

REVIEW



THE NATURE OF PAIN Michael Haneke's 'Amour' takes viewers to the depths of life, love, loss and genuine intimacy.

Last Cannes Standing

THE FILM snob's favorite time of year is upon us. Here's our second round of recaps from the Cannes Film Festival.

Michael Haneke's aptly titled *Amour* uses a deceptively simple plot to dive headfirst into some of the most basic components of the human experience: love, life and death. Georges (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and Anne (Emmanuelle Riva) are a retired musician couple whose quiet life is disrupted when the latter suffers a stroke. Opening with a stunning shot of a deceased Anne lying in bed, Haneke slowly and deliberately takes us through the gradual decline in her health and the toll it takes on both her and her husband. An intimate character study that is as touching as it is realistic, *Amour* is sure to resonate with anyone who has lost a parent or loved one.

Killing Them Softly, an updated adaptation of the 1974 novel *Cogan's Trade*, serves as a darkly comedic political allegory via the criminal underworld of the American urban landscape. Despite being artfully shot and edited as per director Andrew Dominick's elegantly minimalist style, the story itself is almost too sparse times, often leaving wide gaps that the audience must fill in for themselves. Incorporating sound and video clips from McCain and Obama's 2008 presidential campaigns, Dominick creates stark contrast between the politicians' idealistic words and the dastardly deeds performed by the characters, who are merely pawns in a society driven by self-interested entrepreneurship. "America isn't a country," says Brad Pitt's character, a ruthless mob enforcer, in the film's final moments. "It's a business."

The Taste of Money, Korean director Im Sang-Soo's second feature, is a delightfully campy drama centered on an elite criminal family and their complicated web of deceit and borderline incestuous affairs. Money can't buy happiness, but nevertheless it's fun

to see the characters struggle to attain it. In addition to the melodrama, the film's glossy, chic look also helps distinguish it from the other, less-than-memorable, Korean feature in competition: Hong Sangsoo's *In Another Country*. Starring Isabelle Huppert as a visitor to a quiet beach resort in three parallel vignettes, the charming characters are not enough to disguise a weak premise, which perhaps would have functioned better as a short rather than feature film.

Jeff Nichols' eagerly awaited follow-up to last year's festival circuit hit, *Take Shelter*, foregoes the edginess and unpredictability that landed him on the map for an adventurous coming-of-age story set in the rural South. *Mud* follows a pair of precocious 12-year old boys who discover a tall-tale-telling fugitive taking refuge on a nearby island. Yet it's not long before bounty hunters and state troopers descend upon the town, making the boys question both the values of their community and their new-found friend. Matthew McConaughey stars as the titular character running from the law, opposite Tye Sheridan and Jacob Lofland as the young kids who trust him implicitly. The film functions like a modern retelling of *Huckleberry Finn*, solidifying Nichols' reputation as a masterful storyteller.

Un Certain Regard prize-winner *Después de Lucia* is a dark, haunting tale of a newly widowed father and his teenage daughter who try to move on with their lives after their loss. While at first Alejandra (Tessa la Gonzalez) seems to be adjusting well at her new school, a faux pas at a party cripples her social life as her peers' bullying continues to escalate into appalling cruelty. Gonzalez's performance starts out as sympathetic, but unfortunately never moves beyond passive victim. Regardless, a surprise ending keeps *After Lucia* lingering in the mind long after leaving the theater—*Misa Shikuma*.

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recreation of the Jeff Goldblum/Emma Thompson room-wrecking sex scene in *The Tall Guy*. To enjoy it all, you have to presume 1972 as the most hilarious time ever. Danny Elfman unloads a Dumpster of oldies, primarily sugar-frosted cheese by The Carpenters. A little Alice Cooper helps, but the silent cameo by the real Barnabas, the late Jonathan Frid, says it all: sometimes the disdain's so thick you can't find the words. (RvB)

THE DICTATOR

(R; 120 min.) Admiral-General Aladeen of Wadiya is tossed out by an impersonator, and has to get the help of Zoey, a Brooklyn health-food store owner (the wonderful Anna Faris) to get his throne back. Working with his regular collaborator Larry Charles, Sacha Baron Cohen has, for the first time, a cast of actors instead of candid-camera victims. Much of the comedy is straight-out appalling, always low, sometimes hilarious. Particularly terrific is one scene of an unbilled Kathryn Hahn being aided in childbirth by the dictator. If *The Dictator* seems episodic, that's just because of the way comedy films are made in this decade, with long improvs and subsequent cutting back: a process that's to filmmaking what slash and burn is to agriculture. As a result, the relationships start from scratch a lot; the characters seem to be bumping into one another on the New York streets. The plot owes more to Chaplin's *A King in New York*

than to his *The Great Dictator*, but the film does an homage to the other *Dictator* film's speechifying finale: Cohen's sarcasm against an audience bamboozled by the War on Terror. (RvB)

MEN IN BLACK 3

(PG-13; 106 min.) Now with more xenophobia: Confusing and gross foreign grub is contrasted to the mental-healing power of a slice of American pie. A reference to Twin Peaks, or a symbol of a franchise turning aged and cranky? The hairy one-armed Boris the Animal (*Flight of the Conchords'* Jermaine Clement) breaks out of a top-security jail and heads back in time to settle an old score with Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones). Meanwhile, the never more fey Agent J (Will Smith) time travels to 1969 to head off an alien invasion and meet up with the younger K. (Josh Brolin); there he encounters a bliss-ninny alien (Michael Stuhlbarg, of *A Serious Man*) who can see in the fifth dimension, like one of Vonnegut's Trafalmoreans. The anachronisms stand out and the film is seriously without women, even as eye-candy. There's only so much male bonding a man can stand. And considering the threat of alien invasion, *MIB III* is undervillained. It must be hard work writing professional wrestler/super villain threats. The Animal is left with lines like "Let's agree to disagree!" and "Arrggg!" (RvB)

"I WAS SO RELUCTANT TO LET GO OF THE MOVIE THAT I SAT ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE FINAL CREDITS."

The whole second half of the film is a nonstop smile.

—Stuart Klawans, THE NATION

★★★★★
ONE OF THE MOST MAGICAL FILMS ABOUT CHILDHOOD I HAVE EVER SEEN!
—Elizabeth Weitzman, NY DAILY NEWS

"DELICATE AND OBSERVANT — a lovely and piquant examination of childhood."
—A.O. Scott, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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