



Michelle Pfeiffer
as *Stardust's*
wicked witch

Summertime, and the Magic Is Easy

Neil Gaiman. Need we say more?

STARDUST: Directed by Matthew Vaughn. Screenplay by Jane Goldman and Matthew Vaughn, based on the novel by Neil Gaiman. Cinematography, Ben Davis. Music, Ian Eshkeri. Starring Claire Danes, Charlie Cox, Michelle Pfeiffer, Robert De Niro, Sienna Miller and Rupert Everett. Paramount Pictures, 2007. PG-13. 130 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

It's time for a little summer magic that's not of the Harry Potter kind. This is a different kind of magic: the kind from the brilliant mind of author Neil Gaiman, upon whose novel *Stardust* is based. There are certain things you can always expect from Gaiman: an engrossing yarn of a story; magic that has consequences; an awareness of fairy tale and mythological tropes; not-too-perfect heroes and heroines; and a clever sense of humor that manifests itself in unexpected ways. *Stardust*, for example, offers a gaggle of numerically named (Tertius, Septimus, etc.) dead princes who are stuck as ghosts, tagging along behind (and commenting on the lives of) their surviving brothers until one becomes king. But becoming king is complicated: On his deathbed, the princes' father (Peter O'Toole) stripped the color from a glittering red stone and sent it hurtling into the sky. Whichever male of his line returns the color to the ruby will be king of the magical land of Stormhold — if they don't all kill each other first.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the wall that divides Stormhold from a quaintly

adorable England, young Tristan Thorne (sweet-faced Charlie Cox) is trying, with little success, to woo the popular Victoria (Sienna Miller). A falling star gives the boy a moment of inspiration: He'll fetch the

star for Victoria if she'll marry him.

The star, though, has ideas of her own, as Tristan finds out when he arrives at her crash site on the other side of the wall. Stars, it seems, are people too, and this one is a cranky, homesick blonde named Yvaine (Claire Danes) who's soon the prize at the end of several quests. A trio of witches (their leader played by a glorious and funny Michelle Pfeiffer) wants her heart to restore their youth and beauty. A prince wants the necklace 'round her neck, which knocked her out of the sky. And Tristan wants to take her to back to England.

Clearly, there are many adventures to be had here. Director Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake*), who should be given more fantastical epics to direct in the future, and his co-writer, Jane Goldman, map the film out carefully, swooping from gorgeous location to gorgeous location to the strains of an enthusiastically majestic (occasionally perhaps a bit too much so) score. *Stardust's* cast features a cornucopia of talent, including

Ricky Gervais (BBC's *The Office*) in a tiny but droll role and Robert De Niro, mugging and charming as a pirate captain with a few secrets in his closet. Cox couldn't be a more perfect Tristan, hopeful but uncertain, gently growing into his potential like a puppy growing into its overly large paws.

Beyond the sumptuous cinematography and enticing sets, *Stardust's* real beauty lies in the way it perfectly swirls together adventure and romance, humor and darkness; the climax is wickedly scary, the love story sweet rather than sappy. It's endlessly entertaining without missing a beat, and though they're very different films, *Stardust* shares with *Ratatouille* a sense of impervious enthusiasm, a glory in the story that seems to drive its creators to do their very best work. *Stardust* is a fairy tale with its feet on the muddy ground, a story about the strange places love takes you — especially when those places turn out to be somewhere other than where you thought you were going. Who could fail to see the magic in that? **EW**

Stardust opens Friday, Aug. 10, at Cinemark and VRC Stadium 15.

Twenty Questions

INTERVIEW: Directed by Steve Buscemi. Written by Buscemi and David Schechter, based on the film by Theo van Gogh, written by Theodor Holman. Cinematography, Thomas Kist. Starring Sienna Miller and Steve Buscemi. Sony Pictures Classics, 2007. R. 83 minutes. ★☆☆☆☆

Interview is a film with a history more interesting than the movie itself. It's a remake of a film by Theo van Gogh, the Dutch writer, filmmaker and TV host who was murdered in 2004, as the production notes explain, "because of his strong writings against radical Islam and especially because of his short film *Submission: Part 1*." *Interview* is the first of three van Gogh films to be remade in a New York setting; all three films will borrow van Gogh's techniques and his camera crew, including cinematographer Thomas Kist.

Kist creates a tension and tightness in *Interview's* loft setting, shrinking and expanding the sprawling space in time with the dialogue. The film tells the terse story of two people, a journalist, Pierre (Buscemi), and an actress, Katya (Sienna Miller). A scheduled interview quickly dissolves when the two immediately butt heads, but in the street afterwards, Pierre is slightly injured in a silly, contrived car accident that Katya feels (and basically is) responsible for. Improbably, she takes him to her nearby loft, where bourbon, red wine, numerous cigarettes and endless stories carry them deep into the night.

There are moments of brightness in *Interview* — brief seconds where the dialogue becomes crisp enough to lift the film above its characters' incessant sparring, or where the ever-shifting connection between these two dishonest people feels, just for a second, true. But for the most part, the film is a heavy-handed battle of wits, with profession and gender hovering nearby. Sexual tension, a screwy father-daughter dynamic, the telling of secrets and lies: It carries on and on, topics diverting and tempers flaring. Buscemi is solid, as always, and Miller displays a talent for shifting moods in a heartbeat; it's her kittenish ferocity that keeps the movie afloat. But the tiny sparks never catch, and *Interview*, for all its talking, seems to have little to say other than that people look out for themselves, and some are more manipulative — and better actors — than others. — *Molly Templeton*

Interview opens Friday, Aug. 10, at the Bijou.



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