

ALIEN CULTURE

A SHORT FILM BY IESH THAPAR

16 MIN

OFFICIAL SELECTION RAINDANCE FILM FESTIVAL 2018

OFFICIAL SELECTION PALM SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL SHORT FEST 2019

BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL OFFICIAL SELECTION 2018

OFFICIAL SELECTION EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2019

2019 Aspen Shortsfest OFFICIAL SELECTION

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LOGLINE

West London, 1979. Racial tensions are running high. Lucky thinks his younger brother is in trouble, but the truth is far from what he expected.

SYNOPSIS

West London, 1979. Margaret Thatcher is in power and racial tensions are running high in the UK. Lucky (28), a second-generation British Indian, thinks his younger brother, Sunny (17), is being bullied by skinheads. When he finds out the truth is far from what he expected, he's forced to cope with new filial responsibilities, rethink his priorities, and question his own insular views about the world he occupies.

CAST

LUCKY
Sagar Radia

SUNNY
Reiss Kershi

FILMMAKERS

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
Iesh Thapar

PRODUCED BY
Sarah Seulki Oh

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
John Wakayama Carey

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
Danielle Bayliss

ART DIRECTOR
Chapman Kan

COSTUME DESIGNER
Amy Thompson

SOUND DESIGNER
Glen Gathard

EDITOR
Iesh Thapar



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Alien Culture is a recipient of the 2018 London Calling Plus Production Award, supported by Film London & The BFI Network. It is a proof-of-concept short film for the feature film *Strangers In Stereo* (formerly *Alien Kulture*), a gritty coming-of-age drama loosely inspired by the first UK Asian punk band, Alien Kulture.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Alien Culture is a late coming-of-age story about a second-generation British Asian man who learns to cope with new filial responsibilities that are pushed upon him by questioning his own insular views about the world he occupies.

The story takes place in a period of English history that is steeped in complex incident and provocation. That Britain seems so different to the one I grew up in, yet, unfortunately, the themes in the film seem relevant to what's happening in the world today, with the advent of extreme right-wing groups and the formation of dangerous perceptions. For Lucky, discovering who his younger brother really is challenges his own narrow ideals about race relations in the UK and inadvertently makes him rethink his priorities at home.

I think there's hope in finding inclusivity in the unlikeliest of places, and this pertains to the film's subtle message about the power of co-existence. Audiences should be reminded of London's degree of multicultural unity and cohesion. Breaking down barriers between communities is important to me, and the story offers a microcosmic view of that larger picture.

Iesh Thapar

WRITER / DIRECTOR

Iesh Thapar

Iesh Thapar is a British filmmaker who works across film, TV and video games. His short films have played festivals worldwide, including BFI London, Edinburgh, Palm Springs ShortFest and Aspen Shortsfest, and his work has been backed by Film London, the BFI, Sundance, Film Independent, Tribeca and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

His feature *Strangers In Stereo* (formerly *Alien Kulture*) was developed through Sundance and Film Independent's Screenwriting Lab, and in games he has directed performance on titles including 007: *First Light* and *Dragon's Dogma II*. He was named one of 25 'Lodestars', the UK's rising stars of cinema, and is a BAFTA LA Newcomer. As a Columbia MFA Film graduate, he received the 2017 Ezra Litwak Award for screenwriting.

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PRODUCER

Sarah Seulki Oh

Sarah Seulki Oh is an independent producer of narrative and documentary films. Her first feature premiered at SXSW and drew notices from *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *IndieWire*. Her short films have played worldwide, including at Telluride, Palm Springs ShortFest and Warsaw, and have been supported by HBO, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Tribeca Film Institute, ESPN, Film London and the BFI Network.

As a Columbia University Creative Producing MFA graduate, she took home the 2015 Entertainment Partners Best Producer Award. She is a Sundance Creative Producing Fellow and a BAFTA LA Newcomer, and has taught at institutions including UT Austin's Moody College of Communication and Columbia University School of the Arts.

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Q&A WITH DIRECTOR IESH THAPAR

How would you describe Alien Culture in three words?

Dramatic. Aggressive. Strained.

Tell me a little bit about Alien Culture. How did the film come about?

The world, the characters and the themes for *Alien Culture* were born from a feature film that I'm developing entitled *Strangers In Stereo* (formerly *Alien Kulture*, with a 'K' as opposed to a 'C'). It's loosely inspired by the first real UK Asian punk band, Alien Kulture. I was looking to do another short film, and my producer suggested that I have a crack at writing a proof of concept. The main dramatic and central relationship in the feature film centres on two brothers, almost a generation apart. Sunny, the younger brother, is very much the main protagonist in the feature film, and it's about how he manages to pull away from traditional codes to claim his British Asian identity through punk music. In the short, however, I wanted to explore that relationship from the older brother's perspective, and so I decided to write a standalone piece that dug deeper into his character.

What was the inspiration behind your screenplay?

As a second-generation British Asian kid growing up in London, it's hard to sometimes know where you fit in. Ultimately, it was the type of music that I listened to that had a powerful impact in helping me discover a sense of identity and belonging. I was a bit of an oddball, but music helped me discover things within. When I wrote the feature (*Strangers In Stereo*, formerly *Alien Kulture*), I was inspired to write a story that dealt with a character who is caught between subcultures: a traditional South Asian lifestyle on one side, and a liberal punk rock universe of like-minded peers on the other. However, with the short, I was fascinated to tell the story from a different perspective, from the perspective of someone who had steely expectations about how members of their society should and should not behave.

A norm is a guideline or an expectation for behaviour, and I was quite excited to tell a story that dealt with what happens when those 'rules' for behaviour are challenged, subverted or violated, and what one would eventually do about it or learn as a result of discovering that there are new norms. For Lucky, the older brother, he learns that he doesn't quite have his finger on the pulse like he thought, and he needs to change.

What has been the most challenging part of making this film?

I think trying to capture the period with very little resources was the most challenging part of making the film. 1979 West London isn't an easy thing to recreate, and we had to be really careful about what we could and couldn't show. Funnily enough, sometimes creativity is fuelled by the restraints, and I definitely feel this was the case with *Alien Culture*. Having said that, special shout-outs to our production designer, Danielle Bayliss, and costume designer, Amy Thompson. They were just amazing and they absolutely killed it.

And finally, what do you hope people will take away from this film?

Foremost, I hope people enjoy watching the movie. The story takes place in a period of English history that is steeped in complex incident and provocation. That Britain seems so different to the one I grew up in, yet, unfortunately, the themes in the film seem relevant to what's happening in the world today, with the advent of extreme right-wing groups and the formation of dangerous perceptions. I think there's hope in finding inclusivity in the unlikeliest of places, and this pertains to the film's subtle message about the power of co-existence. Audiences should be reminded of London's degree of multicultural unity and cohesion. Breaking down barriers between communities is important to me, and the story offers a microcosmic view of that larger picture.

TECH SPECS

RUNTIME	FORMAT	ASPECT RATIO	SOUND
16 min 8 sec	16mm	1.85:1	Stereo Mix

**5.1 available upon request*



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