

“Alita: Battle Angel”

By Helen Lutz

At one time or another we’ve all been told to ‘think outside the box.’ Some of us manage to do so while others find things quite acceptable remaining within their comfort zones. James Cameron always comes to us with ‘outside the box’ concepts in his filmmaking. “Titanic” was a huge success even though everyone knew that the ship sank – people still flocked to theaters to see it over and over again. Cameron came up with another mind boggling notion with “Avatar.”

Using facial performance capture and advances in 3D technology he amazed us with the characters of “Avatar.” The same techniques are used in the new film “Alita: Battle Angel” bringing a new comic book hero to life – Alita.



A post apocalyptic world exists where life is neither pretty nor easy. We meet Dr. Dyson Ido (Christoph Waltz) working in his clinic in Iron City. Everyone hustles and bustles to scrape out a living. Dr. Ido’s specialty is cybernetics. The inhabitants of Iron City find Dr. Ido’s talents as a surgeon invaluable as he replaces missing limbs with robotic prosthetics. Lose a leg, come see Dr. Ido; he can rebuild you to make you better, stronger, faster than you were before (without the “Six Million Dollar Man” price tag).

High above Iron City hovers the elite city of Zalem, one of the last of the great sky cities. The people of Iron City work to maintain the elite life style for the residents of Zalem and dream of one day being included as one of its residents. The trash from Zalem falls into piles in Iron City and this is where Dr. Ido spends time scrounging for cast off replacement parts for his clinic. Imagine his surprise when he finds a cyborg head and torso in the debris. Returning to his clinic with his new find, he is able to insert it into a body he had created for his dear departed daughter (one of many story lines). When this ‘debris’ awakens we meet a charming, sweet, teenage girl with no recollection of her past whom Dr. Ido names Alita (played by Rosa Salazar – kinda). Her eyes are as huge as her heart as she learns about life on Earth and yearns to remember her past.

“Alita: Battle Angel” weaves through many story lines as Alita meets Hugo (Keanu Reeves) a young man on a ‘motorcycle’ who shows her how to navigate Iron City and takes a liking to her. Hugo introduces her to Iron City’s own sport of Motorball which reminds us of a roller derby on steroids where the biggest, meanest, most creative cyborg contestants compete to eventually be named champion and get to move up to mingle with the elites on Zalem – it’s the fastest way to earn your way. Chiren (Jennifer Connelly) is another cybernetics surgeon working for the Motorball mastermind Vector (Mahershala Ali) who connects all sorts of Motorball hideous winning features to Vector’s competitors. It’s big business. Of course, our Alita eventually finds herself in the middle of the action.

Alita discovers that she is highly skilled in combat, actually amazing. Just what was her past? Treachery is also afoot as it becomes known that Alita’s heart has enough energy to power the entire city – there are forces who want to get their hands on it. Guns are not allowed in Iron City, but just about every other weapon known (and unknown) to man is used. Policing is done by a wicked set of professionals called the bounty hunters – you don’t want to mess with them; unless you are Alita.

“Alita: Battle Angel” is derived from a Japanese comic book series by Yukito Kishiro. Director Robert Rodriguez brings Alita to life as a strong, young heroine who sees the good, but willing to fight evil. The story meanders and runs over two hours, but sets the stage for Alita to become a comic book force in the world of comic book character movies. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats I give “Alita: Battle Angel” THREE HARTS. The oversized eyes are the window to the soul – so see it on the big screen (IMAX and 3D worked for me).