Some credit must be given to the creative team responsible for making “Predators”. Given the recent rash of lame remakes, sequels, TV show adaptations, and blatant rip-offs, the Robert Rodriguez produced sci-fi horror movie can actually be said to be somewhat original.

Original in that it is a sequel in only the loosest terms; one that touches base only briefly to the original 1987 Schwarzenegger hit in order to help establish some of the plot line, while it wisely ignores any of the subsequent sequels…especially the ridiculous “Alien Vs. Predator” series.

Shifting venues from Earth to an unknown star system also helps with the originality, as well as giving a truly bang-up opening. You know right from the beginning that this is an action flick, as the first scene you see is of Adrien Brody’s character Royce waking up while in free fall. Once his parachute has deployed, he quickly discovers that he is in a strange place with seven others; all but one of which are some form of killers…American Black Ops (Royce), a female Israeli Defense Forces sniper, a Russian military bruiser, a Yakuza Mafioso, a Tijuana drug

enforcer, a Sierra Leone soldier, a wacko federal prisoner snatched from death row, along with a doctor snatched from a city street.

Confusion is high at the beginning, as you would expect, but it doesn't take long for them to figure out what is going on; that they are "game" to be hunted down in this "wildlife preserve". It takes almost 30 minutes to get to the point where we have our first attacks from the Predators, and once it starts, it is about what I expected; picking off one person at a time until we can get to the point where our hero and heroine can make their Final Stand.

While this is about as predictable as can be, it is still entertaining. It is helped along by the unexpected appearance of a survivor of an earlier hunt, who is able to also serve as the means for explaining more details of the plot.

The special effects are very good, as are the action pieces, and they are handled adeptly by director Nimród Antal. I also liked the background stories of the characters, once they emerge, as well as the tie-in to the events of the Schwarzenegger film. The writers also take it in a bit of a different direction with the Predators as well, as they are not exactly the same as the ones seen on Earth. I won't go any further in explaining that so as not to spoil anything, but it was a good move on their part.

I'm not sure most people can buy the rail-thin Brody as an action hero, however. To his credit, he has beefed up a bit for this role, but he's still quite lithe, and nowhere near the bulk of an Ah-nuld or even Danny Glover from the second film. This level of fitness works in his favor later on as speed was more important than raw strength, but for me, it's still hard envisioning the Pianist kicking alien ass. On the other hand, he is an excellent actor, and the inclusion of him and the always talented Laurence Fishburne off course raises the quality of this, or any movie they would be in.

The other actors are not quite as lucky. Alice Braga is gorgeous as Isabelle, the only one there who seems to have a conscious…but her obvious Brazilian accent seems a bit out of place for someone who is supposed to be an Israeli (I know, there are Jews from around the world who go to Israel and serve in their military…it just seemed to me like an odd casting choice). Plus, Braga never really comes across as anything more than a beautiful model toting around a gun and pouting a lot. Topher Grace is also a bit miss-used as the doctor; mostly there just to whine and slow down the rest of the group. But some of the flaws in Grace's acting ability detract from

the film in a way that I can't truly describe here without resorting to spoilers. Let's just say that I think the part should have been played by someone else. Neil Patrick Harris comes immediately to mind as someone who would have been perfect in this role. Elijah Wood would have also been great, although perhaps he is a little too much of a "big name" for this fourth banana role.

Of course, you can predict from the start who all will be the last ones standing. For the rest of the cast, they seemed to go for Stereotypes 101, including Mexican tough-guy Danny Trejo (a Rodriguez favorite). At least he's not throwing any knives in this one. This inevitability is redeemed somewhat by an interesting twist towards the end that is not altogether shocking, but nonetheless something that works in the context of the writers' attempt for some originality.

Overall, the movie worked for me as simple-minded popcorn entertainment, which is saying something given the level of crap we've endured so far this summer. I could have completely done without the obvious setup for a sequel at the end, but like most of the rest of the movie, I'll forgive the predictability as long as the trade off is it being Entertaining Predictability.

My Rating: Kelly Holcomb (2 footballs)