



Deep space

One giant leap for cinema, even on the small screen...

GRAVITY ¹²

Film ★★★★★ Extras ★★★★★

OUT NOW DVD, BD, 3D BD



LIFE IN SPACE IS impossible," asserts the soon-to-be-legendary intro card preceding Alfonso Cuarón's already legendary sci-fi. Anyone familiar with the genre would be ill-advised to argue anything to the contrary – call it shouting into the void – so the real question has to be: how can a film set against such a gargantuan canvas, a film that demands to be seen in the cinema, preferably in IMAX, possibly survive on the small screen?

The answer is by adapting. Viewed at home in ultra high-def 3D (the Blu-ray

combo pack also includes a 2D version) the depth of field is impressive, even if the artifice of the special effects is more apparent. But whereas in the cinema Cuarón's dizzying visuals eclipsed the minutiae, here it's the other way round. Tiny details – out-of-her-depth astronaut Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) orbited by her own translucent tears, a Marvin the Martian doll floating cheekily past – take on new significance, while the intimate character moments hit harder than space debris.

Much has been written about the unbroken opening shot that rips Stone and mission commander Matt Kowalski (George Clooney) from the relative safety of the Hubble telescope, which they're repairing, and strands them in the endless black. Damn right – it's astounding. But it doesn't *begin* as an action sequence. Instead it spends minutes making us stare at the uncaring curvature of Earth. Even with Clooney's charismatic gadding about, it's lonely as hell. This isn't just widescreen window-dressing, it's testament to the care that went into Cuarón and his son

Jonás' screenplay. As producer David Heyman puts it, "The film you see today is word for word, image for image the script." Perhaps their work, dismissed by a rare few as hollow, deserves reassessment?

TALKING POINT

The visors on Bullock and Clooney's helmets are completely computer generated – right down to the fingerprint marks, scratches and myriad reflections.

'In the cinema, Cuarón's dizzying visuals eclipsed the minutiae. Here it's the other way round...'

Born again

Beneath the groundbreaking SFX and space theatrics, *Gravity* is about something: loneliness, solitude, finding your humanity at the edges of existence. Surprisingly, it wasn't even originally conceived as a science-fiction movie – the setting came to the Cuaróns after they'd hit upon the theme. Having lost her daughter, Stone has banished herself from human contact, from feeling, until in crisis she's reborn – hence the now-iconic shot of her spinning in the foetal position, and her journeys through the fallopian shuttle interiors.

Experienced again in the intimacy of your living room, the most memorable moments come from connection rather than crisis. One thing that plays deeper is how Kowalski reaches out to his colleague in more ways than one. What does she listen to on the radio back home, he asks, shooting the breeze during a space jaunt. "Anything," comes the revealing answer. "I don't care, as long as they don't talk."

No spoilers here, but *Aningaaq* introduces us to another solitary soul from the margins of the same universe, who's also suffering a loss and living at the mercy of machines. It has a little dust of the Cuarón magic, too, and bodes well for Jonas' solo career (he's attached to border-patrol drama *Desierto*). Watching *Gravity* again, it's sparklingly clear that it's much more than a spectacular synthesis of physical and computer-based film-making. The longevity of a movie doesn't lie in its special effects – which, hard as it is to believe right now, will eventually date – but in its heart, its soul and its storytelling. Magnified in close-up, these are just as impressive. Maybe life in space is possible after all. **Matt Glasby**

EXTRAS

- Short film ➤ Introduction ➤ Shot breakdowns (BD)
- Silent space version (BD) ➤ Making Of (BD)

Float on: (main) Sandra Bullock loses her grip; (inset) George Clooney tries to take control.

Ready to tumble

Gravity Mission Control, an excellent more-than-feature-length Making Of, offers many opportunities to do just that. We learn how the *entire* film, four-and-a-half years in the making, was pre-visualised for 10 months, then shot like a Pixar pic, with live (not to mention A-list) elements added in. Watching behind-the-scenes footage of Bullock being spun around like "a chihuahua in a tumble dryer" in an LED disco box (to mimic the light in space), her measured performance starts to seem positively heroic.

The 30-minute *Shot Breakdowns* offers a closer look at Cuarón's trademark long takes – probably the best we've seen since his own *Children Of Men* (2006). Certain critics have deemed these "show-off", but the director contends that he holds the shots "for as long as the narrative allows", rather than the other way round. Jonás,

meanwhile, reminds us that unbroken takes are how we're used to seeing space in reverent documentaries. For a film about accidents, remarkably little is left to chance – although some of it *is* guesswork. "What makes re-entry so difficult to visualise is that it's something nobody has really seen," admits SFX guru Tim Webber, who'll be filling his mantelpiece this awards season.

Less essential is a 20-minute doc on space rubbish narrated by Ed Harris (another voice-only credit for the actor, who pops up as the sound of Mission Control in the main feature – an obvious *Apollo 13* nod.) "What if you woke up tomorrow and your GPS couldn't give you directions?" he asks, Troy McClure-like. *Festival Lists* – which is literally just that – is perhaps a humblebrag too far. But the final extra, *Aningaaq*, a short film directed by Jonás, reminds us how hard he and Cuarón Sr have worked to give *Gravity* some gravitas.