

Paul (2011)

Rated R. V-4; L -0; S/N -4. Running time: 1 hour 44 min.

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33-34

Of course, Moses, or whoever compiled the Deuteronomic law, never imagined "alien" as encompassing a visitor from another planet. However, his concern, as expressed in the commandment, would have encompassed Paul, our small green character who has been an alien in the U.S. for the almost 70 years. He has escaped from government control and is driving madly through the desert with federal agents trying to pick up his trail. It is then that his life intersects with those of two goofy Brits.

One lesson from the film: do not let an alien drive your vehicle.

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Simon Pegg (Graeme Willy) and Nick Frost (Clive Gollings), co-authors of a sci-fi comic, have flown from London to attend the annual Comic-Con in San Diego. Now their plans are to travel through the West in a rented RV to visit all the sites where UFOs have been spotted. A car careens wildly by them and then crashes. From the fire emerges the little green alien (voiced by Seth Rogen). Even though they have been immersed in stories of aliens coming to earth, one of the pair faints dead

away. When he wakes up, he is now in the RV and, mistaking the alien for an enemy (after all, don't most sci-fi stories depict aliens as monsters attacking humans?), tries to choke him to death. He almost succeeds until his companion stops him.

There follows a series of crazy adventures, during one of which they pick up Ruth Buggs (Kristen Wiig), daughter of a Christian fundamentalist, whose faith is shattered by Paul because there is no room in her tiny universe for aliens or Evolution. And there is, of course, those federal agents led Agent Zoil (Jason Bateman), and later Tara Walton (Blythe Danner) who as a little girl had first discovered and befriended Paul when he had been left behind by the ship. The result of all this is a potty-mouthed version of Close Encounters of the Third Kind—yes, Devil's Tower figures into the plot. In a way it is too bad that the filmmakers decided to inject so much profanity and sex, because the film could have been a family film. It really is funny in many places, such as the scene that plays against our Bambi-influenced expectations. Paul picks up a bird that has smashed itself against the windshield. Inspirational music swells up as he breathes life back into its dead body. His friends are impressed, and then suddenly shocked as he promptly eats the little creature. To their question he replies that they don't expect him to eat a dead bird, do they?

Others will object too that the depiction of the Christianity of Ruth and her father is too stereotypical of the Fundamentalism that Hollywood loves to attack. Along with the humor, the positive thing about the film that I enjoyed was that Paul is depicted as friendly rather than an evil invader (see my take on this in the review of Battle:L.A.) I just wished that it could have been made in a form so that children could see it too.

For Reflection/Discussion

Might contain spoilers.

1. What do you think of the two main characters? How do they show that even though we might be immersed in science fiction, we still might not be prepared for a close encounter of the third kind? What does this lead the government to do in this and the original movie that it spoofs?
2. How does this film fit into the subgenre of aliens come to earth? (See my review of *Battle: L.A.* and You Tube video *Beyond BattLA.*) How is much of the humor based on the premise that aliens must be hostile?
3. What do you think of the way in which Christianity is portrayed? What do you think of the findings of a recent poll in which over half of the American populace believe that the theory of Evolution is false?
4. What other film genre does the film belong to? How does it show the importance of friends holding up each other in fellowship? (Especially recall the scene in which Paul tells his companions that now he will go on alone.)
5. What did you think about the use of Sigourney Weaver in the film? How is her role and fate amusingly ironic in light of her starring role in the *Alien* series?