

The Kid With a Bike

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [May 16, 2012](#) issue

The Dardenne brothers, Jean-Pierre and Luc, are known for their low-key, plot-light, character-heavy tales of survival, usually played out in a small Belgian town that serves as their spiritual microcosm and often focused on the struggles of children to make it to adulthood in one piece. *The Kid with a Bike*, which won a top prize at last year's Cannes Film Festival, continues down this path, though Dardenne purists may find fault with the film's upbeat conclusion, a contrast to the harsher endings of their earlier efforts.

The central character is Cyril (Thomas Doret), an angry 11-year-old living in a home for troubled kids who longs to reunite with his father (Jérémie Renier). The father lives nearby but has had no use for Cyril since the death of his wife. Fate, in the form of his missing bike, leads Cyril to Samantha (Cécile de France), a local hairdresser who takes a liking to the difficult boy.

The story is about Cyril's coming to terms with the fact that he is on his own and must make his own way in life. This journey leads him into a series of second-act complications. All bike paths lead back to Samantha, however. There are no surprising twists or revelatory climaxes for Cyril. He is just a boy forced to accept the tender mercies that life offers him, even if they are not the ones he has prayed for.