

Dead Leaves

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Dead Leaves Analysis

Anime

The movie *Dead Leaves*, is in my opinion, an explosive and over-the-top sci-fi adventure about the twisted journey of two unique individuals trying to figure out who they are and why they have been placed in the position they are in, however in the end, it seems like they end up right back where they started, not knowing who they are.

The rather short science fiction movie marks the directorial debut of director Hiroyuki Imaishi. He worked on a few other projects before *Dead Leaves*, but nothing as big. *Dead Leaves* knows what it is, and does not pretend to be anything else. What it is, is a rather shallow, gratuitous and incoherent movie that is definitely fun to watch. It does not seek to answer the hard questions that other Sci-Fi movies like *Ghost In The Shell* seek to answer. Questions like what exactly it means to be human, or what sorts of rights a non human life form might have. The movie does not attempt to keep the lid on the over-the-top action or try to attach any science to the abilities of the characters, other than mentioning they are clones with certain "gene clusters" that grant them these abilities. The director of the movie is even quoted as asking viewers to "As much as possible, lower the morals in you" and "If possible, drink alcohol." (Diaz, *Nihilistic OVA* doesn't offer much of a message)

The movie opens with the two main characters, Pandya and Retro, just awakened naked on earth. Retro, who gets his name from the Retro television he has for a head, and Pandya, who gets her name from her Panda-like markings around her eyes, exchange a few lines of dialogue that give you a slight idea as to what kind of personalities they have and then go on a rampage in order to acquire some basic needs. They steal a car and start attacking people indiscriminately and are soon being pursued by the police. They manage to dispatch a good number of cops and robot law enforcement fairly easily, with weapons and martial arts they inexplicably know. Not just inexplicably to the audience but even to themselves. Eventually, they are stopped and arrested and sent to a prison known as *Dead Leaves* on a partially destroyed moon. At this prison, they are thrown together with a bunch of inmates they soon discover are all genetically inferior clones who try to convince Pandya and Retro they are no different than them. The warden at the prison is a woman who has a grudge with Pandya, although Pandya does not remember why. Pandya and Retro lead a breakout and the warden is taken down by the baby Retro and Pandya had in prison.

The warden, known as Galactica, seems to be obsessed with a fairy tale about caterpillars who strained themselves to eat leaves from a tree so tall that the sun seemed to rise from its branches. There were some ants at the bottom of the tree who would ask the caterpillars why they stretched their necks so high to eat the leaves from the tree. In the prison, the inmates are all kept in full body suits that make them resemble worms or caterpillars, however they are all content to be incarcerated and locked up. Pandya and Retro on the other hand break free instinctively and lead the other prisoners on a rampage that ends with the destruction of the prison. I believe that Pandya and Retro represented the caterpillars that were stretching their necks to eat from the tree, while the warden and her guards represented the ants who questioned them. While in the prison, Pandya and Retro learn that they were spies who were spying on the prison which is actually a center for a human weapon cloning project, and it houses clones who serve as weapons. However, Pandya and Retro are unique clones who have a "mutant gene cluster" that allow them to have the weapons and martial arts expertise they have.

The film itself is very visually striking, and even obnoxious in a way. The animation is done by Production I.G., who are most recognized for their work on *Ghost In The Shell*, this is done in a very different style than what they are known to do. They usually go for very high iconic level characters and realistic looking environments with full animation. There are streaks of bright colours and lines of onomatopoeia that show up in a lot of the scenes. The visual style is very similar to that of a comic and a lot of the movie resembles a faster paced motion comic. There is a lot of use of multiple panels to show different aspects of the same scene. The action scenes are over the top and the laws of physics do not apply. There is a high amount of gore but I do not find it to be graphic in any way, partly due to the art style. The story is presented from an objective viewpoint. The characters are definitely iconic, but have some very bizarre traits, such as "Dick Drill" who has a giant drill protruding from his crotch, an obvious phallic symbol, and Retro who has a television for a head. Carl Silvio describes cyborgs as, "The cyborg...serves as a representational figure that embodies the capacity of information technologies to erase gender and racial boundaries and the structures of oppression which have historically accompanied them" (Silvio 54). The characters in *Dead Leaves* do not do any of these things, and the characters with cybernetic enhancements seem to have them solely for character design purposes.

After the final battle, Pandya and Retro escape the prison in a pod, after watching their child die after sacrificing himself for them. As they escape, they break away from the gravitational field of the moon, and the ship initiates a cryogenic sleep sequence. The movie closes with the pod crashing on Earth, bringing them right back where they were at the beginning of the movie. The movie ends with not much being resolved and the viewers are almost left right back where they started, with Pandya and Retro waking up in an Earth-bound escape pod. This might be a metaphor for the caterpillars looking up to the leaves, and Pandya and Retro being in a pod representative of their cocoons.

Works Cited

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