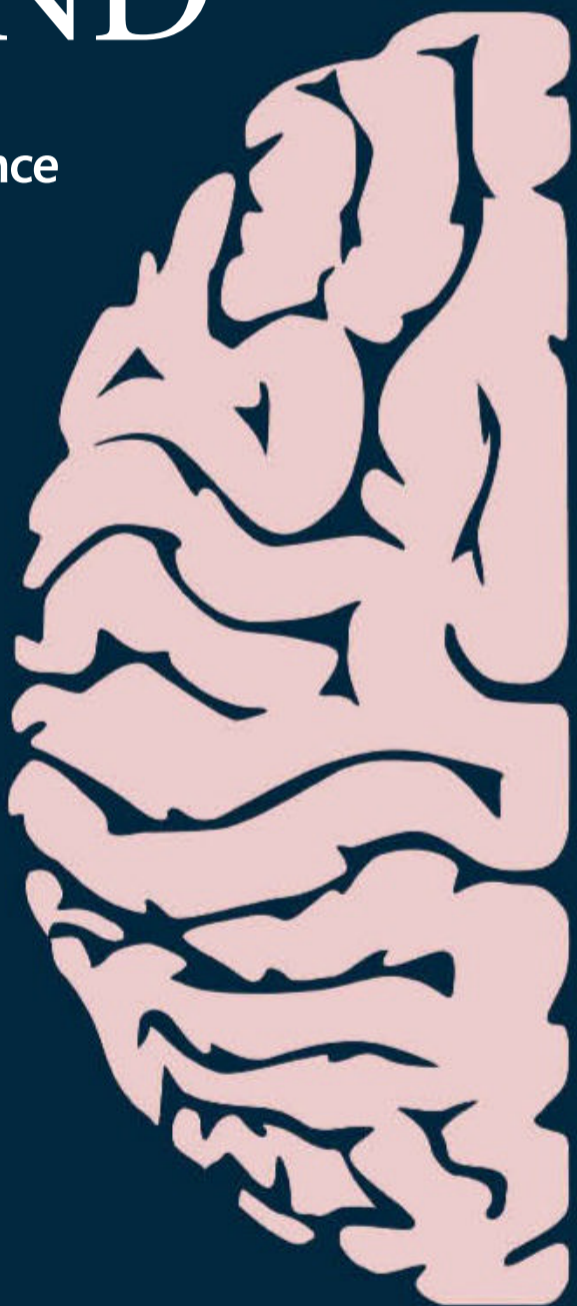


New Scientist

WEEKLY 19 February 2022

MAKING A MIND

How to create an artificial intelligence that really thinks like us



BENEFITS OF YOGA
Why a weekly session could protect your heart

FUSION BREAKTHROUGH
New test gives best hope yet of unlimited energy

PATHOGENS ON ICE
The viral threats hiding in our thawing permafrost

DON'T SIT UP STRAIGHT

Why the rules of good posture are being rewritten

PLUS COSMIC NUCLEAR EXPLOSION / ICELAND'S COLD BLOB / WHITE DWARF PLANET / WHY DO BABIES MAKE SO MUCH NOISE?

No3374 £6.95 CAN\$9.99



Bad moon rising

Finally, a disaster movie without a message and that is fun to watch, says **Leah Crane**



Film

Moonfall

Roland Emmerich

In UK cinemas now

ALL I wanted was to not be bludgeoned over the head with subtext. If I had to sit through one more not-so-subtle reframing of climate change or the pandemic as a different kind of disaster, I think I would scream. My neighbours can thank Roland Emmerich, then, for the relative peace while I watched *Moonfall*, give or take the bombastic sci-fi sound effects and occasional bursts of laughter.

Moonfall is vintage Emmerich, with notes of his 1996 film *Independence Day*, themes reminiscent of the 2014 film *Interstellar* and a few scenes that are very *Star Wars*. The famous *Star Wars* line “that’s no moon” would fit in perfectly. Throughout, *Moonfall* is littered with references to science fiction, both recent and classic.

John Bradley (*Game of Thrones*) has a star turn as K. C. Houseman, a conspiracy theorist-turned-hero who spots before anyone else that the moon seems to be falling to Earth. Halle Berry and Patrick Wilson are also compelling as a NASA executive and a disgraced former astronaut, respectively. Donald Sutherland is fascinating and a little haunting as the keeper of NASA’s darkest secrets. If all these roles sound familiar, it is because this is classic sci-fi: every character is archetypal, and every sci-fi buzzword is present and accounted for.

That isn’t to say the film is predictable, and it certainly isn’t boring. It starts slow, but when it gets going it is packed with action, incredible special effects, spooky tentacles emerging from a lunar crater and the catchy line: “Save



CENTROPOLIS/IR-BAJO

Disgraced astronaut Brian Harper (Patrick Wilson) is just the man to tackle the moon’s real dark side

the moon, save Earth.” Somehow, despite the camp subject matter, the film succeeds in taking itself fairly seriously.

The science in *Moonfall* is largely plausible, although it is, of course, exaggerated for effect. It must be said, because this is a science publication, that the moon is in fact slowly receding from Earth and it would be nigh-on impossible to drag it closer. If it were coming closer at the rate portrayed in the film, Earth would almost certainly

“In real life, scientists are extraordinarily bad at keeping quiet about new and exciting discoveries”

be destroyed – and most of what our heroes in the film attempt to do would be impossible for practical and geopolitical reasons. And after the events of the movie, the planet would be uninhabitable.

There are a few other irritations for those of us who follow real science. Some characters in the film make arguments for space-related

conspiracy theories that may at first glance seem almost convincing. But in real life, scientists are extraordinarily bad at keeping quiet about new and exciting discoveries. NASA is portrayed in an inexplicably negative light, while Elon Musk and his companies are mentioned with eye-rolling regularity to the point that it starts to feel like product placement.

But none of that matters when you are watching the moon rise over the horizon, so close to Earth that it is mowing down skyscrapers and dragging the sea into the sky. Thinking about plausibility feels like a waste of time when you could, instead, think about how the filmmakers animated some of the more impressive scenes.

Overall, *Moonfall* is good old-fashioned fun, an apocalypse movie that didn’t feel the need to remind us that we are living through apocalyptic times. If you have enjoyed any of the major space films of the past few decades and any of the *Fast and the Furious* movies, you will like it. The premise is pleasingly outlandish while mostly remaining believable, as is the plot. It has moments of humour, stretches of gripping action, gorgeous views and plenty of heart. I highly recommend it. ■

Don't miss



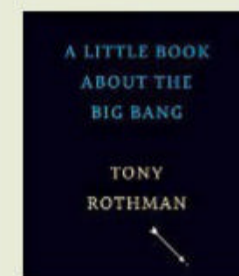
Visit

A New Nature at White Cube Bermondsey in London spotlights the work of the late Isamu Noguchi, whose sculptures in galvanized steel and other industrial materials explore the fundamental structures of nature.



Watch

From is a new sci-fi horror show made by the executive producers of *Lost*. It sees unfortunate travellers trapped in a small town in Middle America, terrorised by strange creatures that only come out at night. The series streams on Epix from 20 February.



Read

A Little Book About the Big Bang by Tony Rothman, a former editor at *Scientific American*, explores arguably the most evidenced – and at the same time most mysterious – idea in modern cosmology.