

“FINAL DESTINATION 5” (Film Review)

Written by Trevor Parker

Sunday, 14 August 2011 08:59



On paper, the FINAL DESTINATION series should be the gorehound’s best friend: Character and plot are scaled back in order to concentrate on what really matters—setpieces featuring the messiest deaths imaginable, cleverly staged and primed to wring squeals and cringes from a predominantly teen demographic. Still, while any FINAL DESTINATION is guaranteed to deliver loads of squishy fun, there’s a glaring lack of emotional involvement or resonance for the audience; they’re like horror’s equivalent of the JACKASS stunt movies. Now, with the fifth entry in theaters, is there reason to hope for something more substantial?

Sam (Nicholas D’Agosto) works alongside his best friend Peter (Miles Fisher) in the sales department of the Presage (heh heh) paper company, while simultaneously trying to further his dream career as a chef and smooth his relationship woes with girlfriend Molly (Emma Bell of FROZEN and THE WALKING DEAD). On board a charter bus on the way to a company retreat, Sam receives a premonition of an impending bridge collapse that will wipe him and the other passengers out in variously impressive ways. Just after he manages to pry his disbelieving friends out of their seats and off to safety, the bridge does indeed crumble just as Sam predicted. Cue Tony Todd returning as the creepy Coroner/Doomsayer to let the survivors know that, once again, death is pissed at the disruption and to expect the universe to fill this vacuum promptly.



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Roll the ingeniously concocted death sequences, this time exploiting setups like a gymnastics meet, laser eye surgery and a visit to an acupuncturist. These are as appropriately spectacular as a fan could hope for, and easily some of the series' best. The opening bridge disaster had a packed audience gasping for breath, perfectly realized with an expert blend of CGI and practical FX. On the downside, the remainder of the running time feels padded with a fruitless police investigation (poor Courtney B. Vance as an FBI agent is made to utter lines like “Two deaths, that’s a coincidence. But three deaths...that’s a pattern!”), and scenes of sappy 90210-grade relationship drama with acoustic guitar plucking plaintively in the background.

Despite the stagnant plot, FINAL DESTINATION 5 is the best entry in the franchise since the original. The cast of mostly unknowns manages to keep straight faces and stay on the right side of annoying, and rookie feature director Steven Quale has wisely narrowed down on the humor, retreating from the outright over-the-top slapstick that the series was careening toward. Quale’s background in 2nd-unit work and visual FX on AVATAR and other projects serves the film’s 3D aspect well; while the process is understandably flat and unnoticeable in the dialogue scenes, Quale takes full advantage of the opportunity to play with spatial depth during the bridge disaster, and the results are fantastic. Also effective are the literally smashing opening credits, with a deluge of broken glass shards and assorted lethal objects flung toward the audience.

Really, the problem with FINAL DESTINATION 5 isn’t in the movie’s actual craftsmanship or entertainment value, but in just how repetitive and interchangeable the series as a whole has become. No one is asking for a FINAL DESTINATION set in outer space, or for Freddy to show up and battle Todd’s Coroner character, but there is almost no variation on the already Kleenex-thin premise from sequel to sequel. We do get a witty twist at the end of this installment that rewards followers of the FINAL DESTINATION series as a whole, but other than that brief inspiration, you may feel like it’s time death changed up the formula.

For die-hard fans of the series or FINAL DESTINATION newbies, for teens craving date-night thrills or for those who don’t mind meatloaf every day, you’ll go home satisfied. For those of us left feeling as if we’ve seen this all before, just drink in that thrilling 3D bridge chaos and hope the producers have a more ambitious storyline up their sleeves for part six.



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