



## Question time

Ridley Scott's space odyssey is more show than tell.

### PROMETHEUS 15

Film ★★★★★ Extras N/A

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**I**F YOU TYPE "WHAT is Prometheus?" into a search engine, you'll receive plenty of theories but little consensus. Many will tell you that it's the eponymous spaceship in Ridley Scott's return to the *Alien* franchise which began in 1979, not to mention a much better title than *Alien 5*. Others will speak of a figure from Greek mythology who stole fire for mankind and was punished by the gods. An *Anchorman* fan suggests the following: "I could be wrong, but I believe *Prometheus* is an old wooden ship used during the Civil War era." Whichever you prefer, this

is a film built on mysteries – whether it actually solves any of them is another matter. Based on a script by Jon Spaihts (*The Darkest Hour*) and Damon Lindelof, whose work on *Lost* has become a byword for philosophical prick teasing, *Prometheus* begins beautifully, like a David Attenborough special on the dawn of man. In a ragged Ice Age landscape, a loin-clothed giant, or "Engineer", opens what looks like a Fabergé passion fruit and swallows the contents. Soon his cells are

exploding in a shower of CG awesomeness, and his body washing downstream on warring currents. What this sequence has to do with anything is debatable, but it's an apt introduction to a film that teems with ideas.

#### Mandroid of the match

Fast forward several millennia to the Isle of Skye in 2089, where geologists Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) and Charlie Holloway (Logan Marshall-Green) discover a cave painting of another Engineer scattering strange orbs. Is it a map of the planets?

Pearls before swine? A load of old balls? Shaw and Holloway favour the first option, and soon we've skipped to space, 2093, where the *Prometheus* is about to touch down on LV-223, one of the worlds depicted. The ship's (motley) crew includes no-nonsense

commander Meredith Vickers (Charlize Theron), who's so tough she does press-ups straight out of stasis sleep. "How long?" she asks, then, "Has anyone died?" Meanwhile, Captain Janek (Idris Elba) seems capable of anything except giving a shit, and snarling geologist Fifield (underrated UK actor Sean Harris) makes an early play for ship psycho. Most intriguing of all is David (Michael Fassbender), a camp, Kryten-ish mandroid who styles himself after Peter O'Toole in *Lawrence Of Arabia*. "The trick," he parrots uncannily, "is not minding that it hurts."

After some expository chat from the holographic Peter Weyland (Guy Pearce), the film's right where it should be: deep in the bowels of a dank pyramid looking for enlightenment in the neon-flecked dark. Alive with awful possibilities, this part of *Prometheus* is by far the best *Alien* movie we've seen since 1986 – although anyone expecting the second half to

match should keep David/Lawrence's advice in mind.

Peerless at creating art-designed other-worlds, Scott's never been great at taming wayward narratives, as the multiple versions of *Blade Runner*, *Alien* and *Kingdom Of Heaven* attest. And it's round about this point that *Prometheus* starts slipping from a five-star triumph to a three-star head-scratcher. Inventive body-horror abounds – the exploding Engineer, Fifield and Millburn (Rafe Spall) getting menaced by a slimy cock-serpent – and Shaw proves her kick-ass credentials by climbing into the Med Pod for some impromptu surgery. It's a useful bit of self-help kit that's strangely absent from future films – "They only made a dozen," explains someone, unconvincingly.

#### Spore point

This is just one of many tantalising loose ends/inconsistencies, including, but not

limited to, the following: why doesn't anybody take any weapons to LV-223? Why do highly trained scientists risk life and limb by removing their helmets in a potentially hostile environment, before proceeding to tramp all over potentially significant finds like members of a school field trip? Why does David infect Holloway with an alien spore – is he annoyed because everyone thinks Logan looks like Tom Hardy? Why is Guy Pearce dressed up like Mr Burns from *The Simpsons*? Why would anyone attempt to make contact with alien lifeforms without taking precautions, or make a \$130m movie without considering any of the above? Finally, what's on the extras? (Fox wasn't giving anything away at press time.)

Frustratingly, the script is smart enough to inscribe some of its own flaws into the dialogue. "We made you because we could," Holloway tells David, although it might as well be Scott explaining why he attempted such a belated prequel. "Can you imagine how disappointing it would be for you to hear the same thing from your creator?" is the all-too-pertinent response. Yes, David, we can.

There's a chance that everything will be cleared up in later films/longer cuts, or perhaps sci-fi needs mystery like aliens need hosts, and we'll be forever in the dark. "There's nothing to learn," concludes a major character before slipping off towards the great sequel in the sky, as David bids them a bland, blond bon voyage. And that's *Prometheus* in a nutshell: it may leave all the big questions unanswered, but it's one hell of a trip. **Matt Glasby**

**Red-light district:** David (Michael Fassbender) investigates an alien structure; (inset) Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) browses old memories.

#### TALKING POINT

Theron was initially due to play Elizabeth Shaw but had to cancel due to scheduling conflicts. These were solved after Rapace had been cast, so she played Vickers instead.