



Les Revenants

They Came Back

Robin Campillo

FRANCE, 2004
French

102 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Haut et Court/France 3 Cinéma**
Producer: **Caroline Benjo, Carole Scotta**
Screenplay: **Robin Campillo, Brigitte Tijou**
Cinematographer: **Jeanne Lapoirie**
Editor: **Robin Campillo, Stephanie Leger**
Production Designer: **Mathieu Menut**
Sound: **Olivier Mauvezin, Valerie Deloef**
Music: **Jocelyn Pook**
Principal Cast: **Géraldine Pailhas, Jonathan Zaccà, Frédéric Pierrot, Bruno Cremer, Catherine Samie, Maurice Garrel**

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Production: **Haut et Court, 38 rue des Martyrs, 75009 Paris, France. T (33-1) 5531-2727 F (33-1) 5531-2728 info@hautetcourt.com**

Following in a long tradition of artistically-minded, politically aware cautionary tales with a sci-fi spin (think Chris Marker or Stanley Kubrick) Robin Campillo's *Les Revenants* takes as its core a pulp-fiction premise – What if the dead came back? – and makes emotionally charged, socially relevant cinema.

Director Campillo is in the same intellectual circle as Laurent Cantet, whose meditations on the work world have created a whole new sub-genre of cinema. *Les Revenants* is an unexpectedly powerful addition to that canon. Campillo's ultimate, barely hidden aim here is to address – believe it or not – the sustainability of social programmes within a welfare state and the dislocation of tight-knit communities through unplanned immigration.

One morning, the neighbourhood wakes to see a group of recently deceased people strolling back into town, looking much as they did just before death. Many of the residents are unprepared to resume their lives with their former family members, so a large “refugee” and reintegration camp is set up. Frequent meetings of the town council address employment and benefits for the returnees, as well as how to counsel those on both sides of death. All seems fine until *les revenants* start exhibiting peculiar behaviour: they never sleep, are immune to disease, seek comfort underground and are incapable of learning. Suddenly, they are a community feared and hated by the others.

Although ultimately enigmatic about its political programme, *Les Revenants* remains a brilliant, thoughtful intellectual experiment. Telling its story mostly through the eyes of three couples – two of which see wives and husbands reunited, the other welcoming back a child – provides the film with an emotionally rich foundation. The pain and dislocation the families suffer is visceral and intense; their longing to have it “just the way it was” shown to be a fallacious joke. *Les Revenants* is easily one of the year's most imaginative films.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Robin Campillo is well known as the co-writer (with Laurent Cantet) of Cantet's highly acclaimed *L'Emploi du temps* (01) and as the editor of Cantet's *Les Sanguinaires* (97) and *Ressources humaines* (99), and Gilles Marchand's *Qui a tué Bambi?* (03). *Les Revenants* (04) is his first feature as director.

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