

Piotr Stasik about FILM FOR ALIENS

"Children are slaves to our need for supervision"

Jeremi, a YouTuber with a talent for loneliness and isolation, must spend the summer with his grandfather in the countryside. The healing green environment turns into a challenging place when a robot appears on the scene and hands him weird assignments. Like, creating a message for aliens in the form of a film. To fulfil his task, Jeremi gradually makes friends with a group of kids. The story is a trigger to send children into nature where they confront their own primary emotions. The methods used by Polish director Piotr Stasik were not obvious, as he explained during the Filem'on Festival.

In the early seventies, messages were sent into space to inform eventual aliens about the human race.

Piotr Stasik: This idea was at the origin of the movie. In my opinion they should have asked children to send those messages, who would speak more directly from the heart. Sincere emotions could describe our lives much better than mathematical calculations, boasting about the achieve-

ments of humankind.

Like the miracles of the internet. In the opening scenes we get to see the bizarre clips that Jeremy posts online.

Stasik: In the preparation phase of the movie, I met numerous children. When asking them about their future profession, most of them answered: I want to get rich and famous through YouTube or TikTok. That is what 80% of these children dreamed about, so I used it as the starting point of our story.

Watching your film had a surprising-ly disorienting, alienating effect on me.

Stasik: I focus more on energy than on structure. Our producer got scared when I told him: we only need a script to throw it away. The script was only the basis, everything else came from improvisations with the children. I never gave the actors - or should I say 'characters'? - specific dialogues and we never used a clapperboard. We worked with a very small crew: just



me, one sound guy and one set assistant. We made this movie together with the children; we were all directors. Sometimes it was even better for us to leave the set for a while and leave it all up to the kids.

Does that make the movie reflect their daily lives?

Stasik: I was looking for children that stood close to the characters they played; entering the set for them felt like a natural prolongation of their everyday life. When Jeremi meets his new friends, it takes a long time for them to connect... just like in reality. The kids don't use their real names

in the film, but on the set they called each other all the time by their character names.

Looking for references, this is certainly no Pippi Longstocking! I was more thinking of LORD OF THE FLIES.

Stasik: Our DNA doesn't evolve as fast as the processors in our smartphones. Deep inside we're still wild forest animals, relying on our instincts. You see Jeremi returning to a rather primary state of mankind. Compared to LORD OF THE FLIES, our story goes the opposite direction. Children left to their own devices are able to build a new,



positive society. People are both good and bad, and in LORD OF THE FLIES the wrong choices are being made. Jeremi's father has a hand in all this. He knows that Jeremi needs to meet other people. Only through meeting others can you become a complete human being.

It feels like the movie was shot in one location.

Stasik: It wasn't. What I was looking for were abandoned, empty spaces that we could make our own territory, and where we would hang out from morning till evening. Spending time together adds many layers to the story. Like when we could hang out in this forgotten scrapyard for old trains. That was a private collection, run and curated by two old men, without a budget or a clear purpose. I found it by accident, simply following my intuition.

Throughout the film the kids are often observing each other, while all the time somebody "up there" is observing them.

Stasik: Everyone is observing everyone, and they all seem to be afraid of real life; they watch it rather than live it. That is why we are hiding on the internet. Online, we don't feel alone, but in fact we are. The most impor-

tant advice in my movie is: when feeling bad, go outside and meet others." It sounds easy, but for many people it seems to be very difficult.

Does it feel like the story told of FILM FOR ALIENS is completed?

Stasik: Children and parents often ask me about a sequel, but I decided to do something different. I'm launching a social project taking children back into nature. Supported by the Leonardo Da Vinci Foundation, we'll make forest journeys, spending time outdoors. All we offer the kids is space. For my movie I observed many children and I saw the impact that wild nature has on them. The first hour might be difficult, they might feel uncomfortable or afraid. But after one hour a change is setting in. My parents were farmers and I spent a lot of time alone with books in nature. Now I want to offer the children of today a similar experience.

What you need to inspire them is nothing but a certain place or environment?

Stasik: Kids can find those places everywhere, even in New York. When I went there with my film, I provided a 'Laboratory of Adventure' workshop for the festival. Our biggest challenge is overcoming the parents'



anxiety and their desire for control. On Facebook one boy posted that this workshop had been the best adventure of his life. Parents all remember this feeling - "our childhood felt so much better" - but they can't let go of control. Children are unhappy due to their lack of freedom; they're slaves to our need for supervision. We're killing our children with control mechanisms. What we need is nothing less than a revolution.

What kind of tasks do you give them in your Laboratory?

Stasik: We send them into the forest, alone, for two hours. We give them ropes to build a tent, or a stack of books. I've seen them playing for

hours with a simple typewriter! And why should they wash themselves if they'll get dirty again anyway?

What is your biggest challenge as a filmmaker?

Stasik: Because my methods are rather unconventional, everyone thinks I'm crazy. People try to control me, just like they're trying to control children. Almost every day I have to fight for the things I want to do, and all the time it feels like someone is trying to slaughter my inner child. Luckily they don't know where exactly he's hiding...

-
Gert Hermans