

Marja Pyykkö about SIHJA, THE REBEL FAIRY

“A hoodie in a box”

Sihja, an outrageous young fairy, is surely one of a kind. When entering the life of Alfred, a shy and sensitive boy, she turns his whole world upside down. She messes up his room, scares off his friends and spits her milk all over the table. But even stranger things are happening. Birds are found dead on the streets, and both plants and people display rather peculiar behaviour. Something weird is going on at the local fertilizer factory! Alfred and Sihja are the only ones capable of preventing an environmental disaster that threatens the nature of mankind.

Keeping control over the uncontrollable, that was a mission for Marja Pyykkö, director of SIHJA, THE REBEL FAIRY, and skillfully mastering the twilight zone between chaos and order, with the support of Finnish producer Tuffi Films.

Marja Pyykkö: Tuffi is known for its ambitious catalogue with high artistic standards. I am honoured to be part of this tradition. Scriptwriters Jenni Toivoniemi and Kirsikka Saari have de-

livered great work; it was a pleasure to create Sihja’s world on such a solid base.

Can I compliment you with Sihja’s wings? Scientists would probably identify them as “too small to carry a creature of Sihja’s size” but they look so elegant!

Pyykkö: Me too, I was very pleased. We had a lot of discussion about them. Fortunately the Dutch ‘magician’ Rob Hillenbrink gave them their final shape. The idea was to combine a bat and a maple leaf, with one specific sort of beetle in mind as our reference. Rob and I joined forces with production designer Otso Linnalaakso, DOP Remko Schnorr and the VFX wizards from PlanetX to make it all come to life.

An iconic object for this film is Sihja’s yellow sweater. What happened to it after the shoot?

Pyykkö: I wanted Sihja to be like a ray of sunlight, clear and bright. This oversized hoodie lends her a kind



of street credibility. “Sihja from the Bronx” I told my costume designer Emmi Leeve. I have two daughters, who often stood model for several parts of Sihja’s character. The hoodie is now guarded as a treasure in Tuffi’s secret safe deposit box, for possible later use.

Fairies come with special effects! Was there a lot of “film magic” required to make her walk up the walls? Or were there other more complicated tricks required in the film?

Pyykkö: I always try to get “the real feel” to all the tricks. It helped a lot that Elina Patrarkka (Sihja) is a talented gymnast; with the help of a stunt team she was really walking on walls, wearing a harness and rigs. She did her own stunts, which wasn’t easy at all. Justus Hentula (Alfred) and Elina were very brave and bold, and after a lot of training, they did as much as possible on the spot, including the flying scenes. Those kids were flying above the rooftops, hanging on cranes, which was truly amazing! I wanted the audience to really feel the



night wind on their faces.

If there is one thing among the actors that sounds very convincing, it surely is their laughter. As if they had an awful lot of fun on the set.

Pyykkö: The secret to that is... Justus! He is hilarious. Elina simply loved his stories, and they got along so well. We did some rehearsals without a script, mainly trying out stunts and hanging out together, talking about life. From then on, the work on the set was filled with trust and laughter.

Maybe it had to do with the many things Sihja was allowed to destroy. Already in her very first scene, she turns Alfred's room into a total mess. Was it fun, wrecking all that stuff?

Pyykkö: Of course! Especially the mud fight was cool. At first the kids were a little worried about getting dirty, splashing each other with mud – which was actually cleaned thoroughly to avoid all risks. As soon as mud was flying around, we sent our DOP to the middle of the arena, and let the kids loose. Pretty cool!

Elina Patrakka's 'magic aura' makes her perfectly credible as someone who might perform magic.

Pyykkö: This little lady has special



powers! She is rather experienced and has been working on various film sets before. But she was simply born to play Sihja, the role allowed her to display her full potential, freely playing around and experimenting. She is pure magic, and a true pro, even if that sounds weird to say about a nine year old.

How are the other kids treating Alfred? I wouldn't exactly call it bullying, but how would you describe it then?

Pyykkö: Alfred is drawn towards different things than the other kids, which I also have witnessed with my own daughters. This story is Alfred's farewell to childhood, the last adventure in which he can deny all pre-teen problems already "lurking" around the corner. He is still in his own magical world, and I think he is happy there, not ready yet to take the next step. The gang of other kids isn't bad or mean, they are just in a different universe than him. I love how Justus gives shape to Alfred, wise, and full of righteousness and humour. The value of kindness is priceless.

I was intrigued by the 'magic potion' that plays a crucial role. We're all dreaming of a better world, but a potion that "destroys all bad elements" sounds horrible. That is an interesting ambiguity!

Pyykkö: Nature is naturally leaning towards chaos, while humans are desperately looking for order. But when looking into nature, you will always find order, and when looking at humans you will always find chaos. It is all about balance, between temper and serenity, between beauty and ugliness... All emotions have their rightful place in our world, including sorrow and rage. Our flaws and weaknesses are little jewels to treasure.

Can you tell us something about that intriguing factory location?

Pyykkö: Those scenes were shot in a water plant, with amazing colours and shapes. All that grey and yellow! Other shots were made in an abandoned factory. All the machinery and empty halls allowed our art department to create a world exactly like they wanted it. I find the result very convincing.

I'm probably not the first one who saw certain similarities between the scenes with the shipment of "magic potion" and the current vaccination debate...

Pyykkö: The script was written way before we even heard about Covid-19, so I have to admit this is pure coincidence.

–
Gert Hermans

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