Reviews by Emily

Here I will write reviews of movies, games, music, life, whatever

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Movies

Movies I see in theaters or at home

Movies

The Order

I saw this last night, December 17, 2024. An action/thriller based on true events. An FBI agent investigates a series of robberies which turns out to be organized by a neo-nazi group led by Bob Matthews (a real life figure). I was interested to see this because the real events took place in the Pacific Northwest, where I live. If you didn't know, the urban areas of the Pacific Northwest lean liberal, but the rural areas are a haven for far right extremist groups, and there are a lot of nazi-types who move to eastern Oregon and Idaho specifically to try to start communes or militias. Bob Matthews was one of them, who tried to start both a commune and a militia in the 80's.

This movie definitely falls into the trope of the main male cop-type character who has been through some trauma and is largely stoic and unable to express and process his emotions, except with occasional outbursts of anger. These kind of character arcs tend to disinterest me. If I can't see someone's emotions on screen, then it becomes hard to be immersed. Indeed, I found myself checking my phone a few times to see how much time was left in the movie. However, there was a side character that was more compelling for me than the stoic main character, and even nearly brought me to tears at one point. In fact, this movie, even though it ends with the "good guys" largely winning, the film to me reads as a tragedy which is at least somewhat novel to me for an action thriller. The main character (I can't even remember his name now) has seen so much violence at the hands of organized crime that he becomes obsessed with stopping it, even to the point of putting people he cares about in danger. Because of this obsession, he does eventually stop the crime organization, but at the cost of hurting the people he loves. Was it worth it? Probably not, just like the movie itself probably isn't worth it. Please give me a compelling character who actually learns from his mistakes, or at the very least, one that I can see is visibly tormented by these character flaws instead of bottling up his emotions presumably forever after the movie ends.

However, the movie was certainly watchable, and the few action scenes did in fact have me at the edge of my seat. There was blood and gore, which I tend to not like, but I felt it enhanced the story, and wasn't there just to evoke a reaction for no reason. The acting was good, and the characters were likeable, though I would have liked to see them be a bit more dynamic. As far as I could tell, the movie followed real events relatively closely, at least matching the Wikipedia page for Bob Matthews. There were several times towards the end that I just had to laugh as I was brought out of immersion by how events went down.

Overall, 3 out of 5 stars. Wouldn't recommend, wouldn't see again, but wouldn't leave the room if it were playing.

Movies

The Wizard of Oz

After watching the excellent Wicked, I just heard that they already made a sequel, The Wizard of Oz! I had to watch it immediately. But seriously, the Wizard of Oz was one of my favorite book series growing up. Yes, a series. There are so many. When I reread them, I will also give them a review! L. Frank Baum was apparently pretty racist, so does that come through in the books or the movie? Probably, but I hope some of it is salvageable, especially my favorite character, Ozma the trans girl princess! But I think this movie is far enough removed from the author not to show signs of racism. We will see about the books.

Unfortunately, I would say that the story in this movie does not in fact live up to the book. I enjoyed the book characters really showing how they already have the attributes they want from the wizard, especially the Scarecrow. The Scarecrow is constantly coming up with plans that save the crew from various perils. The movie certainly does show the Tin Man's heart, but the Cowardly Lion seems to be exactly that, a coward, whereas in the book he shows off his courage while thinking he is a coward the whole time. In the movie, the poppies are waved away by the magic of Glinda, where in the book, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow have to work together to get the flesh-havers out of the situation. I think it involves previously befriended mice? I will report back after I reread the book. The point is, the second half of the movie suffers from feeling as if things happen and characters do things just to get from one scene to the next.

But who watches this movie for the story? Isn't it all about the costumes, sets and songs? Yes, the sets are amazing! And the costumes are perfect. It's wonderful to watch, like watching the most expensive stage production you've ever seen. And the songs—Somewhere over the Rainbow, Follow the Yellow—no that one is actually pretty annoying. The song the munchkins sing is—oh my god make it stop! But, If I Only Had a Brain is quite enjoyable, and the choreography is very fun. The Scarecrow does an excellent job making the audience feel that he actually is stuffed with straw. And then—wait, the Tin Man sings the same tune? And, oh no, so does the Lion? This is where I really felt the movie losing its momentum and pacing, which is not helped by the lion's dumb voice and honestly the worst costume out of the main characters. There is absolutely no good song after this. Do you remember the song they sing in the Emerald City? Neither do I. And do you remember that the Cowardly Lion has a song about becoming king of the jungle that he sings in the Emerald City? Why does the character with the absolute most annoying voice get a song that contributes nothing to the story?

Okay, but there are definitely good reasons to watch this movie. Every moment that Dorothy is in the spotlight is an absolute delight. Her face and demeanor are immensely expressive, and somehow she has chemistry with every character she meets. I feel for her plight as she fights for Toto in Kansas while everyone around her dismisses her concerns and gives in to, um, the witch, and "The Law." And her singing is out of this world. Holy shit I think this movie only made it big because of Somewhere Over the Rainbow. And it deserved that. If it's been a while since you've heard it, you should

listen to it real quick. She definitely doesn't sound 16, let alone any younger, but nobody cares about that.

The Wicked Witch of the West is the other character to watch in this movie. So campy, so perfectly evil and wicked. And as a sequel to Wicked, watching the first scene with her and Glinda honestly works really well with that additional extra-canonical context. Which brings me to the politics of this movie. Wicked didn't just take an innocent story and twist it into making the witch the heroine. The political commentary was here from the start, and from that starting point, it's easy to start questioning the cracks in the story we are told. Should we really take the story at face value? I think it works well thinking of it as a propaganda piece to prop up Glinda, the Wizard, and the new illegitimate regime of the Scarecrow as ruler of Oz (Where is our favorite trans character and the rightful ruler of Oz, Ozma?).

Overall, I think this movie deserves a watch, but you might start to nod off at around the halfway point. But really, we should forgive this movie its faults. It's just a kid's movie, after all, and—oh my god, the monkeys! That is the creepiest thing I've ever seen! And we all watched this as kids? No wonder my childhood was so fucked.

4 stars out of 5. You have to watch it at least once in your adult life. Worthy successor to Wicked.

Movies

Sonic 3 ????? (and Sonic Adventure 2 ?????)

I did not re-watch Sonic the Hedgehog 1 and 2 before seeing Sonic the Hedgehog 3, so it's been a while since I've seen them. But I remember enjoying Sonic 1 as a fun but kind of forgettable jaunt and 2 as fairly mediocre. So my expectations of 3 were not very high, but I wanted to see the movie, for the simple reason that the movie introduces Shadow the Hedgehog.

Shadow is like if Sonic were edgy and dark, and he's one of the best things that happened to the Sonic franchise. In the games, Shadow makes his first appearance in Sonic Adventure 2 from 2001, which was the second 3D Sonic game to be released, and also, the first Sonic game I ever played. Yes, I am a dirty heathen who played 3D Sonic before 2D Sonic, and I loved it. I still love it. It's hard for me to explain my love for this game, because this game is, in my opinion, both the best 3D Sonic game ever released, and a hot pile of garbage. But for this essay, I'm concerned mostly with its story.

The story, as it's presented in the game, is full of cliches and tropes, plot holes and nonsense, characters showing up at random places, and scenes that don't quite follow from the last. This is a story where Tails realizes that the president is on a video call with Dr. Eggman, so Sonic and Tails race to intercept the President's limo, jump in, interrupt delicate negotiations involving the lives of everyone on earth, trace the call to find out where Eggman is, and leave without so much as a thanks. And at least in the version I played, Sonic Adventure 2 Battle for the GameCube in English, the characters have awkward pauses or interrupt each other in hilarious ways that were clearly not intended by the developers. Underneath the bad acting, timing problems, and awkward shaping of the plot to fit gameplay, however, is surprisingly deep lore that is only hinted at during the game and its cinematics. I myself had to watch a Youtube video to understand the full backstory. But the mystery and ambiguity in the way that Shadow's origins are presented is part of the story, not a flaw in the storytelling. Shadow himself does not have a full memory of his own past, and struggles to figure out who he is.

In fact, the whole structure of the game supports the story of Shadow struggling to understand his own nature. The game is organized into two main campaigns: the good campaign where you play as the archetypal good guys Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles, and the evil campaign where you play as the "bad" guys Shadow, Dr. Eggman, and Rouge the Bat. Once you beat both campaigns, the two stories merge into one for the finale campaign, where the good and evil characters have to work together to defeat the true final boss.

The plot hinges on events that happened 50 years ago, which Shadow keeps having flashbacks to. Shadow was an experiment created on the research facility and space colony ARK by Gerald

Robotnik, the grandfather of Dr. Eggman. Gerald was attempting to create the "ultimate lifeform" through Project Shadow. Gerald also had a granddaughter, Maria, who had a close bond with Shadow. But eventually the government's military, G.U.N., "shut down" the research by murdering everyone on ARK. Maria helped Shadow escape, but died in the process. Her last words to Shadow ring in his memory, but his memory isn't complete, and he thinks she wanted him to exact revenge on all of earth for her death. Shadow is captured and put on ice for 50 years until Dr. Eggman frees him, not knowing Shadow's full history. Together they start collecting chaos emeralds to power ARK's planet-busting weapon, the Eclipse Cannon. Rouge the Bat is also here, ostensibly helping them collect Emeralds, though secretly she is actually a spy working for the President. Eventually they have 6 out of 7 emeralds, enough to make a display of the Eclipse Cannon's power by destroying half of the moon.

Meanwhile Sonic has been mistaken for Shadow since they look alike, and is running from G.U.N., and he and Tails, Knuckles, and Amy (Sonic's wannabe girlfriend) are trying to find Dr. Eggman. Eventually they locate him on ARK, and Tails creates a fake Chaos Emerald that has the same properties as a real chaos emerald, but with less power, which for some reason means that it will backfire and destroy the Eclipse Cannon if it is used to power it.

But unwittingly, all of them are playing into the hands of the long dead Gerald Robotnik, who "went insane" after years in the custody of G.U.N. and while pretending to work for G.U.N., programmed the station to crash into Earth, completely annihilating the planet, whenever the 7 chaos emeralds were used to activate the weapon. So when Sonic places the Chaos emerald in the Eclipse Cannon, the Cannon is destroyed, but ARK begins to plummet to Earth, guided by a creature who may be the actual "ultimate lifeform" instead of Shadow. Until the discovery of this creature, Shadow found purpose and identity in being the ultimate lifeform, but now he questions even his own identity. In the end, Shadow properly remembers that Maria wanted him to protect earth, not destroy it. He (seemingly) sacrifices himself to save earth, finally feeling that he has achieved his own self made purpose, born out of his love for Maria.

Because of the awkward way that the story is told, I didn't take Shadow seriously at first. He seemed melodramatic and emo for no reason to me. It was only after multiple play-throughs that I started to appreciate the melodrama and look past the polygonal animation and voice acting to see that Shadow is not a one dimensional character. His motivations make sense, and he grows from feeling anger and wanting revenge because of the pain in his past to letting that pain be a motivation to help others. There's a scene in the middle of the game where Rouge is trapped in a building that is about to blow up, and we see Shadow experiencing a flashback to Maria's death cut together with the image of Rouge about to die. Shadow then decides to save Rouge to spare her from the same fate as Maria. He plays it off as if he did it for selfish reasons, but the cracks are already starting to form in his bad boy persona. Shadow is not an evil character, he's just in pain, and honestly, he has good reasons to rebel, at least against the government that killed his friend.

Sonic also has an interesting character arc, or at least is set up to have one. He is mistaken for Shadow, who is just as fast as he is. Sonic finds himself fighting against the authorities, even though he is usually thought of at the "good guy." Sonic accuses Shadow of being a fake hedgehog, but the truth is that Shadow was created 50 years ago, and presumably Sonic is not 50 years old.

Sonic, just like Shadow, needs to let go of the story he tells about himself that he's the fastest hedgehog in the world, and Shadow is just a fake hedgehog, and instead work with Shadow to save earth.

With all of this story, it seems that it would be easy for Sega to make Sonic the Hedgehog 3 a great movie. Or just a good movie. Alas, it was not to be. Three major things hindered this movie from being great, or honestly, even watchable. First, the previous two movies set up human characters not found in the games, namely Tom and Maddie Wachowski. The movie is constrained to the previous canon, and the idea that these humans need to be main characters. They just get in the way, and a whole unnecessary, campy subplot has to be created to have something for them to do.

Second, the movie tries to be about a theme of teamwork, and how badly things go when you try to do things on your own. The lesson falls flat and feels preachy. Sonic Adventure 2 was not about teamwork, though there was plenty of teamwork in it. It was about identity, and about the nature of good and evil. Teamwork featured in the game as a result of figuring out how one's identity works to enhance a team's capabilities. And the third reason this movie fails, is Jim Carrey.

Jim Carrey is the worst thing that happened to this movie. He takes up an inordinate amount of screen time, and reduces the characters of both Dr. Eggman, and Gerald Robotnik into mere slapstick humor. It was painful to watch. I did not want to see Jim Carrey slap his belly around for a minute straight, or break the fourth wall by looking at the camera and tell us that he's one actor playing two characters, or have a fight with his grandfather that references the Green Lantern movie. I crave sincerity in my Hollywood blockbusters, something that Marvel has made all but obsolete. Sonic Adventure 2, despite its numerous flaws, is extremely sincere. Even though I laugh when the sincerity doesn't hit like it's meant to, that seriousness drives a plot that is unashamed of its silly nature and allows the audience to accept its reality and be part of the story.

The elements of a good story are here in Sonic 3, in all their sincerity. Maria features prominently, with a largely similar plotline as in Sonic Adventure 2. Shadow retains his seriousness, and the movie left me wishing I could have seen a movie with Shadow as the main character, not Dr. Eggman, or Tom Wachowski, or even Sonic. Keanu Reeves was obviously the perfect voice for Shadow, and Shadow has a similar arc of wanting revenge, and eventually wanting to help save earth. Ultimately this movie would have been watchable with about ten percent of Jim Carrey, and it would have been great if it were reworked with Shadow as the main character. As it is, I cannot recommend it. Can we all just pretend like the cinematics of Sonic Adventure 2 is the real Sonic the Hedgehog 3? If that's the case, I give it 5 stars out of 5. Go watch that Youtube video, or better yet, play the game. Otherwise, if you're wanting to see the movie in theaters, I give it 2 stars out of 5. At least Shadow is in it, but it could have been a masterpiece.

Movies

The Day the Earth Blew Up: A Looney Tunes Movie ?????

I didn't hear about this movie until I saw it listed at my local theater. Did they spend no money whatsoever on promoting it? The Day the Earth Blew Up has phenomenal animation, taking me back to watching those classic Looney Tunes cartoons as a kid. The animators clearly crafted this movie out of great love for that old style of animation. The movement of the characters is fluid and exaggerated, allowing for so many great visual gags. Do you know that thing where for the first season of an animated show the characters look wild and wacky, and then as the seasons progress, the animation locks in and closely follows the character models and the characters look smoother and prettier, but stiffer? The animation in this movie is a breath of fresh air in defiance of that phenomenon. They clearly gave their artists plenty of space for creativity.

Unfortunately, the superb animation doesn't save this movie from being boring and falling into the kid's movie trope of character growth that feels hamfisted and artificial. Daffy as a character is obnoxious, though that's not too surprising. Porky Pig is actually fine, though there is a running gag about sharing a stutter with his love interest Petunia that is cringy to watch. Petunia might be my favorite character. She has perhaps the most depth out of any of the characters, and I found her romance with Porky to be endearing. The movie has some genuine laugh out loud moments that made me worried I was being disruptive in the theater. These moments thankfully punctuated the overall dull story.

All in all, I can't recommend this movie. I think it would be great if its already short 90 minute time were cut in half, or even a third. 3 out of 5 stars.

Movies

Black Bag ?????

One way that I gauge my interest in a movie is by how often I think about the time or how long the movie is. During this movie, I do think I checked the time once, but I was fairly well engaged the whole time. Part of that is due to the movie's relatively short run time, 90 minutes as opposed to the more common 2 hour movie. My opinion is that if you have a 2 hour movie, it had better be justified by some amazing character development or storytelling. I'm always thinking about what could have been cut in a movie to keep the plot moving. This movie was not like that. 90 minutes was the right amount of time for the story they were telling.

The movie is essentially a murder mystery set in a James Bond-esque setting, complete with Pierce Brosnan in an essentially cameo role as the director of whatever shady MI6 or CIA type workplace the movie takes place in. The main character George must work out which of his five co-workers sold a MacGuffin to the Russians. But, uh-oh, one of the suspects is his wife! This movie has all the regular classic mystery tropes, like gathering all the suspects into one room together to suss out the killer, red herrings, twists, and suspects doing bad things without actually being the real villain. It's an enjoyable romp all in all. I liked that the movie was suspenseful and engaging without needing a lot of action.

My biggest complaint is that I felt no emotional ties to any of the characters, especially the main character George, who really should have been more likeable. He shows very little emotion through the whole movie, with the exception of one scene where he looks a bit nervous for a few minutes. Even the other characters accuse him of being a machine. I actually don't hate stoic characters, but I think a good stoic character needs at least one scene where they break to show you their humanity, as well as a tragic backstory to justify their stoicism. I understand where the filmmakers were coming from, however. This was a movie about killers who have...creative ethics. While George is solving the mystery, the viewers are trying to understand the varying moral codes of the characters.

In a lot of movies, we see action heroes and spies who seem to let their jobs envelope their entire lives and identities, and in this movie we see some of the consequences of letting your work life bleed into your personal life. I enjoyed thinking about that, though the lives of these characters were so ridiculously over the top that it's hard to relate to them, so some of this messaging misses the mark.

Overall, I can recommend this movie if you like spy movies or classic murder mysteries, especially since it's short enough not to be a big event to go to. I think it could have been better if the main characters were more emotional and relatable. Still, 4 out of 5 stars, I probably will never see this movie again, but I am glad I did see it.

Movies

Ash ?????

Ash is a sci-fi horror movie that leans more on horror than sci-fi. When I watch sci-fi, I want to think about how future technology might impact our humanity, identities, or lives while also commenting on the current state of the world. That's not what I got from this movie, it was much more like a monster of the week, but set in space. I'm not a horror kind of person, so it's not too surprising that this movie scared the shit out of me. It leans into the trope of "Wouldn't it be scary if you couldn't tell what is real and what isn't?" and yeah, that's definitely scary. I don't like thinking about that. But still, I was rooting for the main character, engaged in her plight, so I'll give it points for that. The effects and the setting were also interesting, so points there too. But I didn't really think this movie said anything unique or profound. It was just another alien monster movie. 3 out of 5 stars, obviously I will never watch this again, but I don't regret seeing it, it was a competently made movie.

Movies

Rule Breakers ?????

Rule Breakers is a film by Angel Studios, which is based in Utah. Maybe you can guess what kind of studio they are. I previously watched the movie Homestead by the studio, and even though I have major issues with the film, I actually thought that Homestead, though it wasn't that great of a film, had a solid story that could have been helped by better dialogue and a bit less Christian propaganda. Rule Breakers, however, was terribly boring, with a story so slow, that I was glad there was no one else in the theater with me, so that I could play on my phone, or get up and do jumping jacks without bothering anyone. Rule Breakers is essentially a sports movie, but instead of sports, it's based on the true story of the all girls robotics team from Afghanistan who almost didn't make it to their first competition due to their US visas being denied. The movie relentlessly bashes the patriarchal culture of Afghanistan which had my Cross-Cultural Studies degree fighting with my Social Work schooling. On the one hand, obviously Afghanistan is a pretty terrible place for women, and it's great to see a real life story of women escaping that. On the other hand, I can't help feeling that Christians making such a movie is still a kind of subtle propaganda trying to convince us, "See? That religion is SO bad to women. Isn't Christianity great by comparison?" I'll admit that I went into the movie with very low standards due to my own negative experience with Christianity, and I'm sure that influenced how I perceived the movie. But still, there was something off about the way the violence of Afghanistan was portrayed. It felt like they were trying to raise the stakes of the movie without affecting the characters' actions or showing them struggling emotionally. The most was when one of the character's father dies, but even then, they don't change any plans at all. Still, in the second half of the movie when the team is finally competing in several robotics competitions, I was definitely rooting for them. I think more than half of this movie could have been deleted, and more time could have been spent on the girls and their character development. 2 out of 5 stars, I'm sorry that I wasted 2 hours on this boring movie.

Movies

In the Lost Lands ?????

This was not a good movie. It was too dark (visually, not thematically), I laughed out loud at some of the clunky dialogue, the setting made little sense, and the characters weren't all that interesting. I looked at my watch halfway through surprised that the movie wasn't almost over yet. But it has a certain charm to it. The movie is set in a post apocalyptic world, so modern technology is mixed with medieval style elements. I practically lost it when the bad guys confront the main character, who has the power to create illusions if she is looking into people's eyes, so the bad guys are all wearing aviator sunglasses which block her power. Incredible. There is a continuum that starts with movies apologizing for themselves, to being genuinely heartfelt, and all the way to being pretentious about themselves. This movie falls squarely into pretentious. But I prefer that over the movie that apologizes for itself. A fine romp, I will forget everything about this movie in a few days, here's a way too generous score: 4 out of 5 stars, I don't recommend, but I'm glad I saw it.

Movies

Mission: Impossible ?????

There were a lot of movies that I wasn't allowed to see as a child. This wasn't one of them. I saw this when I was young enough both to not question the silly gadgets that barely make sense, and to not understand the meaning of them. Why does Ethan Hunt have a thingy he has to screw onto the pay phone? And what does it do? Apparently...it encrypts the call? How does putting a gadget on top of a zip drive and watching the number go up indicate that it's a tracking device? How does sending a usenet message to "Max@Job 3:14" actually successfully get a message to Max???? All these silly gadgets endear me to this movie, even as I think about how I loathe when modern movies bypass plot problems by duct taping over them with silly future tech. Instead of being overwhelmed by tech, this movie is grounded in the realism of the analog film of the 90s, filming on location with sparse CGI as far as I could tell, excepting the helicopter in the tunnel at the end. Tech isn't at the center of this movie, instead Ethan's quest to figure out the motives of his team members is what makes this movie exciting to watch. At the same time, it's unfortunate that the movie uses the lead female character as an object to develop not her own character, but to develop the hero and villain's characters. The hero almost loses the battle due to his weakness in being tempted by her, and the villain shows his villainy by coldly discarding her.

Overall, if you're willing to laugh at the silly bits, this movie is worth a watch. 4 out of 5 stars.

Movies

M:i-2 ?????

In the first Mission Impossible movie, Ethan Hunt stops his teammate Krieger from killing a CIA security guard who discovers them in the middle of their operation. "Zero body count," he demands, showing that compared to his adversaries, who don't show any hesitation in increasing their body count, his goal isn't just to steal the thing he needs, it's to show IMF that he's not the bad guy. The Ethan Hunt of M:i-2 has no such qualms as his former self. He mows through enemies like he's in a video game, and they keep popping up to be mowed down like they know they're NPCs. This is a movie built for spectacle. While the first Mission: Impossible movie made catching a single bead of sweat into a thrilling scene of epic suspense, M:i-2 makes a potential worldwide pandemic into a boring slog of unnecessary slow motion and close ups.

The end of the first Mission: Impossible is Ethan Hunt constantly one step behind his adversaries, methodically gaining ground on them and carefully taking advantage of the opportunities presented to him. And it's personal for him. He's up against two people who betrayed him and killed his friends. When he plants an explosive, jumps, and—somehow—propelled by the explosion lands on a moving train, it's satisfying, despite its implausibility, because we know what this means to him. The emotional stakes are high. But when Ethan Hunt in M:i-2 shoots the tenth henchman coming after him in a car, or a motorcycle or whatever, there's no sense that once he kills the next henchman, he will have achieved his goal. Even his fight with the main baddie suffers from this problem. A good fight tells a story. I'm engaged with fights when I understand why each blow is aimed, who is winning or gaining, and what they are fighting for. The final fight is just two dudes wailing on each other until one of them can't get up anymore. What is the fight for? Ethan Hunt is carrying the antidote that he must get to his girlfriend in time. The antidote is in his jacket, but at the beginning of the fight, he throws his jacket off, and it's just lying on the ground, not participating in the fight. A good fight would have made the antidote visually and strategically central to the fight. But this is not a thoughtful movie.

Unfortunately, similar to the first movie, the main love interest in M:i-2 is mostly just a prop to show the bad guy how bad he is, and to give the good guy some emotional stakes. She gets one good moment of agency in the middle, but mostly we get to see her fall for Ethan Hunt after one evening of romantic chemistry, and then abused and coerced by her ex boyfriend for the rest of the movie.

If you're willing to turn off your brain and laugh at the absurdity of it all, this movie is bearable. But it shows that there must be some rule about franchises that even though they might start off in a specific niche genre, they tend to end up as generic action. At least, that was my take on the Fast and the Furious series. I've seen the 3rd and 4th Mission Impossible movies, and remember liking the 3rd, but I will report back on how much of that is just nostalgia. 3 out of 5 stars, definitely skippable.

Movies

M:i:III ?????

This movie was one of my favorites movies for a while. A few years back I watched it with someone who nitpicked all the ways that the movie wasn't realistic, so I was worried that on rewatch I would find that I had given it more credit than it deserved. Maybe it's nostalgia, but I still think this movie is spectacular. It's a masterclass in how to create and sustain tension, while not losing sight of the personal stakes for the protagonist. Even though I knew exactly what was going to happen in each scene, I was still at the edge of my seat, worried for the characters that I already knew would make it to the end. In the last Mission Impossible movie, Ethan Hunt was just an overall cool guy who could handle anything thrown at him. In this movie, he's still ridiculously talented at what he does, but it feels like he's constantly at the edge of his abilities. In the last movie, he gets hit and shrugs it off without it seeming to affect him, but in this movie, you can see him struggle to recover his wits and keep going every time. Tom Cruise's acting sells this, as well as the writing and directing, giving each of these hits its proper weight to make the whole film feel like Ethan Hunt could fail at any given moment, but he doesn't, in large part because his love for his wife is so strong and desperate. Though his wife is the damsel in distress for most of the movie, she does get a solid scene where her choices and brains save Ethan Hunt from certain death. She feels like more of a character than the previous two love interests, even if most of her character traits are in service of their relationship. It's progress. And yes, there's a lot in this movie that is not realistic. Ethan Hunt should have died many times over, and setting up an entire operation in 2 hours feels literally impossible, but if you accept the reality where there's a government agency called "Impossible Mission Force" and suspend disbelief, the movie does have a sense of internal logic that satisfies me. And there's another kind of realism in this movie that helps it feel immersive. The movie was shot on location without a lot of green screen as far as I could tell. Tom Cruise really is running through the streets of Shanghai, and he interacts with real objects in real, physical sets. I've seen too many MCU and Disney CGI fests, so it feels like a breath of fresh air to have no trouble believing that what I'm seeing is at the very least physically possible, if not realistically plausible.

Though I like this movie more than the first Mission: Impossible, I do think it lacks something that the first one had. This one beefs up the action and suspense, and even though I just praised this movie for doing tension very well, I tend to enjoy when movies take their time and give space to breathe. That action replaces a lot of the drama of personal betrayals, double agents, and false identities, which works for this movie in its own way, but still feels like a loss for the character of the Mission: Impossible franchise. It still stays truer to Mission: Impossible than M:i-2 does, but that's not very hard to do. All in all, this is my favorite movie of the franchise. 5 out of 5 stars, I can easily recommend this as one of the top action movies of all time.

Movies

Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol ?????

The Mission Impossible movies shine most when they are grounded in some kind of reality. In the first movie, it makes no sense that there's a room where you can't touch the floor, and it senses temperature, and it detects sound, but then Tom Cruise is hanging by a wire, and the sound cuts out, and the tension rises as we see this very physical stunt being performed for real. The ridiculousness of the contrivance matters less when you see that these stunts are real. In Ghost Protocol, Jeremy Renner wears a "magnetic suit," drops a hundred feet, is caught by a magnet, and hovers around in a server room. It's very silly, and it looks fake, because it is fake. This movie is contrived to make a plot to watch exciting things happen to a group of people. It's silly and forgettable. The team Ethan Hunt leads is made up of misfits, and they have to work together in order to win the plot. Hearing Tom Cruise tell his team that they worked well together made me feel like I was watching a kid's TV show where they have to spell out the moral lesson learned at the end of the episode. But the most egregious sin this movie committed was breaking up Ethan Hunt and his wife, making the poignant wedding scene in M:i:III lose its meaning. I got a spoiler that she returns in a later movie, so I'll hold out some hope for that, but not too much. They're as likely to kill her off as to make her a real character. And speaking of love interests, this one teases a bit of chemistry between Ethan Hunt and his teammate, and she does have a reasonable role, but she feels one dimensional as a character. Still waiting for a proper female co-lead in one of these movies. 2 stars out of 5 because I'm so annoyed about Ethan Hunt's wife.

Movies

Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation ?????

Alright, here we have it. The first Mission: Impossible movie to have a female co-lead who is a full character, and a match for Ethan Hunt himself. She even saves Ethan from drowning, and it's a skill she has over him that was previously set up, so it's believable. Props to the movie for this. But overall, I was fairly bored watching this movie. The scenes involving Jeremy Renner and Alec Baldwin I found boring. Ethan Hunt comes off as a crazed conspiracy theorist, even though we all know he's right. It all comes to a head in the finale where he's proven right, which, I'll admit, I found enjoyable. But the stunts are just okay, like I feel like I've heard that Tom Cruise really had to hold his breath for a long time for this stunt, but when he was underwater, for some reason it didn't feel realistic. I know I've been harping on this realism thing too much for this series. Maybe it's not important. Maybe I'm getting fatigued by too much Mission: Impossible, with 5 movies in 6 days. So far, I think Mission: Impossible peaked with M:i:III. And my earlier prediction is so far holding out: the series is drifting away from the spy genre into action, complete with a shift in tone just ever so slightly towards too much comic relief, as seen by Benji's character, introduced in movie 3. They do try to do some of the betrayal stuff here, but I don't think they commit. We're supposed to wonder, like Ethan Hunt and his team do, whether his love interest will betray them all. But we're given too much information. The movie doesn't commit. The first Mission: Impossible movie committed hard to the will she/won't she be a femme fatale. And I don't count the other character who has a betrayal, because I just don't care about them. A betrayal twist has to mean something personally to the characters, and to the audience too. Maybe the problem is that once you put a twist into your movie, then when the sequel doesn't have one, people are disappointed, but when you put one in, people are looking for it, so it doesn't feel that good. Anyway, I want to be entertained. Surely these last three movies will do that for me. I said earlier that I had only seen the first 4 movies, but I actually saw this one too, I just didn't remember it at all. 3 out of 5 stars. It's fine.

Movies

Mission: Impossible - Fallout ?????

After a couple of duds in the series, Mission: Impossible - Fallout comes back swinging, with the record for the most amount of times I stared at my TV screen, mouth agape, saying something stupid like "Holy shit!" while another incredible stunt ratchets up the tension on this movie which, if it has any flaws, it's that it is too exciting and stressful, not giving enough breathing room. In that sense, this one resembles M:i:III the most. I complained about the fourth movie, Ghost Protocol, unceremoniously making the storyline about Ethan Hunt's wife meaningless. This movie fixes that in a satisfying way, both for the viewers like me, as well as for Ethan himself.

I really enjoyed the clarity of the cinematography of this movie, and the series in general. This movie proves that you don't have to put your action in the dark or shake the camera around a bunch in order to make it exciting. Some people are nostalgic for old school film over digital cinematography, but I actually prefer movies that look like this one, ironically for the same reason that people prefer film. It's about the immersion. Digital cinematography has become loaded with visual effects, and so brings to mind fakeness for a lot of people, who understandably feel more immersed in analog film, which brings to mind the physical reality of 80s and 90s movies. But Fallout doesn't feel like a movie with a bunch of visual effects and CGI, though I'm sure it's just loaded with them. Instead, the crispness of the cinematography immerses me in a different way, removing the barrier of the medium that sits between me and the action, making me feel like I am there inside a crashing helicopter along with Tom Cruise experiencing the same stress and excitement. This movie makes the whole series worth watching, in my opinion, and also proves the rule that the best Mission: Impossible movies are the ones where Ethan Hunt's hair is short. Five out of five stars, you don't want to miss this one.

Movies

Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One ?????

Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One follows a great tradition in this series of an inconsistent naming scheme, with the next movie totally ditching having "Part 2" in its name. This movie, while not quite living up to its predecessor "Fallout," still delivers action that makes me excited that I get to see the final film in IMAX tomorrow. When I started watching this movie, I groaned when I realized that the antagonist was going to be an AI. But the movie doesn't fall into some of the worst tropes of Hollywood AI characters. The next movie could ruin everything, of course, but I'm still eager to find out the answers to my questions about what is really going on in this movie, and how this AI plot is going to play out. Ironically in a movie about the dangers of computers and the need for a human touch, I noticed a fair amount of CGI in this movie. But I forgive it, because it didn't totally take me out of the action.

This movie brought humor back into the series in an interesting way. A lot of the humor comes from physical action instead of from quips by the characters. I enjoyed it, though it may have been a bit much. I guess I complained a little about the last movie having no breathing room, so watching a car chase scene that seemed to be solely included for its humor was an interesting choice, and not necessarily a bad one. But the scene where Ethan Hunt lands in a train car after parachuting off of a cliff and saves the day by accidentally knocking out one of the bad guys did make me groan internally even as I laughed externally.

Overall, I enjoyed this movie, but it fell a bit short of the previous film. So 4 out of 5 stars.

Movies

Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning ?????

It's been about a month since I saw this one, so I had to read the Wikipedia article to remember the plot. I also started the review for the previous movie the day after I saw it, but didn't upload it till today, so I forgot an important part that I'll put here. In the previous movie, they killed off Ethan Hunt's love interest, and it seems like they only did that to introduce a new one that he has in this movie. I take major points away for that. But in this movie, the stunts are great, but the thing that made the last movie good, having the villain be a smart, almost prescient AI, is almost completely discarded here, even though the story continues with the same plot line. This movie was built for nostalgia, and I think it worked as far as that goes, with plot elements from many of the previous movies getting threaded into this movie and tied up in a neat way. There was a meta commentary about how each of the movies raised the stakes for Ethan Hunt, who constantly doubles down on gambling more and more lives to save the lives of the people he loves, leading up to this final gamble of the entire world's future. I think this also worked for this movie. I'm giving this movie 3 stars, but I waffled back and forth between 3 and 4 stars.

Ultimately, if you want to know if it's worth watching the full series, I would say yes, and this movie, though not the best of them, is a solid ending to the series, satisfying enough as endings go. If you just want to watch the best of the best Mission: Impossible movies, then watch Mission: Impossible, M:i:III, then Mission: Impossible - Fallout, and end it there. I don't think you're missing too much. But you could add the last two to that list. They're really not bad.

Movies

Superman ?????

I guess it's movie season, because this week I watched both Elio and Superman, and during the movies, I didn't look at my clock or wonder when they were going to end even once. It's a nice feeling. The 1978 Superman movie was one of my favorite movies growing up, and apparently James Gunn is also a 1978 Superman fan, because even though the movie avoids all the cringey nostalgia traps, it still hit some hidden nostalgia button in me. Perhaps the most obvious is that John Williams' Superman theme is played often, almost too often, and yet each time I heard it I felt like cheering as I watched Superman triumph over the baddies. The movie also puts Superman in a universe more akin to his golden age comics than the dark universe that Zach Snyder created for the character. It's a refreshing take. Sometimes it feels maybe a bit too cartoony, but it doesn't sacrifice emotional depth. I do have some complaints on that front, though.

Towards the beginning of the movie, there is a scene where Lois Lane (who is already dating Superman, and already knows his secret identity) is interviewing him, and asking some tough questions about his recent actions where Superman essentially scares and bullies a fictional political leader in order to prevent a war. Superman gets angry at Lois, and doesn't see that he's done anything wrong, because his objective was to prevent deaths from war. But he doesn't really address Lois' concerns that he may have stirred up more trouble by taking things into his own hands. When I saw this scene, I was very happy. I like how this Superman can get angry, and be human. I think this highlights how being empathetic can lead to anger, and being angry can cause those who see the angry person as being a bad person, justifying and solidifying their own beliefs. I expected that Superman would have a character arc where him taking action without considering the broader impact of his actions would lead to some kind of conundrum that he would have to solve by not letting his anger guide his actions, showing to the world that he is in fact the best person for the job of protecting Earth. That didn't happen. He does get into trouble, but that trouble essentially starts a different arc, where he has to consider his heritage, and who has more influence on him, his biological parents, or the parents that raised him. I don't think this is necessarily a bad arc, but because the movie sort of started with one arc and then shifted to the other arc, it didn't do either arc as well as it could have. He got angry one more time, and it did seem to add to people having a negative view of him, but it didn't feel like he did anything different to change that view. He just saves the world like he would do anyway, and all was forgiven, by the world, and by Lois.

Regardless of this major flaw, which does set this movie back by one star in my opinion, I still highly recommend this movie. I feel like James Gunn gets Superman in a way that I haven't seen in a while. I enjoyed all the supporting characters as well, including Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen as well as Lex Luthor and his team of goons and cronies. (I appreciated the inclusion of Otis as a henchman of Luthor, a nod to Luthor's henchman in the 1978 film.) This Lex Luthor does feel like a real threat, like he's one step ahead of Superman the whole time, though he does devolve into incoherent cartoony madness at the very end.

This movie definitely has flaws, and could have been more emotionally moving, but it kept my attention for the entire runtime, and I was always rooting for the good guys to win, so it gets my recommendation with a solid 4 out of 5 stars. I'm just now learning that this movie is meant to be a soft reboot of DC, being the first movie in the DC Universe (DCU) which is totally separate from the the previous and totally different DC Extended Universe (DCEU). Since that is the case, I'm excited to see what they come up with, especially the next film planned for next year, Supergirl. I'm actually a pretty big Supergirl fan, so I hope they don't fuck it up!

Movies

Elio ?????

Once upon a time, every single Pixar movie was guaranteed to be an absolute banger, with NO exceptions. The 15 year run starting with the very first feature length CGI film Toy Story in 1995 up until the excellent Toy Story 3 in 2010 was legendary. The stories were filled with incredible character arcs and creative takes on beautiful fantasy worlds, leading to the meme that Pixar just asked "What if _____ had emotions?" and created the best possible film from that simple question. What if toys had emotions? What if bugs had emotions? What if monsters had emotions? What if robots had emotions? Then Cars 2 came out, and the bubble was burst.

The funny thing is, aside from Cars 2, Pixar doesn't actually make bad movies. Some of their movies just feel like they are missing that magic spark that I had come to expect from Pixar, that nebulous "What if _____ had emotions?" feel. But after a few okay movies, Pixar released Inside Out, answering the important question of "What if emotions had emotions?" and it felt like the magic spark was back. Now Pixar makes two kinds of movies, inoffensive movies, and emotional big hitters. Inside Out, Coco, Toy Story 4, Soul, Luca, Turning Red, Elemental, and Inside Out 2 all hit me with the feels, and if you haven't seen one of those, they're well worth the watch. Luca and Elemental are probably the weakest entries on this list, but I think they make it in by trying something new and creative, and I feel like they have something worthwhile to say. Inside Out, my favorite movie of all time, along with Coco are some of the best movies ever made of all time, and if you haven't seen them, oh my god why not, go watch them right now I mean it why are you still reading this they are so good please don't make me come to your house and force you to watch them they are important culturally and for your mental health so just do it. So where does Elio fit?

Well, Elio feels pretty derivative. It's like the backstory and setting of Lilo and Stitch mixed with the plot of The Owl House. Elio is a kid whose parents died, and is being raised by his aunt, but wishes aliens would come and take him away, because he has trouble fitting in on Earth. Then aliens actually do come and take him away, and shenanigans ensue when Elio pretends to be the leader of Earth in order to be accepted into the Communiverse, a peaceful group of diverse aliens living in an advanced space habitat. The plot is simple enough that I feel like I've seen this movie before. And there's some scenes that took me out of my suspension of disbelief, particularly a scene where the characters are in a spaceship dodging satellite debris. Like, come on, space is huge, that's not how it works. That's not even how it worked in an earlier scene in the movie, so why did it change? Elio changes too. In the beginning, he is an awkward kid who struggles to relate to others, but he doesn't seem to have trouble relating to the aliens who abduct him. He is more confident than is believable. And this definitely feels like a kid's movie. Elio is young, and the shenanigans are slapstick and childish. And I have several more gripes, so all in all I shouldn't have liked this movie...

But I cried like a baby numerous times, so I can't help but put this solidly in the category of emotional big hitters, answering the important question of "What if aliens had feelings?" as well as "What if lonely awkward kids had feelings?" and even "What if struggling parents had feelings?"

Maybe it was just the mood I was in when I saw it, but I think Pixar found that magic spark for this one, letting authentic emotions run freely throughout the movie, even if the story isn't always the strongest. I think that's the most important thing in a movie. When I go see a movie, I want to connect with the characters, and have my heart moved so that I am rooting for the characters to grow and to find their strength and their place in the world. For that reason I will heartily recommend Elio to anyone who wants to be moved in this way. I am probably going to see it again myself. So despite its flaws, I give it five out of five stars. And I can continue to be a fangirl of Pixar, because even while half their films are just okay, if the other half are like Elio, I don't want to miss a single one.

Shows

Shows

Sonic Prime ?????

I think I just have to admit I love animated movies and shows something like 2x or 3x more than live action movies. It's easier for me to forgive their flaws, and honestly, I love looking at colorful things on screen. I watched Sonic Prime to get more of my Shadow the Hedgehog fix, and though I was disappointed by a number of things in the show, I really enjoyed it, especially that one episode that exclusively featured Sonic and Shadow together. In fact, I would say that episode did good guys fighting each other in a frenemies style rivalry better than Batman v. Superman. Well, that's not that difficult. How about better than Captain America: Civil War? Yeah, that's my controversial opinion. It's just a shame that the show didn't feature the two of them together even more, because their relationship was a perfect match for the overarching theme of the show.

The lesson that Sonic has to learn throughout this show is actually pretty unique. Sonic's character flaw is also a strength for him. He believes that everyone has the capacity for good, and that people can just come together and agree on how to live in harmony without conflict. The problem is that his thinking is rigid, and he just assumes everyone is on board with his plans and ideas for the future. His optimism is endearing, but it leads him to have blinders on for how he might be stepping on others' toes without realizing it, assuming that what's best for himself is always best for his friends.

Most of his friends do go along with Sonic because he is a genuinely nice person who tries to help. But Shadow is a foil for Sonic, because Shadow is brutally honest with Sonic about how Sonic needs to change. They genuinely have amazing chemistry, and as opposites, they bring out the best in each other, Sonic keeping Shadow from being overly pessimistic, and Shadow keeping Sonic grounded in reality. It's super fun. I also may have gone into the show with the headcanon that they are totally in a relationship with each other, which I will say, there's not really evidence for, but also not really any evidence against that being the case. So it will stand in my head as my personal canon. They are a very cute couple.

Okay, what else is good here? Sonic travels to different dimensions, meeting three different versions of each of his friends, dystopian city themed, pirate themed, and jungle themed. As Shadow keeps reminding Sonic, they aren't his Green Hill themed friends, they are fully separate people with their own motivations and backstories, and I never felt like I was just watching duplicates. Some of the alternate versions become friends with each other in very sweet ways that were interesting to watch. I particularly like robot Amy Rose, "Rusty Rose," who I felt had a believable arc where she switches back and forth from bad guy to good guy.

The show throws in homages to various movies, and they all worked without being heavy handed. Like dystopian themed Tails has 7 mechanical tails in additional to his two organic tails, and the first time we meet him, he and Sonic fight on a train, in a clear reference to the Doc Ock fight in Spiderman 2. Very iconic, I enjoyed it.

There's sort of a twist at the end of season 2, where the villain switches from the alternate version of Eggman (more on that in a second) to a different, arguably more threatening villain, which I think is good in principle, but that brings me to my gripes about the show.

The entire third season of the show (each season is only 7 or 8 episode long) is basically one long fight. It should have probably been about 3 episodes, maybe 4. The villain's goals at one point even seem perfectly aligned with Sonic's but some bullshit reason leads them to fight anyway, which left me confused about what the plot even was anymore. The good guys set up multiple plans to assault the villain's lair only to not really make progress. In fact, that's a problem the entire show has. There are many fights, especially one-on-one fights, that are really fun to watch, with honestly amazing choreography that shows off Sonic's unique fighting style. And there are many fights where the villains can literally just conjure up infinite minions to fight, so it feels like fighting is totally pointless. As soon as they finish off one group of minions, another appears, and no progress is made. My guess is that this is one of those corporate problems, where the studio, Netflix, has requested a specific number of episodes of a specific length, so they have to fill up the time with this pointless fighting instead of making the best possible show.

The alternate version of Dr Eggman is actually 5 Dr Eggmans working together. This contributed nothing to the story. Two of the Eggmans are so cringy I could barely watch them on screen, a baby Eggman that babbles incoherently (but everyone in universe understands), and an elderly Eggman whose only character trait is "being old." These Eggmans don't feel very villainous, as they are constantly just played for laughs that fall empty, unless maybe you are very young. The story could be barely changed and feature just one alternative Dr Eggman, or even 3, as long as they ditched most of the "jokes."

Finally, I have to admit the animation quality is pretty low, although I think the animators used their budget well, putting time and effort into making Sonic's movements look hella cool, but the backgrounds definitely suffer a lot. Overall, I would recommend this show if you're looking for something lighthearted that's not a big time commitment Well, I guess if you think about 8 hours is a small commitment. It had a definitive ending, though, so it's not like you have to keep catching up. I seem to be in the minority in disliking Sonic 3, but I genuinely think this is a better representation of the Sonic Universe than those live action interpretations. Maybe it's my bias towards animation talking. But after Sonic 3, I really needed more of Sonic + Shadow, which I got by replaying Sonic Adventure 2, and then by binging this show. I give it 4 stars out of 5, I recommend this show, but I give no guarantee you'll enjoy it, since you have to look past a lot of junk to find the good bits.

Shows

Last Exile ?????

The anime Last Exile from 2003 is good, I'd give it 4 stars out of 5. I came for the exciting dogfights, I stayed for the complex politics and commentary on war and power. The ending is maybe a bit cheaper than I would have liked, but I don't think they flubbed it or anything. It's hard to bring in a show like this for a satisfying ending, when you have set up so many moving parts. They made sure they hit all the big points, even if it felt like a bit too easy of a win, it still felt earned.

All that's good, go watch the show! I want to rant about the romantic subplot of this show. Because it was very weird, and I think they were going for a certain kind of romantic tension, but I don't think they quite hit it. This was my second time watching the show, and I even still have memories of thinking about how weird it was for decades after watching it for the first time about 20 years ago. I have some ideas about how the plot could be improved, so I'm going to summarize the plot in the show, and then I will offer my modifications. So major spoilers ahead.

Claus Valca and Lavie Head are our main characters of the show, and also the main romantic plot. About halfway through the show, we learn their backstory. Their dads were best friends, and they were couriers who used vanships to deliver messages across the world of Prester. Vanships are little World War II style planes, except instead of using wings to fly, they use a basically magical element called Claudia. Importantly, vanships have two seats, one in front for the pilot, and one just behind this seat for the navigator. Vanships are often used to demonstrate relationships between characters, but I'll get to that. Claus and Lavie's dads head out on an important mission, to deliver a message from Anatoray to Disith.

The world of Prester is divided into two parts, Anatoray, and Disith, connected only by a dangerous area know as the Grand Stream. The dads are assigned a mission to deliver a peace offering from Anatoray to Disith, who have been at war due to Disith's weather getting to cold to survive in, and generally there not being enough resources to go around. Unfortunately, the mission fails, and both dads die in the Grand Stream when Claus and Lavie are just 7 years old. Lavie's mother was already dead, and Claus' mother dies 6 months later, leaving them orphaned. They have to sell their house in order to keep their dads' vanship, which they learn how to fly and take care of as they grow up. Soon they both become naturals in the sky, with Lavie as navigator and Claus as pilot. They survive on courier work, just like their dads, and the main story starts when they are both 15.

They take on a dying courier's mission to deliver a girl named Alvis to a flying air ship called the Silvana. Claus particularly feels responsible for her safety, and does not trust the Slivana or her crew to take care of Alvis. So he and Lavie stay aboard, at first in an adversarial position, but eventually they learn to trust the crew and feel that Alvis is in fact safest on board the Silvana and especially under the captain of the Silvana, Alex Row, and his second in command, Sophia.

Claus and Lavie's vanship is damaged, but the Silvana has its own vanships on board, kind of like an aircraft carrier. We meet another vanship pilot, Tatiana, and her navigator, Alis. Tatiana is initially cold with Claus and Lavie, partially because she feels that compared to her, Claus and Lavie are not very capable. This is due to the fact that the first time they fly in a combat mission, Lavie passes out, and decides that she does not want to fly in combat situations. Lavie says that she will continue to be a mechanic for Claus, and hopes that someday they will still fly together across the Grand Stream, just as their fathers tried to do 8 years ago. This is the start of my dissatisfaction. I think the messaging they are going for here is that everyone is forced to be in a war, and fighting is an evil necessity, so Lavie sees the evil part, and Claus sees the necessity part. But unfortunately, it weakens Lavie as a character.

Alex Row sees talent in Claus, and orders him to run an escort mission with him. He needs a navigator, and Alis volunteers. Alis has been dissatisfied flying with Tatiana, because she does not feel as free with her. Remember when I said that vanships demonstrate relationship dynamics? Tatiana and Alis feel like they are in a lebian coded relationship. Given that this is an anime from 20 years ago, you couldn't just outright say it, but it would have been pretty cool if they did. So Alis wants to fly with Claus, and Tatiana takes this as a slight toward her, and the next time there is a combat mission, Tatiana orders Claus to be her navigator. During the fight, Tatiana and Claus get separated from the Silvana, and crash land in a desert. There's a sort of bizarre subplot here. Before the fight, Lavie gives Claus a set of clothes to take with them just in case, and in the crash, Tatiana's clothes get some engine liquid spilled on them, so Claus give her the clothes that Lavie gave him to wear. When they return to the Silvana, Lavie is upset because she feels that it may mean that Tatiana and Claus were intimate with each other. It's true that Claus and Tatiana are much closer after the mission, and Tatiana seems to feel that Claus giving her clothes was an intimate act in its own way, but to me, it reads like Claus is just being the nice and pragmatic person he always is, and does what needs to be done for both of them to survive. But Lavie can't get over it so easily, but she also can't bring herself to ask Claus outright if he slept with Tatiana.

Eventually she tells him that she doesn't see the same sky as he does anymore, and that she doesn't like who her is becoming with him getting more into combat rather than peaceful flying. There is also one more bizarre thing that happens romantically. The first officer, Sophia, is revealed to be the daughter of the Emperor, and she is going to leave the Silvana to take hes place as the new Empress. Before she leaves, she has a conversation with Claus, and with no prior build up, she kisses him on the lips, and he seems to like it, and becomes mildly obsessed with her. I fully thought she was a 30 year old woman who was kissing a 15 year old boy, so it felt really weird and bad. Apparently she's only 19, but that's still quite the age gap, still a rather problematic power gap, and also there's nothing in the story that really supports her liking him in that way. She seems to like Alex Row, who is too obsessed with his own revenge arc and his own dead lover to even notice that she's interested in him. I think maybe the idea the writers had was to show that she was using Claus as a substitute for Alex, but it simply doesn't work for me.

Anyway, of course the romantic tension between Lavie and Claus resolves by...I guess time just goes by, and they both agree that combat sucks, but it has to be done in order to make the skies free again. So in the end, stuff happens, and Claus and Alvis are in Anatoray, while the Silvana is in the Grand Stream, on its way to Disith, and it's very important for Alvis to get to the Silvana in Disith for reasons I won't go into, so Claus and Alvis make their way to the Grand Stream. The

Silvana sends several vanships to relay Claus and Alvis to their destination, and of course it's Lavie who navigates for Claus in their dad's old vanship, and they make it through the Grand Stream just like they always dreamed of.

Okay, some things I love about Claus and Lavie. Their story is so tragic, and yet it's wonderful to see how they bonded together to survive through their childhood. They mean so much to each other, and they have good chemistry with each other because of it. I like the idea of them having some romantic tension. I can see how they would grow up with each other, and maybe they just assumed they would be together forever without thinking about the ramifications of that. I just think that in the story that was presented to me, there was no earned growth in their relationship. Things happened, and then they just moved on. So here's how I would have done it.

Everything happens as normal until about the middle of the story, when Claus and Lavie come back to the Silvana from their combat mission, which is a failure, just like in the original story. However, this time, it's not just Lavie's fault. Claus is also not a very good gunner. (This is actually kind of true in the original story. He wastes a lot of the very limited ammunition in trying to hit the enemy.) They fight a little, and blame each other for the failure. Later, Lavie comes to Claus and says that she wants to learn how to be a pilot. She's been stuck in the back seat too long, literally and metaphorically. Claus is skeptical, and says he would be worried about her passing out in the pilot's seat. Lavie goes away fuming. Lavie starts to realize that she's never put herself first in their relationship, and she doesn't know who she is without Claus, but she wants to find out.

Claus flies the escort mission for Alex with Alis as in the original, and then Claus flies as navigator with Tatiana. They crash land together, but there's no subplot with the clothes though. Instead, they come back, and clearly Claus is closer to Tatiana. Lavie is acting distant from Claus, but then she asks him if something happened between him and Tatiana. Angry at her, he says nothing happened. He goes to find Tatiana, and unexpectedly, Tatiana gives him a kiss. He can't stop thinking about it. Claus is unsure how he feels. Meanwhile, Lavie asks if Alis will help her learn how to pilot a vanship, and they train together. Though Lavie isn't as good of a pilot as Claus, it turns out she is a natural at being a combat gunner. In the original, Alex acquires a map of the Grand Stream, and I think it would make sense if Lavie were to study this map, and start to show that she is dedicated to learning the ins and outs of this dangerous place, full of fickle, deadly strong winds.

Tatiana and Claus kiss again, but this time Lavie spots them. Lavie goes and talks to Alis, and Lavie even tries to kiss Alis in revenge. Alis draws back, however, and tells Lavie that Lavie needs to talk to Claus because she can't expect him to read her mind. Eventually Lavie goes to Claus, and says that she was hurt seeing him kiss Tatiana, and she was hurt because she loves Claus, she wants to be with him forever, and if he's with anyone else, they won't be together. Claus awkwardly says that he hasn't thought of Lavie that way. Lavie runs away crying at this rebuff. Claus almost immediately stops feeling attracted to Tatiana, as he realizes that he's been suppressing his feelings for Lavie, subconsciously not wanting them to lose their childlike, innocent bond. Eventually, after several episodes of doubt and awkwardness, Claus goes to Lavie, and expresses this. Lavie directs Claus to hold her tightly, and they kiss for the first time. For the rest of the show, it should be clear that the two of them are more intimate with each other, with a lot of touching and holding each other. There is only one last thing to do, and that's to demonstrate their relationship in their vanship. Just like in the original, Claus and Alvis will be separated from the

Silvana, and need to get to back in order to win the fight. The Silvana is in the Grand Stream, being attacked by the enemy, the Guild, who has their own super dangerous equivalents to vanships. Lavie realizes that she needs to go back to get Claus, but Alex won't let her, because it's too dangerous. But she and Alis defy his order and go anyway, and Lavie proves that she deserves to be a combat fighter by expertly punching through the enemy's ships. They make it back to Claus, and Alis stays behind while Lavie and Claus fly back through the Grand Stream. Claus does the flying, but Lavie instucts him on the fly how to be a better gunner when they need it most.

And they make it through the Grand Stream, as was always their goal. And now they've advanced their relationship from that sweet childhood bond to a strong bond of respect for each other.

Well hopefully this made sense and was entertaining. At the very least, it's now out of my head, so I can go watch the next perplexing anime series.

Shows

Rick and Morty Episode Ratings

I'm watching through the series, and just going to write down my personal ratings and thoughts for each episode

Season	Episode	Title	Rating (out of 5)	Notes
1	1	Pilot	5	The start of it all, a must watch. Perfect pacing, love the cold open and "They're robots Morty!"
1	2	Lawnmower Dog	4	I enjoy the inception knock off storyline the most, the bit where they're deep inside the dreams having to remind themselves of the plot is too perfect.
1	3	Anatomy Park	4	The image of a gigantic dead old man being exploded above the US is amazing, plus Jerry's dad jumping in the closet with a superman costume is perfect. "Would you like to ride the bone train?"
1	4	M. Night Shaym-Aliens!	4	I love trying to figure out when Rick knew that he was still in a simulation, and wondering if he suspected Morty was a fake. "Hungry for apples?"
1	5	Meeseeks and Destroy	4	"I'm Mr. Meeseeks!" Iconic, not to be missed. A little uncomfortable with the jellybean scene though.

1	6	Rick Potion #9	6	The actual best episode in the entire series. I love Jerry's character arc here, and the solution to the main problem really elevates the lore.
1	7	Raising Gazorpazorp	3	Not terrible but not very impactful, plus somewhat problematic with its gender essentialism, though you could take it as parody.
1	8	Rixty Minutes	5	Improvised nonsense at its best, the first anthology episode of the series has to be the best. "It's just two brothers. . . "
1	9	Something Ricked this Way Comes	4	The pluto storyline is boring, but you don't want to miss this one for the iconic bits, like Summer and Rick getting roided up to beat down bullies, and "You pass butter." "Oh my god."
1	10	Close Rick-Counters of the Rick Kind	5	First episode that introduces a substantial continuity and expands the lore. Hard to forget the Evil Morty music.
1	11	Ricksy Business	4	Can't miss the introduction to Bird Person, of course. Solid episode.
2	1	A Rickle in Time	5	I love this type of "high concept" sci fi. The B story with the Titanic was pretty boring though.
2	2	Mortynight Run	4	I'm not a huge fan of the moonman song, but this episode has some of the best one liners "Oh boy, here I go killing again!"

2	3	Auto Erotic Assimilation	4	Somewhat thought provoking.
2	4	Total Rickall	5	Classic Rick and Morty. I'm still not convinced Mr Poopybutthole isn't a memory parasite.
2	5	Get Schwifty	4	A lot of laughs, what else can I say? Except "Get schwifty!"
2	6	The Ricks must be Crazy	5	The best episode of the season. "Keep Summer safe." Perfect execution of a clever concept, and hilarious through the whole episode.
2	7	Big Trouble in Little Sanchez	5	"Get your shit together, put it in a backpack, just get it together." I was laughing the whole time, so many good bits. I like Jerry's solution to the B story, I wonder what happened to goddess Beth.
2	8	Interdimensional Cable 2: Tempting Fate	4	Not as funny as the first, but still funny.
2	9	Look Who's Purging Now	4	Funny, but a little too gratuitously violent for me.
2	10	The Wedding Squanchers	5	I love the lore episodes. Having just read "The Sociopath Next Door," I was beginning to think of Rick as a sociopath, but he does appear to have something of a conscience here. It's fun to think about!

3	1	The Rickshank Rickdemption	5	I'm craving szechuan sauce now. Okay, maybe Rick is just a sociopath. It's still fun to watch him outsmart everyone around him.
3	2	Rickmancing the Stone	3	This one feels a bit preachy or forced with its "moral." Still has a few funny bits though.
3	3	Pickle Rick	5	"I'm pickle Rick!" There's a good reason that this one gets memed so much. Solid, fun story, decent monologue by the therapist.
3	4	Vindicators 3: The Return of Worldender	5	I guess we're just trashing on Rick this season, and I'm loving it!
3	5	The Whirly Dirly Conspiracy	4	It's got some strong moments and some weak moments. Am I grading these too well, or was early Rick and Morty just this good?
3	6	Rest and Ricklaxation	3	"In and out, 20 minute adventure!" Kept my attention at least.
3	7	The Ricklantis Mixup	5	Honestly kinda feels prescient, with the assassination attempt on the Morty candidate and then the very quick changes in the Citidel after the election. This one is the best episode in the season.
3	8	Morty's Mind Blowers	4	Not as good as Interdimensional Cable, but a good few laughs here and there.

3	9	The ABC's of Beth	4	"Don't jump a gift shark in the mouth" This one loses points for the very gross cannibal-incest plot point, but gains points for Beth's character arc.
3	10	The Rickchurian Mortydate	3	I'm ambivalent about this one. There are some funny bits, but I don't feel the ending with Jerry being reunited with his family is satisfying. I suppose that's the point, that Jerry and Rick are unlikeable for different reasons, and both are uncomfortable patriarchs.
4	1	Edge of Tomorty: Rick Die Rickpeat	5	"You little monster, I thought you were masturbating!" I love the concept of the death crystals and how Morty uses them. And the after credits reveal really pulls everything together. Best episode of the season
4	2	The Old Man and the Seat	5	OMG, confirmed, Rick uses Linux. Specifically he uses Debian, which is amazing. Also, this episode is very funny. Great character arcs.
4	3	One Crew over the Crewcoo's Nest	5	"You son of a bitch, I'm in!" I forgot "Elon Tusk" was in this. He's as terrible an actor as he is a...person.
4	4	Claw and Hoarder: Special Rick Tim's Morty	2	Maybe the first real dud in Rick and Morty. Boring, weird and unnecessarily sexual/incestuous.

4	5	Rattlestar Ricklactica	4	Time travel shenanigans. I'm pretty sure it doesn't make sense. Snake jazz.
4	6	Never Ricking Morty	4	Not as many laughs, but I love this kind of story. Very meta, with Story Lord.
4	7	Promortyus	4	I like the concept, and I like the way the story is revealed non linearly
4	8	The Vat of Acid Episode	4	OMG, Rick is such a psycho. Includes a great bit of non verbal storytelling.
4	9	Childrick of Mort	4	"Getting high and playing video games is the best!"
4	10	Star Mort Rickturn of the Jerri	4	I do always like the lore episodes, and space Beth is a great addition to the cast. But this episode felt too short, like they tried to cram too much into 25 minutes.
5	1	Mort Dinner Rick Andre	4	Classic Rick and Morty. "Fuck off, I'm a time God!"
5	2	Mortyplicity	5	Another one of those sci fi concept episode that I really like. Decoys. My favorite episode of the season, except maybe the final episode? Best non-lore episode for sure.
5	3	A Rickconvenient Mort	4	I didn't laugh much, but I liked the stories of both Planetina and the apocalypses. The animation of Summer averting an apocalyse is actually really good.

5	4	Rickdependence Spray	2	Yuck. Was this necessary? I didn't give it the lowest rating because I did laugh a little.
5	5	Amortycan Grickfitti	3	Boring for the most part, but not terrible. It's the one with the demons who enjoy pain.
5	6	Rick & Morty's Thanksploitation Spectacular	3	Not particularly interesting but not offensive.
5	7	Gotron Jerrysis Rickvangelion	4	A point away for integration of the giant incest space baby, but otherwise I loved it. The voice overs were great!
5	8	Rickternal Friendshine of the Spotless Mort	4	More lore. Pretty good.
5	9	Forgetting Sarick Mortshall	4	"Rick and Two Crows forever!"
5	10	Rickmurai Jack	5	Satisfying ending (?) to Evil Morty's arc. Makes me think about philosophy and stuff.
6	1	Solaricks	4	Solid lore episode "Parmesian. Gross."
6	2	Rick: A Mort Well Lived	4	Solid, but not too many laughs.
6	3	Bethic Twinstinct	4	I found this funny. Is it bad that I think it's totally cool to make out with a clone of yourself?
6	4	Night Family	3	It's fine. I have lost all sense of whether my ratings have any kind of objective meaning

6	5	Final DeSmithation	3	It's fine, I actually laughed quite a bit, but it left me feeling empty...or maybe I just feel empty right now.
6	6	JuRicksic Mort	3	Actually pretty funny, but missing some kind of spark?
6	7	Full Meta Jackrick	3	Good concept with all the meta stuff, but actually kind of boring. Missing something, maybe heart? I don't know what that means.
6	8	Analyze Piss	4	I had a good couple of laughs, but ultimately, this one fails to feel very great. "Is that man dead?" "Is everything here confidential?" "Everything but murder" "Then he's fine."
6	9	A Rick in King Mortur's Mort	2	So boring. No stakes at all. Nice reference to the vat of acid episode though.
6	10	Ricktional Mortpoon's Rickmas Mortcation	3	Not too interesting, but not too bad. I ended up like Robot Rick
7	1	"How Poopy Got His Poop Back	3	Pretty generic
7	2	The Jerrick Trap	5	First episode that made me laugh hard in a while. The new amalgamation of Rick and Jerry are good.

7	3	Air Force Wong	5	I really liked the story of this one. I think I like Rick and Morty more for the fact that any crazy premise is possible, and the creators can deliver great stories based on those premises. Laughing out loud is a bonus, but not necessary for me to feel good after watching an episode. Like this one. This one's the one with Virginia
7	4	That's Amorte	5	Now I'm hungry for spaghetti. Just kidding. I laughed so hard.
7	5	Unmortricken	5	Holy shit. Great lore episode. I forgot everything about this episode since last time I watched it, including Evil Morty. Great characterization.
7	6	Rickfending Your Mort	5	"I'm a leg Morty!" This season's version of a clip show or anthology is very funny, and the framing story is good on its own as well.
7	7	Wet Kuat Amortican Summer	2	Not a fan. Maybe it's because I haven't seen Total Recall. Just kind of annoying and gross.
7	8	Rise of the Numbericons: The Movie	3	I guess not the worst? I didn't really enjoy it
7	9	Mort: Ragnarick	4	I liked this one. Not top quality, but close

7	10	Fear No Mort	4	Really good character arc, interesting concept, I wouldn't want to miss this one if I watched the series again, but it does feel like it's missing a little something.
8	1	Summer of All Fears	4	Funny! Pretty good start to the season

Shows

Rick and Morty ?????

I just rewatched all of Rick and Morty in anticipation of season 8 coming out some time in 2025. I've been a huge fan of the show since it was first released, but I remembered season 5 and 6 being a disappointment. However, I also remembered season 7 as being very funny. Weirdly, though, I had seen other ratings that showed that season 7 had a lower rating than season 5 and 6, which I thought was weird. I wanted to see if I was misremembering or if season 7 really did represent a potential comeback of the good old days of Rick and Morty. So I watched all seven seasons and gave every episode a rating out of 5.

Rick and Morty is definitely a hilarious show, but there were a lot of episodes that didn't make me laugh and yet I enjoyed them as much or more than funnier episodes. I think RIck and Morty succeeds not just because of the wacky humor, but also because the premise of interdimensional travel is so bonkers, that it allows for them to explore all kinds of crazy sci-fi scenarios, and the wild consequences that other sci-fi stories might gloss over. Nothing is off limits, though, as referenced in the show, they go pretty light on time travel, only visiting the concept twice. I'm a huge fan of sci-fi and animation, so this show is automatically in my top favorite shows of all time for that reason.

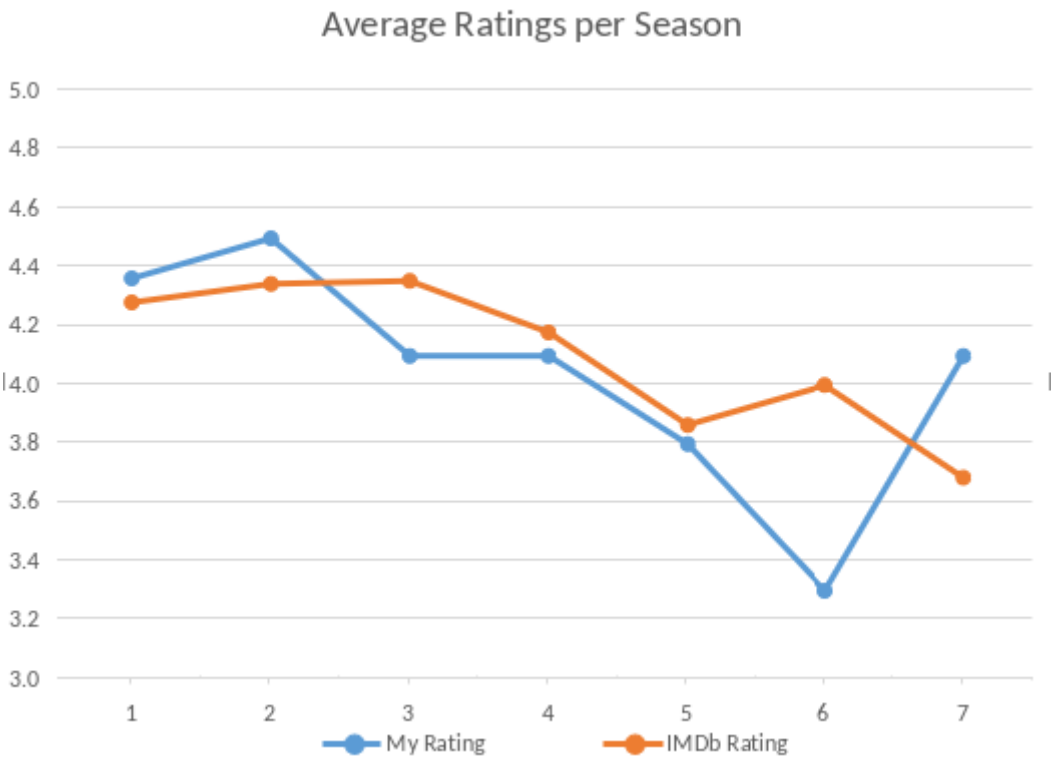
The characters in Rick and Morty show natural growth over the 7 seasons. For example Rick starts the show as a sociopath who doesn't care about his family since he knows that there are infinite versions of them, and he can always jump to another dimension and find new versions of them to spend his time with. In the later seasons, he grows to become attached to the specific family he has found, and starts to learn how to treat them better. Introduced in season 3's episode "Pickle Rick," his therapist Dr. Wong challenges Rick to face his problems instead of running from them, and he very slowly, very reluctantly begins to do so.

RIck and Morty has a mixture of serialized episodes and standalone episodes. I used to think that TV shows that are serialized are best, but now I believe that serializing a whole show can make the stories very tedious. Rick and Morty does a good job of mixing it up. I enjoy every single lore episode, but I think it would be too much if every single episode were a lore episode. Dan Harmon, the co-creator of the show, is brilliant as a writer. He created another of my favorite shows, Community, which shares its zaniness and pop culture homages with Rick and Morty. Dan Harmon uses his formula of the "Story Circle," derived from Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, which is what helps each episode feel like more than just a comedy sketch, with stakes, growth, and a satisfying story.

Comparing IMDb ratings (divided by 2 since they use a scale of 10) to my own ratings, I can see that what I originally thought was true. I enjoyed seasons 5 and 6 less than season 7, but reviewers on IMDb don't share my opinion. That was my subjective experience as well. As I watched seasons 5 and 6, especially 6, I just felt empty inside after most episodes. There were definitely a few duds

in season 7, but I rated half the episodes 5/5, while season 6 had no 5/5s and season 5 only had two.

Season	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My Rating	4.4	4.5	4.1	4.1	3.8	3.3	4.1
IMDb rating	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.2	3.9	4.0	3.7



My hypothesis is that since viewership peaked in season 3 (according to Wikipedia via Nielsen), the people who watched season 7 were mostly the people who enjoyed the humor of season 5 and 6, which was weirdly, a lot of incest jokes and other gross humor. Another hypothesis is that people didn't like the new voice actors for the titular characters Rick and Morty after Justin Roiland was forced out due to sexual misconduct allegations. For the most part, I don't mind the new voice actors. Morty in particular is pretty much impossible to tell apart from his old voice. However, there were several episodes where I felt Rick's voice didn't match as well, a little deeper and a bit less scratchy. And Justin Roiland gave the characters, especially Rick, more of an off-the-cuff feel, which I think is lacking in season 7. So it sometimes feels like I'm watching a different Rick.

Overall, the show is great, especially the first 3 seasons. If you haven't seen this show, I definitely recommend you watch it. You may want to skip some episodes, but you have to be careful, because there are some important (and fun) lore episodes even in the bad seasons.

Here's a helpful viewing guide if you just want to skip the worst episodes:

> Season 1: Watch all the episodes, though you can skip episode 7: Raising Gazorpazorp if you want to

Season 2: Watch all the episodes, every single one is a banger (at least a 4/5 on my scale)

Season 3: You can skip episode 2: Rickmancing the Stone. The last 2 episodes aren't my favorite, but they're somewhat important for the lore

Season 4: Watch all the episodes except DEFINITELY skip episode 4: Claw and Hoarder.

Season 5: DEFINITELY skip episode 4: RIckdependence Spray, and you can also skip episode 5: Amortycan Grickfitti and episode 6: Rick and Morty's Thanksploitation Spectacular

Season 6: You can skip episodes 5, 6, 7 and DEFINITELY 9

Season 7: You can skip episode 1: How Poopy got his Poop Back and episode 8: Rise of the Numbericons, and DEFINITELY skip episode 7: Wet Kuat Amortican Summer

If you just want to watch the best of the best episodes (according to both me and IMDb) along with the important lore episodes, here's the guide:

Season 1: 1,2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11 (skip 3 and 7)

Season 2: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10 (skip 8)

Season 3: 1,3,4,6,7,8,9,10 (skip 2 and 5)

Season 4: 1,2,3,5,8,10 (skip 4, 6, 7, 9)

Season 5: 1,2,8,9,10 (skip 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

Season 6: 1,3,4,8,10 (skip 2, 5, 6, 7, 9)

Season 7: 2,3,4,5,6,10 (skip 1, 7, 8, 9)

Books

Books

A Court of Thorns and Roses ?????

I just finished with the audiobook version of this. It was fine. I read a review just now complaining about some of the non-consensual sexuality contained in it, and while accurate, it's not like I wasn't expecting that in a book that I knew going into was a romance fantasy. It's a fictional book. The rules are different when you're reading a book, especially one meant primarily for women, where you can be completely safe while you read about fictional characters. However, as a woman who is attracted to women, this very straight romance was not terribly interesting to me for the most part. It's weird to hear faerie creatures talking in very heterosexually normative ways. As Prince Andhera says in "A Court of Fey and Flowers," I assume most faerie characters are all kind of pan, but I guess that's not the case in "A Court of Thorns and Roses."

The writing quality in the book was mediocre. At many points I laughed out loud at the awkwardness, but it takes more than the occasional or even frequent corny phrasing to deter me from a book. I did get into the story, and I was invested in the ending, even though I pretty much knew exactly what was going to happen. I didn't know going into the book that this was originally meant to be a retelling of Beauty and the Beast, but I picked up on it quickly. The protagonist, Feyre, is the most annoying character because she is so oblivious and stupid, missing all the obvious plot points. And the other characters are annoying because they warn her not to do things, but don't explain why not, then get mad when she disobeys them, which is something they should expect because she does it over and over again. The antagonist too, is kind of stupid and makes several deals that give huge loopholes to be exploited. The whole plot feels super contrived, so I had to just accept that that's how it was going to be, and I just had to follow it to the end.

Anyway, I'm not sure that I want to read the rest of the series. I should probably read other books that are more worth my time. But I'm stupidly curious about what will happen next. 3 out of 5 stars, I'm not sorry that I read it, but there was probably a much better use of my time.