

'F9: The Fast Saga' takes action absurdity to new heights

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<<

out of <<<<<<

Running Time: 145 minutes

This film opens in cinemas on June 25.

I'll admit that I'm not the biggest fan of the *Fast & Furious* franchise, but after eight hit titles in the series (as well as a spin-off), it's almost pointless to be too hard on the flicks. Personally, I have always felt like the films could do with a heavier dose of realism that would make the driving stunts and scenarios feel more dangerous and exciting. But the writers and producers have chosen to go in the opposite direction. Instead, the movies are very silly pieces of popcorn entertainment, many of which still offer impressive action sequences.

F9: The Fast Saga is the latest entry, and one which leans even further into ridiculousness. Is it too much? It may be for me, but series fans probably won't mind at all.

After the events of the previous film, street-racer/covert ops agent Dominic Toretto (Vin Diesel)

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and his wife Letty (Michelle Rodriguez) have decided to retire to the country. Their plans are short-lived when team members Roman (Tyrese Gibson), Tej (Ludacris), and Ramsey (Nathalie Emmanuel) arrive to inform them that arch enemy Cipher (Charlize Theron), was captured by authorities and then kidnapped by a second, mysterious figure. The sinister foe turns out to be a wealthy megalomaniac known as Otto (Thue Ersted Rasmussen), and his henchman, Jakob (John Cena), who happens to be Dominic's little brother. We get an extended backstory about the falling out between the protagonist and his sibling and soon learn that the villain intends to steal pieces of the dangerous Aries electromagnetic weapon.

This device can be used to control the world's computers and potentially cause worldwide chaos.

The good news is that, once again, the action and driving sequences are well shot and edited. Some of the elaborate car chases involve flipping trucks and out-of-control cars that narrowly miss the protagonists. During the climax, the use of magnetization as a weapon also results in some visually impressive destruction as vehicles are thrown into the streets. The film also earns some goodwill from the comic relief, including comments from Gibson about his suspicions that he might actually be invincible.

The character's assertions are laughed off by his pals, but given what is occurring around him, there can be no doubt that it's a reasonable assumption (and a way for the writers to acknowledge the craziness on display).

But while the above sequences are all fun to watch, the over-the-top bits again diminish the potential for greater thrills and tension. It all looks good, but little of it makes any sense. While the sight of magnets throwing vehicles around on the road looks nifty, it's strange that they don't seem to have any effect on the heroes driving around. When the leads are caught in a crashing vehicle, they always seem to leap out and land on their feet like superheroes, without so much as a scratch or even a bruise.

The significant subplot involving Dominic and his brother also begs the question of why this life-changing event hasn't been discussed previously and in more detail. And there are plenty of clunky speeches from the lead. They are not only about the importance of family, but also that driving is all about skill and not expensive gadgets. Like other flicks in the series, every important message or moral being delivered by Dominic is contradicted by his own deeds later in the story.

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As for the preposterous finale, it's rare that a James Bond movie from the late '70s like *Moonraker* could come off as more authentic and believable in its depictions of science and technology. Yet somehow, that is what occurs.

The movie is certainly nonsensical and the plot doesn't wrap any storylines up, only re-establishing the central foe from an earlier film and adding a long-lost character or two to the heroic group of characters. Still, one supposes that this will not matter to the moviegoing public. And, it's hard to get truly annoyed by a movie that is farcical beyond words. *F9: The Fast Saga* is as clever as a bag of hammers and will result in more laughs than actual thrills, but it may still amuse franchise enthusiasts.

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