

Movie Review:

Sexually-charged ‘Don Jon’ explores societal pressures of love

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I have always had a deep abiding love for Joseph Gordon-Levitt. He’s a beautiful man with a penchant for indie films, so basically, we’re soul mates. I wanted to make sure I supported his new endeavor as writer/director/star in the long anticipated film “Don Jon” so I made sure to check it out the week it premiered. Granted, I didn’t know too much about the film beside the very non-descriptive trailer and the fact that I am madly in love with the star.

I saw the film in a full theater where my lack of knowledge about the film seemed to be the norm. There were college girls there to support the man that had been their crush

since “Third Rock from the Sun”—Tommy hit his growth spurt—and college men who were intrigued by the idea of a porn-focused film. All of us settled in for what we were sure would be a funny and sexy film. The movie star Gordon-Levitt in his first screenwriter and director roles as the titular Jon.

Jon is a dedicated son, church member, gym goer, and porn fan. He admits in the beginning of the film that a real woman (he doesn’t use as polite a term) can never be as good as porn in his opinion. He goes on to list the shortcomings of actual women, you know, our wants and needs that aren’t just pleasing him, which get in the way of his enjoyment of the act.

Jon is clearly a self-centered and superficial person who views everything as a

means to an end, even his focus on his family’s church is shown to be another short term fix, a way to wipe his soul clean the way you wipe down a table; more a simple matter of maintenance then faith.

Then Jon meets Barbra; the gorgeous Scarlett Johansson at her New Jersey finest. Up until this point in the movie it’s exactly what everyone expected. Sex, porn, and pretty people. We were all taken by surprise by what Gordon-Levitt had up his sleeve. The second half of the film delves into the ideas of love that our society pushes on us at every turn; from barely clad women in advertisements, to every romantic comedy ever made.

Companies are selling us ideas about love and intimacy and we are internalizing them without even realizing. The film becomes almost

painfully honest, with Jon starting to wonder how someone learns how to have a meaningful relationship if they don’t know. For everyone expecting a write off comedy, the moments of soul searching and honest examination of relationships made the movie harder to sit through.

At some points, the movie becomes so honest that it’s almost difficult to watch without cringing. If you aren’t the type to become squeamish in the face of vulnerability, and the awkward actions of the oblivious then this movie will be a wonderful experience that will incite questions about the nature of relationships and the ways people approach them. I strongly recommend it. That said, you will see breasts and behinds so, and I cannot stress this enough, DO NOT bring your mom.

Movie Review:

‘Gravity’: clichés...in space!

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Alfonso Cuarón’s thrilling suspense “Gravity” puts you hundreds of kilometers up in space, where human life drifts within the unfathomable expanse of stars above the breath-taking beauty of the earth. And, as we see, tethered in space to a suspended hunk of metal, the slightest mistake may prove to be—dare I say—the gravest. It’s all too bad that, aside from the thrill and suspense of this scenario, “Gravity” offers us so little else.

“Gravity” follows Dr. Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock), a medical engineer, and Captain Matt Kowolski (George Clooney), an astronaut, as they complete their space mission. Things go horribly wrong; however, once the bumbling Russians accidentally cause a chain of satellite collisions that send a cluster of debris floating perilously in their direction. Thus begins a series of, shall we say, unfortunate and somewhat unbelievable events that serve as obstacles in Dr. Stone and Capt. Kowolski’s journey home.

If you haven’t picked up on the clichés, you may wish to reread the previous paragraph and consider nearly every space film ever created. Conflict, of course, is the heart of all stories. Unfortunately, “Gravity” never delivers on a more nuanced thesis other than what seems to be expected; the

fragile yet ultimately tenacious spirit of humanity.

Faced with these overwhelming, deep-space obstacles threatening her annihilation, Dr. Stone wavers along the spectrum of human response; but with only the hackneyed threads of a back-story, one wonders whether she would have been more compelling a character were her story to remain completely undisclosed—especially since the exposition of her character is essentially naught else but a string of clichés itself (e.g. “Tell my (deceased) daughter I found her red shoe—she was so worried about finding it.”)

None of this is to discount the thrill and suspense of “Gravity;” on the contrary, it is but to highlight how Cuarón fails to exceed any of our expectations of the space-suspense genre. “Gravity” does deliver on excitement, but the absence of compelling character stories, the odd tension between the cinematography and the soundtrack, and the ambiguity of the narrative voice overall, all point to a promising concept weighed down by—could it be—too great a consideration of Hollywood. In other words, Cuarón shouldn’t have held back and ought to have taken his vision further artistically (a la Terrence Malick’s “Tree of Life”).

If you’re looking to be put on the edge of your seat with suspense, go see “Gravity.” Just don’t expect much else other than a bit of light-headedness.

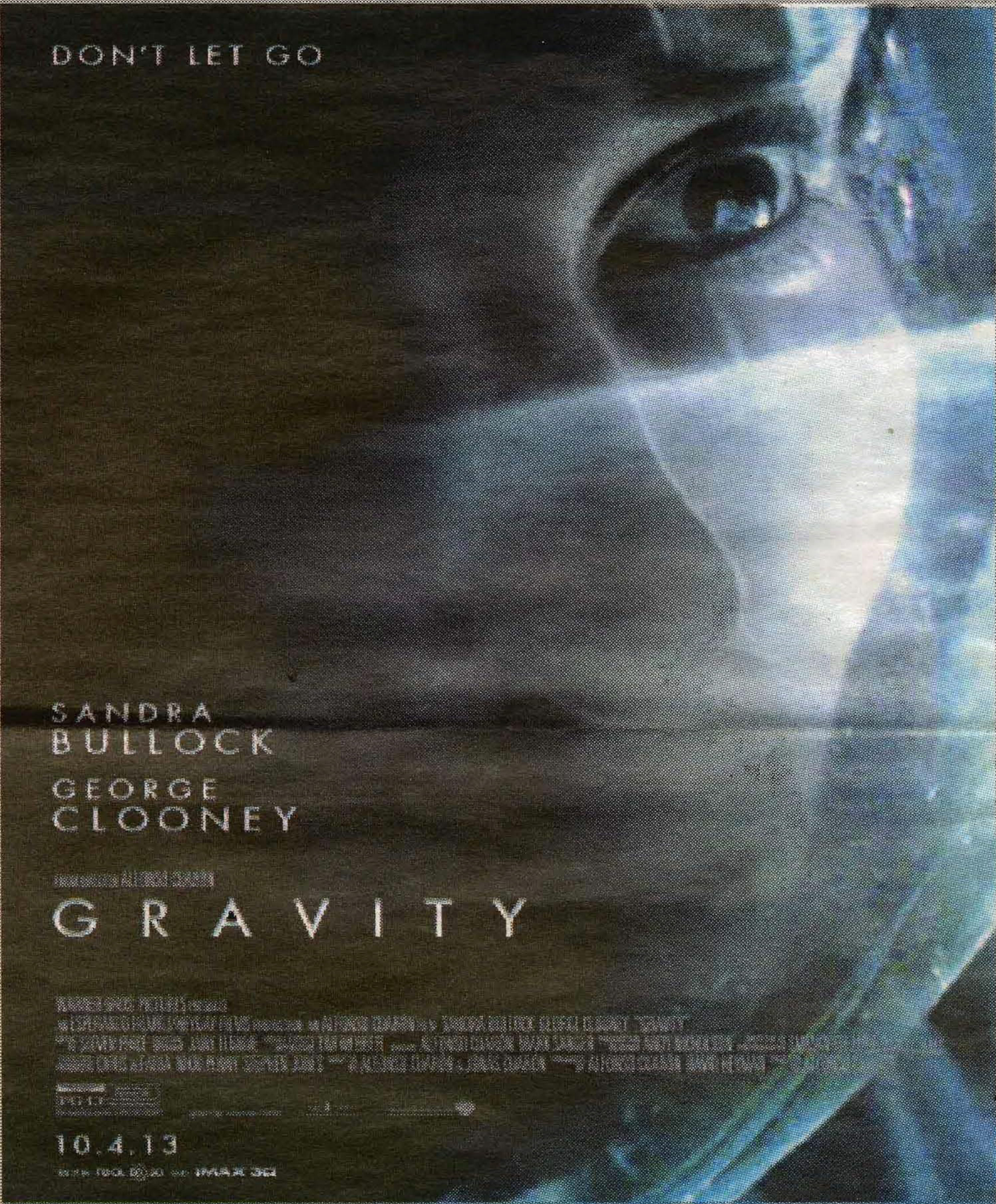


Image courtesy of www.comingsoon.net

Game Review:

Life lessons learned from ‘Super Hexagon’

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It doesn’t take much to be great. In a world of \$300 million AAA games, it’s always refreshing to see a game so simple and compelling as “Super Hexagon.” A hexagon, a triangle, and rapidly collapsing walls make Super Hexagon a mind-blowingly difficult twitch reaction game. Debuting late 2012, Super Hexagon enjoyed raved reviews and now is relatively past its prime.

Finding it on my computer, I thought, ‘I’ve got some time to kill before my next meeting; let’s give it a go.’ The goal of the game is rather simple: move the little triangle around the hexagon, and avoid the falling walls for 60 seconds using the left and right arrow keys while a repetitive set of tune tracks play in the background.

It’s horrifying how quickly you fail the first time your friend convinces you to give it a go. A female voice constantly says “Begin” and “Game over”, sometimes overlapping as you fail again and again within seconds of starting. So

many things go through your head:

“If it was only a little slower, then I could get the hang of it.”

“If only there were a practice level, you know, like other games have.”

“That one part is way too hard! You have to do a full 180!”

“If only it gave me this sequence!”

“Yes, 10 seconds! Wait? NO! Why is it titled?!”

“IT CHANGES INTO A PENTAGON, THAT’S NOT FAIR!”

“That shouldn’t count—I was on the line.”

“If it snapped to sides, it’d be better.”

“Oh, come on! I ran under that wall!”

These were just my way of making excuses, but I’m glad it’s as hard as it is. I’m also glad it only gets harder. I’ve still yet to unlock “Hardestest” mode and I’m proud that my time on “Hardester” is a measly 11 seconds. I can’t count the number of times I’ve died at 1:54 seconds (It’s not possible to get a lower score). Perseverance is a funny word, but at the very least, this game taught me it’s OK to fail. and fail...and fail, and fail again.

Life Lesson 1: “Suckin’ at something is

the first step to being sort of good at something.”

This game also taught me that I don’t need it to be easier. There are so many times when I look at things that didn’t come out just right and I think of all of the systems that could’ve made things better. I want to find something and say, “This thing. This thing right here. It could be better. Let’s get some people on that.” Yet so often what could be better is me, and I’m the one that needs to get on it. I think this is something that a lot of people can relate to. I don’t like to think that the reason something failed was because of my inability, but really, how often is it beyond my control to make it work? When life gives you lemons, figure out why you asked life for lemons. This is actually my core philosophy now; “Just be better.” As naive as it sounds, I’m not willing to accept there are things that I cannot do; it’s really empowering.

Life Lesson 2: When things don’t go right, think about what I can do to simply be better.

It also taught me that there’s always someone better. This may sounds like a contradiction, what if I want to be the best, but there’s always someone better than I am? What happens then? Well, the majority of the “record

times” on my computer are because of other people.

Those moments when you know you’re getting close to the record are indescribable. When I do better the record, you bet I go and let everyone know that I’m a BAMF at Super Hexagon. I know that in a few hours someone will have a new time for me to beat which is somehow always a second or two more than what I can reach, but for that brief moment, I was the best and there was no one to stop me.

At first, it frustrated me that a difference person’s score was not only better than mine, but that I had to look at it every single time I died; that I’d see a reminder that I didn’t do well enough yet again. Having people better than me is just as important to me as telling myself that I can do anything. Together these two things tell me that I have no reason not to try, and I have no reason to ever stop trying.

All in all, Super Hexagon is one of the greatest games I’ve ever played. The endless onslaught of walls will provide for a brutal 10 seconds of fun, whether it’s a mind numbing way to get through a lecture, or a mind opening experience.