



Oz the Great and Powerful: Not so Great

Oz the Great and Powerful is a fantastical prequel to *The Wizard of Oz* that delves into the story of the man behind the curtain. With strong elements of morality and redemption, *Oz the Great and Powerful* is entertaining, but perhaps relies too much on special effects rather than a compelling narrative.

Oscar Diggs (played by James Franco) is a magician for a traveling circus when he is forced to escape from a rather uncomfortable situation. Seeing an easy way out, Oscar jumps into a hot air balloon. Unbeknownst to him, however, a tornado approaches and sweeps Oscar into a magical land that has been under the control of an evil witch who has wreaked havoc on the land and people.

Upon his arrival to this strange land, Oscar is approached by a witch named Theodora (Mila Kunis), who informs him of a prophecy that a wizard was to arrive in Oz and destroy evil and bring peace to the land. Oscar asserts that he is a wizard of sorts, leading Theodora to believe that Oscar will be the one to fulfill the prophecy. Theodora leads Oscar to the capitol of Oz, Emerald City.

Meanwhile, Theodora has an evil sister named Evanora (Rachel Weisz) who repeatedly lies to her sister. Though Evanora is guilty of the murder of the girls' father, she pinned the guilt on their other sister, Glinda (Michelle Williams). Evanora wants her sister Glinda dead, believing Glinda to be an obstacle to her total reign, so she calls upon Oscar to kill her.

But Oscar is not so easily fooled. When he confronts Glinda, she tells him the truth about her sister and she and Oscar experience an immediate connection.

Together, Glinda and Oscar begin to consider how they might go about rescuing the land of Oz from Evanora and protect the people of Emerald City.

It seems that Oscar is at a disadvantage, however. Though he is a circus magician, he naturally does not have any "real" magic. How can he save Oz?

The beauty of the story is that "magic" is in the eyes of the beholder. Oz needs more than some spectacular magical displays to be saved, and Oscar may have just what it needs.

Oscar begins as a con man of sorts. His traveling act involves a great deal of tricks that fool his





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audiences and that, combined with his charms, compel females to fall madly in love with him. But Oscar has no intention of settling down, though he thinks nothing of helping women break their marital vows. In fact, he does not seem very interested in being a good man, much less a hero. His father was a great man who ultimately died penniless, a memory that continually drives Oscar down a very different path, one that he hopes will end in wealth and notoriety.

When Oscar arrives in Oz, he truly believes that everything he'd ever hoped for was about to come true. Awaiting the wizard that has been prophesied to save Oz is a throne and significant wealth, not to mention a plethora of beautiful women.

Of course, there is much more to the prophecy than that. As such, *Oz the Great and Powerful* becomes a wonderful story of redemption as we watch a significant transformation on screen.

Glinda plays a major role in that transformation. She is able to size Oscar up rather quickly, acknowledging that he is a "selfish" and "egotistical" man, but one who is more capable than he believes.

A significant theme in *Oz the Great and Powerful* is the quest for something bigger. For Oscar, his quest is for greatness, but he eventually finds something more significant than that: goodness.

Oz the Great and Powerful is a redemptive film. Oscar cannot remain the same man and possibly help save Oz. He must be willing to self-sacrificially help others.

Some moviegoers may be disturbed by the abundance of magic in the film. Of course, one should expect there to be significant magic as the film is meant to be a prequel to the fantastical film *The Wizard of Oz*. But in the end, it is not magic that conquers, but goodness.

Oz the Great and Powerful proves to be an entertaining film in its own regard. It is more lighthearted and comical than *The Wizard of Oz*, and its aesthetic quality and special effects are truly phenomenal. Whether moviegoers would say the film rivals *The Wizard of Oz* is another story. If moviegoers share in my view that *The Wizard of Oz* was a bit slow-moving and downright boring at times, they may find themselves more appreciative of *Oz the Great and Powerful*. But if audiences loved *The Wizard of Oz* and expect *Oz the Great and Powerful* to meet or exceed the standards set by *The Wizard of Oz*, they may be disappointed.

What *Oz the Great and Powerful* lacks in narrative, it certainly makes up for in computer-generated special effects, possibly to a fault. It is often the case that films lacking in story often have to overcompensate with explosive special effects.

I suspect that if *The Wizard of Oz* was never made, *Oz the Great and Powerful* would face significantly less criticism. However, as it is intended to be the prequel for *The Wizard of Oz*, this film is forced to rival the originality and heart that dazzled audiences in its 1939 predecessor. That is rather an unfair pursuit.

Of course, without the charms and innocence of Judy Garland, *Oz the Great and Powerful* is fighting an uphill battle. But James Franco does a decent job with the character of Oscar, depicting both smarmy and admirable rather well. Still, throughout much of the film, his expressions seem to vary very little and reflect not much more than awe. Whether that was intentional or a reflection of his acting choices is uncertain.

Oz the Great and Powerful introduces some intriguing characters, including a monkey dressed in a bellhop's uniform (Zach Braff) and a China Girl, a life-like porcelain doll (Joey King). But none of them



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have the charms of the Scarecrow, Lion, or Tin Man.

The relationship between the three witches proves to be an interesting one, and their moments on screen are entertaining.

There are moments in *Oz the Great and Powerful* that may be a bit too frightening for younger audiences, a reflection of Director Sam Raimi's style as seen in the *Spider-man* trilogy.

Overall, *Oz the Great and Powerful* does an interesting job with the story of Oz and has entertaining elements. If it were not in the shadow of *The Wizard of Oz*, it may be a more widely applauded film.



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