

'Oz the Great and Powerful' Demonstrates Power of Goodness

The fantastical and colorful *Oz the Great and Powerful* is anything but in its opening scene. Set in a black-and-white traveling carnival in Kansas, Oscar Diggs (James Franco) is a less-than-honest magician conning women and patrons into believing he's much more powerful than he is.

With the help of his partner, Frank (Zach Braff), Diggs—whom everyone calls Oz—charms ladies into falling in love with him and tricks customers into giving him their money. But after an ill-fated show, when a paralyzed young girl begs Oz to make her walk, it's clear that he's just a phony.

As he's telling the beautiful Annie (Michelle Williams) that he doesn't want to be a good guy who settles down—he wants to be great—his scheming catches up with him when the significant other of an innocent woman he's fooled bangs down the door of his trailer.

Oz manages to escape just in the nick of time with the help of a trap door, Frank, and a hot air balloon that doesn't completely belong to him. But the danger doesn't end there. No, it's just beginning, as his balloon goes right into a tornado.

With the 3-D effects and believable sounds, it felt as though I was right in the middle of the tornado with Oz as large objects flew about, hammering and piercing the basket of his balloon. Despite his not-so-moral ways thus far, he cries out, "Get me out of here and I'll do great things ... I promise. I can change!"

Once the storm is over, Oz finds himself in a magnificently

colorful land, complete with gorgeous waterfalls, ruby flowers, beautiful witches and singing munchkins. "Thank you," he says after he lands, while pointing upward. "You won't regret this."

Oz quickly meets the beautiful witch Theodora (Mila Kunis), who explains to him that the people of Oz have been expecting a wizard who will come to save their land. Their deceased king prophesied that a brilliant wizard with the same name as the land would save them. Though Oz knows he isn't that wizard, he tells Theodora he is.

Dazzled by his good looks, a few tricks he had up his sleeve and his always charming ways, the good witch leads him to Emerald City, where he will take over his throne. After just a day, Theodora is already sure she will be his queen.

Oz seemingly has everything he could ever want—a beautiful woman, power and riches. But of course, it can't be that easy! Theodora's sister, Evanora (Rachel Weisz), tells the magician he must first conquer the wicked witch before he can claim the throne.

On the way he and his winged-monkey servant (Braff) save a China girl, and the unlikely trio set out to destroy the evil witch. Oz meets Glinda (Williams), whom *The Wizard of Oz* and *Wicked* fans know as the beautiful, blonde, moral witch who saves the day.

The film, directed by Sam Raimi (*Spider-Man 3*), is definitely not lacking visually. The vibrant colors and 3-D pictures are fantastical and jaw-dropping. Even the whimsical 3-D credits are impressive.

Though it carries a PG rating, parents should think twice before bringing their youngsters to see *Oz the Great and Powerful*. Language is minimal—two "d-words" and a few uses of "Oh my gosh." But there are a number of tense moments that could alarm young children—from the dangerous balloon ride in

the twister to the evil witches' grotesque flying apes, who jump, growl and squeal at the audience.

The Wicked Witch of the West is slightly terrifying herself. She and another evil witch throw fireballs and lightning. The evil green witch magically throws Oz to the ground and declares that she'll make the yellow brick road "run red with blood."

Though there is no blatant sexual content—we only see Oz dance with and lightly kiss women—it's no secret that he's a player and is quite experienced with seduction. There are several innuendos, and we see cleavage and a revealing corset at one point.

Another questionable aspect of the film is the undeniable magical elements. All three witches portray themselves as good (the question is, *Who is good and who is bad?*), but is there even such a thing as a "good" witch?

All three sorceresses have magical qualities, using magic stones or wands to access their powers and levitate. The evil witches shoot fire bombs and lightning bolts, while Glinda conjures up rainbow fog and uses bubbles as transportation. Oz also learns that the previous wizard granted "good and noble" wishes.

One positive theme is that good overcomes evil. The hardworking people of Oz team up to defeat the evil witches, assisting the efforts of Glinda, with her goodness, and Oz, with his fanfare.

Oscar Diggs may be a shady character at the beginning of the story, but his progression into a better man is clearly displayed. Glinda once tells the wizard wannabe that he's "weak, selfish, slightly egotistical and a fibber," but she is also optimistic in hoping that he can become a good man, telling him he's capable of "more than you know."

Though this prequel-like tale is much different from its counterparts, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Wicked*, it does have some powerful lessons about friendship, selflessness and goodness. With the help of the good witch and his newfound friends, Oz ditches his selfish, manipulating qualities to join the cause of saving the good people of Oz.