

## Interview: Joe Cornish, John Boyega of ‘Attack the Block’

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CHICAGO – “Attack the Block” has been building buzz all year and Chicago will finally be able to see what all the positive internet hype has been about when it opens here on Friday, July 29th, 2011. Director Joe Cornish and future superstar/lead John Boyega (the young man has an unbelievable amount of charisma, on-screen and off) both came to town recently and sat down with me at The James Hotel to talk about aliens, special effects, Basement Jaxx, John Carpenter, and the potential for a sequel.

When I walked in, John was signing off of Skype...

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I want to start there...the social media aspect of promoting yourself and this film. At the screening I was at, there was a lot of talk about tweeting and social networking. How important is that to a movie nowadays?

**JOE CORNISH:** To a movie like this, it's VERY important. Screen Gems' marketing approach is to just screen it and build buzz. We're not getting a big marketing campaign. “Attack the Block” — if it's successful will be successful because of word-of-mouth and people honestly digging it. Which is cool. It's an honest approach. It's not to say that I would have fought back if they'd offered to spend \$100 million. We wouldn't have been anti-that. At the same time, in a world where big blockbusters are heavily marketed, it would feel kind of cool if this film could be a success through genuine word-of-mouth.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Doesn't it feel like that's starting to become more “valid” for lack of a better word? People don't want something pushed down their throat. They want a personal recommendation.

**CORNISH:** I hope so. That's how it used to be. Really, the way that “Attack the Block” is being released is the way movies used to be. Films would be released in a big format in select cinemas and roll out if they were successful. It's yet another old-school aspect of “Attack the Block.” Not only does it look and feel like an old-school movie, it's being released like one as well.



Attack the Block

Photo credit: Screen Gems

**HollywoodChicago.com:** John, have you seen it with an audience? Were you at SXSW [where the film earned rave reviews]?

**JOHN BOYEGA:** No, but I was at the L.A. Film Festival.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Can you speak a bit about watching it with an audience for the first time? My audience was very responsive, cheering and shouting things like “Yeah, Moses” [John’s character’s name] at the screen. What’s that feel like?

**BOYEGA:** You get a different feel watching it with an American audience — they’re very vocal and the energy is very different. People clapping. It was great. You get a different aspect. You see it differently.



Attack the Block  
Photo credit: Screen Gems

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Does anything play differently than you expected?

**CORNISH:** I think American audiences relate to the style of the film — this is a film that’s really informed by American movies. It’s really at home here. And it’s a film that’s based in quite a real environment in the U.K. which makes some people [there] a little bit anxious or unable to let go and deal with it as an escapist movie.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** It’s more of a fantasy for Americans.

**CORNISH:** Absolutely. Which is how it was intended. I think American audiences are a bit more able to take it that way.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** And yet the realism of the location is important. I like the use of the building, the location — it’s a very ’70s thing — like John Carpenter, who you’ve cited as an influence. It reminded me of [George] Romero and [David] Cronenberg at times too.

**CORNISH:** “Shivers.” Yeah. Definitely. It’s the area I grew up in. I grew up in Stockwell. I was born in Marble Arch but I came straight to Stockwell. I’ve lived my whole life. I grew up around those blocks and they always felt like something out of science fiction, like spaceships or space stations. The walkways. It’s like “Metropolis” or “Logan’s Run.” It’s like a futuristic city. And they were built with that intention. London was heavily bombed in the second World War so they built these estates with a utopian spirit after the war. We wanted to take them back to that optimistic, futuristic sci-fi feel.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** When you speak about these influences, are they conversations you had with your cast? Did you show them the movies that inspired this one?

**BOYEGA:** Yeah, yeah. We got DVDs [mimes a stack of DVDs with his hands.]

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was in there?

**BOYEGA:** “The Warriors,” “Assault on Precinct 13,” “Over the Edge.” We had a screening of “Predator.” Some Brazilian film...

**CORNISH:** I really included these guys as early as possible. There quite a few of hood movies in the UK that deal with the more realistic side of this world. It was important to me that John and the boys knew about that world but that we were putting these style elements into it.





Attack the Block

Photo credit: Screen Gems

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Let’s talk about your character. This is one day in the life of Moses — Do you know more about his life? His childhood? His background? Did you work that out yourself or together?

**BOYEGA:** We had a long rehearsal process. We had time to sit down and talk through our individual characters and where they’d been before and how they got to that point in their life. It gives depth to your performance. You can tell that this guy has a history. You know his background.



Attack the Block

Photo credit: Screen Gems

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You did that with all of them?

**CORNISH:** We did a day on each character. We discussed every line — why they said that, what it meant, and everyone could chime in. But you also went off and did character work on your own.

**BOYEGA:** I kind of built Moses from scratch because all I was given was “*Moses is strong, silent, rides a BMX dirt bike.*” That was it. [Laughs.] The silent approach read well in the script but there needed to be storytelling behind it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Is it very loyal to the script because of the nature of the dialogue you dissected with your cast?

**CORNISH:** I wrote the last two drafts with the cast on-board. Everything in those sessions was stitched into the script. But we didn’t change too much. That was something I learned off Edgar [Wright]. He’s often asked if his scripts are improvised. They’re not. You rehearse it and then you lock it down because you can’t really afford...maybe if I had a Judd Apatow budget. Stylistically, that’s not the kind of movie I’m interested in making. I want to frame shots. I want to do composition. I know how long my scenes should last. We all wanted to keep the story moving forward. We wanted to make an action movie. So, we kept the dialogue to a minimum.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** But the dialogue is unique. You’ve referenced “A Clockwork Orange” but it’s not THAT stylized, you can follow it...we’re not going to [as some rumors have suggested] add subtitles, right?

**CORNISH:** No, no. There is NOT going to be any subtitles on “Attack the Block.” Nope. Screen Gems aren’t going to touch it. They’re releasing the same movie as at SXSW.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** That makes me happy. It doesn’t need subtitles.

**CORNISH:** I don’t think it’s an issue. You get into it. People pick it up. It’s not that complicated.

**BOYEGA:** The narrative is strong.

**CORNISH:** Plus, a lot of that slang is American. Most of it comes from 30 years of hip-hop culture. We only use about 10-15 slang words, repeated in different contexts. I designed it that way. A lot of my favorite filmmakers have trouble breaking out internationally because it’s so dense. We went out of our way to simplify.



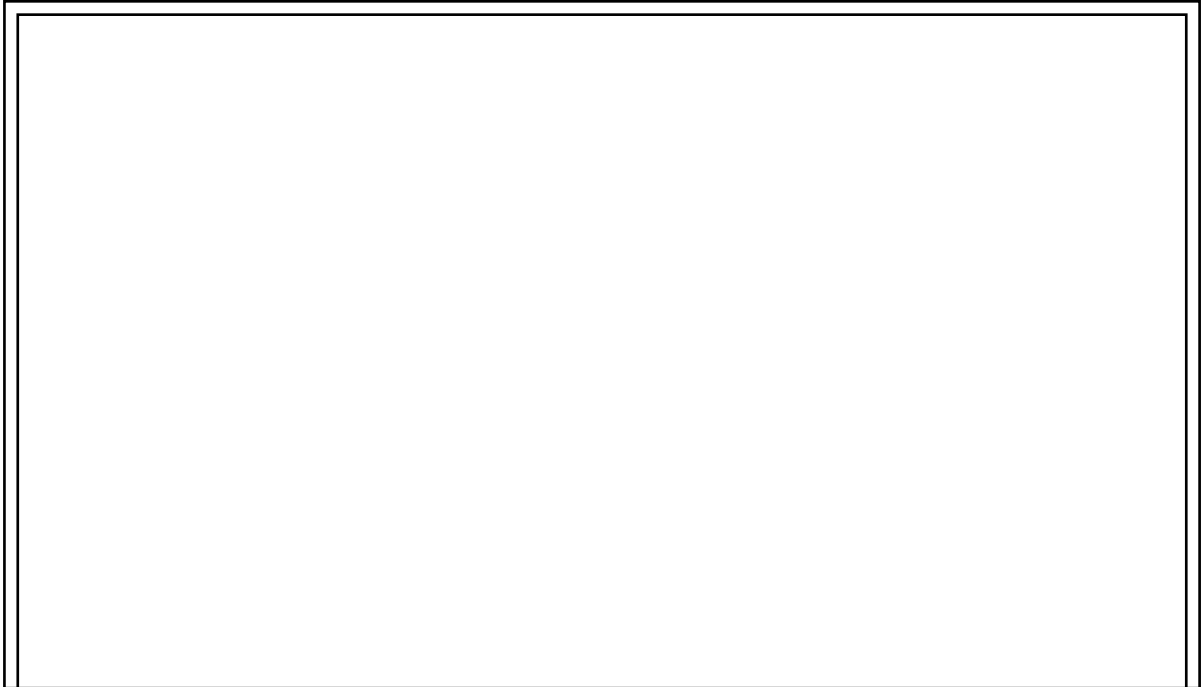
Attack the Block  
Photo credit: Screen Gems

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Let’s talk a bit about the aliens/effects. John, what do you see on-set? Was there someone in an actual suit?

**BOYEGA:** Yes. We had the lovely Terry Notary on all fours running around and chasing us.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Speak about the importance of that and practical effects — having something there physically as opposed to acting to a tennis ball and having a computer take care of it later. Is that purely budget? If you had the budget, would the aliens have all been CGI or do you have a love for practical effects?

**CORNISH:** I have a love for practical effects. I have a theory that digital animation is animation and animation never blends that well with live-action. It can work if you’ve got “Godzilla” but even “Jurassic Park” most of those effects are practical. The company we worked with agreed. It’s not like they’re saying let’s do it with CGI. They want us to bring them practical stuff and they’ll add the touches. They don’t WANT to do the whole thing.







Attack the Block  
Photo credit: Screen Gems

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Is it important to you too?

**BOYEGA:** I can't agree entirely. As an actor, your imagination needs to be long-range. You need to see things that aren't there. But it's good to have it because it brings a certain kind of spice to it. Terry would actually make a noise and I would flinch and I wouldn't do that with a tennis ball. He's a character — growling, drooling.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was the hardest element of production?

**CORNISH:** The biggest surprise for me was how quickly you have to shoot. We had ten weeks and to do stuff safely takes time. You spend years and years writing and half-a-year in prep and then you stand on the set and you have 4 minutes. Something isn't how you expected. It's raining. You're tired. The prop guy brings you the wrong thing. And you just think "F\*\*k me, I spent so long planning for this." You just have to swallow your impatience and your pride. You have to be patient with each other and understanding. Sometimes those are the best moments. It's nice to have a blend of the planned and stuff of the moment.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Let's talk a bit about the music — how did Basement Jaxx get involved?

**CORNISH:** The ambition was to combine a John Carpenter sound with a John Williams sound. I always thought that it would be cool to score the gang with the Carpenter feel and the aliens with the orchestral feel. And then at the climax it would switch. It kind of happens. It's not quite as pure as that. That was always the sense. Basement Jaxx — the first gig they ever did was at a club at the end of the road in the first scene. There's a joy to what they do. A happiness. Sometimes electronic scores can be so dark and scummy. We studied Carpenter really hard. We realized he does a thing where he doesn't use a snare. You can never really tap your foot or snap your finger.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Everyone's going to ask — would you do another one, the next day on the block?

**CORNISH:** I'd love to. It's that funny thing. We'd have to do it NOW. We'd have to pick up from the moment it ended.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The rest of the invasion that's still going on.

**CORNISH:** We figured there'd be another wave.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** So, it HAS been talked about.

**BOYEGA:** [Laughs]. We've discussed it.

**CORNISH:** We're waiting for "Benjamin Button" technology to get cheap enough to age down the whole cast so the "next day" feels believable. It's got to get cheaper and better.

**Before they start production on that inevitable sequel, check out "Attack the Block" when it opens this Friday, July 29th, 2011 in 7 major cities, including Chicago.**



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [15]  
Content Director  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [14]

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