

Film Review: Jeff Nichols's 'Mud' Will Cause Cinephiles' Hearts to Swell

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on April 25, 2013 - 1:21pm

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CHICAGO – Sometimes it's difficult to pinpoint the precise moment when one falls in love with a movie. Other times, it's as effortless and intuitive as the day one stumbles upon a soul mate. That moment struck me like a bolt of lightning early on in Jeff Nichols's "Mud," the most richly satisfying and purely enjoyable moviegoing experience I've had thus far in 2013.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

An Arkansas teen, Ellis (Tye Sheridan), witnesses an older boy aggressively hitting on a pretty girl across the street. Her resistance only intensifies his advances, thus inspiring the perturbed Ellis to swiftly cross the street and punch the brute squarely in the face. This sort of scenario would normally lead to a fistfight, but in this case, the offender realizes he's been owned and sheepishly fades into the crowd of his stunned peers. No macho action set-piece in any recent Hollywood blockbuster comes close to matching the badass euphoria of this scene.



[Read Matt Fagerholm's full review of "Mud" in our reviews section.](#) [12]

Of course, there are at least a thousand ways in which it could've rung false. Not many young actors could pull off this scene without cloaking themselves in artificial posturing, but Mr. Sheridan is a special case indeed. He made his debut a mere two years ago in Terrence Malick's masterpiece, "The Tree of Life," in which he played the youngest of Brad Pitt's sons. Whether that experience taught him how to appear naturalistic on camera is anyone's guess, though it certainly couldn't have hurt. What is inarguable is Sheridan's gift for being wholly authentic in situations where many of his peers would resort to actorly tricks. There isn't a frame in which Sheridan appears to be forcing emotion, and the same can be said of his co-star, newcomer Jacob Lofland (evoking the look of "Stand by Me"-era River Phoenix), who sports wicked comic timing in the role of Ellis's loyal friend, Neckbone. Both of these fresh-faced performers grew up in the South and their comfort in outdoor physical activities—such as fishing and dirt bike riding—is a major plus, but that doesn't translate to having a commanding screen presence. Sheridan and Lofland embody the sort of rugged, self-assured, morally grounded masculinity that died somewhere during the steroid-induced era of '80s excess. These kids don't need to put up a false front in order to project fierce inner strength. No wonder the horndog didn't bother punching back.

'Mud' stars Matthew McConaughey, Tye Sheridan, Jacob Lofland, Reese Witherspoon, Sam Shepard, Ray McKinnon, Sarah Paulson, Paul Sparks, Joe Don Baker and Michael Shannon. It was written and directed by Jeff Nichols. It opens in local theaters on April 26th, 2013. It is rated PG-13.

Matt Fagerholm will discuss 'Mud' along with other new releases on Vocolo radio's Morning AMp show Friday, April 26th, at 9:30am CST.

Tune in here: <http://www.wbez.org/player>.



[Continue reading for Matt Fagerholm's full "Mud" review.](#) [12]



Tye Sheridan, Jacob Lofland and Matthew McConaughey star in Jeff Nichols's Mud.

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