

Tomorrow Ever After: A Kinder Future

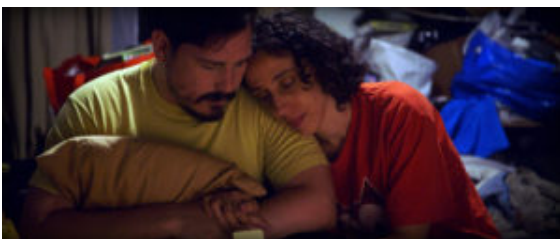
Here on *Wrath-Bearing Tree* we write a lot about ways in which things are imperfect—culturally, politically, institutionally. We often point out examples of things that go wrong. People who lie or use faulty logic to advance unethical or selfish agendas. We focus on negativity in part because we're combat veterans, and have seen bad consequences of lazy thinking and decision-making. The other thing that unites us, if anything, is that we share a basic conviction that things could be better. Especially when it comes to media, and entertainment.

It's not easy to create *ethical* and entertaining drama that uplifts at the same time that it provides laughter. Without resort to conflict—usually in the form of sex or violence—stories fall flat. Why consume an account of someone's perfect day? Few movies manage to leave a majority of their audiences feeling *better* (rather than exhausted), because it's very difficult to accomplish this. Recent examples include [Hot Tub Time Machine](#) and [Safety Not Guaranteed](#), both of which manage to deliver without relying much on violence or sex.

Violence and sex from the male perspective are hallmarks of most mainstream films. In the fourth week of April, I watched or re-watched four movies: *Star Wars: Rogue One*, *LA Confidential*, *American Beauty*, and the upcoming [Tomorrow Ever After](#). The first three movies are violent fantasies that appear to hate women and poor people, and maybe people in general. Characters in the film earn their punishments in a variety of ways, but those ways all come down to the alienation wrought by dissatisfaction with a society built on sexual exploitation and the urge to destroy. They offer dark visions of human nature, and are at heart nihilistic visions of the past, present, and future.

Tomorrow Ever After is different. In it, the principle conflicts that unfold within and between characters are existential, based on questions about their purpose—they are not transactional or punitive. Conflicts unfold within characters as they grapple with the constraints of living within a patriarchal, capitalist system. In this system (that of our present time—the movie is set in 2015) women are systematically oppressed by men, who are systematically oppressed by a system in which housing is not guaranteed, jobs are difficult to come by, and money is the mechanism by which people and items are valued. In *Tomorrow Ever After*, this period of human history is referred to as “The Great Despair.”

One of the film’s most impressive accomplishments is its ability to represent the problems posed by money in a realistic, relatable way, while simultaneously making it clear that this situation is unnecessary—ridiculous, even. The film’s satirical touch is so light that it’s almost unseen, but it guides everything, and fills *Tomorrow Ever After* with humor and optimism. A film about the evils of sexist patriarchy and capitalism sounds like it would be annoying or boring, but this is not the case with *Tomorrow Ever After*. I suspect that this is because it spends so little time moralizing, and because the director and actors are so good. There are no cynical or clichéd moments where a character pauses to deliver some memorable line, no posturing, no *bullshit*. Given the conceit about time travel, this is nothing short of extraordinary.



In *Tomorrow Ever After*, the difficulty of providing empathy or compassion to

strangers without resorting to sex or the threat of violence generates much of the positive motion in the plot and between the characters—successfully so

The pacing is wonderful. There isn't a single moment in the film where someone watching is lost or displaced, save for the very beginning (this is to be expected in a movie about time travel). Contrast this with *Rogue One*, or *LA Confidential*, or even *American Beauty*, all of which make themselves known only through repeated screenings, or by reading secondary material. *Tomorrow Ever After* is not interested in spectacle, nor is it particularly interested in rendering judgment—it is a parable about all of us, and how we live, and so there are no bad characters to murder, no suffering characters that do not themselves possess the means of their own redemption.

The most impressive accomplishment of *Tomorrow Ever After*, however, that its characters are believably written, and the actors capably bring them to life. Because the conflicts encountered by many characters are all basic and comprehensible, one finds oneself empathizing with *everyone* in the film. This accomplishment confirms what appears to be *Tomorrow Ever After's* chief hypothesis: that when we view each other with empathy, and treat each other with kindness, life becomes much more enjoyable and pleasant. In this way, *Tomorrow Ever After* functions not only as a morale parable, but also as evidence that its hypotheses are true. After all, if it's possible to make an film that engages, inspires, and entertains without laser battles, sex, violence used as a vehicle for redemption, or murder—*Tomorrow Ever After* promises none of these elements—maybe, just maybe, it's possible to make a better world, too.