



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD

Chi-Fou-Mi Productions presents

The Kingdom

A Film by Julien Colonna

France – 2024 – 108 min



INTERNATIONAL SALES

GOODFELLAS

Flavien Eripret

feripret@goodfellas.film

<https://goodfellas.film/>

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

CINETIC MEDIA

Ryan Werner

ryan@cineticmedia.com

Layla Hancock-Piper

layla@cineticmedia.com

Jon Rushton

jon@jonrushton.com

Synopsis

Corsica, 1995. It's Lesia's first summer as a teenager. One day a man bursts into her life and takes her to an isolated villa where she finds her father, in hiding, surrounded by his clan. An underworld war erupts. The noose is tightening around them. Death strikes. Forced to go on the run, father and daughter will learn to face one another, to understand and love each other...



Director's Note

Corsica, a territory lying at the crossroads of Mediterranean peoples, has always been a land irrigated by violence – a violence that has in recent years intensified in this insular society, feeding the fantasies of an idle youth fascinated by easy money, guns and power. Crime as a business has become commonplace, bloodying the island with impunity, like so many other territories struggling to find a path to peace.

I chose to set this story in Corsica in the 90s as it was a decisive period for the island's political, social and economic future. At the time, some nationalist activists chose to go into business, while others joined the underworld, thus altering its topography and profoundly destabilizing an already precarious peace. This decade was the incubator for clan wars, some of which continue to this day.

The Kingdom's narrative perspective is from the level of a child in a man's environment. The point of view is simultaneously immersive yet distanced and depicts a filial relationship trying to exist, to survive in a context where everything dies. The characters' emotional issues can be seen more clearly as I have placed the classic genre film plot – the military chessboard, the war of clans and territories – in the background. I wanted to create a space in which to see something else come alive: a story about the consequences of these marginal lives, a more truthful reflection of an environment that is too often treated fantastically, and thus to stake out the boundaries of an anti-gangster film.

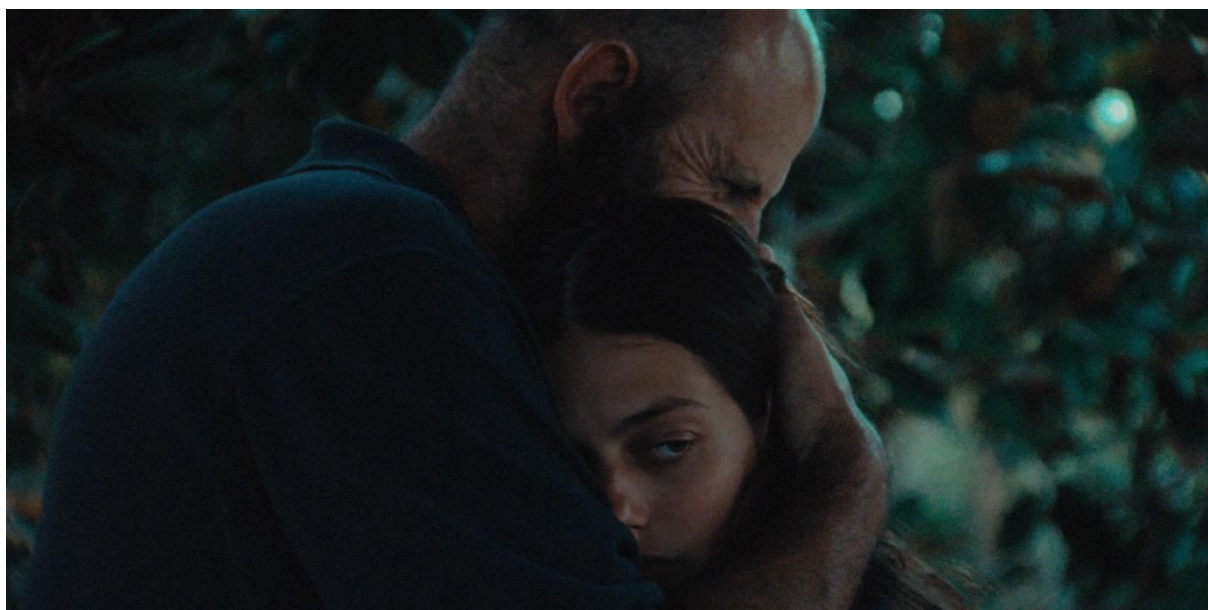
"The criminal when he commits his crime is always a sick man" wrote Dostoevsky. Though the contexts are different, these men are indeed profoundly sick. Through this film I want to show the machinery of thug rule in its inevitable programmed extinction. These men are neither heroized nor sanctified; on the contrary, they are shown as the penitents of their own lives, ghosts of those who are already dead but don't yet know it. Contrary to the stereotypes, fancy restaurants are rare, flashy cars forbidden – too showy – and pretty women often weighed down by anxiety. I want to re-establish the reality of these destinies, to trace their lives, like those of wild animals, alternating between the hunter and the hunted, in which fear is omnipresent. Men's fear of losing a friend, of leaving behind a widow or orphans, of not accepting the outcome of the *Malavita*. Lesia's fear of seeing her father die at any moment, powerless in the face of the male violence imposed on her, in the face of the carefree childhood slipping away from her. Fate crushes history in its slow inertia.

The Kingdom is a coming-of-age story: through Lesia's journey I want to show the self-sacrifice she has to make in order to be accepted by adults, to survive this omnipresent threat of death, to have the perseverance to love her father and to be loved in return. My co-writer Jeanne and I wanted to portray a sentinel child, mature, her wound hidden away, kind and courageous, reasonable but obstinate.

Reflecting his character, Pierre-Paul is not easy for the viewer to make out. He's a paradoxical man, as straightforward in his ways as he is complex and unreadable psychologically: loving but cold, strategic and authoritarian. Over the course of their relationship, we will discover the vulnerability of this man, the cracks linked to his childhood and the flaws that come with being father leading an existence such as his.

The bond between Pierre-Paul and Lesia structures the story while they are on the run, struggling to communicate when so much remains to be said. During their wandering flight they encounter people, places, landscapes, all the elements of their kingdom, that shape their relationship, strengthen their bond, reveal their love. This love becomes the film's central issue, their reunion jeopardised by this marginal life, by the weight of past choices. The bond between father and daughter barely remade, still fragile, is ready to break at any moment on the altar of the price to be paid, the necessary sacrifice. Their relationship also questions the legacy of violence. The film seeks a living space, a place of peace between determinism and free will, a path to reconciliation marked out, as is often the case, as much by acts as by failures of love.

I want *The Kingdom* to be a sincere, embodied, and troubled work. *The Kingdom* as a territory for which you fight. Between people of the same kind, or against the others. *The Kingdom* because fathers are seen as kings by their children, before dying and being replaced relentlessly by those who follow. An imaginary *Kingdom* of memories, of sensations, to which we alone possess the keys. Because the bonds we forge are always linked to places, to people, to smells. Like the *Kingdom* Lesia will have had the fortune to know with her father, and which she will look back on when grown up as her paradise lost.



Q&A with Julien Colonna

How did you get into filmmaking?

I was attracted to photography very early, which I started aged 5, regularly stealing my mother's camera. I've also always written a ton of stories, read only by me. And of course I was a movie buff, thanks to my parents who fed me with films very early on. My mother dreamed of being an actress, she was crazy about film noir and loved Gabin, Garbo and Dietrich. My father dreamed of freedom, he loved the great American West and westerns. As a child I steered between their two poles and those I created for myself as a teenager, like the films of Coppola, Lynch, Wong Kar-wai and many others. Later, I understood that I could combine cinema, photography and writing to become a director. So I tried to work on it.

How did the idea of *THE KINGDOM* come about?

The first spark came six years ago, when my wife told me that she was pregnant. This shook me up quite a bit for a few weeks. Unconsciously, I wondered about the child I was going to have, the father I was going to try to be, and inevitably the child I had myself been, the parents I had had... Then a significant childhood memory emerged: I was 10 years old, with my father and his friends in a makeshift camp by the sea, with nothing and no one else around. We fished, we slept under the stars, it was life in the wild. Years later I learned that this moment had a completely different meaning for him. With this memory in mind, the idea of the film emerged: a father and daughter are on the run, things go wrong, they try to learn how to know each other, to understand and to love each other.

So it's an autobiographical story?

Even if the parent-child relationship is very close to the one I experienced and even if I drew on a certain veracity from a known context, my desire was to write a pure cinematic fiction. Neither I nor anyone else can claim to have lived this story as we describe it in *THE KINGDOM*. It's the result of scriptwriting work by Jeanne Herry, my co-writer, and me, not of memory.

***THE KINGDOM* is built from the point of view of a young girl, Lesia. Was it conceived this way from the start?**

The decision to place the narrative at the level of a child in a very opaque adult world was always clear. As was the wish to depict a filial relationship that tries to exist, to survive, in a context where everything dies. We tried to infuse an emotion that runs through the film from beginning to end, through the parent-child bond, a universal bond that raises questions of nature and nurture, and the legacy of violence, but also of the path to reconciliation – a path often strewn with the failings of love.

And this determines the structure of the story. Lesia doesn't understand what's going on around her father, which induces tension, a zone of mystery...

When we were writing, the biggest challenge was how to tighten the narrative with a lead character who stays outside the plot dealing with the life and death of men. The character of Lesia had to be realistic but surprising in her choices, unpredictable in her actions. We wanted a sentinel-child with her maturity, her hidden wound, gentle and courageous, reasonable but stubborn. Thus, her structural trajectory could go from listening to action. The men discuss their business and Lesia will try to find out more to get closer to her father.

If the film is intended to be realistic as a whole, we had to come to terms with reality because a child would never have access to these conversations, or these settlements of scores. As Pasolini said: "History is the passion of sons yearning to understand their fathers." This is probably what Lesia is trying to do throughout the film.

However, the plot around the father and his men remains very vague. We don't know whether he is being hunted for Mafia, political or simply personal reasons.

In life as in movies, in Corsica or elsewhere in the world, these mob stories are unfortunately all the same. With Jeanne, we wanted to position THE KINGDOM somewhere else. That's why we deliberately put the classic genre plot in the background, the military chessboard, territorial war... to create a space for something else to be born: a story about a filial bond that recounts the dramatic consequences of these marginal lives, a place of peace between determinism and free will, a more truthful reflection of an environment too often treated fantastically, and thus to stake out the territory of an anti-gangster film.

Which is? What was your intention?

THE KINGDOM is a tragedy in which fate crushes history in its slow inertia. I wanted to show the machinery of thugocracy in its inevitably programmed extinction. The thugs are neither heroized nor sanctified; on the contrary, they are shown as the penitents of their own lives, ghosts who are already dead but don't know it yet. Contrary to popular belief, fancy restaurants are rare, flashy cars forbidden because they're too showy, and beautiful women often riddled with anxiety. I wanted to describe their wild animal lives, alternating between hunting and being chased, with fear omnipresent. The men's fear of losing a friend, of leaving behind a widow or orphans, of not accepting the outcome of gangland life. Lesia's fear of seeing her father die at any moment, powerless in the face of the male violence imposed on her, in the face of the carefree nature of a childhood that's slipping away from her.

What is your opinion of organised crime and clans?

As in the film, these are people who have chosen their destinies. All over the world, a section of the youth lives with the fantasy of an easy life where money and power rule. My film was also born from the desire to show that this path is paved only with tragedy and loneliness. If the film is viewed by one single young person considering this path in life who starts to question his choices, it will already be a victory.

How did the writing with Jeanne Herry go?

From the beginning of the project I knew I wanted a female co-writer. When Jeanne and I met, everything was obvious. Our sensitivities, our approaches, our methods... These months spent together were nothing but work and ease. Jeanne is one of the most beautiful encounters of my life as a man and as a filmmaker.

Even if your cinematic styles are very different...

We have different obsessions because we have different stories, but I see myself quite a bit in all her films as she sees herself in *THE KINGDOM*, I think.

THE KINGDOM is very sparing with dialogue. Your direction is much more about bodies, faces, gestures, movements, looks...

The direction was at the service of a rather taciturn script, which itself served a character who speaks little and listens a lot. It is a narrative form I cherish that resembles me. Do the maximum, and speak the least, so that the word is powerful. It's what we tried to do throughout the film: starve the dialogue so that at a given moment, the dyke of speech might give way.

This was also one of the many casting challenges of casting: to find fascinating characters to film, their behaviour, their looks, their silence, without relying on words.

The mise en scene also serves a chilling realism...

I didn't want a dogma to impose a truth. Nothing is black and white in this film, everything is grey. I wanted the direction to reflect of this flight, in movement, beset by change, which is disconcerting for the viewer because nothing is by the book or given. It seemed to me fundamental to transcribe this permanent unpredictability. My DP Antoine Cormier and I allowed room for variations, for ruptures between precarious handheld camera, very slow zooms, fluid and precise movements or more contemplative long shots. The film's characters are in search of a freedom that's forbidden them. The direction on the other hand had to be free to be able to relate the complexities of situations, emotions, silences, things unsaid... Throughout the process we sought to achieve the most sober aesthetic naturalism possible.

THE KINGDOM owes a lot to its cast: non-professionals or little-known actors, all of them remarkable. How was the casting done?

Finding them was a long search spread over eight months of street casting throughout Corsica, led by several casting directors. The large majority are non-actors from Corsican society, chosen from several hundred people, after numerous call-backs, for their sensitivity, their capacity for work and their inner selves. Once chosen, Ghjuvanna (*Lesia*) and Saveriu (*Pierre-Paul*) worked tirelessly for several months during many workshops between Corsica and Paris. Seeing them evolve and become aware of their potential during this preparation was very moving. Working with them, the clan and the rest of the cast was a most extraordinary human and spiritual

adventure. They let themselves be guided without knowing where they were going, with only the trust they placed in me, and I am eternally grateful to them.

Why THE KINGDOM?

THE KINGDOM as territory for which you fight. Between people of the same kind or against the others. THE KINGDOM because fathers are regarded as kings by their children, before dying and being replaced tirelessly by those who follow. The imaginary KINGDOM, of memories, of sensations, to which only we possess the keys. Because the bonds we forge are always linked to places, to people, to smells. Like THE KINGDOM that Lesia had the chance to know with her father, and that she will, as an adult, remember as her paradise lost.



Director's Biography

Julien Colonna is a screenwriter, director and photographer.

After completing his Master's degree in Social Sciences from Paris-IX Dauphine, Julien studied screenwriting and directed a number of shorts. One of these – CONFESION, shot in the Bangkok slums – was screened at more than twenty festivals, receiving numerous awards.

Julien directed several films across the world in collaboration with a variety of international talent, including Australian actor Hugh Jackman, artist C.J. Hendry, and photographer Luo Yang, and in association with Dazed and Nowness.

His first feature screenplay, EQUINOXES, won the Télérama 'Coup de coeur' Sopadin Award.

His feature film directorial debut, LE ROYAUME, written with Jeanne Herry and produced by Chi-Fou-Mi Productions, will premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, 2024, in Un Certain Regard.



©Giovanni Lorusso

Cast

Lesia	Ghjuvanna BENEDETTI
Pierre-Paul	Saveriu SANTUCCI
Ste	Anthony MORGANTI
Santu	Andrea COSSU
Petru	Frédéric POGGI
Ghjasé	Régis GOMEZ
Jeannot	Eric ETTORI
Joseph	Thomas BRONZINI
Louise	Pascale MARIANI
César	Attilius CECCALDI
Romain	Ghjuvanni BIANCUCCI
Thomas	Joseph PIETRI
Marianne	Marie MURCIA
Laurent	Alexandre JOANNIDES
Fred	Toussaint MARTINETTI

Crew

Director	Julien COLONNA
Screenplay	Julien COLONNA et Jeanne HERRY
DP	Antoine CORMIER
Sound	Thomas GUYTARD, Niels BARLETTA
Production Designer	Louise LE BOUC BERGER
Casting	Julia CANARELLI, Océane COURT MALLARONI, Fanny de DONCEEL, VIGGIE
Costume Designer	Caroline SPIETH
Continuity	Marion BERNARD
1st AD	Lucas LOUBARESSE
Key Makeup Artist	Julia FLOCH CARBONEL
Key Hairstylist	Emmanuel JANVIER
Régisseuse Générale	Dorothee ALLAIN
Production	CHI-FOU-MI Productions
Producers	Hugo SELIGNAC, Antoine LAFON
Production Manager	Laurène LADOGE
Postproduction Manager	Pauline GILBERT
Editors	Albertine LASTERA, Yann MALCOR
Original Music	Audrey ISMAEL
With the participation of	CANAL+, NETFLIX
With the support of	Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, de la collectivité de Corse
in partnership with the	CNC
In association with	ENTOURAGE SOFICA
Associate Producer	ARTISTES & 2