Written by Mike Schulz
Sunday, 28 November 2010 17:43

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LOVE & OTHER DRUGS

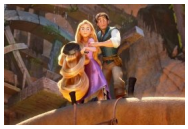
In my 2009 review of the director's turgid World War II drama *Defiance*, I opened by asking, "Am I the only person who wishes that Edward Zwick would go back to making sharp, bitchy comedies like his 1986 Rob Lowe-Demi Moore romance *About Last Night ...*?" Well, less than two years later, Zwick has returned to those romantic-comedy roots with *Love & Other Drugs*. Because, apparently, I needed another reminder to be careful what I wish for.

All told, I guess this sorta-raunchy, sorta-sweet movie isn't bad, and it certainly has more energy than the earnest, weighty, Oscar-baiting pictures that Zwick has been foisting on us of late. Set during the dawn of the late-'90s Viagra craze, *Love & Other Drugs* finds Jake Gyllenhaal playing a pharmaceutical sales rep who falls, quickly and deeply, for Anne Hathaway's free spirit with the artfully shabby loft apartment, and their scenes together, especially in the introductory reels, are a blast. There are far worse ways to spend your multiplex allowance than watching two great-looking, frequently naked stars laugh and cavort and eat Chinese take-out, and for long stretches, Gyllenhaal and Hathaway are enough to make you ignore the tired sitcom plotting and obvious hard-on gags; legitimate screen chemistry is so rare these days that the stars' loose and easy rapport is refreshing in the extreme. Yet with Hathaway's Maggie immediately introduced as suffering from early-onset Parkinson's disease, you spend even the film's fast, flinty early scenes waiting for the other shoe to drop, and drop it does. In truth, a whole *bunch* of shoes drop, and what's frustrating, if not infuriating, about the movie is that absolutely none of them are

matching ones.

You want subplots? Man oh *man* does *Love & Other Drugs* – with its script by Zwick, Charles Randolph, and Marshall Herskovitz – provide subplots. There's Gyllenhaal's unapologetic lothario dealing with his fear of commitment, and Hathaway's noble victim dealing with her fear of abandonment, and the pair dealing with their mutual fear of intimacy. There's Oliver Platt (unusually unpleasant here) delineating the perils of corporate greed, and Hank Azaria (his charm in the service of an odious role) embodying medical-establishment impropriety, and Gabriel Macht (blandly threatening) satirizing pharmaceutical-company competition.

And in the most jarring touch of all, there's Josh Gad as Gyllenhaal's unmotivated, multi-millionaire, porn-addict brother, who takes residence on his sibling's couch and jerks off to videotapes of baby bro having sex. It's bad enough that Gad's every revolting, credibility-straining appearance makes you want to hide under your theater seat. (Aiming for Jack Black, the actor doesn't even qualify as sub-Dan Fogler.) But how can any movie think to offer his grotesque antics back-to-back with scenes of a tearful Maggie struggling to open a bottle of pills, or actual Parkinson's sufferers – in the film's most truthful, touching, and utterly shameless sequence – wittily espousing on their hardships during group therapy? With its tireless and eventually exhausting vacillation between high drama and the lowest of lowbrow humor, *Love & Other Drugs* wants to be a romantic comedy for the ADD generation, but it's one that's clearly, and sadly, off its meds.



TANGLED

I was among those invited by radio station 104.9 FM, Disney, and Rave Motion Pictures Davenport 53 to attend a November 20 sneak preview of the animated musical *Tangled*, and I'm happy to report that it totally made up for the anguish of *Secretariat*. Admittedly, my hopes weren't terribly high at the outset of Disney's latest, as this spin on the Rapunzel fairy tale opened with dispiritingly snarky, Dreamworks-y voice-over narration, some rather confusing backstory, and an introductory number that sounded like what you'd get if you

took
The Little Mermaid
's "Part of My World" and
Beauty & the Beast
's "Belle" and kept alternating a lyric from each. (Upon the introduction of our heroine's anthropomorphic-chameleon pet, I also worried that I'd reached my breaking point with voiceless, "funny" quadruped sidekicks.) Yet despite some forgivable cheating in the narrative – the length of Rapunzel's cascading coiffure changes depending on the needs of the scene – and a borderline-unforgivable
cheat at the movie's finale (she's got magical hair, fine, but when did her
teardrops
become magical?!),
Tangled
is an enormous amount of fun.

Though the colors are predictably dimmed in its 3D presentation, the imagery is still rich and vibrant; there's a particularly stunning sequence in which hundreds of glowing paper lanterns ascend to the heavens. The encounters between the heroic thief Flynn Rider (voiced by Zachary Levi and modeled, apparently, on Adrien Brody) and the huffy steed Maximus are oftentimes laugh-out-loud hilarious, almost as funny as the slapstick involving a continually, and surprisingly, useful frying pan. (Not since *Throw Momma from the Train* has the kitchen utensil been employed this satisfyingly.) While the songs are nothing to write home about, lead Mandy Moore's vocals are lovely, and a tavern-full of ruffians croon an amusing ditty that wouldn't be out of place in *Monty Python's Spamalot.*
And best of all,
Tangled
finds Broadway legend Donna Murphy voicing Rapunzel's stepmother, a deceptively solicitous harridan who shames her daughter into remaining locked in a tower and responds to the girl's excitement over her new beau with a martini-dry, "Yes. A wanted criminal. I'm
so
proud." Now there's a welcome first in the Disney canon: a hateful villain whose weapon of choice is
guilt
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