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The Illusionist - DVD

Two magician-based stories in as many months? Which one should you watch?

by Dan Hall published on 18 July 2007

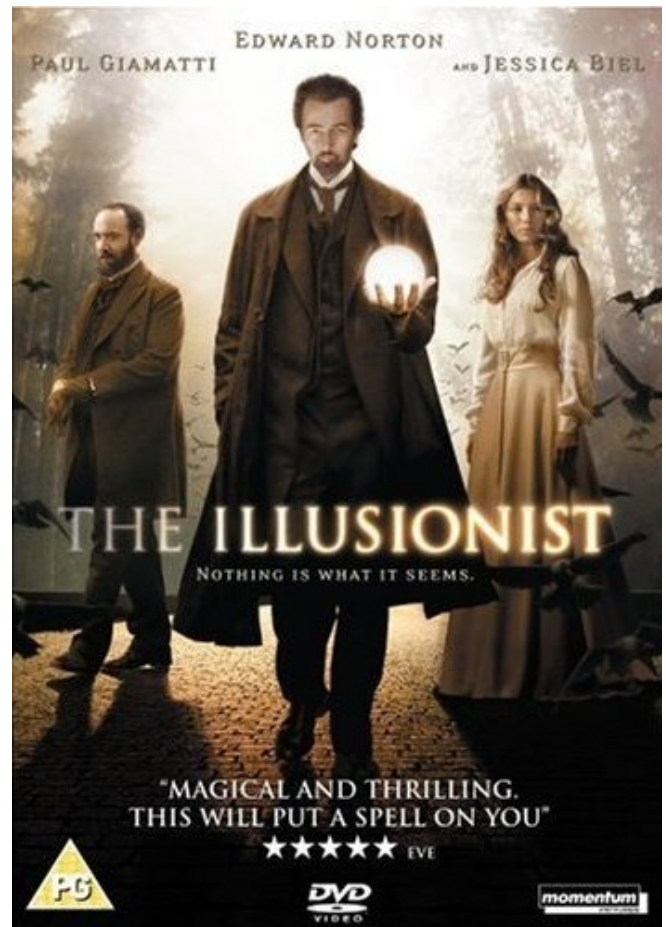
You wait years for a movie about early nineteenth century magicians to come along and then, hey presto, two turn up at once. Hot on the heels of Christopher Nolan's "The Prestige" comes the big screen adaptation of Steven Millhauser's short story "Eisenheim the Illusionist".

Eisenheim (Norton) is a famous conjuror in early -1900s Vienna, who falls in love with a woman (Biel) well above his social standing. When she becomes engaged to the Crown Prince (Sewell), the magician uses his powers to free her and undermine the stability of the royal house of Vienna.

The combination of great source material, quirky cast, and Jessica Biel's spectacularly toned derriere seemed like a sure fire cinematic hit but, much like everything else in director Neil Burger's twisting movie, this proved to be little more than an illusion.

Blighted by soporific pacing, obvious twists, and a plethora of dodgy facial hair, The Illusionist is a strangely passionless exercise that suffers poorly in comparison with last year's "Prestige". While Giamatti does his best to inject some life into proceedings and Norton is well cast as the enigmatic magician, Rufus Sewell's mad eyes/shouty shouty routine has become rather tired over the years and Burger's final "reveal" (the movie is shaped like a trick) proves that he actually doesn't have much up his sleeve at all.

Unfortunately it's not an illusion, there really is only a lightweight, 15-minute "Making Of" featurette to accompany director Neil Burger's talk track on this below par special features package. Burger talks eloquently about magic history and reveals that most of the tricks used in the film are based on real illusions. However, we



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never learn much about the actual mechanics of the magic, making the whole exercise rather futile.

In fact, the absence of all the big name cast is the most revealing aspect of the whole package and, whereas the Prestige's initial DVD release was a prelude to a special edition later this year, don't expect to see a more complete version of The Illusionist out any time soon.

VERDICT

Throw in a wholly unconvincing love affair, an abysmal opening credit sequence, and a thoroughly off putting cameo from the bloke who plays Bradley's dad in Eastenders, and as Paul Daniels would say, "you'll like this but not a lot".

Rating: PG

Staring: Edward Norton, Jessica Biel, Paul Giamatti, Rufus Sewell

Directed by: Neil Burger

Extras: Director's Commentary, Making Of Featurette

At a glance

What is it?

Drama

Good

Jessica Biel's spectacularly toned derriere, Giamatti does his best to inject some life into proceedings, Norton is well cast as the enigmatic magician

Bad

Soporific pacing, predictable plot twists, the wholly unconvincing love affair

Verdict

As Paul Daniels would say, "you'll like this but not a lot"

Price £20

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10