

Inhuman Resources: In French Netflix series, an unemployed man takes extreme measures

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The French Netflix miniseries *Inhuman Resources* (*Dérapages*), based on Pierre Lemaitre’s 2010 novel, *Cadres Noirs* [Dark Executives], is directed by Ziad Doueri, who co-wrote the script with Lemaitre.

The six-part program concerns the plight of a middle-aged man, Alain Delambre, who seeks to redress his long-term unemployment through extreme measures. The mini-series, which features former Manchester United soccer star Eric Cantona in the leading role, was popular in France.

An intriguing work that holds the viewer’s attention throughout, *Inhuman Resources* is decidedly uneven, artistically and socially. It exudes a hostility to capitalism and top corporate executives, but as the series wanders into thriller-action territory, the social element comes and goes. Moreover, the generally unpleasant and unsympathetic central character detracts from an angry and potentially hard-hitting piece about modern French society.

On the verge of losing his shabby Paris apartment, Delambre (Cantona), who lives with his wife Nicole (Suzanne Clément), has been unemployed for six years. Due to his age, he was laid off from his position as a human resources (HR) director. Since then he has bounced from one low-wage job to another.

Delambre is depressed and angry, as well as emotionally and physically impotent. His latest miserable gig is at an auto parts plant, where he violently retaliates against an abusive manager. Increasingly, Nicole and the couple’s daughters—Lucie (Alice de Lencquesaing), a novice attorney, and Mathilde (Louise Coldefy), pregnant and married to the pompous Gregory (Nicolas Martinez)—find Alain unbearable. The only one who can tolerate him is Charles (Gustave Kervern), a homeless, alcoholic computer wizard.

Life is bleak indeed, but miraculously Alain is shortlisted for an HR department position at aerospace giant Exxya. This is suspicious because he performed poorly on a qualifying test. As it turns out, the firm’s CEO, Alexandre Dorfmann (Alex Lutz), has a farfetched plan to test the loyalty and toughness of his executives and select the one who can best carry out the massacre of over 1,200 jobs—two out of every three workers—at Exxya’s Beauvais factory in northern France.

The understated, hipster Dorfmann has opted for this plan due to his fear that “the union and workers ... will want to set fire [to the plant], not just burn tires and then they’ll threaten to lynch the guy [manager]. We have to test their [the executives’] resistance to real violence.”

The Exxya chief, with the help of a consultant, wants to strip upper management “naked” by setting up a false hostage scenario to evaluate their reactions. Alain becomes aware of the scheme through Charles’ hacking kills. To stack the odds in his job-seeking favor, he hires a dubious counterterrorism expert as his trainer. Alain also lies to Mathilde and extorts money from her to pay for the military-style instruction.

He then turns Dorfmann’s phony hostage drama into a real one to create conditions where he can fleece the company of 20 million euros—the product of bribes and kickbacks. “The unemployed are in charge. Humiliation makes people violent,” shouts Alain to the terrified corporate captives.

He further justifies his acts: “The system provoked me. Anger is like money, when it works it grows and eventually needs an outlet.” Hauled off to prison, Alain writes a book and becomes the most famous unemployed man in France, manipulating his reluctant attorney-daughter Lucie into defending him.

In the concluding episode, Alain and Dorfmann confront one another. The CEO asserts at one point, “You think that capitalism is inhuman and based on greed. That it maintains poverty in order to enrich the wealthy,” while Alain nods his head. Dorfmann then tries to justify his company and himself by suggesting that he and Alain, in fact, aren’t that different. “You know why you and I are more alike than you think? Simply because we are human beings ... We’re more like wolves than lambs. ... We’re capable of anything.”

Delambre responds, “Only the privileged can afford this kind of moral grandstanding. It’s not necessary with me. In fact, your system lied to me, manipulated me, used me and was going to get rid of me without a second thought.” The \$20 million in question, he says, “isn’t mine because I stole it. It’s mine because I earned it.”

Dorfmann’s brutal conspiracy is loosely based on a real event. In October 2005, Philippe Santini, the managing director of advertising for France Télévisions, created a phony hostage exercise after which his victims suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Describes *Mediapart*: “A commando unit of nine hooded men ... heavily armed GIGN [National Gendarmerie Intervention Group, a counter-terrorist unit] agents actually burst into the meeting room and took all the FTP executives hostage.” In 2009, one of the victims pressed charges and Santini was eventually convicted.

The author of the novel on which the series is based, Pierre Lemaitre, told *Mediapart* that he found the 2005 incident “particularly shocking, but to in my eyes, not truly surprising.” Lemaitre took note of the fact that the fake hostage episode marked a new stage in the control management attempted to exercise over employees, to the point where it was now claiming “a right of life-and-death” over them. *Inhuman Resources* may be inspired by an actual occurrence, but that does not guarantee its ultimate cohesiveness and plausibility. The series strays from “typical” responses and actions to the breaking point, and beyond. The actors perform well in this visually appealing mini-series that attempts to present a fanciful, one-in-a-million reaction to joblessness, which requires the services of an action movie hero, in a serious and “realistic” manner. In the end, the series creators cannot pull that feat off.

Consequently, the important theme of unemployment,

its humiliations and pain, and the overall crimes of capitalism tend to get lost in the dramatization of an exotic, individualistic act.

Dorfmann fears laid-off workers will fiercely oppose his efforts to close down the Beauvais factory. This is a more probable outcome in a country that has seen numerous plant occupations and millions marching against pension cuts. What do commando training and hostage-taking, likely to be taken up by anti-social, disoriented middle class elements, have to do with any of this?

It is noteworthy that the 1,200 laid off workers go unvoiced and unrepresented in *Inhuman Resources*. Despite Alain’s considering himself a warrior for the unemployed, he remains focused on the money and makes no effort to contact the workers.

Instead, his actions set off a series of tragedies, which destroy or endanger many of those around him. All this plays out behind the scenes, behind the backs of the Beauvais workers and the public. What precisely is the point here?

The series suggests on numerous occasions that an inhuman society produces an inhuman response. But not only that. It also produces a humane and progressive response, such as the global anti-police violence demonstrations and the Yellow Vests movement. *Inhuman Resource*, as the title suggests, displays considerable insight up to a certain point and then loses its way.



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