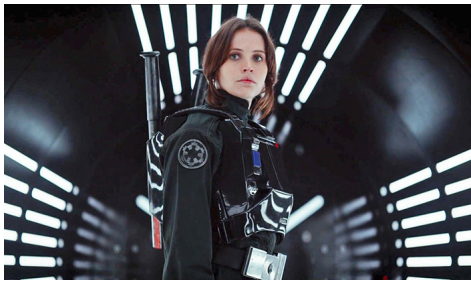


'Rogue One: A Star Wars Story' stuns visually, but fails dramatically

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 16 December 2016 10:15



Rating: «« out of 4

Running Time: 134 min.

If you're a fan of the new slew of *Star Wars* films, I have some good news. Based on the reaction of the audience at a preview screening, you're probably going to enjoy

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story

. It is a very slick and well-produced film that looks even more spectacular than last year's *Episode VII: The Force Awakens*

. However, it's also unlikely to do much that will hook those (myself included) who aren't already big aficionados of this cinematic universe.

Set just before the events of *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope*, this story revolves around a mission to discover a design weakness in the villainous Empire's Death Star space station. We follow Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones), a young woman whose scientist father Galen (Mads Mikkelsen) was kidnapped by the bad guys to help engineer the destructive floating orb. While searching for her dad, she ends up in the company of a rag-tag outfit of rebel ne'er-do-wells who go on a suicide mission to steal the Death Star secrets and share its weaknesses.

Obviously, the movie suffers to some degree just for being a prequel. While we don't know the specific details, viewers familiar with the original film will know how events are going to play out. There aren't a lot of story surprises and it does kill some of the suspense. And the movie goes on plenty of tangents to reference to the original film, even rolling out some old characters via CGI technology. It's an interesting experiment, but overall the familiar faces recreated using computer-generated effects appear odd and off-putting.

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At least the rest of the film looks incredible. The cinematography from Greig Fraser (*Lion*, *Foxcatcher*)

) is consistently stunning. In fact, it's a better looking movie than the previous installment and many of the vistas closely hark back to the original series. These landscapes and crowded otherworldly marketplaces are impressive, as are the massive battles and shots of x-wings and tie fighters making elaborate maneuvers. If nothing else, the photography is consistently wondrous to behold.

Unfortunately, the movie's biggest problem appears to be the rebels themselves. Unlike other films in the series, this effort has a somber tone. That means that there isn't much banter. There is a lot of exposition and tech-talk, but it quickly becomes tiresome. The film's lead robot gets in a few cracks and amusing comments, but there's almost no witty back and forth or spark between the characters. In fact, most of the humans come across as unmemorable and as a result we never get emotionally invested in their plight. When the talking machines make a stronger impression than the people, it's a problem.

And that's too bad, because this *Star Wars* film has an interesting and unusual angle; focusing on smaller, unknown characters and their selfless and sometimes sacrificial acts in the name of a cause. If they had been developed further and we had cared more about these people by the end of the feature, it would have a far greater impact. Instead, it feels dramatically stiff.

This reviewer could probably sit back and enjoy the images in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* all day long. It's enjoyable in the moment, but I couldn't help but feel like this was a missed opportunity. The movie doesn't feel like a necessary footnote in the saga, isn't as exciting as it should be and didn't leave me caring about the characters. However, it is impressive on a technical level. The gasps of joy from the crowd lead me to believe that to fans of the series, its shortcomings will be ignored. If you love

Star Wars

, you'll probably be thrilled. Otherwise, you may continue to find yourself shrugging at this current phenomena.

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