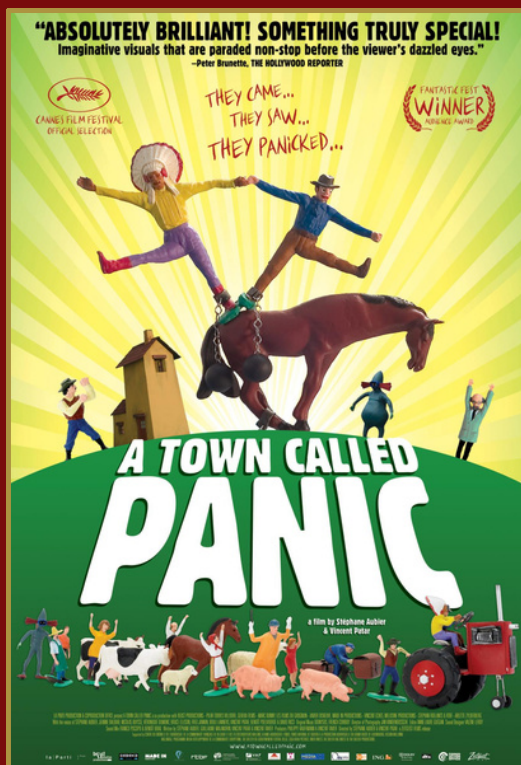


'A Town Called Panic': The First Stop-Motion Film Screened at Cannes

Author: Chethana Srivatsa



'A Town Called Panic' was the First Stop-Motion Film to be Screened at Cannes

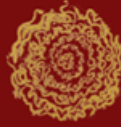
Source: IMDb



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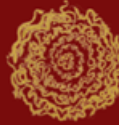
The first stop-motion film to be screened at the prestigious Cannes Festival was 'A Town Called Panic' (French title: '*Panique au village*') in 2009. The story for this historic film initially came from a 1991 four-minute short film. Based on the short, a French-language Belgian stop-motion sitcom series was made and aired between 2002 and 2003. Consisting of twenty five-minute-long episodes, this series inspired the 2009 feature film as well as thirty-minute-long specials in 2013 and 2016, along with a short film in 2019.



The 3 Main Characters in '*Panique au Village*'

Source: European Film Awards





The major characters of the '*Panique au village*' universe are Cowboy, Indian, and Horse, three toy figures who live together in one house. Cowboy (think Woody from '*Toy Story*') is portrayed as immature, reckless, and not the smartest tool in the shed. His antics keep landing the group in troublesome situations. Indian is a Native American, often shown in a stereotypical manner with a large feather headdress. While Indian is somewhat more mature, he also frequently sets out on reckless endeavors, just like Cowboy. Horse is the leader of the pack: more intelligent and mature than both Cowboy and Indian, and often has to help them get out of trouble. Interestingly, the '*Panique au village*' universe was recreated for advertisements for Cravendale Milk, although the main characters were rebranded as a cyclist, a pirate, and a cow.



The Directors of the Film, Stéphane Aubier and Vincent Patar

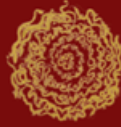
Source: LM Magazine



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The 2009 film was directed by Stéphane Aubier and Vincent Patar, who also co-wrote the script with Guillaume Malandrin and Vincent Tavier. Aubier and Patar are also the creators of the series. Described as a “raucous, endlessly creative animated romp with a quirky, adult sense of humor” (Rotten Tomatoes), the film begins with Cowboy and Indian attempting to make amends for forgetting Horse’s birthday. They ask their neighbor to get Horse out of the house so they can make preparations. While Horse sets off on an adventure where he meets his love interest, Indian and Cowboy plan to build a brick barbecue for Horse. Indian wants to order fifty bricks, but Cowboy accidentally orders fifty million bricks. The two then make the barbecue and stack the extra bricks into a gigantic cube that they hide on top of the house. Unfortunately, this causes the house to collapse when Horse returns in the evening. While the three are attempting to rebuild the house, they find some creatures stealing their bricks.



Stills from the Film

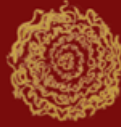
Source: Into Film, Zeitgeist and FilmAffinity



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This sets the trio off on an adventure as they follow the creatures. At one point, they lose track and fall off a cliff and into the core of the earth. When they make their way out, they find themselves in a vast tundra. After some more adventures, they run into one of the creatures and chase it to find that the creatures are building an exact version of their home under the sea. After a cinematic fight with many funny shenanigans, the trio destroys the underwater house and returns home. The creatures follow them back and try to destroy their house, but the trio manages to save their house with the help of their neighbors and friends. The film ends a year later, when the aquatic creatures now live in harmony with the trio, and Cowboy and Indian accidentally ruin Horse's birthday gift again.



Stills from the Film

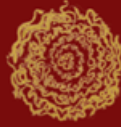
Source: IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes



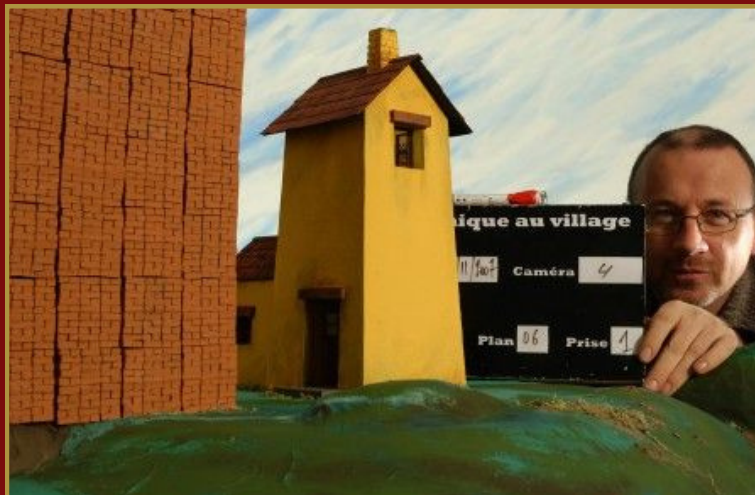
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The film feels a little different from the series and shorts as it focuses on one overarching narrative filled with many small gags and conflicts, unlike the series where conflicts resolve within a short duration of time. However, some argue that this is what makes the film not click; the constant farces can feel tiresome and mind-numbing, especially for older audiences. As Roger Ebert put it, "Because the plot is just one doggoned thing after another without the slightest logic, there's no need to watch it all the way through at one sitting. If you watch it a chapter or two at a time, it should hold up nicely" (Ebert, 2010). Ebert later named it in his list of the best animated films of 2010.



Behind the Scenes Photos of the Film

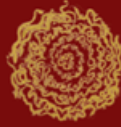
Source: KPBS and Pinterest



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'Toy Story' and 'Lego Movie' bear Similarities to 'Panique au Village'

Source: Vulture and Coproduction Office

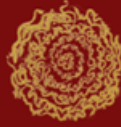
The film reportedly used a total of 1500 plastic toy figures and was made over the course of 260 days in a studio near Brussels. Viewers can easily find similarities between *'Panique au Village'* and movies like *'Lego Movie'* and *'Toy Story'*. *'Lego Movie'* has a stop-motion-like feel and even similar-looking scenes (Hilliard, 2014). Incidentally, some call *'Panique au Village'* as "*'Toy Story'* on absinthe" (Empire Magazine). Cowboy is quite similar to Woody from *'Toy Story'*. While Woody's frenemy is Buzz Lightyear, Cowboy's frenemy is Indian. Their constant fights to prove dominance over each other often land them in trouble. Both Buzz and Indian are shown as having more of an edge over Woody and Cowboy; Buzz is flashy and new and so more attractive to Andy, while Indian is more intelligent and mature than Cowboy. However, Indian is shown in a more stereotypical and regressive manner, while Buzz is shown as modern and futuristic. Perhaps this could be a similarity too; both are shown as anachronistic or out of time in comparison with Woody/Cowboy–Indian in the past and Buzz in the future.



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Woody and Buzz from 'Toy Story' are similar to Cowboy and Indian from 'Panique au Village'

Source: Polygon and IMDb



Similar Scenes in 'Panique au Village' and 'Lego Movie'

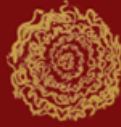
Source: Game Informer



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A Lego Set Inspired by '*A Town Called Panic*'

Source: DeviantArt

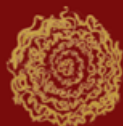
Aside from premiering at Cannes out of competition, the film was screened at the Toronto, São Paulo, Melbourne, and Warsaw International Film Festivals, as well as the AFI Fest. It won the Audience Award at the Fantastic Fest, Best Sound and Best Production Design at the Magritte Awards, and Best Animated Feature Film at the Sitges Film Festival. It was also nominated for Best Foreign Film at the César Awards, European Short Film at the European Film Awards, and Best Original Score at the Magritte Awards. It is now a cult classic fondly watched by many in both the original French and dubbed English versions, whether old or young. Aside from the stereotypical elements, the film can also be understood as providing a lens into society and its view of the 'other.' '*A Town Called Panic*' is thus an interesting watch for all ages.



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The Movie is a Lens into Society's View of the 'Other'

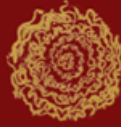
Source: Coproduction Office



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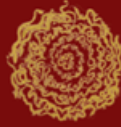
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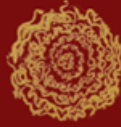


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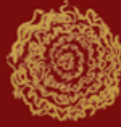
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