

‘Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them’ Relies on Second-Hand Wonder

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 17, 2016 - 7:32pm

- [Alison Sudol](#) [2]
- [Carmen Ejogo](#) [3]
- [Colin Farrell](#) [4]
- [Dan Fogler](#) [5]
- [David Yates](#) [6]
- [Eddie Redmayne](#) [7]
- [Ezra Miller](#) [8]
- [Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them](#) [9]
- [Gemma Chan](#) [10]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [11]
- [J.K. Rowling](#) [12]
- [Johnny Depp](#) [13]
- [Jon Voight](#) [14]
- [Katherine Waterston](#) [15]
- [Movie Review](#) [16]
- [Ron Perlman](#) [17]
- [Samantha Morton](#) [18]
- [Spike Walters](#) [19]
- [Warner Brothers](#) [20]
- [Zoe Kravitz](#) [21]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It’s been five years since the last Harry Potter film, and for fans eager to scratch that itch for a dreamworld of magic again “Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them” will probably suffice. It’s this story’s tangential connection to the Harry Potter universe that is its biggest asset – but the film unfortunately can’t muster up much wonder on its own.

Essentially “Fantastic Beasts” is one long scene setter, introducing audiences to the world of wizards across the pond. Hogwarts graduate Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne) stumbles off an ocean liner in 1920’s New York City with a briefcase full of mischievous beasts. We’re introduced to a world where Wizards are completely underground in a country full of “No-Mags” (the American version of a Muggle). There’s a puritanical organization run by Samantha Morton...which aims to exterminate magic in all its forms, there is Percival Graves (Colin Farrell)...the head of the wizard council’s secret police, and there is yet another black cloud of doom that threatens to set the Wizard world at war.



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Eddie Redmayne in 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Redmayne plays his character as more of a researcher than wizard. He's exactly the kind of creature you'd expect to be called Newt – who is generally ill at ease with others – and is more at home among the specimens he studies and collects. He's working on a field guide for Wizards about the fantastical creatures to give his them a greater understanding of the world around them. But when a few of the beasts escape at a bank, because of a mixup involving identical suitcases and an aspiring baker (Dan Fogler), Redmayne must travel all over town trying to get them back again. He teams up with a low level Wizard Investigator (Katherine Waterston), who's been busted down to wand registration duty, but dreams of getting back to the big time.

The art direction in the film's Art Deco-era New York is nothing short of stunning, and the film draws on that glow of nostalgia along with the Harry Potter lore to try to cast a spell on audiences. But It's somewhat telling that in a big blockbuster production such as this, that it's the old smaller tricks (such as the moving pictures on a wanted poster, or in a newspaper) that are the ones that capture the spirit best.

The movie is full of big set pieces, some that work (such as a visit to underground Wizard speakeasy), and a lot that don't work. Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling (who adapted the screenplay from her novel) and director David Yates spent a good deal of the story devoted to the kind of world-obliterating mayhem that may as well have been deleted scenes from "Batman V. Superman" or "Man Of Steel." The Beasts themselves aren't anything to write home about – kind of all blending together in the same sort of digital mashup.



The Cast Keep Their Wands Dry in 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

"Fantastic Beasts" isn't a one off adventure, it's just the first of a planned series of five films. At least, this film presents the seeds of a more interesting story ahead...involving more of the Harry Potter world, with a renegade Wizard named Grindelwald who's wants to bring Wizards out from the shadows, and that legendary 'Head of Hogwarts" Albus Dumbledore. Overall, Rowling and Yates have put together an okay origin story that's probably good enough to rope in the die hard fans, but let's hope they have a few more tricks up their sleeves the next time.

"Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" opens everywhere on November 18th. Featuring Eddie Redmayne, Katherine Waterston, Alison Sudol, Dan Fogler, Colin Farrell, Zoe Kravitz, Ron Perlman, Samantha Morton and Jon Voight. Screenplay adapted by J.K. Rowling, from her novel. Directed by David Yates. Rated "PG-13"



[22]

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- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/fantastic-beasts-and-where-to-find-them>
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