

AJ ANNILA TALKS “NUMBER 13”



FANGORIA: Tell me about the film you're working on right now.

ANNILA: NUMBER 13, It's a survival thriller that we're doing with the Finnish producer Tero Kaukomaa from Timo [Vuorensola]'s film [IRON SKY], Canadian producer Dean English and the German production company and sales agent Picture Tree International. It has wolves and humans in it.

It started with an idea a couple of years ago when I wrote the first draft, and then Doug Taylor who wrote SPLICE came on board from Canada. We wrote a couple drafts together and then we had one more writer - who actually wrote SAUNA - and now it's a collaboration of three writers. And it's a story about this group of wolf scientists that track down this very isolated wolf pack in Northern Canada in order to GPS-collar them. And all of a sudden they run into a bloody and naked stranger running in the frozen tundra. They give shelter to this man, and then find themselves surrounded by this very aggressive wolf pack. And when the identity of the stranger is revealed, it also unleashes the hidden motive of the human characters who start to act almost like animals. It's a film that finds the true difference between wolves and humans, because there are hundreds of similarities between humans and wolves but there's only one difference - and that is our capability to lie to ourselves. That's the unique talent that only the humans possess in the animal kingdom. Because even a wolf can lie, but they can never lie to him or herself. And we can do that. It's a very claustrophobic survival thriller.



And we're working with a pack of amazing wolves. Almost the entire first act we are just following the wolves, almost like looking at a nature documentary. And so we needed to find the best wolves in the film business, and we found them in Canada. We are working with a pack of 16 trained wolves that are working with an animal trainer called Andrew Simpson. I went to meet these wolves three years ago already, because that was the first thing we needed when we just had a treatment. If we couldn't find a wolf trainer then this film would be impossible to make, because we need to do some strange things with the wolves. And we would never have the 60 million dollar budget to do it digitally, and that always looks fake anyway. So I went to meet the wolves and I had storyboarded segments from the film where the wolves needed to act schizophrenic. And I thought we would have to do everything in separate shots, but he just brought in a big wolf and said "calm" and he just sat still looking into my eyes. And then he made a signal and it started to bare its teeth to me. And then another signal and it started to submit. So



FANG: Did you get to pet any of the wolves?

ANNILA: Yes, yes. But they are really wise animals, because when I go to their fenced area, I'm a man, I have a beard, so they don't trust me. They circle around you, they don't come close to you; their ears are pointed back. They only come to me when the trainer tells them to. But still they don't trust me. And my wife works with animals, so she insisted that I take her to meet the wolves also. And immediately when they see my wife they all come running to her. They smell her once and then lay on the ground waiting for belly-rubs.

FANG: I'm a big animal freak so I'm always jealous when people get to make films that allow them to pet and touch all these animals.

ANNILA: Those are the most beautiful days in developing this film, because they are amazing animals. I'm surprised people even bother to do digital wolves in their films, because they can do anything.

FANG: Would you ever make a movie with just animals and no humans?

ANNILA: I would love to do that, because people are the hardest part of filming.

FANG: There aren't enough films made with just animals that aren't made for children. You know, that aren't nature documentaries, and aren't made for children. THE BEAR is the only one I can think of.

ANNILA: Our wolf trainer Andrew has actually been in China for the last three years, working with the director of THE BEAR. They're doing one of the biggest wolf films in history, WOLF TOTEM. So it was very lucky that we found him, that he fell in love with our story, and that then the biggest animal director in the world scooped him up too, it just proves my point that he's the best.



they are really amazing animals, and they are working for sausages. After every good take they get a piece of sausage. And of course I'm going to do that with the human actors also [laughs].