

FIRST LOOK

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

Potter does Hammer horror in haunted house classic

THE CHILD STARES AT HARRY POTTER, WHO

crouches and smiles. The child is muddy. Harry Potter is dapper: Victorian suit, well-pruned sideburns. The boy wizard, now a man, makes a joke to the pre-school sprog: "You're going to scare grown-ups in the audience!"

We're at a West London studio, where the dusty, eerie interiors are being shot for the ill-fated Eel Marsh House, the spectral centre of *The Woman In Black* — the much-anticipated adaptation of Susan Hill's acclaimed novel. In a moment, the nipper will slip through the shadows and Daniel Radcliffe will, to use the Stanislavskian technical term, brick it. He's playing a lawyer named Arthur Kipps, and has come to wrap up a will and save his job. Instead, he discovers the village of Crythin Gifford has a dark, deadly secret... in a dress.

The titular figure has scared readers for nearly 30 years — and audiences for more than 20. The 1983 novel became a play, noted for its innovative staging and simple, sure ability to bring *The Fear*. Having opened in 1989, the show still runs in the West End today. A film feels like a natural expansion: able to build on what is only suggested, but without losing the power of the unknown.

For Radcliffe, it's a smart transition from the spells and scares of the most commercially successful film franchise of all time. "I feel like I've landed on my feet with this being the first thing after Harry," he says. "Because this is very different, in that I'm playing a father and it's a more grown-up film, but it's not so scandalously different that people will say, 'Oh, he's just trying too hard; he's trying to shock us into thinking he's something else now.' I think I've taken away some of the ammunition people can throw."

Radcliffe is affable and engaging, with a good line in self-deprecation that never falls into false modesty. He knows he has to prove he can carry a movie without Potter's specs, and convince audiences he can actually play a dad.

"I cheated a bit on that," he says. "I got my godson to audition to play my son — and he was very good and got the part! I've known him since he was a baby and there's already a chemistry there; there's a lot of love between us. I got very lucky on that." It's hardly uncommon for a man of Radcliffe's age (21 when we speak, 22 now) to have children, especially in the Victorian age. "But I know it's going to be a leap for people who've seen me in a schoolboy outfit for the last ten years and suddenly I'm playing a dad," he says. "In the script you read, it probably said Arthur was 27, but we're pitching it at about 24. Because I can just about pass for 24, especially with the sideburns and make up... That was the thing that worried me more. I started to think, 'Should I do a deeper voice?', but the chances are my voice isn't going to be

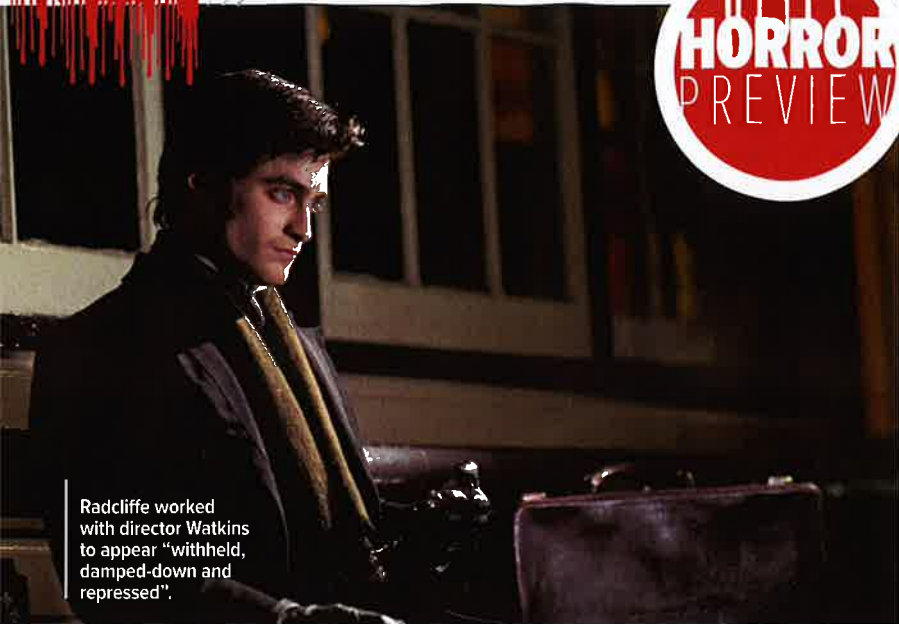


Here: Daniel Radcliffe as Arthur Kipps, the young lawyer and father grieving the death of his wife. Above: With Janet McTear.

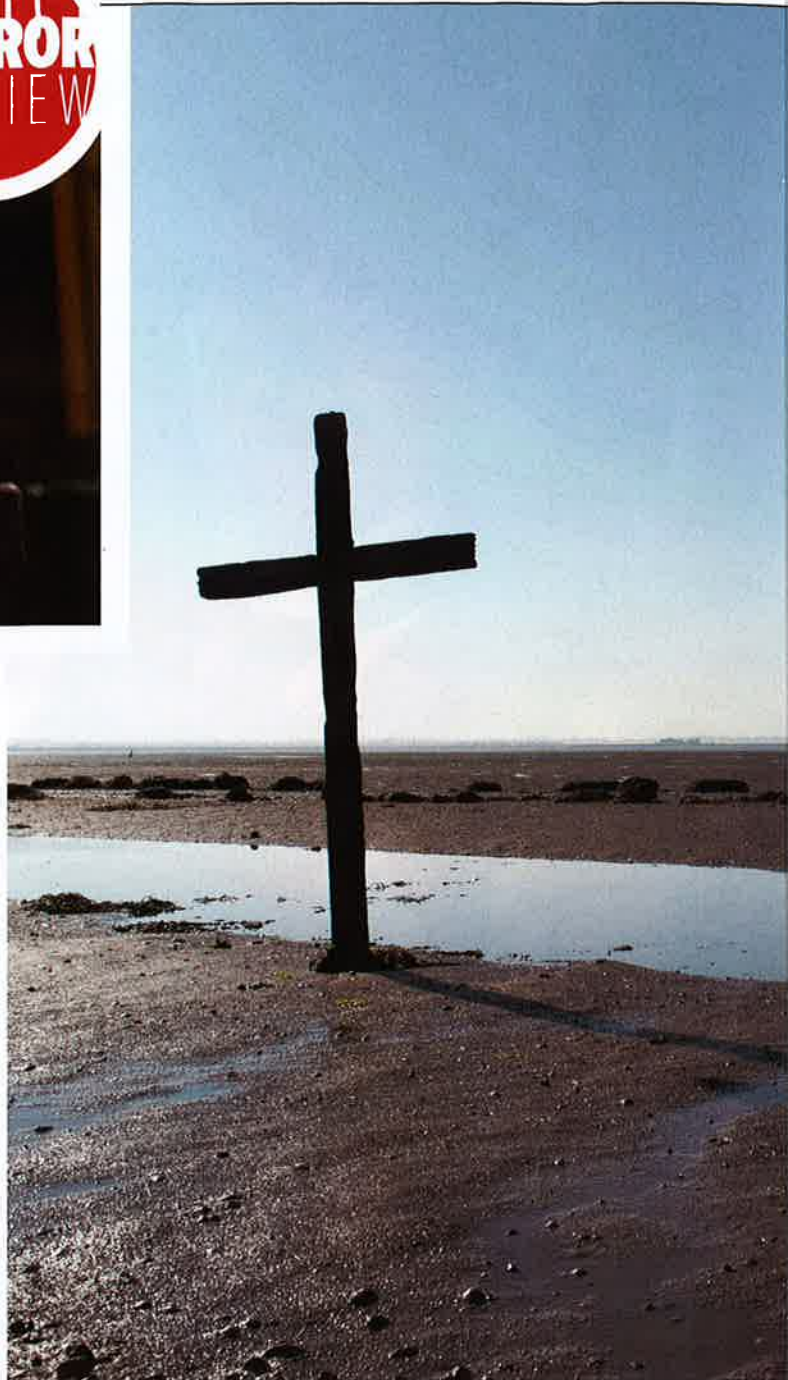




"YOU WANT TO MAKE A FILM THAT'S TERRIFYING BUT HAS A HEART." James Watkins, director



Radcliffe worked with director Watkins to appear "withheld, damped-down and repressed".



any deeper by the time I'm 24, so it didn't make sense. And James was very quick to allay my fears and say, 'Well, if that's what the audience is thinking about, then we're bugged anyway.'

"James" is James Watkins, the writer-director of the excellent *Eden Lake*, shooting from a screenplay by Kick-Ass writer Jane Goldman. "She's got a really great film knowledge," says Watkins, "but an emotional understanding as well, which is what really appealed to me in the script. You want to make a film that is really terrifying, but at the same time has a heart to it. If we can achieve those things we'll have made the film we set out to make."

The pair worked closely on the draft, trimming the back story, resisting any encouragement to reveal *The Woman In Black's* roots before Kipps himself discovers them. "We lost the flashbacks," says Goldman. "It's much stronger without them, much more claustrophobic — we stay with Arthur." Both were pleased to secure Radcliffe, whose post-Potter appeal obviously brings attention, as well as a determination to deliver a strong performance. Kipps has lost his wife, who died in childbirth, and it has left a massive psychological scar.

"Dan went to see a grief counsellor to explore all of that and read up a lot about it," says Watkins. "And Jane lent him the C. S. Lewis book *A Grief Observed* (about how Lewis dealt with the death of his wife). It was important to understand the weight of loss. Dan is a very naturally fizzy, upbeat, high-energy guy. It was important for me, both in terms of the character, and in terms of drawing a distinction between this character and Harry Potter, that he be much more withheld, damped down, repressed: a guy that's retreated from life, from his job, from his son. That's the character. We worked very hard to explore that. Even down to the way he breathes. Dan often breathes with his mouth open and in this film, you'll see it, he's breathing through his nose. It creates a whole different energy."

Radcliffe confirms: "That's one thing James has been very, very keen on. The note I get more than any other on this film is, 'Close your mouth!'"

When not panting, Radcliffe read not only Lewis' book, but the Virginia Ironside classic about dealing with grief, *You'll Get Over It*. "It was fantastic. It was the most honest book," he says. "The thing it talked about, that I liked, was that people always talk about the seven stages [of grief], but what it said was, the idea of having stages implies that after you've gone through them you will be over it. The thing with Arthur is he never got out of that place. There's a bit in *A Grief Observed* where it talks about [how grief is] like walking through a valley where the landscape always changes and repeats. It's that thing of being stuck in the cycle of grief and living with the ghost. That's what he's been doing: living with the ghost of his wife for the last four

years. What's interesting is when he comes here [to the village]. When I was reading the script I was going, 'Why doesn't he leave?! He's nuts for staying here!' But the interesting thing James said was, 'He's lost his wife, he's searching for her and then he sees the ghost of a dead woman.' That curiosity keeps him there. Because curiosity is a very powerful thing. It sounds like a twee word, but it's what makes us human. It's such a powerful force."

Curiosity and the unknown runs through *The Woman In Black*, from the back story to the scares, with a sense of unease growing via slow-burn scenes which reject gore in favour of suspense and suggestion. The production's touchstones have included "classy elevated ghost stories that have both heart and horror": *The Innocents*, *The Others* and *The Orphanage*. "There's a confidence to those films," says Watkins. "You're hopefully sucking the audience into the film and having them really lean in. You want people listening for little sounds in the house, and what's coming in on the edge of the frame: what could it be? I think those films did that really well." So it's a horror, then, but not the Hammer of crimson fangs and Christopher Lee. This will be a chiller.

"IF I WASN'T IN THIS FILM I'D BE FAR TOO SCARED TO SEE IT." Daniel Radcliffe

Susan Hill's acclaimed novel has been scaring readers and audiences for nearly 30 years. Below: Claran Hinds as Mr. Dally,



It is a film about death, in part, but also about hope. "I think that's why horror films work," says Watkins. "Or, these sorts of films — ghost films — that sense of the unknown, the undiscovered country. We're so culturally repressed about death. I don't know if that's a good or bad thing. Nobody really wants to engage with death. So a film that does becomes interesting and unsettling."

Radcliffe remembers Watkins quoting him the Kubrick notion that the idea of the supernatural is inherently consoling because it implies life beyond death. "And that's what Arthur is after in a lot of this," says Radcliffe. "He's living in fear but also living in the hope that just for a second he'll have some confirmation his wife is living in a better place and they will be reunited."

Back on set, the child's muddy footprints mark the floor — the only evidence that he was ever there. Harry Potter looks scared. "The irony," he smiles, "is that if I wasn't in this film, I'd be far too scared to go and see it..."

The Woman In Black is out on February 10, 2012.



TWIXT

Francis Ford Coppola returns to fear with an experimental thriller...

ANYONE WHO'S EVER WONDERED WHAT IT IS FRANCIS

Ford Coppola dreams about after late nights at the cheeseboard need wonder no more. Coppola pinpoints his midnight musings as the root of his latest, self-financed indie pic, *Twixt*. The story finds low-rent horror scribbler Hall Baltimore (Val Kilmer) arriving to pimp his latest witch-filled tome in a creepy small town. There, he's told of a series of murders, which piques his interest. But as he starts to investigate further, things begin to get *really* strange. How strange? Try fear legend Edgar Allan Poe (Ben Chaplin) cropping up to act as a sort of spirit guide through an encounter with deadbeat teens, vampire girls and more...

Twixt channels the genre that Coppola both loves and got his start in. "I've always loved the Gothic romance story, the horror story. I began my apprenticeship with Roger Corman; I learned low-budget horror film at his knee. There's a great tradition of Gothic romance in America and there's no question that imagery helped me in the making of *Twixt* — the full weight of that is all through the film."

Empire has seen a chunk of footage from the thrifty production, which shows off a distinctly weird tale that could have come from the noggin of David Lynch. Coppola has a bold plan to change how audiences see it, upping Kevin Smith's recent ante with *Red State* by aiming to take the movie on tour around the US as a set of digital files to remix in front of cinemagoers while live musicians play the score. Part of that is pure Coppola envelope-pushing, but it is also a reaction to the idea that 3D is now the only gimmick that matters. "Cinema is so young, barely a hundred years old. How dare anyone think 3D is all it has up its sleeve!" says Coppola. "Cinema is just beginning its expression." Anyone thinking otherwise is, well, dreaming.

Twixt is out later this year.



Here: Val Kilmer as horror scribe Hall Baltimore. Above: Elle Fanning (*Super 8*) gets ghostly