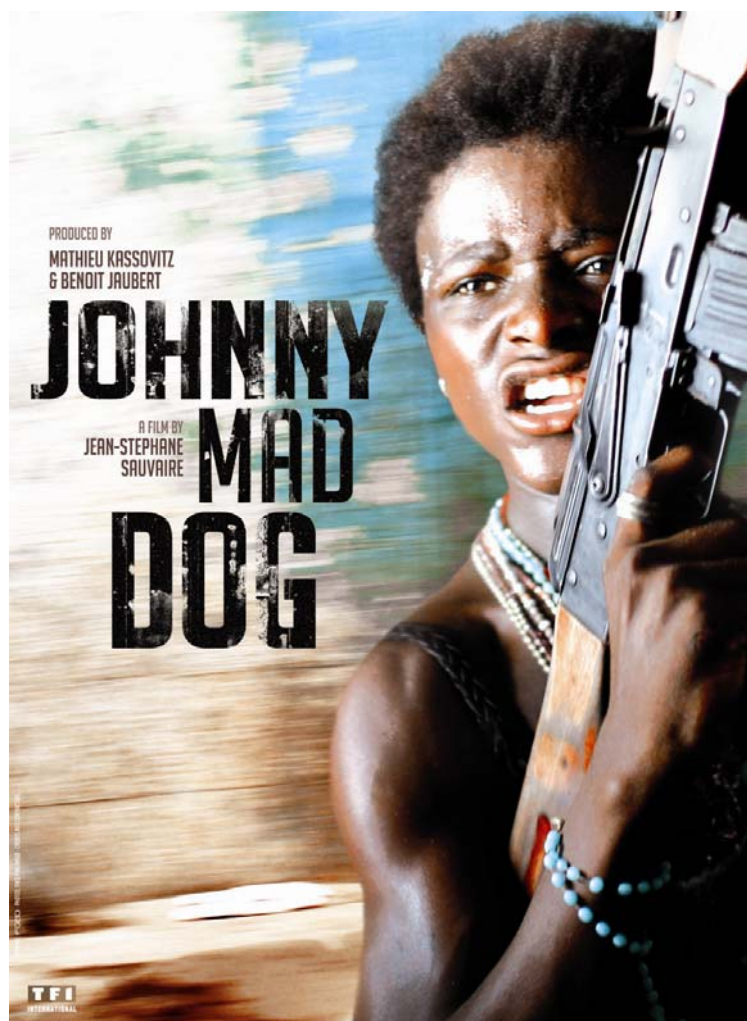


MNP ENTREPRISE / **Explicit Films**

Present



A FILM BY JEAN-STÉPHANE SAUVAIRE

WRITTEN BY JEAN-STÉPHANE SAUVAIRE AND JACQUES FIESCHI

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY EMMANUEL DONGALA

TREATMENT

PHOTOS: THÉO PINGAUD - CREDITS NOT CONTRACTUAL



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SHORT SYNOPSIS



A deeply moving film on African child soldiers produced by Mathieu Kassovitz and Benoît Jaubert.

Today, in contemporary Africa.

Johnny, 15, a kid-soldier with the look of a gangsta rapper, armed to the hilt, is inhabited by the mad dog he dreams of becoming.

With his small commando – No Good Advice, Small Devil, Young Major – he robs, pillages, and slays everything in his path.

Laokolé, 13, attempting to invent the glorious future which her brilliant studies seem to have in store for her, strives to flee her city occupied by teenage-soldier militias, with her disabled father and her little brother Fofo, 8.

As Johnny advances, Laokolé flees . . .

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY EMMANUEL DONGALA "JOHNNY MAD DOG"

BY: JEAN-STÉPHANE SAUVAIRE

Carlitos Medellin – nominated at the following festivals :
Amsterdam, Cuba, Sao Paulo, Miami, Bogota, Geneva, San
Francisco, Quebec, Bradford, San Diego, New York, Rio,
Jerusalem etc.

Matalo – nominated at the following festivals:
Sundance, Rotterdam, San Diego...

A Dios – Best Short Film – Aspen Short Film Festival, USA

CAST: CHRISTOPHER MINIE, DAISIE VICTORIA VANDY

PRODUCERS: MATHIEU KASSOVITZ
AND BENOIT JAUBERT (associate producer on *Love Me
If You Dare*, *Irreversible*, *The Girl From Paris* and executive
producer on *Cyclo* and *At The Height Of Summer*)

PRODUCTION: MNP ENTREPRISE IN COPRODUCTION WITH EXPLICIT
FILMS AND SCOPE PICTURES

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DoP: MARK KONINCKX

ART DIRECTOR: ALEXANDRE VIVET

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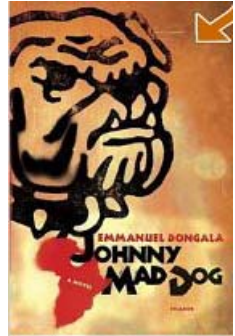
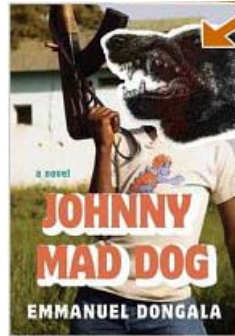
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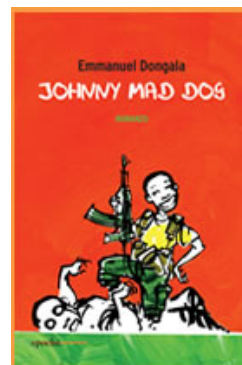
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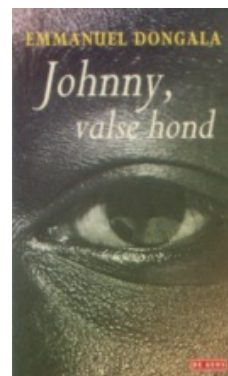
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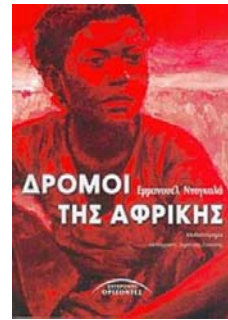
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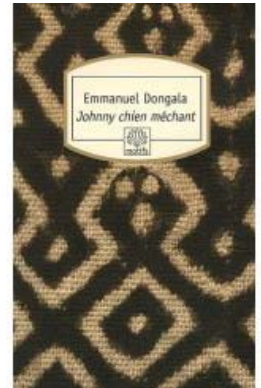
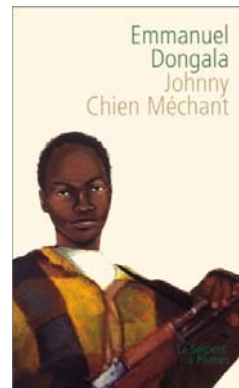
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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

It all started with a friend of mine who said, "I thought about you when I read this book. It's called *Johnny Mad Dog*. It's about you, I know you're going to like it. Read it."

I read the book and I was overwhelmed.

I was moved by its evocation of the contemporary tragedy of Africa about which we speak so little, as well as by the teenagers who are confronted with the violence of civil war and also, not least, by the universality of its story. A puzzle, an Africa in bits and pieces: to reconstruct, to face honestly, to try to comprehend... Both raw and realist. Self-evident. A necessity.

Johnny Mad Dog is a novel by the Congolese writer Emmanuel Dongala. A narrative experienced from the inside that makes no concessions. The story could be taking place in the Congo, in Liberia, in the Ivory Coast, in Sierra Leone or elsewhere, in Latin America or the Middle East - it is a common theme in far too many countries.

The desire to adapt this story for the movies is above all that of wanting to give life to its two main characters, Johnny and Laokolé. Both are totally romantic, complex, moving figures who are plunged, despite themselves, into a state of horror that is beyond them. Nevertheless, it is here that they must come to terms with who they really are and strive to go on existing.

While Johnny destroys, Laokolé keeps alive the hope of constructing a future. In the movie we will delve into their inner selves, their dreams, their suffering, their feelings, their fears, their despair and their hope . . .



Johnny's path in life brings to mind Alex from Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. He is the angel of evil, the ruthless killer, without rhyme or reason. He is one of those child soldiers who kills smiling and dies without a tear. Traumatized at an early age, left to fend for themselves outside of any family structure, child soldiers have no alternative but to enter the wild. They profit from their pillaging to dress up with whatever they find and wield disproportionately large weapons . . . They live in a world of disguise, travesty, and make-believe. They live in a world of their own where play is transformed into the grotesque and the macabre.

To make this violence palatable, the movie will depict situations from Johnny's point of view, as he feels them: both his detachment and unconsciousness in the face of horror and the repressed sensitivity and humanity that lies buried deep inside his soul.

Laokolé is the most obviously positive character in the story, the ray of hope, the future in the midst of this carnage. She has the will to live, or rather to survive, to learn and to construct, all of which gives her the tenacious force to resist. She does not cease advancing, fighting in her own way against the total annihilation of her country, her ethnic group, her family, and her childhood.

War creates a state of no-rights which allows for all kinds of impunity and madness. It normalizes death, standardizes barbarity, maintains fear and phantasmagoria, brings back to life old demons, overturns morality and humanity. War is intimately tied to the crisis that our two teenagers in search of their identity are going through: it brutally confronts them with an image of omnipresent death and with the violence of their awakening sexuality.

The film will enact these confrontations: good against evil, the conscious against the unconscious, reason against madness, life against death, or, simply, Laokolé against Johnny...

TECHNICAL NOTE

To best depict the reality of these children at war, the filming will be close to documentary style with minimal staging and will seek to portray brute reality in all of its authentic, immediate, and visceral nature.

The casting is crucial.

Most of the characters are non-professional teenage actors who are familiar with the subject and have experienced war first-hand. The former child soldiers I was able to audition in Africa (mostly Liberia) feel a sense of necessity in making the movie and in expressing their personal visions.

The screenplay will be used as the basis for our work together. We will supplement and enrich the screenplay through a long rehearsal period and improvisation sessions. This is a way of not betraying them and of being as close as possible to their real lives, even if they are often immersed in violence. This is also a way for them to tell their own stories.

Monrovia, as a capital of Western Africa, seems like an extremely interesting place to film *Johnny Mad Dog*. The city is a character in and of itself, a city that has emerged from fifteen years of civil war and is today in a state of decrepitude and total abandon. The recent presence of war can be seen everywhere: nothing seems to have been actually reconstructed, like so many indelible scars.

HD will enable a true liberty in a shooting deeply rooted in its subject, involving “non-professional” actors, in a country where no film was ever shot before.

The use of scope will bind together the “fictional” universe and the “authentic” universe – close to a documentary – thanks to the 2.35 ratio in addition to radical filmmaking choices, sometimes on the edge of experimental. The image of the film itself will be highly contrasted, sharp, alive, revealing the extreme emotions of the characters. A camera always on the move, ready to react to the disordered impulses of the protagonists, to better transcribe the constant urgency and frenetic pace of the action. A camera striving for survival. Sometimes exalted, sometimes still, but always alive.

What interests me most today is to confront the *Johnny Mad Dog* screenplay with the raw matter that is reality, the brutal reality of Africa, and in this way give the movie an even stronger feel for the truth.

Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire



PRODUCERS' NOTES

We read *Johnny Mad Dog* by Emmanuel Dongala and were profoundly moved by the veracity of the story. Meanwhile, Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire presented us with his adaptation of the book. It is a lyrical, courageous, and crucial novel. The idea of making it into a film immediately appeared to us to be of the utmost necessity. But we knew that adapting such a book was a formidable challenge. Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire and Jacques Fieschi have managed to put their intelligence and sensitivity to such an effect in service to the original story that their screenplay has become a work in and of itself, both close and complementary to the novel.

Child soldiers have been fighting forever on all the front lines of our planet. Modern warfare has intensified the horror of these conflicts. Manipulated and used by warlords, these children are victims sacrificed to the powers of military and political interests running their countries.

This hell has never been brought to the big screen in the form of a feature-length fiction. This movie is an occasion for Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire to draw attention to these martyred children whose childhood has been robbed; all the more so because this director's engagement on behalf of children suffering violence is exemplary: his documentary *Carlitos Medellín* was awarded Best Film for Children's Rights at the 2004 Human Rights Festival.

At the risk of disturbing us, the truth will make *Johnny Mad Dog* a moving experience.

What's more, we think it is high time to treat this subject in a feature-length film. The remarkable work done on the screenplay by the authors, as well as the research and auditions that were part of the development stage in Liberia have already mobilized strong support from all the concerned official organizations. They all wish to see the story of these tragedies which Africa has recently experienced brought to the big screen: so as not to forget. So as to construct again.

Mathieu Kassovitz

Benoît Jaubert



TREATMENT

TREATMENT

For Johnny Mad Dog, a 16-year old African child soldier, life is all about survival. Take what you can. Kill or be killed. Johnny lives and wages war with a group of 30 young boys and teenagers. Like the others, Johnny was inducted into the rebel army by force and has no family. Since the age of 11, Johnny's gun is his mother and his father, his only security.

The boss of Johnny's rebel commando is a tough 20-year old named Never Die. Though they sometimes meet up with adult soldiers, the kid rebels operate alone and unsupervised, ruthlessly pillaging and terrorizing villages, killing, looting and abducting new young recruits in their path of destruction.

For 13-year old civilian girl Laokolé, survival is another matter. Helpless in the face of the rebels' senseless violence, her only weapon is her intelligence, her only defense to run and hide.

The rebel forces are preparing a major offensive strike on the city. Never Die gives Johnny and the boys cocaine, amphetamines and other drugs to pump them up for an attack on the city's radio and TV broadcasting center. Never Die chooses Johnny to open fire with a rocket gun. Johnny hits his target and plows into the building with his commando. During the attack, he happens upon a star newscaster and rapes her. Johnny and the boys know no limits or ethics. They swiftly take over the building.

The commando regroups at a military base in the woods, where Never Die tells the rebel kids of the big mission: to take over the capital and oust the President. Johnny has proved himself. Never Die appoints him leader of the commando for their part of the operation. Johnny is proud to be named head of the SBU (Small Boys Unit) and is congratulated by the other kids. New young recruits are added to his commando, including a naïve, attractive young girl named Fatmata. Johnny eyes her with desire but leaves her be. The newcomers undergo initiation rituals in the night.

Meanwhile, Laokolé hears news of the impending rebel attack on the city and fears the worst. She must find a way to escape to a safe place with her crippled, legless father and 8-year old little brother Fofo. After burying the family's valuables, Laokolé and Fofo sneak away. In the streets, they see Johnny and the SBU advancing toward them and quickly hide in an abandoned building.

Johnny, who has found a discarded Uzi gun, intercepts a schoolboy carrying a basket of fruit, a "suspect" who claims his innocence. Johnny shoots him dead with the Uzi. Laokolé is horrified. Entering the abandoned building, Johnny finds Laokolé huddled over her little brother. She faces him courageously. They exchange a long stare. Johnny leaves them behind.

Fofo remains in hiding while Laokolé retrieves their father in a wheelbarrow. But when she returns, Fofo is gone. She makes up a story for her father, and continues pushing him on through the war-torn streets.

Never Die calls Johnny and the SBU to a meeting. The boys wait anxiously under the bridge, drinking gin and doing drugs to harden their nerves. Never Die gives them their mission: they must charge over the bridge into the city, then reach and secure "Embassy Row".

The SBU blasts its way over the bridge through heavy gunfire. It looks like a suicide mission. One boy turns back and is promptly shot by Never Die. The others press on, firing like mad. A huge explosion, then all is silent. They cross the bridge and enter the city.

Suddenly, two of the boys are shot down by a sniper. They track down and kill him, then take stock of the situation. They are almost out of ammunition, and are lost in the unfamiliar city. One of the shot boys is dead. The other, Tupac, is severely wounded. They leave the dead behind and head out into the deserted streets, dragging Tupac with them.

Laokolé reaches the Red Cross refugee center, where Matt, an emergency doctor, gives her father morphine. He is infected and delirious with fever. Laokolé, full of despair, searches the camp for her little brother.

Johnny and the SBU reach the refugee center and try to take it over, but are stopped short by UN soldiers. A tense standoff ensues. Matt the doctor sees the wounded boy Tupac, and breaks through the line to save him. Johnny backs down. He lets Matt take Tupac into the center for treatment, and despite protest, retreats with his commando.

Johnny manages to contact Never Die, who simply orders him to stay put. The boys are fearful and restless. That night, high on wine and drugs, Johnny gets friendly with Fatmata, renames her Lovelita and has her put on a looted wedding dress. They make love in an abandoned building against the backdrop of bomb explosions in the night sky.

The next morning, Johnny wakes to find the UN evacuating the refugee camp. He kicks his commando awake. Beat and hung-over, the unit enters the emergency center, pillaging and harassing the refugees. They recover Tupac, who has regained consciousness. They trash the UN offices and take to the streets.

Laokolé, like the others, has been abandoned in the camp with her sick father,

and must find a way to escape. She cannot find her wheelbarrow. She bribes a man on a bike with a trailer to tow him for 20 dollars - all the money she has left. They flee. On the road, Laokolé's father dies. They bury him. Laokolé is left alone. She wanders the streets, mostly deserted and littered with corpses. She escapes the fire and smoke by entering a tropical forest. Scared and disoriented, she gets lost.

The SBU pillages a luxurious villa. Johnny confronts its owners, a wealthy, educated young couple. He harasses and humiliates them, but leaves them alive. Driving away in the couple's new Cadillac, Johnny and his unit hear news of the rebel army's victory.

The rebels celebrate wildly in the streets. Johnny and the SBU join in the drunken, drug-induced madness. A rebel girl pulls Johnny into an alley to have sex with him. They are interrupted by Lovelita, who goes mad, chases the girl off and tries to shoot her. Lovelita is shot dead by a fellow rebel. Johnny performs a small ceremony and buries her.

Never Die, now a corporal in the army of the new President, finds Johnny in mourning. He relieves him of his duties as a soldier and recruits him as a security guard for the refugee camp outside the city.

Laokolé reaches the refugee camp in the forest, where she befriends and cares for a 3-year old girl. Fighting for food rations, she sees and recognizes Johnny, and insults him. Johnny is taken aback. Later, when the guards come to pick out girls to serve their pleasure, Johnny picks Laokolé. She goes with him, but insists on bringing the little girl.

Johnny drives them out to his house, a little shack in a poor neighborhood. Laokolé calls him by his war name and condemns him for killing the boy with the basket of fruit. Johnny, surprised and turned on, remains calm and tries to seduce her. Laokolé attacks him brutally and escapes...

Laokolé returns home and begins a new family life with the little girl. The devastated city, patrolled by UN tanks, undergoes slow reconstruction efforts. One day, in the bus on the way to school, Laokolé sees Johnny in the street. He has cleaned up and is carrying a notebook. They exchange a long look. As the school bus pulls away, Johnny doesn't look back. He continues on to his own class at a self-help school that teaches education basics. Johnny, too, has begun a new life for himself.