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Divinity

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Divinity

Abstract

This is a film review of *Divinity* (2023), directed by Eddie Alcazar.

Keywords

Immortality, Science Fiction, Dystopia

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Author Notes

Dereck Daschke is a professor of Philosophy & Religion at Truman State University and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Particularly interested in the intersection among religion, psychology, and wellness, his academic work over more than two decades has analyzed the transformational breakdowns and creative buildups in the form of apocalypses, mysticism, new religious movements, psychedelics, the Bible, Bob Dylan, and, of course, film. He regularly teaches “Religion and Film” at Truman and has overseen a number of student research theses that have contributed to the conversation about just why it is that movies capture our meaning-making imaginations in the way they do.



Divinity (2023), dir. Eddie Alcazar

“Is death just an illusion? Imagine what we could achieve if our time were endless. Maybe then the universe would awaken, and there would be a new beginning.” So states Jaxxon Pierce (Stephen Dorff) in the slick ad campaign for the miraculous anti-aging serum “Divinity,” which effectively promises immortality. The ad concludes, “Your search for salvation is over.” Divinity was created by his father Sterling (Scott Bakula), who himself died without perfecting it for human use. Thus his sons Jaxxon and Dip (Michael O’Hearn), a body builder seemingly committed to physical perfection, seek to carry on his legacy in different ways. While on the verge of fulfilling his father’s vision, Jaxxon and the Divinity serum are abducted by two otherworldly brothers (Moises Arias and Jason Genao), both listed in the credits as “Star.” The Star brothers are carrying out some mysterious agenda that involves forcing Jaxxon to take in impossible amounts of Divinity, apparently to catalyze a transformation of this human into something much, much more. In parallel and in connection with these events is a realm inhabited by women clad in white

leotards, whom are revealed to be the last fertile women on earth, as it turns out that Divinity robs one of the ability to reproduce. These women are understood to be “pure,” as in untainted by the immortality drug, but of course implying so much more than an unsullied bloodstream.

Thus Divinity, the serum, and *Divinity*, the film, set up a high-stakes sci-fi tale of clashing agendas for the future of humanity and beyond. As a film, at the visual level, it is tensely atmospheric, especially in writer-director-producer Eddie Alcazar’s choice to film in grainy, high-contrast black and white, which immediately calls to mind Darren Aronofsky’s thematically similar π (*Pi*, 1998). The low-key special effects, including a climactic stop-motion battle royale sequence, lend the film an engaging and fun B-movie ambiance. The love between and conflicts within the two sets of brothers also suggest some parallels with the famous sibling rivalries of the Book of Genesis. However, the plot itself seems half-baked in the end, as it’s increasingly unclear what, exactly, are the plans of either the Stars or the Purity women concerning Divinity, which then undermines any clear or truly interesting exploration of the central question of the film: At what cost immortality? A scene near the end attempts to explore that question, but in the most ham-fisted way possible, both in its ethical set up and its clunky plot mechanics. (It’s always useful when the bad guy leaves a VHS tape with a full explanation of his plans labeled and ready to go in the player.) And the women’s roles are almost literally reduced to “whores” or “Pure” and salvation is achieved when one is rescued from the former status to become the latter.

Divinity has its pulpy retro sci-fi charms and some decent visuals and performances, but doesn’t offer anything new or compelling to say about the ancient, some would say ultimate, human questions: How can I escape death? And If I can, should I?