

Review: 'Pacific Rim' is skillful—and very noisy (Update)

July 9 2013, by Jocelyn Noveck



This film image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Charlie Hunnam as Raleigh Becket, left, and Rinko Kikuchi as Mako Mori in a scene from "Pacific Rim." (AP Photo/Warner Bros. Pictures, Kerry Hayes)

It's one of the saving graces of "Pacific Rim," Guillermo del Toro's new mega-budget monsters vs. robots extravaganza, that at a key juncture, it knows how to make fun of itself.

This welcome bit of comic relief amid all the crunching, smashing and groaning in 3-D comes just as the good guys—that would be the robots, or rather the humans operating the 25-story machines built to save

humanity—have hit a snag. These massive, digitally controlled contraptions suddenly all fail at once.

But then—eureka!—someone points out that one rusty old robot is analog. And so, in a movie that has spent some \$200 million to boast the very best in state-of-the-art tradecraft, an analog machine saves the day, at least temporarily. Ha! Holy retro technology.

It's too bad that del Toro's film, a throwback to the Japanese Kaiju monster films made famous by "Godzilla," doesn't have many more such deft moments. Though it's made by an obviously gifted director and will likely please devotees of the genre, it ultimately feels very short on character and long on noise, noise, noise. Did we mention the crunching, smashing and groaning?

Happily, the plot is not convoluted (the script is by Travis Beacham and del Toro) and there's at least one really cool concept, called "The Drift." No, this doesn't involve land formations.



This film publicity image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows the Gipsy

Danger robot battling the Knifehead monster in a scene from "Pacific Rim." (AP Photo/Warner Bros. Pictures)

It's the mind-melding that occurs between the two pilots of each Jaeger—that's what they call the mega-robots that humans have built to fight the monsters rising from the sea. Subjected to a pre-flight "neural handshake," the pilots are suddenly sharing brains, the better to command their robot.

This leads to amusing dialogue, such as: "You know what I'm thinking?" Beat. "I'm in your brain!" That's meant to be funny, but a later remark seems inadvertently so, when the hero balks at going back to battle: "I can't have anyone in my head again!"

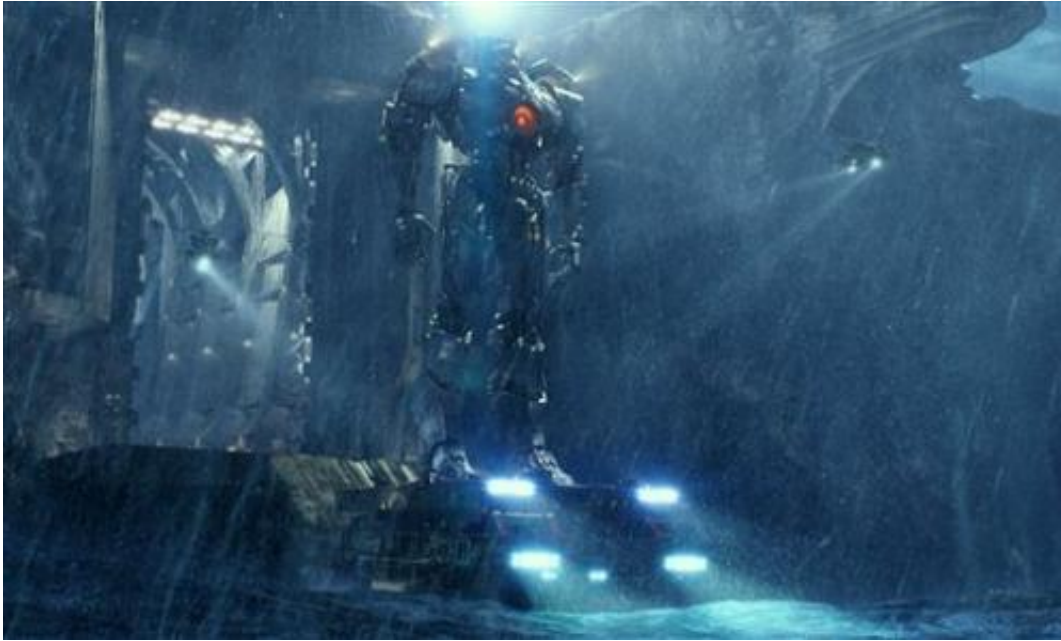
The real action begins some seven years into the Kaiju offensive (and circa 2020.) The Jaeger program, once successful, is failing. Global defense authorities decide to drop it and go for a giant coastal wall. Didn't they see "World War Z?" Ask Brad Pitt: Walls don't keep out zombies, and they won't keep Kaiju out, either. It's back to the Jaegers.



This publicity photo released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows, front from left, Charlie Hunnam as Raleigh Becket and Rinko Kikuchi as Mako Mori in a scene from, "Pacific Rim." (AP Photo/Warner Bros. Pictures, Kerry Hayes)

Enter jaded former pilot Raleigh Becket (a handsome but bland Charlie Hunnam). Raleigh lost his co-pilot and brother in a Jaeger fight, and is in no mind to share his, er, mind again. But humanity's at stake.

His new co-pilot is a young Japanese woman named Mako (Rinko Kikuchi) with a serious beef against the Kaiju. Showy supporting parts are played by Idris Elba as the impressively named commander Stacker Pentecost; Charlie Day as a manic, nerdy scientist (but not as funny as he could be); and Ron Perlman as a shadowy Kaiju-parts dealer.



This film publicity image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows the Gipsy Danger robot in a scene from "Pacific Rim." (AP Photo/Warner Bros. Pictures)

It takes a good hour for the real battle to get going. You're glad when it does, but mostly, you wish the mind-melding concept had been mined more fully, especially since the scenes inside people's minds show, too briefly, another, subtler side of del Toro's talents. One arresting flashback to Mako's youth almost seems to come from a different movie—like the dloeperloeirector's powerful 2006 "Pan's Labyrinth." Too bad del Toro doesn't share a bit more of that terrific side of his moviemaking mind with us here.

"Pacific Rim," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America "for sequences of intense sci-fi action and violence throughout, and brief language." Running time: 131 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

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