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Jungle Cruise is a 2021 American fantasy adventure film directed by Jaume Collet-Serra from screenplay written by Glenn Ficarra, John Requa, and Michael Green, based on Walt Disney's theme park attraction of the same name.[1] Produced by Walt Disney Pictures, the film stars Dwayne Johnson, Emily Blunt, Édgar Ramírez, Jack Whitehall, Jesse Plemons, and Paul Giamatti, and follows the captain of a small riverboat who takes a group of travelers through a jungle in search of the Tree of Life.

Plans for feature film based on the Jungle Cruise ride began in 2004 following the success of Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl the year prior. The project laid dormant until 2011, when Tom Hanks and Tim Allen were set to star, though that version fell through and Johnson was cast in August 2015 and Blunt the following January. The rest of the cast joined in spring 2018, with filming taking place in Hawaii and Atlanta, Georgia from May through September that year.

Following a year delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jungle Cruise was released in the United States on July 30, 2021, simultaneously in theaters and digitally through Disney+ with Premier Access. The film has grossed over \$13.5 million worldwide and received mixed reviews from critics, who felt it was fun and praised Johnson and Blunt's chemistry, though believed it overused CGI.

Plot

In the 16th century, Spanish conquistadors led by Don Aguirre travel to South America in search of the Tears of the Moon, a mythical tree whose petals can cure any illness, heal any injury, and lift any curse. After most of the men die in the jungle, the survivors are nursed back to health by a local tribe using the tree petals. When they refuse to reveal the location of the tree, the Spanish destroy the village. As punishment, the conquistadors became cursed by the village chief to never die and never be able to leave sight of the river or the jungle would take them back to it for all eternity.

In 1916, Dr. Lily Houghton and her brother MacGregor detail Lily's research on the Tears of the Moon to an association of Royal Society explorers on London, explaining that the petals could revitalize medicine and aid in the British war effort. The Houghtons request access to an arrowhead recovered by Dr. Albert Falls that Lily believes is key to locating the tree. When the association denies their request, believing the tree to be a myth and a female scientist unqualified to join their ranks, Lily steals the arrowhead instead. She narrowly avoids Prince Joachim, a German aristocrat who also wants the arrowhead and the tree.

In South America, Frank Wolff takes tourists on jungle river cruises, which he embellishes with fake dangers and corny jokes. When his boat engine is repossessed by businessman Nilo, he attempts to steal it back. Caught in the act by Lily, Frank pretends to be Nilo and tells her that the Tears of the Moon is a myth and that she will not be able to handle the dangers of the jungle, but changes his tone when he notices that Lily is in possession of the arrowhead. Frank's deception is revealed when the real Nilo shows up, but Lily hires Frank anyway after he underbids Nilo and bravely fights a jaguar.

Frank, Lily, and MacGregor depart on Frank's boat, but are almost intercepted by Nilo attempting to get his engine back, mercenaries hired by Joachim to retrieve the arrowhead from Lily, and Joachim himself attacking in a German submarine. After they make their escape, it is revealed that the attacking jaguar was actually Frank's pet Proxima, and Lily wonders if Frank can be trusted.

Joachim locates the cursed conquistadors, whose bodies have turned to stone due to them traveling too far from the river, and have been infested over time by tree roots, snakes, and insects. Joachim frees them by diverting the river, and offers to help them break the curse if they help him to retrieve the arrowhead.

As Frank, Lily and MacGregor continue down the river, they become closer. MacGregor reveals to Frank that he was nearly disowned by his family due to being gay, but Lily stood by him. Breaking into Frank's cabin, Lily finds photos and drawings of new inventions such as the automobile, but also discovers drawings of the arrowhead and research on the Tears of the Moon. Lily accuses Frank of wanting the tree for himself, but he explains he gave up searching for it a long time ago and believed it couldn't be found. They are attacked by a tribe of "cannibals" who demand the arrowhead, but this is exposed as another of Frank's artificial dangers; a friendly tribe he has an arrangement with. Frank apologizes and claims he was unable to call off the plan, but Lily rebuffs him.

Trader Sam, the tribe's female leader, translates the writing on the arrowhead, revealing the location of the tree, and that it only blooms under a blood moon. The conquistadors attack and manage to take the arrowhead; Frank recovers it and gives it to Lily, but is stabbed through the chest with a sword and falls to his death. Lily runs away from the river so that the Spaniards cannot follow her (due to the limits of the curse).

The next morning, Lily discovers that Frank has miraculously survived. He reveals that his real name is Francisco, and he is actually one of the cursed conquistadors, unable to die or leave the river. The expedition to find the tree was originally a noble one to save Aguirre's sick daughter, Anna, but when the natives were attacked by the Spaniards, Frank switched sides to help the villagers. After years of fighting, Frank trapped Aguirre and the others in a cave where the river could not reclaim them and where, without it, they became petrified. After removing them as a threat, he spent centuries searching for the tree in order to lift his own curse. But unable to find it without the arrowhead, he had finally given up.

An injured MacGregor stays behind with Trader Sam while Lily and Frank make the final journey to the tree. MacGregor is captured by Joachim and forced to reveal the location of the tree. Joachim breaks his arrangement with the cursed brigands, in order to keep the petals for himself, but Frank, Lily, the Germans, and the Spaniards all converge on the tree. With the arrowhead puzzle solved, the tree begins to bloom under the blood moon. The moon passes as they fight, and Lily is only able to recover one petal. MacGregor fights Joachim, who dies, while Frank crashes his boat to block the river, which turns himself, Aguirre and the other Spaniards into stone. Lily expends the petal to revive Frank and break his curse. The moon breaks out one last ray of light and one final petal blooms - Lily's research can proceed. Returning to the United Kingdom, the society has offered full membership to Lily, which she rejects via MacGregor, who uses the opportunity to insult the society, saying that they're not worthy of the research, or the tale of the trip, or anything learned by it, primarily stories due to their chauvinism and insular nature. Lily fulfills her promise to show Frank all of London and the movie ends as she gives him his first driving lesson in her automobile, where she herself delivers a corny joke, worthy of Frank's admiration.

Cast

Dwayne Johnson as Captain Frank "Skipper" Wolff, a shrewd and cynical but noble steamboat captain who reluctantly agrees to guide two explorers on their quest for the Tree of Life. He eventually reveals that his original name was Francisco Lopez de Heredia, the adopted brother of Aguirre and a trained cartographer who has spent centuries trying to find the Tree.[5]

Emily Blunt as Dr. Lily Houghton, a Botany graduate^[5] who is an eccentric, adventurous, and virtuous scientist searching for the Tree of Life, which she hopes to study for its healing properties.

Jack Whitehall as MacGregor Houghton, Lily's younger brother and reluctant assistant.^[6]

Édgar Ramírez as Aguirre, an arrogant Conquistador who once sought the Tree's power, only to be cursed with immortality for his wickedness.^[7]

Jesse Plemons as Prince Joachim, a deranged and ambitious German aristocrat who finances and leads a military expedition to claim the Tree of Life for himself.

Paul Giamatti as Nilo Nemolato, a crusty harbormaster who manages the port where Frank docks his boat. Veronica Falcón as Trader Sam, a female version of the character from the ride.

Dani Rovira as Sancho Kapoor

Quim Gutiérrez as Melchor

Andy Nyman as Sir James Hobbs-Coddington

Production

Early versions

In September 2004, it was announced that *Jungle Cruise* would be developed for Mandeville Films, with a script by Josh Goldstein & John Norville. The film was loosely inspired by the theme park attraction of the same name. The film was announced to take place within the twentieth century.^[8] In February 2011, it was announced that Tom Hanks and Tim Allen, who had previously worked together in the *Toy Story* franchise, would star in the long-gestating film, with a script to be written by Roger S. H.

Schulman.^[9]

Pre-production

In August 2015, it was announced that Walt Disney Pictures was redeveloping its film adaptation based on *Jungle Cruise*, to star Dwayne Johnson.^[10] The previous script originally written by John Norville and Josh Goldstein, would be rewritten by John Requa and Glenn Ficarra, and the film produced by John Davis and John Fox, with the intention to harken back to its period roots.^[10] In April 2017, Johnson expressed his interest in having Patty Jenkins helm the project,^[11] but in July 2017, Jaume Collet-Serra was announced as the director of the film.^[12]

In January 2018, Emily Blunt was announced as a leading cast member.^[13] The same month, Michael Green was reported to have rewritten the script, previously worked on by Patrick McKay and J.D.

Payne.^[14] In March 2018, Jack Whitehall was cast as the brother of Blunt's character.^{[15][16]} In April

2018, Édgar Ramírez and Jesse Plemons were added to the cast as villains with the former being "a man

with a conquistador background".^{[17][18]} In May 2018, Paul Giamatti was cast to portray a "crusty

harbormaster."^[19] In June 2018, Quim Gutiérrez joined the cast to portray one of the villains.^[20]

In December 2018, it was reported that Whitehall's character would be gay and would have a coming out scene in the film with Johnson.^[6] This would be the second incidence of a gay character in a live-action Disney film, the first being *Le Fou*, portrayed by Josh Gad, in the 2017 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*. There was some backlash over the report, with some online expressing anger over a straight man being cast as a "camp" gay character.

Filming

Principal photography began on May 14, 2018, in Hawaii and Atlanta.^[22] Filming wrapped after several months on September 14.^[23]

Post-production

Joel Negrón serves as editor on the film, with DNEG, Industrial Light & Magic, Rodeo FX, Rising Sun Pictures, and Weta Digital providing the visual effects.^{[24][25]}

Music

In January 2019, it was announced that James Newton Howard joined the production as the film score composer.^[26] By August 2020, it was revealed that Metallica collaborated with Howard on an instrumental version of the song "Nothing Else Matters", for the film. According to the band's drummer

Lars Ulrich, Metallica worked on the film after Walt Disney Pictures president Sean Bailey, felt like Jungle Cruise was "the right fit" for a collaboration between Disney and Metallica. Bailey had been "always look[ing] for the right match where there was a way that Metallica could contribute to some [Disney] project".[27]

Release

Jungle Cruise had its world premiere at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California on July 24, 2021.[28] It was released in the United States on July 30, 2021, simultaneously in theaters and on Disney+ with Premier Access for US\$30.[29][30] Initially, it was slated for October 11, 2019 before being moved to July 24, 2020,[31] and was delayed to the July 30, 2021 date due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[29]

In May 2021, Disney announced that the film would be released simultaneously in theaters and on Disney+ with Premier Access. The filmmakers decided on this, after being given multiple options by Disney, due to the continued closure of theaters in markets like Brazil and Europe due to surges in COVID-19 cases.[30]

Reception

Box office

In the United States and Canada, Jungle Cruise was released alongside Stillwater and The Green Knight, and is projected to gross around \$25 million from 4,200 theaters in its opening weekend.[32] The film made \$13.4 million on its first day, including \$2.7 million from Thursday night previews.[33]

Critical response

On review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, the film holds an approval rating of 63% based on 251 reviews with an average rating of 6/10. The site's critics consensus reads, "Its craft isn't quite as sturdy as some of the classic adventures it's indebted to, but Jungle Cruise remains a fun, family-friendly voyage." [34] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 49 out of 100, based on 46 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews". [35] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A−" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak reported 80% of audience members gave it a positive score, with 60% saying they would definitely recommend it. [33]

Writing for Variety, Owen Gleiberman praised Johnson and Blunt's chemistry and said that "Jungle Cruise is a movie that implicitly asks: What's wrong with a little good old-fashioned escapism? The answer is: Absolutely nothing, and Jungle Cruise is old-fashioned, expect that it pelts the audience with entertainment in such a lively yet bumptious way that at times you may wish you were wearing protective gear." [36] Korey Coleman and Martin Thomas of Double Toasted both gave it a relatively positive review; even going so far as to predict that other critics would negatively critique it simply because of its premise. However, they were both split on the portrayal of Jack Whitehall's character. While Thomas found Whitehall inviting and a positive step forward for LGBTQ characters, Coleman found him somewhat campy and unnecessary. [37]

Rolling Stone reviewer David Fear gave the film 2.5/5 stars and describing it as an "attempt to sell the Magic Kingdom's vintage, colonialism-a-go-go boat ride as the next big endless-summer-movie thing" and added "everything settles into a well-worn, familiar Jungle Adventure 101 groove. It turns out that Blunt's tart apple crisp of a comic performance pairs nicely with Johnson's beefcake served with a side of ham." [38] Writing in the New York Times, Jeannette Catsoulis was negative about the film, saying that the plot is "mostly unintelligible and wants to beat you into submission", adding that the film "exhibits a blatantly faux exoticism that feels as flat as the forced frisson between its two leads", and concluding

that the movie is a "soggy mess".[39]