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COOTIES AND THE BOY**

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CAST AND CREW TALK VAMPIRE END TIMES

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FEATURING MICHAEL IRONSIDE



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SATANIC PANIC

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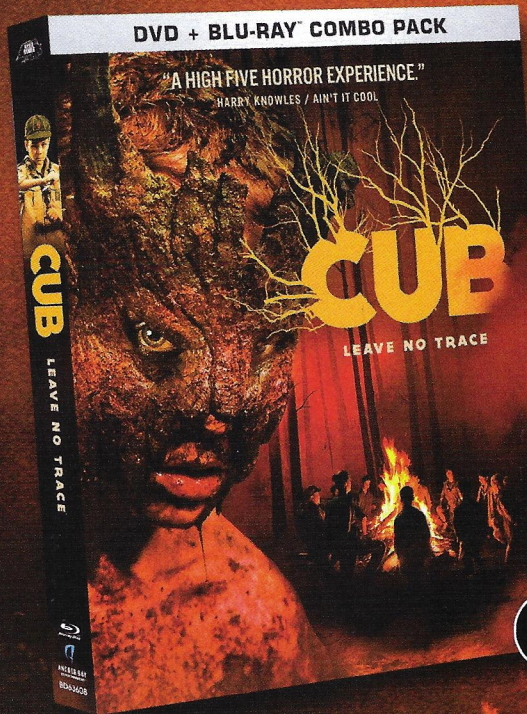
JAPAN'S LOST KONG MOVIE

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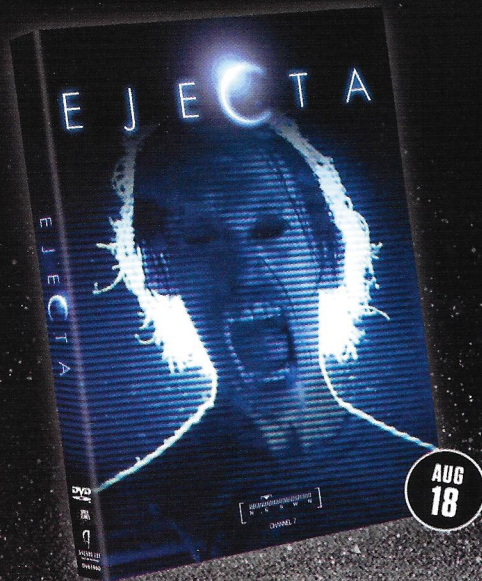
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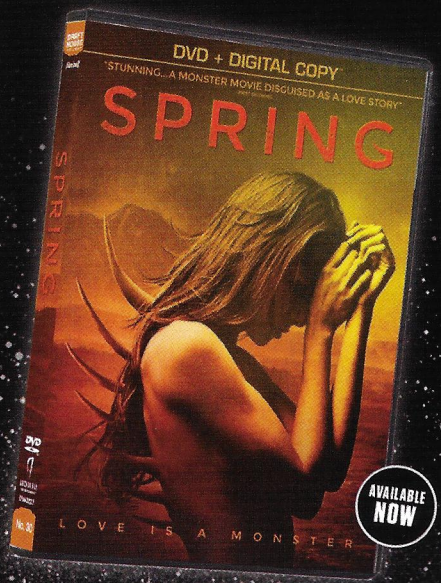
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"KINETIC AND BRUTAL."
JAY HAWKINSON/BLOODY DISGUSTING



**HORROR
COMIN AT YA
FROM ALL
ANGLES**



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BELGIAN FILMMAKER JONAS GOVAERTS DEFENDS HIS TABOO-BREAKING
CUB, WHICH PUSHES THE HORROR GENRE IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE NEW
DIRECTION WITH ITS BRUTAL BOY SCOUT HOMICIDES

KILLING

Kids
by DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ





CHILDREN ARE PROBABLY THE LAST REMAINING TABOO, HORROR'S FINAL FRONTIER. IN SPITE OF THE TIRED TROPE OF "KID IN PERIL" BEING SO COMMON IN THE GENRE, CHILDREN ARE MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A PROTECTED SPECIES. So sweet, pure and angelic, they are perfect as victims, although threats to them are rarely realized fully, and a lot of sensitivity is needed in those rare cases when the story demands that they come to a bad end (as in, say, *Pet Semetary*). Things get even more complicated if kids are not only on the receiving end of violence but are also its perpetrators. For obvious reasons, ghost kids of *The Grudge* kind are safe to use (and overuse), but real flesh-and-blood psychos of the preteen variety (à la *The Good Son*, 1993) are a touchier matter, especially in America, with its high rates of school violence and shootings. Because of all the real-life horrors, kiddie terror in the movies has to be moved far into the realm of fantasy and supernatural.

Then Jonas Govaerts comes along, director of the Belgian horror movie *Cub (Welp)*, who's unafraid to use both "kid in peril" and "killer kid" scenarios without resorting to the supernatural — at least as anything more than a hint. In his film a Scout troop goes camping in a forest allegedly haunted by a feral kid called Kai who can turn into a werewolf at night. It's a fun story to chill your bones around campfire, right?

Well, there may be some truth to it after all, as a shy and bullied boy named Sam (Maurice Luijten) soon discovers when he meets not only Kai (Gill Eeckelaert) but also his adult mentor. The man is given neither name nor back story: the director refers to him as "Poacher," but his motives in the film are unclear. He's a psycho who lives in a series of tunnels under the woods and surfaces to set various booby traps in the foliage. The boy, who sports a creepy wooden mask helps him, though we're not sure why.

To make matters worse for Sam, the Scouts like to pick on him, some of the Scout leaders are less than kind and a few of the locals have it out for the campers. It also means there are plenty of victims for the Poacher, whose weapons of choice include spikes and bees — sometimes together. Somehow, Sam has to survive all this. No one ever said growing up was easy, but in *Cub* it's downright brutal.

So many horror films are based on the formula of teens/young adults going into the woods to party and meeting their fate at the end of the boogeyman's blade. And yet, so few have gone back to the origin of



Cruel Summer: (from top) Sam (Maurice Luijten) is bullied, tales are told around the campfire, and (opposite) the feral Kai (Gill Eeckelgaert).

the woods archetype; fairy tales such as "Little Red Riding Hood," "Hansel and Gretel" and "Babes in the Wood," and even fewer have had the guts to place actual children in that environment. *Cub* returns to the root of the story, which



has to do with basic fears of the dark, of abandonment and solitude. This is the central childhood fear, which never leaves us: that of being left alone, with no parents or friends around, and forced to fend for ourselves, surrounded by darkness and wild beasts.

Sam is that archetypal child: an orphan whose solitude is even greater due to his wild imagination, silence and mysteriousness which make him an out-

sider among his peers. The world of adults, as presented in *Cub*, is neither particularly heart-

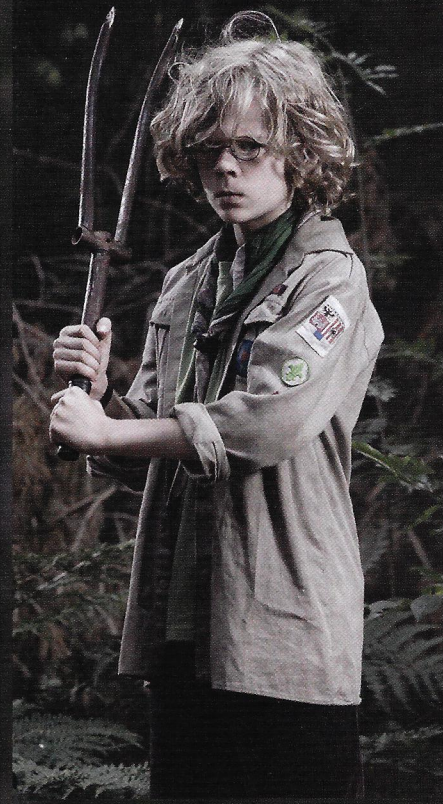
warming nor all-embracing and, apart from one female Scout leader, is either indifferent or openly hostile to our small protagonist. When one is stranded among jerks both juvenile and adult, even a werewolf boy might become desirable as a friend. But how will our young cub react when he meets the Big Bad Wolf? That encounter deserves to be seen — on DVD and Blu-ray, coming from Artsploitation on August 18.

In order to celebrate its release and enlighten North American viewers after numerous successful festival screenings all over the world, Govaerts sheds some torchlight on his debut feature.

The inevitable questions: what is the origin of this story? How did it come to be? Are there any autobiographical elements in it?

I was a Scout for many years; my totem was Imaginary Toucan. To earn my totem, my lead-





Boyhood Boogeyman: Kai emerges from the woods to terrorize the preteen campers, and one Scout arms himself for battle.

ers gave me the assignment to protect our campsite from the “evil locals.” I remember making all kinds of silly booby traps from ropes, backpacks, axes, flashlights... So that must’ve been where the original idea came from. I was also surprised there had never been a slasher film featuring Scouts; it seems like such an ideal concept since a scouting trip is the perfect excuse to venture deep into the woods. Since I knew the Scout world and its traditions so well, it seemed only logical to set my first film in that arena. Write what you know, as my teachers often said!

How did you conceive the “monster kid,” Kai, both in visual terms and in terms of what he stands for in the story? Why is there a killer kid at all if there is a grown-up psycho as well?

Simply put, Kai is Sam’s dark side. He’s there to wake up Sam’s hidden urges. Kai’s a primal force, so his look had to be primal, too. His moves and sounds were based on different animals, from birds to apes, and his bark mask was inspired by pagan designs. I wanted something basic yet instantly iconic: not a simple task when there are already so many horror masks out there. Please note, though, that Kai is not a “killer kid.” The only thing he kills in the film is the dog. He’s really the Poacher’s little helper, a slave almost. The Poacher and Kai are a

ONE OF THE REASONS I LOVE HORROR IS THAT THE GENRE ACTIVELY INVITES YOU TO PUSH BOUNDARIES.

— Jonas Govaerts

team, each with a specific function. This dysfunctional family dynamic was important to me because I really see *Cub* as an adoption story. Some people seem confused or even angered by this twist, probably because it goes against standard slasher rules, whatever they may be. But I find these shifting alliances much more interesting than having yet another lone, single-minded, unstoppable killer. I’m the first to admit it’s told in very broad strokes, but then

again, *Cub* is first and foremost a horror film, not a domestic drama about abuse.

Tell us about casting kids for this film, especially Sam and Kai. What qualities were you looking for in the child actors, and how did you direct them through such a violent story?

It was really a mix of common sense, hard work and dumb luck. I found my lead Maurice first, before I even started casting: a cameraman showed me a short he was in [*The Gift*, directed by Ralf Demesmaeker] and when Maurice showed up, looking like a young River Phoenix, I instinctively knew I’d found my Sam. After that, we set out to create a troop of cubs that would look and sound like an actual Scout troop: I didn’t want the kids to play characters, I wanted them to be themselves. So we chose a loudmouth to play the loudmouth, a good singer to play the good singer, and so on. We looked closely at which kids clicked best with others, and used their natural dynamic for the film. A lot of what you see and hear them



do is encouraged improvisation. They weren't around for the more horrific scenes, but honestly, I doubt they would've been shocked by them. Twelve-year-olds today are very hard to impress!

Was Kai more difficult to cast?

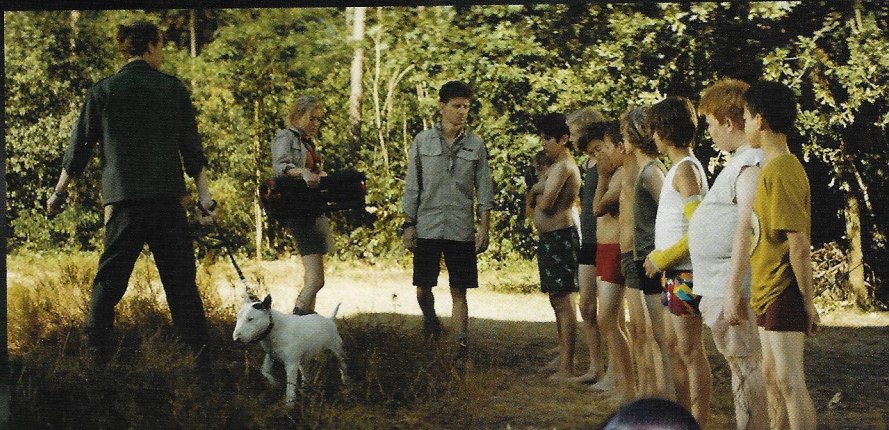
The hardest part was casting the feral child, Kai. Gill was one of the last boys we saw, after auditioning many, many kids, from circus schools, sport schools. ... It helped that he had a background in musicals, and was a bit older than the rest, which meant he responded a bit better to technical direction. He had a movement coach on set, a talented lady called Philine Janssens, and did a lot of stunt training in advance, along with Maurice and the adult actors. I often forget to mention him because he's masked for the entire film, but I think him and Maurice are equally impressive, in very different ways.

Did you have any doubt regarding a plot in which children kill and are killed? How about your producers?

One of the reasons I love horror is the genre actively invites you to push boundaries. So I saw the unspoken "never kill the kids" rule as a challenge. How far is too far? By not sparing the children for a change, I knew the movie would automatically feel a bit more fresh, bold and original. But instinct also told me I couldn't show those kids dying graphically; nobody wants to see that, the audience would just tune out. That's why it's filmed the way it's filmed. Since we don't have a legitimate horror tradition in Belgian cinema, the producers and funders of *Cub* weren't really aware of the rules of the genre, so I probably got away with a lot more than I would have if I had made this film in America. Before shooting, I sent the script to my agent in LA; I recall him saying that if the film was ever to be remade, the kids would have to be at least sixteen...and the dog death scene would have to go. I think it's telling that the dog scene has caused much more of a stir than the scene with the kids. In cinema, we somehow value animal life over human life. Neither of those scenes is in there purely to shock, though: the dog scene functions as a vital turning point for the character of Sam, while the kids scene demonstrates just how high the stakes are raised at that point.

What are the tunnels and the whole structure beneath the woods? Who/what is The Poacher, and what is his motivation?

The Poacher's Lair was inspired by the Ark II, a [private] bomb shelter in Canada consisting of 40 school busses welded together and buried in the ground. The idea to



Suffer The Children: (from top) The Scouts are blamed for strange goings-on at the campsite, and Sam makes a terrible subterranean discovery.

I SAW THE UNSPOKEN 'NEVER KILL THE KIDS' RULE AS A CHALLENGE.

- Jonas Govaerts

include a death pit came from Dario Argento's *Phenomena*. There is mention of a closed-down bus factory in the beginning of the film, so you could assume the Poacher is a disgruntled ex-employee who went a bit psycho after losing his job, foraged what he needed from the factory and built himself an elaborate underground labyrinth. I always have to laugh when people question the logistics of the lair. This is not meant to be reality: we're seeing this world through the eyes of a twelve-year-old with a fevered imagination. Again, some people seem pissed off by the lack of back story when it comes to the Poacher, but that was a very deliberate choice. I can't stand horror films that grind to a halt just so we can hear the killer explain why he's doing what he's doing.

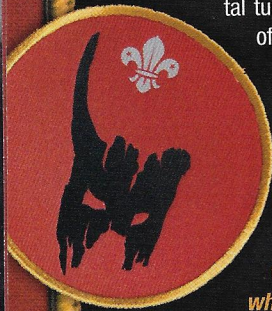
Why does Sam so easily turn to the dark

side? Doesn't that somehow justify his previous bullying, i.e. that he "had it in him all the time"?

Sam is more complex than you give him credit for. We don't know what the character has been through before we meet him, and thanks to the brilliant, ambiguous performance by Maurice, we're often not sure what he's thinking, either. He's a troubled boy who's being pushed closer and closer to the edge, until he finally snaps. But I wouldn't say he does it without a fight. There's a constant struggle between good and evil in him. It's only when he's betrayed by everyone around him that he finally breaks.

How has the film been received? I imagine you've had some angry responses.

It's proven to be a very divisive film, for sure! Some people find the lack of a cut-and-dry



back story for certain characters refreshing, others find it extremely frustrating. Some really appreciate the gradual tonal shift from playful and humorous to dark and bleak, others find it too jarring. It's been called a throwback slasher, but also a refreshing spin on the genre. ... The ending especially seems to divide people: for some, that's the point where the movie falls apart, others get that it's the only and inevitable conclusion to this particular tale and applaud the fact it has the balls to get so grim and nihilistic. Some reviews have made me feel like Orson Welles, others like Uwe Boll... I think I'll just change my name to Orson Boll! The weirdest responses came from French reviewers, though. They didn't give a shit about any dogs or kids getting hurt, they were mainly upset about the fact that all the bad guys are French, which isn't even true.

Was your movie crowd-funded? How did that work out?

That's actually a bit of a misunderstanding, which I'd like to set straight. *Cub* was going to get made no matter what; we already had funding from the Flemish Film Fund in place. The crowd-funding campaign [called Buy a Trap, Kill a Cub] was used more as a promotional tool; it gave the public a chance to actively participate in creating "the first Flemish horror movie," plus it gave us a ton of free media attention, as we

were the first Flemish full-length feature to utilize crowd-funding, at least on this scale. And it worked: not only did it buy us a whole extra shooting day, but everyone knew the film was coming a year in advance.

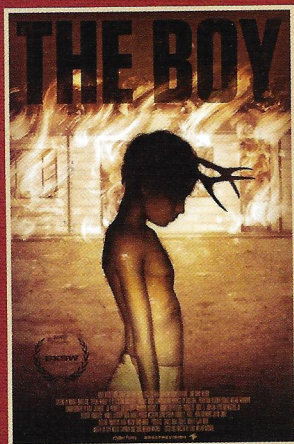
What is your next movie project?

If all goes well, my next project will be a heavy metal horror movie titled *Heads Will Roll*. For a little while in the '80s, people thought metal music was actually truly evil, and that's an idea I'd

really like to play with. Think Metallica's *Some Kind of Monster* but with an actual monster! The research for *Heads* has been interesting for sure: every day for the last couple of weeks I've watched a heavy metal horror movie, which was an actual horror subgenre for about ten years. Most of them are atrocious – *Blood Tracks*, *Rocktober Blood* – some are hilarious – *Black Roses*, *Rock 'N Roll Nightmare* – and a few of them are surprisingly good. I have a real soft spot for *Trick or Treat*. 🤘



Bleeder Of The Pack: Sam is tasted by the Poacher in his underground lair.



GROWING UP DEADLY

THE BOY

Starring Jared Breeze, David Morse and Rainn Wilson
 Directed by Craig William Macneill
 Written by Craig William Macneill and Clay McLeod Chapman
 SpectreVision

This film's title is reminiscent of other minimalistically named kid-dy-horrors, such as *The Child* (1977), *The Children* (1980/2008) and *Orphan* (2009). But be warned: *The Boy* is not your typical genre flick, but rather a moody indie drama with very dark

overtones, although it can also be watched, if you're so inclined, as a quiet, slowburn horror that delivers some chilling goods in its second half.

Nine-year-old Ted (Jared Breeze: *Cooties*) is an angelic blond boy who's obviously up to no good. Abandoned by his mother, left with his destitute dad (David Morse: *The Good Son*) to help him with a backroad motel, with no friends and too much free time on his hands, he grows from sociopath to psychopath. He leaves food for animals on the road to get them killed; one dead deer later, the man whose car killed the animal (Rainn Wilson: *Cooties*), ends up recuperating in their motel and bonding with Ted. But the child (pictured) sees people only as means to an end, namely to reunite with his mom in Florida.

There are some creepy moments here: the boy enters guests' rooms to watch them sleep; he ominously observes while his dad guts the deer (and

takes a special liking to its horns, placing them to his head in the fiery climax); and a chicken is kicked to death (offscreen) when his father decides to "freeze his assets" (the money Ted's been collecting for the bus ticket to Florida). The bearded guy will meet a nasty end, but it is nothing compared to what happens to a dozen obnoxious youths who come to the motel for their prom afterparty...

The Boy – intended to be the first film in a trilogy about Ted's transformation into a serial killer – is destined to be the other killer kid movie produced by Elijah Wood's *SpectreVision* label, because *Cooties* will probably get all the spotlight with its crowd-pleasing effects. Pity if that happens because *The Boy* is a strikingly clever, layered, ominous and atmospheric chiller for the patient and discerning viewer, with stunning widescreen cinematography by Noah Greenberg. Show this boy your love, not neglect, and you will be rewarded.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

