

# Mission Impossible's Turbulent Takeoff, Triumphant Landing

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Despite a slow start, the newest, and last, *Mission: Impossible* brings viewers through an unbalanced and uneven ride on the shoulders of Tom Cruise.

Ending a franchise is always difficult. There is so much to balance: resolving any dangling plot threads from previous installments (in a way that does not feel shoehorned in), closing out the characters arcs of each beloved character (potentially including each of their fates), honoring the series' legacy (without being overly self-referential or too reliant on nostalgia), and considering what type of final note to end the series on.

This closing-out-a-franchise process is made more difficult when it's not clear if it's truly the end or not; an ending with an open door will always lead audiences to speculate if it's "really" over. Modern audiences have been inundated with a constant barrage of franchise revivals and legacy sequels, so it's hard for something to ever seem like a truly-closed book.

There have been conflicting comments made by lead actor, Tom Cruise, and veteran franchise director, Christopher McQuarrie, as to whether this film is really the end. With the subtitle of *The Final Reckoning*, one would assume that this eighth installment of the nearly-30-year-long *Mission: Impossible* franchise would be its last. But, by the time one reaches the credits, it's unclear if the journey of protagonist Ethan Hunt (portrayed by Tom Cruise) is over or not; the door is left open for future installments, despite a few prior scenes that may have implied the contrary.

After all, this film was initially titled "Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning: Part Two", but that title was abandoned. So, this film is not only a technical part two to the franchise's previous installment (*Dead Reckoning: Part One*, which has ended up now dropping the Part One), but also carries the burden of being the overall series finale.

Lead actor and stuntman extraordinaire, Tom Cruise, made comments in 2023 that he would be willing to play Ethan Hunt into his 80s, citing Harrison Ford's 40+ year tenure of portraying the legendary adventure hero, Indiana Jones. Taking all of this information into account, perhaps it's reasonable to conclude that a film that was shaky on its exact identity from the get-go was a warning sign for the uneven nature of this supposedly-final installment.

Clocking in at a 2 hour and 50 minute runtime, it is the longest *Mission: Impossible* film, and one certainly feels it. This film is unbalanced; the beginning hour, or possibly even hour-and-a-half, can be a trudge to get through:

there is little in the way of plot advancement, compelling character drama, high-octane action, or stylized stunt sequences that have been the franchise's trademark quality over the years.

Earlier installments in the franchise — even the previous one, *Dead Reckoning* — wasted no time in getting to the stellar action and stunt work that puts people in the seats. What there is a lot of during this long beginning section, however, are reminders of the plot from 2023's *Dead Reckoning*, which the audience is constantly reminded about, in addition to stressing the world-ending stakes of the central conflict in this story: the threat of an AI known as "the Entity," which is bent on destroying the world. The only explanations I can think of to explain this many blatant reminders of the plot and stakes are that director McQuarrie must've believed that a lot of audience members had never seen the previous film, or that they all have memory issues.

Aside from the glacial pacing in the first half — which could have been edited down significantly without losing all too much — the other most frustrating aspect of this film is its uneven tone. The film takes itself very seriously, which is a departure from practically every prior installment featuring a blend of comedy and lightheartedness with drama and stakes, but that in itself is not inherently a fault. The fault lies in the poor counterbalancing of its very self-serious tone: its comedy is poorly implemented.

The majority of the comedic moments did not land — there were very few laughs from the audience — and I was in a packed IMAX theater on opening night. There were moments that were presented in such an odd way that it made you question whether it was supposed to be funny or not. The lack of laughter in the theater during these moments confirmed that I was not the only one feeling this way. Thus concludes most of my problems with the picture.

If you had stopped reading in the previous paragraph, you would probably think that I hate this movie. But, I don't: I think there was a lot of good in it. There is an appropriately touching and poetic sendoff for a certain beloved character. There are fun callbacks and interesting wrap-ups from previous installments. The underwater submarine sequence will have you holding your own breath in anticipation. With about an hour left to go in the film, the pacing accelerated dramatically and was back on-par with previous outings. The final action set piece, featuring Tom Cruise climbing all over a (real, non-CGI) flying airplane, is nothing short of phenomenal, and will have



"MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - THE FINAL RECKONING," Courtesy of Paramount Pictures

you thinking: "How in the world...?" This sequence in particular may be the film's standout; it is an extraordinary set piece that left me breathless. That scene is yet another impressive addition to Cruise's storied repertoire of death-defying stunt scenes, from the scaling of the Burj Khalifa in *Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol* (2011) to the driving-a-motorcycle-off-of-a-cliff scene in *Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning: Part One* (2023), which have helped cement him as "the last true movie star." That label is one that he rejects, but is perhaps well-suited to him for being an actor, producer, and expert stuntman in an already 40+ year career in the industry.

The final scenes of this film were emotionally resonant and encapsulated well the themes of the series as a whole. It was conclusive — to the extent that it feels like it could be an ending. And, if this is the ending, then I'd say that Cruise & co., overall, stuck the landing. It's just a shame, in my view, that as an individual film, it did not reach the highs that this franchise had reached in the past.