

Gunnbjörg Gunnarsdóttir about VICTORIA MUST GO

“All the research I did on guns and hitmen”

Is it unforgivable that I always misremember the title of this film? Because while VICTORIA MUST DIE may not pass muster socially, that's actually what it's about. The Victoria in question is the new stepmother of Hedvig and Henrik, a pair of posh kids, who can barely get their father's attention anymore, all the while succumbing to the new rules of the annoying Victoria. And therefore... VICTORIA MUST GO! They come up with a brilliant plan: they will hire a hitman!

Even more striking than the absurd story, which constantly balances on the edge of what is morally acceptable, is the art design of this Norwegian film. As if every single scene was designed beforehand to fit with the general looks of the film.

Gunnbjörg Gunnarsdóttir: I did! I've put a lot of effort into the production design of every single shot. All colours were chosen meticulously. There is not a single car to be seen in the film because a) cars are ugly and b) this helps us enter the spotless uni-

verse that these kids are living in.

This is a universe that you designed?

Gunnarsdóttir: This harmless world in pastel colours sets a strong contrast with their evil plans, while the hitman's universe is defined by more earthy colours. Sometimes my editor advised me: You can cut this scene, it doesn't add to the story. But I was like: *“No, that scene is there for its colours! They are telling the story.”* MOONRISE KINGDOM was indeed one of the many inspirations that found its way onto our moodboard.

Henrik and Hedvig match together magically. They're both... erm... weird?

Gunnarsdóttir: Sverre Thornam (playing Henrik) was willing to do basically everything I asked him, except swearing. He found it really hard to swear on camera. He doesn't look like the average little boy, but has a unique charm. Mille Sophie Rist Dalhaug (playing Hedvig) never acted before but stood out in the auditions. Our cast was a mixture of cute, talented



and fit to play.

What exactly do they get from their father?

Gunnarsdóttir: The movie is mainly about what they don't get from him. They used to have an excellent relationship, but ever since he fell in love, the kids feel like they have lost him. Despite their strong bond, they have somehow lost each other in the process of bringing this new woman into the family.

Would you call him weak or strong?

Gunnarsdóttir: Weak! He wants to please everyone, all the time negoti-

ating, trying to be a diplomat, but he never succeeds. Parents finding a new partner are often not very considerate towards their kids, who have to deal with all those consequences and changes.

You didn't shy away from the evil stepmother stereotype.

Gunnarsdóttir: The stereotype is there for a reason. At the age of 14 I had a hard time when my stepmother moved into our house. Nowadays we have a good relationship, but back then we were arguing all the time. I want to give a voice to all children who have to deal with step-parents



entering their lives and setting new rules. Relationships within a family are unique and can't be shared easily with others. Then you see this fragile bond falling apart.

To make Victoria an even more evil character, you make her a representative of the influencer generation... which makes us dislike her even more!

Gunnarsdóttir: When Hedwig calls her a shitty influencer, Victoria replies that she is not an influencer. That's what they always say! Influencers often don't acknowledge themselves as such, because they know this comes with negative connotations.

My favourite fun moment is what I would call 'the dramatic power of the flute'. You hear the orchestra building up towards a Swan Lake climax, but all you see is this tiny girl with a flute.

Gunnarsdóttir: I appreciate how Olav Øyehaug's music helped to give shape to this bizarre universe. Remember the musical homage to RESERVOIR DOGS? We both saw the humour in having a choir boy and a girl in cheerleader costume walking through a super clean village, looking for a hitman.

Do you realise how weird it sounds

when you say sentences like these?

Gunnarsdóttir: I'm so used to it, after all the research I did on guns and hitmen. My 'search history' from the last two years must look crazy - someone at Google Headquarters must think I'm a dangerous freak.

What can you tell about this extremely clean town?

Gunnarsdóttir: My hometown Bergen is a colourful city with pretty houses and charming streets. Within this place of innocence, two rich kids from a privileged family presume that they can take advantage of everyone. For instance, of an immigrant worker, whom they want to hire as a hitman. This is what I observed: money helps you to get away with everything, even when treating people badly. These kids are very bourgeois and privileged; their body language looks extremely confident.

When Carl sets out to find a job, you show a crack in the Norwegian welfare state.

Gunnarsdóttir: Carl gets treated very badly at the NAV (Norwegian Labour & Welfare Administration). In Norway the qualifications of well-educated immigrants are often not validated, so they end up in low-status jobs. The NAV system is complicated, but when

it works in their own favour, then suddenly it becomes very easy. As soon as they can save money on you, efficiency grows fast.

There was one layer to the story that was exclusively for Norwegians, about the guttural sounds of the west coast.

Gunnarsdóttir: There is a big east versus west coast rivalry going on. Bergen - the former capital of Norway - is on the west coast. We're struggling with an 'inferiority complex'. I don't think people in Oslo care about it as much as we do. Moving to Oslo is considered a big thing. I never did - I'm still working from Bergen.

I was all the time wondering how you'd be able to find an ending to the story.

Gunnarsdóttir: Writing a proper, fair ending was the hardest part indeed. We couldn't afford to have the children actually kill Victoria. But after all they did, I couldn't let them get away without a punishment.

How exciting was it to shoot the boat race?

Gunnarsdóttir: In the script was just one line: "intense boat chase". The producers said it's impossible; this will cost you one extra week. But the



movie needed some extra action, so we went out to sea with three boats. We had stunt 'drivers' but the actors wanted to sail the boats themselves. That's one thing you learn as an autodidact filmmaker - because that's what I am: it makes you good at creative solutions. If there's a scene that you can't afford, but you really want it, you make it happen, regardless of the budget.

–
Gert Hermans