

'Alien: Covenant' gets the job done

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of 4

Running Time: 123 min.

This is an odd way to start a review, but your enjoyment of this creature feature will likely have a lot to do with your feelings about *Prometheus*. Since it's release, I've heard all sorts of reactions from viewers both positive and negative.

Alien:

Covenant

is the latest in the series and fits somewhere between the last film and a proper

Alien

movie. It continues with the themes set up previously, adding a dash or two here and there of face-hugging monster mayhem. The end result isn't perfect but is ambitious, with enough new and compelling material to earn it a pass.

The story follows a spaceship carrying humans set to colonize a new planet. A strange event awakens the crew and brings attention to a distress signal from a remote but habitable world. Leader Oram (Billy Crudup) suggests visiting and potentially setting up roots there, much to the displeasure of terraforming authority Daniels (Kathleen Waterston). Oram overrules objections and orders pilot Tennessee (Danny McBride) to land the ship. Assisting is android Walter (Michael Fassbender), an updated, more obedient version of the David automaton (also played by Fassbender) introduced in the previous film.

As you might imagine, things go south quickly and the group come under assault before meeting the unexpected origin of the transmission. Yet, the aliens are still more of a sideline to what I imagine the last pair of films are really about. There appears to be a theme repeated, mixed with elements of the Greek legend the previous film was titled after. These characters want answers to eternal questions of life and how they came to be. However, they're ultimately

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disappointed in their creator, be it an alien or their own human parent. Invention isn't pretty; in fact, it is messy and ugly, resulting in enraged children and parents of various species lashing out and attempting to punish one another.

This is a much darker and more unpleasant journey than the last film, but that doesn't mean that it looks anything less than spectacular. The cinematography from Dariusz Wolski is phenomenal, from the neon-tinged spacecraft to the earthy but darkly foreboding planet terrain. There are some absolutely gorgeous shots in this feature. And the chills and thrills come in good measure, with shocks expertly timed and crafted. The two climactic battle sequences involving an alien are spectacular and thrilling, adding a real adrenaline rush to the finale.

Still, like its predecessor this follow-up isn't without a few minor missteps. Some of the supporting characters are thinly drawn, not all of the motivations are clear (although this may be intentional and setting up further sequels) and some of the behavior on display at times appears illogical; in particular, a shower sex-scene arrives at a very strange and inappropriate moment in the story. Moments like this also seem to be a bit of a contrast with all the philosophizing going on. And although it's amusing, most will see the movie's coda coming well in advance.

If you hated *Prometheus*, *Alien: Covenant* isn't likely to win you back over. Still, I'd much rather see the filmmakers aim high, take a few risks and attempt to address deeper concepts and ideas (even if they're occasionally muddled) than completely fall back on the familiar. This one does try to mix, match and have it both ways, but there's more here that works than in a great many genre follow-ups. And frankly, I'd be up for another chapter in this series, which is much more than I can say for most sequels.

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For the Sun***