

“SAW 3D” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Friday, 29 October 2010 16:44



The ads for SAW 3D depicting Jigsaw as a giant construction project are more accurate than the marketers probably know. The latest and, supposedly, last of this by now exhausted franchise is as mechanical as they come, and a big comedown from the unexpectedly decent previous entry.

SAW VI managed to inject some fresh urgency and character quirks into the formula, but SAW 3D is as grindingly impersonal as the assorted torture devices it spotlights. By now, any tangible attempt to engage us with intriguing characters and a sense of mystery is gone; all that's left is a series of death setpieces strung together with half-assed plotting and weak acting, “enhanced” by the addition of 3-D. The dimensional process used here is OK and provides a bit of atmospheric depth to certain sequences, though it has mostly been employed to spew guts and other body parts into the audience's face.

The enthusiasm with which the filmmakers fling the viscera around is all of a piece with SAW 3D's sadism, an element more pronounced here than in any previous entry. The movie practically salivates over the hideous demises that have been contrived for its victims, inviting us to cheer its sickening ingenuity—which is really the antithesis of horror, which is supposed to make you care about its characters and hope for them to overcome the evil they're faced with. SAW 3D gives us no one to root for—everyone on screen is amoral, corrupt, murderous or, in the case of its law-enforcement figures, inept.



Certainly, you can't have much faith in the competence of a police force unable to catch a killer who, as SAW 3D opens, has set up one of his elaborate multiperson traps right in the middle of a public area, the better for a crowd of passersby to witness the bloodshed once it's set into motion. After this opening setpiece (which, as my Fango colleague Sam Zimmerman accurately

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observed, more resembles a piece of performance art parodying a Jigsaw construction than one of his legitimate creations), we’re reintroduced to Lt. Hoffman (Costas Mandylor), the SAW sequels’ new central villain who has managed to escape the death device that Jigsaw’s widow Jill (Betsy Russell) left him in. He’s still up to his old tricks, though his choices of targets seem even more random and unmotivated than ever—and we now suddenly learn that there have been a number of previously unreported survivors of Jigsaw’s mayhem as well.

Several of them are followers of Bobby Dagen (Sean Patrick Flanery), who himself got out of one of those tight situations and subsequently penned a tome called S.U.R.V.I.V.E. (what that acronym stands for is never explained), which has become something of a self-help tome for others in the same situation. Only thing is—oops—Bobby made the whole story up, and inevitably, Hoffman abducts him to teach him a lesson about exploiting his mentor’s legacy. Soon, Bobby is running the sort of gauntlet that has become wearily familiar in these films, bouncing from one room to another in which one of those complicit in his scam (his lawyer, publicist, etc.) is strapped into an elaborate death device. Each scene plays the exact same way—Bobby enters, listens to a taped message from Jigsaw (er, if he’s been dead a while, how come his voice is on the tapes?) and struggles vainly to stop the murder machines as the victims scream and yell things like, “What’s going on?! Why is this happening?!”—questions you’d think they would immediately realize the answers to, considering that they’ve been cashing in on Jigsaw’s notoriety for some time.

Meanwhile, Jill is being held in a “safe house,” i.e. a furnished corner of the local police station, where Internal Affairs officer Gibson (Chad E. Donella, a usually capable character actor who here appears to have been taking bad-acting lessons from the previous sequels’ Scott Patterson) is trying to figure out how Hoffman can be apprehended. There’s no suspense to any of this, because it’s clear early on that if the trapped souls don’t die as nastily as possible, the movie has no reason to exist, and that Hoffman, like Jigsaw, will always have the almost supernatural ability to construct and execute the most complicated apparatus anywhere, anytime he wants with complete impunity. The whole thing comes to a violent head, the movie appears to be over with absolutely nothing changed other than the fact that a bunch more people are dead...but of course, there has to be one last “surprise,” only this time it’s half-baked and makes no sense in the context of the previous films.

Indeed, trying to reconcile what’s presented here with the events of SAW 3D’s predecessors will only make your head hurt almost as much as one of Jigsaw’s signature jaw-traps. With any sense of a coherent chronology completely gone by now, and top-billed “star” Tobin Bell appearing on screen for less than five minutes, this is a clear case of a horror franchise running on fumes, trying to up the ante only by being more grotesque than ever, rather than branching out in any interesting story directions. (What if that opening scene *was* a performance piece, and Jigsaw’s notoriety was starting to inspire certain artists to exploit the public’s fascination

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with death? Now that might have made an interesting movie.) The really sad thing is that as you read this, more people are probably watching SAW 3D in a theater than will ever trek out to see far more adventurous and resonant current genre films like

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