Battle: Los Angeles

PG-13

116 Minutes

Rating: ****

Battle: Los Angeles is hardly a groundbreaking film. Alien invasion films are a staple of science fiction and action movies, but as with all popular stories, there’s always room for one more good one. And while Battle: Los Angeles does have its flaws, there is certainly more good than bad about it.

Aaron Eckhart stars as Sgt. Michael Nantz, a grizzled marine on his final tour of duty. Nantz is a consummate professional, tough and experienced, but his squad knows that bad things have happened to men under his command before. Now they are going into battle against a mysterious invader that fell from the sky off the Pacific coast, with similar invasions breaking out all across the globe. It doesn’t take long for the marines who go into the killing zone that L.A. has become to figure out that they are fighting something not of this Earth.

Eckhart has generally been a supporting actor for much of his career, but in Battle: Los Angeles the veteran proves he can carry a film. His Sgt. Nantz is thoroughly likeable, and the soldier’s inner battle with his personal demons is just as engrossing as his no-holds-barred war with the merciless alien invaders. Eckhart makes Nantz a charismatic hero that is tough as nails in true Marine fashion, but never a superhero. Nantz’s squad is also sketched in fairly well, and features strong, grounded performances from Michelle Rodriguez, Cory Hardrict, and Noel Harris, among others.

Alien invasion epics won’t work without standout special effects, and Battle: Los Angeles definitely delivers the fireworks. The aliens don’t look particularly original, but they are believable and suitably menacing. The manifold action scenes are hot and heavy, with a visceral, gritty quality that heightens the suspense and makes suspension of disbelief easy. The atmosphere is thick with dread—as it should be when the human race is facing total extermination—and the sets are suitably imposing. Director Jonathan Liebesman choreographs the mayhem with expert precision, working from a well-crafted script from writer Christopher Bertolini.

Bolstered by a strong central protagonist and buoyed by all the basic ingredients sci-fi buff’s demand, Battle: Los Angeles has the action, thrills, and human drama to go a long way at the box office. The ending works, but there’s still room for a sequel. Maybe Sgt. Nantz has one more tour of duty left in him.