

WHAT'S ON: Jungle Cruise — adventure at full steam ahead

By Dan Jensen

29 July 2021



A British botanist sets out with her brother to find a fabled tree of life in the Amazon jungle with the help of a brash boat skipper. [Dan Jensen](#) shares his thoughts on the latest Disney movie based on a famous ride.



JUNGLE CRUISE was directed by [Jaume Collet-Serra](#) (*Orphan*, *The Shallows*) and is a film that has drawn comparisons to other adventure movies such as the Indiana Jones series, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Mummy*. While it definitely draws inspiration from all of those franchises, it never quite reaches their peaks and likely won't be regarded in 40 years the same way *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is today.

That's not to say *Jungle Cruise* is a bad film.

Based on a Disney theme park ride (in the same vein as *Pirates*), the movie stars [Emily Blunt](#) as scientist Lily Houghton, who along with her brother, MacGregor ([Jack Whitehall](#)), set out to find the "Tears of the Moon", a healing tree in South America in 1916. With the aid of a boat skipper, Frank Wolff (played by [Dwayne Johnson](#)), their quest becomes a race against an Imperial German by the name of Prince Joachim ([Jesse Plemons](#)) along with several supernatural Conquistadors with a history tied to the tree.

Throw in a lost Amazonian tribe, an angry Italian businessman (played by [Paul Giamatti](#)) and a jaguar sidekick and you've got yourself quite a lot packed into the space of two hours.

The highlight of the film is the character of Lily and the way she's brought to life by Emily Blunt. This is a woman who defies all the rules society expects of her, isn't afraid to speak her mind and for the most part is quite fearless. Blunt's performance was warm and delightful with several quirks thrown in to make Lily a memorable character and she was terrific in every scene.

The other star performer in this movie wasn't on screen — composer [James Newton Howard](#). The score to this film is extraordinary, swelling to a rousing peak during action scenes and stirring emotions when required. There's also a brilliant acoustic "reimagining" of the song 'Nothing Else Matters' used during flashback scenes, performed by [Metallica](#)

themselves and fitting in surprisingly well against scenes set in the 1500s.

Jungle Cruise is a great looking film, too. The jungle scenes were mostly filmed in Hawaii which always looks gorgeous on camera, but it also benefits from some great production design, especially in the London scenes where streets are crowded with early 20th Century automobiles and fashions.

On the flip side, at times the film can feel a little bit like watching a hyperactive child running amok with a room full of toys. The action scenes, in particular, move at a dizzying pace and sometimes border on the ridiculous. One might think this was due to the film being aimed at kids, but with its M rating, a few on-screen murders and supernatural scares, parents might want to be cautious about letting their little ones watch it.

While Emily Blunt was a joy to watch, Dwayne Johnson felt a little miscast in the role of Frank. This is a comedic character who enjoys making people cringe with terrible puns, but also harbours a secret past that makes this side of him feel a little out of place. The tone of the character shifted about to adapt to whichever scene he was in and felt a bit inconsistent.

The same goes for the character of Joachim. Jesse Plemons, who has been excellent previously in things like [Breaking Bad](#) and [Game Night](#), gives a somewhat confusing performance here. His character is too silly to be menacing, yet too dastardly to be completely funny. He just seems to be there as an antagonist because the story needed one.

Characters aside, some of the film's dialogue seemed out of place (the phrase "crazy determined" really didn't fit with the time) and the special effects were a mixed bag. For the most part, everything looked believable, but Frank's pet jaguar, Proxima, looked unfinished. Fortunately, he was a rather well-

written character so the sub-par CGI was forgivable in the end.

Jungle Cruise is a fun time at the movies but isn't going to leave you hoping for a sequel or a whole franchise. It's disposable entertainment. Well worth checking out if you're a fan of adventure films, but not likely to be hailed as a classic in 40 years.

Jungle Cruise opens across the country today in cinemas and will be available on Disney Plus Premier Access on 30 July.

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