

'Aladdin' looks exceptional, but has some dry spells

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 128 minutes

Disney certainly has gone all in with live-action remakes of its animated titles. Just two months ago we got the new *Dumbo*, and this week *Aladdin* is the feature being updated. This effort follows the original far more closely, which is both a benefit and a curse. The result is a pretty looking redo with excellent production values and photography on display. Yet its construction does feel a bit overextended, and the results are something of a mixed bag.

Set in the Arabian city of Agrabah, Aladdin (Mena Massoud) is a thief who survives by taking what he can, when he can (although he also seems to enjoy giving his stolen property away to the poor in equal measure). Princess Jasmine (Naomi Scott) lives in seclusion in the city's palace, resisting attempts made by her father (Navid Negahban) to find her a prince. Complications arise when Jasmine encounters Aladdin. Another threat comes in the form of the power-mad Jafar (Marwan Kenzari), who wants the throne for himself and forces Aladdin to try to retrieve a magic lamp for him. Of course, the protagonist soon discovers the item, rubs it and meets the Genie (Will Smith), who promises to deliver on three wishes for anything that Aladdin desires.

A few of the lengthier interchanges between Aladdin and the Genie earn laughs and there are also some amusing moments when a dim-witted prince (Billy Magnussen) arrives to try to win

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Jasmine's affections. He's only in a few scenes, but does make an amusing impression. The movie also looks quite good. It's definitely a spectacle, with some great set and elaborate numbers and crowd scenes (the filmmakers seem to enjoy employing confetti cannons at every opportunity). Director Guy Ritchie (*Sherlock Holmes*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*) also knows how to shoot action, and so an early chase through and above the city is exciting to watch, as are some long takes that follow the actors around the elaborately designed environments.

Some of the CGI elements work, including a flying carpet with a distinctive personality. However, a few of the photorealistic animals aren't quite as effective, with neither Aladdin's pet monkey or a sinister parrot generating a whole lot in the way of laughs. Jasmine's tiger, which wanders around, growls and occasionally licks people, most certainly worked in the animated film, but feels a bit out of place and surreal in a real world setting.

And as great as the sets and musical numbers look, it certainly feels as if the material itself has been stretched out. The original animated film was a zippy 90 minutes, while this version runs well over two hours. Much more time is spent setting up the story and focusing on the budding romance between leads Aladdin and Jasmine, in addition to setting up the latter as a strong-willed woman who wants to take a leadership role in the kingdom. That's all well and good, but they do slow the pacing, and these tangents also mean that central antagonist Jafar disappears for long stretches of the story, leaving little in the way of a threat for much of the running time. The additional musical numbers are reasonable, but don't stand out from the more famous and familiar tunes.

Overall, *Aladdin* looks great and has fun moments here and there, but some of the adapted elements are clunky, and the story begins to feel drawn out by the close. It's a reasonable effort, but not quite as successful as the recent *Beauty and the Beast* redo.

Personally, I could do without all of these remakes, but audience members and families who are excited about this update will likely find enough that works to enjoy the experience. Guess it'll only be a matter of time before Disney ends up cranking out live-action adaptations of *The Rescuers*

,
The Black Cauldron

,
The Hunchback of Notre Dame

,
Treasure Planet

and

Lilo & Stitch

. Brace yourselves.

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