

'Winter's Tale' Freezes in Cheesy Movie Hell

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on February 14, 2014 - 4:49pm

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The poster for “Winter’s Tale,” after promising that “It’s not a true story, it’s a love story,” makes a large demand from its viewers at the bottom: “This Valentine’s Day, Believe In Miracles.” While there is indeed a difference between filmmaking and marketing, it is hard to not imagine writer/director Akiva Goldsman whispering “believe in miracles” into the ear of every executive who helped “Winter’s Tale” come to life, immediately after throwing glitter on them.

The catch with miracles in movies is not whether we believe in miracles, but if we trust, or more directly, buy them. Do we buy the miraculous magic of Goldsman’s “Winter’s Tale”? Not at all. You can’t believe a miracle if you don’t buy the story behind it.

Based on Mark Halprin’s 672 page novel, “Winter’s Tale” is the swirling creation of a zealous Hollywood storyteller, or most definitely, the guy who made money for devising the puns of 1997’s “Batman & Robin.” In the film, Colin Farrell plays Peter Lake, a ruffian in early 20th century America who was abandoned by his parents when they were sent home from Ellis Island. Lake works as a thief for Pearly Soames (Russell Crowe), an angry man with scars on his face and literal demons within him. When Lake escapes from the clutches of Pearly (with the help of a flying white horse named Athansor) he soon gazes upon a woman named Beverly Penn (Jessica Brown Findlay), who is dying of consumption. Though the two meet while he is trying to rob her place, the couple begin a cold-and-heavy courtship, where he must respect her need for cold temperatures, and muffle his hormonal inclinations.

Meanwhile, Beverly’s life clock continues to wind down, and the two are the target of Pearly’s rage. Pearly thinks Peter is Beverly’s “miracle,” and in his business of killing miracles, needs to ruin Peter’s chances of saving someone, or else.



Peter Lake (Colin Farrell) in 'Winter's Tale'

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Their characters may be goofy being who speak weepy lines with stubborn accents, but Farrell and Findlay trudge through Goldsman's junky blizzard, trying to at least salvage their own parts. Farrell, especially, deserves some mercy despite picking such a jokey story and a weepy role. Even when Goldsman's script is squeezing him for all the cheese inside, he shows to be functional and sincere.

Other performances escape with less dignity. Russell Crowe continues to be a wavering talent, sometimes worth defending (like with "Les Miserables"), but "Winter's Tale" brings out some of the hammiest in him. William Hurt appears briefly in the movie as well, delivering his dialogue as Beverly's protective father as if he is trying to escape. Jennifer Connelly shows up to carry the grunt work that is this film's wild-and-crazy third act, but is overshadowed in silliness by a scene in which Eva Marie Saint (playing a secret character) drops a set of binders.

Considering Goldsman's initial background as a screenwriter, one can see a particular aspect of this endeavor that must have appealed to him. A popular rule in screenwriting is that you can only have "one magic bean," that the storytelling process can't handle more than one large fantastical element (like a story having a significant "ghost" character). With "Winter's Tale", Goldsman defies this rule, but unfortunately gives the credo further credence with his absurd lack of tact in handling his many special elements. "It's not a true story, it's a love story" only becomes a cop-out for the absolutely bananas version of fantasy reality he creates within this movie.

Athansor, for example, is introduced as a magical getaway, one conveniently waiting for Peter when he needs to make his big break, and then out of nowhere shows to be a horse with excellent leaping bounds. How this punctuated? With Crowe snarling, all seriousness in tact, "He's got the goddamn horse."

Though a quick peek at the film's official trailer tries to downplay the crazy party at hand, here are some strong ingredients to be seen in the big picture: not just one but TWO dying characters of innocent backgrounds, a broadly drawn presentation of "angels and demons" featuring a Fresh Prince of Darkness, magical stones, a Ms. Freeze (instead of Mr. Freeze) medical condition, a character who simply stops aging, a flying horse with convenient timing and translucent wings, a food critic employed by a newspaper with a nice apartment, and more. "Winter's Tale" is like the "Expendables" of fairy-tale and religious elements, but when all mashed together the result is too excessive to take seriously.

On top of this, then add the movie's capital letter handling of ideas like Fate and Destiny, which are directed towards the story's ultimate point of gushing about Miracles. "Winter's Tale" is a whole list of strong ingredients that don't complement each other; it's not the fairy-tale ice cream sundae it may think it is (such as Joss Whedon's take on "The Avengers").



Peter (Colin Farrell) and Beverly (Jessica Brown Findlay) in 'Winter's Tale'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

If "Winter's Tale" were to be a public Valentine for any of Goldsman's past collaborators, it would likely be J.J. Abrams, whom Goldsman must be thanking for cameos as "Vulcan Council Member" and "Starfleet Admiral" in "Star Trek" and "Star Trek Into Darkness," respectively. Goldman lights the movie to look like Abrams' take on magic, where his famous (infamous?) lens flares are even a part of the visual storytelling.

But aside from Abrams, who is this film really for? The answer is uncertain, and I think it goes to show a further disconnect between the rules and the realities that Goldsman chooses to write by. "Winter's Tale" does balance out romance with action (a swift coverage of stereotypical

gender demographics), but its age range leaves one baffled. It's too loaded with whimsy for adults, and the surprising sexual content is more sexual than usual "PG-13" middle school teen fare.

Fitting to be released on the day of red envelopes, chocolates, and flowers, "Winter's Tale" is an example of how silly one looks if they try too hard to be a romantic. With his directorial debut, Goldsman may think he has a glowing, unique love story, and one that touches all the bases and then some. But instead he has just another weird disaster, where he loses grasp of what makes for sturdy fantastical nature. To paraphrase Goldsman's own dialogue, nonetheless from a previous film of the same problem - freeze in hell, "Winters Tale"!

"Winter's Tale" opens everywhere on February 14th. Featuring Colin Farrell, Jessica Brown Findlay, Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connelly, and Eva Marie Saint. Written and directed by Akiva Goldsman from Mark Helprin's novel of the same name. Rated "PG-13"



[13]

By [NICK ALLEN](#) [14]
Editor & Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
nick@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

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