

‘The First Purge’ is Nothing But Tedious Trash

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 3, 2018 - 6:37pm

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – I saw the original “The Purge” five years ago, but missed the other two installments. Let me say that nothing in the new prequel “The First Purge” makes me want to make up for lost time and catch up. The setup is the same... one night of legalized violence each year where the citizens are allowed to do whatever they want without the fear of prosecution.

The Purge is dreamed up by a new political party – “The New Founding Fathers” – who seized both power and a social scientist (Marisa Tomei, continuing the long line of talented actors who should know better than to be in junk like this). Trash that at least knows its trash can offer some guilty pleasures, but trash that believes it’s a serious minded social allegory, slipped into a cash grab prequel to a series of cheaply-made-but-highly-profitable exploitation films, well that’s almost too much to take... and “The First Purge” is that kind of trash.



Ain't That America: Trying to Avoid ‘The First Purge’

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

This initial Purge itself is designed as an experiment, and is concentrated on New York City’s Staten Island. The borough’s poor residents, mostly black and brown, get paid to stay on the island during the Purge, and get paid more if they participate and purge themselves. The

heroes here include a local drug kingpin named Dmitri (Y'lan Noel), who's been turning neighbors into steady customers, and resents any outsiders coming in on his turf. He's no better than the people orchestrating the Purge, but since he's from the neighborhood and they're not, the film asks us to root for him.

Writer and series creator James DeMonaco tries to pull a "Get Out" vibe, but lacks the nuance or the skill to get his point across. Instead the message about the poor being marginalized and exploited by white people in power just comes off as heavy handed... it lands with all the subtlety of an anvil to the head. Even on a purely exploitative level, "The First Purge" has purged itself entirely of suspense. There should be a kind of "Grand Theft Auto" anything-goes demented glee to it, but the film manages to make orchestrated chaos look boring.

Director Gerard McMurray doesn't follow the "Michael Bay Model" of slicing every scene into an incomprehensible mess, but he doesn't create any particularly effective action scenes either. They're just kinda rote and ordinary, the sort of lifeless exercise that no amount of digital blood splatter can cover up. Also the acting here is strictly the amateur hour, with Rotimi Paul deserving special scorn for giving a masterclass in bad overindulgence as a purging junkie named Skeletor.



The Red Zone: Marisa Tomei in 'The First Purge'

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

At one point, Marisa Tomei's character mutters the words "What have I done?." I was thinking the same thing about her, and this particular career choice. This is a movie that felt at least 45 minutes longer than it actually was. By the end I couldn't wait to purge this prequel, and this entire series from my brain forever.

"The First Purge" opens everywhere in on July 4th. Featuring Marisa Tomei, Luna Lauren Velez, Lex Scott Davis, Y'lan Noel, Jovial Wade, Mugga and Rotimi Paul. Written by James DeMonaco. Directed by Gerald McMurray. Rated "R"



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