

MAZE RUNNER: THE SCORCH TRIALS: Slick and Efficient, But Unexceptional

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<< out of 4

Running Time: 131 min.

First things first - there are no mazes in *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials*, although there is plenty of running. That might be a little peculiar to series newbies and will also disappoint any labyrinth enthusiasts. Instead, this film picks up right where the original ended, taking its hero on a dangerous journey to find a better life outside his confines.

As expected, there are plenty of similarities between this young adult series and other dystopia-themed titles of its genre. While the flick doesn't offer a whole lot that is new, it is a slick and well-produced effort that, if nothing else, should appeal to its target demographic.

After the events of the first film, Thomas (Dylan O'Brien) has broken out of the bizarre maze world that he once inhabited. Having reached the outside with friends and love interest Teresa (Kaya Scodelario), he is immediately picked up by a soldier named Janson (Aiden Gillen). The military man praises the youngsters for breaking free and takes them to a secure location, promising to place them all in safe homes.

Of course, there are complications. The protagonists soon find themselves on the run from infected wasteland zombies, and come into contact with Vince (Barry Pepper) and Mary (Lili Taylor), leaders of a resistance movement. Early on, the story builds an effective sense of mystery around Janson and their new digs. There's a lot of sneaking around the facility and spying on others, building some tension in the process.

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As this section of the movie ends, the remainder becomes an extended chase and somewhat episodic in nature. The heavy emphasis on action probably serves the film well and keeps events moving at a brisk pace. The zombies are fast moving and it leads to some very intense sequences, including an exciting struggle in a precariously half-toppled building on top of a cracking window pane. There's also a scary bit in which infected parties come to life in a darkened tunnel (it works better if you don't ask yourself why the leads would decide to go into a passageway filled with dead bodies in the first place).

It's when things slow down that the movie isn't quite as successful. There are a lot of characters in the movie and not nearly enough time to develop them all. While some segments work well, others feel a bit forced and silly (including a trip to an opium den... remember kids, drugs are bad!). The relationship between Thomas and Teresa becomes strained as well. It's handled in a rather obvious and predictable way - they don't spend enough time together in the film for us to really care about their plight.

While the action in the climax is handled well, one also can't help but feel a little let down. It's no surprise that the film doesn't resolve anything, merely putting the pieces in place for the next (and presumably final) film. That's to be expected, but the overall effect leaves one with the feeling that a lot of this tale is superfluous.

Still, it's a slickly produced effort that is more than technically proficient at delivering action. *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials* is not likely to stay in the memory bank for a long while, but it is a perfectly capable picture that will entertain its fan base. Despite some eye-rolling teen drama, underdeveloped new characters and a distinct lack of actual mazes, it's an efficient action adventure. Maybe they'll find a way to work a confusing web of passageways into the next one - otherwise they might want to consider simply referring to it as "The Runner" from here on out.