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3 stars

3 stars for 'Scott Pilgrim vs. the World'

August 12, 2010 | By Michael Phillips | Movie critic



3 stars

It's easy to make a movie in a style approximating that of a comic book or graphic novel. "Sin City" did it. "Road to Perdition" did it. "Watchmen" and "Kick-Ass" did it. As did "Ghost World." Except for that last one, the others fell short as movies because they mistook visual replication for authenticity. They were storyboards based on storyboards, not films.

"Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" is different, and not just because it's funny first and everything else second. Director and co-writer Edgar Wright

understands the appeal of the original Bryan Lee O'Malley graphic novels, about a Toronto fellow in his early 20s, dating, sort of, a high school girl with the superb name of Knives Chau. Scott Pilgrim plays in a band called Sex Bob-Omb. His heart goes ka-THUMPA-thumpa when he spies a New York transplant named Ramona Flowers (Mary Elizabeth Winstead). A tough babe in black leather and boots, she says he can date her if — major if — he vanquishes all seven of her "evil exes."

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The battles are epic, wall-smashing, physics-bending blowouts. O'Malley's manga-inspired books combine utter banality with superhero hyperbole, and it's a lot for a director to take on. Wright, who is British, has taken it on and won. "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" lives and breathes the style of the original books, with animated squiggles and hearts and stars filling out the frame in many individual shots. Some of this is cute; some of it is better, weirder than "cute."

Michael Cera plays Scott. The rap against Cera, best known for "Juno," is that he's "the same" in movie after movie. I've heard the same argument used against Jesse Eisenberg, and a hundred other actors. Sorry, folks, I don't see it. Cera's range may not be expansive, and he's certainly a narrowly defined physical type, but his verbal hesitations are exquisitely calibrated. "I was thinking we should break up, or whatever," he tells Knives (Ellen Wong), and the singsongy way he says it, he's speaking for every conflict-avoidant arrested-development male who ever sidled up to a breakup speech like the biggest wimp imaginable.

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