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Solo: A Star Wars Story (Movie Review)

Abstract

"In *Solo*, Han tries to figure out who he is and what he belongs to, if anything."

Posting about the movie *Solo: A Star Wars Story* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/movie-review-solo/>

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Movie Review: “Solo”

 inallthings.org/movie-review-solo/

Josh Matthews

June 2, 2018



Title: [Solo: A Star Wars Story](#)

Directed by: Ron Howard

Written by: Jonathan Kasdan and Lawrence Kasdan

Music by: John Powell

Starring: Alden Ehrenreich, Woody Harrelson, Emilia Clarke, Donald Glover, Paul Bettany, and Joonas Suotamo

Solo, the new Disney *Star Wars* movie, begins with a flash of light. Then the screen goes to black. Then another flash. Then black again.

What’s happening is that Han Solo, the movie’s hero, is hot-wiring the intergalactic version of a 1950s hot rod. He’s making sparks that will light up his world, maybe for good. But he’s having trouble, and things are going back to black. He’s trying to get the car to run while also trying to steal it.

This sums up Disney’s takeover of *Star Wars*, which can’t seem to make any original creative sparks after taking over the franchise from George Lucas. As of this writing, *Solo* is performing below expectations at movie theaters worldwide, following blistering fan critiques of 2017’s *The Last Jedi*.

Disney’s main problem is that it is still feasting on the beloved details of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, only nothing’s left on the bone. What new element of the recent *Star Wars* movies has been memorable? Has Disney created anything fresh and interesting yet? *The Force Awakens* rehashes just about every major scene of that trilogy, making it one long, expensive collage.

Solo is guilty of the same artistic theft. I counted at least twenty references to the original trilogy, and there’s probably dozens more. Things happen in *Solo* that we’ve already seen before. Remember somebody trying to use a thermal detonator to threaten an alien mob boss? Or Han risking the Millennium Falcon by taking it into an asteroid field? How about a ruse that uses a shackled Chewbacca as a fake prisoner?

You could look at this darkly and call it unoriginal, or you could look at it brightly and call it retro. *Solo* has some of that big-helmeted, plasticky 1970s sci-fi look to it that makes my inner seven-year-old happy. Yet, it's not even original in its retro nostalgia; recent movies like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Blade Runner 2049*, *Ready Player One*, and the *Planet of the Apes* trilogy beat it to that.

Yet of all of these, *Solo* might offer the most fun.

That might be because of the character. Thanks to Harrison Ford, Han Solo had more appeal to some of us than the archetypal characters he was surrounded by, including the Princess, the Wizard, and the Hero with a Thousand Faces.

Solo tries to flesh out why, in *Star Wars: Episode IV- A New Hope*, Han Solo is an arrogant but likeable smuggler who doesn't seem to care for much besides getting paid. It explains how he becomes a pilot, how he meets Lando Calrissian, how he wins the Falcon, and—in the best scene of all—how he becomes buddies with Chewbacca.

I've held off on explaining the plot because mentioning almost any of it would spoil too much. What should suffice is that Solo (Alden Ehrenreich) is probably twenty years younger in *Solo* than he is in *Episode IV*. He has a girlfriend whom he loves, but they are separated melodramatically in the movie's opening. After their split, he forever hopes to make enough money and return to her, a romantic dream that sets up him up to be smacked hard by reality.

The movie includes a kitchen sink's worth of plot clichés: the Heist, the Poker Game Con, the Prison Break, and One Last Job. Steer clear of this movie if your tolerance for any of these is low; when I say that this movie is “fun,” just know that I am a sucker for all of them.

As well, most of the plot of *Solo* is built on several small lines in the original trilogy, including the one about Han making the Kessel Run in twelve parsecs. Han does indeed accomplish this, although in slightly more than twelve (he rounds down for bragging rights). While I still don't know what “the Kessel Run in twelve parsecs” means, it's part of an inspired sequence that includes a “gravity well” and a Cthulhu-like space octopus—the kind of new sights that Disney needs more of in these *Star Wars* movies.

I always thought that *Solo* was modeled in part on the King Rat figure in WWII prison camp movies, exemplified best by William Holden's character in *Stalag 17*. While ostensibly part of a larger team, these solo characters live for themselves. They do what it takes to survive— only maybe they have a heart for the group they are supposed to be a part of.

In *Solo*, Han tries to figure out who he is and what he belongs to, if anything. He lives, as the movie's opening tells us, in a “lawless time,” even though the tyrannical Empire oppresses everybody and enlists young men like Han in its terrible wars of conquest.

These days, there is a lot of appeal for this kind of character existing in this kind of setting. Although the material needs a new vision, *Solo* is the rare, unoriginal blockbuster that might be worthy of a sequel. I see more sparks of light than darkness here.