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Belgrade's Delerium and Film and Music Entertainment (F&ME) pact with Slovenia's Forum Film and Macedonia's Sektor Film on a Feature Adaptation of The Porcupine Booker Prize Winning Author Julian Barnes.

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"There are difficulties inherent in the changeover from a controlled economy to a market economy," repeated the former President. - 'There's no food in the fucking shops.'
- *The Porcupine*

On the eve of the World Premiere of Srdjan Dragojevic's *The Parade* in the 1600 seat Friedrichstadtpalast, the team responsible for that film have pacted to produce Dragojevic's next project which will be an adaptation of Julian Barnes' 1992 novel *The Porcupine*. This will be for Barnes, who's currently riding high as the winner of the prestigious Booker Prize for his novel *The Sense of an Ending*, will be the first filmed adaptation of one of his works since the highly successful *Metroland* directed by Philip Savile and starring Christian Bale and Emily Watson.

Set in a post-communist fictional country, *The Porcupine* takes as its theme the trial of Stoyo Petkanov, a character judged to be a thinly disguised Todor Zhivkov, the former communist leader of Bulgaria. As the newly appointed Prosecutor General attempts to ensnare the former dictator with his own totalitarian laws, Petkanov springs a few unwelcome surprises on the court by conducting a formidable defense. *The Times* described the book as 'Superbly humane in its moral concerns - an excellent novel'.

More political thriller than courtroom drama, and *The Porcupine* shows that everyone in this situation has their ambiguities, their own personal mix of higher motives and blatant self-interest. The trial delivers a verdict, but fails to deliver what people really want, because what they want is unattainable. An oppressive regime affects the whole society for generations, corrupts and co-opts ordinary people, blurs the distinctions between right and wrong. Justice is hard enough to attain in a simple criminal trial. When it's an entire nation's policies for half a century that's being put on trial, it's not surprising that the results fail to satisfy.

"In this world in which the absolutism of capitalism is being seriously questioned," says director Dragojevic, "Barnes' *The Porcupine* examines a recent phenomenon in Eastern Europe: nostalgia for Socialism. I see this as the first sign of the crossing over from a society in transition to post-transitional society. The script treats this nostalgia as a screen, a strategy to cover up the twin traumas shared by all East European societies: the trauma of socialism and the trauma of transition. Add to this the failure of capitalism since Barnes wrote the book – and we have a very contemporary tale of two systems."

The novel has been adapted for the big screen by Dragojevic and Brit scribe Geoff Cox (who was script editor on John Hillcoat's *The Proposition*) and will be produced by Delerium's Biljana Prvanovic and Film and Music Entertainment's (F&ME) Mike Downey and Sam Taylor along with Eva Rohrman from Forum film and Vladimir Anastasov from Sektor Film. The film will shoot in the former Yugoslavia and the team is currently exploring options in the Ukraine, Belarus, East Germany, Russia and Georgia to shoot some major exterior sequences.

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“Until recently, people from beyond the Iron Curtain seemed to have a spiritual advantage over us in the West.” says Film and Music Entertainment’s Mike Downey. “You travelled to Russia and Eastern Europe and had to feel it - artists and writers living for truth and art, the certainty of a world in which people of sensibility knew who their enemy was and opposed and despised that enemy. Now with the death of Capitalism - East and West, we're all together in a whited-out, make-a-buck world. This is the world that *The Porcupine* portrays and it has a powerful contemporary resonance for a novel written 20 years ago.”

The film, which is expected to begin pre-production in late summer 2012, will shoot in English and with an international cast.

Says Julian Barnes: “I’m a child of the Cold war. At school and university I studied Russian. In 1965 I went on a big trip with friends – driving from England through Germany and Poland to Russia, up to Leningrad, down to Kiev and Odessa, into Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and home. I visited Romania again in 1979 – indeed, proposed to my wife there. I’ve been to Bulgaria twice, once just before Communism collapsed, once as it did so. So I know something of the background and when writing *The Porcupine* I was helped by Bulgarian friends with certain details. I view the fall of Communism as a largely joyous event in itself, though I view much of what followed – the triumphalism of the West, the weakening of the Left’s good, true ideas (as opposed to its totalitarian tendencies), the brutal bullying of the spreading capitalist system – with dismay.”

Meanwhile, Dragojevic’s controversial runaway success: *The Parade*, screening here in Panorama, *The Parade*, has broken all box office records for 2011 in its home country of Serbia, and continues an extended run in Croatia and to date has clocked up a massive \$1,098,869 admissions in the former Yugoslavia alone.

WIDE Management will be handling international sales in Berlin and the film is rolling out at a series of major international festivals during 2012.

Ends

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Additional press articles regarding *The Parade*:

CINEUROPA

<http://cineuropa.org/2011/nw.aspx?t=newsdetail&l=en&did=216251>

REUTERS

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/-/world/12896216/serb-comedy-has-balkans-united-in-laughter/>

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

<http://www.france24.com/en/20120214-gay-pride-movie-unlikely-balkans-box-office-hit>

DEUTSCHLAND RADIO

<http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/thema/1676229/>

TAGESZEITUNG

<http://www.taz.de/Berlinale-2012-Srdjan-Dragojevics-Parada/!87581/>

SPIEGEL

<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/0,1518,814902,00.html>

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