SYNOPSIS

Struggling actor Cedric seems doomed to lead the life of a loser. He's broke and his girlfriend has dumped him. Even his own father, sister and best buddies have lost faith in his ability to do anything worthwhile. Then finally, he gets a lead role: the superhero "Badman". A chance to pull himself out of an endless downward spiral and gain his father's respect. But fate strikes again!

Rushing off the set in full costume, Cedric has a car accident, loses his memory, and wakes up convinced he really is a superhero on mission! Confronted with real-life adventure and danger, his true nature is put to the test.

Does he have what it takes to tackle the forces of evil, defend the weakest among us and beat the bad guys? But you can't just decide to be a hero, let alone a superhero… especially someone like Cedric!

INTERVIEW WITH PHILIPPE LACHEAU

co-writer, director and actor

In the five comedies you have co-written and directed, you've often surprised us with spectacular gags that rely on stunts, clever live action tricks and sophisticated visual effects. For example, the go-kart scene in *Babysitting*, the parachuting scene in *Babysitting 2*, filmed in one long shot from the character's point of view, or the changing sets in *Super Who?*, when Cedric falls through successive floors of the hangar, which are actually just canvas tarps printed with 3D images. What films inspired you to dream up such elaborate visual gags of your own?

When we're writing the story, the visual gags inspire us and help us to develop the story's structure much more than any jokes in the dialogue, which we go back and rework later. Those spectacular gags are usually complicated and expensive to plan, create and execute, but they're part of our DNA, because we grew up watching comedies of Francis Weber. He's the filmmaker who made me want to work in this industry. The American movies that made me laugh the most were ones like the Farelli brothers' *Dumb and Dumber* or *All About Mary*, the kind that use a lot of visual humor and push transgressive gags much further than what anyone dared to do in France. When we're working on a new movie, the visual gags reassure us much more than funny dialogue, because we say to ourselves, «Okay, if everything here goes as planned, the audience is gonna crack up laughing», whereas reactions to a punchline are a lot harder to predict.

As a screenwriter, director and actor, what do you specifically enjoy about mixing comedy and adventure?

I'm a fan of adventure comedies like *The Goonies*, *Romancing the Stone*, and of course the Indiana Jones saga, which has a lot of humor in it. They really influenced me as a kid. You get drawn in by the riveting action and you have a good laugh, too. In our films, I like the idea that we are drawing in audiences with the promise of comedy but offer them adventure like an unexpected bonus, a nice surprise. In *Superwho?*, the fight scenes with Badman and the chase scenes are very polished, because we wanted to surprise and captivate the audience. It's an added pleasure for us too, because those sequences are really fun to shoot. We're always wowed like kids when we find ourselves in a set-up like an American-style action film. It's important to keep in mind how expensive a movie ticket is. It's primordial to us that people leave the movie feeling satisfied and say, «That was cool. I got my money's worth.»

What comic strips and superhero films did you like best as a kid?

Actually, I didn't read comics very much when I was a kid. I didn't really discover them until later. The first movie superhero I was struck by as a kid was Superman, played by Christopher Reeve. Superman is so fascinating that you want to be like him more than any other character. He is strong, humble, kind and invincible. Which by the way makes it really frustrating to see him get pushed around when he is Clark Kent. You feel like shouting at him: «C'mon, tell them who you really are!» (laughs) When I read Marvel comics, I loved Thor, probably for his badass side, for the Scandinavian mythology and his magic hammer. As for movies, I really liked *Guardians of the Galaxy*, as well as *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, for the way Christopher Nolan depicted that whole universe.

Did you ever want to do parodies of superheroes when you were still a kid? Did you ever do that in the amateur videos you shot with your parents' video camera?

Yes. I remember a skit I videotaped with some buddies when I was about ten. We interviewed Superman while he was flying and said, «Oh, Superman, we're really lucky we found you!», and he replied, «You sure are, because the sky is big!» Much later, on Canal Plus, I shot a skit about Superman retiring, and my it was my dad who wore the costume! (laughs)

After adapting *Nicky Larson*, were you ever tempted to try to make a «real» superhero movie, about a character with superhuman powers living in the real world?
Of course that's tempting. Just like we sometimes had the urge to make our *Nicky Larson* adaptation a pure action film, even though our goal was to keep it a comedy. To be honest, I'm not sure I would know how to conceptualize and film a real superhero movie, even if I think I would definitely have things I'd want to show. The problem is, it's really hard to do that these days, because you have to compete with American productions with budgets near 250 million dollars. That said, on Netflix, I saw the French film *How I Became a Superhero*, which is really well done. I was happy for Douglas Attal and his whole team, because they pulled it off and did it well. The situation in France is particular: you're forced to invent a new superhero for a film project, because the ones that have been created here in our country have never reached the same notoriety as American characters from Marvel or DC comics. It's really tough to compete on the market with icons who were well known by our parents and even our grandparents!

So you set out to do a comedy from the very start?
Yes, but the real starting point for the screenplay was the idea of an actor who is shooting a film and loses his memory. The superhero theme came later. I'd been wanting to do a parody of the Jason Bourne saga for a long time, based on the concept of an actor shooting a spy movie who has an accident while driving a stunt car. Disoriented and in shock, he doesn't know who he is anymore. When he opens up the trunk and finds traces of blood, gadgets, fake passports and guns, he thinks he is a real secret agent. But the dark side and hitman side of a spy thriller ended up being too heavy for us, so we ended up turning towards the more positive vibe of the world of superheroes. We decided to parody Batman, to stay within a certain logic, since Bruce Wayne has no superpowers and has to rely on gadgets and mastering fighting techniques. That's when it got to be more fun for us and synched up with what we like most about creating new films: living out our childhood fantasies. Writing a screenplay is like using a magic wand: everything you write comes to life! It was great to experience that when we shot scenes of our fake vigilante hero Badman, being a grown-up having fun like a little kid playing a superhero, even if it was a parody!

Did the superhero idea stem from frustration that those kind of films weren't being made in France until a couple of years ago?
It's true, back then, we hadn't heard of any projects like that in France. We didn't know that Douglas Attal's film was in preproduction, but there's no conflict there regardless, because his project isn't a comedy. The priority was to come up with something original, and the way *Superwho?* uses parody, together with the idea of the character losing his memory, gives us a way of offering audiences something totally new.

When you're in the writing process, do you develop several projects at the same time, as different pitches or treatments?
There aren't any predetermined rules. The idea of an actor with amnesia who thinks he's a spy came to me seven or eight years ago. I put that away in a drawer and moved forward on other movies before I came back to rework it with the superhero theme. We've got others like that in stock. Maybe we'll be able to bring them to life too one day!

We were talking earlier about the way you combine comedy with adventure, but you also use suspense. For example, the cave scene in *Babysitting 2* or the scenes with the real gangster in *Superwho*?
Yes, because while we're developing a story, we often ask ourselves what it would be like if we got rid of all the gags, if the story itself would still be compelling enough for people to want to watch it all the way to the end and find out what happens to the characters. In *Babysitting*, the hero and the little boy disappear, and you want to know where they've been and if everything's okay. Since I tend to get bored easily when I watch a movie, I'm obsessed with keeping the audience's attention by cultivating mystery and a certain kind of suspense through the story's structure.

The regulars of your troupe - Élodie Fontan, Tarek Boudali, & Julien Arruti - are all in the film. Does each one talk to you about new kinds of characters they'd like to play before you start writing a project?
We don't necessarily talk about it beforehand, but since we've already shot several films together, we try to mix it up and play different characters each time, so that the audience doesn't get bored. Sometimes the roles can be fairly similar, if it works in the story. In Superwho?, for example, Élodie plays a warrior, an action-taker, which is new for her. But the number one priority in casting these parts is to make it funny.

When you're writing action scenes, do you describe in detail how the gags unfold sequentially? Or do you just outline them generally and do the visual development later?
Initially, we describe as many gags as we can, then we bring in our stunt supervisor Marc David, who works out the action with his team. They film and edit mock-ups of their proposals on their own, bringing in their own ideas as well. Then we watch them together, and if we get stuck on something that doesn't work, we put our heads together to find solutions, and those additional gags are integrated into the film. But generally speaking, we spend a lot of time up front developing a very polished and precise script. That's much more reassuring for everyone!

During the scene where Cedric meets the film producer played by Chantal Ladesou, are you taking a jab at the French film industry for not daring to invest in entertainment that could compete on an international level with American productions?
Yes, but in a friendly way, because the truth is, the French and American film markets are not comparable. When an American movie comes out in the United States, it's in a lot more theaters, so the return on investment isn't the same. We're not playing on the same game board!

Isn't entertaining audiences and making them forget their troubles, sometimes serious ones, a real superpower?
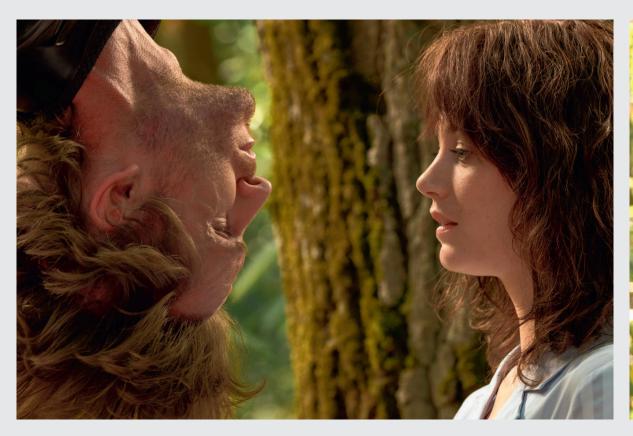Absolutely. As a matter of fact, when people ask me who my favorite superhero is, I often answer Kylian Mbappé! He inspires millions of people and fills them with extraordinary sensations. That's also what counts the most to me and motivates me. Nothing makes me happier than when people thank me for that reason. It makes me feel great. At the risk of repeating myself, I got into this profession because I saw my parents laughing at the films of Francis Weber, when they were broadcast on TV. My childhood memories of that are very precise. I clearly remember looking back and forth from the TV screen to my mom and dad and feeling their happiness. I thought the people who created those movies had some kind of wonderful power, and I wanted to do what they did.

What other superpower would you like to possess?
What I'd like more than anything else is to have the power to treat sickness and heal people. For my personal pleasure, I'd like to fly. That's since I discovered the experience of parachuting while shooting *Babysitting 2*. Even if the sensations of flying are short-lived, they are extraordinarily intense.

But it would be good to be invulnerable before you fly, because if you don't see an obstacle in time, it could mean trouble.
When you look at it that way, for sure, we could add being invulnerable before we add the power to fly.

But I wouldn't like to be invulnerable and immortal, because it would be unbearable to see everyone you love pass away. I really liked the hero's teleportation power in the movie Jumper. To be able to say, «Hey, I'll just go to New York in a flash, and after that, I'll sit down on the top of the Great Pyramid to watch the sunset.» That was really a fascinating idea.

MAKING THE FILM

Exploring the world of superheroes opened up new filmmaking possibilities for you.
Since it's a parody, we can use what's already been done and have fun twisting around the cinematography and directing style of those references to make them funny. Since the main character is an ordinary guy who thinks he's a superhero, that makes the situations all the more ridiculous.

Did you include allusions to recent superhero films in the credit sequence to tell people who are superhero movie fans, "I'm a real fan of those films, too»?
Yes. It's the same operating principle we used for *Nicky Larson*: the story and the main gags were made to entertain people who don't know the 1980's cartoon, but there was a second level of the story just for the fans, with very pointed allusions and inside jokes.
You can laugh watching *Superwho?* even if you don't know anything at all about that whole world. But fans of Marvel and DC comics will recognize hidden gags almost everywhere, in the subtitles, the background scenery, the names and signs, etc.. The movie is filled with references, and when it comes out, we'll see how fans react and find out which gags they've spotted and which ones they've missed!

Did you spend a lot of time analyzing the DC and Marvel movies in order to reference them in certain shots and scenes, like the way you directed the «film within a film» where we see Badman retrieving a bag of money stolen by his arch enemy The Clown?

What we tried to reference above all were the most famous superhero scenes, which is far more complex than you'd think it would be. Those moments are accessible even to average audiences. For example, the upside-down kiss from the first *Spider-Man* movie by Sam Raimi, which we do a parody of. But scenes as famous as that one aren't as easy to come by as you'd think. We also made a reference to *Joker* by recreating Joaquin Phoenix's famous dance moves when Cedric dances on the stairs with joy after he's been cast to play Badman. For the fight scenes and car chases, we stretched beyond superhero movies and found inspiration in the visual style of American action films.

Do you create storyboards to map out the action of sequences and gags?
We mainly use storyboards to describe visual gags, whereas fight scenes are developed more meticulously, thanks to the video mock-ups Marc David's team creates and proposes. That's fantastic, because we can see right away if a scene works or not, and we can change or improve things. I'm happy about what we've succeeded in doing in Badman's action scenes. I hope audiences will like those fight scenes, too.

Which sequences were the hardest to direct and act in at the same time?
All the scenes with my buddies, because as soon as they start to laugh, the whole set turns into a schoolyard. I'm the only one focused on the day's shot list and keeping on schedule, and if a case of the giggles breaks out, I'm totally screwed! Of course it's a positive thing, because that means we've got a cheerful vibe on the set, but every time Julien, Tarek and Élodie do a scene together, I know I'm going to be stuck in the role of a teacher dealing with unruly students! The only solution is to wait for them to calm down. That's 100% necessary, because as soon as Tarek breaks into laughter he cries, the tears stream down his cheeks and we have to redo his makeup!

What were the main artistic and technical challenges you had to overcome to make *Superwho?* into a film?

I worried about Badman's costume, because the shoot was planned for summer and I was afraid of suffocating and being uncomfortable in it. That kind of costume is thick and takes a long time to get into, because as I had learned in preproduction, all American actors who play superheroes wear spandex jumpsuits with fake foam muscles underneath their suits. It's crucial, because those elastic suits are very tight and compress your flesh and the volume of your real muscles. Luckily, the costume designers took very good care of me and slipped frozen shammy cloths beneath my suit to cool me down. That was really wonderful, because wearing a superhero costume all day long is a challenge. I also discovered the limitations of that kind of suit, because when you're wearing fake muscles, a hood and a mask, it's impossible to fight like you normally would: you can't lift your arms up all the way or move your head up and down, and a lot of other kinds of movements become difficult. That's why you have to get tricky and create several costumes, each with different characteristics. And different hoods as well. I needed several people to help me correctly position the main hood, which had been made from a cast of my head, but in certain shots, I had to be seen putting it on or taking it off on my own, in one quick gesture, so in those shots we used other versions.

How did you come up with the costume and mask for Badman?

The costume was a crucial element of the film, because it really had to correspond to the story we wanted to tell. Even if in the film, the producer says, «Our superhero's name is Badman, and he's nothing like Batman, because he doesn't have a cape», we still tested out a lot of different concepts and a lot more colorful options, to be different from Batman. But when we thought it through, if we wanted Cedric to be able to believe he was a masked vigilante, we needed the costume to be as realistic as possible, like a more futuristic version of SWAT team armor. And when we did our research, we discovered the work of Loïc Michel and his team of geniuses. They live in the French city of Valence and make custom replicas of superhero suits for conventions and publicity events. When we contacted them and told them about our project, they were wild with joy - incredibly enthusiastic. We worked hand-in-hand with them to make a lot of different sketches of the torso, shoulder pads, gloves and hood, which we defined and validated bit by bit to get to the definitive version of the costume's design. After that, we started making the different elements of the suit, and I have to admit, putting on the complete costume for the first time was a fabulous feeling. It was a kid's dream come true. During the screentests, I couldn't help feeling like a superhero! That's the effect the costume had on me. I believed it, even though it's a little ridiculous and Badman is only a parody of a hero vigilante! It was also the fulfillment of a dream for Loïc and his team, because it was their first experience working on a film.

You created a Badmobile for the film, too.

Yes! It was so cool that we all wanted to go driving around in it, but that was impossible because it didn't meet standards for a street vehicle!

During preproduction, what kind of physical training did you impose upon yourself?

Physical therapy! A few weeks before the shoot began, I tore a calf muscle while playing football with some friends and had to walk on crutches. We reorganized everything to schedule all the scenes where you see me walking or running for the end of the shoot. Regular sessions with a physical therapist helped to speed up the healing process. As for physical training, I work out regularly to stay in shape. Plus, since I was going to have fake muscles under my costume, all I had to do was use some self-tanning cream, oil up my skin and get the right kind of lighting to give the impression that I have a lot of muscles in those shots where you see me shirtless, lifting weights. We cheat a little!

The film score was composed by Maxime Desprez and Michael Tordjman. You've worked with them for a long time now.

We've been working together since *Babysitting*. They've been on every one of our films and I'm very proud to see that after starting out with us, their careers have really taken off. They have a lot of talent and they work hard. When we started thinking about the world of superheroes, we tried to find atmospheric elements and musical themes that reminded us of the film scores of Marvel and DC productions, but didn't require a real orchestra, because we didn't have the budget for that. I added some musical references to the footage when we did the edit, so they'd have an idea of the mood I wanted to give different scenes. And of course, when we alluded to the Avengers, they did too, musically.
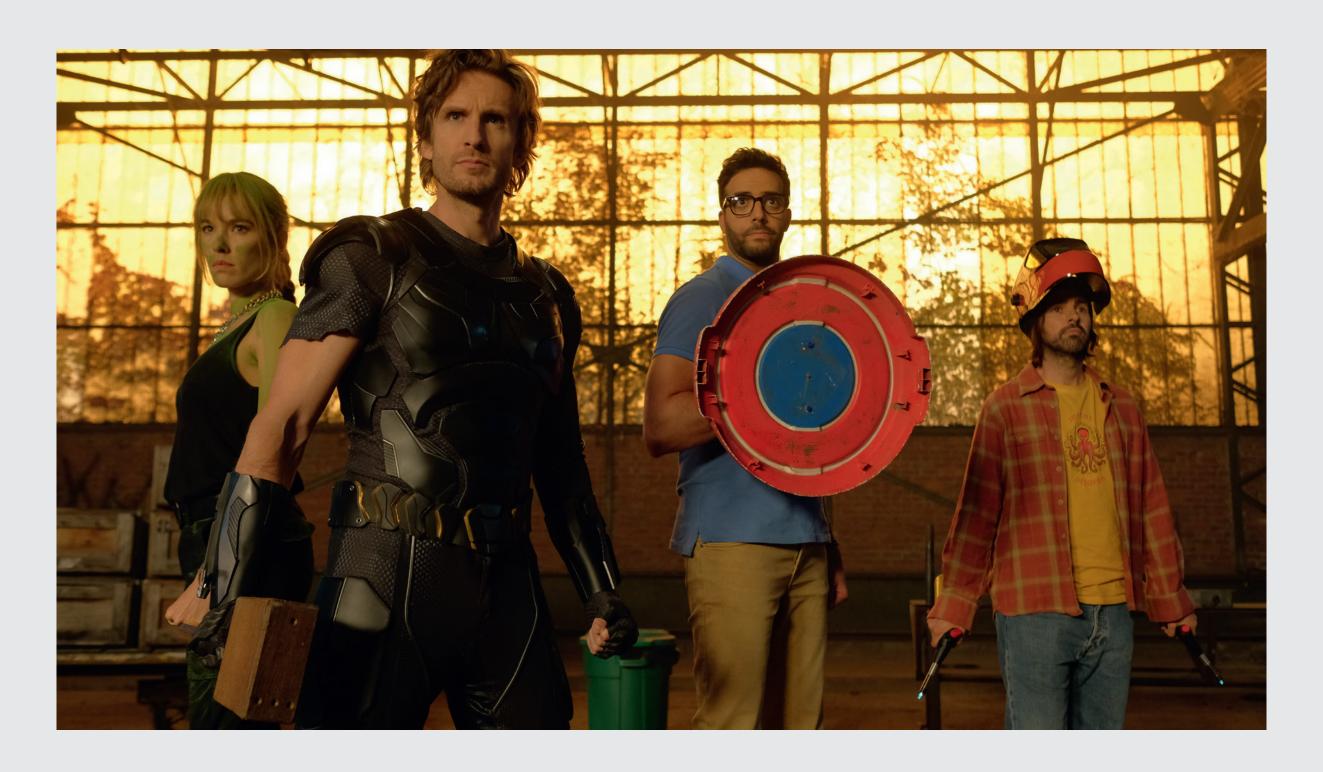
They pulled it off with flying colors, because you really can't tell the whole thing is digitally sourced and played on a keyboard.

Yes, they did a wonderful job. And since there are emotional scenes as well as action and comedy, they were able to use a very broad creative palette.

Last question: how would you like superhero fans to react when they see your comedy?

Taking on the world of superheroes was new and exciting for us. Judging from the reactions of those who've seen it so far, they like the comedy and the way the action builds, and I think the last third of the movie works quite well.

There's an effect similar to the movie *Kick-Ass*, in the way Cedric's character ends up becoming a hero in real life, by fulfilling his dream. I hope comic book fans will laugh as much as we do when they discover this young man who thinks he's a superhero and see how we've brought his misadventures to life.

Cast

Cédric «Badman»	**Philippe LACHEAU**
Seb	**Julien ARRUTI**
Adam	**Tarek BOUDALI**
Éléonore	**Élodie FONTAN**
Laure	**Alice DUFOUR**
Michel Dugimont	**Jean-Hugues ANGLADE**
Le Schyzo	**Amr WAKED**
José	**Paco BOISSON**
Jimmy	**Brahim BOUHLEL**
Alain Belmont «The Clown»	**Georges CORRAFACE**
The Producer	**Chantal LADESOU**
The Director	**Tony SAINT-LAURENT**
Cindy	**Salomé PARTOUCHE**
Monique	**Dédeine VOLK-LEONOVITCH**
Jean-Pierre	**Régis LASPALÈS**

CREW

Producers	**David GAUQUIÉ and Julien DERIS / CINÉFRANCE**
	Philippe LACHEAU / BAF PROD
Screenwriters	**Philippe LACHEAU, Pierre DUDAN, Pierre LACHEAU, Julien ARRUTI**
Director	**Philippe LACHEAU**
Technical Advisor	**Vincent RICHARD**
1er Assistant Director	**Amin HARFOUCH**
2nd Assistant Director	**Anna PAZEN**
Script	**Isabelle QUERRIOUX**
Casting Director	**Meriem AMARI**
Stunt Coordinator	**Christophe MARSAUD**
Stunt Supervisor	**Marc DAVID**
Fight Choreographer	**Gary COTHENET**
Live Special Effects Supervisor	**Jean-Christophe MAGNAUD**
Director of Photography'	**Vincent RICHARD «MARQUIS»**
Set Photographer	**Julien PANIÉ**
Sound Engineer	**Arnaud LAVALEIX**
Costume Designer	**Claire LACAZE**
Key Makeup Artist	**Magali CEYRAT-PLASSON**
Key Hair Stylist	**Gérald PORTENART**
Production Designer	**Samuel TEISSEIRE**
Post-production Supervisor	**Luc-Antoine ROBERT**
Editor	**Antoine VAREILLE**
Supervising Sound Editor	**Frédéric LE LOUÊT**
Sound MixerJ	**Julien PEREZ**
Colorist	**Réginald GALLIENNE**