

## Document Citation

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**La Captive du désert**  
**(Prisoner Of The Desert)**  
**(FRENCH)**

*Variety* — 5/9/90

Paris A Pari Film release of a Titane/Double D Copyright coproduction. Executive producers, Pascale Dauman, Jean-Luc Ormière. Producers, Roger Diamantis, Jean-Bernard Feytoux, Jean-Luc Larguier. Written and directed by Raymond Depardon. Camera (color), Depardon; music, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre; sound, Claudine Nougaret, Sophie Chiabaut, Gerard Lamps; assistant director, Patrice Martineau; production manager, Baudoin Capet. Reviewed at Gaumont, Neuilly, April 9, 1990. (In Cannes Film Festival, competing.) Running time: **100 MIN.**

With: Sandrine Bonnaire.

■ **“Prisoner Of The Desert”** is a laconic, hypnotically spare film from French photojournalist/documentary filmmaker Raymond Depardon. Repping France in the Cannes competition, pic walks a fine line between fascination and boredom, and probably will divide audiences into two vocal camps.

“La Captive du désert” records the magnificent and terrifying beauty of the desert as experienced by a young French woman held captive by native rebels. Depardon, who wrote, directed and lensed, based his story on an incident he covered as a reporter in 1975: the capture and detention in Chad, for about 15 months, of a young Gallic researcher by rebel soldiers.

In his second fiction feature endeavor, Depardon isn’t interested in historical or political reconstruction. There is no biographical info provided on the protagonist or exposition on the armed revolt of the indigents who took her hostage.

Depardon plunges us into the world of hostage and captors. The film’s opening sequence is magnificent: against a vast desert landscape a caravan — camels, men, women and children — files before the stationary camera. Just as the shot begins to try our patience, there suddenly appears the figure of a white woman, flanked by two gun-bearing African escorts. The tone and theme are set.

There is no overt drama or suspense — the woman is under no immediate physical threat from her guardians — only the constant image of a young woman, yanked suddenly from her environment and entourage, fighting heat, physical discomfort, exhaustion, loneliness and despair. After months of captivity, during which she unsuccessfully attempts to escape, the rebels decide to free her.

No doubt Sandrine Bonnaire’s performance as the captive will be underrated simply because she submitted to 2½ months of unsimulated rigors in the torrid heat of the Nigerian desert. But she endows

her sketchy characterization with the subtlety and psychological ambiguity that makes this woman’s plight all the more intriguing.

Depardon’s desert imagery is stunning, alluring and repelling. The high quality of sound work by Claudine Nougaret and Sophie Chiabaut is a major contribution to the film’s spell. — *Len.*