

‘Ghost in the Shell’ characters are hard to love

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 31 March 2017 06:53



But special effects captivates the eyes

Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 108 min.

To be perfectly honest, while this reviewer has seen the 1995 anime feature upon which this live-action remake is based (along with a manga comic book), he doesn't remember it all that well. And perhaps that's a good thing. With little in the way of expectations, the flaws that are present in this sci-fi action film update don't seem quite as bothersome. Instead, first impressions of *Ghost in the Shell* leave one marveling at its consistently bizarre and memorable imagery.

Set in the future, the story follows Major (Scarlett Johansson), a special member of a task force trained to take down criminals. She's remarkable in particular because she is a cyborg. Her body is made up entirely of mechanized limbs; the only original part of the woman is her brain. After an attack by cyber-terrorist Kuze (Michael Pitt) on Hanka Robotics, Major finds herself not only attempting to stop him, but dealing with visual glitches appearing in her own field of vision. Helping the heroine stop the threat and receive treatment are her partner Batou (Pilou Asbaek), boss Chief Aramaki ("Beat" Takeshi Kitano) and doctor Ouelet (Juliette Binoche).

One can not deny that the feature looks absolutely phenomenal. There are striking visuals and characters throughout, the likes of which appear totally new to the world of live-action. From the

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robotic Geishas whose faces open up, characters possessing unusual, augmented physical alterations, to a tank with spider-like characteristics, every shot in the movie looks great. Even the holograms-filled cityscapes and streets are striking to witness. The action is also handled impressively, with Major jumping around and taking out villains using elaborate slow-motion choreography and creative editing. The film was screened in 3D and this is one of those occasions where the format benefited it; the depth was very evident and consistently on display.

While the technical elements are perfect, there are some minor issues. The tone is deadly serious. While Asbaek provides a bit of comic relief as Major’s partner, and tough-guy Kitano is always fun to watch, the film feels too heavy. Frankly, it could have used just a bit more levity to break up the oppressiveness. The pacing is fast, but as events progress the solemn pitch does become exhausting and appears to slow things down. This is also a movie filled to the brim with cold, cybernetic characters. The lack of relatable characters leave the viewer less invested and at some emotional distance.

Thankfully, there are a few story additions that attempt to address this problem to some degree. The concept of a person once human and now dealing with a newfound existence in a completely cybernetic body is an interesting one (even if it has been seen before in films like *Robocop*). Wisely, the film inserts a deeper and more detailed back-story for Major that adds a deeper resonance to this theme. It doesn’t result in any big emotional moments, but does inject enough humanity to the proceedings to keep us watching.

This movie is far from perfect and may be off-putting to some viewers. It’s pretty clear that it has issues with certain elements, namely the stiff nature and mannerisms of its characters. But the visuals are nothing short of jaw-dropping. This is an absolutely incredible-looking movie with stupendous practical and computer effects. Even if one isn’t all that invested in the plight of the characters, it’s always interesting to look at. And for a reviewer expecting the worst, that was enough to keep me engaged and cut it some slack. *Ghost in the Shell* may not capture the heart, but it will keep the eyes captivated over its running time.

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