

Carice van Houten

Dutch Treat

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Speedway

Carice van Houten is overwhelmed, and, a little bit cold. Doing publicity in Los Angeles to promote her new film, *Black Book*, she has arrived during what appears to be an early dose of L.A.'s infamous 'June Gloom' — something that those coming to Los Angeles and looking forward to California sunny skies usually don't expect. The very well-received *Black Book* is about to hit stateside, and is already a massive hit overseas (the film had the biggest box office ever in her native Holland). Van Houten has literally cancelled all of her other engagements until 2008 in an effort to promote this film, as well as eventually take a much needed breather.

Black Book begins in the final throes of the Second World War in Holland. Rachel Stein (van Houten) is a Jewish singer, about to be reunited with her family. Their reunion is short-lived, however, when a Nazi squadron guns down her entire clan in front of her. After a narrow escape, she joins the Dutch resistance, and working undercover, man-

ages to maneuver her way into the upper echelons of the German SS, as well as the heart of one of its senior officers, General Muntze (real-life boyfriend, Sebastian Koch). Her tenacity and dedication is the epicenter of the film — she is determined to bring down the people who murdered her family, and the many others who also were killed.

Only 29 years old, van Houten has quickly become one of Holland's top actresses; already she has 21 films to her credit, as well as having won the coveted Golden Calf award — the Dutch equivalent of the Oscar — for her portrayal of Rachel. (The film also took the top honors of Best Film and Best Director.)

Black Book also marks the first time in 20 years that director Paul Verhoeven (*Soldier of Orange*, *Basic Instinct*, *Total Recall*) has done a film in his native Holland. For van Houten, working with a legend proved to be a bit unnerving. "I heard so many crazy things about him," says the petite redhead. "I had never met him before. All I had heard about

him [was his] screaming and stuff, but he's a passionate guy. He knows what he wants, and I appreciate that. Every day I thought, 'Oh, maybe today is the day he is going to explode.' But he was so calm." For van Houten, working with the cinematic legend paid off in spades. "You know, he gave me all the support I could ever ask for," she says with a quick laugh, then adds at the last minute, "He was the best personal assistant you could have."

Her Rachel in the action/romance/thriller is undeniably a star-making turn. She is a symphonic amalgamation of Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo — at times cold and calculating, at others coy, vulnerable, broken. "There was so much to play there. It's a really big, big lead — a dream for any actress to play," admits van Houten with a shy smile. "I thought it was such a challenge. I was a woman walking around with a secret, always walking around on eggshells like so many back then, just constantly struggling to go on and survive." ▼