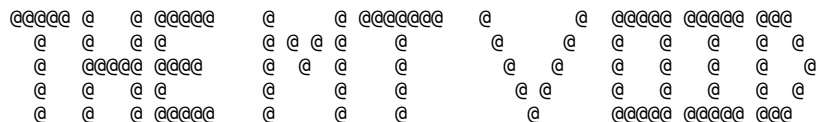


# MT VOID 08/12/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 7, Whole Number 2236



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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, [mleeper@optonline.net](mailto:mleeper@optonline.net)  
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, [eleeper@optonline.net](mailto:eleeper@optonline.net)  
Sending Address: [evelynchmelisleeper@gmail.com](mailto:evelynchmelisleeper@gmail.com)  
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### **Six Lost Worlds: The Dramatic Adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Novel (Part 4)** (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

[continued from last week]

THE LOST WORLD (1999)  
a.k.a. SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S THE LOST WORLD

Richard Franklin directed the 1999 version of THE LOST WORLD as a two-hour (minus commercials) pilot for the Canadian TV series of the same name. In fact the series sold and apparently ran in Canada and the United States. I was less than pleased with the pilot, which was very much of a television quality.

The setup is only vaguely correct and the people never do get off the plateau because then we would not have a continuing television series, would we? The focus is not even on the characters that Doyle created. They are lessened in importance compared to new strong (female) characters.

After an action prolog in which we see a man attacked by something big in a jungle, presumably a dinosaur. He finds tall, handsome explorer Challenger (Peter McCauley, very unlike Doyle's version). He dies in his camp, but not before he leaves Challenger his journal and photo negatives of pterodactyls. Challenger returns to London with tales of this lost world that he has not visited. He tells the geographic society of his discovery. They are skeptical, but suggest a special expedition. There are the usual three volunteers: Ned Malone (William deVry), Lord John Roxton (William Snow, a Pierce Brosnan look-alike), and Dr. Summerlee (Michael Sinelnikoff). Michael Sinelnikoff, as I said, also played Summerlee in the American version the previous year. In that he was a major character. Here, though he plays the same role, he has a lot less acting to do.

In one more variance from the book, Challenger seems to have no enmity toward Malone. When the question of who will fund the expedition arises a mysterious and beautiful woman steps forward, Marguerite Krux (played by Rachel Blakely) and volunteers on the

proviso that she can come on the expedition. Krux irritatingly has attitudes of 1999 and not at all of 1912. She complains about museums of "dead things." She wears brief outfits in the jungle. They nicely show off her cleavage but would be roughly the equivalent of ringing a flying insect dinner bell. She also seems to like skinny-dipping. The Victorian Doyle would probably have been scandalized by this adaptation of his book.

The group travels to the rain forest. Along the way they survive an attack by headhunters. They also survive the crash landing of the balloon they brought for their ascent onto the plateau. The landing of the balloon is never shown, probably as an economy measure. (The credit sequence shows the splintered piece of plateau that is the way the explorers in the book get onto the main plateau. The film never actually uses that entrance, choosing a perhaps more visual balloon ascent.)

On the plateau the explorers find Veronica, a Sheena-like jungle girl clad in a brief leather two-piece. She also is an abundant source of cleavage and is the last survivor of a previous expedition that included her parents. She has grown up on the plateau, and she lives in a fantastic tree house beyond anything Tarzan imagined. It even has an elevator.

The characters are not well developed. Roxton proves to be a likable bouncer. The other males are bland and uninteresting. Krux would be a character of some interest if she were a little less 1999 and more 1912.

The special effects are generally indifferently executed and there is not much real interaction between humans and dinosaurs. The large beasts are seen most frequently from distance. The prehistoric animals are an audience attraction, but they are a background detail that rarely fits into the plot. In fact, before the dinosaurs are first seen by the expedition, nobody even thinks to ask Veronica if there are dinosaurs on the plateau or not. The actual purpose of the expedition just never comes up. Now that is really relegating the dinosaurs to the background and concentrates more on the ape-men. Of course, Doyle did much the same. The effects might have been good if seen in Willis O'Brien's day but are really not up to 1990s standards. The images of the beasts are just never really integrated into scenes with people and frequently there are bad matte lines. When a pterodactyl grabs Roxton and carries him off the lizard undulates in air with the wing-beats, but Roxton remains rigid.

This version is more just a castaway story than a serious adaptation of Doyle's book. It is reminiscent of the old children's program "The Land of the Lost." The pilot is less interested in telling Doyle's story as in setting up the television series.

This brings us to the television series. Episodes I have seen have not been very interesting and not very faithful to the Doyle. They seem to freely move into the area of fantasy and have a lot of female flesh. Some of the writing is painfully bad. While searching for a way off the plateau the trapped explorers find what Challenger calls an "ocean"--on the plateau. He wants to find a sea route off the plateau. How exactly does he think that would work? How do you have an ocean lapping at the top of a plateau?

But even while this "sci-fi" series was being produced techniques for creating animal images on film improved. And Doyle's story was, as always, the perfect showcase for the new effects. So two years later the story was filmed a sixth time.

## THE LOST WORLD (2001)

It is not like previous decade had not had several adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle's THE LOST WORLD. But after the BBC finished their "Walking with Dinosaurs" with very realistic-looking effects, I suspected that the next natural thing to do with this technology for creating lifelike dinosaurs was to juxtapose them with humans. No respectable non-fiction presentation could do that. One would have to do a story in which humans interface closely with the dinosaurs. There is only one classic, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's THE LOST WORLD. (Note: JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH does have humans in viewing distance of an ichthyosaur fighting a plesiosaur, but these are not really dinosaurs and it is only one sequence.) So once again the Doyle was adapted.

The BBC, in cooperation with the A&E cable network, brought us a new version about 165 minutes long. The special effects combine CGI and full-scale models to give us state of the art visuals and dinosaur images that look realistic and fit our current paleontological knowledge.

This was, at least to my taste, the best version of the story we are likely to get for a while. Willis O'Brien who created the effects for the 1925 THE LOST WORLD and then was heartbroken when lizards were used in the 1960 version of the film would have been very pleased to see this version. Doyle might have been a little less pleased with the liberties taken with the plot. But still it was done on a relatively intelligent level.

Bob Hoskins takes a turn playing Challenger, a scientist with the reputation for being a crackpot. He outdoes himself when he claims that on his last expedition to South America he found a remote place where dinosaurs still live. The Royal Society is skeptical but fits out an expedition of four led by Challenger and the bland intellectual Summerlee (Edward Fox this time), a skeptic who has no patience for Challenger's claims or eccentricities. There is also game hunter Lord Roxton (Tom Ward) and news reporter Edward Malone (Matthew Rhys). The expedition finds the plateau where Challenger saw the dinosaurs all right, but their means of exit is destroyed in a way closer than usual to the Doyle, though still somewhat revisionist. They have to face the now all-too-real dinosaurs that Challenger reported seeing.

None of the cinematic versions of the novel have been really faithful. The newest version only roughly follows the Doyle and creates two new major characters. Agnes Clooney, raised in the jungle near the site of the plateau has lived in the jungle all her life and will act as a guide at the plateau. Theo Kerr (Peter Falk) is her uncle, a Bible-thumping missionary at odds with Summerlee over the issue of Creationism and Evolution. This is a more intelligent revision than in previous versions, but one wonders why it is always found necessary to revise the Doyle plot.

While the triangle of Challenger, Summerlee, and Kerr contest science, a romantic triangle of Clooney, Roxton, and Malone sprouts. The novel is "revised" throughout. In the novel, Challenger is the most irascible character with a reputation for violence against newspaper reporters like Malone. Hoskins loses this dimension and seems to be the most pleasant and amiable of the expedition

members. The story starts as great fun, though in the last hour the writing is disappointingly pedestrian.

Among the modifications from the Doyle is the effort to humanize the sub-human ape men on the plateau. In the book they were cruel killers who entertained themselves dropping their enemies over cliffs. That aspect was considerably toned down for this television version. This is the longest version yet made so there is more emphasis on South American color than there was even in the novel.

The special effects are certainly what sets this version apart from previous cinematic adaptations of the novel. Still, the dinosaurs, while more real-looking than previous version, are not quite integrated with the people. When we see an entire dinosaur, requiring CGI, it cannot quite interact with the people superimposed in the scene. It was much like early Ray Harryhausen rarely had the creatures he created interacting directly with people. When need be, he could have cowboys lasso a dinosaur, but such effects were used sparingly and it showed. In this LOST WORLD we see even less such interaction. People will be chased by a dinosaur that looks realistic, but on a different plane from the people. What does that mean? It is hard to describe.

Admittedly, in the 1950s it was very easy to describe what was wrong with the special effects of a film. In the 21st century complaints with the special effects are more abstract and harder to explain. But some limitations are still obvious to the eye.

This is probably the best version of THE LOST WORLD since the 1925 version. It will probably be a while until a better version of THE LOST WORLD is made.

[concluded next week]

[-mrl]

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**A DESOLATION CALLED PEACE** by Arkady Martine (copyright 2021, Tor, \$26.99, 494pp ISBN 978-1-250-18646-1) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

A DESOLATION CALLED PEACE is the spectacular sequel to Arkady Martine's Hugo-Award-winning novel A MEMORY CALLED EMPIRE. It's tough act to follow when your debut novel is as successful as A MEMORY CALLED EMPIRE, but Martine manages to write not only a novel that is as good as her first, but one that is quite possibly even better.

Diplomat Mahit Dzmare is back on Lsel Station along with her two imago lines of Yskander Aghavn planted firmly in her head. At the end of MEMORY, Dzmare had alerted both Lsel and the Teixcalaani Empire of an impending alien invasion on the outside of Teixcalaani Space. Nine Hibiscus, and her second in command, Twenty Cicada, are out at the forefront of the impending war with the aliens. Things are complicated, though. She and a small fleet--small because it just isn't big enough to deal with the impending invasion--have been sent out by a faction that may not want her to survive. Political forces on Lsel Station want the impending war to drag on forever, depleting the Empire forces so it doesn't have enough resources to eventually absorb Lsel. To make matters worse, there apparently is no way of communicating with the enemy.

When Nine Hibiscus calls back home to get a diplomat trained in first contact communication, Three Seagrass, by virtue of her position in the government, assigns herself to the mission and eventually finds and drags along Mahit with her; after all, she's been wanting to see Mahit again and Dzmare may have just the right kind of training to help her with this mission.

Back at the end of MEMORY, the Empire was in a state of upheaval. There's a new emperor on the throne, and a new heir--an eleven-year-old boy, a clone who is genetically 90% of the previous emperor--who gets involved in the political fray back home. He assigned to be the "little spy" of the emperor, Nineteen Adze, as she tries to figure out what is going on within her own government and the various ministries that run it. That curious and intelligent eleven year old, Eight Antidote, takes a lot of initiative and goes off exploring avenues that he probably wasn't supposed to, and he learns the ins and outs of how the ministries work and how they're manipulating the conflict out at the edge of the empire.

There's a lot going on here. Political intrigue both in the Empire and at Lsel station; a conflict with an overpowering and uncommunicative enemy; a potential plant within the fleet that may be there to ruin the effort to resolve the conflict with the enemy; a diplomat with two extra sets of memories running around in her head; a pair of lovers whose conflict may derail the effort of dealing with the enemy; and a young boy who is growing up faster than most his age and who may just hold the key to the entire situation.

A DESOLATION CALLED PEACE is the Space Opera that was promised at the end of A MEMORY CALLED EMPIRE. But it's more than just that. It's got weight and heft. Sure, it's got frightening aliens that the protagonists are struggling to understand. It's got space ships shooting at each other. It's got believable characters with real problems. It's got puzzles to solve. It's got Empires--because after all, Space Operas have Empires. But mostly what it has is a terrifically written story that, when combined with its predecessor, is a good a science fiction tale as we've seen in a very very long time. [-jak]

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**THE LOST WORLD (1998)** (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Mark's comments on THE LOST WORLD \(1998\)](#) in the 08/05/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Mark writes,] "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." [-mrl]

Some people were so annoyed with the changes Peter Jackson made to LORD OF THE RINGS that they said it should be called "J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings." [-gmg]

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**The MT VOID** (letter of comment by Guy Lillian III):

In response primarily to [the 08/05/22 issue](#) of the MT VOID, Guy Lillian III writes in THE ZINE DUMP #55:

Each week a new MT VOID appears in my e-mail. In it the witty fannish duo Mark and Evelyn Leeper, plus the occasional guest, comment on science fiction--books, films, TV--and do so with intelligence and energy. No talk of fandom here; the subject is the genre. In recent months, we've seen the team discuss and review various interpretations, almost all awful, of Doyle's THE LOST WORLD, GOOD OMENS, great samurai films (including the unforgettable DUEL ON GANRYU ISLAND), Hal Clement's classic NEEDLE, the re-told World War II story of Operation Mincemeat, and an interesting look at racist robots in antique SF and how they reflect the general social tenor of the times. Consistent, intriguing, quality work. I must also thank Mark for his support in my new struggle with Parkinson's. [-gl]

Evelyn notes:

The racist robots were actually real current AIs, alas, rather than those in antique SF. [-ecl]

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

OLIVE ODYSSEY by Julie Angus (Greystone, ISBN 978-1-553-65514-5) is half about the history, biology, and uses of olives and olive trees, and half a travelogue involving a sailboat and a ten-month-old baby. For what I was interested in, there was too little of the former, and too much of the latter. My attitude was not improved when Angus talked about how her baby screamed through the entire flight from the United States to France; she expressed no remorse about subjecting her fellow passengers to this. The details of their difficulties in buying a sailboat had nothing to do with olives either. (And she told someone that she had thought that light olive oil had fewer calories than regular olive oil.) Ultimately, I somewhat gave up, flipping through what was left of the book to read about olives in the sections that talked about them.

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE ALCHEMIST'S DAUGHTER by Theodora Goss (Gallery/Saga, ISBN 978-1-481-46651-6) is a mash-up of FRANKENSTEIN, THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE, and a few other classic horror and detective tales, but with primarily female characters. It was enjoyable enough, but at times a bit heavy-handed, and I found it hard to suspend my disbelief that these characters could all end up meeting each other. (I'm interested in comparing it to THE DAUGHTER OF DOCTOR MOREAU by Sylvia Moreno-Garcia, especially as I liked her MEXICAN GOTHIC.) [-ecl]

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Mark Leeper  
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Capitalism is the extraordinary belief that the nastiest  
of men, for the nastiest of motives, will somehow work  
for the benefit of us all.

--John Maynard Keynes

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