

Blu-ray Review: 'Final Destination 5' Succumbs to Fitfully Amusing Silliness

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CHICAGO – There's no question that the "Final Destination" series is among the most lame-brained, ill-conceived, lazily executed franchises in Hollywood history. Every installment follows the exact same plot formula, from the opening catastrophe to the bleak epilogue. There isn't a single surprise or quality scare in these pictures, and yet they still continue to make copious amounts of money.

But after the wretched awfulness of the oddly titled 3D reboot, "The Final Destination," this fifth installment is a slight improvement, if only because the filmmakers play much of it for laughs. James Cameron's frequent collaborator, Steven Quale, is in the director's chair this time around, and needless to say, he makes the film vastly more polished than it has any right to be. Yet he's still unable to make the picture resonate as anything other than a mediocre time waster.



Blu-ray Rating: **2.0/5.0**

The film opens as young, photogenic Sam (Nicholas D'Agosto) receives a horrific vision of an impending bridge collapse. No Blu-ray disc could possibly equal the experience of viewing Quale and his team's towering 3D visuals on the big screen. The carnage reaches an operatic scope worthy of DeMille, but still inspires derisive laughter rather than squirm-inducing fear. That's because the script encourages a sociopathic desire in audiences to take pleasure in the cardboard characters' gory demise. After Sam saves seven of his friends and colleagues from disaster, Death (Tony Todd) starts lurking around like an evil Dennis Haysbert (I keep waiting for him to ask, "Are you in good hands?"). Since Death is peeved that the kids have cheated him, he has to find more inventive ways to kill them off. Life exists merely to function as Death's Rube Goldberg contraption. He's as immortal and inescapable a force as Freddy or Jason, thus relieving the film of any real suspense. It's pointless to guess how each death will occur, since the vast majority of clues end up as red herrings. Regardless of the endless supernatural occurrences, many of the deaths are caused by the unseemly negligence of doctors who never seem to hear their patients' helpless screams behind closed doors.



Final Destination 5 was released on Blu-ray and DVD on Dec. 27, 2011.

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Home Entertainment

The monumental silliness in “Final Destination 5” destroys any sense of terror, yet it also has an unusual charm. It’s as if Quale was fully aware that he was assigned a stinker, and decided to at least have fun with it. The casting of comic David Koechner as Sam’s loathsome boss is a further indication that the film is meant to be enjoyed as a tongue-in-cheek lark. There are even a couple laugh-out-loud moments, such as when a soon-to-be-corpse demands that his masseuse at a Chinese spa speak in subtitles (and she does). She subsequently impales him with so many liposuction needles that he ends up resembling a portly Hellraiser. When another doomed character tells Koechner that guilt isn’t fatal, he replies, “Obviously, you’ve never met my in-laws.” If Quale had made more of an effort to explore the comic possibilities of this material, he may have ended up with a genuinely entertaining movie. Instead, the moments of inspiration serve as fleeting highlights in this soulless retread. Fans of the 2000 original film will appreciate the twist at the end of “5,” which admittedly culminates in an amusing punch line. But my overarching reaction to this franchise remains unaltered: life is too short to waste on this mind-numbing dreck.

“Final Destination 5” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.4:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks, and includes Blu-ray, DVD and Ultraviolet digital copies of the film. In the sole featurette, screenwriter Eric Heisserer said that the biggest obstacle the studio faced when agreeing to the sequel was how to justify the title “Final Destination 5” after “The Final Destination.” Koechner dubs the experience “quite delightful,” while Jacqueline MacInnes Wood reveals that she volunteered her own eye for the laser eye surgery sequence (what a trooper). The fifteen minutes of “alternate death scenes” largely consist of recycled footage with two slight tweaks. Yet aspiring filmmakers may appreciate the disc’s two visual effects breakdowns that offer split screen comparisons of production dailies and early animation with the final cut.

‘Final Destination 5’ is released by Warner Bros. Home Entertainment and stars Nicholas D’Agosto, Emma Bell, Miles Fisher, Jacqueline MacInnes Wood, P.J. Byrne, Arlen Escarpeta, Ellen Wroe, David Koechner, Courtney B. Vance and Tony Todd. It was written by Eric Heisserer and directed by Steven Quale. It was released on Dec. 27, 2011. It is rated R.

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