

IN SPACE, NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU YAWN

Director Ridley Scott turns the face-hugger on you with the wretched, cynical *Alien: Covenant*



Ponderous, pornographic and unforgivably dull, *Alien: Covenant* proves once and for all that Ridley Scott is the single biggest hack in contemporary Hollywood — a director of such ignominious bad faith that, faced with the morally bankrupt option of playing pimp or whore to his own reputation, he simply chooses both.

Let us not dither here over tedious details like plot, because if you've seen one *Alien* rehash, you've now seen them all: A big, clunky cargo ship with a crew in deep sleep suddenly pops awake, only to receive a mysterious alien transmission that it simply must investigate, against the objections of certain lesser officers.

Draped over this musty skeleton of a story is a mangled and tendentious re-envisioning of the Judeo-Christian myth of creation, which Scott and his six screenwriters work over like drunken monkeys thumbing through the Pentateuch.

At the center of it all stands poor Michael Fassbender in the dual role of the androids' David (get it?) and of Walter. They stand in for God and Satan in this insipid retelling of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The fascist devil android David

wants to repopulate the universe with perfect aliens, using the human crew of the *Covenant* as big fleshy incubators, but Walter, the more evolved android, has feelings.

To answer the question whether it's better to serve in heaven or reign in hell, David and Walter have a kick-ass ninja fight right out of the *X-Men* movies. Who wins? Who cares? (Spoiler alert: there will be a sequel.) Of course, the film also wants to paint Walter as a kind of android-Jesus, leading to a theological confusion that is silly at best.

Alien: Covenant is the cinematic equivalent of a mediocre man in mid-life crisis purchasing a red Corvette to compensate for his waning vitality and diminishing relevance. That Scott opts to rev his exhaust in our face for two and a half hours should be grounds for a class-action lawsuit.

Let you think my objections to *Alien: Covenant* are merely of the twee intellectual variety, I submit for your perusal a sampling of the moral, technical and narrative sins of this commodified bummer of a movie:

The violence of *Covenant* is vulgar, sadistic and as languorously served up as a slo-mo money shot. During the film's one completely arbitrary sex scene, which looks

like something brother Tony Scott (*Top Gun*) might have directed, two inexplicably showering crewmembers (Really? Erotic showering in the aftermath of a massacre?) are gutted when the alien's phallic tail slithers up the woman's leg.

Every single character is a bad stand-in for a previous character in a previous *Alien* film.

The film is utterly lacking in suspense.

Instead of suspense, or even sense, it relies on cheap scares and one-liners that culminate in Fassbender actually saying, as he does his best Hannibal Lecter, "Night, night, don't let the bedbugs bite."

After a protracted and incredibly absurd battle to the death with an alien while cabled to the surface of a hovercraft in swirling, tilting lift-off, Daniels — played by Katherine Waterston in the butch Ripley role, right down to nipples poking through her tank top — is approached from behind by David/Walter. When he taps her on the shoulder, she doesn't so much as flinch.

The nonsense just goes on. There isn't a thing about this movie that doesn't insult the intelligence of the audience, right down to its trailer, a cobbled-together bit of consumer fraud that should inspire a second class-action lawsuit.

With the original *Alien*, released in 1979, Scott somehow managed to concoct a masterpiece of slow-broiling horror and paranoia — a sci-fi thriller about a ragtag crew of blue-collar workers in deep space, all of them remorselessly sold out by an evil corporation that wants to cart home the perfect weapon, an indestructible biological killing machine. The movie is gritty, artsy, excruciatingly suspense and loaded with implication.

Almost four decades later, and Scott himself has become that evil corporation, foisting a face-hugging beast of prey on Hollywood audiences. Oh well: As they say, there's a sucker born every second. *Alien: Covenant* is an amusement park run by a jaded barker who can't confront his own nihilism because it keeps paying the bills. (*Broadway Metro, Cinemark 17, Regal Valley River*) ■

EUGENE ART TALK

BY BOB KEEFER

WHITE LOTUS CELEBRATES A QUARTER CENTURY IN EUGENE

An artistic marriage creates a leading art gallery

One day in 1984, a young Taiwanese woman spotted an older American man standing at a traffic intersection in Taipei. He looked confused. "He looked like he was lost," recalls Hue-Ping Lin. "I asked if I could help him."

Rather than trying to give complicated directions to a foreigner, Lin ended up walking him the few blocks to his destination. "I asked where he was from. He said 'Oregon,'" Lin says. "I said, 'I just got admitted to graduate school at the University of Oregon.'"

She and Dick Easley, a former U.S. Navy officer turned stockbroker turned art collector, were married on Jan. 2, 1985. Lin was 26; Easley was 50. Their marriage would produce one of Eugene's most prominent art galleries, the White Lotus Gallery.

On Saturday, May 27, Lin and her staff at White Lotus will open a show that celebrates a quarter century of exhibiting fine Asian and Northwestern paintings, prints and sculpture in Eugene. The exhibition will include work by a range of artists the gallery has shown. Sadly, Easley won't be able to join the party; he died April 22 at the age of 82.

In 1992, just a couple years before I decided to swerve my newspaper career from news into art writing, I wandered into the original White Lotus, soon after it opened — it was at 2636 Willamette Street, in what is now a Mini Pet

Mart — and began what would become a slow, delicious mentorship in Asian art from Lin and Easley.

In its early years, the gallery showed works from Easley's collection of mid-20th-century Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, which were as foreign and enticing to me as comic books from another planet. Dick was always happy to introduce work to a beginner, the way you might take someone to a new restaurant that serves interesting but unfamiliar cuisine.

Soon White Lotus was also showing contemporary paintings and prints collected by Lin on her regular trips to Taiwan and China. Lin never went for flashy or expensive work. "I wasn't looking for what people wanted," she says. "I was looking for good, not-well-represented artists, particularly female artists. I still feel pretty strongly that they are under-represented. A lot of times we didn't sell that much."

Lin would bring little-known Asian artists to Eugene to attend their own shows. Most of them didn't speak English, and I soon found myself doing interviews in translation with people like Wang Gongyi, Miao Hui-Xin and Su Xing Pin — artists who have since gone on to international acclaim.

The early days were slow. Few people found their way to the tiny, out-of-the-way gallery. Then a strange and unexpected thing happened: "Something called 'the internet,'" Lin says.

She and Easley built a website. "Then somebody called one day from Minnesota," she says. "I had to say we are a very small gallery. 'But you have exactly the kind of work I'm looking for,' the buyer said." Soon they were selling Asian art around the country.

The gallery's reputation spread. In 1996 Lin and Gordon Gilkey, Oregon's most prominent print collector, co-curated a show at the Portland Art Museum of *Contemporary Chinese Prints* with work from more than 50 artists.

Gradually Easley and Lin began to include non-Asian art at the gallery. The first Westerner to show there was Gary Tepfer, with his photographs of Mongolia; another was painter Jon Jay Cruson, whose work has always shown a strong Asian influence.

One of the most spectacular non-Asian shows at the gallery came in 2013, when it presented work by Morris Graves, an Oregon native nationally known in the 1950s as one of four Northwest mystic painters (the other three were Guy Anderson, Kenneth Callahan and Mark Tobey).

It is perhaps fitting that one of Graves' paintings, from 1945, is simply titled "Lotus." ■

Twenty-five Years of the White Lotus Gallery opens with a reception from 1 pm to 5 pm Saturday, May 27, and runs through July 8 at the White Lotus Gallery, 767 Willamette Street.