

FATE: THE WINX SAGA

Fairy Tales

AS *Fate: The Winx Saga*

RETURNS FOR ANOTHER SERIES, SFX JOINS THE CAST
AND CREW ON-SET IN IRELAND TO FIND OUT
HOW THIS SECOND SEASON IS "BIGGER AND BETTER"

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FATE: THE WINX SAGA

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S *SFX* ARRIVES IN THE grounds of Killruddery Estate, a vast, 800-acre mansion 12 miles from Dublin, it's clear it ain't a normal day here. A throng of tough-looking stunt performers are

brawling with swords to our left, while to our right we spot a familiar flame-haired figure sitting, wrapped in a fisherman's jumper and tweed jacket and cradling a Red Bull.

Abigail Cowen is, along with the rest of the cast and crew of Netflix's *Fate: The Winx Saga*, a week away from wrapping and, for her at least, today is all about her character Bloom's reunion with someone we thought we wouldn't be seeing again, when she was spectacularly offed by the dastardly Rosalind (Lesley Sharp last time out, Miranda Richardson this time round) in the closing moments of season one.

Except actor Eve Best isn't here for her phantasmal resurrection as Alfea school of magic's steely headmistress Farah Dowling. Today, it's a stand-in that Cowen is working alongside, with Best's pre-recorded lines being pumped through a speaker (she will, we're reliably informed, be edited in later). As Cowen and Dowling's surrogate saunter through the grass, the younger actor trips up. Cut! "Sorry!" she laughs, before stamping on the offending mound of earth.

It's 1 November here in County Wicklow, and a nippy eight degrees, but it's clear that autumn – and the occasional burst of drizzle – doesn't exist in *Winx*-land. There's even a man here whose job it is to scurry round collecting the dead leaves in a giant bin-bag, while the other female actors are hiding their super-chic summer fashions under puffer jackets and wellies. "I think people would be surprised to learn that it's so cold and we look like we're warm," Cowen tells us, between takes. "Season one was freezing cold. This has been better though, because we started in summer."

POWER STRUGGLE

That first season of *Fate: The Winx Saga* debuted on Netflix in January 2021. A live-action reimagining of Nickelodeon's long-running *Winx Club* cartoon, it wasn't, first time round at least, a frontline series for the streamer, yet there's no sign today that they've gone into this second season at anything less than full throttle. This is TV production on a truly feature-film scale, which is only fitting considering where we left the series. "There's a war on the horizon," Rosalind told



Hannah van der Westhuysen as Stella (front).



Abigail Cowen as Bloom, making an entrance.

Dowling just before snapping her neck. "The Burned Ones are nothing compared to what's coming." Oof.

Showrunner Brian Young knows something about working on big-budget YA shows. A veteran of *The Vampire Diaries*, he has characterised that first series of *Fate* as the one that explored the question "Who am I?". When we first met fire fairy Bloom at the beginning of that season, she was attempting to work out her place in the world. By its end she'd discovered that she was a changeling – a fairy who'd been sent to the First World as a baby, where she was swapped with a human child and raised as, well, a muggle, to borrow another franchise's term.

"I always try and think of what's a question that people this age will be asking themselves?" Young tells *SFX*, as we shelter from the cold in the estate's spacious greenhouse. "Season two, the question we talked about was, 'What am I going to be when I grow up?' When you're at this age, you're starting to figure out, what does my life look like when I'm out of this school environment, when I'm out into the world? And for these fairies, what does their life look like with these powers?"

"For Bloom, specifically, she has this thing which she comes to learn over the course of the second season, that she has this really special thing inside of her, so what does that mean for her life? The idea that she's going to be an artist or an engineer is not a reality any more, because she has this massive power inside of her and has a bigger destiny. How do you wrestle with that when you had a more normalised idea for what your life was gonna be? I think that's part of the journey everyone on the show is going to have in season two."

"At the beginning of this season, Bloom

is kind of coming into herself," says Cowen, who came to *Fate* off the back of a recurring role in the similarly teen-skewed *Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina*. "She's more confident, but maybe a little too confident, kind of cocky. And then in the middle and towards the end [of the season] she kinda falls flat on her face and realises that she's not as much in control as she thought. So it's a big learning experience for her. Towards the end, I think there's more of a balance and a peace within her about her powers."

"In season one, Bloom was asking, 'What is my backstory?'" Young adds. "In season two, she starts the season realising the sacrifices and the actions that she took had some pretty

“This year you're coming into something kind of fascist”

disastrous consequences for her and her friends. So there is a resistance, I think, at the beginning of season two, where Bloom is a little bit worried about the answers that she would find if she continues looking. As our mythology expands, the core of who Bloom is is going to be important to that. And obviously, that's going to be something that she still has to figure out. We'll answer some questions in season two, but there'll be more questions for season three."

A big change for this second season is that Queen Luna (played with icy relish by Kate Fleetwood) and her army of jackboots are now in charge of Alfea. If there was a criticism often made of series one, it was that things were maybe a bit too cosy; that it was a bit cookie-



Terra (Eliot Salt) and friend get into trouble.

Andreas (Ken Duken) gets his collar felt. Literally.

cutter about those high school scenes. Looking around at the sheer number of mean, paramilitary gear-clad extras here today, that's not a brickbat anyone's likely to throw at this second season.

"In series one, it was a little bit more like you would expect from a school environment," says Eliot Salt, who plays the socially awkward earth fairy Terra. "This year you're coming into something very terrifying and it's very military and kind of fascist, the energy. The uniforms are a lot more severe and there are armed guards everywhere."

So what of that skirmish we were watching being rehearsed outside, where a gaggle of stunt performers were clanking their swords in what looked like an epic battle for the heart of Alfea? "That's a big battle that's going to film later today," confides Young, his face beaming at the sheer budget-busting ambition of what he has planned for this season.

"Our new villains are the Blood Witches and, just to give a little bit of context, one of their powers is their ability to take over the minds of our characters. So some of our Specialists [the school's non-magical, sword-wielding pupils] are fighting their friends and their allies who

have been taken over, as well as the Blood Witches themselves. It's super exciting. David Moore, who's our block three director, is a genius. In Covid times, it's difficult to rally as many extras as you would normally be able to rally, but with some VFX help and with some clever filming we're able to fill out our world."

That's for today, but what of *Fate: The Winx Saga's* future? With 208 episodes of *Winx Club* to draw from, not to mention a plethora of spin-offs including *PopPixie* and *World Of Winx*, Young and his writers have much to draw on.

"It's kind of an embarrassment of riches, just in terms of the amount of mythology that the original source material has," Young says. "For us, it's really about trying to figure out what part of that fits into a YA world. But I think the tricky thing with any Young Adult show is how do we maintain this bubble that they exist in? For me, part of the DNA of the series is them all together. But obviously, we're all creative people and we can come up with ways to keep them in each other's orbit."

For the moment, Young is just keen for fans to savour *this* season, which he stresses is much bigger and much more emotionally charged than the first. "Knowing that it was going to be bigger, we've had more second unit days, more VFX, more everything, to be completely honest," he smiles proudly. "The benefit of a season two show is that if season one is successful, it gives you the ability to expand all the things that made season one great!"

Fate: The Winx Saga is on Netflix from 26 September.

Wing Team

Five iconic fairies from the big screen

Tinker Bell (Peter Pan)

The most iconic fairy of all, whose fame has transcended the original 1904 story, Tinker Bell has been spun off countless times into her own movies, including 2008's *Tinker Bell*, the first of the Mouse House's Disney Fairies franchise. Imagine if the Disney Shop ran out of outfits...



The Green Fairy (Moulin Rouge!)

She may only feature in Baz Luhrmann's cosmically camp musical for less than a minute, but Kylie Minogue's cameo as the green fairy is one of the most memorable moments in a film stuffed with them. Her rendition of "The Sound Of Music", which starts off angelic before becoming increasingly sultry, is priceless.



Cherlindrea (Willow)

Time will tell whether "the lally maiden of the forest" from Ron Howard's 1988 movie will be making a return in Disney+'s forthcoming revival. Played by Swedish actress Maria Holvöe, Cherlindrea was the fairy queen who bestows Willow with her wand and sends him off to find Fin Raziel.



The Fairy Godmother (Cinderella)

In *Cinderella*, the fairy godmother blesses our titular hero with a stunning dress, glass slippers and, of course, a carriage made from a pumpkin. As fairies go, she's the top dog, able to transform anything and everything, such as changing rats and lizards into coachmen.



Tooth Fairies (Hellboy 2: The Golden Army)

Most fictional fairies tend to be graceful, peaceful and celestially beautiful. Not so the Tooth Fairies from Guillermo del Toro's *Hellboy* sequel. These vicious little critters are kinda what you'd get if you crossed Tinker Bell with a piranha. The fairies of del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* were less fright-inducing.

