

# A lovely, beautiful war: "Long Engagement"

Blake Hinton  
Reviewer

A few years ago, Jean Pierre Jeunet burst onto the international scene with the mega-hit "Amelie." What made "Amelie" so unique was more than the fact that it was a great film. "Amelie" displayed a new directorial direction for Jeunet.

The film was characterized by the use of special effects to create a whimsical and almost surreal attitude. Now Jeunet uses that same style on a very different story, that of World War I, in the magical film, "A Very Long Engagement."

The story of a "A Very Long Engagement" seems unique, but simple enough in the beginning. The film opens in the trenches of World War I where five condemned soldiers are being led to a cruel death for the crime of self-mutilation. For their death sentence, they are led to the front line trench and then thrown out into No-Man's Land to be either shot or to die of exposure.

The film then switches to the lover of one of those soldiers named Mathilde (Audrey Tatou). She is living with her aunt and uncle on the coast of France and has not given up the idea that Manech (Gaspard Ulliel) is still

alive. Mathilde claims that she would know if he was truly dead. Therefore, despite reports that he died in No-Man's Land, Mathilde decides to launch her own investigation. As she delves into the execution of the five soldiers, she realizes that things aren't what they seem. At the same time, a mysterious woman begins murdering officers involved in different parts of that fateful execution.

As one can see, "A Very Long Engagement" is slightly deceiving. What starts off as a seemingly basic story unravels into something far more complex. This is a great quality of the film. One of the most engaging things about this movie is wondering where the movie will go next as the events surrounding the execution get more and more complex. One should be warned that for the first hour, "A Very Long Engagement" is a bit too complex for its own good. Once one gets into the film it all falls into place, but it wouldn't be surprising if the audience was a bit confused in the beginning. This is one of the very few flaws of an overall great film.

It's interesting to think that many critics have already complained about two specific things in the film. The first problem is using a whimsical approach to tell a war story and number two that the film is overstuffed with characters and

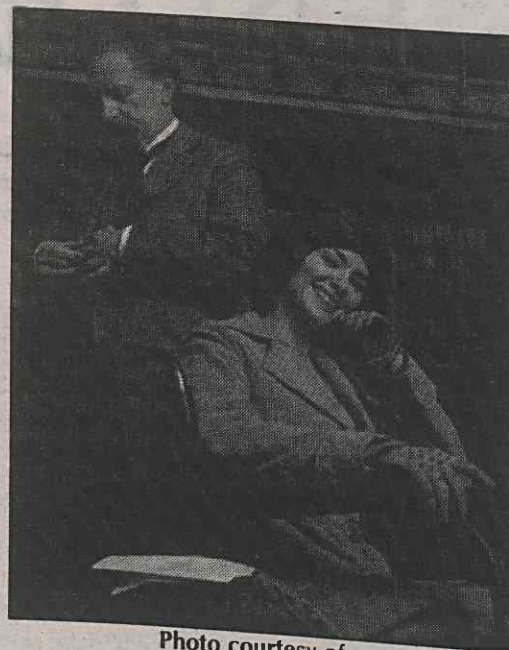


Photo courtesy of www.imd.com

Play creates a visually entertaining and mentally entertaining story with beautiful scenery and plot twists.

plot. Yet, those critics seem to be missing an important thing; in the end, this film is really two films in one, an exploration of the horrors of war and a labyrinth detective story led by Mathilde. Jeunet accomplishes both so well. On one hand, the audience gets to see the horrors of war by way of intense battle scenes and an authentic feeling of place. On the other hand, he also uses his trademark whimsy to make those scenes more powerful and to enrich his complex detective story. He accomplished both splendidly.

As far as the kitchen-sink quality, it's certainly there. This film is overflowing with details, subplots and characters among everything else. Yet, if this film is cluttered, why can't more films be cluttered with so many engaging things. It seems as if every scene, Jeunet is creating another engaging character or revealing a small detail. The most powerful moments in the film come from small things like a condemned woman finding a note from a dead lover or a line of dialogue that caps a poignant ending. Jeunet really makes this quality work.

The acting is very good too. Audrey Tatou may not be the most dramatic actress, but she is extremely photogenic with a very expressive face. Her saucer eyes seem to convey so much emotion with little effort. The dozens of people who fulfill the smaller roles also do a fine job, even if their scenes may be short. In the end, all this adds to a truly beautiful movie. Jeunet has created another great film, both a moving depiction of the horrors on the battlefield and the true love off the battlefield.

## In Theaters

"Are We There Yet?"

Jan. 20

Ice Cube, Nia Long, Aleisha Allen

"Hide and Seek"

Jan. 28

Robert De Niro, Dakota Fanning, Famke Janssen

"Alone in the Dark"

Jan. 28

Christian Slater, Tara Reid, Stephen Dorff

"Milk and Honey"

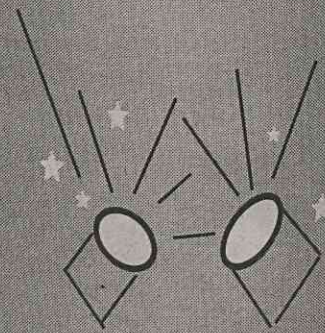
Jan. 21

Greg Amici, Eleanor Hutchins, Anthony Howard

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Jan 21

Asanee Suwan, Sorapong Chatree, Orn-Anong Panyawong





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