

Uneven 'Beautiful Creatures' Still Casts Spells

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 15, 2013 - 9:22am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The young adult horror/romance genre is running out of themes, could somebody please come up with a hunky Frankenstein monster? "Beautiful Creatures" uses witches as it's premise, and features newcomers Alice Englert and Aiden Ehrenreich as the spell-crossed lovers.

The film can't decide what it wants to be, obviously first it's about the hunk and the teenage witch swooning over each other for the Valentine's Day crowd, but also it weirdly tortures both lovers with a series of spells, perpetuated by "casters," and oddly features a series of unrelated characters who waltz in and out of the story without adding much to it. Whether the production is following the books closely or trying to create their own focus, either way the film is not cohesive. However, there are some highlights – a few of the spells are spectacular, the production design is appropriately gothic and bizarre, and Alice Englert (daughter of director Jane Campion) puts a nice spin on the waif-like girl turned reluctant witch.

There's a new kid in town, a small and close-minded Southern town with a civil war battle past. Her name is Lena (Alice Englert) and immediately the popular, Jesus-loving girls in her high school class start dissing on her relatives, who are rumored to be servants of Satan. This makes the goth-like girl a bit angry, and the result is smashed in classroom windows. There is something about Lena, a girl that high school hunk Ethan (Aiden Ehrenreich) had seen in a dream.



Wherefore Art Thou: Ethan (Aiden Ehrenreich) and Lena (Alice Englert) in 'Beautiful Creatures'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Like Lena, Ethan is an outsider, and longs to leave the small town. He explores Lena's living space, a manor named for owner Macon Ravenswood (Jeremy Irons). He finds out that Macon is a "incubus" and that his niece Lena is a "caster," who on her 16th birthday could be forced to the dark or light magical arts. Several characters surround this 16th year "claiming," including Sarafine (Emma Thompson), Amma (Viola Davis) and Ridley (Emmy Rossum).

"Beautiful Creatures" is a strange and rather non-compelling story, considering its high concept subject matter, and even the relationship that is center stage is shuffled aside to take up the whole claiming ritual. The story lacks focus with those plot devices fighting each other, and characters are introduced as seemingly important, and then disappear without further explanation. This film adaptation just couldn't corral whatever the novel was trying to communicate, and overall feels flat.

But that doesn't mean there aren't some cool scenes, this is witchcraft after all. One particular scenario has a table twirling round and round when Lena and Ridley face off, and the beauty of the confrontation has a surreal quality about it. Speaking of Ridley, she puts the wowza in witchy allure, making an entrance in a sports car, in an outfit that would put a spell on anyone. Alice Englert is perfectly cast as Lena, forgoing the usual goth girl darkness and displaying a welcome vulnerability. Production design is notable, including interiors in Ravenswood Manor that shape shift, and is influenced by the clean Bauhaus school of interior design.

The ending is a mess, and smacks of rewrite (the director Richard Lagravanese adapted the screenplay from Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl's novel). By the time the "confrontation" between light and dark has come about, Ridley seemed to be important, then wasn't, Amma seemed important, then wasn't, and Emma Thompson played a dual character that was at first important – and more interesting– when she was town antagonist Mrs. Lincoln, and then less important and interesting as Sarafine. Both Thompson and Jeremy Irons chew on the scenery and can't help but show off their bayou southern accents, so gnarled that subtitles could have helped.



Ravenswood Manor: Lena and Macon (Jeremy Irons) in 'Beautiful Creatures'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

The film adaptation no doubt got tangled in the "Twilight" formula...how to combine the hot teen romance versus the complex magical family tree and caster spells. The Southern gothic angle of the civil war ghosts and casters had some weight to it, much more than the lovers, but I'm sure the Warner Bros. marketing department is hoping for that young teen franchise, so the lovers dilute the caster angle. Also there are not enough bare shirted monster boys to fall back on, so it was up to the story to provide something, but it didn't deliver.

Anyway it's easy to picture Lena running away and marrying her man in the sequel, and Ethan becoming an advertising man in New York City, with his caster wife doing "bewitched" spells in suburbia. Featuring Emma Thompson as Endora, I mean Sarafine.

"Beautiful Creatures" opened everywhere on February 14th. Featuring Alice Englert, Aiden Ehrenreich, Jeremy Irons, Viola Davis and Emma Thompson. Screenplay adapted by Richard Lagravanese, from the novel by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl. Directed by Richard Lagravanese. Rated "PG-13"



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