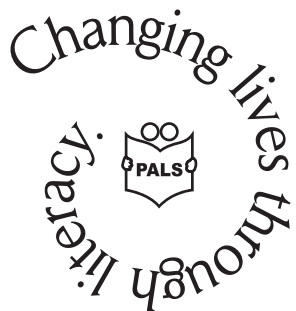


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Snakes: motherfuckin' awesome!

Snakes On A Plane

Directed By David R. Ellis
Starring Samuel L. Jackson, Julianna Margulies, Nathan Phillips, Rachel Blanchard, Flex Alexander and Kenan Thompson
Now playing

EDMON ROTEA
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Just as the old expression says "never judge a book by its cover," the same also applies to movie titles—never judge an upcoming film by its title, no matter how preposterous it may sound. Despite its simple, self-explanatory title, pre-release criticisms and hype, the airborne action-thriller *Snakes On A Plane* delivers not only tons of snakes, but also tons of excitement.

While the film's title is blatantly indicative of the plot, *Snakes On A Plane* at least gets points for its originality, inventiveness and cheesiness. The film opens with a scene of a picturesque Hawaiian excursion: sandy beaches, bikini-clad women, sexy female surfers, tanned bodies and, well, more images of bikini-clad women.

The film starts with what most consider the vacation of a lifetime—that is, until it turns into a nightmare for Sean Jones (Nathan Phillips) when he witnesses the brutal murder of his father, a Californian state prosecutor, at the hands of LA-based gangster Eddie Kim (Byron Lawson) and his thugs. The event prompts FBI operative agent Neville Flynn (Samuel L. Jackson) to seek out and protect Jones, who may be the one and only key witness to finally testify against Kim for all his crimes,



even if it means Flynn must fight off hordes of snakes on his return trip from LA.

During the tortuous flight, Flynn not only has to deal with the venomous creatures; he must also contend with whiny passengers, dead pilots, plane malfunctions, de-pressurized cabins and even more snakes. While the plot may wear thin at first, there's never a dull moment throughout the entire movie.

Snakes uses the formula of previous B-grade action thrillers. Those films, from *Night of the Living Dead* to *Tremors*, have always involved a group of unsuspecting individuals suddenly under attack by creatures that just happen to have a taste for human flesh. As a result, the attacks prompt the remaining survivors to seek out safe refuge and fight off the creatures one after the other as they struggle to find a safer place. This generic plot line, while overused, benefits the film's nar-

ative. Watching it is a lot like indulging in one of life's guilty pleasures, like eating an entire tub of premium-brand ice cream, or consuming an entire box of chocolates. Viewers will constantly crave and look forward to the next minute—or snake bite—no matter how predictable or ridiculous the plot becomes.

Again, like most B-movies, *Snakes On A Plane* is complete with gruesome and unsettling death scenes that will make most viewers flinch, and perhaps fear snakes—or flying coach—after seeing this film. The movie is complete with breasts, physical humour, lots of Samuel L. Jackson ass-kicking scenes and tons of soon-to-be-classic one-liners.

While *Snakes On A Plane* isn't an Oscar-worthy film, at least it's good enough to not win any Razzies. Even though it shouldn't be taken seriously, it's still a fun film to watch from beginning to end—and more entertaining than the average in-flight movie.

Vengeance trilogy's sympathetic finale

Sympathy For Lady Vengeance

Directed by Chan-wook Park
Starring Yeong-ae Lee, Geum-ja Lee, Min-sik Choi and Mr. Baek
Metro Cinema

DANIEL KASZOR
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Sympathy For Lady Vengeance is one of the most arresting movies to be released in theatres this year. It's a brutal, poignant, sickening and heartfelt story, guaranteed to entice audiences more than any other movie slated for release in upcoming weeks.

Lady Vengeance begins as Lee Geum-ja is leaving prison. 13 years before, she had killed a boy in a botched kidnapping. Now, after seemingly being reformed in jail, she has turned her back on the pastor who "cured" her temperament, and is hoping to seek vengeance on those who wronged her. Helping her are several women she befriended during her time in prison, where she was known only for her kindness.

However, that synopsis doesn't fully explain the true nature of the film; it's so much more than a simple narrative. *Lady Vengeance* works almost as an opera, with visual crescendos and sometimes non-linear expressions of emotion. And as the visual symphony progresses, director Park Chan-wook begins to layer the story with dimensions that he had barely hinted at throughout the film's rather flat and standard revenge set-up.

Lady Vengeance is the third in Park's "vengeance trilogy" (the first two being *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy*), a series of movies not



narratively related, but tied together through an overall theme of being wronged, the reprisals to those wrongs, and the effects those reprisals have on the soul. However, in comparison to the last film in the trilogy, *Oldboy*, where Park's style ran rampant and into hyperbole, *Lady Vengeance* maintains an emotional grounding and realism that lends a contrast to the film's narrative and visual flourishes.

The praise for the emotional foundation can't be given solely to Park, though, as the lead actress playing Geum-ja (Lee Yeong-ae) performs with such nuance and believable emotion that it's oftentimes impossible to think of the movie beyond her performance, even when Park has staged a particularly interesting or stimulating scene. It's this performance, alongside an overall more nuanced approach to filmmaking than in Park's previous efforts, which elevate the movie beyond its predecessors.

It should be noted that because of Park's sometimes outlandish style, and because of the speed at which the

Korean subtitles slip by, it can sometimes be difficult to follow what's going on. However, the overall gist of the story, and its overall moral, aren't hidden by confusing moments—like when viewers try to decipher exactly who all periphery characters are and what they're doing in their particular scenes.

Yet, this quibble is minor, and in truth, doesn't affect the movie that harshly. *Lady Vengeance* is a film that needs to be worked at and digested, but really, the foreign language is just another aspect of cinematic exploration. The same goes for the brutal, but never gratuitous, violence that sometimes appears in various scenes throughout the movie.

Even though, in the end, Geum-ja is forced to face her own sense of guilt over the wrongs she has caused in the world, *Lady Vengeance* shows its true nature as a film not focused on revenge, but on redemption. And in that same way, the "vengeance trilogy" ends on a note that is introspective and hopeful, if not a little bit sad.

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