



Locarno Film Festival
Official Selection

A Film by Srdjan DRAGOJEVIĆ

HEAVENS ABOVE

NEBESA

Production Company

DELIRIUM d.o.o.

Producer: Biljana Prvanović

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PLUTO[•]
FILM

HEAVENS ABOVE

A film by Srdjan Dragojević

Germany/North Macedonia/Slovenia/Croatia/Montenegro/Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021, 122 Minutes

World Premiere in International Competition at 74th Locarno Film Festival



Technical Data

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Original title | NEBESA |
| English title | HEAVENS ABOVE |
| Genre | Dark Comedy |
| Year of production | 2021 |
| Length | 122 Minutes (25fps) |
| Shooting format | 16:9 |
| Screening format | DCP 2K (2048x858) (1:2,39; 5.1) |
| Language(s) | Serbo-Croatian |
| Subtitles | English |
| Color or b/w | Color |
| Production Company | DELIRIUM |
| Co-Production companies | MA.JA.DE. Fiction GmbH, Sektor Film, Forum Ljubljana, Studio Dim d.o.o., Max Film Novi Film, ZDF/Arte |
| Production Country | Serbia |
| Co-production Countries | Germany, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina |

Cast

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Stojan | Goran Navojec |
| Nada | Ksenija Marinković |
| Gojko | Bojan Navojec |
| Father Atanasije | Miloš Samolov |
| Julija | Nataša Marković |
| Little Julija | Sana Kostić |
| Stinky | Radoslav Milenković |
| Microbe | Srdjan Todorović |
| Giraffe | Ana Mandić |
| Borka | Nela Mihailović |
| Ljubiša Trgovčević | Nikola Pejaković |
| Petar Marković | Miloš Timotijević |
| Snežana Marković | Andjelka Prpić |
| Rajko | Dejan Aćimović |

Crew

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Director | Srdjan Dragojević |
| Written by | Srdjan Dragojević |
| Producers | Biljana Prvanović, Srdjan Dragojević |
| Director of Photography | Dušan Joksimović |
| Editor | Petar Marković |
| Production Designers | Jelena Sopić, Jovana Cvetković |
| Costume Designer | Tatjana Strugar |
| Key Make Up Artist | Sandra Ivatović |
| Sound Designers | Ognjen Popić, Julij Zornik, Zoran Maksimović |
| Sound Mixer | Darko Glišić |
| Music | Igor Perović |
| VFX Supervisor | Nebojša Rogić |
| Production Company | DELIRIUM d.o.o., Belgrade (Serbia) |
| Financial Support from | FCS (Serbia), MDM (Germany), NMFA (North Macedonia), SFC (Slovenia), HAVC (Croatia), FC Montenegro, FK Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eurimages |



Synopsis

Stojan (Goran Navojec) is as dull and simple as he is kindhearted. When a freak accident changing a light bulb puts a glowing halo above his head, he quickly becomes the new attraction around town. His strong-willed wife Nada (Ksenia Marinkovic) isn't at all amused about the unwanted attention amongst their neighbors. After several tries, nothing can remove the shining annoyance and turn her husband back to his former unremarkable self. Stojan, the unwilling saint, begins to like his new lifestyle and quickly turns to sinister crimes...

HEAVENS ABOVE is a dark comedy told through three stories of one family and spanning over three decades (1993, 2001, 2026). The film explores the impact of miracles on modern society. Numerous characters reappear, intertwine, and affect each other's destinies in increasingly bizarre circumstances. Director Srdjan Dragojević delivers a wild and grotesque perspective on post-socialist eastern Europe that succeeds in showing the dark sides of progressive thinking patterns.



The Director: Srdjan Dragojević

Born in 1963 in Belgrade. Author of 8 feature films and 8 books for grown-ups and kids. His film “Pretty Village, Pretty Flame” is among the 1000 best films of all time in Halliwell’s film encyclopedia and among the 30 best war films in history, according to Sight&Sound critics. “The Parade” was a huge box office hit in Europe in 2012 after receiving three awards at Berlinale.

Filmography (Selection):

- 2021 HEAVENS ABOVE (feature)
- 2014 HOLIDAYS IN THE SUN (feature)
- 2012 THE PARADE (feature)
- 2009 SAINT GEORGE SHOOTS THE DRAGON (feature)
- 2005 WE ARE NOT ANGELS 2 (feature)
- 1998 THE WOUNDS (feature)
- 1996 PRETTY VILLAGE, PRETTY FLAME (feature)
- 1992 WE ARE NOT ANGELS (feature)

Interview with Srdjan Dragojević

Your movie revolves around a lot of religious issues and metaphors. What is your view on religion and its role in society?

A lot is – an understatement. Maybe even a little too much for my own good. But, I do not expect the audience to understand everything. Pick up the metaphors that intrigue you the most and don't worry about the others. For me, who grew up in Atheist society, in Socialism and whose sister is an Orthodox nun, they were all necessary. What is the true nature of God? Is it the one from the Old Testament that punishes and asks for sacrifice or the God of love and mercy? Are we able to differ miracles as signs of God's mercy or the Devil's temptations? The Golden Calf is also a really important metaphor in HEAVENS ABOVE. Is Christianity in today's world just praying to idols, money, glory, celebrities, and our hungry, selfish Egos?

While HEAVENS ABOVE starts out as rather comical, things take a dark and dramatic turn in later chapters. How would you define the genre of your movie?

As Life itself, right? It starts as a comedy, but the tragedy is inevitable. Most of my films are dark comedies. I consider myself a Realist. As a Clinical Psychologist and former Psychotherapist, I believe that the director's duty

is to manipulate the audience's emotions in a positive sense. I've done that in some of my earlier films, „Pretty Village, Pretty Flame“, „The Wounds“ and „The Parade“. All those films blend comedy and tragedy. This approach can be a two-edged sword. The audience is more drastically divided. But I try to make art-house films for the common working man who deserves more than simplified Hollywood or Netflix products. Besides, I believe that sometimes the cinema's mission is to disturb the viewers. First entertain them, make them laugh, and gradually lead them into a completely different genre, making them feel uncomfortable for the laughs earlier.

Your protagonist Stojan could be seen as kind of a „bad „Jesus figure as he takes on the sins of the world by rigorously committing them all. Do you believe one has to be a sinner to get by in modern society?

Stojan starts out as a genuinely good man. Almost a Saint. He gets rewarded with a halo. But is the halo God's mercy or just the Devil's cynical temptation? There is no direct answer to that question. He deeply suffers when his wife makes him perform a series of sins, from smaller ones to the biggest, mortal sins. She believes she's doing the right thing, she refuses to accept this as a gift from God. There are several layers of reasons for these actions. Stojan's wife Nada is, in a way, a metaphor of today's media: capable of turning any good man into a sinner. This is particularly



true in transitional societies as ex-Yugoslavia, where the media became an instrument of out-of-control capitalism. In the third chapter, after no sins managed to remove his halo, the hero turns into something that can perhaps be described as a demonic force. He became the president of a small East-European country. In Hungary, they will see him as Orban, everyone in Serbia will recognize Vučić. The film's metaphors widely mix religious and political agendas.

There are a lot of paintings and art installations scattered throughout HEAVENS ABOVE. Were they produced specifically for the film or where did you find them?

Yes, created by Tatjana Strugar, a talented artist and the costume designer for this film, who I've been collaborating with for the past three decades. Each painting in the film is a result of thorough discussions during which we tried to envision the art through the perspective of the character, who is struggling with a severe mental disorder. The paintings were a way to add an additional metaphorical layer. I don't like random things in my films. Everything is planned and essential for carrying out the idea of the film.

Who is the holy Petka?

The Catholic religion has 159 female saints out of 1486, a good illustration of male domination. The Eastern Orthodox religion has almost 300 female saints. St. Petka is one of the most celebrated ones, especially in the Balkans. Besides the „classic“ ones like giving eyesight to the blind, her miracles include one that superhero movie fans would find interesting – she could

make herself invisible. The second story of HEAVENS ABOVE features a mentally challenged hero who worships St. Petka. He is sentenced to death and turns into a baby. However, the authorities still see him as a murderer and refuse to back off from the punishment. Some might find this story cynical. Does religion „work“ better with the weak-minded? The point here can be that only a pure soul can see and reach God.

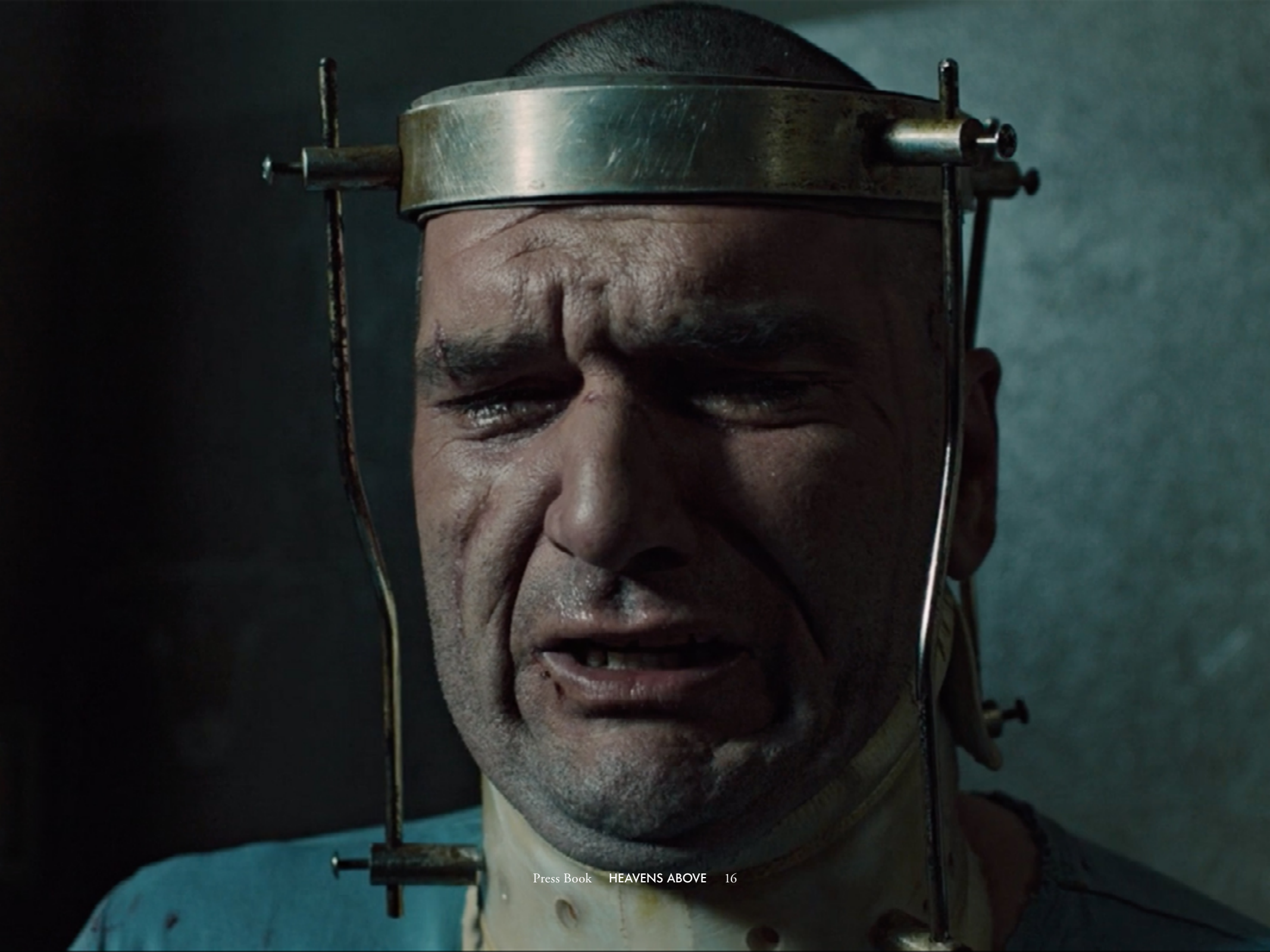
Divine interventions, a halo on someone's head and miraculous de-aging. What's your reason for including a lot of surreal elements into HEAVENS ABOVE?

Once upon a time we had Surrealism. Today, we have superheroes. Miracles became an everyday thing, we see them all the time on the screen. But God's miracles are still all around us. Only it seems that we are no longer able to recognize them. HEAVENS ABOVE deals with that subject, too. There is one miracle in the film that unquestionably belongs only to God, and that is our will to sacrifice ourselves for someone else. It is, maybe, the biggest miracle of them all.

Do you think the world would be a better place, if humans could literally sustain themselves by consuming art, as your movie suggests?

Your interpretation is quite intriguing, but it might actually be the opposite of what I wanted to show. Which makes me feel good because it is wonderful when a film becomes a Rorschach test with an indefinite number of interpretations. Nutritious art, yet another miracle, plays a different role in this film. It is about the term „Creative Industries,“ which I find

utterly disgusting. Neoliberal capitalism simply cannot accept that art can just be the Artist's needing to say something about the world around them. That the primary goal is not to make money. The artist in HEAVENS ABOVE sees his paintings that feed people as a curse. He wants his art to uplift people – not to fill their bellies. Unfortunately, we all are, one way or another, forced to think about that nutritious aspect. For instance, if this film satisfies the appetites of the viewers and distributors, maybe I will get the chance to make another one. Out of my inner need, of course.



Producer: Biljana Prvanović

She has produced or co-produced 8 feature films, a range of short films (documentaries and fictions), TV commercials, and media campaigns.

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