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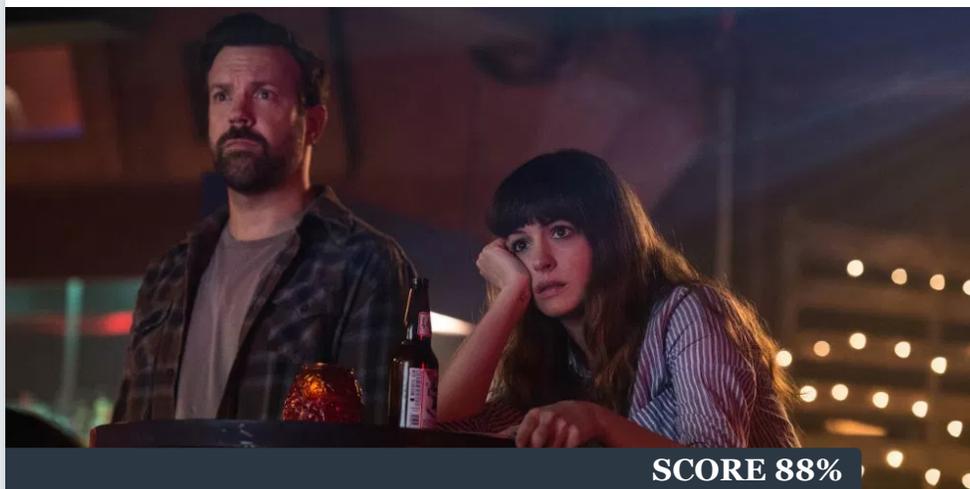
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COLOSSAL IS A MONSTER MOVIE ROOTED IN ITS PROTAGONIST'S PSYCHE

Posted by Christina Tucker | Apr 10, 2017 | New Releases, Reviews | 0 🗨️ | ★★★★★



Overview: A woman in the midst of a difficult period in her life finds that her mental state has manifested in a monster that is wreaking havoc in Seoul, Korea. NEON; 2017; Rated R; 110 minutes.

Attack of the 50 Foot Woman: Nacho Vigalondo's *Colossal* largely exists beyond genre and plays with

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SCORE: 85%

expectations in all fronts. It is neither a parody of the kaiju, monster movie genre nor a monster movie played straight. Not wholly tragic but certainly not laugh-out-loud funny. *Colossal* is rooted in a metaphorical concept: a person's mental state has manifest physically. The way invading creatures in monster movies often reflect social anxieties regarding anything from terrorism to nuclear weapons, *Colossal* pursues this idea on a personal level.

Gloria (Anne Hathaway) is unemployed, dealing with a drinking problem and fresh off a rough breakup when she returns to her childhood home. Isolated, her mental situation tenuous, she reconnects with a childhood friend Oscar (Jason Sudeikis) as well as his friends Garth (Tim Blake Nelson) and Joel (Austin Btownell). She is initially unproductive, alternating between drinking and sleeping, until Oscar offers her a job at his bar.

Soon after returning home, a monster attacks Seoul, South Korea (a fun location as a homonym with the word "soul.") After the monster acts out Gloria's nervous tic, Gloria experiments and discovers that at a specific time, at her local playground, the beast will mimic her actions.

Somewhat absurdist, conceptual, and psychological, *Colossal* almost feels like a parable, a Jekyll and Hyde for the modern era, in which Gloria tries to control her psychological weaknesses when they become larger than life. She is not the only person with weaknesses and destructive tendencies, and not wholly to blame for her mental state. We see the way that the unkind and abusive men in her life both enable and mistreat Gloria, from childhood to the present day. While

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The Shape of Water Shows the Beauty in Our Differences

SCORE: 94% 

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SCORE: 88% 

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Colossal explores Gloria's flaws and the monsters it creates, it also takes those around her to task for the way their actions damage and affect her.

Them!: "The first time my monster appeared was when we were kids," Gloria says. This turns out to be true of her childhood friend Oscar, as well, who has his own monster, a robot that is revealed later in the film. The playground in Gloria's hometown seems to be a representation of Gloria's mindscape, and Oscar has little respect for either. After Gloria explains how her behavior manifests in a giant monster in South Korea, Oscar finds that he can also manifest a monster, a large robot. He returns to the playground to play around with his newfound power, to Gloria's horror. "You don't think it's funny?" Oscar asks Gloria. The playground setting of the conflicts between Oscar and Gloria contributes to the film's psychoanalytic feel, Oscar and Gloria's immaturity is acted out on a childish stage, connecting them to their own destructive, poorly adjusted behaviors, learned in their youths.

As the film progresses Oscar becomes verbally and eventually physically violent, eventually threatening to do permanent damage to Seoul by way of his monster if she returns to her boyfriend. Tim (Dan Stevens) her ex-boyfriend, is disrespectful, albeit to a lesser extent, condescending and dismissive. Gloria's interactions with both of them are tragic, and when the film's extended metaphor is most effective.

The metaphor at the core of this film's concept, which can initially seem simple, is increasingly multi-layered. It is, overall, concerned with collateral damage, and the way Gloria and Oscar's destructive



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behavior impacts others, are at the heart of this, human issues enlarged to a supernatural scale. The script, however, sometimes over-explains the film's themes. Gloria telling Oscar he hates himself, Tim telling Gloria she's a mess; these lines feel excessive. Gloria's nervous tic, for example, in which she scratches the top of her scalp, was noticeable enough without any verbal attention brought to it. Had it gone unremarked upon would have lead the scene in which the monster does the same gesture more gratifying. The themes are essentially psychoanalytical, although sometimes the script doesn't seem to trust the audience to fully grasp them.

Half Human: The dramatic moments are effective largely because of the strength of acting by the entire cast. The humor, as well, is largely well-played, but can sometimes cause some tonal dissonance. The humor is what makes the genre of *Colossal* hard to place; with more humor, *Colossal* would feel like more of a parody, without it, the film would be a psychological drama. The fact that *Colossal* remains in between, I think, is part of its appeal.

Hathaway beautifully commits to Gloria's sensitivity. She reacts emotionally to the devastation in Seoul before she knows it is connected to her actions, and is concerned that no one will care if the destruction is confined just to one space. When she, while drunk, accidentally kills hundreds while in control of the monster, she is distraught. Gloria's behavior is questionable throughout, but her underlying personality is undeniably sympathetic. Vigalondo makes the wise choice to focus on Hathaway's expressions and let her performance breathe. Every tear and expression is allowed its moment to connect,

and Hathaway's acting allows the film its sincerity and emotional impact.

There is some weakness in the last third of the film, in which Gloria's drinking problem is largely forgotten and the struggle between Oscar and Gloria become the driving conflict. It is in this portion that the metaphor becomes somewhat more ambiguous. The monster becomes not a representation of Gloria's alcoholism specifically, meant to be destroyed or overcome, but something more complex, and a being that Gloria uses to her advantage to protect herself. "It's a good monster," a man at Oscar's bar says at one point, after Gloria defends the playground, and Seoul, from Oscar's robot's destruction. The monster is neither good nor bad, can be either destructive or defensive. Gloria defends her mind from those outside who mean to harm her, and uses her monster to her advantage. She doesn't have a miraculous recovery, but does protect herself, defends her own mental well-being when it counts. This lack of a perfect resolution is characteristic of *Colossal*, a film that overall rejects oversimplification.

Overall: Rooted in an original concept, albeit sometimes over-explained by its script, *Colossal* is focused in its execution and understands its intentions. Its core metaphor is emotionally grounded with impressive performances by Hathaway and Sudeikis. *Colossal* is part character study, part monster movie, part parable, and overall transcends genre in an enjoyable and touching way.

Rating: B+

Featured Image: NEON

COLOSSAL

88%

FINAL

ASSESSMENT:

"Colossal is part character study, part monster movie, part parable, and overall transcends genre in an enjoyable and touching way."

88%

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Christina is formerly an art history student, currently an aspiring film critic, screenwriter, and/or starving artist. Born and raised in Michigan, she is currently based in New York City.

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