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I suppose one should be pleased that the title card for the location refers to a rock called the Negro's Head, as opposed to what one might have expected in 1911. The rock also looks more like a Mount-Rushmore-style carving than a naturally formed rock, though the novel describes it only as "a peak ... shaped like the head of a negro" and "a great rock cavern like the head of an Ethiopian." (Unless some sloppy typesetter replaced "carved" with "cavern" and the error never got corrected.)

This version claims the fire itself has changed, causing "She" to grow old. It also announces this on a title card *before* we see the scene--talk about ruining the surprise!

Released theatrically 26 December 1911.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0001877/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/she-1911>

SHE (1925): The title character is played by Betty Blythe. Her first film was in 1916, her last was MY FAIR LADY in 1964, making her career almost as ageless as Ayesha. (Ironically one of her early films was the 1921 FAIR LADY, no connection.)

This is feature-length (the IMDb says 69 minutes, but it is actually about 95 minutes), so we see more characters than in the 1911 version: Ustane, Billali, and so on. (There appear to have been two more short versions in 1916 and 1917, now apparently lost.)

Leo Vincey's father says of Leo, "His birth cost me his mother's life," as though everything mattered only as it affected him.

Leo Vincey looks a bit foppish, but that may just be the different time (and acting style).

Here the rock is the Ethiopian's head.

This adds a bit of raciness when Ayesha steps into the flame--she removes her clothing (which presumably would not survive the fire), but her "very long and convenient hair" (as Raymond Chandler would have said), and then the flames (actually colored streamers) manage to conceal all the naughty bits (or "the Midlands", as one character calls them in MRS. HENDERSON PRESENTS).

Released theatrically 21 June 1925.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0016338/reference>

SHE (1935): This was produced by Merian C. Cooper and written by Ruth Rose, so the language of the cave dwellers sounds a lot like that of the Nias islanders. Also, the giant gate is from KING KONG, and Max Steiner did the music. And the contemporary love interest is played by Helen Mack, who was in SON OF KONG. The title character is played by Helen Gahagan, later Helen Gahagan Douglas, who went on to serve in the United States Congress. (She also coined Richard Nixon's nickname, "Tricky Dick".) It also has Nigel Bruce, who plays a bumbler long before he took on that role in the Sherlock Holmes films.

In this version Leo Vincey is from an American branch of the family (to explain the accent, I suppose). (By the time of THE WOLF MAN, apparently only a few years in America was enough to change someone's accent.)

Another change is that Ayesha's land is in the Russian polar regions rather than Africa. (H. Rider Haggard probably spun a few times in his grave over that.) Her realm is also very Art Deco.

This depiction of Ayesha was the inspiration for the Wicked Witch in SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARVES.

And at the end there is a sacrificial ceremony, where the participants dance around in a circle, sometimes shot from an angle that reminds one of Busby Berkeley numbers, or the June Taylor Dancers on the old JACKIE GLEASON SHOW. What with

that, and the language, and the gate, there may be more of Cooper and Rose than of Haggard in this version.

You can tell this is post-Code: Leo doesn't talk about waiting for Ayesha's reincarnation, but settles down with Englishwoman Tanya, who makes a sappy speech about home and family. And Holly suggests that while it might have been an overdose of radiation, it also might have been the hand of God.

Released theatrically 12 July 1935.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026983/reference>

SHE (1965): This is the fifth version of the story. Apparently the 1935 version was considered definitive enough to discourage any remakes. Then again, in the sound era, the push for remakes of films every few years seemed to have died out. (However, sequels became more popular.) The title character is played by Ursula Andress, with her voice dubbed by Nikki van der Zyl (who also dubbed her in DR. NO).

This is Hammer's version, so naturally it starts out with Holly, Leo, and Job in a bar with a lot of scantily clothed belly dancers. After a somewhat gratuitous bar fight, the three of them go off in search of a lost city in the Mountains of the Moon. This looks at least somewhat more Egyptian than the 1935 Art Deco version.

As with the other versions, the residents of Ayesha's city are pretty much Caucasian (or vaguely Middle Eastern), while the cave dwellers are definitely black. How the very blond Ursula Andress is passed off as Egyptian is not clear.

In this version, as in the 1925 version, Leo *does* enter the flame, and so he is now immortal and Ayesha is dead.

Released theatrically 18 April 1965.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0059710/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1068459-she>

THE VENGEANCE OF SHE (1968): This starts with a truly lame theme song. (Ever since Dmitri Tiomkin realized he could make extra money if there was a theme song that could be marketed as a single, we have been subjected to a varying quality of theme songs in movies. James Bernard based his themes on the titles, but didn't put words to them.)

Anyway, this starts out in the "then-present", as Mark dubbed the period contemporaneous with when a movie was made.

Carol, a rather spaced-out woman endowed with "busty substances" (as Peter Cook and Dudley Moore would say), is hitchhiking and is picked up by a sleazy truck driver who tries to rape her, but his truck mysteriously puts itself into gear and runs over him.

She wanders to a port on the Riviera, and swims out (in her underwear) and boards a yacht owned by George (played by Colin Blakely, who played Matthew in A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS). She is apparently being mystically drawn to Kuma (with the help of spooky music) to become Ayesha, and George's friend Philip goes with her. The usual stuff happens, with some political plotting thrown in, and eventually Carol breaks out of her trance just in time to avoid being forced into the flame, and Killikrates (whose name was Kallikrates in SHE) decides eternal life isn't worth it and commits suicide by entering the flame a second time. Meanwhile Carol gets her long gown caught on something, so Philip rips it loose, conveniently leaving just enough skirt on her to pass the censor's board.

There's very little of Haggard left in this one.

Released theatrically 1 May 1968.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0063765/reference>

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

[-ecl]

Peter Watkins, 1935-2025, R.I.P. (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

The Guardian reports:

"Peter Watkins, the radical British film-maker who won an Oscar for his controversial drama-documentary THE WAR GAME [1966], about a nuclear attack on Britain, has died aged 90."

[The BBC gives his date of death as October 30; the IMDb says October 31. His ninetieth birthday was October 29. -ecl]

Mark was a great admirer of THE WAR GAME, and here are some of his comments over the years:

Comparing THE DAY AFTER to THE WAR GAME:

Nicholas Meyer said in TV GUIDE that he hoped his film would stand up next to Peter Watkins's documentary THE WAR GAME. I cannot believe that he was talking about the same THE DAY AFTER that ABC showed. If he really had that hope, it must have been based on scenes that ended up on the cutting-room floor. Sorry, Nick.

Comparing TESTAMENT to THE WAR GAME:

TESTAMENT is well-mounted and well-intentioned, but suffers the same problems as all after-the-bomb films (with the exception of THE WAR GAME): it concentrates on the luckiest 5% of the population and even then is rife with technical inaccuracy.

Talking about favorite SF films:

Here is my list of what are my favorite science fiction films. It is quirky, but then anybody's favorites list is. ... Strongly considered for the list was THE WAR GAME (disqualified only because it probably is not usually considered to be a science fiction film).

And talking about being frightened by films:

After age ten I was never really frightened by anything on the theater screen or the television screen. ... I will make one exception and say that I was frightened by the Peter Watkins pseudo-documentary made for the BBC called THE WAR GAME. With what was known about the effects of nuclear war in the late 1960s Watkins tried to show what would happen if nuclear war came to Britain. It heavily influenced a later British TV movie, THREADS, though THREADS lacked the dispassionate BBC narrator explaining exactly what was going on. "This is a firestorm. At its center temperatures reach 1000 degrees centigrade. These people are asphyxiating because the fire is pulling all oxygen to the center of the storm," the narrator helpfully explains. But this is a different type of frightening from the type one sees in "The Hungry Glass." This is frightening because it is presenting a truth that is frightening. It is not the images themselves that are frightening. There probably is some scary stuff right now about the COVID-19 virus, but I do not listen to the same channels. [written in early 2020; Mark did rate CONTAGION a +3 or 9/10 back in 2011]

[-mrl]

Bad News from Alpha Centauri A (pointer to article):

James Davis Nicoll brings us bad news from Alpha Centauri A:

"Astronomers report that there very well might be a planet orbiting in or just outside Alpha Centauri A's habitable zone. Alas, ordering the stokers to start shovelling seetee into the photon-drive may be premature. Alpha Centauri Ab is an interesting world but it isn't Earth 2." [-jdn]

Full article at <https://reactormag.com/bad-news-from-alpha-centauri-a/>

Is China REALLY winning the race to the Moon against NASA and SpaceX? (comments by Gregory Frederick):

The Moon has many important resources which will drive missions to the Moon for mining, settlement and exploration.

Moon resources include abundant solar energy, water ice, Helium-3, and rare-earth metals found in regolith (rock and soil). Water can be split into oxygen for breathing and hydrogen for rocket fuel, while metals and regolith can be used for construction. Helium-3 is a potential fuel for nuclear fusion reactors. The Moon also has other valuable elements like titanium, aluminum, and thorium.

China has a lunar lander and a space capsule with a rocket that if all goes well could be on the Moon by 2030. If they get there first they will lay claim to these resources which can be close to the water ice. Being near to the water ice is essential to any long term missions. NASA has a Moon ready rocket and capsule (the Artemis mission) but not a fully developed lunar lander and the current administration is planning to axe the NASA budget and cut thousands of employees. The [23-minute] video below details exactly what is happening.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXoFTRS2MQw>

[-gf]

THE STONE TAPE (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to various comments on THE STONE TAPE in the 10/31/25 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

The science fiction nerd in me thought there was too much hand-waving on the technical details. Mind you, I haven't seen it since it was first broadcast.

Kneale was at Seacon in Brighton in 1979 and his view of SF fans led to his sitcom KINVIG--not very flattering. [-pd]

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

I was re-watching THE GREAT GATSBY (1974), and while I realize there is a lot in this movie (and book), no one seems to have commented on the purchase of the puppy. This is almost the first example of how Myrtle is just as thoughtless as Daisy and Tom. Fitzgerald writes, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that held them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made ...," but Daisy wanting a puppy "for the apartment" that she and Tom use but don't live in is a perfect example of not thinking things through, of caring only about what she wanted right then, and not even thinking about who would take care of the puppy when she returned to the Valley of Ashes and Tom returned to Daisy. Not that Tom would ever take care of the puppy anyway--in fact, the puppy would be lucky if Tom just put it outside to fend for itself rather than throwing it out a window.

No, to Myrtle the puppy was just like the dresses and jewelry that Tom gave her--something to be kept in the apartment to be pulled out and worn, or used, or displayed when she wanted, and forgotten the rest of the time. (She does have a dog collar in her drawer in the Valley of Ashes, but it is studded with diamonds and easily portable.)

The scene right after the puppy sequence emphasizes this. We see a row of society women at some sort of event, each holding their dogs--all fancy-looking dogs--that are clearly spoiled pets. There is no way Myrtle could bring the puppy back to the Valley of Ashes, or spoil it there if she did.

Also, note that Meyer Wolfsheim says Gatsby was educated at "Oggsford College". Aside from the pronunciation, it's not Oxford College, it's the University of Oxford, which consists of forty-three "colleges" of varying sorts. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Censorship, like charity, should begin at home,
but unlike charity, it should end there.
--Clare Boothe Luce

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