

THE G.B. WEEKLY

Review: Jo Richards Golden Bay Weekly on

This Giant Papier Mache Boulder Is Actually Really Heavy

Hollywood sci-fi might feature plenty of spectacular bangs but they cost a lot of bucks to produce - it's not cheap to create inter-galactic space battles, death stars and weird aliens on screen. Spending large, however, doesn't always guarantee a good result: Take *The Phantom Menace* or *Mission to Mars* - each cost over US\$100 million to make and feature some dazzling special effects, but they are about as coherent as a Klingon with a skin-full of Bloodwine. And what was George Lucas thinking when he foisted Jar Jar Binks onto legions of his loyal Star Wars fans? There isn't a galaxy far, far enough away in which to exile this tragic cartoon character.

While Kiwi director Christian Nicolson doesn't benefit from the financial backing enjoyed by Lucas, his award-winning comedy space adventure *This Giant Papier Mache Boulder Is Actually Really Heavy* is actually really very good indeed. That's because the bargain-basement blockbuster cleverly embraces its budgetary constraints to boldly go where twenty-first century sci-fi fears to tread - back to the CGI-free good old days when spaceships were real models, monsters were made of latex and laser guns were silver-painted curling tongs.

It may be unashamedly retro and knowingly a bit cheesy, but with its invocation of the spirit of *Flash Gordon*, *Blake's Seven* and the like, Nicolson's parsimonious production is more homage than fromage. In fact it's a joyful celebration of the genre in which the small troupe of actors appear to be having at least as much fun as their audience who can indulge in a game of spot-the-everyday-objects-which-have-been-transformed-into-space-props - just like viewers of early *Doctor Who*. And the director makes sure that there is always something interesting on the screen where action is set to stun, laughs are at warp-factor nine and the story unfolds through a classic sci-fi narrative:

While watching an old B-movie at an Armageddonesque expo, three regular guys are sucked into its on-screen parallel universe and materialise at the helm of a rickety spaceship. They fight a space battle, make an enemy of the evil Lord Froth and unwittingly save space princess Lady Emmanor. But the amateur crew become trapped in the low-budget cosmos and must find their way home before being transformed into sci-fi characters.

The references to classic films and TV come as thick and fast as a meteor shower; some are direct hits, others are more subtle, but all are affectionate nods to productions past. Even the geekiest fans, however, will miss a few little gems as they flash by first time around - but at least that provides the perfect excuse for a second viewing.

Because of the lack of funding, the movie almost never happened and it's only due to Nicolson's tenacity that the project was completed. The making of *TGPMBIARH* is a compelling story in itself and worth a read through the director's blog postings on the film's website.

With its cheap - or more accurately, inexpensive - laughs, this top value space movie could be destined to become a modern classic - proof that you don't need to spend big bucks to get a decent bang.

4/5 STARS