

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "THE FOUNTAIN"

The good news: I don't have to worry about giving too much of the plot away.

The bad news: There is no plot.

In a November 2006 interview in *Wired*, writer/director Darren Aronofsky describes his early enthusiasm toward his concept of "The Fountain": "How cool would it be to cut from a battle scene in some historical period to a man traveling alone in space for an unknown reason?" The operable words here being "for an unknown reason." After 96 minutes of staring at pretty pictures, frequently the same pretty pictures, the reason continues to be unknown.

Making the reason that actors Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett pulled out right before the initial shooting date all the more known.

There's an argument being propounded by fans of this film that the audience may not always need a plot. Phooey. It's called "moving pictures" for a reason, referring to a plot that moves, hopefully moving us. And speaking of moving, for 96 minutes we get to watch Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz weep. And weep. They're doing so much weeping up there on the screen, that there's no need to join in unless one wishes to add one's own tears of boredom into this intergalactic, nebulaic mess called "The Fountain."

Seemingly more about a tree than a fountain, we get more time travel with this chrono-yawn than a "Back to the Future" trilogy. Though time travel in a story can be highly effective, I don't think it was Aronofsky's long-term goal to jump from one epoch to another in order to model Jackman's different looks. But there we have it: bearded, bath-deficient Conquistador vs. hip, scraggly scientist vs. Kung Fu Carradine-esque future boy. Maybe, à la "American Idol," viewers can text message their votes for their favorite look. At least that would create some sort of frisson, some get-up-and-go to this cinematic thing that got-up-and-went.

As for Jackman's ladylove, at one point the underused Ellen Burstyn character praises Izzy (Rachel Weisz), speaking of her as a wonderful woman. Really? We don't get to see anything wonderfulâ€”actually, all we know about Izzy is that she's crying and dying. Or is that dying and crying? Which order is most effective? Let's review it at least another dozen times before deciding.

Still, "The Fountain" treats us to some beautiful cinematography. Having lost his big budget, it was necessity that drove Aronofsky to find another way to shoot f/x techniques in a much more economical method than the costly CGI ("Computer Generated Imagery"). Enter Peter Parks, a photographer who, per the Wired interview, "can make a dash of curry powder cascading toward the lens look like an onslaught of flaming meteorites." Cinematic touches such as a car's headlights first approaching upside down and then right-side up, repeated later by horses' hooves, is a fun effect to observe. The repetition of the left to right scrolling of calligraphic letters transitioning into scenes is lovelyâ€”if only the ensuing scenes had as much movement as the scrolling letters leading into it, we might be getting somewhere. But no, tree-like, we stay firmly rooted as we are pelted with frame after frame of the same damn thing.

Izzy gives her husband her manuscript of "The Fountain," requesting that he write the final chapter. Her excuse? She's dying and is therefore otherwise engaged. Perhaps Aronofsky is attempting to do the same, handing this mess of images off to the audience, hoping that maybe as we sit and stare in the dark, we might be able to ascribe some meaning to his work. Sorry, guy, but it's the holidays, and we've got so many year-end movies to seeâ€”we're also otherwise engaged.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: D-plus

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Production Credits: "The Fountain" Directed by: Darren Aronofsky Written by: Darren Aronofsky
Cast: Hugh Jackman, Rachel Weisz, Ellen Burstyn Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 96 minutes Grade:
D-plus

The Screen Savor: "A Chrono-Yawn"™ by Kimberly_Gadette