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VENICE DAYS

CAPTURE (THE FLAG) FILMS PRESENTS

A FILM BY YANNICK DAHAN & BENJAMIN ROCHER

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FRANCE / 2009 / 95MIN / 35MM / 2.35

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SYNOPSIS

North of Paris. In order to avenge the murder of one of their own by a group of ruthless gangsters, four corrupt cops go on a rampage in a condemned building serving as the mobster's hideout. Now trapped, the officers are about to be executed when the unimaginable occurs: hordes of bloodthirsty, cannibalistic creatures invade the building, savagely attacking everyone. Unexpected alliances are made when their lives are threatened by the unthinkable.

INTERVIEW

Can you tell us how you met?

Yannick :

It's been a while now! As a matter of fact, Benjamin and his brother, Raphael (our producer), had begun working for a thematic cable station that had just started up. Raphael was head of programming and he was the one who talked me into presenting a cinema show, even though I was working for the written press.

Benjamin:

I had started working as computer graphic designer and was making computer-generated animation for Yannick's shows. That's how we all met. When the TV station shut down, my brother and I decided to start our own TV production company, and so we asked Yannick to join in on the adventure. We haven't left each other since and, together, the three of us set up a film production structure, Capture the Flag Films, which was the origin of THE HORDE.

Precisely, how did the project, THE HORDE, start?

Benjamin:

Actually, THE HORDE is really the result of team work, born out of an opportunity. Canal+ was looking for targeted genre films in order to fill its program schedule and decided to create a film collection called French Frayeurs (French Fears). The idea was to partly finance small scale, 100% French, original horror movies made by young directors.

Yannick:

Benjamin and I had wanted to direct for a long time and we were already working on the synopsis of another movie. However, the budget needed for

a first full-length feature was too high. So we thought about something more modest that could take place in one place only and that would be a fantasy film. Then, one day, I simply told Raphael Rocher that it would be nice to use the logic of From Dusk till Dawn, that is to say a genre that switches brutally into another, but with a serious treatment. Later, Benjamin and I agreed on the two genres we would mix: seventies urban film noir and zombie films. In any case that was the initial intention. Between the different versions of the scenario and filming, this logic evolved and the film became more of an offbeat action film than a pure horror film.

Did you make shorts before launching into the making of THE HORDE?

Benjamin:

Because of my studies, I had the opportunity to direct small shorts very early on; animation, at first, then mixing computer-generated images and real images, as was the case for Ticketland, a short I made with Dimitri Amar... our editor on THE HORDE! That goes to show we truly are a small family. But our partners, justifiably, wanted to make sure that we were able to handle a shoot as ambitious as that of THE HORDE. Therefore, right in the middle of raising money for the film, we decided to make a short called Rivoallan. It reassured our investors and convinced us even more that Yannick and I did good work as a team.

Yannick:


As far as I'm concerned it was baptism by fire! I had made a few shorts when I was younger but nothing that could have prepared me for a shoot as intricate as THE HORDE.

You say THE HORDE was a difficult film to make. Why?

Yannick:

We had to be crazy to make this film!! That's what you need to understand (laughter). To begin with, making the first French zombie film is one thing, but convincing the French film industry – which forgot everything it knows





about the genre and looks down on it – is another. We had to make them understand that THE HORDE was a project supported by real enthusiasts who love genre cinema and for a public that loves this kind of films, is not narrow-minded and shows genuine interest when offered a work that is generous, sincere and respects their expectations.

Benjamin:

And, then again, you also have to keep in mind that we only had a budget of 2 million Euros. It's quite a nice budget when making an independent film, but when you have to make up 300 zombies, orchestrate shoot-out scenes and explosions, handle 6 main characters under constant physical strain or include digital special effects, well, 2 millions frankly isn't much. Yet it's because it was impossible, and because we were crazy and a bit green, that we managed to wrap up this project.

Yannick:

We wanted to go back, in our own modern way, to this kind of craftsmanship, this old film noir tradition or that of French adventure films from the 60s, that is to say a cinema meant for the enjoyment of the public, that is at once funny, dramatic and intense, and creates a separate universe into which the spectator enters unquestioningly.

You talk about a separate universe, yet there are many things whose influence can be seen in your film

Yannick:

Clearly! But this influence is not conscious. Benjamin and I are voracious moviegoers. When you see our main character brandish a machete in the face of 300 creatures, you obviously have Conan the Barbarian! (laughter) We are great fans of Sam Raimi, Spielberg, Jackson, Del Toro, the Cohen brothers or even McTiernan, Carpenter and Verhoeven. I just realized I forgot to include Romero. This is probably why we consider THE HORDE to be more of an action film than a zombie film!

Benjamin:

As far as we are concerned, zombie movies are a genre of their own, one that is quite metaphorical. For my part, I think that zombies are the most terrifying creatures in the collective imagination because they touch what we fear most: death. And the concept of a zombie movie, in which the dead return to devour the living, aside from its obvious symbolism, touches something profoundly existential.

THE HORDE is an existential movie, then?

Yannick:

Of course not! For us, THE HORDE is a wild roller-coaster ride. We'd like the spectator to go through a wide range of emotions: laughter, fear, pleasure, surprise, etc. For us, the zombies in our movie aren't the story's central subject. We see them more as the allegory of those left behind taking revenge on a society that forgot about them. This is the reason why we often treat them as victims in the movie and why the action is taking place in run-down suburban ghettos, characteristic of French suburbs.

Benjamin:

Our stand, from the start, was to have characters who were "larger than life", seemingly caricatural but who all along the story reveal the cracks in their persona. These personal shortcomings are more often at the root of their problems than the threatening zombies. There are no heroes in THE HORDE but rather symbolic figures confronted with the alienation of French society. All this, however, is only the background. We have no message to send or moral lesson to give. Yet, without appearing to do so, a shot or a dialog can implicitly evoke racism, ethnocentrism, the toughening of right-winged people or absurd urban planning policies. This isn't the subject of the film – obviously – it's just our own vision of the world which inevitably shows through in our film.



Was the shoot particularly grueling? Were there moments of stress or tension you weren't prepared for?

Yannick:

Yes, it was very difficult for the whole team. We didn't have enough time, enough money and just went crazy, as you might say! (laughter). We all learned a lot on the spot. We had to adapt quickly to the thousands of constraints that sprung up on us. Yet at the same time I think it was a productive experience and a phenomenal learning opportunity. Something of a boot camp that Benjamin and I will never forget. It is when under strain that one has to be creative. This kind of strain makes you grow...

What do you think of this new wave of French directors who are becoming specialized in the genre, such as Xavier Gens, Pascal Laugier, Bustillo & Maury, etc.? And why, in your opinion, is there no love lost between France and fantasy cinema, unlike in the UK, Spain or the US?

Yannick:

What can I say? It's an endless debate in which I have been involved for years. There are hundreds of factors to be taken into account: the lack of financing, the lack of daring on the distributors' and movie theater management's part, TV channels' fears, the lack of support from public authorities, condescension from the movie-making circles, the blatant incompetence of some producers... Yes there is a real problem concerning genre cinema in France but initiatives such as those taken on by Aja, Xavier Gens or Pascal Laugier do change things little by little. We understand that we can count on no one, so we have to make do on our own, with limited financing.

Benjamin:

It is frustrating for us and for the public, who simply can't find the kind of productions backed by solid money they can see in American horror films. Yet we have to persevere. One day, French fantasy films will federate enough viewers to reverse the trend. At least I hope so.

In your opinion, what makes your film different from other genre movies made in France?

Benjamin:

One thing is obvious: we didn't want to further push the limits of gory scenes, violence or suffering. Martyrs, Frontiers, Inside or High Tension are very intense works, very dark and very violent, visually as well as psychologically, and that's why they are so striking. As far as we're concerned, we wanted above all to make a film that was more laid-back, a kind of whimsical adventure movie in which action and humor prevailed over any kind of trauma.

Yannick:

It's up to you to tell us if the film corresponds to that but, in theory, I think we simply ended up in another genre. Even if THE HORDE is a violent movie, it is not a horror movie in the strict sense of the term. It is a real action movie, intense, at times scary and gory, but its violence is surreal. I think our style is more nutty, like a comic-book that has come alive!!





CAST

AUORE
OUESSEM
ADEWALE
JIMENEZ
RENÉ
JO

Claude Perron
Jean-Pierre Martins
Eriq Ebouaney
Aurélien Recoing
Yves Pignot
José Prestia



CREDITS

Directed by
Produced by

Yannick Dahan & Benjamin Rocher
Raphaël Rocher / Capture The Flag Films
Le Pacte

Screenplay

Amaud Bordas
Yannick Dahan
Stéphane Moassakis
Nicolas Peuffaillit
Benjamin Rocher
Julien Meurice

Cinematography

Editing

Production Design

Production Management

Stunt Choreographer

Dimitri Amar
Jéréemie Streliski
Marie-Laure Merriaux
Alain Figlarz

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