

# Cosmological and Religious Symbols in the Film *Alita: Battle Angel*

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*This article aims to identify cosmological and religious symbols in the film Alita: Battle Angel (2019). We systematize the religious symbols present in the film and determine which religious tradition it belongs to. It has been established that the film contains the following early Christian religious symbols. The main character of Alita has common features with the figure of Jesus Christ: 1) the symbolism of baptism in obtaining an "transfigured" Alita's body; 2) sacrificing one's body with a future resurrection in a more perfect bodily form; 3) love and willingness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of this love. Just as Jesus Christ sacrifices himself for those he loves, so Alita is willing to give her own heart to the object of her love; 4) the relationship with the Father character. In a relationship with Dr. Dyson Ido, Alita goes through a difficult path from hostility and non-recognition (at the beginning) to reconciliation and recognition of him as a father; 5) the symbolism of the sword. It was also found that the world in which the film's events take place has distinctive Gnostic features. The Gnostic trope is present, according to the terminology of Pavel Nosachev. The evil demiurge Nova governs this world full of suffering. The main character gradually solves the deceptive nature of reality (by recollection). The use of religious images in popular culture reflects the expectations of modern audiences.*

*Keywords: Alita: Battle Angel, Jesus Christ, Gnosticism, religious symbols, cosmological symbols, cinema, the demiurge*

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## Introduction

Cosmological and religious symbols are widely present in modern popular culture, particularly in cinema. In the conditions of secularization, religious images, ideas, and plots do not disappear but are transformed. Often, cosmological and religious symbols are present in works of art in an implicit, hidden form. One such work is the object of this research.

This article aims to reveal cosmological and religious symbols in the 2019 film *Alita: Battle Angel*, directed by Robert Anthony Rodriguez, a remake of the manga film *Battle Angel Alita* by Yukito Kishiro in the form of a cyberpunk action film.

There is little scientific research that would be relevant to this film. First, there is a study (a short survey) examining the use of certain robotic technologies in medical rehabilitation. These technologies are similar to those shown in *Alita: Battle Angel* (Murphy, 2019). There is a second study (a conference paper) that reviews a technical aspect of the film, namely the computer graphic features the film employs (Stomakhin et al., 2019). At the moment, there are no studies aimed at analyzing this film from a religious standpoint.

Among the scientific studies devoted to identifying cosmological and religious symbols in cinema, the following are worth mentioning. They characterize specific methodological approaches to this problem. Thus, Faiza Hirji, in his study, analyzes Islam as it is represented in the national Indian cinema that is produced by Bollywood. The author states that Islam is often associated with violence, terrorism, and intercultural misunderstanding (Hirji 2008). Anton Karl Kozlovic takes a similar approach when analyzing “sacred cinema” in Hollywood products. It focuses on the following three categories in popular films: 1) holy plotlines; 2) divine symbolism; 3) sacred subtexts, including the Christ figure. The author concludes that the use of such means in cinema is useful for the religious education of young people (Kozlovic, 2007). In his study of the influence of gnostic ideas on modern cinema, Fryderyk Kwiatkowski considers three films: *Dark City*, *The Matrix* trilogy, and *The Truman Show*. It demonstrates the gnostic origins of certain strategies used in these films to demonize the world’s creators (Kwiatkowski, 2018).

Another approach to studying cosmological and religious symbols in cinematography is to focus on the director’s style. Here, we can talk about finding an answer to the question: How this particular director uses religious symbols in his work? Thus, Pavel Nosachev analyzes the creative achievements of the American director Kenneth Anger. First, the author analyzes and systematizes the director’s work and then investigates its religious basis. The author examines three Kenneth Anger films in detail (*Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, *Invocation Of My Demon Brother*, and *Lucifer Rising*) and, based on these examples, claims that Allister Crowley’s ideas influenced Anger’s work. Nosachev also hypothesizes that Kenneth Anger deconstructed Crowley’s thoughts, going back to their Christian origins, and unconsciously reproduced Christian aesthetics (Nosachev, 2021b).

Silvia Angeli explores the work of the famous Italian director Marco Bellocchio through his 1971 film, *Nel nome del padre*. The author analyses the presence in the film of elements of a particular religious tradition: in this case, Catholicism. In her opinion, the film presents a rethinking of Scriptures episodes, such as the Last Supper, Deposition, the Passions and Catholic rituals (masses, burials, communions). Angeli also discovers direct references to the Scriptures through direct quotes and Christian (mainly Catholic) symbols. She emphasizes the importance of religion to the director, despite his use of irony and satire, and considers his possible motivation for such an especially ambivalent attitude (Angeli, 2018).

Richard Walsh demonstrates another possible approach. He explores, through several films, how certain religious figures are represented in cinematography (in particular, the figure

of St. Paul). Here, there is a concentration on the characters of the film. Thus, he notes that typical films about the Apostle Paul, including television and church productions, represent Paul according to a certain pattern: 1) a spectacularly conceived Acts, 2) his martyrdom, 3) hagiography, and 4) biopic film structure (Walsh, 2019).

We consider all of the methodological approaches used to research cosmological and religious symbols in cinematography legitimate and useful. They all help us to fulfill certain research tasks. However, for this study, we consider it necessary to use a different method. First, we do not consider trends in the use of cosmological and religious symbols in cinema in general (or the cinema of a particular country/period of time, etc.) but focus on one film, *Alita: Battle Angel*. Second, we do not consider the features of the style of the film director (Robert Anthony Rodriguez) and his possible psychological motivations for his creative decisions. We are not looking for answers to the question: Why did the director do it this way and not otherwise? or What features of the director's personality influenced his art? or What did he want to say with one or the other symbol? or Did he consciously use this symbol or unconsciously?, etc. All these questions are beyond the scope of our study. Third, we try to consider cosmological and religious symbols in the film as they are, rather than look for answers to how they got there. We systematize the cosmological and religious symbols present in the film and determine which religious tradition they belong to. The working hypothesis of this study is the presence of symbols of the early Christian tradition in the film *Alita: Battle Angel*.

In the process of analyzing the symbols, we have relied on Rudenko and Liashenko's methodology (Rudenko & Liashenko, 2020).

The film's plot is set in a post-apocalyptic future, 2563, three hundred years after the war with Mars known as The Fall. Events take place in Iron City, a huge city that sits beneath the flying city of Zalem. Once, there were many such flying cities, but only one remained after the war.

Dr. Dyson Ido finds the remains of a cyborg girl at the Zalem dump and takes them to his clinic. There he gives her the cyber-body of his daughter, who has died at the hands of a criminal. Since the girl found does not remember her name, Ido gives her his daughter's name, Alita. The former wife of Ido, Dr. Chiren, disapproves of this. Once recovered, Alita goes out into town and meets a guy named Hugo and they fall in love with each other over time. Hugo shows Alita the city's main features and then teaches her to play a game called Motorball (a racing sport played by cyborg gladiators). While playing the game, Alita shows remarkable power. One night she follows Dr. Ido because she thinks he is a mysterious cyborg killer. However, it turns out that he is a Hunter-Warrior, a licensed bounty hunter. It should be noted that firearms are prohibited in Iron City, so all Hunter-Warrior use exclusively cold weapons. Firearms are possessed only by Centurions – robots that perform the function of keeping order.

At one point, Alita and Dr. Ido are ambushed. During the fight, Alita kills two cyborg criminals and damages their leader named Grewishka, who escapes. During the fight, the main character recalls a fight on the moon in which she once participated. Ido explains that her heart is a piece of lost ancient technology, a source of energy and of great power, designed to work in a much stronger body. Hugo leads Alita outside the city to where a downed Martian ship lies in the lake. Alita dives into the water, gets on board, and finds a body she thinks is meant for her. She asks Ido to connect her head to this body, but he refuses, at first.

Meanwhile, Vector, the organizer of the Motorball competition, orders Grewishka to kill Alita and bring her body to him. At the same time, Alita goes to the Zalem police station and

gets a Hunter-Warrior license. She tries to convince the Hunters of the Kansas Bar to fight Grewishka. But Grewishka's patron saint, who lives in Zalem, has removed him from the list of criminals. The Hunters make fun of Alita. She fights and defeats them. Dr. Ido comes to the bar to pick Alita up. At that moment, Grewishka appears. He challenges Alita. They fight in the dungeon. During the fight, he destroys Alita's body. She is left without the use of her legs, but she pushes her only hand into his eye. Grewishka runs away, and Ido is forced to connect Alita to a new, significantly stronger body. Following an order from a man from Zalem named Nova, Vector prompts Hugo to bring the girl to the Motorball competition, where he plans to kill her. However, Alita defeats all her opponents and becomes the crowd's favorite. One of the Hunter-Warriors, Zapan, accuses Hugo of killing cyborgs, and he organizes a hunt for him. When Alita finds out, she escapes from the arena and searches for Hugo. She finds him, but Zapan has already caught him. Zapan states that he or Alita should kill Hugo as a criminal. The girl takes the wounded Hugo to the Hunter-Warrior temple, where she must kill him. Later, Ido transplants Hugo's head onto a cyborg body. He tells Alita that he once lived with Dr. Chiren and was born in Zalem but had to go down to Iron City. That was the only way he could save his daughter, who was ill. He talks of someone in the heavenly city of Nova, and Alita understands that she has to kill this person. She goes to the temple, where she kills the guards and finds Vector. Grewishka is once again attacked and Alita kills him by cutting him in half. Nova takes possession of Vector's body and talks to the girl through him. Returning to Dr. Ido, she learns that Hugo has decided to climb up a tube from the Iron City to get to the flying city of Zalem. Alita finds Hugo and tells him about a trap on his way. However, it is too late. A rotating blade comes down the tube and kills Hugo. Sometime later, Alita returns to the Motorball competition, where she becomes a champion. She fights for the right to climb to Zalem. Nova is watching this from the heavenly city. At this point, the film ends.

In this study, we ask and try to answer whether there are religious symbols in the film *Alita: Battle Angel* and, if there are, what these symbols are.

### **Cosmological symbols**

Zalem is a city of gods; Iron City is a city of people. The film's events occur in Iron City, a large post-apocalyptic city. Above Iron City is another city, Zalem, which hangs in the sky thanks to advanced technology. According to the film's plot, there were many such cities once, but only one survived the war. The products of the factories and farms are lifted from Iron City to Zalem by special tubes, while in the opposite direction, the garbage of Zalem is poured into the dump situated at the centre of Iron City. It is symbolic that the film's actions begin precisely at the landfill.

The people of Iron City cannot go up to Zalem: "Nobody from down here ever goes up. It's a rule that's never broken," says Dr. Ido. However, people from Zalem can get down to Iron City: Dr. Ido, for example. It later transpires that there is a way to get up to Zalem; winning a Motorball challenge entitles the champion to do so.

Two of the characters in the film, Hugo and Dr. Chiren, are desperate to get to Zalem. Dr. Chiren says to her ex-husband, "I am going to get back to Zalem somehow. I will claw my way there with my bare hands if I have to." At the same time, others, such as Dr. Ido and Vector, have no such aspirations and want to stay in Iron City. It is worth noting the different motivations of these latter two characters. In a conversation with Hugo, Vector says, "I'd rather rule in hell than serve in heaven. We'd be at the bottom of the food chain up there, but down here we can live like kings." This is an almost accurate quote from the

epic poem *Paradise Lost* by the 17<sup>th</sup>-century English poet John Milton, in which Satan says: “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven” (PL 1.263). However, Vector is one of Satan’s incarnations in the film; see below. The other character who does not aspire to reach the upper world, Dr. Ido, was born in Zalem but was expelled to the lower world, and he enjoys helping people and cyborgs in his clinic.

Iron City suggests Babylon as presented in the Bible (Genesis 11:1-9). In particular, the multilingualism of Iron City underpins such symbolism. “Why are there so many languages?” asks Alita. “After the big war I told you about, only Zalem was left... and any survivors from all over the world came here. Everybody down here works for Zalem,” answers Dr Ido. In the Jewish-Christian perception, the inhabitants of Babylon are characterized by pride and a rebellious character. They sought (unsuccessfully) equality with God (an episode of the Tower of Babel). In Christian texts, Babylon (the city of men) is often opposed to Jerusalem (the city of God) and is associated with abominations and immorality (Bigalke, 2011). At the film’s end, Hugo tries to get to the heavenly city and become a resident, but Nova prevents this (analogy with the Tower of Babel). However, this was achieved using a more brutal method than mixing languages.

Iron City is not a good place. “It is a harsh world. The strong prey on the weak down here,” says Hugo at one point. Ido says almost the same thing: “Do not trust anyone. People do terrible things to each other here.” Grewishka shares a similar view: “Iron City is no place for innocents.” Interestingly, for groups of early Gnostic Christians, our world was similarly a place to be saved from (Lohr, 2011).

However, it should be noted that Iron City is not the worst place in the world of film construction. Thus, during a fight in the Kansas Bar, Grewishka punches the floor and jumps down a few dozen meters, probably into an abandoned sewer, while saying to Alita: “Come to my world. Welcome to the underworld. My world. From here, there are worlds above worlds (...) going farther up than you can imagine. And the trash of each one flows down to the one below till it all ends up here.” So, if you draw a parallel with the Christian elements of world-building, then Zalem is heaven, Iron City is the earthly world, and the sewers are the analogue of hell.

## Religious symbols

Alita is Jesus Christ in the Christian and Gnostic interpretations. She is the film’s main character and has features that allow her to be identified with Christ of the early Christian and, especially, Gnostic tradition. Below we will look at these features in more detail. Before starting our consideration, it is worth mentioning the important methodological work of Kozlovich, which is devoted to the structural characteristics of the figure of Christ in cinema (Kozlovich, 2004, 2007). The author of this study notes that the Christ figure is widely present in modern cinema: for example, in such films as *Braveheart*, *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner*, *Superman: The Movie*, *Hannibal*, and others. Kozlovich identifies 25 structural characteristics of the Christ figure, which, in his opinion, are inherent in the cinematographic Christ. We consider these characteristics too broad, but in certain circumstances, they may be useful in identifying Christian symbols in cinema. Thus, not in every film where the Christ figure is present can one distinguish “12 associates” (No.7 in the classification of characteristics): that is, 12 close friends of the protagonist who can be associated with the 12 apostles.

In our opinion, the symbolism of the number 12 in the religious history of mankind is much broader than the purely Christian context. Also controversial is item No.8, “the holy age,” which states how a hero begins his adventures when he reaches the mystical age of 30.

Here, we can talk about the universal archetypes of the middle-age crisis, which encompass a broader context. Thus, the mythological figure of Christ follows these archetypes rather than introduces them. Item No.10, “a sexually identified woman,” is also not mandatory in films where the Christ figure is present. In addition, there are movies in which the Christ figure is a woman. Paragraph No.11, which refers to baptism rites, we consider quite legitimate, as well as No.12, “a decisive death and resurrection,” No 17, “A cruciform pose,” and No 18, “across associations.” We cannot agree with No.23, “blue eyes,” as a mandatory attribute of the cinematic Christ. Blue eyes can represent, for example, the romantic nature of a hero. Note that Ido has blue eyes, but they cannot be matched with the Christ figure. In addition, we believe blue eyes are an attribute of an actor rather than a hero (of course, directors choose actors for certain roles, but it is unlikely that the colour of the eyes is the main criterion in the choice). We agree with Kozlovich that the actor Mel Gibson playing Braveheart has the distinctive features of Christ (he sacrifices his life for the freedom of his country). But Mel Gibson in *What Women Want* has the same blue eyes as in *Braveheart*, but his character by no means represents the image of Christ. As for the last point, “J.C. initials and Christ references,” it is primarily concerned with literary works, although they are relevant in some cinematographic works (Kozlovich, 2004). Here, we have tried to identify commonalities between *Alita* and Christ.

First, let us consider the problem of the main character’s body as presented in the film. *Alita* falls to the landfill from Zalem and is found by Dr. Ido, who connects her to the mechanical body that was intended for his sick daughter. *Alita* then finds her real, cybernetic body on a wrecked Martian spaceship which is lying in a semi-flooded state in a lake. It should be noted that this cybernetic body has not been constructed using Zalem technologies but by using more advanced Martian technologies. To recover this cybernetic body, Ido must dive into the lake. This scene may be a direct reference to the biblical symbolism of baptism. Christ accepts such baptism before beginning his earthly ministry: “And Christ, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened before him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him” (Matthew 3:16). Later, in a conversation with Nicodemus, Christ declares baptism is a prerequisite for entering the kingdom of God: “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God!” (John 3:5). In early Christianity, baptism gained significance as the main rite of entry into the faith and as a sign of the unity of the church (Gagnon, 2011). It is also the case that the rite of baptism is important in modern Christianity; it symbolizes the second birth.

Second, before Dr. Ido combines the main character with her real body, *Alita*, in the battle with Grewishka in the dungeon, loses her cyborg body. The apparent parallel is the death and then the resurrection of Christ. It is worth recalling that the idea of a bodily resurrection was a very important religious provision (Schmidt, 2011). After the resurrection, according to the Christian tradition, the body of Christ had unusual powers. Thus, when the disciples were hiding behind closed doors, Jesus “came and stood in their midst” (John 20:19, 26). While Cleopas and his friend recognized him, “he vanished out of their sight” (Luke 24:31). With the new body, Jesus could change his image of his own accord (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:16; John 20:14). The properties of *Alita*’s new, real body are similar. “It is the adaptive technology of the berserker body. The shell is reconfiguring to her subconscious image of herself. I have never seen anything like it,” says Dr. Ido. By merging with her true body, *Alita* destroys the antagonists Vector and Grewishka. Thus, Christ, after death and resurrection, receives his perfect body, and *Alita*, after the destruction of her ordinary body, receives her real and more perfect body.



Third, with Alita's love for Hugo, a love line is present in the film, but it is not about a habitual passion or romantic crush between young people. Love is what makes an Alita cyborg human. Immediately after the kiss that takes place between them, Alita asks Hugo: "Does it bother you (...) that I am not completely human?" "You are the most human person I have ever met," he replies. For these characters, love is, above all, a sacrifice. Alita is ready to give her heart to the object of her love, Hugo. When she learns about his dream of collecting money to get to Zalem, she says to him: "I'd give you whatever I have. I'd give you my heart. Take it." At the same time, she takes her heart out of her cybernetic body and offers it to him. He refuses such a sacrifice and says, "Do not just do things for people. No matter how good you think they are, or how deserving they are." When Zapan injures Hugo, Alita is willing to save him even at the cost of her own life: "I'd give him my life if I could."

According to the Christian faith, love is one of the most important commandments: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one other; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). Christ speaks especially of love combined with self-sacrifice: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12-13). Alita, to the last, tries to save her lover. "Thank you (...) for saving me," she tells Hugo before she dies. Thus, according to the Christian myth, as Christ's self-sacrifice saves those he loves, so Alita tries to save Hugo through her self-sacrifice.

Fourth, the relationship between Alita and Dr. Ido should be considered. Immediately after her rebirth in Iron City, the Alita is merged with the body intended for Dr. Ido's daughter. We can say that he finds himself in the role of her father from the very beginning. It is he who gives her a name when she asks him, "While I am learning names, do you have one for me?" "Alita," he replies. Interestingly, the girl immediately likes the name: "It is a nice name. I love it. Can I keep it? At least until I can remember my real name?"

However, we cannot say that everything was fine in their relationship from the beginning. After learning about the night murders of women, Alita initially suspects the doctor of these crimes. She even watches him to see if her suspicions are true. Even after Alita is sure that Ido is not a criminal but, on the contrary, is a Hunter-Warrior, their relationship is far from perfect: "I am not your daughter. I do not know what I am," she says to him. Later, she wants Ido to combine her with a new, more perfect body. He refuses to do this, motivated by the thought of the danger she might face: "You are not just a warrior, Alita. You are a URM Berserker, the most advanced cyborg weapon ever created. And that is exactly why I will never unite you with this body." Contrary to the doctor's wishes, Alita becomes a Hunter-Warrior. But at the end of the film, after mingling with her real body, she says to Ido: "Thank you, Father."

So, the following can be said. During the film, Alita's relationship with Ido follows a difficult path, from one of hostility and non-recognition to reconciliation and the recognition of the doctor as a father; from "I am not your daughter" to "Thank you, Father."

Alita's relationship with Dr. Chiren, the mother figure) is similar. Initially, Dr. Chiren does not see Alita and helps her enemies (Nova, Vector and Grewishka), but then she helps Alita save Hugo. We believe that Alita's relationship with the family and her father and Christ with the earthly family and the Father may be compared. Christ also had a misunderstanding with his earthly family. So, when Mary appeals to Jesus at Cana of Galilee to solve the problem of the lack of wine at the wedding, although he answers her: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4), he still solves the problem. In general, the disciples of Christ turned out to be closer than his family. When the disciples,

during a sermon, told him that his relatives had come to him, he replied: “Who is my mother and my brethren?” And looking round on them that sat round about him, he saith, ‘Behold, my mother and my brethren!’” (Mark 3:33-34). Even the last words of Christ on the cross (in contradictory versions of different evangelists) show reflect the aspects discussed above, those of disunity, alienation from God, his Father, and his reconciliation with Him: “And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’, that is, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46; also Mark 15:34) and “And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’: and having said this, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46). In this case, we do not investigate the historical veracity or falsity of these words. We believe that these two mythologems perfectly illustrate the aspects of Jesus’ alienation from God and his reconciliation with him.

We believe it is possible to draw an analogy in the relationship of Alita with her parent/family and the relationship of Christ with God/his family. Such a scheme, first a conflict and then a solution to the conflict between the hero with his father/parents, is a fairly common plot in literature and cinema (we can mention, for example, the classic Star Wars trilogy (Taliaferro & Beck, 2015), where a similar plot was used). Perhaps this plot originates from religious archetypes, and modern mass culture has adopted it. However, this question is beyond the scope of this study.

Fifth, let us discuss the sword used by Alita. It immediately caught her attention as soon as she saw Zapan using it. Zapan spoke of himself as: “Keeper of the legendary Damascus Blade. Honed to the monomolecular edge. It slices armor like butter. Forged before The Fall by the lost arts of URM metallurgy.” Later, during a bar fight, Alita says to him, “You do not deserve such a weapon.” Finally, during her bar fight with Zapan, she takes the sword from him, and she uses it in subsequent battles. It is worth noting she uses the sword to destroy Vector and Grewishka.

In the New Testament, the sword is one of Christ’s symbolic attributes. He says in one sermon: “Think not that I came to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). In the visions of the apostle John, Christ also has a sword: “And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:16; also 2:12; 19:15). It should be noted that as early as the first centuries of Christianity, the general tendency was to interpret the sword metaphorically, and it was not interpreted as a symbol of violence (Croy, 2019).

Nova is a gnostic demiurge. The main antagonist in the film *Alita: Battle Angel* is Nova, “the watcher behind the eyes” as Dr. Ido says. We know that he lives in Zalem and controls all evil forces from there (see below for more about other evil forces). It is Nova who expels Ido’s family, including his sick daughter, to Iron City. In one of her memories, Alita recalls an episode of her training and her instructor saying about Nova: “He is the dragon that must be slain.”

Alita remembers trying to get to Zalem to destroy her main enemy. Broadly speaking, the biblical myth of the fight against the dragon speaks of the problem of the existence of evil in the world (Miller, 2019). The bible usually associates the devil with the dragon: “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels (going forth) to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels” (Revelation 12:7). Accordingly, the dragon acts as a representation of evil. In some places, the bible uses the image of Yahweh as a dragon-like creature that pours fire from its mouth and smoke from its nostrils (Kim & Trimm, 2014). Note that among the Gnostics, the demiurge was identified with the Old Testament Yahweh (see below).

Nova can enter into the consciousness of cyborgs equipped with a special chip (a telepresence chip) and speak to them (he does this through Grewishka and Vector). The



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devil acts similarly during the Last Supper: “And after the sop, then entered Satan into him. Jesus, therefore, saith unto him, ‘What thou doest, do quickly’” (John 13:27; also Luke 22:3). Interestingly, the characters whose consciousness Nova enters are the main representations of the forces of evil in their worlds (Vector in Iron City, Grewishka in the underworld, which is located under Iron City, as discussed above). It is Nova that manages these characters. He says to the main character through Vector: “Remember. I see everything.” Hence, Nova is an analogue of the demiurge (precisely in the early Christian-diagnostic sense of the term). It should be noted that among the early Christian thinkers, now commonly referred to as Gnostics, the idea of distinguishing the highest and transcendent God on the one hand and the lord of this world, the demiurge, on the other was widespread (Lohr, 2011). At the same time, some early Christians identified the demiurge with God, the creator of the world, as described in the Old Testament (Dunderberg, 2011).

So, Nova is the evil lord of the world who prevents people from getting out of prison (leaving Iron City). This demiurge can be associated with the dragon, the devil, or Yahweh in the Gnostic interpretation.

### Cultural impact

When discussing the cultural impact of the movie *Alita: Battle Angel*, we must take into consideration two aspects of said impact. First is the formation of a certain fan community that perceives ideas presented in the movie and cosplays the characters during certain entertainment events, such as fan festivals like Comic Con.

The second aspect is as follows. According to Pavel Nosachev: “The problematics of Gnosticism, its imagery, mythologemes, symbols have entered into the life of modern man” (Nosachev, 2021a: 297). We believe that the film *Alita: Battle Angel* confirms this fact. The gnostic elements are simultaneously mixed into the film with the Christian ones. To illustrate this thesis, it is worth using the Gnostic trope in Nosachev’s terminology. He believes that: “In its content, the Gnostic trail is an adaptation to the modern popular culture of several representations of ancient Gnosticism, namely: 1) our world is a prison created for human torment; 2) the evil creator of this world is a demiurge; 3) the Gnostic can solve the deceptive nature of reality; 4) gnosis is a kind of extra-rational experience that reveals to the Gnostic the truth” (Nosachev, 2021a: 298). Accordingly, we have established that the world in which the film’s events take place can be equated with prison and, at least in part, this relates to human suffering. It corresponds to the first element of the Gnostic trail. Nova, the main antagonist of the film, although not the creator of this imperfect world but its lord, has all the features of a Gnostic demiurge. This is in accordance with the second element. The main character, Alita, gradually solves the deceptive nature of reality (this happens through recollection). This corresponds to the third and fourth elements.

It should be noted that in this case, the Gnostic trope is not limited just to artistic culture, but it impacts society as a whole (for further reading about the impact of culture on politics, see Omelchenko (2021); Pavlova (2018)). Thus, in the film, a societal pessimistic worldview is shaped based on the Gnostic trope.

### Conclusions

*Alita: Battle Angel* contains the Gnostic trope and facilitates the formation of a corresponding worldview of society. The cosmological symbols present in the movie also correspond to the Gnostic understanding of the world.

We have also established the presence in the film of symbols that bring the main character, Alita, close to the figure of Christ.

First, there is the symbolism of baptism when Alita receives her true body. She dives into the water in the process of gaining a body. This scene references the baptism ritual described in the bible. Christ also went through this ritual.

Second, she sacrifices her earthly body for a future resurrection with perfect corporeality. Christ, after death and resurrection, receives a perfect body, and Alita, after the destruction of her ordinary body, receives a real and more perfect body.

Third, there is love and the willingness to sacrifice for the sake of that love. Like Christ, for Alita, love is, above all, a sacrifice. Just as Christ sacrifices himself for those he loves, so Alita is willing to give her own heart for the object of her love; her father.

Fourth, there is the father-child relationship. In her relationship with Dr. Ido, Alita follows a difficult path, from hostility and non-recognition toward her father to reconciliation and recognition of him. The relationship of Christ with his earthly family and God, his Father, has similar features. Even his last words on the cross (and the two contradictory versions in the bible) show the aspects discussed above: disunity, alienation with God, the father, and reconciliation with Him.

Fifth, there is the symbolism of the sword. In the New Testament, the sword is one of the symbolic attributes of Christ. Similarly, Alita has a sword with which she fights evil.

Thus, it may be said that *Alita: Battle Angel* contains many hidden religious symbols, although it is classified as a cyberpunk action, adventure, family, and science fiction film. Perhaps, this use of religious images in popular culture reflects the expectations of modern audiences.

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