Cats on Film Pod

Transcript

Cats on Film Pod Episode 16
Roald Dahl's The Witches (2020)



INTRO JINGLE

INTRO SHOW

RAY
Hi everybody! Welcome to *Cats on Film Pod*. I'm your host, Ray Ilyn, here with my co-host, Skipper.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Thanks for joining us every Tuesday as we review cats in film. There will be spoilers.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Today, we're reviewing *Roald Dahl's The Witches.* The remake just came out last month – right before we released our review of the 1990 version of *The Witches.* If any of you lovely listeners missed it, just go back two weeks in our archive.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
I like seeing different people's perspectives on a classic character. If they're gonna do a remake, I prefer a fresh take on The Grand High Witch.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
The men behind this adaptation are great filmmakers – Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo Del Toro, Robert Zemekis – and the second screenwriter is Kenya Barris, creator of *Black-ish* and its spin-offs. So there's two Mexican men and one Black man working with old Hollywood white guy Zemekis. They definitely give a different take compared to the all-white British production from thirty years ago. Not only is this version set in the U.S., rather than the U.K., but the lead characters are Black and the screenwriters took the opportunity to comment on race relations in 1960s Alabama.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Yes, let's recap!
Hades is a black short-hair, entirely CGI cat who hangs out on and around the Grand High Witch, played by Anne Hathaway. It's fun to see him licking his chops when she mentions mice in the Grand Orleans Imperial Isle Hotel.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
I think he's the only cat in the whole movie. The Alabama witch has a snake . . . Oh! The Irish witch has a big gold cat necklace, but we don't see her familiar. So we've got another black cat with an evil witch.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Exactly! Why do they want to keep up such a harmful precedent?

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Ugh, yeah.
Anyways, the fancy Gulf Coast hotel they're staying at has a strict "no pets" policy, but the Grand High Witch just talks right past the hotel manager and keeps Hades on her—literally perched on her arm. Unfortunately, the kitty gets relegated to their hotel room – a suite, really.

They've got a big balcony with a view of the sunny beach – a nice place to relax, so long as you're free to move about.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Yeah, there is major animosity between the Grand High Witch and Hades. When she's talking to the hotel manager about caging Hades and he contradicts her by hopping into that kitty carrier –

CLIP FROM *ROALD DAHL'S THE WITCHES*
MR. STRINGER
Madam, I have procured this, uh, for you today. I thought you might like it. It's a kitty carrier! And I thought you could put your feline friend in there, and you can transport him all over the hotel, including the dining room. Thought you might like that.
GRAND HIGH WITCH
Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Cat Cage Procurer, I will never, EVER allow my precious puss to be—
HADES
Meows, growls, purrs
MR. STRINGER
Well, look at that. He likes it in there.
HADES
Purrs

RAY
Ooo, she's an-ger-eee. She's just staring daggers at Hades until the hotel manager leaves. Then, she lets that bottled-up fury out and locks up Hades!

CLIP FROM *ROALD DAHL'S THE WITCHES*
GRAND HIGH WITCH
Well, my precious, since you enjoy being in that cage so much, you can stay in it!
HADES
Hisses
GRAND HIGH WITCH
Traitor!

RAY
Yow! She really is as evil as Grandma says!

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
I'd thought since Hades is her familiar they would get along. I mean, she can seemingly read his thoughts when he comes back from staring at the Hero Boy and his Grandma in their fancy bed.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Oh, wow – yeah. If she can hear his thoughts, she may be hearing that he doesn't entirely like her, which would not improve their relationship.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Oh, definitely not. I do not want to read other people's minds. I'd prefer being able to move stuff with my mind, like Dark Phoenix. How 'bout you, Skipper? What super power would you like to have?

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
I have to agree – you are flawless exactly as you are.

SKIPPER
Purrs

RAY
Okay, back to Hades, whom the Hero Boy-turned-mouse notices is trapped in that kitty carrier on the balcony.

CLIP FROM *ROALD DAHL'S THE WITCHES*
HERO BOY/MOUSE
Hey, Grandma, what about him?
HADES
Hisses & growls
GRANDMA
I'll call the manager to let him out once we outta here.

RAY
Such a nice change of pace! All too often, kitties are forgotten when the action's going down. But Hades actually plays a role in resolving the plot by taking out the Grand High Witch after she's turned into a rodent.

CLIP FROM *ROALD DAHL'S THE WITCHES*
GRAND HIGH WITCH/RAT
Stay back, you stupid—Precious!
No, Hades! Hades—Precious!
Remember who feeds you!
No, don't think about food!
HADES
Hisses
GRAND HIGH WITCH/RAT
Ahhhh!
HADES
Yowls

RAY
In Dahl's book, the mouse-boy and his granny make plans to use cats on witches they've turned into rodents, but none of that is explicitly mentioned in the 1990 movie.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Yeah, Hades definitely enjoys attacking the witch-rat. She must've been a really bad cat-mom. Like, when she's tending the bandages on her injured claw-hands and whimpering, instead of snuggling up to her and purring the way a good kitty, such as yourself, does when their person is in pain—

SKIPPER
Coos

RAY
Yeah
Well, Hades just starts bathing himself and ignoring the Grand High Witch's pain.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Hopefully, he has a better life once she's out of the picture.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY

Yes – no worries about animal cruelty on the set since the featured animals are fully CGI. There are some farm critters in Granny's flashback that look like real live animals, but they aren't really performing – just hanging out.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
Yep, getting paid to be themselves.
And as for the mice and snakes and Hades, no live creatures get thrown about or locked up. And the CGI makes it okay for Hades to sit out in the rain at night staring at the protagonists through their hotel room window, which just coincidentally happens to be directly above the Grand High Witch's suite. Hades' kitty movements and sounds are pretty realistic, except for him having supernaturally better dexterity than the average cat.

SKIPPER
meows

RAY
You *do* have great paw skills, Skipper, but a CGI character does parkour moves better than anybody. It *is* a fictional fantasy movie, after all.
What's your rating of feline representation in *Roald Dahl's The Witches?*

SKIPPER
Meow, meow, meow

RAY
Three paws out of four for the update to *The Witches.* There's still a color-ist association of black cats with evil witches. However, no live cat was harmed in the production. Plus, Hades gets to have a personality and some bearing on the plot.

SKIPPER
meows

END STING

RAY
Thank you for listening to *Cats on Film Pod.*
Know anybody who likes spooky stories for kids?
Remember to share this podcast with them!

OUTRO JINGLE

END CREDITS

RAY
Cats on Film Pod is voiced and produced by Ray Ilyn, with music by The DōsMan, and additional sounds from FreeSound.org.
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SKIPPER
meows