

Interview, Audio: Director Ana Lily Amirpour Stirs up 'The Bad Batch'

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CHICAGO – The dystopia – or negative future world – is a genre staple, from “Soylent Green” to “Max Max.” The latest film to ponder the possibilities is “The Bad Batch,” from writer/director Ana Lily Amirpour. This is her sophomore feature, after “A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night,” and features Suki Waterhouse in the lead role.

“The Bad Batch” is set in Texas, where persons branded with the film title are banished into a desert-like existence. A young woman name Arlen (Waterhouse), struggles to survive after her banishment, and finds out that a renegade society has formed within the harsh environs. She is captured, and is tortured into bodily harm, but manages to escape to another place-within-the-place, run by a leader named The Dream (Keanu Reeves). Arlen becomes intent on revenge, and in that state of emotion gains an enemy, the mysterious Miami Man (Jason Mamo). The world is also populated with characters portrayed by Diego Luna, Giovanni Ribisi and Jim Carrey, which means the Bad Batch just got badder.



Suki Waterhouse of 'The Bad Batch'

Photo credit: Neon

The mind of writer/director Ana Lily Amirpour is awash in alternative subjects. Her first feature film, after a number of short film efforts, was “A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night” (2014), and was described as “the first Iranian vampire Western.” Amirpour’s family has roots in Iran, but she was born in England and raised in the United States. She had been making films since she was 12 years old, and graduated from the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. HollywoodChicago.com talked to her during a promotional tour of Chicago for the film, and divides that talk between a Q&A transcript and an audio portion, that both delve into her one-of-a-kind perspective.

HollywoodChicago.com: There have been many dystopian societies in art, from ‘Brave New World’ to ‘Mad Max.’ When you were creating

your take on it, how did you want to characterize it that distinguished it from any other fictional dystopia?

Ana Lily Amirpour: I don't consider it dystopia, I look at it as reality. Everything is dystopia, and there is no such thing as utopia. Works like 'Brave New World' and 'The Handmaid's Tale' develop their atmosphere from a movement or a revolution, as if the world has ended and has come out to this other side. When I wrote 'The Bad Batch,' I thought that the world outside the gates that confine the 'bad' characters is simply our world today. So if we're pushed a little bit farther, in the sense of protection or resources, who are we? How do we define what is good or bad? What is the morality of human behavior?

HollywoodChicago.com: There are parallels to 'Alice in Wonderland' in this film. What do you think is most surreal in this particular rabbit hole, and what instinct do you believe Arlen uses best in her need to survive?

Amirpour: I only noticed this after I had finished the film, and watched it again a few months later... she is kind of like a shark because she keeps on moving forward. I do feel that in modern society that still is the best way to survive. Whatever it is, just keep doing something, because complete stillness or inactivity is more like death than death. But sometimes it's reckless, and sometimes Arlen moves forward before thinking, that is the thing about her.

HollywoodChicago.com: The lead role of Arlen needed a lot of particular performance qualities. What did Suki Waterhouse bring to you in her audition that nailed those undefined qualities that was necessary for Arlen, as you created her?

Amirpour: I don't personally do that many castings, in this film and in my first film. But I did get involved in "The Bad Batch," because we couldn't think of an actress that was a 3-D embodiment of the character. But when I saw Suki on tape, I knew she was 'it.' And I can't describe that any more than to say that I never had to really express to her the the ideas that were on the page, she just instinctively embraced it. She was Arlen, and I didn't want to f**k it up. Her instinct was just it.



Director Ana Lily Amirpour (in Pink) Sets the Scene in 'The Bad Batch'

Photo credit: Neon

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the more interesting lines in the film is in regard to the 'economy of comfort' that develops in the bad batch society. Since that economy also makes a fortune for pharmaceuticals, the liquor industry and legal/illegal marijuana trade in our current society, what do you think the economy of comfort says about us?

Amirpour: That's a big question, and I don't have the answers, even though I ask the question in the film. It involves human colonization, how it develops, and it's an observation based on that development. I don't have an answer, but it just the way things work. It's cool that you bring it up, because I find that most participants in that economy don't think beyond it.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had many notable stars in smaller, almost cameo roles. What intrigued them all about participating in this film, did you get feedback as to why, for example, Jim Carrey decided to take the role?

Amirpour: I believe that every character I create is in their own film, that happens to overlap with the main film. There are complete and real characters, even though we only spend only a little time with them. In the approach to what those entities are, that always appeals to an actor. What are they, since they are going to embody this character? I knew that Jim was going to do it, for example. It's that thing about the character, where he was that thing. He became the kind, gentle soul of this universe.

It was the same with Keanu. When I came up with the concept of 'The Dream,' on the surface he just seemed like another creepy bad man or villain. It had to be played by someone larger than life, but not malicious. And Keanu is that person to me, and he was The Dream like I wanted The Dream. [laughs]

In the audio portion of the interview, Ana Lily Amirpour talks more in-depth on the themes in her created society of "The Bad Batch," her family background from Iran to America, and the source of her personal philosophy.

"The Bad Batch" has a nationwide release on June 23th, including in Chicago at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Suki Waterhouse, Diego Luna, Jason Momoa, Yolanda Ross, Keanu Reeves and Jim Carrey. Written and directed by Ana Lily Amirpour. Rated "R"



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