

‘John Dies at the End’ Kills Its Own Creativity

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 6, 2013 - 11:21am

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [Chase Williamson](#) [3]
- [Clancy Brown](#) [4]
- [Don Coscarelli](#) [5]
- [Doug Jones](#) [6]
- [Glynn Turman](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [John Dies at the End](#) [9]
- [Movie Review](#) [10]
- [Paul Giamatti](#) [11]
- [Rob Mayes](#) [12]



Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – You’re at a party. It’s getting late. Chemicals have been ingested, booze has been imbibed, and conversation has been exhausted. You spot an interesting looking fella in the corner and he says he has a story to tell you. Maybe it’s the rush of something different, but the first half hour of that story is fascinating, filled with potential and creative in so many ways. And then you realize not only is he making it up as he goes along but that it’s getting far less interesting as he does so. An hour later you just want a ride home and the comfort of your bed. Such is the experience of Don Coscarelli’s “John Dies at the End,” a disappointing horror-comedy with some great ideas but no idea how to shape them into a movie.

Coscarelli reportedly became interested in the story by David Wong that would become this film after seeing the title on an Amazon recommendation and (correctly) noting that the title is fantastic. He probably should have read more than the title since it’s the cleverest thing about the film. That’s a little harsh. There are moments of creative spark in “John” (Coscarelli, the director of the “Phantasm” films and “Bubba Ho-Tep” is too visually competent a director not to find a viscerally-charged image here and there) and the opening act is actually pretty great. It’s when the movie loses its hallucinogenic set-up in favor of a more traditional narrative on its way to a clear non-ending that viewers will lose interest. The movie dies long before the end.



John Dies at the End
Photo credit: Magnolia

David Wong (Chase Williamson) is having a weird few days. “John Dies at the End” is one of those metaphysical horror films that posits that our world is just a façade. There are not only alternate worlds filled with ugly, horrifying demons pulled from our nightmares but the way we

look at space and time is simply incorrect. And there is a drug out there called “Soy Sauce” that could be the portal to a new kind of comprehension. Except it tears most people who use it apart from the inside. Except for John (Rob Mayes) and Dave. Dave has a story to tell to a reporter named Arnie (Paul Giamatti). John, you know what happened to him, and long before the end, although that doesn't mean he's gone. Yes, death is merely the beginning in a film like this one.

Where does Dave's story go? All over the map. It includes a possessed white rapper (Johnny Weston), a cop (Glynn Turman) trying to investigate why this drug is tearing everyone apart from the inside, a famous supernatural mentalist (Clancy Brown), and cameos from great horror icons like Doug Jones and Angus Scrimm (the Tall Man from the “Phantasm” movies). Heavily draped in style merged with Coscarelli's obsession with the slimy, “John Dies at the End” seems to have all of the ingredients to work. It makes it sadder that it does not.



John Dies at the End

Photo credit: Magnolia

Rarely has a work felt more like it was made up as it goes along than “John Dies at the End.” The film has no structure, which would have been fine if Coscarelli and Wong didn't feel some need to find one by the final act. It's a stoner trying to find meaning in his dreams. Sometimes the dream is just a dream. But the very format of “John” – the way it is being told to a reporter – requires it to be an actual story with a set-up, middle, and end. And each of those aspects feels more inferior than the one before.

The first half-hour of “John Dies at the End” bristles with creative potential that is simply never fulfilled on. One wonders if a less-literal director than Coscarelli had tackled the entire piece, someone like David Lynch or David Cronenberg, if it might have worked better. It should be “Naked Lunch” or “Upstream Color” but it becomes something disappointingly conventional, even as characters are taking off limbs to enter interdimensional portals. That may sound ridiculous but it's a tonal balance. “John Dies at the End” feels too literal when the version of this story that would have worked would have taken us on a “Soy Sauce” journey with Dave and John.



John Dies at the End
Photo credit: Magnolia

One of the problems with “John Dies at the End” is the weak cast, especially the wide-eyed, open-mouth approach of Williamson, who is just not an engaging lead. Williamson and Mayes often come off as horror movie versions of Bill & Ted and neither are as charismatic as they needed to be to carry this movie. It doesn’t help to have acting luminaries like Giamatti and the always-captivating Doug Jones in the cast. They steal scenes from the guys we’re supposed to care about.

Ultimately, “John Dies at the End” can’t decide what it wants to be. Is it a trippy journey to the other side? A comedy? A horror movie? (There are no honest scares, which is disappointing). The tonal imbalance that seeps into the piece after its set-up just allows the whole story to sink to its end. Think back on the idea of a stoner at a party with a story to tell. Now imagine that you’re a little buzzed but the party is out of booze to keep it going. Long before the story is over, the high has worn off and your hangover has begun.

“John Dies at the End” stars Chase Williamson, Rob Mayes, Paul Giamatti, Clancy Brown, Glynn Turman, and Doug Jones. It was directed by Don Coscarelli and will be released in Chicago on February 8, 2013. It is currently available On Demand.



[13]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

Source URL (retrieved on Mar 28 2024 - 4:55am):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/21251/john-dies-at-the-end-kills-its-own-creativity>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brian-tallerico>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/chase-williamson>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/clancy-brown>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/don-coscarelli>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/doug-jones>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/glynn-turman>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/john-dies-at-the-end>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/paul-giamatti>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/rob-mayes>
- [13] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#BRIAN>