

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU

**Brando Does It Doggie Style!
Oh, Sorry, It Just Looks Like He Walks On All Fours.**

Starring, and I use the term loosely: Marlon Brando, Val Kilmer, David Thewlis, Friruzza Balk and Ron Perlman
Directed by John Frankenheimer

by Melanie Morningstar

From the classic genius mind of H. G. Wells, this movie should have been the summer thriller that made you want to scream and your blood curdle. This movie couldn't make milk curdle. "The Island of Dr. Moreau", one of Wells' many "fantastic" stories, this much-anticipated movie should have come together in one cinematic explosion. Unfortunately, "The Island of Dr. Moreau" can't even produce a whimper, let alone a bang. No, that's not strictly true, the odd cat or dog can be heard whimpering from time to time, as could a few audience members.

Wells, spot on as ever, with his 19th century glimpse into the future; this time hitting the mark with genetic engineering. We're at a point in our scientific evolution where we'll even buy the plot as plausible. It's all laid out right there on the screen, no leaps of faith or wild imaginings, and even without the element of making the viewer have to believe this story might be true, these "Hollywood Greats" couldn't find their way out of a wet paper bag, let alone an isolated island in the middle of no-where (which happens to be Australia).

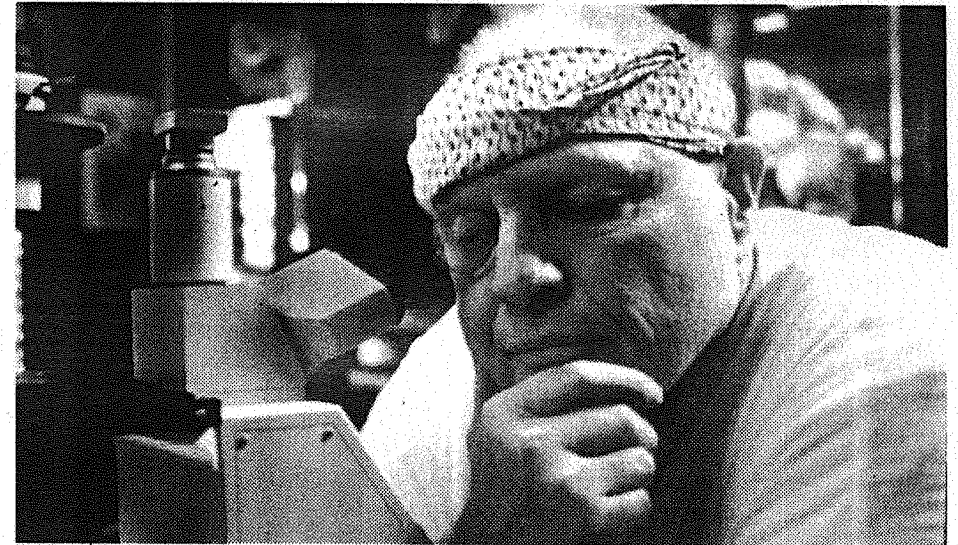
Marlon Brando doesn't even walk through the role of Dr. Moreau, he lumbers through it. He's ridiculous and boring, and commands none of the power on screen that a gifted, genius, mad scientist must evoke. The viewer must be as scared of the creator as the created. There's no passion for his "children"; they are simply two dimensional monsters from a 19th century side-show (lots of grumping, and yes, some whimpering, too).

Val Kilmer, who never seems to pick dud roles and is a terrific actor, (you'll remember him brilliantly as Jim Morrison in Oliver Stone's "The Doors", among many other wonderful movies), seems to have taken his cue from Brando and gives absolutely nothing to his role. It seems as though he had to unlearn everything about his talent and acting ability in order to share the same screen with Brando.

David Thewlis, so creepy and disgusting and dazzling with Leonardo DiCaprio in "Total Eclipse" does his best, but just by acting his part, he looks like he's over-emoting.

Ron Perlman, always the "beast-master", has done a great job of making a career out of his "unconventional" features. He can act, too, but you wouldn't know it watching this movie.

Academy-award-winning make-up artist Stan Winston (he made the "Alien" & the Vampire Lestat) has done a wonderful job creating these - er...shall we say...genetically altered beings, but on the virtual cusp of the 21st century, with movie technology as advanced as it is, the least one could expect is convincing creatures. And he does succeed. But set within the walls of this unintentionally hi-camp, pathetic movie structure, one can't even appreciate that genius.



John Frankenheimer, director of some of the greatest thrillers of all time "The Manchurian Candidate" and "Seconds", must be going senile. How could he have let this production get so out of hand? Didn't he read the script?

Didn't anyone read the script? Will someone please tell me now a movie with that sort of budget (there was clearly no expense spared) goes into production with a script like that. The dialogue is so lame that one finds oneself cringing, not as a reaction to the fear supposedly being mustered on the screen, but to poorly delivered ghastly lines, which become ridiculous, boring and downright stupid. Richard Stanley the writer, another loose term, is a proud alum of the Cape Town Film and Video School in South Africa. My guess is that he spent all his time surfing in that beautiful city, and paid someone else to take his exam for him. Remember that name, in order to make sure you don't waste your time seeing anything else that has his credit on it. That's a little harsh. He has created some well conceived works in the past, but you'd never know it from this one.

There may be someone out there who liked this movie. Perhaps someone from the Australian Tourist Commission (desperately hoping that some viewers may have, at least, enjoyed the scenery) and, probably Val Kilmer's mother liked it.

As I left the cinema, I tried to pinpoint exactly how I felt. Disappointed. That's it, I was terribly disappointed.

However, unless you have some objective, academic reason to see "The Island of Dr. Moreau", like you're writing a thesis on the 100 worst movies ever made, do not waste your time. Really, really, I mean it. Do not waste your time. Don't even rent it on video. In fact, take the money you'd spend on the movie and hand it over to the next panhandler you encounter on the street. Your cash will be better put to much better use. Just ignore "The Island of Dr. Moreau" and hopefully it will go away.

—Melanie Morningstar is Film Critic for *Wlire*.