

MOVIES

Opening today

From strange to weird
in dreamlike fashion

RICK BENTLEY
Tribune News Service

“**T**he *Bad Batch*” is an intriguing example of the abstract filmmaking that has oozed from the mind of director-writer Ana Lily Amirpour (“*A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*”). She doesn’t follow traditional paths of linear storytelling or coherent imagery.

Instead, she splatters the screen with a concoction of ideas, people and events that forces the viewer to analyze these elements with regard to what is happening and draw his or her own conclusions of where it is all going. If Amirpour were a trail guide, she would not point you down a set path but drop crumbs you would have to find and follow.

This approach to making movies is not for those who only want a production that has a definitive beginning, middle and end. This all makes for a project that demands attention, so passive moviegoers not willing to try something that will take them out of their comfort zone should make other plans.

Amirpour invites the viewer to join the journey at the border of Texas and a barren wasteland populated by society’s rejects. This world that has been devastated by some disaster exists somewhere between the prison system John Carpenter introduced in “*Escape From New York*” and the Orwellian existence found in the “*Mad Max*” movies.

Tossed into this foreboding world is Arlen (Suki Waterhouse), a vain young

REVIEW

The Bad Batch

Who: With Suki Waterhouse, Jason Momoa, Jim Carrey, Keanu Reeves and Giovanni Ribisi. Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour.

Rated: R for graphic violence, drug use, language and partial nudity.

Running time: 115 minutes.

When: Opens today.

Where: Cedar Lee Theatre, 2163 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights.

Grade: C+

woman who is captured within the first few moments of the film. Her captors are bodybuilding cannibals who proceed to chop off her right arm and leg. Despite her injuries, Arlen escapes and she floats like a post-apocalyptic Alice who has fallen into a rabbit-hole world of unrelated people and actions. One moment she’s limping through the desert to commit murder, and the next she’s on a head trip that makes her one with the cosmos.

“*The Bad Batch*” can be viewed in very different ways. Amirpour puts it on the viewer to take all of the small pieces and create his or her own mosaic of meaning. There’s really no right or wrong conclusion.

Amirpour’s film won’t appeal to everyone, but there’s no denying that it is original and should be a sign of even more engaging work to come.

Opening today

Lavish film poses moral issues

Soldier’s dilemma hits tragic proportions in WWII period piece

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Was there such a thing as a “good” Nazi? An “exception” to the rule?

That’s the question first-time movie director David Leveaux asks in his lavish World War II period piece “*The Exception*,” a thought-provoking romance-thriller set in the estate of exiled Kaiser Wilhelm II in the Netherlands.

Leveaux, a stage director, filmed on location in an elegant mansion, sparing no expense, from the ornate, servant-filled home to the formal uniforms, classic cars and graceful grounds. It’s all filmed in soft-focus, with lots of shadows ... this truly feels like the end of an empire.

The inestimable Christopher Plummer stars as the aging and disgraced kaiser, and it’s worth seeing the film for him alone. He’s so stoic and graceful and witty and wary, one almost forgets that his disastrous World War I leadership ruined Germany and led to the Nazis.

Jai Courtney (“*The Divergent*” series), equally stoic, almost to the point of unfeeling, is a German soldier sent to guard the kaiser, keeping him safe and investigating for spies who may have infiltrated his house as Germany overtakes Holland.

At first, Capt. Brandt appears as cruel and calculating as his fellow soldiers. But as a passionate, and quite hot, relationship develops with the kaiser’s maid



A24 FILMS

Christopher Plummer stars as the aging and disgraced Kaiser Wilhelm II in the World War II drama “*The Exception*.”

REVIEW

The Exception

Who: With Christopher Plummer, Lily James, Jai Courtney and Janet McTeer. Directed by David Leveaux.

Rated: R for sexuality, graphic nudity, language and brief violence.

Running time: 107 minutes.

When: Opens today.

Where: Cedar Lee Theatre, 2163 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights.

Grade: A-

Mieke (a steely but lovely Lily James of “*Downton Abbey*” fame), his human side is revealed.

He soon learns Mieke is not the obedient servant she seems, but is secretly Jewish — and may be the spy he is seeking.

Janet McTeer, as the kaiser’s wife, Princess Hermine, is not happy about the relationship and brings it to the kaiser’s attention. In one of the film’s lighter moments, he laughs it off, citing his own past indiscretions.

But light is followed by extreme dark. A visit from

Heinrich Himmler (Eddie Marsan) himself brings the events to a head, as he almost gleefully announces the Nazis’ Final Solution plans over a refined dinner. Some in attendance are aghast; others unquestioning.

When Himmler embarks on a plan to expose the spy in the kaiser’s household, Brandt’s dilemma reaches tragic proportions. Will he be a “good” Nazi and follow his heart and conscience? Or a “good Nazi” who just follows orders?

The ending is heartbreaking, and inspiring.