

Go Ask ‘Alice in Wonderland’ With Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway

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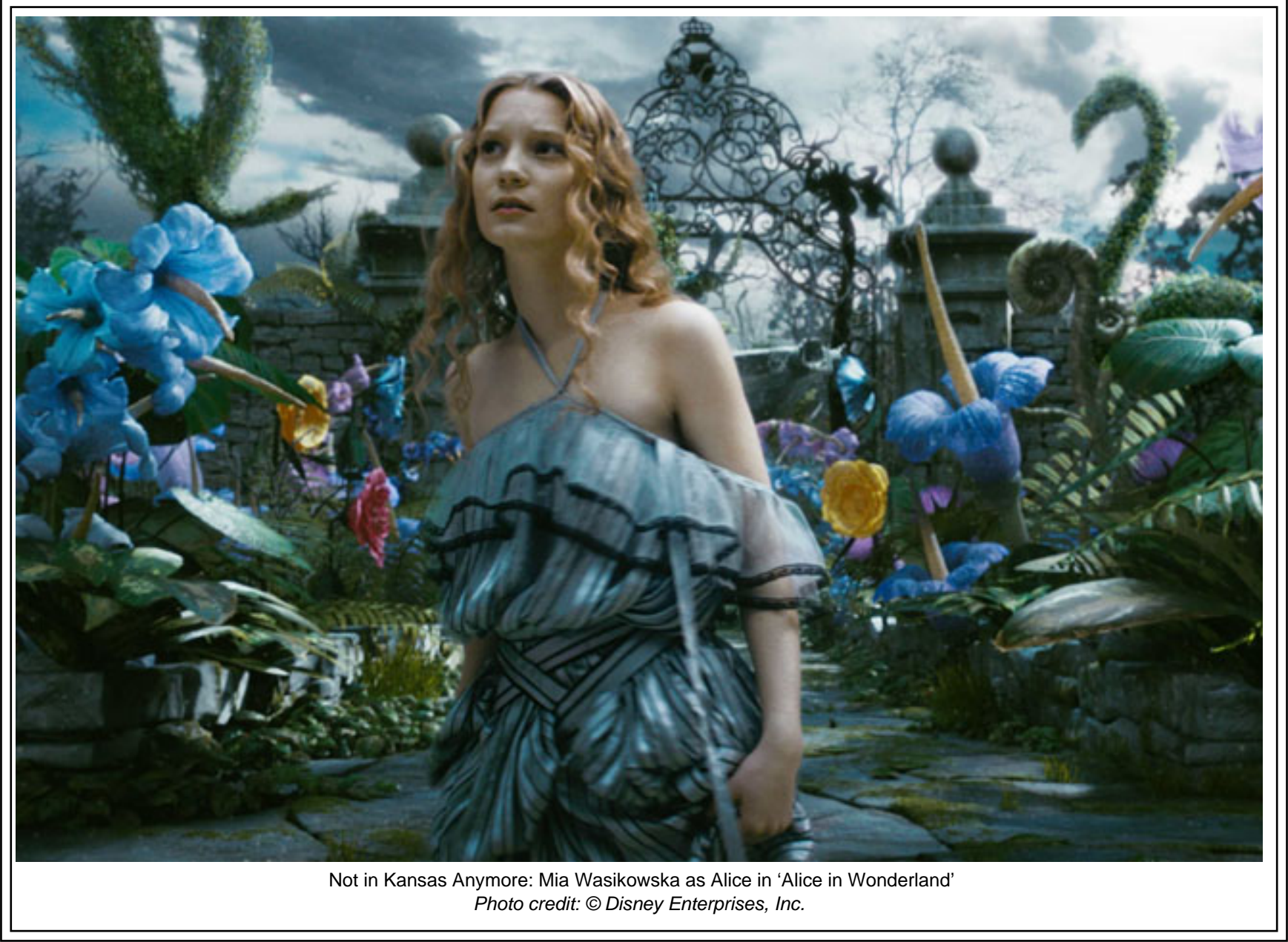


Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – It’s like living in a dream. Director Tim Burton’s adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland” uses 3-D magic for a timeless classic and creates gratitude for this current era of technology and creativity.

The Walt Disney Production features Alice (newcomer Mia Wasikowska), introduced as a special child. The daughter of a world explorer and dreamer, young Alice is afflicted with feverish visions about another realm that seems as real as the world around her. When she grows up – and after her father has died – she is set up through her station to marry the most genteel Lord in the region. Except she doesn’t love him.

Help is on the way in a form of a clock-wielding White Rabbit. The creature is oddly familiar to the grown-up Alice, and dutifully she follows him down the rabbit hole. As she plunges, those childhood visions are about to become her new reality and most adventurous challenge.



It is Wonderland where she has landed, where her curiosity is the only way she will find her way in or out. She has a bit of a problem with size control – one cake makes her larger and one sip makes her small – and she also needs to figure out who her allies are and who wants her

head.

Her colleagues in this new land turn out to be quite eccentric. The Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) wears his oddness on his noggin, and his collection of fellow travelers include a March Hare, a Dormouse and a couple of rotund twins named Tweedledee and Tweedledum. Alice's enemies are even more bizarre, the Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter) has a bulbous oversized skull, which may explain her penchant for demanding decapitation. Her aide and lover is the Knave of Hearts (Crispin Glover), whose advice to the Queen is based only on perpetuating fear upon Wonderland.

There is hope. The White Queen (Anne Hathaway), who is in exile, is waiting for Alice to help return her to the throne. Most folks in this strange land have the impossible idea that the girl within the woman will come to the aid of their country. Even the ever-smiling Cheshire Cat.

The source story, with its myriad reprintings and reworkings in virtually all media, is familiar enough. But director Tim Burton reinvents the crucial elements in the scenic beauty of Wonderland, preserving and enhancing its glorious sense of well...wonder. And after the throw down of "Avatar" at the end of 2009, Burton expounds upon the new 3-D by using it like a painter expresses photo realism. It's impossible – that word again – to describe and must be experienced.



The Royal Scam: Helena Bonham Carter as the Red Queen in 'Alice in Wonderland'

Photo credit: © Disney Enterprises, Inc.

But all of this technological finery would be absolute rubbish without the crucial awareness of the humans that populate Wonderland. The performers use their sense of admiration to interpret the Lewis Carroll nonsensicality, and Johnny Depp has imbued the Mad Hatter with the insanity that is expected and in this case absolutely appropriate. Helena Bonham Carter, as the Red Queen, manages to be both horrifying and sympathetic as the same time, all the way up to her just desserts. And when was the last time we saw Crispin Glover in a really special role? It is in his maturity that his greatest era as an actor may just be beginning.

Just as madness and evil are characteristics that calls for scenery chewing, Burton also manages to make his "nice" roles just as weird. Mia Wasikowska as Alice defines the heroic nature plainly and succinctly, but also has the reckless confidence so we can journey along with her. And unless there is something really pure and beautiful that a fight must be waged for, there is no reason to take up arms. Anne Hathaway is that purity in the film, saturating the White Queen with such ethereal wonderfulness – her very gestures are angelic – that the taking of action to champion her way of life makes perfect sense.

Finally, the animatronic animals deserve special mention. There would be no Alice in Wonderland without the Dormouse, March Hare, Cheshire Cat, White Rabbit, Blue Caterpillar and various other mystical creatures. They all have separate and realistic personalities in the way that they're "drawn." Like Superman's flight, we can believe that a girl can ride a dog.

Where would this film be without the morality of the source that author Lewis Carroll created? Screenwriter Linda Woolverton manages to capture the morality that is necessary to buy completely into Alice's journey. How is any impossible goal in life accomplished without disbelieving the impossible barriers that are put before us?

Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland reminds us that anything is attainable – and he creates a work of art that proves it. It does takes courage, sacrifice and even a little madness to fall through the rabbit hole. But oh, how essential that wonderful land can feel once we get there.

Walt Disney's "Alice in Wonderland" opens March 5th everywhere in Disney Digital 3-D, Real "D" 3-D and IMAX® 3-D. Check local listings for showtimes and 3-D availability. Features Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway, Mia Wasikowska and Helena Bonham Carter, directed by Tim

Burton. Rated “PG.”



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