

# Sophie Farkas Bolla about ADVENTURES IN THE LAND OF ASHA

## “The story might be completed, but not the mystery”

One children’s film from Quebec is currently on a successful European festival tour. The adventure of two children from different origins who find each other in a joint quest proves to be universally recognisable. Director Sophie Farkas Bolla tells her story in a park in Chemnitz, where autumn leaves spin in the wind. From there it is a short step to wintery Canada.

Nine year old Jules moves to the countryside, where his uncle plans to settle “new land”. Under his bed in the attic, where Jules is confined because of his skin disease – he finds a book about the original inhabitants of the Canadian forests. One day he meets Asha, a girl belonging to a local nation. She lives alone in the wilderness after her parents have gone missing for some time. Together, they embark on a dangerous mission.

**In the opening scene a feather, floating on the wind, kind of drags us into the story.**

Sophie Farkas Bolla: That feather is like an invitation: “Come and live the

adventure...” This story will take you out into nature and magic will happen. It creates mystery and spurs curiosity. Later you will understand this feather actually belongs to Asha.

**It’s a welcome into the land of Asha. It’s not the land of Jules and Asha, it’s her land!**

Farkas Bolla: When European settlers arrived in Canada, specifically in the province that is now known as Québec - where I live - there wasn’t any land treaty signed until 1760. It only dealt with a very small part of the land by the St-Lawrence river. After that, no other treaty was signed until 1975. Nowadays the reclaiming of ancestral territories is a political issue, as the majority of First Nations in Québec have never signed any sort of agreement. This exploitation of resources by settlers is addressed through the character of Jules’ uncle who invites a logging company to cut down the forest. To whom belongs the earth? From a European point of view the earth is our property, from an indigenous point of view we all belong to earth

and we have to take care of it. These are very different viewpoints. I looked for a poetic way to acknowledge this problem, hoping for a better future together.

**Does this explain why Asha is separated from her parents?**

Farkas Bolla: Asha can be seen in many different ways. As Jules’ imaginary friend, or as a spirit helping him in his quest for self-acceptance. She comes from 300 years ago, when her nation was still around, before they were wiped out by European colonists, diseases or wars. Many nations completely disappeared. Asha will never find her parents because they have died, her nation doesn’t exist anymore. For Gaby (Jourdain, playing Asha) it was obvious she was a spirit; for Alex (Dupras, playing Jules) it was obvious she was his imaginary friend. This says a lot about the different cultures they’re coming from. All this makes Asha a complicated character; she can be a picture from a book, coming to life, or she can be a representation of America’s disappearing



nations.

**That mystery doesn’t get solved at the end of the film.**

Farkas Bolla: It’s an open ending because this story about Canada also has an open ending. We are still working on it today; figuring out how to live on this land together. The story might be completed, but not the mystery and what it means to us today.

In some way this adventure movie fits into the Production La Fête tradition, set by Rock Demers.

Farkas Bolla: People from my generation grew up with those films and



we want to make children's films like the ones we saw when growing up. Those of us who have become parents want to make films for our families. The movies that we remember - the ones that we could watch over and over again - are the source of this new batch of Quebec films.

**With outdoor activities like mountain climbing, river rafting etc. this film looks like one big survival camp.**

Farkas Bolla: We were in all these places; it was just a matter of finding the most beautiful ones, the one that looked magical. As a kid, you would see magic everywhere. Two rocks and a tree were enough to create an entrance to a new world... in our heads. That is the feeling I wanted to recreate - the way you perceive nature as a child. That is why sometimes on screen, there is a tiny bit of magic, like the roots of the trees sometimes moving a bit. This "did I really see that?" kind of feeling, we made it happen.

**Some exercising in survival must have been inevitable.**

Farkas Bolla: I told the team: If you want to spend your summer outside in nature and drag those boxes with lenses around in a forest, this is your project; if not, then forget it.



The team was great; they were like troopers. Every time we climbed up a mountain, they were like "oh, this is so pretty..." whereas they could have been complaining all the time.

**Not even the dog complained?**

Farkas Bolla: Never. She had a stunt double, but Spark was great. Her name was Misha, an amazing 10 year old dog. We could show her something once and then she would do it over and over again. What a great dog - everybody loved Misha.

**It was Canada... so there needed to be snow!**

Farkas Bolla: Only for one day! We

started at 8am and finished at 4pm, when the light was gone. The day before we had a big snowstorm, which was great, as all the trees were beautifully covered with snow.

**It sounds as if Canadian nature has been rather mild with you!**

Farkas Bolla: Everyday something didn't go as planned. The worst day was when we shot the last scene, in which Asha sails off in her canoe. I always imagined that scene being all foggy. We hired those machines to produce the fog, but the wind and sun made it impossible. Looking back upon it, I think the result looks better this way, more luminous. But back

then it was hard to accept and by the end of the day I felt totally depressed. So my big lesson in filmmaking was: be in the moment and make the best of what you get.

**When exactly is the film set?**

Farkas Bolla: In the 1940s, after the stock market crashed, which caused huge unemployment in the cities. At the time, the Québec government offered land up north to people who would set up small settler villages on the territories of indigenous people, who had maintained their semi-nomadic lifestyle. Logging companies were offered forest land, but then found out people were still living there. This extraction of resources caused tensions between the settlers and the local nations. And that was just the tip of the iceberg. ADVENTURES IN THE LAND OF ASHA is an exciting film for children, but by setting this context, we might raise a sense of curiosity among young audiences.

-  
Gert Hermans