

AGAT FILMS & CIE, ATELIER DE PRODUCTION

Present



# EAT THE NIGHT

A FILM BY CAROLINE POGGI & JONATHAN VINEL

2024 – FRANCE – DRAMA, ROMANCE, THRILLER – FRENCH – 107'



## **SYNOPSIS**

---

Pablo, a small-time dealer, and his teenage sister Apolline have forged an unbreakable bond through their shared obsession with the online video game Darknoon. When Pablo falls for the mysterious Night, he gets swept up in their liaison, abandoning his sister to deal with the impending shutdown of their digital haven alone. As Pablo's reckless choices provoke the wrath of a dangerous rival gang, the end of their virtual life draws near, upending their reality....

## INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE POGGI & JONATHAN VINEL

---

***Your first feature, Jessica Forever, and now this second film, Eat the Night, are six years apart. And yet, these six years have been filled with an enormous amount of side projects...***

After *Jessica Forever*, we needed time before starting a new project. We made a lot of hybrid films, like *Baby Anger*, *Watch the Fire or Burn Inside it*, or most recently, *Best Secret Place*. However, these weren't "rough drafts" for *Eat the Night*. They were a means to finding a space slightly outside of cinema, so we could return to it all the more prepared. This film comes from a strong desire to create cinema – the desire to confront a much more narrative storyline than *Jessica Forever*, while maintaining our desire for hybridization. It juxtaposes different worlds, then makes them collide. We're more interested in circulation, the interstitial, passage, bridges, and exploration. But our primary desire for the film was the characters. It all started with them. The first character to emerge was Night. We wove the story around him: his passionate love of Pablo, running away with Apo, and the ensuing tragedy that infects them all. Originally, the story was told in a flashback through his eyes. We'd also always wanted to write a story about the end of video game servers. We watched quite a few of these online, and they made a real impression on us. They were like a sort of lost world, an inaccessible refuge.

***Was there more than one writer for this film? What were the film's ambitions?***

**Jonathan:** Yes, we wrote it with Guillaume Bréaud, who had also worked with Thierry de Peretti. Since he's not a screenwriter by training, his approach was quite different. He's also a director, and we share the same tastes in film. We met him on a first draft of the script and he helped us structure it, to find its core and develop the plot as a thriller. Our greatest difficulty was to be able to link the different worlds that coexist in the film. We started writing on the first day of lockdown. Strangely enough, during this period, we rewatched all five seasons of *The Wire*. That definitely had an impact on *Eat The Night*.

**Caroline:** Yes, it was an inspiration, and it also helped us be comfortable with questioning each of the character's sexuality. For me, Omar in *The Wire* remains one of the most beautiful characters ever written. That's because his sexuality challenges certain sociological prejudices and clichés. That's what we wanted to achieve by having Pablo and Night fall in love. *The Wire* also made us feel comfortable with the idea of having not one but several central characters, then organizing the story around them.

**Jonathan:** We most likely already wanted to do that in *Jessica Forever*, but we hid behind the fact that it was a group of characters. Here, there is no group. Each character carries the film from the perspective of his/her own solitude.

**Caroline:** The film focuses on their trajectories, showing how they relay the different storylines to one another. But it also undeniably relates the impossibility of being together. Perhaps that's all the film is about – despite all the love everywhere. The only time, the only shot where we see all three of them together is in front of the computer – and even then, they're all looking at the video game!

**Jonathan:** *Eat The Night's* other ambition was to film action. We systematically avoided this in *Jessica Forever*. It was always off-camera. We grew up on films like *To Live and Die in L.A.* (William Friedkin), *The Mission* (Johnnie To), *Time and Tide* (Tsui Hark), *King of New-York* (Ferrara), *Ichi the Killer* (Takashi Miike)... We wanted action to be at the heart of this film because, at its own very heart is the video game, Darknoon.

***Was the game there from the start? How did you balance it out with the live action parts of the film?***

**Caroline:** Our first drafts went too far in the opposite direction. But that's how we work: we exhaust our story lines, push the motif, let it settle, then refine it. In *Eat The Night*, "finding balance" also meant confronting ourselves with the task of filming an urban, geographical and, *a fortiori*, a social reality. In our previous films, the locations had no sociological markers. On the contrary, we would explore imaginary worlds that were trying to exile themselves from reality and found an escape in games, groups, gangs, parties, rituals, forests, and so on. But that couldn't continue. The game needed a counterpoint. Darknoon and reality had to stare each other in the face.

**Jonathan:** At first, we didn't have a specific city in mind. In the middle of writing, Guillaume suggested we visit Le Havre, a port city in the North of France. He immediately got us to anchor the narrative in reality during the writing process. This is the first of our films that actually takes place "in the world".

**Caroline:** But we didn't film the city's most commonplace spots. You can know a bit about the city and still not recognize it. So, we looked for places that had an element of strangeness, or complexity. In Le Havre, you see fragments of Europe. You suddenly find yourself in a different network, in one of the nerve centres for the circulation of global trade. That's another reason why we wanted to film this port.

**Jonathan:** Incidentally, we also filmed in the forest of the North of France, which further blurs the locations. We took the liberty of doing this because, in video games, you go from one background to another without knowing how you got there. In the film, it's the same: the transitions are a bit magical, moving from the forest to the house and so on. You move through locations as if you were changing backgrounds.

***If the game begins to inspire actions in the "real world", then the real world will no longer dominate the game. Is the game therefore no longer fulfilling its role as an escape from reality?***

**Jonathan:** Relationships within a given space, ways of communicating, individual solitudes: all this was filmed one layer at a time. That said, gestures and locations had to ring true without turning the film into a documentary. It was a delicate balance. During the shoot, this pushed us to adopt a different position. There was no confrontation between the game and reality. Instead, there was circulation. And therefore contamination. We had to find a way to frame, light, and connect the actors. It also changed the way we set up scenes and linked actions. The ambition of *Jessica Forever* was to turn the world into a game, so we stripped it of anything too realistic. With *Eat the Night*, we tell the story of the game's extension into the world. The game lays down the rules for conduct in the real world, then teaches us how to live and survive. For an entire generation, from that point on, reality is the continuation of

the player's existence outside the game. Their bodies follow in the footsteps of their avatars, and can be said to go from one mission to another.

**Caroline:** Pablo lives his life as if he were in a game. He tries to survive every level. He delivers his drugs as if he were delivering them in *GTA*. When we filmed him manufacturing his pills, it was like filming a gamer showing off his skills. Pablo and ecstasy was like *Zelda* and food. He was proud of his recipe. He makes his own dishes.

### ***Does the game Darknoon actually exist?***

**Jonathan:** No, we invented it entirely for *Eat the Night* with Lucien Krampf and Saradibiza. The story of the game is never told in the film. We see them play, but we don't know what the objectives are. What interests us is the people who play: what they say to each other, the feelings created and strengthened by the game. I'm a gamer myself, but I really enjoy just hanging out in games, in spots where there's very little action. Gaming has taught me to see the cinema of wandering and contemplation in a different light. Gus van Sant, Béla Tarr, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul were aesthetic shocks when I first became interested in film. I was already playing a lot, and I didn't see any contradiction between this cinema and the way I played video games, which was that of a vagabond. That's always surprising to gamers, who only experience them as violent, compulsive, and cathartic. *Eat the Night* is therefore an attempt to dig tunnels that connect gaming and life. The difference between them is death. In the game, you lose then start over again. In real life, violence can kill.

### ***Video gamers are often blamed for teen violence.***

**Caroline:** Our film doesn't seek to adopt what some might call a moral position on gaming and its effects on reality. It bears witness to a contamination of one by the other. Even in our *mise-en-scène*. You can't tell the story of this communication between these two worlds – the virtual and the real – with the intention of criticizing a particular influence or behaviour. The fact is that video games have been around for decades, and today's gamer is no longer just a thirteen-year-old boy. Many people play games, and generations have grown up with them. They feed human relationships, our ability or inability to bond with one another, our way of understanding an event, and the space in which we grow. That's what interests us. We film the children of the virtual who now live in reality. And this reality is no longer exactly the same colour. The game has rubbed off on them. In the film, the game lasts twenty minutes at most. Yet its influence is everywhere.

### ***What happens when the game takes over your characters' lives?***

**Caroline:** They've spent more time in the virtual world than out in the streets. This creates a rupture. Apo is blocked in her ability to act in the outside world, instead of the game – which sexualizes her, making her strong and heroic. She has to learn to be something other than her avatar, without becoming its opposite. Like all of us, she's trying to find herself.

**Jonathan:** That's what Apo, her brother Pablo, and Night all have in common. When Night has to communicate with Apo, he rapidly understands that the only immediate way to do this is through avatars – where it's quicker for her, and where she's not suddenly suspicious. That only works if we capture something about a generation that has primarily grown up gaming. Gamers will also feel a kind of melancholy, because the structure of the game – which allows

several people to play side by side – is doomed to disappear. And today's games are destroying this option for financial reasons. The feeling of isolation is going to get worse. We wanted to show the end of an era, when you could just play together on a sofa. Proximity will therefore be lost. The collective, too.

***Filming Darknoon, which you entirely invented, is the other part of Eat the Night that you directed... How did you direct this "other" film?***

**Jonathan:** We filmed it as we always have: tightly framed, static, with perfectly straight lines. For the live action scenes, however, we gave the actors free rein: they could move about, and so could the camera. The fact that they were acting enabled us to block the space differently.

**Caroline:** There were no spotlights, except on the ceiling of Pablo's abandoned house. The rest of the lighting came from amplified bedroom bulbs, heating units, and natural light. This is a choice we made with our DP, Raphaël Vandebussche (with whom we worked on *As Long as Shotguns Remain*): the actors could go wherever they wanted. We let them make the space their very own. That was also their challenge as characters: to get out of the game and venture into the real world. That's why we chose tighter frames, up close, with a more nervous camera tracking them. Raphaël and I went back and forth a lot in order to find common ground. We talked about *S'en fout la mort* (No Fear, No Die – Claire Denis), Tobias Zielony's photos, *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-Wai), *Ghost Dog* (Jarmush) and, even more recently, *Good Time* (Safdie Brothers).

**Jonathan:** We spent six months editing the film, using text inserts instead of actual gaming scenes. It was hard to get an idea of the overall rhythm and transitions from one world to the other, upon which everything depended. Nerve-wracking, is more like it. The shoot went against all the theories we'd developed in the writing process. The final scene of the game didn't appear until two weeks before the final edit. The references we gave Sara and Lucien – particularly those concerning the 3D realism of their faces – came from games developed by studios, like Kojima, where a single cutscene from one of their games would have cost our entire budget! We're not in the same league at all... But I'm still amazed at how far we've come.

**Caroline:** Especially since we were so demanding. We wanted the game to have a certain degree of resemblance to Apo, Pablo, and Night, while at the same time retaining a slight difference, which is what makes the game so poetic and different.

**Jonathan:** The game's colours are poppy and almost fluorescent. We needed to counterbalance the characters' bleak trajectories. This light was also an important factor in the actors' performance. We constantly asked them to act their scenes brightly, passionately, or gently in certain spots, and never to insist on the script's darkness. We wanted to film young adults that were full of life. Unlike *Jessica Forever*, where our characters were already dead, or in a sort of purgatory, they weren't allowed to be extinguished here. It was our way of fighting everything that frightens us.

**Caroline:** And of refusing to let anything grind us down. We hope we can continue to be curious about what's new, what's being invented. That's what *Eat the Night* means. It's dark out, but we may want to bite off some of this thickness and look for a glimmer, some excitement, a feeling, something new... hope. To even eat the dark thoughts.

***The film also shows the impressive maturity of this generation, who are both candid and devoid of innocence. Can you tell us about the actors who play them?***

**Caroline:** During the auditions, Théo, Erwan, and Lila quite naturally came to mind. We went with our gut instinct. We saw the characters directly in them, without needing to transform them. Lila Gueneau, who plays Apolline, was the same age as her character at the time of filming: 17. What's striking is how much more mature she was than many of us. She faced up to the challenges with incredible firmness, knowing that we wouldn't let her get away with anything. Yet she could also be fragile. Her desire to be part of the movement was intact, which is something we couldn't theorize. But the contrast with the two boys in their late twenties, Erwan and Théo, only reinforced it.

Night is Erwan Kepoa Falé. The year we met him, he'd just been hired by Christophe Honoré for *Le Lycéen* (*Winter Boy*) and Ira Sachs' *Passages*. He had the character's charm, gentleness, and complexity, somewhere between opacity and sunlight.

**Jonathan:** Yes, as soon as he appears in a shot, the rhythm changes. His presence calms the scene. While Lila has to play a girl stuck in a video game and Pablo is a human dynamo that can't sit still, Night instantly calms things down. Even though Pablo's madness will contaminate him.

Pablo is Théo Cholbi, and we've been wanting to work with him for a long time. He's got this restlessness, this feverishness and crazy energy. We asked him to rewatch Al Pacino in *Panic in Needle Park*. We wanted to try and take him to a place that was both fragile and intense.

**Caroline:** In the end, there was a real symbiosis in the trio, both on screen and off, despite their different ages and backgrounds. It was quite a sight to see.

**Finally, let's talk about the music. Is this the first time you've had a musician compose the soundtrack for one of your films?**

Caroline: Yes, Ssaliva is a Belgian composer from our generation. We share the same references and grew up in the same cultural context. In his music, he uses collage, contamination, deformation, and disintegration. He's not afraid of excess or overflow. His work isn't "safe". As a result, his music was perfect for us. He was able to create bridges between the different worlds, but also relay emotions between the characters, and between their avatars.

**Interview with Philippe Azoury, Paris, April 20, 2024**

## ABOUT CAROLINE POGGI & JONATHAN VINEL

---

Jonathan was born in Toulouse in 1988. Caroline was born in 1990 in Ajaccio.

Caroline and Jonathan directed several films separately before starting their artistic collaboration with *As Long as Shotguns Remain*, which won the Golden Bear for Best Short Film at the Berlinale. They then directed *Our Legacy*, also selected at the Berlinale. In 2018, their short film *After School Knife Fight*, selected at the Cannes Critics' Week, was released in theatres as part of the sketch film *Ultra Rêve*.

Their films are regularly shown in France and abroad, in festivals, museums, galleries, cinemas, on television and online.

They live and work between Paris, Corsica and Toulouse.

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2024** *Eat The Night* - feature (Cannes - Directors' Fortnight)
- 2023** *Best Secret Place* - short (Locarno Film Festival)
- 2022** *Watch the Fire or Burn Inside it* - short (Locarno Film Festival)
- 2020** *Baby Anger* - short
- 2018** *Jessica Forever* - feature (Toronto - Platform, Berlinale - Panorama)
- 2017** *After School Knife Fight* - short (Cannes - Critics' Week, New Directors/New Films)
- 2017** *Martin Cries* - short (Berlinale - Competition)
- 2014** *As Long as Shotguns Remain* - short (Berlinale - Golden Bear)



# CAST

---

PABLO

Théo CHOLBI

NIGHT

Erwan KEPOA FALÉ

APOLLINE

Lila GUENEAU

## CREW

---

Directors	CAROLINE POGGI & JONATHAN VINEL
Writers	CAROLINE POGGI, JONATHAN VINEL, GUILLAUME BRÉAUD
Producers	THOMAS & MATHIEU VERHAEGHE, JULIETTE SCHRAMECK
Associate Producer	TRISTAN VASLOT
Production Manager	DIEGO URGOITI-MOINOT
Director of Photography	RAPHAËL VANDENBUSSCHE
Sound	LUCAS DOMÉJEAN
Editor	VINCENT TRICON
Assistant Director	CAROLINE RONZON
Set Design	MARGAUX REMAURY
Costume	PIERRE DE MONES
Original Score	SSALIVA
Darknoon Creation	SARADIBIZA & LUCIEN KRAMPF
Production	AGAT FILMS - EX NIHILO ATELIER DE PRODUCTION
In co-production with	ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA
In Partnership with	CANAL+, CINÉ+, ARTE FRANCE, PICTANOVO ET DE LA RÉGION HAUTS-DE-FRANCE, DE LA RÉGION NORMANDIE, CINEMAGE 17, COFINOVA 19, INDÉFILMS 11, LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 16
International Sales Distribution France	MK2 FILMS TANDEM

# INTERNATIONAL PRESS & SALES

---

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS

### RENDEZ-VOUS

**Viviana Andriani**

+33 6 80 16 81 39

[viviana@rv-press.com](mailto:viviana@rv-press.com)

**Aurélie Dard**

+33 6 77 04 52 20

[aurelie@rv-press.com](mailto:aurelie@rv-press.com)



## INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director

[fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com](mailto:fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com)

Olivier Barbier, Head of Acquisitions

[olivier.barbier@mk2.com](mailto:olivier.barbier@mk2.com)

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales

[quentin.bohanna@mk2.com](mailto:quentin.bohanna@mk2.com)

Elise Cochin, International Sales

[elise.cochin@mk2.com](mailto:elise.cochin@mk2.com)

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager

[anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com](mailto:anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com)

Alya Belgaroui-Degalet, Head of Marketing

[alya.belgaroui@mk2.com](mailto:alya.belgaroui@mk2.com)

Lucie Cottet, International Marketing

[lucie.cottet@mk2.com](mailto:lucie.cottet@mk2.com)

[www.mk2films.com](http://www.mk2films.com)