

Review #34 : *Kate and Leopold* (2001)

Hugh Jackman

TRAILER

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FJywpD2PU4>



A long-running fantasy drilled into the minds of generations of American women by Hollywood movies and romance novels is that a refined Englishman with a cultivated accent – and a title is the ultimate catch. That fantasy is made all the sweeter if the Englishman is a blast from the past. How about a courteous Victorian gentleman who stands when a lady rises from the table, refers to dating as courting and understands the language of flowers – *orange lilies imply hatred, while begonias and lavender signal danger and suspicion* ?

But the cherry on the cake has to be his equestrian mastery. Once astride a horse, Australian beau Hugh Jackman becomes the embodiment of the proverbial **knight on a white charger**. Encountering such a creature, the only choice left for a stressed-out modern damsel is to shed her defences, swoon in his arms and be carried off into a nice *happily ever after*...

If *Kate and Leopold* were a 1940s movie, Meg Ryan's character would probably be a wide-eyed shop girl – Loretta Young perhaps – weaned on Jane Austen and Emily Brontë and eventually landing in the arms of Cary Grant or Laurence Olivier. Here she is a crisp, high-powered marketing maven whose company measures the public taste in everything from movies to margarine.



SYNOPSIS

Kate Mc Kay lives in a Manhattan apartment one flight down from her ex-boyfriend, Stuart, an eccentric scientist. Unbeknown to Kate, Stuart discovers a time-travelling portal that can be accessed by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge at certain moments, and the movie's opening scene finds him newly arrived with a camera in late-19th-century Manhattan.

Stuart winds up at a Party at which the world's most eligible bachelor in 1876 Duke Leopold – whose family fortunes are in dire need of replenishment – is about to announce his engagement to a wealthy but unattractive heiress. When Leopold catches Stuart snooping around the house, Stuart flees, and Leopold chases him through the streets and up the side of the still unfinished Brooklyn Bridge from whose girders they tumble into the present through the same magic portal. As they arrive in 2001, all the elevators in Manhattan go haywire.

From the moment Kate and Leopold set eyes on each other... it's obvious that true love will soon blossom. And as it does, their romantic combat boils down to competing one-liner views of love and work with the cutesy twist that **the woman is the cynic and the man the romantic**. Kate snaps : *You can't live a fairytale* while Leopold floridly declares : *Marriage is a promise of eternal love. I cannot promise eternally what I have never felt momentarily.*'



Once they're acquainted, Kate has the bright idea of featuring Leopold in a TV commercial for a low-fat butter substitute. All goes swimmingly until Leopold samples the product he's hawking and stalks off the set, declaring it tastes like *pond scum*. Talking about the 2000s : *You have every convenience, every comfort, yet no time for integrity*, he scolds. To which Kate replies she doesn't have time for speeches from 200-year-old men who have never had to work a day in their life : *I've been paying dues all my life, and I'm tired, and I need a rest, and if I have to sell a little pond scum to get it, then so be it.*



Such exchanges may lack the tang of classic screwball comedy – but they have more flavour than most comic movie dialogue nowadays. Meg Ryan's lines sound custom written to suit her snippy, plastic pertness, while Australian actor Hugh Jackman lends Leopold's haughty pronouncements enough good humour to keep his character from turning into an insufferable twit.

Leopold is brilliant repository of dating etiquette – which he is more than happy to pass on to others. His tips to Kate's doltish brother Charlie help him get to first base with his own dream girl. Dropping by a restaurant where Kate's manipulative boss J. J. Camden is trying to impress Kate with his bogus passion for opera, Leopold trumps him with his knowledge of *La Bohême*.

In the most dramatic scene Kate's purse is snatched as she is hailing a cab on Fifth Avenue, and Leopold promptly borrows a handy carriage horse and heroically charges into Central Park to apprehend the mugger +++



REVIEW

If you didn't like *Bewitched* or *I Married a Witch* you aren't going to like *Kate and Leopold*. **It is essentially a fairytale** with a sci-fi twist and a lot more plot than you might find in one of those Nora Ephron's cotton-candy day dreams. Hugh Jackman is utterly charming as Leopold and so is the young actor who plays Kate's brother. Some of their scenes together are the best and the funniest in the movie. The script is clever and far above what we usually get in this type of chick flick – I'm thinking about *27 Dresses* or *10 ways to lose a guy* etc...

This is not to say the movie is without flaws. *Kate & Leopold* has been out for a couple of years now and people still complain about them. I have a few personal gripes myself. Frankly, during the first viewing, I could not get past Meg Ryan's hair. I was literally stunned by it. She's such a pretty woman, it amazes me that she thinks (or thought) that the Cookie the Clown haircut was cute. Not at all ! Ms. Ryan, what *were* you thinking? Was this a mid-life crisis reaction ?



Secondly I though the use of profanity was overdone. My reaction is not out of prudishness. But it seems to me to lessen the authenticity of a character's intelligence. It surprised me that Leopold didn't object to Kate's constant swearing – she is, after all, a lady – or that he didn't make a comment on it in general. I didn't feel he was reacting within the social attitudes of his own time. Even if it is a fantasy, he's not going to acclimate to our times all *that* quickly. All in all it's still a very **delightful comedy** so I hope you enjoy as I did +++

