

MT VOID 09/18/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 12, Whole Number 2137



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
09/18/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 12, Whole Number 2137

Table of Contents

[Correction to Convention Conflicts](#)
[THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON](#) (comments by Mark R. leeper)
[BEAUTY AND THE BEAST \(LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE\) \(1946\)](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Infomercials](#) (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Tim Merrigan, Kevin R, Dorothy J. Heydt)
[A CANTERBURY TALE](#) (letter of comment by Paul Dormer)
[This Week's Reading](#) (A STUDY IN BRIMSTONE, THE HELL-HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, and MY GRAVE RITUAL) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com
All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send mail to eleeper@optonline.net
The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.
An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Correction to Convention Conflicts:

In the comments on convention conflicts in the 09/04/20 issue of the MT VOID, I mis-attributed, "Mind you, I thought Con Jose back in 2002 were taking the piss when they scheduled two panels about Buffy in consecutive timeslots--at opposite ends of a very large convention centre." I attributed it to Tim Merrigan, but Paul Dormer writes, "That was me, responding to Tim." [-ecl]

THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON (comments by Mark R. leeper):

Capsule: The image of THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON (1954) is imprinted on our cultural psychology perhaps only surpassed by the visages of King Kong, Frankenstein's creature, and Godzilla. The creature himself is an icon more recognizable than any number of screen monsters that have appeared in the 20th-century. The science of the script is laughably problematic, but does not seem much of a flaw. What is remembered is a short sequence with Julie Adams swimming on the surface while unknown to her the creature is swimming a symmetric dance. This is certainly one of the most fondly remembered of the science fiction films of the 1950s. It probably is not for the script, which frankly is flawed, but some the visual images work well in the film. Still the film is a classic.

Cast: Julie Adams, Richard Carlson, Richard Denning.
Dir: Jack Arnold.

A scientist doing research on the Amazon finds a fossil hand of some strange creature that is part amphibian but still very humanlike. He goes off to show other scientists what once lived in the Brazilian Amazon. Unbeknownst to him there are fresher specimens around and the real thing is extremely nasty. An expedition to recover more of the fossil at first meets with

failure until the site of the search is moved to the nearby Black Lagoon. There the expedition finds itself prey to the title creature. Actually the creature does seem to stray from the lagoon, since that is where we first see him, but most of the time in the lagoon seems to be where you find him and he is anxious to defend this soggy turf.

The film has two basic conflicts. Obviously there is the creature against the humans. And then there is a conflict of the success-oriented scientist against the curiosity-oriented scientist, but the script of the rivalry of the two scientists is clichéd. The characters are one-dimensional and the plot reduces the title character to little more than just an angry bear besieging the expedition. There is one advantage there, the creature is of a believable strength. He is stronger than a human, but not absurdly so. There is a more believable creature than the living tank in *ALIEN*. The one touch that makes the creature interesting is his fascination with Kay (played by Julie Adams), the female lead actress, even though that makes little biological sense. The creature would be attracted to a gill-woman. There is the remarkable "underwater ballet" where Kay swims on the surface and the creature swims under her does have a sort of eroticism. Also making little biological sense is the crossing of an amphibian with something so human-shaped. They are really pushing convergent evolution particularly making the creature attracted to Kay. Consider how many more people know what the creature looks like and how few can picture the Martians from *WAR OF THE WORLDS*. Does the writer think he himself could be attracted to a female gorilla, no matter how cute?

But where the film gets its real class is in the quality of its cinematography. Unlike Jack Arnold's *It Came from Outer Space*, the shots are remarkably well-composed. While it is a little less true of the underwater photography over which there was less control, the majority of frames could stand by themselves as stills. It is hard to balance that sense of composition with the demands of 3D photography. The visual sense of this film is really the main reason the film is so fondly remembered. The best touch of the film is that look of the creature makes it one of the most memorable monsters of the 1950s. On the other hand pieces of the dialogue are awkward and the little science lectures that often even get the science very wrong.

Obviously this monster is one that has struck some chord in the audience that goes far beyond the film. This film gets a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

Turner Classic Movies is running this in both September (September 26, 2:00 AM) and October (October 12, 2:00 PM).
[-mrl]

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE) (1946) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Jean Cocteau combines elements of the Cinderella story with the Beauty and the Beast story, namely the two mean sisters (in this case, full sisters rather than stepsisters) who spend their time dressing up and putting on airs while Belle scrubs the floor.

Cocteau conveys the magical atmosphere with simple in-camera trick. Candles light themselves by the trick of being blown out and then having the film run backwards. Sculptures come to life by having actors' faces covered in a gray(?) make-up to match the rest of the stonework. (Having the film in black and white makes this easier.) When Belle travels through the hallway with windows, the actress is on a wheeled dolly that is pulled smoothly so that she appears to float through.

As is common, the Beast is too magnificent to be horrible. One can argue that a fearsome beast can be magnificent--consider the lion-- but it still makes him a bit less beastly. Belle describes him as ugly, but he is not. Quasimodo is ugly in most (all?) the film versions in large part because of his asymmetry, but the Beast does not have that flaw.

On the other hand, Avenant is handsome, but turns out to be a louse. So Cocteau gives her the best of both worlds: the Beast's appearance is changed to that of Avenant, while the (dead) Avenant takes on the appearance of the Beast. All in all, this is an incredibly lookist film (and story).

And then the Beast tells Belle they are going to fly to his kingdom where she will find her father (who was ailing just a few days earlier) and her sisters will serve her, and then they rise up into the sky (heavens?) with billowing cape, and clouds, and everything else that makes them look like Renaissance angels. Is Cocteau trying to signal that they are dead and the Beast's kingdom is in Heaven?

It is not clear at what point the Beast decides not to kill Belle. Is it when Belle's father first mentions a daughter and the Beast wants companionship more than vengeance? Or is it when he first sees her?

Why does the Beast lap up water from the pond? He is perfectly capable of drinking from a cup.

A technical note: The subtitles on the version I saw were incomplete--not every line was translated--and often I would catch a nuance in the French missing from the English. From example, Belle uses the verb "sortir" to the Beast, "Sortie," which is translated, "Go." But "sortir" has the meaning of "exit" or "leave". In this case Belle is specifically telling him to leave her room, not just to go in general. (When the horse is told to go, that is just "Va!" the imperative of "aller".) [-ecl]

Infomercials (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Tim Merrigan, Kevin R, Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Mark's comments on infomercials](#) in the 09/11/20 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

Infomercials were more than half a century old back in 1990, and are rapidly approaching the century mark. Here is an exciting radio program from 1933:

<http://www.panix.com/~kludge/radio17.mp3>

Fidelity here is not great, and the band is a little bit on the loose side, but the product does exactly what they claim. [-sd]

Tim Merrigan adds:

Until sometime in the late 50s or early 60s it was not uncommon for variety and similar shows to incorporate commercials into the programming. That sounds like this is more of that than that the programming is specifically designed to promote the product. So, I'm not sure it qualifies as an infomercial. If this is an infomercial, so was the Texaco Star Theater. [-tm]

Kevin R writes:

I remember the cast of "The Beverly Hillbillies" appearing in Kellogg's Corn Flakes spots:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqgrjpYxYF4>

The SUPERMAN TV cast flogged them, too. Of course, on the radio, The Man of Tomorrow was sponsored by Kellogg's Pep.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQYmqYC2sjY>

... and introducing Sugar Smacks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfbeXrLzZW8>

Captain Marvel hung out with Mr Tawny, but Kal-El was pals with Tony!:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHqzDQLT-iY>

Dorothy J. Heydt adds:

And I remember whoever it was played Tom Corbett, Space Cadet, flogging Wheaties.

Also, meeting the studio audience after the show (which was broadcast live), and answering questions about space and science and stuff. Which the actor could not have been expected to know; so they stood him in front of a curtain with a plug in his ear, and Willy Ley on the other side with a microphone.

/google

Frankie Thomas was his name.

.... and IMDB also had a line with the same series title and "in development." No other information. Dear me. [-djh]

And Evelyn adds:

If you watch old television shows from the 1950s (in specific, "Meet The Goldbergs"), you will see commercials worked into the plot. (As Raphael A. Riccio writes in an Amazon review, "The early episodes also included Molly pitching various products such as coffee, vitamins and knives in ads that were cleverly worked into the beginning of the script.") Today's product placement is merely visual (so far as I can tell), but back then Molly Goldberg actually told everyone about the benefits of Sanka. [-ecl]

Paul Dormer writes:

I watch live baseball on BT Sports in the UK and it would appear that baseball coverage still does incorporate commercials into the commentary. But it seems BT are not allowed to show these. So you hear a couple of words of the ad and then suddenly the screen blanks to the BT Sports logo, hold music is played, and then they cut back to the game.

Not sure why they have to do this. It's not as if I'm like to try and buy something being advertised when the nearest place I could is over 3000 miles away. [-pd]

Jay E. Morris responds:

I know sports commentators will often be hyping other network shows during the game. Perhaps it's BT not wanting to have mentioned shows not available? Or on another network? [-jem]

Paul answers:

I recorded last night's Sunday night game and I've just been watching it. It's not the commentators doing it, it's an actual short ad interpolated in the middle of the commentary - not a full ad break. They didn't cut away in time for a couple, so I did see the start of an ad for Grubhub, who I don't believe deliver round my way. The other was for some offer with T-Mobile.

Certainly on the NFL coverage on Sky, you're always getting ads for upcoming shows, some of which are even shown over here (but not at the time and day advertised). [-pd]

And Jay says:

Oh, those. I think it's because they don't want to go to a full commercial break but it's time to earn some money. No idea on those. [-jem]

Kevin R adds:

Other live broadcasts have done this. As early as 1926, Bulova produced its first radio commercial. "At the tone, its 8 PM, B-U-L- O-V-A Bulova watch time." I used to hear a version of this on New York radio decades later. That was likely all-news WCBS (880 AM) or WINS (1010 wins New York!)

The in-game, mid-commentary ad is known as a "drop-in." Baseball and other live sports don't have "hard breaks" requiring action to stop and ads shown. A baseball half inning can have a side set down in as little as three pitches, or the team at the plate could "bat around." The NY Times explained the drop-in, here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/19/sports/baseball/radio-broadcasts-balance-baseball-with-advertising.html>

[Two years ago the Mets moved to WCBS radio, when the Yankees took over WFAN (formerly WNBC).] [-kr]

[This is a long continuation of this discussion of commercials in live sports at <https://groups.google.com/g/rec.arts.sf.fandom/c/C7CZI-OFCVI>. You may need a Google (free) account to read it. -ecl]

A CANTERBURY TALE (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

Incidentally, have you ever seen the film A CANTERBURY TALE? It's very little to do with Chaucer, a wartime piece from Powell and Pressburger about three people thrown together by circumstance on the way to Canterbury, and a man who puts glue in women's hair. A curious film, but worth watching. It was on TV recently and I saw it again. [-pd]

Evelyn responds:

I saw it back in 2011, but don't recall it very well. [-ecl]

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

I have been reading G. S. Denning's stories of "Warlock Holmes"; there are five volumes, but I have only the first three: A STUDY IN BRIMSTONE (Titan, ISBN 978-1-7832-9971-3), THE HELL-HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (Titan, ISBN 978-1-7832-9973-7), and MY GRAVE RITUAL (Titan, ISBN 978-1-7832-9975-1). These retell Sherlock Holmes stories making Watson the brains and Holmes a warlock with magical powers, Groggson an ogre and Lestrade a vampire. Not surprisingly, these are laced with humor. ("They await their master's summons, lying dormant in some faraway land--a land of gray skies and shattered hopes, where no man ever smiles. Philadelphia, I seem to recall.")

They are not great literature, but they are amusing enough for Sherlock Holmes fans; other readers will not get the references and re-workings. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

I never want to hear another bad word about cultural practices of the Aztecs, the Egyptians, the Celts etc now that we have "a pyrotechnical celebration of fetal genitalia burned down 100k acres in 2020" in our history books.

--G. Willow Wilson

Tweet

Go to [our home page](#)