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"The Alamo" Movie Review

Forget "The..." Sorry, That's Just Too Easy

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The first rumblings from Touchstone Pictures over "[The Alamo](#)" centered around how authentic their 2004 cinematic version would be. Historians were used as technical advisors, insuring the accuracy of the events portrayed on screen. Unfortunately, while the filmmakers were worrying about getting the history right, they forgot they were making a movie that needed to flow narratively and work as entertainment for the masses.

Director John Lee Hancock (who also gets a screenwriting credit along with Leslie Bohem and Stephen Gaghan) uses a heavy hand in setting up his shots, never really allowing the events to flow or the characters to develop. Everything looks and feels like a set up shot. Much ado was made over the huge set constructed specifically for "The Alamo." And while it looked great, it never lost the manufactured feeling. Even more bothersome than the set remaining a set was the stilted dialogue. Characters spout background facts that seem to come from nowhere. I get the point. Hancock et al were trying to dispel some myths surrounding legendary figures Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett, Sam Houston, and William Travis. But if you can't work the facts into the story, having the actors just sling little known facts out there isn't the way to go about it. If you can't work it naturally into the flow of the film, then it shouldn't be included in the script.



Patrick Wilson and Jason Patric star in "The Alamo," directed by John Lee Hancock. Touchstone Pictures

For all the cannons, gunshots, bludgeoning and stabbing, there's very little blood and no bodies with missing parts in this version of "The Alamo." It's as if the battle has been Disneyfied in order to get a PG-13 rating. Even those of us who aren't historians know the battle for the Alamo had to have been a bloody affair. We've seen battles done realistically on film over the course of the last 10 years. "The Patriot," "Saving Private Ryan," and others proved you can make a movie that's visually stunning and emotionally moving – and bloody. The battle scenes in "The Alamo" were like a throwback to movies from the 80s. I'm not advocating violence in films, but this *is* a movie with only one purpose – to show the heroic struggle over the Alamo. If any movie deserves to include violence, "The Alamo" does. Political correctness and MPAA ratings should not dictate the feel of a movie that centers around one significant event in America's history.

Only a very small portion of what is wrong with "The Alamo" can be blamed on the actors. [Billy Bob Thornton](#) is a shining light in this otherwise dreary tale. Jason Patric's death bed scene lasts way too long, so long you actually forget he did some good work in this movie prior to having to linger in bed. And poor [Dennis Quaid](#) is kind of lost in the mix. As Sam Houston, he orders around his men, looks a bit deranged, and doesn't really seem to have much direction. On the other hand, Patrick Wilson does a good job of playing William Travis, a man who's not accepted as a leader and has to earn the respect of his older and more experienced compatriots. The rest of the cast kind of wander around hoping to make an impact with their minimal bits of dialogue, but never really get a chance to develop.

When "The Alamo" trailer was first released I was worried about this movie. Here's a sobering story of death and the trailer features Billy Bob Thornton saying something like, "We're going to need more men." To me, that line would have been best served promoting a comedy. It sent a mixed message and was a poor promotional tool.

"The Alamo" finds you leaving the theater not debating whether or not the movie was historically accurate, but wondering what exactly was the point of making this film. I never would have thought it possible for a movie about "The Alamo" to be as boring and lifeless as this 2004 version turned out to be. To me, this movie feels like a bad job of cut and paste. It's as if the filmmakers took all the scenes, cut them up into snippets, placed the snippets in a hat, and then pulled them out at random, leaving a majority still in the hat. The pulled pieces were then glued together like puzzle pieces that are forced into place.

Give me the old John Wayne version any day. Even if it wasn't historically accurate, at least it was watchable.

C- (only saved from a D by Billy Bob Thornton)

"The Alamo" was directed by John Lee Hancock and is rated PG-13 for sustained intense battle sequences.

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