

‘Arrival’ packs an emotional wallop

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

Running Time: 118 min.

Director Denis Villeneuve has been on a great run. His previous films, *Sicario*, *Enemy*, and *Prisoners* have been unique films tackling deeper themes and raising as many questions as they answer. The science-fiction drama *Arrival*

(based on a short story by Ted Chiang) may be the most cerebral of the bunch. Despite focusing on the mysterious appearance of alien spacecraft in locations around the globe and that have a worldwide impact, this tale manages to maintain a small and intimate focus.

The central character is Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams), a linguist who is called in as a translator by U.S. Army Captain Weber (Forest Whitaker) after the alien ships arrive. She's teamed with physicist Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner) to establish communications and find out why they've arrived on our planet. It's isn't as easy to understand one another as it seems, leading to consternation on the part of governments around the world.

Amazingly, the film sharply deals with the numerous challenges characters face in simply

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attempting to make contact, let alone understanding why the extraterrestrials have visited.

Understanding the alien language on a basic level, as well as its many possible interpretations, results in confusion and fear from the military and various factions. It leads nations on a path to war and greatly adds to the tension. This is compelling stuff that builds slowly as events progress and conflict rises.

The photography is also beautiful, capturing the alien ship and its interiors in a plausible way. There isn't an overabundance of CGI imagery. Obviously, there are plenty of effects, but they're used in a subtle way.

The camerawork is also effective in its restraint, following its characters from a distance and moving in on events very slowly. It's a clever technique that almost makes viewers feel like they're tagging along with the group members as they meet in Army barracks and discuss the next course of action.

Adding to the striking look are the otherworldly creatures. Referred to as Heptapods, they are interesting and memorably rendered, as are the strange gravitational changes that occur within the craft. Characters find themselves off balance and turned around when entering, which in a sense mirrors their emotions after what will be revealed late in the film. The look of the movie is subdued and cool, matching the bittersweet tone and sadness afflicting the main character.

Without getting too specific, this is also a very melancholy effort. Adams effectively navigates some very complex emotions as Banks. Her actions are intercut with footage of her young daughter passing from a terminal illness. And the protagonist's eventual ability to understand and process the alien language comes with an unexpected cost. Sensitive viewers be warned: the end itself is powerful and packs an emotional wallop.

It's heady stuff, using themes like language, communication, and the perception of time. As expected, viewers will likely be left with a lot on their minds afterward.

This is the type of movie that doesn't explicitly explain the minute details with exposition

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(although it is certainly clear enough to understand), asking the viewer to consider what they've seen and whether or not they might make the same personal choices as the protagonist.

Arrival may seem like a big and epic story, but ultimately it's told in a very small and personal manner. It's also a pretty fantastic movie, expertly handled to deliver suspense and, with quiet force, a big emotional punch. This is one unique film that isn't easily forgotten.

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