

Interview: To the Stars With 'Moon' Director Duncan Jones

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 17, 2009 - 7:00am

- [Alien](#) [2]
- [Aliens](#) [3]
- [Avatar](#) [4]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [5]
- [Duncan Jones](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Interview](#) [8]
- [James Cameron](#) [9]
- [Moon](#) [10]
- [Sam Rockwell](#) [11]
- [Star Trek](#) [12]
- [Terminator: Salvation](#) [13]

CHICAGO – With “[Star Trek](#) [12],” “[Terminator: Salvation](#) [14],” and now Duncan Jones’ “[Moon](#) [10],” it’s been a good season for science fiction fans. Jones’ directorial debut is a stunning piece of psychological sci-fi about a man who is literally being replaced by a younger version of himself.

[Sam Rockwell](#) [11] stars (and gives the best performance of the year to date) as Sam, a man who works mining an energy-producing substance on the moon and sends it back to Earth. His three-year assignment with only a robot pal named GERTY (voiced by [Kevin Spacey](#) [15]) to keep him company is finally about to come to an end.

After an accident outside the base, Sam returns to find a younger version of himself who claims to be starting his three-year assignment. Has Sam gone crazy? What is going on? “Moon” is one of the best debuts of the year and it was borne not out of looking at the stars but looking within.



Sam Rockwell, Duncan Jones.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

“Most of the stuff was quite personal, to be honest,” says Jones. “Story-wise, it was really something that I came up with because I wanted to address a few things in my own experience - the idea of being able to meet yourself and talk to a younger version of yourself and maybe give yourself a little slap. Or tell yourself that everything is going to be okay. That was something I found interesting and assumed that everyone has gone through - wanting to be able to tell the younger you that either everything is going to be fine or that you need to change something.”

“Also, while I was writing, I was going through a really painful, horrible, long-distance relationship that was a heartbreaker. I wanted to talk about that - the paranoia and what you go through when you’re trying to maintain a long-distance relationship. So, again, that was a very

personal thing that became incorporated into the story.”



Jones came up with the story, which he wrote specifically for Rockwell, but he handed over screenwriting duties to Nathan Parker. Jones regularly works with a writer named Mike Johnson, but he was busy working on “Sherlock Holmes”. He felt confident that Parker could handle writing duties but also not interfere with what Jones wanted to accomplish as a director. “It was my first feature and it was Nathan’s first feature. It seemed like I was going to get my opportunity as a director and Nathan needed his opportunity as a writer, but it was very much a collaborative work.”

That collaborative work actually stemmed from a meeting with Rockwell about another film. “It was written FOR Sam,” reveals Jones. “I met with Sam about three years ago to discuss another script - one that Mike and I had written together. He loved it but it was slightly too ambitious as a first feature and it wasn’t something that we were going to be able to make. But Sam and I got along very well and we just started talking about the kinds of roles that he wanted to play as an actor and I told him that I would write something for him because I wanted him to be in my first film. ”

Rockwell and Jones got together for a week of rehearsal time with the help of “one of Sam’s actor buddies. We broke the script down and went through it scene by scene. We tried a lot of improv. We tried to get into how differentiate the two Sams. What made Sam #1 and Sam #2 different? Sam had a lot of details about the background of the character that didn’t even make the script. I would either know it or I would make it up in a way that could be cohesive with the rest of it, so we both felt comfortable knowing where things were coming from.”

Unable to shoot Sam #1 and Sam #2 separately, Rockwell had to jump between the two characters. “We did have, in the back of our minds, some rough archetypes,” says Jones. “Sam #1 was kind of a little more hippie-dippie. He’d kind of mellowed out over the years and he was a little bit bumbling in some ways. We didn’t want to play it up too much but it was a way to immediately get into that character and then we could tone it down. Sam #2 was kind of angry, a bit aggressive, but he does actually change over the course of the film and he mellows out and becomes much more sympathetic and almost brotherly to Sam #1. Those were the two types and it was really gauging where they were over the course of the film.”

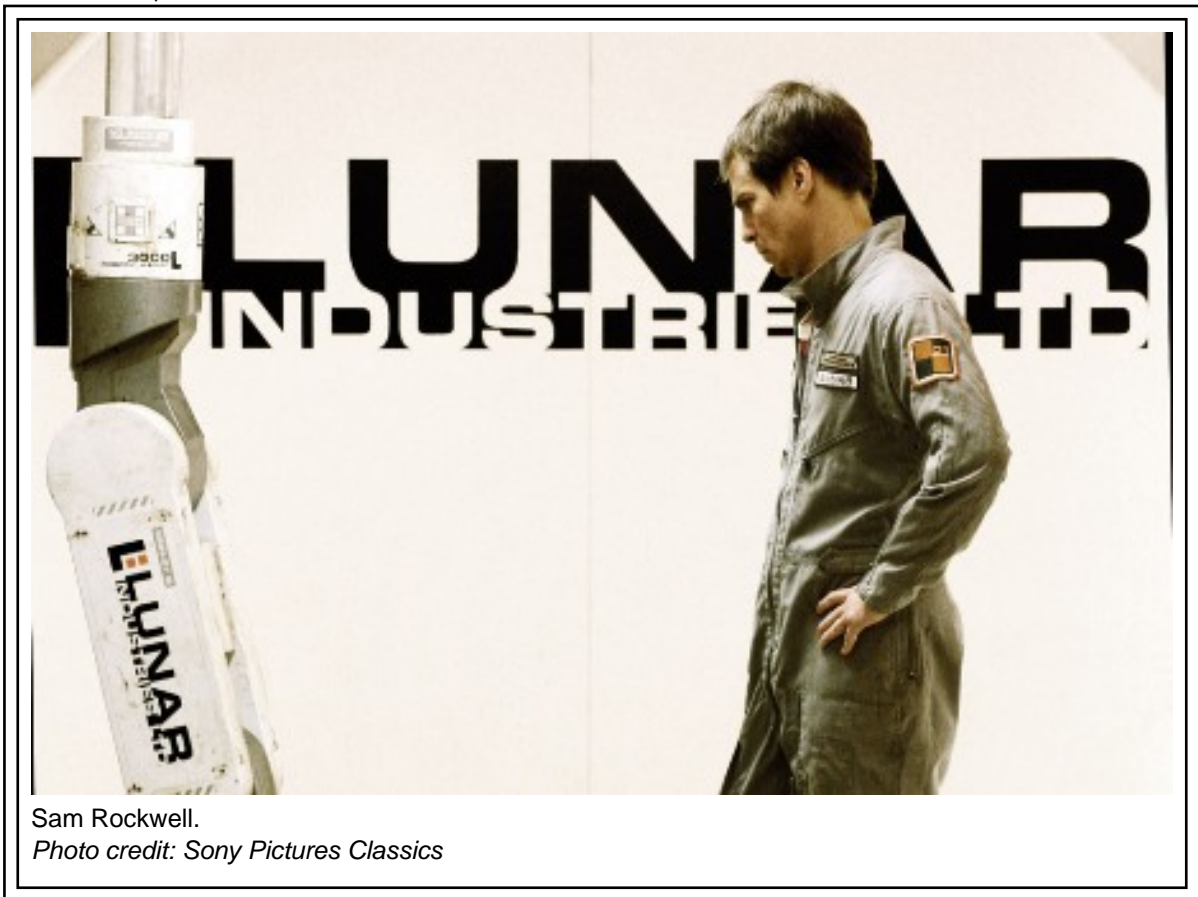


Sam Rockwell.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

A key element to “Moon” is the design of the base, one that looks like it was pulled straight from sci-fi of the ’70s and ’80s, more than the slick look of today’s genre product. When asked about the design of the base, Jones says, “Our big homage is to science fiction films of the ’70s and ’80s. There’s two homages. There’s the type of film in that it’s about a character, a blue-collar guy, and how the environment affects them as opposed to lantern-jawed heroes going from one set piece to another. That was one homage. The other homage is obviously the aesthetic. That was straight out of films like Outland and Alien. Those were the two touchstones. The work of Ron Kolb, Syd Mead, Douglas Trumbull, Ridley Scott.’

Jones and his team also did something unusual in modern sci-fi, using miniatures instead of just CGI. “Cameron used them for all of the Aliens stuff and it still holds up,” says Jones. “It looks fantastic. And we were lucky that were still a couple of old-timers out there who worked on those films that were willing to come and work with us. I’m not sure we could have done it without them. Bill Pearson, who built our miniatures, built the Nostromo.”



Sam Rockwell.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

To make a movie like “Moon,” a director needs to be a sci-fi fan himself. Jones cites “Silent Running,” “Outland,” and “Alien” as major influences but also cops to seeing two of 2009’s biggest movies, having high praise for J.J. Abrams’ “Star Trek”, but also noting, “Watching it, it did sort of remind me of some things about Star Trek that I missed that WEREN’T in the film. But I’m sure that...It was a good starting place for a new franchise and it was a great starting place. If J.J. decides to do a sequel, I’m sure he will venture into the territory that I miss from the TV show - the idea of venturing to new places. That side of it.”

As for "Terminator: Salvation," Jones merely says, "I think you're a very, very brave man to try and make a sequel to a James Cameron film. I think Cameron himself is one of the few people to make a successful sequel - Aliens - from the Ridley Scott film. But I wouldn't try and do that. (Laughs.) You've got to have very special chops to do a sequel to a James Cameron film. I can't wait for James Cameron's Avatar. That should be really interesting. But other than Avatar, which we'll have to see, they have been fairly stereotypical Hollywood films. Some work better than others but this is very different from anything else."

Finally, Jones revealed that he's working on a companion piece to "Moon" called "Mute". The film will take place in the same time period and even feature Rockwell in a small role playing the same character from "Moon".

"It's the other side of the coin from Moon," says Jones. "Moon is this small, quiet film about isolation and alienation. Within the same timeline of Moon, I want to tell a city film, a story that takes place in future Berlin and it's a thriller. It's very much paying homage to Blade Runner. It's that vibe. And Sam's actually agreed to do a little cameo in it and we'll do a little epilogue about what happened to Sam in the next film. It's very much the other side of the coin.'

Jones doesn't want to lock into science fiction for the rest of his career. "Just these first two," he admits. "I think these work as a companion set. It kind of worked for Ridley Scott and for James Cameron to do a pair of science fiction films first. (Laughs.) Kinda. If I could get anywhere near that, I'd be very happy."

"Moon" is playing in select cities now and opens around this Friday, June 19th, 2009 in Chicago.



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