



This Ain't Yo Daddy's RoboCop

As technology continues to develop at breathtaking speeds, it is always refreshing to see a film that urges us to step back and ponder the ethical questions that inherently pop up when we discover new ways to tinker with creation. That *RoboCop*, the reboot of the 1987 original of the same name, does this in multiple ways and is also a solid, if not quite overwhelming, piece of film makes it that much more refreshing.



As with any reboot, there is a fine line between satisfying the rabid fans with enough material rooted in the original while still justifying its existence. The reboot succeeds in the first area with plenty of tongue-in-cheek nods to the original and a story structure that retains essentially every main story beat from the 1987 version. We're still in a futuristic and dystopic Detroit and a multinational corporation still controls the city — OCP in the original and OmniCorp in the reboot. But although the films are nearly identical in structure and arena, it's what happens between those beats that separates them and ultimately what justifies a reboot of *RoboCop*.

To point out every single way that the reboot is better than its predecessor would be like shooting fish in a barrel. Film-making technology and techniques have obviously come a long way in 20-some-odd years. Tech aside though, there are more enduring ways in which things are different in 2014 than 1987.

The acting in the reboot, for instance, is far superior to the original. Joel Kinnaman, known for his portrayal of ex-junkie detective Stephen Holder in the AMC/Netflix series *The Killing*, is playing a member of law enforcement of the investigative variety once again. When Detroit Detective Alex Murphy is irreparably harmed in the line of duty, OmniCorp sees an opportunity to overcome American opposition to robots in law enforcement. OmniCorp keeps Murphy alive by turning him into a cyborg, and RoboCop is born. That Kinnaman is essentially just a face for most of the film and is still able to telegraph the emotional roller coaster of a man who just became a robot speaks for itself. Abbie Cornish does a good job of portraying Murphy's long-suffering wife.

A performance highlight is Samuel L. Jackson as Pat Novak, a satirical character who hosts the news show *The Novak Element*. Obviously meant as a sendup of neo-con personalities such as Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity, these segments that book-end the film and give us a broader peek at RoboCop's world were most entertaining. In fact, it is through Novak's show that the audience receives its bearings in the new RoboCop's world.

Whereas the original remains contextually stuck in Detroit and the conspiring of OCP has ramifications only within city limits, the reboot has much higher stakes and a bigger context with the soul of America at stake. OmniCorp runs the American imperialistic machine overseas but is kept from fleecing the American public's tax dollars with government contracts at home because the American people do not want robots without conscience enforcing the law.

This is yet another area of departure where the reboot updates the original. In the original, Murphy actually dies and his conscious mind is resurrected or reincarnated in the robotic body of RoboCop. In



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the reboot, Murphy is severely injured and may die if he is not given the robotic body but does not die. In the reboot, the robotic part of *RoboCop* is essentially a weaponized life support machine. In the '80s, caught up in sci-fi euphoria, one could imagine being brought to life in a future age when our conscious mind could be reassembled by a large computer. Now, in spite of scientific discoveries of depths we could not even imagine in the '80s, it looks as though when we are dead we are dead. This dates the philosophical underpinnings of the original and the reboot brings *RoboCop* current with up-to-date moral dilemmas concerning free will and bioethics. It also raises alarming questions about the [militarization of our local police forces](#).

Another welcome change is that the reboot spends much more time on the relationship between Murphy and his wife and son. This makes for a greatly more rounded character in *RoboCop* than the original and one which the audience can connect with emotionally. Murphy's wife also provides an additional emotional anchor point to tie us to the story.

In fact, for every area except one that the new version departs from the original, the reboot is stronger for it. Unfortunately, the weak point in the reboot is an end that is anticlimactic and does not quite satisfy. The original *RoboCop* had an ending that brought the story full circle and kept entertaining surprises coming to the very end — even though that ending was not set up effectively. The reboot falls just short of spectacular right when it matters the most. I kept wondering how the filmmakers were going to creatively wrap the movie up. Instead, it just ends. In fact, if the original's ending were merged with the reboot, the weaknesses in both scripts would have been more or less fixed.

In spite of its shortcomings, though, the remake of *RoboCop* is a very slick, thoughtful, and welcome update to the original and is a perfect alternative to the sappy romances that flooded the screens this weekend. It opened Wednesday, February 12 and is rated PG-13 for language, violence, and some making out between Murphy and his wife. The language includes one mumbled f-word, a bleeped out f-word (Samuel L. Jackson filling his quota), and smatterings of cussing of various sorts.



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