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Movie review: *Sea of Dreams*

Beware the black sea undertoad.

BY JOHN P. MEYER

Mexican director José Bojorquez is credited (on IMDB) with one earlier film effort: something called *Virus Man*, which - we get the impression - is a short film that he'd probably like us to forget about. (Although it does star a pair of undeniably attractive actresses...) Details are hard to come by.

With his feature film debut *Sea of Dreams*, however (which he both directed and co-wrote), he's delivered something solid on which to anchor a future filmmaking career.

Playing out like a Gabriel García Márquez story filmed on color-saturated *Velvia* stock, the movie follows the life of a girl named Grecia who is lost at sea while just a youngster, but returns - to the excitement and surprise of the villagers (fisher-folk, mostly) - borne ashore on a raft of seaweed and homogeneous benevolent flotsam. None the worse for wear is little Grecia, who -



Sea of Dreams

A beautiful woman, led to believe she has powerful ties to the sea, defies everyone to prove them wrong, in a world where man and nature connect in improbable ways, where myths are real and truth is imaginary. "Sea of Dreams" creates a fascinating world that celebrates the miracles of falling in and out of love, of death, and of freedom. The story is a classic narrative that celebrates the mysteries and wonders of human relationships in a magical world where people carry strong beliefs that can fulfill the heart's deepest desires

it's soon discovered - has been blessed by The Sea Herself. Further, Grecia is able to confer her blessings on local fishermen. Plying their trade after having had Grecia's palm applied to their bowed heads, these fellows return after a day's fishing with generous quantities of golden mackerel - or are they sea bass? (Tasty, in any case.) Grecia grows into a comely young woman, loved by all in the village.

the heart's deepest desires.

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Grecia accepts a gift from an admirer, who might want to consider donning a life vest at this point.

There's a downside to Grecia's charm, of course (isn't there always?): since The Sea has given her new life, it (She?) exercises a proprietary hold on Grecia's affections, and doesn't take kindly when - say - a boyfriend attempts to win favor in the eyes (and arms) of the lissome lass (portrayed in her adult incarnation by Israeli-born actress Sendi Bar). She (The Sea) tends to turn all inky and black when said suitors take a swim, dragging them down into Her watery embrace -

which side-effect soon renders Grecia's erstwhile paramours into bona fide chickens of the sea. And who can blame them?

Enter Marcelo (in the person of actor Johnathon Schaech, [interviewed here](#)). The handsome and charming young photographer disembarks at the village to follow in the footsteps of his father, who lived and painted there before Marcelo was born. Marcelo attempts to document the scenes his father painted using his camera, but is distracted from this project by the appearance on the ground-glass of Grecia, all smiles and come-hither eyes and flowing raven locks strewn with tiny shells - compliments of

her benefactress, The Sea. Marcelo is smitten and - upon learning of the curse surrounding Grecia - shrugs it off as nonsense.

The movie is gorgeous to look at; it was filmed in the village of Tlacotalpan in the coast-hugging state of Veracruz, Mexico, and the camera seldom strays from emerald green grass, azure blue water, **golden-hour** skin tones or brightly-painted village walls. Even Woody Allen would defer from using black & white on a location such as this.



Marcelo (Johnathon Schaech) can't believe folks take this curse of the sea stuff seriously

The lead players shine, displaying a genuine chemistry: Mr. Schaech looks right at home in straw panama and linen trousers, while Ms. Bar convinces as a mysterious young woman capable of inducing infatuation and devotion in her male admirers, regardless of the risks they might face in pursuing her.



The face that sank a couple of suitors

In key supporting roles are **Seymour Cassel**, attendee at this Spring's AFI Dallas International Film Festival; dynamite Brazilian actress Sonia Braga (playing the bruja who foments a brouhaha over Grecia's curse); and beloved Mexican actress Angélica María, who returns to the big screen (playing Grecia's grandmother, Rina) after an extended absence.

The audio palette matches in tonal intensity the visual richness of the

film, with a string-heavy romantic score composed by the prolific Luis Bacalov (*Il Postino*, *B. Monkey*, *Assassination Tango*). Thematically, the story abounds in yin-yang, sea-land, light-dark, sun-moon dichotomies, with a strong element of predestination thrown in for good measure. While the ending is bittersweet (leaning toward the bitter), it certainly jibes with the fairy tale nature of the story. All in all, a pleasant change of pace from the cinematic mayhem so prevalent in theaters just now. Kick back - relax - put your feet up (unless there's someone sitting in the row in front of you) and enjoy escaping to a magical realm, if only for 90 minutes or so.

JEALOUS, EH?: "The sea loves her so much." - Nurka (Sonia Braga)

HOW 'BOUT CHICKEN?: "Do you have any better fish?" - Marcelo, to local monger

"No, but you can buy a pole." - fishmonger to Marcelo



Sonia Braga: bruja

AT LEAST SINCE LAST YEAR: "This is the best day of the dead we've had in a long time." - Grecia to her grandmother

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