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Mini Reviews, Part 10 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)

This is the tenth batch of mini-reviews, two science fiction films:

OMNI LOOP (2024) [with SPOILERS]: We meet Zoya in the hospital, where the doctor is explaining that she has a black hole inside her which is slowly growing and will kill her in about a week. (Plot hole #1: Why won't it keep growing and absorb the whole Earth?)

But Zoya has some magic pills, which when she takes on, she jumps back to a week earlier. (Plot hole #2: This reeks of "Star Trek" and "tech-tech-tech".) So the basic plot is GROUNDHOG DAY, but with a week instead of a day. (It's *not* a plot hole in GROUNDHOG DAY, because that is a fantasy, not science fiction.)

Zoya finds herself wishing she had made different decisions in her life and wanting to extend the range of the pills so that she can go back further. She happens to (literally) run into Paula, who is working on questions of time at the local community college (really?) under Zoya's old professor (really?) and they steal the nanoscopic man that was created when the professor was working on shrinking people (really?). (This is like THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN ... well, sort of.)

Plot hole #3: The pills regenerate, so they never get used up. Actually, it's not clear why there is more than one pill--Zoya says taking multiple pills doesn't make a difference.

So they are working to solve the problem of how to increase the time span. Plot hole #4: Paula claims they have all the time in the world, but after a week of work, Paula "resets", so Zoya has to re-convince her and also bring her up to speed each time. Plot hole #5: How do they keep all the knowledge--which seems to involve complex equations and diagrams filling a notebook--that they have gained during reset? How does the notebook with their work stay in existence? Why is the nanoman still in the lab each time?

We eventually find out that Zoya found these pills when she was twelve, and used them to do well in school (after she knew the answers on a test, she would jump back to take the test again). And in fact, Zoya did not like the work of science--she liked the solutions. She claimed her husband disparaged her work and made her decide to become a wife and mother (and textbook writer) rather than a research scientist. But we find out that memory is not reliable as we see the discussion and realize that he was actually very supportive. So we also learn that basing the reasons for time travel on one's memory is a risky proposition. In spite of this, we discover that everyone wants to go back; everyone has regrets.

At one point Zoya tries to find someone she had worked with before who turned out to be "successful", and discovers that ultimately he was not satisfied, and his son did not think his father was a success in what mattered. The father also seems to have kept (stolen?) Zoya's work that supposedly Zoya's mother had. Plot hole #6: How did he get it?

Eventually, Zoya realizes that she is wishing for what the son discounts as unimportant, but that she has what the son sees as success. And that she would lose a lot of the good along with the bad if she is successful.

Or as Billy Rose and Mort Dixon wrote in 1928, "If you want the rainbow, you must have the rain."

Paula asks Zoya what happens when she loops back, but this assumes that that particular time line goes on even when she loops back. This clearly involves some deep discussion of the nature of time.

The casting is a good example of diversity without a sledge hammer, just as John Carpenter did it forty years ago.

(The title seems to refer to the constant looping Zoya is doing, and perhaps it does, but the Omni Loop is an actual part of the Miami Metromover system. However, there is no 1209 University Drive, Princeton, NJ.) [-ecl]

Released streaming 20 September 2024.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt28150132/reference

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/omni_loop

THE WILD ROBOT (2024): In THE WILD ROBOT, robot Rozzum 7134 is shipwrecked on an island. (The name is a nod to R.U.R.--"Rossum's Universal Robots"--by Karel Capek.) Rozzum 7134, or Roz as she(*) becomes--is a helper robot, designed to complete the tasks she is given. Without instruction, when she tries to help it doesn't always work (she thinks the help a beaver needs is to remove the sticks damming the river). Eventually, she learns the animals' language through some equivalent of the Universal Translator (and apparently all animals speak the same language and are mutually understandable).

After she accidentally kills most of a goose family, she is imprinted on by the remaining gosling, and then helped in the requiring mothering by a fox.

The main idea seems to be the concept of family as not necessarily biological or genetic, but by accidental or purposeful construction. (We saw the same thing in ICE AGE.) As pointed out by Caroline Bielak on the podcast "History in Reverse", there is also a sub-theme of diversity, and how the animals defeat the robot attackers because they have many different skills and modes of fighting, while the robots have only one.

(There is also the iconic Dreamscape symbol of a silhouette against a full moon. This is sort of like how Alfred Hitchcock had a cameo in all of his films.)

At one point, a character says, "We must become more than we were programmed to be." This seems to be a rewording of the famous statement by Rose Sayer in THE AFRICAN QUEEN: "Nature ... is what we were put in this world to rise above."

There does seem to be a supernatural/religious element in the the idea that Roz can have her memories erased and yet still remember things. Caroline suggested that because Roz had rewritten and overwritten her code, the memory removal might no longer work, but I am not convinced.)

And [SPOILER] if the animals are all friends, how will the carnivores survive, and then what will keep the herbivores from overrunning the resources?

(*) The notion of a gendered robot is peculiar, yet calling Roz "it" doesn't seem right either. This is yet another reason to come up with a set of non-binary singular pronouns for sentient beings. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 27 September 2024.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt29623480/reference

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_wild_robot

COMIN' ROUND ANTARES (to the tune of "Comin' Round the Mountain") (words by Evelyn C. Leeper) >{? In the process of scanning in old MT VOIDS (from the 1980s!) I found this filk song in the 11/27/83 issue that I have no memory of writing:

She'll be comin' round Antares when she comes, [2 times]
She'll be comin' round Antares,
With the payload that she carries.
She'll be comin' round Antares when she comes.

She'll be blasting all her rockets when she comes, [2 times]
She'll be blasting all her rockets,
She'll have space dust in her pockets.
She'll be blasting all her rockets when she comes.

She'll be stopping off at L-5 when she comes, [2 times]
She'll be stopping off at L-5,
With her ion-powered warp drive.
She'll be stopping off at L-5 when she comes.

She'll have tales of alien races when she comes, [2 times]
She'll have tales of alien races,
Distant planets and strange places.
She'll have tales of alien races when she comes.

She's much younger, she will find, when she comes, [2 times]
She's much younger, she will find,
Than the twin she left behind.
She's much younger, she will find, when she comes.

She'll be crossing the ecliptic when she comes, [2 times]
She'll be crossing the ecliptic,
Towards an orbit that's elliptic.
She'll be crossing the ecliptic when she comes.

She will use atomic fission when she comes, [2 times]
She will use atomic fission,
On her interstellar mission.
She will use atomic fission when she comes.

We will kill the old red rooster when she comes, [2 times]
We will kill the old red rooster,
While she refuels her old booster.
We will kill the old red rooster when she comes.

[-ecl]

Double (and Triple) Feature Recommendations (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)

Triple feature: PSYCHO, "The Making of Psycho" (90-minute extra on the "Psycho" DVD), and HITCHCOCK (narrative film about the making of PSYCHO, starring Anthony Hopkins and Helen Mirren)

Double feature: REMEMBERING GENE WILDER and YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN

Double feature: WICKED and THE WIZARD OF OZ.

[-ecl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I don't have as many things to say about A STUDY IN SCARLET by Arthur Conan Doyle as I did about (for example) "The League of Red-Headed Gentlemen", but I did notice a few things.

In the beginning, [Doyle as] Watson writes, "[At the fatal battle of Maiwand] I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. [In the base hospital at Peshawar] I was struck down by enteric fever... [After I recovered] I was despatched accordingly, in the troopship Orontes, and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined..."

Although we occasionally see Watson complain about the shoulder wound (or sometimes a mysterious leg wound), when he's climbing over fences to help Holmes burgle a house, or tackling a criminal, his health hardly seems "irretrievably ruined."

Watson tells Holmes, "I keep a bull pup."

How on earth can Watson have been keeping a bull pup through all the battles and wounds and enteric fever, not to mention ending up in a hotel with no permanent place of residence?

Holmes describes himself thusly, "The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical, are really extremely practical -- so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese. ... I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault, they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent."

Holmes claims he is making a living as his consulting detective. He claims that the government and private detectives bring him cases they can't solve. But we never see any private detectives bring him cases, and surely Lestrade, Gregson, Jones, and Mycroft aren't paying him out of government funds when they ask for his help. Yes, he gets the occasional payment (such as in "A Scandal in Bohemia" or "The Adventure of the Priory School"), but that is a rarity. And a lot of cases seem to come to him directly, making him basically just another private detective. Well, the best of them, but still not a new category. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

This country has come to feel the same when Congress
is in session as we do when the baby gets hold of a
hammer. It's just a question of how much damage he
can do with it before we take it away from him.
--Will Rogers

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