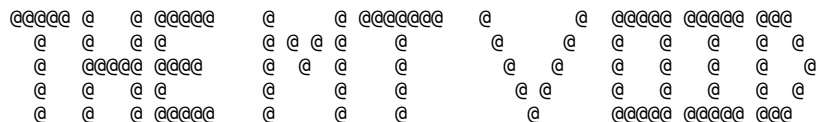


# MT VOID 08/19/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 8, Whole Number 2237



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**Six Lost Worlds: The Dramatic Adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Novel (Part 5)** (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

[continued from last week]

### Summary

Sadly after the one reasonably good film version in 1925, there are no satisfying versions of Doyle novel. All versions have been too anxious to introduce new characters, frequently love interests. And some try to make political points. This is just not a novel that has been treated very well in its film adaptations. Ordering them best to worst, identifying them with the person playing Challenger and the year I would say:

1. Wallace Beery 1925
2. Bob Hoskins 2001
3. Patrick Bergin 1998
4. Claude Rains 1960
5. John Rhys-Davies 1992
6. Peter McCauley 1999

It should be noted that the 1997 film THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK is based on the Michael Crichton novel of the same name. Nothing that I have ever seen has ever connected it with the Doyle's THE LOST WORLD. I nevertheless notice that there are several plot parallels to film versions of THE LOST WORLD. One man claims there is an isolated place in South America where dinosaurs can be found. There is an expedition to find the place. After a struggle against the dinosaurs, one is brought back to a modern city where it escapes and goes on a rampage. It is hard for me to not see this as a sort of tribute or homage to the film versions of the Doyle.

There have also been audio versions of the story. Unfortunately, I do not know of where any but one are available. BBC Radio did

productions of the story in 1938, 1944, 1949, 1952, 1958, 1975, and 2013. I have not heard these versions, nor would I know even where to search for them. Any pointers from readers to where to find these or other adaptations would be welcome. I have heard an audio-book abridgment read by James Mason. He was chosen, no doubt, because of his association with two classic films based on more classic science fiction books, TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA and JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH, albeit books by Jules Verne not Arthur Conan Doyle. The one audio dramatization I have heard was not one I had much hope for and it was about what I expected.

#### ALIEN VOICES: THE LOST WORLD (1996)

"Alien Voices" is an audio theater company specializing in science fiction stories. It is built around three actors associated with three different series of STAR TREK. The actors are Leonard Nimoy (formerly Spock), John de Lancie (Q), and Armin Shimerman (Quark). "Alien Voices" seems frequently also associated with the cable Sci-Fi Channel. The drama group seems to specialize in doing the classic science fiction stories from the likes of H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

There are a number of faults built into any "Alien Voices" production. The first is that the three actors are overly familiar and overly associated in other roles. They also have characteristic voices. That makes it almost impossible to lose them in their character. Through ego, I suspect, they don't want to be lost in the roles either. One does not have Lord John Roxton as a character so much as John de Lancie DOING Lord John Roxton as the character. The acting is uniformly weak. They use their own voices rather than using dramatic tricks to change them and at the same time other actors are exaggerating accents unrealistically. Thus the actors and scriptwriter make very clear that they do not take the material seriously and they do not expect the audience to do so either. It is supposed to be all in good fun, but it makes it very hard to appreciate the stories. In any case the length of the stories is on the order of forty-five minutes, which it really not enough time to do justice to the novels they are adapting and too much time is spent on the humor. In addition, what is there is not faithful to the novels. That is not uncommon in dramatic adaptations, but they take particularly large liberties. In the case of THE LOST WORLD, Summerlee is a woman and becomes a love interest for Edward Malone. There are little sexual double entendres and other references that the Victorian Doyle would never have wanted in a novel intended as wholesome entertainment for "the boy who's half man or the man who's half boy." The story is told as the newspaper editor McArdle (Leonard Nimoy with no effort to sound Scottish) reading dispatches from Edward Malone. Just how these dispatches are supposed to get to London from the top of the plateau is unclear, but in this version not a lot of time is spent actually on the plateau. That part of the story, what should be the shank, is much abbreviated. In fact, there are only two encounters with dinosaurs on the plateau. While that part has a few of the essentials from the novel, it is the least compelling sequence of the dramatization. That may be because the virtues of that part of the story are mostly visual.

In any case this adaptation is at best half-hearted and of all the versions in covered in this article, it is the one least likely to capture the imagination of a young new-comer.

There has never been a fully satisfying adaptation of Doyle's novel. After a span of ten years in which there were four cinematic versions, it seems unlikely there will be another one for a while. However, that was what I would have thought after three adaptations and we got still one more. As special effect technology improves, the fascination that virtually everybody has with dinosaurs, will lead more people to try to render them realistically on the screen. Then they will want to put them in adventure stories. Some of Edgar Rice Burroughs is a possibility. But really there is only one major classic adventure story with dinosaurs. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote it in 1912. It's THE LOST WORLD.

[-mrl]

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#### THE LOST WORLD (1999) and Tarzan (letter of comment by Peter Rubinstein):

In response to [Mark's comments on THE LOST WORLD](#) (1999) in the 08/12/22 issue of the MT VOID, Peter Rubinstein writes:

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

I haven't seen this version, but I would point out that the later Tarzan movies show his treehouse with an elevator. (Powered by pachyderm) [-pr]

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#### John Maynard Keynes and Adam Smith (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Kevin R, and Robert Woodward):

In response to [the quote from John Maynard Keynes](#) in the 08/12/22 issue of the MT VOID ("Capitalism is the extraordinary belief that the nastiest of men, for the nastiest of motives, will somehow work for the benefit of us all."), Gary McGath writes:

Keynes thought that being more well-off and comfortable and having nice stuff is "the nastiest of motives"? That explains a lot about him. [-gmg]

Kevin R responds:

JMK was presumably trying to rebut Adam Smith:

"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. [etc]" [Book I, Chapter 2 of WEALTH OF NATIONS] (<https://oll.libertyfund.org/quote/adam-smith-butcher-brewer->

[baker](#))

This from a civil servant, who collected a significant proportion of his income through coercion. [-kr]

Robert Woodward asks:

Wasn't this a position that he was appointed to AFTER the publication of WEALTH OF NATIONS? (BTW, if I follow your definition correctly, all civil servants collect most of their income from coercion because the vast majority of government income is from taxes.) [-rw]

Kevin responds:

If I was unclear, I apologize. By "This from..." I was referring to the remark by Keynes that the Leepers used at the end of MT VOID #2236.

I would hesitate to call an 18th century Don at a Scottish University a "civil servant." Who owned, operated and funded those at that time? The Crown? The Kirk? The Edinburgh town council? Was it what we would now call a QUANGO?

In the 1700s, the students paid their lecturers directly, acc to:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/02/college-cost-18th-century-scotland/459387/>

[-kr]

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

KWAIDAN (1964) may have been inspired by DEAD OF NIGHT. FLESH AND FANTASY predates DEAD OF NIGHT, and there were a couple of horror anthology films a year or so before KWAIDAN, but DEAD OF NIGHT is considered the real inspiration for the horror anthology sub-genre. However, KWAIDAN made some major changes. Unlike the other horror anthology films, both before and after, there was no framing story. In a sense, this parallels when movies decided they could have non-diegetic music; it was a decision that the audience was intelligent enough to cope with four totally separate stories. (I am reminded of the first time the child of a friend read a short story collection. After the second story, he wonders how the author would connect it to the first, and the third confused him even more. But he was only about eight years old.)

It is worth remembering that KWAIDAN is from 1964, well after many major Japanese films. It may be just me, but I keep feeling I am watching a film from the early 1950s, perhaps because of the heavy use of soundstages rather than shooting external scenes outdoors.

All four episodes of KWAIDAN have fabulous art/set design, which I will comment on in the individual stories.

"Black Hair" has very little diegetic sound; it is almost entirely voice-over, music, and sound effects. There is well-crafted use of lighting in the skies--sunrise, etc. At the end color of the robe and hair fluctuates, but this just reflects the subjectivity of the scene. The arrow-shooting contest sequence was shot outdoors in a realistic style, but all the other scenes were obviously shot on a soundstage. The one negative is that the ending is predictable.

"The Woman of the Snow" was shot entirely on a soundstage. There is a shot of a sky full of eyes that may have been inspired by the 1945 Alfred Hitchcock film SPELLBOUND. The red flag at the river in an otherwise monochromatic scene is like the red coat in SCHINDLER'S LIST. There is interesting between color (e.g., the old man's face) and monochrome (e.g. the young man's face). In general, the director and cinematographer keep monochrome for flashback, and then switch to color for the present, but with no cut, just a filter change.

"Hoichi the Earless" starts with the Battle of Don-no-ura between the Genji and the Heike. (ObsF: Somtow Sucharitkul has written an opera about this battle, under the pen name S. P. Somtow.) There are some outdoor shots of the sea, but even the sea battle was shot on a soundstage with a tank and a painted background. The relative calmness of the water, as compared to the real sea, is one of many giveaways. (One is reminded of the scene at the end of THE TRUMAN SHOW.) This seems to reflect an attitude that is common in Japanese kaiju films, which is that the audience is expected to have a willing suspension of disbelief at the obvious model work (trucks, buildings, etc.) rather than complain about how unrealistic it is. In some sense, it is the attitude that a movie can be considered the same way one considers a stage play or puppet theater. One doesn't complain that the backdrop of a stage set looks painted or that the puppets don't look like real human beings.

This episode goes between realistic scenes of the monastery (even if they are obviously on a sound stage), and surreal scenes of Hoichi's nightly destination. For example, there may be a driving rain in the "real" world, but when other monks get to the destination, the rain suddenly stops, and all the water on the ground disappears. There is also a clever scene where the flames from two monks' lanterns escape and fly around on their own.

As the final story, "In a Cup of Tea" is sort of like a "palate cleanser" dessert after a heavy meal. It is a fairly simple story, about a man who sees someone "trapped" in a cup of tea. The vision keeps recurring, and eventually the person "escapes" and attacks him. At the end, a friend and a servant wonder where he is--and then the servant sees him in a bucket of water.

Needless to say, highly recommended.

Released theatrically in the US 11/22/1965.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058279/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/kwaidan>

Two of the four stories in KWAIIDAN are from KWAIIDAN: STORIES AND STUDIES OF STRANGE THINGS by Lafcadio Hearn (Dover, ISBN 0-486-21901-1): "The Woman of the Snow" ("Yukionna"), and "Hoichi the Earless" ("Miminashi Hoichi no Hanashi"). "In a Cup of Tea" (Chawan no Naka") is from Hearn's KOTTO; BEING JAPANESE CURIOS, WITH SUNRY COBWEBS. "The Black Hair" ("The Reconciliation") is from SHADOWINGS. All are Hearn's re-tellings of classical Japanese folk tales. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The only way to keep your health is to eat what you  
don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what  
you'd rather not.

--Mark Twain

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