

# ‘Loving Pablo:’ A tragic love story fueled by drug money



CHENNAI: Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem have been paired together onscreen for years now — from 1992’s “Jamón Jamón” to Woody Allen’s 2008 comedy-drama “Vicky Cristina Barcelona” and most recently in Asghar Farhadi’s Cannes opening, “Everybody Knows” — and their chemistry has not subsided.

Set to hit UAE theaters on June 28 after it premiered at the 74th Venice Film Festival in September, director Fernando León de Aranoa’s “Loving Pablo” is all fire and fury as it follows the story of not just the drug racket in Colombia, but also the burning, passionate relationship between the country’s cocaine lord, Pablo Escobar (Bardem), and his television journalist lover, Virginia Vallejo (Cruz). She finds herself attracted to him after an interview session and he plays the perfect gentlemanly lover, even as he floods the American market with cocaine. The film reveals the Jekyll and Hyde

personas of Escobar — he teaches his young son never to touch the drug he has made millions peddling, but becomes ruthless when Vallejo grows desperate in her love and demands more from him.

Inspired by the book “Loving Pablo, Hating Escobar,” in which Vallejo details her intimate years with Escobar between 1983 and 1987, the film explores the seedy world of the drug baron.

It is somewhat of a biopic and traces his life from humble beginnings to his position as a Colombian kingpin, and eventually to his downfall. However, even while detailing the somber story of a tragically hopeless romance, the director managed to lighten the narrative with, among other devices, a scene where the pot-bellied Escobar runs stark naked through the jungles of South America, a rifle in hand and his bare bottom bouncing in the breeze.

Though the movie has been told from Vallejo's perspective, Escobar remains paramount to the plot. Even so, what remains etched in the viewer's memory is her life, which swings like a wild pendulum from pleasure to pain, from ecstasy to anguish.

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