

Colossal (2016)

Rated R. Running Time: 1 hour 49 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 0; Language 1; Sex 1; Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 4.5

The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out.

Jeremiah 17:9 The Message

Spanish director Nacho Vigalondo fantasy film is a fascinating tale of the wounded psyche wreaking havoc in the world. I think Freud would have enjoyed it a lot. It certainly is a cut above the usual Godzilla-type films that I am used to seeing.

The jobless Gloria (Anne Hathaway) has so over-taxed her boyfriend's patience by drinking too much and staying out so late that boyfriend Tim (Dan Stevens) has kicked her out of their New York apartment. Broke and with nowhere to go, she returns to her parents' old house in Maidenhead, New Jersey. Walking from the bus station and before she reaches the house to stow her things, Oscar (Jason Sudeikis) drives by in his pick-up, stops upon recognizing her, and takes her to see the tavern that he has taken over from his parents. The two were childhood friends, he staying behind while she headed out to the big city.

They reminisce, and he introduces her to his two barfly friends Garth (Tim Blake Nelson), and Joel (Austin Stowell). He offers her a part-time job, as well as bringing by her unfurnished house a TV set and some furniture. She hangs out with him and his buddies after hours, consuming far too much alcohol into the night

We think the film is heading toward a consummation of Oscar's earlier crush on Gloria, but this would be too predictable. On her TV Gloria sees a giant reptilian monster (a kaiju) attacking Seoul Korea for a while and then disappearing. It returns each following night. Noticing that some of its actions are like hers, she slowly discovers that she is indeed inducing its actions. When, in her stupor while crossing a playground, she stumbles, the huge monster also falls, crushing hundreds of people. She decides to sober up lest she cause more deaths. Her three drinking friends are astounded when she takes them to the playground and via their internet-connected tablet demonstrates that she is controlling the monster. Soon a second monster, a giant robot, joins the first, and we discover that it is Oscar. Both of them have been suppressing a rage that harks back to something that happened between them 25 years earlier in the field that has become the current playground. Gloria's rage was triggered by the cruel thing that Oscar had done. However, his rage is just as great because she had always surpassed him in achievements, so that his seeming benevolent masks a huge cauldron of resentment.

The climax is something to behold. The action and motivations are not always clear, but the overall intent of the filmmaker comes through loud and clear, a study of the enormous power of the injured human psyche. I think not only Freud, but the prophet Jeremiah also would be intrigued by this dark film. Director Nacho Vigalondo certainly follows his own path, making most other horror films seem shallow and pointless by comparison. In the real world monsters exist, not on the other side of the world, but within, deep within, ourselves.

This review with a set of questions is in the May 2017 issue of VP.