

Ambition, Ingenuity Win Fight of ‘Scott Pilgrim vs. the World’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 13, 2010 - 4:04pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Working from the graphic novels by Brian Lee O’Malley, Edgar Wright and Michael Cera deliver one of the most unique films of the year in the comeic-book/romance/comedy/video-game/pop-art/action/musical “Scott Pilgrim vs. the World.” You won’t see anything like this again for a long time. It’s an imperfect film that can get downright frustrating but it displays enough flashes of genius to warrant your time and demand your forgiveness of flaws.

The sad fact is that original, creative filmmaking seems to be a rarer and rarer commodity in an era when so many films feel like product of a committee of producers. When creative voices express this kind of unabashed ambition, it’s our responsibility to encourage it or else stop complaining as the factory line of Hollywood churns out more generic crap. “Pilgrim” doesn’t live up to the very high standard of Wright’s “Shaun of the Dead,” “Hot Fuzz,” or “Spaced” but no one can deny the straight-up passion for the art of moviemaking on display in every single frame of this unusual film.



Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

Photo credit: Universal

Scott Pilgrim (Michael Cera) is in the middle of a quarter-life crisis. He lives in a beat-up studio apartment with his abrasive gay roommate (Kieran Culkin), plays in a mediocre band called Sex Bob-omb (with the great Alison Pill and Mark Webber) that's so unknown that "all their gigs are secret gigs," dates a naive high school girl named Knives Chau (Ellen Wong), and generally mopes his way through life. Those of you who think that Cera has been playing the same role for the last few years, Pilgrim almost feels like the apotheosis of the "Cera character." It's either the perfect part for him (which is what I think) or too much in line with what he's done before. If you're exhausted by Cera, this is not going to change your mind. Personally, I think it's a perfect role for the actor and he nails it. The entire supporting cast works including Kendrick, Evans, Routh, Culkin, and Schwartzman.

One night, Scott dreams of a pink-haired girl on roller skates named Ramona Flowers (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and the next day the girl of his dreams becomes real at a party. Scott virtually stalks her to get close, ignores poor Knives, and soon discovers that if he's going to be with Ramona, he'll have to defeat her "seven evil exes" (including Brandon Routh as a super-powered vegan, Chris Evans as a cocky actor, and Jason Schwartzman as Scott's ultimate nemesis). Anna Kendrick co-stars as Scott's only vaguely-supportive sister and the great Aubrey Plaza ("Parks and Recreation") shows up in a small role.

It's very difficult to put the experience of "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" into words. It is a hyper-realized slice of pop art in which characters have super-strength, break into song, or merely bang their heads against a pole as "sound-words" (like in the old "Batman" series) fill the screen like a piece of pop art. Wright's film is vibrantly alive in every single frame as the filmmaker has tried to capture the breakneck pace of multiple books in less than two hours time. He tosses dozens of inspirations and themes into a blender and hits puree, spitting them out into a celluloid stew that will leave many people exhausted and, sometimes understandably, turned off.



Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

Photo credit: Universal

While the film is a visual delight, it is also a little light on emotional weight. The film has no time to get under the character's skins because they're not even real characters. They're cartoon characters in a video game dream. And I don't mean that as a criticism although many critics and viewers will be turned off by this stylish exercise. Is it style over substance? Can the style BE the substance?

Even if you answer yes to that last question, "Pilgrim" still kind of hits the mat in the final act as the film begins to drag and the surface-level approach leaves the climax without any dramatic weight. The film simply doesn't build like it needed to because the romance never feels quite genuine. It's a deep flaw of the film that, despite Schwartzman's effective villain role in the last reel, I enjoyed the first half of the movie much more than the second. It almost seems to run out of steam as it runs out of exes and I think Wright could have better mixed the stylish exercise with a bit more emotional power. Despite that, there's too much to like here to completely ignore the entire piece merely due to the slight missteps in the final act. "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" may not be a knockout, but it wins the fight.

'Scott Pilgrim vs. the World' stars Michael Cera, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Alison Pill, Mark Webber, Ellen Wong, Kieran Culkin, Anna Kendrick, Aubrey Plaza, Chris Evans, Brandon Routh, Mae Whitman, and Jason Schwartzman. It was written by Michael Bacall & Edgar Wright from a series of books by Brian Lee O'Malley and was directed by Wright. It is rated PG-13 and opens on August 13th, 2010.



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