



Alchemy of MirrorMask, The

Dave McKean , Neil Gaiman

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An oversized, lavishly produced book, *The Alchemy of MirrorMask* takes readers inside the making of the feature film and allows them to experience the creative process. Animated by Dave McKean and written by Neil Gaiman, *MirrorMask* combines animation and live action with a compelling storyline to take the cinematic experience to a stunning new level.

MirrorMask is the story of Helena, a fifteen-year-old girl who works for her family's circus. She juggles, sells popcorn, and longs to run away and join the "real world." Helena also dreams, and one day she wakes up to find herself in a strange new world populated by mysterious creatures...a dream world where she embarks on an amazing journey.

Each chapter in *The Alchemy of MirrorMask* begins with an introduction by McKean and Gaiman and then guides readers through the different types of visuals used to create the film, including sketches, paintings, storyboards, 3-d models, photographs, texture maps, frame blow-ups, and more. Also included are photos taken on the set and during McKean's travels to Venice, Prague, Trieste, Warsaw, and other places that provided inspiration for *MirrorMask*. Gaiman and McKean's insightful commentary sheds light on the film's journey from concept to screen.

Gaiman and McKean fans, cinema buffs, and visual art enthusiasts will all delight in *The Alchemy of MirrorMask*, a rare, behind-the-scenes look at the making of an extraordinary film.

Alchemy of MirrorMask, The Details

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From Reader Review Alchemy of MirrorMask, The for online ebook

Rich Stoehr says

"Welcome to a part of the art of *MirrorMask*."

This isn't an art book, though it has art throughout. As Dave McKean describes it in his introduction, *The Alchemy of MirrorMask* is "a record of the feeling of making the film." Which makes sense, as I found the book every bit as clever, insightful, peculiar, and approachable as the film itself.

MirrorMask is a unique film, to say the least. A young adult coming-of-age movie, certainly, but one suffused from the first frames to the last with the mind-bending creative vision of Dave McKean, an artist of many media. While watching, the story sweeps the viewer into its weird world, while the artistry makes one want to pause frequently and admire the composition, the imagery, the detail of each scene.

The Alchemy of MirrorMask gives us the chance to do just that - and not just to see the finished frames of the film, but the drawings and photographs and textures that went into building it. Each page has some piece to admire, and something to reveal about how the movie was made. I found my eye lingering over picture after picture; many familiar and many completely new, eager to see the next but reluctant to leave what I was looking at.

With many of these images is small blurbs of commentary from McKean himself, or from Neil Gaiman, who collaborated to write the script and shape the story. These commentaries are not pretentious or lofty Statements of Art, but rather surprisingly approachable little segments, insights into the visions that laid the foundations for the film, or funny stories about how they translated into reality.

For example, from McKean's introduction: "The digital world can go anywhere and do anything, yet is usually called upon to re-create the digital world. Although an astonishing technical achievement, this seems to me to be a narrow goal." Those who've watched *MirrorMask* can see in this the principle that underpins most of the finished film - that creating art is much more than re-creating reality.

Or Neil, on McKean's development of the look of the dream city: "He made some collages on his computer to accompany the script to the Jim Henson Company, to show everyone what he meant things to look like. What's odd is that, looking at those images now, I understand them completely... At the time I simply nodded and had faith." Many of those pictures are included in the book, both the original photos and the texture maps made from them. Even though most are photos of various cities in Europe, I can see the dream city of *MirrorMask* somewhere in each one.

Or McKean again, this time on why the rebellious monkeybird is named Malcolm: "That's the big problem with *The Lord of the Rings* for me. You never get Orcs called Malcolm, or Bob, or Gerald, and I think it's the poorer for it. Actually, you never get Orcs just having a night off. They never just put their feet up, have a jam sandwich, do a little gardening. There's always too much stomping around being evil to be getting on with." How can you possibly argue with that?

"Alchemy," according to the dictionary: "a seemingly magical process of transformation, creation, or combination." In the film *MirrorMask*, we see the end result of the process, the new thing created from base materials.

In *The Alchemy of MirrorMask*, we get a glimpse into the process itself. Not the whole thing - McKean's not about to give away what makes the magic work, and I'm not even sure he could if he wanted to - but glimmers and insights into the ideas and images and personalities and that went into crafting a truly magical film.

Glaucconar Yue says

Nice visual materials, but the authors' commentaries are mostly just random anecdotes.

Kayleen says

A really cool insight of my favorite fantasy films, Mirrormask. Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean talk throughout, and they show amazing pictures and drawings.

A must have for any fan.

Parka says

(More pictures at parkablogs.com)

This book contains a stunning collection of collages by Dave McKean. Every piece of collage is showcase of creativity and fantasy. The pages are visually saturated from the cover to the last page, a feast for the eyes.

The premise of the book is on the production of the movie Mirrormask. It talks about the production of the movie exclusively. Very little is mentioned about the story, which is not a problem if you have watched the movie.

The thing with collages is, they are typically filled with great textures. This book is no different. It is through the textures of these collages that give this book so much depth.

I felt there could have been more write up on the making of the movie. But this book is essentially 5 stars for the art displayed.

This review was first published on parkablogs.com. There are more pictures and videos on my blog.

Jaimie says

"Art of" books are always fascinating, but this exploration of McKean and Gaiman's film MirrorMask is something else. To many readers I imagine that it looks like loosely bound chaos, with little connection to the actual narrative of the film, but this is really very much in the tone of the film itself. MirrorMask is a complex, convoluted story for all that it masquerades as another take on the Alice in Wonderland adventure, and it's best taken as a chaotic dreamscape adventure that needs no formalization. Its beauty lies in the

exploration of the insides of Dave McKean's and Neil Gaiman's occasionally cooperative minds, which clearly know few bounds and are capable of combining a variety of themes and imagery into something wholly new and wonderful. This book may not seem to make any more sense of the film than itself, but the motley arrangement of sketches, film stills, concept art, and commentary gives us glimpses behind the curtain and some additional material to explore in context. If there had been an attempt to rationalize the creation of the film I honestly don't think that it would be very enjoyable, since viewers of the film must accept the beautiful chaos of the story and readers must do likewise. To do otherwise would detract from the film and potentially strip it of some of its magic (and none of us want that)!
