

Wide Awake for “Wake Wood”

Written by Jorge Solis

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Thanks to our friends at Dark Sky Films, New York audiences were given a chance to preview Hammer Films' WAKE WOOD (which releases July 5 on disc) at an exclusive FANGORIA screening this past week. Co-writer/director David Keating attended the premiere and also held a Q&A session afterward, which you can check out below...

WAKE WOOD tells the story of a loving couple (GAME OF THRONES' Aidan Gillen and THE CHILDREN'S Eva Birthistle), who lost their daughter (Ella Connolly) in a tragic accident. To escape from the grief and with their marriage on the rocks, the mourning parents seek solace at the strange town of Wakewood. The weird residents offer the parents a chance to resurrect the daughter from the grave—for only three days. To see their daughter one more time, will this grieving couple accept the offer or relive an even darker nightmare?



When asked where the inspiration came from, Keating jokingly replies, “This is actually a documentary, and there are a lot of places in Ireland like this! It was just an idea that producer/screenwriter Brendan McCarthy came up with. He is a really old friend of mine. I happened to be a professor at his MA screenwriting course that year. I had a box of scripts, and I read his last. I called him up and just said, ‘Congratulations. I was really worried about

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reading your script. I thought it was going to be terrible. I think it could be a movie.' He thanked me, called me back, and asked if I wanted to direct it. It was in the very early stages, a dissertation piece. The basic idea was certainly there. It came from his sick mind and the fact that his father and mine were qualified veterinarian surgeons. We do like animals!"

Though some of the film's themes were inspired by W. W. Jacob's classic short story "The Monkey's Paw" and Stephen King's modern riff PET SEMATARY, the director felt his picture stood on its own. "It wasn't hard to avoid other films, because the proposition became quite clear to me at least," Keating says. "I was sure that I wanted to make a film about how much people love their kids. McCarthy and I were pursuing that as an idea, which is interesting to me. It doesn't really matter if other people have explored that before."

With its brooding Gothic vibe, the film harkens back to the style of the British horror movies of the '60s and '70s. "I like lots of films of different periods, but I'm particularly fond of the 1970s," Keating says. "I think it's because it had to do with the filmmakers who were working at that time. The structures were evolving within the film industry and also in society. My favorite horror films were certainly from that decade. Because this felt like a '70s horror film, I felt the challenge became, 'Can we make a contemporary film which modern audiences would relate to?' That was the kind of target that we set up from the beginning."

When asked if the movie was easy to get financed, Keating notes, "It was easier than other things I tried to do. I very nearly made an awful lot of films, if you follow me. It's very easy to almost make a film. It's very difficult to get them across the line. What happened with this film is we had backing from the Irish Film Board and a UK distributor that I had a relationship with. And then, somewhere in the development, Hammer studios became involved. We were determined to make the film at whatever money we could raise."

Further explaining WAKE WOOD's involvement with the legendary Hammer, "It is still the same company, although it's owned by different people," Keating says. "A group of financiers got together and the company bought the back catalog. It's been a long time ago since Hammer made a film, since the '70s. They made one Irish film and two big budget films here in the U.S., LET ME IN and THE RESIDENT. They have a slew of projects they're working on."

Keating had nothing but praise for his WAKE WOOD cast. "I wanted to make a film with Irish actors because it would be easier to create a reality, not that we were saying, 'This is Ireland,' " he says. "I've known Gillen for a long time; he is a funny guy. I've been tracking Birthistle for a

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long time. I thought she was capable of carrying off the role. Timothy Spall is a fantastic guy. He is just a little bit off from becoming an English national treasure, sometime in July [HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART 2]. He comes from the Royal Shakespeare Company and is very into improvisation."

The filmmaker also mentioned how he directed child actress Ella Connolly, who boasts a frightening dominance in WAKE WOOD. "I try to find a common ground with actors," Keating says. "I let them understand what kind of person I am. I try to get them to understand who they are. I like to spend time with the people I'm working with. I like to meet with them, cook for them and hang out with them. When I met Connolly, I learned she is a serious martial artist. Martial art is about balance, focus and practice. She taught me Tae-Kwan-Do Kata, and we practiced together. I tried to be clear and open as possible."

Keating also drops hints about his next possible project, THE CHERRY TREE. "If WAKE WOOD is about how people love their kids, this is about how much a daughter loves her father," he says. "This is about a single dad and his 16-year-old daughter. To save his life, she has the devil's baby."

For more on WAKE WOOD, see FANGORIA #305, on sale this month.