

## Fatalistic Attraction: Damon and Blunt Deny Destiny in Adjustment Bureau

By BRAD BARTH 03.03.2011



It's an age-old philosophical debate: free will vs. fate. Do we shape our world through our own individual choices, or are our destinies all part of a master plan that was predetermined long in advance?

Well, if you believe Universal Pictures' *The Adjustment Bureau*, the answer is the latter — only the master plan is executed by a covert unit of mysterious agents in fancy fedoras. Working for an unspecified higher power known simply as "The Chairman," these dapper agents of fate are responsible for scripting the future of mankind.

Now imagine what would happen if you accidentally caught a glimpse of these agents rewriting your life story, and you didn't like the ending. That's what happens to senatorial candidate David Norris (Matt Damon) when he stumbles upon The Adjustment Bureau's plan to come between him and Elise (Emily Blunt), the woman of his dreams, who just happens to be the one person standing in the way of his ultimate destiny. With agents tossing every improbable obstacle in Matt's way, from conveniently dropped cell phone signals to orchestrated car accidents, Matt realizes he must take on fate itself in his pursuit of true love.

Whether we believe in fate or not, most of us experience moments in our lives when we feel as if something was meant to be, that the outcome was written in the stars. For instance, if life had unfolded differently for Blunt as a teenager, she'd probably be watching *The Adjustment Bureau* at her local movie theater, instead of starring in it.

"I had this really impressive idea that I was going to be a translator for the UN and be fluent in Spanish," said Blunt during her film's press junket last month. The first step toward that lofty goal was to get into the fiercely competitive Westminster School in London, which her older sister had attended. Much to her dismay, however, her application was rejected. "I remember at 16 just being devastated and my life was over."

Blunt was forced to settle for her second-choice school, which boasted an excellent drama department. "I previously hadn't considered acting, but I did a play through my school that went to the Edinburgh Festival," she continued. "I got an agent, he's still my agent, and now I'm here with you nice people. And if I had gone to Westminster I wouldn't be doing this job, guaranteed."

Not to be outdone, Damon recalled his most fateful decision — agreeing to play the role of a conjoined twin in the outrageous Farrelly Brothers comedy *Stuck on You*. At the time, Damon had been considering accepting the lead role in Werner Herzog's soldier drama *Rescue Dawn*, which eventually went to Christian Bale.

"I remember talking to my mother and my mother said, 'You know, you don't always have to go into a jungle and lose a bunch of weight. You're allowed to have a little fun,'" Damon recalled. "I did the Farrelly Brothers movie and that was where I met my wife."

*Mad Men* silver fox John Slattery, who plays a middle-management boss at the Bureau, doesn't really believe in fate — "I think we're all a product of the decisions we make," he said — but even he had to admit that his next big project practically fell into his lap as if it were in the cards.

After pursuing the movie rights to a certain unnamed book for the better part of a decade, Slattery recently attended a concert and ended up sitting next to the rights holder, who happily gave them up. "You go, well, maybe this was the next thing I was meant to do," said Slattery. "I think some signs are hard to ignore, but I really think it's a lot of luck."

Fate even seemed to play a hand in the making of the movie itself. Screenwriter and first-time director George Nolfi (*Ocean's Twelve*, *Bourne Ultimatum*) recounted shooting a key scene with Damon on a Hudson River ferry boat in New York.

"It was a fairly long scene and I wanted it to be visually very controlled, very ordered, composed, almost postcard-like shots," said Nolfi. "And we got out there and had this amazing weather, which is exactly what I wanted, which was this suggestion of rain."

Midway through the shoot, however, the crew grew concerned as the overcast sky gave way to a blazing sun. The suddenly bright backdrop no longer matched up with all of the previously shot footage, leading to the distinct possibility that the scene would have to be scrapped altogether. But just as the crew was ready to resume shooting, this time from the opposite point of view, "the clouds came in and then it actually looked almost identical" to the earlier conditions.

Nolfi can only hope that fate continues to favor *The Adjustment Bureau* when it opens in theaters on March 4. Only time will tell if filmgoers choose to exercise their free will and go see it.