

## LIFE (2017)

- Released by March 24th, 2017
- 1 hour 43 minutes
- \$58 Million budget
- Daniel Espinosa directed
- Rated R for language throughout, some sci-fi violence and terror
- Production Companies: Columbia Pictures, Skydance Media, Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE)
- Produced by Don Granger, Vicki Dee Rock

## QUICK THOUGHTS:

- **Marisa Serafini**
- **Demetri Panos**

## DEVELOPMENT

- “[W]hen I met the studio, I told them after I had pitched my perspective that I frankly didn’t buy that they would let me do this ending, and if that was so, then I would walk. And then they were very supportive actually; it was one of those sort of lucky coincidences where the people in power can see or were fascinated by the vision of the twists.” - Espinosa
- “It originated out of the head of David Ellison who runs Sky Dance. I don’t know if you got the chance to talk to him. He’s the head of the company. But he had this vision for a movie where they bring back a sample of life from Mars to the international space station for study and it grows when it’s exposed to the atmosphere and it starts to attack the crew. And so he pitches that at a general lunch, because we worked on *GI Joe: Retaliation* for him over at Paramount, and he pitched it to us over lunch and we said, “That sounds pretty cool.” And a few months later and went back in, pitched him our vision for it, and then – ultimately – wrote the screenplay. He hired us to write the screenplay. And it was probably the smoothest, easiest, most fun process of making the movie. Like it just breezed through to production.” - Reese

## WRITING (Rhett Reese, Paul Wernick)

- *Zombieland, G.I. Joe: Retaliation, Deadpool*
- We were very careful not to have that antagonist among them who was more interested in bringing the life form back down to the planet, to help the planet in some nefarious way. - Reese
- We visited the set twice, and in pre-production we were there, but we were by nature of the 21st Century and the ability to communicate easily. We did see things, and were able to kind of rewrite scenes in ADR, in post, so we did have at least some input in post, but largely, we were not functioning in that same capacity [as *Deadpool*] on this one.” - Reese

## STORY/TOPICS

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Comparisons (*Alien/The Thing*)
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Claustrophobia

## **CAST:**

### **JAKE GYLLENHAAL** (David Jordan)

- On March 10, 2016, Jake Gyllenhaal was cast in the film
- Was intrigued not only by the script's scares, but the larger ideas behind the characters. "It was a beautifully paced, terrifying script. It's a fun idea – you think you know where it's going, and then it evolves into something where you really, really don't."
- Jake is very talented and a very creative person, always finding the best way for each scene. In rehearsal he was always questioning and trying a lot of different ways to perform. Every day, we had a rehearsal before we started shooting. It was like a workshop for the theater." -Sanada

### **REBECCA FERGUSON** (Miranda North)

- On January 28, 2016, Rebecca Ferguson came on board to star in the science fiction film
- "Rebecca is a hard worker and a very kind person, very supportive of others. She created a bond between the cast and crew." - Sanada
- "I actually turned the film down in the beginning because I thought, 'How is this not going to be compared to the Ripley character?'" Ferguson told Business Insider, hours before presenting "Life" as the closing-night film at this year's SXSW festival. "And the producer said, 'Just talk to [director] Daniel [Espinosa], let him explain,' and it was literally 10 minutes into that conversation that I was hooked. He said, 'Take the alien out of it and look at the drama between the characters and their storyline.' It's a character piece set in space where we take something from its natural habitat and we try to control it and provoke it and what we're doing is basically creating our own disaster. Which is a beautiful mirror in how we are treating ourselves on earth."- Ferguson

### **RYAN REYNOLDS** (Rory Adams)

- Ryan Reynolds also joined the film on February 16, 2016.
- Ryan was originally going to play David. And I think he was excited about playing the more introspective, you know, going a little bit against type. When the roles swapped, and he took the Rory role and Jake took the David role, I think Ryan did feel like he was very comfortable in his own skin as kind of the, I'd say the cowboy, but just someone who has a great sense of humor, is outgoing and is brave and is cocky a little bit. - Reese
- "Ryan is friendly and of course professional but also a humble person. He was great. He's also an ad-lib pro. The improvisation was great, so I could laugh naturally during the funny scenes. Every take, he'd change the lines to something new." - Sanada

### **HIROYUKI SANADA** (Sho Murakami)

- On June 23, 2016, Hiroyuki Sanada was cast
- This is my fourth space movie.
- "I did some [stunts] in *Life*, where we did two weeks' training for the wire work, but I've been doing that for 40 years. People are surprised I can still do it in my 50s. But that's why I started training when I was young.

### **ARIYON BAKARE** (Hugh Derry)

- To play a paraplegic in zero gravity required a bit more harness work from Bakare than from the other actors. "All of the other characters have one harness, but I had three: a body harness, a swivel, and a jerk vest, which was like a straightjacket," he says. "Derry can't move his legs, so in one particular scene – when his hand gets crushed – his legs have got to be wild and ferocious."
- I flew to L.A. and was meeting for several projects, including *Hidden Figures* and *Fences*. And then this film script came. This was my first audition out of all three of them. And I'd been on second auditions for each one. I was like, "I'm going to land a big Hollywood movie," but I didn't know which one I was going to land.

- Hugh Derry would have training closer to that of Dr. Rutherford, a British geneticist who has published influential books on the creation of life and the use of genetic modification to make new life forms. “When you’re dealing with unknown agencies or unknown organisms, possibly dangerous, possibly infectious, there’s a number of protocols in place to stop any potential threat,” says Rutherford, describing Derry’s lab. “You know these are rigorously enforced with smallpox and Ebola – there are tight regulations which are all managed by major organizations like the CDC. In this case, it’s contained in an incubator, which is contained in a sealed lab, which is on the ISS in low-Earth orbit. This seems like a sensible protocol at the time...”

#### **DIRECTING** (Daniel Espinosa)

- I think in many ways it has more to do with John Carpenter’s *The Thing* because of that, you know?
- You look into like [*Solaris*] Tarkovsky and the greatest sort of artist achievements in the genre. Then you look into like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Carpenter’s *The Thing*, but I thought it was quite interesting that science fiction has a bit of a noir element, you know? We have to take a very sort of noir-esque turn towards the ending that more resembles Raymond Chandler in space. So I thought that was quite fun, but then you also have modern masterpieces like Cuarón’s *Gravity* and Nolan’s *Interstellar*.
- "Once I decided to do 'Life' [Ridley Scott] gave the blessing right away," said Espinosa, who had a relationship with Scott already as he was a producer on Espinosa's 2015 movie "Child 44." "He has always been encouraging of my work and he didn't think it was an 'Alien' rip-off at all. I actually had the opportunity to spend time with him in his office and go through his storyboards for 'Alien' and 'Blade Runner' and talk to him about them. It's an honor that he allowed me to do that."

#### **THE SCIENCE**

- Tons, tons. Just the design of the ISS -- we contacted NASA just to find out what the future development phases would be, to get their perspective on what they were actually going to build. Then to contact the researchers to develop a correct program of how this would actually happen, and then we always had the theoretical physicists on set, that spoke about movement in zero gravity, about what’s possible and what’s not possible, and who works for NASA. Then we had the astronauts who were put together with each actor according to their specific scientific background. So that’s how [we] slowly constructed this piece because I thought what was unique about it was the realism.

#### **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY** (Seamus McGarvey- DP, Nigel Phelps - Production Designer)

- Eight-minute opening shot
- Principal photography on the film began on July 19, 2016, at London's Shepperton Studios.
- There was no greenscreen and they created a full International Space Station and used the four biggest sound stages at Shepperton Studios.
- ISS DESIGN:
  - Phelps designed the ISS set for the film. Known for *WORLD WAR Z* AND *TWO TRANSFORMERS FILMS*
  - The masters built the sets that their actors performed in. It’s not CG. What you’re watching is actually what was shot. The material you have around them will affect their characters.
  - ISS that ages the current modules and adds a few incremental upgrades.
  - The components of the set were modular designs, allowing Espinosa to film long, continuous takes from one location in the ISS to another, but also with removable walls

- and ceilings, allowing him to place the camera wherever he liked.
- Unity is a berthing module allowing vessels to connect to the ISS. For the purposes of the film, this module houses the ISS kitchen (which on the real ISS is located on Zvezda and is not as luxuriant as the film's version). Because a number of scenes involved crew members eating together, the filmmakers chose to expand this space for storytelling purposes.
- Propmaster Barry Gibbs and his team made up 5,000 sachets of food. "You can look at some cool videos where astronauts are eating food in space and they can take it out of the packet and it floats and they can step forward and eat it," says Gibbs. Obviously, that would not be possible with Earth's gravity. "We decided on sachets of food that you would snip at the top and spoon or squeeze."
- **ZERO GRAVITY**
  - Alexandra Reynolds and Henson's stunt team trained the actors for two hours a day leading up to production.
  - "Before filming, we trained a lot with the wire, but also without the wire -- we had to create the feeling of zero G. It's kind of stretching – muscle training – and I got to the point where I was just doing it in my own life," says Hiroyuki Sanada.
  - "I practiced this flotation all the time – when I was sitting, chatting, eating, and so on," concurs Olga Dihovichnaya. "It helped me, because during the take I could think about the scene, not about just about how to continue floating."
  - FRANKLIN HENSON, the film's stunt coordinator, headed the team controlling the harnesses and wires, working closely with Alexandra Reynolds on the actors' stunt movements. "We put all the actors on individual wire rigs, so they could fly up and down the sets, basically controlling it themselves," he says. "We have a number of harnesses – jerk vests, leg cuffs, swivel harnesses – from which they are picked up from the hips. You need a good core strength; if you start to flop, gravity will drag you down. It's hard work, but by the sixth or seventh session they were flying beautifully."
- PROPMASTER BARRY GIBBS involved creating complex pieces of machinery that had to look weightless. One example: an incinerator that is rigged by the astronauts to become a flame thrower. "We had to make a heavy piece of machinery light enough for the actors to be able to carry it and look like there's no weight." They achieved this with the use of puppeteers.

## VFX/EDITING ()

- **CALVIN DESIGN:**
  - SWEDISH GRAFFITI ARTIST JONAS "ZIGGY" RASSMUSON
  - Espinosa turned to slime mold. Though few living organisms are less threatening than slime mold, their unique cellular structure provided inspiration. While human beings are multicellular organisms with specialized cells (brain cells, blood cells, lung cells, etc.), slime molds remain single cells working together as a single unit. "When I saw a slime mold video, it was like an expression of something new," says Espinosa.
  - We were inspired by a lot of very deep-sea creatures, translucent. You know, we did a lot of research into about what lives at the bottom of the ocean and found some translucent deep-sea creatures that inspired us. The octopus was another one that inspired us in terms of its ability to improvise and overcome obstacles. There's a video of an octopus trying to squeeze into a tiny little hole, and it's amazing and haunting at the same time, you know? So we laid it all out on the page. And as we were writing it, a lot of science inspired us. And Daniel and the creature design folks and visual effects folks came on. It evolved over time, but in a way that ultimately culminated in something that's even scarier and cooler on screen than was in our minds.- Paul Wernick

## **WARDROBE/MAKEUP** (Jenny Beavan- Costume Designer)

- "The EVA suit is obviously a complete cheat as it's made in cotton, but it does have gorgeous features, like the gloves which are beautifully detailed and the backpack which is the suit's life support – there is everything in there that you would need for a walk of several hours outside the space station. NASA now has a much more modern pack on the front of the suit, but I felt it was rather overpowering for the actor, so I changed it and went more retro and I think it's the iconic image of an astronaut. There's also a big tool belt and all the badges that they wear that are attached by velcro, which was originally developed for NASA. Velcro is one of those wonderful inventions that we hate in period costume, but we love it in space wear!
- "The IVA suit is a larger suit and has a pram hood arrangement with the helmet, which is a parachute," continues Beavan, a ten-time Oscar nominee and two-time winner, for her work on *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *A Room with a View*. "It's a Russian suit, because the astronauts go up and down in a Soyuz from Kazakhstan."

## **SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS**

### **SOUND/MUSIC** (Jon Ekstrand)

- The composer and the director team up for the sixth time with *Life*.
- Two major musical ideas were to mirror the film's tonal shift and to provide an atonal score that reinforced the film's thriller themes. "The score is more melodic, drawing on classical cinema, in its first third – I didn't want to give away what's coming," he says. "Then it becomes atonal in a way that fits a terrifying thriller. It starts off beautiful and melodic – and in the third reel, it becomes more ominous and dissonant."
- Performed by a 100-piece orchestra and 32-voice choir. Ekstrand moved his studio from Stockholm to London to be closer to Espinosa during the editing process.
- "Since then, we've become the best of friends, and I've seen him pour his bravery, his vision, and his tenacity into his work. He's still drawing on that odd music we heard when we were 21 – he's still imagining our futures, dreaming, and pouring his creativity into his work." - Espinosa

### **PROMOTION**

- *Life* was released on March 24, 2017, by Columbia Pictures after being moved up from its previously announced release date of May 26, 2017, to avoid competition with *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales* and *Alien: Covenant*, which had moved up its release date from August 4, 2017, to May 19, 2017.<sup>[11][12]</sup> It had its world premiere at South by Southwest on March 18, 2017.

### **BOX OFFICE**

- Total Lifetime Grosses (As of March 29th): \$15,906,317
- Domestic: \$15,906,317
  - + Foreign: \$15,850,988
  - = Worldwide: \$31,757,305
- Domestic Summary
  - Opening Weekend: \$12,600,000
  - (#4 rank, 3,146 theaters, \$4,005 average)
  - 100.0% of Total Gross: %
- > View All Weekends
  - Widest Release: 3,146 theaters
  - In Release: 6 days / 0.9 weeks

- It ended up debuting to \$12.6 million, finishing 4th at the box office behind *Beauty and the Beast*, *Power Rangers* and *Kong: Skull Island*

## RECEPTION

- IMDB: 7.9
- Cinemascore: C+
- RT: 67% Tatometer, 63% Audience
- "*Life* is just thrilling, well-acted, and capably filmed enough to overcome an overall inability to add new wrinkles to the trapped-in-space genre." On Metacritic, the film has a score of 54 out of 100, based on 44 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".

## SEQUEL/LEGACY

- "Just the fact that Calvin can now possibly reproduce, I think, is an interesting idea. We've dropped him in a situation that is teeming with life to hunt and to eat. That being the ocean, or the coast of Indonesia or Vietnam or wherever we are saying he's landed. So that opens it up right there. But just the idea of firewalls could extend to Earth in the sense that now they've failed to contain Calvin to the station. The question is, how would the Earth react? Obviously, this was an international effort, so there are a lot of countries cooperating. And again, they would be trying to contain this thing from moving forward and yet there might be more Calvins to deal with. To us, that screams interesting sequel." - Reese
- "There's no sequel coming. It ends like that. It's American pulp fiction. Not like the movie, but pulp fiction, *The Twilight Zone*, and *The Night of the Living Dead*. It's a great tradition. If you look at American movies in the 1900s, those kind of endings solely exist in American cinema. It's a great, great American tradition of those great turns. It's almost like a joke on life. That's why I put that poppy song afterward." - Espinosa

## FINAL THOUGHTS