

INCIDENT IN A GHOSTLAND



CAST

Crystal Reed ... Adult Beth
Anastasia Phillips ... Adult Vera
Emilia Jones ... Young Beth
Taylor Hickson ... Young Vera
Kevin Power ... Candy Truck Woman
Rob Archer ... Fat Man
Mylène Farmer ... Pauline

CREW

Director of Photography
Danny Nowak, csc

Edited by
Dev Singh

Production Designer
Gordon Wilding

Costumes Designer
Brenda Shenher

Music by
Todd Bryanton

Additional Music by
Georges Boukoff and **Anthony D'amario**

Written & Directed by
Pascal Laugier

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INCIDENT IN A GHOSTLAND

by Alan Jones

Warning: the following article contains spoilers!

In 2008, director Pascal Laugier rocked the horror genre with *Martyrs*, one of the most controversial, disturbing and shocking movies ever made. A masterpiece of surreal power and strangely beautiful excess, the story of a brutalised teenager seeking revenge on the family who held her in abusive captivity put Laugier firmly at the vanguard of French Extreme cinema. Alongside fellow Gallic gore gurus Alexandre Aja's *Switchblade Romance* (*Haute tension*, 2003), David Moreau and Xavier Palud's *Them* (*Ils*, 2006), Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo's *Inside* (*À l'intérieur*, 2007) and Xavier Gens' *Frontier(s)* (*Frontière(s)*, 2007), Laugier's distinctive talents elevated the genre to new heights of wonder-infused sustained dread.

Laugier practically pioneered the unconventional swerve into the uncharted unknown with *Martyrs*. By expertly planting startling twists he navigated the stark horror left in their wake towards a more ambitious psychological intensity. The result was a uniquely thought-provoking and over-powering emotional sucker punch. Defying genre expectations with his brand of sly audacity, and thereby increasing the stomach-churning qualities of his work, is something Laugier has made his outstanding signature. It's a dazzling trait he confidently continues to mine in the critically-acclaimed and award-winning *Incident in a Ghostland*, his exceptionally devised and violently twisting take on the home invasion chiller which playfully makes use of disorienting timelines, heightened anxieties and shifting realities to keep even the faint-hearted in an appalled thrall.



But how did the outspoken firebrand get to the pinnacle of his *Incident in a Ghostland* powers? Pascal Laugier made his first important mark on the French film industry with director Christophe Gans' French blockbuster *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (*Le pacte des loups*, 2001). Not only was he Gans' gofer on that period horror (he can be seen briefly playing an assistant to François Hadji-Lazaro's Machemort character), but also the director trusted him implicitly to helm two detailed 'making of' documentaries used to promote the movie.

These led to a grateful Gans and his producer Richard Grandpierre undersigning Laugier's feature film debut *House of Voices* (*Saint Ange*, 2004), a supernatural confection set in an Alpine orphanage in the style of *The Others* (2001). A modest hit in France, *House of Voices* impressed Grandpierre enough to take a chance on Laugier's next project, *Martyrs*. Grandpierre was after all the producer of Gaspar Noé's hugely contentious *Irreversible* (2002) and *Ils* and recognised the contemporary seismic shift in Gallic genre production that would put *Martyrs* at the forefront of the French Extreme movement and on many Top Ten lists as one of the greatest horror movies ever made.

It was in the astonished aftermath of *Martyrs*' wildly enthusiastic reception that the American outfit Miramax came calling, asking Laugier to consider remaking *Hellraiser* (1987). Because Clive Barker's sadomasochistic fantasy was an inspiration for *Martyrs*, Laugier happily climbed aboard the project and spent four months with the Weinstein brothers trying to crack the basic commercial conundrum of how to make the vicious subject matter more mainstream. But like the *Inside* guys before him, Laugier sadly walked away out of respect for Barker's brainchild when it became clear the demonic Cenobites would be playing no part in any remake plans.

Instead Laugier threw himself into making his English-language feature debut with *The Tall Man* (2010), which concerns itself with a legendary child-abducting entity plaguing a depressed mining town. Starring Jessica Biel as a widowed nurse, and once more garnished with sneaky sleight-of-hand shocks, *The Tall Man* opens in a ghost landscape while unexpectedly closing with its feet planted firmly in the real, unsettling world. Known as *The Secret* in France where it became a box-office smash, the superbly directed *The Tall Man* crystallised Laugier's singular style and ground-breaking reputation.

Once more in the wake of home-grown triumph, Laugier was asked by maverick *Paranormal Activity* (2007 onwards) franchise producer Jason Blum to consider directing a sequel to 2012's *Sinister*. Laugier landed in Blum's universe because his company, Blumhouse, had produced the instantly redundant 2015 *Martyrs* remake by Kevin and Michael Goetz. By this time, Laugier had seen too many examples of his comrades heading to Hollywood to fulfil their Steven Spielberg fantasies only to return home completely traumatised by the disheartening, blinding-out experience. As he said at the time, "American studios have the ability to hire us for our original vision only to ultimately insist we just be like everyone else. There can be only one person in control of a film, not ten all with different views. I played that game with Miramax and I had no intention of ever doing it again."

After spending two years on a movie that didn't come to fruition (*Details*), and avoiding all overtures for a *Martyrs* sequel, Laugier needed to get back behind a camera. Inspired by his three favourite films of recent years – Rob Zombie's *The Lords of Salem* (2012), David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* (2014) and S. Craig Zahler's *Bone Tomahawk* (2015) – he wrote *Incident in a Ghostland*, a film which encapsulates the visceral spirit of *Martyrs* within the tricky narrative essence of *The Tall Man*. He explains, "With [*Incident in a Ghostland*] I wanted to put across the feeling of entering the mind of someone



just as the ground is slipping away beneath their feet. That total empathy with a character so dazed by what's happening that they don't fully understand the implications. The viewer doesn't want to watch but is compelled to do so through sheer delayed shock. I often wonder why the people who see my films just don't get up and walk out because they can't handle what's going on. Like them though I have to see the horror through to the bitter end. That key element is what drives my movies, especially this one."

Incident in a Ghostland begins with teenage sisters Beth (Emilia Jones) and Vera (Taylor Hickson) moving out to the remote countryside with their single mother, Pauline (Mylène Farmer), into a rambling property they've just inherited. The creaky old house is piled high with creepy dolls, stuffed animals and musty antiques left behind by their eccentric aunt. But the excited family barely gets time to explore because, on the very first night in their new home, they are confronted by two murderous intruders who have been roaming the region in an extremely menacing candy truck looking for victims to satisfy their strange desires. As Pauline fights for her daughters' lives, Beth and Vera hide in the cellar as the Fat Man (Rob Archer), a mentally handicapped man-child, and his sadistic guardian (Kevin Power, voiced by Angela Asher), subject the trio to an array of cruelties.

Sixteen years later, Beth (now played by Crystal Reed) wakes up screaming from the nightmare of the memories accrued during those hours of anguished terror. Now happily married and living in a luxury Chicago condominium, Beth is a bestselling author of horror fiction in the tradition of her absolute hero, H.P. Lovecraft. Her latest book, *Incident in a Ghost Land* details the events that marked that first night in the old, dark house. But the thrilling reception given to her new macabre tome is offset by her sister Vera (now played by Anastasia Phillips), who still lives in that same house with their mother, calling with some upsetting news. With trepidation Beth finally decides

to return home, only to find she will never, ever forget the source of her terrifying trauma.

Predominantly shot in the province of Manitoba, Canada, *Incident in a Ghostland* once more accents strong female leads in typical Laugier fashion. Following in the footsteps of Virginie Ledoyen and Lou Doillon in *House of Voices*, Mylène Jampanoi and Morjana Alaoui from *Martyrs* and Jessica Biel and Jodelle Ferland in *The Tall Man*, Crystal Reed and Anastasia Phillips both step up to the mark to reveal various shades of strength, weakness, ugliness and beauty in their deceptively complex characters that have to stay ahead of the many chilling curveballs Laugier throws into his perilous mix. Both actresses expertly eschew their television credentials to create believably crushed individuals barely able to lick their wounds and prevail against the tyranny of their reality.

For many though, especially Laugier's French audience, the star of this ominous show is pop icon Mylène Farmer. One of the most successful recording artists of all time in France, often referred to as that country's Madonna, Farmer holds the record for the most number one hits in the French pop charts, with seventeen to date – eight of which were consecutive. Her signature 1991 hit 'Désenchantée' is an existential lament and her most globally well-known club anthem. Still a massive draw on the arena concert circuit, Farmer's very limited film career began in 1994 with the flop *Giorgino*, directed by her song-writing partner Laurent Boutonnat. Since then she had only voiced the Princess Sélenia character in the French-language version of director Luc Besson's children's fantasy adventure *Arthur and the Invisibles* (*Arthur et les Minimoys*, 2006) and its various sequels.

It was in 2015 that Farmer and Laugier would come together, when the singer asked Laugier to collaborate on the music video for the song 'City

of Love' taken from her *Interstellaires* album. Oddly prescient of *Incident in a Ghostland*, with Laugier's camera roaming through a creepy cobwebbed house full of weird memorabilia and ephemera while a Giger-esque creature scuttles in the shadows, the clip forged a relationship between the two clearly simpatico artists. Laugier reveals: "I was in the process of financing and casting *Incident in a Ghostland* while directing the video and Mylène knew I was struggling to find an actress to play Pauline. One night, at two o'clock in the morning, she sent me a text saying she would happily play a small cameo but I only had the important role of the mother. So I sent her the script and two hours later she accepted the part of Pauline. Originally I had written her as a downtrodden woman, probably working as a waitress to make ends meet, someone broken by the sheer grind of life. Within four days of Mylène coming on board, and inspired by her enthusiasm, I had completely re-written Pauline as a French exile living in the USA. Quite what her fans think about their favourite singer being beaten to a pulp and stabbed repeatedly is another matter entirely..."

Within the narrative of *Incident in a Ghostland* Laugier pays homage to a host of horror heroes like Stephen King, Robert Aldrich, Tobe Hooper and Lovecraft, going so far as making the latter iconic writer a part of the plot. He explains: "I was channelling my inner Beth while writing the script and directing the picture. When I was fourteen years-old I was making Super 8 movies in the style of Dario Argento and John Carpenter. Everyone should have a goal to aim for and Lovecraft is Beth's benchmark, although I make it quite clear she has evolved her own approach. It's something we all have to recognise: only with maturity do you develop your own creative personality. As much as you want to remain an optimistic fourteen-year-old besotted by the horror genre."



But for Laugier the biggest challenge with *Incident in a Ghostland* was experimenting with the visual grammar of horror to achieve a completely matchless effect. "I knew the savage ritual of the Fat Man, including dressing up the girls as dolls, stroking, smelling them... and far worse, was going to mean a very long sequence with no dialogue. Could I hold the attention while respecting very clear dramatic issues? It's important to understand why this ogre is doing what he's doing and I think I did push the cosmic horror envelope in interesting directions here. I don't want to analyse it too much though. I realised early on that the common element to all my films is to evoke nostalgic childhood memories by escaping from depressing reality into a vivid imagination."

Alan Jones is a broadcaster, film critic, genre author and co-director of FrightFest.



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Incident in a Ghostland is presented in the original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with 5.1 and Stereo sound. The HD master was supplied by the filmmakers.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet Produced By **Ewan Cant**

Associate Producer **Mike Hewitt**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert** and **Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**

Blu-ray Authoring and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Design **Obviously Creative**

Reverse Artwork Designed by **Oink Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Flavien Bellevue, Georges Boukoff, Anthony D'amario,
Sandy Gillet, Sigrid Larsen, Pascal Laugier, Grégoire Melin, Leroy Moore,
Anthony Nield, Alexandre Poncet, Ed Rig and Tom Stewart.

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