

Film Review: Sci-fi pandemonium feels eerily familiar

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U-Wire Content

Blending elements of countless science fiction films that preceded it, "Pandorum" creates a creepy atmosphere, but eventually gets lost in the pandemonium caused by its plot's intricacy.

Directed by Christian Alvart ("Case 39"), "Pandorum" is set in 2174, when Earth no longer exists. Our species' survival now rests in the spaceship Elysium's successful journey to a planet capable of sustaining human life. Two crew members, Cpl. Bower (Ben Foster, "30 Days of Night") and Lt. Payton (Dennis Quaid, "G.I. Joe"), have just awoken from a cryogenic freeze and have no recollection of where they are or what their mission is. The two must work together to figure out where the 60,000 others on board have gone and what their purpose on the Elysium is before the evil that lurks in the darkness of the ship finds them.

This may be a stupid question, but have all hopes for originality in the sci-fi genre been lost? This weekend alone we get "Pandorum," a version of Pixar's "WALL-E" that has been molested by Ridley Scott's "Alien," as well as Bruce Willis' "Surrogates," which is a white man's "I, Robot" mixed with a Spielberg-less "Minority Report." Add in the disappointment that was "9" two weeks ago and it definitely appears that this is the case.

Originality aside, "Pandorum" is hardly a bad movie. Alvart does a solid job of creating a dark and tense atmosphere that makes the 1997 sci-fi horror film "Event Horizon" so horrifying. Also like "Event Horizon," "Pandorum" plays off the idea of space paranoia and the gruesome acts, of which it makes the ship's crewmembers capable. Taking things one step further, though, Alvart throws in a few gnarly looking beasts that look eerily familiar to the creatures from 2006's "The Descent."

By mixing the strange alien creatures with the plot of paranoia and the idea that no one can be trusted, along with not knowing what the hell is going on, "Pandorum"

becomes one big, jumbled, yet consistently chilling, mess. Oh, I almost forgot to mention that random renegade martial arts warriors who look like extras from "Mad Max" (Did you honestly think the movie name-dropping was over?) are thrown into the already overwhelming scenario to add a few more visual thrills to the action sequences.

Known for his over-the-top supporting roles, Foster does a commendable job in the lead role. While his dialogue may be light, his intensity and commanding aura carry the film well. Quaid, on the other hand, does little with his short role and even when the big twist comes, his chance to shine comes off as lackluster as a B-movie performance.

When the final 20 minutes arrive, the film does kick into high gear and delivers more revelations than "The Departed." (That was the last one, I swear). Satisfying as the conclusion may be, many will find it difficult to be satisfied by a film so convoluted and unoriginal that it makes the "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End" (Sorry, I lied) screenplay appear simple.

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