

Solo: A Star Wars Story succeeds courtesy of its distinctive characters

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

Running Time: 135 minutes

Much like the Marvel comic universe, it has gotten to the point where we can now expect a new *Star Wars*

movie every year or so. Coming from the minority perspective of a person who enjoyed but has not been overly enthralled by the re-launch of the series, this reviewer felt some trepidation about yet another feature arriving in cinemas. Surprisingly,

Solo: A Star Wars Story

actually stands as something of an anomaly. While it's too long for its own good and does run out of gas by the close, this episode worked for this reviewer more effectively than all of the recent features in the series.

This tale details the back story of Han Solo (Alden Ehrenreich), following the young lad's beginnings on the planet Corellia. Struggling to escape the planet and start a new life as a pilot with girlfriend Qi'ra (Emilia Clarke), the youngster encounters crook and smuggler Tobias Beckett (Woody Harrelson). Immediately roped in to assist on a big deal with crime boss Dryden Voss (Paul Bettany), Solo's first adventure poses many dangerous challenges, as well as first encounters with the likes of Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo) and Lando Calrissian (Donald Glover).

Ehrenreich does well acquitting himself to the role made famous by Harrison Ford. The young Solo is more innocent and idealistic in many respects, but still possesses moments of

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recognizable swagger and cheekiness that will appeal to audiences. It's a difficult challenge, but he succeeds admirably. Viewers should have no trouble buying into the fact that they're watching a different actor portray an iconic character.

The movie benefits most from the well-written screenplay by Jonathan Kasdan (TV's *Freaks and Geeks*

) and his father, Lawrence Kasdan (*The Empire Strikes Back*

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Raiders of the Lost Ark

,
The Big Chill

). Simply put, the dialogue in this film is much sharper than it has been in other *Star Wars*

installments. While grim things are taking place, this is a funnier movie and has some genuinely wry and amusing lines as the various characters bicker with one another. In particular, Solo's budding friendship with future co-pilot Chewbacca offers some great moments.

In fact, there is a certain moral ambiguity between all of these characters that adds significantly to proceedings. Unlike most of the heroes from the recent series who are altruistic and seemingly perfect (but as a result not quite as compelling), the persons in this story are flawed and forced into tricky situations in which there are no ideal solutions. Watching them manipulate each other to secure their own interests, as well as struggle with the collateral damage caused by their decisions is far more intriguing to watch.

Honestly, the film does play on viewer nostalgia, introducing elements that also appear in the original movies. Yet it isn't reliant on these nods and provides a couple of big and elaborate action and chase scenes, thrillingly presented by director Ron Howard (*Willow*, *Apollo 13*, *Far and Away*

,
Rush

) using impressive long takes.

Truthfully, the movie's best moments come in its first two thirds. The climax feels a bit smaller and much more subdued than the bigger, more elaborate battles earlier in the feature. In fact, the finale almost feels like a simple standoff/shootout from a western. And like all recent efforts in this franchise, there's an attempt to tie together some of the characters with familiar faces from other installments. It isn't really necessary and doing so creates extra scenes that pad out

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the running time. However, these are my biggest complaints, which isn't too bad considering.

Solo is far from flawless, but in a strange way I preferred it to the franchise's other new ventures. These characters feel far more human. While that may have something to do with the roles already being established and familiar, the writing and the struggles depicted are far more relatable to this viewer. And even with the updated computer-generated action, it feels closer in tone to the original films. This chapter presented its makers with a daunting task, but ultimately manages to steal a recommendation.

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For the Sun