

FILM

Robocop sequel is good for violence enthusiasts

by Peter Stathis

Robocop 2
directed by Irvin Kershner
produced by Orion Pictures

In a place not far away, tomorrow has arrived early. The Detroit police are on strike, Nuke drug lords own the low ground, and Omni Consumer Products, an evil super-corporation rules the city from its business tower-turned-city hall. Into this grim prophecy walks Robocop Alex Murphy, determined to kick some criminal ass, and placate the NRA and vigilantism in one mechanical stomp.

Again, as in the original, *Robocop 2* combines the film's narrative with the concept of commercial television. At home, work, and on the way to both, people are bombarded with commercial news. A nuclear reactor accident destroys the Brazilian rainforest, followed shortly after by a commercial selling anti-ozone tanning lotion. A commercial for a car security system that electrocutes potential burglars is

followed by a newsclip of the Surgeon-General being assassinated during a speech against Nuke addiction. It's definitely tongue-in-cheek, but also disturbing in its proximity to current television practice.

But, let's face it: *Robocop 2* is an action film, not a deep, intellectual statement. So how does the adventure hold up? If you look past the flashy special effects, *Robocop 2* actually delivers its message on some very traditional lines. Murphy has to resolve the age-old dilemma of "man versus machine," except he has to do so from within one body.

And, quite obviously, the popular "good versus evil" theme drives most cop movies. *Robo* is no different. The psychotic brain of Murphy's nemesis, Cain (remember the bible?) is transplanted (21st century Frankenstein) into a newer model, Robocop 2, with more firepower and a healthy appetite for king-sized doses of Nuke as payment.

Violence enthusiasts can rest assured there are plenty of explosions and dozens of documented

deaths. And, of course, the film ends with the obligatory brawl scene as the two megacops exchange fisticuffs, fall from 500-storey skyscrapers, get rammed by tanks and try to rip each others' brains out — literally.

Comparisons to Schwarzenegger's *Total Recall* are inevitable. But Peter Weller does a more

convincing job as a robot than Arnold ever achieves playing a human character.

Robocop 2 goes off with a big bang in a summer full of high-priced violence. Costing a paltry \$30 million, compared to *Total Recall*'s \$60 million price tag, it's entertainment with an attitude. Credit goes to Frank Miller (of

Dark Knight and *Elektra Assassin* comic fame), who wrote a decent sequel and Rob Bottin, special F/X director, for the spectacular images, especially Robocop's dismemberment scene.

There's a lot to like on the Robo-rollercoaster. And there will be even more by the time *Robocop 3* comes to town.

Dante cooks up a great New Batch

by J. A. Stephan

Gremlins 2: The New Batch
directed by Joe Dante
produced by Warner Brothers

They're back, and they intend to do some serious partying. It is no smalltown affair this time: we're talking about Manhattan-mania. *Gremlins 2* features a cast of creatures bent on having a good time, and the fun is infectious.

The birth of the first batch of gremlins left the town of Kingston Falls in ruins. Gizmo, the furry little animal responsible for the villainous attack, was taken away by his rightful owner to a Chinese antiques shop in New York.

As the movie opens — after a cute battle between Daffy Duck and his animator — Gizmo is captured by genetic scientists and carried off to Splice O'Life, a lab in the highrise Clamp Centre (Trump Towers?).

A running joke throughout the film is how automated this human environment has become. When one makes it through the revolving doors (either they act like the spin cycle of a washer or trap you halfway), one meets with glorified functionalism reinforced by a multitude of artificial voices. From the elevator: "Thank you. Have a nice day" to the washroom: "Make sure to wash your hands," an employee is never free from modern technology.

This is where Billy (Zach Galligan) and Kat (Phoebe Cates), the protagonists of the previous adventure, now work. Their ordinary lives are shaken when Zack steals Gizmo from the lab, and soon after loses him within the complex. It isn't long before Gizmo and water mix to spawn the first horde of gremlins.



Zach Galligan, Phoebe Cates and friend in *Gremlins 2*.

If the little monsters eat after midnight, they multiply. There just happens to be a late night ice cream parlour open for that purpose; customers beware — there's an evil newborn swimming in the M & Ms, and another drowning in soft serve. It's up to Billy and Kat to do battle once again or these nightmares escape at sundown to make rotten the Big Apple.

Complicating the fight is the gremlins' thirst for the genetic potions wrought by Doctor Catheter (Dracula's Christopher Lee) and his jolly sidekicks. Suddenly, the heroes must contend with mutated critters. The crowning achievement is a talking gremlin able to handle a talk show and take the lead in a grandiose musical production of "New York, New York."

The human actors manage as best they can among the scene stealers. Galligan and Cates pale in contrast to the more eccentric characters. John Glover as Daniel Clamp, a combination Ted Tur-

ner/Donald Trump, lends heart to the mogul.

Haviland Morris, whose style suggests Tracey Ullman, is dynamic as Billy's high strung, butt kicking boss. Cameo performances by Hulk Hogan, Leonard Maltin, Bubba Smith and Paul Bartel are annoying breaks in the continuity of the film, and should have been passed over.

Director Joe Dante (*The Howling*, *Gremlins*, *Explorers*) and screenwriter Charlie Haas don't go by any formula in this outstanding sequel. The sight gags are reminiscent of *Airplane*, but the characters resemble devilish muppets. The situation is pure *Die Hard*, although Bruce Willis wouldn't have a chance.

Rick Baker's gremlins are original and life-like; they possess a terrific range of facial expressions and movements. Their presence alone is enough to incite laughter, and their antics are unrivalled.

Gremlins 2 could well be the funniest release of the summer. It's silly, it's extreme, it works.



Robo walks off into the sequel — err, sunset.

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