

MOVIE REVIEW

‘Rogue One’ is a dark, exhilarating blast

By LINDSEY BAHR
AP Film Writer

“Rogue One: A Star Wars Story” seemed suspicious on paper, like any film saddled with the dreaded “spinoff” label. For a while all the odds looked stacked against it too — reshoots, script changes and a director in Gareth Edwards whose last blockbuster “Godzilla” had visual flair but no humanity, not to mention the fact that the film would be asking us to learn a dozen new characters with strange names, none of which were Skywalker or Solo. And of course as with any franchise there’s that ever-present knowledge that, in some ways, this is another line-item on a corporate profit sheet.

As it turns out, those should-be liabilities were only assets in the end. “Rogue One” is a bold and stirring adventure film that will have both fans and casual observers spellbound. It is easily the most exciting blockbuster in recent memory this side of “Mad Max: Fury Road,” and that includes “The Force Awakens,” which now looks lazy and bloated with sentimentality and fan service in comparison to the subversive ingenuity of “Rogue One.”

How refreshing it is to have a truly contained film that doesn’t have any objective beyond the story at hand. There is nothing to advance, nothing to tease, no “maybe we’ll find answers in the next movie in 2 years” here. It is just allowed to be what it is, which is an intense and visually engrossing powder keg of a film.

It’s a simple idea, really: Who are the rebels who stole the plans for the Death Star? That pivotal action kicked off the original “Star Wars” and it’s pretty inherently dramatic.

Loosely, “Rogue One” is rooted around the plight of Jyn Erso, whose father Galen Erso (Mads



Jonathan Olley/Lucasfilm Ltd. via AP

This image released by Lucasfilm Ltd. shows Felicity Jones and Diego Luna, right, in a scene from “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.”

“Rogue One: ”

★★★★

PG-13, 133 minutes

Mikkelsen) is a scientist who once worked for the Empire. He gets drawn back in by the ambitious Orson Krennic (Ben Mendelsohn) to help finish the Death Star, leaving Jyn, played by Beau and Dolly Gadsdon as a young girl, and Felicity Jones as an adult, to survive on her own. Jyn is sort of raised by a rebel extremist in Saw Gerrera (an over-the-top Forest Whitaker), but much of this is left both unseen and unexplained.

What we know is she’s a child of war, and an almost apathetic one at that, until she’s rescued

from imprisonment by a group of rebels hoping her familial connections might help with their efforts against the Empire. There she’s put together with a deadpan droid K-2S0 (Alan Tudyk) and a spy, Cassian (Diego Luna), who’s given a secret mission within the mission. Eventually they meet the blind Jedi Chirrut (Donnie Yen), his decidedly more practical companion Baze Malbus (Wen Jiang) and the conflicted pilot (Riz Ahmed), forming a motley crew of unlikely heroes.

The real feat of “Rogue One” is that Edwards and screenwriters Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy create a world with actual stakes, making the audience feel for and worry about characters we’ve just met. It doesn’t rely on decades-old nostalgia, although there is a bit

of that too in mostly unobtrusive ways. There’s also some CGI that veers pretty dramatically into the uncanny valley. But like the somewhat slow and disjointed beginning, eventually it all just washes over you, especially as the riveting action kicks in, taking you from the trenches to space and back again. The only downside of the thrilling battles in the third act is that it means less time with the leads — especially Jones, Luna and Mendelsohn, whose performances make up for the script’s occasional deficiencies.

“Rogue One: A Star Wars Story” is one of the best Star Wars films ever made. Only time will tell if it will surpass “The Empire Strikes Back” as the franchise standard bearer. There’s a compelling case to be made.

WHAT TO DO

Festivals

Living Nativity

•Saturday, Dec. 17, 6-8 p.m.; Sunday, Dec. 18, 4-6 p.m.
•First United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston

Free. Live animals and actors portray the Biblical story of Jesus’ birth. Refreshments served inside the church. Also, Saturday includes live entertainment by Desert Aire Dulcimers.

Christmas Extravaganza

•Sunday, Dec. 18; 1:30-8 p.m.

•Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., 403 S. Main St., Pendleton
Free/all ages. Live music hosted by J.D. Kindle and the Eastern Oregon Playboys. The holiday festival features lots of musical guests and Santa.

Art, Museums & Authors

Student art + Telera McCullough & Amy Fink

•Saturdays/Sundays; noon-5 p.m.

•Arts Portal Gallery, 508 N. Main St., Milton-Freewater

Free. Exhibit features artwork from Central Middle School and Mac-Hi students, as well as the felted wool work of McCullough and Fink. Runs through Dec. 31.

Art of the Gift

•Tuesday-Fridays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
•Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St.
www.pendletonarts.org

Free. Unique holiday gift shopping of more than 35 artists. Also, in the gallery are gorgeous antique American stained glass windows from the collection of Frank Duff. Handcrafted furniture by Bruce Gianotti and Jeff Blackwood also on display and available for sale. Runs through Dec. 31.

“Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race”

•Monday - Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

•Tamástsiik Cultural Institute, near Wildhorse Resort & Casino.
www.tamastsiik.org

\$10/adults, \$9/senior citizens, \$6/youths, free/5 and under or \$25/family of four. Features a traveling exhibit from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which examines how Nazi leadership used science to help legitimize persecution, murder, and ultimately, genocide. Runs through Jan. 7.

“Celebrate Family”

•Monday-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

•Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, 2020 Auburn St., Baker City
www.crossroads-arts.org

Free. Features the Bingham family artists Pam Bingham (pottery), Greg Johnson (woodworking), Seth Bingham (metal art) and Amanda Jakobson (sign maker). Much of the artwork is for sale. Runs through Dec. 31. Paul Hoelscher

•Tuesday-Sundays, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

•Peterson’s Gallery, 1925 Main St., Baker City
www.petersonsgallery.net
Free. Features the charcoal

and ink artwork of Paul Hoelscher. Runs through Dec. 31.

Music

Phoebe Gildea & Noah Brenner

•Saturday, Dec. 17; 7:30 p.m.

•Kirkman House Museum, 214 N. Colville, Walla Walla
www.kirkmanhousemuseum.org

\$25. Introducing their CD release featuring Gildea’s soprano voice and Brenner’s harp-playing. The classic Christmas collection features old and familiar favorites.

The Mix

•Saturday, Dec. 17; 8 p.m. No cover

•Wildhorse Sports Bar, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission

Sunny Lefurd

•Saturday, Dec. 17; 9:30 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston
<https://thepheasant.ticketleap.com>

\$25. An evening of music with Sunny Lefurd and Cory Peterson.

Great Pacific Christmas Pageant

•Sunday, Dec. 18; 1:30-8 p.m.

•Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., 403 S. Main St., Pendleton
Free/all ages. Plenty of guests (TBA) and Christmas music, both traditional and otherwise.

Small Souls with Nitty Gritty

•Monday, Dec. 19; 7-9 p.m.

•Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., 403 S. Main St., Pendleton

Free/all ages. Brian Rozen-dal and Bryan Daste transform minimalist folk songs into lyrical soundscapes.

Nuketown

•Friday, Dec. 23; Saturday, Dec. 24; 8 p.m. No cover

•Wildhorse Sports Bar, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission

Night life

Karaoke Competition

•Saturday, Dec. 17; 8 p.m.-2 a.m.

•Sub Zero Restaurant & Lounge, 100 W. Highway 730, Irigoin

No cover. Signups start at 8 p.m. Cash prizes for winners.

DJ music

•Saturdays, 8 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Karaoke w/DJ David

•Saturdays; 8 p.m.

•Riverside Sports Bar, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla

Whiskey Wednesday Game Night

•Wednesdays; 3-7 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

No cover. Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo 64.

Digital Karaoke

•Thursdays and Fridays, 8 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Mac’s Trivia Night

•Thursdays, 8 p.m. No cover

•Mac’s Bar & Grill, 1400 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton

21 and older. East. Drink. Think. Teams of 2-8 compete in trivia contest with other teams. Live host and prizes.

Wine tasting

•Fridays, 4-8 p.m.

•Sno Road Winery, 111 W. Main St., Echo.

Open Mic

•First/third Friday each month, 8 p.m.-midnight

•The Packard Tavern, 118 S.E. Court Ave., Pendleton
www.facebook.com/groups/pendletonopenmic

Karaoke w/DJ David

•Fridays; 8 p.m.

•Riverside Sports Bar, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla

DJ and dancing

•Fridays, 8 p.m.

•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Cimmi’s Late Night Martini Lounge

•Fridays; 9 p.m.-midnight

•Virgil’s at Cimmiyotti’s, 137 S. Main St., Pendleton

No cover. Features martinis, mixology and music.

Theater & film

“A Christmas Story: The Musical”

•Dec. 16-17, 23; 7:30 p.m.

•Dec. 17, 24; 2:30 p.m.

•Elgin Opera House, 104 N. Eighth St.
www.elginoperahouse.com

Reserved \$17/\$8. Set in the fictional town of Hohman, Indiana, the musical follows 9-year-old Ralphie Parker and his quest for the Holy Grail of Christmas gifts — an Official Red Ryder

carbine-action 200-shot Range Model air rifle.

Dancing with the Hermiston Stars

•Saturday, Jan. 14; 7 p.m.

•Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St.
www.desertartscouncil.com

\$20/adults, \$10/students (additional \$5 at the door). Presented by Desert Arts Council, it features a new line-up of community stars who hit the dance floor with members of the Utah Ballroom Dance Company.

Cabin Fever

•Saturday, Jan. 14, 6 p.m.

Dutch oven dinner show; Saturday, Jan. 21; 6 p.m., show only

•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395

\$38/dinner show, \$15/show only. John Wambeke & Friends present a musical variety show.

Tickets available at Cottage Flowers, 1725 N. First St., Hermiston.

Hot tickets

•Trans-Siberian Orchestra: The Ghosts of Christmas Eve

Dec. 30, Moda Center, Portland; Dec. 31, Key Arena, Seattle. \$41-

\$76 via www.ticketmaster.com

•Cabin Fever: Jan. 14 & Jan. 21, Hermiston Conference Center.

\$38/Dutch oven dinner show, \$15/show only via Cottage Flowers, 1725 N. First St., Hermiston

Want to get your event listed in our calendar? Send information to tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com, or c/o Tammy Malgesini, 333 E. Main Street, Hermiston, OR, 97838.

BRIEFLY

G.P. to throw annual Christmas extravaganza

PENDLETON — A variety of musicians will take the stage during the annual Great Pacific Christmas Extravaganza.

Sure to ramp or amp up your holiday spirit, the event is hosted by J.D. Kindle and the Eastern Oregon Playboys. The fun gets started at 1:30 p.m. at Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., 403 S. Main St., Pendleton. It’s an all-ages event and there is no cover charge.

Christmas tunes, both familiar favorites and original renditions, will play long into the evening. Also, Santa Claus is on the special guest list.

For more information, call 541-276-1350 or search Facebook for “Great Pacific.”

Rare plant named after rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix

SAN DIEGO (AP) — California researchers have named a newly discovered rare plant after Jimi Hendrix.

The plant, found in Baja California, Mexico, has been christened *Dudleya hendrixii*, or “Hendrix’s liveforever.”

Liveforevers are a kind of succulent with enormous lifespans.

This one is a stalky plant less than a foot tall with pinkish-white flowers that dies in summer and re-sprouts in fall.

San Diego State University says a former graduate student, Mark Doderio, discovered the plant — supposedly while listening to Hendrix’s song “Voodoo Child.”

The university says Doderio and Stephen McCabe of the University of California, Santa Cruz, decided to name it for the late rock guitarist.

HERMISTON

Melonville Comedy Festival offers laughter in the new year

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

A pair of regulars on the Bob & Tom Show will return to the Melonville Comedy Festival stage after the new year.

Dwight Slade, who performs on some of the biggest comedy venues across the globe, will headline the show. Gabriel Rutledge, a past winner of the Seattle International Comedy Competition, is the middle act. The pair previously brought laughs to Hermiston about 10 years ago. In addition, Chase Mayers, an up-and-coming funny man from Louisiana, is the opener and will serve as master of ceremonies.

The Melonville Comedy Festival is Saturday, Jan. 28 at 8 p.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. Tickets, which are \$35 each, are now on sale for the 21-and-over event. Midway Tavern will offer a no-host bar. In addition, athletes and coaches from the local Special Olympics team



Contributed photo by Will Radik

Dwight Slade is the headliner for the Melonville Comedy Festival Saturday, Jan. 28 at the Hermiston Conference Center.

will sell food to raise money for expenses.

The annual comedy festival started in the early 1990s as a fundraiser for the Umatilla County Fair. Serving on the fair board at the time, Warren Smith assisted with booking national acts to the fair’s Main Stage. Bringing



Contributed photo

Gabriel Rutledge



Contributed photo

Chase Mayers

comedians to town, Smith said, was cheaper than arranging for bands because they didn’t come with lots of equipment or a big entourage. Because of that, Smith took on producing the show when the fair board decided to discontinue the festival several years later.

Smith likes to laugh and stand-up comedy shows are limited in the Hermiston area, he said. As long as people still support it, Smith will continue arranging for the yearly show.

Trying to keep tickets at a reasonable price, Smith brings in talent that are known around the comedy circles. However, they don’t come with the high ticket prices of top acts, which can cost upwards of a couple hundred dollars, he said.

“I like to make the show affordable so everyday people can come out,” Smith said.

The winner of this year’s Boston Comedy Festival, Slade aspired to do stand-up as an adolescent. At the age of 14, he would sneak out of the house with one of his friends and they would pedal their bikes to local open mic nights. When he was 18, Slade placed third in the Euphoria Comedy Contest. He then headed to Hollywood, where he was one of the youngest comedians ever to perform at the famed Comedy Store.

During the comedy boom

of the ‘80s, Slade headed to Portland — where he still resides — to get more valuable stage time. The move resulted in establishing himself as a premier comic in the Pacific Northwest — opening shows for Jay Leno, Jerry Seinfeld and Dave Chappelle.

In the ‘90s, Slade garnered more radio time and even released a pair of comedy albums. Following that was his feature film debut in 2000 in “Inconceivable.”

From there, Slade made appearances in three prestigious North American comedy festivals — Aspen, Chicago and Montreal. That success led to international exposure at Scotland’s Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He also has performed for United States troops in Afghanistan and done a tour in Israel.

Rutledge, who finds humor in everyday life, also is the author of “Happiness Isn’t Funny.” He has made TV appearances, including on Nickelodeon, Comedy Central and HBO. A pair

of his comedy albums are among the top ten on Sirius Satellite radio. He resides in Olympia, Washington.

Hailing from Louisiana, Mayers is a comedy club headliner throughout the Gulf Coast region. His unique accent and mixture of storytelling and observations draws audiences in wherever he performs. He made his big screen debut in “The Butler.”

The show, Smith said, is sure to tickle the funny bone. Hilarious and entertaining, it may not necessarily be politically correct but it won’t be raunchy or indecent, he said.

Tickets are available at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce or www.melonvillecomedyfestival.com. For more information, contact Smith at 541-561-7488, melonvillecomedyfestival@gmail.com or search Facebook for “Melonville Comedy Festival.”

Contact Community Editor Tammy Malgesini at tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4539