

# 'Amsterdam': An excellent cast does not quite elevate this period thriller



CHENNAI: Decades later, World War I and II stories are as enthralling as ever — and “Amsterdam” is yet another title that offers its take on the inter-war years.

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David O. Russell’s crime caper is set in the 1930s and earlier, when the war clouds were gathering over Europe.

Headlined by no less an actor than Christian Bale (in his third outing with Russell after “American Hustle” and “The Fighter”), the film catches your eye with a series of close-ups and long lens work, courtesy of cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki.

As for the plot, Bale plays Dr. Berendsen, who, along with his friend Harold Woodsman (John David Washington), gets caught up in a bizarre conspiracy. The pair met in the trenches of WWI and formed a bond. Wounded on the battlefield, they meet an

American nurse, Valerie (played by a compelling Margot Robbie), during their hospital stay. The trio become part of a story that unfolds on screen through flashbacks and love affairs.

Partly inspired by real historical events and people, it is based on the little-known 1933 “White House putsch” in which a set of wealthy businessmen conspired to overthrow President Franklin D. Roosevelt and dupe a retired army general into leading their fascist veterans’ organization.

The rather wacky take on real-life events is set between Amsterdam and New York, where a young woman (played by pop superstar Taylor Swift) meets Berendsen and Woodsman. She is convinced that her father, a US Army general, was murdered and the mystery deepens when she is killed and the blame falls on our pair of protagonists. Their quest to clear their names is muddied with the introduction of a bizarre duo played by Oscar winner Rami Malek — who is hardly allowed to be on his best form — and Ana Taylor-Joy. Completing the all-star cast is Robert De Niro in the role of another army general.

Although most of the performances are great and “Amsterdam” looks spectacular on screen, it is not a film that will remain in one’s memory. It makes an attempt to touch on race relations, the concentration of wealth and fascism, but does not quite get there. All in all, it is a tad disappointing considering Russell is a five-time Oscar nominee — audiences may well expect a more thrilling, nuanced ride.

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