

'Anaconda' follows familiar plot

Doctor, film crew find themselves fleeing 40-foot corpse-crusher

BY GERRY BELTZ
Film Critic

"Anaconda." It wraps around you, squeezes you until you hear your bones break, then swallows you whole. (Kind of like your Aunt Lily at Thanksgiving, except an anaconda doesn't smell like perfume from the 1/2-Price Store.)

"Anaconda" is another in a long line of "giant, unstoppable killing thing" movies made popular by great flicks like "Jaws" and "Aliens." In fact, the slogan of "Anaconda" — "If you can't breathe, you can't scream" — is a blatant rip-off from "Alien."

Director Luis Lloma ("Sniper") manages to piece together a halfway interesting fright film with a plot that has seen more use than Heidi Fleiss' phone number on New Year's Eve.

Dr. Steven Cale (Eric Stoltz) is traveling with a film-and-sound crew down a South African river, making a documentary on a search for a mystical tribe. This is a big break for director Terri (Jennifer Lopez, "Selena") and cameraman Danny (Ice Cube).

Along with potential victims ... I mean, the rest of the documentary crew, they rescue Paul Sarone (Jon Voight, "Rosewood"), who seems to be very at home in the jungle.

After rescuing Cale from a potentially lethal wasp bite, Sarone manipulates the crew into taking a different route back, ostensibly for medical help. But Cale is after bigger game: a 40-foot anaconda snake. He wants to capture it alive, and won't let anyone get in his way, at any price.

Oooh, the tension. You could cut it with a knife.

Voight takes his role as the slimy snake-hunter well, and like his prey, gradually sheds his outer skin to reveal his true self. Unfortu-

The Facts

Film: 'Anaconda'
Stars: Jennifer Lopez, Jon Voight, Ice Cube, Eric Stoltz
Director: Luis Lloma
Rating: PG-13 (Language, Violence)
Grade: C+
Five Words: Snake flick squeezes out scares

nately, he is capable of only two facial expressions in this film: "horrific surprise" and a "forced-smile-after-eating-bad-yams" glare.

His "Paraguyan" accent was a bit overdone, also. (However, as I have never been to Paraguay, and to the best of my knowledge, don't know anyone from Paraguay, I could be wrong.)

Lopez and Ice Cube both deliver decent performances. But by film's end, Lopez is just another screaming, thrashing victim, while Cube wants the snake dead so he can move on to his next film.

Former MTV game show hostess Kari Wuhrer also shows up as part of the documentary crew, but has the life expectancy of one of Captain Kirk's girlfriends.

The real star of "Anaconda" is the snake itself, brought to life through Animatronics and computer-generation. Realism kind of takes a left turn here, and some of it is too fake to be really scary, but it still comes out quite menacing for the most part.

The jumps are real. The scares are real. Don't be surprised to find yourself wringing your hands together.

Still standard fright stuff, "Anaconda" is worth a squeeze or two.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

Theater Review

Performance marked by uneven cast

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Theater Critic

The cast of "Six Degrees of Separation" weaved their characters of different ages, class and backgrounds together, proving that everyone is linked by a few common threads.

The play, presented Saturday by the UNL theater department in the Howell Theatre, revolves around a young con artist named Paul. Paul invites himself into the lives of various families, claiming to know their children at college.

Ashley Hassler was the epitome of sophistication in her role as Ouisa Kittredge. Her resonant voice and stately posture provided an aura of class and style. But she was still able to portray the inner fire and passion of Ouisa through her gleaming eyes and wishful hands.

Eric Harrell complimented Hassler well in his role as Flan Kittredge. His delivery and tone also radiated class and wealth, but Harrell seemed to forget that his character was more than just a voice. His gestures were sporadic and often nonexistent for half of a scene.

John Ziegler's performance as Geoffrey was flat. His accent seemed vague, he projected his lines poorly, and his portrayal lacked the grace and charm needed to pull off some of the more comic moments.

Mitchell Strong did an excellent job portraying the childishness of Paul, but faltered on this character's other dimensions. He missed Paul's inner turmoil and motivation and lacked the charm needed to make the audience believe these people would invite him into their homes.

Heather Currie and Jeff Luby gave wonderful performances as Kitty and Larkin.

Please see SEPARATION on 10

'Grosse Pointe' shoots a winner

BY JEFF RANDALL
Film Critic

After the unexpected and immediate success of "Pulp Fiction" in 1994, a slew of pretender films spawned by the Tarantino generation have emerged in the American film market.

"Grosse Pointe Blank" is one of those films. John Cusack — an actor who has made his career with offbeat roles — stars as Martin Blank, a professional killer who is at somewhat of a crossroads in life.

He is fast approaching the age of 30, he is losing his zeal for assassination and he has just received word that his 10-year high school reunion is coming up.

After a brief consultation with his terrified psychiatrist (played with the usual comic apprehension by Alan Arkin), Blank decides to return to his hometown of Grosse Pointe. While there, he plans to reunite with the prom date he stood up, visit his old house and kill a guy.

To further the plot, nearly every one of these plans goes awry — his prom date (Minnie Driver) is still holding a grudge, his house has been turned into a convenience store and a rival hit man (Dan Aykroyd) is in tow with a pair of government agents who plan to kill Blank.

As expected in a comedy, a series of hilarious scenes follows as Blank maneuvers his way through his old stomping grounds, all the while debating whether he should tell his old acquaintances what he really does for a living.

As expected in a film about a hit man, a few fight scenes are scattered throughout the

The Facts

Film: 'Grosse Pointe Blank'
Stars: John Cusack, Minnie Driver, Dan Aykroyd
Director: George Armitage
Rating: R (Language, Violence)
Grade: A-
Five Words: 'Grosse Pointe' hits its mark

story.

Cusack is excellent in his portrayal of a man whose lack of morals makes his job easy but his personal life a real challenge.

Driver is equally impressive as the rock-lovin' rich girl who is torn between her attraction to Cusack's character and the 10 years of anger she has accumulated since he stood her up on prom night.

Aykroyd's hit man character is typical post-"Saturday Night Live" fare for the one-time Blues Brother. His role is kept to a near minimum, but his scenes with Cusack are among the funniest moments in the film.

Ultimately, "Grosse Pointe Blank" is — like "Pulp Fiction" before it — a comedy that doesn't try too hard, a gangster film that doesn't act too cool and a love story that doesn't get too sentimental (well, maybe "Pulp Fiction" was a little short on the love story part).

In short, "Grosse Pointe Blank" is one of the year's best films and is definitely worth a look.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLLYWOOD PICTURES
JOHN CUSACK stars as Martin Blank, a professional killer who attends his 10-year high school reunion, in the new film "Grosse Pointe Blank." Cusack was also a co-producer and co-screenwriter for the film.