



CHRISTOPHER YOUNG

'Fantasy Island' Is A Missed Opportunity To Re-imagine A Classic Show Into Something Suspenseful

By **Murjani Rawls** - Feb 19, 2020

The first episode of *Fantasy Island* aired on ABC on January 28th, 1978 starting Ricardo Montalbán as Mr. Roarke. A character who presided over a mysterious island that granted visitors their wildest fantasies – albeit for a price. There was usually a caveat or a lesson to be learned. Nothing can be given back without something being taken, right? You look at this basic plot and it seems ripe for a horror remake. Or at least a suspenseful update at best. This was the task of Blumhouse and director Jeff Wadlow (*Truth Or Dare*). The setting itself is a fertile playground to make an intriguing story. Combining many different threads into a coherent movie is another degree of difficulty.

Much of the beginning of the movie follows the main crux of the show. An assortment of strangers come to an island with all different desires in hopes that Mr. Roarke (**Michael Peña**) can make good on them. Some of these wishes include getting back at a school bully or having an excess of money and power. The fantasies find a middle ground of being very trivial and also emotional.

It's the same balance that the movie struggles to maintain and discards completely once you arrive at the third act. *Fantasy Island* is interested in fulfilling every bad horror motif in its almost two hour run time. Cheap jump scares that you can spot. The movie entices the viewer to follow the resolution bread crumbs that ultimately leads to a puzzling swerve.

There's a certain mysticism that's involved in how the island makes these dreams come true. Much of it is tied to Mr. Roarke directly and the story of him keeping his wife Julia (Parisa Fitz-Henley) alive. With how the story plays out, the inferred depiction of the island is almost akin to a hungry monster. So, there's this symbiotic relationship between Mr. Roarke and the island with a story that seems underserved. It's not so much that the island is out to teach an admirable lesson, but it's more so out to punish.

One of the main problems that are apparent in *Fantasy Island* is the movie trying so hard to tie itself together. In doing so, it directly undermines the stories that compel audiences to care. Gwen Olsen's (**Maggie Q**) reason to go to the island deals with her regret and to have a second chance of having a family. Patrick Sullivan (**Austin Stowell**) wants to go to war to have a moment with his late father. While the choice for heroism and sacrifice is admirable, there is some dialogue and decisions that render questionable logic. Melanie Cole (**Lucy Hale**) and her childhood tormentor, Sloane Maddison (**Portia Doubleday**) engage in a cat-and-mouse game where each character is unlikable. There's a point in the movie where both characters are presented with a choice to forgive their past mistakes. Afterward, Melanie's character arch steers the movie in a completely different direction. You don't feel tied to a certain story beat as you should.

The purpose of granting these wishes are for our characters to truly learn something. That not all that shimmers is really gold. You only feel that a couple of characters really grasp the concept. Sure, having exorbitant amounts of money brings about many problems. The cinematography of Toby Oliver shows the beauty and lushness of the island itself. The movie also does a good job at differentiating settings. It just falls short in the [horror](#) element. Nothing is particularly creepy and some scenes fall to the more comical side such as a zombie guerrilla tactical team.

It's hard to walk away from *Fantasy Island* feeling like this idea could have been utilized better. This is a pretty good cast and a good basis to build something that you can make sequels to. Perhaps, there's a movie where you can parse both compelling scares and narrative that really

depicts the dangers of changing the past. Unfortunately, this movie will be known as a low-budgeted early year release that may be entertaining at a surface level.

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