



VIN DIESEL GOES ROGUE

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Playing fast and loose with reality as Diesel goes rogue in *The Fate of the Furious*

There are several spoilsable things in *The Fate of the Furious*, and most of them have to do with family — “family” being the eight-film series’ touchstone, its go-to word when Vin Diesel needs to intone something meaningfully.

But it is no spoiler to tell you that Diesel’s Dom Toretto wins the first race he’s in, because Dom always wins, eventually. He may barely scrape by, or fling himself into something ass-first, or piece together an absurd plan with the help of his family, but he’ll get there.

A lot of bonkers stuff just has to happen first, and in this case, the emphasis is on “a lot”: a lot of characters need their screen time in *Fate*, and you feel it, even as you’re grinning like an idiot at the most recent explosion or car chase or The Rock vs. Jason Statham fight.

Scott Eastwood steps in as the team’s pretty white guy, but it’s unclear why he’s there except to give Roman (Tyrese Gibson) a break from being the brunt of everyone’s jokes. Just about every character still alive after the last three movies shows up eventually and we get Charlize Theron as the villainous Cipher, plus the most perfect Helen Mirren cameo on record. (I’m rooting for a spinoff starring her and hers.)

The *Furious* films are a weird joy in a world that needs them. Family is the most important thing, and cars, and doing the right thing in the least likely way. *Furious 6* had its sleek London car chase and its impossibly long runway; *Furious 7* dropped cars out of planes and put Michelle Rodriguez, one of the series’ unsung VIPs, in a dressed-up fight with Ronda Rousey.

Reality is a bubble the movies long since popped, and that’s part of the fun: The most incredible hacking takes place with just a spot of typing, cars are always fast enough, and the Rock eats rubber bullets for breakfast and laughs about it. It’s an ongoing madcap, violent delight, but *Fate*’s action sequences are often so stuffed with characters that it feels like we’re missing the cool parts while hopping from person to person.

Fate’s best fight involves one man, encumbered by a very fragile package, versus a whole plane of baddies. As a cleverly choreographed display of excellent comic timing, it’s a spectacle of ferocious grace — but it’s also not about the team, which may be the flaw that keeps this movie from being quite as excellent as the last few.

As plots go, “Dominic Toretto has just gone rogue” should be a great one, but it leaves the rest of the gang with a leadership vacuum — a problem that regular *Furious* screenwriter Chris Morgan doesn’t account for. The emphasis on family — which has, in this series, always meant chosen family as much as blood relations — gets taken literally in a way that raises a lot of questions about where the story goes from here: *The Fast and the Furious: The Next Generation?* (*Regal Valley River, Cinemark 17*)

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