

'Veni Vidi Vici': Rotterdam Review

BY **JONATHAN ROMNEY** | 26 JANUARY 2024

Sharp Austrian satire takes careful aim at the lifestyles of the super-rich



**SOURCE: ROTTERDAM INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
'VENI VIDI VICI'**

Dirs/scr: Daniel Hoesl, Julia Niemann. Austria. 2024. 86mins

The lifestyles and ethics of the uber-wealthy have, like it or not, become one of the pressing themes of the contemporary world. This represents a considerable challenge for cinema, as few non-mainstream film-makers can muster the kind of budget it might take to convincingly depict the life excessive – and even fewer have the kind of imaginative focus to be truly incisive about the mysteries of the one per cent. A singular exception is Austrian black comedy *Veni Vidi Vici*, which manages a fabulously opulent display of set dressing while turning an icily dispassionate gaze on an elite

wealthy enough to literally get away with murder.

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Produced by Austrian cinema's godfather of social unease Ulrich Seidl, *Veni Vidi Vici* mixes a spikily provocative edge with pleasingly poisonous glamour; this combination should make for considerable international traction after it screens in Sundance (World Cinema Dramatic Competition) then Rotterdam, where co-director Daniel Hoesl won the Golden Tiger in 2013 with his earlier tilt at consumerist capitalism, *Soldier Jane*.

Hoesl also made the finance-themed *WiNWiN* (2016) and further explored the world of wealth in 2020 documentary *Davos*, co-directed by Julia Niemann, with whom he collaborates here. The film begins with an on-screen quote from Ayn Rand: "The point is, who will stop me?" And indeed, no-one seems able or even willing to stop the thrill-kill by a man who has everything, and who is as much a modern Caesar as the title suggests – billionaire entrepreneur Amon Maynard (Laurence Rupp).

Aided by taciturn butler Alfred (Markus Schleinzer), Amon enjoys taking homicidal shots at innocent passers-by in the idyllic mountain area where he has a palatial estate and a seemingly infinite fleet of disposable white Porsches. Amon is so wealthy and powerful, and projects such a shiny image as a benignly laidback family man, that no-one dares accuse or challenge him – one exception being an elderly local gamekeeper who gets predictably short shrift from the local constabulary.

Amon lives in pampered bliss with his wife Viktoria (Ursina Lardi) amid the trendy art-filled expanses of his chateau. The two are looking for a surrogate mother to give them a new child, but meanwhile have two young adopted daughters (one Black, one Asian) along with Amon's teenage daughter by his previous wife. Played by coolly unnerving newcomer Olivia Goschler, self-possessed teen Paula – who offers intermittent voice-over narration – cannot wait till she is old enough to play with Dad's gun collection, and shows signs of cold-blooded entitlement on a level that even he can't match.

Two narrative threads run over three chapters, one for each word of the title. One strand involves the attempts of down-at-heel but committed journalist Volker (Dominic Warta) to expose Amon: here the film takes a stock figure and a stock situation and twists the clichés with acidic perversity. Another involves Amon's forced merger – with the backing of a complicit minister (*Soldier Jane*'s Johanna Orsini-Rosenberg) – of a company belonging to his elderly former mentor, whom he now betrays in a classic Oedipal coup. Amon's ruthless instinct for conquest is signalled by a deadpan sight gag: he drives over an unspoiled expanse of beautiful countryside which we then see transformed via his

entourage's Augmented Reality goggles into the site of his planned super-factory.

A political and social idea runs through the film, ripe for dissection: Amon's credo of 'creative destruction'. It may sound quintessentially 'now', but in fact was articulated in the mid-20th century by an economist referred to here, Joseph Schumpeter.

DoP Gerald Kerkletz's tightly composed visual sets a detached, deadpan tone with its widescreen long takes and fixed-camera tableaux, while Hannes Salat's glacially chic production design genuinely evokes a world of blue-chip luxury – although Austria's magnificent rural scenery certainly helps. Occasionally the satire hits an obvious note – although it is perhaps unavoidable that, when depicting the excesses of privilege, a film runs the risk of overstatement (and a score mixing modernist choral gasps with some too-familiar classical staples doesn't always come off).

Overall, though, the stylistic consistency and sustained chill of the black comedy make for a satiric focus far keener than, say, the farcical overkill of *Triangle Of Sadness*. The casting works beautifully too, with Goschler making an unsettling impression as the quizzically angelic-seeming, but slyly feral Paula (her priceless turn to camera at one point is moew Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* than *Fleabag*). Schleinzer (also known as director of the disturbing 2011 drama *Michael*) makes an enigmatic impression as the near-silent majordomo, and Rupp is coolly unnerving behind a boyish nice-guy smile.

Production Company: Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion

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Producer: Ulrich Seidl

Cinematography: Gerald Kerkletz

Editing: Gerhard Daurer

Production design: Hannes Salat

Music: Manuel Riegler

Cast: Laurence Rupp, Ursina Lardi, Olivia Goschler, Dominik Warta, Markus Schleinzer

