

PIXELS Features A Script With Too Many Design Flaws

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 24 July 2015 04:50



Rating: «« *out of 4 Stars*

Running Time: 106 min.

Truthfully, the idea of characters from arcade games of the 80s waging war against the Earth is appealing. Pixels features a super concept, but something goes a little wonky in the execution. While the movie should have given star Adam Sandler a chance at something different, the production doesn't stray from the actor's slapstick formula. Yes, it's better than most of his recent output, but it's still a disappointingly generic film that ultimately comes across a little uninspired.

Back in the 80s, a time capsule probe is sent into outer space. When an alien force receives it and interprets the contents as aggressive, they send warriors based on famous arcade games. President Cooper (Kevin James) calls upon his childhood friend/video game authority Brenner (Sandler) for advice. As extraterrestrial attacks begin, Brenner recruits unstable childhood pal Ludlow (Josh Gad) and ex-con/arch gaming nemesis Eddie (Peter Dinklage) to help. This motley crew raises the eyebrows of Colonel Violet van Patten (Michelle Monaghan), but their archaic knowledge helps humanity fight back.

And that's about all the character development viewers will get. They play games against the alien force and begin to feel validated in their childhood pursuits, but that's about as big of an arc as each actor is given. There's not much of a plot either and the script does nothing to explain the motivations for the extraterrestrials (other than a brief comment from a character that their planet was once a happy place before they received Earth's violent communications).

Admittedly, the exaggerated versions of the arcade games are wonderful to look at. It's fun to

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see the enormous digitized attackers chase the heroes and rampage through the real world. This includes an impressive Centipede and Pac-Man stand-offs through the streets of London and New York City. Yet, while there's great potential in the sweet-looking arcade creations taking out people and buildings in a hilariously malevolent way, the movie shies away from depicting any significant chaos.

The supporting characters have a few funny moments. Dinklage is amusing as the arrogant Eddie, who makes outrageous demands of the government before he agrees to help save the world. And it's entertaining to see alien-dubbed clips from the 80s used to relay messages. It allows Earthlings worldwide to receive death threats from the likes of a New Wave-era Hall & Oats.

Still, it's sad that for every amusing idea or comment, there are so many stale jokes and juvenile gags. Against all odds, the screenwriters even manage to inflict some pointless scatological humor upon the audience (it involves one of the arcade characters wetting itself). Much of these half-baked attempts at laughs are directly aimed at very young children. This is particularly strange, given that the subject matter's primary appeal is to 40-somethings who remember playing these games. It's difficult to imagine why one would cast so many talented performers and comics (including not only leads like Sandler, Dinklage, Gad and Monaghan, but also Jane Krakowski, Brian Cox and Sean Bean) and then give them little to do other than scream and fall over themselves.

Perhaps the producers were hedging their bets and trying to squeeze material in for every demographic, but the approach leaves *Pixels* in a comedy no man's land. Most viewers will feel that they aren't the target audience. And while the movie may contain a couple of fun scenes, the subject matter never quite gels with the obvious and occasionally infantile humor. It could have been a darkly funny apocalyptic comedy, but the version viewers will see contains too many design flaws.

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