

Documentary film about online child abuse

# CAUGHT IN THE NET

## When the hunters become the hunted

Hypermarket Film Czech Television Peter Kerekes Radio and Television Slovakia Helium Film

Sabina Dlouhá (Nicky) Anežka Pithartová (Teeny) Tereza Těžká (Mishka)

Written and Directed by Barbora Chalupová & Vít Klusák Director of Photography Adam Kruliš

Sound Adam Bláha Music Pjoni Film Editor Vít Klusák Production Designer Jan Vlček

Costume Designer Veronika Traburová Make-up Artist Barbora Potužníková

Digital Masks Designer Plátek Head of Production Anna Poláčková Executive Producer Pavla Klimešová

Producers Vít Klusák & Filip Remunda Distributor Outlook Filmsales

[www.vsitifilm.cz](http://www.vsitifilm.cz)



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# CAUGHT IN THE NET

*feature-length documentary film, CR, 2020 • 100 min. • directors: Barbora Chalupová & Vít Klusák*  
• rating 15 • distribution premiere: 27. 2. 2020 • distribution in CR: Aerofilms • [vsitifilm.cz](http://vsitifilm.cz)

Original idea: Vít Klusák

Screenplay and direction: Barbora Chalupová & Vít Klusák

Featuring: Tereza Těžká, Anežka Pithartová, Sabina Dlouhá

Cinematographer: Adam Kruliš

Editor: Vít Klusák

Music: Pjoni

Sound: Adam Bláha

Executive producer: Pavla Klimešová

Head of production: Anna Poláčková

Digital masks: Plaftik

Architect: Jan Vlček

Make-up: Barbora Potužníková

Photographer: Milan Jaroš

CT creative producers: Jiřina Budíková, Petr Kubica

Producers: Vít Klusák & Filip Remunda

Producers and co-producers: Hypermarket Film, Czech Television, Peter Kerekes, Radio and Television of Slovakia, Helium Film

General partner of film: CZ.NIC

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# HOW IT ALL BEGAN

In autumn 2017 the company O2 contacted director Vít Klusák with a request to make a viral video that would highlight in a dramatic manner the sharp rise in the number of children being abused on the Czech internet. Klusák brought his colleague Barbora Chalupová on board the project and together they undertook research in the form of a test, creating an authentic-looking fake profile of a 12-year-old girl, Týnka, and waiting to see what happened. Within five hours of the profile going live 83 men aged between 23 and 63 contacted the girl, the overwhelming majority with explicit propositions of mutual masturbation via video chat. Many sent photographs of their erect penises without warning while some sent links to all kinds of porn, including animal porn. That very evening four men gratified themselves in front of a web cam without “Týnka” ever even showing herself... Within a few days the documentarians Chalupová and Klusák concluded the phenomenon had the ingredients of an independent, feature-length documentary, not just a short viral video.



# SYNOPSIS

Three actresses, three children's rooms, 10 days and 2,458 sexual predators. An experiment that shines an urgent light on the taboo subject of the abuse of children on the internet. Three over-18 actresses with very young appearances are tasked with pretending they are 12 on fake social network profiles. In faithful copies of children's rooms created in a film studio they chat and Skype with men of all ages who have searched for and contacted them online. The vast majority of these men demand video sex and send photos of their penises or links to porn. Some even attempt blackmail. The documentary delivers the gripping drama of the protagonists playing "12-year-old girls" from casting to face to face meetings with predators (watched by security and six hidden cameras). Predatory tactics are gradually turned against perpetrators and hunters become the hunted.





# BARBORA CHALUPOVÁ



Barbora Chalupová is a director from the emerging young generation. Her work began with the student film *Thank You, Melonik* (2014), which was shortlisted for a Magnesia Award for best student film and was later screened at the festival for short films iShorts vol. 6 and the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Her next work, *Arms Ready* (2016), was nominated for the Pavel Koutecký Prize and was in competition at the One World festival and Jihlava IDFF. That was followed by *A Theory of Equality* (2017), in which the director mapped the contemporary debate on gender equality in the Czech Republic. The film was presented in the Czech Journal series. Her experimental picture *On the Edge* (2018) focused on the flat earth movement in the Czech Republic and was shortlisted for best student film at the Magnesia Awards. Last year Chalupová brought out the authorial documentary *Real(e)state* (2019); exploring the ongoing Czech housing crisis, it premiered at the One World Film Festival. As well as working on *CAUGHT IN THE NET* the director is currently finishing *A New Oath*, about the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

# INTERVIEW WITH BARBORA CHALUPOVÁ

## **Do you recall the moment you decided to collaborate on the film?**

When I first saw the statistics relating to the safety of children on the internet I was frankly taken aback. They were alarming numbers that I had real trouble actually imagining. But that was nothing compared to the indescribable shock when, with a view to understanding the issue more deeply, we created the identity of a naive, non-flirtatious 12-year-old girl, Týnka, who was bored one afternoon and set up a profile on social networks. Within five hours, a total of 83 men, aged 23 to 63, had contacted her. The vast majority moved on to explicit sexual allusions and propositions after a few innocent opening lines. This included “offers” of mutual masturbation over Skype; two gentlemen actually did it that day. But the moment you’re asking me about actually occurred a little later. I was meant to call Vít because we wanted to clarify what it was we’d witnessed the previous day and he told me a story that was absolutely key to my getting on board the film. He told me that an unnamed man in a top position borrowed his daughter’s phone. She had been playing on it but had to get back to school for afternoon lessons. When she left he picked up her phone and found out she hadn’t signed out of her messenger. He looked at it and discovered with horror that his daughter was conducting a very intimate conversation – supplemented with nude pics of her – with a man of his age. When the daughter got home he and his wife, in tears, read her the riot act. And she confessed. She confessed that the girls in her class wrote to guys like that and she was the only one who didn’t. So she just made one up. And that was the moment. If there was such a complex and socially serious situation as children themselves writing dirty stuff in order to be successful in their group, then I had to accept collaboration on the film.

## **Why did you resort to creating a hoax?**

We faced a challenge as to how to document a phenomenon that takes place behind the doors of children’s rooms. We wanted to show as accurately as possible all the tricks and manipulation that predators employ in their communication with kids. We were aware of the ethical fragility of our experiment. That’s why from the very outset we also consulted with experts: psychologists, a sexologist, a lawyer and the police. At the same time, we wanted to play fair with viewers, so we decided to we’d carry out the entire experiment ourselves, without hiding our own doubts or situations that didn’t work out. We believe that if we’d shot the film as, for instance, a collection of

interviews or as reportage, nobody would be able to imagine all the stuff that children go through today.

## **Are there any major differences between the original proposal and the actual shoot?**

Through research and consultations with experts we succeeded in coming up with such a proposal that it didn't differ much from the actual shoot. The only thing that never ceased to surprise me throughout filming was the speed with which the predators contacted our girls. After a few opening lines they immediately moved on to explicitly sexual propositions. And of course the quantity. The actresses barely had time to reply, never mind handle all the men requesting video chats.

## **For you, what was the hardest thing about the entire process?**

For me personally it was the editing room. To go through again, in detail, everything that happened in the studio and at the face to face meetings was frustrating for me. When the weight of directing was off there was time to look in detail at all the recorded material, calmly and with some distance. Frankly, there's some stuff I never need to see again in my life. Naturally the task before us was complicated. We had to balance the degree of "gross" stuff so that the film showed the reality but at the same time stayed watchable.

## **Did working on the film change your outlook on the subject?**

I don't think my position on the subject changed. I didn't see it in black and white in the sense of "angelic children and evil men". But I must admit that one thing did surprise me. I knew that this phenomenon had been here for at least 10 years. But in recent years what's happened is that girls and boys have started to become aware of the value of their own naked bodies and to sell them without hesitation on the internet for credit or a new phone app.

# VÍT KLUSÁK

Vít Klusák is a Czech film director. He studied photography at a graphic arts-focused secondary school. He is a graduate of the Department of Documentary Film at FAMU (where he studied under professors Karel Vachek and Helena Třeštíková) and has been lecturing at the film school since 2006. Klusák and Filip Remunda set up Hypermarket Film, which is focused on authorial documentaries and on principle does not produce advertisements, in 2003 and both continue to head the company. The documentary comedy *Czech Dream* (2004) by Klusák and Remunda won prizes at a number of domestic and international festivals and was broadcast by 24 foreign TV stations. The pair's *Czech Peace* (2010), about an American radar in the Czech Republic, received its world premiere at Michael Moore's festival in Traverse City. Klusák's feature-length absurd documentary *All for the Good of the World and Nosovice* (2011) picked up the Film Critics' and Theoreticians' Prize for best documentary film (Czech Lion). His *The Good Driver Smetana* (2013) was a personal project. Alongside directing and producing he works as an editor. He has four children and lives in Prague.

Current notable projects from the director include a series of authorial documentaries for Czech Television – *Czech Journal* (e.g., *Tabloid Workers*, 2014); several episodes of the legendary show *Yes, Boss!* for TV station prima; the documentary *Matrix AB* (2015), a portrait of oligarch Andrej Babiš; *The White World According to Dalibor* (2017), a stylised depiction of a small-town neo-Nazi; and the almost completed Czech-Polish road movie *Once Upon a Time in Poland* (2020, co-written and directed with Filip Remunda).





# INTERVIEW WITH VÍT KLUSÁK

## **On what basis did you select the three actresses playing 12-year-old girls?**

We were above all looking for actresses who came across in an authentic, non-actorly way. That's actually also the reason there's only one real actress: Tereza Těžká from DAMU. Sabina Dlouhá and Anežka Pithartová hadn't been on camera before. I can't hide my joy at the fact that viewers and journalists have been telling us that all three are completely natural while at the same time portraying pre-pubescent children. That was another essential criterion of casting – for viewers to believe they were 12–13. But it was enough to go into a café with them and try to order them a wine and it was instantly clear we'd got that parameter right.

## **The children's rooms and clothes also aided the impression they were 12-year-old girls. What else did you keep an eye on?**

We played around with that. During her research, the film make-up artist Barbora Potužníková discovered that the blood supply in the faces of girls of pre-pubescent age is different than in those of older girls, so she simulated that using make-up. But we also paid attention to IT details. Though all the actresses were in one spot near Prague, their computers gave the cities we put on their fake profiles, so that would be apparent from the email header. Also we mainly based the profiles on photos from when the girls really were 12. But we also paid attention to the weather. The cinematographer Adam Kruliš followed the day light at the purported addresses; when it was cloudy in Pilsen then they turned off the lights outside the window of our “12-year-old Niky Komárková”.

## **How did the actresses prepare for the roles of girls of 12?**

It helped that we gave the girls homework. We got them to meet children of that age a fortnight before the shoot and pick up as many observations as possible regarding how they speak, write, watch YouTube and so on these days. To make sure they didn't cut corners, they wrote the observations down in essays. Tereza contacted her younger cousin and she set up a group on messenger where she brought in classmates. Thanks to them, Tereza was able to note down and pick up on the abbreviations, GIFs and emoticons they use. We also paid attention to typos and spelling mistakes. For instance, kids don't put a gap after a comma and in fact don't pay a lot of attention to punctuation at all.

## **There's been a lot of chatter about the film for months before its release. Is that because the subject has major tabloid potential?**

I think you're right. It's definitely generating some intense attention. But at the same time I think that we've managed to avoid quite well the pitfalls of handling the subject of *the abuse of children on the internet* in a shock horror, emotionally blackmailing way. My colleague Barbora and I had lots of discussions in the editing room and fine tuned each scene in such a way as to not overstep the mark. That's also why we weren't shy of humour.



**The audience laughed quite a lot at pre-premieres. What's your response? Isn't that bordering on cynicism, when the issue is child abuse?**

Thanks to a series of pre-premieres around the country we have feedback from viewers that humour in such a film is surprising, but pleasantly so. Some viewers, girls in particular, are afraid our film will turn their stomachs and they won't manage to watch till the end. But fortunately that hasn't proven the case. Predators are frequently ridiculous when they're pursuing girls and sometimes it's verging on parody. There are moments when the audience laughs with relief – kind of emotional release valves thanks to which you can make it to the end and absorb even the heavy passages.

## **The film ends with the title “the Czech police requested the footage and used it to launch criminal proceedings.” What did cooperation with the police look like in concrete terms?**

It's good to be aware this project grew out of a experiment with many variables. In the beginning we had no idea what kind of behaviour we'd be shooting, how far it could go. When we were writing the proposal we said our aim wasn't to criminalise these men, that we wanted first and foremost to show the techniques of manipulation they employed on children and to spark a major social discussion. But then we filmed blackmail and threats. Some of the men sent our actresses paedophile and animal porn and it was clear that we couldn't keep it to ourselves. The policemen whose desks it landed on behaved with utter professionalism. They told us that our film had the potential to become a powerful instrument of prevention and that they welcomed it.

## **What would you like your new film to change?**

I'd like it to set off a discussion throughout society that would result in positive ideas on how to protect children in the online sphere, not just from abusers but also from themselves. We mustn't forget that kids themselves often meet dangerous situations halfway. I would also hope that the film doesn't stir up a thirst for vengeance or prohibitions, as often happens with issues where you dig into something shady. If harm is involved, repression is appropriate. But most energy should go into prevention. That said, the main thing is to offer children better things to do than plonking down with a tablet. We have to start with ourselves. I'm constantly squinting at my phone and am virtually writing mails at the steering wheel. And I know that's bad. For me and for my kids – I don't want them to remember me that way.



**TEREZA  
TĚŽKÁ**



**ANEŽKA  
PITHARTOVÁ**



**SABINA  
DLOUHÁ**



# INTERVIEW WITH THE ACTRESSES

## **Why did you decide to take part in the film CAUGHT IN THE NET?**

**Tereza:** Before I was introduced to the subject of our film CAUGHT IN THE NET I hadn't a clue how big the problem of child abuse on the internet was. I think it's the same for most people. I encountered it myself when I was 12 and thought I was the exception, that the internet was more protected nowadays. But the opposite is true. That's why I didn't hesitate a second about taking part. I believe it's an issue that needs to be discussed and needs to be addressed.

**Anežka:** I went along to the casting because I wanted to try film acting. The only condition was a young appearance, which I struggled with my whole childhood. My whole puberty everybody asked me why I was so small and I had no response. I thought it was great I could make use of my late development in some meaningful way on the shoot. But I hadn't a clue what all the film would entail. I find it hugely satisfying when I see a cinema full of children at a screening and I can discuss it with them, or even help them.

## **Would you go into the project again?**

**Sabina:** Yes, I would, because this subject should be talked about more. It's really important that 12-year-old kids realise that when they post something online it's there forever.

**Tereza:** It was the toughest work I've ever done in my life. Every time I thought it couldn't get worse the next day something happened to show me I was wrong. But at the same time it was also the nicest work I've ever done. It gave me an unbelievable amount and showed me that doing something worthwhile is where you find genuine satisfaction. So yes! In a flash.

**Anežka:** I wouldn't like to experience it again. But I definitely wouldn't change my decision at the casting session.

**People are frequently scared off by the theme and say they won't get through a screening. What advice would you offer?**

**Anežka:** I get that for some people it's going too far, but I'd be sorry if they missed out on the film out of fear. You can always leave a screening, but give it a try. If you want to tackle evil you have to get to know it first.

**Tereza:** I'd advise them not to be scared by the theme but instead to try to take a through look at it. Despite the serious subject, our film is very subtly done. Honestly, I was a bit scared too. After all it's a summary of something I lived through for six months and it wasn't so easy. But in the end I laughed out loud several times in a full cinema.

## **What was the toughest moment of the shoot?**

**Sabina:** For me it was probably the first Skype, when I had no idea how it would all play out.

**Tereza:** That's a really tough question, because every time I answer it different stuff comes to mind. There were loads of tough moments and each was tough in a different way. For instance, when one of the predators made public fake, photoshopped nude pics of me and started to blackmail me. In that moment it didn't occur to me at all that it wasn't my real body, that it wasn't me. Or when I almost broke character because I was Skyping with a predator who was saying such absurd, ridiculous stuff that I wanted to laugh. Even though they were really nasty things. There's lots of stuff like that. It's hard to say.

**Anežka:** For a long time I didn't experience anything so awful – until the breaking point came. It wasn't a concrete experience, more a moment when it occurred to me that the sexual abuse of children was somehow taking place everywhere. During one week cases that had previously been covered up began surfacing in the media. A documentary came out with the testimony of adult men about abuse by Michael Jackson and at the same time there were totally shocking testimonies from girls abused in the church. Right then I succumbed to total despair. I had the sense that all men are abusers and all kids abused.

## **Do you have any recommendations for children or parents who watch the film?**

**Tereza:** It's important that children know they have absolute support from a parent and that they actually have it. That they can confide anything at all in them and not bottle it up. As you see in the film, which I had the chance to experience for myself, it's very easy to get sucked in. We didn't contact a single predator first. When communicating we followed a strict code regarding what we could write and say – and even still we got into incredible situations. It's also important for a parent to be aware what their kid is up to on social networks. I'm not talking about strict control but more like a partnership. To take an interest in what the child likes to get up to online, maybe set up their own account on social networks. Communication and trust are extremely important. Children,



especially at that age, have a million questions about their bodies and sexuality. It's far better to speak about stuff like that openly with someone who knows them intimately and for it not to be taboo. It could end up with some predator speaking openly about it with them. The internet isn't just some nasty place full of pitfalls and traps, but it is important to follow some safety rules.

**Anežka:** Exactly. Communication is the main thing.

**Sabina:** I'd recommend that parents go to the film with their kids. They can discuss it afterwards. But I wouldn't want parents to bar their kids from social networks or tell them the internet's a bad place. That's not true. The internet is a wonderful place – very inspirational.



# CAUGHT IN THE NET: School's Out

After reaching agreement with experts, the makers decided to offer the film in two versions: CAUGHT IN THE NET, rated 15 (100 min.); and **CAUGHT IN THE NET: School's Out**, rated 12 (63 min.). *"We regard it as important that school children, who the film is chiefly about, can see it. For that reason we created a version, CAUGHT IN THE NET: School's Out, that will be accessible from the age of 12 and which cinemas will mainly show in the afternoon hours. It's a selection of dramatic scenes from the big film supplemented by appearances by our actresses in which Tereza, Sabina and Anežka give younger viewers advice on what to do in such highly-charged situations and who to turn to,"* says director Vít Klusák of this version.



# **CAUGHT IN THE NET: School's Out**

*feature-length documentary film, CR, 2020 • 63 min. • directors: Barbora Chalupová & Vít Klusák • rating 12 • distribution premiere: 27. 2. 2020 • distribution in CR: Aerofilms*

Original idea: Vít Klusák

Screenplay and direction: Barbora Chalupová & Vít Klusák

Featuring: Tereza Těžká, Anežka Pithartová, Sabina Dlouhá

Cinematographer: Adam Kruliš

Editors: Vít Klusák, Jakub Podmanický

Music: Pjoni

Executive producer: Pavla Klimešová

Head of production: Anna Poláčková

Architect: Jan Vlček

Expert advisor: Kamil Kopecký

CT creative producers: Jiřina Budíková, Petr Kubica

Producers: Vít Klusák & Filip Remunda

Producers and co-producers: Hypermarket Film, Czech Television, Peter Kerekes, Radio and Television of Slovakia, Helium Film

General partner of film: CZ.NIC

## **Synopsis of CAUGHT IN THE NET: School's Out**

A special version of the film CAUGHT IN THE NET suitable for children from 12, including unaccompanied by parents or other adults. Three adult actresses who look around 12 join social networks to experience in real time what goes on in the online world. In copies of children's rooms they chat and Skype with men who have found them online and written to them. The vast majority of those men demand video sex or send erotic photographs and videos. The actresses even experience threats and blackmail. The most powerful moments from the official feature-length version of the film are supplemented by practical advice, guidance and commentary from the actresses, who have themselves experienced online sexual harassment.





## EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

In response to great public interest, the makers decided to add an education campaign to the film. It will be linked to the documentary's cinema distribution and is intended to educate the broadest possible audience about the issue of the abuse of children on the internet. As part of the campaign the directors and actresses, along with experts, will travel all around the country and show the school version, *CAUGHT IN THE NET: School's Out*, to children. Q&As with the makers will follow screenings. Simultaneous with the launch of the education campaign a website, [vsitifilm.cz](http://vsitifilm.cz), will go live; Kamil Kopecký of Olomouc's Palacký University has provided expert supervision.

The education campaign has also been supported by the three biggest players in online security in the Czech Republic. The general partner of the campaign is Avast with the project Be Safe Online, the general partner of the film and the main partner of the campaign is CZ.NIC and the main partner of the campaign is the company O2 and its educational project O2 Smart School. The team surrounding directors Barbora Chalupová and Vít Klusák believe the education campaign will help thousands of parents and children. Major interest on the part of teachers and legislators is also expected. The entire education campaign will be introduced by the filmmakers and partners at a press conference on 10 March, at which a number of experts from partner organisations will also speak.



***General partner of the campaign***

“Unfortunately not much is said these days about the dark sides of the internet, so we very much welcome the making of the film Caught in the Net. It was an honour for us to become general partner of the education campaign for the film. Incidentally, we at Avast have been active in the area of online security for a long time. Our project Be Safe Online, which is focused on children, parents and educators, has been using specific cases and education to raise awareness of online dangers for over two years.”

**Ondřej Vlček**  
CEO of Avast



***General partner of the film and main partner of the campaign***

“Internet security is one of the main priorities of the CZ.NIC association, so an accent on it runs through most of our activities. We operate the [CSIRT.CZ](https://www.csirt.cz) national security team, build infrastructure that meets the highest security standards and also focus on the security of domestic users. It is clear to us that the key to increased internet security is final users behaving in a safe manner. That’s why we emphasise education.

Following our series Getting the Knack of the Internet, our most visible educational project for the general public to date, we are now focusing on the safety of children in the online sphere. We created and run the STOPonline.cz hotline, on which illegal content can be reported as part of the Safely on the Net project, and are building up a network of cooperating institutions focused on the prevention of risky behaviour on the internet.

General partnership of the film CAUGHT IN THE NET is a natural continuation of our activities. Within the linked education campaign our aim is to introduce users to the referred to STOPonline.cz as an appropriate place to report suspicions of child pornography circulation, child abuse and cyber grooming.”

**Ondřej Filip**  
executive director of CZ.NIC



**Česká televize**

*co-producer of film*

“This is an extraordinarily important film that raises the hitherto taboo subject of the abuse of children on the internet. Czech Television just had to be involved with a film that reveals in such a profound and direct way the techniques of manipulation used on young people. Warning against basic social problems is one of the priorities of public service television, which is why we were among the first co-producers to support the film.”

**Jiřina Budíková**  
CT creative producer



*Main partner of campaign*

“Numbers from our research were there at the very beginning of the film CAUGHT IN THE NET. We thank Vít Klusák and Bára Chalupová for breathing life into them and creating a real picture of them. We’re very glad it has gone beyond the film and that the company O2 can join and support the instructional dimension that it acquires thanks to the educational campaign. Teaching children to behave safely on the internet is the chief aim not just of this activity but also of the programme O2 Smart School, which is a proud partner of the campaign.”

**Marie Mališková**  
head of CSR, O2C