

The World's End: With a bang and a whimper

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Directed by Edgar Wright; written by Wright and Simon Pegg

The World's End is billed as the third in a series of films, the “Three Flavors Cornetto trilogy,” also including *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Hot Fuzz* (2007), which feature elements of comedy, action, horror and/or science fiction. Edgar Wright directed the three films and the antic efforts of British performer-writers Simon Pegg and Nick Frost are central to each. Frost and Pegg also starred in *Paul* (2011).

The latest film begins with an institutionalized Gary King (Pegg) in a group therapy session. He describes the best night of his life, which is also where he figures everything went wrong.

Through flashbacks we see a very charismatic young King (Thomas Law) leading his four friends, all young and fresh out of school, as they embark on an adventure to complete the “Golden Mile”—a route through their sleepy hometown of Newton Haven that includes stops at twelve pubs, at each of which a pint is supposed to be drunk. Gary views the failure to reach the last bar, *The World's End*, as the turning point in his life.

An offhand comment from one of the other patients puts a gleam in Gary's eye and he decides to reassemble the group to complete the Golden Mile. If they can do that, he figures, then somehow everything will be set right again.

Unlike Gary, the other four (played by Frost, Eddie Marsan, Martin Freeman and Paddy Considine—a talented ensemble!) are leading reasonably contented lives, however dull. They have joined the grown-up world of jobs, families, schedules. Gary, on the other hand, clings desperately to the crass bravado of youth, along with the adolescent insecurity this usually covers up. There are moments of true pathos, and one does feel empathy for King.

The other men are convinced to join the quest, and meet at the appointed time and place. Gary arrives

hours late, driving up in the same car he had when they were all young. It is clear that the world has stood still for this man, with unhappy consequences.

The laughs the reunited gang has are nervous ones, and the friends' efforts to find a way out of the situation lends a realistic tension to the scenes. Things come to something of a head at The Cross Hands (one of the pubs) when Gary engages a local teenager in a very athletic and well-choreographed battle and discovers him to be a robot.

Here, the film takes a turn for the worse. The transition to the realm of action/science fiction is not well-executed. More is expected, given the predecessors in this trilogy.

As we learn that the town is largely populated by robots, the pacing in *The World's End* becomes hackneyed and the level of humor drops to the merely juvenile. The characters, in the main, are flat and stereotyped. Indeed, certain scenes seem badly borrowed from other films, including a tired take on the fembots from the Austin Powers franchise.

Gary remains determined to complete the Golden Mile, and desperately urges his friends onward. After a series of fights, each of which is frenetic and predictable, the World's End is reached. By this point, it seems the actors have largely given up and want to be done with things.

In any event, the face-off with the invading robot aliens is the culmination of a downhill journey. It seems the writing duo of Pegg and Wright too have thrown in the towel by this stage. After much shouting and unconvincing posturing by Gary and his friend Andy (Frost), the disembodied voice of the alien robots (Bill Nighy) abruptly announces that his forces “give up” and are leaving. One is relieved—not because the human race will survive, but because the boring and awkward scene will finally end.

The aliens do depart, taking their technology with

them (everything from cell phones to the Internet were apparently gifts of the invaders) and leaving the world a wasteland. Some robots remain, and Gary becomes the leader of those made to replicate his friends in their youth. Thus, he is able to retake his position at the summit of the tiny world he preferred.

Overall *The World's End* is a fairly sad end to an otherwise amusing and occasionally moving trilogy. In *Shaun of the Dead*, Pegg and Wright entertainingly looked at issues of maturity, modern life and the ability of even the most unpromising of screw-ups to rise to the occasion. The transformation of Shaun (Pegg) into a flawed hero was convincing, and the portrayal of the friendships and rivalries between the characters was touching and funny.

Hot Fuzz, the second film in the series, was likewise about friendship, as well as the dangers of conformity. Though the plots of all the films in the trilogy rely on the outrageous or fantastical (zombies in *Shaun of the Dead*, murderous cultish townsfolk in *Hot Fuzz*), the first two had a certain integrity lacking in this last contribution.

Wright and Pegg, speaking to *USA Today*, noted that though this trilogy is complete, they do intend to work together again in the future. One hopes they will—and that the two will give more thoughtful treatment to the next venture.



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