



MOVIES

SHACKLED TO ITS TONE

Project Hail Mary falls short despite its charm

MIAZEE ABRAR

Project Hail Mary has been widely praised for its optimism, for being “hopecore”, and there’s undeniably plenty here that is fun. It’s lively and carried by an effortlessly charismatic Ryan Gosling. It follows Ryland Grace, who wakes up alone in space with no memory of how he got there, only to realise he’s on a mission to stop the sun from dying and wreaking havoc on life on Earth. The film is engineered to please, and for long stretches, it succeeds. But that very impulse to constantly please becomes its biggest limitation.

The film feels locked into its own tonal box. When Grace first encounters an alien spacecraft, the film rushes to avoid any real sense of awe or terror. Instead of a moment of brief existential rupture, it ends up robbing both Grace and the audience of a rollercoaster of emotions.

The fragmented flashbacks also seem untethered to sensory triggers or internal struggle, which might have worked as non-linear storytelling. But because Grace’s amnesia is initially framed with high stakes,



the film’s failure to clarify what he gradually remembers versus what is being told to us creates a disconnect between his journey and the viewer.

The relationship between Grace and his alien buddy, Rocky, is the heart of the story, and it mostly works. However, if a story hinges on a bond, that bond needs more meat to it than banter. It needs evolution that reveals deeper dimensions of each

character beyond anecdotes, without which the emotional payoffs feel muted. This also manifests as a pacing issue. Exceeding two and a half hours, the film doesn’t significantly deepen the inquiry into its central dynamic to justify its length.

Project Hail Mary has its share of emotional peaks and valleys, but they feel like checked narrative boxes rather than earned milestones. The film is reluctant to sit with its darker moments. Gosling sheds tears, and composer Daniel Pemberton’s score soars, but these elements feel like all-too-visible hands of storytellers trying to pull at heartstrings.

There is nothing wrong with a spacefaring buddy comedy being just fun. But when a story places characters in situations that demand a deeper interrogation of theme and psyche, honouring those needs doesn’t mean shifting into “doom and gloom”. It simply means emotional honesty, which provides fuel for a story’s eventual triumphs. Without it, grand gestures of sacrifice, swelling music, and cosmic imagery become mere shorthand to conjure awe out of thin air.

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