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Thursday, August 28, 2008

IRA film to be premiered despite threat of legal action



Ben Kingsley: plays an RUC Special Branch agent

MICHAEL DWYER, Film Correspondent

THE PRODUCERS of a new film on a British intelligence operative who infiltrated the IRA say that its world premiere will go ahead as planned at next month's Toronto International Film Festival, despite a threat of legal action from Martin McGartland, on whose experiences it is based.

The film *Fifty Dead Men Walking* shares its title with the book by McGartland and Nicholas Davies.

McGartland gave it that title because he believes his undercover activities saved that many lives between 1987 and 1991.

The screenplay is by the film's Canadian director, Kari Skogland, and the credits state that her screenplay was "inspired by" the book.

Rising British actor Jim Sturgess plays the character based on McGartland. The Toronto festival programme notes say that the character is introduced as "a small-time Belfast hustler" who becomes "a prime target for British intelligence".

Oscar-winning actor Sir Ben Kingsley plays the RUC Special Branch agent who recruits him as a mole.

The film is scheduled for a high-profile gala screening at the Toronto event, which ranks with Cannes and Venice among the world's three most important film festivals.

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The Toronto programme notes describes the film as "a sweeping political thriller that gives a face to what Northern Ireland . . . calls the Troubles". But the film's Canadian distributor TVA Films cancelled a Toronto press screening of the film last Friday, citing "a print problem".

McGartland has threatened legal action to stop the festival screening going ahead. He said he and his solicitor had seen "a version of the film" at a private screening.

He told the trade publication *Screen International* that the version of the film he saw misrepresented his life and showed him participating in murderous bomb attacks and torture, both of which he denies.

"I definitely have a case in terms of infringement of my moral rights, not only in the UK but all around the world," McGartland said.

"If my solicitor tells me it damages my reputation, I will seek an injunction to see that the film is pulled and the DVD doesn't see the light of day."

However, in a statement yesterday, the film's producers said due process had been followed throughout the production, including the licensing of rights to the source material.

The statement continued: "Mr McGartland was consulted by the filmmakers during the production, read the script, and watched the film in advance of any public screening. He was also given the opportunity to have the name of the lead character replaced with a fictional character name, which he declined."

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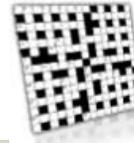


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