

Edinburgh International Film Festival – Highlights For Friday



Grabbers

Drink up, they're after you.

Erin Island, Ireland. Garda Lisa Nolan arrives from the mainland for a two-week tour of duty, just as another guest arrives from a bit further away. Now Lisa must team up with her new alcoholic partner, the local marine ecologist and a boozy fisherman to save the island, and the world.

The festival is just getting started but I can tell you right now that this will be my number one film of the fortnight. Combining the best elements of other monster classics like Tremors, Jaws, Deep Rising and Aliens into a new – and very Irish – whole, Grabbers is feckin' brilliant. It's another leading role for Richard Coyle (yesterday's Pusher) as Erin Island's resident cop Ciarán O'Shea; a part that couldn't be further from Frank. The film belongs to Ruth Bradley as Lisa though. Her strait-laced Garda starts off as cute but a little dull, a by-the-book character who loosens up considerably once the plan to avoid the monsters kicks in, and ends up channeling Ripley in the best way. And what is that plan? Well, let me put it this way: the alien monster lives on blood, and it really doesn't like alcohol.

And what about the monster? It's gorgeous. A rolling mass of tentacles and stingers with a very, very big mouth, it's a prime example of how CGI can be used sparingly and effectively, alongside practical on-set effects that add to the illusion of the monster affecting its surroundings –

whether it's the big guy flipping a car or one of its babies swinging on a light fixture. Belfast-born director Jon Wright has paced the film just, eh, right – working with debut screenwriter Kevin Lehane – starting off slow and keeping the Grabber itself hidden until late in the game, while also allowing us to get to know and like the cast of characters that will be facing off against it.

This film really could have been made just for me. It's funny, suspenseful, scary, deliciously vulgar and delightfully whimsical. Grabbers is getting its European premiere on Friday night at EIFF with a second screening on Monday. The nationwide release date is not yet confirmed, but will be sometime later this year.



Rent-a-Cat

Sweet, funny and delightfully charming.

Are you lonely? Do you like cats? Meet Sayoko. She spends her days doing chores around her feline-filled house, talking to herself, and pulling her cart full of cats through the park by the river. If you pass her inspection, she will rent you one for as long as you need the company. But are any of her customers as lonely as Sayoko herself?

As this new film from writer/director Naoko Ogigami (Kamome Diner) unfolds, I defy you not to fall in love with Sayoko, played by Mikako Ichikawa, the same way we all did with Audrey Tautou in Jeunet's Amelie. She is the most adorable cat-lady you've ever seen in film or otherwise, as far from the stereotype as it is possible to get. Ichikawa's performance is all the more impressive for the fact that she spends most of the movie in her house alone, talking either to her cats or her shrine to her dead grandma, and never once is it boring.

This is a film about loneliness and how that loneliness can be

abated by either a small furry friend or just someone to talk with. It gives a peek behind the curtain of the formality of life in Japan, and asks what cost to human relationships that stricture exacts. The repetition of the faintly episodic set-up works as sort of a lullaby, bringing you into the magical-realist world that Sayoko and her cats inhabit. It is definitely a world worth visiting, and you can do so this Friday evening, or Sunday afternoon. There is no information available yet about a nationwide release, but it will most likely be out on DVD and Blu-Ray soon enough.

One general criticism I have about the Edinburgh International Film Festival – especially in the last couple of years – is that it can be very arty. I realise that festivals like this are the only times some films are able to be shown on the big screen, but at the same time they tend to appeal to a more niche audience; they're often not very accessible to the casual moviegoer. Well these two films are perfect for the casual moviegoer. If you've been on the fence about going to see something during the festival for that very reason, then these two come highly recommended.

You can see more from me at my own movie review site, [here](#).