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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Mini Reviews, Part 16 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the sixteenth "batch" of (well, two) mini-reviews, films for the whole family (more or less):

CRUELLA: CRUELLA is a prequel to 101 DALMATIANS (1996), or ONE HUNDRED AND ONE DALMATIANS (1996), or both. It gives the back story of Cruella DeVil, but not the back story you expect. It seems to be following in the genre of story in which everything you thought you knew turns out to be wrong, and the first one of these I can recall is Gregory Maguire's novel WICKED. All the acting seems to be over the top, but it's probably amusing enough for an undemanding audience.

Released theatrically 05/18/21; available on DVD and on various streaming services. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3228774/reference>

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

JUNGLE CRUISE: JUNGLE CRUISE (the movie) was based on "Jungle Cruise", a Disneyland ride, so we weren't expecting much, and were definitely pleasantly surprised. (Then again, so was PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN, and that turned out well.) It does add to the story some supernatural elements apparently not found in Disneyland.

Screenwriters Michael Green, Glenn Ficarra, and John Requa deliver a script that is actually well written and one that is more fun than usual. That quality of writing talent is hard to find these days. The script owes some of its intelligence and humor to THE AFRICAN QUEEN and ROMANCING THE STONE, as well as THE MUMMY (1999) and RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK. But there is nothing wrong with using classics as inspiration, especially when one expects many in the audience to get the references. Dwayne Johnson is charming as Frank Wolff in a Charlie Allnut sort of way; Emily Blunt is a bit more openly assertive as Lily Houghton than Rose Sayer was. All in all, this is a fun movie.

Released theatrically 07/20/21; available on Disney+. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0870154/reference>

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

[-mrl/ec]

ROME and Historical Figures (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the HBO series ROME](#) in the 04/29/22 issue of the MT VOID, Joseph T. Major writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "Only HBO's ROME comes close on the historical figures, but the two main characters are totally fictional." [-ecl]

Not totally.

"In that legion there were two very brave men, centurions, who were now approaching the first ranks, T. Pullio, and L. Vorenus. These used to have continual disputes between them which of them should be preferred, and every year used to contend for promotion with the utmost animosity. When the fight was going on most vigorously before the fortifications, Pullio, one of them, says, "Why do you hesitate, Vorenus? or what [better] opportunity of signaling your valor do you seek? This very day shall decide our disputes." When he had uttered these words, he proceeds beyond the fortifications, and rushes on that part of the enemy which appeared the thickest. Nor does Vorenus remain within the rampart, but respecting the high opinion of all, follows close after. Then, when an inconsiderable space intervened, Pullio throws his javelin at the enemy, and pierces one of the multitude who was running up, and while the latter was wounded and slain, the enemy cover him with their shields, and all throw their weapons at the other and afford him no opportunity of retreating. The shield of Pullio is pierced and a javelin is fastened in his belt. This circumstance turns aside his scabbard and obstructs his right hand when attempting to draw his sword: the enemy crowd around him when [thus] embarrassed. His rival runs up to him and succors him in this emergency. Immediately the whole host turn from Pullio to him, supposing the other to be pierced through by the javelin. Vorenus rushes on briskly with his sword and carries on the combat hand to hand, and having slain one man, for a short time drove back the rest: while he urges on too eagerly, slipping into a hollow, he fell. To him, in his turn, when surrounded, Pullio brings relief; and both having slain a great number, retreat into the fortifications amid the highest applause. Fortune so dealt with both in this rivalry and conflict, that the one competitor was a succor and a safeguard to the other, nor could it be determined which of the two appeared worthy of being preferred to the other." [n Bellum Gallicum, Liber V, XLIV]

Not quite like the two characters, but there were people of the same name. [-jtm]

Evelyn responds:

HBO may have used two names out of history, but the characters as shown in the series are just two legionaries with the same names, but nothing else in common so far as we know. So I think of them as totally fictional. YMMV. [-ecl]

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

I've written comments on several Sherlock Holmes stories, but today I will tackle the first, A STUDY IN SCARLET by Arthur Conan Doyle. It is also one of the four novels (as opposed to being a short story). As I think will be clear, Doyle had not firmed up the back story for either of his characters. Watson's famously "wandering wound" doesn't wander in this story, but is not consistent across all the stories. I will note other changes as well.

Watson begins by saying his health was "irretrievably ruined." He later adds "I am not strong enough yet to stand much noise or excitement," and says, "My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial." Doyle seems to hold to this in this book, but even just one book later (THE SIGN OF FOUR) Watson is involved in quite a bit of excitement, and in future stories he is climbing walls, running across moors, and constantly being told to bring his service revolver on trips, which sounds pretty exciting to me.

Stamford says that Holmes had found some nice rooms "which were too much for his purse." That may have been true then, but from the start Holmes is spending money right and left, and not always being reimbursed. For example, he pays the six Baker Street Irregulars a shilling each the first time they show up and presumably at least one more each when they find the Aurora.

Anyway, Watson's pension is eleven shillings and sixpence a day, or a little over four pounds a week. Stangerson and Drebbler were paying a pound a day each for rooms at the Charpentiers', or fourteen pounds a week. Even if one thinks of the Charpentiers as running a hotel, while 221B is a long-term rental, it doesn't seem as if Watson could afford half the rental. (We are never told what the rental is, but we do know that what Holmes paid in rent would have paid for the building several times over.)

Jefferson Hope sends someone to 221B Baker Street to get the wedding ring. Yet he is not the least bit suspicious when Wiggins asks him to bring his cab to that same address at the end of the story.

It is beyond coincidence that just when Holmes needs to check if a pill contains poison, there happens to be a sick dog that needs to be put out of its misery. (And given the expression on Stangerson's face, it does not seem like this was a particularly painless death.) On the other hand, it may explain what happened to the bull pup Watson mentioned keeping; was it given away because it couldn't get along with the terrier? (Though how Watson managed to have a bull pup when he was fresh out of the Army and living in a hotel on limited funds is never explained either.)

Watson writes, "I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion." By the start of THE SIGN OF FOUR, Holmes is explicitly a cocaine user, but it is not clear whether Doyle intended this when he wrote A STUDY IN SCARLET.

Holmes describes himself as the only consulting detective in the world. "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." But this also does not last long. Although he claims the non-Scotland-Yard cases are "mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies," it is clear that he quickly developed a reputation and people would come on their own. This is especially true when it is not obvious at the start that there has been a crime. I don't feel like checking every story, but it appears that almost all the stories in the first collection, THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES--are brought to him by private individuals acting in their own behalf.)

Holmes complains that Scotland Yard "will pocket all the credit," but he certainly manages to become well enough known to get a lot of future cases on his reputation alone, and in later stories tells various police detectives that he does not want any credit or publicity (although it may not take much for him to gain a good reputation).

Though the relationship between the Mormons and the Masons has been rocky at times, it is certainly possible that Stangerson would have a "gold ring with a Masonic device."

The idea that you can judge a person's height by the length of their stride assumes that the ratio of leg length to overall height is a constant. It isn't. For example, at one point I wore a pants leg an inch longer than Mark, yet he was three inches taller than I was.

Does lightness and transparency of pills really indicate solubility in water?

Jefferson Hope is also suffering from ill health, yet manages to engage in a struggle described as a "furious resistance" with at least three men. His aneurism conveniently waits until he has told his story and then, apparently, bursts when he is sleeping peacefully.

Hope said, "I had grown my beard and there was no chance of their recognising me." Then he says then Enoch Drebber, even drunk, was able to recognize him.

And keeping the wedding ring as a memento of Lucy seems strange, since it would be something she hated, not something she treasured.

These obviously are just a few of the items worth noting in the book. For a more complete annotation, see either William Baring-Gould's or Leslie Klinger's annotated versions. (There is also an Oxford annotated version but it is nowhere near as complete as Baring-Gould or Klinger.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction
is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth isn't.
--Mark Twain

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