Review: Gravity, 90 Minutes of Terrifying Beauty, Extraordinary Special Effects

Jocelyn Noveck, AP National Writer

In an age when we're able to consume content so many different ways — and that's a good thing, mostly — let's declare right now that there's only one truly correct way to experience "Gravity," Alfonso Cuaron's thrilling new space film. In a theater. On a huge screen. And in 3-D. Yes, even for all you 3-D naysayers — we hear you, but this is the movie you HAVE to see in 3-D.

And please, no matter how many months or years pass, don't watch this film on your little smartphone.

If you've seen the heart-pounding trailer, you'll know that Sandra Bullock and George Clooney play astronauts who experience a traumatic accident in space. You may also know about the extraordinary special effects used to create this weightless cinematic world — so extraordinary that many are calling the film a landmark of the sci-fi genre.

But what you can't know, until you're in the theater, is just how much you'll feel like you're up there in space, feeling its vastness, perhaps even feeling cold. And how you might let yourself forget, momentarily, that this movie wasn't shot on location. And how you'll ask yourself, how did they DO this? And how you'll then forget the question, because you'll be caught up once again in this 90-minute thrill ride.

Cuaron's filmmaking prowess is no secret. His 2007 "Children of Men" was a masterful evocation of a bleak futuristic world where women can no longer conceive, and warring gangs struggle for control of the dying human race.

But while that film teemed with people, "Gravity" has but a few. It aims to evoke the full terror of true solitude — indeed, Bullock is alone much of the time.

And though it doesn't take place on Earth, "Gravity" is in a way closer to our reality — not a futuristic world, but one that exists today, though you'd have to be on a space mission to get there.

If you were, you'd want to be with Matt Kowalski (Clooney), the experienced mission commander, cocky and totally in charge. He jokes easily with Mission Control (voiced by Ed Harris, in a nice nod to "Apollo 13" and "The Right Stuff") while spacewalking with a new jet pack, but when disaster strikes, he's the guy you want nearby.

Bullock is Ryan Stone, a medical engineer installing a new system on the Hubble telescope. She's on her first mission, and feeling rather queasy, when suddenly a massive field of debris comes hurtling by, sending Stone spiraling out of control.

All this and more is established in a single, stunning, 13-minute opening shot. And Cuaron is just getting started.

While we'll reveal no more plot, it's worth noting that the film's one flaw stems from an effort to give Bullock's character more of a backstory than necessary, perhaps an overly sentimental one. But overall, the actress finds that difficult balance between frailty and tenacity. And Bullock's grounded presence — pun intended — is a huge plus here.

The script is by Cuaron and his son, Jonas, but kudos are also due cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki and visual effects supervisor Tim Webber, for their seamless blend of live action, animation and CGI. As for the 3-D, never once does it feel anything less than totally integrated with the film's purpose.

As the credits roll, you may find yourself thinking about real space launches you've watched, or watching man walk on the moon, and remembering that feeling of awe at how man ever developed the technology to explore space in the first place.

But save a bit of movie-lover's awe, too, for Cuaron, who has many of us feeling closer to space than we've ever felt before.

"Gravity," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "intense perilous sequences, some disturbing images and brief strong language." Running time: 90 minutes. Four stars out of four.

MPAA definition of PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Copyright 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/12/2013 - 4:02pm*):
http://www.scientificcomputing.com/news/2013/10/review-gravity-90-minutes-terrifying-beauty-extraordinary-special-effects