

Mia ja valkoinen leijona

Ohjaaja Gilles de Maistren haastattelu

Lähde: Galatée Films, Outside Films ja Studiocanal - Production notes

Where did the idea for the story come from?

It goes back years. I shot a series about children around the world who have deep bonds with wild animals for a French television documentary. My research took me to South Africa, where I filmed a child whose parents had a lion-breeding farm. They bred lions for conservation purposes - or so they claimed. The end goal was to sell them on to zoos and wildlife parks, to celebrate the king of animals in all its glory, and sometimes even to rewild them. There was a 10-year-old boy there who was in love with the lions. Once we finished filming and I left the farm, I found out that the lions were being bred for hunting.

This movie is about an 11-year-old girl called Mia, whose parents breed lions and she develops a bond with a white lion cub. The parents are witnesses to this deep friendship and start worrying about what will happen when the cub grows up. So they decide to sell him to hunters. And when Mia realizes the truth, she decides to save the lion and help him escape the farm to a reserve where he might live out his days in peace. But the journey to get to this safe haven is complicated, to say the least...

It's a family movie rather than a documentary, although there was a real-life friendship that inspired the relationship between the young girl and the lion we witness in the movie. It draws on a completely new and unusual way of working. We met over 300 kids in South Africa to find just the right actor. And we came across this little girl, Daniah. The first time she came head to head with a lion cub, she didn't use her hands as we saw most of the children do, but her head. Our lion expert, Kevin Richardson, was convinced it needed to be her. Today, Dinah has grown up, and she's now 14. The lion is no longer a cub, but a 250-kilo giant, and yet the two are still friends. I think it's the first time anything like this has been attempted: telling the tale of a love story between a wild animal and apex predator, and a little girl, with no special effects.

How did you meet Kevin Richardson?

Once I'd had the idea for "Mia and the White Lion", my next question was: how can I make this happen? I'd already worked on a documentary about Kevin Richardson, called "The Lion Whisperer". The man is just incredible, an international star who's worked with over 100 lions over the past 20 years, dissolving the boundaries between humankind and the animal kingdom to create authentic relationships between the two. When I spoke to him about "Mia and the White Lion", he said: "This is going to be complicated, unless you're prepared to film the movie over three years, using a very young lion cub. You'll need to build a bond between the two and shoot the movie using the same lion throughout. But that's impossible, you won't have the time." And I replied: "Let's do it anyway!". Studiocanal and Galatée Films were excited and on board, and so that's what we did!"