



FROZEN

As its fans (and I'm one of them) will gladly attest, Disney's *Frozen* is a bit of a throwback to the studio's recent golden age of animated entertainments – that period from the late '80s to the mid-'90s that found more-or-less traditional fairy and folk tales goosed with healthy portions of Broadway razzmatazz. (Those in the press championing this new work as a welcome and rather bold return to form, however, do seem to have conveniently forgotten about 2009's excellent

The Princess & the Frog

and 2010's near-excellent

Tangled

.) But while much of the film follows the standard Disney-in-its-prime formula to the letter – big-eyed ingénue heroine, check; wacky animal sidekick, check; rafter-shaking power ballad destined to win an Oscar, check – there is one aspect to

Frozen

that separates it from the

Little Mermaid

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Beauty & the Beast

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Lion King

herd: The movie is kind of bonkers.

Not always to its credit, in my opinion, as it took close to 10 minutes at the film's start for me to glean just what the hell was going on. Inspired, as the end credits tell us, by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Snow Queen* – though, beyond its wintry setting, inspired *how* is tough to discern

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Frozen

opens with some fuzzy, confusing backstory introducing us to our young leads: the red-headed spitfire Anna (voiced by Kristen Bell) and her platinum-blond sister Elsa (Idina Menzel), the latter of whom was born with the magical power to turn anything she touches into ice. A frightening household accident, an encounter with some lovable trolls, and the deaths of two parents later, the formerly close siblings are now uncomfortably estranged, and awaiting Elsa's coronation as the new queen of a remote Scandinavian kingdom. But in her overly dramatic reaction to the news of Anna's engagement – a betrothal that, as characters here recognize, comes about

awfully

quickly, even for an animated comedy – Elsa’s incensed touch imposes an eternal winter over her entire kingdom, causing the young royal to hightail it to the hills and begin her self-imposed exile in a shimmering ice mansion resembling Superman’s (the Christopher Reeve Superman’s) Fortress of Solitude. It’s up to Anna, then, to bring Elsa back home, aided by the hunky, Nordic galoot Kristoff (Jonathan Groff), his trusty reindeer Sven, and the ambulatory snowman Olaf (Josh Gad), whose grandest hope involves lying on a beach in summer.

Let’s stop for a second here. Magical powers? Okay. Why not? Lovable trolls? Well, sure, there are trolls in Andersen’s story, but they’re not exactly lovable, and barring their singing the one self-consciously clever, time-wasting song that should have been cut from the movie entirely, it’s hard to see what *Frozen*’s trolls bring to the party here. Ambulatory snowman? You got me. We see the very young Elsa construct a snowman that she names Olaf early in the film, yet we never learn what kind of sorcery causes it, numerous years later, to spring to life, or why Olaf is so fanatically devoted to the idea of one day sunning himself in the tropics. Much of Disney’s latest, directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, is like this; random ideas that don’t connect appear to be thrown into the mix with little regard for narrative logic, and the movie too frequently leads us to expect plot diversions and confrontations that don’t transpire. (Early on, it’s suggested that close to 10 years pass with the sisters not allowed to see one another, and we wait for the moment when they’ll finally, again, lock eyes. Apparently, it happens, but perversely it happens off-screen.)

Yet considering how fantastically funny Josh Gad’s line readings are, I wouldn’t have traded that strange, sun-obsessed snowman for anything in the world, just as I wouldn’t have dreamed of missing Menzel’s belting of Elsa’s requisite you-go-girl anthem “Let It Go,” or the film’s stunningly tactile animated effects, or the description of Groff’s cheerful lummo as “riding across the fjord like a valiant, pungent reindeer king.” Even when it doesn’t make a lick of sense, the touching, smartly paced, oftentimes riotous, and consistently gorgeous *Frozen* inspires a delicate enchantment, and I’ll admit to being quite taken with the one element of the movie that truly

did

feel revolutionary: It turns out that the token, storybook example of true love required to break Elsa’s spell is not, in fact, love of a romantic nature. Thematic progress in Disney’s animated outings may be slow in coming, but as the studio’s post-golden-era product happily suggests, it is coming.

Disney on Ice: "Frozen," "Black Nativity," and "Homefront"

Written by Mike Schulz

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