

APPENDIX III: LOST FILMS

In our researches for this new edition of the Universal Movie Guide, we frequently come across references to films that have been lost or destroyed, movies of which there is nothing more left than a few tantalising frames, and films, whether famed epics in their day or just obscure one reelers, of which there are no longer any copies extant. The following is a short, tantalising list of a few of those films, whose sole mutual connection in this instance is that – like A Star Is Born, like King Kong, like Frankenstein – they have all been remade by later generations. But these are the – lost – originals, and should any of these vanished artefacts ever surface in some dusty archive or private collection, we will assuredly be the first to let you know.

1901: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1900)

The oldest film in our list is also the most charming. Directed by Georges Melies, it displays that director's box of tricks at their best: camera trickery, imaginative special effects and a storyline that's as amusing as it is charming. The premise – a group of spacefarers discover a map to a faraway planet and set out to find it in their cosmic galleon – may be as old as the hills, but the execution of the story and the primitive but enchanting visual effects – particularly the famous “voyage through Saturn's rings” sequence – make *1901: A Space Odyssey* a film that even today can be enjoyed with only minimal suspension of disbelief.

STAR WARS (1936)

With Buster Crabbe in the lead role of Space Captain Solo and Jan Rogers playing feisty screamer Princess Laya, *Star Wars* was a huge hit in its day – and it's not hard to see why. With scripts that appealed to any lad between six and sixteen, exciting fist fights and battles, decent model work and a suitably furniture-chewing villain in the form of Charles B Middleton's Death Invader, *Star Wars* was one of Universal Studios' biggest serials, only running out of steam when the US entered WW2 and the movies were suddenly no match for the real “Phantom Of Menace.”

WHEN HARRY MET SALLY (1944)

This classic movie was singlehandedly responsible for the revival of the “screwball comedy” and is also notable for the reunion of Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn, who had first paired up in 1938's *Bringing Up Baby*. The premise of *When Harry Met Sally* is a simple, yet daring, one: when a divorced couple are thrown together again by circumstance, can they overcome their mutual dislike and become friends? *When Harry Met Sally* answers that question with a resounding “Yes, and then some!” but – as you'd expect from director Howard Hawks - this movie is as sceptical of romance as it is romantic about scepticism, and features some marvellous sparring between the two leads as well as the now-legendary diner kiss/ “I will have what she just had” final line.

THE PRODUCERS (1942)

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy could still draw on enormous reserves of love and goodwill from their fans, but their halcyon days were behind them, which is possibly one of the reasons that the comic genius pair agreed to sign up to this genuine curio in their catalogue.

The premise is simple, if bizarre: the duo have somehow become Broadway producers who have agreed to put on a show which Stan thinks is a baseball musical called *Springtime For Hitters*. When the truth dawns on them, Ollie is terrified that they will go to jail and be shot as traitors, but Stan has a brilliant idea – they will go ahead with the show and tell everyone it’s a patriotic comedy. The crazy idea works, and all is well until the *real* Adolf Hitler gets wind of the show’s success and sends a team of crack Nazi assassins to wipe out the boys... Unlike its fictitious musical, *The Producers*, sad to say, was not a success.

BRIDESMAIDS (1953)

Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell, Jayne Mansfield, Dorothy Dandridge, Doris Day, Grace Kelly... if this film was to be remembered for nothing else, then it deserved note for its casting alone. Never had so many great names been paired in one movie (one does not envy the person who would have had to work out final billing). Audiences would have flocked to the movie theater to see any of these women – but all of them together? The mind boggles. But sadly all we have of *Bridesmaids* is a few tattered scripts, Jane Russell’s screen test and a couple of (astonishingly rare) draft posters. Why? The story was simple enough: career girl Doris Day is getting married and, before she hands in her independence for an apron and a frying pan, wants to make sure that all her oldest and best gal pals are together for one last hurrah. So she demands – and gets – five bridesmaids, composed of childhood friends, work colleagues and even her boss (Grace Kelly, in a rare swerve into comedy). The resulting hen night descends into comic chaos (and there’s a great running gag about Jayne Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe getting mistaken for one another). But with contract clashes, personality issues and health problems running rife among the cast – not to mention controversy over a rare equal billing for Dandridge – *Bridesmaids* never got beyond the planning stage. A great lost movie and a crying shame.

DOCTOR WHO AND THE DALEKS (1967)

Doctor Who, a 1960s TV science-fiction show for children, was almost as popular as the Beatles in its native Britain, so a cash-in movie was inevitable: in fact, five were made, each starring the ever-popular national treasure Margaret Rutherford, whose intergalactic adventures with her child “companions” – including a young Dennis Waterman – were often more daring and spooky than the televised versions: so much so that by the time of the last film, *Doctor Who And The Daleks* – released after the TV show itself had been cancelled - one critic complained that the series was nothing more than “a kiddie Quatermass.” And certainly there is no scene darker than the one where Rutherford’s Doctor travels back in time to the very moment where her nemesis the Dalek race was created and asks herself if she has the right to terminate their existence: her answer is, even now, shocking.

ALAN PARTRIDGE (1973)

Peter Sellers rarely returned to these shores after the initial flush of his Hollywood success, so this is a rare chance to see the chameleon of comedy in a late British role. But *Alan Partridge* – directed by a young Stephen Frears, from a script by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall – is more tragedy than comedy. Partridge may be a great comic creation but Sellers vests in him an almost unbearable poignancy: for all his pomposity, vanity and Pooteresque lack of self-awareness, Seller’s Partridge is a creature rooted in sadness and existential melancholy. *Alan Partridge* - shot in murky colours with a moody soundtrack by John Barry – likewise has a superficially comic storyline: Partridge is a radio disc jockey, a

man who spins bland tunes, reads out requests and engages in open warfare with rival DJ “Groovy” Gareth Cheeseman (also played, with brio, by Sellers). Alan lives an empty soulless life, but when he is kidnapped by obsessive fan (Mary Tamm), he finds something to live for. The movie’s surprise ending, which we have no intention of revealing here, lets a chink of sunlight into the unremitting gloom, and suggests that there can be redemption for all of us, even disc jockeys.

SHAUN OF THE DEAD (1978)

The movies of Robin Askwith are almost a genre in themselves: a certain type of English bawdiness reminiscent of Chaucer, seaside postcards and *Carry On* films where the tease is for once consummated (or at least almost consummated, as our hero all but gets his end away before being chased, butt-naked, down a suburban street by an irate husband). *Shaun Of The Dead* is no exception. Askwith plays Shaun, a TV repairman, who is having a normal day fixing lonely housewives’ sets with his big spanner, wrestling with 18 inchers (TV screens) and generally going about his business, when the dead rise from their graves. These zombie dollybirds only want one thing – and it’s not brains. Shaun beats off the undead with his bendy aerial, and emerges triumphant when he discovers that the only thing that kills zombies is tricking them into having sex with each other. *Shaun Of The Dead* climaxes in a undead orgy that earned the film both an X certificate on its release and the apparent admiration of both George A Romero and Seth Rogen.