

# MONTHLY MOVIES

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## From book to screen: The fairytale of a fairytale

**By T. Rob Brown**

In the early 1970s, novelist, screenwriter and playwright William Goldman asked his two young daughters what they'd like him to write his next novel about. One replied, "a princess," and the other, "a bride."

Like a marriage made in heaven, thus was born one of the greatest love stories ever told ... er, one of the greatest comedies ever crafted ... er, one of the most quotable movies ever scribed ... er, one of the greatest adventure stories ...

And that's just it. There are so many reasons to love Goldman's story of romance, wedding, adventure, fencing, betrayal, fighting, miracles and ...

"Is this a kissing book?" Grandson (Fred Savage) asked Grandpa (Peter Falk) in the film version.

Yes, it's definitely a kissing book.

From the 1973 novel to the September 1987 film, this story is as timeless as they come.

Writing the story as a retelling of the fictional Simon "S." Morgenstern's original "The Princess Bride," Goldman uses this literary device to present the work as an abridged version—sometimes called

the “Good Parts” version. Goldman set out not just to write a great fairytale but to parody while still paying homage to that sub-fantasy genre. The story satires classics like “The Three Musketeers” and “Ivanhoe” while perfectly blending romance, humor, wit, action and fantasy.

There’s no surprise the film was an instant success, bringing in twice its cost at the box office. In the secondary markets of VHS, DVD and later Blu-ray releases, the now 35-year-old film reached cult status and became a true classic.

It spread throughout pop culture: Disney Theatrical created a stage musical version in 2013; Ravensburger released “The Princess Bride Adventure Book Game”; Toy Vault released a card game on it in 2008, a roleplaying game book (2019) and a 16-inch plush of the Dread Pirate Roberts; McFarlane toys released an action figure set of five of the main characters; SparkWorks released several Princess Bride games including “Battle of Wits,” “Prepare to Die!” and “I Hate to Kill You”; Albino Dragon released two decks of Princess Bride playing cards; and fans all over Etsy offer DIY games like Princess Bride Bridal Shower Game, Princess Bride Trivia Night and a Princess Bride Board Game complete with seven hand-painted miniatures of the key characters.

The PG-13 variant of “Deadpool 2” called “Once Upon a Deadpool” (2018) even borrows Savage himself, as an adult, and “The Princess Bride” story framework where Deadpool takes the place of Grandpa, reading the story of Deadpool to a “captivated” Savage. Even AEG’s “Love Letter” board game feels highly influenced by “The Princess Bride.”

The film holds a special place in our hearts. It’s a generational film and parents often can’t wait until their children are old enough to show it. It makes a great date film too.

In a video interview with People, Chris Sarandon (Prince Humperdinck) said, “It evolves as you grow.” He referred to how through additional viewings of the film, when we’re older, we get more out of it.

Even one of the Alamo Drafthouse’s famous movie parties focuses on “The Princess Bride.” I attended this one years ago with a friend, swinging our inflatable swords around during the fencing scene, quoting along to the dialogue we all know so well.

In the ‘80s, I read the novel in high school—yes back when “a hot fairy tale” drew attention across the cover of the paperback edition and its back cover featured profanity referring to Prince Humperdinck’s character. I noted how close the novel and the film related. Rarely is a film so close to its novel. Sure, there are some differences, such as Humperdinck’s Zoo of Death and the film’s switch from the S. Morgenstern history and Goldman’s own viewpoints to that of a framing story with Grandson and Grandpa.

So, why do we love this movie so much?

My speculation includes five specific reasons why we love this film: its overlying theme of romance, the fantasy elements, its great cinematic sword fights, memorable dialogue and humor, as well as the cast.

## **ROMANCE**

The most romantic line in the film is probably, “As you wish,” when Westley (Cary Elwes) reveals his feelings to Buttercup (Robin Wright). As I’ve indicated in a past column, this line evokes subtext. But it’s far from the only romantic line in the movie.

Grandpa’s telling of the tale in the early part of the framing story includes: “That day, she was amazed to discover that when he was saying, ‘As you wish,’ what he meant was, ‘I love you.’ And then even more amazing was the day she realized she truly loved him back.”

Grandpa comes back to us on the bookend to finish the tale with this line, “Since the invention of the kiss, there have been five kisses rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind. The end.”

Like I said, it’s definitely a kissing book.

“Death cannot stop true love. All it can do is delay it for a while,” Westley tells Buttercup.

One of Buttercup’s most romantic lines occurs when she finds out Westley is still alive: “Move? You’re alive. If you want, I can fly.”

## **FANTASY**

“You rush a miracle man, you get rotten miracles,” Miracle Max (Billy Crystal) tells the heroes as they try to save Westley’s life.

Without the fantasy elements, this film would be less interesting. Splicing magic into the romance conjures up the wonder of a fairytale love. This is a tried-and-true formula that Disney films adhere to all too well.

One of the things that make this fairytale so unique—especially for its time—is that it’s intended for adults. It’s a film for the whole family.

## **SWORD DUELS**

One of the things that really impresses me about this film is its wonderful and well-choreographed swashbuckling. The actors learned their parts, the techniques, practiced and portrayed the fights in an amazing way.

Even before the first duel begins, Inigo Montoya (Mandy Patinkin) asked, “I do not mean to pry, but you don’t by any chance happen to have six fingers on your right hand?” The Man in Black replied, “Do you always begin conversations this way?”

We learn the troubled backstory of Montoya’s character and we feel for him as he faces off against this mysterious Man in Black.

“You seem a decent fellow. I hate to kill you,” Montoya says as they prepare to cross swords. The Man in Black replies, “You seem a decent fellow. I hate to die.”

Both show their skill and knowledge of the art of fencing as they banter back and forth about various fencing styles and techniques as they exhibit expert footwork across the rocky terrain. Blades clash again and again as the two masters duel.

For a moment, it seems as if Montoya will fail until he announces that he's not left-handed. Only for a turnabout when the Man in Black also admits he's "not left-handed either." Such a classic and humorous twist.

In the end, the Man in Black outduels Montoya. "Who are you?" the defeated Spaniard asks. "No one of consequence," the dark-clad winner remarks. Inigo pleads, "I must know" but the Man in Black ends with "Get used to disappointment," before knocking him unconscious.

As good as that sword duel is, we get another as Montoya finally faces off against his father's murderer—the six-fingered man.

"Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

## **DIALOGUE/HUMOR**

This is probably the most difficult category to narrow down in terms of my favorite pieces of dialogue and humor. There's so much good stuff in this film that I often view it as a complete work.

Only a handful of movies reside in this class, when it comes to quotability. Fans often know this movie by heart. The lines are just so much fun to quote along.

I haven't given Fezzik (Andre the Giant) his due time yet in this article. One thing I'm grateful for is that the filmmakers didn't reduce Andre to just a comedic role or just a brute strength role—they embraced the humor and physicality of this wrestling legend but remembered the actor's own true nature as a gentle giant. While we often focus on the romance as the heart of this film, Fezzik definitely shows us the heart and innocence that make him so beloved in this role.

From "Anybody want a peanut?" to "My way's not very sportsman-like" to "You've been mostly dead all day," we laugh along with one of the first wrestlers to join the movies even before Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Dave Bautista, John Cena and most other actor-turned-wrestlers.

Another source of comedy in the film came in the form of Wallace Shawn (Vizzini), known mostly for repeating "Inconceivable!" To which Montoya finally responded, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

His other great comedy moments include the battle of wits with the iocane powder for the princess' life. "You're trying to kidnap what I've rightfully stolen."

"Let me put it this way. Have you ever heard of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates?" he asks the Man in Black. "Yes." Vizzini bluntly retorts back, "Morons."

As he thinks he's about to win the battle of wits, Vizzini proclaims with a deathly cackle, "Never go against a Sicilian when death is on the line!"

Comedy legend Crystal added his skills to the film in the role of Miracle Max, a failed wizard who was rejected by "the king's stinking son." Max and Valerie (Carol Kane) perform crazy antics as they argue over whether they will try to save Westley.

The craziness begins when the heroes knock on his door and Max threatens to call the Brute Squad. Fezzik informs him, "I'm on the Brute Squad." Max looks him up and down. "You *are* the Brute Squad!"

They disagree over whether Westley is dead or “mostly dead” and why it’s so important to save Westley. After some trickery, Montoya finally tells Max that it’s because of true love.

“Sonny, true love is the greatest thing in the world ... except for a nice MLT – mutton, lettuce, and tomato sandwich, where the mutton is nice and lean and the tomatoes are ripe. They’re so perky; I love that.”

Crystal’s classic humor defines the character, making him a highly memorable part of the film all the way up to, “Have fun stormin’ da castle,” as he and Kane wave goodbye to the heroes.

## **THE CAST**

Some of the cast made their earliest appearances here and it set them to future roles and fame.

Elwes and Wright show up in numerous other films in the following years. Elwes is known for Mel Brooks’ “Robin Hood: Men in Tights,” “Kiss the Girls,” “Liar Liar” and “Saw.” Elwes even wrote a book titled “As You Wish.”

Wright’s also known for her pivotal role of Jenny in “Forrest Gump” and roles in “Beowulf” and “Unbreakable.”

Patinkin ended up later in “Alien Nation,” “Dick Tracy” and “Homeland.”

“The Princess Bride,” rated PG, was directed by Rob Reiner and features Elwes (Westley/The Man in Black), Wright, Patinkin, Andre the Giant, Sarandon, Christopher Guest (Count Rugen), Shawn, Savage, Falk, Crystal and Kane. It received a 97% Tomatometer score and a 94% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 8.0/10 on the International Movie Database.

Let’s end on a great Westley quote that sums up the entire film: “This is true love. You think this happens every day?”

“The show must go on.”