



FILM MOVEMENT®

Presents

NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH

NI LE CIEL NI LA TERRE
(formerly *The Wakhan Front*)

A film by Clément Cogitore

"Goes from the Combat Zone to the Twilight Zone." – Fangoria

"It's effectively spooky, and moves beyond the clichés of combat into troubling political and metaphysical territory." – The New York Times



France / 2015 / Drama, War / French, Farsi
100 min / 1.58:1 / Dolby 5.1

Opens in NY Aug. 5th at the Film Society of Lincoln Center & in LA Aug. 12th at the Laemmle Royal

Downloadable hi-res images: <http://www.filmmovement.com/filmcatalog/index.asp?MerchandiseID=505>
Official Trailer: TBD

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LOGLINE

A French army captain's sanity and the loyalty of his squad are tested while on a mysterious surveillance mission in a remote valley of Afghanistan.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Afghanistan, 2014. Approaching the withdrawal of troops, Captain Antarès Bonassieu and his squad are assigned to monitor a remote valley of Wakhan, Afghanistan, on the border of Pakistan. Despite their determination, control of this so-called calm sector will gradually crumble as soldiers start to mysteriously disappear one by one.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In Afghanistan in 2014, as the troop-withdrawal approaches, French Army Captain Antarès Bonassieu (Jérémy Renier) and his squad are assigned to monitor a remote valley of Wakhan, Afghanistan, on the border of Pakistan. Despite their determination, control of the secluded valley will slowly fall out of their hands. Negotiating control of the region between local shepherds and possible Taliban sympathizers grows more and more tenuous for them, as men from all sides start mysteriously disappearing. Unable to explain this eerie phenomenon, the soldiers find themselves embroiled in an existential nightmare, desperate for their own safety.

Premiering in the Cannes Film Festival's Critics' Week (Semaine de la Critique), NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH (*Ni le ciel ni la terre*) explores the enigma of war, introducing supernatural elements into the mundane activities of an isolated French army unit patrolling a remote Taliban-controlled territory. NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH is Clément Cogitore's first feature film.



CREDITS

CREW

Director
Producer
Screenplay

Photography
Editing
Set Design
Costumes
Casting
Sound
Original Soundtrack
Production
Associate Producer
Co- Producers

Clément Cogitore
Jean-Christophe Reymond
Clément Cogitore with the participation of Thomas Bidegain
Sylvain Verdet
Isabelle Manquillet
Olivier Meidinger
Agnès Dubois
Tatiana Vialle
Fabrice Osinski, Julie Brenta, Vincent Cosson
Eric Bentz
Kazak Productions
Amaury Ovide
Joseph Rouschop, Valérie Bournonville

CAST

Cpt. Bonassieu
Sgt. Frering
Jérémie Lernowski
William Dennis
Khalil Khan
Corporal Baxer
Patrick Mercier
Etienne Baxer
Khalil Khan
Benjamin Julliard
Stéphane Boissel
Oscar Varennes
Taliban "Sultan"
Village Teenager (Motorbike)
Malek Abdulah Ali (Village Chief)
Village Father (Motorbike)
Malek's Son
Officer Armenet
Philippe Le Thieur
Gulbuddin Bakhtawar
Voice of Sarah Dennis

Jérémie Renier
Marc Robert
Swann Arlaud
Kevin Azaïs
Saam Mirhosseini
Clément Bresson
Finnegan Oldfield
Clément Bresson
Sâm Mirhosseini
Édouard Court
Christophe Tek
Steve Tientcheu
Hamid Reza Javdan
Aria Faghieh Habibi
Seyed Jafar Mirhosseini
Dean Mirhosseini
Yashar Vah
Patrick Ligardes
Michael Vander Meiren
Farhad Faghieh Habibi
Chloé Astor

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY - Clément Cogitore (Director/Screenwriter)

After studying at the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs of Strasbourg, and at the Fresnoy-National Studio of Contemporary Arts, Clément Cogitore developed an artistic practice halfway between cinema and contemporary art. Combining film, video, installations and photographs, his work questions the modalities of cohabitation of men with their images. There are often questions of ritual, collective memory, and figuration of the sacred, as well as a particular idea of the permeability of the worlds in his work.

His films have been selected for numerous international festivals, such as the Cannes Directors' Fortnight, Locarno, Lisbon, and Montréal, and have won several awards. His work has also been screened or presented in various museums, including the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris, Haus der Kultur der Welt in Berlin, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

In 2011, he was awarded the Grand Prix du Salon de Montrouge for contemporary art and in 2012 was Resident of the Villa Medici, the French Academy in Rome. In 2015, his first feature film, NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH, was selected for Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was awarded by the Fondation Gan and acclaimed by critics.



Born in 1983 in Colmar, France, Clément Cogitore lives and works between Paris and Strasbourg and is represented by the Eva Hober Gallery (Paris) and Galerie Reinhard Hauff (Stuttgart).

Filmography:

2015 NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH

2012 UN ARCHIPEL (Short)

2011 AMONG US (Short)

2011 BIELUTIN – DANS LE JARDIN DU TEMPS (Short)

2010 SCENES DE CHASSE (Short)

Additional Works:

"INTERVAL RESONANCE" Solo Show - Palais de Tokyo in Paris, July 11 to September 11, 2016

"*The Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard*" - Nomination 2016 - Curator: Isabelle Cornaro, September 6 to October 25, 2016, recognizing emerging artists on the young French art scene featured through an exhibition designed by an independent curator.

"Hypothesis" - Carte blanche to Clément Cogitore, Paris Club Silencio - July 12, 2016

"A TEAR OFF MAY ONLY HELL" Group show - Eva Hober Gallery, May 21 to June 25, 2016

"NEITHER HEAVEN NOR THE EARTH" Solo Show - Galerie Reinhard Hauff in Stuttgart, May 28 to June 16, 2016

INTERVIEW WITH CLÉMENT COGITORE

NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH is at the intersection of several film genres. What was the genesis of this idea?

The idea first came to me one day in a train station, as I was contemplating a missing-persons poster. I figured that they probably hadn't disappeared, but had been murdered, or had gone off to start a new life far away. In this world of ours, no one ever really disappears. It's just that they've gone missing from a human community. I then wondered what would happen if these people had really, purely and simply, vanished off the face of the earth. The thought made me want to write a sort of metaphysical thriller to address the subjects of disappearance and mourning through irrationality.

Why did you use war as a backdrop?

Because war is about men having to directly face death. And I wanted to depict the art of war today, which uses new technology to be in absolute control of bodies, with landscapes that most often are viewed remotely via an image. How can the very notion of a disappearance, this loss, occur within such a setup? What challenges does it entail? The way we wage war in of itself also reveals who we are.

All the more so since you aren't talking about just any war...

Indeed, speaking about war in Afghanistan implies a confrontation of beliefs. NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH is a film about belief, in the broadest sense of the term. It starts with the belief concerning what we see or don't see. Did what we think happened really happen? Then there is the belief related to identity: are we truly facing the right enemy or the right emissary with whom to negotiate? Gradually, it starts dawning upon the soldiers that these state-of-the-art technologies, these monitoring devices, can be manipulated, that something always manages to escape them. Their belief system slowly shifts; they fall into another form of perception and intuition. Gradually, these soldiers stop reacting to facts, but instead react to what they consider to be signs; thus slipping insidiously from the realm of protocol to that of faith. In short, it's as if we started with a war film that drifts into a police thriller, then tips into a fantasy film...

...that ends on a metaphysical note.

In the last third of the film, I wanted to lead the audience towards the subject I really intended to address: the way belief systems are constructed, the meaning they have for every individual and the way they establish a community. Here, whether soldier or Taliban, whether tattooed, bearded, or massively armed, each in his own way is like a lost child. In other words, they are people like you and me: beings who need love, and are fearful of death. Their journey consists in putting words to something that can't be explained, yet which puts them in danger. It is constructing a system interweaving belief and fiction – in the noble and necessary sense of this word – in order to make up for this lack of love, and fight off the fear of death. Communities, whether they are a family, a people or a civilization, are constructed around myths or shared stories that allow us to coexist with what's beyond our grasp.

Your film reshuffles the associations we make with perception.

I wanted people to leave the theater unable to decide whether it was a war film, a thriller, an indie film, a metaphysical film, an art house film... In fact, I wanted to cut across genres, particularly by playing mind games with the audience. I wanted them to experience a pendulum of fear and spiritual emotion.

Did your experience as a visual artist influence you?

Yes, it influenced and nourished me. My entire visual arts world is present in this film. But it was important for me not to make an artistic, experimental or meditative film. My movie references were, for a long time, on the radical side and visually powerful – Tarkovski, Bresson, Godard, etc., and then I rediscovered cinema with the strong narrative arcs seen in television series today, Shakespearian dramas playing out over several seasons. Suddenly, I once again enjoyed being told a story, and I wanted to confront my highly visual universe with a breathtaking narrative and well-established characters. I wanted to take on unexpected and unsettling developments, and strike a balance between a universe bordering on hallucination and a strong dramatic composition.

How did you write the screenplay?

I met Thomas Bidegain (writing collaborator; screenwriter for A PROPHET, RUST AND BONE, DHEEPAN; and director of LES COWBOYS) quite early on in the project, when I was working on the treatment. We had an extremely productive discussion. Then, I wrote the first draft by myself. When the script was solid enough, Thomas stepped in on a regular basis. The movie's general outline took shape quite quickly, but it took me two more years to resolve the questions of rhythm, efficiency, pure dramaturgy and progression of the characters. I also did a great deal of research on the war in Afghanistan: the work conducted with the local populations, the use of weapons, digital technology.

I interviewed people from the military, watched videos of soldiers preparing an operation, and the debriefings. This war is also the encounter of two civilizations, two ways of thinking: a Western army and a remote village of Central Asia. How do you create a dialogue between the two sides, one in power and an occupying presence, the other in survival mode and in the continuation of a way of life? How do they speak, negotiate, and interact with one another? And what happens when they come to a deadlock? These questions, which come from my documentary experience, interest me greatly.

The film begins with the disappearance of an animal, not a man...

This misleading trail allows us to introduce the film's meaning. What causes the events in this valley isn't directly targeting men but affects life in general. It's a physical phenomenon, which occurs specifically in this place, under these conditions. Contrary to maledictions or miracles, this phenomenon has no moral. It isn't there to commend or condemn. NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH isn't about religion, but about a sense of what is sacred, in other words the relation to the divine or the invisible outside any political exploitation of the notion. It's about a form of mysticism. In the Islamic religion, it's called Sufism. In the last third of the film, Antarès attends a Sufi ceremony, and other discreet or subliminal references to Sufism are scattered throughout the film. Because it advocates a tolerant and spiritual Islam based on a direct relation between the individual and the divine, this very free-spirited branch of Islam has been among the first victims of the increase in radical Islam and its fanaticism.

In reference to current events, do you think it is all the more necessary to speak about faith today?

When I started writing this film in 2010, I never imagined the extent to which it would echo current events. In French public schools, which are schools meant to reflect the spirit of the French Republic and thus entirely secular, I learned a long time ago that what I was being taught was an objective reality, a truth; anything outside of this framework was a matter of a belief. It took me quite a while to grasp the full extent of this lie. The Western world is built upon a belief system, as are communities considered archaic or influenced by religion. Our democracy is a belief system; human rights are a belief system. Capitalism is a belief system, which also has its obscure side. It is as damaging to mankind as any religious fanaticism. Hence, the question isn't so much whether we live in a belief system but rather which belief system do we live by and does it makes the world a better place to live in?

Why did you choose Jérémie Renier to play Antarès?

Because he is a very good actor who has the ability to reinvent himself with each role. He doesn't have a fixed image. He appears in mainstream films as well as in auteurist films. I wanted someone whose acting was highly physical. Jérémie did a lot of body-building, and he hardened his features. I love Herzog's filmmaking and one of my inspirations was Klaus Kinski. Antarès is a young man crusading for

rationalism, lost in some godforsaken part of the world, merely trying to do his job and complete his mission successfully in this bizarre valley. He's quite a bit of a colonialist and at times disdainful towards the local populations. But he abides by the rules. In this valley whose way of functioning has been completely upset, he



will cross some lines, and become a brutal manipulator to achieve his ends.

When he digs the cave, his belief borders on madness...

It's crazy yet his reasoning is very logical. Antarès as a character was less compelling on paper. Jérémie fleshed him out and gave him life, strength and conviction. The same goes for the other actors. Kevin Azaïs ("William Dennis") I saw during a casting and I was instantly mad about him. He has this crazy energy. Swann Arlaud ("Jérémie Lernowski") is also an exceptional actor. As for the Afghan villagers, they were non-professionals for the most part and they brought to the film a refreshingly singular presence; another type of fragility because they aren't used to being in front of a camera.

And the actor who plays the interpreter?

Sâm Mirhosseini is a former Legionnaire. He has an exceptionally powerful presence and energy. Sometimes, all I needed to do was turn on the camera and capture his aura. As for Hamid Reza, who plays the Taliban chef, he had a role in Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. He has a very intense look in his eyes and his exchange with Antarès sometimes lapses into the absurd. You don't know if you should laugh at or cry for these lost Taliban dressed in rags and these overly armed and helpless soldiers. It is also this clash of cultures that I wanted to recount.

Can you tell us about the use of sacred music?

It's an age-old music, almost medieval, to which I am quite attached. "The Song of the Sibyl," in particular, holds a very important meaning for me. In Greek civilization, it was the song of the oracles chanted by women during divination sessions. It is still sung today in Andalusia, with different lyrics for the Christmas liturgy. This meditative chant has traveled across different faiths; it comes from the most remote ages, a world where men spoke with spirits.

But beyond being associated with a meaning or a certain knowledge, this music touches me immediately and viscerally. Therein lies its absolute power: it embodies a universal mystery that doesn't need an esthetic or cultural tool to be experienced.

Why did you contrast it with electronic music?

It's another music that I'm strongly attracted to. In my previous films (shorts or documentaries) I shot a number of rave parties and the trance that unfurls when a crowd of people is facing in the same direction, towards someone who is inaccessible on stage, in a different dimension. What I see in these situations is the resurgence of age-old rites, a type of contemporary liturgy that has shed religion.

At the end of the film, Antarès writes to the wife of the missing soldier: "I've not disappeared, I have gone."

This woman is the trigger allowing Antarès to speak freely. With her, for her, he starts putting a name to things. Are there no words for that which doesn't exist? This is the essence of language: being able to name the invisible. There are no corpses, and yet, these soldiers are no longer here. How do you mourn someone who isn't really dead? As I see it, Antarès' words are a way of creating his own parable to put a name to this reality. His words are tinged with Christianity, but not entirely so. It has to do with another world that accompanies this world. From which comes the [French] title: NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH.

In the end, I don't know whether his gesture towards this woman is beautiful or monstrous. I think it is like all beliefs: a comforting fiction – perhaps a lie – bringing solace and giving meaning to the world.

This final lyricism is abruptly interrupted by the arrival of a helicopter...

I could have ended the film with this lyrical moment; an emotion which I hope is at once beautiful and simple. But the world that I am depicting isn't beautiful and simple. It is like ours: beautiful and formidable. I therefore made the choice to end with something else: the helicopter, the dust and a harsher music. I didn't want to make a film about belief that would lull us to sleep at the end of the day, but on the contrary one that would wake us and haunts us in the dead of night.

SELECT FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

- 2015 Cannes Film Festival – **Semaine de la Critique Fondation Gan Award**
- 2015 Helsinki Film Festival
- 2015 Warsaw Film Festival
- 2015 Torino Film Festival
- 2015 Motovun Film Festival – **Propeller of Motovun Best Prize**
- 2016 Festival du Film Francophone de Namur
- 2016 New Directors/New Films
- 2016 Sarasota Film Festival – **Special Jury Prize**
- 2016 COLCOA French Film Festival – **Best First Feature Winner**
- San Francisco International Film Festival
- 2016 Montclair Film Festival



About Film Movement

Launched in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films, based in New York City. Film Movement has released more than 250 feature films and shorts from 50 countries on six continents, including the recent Academy Award-nominated film THEEB, and other top prize winners from Sundance, Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Berlin, Tribeca and other prestigious festivals. Together with two imprints, Omnibus Entertainment and Film Movement Classics, Film Movement releases its films through numerous distribution channels, including hundreds of art-house cinemas, universities and libraries; home video; television outlets; Cable Video on Demand; In-flight Entertainment; broadband outlets; and its original film subscription club. For more information, please visit www.filmmovement.com.