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Through The Looking Glass Movie 1985

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A Deep Dive into the 1985 Television Musical: Through the Looking Glass

In the vast landscape of **Alice in Wonderland adaptations**, few are as delightfully odd and visually ambitious as the 1985 television musical **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985**. Directed by Walter J. H. and starring the iconic Carol Channing as the White Queen, this made-for-TV film attempted to bring Lewis Carroll's chessboard sequel to life with an all-star cast, original songs, and a heavy dose of 1980s television magic. While it never reached the iconic status of the 1951 Disney animation or Tim Burton's later gothic vision, this adaptation remains a curious and beloved artifact for fans of fantasy television. This article will explore the film's unique production, its star-studded cast, its contrasts with the source material, and its lasting place in the world of **1980s fantasy films**.

The **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985**is a musical television film that originally aired on CBS. It follows young Alice as she steps through a mirror into a world where everything is backwards and governed by the rules of a giant chess game. The film is particularly notable for its blend of slapstick, vaudeville-inspired musical numbers, and a cast that reads like a who's who of Broadway and classic film. From Carol Channing's flamboyant White Queen to a memorable cameo by the legendary Red Buttons, the production is a time capsule of mid-1980s television spectacle.

The Genesis of the 1985 TV Adaptation

When CBS decided to produce a television musical based on Carroll's second Alice book, they turned to veteran television producer and director Walter J. H. The goal was to create a family-friendly holiday special that could compete with other network programming. Unlike many **Alice in Wonderland adaptations**, this one leaned heavily into the absurdist, episodic nature of the original text. The script, written by Paul Zindel, took significant liberties to shape a story suited for a two-hour broadcast slot with commercial breaks.

One of the most defining aspects of the **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985** is its casting. Carol Channing, already a Broadway legend for *Hello, Dolly!*, brought her signature larger-than-life persona to the White Queen. Her performance is a masterclass in comedic timing, complete with exaggerated gestures and a singing voice that commands every scene. Opposite her, the Red Queen was played by the formidable Ann Jillian, whose sharp, high-energy delivery provided a perfect foil. The film also featured the talents of Sid Caesar as Humpty Dumpty, Jonathan Winters as the Tweedles, and Mako as the Lion and the Unicorn. This ensemble made the production a star-studded event that attracted family audiences.

Plot Overview: A Journey Through the Chessboard

The story of the **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985**closely follows the broad strokes of Carroll's narrative, though it compresses and reorders events for dramatic flow. Alice, played by Kate Burton (daughter of Richard Burton), discovers that the mirror in her living room is a portal to a fantastical dimension. In this looking-glass world, everything is reversed: flowers speak, chess pieces come to life, and time runs backward.

Alice's goal is to become a queen by crossing the chessboard, meeting a series of eccentric characters along the way. She encounters the Tweedle brothers, who recite "The Walrus and the Carpenter" in a baroque musical number; Humpty Dumpty, who disdainfully explains the meaning of "Jabberwocky"; and the White Knight, played by Dudley Moore, who offers a wonderfully bumbling lesson on falling off horses. The film's musical score, composed by the team of Larry Grossman and Hal Hackady, includes songs like "White Queen's Calypso" and "Red Queen's Dance," which, while not chart-toppers, fit the whimsical tone perfectly.

The film reaches its climax with Alice's encounter with the Red Queen, a chaotic feast scene, and the eventual awakening from the dream. The **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985**ends on a warm, sentimental note, with Alice realizing that the looking-glass world was a product of her own imagination—or was it?

Key Characters and Performances

- Alice (Kate Burton): Kate Burton brings a gentle, earnest quality to the role. Unlike the more defiant Alices of other adaptations, her performance is that of a curious, slightly bewildered girl who observes rather than argues. This fits the dreamlike logic of the material.
- The White Queen (Carol Channing): Stealing every scene she is in, Channing's White Queen is a whirlwind of manic energy. She sings, dances, and delivers lines about living backward with absolute conviction. Her duet "I Was Born on a Day That's Not Today" is a highlight.
- The Red Queen (Ann Jillian): Ann Jillian's Red Queen is a fierce, shrill antagonist. Her costume is a riot of red satin and crown, and she delivers her threats with palpable glee. She provides the main source of tension in the second half.
- The White Knight (Dudley Moore): Dudley Moore injects a wonderfully clumsy, droll humor into the White Knight. His song "A Question of Etiquette" is a charmingly silly ode to falling and getting up again.
- Humpty Dumpty (Sid Caesar): Sid Caesar uses his classic physical comedy skills to portray the egg-shaped philosopher. His scenes are a primer in how to deliver dense wordplay with comic timing.

Production Design and Visual Style

Given the constraints of mid-1980s television budgets, the production design of the **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985**is remarkably inventive. The sets are deliberately theatrical, with painted backdrops, oversized props, and a color palette that favors pastels and primary colors. The mirror effect is achieved through practical camera tricks, and the chessboard floor tiles are a constant visual motif. Critics at the time noted the film's resemblance to a stage play, which actually works to the director's advantage. The artificiality reinforces the dreamlike quality of the story.

Costume design is another standout. Carol Channing's White Queen costume is a confection of white ruffles, lace, and a towering wig. The Red Queen's dress is a sharp contrast of crimson and gold. The Tweedles wear matching striped suits, and the various chess pieces are costumed in a mix of medieval armor and whimsical hats. These costumes help each character leave a lasting impression, even when the script rushes through their scenes.

Differences from Lewis Carroll's Book

No adaptation of **Through the Looking-Glass**is perfectly faithful, and this 1985 version makes several notable changes. The most significant is the addition of a framing device where Alice's father appears briefly, and a subplot involving a lost yarn ball that mirrors the looking-glass world. The film also omits some of the more esoteric poems, like "Jabberwocky" (though it is referenced) and the "Queen Alice" finale, which is replaced with a more conventional resolution.

Furthermore, the chess structure of the original book—where each of Alice's moves corresponds to a square on the board—is largely abandoned in favor of a more linear, episodic journey. The **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985**prioritizes character comedy and musical numbers over logical progression. For purists, these changes may be frustrating, but for a television audience seeking entertainment, they make the story more accessible.

Reception and Critical Response at the Time

Upon its airing on CBS in 1985, the film received mixed to positive reviews. Many critics praised the cast, especially Carol Channing and Ann Jillian, but noted that the script lacked the intellectual edge of Carroll's original. *The New York Times* called it "a cheerful, if somewhat chaotic, romp" while *Variety* singled out the musical numbers as "charming but forgettable." Audiences, however, were more enthusiastic. The film earned respectable ratings and was frequently rebroadcast during holiday seasons throughout the late 1980s.

For years, the **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985** was largely unavailable on home video, adding to its mystique. It was released on VHS in a limited run, and then fell into relative obscurity until the rise of streaming and fan uploads. Today, it is considered a cult classic by fans of **1980s fantasy films** and collectors of obscure musicals.

Musical Score and Songs

The music by Larry Grossman and lyrics by Hal Hackady is a mix of vaudeville, soft rock, and show tunes. Notable numbers include:

1. "White Queen's Calypso" – a jazzy, Caribbean-flavored song where the White Queen describes her backward existence.
2. "A Question of Etiquette" – sung by Dudley Moore, this is a funny, self-deprecating number about the difficulties of chivalry.
3. "Red Queen's Dance" – an energetic, percussion-heavy dance number that showcases Ann Jillian's athleticism.
4. "The Walrus and the Carpenter" – performed by the Tweedles, this adaptation keeps the original poem's dark humor intact.

While the songs are not as memorable as those from Disney's Alice, they serve the story well and provide a cohesive musical identity.

Legacy and Where to Watch Today

The **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985** holds a special place in the hearts of those who saw it as children. Its televised broadcast made it a shared experience for a generation, and its occasional reruns on cable networks have introduced it to new viewers. Today, the film is available on DVD and various streaming platforms. It is often discussed in forums dedicated to **Alice in Wonderland adaptations** as an example of 1980s television's willingness to take risks with literary material.

For modern viewers, the movie offers a fascinating look at pre-CGI television fantasy. The practical effects, theatrical sets, and unabashed silliness make it a refreshing antidote to today's slick digital blockbusters. The performances, particularly from Carol Channing, are timeless reminders of the power of physical comedy and musical theater.

Conclusion

The **Through the Looking Glass Movie 1985** remains a charming, if flawed, attempt to bring Lewis Carroll's surreal world to the small screen. Its strength lies in its cast, its willingness to be silly, and its earnest musical spirit. While it lacks the philosophical depth of the book and the polish of major studio films, it has earned a loyal following as a warm, family-friendly adaptation. For anyone interested in **1980s fantasy films** or the history of television musicals, this odd little gem is well worth discovering.

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