

THE EXTRAORDINARY
ADVENTURES
OF
Adele
BLANC-SEC
A FILM BY LUC BESSON



Release date (France)

April 14th 2010

Technical Specifications

Format	2:35
Running time	107 minutes
Sound	Dolby SRD / DTS

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THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ADELE BLANC-SEC

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1912. Adèle Blanc-Sec, an intrepid young reporter, will go to any lengths to achieve her aims, including sailing to Egypt to tackle mummies of all shapes and sizes.

Meanwhile, in Paris, it's panic stations! A 136 million-year old pterodactyl egg on a shelf in the natural history museum has mysteriously hatched, and the bird subjects the city to a reign of terror from the skies.

But nothing fazes Adèle Blanc-Sec, whose adventures reveal many more extraordinary surprises...

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ADELE BLANC-SEC

LUC BESSON

Writer – Director

Meeting Jacques Tardi

It's a long story. I first fell in love with his heroine, Adèle, about ten years ago. I tried to contact Tardi, but unfortunately he had agreed to do *Adèle* with another director. At the time, I was a bit saddened, but pleased that he had chosen a "great" director and wished him the best of luck. I waited impatiently to see the movie, which never came out. After three or four years, I called Tardi back and he told me he'd fallen out with that particular director and filmmakers in general. He rejected the whole idea of a movie adaptation. I had to convince him to reconsider. We met several times. We needed to reassure him, prove our credentials and wait another year to buy back the rights that his agent had sold to someone else. After six years of waiting and negotiating, Tardi finally agreed to sell me the rights to his Adèle.

Adapting the comic book

I wrote a first draft of the adaptation, staying very faithful to the comic book, Tardi's universe and the underlying characteristics of Adèle Blanc-Sec.

I gave my script to Tardi in a state of undisguised anxiety. It was nerve-racking in the sense that he wrote the comic book and I had made his character my own by adapting it. But I struck lucky because he read the script and said, "It's great!" He recognized his comic book and character, and at the same time discovered a film adaptation of them, not just the transposition of his story into moving pictures. That really won him over. The only change he asked for was to the name of one of the characters.

The actors

Main characters

"I was very lucky on this shoot. All the actors gave me everything they had and they all contributed so much."

Louise Bourgoïn ~ Adèle Blanc-Sec

I'd been following Louise's career for some time--from wacky weather girl on (cable channel) Canal+ to female lead opposite Fabrice Luchini in Anne Fontaine's *The Girl From Monaco*. Her ability to play a range of totally different characters really appealed to me because it's a very rare talent, which is particularly relevant to the role of Adèle, who adopts about fifteen different disguises in the movie. When I met Louise, we hit it off immediately and I was sure that I had my Adèle.

Louise is very open-minded, always on the ball and able to switch from hot to cold in the blink of an eye, just like Adèle, but less crazy. Louise is also very hardworking and extremely reliable. With Adèle, it's more complex because she keeps going her own way and nothing can stop her! On set, the crew nicknamed Louise "the accountant" because she was constantly checking the continuity and shot list. She knew it all by heart. Working with her was a complete eye-opener!

Mathieu Amalric ~ Dieuleveult

Mathieu Amalric was one of the first actors I chose for *Adèle*. I really like the man and the actor. He's one of the greatest talents of his generation, capable of absolutely incredible metamorphoses. His performance in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is simply astonishing.

I met with Mathieu to offer him the role of Dieuleveult, but he replied that he was taking a break from acting to devote himself to directing. Actually, I think I sweet-talked him into it with the help of his children. He went home and mentioned it to his son, who said, "You're nuts! Tardi, Adèle Blanc-Sec, that's amazing! You have to do it!" Mathieu called me back to say he'd make an exception for *Adèle*. So it all worked out fine and the shoot with him was a complete pleasure.

When audiences see Dieuleveult in the movie, I don't think they'll recognize Mathieu unless they know which character he's playing. Facially, he's unrecognizable. He even altered the tone of his voice. He totally subsumed himself into the character in a quite exceptional performance.

Gilles Lellouche ~ Caponi

I've known Gilles Lellouche a long time. We met in 2003 on *Pourkoi... Passkeu*, his first short film. I've always had a lot of time for Gilles, but I never found a role to offer him.

Physically, Caponi isn't too dissimilar to Gilles. He just needed to put on some weight. I didn't ask him to gain thirty kilos in two months, like Scorsese with De Niro on *Raging Bull*. We just padded him out a little. After barely a couple of meetings, we'd got our Caponi, who isn't an easy character to pin down--he's a gruff, provincial type, not the sharpest tool in the box. He's always slightly off the pace, which constantly creates comedic situations. He's also one of the key characters in the movie and a good counterweight to Louise and her investigation.

Jean-Paul Rouve ~ Justin de Saint Hubert

There's a striking physical resemblance between Jean-Paul Rouve and Saint Hubert in the comic book, the big game hunter who abandons a safari to hunt the pterodactyl. We just needed to give him a little goatee, darken his eyes a touch, put a pith helmet on his head, and he was absolutely perfect!

Jacky Nercessian ~ Esperandieu

Jacky Nercessian is another actor who has an astonishing capacity to metamorphose. He can play any role, even a crazy old lady if you give him a dress and a wig!

On *Adèle*, Jacky was in make-up for five hours a day. It's a wonderful role for him to get his teeth into because he has huge stage and film experience and I don't think he ever got the major role he deserved. I hope he will now because he truly can play anyone and anything.

Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre ~ Agathe

For Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre, it was tricky because she plays Adèle's sister. They bicker and fight all day long, but they're quite alike physically and facially. I'd never met Laure, but I was very pleasantly surprised.

The Crew

"I called on talented technicians, most of whom were old acquaintances."

Thierry Arbogast as DP. We've worked together since *Nikita*.

Olivier Bériot did a very special job with the costumes. He's a hugely talented designer, whom I've got to know well because he also worked on the *Arthur* trilogy.

The production design is crucial in *Adèle*, and once more I brought in Hugues Tissandier, who worked with me on *Joan of Arc* and the *Arthur* trilogy. We get on really well. As usual, we started by working with reduced-scale models of the sets, which allow me to select my camera angles. With models, you soon notice if the ceilings are too high or too low, or the walls too far apart. Hugues now uses digital technology to design and pre-visualize the sets, which means I can take a virtual tour to preselect the angles I want to shoot from and the lenses I want to use. It also saves money to use new technology because we reduce set construction to what will actually be in the shot. Our research was made much easier by the abundance of texts on Egypt and the valuable collaboration of Jacques Tardi, who opened up his private library to us. Jacques owns an apartment filled with period books and documents, and Hugues spent a lot of time there with him. I think Tardi was quite impressed by the quality of our work, judging by his reaction when he first saw Adèle's apartment. It was very moving to see. Jacques arrived on set and entered Adèle's apartment, which he had created after all, and suddenly Louise, as Adèle, came to meet him, in her green dress and feather hat, and handed him a copy of the comic book that she had signed for him. It was a wonderful moment.

It's true I often work with the same crew. They're all very good, real "warriors", some people would say, but I guess I don't want them to work exclusively on my movies. I'm delighted when they go to the USA, China or anywhere else with other directors. They see different things, have enriching experiences, and that nourishes my work. The important thing for me is that they still want to try new things, push the envelope a little bit further. I ask a lot of them. More, always a little bit more...

A new film, a new experience

Every film is a different experience, because of the story, characters, actors, people you meet and also, above all, because of when you make it. When you make your first movie, everything's brand new. I was twenty when I made *The Last Combat*. Then time goes by... You're not the same person at 25-30, not the same at 40, not the same at 50...

There's a sort of complex alchemy between your own spiritual and intellectual development and your practical experience. The big issue, when I start shooting a movie, is knowing how I can use that experience and still have the new and fresh take on things that is vital to making a good movie.

On *Adèle*, we did a lot of groundwork in pre-production and I really focused on that phase. It was also the first time I wasn't also producing. Having a producer, Virginie Besson-Silla, my wife, was a very enjoyable experience to the extent that I was able to devote all my energy to directing. I was very demanding, the whole time, and I gave it all I had. I really wanted this movie to look as good as possible and for the editing process to be nothing but pleasure, sheer pleasure.

FILMOGRAPHY

2009 *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*

2009 *Arthur And The War Of The Two Worlds*

2008 *Arthur And The Revenge Of Maltazard*

2006 *Arthur And The Minimoy's*

2005 *Angel-A*

1999 *Joan Of Arc*

1997 *The Fifth Element*

1994 *The Professional*

1991 *Atlantis*

1990 *Nikita*

1988 *The Big Blue*

1985 *Subway*

1983 *The Last Battle*

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ADELE BLANC-SEC

TARDI

INTERVIEW

Where did you get the idea for the character of Adèle-Blanc-Sec?

The Casterman comic book publishing house saw my early work and commissioned me to make a series. I needed a main character to drive it. To be honest, I didn't have many ideas. It was in the 1970s and back then I leaned more towards stand-alone albums. Despite that, the concept was attractive, so I began to check out various comic book heroes, who were mostly male characters—racing drivers, aviators, soldiers, cowboys and cops—with very few female characters except for Bécassine, a provincial maid who didn't even have a mouth, and Barbarella, in a more erotic register. That's where I got the idea for a female character who'd be the equal of all these male heroes.

I have always been interested in the serial novels that were very popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the most famous in France was Arsène Lupin, who made his first appearance in 1910. As a result, I decided that my heroine would be a contemporary of his.

There was also the question of what she could possibly do as a job because, when you take a closer look, most comic book heroes except soldiers don't have a clearly defined profession. You never see them at work, you don't know how they earn a living or how they actually live. Of course, my heroine wasn't going to run a building contractor's, but she could do the same job as me and, transposed back to 1910, that meant she'd be a writer of serial novels.

We see her at her typewriter from time to time or with her publisher, and she talks about her work. Even if we don't see her working very often, it gives us an indication of her lifestyle and standard of living. She's not from a wealthy family, she's an independent woman who works for a living and is resolutely modern, not at all in the mindset of women of the period.

Finally, I needed a setting. I use locations in Paris because I enjoy drawing them. I like museums a lot because they inspire me and, in particular, the botanical gardens with its glass roof, the display cases and all the scientific paraphernalia they contain.

So, I had my character and the starting point of a story, the botanical gardens and—long before *Jurassic Park* and *Indiana Jones*, I'd like to point out—a 136 million-year-old pterodactyl egg that would hatch and spread terror over Paris in the 1900s.

Where does the fantasy dimension in Adèle Blanc-Sec come from?

Fritz Lang, for the fantasy aspect, and Jules Verne, for the "inventing things out of nothing" aspect, which makes for quite a poetic-scientific combination of breathtaking situations and off-the-wall stories that don't quite add up but you let yourself be whisked along in an almost childlike way.

Did you think Adèle Blanc-Sec could be turned into a movie?

As soon as the first album was published, the Japanese wanted to make a cartoon series, but the changes they wanted made an adaptation impossible. An American studio was also interested. Their adaptation was so "American" that my heroine and her world lost their identity, so the project went no further. Then, various TV production companies showed an interest. Finally, ten years ago, Luc Besson called me.

Overall, is the screenplay faithful to the spirit of your comic books?

Basically, I'd say no, it isn't, because you have to accept that an adaptation is a betrayal—and after adapting a number of novels into a comic book format I know what I'm talking about. When you change format, you change the means of expression and the way of telling a story is different. A comic book is a succession of still images, snapshots that tell a story and that the reader can come back to or linger over. In a movie, the director controls time, sets the pace, decides to have a close-up of a face, an object, etc.

Then, there's the concept of a series. When I start working on a story, I never manage to fall on my feet—it often goes off in all directions. In the end, I often fall back on the old serial-novel trick, "to be continued". At the same time, I implicitly promise the readers things without actually knowing if I'll be able to keep my promises. In the movies, it's different. You need an ending, even though you can leave open the possibility of a sequel. The narrative functions in different ways in movies and in comic books.

The difference is even more blatant in the treatment of the characters. In a movie, a minor character or extra can't suddenly take over from the main character whereas, in a comic book, they can. I sometimes allow myself to take a huge detour through very secondary characters who suddenly become very important to the story, simply because I enjoy drawing them. That's exactly what happened to Edith Rabatjoie. Initially, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* was going to be called *The Adventures of Edith Rabatjoie*. It's just that I got no enjoyment out of drawing the character and when Adèle appeared in the story to abduct her, she also took over the lead role in the series.

To my mind, the only thing movies and comic books have in common are pictures.

What do you think of the choice of actress to play Adèle Blanc-Sec?

The actress had to be able to get into Adèle's personality, to become Adèle psychologically and display the same mental traits. It would have been ridiculous to choose an actress because she looked just like the Adèle I drew, especially as she evolved physically over the course of the series—the Adèle in the first albums looks quite different than the Adèle in the last ones. Gradually, she changed, became a bit caricatural, her nose turned up more, all because I don't like to suffer when I'm working. Some comic book artists do very precise sketches then ink them in. I do very rough sketches that only take shape when I start inking, touching up and adding color. As a result, my characters gradually change and develop. I'd say that Louise Bourgoïn was an excellent choice because her performance captures the spirit of the character. On screen, she becomes the feisty, independent and inquisitive heroine, who turns out to be quite anachronistic in relation to the period.

Do the sets have particular importance for you?

The sets and locations are essential. *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* take place just before the First World War in very loaded settings, in apartments where there isn't a single square inch of free space. I like locations that are brimming over because it's always more interesting to draw an old chair or an old bistro table with very ornate legs rather than a formica table. I prefer to draw 19th century buildings rather than modern constructions, for which I have to work out the geometry—that annoys me. In my stories, the decoration is also an element that adds to the narrative, like the mummy that is part of the décor and becomes a character in the story. I also need objects that represent the action I'm describing. I don't have the same flexibility as a writer. Actually, I face the same problems as a movie set designer.

Mathieu Amalric says he finds your comic book series "very sexual". What do you think?

Of course, the issue of Adèle's sexuality was raised very early on, but you have to go back to the context of the period when I wrote the first albums. In the 1970s, there was no way I could show Adèle having sex, so I tried to get round the problem with an allusive approach. For example, we realize that she wants to save Lucien Ripol from the guillotine because she loves him. There's also the sequence in which Zborowsky, who is in love with Adèle, has a dream in which she's semi-naked running on the top of a cliff surrounded by prehistoric animals. It wasn't an attempt at eroticism, but having a heroine who is definitely very modern for her times, it seemed natural for her to have a sex-life. In the depiction of the character, the only slightly erotic image of Adèle is when she's in the bath. It's a pause in the story. Adèle thinks things over in the bath and it was a pleasure to draw her like that.

In the comic book, Dieuleveult hates Adèle, but isn't he also clearly attracted to her?

It's obvious that the bad guys who are out to get Adèle are also attracted to her. A lot of people would like to get rid of her, but she's impossible to kill off, and that helps me to keep the story moving forward. Everybody has a motive to get her—sometimes not because of something she's done, like the episode when a dentist gives her a filling using a special alloy used for drill bits that the bad guys want to use to crack a safe. I like playing with situations like that.

In the movie, isn't the relationship between the two characters more ambiguous?

Most likely, but it could be Dieuleveult's overriding hatred towards Adèle that masks the attraction. Some characters hate Adèle from the very beginning. They call her "that Blanc-Sec woman". The scientists, for example, who all have the word "dieu" (God) in their names—Dieuleveult, Esperandieu—which is a way of mocking them because they all think they're superior beings working for the good of humankind. The police officers, like Caponi, don't like Adèle very much either. And then there are more ambiguous, minor characters, some of whom I retrieved from other albums.

Generally, I find it more interesting to have mad scientists, like the one who appears in one of the final Adèle episodes and who dies in an accident almost immediately, or bad guys. Hitchcock used to say that a film was good if there was a good bad guy.

Do you think the series has a political message?

No, it's just what you read every day in the newspapers—rotten police officers, corrupt politicians—a truly frightening list. Adèle is an anarchist—she has no God and no master. She's incredibly suspicious of the institutions of power. But *Adèle* is definitely not a political comic book. That really isn't the point of it.

All your characters have extreme physical characteristics. Why?

It's true that they have a certain disconcerting beauty, but I like drawing characters like that, with high cheekbones, pointed noses and black clothes. It's the influence of expressionist German cinema on my art and it flows easily from my pen! Obviously, bringing that to life on screen requires a lot of work in make-up.

Tell us about Adèle's sister...

In the comic book, Adèle discovers the existence of her sister very late on, and they develop an immediate dislike of each other. Mireille (Agathe in the film) is convinced that Adèle, her sister, is out to steal her fiancé, which is completely untrue. So why introduce the sister? I needed another female character who was very different than Adèle and I also wanted to introduce a family element that

unsettles Adèle, in the same way as I wanted to show she had a job. It's a means of anchoring the character in reality and giving her roots.

Why does Adèle always wear a green coat?

Because of Bécassine, who was first female comic book character in the early 20th century. Adèle is a kind of anti-Bécassine, and she's a redhead so the colors match wonderfully.

You'll soon be releasing the tenth Adèle album. Can you tell us about it?

Yes, I'm going to release the tenth and last album because I think the series needs a conclusion. I feel a need to round it off.

What were your feelings on set?

Great admiration for Luc Besson and the strong sense that it's much easier to bring characters to life on paper!

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1946, the son of a career soldier, Tardi spent his early years in post-war Germany, then studied at art school in Lyon and Paris. In 1969, he started working on the weekly magazine *Pilote*. In 1976, Casterman published the first *Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*, whose immediate success continued through to the ninth album published in 2007. Tardi also gave a face to Nestor Burma, Léo Malet's famous detective hero, in comic book adaptations of novels such as *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac* and *The Bloody Streets of Paris*.

A multi-faceted graphic artist, Tardi fulfilled one of his biggest dreams in 1988 when he illustrated with around 600 superb black-and-white drawings Céline's powerful *Journey to the End of the Night*. The book was a considerable success and Tardi went on to illustrate two other works by Céline, *Cannon-fodder* (1989) and *Death on the Installment Plan* (1991).

In 1993, he published *C'était la guerre des tranchées*, the culmination of several years' research to denounce the absurdity and horror of the First World War, in which his grandfather had fought. *Le Cri du peuple*, adapted from a novel by Jean Vautrin, was first released in October 2001 and became a magnificent four-part series about the Paris commune, a subject that fascinates the artist.

More recently, Tardi has revisited the First World War in *Putain de guerre!* in collaboration with Verney, and has illustrated the albums *1968-2008 n'effacez pas nos traces* and *Des Lendemains qui saignent* by protest singer Dominique Grange.

His originality, remarkable career, and the consistent quality of his work make Tardi a major figure today on the European comic book scene. Among other awards, he won the *Grand Prix de la Ville d'Angoulême* in 1985.

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ADELE BLANC-SEC

VIRGINIE BESSON-SILLA

Producer

INTERVIEW

Where did the idea for this movie come from?

We'd been trying to buy the film rights to Tardi's comic book for ten years. Luc has always been fascinated by Adèle Blanc-Sec because she's a simply extraordinary character. Initially, the rights had been sold to a well-known director, but his project didn't get off the ground. When we found out that the rights were available again, we didn't think twice and we struck a deal very fast.

Why adapt a subject like this?

Besides having a director who adored Tardi's comic books, there were some obvious reasons for us. First of all, the character of Adèle Blanc-Sec, who is truly very special. She's like a modern-day heroine living in the early 20th century. She's independent, free-spirited, behaves like a man, and we don't know what she does really... Journalist? Detective?

Also, the early 20th century was a magical period with a hint of insouciance, before the havoc wreaked by two world wars.

Then, there was the location, Paris, a symbol, a magical, mysterious city.

Finally, there are the extraordinary adventures of our heroine, involving mad scientists, the President of France, mummies and a pterodactyl spreading panic in the skies over Paris. There are so many possibilities.

What's your approach to the adaptation of a comic book?

I think that, initially, it's essential to stay very faithful to the story and vision of the comic book in the writing process. Once we've established the narrative structure and determined what we want to keep from the comic book, we can write a movie that will work over 100 minutes. After that, it's easier to think in terms of the film. For Adèle, we tried very hard to capture the comic book characters with their extravagant appearances, and the amazing sets and locations.

This is the first time you produced a Luc Besson movie. How did it work out?

Producing a film directed by Luc Besson is first and foremost an incredible experience. Besides his exceptional artistry, he has gained a lot of experience from his previous movies. He is precise, visionary and knows exactly what is needed to achieve what he wants. We're there to ensure he gets what he needs.

Luc Besson, the filmmaker, is also Luc Besson, the director of actors, the camera operator and even the guys who acts out the scene for the cast... Is that what sets him apart in French cinema?

Luc doesn't work to order. He's a rare director, who has his own style, a very personal way of filming a story. Whether it's a more intimate subject, such as *Angel-A*, or a historical subject, such as *Joan of Arc*, his films blend action, an esthetic approach, the technique of his camerawork and his personal way of directing actors.

Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre compares Luc Besson to the "captain of an unsinkable ship". Would you agree with that?

Luc as the ship's captain, definitely. He takes charge of things, he moves forward and keeps the people he works with moving forward whatever happens.

Unsinkable, though? I don't know... Nobody's unsinkable, but Luc is strong because he gets things done.

How did the writing process go?

Luc was very concerned not to change the spirit of Tardi's work and he organized several meetings with him to get a good idea of what he wanted to see on screen and what was truly cinematic in the comic book. Beyond that, Luc perhaps also wanted to make his Adèle more sensitive than Tardi's heroine and that's one of the reasons he developed the role of Agathe, Adèle's sister, in the story. The screenplay didn't take long to write. After all, the project had been trotting through Luc's mind for ten years!

Tardi liked the screenplay from the first draft he read. That was important for us because Adèle is his baby.

How did you involve Tardi in the making of the movie?

In pre-production, Hugues Tissandier, the production designer, and Olivier Bériot, the costume designer, visited Tardi to consult his archives and get a handle on his world. After that, we invited Tardi on set so that he could see for himself the crew at work, the beauty of the sets and the

magnificent costumes. He wandered round the set—Adèle's apartment—and saw his work come to life, literally. It was both funny and moving.

How did you approach producing a blockbuster?

I wouldn't say it's a blockbuster, but it is a period movie, which means it's a major undertaking in production and financing terms. We tried to control spending while ensuring we had the resources to achieve precisely what we wanted.

Tell us about the locations.

We shot in a series of outstanding locations. The Paris locations were magical: the Louvre at night with the Mona Lisa as our only audience; the Place de la Concorde at night sealed off to traffic; the Museum of Natural History surrounded by pterodactyl and mammoth skeletons; the Vincennes zoo with its giraffes and hippos; mythical locations like the Palais Royal and the Eiffel Tower, which we had all to ourselves. We also shot in Egypt for a few days in totally unreal locations, including an archeological site from the Nubian period.

In that respect, the movie is a blockbuster because we set ourselves no limits and that gives an extra dimension to the movie and plunges us into the atmosphere of the period.

The movie is adapted from a French comic book set in France. Do you think it will appeal to international audiences?

It's not about the comic book anymore. It's about *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*, the new movie by Luc Besson set in 1912 in Paris and Egypt starring Louise Bourgoin, an extremely talented young actress, and an exceptional supporting cast. I think it has real potential internationally because we go far beyond the limits of a typical French movie.

Tell us how you chose Louise Bourgoin to play Adèle Blanc-Sec.

Luc chose a young actress and modeled her into the character as he saw her. Casting Louise seems like the obvious choice now, but back then it wasn't. We were leaning towards certain famous French actresses, but we needed someone to play Adèle Blanc-Sec, a very strong, independent character with a huge following among comic book fans, not just a name on the poster. I insisted on it being a less famous actress who would truly become Adèle on screen, not just a star playing Adèle. And Louise Bourgoin is an extremely talented and hardworking young actress with a lot of personality, just like our heroine. In terms of her physique, we needed an actress who wasn't too slim, who had the curves to wear costumes of that period, and who, in terms of the story, wasn't afraid of leaping all over the place. Louise was perfect. On set, she was focused, polite, easy to talk to—a dream!

She has some quality screen partners in the movie...

Mathieu Amalric as Dieuleveult is simply amazing. Gilles Lellouche is perfect as Caponi. Jean-Paul Rouve as Justin de Saint Hubert, the pterodactyl hunter, is very funny. Jacky Nercessian as Professor Esperandieu gives an exceptional performance because he is so eccentric yet moving. And hats off to Philippe Nahon, who plays Professor Menard, to Serge Bagdassarian, a star of the Comédie Française, who plays Choupard, and to Gérard Chaillou as President Fallières. The film also co-stars some very promising young actors, particularly Nicolas Giraud, who gives a very nuanced performance as Zborowsky, who falls hopelessly in love with Adèle, and Laure de Clermont as Agathe, Adèle's sister. You'll definitely be hearing more of them in the future.

All the actors gave the film everything and you can see that on screen. We had a long pre-production period to enable all the actors to rehearse as much as possible with Luc before, and during, the shoot. Then there was the surreal work put in by the makeup, hair and costume departments, and a real synergy that developed between cast and crew. Everybody was moving in the same direction and that happens so rarely that it needs to be underlined.

Will Adèle Blanc-Sec take us on other adventures in the future?

This film is an adaptation of two albums, *Adèle et la Bête* and *Momies en folie*. Tardi wrote nine Adèle albums in all, so there's room for more adaptations.

So will there be more of Adèle's big-screen adventures? I hope so. That would mean that the movie-going public wants to see her back!

FILMOGRAPHY

2011	La Mécanique du Cœur	Mathias Malzieu - Stéphane Berla
2010	The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec	Luc Besson
2009	From Paris With Love	Pierre Morel
2007	Si j'étais toi	Vincent Perez
2006	Love and Other Disasters	Alek Keshishian
2005	Revolver	Guy Ritchie
2005	Au suivant	Jeanne Biras
2004	A ton image	Aruna Villiers
2003	La felicità non costa niente	Mimmo Calopresti
2002	Peau d'ange	Vincent Perez
2001	Yamakasi	Ariel Zeitoun

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ADELE BLANC-SEC

LOUISE BOURGOIN

Adèle Blanc-Sec

INTERVIEW

Were you familiar with Jacques Tardi's work before Luc Besson offered you the role of Adèle Blanc-Sec?

Yes, I had read and adored the nine albums in the series. Adèle Blanc-Sec is one of the very few comic book heroines who isn't an airhead or a bimbo. She doesn't go out of her way to be nice to people, she's strong and quite caustic, and that's what I like about her.

As for Tardi, I find that he tells pretty offbeat stories. The endings are always very surprising, nothing happens in a predictable order. The fact that he draws without the story totally locked down makes his work seem very free, and often impertinent and original.

Tell us how you met Luc Besson.

His assistant called me in the middle of the week to ask if I would meet him, without giving me any further details. We met the very next day. He gave me the screenplay, which I read that evening. I called Luc right away to say I absolutely wanted to do it. Next day, when we met, he said, "You're Adèle!" It all took barely 24 hours.

I was very proud that he gave me such a multi-faceted role and had faith in me despite my relatively slender filmography. I couldn't wait to start rehearsals, and because Luc's such a perfectionist and a hard-worker, I was able to prepare for the part months in advance, which was wonderful.

What was it like working with him?

Like working with Superman. He sleeps three hours a night, edits, shoots, always has time for his family, actors and crew, stays focused and objective, and knows and gets exactly what he wants. I really had to step up and it was an amazing experience. We did a lot of work on the character of Adèle both physically—I even learned to walk more stiffly—and dramatically—I learned the whole script before we started shooting and rehearsed my lines endlessly. Luc told me that if I could say my lines without being put off by him moving around me, that meant I had it down. So, while I paced up and down saying my lines, he goofed off to try and distract me. And when he couldn't distract me, I knew I'd nailed it.

How did you approach playing a comic book heroine?

Above all, I was struck by Adèle's physical appearance. She has a very singular face, with an upturned nose and freckles. She doesn't care what she wears—her hats are particularly shapeless but she doesn't give a hoot. It's nice to have a female character who doesn't conform to the standards that are usually inflicted upon us.

What character traits did you particularly focus on?

Personally, I think it's an enormous help to have to "transform" yourself slightly to get into a character. It definitely benefits the performance. Basically, I have always liked wearing disguises because my mother only took photos of me as a child when I was wearing a disguise. I don't know why, but disguise equaled photo and I used to love that, so I dressed up every day as Davy Crockett, a fairy, a ladybug...

Tell us about the Adèle Blanc-Sec in Luc Besson's movie.

I'd say that Luc's Adèle is a little more likable than the comic book Adèle. She's more human, genuinely sensitive. As the story progresses, we realize there are things that hurt her, that Adèle has flaws, which she tries to cover up, of course. She's opinionated, feisty, touching, and brutally honest, with a real sense of humor. She's a sort of female Indiana Jones. The story is packed full of fantastic adventures for her, like riding a pterodactyl, bringing mummies to life, paddling down the Nile in a sarcophagus, and saving the President's life, but she also has more private, emotional moments, with her sister in particular. It's fun to play such a bold and physical heroine and it's rare in this kind of movie, where women are often just a foil for the men, conforming to a stereotype and giving the lead, who is usually a man, things to do. In Luc's movie, it's the heroine who's in control of the action from beginning to end. It's a wonderful role for an actress.

How did you get on with the rest of the cast?

They were all on set only a few days at a time, so it was a bit frustrating because I didn't really have time to get to know them, except Laure de Clermont, who plays Adèle's sister, Agathe, and with whom I got on really well. Acting with Mathieu Amalric, who plays Professor Dieuleveult, was like a dream come true, but the latex mask and dark glasses he wears in the movie made it feel like I was acting opposite a kind of disembodied Amalric. That was a curious sensation—you realize how difficult it is to act without being able to see your scene partner's eyes, to bounce off their expression. Jacky Nercessian, who plays Esperandieu, is an incredible actor who constantly made me laugh. In fact, I have nothing but good memories.

What do you think of Hugues Tissandier's sets?

As a former art student, I admit that I was amazed by the sets Hugues built. It was a real shock when I went into Ramses II's tomb for the first time. Adèle's apartment—her bedroom, the bath, the ornaments—all draw closely on the comic book. Hugues did an incredible job.

Tell us about the costumes.

They're sumptuous. I wear eighteen different costumes in the movie. Olivier Bériot took his inspiration for some of them from period etchings, and the others came straight out of his imagination when there were no archive documents, like, for example, the tennis dress or the safari outfit that I wear in the desert. I guess, in 1912, there weren't many women tennis players because it was essentially a sport for men, and so there aren't many illustrations. Adèle's costumes are a compromise between period fashion and the requirements of the movie, and I have to say it was fascinating to see things come together, gradually bringing my character to life.

Which are your favorite scenes?

When I read the script my indisputable favorite was the scene with the stammering policeman at the police station. It's an incredibly funny scene. I was so looking forward to it that I put too much pressure on myself and it took me several takes to get it right.

The scene with Patmosis, the mummy who's a nuclear physicist, stepping out of a display case in my apartment and asking for a cup of tea is very funny, too.

The tennis scene is fun and esthetically appealing. In 1912, a woman had to play tennis very elegantly. I had to take lessons to learn the way they moved back then, turning a forehand, backhand, smash or service into a kind of ballet step, knocking the ball back while kicking your back leg up high and holding the pose on the tiptoes of your other foot. It was quite complicated but looks good on screen.

And then, of course, there's the scene where Adèle rides the pterodactyl. Luc found a pterodactyl tamer—I had no idea they still existed (*laughs*)—and I trained for three months, starting ten meters off the ground until I was flying as high as the Eiffel Tower with no saddle or harness. I confess I was pretty pleased with myself. Compared to that, the camel in Egypt was a piece of cake.

FILMOGRAPHY

2010	The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec	Luc Besson
2009	Blanc comme neige	Christophe Blanc
2009	L'autre monde	Gilles Marchand
2009	Sweet Valentine	Emma Luchini
2008	La fille de Monaco	Anne Fontaine
2002	Les femmes ou les enfants d'abord	Manuel Poirier