

Fantasy lives of girls in the city



With
Jacinta Tynan

I was a little nervous about the Sex And The City movie. It's just that I hadn't seen The Girls in a while, and was hoping we'd still get along. A lot can change in four years.

Don't worry, I don't plan to give anything away. But I was relieved to discover that in their absence, the four women we know so well have moved on.

They've gone from good-man hunting to real estate, babies and Botox. If the series was about looking for love, the film is about how to keep it.

It would have been a tragedy and a sad indictment on all our lives if the girls were still single in the city all these years later. What hope would that have given the rest of us?

Don't assume for a minute that this is some frivolous, fictional set-piece with no connection to reality, a 145-minute distraction from what really matters in life.

For many of us, Sex And The City is a staple diet: an uncanny snapshot of our own lives giving us hope, answers and kinship in the guise of a like-minded posse of girls at the same life stage who also happen to have enviable wardrobes and sharp wits.



Parallel universe: Carrie Bradshaw and her friends offer 'a simpatico unrivalled by anything else on screen'

We've watched them go through the same stuff as us, loving the wrong men and losing the right ones, and they feel just like our friends.

We all needed a little time apart to get on with our lives, but now we're back together. And the expectations are enormous.

"I'll be a bit put out if they all couple up," a friend says, pre-movie. "That'll mean we'll all have to."

Not that she governs her life by the SATC girls. Not fully.

But there's a simpatico unrivalled by anything else on screen, big or small.

"It speaks to me," she says. "I'll be going through a dilemma with a bloke, then catch an

episode of Sex and think 'That's me!'"

The stakes are higher for another friend. With her very own Mr Big on-and-off since the series began, bearing a striking resemblance to Carrie's tumultuous, roller-coaster relationship, the plot line is crucial.

"I need to know what happens next," she says, referring as much to her own life as to the film release, and with only a shade of jest.

This friend isn't clueless. She's a sharp investment banker whose boss has given her the afternoon off to see the SATC movie despite closing on a half-billion-dollar deal at week's end because he gets how important it is to her.

Her friends have pre-booked a group matinee. Why should she miss out for her corporate career?

"I really care about Carrie," says another friend in all sincerity.

"Why did she let Aiden go, silly girl? He was so right for her."

Even though she found her man, she's hoping the film doesn't give false hope to those who haven't.

"I'll be so

disappointed if she ends up with Big, because it's a cliché. Life is messy. Some get their prince, but most don't."

This is one film where a happy ending won't do, because it might shatter our illusion of art imitating life.

For 94 half-hour episodes, we were voyeurs of their lives, lunch dates and bedrooms.

It's our parallel universe, our social reference point that we'd hate to see ruined by a schmaltzy crescendo. Which is why one friend plans to catch the film solo, pre-empting it as a spiritual experience.

"I don't want to be reminded that I'm in a cinema. This is my life. I'm living it, not watching it," she says.

"I admit I've fantasised about being Carrie, and I have a friend who could be Charlotte."

This friend called me after the film, horrified, saying: "Charlotte stole my baby name!" And she's not even pregnant.

She's not alone. There were audible gasps from behind me in the cinema, and a high-volume "Ohhh!" at a point I won't reveal. People were weeping, including me — and even, reportedly, men. Straight ones.

It's not just about whether Carrie gets Big (I'm not saying either way), but whether The Girls have evolved.

We've done the single-girl thing to death, with SATC spawning a legion of Carrie clones writing columns on love or lack thereof. (Not mentioning any names).

Lamenting a lack of good men over cosmopolitans is so passé. We have new dilemmas and preoccupations — and so, thank goodness, do they.

This isn't, we hope, the end. It's just a catch-up. They made single sexy, so just think what they could do with motherhood, menopause and beyond.

It's a long road ahead, and we'll need all the friends we can get.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

■ Sex and The City was #1 in the US for its opening weekend taking US \$56M on 3285 screens, a record opening for romantic comedy.

■ It outgrossed Mission Impossible which took US \$45M on its opening weekend, and more than doubled takings for the The Devil Wears Prada (\$28.8m).

■ In Australia, it debuted on Thursday on 454 screens across the country.

■ Tens of thousands of tickets have been pre-sold on line, the second highest record for on-line sales to Harry Potter 5. It's outselling Indiana Jones 2:1

■ Greater Union cinemas are booked up five weeks ahead especially in premium Gold Class cinemas. Special group bookings are available with a Cosmopolitan thrown in. Extra sessions are being added from 10pm at five Sydney cinemas.