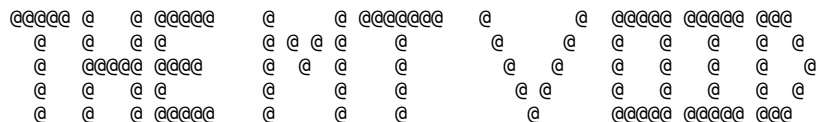


# MT VOID 07/15/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 3, Whole Number 2232



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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### Why Michael Dirda Misses the Old DC Comics (pointer):

"Marvel superheroes get a spiffy update. Still, I miss my old DC Comics.":

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2022/07/06/marvel-comics-new-editions/>

### Six Lost Worlds: The Dramatic Adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Novel (Part 1) (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

[Given the choice of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's THE LOST WORLD (book and 1925 film) for our book-and-film discussion group this month, this seemed like a good time to reprint Mark's article on the various adaptations, originally published in Argentus, Number 3, Summer 2003lost. It will run in five parts. -ecl]

Imagine a land so isolated from the world that it was beyond the reach even of the forces of evolution. On one plateau deep in the remote Amazon rain forest there is a land that has withstood the ravages of time. Here dinosaurs and prehistoric ancestors of man still live.

In 1960 I remember being enthralled with the publicity for the upcoming film THE LOST WORLD. I was nine years old and anything that had to do with dinosaurs was okay with me. I had only recently seen the 1959 version of JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH and loved it. But only three sequences in the film had dinosaurs. (Okay, to be literal, there are no dinosaurs in that film, but at nine I was not ready to make zoological distinctions.) The Sunday comics had ads telling a little teasing bit of the story of an expedition to a plateau with dinosaurs. I was hooked. I guess I still am.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of the Sherlock Holmes series of stories, also had a science fiction and fantasy series featuring short, wide, and blustery Professor George Edward Challenger. The stocky scientist was first introduced in his 1912 novel THE LOST

WORLD. For this tale Doyle saw the dramatic possibilities of humans interacting with live dinosaurs. He told an irresistible story of an Amazon plateau so isolated that evolution had passed it by and where the dragons of the past still reigned supreme. There are two more novels with the same set of adventurers, though they are not nearly as interesting or famous. *THE POISON BELT* is about the earth traveling through a field of poisonous ether gas. *THE LAND OF MIST* is a plea for tolerance for a spiritualist church. Two shorter stories have Challenger opposing an inventor who has created a terrible weapon in "The Disintegration Machine," and discovering the Earth is a living organism in "When the Earth Screamed." Doyle is said to have preferred writing Challenger stories to stories about Sherlock Holmes, though the latter undeniably had greater popularity and perhaps were better written.

The publicity I was seeing in 1960 was for the second of what at this writing are six screen adaptations of the novel. In this article I will review each of the six adaptations of Doyle's novel to the screen. In doing so I face certain problems. First, the earliest version is incomplete. I will have to review what is available, a restored version of 92 minutes. A more widespread problem is that in my opinion none of the adaptations has been satisfactorily accurate to the novel. Every one of them takes at least one woman along and Doyle did not have a woman on the plateau in the novel. Each adaptation does a lot of inventing as if there was something wrong with Doyle's story. There really is not. If I like a version, it really is mostly in comparison to the other renditions that may not be as good.

### THE LOST WORLD (1925)

The 1925 version had the much of the story more faithful to the novel than any of the later film versions, though some incidents occur out of order. One revision is that in the book Challenger brought back only a pterodactyl, and it escapes before it is seen by more than a roomful of people. The 1925 silent film version apparently thought it would be more dramatic to have the animal brought back be a brontosaurus and it does quite a bit of damage when it escapes. This would show off imaginatively the stop-motion animation.

The 1925 film version was the first feature-length film to use stop-motion animation to any great degree. The technician who created the effects was a young Willis O'Brien, who would later be in charge of the effects of *KING KONG* (1933). In fact, though O'Brien did not contribute the plot to *KING KONG*, it has strong similarities to *THE LOST WORLD*, with the animal brought back to civilization being a very large ape.

This first and arguably the best version of Doyle's classic was the first version, a silent film. However, for years it has been nearly impossible to tell with any assurance much about the 1925 version of *THE LOST WORLD*. There are four or five different versions of this film. Until relatively recently only an edited version a little over an hour has been available. This was much chopped down from the original film. Recently a 93-minute version has become available to the general public on DVD. Reportedly the original release was 104 minutes so only about 11 minutes of the original theatrical release are still missing. However, that is the released version.

Sadly, it is impossible to see at this point what the released film was really like. Production stills shown on the Turner Classic Movie cable channel seem to indicate that there was a great deal more of Doyle's plot that was shot than could possibly fit into the missing eleven minutes. Some sequences that look like they would have not only lengthened the film but made it more faithful to the published story. The stills include the "stool of penance" scene from the novel in which Challenger used as a most politically incorrect way to punish his wife. Also there is indication that as with the original novel Challenger was not chosen as one of the members of the expedition and he uses trickery to join the party after they are on their way. This plot was in the Doyle and was apparently filmed for the silent version and then probably edited out. (Of the adaptations covered in this article only the 1992 television version and the "Alien Voices" audio versions are faithful to the book in this regard.) So while even the 93-minute version indicates large liberties taken from the novel, there was probably sequences shot that could have made for a fairly accurate version that perhaps never came together.

I personally recommend this 93-minute version as being more entertaining than the 63-minute version that has been available. The shorter version has just the minimal story needed to connect up the special effects shots. The longer editing makes the expedition seem less slapdash and makes the film feel more like a ripping adventure story. The shorter editing has the background story be little more than a frame for the dinosaur sequences. That audiences would settle for that is a testament to the popularity that the Willis O'Brien's dinosaur sequences had with audiences.

It is hard to gage the impact that these sequences must have had since so little like them had been seen on the screen before. Many of the viewers assumed that the dinosaurs were full-scale mechanical creations, and a few were naive enough to believe they were seeing real live dinosaurs. It is hard to believe from the jerky effects, the best possible at the time, that people took them for real. But in fact there were some who did. While the film was in production Marion Fairfax, who wrote the screenplay, thought she would reassure special effects technician O'Brien and told him that if the effects did not work out, the dinosaurs could easily be removed from her screenplay. It is hard to imagine how popular a film they could have made without the attraction of the dinosaur effects.

The variations in plot from the novel are relatively small changes of little consequence until the travelers arrive at the plateau. Perhaps the biggest change was the addition of a love interest for Malone to go with him on the expedition. This is Paula White, daughter of plateau discoverer Maple White, played by Bessie Love. After the crew gets to the plateau the story diverges somewhat more. The novel talks of two tribes of humans. One are half-human Neanderthal sorts, the others are like modern Indians. Doyle spends much of the plateau story of how the modern Indians beat the half-men, proving the superiority of modern man. Frankly, for me this plot is not as interesting as the dinosaur-related plotting. In this 1925 version of the film the two tribes are reduced to one ape man, played by a man with the unlikely name Bull Montana. Montana specialized in playing apes and half-men in the movies. Without particularly good looks he had found his niche playing ape-men. The filmmakers had only one half-man actor so the story more concentrates on dinosaurs. Probably that is not a bad thing. Even at the time the dinosaurs were more intriguing to audiences than a man in an ape costume, however lurid.

Some additional liberties are taken. The zoological meeting takes place before Malone visits Challenger's home. The escape route from the plateau is destroyed by a dinosaur rather than by Gomez. The most memorable variation, and one that would inspire other films, is that instead of bringing back a pterodactyl, Challenger returns with a brontosaurus who then escapes and wreaks havoc in London. This popular sequence probably inspired films like *KING KONG*; *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS*; and *BEHEMOTH, THE*

## SEA MONSTER (a.k.a. THE GIANT BEHEMOTH).

I have read a review that said that Willis O'Brien's special effects have still rarely been matched. That comment was well-intended but I think that Willis O'Brien would be among the first to deny it himself. While these effects were a big step forward from O'Brien's previous work, he would do better work for KING KONG in 1933. O'Brien's protege Ray Harryhausen furthered the art a great deal more. O'Brien would probably have been ecstatic to see the JURASSIC PARK films, and perhaps none more than THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK II, which I see as in part a tribute to him and his contributions. Some of the sequences, like a stampede of dinosaurs, are not technically perfect but are ambitious beyond belief for a film this early.

O'Brien was, at the time he made THE LOST WORLD, still having some problems with the smooth fluid movement of the figures he is animating. He also has a tendency to make the creatures of too large a scale. An example is the pterodactyl that seems much too massive in comparison to the spur of the plateau. O'Brien would similarly exaggerate the size of his stegosaurus in KING KONG. Some of his matte scenes, static and traveling, combining images of actors and dinosaurs are well ahead of their time. While O'Brien never let the humans get too close to the dinosaurs, they impressively give scale to the giant beasts. There is one scene in which the humans throw a flaming piece of wood in a dinosaur's mouth. This could not use stop-motion since there is no effective way to animate a flame frame-by-frame. For this effect a hand-puppet seems to have been used.

The acting is sufficient but spotty. Wallace Beery makes the best Challenger of any of the screen versions. He is sufficiently gruff and pushy. Bessie Love as Paula is not so good and her main talent seems to be that she can look frightened well. Arthur Hoyt's Summerlee is almost unnoticeable. One barely remembers scenes he was in. Lloyd Hughes is bland as Edward Malone and reminds the viewer of Harold Lloyd. Lord John Roxton is played by Lewis Stone, who later would play dignified roles like Captain Smollet in the 1934 TREASURE ISLAND and Judge Hardy in the Andy Hardy series. Stone makes an imposing Roxton if not a very interesting one. He seems almost too dignified to be the great hunter.

Unless one counts films like KING KONG, UNKNOWN ISLAND, THE LAND UNKNOWN, or TWO LOST WORLDS, all of which arguably took some inspiration from the Doyle, the next real film version of THE LOST WORLD was released in summer of 1960 with Claude Rains as Challenger.

[continued next week]

[-mrl]

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## Changes to "Star Wars" Films (and Others) (letters of comment by Peter Trei, Gary McGath, and Tim Merrigan):

In response to [Warren Montgomery's comments on changes in RETURN OF THE JEDI](#) in the 07/08/22 issue of the MT VOID, Peter Trei writes:

Your correspondent saw the 1997 'Special Edition' of the movie.

[https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Star\\_Wars\\_Triology\\_Special\\_Edition](https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/The_Star_Wars_Triology_Special_Edition)

In 1997, for the 20th anniversary, Lucas released remastered versions of all three films, not only cleaning them up optically and sonically, but changing music, adding scenes and special effects, and dropping CGI critters and aliens into existing scenes.

Note that this is far from the only time it SW got changed. "Han shot first!"

[https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/List\\_of\\_changes\\_in\\_Star\\_Wars\\_re-releases](https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/List_of_changes_in_Star_Wars_re-releases)

[-pt]

Gary McGath responds:

That's not as bad as the editing of E.T. to eliminate any suggestion that cops would draw guns on kids. Mustn't let the audience think that ever happens. [-gmg]

But Tim Merrigan says:

To accomplish they've got the edit the IRL [In Real Life] news. [-tm]

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

Our book-and-film did THE LOST WORLD by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle this month; the film was the 1925 silent version with the Robert Israel score. (There have been several film adaptations, and the silent version is available with two different scores.)

The book has a lot that did not make it to the film. In the book, there are two sub-species of humans, a more advanced one and a more primitive one. To the characters in the book, the less advanced are considered animals and suitable only for extermination or slavery. In the film, there is only two humanoids shown on the plateau, and they are basically also shown as animals, but at least there is no attempt at extermination. There is also no subplot of someone out for revenge against Challenger.

It is not clear how old the various characters are, but the actor playing Roxton was 46, and the actress playing Paula White was 27. He

somehow looked older, she looked younger, and the result was that the way he was looking at her seemed very creepy. Of course, it might not have been back when the film was made; I think the age difference was not considered as important then.

In the film, when they get to the base of the plateau, Challenger says they chopped down one of the two trees on the "pillar" to make a bridge to the main part of the plateau, and the stump was still visible. So they climb up and chop down the second tree to make a bridge, but it apparently never occurs to anyone to ask what happened to the first bridge.

Challenger and Summerlee have an article about whether something fired from a catapult follows a parabola or a curve, completely overlooking that a parabola *is* a curve.

How incredibly convenient that when xyzzzy and Paula think they will be trapped on the plateau permanently, Paula mentions that Summerlee used to be a minister, so he can marry them. This was actually pre-Code, but I guess they were concerned about local censors.

And it is also convenient that the ladder that the two men at the base construct is *exactly* the right length to reach from the cave to the ground.

Willis O'Brien did an amazing job of putting ten or twelve dinosaurs in a single scene, though without major interaction among them. It wasn't until CGI that you could have, e.g., the gallimimus herd in JURASSIC PARK, or the dinosaur stampede in KING KONG (2005).

I love how all the cast were given their honorifics ("Mr.", "Miss", etc.). Was it a more formal time, or were they trying to make acting seem more respectable?

The introduction to the film has the following quote by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:

"I have wrought my simple plan  
If I give one hour of joy  
To the boy who's half a man,  
Or the man who's half a boy."

I guess I wasn't in his target audience. [-ecl]

Go to [our home page](#)

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Quote of the Week:

It is better to ask some of the questions than to know  
all the answers.

--James Thurber

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