

CONSIDER THE LOBSTER

Love is blind and brutal in this dark, brilliant love story



COLIN FARRELL AND RACHEL WEISZ SEE THE WORST SIDE OF COUPLEDOM IN *THE LOBSTER*

The *Lobster* is the English-language debut of Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos. As far as I can tell, it's a near-perfect film, a movie of surpassing oddness and eerie beauty, though hardly an easy one to digest. Nor is it very pleasant, in the conventional sense.

The Lobster has been hailed as a black comedy, and certainly the opening scenes contain a dark humor that is at once brittle and squirmy: David (Colin Farrell), a recently widowed man whose pudgy good looks are flattened by a complete lack of personality, checks into "the Hotel," a massive resort where single people are given 45 days to find a suitable mate. Patrons who fail to couple-up after the allotted time are turned into an animal of their choice. David, revealing the hard armor that hides a broken heart, opts to become a lobster should he fail. His brother, who shares a room with him, was turned into a dog.

Of course, hotel residents can increase the length of their stay by hunting down with tranquilizer guns any number of the grimy loners — devoutly "single" people — who wander the countryside outside the establishment.

The conceit of a malevolently utopic hotel where a collection of strangely affectless patrons are forced to find a perfect romantic match under the threat of beastly transformation is enough to fuel any film, but this is just the tip of an iceberg in *The Lobster's* ocean of disturbing implications. If the movie opens on a note of Charlie Kaufman-esque absurdism — with a hint of Lynch and Kubrick, to boot — it eventually departs into new and complex territory that is unique, startling and yet, somehow, uncomfortably familiar.

Lanthimos, who co-wrote the screenplay with Efthymis Filippou, is a supremely confident director whose tight control of the material squeezes a rich, dreadful symbolism from the smallest detail, whether that be a llama suddenly passing unremarked across the screen or the sociopathic glare of a heartless woman eavesdropping on a random conversation. The universe he creates contains its own hermetic logic — the cinematic equivalent of Kafka's penal colony — and in this sense *The Lobster* is neither comic nor tragic but visionary in the truest sense.

At just about its midpoint, the movie breaks down the doors of its own claustrophobic reality, exploding outward in the glints and splinters of some infernal kaleidoscope. An act of excruciating violence inspires David to escape the Hotel. He flees into the arms of the militant loners roaming the woods, where he meets a woman (Rachel Weisz), and the two concoct a secret sign language in order to communicate under the watchful eyes of the puritanical cult leader (Léa Seydoux), whose code is radical platonic individualism.

It is here *The Lobster* really gains momentum. Lanthimos utterly subverts the dichotomies of classic dystopias by creating a world of pervasive repression — there is literally no exit here. Whether a subject of the Hotel, a renegade in the wild or a denizen of the city, where couples share a common trait, everyone is under a kind of emotional lockdown that is insidiously enforced person to person.

And yet, as with any vision of social dysfunction, it remains the individual who ultimately stands imperiled but sacred. Beneath the hard shell of *The Lobster* beats the heart of a tender and tragic love story — even if love, by its very nature, must be blind. (*Broadway Metro*)

GREEN ROOM

The most terrifying villains are never monsters, only men — a fact that writer-director Jeremy Saulnier reiterates, most effectively, with his third feature film. Set in the lush green backwoods of western Oregon, *Green Room* follows an unknown band as they run out of gas, lose a gig, get interviewed by that one enthusiastic fan every band has and then wind up playing a show in an even more out-of-the-way place than usual. But this is far from a story about a bunch of punks provoking their way into a backwaters shitshow. The tipping point, the thing that makes their violent hosts reveal themselves, is something else entirely. Trapped in the small back-stage area, the band (including Anton Yelchin and Alia Shawkat, with Imogen Poots as a show-goer) tries to fight their way past men with knives, trained killer dogs and the club's eerily calm owner (played by Patrick Stewart, all his usual grace turned to taut, deadly practicality). Saulnier's eye for the details of band life, from the perfectly dingy club to the roles each member plays off stage as well as on, gives *Green Room* the sense of accuracy that makes its claustrophobic struggles all the more tense. Oregon's woods have never looked quite so lonely. There's another local bonus: Eugene-area actor Kasey Brown plays a chilling "skinhead drummer." (*Broadway Metro*)

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

It's not the fault of *X-Men: Apocalypse* that its villain, with his plan to destroy the world and all the puny people in it, feels extra tired just now. Like *Captain America: Civil War*, *Apocalypse* has too many people on its teams. And similar to all those Zack Snyder movies, *Apocalypse* is awash in property damage, filling the screen with ribbons of debris and collapsing buildings. In short, *X-Men: Apocalypse* spends too much time not feeling particularly like an *X-Men* movie, which is a little crushing for those of us who love the X-Men best among all those semi-functional superhero families. Its most egregious bit of comics failure is arguably the addition of two new female characters for the sole purpose of killing them to give a man his motivating anguish. There is a term for this — fridging — and it's extremely lazy storytelling. Somewhere in the middle of this super-sized muddle of tropes is the movie that could've been. When the *X-Men* movies (new and old) are at their best, they're character-driven: think of Rogue's loneliness, Xavier and Erik's complicated friendship, the unwillingness of Jennifer Lawrence's Raven to rely on anyone. When *Apocalypse* has room for these moments, it shines. (*Cinemark 17, Regal Cinemas*)

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