Prometheus
R
124 Minutes
Rating: ****

Prometheus marks director Ridley Scott’s return to the world of the sci-fi classic Alien...sort of. Prometheus is a prequel to Alien, though in fact the two films are related by only a few shared elements. Viewers who haven’t seen Alien won’t have any trouble following Prometheus, while those who have will get to see how certain plot strands from the older film originated, but both groups should be able to enjoy Prometheus for what it is: a surprisingly intellectual thriller that will scare the dickens out of you.

Prometheus is the story of a band of future explorers led by archeologists Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) and Charles Holloway (Logan Marshall-Green). Shaw and Holloway have discovered a series of ancient cave drawings that they believe are an invitation to venture out into space and meet the extraterrestrials who may have seeded life on prehistoric Earth. The powerful Weyland Corporation finances the adventure, under the direction of the cold, imperious Meredith Vickers (Charlize Theron) and the enigmatic android, David (Michael Fassbender). The crew of their ship—the Prometheus, of course—is in the dark regarding the nature of the expedition, and when they learn alien life forms are at the heart of it all they are extremely skeptical. But their skepticism turns to fear-tinged certainty as the idealism of the star-struck archeologists evolves into horror, for the crew of the Prometheus does indeed discover alien life—ruthless, predatory, and virtually unkillable.

Prometheus takes up several divergent themes, most of them never fully answered. Where did human life come from? If aliens made us, then who made them? Does science refute God, or point the way to Him? And why might our unearthly creators decide that making us was a mistake, to be mercilessly corrected?

The script deserves a lot of credit for exploring these sometimes contradictory questions, though it fails to ever really answer them. Indeed, much of the plot itself remains opaque, and the viewer walks away unsure of just why certain things in the movie happens. In short, the story doesn’t make total sense.

But it is never boring. Prometheus is essentially a horror film, and if it fails to equal the original Alien—a tall order, indeed—it is still one of the best thrillers the big screen is likely to give us this year. Like Alien, Prometheus gives us a strong female protagonist with whom to identify, and Elizabeth Shaw is a likeable, even admirable woman who we want to see survive the chaos that her dreams have turned into. In the end, while her questions remain unanswered, she holds onto the faith in God that her comrades lack. And that is perhaps the film’s most important lesson, even if an unintentional one: when logic fails, when our questions go unanswered, it is faith that nonetheless sees us through.