

UGC YM presents

A SPOT OF BOTHER

(Une petite zone de turbulences)

A film by Alfred **LOT**

With Michel **BLANC**, **MIOU-MIOU**,
Mélanie **DOUTEY**, Gilles **LELLOUCHE**
and Cyril **DESCOURS**

Screenplay, Adaptation and Dialogue by Michel **BLANC**

*Based on the novel, "A Spot of Bother" by Mark Haddon
and "Une situation légèrement délicate", NiL Editions*

Screenplay Adaptation: Alfred **LOT**

Running time: 108'

French release: January 13, 2010 by UGC DISTRIBUTION

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International Sales



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SYNOPSIS

Jean-Paul, recently retired, is a hypochondriac...

Anne, his wife, is cheating on him with a former colleague at the office...

His daughter Cathie, divorced mother of a five-year-old boy, lives with Philippe, a "nice guy" who Cathie's gay brother Mathieu calls "IQ Minus 10".

When JP discovers a small, sinister spot on his left hip, and Cathie tells him she's getting remarried to "IQ Minus 10", and Mathieu gets dumped because he fails to invite his lover to the wedding, and JP accidentally finds out that his wife is cheating on him, the family decorum implodes.

Arguments, insults, revenge... JP, Anne, Cathie, Mathieu and Philippe show no mercy!

They're in a spot of bother, but together - somehow - they'll make it through...

INTERVIEW WITH ALFRED LOT

How was “A Spot of Bother” born?

Yves Marmion, who produced “Summer Things”, wanted to make another film directed by Michel Blanc. He gave Michel a copy of Mark Haddon’s novel “A Spot of Bother”, for him to write a script and make the film. But Michel refused to direct. He thought the project was too similar to “Summer Things”. Was Yves secretly wishing that Michel would change his mind? Maybe. In any case, Michel didn’t give in. In the meantime, Yves, who had seen my first feature film, “Room of Death”, offered me a few detective stories. I turned them down, except for the third one, which I’m actually working on right now. So he asked me to read Michel’s script.

What did you think?

That there was definitely room for me in there somewhere. I believed in the characters. I thought we could identify with them, that audiences would be willing to join in the madness. Michel had written a hilarious and prolific adaptation: it was two hours and forty minutes! It had to be cut down, but right away I felt like I was in a candy shop, having to choose between jellybeans and gummy bears! So I slipped right into his version. I liked the way the protagonists expressed themselves. They all had a funny, colorful way of reacting to one another. It was like real life, and then again it wasn’t. Because I don’t know many people who have such a talent for repartee. I immediately decided to move away from the group dynamic and focus on Jean-Paul, Michel’s character, being careful not to lose sight of the others. Each of them had to have a direction to go in. A personal destiny. Even if “A Spot of Bother” seems at first to be about a couple, or couples, actually, the crisis Jean-Paul is going through had to infect the other members of the family and allow each of them to resituate his or herself.

Had you planned for Michel to play the character of Jean-Paul?

Yves and I had made up a list of possible actors. But first I wanted Michel to read the changes I’d made to his script. I needed him to give me advice, to touch it up, and in a way, to approve it. We’d set up an appointment in a hotel bar. Michel showed up with a post-it and four or five very pertinent remarks.

A short while later, he looked at me and asked, “Would you mind if I played the part?” I shook his hand. It was a wrap. I flew out on a magic carpet.

How did you choose the other actors?

I knew Gilles because I'd worked with him on "Room of Death." I knew he was going to have fun with the character of Philippe. Philippe is very honest. He has no hidden agenda. He doesn't lie. Gilles is like that too. Yes, he's capable of showing up with his baggage, his tough-guy act, that "rough and ready" side of him. But the backwards, disconnected, out-of-touch things Philippe says out of ignorance are in the end the most sane by far. I had never worked with Mélanie, but I thought it would be interesting to offer her something other than the "cute little girl" roles we've often seen her play. I liked the idea of her biting. And she's a very good biter! Miou Miou makes us feel empathy, which is a crucial quality for the character she plays. Because Anne isn't a very likeable character at first. She cheats on her husband and cares more about what other people think than she does about the happiness of her family. Miou Miou gave her humanity and sweetness. Cathie's brother was a more complicated choice. What twenty-year old actor could hold his own playing with all these seasoned actors? The character is homosexual and self-assured about it, even if his family has a harder time with it than he does... What he can't handle is having a partner, making a commitment. A predicament that has nothing to do with sexual preferences. We had to have an actor who exudes a certain stability and determination, who is capable of opening up and shining as the story develops. Cyril Descours is a hard worker who prepares intensively but has the talent of breaking free from that, to simply be real and radiant.

What was off limits for you?

Michel and I promised ourselves we wouldn't go for all the easy laughs, that we wouldn't force the structure. The situations and dialogue were either funny in themselves, or not! We tried to keep that goal in sight throughout the film. Michel's a relentlessly hard worker, he knows every scene down to the last detail, but he was classy enough to avoid interfering with my directing. He always asked me permission to look at the monitor, and even that was only twice a week! If he had directed the film, I'm sure he would have picked out different candies from the candy shop, but he never made me feel it.

The film is funny, but it's also haunted by death...

Jean-Paul thinks he's dying. That he's going to die at any minute. Death is, in fact, present throughout the film. It's what I call "the blanket effect in winter." You have to stick your foot out of the blanket to realize that it was warm underneath. There has to be pressure, danger, underlying fear for the characters to let go and in the end, lift up their heads. You have to be terrorized by cancer to cut up your hip with scissors. At that instant, Jean-Paul is giving in to the madness. He blows a fuse. Later, we laugh about the mutilation. At the time, though, we don't.

What makes him snap out of the madness - the discovery of his wife's infidelity?

Yes, her infidelity pulls him out of his suicidal madness. Luckily Anne was unfaithful. And luckily he was standing there at the door. Anne can't continue a sexual relationship with such a profoundly morbid man. She is above all concerned about herself - and Jean-Paul too. As a result - and it's a fantastic idea any way you look at it - discovering Anne's infidelity brings Jean-Paul back to life, to his family and his wife, who he tries to win back. To facilitate Anne's return, I made sure to "damage" her lover a bit - Vladimir Yordanoff - by filming him in his underwear with a background of empty walls showing marks from paintings his ex-wife took when she left him... Because, after all, why would she get back together with that grump...

Where did you find Anne and Jean-Paul's house?

Twenty minutes south of Paris. The first thing I liked about it was that it didn't remind me of a specific upscale suburb. It could be anywhere. Second, it had an ideal layout, with its large sloping yard and a pond where that crazy Jean-Paul could build his "tomb". Finally, it offered a lot of different possibilities for the many interior scenes, but it cramped the characters a little. It added tension.

Where does that tomb story come from, Cathie playing a dirty trick on her father?

From one of my friends. It annoyed me a little that Jean-Paul was building a shed that had nothing to do with the story. When I said to Michel, "Jean-Paul doesn't realize he's building his own tomb," he cracked up laughing!

Why did you choose CinemaScope?

From the very beginning I wanted to make the film chic and elegant. Something that would correspond to this upper middle class family. Real 'Scope is still, though probably not for long, the medium that gives you the most beautiful image. The limitations of using it, especially the heavy lenses, had an influence on the film. Though I'd planned on shooting more scenes hand-held, in the end I had a lot of fun playing with dolly shots, which fit the spirit of the film even better.

At Cathie and Philippe's wedding, we see a real mix of social classes...

That wasn't as obvious in the novel and the script. During the civil wedding at City Hall, David Seigneur, who plays Philippe's colleague, had the fantastic idea of jumping in and shouting with his friends like sports fans, just after the bride and groom said yes. He was so good that I figured out how to develop his character and insist on that notion of class, which until then had only been carried by Gilles' character. Finally, he and his gang of bodyguards offer a little show on the night of the marriage: a sort of Haka dance to the rap song of "Né Sous la Môme Etoile" by IAM. That's a good example of the collective spirit that stayed with us during the whole filmmaking process: each of us, producer, screenwriter, actors and technicians, contributed to making the film what it is today.

Does the end of the film leave things in suspense?

The end is a social convention. For me, nothing is resolved. Philippe and Cathie are married. But there's hard work ahead. As for our star-couple, Jean-Paul and Anne, nothing's set for sure. It'll be necessary to go... to Bruges.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL BLANC

How did the film "A Spot of Bother" come into being?

Yves Marmion, at UGC, has been trying for the past few years to get me back into directing. So he had me read "A Spot of Bother," an English novel by Mark Haddon. I liked the book. But it had a lot of obvious similarities to "Summer Things", similarities I was afraid would only be accentuated by my directing. If I get back behind the camera one day for a fifth feature film, I'd just as soon make it completely different from the others. I'm very wary about forming habits when it comes to filmmaking, and art in general. To justify working two years on a project, you have to be able to put yourself at risk, to say to yourself, "That, I've never done." On the other hand, I was willing to adapt "A Spot of Bother". I more or less offered to do it.

What kind of difficulties does adaptation entail?

With an adaptation of any kind, you always run the risk of losing the original style. If that's what turns you on when you read it, it's a pretty good bet that you won't find what you're looking for, that you'll have to substitute with equivalents instead. The other pitfall is editing. Trimming scenes from a novel I like always breaks my heart. Because I wonder if I'm cutting out something that was essential to the author. So I always work the same way. I write. Then I leave it alone three weeks before reworking it. At that point, it's no longer the book I'm adapting, but my script. For "A Spot of Bother" I wrote five different versions, then Alfred worked on my final version to make his shooting script.

What did you like about the novel?

Like Joseph Connolly's work, it's a mix of genres. In other words, those situations that start gradually degenerating as the characters find themselves sucked into bottomless pits of trouble. JP, Anne and the others do some pretty strange things. They don't have Cartesian logic; they're a little crazy. JP, for example, suffers from hypochondria. But hypochondriacs generally don't engage in self-mutilation. JP does. And Alfred even shot the scene so that it would be bearable. Because when I read the novel, I nearly threw up.

I understand you're not a complete stranger to hypochondria?

There are sequences in the film that echo my own experience, though they're hardly the most spectacular ones. Like JP, for example, I've used a knife to discreetly inspect a wound while sitting at the table. And once when I was in New York buying a shirt I twisted around and around in the dressing room because I'd seen a little brown spot on my skin...

How would you define JP?

He's taken an early retirement. He was fired from a job he probably didn't even like, but his life still revolved around it. As a result, things have gradually gotten out of whack. Jean-Paul probably senses that his wife is growing distant. He neither understands nor accepts his son's sexual orientation. He takes his future son-in-law for an idiot, but Philippe is probably the only one in the story who has any real-life intelligence. The English relate to a caste system. It's been true since "My Fair Lady". I translated these castes, which aren't nearly as strong in France, into Jean-Paul and Anne's ambition for Cathie to marry well. In Haddon's book, Philippe was working class, whereas the family was middle class. In the film, we made him a security guard. A world that might seem foreign to these people.

Why did you want to play Jean-Paul?

Mostly because Yves and Alfred couldn't find anyone else, even if they did have a few leads (he breaks into laughter). Since I'd always ruled out directing the film, I stayed out of casting - anything else would have been dishonest, to say the least. Months went by, so I finally asked, "What about JP?" You have to realize that everyone I knew was telling me I should play the part. I was interested in his crazy side and his suffering. There was a challenge: try to keep the focus on comedy, despite the scenes where the character is hurting or fearful.

How did you relate to the others during the shoot?

I tried not to give my opinion, except when there was a problem with the dialogue. Other than that, I tried to be like any other actor on the set. When I needed to look at the monitor, it was always for a question about my acting, and I asked Alfred's permission every time. I didn't want him to think I was doing it because I didn't trust his directing.

“A Spot of Bother” is a film about what it is to be a couple...

It's a film about commitment. André Gide said, “Choosing one is refusing another,” and he certainly knew what he was talking about. The characters essentially all have the same problem: getting themselves to admit that they love each other, or for some of them, continuing to tell each other that they do. Mathieu, Anne and JP's son, refuses to see his partner more than three times a week. He's scared to death of commitment. Men, who are usually more promiscuous than women, sometimes have a hard time giving up multiple partners. Their daughter Cathie knows in her heart that “IQ Minus 10” is the man for her, but her head refuses to follow her heart.

You have to admit the character is a bit...

Clumsy. Philippe takes refuge in public places because he's afraid of existing. He has so little confidence in himself that he hides behind preformulated sentences and sayings. I had a friend like that once, and I borrowed from him a bit for “IQ Minus 10”... But Philippe knows when he loves someone. He also knows he'd do anything for Cathie.

And yet, when he talks to Mathieu, he turns out to be more open-minded than you think he would be...

When he first talks to Mathieu, he's a little naïve. He pretty much has to ask, “How do you gays do things?” Mathieu is a little oversensitive in his reaction. He's carrying around a few preconceived notions about this macho straight guy. It's almost reverse homophobia. I also really like the shed scene. At that moment, Mathieu and Philippe each need what the other one has. They let their guard down.

Who is Jean-Paul's wife, Anne?

Submerged in his work, Jean-Paul must have been out of touch. Since he retired, he's completely lost. Even if, like all real neurotics, he sees he's acting crazy. He is “in” and “out” at the same time. Anne eventually got turned off by this. She cheats on Jean-Paul because David (Vladimir Yordanoff) at least listens to her, is interested in her, speaks to her. With David, Anne becomes “lovable” again, in the sense that she's worthy of being loved. He wakes her up. I love Sleeping Beauties who emerge from their slumbers, like Charlotte (Rambling) in “Summer Things”.

Were you surprised by Alfred Lot's directing?

If I had to direct "A Spot of Bother," I probably would have opted for the same aesthetics as "Summer Things": moving, spontaneous scenes caught with a hand-held camera. The first day I showed up on the set, I saw rails on the floor. I even called Alfred "the Station Master". He told the story with his own music, in his own style. A comedy that develops through crisis situations has to move fast. He chose to make the movement fluid, elegant. A tough challenge and a total success. It's really 100% his film.

Did you enjoy working with the cast?

My agent thought of Miou-Miou right away. And I said to myself, "Well of course." She makes up for the shortcomings and weaknesses of a character or a screenplay like no one else. So she saved us on several occasions. Not only is she unpretentious, she has amazing intuition. And I also thought we worked as a couple. As for the others, I didn't really know them and it's very troubling to have to play such intimate roles with strangers, even if they gradually become more familiar. Mélanie and Cyril are very different. Mélanie is friendly and outgoing, but she turned out to be quite capable of telling my character off in no uncertain terms. She plays one of those nasty, pig-headed characters we all love. Cyril, on the other hand, is more mysterious. In the scene where I break down, before I go hiding in the forest, he suddenly grabs my neck. That helped me a lot. If you find yourself faced with an actor who doesn't give you anything, the feelings don't come. Miou-Miou, Mélanie, Gilles and Cyril give.

The end of the film is left open...

First, I hate telling audiences what they're supposed to think. Second, being a couple takes work, especially after a period of crisis. If Anne and Jean-Paul fell into each other's arms, I wouldn't believe it. But Anne proposes wiping the slate clean. JP makes the effort of coming out of his tomb, as his daughter calls it. They head back to the house. Maybe they'll do things together again. Yes, maybe there's a chance of starting over in Bruges... I like to think there is.

INTERVIEW WITH MIOU-MIOU

What made you decide to do "A Spot of Bother"?

Everything. I was thrilled with the script and its very funny ways of showing how confused human beings are when faced with commitment, with life. And meeting Alfred was a determining factor, as well as the casting choices.

How did you get along with Alfred?

I liked him right away. When we were shooting, it was a real pleasure to be greeted by his big smile. You wouldn't want to let Alfred down. When he adds even more dolly shots and long takes into a scene, you cry out, "Again?" but you go for it. You want to participate, to give.

What about Michel Blanc?

Everyone thinks we see each other often. Actually, we hadn't seen each other since "Ménage" by Bertrand Blier, but it seemed like only yesterday. I think Michel and I are believable as a steady couple that's been together a while. There's a certain familiarity and attentiveness between us. We would re-discuss the script and search for a scene's energy together. We laughed a lot, especially during that scene where I put him to bed.

Did you know the other actors?

Mélanie studied at the conservatory with my daughter. She's a sweetie. She turns towards you and she shines. I liked Gilles a lot, too. In that sneaky eye of his, you see he's constantly looking for trouble. He's constantly moving and has a lot of suggestions. As for Cyril, I find him exceptional in a difficult role.

I hear you pick apart screenplays...

I'm obsessed with the story. I try to find things: echoes, exceptions, nuances. I also read the novel.

How would you define Anne?

I think she and her husband Jean-Paul felt very close to one another. In certain photos at their house, you see them laughing. They were happy and probably very much in love. Then Jean-Paul became more distant and unavailable. As a result, David (Vladimir Yordanoff) is probably the person who Anne talks and laughs with the most. When he tells her he loves her, she is moved to tears. It's the high point of her relationship with him.

When Anne tries to tell Cathie about her affair with David, Cathie brutally pushes her away...

And I understand her. Between her father and her fiancé, Cathie already has enough to worry about. If on top of that she has to hear about her mother having an affair...! Cathie's nasty, hard to get along with. Everyone tells her so. And Mélanie (Doutey) plays that perfectly. I think that the actors in "A Spot of Bother" have a degree of sincerity that goes beyond comedy. We even feel compassion and a touch of tenderness for the characters. They are so lost, so far astray.

Does Anne make an effort to try to understand Mathieu?

Yes, and Jean-Paul's sarcasm embarrasses her, because Mathieu leaves home every time, and his repeated absences upset her. The last thing she wants is to never see her son again. She admits he is homosexual and that's already a lot. By inviting Mathieu's boyfriend to Cathie's wedding, Anne is doing the best she can do.

Is Anne very concerned about how people see her?

Yes, and I find that very sincere and realistic. Cathy and Mathieu also have problems with choosing a partner; their partners have to represent them as well. I don't know if the family name Muret ("*mur*" is the French word for wall) refers to the wall Jean-Paul builds or to the family's character as a whole. In any case, Anne, Cathie and Mathieu are always on the receiving end of saying "I love you". They have a hard time responding, a hard time making a commitment.

INTERVIEW WITH MELANIE DOUTEY

How did you get involved in this project?

I'd met Alfred during the preproduction of his first feature and it didn't work out, but I wanted to work with him again. In its direction, art direction and casting, "Room of Death" is a very mature and personal film.

When I read "A Spot of Bother", which is a totally different world, I was impressed by its sharp, cynical language and simple depiction of family life. I came on board with total trust.

Do you understand Cathie?

I love nasty characters, even if I'll never allow myself to be that way. There should be more Cathies in French films. She's never afraid of telling the truth, even if it hurts. She's also clumsy and can be egotistical. Her verbal abuse comes from her constant insecurity. I liked her spontaneity; she doesn't try to please to get her way. Michel and Alfred, who wrote the script, don't try to justify everything their characters do. Their shortcomings make them endearing.

She loves Philippe but she's not sure...

It's difficult to be with someone who's not welcome in your family. Jean-Paul and Anne are hardly thrilled about the idea of this marriage. They're upper middle-class, live in a nice big house and don't like seeing their daughter with the bouncer of a nightclub who may be sweet but has certain "lower class" manners. This family is afraid of what other people think. You don't stray from the beaten path. On the other side is Philippe, who isn't used to people like Jean-Paul, Anne or Cathie. As for my character, she's petrified of making a mistake. Her first marriage hurt her deeply. Cathie has peaceful relations with her ex-husband (Eric Caravaca) but there's still a little manipulation going on. Their divorce still sticks in her throat. She's the one who got dumped with a young child. And even more, her ex probably represented the ideal son-in-law for her parents. "A Spot of Bother" is a film about commitment. All the main characters feel truly frightened by it. Except for Philippe. But Philippe lets himself get eaten up by Cathie's fears.

How would you define the relationship between Cathie and her father?

It's very beautiful. With just a look or a word, you can see they're on the same wavelength. The love they feel for each other is boundless, but they never have the time to express it. The characters are always caught up in their daily routine. A routine that puts blinders on their eyes. Cathie's life falls into place and she is too frank with people who are close to her. Jean-Paul is afraid of dying and falls into a sort of mute silence. He gets by, hiding from his fear and not knowing how to express it, like his daughter. Cathie doesn't take time to be attentive to her father's anxiety. She's very self-centered, and all the characters are at a crossroads, they all risk missing the opportunity of their lives. Jean-Paul realizes - even if he probably understood it long before - that his children won't live up to the high hopes he had for them.

What about Cathie's relationship to her mother?

The two women talk by barking at each other. They're like two porcupines that poke each other when they get too close. And when they're too far apart, get cold. Has Anne always been jealous of Cathie's relationship to her father? When Anne tries to bring up her affair with David (Vladimir Yordanoff), Cathie's reaction is extremely violent. Maybe she imagines that the conversation could lead to another equally embarrassing one about commitment - her own and her mother's, a hereditary failure. But Cathie is defensive and escapes the conversation the two of them could have had about the "Philippe" problem. Cathie can be very childish sometimes: she has a hard time letting go of the image her parents worked so hard to establish, the image of a lasting and loving couple, as if to last meant to love.

Cathie is also very close to her brother...

There is a beautiful fraternity between them, in the noblest sense of the word. A real togetherness, too. Cathie is the only one who totally accepts Mathieu's homosexuality.

Death is present throughout the film...

As if the film constantly carried along, without it ever being emphasized anywhere, the anguish of the word "end". As if death were an integral part of daily life, which I find both realistic and very sane. But this serious theme is never taken seriously. Well, of course, there is that one extreme example of Jean-Paul's mutilation...

How was it working with Alfred?

We did a lot of readings together. He is very precise and very demanding. But let me reassure you right away, there's nothing tyrannical about him. He lets the actors make the characters their own. On the set, he sometimes suggested an intonation for a line or a nuance in a facial expression. He helped us to invent. He likes actors. Alfred is always conscious of the film's continuity. He pays attention. He does a lot of takes. But I like that. Alfred's directing has a very personal touch. His images always tell a story. The last shot of the film, for example, tells the story of the emptiness in which the characters struggle. Anne and Jean-Paul go back to living their little lives again.

Did you already know Michel Blanc and Miou-Miou?

No, but I admire him as an actor, always faithful to the honesty of his characters. Whether acting or directing, Michel knows how to juggle drama and humor like nobody else. And he was very closely watched on this film. Like Miou-Miou, he stays focused; he wants to do what's right not only for his character, but for the others as well. Miou-Miou is an exquisite woman and actress. Her curiosity is boundless and she is amazingly giving.

What about the other actors?

Gilles is an actor I admire enormously, too. It was very enjoyable to work with him, even if it is always very intimidating to be observed up close by someone you know so well. As for Cyril, I'd met him briefly on "Clara Sheller". His work on the film literally blew me away.

INTERVIEW WITH GILLES LELLOUCHE

What made you decide to do this film?

I had already worked with Alfred on his first feature, "Room of Death". I see him as a person who works, a virtue that we're gradually losing in this business. Alfred is usually the first to show up and the last to leave the set. He is gifted with unequalled energy, coupled with a talent for observation. He also has the great strength of being able to tell a story ambitiously but without ostentation, which already makes him, after only two films, an excellent filmmaker. I also knew that Michel Blanc had written the script for "A Spot of Bother". I think he is unrivaled when it comes to screenwriting and dialogue. "Grosse Fatigue," an outstanding story, mixes reality and fiction with an eye to fantasy. I always thought behind his mustache man in "Les Bronzés" and his pathologically jealous character in "Summer Things" was hiding an astute and modest man. So I accepted the film more because of Alfred and Michel than for the character, who's a bit of a "moron," a guy I felt like I'd already come across often enough. And okay, there was also my sweetheart (Mélanie Doutey)...

Is Philippe, who Cathie's brother Mathieu nicknames "IQ Minus 10," really such a "moron"?

I was won over, in any case, by his character arc. It reminded me of the hero in "It Takes All Kinds" by Agnès Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri. We live in an era that drags around tons of stereotypes. You see it clearly on TV: everyone feels entitled to judge everyone else. Sometimes a mere gesture out of place is enough for certain people to decree: "You're not in my class." There's nothing neurotic about "IQ Minus 10". He is down-to-earth and simple. He is untouched by cynicism. He just hides behind preformulated phrases. They are to him what a suit is to a businessman. Philippe loves Cathie so much that he prefers to spout out litanies of common locutions rather than take the risk of saying something stupid. JP, Anne... all the other characters stand outside of life. He has his feet planted firmly in it. These days, showing up like a "normal" person has become suspect. Unbelievable, isn't it?

How did you prepare for the part of Philippe?

I gained weight to give him a heavier feel. And since I have a tendency to be fairly expressive, I had to control myself and let nothing show. It had to be done, for the super sharp dialogue to keep its full impact. But I also got inspiration from a friend who resembled him. I was actually the one who was most annoyed by his screwy preconceived notions. At first, my vision of Philippe was a little heavy-handed. Alfred, who wanted to avoid caricatures, quite astutely put me back on the right track. He had a real feeling of benevolence for every one of his characters.

Two scenes prove that Philippe is more worthy than he appears to be: his conversation with Mathieu about partnership and the shed scene.

Because my character works as a bodyguard, Mathieu thinks he must be homophobic. He takes him for a big brute, but Philippe breaks stereotypes, he's always reaching out to people. In the shed scene, both men find themselves a little lonely in love. So they decide, for once, to stop hiding. I like the idea of participating in films with a message of acceptance. "A Spot of Bother" seems to portray family life fairly accurately. It's not fantasy, or even pure fiction, since these micro conflicts exist in every clan. I also really like JP and Cathie's beautiful father-daughter relationship, which is based on what I'd call tender animosity.

Did you discover anything new on this shoot?

I discovered Miou-Miou, a remarkable woman of great simplicity. I have a real passion for 1970's cinema, which put out at least five masterpieces a year. And I remember her perfectly in "Est-ce Bien Raisonnable?" by Georges Lautner - she was extraordinarily beautiful. Miou-Miou, who has amassed innumerable awards during her career, is infinitely more reserved than most other actresses of her generation. I'm touched by people with great talent who are humble. Michel is more introverted and self-protective. You don't reach out to him - he reaches out to you. He is very meticulous and he never took over the project. In other words, he never wanted to take the boss's place. As for Alfred, he defines things before we get thrown into the big washing machine of the shoot. He also breaks things down a lot and does a lot of takes.

I hear the rap song at the wedding was partly your idea?

Not exactly. Alfred wanted that song and it just so happens I know the group IAM.

In that scene, you don't look like you're acting...

With rap music, everyone dances pretty much the same, whether you're from an upscale suburb or a housing project - it's an up and down groove (*he demonstrates*)...

How do you interpret the last shot of the film?

"A Spot of Bother" speaks of passing time and the erosion of feelings. When you've been married twenty years, I think a couple ends up having a tacit agreement of shared boredom and enthusiasm. It's not just about physical bliss anymore, but... much more. Life isn't a novel by Alexandre Jardin. You don't fall in love again every morning. But now JP and Anne have to redefine their daily routine. It's an extremely original kind of banality: the old holds the promise of the new. In any case, that's what that beautiful image means to me.

INTERVIEW WITH CYRIL DESCOURS

How did you come on board “A Spot of Bother”?

Thanks to Brigitte Moidon, the casting director. She had cast me as one of the main characters in “Complices” by Frédéric Mermoud, a film with Emmanuelle Devos and Gilbert Melki coming out in January. At first, Alfred had an older actor in mind for Mathieu, but we had an extremely productive work session. We got right down to the essential... At the end of a scene, he suggested a different intention that gave the text a more subtle meaning. You could tell he knew exactly what he was talking about. He didn't get lost in endless fantasies about the characters' past or psychology. When at work, he's always cool on the surface, but he has a sharp eye and doesn't miss a thing. He trusts his team and that's very gratifying for us all.

Your character, Mathieu, has a hard time making a commitment...

He's afraid of asserting himself with his family. A common fear, or at least I think it is, for a lot of young homosexuals, who even today are torn between their sexual orientation and their parents' expectations. The fact that Mathieu's father, Jean-Paul, blows a fuse and the whole family finds itself pulled into the whirlpool helps him, strangely enough, to “come out”.

Mathieu seems very close to his sister Cathie, the only one who has accepted his homosexuality right from the start...

In the only scene of the movie when they're alone together, they laugh like crazy. That moment alone sums up how close they are. I think the film speaks about the generation gap, among other things. Jean-Paul and Anne have stagnated in their beautiful house. The kids are trying to find love and their parents are trying to get it back.

How would you define the relationship between Philippe and Mathieu?

Philippe is an intruder in the simplest sense of the word. He intrudes upon the family - he shakes up the bitter, snobbish prejudice of a family too comfortably settled in outmoded principles. At first, like his father and mother, Mathieu takes Philippe for a brute; he even nicknames him “IQ Minus 10”!

But they gradually get to know and appreciate each other, for example when Mathieu shows up at his sister's and finds Philippe vacuuming, or the night they have that conversation near the shed, which bonds them once and for all. The not-so-sure-of-himself gay and the seemingly homophobic brute gradually discover each other's worlds and a friendship is born.

How did you fit into the group?

Quite easily. It's often said that a comedy requires seriousness and concentration for the comedic elements to work. It's true that you have to be rigorous and accurate, but that didn't keep us from having a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Michel Blanc is an actor I really admire, he is very meticulous and I think his character is hilarious. No one else could have made his character's craziness so believable.

What about the others?

Miou-Miou is incredible. She's always innovative and unconventional - it's both surprising and destabilizing to work with her. Mélanie I knew from having worked together on the France 2 series "Clara Sheller", and I love the spontaneity of her acting and her expressive friendliness on the set. Gilles is a powerhouse of an actor but he is also very sensitive and succeeded in making his character an endearing brute. It was a real pleasure to benefit from such a kaleidoscope of personalities.

CAST

Michel Blanc	Jean-Paul
Miou Miou	Anne
Mélanie Doutey	Cathie
Gilles Lellouche	Philippe
Cyril Descours	Mathieu
Yannick Renier	Olivier
Wladimir Yordanoff	David

CREW

Director	Alfred Lot
<i>Based upon the novel "A Spot of Bother" by Mark Haddon and "Une situation légèrement délicate", NiL Editions</i>	
Producer	Yves Marmion / UGC YM
Screenplay, Adaptation, Dialogue	Michel Blanc
Screenplay Adaptation	Alfred Lot
Production Manager	Sylvestre Guarino
Post Production Manager	Abraham Goldblat
Director of Photography	Jérôme Almeras
Production Designer	Jean-Pierre Fouillet
Costume Designer	Olivier Bériot
Costume Supervisor	Magali Cohen
1 st Assistant Director	Stéphane Moreno Carpio
Editor	Virginie Bruant
Casting	Brigitte Moidon A.R.D.A
Casting - Children	Marion Touitou
Casting - Extras	Claire Andrieu
Key Makeup Artist	Sophie Benaïche
Key Hair Stylist	Stéphane Desmarez
Sound	Laurent Zeilig A.F.S.I
Sound Editor	Francis Wagnier
Sound Mixer	Dominique Gaborieau
Original Music	Nathaniel Mechaly
International Sales	TF1 INTERNATIONAL
French Video Rights	UGC Vidéo

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With the participation of CANAL+ and TPS Star
With the support of REGION ILE-DE-FRANCE
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