December 18 is another big date for the home video market, as the new version of Total Recall is set to be released on DVD. Total Recall circa 2012 is yet another Hollywood remake, this time of a popular film from 1990 starring the great Arnold Schwarzenegger. The original Total Recall may not be Schwarzenegger’s best action film, but it is highly entertaining with a clever script and remains quite popular today.

So why the remake? Though it retains the general plot outline from the previous film, the revamped Total Recall does make some significant changes to the earlier movie in terms of setting and characterization. Our main character is still Douglas Quaid—this time played by Colin Farrell—and Quaid is still unsatisfied with his unassuming, boring life. To spice things up a little he visits ReKall, a business which can artificially implant memories in your mind, in effect making your wildest dreams come true. But something goes wrong, and Quaid’s ReKall experience awakens dormant memories already lurking in his head, memories that mean everything Quaid believes is false…and that Quaid isn’t who he thinks he is.

Farrell is a very different actor than Arnold Schwarzenegger, and while he may not bring the same physical presence to the action scenes that his predecessor does in the same role, Farrell compensates by displaying a much greater dramatic range and taking the part far more seriously. Farrell captures the confusion of a person struggling to discover his true identity perfectly, and if he’s not the Terminator he still handles the many action scenes with great dexterity.

Farrell is ably supported by a strong pair of co-stars: Kate Beckinsale as Lori, Quaid’s wife—or is she?--and Jessica Biel as Melina, a woman Quaid knows only from a recurring nightmare. Beckinsale’s past roles in films like Underworld and Van Helsing serves her well in this film, and she creates a character of great mystery, beauty, and danger. Biel has the part of the “good girl” who knows who Quaid really is, and loves him anyway. Both women bring a lot of dangerous curves to the movie and a great fight scene between the two is a highlight of the film.

Total Recall is set in the future, and if the special effects aren’t up to the task the story’s internal credibility will crumble. Fortunately, the effects are great, and even on the small screen should be mindblowing. This film’s version of future earth is a much darker, nastier one than that of the 1990 movie, and it’s a shame we don’t see a little more of it. The labyrinthine cityscapes are marvelously realized, and the action scenes set within them are explosive and hard-hitting.

The only real weakness the film has is a somewhat rushed feeling. A few supporting characters and plotlines really should have been fleshed out a little more, and while Total Recall isn’t a short film it might have been wise to spend five or ten extra minutes rounding things out. Otherwise, the new Total Recall is a great ride. The action is nearly non-stop and the characters and their world are really interesting. Whether or not it’s as good as the original, the new Total Recall is easily worth a rental, if not a purchase.