

Interview: Alice Englert, Aiden Ehrenreich of 'Beautiful Creatures'

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CHICAGO – The peculiar genre of young adult supernatural fiction has produced collections that define popularity. The new film “Beautiful Creatures” is the latest adaptation that feature young lovers among the mystic spells. Newcomers Alice Englert and Aiden Ehrenreich portray that couple.

Alice Englert was born in New Zealand in 1994, the daughter of filmmaker Colin Englert and legendary director Jane Campion (“The Piano,” “Bright Star”). She made her feature film debut directed by her mother in a segment from the film “8” (2008), and also made a splash as Rosa in last year’s “Ginger & Rosa.” Aiden Ehrenreich was born in Los Angeles in 1989, He was “discovered” by Steven Spielberg after the director saw him in a comedy film at age 14. He worked with Francis Ford Coppola in the film “Tetro” (2007), and took over the role as Ethan in “Beautiful Creatures” as a replacement for another actor right before production.



Wherefore Art Thou: Aiden Ehrenreich and Alice Englert in 'Beautiful Creatures'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com spoke to Alice Englert and Aiden Ehrenreich as part of a press roundtable with Nick Allen (The Scorecard Review) and Locke Peterseim (Hammer & Thump).

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you both think you did in the audition process that landed the roles for you? How do you think your display of the characters made you the right fit?

Alice Englert: We both have said before that we didn’t want to audition after reading the brief, it was the script that made all the difference. Richard LaGravenese, the director, had seen me audition for a different film in which I improvised an anorexic girl whilst holding an apple,

passing it back and forth in my hand. He saw a witch in that, and asked me to do it.

When I finally read the script, I wanted to do it, but I was afraid of the word 'studio,' thinking they'd want me to do it in a certain appealing way. I wanted her to be unappealing person that people couldn't connect to, and Richard said great.

Aiden Ehrenreich: I do an exercise with friends where we write parts for one another, because sometimes you come across lines in a script that just fit, that you can say over and over. It has to do with understanding the point-of-view of the character. When I read the script for 'Beautiful Creatures,' I just felt that, I got it. I understood Richard's viewpoint [the director also wrote the screenplay] on who the character was, and I knew I had a take on it that was in line with his take.

HollywoodChicago.com: This film is from the guy's perspective, and in it he is the one fainting, being manipulated and generally put upon. How was it playing the character from that angle?

Ehrenreich: The authors of the original novels told me that most books in this genre have the guys cold and aloof, like impenetrable jerks. They wanted to write a story in which the guy was literate and polite, a good guy. For girls who read these books, they look to these books to figure out what they like in a guy, and ours is different.

Englert: I love the character of Ethan, because he was more than just a good guy, he got flaws and seems more real. It's important in a supernatural story to have somebody who is real, because one of the reason's I was attracted to my character was the way she reacted to Ethan. I could understand it and believe it, and go with it.

HollywoodChicago.com: Despite your 'powers,' in the film, you seemed to play the character of Lena as softer and more vulnerable. Was that your approach to her?

Englert: I wanted to play away from any magical thing, because with the effects there was enough of it.

Ehrenreich: That's what is special about the story to me, that it starts about witches and 'casters,' and then transitions into Lena, who simply wants to be a normal person. Ethan doesn't fit into the town of smaller minded people and Lena doesn't fit into the caster world, because she wants to be more normal. It becomes a definition of what is normal, what does it mean to be a human being. That is what the title implies, that the 'beautiful creatures' are people, because they are so foolishly hopeful.

HollywoodChicago.com: Being a 'name' celebrity has it's own moments of being outside the norm. Are you both prepared for name recognition and 'celebrity' if the film takes off?

Englert: No, how the hell could you possibly prepare for something like that? When somebody tried to explain to me what could possibly happen, I just left. [laughs]

Ehrenreich: There is nothing in your life that could prepare you for such a thing. To me, my ace in the hole is having friends and family that are honest with me...

Englert: I like friends who just tell me I'm great.

Ehrenreich: [Laughs] We're both lucky that we grew up in an atmosphere – me around show business in Los Angeles and Alice with her mother – around the film industry in some way, around it enough not to freak out. I'm grateful for that.



An Intimate Moment for Aiden Ehrenreich and Alice Englert in 'Beautiful Creatures'

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com: Both of you were not born in the South, and the film has a connection to Southern Gothic mystery. When doing your research about that mystery, what fascinated you the most about the Southern way of life in America and how did you apply it to your character?

Englert: I think the real acceptance of the supernatural is key. When we were shooting exteriors in New Orleans, near the house that stood in for Ravenswood Manor, I asked the person who took care of the house if there were any ghosts. She said, ‘oh yeah, he just stands there and doesn’t bother anyone. He loves western music and likes to change it.’ It was just a conversation about the civil war ghost in the house.

Ehrenreich: I think my character was an update on the ‘southern gentleman.’ I had a lot of fun playing with that element of Ethan. Having this story where I got to play that classic bit of American mythology, ‘come over here Scarlett,’ was cool, and then it gets picked apart. Ethan likes that Lena doesn’t have a veneer, that she is more directly honest, and it’s that draw to her that gets him out of the southern charm part of himself.

HollywoodChicago.com: You both did convincing dialects. How difficult was it to pick up the regional accents, and working with the dialect coaches?

Englert: Since I’m from New Zealand, I’m constantly working with dialect coaches, it’s not strange for me to deal with, but it’s a huge struggle initially, and then it just happens. It’s really about how your mouth moves, and the whole way you present yourself changes.

Ehrenreich: When I watched the film, I realized there were points where I never looked liked that before, the accent actually changes your face. The accent activated something in me that I wouldn’t ever consciously done. Our dialogue coach, Rick Lipton, included tips on why southerners talk like that within the culture. The southern culture supplemented so much of it for me, and was really helpful. I still don’t know if it works. [laughs]

Englert: The accent is so much about manners, as much as intonation. I had to move my voice higher, which was difficult because I have a lower voice [mumbles to demonstrate].

HollywoodChicago.com: Alice, what did you learn from your mother’s approach [Jane Campion] to film making and working with actors over the years that has helped you most in beginning your performing career?

Englert: So much, seriously. I don’t even know what type of actor I’d be if I wasn’t my mother’s daughter. So much of the way she works I agree with, and has influenced me. It’s bizarre to me to imagine not having that in my life.

I was doing a school play when I was ten years old, and the teacher I had was constantly saying ‘emphasize this word.’ I was reading my speeches in the car with my mother, doing the one word emphasis, and she turned around and said, ‘just say the words, and breathe when you need to breathe, what is interesting will happen anyway.’ And this was just a school play, so of course I said, ‘no Mom, she’s the school teacher and she told me to emphasize that word!’ She turned around to my ten year old self and shot back, ‘Well, I’m a film director!’

“Beautiful Creatures” opens everywhere on February 14th. Featuring Alice Englert, Aiden Ehrenreich, Jeremy Irons, Viola Davis and Emma Thompson. Screenplay adapted by Richard Lagravanese, from the novel by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl. Directed by Richard Lagravanese. Rated “PG-13”



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