

THE TOTAL FILM HOME ENTERTAINMENT BIBLE

LOUNGE

JULY 2006

ESSENTIAL ★★★★★ ACE ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★ BARGAIN BIN ★★ COASTER ★

EDITED BY ANDY LOWE & JONATHAN DEAN

THIS MONTH

LOUNGE NEW STARTS HERE

Aeon Flux
Breakfast On Pluto
Brokeback Mountain
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Lower City
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Big Hitters

Spielberg and Bana tackle terror...

MUNICH 15

Out 12 June (£19.99)

Film ★★★★★ Extras ★



Spielberg was never going to win with *Munich*. From one side he was ripe for a hammering, as Hollywood's highest-profile flag-flyer for Jewish causes, for favouring the Israeli view – that their response to the 1972 Munich Olympic massacre was a reasonable quid pro quo to a barbaric act. From the other, pro-Israel hardliners were always going to splash bile on him for paying a nanosecond of lip service to the Palestinian struggle – see the scene in an Athens stairwell between Eric Bana's Mossad agent, Avner, and an Arab terrorist, one of *Munich*'s frequent "big-theme" conversations.

He knew what he was letting himself in for, and to emerge with a tense, vigorous, thought-

sparking thriller that applies the spare efficiency of great Hollywood storytelling to the prosaic, ethical examinations favoured by master political filmmakers like Costa-Gavras, just goes to show what a genius the man is (and, no, you're not reading that other magazine – *Total Spielberg*).

Some (including author George Jonas, whose book *Vengeance* is *Munich*'s wellspring) slammed Spielberg for moral posturing, for letting the gunslinger blow everyone away, and then having a guilt trip about it. But if ever there was a loaded moral dilemma, this is it, and *Munich* is Spielberg's Long Film About Killing: how does it feel to point the gun at your enemy, squeeze the trigger and watch as he staggers, spurts blood and falls down dead. In *Munich*, it ends up feeling like despair rather than elation.

At the start Spielberg gives himself a get-out clause, adding the disclaimer "inspired by real events". But the 1972 Olympic atrocity is forensically recreated (aided by its status as live, prime-time horror), as Palestinian >>

<< terrorists, operating under the banner Black September, clumsily execute a plot to ransom the Israeli Olympic team in exchange for Arab prisoners. When all nine hostages die in an airport fire, an "unofficial" Mossad hit squad is dispatched to Europe to hunt down the masterminds...

That's Spielberg's launch pad and he deploys his peerless talents, Janusz Kaminski's austere cinematography, and Bana's tormented central performance to guide us on a haunted and haunting journey. There's revulsion at the heinous athlete slaughter, a bloodthirsty, "Kill them!" craving for revenge and a slow-burn unease at, first, the true guilt of the intellectuals on Israel's hit list ("They must die for Israel to live," declares Geoffrey Rush's unbending intelligence officer) and, later, what this undercover mission is achieving (Tony Kushner and Eric Roth's script pointedly referring to the terrorists' brutal response to the vengeance).

As the five Jewish assassins – including Daniel Craig's gung-ho South African, Mathieu Kassovitz's frail Belgian bombmaker and Ciarán Hinds' nervous clean-up man – go about the business of killing, in Paris, London and Beirut, Spielberg chips away at our confidence. They make mistakes: aborting a mission when a little girl picks up an explosives-packed telephone. We see the gory aftermath of their handiwork (body parts hanging from ceiling fans). They become anguished and argumentative, defying their orders in a horrific, hollow reprisal killing of a Dutch femme fatale who has taken out one of their own.

Buffeted about this revenger's tragedy is Avner, who morphs from a cocky idealist to a depleted

'It simmers with action, suspense and violence'

shadow, disoriented by the notion that performing heroically for his country can feel so dehumanising. His conflicted disintegration is *Munich's* own crumbling soul. Bana is riveting, his bold, humane, absolute commitment to the character sparing Spielberg's blushes when the director occasionally fumbles in the dark. Towards the end, Spielberg does indeed "jump the shark" (recalling *Schindler's List's* cringe "This ring!" speech) when he cross-cuts between Avner's grim flashbacks to the *Munich* slayings while he's robotically fucking his wife, climaxing in a love it/cringe-at-it primal scream.

But, hey, it wouldn't be a Spielberg film if he didn't splice in at least one awkward moment. And the rest of this brainy, accomplished thriller, which simmers with action, suspense and intrigue, makes it a potent and worthy addition to the director's canon – even if the Academy only grudgingly granted it five nominations (awards tally: 0) while criminally ignoring Bana.

Depressingly, once again, Region 2 gets the vanilla, single-disc treatment. While the Region 1 (two-disc) version is awash with juicy featurettes, we get an 8-minute intro from The Beard and a brief Making Of, featuring interviews with all the main players. Both are decent, but why hold the full package back from Europe? Do they think we smell or something?

By declining to offer pat answers to a hopeless situation that's only got worse since its '70s setting, *Munich* argues for peace while not denying that, sometimes, you need to use force against your foes. As George Jonas himself has said, "For not solving the problems of the Middle East, Spielberg should get a Nobel Peace Prize, like everyone else."

Matt Mueller



'I felt embarrassingly indulged by Spielberg...'

In an exclusive new interview, Lounge talks to *Munich's* hit-squad honcho **Eric Bana**...

How did you and Spielberg prepare?

We were in each other's pockets the whole time. There was a stack of research, but that was really just the tip of the iceberg. The character was my responsibility, but Steven and I had tons of conversations. Any time I was in LA, we would talk over the phone – about the character, where the script was heading and how the changes might affect Avner. It was a constant dialogue. By the time we came to shoot, it felt that we were both on the same page. It's strange how completely in sync we were. I don't remember any disagreements.

It was a short shoot – around three months. Given the emotional collapse your character has to go through, that must have been pretty draining...

Definitely. But if the film had taken, say, five months to make, it would have been even tougher. The pace we hit on day one was the pace we kept up with every day. The sheer energy Steven was attacking the project with... I love that. It forces you to keep up. The adrenaline really helps keep you moving.

Did you both talk about the potential controversy you were walking into?

Strange, but we didn't really discuss it in those terms. We were probably a bit naive – blissfully choosing not to acknowledge the shit-storm the film would cause. If I'd let it get too deep into my thinking while we were shooting, I would have gone insane. Steven and I kept our focus on the characters, the story, what we were doing that day... We were in denial.

Were you aware of how your source material [the book, *Vengeance*, by George Jonas] had been discredited?

It never has. People have tried, but never really succeeded. The account of events has never been factually discredited. The problem with a story like this is that everyone has their own agenda based on which side of the fence they're on and which department they work for. Steven and I thought we could just ignore it all, but then, at the press junket, it was thrown right back at us.



That's got to be strange – fielding questions about your own personal views on the story...
It was one of the toughest things I've done in my life. The film was a breeze compared to going out and talking about it. People make the mistake of assuming you're a politician because you choose roles like this. But it *has* hardened me, made me a different person.

Was it a tough role to shake off?
I didn't want to shake him off. I enjoyed playing him. It wasn't like I felt I had to dispose of him at the end. When you have a good experience with a character, he does kind of hang around. He's gone now, though...

How was Spielberg as a director?
Terrific. He was always crystal clear about what he wanted, but without being closed to ideas and experiments. I don't know any other director who could

achieve that kind of balance, while retaining the vision about what the scene is about. He never puts you in a box and makes you feel like there's only one way to get out. I felt... embarrassingly indulged by him.

He wanted you after seeing *Hulk*, didn't he? Not too many parallels between the two characters...
[Laughs] Steven said he loved my performance in *Hulk* for the way I completely surrendered to the genre, without any irony. It's easy to be too self-conscious, these days. I'd rather say, "You know what? I'm just going to bloody well go with it!" I try to keep trust in the director and let everything else fall where it falls.

How did you get on with Daniel Craig? You were linked with the Bond role a couple of years ago. D'ya reckon he's the man for the job?

I was linked by the *media*, yeah! I loved working with Daniel and I think he'll do an awesome job. I got in his ear about it when we were shooting, because he was trying to decide whether to do it or not. There was plenty of typically Aussie-Brit banter. We hung shit on each other all the way through the shoot. I can't wait to see the film so I can get some more ammunition.

Are you consciously trying to move away from action, towards roles with a bit more substance?
I've only done one action film, *Troy*. I really don't fancy doing a Tom Cruise and being the hero of a big blockbuster movie. The character comes first and if the character has to do a shit-load of physical stuff, then fine. But I just don't see myself as an action hero. I like characters who are surrounded by real drama.

Andy Lowe



ERIC ON MUNICH

Bana's take on the key scenes. Spoilers ahead...

UNSAFE HOUSE



In a double-booked hideout, Avner has a cagey conversation with a radical young Arab ("We can make the whole planet unsafe for Jews...").

"If you were to reduce the film down to a single scene, this would be it. I could sense that I was channelling Steven's views on the futility of it all. It was very nerve-wracking. I was pretty nauseous on the day. It was also quite an acting job: an Israeli Jew pretending to be a German talking to a Palestinian while trying to disguise the fact that he's Red Army Faction, not Mossad. And at the same time, I had to give the audience something. I couldn't play it too cool. You had to see that he was pissed off, but was holding it in out of fear of blowing his cover."

BAD BLOOD



When a female agent murders one of Avner's crew, they briefly abandon their mission to take private – and shocking – revenge.

"We shot a much worse version to the one that made it into the film – a lot longer and harder to watch. It wasn't a pretty day. I guess it's more about their mental state than anything else. They just hated the bitch for killing their partner. There's a lot of talk about this scene being the source of Avner's guilt, but, after the first killing, he becomes a machine, and only at the end does he question the morality of what he's done."

SEX AND VIOLENCE



A post-mission Avner makes love to his wife. Spielberg intercuts with the terrorists machine-gunning the tied-up athletes.

"We didn't worry about pushing the boundaries of taste, or whatever. I really trusted Steven because he made it clear to me and Ayelet Zurer where the scene was coming from. To me, it's all about a husband and wife – how Avner has been to Hell and back and can't shake it off. He's trying to blank out an intense emotional memory with something even more intense – his feelings for his wife. The most important moment is that completely non-judgemental look of understanding on her face at the end."

THE FINAL SHOT



Avner walks away from a meeting in New York, sometime in the mid-'70s. The credits roll over a still cityscape – with the World Trade Center in the distance.

"The shot was planned very early on. It was right there in the script. Weirdly, it was less poignant reading it than it was seeing it. The visual was far stronger, because it's easier to relate to Avner's psychological journey as seen through our own eyes – particularly with what the image of the World Trade Center means for us, today. *Munich* tells a story of events that happened in 1972, but the final shot makes it clear it's also firmly about where we are in 2006."