

Movie review: 'Secrets of Dumbledore'

By Chris Hewitt
Star Tribune

Third time's a charm for the "Fantastic Beasts" series, which took three tries to — finally — produce something that feels like a complete movie.

"The Secrets of Dumbledore" takes a few scenes to get going. After the introduction of a dizzying array of characters and story lines, things don't really click until Jessica Williams' Lally Hicks shows up to summarize what happened in "Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald." One thing she doesn't mention: The series took

advantage of the opportunity to dump Johnny Depp and trade up with Mads Mikkelsen as villainous Gellert Grindelwald.

With his etched cheekbones and menacingly measured delivery, Mikkelsen plays a lot of people who probably have kill rooms in their basements. That's true here, too, where the principal conflict is between Grindelwald and Jude Law's Al-



Warner Bros. Pictures
From left, Jessica Williams, Callum Turner, Fiona Glascott, Dan Fogler, Jude Law and Eddie Redmayne in "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore."

bus Dumbledore, who's not yet the head honcho at Hogwarts (although the school does get enough screen time to make Potterheads gleeful).

Once lovers, they've parted over the direction the wizarding world should take and Grindelwald is running a rigged campaign, complete with Nazi-like imagery, to assure he'll be chosen to lead it. Dumbledore,

with the help of Eddie Redmayne's timid Newt Scamander and too many other muggles and wizards for us to keep track of, is determined to stop him.

Having elegantly walked a line between good and evil for three seasons as "Hannibal" Lecter on TV, Mikkelsen is an old hand at quietly following through on horrible threats. He doesn't always play bad guys

— the tension in the mesmerizing "The Hunt" was that he was pure-hearted but Mikkelsen's casting planted doubts — but the Danish actor is such a wily performer that he could probably play Mr. Rogers straight and still make him seem like serial killer material.

That elusive quality is a huge asset in "Secrets," which boasts the beasts promised by its title, including a magical deer/lizard creature, some dancing scorpions and glimpses of what may be a dodo. Other than Grindelwald, though, its characters are

not so fantastic. Virtually everyone is either clearly good or evil and there's never any question who should — or will — win, unless you somehow missed the "Potter" series. There's also an issue I have with many entries in the fantasy genre: If everything is possible, if a spell can turn evil good or bring the dead back to life, does anything really have a point?

Ultimately, "Secrets" answers that question in the affirmative. He may be a wizard but "Secrets" explores the humanity of Dumbledore more than any previous "Beasts" or "Potter" movie, making sure we see that a gay man in the 1930s was doomed to be an outsider. "Secrets" leaves him the possibility of further adventures, if more movies get made, but it also helps us understand the trauma that will make him tick at Hogwarts.

The ending of "Secrets" is a bittersweet balance between its title character's pain and the promise of a couple of sweet relationships that involve the supporting wizards and mortals. At least for its straight characters, "Secrets" insists, love is stronger than magic.

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