

### **I couldn't think of a good headline....**

On Saturday, April 27, The Globe was given the opportunity to speak with Brit Marling, Alexander Skarsgård, and director Zal Batmanglij as part of a promotion for their upcoming film, *The East*, a thriller that was shown at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and picked up for distribution by Fox Searchlight.

Brit Marling stars as Sarah Moss, a former FBI agent that acts as an operative for the private intelligence firm, Hiller Brood. She is tasked with infiltrating an anarchist collective known as The East by going undercover and convincing it's members of her loyalty and genuine participation. However, things begin to change when she begins to fall in love with the collective's charismatic leader, Benji, played by Alexander Skarsgård, prompting her to question the moral underpinnings of her undercover work.

Prior to writing the screenplay, Marling and director Zal Batmanglij spent two months in 2009 practicing Freeganism, the practice of reclaiming and eating food that has been discarded, in addition to other alternate lifestyle practices, with the purpose of limiting one's participation in the conventional economy and minimizing one's consumption of natural resources.

"We didn't do it for research, we did it for our own lives," Batmanglij said. "When you all of a sudden break the lock of a dumpster behind a grocery store and realize how much good food is in those dumpsters that has to be thrown out legally...it changes your perception, especially when you start having three meals a day from that."

During their experience, they got involved with an anarchist collective in addition to learning various skills employed by active "freegans," such as train-hopping, squatting, and as previously mentioned, breaking locks off of dumpsters. Much of that experience, in addition to research into the pharmaceutical industry and inspiration take from other spy thrillers, was incorporated into the screenplay.

"I think that there was some moments that we experienced on the road that entered the film," Marling said. "We did feel though that all the corporate crimes that happened...those are things that are literally ripped out of the headlines of newspapers..."

The primary target of the anarchist collective in the film is a multinational pharmaceutical corporation, as the modern anarchy movement focuses less on protesting the government, and more on protesting against the corporate structure.

"There was a PBS special about a class of drugs that were causing really severe...side effects," Marling said. "The idea sort of came as an 'eye-for-an-eye' justice or a group of people who want to hold corporations accountable for this kind of behavior."

While it may appear that this film is seeking to preach a message about the philosophies of the anarchy group depicted in the film, Batmanglij states the film is not about conveying a message, but rather getting people on both sides to ask questions.

"We're not preaching anything," Batmanglij said. "We just wanted people to ask questions...from whatever side they are [on]."

*The East* is rated PG-13 for thematic elements, violence, some disturbing images, sexual content and partial nudity. The film will be released in theaters on May 31.

The trailer can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlbM1voHKYw>

### **Sidebar: Skarsgård's One Response**

Throughout the interview, there most of the questions were directed to Batmanglij. However one question, asked by Alex Lam from the University of Kansas, was directed to all three participants, prompting the only response from Alexander Skarsgård.

Below is an abridged transcript.

Lam: I was wondering how you guys prepared for the roles...

Skarsgård: I was working on a couple of other films right before *The East*. So unfortunately, I did not have time to go on the road or anything. So I had to do a lot of my research on my own from my trailer on set or in my hotel room in New York. So that's kind of how I started...learning more about the world and the character, coming up with ideas.

Obviously, in hanging out and talking to Zal and Brit, that helped me shape the character.