

Sexy seductions as appealing as dragon slaying



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Last week I finished the final novel on my university reading list. No more 20th century American ennui! No more diatribes on the Canadian immigrant experience! No more Margaret freakin' Atwood! Don't get me wrong, I enjoy novels like *Alias Grace* and *Cosmopolis*, but you get a different tone in reading a book you picked out for fun in comparison to a book a professor picked for you with the idea of enriching your mind.

The first book on my "After University

Pile" list was *Bet Me*, by Jennifer Crusie. My sister raised her eyebrows and said, "I guess you're young enough to get away with it." My mother raised her eyebrows and said, "I hope you realize this author's writing for a more average audience." A co-volunteer at the *Gateway* raised her eyebrows and said, "I wouldn't have lowered myself to that level." You see, *Bet Me* is an example of a genre that, despite being the highest-selling in paperback, is also one of the most publicly mocked: the mistreated, downtrodden, secretly beloved romance.

Why is romance the most derided of the genres? How did "Harlequin Romance" become the by-word for "by-the-numbers tripe" instead of "Dragonlance Fantasy?" Readers of true crime can buy novels with blood-soaked weapons on the cover and walk

out of the store unmolested, but if you want a book sporting a shirtless Fabio, you have to accept the fact that the cashiers at Chapters are going to assume that you're a) uneducated, b) pathetically single or c) childishly naïve.

Romance is held in contempt because people believe that it either gives their readers unrealistic expectations, or that it's read with the intention of improving one's love life. I was warned by my mother that I shouldn't take romance novels as examples of real relationships. Right. And yet, no one cautioned me not to take Peter S Beagle's books too seriously because I might get the idea that unicorns exist, or that I shouldn't read *Lord of the Rings* if I need advice on how to take over the world with magical bling-bling. In society's eyes, fantasy readers know that dragons don't really exist, mystery readers admit that

many crimes remain unsolved and adventure readers realize that in real life, James Bond's bullet-riddled corpse should currently be decomposing in an unmarked grave in Siberia. And yet women who read romance ... wait, did I say *women*?

Indeed—I think one of main reasons that romance is mocked is because of society's long-held and subconscious belief that women, by themselves, are stupid. Romance is the only genre that's written, produced and read almost exclusively by women. Science fiction and adventures were primarily male-pioneered and are read by both genders, so no one worries about those readers wanting to contact aliens or rescue damsels in the jungle. And yet the flighty, pink-stiletto-wearing female readership of romance is disastrously inclined to confuse fiction and reality.

Since when is the rakish pirate king who falls for the feisty virgin widow of his dastardly magistrate half-brother a more believable character than a rock-star vampire?

Women read romance for the same reason people read mystery and science fiction: to live vicariously through the protagonist's exciting, sexy and fantastic adventures. If it's not wrong to piggyback upon a vampire's quest in Anne Rice novels, then there's nothing weird about reading a romance to experience a delicious seduction by the aforementioned pirate king. Heave ho, ladies, and enjoy your love-struck pirates, passionate Scottish lords and tenderly savage cowboys. Because we know that once we close those books, we're back in the real world, with fiendish exams, pretentious professors and disappointingly fully-dressed men.

Mimzy preaches a dull environmental mantra

The Last Mimzy

Directed by Robert Shaye
Starring Chris O'Neil, Rhiannon Leigh Wryn, Joely Richardson, Timothy Hutton, Rainn Wilson, Kathryn Hahn, Michael Clarke Duncan and Tom Heaton
Opens Friday, 23 March
Empire Theatres

MARIA KOTOVYCH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

A little stuffed bunny named Mimzy could kick Barbie's ass any day, especially when it comes to saving the world.

In *The Last Mimzy*, Noah Wilder (Chris O'Neil) and his little sister, Emma (Rhiannon Leigh Wryn) are playing on the beach when they find Mimzy and some other toys that give them special powers. The toys have been sent from the future by a scientist who's concerned about humanity's fate. Environmental destruction has gotten

increasingly bad, and the scientist (Tom Heaton) sends the toys back so someone can, basically, save the world.

At first, the children's self-absorbed yuppie parents, Jo (Joely Richardson) and workaholic David (Timothy Hutton), along with Noah's teacher, Larry White (Rainn Wilson), don't know about the toys. Eventually, their magical powers cause a blackout in Seattle, which "terrorism expert" Nathaniel Broadman (Michael Clarke Duncan) suspects is an attack, pinpointing the Wilder family as the source. The remainder of the movie is a race for the Wilder family to escape from a terrorist detention centre in order to save the world.

The Last Mimzy sounds like an exciting and suspenseful movie, but it's really not. After the children find the toys, nothing—that's worth watching, anyway—really happens. The children experiment with the types of things the stuffed animals can do, then they go to school, then they play with



them some more and everything is all hunky-dory. The problem is that there's no conflict and no actual point to the story until about halfway through. It's not until the family is accused of terrorism that something interesting actually happens.

Even worse is the film's loose environmental commentary wrapped in a contrived pseudo-Buddhist feel. Noah's teacher lectures about DNA and how environmental pollutants can affect

humans. His mother meditates in front of an altar. Environmental destruction threatens humanity. Yet, the family has an enormous home, a huge beach house and fancy, expensive, gas-guzzling cars, sending a convoluted message to kids.

The only redeeming feature of *The Last Mimzy* is the brother-sister relationship between Noah and Emma. O'Neil and Wryn do a decent job, although Wryn's crying looks really

fake. Still, it's refreshing to see a movie where siblings *actually* play together and take care of each other.

The Last Mimzy could have presented the message about environmental destruction more convincingly, but the unfortunate contradictions cause audiences to raise an eyebrow at the whole attempt. Pollution destroys our physical environment, and at the same time, bad movies like *The Last Mimzy* do the same to our culture.

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