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# Alita: Battle Angel – Review

5 mins read

Written by & Jacob Heayes | Feb 26, 2019

Like the cyborgs that inhabit its glossy, commercialised metropolis, *Alita: Battle Angel* often feels stitched together from a scrapheap of genres and concepts. Far from a well-oiled machine, the film suffers greatly from the clashing methodologies of its two prominent filmmakers. Between the spectacle-driven James Cameron and the economical Robert Rodriguez, there is a war of function in *Alita*'s heart. Yet like the best technological marvels, *Alita: Battle Angel* entertains when one embraces its quirks. Push past the loose screws and ill-fitted parts and there's a fresh, hyper-stylised motor working frantically in overdrive.

In short, *Alita: Battle Angel*'s narrative isn't a far cry from material already entrenched in science-fiction, particularly of the Japanese variety. Alita (Rosa Salazar) is rescued from a scrapyards by brilliant cyber-scientist Dr. Ido (Christoph Waltz) and soon discovers she possesses abilities beyond her imagination, as well as a potentially world-threatening enemy lodged in her murky past. The cyberpunk design channels the aesthetics of *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira* yet also has an undeniable trace of DNA from the Wachowski Sisters' similarly absurd *Speed Racer*. As a narrative-driven work, *Alita: Battle Angel* is resoundingly derivative with a sluggish first act that is overstuffed with dry exposition and unfortunate attempts to establish an unnecessary romantic subplot. Without an excuse to send Alita into flashy setpieces from the off, the film struggles to engage with only Rodriguez's frankly atrocious dialogue and Cameron's hollow CGI work to use as a crutch. The pulpy, obvious exchanges

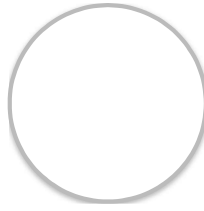
may have felt right at home in *Planet Terror* but spoken within this evidently gargantuan-budget cityscape, it's downright uncomfortable. This is only heightened by the reality that *Alita: Battle Angel* is a direct product of mega-franchise Hollywood, leaving on an unsatisfying cliffhanger and lacking a singular antagonist to latch onto. When the credits roll, it's hard not to feel irritated that Rodriguez spent so much time on street games and meet-cutes.

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And then we have Motorball. The kinetic, smooth and colossally ambitious action sequences are far and away this film's saving grace – championed by its superb Motorball sequence. This small portion is demonstrative of the best qualities of *Alita* when its clunky parts finally turn together. For one, it's fast. Taking place entirely during a sports event that's part race, part destruction-derby, the sequence is refreshingly dynamic and zips along like *Robot Wars* on two legs (and has the childlike giddiness to boot). Not only that, but there's a surprising sense of geography and clarity throughout this film that's otherwise at odds with its ultra-energised, aesthetically focused direction. Alita herself moves less like a fighter, and more like a projectile, diving and leaping through sets and in-between foes with eye-popping speed. The fight choreography and sound crew do an exceptional job of creating spatial awareness and building excitement, emphasising punches connecting, and robotic limbs abruptly severing. Despite the vapid nature of the lucrative visuals, there's still something tangibly thrilling and – dare I say – original about Alita's action that feels genuinely ripped from the pages of the best, most visually stimulating anime.

The end result is inherently conflicting – much like the internal workings of the film itself. There's something unshakably bizarre about *Alita's* mere existence, riddled with countless delays and obnoxious spending choices all for what was already a niche adaptation in a struggling genre. Whether it wants to be riding on the heels of *Avatar* or accepting itself as an expensive B-movie, *Alita: Battle Angel* is always at the very least interesting. Identity crisis or not, it's a vibrant and refreshing name to see, and for all its flaws and unmistakably terrible storytelling, there's a baffling enjoyment to be found if you're willing to go along for the ride.

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**JACOB HEAYES**

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