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The new Disney film comes along with a bag full of tie-in books. Will **L. Frank Baum's** Oz find a new generation of fans?

Going over the rainbow and along the yellow brick road to find the Wizard of Oz with Judy Garland's Dorothy, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow, has become something of an annual television event. This month sees the release of **Return to Oz** the first major Oz film to challenge MGM's classic musical made in 1939. Puffin have the tie-in novel and are launching new editions of eight of the original Oz stories in a series it's calling **The World of Oz**. Hippo have a large size Picture Storybook of the film illustrated with full colour stills.

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The Film

Walt Disney Pictures' **Return to Oz** (not a musical) is the final realization of a project begun over 20 years ago when Disney bought the rights to eleven of L. Frank Baum's Oz books. It takes characters and ideas from several of the Oz stories to make a new narrative. You will remember that at the end of **The Wizard of Oz** Dorothy returns to Kansas leaving the Scarecrow (with his new brain) to rule Oz. When she returns in this new film she finds the Yellow Brick Road and the Emerald City in ruins and all her friends turned to stone. The cruel Princess Mombi (Jean Marsh) and the wicked Nome King who is made of stone (Nicol Williamson under inches of complicated make-up) have taken over. It's up to Dorothy, Toto and Billina (the talking hen) with their new friends Jack Pumpkinhead and Tik-Tok (fighting machine extraordinary) to put things right.

As you would expect the screenplay provides a field day for special effects: a talking hen for instance and The Flying Gump created from a stuffed Gump's head with an old Victorian sofa for a body and palm fronds for wings. Nine-year-old Fairuza Balk who plays Dorothy flies on its back. She is also catapulted through windows, falls headfirst into a raging river and is swept away clinging to a chicken coop. The sets and costumes are, of course, spectacular. Richard Hughes who designed the costumes says he took as his reference point the wood-cuts, drawings and colour illustrations done by John R. Neill for the early edition of L. Frank Baum's stories. And the characterisations of the Scarecrow, the Tin Man etc. are based on the original drawings by William Wallace Denslow, Baum's first collaborator.

Return to Oz was made in England, filmed mainly at Elstree Studios where the Emerald City was built and also on Salisbury Plain where they recreated the Kansas farmstead where Dorothy lived with Aunt Em and Uncle Henry which was carefully stocked with the type and breed of animals authentic to mid-west USA in 1900.

The film has all the ingredients of the early Disney - adventure, suspense, excitement, some gruesome bits, some funny bits and good fighting against evil. All that and a strong, resourceful heroine. What more could you want to while away

a wet day this summer?

The Books

Children and their parents are likely to flock to the film. It's a relief, for once, to be able to recommend without reservations the tie-in books which come with it.

Listening to it read aloud or reading independently, children from six upwards should have no difficulty with Alistair Hedley's **Return to Oz** based on the photoplay written by the film's director, Walter Murch, and Gill Dennis. The book has a straightforward narrative in ten short chapters generously illustrated by Jo Worth's attractive line drawings and with four pages of colour stills from the film. Also based on the Murch and Dennis photoplay is Lance Salway's story version for Hippo. It's very much a shot for shot re-working of the film and strangely seems more two-dimensional than Alistair Hedley's story; but it is very lavishly illustrated with stills from the film in full colour. Good for a child who needs to relive the film in a literal way.

Simultaneously with the book of the film Puffin are publishing the first eight of Baum's Oz adventures - an enticingly collectable series which could well be greeted as enthusiastically by children now as each book was 70 and 80 years ago. **The Wizard of Oz** on which the MGM musical was based appeared first in 1900 and was an instant popular success. **The Marvellous Land of Oz** came four years later and from then on it was a book a year whether Baum liked it or not. The response from his American child readers who looked forward to a new Oz book every Christmas was comparable to that inspired by Enid Blyton. When he tried to put an end to the series with the sixth book, **The Emerald City of Oz**, in which he magics Uncle Henry and Aunt Em to Oz and has the famous sorceress, Glinda the Good, use her magic charm to make the Land of Oz 'entirely disappear from the knowledge of the rest of the world', they would not have it. Two years later Oz was visible again in **The Patchwork Girl of Oz** and seven more stories followed, the last two published after Baum's death in 1919.

Unlike many 'classic' tales from the early years of this century Baum may well find an audience of enthusiastic new readers. His inventiveness in creating cast upon cast of yet more strange and wonderful characters is remarkable. Professor Woggleby, for instance, who feeds his students School Pills - 'We live in an age of Progress. It is easier to swallow Knowledge than to acquire it laboriously from books.' The time saved is spent on athletics; the Cuttenclips all made of paper - 'VISITORS are requested to MOVE SLOWLY and CAREFULLY and to avoid COUGHING or making any BREEZE or DRAUGHT'; the Yoop, the Shaggy Man, the Woozy. Some make a brief and entertaining appearance, others stay around and join the team which from book to book never fails to find an adventurous quest or exciting struggle with the equally diverting cast of villains. It's all very pacy (no hold-ups for long descriptions) and child-centred: A. A. Milne crossed with Dr Seuss with a dash of Dahl and Monty Python thrown in for good measure. Except of course that they all came *after* Oz. If Dorothy has a literary predecessor it is **Alice**. But the breath of life blown into Oz is very much of the New World.

Baum's robust brand of escapism, his strong female characters, his humour, his brisk event-filled narrative and his almost total lack of whimsy should recommend him anew in this country to adults and children alike.?

The Books from Puffin:

The Wizard of Oz, 0 14 03.1935 2, £1.25

The Marvellous Land of Oz, 0 14 03.1936 0, £1.25

Ozma of Oz, 014 03.1937 9, £1.25

Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz, 014 03.1938 7, £1.25

The Road to Oz, 0 14 03.1939 5, £1.25

The Emerald City of Oz, 0 14 03.1940 9, £1.25

The Patchwork Girl of Oz, 0 14 03.1941 7, £1.25

Tik-Tok of Oz, 0 14 03.1942 5, £1.25

Return to Oz, Alistair Hedley, Young Puffin, 014 03.1957 3, £1.50.

from Hippo:

Return to Oz, Lance Salway, 0 590 70420 6, £2.50

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