

## Alex Winter Reopens “THE GATE”

Written by Michael Gingold

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It's been quite some time since Alex Winter directed creatures on the big screen for the cult favorite FREAKED. And while he's been busy in the TV realm since then (most notably, helming two of the BEN 10 movies for Cartoon Network), fans who freaked out over his last feature venture have been anxiously awaiting his return. Now he's back with a new version of the 1987 independent hit THE GATE (pictured), to be shot in 3-D next year.

At this past weekend's Rock and Shock convention, Winter gave Fango the details on the project, which has been in the works for quite some time. “I first got involved two years ago,” he says, “when Andras Hamori, a producer on the first one, came to me about making a new version. I love the original, and I just felt it was one of those horror movies that would make a good remake. I love doing stories about kids and I love horror and thrillers, and I felt this was a really good opportunity to bridge those different things that I enjoy—to make a genuinely scary movie for young audiences.”



A classic supernatural story from further back also inspired him—including his decision to shoot the new GATE (which will lens in Germany and Toronto) utilizing the latest dimensional technology. “One of my favorite movies of all time is THE HAUNTING, the Robert Wise movie,” he says, “and I always thought, ‘God, I wish he would’ve made that in 3-D.’ I genuinely do; I think it would’ve been amazing that way. So I asked Andras if we could do THE GATE in 3-D, because it’s really ripe for that technology.”

And unlike certain recent horror movies, this one has been conceived for that extra depth from the beginning. “It’s going to be shot, designed, the whole bit” for 3-D, he promises. “We’re teaming with some of the biggest people in the field, and I’ve been working on the development

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for two years now. I've met everybody, tested every piece of equipment and gotten extremely involved in the 3-D process, and I've become a big proponent of it. I've been giving a lot of talks about it and I have a lot of opinions about it. Even about conversion, which I believe is the way to go a lot of the time.”

Yes, the oft-maligned post-conversion 3-D process will be employed on THE GATE—but only for certain portions, and Winter assures that the entire feature will be shot with dimensionality in mind. “I'm going to use a hybrid approach, which I believe is the best way,” he notes. “There's a lot of ignorance about conversion; it has become sort of a buzzword for 'bad 3-D.' But that's got nothing to do with conversion; it has everything to do with rushing things, and if you do things too quickly in the effects realm, it looks crappy no matter what you do. Good conversion looks absolutely beautiful, and in some cases, it can actually look better than shooting stereo.”

Winter is also updating the original GATE's plot, in which two young friends (one played by a preteen Stephen Dorff) discover a mysterious backyard hole that proves to be a gateway to hell, forcing them and one of the boys' teenage sister to battle the demons that emerge. Keeping in mind that “I'm making this for an audience that's 2011, and not 1987,” the writer/director doesn't have to look far for inspiration. “I've got three boys,” he notes, “and I know what they like and I know what scares them. I'm just trying to make the most entertaining, scary movie for today's kids that age, which is what they did with the first one. I read an interview with Michael Nankin, who wrote the original, where he was talking about how he mined his own childhood for it. That's very much what I'm looking to do. There haven't been a lot of good 'kids in jeopardy' movies, because I think the studios are afraid of making them. I'm looking to make a good, modern film of that type.”

He also reveals that he'll be doing it without Randall William Cook, who helped create the striking visual FX for the '87 version and was originally attached to direct the redux. “He's not involved in this at all now,” Winter reports. “I'm a huge fan; he's one of the greats, along with David Allen, who did stop-motion on the original and isn't alive anymore. I had the pleasure of working with him on FREAKED, and I'm a huge Ray Harryhausen buff; I know the original purely because of the effects. When it came out, I was already in film school; I wasn't a kid, and I was a fan of that movie primarily because of what Cook and those other guys did. The foreground/background miniature work in that— it's really hard to do, and it's amazing.”

The new movie, however, will eschew some of the physical FX techniques employed on its predecessor; Winter has a hybrid approach in mind for his GATE's visual tricks. “The way I work with effects is, I tend to do an amalgam of different types in order to keep things mixed up and looking their best. I won't be doing stop-motion; I don't think today's audience would really get it.

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If I was making this as a retro movie, for people just like us, that would be one thing, but my son would look at that and say, ‘This is crap,’ and he wouldn’t want to watch it. So I have to keep that in mind. I don’t want to lose the audience just by trying to be faithful to something that somebody else did. I’ll be using a mixture of CGI and practical effects, and I’ll have little physical minions as well as digital ones.”



Winter adds that the staff who’ll bring the assorted hellish critters to life have yet to be confirmed (though ALIEN mastermind H.R. Giger was announced as a designer last year), and he’s currently interviewing artists for the job. He knows one particular talent he’d like to have on board: “If I could afford him, I’d bring Bill Corso on to do the makeup. Maybe I could get him for half a day. He did all my makeup on FREAKED; he applied it every single day. We were connected at the hip for months and months and months, and I think it’s a crime he didn’t get an Oscar for that, because he and his guys broke the mold. What they had to do on FREAKED in order to make that work—my mouth articulation and all that stuff—had absolutely never been done before, and took an enormous amount of R&D. I was a willing guinea pig, and those guys are geniuses. He’s still the best, and I love him to death.”

FREAKED was distinguished by its anything-goes sense of humor, while the original GATE was played pretty much straight. From hearing Winter talk, it sounds like his take on the remake will be a combination of the two. “I try to not lock the tone of a movie in this early; I try to get the cast together to figure it out,” he explains. “But something in the back of my mind is telling me there’s going to be a lot of humor in this film, probably a lot more than there was in the original. What I love about that movie is its surreal edge, which I’m keeping—that’s my bag, that’s what I’m interested in for this. Like [his 1999 thriller] FEVER, or sort of like FREAKED, I enjoy movies where you’re not quite sure whether things are really happening or somebody’s dreaming it. And more than anything other than the effects innovations, from a story standpoint, I’d say that’s where the original GATE succeeded. It opens with that weird dream, ends in a weird way, there are no parents around. It’s sort of a child-fantasia netherworld, and I really want to keep that, but apply my sense of humor as well. Not as crazy as FREAKED, because kids wouldn’t get it, but just more raucous comedy—and that can definitely elevate the scares too.

“So it’ll be more of a ride in that way,” he continues. “It’s going to be surreal, and it’s going to have that element of ‘Where are the grownups?’ I love that: The house is being torn to pieces, shit’s flying everywhere and there are no police, nobody knocks on the door and offers any help.

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That’s something I love, and it’s a hard thing to pull off. It’s a leap of faith; you’re afraid the audience is gonna go, ‘I don’t buy this; where are the cops?’ But I’m taking the leap, because I think the movie would suck if I didn’t.”

And as for the kids who’ll be facing down those threats, Winter says he has chosen a few young thespis for THE GATE, but isn’t ready to announce their names just yet. “I’m really picky about kid actors; I’m not casting it like a bad Disney movie,” he says. “So it’s not people you know; it’s not like you’ll go, ‘Oh, that guy.’ They’ve been in stuff, but I’m just casting good, talented young people. I saw everybody, though; there are only so many 12-year-old actors out there.

“What’s going to be fun,” he adds, “is the stunt casting. There’s only one real adult, and that’s their dad, and his stuff is gold. So we’ve got some good ideas for who can play the dad, and I’m hoping we get him, because it would be pretty great.”

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