

PACIFIC POW!

Del Toro has made one hell of a summer blockbuster

PACIFIC RIM: Directed by Guillermo del Toro. Story by Travis Beacham, screenplay by Beacham and del Toro. Cinematography, Guillermo Navarro. Editors, Peter Amundson and John Gilroy. Music, Ramin Djawadi. Starring Charlie Hunnam, Rinko Kikuchi, Idris Elba, Max Martini and Robert Kazinsky. Warner Bros., 2013. PG-13. 131 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

When *Pacific Rim*'s end credits rolled, a friend turned to me and said, "Now I kind of want to watch that Hugh Jackman 'rock 'em, sock 'em' robots movie." Such is the effectiveness of Guillermo del Toro's deliciously oversized robots vs. monsters movie: It'll make you want *more* fighting robots, even of the sub-par kind.

That's not to say that *Pacific Rim* is perfect, because it isn't. Some of the dialogue is so leaden, even solemn, elegant Idris Elba can't make it fly. Despite the international concept, the non-English-speaking characters (and robots) are mostly set dressing. And the film has room for only one woman who speaks more than a scant handful of lines. (To be fair, she's by far the most interesting character.)

A breathless intro gives a quick history of the kaiju — giant alien beasts that come from an inter-dimensional, undersea rift — and introduces the film's blond lead, Raleigh Becket (Charlie Hunnam). After Raleigh barely survives a kaiju attack, *Pacific Rim* skips ahead five years. Humanity is losing the kaiju war. The battle robots, called jaegers, are being decommissioned in favor of a huge coastal wall that's exactly as effective as you expect. Given just a few months of funding by his shortsighted international masters, Marshall Stacker Pentecost (Elba)



collects the remaining jaegers and their rock-star pilots at his massive, gloriously detailed Hong Kong base, where he plans one last assault on the oceanic breach. They're no longer the army, Pentecost says. They're the resistance.

A lot of pop culture tropes are packed into this plot — the final mission, the last fighters of their kind, the tired leader, some inevitable macho sparring — and del Toro just keeps 'em coming with the design of the jaegers, which will remind you of any and every robot yet imagined, from Iron Man to the Iron Giant, Voltron to Gundam. The massive jaegers require two pilots, their minds linked in a "neural handshake," which lends itself neatly to both plot and character development, providing a layer of shiny futuristic tech between humans and the big metal rides. Raleigh needs a new co-pilot, but he or she has to be perfectly mentally compatible with him. Enter Pentecost's protégé, Mako Mori (an excellent Rinko Kikuchi), who proves herself both capable and powerful. She's held back only by the steely Pentecost, who has his reasons — until the kaiju render those reasons irrelevant.

Huge, misshapen things, the kaiju have a visceral presence. Knife-headed or claw-tailed, they take up space in a convincing way, crashing through buildings and displacing massive volumes of seawater. The jaeger, like the kaiju, are all a little different, whether tank-like or three-armed, and del Toro makes it clear that the skill required to pilot one is physical and mental. The fights are brutal, entertaining, destructive — and clever. *Pacific Rim*, though dark, fairly gritty and occasionally genuinely scary, never stops being fun. Del Toro at least tries to get the people out of the way before destroying cities, so you never have the dour, ignored death toll of *Man of Steel*; he provides hyperactive comic relief in Pentecost's science team, who bicker like overcaffeinated, brilliant children (though Charlie Day could certainly shout a little less). By the time Ron Perlman rolls up as the master of the kaiju-parts black market, *Pacific Rim*'s tone is perfectly set: a feisty middle ground between giant-monster camp and end-of-the-world seriousness. Cancel the summer movie apocalypse; del Toro is here to bail us out. ■

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