

## "I, Robot" Soulless and Hollow: Also, "A Cinderella Story"

Written by Mike Schulz  
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### ***I, ROBOT***

*I, Robot* is perfectly titled, because it's about as mechanical and impersonal as Hollywood entertainment gets. That's not to say it's *completely* unenjoyable – Alex Proyas' sci-fi work, inspired by a series of Isaac Asimov stories, features some nifty set pieces, including an exciting mid-film sequence involving a hundred 'bots doing considerable damage on an underground freeway – but the film progresses with so little inventiveness that you'll have better luck tallying up the film's numerous influences (

*Blade Runner, A.*

*I.*

,  
*Minority Report*

... ) than finding an original idea.

Set in 2035, when robots have become commonplace as servants and menial laborers, a leading 'bot manufacturer has, apparently, committed suicide. Yet Will Smith's Detective Spooner, like all cinematic lone-wolf detectives, has a Gut Feeling That Something's Not Right, and suspects a robot of doing the murderous deed. As the robots have been specifically designed never to harm humans, no one believes him. Will anyone be surprised to learn that Spooner might, indeed, be correct, and that a full-scale, computerized revolution might be

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brewing? Haven't these people *seen The Matrix*?

Derivative though *I, Robot* is, it's amusing in fits and spurts, and the movie is fortunate to have Will Smith at its center. He's working with subpar material and obviously knows it, yet his hipper-than-thou coolness gives the film moments of much-needed levity, and God knows he's more welcome than Bridget Moynahan, who plays one of the most annoying characters this genre has ever seen. Like a pissier Scully from *The X-Files*, she spends nearly all her screen time pooh-poohing Spooner's contention that the 'bots aren't completely harmless; she's such a reflexive company yes-(wo)man that the script appears to be setting her up as a co-conspirator. (When that *doesn't* happen, it's just bewildering.) And Chi McBride, as Spooner's ball-busting superior officer, is nearly as obnoxious; he's as clueless as Moynahan in his blind devotion to the robot cause. (And yes, cinephiles, this walking cliché *does* , at one point, ask Spooner to turn in his badge.)

Oddly, the film's most persuasive performance is given by the robot accused of murder, who goes by the moniker "Sonny"; he's no Gollum, but this CGI creature's doe-eyed melancholy is almost touching, and he appears to be the only "actor" onscreen who's actually thinking about his line readings. (He's certainly more expressive than the film's Bruce Greenwood, who has officially done his oily-corporate-bastard number one time too many.) Yet even if the film featured humans you cared about, *I, Robot* would still be a mediocrity. The cinematography is bleached-out and fuzzy, as if the whole *movie* was done with CGI, and while several of the action scenes have a kinetic pop, the sight of metal clashing against metal eventually grows tiresome. (The film could have used some of the luxurious gloom of *Proyas'* *The Crow* and *Dark City* .) *I, Robot* plays like the blueprint for an action blockbuster, and like its mechanized antagonists, it winds up efficient, soulless, and hollow.

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**A CINDERELLA STORY** (2004) is a teen romance film directed by Mark Rosenthal. It stars Lindsay Lohan as the underdog and the prince. The film is a remake of the 1997 film 'A Cinderella Story'.