

Tin Can Buffaloes

by Etienne Sievers

Semifinalist

NICHOLL
FELLOWSHIPS

IN SCREENWRITING



Rated highly on

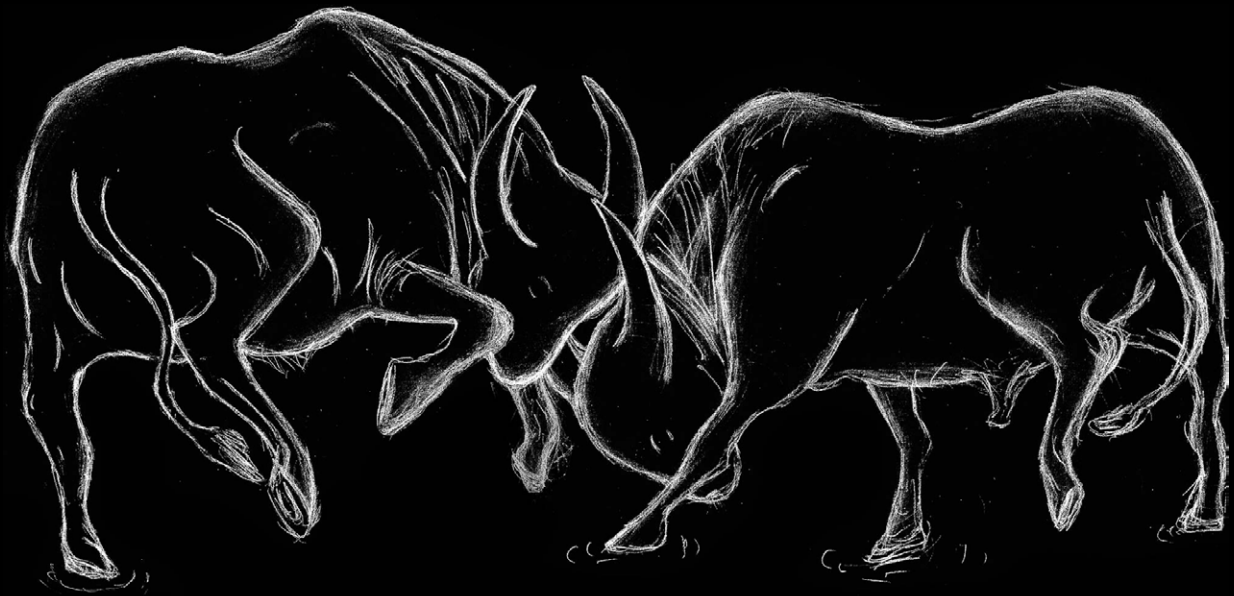
THE BLACK LIST

script hosting website

Developed with the support of

eQuinox
EUROPE

INTERNATIONAL SCREENWRITERS WORKSHOP



GENRE Drama/Coming-of-Age

EST. RUN TIME 110 mins

LANGUAGE English/Hindi

LOGLINE

A spirited young orphan in Goa (India) who dreams of joining the close-knit local community of buffalo fighters must decide what kind of a man he wants to become as his cynical grandfather and his ambitious uncle fight over his allegiance.

SYNOPSIS

Present-day Benaulim, a developing coastal village in South Goa. Thirteen-year-old orphan EDWIN dreams of entering his deceased father's water buffalo YAMU into a fight against another buffalo. Doing this, he hopes, will make his classmates and the other bull owners in the village accept him as one of their own.

The boy lives in a primitive shack on the old family property with his world-weary and neglectful grandfather FRANCIS. When Yamu - Edwin's only real companion - is taken away by a money lender as leverage for the old man's debts, Edwin must come up with a plan to earn enough cash to get his buffalo back.

Setting out on a conflict-ridden journey to the city of Margao with his reluctant grandpa, things start to look promising. But when the old man's dark past catches up with him, the boy deserts Francis to accept the help of his successful but inscrutable idol CAESAR. Caesar, a popular bullfight aficionado, turns out to have a surprising familial connection with Edwin and offers him more than expected. But to Edwin's dismay, it soon turns out that shining "Uncle Caesar" has an agenda of his own.



Caught in the ugly cross-fire of a long-standing dispute between his grandfather and his uncle, Edwin comes face to face with his family's past and his own inner demons. Racing against time to save his buffalo from certain death, the boy desperately enters the dangerous underbelly of Goa, where he makes a fateful decision.

As the story catapults towards a gruesome climactic bullfight, the disillusioned young man is not only forced to choose between risking the life of his beloved buffalo and his family's heritage but must also ask himself: Is it possible to build something new without destroying the old?

SETTING



Beyond its reputation as a picturesque holiday and party destination, the former Portuguese colony of Goa features a multifaceted culture rarely portrayed on film.

While grappling with environmental problems such as overfishing, mining and pollution, India's smallest state has the country's highest GDP per capita, attracting migrants and laborers from all over the subcontinent.

Impacted by the effects of an expanding tourism industry, cultural globalization and the forces of modernity, many of Goa's young struggle to preserve the roots of their identity as they embrace the new.

Some, like the protagonist in this project, find a sense of belonging and a form of release in the ancient Goan tradition of *dhirio* (bull wrestling). In this secretly practiced blood sport, crowds of men cheer on two water buffaloes that are made to fight against each other in frenetic but - mostly - non-lethal battles.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Tin Can Buffaloes is a film about social status. About the desire to receive recognition, about struggling against social prejudice, and about the way we engage with our past, question our beliefs and shape our environment as we attempt to determine our future. These are issues I can identify with due to my own past.

Born in Germany, I grew up predominantly in India. My early classmates were Indian. I learned how to read and write at their side. I spoke like them. Soaking up Indian myths, flavors, sights and sounds, I felt at home, yet, I was not. The contradictory feeling of connecting with a certain community while, for one reason or another, never really belonging is pertinent to this project.

Without equating my own life to that of my protagonist, everything the boy in my story encounters incorporates elements from my own experiences. The vitalizing yet disruptive transformation of Goa from a rural to a semi-urban setting that I witnessed over the past twenty-five years is one such impression.

My cross-cultural sensibility shapes my interest in issues like these and results in a focus on specific details that others might choose to overlook. At the same time, my history and work as a filmmaker in India give me an emotional, informed and authentic entryway into my subject matter.

Tin Can Buffaloes highlights the idiosyncrasies of a specific setting but asks universal questions highly relevant to the current age: Where do I really belong? How can I transcend societal pressures and find my true self? How will I achieve a better life without negatively impacting others? I invite viewers to follow me on a journey to explore these questions in new ways.

STYLE

Fluctuating between tragic and optimistic, *Tin Can Buffaloes* is a tightly-paced, occasionally humorous coming-of-age/social drama best described as a character-driven disillusionment tale that incorporates elements of action and adventure.

Tin Can Buffaloes is not Bollywood. Subtle performances will go hand in hand with real-life shooting locations and natural lighting. A non-manipulative, non-ethnic score will discreetly dramatize relevant scenes. Conceptually, the film invites comparisons to timeless classics such as *Bicycle Thieves*, *The 400 Blows*, and *The Apu Trilogy*, but also more recent examples like *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Theeb* and *Capernaum*.

Visually, *Tin Can Buffaloes* harks back to the imposing but gritty style of the cinema of the late '70s and early '80s. Featuring its setting as a character of its own, the film will use a widescreen anamorphic aesthetic and a warm, slightly desaturated color grade.

The brief climactic bullfight will be captured using a combination of cleverly intercut close-ups, CGI, and already acquired documentary footage.

TARGET AUDIENCE & APPEAL

Tin Can Buffaloes belongs in the "International Indie" category and will appeal to global audiences interested in gripping stories that authentically portray local yet universal themes and social issues.

The film targets a multi-generational viewership constituted of individuals from the following age ranges: Film enthusiasts aged 45+, teenagers aged 12-16, as well as a heterogenous group of viewers aged 35-44 participating through VOD services after a cinematic release. Aiming for a 12A/PG-13 rating, the film is suitable for, but does not primarily belong in, the children's movie demographic.

With its mainly English dialogue (cf. *Slumdog Millionaire*), its grand visuals, and suspense-based elements, *Tin Can Buffaloes* is equipped to cross boundaries readily.

DIRECTOR'S PROFILE



Originally from Berlin, Germany, Etienne Sievers grew up predominantly in India. He studied Filmmaking in the UK with a DAAD scholarship.

His latest short film *The Peanut Seller* won five awards, including the Satyajit Ray Award at the London Indian Film Festival. It was selected as the opening film for SAFF Montreal.

His short film *Dilli Dreams* was screened at numerous festivals including Raindance and was released by L'Agence Du Court Métrage in cinemas across France.

In addition to *Tin Can Buffaloes*, Etienne is currently developing two screenplays set in Africa. He served on the short film jury of the 2020 Indian Film Festival Stuttgart.

Watch Etienne's *The Peanut Seller* online: <http://etiennesievers.com/peanut/>

Contact

Etienne Sievers

info@etiennesievers.com

+49 (0)1577 3222 994

www.etiennesievers.com

