



# TALE OF TALES

ITALY

MATTEO GARRONE

WINCHESTER  
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After *Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone's grittily authentic 2008 take on the Italian thug life — inspired by actual journalism — the filmmaker moved subtly away from verisimilitude. Even his 2012 follow-up, *Reality*, a dark satire on reality television, had elements of surrealism to it. But with his latest *Tale of Tales*, a trilogy of dark fables inspired by an anthology of fairy tales by Italian folklorist Giambattista Basile (1566-1632), Garrone has left the real world utterly behind. This is a world of ogres, sea monsters, soothsayers and magic, where transformation and the implausible — a pet flea the size of a pig; a withered crone who becomes a beautiful young maiden; albino twins, born to different mothers — are commonplace.

If you do not have the taste for such foolery presented as fact, you probably will not enjoy this. But for those of us who do, Garrone has created a world of both rich and ugly textures — visual, narrative and imaginative — that transports, delights and imparts disturbing lessons.

The casting, to begin with, is impeccable. For the main roles, Garrone has chosen actors whose striking physical features lend themselves remarkably well to fantasy. As the trio of Renaissance kings around whom these stories revolve, Vincent Cassel, John C. Reilly and Toby Jones make use of their extreme physiognomy to convey a subtle otherworldliness from the get-go. Their un-made-up appearance — a hooked nose here, a prominent forehead there, an unusually short stature — signal a sense of heightened oddness.

Among the main cast members, only Salma Hayek, as Reilly's queen, is conventionally beautiful. It's her soul that is twisted.

Hayek plays the barren queen of Longtrellis, whose desire to bear a child leads her to take dangerous risks. When, after following the grisly instructions of a necromancer, she is finally able to deliver a son (Christian Lees), her scullery maid gives simultaneous birth to the boy's "twin" (Jonah Lees). Eventually, the queen banishes the lower-class child out of jealousy — despite the fact that he has grown up to be her young prince's best friend.

The other plots concern marriage: the reluctant union of a princess (Bebe Cave) with a giant (Guillaume Delaunay), and the story of a lecherous king (Cassel) who weds an ancient hag (Hayley Carmichael) who has been transformed, through magic, into a young woman (Stacy Martin).

There are many themes at play here that viewers will recognize from fairy tale literature: bad parenting, rival siblings, true love (and lust), devil's bargain, obsession and loyalty. Garrone stirs them all together masterfully, in three stories that revel in the grotesque as much as they do the beautiful, even finding a kind of allure in the horrific. One character is flayed — by her own choice; a dragon is slain; one monster is decapitated. These are not bedtime stories, unless you want nightmares.

**Michael O'Sullivan, *The Washington Post***

**WRITER:** Giambattista Basille **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Peter Suschitzky **MUSIC:** Alexandre Desplat  
**CAST:** *Queen of Longtrellis* Salma Hayek | *King of Strongcliff* Vincent Cassel | *King of Highhills* Toby Jones

VOTING FOR *ELLE* A35 | B32 | C11 | D9 | E3 | Rating 74% | Attendance 101

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