

Losing Money to Become a Tycoon: Starting with Games

Chapter 529: Why Didn't It Win the Palme d'Or?

A quick browse through the major online forums—especially those that had once been the main battlegrounds between the movie's fans and detractors—revealed what could only be described as a field littered with corpses.

And these "corpses" weren't casualties from any recent battle.

They had all been dug up from their graves.

"Didn't people say this movie appealed neither to Chinese audiences nor to foreigners? Got it. So Cannes must not be run by foreigners."

"The haters have officially stripped Cannes of its foreign citizenship. I suggest our country take in the homeless Cannes, relocate it to Jingzhou, and rename it the Tengda Film Festival."

"'Tengda Film Festival'? Are you implying that Tengda Group is rich enough to bribe the jury? Congratulations—you've uncovered the truth! (*doge emoji*)"

"This movie really did become popular thanks to marketing. Poor overseas box office? Just go win an award at Cannes. Marketing confirmed! (*doge emoji*)"

"Looks like A Better Tomorrow really did get lucky with its release window. If it'd opened during an even better season, it probably would've stripped every competing blockbuster down to its underwear."

"Big-budget films that *didn't* have to compete with A Better Tomorrow must be dropping to their knees in gratitude right now. The more they think about it, the scarier it gets."

"Can you tell that joke again?"

"Which one?"

"The one about foreign blockbusters."

"Journey of the Flying Star! A real foreign blockbuster has arrived!"

"Hahahahaha!"

"I heard foreign audiences weren't buying this kind of movie. Yet today overseas theaters not only extended A Better Tomorrow's theatrical run, but also increased the number of screenings. Once again, we'd like to remind all foreigners: Watching this film carries the risk of having your nationality revoked. Please view responsibly."

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Comments like these were everywhere.

People dug up all the old posts and comments from the movie's critics and mocked them over and over again.

Many of the haters had been beaten down so thoroughly that they'd lost all will to fight.

Some deleted their comments.

Others disabled replies.

Most simply pretended to be dead.

There was no helping it.

Results were the most devastating slap in the face.

Previously, the critics had relentlessly seized upon A Better Tomorrow's poor overseas box office as irrefutable proof that only Chinese audiences liked the film while foreign audiences didn't.

But the Cannes award carried simply too much prestige.

It completely turned the situation around.

Every previous argument collapsed overnight.

Pei Qian leaned back in his executive chair, speechless.

It wasn't that he wanted to read any of this.

He simply couldn't avoid it.

The entire internet was talking about it.

Even if he just wanted to scroll through Weibo to look at pretty girls, he'd still run into discussions about A Better Tomorrow.

It was an unavoidable, 360-degree bombardment.

Screenshots of the haters' old posts had been plastered everywhere, with everyone repeatedly "whipping the corpses"—continuing to mock people long after they'd already lost.

It was enough to make anyone who saw it feel sorry for them.

Silently, Pei Qian observed a moment of mourning for those brave souls.

You've all suffered...

I promise I'll clear your names with my next movie!

Please... trust me one more time!

After browsing a few of the hottest discussion threads, Pei Qian thought to himself:

Surely this whole A Better Tomorrow affair would finally die down now?

The popularity had lasted far too long.

He had never imagined a movie could have such incredible staying power.

It had premiered back in February, yet discussion online had continued almost nonstop ever since.

Worst of all, every fresh wave of internet attention translated directly into more purchases and more streams for A Better Tomorrow on Aili Island.

Pei Qian simply couldn't understand it.

Where were all these new viewers still coming from?

It reminded him of that famous internet meme:

"Who on earth still hasn't bought GTA V?"

Still...

At least the nightmare was almost over.

By now, every possible nightmare had already happened.

The movie had even won an award at an international film festival.

Surely things would calm down after this?

People had already exhausted every conceivable angle for praising it.

Wasn't it finally time to close the book and let the film rest in peace?

Pei Qian decided to stop paying attention and simply wait for the hype to fade naturally.

Just as he was about to close the webpage, however, his eyes happened to catch the title of another post.

"Why Did A Better Tomorrow Win the Grand Prix?"

Pei Qian couldn't help sighing.

Another one?

Just another article finding yet another angle to shower the movie with praise.

He had seen far too many of these already.

Ever since A Better Tomorrow had won the Grand Prix, countless media outlets chasing traffic had published nearly identical articles.

They all followed the same formula:

First, explain how prestigious Cannes and the Grand Prix were.

Then, review the last time a Chinese film had won the award.

Finally, analyze why A Better Tomorrow had appealed to the Cannes jury, naturally segueing into another discussion of the film's artistic merit and profound themes.

Pei Qian had already read enough articles like that.

He had absolutely no interest in reading another one.

However, the popularity of this particular post seemed unusually high.

Pei Qian hesitated for a moment before clicking on it.

Yet after reading only the very first sentence, he nearly blacked out.

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"When you saw this title, did you think I was going to explain why A Better Tomorrow won an award?"

Wrong!

What I want to ask is this: Why did A Better Tomorrow win the Grand Prix instead of the Palme d'Or?

"Everyone knows that this year's Cannes Film Festival awarded the Grand Prix to A Better Tomorrow, while the Palme d'Or went to Journey of the Soul, a Southeast Asian film."

"Most people have been so excited that A Better Tomorrow won the Grand Prix that they never stopped to ask a more important question:

Why didn't it win the Palme d'Or?"

"In fact, a comparison between the two films reveals many similarities."

"Journey of the Soul tells the story of a poor farmer who, after being diagnosed with a terminal illness, begins seeing the spirits of his deceased family members. Guided by those spirits, he eventually discovers the story of his previous life."

"The film uses entirely non-professional actors. Most of the dialogue was improvised, and the cinematography relies heavily on long, uninterrupted takes with very little editing."

"Although Journey of the Soul showcases an exotic cultural landscape and incorporates supernatural elements—qualities that seem to align well with Cannes' artistic preferences—I have to admit that, compared with A Better Tomorrow, it doesn't possess a clearly superior level of artistry or thematic depth."

"On the contrary, A Better Tomorrow explores issues such as the widening gap between rich and poor, the corrupting influence of money, capital's manipulation of technology to control people's lives, and the fear of human beings being reduced to mere data."

"Compared to the theme of 'the soul,' these subjects obviously resonate with a much broader audience and carry even greater philosophical depth."

"Many people in China simply aren't familiar with Cannes, so they instinctively assume that Chinese films naturally don't suit the tastes of the jury, and therefore it's perfectly normal that A Better Tomorrow didn't win the Palme d'Or."

"That is a complete misunderstanding."

"In my opinion, compared with Journey of the Soul, the jury also held A Better Tomorrow in extremely high regard."

"According to unofficial reports, the Palme d'Or was ultimately decided only after three rounds of voting."

"In other words, while the awards ceremony appeared straightforward on the surface, many twists and turns likely occurred behind closed doors."

"Considering that A Better Tomorrow had already won the Grand Prix—effectively making it the runner-up of the main competition—it almost certainly remained in contention throughout those three rounds of voting."

"Which brings us back to my original question:

Why didn't A Better Tomorrow win the Palme d'Or?"

"If you accept the reasoning above, then keep reading."

"In my view, there are two important reasons why A Better Tomorrow ultimately lost the Palme d'Or to Journey of the Soul by the narrowest of margins."

"The first involves an unwritten rule shared by virtually every major international film festival."

"As everyone knows, these festivals compete fiercely to attract the world's best films and maintain the prestige of their awards."

"For that reason, they naturally favor films that choose to hold their world premiere at the festival itself."

"Movies that have already won awards elsewhere, or have already achieved widespread recognition before the festival, are often viewed less favorably."

"After all, the festival doesn't want to spend its own prestige promoting someone else's success."

"Nor would that be fair to the festival's 'homegrown directors'—those who faithfully premiere their films there year after year."

"Only truly exceptional films receive exceptions to this practice."

"A Better Tomorrow has already been released overseas."

"Fortunately, its overseas marketing had been weak and public attention relatively limited, allowing it to qualify for the main competition and ultimately earn an award purely through the strength of the film itself."

"Nevertheless, the fact that it did not premiere at Cannes undoubtedly cost it valuable points in the eyes of the jury."

"The second reason is largely speculation on my part."

"Take it simply as one person's interpretation."

"I believe virtually everything in A Better Tomorrow up until its ending matched the jury's tastes remarkably well."

"The problem is..."

"Do you all remember the post-credit scene?"

"The one where someone throws a handgun onto the protagonist's doorstep?"

"As for whether that post-credit scene actually appealed to the jury..."

"I'll leave that for you to decide."

"Perhaps, if that scene hadn't existed, A Better Tomorrow might have had an even better chance of winning the Palme d'Or."

"Finally, let me point out something rather interesting."

"Did you know that in 1998, there was another film that won the Grand Prix at Cannes?"

"Thirteen years before A Better Tomorrow, it received the exact same award."

"The film was called Life Is Beautiful (*La vita è bella*)."

"Meanwhile, the English title of A Better Tomorrow is Tomorrow Is Beautiful."

"Separated by thirteen years, two equally outstanding films with remarkably similar titles ended up receiving the very same award."

"It almost feels as though there's some strange connection between them."

"What's even more interesting is that although Life Is Beautiful only won the Grand Prix, its reputation among Chinese movie fans eventually far surpassed that year's Palme d'Or winner."

"So while we should certainly celebrate A Better Tomorrow's success at Cannes, we shouldn't feel disappointed that it won 'only' the Grand Prix."

"This film deserves far more praise than most of us have even imagined."

"Let's all look forward to Feihuang Studio, the 'Beacon of Chinese Cinema,' creating even more outstanding films for us in the future!"