

Death on the Nile review – glamorous murder mystery is all sparkle and no spark



2/5 stars

Aaah, the river cruise. Well, if COVID did not put you off the idea of being stuck on a boat in the middle of nowhere with a collection of strangers, Kenneth Branagh's take on Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* certainly will.

Branagh's adaptation of the 1937 classic features an all-star cast including Sophie Okonedo, Annette Bening, Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, Letitia Wright, Russel Brand and Rose Leslie, to name but a few. There are more dodgy accents here than at a drama school audition, and everyone seems to be trying one on for size, whether it fits or not.

Branagh reprises his meticulous but entertaining Poirot from *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017). Even his moustache gets its own backstory in a black and white WWI flashback, which parallels Branagh's other directorial work of the year, the much Oscar nominated *Belfast*. The origin of facial hair has rarely been featured in cinema, and it seems a trend unlikely to continue. The plot follows Poirot as he joins the luxurious honeymoon of Linnet (Gal Gadot) and Simon Boyle (Armie Hammer) in Egypt, where they take a rather chaotic

group of friends and family along with them. Events occur, they end up on a river cruise and, characteristically, murder ensues.

This is a film not untouched by controversy, as well as multiple delays to its release due to the pandemic. It makes for uncomfortable viewing to watch Armie Hammer, who was all but cut from the trailer, dance and flirt with multiple women, as allegations of his sexually manipulative behaviour (which he strongly denies) have surfaced in the time between the film's shooting and release. Other aspects of the plot may grate with the modern viewer. A total lack of respect shown by these tourists for ancient Egypt may have been acceptable in the 1930s, but in a film made for a 2022 audience the way the characters cavort over Egyptian landmarks leaves a sour taste.

For all its faults, *Death on the Nile* does include some powerful acting. Emma Mackey, playing the jilted Jaqueline du Bellefort, gives a powerful and emotional performance, managing to nail the single tear rolling down her cheek in several scenes. Comedy duo Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders are joyfully reunited, playing Marie Van Schuler and her nurse Mrs Boyle, and bring light comedic relief as well as some genuine tenderness, which is otherwise lacking.

With a budget of over £67 million it is unsurprising that the landscape and characters look beautiful: you will be putting your hair in rollers and grabbing the red lippy before you can say "little grey cells". And it certainly sounds the part, an original score by Patrick Doyle hits the emotional notes of the film often better than the actors. But as a film which wants to carry its audience along on the journey, invite them onboard and keep them guessing who the murderer is, *Death on the Nile* lacks the necessary charm to make you feel like one of the detectives. As a project with so much potential, *Death on the Nile* is all sparkle and no spark.

*Death on the Nile* is released on 11 February in cinemas.