

Going into the film, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. As the penultimate film of the franchise, the movie was described to me as "dope" by one friend but "incredibly boring" by another. Maybe I should have just expected exactly what the *Mission Impossible* franchise had been known for for so long; somehow its action and spectacle is elevated by each successive film, yet (spoiler!) its writing is about as consistent as 2023 NBA MVP Joel Embiid.

The most glaring issue throughout the 163 minutes of runtime is the dialogue. I can partially excuse a particular scene during the "exposition" of the film, where US military bigwigs vehemently discuss the object that ends up becoming the film's MacGuffin. The movie is attempting to keep the intensity of the opening 20 minutes, where the fate of a central character close to the protagonist is a mystery. Characters talk matter-of-factly, making statements and finishing each other's thoughts, even though one of them, the Director of National Intelligence, was not even supposed to have heard of this object before. This is a red flag. Only a handful of questions were asked during this "exposition vomit" as the dialogue was definitely not structured like a real conversation; if you are not a part of the *John Wick* franchise and your entire script is written like this, you are in trouble. I doubt many franchises can maintain a level of fervor that can justify this type of writing, and as expected, neither could *Mission Impossible*.

This scene was immediately followed up with a monologue from CIA Director Kittridge about how Ethan Hunt has to (paraphrasing) "pick a side because [his] days of fighting for the greater good are over". He goes on to say something about the "final war", which "will be fought over the last remaining resources on the planet", and I shrugged my shoulders. The film obviously tries to be more than just another run of the mill summer blockbuster. My guess is that Kittridge is attempting to talk about how "the victor rewrites history to become just" or something in an effort to convince Hunt to recover an "entity" capable of corrupting sources of digital information. They hammer this idea home with several shots of unfortunate salarymen dictating an entire national security database by hand. This theme is of course never touched on again except in a scene far (like 110 minutes) later, where two American agents are discussing what they would do with the "entity" over some tea as they stake out a black-market deal. "I would destroy it as no one man should have that power", says one guy, almost quoting Kanye. When some random side character comes to the same conclusion as the protagonist, I'm not sure the ethical issue is that profound. And just in case you were wondering what happened to the "central character", she was revealed to be alive literally 10 minutes after her potential death!

The dialogue – I would say – is quite bad in two other scenes. The first takes place after a major character death scene that fell flat, where a powerful speech would draw viewers back in and justify how the characters immediately went about their day afterwards. Instead, the three members of team Hunt finish each other's sentences and try to look cool. "We're on this mission because we want to be, not because we have to be"! The second is antagonist Gabriel's epic address about his master, the so-called "entity" (which is a pretty try-hard thing to call an AI). I completely tuned out when he tried to make this glorified Chat-GPT look intimidating; "we know everything that'll happen to you since we make quintillions of calculations every millisecond"! This obviously does not make for a very compelling villain.

Speaking of Gabriel, I was slightly excited when they first showed that he was a figure from Ethan's past, who killed someone important to him. He is very calm yet intense, and that clearly impacts Ethan, who cancels an entire mission just because he thought he caught a glimpse of him. Unfortunately, I later found out that this was pretty much a retcon, and Gabriel never showed up in any previous movie. I'm guessing someone somewhere thought that having some guy that personifies "fate" would be cool (maybe they watched Dr. Fate in Black Adam). Along with saying things like "my master says that someone important to you will be killed by me again" (which happens for a reason that I don't quite understand), Gabriel acts like he always knows who will betray him and how. In fact, he kills two characters because of this. And when Ethan is making his final getaway, the narrator is probably referring to the final showdown between these two as he says that "history is destined to be repeated". They really try to drive this one home to mixed success; the concept of general AI being called an "entity", going rouge, and somehow predicting the future like Dr. Strange is slightly too outlandish even by the standards set by *Dead Reckoning Part 1*.

If not for its incredibly dynamic third act, I would have given this movie a much lower rating. A friend once suggested that "Tom Cruise does not miss", and this is true ... in terms of action at least. The motorbike stunt tops *Fallout's* Halo jump as the most daring thing Cruise has done on screen yet, and it comes with the typical *MI* quips trademarked by Benji (I too am tired of the MCU quipping all the time, so I'm not too sure this is a good thing). The choreography is consistently top-notch, and the action is never dull. The director and co constantly push the tempo of the act, going from one set piece to another without lingering for too long. This was my biggest complaint about the helicopter chase from *Fallout*, so I'm glad that it's fixed here. There's even a little twist in this act like how Henry Cavil was revealed to be the villain in the previous film.

The second act's car chase is almost as refreshing: Pom Klementieff's Paris clearly enjoys wreaking havoc in the streets and Hunt and his companion are forced to drive handcuffed together, switching seats multiple times. The short sword duel on the Venice bridge felt like a masterclass in action choreography. In isolation this scene would be quite powerful, and is something that I would have expected to see (or more accurately, would have wanted to see) in *Star Wars*. The soundtrack was every bit as (though I would want to biasedly say *almost as*) riveting as *Duel of the Fates*, and the writing quality was quite reminiscent of some recent films in that franchise.

Unfortunately, due to poorly-written/incomplete dialogue and ill-developed themes, *Dead Reckoning Part 1* fails to live up to the heights set by its predecessor, *Fallout*. However, contrary to the jokes made here, it is not a bad film. As a critic, I tend to harp on the weak points rather than praise the strong, and the film's action cinematography is definitely a diamond in the rough. Too bad no one remembered to polish it.

Final Score: 7.4 / 10