

Lights, Camera, Narratives

Tales that change with teller and tellee



THE FALL: Directed by Tarsem. Written by Tarsem, Dan Gilroy and Nico Soultanakis, based on Valeri Petrov's screenplay for Yo Ho Ho. Produced by Tarsem, Lionel Kopp and Nico Soultanakis. Cinematography, Colin Watkinson. Music, Krishna Levy. Editor, Robert Duffy. Starring Lee Pace, Catinca Untaru and Justine Waddell. Roadside Attractions, 2008. R. 116 minutes. ★★★★★

If you've read anything about *The Fall*, it's likely something about the countless locations, the years of trying to make the film, the hunt for the perfect star, the deception perpetrated on the crew regarding one of the actors. There are a hundred good stories behind this one beautiful film, and hopefully someday they'll get told.

For now, forget them. Forget anything you've read. If you've been thinking about seeing the movie, stop reading this. We can argue about it later. Just go.

The Fall is likely the single most beautiful film this year. The movie adds up to far more than was suggested by Tarsem's previous feature, the messy, macabre *The Cell*, which simply sunk a standard serial killer story into the depths of the director's vivid imagination. No, this belongs with the stories, fragmented and false and unendingly true, that we wake up to; with the images that seep into daylight and give flashes of brightness against dark sidewalks; with

the sights that we see with our eyes closed.

The Fall, into which we sweep via a stunning black and white credit sequence set to a beautiful bit of Beethoven, rests on a simple nugget of a story: In a hospital in Los Angeles, early in the 20th century, a depressed, broken stuntman lies in bed. Into his room creeps a little girl with a broken arm who speaks English half tinged by her Romanian heritage and half by the stumbles and skips that all children make. He begins to tell her a story. In minutes, he is interrupted: "Why?" she asks him. Why would a hero pour out the last of his water? "That's stupid."

And so it becomes their story, his words turning in her imagination into an impossibly gorgeous tale cast with familiar (to the girl) faces. It's a tale that changes in a second, crossing boundaries and timelines and mucking about with itself; it's a story woven from his broken heart and her short, sad history. The love stories intertwine: the love of the director for his creation, of the stuntman, Roy (the magnetic, exceptional Lee Pace) for his leading lady; of the child, Alexandria (Catinca Untaru, in her first role) for her new friend; of a filmmaker for his medium and for the images he can cook up to match or push the story: butterflies, reefs, orange deserts, tiny monkeys, x-ray

technicians, oranges, princesses and palaces, nurses and nuns, black horses and labyrinths.

The Fall is a story about making movies, about making connections, about rewriting a life and about finding the extraordinary in the everyday. People will love it; people will hate it. Some will see the director's indulgence — in his visionary imagination, and in his young star, whose reactions and ideas were allowed to shape the story as it formed — as something to criticize, or find that Roy's self-indulgent misery takes the story to too dark a place. But for those who let themselves slip into the film, that indulgence becomes a leap of faith, a trust in the power of a story and of a connection. It couldn't have worked any other way. The absurdity, the overwrought speeches of the characters Roy invents and Alexandria envisions, the way things are often too literal, too odd, or too implausible, the unlikeliness of our group of heroes: All serve to pull the story tighter around Alexandria and Roy, to create a world that's just theirs and that will reshape their real worlds indelibly.

Idiosyncratic, unforgettable, *The Fall* gives us a world just around the corner, just around the globe, impossible yet all real. And it gives us a visual feast that at its heart reflects one of Joan Didion's great quotes: "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." As Roy retells his story, steering toward the end he's reaching for, the end he's befriended the child in search of, Alexandria takes hold; it's her story, too. Every tale has a teller, but every audience changes the tale. **EW**

The Fall opens Friday, June 20, at the Bijou.

I Spy Something Goofy

OSS 117: CAIRO, NEST OF SPIES: Directed by Michel Hazanavicius. Written by Hazanavicius and Jean-François Halin, based on characters by Jean Bruce. Music Box Films, 2008. 99 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

This spy spoof will likely fall flat for all but the most fervent fans of certain other spy films (no, I don't mean Austin Powers). Its accidental hero is the blandly brash and self-confident Hubert Bonisseur de La Bath (Jean Dujardin, whose eyebrows are shockingly mobile), aka OSS 117, who seems to succeed in his missions via sheer hubris and luck (though he feels like a send-up of Bond, the character's appearance in novels actually predates Ian Fleming's creation). He's sent to Egypt to work out what's happened to a colleague; there, he's shocked to find his contact is a beautiful woman, Larmina (Bérénice Bejo), whose job is mostly to point out how utterly hopeless OSS 117 is. Hubert makes mistakes, doesn't see clues, regards the call to prayer as a personal affront to his sleep and generally stumbles through a plot involving Nazis, Russians, an angry imam and a few double-crosses. It's all quite light, and though the film looks nice enough (the greenscreen shots in cars, the drivers of which are constantly twisting the wheels, are oddly amusing), there's no kick to the plot, no excitement in the action and not a lot of laughs to be had. But if *Get Smart* isn't enough bumbling spy action for your week, *OSS 117* might meet your needs. — *Molly Templeton*

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