

Crass plot, disappointing animation sink 'Shark Tale'

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

The best that can be said about a bottom-feeder like "Shark Tale" is that it makes you appreciate a cultured pearl like "Finding Nemo" that much more.

Superficially, this shameless rip-off resembles Nemo only in that it is also an animated, undersea adventure revolving around the plight of a brightly-colored fish. But that's right where the similarities end.

While Nemo was a light, heartwarming fable and fun for the whole family, "Shark Tale" is a relatively-crass cartoon which might not even be appropriate for very young children, despite its kid-friendly PG rating.

For it deals with adult subject-matter, such as dating, gambling addiction and the mob, and not always in an appropriate manner.



Will Smith is the voice of "Oscar," a tiny, trash-talking fish who's in debt to the Mafia.

Already, several anti-defamation groups have understandably complained about the picture's insensitively linking Italians with organized crime, and there are other groups equally-de-

meaned by the film's tendency to trade in obvious stereotypes. Just as offensive as the school of Mafia fish speaking in 'fuhgedaboutits' and 'bada-bing, bada-booms' are several ostensibly Black

characters butchering English in Ebonics.

Despite all of this, what's most irritating about "Shark Tale" is its incessant plastering of prominent ad placements across its cinematic

seascape, ala a minor league baseball team's outfield wall.

These commercials are passed-off as clever plays on words, because Coca-Cola has been transformed into Coral-Cola, Krispy Kreme into Kelpy Kreme, Old Navy into Old Wavy, The Gap into The Gup, etcetera. But each product's distinctive lettering and logo is so recognizable, that the actual brand names automatically register in the mind without necessarily noticing the slight spelling alterations.

Be that as it may, "Shark Tale" typecasts Will Smith as the voice of Oscar, a tiny, trash-talking fish with a 5,000 clam debt that has him in hot water with the mob. In addition, Oscar's libido has left his love life in a limbo where he has to choose between Angie (Renee Zellweger), an innocent angelfish, and Lola (Angelina Jolie), a scheming, seductive dragonfish.

Robert De Niro co-stars as ruthless Mafia godfather Don Lino, while Jack Black plays his son, Lenny, a meek, vegetarian shark who'd rather not have anything to do with the family business.

The cast also includes Martin Scorsese as an eyebrowed blowfish, reggae's Ziggy Marley and comedian Doug E. Doug as Rastafarian jellyfish, NBC's Katie Couric as reporter Katie Current, and Vincent Pastore, Michael Imperoli and Peter Falk in one-dimensional roles.

Even the animation is disappointing, with the anthropomorphic leads being imbued with so many human traits that they come off more like people than as fish. And the story is a muddled mess which never makes its mind up whether it wants to be a Mafia drama, a romantic comedy or simply a disconnected sequence of crude one-liners.

"Shark Tale" is only decisive in its efforts to whet the appetites of consumers.

This leads to the sneaky suspicion that it might have been designed more as a series of sales pitches than as a feature-length actually intended to entertain. If this represents the future of filmmaking, heaven help us.

Fair (1 star). Rated PG for mild language and epithets and crude humor.

Bishop T. D. Jakes hopes movie inspires

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Thomas Dexter Jakes was born on June 9, 1957, in South Charleston, W. Va., to Ernest, an entrepreneur, and Odith, an educator. He credits his parents, both charitable benefactors in the community, with instilling in him integrity, discipline and self-reliance.

From a very young age, he was devoted to the gospel. In 1979, he began fulfilling his calling to the ministry by founding and serving as pastor of Greater Emmanuel Temple of Faith, a small storefront church in Montgomery, W. Va., which originated with only 10 parishioners. Referred to as the "Shepherd to the Shattered," he came to be known for ministering to drug addicts, the

homeless, prostitutes, single mothers and others in dire circumstances.

Over the course of his career, Bishop Jakes has also been a community advocate, syndicated columnist, best-selling novelist, playwright, author, inspirational speaker and broadcaster. Five years ago, he relocated to Dallas, where he now pastors the non-denominational Potter's House, one of America's fastest-growing mega-churches.

A cousin of talk show host Tavis Smiley, the popular televangelist can be seen on TV programs airing on BET, the Daystar Network, the Christian Channel and the God Channel. This very busy Renaissance cleric has also produced conferences, symposiums, plays, gospel albums and books — one of

which, "Woman, Thou Art Loosed," has just been made into a feature film.

Jakes, who recently added acting to his repertoire and appears in the movie, lives in Dallas with his wife, Serita, and their five children.

KW: What gave you the idea to write "Woman, Thou Art Loosed" in the first place?

BJ: "Well, I've spent 28 years doing counseling, and I've gotten to see a lot of things from the inside in terms of people's lives and struggles. So, I think it's a case of art imitating life. Bringing it to the screen just gives us an opportunity to look at segments of people's lives that ordinarily remain private and hidden from public view."

KW: What made you decide to turn it into a movie?

"Censorship will always exist," said Soandres del Rio, 28, of Hermanos de Causa, or Brothers With a Cause. "I have to think really hard about the way to say something, a way that will be well understood, to avoid getting myself into possible trouble."

But rappers such as del Rio say they support Cuba's revolution, and their criticism is constructive. "We're not focusing on the problem with a point of view that's looking to overthrow the president," said del Rio. "We're simply saying that such a thing is bad, such a thing could be better, we're Cuban too, and we have rights."

And most everyone is united in wanting Cuba's unique brand of rap to be recognized.

"We're working so hard," said 25-year-old Jessel Saladriga, known as "Mr. Egg," of Los Paisanos. "Our dream is that people across the world will know who we are, and what we stand for."

Hip-Hop

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tour, but they still must scramble to make ends meet. "It's very, very difficult to make a disc in Cuba," said Umoja, known as "Kokimo." Studio recording time costs \$15 an hour and mixing each song costs \$5, he said — a daunting sum in impoverished Cuba.


Along with the financial challenges, Cuban rappers must also think twice about lyrics overtly critical of the communist state.

Observers accustomed to almost nonexistent public criticism were shocked at the 2002 hip-hop festival, when performers made direct jabs at the government. One rapper called the Cuban police "the worst nightmare" of the island's youth. Another group complained of difficulties under the island's economic system — "I'm tired of this routine, how much longer will it last?"

Both groups were suspended from performing for six months.


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