



FILM: **ARRIVAL**

FDG RATING: 3.1

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Denis Villeneuve: *Director*

Amy Adams: *Actress, Louise Banks*

Jeremy Renner: *Actor, Ian Donnelly*

Based on book "Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang

DATE: December 11, 2016

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **ARRIVAL**

Arrival is a sci-fi film with a novel approach to the descending aliens who, rather than trying to capture earthlings for research or infect them with a hideous disease, or become earth's all powerful rulers, these globular extraterrestrials sole purpose is to help humanity with a gift to see into the future, because they know that in 3000 years they will need humanity's help. We learn their purpose through the communications expertise of linguistics professor, Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams) who, while watching the chaotic spectacle on TV is whisked away from her home by an elite military entourage and taken to a makeshift military base in Montana and tasked with figuring out what the extraterrestrials want and why they are here.

Twelve massive black, spaceship-pods are hovering in 12 locations around the globe causing mass panic while emergency meetings of leaders in each location discuss how to attack the terrifying alien threat and are teetering on launching a galactic war. For some reason, it seems that the US is the only country approaching the aliens linguistically, hoping Louise Banks can interpret the deep, echoing, whale groan-grunting sounds they emit. She is teamed with Ian Donnelly, a scientist-mathematician (Jeremy Renner) who applies mathematical algorithms to the inky black circular, sound shapes that spurt from the alien heptapods star shaped tips of their appendages.

The decoding process is extremely fascinating and spans the length of the film while simultaneously weaving in flashbacks/flashforwards of Louise's life. She had a daughter who died very young from a disease. Her husband couldn't handle the devastating loss of his daughter and leaves the relationship. That is the tear jerker part of the film but it becomes more interesting as the movie begins to dreamily glide between Louise's present, past, and future so that we aren't quite sure which time dimension we are seeing.

For those of us who enjoy a good sci-film and can ignore any parts that don't make sense, Arrival, is an absorbing story told in a soulful, hopeful tone. Appreciating its original approach and hopeful message, most of our resident critics thought it was a good sci-fi flick. Others couldn't get past the holes in the story as well as Colonel Weber's (Forest Whitaker) hard military persona who easily gives the go-ahead to Louise. Other problem areas that interrupted the story flow: If linguistics is the study of sound and meaning, that really wouldn't include ink blob visual symbols emitted by the heptapods. So why wouldn't the military also kidnap a semiotics (symbols) expert to be part of the team? Why is Ian always smiling? His character doesn't seem to have the concern that the situation deserves. (Renner was outstanding in the Hurt Locker. What happened here? Or was it just the flat dimensional character he portrayed?) With the highest level of restricted security covering the pod and the inner capsule, how could those two rogue soldiers plant the explosive device? They surely would have been stopped. In a following scene, the heptapods are pounding on the transparent partition trying to alert Louise and Ian to the device behind them, but these two experts fail to pick up on this obvious communication and completely ignore these dramatic gestures. Given the more sophisticated response to the aliens by the United States, isn't it too simplistic to assume all the other countries would jump to a destructive strategy? It appears that the heptapods gave Louise the gift of seeing the future, but why would she be the only person to receive the gift? (Intended to be a gift for the human race, evidently, she is the only being in the entire world with the patience and desire to try to understand the heptapods.) Her ability to see the future is how she knows the dying words of General Shang's wife, causing him to call off China's military attack. But since this action is in the present, Shang wouldn't yet know his wife's dying words. (Typical time-warp contradiction). And was the back story of Louise's daughter dying really necessary?

But pushing the gaping holes aside, the exploration of how we communicate was compelling. Especially how easy it is to misinterpret communication which, as in this situation, could lead to possible catastrophic consequences. Louise decoded the term "weapon" causing an immediate escalated fear reaction but she quickly countered with an explanation that it could also mean "tool" or "technology". The film also exhibits a plea for international cooperation: the heptapods purposely landed in 12 strategic locations in order to force the international world to work together to solve the communications puzzle. And the beauty of multi-dimensional chronology, as seen in the heptapods perception of non-linear time, is reflected in the way the film unfolds, allowing us to experience this unfamiliar, non-sequential, visionary existence.

Critics said Arrival is one of the best science fiction movies in decades praising its mature and thought-provoking approach to the genre. Many in our discussion group agreed and offered a warm reception for this film's arrival, but a few of our own skeptical earthlings extended a cooler welcome resulting in a multidimensional score of 3.1 (including a 4, some 3s, and a lonely 2) on a scale of 1-5. (5 is the best)



See you at the movies!

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Film Discussion Group Organizer