

World of Words

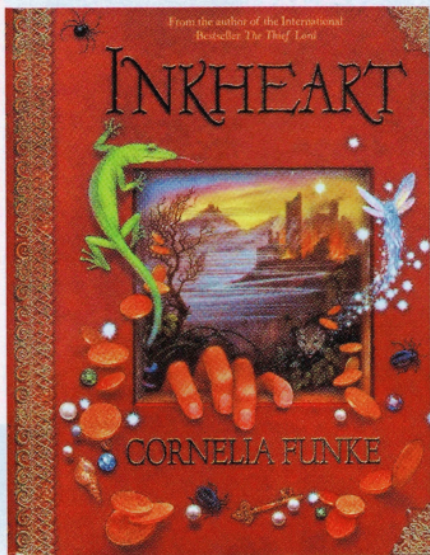
By JOE NAZZARO

The bestselling fantasy book *Inkheart* literally comes to life.

It's a cold January day at Shepperton Studios, just outside London, and director Iain Softley and an A-list group of actors are well into production on New Line Cinema's big-screen adaptation of Cornelia Funke's bestselling 2003 fantasy novel *Inkheart*. Temporarily sidelined by New Line's downsizing in mid-2008, the film has been picked up by the studio's parent company, Warner Bros., and is scheduled for a January 23 release.

On this particular morning, STARLOG will be watching one of the sequences being shot today, as well as sitting down with members of the cast and crew. For those unfamiliar with *Inkheart*'s premise, producer Diana Pokorny offers a condensed version of the story. "Brendan Fraser plays Mo Folchart. He has a great love for books, and he's a book-binder," she explains. "Mo reads to his three-year-old daughter Meggie [Isabella Clark] and wife Resa [Sienna Guillory] from a novel called *Inkheart*, which is a fantastic, magical story set during medieval times.

"But Mo reads it so beautifully that sometimes things inadvertently come out of the book. Mo considers this a curse, because he doesn't have control over this ability. When Mo reads aloud to his daughter, several char-



Based on Cornelia Funke's fantasy bestseller, *Inkheart* premieres January 23. *Inkspell* and *Inkdeath* complete the author's novel trilogy.

acters suddenly appear, including Capricorn [Andy Serkis], who is evil, and Dustfinger [Paul Bettany], who you aren't sure if he's good or bad. Also, sometimes people or things go into the book—like Mo's beloved wife."

The story picks up a decade later. "Unbeknownst to Meggie [now played by Eliza Hope Bennett]—who doesn't understand what's going on—Mo is searching for another *Inkheart* copy, hoping that somehow, by reading the book again, he can bring Resa back," Pokorny says. "Meanwhile, Capricorn has dis-

"Silvertongue" (Fraser) is pursued by Dustfinger (Paul Bettany), an *Inkheart* character Mo read out of the book and into reality.



covered that he actually likes this world better, because there are all sorts of exciting things like guns and duct tape. So he's cornered in a little part of Italy, where he has things read out

Mo's supernatural ability imperils both Aunt Elinor (Helen Mirren) and his daughter Meggie (Eliza Hope Bennett).





Literature in action! Mortimer Folchart (Brendan Fraser) demonstrates the power of reading—calling forth the tornado from *The Wizard of Oz*.

of other books for his own, evil use. However, Dustfinger *doesn't* like living in this world. He wants to return home, and he's hoping that Mo will be able to read him back into the book. So

the story sets off from there, as everyone comes back together, each with their own agenda.

"Along the way, Mo & co. pick up his Aunt Elinor [Helen Mirren], who also helps them. Jim Broadbent plays Fenoglio, *Inkheart*'s original writer. Mo tries to find him, hoping that Fenoglio has a copy of *Inkheart* and can help him track down his family. Inadvertently, Mo reads a character out of *Arabian Nights* [Farid, played by Rafi Gavron], who also joins them on their adventures."

Inking the Deal

The process of bringing Funke's beloved novel to the screen began when executive producer Ileen Maisel was given an early copy of the finished manuscript. She flew to Hamburg with her partner Mark Ordesky to see the author, and ultimately secured the rights over David (*Harry Potter*) Heyman. As Maisel recalls, "One of the things that we did before we got a writer on board was spend lots of time in Hamburg with Cornelia, literally going through her book page by page. *Inkheart* is fantastic, but for example, Resa is almost a nonexistent character. What was her relation-

ship with Dustfinger? How do you define that? Did they have an affair or didn't they? We needed to clarify all of those things.

"People have certain expectations for the movie, but Iain and his team have taken it in a direction that nobody could have imagined: the writing on the faces, the Black Jackets' cool look and Helen's interpretation of her character, which isn't exactly how Elinor is in the book, but Cornelia loved it. When Cornelia is writing a novel, she's God in her world, but with the film, she was happy to share some of the responsibility."

Assembling a top-notch cast proved rather easy. Funke had written the first *Inkheart* with Fraser in mind as Mo, and Softley's wish list included Mirren, Broadbent and Bettany, all of whom enthusiastically responded to David Lindsay-Abaire's script. Even the search for Meggie was relatively straightforward. Although the producers saw a large number of young actresses, they ultimately cast Bennett, who had auditioned early on in the process.

The *Inkheart* character who arguably changed the most from book to movie is the villainous Capricorn. "Andy wanted to play that part," Maisel says. "Mark and he were



having dinner together, and Andy said, 'What about me for Capricorn?'"

"He also nailed the audition," Ordesky adds. "Andy was up against some other people, but he was great, while they were only fairly good. This is a fabulous opportunity for Andy, because he's a terrific actor, and he's very funny and scary in the movie."

Back in the studio, while Softley rehearses his cast through a scene that takes place in Capricorn's headquarters, some of the film's department heads offer a look at their respective contributions. Costume designer Verity Hawkes has set up several illustrated boards that show off the reference materials and fabric swatches for the major characters, as well as some of their actual wardrobes.

For the Black Jackets, Capricorn's henchmen, black lines mark their faces and clothing to indicate their origin. As Hawkes explains, "Capricorn finds someone with the ability to read people out of books, but he doesn't do it very well, so everybody comes out with writing on them. I wanted the Black Jackets to look cobbled together, with an army feel about them, but neither modern nor period; they're a collection of things that are threatening together. And when Capricorn originally gets read out of *Inkheart*, he's wearing a medieval costume.

"Then there's Mortola [Lesley Sharp]—who we later find out is Capricorn's mother—and the Inkheart maids, including



Every book must have a writer—and in this story, *Inkheart* was authored years ago by Fenoglio (Jim Broadbent).

Resa and some of the other girls he has read out from different books. For the villagers, we've referenced Eastern European refugees, and Capricorn terrorizes these villages. There's a scene in *The Arabian Nights* where a character's surrounded by the 40 Thieves, and we go from the Black Jacket world into the colorful world of the *Arabian Nights*."

Hawkes dressed Mo and Meggie in contemporary clothes, but put them together in such a way that they couldn't be dated. "Dustfinger looks like a traveler, so he's layered—he doesn't have a particular costume change," she adds. "He has one other jumper, and he keeps everything in his bag. Dustfinger's [outfits are] modern and practical, but still have a medieval sensibility. With Elinor, Helen came up with the great idea that she should look like [British poet and critic] Edith Sitwell, so I

went out and collected [the appropriate apparel] to fit in with that brief."

The notion of using printed lines on various *Inkheart* characters was also employed by makeup designer Jenny Shircore. "I think the initial idea came from Iain," recalls Shircore, who won an Oscar for *Elizabeth*. "He was talking about Sienna's character, who is captured and taken into *Inkheart*. Iain said, 'She should have writing all over her,' and it progressed from there. We discussed how these people should look, because they're from the pages of a book written today about a period 500 years ago.

"I used several methods for the crowds, all of the people from *Inkheart*. There's Roman lettering on the men and slightly prettier, softer-colored medieval lettering on the women's faces. We took bits from the novel as well. I had the lettering made up three different ways:



Neill Gorton's Millennium FX created the movie's Minotaur and puppet doubles (for Toto and the ferret Gwin).



Swimming to life from *Peter Pan*, Captain Hook's crocodile was also constructed by Millennium FX.

stencils, tattoos and pen. That helped with the speed. Since it's print, we couldn't do it free-hand, because it's supposed to be from a book."

One of the major changes between the source book and Lindsay-Abaire's screenplay is the introduction of several characters from the *Inkheart* trilogy, including Toto and the winged monkeys from *The Wizard of Oz*, the crocodile from *Peter Pan* and a Minotaur taken from a book on Greek mythology. For the latter two creatures, visual FX supervisor Angus Bickerton recommended longtime collaborator Neill Gorton and his Millennium FX company.

"They were going CGI with the winged monkeys," Gorton says, "but they wanted some physical characters, primarily the Minotaur—a suit with an animatronic head—and giant crocodile. We also made stunt double puppets for the ferret and Toto, because when you're working with animals, you need backups.

"We spent lots of time trying to find the right 'levels' for the fantasy creatures. If you look at the flying monkeys, they're like chimpanzees with these big, beautiful wings. So design-wise, it was a case of picking the proper elements. It's the same thing with the crocodile—there's a lovely feel to it. Fantasy became reality without it being too much of a Disney caricature. I would go on the set and the crocodile looked real; it didn't look made up."

As Black As Ink

In order to create a film that straddled modern-day Europe and *Inkheart's* medieval fantasy realm, Softley enlisted production designer John Beard, whom he had worked with before on such films as *K-PAX* and *The Skeleton Key*. After settling on a number of shooting locations in Liguria, Italy, Beard's job was to re-create some of those buildings in the studio; he even brought in a truckload of stone from the area.

"The reason we went to Italy is because we found this fantastic village called Balestrino, which was completely abandoned apart from the people who lived at the top," Beard offers. "I always imagined that I would have to build ruins in the streets to make it look like an uninhabited village, but it was the other way around—we had to spend time and money making it safe to work there. We filmed three major scenes in Liguria: the book fair, Capricorn's village and the seaside town."

Beard has worked with directors ranging from Terry Gilliam to Martin Scorsese, and he enjoys having the freedom to interpret the reality that he's helping to create. "I used to prefer the things I did during the '80s, like *Brazil*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Absolute Beginners*," he admits. "I avoided period films because they usually need to be a perfect re-creation of things that were carefully documented. Iain was set to direct *The Wings of the Dove* after *Hackers* and *Backbeat*, and he told me, 'Come on, let's have a go at this!' Somehow we managed to bring a contemporary look to *Wings of the Dove* even

though it's a period piece. After that, all I got offered for a long while were period films, but I always tried to give them a little bit of the unexpected."

Meanwhile, in Capricorn's castle, Softley is ready to shoot Scene #73, which involves virtually all of the main cast members as well as several Black Jacket extras, including a disfigured giant aptly named "Flatnose." In this scene, Capricorn's henchmen have captured Mo, Meggie and Elinor, thanks to information from Dustfinger, who is hoping that Mo can be compelled to read him back into the last remaining *Inkheart* copy. But to Dustfinger's chagrin, Capricorn has no intention of keeping his bargain and throws the book in the fireplace.

The sequence is a *tour de force* for Serkis, who extols the virtues of modern-day society—including, for some strange reason, duct tape. With so many actors involved, the scene has to be shot over and over from different angles, which means endless takes—especially when the tiniest error can ruin a perfect shot. At one point between takes, Flatnose leans over to Bennett and tells her a joke. The two then link arms and sing, "We're off to see the wizard!" as they exit the set amidst gales

of laughter. Perhaps you had to be there.

During a break in filming, the actors get a moment or two for a quick chat, beginning with Bennett, who talks about *Inkheart's* lengthy auditioning process. "Casting children is really different from casting adults," she points out. "My first audition was in April [2006], which is when I met Iain. But they changed the casting agents and then had open auditions, so I thought that I didn't get the part. Four months later, though, I got another call, and I met with Hubbards Casting and then met Iain again over lunch. We talked about the film, and I was offered the part the following week. So it was a long process, but this was something that I wanted to do from when I first read the book. Usually, I don't get my hopes up, but I did on this one, so it was a relief when Iain called."

For Serkis, the subject of *Inkheart* first came up during that aforementioned dinner with Ordesky, with whom he had worked on *The Lord of the Rings*. "It's so rare that you read a script that's rooted in reality but can be translated into a fantasy world," Serkis says. "That's what appealed to me."

Capricorn is more of a conventional villain in the book ("A heart as black as ink," Serkis



STARLOG's on set for this sequence as Capricorn (Andy Serkis, seated left) demands Mo read of the 40 Thieves' treasure—and bring out the gold.



Medieval street performer Dustfinger has his own unique skills. He's a firethrower.



Iain (K-PAX) Softley directed *Inkheart* from a screenplay by David Lindsay-Abaire.

quotes), but his film incarnation is more tongue-in-cheek. "Capricorn is very droll and dry," Serkis remarks. "He likes the finer things, and I suppose that what he's about—and the reason why he's in this world—is that Pandora's Box has been opened, and this guy has come into this parallel universe, and he [falls in love with] these material things. Capricorn loves fine suits and wines, and he's very happy about living in a castle. He loves the smells and sights and sounds; that's what really does it for him."

Out of the Inkwell

Serkis isn't the only actor with strong ideas about how to play his character. During the first day of rehearsals, Mirren reportedly showed up with a large shopping bag of "research" for Elinor. "What is on the page is wonderful," she explains, "but I couldn't see my way around acting the way Elinor is in the book. She's very strong and interesting, so I wasn't saying, 'Oh, that's boring. I want to do something else!' But I didn't feel that I could perform [the character as she is in the novel]. Another actress would have been better in that role, so my suggestion was, 'If you want me, can I bring what I think I can give to it?'"

"I've based my [perception] of the character on Edith Sitwell, the English poet who completely lived in the imaginative world of books, literature and poetry as opposed to the real world. Elinor's story is about learning to live in the real world, albeit the fantasy world of our wonderful film. That's my thinking behind the character, so thus the costume and the turbans, which are absolutely based on Edith Sitwell. Elinor is an exotic and bohemian woman who lives in the world of literature, so that was my way into it."

Fraser has tried to structure his performance as Mortimer "Silvertongue" Folchart as though he's in a three-act play. "In the beginning, Mo is absolutely lost, because he has spent the last 12 years looking for Resa," Fraser comments. "But he hasn't come clean

with his daughter about the reason why her Mom is missing, so there are some fairly dark themes to play here."

"Mo doesn't necessarily want this 'Silvertongue' ability, and then to learn that his daughter also has this power makes it even worse for him. He's gripped with fear, and you really only see him emerge, step up and get a backbone at the end, when what he loves most is threatened, and that's his family."

If Funke had Fraser in mind for Mo, Bettany jokes that he didn't have the same short-cut in landing the Dustfinger role. "I think she had Jude Law in mind," he deadpans. "I was reading the book with my nine-year-old when the script turned up. I usually find fantasy quite difficult, but I didn't while reading *Inkheart*. I think that's because the book is so firmly set in this world, which is really helpful for me and people who aren't so *au fait* with that type of story."

"What I love about Dustfinger and the

other characters is that they aren't entirely bad or good. He's an opportunist who wants to go home, and Dustfinger and Mo will do each other over to get what they want. Mo wants his wife back, and Dustfinger wants to return to his wife and children, but unfortunately their objectives clash. That's fun to play."

And what about that old admonition about working with children and animals—is that fun, too? "We have great kids and animals," Bettany declares. "Eliza is incredibly articulate, smart and works so hard. She works a day like we have to, and then she has to go to school as well. Gwin the ferret also goes to school. We have like 20 ferrets, and each one does different things. One of them is really stupid and dull and just sits on my shoulder, and one is an attack ferret who runs up my shoulder and tries to get my ear. At the last minute, we'll swap the attack ferret for the dull one. We have so many ferrets and, of course, Toto the dog is here, too."

Softley has been associated with *Inkheart* longer than just about anybody involved with the film. "It's incredibly fulfilling working on a project like this, where we're essentially creating our own world," he observes. "You've seen the sets—that's what distinguishes my job from working in another medium, such as the theater. I have the opportunity to create these magical worlds as well as to go to real places, and [my job is to] find that link between realism and fantasy. I knew that *Inkheart* was going to be rich, and in terms of its scope, this film has been very enjoyable."

The *Inkheart* book series is a bestselling trilogy, so the subject of possible sequels rears its head. The principal cast is signed on for *Inkspell* and *Inkdeath*, the second and third installments, but it remains to be seen if this group will reunite for another adventure. "I love this project," Diana Pokorny enthuses. "I love the book, the material, the characters and everything *Inkheart* is about. We have a great cast and got Iain to direct it [because of the books]. It all ultimately stems from a fantastic source!"



Farid (Rafi Gavron) joins Meggie and fellow heroes when he emerges from the fabled *Arabian Nights*.