

MARKUS DIETRICH ABOUT INVISIBLE SUE

“I’m good in superhero trivia”

12 year old lone wolf Sue is a fan of comic books. Especially the ones about superheroes. But she never expected to gain superpowers herself. Though after an accident in a lab, where her mum works as a scientist, she is suddenly able to become invisible. Shortly after, her mother is abducted. With the help of her new friends Tobi and App, Sue has to rescue her mother and hunt down the kidnappers.

INVISIBLE SUE tells a hectic story about an unlikely superhero and her odd friends. The pace is rapid, the storyline complex, there’s flickering lights and sinister locations. The film by German director Markus Dietrich premiered at the Cinekid festival in Amsterdam.

Markus Dietrich: That was decided by our sales agent Attraction. For them Cinekid could just be the right place to start the worldwide promotion. We wondered if it would be okay to

premier abroad with a film from the German ‘Besondere Kinderfilm’ programme. But INVISIBLE SUE has a very European feel. The Berlinale doesn’t give much visibility to domestic productions and the film is probably too mainstream for their competition. Today we had a screening with Dutch children, they reacted perfectly well. Now we know the film works as good for an international as for a German audience, and we know now Attraction was right - they already sold the film to several territories.

While your debut film SPUTNIK was strongly rooted in German history.

Dietrich: SPUTNIK was very important for me, as it was telling my own story – that girl Frederike, that was me. I simply had to make a film about that key moment in my childhood years: the fall of the Berlin wall. But I decided to make my second movie more universal.

Both films have a thing in common:



a female main character, both truly empowering heroines.

Dietrich: Because they are able to solve situations themselves, with very little help from boys. There are two reasons for that. I have a strong daughter with a powerful fantasy, and I should offer her stories to which she can relate. The other reason are my childhood heroes. I grew up with PIPPI LONGSTOCKING. RONJA ROBBERS DAUGHTER was my very first cinema experience, back then in the DDR, and up till now it’s one of my all-time fa-

vorites. I have a deep admiration for characters like them, strong and real. We even named our daughter Selma after Torun Lian’s film IKKE NAKEN (and after the first female Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Selma Lagerlöf).

There’s the clinical setting in the lab versus a castle-like manor and a skyline referring to Gotham City. You must have had a terrific set designer.

Dietrich: For three years I’ve worked



intensively with my old friend Stephan von Tresckow on the creation of this world. We made the story not German or Luxembourgish, but situated in its own world, 'somewhere' on the planet. Finding locations that fitted this big story was an absolute priority.

One location that you found particularly spectacular?

Dietrich: The factory ruins! When I saw that wasteland, I changed the script just to enable us to shoot on that location. Those scenes initially were to be shot in a forest, but these run-down industrial facilities were a true superhero set. Nothing had to be constructed – everything was there.

Sue is invisible in more than one way. She's seldom noticed and even called 'a monster' and 'a freak'.

Dietrich: The starting point was a superhero with passive powers. The power to become invisible is only useful when she smartly uses her brain. Sue is an outsider, a nobody. It's a universal question for children: Who am I? How visible do I want to be? And where would that get me? That's what she has to learn.

Her quest urges you to tell a story that is getting more and more com-

plex. At certain moments we can't but wonder: who is where, doing what for what reason? You challenge your audience narratively.

Dietrich: I don't like movies telling obvious stories, I want to surprise the audience with big questions. Who can I trust? Do I really know my parents, my family, my friends? As Aunt Lore says: people are often not what they seem. As a child I loved my grandfather deeply, he was my hero. Later I found out that behind this old man's friendly façade once was a brutal and alcoholic father and my whole world fell apart.



What about all that inventor's mumbo jumbo? Was any of it scientifically substantiated? Were you advised about chemical reactions?

Dietrich: Only about the formula on the whiteboard in the lab. All other scientific modifications are pure non-

sense. Luckily my wife is very good at natural sciences, while on the other hand I'm good in superhero trivia. The mutations in Sue's blood are not impossible. They're plausible, although only to a certain degree.

These days so many films have drone-shot scenes. You went one step further: using a drone to film a drone.

Dietrich: I admit... When Kaya is on the square playing with her flying gadget, we used a drone to film this beautiful location from up in the air. These days technology allows you to shoot marvellous pictures in no time. After some recent accidents though, Luxembourg has very strict regulations on the use of drones, especially when flying over people. We made them very nervous! But safety first – we do have a big responsibility towards the actors, the people on the set and the city's inhabitants. We were shooting in Luxembourg city!

The home of your co-producer Amour Fou who – I quote you – "saved your ass".

Dietrich: The Besondere Kinderfilm fund was with us from the very beginning, but still we needed like €300,000 to close the budget, and

we didn't find any German investors willing. Behind the scenes were ongoing discussions if this type of film was actually worth being made. Then German producing company Ostlicht Filmproduktion met Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu and Bady Minck from Amour Fou, who loved the script but never did a children's film before. What I really appreciated: when applying with the Luxembourg Film Fund, a director gets to meet the board to defend his project and explain his vision. Only through that money we could make the film.

I'm sure you were involved in many discussions about superpowers. You must be an expert now!

Dietrich: In general, kids wish they could fly. About 90% of them seems to have this Superman fixation. If we'd ever make a sequel, flying will be unavoidable. I'd rather prefer teleporting, while Lui Eckhardt (playing Tob) wanted to time travel, a very creative but equally dangerous superpower.

–
Gert Hermans