

ALADDIN

Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker
Produced by Ron Clements and John Musker
Distributed by Disney's Buena Vista Pictures
Released in 1992

A stupendous film of joyous excess, much of the pleasure of *Aladdin* comes from its warped view of reality. But the story is appealingly straightforward, delineating the burgeoning heroism of a "diamond in the rough."

Reality in the movies can be skewed numerous ways, both explicit and implicit. One compromise promotes drama at the expense of reality. This is not to say that such films are unrealistic, but when casualty-free short-range machine gunplay and long-lost half brothers pepper our cinematic divertissements, we are generally forgiving to the point of ambivalence. Audiences unconsciously ascribe to films different standards of believability (and morality, for that matter) than are applied in everyday interactions. In hopes of a quality evening's entertainment a jaundiced, frightened view of life may be temporarily discarded to favor the truths of a parallel universe, an alternate reality. Cartoons are already removed from reality one step further than live action films. *Aladdin* seems to be caught in an altogether alternate reality.

Aladdin suffers a major identity crisis for much of the film, wrestling with his "street rat" heritage while trying on the title of Prince Ali Ababwa to woo the comely Princess Jasmine, who, despite her liberated outlook, he fears may still prefer an archetypal dream-suitor. (This even though a proto-feminist would probably welcome marriage to an ignorant monkey-loving pauper of handsome visage, as she could retain some romantic interest while manipulating her idiot-king and, with time, engineer a silent coup.)

Eventually, Aladdin puts his fears of inadequacy behind him and accepts who he really is. When Genie warns Aladdin just prior to the final fight with Jafar that he can't help him, Aladdin tells him not to worry; he'll use his street smarts and improvise. And only when he does this is he able to defeat Jafar and ascend to the royal status of which he had long dreamed and pondered. Thus the film's primary message finds expression—*be yourself*.

One wonders if Jafar lived by this maxim. As a sage liege with a jimmy to kill, all the armies of the sultan might be required to quell the vizier's ardor for self-fulfillment. But that wasn't necessary, even as it was too late, for Jafar was undone by his defining characteristic—power-lust. Looking back, he may have liked to follow Aladdin's example. Once Jasmine's father dies, Aladdin will be crowned sultan, which is exactly where Jafar wanted to be all along. Aladdin didn't want to hurt anyone on his way to the palace, and seemed indifferent to the tasks of ruling, but embraced the luxuries of the harem as a contrast to his ragged life of thievery and food scraps. Jasmine loved him for it, and pledged her devotion. Maybe if Jafar had been as sympathetic he may have wooed Jasmine and realized his dream, instead of needlessly prostituting himself as a slave to sorcery.

When Aladdin exploits the unparalleled opportunity afforded him by grasping the ebony lamp near the film's conclusion, Jafar becomes his prisoner. Somehow Iago is able to

knock around in there as well. Genie thumps them into a new Cave of Wonders, and all ends well. However, Iago, personified to have human characteristics (most disturbingly realized in his "Polly want a cracker?" savage-vengeful diatribe opposite the sultan) may have the wherewithal to free Jafar by rubbing the lamp; if there is a way to kill Genie-Jafar, it should be done. And with the issue of genie power fresh on our minds, let us consider the risks Aladdin takes freeing Genie. He trusts that this "phenomenal cosmic power," no longer fettered by eternal servitude, will act with benevolence and kindness. It's a huge responsibility undertaken by Aladdin, and who is to say that genies are governed by a sense of conventional morality? If there is a way to kill Genie, perhaps it should be done as well.

Some of the best jokes in Aladdin involve incongruous references to the present that dazzle and delight by their audaciousness and impeccable timing. The Blue Genie of the Lamp morphs into a stewardess, a U-Boat, a cheerleader, a bee with tail aflame, Rodney Dangerfield, a canine-corralling Scot, a Frenchman-philosophe, and (the best) a director feeding cues from a script titled "Aladdin."

Suspending our disbelief, we consider that Genie may have power to travel through time, so these little futuristic asides may be an indulgence he uses to keep sane. However, when he thrusts a microphone into Aladdin's face, how does our hero know to speak into it? He's never seen one. He may think it's a weapon. But he gets it right, whether it was a lucky guess or not. At least three incongruities in the film cannot be resolved—the reference to "Dead Sea Tupperware," Abu-as-windup-toy, and the red heart boxer shorts of Prince Akmed; but they're hardly bothersome, and a whole lot of fun—just like the entire film.