

PRIMA LINEA PRODUCTIONS  
PRESENTS



# THE BEARS' FAMOUS INVASION





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A FILM BY LORENZO MATTOTTI

RUNTIME: 82 MIN

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# SYNOPSIS

To find his long lost son and food to survive the winter, the great bear king leads his clan down from the mountains and into the world of men. After escaping terrible monsters and defeating an evil duke, the bears and men live together in peace – for a time.







# LORENZO MATTOTTI INTERVIEW

**It all started with a story by Buzzati published in 1945. I imagine you read it as a young man. Is it a well-read book in Italy?**

It has been for several generations, but less so now. However, Dino Buzzati is still a classic, although not as widely popular among children. I didn't read it myself when I was a small child. I think I read Dino Buzzati because I had known him for a long time because of his other novels. But then I started reading all his books. Afterwards, he did a comic strip called "Poem Strip", which was republished by Actes Sud. It really impressed me. That was back in 1970, and this great writer, who was famous for other things, was publishing a comic strip: a very original thing to do at that time.

**What effect did this book have on you? Did it make an impact on you very early on? Or did the desire to adapt it come later?**

Yes, later on. Buzzati influenced all my work in general. He wrote several books, and did paintings too. It was the atmosphere that influenced me a lot, his way of telling stories as if they were legends or ancient tales, always full of magic and mystery, and sometimes with a dark atmosphere. I remember other books he wrote which left a strong impression on me. It came afterwards, with Valérie Schermann, the producer of the film.

**What is it about him that interests you?**

It's his way of telling a story, his tone, so to speak. It's also his way of working with metaphors, fables, fantasy and mystery. It's the expectant, tense atmosphere he creates.

**This story is a tale for children written in 1945, and you can definitely feel it's about war and dictatorship.**

It talks about a lot of things. He started it for Corriere dei Piccoli, which released it one chapter at a time, like a soap opera. At one point, he created a city that was censored because it looked too much like Berlin and they asked him to change it. It wasn't even called "The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily" but

"The famous invasion", then it became "The famous invasion of the Maremma", which is a region a bit like the Camargue in France. After he stopped working at Corriere dei Piccoli, he started drawing for his niece. One or two years later, he decided to write a book. He used the entire narrative, rewrote it and added the whole second part. It does, of course, raise a lot of questions. Do the bears symbolize the communists? The Russians? I don't know. I don't think one should get too attached to that. When I read the story, I didn't notice all those allusions.

**It's obviously a tale, and when one reads your work, one sees that it's a genre you enjoy. What is it that you like about this type of story, about tales, metaphors, fables, and legends?**

They empower me to work a lot with drawing, with mystery.

**Does that unleash your imagination?**

Yes, there's always something mysterious about drawing and its possibilities. Conjuring up something that exists, like fables, always requires work. It's really something that's related to images, like painting. He obviously also influenced me by the way he used shapes in his metaphysical landscapes. He made a series of votive offerings, legends featuring an imaginary saint. The whole thing is very much linked to Italian tradition and religion: it's like an epic journey, an epic tale of an imaginary land, of mysteries, legends and more. I've always liked it because it's part of the fable... It empowers me to create universal tales that are not too topical... You can slip current events into the narrative, but with metaphors to give them a lasting feel and so that several generations can understand them... Actual realism has never really interested me. I've always loved symbolism in my work.

**And expressionism too?**

Yes, of course. I suppose I'm expressionist by nature, but with culture I've become much more of a symbolist, more metaphysical... In all events, many works of art have influenced me.



**Your drawings exude the ability to develop a reader's imagination, to invent, to search, to create.**

That's the whole object. I don't want to tell readers everything, explain everything, but rather give them an opportunity to fire up and enrich their own imagination, their own personal vision... That's how I grew up... All the authors I liked were the ones who let me dream up and imagine things my own way, the ones who enriched me with the imaginary.

**To come back to the film, when Valérie Schermann and Christophe Jankovic, the producers, proposed a feature film, why did this tale come to mind?**

It was completely natural. I don't know why, but the book is like a magic box. It contains love to tell the kids about, the narrator's way of always playing and talking. There are tons of ideas all over the place. We had to simplify a lot. In addition, he's strange: he invents characters and then leaves them standing there. We had a lot of trouble making it coherent.

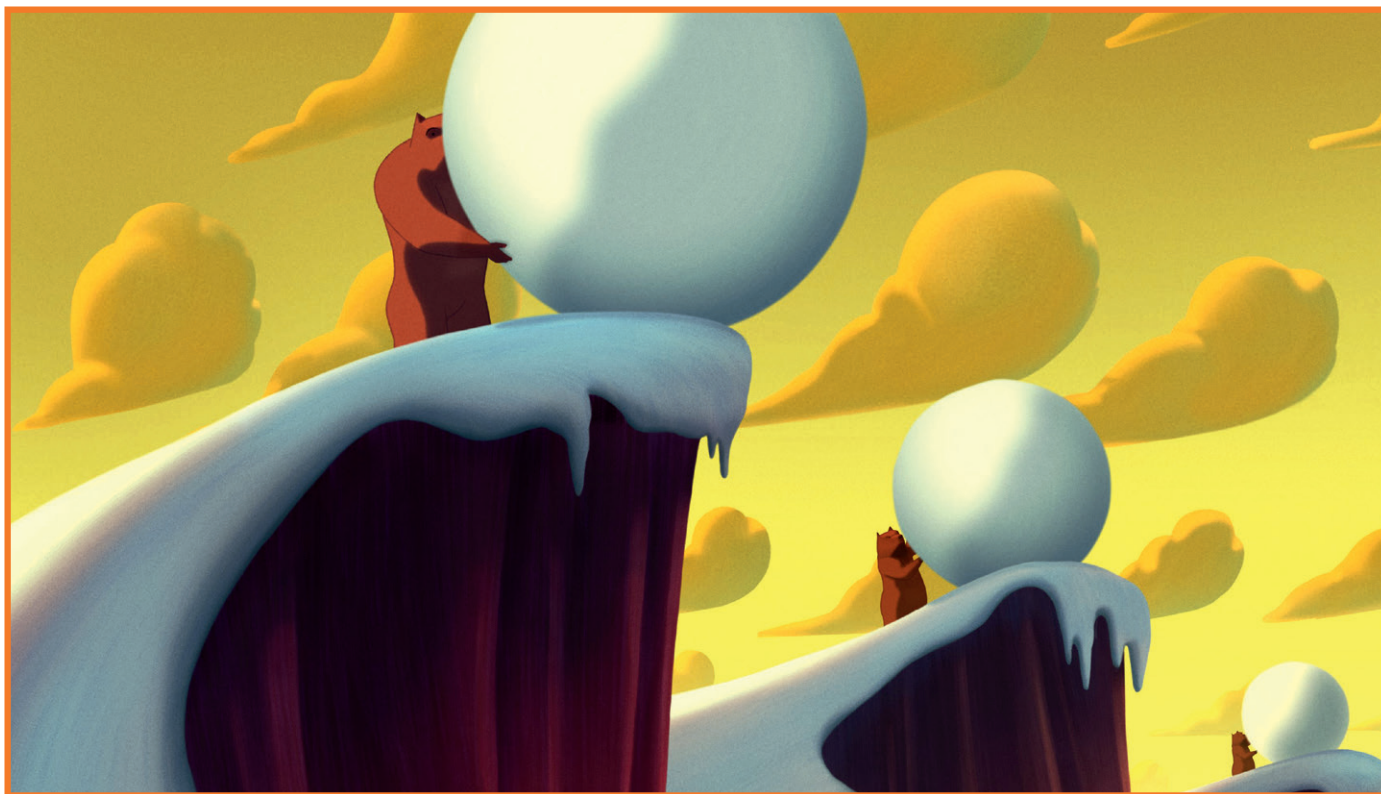
**And that's why you asked Jean-Luc Fromental and Thomas Bidegain, who have a background in film making, to write the script.**

I didn't know Thomas. It was Valerie Schermann who introduced him to me. I think it was a wonderful trio. From time to time, there was also my friend Jerry Kramsky in Italy who told me things that helped, and who also provided the Italian translation. We struck a good balance. Jean-Luc Fromental is a highly literary person, so he was very attentive to words and logic. Thomas Bidegain is a film fiend.

**Did the script take a long time to write?**

The treatment was a bit complicated because there was no girl, no female characters, so we had to come up with the underlying rationale. There were too many characters coming and going, and we wanted someone to tell the story because we needed a common thread. We invented Gedeone and the little girl. The old bear was us too.





**Why did you think it was an easier way for the public to follow the plot? Was it a suggestion someone made?**

First, we came up with the idea of the little girl who grows up. I really liked the Sicilian story singer concept because it enabled us to summarise and jump from place to place in the narrative and to enter and exit at all times. I really liked the idea of the voice over in the narrative, because it's classic Buzzati: there's always a voice over in his work.

**And it's the very principle of storytelling: "Let me tell you a story."**

It's the narrator who goes from place to place, like a Sicilian story singer. Buzzati has worked with poems and books. He's full of little poems and rhymes, and I really wanted to keep that dimension. Then there was the idea of the old bear, which is an excellent idea that provided some freedom for ellipsis.

**Did Jean-Luc Fromental and Thomas Bidegain work with you all along?**

Yes, we always talked together, and they would then write.

**Were you starting work from your end?**

I immediately wanted to do a little storyboard: an extremely quick pre-storyboard to see where we were going and because I needed to see if there were enough sequences. I wasn't concerned with the issue of length, but I wanted to see if the sequences worked, and if there was a rhythm in the narrative coupled with the images. I can't think with words: I have to think with images. My problem was to keep an overview of the film in mind all the time. Rewriting a sentence or new dialogue is easy: recreating an image another matter.

**Did you do a lot of research? As connoisseurs, we recognize your signature in the scenery, the characters, the angles and the lines.**

I had the film's key images very quickly, with many graphic ideas. Buzzati's drawings helped me a lot and being able to use his drawings as a basis was a kind of safety net for me because I couldn't invent everything from scratch: it's not my story.

**Are his drawings similar to yours?**

His style is much more naive, but there are some very nice graphic ideas there and I took them and used them for the film. I imagined furless bears that marched in line like soldiers. This is really characteristic of Buzzati.

I also used a lot of character outlines. At first, he does little sketches which he tries out with all his characters, a little like we did with the old bears, whereas he did it for all the characters. Working from a basis that came from Buzzati really made me feel more relaxed. Of course, achieving the final production images was a very lengthy process.

**Is this your first feature film?**

We started out really enthusiastically. In the beginning, it could have been a minor, very simple film that was less cinematographic. But little by little we realized that the story was strong, that there were lots of spectacular things and so we aligned with this vision. The final imagery was very tricky to produce with this degree of richness and spectacularity. We proceeded step by step. For a whole year we tried to make the film in 3D and had two teasers made in 3D with two different teams, but we finally realized that it was too expensive with that quality and with all those sets, all that detail. We wouldn't have had enough money.

**But the 2D is beautiful...**

We tried to find ways to use 3D in a different way, in the settings, in the atmospheres, by doing it in a graphic, poetic way. I also wanted great depth all the time. I couldn't stop repeating "more depth, more depth." I wanted to play with all the possibilities of the big screen.





The camera movements are complicated and expensive, and the directing is almost classic. This is practically an unavoidable choice if you want to make images, and especially animation, come alive.

**This is where you feel the influence of symbolism, of expressionism: the images themselves are already extremely eloquent and impressive. But then again, it's a movie, so it has to move.**

You have to have the pleasure of seeing things happening in the images, like the play of light. I am very contemplative by nature. OK, so I've told a story, but what is a children's story, what is the rhythm of the narrative? What is the struggle between getting lost in the imagery and following the rhythm? That's really a lesson I learned well. It's something we discussed a lot and I realize that my thought structure was very illustrative. In the book, there are the characters of king Léonce and his son. There are many characters, but the general atmosphere of the book involves characters moving against vast landscapes. We needed to get up closer to the characters, so we made the crucial choice of the father and son. We chose to take this relationship between father and son to the very end, where it becomes dramatic in the second part. This doesn't really happen in the books... The drama of the book, which is also in the film, is obviously Léonce who loses his identity and his ability to see all these bears becoming almost like men, with all their vices. But Léonce's son only appears after he's found him in the casino. He's in debt, and going downhill. We really built the Tonio character. Of course, we had to invent Almerina because he represents the relationship with humans. Together with Thomas and Jean-Luc, we really did an extensive rewrite. On the other hand, I was still worried about losing the connection with Buzzati. In the end, I think we betrayed him.

**Another thing that is fascinating about your work is the colours and the way you work with them, how you arrange them, how you mix them, how you match them in your albums and in this film. Where does this talent for colour come from? One's tempted to say that they'll never match and in the end, of course, they do.**

I find that creative people are very afraid of colours. Not many people take pleasure in using colour. I have always had fun using them. I asked my chief decorator to use bold colours, not to be afraid, and also to use touches of light. Colours are light. Images always have to be brought out using lighting effects. But you shouldn't be afraid of this red, or that yellow. Colours are energy. They convey positive energy to us. What I hate about some animated films is that they don't know what colours to use, so yellowy-brown wins the day.

And at night, everything is grey, black, and blue. Then they turn on the white lights. I didn't want any blur. You know, the rays of light shining through fog: that's classic Disney. When you don't know what to do, you put on a bit of fog, and then you mix everything up. I didn't want that at all. The image has to be clear. If there's a little house there, the spectators must be able to see it. I like my films to show a clear view. I love to be shown things. My film culture has nothing to do with film!

**So what exactly is your film culture?**

I loved Herzog, Tarkovski, all the German films of the 70s, all American independent films, and of course, Pasolini and all his "Tales". Fellini, for us Italians... When I saw "Amarcord", I said "now that's my culture". My people come from the plains. My family comes from the plains. Everything that happens in "Amarcord" is part of our deeper selves. In fact, that's true of





**Precisely, from the point of view of animation, colours, framing, style and line, the result sometimes gave me the impression of a blend of the clear Belgian line and Eisenstein. It was a very constructivist and simplified mixture.**

I wanted a very clear dimension. I wanted the characters to really be characters, the houses to be houses. I wanted the air to blow through it all. I said right away that I didn't want any pastel colours. A little work was done in pastel when we worked on matter. But I didn't want matter. I wanted air for this film. I don't like the feeling of claustrophobia that some gorgeous, very artistic, very beautiful animated films can leave you with. I mean how they make you feel the paper, the colours, but it's difficult to get out of it.

**That's why I'm talking about clear lines. There's nothing unnecessary in your drawing. Sometimes it almost looks a bit "Tintin-esque". I don't know if that's a compliment.**

It is, I just love Tintin. On the other hand, the images open up to space. I always wanted to stay in control over space, and the organisation of space. And when you talk about Eisenstein, yes, of course, I think Eisenstein is part of it. I remember going to see "*Ivan the Terrible*" to get the two or three shadows right. You tell the story with silhouettes. Eisenstein also used vast spaces. From the very beginning I said that I didn't want the material effect of the pencil. And that already gave us a precise direction to follow. On the other hand, I wanted to achieve some volume. That's why the 3D experience ultimately helped us to build the bears. I wanted a three-dimensional idea of the characters, even in 2D. 3D makes it possible to achieve depth, large spaces, and an architectural organisation of all images. I think that at the beginning I would have liked, in a somewhat ingenious way, to work even more with distorted perspective, to play even more with total unrealism, with the freedom of using characters that can shrink instantaneously. That's very complicated to manage in an animated film. But it might have made it feel a little more cartoon-like. Another thing that interested me and that I had used a lot in the short film "*Fear(s) of the dark*" was metamorphosis. We used it on the ogre. We used circuses a lot. But hey! The narration alone was a very complicated challenge. We really did chose to be as popular as possible and not do a huge job on metalanguage.

everything in visionary cinema. But let's not forget Coppola's "*Apocalypse Now*".

In my opinion, the very last great director is Wong Kar-wai, whom I met and with whom I had the chance to work. I love the somewhat contemplative, almost hypnotic atmosphere he achieves in his film "*In the Mood for Love*".

**You say that you've worked with a lot of influences regarding image and colour. What does that mean? Pictures? Paintings?**

Yes, Renaissance paintings. What interested me a lot was the way things were stylized: how the mountains were stylized, how caves were stylized, how cities were stylized to create the overlying code of the bear world. It's not realistic at all. So I showed some American painters, certain colours and drawings by Beato Angelico, and the way Giotto did caves. Of course, Buzzati's enlargements, and also his other drawings as well as all the paintings he did, were put on the walls. We had a sort of alphabet that we used to say things like: "Look, we can

do things this way to depict trees, to show nature." Nature is made up of shapes. So, you need to decide which shapes to build. Actually, an animated film is incredible because you have to decide everything. If a butterfly flutters by, how do you show it? What's a butterfly like in this imaginary world? So, we must be very careful not to make it too realistic: it has to be synthetic but not too flat or false. We chose to draw in all the shadows. I wanted the characters to completely blend into the landscape. I didn't want to give viewers the impression of a colourful landscape with flat characters on top. If you don't put the shadows under the characters, they don't blend in. We did a huge amount of shadow work for all the characters, and also the shadows projected on the walls. Obviously, I'm thinking of expressionist cinema. I love Orson Welles and his work on shadows: the shadows of silhouettes, the shadows on walls, light, lighting effects... I just love it. Then of course, I had to be very careful not to make the film too dark.



**At some point, people have to look and see exactly what's going on. In comics, you can go back to a scene, and stay there as long as you want, but in films fluidity is essential...**

The enormous job we did was to achieve this fluidity in the narrative. There were some very hard moments, because it felt like progress was very slow. There was a lot of dialogue. I was anxious about dialogue. On the other hand, it was also great to achieve a rhythm between contemplation and the story, the narration. We really did a lot of work on this. In the end, we didn't really cut out a lot. The structure was almost identical to the original one. We just simplified. We did a lot of general cuts, little things here and there, to lend fluidity and rhythm between the scenes. All this preparation.... All this work ended up taking a very long time.... When production really started, with the animators, the team of decorators... Work had already started on the sets. Once we found things, we had made good progress with the sets. But there were no real moments of crisis in the film's production. We never had to redo a sequence. We never said: "It's not working, we're doing it again." We never had to do anything all over again.

**As a solitary person by definition, do you like teamwork? Does that get you out of your cave?**

The work with the production team and the animators was very enjoyable. It frustrated me a little bit because everyone works with tablets and computers. I had decided to stick with the team, see all these talents and get them to work on a common project. In fact, I used everyone else's talent to build this cathedral, a cathedral that belongs to us all.

**But you do get acknowledgement.**

That's very good. Yes, of course, I put a lot into it. The structure of the images is part of me. But the richness of certain lighting schemes, certain colours of the sets, certain ideas of the characters' movements, all this happened thanks to the animators. I was feeding them ideas. I would say, for instance, that it was very important for hands to move. But apart from that, the rhythm was set by the animators. I have the impression that most of them had fun. They did this work with pleasure. And I think it shows in the film. At least I hope so.

**Why did you choose Jean-Claude Carrière to tell the story?**

He's an extraordinary guy. In addition, he has worked with the greatest. And he trusted me right away. He did a wonderful job, with his deep voice. And we managed to find Camilleri for the Italian.

**Camilleri the novelist?**

Yes, he has an incredible voice. He's really an old Italian storyteller.

Jean Claude Carrière was in the studio for another project, we heard his voice and asked him if he wanted to play an old bear, point blank.

On one hand, Jean-Claude Carrière, and on the other, Camilleri. What more do you want? Plus, they're impersonating an old bear. They take pleasure in storytelling. It's also symbolic. It's a continuation. I still like it.

**The film is being presented at Un Certain Regard. What does being in Cannes mean to you?**

I designed the Cannes poster in 2000. I once braved the Cannes stairs. It was a great pleasure. I had no stage fright issues. I remember that no Italian films were competing. I was the only Italian in Cannes. Everyone was asking me things. It was very pleasant. I'm really glad we're in Cannes.





# CAST

## WITH THE VOICES OF

<b>Leïla Bekhti</b>	Almerina
<b>Thomas Bidegain</b>	Gedeone
<b>Jean-Claude Carrière</b>	Vieil ours
<b>Beppe Chierici</b>	Théophile
<b>Arthur Dupont</b>	Tonio
<b>Thierry Hancisse</b>	Leonce
<b>of the Comédie Française</b>	
<b>Pascal Demolon</b>	Grand-Duc
<b>Jacky Nercessian</b>	Salpêtre
<b>Boris Rehlinger</b>	De Ambrosiis, Babbon



# CREW

<b>Director</b>	Lorenzo Mattotti
<b>Scenario and dialogues</b>	Thomas Bidegain, Jean-Luc Fromental, Lorenzo Mattotti
<b>Based on the novel</b>	La Famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia by Dino Buzzati
<b>Graphic design</b>	Lorenzo Mattotti
<b>Original Music</b>	René Aubry
<b>Producers</b>	Valérie Schermann, Christophe Jankovic
<b>Co-producers</b>	Nicola Giuliano, Francesca Cima, Carlotta Calori, Ardavan Safaee
<b>Animation studio</b>	3.0 studio - Angoulême, Paris
<b>1<sup>st</sup> assistant director</b>	Rafaël Vicente
<b>Storyboard manager</b>	Aymeric Gendre
<b>Layout and set manager</b>	Julien De Man
<b>Lead animators</b>	Julien Dexant, Laurent Kircher, Jean-Christophe Lie, Antonio Mengual-Llobet
<b>Animation support managers</b>	Léa Bancelin, Marie Bouchet, Joanna Lurie
<b>Lead shadow animator</b>	Pascal Herbreteau
<b>Lead special effects animator</b>	Mouloud Oussid
<b>Compositing manager</b>	Joan Frescura
<b>Editing</b>	Sophie Reine
<b>Sound</b>	Piste Rouge - Bruno Seznec, Fabien Devillers Jean-Marc Lentreten, Sébastien Marquilly
<b>A French-Italian co-production</b>	Prima Linea Productions, France 3 Cinéma, Pathé, Indigo Film with Rai Cinema
<b>With the participation of</b>	Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions
<b>With help from</b>	Centre National de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée MIBAC, Programme MEDIA The European Union's MEDIA Programme
<b>With help from</b>	Région Ile de France, Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Département de la Charente through Pôle Image Magelis, Procirep, Sacem and La Fondation Gan pour le Cinéma

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