***Rating: «« out of «««« ***

Running Time: 142 minutes

Another Young Adult book-to-film series is set to come to a close this week with *Maze Runner: The Death Cure*
. You'll be forgiven for having forgotten about the previous features; it has been nearly two and a half years since the last installment in the franchise (due to a horrible on-set accident in 2016 early into the production that put its star out of commission for several months). This finale arrives chock full of action and explosions, although from a story perspective this feels like both a blessing and a curse.

This chapter resumes with Thomas (Dylan O'Brien) having long escaped the mazes, survived travel across a sun-battered, dystopian world ravaged by a zombie-like virus and joining a revolutionary faction. He vows to bring down the sinister organization WCKD, run by scientist Ava Paige (Patricia Clarkson) and official Janson (Aiden Gillen). In doing so, he hopes to free fellow maze runner Minho (Ki Hong Lee) who is having his antibodies harvested to be used for a proposed cure.

This film dispenses with talk from the onset and is all about physical conflict. In fact, for a casual viewer it's hard to catch up with who is who and the details of the story. The movie opens with an elaborate train chase, with the heroes attempting to free a group of hostage children with natural immunity to the disease. The action itself is well-handled, with the hero jumping onto the train and avoiding gunfire from soldiers and flying warplanes. It's an impressive opening sure to wow fans of the series.

Along the way, there are further stunts as the protagonists make their way towards a walled-in city housing members of the WCKD team. As expected, they end up storming the castle (or in this case, labs), leading to more violence, chaos and stunts. This involves a bus full of kids being lifted by a crane over the downtown area while being pursued. Once again, star O'Brien trades fisticuffs with the sinister Janson and the throw-down looks rough and convincing.

However, for all of its blasts and detonations, one could really have done with more time spent reintroducing the characters and reminding us about who they are and why their plight is important. Instead, there are scant few moments between the blasts, with persons simply delivering basic exposition about what they need to do to stop WCKD. Gillan makes for an intimidating foe, but he's so sinister that even his nefarious snarls start to get old.

As battle after battle unfolds and the invasion begins, the action itself really becomes tiresome and drawn out. The movie runs over two hours and twenty minutes, and it doesn't need to. Sure, this is the big finale and it's important for the kids to be in over their heads. Still, this viewer got worn-out watching the characters struggle and stumble their way past to rescue points. The final hour seems like nothing but an extended skirmish, with the characters drawn into more unnecessary side trips to make their way to the same destination.

That all being said, it's impressive to see the makers of this series try to go out on a bang. *Maze Runner: The Death Cure*
will certainly appeal to many within its target demographic thanks to its not-stop barrage of action. It certainly provides a definite close for those following the series. Yet for this viewer, one could have done with fewer explosions and more conversations to get its central themes across.

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By Glenn Kay

For the Sun