

“With friends like these, who needs anemones?”

Finding Nemo

Directed by Andrew Stanton

Screenplay by Andrew Stanton

With the voices of Albert Brooks, Alexander Gould, Ellen DeGeneres, Willem Dafoe, Brad Garrett, Geoffrey Rush

MPAA Rating: G

101 minutes

Three and a half stars

Reviewed by David Lavery

Stephen King once wrote that the scariest movie he had ever seen was *Bambi*. The traumatic death of Bambi's mother left a permanent scar on his psyche. The new Pixar film *Finding Nemo* may spawn the next horror master. In its first five minutes not only is another mother, the title character's, killed, three hundred and ninety nine of Nemo's siblings are slaughtered by a barracuda attack.

The lone survivor, an adorable clownfish named Nemo (Gould), is raised by an overprotective single father named Marlin (Brooks), but of course a dad's zealous care cannot protect him against the dangers of the world. Nemo, seeking to impress his friends at school, by swimming into open water, is caught in a net and ends up in an aquarium in a dentist's office in Sydney, Australia. A father's quest begins.

As in other Pixar marvels (*A Bug's Life*, both *Toy Story* films, *Monsters, Inc.*) what makes *Nemo* so utterly captivating is the great care given by the animators to the creation of a fully realized imaginary world. Scores of sea creatures and birds (a wide variety of fish, octopi, tortoises, pelicans, sea gulls) are given clearer, more believable personalities than in some human dramas, and with over-the-top anthropomorphism, their worlds, whether at sea or inside glass walls, enthrall us with their hilarious particularity.

New parents are thrilled to have found a home (inside an anemone) with an "ocean view." Everyone assumes (incorrectly) that a clownfish can tell a joke. (By film's end, of course, he will.) Fin-to-fin underwater traffic is, of course, controlled by a crossing guard. A school of fish becomes, well, a school of fish, taught by a manta ray. A tortoise is a surfer dude, an underwater Jeff Spicoli, much older than he acts. A fish proves to be "H₂O intolerant." A young octopus tends to prematurely "ink" when frightened. Sharks (with Australian accents) attend a twelve-step program that teaches that "Fish are friends not food." (When a shark named Bruce [!] goes off the wagon, he's transformed into Jack Torrance from *The Shining*.) Dory (a pitch-perfect

DeGeneres), a blue tang fish who accompanies Marlin on his quest to find his son, is afflicted with short term memory loss but can speak whale and other underwater languages (or thinks she can). The denizens of the dentist's aquarium have come to know everything about proper tooth care.

Though its basic Pixar formula is anything but new and its buddy film pairing (of Marlin and Dory) no major departure from Buzz/Woody or Sully/Mike, *Finding Nemo's* hook is so tempting that we bite early, willingly, and can't wait to be reeled in.