

The Scoundrel's Wife: About the Production

Synopsis

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“Casting a movie is like making gumbo”

Academy Award-winner Tatum O'Neal as Camille Picou

Julian Sands as Doctor Lenz

Tim Curry as Father Antoine

Lacey Chabert (*Party of Five*) as Florida Picou

Eion Bailey (*Band of Brothers*) as Jack Burwell

Patrick McCollough as Blue Picou

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A director returns to his roots

A ~~Husband~Wife~~ Wife~Husband writing team

Filmed and financed entirely in Louisiana

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“I only had eyes for Zorro!”

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Writer Michelle Benoit

Producer Peggy Rajski

Producer Jerry Daigle

Executive Producer Michael Donaldson

Co-producer Michael Arata

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THE SCOUNDREL'S WIFE - Synopsis

Starring Academy Award-winner Tatum O'Neal, Julian Sands, Tim Curry,
Lacey Chabert, Eion Bailey & Patrick McCullough.

Against the real dangers and explosive paranoia of a home front besieged by the enemy, a haunted outcast and a mysterious stranger struggle for redemption in the dramatic love story, *The Scoundrel's Wife*. Set in writer/director Glen Pitre's home town of Cut Off, Louisiana, the film recounts events that actually took place there as, early in World War II, prowling German U-boats sank more than 600 merchant ships along America's Atlantic and Gulf coasts, often within sight of land, prompting witch hunts for traitors in numerous coastal communities.

A lonely but fiercely independent widow, Camille Picou (Academy Award-winner TATUM O'NEAL) lives in a bayou village where her husband's unsavory reputation fuels wild speculation even after his death. Whispered rumors about what really happened on a murky night years before torment Camille and swirl around her two teenage children: romantic, reckless Florida (*Party of Five's* LACEY CHABERT) and brooding Blue (PATRICK McCULLOUGH), eager to redeem his family's honor.

The devastating news of Pearl Harbor galvanizes the entire nation. But in Cut Off, the war is closer still. German U-Boats, patrolling the fishing grounds just offshore, torpedo American tankers. Explosions light up the night sky. The wreckage Camille and Blue catch in their shrimp net and the casualties they rescue from the sea are constant reminders of the danger lurking just beneath the surface. When German prisoners of war are brought in to work the sugarcane fields, tension in the community approaches the breaking point.

A mysterious refugee arrives in town. The foreigner, Doctor Lenz (JULIAN SANDS), is immediately suspect. His reluctance to practice medicine only adds to people's misgivings. But Lenz reawakens long-forgotten feelings in Camille. Neither dares reveal the truth about the secrets that bind them, even as the rogue of a village priest, Father Antoine (TIM CURRY), decides to quash their budding relationship.

Meanwhile, ships continue to go down. On a coast notorious for smuggling, Coast Guard Ensign Jack Burwell (*Band of Brothers's* EION BAILEY) is charged by his superiors to unmask any fishermen who might be selling fuel, supplies, or information to the enemy submarines. He makes already-tainted Camille his primary target. One by one, he seduces away her children, fans the hostility of the village, drives a wedge between her and Lenz, and draws his net ever-tighter.

Hell breaks loose, all in one terrible day, when a cache of fuel comes up missing, German POWs escape their nearby imprisonment, and a group of horribly wounded casualties puts everyone to the test. As fear and anger boil over, Camille, Lenz, and her family are caught in a web of false suspicion and secret shame that threatens to destroy them all.

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“Casting a movie is like making gumbo...”

Glen Pitre, Director

“Because just like gumbo, casting requires the right ingredients, in the right proportions, brought in at just the right moment. It takes skill, it takes finesse, but let’s be honest—as much as anything it takes good fortune. On *The Scoundrel’s Wife* we were VERY fortunate,” remarked director Glen Pitre of his talent line up.

The Scoundrel’s Wife returns Academy Award-winner Tatum O’Neal to the big screen as Camille Picou, and stars Julian Sands as Doctor Lenz, Tim Curry as Father Antoine, Lacey Chabert (*Party of Five*) as Florida Picou, Eion Bailey (*Band of Brothers*) as Jack Burwell, and introduces Patrick McCollough as Blue Picou.

“Casting an independent film, when there’s no studio checkbook to wave around, is always trying,” asserted the 45 year-old director. “On this one, everything depended on who played the film’s pivotal title role.

“One Oscar-winning actress had flirted with the part for almost a year, but after our sixth or seventh ‘final, now-or-never, fish or cut bait’ deadline, she took another film instead.” After that, things grew frustrating. The lead character had been a teen-age mother; when the story opens her kids are 17 and 18, but in youth-obsessed Hollywood that presented a problem.

“We were hearing back from actresses in their fifties that they were ‘much too young to play the mother of an eighteen year-old,’” recalled Pitre. “By this point we were well into pre-production, hiring crew, building sets, making non-refundable equipment deposits, and we still didn’t have a cast. One night my wife woke me up and claimed I’d been chanting in my sleep: ‘Nerves of steel, nerves of steel...’”

Things finally broke when producer Peggy Rajski heard through the Hollywood grapevine that Academy Award-winner Tatum O’Neal was considering a return to the screen, *IF* she found the right role.

“Bells went off when she was suggested,” remembered Rajski. “The character Camille had so many parallels to Tatum’s own life: being a mother so young, being on film hiatus for nearly a decade yet having the community’s eyes always on her, judging her.”

“All of a sudden, things were happening at the speed of light,” recalled Jerry Daigle, the film’s other producer. “Forty-eight hours after Tatum was first suggested, Glen [Pitre, the director] and I were on a plane to New York to meet her. Forty-eight hours after that we had almost the entire cast in place.”

“This cast is certainly the tastiest gumbo I ever served,” claimed Pitre, who once spent a year as a ship’s cook to pay for the completion of one of his early films.

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Academy Award^(r) Winner TATUM O’NEAL as Camille Picou

“Fighting your demons, raising children alone, living down your past... My character, Camille, has encountered a lot of obstacles, a lot of hardship, but she isn't a martyr. That attracted me to the role.”

Tatum O'Neal

At age ten, Tatum O'Neal became the youngest person to ever win an Oscar (as well as a Golden Globe) as the tough_talking, cigarette_smoking orphan in *Paper Moon*. She followed that up with the hit comedy, *The Bad News Bears*, then *Nickelodeon*. In the horse racing drama *International Velvet*, she reprised a role played by Elizabeth Taylor a generation earlier.

But in her early twenties, Tatum left the screen to have children (Kevin, 15; Sean, 13; and Emily, 10). A very public break-up with her husband, bad-boy tennis star John McEnroe, and rumors of substance abuse became fodder for the tabloids.

After such a long absence, finding the right vehicle to return to the screen was not an easy choice for O'Neal. It was the timeless quality of the role she would play in *The Scoundrel's Wife* that appealed to her and ensured her participation in the project.

“The Scoundrel's Wife is a period romantic drama, but fighting your demons, raising children alone, living down your past, all that still happens today. My character, Camille, has encountered a lot of obstacles, a lot of hardship, but she isn't a martyr,” said O'Neal. “Camille struggles to find who she is rather than allowing behaviors to be patterned for her.”

At the heart of *The Scoundrel's Wife*, the character of Camille Picou is a strong woman suspected of participating in a horrific crime with her late husband nearly a decade earlier. Camille has chosen to never speak of the incident, never to reveal the truth of that dark night. It is in this character that writer/director Pitre has placed the very crux of the themes of transformation and forgiveness in *The Scoundrel's Wife*.

“I wanted to put Camille through the cauldron,” explained Pitre. “Her way to finding peace is to be accused again, and this time, even more unfairly.”

“Working with Glen has been great,” said O'Neal of her relationship with Pitre. “He loves this movie, loves Camille. We go to blows over the way he and Michelle wrote her (a 1940's Southern woman) and the way I play her (a more universal woman who fights to be seen and heard, not disrespected). We fight over it, but it's a good fight. We wrestle till we arrive at the truth of the character and the situation.”

“Camille is already tainted by the time we meet her,” adds O'Neal. “Then she meets this refugee, Doctor Lenz, who has come to town with a similar experience but who has chosen a different path to escape the ghosts that follow him. By that example, Camille learns to forgive herself, and to love again.”

The movie marks Tatum O'Neal's first feature film role in a decade (though she earned good reviews for the lead in the 1993 TV movie *Woman on the Run* and had a cameo in Julian

Schnabel's critically acclaimed 1996 *Basquiat* for HBO). "Most actors with an Oscar on the shelf would just assume they could walk back onto the set. Not Tatum," affirms Pitre. "She systematically prepared for her return to the screen. Studying, taking acting classes like she was a beginner, instead of someone who had literally grown up in front of the camera."

The actor herself credits yoga with being instrumental in her resuming her career. "It prepares me mentally and physically," said O'Neal.

Whatever the preparation, the producers of *The Scoundrel's Wife* were delighted to have snagged O'Neal's re-introduction to cinema audiences. "They say movie stars are different and it's true. You put them in front of the camera and you can't take your eyes off them. That's very true in Tatum's case," said producer Daigle of his star.

"Tatum is the heart and soul of the film," agreed Producer Rajski. "Her ability to get under the skin of Camille is mesmerizing. Tatum has an emotional intensity and honesty. A wounded, rich poignancy that shows between the lines as Camille deals with issues of moral culpability: when do we finally learn to forgive? I feel like Tatum is almost channeling Camille."

"*The Scoundrel's Wife* is my first experience working with Tatum," remarked Julian Sands, who plays Doctor Lenz to O'Neal's Camille. "*Paper Moon* established her, won her an Oscar, and was great, instinctive work. I find her very compelling as a person. As an actress she has great strength and instincts, as well as judgement with a depth of internal feeling that is very rare. It's not learned, it's something one must have."

"I had met Tatum when she was about 9 or 10," remembered Tim Curry, who plays Father Antoine in *The Scoundrel's Wife*. "I hugely admire her performance in *Paper Moon*. Whenever you see a young performer with such emotional depth, you know you're looking at a rare talent, and indeed, Tatum's a natural."

"With Tatum, the audience won't know what to expect," concluded Pitre. "She's certainly not the little girl from *Paper Moon*. The experiences she's had since her youth—marriage, children, the vicissitudes of adult life—have contributed greatly to her portrayal of Camille."

"I'm sure my audience will be surprised when they see me up on screen," agreed O'Neal, "but I believe they won't even think of Tatum O'Neal; they'll be thinking of Camille."

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JULIAN SANDS as Dr. Lenz

“I play the tall, dark stranger, the Heathcliff... It’s a deeply romantic story. Sensual. Rare. Forbidden.”

Julian Sands

“At times you see the way which Julian looks at Tatum when they are in character as Lenz and Camille, and it’s the way any woman would want to be looked at,” commented producer Peggy Rajski. “He can see directly into Camille’s soul. For her to allow that is an incredibly powerful act.”

“How do you create chemistry?” added screenwriter Michelle Benoit. “You write it in to the script as best you can, all the while knowing that it’s really all up to the actors. But even the actors are just feeling their way. How *do* you create chemistry? You can’t bottle it. But every now and then, if you’re lucky, you can capture it on film. We were so damn lucky.”

“Dr. Lenz is a refugee from Europe,” explains Sands about his role as the romantic lead in *The Scoundrel’s Wife*. “He’s been given a chance to relocate to the fishing village of Cut Off, Louisiana, but 1942 is when Operation Drumbeat is happening: German U_Boats are patrolling off the Louisiana coast, trying to sink American ships. That environment gives way to local rumors and paranoia about collaborators and saboteurs.

“The story was a revelation,” continued Sands. “Rumor mongering transcending its time and place in history. In the middle of it all is this character Lenz. He finds his own heroism, redemption and mystery... yet he’s masquerading. It’s through Lenz’ relationship to Camille that we learn about his past, his history and even his whole identity.

“The script was so well written. I’d done a bit of my own research, but the richness was already in place. It is a deeply romantic story—sensual, rare, forbidden.”

Sands first made a lasting impression on American audiences with *A Room With A View*, although he had already been seen in the critically acclaimed films *The Killing Fields*, *Oxford Blues*, and *After Darkness*. He has since worked with some of the most talented directors available including Martha Coolidge, Paul Schrader, Ken Russell, Robert Altman, Frank Marshall, David Cronenberg and a half-dozen films with Mike Figgis.

“Julian, whose career for years and years has been extraordinary, is not just a fine actor but also a fine collaborator,” said Pitre. “He’s generous, feeding the others around him. He has an intensity with a wisp of the mischievous, like he’s always hiding a secret of some kind.

“He was not my first thought for this role. Too blonde. Too, well... British. But he metamorphoses into this role. Not just the darkened hair. It’s his whole being. It’s really something to see.”

* * * * * **TIM CURRY** as Father Antoine

“My character is smart, a wit, yet something of a failure. For him it's a tale of thwarted ambition.”

Tim Curry

“We grinned for an entire afternoon when we heard Tim had said yes to the part of Father Antoine,” smiled writer Michelle Benoit. “What a professional! What a talent! You never knew what he'd bring to a given take, but it was always magic.”

“Imagine Dr. Frank N. Furter singing the 1940's folk song 'My Bucket's Got a Hole in It,’” added producer Rajski, referring to Curry’s legendary cult classic, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The British actor’s filmography also includes *Clue*, *The Hunt for Red October*, *Home Alone 2*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Scary Movie 2*, and *Rugrats in Paris*, among others, as well as countless roles on both New York and London stages. The attraction of *The Scoundrel's Wife*, said Curry, was that this was a role he had never played before.

“Father Antoine doesn't understand why he's still stuck in this tiny village in Louisiana,” explained Curry. “The great challenge in his life is Camille, who has refused to make confession for a horrific crime years earlier that he and everyone else in town believes she committed. I think he admires Camille, sees her as the strong woman she is, the strong person he'd like to be himself. And for somebody who would appear to be a rather weak man, and a weak man of God, he later reveals himself to be neither of these things.”

On the set, gracious, affable Curry was a magnet for extras, the film’s investors, and onlookers who wanted to be photographed with a movie star, but he was equally popular with his fellow actors. “Tim Curry has influenced a generation of actors with his glamorous pathos,” admitted co-star Julian Sands, “and as Father Antoine, Tim is wonderful.”

“I do a lot of cartoon voices in California,” commented Curry. “It's my favorite thing to do. Julian and I did one together, eyeing each other across the room the way English actors do in Los Angeles. I'd admired his work previously, and was very keen to work with him on *The Scoundrel's Wife*. We've become very good friends on this film; we had a little corner of English jokes on set from which everyone else was excluded.”

“Lacey [Chabert] and I also do a cartoon together, *The Wild Thornberrys*,” adds Curry, “where we play father and daughter, so I was friend and fan of Lacey's before we arrived in Louisiana. She's extraordinary, beautiful, talented... and one of the most centered young women I've ever met.”

“Tim is so funny,” responded Chabert. “His commentary is the best; everything he does sparkles.”

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LACEY CHABERT as Florida Picou

“I fell off a horse, tumbled out of a car, had fire ants attack me, a spider bite me, and even had my slip drop right off in the middle of my big dance scene!”

Lacey Chabert

“It was an offer most actors never get,” recalled Chabert. “Glen [Pitre, the director] called and said, ‘How would you like to play your own grandmother?’”

Best known for her award-winning performance as Claudia Salinger in the hit television series *Party of Five*, eighteen year-old Chabert is also an accomplished Broadway actress (*Les Miserables*) and film star (*Lost in Space*, *Teen Movie*). Her voice can be heard in numerous animated television series and films, including *Rescue Me* in which she co-stars with *The Scoundrel's Wife* cast mate Tim Curry.

“Though we’d only met a couple of times, Lacey and I are distant cousins,” explained Pitre. “Her father was born in Cut Off, the little bayou town where I grew up, where the movie is set, and where her grandmother still makes her home.”

“My grandmother lived through the incidents on which the story is based,” pointed out Chabert, “and was about the age then that I am now.”

“I’ve wanted to do a period piece for a long time and loved the true story aspect of the script. It has great scope, meaning and depth. The character, Florida, was someone I hadn’t done before, but she jumped off the page for me. She is a free spirited dreamer who craves excitement and scandalizes her family. Immediately enamored by Jack Burwell’s dashing nature, she makes it her mission to get him.”

“Plus I wanted to work with Glen,” continued Chabert. “He’s creatively always right on. This has been a very special film for me because of all the local people who’ve worked on it.”

“There is a huge fan base on the bayou for Lacey,” added Benoit. “The folks here have felt an ownership of her career ever since was discovered on Star Search. The day didn’t pass that some cousins she had never met before came up and introduced themselves.”

“Lacey’s been wonderful. Fearless,” said producer Rajski. “She’s literally been tossed about and still shines.”

Laughing, Chabert confirmed Rajski assessment of her performance. “Tossed about indeed! I fell off a horse, tumbled out of a car, had fire ants attack me, a spider bite me, and even had my slip drop right off in the middle of my big dance scene! It never stopped!”

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EION BAILEY as Ensign Jack Burwell

“I hesitate to call Jack a bad guy, but rather a good guy with good intentions who tries to do good but fails... Again and again and again.”

Eion Bailey

“Eion Bailey had been picked up at the airport and dropped at his hotel. I had cast him from a tape and we hadn’t even spoken on the phone,” remembered director Glen Pitre. “So I popped over to his room to introduce myself. We barely had shaken hands when he says, ‘I plan to emphasize the positive qualities of Jack Burwell.’”

Pitre wasn’t quite sure where Burwell was heading. ““You do realize Jack is the villain of the piece?” I asked. ‘No, sir, I don’t think he is,’ he answered. That had me flummoxed. ‘Then who is?’ He looked me dead in the eye and with all sincerity said, ‘The Germans. There’s a war on.’ And that’s when I realized, oh my goodness, this fellow hasn’t even unpacked yet and he’s already in character.”

After roles in *Center Stage*, *Almost Famous*, and *Fight Club*, Bailey was fresh from completing work on the Steven Spielberg / Tom Hanks HBO mini-series, *Band of Brothers*, which, like *The Scoundrel’s Wife* is set during World War II.. “But *The Scoundrel’s Wife* shows the World War II no one remembers,” said Bailey. “When the enemy came knocking right on America’s door and turned us against one another.”

“Jack is the Coast Guard ensign in town, in effect the sheriff,” explained Bailey. “Being the only authority around, it’s his job to hunt down traitors. As Burwell, I have reason to believe it’s Camille supplying the German U-boats, and if it’s not her, she knows who it is. So I make her life hell. That’s where my duty falls.”

“Because I’m in uniform, Flo goes for me. Even more because her mother hates me. It’s normal: my sisters dated a lot of guys my parents hated!” added Bailey, who took swing dance lessons in order to better spin, twirl, and jitterbug co-star Lacey Chabert.

“It was late in the casting process and we’d still not found a Burwell we’d liked,” remembered Pitre. “I asked Sharon [Howard Field, the casting director] to do one more session. She sent a tape to me and Eion jumped off the screen. He was everything I’d always thought the character should be. The earnestness, the charming ruthlessness, the Clark Gable charisma.”

“Working with Eion kept me on my toes. He’s always thinking, always pushing boundaries. Eion thinks that this is Burwell’s story. That’s how it ought to be, but it makes me work harder, which is good,” added Pitre. “Besides, Eion is fun; we’d play jokes on each other constantly. I kept threatening to call in all the 15 year old girls who, because of *Center Stage*, were always hanging out just to catch a glimpse of him.”

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PATRICK McCOLLOUGH as Blue Picou

“This morning I wrap my first movie and this afternoon I’m going to graduate high school... They say big things come in threes... Boy, tonight, if I could only get _____!”

18 year-old Patrick McCollough on his last day of shooting

“I’d never been in a movie before, but I’d almost been *Almost Famous*,” explained newcomer Patrick McCollough. “They flew me out to L.A. to audition for the lead in that movie, but [director] Cameron Crowe told me I was too good looking... None of the girls I know ever told me that.”

“We’d actually offered the role of Blue to Patrick Fugit, the kid who did play the lead in *Almost Famous*, and had just heard that he’d passed to take a bigger part in another picture,” smiled Pitre. “But we still fully intended to cast Blue out of Los Angeles, until Laura Gianelli, who was casting our extras, insisted I look at Patrick.

“His mom took him out of school for the day. They show up at the production office. Black hair, pale skin, piercing eyes atop a lean, gawky, Gary Cooper body. All of a sudden everyone in the office, women and men alike, are whispering ‘Who’s the kid?’”

“Patrick is one of those things as a producer you get very excited by,” added Rajski. “He is our discovery. He's got a face the camera loves.”

“At first I was very dubious,” remembered producer Daigle. “We had young actors who’d starred in numerous wide-release movies reading for us, but Glen announces that he’s casting an unknown from my old high school. Then I saw Patrick’s audition tape, and all my fears just went away. This is a star-making role for Patrick.”

“He just blossomed in front of camera,” continued Pitre. “Patrick has a lot of natural talent of course but he's also just so whip-crack smart, that within a few days he's got the lingo and is finding the nuances of his character like a pro. Holding his own with veterans like Tim Curry and Julian Sands. And between takes doing pitch-perfect impersonations of his cast mates that would put the whole crew in stitches.”

“Blue is an awesome character,” said McCollough, a high school senior from New Orleans, of his premiere motion picture role. “He's brooding and introverted, and has enormous intensity in his quest to grow up.

“I like the moment when Blue is forced to guard his mother, Camille. It all comes together there, everything just slams into each other. It's such a bad moment for him. I think Blue doesn't always make the right choices, but in the end he does the right thing and becomes a man.”

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From the Set

A director returns to his roots

In 1977, when 21 year-old Glen Pitre directed *La Fievre Jaune*, the first of the no-budget, 16mm, Cajun-dialect historical dramas that would establish his career, casting was easy. His mom and dad, little brother, a great aunt, and several cousins had all the speaking parts. A couple of unfinished rooms at the back of his parents' house became his sound stage. His second hand Volkswagen beetle was the primary production vehicle.

For the little movie's biggest scene, a church service, at the end of a 6 mile dead end road he found a chapel that would pass "as is" for the film's 1890's setting, enlisting its entire congregation to raid their closets for appropriate costumes ("You can't go wrong with bib overalls") and come be in his movie.

Nearly a quarter-century later, Pitre once again found himself at the end of that same dead-end road, just across a canal from the old chapel. And while *The Scoundrel's Wife* may be modestly budgeted by Hollywood standards, nevertheless going to and fro past its caravan of trucks and trailers were legitimate Hollywood stars, period-accurate costumed extras, and even a platoon of shackled German prisoners guarded by fully armed American soldiers, with not a bib overall in sight.

But some things were very much like Pitre's beginnings. His mom, dad, and little brother all appear in this film. Even his Uncle Elvis (Chabert, not Presley) was on the set this day, "Just in case Glen needs a hand." And if much of the crew was from New York and Los Angeles, locals nevertheless held many key positions. Production designer Kelly Curley was as familiar with shrimp boats as Pitre, and Pitre's conversations with gaffer Paul Olinde usually took place in Cajun French.

"I shot my last picture in Chicago. The one before that, in Monterey and Los Angeles," said Pitre. "I wanted so much to come home for this one. For me, there's no greater thrill than taking all the technology available to modern movie-making and putting it in service to telling my own community's stories, just as my grandparents told stories to me, and their grandparents told stories to them."

There was a pause in the day's shooting as the condor crane which held lights was moved out of the way so a second crane could lift a 35' shrimp boat over a bridge and into place for the cameras. While waiting, a mother carrying a baby walked up to Pitre. "When I was her age," she said, indicating her child, "I was in your movie, *La Fievre Jaune*. I was in the church scene, in my mama's arms, just like I'm holding her now."

Pitre reminisced with the mother, cooed at the child, and tried not to feel too ancient. "You've sure come a long way," the woman, Desiree Dufrene, told him.

Pitre deliberated before he replied. "You could say that," he finally answered, gazing across the canal at the old chapel, "but you could say, I've only come a hundred fifty feet."

A Husband~Wife Wife~Husband writing team

“I call it couples therapy,” said writer Michelle Benoit of collaborating with husband Glen Pitre on the screenplay. “My office is in the front of the house, and his is in the back, so the mid-point is the kitchen. We just keep passing drafts back and forth across the kitchen table until we don’t know who’s written what.”

The Scoundrel’s Wife is not the couple’s first collaboration, but it is their first movie together. They’d previously co-written a travel book (*Country Roads of Louisiana*), a historical novel set in the 1680s (*Great River*), co-produced several TV documentaries (*Haunted Waters, Fragile Lands, Good For What Ails You, Wings Over Wetlands*), and most recently co-designed a half-million dollar museum exhibit on waterlife. “But big screen motion pictures had up to now been my exclusive turf,” explained Pitre.

“Glen and I keep a list going of stories we want to tell in whatever form,” continued Benoit. “We decided it was time do a movie together and we loved this one for that project. *The Scoundrel’s Wife* is a story drawn from historical fact but also shared local folklore. It deals with misplaced guilt and innocence, with scapegoats, all themes that Glen loves.

“But for me it was the chance to tell the story of a strong but shut-down woman who must learn to forgive herself. It’s something all women face, because we all carry around guilt. Maybe not the horrors that haunt [the movie’s main character] Camille, but often more insidious regrets. Things like: ‘I could have been a better mother,’ or ‘I could have been a better daughter.’”

“We’re also a team on set,” added Pitre, “which is terrific because Michelle can pull me aside to remind me what’s important, what’s at the core of each scene.”

“Both Glen and Michelle are very flexible, very reasoned filmmakers,” explained actor Tim Curry. “You can go equally as well to either of them on set. It’s a partnership. There is no sense of territory. Clearly it’s a remarkable marriage and just as clearly a collaborative one in terms of both life and art. I hugely admire and am rather jealous of that.”

Is the collaboration always so harmonious? “Not always,” admitted Benoit. “Sometimes it comes down to raw negotiation: ‘Okay, I’ll let you cut my favorite line, but you make lunch.’”

“And then there was the time,” remembered Pitre, “about the third draft, when Michelle chased me through the house yelling, ‘You whiny creep! You whiny creep!’”

“He deserved it,” responds Benoit.

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Filmed and financed entirely in Louisiana

“When we tallied it up, the investor pool for *The Scoundrel’s Wife* constitutes the world’s seventh largest navy,” claimed director Glen Pitre, referring to the numerous marine transportation companies and their CEOs who put money into the film.

“The usual image of the Louisiana bayou is of a very sleepy place, and there’s certainly some truth to that. But it’s also here, over the last half century, that the technology of offshore oil production was invented from scratch. One of the movie’s investors built and operates an Antarctic ice-breaker from sub-tropical Louisiana. Another made millions selling the patents for his literally back-yard inventions to Fortune 500 companies. With a local tradition for that sort of defy-the-odds entrepreneurship, investing in a home-grown motion picture isn’t such a leap.”

“It’s not so very different from the ventures we usually invest in,” agrees producer Jerry Daigle, who represents Advantage Capital Partners, the movie’s majority investor and Louisiana’s largest venture capital firm, based in New Orleans with offices in New York, Tampa, and St. Louis. “We looked for the same attributes in this as in any other proposal. Are the key people experienced? Do they have a lot at stake personally in the venture’s success? Do they have the sense to get help in the areas where they’re weak? Are they making full use of local advantages? Is there a clear exit strategy?”

“As I told my board, ‘You shoot the movie. It makes money, or it doesn’t, but either way, you’re out of there. There’s no clearer exit strategy than that.’”

But exiting was not so easy for some other investors, who were called on to contribute well past their financial involvement. “When the reality of filming night scenes on open water sunk in, we realized that even the flotilla of small boats we had assembled weren’t going to cut it,” said producer Daigle. “So Glen called one of the other investors and borrowed—yes, borrowed—this multi-million dollar seismograph barge, with a carrier deck and generator and crane and these huge sixty foot steel legs that would lift the entire vessel out of the water to form a stable shooting platform. The crew dubbed it ‘Water World.’”

Remembers co-producer Michael Arata, whose Circle in the Sky Productions helped put together financing for the film, “One of my partners runs Acme Oyster House. He’d get a call, ‘We need two truckloads of oyster shells to dress a set.’ Another partner is general manager of Brennan’s, one of New Orleans’ most famous restaurants. He’d get a call, ‘Do you have any leftovers? We’re running late tonight. We need a hundred and thirty 2nd meals.’ Come midnight, sixty miles from the restaurant, cast and crew would dine on crawfish fettucine and turtle soup.”

But it wasn’t just investors who were called upon to help. “They say making a movie is like going to war, but making them this way is more akin to a political campaign,” says Pitre. “You need your financial backers and lots of hired pros, but you also need an army of volunteers, the grass roots support whose sheer enthusiasm fill the gaps when funds fall short. We had 400 local extras who gave their time freely,” remarked Pitre about the extraordinary townsfolk who offered to recreate their own past for the film.

“And like a political campaign, when its done you have a constituency to answer to. The

guy who wrote the big check expects a profit, sure. But the guy who showed up to be an extra expects something too. He expects to be part of a well told tale.”

“I don’t know how we could have done it any other way,” added producer Peggy Rajski. “The truth is there is something about the social environment here that added to the unique sense of community: Truly one of the gifts of this piece is how deeply it extended to that community. It was amazing to see the ladies of the local museum roll up their sleeves with such willingness. It was a short cut for us and pride of ownership for them. I see transformation themes played out in lives of the people here and I’m privileged to be associated with it all.”

“It was the most exciting, most interesting, most exhausting, most infuriating experience I ever had,” adds Marge Barker, one of those “museum ladies” who became a full-time crew member during the shoot. “And when it was over, I cried because I didn’t want it to end.”

* * * * *

The cast comments on the location

Tatum O'Neal:

“It had to be shot in the bayou. You could never duplicate these trees, or the shrimp, or my boat or the thousands of bayou shots we got. The swamps, you could never do this anywhere else. The extras; their faces. It’s beautiful here. I got to love driving the boat on camera, but I never did enjoy having to peel all those shrimp.”

Julian Sands:

“I was in Louisiana ten years ago to do *The Awakening* [a.k.a. *Grand Isle*]. I enjoy this part of the south. It reminds me of Venice very much: there is an anachronistic melancholia, very charming, very soporific. I understand why people stay rooted here. It almost feels like Africa, the sweeping sky, the beautiful live oaks, and the presence of large reptiles. I find it very elemental. As an actor, you’re often a reactor to script, to action, to location. So when location has such depth to it, it can only add to the elements.”

Tim Curry:

“One of the reasons I said yes is that it’s a very strong, very simple story rooted in some strong history. Simply and elegantly written. It has a strong sense of place. This story, in a sense, couldn’t happen anywhere but the bayou.”

Lacey Chabert:

“About the hundredth time someone walked up to me on the set and said, ‘You don’t know me, but I’m your cousin,’ I just burst out laughing. I couldn’t help it.”

Eion Bailey:

“I loved the story, the fable, the small town. I love the atmosphere of stories that take place in the heat, the swamp, in that lazy way of life. The environment helps immensely. The heat and humidity weighs on you, affects your very movement. There is nothing else like it. I could tell immediately I’d feel right at home.”

* * * * *

“I burst into tears”

“People kept showing up with connections to our story,” remembered director Pitre. “One day a boy was pulled, more or less at random, from the crowd of onlookers to play a casualty from a torpedoed tanker. This kid—seventeen, still in high school—the make up department dipped him in what looked like crude oil, then shaved half his head and applied utterly convincing burn make-up. We shot the scene. Looked great. The kid went home happy, still in make up so he could show off.

“But next morning, my Assistant Director comes over, says the kid’s mother’s on set. Wants to talk to me. Looks pretty emotional. “Oh, no,” I think, assuming I’m going to get reamed out about the wacky hair-cut we gave her son. But no...

““When Collin got home yesterday, I burst into tears,’ she tells me, looking like she’s ready to cry again. Now I’m thinking that the make-up was so convincing, she thought he’d been in an accident. But no...

“During World War II, the boy’s grandfather had himself rescued a badly burned U-boat casualty, and the poor fellow, too weak to be taken to a hospital, died in her father’s bed. So when her son showed up looking like that, all those tears were because here was her son playing the ghost of the saddest family story she’d grown up hearing.”

“I only had eyes for Zorro!”

“One of my favorite moments on location,” confided Tim Curry, who plays Father Antoine, “was that old dance hall in Cut Off. It had been the only place for 50 miles around where all the townsfolk could gather. It was the hub of their social life, their information center.”

It was also a nightmare location for most of the crew. The cavernous hall had closed more than fifty years before. Using it meant tracking down far-flung heirs for permission. Cleaning out a half century of dust. Wrangling, costuming, feeding, and parking the shoot’s largest group of extras, lighting its largest interior space, bringing in a tractor trailer-sized portable air conditioner. But eventually, everything was in place, from the busy bar and slot machines on one end to the eagle-eyed chaperons and Creole jazz band on the other.

“While shooting the dance scene there,” continued Curry, “the director’s mother, who I imagine to be in her 70’s, came up to me and said ‘This is where I fell in love with my husband. It was a Mardi Gras dance; he was dressed as Zorro.’ I asked her what she was dressed as, and she replied, ‘I don’t remember, I only had eyes for Zorro!’ There was the scene as far as I was concerned. That encounter, that location, became hugely centering for me.”

* * * * *

THE FILMMAKERS

Writer / Director, Glen Pitre

Born in Cut Off, Louisiana (the town where *The Scoundrel's Wife* is set and was partly filmed), Glen Pitre worked his way through Harvard by fishing shrimp each summer. By age 25, American Film magazine had dubbed him “father of the Cajun film” as his no-budget costume dramas *La Fievre Jaune* and *Huit Piastres Et Demie!*, the first Cajun dialect movies ever released in Louisiana theatres, broke house records in bayou country cinemas.

Pitre's first English-language production, *Belizaire the Cajun*, was an official selection of the Sundance, Cannes, and Toronto film festivals, and was released theatrically across America and around the world. All three of Pitre's English-language movies as director have featured an Oscar winner in their casts: Robert Duval in *Belizaire*, Louise Fletcher in *Time Served*, and Tatum O'Neal in *The Scoundrel's Wife*. Pitre has also worked as producer (*In Quiet Night*) and screenwriter, including several scripts for the late Brandon Tartikoff.

Pitre's movies, TV documentaries, novels, non-fiction books, radio programming, museum design, and folklore preservation have earned him numerous awards, including a knighthood from France. His live storytelling has become a regular feature of the New Orleans Jazz Fest's narrative stage. Over the years, Pitre has also been gainfully employed as an oilfield laborer, house painter, ship's cook, roadside vendor of garlic, and once, briefly, as a sleeper for an experiment on dreams.

Though he keeps apartments in Los Angeles and New Orleans, the 45 year-old Pitre still makes his home on Bayou Lafourche, just 14 miles from Cut Off, with his wife and partner, Michelle Benoit.

Writer Michelle Benoit

A Scots-Irish-Cajun from the southwest Louisiana prairies, Benoit has received degrees from the American University in Paris and the University of New Orleans.

In addition to the screenplay for *The Scoundrel's Wife*, Benoit has co-authored two books, *Country Roads of Louisiana* and *Great River*, and several articles with her husband, Glen Pitre. She has also co-produced the award-winning documentaries *Haunted Waters*, *Fragile Lands* and *Good for What Ails You*, as well as designing and producing permanent displays for the Louisiana Cotton Museum, Bayou Terrebonne Waterlife Museum, and Tickfaw State Park.

Most recently, Benoit wrote, directed, and produced *Wings Over the Wetlands*, a documentary on migratory birds for public television broadcast in fall 2001.

Producer Peggy Rajski

Rajski began her career in independent films with writer/director John Sayles, producing Sayles' *The Brother From Another Planet*, *Matewan*, and *Eight Men Out*. For director Stephen Frears, Rajski co-produced *The Grifters*, which garnered four Academy Award nominations and captured the 1991 Independent Spirit Award for Best Feature.

While serving on the Dramatic Jury at the Sundance Film Festival, Rajski met fellow jurist Jodie Foster. With Scott Rudin she produced Foster's directorial debut, *Little Man Tate*, as well as her second film, *Home for the Holidays*. Rajski also produced *Used People* from Director Beban Kidron. Rajski's own directorial debut, *Trevor*, won an Academy Award for Best Live Action Short.

Rajski has served on the board of the Independent Feature Project/West and is a past board member of New York Women in Film and Television from whom she received the MUSE award in 1991. She also helped found The Trevor Project, a nonprofit foundation which administers the nation's first and only 24-hour toll-free suicide hotline for gay youth.

Producer Jerry Daigle

Of Cajun ancestry, Daigle has roots in New Orleans and the bayou country of Lafourche Parish. A lawyer and accountant by training, Daigle is making his first foray into feature film production from a career in private equity investing. He is associated with Advantage Capital Partners, the largest venture capital firm in Louisiana, based in New Orleans with offices in St. Louis, Tampa and New York.

Executive Producer Michael Donaldson

Donaldson earned his law degree in 1967 at the University of California at Berkeley after a three-year stint in the United States Marine Corps, where he led the first American ground combat unit in Vietnam. He has been an entertainment lawyer for more than thirty years. General Counsel to the Independent Feature Project - West, president of the International Documentary Association, and a popular keynote speaker, Donaldson wrote *Negotiating For Dummies* which has sold over 100,000 copies in English and has been translated into nine languages, as well as the popular text *Clearance & Copyright: Everything the Independent Filmmaker Needs to Know*. Other projects include Associate Producing *Ageism in Hollywood* and Executive Producing *Wake* starring Gale Harold (*Queer As Folk*) and Martin Landau.

Co Producer Michael Arata

Arata has produced theatre and film in New Orleans for the last ten years, including a three-year term as chairman of the country's oldest active theatre, Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre. He was Executive Producer of the award winning documentary *The People's Story*, Executive Producer of the feature *Tony Bravo, Scenes from a Forgotten Cinema*, and Executive Producer of the upcoming documentary *Shalom Y'All*. He and associate producers Glen Armantrout and Blake Brennan are members of Circle In The Sky Productions.

Director of Photography Uta Briesewitz

A native of Leverkusen, near Cologne, Germany, Briesewitz spent over six years shooting everything from documentaries to rock concerts to major sports events to super slow_motion photography before moving to Los Angeles to attend The American Film Institute. Her first feature as Director of Photography was *Next Stop, Wonderland* which won the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the Deauville Film Festival as well as selling for a record amount at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival.

Briesewitz also shot the award_winning documentaries *Baby, It's You*, and *Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians*, in addition to the features *Session 9*, *Getting Personal*, *Love Stinks*, *Seven and a Match*, and *XX/XY* starring Mark Ruffalo.

* * * * *

Historical Basis

The U-boat attacks

A month after Pearl Harbor brought America into World War II, Germany launched Operation Drumbeat (*Paukenschlag*) from occupied France. Intended primarily as a morale buster (like America's Doolittle Raid on Japan), the submarine rampage on American coastal shipping was so unexpectedly successful that Hitler decided to extend and increase the attacks.

Five waves of German U-boats sailed to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of America, attacking oil tankers and other merchant vessels. During the first six months alone they sank 397 ships at the loss of only 7 U-boats. Hot spots—the approaches to New York harbor, North Carolina's Cape Hatteras, and the mouth of the Mississippi River in Louisiana—became known as “Torpedo Junctions.”

U-boat commanders reported that the lights of seacoast towns and beach amusement parks silhouetted passing American vessels like “targets in a shooting gallery.” U-boats often could be seen in full view of tourists as they surfaced to shell American vessels in broad daylight. Submarines also landed Nazi saboteurs. Several such spies, captured on Long Island and in Florida, were given the electric chair, making headlines.

With the U-boats seemingly operating beyond their range, Washington began to suspect America's coastal fishermen as the enemy's secret source of fuel. (Actually the enemy subs were refueling via top secret tanker submarines known as “milch cows.”) From the lobstermen of Maine to the shrimpers of Louisiana, commercial fishermen were subjected to searches, investigations, and scapegoating, even as these same fishermen reported the positions of surfacing U-boats and picked up survivors, saving many lives.

By 1943, protective convoys, effective black-outs, increased use of aircraft, and a string of sub-spotting blimp squadrons began to shift the balance. The U-boats began retreating to the mid-Atlantic sea lanes to form into “wolf packs” for the Battle of the Atlantic.

Update: U-boat mystery solved

On May 18th, 2001, the cast and crew of *The Scoundrel's Wife* were filming a scene involving casualties of a World War II U-boat attack being treated by a rural Louisiana doctor. At the very same moment, eighty miles away and nearly a mile deep in the Gulf of Mexico, an underwater robot surveying a route for a natural gas pipeline discovered the wreck of the *U-166*, the only German submarine sunk off the Louisiana coast.

May, 1942, was gruesomely called “the Happy Time” by Nazi skippers whose U-boats claimed 41 ships in the Gulf of Mexico off Louisiana, the highest total for any sector during the entire war. But by July of that same year, American counter-measures were already making life tougher for the undersea predators.

On July 30, 1942, the *Robert E. Lee*, a tramp steamer requisitioned by the American military, sailed out of the Mississippi River carrying 406 people, including survivors of earlier U-boat attacks. Waiting for it was the *U-166*, whose torpedoes sent the overloaded freighter quickly to the bottom. A Coast Guard patrol vessel escorting the *Lee* dropped six depth charges, but reported no apparent kill.

Two days later, a patrol plane bombed a surfaced U-boat south of Houma, Louisiana, and claimed a direct hit. After the war, captured naval records indicated that the *U-166*, under 28 year-old captain Hans-Guenther Kuhlmann, indeed disappeared about that time and place. The plane's crew, Henry White and George Boggs, were both decorated. The aircraft itself became an exhibit at the Pensacola, Florida, naval air museum.

But as its recent discovery alongside its last victim now shows, the *U-166* was indeed sunk by the Coast Guard vessel, and not by the plane, which evidently achieved only a near miss on a different sub. Both the *U-166* and the *Robert E. Lee* will remain, undisturbed, on the ocean floor as protected war grave sites.

German prisoners on American soil

During World War II, half a million German and Italian prisoners of war were brought to the United States for internment. Hastily built “p.w. camps” sprang up in 45 states, as prisoner work gangs did a great deal to replace the agricultural labor drained away for fighting and war industries. Escape attempts were common, but rarely successful.

One of the most controversial incidents to arise from the mass imprisonment was when nationally-famous columnist Walter Winchell broke the story of a Louisiana farmer who was so grateful to the German p.w.'s who had brought in his rice crop that he took them all out for a seafood dinner at a local brothel. Unfortunately, the writers of *The Scoundrel's Wife* were unable to work this incident into their script.

So how much of the story is true?

Cut Off, Louisiana, the oddly named setting of *The Scoundrel's Wife*, really does exist. In fact, this fishing village on a coastal bayou south of New Orleans is the hometown of *Scoundrel's* writer/director, Glen Pitre (*Belizaire the Cajun*).

Inspired by the rich oral storytelling traditions of their native southern Louisiana, Pitre along with writing partner (and wife) Michelle Benoit used local history and legends of WWII spies, traitors, escaped prisoners and marauding German U-boats to craft a love story between two outsiders that explores themes of shame, guilt, and redemption.

"*The Scoundrel's Wife* explores an aspect of WWII you don't often see," observed writer Benoit. "From the first shock of Pearl Harbor, Americans realized their shores were not invincible. Then the U-boats attacks began. At Atlantic City, people would watch from the boardwalk as tankers burned. This wasn't the newsreels; this was waking up at night to ships exploding offshore."

"The nearness of the enemy leavened fear into paranoia," continues Benoit. "Americans became caught up in their own propaganda, suspecting one another in order to put a face on a faceless enemy. In many communities, rumors started about fishermen selling fuel and supplies to the U-boats. The government got involved, investigating citizens for treason. It happened in Cut Off, but it also happened in other states."

"In Louisiana, there's a story of French bread wrappers from a nearby bakery being found among U-boat wreckage, proof positive, it is claimed, of locals trading with the enemy," points out Pitre, whose background includes collecting folk tales for the Library of Congress. "On Cape Hatteras [North Carolina] you hear the exact same legend, except instead of a French bread wrapper, it's a pouch of local brand tobacco. At Marblehead, Massachusetts, it's a bean can."

"I've always been fascinated by how event becomes lore, by the ripening of history into myth," says Pitre. "What we do as filmmakers, as storytellers, is only a conscious version of what any community or nation or culture does to its heroes and villains and scapegoats. We remold them to fill the roles we need to have filled."

Pitre went on to discuss the inspiration for the main characters in *The Scoundrel's Wife*:

On CAMILLE: "This bayou was notorious for smugglers since even before [19th Century pirate/hero] Jean Lafitte made it his refuge. During the Great Depression, when anti-Asian laws were in force, the smuggled contraband was often illegal Chinese immigrants. Everyone in Cut Off knows the tale of the skipper who, rather than get caught, dumped his human cargo overboard—and then went mad from the guilt. But Michelle and I were more interested in the wife he left behind. A woman who didn't get to go mad, who instead had to remember her part in a horrific crime, and with those memories had to face each day."

On LENZ: "Like Lenz, the first doctor in Cut Off was a refugee from Europe. Like Lenz, he was

an object of suspicion. The classic outsider. The stranger. Separated by language, culture, education, religion, everything. Even today you'll find old timers who tell wild stories about him. Some even claim he was a werewolf! This even though, like Lenz, the local doctor was where they routinely brought the survivors of the U-boat attacks."

On FLO: "My Aunt Euna, my Aunt Vesta, great-aunts, cousins, all left Cut Off for the first time to go to New Orleans to work in 'the war effort.' Some came back with husbands, many never came back at all, returning only for visits. World War II changed life for everybody, but especially for women, for what was considered acceptable lifestyles for them."

On BLUE: "For the first few months after Pearl Harbor, my dad suffered the same indignity as Blue: not quite old enough to join on his own, and a mother who wouldn't sign his permission slip."

On BURWELL: "Bayou Cajuns reserved a special place in hell—right next to revenue agents and game wardens—for the U.S. Coast Guardsmen assigned to keep tabs on them. They called them 'shrimp Nazis' and 'fuel fuhrers.'"

On FATHER ANTOINE: "Without giving away too much of the story, what happens to Father Antoine really did happen to Cut Off's German born priest. How guilty was he? Depends who you talk to."

A story set in a very specific place and time, *The Scoundrel's Wife* nevertheless explores universal themes that transcend the boundaries of the Louisiana bayou at the onset of WWII.

Credits

Camille Picou	Tatum O'Neal	
Doctor Lenz	Julian Sands	
Father Antoine	Tim Curry	
Florida Picou	Lacey Chabert	
Ensign Jack Burwell	Eion BaileyBlue Picou	Patrick McCullough
Neg Picou	Rudolf Martin	
Shrimp shed owner	Lorna Farrar	
Dance hall owner	John McConnell	
Beaten P.W.	Lance Spellerberg	
Snake-bit P.W.	Kurt Gerard	
Coast Guard commander	Michael Arata	

Directed by Glen Pitre
Written by Michelle Benoit & Glen Pitre
Produced by Peggy Rajski & Jerry Daigle
Executive producers Michael Donaldson & Steven Stull
Co-producer Michael Arata
Line Producer / U.P.M. Sandra Stokes
Director of photography Uta Briesewitz
Production designer Kelly Curley
Casting Sharon Howard-Field
Editor Peter Ellis
Costumes Astrid Brucker
Music composed and conducted by Ernest Troost
Source music performed by Don Vappie and the Creole Jazz Serenaders