



# BFI FAMILIES

FAMILY FRIENDLY FILM SCREENINGS,  
ACTIVITIES AND WORKSHOPS



## THE WATCHER IN THE WOODS

### What's it about?

Disney's supernatural family thriller sees an American family move into a manor in the English countryside. The owner (Davis) now lives in a house next door and notices a resemblance between one of the girls and her own daughter, who disappeared from a chapel in the local woods 30 years earlier. Soon the children become aware of strange goings on in the woods and find themselves in the middle of a spooky adventure.

## The Watcher in the Woods

In Disney's cult fantasy *The Watcher in the Woods* the Curtis family – Helen (Carroll Baker), Paul (David McCallum) and their daughters Jan (Lynn-Holly Johnson) and Ellie (Kyle Richards) – take up residence in a country pile owned by the irascible Mrs Aylwood (Bette Davis). As it turns out, Aylwood's daughter Karen disappeared 30 years ago, and the matriarch's stern visage is softened by Jan's resemblance to her missing child. Through a series of uncanny events involving circles of blue light, near-fatal accidents and disturbing visions of the absent daughter, Jan comes to understand the truth behind her doppelgänger's disappearance.

Based on a 1976 novel by Florence Engel Randall, and directed by English journeyman John Hough, *The Watcher in the Woods* is a beautifully shot, well-acted (21-year-old Johnson is especially terrific) curio, an oddball artefact from the period in Disney's history when the studio was making a bid for relevance in the post-*Star Wars* landscape of mainstream cinema. This period also produced cult favourites such as *The Black Hole* and *Tron*, but neither of those can boast the decidedly troubled history – nor the eerie atmosphere – of this production.

Unhappy with its initial reception, Disney recalled the film and embarked on a tortuous process of rewrites (there were reportedly 152 possible conclusions in the running) and reshoots that resulted in two variant endings, one of which made the final cut while the other, which was to utilise special effects to create an alien world, remained unfinished. Meanwhile, tales abound of tension on the set involving an irritable Bette Davis, nervous executives and an embattled director.

**Joseph Stannard, *Sight & Sound*, March 2011**

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### THE WATCHER IN THE WOODS

*Directed by:* John Hough

*©:* Walt Disney Productions

*Presented by:* Walt Disney Productions

*Produced by:* Ron Miller

*Co-producer:* Tom Leetch

*Screenplay by:* Brian Clemens, Harry Spalding, Rosemary Anne Sisson

*From the novel A Watcher in the Woods by:* Florence Engel Randall

*Director of Photography:* Alan Hume

*Final Sequence Designed by:* Harrison Ellenshaw

*Photographic Effects:* Robin Browne

*Final Sequence Visual Effects:* David Mattingly,

Richard Kendall, Don Henry

*Special Effects:* John Richardson

*Editor:* Geoffrey Foot

*Production Designer:* Elliot Scott

*Art Director:* Alan Cassie

*Costume Designer:* Emma Porteous

*Make-up Chief:* Ernie Gasser

*Hairdressing Chief:* Joyce James

*Music Composed & Conducted by:* Stanley Myers

*Sound Recordists:* Claude Hitchcock, Gerry Humphreys

*Sound Editor:* Jim Shields

*Stunt Supervisor:* Vic Armstrong

*Filmed at:* Pinewood Studios

### Cast

Bette Davis (*Mrs Aylwood*)

Carroll Baker (*Helen Curtis*)

David McCallum (*Paul Curtis*)

Lynn-Holly Johnson (*Jan Curtis*)

Kyle Richards (*Ellie Curtis*)

Ian Bannen (*John Keller*)

Richard Pasco (*Tom Colley*)

Frances Cuka (*Mary Fleming*)

Benedict Taylor (*Mike Fleming*)

Eleanor Summerfield (*Mrs Thayer*)

Georgina Hale (*young Mrs Aylwood*)

USA/UK 1980

84 mins

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