

IN PROGRESS...



Life on the inside is a black reflection of life on the outside for prisoners (left to right) Lenore Zann, Louise Marleau and Alberta Watson.

In the 1840's, La Petite Bastille, Quebec City's prison overlooking the Plains of Abraham, was a wonder of modern penal reform. It was the first prison to employ a tiered system of cells, facilitating heating and keeping tuberculosis at bay. Today, at three p.m., the solitary cells face rows of tables with brightly checkered cloths and bottles of good wine. Places are set with antipasta and wicker baskets of fresh bread. A white-hatted chef stands to the rear, behind the buffet. No, this is not another sandblasted restaurant with a gimmick. It's lunchtime on the set of **Black Mirror**.

Mirada Productions has occupied the prison. Editing facilities are just to the right of the main entrance, and the production office is upstairs. On his way from the set in the old courtyard commons below, the tuqued, down-vested régisseur bounds up the stairs two at a time to confer with production manager Sylvie de Grandpré. As yet, there is no publicist, and associate producer Pierre Caro (producer of *Borsalino*, and *Le vieux fusil*), disseminates project information with great selectivity. Describing the budget as "Two million...and a bit", he acknowledges that there are no internationally known

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stars in the picture. Of the three female leads only Louise Marleau is a veteran, and her following is mainly drawn from Quebec audiences. Alberta Watson from Toronto is in her first major feature role (she appeared in *In Praise of Older Women*), and newcomer Lenore Zann has just finished commuting between this set and Montreal to finish Filmplan's *The Fright*.

Despite the lack of "stars", this is hardly a "no frills" production. "To have one Faye Dunaway just for the investors", says Caro, "would create an imbalance. Jean Genêt is the missing star." **Black Mirror's** screenplay, adapted from Genêt's play *Haute surveillance*, has undergone star treatment. Director Pierre Alain Jolivet collaborated on the first screenplay adaptations with Genêt himself, and also with Jean-Claude Carrière (a French writer who has worked with Luis Bunuel for the last ten years, and who wrote Milos Forman's latest film, *Taking Off*. He also wrote the screenplay for *The Tin Drum*

which won the Golden Palm Award at Cannes last year.) Arthur Samuels, who has had the difficult job of turning the French script into a workable English screenplay, remains on set as dialogue coach.

The story is full of vision and allegory; everything that happens inside the women's prison is a parallel of life on the "outside". The plot centers around four women who have all spent different lengths of time inside. They hear on the radio of a bizarre murder, and devise a dangerous game: a tag of sorts, where whoever becomes "it" must kill a fellow prisoner. When the young Julie (Zann) is declared "it", and refuses to take part, her fellow prisoners force her into it.

One crew member remarks that there is a fascinating visual irony to the film. "There are all these gorgeous women, like as if they're in a soap commercial, doing horrible things to each other."

It has taken director Jolivet two years to bring this project to fruition. Probably the most difficult task was wooing the reclusive Genêt, now 72 and suffering from throat cancer, into giving him the property rights. Fifteen years ago, Genêt had sold the rights for *The Balcony* to a U.S.

production company. Genêt considered the result so disastrous that he vowed never again to allow his works to be reproduced on film or television. Jolivet approached Genêt's agent and was told to write to the playwright. One month after sending off his request, Genêt telephoned Jolivet and asked him to come to his apartment "in twenty minutes." His one-room Paris apartment consisted of an armchair, a lamp, and a camp bed on which Genêt sat "like a Bishop." There, Jolivet managed to seduce the author with his cinematic vision, and Genêt agreed to the project — so much so, that he has had a direct input into the screenplay.

Most of the film is being shot in sequence, and the call sheets are a curious mixture of English and French. It's even more curious to see a French author, French director and French producer, in co-production with a Québécois executive producer (Nardo Castillo), filming in Quebec, with a largely Québécois crew and cast, all producing dialogue in English.

"I could not finance the film in France," says Caro, apparently because Genêt's popularity there was insufficient. "His editor said that on any \$100 from book sales, \$60 is from the English-speaking market (90% of that from that U.S.), and \$15 from Japan. The remainder is from France and the rest of the world."

Caro came to Montreal and interested Castillo (head of Films 24, a successful commercial production house) in the project. From Montreal, Caro found sales interest forthcoming from PBS in the States. He and Castillo then lined up investors: "The majority are in Canada," including Canadian Film Development



At first, she makes the dolls. In the end, Louise Marleau and fellow inmates tear them to pieces.

Corp. money. The CNC (Centre national du cinéma, France's equivalent of the CFDC, is also involved.

The film's investment package closed late in the summer — while Toronto thirsted for the sweet rains of interim financing necessary to let loose, everyone in Quebec was working. "All our candidates for D.O.P. (director of photography) were busy. But Sylvie, who had

worked with Films 24, came in with a roll of Perci Young's." An engaging 34-year-old, half-Chinese and half-French, Young came to Canada from South Africa five years ago, and compiled an impressive show reel. Jolivet was convinced immediately that Young's lighting could capture *l'esprit* of the subject." This is Young's first feature.

"For style," says Caro, "the three most important people to a director are, first, the D.O.P.; second, the art director; and third, the editor. They must all understand the same vision. After that, *everyone* is important." And they're treated that way. The producer shakes the hand of the best boy and thanks him after a difficult day. Coffee and catering rate five stars in the Guide Michelin, croissants and pâté replacing the ubiquitous bagel, and the production manager understands the needs of a dozen, lovely, half-naked extras working in the cavernous cold — but then, so do the grips!

Understanding the vision is more difficult. Still, the crew say that the rushes are breathtaking; and with a little luck, this time around, Genêt's vision will lose nothing in translation to the screen.

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p.c. Mirada Productions Inc. (Montreal), P.C.P. Inc. (Paris) 1980 exec.p. Nardo Castillo assoc.p. Pierre Caro d. Pierre-Alain Jolivet or. screenplay Pierre-Alain Jolivet, Jean Genêt, Jean-Claude Carrière, from the book "Haute surveillance" by Jean Genêt sc. Arthur Samuels p. admin. Louise Dupuis p. man. Sylvie de Grandpré asst. to the p. Michel Lemay loc. man. Renée Leclerc, Luce Richard (asst.) a.d. Mireille Goulet (1st), Pierre Anctil (2nd), Jean Turgeon (3rd) p. acct. Jean-François Côté p. sec. Dominique Houle d.o.p. Perci Young cam. op. Henri Fiks asst. cam. Mathieu Décarry (1st), Michel Bernier (2nd) art. d. François de Lucy, Michel Denuet (asst.) set dress./props. Claude Charbonneau, Marc Corriveau (asst.), Madeleine Piché (asst.) head carpenter André Brochu cost. Huguette Gagné ward. Marie-Hélène Gascon make-up Jocelyne Bellemarre,

Suzanne Savaria (asst.), Monique Paquet (asst.), Elaine Hamel (asst.) hair Bob Pritchett, Richard Hansen (asst.) cont. Brigitte Germain sd. Jean-Michel Rouard boom Eric Zimmer chief machinist Johnny Daoust, Emmanuel Lépine (asst.), Pierre Charpentier (asst.), Jacques Leflaguais (asst.) chief elec. Jock Brendis, Gary Phipps (asst.), Luc Marineau (asst.), François Aubry (asst.) ed. Dominique Boisvert, Christine Denault (asst.) stills Denis Fugère driver Guy Poirier 2nd unit/cam. asst. Jean-Marie Buquet (1st), Luc Lussier (2nd), Claude Simon Langlois (3rd) sp. efx. Jocelyne Bellemarre (make-up), Joe Elsener (guns), Gary Zeller (fire), Jacques Godbout (asst.) i.p. Louise Marleau, Lenore Zann, Alberta Watson, François Dorner, Carolyn Maxwell, Lyn Jackson, Septimiu Sever, Denise Hamilton, Wendy Dawson, Natasha Doo, Madeline Chartrand, Catherine Colvey, Pamela Collier, Marthe Turgeon, Jocelyne Goyette, Marie-Hélène Gagnon, Martine Fugère, Francyne Morin, Judy London, Louise Ladouceur, Georges Sirois, Jacoba Knaapen, Riva Spier, Céline Verrault.

Suzanna Plowright