

# Extremely campy Momoa saves start of franchise's end

By Michael Phillips  
Chicago Tribune

Unlike "Fast X," let's keep this review quick and fuel-efficient.

"I'll kill Dominic Toretto. I'll kill 'em all." So says the disturbed, ballet-loving Dante, the son of the Rio drug lord killed off in "Fast Five." An extraordinarily campy Jason Momoa dines out upon this vengeance-driven role, sporting dandy pigtails one minute and "Swan Lake"-ing around the next, when he's not blowing up Rome or kidnapping Dom's son.

Momoa is the chief, merrily depraved reason to sit through "Fast X," even as he becomes its emblem of code-switching, tone-juggling mania. The movie's OK. Produced on a reported \$340 million budget, it's 340 million dollars' worth of OK.

On Instagram, while filming, star Vin Diesel called "Fast X" the "beginning of an epic ending." Now, unless you're "The Empire Strikes Back" or thereabouts, that sort of project can feel like time spent watching track getting laid for a train arriving later. There's a ton going on in "Fast X," with Diesel seething, and Charlize Theron and Michelle Rodriguez smashing each other's heads against concrete or metal, while John Cena and Leo Abelo Perry kill assailants with cannonballs shot from their cannon car. Yet somehow it feels like you're hanging off a cliff for 2 hours and 21 minutes, waiting for the cliffhanger ending, which isn't technically any kind of ending. It's a middling.

Rita Moreno enlivens a couple of scenes as Abuela Toretto. Performers with a



Jason Momoa as Dante in "Fast X." UNIVERSAL PICTURES

comic edge, such as Cena and Nathalie Emmanuel — the series' one-woman geek squad — lighten the load. The film's problems qualify as problematic only for those who like their action scenes a little less "Wacky Races" but meaner, and a little more sustained and suspenseful.

Action filmmaking on a global scale requires more than location scouting and

crowd control. Now that we're in the Mid-Digital Age of filmmaking, we're seeing an amalgam of practical and digital effects in practically every large-scale action sequence. Everything and anything is possible.

But not everything is advisable. Building an action scene so that it actually builds, and peaks, and valleys, and adjusts

its rhythm so that we're fully invested while being constantly surprised — some movies leave all that stuff to the editing phase.

The movie yanks Dom and his crew from Los Angeles to Rome to Naples to London to Rio to green-screen Antarctica. Defying "the laws of God and gravity," weathering bad press (they're framed for Dante's terrorist attack on Rome), director Louis Leterrier slams it all together dutifully.

In Rio, Dante really wants to race against Dom. Frustratingly, the drag race, like everything else in "Fast X," has no time for racing; it's all about detonators and Dante's Joker-ripcoff mind games.

The bad man boasts an unlimited supply of remote-controlled vehicles, a neutron bomb and scads of machine-gun-wielding

minions. Now and then, we get a detour into comic-relief psychosis, as in one sequence where Dante holds an extended, chatty conversation with two of his deceased and decaying victims, propped up as if joining their killer for backyard mojitos. Every franchise offering needs its mark of distinction; this is "Fast X's."

My affection for a lot of the earlier Fast & Furious movies has everything to do with the people on the screen, and the squealing of the tires. Not so much the world destruction. Outlandish mayhem needs better visual stylists than Leterrier.

**MPA rating:** PG-13 (for intense sequences of violence and action, language and some suggestive material)

**Running time:** 2:21

**How to watch:** In theaters

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