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THE ART OF WRITING A REVIEW

When you sit down to review a book, what do you think a review is actually for? Is it primarily for other readers, for the author, or for yourself?

What separates a genuinely helpful review
from simply saying,
“I loved it” or “I hated it”?

What are the essential pieces you think a good Amazon or Goodreads review should contain?

What kinds of details help another reader decide whether a book is right for them?

How much plot summary is useful before a review starts becoming a recap? How do you discuss things like characterization, pacing, prose, dialogue, worldbuilding, romance, or plot without making a review feel like a school book report?

Should reviewers explain why something worked or didn't work for them?
What does that look like in practice?

How important is it to distinguish between “this book is poorly written” and “this book simply wasn’t for me”?

What does a really effective
three-star review look like?
Can a mixed review actually be more
useful than a glowing one?

Do star ratings mean the same thing to everyone?

What does a five-star, four-star, or three-star rating mean to each of you?

How should reviewers handle spoilers? Are spoiler warnings enough, or are there some things you simply shouldn't reveal?

What are some common mistakes you see people make in Amazon or Goodreads reviews?

What makes a review unfair rather than merely negative? Are there criticisms that don't really belong in a book review—for example, complaints about shipping, price, cover damage, narration, or expectations created by marketing?

How do you write a negative review without making it personal or cruel? Is there a difference between criticizing an author's choices and criticizing the author?

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Should reviewers ever mention grammar, editing, formatting, or typos?
If so, when does that become useful information rather than nitpicking?

How much should genre expectations influence a review? Is it fair to criticize a book for following conventions that are normal within its genre?

Things become more complicated when the reviewer is also an author, editor, blogger, beta reader, or other industry professional. When should those relationships be disclosed?

What if you know the author socially but have never worked with them? Does that need to be disclosed?

Is it ethical for authors to publicly review books by direct competitors in their own genre? Does the answer change if the review is positive versus negative? What about editors reviewing books they did not edit but which were written by authors they could potentially work with someday?

How do you recognize when your professional knowledge is making you evaluate a book differently from an ordinary reader?

Are there situations where the most ethical choice is simply not to review a book? If you're part of a relatively small genre community where everyone knows everyone else, is complete impartiality even possible? What does ethical reviewing look like in that environment?

Do you write differently for Amazon than you do for Goodreads, a blog, or another review platform?

Is there anything reviewers should understand about how reviews affect authors before they post one—or should that not influence the review at all?

Authors are often told never to respond to reviews. Do you agree? Are there exceptions?

What responsibilities do reviewers have when discussing sensitive subjects, representation, historical issues, or potentially triggering material?

Can a negative review actually help sell a book to the right reader?

If someone in the audience has never written a book review before, what is the simplest formula you would give them?