

**Jan Chats
with
Writer/Director
Lorene Scafaria**

**Chicago Press Day
for
*Seeking a Friend
for the
End of the World***



You wake up one morning, turn on the news, and learn that a huge asteroid is heading toward earth. Facing certain destruction in a matter of days, what would YOU do? Lorene Scafaria was in Chicago on June 5th to promote her new film *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* starring Steve Carell and Keira Knightly. Although the long title is a bit of a turn-off, I thought Scafaria's film was really lovely and very surprising. I saw it weeks ago, yet scenes still linger in my mind.

Jan: What a fine line you walk in this film, Lorene!

On the one hand, you have movies like *Armageddon* bearing down on you with all their “superhero” special effects. And on the other hand, you have the art house pomposity of *Melancholia*. So two male paradigms are out there, and you reject them both.

So take me through your thinking: How does a Jersey Girl structure her story about the end of the world?

Lorene: Well, *Melancholia* wasn't even real yet when we were making this, so I didn't have that to compare it to. But everyone else is comparing them, so I'm like: “I don't get it.” But that's all right.

For me it was like this: The romantic comedies of the last ten years, they've been dying on the vine. They've become so formulaic with these made up obstacles for people...

But I love relationships. I love intimate stories about people; whether it's a guy and a girl or whatever it is, I like intimate stories of people and how they relate to each other.

Taking this concept [of the end of the world] allowed me to focus on what people want and need and care about and how they spend their time, which was really what I was focusing on mostly.

So I was taking the end of the world idea as a backdrop. I was like: “Oh, this is great. We'll make this big epic thing with this giant ticking clock. And these two people will find each other at the worst possible time... or is it the best possible time? And we can tell a really intimate story in the midst of a large epic.”

Jan: Global chaos.

Lorene: Global chaos, exactly.

Two people at the end of the world—all the chaos that's around them that they're sort of wheeling through—and obviously some people are just mowing their lawn and other people are doing heroin... But there's something to me that becomes even more romantic, and that's what I was excited to explore and see.

Jan: I love the way you describe your theme in the Director's Statement you included in the Press Kit:

“Time is the great equalizer and our time here is limited.”

Everyone can relate to that, Lorene. Asteroids are nice for a superhero movie, but in real life we all live with the burden of time, and that's your metaphorical import. None of us can ever really know what will happen tomorrow.

Lorene: Right. When I first thought about it, I was like: “Oh, it's Western! This is a Western and the posse is up on a hill!”

The posse is the asteroid. Death is coming for everybody and we're all just trying to outrun it or ignore it.

Some people (like me) can't stop thinking about it, but using time is the only commodity that we actually have. That's all I have to give anybody—my time. And the only thing I get upset about is when someone wastes my time, and that's truly it.

I look back and my regrets have nothing to do anything with except: “Oh, I wish I had spent that time there. I wish I spent that week with my family. I wish I had not let that person waste so much of my time.” Why is that? It's because there's nothing more precious than that. What a gift to tell someone: “I would like to spend all my time with you.”

In this case, well, what if you take “forever” off the table? What if “forever” doesn't exist and you can't promise someone that, does that change who you're with? Does that

change how you feel about a person? It forces you to live in the immediate—in “the present.”

For a guy like “Dodge” [the character played by Steve Carell in *Seeking a Friend*], Dodge faces no future, and then he is going to immediately chase the past. He's continuing to not live in the present by chasing the past, which I also think would happen.

When I asked around and asked people what they would do, I mean barely anyone was like: “Well, I'm going to find someone new and have a great few weeks.” It was all about: “Oh, I'm going to find a high school sweetheart. I'm going to...”

Jan: ...correct that thing?

Lorene: Right. “Correct that thing.” But love doesn't have to last “forever” to be real, and that was something that I felt was important to say—sort of like a unifying theme—we all are facing this, but doesn't that make it all the more precious?

I was talking to a friend of mine the other day: “Isn't it weird that at funerals everybody is so full of life?” We're facing someone's mortality and we're all talking and we couldn't be more uplifted by the stories of this person!

At my age you go to baby showers and it's sort of an opposite feeling. Everybody's facing their own ticking clocks, and everybody looks pretty pale and drained. And I was like: “What is that?”

What a difference! You go celebrate life and everybody's like dead inside. But you're at a funeral brunch and everybody's like: “Oh, life is precious.”

So I said to myself: “There must be a way to convey that kind of feeling.”

Jan: So was it hard to pitch? Did people understand what you wanted to do with this story?

Lorene: No, it was really easy to pitch, and I sold it as a pitch with myself attached to direct. They'd never heard of that, so it was a very strange thing for everybody. What was tougher was to hand in the first draft because it's so subjective; people put their own thoughts into it and are sort of hoping to see certain things. “Oh, I wish it was this way,” or “I was hoping Dodge would be more like Jerry Maguire.”

It is a high concept idea that could've gotten so messed with along the way, and I was really happy I was with a smaller studio to take care of it.

Jan: So did you feel you had a lot of autonomy in getting the story made that you wanted to make?

Lorene: I did. I did feel that way. I'm not sure anybody thought this would happen; I don't think anybody truly believed it was going to take place. I'm not sure.

It seemed like something that ended up sort of having a life of its own and getting made that way. We had a reading for it, and actors came out and read the script. And then agents heard about it and started to get interested. And once Steve Carell got involved, there was a real momentum.



Keira Knightley as "Penny."



Steve Carell as "Dodge."

Jan: Last topic: I found a wonderful interview with you posted on a website about "The Fempire" where you said: "It seems harder to get female stories out there, so in a way that's inherently harder. When I hear the percentage of female writers and especially female directors, I get bummed out, but I don't really know what it means." Is it OK to talk about this a bit?

Lorene: Oh please, yes, fine.

Jan: Okay, so part of the work that I'm doing with WITASWAN and International SWAN Day is to prove my thesis: "The movies are there, but what's missing is the audience."

Lorene: Right.

Jan: So it's just not the case that there are no films by women filmmakers...

Lorene: Right, right.

Jan: ...but they keep getting slammed down by a combination of critical response and audience ignorance...

Lorene: And I think it's the stories, female stories. I have no idea what makes someone want to be a director—you know what I mean—in terms of male and female. But in

terms of stories, women stories are so hard to get made and I think you're right. I think that the audience for it needs to come out first.

And I actually think we're just now on it. I feel like this year alone, some things have been shifting. At least maybe it's just people I know and so that's what I'm going on, but there are more [female] show runners on TV (Lena Dunham on HBO, and Mindy Kaling, Dana Fox, Liz Meriwether...) It's women in charge and it's women stories...

But as they go long, it's like: "Well, okay, let's make sure that the guys are..." I mean just as they go long, audiences want male stories.

Jan: Well, what I've learned about women is that they have to fight for so much already ("Please take out the garbage, dear.") that they just don't have the energy at the end of the day to say to their significant others: "Let's go see this thing."

Lorene: I think we're better at sharing, right? So we'll be like: "We'll watch your sports, (or whatever it may be), we'll do that, if you'd like to come and see this with me." But I don't think it goes both ways in the same way.

Jan: Well, in "The Fempire" you are definitely holding up your end!

Lorene: And I'll keep doing it 😊

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PHOTO CREDITS:

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To read my review of *Seeking a Friend...*, visit:
<http://www.TheHotPinkPen.com/?p=3027>.

For more about "The Fempire," visit:
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