

Puppy love blossoms across species in supernatural romantic fantasy

Written by Kam Williams

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Ethan (Alden Ehrenreich) has lived his whole life in Gatlin, South Carolina, a tiny town in denial about the fact that the South lost the Civil War. The community is so backwards that it has banned books as seemingly innocuous as "To Kill a Mockingbird."

This frustrating state of affairs has left the curious sophomore determined to attend a college far, far away from the Bible Belt. In the meantime, however, he is secretly reading any of the censored titles he can get his hands on.

For months, Ethan has also been haunted by a recurring nightmare in which he attempts to approach a gorgeous ghost, only to die right before reaching her. Consequently, he wakes up in a cold sweat every morning with a crush on an apparent apparition he thinks doesn't really exist.

But, as luck would have it, a new transfer student who's the spitting image of the girl of his dreams shows up in Ethan's class on the first day of the fall semester. Recently-orphaned Lena (Alice Englert) has just been taken in by her Uncle Macon Ravenwood (Jeremy Irons), the wealthy neighborhood weirdo whose family founded Gatlin generations ago.

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Most of the locals know better than to trespass onto the unwelcoming, Gothic Ravenwood Estate, but not Ethan, who's too smitten with Lena to care. It's not long before he and Lena are an item, although the flirty 15 year-old does her best to warn her new beau that she's nothing but trouble.

If only Ethan bothered to consult librarian/seer Amma Treadeau (Viola Davis), he'd know to steer clear of the entire Ravenwood clan. For, truth be told, they're "Casters," meaning otherworldly beings whose supernatural powers kick in when they turn 16. And with Lena's impending 16th birthday just over the horizon, the burning question is whether she'll be a good witch or drawn to the dark side by her cousin (Emmy Rossum) and late mother (Emma Thompson).

Thus unfolds *Beautiful Creatures*, a deliciously naughty adaptation of Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl's young adult novel of the same name. Directed by Richard LaGravenese, the picture's plotline is a bit reminiscent of the vampire/human series *Twilight*, except with the human and non-human protagonists' genders switched.

Between a talented cast and a compelling script, *Beautiful Creatures* is bound to do well with the targeted tweener/teen demo with which such cross-species romances seem to resonate nowadays. A viable jumpstart of yetta nudder escapist fantasy franchise.

Very Good (3 stars)

Rated PG-13 for violence, sexuality and scary images

Running time: 118 minutes

Distributor: Warner Brothers

To see a trailer for *Beautiful Creatures*, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TnL6r8U818>