

Alice in Wonderland Movie Review

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Exclusives - Exclusives



Kavi Shah reviews the *Alice in Wonderland* movie, due for release on March 05, 2010.

Alice in... Underland? Apparently so, and that's not the only twist. Alice is now a teenager, gone is her blue dress, and in its place, she's sporting a suit of armour. Sounds a little peculiar right? Don't fret. You'll still be taking a tumble down a rabbit hole with the beautiful Alice, and reuniting with her childhood friends Absolem, the Cheshire Cat, the White Rabbit, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, and of course, the Mad Hatter. But, in keeping with the peculiarity theme, you learn that Alice actually has no memory of them!

Lesson one: don't expect an easy retelling of Lewis Carroll's classical 'Alice in Wonderland'. Director Tim Burton has played fast and loose with the beloved classic and brought his own spin to this one. The characters may be familiar, but the plot deviates insanely from the original. "Tim's created a whole new world for Alice to live in. The tone is a little more grown up" says producer Jennifer Todd. "There isn't a little girl in a blue and white dress."

Rather than coming face-to-face with a beautiful Wonderland, Alice comes up close and personal to a cruel, oppressed realm which is in decline under the suppressive and tyrannical rule of the evil Red Queen. The colour palette is drained, and the place overgrown, but Alice will surely come to the rescue.

Some of Carroll's original illustrations do occasionally drip through the film though, like the White Rabbit who shows up at Alice's garden party, complete with his ticking clock, and the vicious Jabberwocky, the Red Queen's dragon, is a near replica to Carroll's original. But there are a number of added extras too. Carroll probably never envisioned 'Alice in Wonderland' as a fantasy, action-adventure movie featuring huge battle scenes between red and white armies.

In this extension to Carroll's original stories, Alice Kingsleigh, (played by Aussie actress Mia Wasikowska) is now 19. She attends a garden party at a Victorian estate shortly after the death of her beloved father. The formal affair, unbeknownst to Alice, is an engagement party planned by her mother and sister. Just as the arrogant, ill-mannered, chinless Lord Hamish Ascot proposes to Alice under a gazebo, before the eyes of hundreds of snooty society-types, Alice spots a white rabbit wearing a waistcoat and pocket watch scurrying across the grounds. In shock and confusion, off she rushes, following the furry fellow, tumbling down a rabbit hole into Underland. This was a place she'd visited 10 years beforehand as a child, and misheard the word 'Underland' to be 'Wonderland', although she has no memory of it or its inhabitants. Alice reunites with her childhood friends and they request her help in overthrowing the Red Queen (played by Helena Bonham Carter) who has taken control of the land from her benevolent sister, the White Queen (played by Anne Hathaway). Alice is informed by the wise, hookah-smoking caterpillar (played by Alan Rickman), that her presence in Underland is no mistake. According to ancient prophecy, she's the only one who can slay the Jabberwock, the dragon who terrorises the inhabitants of Underland under the rule of the Red Queen. Alice embarks on an adventure journey to save Underland and restore it to its former glory, and to seek her true destiny too.

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THE FILM CELL



Burton plays with gender and social class issues of a Victorian era. He paints Alice as a Victorian girl on the cusp of adulthood, who is toying with the concept of an arranged marriage. He gives her the power to reject the destiny created for her by others, and instead seek out her own path, making her an empowering feminist figure.

In order to do this, Alice embarks on a journey throughout the movie where she is constantly forced to question her identity. Absolom the caterpillar probes: 'Who are you?' and the inhabitants of the land constantly query whether she is the 'real' Alice. Burton gives Alice the 'Girl Power' factor to discover herself, be the heroine of the land, and prove herself as self-assured. Mirroring this symbolic transformation, Alice grows and shrinks as a person throughout the film with the help of magic little potions, labelled DRINK ME, and pieces of cake, labelled EAT ME, which allow her to transform from 6 inches to a great 20 feet tall, a classic feature of Carroll's books.

"In the beginning, Alice is very awkward and uncomfortable in her skin. She doesn't fit into the Victorian society or structure that she's a part of, and she doesn't like what's expected of her, which is to get married and be a good wife," Wasikowska says. "So her experience in Underland is about reconnecting with herself and finding she has the strength to figure out what she wants."

Penned by American screenwriter Linda Woolverton, whose credits include *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*, the film is reflective of her own experiences. She said: "I wrote this at a very dark time in my life. A lot of bad things had happened—death, divorce—so I was kind of down the rabbit hole myself at the time." It was only when she thought of making Alice older and bringing her back to Wonderland that it all came into focus. "I got an image of her standing at a very crucial moment in her life, looking over and seeing this rabbit leaning against the tree, looking at her, knowing she had to put a pin in this crucial decision and follow this rabbit, because that was her destiny."

Whether there is a real need for Alice to go on this 'self discovery' journey is arguable, and could be said to make this film, ironically, an unsatisfying non-starter. The journey is exciting and the characters encountered on the way are fascinating, but whether this fits well within the 'Victorian' bookend storylines Burton sets up, can be disputed. The ending is rather dissatisfying too. Don't smirk when you hear it – Alice becomes an... APPRENTICE!

Never mind the storyline, the visuals on this 3D epic are top notch. It offers crisp, bright and über realistic images and makes your skin tingle as you forget that you're sitting inside a cinema rather than in Alice's pocket. You feel as if you're flying down the rabbit hole with her, as she encounters soaring pieces of furniture, including a heavy piano, and you even dodge in your seat to make sure Alice won't get crushed by it! The first half of the film in particular, features Alice thrashing this way and that, and you feel like you're in the thick of the action beside her, joining the characters in this whimsical world.

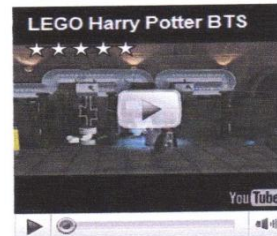
To create his 3D version of Lewis Carroll's classic, Burton shot his actors in front of green screens rather than on real sets, and then used the latest digital technology, computer generated imagery (CGI), to insert sets, props, backgrounds and even some characters into the frame in post-production. Apart from the scenes featuring Alice in the real world, which he filmed in Cornwall, Burton spent quite a few weeks in an all-green environment. "The novelty of the green wears off very quickly," Johnny Depp (who plays The Mad Hatter) says. "It's exhausting, actually. I don't mind having to spew dialogue while some guy is holding a card and I'm talking to a piece of tape. But the green beats you up."

Many of Carroll's creations are fully animated characters and Burton amassed a group of British actors to voice them. They include the Dormouse (voiced by Barbara Windsor), the White Rabbit (voiced by Michael Sheen), the March Hare (voiced by Paul Whitehouse) and the Cheshire Cat (voiced by Stephen Fry). On set, these characters were

RELEASE DATES

- Beedle The Bard - December 04, 2008
- The Exhibition - Spring 2009
- DH Paperback - July 07, 2009
- H-BP Movie - July 15, 2009
- Wizarding World Themepark - 2009/2010
- DH Movie Part One - November 19, 2010
- DH Movie Part Two - July 15, 2011

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LATEST IMAGES



SITE UPDATES

- 19/02/10 - New poll launched
- 15/07/09 - New video added to TDS YouTube channel
- 15/07/09 - New Half-Blood Prince UK & US premiere footage added to Exclusives section

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POLLS

How excited are you about the Harry Potter theme park?

- SO excited! I can't wait!!
- Very excited - should be fun!
- I'm excited but can wait to visit it
- I'm happy that it's being built but don't think I will visit it.

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represented either by green cardboard cut-outs, full-size models or actors dressed in green.

Burton refreshed Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, and now he has enlarged Carroll's classic, taking it to a new height; "It has been Burton-ized" according to producer Richard Zanuck. The best parts in the film are, of course, running into some of the most charismatic characters, who provide a feast for your imagination.

The liveliest performance is put on by Johnny Depp as the off-his-rocker Mad Hatter. Outrageous looking with his covered top hat, orange hair, bushy, fluffy eyebrows, and funky costumes, he's Alice's greatest ally.

Depp said the Mad Hatter was like "A mood ring; his emotions are very close to the surface. The term 'mad as a hatter' actually came from real hatters when they were making top hats. The glue they used had very high mercury content and it would stain their hands, they'd go goofy from the mercury and go nuts".

He's suitably freaky and fearless, with ever-changing, unpredictable moods. In creating the Hatter's look, Depp felt his entire body should be affected by the mercury, not just his mind, and worked closely with Patty Duke, his make-up artist of 18 years and his costume artist Colleen Atwood to achieve this kooky, colourful, clownish look. You'll love his gruff, unexpected Scottish accent, and his big eyes switch from apple-green to avocado-green colours.

"He has an ability for transformation that is fabulous" says producer Zanuck. "There's no way anyone else can do these crazy, offbeat, eccentric characters like Johnny can." Burton and Depp have, over the past two decades, created a memorable series of onscreen oddballs, including Edward Scissorhands and Willy Wonka, and this marks their seventh collaboration. You could say that hints of Willy Wonka still linger in Depp as he plays the Hatter.

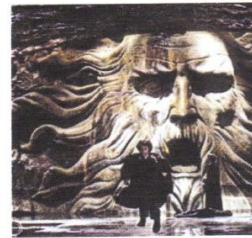
Bonham Carter plays the spiteful, flaming Red Queen. Her bulbous head was created by digitally increasing it to twice its actual size on screen. She puts on a convincingly wicked performance and evokes a lot of rage. Her demonic nature is cleverly shown off as she uses a live pig as a foot stool and expresses love for 'morning executions'.

Bonham Carter's chilling transformation into the Red Queen required three hours in the make-up chair each day. She said: "The big hazard was, I lost my voice pretty much every day by 10 o'clock because she shouts a lot. 'Off with his head! Off with her head!' It's quite exhausting losing your temper all the time." There's a hell of a lot of slaying in the film, most of which has something or the other to do with the bloody Red Queen, and could make you think twice about whether it should actually have a PG certificate.

In stark contrast, Hathaway plays the delicate and serene White Queen, sister to the Red Queen. She's no ordinary White Queen as you'd expect. She's a punk-rock, peroxide blonde with a gothic beauty. She's got black eyebrows, lips and black painted nails, but she's also glamorous, graceful and emotional and her character had little digital manipulation. At times, Hathaway seems a little uncomfortable, and in her role, and it's difficult to decide whether she suits the 'domestic goddess' that Burton paints her to be, as she concocts a magic potion complete with amputated fingers and urine.

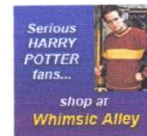
Newcomer and not-so-Hollywood-startlet, 19-year-old Aussie Wasikowska is well suited to playing the curious 19-year-old Alice. Some of her lines are intriguing, for example in reaction to a complaint that all the roses in the bushes are white instead of red, she simply says that it isn't a problem and the roses could easily be painted red! Such innocence, and imagination, is inspiring. Furthermore, Alice draws on a piece of advice her late father gave her, saying to the Mad Hatter that the best people in the world are the bonkers people. It's this careful scripting which really draws you to Alice. One of Wasikowska's most memorable moments is when she's kitted out in Joan of Arc armour and grabs the vortal sword, and roars, "Off with your

GALLERIES

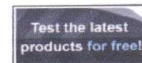


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TOLUNA



head" to the Jabberwock. While Wasikowska's acting is a little dry to begin with, it definitely spices up as the film progresses.

On a funny, unimportant note, it's quite mindboggling as to how Wasikowska managed to complete many of her adventures (including the climbing, the traipsing and the changing body sizes) in a series of puffy dresses!

If only all cats could smile! Stephen Fry provides the perfect voice for The Cheshire Cat. This grinning tabby cat, with its ability to evaporate into thin air, and reappear when it likes, is spookily necessary. Its star feature is its disembodied head which comes in very handy later in the film. You could even think of the chubby Cheshire Cat as Garfield's brother!

Alan Rickman provides the gruff, authoritative voice of Absolem, the wise blue Caterpillar who never stops smoking. He gives Alice few answers through the movie, and his meanness as he says to Alice, "You silly girl", will remind you of Professor Snape. Absolem is authoritative, all-knowing, and the guardian of the Oraculum, an ancient document that depicts every major event of Underland. He challenges Alice to come to a better understanding of herself, and gives intuitive lessons of life to her, but you wouldn't ever imagine Snape doing this!

Bayard the Bloodhound is voiced by Timothy Spall. You feel sympathy for this old dog as he's forced to be an accomplice to the Red Queen in fear that his imprisoned wife and pups will be injured if he doesn't obey. He effectively depicts Burton's political allegory in the film as he almost seems forced by the oppression. Luckily, with the help of Alice, Bayard will be relieved of his shackles and prove secretly loyal, becoming Alice's ally and a convenient transport system too.

Paul Whitehouse voices the March Hare who hosts the Mad Hatter's tea parties at his Hare House. He's paranoid, anxious and slightly insane; the latter quality could be likened to Sir Cadogan in Hogwarts! The Hare is prone to tossing crockery and constantly wrings his ears. While perfectly competent, there is not really a memorable moment for this Hare – he merely goes skipping in and out of the movie, making little impact beyond the visual.

The performances which will leave you grinning like The Cheshire Cat are those of Carroll's lovable creations, Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Little Britain star Matt Lucas enacts both roles, but only his rubbery, rotund features have made the finished film. The tubby Tweedle twins are adorable, and you may want to take them home with you. Lucas' casting is perfectly suited to the infantile Tweedle's, who constantly disagree with one another. Lucas said: "I imagined them as naughty Victorian children, with their hand in the honey jar. And so I made them quite child-like which does come naturally to me because I'm a big kid anyway."

For the acting, Lucas had to wear a green, teardrop shaped suit which allowed only his face to be seen. "The fat suit didn't let him to bring his arms straight down to his sides. It gave him a volume to work with and a way of walking that's unique" said visual effects producer Tom Peitzman. Lucas would first perform a scene as Tweedledee and then he would play the scene as Tweedledum.

The furious, beastly Bandersnatch, at first sight, could remind you of Hagrid's dog, Fluffy, with its teeth-baring face. Yet, this won't last for long – Alice will work her magic on him!

Perhaps Burton shouldn't have reworked 'Alice in Wonderland'. This film could have worked better as a straight rendering of the original, with the added plus of his humour. Furthermore, whether we could actually classify this as a sequel is difficult to answer because Alice spends a lot of the film claiming not to remember anything from her previous adventures, and the characters do pretty much the same things as they did when they first met her.

Nevertheless, 'Alice in Wonderland' has inspired a host of real-world fashion from Donatella Versace's Spring/Summer 2010 runway collection to accessories by Stella McCartney, to one-off dresses from the late Alexander McQueen.

Also, renowned crystal manufacturer Swarovski launched its own exclusive jewellery collection while OPI created four limited-edition Nail Lacquer shades inspired by the film. There's a chance for every girl to get a little Alice in her!

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