

Sean Astin among 'Spirit' cast

By Gregg Goldstein

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Sean Astin (Getty Images photo)

Sean Astin, Giovanni Ribisi, Ron Perlman and Anjelica Huston are heading into the CGI-animated "Spirit of the Forest," an eco-fairy tale for Fantastic Films International and Dygra Films.

Astin and Ribisi play two gopher friends whose home is threatened when an evil businesswoman (Huston) plans to tear down their forest to build a highway. With the help of an old oak tree (Perlman), the animals and their friends fight back with a vengeance.

"In 'Lord of the Rings,' my favorite element in the story was the Ents, these massive trees getting cut down that fought for their own survival; in 'Spirit,' the trees also come to life," said Astin, noting the environmental message in both films. "It's another way of telling a story that needs to continue to be told. Progress comes at a price."

Spain-based Dygra's "The Living Forest" (2001) and "Midsummer Dream" (2005) each won the Spanish equivalent of an Oscar for best animated feature. "Forest" will hit theaters in September in Spain.

FFI is producing the celebrity voice-over recordings and repping worldwide sales of "Forest" outside Spain and Portugal. The company will screen the film for buyers at next month's Festival de Cannes and plans for a 2009 release in international territories.