

# Reading Report

**Title** the so called UNTITLED new project by Jacques Audiard:  
**DHEEPAN** aka **ERRAN**

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**Draft** ---

**Pages** 95 **Reader** phl/dfk

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An ex-Tamil soldier arrives in France as an asylum seeker. He finds a job as a caretaker in a derelict Parisian suburb infested with drug dealing. A war between gangs breaks out and the area becomes a war zone like in Sri Lanka. The ex-soldier wins the battle and emigrates to England.

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|---|---|---|---|
| Does the script tell a complete STORY?                                  | X |   |   |
| Do we BELIEVE in the story?   |   | X |   |
| Does the story have a MAIN CHARACTER we are rooting for?                |   | X |   |
| Is the Main Character's main GOAL interesting?                          |   | X |   |
| Are the OBSTACLES and FORCES of ANTAGONISM strong and complex?          |   | X |   |
| Do the Main Characters go through a meaningful CHANGE?                  |   |   | X |
| Is it possible to PENETRATE the mind of the Characters?                 |   |   | X |
| Does the story develop an interesting THEME, a potent message?          |   | X |   |
| Is the story's UNIVERSE (where and when) appealing? Relevant? Original? | X |   |   |
| Is the storytelling DYNAMIC?  | X |   |   |
| Is the DIALOGUE well written?   | X |   |   |
| Potential for VISUALLY stunning scenes?                                 | X |   |   |

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| <b>Target AUDIENCE</b>     | Arthouse, Audiard's aficionados. Younger audience could be attracted to the second, the "gangster" part.  |
| <b>REFERENCES / GENRES</b> | DE ROUILLE ET D'OS (RUST AND BONE) 2012, LA HAINE 1995 / Melodrama  |
| <b>REMARKS</b>             | All the strength and weakness you expect from an Audiard film. His new film will probably suffer from a lack of star appeal but will be appreciated for its authenticity and realism.<br>On IMDB the new Audiard project is entitled "ERRAN". |

## Content

The film starts in Sri Lanka during the civil war. The main character is teamed with a fake wife and a fake 9-year old child to pose as a family of refugees. This trick is helpful: They succeed going to France where their life as Tamil asylum seekers in Paris is described with vivid details and convincing authenticity. This first part (23 pages of the script) establishes the typical “Audiard couple”: two people who have nothing in common but have to collaborate in order to survive or to accomplish something. They pretend to be a family because they know this will help them get their visas as political refugees. The concept of the fake family is rather interesting and somehow touching. They have to stick together and find ways to relate to each other despite their lack of feelings for each other. This “exotic”, “third world” premise should appeal to the arthouse audience alright.

The second part describes the new life of Dheepan and Illayaal as caretakers in a derelict suburban council estate (a “Cité”): Three blocks of flats inhabited by poor immigrants from different continents and surrounded by dealers and hoodlums. It is as if we were in a different film. Our attention shifts to the surroundings. The “Cité” becomes the main subject of the film. The two Tamils discover it like us and adapt to it. Because they are resourceful and motivated they are soon successful and seem to be able to change, improve the environment by cleaning it, repairing the broken-down elevator, becoming a social hub for the other tenants. This is an ironic development that we enjoy. For a while, they become a family confronted with concrete, recognisable issues we can relate to (school for their “daughter”, their budding sexual attraction, their friendship with the other tenants, etc.). There is a slight unease about the way the first story of the two asylum seekers has been hijacked into a “Cité”-story (think Kassovitz’ LA HAINE), as if the story of the Tamil refugees wasn’t “enough” for a whole film... but as an Audiard film we were kind of expecting a brutal shift of the story like that. And there’s much more to come...

A new film (story) starts later when we focus on the drug dealers who operate in the adjacent block of flats. The film becomes an almost perfect copy of the HBO TV series, THE WIRE. This new world is described in incredible details and veracity: the sophisticated organisation of the dealers, the spotters, the guards, the customers, and the big boss being released from jail who squats the flat of an old dementia man, etc. It is all extremely well described, perfectly believable and entertaining... but we lose sight of the original story and characters.

The fourth story is triggered by a strange and quite surreal reaction from Dheepan: he draws a line in white chalk between “his” block of flats and the area infested by the drug dealers. This starts an extremely violent war between gangs. People are shot dead and blood pours everywhere. The two Tamil characters are wounded. The film turns into a very realistic gangster film that is at risk of putting off those who were expecting a third world realistic social drama.

At the end, the Tamil refugees emigrate to England where they become a real family and where everything seems better and happier. The film ends in a rather weak flagellating, self-deprecating, somehow reactionary judgement of the state of France. We’re not sure what has changed for the main characters, apart from their decision to change the country. Once again we’re emotionally very far from them.

## Estimation

In summary, despite its flaws, this script is of superior quality. One can see the original visual treatment and the cinematic scene. No doubt that this will look great on the screen. The subject matter and the storytelling make it a big festival material. In terms of commercial appeal, the story could satisfy different groups of the arthouse audience, providing the marketing is good and outstanding enough to make them come to see it. But the film will only be a real success if the casting is good. It won't be able to rely on well known actors, like in *DE BATTRE MON CŒUR S'EST ARRÊTÉ* (THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED) or *DE ROUILLE ET D'OS* (RUST AND BONE). More than in *THE PROPHET*, the unknown main man (actor) will have to be outstanding to make it really special.

The problem is that – quite often in an Audiard's film – the characters remain one dimensional. It is not really possible to penetrate their minds and share their inner feelings. Until the end, we won't know much about the ex-soldier, this woman and the orphan girl, apart from their Tamil refugee status. So it's all about what they do, without us being able to share their motivations and inner conflicts. The psychological side of the story doesn't play a big role. For example, we suspect that the social and religious background of the characters must play an important role in their relationship, but this is never established or addressed. The characters remain mere concepts and as such they remain strangers to us.

Another issue that will contribute to prevent the audience to connect deeply with the story is the fact that the two main characters will probably talk in Tamil to each other. The subtitles may be an additional obstacle for the audience. Subtitles will be omnipresent during the whole film as the storytelling focuses on the view point of the two Tamil characters: they don't understand the world surrounding them and mostly talk to each other, trying to explain what's going on around them. They "translate" a world we don't know much (the world of the gangs) into a language we don't know. This leaves the audience in a peculiar position, as if one wasn't really allowed to participate in the whole process.

**dfk:** Since the shooting is supposed to have already started, it can't be expected that the authors have made any improvements to the script. Unless this book was not the last version, which I strongly assume. Audiard quite often tells several films in one work, e.g. *DE ROUILLE ET D'OS*. In any case, it looked exactly the same in that script from 2011. Through further script development and editing, he managed in that film to tell the story in its entirety and convey the feeling of having seen an entire film.

The strange happy ending with the escape to England doesn't do justice to the film and isn't credible. (Is this kingdom the paradise for Asian refugees?) This ending might have been demanded and invented by a marketing director of a Hollywood major studio - or by the BBC. This resolution of the Tamil patchwork family's story will accommodate the romantic part of the audience and allow the harsh realism of the cinematic narrative to be better "digested" (Billy Wilder) at the end and on the way home.