



Arrival Denis Villeneuve, 2016

U.S. (Lava Bear Films, 21 Laps Entertainment, FilmNation Entertainment) 115m 48s Color
 Producers Shawn Levy, Dan Levine, Aaron Ryder, David Linde Screenplay Eric Heisserer Photography Bradford Young
 Cast Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner, Forest Whitaker, Michael Stuhlbarg, Tzi Ma, Mark O'Brien, Abigail Pniowsky, Julia Scarlett Dan, Frank Schorpion Oscar Sylvain Bellemare (sound editing) Oscar nominations Shawn Levy, David Levine, Aaron Ryder, David Linde (best picture), Denis Villeneuve (director), Eric Heisserer (adapted screenplay), Bradford Young (cinematography), Joe Walker (film editing), Patrice Vermette, Paul Hotte (production design), Bernard Gariépy Strobl (sound mixing)

The more advanced special effects become, the harder it is for them to impress. Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival*, understanding this fact, inspires wonder not through the depiction of its immense, pebble-shaped spacecraft but by answering an intriguing question: what would be the fundamental challenges if we were actually visited by aliens?

Its lead character, accordingly, isn't a political or military figure but linguistics professor Louise Banks (Amy Adams). Her occupation is integral: after a dozen alien ships appear across the planet, she is tasked by the U.S. government with decoding their language. Communication is appropriately one of the film's main themes—beyond Banks's philological efforts, *Arrival* reflects upon the difficulty of international cooperation and its crucial role in tackling global problems.

Arrival's most thrilling scenes are all conversations. Banks, along with sensitive physicist Ian (Jeremy Renner), solves problems through research and reason. Eric Heisserer's ambitiously structured screenplay is unafraid to raise concepts like semasiographic writing or nonlinear orthography, and displays faith in our ability to follow the narrative's play with time. What prevents *Arrival* from becoming a cerebral exercise, however, is its grounded humanity: Ian, approaching a spaceship for the first time, runs his hand along its surface and is amazed and awed. **JWA**



The inky, spidery writing of the aliens was created by Montreal artist Martine Bertrand.



U.S. (A24, Plan B Entertainment) 111m Color
 Producer Dede Gardner, Jeremy Kleiner, Adele Romanski Screenplay Barry Jenkins
 Photography James Laxton Music Nicholas Britell Cast Ashton Sanders, Alex Hibbert, Trevante Rhodes, Marhershala Ali, Naomie Harris, Janelle Monáe, André Holland, Jharrel Jerome, Jaden Piner Oscars Dede Gardner, Jeremy Kleiner, Adele Romanski (best picture), Marhershala Ali (actor in support role), Barry Jenkins, Tarell Alvin McCraney (adapted screenplay) Oscar nominations Barry Jenkins (director), Naomie Harris (actress in support role), Nicholas Britell (original score), James Laxton (cinematography), Nat Sanders, Joi McMillon (film editing)

Moonlight Barry Jenkins, 2016

Barry Jenkins' stunning film, which is adapted from playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney's *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, captures three moments in the life of a single character. "Little" Chiron (Alex Hibbert) is bullied at school and has to deal with his crack-addicted mother (Naomie Harris) but finds solace in the time he spends with Juan (Marhershala Ali) and Teresa (Janelle Monáe), a drug dealer and his girlfriend. The teenaged Chiron (Ashton Sanders) is withdrawn but forms a bond with Kevin (Jharrel Jerome). Finally, in his mid-twenties, "Black" Chiron (Trevante Rhodes) is reconciled with his mother and decides to visit Kevin (André Holland) after more than a decade has passed.

Mood is everything in *Moonlight*. The script, sparse and poetic at times, is the framework over which Jenkins and regular cinematographer James Laxton create moments of breathtaking beauty. Each of the chapters in Chiron's life unfold in brief snapshots. Yet the understanding that Jenkins has of this world—both he and McCraney grew up in similar circumstances in a Florida neighborhood—allows him to reach deep into each character and draw out authentic and subtle nuances in their behavior. As Martin Scorsese did with *Mean Streets*, Jenkins offers up a fresh take on a familiar world. And Nicholas Britell's score, along with a selection of songs that brilliantly inform the narrative, underlines the emotional cadence of each scene.

The three central performances—the incarnations of Chiron at different ages—succeed in being both different and a progression of one character. And bookending the film is Ali's deservedly acclaimed portrayal of Juan and Holland's sensitive take on the grown-up Kevin. His and Rhodes's scenes together, particularly the extended sequence in a diner, ache with a sense of longing, a desire to belong, and the hope that they both might finally have found their way home. **IHS**

"Faggot is a word to make gay people feel bad."

Juan (Marhershala Ali)



The three actors who play Chiron never met during production, as Jenkins wanted them to develop their own personas for the character.