

PRODUCTION NOTES

NOVEMBER



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CINEMA - UMEDIA

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SYNOPSIS:

In November 2015, a series of unprecedented and deadly attacks hit Paris. The anti-terrorist police led by Heloise (Sandrine Kiberlain) and her chief commander Fred (Academy Award® Winner Jean Dujardin) face an unprecedented level of pressure: in a race against the clock, they must find the perpetrators of the attacks as quickly as possible before they can strike again, travelling across Europe and beyond in one of the biggest manhunts in history.

INTERVIEW WITH CEDRIC JIMENEZ (DIRECTOR)

How did this project come about?

The project was started without me. Olivier Demangel and the co-producer Mathias Rubin came to offer me the script, which was already very advanced. But the subject is obviously very important to everyone, and no one can be insensitive to it. This may also be the reason why I had reservations about making a film out of it before reading the script. And at the same time, it was impossible not to read what Olivier had done with such a subject, and it was his script that totally convinced me. I was very surprised by the script, by its angle and bias. It doesn't deal with the attacks themselves, at least not head-on, but with the five days that followed. What fascinated me was that, beyond the shock, the police investigation was a daunting task, and in terms of responsibilities, it created an incredible tension for this service. The script talks about that. That's what made me want to produce it. I put myself in the shoes of the investigators and wondered how I would react to the obligation of result, and the fear of disaster if that result was not achieved.

You reworked the script with Olivier Demangel. What was your contribution?

Yes. We worked together on the substantiality of the investigation and its magnitude. The impossibility of finding two wanted men in a metropolis like Paris. And this, without knowing their identity. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. I asked Olivier to potentiate the scope of this investigation. Basically the script was a little less broad, but everything was there. All the dramaturgy. The fact that it is purely an investigative film, that there are very few developed characters, at least in their intimacy, and that the plot takes place over five days. Actually, I just opened up the scope of the script.

The attacks are filmed out of range, or even non-existent. Did the question arise about showing them?

Never. I would have found this obscene, truly obscene.. If I'd had the slightest impression in that way, I would never have made the film. What I liked was that it was the opposite point of view. The attacks were not staged, nor were the victims. The only time the film does this is in the hospital, but it's only from the perspective of the investigation. And it's right on the edge of the frame, trying to be as modest as possible.

Did the fact that the script is both very factual and very precise in the timeline help you with the production? To find the pulse of the film?

Of course. I wanted to recreate what the members of the anti-terrorist squad had told me. They spoke of "tunnel effect" - I found the term very revealing and I wanted to recreate it in the image. The fact that they went home and had no intimacy with their family seemed important to me in telling this story. Because that's really what they've been through 24 hours a day without interruption. They put everything aside, even their feelings about it. They went on a mission. It was a challenge for me, even in the production, to recreate this forward movement without any room for states of mind. We don't know who they are. It's a production choice, a narrative choice, a bias. I like blunt bias. The bias was the investigation. The characters are there, they exist, but always at the service of the investigation.

All the characters, apart from the terrorists whose names we know, were invented. They're fictional characters.

All these characters exist in one sense. In real life, they are protected and live under a different identity. Because when you work for anti-terrorism, you face particularly significant threats. So, in the film, we also protect them from what we can recognise about them. But they're all inspired by real people. Just like the witness. The name is not hers. With the elements of the film, often true, we took care to make them up enough to protect them. Obviously, there was a need not to disclose what might be detrimental to the service and to the judicial investigation.

Faced with such a subject, such a tragedy, what can fiction bring to the documentary?

The documentary must tell the story about the real people, with their real names for example. Fiction allows the opposite, and intervenes to relate what one feels and what one wants to relate in regards to this. Otherwise there is no film. Otherwise we're just journalists. The journalist is here to tell the facts. The filmmaker or novelist is here to interpret them. It's inherent in why we do this job. We want to take ownership of things even at a minimum, while respecting them and staying in our place, at the right distance. Believe me, for this film I paid attention to everything. I weighed it all by the millimetre. But if I stop relating things that come from my guts, I can't make a film anymore.

Does the question of self-censorship arise?

I wouldn't say that. I'd rather talk about precaution. About dignity. When I approach subjects born of my own imagination, I am free. But dealing with a subject like this, you can't just do whatever. There is no question of offending or disrespecting anyone in any way. Not wanting to offend someone doesn't mean censoring yourself. But I don't want to hide either, because if I decided to make this film, it was also about making cinema. While paying as much respect as possible.

Before making the film, you met some of the police officers involved in this investigation. Why was that?

For the sake of accuracy first of all. Since this was an extremely secretive service, there was no documentation available. There's nothing written about it. But I couldn't have invented everything that characterises it. That would have been absurd. Olivier Demangel had already asked for their help. He introduced me to them. I transcribed their procedures, the way these units work... Of course, they have not given me access to all of their files, but everything about how they operate, the structure and the way they operate is authentic.

In this investigation where logistics were very substantial, you highlight the value of instinct, the significance of intimate conviction...

Yes, that's correct. The monitoring device, all of these phone calls, the call for witnesses... This is the result of all of this mechanism that suddenly makes a witness emerge, who becomes the key to the investigation. A witness that some believe, others don't. Just as the film relates. There was even talk of putting this witness in custody, because what she said was really very significant. Her version might even look like a trap. However, some investigators felt that this lead should be followed. It was therefore also the victory of a human and instinctive judgment.

This brings a real dramaturgy to history...

Indeed, if this element did not exist, there would be no dramaturgy within the investigation. Or at least less. Obviously, this wouldn't have changed the gravity of the events, but it was the element that brought

to the film all the dramaturgy from an almost fictional point of view. Which is why a film is a film. This led to a structure of acts, twists and turns.

And this brings to a pivotal scene that is the interrogation, where suddenly the production changes register, and focuses on the more traditional shot/reverse shot...

It's a scene that takes up six or seven pages in the script. There were three cameras, one on each character. It was very clear. The camera wasn't allowed to move. It was only a matter of sensing the palpable tension, a look, a gesture, a face that looks down or a hand that hits the table. It was all there. In fact, the scene is very fragile. A three-way is never easy to direct. There is the character of Jérémie Rénier who does not believe her, that of Anaïs Desmoutier who believes her, or at least who wants to believe her, and that of Lyna Khoudri, not confident in her speech. I wanted to bring out the doubt. And to do this, the production had to be completely set aside, very much in favour of interplay.



For such a scene, do you work a lot in rehearsals on the importance of gestures and expressions?

I made twenty-minute shots without cutting. In reality, such an interrogation lasts five hours. The actor must lose himself, be in a blur. If we redo the scene every time, we do the opposite of what a police officer will try to do. The only way to verify that a person is telling the truth is to see that at the end of the forty-fifth version, their words are always the same. That's why I made them talk and talk again. They all knew their script very well, but it was necessary to hold on for a long time, to manage silence, to change rhythm, and they did it very well. I have tried to preserve, to recreate what is the essence of this type of interrogation, which can be exhausting, and in which one can be overwhelmed.

There is no leading role or leader, and yet you have managed to convince well-known actors to join the cast...

I think that the subject is at the centre of everyone's interest. It requires full responsibility and commitment. When you want to make a film, you have to put the subject at the forefront. We're not here to take the credit. I am the first one, by the way. All the actors were very participatory, very much a "team". Even if for an actor like Jean Dujardin, with whom I had worked previously, it's been a long time since he had 21 days of shooting out of 60. Jean brought the natural charisma, the experience and the great natural authority that he emanates. He is at the centre of the unit, the quiet force, although not without flaws. Jean's acting ability is very impressive. Anaïs is incredible too, she is never shaky and she immerses

herself in her role with such an ease that is impressive. Sandrine brings another colour. She is a character who is not in the field, she manages the political and administrative part of the department. Jérémie, Sami, Sofiane, Stéphane and the other more secondary characters all contributed a lot to the film. Their contribution is immense and I can never thank them enough for their involvement. Finally Lyna is a rough diamond, her appearance in the story is decisive, and she has this little thing besides, that the camera cannot resist her. She is able to transmit emotion with remarkable intensity.

The script relies heavily on the factual, on the specific, and at the same time as a director, you capture fatigue, exhaustion, etc.

That's what was intended, although it was actually quite difficult to achieve. Never shooting in order, and with so many actors, it was difficult to hold this line. But it was very important to me that this was felt. I wanted the audience to feel this fatigue as well. Let them live it with the characters. That's why it's so ultrarhythmic. Like at a boxing match where we're up against the ropes. The breath becomes short, but we must continue and not let go. This is really what I wanted to recreate inside the image. I always try to create a strong connection between the audience and the characters, however imperceptible. I try to make them feel their emotions, fatigue, pain or joy. And for that, my ambition was for the film to be as immersive and organic as possible. I also decided to leave the actors some leeway to look for something less "staged", which makes the scene a bit raw. I wanted some urgency.

The production depends a lot on the subjectivity of the protagonists...

Almost always, in fact. I don't like being really objective in film grammar. As I didn't want any emphasis in the production, and no intimacy with the characters, I had to give it a look. Otherwise we end up with a too clinical approach. The dramaturgy here was to dive with them into this five-day tunnel. And this effectively happens through these subjective shots, where we see what they see. Or by those close-ups, that allowed me to sort of get into their minds. An almost animal immersion in the moment. Because five days is short. We don't evolve. You just feel it, that's all. The adrenaline takes over.

As in the sequence of the assault?

In all high intensity actions, the present moment cannot be replaced by any form of analysis. I wanted to respect at least what the police officers who stormed the place told me. This time that stops when everything becomes both blurred and very clear. We don't think of anything else. I wanted to put the audience in this state of apnea. A state where you block everything to devote yourself just to your breathing.

A word on the music of the film, an organic score, guttural, and which seems to integrate the surrounding noises, the real sound...

When the script was finished, I sent it to Guillaume Roussel, who had signed the music for all of my films. I just warned him that, for once, the script could do without music, and that it would paradoxically need it. Those were his specifications. The idea was that music had to find its place, and to blend in. That sometimes it had to support or optimise. Guillaume worked on it for almost six months. He continued during the editing. And that led to this very organic score. A fairly industrial music that, when it appears, manages to be quite present, while merging without imposing itself on the universe of the film.

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER DEMANGEL (SCREENWRITER)

On such a subject, why choose fiction rather than a documentary?

On such a subject, all choices are difficult. We are somewhat constrained to a form of truth. The choice of fiction is even more difficult than that of documentary: we must find the axis, the framework, the point of view in which the story can take place – especially on a subject so complicated to address. This is why *NOVEMBER* is a fiction that is not based on the psychology of the characters or their intimacy. In that sense I would say there is a hybrid side to the film. The will to meticulously reconstruct reality as a documentary would do, and at the same time the power of fiction through incarnation. The film actually tells how the SDAT collective, the anti-terrorist police, and Sonia (Samia in the film), who was a very decisive witness in the investigation, inter-collided.

How did the script come about?

Initially, producer Mathias Rubin gave us a carte blanche. It was a year and a half after the drama took place, and I thought if I had to fix on a story, that's what I had to concentrate on. But how to approach it? Especially since I was certain, from the outset, that I didn't want to reconstruct the scenes of the attack, nor to incarnate the victims and terrorists. But I had just read a book that told the underside of 13 November. That night when society and Paris almost fell into chaos, and how firefighters, hospital staff, paramedics, police officers and also magistrates managed to take control in order to maintain the cohesion and coherence of the city, the country. I wanted to talk about what public service is today. This service, which is so criticised, and yet is the foundation of society, especially our own. Who protects us during an event like this? Who works when we're all scared? More than the shock, I wanted to work on the shockwave. It was by reflecting on these questions that I discovered what had happened at the SDAT during these five days. The work, the panic, the hard work, the rigour, and finally the solution – that Sonia/Samia, who was like a flower in the darkness of the investigation. That's where the film originated from.

You said that you knew from the outset that you would not reconstitute the attacks. Why is that?

It seemed impossible to me to represent. For reasons of decency, as it were. I didn't want this fiction to revive old wounds. And I precisely sought the almost opposite point of view. A shot filmed by Cédric sums this up very well. It's when Inès, played by Anaïs Demoustier, drives through a tunnel on a scooter while the ambulances race towards the centre of Paris. That's where the film is, for me. That is to say that we will deal with the attacks of 13 November, but that we will go there with characters who stay alongside. Not at the epicentre of the anguish, but alongside those who try to get us out of it. This is the heart of the catharsis of the film – of its redemptive dimension.

No psychologisation, no lead role or leader... how did you work with your characters?

By sticking to their grades and their roles. The characters are at the service of the film, as the police officers were at the service of the investigation. A sprawling investigation, thousands of minutes, hearings, cross-checks, testimonies. The characters wander and stumble in the night. They look, they can't find anything, they start over. It was their decisions that conditioned the writing, not their psychology. And I tried to stick to the way that the SDAT works. They are extremely rigorous police officers with regard to procedure. They are armed only with a dictaphone and the Criminal Procedure Code. They dig into everything that needs to be dug into, go through everything that needs to be gone through. They are in a way a sort of priesthood. From this point of view, the characters finally seem to me to be quite close to the SDAT police officers I was able to meet, in particular the one played by Jean Dujardin.

Then, regarding the issue of the psychologisation of the protagonists, there were more in the early versions of the storyline. And when we met Cédric, he wanted to push the script even further towards a form of radicalism. Not to make a "rivalry" between the event itself and the intimacy of the police officers. Not to dramatise or heroise, but on the contrary to describe as closely as possible their incredible ability to work. And to make a film about their exhaustion, which is something he managed to make tangible in the film. They were going through a gruelling race against time. As Fred, the character played by Jean Dujardin, says, the terrorists are two hours ahead of the police. And an investigation like this is about trying to make up for lost time. Two hours is almost the length of the film. In reality, it took five days to achieve this.

So how to create this link between the characters and the audience inherent in the cinema?

The characters are caught up in the action as are the cinema audience. We live with them the expectation, the anguish, the hope of a resolution. And we also know who they are, because we know the place they occupy in the service. While there is no main character, there is a pyramidal construction, with Héloïse (Sandrine Kiberlain) who leads, Fred (Jean Dujardin) who supervises the investigation, Marco (Jérémy Rénier) who coordinates the investigators, then Inès (Anaïs Demoustier), and the others, who investigate or carry out surveillance. This construction allows us to immerse ourselves in the group. It's first and foremost a film about the collective. It is also a script based on the confrontation between a young and an old generation, played here by Fred and Inès, performed by Jean Dujardin and Anaïs Demoustier. The one who's already there against the one who just arrived. They have two different relationships with people. He is rather closed, procedural, very strict. Whereas she is more into emotions, mistakes, trial and error.

The film is a testament to the diversity of this police force, which is made up of women and men of multiple origins. Is that a reflection of reality?

Following the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, the anti-terrorist police realised that they had a real deficit, not only of troops but of troops from diverse backgrounds. From January 2015, they recruited young people who found themselves on the front line in November without really having been trained at SDAT, which is an extremely demanding service, much more than the "classic" judicial police. This can be seen in the script, and I believe that this allows the audience to identify themselves, as we understand very quickly that, after the shock of the first fifteen minutes, we are in a story about this young woman, Inès, who absolutely wants to solve the investigation, but who doesn't yet have the right arms to achieve this. With this central scene where she makes a major mistake and she gets a rollicking from Fred. But Inès isn't actually the one who solves the investigation.



Neither Inès, Fred, Héloïse, nor Kader succeed individually, but their group does as a body, as a collective, by their complementarity. This also made it possible to avoid another pitfall: that of the heroism of the SDAT police officers. They themselves would largely refute this qualification. They investigate together, sometimes in agreement, sometimes in disagreement, but they move forward together, and we follow them as closely as possible, listening to their instincts, their intuitions. We also evolve with them by experiencing their exhaustion. And I hope we finally understand their sacrifices too.

The central scene of the interrogation highlights the importance of the intimate conviction, in addition to impressive logistics...

When Samia Khellouf (played by Lyna Khoudri) appears in the film, she appears as "Sonia", the witness, appearing in the investigation. Like a complex character. She comes out of

nowhere, and says something unimaginable, since she says she met, under a motorway in Paris, the person who was then one of the most wanted terrorists in the world, and who was even presumed dead in an air strike. I had the opportunity to meet with police officers who were present at the time of her interrogation. Some did not believe her at all, thinking that she was a mythomaniac, or that she had come to set a trap for the service. Others, on the other hand, believed her right away. As in the film, the information is raised from level to level, until the top level gets involved and chooses to follow this lead. Pure instinct indeed.



Was this interrogation scene difficult to write?

I've rewritten it many times. This scene is a pivot scene, as it tilts the film into another dimension. In hindsight, we know that "Sonia" was telling the truth, so it's not easy to rewrite the scene by imagining that they could have suspected her of lying. As a result, it was necessary to fabricate elements that maintain the doubt and ambiguity, and Cédric and Lyna Khoudri have, I think, also been working on how to embody these ambiguities. If it's too credible, there is no more story, and no more realism either. It was therefore necessary to write in such a way that there were enough contradictions in what she said for the doubts to be the same for the characters and the audience. And at the same time we had to tell what she experienced, which is true, which is out of the norm. Sonia/Samia is a tragic character. Few people find themselves like her in a situation where they are condemned by both sides. When she arrives near this bush where she meets the two terrorists, either she stays silent and the police arrest her for complicity, or she denounces them and risks her life, since the terrorists have threatened to kill her. She has an impossible choice. When she appears in the film, she bears this burden, this fear and this anguish. That's why she gets into a complete muddle, and has a fragmented view of what she saw. In any case, that's how I reconstructed it.

The script is based on a very elaborate construction of parallel and factual narratives.

The difficulty in writing was knowing to what extent I could account for the complexity, without ceasing to be intelligible. I think that Cédric, with the shooting, and then Laure Gardette, with the editing, had the same difficulties. The challenge was to report on the enormity of the investigation without misleading the audience. It was therefore necessary to assume that we would lose them a little, but not too much. Preserving this balance was sometimes complicated, because in reality things were even more complex than what we have represented.

To write about the attacks of 13 November, is to ask the question of the limits not to be crossed...

For me, the reconstruction of the scenes of the attack represented the main red line. And yet, I also didn't want this attack to be the pretext for a purely investigative film, disconnected from the drama. That is why we sought a way to give the victims a place, with modesty and dignity. There is the scene of the minute's silence, filmed in real time as a minute of silence. There is also the very important scene of the hospital, which gives an essential place to the victims without being voyeuristic. But we asked ourselves if we had the right to do that. Finally, it seemed important to me that at some point, and in the roughest possible way, a few snippets of the story of what had happened that night should be included. And I really like the way Cedric filmed that moment in the half-light, the sobriety, and the harshness.

BIOGRAPHIES

CÉDRIC JIMENEZ (DIRECTOR)

Cédric Jimenez is a French director and screenwriter born in Marseille. After several years living in New York and London, he began his film career in Paris in 2003 as an independent producer. Between 2006 and 2009 he produced films such as SCORPION, directed by Julien Seri, and EDEN LOG from Franck Vestiel, which was selected by several major Film Festivals including Toronto, Austin, and Sitges. In 2011, he directed and produced PARIS UNDER WATCH. The thriller, co-written with Audrey Diwan, toured several Festivals including Beaunes, Cognac, and Naples, where it received the award for Best Film.

THE CONNECTION, starring Jean Dujardin and Gilles Lellouche is Jimenez's second feature film as a director. Co-written by Audrey Diwan, produced by Ilan Goldman, who has previously produced, LA VIE EN ROSE from Olivier Dahan, Ridley Scott's 1492: CONQUEST OF PARADISE and Martin Scorsese's CASINO.

Reuniting with Ilan Goldman, Jimenez boarded the adaptation (co-written with Audrey Diwan and David Farr) of the historical novel by Laurent Binet THE MAN WITH THE IRON HEART. This was an international co-production, in the English language starring Jason Clarke, Rosamund Pike.

In 2019, he shot the feature film THE STRONGHOLD in Marseille, starring Gilles Lellouche, Francois Civil, Karim Leklou and Adèle Exarchopoulos.

A huge commercial success, THE STRONGHOLD marks the beginning of Cédric's collaboration with Hugo Sélignac and CHI-FOU-MI productions who will be reunited again for his latest project NOVEMBER. This breath-taking thriller based on the true story of the investigation into the 2015 Paris attacks, will be released in 2022, starring an A-list cast including Jean Dujardin, Sandrine Kiberlain, Anais Demoustier, Jeremie Rénier and Lyna Khoudri

FILMOGRAPHY

2022 NOVEMBER

2020 THE STRONGHOLD

**THE MAN WITH AN
2017 IRON HEART**

2014 THE CONNECTION

2012 PARIS UNDER WATCH
WHO'S THE BOSS:
2003 BOSS OF SCANDALZ

OLIVIER DEMANGEL (SCREENWRITER)

Olivier Demangel graduated from the renowned Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris (ENS) and the Femis after studying screenwriting at both schools. From 2013 to 2019 Olivier collaborated on several award-winning projects including LEARN BY HEART from Mathieu Vadepied, which was selected at The International Critics' Week in Cannes, and Simon Bouisson's WEI OR DIE, which won a FIPA d'or (Smart FIPA section) at the Biarritz International Festival of Audiovisual Programmes. He also co-wrote the screenplays for TOWARDS THE BATTLE, directed by Aurélien Vernhes-Lermusiaux, which won the Louis-Delluc prize for Best First Film, and ATLANTICS with Mati Diop, which won the Cannes' Grand Prix award in 2019.

Additionally, Olivier has worked on several TV series, including the Canal+ original BARON NOIR, where he became one of the main screenwriters for the last season. He is currently collaborating with Netflix on WONDER MAN, a short series dedicated to Bernard Tapie's life which is currently in production.

Most recently, Olivier has worked with Mathieu Vadepied and Cédric Jimenez on their latest feature films. He co-wrote NOVEMBER's screenplay (starring Jean Dujardin, Anais Demoustier and Sandrine Kiberlain) and FATHER AND SOLDIER (with Omar Sy). Both feature films were selected for the Cannes Film Festival in 2022, with NOVEMBER screening Out of Competition, and FATHER AND SOLDIER in UN CERTAIN REGARD's official selection.

Olivier is currently writing Cédric Jimenez's next project, VERDE which will depict Ingrid Betancourt's kidnapping by the FARC.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2019	ATLANTICS	Mati DIOP Aurélien VERNHES LERMUSIAUX
	TOWARDS THE BATTLE REPUBLIQUE:THE INTERACTIVE	Simon BOUISSON
2017	RATTRAPAGE	Tristan SEGUELA
2015	LEARN BY HEART	Mathieu VADEPIED
	WEI OR DIE	Simon BOUISSON
2013	9 MONTH STRETCH	Albert DUPONTEL
2011	REVE BEBE REVE	Christophe NANGA-OLY

CREDITS

CAST

Jean DUJARDIN
Anaïs DEMOUSTIER
Sandrine KIBERLAIN
Jeremie RENIER
Lyna KHOUDRI
Cédric KHAN
Sofian KHAMMES
Sami OUTALBALI
Stéphane BAK
Raphaël QUENARD
Sarah AFCHAIN

Sophie CATTANI
Jérémy LOPEZ de la Comédie Française
Quentin FAURE
Victoire DU BOIS

Fred
Ines
Héloïse
Marco
Samia
Martin
Foued
Kader
Djibril
Rudy
Hasna

Sarah
Vincent
Benoît
Julia

TECHNICAL CREW

Producers

Director

Screenplay

Adaptation et dialogues

Director of photography

Editing

Sound mixer

Settings

Costume design

1er assistant Mise en scène

Production manager

Régie

Post Production

Casting

Location management

Make-up

Hair designer

Stunt

CHI-FOU-MI PRODUCTIONS/ Hugo
SELIGNAC

Cédric JIMENEZ

Olivier DEMANGEL

Cédric JIMENEZ & Olivier DEMANGEL

Nicolas LOIR - AFC

Laure GARDETTE

Cédric DELOCHE

Jean-Philippe MOREAUX

Stéphanie WATRIGANT

Fabien VERGEZ

Vincent PIANI

Benjamin JOURNET

Pauline GILBERT

Michael LAGUENS

Séverine DELUC

Myriam HOTTOIS-GARRONE

Nicolas LE SCOUR

Emmanuel LANZI

Mixer
Music department

Marc DOISNE
Varda KAKON

Music by

Guillaume ROUSSEL