

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.

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