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THR *Reviews*

Hors Satan

By Kirk Honeycutt

A PROFESSED NON-BELIEVER, French director Bruno Dumont keeps making movies that flirt with the religious and in one case even had the title *The Life of Jesus*, even though the Christian savior was nowhere in sight. With *Hors Satan* [*Outside Satan*], Dumont shows a miracle, features characters who pray frequently and continues his provocative minimalist style that either drives people crazy or makes them believe they're in the presence of a cinema God. On that latter point, one suspects Dumont is a believer.

For *Hors Satan* — the French title resonates better — is the work of an egoist, a filmmaker who solemnly believes that every stylistic device, forced camera angle, monosyllabic utterance or careless shrug from an actor conveys great meaning to his audience. And his fans at least play along.

The film's debut in *Un Certain Regard* should speed the way for *Hors Satan* to reach those admirers, who

approach his films as the faithful would the act of prayer. Everyone else might be better off in church.

The film is situated in a perfect landscape for a Dumont film. The Côte d'Opale on the Atlantic Coast of northwestern France is a wind-swept, desolate marshlands of government protected dunes and woods. Here a strange recluse identified in press notes as The Guy [David Dewaele] lives in those woods, building nightly fires, poaching game and acting as guardian angel to The Girl [non-pro Alexandra Lamatre]. In return, she hands him occasional sandwiches.

Often he kneels in prayer and eventually so does she.

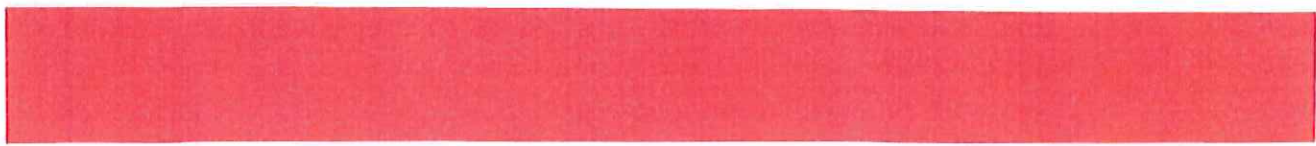
The Guy kills a man who has tormented the Girl and you're asked to believe the man had it coming. The Guy also beats half to death a guard [Christophe Bon] on the wildlife reserve who clearly does not deserve his fate.

The protagonist is a guy who says things like "there's only one thing to do" but you wonder if that's true.



Couldn't he just tell the guard to stop bothering the Girl? That, of course, would require the delivery of at least a couple of lines of dialogue, which is something Dumont parcels out as if words were gold.

Before the miracle occurs, the Guy seemingly heals another even younger



girl in something that falls a little short of a sex act. Also before the miracle occurs, a strange sex scene intrudes that seems to be there simply to provoke an audience reaction and attach notoriety to the film as he did with those uncomfortable sex scenes in *Twentynine Palms*, or his two actors

running in a field without pleasure in Flanders.

All sound is recorded live with no post-production dubbing or editing. You get the sound of wind in the mike but this essentially works against the raw naturalism Dumont seems to want since the sound of wind in a

microphone is not the same thing as the sound of wind you would hear at the actual location. It's a thing a film crew records, just as actors gazing into the near- or mid-distance is a thing only an actor would do on a set of a director who sincerely believes in time-wasting.

One recalls the hostility in the Palais that greeted *Flanders* back in 2006, even if it did win the Jury Prize. *Hors Satan* received only applause, albeit not thunderous. Dumont appears to be wearing down his detractors. ********

Un Certain Regard

Bottom line: inarticulate characters, long blank stares, forced camera angles and allegorical nonsense make up this pretentious study in class-religious ennui.

Sales: Pyramide International

Production companies: 2B Productions/CRAV Nord-Pas de Calais/ Le Fresnoy in association with Cinéma 5

Cast: David Dewaele, Alexandre Lematre, Valerie Mestdagh, Sonia Barthelemy, Juliette Bocquet, Christophe Bon

Director/screenwriter: Bruno Dumont

Producers: Jean Bréhat, Rachid Bouchareb, Muriel Merli

Director of photography: Yves Gaspé

Costume designer: Alexandra Charles

Editors: Bruno Dumont, Basile Bekhidj

No rating, 110 minutes