

REVIEW: 'Five Days at Memorial' replicates the horrors of Hurricane Katrina



CHENNAI: Apple+ TV's limited series "Five Days at Memorial" sets out to capture a natural calamity in its stark reality. Adapted from Sheri Fink's "Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital," a retelling of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in late 2005, the TV version is a brutal but compelling watch. It is brought out most poignantly in a scene where we see an elderly patient watching the raging storm from a window at the Memorial Medical Centre.



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Created by John Ridley, writer of “12 Years a Slave,” and “Lost” showrunner Carlton Cuse, the series brings drama without overly exaggerating, along with a near-perfect recreation of the hospital that becomes a character in itself. Real footage is seamlessly woven into scenes, with the first five chapters devoted to the first five days of the catastrophic event that left 45 patients dead.

Dr Anna Pou is portrayed by the excellent Vera Farmiga, who puts in a powerful performance standing watching the hurricane batter the bridge between two segments of the facility. Then there is the nerve-wracking dilemma as a daughter (Raven Dauda) is forced to abandon her critically ill mother, nurse Diane Robichaux (Julie Ann Emery). A deep sense of heartrending misery and utter helplessness pervades just about every frame.

As “Five Days at Memorial” begins, we see local residents trooping inside the facility to join patients and staff — standard procedure, as the building had withstood many storms in its 80 years. But in this case, the hurricane smashed glass panes and wrenched chunks of iron, leaving little respite. The hurricane passes, but levees then collapse, flooding the city. With the problems mounting, the hospital’s incident commander, Susan Mulderick (Cherry Jones), discovers that the building’s bulky manual says nothing about evacuation protocols in case of floods. With elevators out of operation, doctors and others carry patients to the rooftop helipad.

The last few episodes focus on the investigation into the controversial decision to euthanize terminally-ill patients, and explore the meaning of care and compassion. But what stands out is the failure of the administration, the Federal Management Agency, and all those who had the power to intervene to avoid the disaster.
