

RICHARD GRANDPIERRE PRÉSENTE

MORJANA ALAOUÏ

MYLÈNE JAMPANOÏ



TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2008

MARTYRS

UN FILM DE
PASCAL LAUGIER

RICHARD GRANDPIERRE PRÉSENTE MORJANA ALAOUÏ MYLÈNE JAMPANOÏ «MARTYRS» UN FILM DE PASCAL LAUGIER AVEC CATHERINE BÉGIN ROBERT TOUPIN PATRICIA TUSLANE JULIETTE GOSSELIN XAVIER DOLAN-TADROS
SCÉNARIO ET DIALOGUES PASCAL LAUGIER PRODUCTEUR EXÉCUTIF FRÉDÉRIC DONIGUAIN COPRODUCTEUR CANADA SIMON TROTTIER IMAGE NATHALIE MOLIANKO-VISOTZKY & STÉPHANE MARTIN DÉCORS JEAN-ANDRÉ CARRIÈRE MAQUILLAGES SPÉCIAUX BENOÎT LESTANG ADRIEN MOROT
MONTAGE SÉBASTIEN PRANGÈRE SON PHILIPPE MERCIER GERMAIN BOULAY JÉRÔME WICJAK MUSIQUE ORIGINALE SEPPUKU PARADIGM © ESKWAD ZIK EFFETS VISUELS GROUPE IMAGE BUZZ UN FILM RÉALISÉ PAR PASCAL LAUGIER
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RICHARD GRANDPIERRE PRESENTS

MORJANA ALAOUÏ

MYLÈNE JAMPANOÏ

MARTYRS

A FILM BY
PASCAL LAUGIER

FRANCE - 1H40 - 1.85 - SRD - VISA : 117 112

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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SYNOPSIS

France. A night at the beginning of the 1970s. Lucie, a little girl missing for over a year, is discovered wandering by the side of a country road. Near catatonic, she can say nothing about what has happened to her. The cops quickly find the place in which she's been incarcerated - a disused slaughterhouse. Every indication is that she never once left the empty, freezing room in which she was imprisoned. Filthy and starving, the child's body nonetheless bears no traces of sexual abuse - this was not a paedophile abduction, but something far stranger. What happened in that icy room? And how did Lucie escape?

Lucie is hospitalized - slowly she learns how to live again, an *enfant sauvage* gradually returning to the real world. In the hospital, she meets Anna, another little girl, and a victim of terrible abuse at the hands of her family. In no time, they are inseparable. Anna takes charge of Lucie, like a mother. As for her kidnappers, the police are at a dead end. Lucie's ordeal remains a terrible mystery.

One night, as Anna sleeps, Lucie hears an awful, rasping breathing. A vision appears: a body, naked, skeletal, tortured. Barely human. The apparition seizes her...

15 years later. A house, isolated in the middle of a forest. A family: Mum, Dad, two kids. A happy home. As they eat breakfast, there's a knock at the door. The father opens it to find a young woman, hollow-eyed and wraithlike and mad. In her hands, a rifle. "Remember the little girl I once was?". She shoots him where he stands, enters the house, and locks the door.

Minutes later, the family lie bloody. All dead. Lucie calls Anna, who tells her not to move, she'll be right there. In shock, Lucie hangs up. And then she hears it. That terrible, terribly familiar breathing...

CAST

<i>Anna</i>	MORJANA ALAOUI
<i>Lucie</i>	MYLÈNE JAMPANOÏ
<i>Mademoiselle</i>	CATHERINE BEGIN
<i>Father</i>	ROBERT TOUPIN
<i>Mother</i>	PATRICIA TULASNE
<i>Marie</i>	JULIETTE GOSSELIN
<i>Antoine</i>	XAVIER DOLAN-TADROS
<i>Creature</i>	ISABELLE CHASSE
<i>Torture victim</i>	EMILIE MISKDJIAN
<i>Torturer</i>	MIKE CHUTE
<i>Henchwoman</i>	GAËLLE COHEN
<i>Female torturer</i>	ANIE PASCALE
<i>Lucie, age 10</i>	JESSIE PHAM
<i>Anna, age 10</i>	ERIKA SCOTT

CREW

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY	PASCAL LAUGIER
DP (FRANCE)	STÉPHANE MARTIN
DP (CANADA)	NATHALIE MOLIAVKO-VISOTZKY
1ST ASS. DIRECTOR (CANADA)	CARL DESJARDINS
SET DESIGNER (CANADA)	JEAN-ANDRÉ CARRIERE
EDITOR (FRANCE)	SÉBASTIEN PRANGERE
SOUND EDITOR (FRANCE)	GERMAIN BOULAY
SOUND ENGINEER (FRANCE)	JÉRÔME WICIAK
SOUND ENGINEER (CANADA)	PHILIPPE MERCIER
MAKEUP/SPECIAL EFFECTS (FRANCE)	BENOÎT LESTANG
MAKEUP/SPECIAL EFFECTS (CANADA)	ADRIEN MOROT
ORIGINAL MUSIC	SEPPUKU PARADIGM
	ALEXIS AND WILFRIED CORTES
PRODUCER (FRANCE)	RICHARD GRANDPIERRE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (FRANCE)	FRÉDÉRIC DONIGUIAN
CO-PRODUCER (CANADA)	SIMON TROTTIER
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (CANADA)	MARCEL GIROUX

INTERVIEW WITH PASCAL LAUGIER

Where did you get the idea to make MARTYRS?

In the beginning, the impetus came from Manuel Alduy at Canal+. He was looking for genre film projects, and let me know, via my producer Richard Grandpierre, that he appreciated my work. Richard and I saw an opportunity to launch a project fairly quickly, while we were developing another film that was taking longer to finance. So I wrote the screenplay very quickly, in four months, almost in one go. I also knew that this type of commissioned project, with a precise budget, would allow me great leeway: that I wouldn't have to worry about the standard televisual imperatives. I had true freedom. Canal+ is really the last channel in France to make this possible, and it's very valuable.

I also have the tremendous good fortune of being supported by a producer who believes in my obsessions, who follows me... I don't know how he manages it, but Richard Grandpierre succeeds in bringing the most unusual projects to life. Because, frankly, it's a small miracle that MARTYRS was able to be made.

And how did the story itself come about?

My founding image, was this 'figure of vengeance', the sudden intrusion of this armed girl who arrives to shatter the life of an ordinary family. Starting from this simple idea, I asked myself some basic questions: "Why would she do that?"; "What happened?"; "Is she mistaken?", and to an extent the story wrote itself. In fact, while writing it, I hardly knew more than the viewer who watches the film and gradually understands the nature of the mystery. It was a very intuitive process.

Why did you make such a violent film?

Is it your goal to shock? To exorcize the fear of death and pain?

First, it seemed the most honest way of telling this story. MARTYRS speaks about people who hurt each other. Those who have suffered get revenge and make others suffer. The presumed torturers become victims and conversely, we no longer know where evil begins, who is the 'martyr' of the other... I liked the idea of making a troubling film, where the audience loses its moral compass and no longer truly knows whom to support, whom to identify with. I'm not interested in shocking people per se, but a physical, organic sensation of inflicted pain was vital: without it, we would not have understood the seriousness of this violence, it would have become a gimmick and rendered the film somewhat dubious... I didn't want to distance myself from the characters. I wanted each blow to be really painful, not as some moral discourse about the representation of violence, but because it's the very subject of the

film. Is there something at the end, the very end of violence? Does it make sense that we spend our time suffering and making others suffer? What should we do about this universal distress that seems transformed by a principle of perpetual movement, and appears to engender itself? Will this end? In fact, I believe it's the kind of question that all my favorite horror films ask: how and for what reason is the human condition fundamentally so atrocious? As a genre, horror takes death as a starting point and not as an end point, unlike tragedy, for example. To be is to deteriorate; finiteness is there from the beginning, however one must live with it. Perhaps these are clichés, but they continue to haunt me, move me and compel me to write. And besides, the film's blackness comes from my own mood at the time I made it. The circumstances of my life made me feel very alone. I had the intuition, a vague feeling which made me suffer quite a lot, that our era was one of the most brutal that we've ever experienced. But it's a very particular brutality because at the same time it's silent, refined and contained in society; it's hidden beneath our so-called 'Civilization', but it's certainly there, omnipresent. In any case I'm very aware of it.

The hidden violence, nearly invisible in our western urban societies, truly seems unbearable. The competition is really tough, losers are legion and individual anxiety is at its peak... How long can this last? What will we do with the losers? It seems to me that there are film-makers who should take on these issues. It's vital to have films that reflect this contemporary horror, make it their subject, flirt with the temptation of emptiness, take the responsibility of being the bearers of bad news... a project which seems to me both noble and necessary. If all films, in the name of economic pragmatism, only pursue the current mood, by reflecting back to society an easy and conventional image of itself, it seems that the idea of cinema itself is falling apart... An idea of cinema which is very dear to me. A creative life can't be spent simply stroking the public. Nothing more than that and you might as well shoot yourself! I try to do it, at my level, in the framework of a suspense film, because that's my thing, because it opens up the project, including to the rest of the world, but I could just as easily have made a purely experimental film, shot on DV, without a script. It would have been as dark, as sad, as deadly...

You venture very far into the blackness...

It's not my fault if the era isn't extraordinary! And besides, the genre allows it. I can be more baroque, more expressive than, let's say, in the framework of social realism, for example. For me, it's good when a scary movie, a horror or fantasy movie, call it what you like, offends. As I'm so protected by the codes and archetypes I discussed earlier, it allows me to express some very personal things in a subterranean fashion.

Did making a film as difficult as MARTYRS affect you in a particular way?

Not really, because the joy of making it overpowers everything else. It's my second film, I still marvel at how lucky I am to work in this business. It's true that the film forced us to live through some uncomfortable moments. My energy was pretty dark, I could be difficult and tyrannical. It's not easy to ask an actress to cry for real all day long, or to oblige her to hurt herself. That takes a certain self-abnegation, because in life, I have quite a few inhibitions... The filming was rough. The hardest part on set was to work out the numerous old-school traditional special effects without losing the energy of the performance. We filmed a lot of long sequence shots, without stopping the camera, because each time we cut, I risked losing something of Morjana or Mylene which couldn't be recaptured. That was stressful. Thank God, Benoît Lestang, the creator of the effects, was on hand with his talent and problem solving to get me out of trouble! And my actresses too, who were real troopers. We believed in the project and nobody complained. My producers also gave me complete freedom, never trying to soften the material, financially supporting the making of the film as much as possible. There were funny times, hard times and very unrewarding moments, but nobody ever said that making films is easy.

Is it easier or more difficult to direct a second film?

It's harder to make the first one, without a doubt. I never subscribed to this 'curse of the second film' theory. It seems to me to be a reflection of the privileged who have forgotten the young anxious guy who arrives in Paris wanting to make a film, while knowing absolutely nobody. Before being given the exceptional chance to direct your first feature film, you are worried and permanently frustrated; you know that statistically there's a very small chance that you'll actually do it. You know there are many more talented people than you who want to do the same thing and you have this small voice at the back of your mind, the voice of reason, which continues to worry at you about the fact that your choice is very uncertain and that you shouldn't dream too big. After the first film, you're already in the business, as far as others see it anyway. Your address book is full, your relationships and network are set up, it's a totally different picture.

How did you approach the filming of MARTYRS?

In a completely different way than my previous film. I refused all storyboards, all excessive preparation which would have permanently blocked my conception of the film. I had a very precise general impression of the film, I knew its mood, its rhythm, but, scene by scene, it was completely open.

I wanted to let reality intervene, to force me to make last-minute choices, to find my way according to what was possible and impossible to do. Generally, that's the case on all films, but I pushed this principle even more. I wanted to make a visceral film, which unfolds its story as if live, in the moment, a film that doesn't "let itself be seen". I wanted to free myself from the obsession with form, with beautiful images. For this reason we shot a lot with a handheld camera, improvising as often as possible, employing simple lighting that allowed the actors to use their intuition. Our job was to follow them, to stick to them, to anticipate. Chaos, approximation and problems were rarely far away... I scared myself during the filming, because I'm usually a control freak. But I learned so much.

Why did you shoot in Canada?

For practical reasons to do with the coproduction. Once there, we integrated it into the artistic plan. The light in Quebec is really remarkable, and brought an additional emotion to the film. The sky has shades of grey that I've never seen anywhere else, and the whites are also distinctive. It brought back feelings I had while watching Canadian genre films from the 70s and 80s. David Cronenberg of course, but also lesser-known directors like William Fruet or George Mihalka. They made some B movies that I liked nostalgically and which made this country very mythological for me.

Canada also allowed me to create a slightly distanced sense of space-time, to take the film out of an exclusively present-day context. That's also why MARTYRS opens and ends with an old Super-8 film. I liked the idea that the film tells the story of two young girls who were once on this earth and of whom only a few feet of damaged film remain, the only tangible proof of their existence. It's a real counterpoint to the film's violence and, seriously, the only reason for me to have undertaken it: to touch on something to do with melancholy.

Many directors of French fantasy films can't help themselves from conforming to standard references (consciously or not). What do you think?

When my first film was released, this criticism was often made. Genre fans love to tease directors - especially if they are French and film buffs like them - about influences, quotations, indeed plagiarism. However, so-called 'arthouse' film makers are never questioned about their own inspirations which are also evident. I never understood why. Doubtless because the fantasy genre has its codes and formulas, there's a sort of tacit Bible of the genre and its apostles, the fans, feel charged with a mission... a Guardians of the Temple reflex! I say that affectionately, as a lover of the films of others, I'm a bit like that too. It's amusing and necessary

to integrate that when making a film: start with the tremendously hackneyed codes and try to turn them around, in order to take an increasingly image-savvy public by surprise, a public both well-fed and expert. Thus, MARTYRS constantly plays with the archetypes of the genre, so that each time the viewer believes he's understood the film's style, he's suddenly taken in an unexpected direction. It must be done without dishonesty, without being too clever, without distance, and without post-modernism, because I truly detest that. Is it a revenge film? Not exactly. A monster film? Perhaps. Is it really a fantasy film? Or a thriller? Etc... It's a game with the public; the resulting suspense, it seems to me, allows the audience to better accept the violence, just because it wants to know. It's truly a question of delicate balance. I hope it works.

Many actresses turned the film down. Why?

Because it's violent, because it's assimilated into a questionable genre, because it's not a 'rewarding' project... It's difficult to fight prejudices. I often felt as if I was suggesting a porn movie. Frankly, the world of cinema is extremely conservative, very conformist. Cautious careerism is the general rule, as in any business, it seems completely normal, but in art, it's a terrible thing!

Why did you finally choose Mylène and Morjana?

Mylène was an almost immediate choice. She has a real taste for on-the-edge projects, and the energy of a young woman who wants to shake the rafters, to provoke. I knew that she would agree to enter a borderline universe. Plus, her screen presence is extraordinary, and her charisma. When she enters a room, the temperature changes, people behave differently. It would be impossible to be a film director and not feel that. Moreover, her natural energy is pretty dark. She's dangerous and dark, full of passionate contradictions. On set, when she became the character and lost her temper for a scene, she really scared me. I was thrilled, and at the same time I dreaded trouble erupting. The tension was palpable, you could hear a pin drop. The technicians were scared of her and at the same time they were worried for her. We really had a sensation of imminent catastrophe. It was an amazing experience, and I'll never forget it.

With Morjana, it didn't happen straight away. After the last-minute withdrawal of another actress, I had to begin casting again. I saw many actresses, but I couldn't find the right one. And then a friend advised me to see the film MAROCK in which Morjana had the leading role. I did, and found her intriguing, with a unique strangeness, very different from 'Parisian' actresses. I felt that she acted from instinct, that she had something special. I decided to meet her and in five minutes I knew that she was the one. I didn't

make her do a screen test. I just hoped that she wouldn't flee after reading the script! Her reaction was just the opposite. She wanted to go, she was ready, she absolutely didn't give a damn about her image and at the same time she didn't seem crazy. She truly was an ally for me. In life, I find her overwhelming, irreducible. She's 'exotic', in the true sense of the word, which is to say different, *other*. And she's luminous, which was also essential for me, because her character is obviously that of a saint.

The film's rhythm is very quick, the twists and turns are non-stop...

Suspense is the film's starting point. MARTYRS is a totally narrative film. Until the end, we wonder and question ourselves. I hope that the audience will literally take an hour and a half to understand what the twists are about...

In your view, what would be the ideal reactions from the public concerning MARTYRS?

I'd like them to be moved. I'm not crazy, I know that some won't get past the level of violence, that they'll refuse to go where the film tries to take them. That's how it is, I can't do anything about that, that's part of the deal. I understand very well that some people could find it unbearable. Obviously, I'm expecting some extreme reactions, sometimes as violent regarding me as the film is regarding the public. Perhaps because it's a sick film. An illness reaching its terminal stage... Perhaps some of the audience will be angry with me... I find that prospect very interesting.

INTERVIEW WITH MORJANA ALAOU (ANNA)

What was your initial reaction when you read the script?

When I read MARTYRS for the first time, I was immediately gripped by the intensity of the story. I thought the script had real content. It was powerful, disturbing, harrowing and touching. I couldn't put it down, the scenes are powerful and the writing is very visual. I was absorbed by MARTYRS and its unrelenting suspense. I turned the last page and felt that I should be part of this story, I should make this film!

How would you define Anna's character?

Do you have a lot in common with her?

Anna is a kind of modern-day saint. She's a strong, calm and thoughtful character. She lives for others, her generosity and devotion are boundless. The complexity of this character, which isn't necessarily apparent in the beginning, and her extreme kindness make her almost abstract. But at the same time, she exists, she is palpable and deeply human, motivated by a consciousness of being there for something, to do good. She is sincere and uncompromising. This can be seen through the relationship she has with Lucie, and the energy that she devotes to 'repairing the damage': a concentrated and rational energy, without any hysteria.

I don't really see anything in common between Anna and myself, I had to develop this character while trying to understand her driving force and what makes her act. But when I think about it, like Anna I too can have this strong and enterprising aspect.

How did you prepare yourself physically and psychologically for the role?

Psychologically, I prepared myself in a primitive fashion; I had no idea of how to prepare for the role. After my first reading, I had my vision of the character and Anna gradually became more and more defined in my mind. Some time before the start of filming, I was Anna, I thought and acted like her... But, let's not exaggerate, at 9 pm I became myself again!

Physically, my preparation was more structured. We had a coach, Gaëlle Cohen, and we started to work three months before filming, practically every day. I had to rehearse all the film's stunts and be in great physical shape to keep up on the set. I also had to lose weight for the role. During the entire filming, I realized that this work with Gaëlle was essential, even on a mental level.

How did Pascal direct you?

Pascal, Mylene and I rehearsed a lot, but above all it was important to be able to get to know each other and learn to work together. Pascal didn't use psychology on me, I was free and autonomous in creating my character. Nonetheless, he was very present and spent a lot of time with his actors.

What was the toughest moment during filming?

The first days of filming! I was paralyzed. Because from the beginning, from the first shot, it was vital to have very intense emotions. I needed to cry, scream, give everything I had immediately, all the time. To quickly enter in the film's rhythm which never had any down time, no fat... I realized a little later, after seeing the first bits of editing, how quickly the film moved.

During filming, were there moments where you were really terrified?

Honestly, I was most terrified by the idea of screwing up.

How were the long make-up sessions with Benoît Lestang?

This time allowed me to relax, to rest. Benoît's good mood and serenity permitted me to breathe during the filming. His work is impressive. The makeup became invisible, and the character's reality emerged.

Can you tell us about your accident?

All the house interiors were built in a studio. The place wasn't very big, there were several levels, we sometimes couldn't tell the real from the fake. When 'action!' was called, I fell three meters from a non-secure platform. I didn't immediately realize the extent of the fall. I wanted to get up to continue filming. All the faces around me were white and scared to death, it was quite funny. When I arrived at the hospital in Montreal, it was less amusing. I was told that I had three broken bones and should remain in bed for 6 weeks. Pascal was with me. We looked at each other, we knew that we were in deep shit. It was a strange moment, especially after having spent weeks filming simulated pain, blows, violence. It was a reality check. We had to suspend the shoot.

What was your reaction the first time you saw MARTYRS?

I was very happy to see that the film remained faithful to the script, but with something extra. We plunged into a very particular universe, overwhelming and honest. MARTYRS conveys a melancholy which really touched me. The end result doesn't leave you indifferent, it's a film filled with atmosphere, the power of the images and content really left its mark on me.

Knowing that MARTYRS is very violent, would you dare show the film to your family?

MARTYRS goes beyond the simple representation of physical violence. It's necessary to decipher these scenes. This violence mirrors human relationships and societal rules. Yes, everyone can see MARTYRS. I wouldn't hesitate a second to show it.

INTERVIEW WITH MYLÈNE JAMPANOÏ (LUCIE)

How did you react when you read the script?

It was well-constructed, extremely well-written, I could see the film. Reading the script, it was already a movie. Also, it was something new and unusual. I told myself: 'If I don't make this film, perhaps I'll never have the opportunity to make another like it.' That's why I wanted to play the role of Lucie. It was a sharp contrast to the offers I was receiving: roles of young girls who don't bring anything special to the story. Lucie was really the opposite of everything that was being offered to me. And I loved the idea that Pascal could see me like that, in such a tough role.

When you received the script, did you know Pascal Laugier?

I'd heard about him and I knew that his first film, SAINT ANGE, had been controversial. But when I saw it, I liked it. It's completely different to MARTYRS in its form, but the screenplay and the directing of the actors were intelligent and very subtle.

I had an idea about him. Then I had another idea when I met him for the first time. I met a man who creates a very particular universe and who also defends his ideas. He knows how to explain what he wants, his viewpoints are very clear. As a result, I wanted to follow him.

How did you work together? Your character in the film is very unusual...

Today, I can't stop myself thinking about all the problems Pascal faced: a limited budget, a tight shooting schedule, lots of effects to put in place, a million problems to resolve. On the set, I had a tendency to provoke a slightly confrontational relationship with him.

But it's also perhaps my lack of experience which made me react in this way. Moreover, I didn't know that I was going to react like that! But that stimulated me and it reassured me that there was something a bit violent between us. I'd like to believe it maintained a tension which was evident on screen. And then, before the shoot, Pascal showed me POSSESSION by Zulawski, and I knew that things had been pretty explosive between Zulawski and Adjani...

Describe your relationship with Morjana on the shoot.

Morjana is courageous, she keeps her fear to herself, she also finds her balance in her social interaction with the team. Conversely, I prefer to isolate myself. To find the right mood in a form of rather violent solitude. Especially on a shoot as difficult as MARTYRS, where there was a particular mood and lots of pressure. Above all, I was scared stiff that I'd

fail in the role. So I was very withdrawn and pretty anxious. It was my way of functioning.

Did you recover easily from the well-known 'post-movie blues'?

Yes, I recovered. But there was such an intensity and energy that I felt that 'something' happened. It wasn't nothing, to have made such a film!

How did you prepare the role of Lucie?

Since Lucie is a bit primitive, and reacts by instinct without reflecting on the consequences of her acts before committing them, I thought that I should arrive on the set like that and act in a primitive way. But as Pascal made me do very difficult things starting at 8 am, I needed to isolate myself in a room close by to draw out this slightly hysterical side. I managed to maintain this state because we filmed constantly, in a state of urgency. I hurt myself all over. I took dozens of real blows. I remember one morning I wasn't even able to stand up.

How does Pascal direct his actors?

He's a very demanding director. He never gives up. At the same time, I didn't have enough experience to make meaningful comparisons, especially since the two other films that I made had been directed by Asians. They were more focused on the unspoken, almost to the point of not talking to me at all. It was very different. Those directors were never very guiding about what needed to be done and of course, there was the language barrier. On the other hand, Pascal speaks to you. He has feelings that he expresses clearly.

How did he envisage the link between Lucie and Anna?

It's an essential element of the story, about which Pascal, Morjana and I spoke at length. It was really vital to strike a balance between the different pieces of information, because their connection is built on unspoken things, intense and fragile.

Finally, a scene was added, nearly at the last moment, where Morjana kisses me on the mouth. It wasn't in the script and I wasn't sure I wanted to shoot it. Pascal was convinced that it would shed light on the energy of Anna's character, and help the audience accept that she does such extreme things for Lucie. It's true that in the end the scene works very well. It reveals a great deal about the nature of this connection, without overdoing it.

What was the most difficult moment of filming for you?

When I smashed the mother's skull with a hammer! I became depressed before the takes... like something that I dreaded doing. It continued during the filming of the scene, which lasted for hours on end. First, I beat the actress with a foam hammer, then a dummy

with a real hammer, then in front of a blue screen... I had to find the emotion deep inside myself, with all these hand-crafted mechanisms going on around me. It was very difficult. When you become hysterical and you cry for hours, the time comes when you have no more tears. But you have to find the resources within yourself.

How similar are you and your character Lucie?

There's a lot of her in me! Lucie has a very dangerous and 'borderline' side, which reminds me of my own adolescence. Moreover, the film allowed me to know if I was capable of playing with my own demons. Some evenings, I cried in my room like a fuck up. But that was also due to fatigue, it really was a physical shoot.

Did you ever hate the director due to what he asked you to draw out from inside yourself?

No, because I really wanted to make the same film he did. I wanted to give everything I had! It's not necessarily the case with all shoots, because not all directors involve you in the same way.

How were the makeup sessions with Benoît Lestang?

Fortunately, Benoît was funny. Since the makeup sessions were long, his sense of humor helped tremendously. We were very lucky to have him on the shoot. Because the film's credibility relied on him to a great extent. And since Benoît and Pascal had been friends a long time, the complicity between them brought a lot of fluidity to this complicated shoot.

Do you like horror movies?

Honestly, I haven't seen many, because I like to share films, and I don't know a lot of people who watch horror movies. But I don't really consider MARTYRS a horror movie. Before the shoot, Pascal showed me some films from the 1970s that I found brilliant: William Friedkin, and also HALLOWEEN, because he wanted to show me how good Jamie Lee Curtis's performance was, and how hard it is to be true when the film doesn't depend on the dialogue, on a 'perfect text', but on simple actions like walking down the street, opening a door, etc. Moreover, I find that in terms of 'performance', French actors and actresses need to step up to the plate. Since it's psychologically and physically difficult, you lay bare your soul. It's more difficult than shooting a comedy where everything is simpler. MARTYRS was truly an enriching experience.

Tell us about your preparation before the shoot.

We regularly met in a gym. There was physical training with Gaëlle Cohen, a stuntwoman and fight choreographer who also plays the role of a very nasty henchwoman in the film. And concerning the rehearsals with Pascal, we just drew on pure emotion. He filmed me on video, without hysteria or artifice. He simply asked me to be myself and to look deep inside for something based on my personal life. It was beautiful, simple and intense. I imagine that he saw something in me that he didn't find with the other actresses who auditioned for the role. He wanted to find my faults, in order to make use of them on the big screen, to also discover my secrets so I'd be able to cry all day long, take after take, because it was necessary to hang tough until the end.

INTERVIEW WITH BENOÎT LESTANG (SPECIAL MAKEUP EFFECTS ARTIST)

How was the filming of MARTYRS?

MARTYRS was the biggest job of my career. The workload I had on this feature film was the same as I usually have on four or five French films. There were a lot of bloody effects (slit throats, bullet impacts, hammer blows, etc). The most important effect was Morjana's tortured body. For this sequence, she needed to be ready to film each day at 7 am. So we started her daily makeup at three a.m.! Considering the filming, and the three hours of taking off the makeup, I worked exhausting 19 hour days.

Did you work a lot on the special effects prior to filming?

While Pascal was writing, he constantly called me to ask me what was in the realm of possibility. But everything became much more difficult than foreseen when we learned that that we wouldn't make the film in France but in Canada, with a very short pre-production schedule. All in all, we had two and a half months of preparation for the makeup.

How did you make the gory sequences appear so realistic?

For a bloody effect to be effective, it's ideal to mix special makeups with digital effects. The makeup gives a very raw physical aspect which can't be totally realistic if one only uses digital. Conversely, digital allows you to go well beyond physical constraints.

Can you describe your collaboration with the Adrien Morot studio?

When we were location scouting in Montreal with Pascal, we did the rounds of the studios in Quebec. We finally made an agreement to hire Adrien Morot, whose makeup work I admired in different Hollywood blockbusters such as 300 or NIGHT IN THE MUSEUM. But as he was also working on THE MUMMY 3 at the time, Adrien provided me with two of his colleagues.

What were Pascal's initial intentions for the makeup?

As many directors, Pascal could tell me precisely... what he didn't want! So, the first version of the creature which satisfied me didn't please him at all. He wanted something much more believable. In the end, we made a more realistic monster than the 'zombie' version I had conceived of in the beginning.