

Up

Behind the Scenes
of the New Movie

BY BEKAH WRIGHT

Let's say you sold balloons at the zoo and found out you were about to lose your home. What would you do? If you were Carl in the new movie *Up*, you'd tie your house to 10,000 helium balloons and fly to the most beautiful place on Earth, Paradise Falls. There's just one problem: A kid named Russell has accidentally hitched a ride. Now Carl must survive in a strange land *and* figure out how to get Russell home. Is the weird world of *Up* anything like the real one? NG KIDS finds out.

ROCK STARS

To get his house to Paradise Falls, Carl ties it to himself and Russell so they can pull it like a gigantic parade balloon. Then they maneuver through a gallery of crazy rock formations that look like turtles, birds, and people. Real tabletop mountains also have strange rock formations on top, created by wind and other weather. "There are giant boulders balancing on three-inch rocks," says Steve May, the film's supervising technical director. The natural sculptures are so eerie that natives believed evil spirits lived among the formations.

TALKING DOGS, CRAWLING TOAD

It's scary enough that Russell and Carl have to escape a pack of dogs by jumping down a cliff, rock by rock, using their balloons to slow their descent. What's even scarier is that someone has equipped the yelping dogs with high-tech collars that translate their thoughts into words. In reality, you wouldn't meet any wild or domesticated dogs on top of tepuis. The tabletops are so isolated that many animals that *do* live there aren't found anywhere else—and are pretty strange. Take one tiny South American toad called *Oreophrynella*. It crawls instead of hops!

MONSTER OR MYTH?

Carl has heard of an explorer who disappeared searching for a mythical, giant bird near Paradise Falls. Could a bird that Russell names Kevin be the Monster of Paradise Falls? We're not telling, but we *can* say that no such bird exists in real life. More than 60 million years ago, though, a monstrous bird did roam South America. Known as the terror bird, this flightless predator was 10 feet tall and may have run at speeds of more than 30 miles an hour.

SETTING THE TABLETOP

Carl tries to land when he realizes he's flown away with Russell aboard, but a savage storm blows them off course. They land on a bizarre, cloud-shrouded mountain with a long, flat top. Called tepuis (teh-POOH-ees), tabletop mountains like this actually exist in Venezuela's Canaima National Park, which inspired moviemakers. More than a mile and a half high, the cliff-like tabletops have lush cloud forests on their slopes. Some areas are so wet that slimy algae, which thrives in moist environments, thickly coats tree trunks and branches, says tepui expert Adrian Warren.

Until the late 19th century, no one knew what was on top of tepuis. These mysterious mountains are thought to have inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—who created Sherlock Holmes—to write *The Lost World*, a 1912 novel about a forgotten land of dinosaurs and prehistoric humans.

WATERFALL MINUS WATER

Carl is confused when he thinks the bare tepui is all there is to Paradise Falls. Then he spies the awe-inspiring waterfall in the distance. The movie's made-up waterfall is based on Venezuela's Angel Falls, the tallest waterfall on Earth. It's so high up that the water vaporizes into mist before it hits the ground 3,212 feet down. "Sometimes you can stand right under the falls and barely get wet," Warren says.

VENEZUELA'S ANGEL FALLS

The Monster of Paradise Falls is based on several real birds. The film's artists gave the creature the legs of an ostrich, the beak and head feathers of a toucan and peacock, and the strut of a heron.