

Strand Releasing presents

LOVE AT FIRST FIGHT

A FILM BY THOMAS CAILLEY

Starring Adèle Haenel and Kévin Azaïs

PRESS NOTES

Official Selection:

Director's Fortnight 2014 – Cannes Film Festival

Philadelphia Film Festival 2014

Miami International Film Festival 2015

Colcoa Film Festival 2015

Rendez-vous with French Cinema – Film Society of Lincoln Center 2015

CÉSAR AWARDS 2015

WINNER!

Best First Film, Best Actress, Best Newcomer (Male)

Country of Origin: France
Format: DCP/1.85/Color
Sound Format: Dolby Digital 5.1
Running Time: 98 minutes
Genre: Comedy/Romance
Not Rated
In French with English Subtitles

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<http://strandreleasing.com/films/love-first-fight/>

SYNOPSIS

Arnaud (Kévin Azaïs), facing an uncertain future and a dearth of choices in a small French coastal town, meets and falls for the apocalyptic-minded Madeleine (Adèle Haenel), who joins an army boot camp to learn military and survival skills to prepare for the upcoming environmental collapse. Intrigued and excited by Madeleine's wild ideas, Arnaud signs up for the boot camp himself. They soon realize that the boot camp is harder than they'd imagined, but the experience nonetheless cements them together as the couple continue to explore their young love.

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS CAILLEY

The most striking thing about Love at First Fight is the interaction between the setting and the characters. Nature seems to have been your biggest inspiration.

I grew up in Aquitaine (France), and I had wanted to film in the Landes region, with its huge forests and lakes, for a long time. The land is flat there, and you never see the horizon because there is always something to break up the landscape, like a dune, a line of trees, or a group of houses. This otherwise peaceful countryside is often stricken by disaster in the form of winter storms and summer fires.

That was really my starting point, the idea of tranquil countryside by a still, peaceful lake, which is then battered by a typhoon. This kind of collision, the clash of two opposing elements, is what I envisioned for Arnaud and Madeleine. From there, I imagined the journey of these two diametrically opposed characters, who would come together and push the boundaries of possibility.

Madeleine's character seems to have been written especially for Adèle Haenel.

I wanted a strong character that would infuse the story with his or her energy. I like the feeling that comes with larger-than-life characters in films. The moment Madeleine comes on-screen, you know something big is about to happen. She's the driving force behind the story, shaking things up in Arnaud's world and making things happen.

Adèle Haenel was the first actress that both Stéphane Batut, my casting director, and I both had in mind for the role. Two-minutes into her casting call, we were convinced she was the one. She told us about the time she trained for a marathon in Berlin in the middle of winter in the snow, and how she was all alone, and totally under-equipped for it. I like the idea that through our own self-imposed limits, we can get a taste of freedom. Adèle has that intensity, a special something that's hard to define. She's also very funny, not to mention all of Madeleine's physical exploits in the film. Adèle is an exceptional athlete and brings this to the role.

The character's strength comes from the fact that she doesn't leave any gap

between decision and action. Madeleine exists in a world of pure energy. That explains her quirkiness, and her sometimes inappropriate, awkward, or violent behavior. She doesn't stop to do any soul-searching. If she doesn't like something, she lashes out. If she wants to seek forgiveness, she offers you frozen chicks...

And Arnaud?

Arnaud's qualities are less obvious, especially at the beginning of the film where the character is still reserved and vaguely defined. What I like about him is the way he takes events as they come, and his openness.

While Madeleine has a big personality, Arnaud is more receptive in his attitude, in the way he listens and observes, the way he observes this girl and gradually begins to understand who she is, and her goals and fears. With Arnaud, what you see is pretty much what you get. He doesn't judge others. But his observation of her draws him in, making him responsible for her in a way, and giving him the strength to break out of his inertia.

The power behind Kévin Azaïs's gaze really struck me. Both his presence and gaze have an obvious strength that the camera picks up right away. He's got this sincerity, this spontaneous generosity, which hide his true depth.

For the script, we decided Arnaud's character should "need a film." In other words, what you see of him at the beginning is a promise of things to come; that he will evolve, become more clearly defined, and become a true cinematic hero.

Your characters evolve throughout the film; we feel like we're watching them grow up.

Yes, because they are characters who take action.

When Claude Le Pape and I were writing the script, we wanted to avoid any suggestion that our characters were "sick" and that the film would try and cure them. The plot is not psychological at all. For Arnaud and Madeleine, it's all about constant action, progress, and invention. They're constantly in motion. That's where the French original title "Les Combattants" (Fighters) comes from. For example, at the beginning of the film, Arnaud's bereavement doesn't make him withdraw and become passive. Instead, he picks himself up and tries to find a solution.

With Madeleine, it's the same. She can't sit still. She's always itching to move. The physical training she puts herself through is an attempt to work off this nervous energy. When she feels lost, she just asks Arnaud, "What do we do now?" And he answers, "We adapt. We survive."

That's how they function; what their whole relationship is based on. It's this ability to act, recover, and invent whole new worlds.

Every experience they go through has value as a basis for their growth, be it fighting, enlisting in the army, or eating a fox. But these experiences also have shared worth. This logic of action is their own little game, which strengthens relationship and makes it unique.

However, at some point they do stop taking action.

I think that's when the characters have come to the end of their adventure, and their survival experience would not be complete if they didn't have to face the void. I tried to structure the story like a journey, starting with the seaside resort, then moving onto this strange army community, and finally getting back to nature. The characters' journey is one of peeling away layers, of being stripped bare and exposed.

In order for them to surrender to one another, they have to pass through the void.

It seems as though the film was shot in chronological order.

That was one of the key objectives that Pierre Guyard, my producer, and I had. It turned out to be the best solution, because in the seven weeks of filming, a lot of things changed on a human level. This was accentuated by the fact that that we filmed in remote areas which created a real sense of insularity. I was able to take advantage of that and of what happened within our team, in fact, anything that could bring the actors closer to their characters and the characters closer to their actors. We wanted to strike the right balance between the two.

At the beginning of the film, the distance between Arnaud and Madeleine is like an abyss. They grow together very gradually, so the progression of the film would have been distorted if we had filmed the different stages in the wrong order. I was really interested to see how they would contaminate each other, and how their persistent desire for one another could cause them to become the other person. This contamination is what makes them evolve. At the end of the film, Madeleine is no less obsessive, but now she can count on someone to be her ally, which she would never have been able to do before. Arnaud was the one who allowed her to open up. In the same way, when Arnaud tells his brother about forests spontaneously combusting, Manu thinks he's gone off the deep end. In fact, it's just that he's started talking like Madeleine. He's been contaminated.

This film deals with fiction and fantasy as if they were necessities of life.

Right from the start of writing, I wanted to create Arnaud and Madeleine's story as a journey from reality into fantasy. The film begins from Arnaud's point of view, showing his environment, his family, his friends, his job, everything that makes up the reality of his daily life. Madeleine appears out of nowhere like a shooting star that crash lands in a neighboring field.

She brings fiction to the story; she speeds up time and sets the world in motion.

Our perspective quickly changes from Arnaud's world to Madeleine's, the world she dreams up (The Army), and which proves disappointing as she rejects every one of the values it embodies. In short, nothing happens according to her plans. Because Arnaud and Madeleine don't fit in to any of their worlds, their only option is to create a new one together.

They leave everything behind and create their own fiction: a patchwork, fragile way of life that is both utopian and wretched, but that is all their own. It is both the end of the world, as they know it and its potential rebirth, all at the same time.

The way you portray The Army is really unique, with humor devoid of stereotypes and caricatures.

The Army is not the subject of the film; it's more of a backdrop.

What I found the most interesting was that The Army promised adventure, action, and the chance to overcome one's limits, which attracts young recruits and reveals their underlying existential crisis (with "become yourself" for example). I underwent military training while writing the film, which directly inspired most of the scenes and characters. What I found the most striking, and often funny, was the discrepancy between the young people's expectations and warrior fantasies, and the reality of The Army.

Lieutenant Schliefer, for example, is a character I really empathize with. He invests a lot into the recruits and truly believes in his mission, but is appalled by the radicalism and individualism of the young people he has to train. Schliefer is disillusioned, time and time again; his story is really tragic.

There is a lot of humor in this film. The comedy consistently reduces the distance between the audience and the characters, despite the absurdity of some of the situations and dialogues.

Comedy often implies that the audience will be distanced from the object of humor. I don't like that definition because it suggests that we can laugh at the characters in a condescending way, without empathy. I believe that comedy can actually be a way of reducing that distance and of giving us the opportunity to share something with the characters.

In the boat scene, Arnaud and Madeleine are tiny silhouettes in the middle of a huge lake, yet we understand what they are doing. The camera is 500 meters away but we feel as if we are right there with them in that boat. That's the feeling I like, when comedy immerses the audience in the story, creating intimacy with the characters. We share their rituals, their fantasies, and their beliefs.

And while certain situations are funny in themselves, they become this way thanks to the logic of "resonance" that links the scenes of the film. Taken individually, they could seem strange or absurd. However, taken in sequence, we see how they relate to one another, how they contribute to building up the characters, as well as the

comedy. The editor, Lilian Corbeille, and I really pushed this idea of making scenes bounce back and forth off one another, to gradually draw the audience into Arnaud and Madeleine's way of thinking. We've developed a poetic thread that allows the audience to take part in the action on the characters' level.

Throughout your film, light seems to follow the characters' journey.

I did a lot of preparation work with the Director of Photography, my brother David Cailley. The film sought to portray the two characters' journey, and we wanted the use of light to show this journey, too. We didn't want to make a monochromatic film.

At the start of the film, there are a lot of blue tones that are ultimately fairly cold (the summer sky, the pool, and inside the night club). In the second part, yellow notes infringe upon the blue, evoking the green of The Army, with black and brown tones thrown into the mix. The light gradually begins to warm up. Then the dominant yellow hues are further emphasized in the third section in the forest. Here, the greens become crisper, the river becomes almost golden, just like the characters' bodies, and the nights are lit up with orange campfires.

In parallel to this, the way the characters are framed evolves, becoming increasingly mobile, and opening out onto wider horizons and larger perspectives.

You've also used very specific music. How did you work on that?

I didn't want to use music that would be "inside" the film, which would reflect the characters' feelings and moods.

I instantly liked the music by Hit'n'Run because it has everything I wanted without the coldness and forcefulness that a lot of electro music has. I'm sure it's because they've managed to incorporate a lot of different elements (acoustic, electric, voice, noise, etc.), which removes the mechanical feel associated with electro music. On the whole, the music is extremely simple but still brings across an organic, lively, and poetic feel.

Their tracks are really powerful and epic, and that brings a lot of energy and joy to the shots, while reflecting the variations in genre inherent in the film.

The very unexpected twist at the end of the film brings it almost into the disaster-movie genre.

I don't see it as a total genre switch, because that point in the film is seen from the characters' point of view. It's an action sequence but it's also an introspective and existential moment, where Madeleine and Arnaud's fiction comes to an end. What happens is the embodiment of all their fantasies and fears.

With Alain Carsoux's visual effects, we tried to give this sequence a progressive flow. At first, we used a realistic feel, focusing on the disaster. Then it becomes

more abstract, creating the ethereal effect of almost entering into the characters' minds. In this setting, anything is possible, even an alien landing. And that is almost what happens.

Beyond the spectacular element, I was intrigued to see what would happen if I followed the characters through to the end of their thought process, when the world they have invented threatens to swallow them whole.

BIOGRAPHY – DIRECTOR THOMAS CAILLEY

After studying political science, Thomas Cailley studied scriptwriting at La Fémis (Paris). In 2010, he directed Paris Shanghai, a short film that won awards at numerous festivals. In addition, he has contributed to the writing of several feature-length films.

DIRECTOR FILMOGRAPHY

PARIS SHANGHAI

25 min short film (S16mm) produced by Little Cinema in 2011

Starring Franc Bruneau and Constantin Burazovitch

Bought by CANAL+

AWARDS

Premiers Plans Festival, Angers – People's Choice Award

Lisbon International Festival, Portugal – People's Choice Award

Kiev International Festival, Ukraine – Special Jury Prize, People's Choice Award

Reus European Festival, Spain – Grand Prize

Lille European Festival – New Talent Award

Balchik International Festival, Bulgaria – Jury's Special Mention for the script and lead actor, nominated for Best Film

Aix-en-Provence International Festival – Young Jury's Special Mention Fujifilm Award Winner 2011

Nominated for Best French Short Film by the Syndicat de la Critique at the 2012

Lutins du Court-Métrage Awards

Jury Prize at the Ouroux, Lama, and Moulins Festivals

People's Choice Award at the Altkirch, Montluçon, and Argelès Festivals

2012 CNC Quality Award

ADÈLE HAENEL – FILMOGRAPHY

FEATURE FILMS

L'HOMME QUE L'ON AIMAIT TROP, by André TECHINE

SUZANNE, by Katell QUILLÉVÉRÉ – César Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role – Opening film at the 2013 Semaine de la Critique

ALYAH, by Elie WAJEMAN – 2012 Directors' Fortnight

THREE WORLDS, by Catherine CORSINI – 2012 Official Selection for Un Certain Regard at Cannes

HEAT WAVE, by Jean-Jacques JAUFFRET – Quinzaine des Réalisateurs 2011

HOUSE OF TOLERANCE, by Bertrand BONELLO – Official Selection at the 2011 Cannes Festival – Prix Lumière for Most Promising Actress – Nominated for Most Promising Actress at the 2012 César Awards

IRIS IN BLOOM, by Valérie MRÉJEN – 2011 Directors' Fortnight

WATER LILIES, by Céline SCIAMMA – 2008 Official Selection for Un Certain Regard at Cannes – Louis Deluc Award for Best Début Film – Nominated for Most Promising Actress at the 2009 César Awards

LES DIABLES, by Christophe RUGGIA – Won Best Actress at the 2002 Cannes Junior Film Festival

SHORT FILMS

SEANCES, by Guy MADDIN

LES ENFANTS DE LA NUIT, by Caroline DERUAS – Silver Leopard at the Locarno Festival

ADIEU MOLITOR, by Christophe REGIN

THEATRE

TROIS HOMMES VERTS Valérie Mréjen

MAYENBURG TRILOGY, by Maia Sandoz

THE SEAGULL, by Arthur Nauzyciel

KÉVIN AZAÏS – FILMOGRAPHY

FEATURE FILMS

L'ANNÉE PROCHAINE, by Vania LETURCQ

LOVE AT FIRST FIGHT, by Thomas CAILLEY

THE MARCHERS, by Nabil BEN YADIR

PLAYING DEAD, by Jean-Paul SALOMÉ

THE ULTIMATE ACCESSORY, by Valérie LEMERCIER

VANDAL, by Hélier CISTERNE - Prix Louis Delluc 2013 du Premier Film BAD

SEEDS, by Safy NEBBOU

SKIRT DAY, by Jean-Paul LILIENFELD

SHORT FILMS

ANIMAL SERENADE, by Béryll PEILLARD

LE PÈRE NOËL ET LE COWBOY, by Delphine DELOGET

CAST

Adèle Haenel	Madeleine
Kévin Azaïs	Arnaud
Antoine Laurent	Manu Labrède
Brigitte Roüan	Hélène Labrède
William Lebghil	Xavier
Thibault Berducat	Victor
Nicolas Wanczycki	Lieutenant Schliefer
Frédéric Pellegeay	Recruiter
Steve Tientcheu	Warrant Officer Ruiz
Franç Bruneau	Funeral Advisor

CREW

Director	Thomas Cailley
Producer	Pierre Guyard
Screenplay	Thomas Cailley and Claude Le Pape
Cinematography	David Cailley
Editor	Lilian Corbeille
Associate Producers	Christophe Rossignon and Philip Boëffard
Original Score	Lionel Flairs, Benoit Rault and Philippe Deshaies for Hit'N'Run
Casting	Stephane Batut
Sound	Jean-Luc Audy, Guillaume Bouchateau, Antoine Baudoin, Niels Barletta
Set Design	Paul Chapelle
Production Manager	Mathieu Verhaeghe
Post-Production Manager	Clara Vincienne
First-Assistant Director	Pierrick Vautier
Costumes	Arianne Daurat
Make-up	Marine Beaudoin
Unit Manager	Luc Martinage
Visual Effects	Alain Carsoux