



FAST & FURIOUS

I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that the viewers who are really, *really* dying to see *Fast & Furious*

- like the guy ahead of me in line for tickets, who said to his buddy, "I want to sit as close to the screen as humanly possible" - will already have seen it by the time this review is published. So there's probably little harm in telling you that while the original stars of 2001's

The Fast & the Furious

do return for this fourth (if you can believe it) installment in the fossil-fueled franchise, Michelle Rodriguez's character gets killed off before the end of the first reel. Lucky lady.

In truth, I doubt that fans will be much tormented by the early loss of the movie's only interesting actor, as human beings just get in the way of the series' *raison d'être*. Die-hards may, though, be a tad put off by *Fast & Furious*

opening chase scene, which is exciting enough, but which employs obvious CGI effects in a way that the films' original installment, to its credit, never did; the occasional visual "enhancements" here may give the impression of Bigger and Better in this third sequel, yet they're really just lazy, and so is the movie.

Its plot, if one is feeling generous enough to call it that, finds Vin Diesel's hulking, monosyllabic Dominic Toretto and Paul Walker's vanilla-bland FBI agent Brian O'Conner trading sneers and forming a grudging alliance while waging war against Mexican drug lords, and director Justin Lin provides just what you'd expect: plenty of speedy cars, roaring engines, obsessive framework detail, hissing villains, and L.A. hotties without an ounce of body fat. (Also several shots of women making out, for no apparent reason other than the camera being there.) There's really nothing offensive about the movie's deliberate empty-headedness, and there are random moments of crash-'em-up, pile-'em-up fun. But *Fast & Furious* is still deathly repetitive and too often pokey - it dies several slow deaths when characters *aren't*

racing at top speed - and despite all of the fetishistic automotive imagery, its only evocative sight is a long shot of Los Angeles, where you can barely make out the skyscrapers through the clouds of smog. It makes you wonder if movies such as this one aren't the *reason*

Driving Forces: "Fast & Furious" and "12 Rounds"

Written by Mike Schulz
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12 ROUNDS

Is it too early in John Cena's big-screen career to suggest that he take on the lead in a friendly, Disney-produced family comedy?

Following the inept misfire of 2006's *The Marine*, the WWE star now finds himself portraying a pissed-off cop in director Renny Harlin's *12 Rounds*

, and while the film isn't nearly as wretched as that previous endeavor - this one at least *looks*

like a movie - it's somehow even sillier. In it, a New Orleans-based psychopath (Aiden Gillen), seeking vengeance for the accidental death of his girlfriend, forces Cena into taking part in a dozen increasingly destructive (and increasingly illogical) tests of will and nerve, and by about round four you're nearly ready to laugh the movie off the screen; our villain's deadly schemes are just a shade less elaborate, and jaw-droppingly preposterous, as *Jigsaw's* torture devices in the

Saw

series. The movie requires its audiences to take one staggering leap of faith after another, and given the chaotic chase scenes, frenzied editing, and constantly shaky camerawork - to say nothing of Harlin's film being, at 108 minutes, punishingly overlong - you might be feeling so nauseous by the finale that you'll think you just spent 12 rounds in the

ring

with Cena. (The cineplex lobby should be outfitted with a Dramamine concession.)

Yet somehow, the star emerges from the film unscathed, at least career-wise. He may resemble a steroid-enhanced Mark Wahlberg, but Cena also shares Wahlberg's slightly apologetic charisma and touching earnestness - he seems to really *mean* what he's saying on-screen - and when he's not busting ass (which, to no one's shock, he does well), the wrestling great is allowed to reveal a side to him that's lightly, genially humorous. Early in

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, there's a surprisingly sweet scene between Cena and his girlfriend (Ashley Scott) in which the two engage in some frisky, relaxed banter, and it made me wish the inevitable gunshots and explosions would never come to pass; his nascent film career is thus far pretty indistinguishable from the early output of Vin Diesel or Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, but if Cena wants to play beyond his base, he could sure do a lot worse than to secure a

Pacifier

or

Game Plan

as soon as possible.

For reviews of Adventureland and Sunshine Cleaning, see "[Tilt 'n' Whirl](#)."