

“CREATURE” (FILM REVIEW)

Posted by Chris Alexander | Sep 09, 2011



How a movie bearing the generic handle CREATURE ended up with as many theatrical screens as it has might confound contemporary horror fans. Usually grotty films of this ilk—especially those starring ubiquitous genre icon Sid Haig—are designed for the small screen and unsophisticated audiences. Perhaps it’s due to the pedigree of producer Sid Sheinberg, former head of Universal Pictures and legend in his own right. Maybe it’s because the film’s setup bears more than a passing resemblance to HATCHET, and the fact that HATCHET II garnered brief screen time, and some notoriety, paved the way. But whatever the reason, it’s thrilling to have such an unabashed old-school genre romp out there beside the latest monolithic Hollywood headache, and even cooler that there’s a dude in a slimy rubber suit on the poster.

And that’s really what CREATURE boils down to: a simple, good-time horror flick and yes, a dude-in-a-rubber-suit horror flick at that. A long-in-gestation pet project of former FX guy Fred Andrews, CREATURE sees a parade of somewhat more interesting than usual, slightly older than teenage kids (whose ranks include Serinda Swan and Amanda Fuller) get lost in the bayou, where they meet a grinning weirdo named Chopper (played by professional grinning weirdo Haig) and, of course, the creature of the title, an 8-foot-tall reptilian swamp monster named Lockjaw with a double set of teeth, a hunger for blood...and a really icky, batshit-crazy backstory. Oh, and a giant, glistening...well, why spoil the fun?

And that’s what CREATURE is: fun. It has no pretensions to be great art, but has nice dollops of Southern Gothic sleaze, a great lug of a cheapie-cool monster and enough deviations from the “dead teenager” formula to keep you paying attention to the wonderfully ludicrous twists. And it’s funny—blackly funny. As in the best of the Bs, no one on screen takes five to wink at the audience; they play it straight, but that doesn’t mean the filmmakers aren’t pushing their tongues deep into their cheeks. Unlike the cult-fave HATCHET films, this one’s restrained with the gore, not using it as the sick punchline for vaudevillian amusement. Rather, CREATURE wants to pretend that a half-man/half-alligator monster slopping around in pretty people’s guts is perfectly palatable. Roger Corman circa 1958 would have been proud.

The other thing that really pushes CREATURE out of the generic DTV monster-mash ghetto is the music, composed by Bauhaus drummer Kevin Haskins—a truly bizarre, experimental carpet of weird ambiance and electronics that is like the aural icing on a silly, sick, wonky and very welcome cake (if only more horror filmmakers paid attention to how important sound and music are to giving their work a personality...).

If you opt to have a few drinks and plunk down your hard-earned ducats on CREATURE this weekend, here’s what you’ll get: blood, beasts, breasts (the opening sequence sees Andrews tipping his hat to the Sheinberg-sponsored JAWS, but with much more visible skin) a wild-eyed turn by Haig and passable performances from the creature-fodder cast (though Fuller, whose turn in last year’s blistering RED WHITE & BLUE was equaled only by Charlotte Gainsbourg’s in ANTICHRIST, is rather wasted). Ultimately, CREATURE ain’t that far removed from William Malone’s same-named 1985 trash sorta-classic ALIEN ripoff. You’ve seen it all before, but rarely executed with such no-nonsense charm.



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