

Relentlessly Action-Packed 'Furious 7' Actually Has a Story, Too

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – I've never classified myself as a "Fast & Furious" franchise fan. Nor have I been a hater. I've fallen somewhere in between – willingly watching the popcorn flicks but then quickly going about my life as fast as the furious action ended. Until "Furious 7"...

And it's not just because we've [lost Paul Walker much too soon](#) [24], which, while extremely unfortunate, also unfortunately has the burden of being a boon to this film.



Paul Walker in "Furious 7".

Image credit: Scott Garfield, Universal Pictures

Going into it, I was just as curious how he'd be handled as I was about anything else about it. Since he can't be in the eighth film, would Paul Walker as Brian O'Conner – Dominic Toretto's close buddy – be killed off? Would it insensitively happen in a car crash? Or would writer Chris Morgan and director James Wan ("Saw," "Saw III," "Insidious," "Insidious: Chapter 2," "The Conjuring") surprise us with a tactful and touching send-off? Surprisingly, we got the latter. I was thoroughly impressed with the restraint, heart and thoughtfulness displayed.

I also had the false perception that there wouldn't be much of a plot. Figuring it'd be mostly brawn and no brain, it's easy to think that thing called a "story" was just an excuse to blow stuff up, drive fancy cars fast, flaunt T&A and pull off ridiculous stunts. While I'm not a diehard "Fast & Furious" fan who obsessively knows every nook and cranny about every character's back story and evolution, I actually found myself

– gulp! – getting a wee bit emotional with them. In other words, I got sucked into the story a bit and not just the visual splendor.

Speaking of the eye candy, “Furious 7” – like the previous films are known for – grabs you by the balls and never lets go. There’s literally no downtime, which doesn’t work for some films because you need contrast. While it’s easily one of those films you can pick apart and question its ridiculous nature, here I don’t need to. The film genuinely is a fun-filled, action-packed entertainment ride with characters you actually give a frick about.



Dwayne Johnson in “Furious 7”.

Image credit: Universal Pictures

Sure, cars don’t usually fly (even with parachutes) onto mountains. Nor do \$3.4 million, bulletproof super cars smash through windows in penthouses from tower to tower. And once you lose your memory from brain damage, it doesn’t usually magically come back at exactly the moment you’re trying to save someone’s life using *love* (and, of course, *love* brings back the almost dead instead of CPR). But I’m happy to overlook these flaws and view them not as shortcomings but as acceptable casualties of war wrapped in a film that truly knows how to entertain.

Most ludicrous of all wasn’t Chris Bridges – ha! – but Nathalie Emmanuel as Ramsey. Hackers are always hot chicks with bikini-ready bods, sexy accents and curls to die for. Said nobody ever.

And Ramsey’s great creation – the God’s Eye – steals its intellectual cinematic property from a lot of other films like “Eagle Eye,” “The Dark Knight,” “RoboCop,” “The Italian Job” and more. God’s Eye ends the government’s need for long and expensive manhunts. The software simply taps into the world’s video and audio systems to locate anyone anywhere on the planet in a matter of moments. Certainly possible. Certainly scary. And I definitely want one.



Michelle Rodriguez (left) and Vin Diesel in "Furious 7".

Image credit: Universal Pictures

Now that the franchise has already raked in a whopping \$3 billion with throngs of diehard followers loving all of the films except for the non-"A"-list bomb "The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift," "Furious 8" or whatever it'll be called is already in talks. Interestingly, it [could head to New York](#) [25]. Vin Diesel recently appeared on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" and hinted: "Kurt Russell came in for this movie, but we really hired him because of a story that follows this. That takes place in New York."

"Furious 7" successfully uses franchise favorites Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Michelle Rodriguez, Jordana Brewster, Tyrese Gibson, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, Elsa Pataky and Lucas Black. But upping the ante as each subsequent film must do, they are joined by international action stars new to the franchise including Jason Statham, Djimon Hounsou, Tony Jaa, Ronda Rousey, Nathalie Emmanuel and Kurt Russell.

Known for "The Transporter" films, Jason Statham is the surprise villain you didn't see coming. Delivering a real threat and propelling the plot forward so our heroes have something to save, Statham as Deckard Shaw is the rogue who always inopportunely shows up to make sure everything goes awry. And Djimon Hounsou plays an effective secondary villain, because like the Reese's peanut butter cups I'm eating now while inking this review, two is always better than one.

"Furious 7" stars Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Dwayne Johnson, Michelle Rodriguez, Jason Statham, Jordana Brewster, Tyrese Gibson, Ludacris, Kurt Russell, Djimon Hounsou, Tony Jaa, Nathalie Emmanuel, Elsa Pataky, Luke Evans and Gal Gadot from director James Wan and writer Chris Morgan based on characters by Gary Scott Thompson. The film, which has a running time of 137 minutes and opened on April 3, 2015, is rated "PG-13" for prolonged frenetic sequences of violence, action and mayhem, suggestive content and brief strong language.



[26]

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