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Cannes Film Festival Begins With Witty French Zombie Film 'Final Cut,' Ukraine Prez Zelensky's Emotional Address



At the opening night of the 75th Cannes Film Festival, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appeared via video to address the Palais audience live from Kyiv.

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LAST UPDATED: MAY 18, 2022, 10:46 IST

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Jury members of the 75th Cannes Film Festival on the red carpet, (Reuters images)

The 75th Cannes Film Festival kicked off on Tuesday in style and humour with the French Zombie movie, Final Cut, directed by Michel Hazanavicius, who had earlier given us the brilliant The Artist that won multiple Oscars. Starring Romain Duris and Berenice Bejo (who was part of The Artist), Final Cut, which is a loose remake of the Japanese horror-comedy, One Cut of the Dead, evoked continuous laughs in the 2000-strong Grand Theatre Lumiere.

A film within a film, Final Cut opens with a 30-minute sequence in which a zombie movie shoot turns deadly. The work then takes us back to a month earlier when a second-rate French director, Rémi Bouillon (Duris), is approached by a Japanese producer (Yoshiko Takehara) to helm a horror flick in one uninterrupted take.

But what did not quite seem like a joke was the maskless audience – who despite a strong recommendation to keep their masks on, given the rising Covid numbers in some parts of the world, just did not adhere to that.

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The highlight of the inaugural ceremony was a video message from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky who reminded viewers that there was war and immense suffering. "I'm sure that the dictator will lose," Zelensky said, in a pointed reference to Vladimir Putin. "We will win this war," he added. "Glory to Ukraine."

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Later, Cannes handed out its honorary Palme d'Or to Forest Whitaker. He had once won the Best Actor award at Cannes for his performance in Clint Eastwood's Bird. "It's a great honour to be with you today as we gather to celebrate the power of artists," Whitaker said, calling them "the world's torchbearers, who tell the story of mankind...For years, we'll be processing the trauma of what happened to us and making sense of it all through the magic of dreams and imagination."

There was magic all right on the red carpet just before the night opened. One could spot several Indian stars among the contingent that walked up the steps. Apart from Deepika Padukone in a shimmering gold and black saree, who is part of the main jury, we saw actors R Madhavan, whose directorial debut Rocketry will be screened at Marche du Film or Market, and Nawazuddin Siddiqui. Other Indian celebrities who walked the red carpet were Urvashi Rautela, Tamannaah Bhatia, and Kamal Haasan.

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But French stars were in overwhelming numbers making us wonder whether Cannes had turned into some kind of a local event. Even the interviewers seemed focussed on French celebrities.

Final Cut actors Duris and Bejo, as well as jury president Vincent Lindon — a veteran French actor who recently starred in Julia Ducournau's Palme d'Or winning 'Titane' — got a lot of attention and screen time on the red carpet. Others apart from Padukone in the nine-member jury — Asghar Farhadi (A Hero), Joachim Trier (The Worst Person in the World), British actor-turned-director Rebecca Hall (Passing), American director Jeff Nichols ("Take Shelter") and Swedish actor Noomi Rapace (Lamb) also walked the red carpet, not to forget the A-list Oscar-winner Julianne Moore, Eva Longoria and No Time to Die star Lashana Lynch — were also spotted.

Earlier on Tuesday, the highlight of the traditional jury conference was an explanatory speech by Farhadi. In the face of a plagiarism charge against his A Hero, which won the Grand Prix at Cannes, he said he was innocent. "I need to rectify this situation in the light of the correct information".

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Iranian moviemaker Azadeh Masihzadeh has slapped a legal case against Farhadi over the film, alleging plagiarism of her documentary, All Winners, All Losers, after she had attended a workshop he conducted in Tehran. In March, an Iranian judicial investigator found that Masihzadeh could proceed with her legal action.

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Farhadi explained: "All Winners, All Losers was something I saw at a workshop; I talked about it with the student, but much later on I created A Hero. That cannot be viewed as a way of plagiarising; in fact, what is in A Hero is something quite different."

He added: "When an event takes place and is covered by the press, then it becomes public knowledge and you can do what you like with the event. You can write a story or make a movie about the same event without one

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being a copy of the other."

A Hero is the story of Mohammad Reza Shokri, a man who returns a bag of cash he found while on leave from a debtors' prison.

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FIRST PUBLISHED: MAY 18, 2022, 10:43 IST

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