



PRODUCTION NOTES

MICMACS

A film by
Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Starring
Dany Boon
Omar Sy
Andre Dussollier
Dominique Pinon
Julie Ferrier
Nicholas Marie
Marie-Julie Baup

Release date: April 1, 2010

Running time: 104 minutes

Rated: TBC

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OPÉRETE FILMS TAPIORA FILMS © WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT FRANCE PRESENT

MICMACS

DANY
BOON

A FILM BY
JEAN-PIERRE
JEUNET



ANDRÉ DUSSOLLIER OMAR SY DOMINIQUE PINON JULIE FERRIER NICOLAS MARIE MARIE-JULIE BAUP MICHEL CREMADES YOLANDE MOREAU JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE

SCREENPLAY JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET AND GUILLAUME LAURANT CHARACTERS GUILLAUME LAURANT ART DIRECTOR ALINE BONETTO COSTUME DESIGNER MADELINE FONTAINE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY YETSUO NAGATA (APE) EDITOR HERVE SCHNEID (ACE) MUSIC SCORE RAPHAEL BEAU SOUND JEAN UMANSKY GERARD HARDY SELIM AZZAZI VINCENT ARNARDI DIGITAL SPECIAL EFFECTS ALAIN CARSOUX SPECIAL EFFECTS LES VERSAILLAIS PRODUCTION MANAGER JEAN-MARC DESCHAMPS PRODUCED BY FREDERICK BRILLION GILLES LEGRAND JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET & EPIPHOTE FILMS TAPIORA FILMS WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT FRANCE FRANCE 2 CINEMA FRANCE 3 CINEMA CO-PRODUCTION

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EPITHETE FILMS and TAPIOCA FILMS
In coproduction with WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT FRANCE
present

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Starring
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MICHEL CREMADES YOLANDE MOREAU and JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE

Script
JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET – GUILLAUME LAURANT

Dialogue
GUILLAUME LAURANT

Produced by EPITHETE FILMS and TAPIOCA FILMS
In coproduction with WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT FRANCE
FRANCE 2 CINEMA and FRANCE 3 CINEMA
With the support of LA REGION ILE-DE-FRANCE
In partnership with CNC
With the participation of ORANGE CINEMA SERIES – FRANCE 2 –
FRANCE 3

SYNOPSIS

First it was a mine that exploded in the middle of the Moroccan desert. Years later, it was a stray bullet that lodged in his brain... Basil doesn't have much luck with weapons. The first made him an orphan, the second holds him on the brink of sudden and instant death.

Released from the hospital, Basil is homeless. Luckily, our inspired and gentle-natured dreamer is adopted by a motley crew of secondhand dealers living in a veritable Ali Baba's cave, whose talents and aspirations are as surprising as they are diverse: Remington, Calculator, Buster, Slammer, Elastic Girl, Tiny Pete and Mama Chow.

One day, walking by two huge buildings, Basil recognizes the logos of the weapons manufacturers that caused his hardship. With the help of his faithful gang of wacky friends he sets out to take revenge.

Underdogs battling heartless industrial giants, our gang relives the battle of David and Goliath, with all the imagination and fantasy of Buster Keaton...

INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET

After *A Very Long Engagement*, but before *Micmacs*, your name was associated with two other projects - *Harry Potter* and *The Life of Pi*. Why didn't they work out?

True, just after *A Very Long Engagement*, Warner offered me the fifth *Harry Potter* movie. I turned them down. Truth is, I couldn't see how I could fit in, or how I could make the film my own. The Potter world already exists, the sets are there, the costumes are there, the actors know exactly how to play their parts because they've already done four films together... I knew the load would be heavy, and it didn't really excite me in the first place. *Alien* was different. They chose me because they wanted me to bring my personal touch to the film, to create a kind of hybrid with my own world... Also, to be honest, stories about warlocks, magic wands and flying brooms and such, where absolutely everything is possible, doesn't interest me much. So I said no, even if... my agent told me that if I did *Harry Potter*, I'd be covered for the rest of my life!

And *The Life of Pi*?

That interested me and I worked on it for two years. A few years back I'd read the truly beautiful book by Yann Martel, which begins in India and sets out on the high seas to tell the story, after a terrible shipwreck, of the confrontation on a lifeboat between two lone passengers: a young boy and a tiger. And at the time I thought it couldn't be adapted. Too rich, too detailed, too full of traps: the sea, a child, a tiger, all incompatible elements. And then Fox, who I did *Alien* for, called me... to ask me to adapt it! It was too beautiful a premise to let it pass me by. It's an amazing story of will and survival. And even if it's a completely different world from my own, it carries the theme of all my films, the Tom Thumb theme: an orphan fights a monster. It's simply never the same monster. This time, it had the appearance of a tiger. So I reread the book with a view to adapting it and accepted their offer on the condition that they let me write the script and do the film my own way.

I immediately went to work with Guillaume Laurant, my usual partner. And right away, after only two drafts, we managed to get out a script that everyone liked.

Then to write up the film's budget – the film is so complex – we made a storyboard. I had models of the Pi boat and the tiger made, like you do for an animated film, and with my camcorder I took 3500 shooting script photos. I edited all that together on iPhoto and sent it to Maxime Rebière, who redrew the whole thing. So as of today we have both a photo storyboard and a hand-drawn storyboard! We started location scouting in India and I visited the big studios at Fox where they shot *Titanic*... To me, there was no doubt the film was going to get made. Then the numbers rolled in: 85 million dollars! All that for an Indian kid with a tiger on a boat, it didn't make sense. We thought of every way we could to get the budget down to 60 million and still couldn't find a solution, until one of the heads of Fox said to me, "Produce it yourself!" It was totally absurd! I did actually believe we could make it cheaper in Europe than in Hollywood. We studied the problem, we went to the Alicante studios where they shot *Asterix* at the Olympic Games, we met tons of people, we worked on wave-making machines, we thought out specific shooting techniques, etc. And we made the budget. Fox didn't want to go over 60 million dollars. We managed 59 million... but in Euros, and at the time the exchange rate made the Euro stronger than the dollar, so much so that it came out to be the same: 85 million dollars! Suddenly, I didn't hear from them anymore. Until the day producer Gil Netter told me they were thinking over new solutions. But for me, I'd been on the project two years and I didn't want to spend my whole life on it. I needed to shoot. And right away, with Guillaume, we started on *Micmacs*... which I'd already had in mind, more or less. In three, four months, we'd finished the script.

So what was the initial idea for Micmacs? The hero with a bullet in his head?

The secondhand dealers? The weapon sellers?

As usual, everything came pretty much at the same time. Already, there's always in the heart of me that story of Tom Thumb I mentioned earlier... As for the idea of the weapon sellers, that's been rattling around in my head for a long time now. When we were editing *The City of Lost Children* in Saint-Cloud, next to the Dassault factories, we often went to a restaurant where the Dassault engineers went to lunch, too. They were very straight-laced men, in suit and tie, with nice looking faces, but I couldn't help thinking they were creating and manufacturing incredible weapons to destroy and kill other human beings on the planet! It didn't seem to bother them very much! I was upset and shocked by that. At the same time, I didn't want to make an intellectual piece, I wanted to make a comedy. And what could be more different from arms manufacturers than secondhand dealers?

From there on, it was easy to imagine that gang of scavengers was going to join forces against those businessmen of death. David and Goliath, once again... The idea came naturally, especially since I'd wanted to face off the arms sellers with a gang of characters like the toys in *Toy Story* – I really admire the work of Pixar. People who are unique, marginal, a little naive, but each of them, like in *Toy Story*, has a character trait, something distinctive that serves the story, that helps move the plot forward. Eccentric avengers, clumsy, sometimes poetic, always united and above all, deeply human. Our other big influence is *Mission Impossible* – I'm a unconditional fan of the series. It's obvious that in the plot construction, in its twists and turns, in the tale of manipulations – the fake trip to the desert, for example – there are moments reminiscent of *Mission Impossible*...

And also, sometimes, of Sergio Leone movies...

Yes, of course. As soon as you tell a story about vengeance, about getting even, certain Leone sequences come back to you. And I had fun paying tribute to him with little references to his work...

You can't help thinking of *Delicatessen*, either – probably the do-it-yourself style of the secondhand dealers' cave – and of *Amelie* – the naïve, innocent goodness of Bazil...

As a matter of fact, Micmacs is a little like *Delicatessen* meets *Amelie*... It's true. Not that it was deliberate, of course. A leopard can't change its spots... In any case, from the moment I had the theme, we did what Guillaume and I always do: we each fill up our own idea box with ideas of characters, scenes, bits of dialogue, memories of little things we did when we were kids, expressions, sets and locations we like, until those idea boxes overflow and all we have to do is use what's inside to invent new things, create the characters, build the story and write the script.

In what ways are you and Guillaume Laurant complementary?

It's hard to say. It's a mysterious alchemy. A true partnership, where working together is a joy, and above all, we bounce off each other so well that almost immediately, we can't tell who came up with what anymore. Between us, it's an endless game of ping-pong. It's also obvious that our worlds are in synch. I love playing with the French language – and so does he. If I've made the choice to shoot in France and in French no matter what it takes, it's to be able to play with the language. My greatest influence, of course, is Jacques Prévert. It all starts there. He's a constant source of nourishment for me.

Guillaume and I have the same passion for Prévert, for the poetic realism dear to Carné and Prévert. I try to put that poetic perspective in all my films, and he has a natural tendency to go that way too... Matter of fact, when the dialogue gets a little too ordinary for my taste, I tell him, “We need to 're-Prévertize' that!” It goes without saying that we had a great time with the dialogue for Omar's character!

What was the most difficult part of writing *Micmacs*?

Nothing fundamental. We just had to find the right balance between the gang of secondhand dealers, who look like they just walked out of *Toy Story*, and the weapon sellers, who are more serious types. We didn't want to make the weapon sellers too serious, or to make them into caricatures, either. That was another balance we had to find. That was why, knowing so little about the weapons industry, before starting to write, I made my own little investigation. With the journalist Phil Casoar, I met and questioned a man who had retired from a job at the highest level of the weapons industry, a former secret agent and an engineer from Matra... We also visited a weapon factory in Belgium – in France, that wasn't possible. Really nice people, technicians who talk so passionately about their factory it could be a chocolate shop, only when the new caramel they've just invented hits its target, it makes a tank heat up to 4500°! Which means that on the inside, everyone burns to a crisp in a fraction of a second! Terrifying. And they talk about it as if it were just a technological innovation! All the lines in the film that refer to the weapons industry are authentic, like for example: “We don't work for the Attack Department, we work for the Defense Department.” That's a pretty marvelous justification to keep your conscience clean! Except that their “products” are sold, and at the end of the chain, they cause suffering, mourning, death...

Was it relatively easy for you to find the right characters for the gang of secondhand dealers and determine how their distinctiveness would serve the story?

That's where we could have the most fun and play with fantasy. The idea was to come up with characters with a specific angle, a little like Molière, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The Miser*, *The Misanthrope*, etc. At first, there were a lot more than there are now. And then with each successive work session, we eliminated, distilled and kept the essential. And at a certain moment, I decided that it was good to have seven. First because it's a magic number and secondly, because the story is also a sort of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*!

Matter of fact, their names are descriptive, like the dwarfs' names: Mama Chow because she cooks, Slammer because he just got out of prison, Elastic Girl because she really bends and stretches like rubber, Buster because he's all bust and broken up, Remington because he types on a typewriter, Calculator because she instinctively calculates everything. Only Tiny Pete has the name of a Naïve Artist I like a lot. A sort of Postman Cheval who created a work called *The Ride* out of salvaged materials. The wild automated sculptures Tiny Pete makes in the movie are the work of a different artist I discovered at Halle Saint Pierre, near my home in Montmartre, where I go often, since I love Naïve Art and Art Brut: Gilbert Peyre. I created the character of Tiny Pete so I could use his artwork. Luckily, Gilbert Peyre likes my films and was willing to loan them to us. Once we had defined the characters, we just searched for ways their characteristics could help the story development, the logistics of revenge and the plot twists and turning points...

That explains the Seven Dwarfs, but Snow White, in other words, Bazil, how did you imagine him?

He drives the story. Twice a victim of weapon manufacturers – they made him an orphan and because of them, he has to live with a bullet in his brain that could kill him at any instant. Of course he wants revenge! Adopting him, the secondhand dealers, united – also adopted his revenge. The fact that he has a bullet in his head allowed us to slip into fantasy, delirium, imaginary worlds... like so many little films within the film, little parenthetical animated sequences, all the things I love so much...

You originally wrote the character for Jamel Debbouze, but once again, like with *Amelie* who was supposed to be played by Emily Watson instead of Audrey Tautou, nothing went as planned...

After *Amelie*, I'd promised Jamel I would write a part for him. So I did. I wrote *Micmacs*... for him, taking the risk, without telling him exactly what it was about. He was all excited. He was just as excited when he read the script, if not more. So we went into production, and a few months later, he called me to tell me he wasn't going to do *Micmacs*... for personal reasons, he didn't want to be working at the time. And actually, since then he hasn't shot a thing. Of course I respect his decision. But even so, two months away from shooting, that was... a little tough! Luckily, fate seems to smile on me, so that even if nothing happens as planned, in the end everything happens like it's supposed to happen! Right away, I thought of Dany Boon to replace him. I'd already had him somewhere in the back of my mind, as another possible choice.

What made you think of Dany Boon, who's so different from Jamel?

That's really hard to say. A sort of sixth sense, an inner conviction. As soon as I saw Audrey, I know she was Amelie, even though she couldn't be more different from Emily Watson. Here, it was the same thing. I just knew it. Even before Dany did! As soon as Jamel gave up the role, I contacted him and had the revised script sent to him – we'd erased some of what had been custom written for Jamel, more especially with regards to his handicap: at first, he was the one who jumped on the mine.... Right away, Dany's agent called me back to say he didn't want to do the film, that it was for Jamel, not for him. The film was dead! The week after, I rewrote a version for a woman, and even one for a child. When you fall into icy waters, if you don't fight your way out, you die! And then, finally, I got a hold of Dany. I said to him, "Listen, you're right, you shouldn't do it if you don't feel like it's for you, it's really too bad though because I like what you do a lot, I have for a long time now. Oh well, we'll figure out something else to do together some other time."

He said he liked my films a lot too and was sorry to turn me down. And right there, I put all my chips on the table, and said to him, "What if we got together for an hour? To do some screen tests, just for fun, now that we know you're not doing the film. Just to see if we think we could work together some other time." He said yes. It went really well. While we were doing the screen tests, I said to him, "It's really too bad, look how well we get along, look how well our worlds fit together," etc, etc. He had a great time, and that night he called me to say he'd do the film! And today, when you see *Micmacs*, you can't imagine anyone else playing Basil. Exactly like Audrey with *Amelie*. A lucky twist of fate! On top of that, fate was so kind to me that the very day we wrapped the film, the day I was "free" again, Chanel asked me to direct their new ad for Chanel n°5 with Audrey Tautou! With that, my triptych with her was complete!

After Dany Boon came on board, did you make a lot of changes to the script?

Guillaume and I continued the work we had started when we had him read the script. But it was more details than anything else. And then we did real screen tests, this time. Because compared to Jamel's shrimpy little figure, Dany was afraid he was too bulky, too muscular and that it wouldn't work. Right away we realized that his gentle, dreamy side and his obvious vulnerability made up for his size and even made an interesting contrast. Quite the contrary, we didn't need to worry about thickening him up a bit, putting a big wool sweater or bonnet on him, making him into a big clumsy teddy bear, making him exactly the opposite of what we'd originally planned...

What, in your opinion, is the best thing about him?

It's going to sound like an awful cliché, but I can't help it! First of all, he's an incredible human being who, after the success of the Ch'tis movie, is still utterly modest and simple. During the entire shoot, I never once saw him in a bad mood, or late, or on the telephone, I never saw him complain or be mean to anyone. Really. On top of that, he's funny and a delight to everyone.

And above all, there are things I love about him professionally. We know how funny he can be, but he's also efficient and feels very profoundly. He's very technical, rigorous, knows his lines impeccably and at the same time is extremely inventive, coming up with new things I never would have thought of.

He's very consistent, yet is constantly searching, leaving all doors open and letting himself go to inspiration. For example, in one shot he spontaneously started acting a little like Bourvil. I loved it. And we kept it in the edit.

There's also, at a certain moment, an obvious tribute to Chaplin...

Same thing there. He came up with that. It wasn't in the script at all. It was while we were shooting, at one point he got the idea of playing the scene that way. Afterwards, in the edit, I emphasized it with music... What's really surprising is how consistent he is. There's never a take that's not as good as the others, it's astounding! What surprised me the most was seeing how comfortable I felt with him right away, which isn't always the case with actors.

Is it because he's from the North and I'm from the East, that we've both been through hard times, that we've both worked in animation? There's something easy and obvious between us. Like getting back together with an old friend! It's really rare... Since then, we call each other all the time, play jokes and make fun of each other. What's really disgusting is on top of that, he writes, does shows and directs films! On that note, I love working with actors who are also directors, like Mathieu Kassowitz or Jodie Foster. You explain to them what you're doing – “There'll be a tracking shot there, I cut here and pick up over there” – and they understand. It simplifies things.

When Dany Boon replaced Jamel, did the casting change?

Yes and no. It wasn't so much Dany's arrival as delaying the shoot that changed things. What I wanted was to put together a cast that was unified but made of people who, on the contrary, came from all walks of life: Jean-Pierre Marielle who embodies the great tradition of 1970's French cinema, Omar Sy the television actor, Julie Ferrier who, like Dany, comes from the stage. Of course for her character Elastic Girl, we hired a real contortionist, a young lady from Russia who lives in Germany and who is simply mind-blowing. Michel Cremades, a marvelous character actor of French comedies. And a few of my faithful regulars, Yolande Moreau and André Dussollier, who were the first two I thought of and wrote for, and of course Dominique Pinon and Urbain Cancelier. And a few newcomers: Nicolas Marié, who plays the other weapons seller, Dussollier's rival (originally it was supposed to be Albert Dupontel, but he was working on another film, then François Berléand, but he too was away shooting a film for Philippe Lefebvre) and Marie-Julie Baup, who plays Calculator and who'd never worked on a film before (originally it was supposed to be Marina Foïs, but she was pregnant)... The important thing, as always, was to find the actor with the most talent for the role. It was good to have them all, and all of them together. A real joy.

On the crew, there's also a newcomer in an essential role: Director of Photography... Yes, Tetsuo Nagata, who's Japanese. Bruno Delbonnel, who I did *Amélie* and *A Very Long Engagement* with, wasn't available because he – that bastard! – accepted an offer to do a *Harry Potter* movie! But I'd agreed to let him! He was right to do it, it's good for him, it's an exciting challenge and it'll open up even bigger career opportunities for him in the U.S., I hope... Matter of fact, I've just seen the movie, he did an incredible job. So since Bruno wasn't available, I searched and thought of Tetsuo Nagata, whose work on *Officer's Ward* and *La Vie en Rose*. In his work I see imagery a little like my own. Warm colors, a certain aesthetic quality... On top of that, I'd already worked with him on two or three ads, including the one for Chanel. Since he doesn't like framing – I always make the choice but never do the framing itself – we hired Belgian steady-cam operator Jan Rubens. But even if sometimes we leaned towards colors I've used less before – mauves, blues, greens... – I feel like the image isn't different from my other films. As if each Director of Photography, no matter how different, from Darius Khondji to Bruno Delbonnel to Tetsuo Nagata, has used his talent to serve my vision, my imagination...

On the other hand, excluding the D.P., your regular crew is all on board...

Yes, Aline Bonetto for production design, Madeline Fontaine for costume design, Nathalie Tissier for makeup, Hervé Schneid for the edit (he's the only person I'd trust to finish the film if I got eaten up by a shark!), the Versaillais for special effects, Alain Carsoux for visual effects, the sound team, the mix team, the calibration... it's like a troupe. Between us all there is, I wouldn't dare say a lot of love, but there's something special that brings us together. Me, I love working with them because they're the best! And I think they like to work with me because they know I'm going to make them sweat in a positive way, push them to go farther and give them the means to do it well...

The Ali Baba's cave that the secondhand dealers live in is quite an impressive set. What kind of direction did you give to Aline Bonetto? And to Madeline Fontaine for the costumes ?

Once again, Aline amazed me. I had only said: "They've sculpted a cave in a heap of scrap metal to live in, so the walls have to be metal." I saw her fall apart a little! Since by principle she never shows anything in progress, not even a drawing or model, I discovered the cave when it was finished. My jaw fell to the floor in admiration! On the costumes, it was a little different, it's not really my thing. Initially I have less ideas but I react a lot to Madeline's proposals. When I saw that sort of surrealist pair of overalls, which had been intended for just one scene, I said, "That's it, that's Basil's outfit!" The only indication I'd given to Madeline for Basil was a photo of the main puppet of my first short film. A photo of a guy with a big sweater who already looked like Basil!

In the end, the only area you're not consistent in is the music...

Yes, because each time I try to find the music that corresponds the most with the spirit and story of the film. We had the idea of Carlos d'Alessio before we even shot *Delicatessen*. For *The City*, we immediately dreamt of Badalamenti because of David Lynch, and we got him. On *Alien*, we had a young composer (he cost less for Fox!) who wrote in the traditional musical style of action movies. For *Amelie*, our collaboration was exceptional and entirely by accident – or by fate! – with Yann Tiersen. The osmosis between the image and music was unbelievable.

For *Micmacs*, at first I wanted to do something a little more modern, a little more rap, to take old music from action pictures and sample them, but it didn't work. It just so happened that we were looking for an excerpt from an old movie for the credits – the credits within the credits was an idea I'd had for a long time.

Looking through Warner's Bogart box set (which simplified rights issues!), I watched *The Big Sleep* again, and found exactly what I was dreaming of. And all of a sudden, while listening to the music of *The Big Sleep* composed by Max Steiner, I thought it'd be ideal for all the action scenes. Luckily, there were beautiful recordings, since it had been re-recorded in the 1970's. But that wasn't enough. Once again, fate struck, exactly like it did for *Amelie*. One day, Dany's lighting double, who runs a restaurant, gave me a CD of one of his clients. I listened to it in the car on the way to the shoot and thought it was good. I met the composer, Raphaël Beau, a young music teacher who teaches to problem kids in the suburbs. I told him I was interested but couldn't promise him anything just yet. He composed 25 pieces without being hired! Each time he composed for a certain sequence, it didn't work, but as soon as we put his music on a different sequence, it worked like a charm! So in the end, I told him, "That's right, you're the one who's doing the film!"

You mentioned *The Big Sleep*. There's also an excerpt from a Tex Avery cartoon which couldn't be more appropriate. How'd you dig that up?

Once more, it was chance – or fate! Guillaume has a little girl who's crazy about Tex Avery, and one day when he was watching cartoons with her, he saw that sequence. It was too big of a coincidence for us not to use it. Especially since, once again, it's a Warner Film and Tex Avery is one of my idols – I even wrote a book about him a long time ago...

In *Micmacs*, we rediscover the Paris you love, the traditional Paris of always, but this time it coexists with today's Paris and its contemporary architecture.

It seems like you wanted to keep us guessing by mixing up periods, and not just with architecture. For example, there's that beautiful shot with the tramway and an old salvaged industrial tricycle... And also there's that use of YouTube at the end of the film...

I had fun with YouTube, with using something that's so popular right now, while I'm often criticized for being too retro. And I had to hurry up to do it before other people got the idea!

As for Paris, I tried to change a little, since by now I've more than made the rounds of the traditional Paris I love – the bridge pillars, the metro, the train stations... I liked the idea of mixing in certain elements of today's Paris that I love too, and anyway, I can only film what I love. So a magnificent building from the 30's meets up with the new Line T3 tramway, the open-air metro with a modern post office surmounted by a neon light, the skylight at Galeries Lafayette with a department of lycra sports clothes, the Musée d'Orsay with a contemporary coffee shop...

The challenge was to glorify the same city, but a little differently, and this time to include the suburbs. But it's still a Paris, if not idealized, that's at least seen through my imagination, through my filter... I can't resist emptying the streets a little, cleaning up the sky, playing with the colors. But of course I really enjoyed shooting on the Canal de l'Ourcq at the Crimée bridge, which I love. Prévert was photographed there by Doisneau, there's the Marcel Carné school nearby and you can see the Arletty boat pass by on the Seine... It's where *Gates of the Night* was shot, a film by Carné with Jean Vilar playing Fate. And as chance would have it, we shot the home office of one of the weapons companies at the Jean Vilar Theatre in Suresnes. I love those lucky signs! I totally maintain and defend the heritage of Carné-Prévert .

You say you can't help emptying the streets, cleaning up the sky. Were there a lot of visual effects?

There must be about 350 shots with effects, but they're fairly simple things. There weren't any big scenes like in *A Very Long Engagement*, such as the blimp explosion. But there's always something to erase, to change.

You seem to have – and you can even see it in the film, in the secondhand dealers' cave for example – a real love for craftsmanship, in the noblest sense of the word.

I love it. I love the actual making of the film and I need to be there at every stage, every second. It begins with the choice of paper for the storyboard, all the way to the mix and calibration. Unlike other directors who get bored with those stages, I have fun every single moment. It's my way of doing things and I have a right to that pleasure. Crafting is the ultimate pleasure for me. I always feel like a kid opening up his Meccano box and playing with each piece. And no way can I leave an unused bolt at the bottom of the box! At the same time, I also feel like a chef in his kitchen. When he makes a dish, he chooses the ingredients, he invents, he simmers, he takes risks. Of course he has to like the dish, but the only thing he wants is to share it with others. It's the same for me. The pleasure is only worth something if I can share it with the audience.

In the end, in the spirit of *Micmacs*, we could sum it up by saying that cinema is tweaking and cooking! At the same time, on this film, I did feel we were cutting it close. We made it with 25 million Euros, which is huge for a French film, and yet we were still a little tight. So now I'm thinking I make expensive films and that's beginning to worry me. *Micmacs* wasn't supposed to be expensive, it's just a story about secondhand dealers that happens in the present! What's going to happen the day I want to make a science fiction movie?

And choosing Warner for distribution, was that automatic given the issues surrounding *A Very Long Engagement*?

Of course. Without Warner, without Francis Boespflug in France, without Richard Fox in the U.S., I never would have been able to make *A Very Long Engagement*. After all, I did get 36 million Euros to realize – in French, in France, with French actors – one of my dreams. I owe them a lot. And honestly, the issues concerning the film's approval weren't very enlightening... Trying to make *A Very Long Engagement* look like an American film, even for the purpose of lobbying, is really grotesque.

Was it easy for you to find the title *Micmacs à Tire-Larigot* (French and original title)?

No! Either the title is there before you even begin writing, like *Delicatessen*, or you have to search and it's not always easy. I could have called it “Saperlipopette” - I'm keeping that name for another film! But I really loved the expression “tire-larigot”, which went with the spirit of the film – actually, it's the name of the secondhand dealers' cave. Used alone, it doesn't work as a title. I think it was Phil Casoar who came up with *Micmacs à tire-larigot*. I wonder how it'll be translated in other countries!

INTERVIEW WITH DANY BOON

BAZIL

When Jean-Pierre Jeunet had you read the script, at first you said that you didn't want to do the film...

Yes, we all know well, and even more so when you're a director, how difficult it is to cast roles, choose actors, put together a film – before Kad Merad did *The Ch'tis*, there were four or five actors who either weren't available or turned us down! – even so, when I first read it I couldn't manage to get out of my head that the film was written for Jamel and it couldn't be for me. In the descriptions and in the script's stage directions, I saw Jamel, not me. I had a hard time imagining myself in the role of Basil. And yet I was delighted that Jean-Pierre called me, that he thought of me. I've always loved his films, and I know he likes me too because he's been coming to my shows for the last fifteen years. And so, then – I wonder the idea came from his agent, Bertrand de Labbey – he proposed doing some screen tests, right then and there, for nothing in particular, just to see. Clever idea! We got together in a studio with a little video camera, I did some screen tests with him and it went incredibly well. Right away, I loved the way he dressed me with whatever he could find, the way he directed me, the pleasure I got from saying his lines and letting myself be guided by him. The bond between us was immediate. He did a rough edit on his computer of what we'd shot, he showed it to me and I saw it was there! Even though we'd done it with nothing, with just a little camera and a white background, it was already a Jeunet film and the character of Basil was there! So I said yes. Also, Jean-Pierre told me he was going to revise the script so that the character would fit me better. So there you are.

Prior to working with him, what was it about Jeunet's films that touched you?

His inventiveness, his creativity, his eye, his rigor. He has a very personal touch and a very original world, like few others have, in their own way, people like Terry Gilliam, Tim Burton, Jacques Tati... He's a filmmaker of genius who has a very distinctive world, and at the same time, he's still fragile – there's always something childlike in what he does. He has a very personal way of filming and directing, with an amazing sense of framing... All things I discovered on the shoot as soon as I arrived. All I had to do when I showed up on that amazing set was put my eye to the camera, and I was in a Jeunet film! On top of that, even though he's very demanding, very precise and knows exactly what he wants, his ideas are anything but rigid, he's always open to exploration, to invention...

When you reread it, what did you like about the script of *Micmacs*?

The complexity of the story, the group adventure aspect, the fact that it was nothing like what you usually see, that poetic and wild side of Jean-Pierre you find in all his characters, who each have a special gift. They're bigger than life and at the same time they're incredibly powerful and poetic...

How would you define Basil?

He's an adult who never grew up. A sort of child-man lost in a world that's aggressive, violent, dangerous and very... contemporary! I was also touched by the fact that he becomes homeless and happens upon that family of outsiders who take him in. He's very touching, he has a "Chaplin-like" side to him...

And there's a real tribute to Chaplin in the film, outside the Saint-Eustache cathedral...

Yes. It wasn't really planned, but it just happened that way. As soon as I started to play it like that, Jean-Pierre saw it immediately, felt it and encouraged me.

In what way do you feel closest to Basil?

Uh... In any case, I certainly don't have a bullet in my head! I like the fantasy of childhood in adulthood. Even if we know perfectly well we're not innocent anymore, I love that idea. I like when Basil jokes around in the film and when he teases the Elastic Girl character played by Julie [Ferrier].

What was your biggest challenge with the character of Basil?

With that type of role, the biggest challenge is to stay in character from start to finish, to stay faithful to it. On the other hand, physically, it was... getting inside the barrel of a cannon! Because I'm very claustrophobic, so much so that I can't sit in the back of a car if there's no door, or at least a window that opens! If I take the elevator and the doors take a little time to open, I feel like I'm dying! And when I go to a show, I always sit at the end of the aisle to not get trapped. Just to give you an idea... So then, when I had to put on the welder's cap and fireman suit and get into the cannon, I thought I would faint. I had warned Jean-Pierre, who told me we would work something out and who, in fact, the day of the shoot, had worked out nothing at all! He even told me it was impossible for me to be replaced by a double because you could see my eyes... But anyway, I did it. Jean-Pierre has this talent for getting anything he wants out of you. He's an actor's director who really has a lot of personality, who knows exactly what he wants, but like I said, is very open to suggestions. That makes it very interesting, because that way you can really enrich the character. Jean-Pierre plays his role of orchestra conductor to perfection. When I'm only acting in a film, I can have a lot of doubts, I can have a constant need to do another take, to add something new. But him, he knows exactly when he has what he wants, what he likes. And he stops me. It's very reassuring. And what's fantastic is the feeling you're entering the world of Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

And even reenacting his memories, perhaps? The scene when you're eating the Vache Qui Rit cheese feels like it comes from real experience... or is it improvisation?

No, it's not improvisation. It was written like that, he wanted me to play it that way. I'm sure he did that when he was a kid! That only makes it more touching. Especially since it's extremely satisfying to rediscover that childhood delight through acting... It was pretty much the same with the dubbing scene of *The Big Sleep*, even if technically it was a lot more complicated! I worked so hard that in the end, I knew everything by heart, the dialogue, the rhythm...

What surprised you most about his approach to your character?

When he shaved my head! Then again, I like changing the way I look. When he filmed certain shots with the wide angle, because he always uses a lot of short focal lengths, he'd say to me: "It's great, you really look awful, you're really going to be ugly but the shot is fantastic." I said to myself, "No big deal, you're in Jeunet's world, everything is fine." And he was right. Being attractive or being ugly in that kind of film isn't important. What's

more complicated with him is when there is an emotional scene and he's just as demanding with the shot composition as he is for a stunt! The first time, for example, that I went into the offices of one of the weapons sellers, Vigilante, disguising myself as a waiter, and witnessed that awful speech by Nicolas Marié and cried, he said to me: "You need to have a tear on this side and it has to run down like this." And the most amazing thing is that he gets what he wants. You manage to do it and aren't any less sincere! I know where that certainty and rigor come from. Me too, when I was a teenager, I loved making little movies with clay in super 8, I also had an old 4-track recorder I used to make voices and sounds... I remember the pleasure I had when, all of a sudden, I rustled a piece of paper and it made the sound of a fire crackling. I was ecstatic! Jean-Pierre still has that crafty kid side to him. He's a craftsman, but his craftsmanship is of the highest professional level now.

Has becoming a director yourself changed your place on the set and the way you work with directors?

Maybe I'm more patient. I was already patient before, but I understand the technical side better now. I don't need to be told where I have to look anymore. Also, since I'd worked as a story-boarder in animation, I already had a feel for scene breakdown. And now I know from experience that when you write and make a film, you spend a year and a half, two years thinking of it and working on it before you start shooting, you know all the characters and dialogue by heart. You've worked them and reworked them, reconsidered them, passing through all the emotional stages, from the greatest possible joy to the most absolute depression. So when you show up on the set, you know everything, whereas as an actor, you've only thought about your character – and it's exactly that spontaneity that is so important. That's why it's in your best interest to let yourself be guided by the director, who already has two years of work behind him...

In the film, you have a lot of colleagues that come from very different walks of life...

That's really been a part of the pleasure of this adventure. We were very tight knit group. I like how those families are formed, just like that. Each time, it's a new life. You go through all the stages, all the moods, all the states of fatigue, all the joys... I was delighted to meet Jean-Pierre Marielle, to work again with Julie [Ferrier] who I've known a long time, I even hired her to do the opening act at the Olympia, and to see that contortionist who doubled for her – for me, who has a hard time bending his knee, seeing her warm up by putting her head back between her legs was terrifying! It was also great to work with André Dussollier. I kept teasing him because of his wig, saying he was really Jean-Claude Dussollier, André's unknown

brother, a car mechanic who was trying to take his place! And then all the others... Yolande Moreau, Dominique Pinon, Omar Sy... On stage I'm all alone, so that's what I like about film, we're a troupe...

We know you're committed to fighting discrimination, injustice and the radical right-wing. Were you also touched by the way the film uses comedy to attack weapon manufacturers?

Of course. Yes it's a comedy, but the backdrop is significant. There's something political to this story of a standoff between the little marginal guys and the big businessmen who are also salesmen of death... The speech by Nicolas Marié's character I mentioned earlier rings so true it's terrifying. They talk like that and totally conceal the fact that this "growing market" as they call it, allows half of the human race to kill each other. They're ready to help them do it and make a profit, no questions of conscience asked! I like the way the film mixes bizarre humor and a backdrop that's a little political...

Do you feel you've succeeded in slipping a little bit of your own world into Jeunet's world?

I think so, yes, in my character. At least that's what Jean-Pierre says.

Will having worked with him, having seen him work, change the way you work as a filmmaker?

From now on, I'm only going to shoot with wide angles! Even my kids' birthday videos!

If you could keep only one image of the whole adventure, what would it be?

Shooting the last shot of the film in Morocco. There was an extremely complex crane movement, we were running out of time, there were I don't know how many extras, we spent the day setting up the scene and we got the shot at the last moment, at the exact instant when the sun was setting! It was perfect, but it was pushing it close. It was a fabulous moment and so symbolic of how demanding and passionate Jean-Pierre is, of his ability to go all the way, surpass himself and make us surpass ourselves... It's exhausting but great!

While you're doing the promotion for *Micmacs*, you'll be preparing for the Olympia, finishing the script for your next film and supervising the American remake of *The Ch'tis* by Will Smith... Isn't that a lot for only one man?

That's what's so great, so exciting. I finished the first draft of the script in the middle of the summer and the initial feedback is very good, so I'm going to keep working on it, but everything is fine on that front. I've taken a huge thorn out of my foot, which was writing my third film, and now I'm on the show – that impresses Jean-Pierre a lot, he's even afraid for me when I tell him I still haven't finished writing it! His worrying even ends up freaking me out some days, and at the same time, I've been doing it for fifteen years, so it should be fine... And as for the remake, Will Smith has such a good crew, it shouldn't be a problem. I love having an abundance of activities. It's very rewarding to do it all and also meet authors and filmmakers who have a distinctive world of their own. We only move forward by feeding off of others.

It's what keeps us from repeating ourselves.

THE CHARACTERS

BY JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET

THE SECONDHAND DEALERS

JEAN-PIERRE MARIELLE ***SLAMMER***

He's spent three-quarters of his life in prison. In 1959, the guillotine got stuck and just grazed his gristle. In all of history, it's only happened twice. He was pardoned. No lock stands a chance against him.

“Quite obviously, when we say that the guillotine has gotten stuck twice in all of history, it's sheer nonsense! Marielle is typical of the kind of actor I wanted to work with. All he has to do is talk, the mere sound of his voice brings a whole era of cinema to life before you... He and Dany got along well together. Immediately there was a sort of game between them – jokes, fake insults – as if to dissimulate the respect and friendship that connected them.”

YOLANDE MOREAU ***MAMA CHOW***

Everyone's mama. She lost two little girls at the County Fair who entered the House of Mirrors and never came out. Since then, she's adopted these oddballs with no family and cooks for them.

“Yolande was such an obvious choice for this character... She has a phenomenal ability to improvise, but don't let that fool you: before the shoot, she thinks on her own, she's used to working with Jérôme Deschamps! It's a joy to let her improvise, even if it's not exactly how I'm used to working! When we shot the scenes at the airport, where she embellished upon the situation quite a bit, she made the whole crew crack up laughing. She's an exceptional actress. She'd already played the concierge in *Amelie*. Paradoxically, we're always a little intimidated by each other. I just love her.”

JULIE FERRIER
ELASTIC GIRL

She's always the first to bend over backwards to help out others. A sensitive soul in a flexible body.

"I'd seen Julie's show and went crazy with admiration for her. She's an absolute genius. The way she transforms herself into different characters is exceptional. All you have to do is watch what she did at the last César ceremony, where even Emma Thompson and Sean Penn were fooled by her poor fumbling actress bit! As soon as I saw her on stage, I wanted to make a movie with her. She was ideal for Elastic Girl, able to express both the comic and the disturbing aspects contortionists always exude."

OMAR SY
REMINGTON

Formerly an ethnographer in Brazzaville. He types up lists of everything his friends bring back to him, as well as all the old French proverbs he can gather. From which he deduces that white man has a compass in his eye, his stomach in his heels, holds his candy high, puts a hammer in his head and goes from rooster to ass...

"It was fun giving him those kind of lines. All of a sudden, when they come out of his mouth with that African accent, they're even richer. Omar is a very gentle, very affectionate person. He's also very professional and a pleasure to work with. He hasn't even come close to making use of all his potential. During the screen tests, when he had to run through his lines with André Dussollier for the first time, he was so anxious that he made it nerve-racking for me, too. And then he couldn't have been more perfect! He hit everything right on the mark. He really enjoyed playing the role. It wasn't easy because it takes time for the humor in his lines to fully develop, and he had to go the distance."

DOMINIQUE PINON
BUSTER

His dream is to be in the book of world records. As a matter of fact, in 1977 he broke the record – by nine meters! – of the cannonball man. But he's a completely broken man, both literally and figuratively.

“It's unthinkable to leave Pinon out of my films! With his face and his talent, it's impossible for me to do without him – not to mention the bond that's grown between us over time. My big game is, each time I put him in the worst possible situation imaginable. In *Delicatessen*, he was attached to a toilet seat for a week. In *The City*, he was tied down to a platform out at sea. In *Alien*, he was attached underwater to Black like a backpack. Here I had him thrown into the Seine river, for real! He even had to get vaccinated against rat piss! I also make him do unbelievable things: play the saw, think he's the cannonball man... When I see all that he contributes to the scenes, even when he's not in the foreground, I can't get over it. He still manages to surprise me and make me laugh a lot.”

MICHEL CREMADES
TINY PETE

The artist of the gang. He constructs fabulous automated sculptures and peculiar machines out of the salvaged materials they bring him. Don't be fooled by his small size or age: he is gifted with Herculean strength.

“We've seen him a hundred times in Claude Zidi's comedies, so I liked giving him an unexpected role. I love the sparkle in his eye.”

MARIE-JULIE BAUP

CALCULATOR

Her father was a land surveyor and her mother an alterations seamstress. She has a pea brain but a sharp eye. She measures, calculates, evaluates and organizes everything the others bring home. She always counts everything – and she can be counted on.

“Of course the character of a timid, introverted young girl isn't exactly new to my world... I discovered Marie-Julie when I was casting a different role. She's the revelation of the film. Up until now, she'd never done a movie, just theatre. She's sensational as Calculator, who borders on being autistic.”

THE WEAPON SELLERS

THE BAD GUYS

ANDRE DUSSOLLIER

NICOLAS THIBAUT DE FENOUILLET

AND

NICOLAS MARIE

FRANCOIS MARCONI

“I had fun giving André Dussollier the role of a cartoon villain a little like the character actor from the 50's, Jacques Monod, with an impeccable crew cut. André thoroughly enjoyed incarnating this traditional old-style Frenchman without a conscience. When I gave him the script to read, he left a twenty-minute message on my answering machine telling me how much he'd enjoy doing it.”

“Nicolas Marié isn't as well known. But he's an incredible actor. He was fantastic in Dupontel's films and in Jan Kounen's *99Francs*. *Micmacs* should make him a star, he more than deserves it.”

CAST

BAZIL
NICOLAS THIBAUT DE FENOUILLET
FRANCOIS MARCONI
SLAMMER
MAMA CHOW
ELASTIC GIRL
REMINGTON
BUSTER
TINY PETE
CALCULATOR
NIGHT WATCHMAN
GERBAUD
LIBARSKI
MATEO
GRAVIER
HEAD OF THE REBELS
MARCONI'S CHAUFFEUR
SERGE, VIDEO STORE
LOLA
MRS. CISSE
HER HUSBAND
THE HORNY TECHNICIAN
HIS PARTNER
YOUNG BAZIL

Contortionist Body Double
for Julie FERRIER

Dany BOON
André DUSSOLLIER
Nicolas MARIE
Jean-Pierre MARIELLE
Yolande MOREAU
Julie FERRIER
Omar SY
Dominique PINON
Michel CREMADES
Marie-Julie BAUP
Urbain CANCELIER
Patrick PAROUX
Jean-Pierre BECKER
Stéphane BUTET
Philippe GIRARD
Doudou MASTA
Eric NAGGAR
Arsène MOSCA
Manon LE MOAL
Félicité N'GIJOL
Bernard BASTEREAUD
Tony GAULTIER
Stéphanie GESNEL
Noé BOON

Julia GUNTHER

CREW

Director
Producers

1st Assistant Director
Script
Casting Director
Storyboard
Research
Production Manager
Unit Production Manager

Director of Photography
Steady-cam Operator - Camera
Animated Sequences
Digital Calibration
Set Photographer
Making-of
Head Sound Engineer
Costume Designer
Head Makeup
SFX Makeup

Head Hairstylist
Production Design
On-set Special Effects
Head Editor
1st Assistant Editor
Head Sound Editor
Sound Design
Foley Artist
Sound Mix
Key Grip
Head Gaffer
Stunt Coordinators

Post-Production Director
Special Effects

Jean-Pierre JEUNET
Frédéric BRILLION
Gilles LEGRAND
Jean-Pierre JEUNET
Thierry MAUVOISIN
Anne WERMELINGER
Pierre-Jacques BENICHOU
Maxime REBIERE
Phil CASOAR
Jean-Marc DESCHAMPS
Eric DUCHENE A.F.R.
Tetsuo NAGATA A.F.C.
Jan RUBENS
Romain SEGAUD
Didier LEFOUEST
Bruno CALVO
Julien LECAT
Jean UMANSKY
Madeline FONTAINE
Nathalie TISSIER
Jean-Christophe SPADACCINI
Denis GASTOU
Stéphane MALHEU
Aline BONETTO A.D.C.
LES VERSAILLAIS
Hervé SCHNEID A.C.E.
Anne-Sophie BION
Gérard HARDY
Selim AZZAZI
Jean-Pierre LELONG
Vincent ARNARDI C.A.S.
Bruno DUBET
Patrick CONTESSE
Patrick CAUDERLIER
Jean-Claude LAGNIEZ
Emmanuel LEGRAND
DURAN DUBOI

Visual Effects Supervisor
Original Music
Additional Music
Music Artistic Advisor
Mobile Sculptures

Alain CARSOUX
Raphaël BEAU
Max STEINER
Edouard DUBOIS
Gilbert PEYRE

Interviews: Jean-Pierre Lavoignat

VARIETY

Micmacs

By Rob Nelson

Turning the volume of his slapstick surreality down from 11 to 10, Gallic auteur Jean-Pierre Jeunet ("Amelie") hits the sweet spot with "Micmacs." The wacky tale of a brain-injured videostore clerk who brings down a pair of Parisian arms dealers with the help of some highly creative collectors of second-hand goods, "Micmacs" welds Jeunet's hyperactive imagination to the simpler structures of silent comedy and '40s-era studio capers, resulting in the director's most accessible work yet. Following its surefire French release on Oct. 28, this Sony Classics pickup should translate well Stateside, given the paucity of its dialogue and the purity of its gags.

Jeunet, though working again with co-screenwriter Guillaume Laurant, has turned away from the obsession with capital-F Fate that informed "Amelie" and its follow-up, "A Very Long Engagement." Here, the slender plot is set swiftly in motion by a stray bullet that lands in the head of clock-punching Parisian Basil (Dany Boon) during his umpteenth screening of Howard Hawks' "The Big Sleep." Comatose in the hospital, Basil doesn't notice when his callous surgeons flip a coin, thereby determining that they'll keep the slug lodged in the patient's skull --this at the risk of his sudden death at any time.

An apparently new sensitivity to visual stimuli allows mild-mannered Basil to recognize a weapons manufacturing company's logo as identical to that in an old photo taken by his late soldier dad, who hit an explosive land mine years ago while fighting in the Sahara. Acting like his detective hero, Philip Marlowe, Basil spies on the company's two chiefs, including one Nicolas Thibault de Fenouillet (Andre Dussollier), who absurdly collects the body parts of key historical figures and is currently angling to reel in Mussolini's eye.

Meantime, sleeping along the Seine under a blanket of cardboard, Basil falls in with a merry band of junkyard tinkerers, each with his or her own eccentric specialty: Slammer (Jean-Pierre Marielle) is an ex-con and expert lock-picker; Remington (Omar Sy) types on an old electric; Buster is an obsessive record-breaker (Dominique Pinon); Calculator (Marie-Julie Baup) does the math; and Elastic Girl (Julie Ferrier) literally bends over backward for the crew.

In the spirit of these ingenious recyclers, Jeunet has charmingly repurposed the 65-year-old "Big Sleep" score along with snippets of other '40s film music, all composed by the great Max Steiner. Just as delightful, if more unique, are the tools of infiltration -- ropes, pulleys, bottomless suitcases, makeshift fishing poles, and other bric-a-brac -- with which Jeunet and Laurant have outfitted the gang.

The movie's zanier scenes are allowed to work so well in part because Jeunet has given them sufficient room to breathe; unlike the director's more aggressively hyperactive work, "Micmacs" carefully apportions its visual jokes rather than bombarding the viewer with them.

In a production of enormous size and minute detail, tech credits are top-caliber, most notably the elaborately funky production design of Aline Bonetto. Though little more than props themselves at times, the actors in Jeunet's fantasia perform capably -- or, in the case of Ferrier's memorably contorting Elastic Girl, limberly.

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

Dir: Jean-Pierre Jeunet. France. 2009. 105 mins.

Micmacs is a pleasing original comedy with charm to spare: Jean Pierre Jeunet's breeziest film to date, even as it delivers a strong message against landmines and arms dealing. Bearing the director's inimitable visual imprimatur, and with Welcome to the Sticks' Dany Boon in the central role, Micmacs is set to be one of the season's biggest hits in France when Warner Bros opens it.

The execution and editing of his conceits are expert and constantly surprising, and the sight and audio gags are frequently brilliant.

Sony Pictures Classics has US distribution rights and should score a notable success with the boundlessly inventive Micmacs, if not quite Amelie's \$33m in 2001. International distributors who bought the title from TF1 International are also looking at one of the more warmly received non-English language films of this year or next, and can promise audiences the same infectious package they got in Delicatessen and Amelie.

Micmacs has the added value of playing to a family audience and its ingenious plot machinations, imagination and broad humour will delight children as well as adults. After a mis-step with A Very Long Engagement, Jeunet is back on form with a pure entertainment that will find a very large audience.

The film's first section, in characteristic Jeunet back story fashion, whisks through the early life of young Bazil, whose father is killed by a landmine while serving in the army (possibly Algeria). His mother becomes insane, and he ends up in an orphanage. As an adult, Bazil is working in a video store when a stray bullet from a gangland shootout lands in his head and he is almost killed.

Out of hospital, where doctors have decided to leave the bullet lodged in his brain, Bazil finds himself jobless and homeless and is befriended by an ex-con called Placard (Marielle) who welcomes him into an endearing family of misfits living in a scrap heap and surviving by salvaging junk

The group is led by the maternal Tambouille (Moreau) and includes numbers genius Calcuette (Marie-Julie Baup), former Guinness Record holder as a human cannonball Fracasse (Jeunet regular Pinon) and contortionist Caoutchouc (Ferrier).

One day on a salvaging drive, Bazil encounters two office buildings one across the street from one another – rival arms manufacturers, one of which manufactured the landmine which killed his father, the other the bullet which nearly killed him. He and his new family set out the corrupt and arrogant heads of the firms (Dussolier and Marie) by pitching them against each other in a series of brilliant tricks.

The elaborate stings which Bazil and friends mount on the two arms dealers make up most of the film's running time and each is more entertaining and elaborate than the last, using all of Jeunet's considerable ingenuity. The execution and editing of his conceits are expert and constantly surprising, and the sight and audio gags are frequently brilliant. The cast, led by a relatively non-verbal Boon, whose popularity can only continue to soar after Micmacs, is perfectly attuned to the humorous shenanigans.