



THE
BEAST
MASTER

TURNING OUTLANDISH CREATURES LOOSE
IN GATSBY-ERA NEW YORK,
FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM
AIMS TO MAKE YOU SAY, "HARRY WHO?"

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MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, YOU'VE SEEN one yourself. A pink feather, twitching in a tree. A brown blur, wriggling down a beach. A pair of eyes, intently gazing at you from behind a rock. Then you blinked, and it was gone. Nothing left but the feeling you'd seen something way, way out of the ordinary.

"There are magical creatures everywhere," confirms David Yates cheerily. "Some of them live in the most remote places on the planet. Some are just very good at disguising themselves. One can actually make itself invisible. They're incredibly difficult to find."

Let's get one thing straight: Yates, the director of the final four *Harry Potter* films and this year's *The Legend Of Tarzan*, has not packed the whole thing in to play *Pokémon Go*. Instead, he's putting the final touches to his latest movie spectacular, a sorta-prequel to the *Potter* series that Floo-powders viewers back to New York in 1926. Vast in scale, packed with set-pieces and never-before-cast spells, it's a prospective franchise-launcher that looks certain to succeed. Yet it might not have happened at all.

Back in 2001, eight months before the release of that other franchise-launcher, *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*, J.K. Rowling published two spin-off books, *Quidditch Through The Ages* and, most pertinent at this moment, *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*. Its royalties going to Comic Relief, *Fantastic Beasts* was a breezy tour of the magical animal kingdom in the form of a Hogwarts textbook owned by Harry, written by a man named Newt Scamander, with scribbles on it from familiar characters ("Write



on your own book, Hermione"). Enchantingly conceived and executed — the illustrations of the creatures were inked by Rowling herself — it was an amuse-bouche between wizardly main courses. And so it remained, until the last *Harry Potter* movie was released in 2011. Then, David Heyman got a call from fellow producer Lionel Wigram. "We were thinking about what else we could do in this universe," says Heyman. "And Lionel had an idea: was there a documentary to be made about Newt and his creatures?"

Think 'Beast In Show', a quirky faux-doc following a "magizoologist" as he treks the globe like a cross between David Attenborough and David Copperfield. Heyman and Wigram kicked around the idea, getting more and more

excited at the possibilities. Only when they approached Rowling did they realise they'd been thinking small. "Jo said, 'No, not a documentary,'" remembers Heyman. "But THIS." And she showed us something she'd already started writing."

The scope of the multi-film project she laid out that day made even the *Potter* series look boutique. Rather than confining the majority of its action to a school, albeit a magical and big one with moving staircases and sentient trees, *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* would burst into the Muggle metropolis of New York. And period New York at that, five years before the Empire State Building had even gone up.

The potential was huge, especially with Rowling offering to write the screenplays herself, something she had not done on *Harry Potter*. But the challenges were equally outsized.

A menagerie of wriggling, flying, occasionally shape-shifting beasts would have to be brought to life. The story would need a villain terrifying enough to replace He-Who-Can-Probably-Be-Named-Now-He's-Been-Avada-Kedavraed-Into-Oblivion. And the new films would have to find their way without the benefit of a set of novels to use as a road map.

"It was a completely blank canvas," says Yates. "But rather than being daunting to me, it was a wonderful opportunity to define the tone. While part of the same universe as *Potter*, it's a much more grown-up world. There's only one child character in the story. There are dark forces waiting in the wings. And this time the hero is not a schoolboy, but an adult."

Ah yes, the hero.

NEWTON 'NEWT' ARTEMIS Fido Scamander is in the Diamond District of New York, and he's in big trouble. Striding down the sidewalk, past a theatre marquee proudly billing something called 'Danica And Her Seven Amorous Captains: The New Musical Tale Of A Young Flapper', he casts furtive glances back over his shoulder. The vicinity is vibrant with life, Buick coupes and Hudson sedans whizzing past, pedestrians bustling in both directions. But it quickly becomes apparent who's flustering Newt: a number of sinister figures in long leather coats, rushing to catch him. Gulping, the young wizard reaches into one of the pockets of his eye-catching blue jacket. Something in there might just be of use...

Moments later, cut has been called and Eddie Redmayne is reaching into a different pocket to pull out a hankie. "I'm a phlegmy Newt," he grins, once he's given his nose a blow. It's January 2016, and while a superstorm named Jonas is blanketing the real New York in snow, here in fake New York (aka Leavesden Studios, outside Watford) it's 11 degrees and drizzly. "We've been shooting in these tunnels and I picked up a cold," Redmayne tells *Empire*. "I'm used to doing smaller-budget things, like *The Theory Of Everything* and *The Danish Girl*, which are eight weeks max. With something this massive, you definitely go through ups



Clockwise from top left: Director David Yates (centre) on set with the Fantastic Katherine Waterston and Eddie Redmayne; New York City, 1926-style; Newt Scamander (Redmayne) and Jacob Kowalski (Dan Fogler) marvel at the stick insect-like Bowtruckle.

and downs as far as health [is concerned].”

Redmayne did a stint, of course, as whisper-screaming alien Balem Abrasax in *Jupiter Ascending*. But this is his first lead role in a Hollywood biggie. “I actually auditioned to play [*Chamber Of Secrets* villain] Tom Riddle while I was at university,” he admits. “I properly failed and didn’t get a call back. Over the years I always hoped I might be cast as a member of the Weasley family — I’m colour blind but I’ve always been told there’s a tinge of red to my hair — but unfortunately not. A lot of my friends, like Domhnall Gleeson and Rob Pattinson, got their *Harry Potter* moment, but I never got mine.”

Instead, he’s getting something better: a Newt Scamander moment. The wizard is an oddball, in the best possible sense: a Hagrid-y fellow more comfortable with varmints than his own species. Redmayne, who was dismayed on an early film shoot to have liver pâté smeared behind his ear so a dog would lick his face, had to find his inner Chris Packham. He visited Howletts Wild Animal Park in Kent, mingling with Brazilian tapirs and dusky langurs. Then he went on a two-day tracking course in a forest. “I learned how you can add a bit of spit to a plant and make a remedy,” he thrills. “And how to step onto a twig very gently, without crunching it.”

Like fellow wild-man Crocodile Dundee, Newt must adjust to the hectic pace of life in New York. Unlike Crocodile Dundee, he comes bearing not a boomerang or absurdly large knife, but a magical suitcase, inside of which are exotic habitats teeming with beasts. Inevitably, this being an action movie, it’s not long before the latter escape to run riot around the city. Newt must not only hunt them down and get them back in the case, but elude capture himself by agents of MACUSA (the Magical Congress of the United States of America). Fortunately, like Harry before him, he has back-up: federal wand permit officer Tina Goldstein (Katherine Waterston), her glamorous and telepathic sister Queenie (Alison Sudol), plus baker Jacob Kowalski (Dan Fogler), the first major Muggle character in a JK Rowling movie.

“Actually, I’m a ‘No-Maj — short for ‘no-magic’,” corrects Fogler. “‘Muggles’ is a British term. I’m like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the regular, happy-go-lucky guy that gets to play with the fairies in the forest.”

The quartet of stars watched in wonder as the Big Apple was constructed around them, new façades springing up constantly around the mind-bogglingly massive, and massively detailed, street set. At times there have been 400 extras populating it, plus 41 antique cars. “Even horse crap!” marvels Waterston. “Yeah, baby. I thought it was fake, but it wasn’t. I didn’t learn the hard way by throwing it at anybody, but I came close.”

The aesthetic is Jazz Age with a Rowling twist. A magical speakeasy visited by our heroes,



called The Blind Pig, has a band featuring “goblin brass” and an upright grand piano. MACUSA headquarters, concealed by a spell within the Woolworth Building, has ‘Wanted’ posters on its walls for the likes of Al Capone-esque dark wizard Lancaster Pyke (crime: embezzlement of spells; reward: 4,850 dragols) and vicious witch Ernestina Abutor, aka the ‘Red Panther’ (“Bearing wand and extremely dangerous”).

A lavish outpouring of imagination, it’s impressive, no-expense-spared stuff: even the manholes on the street set blast real steam. But there are a few things conspicuous by their absence. Those fantastic beasts: where to find them?

THERE WAS NO shortage of actual wildlife on the *Harry Potter* sets. Besides the parliament of owls operating as unpaid postal workers, there was Scabbers the rat, Ripper the bulldog, even mean old moggie Mrs Norris. Despite the presence of a studio cat named Teddy (renamed ‘Teddy Redmayne’ for the duration of the shoot), *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* is a different story. You cannot, it seems, call up Birds And Animals and ask for a “swooping evil” or a “bits-and-pieces creature”. Well, you could, but they’d probably hang up.

“When we started designing the creatures, we let our artists go crazy,” says David Heyman. “But ultimately we kept coming back to real things in nature, to find a different language than the pure fantasy language a lot of movie creatures have.” The Fwooper, a grumpy pink bird, was inspired by a documentary clip of an owl spinning its head around and shooting the camera a dirty look. The Erumpent is a 15-foot-tall, rhino-like quadruped. The Mooncalf looks like the ghost of a llama.

The task for Yates and his visual-effects team was to not only animate each one convincingly, but imbue it with a distinct personality. “The Occamy is a very sweet, wild creature that’s a baby, really, and needs to be nurtured,” says the director, becoming animated himself as he conjures one up in his mind. “There’s a wonderful thing called a Thunderbird, who is named Frank — he’s an ancient, regal creature who creates weather when he flies. There’s a strange and powerful force called an Obscurus, which is a darker part of the movie. And there’s the Niffler...”

Appearing in two *Harry Potter* novels but not hitherto seen in the cinematic universe, the Niffler is by all accounts the premier scene-stealer of *Fantastic Beasts*, the midpoint between a duck-billed platypus and Bill Murray. Yates calls him “an avaricious honey badger of sorts”. Redmayne calls him “bally”. A kleptomaniac, he’s fearless in his acquisition of shiny things, even stealing the buckles from people’s shoes. One key scene in the movie will set the furry scuttler free in a bank: coin-based mayhem ensues.

In Rowling’s book, there are 85 types of beast. The movie has whittled them down to a couple of dozen (odds on the mucus-producing, ditch-dwelling Flobberworm making the cut: 100-1), though several made a late resurgence. “The script evolved a lot,” says VFX supervisor Christian Manz. “Suddenly new creatures would appear two weeks before filming. There are so many: funny ones and scary ones and things that defy expectation.” Toy sales are likely to be strong for a few in particular, such as the Bowtruckle, which Redmayne describes as “an emotional, stick insect-like fellow, a bit clingy”. Or the Demiguise, that is, says Fogler, “a super-smart little primate with the strength of 20 men. A lot of kids are gonna want to have him.”

But there is a lot more going on in this story than just beast-collection. Sinister powers are

Clockwise from top left: Colin Farrell as the shrewd Percival Graves, Director of Magical Security; The witch-hating Barebones family, led by mum Mary Lou (Samantha Morton, second from left) and adopted son Credence (Ezra Miller, second from right); The rodent-like Niffler, a big fan of shiny things.

BEST CASE SCENARIOS

HOW DOES NEWT'S WONDROUS SUITCASE STACK UP AGAINST THESE ICONIC PIECES OF LUGGAGE?



BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S (1961)

Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn) is unorthodox over storage: besides stashing her ballet slippers in the fridge, she keeps her telephone in a natty vellum suitcase. At least she doesn't put Cat in the sink.



TRUE ROMANCE (1993)

Tarantino used a briefcase as a MacGuffin in *Pulp Fiction*; for this he threw in, as Dick (Michael Rapaport) puts it, "a whole fucking suitcase full of cocaine!" Alas, it ends up riddled with bullets. Poor suitcase.



OLDBOY (2003)

It's a nightmare to lose a suitcase, but worse to wake up inside one, as Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik) learns in Park Chan-wook's revenge thriller. So iconic is the moment, the Josh Brolin remake put it on the poster.



THE DARJEELING LIMITED (2007)

Perhaps cinema's most coveted carry-ons, this safari-printed Louis Vuitton set was made especially for Wes Anderson's film. As of last year you can buy your own replica online, thanks to super-fan Alberto Favaretto.



PADDINGTON (2014)

The UK Border Force would have a field day with Paddington if they got hold of his marmalade-stuffed valise. Fortunately he sneaks in by ship, avoiding interrogation and possible cavity search.



at work in the big city. Powers so sinister, in fact, that Newt might just need a super-smart little primate with the strength of 20 men.

THERE'S A DANCE that often occurs during an interview about a major upcoming movie. The journalist probes for plot intel; the actor jokes they'll be shot by a sniper if they give it up. Ezra Miller does not do that dance. "Everything I say will be evasive bullshit," he declares, before we've even said hello. "What's so great about this interview is that I literally can't answer any of your questions. And I want you to print that."

The 24-year-old star won't state his character Credence's surname (later announced

as Barebone). And he doesn't bite when we invite him to add a third adjective to the two ("troubled", "mysterious") already on Credence's Wikipedia page. "I wouldn't want to drop a synonym into the bucket," he stonewalls magnificently. "I feel like it's good where it's at."

David Yates does confirm to *Empire* that a new über-villain is rising: "There is a character who we meet in this movie, but who will come to the fore much more in the second one... One of the scariest aspects he has is this amazing ability to seduce with his ideas." So all this makes one wonder: is Credence the new Voldemort? Well, maybe, but there are other possibilities in the mix, such as the witch-hunting members of the New Salem Philanthropic Society, or Senator Henry Shaw Jr (Josh Cowdery), a rabble-rousing politician running for the White House. "The 1920s are a weird parallel to where we're at now," says Yates of the obvious connection between Shaw and the Orange-Hued-2016-US-Presidential-Candidate-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. "Just this fizzy champagne bottle of a world with all this excess, but teetering on the edge of some great collapse, economically and ideologically. And waiting in the wings are malicious forces hoping to come in and capitalise on that."

If the seeds are all in place for an ongoing, darkening saga, only one person really knows what's coming. J.K. Rowling has been more hands-on with this adaptation than previous ones: the design of the MACUSA building's interior was reconfigured after she suggested it incorporate more Gothic architecture. But the novelist-turned-screenwriter has still been relatively reclusive, rarely appearing on set and keeping even the producers in the dark about certain things. "It's actually really exciting to be working on something where you don't know the full story," says David Heyman. Miller has a more colourful way of describing the process of working with the *Fantastic Beasts* mastermind: "She just sits on a big old dragon's egg of info that stirs from somewhere deeper than her mind. And I'm revelling in getting little peeks of the dragon's egg under her mighty weight."

What we do know is that the already-underway sequel will travel to Paris. And it will be as colossal as a Ukrainian Ironbelly dragon (*Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*, p25). "It's quite ambitious," understates Yates, who is set to return alongside the likes of production designer Stuart Craig, cinematographer Philippe Rousselot and costume designer Colleen Atwood. "Stuart is unflappable and indefatigable, but when he saw the script for *Beasts 2*, he said, 'Let me just think about it for a minute...'"

Leprechauns in the Louvre? Sea Serpents in the Seine? Anything's possible. Maybe even a Flobberworm. ●

Clockwise from top left: Newt and No-Maj baker Jacob run into difficulties; Carmen Ejogo as the formidable Seraphina Picquery, President of MACUSA; Witch sisters Tina (Waterston) and Queenie (Alison Sudol) Goldstein.

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FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM IS IN CINEMAS FROM 18 NOVEMBER