

Film Review: 'Morgan'

Robots, supercomputers, automatons: The history of sci-fi can be boiled down to a laundry list of humanoid machines whose very existence raises the question, "Yes, but do they have feelings?" The title character of "Morgan" is, in many ways, a successor to all those spooky-chilly faux-human techno marvels. Except that Morgan does have feelings. She's not a replicant built out of diodes and synthetic skin; she was bred-and-born-in a lab out of synthetic DNA. She's a not-so-far-fetched version of a "human" being who emerges out of the era of cloning and the corporate obsession with genetic modification.

Anya Taylor-Joy, the actress who plays her (it's her first major movie role), was 19 when "Morgan" was shot, but she looks much younger, and though she does have eyebrows, they barely register. All you notice, under Morgan's gray hoodie, is her luminous ghostly pallor, her upper lip cut like an "M," and the startling intensity of her oversized dark almond eyes, which recall the image of extraterrestrials from the '70s. She may on some level be human, but she is every inch a creature.

Explosive scene

The movie is a sci-fi potboiler that starts off by fostering some genuine interest in a character who seems to express something of her moment. Morgan, who's technically just 5 years old (though far smarter and stronger than her years), is a corporate experiment who has grown up in a glassed-in concrete bunker. The film opens with an explosive scene in which she's told, by one of her guardians

(Jennifer Jason Leigh), that they're going to have to cut back on the time she spends outdoors-time that Morgan values with so much emotion that she reacts to the news by leaping out of her chair and trying to claw the guardian's eye out.

So here's the rub: Morgan has feelings, but she also has a highly overdeveloped (or maybe just uncontrolled) id. She'll stare down an interviewer across the table with a look to kill, and then she'll attempt to make good on it; she can glare into a surveillance camera and let the person watching feel as if she's looking right back at them. In her cell, she sits in her sweatshirt, listening to classical music, a sulky figure of hovering brilliance and menace, like Dr Lecter crossed with Negasonic Teenage Warhead. The person who's been assigned to determine Morgan's fate is Lee Weathers (Kate Mara), a risk-management consultant with a mysterious agenda.

Cold and rigid

It's part of the way the movie works that as soon as we see Mara, with her fastidious slick clipped hair and steely eyes, as well as a manner so professionally cold and rigid that she makes her sister Rooney look like Sarah Silverman, it's hard not to notice that Lee seems to share a certain spirit with Morgan, even though she's basically been brought in to shut her down. The others are a team of hipster scientists who have been secluded, for seven years, in a top-secret mansion headquarters that resembles a bombed-out Wayne Manor, located on the edge of a woods that looks like it could be the setting for a remote summer camp. There, they've raised

Morgan and become her wary family. They tend to think of her as a real person, whereas Lee hews to the company line that Morgan should be referred to as "it" (which seems a bit extreme, given that even ocean liners are called "she").

The hang-loose team, the members of which live like drunken bohemians in Portland, include Toby Jones as the head scientist, Michelle Yeoh as Morgan's stern lab-coated "mother," and Rose Leslie as her vivacious behaviorist BFF. All of them remain loyal to her, even after Morgan gets interviewed by a smug psychiatric evaluator (Paul Giamatti) whose driving motivation seems to be to prove that he's superior to her. By the time he's done goading her, she has made mincemeat of him. "Morgan" is linked, in theme and design, to last year's "Ex Machina," which also told the story of an eerie lifelike humanoid experiment locked away inside a corporate woodland bunker. But the highly creepy originality of that film, apart from its eye-popping flesh-meets-metallurgic-skeleton effects, is that it wasn't just about whether the robot in question had feelings or not.

'Commercial' action

It was about the compulsive need of everyone around her, especially the men, to believe that she had feelings. "Morgan" is the first feature directed by Luke Scott, the son of Ridley Scott (who serves as one of the producers), and it's little more than a schlock replay of "Ex Machina." It toys around with some of the same situations, but it doesn't know where to take them. Instead of developing its



This image released by Twentieth Century Fox shows Kate Mara, right, in a scene from 'Morgan.' — AP

themes, it uses them as grist for an overload of "commercial" action. "Morgan" isn't a movie that should be climaxing with fistfights, yet by the time Morgan gets out in the woods again, trying to escape Lee, the efficiency expert-turned-company assassin, she's become the tween Hannibal Lecter meets Jason Bourne.

It's all to set up the film's big kicker of a twist (in a scene that features the original big-screen Lecter, Brian Cox). "Morgan," in the end, takes enough overwrought and even ridiculous turns to seriously compromise its chance of finding an audience. Yet there

are a few moments when something in the movie strikes a chord. All science fiction is metaphor, and a thriller about a hellion ingenue with a dead stare who is really a thing but has feelings anyway, and will kill you if you threaten to take them away, is expressing something about the state of girlhood today. If only it could figure out what. — Reuters

KEYS TO PAY TRIBUTE TO CLIVE DAVIS DURING BLACK BALL

Alicia Keys is paying tribute to the record executive who offered her a recording contract more than 15 years ago at her charity's annual black-tie event. Music mogul Clive Davis will receive the humanitarian award at the 13th annual Black Ball on Oct 19 in New York. The event is an extension of Keys' charity, Keep a Child Alive, which launched in 2003 and supports HIV and AIDS victims in Africa and India. Patti Smith and ASAP Rocky will perform at the event at the Hammerstein Ballroom.

Keys says she's honoring the 84-year-old Davis "for his long-standing commitment in the fight against AIDS." Davis is credited with launching the careers of Whitney Houston, Keys, Smith and Barry Manilow. He also helped engineers the comebacks of Aretha Franklin and Carlos Santana.—AP



Alicia Keys

Box Office Top 20: 'Don't Breathe' inhales \$26.4 million

The modestly budgeted horror movie "Don't Breathe" scared off competitors at the box office this weekend, taking first place with \$26.4 million in its first days in theaters. Directed by Fede Alvarez, "Don't Breathe" cost only around \$10 million to produce. It knocked the comic book movie "Suicide Squad" into second place, after a three-week run in first. "Suicide Squad" took in \$12.2 million, bringing its domestic total to \$283 million.

Holdovers "Kubo and the Two Strings" and "Sausage Party" took the third and four place spots with \$7.8 million and \$7.5 million, respectively. Rounding out the top five was the Jason Statham-led sequel "Mechanic: Resurrection," which debuted to \$7.5 million. The top 20 movies at US and Canadian theaters Friday through Sunday, followed by distribution studio, gross, number of theater locations, average receipts per location, total gross and number of weeks in release, as compiled Monday by comScore:

1. "Don't Breathe," Sony
2. "Suicide Squad," Warner Bros
3. "Kubo And The Two Strings," Focus Features
4. "Sausage Party," Sony
5. "Mechanic: Resurrection," Lionsgate
6. "Pete's Dragon," Disney
7. "War Dogs," Warner Bros
8. "Bad Moms," STX Entertainment
9. "Jason Bourne," Universal
10. "Ben-Hur," Paramount
11. "The Secret Life Of Pets," Universal
12. "Hell Or High Water," Lionsgate
13. "Florence Foster Jenkins," Paramount
14. "Southside With You," Roadside Attractions
15. "Star Trek Beyond," Paramount
16. "Hands Of Stone," The Weinstein Company
17. "Lights Out," Warner Bros
18. "Finding Dory," Disney
19. "Greater," Hammond Entertainment
20. "Ghostbusters," Sony — AP

Fall Preview: Warren Beatty's Hughes film finally takes off

Warren Beatty is standing outside an early screening of his new film, "Rules Don't Apply" - definitely NOT a Howard Hughes biopic, he wants to make clear - discussing his connection to the famously reclusive industrialist and movie mogul. "I never met him," he says, grinning. "And I met everybody." At 79 and 15 years since his last film, the man affectionately known as "The Pro" is back. Beatty, whose exploits on and off the screen made him an unqualified Hollywood legend, has finally made the Howard Hughes film he's contemplated on and off for 40 years.

here," says Beatty, who was taken under the wing of Elia Kazan and cast in 1961's star-making "Splendor in the Grass."

Vibrant film

Many doubted whether Beatty, a notorious fiddler and perfectionist known for bouts of indecision, would ever make his Hughes film. He first obtained the rights in the mid '70s. But the happy surprise of "Rules Don't Apply," which 20th Century Fox will release Nov. 23, is not only that Beatty has at last completed it, but that he's made a

most renowned playboys making a movie about sexual repression. Before marrying Annette Benning, Beatty was linked to everyone from Diane Keaton to Madonna. Peter Biskind's 2010 biography, "Star," tried to estimate the women he's slept with, coming up with 12,775 - a figure Beatty disputes. He and Benning (who has a smart part in the film) have four nearly grown children. Of his 180 degree turn from bachelor to family man Beatty says, "The idea of divorce appalled me and still does." Family has been his primary interest in the years since his last film, the 2001 disappointment "Town & Country." "They're more interesting than any movie," he says.

Outspoken politically

The title "Rules Don't Apply" is also well suited to Beatty, who reigned over 1970s Hollywood and later with distinctly unconventional films like the era-defining "Bonnie and Clyde" and the communist epic "Reds." "Bonnie and Clyde" he made happen at a time when it was seen as arrogant for, as he puts it, "a pretty boy in the movies" to produce a film. Beatty was also unusually outspoken politically, and used his celebrity for political influence.

"I grew up in a circumstance where there were societal rules, there were rules laid down by custom or religion," says Beatty. "I don't know that I'm such a courageous rule-breaker but I do like it when you say it. I've been very lucky. The words that might sum it up are: The access that early fame and fortune can bring one if they are alert. Rules will be changed. Rules will be broken." Beatty, 15 times an Academy Award nominee and an Irving G. Thalberg Award recipient in 2000, hasn't directed since 1998's political satire "Bulworth." He remains gentlemanly and deliberate with his words. Asked about his views on Donald Trump, he suggests anyone reading this article would already know his opinion. "I hope you'll put in parentheses, 'He said laughingly,'" he adds.

Beatty now finds himself wading back into a somewhat foreign movie business. "The public seems to want to know what it's going to get before they leave the house," he says. "I think that sort of applies to fast food also." But another trend is more heartening to him: "I would say that the biggest change the world is going through ... is the liberation of the female," says Beatty. He's been attending screenings of "Rules Don't Apply" partly to get a better feel for today's movie distribution. Looking over at a small theater before the movie starts, he sardonically observes: "You're all on your iPhones." Asked how it feels for him to finally be releasing his Hughes film, Beatty smiles. "Old," he says. Yet Beatty has already navigated a series of eras in Hollywood. What's one more?—AP

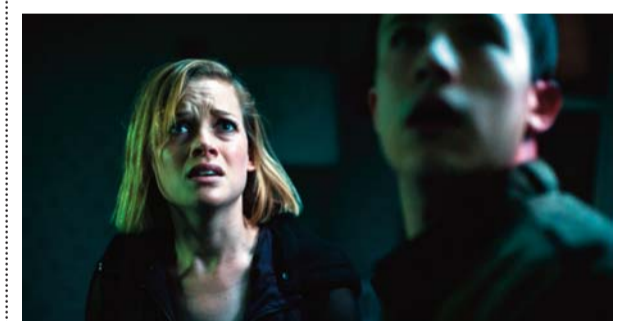


This image released by Twentieth Century Fox shows Lily Collins, left, and Alden Ehrenreich in a scene from 'Rules Don't Apply,' in theaters on November 23. — AP

The focus of the film - written, directed, produced and starring Beatty - has shifted with time. Its central characters are a Southern Baptist actress (Lily Collins), one of two dozen Hughes has put up in bungalows for either starlet or romantic consideration, and her young Methodist driver (Alden Ehrenreich). They're both ambitious but innocent new arrivals to Los Angeles hoping to catch a break with their unseen benefactor. Not coincidentally, the year is 1958, the same year Beatty - a Virginia Southern Baptist, himself - came to Hollywood, following his sister, Shirley MacLaine. "I got kind of lucky kind of fast when I came out

snappy, vibrant film, carried by its young stars and memorable for its portrait of Hollywood power players and their pawns. Sex plays a significant role. "I felt it was time to make another movie and time to make a movie about a big subject - what I would call the comical and sometimes sad consequences of American sexual puritanism," says Beatty. "That attitude, I don't think it's expired. We have to admit it's made us the laughing stock of France, for instance, where the chief of state gets into some mischief and his numbers go up. Here the opposite is true."

There's something fitting about one of Hollywood's



This undated file image released by Sony Pictures shows Jane Levy, left, and Dylan Minnette in a scene from 'Don't Breathe.' — AP

Oops! Bieber not back on Instagram after a 2-week break

False alarm! Justin Bieber hasn't actually returned to Instagram. Bieber's account briefly returned to public view Monday for his nearly 78 million Instagram followers with week-old pictures and videos of Bieber introducing his new dog, Todd. However, the pop star later turned it off again and said on Twitter, "it was an accident." Bieber left Instagram two weeks ago amid criticism of pictures of him and Lionel Richie's daughter Sofia from fans of Bieber's ex-girlfriend Selena Gomez.

Before his account disappeared, he responded to the negativity by writing, "I'm gonna make my Instagram private if you guys don't stop the hate this is getting out of hand, if you guys are really fans you wouldn't be so mean to people that I like." Bieber's return was celebrated Monday on Twitter with #Justin ReactivatedParty. It followed the #Justin Deactivated Party trend that popped up when he left Instagram. — AP



Justin Bieber