

Director Joseph Kosinski (last responsible for the soulless *Tron: Legacy*) takes his time building up the drama. Why rush, when you have so many gorgeous Icelandic landscapes to film, and stunning sets on which cinematographer Claudio Miranda (*Life of Pi*) can linger? Kosinski shot on location and built sets and props, like Jack's cool dragonfly of a ship, whenever possible, and it shows: *Oblivion*'s ruined Earth, and Jack's presence in it, boasts a physicality that so many big-budget movies lack. If this one doesn't have a ton to say — it flirts with thematic ideas about power and lies, loneliness and connection, and is a little overwrought about memory — it also doesn't waste your time with *Prometheus*-level self-important nonsense. If you are tired of Cruise, *Oblivion* might help; while he does rely too much on one very serious squint, he fits into the film's plot like hand in glove, his bland familiarity almost a character trait.

The movie's preview invited speculation, and if you had theories about what it all meant, all that vagueness and Morgan Freeman with his huge cigar, chances are good that at least one of those theories will bear fruit in the course of *Oblivion*'s slightly overlong runtime. Trying to work out what's really going on makes for an unexpectedly satisfying game, and Kosinski and his fellow screenwriters (including Michael Arndt) aim for a balance between spelling everything out (like a typical spectacle flick) and leaving things up to your imagination (like an artier sort of film might).

Oblivion has a few plot wobbles, but nothing worse than those fans of *Star Trek* (myself included) chose to overlook. There's something sturdy and likable about the way Kosinski tells his big story — which cherry-picks from sci-fi classics that are almost spoilery to name — around just a few characters, drawn together across an empty planet. Don't jack your expectations too high, but don't write this one off entirely — and keep an eye on Kosinski. ■



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