

Animated Disney Films That Made Big Changes To The Source Material

When it comes to Disney, "adaptation" is something of a loose term.



Walt Disney Pictures

Nearly every Disney animated film is adapted in some form or another from a classic tale. Frequently they will stay true to the source material, but in order to make family friendly movies from “grim” tales, big changes are in order. These can be beneficial to the film and story, or sometimes just to tag on a cheap happy ending despite the effect it has upon the overall story; often they are solely to allow the potential of a sequel. No matter what the cause, a change is made.

In some cases, it is just the endings that have changed. Take *The Lion King*, for example. It is an almost perfect recreation of Shakespeare’s classic *Hamlet*. The only change being that the characters are part of the animal kingdom as opposed to human beings – except for one slight detail. At the end of *Hamlet*, everyone dies. Of course that would slightly impact the happy ending, and needless sequels, and was scrapped for the continuation of the circle of life.

Other times the tale can get turned on its head. *The Princess and The Frog* was based upon the *The Frog Princess* novel, which was a big twist to the true source material. In the original Grimm tale, *The Frog Prince*, a spoilt princess reluctantly befriends a frog before discovering he is a cursed prince. In the film and novel the premise is twisted, when the princess goes to break the spell with a kiss, she finds herself turned into a frog also.

With Disney's latest animated feature Frozen breaking records and the live-action Maleficent taking a look at the Sleeping Beauty story from the villains perspective, now seems like a natural time to reflect upon how Disney have strayed from the source material for some of their classics....

Pinocchio



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Based Upon: 'The Adventures of Pinocchio' by Carlo Collodi

Pinocchio is unique in this list, it is only the beginning of his story that is different. Rather than being given the gift of life by the Blue Fairy, he begins as a talking piece of wood given to Geppetto by a neighbor. Unlike the naive innocence presented by Disney, Collodi's Pinocchio is a more rebellious troublemaker.

His mischief starts as soon as he gains the ability to walk. He gets Geppetto arrested for suspected abuse when he runs away from home. When he returns, he encounters a talking cricket who warns him the dangers of disobedience and giving in to pleasures. Anyone expecting this cricket to develop into Jiminy will be disappointed, as Pinocchio accidentally kills his would-be sidekick. Although he does appear to him later in ghost form.

When Geppetto is released from jail he insists on Pinocchio going to school. But Pinocchio trades his books for tickets to the Great Marionette Theatre. On his way home he encounters a fox and a cat who use him for his money before robbing him. They are unsuccessful and attempt to hang him, but he is rescued by a dead Fairy. In the Disney version, they convince him to join the show where he becomes a star attraction.

From there on out the tale is much the same, the book even has him sold to a circus later on. The original however had a much longer "adventure" between the Great Marionette and the giant whale.

The Hunchback Of Notre-Dame



Walt Disney Pictures

Based Upon: ‘The Hunchback of Notre-Dame’ by Victor Hugo

While it is understandable that Disney changed Quasimodo from being deaf with unintelligible speech, if nothing else imagine how different ‘Out There’ would be, there were some other pretty big changes. And not just talking gargoyles.

In a rare turn for Disney, the villain was made darker and more despicable. Frollo and the archdeacon were one and the same in the book, making Frollo was a more sympathetic and compassionate character. Or at least he began that way. He took Quasimodo in when he found him abandoned and loves him as his family. His lust for Esmeralda causes his spiral into true villainy, as opposed to it being another part of it. One darker book moment has him attempt to rape Esmeralda in the clock tower.

Phoebus was also very different in the book. He is a married, untrustworthy womanizer. His intentions for Esmeralda are purely physical, and it is this that causes Frollo’s jealous attempt to kill him. Esmeralda’s shallowness isn’t much better. She is besotted with Phoebus while, despite showing compassion to him, she is too disgusted by Quasimodo to even let him kiss her hand.

The ending is drastically different. Esmeralda is hanged for her final rejection of Frollo after he saved her from the King’s men. In reaction Quasimodo kills Frollo by pushing him from Notre-Dame. He then lies with Esmeralda’s corpse. Eighteen months later their two skeletons are found, Quasimodo had died from starvation. When attempting to separate the two, his remains turn to dust.

The Fox And The Hound



Walt Disney Pictures

Based Upon: 'The Fox and the Hound' by Daniel P. Mannix

The tale of The Fox and The Hound is well-known. The tale of Copper (the hound) and Tod (the fox) who were childhood best friends that get parted by their owners. Once grown up, Copper's fellow hunting dog Slade gets seriously wounded by a train while they are hunting Tod. Tod is then released to the wild for his safety. He is still pursued though until he saves their lives. Copper realizes that he is truly his friend and stands up to his owner to protect him. The two go their separate ways having made peace. That's the Disney version anyway.

In the novel, when Tod reached maturity he is returned to the wild. Copper was an older bloodhound who was the leader of his master's pack. Tod happens upon the master's house and taunts the dogs, knowing he is safe as they are chained up. One day Chief, a younger dog, breaks his chain and gets killed by an oncoming train while chasing him. The master obsesses over getting revenge but is unable to catch Tod. He does however manage to kill his family. Eventually Copper chases Tod until the fox dies of exhaustion. Practically dead himself from old age, Copper collapses atop Tod, but his master nurses him back to health. Eventually the master agrees to be put in a nursing home but dogs aren't allowed. So, through his tears, he puts Copper down.

Mannix's tale is about the relationship between The Master and his dogs, specifically Copper, as is highlighted by the sombre ending. Disney changed the dynamic entirely to make the story fit more literally to its title. Swapping Tod from an antagonist of sorts, to making Copper's owner the antagonist.

Sleeping Beauty



Walt Disney Pictures

Based Upon: 'The Beauty sleeping in the Wood' by Charles Perrault

Like Cinderella, Disney's Sleeping Beauty used Charles Perrault's version to base upon and sticks to it pretty closely. The true changes come in Perrault's tale, which was based on 'Sun, Moon, and Talia' by Giambattista Basile. The original story is bleak to say the least.

Upon discovering the princess unconscious in the empty house, the King carries her to the bed and rapes her. Then returns to his kingdom and leaves her. She gives birth to twins while still unconscious, one of whom sucked her finger constantly. Eventually this dislodged the splinter that caused her cursed sleep and she awoke to discover she was a mother. The King decided to return to check on her and when he found her awake and with children, he informed her who she was and what had happened. Somehow this saw them bond despite the small matter of rape.

Furthermore, back in his kingdom the King was married. Hearing him speaking the names of the princess and their children in his sleep, his wife decided to get revenge. She kidnapped the twins and planned to have them cooked and fed to the King. The chef swapped them for lambs and hid the children, while the Queen carried on believing that she had succeeded. Still not happy, she planned to have the princess burned at the stake. The King found out and ordered his wife to be burned instead. The King and the princess marry and live happy ever after. Somehow.

Frozen



Walt Disney Pictures

Based Upon: ‘The Snow Queen’ by Hans Christian Andersen

Following on the recent tradition of Tangled, Frozen is only a loose adaptation of The Snow Queen. Even going as far as to label it “inspired by”. However the plans for Disney to adapt the tale stem all the way back to Walt Disney himself in 1943. The project was shelved until 1990 but was again scrapped in 2002, until 2008 when new Disney chief John Lasseter was approached by Chris Buck. It took seventy years and several different teams to look at the story before it arrived on the silver screen as the record breaking Frozen.

The big problem came from the Snow Queen herself, and trying to find a way to humanize her to have audiences relate to her. Eventually the decision was made to change the Snow Queen from the villain of the picture to make her the older sister of protagonist Anna.

The theme of the ending of Anderson’s work remained with Frozen’s idea that “only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart.” In The Snow Queen, Gerda saves Kai by kissing him, melting his heart and burning away the mirror shard while his own tears dislodge the shard from his eye. This obviously needed changing for the sister dynamic, but Anna’s sacrifice for Elsa and love being the cure is a running theme throughout.

The Jungle Book

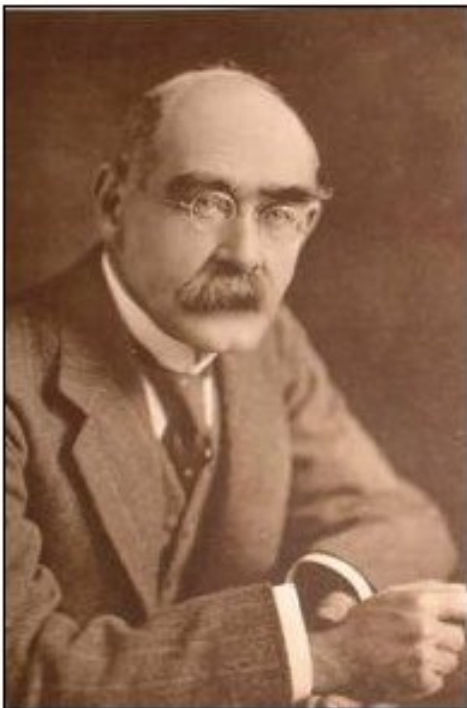


Walt Disney Pictures

Based Upon: 'The Jungle Books' by Rudyard Kipling

The film follows Mowgli, a baby who winds up in the jungle and is befriended by talking predators. After avoiding the human world for years and spending most of his childhood being awesome in the jungle, Mowgli stumbles upon a village and is instantly smitten with some doe-eyed Indian girl. The girl bats an eyelash and Mowgli disappears into the village forever, living happily ever after with his own people and leaving Baloo the Bear and Bagheera the Panther in the dust.

The original "Jungle Book" was a short-story by Rudyard Kipling, a man with surprisingly little tolerance for anything resembling Disney; his mustache simply wouldn't allow it.



In Kipling's version, when Mowgli decides to return to polite society, polite society isn't so certain it wants him back. The village Mowgli tries to return to in the short story re-banishes him to the wilderness, and the family that was kind enough to take him in gets tortured as sorcerers.

In response, Mowgli recruits Hathi the Elephant for help. But the thing is, the book's Hathi isn't the cuddly, forgetful old Major of the film.

No, he's a bloodthirsty, scarred old elephant who likes nothing more than seeking revenge on humans for an old wound he received in a spike pit. The "help" Mowgli gets from his old friend is in destroying the entire village. That's right. The lovable kid protagonist whose goofy antics you grew up laughing at recruits his elephant friend to, along with Bagheera and a bunch of wolves, storm in and *raze the freaking village to the ground*.

All the houses get stomped into dust, supplies are destroyed, the wolves chase away the cattle and good old Bagheera kills the horses.

Hercules



Walt Disney Pictures

Based Upon: 'Hercules' from Greek Mythology

In the Disney version we have our hero Hercules versus Hades, who tries to take out Hercules by sending Meg, a woman whose job it is to find Hercules' weakness. As she is a moderately attractive 18- to 25-year-old woman, she falls in love with him instead as required by Disney law.

Since his first plan failed so miserably, Hades gets Hercules to give up his powers in exchange for Meg's safety, which seems like a reasonable trade until you remember that Hades is like Satan with more gold trim, so he predictably goes back on his word.

As Hercules is fighting a Cyclops, Meg pushes him out of the way of a falling column and is killed, which restores Hercules' powers just in time for him to save the world and bring her back to life.

First of all, the Greeks depicted Hercules as a rampant sexual beast, taking whatever woman he liked before hitting a mid life crisis and being told to settle down. He got married to Megara, but without the help of Hades, a Cyclops or a Motown-inspired soundtrack. They *do* live happily ever after, right up until he gets driven insane by the goddess Hera and heroically murders Megara and all his children.

After regaining his senses, Heracles is consumed by guilt, which is understandable after killing your entire family for absolutely no reason. To try and make amends, he engages in 12 trials that include defeating powerful monsters and shoveling poo out of some horse stables, until he eventually gets killed by a blanket. Maybe they're saving all of that for one of those direct-to-DVD sequels they do.

Tarzan



Based upon: 'Tarzan' by Edgar Rice Burroughs

The evil Clayton, out for some good old fashioned monkey-snatching, locks up Tarzan and Jane on his ship. But Tantor the Elephant crashes through and rescues them, both from Clayton and from the fact that a five-ton animal probably couldn't safely trample all over the deck of a rickety 19th century boat.

Tarzan rushes to the aid of the gorillas and vanquishes Clayton in the most disturbing fashion. In the end, the prim and proper English girl Jane is on her way back to Victorian Britain when she has a change of heart and dives into the ocean. She reunites with Tarzan where we can safely assume she feeds him tea, makes him wear an ascot and claims the island under the Queen's rule. Chalk another one up for the Empire.

In the original, Jane is surrounded by plenty of potential suitors (including Clayton himself) who aren't hulking ape men, yet she still falls for Tarzan. Before she can admit it to herself, though, she leaves for America and considers marrying another man to pay off her father's debts.

Meanwhile, Tarzan suits up and follows her across an entire continent to rescue her from a forest fire that was presumably waiting around until the plot required it. Afterwards, he confesses his undying love for her, and Jane admits she feels the same way. But by this time she's engaged to Clayton, and because this is the 19th century there is absolutely nothing she can do about it.

Left on his own, Tarzan receives a telegram that reveals him as the rightful heir to Clayton's estate and all the property that comes with it (which includes Jane, because women are *things*). Instead of saying the word, kicking Clayton out of his own house and claiming Jane for tax purposes, he chooses to stay silent, thinking that Jane is happy being with Clayton. And... that's it. He simply sacrifices his happiness for Jane's misery.