

Coins of Iron City

By
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Gunnm (銃夢), a Japanese manga created by Yukito Kishiro, ran in Shueisha's *Business Jump* magazine from 1990 to 1995. It was soon published as a set of nine manga volumes in Japan, with an English translation for the US market produced by Viz Media titled *Battle Angel Alita* at about the same time. A deluxe edition in five volumes by Kodansha Comics featuring glossy pages and a new English translation was released between 2017 and 2018 with the same title.

Since 1995, James Cameron had wished to create a movie based on the manga, and although one was announced in 2003, it was delayed by his work on *Avatar* and its sequels. Principal photography finally began in Austin, Texas, in October 2016, lasting through February 2017, and was released in the US on

February 14, 2019 as the PG-13 rated *Alita: Battle Angel*. It was the last film made by 20th Century Fox before the studio became fully owned by Disney. With a budget estimated to be between \$175 and \$200 million dollars, as of this writing it has grossed over \$400 million worldwide. If the movie is deemed profitable, Cameron has indicated that he would like to produce two sequels as the initial movie is inspired by only the first four books in the series of nine.

Centuries after a civilization-ending war, the story focuses on the hardscrabble life of the inhabitants of the dystopian Iron City, a town below the inaccessible, mysterious floating city of Zalem, the only sky city to survive the war. The surface provides supplies to Zalem, while Zalem's trash falls to the city below. It is in this trash heap that a Dr. Ido, a cybernetics doctor, finds the core of a cyborg girl with a still-living brain. He repairs her systems, gives her a body, and names her Alita. As she recovers, she realizes that she has no memory of who she is, but she soon discovers that she has the innate skills and reflexes of a long-lost military fighting style, and determines to learn the secrets of her past.

WARNING: SPOILERS AHEAD

In Iron City, two legal ways to earn "credits" are to be a registered bounty hunter (as Ido is and Alita becomes), and to play the game of Motorball professionally (as Alita does later). An illegal way is to steal cybernetic parts from the various cyborg inhabitants of the city and sell them on the black market, often becoming a target of a bounty hunter. It is rumored that if one

can raise enough credits and by knowing the right shady people, one can escape the city and be sent to Zalem above.

Three denominations of credit coins were used during filming: 1, 10, and 1,000, and they appear in various scenes. These coins (tokens, really) were produced by Troublemaker Studios in Austin, Texas, and some have become available to movie prop collectors. Most were treated by Troublemaker Studios with a solution of salt and vinegar to artificially age them, as they initially looked too bright to give the impression that they had been in circulation, so these tokens as found are in various states of preservation.

The 1 credit tokens are made of copper and are 25 mm in diameter. The obverse features a large “1” ringed by 1s, with “IRON CITY” above and “UNO” below. “1 CRÉDITO” surrounded by an inscription of “MOTORBALL . ZALEM OVER ALL . FACTORY . UNO” appears on the reverse. These tokens were used in several scenes in the film, including in the Kansas Bar (a bounty hunter hangout) and were tossed into a fountain shown in a scene where Alita plays an amateur game of Motorball with others her young apparent age. Some of these tokens remained in the fountain for a week of filming, so have additional surface impairment beyond the artificial aging, such as the example below, which shows spotting on the obverse. 500 of these tokens were struck for the film.



The 10 credit coins have a similar design to the 1 credit coins, but have a large “10” on the obverse ringed by 10s, “DIEZ” in place of “UNO” on both faces, and are 30 mm in diameter. They were made of brass, and were also used in the Kansas Bar scene and tossed into, and remained in, the fountain. 500 of these tokens were struck as well.



The 1,000 credit coins, 39 mm in diameter, were struck in three different metals all with the same design. The obverse shows the city of Zalem surrounded by MOTORBALL . ZALEM OVER ALL . FACTORY . 1000” and the reverse shows the Motorball ball with “IRON CITY” above and “1000” below. Both faces have rings of 1000s.



Five hundred of these tokens were struck in nickel silver in September 2016 for use in the film and appear in the Kansas Bar scene, as well as when Alita and Ido are paid for bounties that they have claimed as hunters. When no longer needed, many of these tokens were given to press visiting the set, studio employees, dignitaries, or sent to Fox for promotional giveaways – the 1 and 10 credit coins were not as popular and were not used in promotions.

Seventy-five 1,000 credit tokens were struck in one ounce of .99 fine silver, with fifty in September 2016 and twenty-five more in January 2017. Ten were blackened and aged to be used on film, but the scene they were to be used in was cut when the script was rewritten so they were never seen on screen.

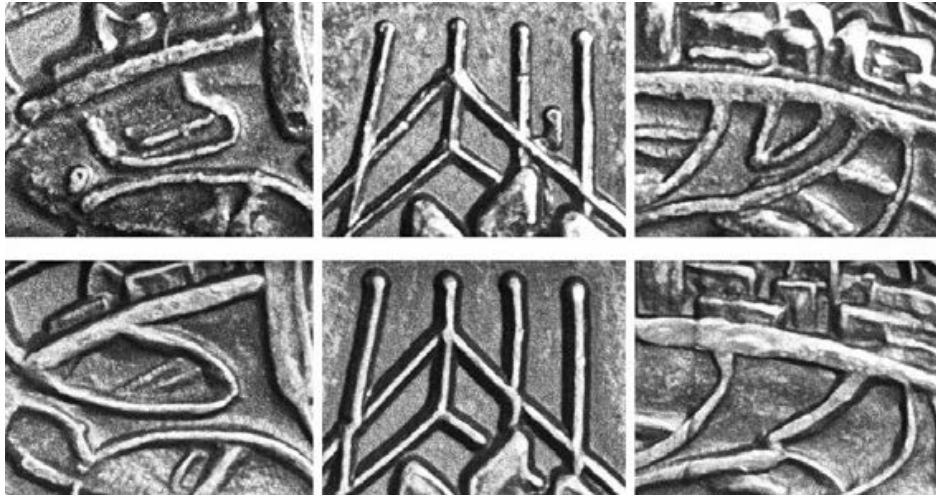
After filming ended, additional 1,000 credit tokens in brass were produced. The nickel silver token production was too hard on the dies, so after the silver, nickel silver, and 300 of the brass tokens were struck, the dies cracked. Second-, third-, and fourth-generation dies were made to strike the remaining brass tokens, with the obverse (Zalem) die possibly laser cut for the additional dies – the original had been hand carved from original designs.

The first 300 of these brass tokens were struck in 2017, the next 2,450 in 2018, and 13,000 more in 2019. The brass tokens were used for an “escape room”-style game called the Alita Experience / Passport to Iron City. No brass tokens were used during filming, and no nickel silver tokens were used for the game.

The game was available in three cities, but has now ended: Los Angeles, California, New York City, New York, and Austin, Texas. Up to ten teams of five or six players played simultaneously with the objective to earn the most credits of all of the teams and to “go to Zalem.” Players had forty minutes to earn credits by participating in various Alita-themed mini-games (such as selecting the most valuable scrap from a scrap pile, performing motor tasks, or answering trivia questions) and to gain clues to learn which of six characters to bet on in the final mini-game, a Motorball match. Each member of the team that had the most credits after the end of the match (presumably after having bet on the Motorball winner) earned one of the brass 1,000 credit tokens. Players could even meet at the Kansas Bar and purchase a special beer in an Alita-themed beer can.



Although virtually the same design as the nickel silver, the successive dies used to strike them are not quite identical to the original. While there are quite a number of minor differences, the images below highlight three of the more significant ones, with images from the nickel silver token on the top row and ones from the brass token on the bottom row.



The first image pair shows the lower part of the city between the two first and second pylon (on the left side). The nickel silver token has a curve that is somewhat rectangular in shape, with a single line through it. The brass token has an elliptical curve with two lines through it in the same place.

The second image pair shows the spikes at the top of the city. The nickel silver token has an additional prong between the last two spikes that the brass token does not have.

The third image pair shows the lower part of the city between the third and fourth pylons (on the right side). The nickel silver token has a pointed curve while the brass token has only an empty space in that area. Also, the adjacent area has a line through it on the nickel silver token, but there is no line on the brass one.

The tokens as obtained are provided in holders indicating their mintage and that they were used on screen, plus each includes a certificate of authenticity signed by Jason Hammond, the property master. The certificate included with the 10 credit token is shown below.





References

Movie poster courtesy of 20th Century Fox's web site at <https://www.foxmovies.com/movies/alita-battle-angel>

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Minting details provided by eBay auction descriptions and personal correspondence with the movie property master.