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Cannes 2011 Day Six: Malick's Latest Opus, A Dour Dumont and Australia's Most Infamous Serial Killer

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World class directors like Lars Von Trier, Aki Kaurismaki and Pedro Almodovar are still to come. So it doesn't seem quite fair but the most anticipated movie of the Cannes Film Festival finally debuted. Terrence Malick's *The Tree Of Life* provoked at least one singular act: all five of the people in my rental apartment got up and out the door at the same time, which has never happened in the history of my attending the festival. We all bolted out the door at 7:15 and were in line at the Lumiere before 7:30, with only a dozen people in front of us, waiting to be let in a full hour before the movie was set to begin. We wanted to take no chances, get good seats and not face the tension of a crowd surging towards the guards at 8:10 or so. No croissant or coffee

at the corner boulangerie, no trade newspapers from the Majestic Hotel, just a straight line for the cinema.

One tradition of the fest is that someone will shout out "Raul!" right as a screening begins. It began one

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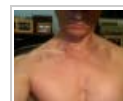
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year when the pickings of the first few days were especially grim and disappointing. Critics faced an overload of movies that should never have been made, much less accepted for screening at Cannes and frankly they were losing heart. As people settled in for a movie directed by Raul Ruiz, someone called out almost plaintively, "Raul!" as in "Raul, *please* save us and deliver a good film!" (I'd like to think the year was 1999 when he delivered *Time Regained* but I can't swear to it.) Waves of laughter greeted this spontaneous prayer and "Raul!" soon became an enduring catchphrase. Annoyed by the hype surrounding Malick (people who merely saw the trailer began insisting *The Tree of Life* would be his masterpiece), my friends had a more belligerent air. Whaddaya got, they were saying. And finally, succinctly, one said quietly to us as the lights went down, "Bring it, b***h!" Well, Malick did.

THE TREE OF LIFE **** out of ****

It's brilliant. Let's get that out of the way. If you like director Terrence Malick, rest assured his new film fits in snugly alongside *Badlands*, *Days Of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World*. It features extensive voice-overs musing on the nature of life, stunning images that convey a wealth of emotion and a surprisingly detailed storyline conveyed almost entirely without conventional narrative. If you're not a fan, this certainly won't win you over. But if you've never seen a Malick film in the movie theater, this look at growing up in Waco, Texas in the 1950s may be the perfect entry point when it opens on May 27. That's not to say the movie isn't polarizing. It looks certain to be the most hotly debated film of the festival. No film buff can afford to miss it, and I can't wait to see it again. [To read the full review, go here.](#)

HORS SATAN/OUTSIDE SATAN ** out of ****

Writer-director Bruno Dumont's latest film is a typically flat, affectless work in which you spend much of the film puzzling out exactly who is who and what is going on. Nonetheless, I found it a tad more plot-driven than most of his films and thus more engaging. Plus, I'm a sucker for itinerant preachers and the like. The Guy (David Dewaele) is certainly saintly, quietly dropping to his knees in prayer at the drop of a hat. He lives outdoors in a rural area of France, depending on The Girl (Alexandra Lamatre) for food and friendship, though he's not one much for talking. When he takes a shotgun and kills her stepfather, we quickly realize she was being sexually molested. Even her mother begs the Guy for forgiveness since she didn't step in and put a stop to it. Things get more puzzling when a local woman begs The Guy to see her catatonic daughter whom the doctors can't help. Turns out he's a Sin Eater of some sort, sucking out the girl's demons and taking the burden upon himself. This almost makes *Hors Satan* an action film by the standard of Dumont's movies. Things get terribly murky in the third act when Dumont loses the thread of his story completely. Everything we think we know about the Guy, the Girl and his special talents is confounded in an uninteresting and messy manner. Still, the two leads are strong, the visuals typically striking and for a while at least the plot was unexpectedly penetrable.

SNOWTOWN ** out of ****

Many people had a problem with the film *Michael*, which meticulously showed a pedophile on his daily routine while a boy is trapped in his basement. What's the point, they said? I felt the aesthetic of the film, the terrific performances and an uneasy fascination with the process -- seeing exactly how this mild-



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mannered creep gets away with it -- kept me engaged. All those people can make the same complaint in spades with this Australian film about the worst serial killer in that country's history. Here's hoping the clearly talented director Justin Kurzel can more fully illuminate whatever story captures his attention next time around. *Snowtown* is grim, grim, grim and easily holds the record for most walkouts at a movie so far this festival. That's what happens when you blithely shoot a dog and soon are torturing, beheading and otherwise killing people. The one sympathetic character in this nightmare is poor Jamie. This kid from a broken home is preyed upon by the pedophile next door who takes nude pictures of him and his brothers, raped by Troy and then has the bad luck to get befriended by John Bunting, a man who seems obsessed with perverts. (Jamie is played by Lucas Pittaway and John by Daniel Henshall -- both are very good and the central real reason to see the film.) John begins by harassing the pedophile until the guy moves away but soon escalates to beheading junkies, torturing and killing others and turning on anyone who might spill the beans. It's a relentlessly dour experience, I must say. The good performances and solid tech work all around can't turn it into an edifying one. What's the point?

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Hors Satan/Outside Satan **
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Michael ***
The Kid With A Bike/Le Gamin Au Velo *** 1/2
La Fee/The Fairy ***
La Fin Du Silence/The End Of Silence **
L'Apollonide/House Of Tolerance * 1/2
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Michel Petrucciani ** 1/2
Midnight In Paris **
Polisse ** 1/2
Restless * 1/2
17 Filles/17 Girls **
Sleeping Beauty * 1/2
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Take Shelter ***
The Tree Of Life ****
We Need To Talk About Kevin ** 1/2
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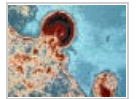
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