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HAPPY END

(LES DERNIERS JOURS DU MONDE)

A FILM BY ARNAUD AND JEAN-MARIE LARRIEU





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Soudaine Compagnie presents

MATHIEU AMALRIC CATHERINE FROT KARIN VIARD SERGI LOPEZ

HAPPY END

(LES DERNIERS JOURS DU MONDE)

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ARNAUD AND JEAN-MARIE LARRIEU
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY DOMINIQUE NOGUEZ

FRENCH RELEASE DATE AUGUST 19, 2009
Running time: 130' / 2.35 / Dolby SRD



Synopsis

As the end of the world becomes imminent, Robinson Laborde is gradually getting over his breakup with a lover for whom he had decided to leave his wife.

Despite the impending catastrophe—to cope with it better maybe—he sets off on a romantic odyssey that takes him across France and Spain.



Interview with **Arnaud and Jean-Marie Larrieu**

Happy End combines themes from your earlier work—new relationships, freedom, desire—in a generous and completely new style. How did you get the idea for the movie?

Arnaud: We read Dominique Noguez's eponymous novel when it was published in 1991. It inspired in us an idea for a complete film. You never know if projects like that will come to fruition. After *Peindre ou faire l'amour*, which was a sedentary film, *Happy End* resurfaced like a major project for a nomadic film. We wrote a very free adaptation.

Jean-Marie: As the writing and financing of a project like this require a lot of time, we wrote and directed

Le voyage aux Pyrénées in the meantime as a sort of joyous exorcism given the scale of the subject—the end of the world.

Arnaud: *Happy End* perhaps captures quite a few themes from our work, but we envisioned it as an opportunity to get out of ourselves. On paper, it's a Hollywood idea! So much about it was new for us: adapting a book, tackling a road movie, the number of characters, violent action scenes... It was an opportunity to direct new things. As they say in America, shooting a scene with three hundred people and the hero lost in the middle is a good test of a director.

You had never directed a crowd scene.

Jean-Marie: It's fascinating, but takes a lot of patience. When you ask two hundred people to start walking together, they look like zombies at first. Bringing a mass of people to life means talking to the whole mass and each particular person.

Arnaud: We sensed we had to start shooting this «ultra-fiction» by plunging our actors and crew into the very real and boisterous throng of the Pamplona Festival. For all of us, it was a dip into reality before launching into the staged action.

Jean-Marie: The crowd scene issue is less anecdotal than it seems. You could even tell the story of the movie from that angle. It would be the story of a man who decides to follow a woman in a crowd one day and, later, when he sets out to look for her as people start to flee, he walks against the stream of this flow of humanity. He moves against the tide of world history.

What were your other «first times» on this movie?

Jean-Marie: We'd never used flashbacks before. There are in fact two journeys in *Happy End*: the first is in space, through several countries, and the other is in time. The further the film progresses, the closer we





get to ancient times. The hero arrives in a medieval castle, then Paris, which is like a city that's been engulfed Pompeii-style.

Arnaud: We started out with the classic idea of seeing your life flashing by just before you die. Robinson revisits his past, but the settings gradually become more primitive also, which is why we have prehistoric caves becoming shelters once more. The «last times» interconnect with the «first times». The last survivors, Robinson and Laetitia, die naked like Adam and Eve.

Beyond the plot, what did you take from Dominique Noguez's novel?

Jean-Marie: A broad and liberated conception of storytelling.

Arnaud: The idea that the end of the world above all represents a motivation. The aim of the journey Robinson undertakes is to find a girl amidst total chaos. His objective is his desire.

Jean-Marie: In Noguez's book, there was a contemporary roguishness that sits well with us—a blend of pessimism, as everything collapses, and spirit of adventure. Robinson is haunted by a woman.

In his mind, anything goes if it means finding her. Between explosions and viruses, his daily existence becomes surreal. Yet he continues having dinner with friends and going to shows, even if they're stopped halfway through.

Arnaud: Some war stories are like that. Daily life goes on in the middle of the worst debacle. It can lead to a certain «black humor», which Dominique Noguez likes, as did the surrealists.

What was your secondary source of inspiration?

Arnaud: We loved a Jim Harrison short story in *Legends of the Fall*—*The Man Who Gave Up His Name*...

Jean-Marie: The story of a guy who gives up his job, whose wife leaves him and who keeps a diary.

Arnaud: Every evening, he dances alone listening to music, drinks a lot and has such perspective on world events that nothing scares him anymore. That's the connection with our film. The character of Robinson, in his relationship with his wife and daughter, is partly drawn from that story.

Jean-Marie: In Noguez's novel, Robinson was a loner who wrote TV screenplays. We gave him a family and this strange job with a big future—Taiwanese bath salesman.

The film flirts with science fiction, even if the future you describe, with its recession and viruses, is very contemporary...

Jean-Marie: We made the decision early on not to specify when the action takes place. The book was written in the 80s and was set in 2010. It was very futuristic. We chose not to keep the 20-year gap in time. We don't give the film a date but it takes place now—you just have to switch on the TV to see that.

Arnaud: It's a present-day movie that shows we're living in a world of science fiction!

The film reflects current events by raising the threat of a mystery virus...

Jean-Marie: How can you not take into account the world we live in? Our generation hasn't been through a war, but it's subjected to a non-specific threat. We

live sheltered lives here, until you find yourself in the wrong bus or subway station when a bomb goes off. There is realism in the movie on this issue.

Arnaud: We wanted to differentiate the film from the usual depictions without giving up the scare factor. Some scenes are frightening, intentionally, even though we never aimed to make an out-and-out frightener.

There have been lots of American and British movies about the end of the world, not so many French ones. What was your take on it?

Jean-Marie: Contrary to tradition, «our» end of the world doesn't have a single cause. It's a series of familiar, if that's the word, catastrophes—earthquake, terrorist attacks, viruses, missiles—that rebound off each other and eventually provoke the ultimate catastrophe. What interested us was not the explanation but the sense of catastrophe, how it resonates with the characters' lives. So ash pours from the sky when Ombeline (Catherine Frot) talks about past loves, and bombs explode just as she admits to Robinson that she was his father's lover.





Arnaud: The other principle was never to leave the viewpoint of the main character, Robinson—filming the end of the world through his eyes. And so playing with all the ambiguity of events—the exodus of vacationers mingling with people fleeing, the firecrackers in the streets of Pamplona mingling with terrorists' gunfire. As sources of news become rarer, everybody is left to interpret as best they can the situations they find themselves in. The film never has just one dimension, it interweaves the collapse of a love affair with the world's collapse.

Jean-Marie: It's the occasionally rowdy encounter between an intimate movie and a blockbuster. It culminates in the scene in the minivan in Toulouse when Robinson refuses to patch things up with his wife and she explodes—literally!

What's Happy End's main theme? Survival? Desire?

Jean-Marie: We always show the characters in a vacuum, in the metaphysical sense, questioning their desires. The film is not an exception, but it's slightly different. For the first time, the characters are confronted by death—theirs and that of other people.

Arnaud: That doesn't stop desire surviving, and even, on the contrary, awakening. It's that classic couple, Eros and Thanatos.

Jean-Marie: It's desire in the broad sense, not just with a sexual connotation. It's also the idea of building, creating, dreaming... Projecting oneself into time and space. «The time for dreams is short, What to do with my nights, What to do with my days» as Aragon wrote in *Est-ce ainsi que les hommes vivent?* We quote the poem in the film. It's about a soldier's romantic adventures in wartime.

Arnaud: The end of the world context exacerbates the romantic aspect. Facing disaster, the characters ask themselves different questions. What to do? Who with? Why? Suddenly, destiny intervenes, old desires resurface. Those who gave a meaning to their lives want to keep control of it to the very end, even if that means suicide. The apocalypse transforms people and bodies.





The character of Laetitia embodies the desire for fiction that drives the film, like an eternal apparition, almost a construct of the mind...

Arnaud: The end of the world means the end of history, every history—that of the world, of individuals, major and minor. As this outcome becomes increasingly clear, Robinson sets off to look for what was the last piece in his story, a love story, an encounter that began with a fleeting moment of eye contact, like the meeting of two molecules giving birth to matter... It's the start of the fiction.

Jean-Marie: Laetitia represents an appeal to the imaginary, elsewhere and elusive. Robinson is followed by this woman, just like he follows her. With her, he is in the uncertainty and pleasure of a story in progress. She taught him to be open to every possibility. That extends to the film, which moves forward step by step embracing our hero's quest.

Arnaud: Robinson has no pre-established plan except that of deciphering at any given moment what he hears, sees, caresses... With a view to saving his skin as well as tracking down Laetitia. The pleasure of the story goes through him. He creates purely cinematic, hypnotic emotions and suspense. And he eventually connects with the total liberty of Laetitia when he abandons Ombeline in the crowd in Toulouse.

The relationship to nudity has always been a strong part of your films. Here, everyone gets naked!

Jean-Marie: Nudity is always beautiful, fragile and interesting to film. It takes us back on the beginning of time, our origins. It has a primitive aspect.

Arnaud: The two heroes have a Robinson Crusoe and Friday angle, that is remarked upon in the film. There's the world around them and they live as if on an island.



But the nudity is not necessarily synonymous with liberty. You also associate it with death, whether it's that of Sergi Lopez's character or in the unnerving scene of hotel rooms littered with corpses.

Jean-Marie: In that scene, there was the almost pictorial desire to reveal the moving and mysterious glimmer of life by simply putting before the audience inert corpses and the rise of a naked woman's chest as she breathes.

Arnaud: The nudity is concretely associated with the baring of each character, as if to reveal flaws and fragility. The girl our hero is looking for stripped him bare—that's the meaning behind the final scene in Paris when they walk along together both completely naked. All they have left is their skin. I remember that Mathieu Amalric said to us, after reading the script, «It's a film about skin.»

Jean-Marie: Skin is precisely the final, fragile frontier between oneself and others, oneself and the world.

This film sees you being reunited with Mathieu Amalric, six years after *Un homme, un vrai*.

Jean-Marie: We continued to meet up, but what a pleasure to work with him again! In just a few years, Mathieu has developed into an incredible actor, even though he has always defined himself as a non-actor. I remember at the beginning, he tended to add little gestures and expressions to his performance, precisely because he thought he wasn't an actor. He wanted to look real. Now, he's pared down his style, but he still has his personal touch. Filming him is a bit like observing the animal life of Mathieu Amalric. He really is one of very few actors who can inhabit his solitude on screen.

He didn't mind working with a prosthetic arm?

Arnaud: On the contrary. The prosthesis was very exciting for him because he was able to come up with new movements. You don't move the same way with one hand less. He really rode his scooter and drove his car. Mathieu has a kind of American actor's way of using his body, combined with real bravery, despite or because of his apparent fragility.



How did you find Omahyra Mota, who plays Laetitia?

Jean-Marie: We needed an actress able to play almost all her scenes naked. Having looked far and wide, and even in the porn business, we tried the world of models. Of Dominican origin, Omahyra was working in New York as a model. Her mysteriousness and androgyny appealed to us right away. She really embodies the woman from elsewhere.

Arnaud: Her character isn't prefabricated. She moves like a wildcat in real life and on screen.

Catherine Frot appears for the first time in one of your films...

Jean-Marie: Catherine Frot is one of those mainstream actors we welcomed aboard, like Daniel Auteuil in *Peindre ou faire l'amour*, and who are outstanding professionals. With Catherine, a line like «I'm here, waiting for you» immediately takes on another dimension.

Arnaud: Once Catherine had unearthed the character's sincerity, as she calls it, everything was fine. She made a conscious choice to try a different environment to what's she's used to. She agreed to start shooting right in the middle of the Pamplona Bull Run...



Jean-Marie: She brings such discipline to her performance... In the Opera scene, she flips from comedy to drama in a few seconds. There's a moment when she seems lost, then everything turns on end. In a flash, she ups the ante. She's a great actress, that's all.

Sergi Lopez, however, is an old acquaintance...

Jean-Marie: What made us want to work with him on this movie, besides the Spanish part, of course, was the idea of seeing Sergi confront Mathieu Amalric. They make a fine duo, total opposites physically.

Arnaud: We also knew that the role of the opera singer would take total commitment and Sergi is capable of anything, miles from the laidback reputation he has and has never deserved.

How did you come to choose Karin Viard and Clotilde Hesme?

Jean-Marie: As far as Karin was concerned, there was a missed opportunity back when we were making *Un homme, un vrai*. The years went by and we promised we'd hook up again. So here she is playing Mathieu Amalric's wife, just like we'd planned six years ago! What we were asking her to do was tricky, with nude

scenes and some very technical dialogue. She did it all brilliantly.

Arnaud: We liked her playing a strong woman rather than the cliché of the girl who can't come to terms with her femininity. Her character grows as the film progresses. She lets something go and rediscovers her sensuality.

Jean-Marie: As for Clotilde Hesme, she impressed us with her ability to get emotion across instantly. Her death scene blew us away. She plays a woman in limbo with very moving majesty.

Can you tell us about the amazing scene in the Chateau in the south of France, with its decadent atmosphere?

Jean-Marie: Shooting a scene in a Chateau, when there are already so many, was a real challenge. We tried to keep it very personal while navigating through the clichés.

Arnaud: There's Jean Cocteau, with the ceremonial welcome Robinson is given; Demy, with the Lacroix dress that Sabine Azéma wears; Brisseau's films; a low-budget version of *Eyes Wide Shut*; Renoir, with the kitchen scene at the end. The Chateau is the home of cinema.





For his last evening among the living, Robinson refuses the temptation of the flesh.

Arnaud: In the Chateau, Robinson traverses a space full of every possibility, every fantasy. There are female couples, transvestites, naked men, women of all ages, a sublimely androgynous woman... Yet he never finds a place where he feels happy. Whenever he stops, people look at him. He's always an object of desire. It becomes a nightmare.

Jean-Marie: Having lived only for his desire, he discovers its limits. He has every pleasure within his grasp and realizes that isn't what he was looking for. What he's looking for is Laetitia, whom he suddenly notices «imprisoned» in an erotic movie being screened in this Chateau. Robinson sees it as proof that she's still alive.

How did you imagine the ending, in the empty streets of Paris?

Arnaud: First, there's the trip across Paris in the twilight, guided only by the beam of a flashlight. Day no longer breaks. The idea was to film places everyone knows in an unprecedented, almost dreamlike situation. Robinson enters the «kingdom of shadows» of Hades and finds... Laetitia, at last, in the glow of an explosion.

Jean-Marie: The last scene, strictly speaking, the one that follows the explosion, provides a lyrical response to the reasons for our hero's quest. Robinson finds this woman. Who is she? A ghost or a goddess? She acquires a mythical dimension. This scene is a final flashback. An absolute flashback. If it's true that your life flashes before your eyes when you're about to die, Robinson and Laetitia die in a memory...

The first time we saw the scene edited together, we were very moved. The Leo Ferré song, with its lyrical crudity, a man and a woman in a street in Paris at night, but like at the dawn of the world, him undressing and watching her... It strips bare our characters and our cinema—the encounter, the unforeseen, the moment when everything changes...

Arnaud: The greatest audacity, at the same time as huge fragility, can be seen in the actors' eyes at that moment.

Jean-Marie: We had worked it so it would be the first scene they shot together!

Arnaud and Jean-Marie Larrieu

Selected filmography

2008 **LE VOYAGE AUX PYRÉNÉES**

Directors' Fortnight – Cannes 2008

Starring Sabine Azema and Jean-Pierre Darroussin.

2005 **PEINDRE OU FAIRE L'AMOUR**

In competition - Cannes 2005

Starring Sabine Azema, Daniel Auteuil, Sergi Lopez and Amira Casar.

2003 **UN HOMME UN VRAI**

Prix Louis Delluc shortlist 2003

Starring Mathieu Amalric and Héléne Fillières.

2000 **LA BRÈCHE DE ROLAND**

Directors' Fortnight - Cannes 2000

Starring Mathieu Amalric and Cécile Reiger,

1999 **FIN D'ÉTÉ**

Presented by A.C.I.D - Cannes 1998

Starring Philippe Suer, Pia Camilla Copper, Marie Henriau and Pierre Maguelon



Cast

Robinson
Ombeline
Chloé
Théo
Iris
Laetitia
Cédric Ribot
Mélanie
Chateau Guest
Sociologist
Doctor Abeberry
Mother Lae
Barbecue Man
Guest appearance by

Mathieu AMALRIC
Catherine FROT
Karin VIARD
Sergi LOPEZ
Clotilde HESME
Omahyra MOTA
Pierre PELLET
Manon BEAUCOIN
Serge BOZON
Daniel COHEN
Jacques NOLOT
Baya BELAL
Daniel ISOPO
Sabine AZEMA
as La Marquise D'Arcangues

Crew

Screenplay by

Arnaud & Jean-Marie Larrieu
based on the novel by Dominique Noguez
«Les Derniers jours du monde»
published by Editions Robert Laffont

Cinematography

Thierry Arbogast, afc

Editing

Annette Dutertre

Sound

Olivier Mauvezin

Béatrice Wick

Stéphane Thiébaud

Assistant Director

Arnaud Dommerc

Production Design

Ana Alvargonzales

Riton Dupire-Clément

Costumes

Caroline Tavernier

Makeup

Delphine Jaffart

Casting

Stéphane Batut

Production Manager

Hervé Duhamel

Coproducers

Paco Poch

Aileen Li

Associate Producer

Hsieh Chinlin

Produced by

Bruno Pesery

Music and clips

Music (non-exhaustive list)

Leo Ferré - orchestral versions:

La Mort des Loups, Night and Day, Love

Songs: *Jolie Môme, Ton style*

Bertrand Burgalat - live music at the Chateau:

Aux Cyclades électroniques

Manuel De Falla - opera *Life Is Short*

Daniel Darc - *J'irai au Paradis*

Film clips shown at the Chateau

Le bonnet blanc video director Maria Beatty



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