

FILM SYNOPSES

(Taken from Sight & Sound Magazine)

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The Matrix

Menial office worker Thomas Anderson operates by night as computer hacker Neo. Warnings from unknown girl Trinity fail to prevent his detention by law-enforcement agent Smith, who demands Neo help capture notorious subversive Morpheus. Refusing to cooperate, Neo is released. Trinity takes him to meet Morpheus, leader of the struggle against the Matrix, an artificial intelligence that controls the world. Morpheus explains that the planet's long-derelict citizens are trapped in the illusion of 1999 (really the distant past) until converted into food and energy to power the Matrix itself.

Joining Morpheus' team, Neo endures an agonising awakening process. Although his body is on a life-support system, a mental projection of his digital self-roams the Matrix's simulation of the everyday. He can also be programmed with phenomenal skills. Morpheus is convinced they have found in Neo the fabled leader, The One, who can rescue the planet. Betrayed by fellow crew-member Cypher, Morpheus is captured by Smith, desperate to prise from him the location of Zion, the last stronghold of humanity. Rushing to the rescue, Neo and Trinity battle enormous odds to save him. As Matrix forces close in, Smith traps Neo and shoots him down. But when Trinity declares her love to Neo's body his digital self is miraculously resurrected. He blows Smith apart and returns to his body just in time to thwart the Matrix invaders. Embracing Trinity and accepting his role as The One, he prepares to revitalise a dormant world.

Drive

Los Angeles, the present. Driver is a mechanic at a stock-car garage owned by his friend Shannon. He takes a phlegmatic approach to the two moonlighting jobs usually arranged for him by Shannon – doing stunts for movies, and as a getaway driver for local robbers. Shannon has ambitions to set up a stock-car racing team utilising Driver's skills; he negotiates for a sizeable loan from financier Rose, at the pizzeria run by Nino (real name Izzy), who is later revealed as a bitter and volatile would-be mafioso.

Driver's casual meetings with his neighbour Irene and her young son lead to a growing attachment to the pair, and a motive for helping when Irene's husband Standard, newly released from jail, is forced to take part in a raid on a pawnshop. The raid goes wrong, and Standard is killed. After being chased by unidentified pursuers, Driver gets away with the bag containing a large amount of cash. Driver correctly guesses that it is drug money.

Driver intercepts one of Izzy's henchmen tailing Irene; to her shock, he violently attacks him. Rose, in a separate incident, also reveals his violent capacities, spearing a fork into the eye of another of Izzy's men. Driver tails Izzy's car, forcing him off the coast road and drowning him in the sea. Realising that the money belongs to Rose, Driver arranges a meeting where the two fight and Rose dies.

Shakespeare in Love

London, 1593. Will Shakespeare, an ambitious young playwright, has promised his new play, *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*, to Philip Henslowe, owner of the Rose Theatre on the South Bank. But Will is blocked and the play unstarted. Henslowe is desperate: deep in debt to brutal loan shark Fennyman, he fears Will may be lured away by Richard Burbage at the Curtain Theatre across the river, favoured by Sir Edmund Tilney, Master of the Queen's Revels.

Viola De Lesseps, a rich merchant's daughter betrothed to Lord Wessex, is enchanted by Will's verse. She joins Henslowe's company disguised as a man calling herself Thomas Kent. At the same time, as herself, she embarks on a passionate affair with Will. Inspired by his love, and following hints from fellow-playwright Christopher Marlowe, Will transforms Henslowe's commission into a love story, *Romeo and Juliet*. The company is boosted by the arrival of star actor Ned Alleyn. 'Kent' is cast as Romeo.

Tilney, tipped off that a woman has joined Henslowe's troupe, exposes Viola and closes the theatre on grounds of immorality, but Burbage magnanimously offers the Curtain to his rival. Will takes over as Romeo, while Viola resignedly goes through with the marriage to Wessex. But after the ceremony she escapes to the theatre for the premiere, and when the lad playing Juliet gets stage fright she takes over the role. The play is rapturously received but Tilney arrives to close it down again. He is forestalled by the Queen herself, who feigns to believe Viola is a man, while making it clear she must renounce Will and sail to Virginia with Wessex. Will starts writing *Twelfth Night*. Viola's ship is wrecked and, sole survivor, she wanders on a strange shore.

A.I. Artificial Intelligence

The Earth's melting ice-caps have drowned countless cities, but population control has ensured the US is still an island of prosperity. Professor Hobby of Cybertronics Manufacturing (William Hurt) proposes the ultimate robot, a child-like construction which can experience emotions. The prototype, a robot called David (Haley Joel Osment), is placed with Cybertronics employee Henry Swinton (Sam Robards) and his wife Monica (Frances O'Connor), whose own child Martin (Jake Thomas) has been cryogenically frozen until a cure is found for his terminal illness. The experiment is a success, with Monica and David sharing an ecstatic relationship. Monica even gives him Martin's supertoy Teddy, a mini-robot with superior reasoning.

When Martin is cured, David is no longer needed; Martin jealously makes trouble for him. When Monica reads them the story of Pinocchio and the Blue Fairy, David is convinced that he must become a 'real' boy in order to keep his mother's love. After an accident in which David nearly drowns Martin, Monica abandons David and Teddy on a distant wasteland where he is soon captured along with a load of discarded robots. He avoids being destroyed as ghoulish entertainment for the crowds at the Flesh Fair arena. With the help of Gigolo Joe (Jude Law), a 'love robot' who is on the run after being framed for murder, David makes his way to Rouge City, a riotous leisure centre where an omniscient computer tells him the Blue Fairy is to be found at the end of the world, formerly Manhattan.

Dodging the police, Gigolo Joe takes him to the drowned city by helicopter, reuniting him with a delighted Professor Hobby who has been producing innumerable further Davids. In despair at this revelation, David throws himself into the ocean but discovers, far below, a statue of the Blue Fairy and begs her to make him 'real'. Trapped in a sunken helicopter, he

remains confronting the statue for 2,000 years until alien visitors release him and decipher his memory. Using a lock of Monica's hair that Teddy has preserved, they are able to reconstruct her for a single day and David at last gets his wish. As the joyful day closes, mother and son fall asleep together as Teddy watches over them.