

“SHARK NIGHT 3D” (Film Review)

Written by Ken Michaels

Sunday, 04 September 2011 16:18



How difficult is it to make a movie that pays off on the title SHARK NIGHT 3D (yes, the “3D” is actually part of that title)? OK, there are sharks in it, and about half of it takes place at night, and yes, it’s in 3D. But you’d also expect that it would be scary or funny or a little bit of both, but it’s absolutely neither.

A lot of people got upset when it was announced that SHARK NIGHT 3D got a PG-13 rating, but that didn’t have to be the kiss of death; after all, JAWS, the granddaddy of this genre, was PG. But it turns out all those people were absolutely right; this isn’t a serious dramatic horror film like JAWS but a cheesy exploitation flick, and you don’t make a cheesy exploitation flick about people-eating fish devouring good-looking college kids without going all out in the gore and nudity department. The people who made last year’s 3D PIRANHA knew that; why didn’t this crew?



Or maybe they did think they were making JAWS; the first scene in SHARK NIGHT is such a complete rip on the opening of Steven Spielberg’s classic, it feels like it has to be leading to some kind of joke, but it doesn’t. Instead, it keeps giving us more stuff we’ve seen before: the introduction of a group of the usual youth stereotypes going on the usual trip to an isolated place (here, a island vacation house in the middle of a Louisiana salt-water lake) where, as usual, there’s no cell-phone reception. And there’s the scene where the college kids meet the local threatening rednecks, of the type that TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL makes so much good fun of. And I guess the filmmakers wanted to recall past 3D horror movies too, because just like in FRIDAY THE 13TH PART III, heroine Sara (Sara Paxton) is returning to the scene of a past trauma, and has a long speech in which she tells a potential love interest all about it.

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Paxton is one of the only things worth watching in SHARK NIGHT 3D—not because she’s given anything interesting or fun to do, but just ’cause she looks good enough to eat in her blue bikini. That seems appropriate in a movie like this, though since she’s the heroine you know she’s not going to be chomped on. Instead, just to keep things in cliché-land, it’s the two ethnics who get attacked first: African-American athlete Malik (Sinqua Wells) and his Latina girlfriend Maya (Alyssa Diaz). Left to make all the wrong decisions about how to respond are Sara and that potential love interest, med student Nick (Dustin Milligan), who’s supposed to be kind of an awkward geek but still looks good with his shirt off; his goofy best friend Gordon (Joel David Moore, who should know better about venturing into Louisiana waterways after HATCHET); tattooed bad girl Beth (AMERICAN IDOL’s Katharine McPhee); and male model Blake (Chris Zylka), whose bare butt in an early figure-sketching scene is probably not the nudity the target audience is hoping for.

None of the acting is bad, exactly, and it’s impressive that the cast are able to keep straight faces through some of the dumber things that they (especially Wells) are asked to do. There are many scenes, though, where people don’t act as terrified at the prospect of being devoured as they should be. That’s probably because, with the exception of a beached hammerhead, almost all the sharks are computer-generated, and not well enough that you feel there’s a real fish—and thus a real threat—going after anybody. Making matters worse is that after that prologue, it’s a long time into the movie before any serious shark action starts happening. As if knowing it’s not delivering in that respect, the movie also throws in those rednecks—Dennis (Chris Carmack) and Red (Joshua Leonard) to provide some human villainy. Especially when it turns out that...

This paragraph should probably have a SPOILER ALERT, but talking about the movie’s big revelation is necessary to convey just how idiotic SHARK NIGHT gets. It turns out that Dennis and Red have stocked the lake with various species of the killer fish themselves, and attached camcorders to them, so that they can charge people to view the resulting attack footage and have a big hit that’s like SHARK WEEK combined with FACES OF DEATH! Frankly, I would love to see a movie explaining how these backwoods peckers captured a great white, a tiger shark, etc., transported them to the lake, outfitted them with those cameras, keep them confined in mesh cages, etc.—but unfortunately, that’s not the movie director David R. Ellis and writers Will Hayes and Jesse Studenberg have made. It could have worked if played as a spoof, or even a satire on the bloodthirstiness of the modern media, but instead it’s done with way too straight a face for this utterly stupid premise to play as anything but a bad joke on the audience.

The only genuinely funny thing in SHARK NIGHT 3D isn’t even really in it; it’s a music video, featuring the cast rapping about the plot, that plays after the end credits are over. It was directed by Milligan himself, who perhaps should have directed the movie too. Even the 3D isn’t

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terribly special—a few neat underwater depth FX here, some shark innards in your face there, but nothing worth the money and trouble of wearing those glasses. If you want to see a genuinely fun post-JAWS shark movie, you’re better off watching DEEP BLUE SEA again, and if you want to see aquatic gore in three dimensions...well, there’s always PIRANHA 3DD in November.

