

## Blu-ray Review: Deftly Absurd ‘John Dies at the End’ Never Runs Out of Steam

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on April 10, 2013 - 10:05am

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CHICAGO – About ten minutes into “John Dies at the End,” a doorknob suddenly transforms into a large flaccid penis. It earns a laugh of sheer incredulity from an audience delighted by writer/director Don Coscarelli’s willingness to do literally anything for a laugh. Not since the ZAZ team tackled “Airplane” and “The Naked Gun” has a film been packed wall-to-wall with so many absurdist gags.

In adapting David Wong’s beloved book for the big screen, Coscarelli attempted to fit as many “fan favorite” moments as he could onto the screen. During the film’s year-long festival run prior to its official release, Coscarelli incorporated audience feedback into the final cut. The result is a messy mishmash of ideas united by a cohesive tone of deadpan lunacy. It may be nuttier than a fruitcake, but the more one is familiar with quantum physics—and the belief that unbridled possibility awaits us in parallel dimensions—the more this film makes a sort of whacked-out sense.



Blu-ray Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The aforementioned penis materializes when the unambiguously heterosexual John (Rob Mayes) attempts to escape the sinister forces lurking in a basement, inspiring him to utter the priceless line, “We can NOT open that door.” Though the penis is only onscreen for a fleeting second, Coscarelli refers to it on this disc’s commentary track as the defining moment of the entire picture. Fans were so adamant about the scene being included onscreen that Coscarelli fought studio executives who wanted to eliminate it from the script. The rest of “John Dies at the End” is just as uncompromising in its polarizing strangeness. The rapid-fire dialogue barely allows the audience to comprehend all the bizarre ideas being hurled at them, creating the sort of confusion felt by bewildered protagonist Dave (Chase Williamson, in a fine film debut). After ingesting a mysterious street drug dubbed “Soy Sauce,” Dave realizes he has the power to travel across time and through dimensions, though the newfound abilities come with a shattering price. This newly opened portal has allowed otherworldly beings to invade earth, taking the form of humans and wreaking all sorts of havoc. In a sly nod to “Lost Highway,” David finds himself seated at a restaurant booth with John at the same time that he’s chatting with John (fresh from another dimension) on the phone. Even the title itself can’t be counted on with any certainty. John dies roughly 40 minutes into the picture, then quickly calls David to assure him that’s he’s very much alive.



John Dies at the End was released on Blu-ray and DVD on April 2nd, 2013.

Photo credit: Magnolia Home Entertainment

Every time the film threatens to devolve into a routine parody, Coscarelli rips the rug out from under us, hurling his captive viewers into yet another startling realm of madness. Not every scene works, and there are many occasions when the picture practically buckles under the weight of its own ambitions, but it left me thoroughly entertained. Adding a dash of grounded humanity is the ever-sublime Paul Giamatti as a skeptical reporter to whom David spills his secrets. In a Fangoria interview included in the extras, the actor recalls his childhood love of Coscarelli's "Phantasm," and how he was originally going to collaborate with the director on the sequel to his wonderful 2002 cult classic, "Bubba Ho-Tep." Giamatti's passion for the material is apparent in every frame, as he tackles his somewhat thankless role with the same awe-inspiring conviction he brings to every project. He's a joy to behold.

"John Dies at the End" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.78:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish subtitles, and includes a lively audio commentary with Coscarelli, producer Brad Baruth and the dynamic duo of Williamson and Mayes (who offers his own mind-bending interpretation of the John character). There are also some deleted scenes that expand on various key characters, a compilation of casting sessions and a diverting featurette on the ingenious hand-crafted effects.

*'John Dies at the End' is released by Magnolia Home Entertainment and stars Chase Williamson, Rob Mayes, Paul Giamatti, Clancy Brown, Glynn Turman and Doug Jones. It was written and directed by Don Coscarelli. It was released on April 2nd, 2013. It is rated R.*



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