

# Filho's 'Bacurau' shines spotlight on a feverish Brazil

CANNES, France, May 26, (RTRS): Set in the scorching outback of northern Brazil in a small, cut-off town suffering from water shortages, "Bacurau", is not short of digs at the state of local politics.

But the trippy romp is also a darkly comic tale of resistance against blood-thirsty US invaders, interspersed with sci-fi worthy riffs about drone-wielding killers.

It's equally, as described by IndieWire critic David Ehrlich, "a wonderful and demented Western about the perils of rampant modernization".

Like the inhabitants of fictional Bacurau, occasionally seen popping mysterious hallucinogenic pills, viewers are invited to give in to the mash-up, in a movie where some clues are deliberately withheld.

"We actually liked the idea of giving people 'X' information ... and that you have to work with that information," director Kleber Mendonca Filho told, asked how to explain the motivations of the film's human-hunting troupe of killers.

References to Brazilian politics are inevitable, even beyond the twists in the plot line, which include a sleazy mayor trying to buy votes with out-of-date medication.

Mendonca Filho, who was last in Cannes in 2016 with "Aquarius" and paired for this film with co-director Juliano Dornelles, said he was delighted the movie was even selected to compete at a tough time for Brazil's film industry.

It is just amazing that this film is seeing the light of the day at a time when in fact they are trying to hide culture, Brazilian cultural output," Mendonca Filho said.

The film kicks off on the road to Bacurau, littered with coffins that have fallen off a truck, before immersing spectators in a funeral dance celebrating the life of a local matriarch.

Soon things start getting even weirder in the dusty town, as mobile phone coverage disappears, Bacurau gets eclipsed from satellite maps, and the killing crew – largely made up of Americans but led by an eery German played by Udo Kier – make their appearance.

### Disturbing

"It's disturbing and messy, a fever dream for a disturbing and messy time in Brazil. And occasionally, it's a lot of fun, too," critic Steve Pond wrote for entertainment site The Wrap.

As premises go, this human-poaching scenario promises excitement galore, though co-directors Kleber Mendonca Filho and longtime collaborator Juliano Dornelles overthink it, delivering a visually impressive but unevenly paced thriller that feels as if it's meant to be analyzed more than enjoyed, and for which footnotes might actually have done more good than subtitles. Though shot in striking anamorphic widescreen and laced with references to John Carpenter, Sergio Leone and the like, "Bacurau" doesn't quite work in traditional genre-movie

terms. Rather, it demands the extra labor of unpacking its densely multilayered subtext to appreciate.

Look up Bacurau on Google Maps, and you won't find it. There's a good reason for that: Mendonca and Dornelles invented the town to serve the ultra-cynical political allegory they had in mind (one can imagine people describing a "Bacurau situation" if and when any of the filmmakers' grim predictions come to pass in the wider world), showing roughly where they imagine Bacurau to be via an elaborate CG opening shot from space. Foreign audiences don't often get to see this part of the country, which featured in such Brazilian breakouts as "Barren Lives" and "Central Station" but has otherwise been ignored in favor of the country's more modern metropolises.

"Bacurau" claims to take place "a few years from now" but hardly feels futuristic, owing to the fact that in the sertao, some communities still don't have running water or electricity, and this particular town has had its limited progress reversed by a corrupt mayor, Tony Jr (Thardelly Lima), who dammed the clean water supply. Even more alarming, early on, the village teacher discovers that Bacurau has been erased from all maps.

It's one of those "The Matrix"-esque moments – in which plebian characters come to understand that those in control have virtually unchecked power – that really ought to send a chill through audiences.

Film

### Variety



This image released by Disney shows Naomi Scott as Jasmine and Mena Massoud as Aladdin (right), in Disney's live-action adaptation of the 1992 animated classic 'Aladdin'. (AP)

### Film

## Diehl stars in 'Beautiful Souls'

# 'Adam' love letter to motherhood

By Jay Weissberg

With her debut feature "Adam", Maryam Touzani allows her audience to sit back and relax comfortably into a beautifully made, character-driven little gem that knows when and how to touch all the right buttons. Taking the stories of two women, both frozen in existential stasis, and bringing them together in a predictable yet deeply satisfying manner, the writer-director ensures this scrupulously even two-hander about grief, shame, and the redemption of motherhood does not emotional comfort food that's neither too sweet nor too heavy. Graced by two exceptional leads given every opportunity to shine, "Adam" should charm audiences in global art houses.

Previously, Touzani has been known for shorts and her work with husband Nabil Ayouch, who here acts as producer as well as writing collaborator. Still, this is very much her own film, its emotional tenor and cinematic style markedly different from Ayouch's work. In terms of structure and narrative trajectory, there's nothing surprising, just strong, confident filmmaking combined with the knowledge that food preparation and music are evergreen ways of winning over an audience. Not to imply they're used here as an easy hook; on the contrary, Touzani's generosity to her characters forestalls any suggestion of cynicism.

A clearly tired Samia (Nisrin Erradi) is looking for temporary work, the camera fixed on her doleful face in such a way that audiences don't discover she's heavily pregnant until someone mentions her condition. Reduced to sleeping in a doorway, she is spotted by Abba (Lubna Azabal) from her window across the way; after a struggle of conscience, the fretful woman goes out and tells Samia she can stay for a few nights. Abba's delightful young daughter Warda (Douae Belkhouada) eases the tension at home, but her mother's dour expression rarely relaxes for more than a few

seconds.

Touzani is a subtle storyteller who doesn't give everything away immediately, preferring things to reveal themselves naturally, like Abba's status as widow. Forced to make a living selling pastries from a window in her home, Abba takes self-sufficiency to an almost perverse level, refusing Samia's help until the newcomer's quiet determination to be useful begrudgingly wins her over with a tempting batch of hard-to-master rziiza, a savory snack made from long strands of dough.

### Struggles

Though Abba is the more shut-down of the two, both women have locked themselves into their inner struggles. Samia rejects any emotional attachment to her unborn child, conceived out of wedlock, and is determined to give it up for adoption and return to her village as soon as she delivers. Her stubbornness on this point matches Abba's, whose inability to process her husband's death extends even to forbidding anyone playing music by her formerly favorite singer, Warda Al-Jazairia. Realizing she needs to break through the walls her new friend erected around herself, Samia forces Abba to listen to the song she had always associated with her husband. Shot with intimate proximity, the scene of their struggle over the cassette tape brings the pressure-cooker situation to a head, with the tension released when Abba finally allows her body to relax to the music.

The script scrupulously ensures both characters get equal time, their inner struggles each played out in such an appealing manner as to excuse the obviousness of the structural calculations Touzani must have made when writing. The same goes for young Warda's over-chirpiness, her eternal sunshine peculiarly unaffected by her mother's blanket projection of misery. Partly inspired by Touzani's own pregnancy, "Adam" is an unabashed love letter to motherhood as well as to the skills of her two leads, both of whom are given wordless moments which allow

the actresses to show off their emotional registers, always in understated ways, that take them from quiet anguish to an affecting radiance.

Together with busy DP Virginie Surdej, the director charted out a visual form strong on closeups that keep track of the way characters move through space, especially within Abba's home, whose walls act as both haven and prison.

### Also:

**LOS ANGELES:** August Diehl, star of Terrence Malick's Cannes competition player "Hidden Life", acquired by Fox Searchlight during the festival, will head the cast of Tom Schreiber's upcoming "Beautiful Souls" ("Schöne Seelen").

Lead produced by Ingmar Trost at Sutor Kolonko in Germany, and structured as a domestic co-production with Maze Pictures, "Beautiful Souls" has just been set up as an international co-production with Spain's Fasten Films and Topkapi Films in The Netherlands.

At an initial financing stage – though the prospect of an international sales agent boarding early on look good – "Beautiful Souls" is scheduled to go into production in late summer 2020.

Described as a goofy drama set in the pop trash of the 1990s, "Beautiful Souls" portrays the impact of macro historical change on a motley German community of inveterate individualists seeking happiness down on Spain's Costa Brava coast.

It turns on Freddy, a perpetual juvenile chancer who's never grown up or had a proper job and, now aged 37, plans to start a new, more relaxed life in a Spanish holiday resort far away from cold Germany. At first he imagines he really has stumbled upon Paradise. He gets a job working for Herbert, who owns a restaurant and a strip club, falls for Nico, who works as "Tank Girl" – filling the glasses of partying tourists with overpriced lager from her beer pistol – and whose sensual dance act casts a spell over Herbert as well as Freddy. (RTRS)

**LOS ANGELES:** Moviegoers voted with their dollars and chose the familiar over the new this Memorial Day weekend. The Walt Disney Co's live-action remake of "Aladdin" crushed the competition at the box office, which included two new original R-rated films that opened as counter-programming to the family pic: The critically acclaimed teen comedy "Booksmart" and the horror movie "Brightburn".

But the strategy didn't quite work. "Aladdin" did better than expected, grossing an estimated \$86.1 million to take the top spot at the North American box office, according to studio estimates on Sunday. It'll likely pass \$100 million by Monday. The others didn't even break \$10 million.

"Aladdin", a musical-adventure directed by Guy Ritchie, stars Will Smith, Mena Massoud and Naomi Scott, and draws heavily on the music and story of the 1992 animated film (the top earner of that year) that it's based on. (AP)

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**LOS ANGELES:** Mati Diop's feature directorial debut "Atlantics" and Jeremy Clapin's animated favorite "I Lost My Body" have both been acquired by Netflix following wins at Cannes Film Festival.

"Atlantics" was awarded the grand prix while "I Lost My Body" was voted the best film at the independent International Critics Week.

The deals are for worldwide rights with the exception of China, Benelux, Switzerland, Russia, and France for "Atlantics" and China, Benelux, Turkey, and France for "I Lost My Body". Netflix has SVOD rights 36-months following theatrical release for France, Benelux, and Switzerland for "Atlantics" and in France for "I Lost My Body".

"Atlantics" tells the story of 17-year-old Ada, who is in love with Souleiman, but has been promised to another man. One night, Souleiman and his co-workers leave Dakar by sea, in hopes of a better future. Several days later, a fire ruins Ada's wedding and a mysterious fever starts to spread. Little does

Ada know that Souleiman has returned. Mama Sane, Amadou Mbow, Ibrahima Traore, and Nicole Sougou star. (RTRS)

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**LOS ANGELES:** Screen Media has bought North American rights to writer-director Joel Souza's police crime-thriller "Crown Vic", starring Thomas



Ritchie



Smith

**Jane and Luke Kleintank.**

The distributor closed terms during the Cannes Film Festival amid a competitive bidding situation between seven other suitors. Screen Media plans to release the pic this fall.

"Crown Vic" premiered in April at the Tribeca Film Festival. The supporting cast includes David Krumholtz, Josh

**Hopkins, Bridget Moynahan, Scottie Thompson and Gregg Bello.**

"Crown Vic" follows one explosive night in the life of a seasoned LAPD veteran, portrayed by Jane, as he takes a young cop (Kleintank) out on patrol and shows him the brutal reality of life behind the wheel of a Crown Vic.

The producers are Alec Bald-

win and his El Dorado Pictures, Anjul Nigam under his Brittany House Pictures, and Bello. Maxx Tsai also produced under his China-based Wudi Pictures.

"Joel starts 'Crown Vic' off with an incredible sequence that had us utterly glued to the screen from there on," said Screen Media president David Fannon. (RTRS)