

'After Earth' offers lessons in conquering fear

Written by Alaina L. Lewis



Will Smith and son, Jaden Smith, teamed up to star in the M. Night Shyamalan movie, "After Earth."

The film, based on a story idea by Will Smith, is set 1,000 years in the future and charts a father and son's war to survive after their spaceship breaks apart due to a meteor shower and crash lands on earth. Earth is now an uninhabited toxic planet that has evolved in every way to kill humans. When these survivors realize that the only working device to send out a distress signal to their home land is in the tail end of the airplane – incredibly, miles from where the rest of the vessel has landed – the son, Kitai Raige (Jaden Smith), must overcome every fear he has of what lurks on the deserted planet, and go on a perilous journey to find the signal and save his father, Cypher Raige (Will Smith), who was injured during their fall.



Not since "Pursuit of Happiness," have this father and son teamed up to carry a movie. Unlike the prior flick, which was focused on Will's character, "After Earth" really is Jaden's film – a coming of age tale of about a boy exacting his fortitude in the face of adversity.

If I can be honest, this film is a bit of a departure from that "Big Willie" style of movie we're used to seeing come out of the Smith camp, but all is not lost on the journey. No, this isn't "Independence Day," "Men in Black," or even "I am Legend." This is an M. Night Shyamalan ("Sixth Sense," "Lady in the Water") vehicle, which means you need to make room for the unconventional writer/directors otherworldly interpretations of your typical boy becoming a man plot.

The film is pretty much a bare bones adventure choosing to leave the fat of the journey in the mind of our protagonist, Jaden. After being shipwrecked on toxic planet earth, Will never really leaves their nearly demolished space craft, rather he settles into the role of being Jaden's

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"eyes" from the ship – the voice from the lookout beacon trying to narrate his son to safety. Up until the end of the great adventure, most of the obstacles Jaden has to overcome start first in his mind. At the very beginning of the film, Will's character offers a memorable speech in the same vein as Dale Carnegie's famous training on the idea that fear does not exist except in the mind. The elder Smith is trying to teach his son to live in the present moment, and to keep a sound mind, rather than borrow fear from a future outcome one is not presently facing. Danger is real, he tells his son, but fear only exists in the mind.

The film was rewarding, and what it lacks in storyline, is made up in life lessons and a genuine experience.

Grade: C+