

A "Love" Letter to Project Hail Mary (2026)

(or: The Power of
Friendship)

This essay / review contains
spoilers for the 2026 movie.

by catdya

There are two subversions in Project Hail Mary (2026) that I praise above all else

1. Grace does not willingly get on the ship. The flashbacks do not contain his change of heart or character development; most of it happens on the ship, in the “present” (showing instead of telling).

2. Stratt does not become Grace’s romantic anchor or really, any reason for him to save the world. Their bond remains platonic, corporate—near-adversarial even—during the end of the flashback sequence. (aside: though it is widely debated among the fandom with regards to the in-universe justifications or even morality of Stratt’s decision, I approach this topic from a nondiegetic, “doylist” perspective; i.e. “how does it serve the greater narrative?” rather than trying to justify the character’s actions as if they were real people)

These two factors make up the core argument of this essay; Rocky, through friendship, becomes the very thing Grace is willing to sacrifice himself for.



I watched Project Hail Mary with my (one and only) ex-boyfriend while he was visiting Indonesia—he's back in Berkeley now. Our story does like this; I asked him out in university, he said yes, the pandemic happened and he was (and still is) a terrible texter for long-distance, so I asked to break up, and we're still very good friends.

He and I live very different lives, yet both of us aren't really "seeing" anyone or actively seeking out relationships. He is one of my confidants for when I need to lament about my friends' romantic lives (because let's be real, if you're a good friend of someone who has a partner, you're gonna hear a lot about that partner!).

For this "date," we wanted to eat sushi before watching the movie.

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Grace started off as a coward. He does not believe in sacrificing himself for "humanity." He feels inadequate—lacking something to fight for. The precursor to the mission (the entire flashback sequence) was him being carried by the plot, not making major decisions for himself;

Stratt asks him to do research, Stratt flies him out to the boat, Stratt assigns him roles and tasks, etc. (while Grace does actively do research, he is a tool to Stratt and co.). This passivity is in great contrast to Grace in the "present."

Upon meeting Rocky, Grace builds camaraderie with the alien. Their shared fate becomes something Grace empathises with. Through the bonding sequence we see Grace becoming more and more willing to help Rocky save his home planet. Even then, Grace is admittedly miffed at the little rock alien invading his personal space, reiterating that they are "two distinct individuals—Both working on our distinct individual parts of that mission."

Culminating in the "fishing" scene, Grace makes the critical decision to leap after Rocky's contraption for the samples. It is one of his major selfless acts. In this climactic section of the movie we see Grace almost dying, Rocky saving Grace, and consequently Rocky almost dying. In short, we are shown that Grace has found a reason to be brave; for Rocky, for Erid, and for Earth.



It is in a sense lonely—alienating even—being surrounded by friends who you know prioritize their romantic partners over you. To have a call with a friend suddenly interrupted because their girlfriend or boyfriend is on the other line does something to your psyche.

I have been asked, kindly, by friends when I'm going to find a romantic partner. My answers of passivity seem to not satisfy them. I once vented to someone about my friend whose schedule was filled with their partner (leaving little room for me to hang out with them). To which I got the response, "well, that's their partner—as they should."

Turning to my ex-boyfriend, I tell him about all the foibles of having good friends with terrible partners. He listens, nods, sometimes agreeing with me when I tell him that "we should kill this guy" in reference to someone mistreating my friend. He doesn't seem burdened with "finding the right person," or at least he doesn't show it. I share my anxieties with him about how hard romance is and he listens compassionately.

I continued to talk to him over sushi until it was time for us to head to the movie theater.

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After the climax we see Grace and Rocky part ways. Not long after setting off, Grace finds a major flaw in the fuel system eating away at the containers. This puts Rocky's ship at risk more than his. In his "final" act of selflessness, he cancels his voyage back to Earth; ships what scientists back home need via small rockets; and chases after Rocky's ship—now broken down.

Ryland "no immediate family" Grace discovers what makes life worth fighting for through interspecies friendship. It shows how friendships could blossom even in the vast vacuum of space. He sees the will to live in others; and that inspires him to become a better, braver person.

Not once does Grace have a love interest, even Rocky's mate is mentioned but never shown. Stratt is almost a romantic red herring of sorts.

The movie shows that “love,” the thing that moves mountains, collects taumoeba, and makes you do a u-turn to save a dying alien, could be as simple as platonic love.

This movie asks “who would you be brave for?” and presents the answer in an oversized xenonite hamster ball.



As I exit the movie theater in a trance-like-state (as one does) I ponder on the themes that hit me the most. Project Hail Mary resonated with me in a way that strikes my most primal fear—dying alone, without a purpose. Instead of the grand narrative of saving two entire planets from sun-eating organisms, there is purpose in merely being a friend. Moreover, instead of seeing platonic relationships as a stepping stone to romance, it poses the possibility that platonic love could be so much more; worth fighting for, worth dying for, worth uprooting your former life to pursue a new one.

And as for my ex-boyfriend? Well, what can I say besides he’s my good friend.

Catdya loves writing about media; films, books, music, etc. You could read more of her works on catdya.com!