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Mini Reviews, Part 17 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Two more neglected films, which I will comment on jointly.

In 1932 A. E. Merritt wrote a novel titled BURN WITCH BURN. In 1936 it was made into a movie, THE DEVIL-DOLL.

In 1943 Fritz Leiber wrote a novel called CONJURE WIFE about women using witchcraft.

In 1944 it was made into a movie, WEIRD WOMAN.

In 1963 it was remade as NIGHT OF THE EAGLE (UK title), also known as BURN, WITCH, BURN (US title), also known (later) as CONJURE WIFE. A two-minute introduction/warning was added to the American version. This film has nothing to do with the novel BURN WITCH BURN.

In 1964, Lindsay Shonteff made a movie titled DEVIL DOLL. It has nothing to do with the film THE DEVIL-DOLL.

In 1980 BURN, WITH, BURN was remade again as WITCHES' BREW (also known as WHICH WITCH IS WHICH?).

So to recap, there is a book titled BURN WITCH BURN and a film titled BURN, WITCH, BURN, They have nothing to do with each other.

There is a movie titled THE DEVIL-DOLL and a movie titled DEVIL DOLL. They have nothing to do with each other.

There is a book titled CONJURE WIFE which has been made into three different movies with five different titles.

This may explain why NIGHT OF THE EAGLE / BURN, WITCH, BURN / CONJURE WIFE, and DEVIL DOLL are on Mark's list of neglected gems: people can't figure out how to find them.

NIGHT OF THE EAGLE (1963) is based on the premise that women--pretty much all women in the film--use witchcraft to protect their families and promote their husbands' careers. (It's a bit inconsistent in this. Tansy seems to come to witchcraft only after a trip to the Caribbean, where she saw an example of how it worked. Yet the other practitioners in the film haven't traveled to somewhere where witchcraft is more common, so how did they come by it?)

The classroom scene reminded me of the classroom scene in RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, where one student has written a message to Jones on her eyelids. I wonder if Spielberg was inspired by this film.

Released theatrically 25 April 1962.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056279/reference>

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

WEIRD WOMAN is not on Mark's list, probably because it is not very good. It was part of the "Inner Sanctum" series, and most definitely a "B" picture. The "islands" here where the voodoo-like ceremonies and superstitions come from are not in the Caribbean, but in the South Seas, and the writer (or director) padded out the film with a long South Seas dance sequence. At least Paula's belief in witchcraft is based on being raised in that culture after her anthropologist father died, rather than being converted in a single night.

Released theatrically 1 March 1944.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037453/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/weird-woman>

DEVIL DOLL (1964) is your basic "evil ventriloquist's doll" story. There is something about it that makes it a classic. Most people think of the segment of DEAD OF NIGHT (1948) as the first instance, but twenty years before that was THE GREAT GABBO (1929), starring Erich Von Stroheim. I would say there couldn't be anything much earlier, because one couldn't have a silent film about a ventriloquist, but Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy were a big hit on the radio, so who knows? Of course, in a movie there is no skill involved either, just recording a second track and overlaying it. Of course, in THE GREAT GABBO the doll is not possessed in any form, just as aspect of Gabbo's psychological state.

SPOILER: It is interesting that in both these "film groups", the earlier film has no supernatural elements (even though it may appear to at first), while the later one does have the supernatural. Certainly there had bene supernatural films in the silent era, so I am not sure what this indicates.

(THE GREAT GABBO is also a great example of a pre-Code film, with a lot more flesh shown among the showgirls--did I mention it was a musical?--than would be possible under the Production Code.)

Other well-known movies and television shows featuring a supernatural ventriloquist's doll include two "Twilight Zone" episodes ("The Dummy" and "Caesar and Me"), and the film MAGIC (1978).

Released theatrically September 1964.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058007/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1005762-devil_doll

[-ecf]

Southern Sky Telescope (comment by Gregory Frederick):

"A new telescope that will be making movies of the Southern Sky for ten years just started its observations last month. It will discover stellar explosions, new comets, unseen asteroids, interstellar visitors, and many previously unknown celestial objects.

"Rubin Observatory is the first of its kind: its mirror design, camera sensitivity, telescope speed, and computing infrastructure are each in an entirely new category. The 8.4-meter Simonyi Survey Telescope at Rubin Observatory, equipped with the LSST Camera--the largest digital camera ever built--will take detailed images of the southern hemisphere sky for ten years, covering the entire sky every few nights and creating an ultra-wide, ultra-high-definition, time-lapse record --the largest astronomical movie of all time. This unique movie will bring the night sky to life, yielding a treasure trove of discoveries: asteroids and comets, pulsating stars, and supernova explosions."

Details in:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLawdQuTIGY>

P.S. That interstellar object just discovered is thought to from the center of our galaxy is could be older then our Solar System. [-gff]

Evelyn adds:

The Vera C. Rubin Observatory is named after the astronomer Vera Rubin, who provided the first convincing evidence for the existence of dark matter. [-ecf]

Starbucks (letter of comment by Pete Rubinstein):

In response to [John Hertz's comments on Starbucks](#) in the 07/11/25 issue of the MT VOID, Pete Rubinstein writes:

I am somewhat surprised you didnâ€™t get more "Battlestar Galactica" references. [-pr]

THE MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Jay Morris):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT](#) in the 07/11/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I love the ending (which I won't spoil here). [-gmg]

Jay Morris adds:

And who turns out to be the key figure. [-jm]

Forgotten Films (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Lowell Gilbert, and Scott Dorsey):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Mark's calling VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED a "forgotten film"](#) in the 07/11/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

There are some genuinely forgotten science fiction films, but I can't remember what they are. [-gmg]

Lowell Gilbert writes:

Well, yes, of course. They say that memory is always the second thing to go. [-lg]

Scott Dorsey suggests:

They would likely be films like K-PAX which everyone forgets is really a science fiction film. [-sd]

Evelyn adds:

The classic example I give of a science fiction film that people don't think of as science fiction is COCOON. A relative who often said she did not like science fiction movies once mentioned having seen COCOON and liking it. So I said, "See, there is a science fiction movie you like." "COCOON isn't science fiction," she emphatically stated. "Let's see ... aliens come from outer space and give us immortality, and you say that is not science fiction?" Well, okay, she had to concede that it was.

For books, the example is FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON. (So I suppose CHARLY would count as a movie of that sort.) There are of course others. [-ecf]

THree Laws of Robotics (letter of comment by Steve Coltrin):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the Three Laws of Robotics](#) in the 07/11/25 issue of the MT VOID, Steve Coltrin writes:

A robot must not fail to maximize shareholder value, or by inaction allow shareholder value not to be maximized. [-sc]

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

A recurring idea in several Sherlock Holmes stories is that someone says something enigmatic. Holmes tries to figure it out, but eventually gives up. Then after he solves the mystery, he figures out what the words meant and how he should have figured it out from them.

SPOILERS AHEAD

For example, no one who is bitten by a snake is going to cry out, "The speckled band!" They'd scream, "Snake!"

And someone dying trying to say "Black Jack of Ballarat" is far more likely to have the energy and breath to say the first part audibly and trail off at the end, than to mumble the first part and say "a rat" clearly. (The BBC radio drama has him say "a rat" twice in a row, which makes even less sense.)

And someone accusing her husband of sending his rival to die in battle is unlikely to decide that the single word "David!" is a clear enough and strong enough accusation.

Another recurring idea is that Holmes and Watson promise discretion, or agree to suppress the truth to protect the innocent, but then Watson writes up the story anyway. If the idea is to conceal the King of Bohemia's relationship with Irene Adler, how is publishing a story in the Strand Magazine going to do that? Or how does publishing "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" keep Alice from finding out the truth about her father, when it's all spelled out? The argument that maybe names were changed doesn't work in the latter case; Alice knows she employed Holmes, so she'll see through any "anonymization".

And yet another trope I noticed in a few stories is that Holmes often catches the criminal, but then lets them go. One person claims that this happens in fourteen stories, but without re-reading all the stories, I came up with only "The Priory School", "The Blue Carbuncle", "The Three Gables", "The Boscombe Valley Mystery", "The Abbey Grange", "The Mazarin Stone", and "The Devil's Foot". [-ecf]

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Quote of the Week:

Get thee glass eyes;
And like a scurvy politician, seem
To see the things thou dost not.

--William Shakespeare
[King Lear, IV:6]