

Magical Trip to ‘The Secret World of Arrietty’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 16, 2012 - 3:27pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Hayao Miyazaki is a living legend and his company Studio Ghibli should be as revered as Disney. They have given moviegoers around the world so many incredible gifts such as “Spirited Away,” “My Neighbor Totoro,” and “Princess Mononoke.” When Mr. Miyazaki only produces or writes instead of directing, such as with the new “The Secret World of Arrietty,” the results are less magical than otherwise but there’s still a lot to like in this gentle, sweet family film. It’s nowhere near manic enough for any wee ones with a case of the ADD (or just general toddler attention spans), but “The Secret World of Arrietty” will connect with the right audience, those who have been enraptured by Studio Ghibli before.

Miyazaki wrote and produced “The Secret World of Arrietty” and his fingerprints are all over it, particularly in the scenes of the beauty and diversity of the natural world. Miyazaki has long been enraptured with the idea that there is wonder in the most mundane place – maybe even your backyard. And that sense of wonder is the best thing about “Arrietty.” In fact, the film stumbles most when it comes back to its kiddie-friendly and somewhat-thin plot. I wanted more of the magical world and less of the practical dictates of the story of a girl the size of Tom Thumb, her parents, and the sickly boy who finds them and protects them.



The Secret World of Arrietty

Photo credit: Disney

Based on the book “The Borrowers” by Mary Norton and directed by Hiromasa Yonebayashi, “The Secret World of Arrietty” is about a small family...literally. The title character (Brigid Mender) is about the size of a large bug, a sweet girl who lives below the floor in an old Japanese home. She has her own home within the home with her tiny parents Pod (Will Arnett) and Homily (Amy Poehler). They openly wonder if they are the final members of their species as Pod heads out most nights into the house to “borrow.” They take little things that no one would ever notice like a cube of sugar that won’t be missed but will feed them for months or a pin that Arrietty can use to fend off rats that has been languishing at the back of a closet for years. They don’t take more than they need and they never want to be seen by humans.

Of course, Arrietty is seen in just the first few minutes of the film by Shawn (David Henrie), a sick young man living with his aunt at his mother’s childhood home before he has a heart operation. This sickly boy who has been forced to recognize the small beauties of life by facing potential death spots Arrietty early in the film and then notices her again in his room when she tries to borrow a single tissue. Instead of

panicking or trying to kidnap her for proof (as housekeeper Hara, voiced by Carol Burnett tries to do later in the film), Shawn protects Arrietty. He puts his own life at risk to protect Arrietty and keep their species alive.



The Secret World of Arrietty

Photo credit: Disney

The scenes in which Arrietty and her father climb through the bottom of the house, encountering bugs and using well-placed nails to ascend are beautiful. It’s captivating to think that the world below your feet could be as exciting a place as it is for Arrietty and her family. When she’s outside, encountering the family cat, jumping on leaves, escaping from bugs, or having an amazing interaction with a crow, “The Secret World of Arrietty” is at its best. Like even the least-effective Ghibli films, there is some striking imagery here that offers further proof that not every animated film needs to be an orgy of CGI effects.

However, when Shawn and Arrietty begin conversing, “The Secret World” sags a bit. Kids will get bored and you may lose interest a bit as well. I was happy that “The Secret World of Arrietty” never gets goofy or silly like so many kid’s movies but it could have used a bit more whimsy and a bit more humor. The whole thing feels a bit too slight to heartily recommend, almost as if the filmmakers were stretching an hour-long story to meet a feature-length running time. The best Studio Ghibli films linger with you like a dream of a magical world that you wish you could close your eyes and revisit. “The Secret World of Arrietty” may not be as magical but it’s still a sweet trip worth taking.

“The Secret World of Arrietty” features voice work by Brigid Mender, David Henrie, Will Arnett, Amy Poehler, and Carol Burnett. It was written by Hayao Miyazaki and will be released by Disney on February 17th, 2012.



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