

Intro:

Robert Pattinson and Romain Gavras have more in common than a knack for attracting beautiful women and an aversion to deodorant. Fittingly, the two first worked together on a series of commercials for Dior Homme fragrances. Now they reconnect, with Pattinson calling in from London, where he's in the midst of a press run for his new film, *Primetime*, to ask Gavras about his upcoming movie *Sacrifice*, which, as the director puts it, boils down to a charity gala interrupted by terrorists who "just wanted to throw people in a volcano." Along the way, the pair discuss all things being auctioned off by Sharon Stone to kiss a dad, how the internet's appetite for memes has crept into Pattinson's on-screen performances, and the unsung beauty of chaos.

ROBERT PATTINSON: What's up?

ROMAIN GAVRAS: Hello. Where are you?

PATTINSON: I'm in London. I'm doing press in the middle of the night for *Primetime*.

GAVRAS: Why? Because it's sexier to do it in the middle of the night or because of the time difference?

PATTINSON: The time difference, but it's like midnight.

GAVRAS: I haven't seen *Primetime*. I really want to.

PATTINSON: They just had the premiere in New York. All right, you're going to regret asking me to do this. I've been trying to write questions and fucking hell, it's hard.

GAVRAS: I Googled you before and the first thing that comes up is you don't wear deodorant, and I don't wear deodorant, so that's—

PATTINSON: I actually do wear deodorant now.

GAVRAS: Oh?

PATTINSON: I kind of stopped smelling a few years ago, but then the paranoia kicked in and I found the most intense chemical deodorants.

GAVRAS: Did you go down a rabbit hole?

PATTINSON: Wait, I didn't even think to Google you.

GAVRAS: Don't do it.

PATTINSON: What comes up first? "Scruffy French director Romain Gavras swept Emily Ratajkowski off her feet." Nice. Anyway, where to begin? How did you come up with the idea in the first place?

GAVRAS: When I go to a film festival, there's a side of the brain that's like, "What if an armed group arrived and said the holiday is over?" So it started from those kinds of mischievous thoughts. Then because my upbringing was with Greek myths and volcanoes, and moms eating their kids, I was like, "What if instead of being regular terrorists, they just wanted to throw people in a volcano?" Then I brought on Will Arbery, and from a very bad 10 pages, we developed that script and a beautiful friendship.

PATTINSON: Sick. It's interesting because there's a weird crossover with criminality and stuff, especially at certain film festivals. The wealth comes from somewhere quite unexplained.

GAVRAS: There's always a yacht and there's always a lot of money.

PATTINSON: Anyway, when you were working with Will, did you always know it was going to be comedic?

GAVRAS: Oh, yeah. The origin story is so silly that it had to have that comedy element. We wanted it to be the way life is where it can be funny, dark, violent and beautiful at the same time. The premise is silly, even though the more we move through the world, the more I feel like the only way to save the world is to throw people in a volcano. That might be a solution. I mean, we've tried everything else. We've tried communism, capitalism. Why not this?

PATTINSON: You have to change yourself before you can change the world.

GAVRAS: That's very corny, but I believe it.

PATTINSON: It reminds me of the Michael Jackson song, "Man in the Mirror."

GAVRAS: That's a beautiful song.

PATTINSON: What do you do every day when you look in the mirror to improve yourself?

GAVRAS: Obviously I don't look in the mirror that much. Every morning I thank the Lord, my mom, MTV, and I—

PATTINSON: MTV?

GAVRAS: Yeah, I'm a bit older than you. I grew up in the '90s when MTV was God.

PATTINSON: I remember that. What were your favorite music videos when you were growing up?

GAVRAS: I think "Windowlicker" by Aphex Twin.

PATTINSON: Was that playing on MTV?

GAVRAS: It was playing late at night. I remember watching that and "Around the World" by Daft Punk when I was very young and being like, "What the fuck is this?"

PATTINSON: It's not such a huge aspect of a director's repertoire to have a unique visual style now. I grew up being obsessed with Luc Besson, but now not that many seem to be doing anything stylish, and I'm always starving for that element of cinema.

GAVRAS: It's always the same discourse about style over substance, and I think cinema has to be style. I introduced you to Lance [Oppenheim] because he has such a unique visual style. But I think that the discourse of style over substance is kind of obsolete and very French, because we're making images at the end of the day.

PATTINSON: A hundred percent. I think most people grew up watching Spielberg and Scorsese where there's a whole camera grammar, as in the way you move the camera. I always find if I'm performing, I like being directed by seeing how the director moves the camera. That type of direction, rather than someone describing the character's mental state or trying to say something about the story, is so much clearer.

GAVRAS: Yeah, it's like a dance. It's my third film with Vincent [Cassel] and every actor is different, but there's moments when I know he will perform better in his close-up. Are you that type of actor?

PATTINSON: It depends. Sometimes I'll find I am incapable of doing something and the camera's two inches away from my face. Other times I literally look like I'm standing there and doing nothing. I love Vincent in the movie. It seems so effortless for him to go from zero to a hundred.

GAVRAS: It's interesting to watch because he'll make jokes, play Candy Crush on his phone and then snap back in. It's the first time I have a big ensemble like this with American actors, like Chris [Evans] and Anya [Taylor-Joy], where the different styles intertwine. We shot in Greece in super complex locations, like a marble quarry, a river, a volcano, but when it's difficult and you feel the environment it's always better because you don't do a lot of green screen shit.

PATTINSON: If I understand what I'm doing, it doesn't make that much of a difference to me. It depends on the director. Like with *The Lighthouse*, because [Robert] Eggers is so good at production design and the set was so tangible, it was just so inspiring to be there. But maybe I'm so used to looking at a tennis ball. I sometimes find it easier because you have more control over it.

GAVRAS: Do you draw a little smiley face on the tennis ball?

PATTINSON: Yeah, exactly. Is it different working with European actors to American?

GAVRAS: Yes and no. Because it was a completely indie film where everyone was happy to be in this crazy movie in Greece and Bulgaria, there were no diva attitudes. I didn't feel the Hollywoodness. The indie side of it puts people in a certain mindset.

PATTINSON: I think the cast you ended up getting has quite a similar sense of humor to you. They're all really funny. And Jonatan "Yung Lean" Leandoer. It's so cool to see this guy suddenly arrive as this actor.

GAVRAS: Yeah. Yung Lean was the first person we cast and I was like, "You're going to play this kid that's in love with his sister." He was like, "I'm down." He had done music videos, but he had no idea about blocking, so it was like having a dangerous baby on set. I was like, "The more awkward you are, the

better because your character doesn't know anything about the world." I think he has that weird poetry and endearing clumsiness in him.

PATTINSON: Yeah. He's also got such an innate camera sense. I remember seeing him do a show when he was 15 or something, and you could just see how charismatic he was.

GAVRAS: Yeah, you put the camera on his face and there's not much he needs to do. His inner world is very strong.

PATTINSON: Chris [Evans] is so good as well. He is so funny. I really want to talk to him about what he was thinking. It is quite a scary part when you're turning up at premieres and thinking, "Are people going to think this is how I feel about these subjects?"

GAVRAS: Where he's really good is that the character could easily just be an asshole, but you're very endeared to him somehow.

PATTINSON: He's just so likable so you can't really stop that. Okay, what were some of my serious questions? When you are doing scenes of madness and chaos, how much are you organizing it beforehand? Do you storyboard and stuff?

GAVRAS: No, I don't storyboard because I can't draw and I think it blocks you into a very specific frame. I organize it well, and then say to a group of 10, "Okay, we're going to rehearse this scene," and to another group of 10, "We're going to shoot it, but we're going to do one take." So then you get people who don't know how to react and it creates something. It's a mix of organizing it well and tricking people into creating some kind of unexpected energy.

PATTINSON: That's such a good idea. I always love the way you do that stuff. I love Yung Lean's song in the movie as well. Did you always have the Arthur Russell song? Was that early on?

GAVRAS: It was at the end. It's one of my favorite songs. We had a playlist with Will that we shared as we were writing just to create a sentiment for certain scenes. And "Agony," the Yung Lean song, was part of the film's sentiment.

PATTINSON: The costumes were so cool too. What were the inspirations for them?

GAVRAS: The costumes for Anya's group reference '90s Bosnian soldiers, because there were mountains and snow.

PATTINSON: Very cool.

GAVRAS: But what about you? What's the character you're dreaming of doing?

PATTINSON: God, I haven't got a clue. I'm looking forward to a vacation at the end of this.

GAVRAS: You want to stop and become a carpenter?

PATTINSON: Definitely. It's sort of exhausting. That's the great thing about filmmaking, you can put all of your energy into three months and then fuck off afterwards for ages. But I'm always prepping something else at the same time. Do you know what you're going to do next?

GAVRAS: No, I'm working on some more videos and writing. Usually what I do is I write a couple things at the same time and see what I'm getting more excited for.

PATTINSON: Do you know when you've been writing something and you're pitching it to people and you suddenly realize this has now been about 12 years?

GAVRAS: Oh, yeah.

PATTINSON: You're like, "I can barely remember when I started talking about this and it's still not finished." The same as when I've done music. I'm looking at so many half-finished songs. When I look at the voice memo of it, I'm like, "This is from 2013."

GAVRAS: I know. That's the hard thing about it. You see the mountain that you have to climb before you go into the trenches and do a film. I'm looking at the mountain right now.

PATTINSON: Nice.

GAVRAS: I speak in metaphors.

PATTINSON: What other questions do I have? Did you always know that the ending was going to be the ending that it is?

GAVRAS: Yes. I think it had to be that ending because—I don't want to spoil it—but in a weird way, it's hopeful. I believe in grand gestures, and I believe it might work. What's next for you then?

PATTINSON: I'm finishing *Batman*.

GAVRAS: You're having a year. The only social media I have is Twitter, and I see memes of you from every movie.

PATTINSON: It's strange.

GAVRAS: I think it's a good thing.

PATTINSON: But it does start to influence you. You're like, "If I just say it like this, it might become a meme." It's not the most highbrow form of acting.

GAVRAS: It isn't. It's a new world.

PATTINSON: I think it's just another thing that was taken from film. I remember when I'd watch a big movie when I was a kid, you'd quote the lines, and they kind of went away.

GAVRAS: Yeah, "Father of a murdered son, husband of a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next."

PATTINSON: Exactly. Memes have replaced that.

GAVRAS: I love that you're thinking about it when you're acting.

PATTINSON: Oh, 100%. This is my serious question. Your work often makes chaos look incredibly beautiful. Do you ever worry that making destruction beautiful makes us desire it a little?

GAVRAS: Wow. We started with deodorant and we got to this. I think there is beauty in chaos because chaos brings reconstruction. Not to speak in metaphors of Greek myths all the time, but it's the phoenix. From burning shit, you rebuild something new. There's always a sentiment of positivity in chaos, and there's a sentiment of excitement that translates on the screen.

PATTINSON: Do you always shoot chaotic scenes with multiple cameras?

GAVRAS: No, usually I try to shoot with one camera, but it depends if you have multiple actors. When you use one camera, though, it forces you as a director to think about the shot. Otherwise you're like, "Oh, we'll see in the edit," and it becomes a bit mushy. I like the structure of one camera. Then chaos has to look natural in front of the camera. You can't edit it to activate that sentiment.

PATTINSON: Yeah. I love how you did all that stuff in *Athena*. You can get that immersion thing and make it very experiential, but it never feels like you're doing it consciously. I think sometimes when a director's trying to make a film which makes you really part of the action, it almost makes it less exciting.

GAVRAS: True.

PATTINSON: What's the last film that made you jealous?

GAVRAS: I really liked *Weapons*. I went to see it with my daughter in a packed cinema. I'm not a big fan of horror films, but the reactions in the room were crazy. People were screaming, people were laughing, and I thought it was really well directed. I thought, "Fuck, this is someone that knows how to make an audience react."

PATTINSON: It's amazing. I love horror films. I'd never really seen a horror film in theaters until a few years ago.

GAVRAS: It's an experience.

PATTINSON: It's the best. It's like going on a rollercoaster. I think the reason horror films do so well so consistently is because it's one of the only forms of cinema where you can buy the ticket and get what you pay for pretty much every time.

GAVRAS: It's a very communal experience.

PATTINSON: I'm excited to see *Resident Evil*. I think it comes out soon. I have one more question. What's a movie you hated when you first saw it and then later realized it was great?

GAVRAS: That's a good question. Because of my dad, I watched [Andrei] Tarkovsky way too young. I watched *Stalker* when I was like seven and was like, "Fuck that shit." Then in my 20s, we watched it and I was like, "This is amazing." That and [Ingmar] Bergman. I watched Bergman way too young and was like, "This is boring as fuck." Then I was like, "Oh, I'm an adult now. I can understand the subtleties and love it."

PATTINSON: Watching *Stalker* at seven is good.

GAVRAS: A nightmare. It was great.

PATTINSON: Amazing. My questions written down were all—

GAVRAS: I love that you've written questions down.

PATTINSON: I literally properly wrote many questions down and I didn't ask any of them.

GAVRAS: All right, well thank you so much.

PATTINSON: Thanks. See you later. See you soon. See you in a bit.