On a certain level, there’s no way I can claim that *Battleship* is a good movie in any conventional sense. Even giving it three out of five stars seems a bit generous. The plot is incredulous and the script couldn’t be riddled with more holes if you unloaded a shotgun at it. Even the idea that the movie is based on Hasbro’s classic board game of the same name is rather disingenuous: yes, there is a battleship involved in the action, almost all of which takes place at sea, but other than that any resemblance to the game we all grew up playing seems purely coincidental. And I certainly don’t remember any aliens in the game I had.

But somehow, despite it all, *Battleship* stays afloat. There’s a certain energy and enthusiasm to the film that is infectious, even via the big screen. The story may not make a whole lot of sense, but it is a lot of fun. The extravagant special effects—merely par for the course in any modern would-be blockbuster—are one factor, but spectacular as the many explosions, gunfights, and various displays of pyrotechnics are, there’s more to it than that, an overriding sense of fun that makes all the conventional weaknesses of the film meaningless.

Certainly, the cast seems to be having a lot of fun onscreen. Taylor Kitsch, who stars as Lt. Alex Hopper, is an empathetic hero whose struggle to overcome his personal weaknesses is ultimately played out with the fate of the world at stake when he finds himself and the crew of his Navy destroyer in the wrong place at the wrong time—and smack in the middle of an amphibious alien invasion. Alexander Skarsgard plays Alex’s older brother and mentor, a Navy Captain to whom Alex feels he has been a shallow disappointment. The gorgeous Brooklyn Decker does an adequate job as Alex’s girlfriend, Samantha, whose father just happens to be the Admiral of the fleet, and played by the great Liam Neeson in a typically authoritative performance. The only real weak spot in the cast is singer Rihanna, making her big screen debut and looking like it. One can only hope that if Rihanna pursues further acting roles, she’ll improve…a lot.

The plot isn’t deep, but it does have some positive aspects, incorporating elements of personal redemption, self-empowerment, and self-sacrifice, all concepts that more movies would be well-advised to advance. And while the movie is in a sense very violent—once the aliens arrive, things start to blow up at a rapid clip—there’s nothing especially graphic or bloody. The dialogue isn’t Oscar-worthy, but is sometimes quite witty.

In the end, *Battleship* is a prototypical summer actioner. It’s nowhere nearly as good as *The Avengers*, but as a very different type of film is still worth seeing if big-budget mayhem is your thing. If you’re okay with a movie that doesn’t stimulate your brain and requires only that you go along for the fast-paced ride and enjoy the show, *Battleship* is surprisingly entertaining.