

“PIRANHA 3DD” (Movie Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Thursday, 31 May 2012 13:58



A movie that calls itself PIRANHA 3DD is clearly not meant to be judged by typical, reasonable critical standards. Clearly it's meant to be viewed and recommended as an exercise in dumb fun. But really, did it have to be *this* dumb?

Dimension Films is releasing the sequel tomorrow in a limited number of theaters (via Radius-TWC, the new label created by the Weinsteins to dump...er, selectively release certain titles) simultaneous with on-demand availability, including a 3DD...er, 3D VOD option. It should go without saying that if you must see this film, 3D, on the big or small screen, is the only way to go, to fully enjoy the impact of the blood, vomit, spat-out fish heads, etc. launched off the screen. That last bit comes courtesy of Gary Busey, who turns up for a shorter cameo than the advance publicity suggested, alongside director John Gulager's dad Clu. Their brief scene pretty much lets you know what to expect in terms of the level of humor, as these two residents of Merkin, Arizona discover a dead cow in a lake pooting out piranha eggs that quickly hatch, the little finners making short work of the guest stars.



Cut to the key setting, the Big Wet Water Park, which has been taken over by sleazy Chet (David Koechner) and turned into what could be called a gentleman's attraction, with lifeguards replaced by "water-certified strippers" and an underwater "Cooch Cam" to allow better views of the female swimmers. This dismays Chet's stepdaughter Maddy (Danielle Panabaker), a marine biology student who isn't pleased with what has been done to her late mother's park. She doesn't have long to fret over it before she discovers an even greater threat, i.e. the flesheating fish, which have completely infested the adjoining lake and could very well swim up the drainage pipes and turn Big Wet into a Big Mess. The fact that the piranha pose a potential menace to far more than the park doesn't seem to concern Maddy, who never thinks to alert the authorities, even when she has a dead specimen to present as evidence...

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Oops, right, dumb fun...sorry.

Instead, Maddy and the two other sides of a potential love triangle, nerdy nice guy Barry (Matt Bush) and her ex-boyfriend, local cop Kyle (Chris Zylka), pay a visit to nutty scientist Mr. Goodman, played by returning Christopher Lloyd in a lengthy scene that adds nothing really to the story or to his character from the original. Meanwhile, the sexual cavorting of Maddy's friends Ashley (Meagan Tandy) and Travis (Paul James Jordan), and Shelby (Katrina Bowden) and Josh (Jean-Luc Bilodeau), gets interrupted by the hungry fish, one of which finds its way into the unsuspecting Shelby's nether regions, the better to feast on Josh's johnson when the couple get down to business. You'd think that Shelby would be a little more aware of a fanged, spiny fish swimming around in her abdomen, but...

Damn, I forgot again—dumb fun.

It's interesting to note that despite its bid to fully indulge the prurient interest, PIRANHA 3DD follows the old rules of exploitation conservatism. The girls who flash their DDs and more are all bit players (pardon the expression), inconsequential to the story, while Ashley and Shelby keep their tops on during their sex scenes and heroine Maddy never gets down. Any female viewers who happen to find their way to this film will be disappointed that the only male flesh on view is Josh's post-trauma member; since a similar gag already appeared in the previous PIRANHA, scripters Patrick Melton, Marcus Dunstan and Joel Soisson—really, it took three people to write this?—also throw in a guy with a piranha up his ass (not sexy).

As that last gag makes clear, PIRANHA 3DD is aimed as much at the frat-guy mentality as it is at horror fans, with its unending crudity and lowest-common-denominator approach to both humor and horror. Yet the equally unrelenting illogic and incoherence in the script and direction make the overall tone feel less like anything-goes exuberance and more like carelessness. There's little wit or sense on view, just cheesy gross-outs and profanities strung together; plot, characters and all that other stuff are clearly beside the point, and for some potential viewers, it might not matter. But for many horror/comedy fans, Bowden's presence might well put them in mind of the far superior TUCKER AND DALE VS. EVIL, which proved it's very possible to make a smart movie about dumb people. PIRANHA 3DD just takes the cheap and easy way out, and its creators barely even bothered to provide a full feature. The movie proper ends at the 70-minute mark, with the end credits padded to an additional 12 via outtakes and assorted silliness involving co-star David Hasselhoff.

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Oh yes, The Hoff's in this movie too, playing himself as a celebrity invited by Chet to host Big Wet's ill-fated opening day. The former BAYWATCH lifeguard elicits a few chuckles at the expense of his rep, but there's nothing to Hasselhoff's role *but* self-parody, and that joke gets tired quickly. He never even gets to grapple with a piranha, giving the sense that his scenes were shot separately from the rest of the movie. Same goes for Ving Rhames, reprising his role from the previous PIRANHA as Deputy Fallon, here sporting a new accoutrement borrowed from Rose McGowan in PLANET TERROR—another film that wove splatter and sick humor together with a lot more panache than PIRANHA 3DD does.

