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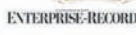
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REEL WORLD

La Mancha found



A subdued victory for director Terry Gilliam

Terry Gilliam has been trying to make *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* for nearly 30 years. The most exposed and public of his attempts—one that he actually got to the point of rolling camera—was a 2000 effort starring Johnny Depp and Jean Rochefort. The plug on that production got pulled after Rochefort, cast as Quixote, turned up with a bad back and rain fell on Gilliam's set with such a vengeance that the landscape was wrecked and the crew's equipment washed away. There was even a 2002 documentary on the failed production: *Lost in La Mancha*.

Gilliam's continued efforts to film *Quixote* in the 18 years since then have been mired in lawsuits and insurance issues, with many notable actors—Ewan McGregor, Michael Palin, Robert Duvall, etc.—coming and going along the way.

So, it was with a little bit of shock that I found myself recently sitting down for this completed film. And as a Gilliam fan, it's with a heavy heart that I report that *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* is quite the mess; probably the result of too many revamps and adjustments over the years.

The problems are not with the performances. Adam Driver does an excellent job stepping in as Toby, a frantic, disillusioned TV commercial director who longs for the days of his not-too-distant filmmaking

past (a character clearly modeled after Gilliam himself). Jonathan Pryce proves to be a perfect choice for Don Quixote, or rather a cobbler given an acting gig who goes so method in his approach that he believes he's the real Quixote.

The film has Toby seeking out Pryce's character in an effort to bolster a current, commercialized version of the Quixote story. In his travels, he confuses dreams with reality, finds himself being mistaken for Sancho Panza (Quixote's sidekick) and battles some fat giants.

The problem is with the narrative structure of the screenplay, co-written by Gilliam, an ambitious and convoluted work that shoots for satire about our current political atmosphere and the state of filmmaking in general. However, its central device—that being the blurring of reality and the dream world—flat out fails. There's no true visual distinction between the two, and Gilliam constantly has Toby pointing out when he is in a dream or not.

This is the first Gilliam film shot digitally, and the visual richness that has accompanied his previous works is nowhere to be found. Much of this movie is just a spastic, visually flat mess. The inspired giants sequence shows a flash of what the movie could've been. Yet given that he had to work with a budget that's two-thirds of what he had for the same film in 2000, it seems obvious here that the director's usual ambitious visuals were limited by lack of funds.

Gilliam has said in interviews that he just wanted this movie out of his system. Now that *Quixote* has finally arrived, perhaps it will clear the auteur's mind and allow him to get on to better things. □