

# Andrey Hadjivasilev about THE TESLA CASE

## “Kids engaged in science aren’t destined to be losers”

Whoever mentions director Andrey Hadjivasilev will mention his determination. Determination to promote his film, to network, to speak up for the Bulgarian children’s film tradition that he wants to restore... And that same determination speaks from **THE TESLA CASE**, a film made with great enthusiasm.

Tony is an aspiring young scientist, inspired by great inventors like Nikola Tesla. But this summer there will be no time for science as he is sent on a summer camp with his classmates and his friend Raya, whose popularity is not only based on her looks but also on her joyful spirit. Her charm doesn’t go unnoticed by Victor, one of the boy scouts with whom they mingle during the camp. While the forest and camping site turn into a battle zone for survival games, the two boys also battle for Raya’s attention. You might remember Tony and Raya from

Hadjivasilev’s movie **THE CURIE CASE**, but both titles stand completely independent from each other.

### Were you ever a boy scout?

Andrey Hadjivasilev: I never was. In Bulgaria, this movement was not very popular in my childhood. But I’ve always liked the values that scouts stand for: protecting nature, helping others, supporting each other in survival. When I decided that my next film would be set in the forest, I thought it could be interesting to make city children meet with experienced boy scouts. But I would say that I rather identify myself with the school kids in the film.

**In all his being nerdy, Tony is not a scaredy-cat. He dares to speak up to Victor and isn’t afraid to face the crowd when speaking about his passion.**

Hadjivasilev: **THE TESLA CASE** is a log-



ical continuation of my film **THE CURIE CASE** (2018) about the same characters. Main actor Martin Paunov had a key role in constructing Tony’s character. I have been working with him on various projects for five years now. I discussed many ideas and decisions with him, we revised the dialogues together, working on an authentic character. Another important element was to break with the stereotype that kids engaged in science are destined to be losers. I want to show that knowledge and science – and the people involved in it – are positive things.

**I presume you also have a certain admiration for great thinkers and inventors. In what way is your film a tribute to people changing the shape of history?**

Hadjivasilev: My film is a tribute to the golden age of Bulgarian children’s films that I grew up with, focussing on the young characters and the adventures they got involved in. Unfortunately, we have lost this tradition and it is my mission as a director to revive it. It is important to cultivate a love for cinema from an early age. And there is indeed a respect for the inventors. It is a sad thing that many kids today think of Tesla just as an electric car brand.

**In those seemingly harmless days of childhood, it is love that is making everything more complex. Most conflicts in your film are set in motion by love or jealousy.**

Hadjivasilev: Love and jealousy are strong motivators. But the main



theme in all my films is always friendship and how to become a better person, as a lesson for all young viewers.

**Considering the atmosphere among the young actors, I wouldn't be surprised if you actually went on a camping trip together.**

Hadjivasilev: I'm not sure what this production mostly felt like: a film set or a summer camp. After the Covid restrictions, the atmosphere on set was a true relief to everyone. My secret to working with children is that we all get to know each other in advance and become friends - we go to the theatre or the cinema together, have pizza and play games. We keep in touch even after the shoot. The adult actors were even a little jealous of the attention I was giving the kids.

**Among all the animals in your film, the wolf is the one that stands out the most.**

Hadjivasilev: When we were training albino rats for THE CURIE CASE, I found out that our animal trainer had three domesticated wolves, which fitted perfectly with my desire to shoot my next film in the forest. The biggest challenge with the wolves was the thirty kids around them. We had a hard time shifting their attention away from the animals; they

were constantly petting them, and on screen they didn't look scary enough. The other animals, like the frog, were rather authentic forest wildlife.

**I have the impression you like matching colours... the lab in the opening scene, the children's clothes... It feels like in terms of colours nothing was left to chance.**

Hadjivasilev: You are totally right. Working with colours and colour palettes is utterly important to me. It is one of the key elements in my narration, and when it comes to young audiences, it simply is a must. Not only the colours... in the phase of preparation, the most time I spent was on costumes and set design. Small elements like the light bulb on Tony's T-shirt or the "Every adventure has a story" quote on Victor's T-shirt when he is telling the werewolf legend at the camp fire are crucial details for me. 99% of the audience probably does not notice them, but the remaining 1% and I will know about them, which gives me great satisfaction.

**Referring to your film... what do you think is most problematic, the situation of Bulgarian children's film or the situation of Bulgarian highways?**

Hadjivasilev: It's like the question of the chicken and the egg, I can't decide



On the set

which one came first and which one is most problematic. The good thing is that in terms of children's films, at least I can make a difference.

**How difficult was it for a young director to make a children's film in your country? Did you have to convince many non-believers?**

Hadjivasilev: Filmmaking is difficult throughout Europe. The sad thing is that Bulgaria lacks a support strategy for young audience cinema. The good thing is that there are some like-minded people and things are starting to improve. This year for the first time, the Bulgarian National Film Centre will specifically support two new features and two shorts for children. I'm already working on my next project.

If you'll ask me again next year, then we'll see if progress was made.

**What makes THE TESLA CASE different from all other "kids in the forest" adventures we ever saw before?**

Hadjivasilev: The positive outlook on science! Also the plot contains a few extra storylines, both for the younger and older audiences. I can honestly say that this is a movie for the entire family.

–  
Gert Hermans