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# Cannes 2010 Prizes: Thailand (and Monkey Ghosts) Win Palme d'Or!

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Thailand won its first Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival with critical favorite *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. It was a tie for Best Actor as Javier Bardem (in *Biutiful*) and my personal favorite Elio Germano of *La Nostra Vita* (whose film was dismissed by many critics) were warmly received. Bardem's win may help the \$45 million *Biutiful* get a distributor in the US since they could definitely count on end of the year accolades and Oscar talk for Bardem and the film. His final thank you was to his "amour," Penelope Cruz, who teared up at the mention.

Juliette Binoche was another popular win as she scored Best Actress for her performance in *Copie Conforme*. She began in English so that Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami could understand her when she said, "What a joy...what a joy...what a joy to work with you Abbas," and then paused, overcome with emotion. When she walked onstage, Binoche had detoured to a spot behind the jury and grabbed something. Had she forgotten her purse? No, at the end of her speech she held up a sign with the name of Iranian director Jafar Panahi in big bold letters and spoke out on his behalf. Panahi is under arrest in Iran and in the midst of a hunger strike begun May 16 that might very well take his life.

To learn more about Panahi's plight and to take action, [go to this Amnesty International site](#).

The Runner-Up prize went to *Des Hommes Et Des Dieux/Of Gods And Men*, a French film about the massacre of Cistercian monks in Algeria. Third prize went to the Chad film *A Screaming Man*. And Screenwriting went to the Korean film *Poetry*. Camera d'Or went to *Ano Bisiesto*, a sexually provocative Mexican film that boasted what was easily the most explicit press kit of the fest, featuring as it did a naked woman pleasuring herself. Shut out completely was Mike Leigh's critically acclaimed *Another Year*.

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arguably the best reviewed film in Competition along with Uncle Boonmee and a front-runner for days though many imagined it was too classic and familiar to woo the eccentric Burton.

But the big news was the triumph of a truly avant garde, experimental director like Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

A wave of joy swept through the press as auteur Apichatpong Weerasethakul -- aka Joe as he engagingly encourages people to call him -- received the highest cinematic award, alongside the Oscars. His films *Syndrome and A Century* and *Tropical Malady* both ranked high on many Best of the Decade lists from numerous critics groups, despite mystifyingly obscure plots that would baffle most mainstream audiences. (He was the only director to have two films in the **Top 10 of Film Comment's survey**. *Uncle Boonmee* is positively accessible in comparison, even though it features monkey ghosts and a scene where a catfish performs fellatio on a princess. The pleasure over his win from the press is both an affirmation of their high regard for his talent and an acknowledgment that only at a place like Cannes would a truly original and daring artistry like his get recognition.

Joe was charming in his acceptance speech, evincing that "this is surreal for me," while noting how important this win was for Thailand. "I would like to kiss all of you," he said, speaking to the nine member jury headed by a typically bedraggled Tim Burton. "Especially Mr. Burton. I love your hairstyle." He thanked his parents for taking him to the movies some 30 years ago when he didn't even really understand what a movie was. And in a tip of the hat to the film's theme of reincarnation, he said, "I would like to thank all the spirits and all the ghosts in Thailand. They made it possible for me to be here."

## DAY TWELVE

**UN HOMME QUI CRIE/A SCREAMING MAN** \*\* out of \*\*\*\* -- It's curious. Africa regularly produces brilliant authors, playwrights, artists and of course musicians. But its film industry has been hobbled and never flourished artistically. Perhaps the micro-budget movement will enable an artist to appear. But up til now, African cinema has focused on noble and important issues delivered with stilted acting and rudimentary technical accomplishment. *A Screaming Man* is a step forward, with a solid plot about a man in Chad whose life revolves around his job as a pool attendant. He's called Champ by everyone because he won a major swimming title in his youth, he was the first pool attendant in all of Chad and he's been working at a major hotel for decades. Now his son works alongside him, but new management demotes him to gate attendant and he's devastated. Meanwhile, the country is collapsing as rebels encroach on the government in power. The acting is better than average for the most part and the story holds your interest. It's something to build on but not on a world class level. Yet. But Africa's time will come.

**OUTRAGE** \* out of \*\*\*\* -- Takeshi Kitano hasn't made a true yakuza film in about a decade. I'd love to report that the time away from the genre has refreshed him. Nope. Kitano's new work is as rote as possible. The story is oh so typical: gangsters plotting to take over each other's territory with reprisal following reprisal and broken oaths piling up as fast as the chopped-off fingers delivered as "apologies" for various slights. Not one character becomes of interest as either hero or villain. We simply watch as they betray each other again and again and again. In a way, Kitano is also betraying the genre he once enlivened so well.

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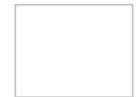
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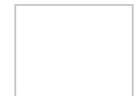
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