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Versus production & Les Films du Worso
present

THE WHITE KNIGHTS

(LES CHEVALIERS BLANCS)

A FILM BY JOACHIM LAFOSSE



OFFICIAL SCREENINGS

SAT. 12, 2:15 PM @ VISA SCREENING ROOM ELGIN (PUBLIC 1)

SUN. 13, 3:45 PM @ SCOTIABANK 3 (P&I 1)

MON. 14, 12:15 PM @ CINEMA 1 (PUBLIC 2)

TUE. 15, 8:45 AM @ SCOTIABANK 13 (P&I 2)

SAT. 19, 6:00 PM @ CINEMA 1 (PUBLIC 3)

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[LES CHEVALIERS BLANCS]

A FILM BY JOACHIM LAFOSSE

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SYNOPSIS

Jacques Arnault, head of Move For Kids NGO, is planning a high impact operation: he and his team are going to exfiltrate 300 orphans victims of Chadian civil war and bring them to French adoption applicants. Françoise Dubois, a journalist, is invited to come along with them and handle the media coverage for this operation.

Completely immersed in the brutal reality of a country at war, the NGO members start losing their convictions and are faced with the limits of humanitarian intervention



JOACHIM LAFOSSE

Interview

For the first time you venture into territory that is completely new for you, that of adventure films.

After two movies that took place in an enclosed space, the Zoe's Ark affair gave me the opportunity to approach a new genre while once again exploring the intricate question of the right to interfere and the boundaries between good and evil. The subject is a wonderful fiction writer's tool.

The White Knights is inspired by the Arche de Zoe [Zoe's Ark] affair, a humanitarian aid organization (NGO), which attempted to abduct "orphans" from Chad in 2007 to give them up for adoption by French families. As in your films Private Lessons and Our Children, this film deals once again with the question of manipulation exerted in the name of "good."

The idea that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" fascinates me. In these films, the main characters establish as a governing rule their own idea of what is good, and apply this absolute to others without further concern about the consequences or ramifications: a student doing badly at school meets a teacher who wants to save him despite himself; a doctor takes in a family that he showers with gifts, smothering them to the point of suffocation. Here, people working in a humanitarian relief organization grant themselves the right to "save" children.

How do you approach an affair of this type?

Subjectively: in proposing a different perspective, another analysis than those offered by the media and the justice system. Judicial truth and journalistic objectivity are not the

only possible perspectives. There is a place for fiction, a place for liberty of interpretation that an artist can easily take hold of. Contrary to what is generally believed, using a news item as a starting point for fiction is a true vector of creativity. It does take a lot to surprise a public who feels like they've already heard everything there is to say about an affair and so the writing process was fairly long. I worked together with several screenwriters. From beginning to end, I needed to test out every part of my film.

Did you meet any of the people with a connection to the Zoe's Ark affair?

No, I never wanted to. As I am an author of fiction, I know very well that what I am staging is not real; it is solely the fruit of my imagination, an elaboration. It's not about them. The protagonists in my story are not the individuals involved in the Zoe's Ark affair. My films are first and foremost a reflection of my own obsessions.

Thus while remaining true to the actual events, you propose a very personal interpretation of the story.

Being true to what happened in reality is never my priority. In The White Knights, I wanted to tell the story from the point of view of the Africans who are completely unaware of the French humanitarian aid workers' lies. They are told that the orphans will be cared for in a health center until the age of 15, that they will be given food and shelter, and go to school. And the Africans believe it. Some even bring their own children to the organization with the laudable intention of putting them in a safer place and saving them from extreme poverty.

Their attitude, dictated by necessity, cannot be compared to the unacceptable attitude of the so-called humanitarian professionals, whose project is to exfiltrate these African children in the name of satisfying the wishes of French families who want to adopt a child, on the premise that their lives will be better in France than their war-devastated country.

You chose Vincent Lindon to play the NGO's leader.

Vincent is the father, the brother or the friend that we all dream of having. We see him as a frank, honest and politically engaged person. He's an honest man. Only an actor who had that dimension, someone irresistibly attractive and charming could play Jacques Arnault. How else can you explain that this man raised 600,000 euros and convinced an entire team of people to leave for Africa and organize this type of operation without having an actor who already had all these qualities?

Jacques Arnault is a fantastic character because he embodies all the contradictions inherent to the generous and well-meaning Westerner excessively playing the "good faith" card to save the world – to save his vision of the world.

Vincent Lindon confers a compelling charisma upon his character.

Vincent Lindon brings to the character the dimension required to ensure our faith in him: he isn't motivated by self-interest. He's generous and even if his actions have tipped over into something morally unacceptable, it's unconscious. "Saving the children" for him justifies all his lies and even the reality: he's kidnapping children.

Unlike Laura – Louise Bourgoïn, his girlfriend, who truly believes in the mission and could have walked straight out of Albert Camus' "The Just Assassins" – in the end Arnault's only faith is in himself: he is sacred; he is the law.

I would have never been able to make this film without Vincent Lindon. He gave me his intelligence. In every shot, every sequence, he allowed me to question everything. He is driven by the same desire for a certain kind of filmmaking,

and was open to sharing with me all the uncertainty inherent to creation. It was trying at times, but all of that is part of what makes working with such a special person so wonderful. The director is far from being the only person with knowledge on the set. During my film shoots, I increasingly share my doubts with my actors. In the beginning it may scare them a little. Then everyone gets down to work and starts making suggestions. I have become the "go-to guy" for sounding things out – we search together.

The money he hands out to the village chiefs gives him an advantage in this war-devastated country.

That is part of his act of good conscience as a white man. There is never a single moment when he admits that the money's purpose is to buy children. No, it is always for services rendered.

There is a heart-wrenching scene when he imposes an ultimatum upon the African mothers: take back the child that they had entrusted to him or give the child up for good.

At one moment or another, a perverse person is bound to say something truthful. Otherwise, we wouldn't believe in them or vote for them. Jacques Arnault is capable of believing in and making others believe in the rules he has defined, no matter their fictitious nature; he only wants orphans, even if he knows deep down that he can never verify that the children are truly orphans.

When writing about this type of subject, it is quite exhilarating to put true words into a transgressive person's mouth.

During their trial in 2012 and 2013, the members of Zoe's Ark hid behind their idealism: they claimed they wanted to save children who were victims of the war; they insisted they'd been acting in the name of "good."

It's always in the name of "doing good" that essential questions are brushed to the side. The appropriateness of one's right to interfere is one of them. What wish or desire truly motivates Westerners who leave on these missions in the name of humanitarian aid and democracy?



Without generalizing, because thankfully there are those who don't fall into this category, there are, among those humanitarian aid workers, people with leanings akin to neocolonialism.

In their own way, they are self-righteous terrorists! Jacques Arnault, the main character, doesn't follow the law; he makes the law. He decides what is legal and what isn't, regardless of politics, which is the main debate here, concerning the acceptance of otherness and of basic principles pertaining to reality. We're back to the issue of "the right to interfere." In a certain way, Jacques Arnault applies this concept literally, spearheading a forceful approach. Yet this concept doesn't work when it is applied literally: you can't help people despite themselves. Moreover, it was striking to observe the extent to which ideologists of the right to interfere were embarrassed by this affair. It was undoubtedly easier for them to write off the individuals involved with Zoe's Ark as fools, when they also could be seen as the embodiment of die-hards who are ready to take things to the very end of their logic,

As is the case in all your films, we are literally in each character's head.

Indeed, the story is less interesting to me than the characters' complexity. I enjoy following them from the first to the last shot, to experience their contradictions first hand. My goal is to make sure the audience gets caught up in and shares this fever that pushes an entire humanitarian group into a form of collective blindness.

In the scenes where the parents who want to adopt children have telephone conversations with Jacques Arnault, the leader of the group, we can clearly see how he wields his power to satisfy these French parents who so desperately want to adopt a child.

Jacques Arnault understood very well that their wish to adopt was more important than anything else to them, and what he could get out of them – notably 2200 euros each to

help him start his operations.

Yes but aren't the adoptive parents also somewhat the people who are behind the whole operation?

These parents are so severely blinded by their difficulties in being able to adopt a child that they forget to question any potential breach of the law. With all due respect, I think it is an excellent thing that current legislation makes adoption so difficult. When a country prohibits international adoption, someone from another country can't just ignore their law and take it upon themselves to exfiltrate orphans within the context of a "humanitarian" mission.

At the beginning of the film, there is an incredible scene where we hear volunteers who have just arrived in the camp, singing a Julien Clerc song by the campfire: Ce n'est rien – "It's nothing." The discrepancy with what is brewing behind the scenes is astonishing.

I like this song because it represents both the horror of denial and the magnificent side of forgiveness. But up to what point can one claim that "It's nothing?" Many humanitarian aid workers have told me that once you start doing field work, there is always a moment when you have to call upon this concept, when you are forced to no longer truly think things through. I, naturally, am a great coward – I am incapable of rolling up my sleeves and going out there in the field. I haven't saved anybody – I just make fiction.

"Coward" is the term one of the volunteer nurses uses in reference to her superior, Chris, played by Yannick Renier, when he decides to quit the mission.

There are also characters in this film who choose to face their powerlessness and refuse to support a project that is headed for disaster. Anybody can make a mistake or take off with a bad idea, as long as they stop before going through with it. One has to be very careful with ideology, I truly believe in the principle of realism; it doesn't make us more powerful, it can even weaken us, but it's better that way.





Although continuing to sell his services to the organization, and choosing to be cynical, Reda Kateb's character is also perfectly aware of the inane nature of this undertaking. It's as though his own actions mirror the characters and their irresponsible behavior.

He's closer to real life than fantasy. He realizes how complex the world is. He's not Manichean – from his perspective nothing is either black or white.

Supposedly an impartial witness, Françoise, the journalist, played by Valérie Donzelli, ends up sending highly contradictory messages.

Although having initially left on this assignment with the intention of informing and bearing witness, Françoise is overcome by her emotions. She loses her critical sense and allows her feelings to govern her reasoning. She represents the moral question that journalists have to ask themselves every time they witness a tragic situation.

It's the first time you've directed a movie of this scope: an adventure film, war scenes, chase scenes in the desert, scenes in an airplane...

In this movie, everything was bigger than anything I had ever filmed before – the scenery, the faraway locations, and the camera movements. My solution was to cling to the characters and follow them in their complexity until I found the formal accuracy I was looking for. I had in mind lessons learned from Sidney Lumet, the Dardenne brothers, and Maurice Pialat. It's the characters' truth that makes a film; like a sculptor, you have to chisel your stone until this truth is revealed.

The White Knights is also your first film with a large cast. Did you direct differently when dealing with a team of 50 people along with a hundred or so extras and 60 children?

It is impossible to direct such a massive project all by yourself. You have to have faith that it's going to work out.

I have been surprised at times, but I never felt like I was losing the bigger picture; on the contrary I had the impression of gaining much more. This goes to show that filmmaking is a collective art, and that there are as many ways to direct as there are actors.

Why did you choose to shoot in Morocco?

It would have been extremely complicated to film in Chad – the insurance companies would not have covered us – but it was very important for me to make the film with Chadian people. We discovered that there was a community of Chadians living in Morocco. We spent three months with them. It was edifying to measure the extent of their anger with regard to the Zoe's Ark affair.

The music, by the band Apparat, plays an important role in the film.

The music had to constantly underline the characters' willpower and omnipotence; it had to directly strike the spectator's unconscious, hit them in the gut. Electronic music, which is more impulsive than emotional, suited this role perfectly.

It's the third time you've worked with the Director of photography Jean-François Hensgens.

He's someone to whom I can say: "take possession of the film, bring me your talent, shake me up, and surprise me." I always let him submit something to me first – I'm increasingly convinced that the most important quality one can expect from a filmmaker is to foster the talent of those with whom you are working.

(1) In "Pièces à convictions" a French investigative journalism monthly TV program.



JOACHIM LAFOSSE

BIOGRAPHY

A renowned director of contemporary cinema, Joachim Lafosse has seen his career go from strength to strength as shown by the national and international recognition garnered by «Our Children» (selected for the Un Certain Regard category and winner of the Best Film Award and Best Actress Award (Emilie Dequenne) at the Magritte film awards).

Adept with challenging subjects, his filmography is populated by monstrous characters whose motivations he always seeks to understand, as it is often said: the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2015 > L'ÉCONOMIE DU COUPLE (in post-production)
- 2014 > LES CHEVALIERS BLANCS **THE WHITE KNIGHTS**
- 2012 > À PERDRE LA RAISON **OUR CHILDREN**
- 2010 > AVANT LES MOTS (Short)
- 2008 > ÉLÈVE LIBRE **PRIVATE LESSONS**
- 2006 > NUE PROPRIÉTÉ **PRIVATE PROPERTY**
- 2006 > ÇA REND HEUREUX **WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY**
- 2004 > FOLIE PRIVÉE **PRIVATE MADNESS**
- 2001 > TRIBU (Short)

CAST

Vincent LINDON Jacques Arnault

Valérie DONZELLI Françoise Dubois

Louise BOURGOIN Laura Turine

Reda KATEB Xavier Libert

Stéphane BISSOT Marie Latour

Raphaëlle BRUNEAU Nathalie Joris

Jean-Henri COMPÈRE Roland Duchateau

Phillipe REBBOT Luc Debroux

Yannick RENIER Chris Laurent

Tatiana ROJO Christine Momboza

Catherine SALÉE Sophie Tinlot

Luc Van GRUNDERBEECK Yves Ménard

Bintou RIMTOBAYE Bintou



CREW

DIRECTOR **Joachim LAFOSSE**

PRODUCTION COMPANIES **Versus production, Les Films du Worso**

LINE PRODUCERS **Jacques-Henri & Olivier BRONCKART** (Versus production) &
Sylvie PIALAT (Les Films du Worso)

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

David CLAIKENS et Alex VERBAERE (BNP Paribas Fortis Film Finance), **Jean LABADIE** (Le Pacte),

Antonino LOMBARDO (Prime Time) **Arlette ZYLBERBERG** (RTBF - Télévision belge),

Tanguy DEKEYSER (Proximus), **Benoît QUAINON** et **Gilles SITBON**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **Gwennaëlle LIBERT**

SCRIPT **Joachim LAFOSSE, Thomas VAN ZUYLEN & Bulle DECARPENTRIES**

DOP **Jean-François HENSGENS A.F.C. – S.B.C**

SOUND **Christophe GIOVANONNI, Ingrid SIMON, Valérie LE DOCTE**

PRODUCTION DESIGNER **Olivier RADOT**

COSTUMES DESIGNER **Pascaline CHAVANNE**

EDITOR **Sophie VERCRUYSSSE (With the collaboration of Yann DEDET)**

PRODUCTION MANAGER **Béatrice CHAUVIN-BALLAY**

POST PRODUCTION MANAGER **Nicolas SACRÉ & Toufik AYADI**



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