



# The Wizarding World before Harry Potter

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[Beware, this article contains spoilers.]

The wizarding world of Harry Potter is where many of us lost ourselves in growing up. It's difficult to express just how drawn in we were—I could never wrap my head around the genius that JK Rowling is and the world she had created. This is why it is particularly disappointing the manner in which the extended Harry Potter universe is shaping up to be, post the release of the last original film.

The latest and second of the new movies *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* which released last month is in my opinion a much more coherent and magical experience than the first *Fantastic Beasts* movie. The moment Hedwig's Theme played as we returned to Hogwarts the first time since the original series, couldn't help but excite me. This film is a lot more related to the original storyline but that does not validate the many reasons this extended franchise isn't measuring up well.

## IT DOESN'T HAVE THE EMOTIONAL VALUE

In the original stories, the journey of a neglected orphan slowly finding his way to a world that finally cared about him and growing up with the help of heartwarming friendships and a plethora of lovable parent figures had the audience invest every bit of their emotions – we felt every heartbreak, every victory Harry experienced.

It is not to say that Newt Scamander

isn't lovable – surely his shy demeanour and briefcase full of the most misunderstood creatures carries enough charm. However we simply don't know as much about him as a person or his background to feel things. Jacob Kowalski is used merely as a prop and the Goldstein sisters as characters seem absolutely standard.

## THERE ISN'T ONE PARTICULAR GOAL

We are never sure what this series of films is actually planning to explore. The first film in 2016 seemed to be a harmless fun backstory about an intriguing character and I expected it to be an adventure trilogy. The latest film however is suddenly darker and more ambitious and seems to suggest this series will deal with fighting Grindelwald the way the original films were spent fighting Voldemort. However, the most interesting parts of Grindelwald's history including his relationship and duel with Dumbledore is already in the past by now. Now that we know there will be five films in this series and not three, it won't be until the next film we know where this series is actually planning to go in terms of content or tone.

## SO MANY QUESTIONS!

At what point in his life did Dumbledore hire a personal stylist and go from vests and ties to robes and pointy hats? Why couldn't Nagini simply be played by a south Asian character or did the Patil sisters and their hideous coloured *lehengas* already fill up the quota? Rowling's tweet

about Nagini originating from Indonesia and justifying the casting of an Asian character by saying the Chinese are an ethnic group in Indonesia is incredibly flawed.

Also, how did Queenie Goldstein go from an upbeat character in the last film to the confusing and manipulative character she is in this one? How was McGonagall already a Hogwarts professor in the 1920s given we previously knew she was born around 1935?

## THE AMERICAN TREATMENT

Harry Potter in its essence is a very British story. Starting from the British schooling system which shapes everyone's experience at Hogwarts a lot more than we realise (every time McGonagall yells “5 points from Gryffindor!” it's only because the British schooling system has a house structure and hence the fight for a House Cup) to the incredibly creative insults uttered by Vernon Dursley every summer around Harry, the story is grounded in the UK through its practices and imagery.

Moreover, moving to the United States seems like an extremely easy cash grab. A desperate move to Americanize the story seems based on the interest to pander to the American market and even the global market. With the latest film moving to Paris and Rowling hinting that the next will feature Rio de Janeiro, let's just hope the films have enough heart to sustain this and its ambitions aren't purely geographical.

## CASTING

Featuring a star cast is tempting but

Johnny Depp isn't enough to pull the audience to theatres – *Crimes of Grindelwald* had the lowest ever box office opening for a Harry Potter film earning a mere USD 62 million in its opening weekend in the States. Jude Law, Eddie Redmayne and the rest are all charming but the Harry Potter franchise has never been about big stars; the primary cast featured newcomers who were barred from signing any other projects during the tenure of the original franchise so the audience could picture them only as their characters.

## REPRESENTATION

The latest films have angered many who expected more representation by now – something the Star Wars franchise has achieved. Leta LeStrange and her story arc bring a welcoming black storyline however people have pointed out that her story is also very problematic – the race angle does not fare well (Google it and you'll know). I would complain that the women in this new series aren't doing much but then again neither are the men and only Grindelwald looks like he's having a blast.

I still have hope for the next movies, if only to get another glimpse of Hogwarts and hoping the films get progressively better.

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