

NO MATTER YOUR AGE, IF YOU CROSS THE  
CHILD EATER, HE'LL BE THE LAST THING  
YOU EVER SEE

# TENDER MORSELS

by  
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**T**HE SHORT FILM ISN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR SOME BOOGEYMEN, AS EVIDENCED BY *MAMA* AND *LIGHTS OUT*, WHICH WERE ADAPTED INTO MAJOR FEATURES. The most recent example, *Child Eater*, has much in common with Jalmari Helander's *Rare Exports*, which also made a similar leap and was inspired by Scandinavian dark Christmas folklore.

"I'm from Iceland," says *Child Eater* writer/director Erlingur Óttar Thoroddsen, "and we have a lot of weird Christmas legends there. I love mythology and stuff like that, so I wanted to do something that explored it."

Thoroddsen drew specifically on tales of thirteen thieving Yuletide creatures and their mother, who steals bad children from their homes on Christmas Eve, takes them to her mountain abode and devours them.

"I didn't want to tell that story, necessarily," he recalls, "but that weird, almost-human figure that takes children away and eats them always stuck with me. I decided to combine that with a lot of other, different ideas, done with the surreal feeling of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*."

The result was the fourteen-minute *Child Eater*, made by Thoroddsen and producer Perri Nemiroff while they were attending Columbia University's film school. It played a bunch of festivals, yet its creators didn't have plans to turn it into a feature — at first. They eventually realized they had more story to flesh out of the concept.

The full-length *Child Eater*, out from MVD this month, follows the same basic premise as its predecessor, and features the same lead actress, Cait Bliss. She plays Helen, a babysitter looking after a boy named Lucas (played by Cameron Ocasio

— the kid in *Sinister* who barbecues his family — in the short, and by Colin Critchley in the feature). When Lucas is spirited off into the night by Robert Bowery, the eponymous villain with a taste for the eyes of his victims, Helen must rescue him. In the feature, she travels to the Catskill Game Farm, a now-disused zoo in upstate New York.

A key shooting site, it's where this writer gets to see the wizened, goggle-wearing Child Eater (Jason Martin, buried under prosthetics) in action.

"When we found out about this place and were allowed to scout it for the first time, it just felt so right," Thoroddsen says. "In the short film, it was a summer camp Bowery built, and we knew we couldn't really fake that here, but there was already kind of an animal angle in the short, with some bird imagery, and there's a story in the movie about a black stork. So we felt, what if instead of having built a summer camp, he was the owner of this zoo, and that's how he lured kids to eat their eyes?"

It is indeed quite a freaky setting for Helen and Bowery to play their deadly game of cat and mouse. It's all part of the effort to make audiences as uncomfortable as possible — particularly as it centres on a child in danger.

"It was definitely one of the most challenging things on the short," says Nemiroff. "We debated for quite some time about how far to go with that, and we've been hit with similar questions on this one. Maybe not in the exact same way, but there are a couple of elements and a couple of people who die that almost made us uncomfortable doing it. I guess

that's the case when you kill anybody, depending on how you do it and how the audience is going to feel." 🐾

