

Herpetological Horrors No. 5

By Russ Case

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Snakes on a Plane Movie Poster. When talk turns to horror movies that feature reptiles, Snakes On a Plane (2006) is bound to come up. Probably the most famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) in this subgenre, the movie had so much advance word of mouth that it became an Internet phenomenon long before it appeared in movie theaters. Dozens of Internet forums, blogs and online whatnot sprang up all over the Web. New Line Cinema, the studio releasing the movie, was delighted with all the advance publicity, millions of dollars' worth of advertising for free. It really was the first instance in the entertainment industry where such a furor of advance Internet interest erupted over a yet-to-be-released movie. Industry people waited with baited breath to see if all that Internet interest would translate into box office gold.

It didn't. Although people were eager to rhapsodize on and on about the movie from their keyboards at home, it turned out not all were as interested in plunking down any dollars in order to see it. The movie mostly fizzled in U.S. theaters. Of course it made more money overseas and through DVD sales, and today it has achieved cult film status.

I got caught up in the Snakes On a Plane publicity locomotive myself. For the September 2006 issue of REPTILES I interviewed the filmmakers, including Jules Sylvester, who I had previously interviewed for the magazine. Jules provides animals, including many reptiles, for movies and television. His Reptile Rentals facility is chock full of cool reptiles (and tarantulas) that Jules was only too happy to show off when I visited. I also spoke with the film's director, producer and writer. The movie was made primarily to capitalize on two major fears people have: flying and snakes. Once Samuel L. Jackson got involved the excitement mounted, and the title of the movie itself got people ready for fun. All the filmmakers were tingling with the anticipation of the movie's upcoming release. Too bad it wasn't a huge blockbuster. (You can read my Snakes On a Plane article [here](#).)

The plot concerns a witness who is to testify against a drug kingpin. Sam Jackson is the cop transporting the witness by plane from Hawaii to Los Angeles. The kingpin's henchmen place a crate containing hundreds of venomous snakes in the cargo hold, with a timer set to release the snakes – driven into a crazed frenzy by the application of pheromones – once the plane is over the ocean, past the point of no return. The plane enters a huge storm, the timer releases the snakes and goofy pandemonium ensues.

Part of the fun for snake savvy viewers is seeing harmless snakes, such as kingsnakes, being referred to as deadly species. For instance, a "taipan" is actually a Florida kingsnake. And the movie's pretty funny despite some ludicrously grisly deaths, and it has earned a place as one of the best of the cheesy reptile horror movies.

My next blog will be devoted to another intriguing tale of snakes loose within a vehicle, but this time we're not talking about any mere airplane -- we're talking submarine.

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