

## Chilling, Creepy 'Apollo 18' Makes Us Wonder What If

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 2, 2011 - 6:11pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Space, the final frontier. The USA made one giant leap for mankind during the Apollo moon landing program forty years ago. Why were the missions abruptly terminated? Why haven't they gone back? "Apollo 18" theorizes on the answers.

Set up and shot as if using top secret archival footage from the era, technical flaws and all, Apollo 18 becomes a secret mission after Apollo 17 (the last real mission), facilitated by the Department of Defense (and that ain't gonna come out good). The film is eerie, for the colorless vacuum of the moon is a perfect setting for a few conspiracy theories to bloom.

It begins with the somber explanations of how Apollo 11 started it all, but one year later the decision to scrub the rest of the missions was made, and Apollo 17 was the last "official landing" on the moon in 1972. Apollo 18 is being launched as a secret mission, given the task to plant what is assumed to be defense oriented sensors that would detect Russian air strikes.



Can You Hear Me Now?: A Space Scream in 'Apollo 18'  
Photo credit: Dimension Films

As was in the previous missions, two astronauts (portrayed by Warren Christie and Lloyd Owen) land on the lunar surface, and another crew member circles above them in orbit within the command module. The secret mission is then tracked through video and surveillance footage that has ended up being declassified, and the bizarre saga unfolds through those multiple points of view.



Great care in production design detail is what makes the film work. The mock-up of the 1970s era video and moonscapes are spot on. As the surreal creepiness unfolds, it is enhanced by cameras on the astronauts, the lunar module (inside and out), the command module circling above and that funky rover car the moon men used to drive. It is spliced together for maximum effect, and contains appropriate aging on the film and fuzziness on the video, plus the audio rhythms of "Houston, we have a problem." For those reasons alone, it is a true original idea.

The seriousness the film imposes is almost a satire of America's obsession with conspiracy theories, and the cold bureaucracy portrayed in the Department of Defense is appropriate given the vast conglomerate of agencies designed to "protect us." With a choice of NASA, the CIA or the military, nothing says covert operations like the good ol' DOD. The 800 pounds of moon rocks collected will never seem the same.

The "secret" of the secret mission has been covered before in other types of sci-fi, and didn't this summer's "Transformers" movie cover the same lunar territory? Through the lens of the various cameras, and edited for maximum jump-from-the-seats reaction, the early ordinariness of the lunar surface revelations become progressively weirder, and by the end is overshadowed by how the persons on the ground are treating their sky pilots above. This pays off long after the "event" ultimately asserts itself.



Something's Not Right: The Lunar Surface in 'Apollo 18'  
Photo credit: Dimension Films

The actors portraying the astronauts are great, both for the look of the era (the director mocks up some home movies just to realize 1974 even more) and how they handle all the fear and loathing on the lunar surface and in the module above. The script by Brian Miller gives them some crisp, desperate dialogue to go along with the fuzzy era video look, with even a nice reference to Watergate thrown in.

Sometimes a moon rock is more than a moon rock, and the Department of Defense really exists to defend themselves. Given the covert state of government today, a confidential moon mission like Apollo 18 seems like a small drop in the huge secretive vat of "nothing to see here, move along."

*"Apollo 18" opens everywhere on September 2nd. Featuring Warren Christie and Lloyd Owen. Screenplay by Brian Miller, directed by Gozalo López-Gallego. Rated "PG-13"*



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]  
Senior Staff Writer  
HollywoodChicago.com

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]

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