

COMPÉTITION  
**GÉRARDMER**  
FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM FANTASTIQUE 2023



UNITÉ and LES FILMS DU WORSO  
present

# LOCKDOWN TOWER

A FILM BY GUILLAUME NICLOUX  
WITH ANGÈLE MAC AND HATIK  
SCREENPLAY BY GUILLAUME NICLOUX

France – Running Time : 1h29 - Format : Scope 2.39 - Colour – Sound : 5.1

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## SYNOPSIS

The inhabitants of a tower block wake up one morning to find a black veil shrouding all the windows and doors of the building - a black veil which devours anything and anyone who tries to go through it...

Stuck inside together, families organize themselves but time passes and nothing changes. They gradually return to their most primitive instincts and now respond to a single watchword : survival.

A woman with dark skin and curly hair is shown in a dark, confined space, holding a young child with curly hair. The woman has a serious, almost fearful expression. A bright torch is visible in the upper right, casting a warm, orange glow on the scene. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a cave or a prison.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE BY GUILLAUME NICLOUX

*Lockdown Tower* depicts the inhabitants of a building facing the void. An unexplained lockdown where humans have no alternative but to survive savagely.

This is an horror movie where horrifying events take place. Famine, murder, sexism, cannibalism, racism, homophobia, torture. It could be the synthesis of all contemporary violence and fears.

This is not an optimistic vision of mutual support and sharing. It is rather a ruthless portrayal of the human incapacity to tolerate one another in a confined space. It is a film of terror that explores the unacceptable. A film where individuals become brutal as a result of cowardice and impotence.

*Lockdown Tower* doesn't provide any kind of salvation or redemption. It is without morals and performs its work of annihilation without considering any forgiveness. It has no respect for anything other than what it exists for, its stubbornness of destruction. To give everything back to the void.

*Lockdown Tower* consumes poor, torn souls who, pressed towards the edge of survival, will make clannism the ultimate barrier to death.

My shock as a child/spectator is fear. I was immediately fascinated by this cinematographic genre and this type of cinema shown on television. These films, watched far too young, shaped my imagination. Being terrified until I couldn't sleep drove my addiction to cinema.

This is why *Lockdown Tower* is perhaps also my most personal film. It deals with this childish fear that haunted my dark nights. The fear of a life-devouring void.

It is fear that rules the world of *Lockdown Tower* and favours the plague. A fear where the darkest impulses take over and where chaos determines the rules of a society that has returned to the prehistoric age.

However, where the law of the most ruthless and insane prevails by force, one woman will not give up and will save what is still possible to save.

Guillaume Nicloux

# AN INTERVIEW WITH GUILLAUME NICLOUX

BY CHRISTOPHE LEMAIRE

Looking at your background, you have often flirted with fantasy and horror films, but we can't say that you are specifically known for these genres?

I don't think my films were ever meant to be clearly defined, but that doesn't stop me from being an horror film fan in all its forms, from the most realistic to the most baroque.

So you like this genre?

Absolutely. As a child, I was thrown into the supernatural fairy-tale genre with the discovery of *Dumbo*, *Peter Pan* and *The Aristocats*... flying elephants and children, talking cats... for a long time, I considered the death of the mother in *Bambi* as one of the most successful horror scenes. Then, at the age of 10, my parents allowed me to watch television and this came as a shock. I made weekly commitments to Patrick Brion's *Le Cinéma de Minuit* and Claude-Jean Philippe's *Le ciné-club*. There I discovered the films of Tod Browning, James Whale, Friedrich Murnau but also the works of Jean Epstein and Jacques Tourneur. At the same time, my father started to sneak me into films that were forbidden to children under 13. These were traumatic films for a child, but they were the foundation of my interest in the genre, from *Zardoz* to *Carrie*. As my father was passionate about cinema, I had access at a very young age to the magazine *Midi Minuit Fantastique*, to the first issues of *L'Ecran Fantastique*, in the square format era... For a long time my bedside book was *Le fantastique au cinéma* by Michel Laclos.

The first genre film that deeply disturbed you?

Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left*. I had just entered the sixth grade and the teacher who ran the high school film club had organised a trip to Le Grand Rex in Paris for the Fantastic Film Festival. The audience used to scream during the screenings but this session was calmer than the others. This terror had nothing in common with the cinema of Lucio Fulci, Mario Bava or Dario Argento. I was experiencing a pure «realistic» horror film for the first time. From this date on I was very interested in the first films of Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven and of course George A. Romero. A few years later, the other big disturbance was Don Coscarelli's *Fantasm*.



### How did the script for «Lockdown Tower» come about?

There is always a personal trigger in most of my films. For *The End*, it was after a nightmare that I asked **G rard Depardieu** to play myself in one of my dreams. For *Lockdown Tower*, it was the supernatural dimension caused by the covid lockdown that provided the starting point for the story. In a totally spontaneous way, I drew on the apprehension of isolation and the resurgence of an infantile fear, that of total darkness.

### Have you ever wanted to start your film career with a classic horror film?

No. You can be passionate about a genre without necessarily addressing it. Many of my films are characterised by an unstable atmosphere where the fantastic is never far away (*That Woman*, *The End* or *Valley of Love*). In *Lockdown Tower*, I use a supernatural event from the very first minutes to then devote myself to the madness of the inhabitants confronted with this black matter devouring everything that tries to penetrate it.

### A sort of black veil that comes out of nowhere you might say...

I prefer the term «dark matter» rather than «black veil» in order to avoid any amalgam or far-fetched misunderstanding of the «black veil/city» type. *Lockdown Tower* is a genre film and if there is a metaphor, it is about the fear of death. And as far as this dark matter is concerned, I was inspired by Vantablack, a substance capable of absorbing over 99% of light. About ten years ago, scientists succeeded in creating this material made up of carbon nanotubes which, when assembled together, absorb almost all the light. In a way, it devours it.

### Can we say that the planet is totally swallowed up by this dark matter and that *Lockdown Tower* is the last place of life on earth?

Yes, the last remaining shield of a world immersed in the middle of a giant black hole. The ultimate building tower where survivalism pushes men to barbarity.


### *Le Poulpe* was a charge against the far-right French party, *The Nun* an adaptation against male hegemony and *To the Ends of the World* clearly anti-colonialism... Does *Lockdown Tower* denounces in a way a form of community withdrawing in response to fear?

One can interpret it as a fear against any form of identity-based movement. I am in favour of mixing genres and people. Horror films have often been a preferred niche for addressing the concerns of our society. Romero's *Zombie* is a textbook case. In the early 1980s, the French censors dumbly banned the film for five years on the pretext that it conveyed a Nazi ideology, even though it criticised the American over-consumption society.

### Where did you shoot the film?

In a tower block in Aubervilliers that was waiting to be refurbished. We took over the whole place and rebuilt the homes of all these families.





The film's photography is stunning, do you choose different cinematographers for each project?

Usually, I work with Christophe Offenstein (who made *Lockdown Tower*) or Yves Cape. But I am not against working with others... this was the case for *To the Ends of the World* with David Ungaro. The look of the film also depends a lot on the setting and what is placed in the frame. In this field, I have been working with Olivier Radot, the head set designer, for about twenty years. Lighting and sets are therefore intimately linked. Richard Deusy, the colour editor for my films, and Anaïs Roman, the costume designer, are also valuable collaborators.

The film is a bit gore, but not that much. One thinks of *Fog* or the finale of John Carpenter's *The Thing*... Which effects do you want to bring to the viewer with *Lockdown Tower*?

Unease and anxiety. With this type of film, it's not only what you see on the screen that's important but above all what you feel. S. Craig Zahler's *Bone Tomahawk* or Bruno Dumont's *Twenty Nine Palms* are good horror films because they manage to combine two worlds, the visible and the invisible. A crude realistic everyday life and the idea of the intolerable. Gore for its own sake does not interest me. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the horror does not come from what we see but from what we imagine. What I do care about is the «slippage» of a world that is never far from the one we live in, James Watkins' *Eden Lake* is a good example of this.

*Lockdown Tower* is played by newcomers and unknown actors. Except for Hatik, who was revealed by rap music and the TV show *Validé*... why?

I have made four films in five years with Depardieu, a film and a TV show with Gaspard Ulliel. In a very short time, I have both found a cinephile father and lost a dream son. On both sides, this leaves permanent marks... this is why I made the documentary *Les Rois de l'arnaque*... as a parenthesis... with Gaspard and Gérard we needed a break in order to find ourselves better. I wanted to work with less experienced actors and I loved creating with them. Angèle Mac, who plays the heroine, was a fabulous ally.

Could you have done *Lockdown Tower* in a wealthy building in the 16th arrondissement with middle-class people played by well-known actors?

Not for sure, I felt closer to this popular world because I had been around it in my youth. But other directors can use the concept and imagine their own version.

What do you think of today's «genre cinema» ?

I have the impression that the public is watching more and more fantasy and horror films because it is a safe and reassuring refuge. This does not exclude the possibility of refreshing the genre. *Get Out* or *It Follows* managed to alter the story by adding a theme related to sex or racism. I remember at the end of the 80s the discovery of Kathryn Bigelow's *At the Edge of the Dawn* at the Fantastic Film Festival, which renewed the vampire film.

There was no real wave of fantasy films in France as there was in England, Italy or the United States...

Beginning in the 1960s, some filmmakers ventured into the world of the bizarre and terror with a personal mark related to their success, from Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* to Jean-Pierre Mocky's *Litan*, from Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* to Christian de Chalonge's *Malevil*. But for the past forty years, the audience has been reluctant to see French films in genre cinema... however, in 2001, Claire Denis surprised with *Trouble Every Day* and Julia Ducournau's *Titane* recently won an award at Cannes. Today the situation is becoming more complex with the declining interest in theatres and the new broadcasting tools. The diversity of films available on the platforms is such that you have to compete with a wide range of productions. At the same time, resilience and competition stimulate the imagination, so it is also up to scriptwriters and directors to be innovative.



# THE MUSICAL ENVIRONMENT, WHY TIM HECKER?

Horror films scores have their own conventions and obeys precise rules. It often supports the suspense and enhances the terror, but it can also reinforce its traditional challenges by exploring less structured and sometimes contradictory areas.

**Tim Hecker** is a unique Canadian composer, inspired by both classical and Drone music, he is the author of a dozen of solo albums and as many collaborations with different artists such as **Johann Johannsson** or **Ben Frost**. To date, he had never composed for the cinema and it is the type of experience that I like. To ask a talented composer whose work I admire to create a first musical stage before the shooting so that the music can be part of the production.

This is how I worked with **Shannon Wright** for *To the Ends of the World* and **Julia Kent** for *Twice Upon a Time*. This has the advantage of establishing a relationship without any filmic reference points and of making this experience a collaborative field of experimentation.

Tim doesn't like to be categorised as «Ambient». However, he does belong to this family where the mystical aspect is essential. By this I mean, where the mysterious, spiritual and hypnotic dimension acts in an intense way on our psyche. His music moves me and shocks me, disturbs me and bewitches me, so it has been a tremendous emotional catalyst since the writing.

It has never been our intention to «stick» to the plots of *Lockdown Tower* or to underline its twists. Our concern has always been to know whether the music would enhance the film in an unexpected and disturbing direction, without limiting our choices or dictating them by an obligation of horrific results.

We wanted to be surprised and disturbed first, so I asked Tim to resist making up frightening music and to be the core of my own fear, in a more introspective way. By using other sources of influence, in this case my own anxieties about death and dark screens. I therefore questioned his fear with the help of my own, in a two-way communication.

**Guillaume Nicloux**



## CAST

ASSITAN .....	Angèle MAC
AHMED .....	HATIK
CHAKIB .....	Ahmed ABDEL-LAOUI
DUMA .....	Kylian LARMONIE
MANSOUR .....	Merveille NSOMBI
FRANÇOIS .....	Nicolas PIGNON
JORDAN .....	Igor KOVALSKY
AUDREY .....	Marie RÉMOND
INGRID .....	Judith WILLIQUET
MATHÉO .....	Modeste NZAPASSARA
MÉLANIE .....	Coline BÉAL
DRISS .....	Kévin BAGO
ANTON .....	Bruni MAKAYA
BABA .....	Pierre VENTURA
NOURDY .....	Ayoub BARA
SHAKIRA .....	Lina-Camélia LUMBROSO
GRÉGORY .....	Laurent POIGNOT
BRUNO .....	Jean-Baptiste SECKLER
NATHAN .....	Jules HOUPAIN

# TECHNICAL SHEET

DIRECTOR	Guillaume NICLOUX
1 <sup>er</sup> ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Guy-William ADOH
CASTING DIRECTOR	Elise CRESSON
DOP	Christophe OFFENSTEIN
SOUND DESIGNER	Olivier DÔ HUU
COSTUME DESIGNER	Anaïs ROMAND
MAKEUP	Sylvie FERRY
HAIR	Sandrine MASSON
SET DESIGNER	Olivier RADOT
LOCATION MANAGER	Nils ZACHARIASEN
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Jean-Pierre CRAPART
POST-PRODUCTION MANAGER	Astrid LECARDONNEL
EDITOR	Guy LECORNE
ORIGINAL SCORE	Tim HECKER
PRODUCERS	SYLVIE PIALAT, BRUNO NAHON
CO-PRODUCERS	CAROLINE NATAF, BENOÎT QUAINON, THOMAS MORVAN
PRODUCTION COMPANIES	UNITÉ ET LES FILMS DU WORSO
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