

How the Creators of Your Favourite Sponge-Related Kids Show Made a Horror/Comedy Masterpiece of a Film

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Now - this is a film. 8-year-old me thought it way back in 2008, and 25-year-old me thinks it, too. Rewatching this animated masterpiece - in which Spongebob and his good buddy, Patrick, have to travel to the dreaded 'Shell City' in order to retrieve King Neptune's stolen crown - I was blown away by how the film perfectly juggles its horror and comedic elements.

Plankton is trod on by Spongebob and painfully scraped across the road (whilst screaming in agony) - and it's hilarious. Dennis (the film's moustachioed ode to Javier Bardem in 'No Country For Old Men') rips the mouths off of two chuckling petrol station attendants, all with his bare hands, and it's played for laughs. When Spongebob stops for ice cream in a seemingly deserted graveyard (surrounded by mountains of bones - already, that's intense), he is served by a sweet old lady who ends up being just an extension of a huge monster fish. Her body almost caves in on itself, as she is revealed to just be a front for this evil fish and his desire to eat our favourite sponge. It's grotesque, it's horrifying, really fucking dark stuff for a film that's only rated PG - but most of all, it's fucking funny.

Being able to have real fun with the animation style and bending it to show some truly scary images, all without alienating your target demographic (lil' kids) is such an impressive skill. A worse film would shy away from such dark moments, in favour of trying to avoid startling or disturbing young spectators. But, if you lose these moments, you lose the charm of 'The Spongebob Squarepants Movie', which perfectly captures the deranged nature of the show (which I fucking adored as a kid), as well as the almost surrealist humour of the whole thing.

Rewatching this classic, I never felt bored or talked down to. I felt the same joy and excitement as I did as a little kid, rewatching this film and being engrossed in all the crazy twists and turns. If anything, I think going back to this film as a (somewhat) adult, I picked up on the true genius of it. Having Spongebob and Patrick get 'pissed' on 'Triple Gooberberry Sunrises' (big ol' ice cream sundaes) was hilarious and makes his drunken outburst at Mr. Krabs (who is trying to convince Neptune he didn't steal his crown) even better.

Even in the sadder moments the film consistently treats its audience like adults. In what may be one of the most devastating portrayals of true human/sponge/crustacean friendship, Spongebob and Patrick come close to death in Shell City, as they are shoved under a burning light in order to dry them out so the 'Cyclops' (a guy in old-timey diving get-up) can stick googly eyes on them and flog them to tourists. As they comfort each other and reminisce on their journey up to this tragic point, it's truly devastating to watch. The thing that saves them is the tears the two shed (as they sing the 'Goobey Goober' song) causing an electrical fire and setting off the sprinklers. It really is hard-hitting stuff; the film does not shy away from the emotional gut-punch of the scene.

I could go on and on about my favourite moments in this film and how they balance horror and comedy. The brilliant subversion of the gang of evil monsters who, amazed at Spongebob and Patrick's improvised dancing decide to spare their lives. Or Plankton turning Bikini Bottom into an underwater remake of 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' via his free-with-any-meal Chum Bucket hats. The list is endless - this is such a good fucking film. Rewatching it, I can really see where my own comedic tendencies come from, and how being treated like a capable and mature spectator, even as a child, led me to my own interest in dark comedy. So, thank you, Spongebob creators, for making me belly-laugh at a fish getting its mouth ripped off. The way this film experiments with tone and visuals, balances its darkest and funniest moments, all while being marketed to 10 year olds - it's just so fucking sick. Here at Big Lads Film Zine, we're all Goobey Goobers (Yeah!).