

DVD Select: 'Snakes on a Plane' is silly, just plain campy fun

by Robert J. Hawkins

I think we all know by now that the participation of movie blogigencia on the Internet did not turn "Snakes on a Plane" (New Line, 2 1/2 stars) into the greatest horror movie of all time, nor the campiest.

Just the same, it's a pretty entertaining thrill ride for a rainy winter night. (OK, a snowy night if you've got it.)

Actually, all that online participation in the creation of this movie proved to be a distraction and set it up for disappointment once it finally opened in theaters. Expectations for something that proved so modest were way off the charts.

~SNAKES ON A PLANE™ - Chaos reigns in the skies over the Pacific in the thriller "Snakes on a Plane." CNS Photo courtesy of James Dittiger. In the end, "Snakes on the Plane" is just a nice, entertaining thriller, leavened with plenty of humor. It only asks that you shut off the inquisitive corner of your brain and just give in to what unfolds on the screen.

See? It's easy.

Hawaiian hunk Sean Jones (Nathan Phillips) has witnessed a murder by crazy Asian mobster and movie stereotype No. 1 Chen Leong (Terry Chen). Sean himself is saved from assassination by movie stereotype No. 2: rugged, no-nonsense FBI agent Neville Flynn (Samuel L. Jackson).

To put crazy Chen away, Sean has to testify in Los Angeles. And what's the safest way for the government to get him there? Aboard South Pacific Airways commercial Flight 121 "with nonstop service from Honolulu to Los Angeles." (OK, think about that last one for a moment. It will come to you.)

The plane's roster is filled with types that you get right away: Three G's, the rap star (Flex Alexander), the upscale princess Mercedes (Rachel Blanchard) with her obnoxious tiny dog, the rude and annoying businessman (Gerard Plunkett), as well as the young kids traveling alone, the groping lovers, the guy with aviophobia, etc.

The crew is not immune from movie shorthand, either. There's the redneck sexist pilot (David Koechner), the sexy flight attendant (Sunny Mabrey), the "one last trip" flight attendant (Julianna Margulies), the mother of all flight attendants (Lin Shaye) and the sexually ambiguous flight attendant (Bruce James).

Needless to say, some of these people will die before the trip is over - especially if they are mean or nasty people. Others will undergo great personal transformation, for which they will be awarded kitschy lines by the director (David Ellis) and screenwriters (John Heffernan and Sebastian Gutierrez).

Crazy Chen smuggles hundreds of deadly poisonous snakes past airport security in boxes of Hawaiian flowers and onto this plane at the last minute - apparently nobody notices the sudden introduction of all that flora on the cargo manifest. The snakes are hopped up on pheromones - the smell of flowers drives them crazy.

Pretty soon, snakes are crawling out of toilets, up through conduits, out of overhead bins, under seats, into the cockpit - and they are killing people at a ferocious rate.

It gets funnier.

I think now that the film has run its course in theaters and soon on DVD, a new Internet-based version should be cut. In this one, we the viewers will get to vote on who lives and dies aboard Flight 121 - thereby

changing the dynamics of the story and, ultimately, the conclusion.

For example, if Samuel L. Jackson gets the blood sucked out of him by a python early on - you know that plane is going down with all the wimps in control. And there are at least three people who did not die in the movie who should have - making it far more interesting in my mind.

Well, what do you think?

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Artie Lang's Beer League" (Echo Bridge, 2 stars) I wanted to hate it, just so I could start feeling good about myself and my place in decent society. Just the same I found myself laughing at this celebration of softball, debauchery, beer, babes and redemption. About what you'd expect from Howard Stern's radio sidekick.

"The Covenant" (Sony, 1 star) What if the cast from "One Tree Hill" (or any TV series filled with attractive young people doing bad things to each other) had supernatural powers that unleashed a great evil force upon the world that they would have to now contain - even as they battled forces of jealousy and suspicion? Or something like that. Director Renny Harlin tries again, bless him.

IT CAME FROM TV

"Love's Abiding Joy" (Fox Faith) The fourth Hallmark Channel TV film from the novel series by Janette Oke, follows the continuing saga of Missie and Willie LaHaye, pioneers of the rugged West who find their love and faith challenged at every turn. Directed and written by Michael Landon Jr.

FROM THE VAULTS

"Shottas" (Sony, 2002) Gangsters growing up on the streets of Kingston, Jamaica, mon. Cast includes Ky-Mani Marley (son of Bob), and musicians Wyclef Jean, Spragga Benz and even boxer Lennox Lewis. Acting is about what you'd expect from a novelty cast but the story and music are solid.

DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin

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