**This Isn’t Your Childhood Fairytale**

by Elizabeth Fincher

*Pan’s Labyrinth* takes its audience on a journey of tragedy, mystery, and visual ecstasy. Although, upon first glance it mimics some of the main plot points in *Alice in Wonderland* (the clock, time, books, magical doors, food, dreams), it is vividly different in that this tale is not intended to make little ones sleepy before bedtime. While watching the horrific acts of violence in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, I, at times, wished that it were filled with the wholesome, fluffiness of a child’s fairytale. But what this movie lacks in fluffiness, it makes up for in truth.

Other critics have called it an “adult fairytale,” and I wholeheartedly agree. It is for adults in that although the movie begins with the image of a child reading a fairytale, this movie is far from a child’s fairytale. The adult rating (“R”) was not bestowed lightly as the violence within this film is depicted extremely graphically. The fairytale aspects of this film far outshine the whimsical world of Disney. In post-WWII world in Spain, a young girl, Ofelia, finds herself fatherless with a very sick, pregnant mother and new, evil step-father. “You’ll soon see that life isn’t like your fairytales,” were Ofelia’s mother’s harsh yet truthful words. Unlike her fairytales, Ofelia’s fairies are not Barbie-like with transparent wings. First, they appear to her as stick insects and then transform into dark, neutral-colored carnivores with mock appendages. Her fairies are much darker and creepier versions of a child’s pastel, pixie-dust toting fairies.

Also unlike a child’s fairytale character is Ofelia’s fairy-godmother, who comes not in the form of a plump, grandmother look-alike but instead as a creepy, tall, woodsy faun with horns and a tricky temperament. Unlike Cinderella’s magical guide, Ofelia’s faun gives the impression that he cannot always be trusted. As I watched the interactions between the two unfold on the screen, I couldn’t help but notice the knot in my stomach. I wanted to protect Ofelia because no one in the movie seemed completely trustworthy, including her mysterious guide. By creating a world on screen in which the audience must stay on guard, Guillermo del Toro shared the real-world truths of this fairytale: Not everything is safe, not everyone can be trusted, and not every story ends with a “happily ever after.”

Writer and Director, Guillermo del Toro did a magical job in creating an escape to a fantasy world grounded in truths of the real world. The animation combined with the solid script and storyline bring this film to a new level unto its own. Quite often, I found myself cringing at the violence and yet asking, “How did they do that without actually hurting anyone?” The creatures are magical and dangerous; this is not like the fairytales that we grew up with. In fact, the music, lighting, violence, and mystery leave the audience feeling slightly unsettled during the entire film.
I would definitely recommend this movie, but be forewarned: it’s not for the faint-hearted. The violence took my breath away at times and even tempted me to cover my eyes a time or two. *Pan’s Labyrinth*’s visual rapture, soulful truths, and unique fairytale-like storyline combined with the haunting tune of the wordless lullaby guarantees a unique experience and thought-provoking time for adults.