

WILD BUNCH, SUPERPROD FILMS, LES FILMS DU LÉZARD, ELLE DRIVER AND BIDIBUL PRODUCTIONS
PRESENT
BASED ON A PROJECT BY LES FILMS DU LÉZARD

ISABELLE
CARRÉ

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

DIDIER
BOURDON

FRANÇOIS
DAMIENS

ALEX
LUTZ

AHMED
SYLLA

LUC
SCHILTZ

The LULUS

BASED ON THE GRAPHIC NOVELS BY RÉGIS HAUTIERE AND HARDOC
PUBLISHED BY ÉDITIONS CASTERMAN

A FILM BY
YANN SAMUELL



WITH TOM CASTAING LÉONARD FAUQUET-VAN OVERBEKE MATHYS GROS PALOMA LEBEAUT LOUP PINARD
SOLAL DEVEY AND THE PARTICIPATION OF EMMANUELLE GRÖNVOLD

SUPERPROD

LES FILMS DU LÉZARD

ELLE DRIVER

BIDIBUL

CASTERMAN

CANAL+

OCS

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LE CERCLE NOIR POUR FILM ELLE DRIVER

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PUBLISHED BY ÉDITIONS CASTERMAN

FRANCE - RUNNING TIME : 110 MIN - FORMAT : SCOPE 2.35 - COLOUR - SOUND : 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES :
ELLE DRIVER

44 rue Blanche 75009 Paris
sales@elledriver.eu
Tél: +33 1 56 43 48 70

elle driver



SYNOPSIS

August 1914. While the German army is gaining ground in the North of France, four boys aged 10 to 15, LUCien, LUCas, LUigi and LUDwig are left behind during the evacuation of their orphanage. Without the protection of Abbé Turpin (François Damiens) and the schoolteacher Leutellier (Alex Lutz), the Lulus are now stranded on their own behind the enemy front line. Soon joined by LUce, a pretty young girl separated from her parents, they decide to reach the neutral country of Switzerland by all means possible... they embark on an adventure for which nothing and no one has prepared them! They will discover that the supposed enemies can turn out to be formidable allies, like Hans (Luc Schiltz), the German deserter with a big heart, Louison (Isabelle Carré), the so-called witch of the village, Gaston (Didier Bourdon), the grumpy clog maker or their new friend Moussa (Ahmed Sylla), a young Senegalese rifleman.!



PRODUCTION'S NOTE

Having grown up in Hauts-de-France, the northernmost region of France, not far from the battlefields of the Great War, we were brought up with the history and events that permanently shaped this beautiful region.

When we discovered *The Lulus*, the richness and tenderness of this story about four orphans blew us away. Here, the war is recounted from a different perspective: that of children, innocent witnesses unaware and untroubled by the history that is being made before their very eyes. It's a story full of humour, incomprehension, and fear, but also laughter and resourcefulness, with, in the background, the constant search for the family bonds they so lack. These children bring a quirky, moving perspective to the war, and we were immediately won over by thought of being able to tell history at a child's level.

On the one hand, the series shows us the extraordinary resilience of orphaned children plunged into a conflict that overwhelms them. On the other hand, it shows us the side of the Great War we usually don't see. As the story advances, we learn a lot about World War I without actually confronting the front and its horrors. The protagonists are subject to the war without participating in it, and a lot of information is conveyed through the perception of the Lulus.

It's impossible not to grow attached to the destiny of these children who are on their own, and who, despite their bickering, experience something extremely powerful together. Already orphaned by the loss of their parents, they are again orphaned when they lose the protection of society, which they can no longer access.

Yann Samuëll was an obvious choice to us, not only for his experience with directing child actors, his screenwriting, his efficiency, and his ability to keep production costs under control, but also, obviously, because of our shared vision when it comes to adapting *The Lulus*. Following his meeting with Régis Hautière (who continues to help and support us), it became clear that Yann was the ideal screenwriter and director to bring this great adventure to the screen in a way that will both entertain and educate.

INTERVIEW WITH YANN SAMUELL

How did you discover Régis Hautière and Hardoc's graphic novels ?

It was Éric Boquého, producer at Films du Léopard, who was behind the project and who discovered the comic. We met for another project with children, when I had just finished *War of the Buttons*, and he was reluctant to send me the graphic novel, thinking that I didn't want to make any more films about children. This was not entirely untrue, but when I discovered the six albums, I realised that there was a very different approach to other films about childhood, even if the issue was similar. So I called the two authors and explained to them that I was being offered to adapt their albums, but that I could only accept if the film did not cheat with violence and was not sweetened. Because I had seen in their work a monster movie with war playing the role of the monster! And they told me that they were inspired by *The Walking Dead*!!

Which other elements convinced you to embark on this project?

I liked the nature of childhood, the ability of children to redefine themselves, whatever the circumstances. As in *The Night of the Hunter*, they overcome adversity and are able to reset the counters.

Also, as I was writing, I was scouting and I realised why I felt so appealed by this film: there is a famous shot of a child perched on a tank during the Liberation of Paris in August 1944, and it happens to be my father, who had just died. I realised that this film was a way of paying tribute to him.

What direction did you want the adaptation to take?

I was in constant contact with Régis Hautière, and I sent him successive versions of the script, but as long as I respected the spirit of the comic, he trusted me completely. In my eyes, war is a situation of decay where you lose loved ones, material goods, but also hope, convictions and ambitions for the future. What interested me in my approach was that the children in the film, who are orphans and have nothing, go the other way round: the further they move on, the more they grow. They find their own image of mother, father, grandfather and big brother in the course of their encounters, and I wanted them to come out of the war as winners.

Have you conducted any research on the history of orphans during the First World War?

I was so absorbed in the literature that it almost became a burden! It's easy to get lost in the history of the front lines that were moving every day. After a while, I remembered that this was a fiction and I had to put aside some of the history and take some creative liberties. For example, the Senegalese riflemen

were not called up in 1914, unlike what the film suggests, but I liked the character of Ahmed Sylla tremendously because he was the children's adoptive older brother. Some of the characters, although fictional, reflect the spirit of the time that I discovered through my research. The teacher, played by Alex Lutz, is initially very similar to Jean Jaurès, but when we find him later, he has lived through the horror of the war, he is altered by the hardships, and no longer believes in what he used to teach, whereas the children continue to believe in it.

Each of the young protagonists has his own personality. How did you draw them?

First of all, it's my job as a scriptwriter: after writing a storyline that I like, I do several rereads and complete rewrites by putting myself in the shoes of each of the characters to give them depth and ensure that they react consistently to events. On the other hand, I leave myself some flexibility so that at the time of casting I can, with the young actor, rework the suit to fit the performer. Once this stage has been completed, we work on joint readings, rehearsals and improvisation around situations that are not necessarily in the film. There are also casual moments when we have a meal together and get to know each other outside of a professional setting so that I can understand their personalities and integrate these elements into the film. I spend months in writing the parts, they become like my own children, and then the moment comes when I have to find the performers: I have to give my heroes some room to grow and put them in the hands of someone else, and then it's like an adoption!

You orchestrate a great adventure and war film.

The fact that I was embarking on an adventure film was my main motivation! To fit the story into the genre, I scripted the arrival of the war in a very explosive way with the bombing of the abbey so that the adventure would be like an incarnation of a character who comes and carries the protagonists away. It is not them who are looking for adventure, but the adventure that drags them in its path like a tsunami. Moreover, if only to respect the title's commitment, it was essential to go all the way with the war film. The First World War was the first modern, industrial, cynical war, entirely decided by the bosses in order to - among other things - kill the left-wing movements that were emerging. At first, most people went into combat fresh and joyful, but they soon realised that machines could kill hundreds of men in a minute. Now officers were sending soldiers to the front as cannon fodder and there was no longer any nobility in war. It was a very disruptive moment and you had to feel it in the film.



The little orphans are thrown into an adult world, fierce, cruel, brutal...

I liked the idea that at the beginning these children are in a cage - the orphanage - where they have no rights, no parents, and all of a sudden the cage door is opened and they discover the world at the worst possible moment. The world is theirs, but at a time when it is self-destructing. They are free, yes, but at which cost?

The Lulus are full of convictions at the beginning, especially about girls, but their assumptions are quickly challenged by Luce...

Luce arrives at the same time as the adventure: she embodies the discovery of the world, of war and of the position of girls. I like to shake up clichés, and the idea that this young girl is in the end more adventurous than them, who thought they were adventurers, appeals to me a lot.

Moreover, the female figures in the film have guts and determination.

It's a historical truth: the men were at the front and the women took the lead in society because they had no other choice. These are parameters that we have considered with the actresses to develop a path for their characters. Louison, played by Isabelle Carré, was until then considered a witch: she was hated but needed, and she suddenly becomes the queen of the village, able to defeat a German squad. Likewise, the doctor may not be a trained specialist, but it was felt that she had probably observed a surgeon amputating legs and is now imitating him. These are characters thrown into a situation that they would not have experienced under normal circumstances.

You are especially good at catching the moments of complicity between the actors.

It's an alchemy I find tough to analyse, but it has a lot to do with the trust I place in my performers, even though I give them instructions and orient them, since I'm the only one with the overall vision of the project. I always work on the basis of their ideas, in such a way that their interpretation is organic and not a patchwork. This approach creates a comfortable atmosphere on the set, which encourages this complicity. I am not worried about anything: I can have a dreadful day, where nothing works, and I can live with that. I often think of the Tibetan proverb: "If a problem has a solution, there is no point in worrying. But if it doesn't, then worrying doesn't help". We spent time with the children having fun, getting to know each other, playing, so that they came to the set not for professional reasons or for ambition, but because they were happy to be together.



**The frontline sequence is both heart-breaking and spectacular.
How did you plan and direct it?**

I worked as an illustrator for a long time and therefore I storyboarded everything. We needed to have this powerful climax, which goes beyond the scope of what a character can do, while remaining as close as possible to the protagonists - as close as possible to the human being. There had to be that equilibrium. I've also seen a lot of war films, such as *A Very Long Engagement* and *1917*, but *Empire of the Sun* remains a reference in terms of children confronted with chaos - and besides, on the set, I was wearing the cap from that film that Steven Spielberg gave me as a lucky charm!

The movie set is stunning.

The choice of the battle location was crucial and it was actually the last set that I approved. It was very hard to find because it had to be fully destroyed due to the quantity of explosives used. I also wanted to find this chromatic range, between the white earth, very chalky, recalling the battle of the Somme, the reds and oranges of the explosions, the blue of the French soldiers and the green of the Germans. The main reference I gave to my chief operator and my other post supervisors was the German painter Gerhard Richter, who blends the abstract and the figurative. I particularly discussed this with the pyrotechnicians because I wanted the explosions to be guided by this painting so that they would be both realistic and artistic.

How did you work on the sound material?

I was very keen for the music to start softly, then grow and overshadow the sounds of war. We start with a chase, then we get immersed, carried away by the glorious emphasis of the music - an illusion - which ends sharply with bullets whizzing by, shrapnel flying and soldiers collapsing. The sound work goes hand in hand with the staging to show how disproportionate war can be but when the action stops, we return to the actors and the humanity.

How did the casting of the children go?

Like every time, it's a gigantic job. I always call on the same casting director who has a very nice approach to her work. She loved the script, and at a very early stage, she started to do a lot of tests, then she sent me the videos, and I met those who seemed interesting. I attended all the casting sessions and, very quickly, I felt who the winners were going to be, but I always left myself the possibility to change my mind. As with *The War of the Buttons*, I also had to think about the length of the work because the children can quickly get tired, especially as you cannot make them work more than a specific number of hours.

Did they meet before the shooting?

Absolutely, because it was about creating a coherent group. We brought together the six children I had chosen, who came from all over France, for the first time over a whole weekend in Paris:

we started with a breakfast during which I introduced them to each other and, after ten minutes, one would have thought that they were school friends who had known each other all their lives. I told myself that I was right - something obvious came out, secrets were exchanged, kind of a catharsis, because they were really in confidence. I think it's also linked to the fact that I do the same things as them: during the weeks of preparation, as on the set, I don't ask my performers to do anything that I wouldn't be able to handle myself, to the extent that I perform the stunts that I ask them to do.

Did you think about adult actors early in the process?

It is often a mistake to try to write for someone. You don't invent anything, you don't make a counter suggestion, and it's not very interesting. You have to write characters with integrity and find the sensibility that seems to fit the character, shaded of course by the actor's personality. Once I have the final version of the script, I think about casting. I have to say that I was the first to be surprised to attract such a high calibre of actors because they sometimes came for three days. I think it was very exciting for them to be involved in a costumed adventure film. Some of them and I had almost worked together on other projects - we spent a long time trying to get a feel for each other and then when this project came along, it was the right time, like a wedding.

How did you develop the sets with Herald Najar?

I assumed that I would actually shoot the entire film in the North in order to have that particular light and feeling. It was even more important because our story belongs to the region's legacy and we can't steal it from it. I was right since every single extra was extremely committed to the project and it was the first time in my career that I wrote personally to each of them thanking them. The challenge was to find these places in the Hauts-de-France. We went through a series of locations to refine our research and the biggest challenge was the bombed-out village, especially as I didn't want to do everything in VFX. Suddenly, I liked a perspective on a church, but we had to divert the road, redesign a lot of houses... I then went behind a wasteland, where there was still the same perspective, and we completely rebuilt the village on this location from where we could see the church. It was a huge and spectacular set which, during all the months of building and shooting, was visited by tourists.

There is a great cohesion between the sets which, nonetheless, offer a wide diversity.

I absolutely wanted to give the film a visual unity and we worked a lot on the colour charts and the consistency with the costumes and the lights. However, I am sensible to the evolution of the sets during the film. Often, in historical movies, you only see old objects and set pieces, but this time I wanted to have a modern location - the "Familistère". While everything is crumbling around them, the children lend on a brand new site, and this was also a response to the traditional historical representation.



Tell me about the costume process.

The children have three costumes in the film: the one they wear as orphans - they are then lost in the crowd of orphans without any past or future - the one Louison gives them, which defines their own personality and allows them to become themselves through a colour chart, and, finally, this identity is reinforced when they arrive at the “Familistère”: we understand at this point that they took a step forward because they have left childhood and have made decisions for themselves. They now have clothes that bring them closer to adulthood.

Did you use visual effects?

All the poetic transitions, between key events, included VFX. But the battlefield scenes were all physically shot and the ash rain is a mix of live and VFX shots. Nevertheless, I wanted most of the scenes to be shot on set to help the kids to act. For example, for the abbey explosion, we had real explosions around the children - with all the safety measures - and they were terrified. Afterwards, they were constantly on the lookout and when you see their reaction on the screen, I think it was necessary.

What were your framing and lighting priorities?

We were largely inspired by the autochromes of the time. There are all sorts of colours that don't stand the test of time, but others are incredibly intense, with an extraordinary softness and glaze, and sometimes an exploding pink and blue that seems unnatural compared to some of the missing colours. I wanted the film to be dominated by an inky blue and a golden yellow. The ink blue refers to the origin of the children, to school, to education, to anonymity, while the yellow evokes adventure, fire and war. We took the point of view of the children who do not necessarily perceive the major events taking place around them. We therefore used real anamorphic lenses, with blurred and vignetted edges. With these particular lenses, you can get the focus on the centre of the image, but not on the edges, which directs the viewer's vision. There was also a very graphic side

to the image, without becoming a caricature. For example, the children are walking in a forest, but we chose this one with pine trees that look like cathedrals or columns. Because the world around the children is full of meaning.

What did you have in mind regarding the music?

When I write the script, I put myself in a sort of aquarium, surrounding myself with colours, sounds and atmospheres that evoke the film to come. As a result, throughout the writing phase, I was constantly wearing the colours of the film and listening to music that evoked this adventure - classical, rap, hip-hop. And when I saved this music on a playlist, I realised that there was a majority of jazz and ragtime. So I needed a jazz composer! I contacted Mathieu Lamboley, a jazz pianist by trade, and I had him listen to the music. I wanted a score that sounded like film music, with jazz chords. In the end, the soundtrack mixes gypsy jazz pieces, with banjos and guitars, and then evolves into very poetic pieces. While the framing can lie to the viewer, the music always tells the truth about the character and his emotions.

ARTISTIC SHEET

LUCAS	Tom CASTAING
LUDWIG	Léonard FAUQUET
LUIGI	Mathys GROS
LUCE	Paloma LEBEAUT
LUCIEN	Loup PINARD
OCTAVE	Solal DEVEY
LOUISON	Isabelle CARRÉ
ABBÉ TURPIN	François DAMIENS
M. LEUTELLIER	Alex LUTZ
MOUSSA	Ahmed SYLLA
HANS	Luc SCHILTZ
GASTON	Didier BOURDON
MME BERRAULT	Emmanuelle GRONVOLD
COLONEL KLAUS	Nickel BÖSENBERG
SERGEANT SCHNABER	Franck BECKMANN
LUDWIG 5 YEARS OLD	Étienne VALENTI
LUDWIG'S MOTHER	Marie VAISY
THE DIRECTOR OF THE LOCAL WELFARE SERVICE	Jean-Michel LARRÉ
THE FRENCH OFFICER	Philippe MEYRER





TECHNICAL SHEET

DIRECTOR Yann SAMUELL
SCREENPLAY, ADAPTATION AND DIALOGUES Yann SAMUELL
BASED ON THE GRAPHIC NOVELS by Régis HAUTIERE and HARDOC
« La Guerre des Lulus »
Published by Éditions Casterman

ORIGINAL SCORE Mathieu LAMBOLEY
EDITING Sylvie LANDRA
DOP Vincent GALLOT
SET DESIGNER Hérald NAJAR
COSTUME DESIGNER Magdalena LABUZ
SOUND Bernard BOREL, Nicolas LEROY, Grég VINCENT, Michel SCHILLINGS

MAKE UP Frédo ROESER
HAIRDRESSER Félix PUGET
1st ASSISTANT DIRECTOR François DOMANGE
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Laurent LECETRE
POSTPRODUCTION DIRECTOR Mélodie STEVENS
PRODUCED BY Marc GABIZON,
Clément CALVET, Jérémie FAJNER,
Éric BOQUÉHO, Thierry BARLE,
Adeline FONTAN TESSAUR,
Jérôme ROUGIER,
Christel HENON, Lilian ECHE

CO-PRODUCTION FRANCE-LUXEMBOURG
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WITH THE SUPPORT OF CANAL+
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CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA
ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
PICTANOVO WITH THE SUPPORT OF
RÉGION HAUTS-DE-FRANCE

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH COFINOVA 18, COFIMAGE 33



THE LULUS

A COLLECTION OF GRAPHIC NOVELS
A UNIQUE AND ORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE
ON THE WORLD WAR I

Written in 2013 by Régis Hautière and Hardoc, *The Lulus* is a comic book about four orphans and a little girl lost during the First World War. In the spirit of Enid Blyton's books or *Little Nicholas*, the adventures of the 5 Lulus (each of their first names beginning with Lu..) share with the young reader the key moments that children can experience during their youth (friendship, joy, crying, first love...) while telling us about the war seen by these five children.

By choosing to make the Lulus orphans or Luce a child who lost her parents during the exodus, the authors free themselves from the main problems of the war to make a background for the wanderings and survival of Lulus. Régis Hautière and Hardoc have created a new and real family for the Lulus. Their own!

A moving, exciting and rich series in twists and turns, *The Lulus* allows us to look back on a war that is quite distant for today's young generation, but it is also an opportunity to go on a great journey in the French Hauts de France, in Belgium and in Berlin with the Lulus. After the 5 years of war, each corresponding to a volume, the new albums now focus on the paths of each Lulus after the war. A separate volume also made it possible to fill in the narrative the narrative ellipsis in Germany.

The Lulus is 10 volumes in almost 10 years and 500,000 copies sold.

The series is edited by Casterman.