

Guillermo del Toro: In the “DARK” and Out on a “RIM”

Written by Michael Gingold
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The eagerly awaited remake of DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK makes its Canadian premiere tonight at Montreal's [Fantasia festival](#) ahead of its general release August 26 from FilmDistrict, reviving little monsters that have terrorized TV viewers for decades. Guillermo del Toro, a writer and producer of the new film who has shepherded the project for nearly two decades, spoke to Fango about the new creatures, plus other beasts and remakes he's got in the works.

When it came to updating the critters who haunted the 1973 AFRAID TV movie, del Toro (pictured below with young star Bailee Madison) tells Fango, “I really wanted to honor the original look, and Troy [Nixey, the director] agreed with that. That was done with very low-tech solutions, but was really, really creepy, with the hairy body and the bald, wrinkled, pale faces, sort of pruned. So that was the first part of the exercise; we said, ‘Let's honor that,’ and we went with a very small group of concept artists: Chet Zar, Keith Thompson and Troy himself. We met at my home office at ‘Bleak House’ and worked on it for about three days, and I think we nailed it!”



There are certain moments when the creatures in DARK, which also plays a special screening next Monday, August 8 at New York City's [Lincoln Center](#), resemble monstrous versions of the fairies from del Toro's PAN'S LABYRINTH. But the filmmaker says this element of the design goes back to a much older source. “The idea was to give them that sort of fairy appearance because of a writer called Arthur Machen,” he reveals. “Machen, especially in his tale ‘The White People,’ talks about ancient fairy creatures that are malevolent. They hate mankind and they torture humans, and I always thought that was a very compelling idea.”

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At the moment, del Toro is in preproduction on a movie that will bring much bigger beasts to the big screen. *PACIFIC RIM*, which he'll direct from a Travis Beacham script for Legendary Pictures and Warner Bros., with a cast headed by Charlie Hunnam, Idris Elba, Charlie Day, Willem Dafoe, Max Martini and Rinko Kikuchi, is a monster mash in which humans pilot giant robots to fend off an invasion of Earth by huge alien creatures. Sounds like there's a heavy Japanese influence at work, at del Toro confirms, "It's a great, great *kaiju*-vs.-mankind extravaganza. I saw all those movies as a kid; I grew up watching *GOJIRA*, *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS*, *FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD*, you name it. We saw them every Sunday in Mexico; there was a matinee with either British horror or Japanese horror, so I grew up on a steady diet of Japanese horror and science fiction. And we used to get a lot of Japanese TV—*ULTRAMAN*, *SPACE GIANT*... Mexico, for whatever reason, unexplainable to me, had a huge market for Japanese fiction."

As on *DARK*, del Toro hand-picked a team of designers to honor past inspirations while putting a new stamp on their bestiary. "I have a very good crew; among them are [fantasy illustrator] Wayne Barlowe, Guy Davis from the *B.P.R.D.* comics, a couple of newcomers and a sculptor I admire very much called Simon Lee. It's a really great group, and they're very mindful that these creatures should have the extravagance and the flamboyance and the sort of madness the *kaiju* have. We are not making straight dinosaurs or anything like that. Part of what is fun about a *kaiju* movie is that the monsters are really a little bit operatic."



It's well-known that del Toro has had a number of irons in the fire that hark back to horror films and literature of decades past, and while he's not attached to *THE RING 3D*, as has been reported by a few sources ("That's a false rumor; I have never been involved with *THE RING*, and I would never be involved with those"), he's continuing to shepherd a U.S. reboot of *THE ORPHANAGE*, the Spanish chiller he produced for director Juan Antonio Bayona several years ago. While that film was a critical and commercial success, del Toro says the new version will allow the story to achieve its full onscreen potential.

"Even when we produced the Spanish movie, I had intended to remake it," he reveals, "because we had a very different screenplay that, because of money and time, got turned into the movie you saw—which is great, but there was this other structure for the original script that

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I wanted to try. So even before we shot [Bayona's] film, it was an economic decision, a pre-existing creative decision, to change it.” For the new version, “We have Mark Pellington attached as director—I’m a big fan of his *MOTHPATH PROPHECIES* and his video work—and we are out to actors, so we’re hoping to get things going soon.”

Looking back further, del Toro still plans to revisit *FRANKENSTEIN* and *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, though he admits, “*JEKYLL AND HYDE* is not in the near future. *FRANKENSTEIN* I’ve started writing already, and Universal expects to see my treatment in August. I really would love to do it very soon; that and *AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS* are the two biggest movies on my wish list.” The epic H.P. Lovecraft-inspired *MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS*, of course, fell apart over ratings concerns on Universal’s part, but that hasn’t led del Toro to proceed with caution in pursuing *FRANKENSTEIN* with the studio. “Frankly, I can understand, from a business point of view, why they made the decision they did [with *MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS*]. I know for a fact that it was not an easy choice for them to make; they had spent many millions of dollars and months developing it with me. We went through nine months of development, financed by Universal; we scouted at the glaciers, we built maquettes, we did tests, we did key-frame art, we were a week away from opening offices in Toronto. And I think when you have a partnership with a studio, you have that partnership through the ups and downs. And I still have that partnership with them.”

So, would Universal let him take *MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS* elsewhere if another studio expressed interest in it? “You know, since I’ll be doing *PACIFIC RIM* for the next 17 months, I don’t think we’re having that chat yet,” del Toro laughs. “And I really would love to do it at Universal, frankly. If things change, and they really have expressed their desire to do it down the line... They understand the project, they developed it with me, we are on the same page creatively; the only difference we have is the PG-13 vs. R. I didn’t want to give in on that, because I believe it’s important for the property. And as I said to them, ‘Look, the MPAA may end up giving us a PG-13, because there is no unnecessary gore, no cursing, no objectionable material, it’s just very intense.’ But having gone through the MPAA with *DON’T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK* [which wound up with an R], I’m afraid if I give in to the PG-13 on paper, I’ll risk the movie being compromised in terms of intensity.”

Despite their disappointment over *MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS* being stalled, del Toro’s fans can appreciate that he’s standing fast where the ratings question is concerned. After all, PG-13 horror is as controversial a topic among genre fans as...well, the current proliferation of remakes. On that subject, however, del Toro takes an opposite view from the naysayers: “I think remakes get a bad reputation for I don’t know what snobbish reason, because when you look back, some of the best horror movies are remakes. When you look at David Cronenberg’s *THE FLY*, that’s a remake. James Whale’s *FRANKENSTEIN*, in a way, was a remake, or another version of the same tale that had been done before by Thomas Edison, certainly. If

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you're averse to remakes, then you would dismiss Terence Fisher's DRACULA, Francis Ford Coppola's DRACULA... I think that's an artificial concern. It's terrible when a remake is driven by purely commercial reasons, but it's great when a remake is driven by a creative desire, you know?"