

Jr. The adaptation was not at all faithful to the book and people who bought the book--"Inner Sanctum Film Mysteries" were timed to correspond to the publication of "Inner Sanctum" novels--were probably pleasantly surprised to find a much better story. It was made a second time in 1962 and a third time in 1980. The

THE MT VOID

Page 2

latter was an uncredited witless comedy, WITCHES' BREW, starring Richard Benjamin, Lana Turner, and Terri Garr. But it was the second production, NIGHT OF THE EAGLE, that most people remember most fondly of the three. That film is not to be confused with NIGHT OF THE DEMON. The latter, made four years earlier, is a great little adaptation of M. R. James's "Casting of the Runes." In the United States this film was shorn of a few of its sequences and shown as CURSE OF THE DEMON. The two films are easy to confuse since each is a nifty adaptation of a well-known story. Well, our next film festival, at 7PM on Thursday, July 27, will help people keep them straight.

The Night of Nights

NIGHT OF THE DEMON (1958), dir. by Jacques Tourner

NIGHT OF THE EAGLE (1962), dir. by Sidney Hayers

THE NIGHT OF THE DEMON: I don't know how this video version of the film came together. Goodtimes Video sells it in a garish box as CURSE OF THE DEMON. That is the title of the abridged American version of this film. The funny thing is that someplace they found the full print of NIGHT OF THE DEMON and must have edited the two films together. The film bears the American title but it is the complete British film. Dana Andrews, Niall McGinnis, and Peggy Cummings star in a very nice little thriller directed by Jacques Tourner, known for directing Val Lewton's THE CAT PEOPLE. The film is about an English adept in black magic and an American skeptic, and develops into a real battle of wills. This is a very fondly remembered film. There is even a reference to it in THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW.

THE NIGHT OF THE EAGLE: I can't tell you why this film is not as fondly remembered as THE NIGHT OF THE DEMON. It certainly has a pedigree. The novel is by Fritz Leiber, as I have said, and the screenplay is by Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson. These are

two very fine writers and with the possible exception of Leiber himself, they were just about the best choice for adapting Leiber's dark novel of witchcraft on a college campus. The film maintains a great deal of tension. It stars Peter Wyngarde and Janet Blair with a terrific performance by Margaret Johnston. It is a fairly faithful adaptation. Again the tension is between a believer in magic and a skeptic, but in this case the skeptic is a college professor who is unaware his wife secretly performs magic ceremonies in an attempt to protect him from evil. This one is subtle, but it works. The American title is BURN WITCH BURN, though it has no connection to the A. Merritt novel of that name! That novel was filmed as DEVIL DOLL in 1936. [-mrl]

THE MT VOID

Page 3

2. NOBODY'S SON by Sean Stewart (Ace, ISBN 0-441-00128-9, 1995, 273pp, US\$5.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The blurb on this says, "'Happily ever after' is only the beginning," and that is a reasonable summary of the book. The eponymous main character, also known as Shielder's Mark, goes into a haunted forest to break the enchantment around the Red Keep. When he comes out with the singing sword Sweetness, he claims as his prize the king's daughter. But nothing after that goes the way the old fairy tales would have it. His wife, though she likes him, doesn't worship him. The king, though he had to grant the request, doesn't much like him either. And the rest of the court thinks that he's "Nobody's Son" and treats him accordingly.

There are parts of this book that are hard to get through because of the thick dialect (including the first chapter). And everything seems to get wrapped up a bit too quickly and neatly at the end. A bit ironic, given the premise, wouldn't you say? There is also a somewhat incongruous discussion of God and religion stuck in the middle. I get the impression that Stewart finds the subject of religion interesting, since he visits it in all his novels, but in this case it seems grafted on rather than an integral part of the

plot. In spite of these drawbacks, however, I would recommend this as an interesting variation on the classic fairy tale pattern. [-ecl]

3. CRUMB (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Come spend a two-hour visit to the Mount Everest of dysfunctional families. CRUMB is a documentary that was seven years in the making about the famous underground cartoonist, his family, his editors, and his hang-ups. The conclusion the film seems to draw is that this is not so much a guy writing really weird comic books as a really weird guy writing comics.
Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4)

Human beings, as evolved animals, have a dual nature. We have an intellectual side and an animal side. The latter we have since we are, after all, we are animals. We are forced to spend time eliminating wastes, we have drives to reproduce ourselves, and we have physical animal bodies. But we wall off that part of our lives by doing it in as much privacy as we can arrange. Much of what we consider to be indignity, much of what we find embarrassing, is to be reminded that we really are biological. There is sex humor and bathroom humor. We find it funny that a President of the United States would vomit on a high dignitary of

Japan because it reminds us that even a President has a lot in common with all other animals. CRUMB is a film that says little more than Robert Crumb is very hung up on the fact that everyone has an animal side and that his bizarre humor comes out of these obsessions.

Robert Crumb's nihilistic and misanthropic underground comics precisely reflect his personality. The man himself is as misanthropic, misogynistic, and kinky as the underground comic books he draws and writes. Or at least that is the face he is

trying to present in the documentary CRUMB, made by his long-time friend, Terry Zwigoff. On one hand the documentary has the air of authenticity because the style of Crumb's work seems so naturally to arise from the person the film describes. But Crumb is obviously someone quite capable of playing jokes on the documentary maker and his audience. It might even be to be expected. When Crumb describes some of the odder aspects of his childhood, like his sexual attraction to Bugs Bunny, it could be true. But it also sounds suspiciously like a put-on in the style of comedian Emo Philips. Crumb could be as weird as he wants us to think he is, or it could be in part a joke or even a publicity stunt.

As weird as he presents himself, Crumb is a functioning human being and in the Crumb family that makes him not just not just unusual, it makes him a real wonder. Each of the Crumb children we see leads a psychologically knotted and screwed up dysfunctional life. The family peculiarities are due in large part to an abusive father who tried too hard to force the family to fit his concept of a norm. We meet three brothers: Robert, the younger Max, and the older Charles. (Two sisters understandably did not want any part of the documentary and perhaps the family.) The oldest of the brothers is the suicidal Charles who has retreated from the world, making himself a recluse in part due to the drug treatments for his self-destructive impulses. Robert's brother Max supports himself by begging on the street and in his spare time performing feats of yoga. The boys continue to rebel against their father and society in general in many different ways. At one time the standard Crumb family mode of rebellion was to draw amateur comic books and this has made one of the boys moderately rich and sort of famous.

In the course of the documentary Crumb tells the camera about his background and particularly his sexual hangups. Bugs Bunny gave way to a marginally more normal fixation on Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, the heroine of a 1955 syndicated television series. The Crumb brothers were social outcasts in school and continued to be so in the drug culture. In spite of rumors that he was at one time "in" with well-known rock groups, he was an outcast with just about everyone but his family.

His discussions in the film include his sexual fetishes, particularly sitting on women's shoes and riding women piggy-back.

We are told that he is not much interested in sex in usual way, though he does have a daughter who is apparently his own. What we do discover is that he has a seriously negative attitude about nearly everything that strikes him as being normal and he seems bitter about just about all that is around him. One temporary exception is France; he seems to think that he will like France and in the course of the making of the film he moves there. Though we do not find out in the film, it seems very likely that he will be disappointed as much by that as by just about everything else in his life.

The film's view of Crumb is at times ironic. While on one hand he claims to be very disinterested in being successful and is unwilling to make some effort that would make his art more saleable, he complains bitterly how his most famous pieces of art did not pay him very well and all the profits are going to others. He claims he was "ripped off" though, in fact, from his account given at a lecture, it sounds more likely that he just made a bad bargain and sold off the rights for considerably less than they would eventually be worth. The three most successful works were the "Keep on Truckin'" cartoon, the "Cheap Thrills" album cover, and the film rights to his character "Fritz the Cat." Zwigoff's documentary style is very often just to let the camera roll as Robert talks with his brother frankly about sex or describing their masturbation or toilet habits.

There are some nice ironies captured on film. Another artist, comments she was never bothered by Crumb's material--some of which it appears was quite racist, at least on the surface. But she did object when his cartoons started taking a misogynist tone, including mutilation fantasies. The film does make some interesting points when it suggests that the image of the wholesome family--the "Leave it to Beaver" family--that was considered the ideal in the Fifties--may have been a reaction to WWII in that people found the stable family reassuring. It is unclear, however, why there was no similar reaction to the Korean and Vietnam wars.

While I am not sure CRUMB lives up to the expectations raised by some of the critical comment, it is an engrossing documentary with the same sort of unaccountable fascination that a dead horse by the side of the road has. Rate it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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Justice, n. A commodity which in a more or less adulterated condition the State sells to the citizen as a reward for his allegiance, taxes and personal

service.

-- Ambrose Bierce

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