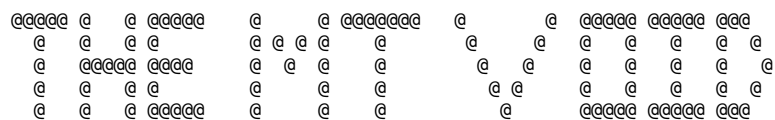


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Six Lost Worlds: The Dramatic Adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Novel (Part 3) (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

[continued from last week]

THE LOST WORLD (1992)

The 1992 version of THE LOST WORLD, a Canadian production directed by Timothy Bond (who previously directed episodes for the television series "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and "War of the Worlds") and written and co-produced by Harry Alan Towers. The film is shot in Zimbabwe and apparently was made together or in tandem with a sequel, RETURN TO THE LOST WORLD. To accommodate this location the plateau is moved from South America to Africa. The transplant gives the story a sort of H. Rider Haggard feel that would be okay, but it is not Doyle.

Towers's script starts reasonably faithful to the Doyle but quickly shows its loyalties are more to sending (condescending) politically correct messages than to the text by Doyle. Male chauvinists everywhere are given a come-uppance by a strong female on the expedition. Because the script is already being written on a juvenile level, a boy is added to the expedition to give children someone to identify with.

As in the book, Malone (Edward McCormack) passes himself off to Challenger (John Rhys-Davies) as a scientist, but he does not have the knowledge to maintain the ruse. Malone is, incidentally, made a Canadian to give the Canadian audience a one of their own to care about. Challenger attacks Malone, the police intervene, and Malone endears himself to Challenger by choosing not to press charges. The forming of the expedition is pretty much like in the manner of the novel though they end up with woman reporter Jenny Nielson (Tamara Gorsu) and a twelve-ish boy Jim (Darren Peter Mercer). The character of Roxton has been eliminated and there is no equivalent. As in the book but few film versions it is decided that it is Summerlee (David Warner) who will lead the expedition and Challenger will remain behind. Not to worry, Rhys-Davies is too big a star to not be included in the expedition.

More invented characters come along. On the way the expedition is joined by a female Noble Savage in a revealing two-piece outfit. She is Malu (Nathania Stanford) and can be counted on to have politically correct thinking as everybody raised in the bush would have. Also along is the nasty Gomez (Geza Kovacs). One more piece that harks from the book--in the end the expedition brings back to London a pterodactyl, though the story of the pterodactyl is somewhat different from Doyle's tale.

The reporter Jenny Nielson appears inspired by the real person Nellie Bly. She is a slightly aggressive feminist. On the other hand John Rhys-Davies makes a passable Challenger in stature and temperament. He is, after his earliest scenes and though he feuds with Summerlee, less strident and more boyishly likable than in the Doyle.

The choice to do the film in a didactic and juvenile fashion that makes it a very bad disappointment after a start that is at least decent. The dinosaurs were rubbery and cute with rough edges rounded off and so was the writing. The script looks for every politically correct lesson that can be wrung from the plot. Doyle, of course, had no women on the expedition. The first two film versions each had one woman along. This version has two attractive women and a plucky youngster. Things are going downhill.

I will not say much about the sequel, RETURN TO THE LOST WORLD. It is not an adaptation of the Doyle, but only inspired by it. The story involves European entrepreneurs who want to exploit the petroleum in the no longer lost world and the team returns to the plateau to protect it. It is not the most original or engaging story and did not really need this particular prehistoric land to tell its story. The sequel certainly underscored that Maple White Land was a noble and wondrous world that needed to be preserved. The 1998 version had a very different attitude toward Maple White's mysterious land.

THE LOST WORLD (1998) a.k.a. SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S THE LOST WORLD

Six years after the Canadian production of THE LOST WORLD, the story was again adapted in the United States with some unusual variations. Even the title was modified. Following the films BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA and MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN, it became popular to include the original author's name in the title of films based on classics. It somehow promised that the content fidelity to the original work. BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA added a love interest for Dracula that Bram Stoker would not have recognized, and MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN had Victor bringing his bride back from the dead in precisely the way that the character in the book did not. Still, it was popular for a while to put the author's name in the title. Hence in two years we have two different films titled SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S THE LOST WORLD. This is the first. To make things even more confusing the two versions each has the same actor playing Summerlee. It must take a lot of explanation on his resume that these really are different films. This film proves its loyalty (or lack thereof) to the original text by starting in Mongolia, of all places.

The 1998 film opens with Maple White finding a pterodactyl egg and paying for it with his life. He lives long enough to pass his notebook and other interesting evidence to his traveling companion and partner G. E. Challenger (Patrick Bergin, who does not look anything like Doyle's Challenger). When Challenger returns to London with his claims that dinosaurs exist, showing notebooks as his evidence, as usual in adaptations he is met with skepticism and is offered the means for an expedition. Amanda White (Jayne Heitmeyer) recognizes her father's notebooks and insists on being part of the expedition. Mr. Summerlee is ambivalent about being asked to go on the expedition, but after a moment agrees. Unique in this version, Summerlee is actually a fairly decent and interesting character and one the audience cares for. Michael Sinelnikoff makes a very acceptable if not highly memorable Summerlee. He does such a good job that in the unrelated production the following year he repeated the role, though that part was not as well written. He is, I believe, the only actor to repeat a role in two unconnected productions of THE LOST WORLD. He also plays the role in the "Lost World" television series, of which I will say more later. John Roxton (David Nerman) is demoted from being the book's English lord to being an obnoxious American hunter who later proves to be of villainous intent. Arthur (!) Malone the reporter also joins the expedition played by an unmemorable Julian Casey. Bergin's Challenger gets along neither with Summerlee nor Roxton, though the audience likes Roxton considerably less.

Using several conveyances of the period, which seems to be the 1930s or so, the crew makes its way to Mongolia and the plateau out of time. The final step involves a helium balloon to ascend the plateau as a sort of getaway after the team has just rescued Ms. White. In the best traditions of KING KONG she had been kidnapped by natives and stretched out on a rack. Having just been rescued and ascending to a land of vicious dinosaurs, Amanda White literally found herself between a rack and a hard place. And a hard place, the plateau is. The travelers find their land of dinosaurs--particularly vicious dinosaurs--and two warring tribes. One of the tribes are Neanderthals one more modern. In the end of an uncomfortable stay only Challenger and White make it out alive, though Malone is left behind on plateau like an Edgar Rice Burroughs hero.

We initially see a "brontosaurus" with some features that are wrong for the animal. Perhaps some effect artist tried to get creative. However, it turns out that the inaccuracy is a feature, not a bug. With hundreds of millions of years of evolution, it appears dinosaurs have diverged from those in the fossil record. Other adaptations have implied that once you got to know this plateau it was a groovy place to be. Perhaps one of the best touches of this version is that definitely is NOT the case in this adaptation. This is probably the goriest adaptation, and the plateau is a painful and dangerous place to be. Perhaps inspired by JURASSIC PARK this film has the meanest and most nasty dinosaurs of any version. The dinosaur effects seem to be in large part digital, though perhaps some mechanical effects were used also.

Making up a little for deficiencies in the writing the film has a terrific look. The art direction by Sylvain Gingras has an antique Indiana Jones tone. Several interesting vehicles are used to bring the explorers to Maple White land, especially a sort of half-track bus. While the transplantation from a South American jungle to snowy Mongolia seems all wrong, it is not a bad setting for an adventure story. It is reminiscent RKO setting their SHE (1935) in Tibet rather than Africa.

In the end, with Malone marooned in Maple White Land as a sort of Robinson Crusoe with dinosaurs, it is expected his adventures might continue. No sequel was made. However, someone in Canada had a very similar idea. Why not have a TV series set on the plateau? So nearly at the same time Canadian producers made their own version of the story, but handled it as a TV pilot and sold an entire TV series on the premise.

[continued next week]

[-mrl]

OPERATION MINCEMEAT (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on OPERATION MINCEMEAT](#) in the 07/29/22 issue of the MT VOID, Joseph T. Major writes:

I have both Macintyre's OPERATION MINCEMEAT and Montagu's THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS. I also have the book which provoked the writing of THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS.

Duff Cooper (Viscount Norwich, husband of the famous society figure Lady Diana Cooper, and father of the historian John Julius Norwich) knew something about Operation MINCEMEAT, and wrote a novel about a British officer who "served his country in death" by having his

body dropped off the Spanish coast with a briefcase of forged documents, OPERATION HEARTBREAK.

Instead of prosecuting Cooper for violating the Official Secrets Act, the intelligence establishment decided to get out a carefully edited version of the story. [-jtm]

Racist, Sexist Robots (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [a news article commenting on robots being racist and sexist](#) in the 07/29/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

The flaw was inherent in the experiment. The software (calling it a "virtual robot" just adds clickbait) was used to identify personal characteristics based on facial appearance. How could it not engage in some kind of stereotyping?

The only thing it can do is go by statistics. In the United States, black people more often have menial jobs than whites do, black crime rates are higher, and women are more often homemakers (though the correlation is less than it used to be). This doesn't mean you should assume someone is a criminal or has a low-paying job based on appearance, but that was exactly what the software was directed to do. [-gmg]

Evelyn responds:

One is reminded of the "South pacific" song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught", the key lyric being:

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

[-ecl]

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

Our film-and-book group did THE HIDDEN as its film, and NEEDLE by Hal Clement (Avon, ISBN 0-380-44263-9) as the accompanying novel. (The film is chosen first, and then an appropriate book is chosen to go with it. Often the book is the basis of the film, but not always.) NEEDLE was written in 1950 and, boy, does its age show. And "boy" is the operative word here. There is a female school nurse, and Bob's mother, and maybe a female teacher, but this is definitely a boy's book. And a boy's book of the "Tom Swift"/"Hardy Boys" type, where somehow the (fifteen-year-old boys have all sorts of unsupervised time, and get to do all sorts of dangerous things, and seem totally independent of any adult supervision unless it is needed to give them something to get around. (In fairness, "Nancy Drew" books were the same.) I guess things were like that back then (whenever the "then" was that Clement was writing about, even though it was supposedly set in the near future). If one reads ROCKET BOYS by Homer Hickham, Jr., one sees the same independence: the boys in that build and fire rockets miles from home, as well as pull up and sell abandoned rails and other activities that would be more than highly questionable today.

And the setting of NEEDLE is equally unbelievable: a small South Seas island (my estimate from the information is about five square miles) with lots of construction materials and enough children to provide Bob with at least three friends his same age, as well as enough to have quite a few other children in the island's school. (Oddly, though, none of the teenagers seem to have any noticeable siblings.) Most of the people live in about thirty houses, so figure maybe fifty houses total, or a couple of hundred people. Even if the company only took young married couples (and given that all the jobs seem to be held by the men, why would the company take on all those extra people?), the demographics are all wrong.

(And while we're at it, why is Bob attending a private school literally halfway around the world from his home?)

Yeah, I know--that's not the point of the story. But it creates a problem with accepting the premises. But somehow it's easier to accept an amorphous alien that inhabits its host's body than the human society Clement has describe. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Get thee glass eyes;
And like a scurvy politician, seem
To see the things thou dost not.
--Shakespeare
[King Lear, Act IV,
Scene 6]

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