

Movie

Review

OZ The Great and Powerful

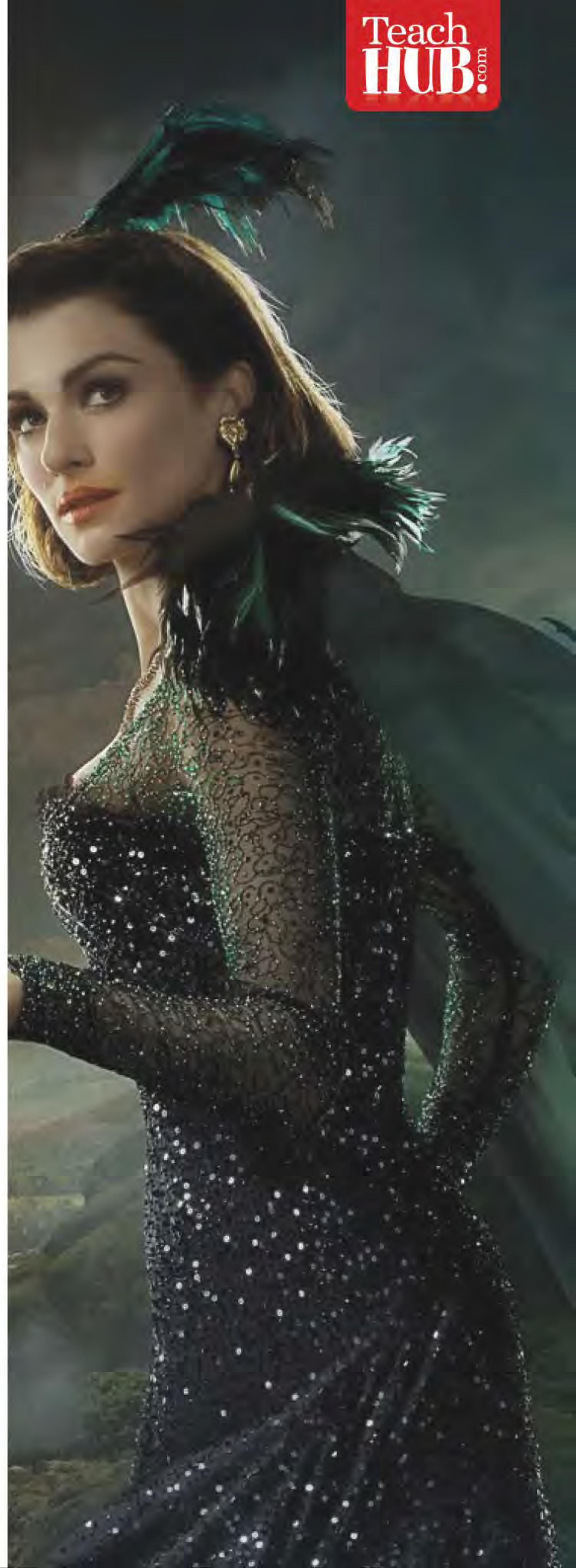
by Stephen Eldridge



Retellings of fairytales are in vogue at the moment, and the results have been decidedly mixed. Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* was a box-office hit, but received a middling response from critics. Last year, the *Snow White* story had two modern adaptations, but neither proved half as magical as Disney's classic. And, of course, *Oz* itself has seen a modern revival with the novel and hit musical *Wicked*. Where *Wicked* told the origin story of the Wicked Witch of the West, *Oz: The Great and Powerful* tackles the beginnings of the Wizard who opposes her.

The result is better probably than average. But if you're hoping for the kind of sensational experience *Wicked* provides, you'll be disappointed. *Oz* is a beautiful movie, with a plot that feels very natural, perfectly mythic, and somehow occasionally surprising. It's also got a talented and charismatic cast. Given how much the film has going for it, though, you might leave the theater wondering why it isn't better than it is.

The film's premise is familiar. Oscar Diggs (James Franco), a small-time magician calling himself "Oz," is escaping a sticky situation involving a carnival strongman and his wife. Extricating himself through use of a hot-air balloon, he is sucked into a cyclone and somehow transported to a land that bears his name. There he encounters the witch Theodora (Mila Kunis) and her sister, Evanora (Rachel Weisz), who tell him of a prophecy: A wizard named Oz will appear to defeat the wicked witch who besets their land (Michelle Williams). Lured in by the beauty of



The film's premise is familiar. Oscar Diggs (James Franco), a small-time magician calling himself "Oz," is escaping a sticky situation involving a carnival strongman and his wife. Extricating himself through use of a hot-air balloon, he is sucked into a cyclone and somehow transported to a land that bears his name. There he encounters the witch Theodora (Mila Kunis) and her sister, Evanora (Rachel Weisz), who tell him of a prophecy: A wizard named Oz will appear to defeat the wicked witch who besets their land (Michelle Williams). Lured in by the beauty of the sisters, and the promise of money and power, Diggs styles himself as the wizard from the prophecy and sets off with a flying monkey (Zach Braff) and a girl made of china (Joey King) to kill the witch and claim his reward.

To those who remember *The Wizard of Oz* well, much of the plot may seem obvious from here. However, there are a couple of neat turns that might catch you off-guard, and the filmmakers have fit the story together so that it's neat and satisfying. The problem is that as the mechanism of the plot unwinds, only rarely does the film stop to do anything else. Scenes seem to happen because they're necessary instead of because the characters and events demand it. Worse, the script spends more time on semi-anachronistic jokes from Finley the flying monkey than on showing us why we should care about Glinda the Good Witch when she appears, or showing us that she has an individual personality at all.



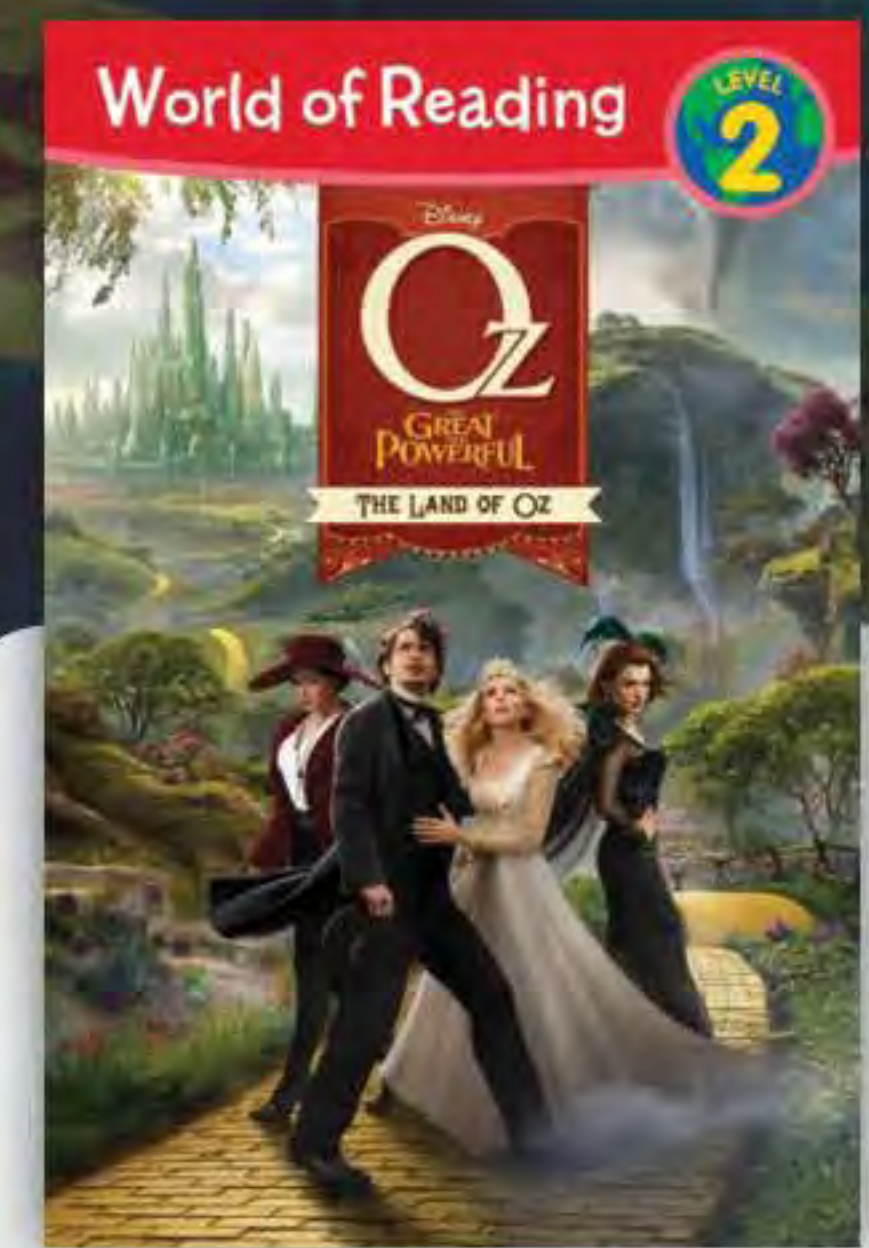
Tap Here to buy Book from Amazon





The cast, despite their talent and charm, is misused. Weisz and Williams are two of the most consistently excellent actresses working today, but of the two only Weisz has any opportunity to show it. Williams's witch has the depth of a one-note cameo poured into the part of a romantic lead. Franco and Kunis, with slightly meatier roles, are unfortunately of more limited range. As recently as 2010, both did remarkable work (Franco in *127 Hours* and Kunis in *Black Swan*), but neither one is well suited to a period fantasy epic like *Oz*. Kunis in particular suffers from a lack of gravitas later in the picture when Theodora has an abrupt change of demeanor.

Still, there are things to enjoy here. Joey King's performance as the China Girl is touching. Character actors like Bill Cobbs and Tony Cox enliven bit parts. And the visuals are, for the most part, beautiful—even magical. You could certainly do worse than to sit back and bask in the charisma of the cast and the talent of the digital artists for two hours. Unfortunately, you could also do much better.



Tap Here to buy Book from Amazon

