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Cannes 2012: Killing them Softly

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The Cannes Film Festival's Competition has its heavy favourite for the Palme d'Or in Michael Haneke's *Amour* (Love), writes *Matt Mueller*, but each new day brings a wave of heavy-hitters seeking to mount their own challenge.

Best of the recents has been *Killing them Softly*, Andrew Dominik's reunion with Brad Pitt following the arty, elegiac *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. A more commercial collaboration than their first, this comic crime-thriller, shot with a down and dirty palette, is a blistering treat, a slick, smartly-scripted adaptation of the 1974 novel Cogan's Trade that pitches mob syndicates in the mould of America's cutthroat, bottom-line-obsessed boardrooms.

It starts with a pair of bottom-feeding dunces (Animal Kingdom's Ben Mendelsohn and Monster's Scoot McNairy, both excellent) knocking off a mob-controlled poker game, and Pitt's enforcer Jackie Cogan being called in to find them and kill them (softly or otherwise). Plenty of nasty violence along the way, but it's the series of stimulating dialogue encounters that take this beyond your average criminal encounter. Much of it bears a Tarantino-esque mark, including Cogan's regular updates to middle-management mob-man Richard Jenkins and his awkward heart-to-hearts with James Gandolfini's repugnant add-on hitman. And, set in 2008 New Orleans, the background noise is supplied by Obama's Presidential campaign rhetoric, so hopeful at the time, so hollow in hindsight.

The film's attempts to tie itself to the decline of capitalism might be a bit strained, but overall Dominik's served up a mesmeric result and Pitt continues the rich vein of form he's been ploughing in recent years...

Kylie Minogue sings a ballad, Eva Mendes gets snatched by a leprechaun-troll and taken to his underground lair, and limousines banter together after a long hard day on the Parisian boulevards in Leos Carax's magnificently bonkers *Holy Motors*. Following Denis Lavant (who resembles Mickey Rourke's unwell cousin) as he's ferried around Paris on a series of bizarre

assignments that involve him adopting different disguises, from a begging gypsy woman to a hitman hired to kill someone who turns out to be himself, Carax's fevered vision seems to be some kind of comment on acting and the nature of performance.

Or it could just be the results of a bad drug trip – we're none the wiser, really. The press screening received an overtly enthusiastic reception from critics and while it's hard to imagine the jury going for it in a big way, stranger things have happened – although nothing, frankly, will out-strange Holy Motors at Cannes this year.