




Red Alert

You're a crook, Captain Hook (Jude Law in crusty mode).



Alexander Molony is Peter Pan. In this film, at least.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Never Say Neverland

Don't Peter Panic! David Lowery's **Peter Pan & Wendy** is finally here



LIKE ITS CHARACTERS, *PETER Pan & Wendy* refused to grow up. The live-action remake of Walt Disney's animated classic first entered development back in 2016, and David Lowery – who, at the time, had just helmed the remake of *Pete's Dragon* – quickly set about scripting his Neverland tale. It took five years for cameras to start rolling and now, finally, the long-gestating project is finished. “It’s rather surreal that it’s actually done,” Lowery, who directed *A Ghost Story* and *The Green Knight* between Disney movies, tells Red Alert. “It almost feels wrong to stop working on it.”

Lowery has been enamoured with Pan since childhood, having first been exposed to JM

Barrie's story while watching Steven Spielberg's *ET*, in which Dee Wallace's mother reads the original book to a young Drew Barrymore. Next for Lowery came the 1954 musical version featuring Mary Martin (recorded for television), which made him wonder how people were actually flying.

Later, Spielberg struck again with *Hook*, released at the perfect time in Lowery's adolescence to become a childhood favourite. Then came the 2003 version, starring Jason Isaacs as Hook, which he holds in particularly high

esteem: “It's so great that the only hesitation I had in signing up for this one was, how do you do it better than that? They captured the book so perfectly.”

Above all, though, there was Disney's 1953 animated movie. Lowery's version, he says, is an “adaptation of all the best parts of that film, with plenty of intervention and reinvigoration.”

It was the filmmaker's “guiding light” throughout the writing process, and he wanted to make sure that much of the iconography – such as Pan and Wendy flying over London – remained, while more dated aspects (like





Yara Shahidi as Tinkerbell: no, she doesn't glow. So?

the original's depiction of Neverland's natives) were removed or updated for modern times.

Following the release of the trailer, these changes were the biggest talking points. First there was the fact that the footage struck a particularly serious, grounded tone that felt different to the animation. "As a Peter Pan film, it's not going to surprise anyone who knows the original material," he says. "It's very fun and it's funny. If it's grounded, it's only because we were trying to shoot on location, build all of our sets, and have everything feel like a real place. I always value the idea that Neverland is

a place that a child could actually get to. As to whether it's a dark and gritty version of Peter Pan... it's not."

Another point of contention has been Lowery's version of the Lost Boys including girls. Certain sectors of the internet have even threatened to boycott the film over the change. "Movies should be for everybody," Lowery retorts. "And it doesn't change the movie at all. It's the same story everyone grew up with. To each their own, but it's their loss, they're going to miss out on a great movie-going experience.

"And I really am excited for kids who get to discover this tale for the first time and for this to be their version of the Lost Boys and Peter and Tinkerbell and Captain Hook and Wendy. The old versions are all going to be there. But for a certain generation, this will be their introduction to the story, and I'm really excited for it to be the one that they think of when they think of Peter Pan."

A less fractious but common response to the trailer has been the question of why Tinkerbell, the fairy played by Yara Shahidi, doesn't glow. "That's something that never even occurred to me," Lowery says. "We all imagine Tinkerbell glowing, but then you're like, 'Where's the light actually coming from? Do her wings light up?' That's the difference



"Yeah, you're gonna have to back it up a bit."

**“For a certain generation, this will be their introduction to the story, and I’m excited”**

between animation and what looks right in live-action."

Finally, despite Lowery admitting that he has mainly stayed away from the discourse, Red Alert brings up one final online annoyance: why isn't Jude Law's villainous Captain Hook hot? "What are they talking about?" he asks with amazement. "It's one shot! Wait to pass judgement until you see the rest."

What Lowery does want to highlight is comedian Jim Gaffigan's Mr Smee, Captain Hook's right hand man, who did not appear in the trailer. "He's a truly wonderful actor and getting to watch him bring Smee to life was a real gift. There's so much material that we shot with Jim that isn't in the movie. I wish we could just make it into a short film because he's not just a wonderful comedian, but an incredible dramatic actor."

A grounded, fun version of *Peter Pan & Wendy* from a critically acclaimed director? Internet be damned; take us back to Neverland right now. **JS**

*Peter Pan & Wendy is on Disney+ from 28 April.*



Wendy is played by the aptly named Ever Anderson.

**► SCI-FACT!** Everyone's favourite sci-fi icon Alan Tudyk appears in *Peter Pan & Wendy* as George Darling, Wendy's father.