

MT VOID 11/11/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 20, Whole Number 2249



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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com
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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

"Tall-Washing" (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Paul Muni was a great actor, but his casting as Benito Juarez in the film JUAREZ was not only white-washing, but also "tall-washing". Juarez was a Zapotec, and 4'6" (137 cm) tall. Muni was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in what is now Lviv, Ukraine, and was ... wait for it ... 5'10" tall.(178 cm). In THE LORD OF THE RINGS and THE HOBBIT, they used special effects tricks to make the dwarves and hobbits appear the right height, even when they hired taller actors to play the parts. I'm not sure whether that is better or worse than just acting as if Juarez was 30% taller.

Mini Reviews, Part 3 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the third batch of mini-reviews.

VOODOO MACBETH: VOODOO MACBETH is a Narrative film (i.e., not a documentary) about the Federal Theater Project production of MACBETH in 1935 in its Negro Theater Unit, headed by Rose McClendon and John Houseman. They got Orson Welles to direct, and this was Welles's directorial debut. The production became famous, perhaps the more so for having no record of it other than still photographs, so a film about it is quite welcome.

Unfortunately, the film VOODOO MACBETH sacrifices historical accuracy for dramatic effect. It adds a gay subplot, a corrupt anti-Communist Congressman, a stabbing, and other flights of fancy. (Then again, this is not unlike Welles's falsifying of reality in his radio production of "The War of the Worlds". In fact, he had a lifelong fascination with magic and other forms of deception.)

This means, though, that the viewer cannot know if there really was an initial problem that the crew was too white, or whether Virginia

(Nicolson) Welles's role in the production is accurate. She is portrayed as quite liberal about African Americans in the film, and the idea for the Haitian setting to be hers. Yet in real life she ended up living in apartheid South Africa and being quite comfortable with that (according to her daughter). But given Orson Welles's ego, it is certainly possible that he took credit for ideas that were not quite his. I am also somewhat skeptical of the extent of the casting difficulties--is it really true that all Welles could find were totally inexperienced actors: a boxer, a singer, an elevator operator, and so on?

There are also a lot of theater superstitions thrown in (no mention of the "M" word outside of the script, no whistling in the theater, etc.).

Released theatrically 21 October 2022. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9748424/reference>

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

ADIEU GODARD: ADIEU GODARD is an Indian-French co-production in the Odia language (one of the official languages of India, from the state of Odisha). The majority of the film is set in a small village and is filmed in black and white (although there are occasional touches of very faded red); the rest is set in an unspecified city and is filmed in color. (The subtitles are in readable yellow, though fairly small and evidently written by a non-English speaker.) The director is not playing for a large audience with this film. We get views of village life in India as well as clips from Godard's BREATHLESS. There is some philosophy as the men in the village try to decide whether cinema is for edification or entertainment. Also, as a commentary on Indian films, people complain the films have no songs or dancing, and someone claims that is because Godard is trying something new. The film goes from a very traditional Indian village to some very current discussions about sex.

[Coincidentally, Jean-Luc Godard died two days after we saw this film.]

Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Released on Hoopla and other streaming services: 26 August 2022.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14502658/reference>

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

LIE HARD: In LIE HARD, Rob, a not-very-bright twenty-something, borrows \$4 million from the mob to impress his girlfriend's father. Then the mob wants the money back. So Rob comes up with increasingly bad ideas, involving two shoplifters, an old man in a bar, the daughter of the mob boss, and the FBI. It's supposed to be a comedy, but it's just lame. Especially the end.

Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

Released on Amazon Prime: 16 August 2022.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13313642/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

Firemen (letter of comment by Sam Long):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Ray Bradbury's use of the term "fireman" in FAHRENHEIT 451](#) in the 11/04/22 issue of the MT VOID, Sam Long writes:

Although we usually think of a "fireman" as someone who puts out fires, back in the days of steam trains, the "fireman" was the guy who kept the fire in the steam locomotive's firebox going. The engineer or engine driver "drove" the train, operated the throttle and the brakes, etc., but the fireman shoveled the coal (or ran the pump that fed oil to the firebox of an oil-powered steam engine.) For more info, see Wikipedia s.v. "Fireman_(steam_engine)".

Fun fact: Before he got into the business of cooking chicken, Col. Sanders worked as a railroad fireman when he was in his late teens. [-sl]

GATTACA and Civil Liberties (letter of comment by Joy Beeson):

In response to [Gary McGath's comments on GATTACA](#) in the 10/28/22 issue of the MT VOID, Joy Beeson writes:

[Gary said,] "The society portrayed there didn't strike me as particularly strong on civil liberties. It appeared very conformist." [-gmg]

We are headed there in a handbasket. [-jb]

ROMANCING THE STONE (and Other Stuff) (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on THE LOST CITY](#) in the 11/04/22 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

I hope this brief e-moc finds you well. It has been a very long time since I have written one of these to you folks, but this semester has been extremely busy. Enrollment at the community college I teach at is up significantly this semester, so additional classes were added, and since the Powers That Be were not interested in hiring new instructors, either part time or full time, they asked if any of us existing faculty would be willing to take on an overload course or two. Sensing nice paychecks, for the first time in my teaching career I accepted a double-overload, and while I have been able to streamline things - I have a total of seven first-year composition courses, so it is all one prep; just change dates as needed; also put as much as possible into auto-grade assignments - the necessary evil called essays still must be individually graded, and brother, does that eat up time! Even so, I have things sort of under control enough to write an occasional letter of comment.

In short, mainly due to the length of your latest issue including short movie reviews, I have to say that none of those films appeal to me. I definitely agree with your assessment of ROMANCING THE STONE (1984) as being entertaining mainly because of the chemistry between the three main actors: Michael Douglas, Kathleen Turner, and Danny DeVito. Their followup flick, THE JEWEL OF THE NILE (1985) bombed, although it did have some fun moments, but it was very hard to recreate the energy of the first movie.

The two books I am currently reading are THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE TALISMAN by Clifford D. Simak, and MERLIN'S RING by H. Warner Munn. Both are fantasies published by Ballantine Books during the same decade (Simak's in 1978, the Munn in 1974), and both have been entertaining. Of the two, Simak's writing style is much easier to get into largely due to the fairly straightforward narrative of that quest tale. MERLIN'S RING sprawls over centuries, if not millennia, covering multiple eras and the narrative style is a bit daunting at first; by page 50 I was finally used to Munn's style and started enjoying it. Then again, Cliff Simak has always been one of my personal favorite writers in any genre, and not just because I had met him many times while I was active in Minneapolis Fandom in the 1970s and 1980's; I simply like his direct story-telling and descriptive phrasing. Pastoral is a word that many critics have used when reviewing a Simak book, and I completely agree. I really like Simak's personalization of his stories. Simply a good writer, and I still miss him.

Anyway, that's about all I have to say for now. Thanks again for sending your weekly VOID. It is always appreciated. [-jp]

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

Before Gary Oldman, before Christopher Lee, even before Bela Lugosi, there was Max Schreck. In 1922 Schreck played Count Orlok, a thinly disguised Count Dracula, in NOSFERATU, a thinly disguised version of "Dracula". A bit too thinly disguised, as it turned out--Bram Stoker's estate sued the producers for plagiarism, and all prints were ordered destroyed. But like many of the Draculas in the movies, the film did not die: while all copies still in Germany were destroyed, the copies already sent overseas (including to the United States) were not. (One reason may have been that while the novel was protected by copyright in Germany, it was in public domain in the United States due to a copyright error.)

Eleven things to know about NOSFERATU:

1. NOSFERATU was effectively the first vampire film. While there is a 1921 Hungarian film that may have qualified, it has been lost. All references to vampires before NOSFERATU are really references to vamps.
2. NOSFERATU is one of the classics of German Expressionism.
3. NOSFERATU was the origin of the idea that sunlight destroys vampires.
4. The etymology of the word "Nosferatu" is unclear. It is apparently not found in any Eastern European languages.
5. In addition to the copies of the film NOSFERATU in the United States, several translations/versions of the novel DRACULA appeared in countries who were not signatories to the Berne Copyright Convention. The earliest was in Iceland, and contains scenes in Stoker's original notes that never made it to the final book. One explanation was that the author had been asked to help Stoker revise his first draft.
6. Count Orlok blinks only once in the film--but then again, he is on screen for only nine minutes.
7. The night scenes in NOSFERATU were intended to be tinted blue, which made the fact that they were filmed "day-for-night" less obvious. (The Kino restoration has the original tinting.) So while the scene showing Count Orlok carrying a coffin under his arm in what seems to be broad daylight is an accurate representation of his strength, but the blue tinting showed it was supposed to be nighttime.
8. Max Schreck's last name ("Schreck") means "terror" in German. It is a common urban legend that it was a stage name, and also that he was actually the actor Alfred Abel, but in fact it is his real family name. He was in dozens of films, but other than NOSFERATU, the only one people might have heard of is THE TUNNEL (a.k.a. THE TRANSATLANTIC TUNNEL).
9. The supposed "werewolf" we see early on is a hyena, and hyenas are not found in Germany in the wild. This is only the beginning of weird animals (and fruits) in Dracula movies. DRACULA (1931) has an aardvark and what is supposed to be a giant bee next to a full-size coffin, but just looks like a regular bee next to a tiny coffin (!). HORROR OF DRACULA has a fruit bowl on Dracula's table in Transylvania with a pineapple in it, and while pineapples had been brought to Europe by Columbus, finding one in Transylvania in the 19th century seems unlikely.
10. Werner Herzog remade this in 1979 as NOSFERATU THE VAMPIRE, one of the rare instances in which both a film and its remake are highly regarded. Herzog has said he considers the original NOSFERATU the greatest German film ever made.
11. In 2000 E. Elias Merhige made SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE, a horror film about the making of NOSFERATU which assumes that Schreck was a real vampire. If you liked NOSFERATU, you have to watch SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE. The phrase "shadow of the vampire" comes from the closing intertitle card in NOSFERATU, and refers to the metaphorical shadow cast by the presence of a vampire in a town. Although Count Orlok definitely cast shadows in NOSFERATU (and quite impressive ones--they were a bit of a trademark of the film), there is disagreement among various folklores about whether vampires cast shadows or not.

[-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

I cook with wine, sometimes I even add it to the food.
--W. C. Fields

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