

TV Shows Watched 2021

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2021/02/11 Inuyashiki



Based on the manga by Hiroya Oku, who also wrote Gantz - which I had assumed from the cheap shots one of the characters takes at that self-same comic in an early episode.

It's not entirely dissimilar to that series either - superpowers from body augmentation / powered suits. A middle-aged man with cancer gets an incredibly powerful robot body and goes from zero to hero but, at the same time, a teenager who's not really engaged with society or those around him also gets the same kind of powers and he goes the other direction... although he does move back and forth a bit between maniac and messiah.

It has some surprisingly emotional moments. It's also short enough to binge in one day. There were some really standout action moments but the potential of the robot bodies isn't really clearly defined enough to maintain the tension a lot of the time. They're kind of a deus ex personified, unstoppable and thus kind of boring ultimately - it's like my problem with Superman. What can you give him to do when he can do anything?

The plot kind of helps keep the momentum going though, as the stories of the two characters and the fallout from their actions dovetail into a climactic showdown and then a weird, emotionally heavy denouement where they end up having to work together... although not really? It's well-conceived exciting sci-fi with some solid characterization but a lot of the storyline doesn't hold up under scrutiny - on the other hand, it maintains the suspension of disbelief well enough that you don't really care. (Although I have to admit, I struggled a little with the airplanes...)

2021/03/19 Wandavision



This felt like a good first draft. It's as though all the pieces were in place and all the right ideas were in line but somewhere along the way ambition overtook talent. It was a fun enjoyable watch - never boring - but most of the depth it demonstrated in moments was fleeting. Super one dimensional "victory by any means" leader of the good guys who isn't really a good guy..

Snoooooooooze.

Katherine Hahn was stellar, on the other hand, even if her back-story seemed like a "oh shit how do we explain this" afterthought as opposed to a concept that had been intricately woven into the threads of Wanda's hallucinatory world from the get-go.

So we have some pretty amazing strong female characters in here - Elizabeth Olsen smashed it out of the park in every episode. Monica Rambeau was cool, and so was Darcy... but it did at times feel a little bit forced - like the sisters are doing it for themselves scene in Avengers: Endgame. It's difficult to write about why this feels weird, from a male perspective. I think my key example would be the binary opposition that's at play: all the 'good' SWORD members with speaking parts are mostly women. All the bad ones are guys.

I'm fine with this being the case to be clear, IF it's well-written and set-up... but it felt a bit clunky and one dimensional at times in this.

2021/03/26 Channel Zero - season 1 - Candle Cove



This was a *teensy* bit annoying - my sister sent me the picture of the tooth child to express her displeasure at being freaked out by it, I couldn't remember where I'd seen it, so I googled it and got hold of the first season... expected the tooth child to be just in one episode as I clearly hadn't done my research, so I was a bit miffed to find I was now locked in for 6 episodes to get to the bottom of the mystery.

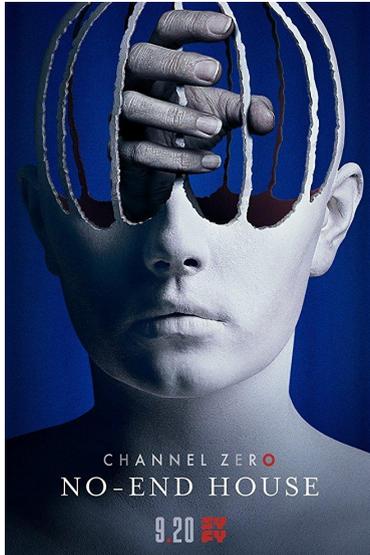
But it was - kind of - worth it. I really enjoyed the way the series was shot, very subtle, steady & muted; less of the jump scares - although there were a few of those, they tended to be well done, like you too were seeing something you couldn't believe was there, much like the characters did. The soundtrack was

really good - hardly noticeable but adding a little bit of creepy menace every now and then.

It is a horror series based on creepypasta so I'm not really sure how fair it would be to criticise characterization or plot holes... the latter of which there are ... more than a few... but I am happy to let them go.

I do feel like the sheriff didn't seem that bothered by the death of his wife. Amy wasn't too affected by the death of Simon - or maybe we just didn't see her reaction to it. Marla quite happily suffocated her only remaining child, which, now I think about it - why did Lily quite happily sit on her grandma's lap and say "KILL MY DAD PLEASE KTHX"? But that's by the by - the point was to deliver an unsettling narrative and I think this delivered. Worth a watch, probably not worth a rewatch.

2021/04/28 Channel Zero - season 2 - No End House



Gawd, this was a mess. I think it was an amazing premise, which was terribly executed and poorly explored.

Essentially the story goes thusly - a house randomly appears somewhere in the world and people venture inside, where they confront their worst nightmares and get freaked out by the - what I assume to be - tailor made terror that they are confronted with inside the walls of this place.

It got off to a pretty solid start with some good twists and turns and then... it all just kind of fell to bits. Pacing went to pieces, the story became really dull. There was a reveal about one of the main characters that didn't make a whole lot of sense...
ZZZZZZ...

It could have been a couple of episodes lighter and been much more enjoyable.

2021/05/02 Channel Zero - season 3 - Butcher's Block



So here's the thing with this show - I feel like once a season has ended there's a chance that the next one will be better, so off I went to try the next one and see if that premise was any better.

Well. No. Not at all. This was even worse. It seemed to be trying to emulate *American Horror Story*; more gross out horror than the creeping dread that I enjoy.

The acting was also pretty wonky - notably bad were the landlady & the young cop. Although if we're being fair, it's also possible that the writing was just so bad for them...

... but Rutger Hauer knocked it out of the park, so it's unclear to me where the issue actually lay.

It was a deeply dull and uninteresting experience though. Don't think I'll bother with the last season for a while.

2021/05/04 Line of Duty - series 6



This was a lot calmer and a lot less twisty and turny for the sake of it... I don't know though, it was pretty disappointing in terms of an ending.

I feel like I'm sick of the formula of the long build up with the sudden reveal and then a long expository interview in a police station... and it wasn't even that of an interesting reveal as it turned out. Although markedly more realistic I suppose than some of the previous ones.

Everyone was great in it, as usual.

JESUS MARY AND JOSEPH AND THE WEE DONKEY wins the award for the best Norn Iron to date in the show, if you ask me.

2021/05/06 The Falcon & The Winter Soldier



Perfectly perfunctory fun action story shenanigans. There's not a whole lot of depth to it, but it was well-written with some great jokes and a pretty rousing end speech by the new Captain America.

I enjoyed the choreography of Sam's fighting - there were some creative moments using the wings - but I'm so bored with superheroes punching things.

Also not terribly impressed by the Sharon Carter twist. Guessing this must be a *Secret Invasion* set-up?

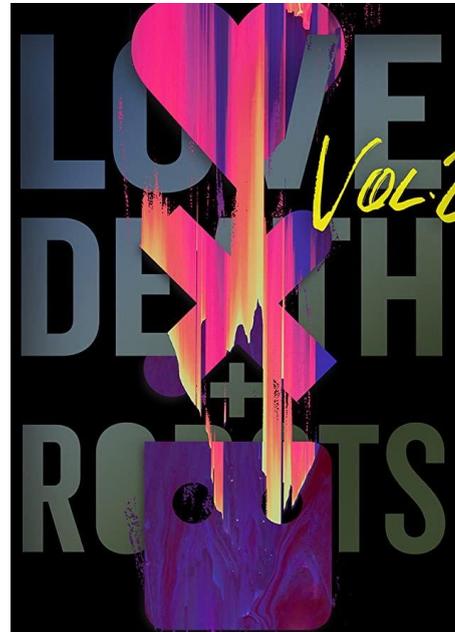
We'll just have to wait and see.

2021/05/16 Love Death & Robots volume II

Going to have to do this one a little bit differently than usual owing to the fact that there are 8 distinct episodes that are about 8 entirely different worlds (although an Easter egg shop name in the last episode harks back to Pop Squad) So I'm going to break it down by episode name.

I - Automated Customer Service

This was the opener, with some funky stylized animation design - kind of like those giant papier-mâché heads they use in festivals. (I was thinking about that one I saw in that show in Barcelona.) Anyway, it's like a light-hearted version of that Black Mirror episode where people are hunted by robot dogs. Except this time it's a vacuum cleaner gone all homicidal. Enjoyable.



II - Ice - more stylized animation! This is kind of the best thing about these series, the way they allow you to see all these different ways of representing the world. This was a fun bit of world-building speed run, literally and figuratively - two brothers, one is genetically modified, the other isn't and they run across some ice floes to escape some frost whales. Which is a weak concept to sustain anything longer than this episode, probably, but it was a fun 10 minutes or so.

III - Pop Squad - this one started off well but the more I think about, the weaker it gets: basically a future society where they live in skyscrapers above the (I'm assuming polluted) clouds and everyone is immortal but then every now and then someone gets bored and they run away. Then they have kids which is so illegal, the police go around executing children. That's the bit that really doesn't hold up under any scrutiny. Good animation, some interesting ideas not really fleshed out sustainably and a bit meh really, all things considered post fact.

IV - Snow in the Desert - yeah, another one of those high concept, does-it-actually-hold-up-for-very-long episodes... Snow you see is the guy's name, he's an albino with a magic hormone in him that lets him regenerate and live forever so he's being hunted by nefarious dudes who want to harvest this hormone for immortality. Good

premise, but not really executed in a way that dings my dong; it was like *The Mandalorian* as filmed by Tarantino. I did like the ending, I thought that that would have been a funky twist if it had been earned better rather than just OH LOOK REVERSO.

V - The Tall Grass - Now we're getting places. This was visually fantastic, kind of like animated oil paintings. A guy steps off a steam train in the middle of nowhere and some spooky beasts attack him in the grass. That's literally all that happens. Some great pacing and exploitation of the environment to build a sense of menace and fear... Derivative explanation for what is going on, but who cares? This was great.

VI - All Through The House - also great but for completely different reasons. Two kids get up because they think they hear Santa... and I suppose they actually *did* hear Santa... except Santa's not a friendly jolly big elf in this version.

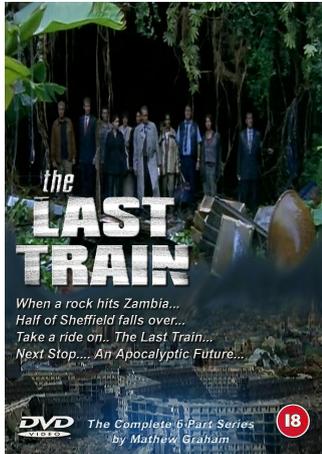
VII - Life Hutch - Heinlein-esque SF military fun times. Not much to the story but I thought it was well done and, much like **The Tall Grass**, it made good use of the story elements to raise the tension and keep the mood for the whole episode.

VIII - The Drowned Giant - so this started off okay but then I realised that the narration was *really really* lyrical and well-written... and then I clicked that it was a JG Ballard short story. It was spellbinding and really interesting to watch. Quite poetic and enigmatic. Plus there's a butchers shop named after Ballard hidden in the show, and the same toy shop that appeared in *Pop Squad* makes an appearance. Makes you wonder are all these shows in the same universe?

(No. The answer is no.)

A great set of fun distractions that I meandered through over the course of a semi-lazy Sunday. I like these compilations.

2021/06/14 The Last Train



So this popped up on reddit as a full series on YouTube. It's a British end-of-the-world kind of a deal, filmed in 1999. I remember somebody at uni way back when it came out mentioning it and me being intrigued by the premise.

It seems a bit ahead of the curve in terms of the whole end of the world movie things, but then again... these kinds of films / TV shows are kind of always popular.

British sci-fi shows like this (although it's more of a drama, really) tend to be pretty bleak and depressing and this was no different. It sees the characters slogging through 5 hours of TV representing a journey - largely on foot - from Sheffield to Scotland.

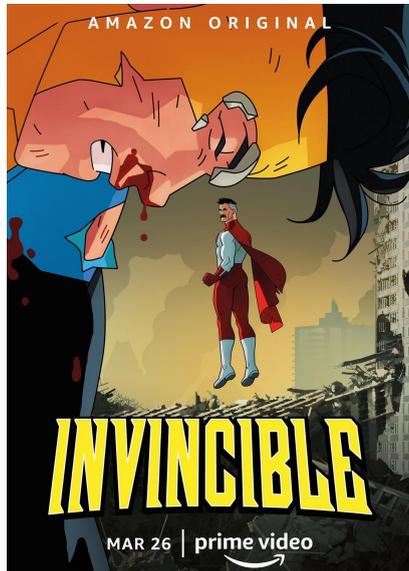
They're survivors who luckily got frozen on a train just as an asteroid hit Earth and caused an extinction level event.

They're on their way to Ark, which is where a bunch of the high and mighty got frozen.

The antagonists of the series end up being - DUH DUH DUH SPOILERS - the descendants of the inhabitants of Ark. Biggest issue I have with that is that nobody thought to mention this at any point between them first being discovered and the final conclusion?

It was very well-acted, nice and grim with some pretty messed up deaths. So, I would happily recommend this to anybody who wants some well-made post apocalyptic drama that is held together with some sci-fi premise sticky glue.

2021/06/17 Invincible



Yeah, hmm. Eh? Not really sure what to make of this. I mean, I was invested enough to watch it through to the end - the cast was great and the characters were interesting...

...but there seemed to be a bit of a disconnect between the animation style, the extremely derivative superhero names/styles and the world that had been built and the actual plot.

It was a bit of a weird tonal shift at times, and I thought the gore didn't quite work half the time, although I get that there was a point trying to be made there.

Quite yawnsome in ooooh what if a superhero was bad kind of a way - this is a very well worn and well trodden path to go down to be honest. Still though, it just about carried it off.

Bit of an odd show really. Didn't seem to cohere adequately but then again, the story was really well-carried off and it was a fun watch most of the time.

I want to say meh, but my heart's enough in it to say instead, just - eh?

2021/07/18 Gentleman Jack



Mum had mentioned this TV show for some reason ages ago but you know, I don't really feel like I have a lot of time for telly so I never committed to it.

Of course, since it is now intertwined with my future living place & I also discovered it was written by Sally Wainwright, I thought I'd give it a go and it was definitely worth it.

Suranne Jones played all the weird nuances to a character like this really well - she was simultaneously smug, manipulative, slightly irritating & yet also captivating, interesting, vulnerable and pretty damn cool.

Only complaints I could level at it were the random murder mystery subplot - erm, why? - and also the coal shenanigans that never went anywhere except to set up series 2, I'd imagine. There was zero closure on the Rawson twattishness and the nicer one of those two dipshit brothers just disappeared.

Bit uneven in terms of pacing and narrative then. This is, however, a very modern kind of an affliction is it not?

2021/07/22 Daredevil - season 3



I was reminded that I hadn't actually watched this yet via a reddit thread where it talked about how good this season was in particular.

I have to admit the whole Electra ninjas stuff lost me a bit in season 2. The supernatural seemed a bit much after all the grounded grittiness of season 1.

So this season was a pleasant surprise, although the usual Marvel netflix issues - far too long, a heck of a lot of padding and flashbacks at the weirdest points in the narrative. (I'm looking at you Karen in Vermont 15 minute opener yawnfest - this could have worked much better if it had been chunked and spread out over the whole season.)

No matter, it builds up pretty well, is gloriously stylish with brilliantly tense fight scenes and - despite a somewhat ridiculous origin story - the rise of Bullseye was pretty neatly done.

Enjoyed this, lots of fun.

2021/07/24 The Mandalorian - season 2



This is such good television.

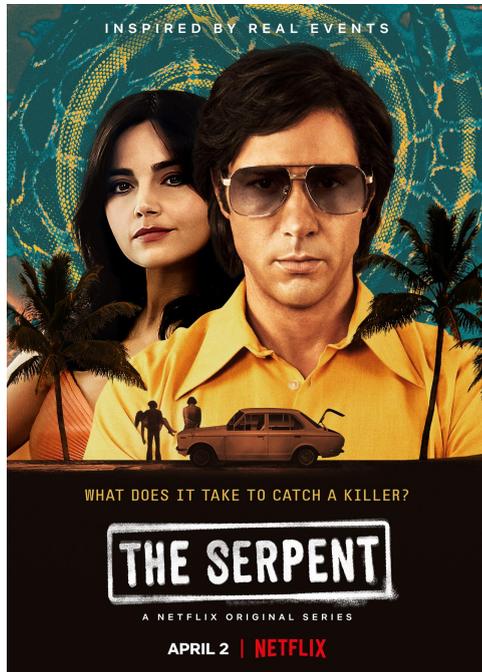
Beautifully crafted, good solid sci-fi fun. Everything the sequels should have been - strikes the perfect balance between episodic adventure show and serialised overarching story.

The *deus ex machina* can get a bit ridiculous - particularly in that very last episode... but the payoff was worth it.

It's really hard to fault this, to be honest - brilliant production values, it's brimming with heart and loving attention to detail.

Cracking stuff.

2021/08/26 The Serpent



Remember reading about this guy years ago and about how he was never brought to justice for his murders...

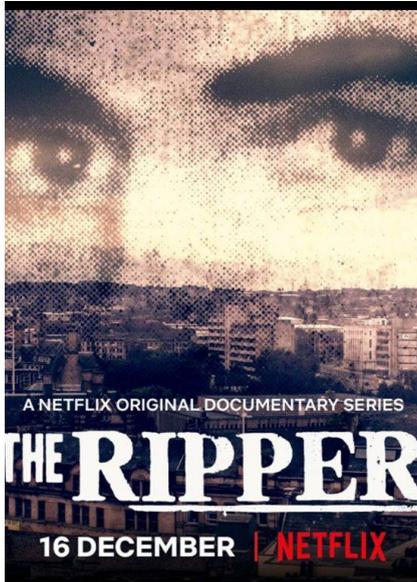
It's a wild ride, lots of twists and turns and suspense and in the case of this particular TV drama - FAR TOO MANY time jumps.

Sheesh. Honestly, I can't decide if it was bad writing, a misguided attempt to build tension, or if somebody genuinely thought that the way to keep everything straight and clear in the audience's minds was to lep about from timestamp to timestamp like a cat on a hot tin roof.

Anyway.

The acting was bang on, the story was very interesting - the pace never let up and there didn't feel like a whole lot of padding so yeah. A great time was had by all.

2021/08/30 The Ripper

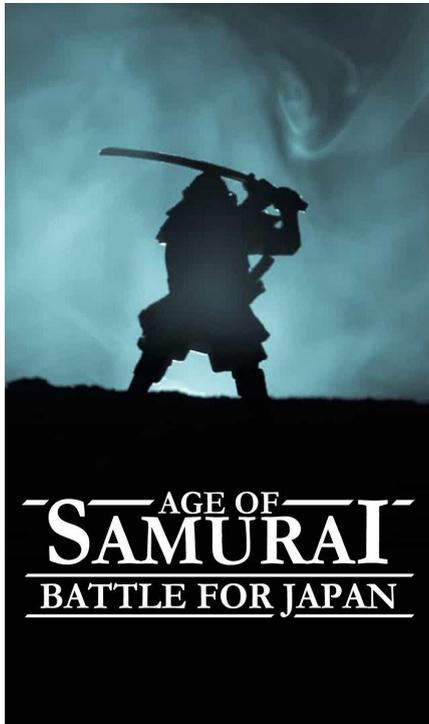


Decided to clear this off my Netflix list seeing as how I now live in Yorkshire and was pretty shocked when I learned Sutcliffe was from Bradford... and his house is still there...

This was a fascinating, well-crafted documentary that focused more on the police failings & the victims than on the ripper himself, and was all the better for it.

Really interesting, with the editing done right to build up the tension and some excellent use of period footage to frame the present day interviews & narrate the story.

2021/10/03 Age of the Samurai



A little 6 episode Netflix mini documentary series about the Sengoku period.

Very low budget - mostly talking heads and some action sequences filmed on the cheap with a lot of repeated costumes and shots.

More on the action bits later, but first to the talking heads - all academics, mostly guys. Some women but, and here's my first "this whole thing was kinda odd" moment - they only used the female academics to talk about female characters from history?

More casual sexism in the action sequences - Nobunaga's wife was famous for her dad being a bit of a handful and killing folk so there was a suspicion she might end up poisoning Nobunaga. So of course we have to see her in the buff riding Nobunaga cowgirl stylee. Right? I mean *what other possible filming choices were possible here?*

I'd almost let this slide but later on we see Lady Chacha doing pretty much the exact same move to Toyotomi so... it's clear somebody likes girl on top and likes to pretend it's not utterly gratuitous whatsoever.

So we've got the sex kind of just awkwardly slammed in. Now we need some violence.

I mean, it's the sengoku jidai so it shouldn't really be that much of a struggle. We still got plenty of extra CGI blood spatter though... probably only the way to liven up some of those battles between 12 guys in the same costumes in a similar looking forest to the one before that...

The whole thing felt like a YouTube fan film and might have been better off as a podcast - the history was spot on, if a bit rushed in bits, and was really engaging. I definitely picked up a few things I hadn't known - or had forgotten about - so I don't feel like I wasted my time watching this. It was just a little ... weird ... to be honest.

2021/10/03 Squid Game



This started off like *Liar Game* meets *Battle Royale*, and I thought it was just going to be a little bit like diet *Saw* torture porn but it really worked the acting chops of most of its leads, ended up having some really tender poignant moments amidst the carnage and really was an exceptionally well constructed little piece of television.

Beautifully shot, cleverly written, visceral and engaging, this was a great little surprise.

Glad this week wasn't as busy so I was able to watch all of it without having to space it out over an extended period of time.

2021/10/19 Samurai Champloo



Yeah it took me about 15 years to finally get the whole way through this... once I'd seen *Cowboy Bebop*, it made sense to follow it up at some point with this, from the same creator.

It's a really really strange anime - and yet it isn't. Thematically, it's a lot easier to get into than *Cowboy Bebop* - or it was for me at any rate.

Then again, it's also set in a very weird version of Edo Japan that features zombies, hip hop monks & graf artists... so hmmm.

It's a loving homage to the format of silly samurai films of old with plenty of episodic shenanigans that are lampshaded pretty heavily - usually by Fuu, who, as the series goes on, starts to comment on how often she gets kidnapped in almost every episode.

Tonally, it's a bit all over the place - I feel like *Cowboy Bebop* had a very clear destination in mind, and worked towards it in a mostly balanced fashion. *Samurai Champloo* seemed to jump about a bit from the sublime to the ridiculous - the four or five episodes prior to the three parter that closes the series out were pretty daft, and had me wondering when the slapstick had gotten so heavy a couple of times. (Turns out that this was intentional - the concept was to do the episodes in different genre styles.)

It all comes together in the end, and our indestructible badass samurai duo have a lovely little conclusion to their respective stories.

Feel like Fuu had a bit of a traumatic ending, though she seemed pretty cheery as the credits rolled...

2021/11/15 Elementary - season 6



Been catching up with the final season of this indulgent silliness.

Lucy Liu's desire to be as fashionable as possible seems to have governed the Watson wardrobe for most of the latter seasons, which always makes me chuckle.

Holmes becomes massively more generous with his fortune in the last season, which isn't that weird but does seem like a shortcut solution to a lot of the conflicts our detective duo faced in season 6.

It wraps up pretty nicely although I think they done Captain Greggs dirty. I assume this was a "could go either way" kind of episode in case they got another season - but yeah an admirably orchestrated end to six seasons of a show that was created because Stephen Moffat said nah to an American remake of his version of *Sherlock*.

2021/11/28 Upload



This popped up on Amazon Prime, I gave it a go because of Greg Daniels' name. Ended up bingeing most of it over the course of a couple of days because it was actually pretty decent.

Central conceit - digital afterlife, kind of sanitised commentary on rich vs poor aspect of that which grows a little more prominent as the season plays out...

A very few laugh out loud moments, but some real creativity and great pacing kept me watching.

(Actually if I'm being 100% honest I think my new crush on Andy Allo kept me watching most of all, but I know I wouldn't have wasted my time if this show wasn't worth it on its own merits.)

2021/12/18 Archer - season 12



I feel kind of bad about saying this but I haven't laughed out loud at Archer since ... maybe the Archer Vice series? I felt like it started to get a little bit stale around about the time they set up the detective agency with Cyril as the boss but not the boss.

I still watch it though, it's kind of comfort food - predictable, yet enjoyable nonetheless.

Still, this season seemed to be a bit of a course correction at times, despite retreading a worn path back to the ISIS head offices and seemingly hitting a soft reboot button.

Not a lot of really standout moments here - usual greatest hits, the addition of a new antagonist who's like the Archer that Archer wants to be but won't admit it, and perhaps the best part of all - a very touching send off to Jessica Walter.