

Cannes Film Review: 'Jodorowsky's Dune'

Indulging one of film history's more entertaining 'what might have been' stories, first-timer Frank Pavich delivers his own mind-blowing cult movie.

By [PETER DEBRUGE](#)



With: Alejandro Jodorowsky, Michel Seydoux, H.R. Giger, Chris Foss, Brontis Jodorowsky, Richard Stanley, Devin Faraci, Drew McWeeny, Gary Kurtz, Nicolas Winding Refn, Diane O'Bannon, Christian Vander, Jean-Pierre Vignau. (English, Spanish, French, German dialogue)

Founded on the iffy premise, raised here by [Nicolas Winding Refn](#), that the combination of a cult book plus a cult director would have equaled a bigger-than-“Star Wars” worldwide sci-fi sensation, “Jodorowsky’s [Dune](#)” indulges one of film history’s more entertaining “what if” stories. Before [David Lynch](#) spectacularly botched a bigscreen adaptation of [Frank Herbert’s “Dune,”](#) [Alejandro Jodorowsky](#), cinema’s shaman of psychedelia, had a spectacular go at the job. Nearly 40 years later, first-time director [Frank Pavich](#) attempts to re-create that vision (in our imaginations, at least). Expect fanboys to flip and minds to be [blown](#) over the highly entertaining result.

The year was 1974. After almost singlehandedly inventing the midnight-movie phenomenon with “El Topo,” Jodorowsky had scored a second hit — in France, at least — with his massive head trip, “The Holy Mountain,” prompting producer Michel Seydoux to encourage whatever project the director might want to do next. “I didn’t read ‘Dune,’ but I had a friend who said it was fantastic,” the Chilean helmer tells Pavich nearly 40 years later, alternating between English and Spanish in an interview that plainly demonstrates how this particular fish tale has swelled over time.

If even a fraction of Jodorowsky’s claims are true, his “Dune” would have been an astounding film, and Pavich does his part by reinforcing the talking-head footage (including two of the Web’s top genre-movie gurus, Devin Faraci and [Drew McWeeny](#)) with concept sketches, character designs and the Holy Grail: one of two known surviving copies of the script, which Jodorowsky had commissioned French graphic novelist Moebius to storyboard completely. Via rudimentary animation, Pavich combines these elements to mock up several key sequences from the film, while composer Kurt Stenzel augments the entire picture with a suitably trippy score.

Here’s where things get really far-out: Still feisty at 84, the director reveals all the talent he had lined up to participate in the project, starting with Dan O’Bannon (“Dark Star”) on special effects and extending to Swiss surrealist H. R. Giger. On the casting front, Jodorowsky shares wild tales of how he allegedly got verbal agreements from [David Carradine](#), Mick Jagger, Udo Kier and a washed-up Orson Welles to accept major roles and, even more astonishingly, convinced Salvador Dali to appear in the film. Still, would you greenlight a big-budget “Dune” with such a cast of [loose cannons](#), especially if the two principal roles were being reserved for Jodorowsky and his son Brontis?

Pavich does an admirable job tracking down surviving parties (except for the suspicious-sounding cast), opting for a humorous rather than indignant tone to the interviews. In shaping them for the film, he happens upon a compelling theory: that even in its still-born form, the film manifested the sort of collective conscious that Jodorowsky was trying to peddle through its plot, trickling down to influence other sci-fi films that followed. The evidence presented regarding details George Lucas may have stolen for “Star Wars” is unconvincing, though O’Bannon, concept artist Chris Foss and Giger did go on to collaborate on “Alien,” extending a relationship that started with “Dune.”

Could Jodorowsky have pulled it off? Certainly, few believed raunchy puppet master Peter Jackson could go from “Bad Taste” to “The Lord of the Rings,” just as Tim Burton was an unlikely choice to reinvent the “Batman” franchise. But there’s also the risk that Jodorowsky’s “Dune” would have flopped and set sci-fi back before “Star Wars” came along.

After “Dune” changed hands to producer Dino De Laurentiis, Lynch’s 1984 attempt was dismissed as impenetrable and unfaithful to the source material, criticisms that likely would have applied to Jodorowsky’s version as well. For him, Herbert’s novel was little more than the delivery device for a lunatic attempt to re-create the LSD experience on film. As the director puts it in the film’s most memorable line, “I was raping [Frank Herbert](#), but like this, with love.”

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Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Directors’ Fortnight), May 18, 2013. Running time: 88 MIN.

PRODUCTION: (U.S.-France) A Snowfort Pictures production in co-production with Camera One/Michel Seydoux in association with Endless Picnic. (International sales: Snowfort Pictures, Los Angeles.) Produced by Frank Pavich, Stephen Scarlata, Travis Stevens. Executive producer, Donald Rosenfeld. Co-producer, Seydoux.

CREW: Directed by Frank Pavich. Camera (color, HD), David Cavallo; editors, Alex Ricciardi, Paul Docherty; music, Kurt Stenzel; sound, Damon Cook; supervising sound editor, Jesse Flower-Ambroch; animators, Syd Garon, Paul Griswold. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Directors’ Fortnight), May 18, 2013. Running time: 88 MIN.

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