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Elysium

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Elysium

Abstract

This is a film review of *Elysium* (2013), directed by Neill Blomkamp.

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Elysium (paradise) is yet another science fiction story about the future of the earth. In 2154, the earth has become almost uninhabitable, so those with wealth have built a space station called Elysium – a place of ideal happiness - that provides luxurious living for those who can afford it. One of the most important features of Elysium is something called Med-Bay, a medical device that heals all kinds of sickness and infirmity, but which is available only to citizens of Elysium.

Those without money continue to live on earth: an earth that has been physically devastated, is overpopulated, and where people can scrounge out a meager existence at best. The lucky ones work for the Armadyne Corporation, a company that provides arms and weapons to the people of Elysium. But, even those who have a job at Armadyne are treated like slaves by the managers of the company.

Max Da Costa (Matt Damon) is one of the “lucky” ones who are employed by Armadyne. An accident at the plant, however, exposes Max to a lethal dose of radiation and his only hope is to use the Med-Bay facilities to be found on Elysium. But, Max is not a citizen of Elysium and so he is not eligible to use their Med-Bay facilities.

Max seeks the help of a smuggler named Spider to help him sneak onto Elysium where he can use Med-Bay. In return Max must help Spider steal valuable information from the head of Armadyne. Since Max is in a weakened condition as a result of his exposure to radiation, Spider outfits him with a mechanical exoskeleton. Spider also outfits Max with an implant for his brain that will allow Max to steal the information that Spider seeks.

Max agrees to steal the information and it turns out that the information provides the code for making everyone on earth a citizen of Elysium, making them eligible for use of the Med-Bay device. Activating the code, however, will mean the death of Max. In the end, Max activates the

code that makes everyone a citizen of Elysium. This means that everyone now can use Med-Bay and live forever—that is, overcome death and have eternal life. In doing this, Max sacrifices his own life, dying for all of humankind.

One might interpret this movie as just another one of the many “savior” movies out there, where the main character sacrifices himself or herself for the welfare of humankind. But, *Elysium* has a number of elements that suggest that the movie goes beyond a simple savior figure, making it specifically a “Jesus” movie. First, Max is raised by a Catholic nun and we know nothing about his parents. The nun symbolically serves as his mother and she is, we presume, a virgin.

Second, Max’s mother, the nun, makes a prediction. She tells Max: “I know one thing. I know that you are special. You will do something very important one day. Something you were born to do,” clearly pointing out his significance and duty.

Third, when Max is fighting to save all of humanity, he is wounded twice. The first wound is to the right side of his belly. This is where the Roman Centurion stabbed Jesus on the cross with his spear.¹ Max also is stabbed in the hand, just as Jesus is stabbed in the hand when nailed to the cross.

Fourth, when Max dies at the computer desk in Elysium’s main data center, his body posture resembles that of Christ on the cross. Max’s arms are by his side. His head hangs down toward his right side, much the way Jesus is portrayed in many paintings of the crucifixion.

Max sacrifices his own life in order to save humankind, to give humankind eternal life--through the Med-Bay device to which the people of earth now have access as citizens of Elysium. In this case, Max is clearly a savior figure—bringing salvation to humankind through his own death. But, Max also may be seen not just as any savior, but as a Jesus figure: because

his symbolic mother is a virgin; because she predicts that he is destined to do something very important; because Max is wounded in a fashion similar to the wounding of Jesus; and, because at his death we find Max in the cruciform position. Finally, during the movie Max becomes involved with agent Kruger, who works for Elysium. Kruger eventually betrays Max in much the same way that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus: this may be seen as additional evidence that the character of Max is a Jesus figure and not merely a generic savior figure.

¹ According to Christian belief, Jesus Christ was killed on the cross by Jewish authorities. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was the climax of a divine plan for humanity's salvation. However, Islam doesn't accept crucifixion. Allah says in the Qur`an: "And because of their saying (in boast), "We killed Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah," - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of Jesus was put over another man (and they killed that man), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not Jesus, son of Mary. But Allah raised him (Jesus) up (with his body and soul) unto Himself (and he is in the heavens). And Allah is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise." (Surah an-Nisa 157-158).