

LUPIN THE 3rd & YOU!

A primer by Tom Farro (@FomTarro)

So, you wanna watch Lupin the 3rd? Good choice. With 50 years of production in the reserve, you'll never run out of stuff to watch. On the flip-side, there's 50 years worth of stuff to watch, and it's kind of a minefield out there. As with anything that gets passed around from director to director, quality and interpretation vary wildly with incarnation, so here's a primer on what's good.

First, some background. Lupin the 3rd originated as a manga in 1967 by a man with the pen name of Monkey Punch, and is basically wild fanfiction continuing a series of french novels originally penned by Maurice Leblanc in 1905. Leblanc's novels featured the character of Arsene Lupin (the first) who invented the "gentleman thief" trope. Meanwhile, Monkey Punch's series revolves around these five dumbass characters, who are as follows:

- **Arsene Lupin III**: Grandson of the famous french thief Arsene Lupin (the first), he has a habit of leaving calling cards and warning his victims well in advance. Still, he always gets what he's after.
- **Daisuke Jigen**: Lupin's right-hand man. Good with a gun, great with a gun. Really, guns are his core competency.
- **Goemon Ishikawa XIII**: Introduced into the original manga to make it feel more Japanese (I am not joking), he's stoic and also a samurai in the 20th century. Ancestor of the 1500s-era folk-hero of the same name.
- **Fujiko Mine**: The classic femme-fatale trope cranked up to 11. She generally has Lupin wrapped around her finger and operates of her own accord. She definitely gets the most variance in quality between incarnations, which can be a bummer.
- **Inspector Koichi Zenigata**: Archetypal hard-working Japanese cop. He works for Interpol and hunts Lupin as his reason for being. Often affectionately referred to as "tottsán"/"old man"/"pops"/"daddio" by Lupin, depending on the language of the subs or dubs.

Over the years, Lupin the 3rd has been adapted into both serialized anime as well as countless longform films. In terms of wondering where to jump in, the key is to know that until very recently, Lupin had no continuity, despite labelling each series as a “Part”. Even episodes within the first three “Parts” were all standalone. So, I recommend you just jump in at whichever of the following sounds most appealing.

Lupin comes in four distinct flavors, each easily identifiable by the color of his jacket:

- **Green Jacket (1971-1972)**: “The first anime for adults”. The first run is often cited as the most faithful to the manga, and aimed to have a crime-film feel in an era when most anime was about super fighting robots.
 - **Recommended episodes**: 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 19
 - **Recommended films**: “The Castle of Cagliostro”, “The Plot of the Fuma Clan”
- **Red Jacket (1977-1980)**: “Scooby-doo with guns”. This run is a lot more in line with traditional Saturday-morning cartoons. In fact, this run put out an episode every Saturday for three years straight, no breaks.
 - **Recommended episodes**: 2, 18, 25, 37, 55, 56, 57, 58, 61, 66, 69, 92, 99, 101, 108, 145, 148, 155
 - **Recommended films**: “Mystery of Mamo”, “Bye Bye Lady Liberty”, “Napoleon’s Dictionary”, “Dragon of Doom”, “Alcatraz Connection”, “The Last Job”, “Eternal Mermaid”
- **Pink Jacket (1984-1985)**: “Mystery Zone”. This run featured wildly inconsistent animation quality, and the only extant subtitles are less than stellar. It’s a particularly mixed bag.
 - **Recommended episodes**: 24, 25, 30, 44, 47
 - **“Recommended” films**: “Legend of the Gold of Babylon”
- **Blue Jacket (2014-)**: “A cohesive story”. This run actually features a cohesive, ongoing plot, which is highly uncharacteristic of any prior Lupin media. It’s very consistent, which is refreshing.
 - **Recommended episodes**: All of Part IV and Part V
 - **Recommended films**: N/A

There’s also a spinoff series titled “**The Woman Called Fujiko Mine**”, which, obviously, focuses on Fujiko. It is completely tonally different than anything else in the franchise. It’s worth mentioning that it was directed by the woman who directed “**Yuri on Ice**” and “**Michiko to Hatchin**”.

Oh, and I’d recommend to *not* watch the Koike spinoff films (Jigen’s Gravestone, Goemon’s Bloodspray, etc). The art is cool but the content is slimy and gross (I suspect the director has never met a human woman before). You’ve been warned!

So where can you watch it? Currently, Crunchyroll has all the episodes for the main series up for streaming. I'm unsure if it requires a paid account, or if a free account works universally here.

The films are a little less accessible, but fortunately the good people at Discotek Media work tirelessly to bring them to the west. You can buy a lot of the better TV specials and movies from them on physical media from their distributor, RightStuf:

<https://www.rightstufanime.com/publisher/EASTERN-STAR?keywords=lupin>

As a fun bonus, at the time of this writing, The Castle of Cagliostro also happens to be on Netflix. If you have a subscription, I'd absolutely advise you to watch it. And then buy the physical release from Discotek above. It's really good.

Anyway, Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope that you can find enjoyment in this series that I love so dearly!