

Should You See 'Solo' This Weekend?

How did Han Solo meet Chewbacca? When did he first hit light speed in the Millennium Falcon? Did he really do the Kessel Run in less than 12 parsecs? Is Han Solo even his real name? For any Star Wars enthusiasts or moviegoers pondering those questions, Lucasfilm is answering.

One of the most intriguing inhabitants of the universe created by George Lucas finally gets top billing in the new sci-fi epic *Solo: A Star Wars Story*. Hyper-driving in to the backstory of Han Solo, popularized by Harrison Ford in the original trilogy, the new film stars Alden Ehrenreich (Hail Caesar!), Woody Harrelson, Emilia Clarke, Donald Glover, Thandie Newton, and Paul Bettany and was directed by Ron Howard.

The story begins on the seedy planet Corellia, where Han and others are enslaved by the villainous creature Lady Proxima. He and his young love Q'ira (Clarke) plot an escape that propels him into the hands of smugglers and pirates, including Beckett (Harrelson) and Val (Newton). Driven by a desire to be reunited, he assists smugglers trying to absolve debts with a massive robbery. Along the way, he befriends a famous Wookiee.

Doing a stellar job of filling some big boots, Ehrenreich swaggers through his role, making it his own while still leaving threads connecting it the familiar face from *A New Hope*. In this incarnation, Han is driven by love, justice and compassion. He's a more idealistic version of the older streetwise space cowboy. In fact, the irony the film reveals is that the man known as a reluctant hero and loner is, at his core, neither of those things. He's quick to act for the greater good, and to do battle for those he loves.

Han's first encounter and sudden friendship with Chewbacca is the film's heartbeat. The unlikely duo banter, come to each other's defense and are inseparable in their heroes' quests. Getting to know a slightly younger Chewbacca (already 190 years old) through the eyes of his soon-to-be best friend is wildly satisfying, making the Wookiee's mourning of Han in *A Force Awakens* even more pronounced.

Equally engaging is Glover as the young Lando Calrissian, introduced in *The Empire Strikes Back* as the previous owner of the Falcon. Viewers are treated to the backstory of the two con men's first adventure together. Glover is solid and effortlessly channels Billy Dee Williams. Lest anyone wonder if the future mayor of Cloud City was always a cape man, the Falcon's closet will reveal all.

Taking over directorial reigns after the sudden exit of original helmers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Ron Howard excels in this universe. Personally, I'd love to see him return, hopefully even to another young Solo adventure. It couldn't have been easy to take charge of a production already running, but the final product shows no signs of backstage drama. Howard may have benefitted from his close ties to his one-time *American Graffiti* director George Lucas and co-star Harrison Ford.

Solo is just as fun or even more so than the other recent Star Wars offerings, including the other spinoff tale *Rogue One* and the anthology comeback *The Force Awakens*. It succeeds on nearly all levels. A minor misstep, in my opinion, is Lando's co-pilot, another droid with an attitude, L3-37. While other recent robotic sidekicks have exhibited entertaining personalities, L's frequent "equal rights for droids" mantra is a bit heavy-handed, and she drains the fun out of several scenes. Harrelson, one of the bigger marquee names of the cast, is so recognizable that his presence is also a bit of a distraction.

Spunky droids aside, however, *Solo: A Star Wars Story* is a solid film overall. It's a wildly entertaining, rowdy ride through the Star Wars universe with some of its most popular personalities. {eoa}

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