

## THE NUTCRACKER & THE FOUR REALMS (2018)

- November 2nd, 2018
- 1 hr 34 mins
- \$120-133 million budget
- Directed by Lasse Hallström, Joe Johnston
- Written by Ashleigh Powell
- The Mark Gordon Company, Walt Disney Pictures
- Rated PG for some mild peril

## QUICK THOUGHTS

- Phil Svitek
- Marisa Serafini
- Demetri Panos

## DEVELOPMENT

- Took over the original release date for *Mulan* (2020), pushing that film's release back to December 20 2019, then finally to March 27 2020, when *Star Wars: Episode IX* (2019) took over for a December release.

## WRITING (Ashleigh Powell)

- A feature adaptation of "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" by E.T.A. Hoffmann.
- Hoffmann story was written a long time ago, and subsequently inspired famous books like "Alice in Wonderland" and later, "The Chronicles of Narnia."
- Powell told *Christian Post* she sought to portray Clara as a smart, capable girl determined to overcome numerous obstacles.
- "We've grown up with the very traditional stories of girls as the 'damsels in distress' or stuck in a tower waiting for a man to save them," she said. "I've always felt strongly that girls need to learn how to be empowered. It's a message I really believe in."
- Powell said that one of the challenges she encountered while writing the script was making the "Nutcracker" villain — who in the ballet is described as a "seven-headed mouse creature" — actually scary.
- "Every time I tried to picture that in my head, I couldn't visualize anything scary," she admitted. "It seemed silly to me, and it wouldn't work onscreen. I had to reimagine, 'what is a way I can take this idea and make it new and exciting? What would be a magical version of that thing?' And I came up with the idea of a bunch of mice who come together to create larger creatures in an abstract form."
- "I became a mother in the course of the movie twice over. This is a love letter to my children," she says.

## CAST:

- At the film's world premiere on Monday night, held at Hollywood's El Capitan Theatre, executive producer Sara Smith spoke about the importance of bringing a diverse cast onboard the project.
  - "We want the movie to look like the world today," Smith told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "We don't want to be living in the past, we want to be part of the present and the future and that's our world, so we were very considerate about that, I think. We have an amazing cast as a result."

- The Nutcracker and Drosslemeyer are played by black actors for the first time in any filmed version of the story.

#### **MACKENZIE FOY** (Clara)

- Foy had seen the "Nutcracker" ballet a handful of times as a young child, but she's more of a martial arts fan (she has a black belt in Taekwondo). "I did ballet way back in the day when I was really, really young," she says. "I don't even think I was very good at it. I think I kind of just, like, flopped around. But I liked the tutu."
- Knightley says her instinct was *not* to offer the younger Foy any advice. "I didn't think she needed any from me. Mackenzie is an incredibly intelligent and thoughtful young woman with her head very much screwed on," Knightley says by email. "She was always working twice as hard as everyone else, as she was keeping up with school work and playing a huge lead in a film. Her work ethic is phenomenal." - Knightley
- Clara's name comes from Alexandre Dumas' book, on which the ballet was inspired, while her mother's name, Marie, comes from E. T. A. Hoffmann's story.
- Mackenzie Foy's black belt training helped her do stunts in 'The Nutcracker'

#### **JAYDEN FOWORA-KNIGHT** (Captain Philip Hoffman / the Nutcracker)

- Appears to be the first young black male actor to take centre position in a Disney film.
- "This my first major role in a movie. This is pretty much my first role in a movie."
- His background before the Nutcracker was theatre.
- Captain Philip is Fowora-Knight's first lead role in a feature film and only his second feature film role, his first a small part in Steven Spielberg's '*Ready Player One*' which was out earlier this year.

#### **TOM SWEET** (Fritz)

- Tom Sweet is an actor, known for [The Nutcracker and the Four Realms](#) (2018), [Gunpowder](#) (2017) and [Ashes in the Snow](#) (2018).

#### **MORGAN FREEMAN** (Drosselmeyer)

- "For the longest time, I couldn't pronounce my name, but it's one of those movies that you look forward to seeing how it all comes together."

#### **HELEN MIRREN** (Mother Ginger)

- Because of spoilers, she can't talk much about the role, but Mirren was excited to play a villain. "She's fabulous and funny, and becomes bitter and angry."

#### **JACK WHITEHALL** (Harlequin)

- "It's a super fun part to play. I love parts that are like that, the comic relief in movies and you know, Disney has a rich history of them. As a kid, watching Disney films, I was always so excited to see, you know, Timon and Pumba or Zazu or whoever it is popping up on screen, dropping in a few laughs. So, it's great to be that in this movie."

#### **KEIRA KNIGHTLEY** (Sugar Plum)

- Knightley claimed that she wanted to do the movie because she'd just been doing *Thérèse Raquin* and needed a break from being "murderous and psychotic and horrific"

and “wanted the opportunity to play a sweet, sugary, pink fairy that was really, really silly.”

- The tune is arguably one of the most famous musical motifs,” she notes. “I thought, ‘Oh, maybe I can use that [melody] in my bit and maybe I can laugh that.’”
- Knightley, who says she loves to do research for her roles, explains that she found herself revisiting “The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” from Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* ballet, which partly inspired the film. “I watched hundreds of ‘Dances of the Sugar Plum [Fairy]’ and I thought, ‘They’re all amazing and I can’t do any of that,’” she opines.
- “Honestly, my whole vibe with it was to be as unsubtle and as silly as possible,” she says. “And as pink and as sugary as possible. When you’ve been thinking about those [gender] things and you’ve been pushing against it, sometimes it’s really good just to be frothy and pink and sugary. Just go for all of them.”

#### **DIRECTING:** (Lasse Hallström, Joe Johnston)

- Lasse Hallström was born on June 2, 1946 in Stockholm, Stockholms län, Sweden as Lars Hallström. He is a director and writer, known for [What's Eating Gilbert Grape](#) (1993), [Chocolat](#) (2000) and [The Cider House Rules](#) (1999). He has been married to [Lena Olin](#) since March 18, 1994. They have one child. He was previously married to [Malou Hallström](#).
- Joe Johnston was born on May 13, 1950 in Austin, Texas, USA as Joseph Eggleston Johnston II. He is a director, known for [Captain America: The First Avenger](#) (2011), [October Sky](#) (1999) and [The Rocketeer](#) (1991).
- Lasse Hallström completed principal photography, but due to him being unavailable Joe Johnston took charge for 32 days of reshoots. Hallström returned to oversee post-production.

#### **TRIVIA**

- Helen Mirren's fourth feature film with Disney after *National Treasure: Book of Secrets* (2007), *Monsters University* (2013) (where she provided a voiceover) and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014).
- At the beginning of the ballet telling the story of the Four Realms, the conductor mounts the podium and conducts an orchestra appearing in silhouette. This is a reference to the Disney classic 'Fantasia,' which included a segment based on the "Nutcracker Suite."

#### **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY** (Linus Sandgren)

- Linus Sandgren is an Academy Award winning Swedish cinematographer. He is best known for his work with Damien Chazelle on *La La Land* (2016) and his collaboration with David O Russell on the films *American Hustle* (2013) and *Joy* (2015).
- He also worked with Gus Van Sant on *Promised Land* where he shot the film in a unique format, Super 35mm 1.3x anamorphic.
- In *La La Land* he shot in the classic Cinemascope ratio 2.55:1.
- Filming began in October 2016 in South Kensington and Pinewood Studios in England.
- Was shot on Kodak 35mm and 65mm film.
- This is the first live action Disney film since *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016) to be shot in the taller 1.85:1 aspect ratio and the first Disney branded film since *Cinderella* (2015) to be shot primarily on 35mm film.
- The set was created by Guy Hendrix Dyas, the twice Oscar-nominated production designer behind films like *Inception* and *Passengers*. “It was quite a lot of pressure to me

to create every eight-year-old's fantasy of *The Nutcracker*," he said good-naturedly in an interview.

- Dyas began the process with simple pencil sketches, spending weeks drawing up ideas for the four realms: flowers, snowflakes, sweets, and the dark final dimension. Production itself took about 14 weeks, a typical length of time for a film of *The Nutcracker*'s scale. As part of his research, Dyas dove into the history of London in 1879, when the story is set—the same year that Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. The world of *The Nutcracker* is draped in candlelight, but keen viewers will note that Drosselmeyer (played by **Morgan Freeman**) has a handblown light bulb in the center of his workshop—a coveted display item for the elite at the time.
- “Because we had a lot of young performers, it felt very necessary to surround them in color and texture, so they could immerse themselves in this world. Then, visual effects, and the great work by Max [Wood, visual effects supervisor], was used largely as a support to the environment.” -Hendrix Dyas
- “Things like the large establishing shots of Drosselmeyer’s home were practical... When we moved onto Drosselmeyer’s estate, that was called Minley Manor, which was on the outskirts of London. It was in the process of changing hands from the prior owners to an organization turning it into a hotel, so by chance, we were able to capitalize on this time, dip in, and use the estate.” - Hendrix Dyas
- “This is not a green-screen movie,” Gordon says. “We actually built these sets. We wanted the audience to feel the reality and almost have a tactile experience, even though they’re not literally touching it. You can feel the difference between virtual sets and real sets.” -Producer Mark Gordon
- “When you see Clara running and chasing the mouse, all of that is a real stage. There’s a new part of Pinewood Studios [in London], nicknamed Pinewood east, built on the other side of the road. We were actually the first production in there. They allowed our director of photography to get his crane over the top of our snowy forests.” - Hendrix Dyas
- “We used several locations, most notably the area around the Royal Albert Hall in South Kensington. All those buildings were basically the right period for us and were able to dress them for Christmas in the middle of the summer.” -Dyas
- “...You walk into the studio and you’re in a forest. It smells like a forest. It looks like a forest. It’s extraordinary. I was just dying to take photographs. But Disney is very, very secretive, and you can’t take photographs.” -Helen Mirren
- THE PALACE:
  - “There’s a strong Russian historical context to *The Nutcracker*, so it was a very natural aesthetic to start studying architecturally. The child in me looked at some of those gorgeous Russian buildings with all their bright colors and onion-topped towers, and I realized very quickly what I was looking at were heaps of candy and flowers.”
  - Dyas also, naturally, researched Russian art and architecture, designing Clara’s music box to look like a classic Fabergé egg. Though films like this often lean hard on computer-generated imagery, he said that Disney allowed him to get deeply practical with the set. He designed functional 14-foot puppets, as well as gigantic origami-like flowers that opened up for the ballet scenes. Dyas also went the extra mile for simpler aesthetic details; a throne room used in the film, for example, was thronged with “thousands and thousands of peacock feathers,” so

he wouldn't have to cheat on depicting their special iridescent blue. "We went to great lengths to try new things," he said.

- **LAND OF FLOWERS:**
  - "There are windmills in the Land of Flowers, and they're farmers, so there's the production of flour and wheat, and all the primary functions of a society are done there. We took it seriously and adorned the sets with live flowers," he notes. "It wasn't about making the flowers look real; it was about getting the perfume in the air and allowing the performers to really feel the magic of what it must be like to be in a world of flowers." - Gordon
- **LAND OF SNOWFLAKES:**
  - For this realm of politicians, ice producers, and miners, Dyas took inspiration from a famous Swedish ice hotel and 16th-century German villages, transforming that architecture into layers of ice. "The most fun was coming up with their transportation system, which is primarily sleighs with deer," Dyas recalls. Foy says that walking into elaborate sets like these felt just as magical for her as an actor as it was meant to feel for the character of Clara: "It was like you walked into a new world."
- **LAND OF SWEETS:**
  - "They had to put signs that said, 'Don't eat the candy,'" says Foy. "I'm like, 'I want to eat it now that I know that it's real!'" Dyas remembers the sets being irresistible temptations for younger members of the cast. "I won't name names, but one of our younger cast, every time I turned up on set, his cheeks were filled like a hamster," Dyas jokes. "A lot of [them] didn't eat their lunch that day."
- **THE FOURTH REALM:**
  - "It's creepy trees and all that kind of stuff, and it was very big and it was beautiful. Those were very, very impressive sets." While Dyas won't go into too much detail, he refers to the Fourth Realm as a "mysterious place" that denizens of the world have been afraid to visit for many years. Prior to becoming this strange place, Dyas says, it was the "fun fair and circus center of the world."

### **WARDROBE** (Jenny Beavan)

- After a 12-week prep period, she had more than 100 people working, cutting and embellishing, fitting and dressing
- Beavan estimates that the movie's principals required 150 costumes (counting "repeats" -- copies for stunts and such), plus hundreds more for the magical realms and about 700 rented costumes for big crowd scenes.
- Some designs let her whimsy fly, such as the getup actor Eugenio Derbez dons that gives new meaning to the words "floral pattern" and the gorgeous embroidery on Freeman's gown ("He was just so easy," Beavan says of the veteran actor. "He loved the shoes. He has very wide feet.").
- But some of the less fantastical creations are among her favorites, such as Clara's "mauve organza dress" as she emerges, vulnerable, from a tree into a frozen world, and her "Little Soldier" costume, based on what women of the period wore when serving in the military.
- Beavan says, "With ballet, what you're trying to do is show the body and the line. She's a dancer like you get in a music box, the ballerina going around. To me it was the simpler, the better. We're so elaborate everywhere [else]. What we wanted to see from Misty and Sergei Polunin, you just want to see good ballet..."

- “The costumes! My God! Every costume is a complete work of art,” says Mirren. “I’m eternally fascinated and impressed by the artisanal craftsmen behind the camera.”

#### **EDITING/VFX** (Stuart Levy)

- Stuart Levy is known for his work on [Jumper](#) (2008), [Allegiant](#) (2016) and [Insurgent](#) (2015)

#### **SOUND/MUSIC** (James Newton Howard)

- Known for *Blood Diamond*, *Batman Begins*, *Signs*, *King Kong*
- The music was adapted in part from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker Suite* from 1892 by James Newton Howard, updating the original and adding new tracks as well.
- For the recording, Gustavo Dudamel conducted the London Philharmonia Orchestra, while Lang Lang was the piano soloist.
- Andrea Bocelli and his son Matteo contributed the original duet "Fall on Me" for the film.
- The score follows the ballet's story, hinting what is about to happen throughout the whole movie.

#### **PROMOTION**

- *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms* was released on November 2, 2018 in 2D and [Real D 3D](#) by [Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures](#), replacing the original date set for Disney's live adaptation of [Mulan](#)
- The teaser trailer was released on December 19, 2017.<sup>[25]</sup> Another trailer was released August 8, 2018
- Two days later, on August 10, 2018, a sneak peek of the film aired on [Disney Channel](#) during a new episode of [Andi Mack](#)
- There was also a trailer that first came out in theatres with showings of [Incredibles 2](#), [Ant-Man and the Wasp](#), and [Christopher Robin](#) before going online on September 4 of that year
- [Andrea Bocelli](#) and his son Matteo contributed the original duet "Fall on Me" for the film, which premiered on [Dancing with the Stars](#)' "Disney Night" on October 22, 2018
- Keia Knightly blasted Disney for having princesses of past be bad role models ([https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/keira-knightley-disney-princesses-role-models\\_us\\_5bdca4e7e4b09d43e31edd08](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/keira-knightley-disney-princesses-role-models_us_5bdca4e7e4b09d43e31edd08))

#### **BOX OFFICE**

- As of November 6, 2018, *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms* has grossed \$24 million in the United States and Canada, and \$39.2 million in other territories, for a total worldwide gross of \$63.2 million
- In the United States and Canada, *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms* was released alongside [Nobody's Fool](#) and [Bohemian Rhapsody](#), and was projected to gross \$20–24 million from 3,766 theaters in its opening weekend
- It made \$5.89 million on its first day, including \$625,000 from Thursday night previews, the lowest figure for a Disney film released in over 2,000 theaters since [The Finest Hours](#) in January 2016.
- It went on to debut to \$20.35 million, finishing second behind *Bohemian Rhapsody*. It was the third big-budgeted film to post a disappointing opening for Disney in 2018 after [A Wrinkle in Time](#) and [Solo: A Star Wars Story](#), although [Deadline Hollywood](#), who

blamed the early-November release date and poor reviews, noted Disney's Marvel and Pixar films from 2018 would offset any possible losses the film would suffer

- The film was released in 45 other countries alongside the US, grossing \$39.2 million. Its top markets were \$12 million in China, \$5.4 million in Italy, Germany (\$2.7M), Mexico (\$2.3 million), Spain (\$2.2 million), as well as \$2.1 million in the United Kingdom

## RECEPTION

- IMDb: 5.5/10
- RT: 34% Tomatometer; 41% Audience
- "Lacking a transporting yuletide story or dazzling dance routines, *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms* is a hollow holiday confection that's lovely to look at – and easy to forget."
- B+ on cinemascore
- David Ehrlich of [IndieWire](#) gave the film a grade of "D+", calling the film "empty but eye-popping", writing "Watching a visually spectacular but virtually soulless new family movie like *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms*, it's tempting to wonder if such eye-popping dreck has any hope of sticking with impressionable young audiences. Is there any chance that the kids of today might be nostalgic for this hyper-saturated nonsense tomorrow?"
- [Alonso Duralde](#) of [TheWrap](#) also gave the film a negative review, writing "The 'child travels to a magical land and learns things' trope has been the basis of many beloved stories, from [The Wizard of Oz](#) to [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) to [The Chronicles of Narnia](#). But it's not a foolproof device, particularly when the magical land in question never makes much narrative sense; besides, how can the Four Realms be magical when the London where Clara already lives is so obviously a cartoon? Both the 'real' world and the fake one are ugly, overdone, and lacking any visual connection to gravity let alone reality."