

Good Kill Screenwriter and Director Andrew Niccol Joins Reel Talk

Leslie Green: Welcome to Real Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, Director of Communications for the DC Office of Motion Picture and Television Development. Also known as the DC Film Office.

Today, we're sitting down with Academy Award nominated, screenwriter, producer, director, Andrew Niccol. Andrew brought us such classics as "The Truman Show," "Gattaca," "In Time," "Lord of War," and he most recently produced "Good Kill," which is opening in theaters I understand, this week, May 15th.

Thank you, Andrew, for joining us on Real Talk with Film DC.

Andrew Niccol: Thank you.

Leslie: Absolutely. We're very happy to have you. I know you're in DC today to promote your upcoming film, "Good Kill," starring Ethan Hawke. Let's first start off by getting our listeners up to speed on what you've done so far in your career. I was pleased to know that you actually wrote the screenplay and directed. Is that, right? The Truman Show?

Andrew: I didn't direct it. I was the producer of Truman Show.

Leslie: Excellent, and one of my absolute favorites. This is a project that you won an Academy Award nomination for. How did you get the inspiration for that film?

Andrew: When you're a kid, especially a young kid, you have to somehow believe the world revolves around you. It's sort of a self-defense mechanism that all kids have. I guess I just never grew out of it.

[laughter]

Andrew: I turned it into a movie.

Leslie: That's pretty interesting. How did you get into screenwriting?

Andrew: That's funny. I was making commercials in London. I had this idea for the movie, the Truman Show. I sent away for a book on how to write screenplays. It wasn't like we had Amazon then. It took a long while to get to me. By the time it did, I already finished the screenplay, so I never read the book. In fact, I still haven't read the book.

[laughter]

Andrew: I don't need that book.

Leslie: Now the film that you recently wrote and is now opening in theaters, "Good Kill," starring Ethan Hawke is about an Air Force drone pilot who becomes disenchanted with his job, dropping bombs on terrorists halfway around the world. This is based on actual events. Is that right?

Andrew: Right. All the drone strikes you see in the movie have actually occurred. There's nothing I really made up.

Leslie: What inspired you to write and direct this story?

Andrew: It was sort of a culmination of things. I kept seeing reports in the news about drone strikes. I was like, "How does that happen? How does that work?" When I discovered with some research, how it happens, it was just so fascinating to me that we have this new type of soldier, this new warfare, it's completely schizophrenic.

We have this guy like Ethan Hawks character, who will fight the Taliban by remote control from a base outside Las Vegas for 12 hours a day, then he'll go home to his wife and kids. That's never happened before. We've never asked people to go to war at home.

It's as the character says in the movie. "When we go to war with a country, we normally go to that country." We're not going anymore. We're staying here. We can fight a war from 7,000 miles away. I thought, well what does that do to the psyche of a soldier, like Ethan's character?

If he's had a strike and seen people blown to bits and then he'll pick up his kids from school. That just never used to happen. That's really tough. For me, that was fascinating. There's no time to decompress.

Normally, you'd be deployed in Iraq or something. It'd take at least a day or so to get back. You had time to say, "OK. I've got to get back into home life." This is war, home, and repeat. [laughs]

Leslie: Speaking along those lines, there are a number of themes that are brought up in the film, clearly war on terrorism, but when a soldier has to then go back to his family, you pick up on some issues like the mental health issues or the side effects of war, which are of course marital issues as well.

You bring all of that up in this story. It's a very interesting one. You mentioned earlier in our previous conversation that there was a connection in the earlier film you did, The Truman Show, and Good Kill.

Andrew: Yeah. A friend asked me, "Why are you making this film? It doesn't seem like your kind of film." Then I saw something online about the drone program that said it was more Truman Show than Terminator. I went, "Yeah. That's why I'm doing it."

Leslie: That's very interesting. Where was the movie filmed? Can you name some of the filming locations?

Andrew: Obviously Las Vegas, because that's where they're based. Then Morocco was the country that played Pakistan, and was Arisitol, and Yamen.

Leslie: With all of the films that you've done, have you ever filmed in DC before?

Andrew: I have not. In fact, I was just talking to Ethan Hawke today as we were driving around. I said, "Wow. It'd be great to actually make a movie."

Leslie: Absolutely. It's a beautiful city. We would absolutely love for you to film in DC. If you could tell us as we wrap up, any next projects that we should know about?

Andrew: I'm too superstitious.

Leslie: OK.

[laughter]

Andrew: I'm afraid if I tell you something, I'll jinx it and then it won't happen.

Leslie: OK. At least we can talk about Good Kill, which opens in theaters on May 15th. Definitely check it out. Again, thank you for tuning in to Real Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, signing off.

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