

And I'm sure I have made more than just this error over the decades. [-ecl]

Mini Reviews, Part 20 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the twentieth batch of mini-reviews, more comedies:

JERRY AND MARGE GO LARGE: JERRY AND MARGE GO LARGE is that rare film that makes mathematics look like fun with a seemingly super-powered handling of multiplication. The premise--based on actual events--is that Jerry understands math, especially probabilities, better than the people running various state lotteries, and has detected a way to play the lottery with the odds in his favor. He also understands the law of large numbers, and this is what makes the story--and the film--visually as well as intellectually interesting.

And there is also an unusual attempt to make believable characters; for example, one easily tells the other that he "has to go." James Bond never tells a Bond girl he has to go to the toidy.

In many ways, this is a small film, even though it was produced by a subsidiary of Paramount. One way the film saves money is by not having any really expensive actors, though a lot of the actors you see are familiar from television.

The film is reasonably accurate, although the ending is perhaps more sentimental than real life. A delightful movie for an adult audience.

Released on Paramount+ streaming 17 June 2022. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8323668/reference>

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

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPEN: THE PHANTOM OF THE OPEN stars Mark Rylance (BRIDGE OF SPIES and WOLF HALL) as Maurice Flitcroft, a middle-aged working-class Briton who has never played golf, but who decides in 1975 (for reasons never explained) to enter the British Open. (The reasons are never explained because perhaps Flitcroft did not know them himself.) Sally Hawkins as his wife is much more restrained than usual.

In some ways it is similar to BELFAST in showing working class people, though BELFAST concentrates on The Troubles, and THE PHANTOM OF THE OPEN takes a more comedic look at life.

Once again filmmakers have sports fascination examined in a popular musical form. Perhaps this is a reference to THE BIG LEBOWSKI, since both films show scenes from the ball's point of view.

The Brits seem to love these comedies about working-class people who have an impossible dream and see it through with pluck and grit--even if they don't always succeed. CALENDAR GIRLS, EDDIE THE EAGLE, MILITARY WIVES, PRIDE, MADE IN DAGENHAM, THE ENGLISHMAN WHO WENT UP A HILL AND CAME DOWN A MOUNTAIN, THE WORLD'S FASTEST INDIAN (okay--he's a Kiwi), ...

(And, yes, Maurice twin sons really were world champion disco dancers.)

Released theatrically 3 June 2022. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12572040/reference>

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

ROSALINE: ROSALINE is similar to CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY in that it is set several hundred years in the past, but uses modern language and modern sensibilities. But while CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY is a new story, ROSALINE is based on a throwaway bit from ROMEO AND JULIET--she was Romeo's "true love" before he saw Juliet. So Rosaline is a character from Shakespeare but unlike Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern (who appeared in Stoppard's play), she does not actually appear in the original play itself. (In this she resembles Rebecca in the Daphne du Maurier eponymous novel.)

The problem with ROSALINE is that the language is disconcertingly anachronistic at times. Characters talk about going on a "date" (the word was first used in that sense in 1896), and having a "boyfriend". Also, Rosaline asks for a match (matches were not invented until 1826) and "wants a career" (also a modern phrase). (For that matter, Rosaline's nurse (played by Minnie Driver) makes a joke about having seven years of nursing school, and later about being a medical professional. But of course "nurse" did not have that meaning--or even exist as a profession--for centuries.) I suppose at least some of this is supposed to be funny, but it can also jerk one out of the milieu as much as if Rosaline had whipped out a cigarette.

When avoiding anachronisms, screenwriters Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Weber do add a crisp wit for their audience. The music is also modern, and it copies a Woody Allen joke about diegetic music.

Overall, this is amusing enough--not Shakespeare, but what is other than Shakespeare himself--and of interest to those of us who like the "side roads" of Shakespearean drama. If you like ROSENKRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD, or the modern re-stagings of RICHARD III or ROMEO & JULIET, you would probably like this. (Yes, I realize that the modern re-stagings are also full of anachronisms. But they are integral to the film, not surprise stumbling blocks.)

Released on Hulu streaming 14 October 2022. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1777606/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/rosaline>

[-mrl/ecl]

Pronoun Festival (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Now that pronouns are a big thing, I think TCM should have a day of pronoun films as a theme. They could run SHE; HER; IT; IT!; THEM!; US; HERSELF; MINE; THEY/THEM; YOURS, MINE & OURS; and ME, MYSELF AND I. [-ecl]

AI Companionship Bots:

And speaking of the film HER:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/03/30/replika-ai-chatbot-update/>

They fell in love with AI bots. A software update broke their hearts.

Companionship bots ... are designed to foster humanlike connections, using artificial intelligence software to make people feel seen and needed. A host of users report developing intimate relationships with chatbots--connections verging on human love--and turning to the bots for emotional support, companionship and even sexual gratification. As the pandemic isolated Americans, interest in [chatbots] surged. Amid spiking rates of loneliness that some public health officials call an epidemic, many say their bonds with the bots ushered profound changes into their lives, helping them to overcome alcoholism, depression and anxiety.

But tethering your heart to software comes with severe risks, computer science and public health experts said. There are few ethical protocols for tools that are sold on the free market but affect users' emotional well-being. Some users ... say changes in the products have been heartbreaking. Others say bots can be aggressive, triggering traumas experienced in previous relationships."

[See article cited for full text.]

NEUROMANCER by **William Gibson** (copyright 1984, Grafton Books, 2011, Penguin Audio, 10 hours and 31 minutes, ASIN: B0058R83CW, narrated by Robertson Dean) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

As a rule, I don't re-read books. There are two reasons for that. One is that there is so much good new stuff being published that I want to read that I don't have time to re-read books, and the second is that if I'm not reading something new, I do like to occasionally read something from my to-be-read pile (Oh, who am I kidding? It's not a TBR pile, stack, table, or bookcase. My backlog is such that I can measure it by the number of bookcases that contains it, and that doesn't count my Kindle.). That's that to say that I don't. Some readers will remember that I re-read DUNE for the 50th anniversary of its publishing, and I re-read each of the "Lord of the Rings" novels as the movies came out roughly a couple of decades or so ago.

Given all that, there will be some of you out there going, "Wait, you've never read NEUROMANCER?" (I have one friend who, when I told him I'd never read it, was pleased that he'd read a Hugo winning novel that I hadn't. He knows who he is, and I'm sure I'll get a text from him when he reads this review.) No, up until now, I've never read NEUROMANCER. If I try to recall why, nearly forty years ago, I didn't read NEUROMANCER because I was stubborn and unwilling to try something new. I was unhappy with the New Wave, and I wasn't any happier with this thing called Cyberpunk. I was 25 years old when NEUROMANCER was first published, but I was still a kid when it came to my taste in science fiction. Having said that, I did read the two follow-up novels in the "Sprawl" trilogy, COUNT ZERO and MONA LISA OVERDRIVE, as part of my Hugo reading those years, most likely because just like with the New Wave, I figured I had to give in and move with the field, although I remember not liking them at the time. No, I will not be re-reading them.

But while I'm looking at a 1986 paperback edition to the left of my computer, I decided that since I was able to pick up the audio book for cheap, I'd go with that. So I dug in.

Those of you who have read NEUROMANCER know the story. Case is a famous hacker and console cowboy who was caught stealing from his employer and as a result had his nervous system modified such that he was unable to access the virtual reality known as "the Matrix" (Long before the movies were released, science fiction readers already had the Matrix). He had no money, no ability to do the thing that he loved and made him famous. Until he was approached by a mercenary in the employ of Armitage. Armitage offered to repair his nervous system in exchange for doing a job. The catch was that sacs of poison were placed in Case's blood vessels, which Armitage would remove if and when the job was completed. Otherwise the sacs would burst and once again he would be unable to access cyberspace.

The story involves a super-powerful family and a pair of super-powerful AIs, Wintermute and Neuromancer, although even the existence of Neuromancer isn't revealed until the latter stages of the book. The Tessier-Ashpool family is looking to merge Wintermute and Neuromancer to form a super AI, and Case and Molly are in the middle of it. Well, honestly, there's a lot more to it than that, and it's fairly complex.

I guess I want to come at this book from the point of view of someone who is reading it for the first--and likely only--time, almost forty years after it was originally published. Looking back at it from the vantage point of nearly forty years in the future, I can see why this was as ground-breaking a novel as it was made out to be. It was completely and totally different than anything that had appeared before it. It is said to have changed the face of science fiction, and was one of those novels that was so important to and in the field that it stood out from the pack back in 1984. Cyberspace and cyberpunk were relatively new concepts back then. Gibson's novel used those concepts to turn the field on its ear, but that was probably never his intention. It was his first novel, and it just so happened that it reshaped the field.

And so the problem with reading it in 2023 rather than in 1984 is that it didn't have that much of an effect on me. Even the famous opening line, "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel," didn't really do too much for me. And one of the things pointed out in hindsight, that Gibson didn't see the rise of cell phones, was nothing that bothered me whatsoever. Looking at it from an historical perspective with high expectations, it fell flat for me. Frankly, I feel that Gibson's last two novels, *THE PERIPHERAL* and *AGENCY*, are much better books. Maybe it's because I could follow the stories in those two novels better. Maybe because the writing is better, nearly forty years later. But, honestly, after I finished the last line of *NEUROMANCER* I shrugged, went, "Huh", and moved on to the next book.

I really didn't care for Robertson Dean as narrator. His narration was bland and dull, and he didn't make much of an effort to distinguish between one character and the next. I wouldn't call it a monotone narration, but it was close enough. I feel as if it wasn't a very good narration at all. [-jak]

THE RISE AND REIGN OF THE MAMMALS by Steve Brusatte (book review by Greg Frederick):

THE RISE AND REIGN OF THE MAMMALS by Steve Brusatte is an engaging and informative book that provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of mammals. The author, a renowned paleontologist, takes readers on a journey that spans over 300 million years, from the origins of mammalian life to the present day.

The book is organized chronologically, beginning with the early mammal-like reptiles of the late Paleozoic era and ending with the rise of humans in the Quaternary period. Brusatte covers the major events in mammalian evolution, including the development of unique features such as hair, milk production, and the ability to regulate body temperature. He also highlights the importance of mass extinctions in shaping the course of mammalian evolution, such as the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs and allowed mammals to flourish.

Throughout the book, Brusatte emphasizes the scientific evidence behind his claims, citing numerous studies and research findings. He also incorporates interesting anecdotes and personal experiences, such as his own excavations in the field, which make the book more engaging and relatable.

Some very detailed descriptions of mammal evolution include the following ones. For example: this book has an interesting sequence of fossils illustrating the evolution of whales going from a raccoon sized *Indohyus* which lived on land and had four legs to a large whale-like *Basilosaurus* creature which lived in the sea and had flippers instead of front legs and had useless, and very small rear legs. *Homo erectus* was the first hominin (human-like being) (*) to leave Africa where hominins first developed and they then expanded around the world. A second wave of human emigration out of Africa by *Homo sapiens* occurred later. Around 300,000 years ago the first fossil evidence of *Homo sapiens* is found in Morocco and if you dressed up this being with a modern day set of cloths he would pass as one of us. But these early *Homo sapiens* had a flatter brain region on its skull which limited brain size. Around 100,000 to 40,000 years ago our classic modern body plan became fixed with the larger globular brain region of the skull. We as *Homo sapiens* could have a much larger and more complex brain with the added space.

One of the strengths of the book is its accessibility. Brusatte avoids using technical jargon and explains complex concepts in a way that is easy for laypeople to understand. The book is also beautifully illustrated, with photographs, drawings, and diagrams that help readers visualize the creatures being discussed.

Overall, *THE RISE AND REIGN OF THE MAMMALS* is a must-read for anyone interested in the natural history of our planet. Brusatte's expertise, combined with his engaging writing style, makes this book both informative and enjoyable. [-gf]

(*) "Hominid" refers to "the group consisting of all modern and extinct Great Apes (that is, modern humans, chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans plus all their immediate ancestors)," while "hominin" refers to "the group consisting of modern humans, extinct human species and all our immediate ancestors (including members of the genera *Homo*, *Australopithecus*, *Paranthropus* and *Ardipithecus*)." -*Sa H. floresiensis* (nicknamed "Hobbits") are hominins, but not hominids. See <https://australian.museum/learn/science/human-evolution/hominid-and-hominin-whats-the-difference/> for details. [-ecl]

Bechdel Test (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Peter Trei):

In response to [Boyd Nation's comments on the Bechdel Test](#) in the 04/14/23 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I don't think much of the Bechdel Test except as a loose heuristic. On the other hand, I watched George Pal's *WAR OF THE WORLDS* this past week, which has just one woman character, whose main purpose seems to be to panic periodically. I said at one point, "You're the only female character in this movie. Set a better example!" [-gmg]

Evelyn adds:

You forgot to mention that she also serves coffee, and cooks breakfast for the hero. [-ecl]

Peter Trei writes:

I note that MAD MAX: FURY ROAD both passes the test, and has female characters who are more competent than the ostensible male protagonist. [-pt]

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

We just watched the BBC's 1962 adaptation of HEDDA GABLER by Henrik Ibsen and I have to say that just as Ibsen's ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE is a very contemporary story (as it was when Peter Benchley re-wrote it as JAWS), so HEDDA GABLER is a very topical take on the gun culture. Hedda Gabler is clearly unbalanced, and she has two pistols she got from her father, hence no background checks, etc. She "playfully" points the guns at the judge and fires towards him, trusting her aim not to hit him. She gives a gun to a despondent author and encourages him to commit suicide (definitely a step beyond just leaving a loaded gun lying around unlocked). When he does, and someone tells her that he knows she provided the gun, she takes the other gun and kills herself rather than face public disgrace. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

My favorite poem is 'Thirty days hath September'
because it actually tells you something.
--Groucho Marx (attrib.)

Go to [our home page](#) THE MT VOID