



Venus Ariel and Jorge A. Jimenez: just a flesh wound.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Fin-tastic Voyage

Adrian Grünberg on what makes his shark movie **The Black Demon** different to the rest

ANY DIRECTOR attempting a shark movie is going up against some truly great films (*Jaws*, *The Shallows*, *Kon-Tiki*, *Open Water*) and some exceptionally bad ones (*Sharknado*). But how to make your shark flick unique?

“There’s a social message in this film about what we’re doing to our planet,” director Adrian Grünberg tells Red Alert, explaining what marks out *The Black Demon* from other elasmobranch-themed movies. “Then there’s the whole mythology behind the creature...”

That mythology is the legend of “El Demonio Negro”. In the film, “the Black Demon”, as the shark (or more precisely, megalodon) becomes known, is summoned after the construction of an oil rig off the coast of Baja California. A killer it may be, but the question *The Black Demon* poses is what is worse: the flesh-eating megalodon or corporate greed?

“I’ve got to admit, the first script I read [by *Blackwater* writer Boise Esquerra] was a little campier,” says Grünberg. “It was more on the comedic side, which I thought

was more typical and more what you’re used to seeing. I liked the idea of trying to make this slightly more serious, trying to make the action and dramatic elements blend in together.”

Grünberg’s previous movie was *Rambo: Last Blood* and before that,

the 2012 Mel Gibson actioner *Get The Gringo*. A supernatural eco-aquatic-thriller, he says, is not something he was ever expecting to be offered.

“It’s not particularly the genre I would have thought to jump on,” he says, “but I read the script and



Junior realises he’s wearing the wrong shoes.



They really should have brought a bigger boat.

it had so many elements that attracted me, like the fact that it was a Latin-inspired shark movie. I don't look or sound the part, but I am Hispanic, so the idea of jumping into a genre that is traditionally very Hollywood was very appealing. It was basically the Hispanic and blowing up our own planet elements that brought me closer to it."

Unlike other shark movies, which tend to put their creature front and centre, Grünberg says he approached the film with a "less is more" approach. Until the film's final reel, "the Black Demon" is only seen in flashes.

"Nothing that we present to an audience is scarier than what the audience themselves can make up in their heads," Grünberg says. "So the idea of giving them a sense of this is what's out there, this is its size, and then letting people fill in those gaps is definitely a conscious choice. To me, it's more a character movie than a shark movie. The shark to me isn't a meat-eating machine, it's not a bad animal, it's not seeking revenge, it's seeking a higher purpose for all of us."

Heading up the cast as Paul Sturges, the inspector for the Nixon Oil Company who's sent to check on the rig, is *Yellowstone's* Josh Lucas. "I've known Josh for a

Audrey just never got on with any seafood.



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long time and I think he's a terrific actor," enthuses Grünberg. "There was something in the original script that we sent him that touched him. I think he got right away what my intentions were and he added so much to it. He would come in every morning and say, 'I've had a thought...' and sometimes these thoughts included giving away things from his character to other characters. He's a very sharing actor.

"There's a subtlety about him," the director continues. "He starts off

and there's certain mannerisms about him that make him look a little wimpy that he loses as he goes along, navigating these decisions and these things that he's done. He becomes this much bigger figure, sturdier and more focused."

The Black Demon was filmed in the Dominican Republic under strict Covid protections. But, Grünberg reveals, in between shooting dates he came down with the virus. "We shot part December and part January and during the hiatus a lot of us, including the actors, got Covid," he recalls. "I had to come in and direct the first week in a tent with that mind fog that you get. I did feel in a haze for a few days, so that was very challenging."

Meanwhile, Grünberg is currently in Mérida, the capital of the Mexican state of Yucatán, shooting what he teases as "a big Latin-American, *Indiana Jones*-type show" for Netflix. "It's coming together very nicely," he smiles, "so hopefully we can put it out there very soon." **so**

The Black Demon is out on Blu-ray and DVD on 10 July.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

- Animated *Babylon 5* reunion movie **The Road Home** to be voiced by original stars Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia Christian, Peter Jurasik, Bill Mumy, Tracy Scoggins and Patricia Tallman.
- *Pistol's* Sydney Chandler to star in Noah Hawley's **Alien** series.
- Marvel's **Loki** scheduled to return on 6 October, while **Echo** drops 29 November.
- **Lockwood & Co** and **The Winchesters** axed after their debut seasons.
- Tim Burton to feature in a new four-part doc.
- Big screen Evil-Lyn Meg Foster voicing Motherboard in Kevin Smith's **Masters Of The Universe: Revolution**.
- **Archer** wrapping after upcoming fourteenth season.
- *The Wire's* Clark Johnson joining **Daredevil: Born Again**.
- Rosario Dawson and Tony Revolori voicing animated dystopia series **Ghosts Of Ruin**.
- Production of **Stranger Things'** final season pushed back by writers' strike.
- Netflix's reality competition **Squid Game: The Challenge** launches in Nov.
- Spy show **Citadel** renewed for season two.



▶ SCI-FACT! Before he became a director, Grünberg worked as a First AD on films such as *Apocalypto*.