

movie reviews

[Reviews](#) [Great Movies](#) [Answer Man](#) [People](#) [Commentary](#) [Festivals](#) [Oscars](#) [Glossary](#) [One-Minute Reviews](#) [Letters](#) [Roger Ebert's Journal](#) [Scanners](#) [Store](#)

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES [News](#) [Sports](#) [Business](#) [Entertainment](#) [Classifieds](#) [Columnists](#)

search

Site
 Web Search
 powered by **YAHOO!**

[advanced](#) » [tips](#) »

register

You are not logged in.

[Log in](#) »

[Subscribe to weekly newsletter](#) »

times & tickets

[Fandango](#)
[Search movie showtimes and buy tickets.](#)

about us

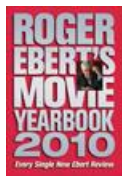
[About the site](#) »

[Site FAQs](#) »

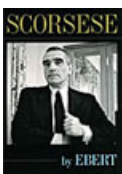
[Contact us](#) »

[Email the Movie](#)
[Answer Man](#) »

on sale now



[Buy now](#) »



[Buy now](#) »



Alice in Wonderland (PG)

Ebert: ★★★ Users: ★★★ You: [Rate this movie right now](#)



One is -dum, the other -dee.

Alice in Wonderland

BY ROGER EBERT / March 3, 2010

As a young reader, I found *Alice in Wonderland* creepy and rather distasteful. Alice's adventures played like a series of encounters with characters whose purpose was to tease, puzzle and torment her. Few children would want to go to wonderland, and none would want to stay. The problem may be that I encountered the book too young and was put off by the alarming John Tenniel illustrations. Why did Alice have such deep, dark eye sockets? Why couldn't Wonderland be cozy like the world of Pooh? Watching the 1951 Disney film, I feared the Cheshire Cat was about to tell me something I didn't want to know.

[Tim Burton's](#) new 3-D version of "[Alice in Wonderland](#)" answers my childish questions. This has never been a children's

cast & credits

Mad Hatter [Johnny Depp](#)
 Alice Mia Wasikowska
 Red Queen [Helena Bonham Carter](#)
 White Queen [Anne Hathaway](#)
 Knave [Crispin Glover](#)

And the voices of:
 Caterpillar [Alan Rickman](#)
 Cheshire Cat [Stephen Fry](#)
 White Rabbit [Michael Sheen](#)
 Bayard [Timothy Spall](#)
 Jabberwocky [Christopher Lee](#)

Disney presents a film directed by [Tim Burton](#). Written by Linda Woolverton, based on the books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll. Running time: 108 minutes. Rated PG (for fantasy action/violence involving scary images and situations, and a smoking caterpillar).

[Printer-friendly](#) »
[E-mail this to a friend](#) »

in theaters

latest reviews

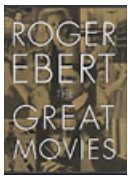
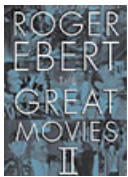
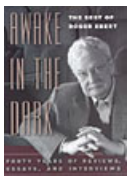
- [Chloe](#)
- [Greenberg](#)
- [Hot Tub Time Machine](#)
- [How to Train Your Dragon](#)
- [The Most Dangerous Man in America](#)
- [Mother](#)
- [Waking Sleeping Beauty](#)
- [45365](#)
- [Leaves of Grass](#)

[more current releases](#) »

one-minute movie reviews

still playing

- [Brooklyn's Finest](#)
- [45365](#)
- [Ajami](#)
- [Alice in Wonderland](#)
- [Araya](#)
- [The Art of the Steal](#)
- [Birdwatchers](#)
- [Blood Done Sign My Name](#)
- [The Book of Eli](#)
- [The Bounty Hunter](#)
- [The Chaser](#)
- [Chloe](#)
- [Cop Out](#)
- [The Crazies](#)
- [Creation](#)
- [Daybreakers](#)
- [Dear John](#)
- [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#)
- [District 13: Ultimatum](#)
- [Edge of Darkness](#)
- [Extraordinary Measures](#)
- [Fish Tank](#)
- [Formosa Betrayed](#)
- [From Paris With Love](#)
- [The Ghost Writer](#)
- [Gigante](#)
- [The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo](#)
- [The Good Guy](#)
- [Green Zone](#)
- [Greenberg](#)
- [Happy Tears](#)
- [Hot Tub Time Machine](#)
- [How to Train Your Dragon](#)
- [The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus](#)
- [The Last Station](#)
- [Leap Year](#)
- [Leaves of Grass](#)



Log onto
EarthShare.org
and see what
you can do.

One environment.
One simple way
to care for it.®

story. There's even a little sadism embedded in Carroll's fantasy. It reminds me of uncles who tickle their nieces until they scream. "Alice" plays better as an adult hallucination, which is how Burton rather brilliantly interprets it until a pointless third act flies off the rails. It was a wise idea by Burton and his screenwriter, Linda Woolverton, to devise a reason that Alice (Mia Wasikowska) is now a grown girl in her late teens, revisiting a Wonderland that remains much the same, as fantasy worlds must always do.

Burton is above all a brilliant visual artist, and his film is a pleasure to regard; I look forward to admiring it in 2-D, where it will look brighter and more colorful. No artist who can create these images is enhancing them in any way by adding the annoying third dimension. But never mind that.

He brings to Carroll's characters an appearance as distinctive and original as Tenniel's classic illustrations. These are not retreads of familiar cartoon images. They're grotesques, as they should be, from the hydrocephalic forehead of the Red Queen ([Helena Bonham Carter](#)) to Tweedledee and Tweedledum (Matt Lucas), who seem to have been stepped on. Wonderland itself is not limited to necessary props, such as a tree limb for the Cheshire Cat and a hookah for the Caterpillar, but extends indefinitely as an alarming undergrowth beneath a lowering sky. Why you can see the sky from beneath the earth is not a fair question. (The landscape was designed by Robert Stromberg of "[Avatar](#).")

When we meet her again, Alice has decidedly mixed feelings about her original trip down the rabbit hole, but begins to recall Wonderland more favorably as she's threatened with an arranged marriage to Hamish Ascot (Leo Bill), a conceited snot-nose twit. At the moment of truth in the wedding ceremony, she impulsively scampers away to follow another rabbit down another rabbit hole and finds below that she is actually remembered from her previous visit.

Burton shows us Wonderland as a perturbing place where the inhabitants exist for little apparent reason other than to be peculiar and obnoxious. Do they reproduce? Most species seem to have only one member, as if nature quit while she was ahead. The ringleader is the Mad Hatter, played by [Johnny Depp](#), that rare actor who can treat the most bizarre characters with perfect gravity. Whoever he plays (Edward Scissorhands, Sweeney Todd, Jack Sparrow, Willy Wonka, Ichabod Crane), he is that character through and through.

This is a Wonderland that holds perils for Alice, played by Wasikowska with beauty and pluck. The Red Queen wishes her ill, and the White Queen ([Anne Hathaway](#)) wishes her well, perhaps because both are formed according to the rules of Wonderland queens. To be sure, the insecure White Queen doesn't exhaust herself in making Alice welcome. The Queens, the Mad Hatter, Alice, the Knave of Hearts ([Crispin Glover](#)) and presumably Tweedledee and Tweedledum are versions of humans; the others are animated, voiced with great zest by such as [Stephen Fry](#) (Cheshire), [Alan Rickman](#) (Absolom the Caterpillar), [Michael Sheen](#) (White Rabbit), [Christopher Lee](#) (Jabberwocky), [Timothy Spall](#) (Bayard) and Barbara Windsor (Dormouse).

The film is enchanting in its mordant way until, unfortunately, it arrives at its third act. Here I must apologize to faithful readers for repeating myself. Time after time I complain when a film develops an intriguing story and then dissolves it in routine and boring action. We've seen every conceivable battle sequence, every duel, all carnage, countless showdowns and all-too-long fights to the finish.

Why does "[Alice in Wonderland](#)" have to end with an action sequence? Characters not rich enough? Story run out? Little minds, jazzed by sugar from the candy counter, might get too worked up without it? Or is it that executives, not trusting their artists and timid in the face of real stories, demand an action climax as insurance? Insurance of what? That the story will have a beginning and a middle but nothing so tedious as an ending?

[E-mail this to a friend](#)



- [The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond](#)
- [The Lovely Bones](#)
- [The Most Dangerous Man in America](#)
- [Mother](#)
- [Nick Nolte: No Exit](#)
- [North Face](#)
- [Our Family Wedding](#)
- [Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief](#)
- [A Prophet](#)
- [Red Riding Trilogy](#)
- [Remember Me](#)
- [Repo Men](#)
- [The Runaways](#)
- [Saint John of Las Vegas](#)
- [She's Out of My League](#)
- [Shutter Island](#)
- [The Spy Next Door](#)
- [Still Bill](#)
- [Terribly Happy](#)
- [35 Shots of Rum](#)
- [Tooth Fairy](#)
- [A Town Called Panic](#)
- [Valentine's Day](#)
- [Waking Sleeping Beauty](#)
- [The White Ribbon](#)
- [The Wolfman](#)
- [The Yellow Handkerchief](#)
- [Youth in Revolt](#)

[more current releases >>](#)

on dvd

new on dvd

- [Sherlock Holmes](#) ★★★ (3/30)
- [An Education](#) ★★★★★ (3/30)
- [The Baader-Meinhof Complex](#) ★★★ (3/30)
- [Fantastic Mr. Fox](#) ★★★★★ (3/23)
- [The Twilight Saga: New Moon](#) ★ (3/20)
- [Tapeheads](#) ★★ (3/9)
- [Precious Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire](#) ★★★★★ (3/9)
- [Planet 51](#) ★★★ (3/9)
- [Gigante](#) ★★★ (3/9)
- [Capitalism: A Love Story](#) ★★★★★ (3/9)

[more new on dvd >>](#)

coming on dvd

- [The Relic](#) ★★★ (4/6)
- [Crazy Heart](#) ★★★★★ (4/20)
- [The Horse Boy](#) ★★★ (4/20)
- [The Lovely Bones](#) ★★ (4/20)
- [Mammoth](#) ★★★ (4/20)
- [Summer Hours](#) ★★★ (4/20)
- [35 Shots of Rum](#) ★★★★★ (4/20)
- [Avatar](#) ★★★★★ (4/22)

[more coming on dvd >>](#)

great movies on dvd

- [Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind](#) (1/2)
- [Cache](#) (1/13)
- [The Hairdresser's Husband](#) (1/27)
- [Howards End](#) (2/23)
- [Make Way for Tomorrow](#) (2/23)
- [Pink Floyd: The Wall](#) (2/24)

[more great movies on dvd >>](#)



<p>900% Gain on Penny Stocks Join today to receive our free newsletter www.StockPickTrading.com</p>
<p>\$97/Hr Part-Time Job (Johnny Depp) Make \$5500 A Month Online. As Seen on ABC NY-Sentinel.com/JohnnyDepp</p>
<p>Refinance Now at 4.0% Fixed \$160,000 Mortgage for \$633/mo. Free. MortgageRefinance.LendGo.com</p>
<p>BRK: Buy, Sell, or Hold? Don't trade BRK until you see this www.TheBestNewsletters.com</p>

Ads by Yahoo!



© copyright 2010, rogerebert.com

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Submission Guidelines](#)

