

Enchanted Turns the Spyglass Both Ways

By

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The best fantasy movie since *Electric Spec's* last issue has been the DVD release of *Enchanted*. It is a fish-out-of-water story, an offshoot of speculative fiction wherein a character from one universe is magically transferred to another, offering insight into both.

Some Day My Prince Will Come

The first ten minutes of *Enchanted* are set in Andalasia, a 2-D cartoon world blended from every fairy tale movie since *Snow White*. Giselle (Amy Adams) is pining away in her room for her dream prince. She's so giddy with anticipation that she bursts into song.

Meanwhile, across the kingdom, gallant goofus Prince Edward (James Marsden) is slaying ogres with his sidekick Nathaniel (Timothy Spall) and *his* sidekick Pip (a talking chipmunk). He hears Giselle's song and dashes to her window, followed by the ogre who dutifully tries to eat her. After the tussle and chase, Edward saves Giselle and they arrange to be married on the morrow.

Edmund's wicked stepmother, a witch-queen (Susan Sarandon), wants to foil the wedding. If Edmund doesn't marry, she can continue to rule Andalasia. So when Giselle arrives for the wedding, the queen takes her aside and pushes her down a deep, dark well, banishing her forever to...

... modern day, 3-dimensional, real-life New York City.

Giselle's golly-gee innocence and ridiculous layer-cake dress make her a freak in the city. Luckily it's New York, where a little freakishness is tolerated. Even luckier, she runs into Robert (Patrick Dempsey), a divorce attorney who has enough pity for the mentally ill that he takes Giselle into his care just long enough—he hopes—to get her on the nearest bus or plane back to the Midwest where she probably came from.

Fantastic Pedigree

As speculative fiction, *Enchanted* is in good company. Some of its relatives are *The Amber Spyglass*, *E.T.*, *Stardust* (a book by Neil Gaiman and a movie released last year), and The Narnia books. If you want, you can look back even further to Mark Twain (*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*) or even to Dante (*The Divine Comedy*, aka *Dante's Inferno*).

The fish-out-of-water story is like a spyglass (amber or otherwise); you see different things when you turn it around. Put the eyepiece to your eye and you get a glimpse into another, distant world: send Dante to Hell and have him report back on

what it's like. Point the eyepiece away from you, and suddenly you see your own world from a fresh perspective, distorted and strange: bring *E.T.* to our world to illuminate just how paranoid and mistrusting we can be (and just how lucky we are to have Reese's Pieces).

Enchanted turns the spyglass both ways.

New York through the Eyes of an Innocent

Since Giselle comes to our universe, the spyglass is pointed backwards. It shows us our own world through the eyes of a visitor from an innocent, childlike world.

Emerging from a manhole in Times Square, Giselle nearly gets run over in her first ten seconds in our world. The neon lights are dazzling, and the mob of staring humanity is intimidating. When the camera pulls back to reveal the neon, New York looks exciting and glamorous, but in close-up and at street level, it's overwhelming.

Swept out of Times Square by the mob, Giselle loses her tiara to an old thief with no teeth, and then finds herself walking past an all-night liquor store on an empty street. We get a sense of dread, knowing she's a sitting duck for muggers or worse. Giselle can't even imagine what kind of danger she's in, but these are our streets, and we take them for granted.

When Robert finally gets her to safety, he becomes condescending. Clearly, Giselle must be mentally defective because nobody is naïve enough to believe in goodness and True Love as sincerely as she does. The fact that Robert makes a very good living by helping people divorce, well, that's just how our world works. Every sane person knows that.

When Traveling to Andalusia...

Screenwriter Kevin Lima also turns the spyglass around. We get to see how things work in Andalusia when he allows a little bit of Giselle's magic to creep into our universe.

Did you know that in Andalusia woodland creatures handle common household chores? Andalusians sing the right introductory notes and the creatures come running. The singer segues into a working song, and the creatures begin to sweep, dust, wash, and dry, assembly-line style. In Andalusia, you get fawns and chipmunks and bluebirds; whereas in New York City there are really only about three common "woodland" creatures, none of which we associate with cleanliness.

Andalusians have an interesting way of handling uncontrollable emotion. When they overflow with feeling, they let it all out in a song. When they do, anyone in the vicinity—including crabs, hippos, and flamingos—will join in the raucous calypso number. Luckily, in Central Park, lots of people sing for spare change and dance at the drop of a hat, and these people are also susceptible to the Andalusian's spell.

Perhaps the most interesting fact about Andalusians is the role of love. In our world, love is an emotion programmed into us by evolution for sexual reproduction and family stability. We don't know whether Andalusians actually reproduce, but *Enchanted* offers one insightful piece of evidence against the notion that they are sexual beings. When Giselle sings about finding the perfect lips for her True Love's Kiss, she repeats the refrain, "That's the reason we need lips so much / For lips are the only things that

touch." Either Andaliasians are more different than we thought, or perhaps Giselle is simply still too young to know about the birds and the bees.

The Truth about Andaliasia

Fish-out-of-water stories can be very enlightening, but they probably offer more genuine insight when both worlds actually exist. An Australian crocodile wrestler coming to New York City, or a missionary going to a remote jungle probably have more to offer than screenwriters and novelists of science fiction and fantasy.

Still, a self-referential look at the fiction aimed at girls tells us a lot about ourselves and what we want our daughters to believe. We want them to believe in True Love's Kiss. We want them to anticipate their wedding day as the most important and magical day of their life. We want them to believe that people are good and kind, except for the villains, who can always be vanquished in 90 minutes or less.

Like the best fish-out-of-water stories, *Enchanted* tells us about ourselves. New York City will get our daughters soon enough. We just want them to believe in Andaliasia for a little while longer.