

'Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw' is an interim fix for Fast & Furious superfans

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 136 minutes

In 2017, Universal released the eighth title in its *Fast & Furious* franchise. Naturally, it was a massive success like all the others in the series. While there is a follow-up in the works, studio heads have decided that another year is too long for audiences to wait to get another fix. As such, they've created the spin-off, *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw*.

It's an overlong and very silly action picture that almost revels in its plot's slapdash absurdities. This movie certainly isn't an action classic, but at least the bickering leads don't appear to be taking things too seriously and have a few fun moments together.

This spin-off centers around Federal Agent Luke Hobbs (Dwayne Johnson) and his nemesis Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham), an ex-British Special Forces serviceman-turned-ill-tempered-mercenary.

The story begins when a sinister team led by Brixton Lore (Idris Elba) tries to steal a programmable super-virus for a mysterious employer. When MI6 agent Hattie Shaw (Vanessa

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Kirby), the sister of Deckard, attempts to thwart the theft, she ends up injecting the virus capsules into her own system and escaping the crime scene. It is soon revealed that the pills will dissolve within a few days, releasing an airborne strain of the disease that will decimate the world. Despite their mutual hatred for one another, Hobbs and Shaw must team up to try and find Hattie, retrieve the pills from inside her body, stop the outbreak, and deal with their own family issues.

If this already sounds like a stretch, it gets even more ridiculous as it progresses. Everything about it is absurd and none of it holds up to much scrutiny. Thankfully, the cast does make up for some of the story's deficiencies. Johnson and Statham are quite entertaining together, even if most of their interactions are a series of insults. This is particularly true early on when they're posturing and expounding on the ways in which they despise each other, using some amusingly graphic descriptions to make their points. They appear to be having fun and it makes one wish that there weren't more verbal strikes taken between the two characters.

The film also benefits from a pair of very entertaining and unexpected cameos that earn some laughs.

Elba is always solid and tries to lend some weight to a completely preposterous role as an associate whom Shaw shot in the head many years ago. Apparently, the villain survived the blow to the brainpan and thanks to his benefactor, has been transformed into a part-cyborg killer. Not only is his body upgraded, but his team's equipment is as well; the character races around on a motorcycle that has the ability to change its form. Want an explanation as to how these advanced medical and technological advances all came to pass? You won't get more than a very general answer in this flick (in fact, you're not supposed to think about it at all).

The action itself is equally exaggerated. It is a barrage of explosions and gunfire, often through busy city streets that are clearly not well-patrolled by authorities. Some of the bits, including the climactic fistfight, are well staged and put together. However, the characters do so many superhuman things (like grasping a tow-truck chain and using it to pull a helicopter closer) that there isn't a lot of tension or real danger to any of the scenarios presented. And the movie is quite long, meaning that the barrage of non-stop fights does become tiring.

Truthfully, I'm a huge fan of this franchise and this particular spin-off didn't alter my overall feelings toward the films. Still, I will acknowledge that *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw* at least attempts to offer a variation or two on the formula and has a few moments of amusingly

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dopey banter between its two leads. It's serviceable popcorn fodder that'll entertain fans. However, the movie would have been a rip-roaring blast had the script emphasized its characters and provided them with sharper material.

NOTE: Enthusiasts will likely want to sit through the entire picture, as there are three bonus scenes at various points over the lengthy credit roll, including one at the very end.

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