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OSS 117: CAIRO NEST OF SPIES

A film by Michel Hazanavicius

With Jean Dujardin, Bérénice Béjo, Aure Atika and Philippe Lefèbre

Written by Jean-François Halin based on the “OSS 117” novels by
Jean Bruce

Adaptation and dialogues by Jean-François Halin and Michel Hazanavicius

A film produced by Eric and Nicolas Altmayer

Running time 1h39
Not rated

Please download high res photos from <http://www.musicboxfilms.com/oss117>

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SYNOPSIS

Egypt, 1955. Cairo is a real nest of spies. Everyone is suspicious of everyone else. Everyone is plotting against everyone else: the British, the French, the Soviets, the family of the deposed King Farouk, who want to reclaim his thrown, the Eagles of Kheops, a religious sect that wants to seize power...

The President of the French Republic, Monsieur René Coty, sends his best weapon to put some order into this turmoil teetering on the verge of chaos: Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath, otherwise known as OSS 117.

NOTES ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

An entire era seen from today.

Nicolas Altmayer, who produced the film along with his brother Eric, remembers: “It all started with the discovery of a few old OSS 117 novels in our parents’ library. The covers with stylized and very colorful drawings, the slightly old-fashioned action scenes and that fifties style awakened a multitude of memories in me. In addition to those images, there were also the movies that were made at the time. Those B series are more than forty years old, and although they are out of style, they also have a charm and humor they didn’t have at the time. To us, it seemed like that it would be enough to divert them slightly, to push them towards comedy so as to obtain something interesting. On top of this desire, there was also nostalgia for Technicolor, the first James Bonds movies, and Hitchcock’s films. From the onset, our idea was to divert, to play with the era’s codes and lean towards comedy.”

Preparing the Mission

Nicolas Altmayer relates: “First of all, we contacted Martine Bruce, the novelist’s daughter. We promised her the film’s humor would be closer to Philippe de Broca’s *Magnifique* than to *Austin Powers*. The idea being to mix the atmosphere of film classics from the period with the humor of the magazine “Pilote”-- Gotlib, Goscinny... We compiled numerous influences, but wanted to make a very contemporary movie in terms of content. Once the rights secured, we spoke about the project with Jean-François Halin. We had immensely appreciated the off kilter humor of his writing in *Quasimodo Del Paris*. Beginning with our first meeting about this project, we were convinced we had the same vision, the same desire to play around with the geopolitics of the era, to make a movie that would be both funny and elegant.”

Jean-François Halin adds: “Our idea was to divert the codes of Jean Bruce’s books by pushing all the principles to their logical outcome. The set? In the midst of a Cold War atmosphere, an exotic city where paranoia reigns amongst spies from all walks of life. The novels contain everything that France was in the 50s -- the fourth Republic, the end of the colonial empire, a rather macho, rather misogynist relationship to women, but also a certain kind of condescension towards colonized people. These components are most certainly not illustrative of Jean Bruce’s personality, but constitute the expression of an era. I think Jean Bruce would have had the necessary distance to laugh about this film. It would have been unthinkable to bring his work back to life and respect the initial face value – our world has changed too much! So I reworked and accentuated everything to show that much of what makes up today’s society also stems from that period.”

The scriptwriter continues: “I wanted to write a movie which, through its ambiance and story telling style, could have been released in 1958.”

Nicolas Altmayer pursues: “We still had to find a director. Jean-François Halin introduced us to Michel Hazanavicius. We did not know him well, but the conjunction of three elements convinced us: his commercial demo reel was extremely brilliant and illustrated in a terrific way his sense of timing, of comedy and of casting. His movie *Le Grand Détournement* was the

second element. He used exactly the same kind of humor we were after, very referential to the type of cinema we wanted to divert—the key word! The third factor was the way in which he spoke to us about the movie, which demonstrated that we were perfectly in synch.

Jean-François Halin intervenes: “Michel was the director I was dreaming of for this movie. Based on the framework I proposed, he constructed the movie’s physical reality with real coherence. Together or separately, we added a lot of things.”

Michel Hazanavicius explains: “This movie was nourished by the different personalities that worked on it. I did not want to lean towards parody, but wanted to respect the style’s integrity. I like the idea of establishing rules of the game and sticking to them. The more we were going to reference the images of the time, the technical means of the period in terms of machinery, lenses, film stock, lights, the classier the object we would obtain would be, a specific frame within which it would be all the more easy to slip in funny elements.”

Jean-François Halin resumes: “The intrigue had to be suspenseful without being omnipresent. We had to find the right balance between the characters’ development, the comedy and the story’s progression. My goal was also to allow several levels of interpretation. You can see *OSS 117* as a spy film, a period film, an action comedy, a comedy of dialogues, the whole thing bearing an off kilter and slightly ironic gaze on that period. With no pretension, I thought it would be interesting to tackle some very contemporary issues with a lighthearted angle. The idea being not to laugh about someone, but with everyone. We all wanted to make a film that would be fresh, a real big screen film that would entertain you and take you to an Egypt worthy of “Tintin” or “Blake and Mortimer.”

Laugh and Let Die

Jean-François Halin explains: “The character is dealt with at face value. He is skilled in many things, but has no intuition. Even though he is completely misogynistic, thankfully for him, women are there to help him think! He remains convinced that he is the only captain on board and that they all dream of sleeping with him...”

Michel Hazanavicius intervenes: “Our OSS 117 is anchored in his era, he is misogynistic, colonialist, homophobic...he’s a synthesis of sorts! Everything that’s not French, white, male and of his age, is inferior to him. Obviously, the whole discourse of the film, if indeed there is one, is to laugh at all of it!”

The director continues: “We took this character and we played with the shift between what he was in the fifties and how he may be looked upon in 2006, whether in terms of cinema or in terms of discourse. Some scenes are not too distant from what could have been done at the time, but their reading today is different. Fifty years have gone by and society has evolved! It wasn’t about denying what France was in the fifties. To make *OSS 117* today and completely obscure this aspect would have been refusing the obstacle. Not a single of the horrors he may hurl remains unpunished—either by a judging gaze, or by a reply, an action...and that is rather amusing!”

The director adds: “In terms of content, I had two pitfalls: the character’s politically incorrect side and the fact that a comedy character kills, yet has to remain appealing. It’s a bit of a transgression. My answer was to dispense a form of naivety throughout the entire film -- a period innocence --, which enables us to say to ourselves that nothing is serious. Not a drop of blood spills—even when someone takes a bullet in the leg!

OSS 117 is everything excepts mean. His complete good faith gives him a childlike side. This clears him, but Larmino and Slimane play an absolutely essential role in our understanding of the character. They are the guarantors of the film’s positioning. They help us see that the film is making fun of the character and that it must certainly not be taken at face value.

Code Name: Jean Dujardin

Nicolas Altmayer says: “We committed to the project with complete recklessness because we did not have the main actor. At the time, Jean Dujardin had just finished *Convoyeur* and had not yet shot *Mariages*. We knew of him in particular through our children who loved his *Brice* character. When we found out that Jean was tempted with the idea of transposing this character to cinema, we called him immediately! The following morning, we met him and we knew—without even speaking to him about it—that we had found OSS 117! Even if he didn’t have the popularity he now has, we were convinced he was perfect. We called Jean-François Halin to tell him, even though Jean was not even in the know!”

The scriptwriter remembers: “While I was writing, I did not know who would portray OSS. Our only wish was for him to be funny and handsome, with a Sean Connery like appearance! All of a sudden, I started writing for him.”

Nicolas Altmayer continues: “A few months later, in the middle of the preparations for *The Brice Man*, we gave the script to Jean. He was really taken. He loved the humor, the subject’s originality and the visual challenge.”

Michel Hazanavicius says: “He and I both felt immediately that we were going to really enjoy ourselves. I became quickly aware of his acting capacity. We worked in complete mutual confidence. I loved seeing him going to the combo between takes, seeing his eye sparkle. He is in every scene, except one! He was always on the shoot with the entire crew, never grumbled, always even tempered. And yet, he had warned us at the beginning that there would probably be a day when he would be really unpleasant, annoyed for nothing, disingenuous, not nice. ‘I always have my pissy mood day, ‘ he had warned. So in the end, everyone was expecting it, but that day never came. He’s a fabulous actor, precise, charismatic. He fills the frame, his presence structures the image and he works on all aspects of his acting. Everyone’s work makes the most of his and he makes the most of everyone else’s. He has an acting palette few actors possess. In addition, he is one of the few actors in France in the slightly deserted niche of the handsome, manly guy.

He is one of the few who can embody heroes. Given the film’s genre, the diversion it implies, Jean had enough credibility to play at face value this hero who rushes forward.

The director specifies: “In his phrasing, I wanted to find the dubbing voices of the time, very enunciated. Jean loved it and had a ball. This phrasing imposed itself on all of us, to such an extent that we kept it until the mixing! The grip, the director of photography, everyone spoke like that. We would speak to each other “in OSS”! We were completely impregnated. The two actors who appear the most in the film, Jean and Bérénice, had already done so much preparation work that they completely mastered this style. They could integrate all the changes on the go, without losing anything.”

Spies Are Forever

Michel Hazanavicius explains: “I worked on the fantasy which this OSS 117 character had become. It’s a ‘period film,’ made with today’s means so as to correspond to the expectations of a contemporary audience. I referred to very emblematic movies from the sixties, Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the latter of which took place, like ours, in North Africa. I also watched *Dr. No* again, the first in the James Bond series. If I had to reference *OSS 117* in time, I would say it’s a story that takes place in 1955 and is told in 1962. This latitude enabled me to have both a fifties style and the sixties’ sexier side. I analyzed the focal length, the script breakdown and the machinery really well. The director of photography, Guillaume Schiffman, studied the lighting, searched for old projectors from the era, selected film stock with the same sensitivity as the ones used at the time. We shot practically everything in 200 ASA. Hitchcock had filmed practically all of *Vertigo* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* with a 40 mm lens, and that’s the one we used as a reference point. From time to time, we had to go

down to 32 mm, go up to 50 mm, or add a few shots of 60 mm zoom to get the right depth of field and a good relationship between the foreground and the background. This implied big sets. We had to be able to remove walls. I had a good time doing it. If you watch the film closely, you will notice that there are a lot of reverse angle shots. For instance, a character is leaning against a wall and his silhouette is nonetheless very well outlined in the reverse shot. The camera was hence two meters behind the wall, a process Hitchcock used a lot. It's the freedom of saying to ourselves "we are at the movies," and not in some kind of realism like in today's cinema which goes looking for short lenses and plays with the smallness of the sets. The camera is "in" the wall, and that poses no problem! Likewise, I really had fun using day for night shots and green screen for car shots. The image in and of itself is funny and gives some kind of narrative identity, it's a cinema delight."

The director continues: "To spoof the era's action scenes, like the fight in the hotel, was a complicated, but obligatory, path to take. The genre demands it, it's impossible to avoid! All the movie's stakes rested on appearing to come from that era, while having today's rhythm. Stories are told much faster nowadays! I worked a lot on the entrances and exits in and out of the frame, even though I had to sacrifice a few during the edit because of rhythm issues. We had to keep the codes without losing sight of the fact that we were there to create laughter. Formalism should never be detrimental to the comedy's tempo.

The chase with the man in a djellaba is a direct homage to *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. We added a few things that are maybe only noticeable after a few screenings. For instance, Jean never crosses an intersection without looking left and right although he saw very clearly in which direction the guy escaped. The film is filled with this kind of detail! We tried to strike a balance between the story and the hardcore comedy situation.

Casting Operation

Michel Hazanavicius comments: "To perform Larmina's role, beyond her acting talent and beauty, the selected person had to be knowledgeable about these types of films, have that kind of music in her ear, the required body language. That's not obvious for a twenty, twenty-five year old actress. And Bérénice arrived! And all of a sudden I saw a good actress who understood the script, understood the lines, and mastered this knowledge, all the while having a sense of derision. In addition, she had a rather unexpected side for the role. It brings to mind this aspect I liked in the first *OSS 117*, in which Mylène Demongeot, as blonde as can be, plays the role of an Egyptian without it bothering anyone! Bérénice is rather credible as an Egyptian. She worked with a coach to find the acting style of the era, but without laying it on thick. We had to strike a balance to build a character that would last over time."

Nicolas Altmayer continues: "It was Michel and his casting director, Stéphane Touitou, who suggested Aure Atika for the role of the princess, and it was an excellent idea. She was immediately taken by the idea of portraying a femme fatale."

The director specifies: "Aure embodies the stereotype of the oriental femme fatale. She desires the one she wants to kill. She is all passion. Aure performed the role all the way, letting her character exist with all of its excesses. It's a great acting performance."

Michel Hazanavicius continues: "For the part of Jack, I thought of Philippe Lefèbvre whom I already knew. The project interested him, he has a hero's physique."

The director adds: "For the rest of the casting, we wanted to keep the "exotic" aspect which a lot of sixties actors had, "actors with accents." So we chose a German for the part of the German, a Russian for the part of the Russian, and Arabs to perform the parts of Arabs. Each person had his part to play. When they arrive with their accent, this reinforces the film's richness further!"

The Shoot

Nicolas Altmayer confides: “For us producers, this film seemed very complicated to make because it required both this Technicolor treatment of the image, which is very specific, and a reconstitution of the fifties, especially the Cairo of the era. Our ally was the relatively long preparation time we had with the director of production, Daniel Chevalier, who spent more than a year with us. This enabled us to find the best solutions for a shoot that took place partly in Morocco and in France. For each department head there were very exciting challenges that had to be met. For the costume designer, Charlotte David, fifties films are practically never made any more. For the production designer, Maamar Ech-Cheïkh, having to conceive some kind of fake chic in homage to the films of the era was very amusing. The director of photography, Guillaume Schiffman, dreamed of confronting such a challenge. All of this was also possible thanks to Michel’s personality which creates a great atmosphere around him, and to a star who arrives every morning feeling great, smiling and happy.

Michel Hazanavicius says: “I had the advantage of having made quite a lot of commercials and of knowing those with whom I worked. Thanks to this bond, automatisms are created that help us work more quickly. The difficult thing was coordinating the two preparations which were taking place at the same time, one in Paris, the other in Morocco.”

The director continues: “I’m not crazy about rehearsals with actors. I like that we speak to one another, that we communicate, that we do readings, but only so that everyone will be more or less on the same page. My way of working with actors is not to do their work. I explain the framing, the range of acting, the text, but not much in terms of psychology. Afterwards, I try to help them with what I can vouch for, the image in other words. I am open to anything and they all have the right to improvise. There weren’t many instances of it though, because everything was really spelled out. On the other hand, there were some changes made to the text prior, sometime even the day before. With Jean, we established very quickly a game that really amused us, and consisted in finding the most old fashioned words to portray the character—“hullabaloo,” “gobbledygook,” --expressions no one uses any more “I like fighting,” “I like panoramas”—came on the set, not really through improvisations, but by furthering the work.”

“The shoot lasted fifty nine days, including four weeks in Morocco for the exterior shots that were filmed on location. Practically everything was reconstituted in the studio, except for an office and the embassy’s mambo room that were shot on location in France. The Nazis’ secret headquarter is a fake studio. It was built in a converted quarry. The hotel lobby was a real headache. We more or less found it at the last minute. In fact, it’s not a hotel at all, but the lobby of an old university. At first, it only had the floor, the frame and the columns. Thanks to the huge amount of work accomplished by the production designer, Maamar Ech-Cheïkh, and his team, it became a superb luxury hotel lobby.” Michel Hazanavicius remembers: “The film benefited from the excellent atmosphere that reigned within the team. For my part, I hate working in conflict situations. Everyone was in the mood to please themselves, to have fun. The producers, encouraged by the rushes, always supported us. We really felt like lucky kids whose pranks were covered up by their parents! No one wanted to make tasteless mistakes. Everyone knew that his or her work would be enhanced. I will never forget what we experienced, the bursts of laughter, the work, and everyone’s efforts. I remember once at lunch, after having tried to shoot the long tracking shot of Jean walking through the hotel lobby, we all went to get lunch without being really satisfied because the image jumped a little. Without saying a word, the head grip, Laurent Menoury, took advantage of his lunch break to redo the tracking shot and reset on his own the twenty-five meters of rails in a more stable manner. When we got back, he just asked us to do an additional take. It was impeccable, and that’s the one we kept! I could also mention the wardrobe mistresses’ all-nighters, or the party the Moroccans organized for us when we were leaving...”

Nicolas Altmayer concludes: “I am delighted every time I see the film, it corresponds exactly to what we had dreamed of. I like the way the audience is progressively drawn into this unusual

movie, made from an homage to a magnificent cinematographic universe, and ends up discovering a particularly modern comedy. It's a juicy combination that grabs hold of the audience and turns it into its accomplice! People from our generation will be able to appreciate the hidden meanings, and Jean Dujardin's fans will be bluffed by his new character!"

OSS 117 as seen by actor Jean Dujardin

"There are two roles an actor dreams of performing: a cowboy and a secret agent! I was offered *OSS 117* long before shooting *The Brice Man*. The cult of the hero is so rare in France that encountering one is a real opportunity! In addition, there was a real fineness in the writing and a desire to spoof without parodying. As an actor, it was the opportunity to create one of these personas I adore. Ten months in a suit, with jet black hair, working on this manner of speech to find the slightly sing-songy musicality French dubbing had at the time, the body language, the look, the stride – it was pure pleasure!

For me as for many others, OSS 177 was a sub James Bond, although he was created four years before. I had seen the movies made at the time but had no particular recollection of them. We worked on the character, pushing it towards Sean Connery without veering towards parody. We needed a French James Bond. He's a good foot soldier, serving René Coty's Republic. I performed him at face value, very sincere. The slightest complacency would have removed all credibility. That's how we can forgive his relationship to Muslim culture, to women, and even his killing function. This naivety creates the character. For him, the Third World lies beyond the Loire River! I built the character little by little, by speaking a lot with Michel Hazanavicius. We're both introverts, but we clicked really quickly. After a few digs at one another, we found out we had the same kind of humor! We had a lot of fun. We made suggestions during the readings, first the two of us, then with the whole team. The preparation lasted two months. I read and reread the script, had fun twisting the text, changing some words, up to the point of digesting it, appropriating it with the help of that extremely articulate diction that's so typical for movies of the time. The timbre is slightly deeper than mine; the way of enunciating syllables is typical. It's the phrasing of a dubber. Once this foundation was mastered, I could work on emotions.

Thanks to my father who was a great film lover, I saw a lot of Hitchcock movies when I was young. The link with that universe was already established with the reading of the script. To say sentences like "It's always an enchantment to see you" is to borrow Sean Connery's educated side, his British allure and elegance, with very French tidy-whities on underneath! I like this mixture. There are also words that snap, like "alpaca," which I added to the sentence "Well done, this will be an opportunity to wear my alpaca tuxedo." From film to film, and now on stage, I try to be a better student each time, to articulate a little more, to place my effects in a better way and to be clearer, simply put. With a text like Jean-François Halin's, there's no missing an effect, skipping a comma. It's a godsend every day.

OSS 117 always had to remain impeccable, with a lot of allure. He had to be a "brilliant asshole"! He is extremely gifted for many things, he can decipher hieroglyphs, sing in Arabic, but he is a little weak in terms of deductions!

The hardest thing was to keep a certain rigor, to maintain the balance, to always be on the brink without slipping into parody. If I overdid it, or didn't do enough, we risked missing out on certain effects.

With Michel, we were constantly doing the necessary adjustments to help him choose from stockpiles of images and colors, with a "more" take and a "less" take and an "in between" take. He could then dose the mixture. With those nice lines, those wonderful sets, those splendid costumes, and those incredible lights, it was all pleasure. I think this joy of acting impregnates the film stock! And the audience feels it.

To prepare the underwater scenes, I went to the Conflans-Sainte-Honorine swimming pool to get my diving certificate. I went through all the stages—five meters, ten meters, removing the mask under water, removing and putting the regulator back...to feel comfortable. On the shoot, I did have a ten-kilogram weight on my feet and my hands were tied! When you're in this kind of situation, you think real hard, real fast. But no reason to panic. I knew people were there in case of need. Performing the role of a guy who is supposed to stay underwater for fifteen minutes, adjusting his tie and asking himself a lot of question is really funny.

Singing “Bambino” in Arabic also amused me a lot. I took five or six phonetic courses with a coach. He sang the song to me, I would repeat it by ear, I played the tape in a loop until I memorized the text. I will never be able to forget it for as long as I live! It creates something really surrealistic. Three days of singing and dancing. I never danced, sang or sweated so much! A great moment of improvisations in terms of facial expressions! I'm a real taker for these kinds of scenes; it's just as fun to make them as to watch them.

In the same vein, I also have a weakness for the Errol Flynn laughter on the beach. I saw this sequence in the rushes and it immediately transported me to the fifties. Maybe because of the mustache, the film stock, the light. It surprised me. We decided to keep the laughter, both idiotic and communicative, which illustrates the character really well.

As a lover of bursts of laughter, I had many opportunities to indulge! They would often come about at the end of exchanges. Michel would not cut the camera and I like it when directors leave tails at the end of a scene. Then, I can really let go. My expectations are added to the crew's because I never know what I am going to throw out there. There is a lull, the pressure mounts and then laughter descends! We added a lot of little things, like when he leaves the Turkish bath, OSS pulls up his boxer shorts...Sean Connery would never do that! Michel and I would suggest this kind of improv. I was a taker, as was the rest of the team. Michel knows how to capture that. Protected by my character, I was afraid of nothing. As Michel Serrault once said “comedy is self derision.” Our responsibility as an actor consists in taking the audience for a ride, showing that it is possible to be different. Before beginning this line of work, I wanted to work in cafés with live theater, and I would tell my friends, full of pretense, that I would be the first French James Bond! They are going to have a good laugh when they see the result!

Michel worked a lot on the casting. He found real types for each part. A real German, a real Russian, with their accents and mugs to suit their purpose! Even the smaller parts were cared for. Look at the guy in the Turkish bath who is more than two meters tall, he's incredible!

We started the shoot with the first encounter at the chicken factory. We were right in the heart of the movie. There was the initial interaction with an Arab employee, Bérénice's aghast look towards the condescending OSS I was beginning to lay down, the lights, the set -- the entire film is there.

Bérénice Béjo was always right on because she had the necessary distance. We really performed together.

Everyone felt like they were taking part in something that was very new. Every time we discovered the rushes, those superb images, we came out even more motivated, even more convinced that indeed, the face value had to be respected without slipping into debauchery. This film doesn't tout, it doesn't assault the audience, it simply suggests that the audience take part in the game with moments of pure craziness—the chicken fight, the pyramid scene, which blend perfectly into the story. When I discovered the finished film, I was struck by the atmosphere, the work accomplished by the whole team. I forgot my performance and I was at the movies! I wasn't looking at myself, I was watching the others' work. And it shows! All of a sudden, I had

the feeling I belonged to a film classic. What I love in cinema is teamwork. I hope to get a chance to work with this one again.

If *Brice* is my son, *OSS 117* is my adoptive son. I never could have written it, but I understood so much, felt so much, that I completely involved myself in it. My relationship with the producers was excellent and they know me. They know that I am a sponge, that I love to embody, to observe, to perform. They go in my direction. When I began *OSS 117*, I was very afraid of not being able to withhold it over time. I am very anxious. During a shoot, I even have a hard time reading another script because my script is my bedside reading! I work on it all the time.

On the set, with the team, a few typical phrases were repeated all the time, establishing a real cohesion. "There is no point," said with the tone of the time and a raised eyebrow worked particularly well. Trying out one of the character's lines in real life also helps to test it. Being able to recite the yellow pages with the character's voice proves that you command it.

The last scene we shot was the one that takes place under water. I had headphones and I could more or less hear what Michel was telling me from the surface. At the end of a take, when I was asking with gestures if we had to redo it, I saw a big thing fall into the water and come down towards me. It was Michel! We had just finished the shoot and he dived in to kiss me! That instant resembles what the film was, an excellent time, both in front and behind the camera, and we are all impatient to share it with the public."

Larmina as seen by actress Bérénice Béjo

"At first, my agent thought this comedy was not for me. I hesitated...and yet, as I discovered the script, I immediately adored the tone, the situations and the story. It was obviously an atypical film, the likes of which we had not seen in a long time. For the tryouts, I had three scenes to prepare, each one with a lot of lines. Every day for a week, I did nothing but work. I was nervous. I arrived at the casting with my makeup and hair done by a friend, with an enormous desire to get the part. At the time, I thought at first Michel was not watching my performance too much. There I was, in a commonplace office, between the printer and the chair, it was quite surreal. I later learned that Michel was in fact carefully listening to my voice and tempo. I was overjoyed when I found out, a few days later, that I was selected!

My character, Larmina, is a well-educated Egyptian with personality but who, at the same time, never forgets her condition in relation to men. She's a hitchcockian heroine. Intellectually, she is almost ahead of her time, without daring to transgress customs. No matter what the hero thinks of it, she is often the brains, whereas as he is only an arm. Michel would repeatedly tell me I was a bit like the film's "whitefaced clown." Theoretically, Larmina is only a foil, but in reality, she leads the game!

Charlotte David, the costume designer, did an incredible job. With Michel, they did research by watching films from the era and in fact, I have the slightly Japanese outfit of one of the James Bond girls in *From Russia with Love*. I would go to fittings every day and could stay there for two hours like a statue on which clothes were being assembled. Everything custom made, very meticulously thought out and selected. There were several tryouts for my hair cut, and little by little, via little touches, I transformed myself. After one hour of preparation, I was Larmina. This concrete manner of becoming the character also helped me place myself in the context of the time, especially with regards to male/female relationships. Everything was much more codified. The first scene we worked on with Jean was the mambo one. That helped us get along! I immediately knew we would work well together. We mutually allowed the other into our place, with no anguish and no feelings of competition. Each gave what he or she had to give. During

the shoot, I felt Jean was holding me up. And Michel's gaze as well. Jean's character is a good caricature, he thinks he's it, funny, intelligent whereas he is neither knowledgeable, nor elegant with girls. However, by dint of stupidities, he becomes endearing. In reality, he's a kid and Michel asked me to adopt a kind of maternal attitude towards him. In real life, I could never fall in love with that kind of guy!

We did a lot of readings to get the very particular phrasing Michel wanted. Jean found it very quickly and I went in his direction. He added lengths, accentuated certain words, everything was very enunciated. As I have the tendency to speak very quickly, I had to really take the time to say things. After a while, I had so much command of this phrasing that I could apply it immediately to the slightest change in text. It follows us today in our conversations. I think the audience can adopt it as well, it's at once exotic and funny!

We laughed a lot. The text, the situations, the spoof, everything was torture. Difficult to contain oneself in front of Jean, especially when he is doing crazy things with the utmost seriousness. Without really improvising, he suggests slight changes, astonishing facial expressions, and that always adds to things. He has complete control over his voice and body, and makes use of everything to create his character. There was so much sympathy between us, that in order to despise him as my role sometimes demanded, I had to squeeze my toes to avoid laughing! But that didn't work all the time and we had to redo some scenes a few times... I think the record was thirty times! The good mood that emanates from Jean spread to the whole team. *The Brice Man* is only one aspect of what he can do. *OSS 117* will show that he can go much further, all the way to drama probably. Michel knew he could trust us and we certainly obliged, even when he asked us to be ridiculous. It was daring! Jean has that courage, so I would also dare, which is more difficult for a woman! Michel has a real intelligence, a real vigor, he knows cinema and he likes actors. In this nurturing atmosphere, everyone did his or her work in a way that was both rigorous and harmonious, which really comes across in the film. My first encounter with Aure Atika happened for the fighting scene on the bridge. We rehearsed for five days, and we are proud of the fact that we had no stand-ins—and that we didn't hurt ourselves! She's a really generous girl. We had a lot of fun revisiting the clichés that are girl-fighting scenes. A real joy!

I like the film's specific combination. Beyond the acting, I like certain scenes like the one when OSS arrives, all decked out, finds a pretty girl asleep on his bed and instead of taking advantage of her as any good secret agent would, moves her to the couch so he can sleep peacefully. That irony symbolizes the entire movie. I have a fondness for the mambo scene. Dancing in such a dress, with such a man is so rare! The scene that was the most difficult to wrap was the one when Jean leaves the bar after singing Bambino. He's supposed to tell me about the chicken thrower, the killer with the knife, and it was too much... Impossible to control the bursts of laughter! We had to start over and each time it was worse. The entire crew was keeled over laughing. We even had to give up and move on to another scene before going back to it!

I would often think of how lucky I was being there. Everything was beautiful, everything was there to create a real spectacle and enable us to be "singular." I felt like one of those icons -- Kim Novak, Audrey Hepburn -- I always dreamed of. While dispensing pleasure and laughter, this movie has a lot of style, and this no longer exists on such a level in French comedy."

Princess Al Tarouk as seen by actress Aure Atika

"It was my meeting with Michel Hazanavicius that really made me want to do the film. Before talking with him, I saw *OSS 117* as a slightly old fashioned French B series, but his presentation of the project really enthused me. The spoof side, the costumes, both an homage and a comedy, between exotic surroundings and hidden meanings, was really tempting.

I play the part of a vengeful princess, a femme fatale who dreams of eliminating OSS 117, but who has also fallen completely under his spell. Before killing him, she would really like to

seduce him. It's a comic book character, with jewels and incredible outfits, impossible hairdos and definitive lines!

The preparation for the movie was an initial pleasure. At the time, I still had no idea about the richness of the film's visual universe. I started with makeup tryouts, it was rather emphasized as it was at the time, then we figured out my hairdos. My hair was never teased, brushed and curled as much as it was in order to get that volume! When I discovered myself in the mirror, I was astounded, but I must admit that I got used to it very quickly! The wardrobe tryouts were a real challenge because everything was custom made and we had to stand still for hours at a time. Thankfully the team was fabulous! One of my character's characteristics also rested on a rather emphatic, almost theatrical enunciation, a phrasing I worked on by drawing on old OSS films. I have some knowledge of Arabic, but I don't speak it. So I went to the Institut du Monde Arabe to learn my lines phonetically with a professor. When you have to act in a language you don't master, you lack confidence at first, but with rehearsals, the sonority and the intention unite and it all comes together!

I also worked on postures, on body language. I had to incorporate all of my character's codes. The hip sway, the way of holding a gun, everything is specific! It's rather fun to perform.

When I arrived on the set, in costume, I really became aware of what the movie was going to be like visually. It's a trip, a total change of scenery. Dressed and lit in this way, facing Jean, I felt different. This contributed to the character's development. At the beginning I didn't know how far to go in terms of performance. I performed in a natural, sincere way in order to keep the spoof side without ever sliding all the way to parody. Michel knew how to push me, take me further and Jean accompanied me in the performance. To perform this femme fatale, to go all the way into this universe was lots of fun. I played the part, accepted the character's physical and sensual side. Performing with hidden meanings, pronouncing certain sentences like "Take me, jackal!" while facing Jean remains a rather jubilant experience. During the camera tryouts, we laughed a lot, but I was concentrated and I tried to hold out on the set! *OSS 117* reexamines a lot of typical situations found in those kinds of film by joyfully spoofing them.

Although my character returns regularly throughout the story, I did not have many shooting days. I regret this a little because the atmosphere was excellent. The fact that the movie required a complex amount of work did not prevent the team from having fun. I think that that state of mind was owed to the film itself, and to the state of mind Michel and Jean brought to the set. Everyone was really happy to be there. Michel was always very comfortable, always had a wisecrack, but was also, as Jean was, very focused. Jean is a worker, very precise, very thorough, which brought different things to each take. I am really happy to have been part of this adventure!"

Text and interviews: Pascale and Gilles Legardinier

HISTORICAL NOTES

OSS 117

OSS 117 was born in 1949, penned by Jean Bruce.

Four years before the first James Bond novel was published, this author invented an American spy of French descent employed by the Office of Strategic Services –OSS, the CIA's predecessor—under the number 117. The agent scours the world, from impossible missions to pretty girls. The tone is brisk; the novels mingle exoticism, action and spying. Success will come quickly and will not be belied: 265 adventure novels translated into 17 languages, 75 million sold copies, plays, comic books and eight movies make up the OSS 117 legend.

Almost six decades later, the manly and seductive hero, ready to confront all kinds of danger, remains one of the first publishing phenomena and a cultural icon of the sixties.

René Coty

René Coty was born in Le Havre in 1882. A lawyer by training, he enters politics and becomes a deputy at 41...

In 1947, he becomes Minister of Reconstruction. He is known for his modesty and his managerial sense, as well as for his height—1, 87m—, which stands out compared to the norm. On December 23, 1953, at 71, he is elected after thirteen rounds to succeed Vincent Auriol as President of the Republic. During the first weeks of his term, he must already confront major crisis. On May 8, 1945, the fall of Dien Bien Phu precipitates the end of the Indochina war. In July, the Geneva Accord legalizes the end of the war and marks in a spectacular manner France's loss of influence on the colonial front. Reactions to colonial presence are also more and more violent in Morocco and Tunisia. This tendency is reinforced with the escalation of the Algerian crisis. Following the Algiers uprising of May 13, 1958, René Coty names the General de Gaulle President of the Conseil national. On September 28, a referendum brings the Fourth Republic to an end, and on December 21, de Gaulle succeeds René Coty and becomes the 18th President of the Republic. René Coty leaves the Elysée Palace on January 8, 1959 and returns to his hometown where he dies on November 22, 1962 at 80.

The Suez Canal

A strategic navigation axis linking the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, this 163 kilometers long canal helps avoid circumnavigating the entire African continent.

The passage already existed at the times of the Pharaohs, by making use of the natural relief, but the creation of the canal as it exists today began on April 25, 1859. The Frenchman, Ferdinand de Lesseps, obtained the concession thanks to his friendship with the vice-roy Saïd Pacha. As soon as the project was launched, the British, fearing that French influence would spread to Asia, opposed it. It will take ten years of work to complete the construction. The first ship used the canal on February 17, 1867, two years before its official inauguration on November 17, 1869. In 1875, after purchasing the khedive Ismaïl's shares in the Canal's company, the British government became the main shareholder. It will take until 1888 for the Constantinople Convention to make the canal's international status official. In fact, however, England, master of Egypt, enjoys complete control of the canal.

Things change in 1956, when Colonel Nasser secures the complete evacuation of the British troops. On July 26 of that same year, Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal. The English react briskly. Along with the French – who see an opportunity to get rid of Nasser with the help of Algerian nationalists—the British, allied with Israel, launch a military operation and parachute their soldiers along the canal and take it over. It will take the intervention of the UN for the Franco-British troops to leave. The Canal was reopened on March 29, 1957. Today, the Suez Canal remains, along with the Panama Canal, the densest maritime axis route in the world, with more than 15,000 passages a year.

France in 1956

That year, France won three gold medals at the Melbourne Olympic Games, including Alain Mimoun's, who ran the marathon in 2h25; Sacha Guitry released his last film *Murderers and Thieves*, with Jean Poiret and Michel Serrault; audiences discovered Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and Romy Schneider became *Sissi* while Bardot shot Roger Vadim's *And God Created Woman* in St. Tropez. Jacques Cousteau presented *Le Monde du Silence* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Grace Kelly became Princess of Monaco. That year, Jean Bruce also published "OSS 117 rentre dans la danse," "OSS 117 voit rouge" and "Visa pour Caracas."

In another domain, on September 28, the first atomic power station was inaugurated in Marcoule and Renault launched its Dauphine car, available in six colors! Despite this wonderful news, France is not doing well. Her influence in the world is constantly waning and the country is isolated on the international scene. On March 2, Morocco officially declares independence, followed on March 20 by Tunisia. The colonies are no longer what they used to be, and it's not over because in Algeria, terrorist attacks and demonstrations against the French presence multiply. International news is explosive. After the popular uprising in Hungary, the Russians send in their tanks. In Egypt, France's British "friends" are evicted by President Gamal Abdel Nasser. A meager consolation...

Cairo 1956, a real nest of spies

A millennial city, Cairo has always fascinated people because of its past and its strategic emplacement.

In 1958, the world has barely recovered from the Second World War and is in the midst of the Cold War. While the colonial powers are fighting over their presence in this very sensitive region, Egypt's main city is living to the beat of commercial exchanges and development, but also of political maneuvering. The country has fallen prey to many power struggles--between the end of the monarchy, Nasser's rise to power and the different trends that operate in the shadows like the puritan group the Muslim Brotherhood, the situation is not simple. The foreign presence adds to the confusion of stakes and power. At the time, nineteen countries have some kind of representation in the city, which constitutes a record. It is obvious that no one is there for cultural exchanges, and that commercial business is often only a façade. An area for lay-overs and transit, a seat of power that changes order in the Middle East a little more each day, Cairo is a place where part of the world's fate may be at stake, where the least amount of information is worth its weight in lives. The British, the French, but also the Russians, the Americans and their allies, all try to keep their position in order to anticipate.

Spy Manual

Here is some of the advice dispensed to British spies in a guidebook dating from 1952

- Abstain from drinking, because drunkenness can lead you to say too much.
- Do not trust French speakers or those who appreciate France.
- Do not ever give any information to a person who is outside of the network.
- Account for all the information you can gather, with no prejudice as to its importance.
- Go to hotel bars and make a note of the non-indigenous faces you see there on regular basis. They are probably informers for other powers.
- Do not leave any written notes in your bedroom or pockets.
- While on a mission, keep you weapon and physical shape in perfect condition.
- If a women attempts to seduce you, be on your guard.
- Never forget that even the slightest bit of information can change the course of History and that any leak can cost lives

Source: Imperial War Museum

Jean Dujardin Filmography (OSS 117 – Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath)

2002 *If I Were a Rich Man* by Michel Muniz and Gérard Bitton

2003 *Welcome to the Roses* by Francis Palluau

All Girls Are Crazy by Pascale Pouzadoux

2004

Mariages! by Valérie Guignabodet

Le Convoyeur by Nicolas Boukhrief

Les Dalton by Philippe Haïm

2005

L'Amour aux trousses by Philippe de Chauveron

The Brice Man by James Huth (+ co-scriptwriter)

Il ne faut jurer de rien by Eric Civanyan

2006 *OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies* by Michel Hazanavicius

Bérénice Béjo Filmography (Larmina)

1995 *Les Sœurs Hamlet* by Abdelkrim Bahloul

1998 *Passionately* by Bruno Nuytten

1999 *Most Promising Young Actress* by Gérard Jugnot

Nominated for a César for Most Promising Young Actress

2000 *A Knight's Tale* by Brian Helgeland

2001 *24 Hours in the Life of a Woman* by Laurent Bouhnik

Like an Airplane by Marie-France Pisier

2004 *The Great Role* by Steve Suissa

2005 *Sans elle* by Anna de Palma

Calvacade by Steve Suissa

2006 *OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies* by Michel Hazanavicius

Aure Atika Filmography (Princess Al Tarouk)

1991 *Sam Suffit* by Virginie Thevenet

1996 *Would I Lie to You?* by Thomas Gilou

1997 *Long Live the Republic* by Eric Rochant

Bimboland by Ariel Zeitoun

1998

Une Vie de Prince by Daniel Cohen

Influence Peddling by Dominique Farrugia

1999 *Highway Melody* by Thierry Boscheron

Blame It On Voltaire by Abdel Kechiche

2000 *Would I Lie To You? 2* by Thomas Gilou

2002 *Mister V* by Emilie Deleuze

2003

Turn Left at the End of the World by Avi Nesher

Testament by Hassan Legzouli

The Clan by Gaël Morel

2004 *Le Convoyeur* by Nicolas Boukhrief

The Beat that My Heart Skipped by Jacques Audiard

2006 *Comme t'y es belle* by Lisa Azuelos

OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies by Michel Hazanavicius

About director Michel Hazanavicius

Michel Hazanavicius began working for television in 1988 for the station Canal +, where he collaborated on, amongst other, the show "Les Nuls." From 1999 to 2005, he directed more than forty commercials.

Director

2006 *OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies*

Co-director, along with Dominique Mézette

1992 *Derrick contre Superman*, short film

1992 *Ça détourne*

1993 *Le Grand Détournement ou la Classe Américaine*

Scriptwriter

1992 *Ça détourne* (TV), also co-director

1993 *Le Grand Détournement ou la Classe Américaine* (TV), also co-director

1996 *Delphine: 1, Yan: 0* by Dominique Farrugia

1999 *Mes Amis*, also director

2004 *Tuez-les Tous! Rwanda: Histoire d'un génocide sans importance* (TV) by Pierre Mezerette

2004 *Les Dalton* by Philippe Haïm

Producers Eric and Nicolas Altmayer

1996 *XY*, directed by Jean-Paul Lilienfeld, with Clémentine Célerié and Patrick Braoudé.

1998

La Voie est libre, directed by Stéphane Clavier, with François Cluzet, Philippine Leroy Beaulieu and Emma de Caunes

Grève Party, directed by Fabien Onteniente, with Daniel Russo, Bruno Solo, Vincent Elbaz, Camille Japy and Gilbert Melki

The Misadventures of Margaret, directed by Brian Skeet, with Parker Posey, Jeremy Northam, Elizabeth McGovern, Patrick Bruel, Brooke Shields and Stéphane Freiss.

1999

The Man with Rain In His Shoes, directed by Maria Ripoli, with Penélope Cruz, Lena Heady and Douglas Henshall

Le Sourire du clown, directed by Eric Besnard, with Ticky Holgado, Bruno Putzulu, François Berléand and Vincent Elbaz

2000

Jet Set, directed by Fabien Onteniente, with Samuel Le Bihan, Lambert Wilson, Ornella Muti, Bruno Solo, José Garcia, Lorant Deutsch and Guillaume Gallienne

Liberate i peccati, directed by Cristina Comencini with Michele Placido, Laura Morante and Francesco Paoloantoni

2001

Plata Quemada, directed by Marcelo Pineyro, with Eduardo Noriega, Leonardo Sbaraglia, Pablo Echarri and Leticia Bredicce.

HS, directed by Jean-Paul Lilienfeld, with Dieudonné, Lambert Wilson, Lorant Deutsch and François Berléand.

2002

Shooting Stars, directed by Fabien Onteniente, with Gérard Lanvin, Lorant Deutsch and Samuel Le Bihan.

Riders, directed by Gérard Pirès, with Stephen Dorff and Natasha Henstridge

2003

I am Dina, directed by Ole Bornedal, with Maria Bonnevie, Gérard Depardieu and Christopher Eccleston

2004

People, directed by Fabien Onteniente, with Rupert Everett, José Garcia, Ornella Muti, Rosy de Palma and Elie Semoun

2005

The Brice Man, directed by James Huth, with Jean Dujardin, Clovis Cornillac, Elodie Bouchez, Bruno Salomone and Alexandra Lamy

Ma Vie en l'air, directed by Rémi Bezançon, with Vincent Elbaz, Gilles Lellouche, Marion Cotillard, Didier Bezace, Elsa Kikoïne, Cécile Cassel and Tom Novembre

Sky Fighters, directed by Gérard Pirès, with Benoît Magimel, Clovis Cornillac, Géraldine Pailhas and Alice Taglioni

2006

OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies directed by Michel Hazanavicius, with Jean Dujardin, Bérénice Béjo, Aure Atika, Philippe Lefèbvre and Richard Sammel

On va s'aimer, directed by Ivan Calbérac, with Julian Boisselier, Gilles Lellouche, Mélanie Doutey and Alexandra Lamy

Cast List

Hubert Bonisseur de La Bath, alias OSS 117
Larmina
Princess Al Tarouk
Jack
Setine
Egyptian Spokesperson
Gardenborough
The Boss
Raymond Pelletier
The Imam
The Follower
Loktar
Slimane
Plantieux
Moeller

Jean Dujardin
Bérénice Béjo
Aure Atika
Philippe Lefèbvre
Constantin Alexandrov
Saïd Amadis
Laurent Bateau
Claude Brosset
François Damiens
Youssef Hamid
Khalid Maadour
Arsène Mosca
Abdellah Moundy
Eric Prat
Richard Sammel

And also, in order of appearance:

Von Umsprung
Rubecht
Bar owner
Man at the airport
Receptionist
Bell Boy
Princess' helper
Helpful passerby
Muezzin
Man with whip
Friend of man with whip
Khalid
Waitress
Mandarin

Michael Hofland
Jean-François Halin
Marc Bodnar
Bernard Nissille
Alain Khouani
Diego Dieng
Mouloud Ikhaddalene
Hassan Chabaki
Hedi Naili
Choukri Gtari
Hafid F. Benamar
Jean-Pierre Paris
Laura Schiffman
Roger To-Thanh-Hein
Minister of the Republic of Montmartre

Crew

Director
Producers

Scriptwriter
Based on the OSS 117 novels
Adaptation and dialogues

Director of Photography
Head Editor
Costume Designer
Production Designer
Special Effects
Casting Director
Production Manager
Original music

Michel Hazanavicius
Eric Altmayer
Nicolas Altmayer
Jean-François Halin
by Jean Bruce
Jean-François Halin
Michel Hazanavicius
Guillaume Schiffman A.F.C.
Reynald Bertrand
Charlotte David
Maamar Ech-Cheikh
David Danesi
Stéphane Touitou
Daniel Chevalier
Ludovic Bource
Kamel Ech-Cheikh

Executive Producer
Executive Producer - Morocco
Associate Producers

Mandarin Films
Sarim Fassi-Fihri – MPS
Artemis – Patrick Quinet
Gaëtan David
André Logie
Belfa Films
Patrick Vandenbosch

With the support of the Tax Shelter of the Federal Government of Belgium

First Assistant Director
First Assistant DP
Second Unit Grip
Second Camera Operator
First Assistant DP
Second Camera
First Assistant DP
Second Camera
Director of Photography for
Underwater Scenes
Sound

Matthew Gledhill
Guillaume Genini
Eric Vallée
Stéphane Massis

Olivia Costes

Julien Bullat

Christian Petron
Didier Sain

Dresses for Miss Béjo and Miss Atika created by Carmen Mateos

Véronique Elise
Joseph Kergoat
Michelle Quelin Quentel
Bettina Keller-Miquaix
Yvon Moreno
Fabrice Leuci

Suits for Mr Dujardin created by
Make-up Design
Hair
Props
Location Manager
Special Effects and
Pyrotechnics Supervisor
Gunsmiths

Georges Demétrau
Marc Leroyer
Arnaud Peltier

Skeleton and Fake Chicken
Designer
Head Gaffer
Head Grip
Head Carpenter – Morocco
Head Carpenter – Paris
Director of Production – Morocco
Studio Manager
First Assistant Director / Casting
Head Wardrobe
Head Make-Up
Head Hair
Assistant Set Designer
Location manager
Head Carpenter
Contractor – Spain

Christophe Calcus
Simon Berard
Laurent Menoury
Eric Bourges
Eric Becavin
Driss Tahri
Mustaphe Zaari
Noureddine Aberdine
Nadia Haouach
Laïla El Khayate
Saadia Loutati
Hind Ghazali
Omar Ouachchane
Mohamed Jarni
Mosquito
Laura Hachel-Dubois
Laurent Brett
Patricia Colombat
Nadine Muse
Mot pour Mo
Guy Letort
Laurent Dreyer

Opening Credits Design
Postproduction Director
Sound Editor
Postsynchronisation

Post Recording

Mixing
Special Effects
Special Effects Supervisors

Head of Postproduction
Digital Lab
Postproduction Director
Technical Director
Image Lab

Mandarin Films
Financial Director
Legal

Un éclair de lune à Maubeuge
(P.Perrin / C.L. Blondy)
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Courtesy of Universal Music Projets Spéciaux

Bambino
Lyrics by Nisa
Music by G. Fanciulu
French adaptation by Jacques Larue
Courtesy of S.E.M.I.

Soundtrack available on Virgin

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Gérard Lamps
Def2Shoot
David Danesi
Philippe Aubry “Falap”
Carine Poussou
Éclair
Didier Dekeyser
Philippe Reinaudo
Éclair

Franck Beule
Nadim Cheikhrouha

