

Glaring Lack of Originality Handicaps ‘The Bad Batch’

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Dystopia has been dissed out. Mining the negative vibe future world can’t seem to touch the rich creative vein any more and the reserves seem dry. Writer/director Ana Lily Amirpour may have an element within her interpretation that is hard core, but it’s not enough to understand the overall vision of her tomorrow world, except that we’re all part of “The Bad Batch.”

A vision of the future world, explored in films as diverse as (just the B’s) “Battlefield Earth” (2000), “Blade Runner” (1982) and “A Boy and His Dog” (1974), always had the desolation, the strange/mean characters and oddball counter-nirvana that develops as a reaction to the dread. “The Bad Batch” does not sway from this formula, and in fact embraces it, but its lack of original feeling is fairly apparent. However, it does have an interesting female protagonist, horror situations that are uniquely stomach-turning, and of course Keanu Reeves. The film is worth watching, but it drags when the lack of originality becomes apparent, and doesn’t add much to the overall movie prescience of our soon-to-be-lost culture and society.

“The Bad Batch” is set in Texas, where persons branded with the “bad batch” designation are banished into a desert-like existence. A young woman named Arlen (Suki Waterhouse), struggles to survive after her banishment, and finds out that a renegade-but-dangerous society has formed within the harsh environs. She is captured, and is tortured into bodily harm, but manages to escape.



Arlen (Suki Waterhouse) of ‘The Bad Batch’
Photo credit: Neon

After collapsing in the desert, she is rescued by The Hermit (Jim Carrey) and is moved 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 Momoa). The faceoff between the two becomes the next scenario of the film, but also the question of who/what/where becomes important.

The lead actress, newcomer Suki Waterhouse, is pretty bad ass, but suffers from a bodily harm that was extremely harsh – but given how this genre of films have progressed, it seemed inevitable. Waterhouse’s character (Arlen, in what I think is a reference to “King of the Hill,” since the film is set in Texas) handles the bad-assery with a nice sense of revenge, but in adopting new character philosophies or in attempting to act more subtly within different scenes... that wasn’t in the cards.

The cameos and supporting roles are wow-inspiring, “is that Diego Luna from ‘Star Wars: Rogue One’ in the film?” YES! I’m fascinated also with Keanu Reeves, who seems content these days to take interesting background roles (like “The Neon Demon”) or remakes of former glories (“John Wick, Chapter Two”). His character of “The Dream” suffered from lack of depth... he was an easy character to exploit as an antagonist, but we never get to the deeper meaning. Jason Momoa as Miami Man was like Danny Trejo in “Machete,” but managed to create a deeper reflex in that type of character.



Jim Carrey as The Hermit in ‘The Bad Batch’

Photo credit: Neon

The strength of the film lies in the female-centric hero, in contrast to the subservience of The Dream’s female harem, but it was never taken to a higher morality or collapse. The characters of Giovanni Ribisi as “Bobby” showcases his tendency towards nuttiness, but in the end the role remains undefined. Essentially the lack of definition in the overall product was its handicap – as was the handicapping of Arlen (a centerpiece of the film), and her eventuality with it. Just because the harm is extreme doesn’t mean it’s relevant to the story.

But what I will agree on, and I think everyone does, is that even the lesser products of Ana Lily Amirpour are more virtuous than other filmmakers in her generation. She knows scope, she’s knows accountability and eventually I believe she will know how to stitch it together to authenticity, without the glaring soft spots. “The Bad Batch” is close, but needs more of Amirpour’s true voice, evolving and emerging with each new film.

“The Bad Batch” had a nationwide release on June 23th, including in Chicago at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport, Chicago. 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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