

## 'Scream' ends not with a bang, but a whimper

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
Friday, 21 January 2022 05:58

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Rating: ««

out of «««««

***Running Time:***  
***114 minutes***

**This feature from Paramount Pictures will be released exclusively at cinemas on Jan. 14.**

Back in 1996, a little horror movie came out of nowhere and became a massive box office and critical hit. The film paid homage to slasher movies of the 1980s, playing on genre tropes with which both the characters and the audience were familiar. It cleverly threw in references and story twists, making a lasting impression and even jumpstarting a few careers among the charismatic cast. Since that time, a few sequels have followed.

While they haven't been quite as potent, all have added some nifty and memorable elements.

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“Scream” is the fifth and latest movie in the series (and the first without director Wes Craven, who passed away in 2015).

The story begins with a new maniac on the rampage dressed in a cape and “Ghostface” mask. When teen Tara Carpenter (Jenna Ortega) is targeted by the psychopath, her older, estranged sister Sam Carpenter (Melissa Barrera) returns to town to protect her. It is revealed that Sam left town years before after learning about her unusual connection to the first string of slayings. She and boyfriend Chad Meeks-Martin (Mason Gooding) contact figures involved in the 1996 fracas, including ex-sheriff Dewey Riley (David Arquette), reporter Gale Weathers (Courtney Cox) and original survivor Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell).

As the body count rises, Sam focuses primarily on her sister’s friends as she attempts to determine who is responsible.

Of course, it’s fun to see some of the established original characters make appearances, even if they aren’t utilized as effectively as one might hope. The story itself also has an interesting angle, focusing on Sam grappling with her dark personal history and the psychological toll it has played. Naturally, there are a few interesting film references and discussions about horror movies. This includes one bit about obsessive fandom, as well as plenty of talk about “requals.”

One character defines them as much-later sequels to genre classics with all-new characters that follow the same plot, but still have a legacy connection to the first film. There is also a funny scene playing with genre clichés involving a character continually opening doors in the house and closing them, with the audience expecting the killer to be revealed throughout.

However, there are plenty of issues with the movie. While a few make an impression, many of the new teen characters aren’t compelling or distinctive. They’re so busy making references that most are too blasé and jokey about the imminent danger, which dissipates some of the tension or concern for them. And while there are a few witty notes, much of the cinema talk doesn’t hit as sharply as in previous installments.

There are also a lot of nods to recent movies like “The Babadook” and “Hereditary” that are defined as “elevated” horror. But even these allusions feel like a stretch, having little to do with the plot of a sequel to a ‘90s film inspired by ‘80s slasher pictures.

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The movie also looks and feels a bit smaller and visually drab than previous entries. While there are some graphic moments, none of the murders stand out as overly memorable in comparison with the set pieces in previous entries. Even the big reveal and explanation of what is occurring during the finale will have viewers asking logic questions. This is in regards to some liberties taken with the looming appearance of the maniac and how the killer can take so much abuse during slaughter scenes and not show any bruises when not wearing the disguise.

In the end, the script gets a little too self-referential for its own good. Even with an amusing film allusion peppered here and there, these kinds of gags begin to feel a bit familiar and tired the fifth time around. Admittedly, this reviewer may be getting old and cranky about teen-based slashers. But while the latest “Scream” does have a few good elements, it is still the weakest entry in the series, and ends up coming across as more of a final whimper.

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