

# Johnny Mad Dog



**NO GUNS, NO GLORY**  
Minie psychs up his troops.



**Dir. Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire.**

2008. N/R. 98mins. Christophe Minie, Daisy Victoria Vandy, Dagbeh Tweh.

We meet the rifle-toting title character (Minie), an African child soldier, during a harrowing opening sequence in which he and his barely pubescent troops destroy a small village. They speak in abrasive, heavily accented English and their atrocities are legion: People are gunned down indiscriminately; a boy is forced to kill his father; everything is looted, pillaged and plundered. An hour and half of comparable barbarity follows—all of it monotonous, none of it enlightening.

If director Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire's aim was to replicate the run-and-gun methods of Paul Greengrass and achieve a similar *vérité*-without-*veritas* effect, he's succeeded beyond

measure. The film was shot in Liberia with a nonprofessional cast, many of whom had similar roles in life to what they play here. But the era and specific conflict are never established, and the implied theme—war is eternal, and turns everyone involved into either beasts or prey—is frustratingly simplistic. It's fortune cookie wisdom from the nihilism brigade.

Several memorably surreal images (a male militant wearing a woman's wedding dress; a perpetually squealing pig carried by one of the boys) recall Elem Klimov's masterful *Come and See*, another seventh-circle-of-hell combat film that tested viewers' tolerance for unflinching onscreen violence. But these scant moments of poetry don't make up for the more often blunt and bludgeoning choices. A moratorium, please, on using mournful Nina Simone tracks for sick-soul-of-humanity symbolism. (Opens Fri; Anthology.)—Keith Uhlich