



Season One Production Notes

“Now Apocalypse” is about a lot of things. For instance, it’s a deep dive into the power of friendship. Then again, it’s also an ode to the wonders of sexual self-expression. There’s also the hint of a possible alien encounter. For creator Gregg Araki, though, the show is ultimately about something even more personal: wish fulfillment.

“I’ve been making independent films for more than 25 years, and this show is literally my all-time, ultimate dream show,” explains the director best known for critically acclaimed indie movies such as *White Bird in a Blizzard*, *Kaboom* and *Mysterious Skin*. “I’ve wanted to make something like this for 20 years or more. It’s the culmination of all my movies in the sense that after doing those for a while, I realized while making them that I always wanted to do a cool, crazy, insane, wild ‘Twin Peaks’-ish type TV show.”

Well, mission accomplished. “Now Apocalypse” takes something familiar and relatable — a coming-of-age story about four twentysomething friends seeking to add more sex and success to their lives — and then blends in an extraterrestrial conspiracy theory. The end result is a sometimes sweet, sometimes surreal story that looks and sounds more like an independent film than a television series.

“I’ve always been interested in this sort of heightened reality, creating a universe that was based on everyday life and what people go through in everyday relationships,” Araki says. “Then, I wanted to kick that up a few notches to give the story this other, mythic kind of quality with an additional level of surrealism.”

The kicking began about three years ago, after Araki approached Karley Sciortino, an author and sex columnist for *Vogue.com*, for her help in creating his first TV series. They’d met years earlier, when she’d written a script he hoped to film. The movie didn’t materialize, but Araki still felt she was “really cool and funny and had this new-feminist sensibility. She felt like a kindred spirit.” A longtime fan of the filmmaker’s work, Sciortino jumped on board immediately to add a strong, sensual female point of view to the “Now Apocalypse” scripts.

“We had conversations for hours, talking about who these characters are and what they want,” she says. “What was useful about me was the fact that I’d been writing about sexuality for more than a decade. I’d never been a cam girl

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NOW APOCALYPSE

but was a dominatrix and a sugar baby. Gregg had created a character named Carly that he said he'd imagined being sort of like me. He was like, 'I want her to be sexually adventurous and in the sex industry.' She was cathartic to write, and even though she wasn't based on me, there was a lot of me in her."

Sciortino and Araki centered their 10 episodes — all of which were written before "Now Apocalypse" even shot a single frame — around four central characters. The "entryway" into the show for most viewers, according to Araki, is Ulysses (Avan Jogia), whom he describes as "a soulful character who is in the wrong era. He's like a wandering minstrel from the 17th century, a poet or romantic. He's trying to find love and adventure but in this weird world we're currently living in."

Ulysses' two closest friends are Carly (Kelli Berglund), a wannabe actress who's found work as a cam girl, and his roommate Ford (Beau Mirchoff), an aspiring screenwriter who's trying to reconcile his love for his astrobiologist girlfriend, Severine (Roxane Mesquida), with her interest in having an open relationship. As far as Araki is concerned, this quartet and their struggles represent "certain audiences that never see themselves on screen. So, this show does that for a lot of people. It gives them characters they can relate to and feel invested in."

In particular, he's hoping Carly and Severine become an inspiration to the show's female audience.

"We made a conscious effort to let the female characters be strong, sassy, independent and intelligent," says Araki, who also directed all 10 episodes of the series. "The male characters all tend to be a little bit weaker, a little more vulnerable and [they] fuck up more. It was kind of cool to flip that around."

That sense of liberation extends to the open-minded approach to sex that "Now Apocalypse" presents.

"The show has an attitude about sexuality that's a little absent in the present day," Sciortino explains. "We've become very focused on the ways sex can be dangerous, where you really have to protect yourself. You know, 'Don't get pregnant. If you have sex, you're going to get a disease and ruin your life.' It's fear-based. What I hope people learn from these characters is their sense of bravery and adventure around sex. They all have a deep curiosity about sex that can be contagious."

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At the same time, she also hopes viewers will see Ulysses, Carly, Ford and Severine as “warm and complicated and human and also sweet and curious and adventurous. That’s what drives the show — their warmth and humanity.”

Forging that personal connection with his audience is a large part of why Araki chose to make “Now Apocalypse” a series rather than a feature film. He’s wanted to experience the expanded intimacy that comes from telling a story over the course of many weeks, instead of a couple hours, ever since he got hooked 20 years ago on another landmark cable series.

“For me and my friends, the characters in ‘Sex and the City’ were like friends of ours,” he explains. “You lived their lives along with them, as opposed to characters in a film, where something happens to someone, and then you move on to the next thing. TV lives in your house and is in your life in a way that movies can’t be. You spend two hours in a theater and go through an experience, and then you go home. Whether you’re watching a series in your house, on your iPad or on your phone, you literally carry the characters with you.”

As attracted as Araki was to what he considers to be “that genre of TV shows about relationships and hooking up and insecurities and how you find out about yourself,” he also wanted to make sure “Now Apocalypse” avoided one particular pitfall such series often succumb to. “They can quickly run out of creative juice,” he says. “Within a season or two, everybody has fucked each other and broken up and gotten back together. There’s nowhere to go after that, so I wanted to have this other level of genre and unpredictability where you don’t know what the fuck is going to happen. You wonder, ‘Is this real? Is it not real?’ I really wanted this show to be in a universe where almost anything could happen. That’s how you keep things fresh and exciting.”

Which is where creatures from outer space enter the picture. Or not. Araki decided to slowly dole out hints of a possible alien presence “as an element to elevate to this whole other level, a ‘Twin Peaks’-y world of ‘What the fuck is happening?’” At the same time, though, “Now Apocalypse” never quite tips its hand on whether the aliens are real or simply a product of Ulysses’ marijuana-enhanced imagination.

“This is mainly a show that’s fun and colorful and sexy, but there’s also a genre piece that feels spooky and scary,” adds Sciortino. “It’s important to retain that tension and not have the alien and thriller-y component take over the show. Holding the ‘are-they-or-aren’t-they-real?’ tension helps to create an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty.”

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It's this aura of unpredictability that Araki believes connects "Now Apocalypse" to his indie film roots, setting it apart from all the other coming-of-age series out there and making his first TV series a turning point in his own life.

"In the world of peak TV, there are hundreds of shows out there, and it's almost impossible to penetrate the noise and get a show seen," explains Araki. "So, I'm grateful Starz has given us creative carte blanche to make the wildest and most insane show we wanted to make. Which I think we've done. This was probably the biggest challenge I've ever taken on, and I learned so much in the making of 'Now Apocalypse.' The process of just doing it, and it turning out the way that it did, has been hugely valuable in my growth as a director. "

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