



Sharing a certain amount of 'atmosphere' with the likes of *Ghost in the Shell*, *Mardock Scramble* sees young girl Balot given an unusual path for revenge on the man who killed her...

Fifteen-year-old Balot's life was not a happy one, it's safe to say. Sexually abused by her father from an early age; forced into the sex trade to survive after her brother found out what was going on and attempted to kill their parents - her life came to a premature end when gang lord Shell murdered her after making use of her services. You'd think that would be the unhappy end to her story - but in Mardock City, technology exists to bring back the dead in cyborg form, and after her subconscious mind agrees to the "Scramble 09" procedure, Balot finds herself once more in the land of the living, under the care of Doctor Easter - responsible for the care and maintenance of her new body - and Oeufcoque, a "universal item" who will serve as her 'case worker' in the upcoming court case against Shell. Amongst other duties.

While Oeufcoque in his "natural" state is a genetically-engineered mouse, you see, he's capable of becoming almost anything that his bearer could need him to be - and as Balot, in her role as star witness for the prosecution, is about to find herself the target of a wide range of Shell's associates, his ability to be used as a lethal and effective weapon is perhaps his most useful talent. But in the process of defending herself, Balot finds herself quite liking the role of killer, and pushes her use of Oeufcoque beyond what he should allow her to do...

The Blu-ray release of *Mardock Scramble* comes with both the original theatrical version of the movie, and the slightly extended Director's Cut, which is the version that I watched for this review. I'm told the difference between the two is "less clothes, more action", and there's certainly no shortage of either sex or violence in the movie - it's a core part of what it's presenting, so if either of those aspects make you uncomfortable (especially bearing Balot's age in mind) then consider yourself warned. With that out of the way, though, what we have here is in some ways a strange combination - of hard science-fiction on the one hand, with the general aspects of the world that the show presents and of the 'forbidden' technology used; but with Oeufcoque filling the "cuddly mascot" role that you'd more expect to see used in an episode of *Pretty Cure* or something like that. When his 'true nature' was first revealed, I was just about ready to facepalm at the apparent silliness of it - but he's used surprisingly well, his abilities being key in setting Balot up for something of a fall towards the end of the movie and his personality being one of the movie's strong points.

As the story unfolds, we pass through the confusion Balot feels around her re-awakening, the initial stages of the court case against Shell, and a few very nicely-done set-piece battles that let her show off her new combat prowess. Given the movie's comparatively short run-time, all this manages to feel quite slowly-paced, which can be a little off-putting - I was expecting something more fast-paced. But that's not a bad thing, and in between the battles you get plenty of background information on Balot which helps explain where she came from and why she reacts

the way she does when she finally gets the opportunity to go on the offensive. There's also an impressive array of bad guys for her to take own, each with their own creepy obsession or fetish to play with and make them even more loathable. What's missing is anything that could be described as plot 'depth' - what story there is is very lightweight, seemingly designed to tie the scenes together and not much else. There are things the movie *could* be explaining (more into the background of Shell and the October Corporation that he works for, for starters), but that it so far hasn't felt the need to do. Given it's based on a series of novels, that surprised me a little.

But even with that said, what we get all adds up to a very entertaining combination. Seeing Balot transform from confused young girl to eager killer is fascinating; her opponents are varied enough to keep you from feeling that you're watching the same battles over again; there are few nice little twists and turns along the way; and it ends on a big enough cliffhanger that I was cursing at the screen when the closing credits began to roll, as the second movie isn't due until the latter half of the year. I hate having to wait. In the meantime, though, this instalment is well worth checking out.

