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.

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