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Prometheus

Abstract
This is a film review of *Prometheus* (2012), directed by Ridley Scott.

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Upon its release, *Prometheus* was divisive. It was by no means a flop, coming 24th for international box office takings according to boxofficemojo.com and earning over $100 million over its budget, yet response has been rather love/hate. Other than disappointed *Alien* saga fans who just wanted an arguably unnecessary overtly-linked prequel, it seems that the core of the film was what divided fans: it did not answer all of the questions it posed. Interestingly, those questions were of a spiritual nature.

Taking the plot-seed of the Engineers from *Alien*, *Prometheus* is about a human exploration team taking to the stars in search of the alien beings that created us, after having discovered a star map found in ancient cave drawings all over the world. Using this map, the crew find temple structures on an alien moon where they discover bodies of the once grand Engineers scattered around the temple and piece together that some kind of disaster occurred to kill all but one. Meanwhile, after finding some small unusual examples of alien life, some of the crew are killed and others become infected with the Engineers' apparent bio-weapons. On a quest for eternal life, the surprisingly alive Weyland (of Weyland-Yutani Corp fame) confronts the last surviving Engineer; the Engineer in return proceeds to lay waste to the remainder of the crew. Our protagonist, Elisabeth Shaw and the seemingly now aware android David are left in the end to pilot one of the Engineers' craft to their home-world in order to answer the many *whys* that have gone unanswered.

Immediately we can recognise that Erik von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* has had a large influence here and the door to our spiritual interpretation is opened. *Prometheus* can thus be seen as humanity trying to reach his/her creator. However, this depiction is all-together Lovecraftian: the gods exist, they are infinitely superior to us and they couldn't care less about us. In fact, it is not only that they do not care, but it seems (due to the capsule rooms full of destructive bio-weapons) that they were considering wiping us out and starting again on Earth before an outbreak of their own design put a halt to their plans. In his book

Supernatural in Horror Literature, H. P. Lovecraft says that all horror stems from what he called *cosmic fear*, or to put it another way, existential fear. Pain, death and dying all cause fear because we do not know what happens next, what our purpose may be and what may be out there in (or beyond) the universe *and* what if the answers to those things are not things we would like. Our characters in *Prometheus* want to know why they were created and the Engineer (who may not have even been able to understand such an inferior race) responds unintelligibly to their first request (which is albeit full of hubris as it is a selfish one) and proceeds to eliminate them. Only weapons of their own design can stop them and even then, we can assume there are whole worlds of them out there so the few losses here are hardly a dent to these alien gods' numbers. The body-horror present (the creatures' penetration of the crew and the infamous self-abortion scene) further highlights how foreign and incomprehensible these hoped-for saviours/creators are.

A way in which this relates to the modern spiritual condition is that we still wonder where we may come from and what our purpose is. Both in traditional religion and on-the-rise popular spiritual systems we find people comforted from the existentially-terrifying void. Faith combats the dark. Shaw indeed appears to have some form of Christian belief system which she does not waver from throughout, which seems to almost be a security blanket for the viewer; the main character has not been shaken in the face of these uncaring god-like aliens so there is no cause for alarm. This is no doubt part of what drives her at the end to continue on in her quest to find out 'why.'

This questioning too is another way in which we can see a synchronicity with spirituality. People are often concerned with 'getting things wrong' when it comes to spiritual matters; be it morally, or simply ritually. Shaw even asks at one point: 'What did we do wrong?' Many fans have even constructed theories around this question. There are many blog posts and articles dedicated to the idea that we had transgressed in the eyes of the Engineers

and that is why they wanted to eradicate us and start again. Indeed, *Prometheus* does have an Old Testament flood narrative feel to it in this regard. Some fans have even suggested that since the cave paintings featuring the Engineers date from different times, this means the Engineers occasionally sent envoys to check up on us and that perhaps even Jesus was such an envoy and our crucifixion of him is perhaps why we have incurred the wrath of the 'gods.' Indeed, the Engineer's computer is set for roughly 2000 years prior to the date of the films events: 2093.

The idea that we may not be fulfilling our purpose, or like the Titan with his gift of fire going against the will of God/the gods, is a very real theological issue. Unlike Shaw and the crew of the Prometheus, we do not have any direct empirical way of finding out the truth. We cannot answer that question. So the fact that many questions go directly unanswered in *Prometheus* appears to fit with our situation. Perhaps this lack of answer (given in a psychologically appeasing fiction via the act of film-going/watching) is why some viewers reacted against the film and indeed why some passionately defend it precisely for *not* answering those questions, as we cannot answer them ourselves. If the act of film-going is viewed as escapism and psychologically comforting (be it in allowing ourselves to consider things we normally wouldn't, like death and the afterlife, or experiencing the release of urges that we cannot express in our society) then *Prometheus* conforms all too closely to the reality of this spiritual crisis. *Prometheus* is not an indulgence in a fictional answer, but rather a provoking piece that can be seen to allow us to consider the very same questions of origin, purpose and intent.

In belief we encounter difficult questions that we may either not want to answer or may not be able to answer; we are confronted with uncertainty and intended doubt in the very nature of our creation; we are called on to have faith and not to know. *Prometheus,* as often in science fiction (e.g., *2001: A Space Odyssey*), maps a journey from scientific exploration to

questions about our very nature that go beyond the reach of measuring tools. Perhaps, in the upcoming sequel, Shaw will have her answers and *know* 'why.' Although it appears doubtful, for we never will.