



*The Great  
Darkened  
Days*

A FILM BY  
MAXIME GIROUX

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**SYNOPSIS** — WHILE A WORLD WAR RAGES, PHILIPPE, A DRAFT-DODGER FROM QUEBEC, TAKES REFUGE IN THE AMERICAN WEST, SURVIVING BY COMPETING IN CHARLIE CHAPLIN IMPERSONATION CONTESTS. AS PHILIPPE MAKES HIS LONG JOURNEY HOME, HE ENCOUNTERS VARIOUS CHARACTERS UNDER THE SWAY OF A DESTRUCTIVE MADNESS BORN OF THE CHAOTIC TIMES. HIS VOYAGE, BOTH VIOLENT AND FASCINATING, IS A HALLUCINATORY INITIATION TO THE DARKER SIDE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM.





## BIOGRAPHY/ FILMOGRAPHY

Maxime Giroux has directed a number of short films, including *Le Rouge au sol* and *Les Jours*, which have been screened at more than 50 festivals and won 15 international awards, including the award for best short film at the Toronto International Film Festival and at Montréal's Festival du Nouveau Cinéma. He also won the 2007 Genie Award for best Canadian short film. His first feature film, *Demain*, was selected for the official competition at Turin and was given special mention from the jury at Tübingen.

Giroux's second feature film, *Jo pour Jonathan*, made its world premiere at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2010 and went on to screen at more than 40 festivals. Along the way, it earned the Gilles-Carle Award for best film at the Rendez-Vous du Cinéma

Québécois, the critics award at the Festival du Nouveau Cinéma, the Cinema and City award at Thessaloniki, the award for best film at the Gotham Film Festival, and two best actor awards for Raphaël Lacaille at Gotham and Whistler. In 2013, Giroux directed the short film *La tête en bas*. In 2014, he finished his third feature film, *Félix et Meira*. The film won the award for best Canadian film at the Toronto International Film Festival and was presented in official competition at the San Sebastián International Film Festival. It went on to screen at almost 100 festivals and won 20 awards. *Félix et Meira* was released in more than 35 countries including France, the U.S., Australia, Belgium, Switzerland and Taiwan. In September of 2015, it was chosen to represent Canada at the Oscars. *The Great Darkness* is his fourth feature length film.





## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

Although Philippe is forced to survive as a Charlie Chaplin impersonator, comedy is a long way's away. Penniless, hungry and distraught, he wants only one thing: to return to his family in Quebec, whom he left behind to escape violence and war. The latter prove hard to avoid, however, and to keep from succumbing Philippe must show resilience as he moves through an America devoid of compassion. Reflecting his descent into darkness, the film is intense, raw, disturbing and terrifying—but also, at moments, tender and deeply human.

This film originated from my observations on the world today. These observations were made from a specific and privileged position: that of a French-speaking North American, whose society cohabits with the most powerful cultural and economic force in human history: the United States. Is it Trump's America we witness in the film? Unbridled capitalism that ravages everything in its path? Climate change, to which so many decision-makers remain indifferent? The market logic that regulates our every word and action? Whatever the answers to these questions, watching this empire becoming dehumanized—at times literally abandoning reason and starting to decay—is what directly inspired me to write and direct this film.

Certainly, my unique position as a French speaker in North America (part of a group making up just two percent of the continent's linguistic population) had a profound effect on the development of this project, consciously or otherwise. Who is better positioned to witness the overwhelming influence of the American Empire on the world than one who lives directly in its shadow?

Of course, there is no clear answer to this question; but there is no doubt that these very contemporary concerns are central to this project and drive my work generally. My previous film, *Félix et Meira*, explored issues faced by two people in minority communities (the Francophone community and the Jewish community) who are trying to find happiness and freedom despite the challenges of living in their respective milieus. This new film imagines the journey of a man trying to survive in a merciless America that is in the process of wiping out every trace of humanity that is a part of its own identity. This process transforms the individual into an amoral animal; undifferentiated merchandise that can be exploited without limit.

*The Great Darkened Days* peers into America's dark side. It is the side that drives the individual toward extreme individualism, all in service of the principle of conquering, under which anything and everything—home, human relationships, nature—can be sacrificed in the name of commerce. The film illuminates the most sinister aspects of the self-serving myth on which capitalist exploitation is based, the myth that leads humans to the vilest parts of themselves—the myth whose veins run throughout today's America.





It is in this context that the choice of the character of Charlie Chaplin (and particularly the various references to the film *The Great Dictator*) reveals all its shades of meaning. The lightness embodied by Chaplin is the converse side of America: beautiful, good, resilient, a power that would oppose fascism and Nazism, standing for hope and mutual respect and pointing the way to a better world.

The journey of the protagonist, Philippe, is therefore very much an initiation, one that parallels America's internal struggle with its own darker side. The film's central theme hinges on this tension: how can a mere individual, personified here as "Chaplin," survive in a country being overtaken by madness? It is not a question here of naïve anti-American statements, but rather of exposing the tension between the dual aspects of America through the struggle of a symbolic character who is fighting for his very life.

The result is a film whose narrative space is not tied to a specific time (in other words, a period piece), but rather that unfolds in an untethered cinematic space, anchored in no defined time, that resists being tied to a circumscribed historical moment. The universe in which Philippe makes his way is characterized by perpetual and total war, in which each is subject to the violence of others and to humanity's basest instincts.

Philippe finds himself moving through a unique space—invented, hallucinatory imaginary, somewhere between dream and reality, in which America has become a hostile world where each must fight to the death simply to survive.

The film was shot in locations that evoke legendary landmarks from the collective imagination of America. The wide open spaces of the West, the America of the first settlers, the site of the Gold Rush: in other words, the America from a time when it still believed its own myth and when the hopeful dream still burned bright. The buildings, cities and towns were filmed as they are today, in 2018—decaying, in ruins. There is no question of anachronism, since this parallel, invented world has no defined time; it is a heightened vision of the world in which we live today, as spectators.

The character of Philippe (who personifies Chaplin symbolically) finds himself wandering through the ruins of this America whose dream has all but vanished. In subjecting this symbolic Chaplin to the evils he experiences (and in leading the viewer on that dark journey through the film), *The Great Darkened Days* asks the question: What has become of this American dream? What has happened to hope in America—to hope itself? How did we end up with an America that is bleak, racist, violent, obsessed with profit and—in our particular moment (i.e., the Trump era)—seems to abound with bad omens, leaving only a bitter aftertaste? In the words of the travelling salesman (a character that draws on both Nietzsche, who predicted "200 years of nihilism," and a character straight out of Tennessee Williams), "How did we fuck this all up?" In this scene, it is as though America itself were contemplating the dead end that lies ahead.







Also worth noting is the inspiration *The Great Darkened Days* takes from the rich cinematic history of the U.S. (particularly that of the 50's and 60's): its ideology and mythology, its locations, its scenery, its spirit. There is something fundamentally American embodied within this artistic tradition. It is for this reason that some scenes were shot in legendary sites from American cinema (particularly a scene shot in the same location as a famous sequence from John Huston's *The Misfits*, and others scenes shot in locations from Hitchcock's *Saboteur*); it is also the reason for the inclusion of certain transcendent elements from American culture of the period, including a famous war poem from the great American poet Randall Jarrell (recited by the travelling salesman character in one of the film's pivotal scenes).

While not specifically a genre film (far from it, in fact), certain elements of that aesthetic can clearly be found within it. The various references—to the western, the thriller and the historical drama—serve to destabilize the viewer, frustrating his or her expectations and creating an intense connection with this unique film. They also serve as a nod to the classic American strategy of seducing the spectator in order to achieve a particular aim—indeed, the film employs these strategies to its own ends while simultaneously putting them into doubt.

This film seeks to find light in a world whose myths are worn out; a world that is weary, disillusioned and hostile. For Philippe and for each of us, the question that arises is: how do we survive in the midst of this madness? How can humanity emerge intact from the darkness that rises all around? Perhaps it is in this respect that *The Great Darkened Days* reveals something deeply relevant to our time, yet universal.





CAST

PHILIPPE	Martin Dubreuil
LESTER	Romain Duris
HELEN	Sarah Gadon
HECTOR	Reda Kateb
TRAVELLING SALESMAN	Cody Fern
ROSIE	Soko
OPPONENT	Buddy Duress
CUSTOMER	Luzer Twersky

CREW

A film by MAXIME GIROUX  
Production SYLVAIN CORBEIL  
NANCY GRANT  
Script SIMON BEAULIEU  
ALEXANDRE LAFERRIÈRE  
MAXIME GIROUX  
Cinematography SARA MISHARA  
Production design PATRICIA MCNEIL  
Art direction SYLVAIN DION  
Costumes PATRICIA MCNEIL  
Editing MATHIEU BOUCHARD-MALO  
Sound STEPHEN DE OLIVEIRA  
FRÉDÉRIC CLOUTIER  
LUC BOUDRIAS  
Original score OLIVIER ALARY  
Post-production supervision MÉLANIE GAUTHIER  
JULIEN TREMBLAY  
Executive production NEVA MCINTOSH  
ERIC CONNELLY  
MAXIME GIROUX  
DANELLE ELIAV



A man in silhouette stands on a fence, looking out over a landscape at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The man is wearing a hat and a coat, and has a bag slung over his shoulder. The background shows rolling hills and a utility pole with power lines. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# *The Great Darkened Days*

CANADA

2018

94 min

1,37 :1

5.1

FRENCH AND ENGLISH