

'Raised by Wolves' Review: Ridley Scott Among the Androids

As a producer and director of a new HBO Max series, the maker of "Blade Runner" and "Alien" indulges his taste for eerie robots and high-minded sci-fi.

By Sept. 2, 2020

Amanda Collin stars as a lethal android in "Raised by Wolves," premiering Thursday on HBO Max. Coco Van Oppens

Ridley Scott, when he's in his great-man-of-science-fiction mode, can be counted on to deliver a signature

image. In the new series "Raised by Wolves," it's a hovering android killing machine — a cross between an archangel and the hot robot of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" — who splatters humans with her banshee scream. It's this show's version of the rainy neon cityscape [in "Blade Runner"](#) or the chest-exploding parasite [in "Alien,"](#) and while it's not as startling as those, it makes you sit up and take notice.

"Raised by Wolves," which premieres with three episodes Thursday [on HBO Max,](#) was created by Aaron Guzikowski, who created the series ["The Red Road"](#) and wrote the Denis Villeneuve [film "Prisoners."](#) But Scott's name comes first in the press notes — he's an executive producer and directed the first two episodes — and he has a proven affinity for androids. It's not a bad bet that a green light went on in his head when he saw the potential of that lethal robot in Guzikowski's story.

Known as Mother, and brought to life by the Danish actress Amanda Collin and a sizable digital-effects crew, she's pretty much the whole show through the six episodes of "Wolves" made available to critics. There are other things going on, including a religious war and, more prominently, an elaborate, multipronged rumination on the meaning of parenting and family.

But they're more in the nature of data sets than drama; they feel as if they could have been assembled by the show's intelligent androids. What catches your interest

are the performances of Collin and Abubakar Salim (as Mother's partner, Father) — well executed examples of the formality and otherworldliness that typify cinematic A.I. — and the moments when Collin's pale skin transforms to bronze-colored armor and she rises into the air, arms outspread.

"Wolves" begins as Mother and Father crash on a distant, scrubby planet, having been sent across space with a set of frozen human embryos by atheist forces who are losing an all-out war against a religious group called the Mithraics. (The faith practiced in the show resembles Christianity, but giving it the name and the deity of an actual [ancient Roman religion](#) keeps everything safely abstract.)

As the androids set up camp and begin to raise their artificial family, the paradoxes are ready-made. Mother and Father, programmed to reject any notion of the supernatural and to instill atheism in their brood, are of course the new Adam and Eve, charged with rebooting the human race in their barren Eden. And as they're forced to take ever more drastic measures to protect the children, they react in ever more human ways, severely testing the idea that there's no such thing as a soul.

Their new home is no paradise — most of the children succumb to disease, leaving just one, Champion (Winta McGrath), which doesn't bode well for humanity. So it's both a danger and an opportunity when a ship carrying a

thousand Mithraics arrives at the same planet.

All of this scene setting takes place in the highly watchable first episode, which has the hushed grandiosity Scott can bring to this kind of material. (The series as a whole exhibits other features sometimes characteristic of Scott's films: grim efficiency and a sense of humor that's stony at best.) Once the believers arrive and Mother starts going into battle mode, the show settles into a more conventional TV-sci-fi groove, parceling out its flashback reveals, arduous journeys and flashy interludes of violence. Travis Fimmel and Niamh Algar add some grit as a Mithraic couple with their own unusual family arrangement, counterparts and antagonists for Mother and Father.

Not much attempt is made to hide or finesse the sources of what we're watching; if anything, "Wolves" seems proud to be derivative. The framework strongly recalls both "Battlestar Galactica," in its combination of big ideas and apocalyptic space opera, and the mechanics of the "Terminator" films. The white-suited Mithraics, trotting across a desert landscape, invoke "Star Wars"; the harsh allegorical elements, "The Handmaid's Tale"; the stylized speech and movements of the androids, the British series "Humans." A mysterious, scurrying child in a cloak is the latest quotation of the eerie figure in "Don't Look Now."

If your appetite for portentous sci-fi action is robust, "Raised by Wolves" may go down easily enough, though

mine is considerable and I still found my attention wandering by the second or third episode. It doesn't help that the production, shot in South Africa, has a drab, gray look.

There's entertainment in watching Mother and Father learn parenting the hard way, bewildered and saddened by the propensity of human children to manipulate, lie and fall into bottomless pits. But mostly there's just the wait for Mother to suit up and give us another adrenaline rush.

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A version of this article appears in print on

Sept. 3, 2020

, Section C, Page 5 of the New York edition with the headline: Androids Tasked With Parenting In a Barren Eden. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

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