

Dish, The (2000)

Directed by Rob Sitch

Writing credits Santo Cilauro & Tom Gleisner

Genre: Comedy (based on a true story)

As Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, our only link was a satellite dish in rural Australia with a few "bugs" (And a few hundred sheep).

User Rating:  7.4/10 (3,421 votes)

Runtime: 101 min

Country: Australia

Plot Outline: In the days before the July 19, 1969 space mission that marked humankind's first steps on the moon, NASA was working with a group of Australian technicians who had agreed to set up a satellite interface. The fact that the Australians placed the satellite dish in the middle of an Australian sheep farm in the outback town of Parkes was just one of the reasons that NASA was concerned.

Town pride, the shaky electricity supply, a worried NASA official, and even romance, all play a part as tensions mount with the world depending on them for pictures of the first moon walk.

Based on a true story, *The Dish* takes a smart, comical look at the differing cultural attitudes between Australia and the U.S. while revisiting one of history's great events.

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The Dish takes us back to the third week in July 1969, when Neil Armstrong was about to take one of the most famous documented steps in modern human history. July 20, 1969 was one of those rare days when most of humanity was focused on an event that had more to do with the triumph of the human spirit than with war, religion, or death.

Most movies made about the moon landing have a decidedly American viewpoint. *The Dish* takes place in the rural Australian town of Parkes, where the largest radio telescope in the southern hemisphere is being "borrowed" by NASA to track Apollo 11 on its famous trip. The television images of the moonwalk are due to be broadcast using their dish. This is a source of tremendous civic pride, despite the fact that the Parkes radio telescope is located in the middle of a sheep paddock.

The telescope is operated by Cliff Buxton (Sam Neill), the "dishmaster", a hard-working, knowledgeable man who lost some of the joy of life when his wife died the year before. He is joined by his two assistants, Mitch (Kevin Harrington) and Glenn (Tom Long), and a NASA representative, Al Burnett (Patrick Warburton). Together, these four are responsible for handling the operations that will allow Houston to keep in constant contact with the spacecraft and to allow the world to see Armstrong's historic space walk. Of course, there are difficulties - such as a power failure and an inconvenient wind storm - but nothing the intrepid team cannot handle.

The Dish has many subplots, including the heroic reception of the American Ambassador to Australia in Parkes, the political maneuvering of Mayor Bob McIntyre, and a romantic flirtation between shy Glenn and a pretty local girl named Janine (Eliza Szonert). None of these secondary story threads detracts from the central story; rather they add to it. *The Dish* is not as much about the moon landing as it is about the gathering together of a town and the unsung courage of the behind-the-scenes people who are as important to any great event as those in the limelight.

The Dish is a comedy with a heart - a rare thing in the movies these days.

from a film review by James Berardinelli

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Discussion:

1. Which character did you find most interesting?
2. Which scene do you find most memorable?
3. Discuss the connection between the emerging romance between Glen and Janine and the story of the space walk.
4. What differences between Australian and American culture were shown in the film?
5. In your view, what is the film's main message?
6. Do you think spending money on space projects is worthwhile?
7. Would you like to go to the moon or travel in space one day?