

THE HALLOW

GROUNDNS

We trek into the wilds of Ireland to investigate the ancient creatures being given new screen life.

By OWEN WILLIAMS

Somewhere in the south of Ireland, FANGORIA is trapped in an attic. Specifically, we're at Co. Galway's Studio Solas, a production facility once used by Roger Corman. Today it's home to writer/director Corin Hardy and the evil forest sprites of his debut feature *The Hollow*. On a raised set accessible only by trapdoor, this writer is surrounded by clutter: old furniture and boxes, televisions, typewriters, birdcages, crockery, cushions, assorted wicker items and various other loft-space bric-a-brac. It's a large set, but feels cramped thanks to the addition of the necessary film equipment and the crew cramming themselves into corners to stay out of shot, stuck up here until the scene is complete and the exit becomes available again. The hatch creeps open and something begins to come through...another crewmember. "This is the lock-in, is it?" he grins.

This is one of relatively few days in the studio, with the majority of *The Hollow* being shot on location in a cottage and several forests some distance away in Letterfrack. "I like things to be as textured

and atmospheric as possible," Hardy says, "so I was adamant about doing as much on location as we could. We're shooting in five forests to get different sequences."

The Hollow (in theaters and on VOD from IFC Films) centers on Clare (Aussie actress Bojanka Novakovic) and her husband Adam (Joseph Mawle), whose job as a tree surgeon has taken the bickering couple and their newborn son out to the edge of some rural Irish wilds. There, in an isolated house from which they've unwisely removed all the protective iron from the windows, they ignore the advice of the locals—to their increasing peril, as they find that the Good People of the forest are far from whimsical storybook fairy-folk. Right now, the cameras are capturing Mawle as he painstakingly investigates with a flashlight, having heard something go bump in the night.

"On one level," Mawle says later, "Adam's journey is fantastical, a very dark fairy tale: the scientist becoming primal. Adam and Clare still have secrets from each other, which I think makes them more tenable, somehow. Rather than

being a perfect married couple, they have difficulties. In many ways, it's about intellect vs. instinct, and they become more instinctive as time goes on. By the end, they're starting to find themselves again, in terms of each other and as parents. Adam is a father, but not a 'dad,' really. But by the conclusion of the film, that has changed."

Back in the attic, the crew has moved on to the next sequence, and Fango watches with some trepidation as an elongated hand with gnarled wooden fingers gropes its spindly way through that trapdoor—a Hollow attempting to get at Novakovic. The twiggy digits are a complex animatronic system; the only CGI

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—Corin Hardy, writer/director

planned here is in the interests of post-production finessing. *The Hollow* is otherwise an all-practical affair—a loving homage to the creature features that inspired Hardy. "It's all about having seen Ray Harryhausen films as a kid and believing those creatures were real," he says. "I loved [British claymation character] Morph too, because he seemed to be of the real world."

The very first rehearsal take works perfectly, but the only person shooting it is Hardy with his iPhone, and it takes a while longer to repeat the shot for the official cameras. For three takes, the director plays the hand himself, roaring as he strains toward his lead actress, who screams back at him fit to bust a lung; Hardy will later decide he wants a *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*-influenced extreme close-up of her fear-anguished face. Both collapse laughing afterward. "I think I'm going to credit myself as Fake Shemp," Hardy beams, referencing the stunt doubles of Sam Raimi's films (check *The Hollow*'s end credits, and you'll see he did just that).

"I'm really proud that we've done [the effects] in camera as much as possible," he continues. "Originally, in my dream big-budget version of this film, the idea was that the whole forest comes to life. Gradually, as we began to make it, we realized we could only afford a relatively small number of creatures, but we're achieving a lot with them. I never wanted to do a CG army of *Lord of the Rings* goblins, but it does feel like we've got more than we actually have."

Finally escaping the attic, we decide to go and meet the Hollow for ourselves. A poke around the creature shop—the back of a truck—reveals various gruesome



A *Hollow* victory is its use of practical makeup and creature FX.

A baby dummy and a member of the crew helped one of the Hallow raise a child.



heads with names like *Crawler 2* and *Sinuous Hallow*. One of the performers who get to wear the masks is a contortionist, one is a dancer and one is a parkour expert; the latter's job at one point was to crawl 20 feet down a tree on a wire. The look is appropriately treelike and organic, with protruding twigs and sparse but sharp teeth. The creatures are blind, and the actors also have very low visibility within the suits. The animatronics in the headpieces mean they can't hear very well either.

Below the loft space are various other



Photo: Martin Maguire

The children of the forest threaten Clare (Bojanka Novakovic) and her little son.

set bits and small pockets of activity. One piece is a portion of a ruin near the cottage, well on its way to being reclaimed by the forest. Currently abandoned, it will later be the site of a scene in which Adam finds the Hallow Cora (Charlotte Williams) holding his baby. Our phone illuminates an amazing art-department job, with pillars surrounded by tree roots and dead wood; the mulch underfoot even makes it smell appropriately peaty.

Immediately adjacent are other little sections being used for 2nd-unit pickups: a small stone wall with a bluescreen behind it; a pile of leaves; a free-standing airing cupboard, currently being used for a shot where Cora snatches the baby through a hole in the top. The closet is artificially filthy, covered in black goo; you wouldn't want to keep your towels in it, much less a child. The infant's yellow blanket and powder-blue romper suit make for a stark contrast to the set design. The real babies are on set (twins are sharing the workload), and as Williams coos at them between takes, they don't seem fazed by her stick hands.

A stunt dummy is used for the actual abduction shot, and everybody holds it as if it's a real child. "It's just the easiest way to carry it," says a burly, bearded, shaven-headed FX guy unconvincingly, as he cradles it against his chest with its head on his shoulder. He adds that someone held it upside down one day, and he was horrified.

"You're never supposed to work with children or animals," Mawle laughs, "and here we are on Corin's first bloody film and it's animals, creatures, babies, blind actors, Australians playing English people..."

A few months later, in fall 2014, Fango catches up with Hardy during the editing process, when he has a bit more time to talk properly. The trip from London to the set involved a train, plane, coach and car—it took very nearly as long to get to Galway from London as it does to get to New York—but today is a leisurely hour's drive to Hardy's quaint home village of Chiddingfold, not far from Brighton. There's no mobile reception, and we can hear nothing but birdsong. The church clock chimes as, fittingly, we enter The Six Bells pub. As Fango waits inside with a pint for Hardy's arrival, a cat comes over, lies down and goes to sleep. It's that sort of place.

"I'd been living in London for 10 years and never thought I'd be able to do anything here again," Hardy explains on his arrival. "Time had moved on. But now I have a baby of my own and we've moved back here, and it made sense to try and bring the edit suite along." A cockerel crows outside, and Hardy laughs, "We keep thinking that's actually on the soundtrack while we're editing."

For Hardy, growing up in these idyllic surroundings, horror was "this other un-touchable world" of films he wasn't allowed to watch. He and a friend used to make trips up to London to buy Fango,

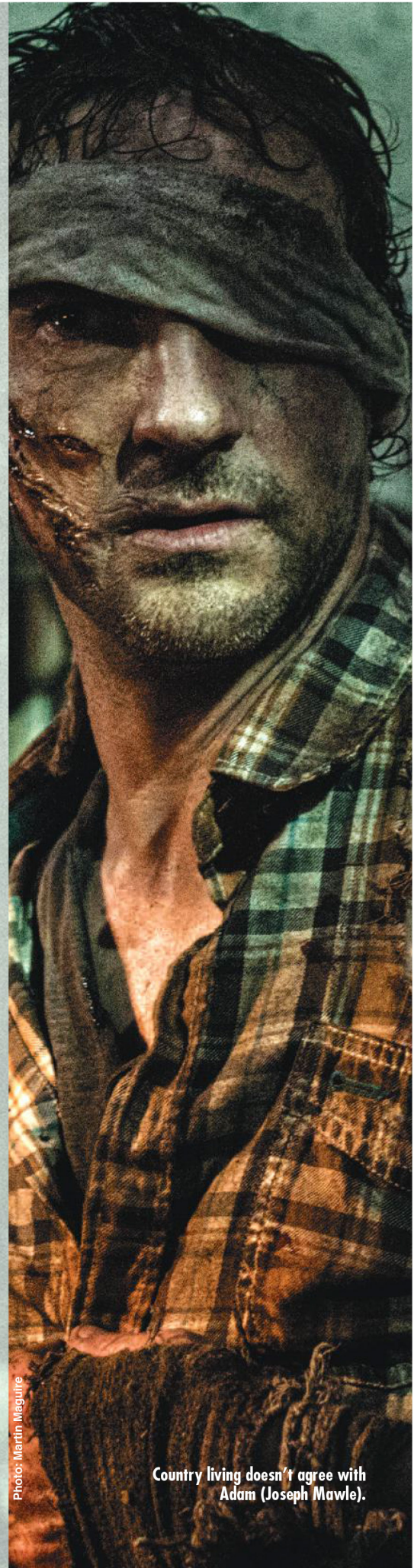


Photo: Martin Maguire

Country living doesn't agree with Adam (Joseph Mawle).



FX creator/animatronic designer John Nolan's achievements gave the production a big head.

kicking off his love of creature features. He was making monster movies on Super-8 from the age of 11: "We had blood pumps and squibs. We learned to edit in camera. I did it all in our bike shed." His TV-director father facilitated a meeting with FX legend Bob (*Hellraiser*) Keen in Hardy's early teens, and while his classmates were presumably painting still lifes of fruit bowls for their school art projects, Hardy was interviewing Harryhausen (who was rude about his foam-rubber dinosaur: "Too

explored too much outside of children's films. This is a sort of fairy home-invasion movie! It transforms from this real-world setting to a sort of fevered nightmare."

His mythology is the result of years of research, but doesn't specifically adhere to any particular folkloric source. "We've created our own stories based on the Good People [the film's original title; it was also known as *The Woods* for a time], or the fairies, or the Tuatha Dé Danann. There's so much folklore out there that I was orig-

inally almost trying to namecheck too much of it.

fat—he basically told me off!"). "I'm not really that computer-literate," he says now. "I was always more comfortable making things with my hands." For his award-winning animated short *Butterfly*—made in that bike shed over five years—"I built camera rigs out of shower-curtain rings and car jacks." That film led to music videos, which was "a way to tell short stories"; the cigarette-packet figures from his Prodigy video "Warrior's Dance" perch on a bookshelf in his house. *The Hallow* has been a long time coming, but it was clearly inevitable that he'd one day make a feature.

"My mission was always to create a horror movie," he says, "but I didn't want to do vampires or werewolves. I wanted to try and look for other ways of creating monsters, and fairies hadn't really been

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"That was one of the hardest things to get right in the screenplay," he continues. "The moment you start doing that, you face the problem of the rules not making sense, because there are so many and they're so widespread and mixed up. You want the movie to be driving forward, but you've got a couple who have to stop and boil water and pour it into halved eggshells and stuff like that. So a lot of the writing process involved balancing the mythology and reality, and then presenting it within a story that didn't need too much exposition."

The family home is a short walk around the corner from the pub. The bike shed now houses the aforementioned edit suite, through a theatrically creaky door, and a small sitting room that has become something of a *Hallow* museum, packed with the animatronic heads and copious design work (examples of which you can see below) that went into the film. "The creatures turned up in a big lorry a couple of days ago," he smiles. "I just wanted them here!"

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—Corin Hardy, writer/director

Also part of the archive is the *Necronomicon*-style book of mythology that plays an important part in *The Hallow*. A labor of ridiculous love, it's bound in wood and contains more illustrations and dense calligraphy than could possibly be visible on screen. "Yeah, well, that's making movies, isn't it?" Hardy asks rhetorically. "If you don't put the work in..."

As we leave, an hour or two later, following tea and biscuits and a look at some of the footage edited so far, we notice the Godzilla cover of Fango's first issue behind glass on one of the walls. "Yeah," he grins, "if you get us into FANGORIA, that's going in a frame too." 