

Suspenseful ‘Life’ is Tense, Compelling Science Fiction

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 25, 2017 - 8:14am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Combining the invasion elements of “Alien” with the life-raft-in-space morbidity of “Gravity,” the new film “Life” maintains a grip from the enlightened beginning to the twisted end. Mars is the origin, so the film joins “The Martian” and “The Space Between Us” in sourcing the red planet.

The idea, it seems, is to find the type of actors who can sell the story, and the cast of “Life” is up to the task. Jake Gyllenhaal, Ryan Reynolds and Rebecca Ferguson are part of the crew that is experiencing the “and then there were none” scenario, as the life form from Mars is loose on their space station. This seemingly unstoppable force occurs through the decision making of exploration... are we willing to take the consequences of “discovering” life outside the earth? It all adds up to a well done thriller, which is more of a suspense movie – like the Alien series – than the consequences-of-the-future science fiction.

A six-person crew pilots the International Space Station, an orbiting United Nations occupied by astronauts portrayed by Jake Gyllenhaal, Ryan Reynolds (Americans), Rebecca Ferguson, Ariyon Barkare (Brits), Hiroyuki Sanada (Japanese) and Olga Dihovichnaya (Russian). They corral a returning Mars probe, hoping a new experiment will yield some evidence of life there.



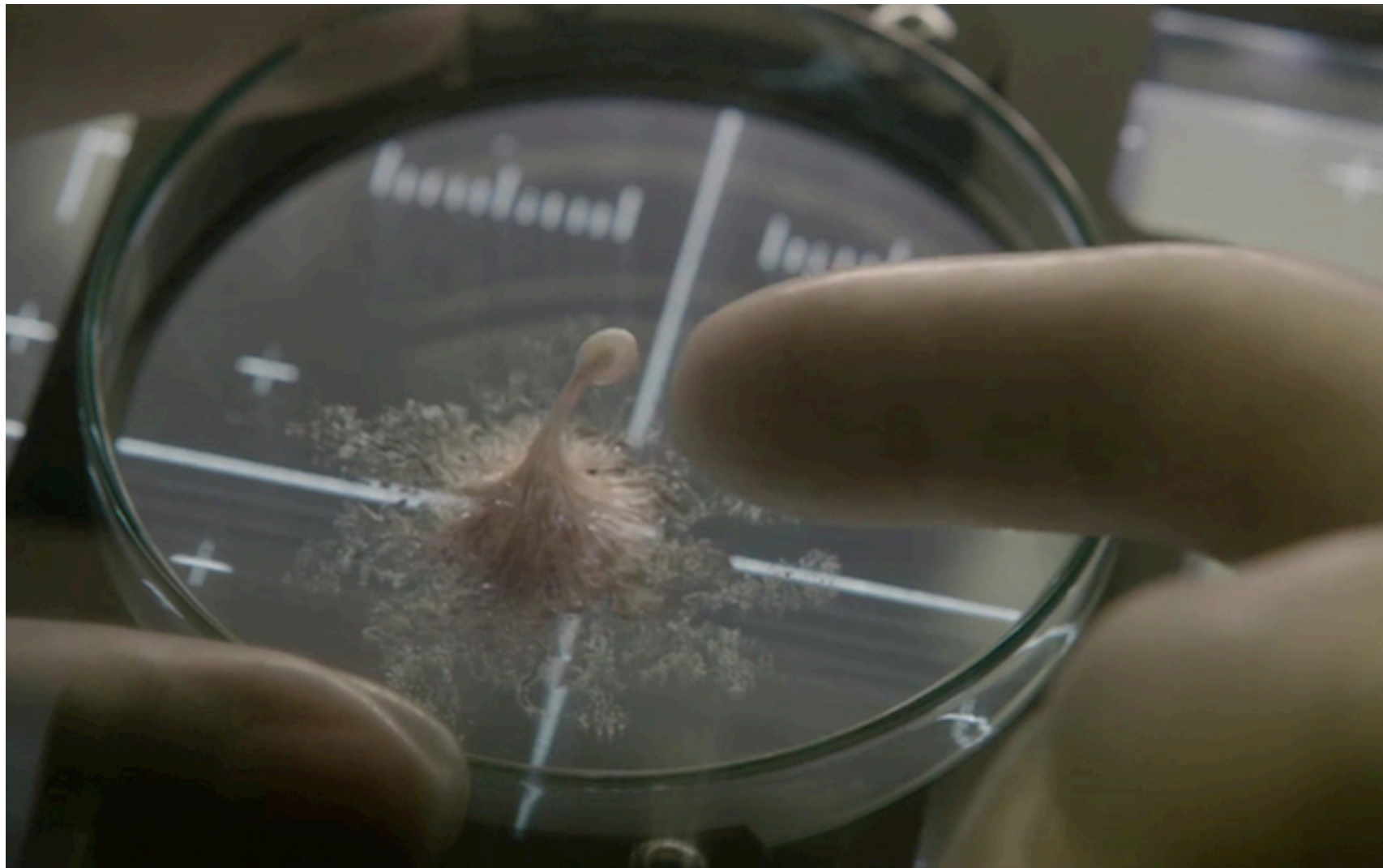
Jake Gyllenhaal Peers into Space in ‘Life’

Photo credit: Columbia Pictures

Profoundly, the life force is discovered, and reacts intelligently to sensory stimulation, which thrills the crew. That thrill turns to ill as the amoeba-like creature craves more life, and is willing to take it from the space craft. It escapes the lab environment and begins to wreak havoc, and one by one the members of space station need to figure out how to survive.

The edge-of-the-seat boldness is the best part of this adventure. From the life discovery – which is so profound they let school children on earth name it Calvin – to the first attack on the crew, the film never lets up on its pulse pounding environment. It is the kind of story where closing the right valve is crucial, as the creature looks for a way in or out, and each click of a meter on an instrument panel becomes significant and potentially vital.

As the creature gains an upper hand, the film calls into question what “life” is and what it means to mess with the “discovery” of it. In our civilization, the recorders of history used the term “discovery” to mean one type of people taking over certain land masses on earth, even if native peoples – who have less power or abilities to defend their territories – are already there. The mystery of Mars is given this treatment, and the life that is discovered there is a force that fights back outside its environment. Will that creature be the “discoverer” eventually, if its victories become recorded?



A Close Encounter Takes Place in 'Life'

Photo credit: Columbia Pictures

Jake Gyllenhaal is a steady performer who also has a sensitive persona that can be annoying, but in this film he just portrays a character – part of the excellent ensemble – and takes over the last part of the mission with an organic intensity. The first victim of the life form, portrayed by Ariyon Barkare, is victimized not only physically but mentally, as his experiments revive and encourage the creature’s growth, and he also has a profound sadness after this scientific wonder becomes a harsh reality.

This is earnest and exciting science fiction, rooted in our current technological world, where inventive discovery... when pushed into the mainstream world... changes our way of thinking and doing things. The “Life” in the film is also how our lives are altered when these connective encounters occur. What is life and who are we within it are questions that become essential when we shake hands with the stuff of our journey.

“Life” opens everywhere on March 24th. Featuring Jake Gyllenhaal, Ryan Reynolds, Rebecca Ferguson, Ariyon Barkare Hiroyuki Sanada and Olga Dihovichnaya. Written by Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick. Directed by Daniel Espinosa. Rated “R”



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