



A scene from *Beerfest*.

ALE'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Beerfest

review by M. Faust

In an age when movie titles are often so bland that I find myself driving past mallplex marquees struggling to remember if I've seen some of the movies advertised, the title of *Beerfest* is a masterpiece of concision. It may not tell you everything you need to know, but it certainly helps you put it in your mental IN or OUT basket. While it's not impossible that it could be the title for a documentary about, say, the rising popularity of microbrews in the US, the addition of an "R" rating lets you rest assured that this is not going to be a movie for the Merchant-Ivory crowd.

What the title doesn't tell you, though, is that for a comedy about drunkenness and crude behavior, this one is top of the line. People in my field of endeavor are often accused of snobbishly disliking the kind of broad humor that "real" people enjoy (or so my family tells me). Actually, what annoys me is when crudeness is expected to be funny in and of itself. You can get away with that on occasion: The farting cowboys in *Blazing Saddles* were funny back in 1974 because at the time we'd never seen that onscreen. Look at the movie now and you'll laugh at a lot of other things, but that campfire scene has lost its shock value.

The five guys who comprise the comedy troupe Broken Lizard seem to understand this. Friends who met as students at Colgate College, where they first formed an improv group, they come across as relatively smart guys (not the same thing as intellectuals) with lowbrow tastes. Their breakthrough feature *Super Troopers* had the juvenile panache (if that's not an oxymoron) of Cheech and Chong at their best: There weren't many big belly laughs, but once I got on its weird wavelength it just made me giggle nonstop.

After the misstep of *Club Dread* and a Hollywood assignment to write and direct *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Beerfest* is a return to form. The plot loosely mixes elements of martial arts adventures and *Fight Club*: A pair of young Americans (Paul Soter, Erik Stolhanske) visiting Munich's Oktoberfest accidentally discover an underground competition, *Beerfest*,

where teams from around the world compete in contests that involve mass consumption of brewski. (Comparisons to activities surrounding the recent World Cup Games may be unintentional but are certainly unavoidable.)

Humiliated by the German team (most of whom sound like they were coached in their line readings by Sid Caesar), they return to Colorado and set about assembling a team to dominate the next year's *Beerfest*. These include Landfill (Kevin Heffernan, who is to Broken Lizard what John Candy was to *SCTV*), a former brewery employee who doesn't understand why he was fired—out of an output of 10,000 bottles per day, how could they miss the 45 he was knocking back?; Fink (Steve Lemme), an underutilized scientific genius whose day job provides one of the movie's biggest laughs (I can only say that it involves frogs); and Barry (Jay Chandrasekhar, who also directed), former master of bar games like quarters and ping pong, now living in what can only be called severely reduced circumstances.

It would be easy to oversell *Beerfest*: This is, after all, a movie largely set in a bar called the Schnitzengiggle Tavern that doesn't mind milking the sight of a shameless old lady (Cloris Leachman, looking every one of her 80 years) making double (or are they single?) entendres about warming up cold sausages. And the main source of humor is guys getting stupid drunk. But I admit that I laughed—a lot. Years of working together gives the five Lizards a collegiality that shows onscreen, which makes up for a certain blandness in their personalities and appearances (the exceptions are the chubby Heffernan and Chandrasekhar, who is of Indian descent). And, with the possible exception of a scene with Jurgen Prochnow French-kissing Mo'Nique, they know how to exercise restraint with gross-out jokes, getting the humor without being simply offensive. It still may not be your cup of tea, or your pint of stout. But for what it is, it's as good as the genre gets.

av

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AND TERRIFICALLY ACED."
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