

# THE ALPHA INVENTION

## ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT

**Duration:**

15:13

**Year:**

2014

**Genre:**

Neo-Noir

Sci-Fi

**Language:**

English

**Country of Origin:**

United Kingdom

**Aspect Ratio:**

1.78:1

**Shooting Format:**

Sony F55 (4K)

Black Magic 4K

**Exhibition Format:**

2K DCP

5.1 Surround Sound

### PRODUCER

Michael Spry

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### WRITER/DIRECTOR

Mark Towers

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# TAGLINE

One invention. One conversation. One revelation.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

After applying an ingenious method to create artificial intelligence on his home computer, a reclusive programmer is contacted one rainy evening by a suspicious dealer looking to buy the technology from him. However, as the call progresses it becomes clear that neither man is who or what they claim to be.

## MEDIUM SYNOPSIS

A programmer called Guy (Billy Boyd) reveals to a buyer on the phone that he believes he has created the very first form of artificial intelligence. And he has done so merely on his home computer but with an ingenious method.

Yet, as he explains his invention to the enigmatic and shady Walter (William Hope) and conducts his final tests it becomes apparent that neither man is who or what they at first appeared to be.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

In an apartment one rainy evening, Guy (Billy Boyd), a computer programmer, begins a phone conversation with an American called Walter (William Hope) who is keen to know what he has been developing. At first Guy is coy, instead wanting to know more about the mysterious figure on the other end of the line. But Walter plays his cards very close to the chest and Guy comes forth with his secret.

He has reached the pinnacle of computer science by creating artificial intelligence. Immediately spiking Walter's interest, he asks if the design is patented to which Guy responds that there is no design. The only thing he designed was an environment, five very basic programs and one final and most vital ingredient: three were made male and two female – competition.

Through digital evolution Guy has developed something which he is sure can be deemed intelligent. "But how do you know?" Walter asks. "Well," Guy responds...

However, unbeknownst to Guy, there is a fly in his ointment and it is Walter who shall have the pleasure of making him very aware of it.

Noir meets sci-fi like never before.

# CAST

GUY - Billy Boyd  
WALTER - William Hope

# CREW

## PRODUCTION

Written & Directed by  
**Mark Towers**

Produced by  
**Michael Spry**  
**Mark Towers**

Executive Producer  
**Alan Musa**

First Assistant Director  
**Greg Karpinski**

Line Producer  
**Holly Bond**

Edited by  
**Mark Towers**

Script Supervisor  
**Georgina Higgins**

Digital Imaging Technician  
**Art Kavalvi**

Colourist  
**Joseph Bicknell**

Concept Artist  
**Sam Mardon**

Runners  
**Jon Freeman**  
**Emily Bottoni**

## CAMERA & LIGHTING

Director of Photography  
**Michael Spry**

First Assistant Camera  
**Philipp Morozov**

Second Assistant Camera  
**Chloe Harwood**

Gaffer  
**Josie Williams**

## ART DEPARTMENT

Production Designer  
**Anna Page**

Art Assistant  
**Zoe Huckle**

Set Builders  
**George Dolan**  
**Leo Rampen**  
**James Ashlee**  
**Luke Powell**

Make-up Artist  
**Makus Glanzer**

## CATERING

**Jan Towers**  
**Liz Read**

## SOUND & MUSIC

Sound Recordist  
**Matthew McCabe**

Boom Operators  
**Michael Clayton Jr.**  
**Chris Reidy**

Sound Designer  
**Oscar Lo Brutto**

Original Score by  
**Doug Berwick**

## VISUAL EFFECTS

Visual Effects & Compositing  
**Ben Wildi**

Production Ident & Key Art  
**James Aldred**

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Still Photographer  
**James Gourley**

## CASTING

Casting Director  
**Matt Western**

Walter Stand-in  
**Erick Hayden**

# WRITER/DIRECTOR - MARK TOWERS

Mark Towers is a filmmaker from London, England. He studied English Literature and Philosophy at Keele University and has since spent most of his time watching films, writing films or on set helping make them.



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## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I, as I imagine many filmmakers will say, have one overarching goal: to make films that linger long in the audience's minds once the last frame has been projected. From my movie-going experience there are, broadly speaking, two ways of achieving this: be thoroughly entertaining or be thoroughly thought provoking. And if you can do both then... well, that's the jackpot.

There are plenty of subjects that incite thought. For this film I turned to Darwin's theory of evolution, something I've always admired for being so beautiful in every aspect, including its ugliness, that you could argue it is unfairly shrugged off nowadays; and artificial intelligence which some suspect is the next step on the former's hierarchy. The challenge is taking these concepts of contemplation and putting them into a vessel of entertainment.

The creation of artificial intelligence is something I haven't seen covered much in cinema, usually we bare witness to the effects and philosophical issues that arise as a consequence of its existence. But to me, if we created AI its birth and how we got there would be one of the most interesting aspects of its history.

It was clear that this was going to be my premise, but as a fan of film noir (and as someone with only the most "indie" of independent budgets!) I wouldn't want the story to take place in some ultra-clean complex with conveyor belts and hundreds of lab coats judging their creation with clipboards behind a glass screen. It would be one recluse in his apartment and he has struck on the one idea no one else thought of.

Or so he thinks! The rest of the plot came very quickly after that and it was immediately clear to me that this was a film that had to be made. I hope that by the end of *The Alpha Invention* you receive the same punch of frisson, that tingle down your spine, that you do when you consider those grander things in life that provoke a sense of wonder. Or simply the one you get from watching a really, really great movie.



## PRODUCER/DOP - MICHAEL SPRY

Michael has worked on a variety of projects as a Producer and Director of Photography since 2010 including feature and short films, music videos, commercials and corporate videos. He was the co-producer and DoP on the short film *Suspect 13* which has been screened at the East End Film Festival and has been specially selected by the UK Film Festival and he was DoP on the short film *The Intention of Miles* which won the Sci-Fi-London Film Festival's 48 Hour Film Challenge.



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## PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Mark and I first met in Soho, London in early 2013 because he was looking for a producing partner to help turn the new script he had written into his next film. His first comment after exchanging greetings was that producing this film would not be easy, not least because he wanted an extremely talented and in-demand cast on board, but if we work hard and keep an eye on the details it will be excellent.

After discussing the various producing duties our conversation finished with Mark saying, "So, two questions, can you take on those headaches? And do you want to?" I went home, read the script, loved the script, and straight away I knew it had potential, not just to attract good talent but also to look and sound amazing. I rang him immediately at 11:30 at night and said "Yes." "To both?" "Yes, and yes."

One of my favourite genres of film is science-fiction as I love the "go anywhere" and "do anything" freedom that that comes with the genre. However, with *The Alpha Invention* the exploration of sci-fi comes solely from the plot, as it is entirely based in one room, the power of the script means you are constantly being pushed forwards to its unexpected climax.

As well as being the Producer, I am also the Director of Photography. It is an unusual combination but Mark liked the fact that the person making logistical decisions knew precisely what the creative reasons were for them being made.

It also means you require a fantastic crew. This project would not have been possible if it were not for all the time and effort our talented and dedicated cast and crew put into the project, both Mark and I cannot thank them enough. We've managed to produce something that I am truly proud of which not only proves what you can do with the short film format but also where science-fiction can be taken on a small budget but with a lot of imagination.

# THE CAST

## GUY BILLY BOYD

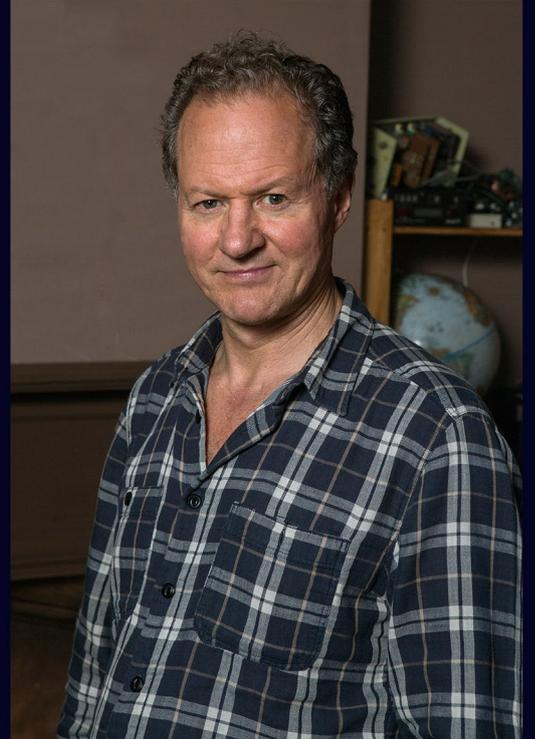


Billy is best known for his role as Pippin in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and appeared in Peter Weir's *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*. He is also a musician and the front man for the band Beecake.



@OfficialBeecake

## (THE VOICE OF) WALTER WILLIAM HOPE



Born in Montreal, William lives in London where he graduated from RADA. In the mid 80's he appeared in James Cameron's *Aliens* as Lt. Gorman. His career to date includes art and indie films and major Hollywood movies including *Captain America: The First Avenger* and *Sherlock Holmes*.



# Q&A WITH WRITER & DIRECTOR MARK TOWERS

## **Why did you decide to make a film about artificial intelligence?**

Artificial intelligence has always been a key area of interest to me ever since I was young. I am amongst the first generation who grew up with a computer inside the home. They were always there and I was always using them so as I saw them becoming more advanced and complex I naturally would start pondering what would happen when these objects inevitably become sentient. But as I've gotten older how they become that has been a key area of interest and I haven't really seen that covered in film.

## **But those films we've all seen about AI interest you? Would you mark them down as influences?**

Oh yeah, of course! I love those films, I just wanted to try something new. I think in *The Alpha Invention* you can see most notably *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* but it wasn't just the sci-fi inspiration. Film noir was an equally big influence, plot points like two males trying to outsmart each other, the shady antagonist and even props like the phone handset and the Venetian blinds. I wanted to take the two genres and smash them together, find the area of the Venn diagram where they crossover.

## **And how about the single location nature of the film, was that the plan from the outset?**

It was. I wanted to do something that was a single location film and not horror. It's used a lot in the horror genre because oppressive forces often lead characters to lock themselves in somewhere or the place that's haunted is their home but it also lends itself very well to noir. It heightens the atmosphere because the audience gets to know the location very well as you've shot it from virtually every angle. And with one character in there you really get a sense of isolation that Billy's character Guy is in – he's a hermit.

## **How did you manage to get Billy Boyd to star in the film?**

Well, I'm a big *Lord of the Rings* fan and have seen Billy in films as early as *Urban Ghost Story* and really liked his style. I'd also always seen the character of Guy as Celtic, certainly not someone with a London accent, I thought it would be a nice contrast with the seedier American voice on the other end of the phone. So I talked to my Casting Director Matt Western, and said "I'm a big fan of Billy's work, do you think we can get him?" to which the answer was "We can try." So we sent the script to his agent and hoped that it alone was strong enough to persuade him. A week later I get a call and this Scottish lilt says "Hello, Mark? This is Billy Boyd!" He said he loved the script and after an hour of discussion about style and how I want to shoot it he said "I'm in!"

## **How long did pre-production take?**

About a year. But I'd been writing it for even longer, since November 2012. It's taken a long time but I really wanted to make sure the script was its absolute best so that we could get someone of Billy's calibre on board. I knew I'd written something good but the challenge was getting a cast that can pull this off because fifteen minutes of one conversation requires actors of extraordinary ability. Thankfully, we got them.

### **And how long was the shoot?**

Three days. We did a day of masters and two days of coverage and what I call “trick shots”, the fancier camera movements for key moments.

### **Which shot or segment was the hardest to achieve?**

Well I thought it was going to be the aforementioned trick shots but if you ask Billy it was probably the masters (*laughs*). We didn't have much in the budget for rehearsals and getting diaries matching was tricky. So on the first day I said to Billy “I'm chucking you in the deep end a bit here,” and we did single takes of the entire film. Billy later told me that he thinks it's the hardest he's ever worked on a film but he did a fantastic job and I just said “Think of it as a rehearsal but we're filming it just in case there's a moment of brilliance.” And there was. Quite a few in fact!

### **You edited the film yourself, some say that's a brave choice as it can be detrimental to the final product.**

Yeah, I think that is true if you are doing it simply for economic reasons. When I write the film reveals itself to me in my head; it's all there so I know precisely which shots I need for which sequences, how the camera should move and what kind of performance it should be capturing. So editing feels a very natural part of that process in post-production. I just lay the film out, warts 'n' all, how it was in my head and then spend about the next twenty-five drafts cleaning up the rough edges or using different shots or sound to overcome various issues. One of those issues might be that it's not working in certain sections, so that's the other crucial part of editing yourself – be objective and kill your babies!

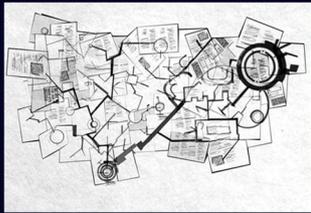
### **How do you go about utilising music in filmmaking?**

Music is usually a huge part of what gets me excited about filmmaking. All the filmmakers I admire use music in really interesting ways and it's the edit synced with the music that, to me, really makes cinema a wonderful artform. However, oddly with *The Alpha Invention* there was no music appearing in my head as I was writing it. Part of this is due to the fact that it's very dialogue driven but the other reason is that I wanted the rain and thunder to be the soundtrack. For the most part, that was going to drive the mood and capture the tone of the film more than anything. Fortunately, I met Doug Berwick our composer, and he wrote some lovely pieces which has inflections of everyone from Miklós Rózsa to Hans Zimmer. It really embellished the feel of the film from classic noir to neo-noir and sci-fi so I started to use more and more of his music in the editing room. Of course, the final sequence was always designed to have music and Doug composed that piece tremendously well, it's my favourite part!

### **What's next?**

Well, I have a few feature scripts written. They're all of varying indie sized budgets, we'll see what we can achieve!

# CONCEPT ART



# PRODUCTION STILLS



All hi-res production stills can be downloaded at [www.thealphainvention.com/epk](http://www.thealphainvention.com/epk)

# BEHIND-THE-SCENES FEATUURETTE

Watch the making of *The Alpha Invention* at  
[www.thealphainvention.com/epk](http://www.thealphainvention.com/epk).

