



NAKKIAH LUI (IN BLUE) IS PREPPED FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

Apocalypse Wow

Between outbreaks and lockdowns, First Nations actor and writer Nakkiah Lui made a comedy series about the end of the world.

by **Raelee Lancaster**

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Nakkiah Lui has a plan for surviving the end of the world: tinned water, a motorcycle and spirulina.

“As a millennial, I might never own my own house,” says Lui. “As an Aboriginal person, I might never get my land back. So, what do I do? I might need to get a bunker somewhere. Maybe I can afford that?”

From her hit romantic comedy play, *Black Is the New White* (2017), to writing for the second season of Hulu’s anti-historical dramedy *The Great* (premiering 20 November on Stan), Lui spans genres, mediums and continents. The latest addition to her resume is *Preppers*, a comedy series about a group of outcasts preparing for the end of the world...whatever that looks like. Co-created and written by Lui and Gabriel Dowrick, the six-parter also stars Lui as Charlie, the audience’s conduit into the world of prepping.

“She’s tried to do things the right way, but it’s just kinda been the white way,” says Lui, who always knew she’d star in *Preppers*, even before developing Charlie as a character. “She doesn’t know who she is, and she’s not very happy. It’s a story about someone who has to reconnect with themselves and their past in order to find a future.”

Lui met Dowrick – her writing and life partner – on the ABC TV sketch series *Black Comedy* (2014-2020), where Lui was an actor, writer and producer, and Dowrick an editor. “We’ve both come from a background of working on comedy, especially something like *Black Comedy*, where we spoke about a lot of racial issues in the sketch comedy way,” says Lui.

The pair were commissioned to write *Preppers* about five years ago. The first version was sillier and more absurd, gaining focus in the second draft. Then, a cataclysmic event swept the real world: the coronavirus pandemic. Between outbreaks and lockdowns, *Preppers* was filmed on Darug and Gamaragal Country, but new questions were thrown

around the writers’ room. While *Preppers* doesn’t put forth one cause for Armageddon, Lui and Dowrick wondered whether their show about the end of the world, taking shape against a looming yet undistinguishable future, should centre on the pandemic.

“What we had to figure out, which I think is a really interesting thing in television all around, is how to talk about COVID in the show,” Lui explains. “I wouldn’t have been able to tell you that toilet paper would be the first thing we were going to run out of.”

Coronavirus isn’t the only factor Lui contemplated. She and Dowrick had to turn their “obsession” with reality shows like *Doomsday Preppers* and *Doomsday Bunkers* into a fictional comedy experience. In her research, Lui infiltrated online prepping communities to learn more about the lifestyle.

“I noticed when watching *Doomsday Preppers*, it’s a really fringe community,” she says. “You’d see people try and guess what a community would look like in the future if everything stopped existing as it is now. I thought that was really interesting and, in a way, kind of hopeful.”

Many practices and values inherent in the prepping community hit close to home for Lui, a Gamillaroi and Torres Strait Islander woman. “I have a lot of family who live out in regional New South Wales. They all know how to start a fire and hunt things,” she says. “I think prepping in that way, it’s in my community’s culture.”

Lui brings up 1788, when the First Fleet descended on Gadigal Land, and how British invasion, colonisation and the genocide of Aboriginal people was, in itself, an apocalypse. “I know from being a First Nations person that my family created dreams and hope from utter

decimation.” Lui is fascinated by this, calling First Nations people “the original preppers”.

“If shit hits the fan and if everything were to go awry, what is it as people that makes us survive and create community and hope from that?”

While *Preppers* deals with serious topics – First Nations people as survivalists, land reclamation and, of course, the end of the world – it is, at heart, a comedy. Lui notes that balancing silliness and seriousness is often tricky, and admits to getting it wrong in the past. The key, she believes, is to “punch up” rather than down. “It’s about always trying to make sure we think about what we’re laughing at. Is it inclusive? Is it critiquing the power that we’re trying to dismantle?”

Here, Lui reminisces about her late grandmother. Before her passing, she said to Lui, “What can you do if you can’t laugh?” Lui keeps that in mind as her career continues to soar.

“After my nanna died, I really dove straight in and started writing ferociously,” Lui recalls. “She



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experienced so much, especially at the hands of racial violence in this country, and being born a woman. Being able to laugh in the face of oppressive power – to me, that’s the biggest kind of rebellion. You can take away everything, but you can’t take away the ability to laugh.”

With *Preppers*, we’ll all be laughing at the end of the world. But the real question is: how does one prepare for that? When Lui isn’t drowning in nihilism at the prospect of fighting for her life and eating human flesh on a desolated continent, she’s working on her end-times checklist.

“I’ve been trying to get my motorcycle licence and a ‘bug out’ kit and learn how to start a fire and live off the land,” Lui lists. “You need cans of water or a filtration system, and enough MREs [Meal, Ready to Eat] for at least 72 hours. And a first aid kit. And clean socks and shoes – so many things can happen to your feet.”

Even with all this planning, Lui is still unsure she has what it takes. To survive the end of the world, it seems, one must have particular taste buds.

“I watched this guy on *Doomsday Preppers*. He had tanks and tanks full of spirulina, because it has a high protein content, lots of nutrients and minerals and vitamins.

“He was convinced the end was going to come and he and his family could survive on his spirulina,” Lui says. “So, I tried to eat spirulina after that.”

Her verdict? “It’s disgusting.” ■