

## Film Review: Meditative ‘Transcendence’ Also Artificially Intelligent

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on April 17, 2014 - 8:00pm

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CHICAGO – The Internet is for real in “Transcendence”, a B-movie with grade-A production quality, loaded with terabyte-size open-ended questions, so long as one can accept it lastly with a scientific mindset. It is a film that perceives technology to be more expansive than a box of wires and computer chips, and actualizes the expanse of the internet as limitless to the realm of spiritual.



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

It is a film that perceives technology to be more expansive than a box of wires and computer chips, and actualizes the expanse of the internet as limitless to the realm of spiritual. Like the notion of naming a wide-release film “Heaven Is for Real”, the experience of “Transcendence” depends greatly on believing the possibility of the philosophies within the film, and with more meditative state about what an internet connection can really achieve. Its hyper reality is to be accepted, do-or-discard. For some, it will play off as glossy Ed Wood, but for those who choose to roll with its prophesying, “Transcendence” will challenge and intrigue by raising questions beyond the usual blockbuster scope.

Before taking on a hyper reality, “Transcendence” begins as a contemporary take on our relationship with technology. Dr. Will Caster (Johnny Depp) is a genius scientist who, along with his wife Evelyn (Rebecca Hall) dreams of restoring the world with the assistance of evolving technology. In his provocative way, he dreams of creating a new god (“Isn’t that what we’ve always done?” he asks at a conference). Soon into the film he is shot with a poisoned bullet by an anti-tech terrorist group named RIFT (which stands for Revolutionary Independence from Technology, as led by Bree, played by Kate Mara), which weakens his body and gives him about a month to live. With the help of fellow scientist Max Waters (Paul Bettany), he and Evelyn download Dr. Caster into a computer, where his consciousness is uploaded entirely into a hard drive in something called “transcendence”. When Mara and her thugs race over to destroy this computer human, Evelyn uploads him to the internet, and the game completely changes.

From this point on, “Transcendence” fully kicks off into its B-movie mode, beginning with a wishful but stupidly huge, two-year-long plot crater that may fully implode the film for viewers that approach stories with logic in firsthand. Nonetheless, the story within “Transcendence” then turns its focus to ruminating on the limitless expanse of the internet age, as Dr. Caster takes his new god-like potential as a supercomputer to biblical lengths. RIFT then teams up with the FBI (led by Cillian Murphy’s Agent Buchanan) and Dr. Caster’s scientist colleague Joseph (Morgan Freeman), and attempt to symbolically unplug the computer man before his internet control affects the entire world.

Presented as an image on various screens for 3/4ths of the film, Depp upgrades the famous sci-fi character of the supercomputer to having a vivid personality. His dialogue reasonably coming in flat like a computer’s intonation, he articulates a vivid sense of consciousness within technology. The film’s most significant performance, however, belongs to Hall, a woman who creates a monster out of love’s desperation, and for the most part pledges to that bond even when things are going haywire (even though the the script’s imposed naivete on her character made me laugh out loud at least once).

As “Transcendence” challenges audiences with jarring non-science, its storytelling becomes a similarly irregular experience. Reasonable preconceptions about characters, concerning their purpose for the story, are countered. For example, while Mara makes a case for a strict antagonist against Depp’s heroic dreams, the film’s debate becomes bigger than choosing one side or the other. Even then, by the time it reaches a strikingly heavy climax, where the film finally provides burst of action, “Transcendence” is bigger than the designation of a villain at all. This all makes the film a surprising ride, in the face of its polarizing notions.

*“Transcendence” opens everywhere on April 18th. Featuring Johnny Depp, Rebecca Hall, Paul Bettany, Morgan Freeman, Kate Mara, Cillian Murphy, Clifton Collins Jr., and Lukas Haas. Screenplay by Jack Paglen. Directed by Wally Pfister. Rated “PG-13”*



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Johnny Depp, Rebecca Hall, and Paul Bettany in ‘Transcendence’  
*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

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