

Point Blank

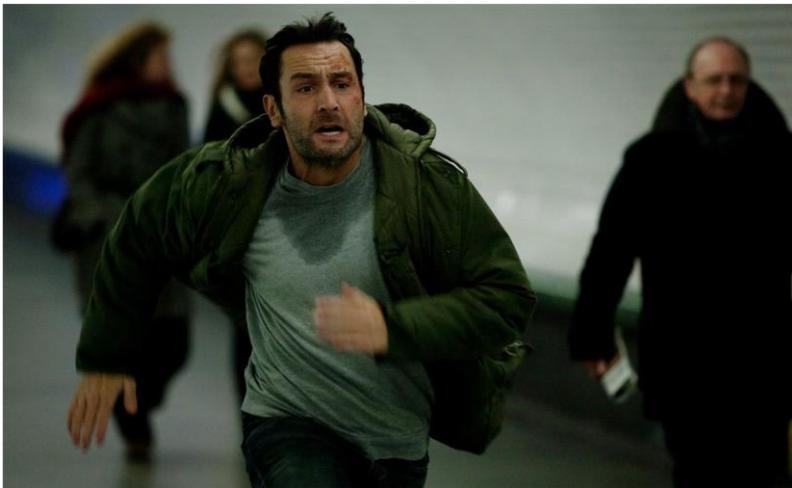
Director: Fred Cavayé

Country: France

Date: 2010

A review by Philip French of *The Observer*:

A couple of years ago, Cavayé made a good thriller called *Anything for Her* (aka *Pour elle*) in which a happily married French schoolteacher turns in desperation to dangerous criminal activities to spring his wife from jail after her wrongful conviction for murder. Paul Haggis's American remake, *The Next Three Days*, transposed to Pittsburgh and starring Russell Crowe, is much inferior. Cavayé's new film (which he co-scripted with Guillaume Lemans) has a similar theme but takes place within a much shorter time span and is even better than *Anything for Her*.



Our attention is hooked from the start by a chase through the night streets of Paris. It ends in an underpass where the quarry, whom we recognise as the ruggedly handsome north African actor Roschdy Zem (star of *Days of Glory* and *Outside the Law*) is seriously injured in a car crash just as he's about to be murdered.

The film then cuts to Samuel and Nadia Pierret, a happily married Parisian couple, and the pace slows. She's Spanish (Elena Anaya, a familiar face from *Sex and Lucia* and *Talk to Her*), seven months pregnant and having an ultrasound scan. Sam (played by the attractive French man-in-the-street Gilles Lellouche, who's in most French films nowadays, including *Little White Lies* and *Mesrine*) is a nurse.

That night he checks in at his hospital where the north African from the underpass is a comatose, unnamed patient. What location combines delusive safety and elusive danger more potently than a hospital at night? Think of the killers stalking the darkened wards and corridors in *Bullitt* and *The Godfather*. An assassin is here too, but he's thwarted and the patient's life saved by Sam. From this point the tension, suspense, surprises and the pace never let up. I haven't been better entertained by any movie this year.

Two thugs break into the Pierrets' flat, the pregnant Nadia is kidnapped and Sam beaten up. The patient is revealed to be Hugo Sartet, a wanted criminal. Then Sam gets a call on his mobile. Unless he gets Sartet out of the hospital and delivers him to a secret rendezvous, Nadia will be killed. Sam becomes possessed with saving her life at any cost to himself or to anyone else. This involves forming an uneasy alliance with the criminal and becoming a fugitive suspect himself.



Meanwhile, before you can say "flic", two police inspectors become involved, a suave senior commandant (G rard Lanvin, the 1980s matinee idol, now a grizzled sixtysomething) and his confident female rival (Mireille Perrier), who resents him getting the most important assignments. They provide further strands in the plot and to extend the social net a link is established between the Sartre case and the unsolved murder of a rich businessman.

Sam is pursuer and pursued as he runs through the streets, driving cars, hopping on buses, diving into metro stations. When he stops to breathe, he vomits convulsively. He's no superhero, just an ordinary man put in a terrible position like any wrongly accused Hitchcock protagonist. As that comparison suggests, it's a familiar story given a modern makeover. The film is plausibly plotted and forcefully played, character is delineated through action, and there is no time for glib moralising. By the time Cavay  reaches the chaotic, brilliantly sustained climax in a police station, the conventional gap between the law and the underworld disappears and the criminal justice system is seen to be in complete moral confusion.

An ironic, satisfying coda, set some years later, comments with proper ambiguity on what has gone before. Cavay  brings it in, credits and all, in 86 minutes, not one of them wasted.

I do have one objection, however. There is already a film called Point Blank, John Boorman's influential 1967 thriller. It was released in France as *Le Point de non-retour*, and remade in Hollywood as *Payback* with Mel Gibson in the role created by Lee Marvin. It is true that *A bout portant* translates as "At point blank range", but it is in my view lazy, unimaginative, annoying and misleading to call this film Point Blank.

Edited down from: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jun/12/point-blank-fred-cavaye-review>