

Solo Mission
A *Project Hail Mary* Review
By: Adam Dombrow

Every once in a while, a movie comes out that just completely fires on all cylinders, producing something that transcends being “ah movie” or “visual/cinematic art”—something that resonates deeper, it becomes *an experience*. *Project Hail Mary*—especially given the current political climate—is one of those *experiences*.

I already knew the chances were good that I would like *Project Hail Mary*; c’mon, it has my guy Gosling in it! I did not expect though that I would be bestowing “best movie I’ll see this year” level hype **in March**, but here we are.

I have not yet gotten around to reading *Project Hail Mary* the book; at first, I felt this might be a detriment, but I am happy to report that I almost now feel like it was a blessing in disguise. I often feel that when we experience adaptations—especially from books into visual mediums—there is almost this sense of *betrayal* if something doesn’t fit this vision that we’ve conjured up in our own minds. You hear it constantly: “the book was better”. I’m honestly glad that I haven’t yet gotten to experience the book, because the visual that Phil Lord and Christopher Miller have given us is downright awe inspiring!

Let’s start there then: the visuals. I am almost mad at myself that I opted to *not* see *Project Hail Mary* on some kind of premium screen (I almost bit the bullet and went to see it on Screen X, despite not enjoying my experience with *Thunderbolts** on that format) and just went with a laser projection (still *kind of* premium I suppose). Let me be clear: **you are doing yourself**

a disservice to not see *Project Hail Mary* on as large of a screen as possible! The visual that Lord, Miller, and cinematographer Greig Fraser (who is absolutely fantastic—look up his filmography) have brought to the screen is on the level of say *2001: A Space Odyssey* when it came out in 1968, or *Jurassic Park* in 1993: *that* scene (if you have read the book, or have already seen the movie, you will know which one) will no doubt go down in cinema history, and snippets will be shown on highlight reels henceforth!

Let's be honest: movies set in space or on space ships are kind of cheating visually, because very few of us have ever been *on* a spaceship, and even fewer of us have been *in* space, so of course they almost *all look cool*. What's even more funny is that the rest of the film is pretty simplistic: sure there are a handful of scenery changes but it's a lot of the same throughout: it's Ryland aboard the Hail Mary, but the genius of Fraser's filming is ***how*** his shots make you ***feel***. You *feel* like you are trapped in a space ship with Ryland, or trapped on an aircraft carrier smack dab in the middle of the ocean. When the movie starts, you *feel* disoriented, like you yourself are just waking up from an induced coma. Early on, you *feel* isolated: the shots feel cramped, with a lot of empty space, and quietness; but the shots open up more as the story progresses, and the Hail Mary begins feeling more crowded, more lively.

In terms of performances, you would think that the “human aspect” of *Project Hail Mary* rests completely on Gosling's shoulders, but you would be very wrong. Sure, Gosling is (as always) amazing; Ryland Grace is initially *not* a hero: he is uncertain of himself, he is lonely, and he *does not* want to be responsible for saving **the Earth!** Gosling brings very real, raw emotion to Grace's entire hero's journey, making it impossible not to feel for the character. The slow burn

of Grace's memories returning serves as a first and second act gut punch, but then something incredible happens: Ryland meets "Rocky".

This budding friendship brought on full blown *E.T.* nostalgia and feels for me, and the team behind "Rocky" (James Ortiz and "The Rockyteers") do a phenomenal job bringing the puppet to life—especially early on, when all of the pair's communication is non-verbal. Kudos to everyone involved for not just making "Rocky" some CGI *thing* and calling it a day. The relationship between Ryland and "Rocky" is the real center of the film (more on that later), and it was absolutely imperative that the character *feel* human, despite not *being* human.

Special kudos go out to Sandra Hüller as well. Hüller has to play German scientist Eva Stratt cold and calculating—she is in charge of figuring out how to save the planet, and that leaves little room for emotional attachments; still though, she does a masterful job slowly revealing that her heart is not completely made of stone, culminating in one of the (in my opinion) most beautiful, *simple yet massively impactful* scenes in the entire film.

I've talked about *feeling* a lot in this review, and that's by design. I usually try to not get too preachy when I write reviews; people are going to believe what they want to believe, and our human experiences are all different, so something that hits me one way due to my experiences might fall flat for someone else. But I don't feel like I am going too far by saying that now—maybe more than ever—with our planet being where it is, **we need art to save us by driving the point home that the differences we perceive to be insurmountable might simply take a leap of good faith to solve.** If a guy and an alien can find common ground—regardless of the situation—but we as humans cannot, then we really do not deserve this planet. If anything, I would hope that this movie would *at least* give viewers pause, and encourage them to think

deeply about just how *insignificant* our differences are in the grander scheme of things.

Project Hail Mary is a masterpiece both technically and critically. I can almost guarantee that there is something here for everyone to like, and although the plot is heavy (I mean we are talking about an extinction level event if Ryland fails at his mission), you will walk away ***feeling something*** (most likely feeling good), and isn't that **why** we go to the movies? While it deserves to be experienced on the big screen (maybe even the biggest screen you can possibly find), I at the very least urge *everyone* to experience this movie!