



# ADVOCATEinsider

May 22, 2007

## "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly"



Photo: Getty

CANNES -- May 22, early morning

Another fine film at Cannes, which is proving the most consistently solid in memory. This French film is directed by artist Julian Schnabel and is based on the memoirs of the French editor of Elle, Jean-Do, who suffered a massive stroke and could only communicate by blinking one eye. But with that ability he communicated with the world (including his wife and mistress, tres French) and wrote a book, which was published 10 days before he died. The film is funny and warm and inspiring without ever sinking into sentimentality. Schnabel pulls out all the stops here by filming much of the story from Jean-Do's perspective (the moment where his right eye is sewn shut will be hard to forget). You're completely immersed in his experience, with flashbacks and the odd moment stepping away from his point-of-view to avoid it becoming a stunt. And lead actor Mathieu Almaric's performance is clearly a front-runner for Best Actor. Usually, at any film festival, you see so many bad films that you wonder if you'll ever see a good movie again. At Cannes this year, I'm wondering if I'll see anything truly bad. -- Michael Giltz

Posted at 02:40 PM in [Books](#), [Cannes Film Festival](#), [Film](#), [Film](#)

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## Zanzibar Defeats Le Pink

CANNES -- May 21, late night

Lots of filing so I went out with friends for drinks. I've already mentioned the brewing battle between Zanzibar (longtime gay watering hole) and upstart Le Pink, with its Euro-trashy white stools but wonderfully gay name. Well, the battle is over. Tonight, the crowd at Zanzibar is tightly packed and flowing into the street. Three doors down at Le Pink? A bored doorman stands around checking out girls while a lone couple sit at a table in the front area. It's nice to know people don't always flee an old friend for a pretty new face.

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## "Oceans 13"



Photo: Getty

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CANNES -- May 21, early evening

At 6 p.m., I saw an Ocean's 13 screening. The cast is swooping in on the festival, with Clooney hosting a Darfur benefit Tuesday night and the official premiere Thursday, but they're doing very little press. Hence, I was only one of three Americans at this sneak peek. (They are doing international press, mostly TV.)

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**"The Golden Compass" Roundtables**

CANNES -- May 21, afternoon

I told you the day was filled with The Golden Compass. More awkward answers from all involved whenever religion is mentioned. Everyone but Eva Green, who cheerfully says she wasn't raised "anything" and pauses when asked one of these religious angle questions and says sweetly, "How the f--- do I answer this question?" I think I like her. Craggy Sam Elliot proved amusingly out of touch when his co-star Eva Green answered a query in French during the press conference. He was absolutely amazed, when of course he shouldn't be: she's French.

But what really struck me at this event were the vile journalists. Every roundtable usually includes a few obnoxious people who try and steamroll over everyone else and ask all the questions. But my table had three of them all sitting together. I was next to a poor Japanese girl and a guy from Turkey who are desperately trying to ask their one question in a second language and these people just blithely ignore them and keep on pounding away with their fourth or fifth query. Thoughtful stars will sometimes enlist questions from everyone by looking around but quite naturally they stick with the people who are speaking the loudest. Jeffrey Katzenberg was the best: he announced he would take one question from each person left to right and did so, ending all the shouting and jostling and petty behavior. I really found these people vile. I'd like to see them in Japan trying to get in a word edgewise and how they'd feel if others elbowed them out of the way.

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**"The Golden Compass" Press Conference**



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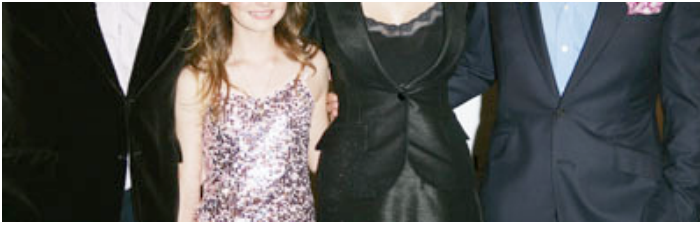


Photo: Getty

CANNES -- May 21, afternoon

Now an afternoon devoted to *The Golden Compass*. I'm really excited about the film (which is due out at the end of the year) because the books are among my favorites and the look and casting of this movie is very encouraging. It looks like they got everything right.

The press conference was in a very large room and there was a bank of TV cameras along the back. Still, I was a little surprised it wasn't jammed and wall to wall. Plus, I know they've been offering invites to their party tonight to people that didn't request it, even though they were previously treating it like gold. Suddenly, they're realizing that these books by Philip Pullman - which have sold an exceptional 14 million around the world and continue to do very well today) -- don't have one-tenth the name recognition of *The Lord of the Rings*, which is one of the best-selling works of the 20th Century.

Every time someone finds out I know the books well, they pepper me with questions. None of this matters for the movie: it's a fantasy with a little girl and a quest and Daniel Craig, Eva Green and Nicole Kidman star. That's all people need to know and the trailer will get that across. Anyone who liked *Narnia* should like this better. But the people behind it are also defensive about the fact that the books are deeply and irrefutably anti-organized religion. They get very touchy and give short, abrupt answers when the British journalists (where the books are the most popular) try to bring that issue up. It's really not a big deal for the first film, because the really controversial stuff doesn't arise till book two and really book three. But they should be better prepared to deal with these questions honestly and without embarrassment. -- Michael Giltz

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May 21, 2007

### **Sneak Peek At Monday**

I've got the new Gus Van Sant film *Paranoid Park* in the morning, followed immediately by Angelina Jolie's *A Mighty Heart*, then a press conference and round table for *The Golden Compass*, a screening of *Ocean's 13* and some stories to file for other publications.

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## Stink! Death!



Photo: Getty

CANNES -- May 20, late evening

My final movie for the day is *Import Export*, a film set in th Ukraine and Austria. Bleak and black humored, this film follows the falling trajectories of two people: a young woman in the Ukraine who goes from nurse to sex worker to floor sweeper to live-in au pair, as well as from the Ukraine to Austria; and a young man who goes from security guard to petty thief to deliveryman, as well as from Austria to Ukraine. Their paths never cross and the worlds they live in -- especially the woman's hospital -- are shockingly sad. It has some powerful scenes -- such as one where the nurse sings a lullaby to the baby she had to leave at home with her mother and another where she mourns the death of a friendly patient. But there are too many diffuse storylines that never quite gel to convince us they belonged together. But boy, when a film ends with an elderly female patient crying out in the middle of the night, "Stink! Death!" you know you're in a cineaste's paradise. It may not have been that good, but by God it tried. Even the bad movies inspire polite indifference to me because none of them are made in order to conquer the box office or appeal to the lowest common denominator. It's just stat sometimes the films don't work. That's all. -- Michael Giltz

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## The Cinema Is Lies!

CANNES -- May 20, evening

After the Golden Compass event, I rushed over to the Hilton to try and catch the Director's Fortnight screening of *Caramel*, which I

believe has at least a minor subplot involving lesbianism. It screened this morning, but it began at the same time as XXY, which was also of interest to queer readers. Now XXY was playing at the third tier "Critics Week" event, which ranks below the Competition, Out of Competition, Un Certain Regard and Directors Fortnight as far as attention paid and so on. But the producers of XXY did send out a nice color brochure about the film, something most movies at that level couldn't afford. So clearly they were making a statement.

Caramel had similar support, as well as a billboard or two. Both were directed by women but because of the subject matter I knew XXY would be dominated by a queer storyline while Caramel's ref in its brochure to women of various orientations was pretty vague and might not amount to much. So I chose XXY and was rewarded with a terrific film. (See below.) But I didn't want to miss Caramel either. Unfortunately the line was way too long and I was shut out. (I'm stuck with a lowly yellow badge but even a pink badge probably would have been fruitless.)

Still, the trip wasn't a waste. While people with tickets were still walking in, a college age French woman in a sexy dress and sporting some lovely cleavage (you really can't avoid discussing these sorts of things at Cannes) walked up and down the line with two hand-made signs. In French, one said "Theater = Truth" and the other "Cinema = Lies." And she was good-naturedly screaming at the people not to go in with an endless tirade about the joys of live theater and how tiny the movies one. One heavy-set older gentleman (my God, someone might describe me that way, though this man was older and fatter than me) stepped toward the girl and asked her to repeat her tirade "en anglais") which she did in stumbling English, but I think he just wanted to stare at her cleavage. She was great fun, even spitting -- SPITTING -- on the ground at the mere mention of film. Gotta love Cannes. -- Michael Giltz

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## "The Golden Compass" Screening

Finally, one of my most anticipated events of the festival arrives: the screening of footage from the holiday release The Golden Compass. This film is based on the first book in a trilogy by Philip Pullman. The over-arching title is His Dark Materials, it's a reworking of Milton's Paradise Lost, and the series (completed only in 2000) has already sold 14 million copies around the world. It will take its place alongside The Lord of the Rings and the Narnia books as a landmark of fantasy. (Pullman has no patience for them.) It's also extremely provocative in tackling organized religion and reclaiming sex as something beautiful and good, especially when you get to the third book. But the first book is deceptively simple and straightforward and overall you are drawn in by the imagination, the wonder and the

marvelous characters.

Pullman is a big fan of storytelling, something he thinks has been lost in mainstream fiction. As you can gather, I'm a big fan of the books. I've written about them a number of times and interviewed Pullman on the phone and at his former home in Oxford. So I was probably more prepared than anyone else in that room and I found the footage -- basically a ten minute trailer -- very promising. Everyone seems to embody their characters, especially Nicole Kidman as Marisa Coulter (Pullman always had her in mind if a film were to be made) and the newcomer Dakota Blue as Lyra. She must carry the film and this 12 year old girl looks capable of it. The sweep was exciting, the armored bear (a central character) wholly convincing, the witch (Eva Green) compelling-- really I had nothing to complain about.

I am looking forward to this film very, very much. And since The Golden Compass doesn't venture into heretical territory (believe me, parts two and three do), they can be very faithful to the books without offending anyone. (And by anyone, I mean the vast majority of people, not the fringe folk who condemn Harry Potter and The Wizard of Oz and anything else they disapprove of.) Good fun, though I wish they'd given us a scene to sink our teeth into. Instead it really was along trailer of highlights that probably made more sense to me than most others.

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## Bill Maher Takes On God

One of the most intriguing projects that surfaced at Cannes is untitled Larry Charles Project. Charles of course was a major force on Seinfeld and directed the Sacha Baron Cohen smash hit Borat. His new film tackles God and may make Borat look like a Valentine. They screened 10 minutes of footage for the film, which is narrated by ardent anti-organized religion comic Bill Maher, who loves skewering faith on his show Real Time With Bill Maher. Like Borat, it blends comedy and docu-style footage, though it's unclear whether the two are blurred as they are in Borat. In any case, it's been sold in many countries (though not the US) but the names of the buyers have been kept secret because of it's controversial nature. It sounds like Christopher Hitchens has already found his favorite film of 2008. -- Michael Giltz

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