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Author(s)	David Stewart Hull
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Dartmouth Film Society

DIE NIBELUNGEN (A Film in Two Parts)

1. SIEGFRIEDS TOD (1923) (SIEGFRIED'S DEATH)

Siegfried	Paul Richter	Volker	Bernhard Goetzke
Kriemhild	Margarete Schön	Hagen Tronje	Hans Adalbert von Schlettow
Brunhild	Hanna Ralph	Alberich	Georg John
Gunther	Theodor Loos	Mime	Georg John

Hans Carl Muller, Erwin Biswanger, Hardy von Francois, Frida Richard, Georg Jurowski, Iris Roberts.

2. KRIEMHILDS RACHE (1924) (KRIEMHILD'S REVENGE)

Cast as above with addition of:

Attila Rudolph Klein-Rogge

Scenario by Thea von Harbou. Photographed by Carl Hoffmann and Günther Rittau (and Walter Ruttmann for the sequence "The Dream of the Falcon"). Sets by Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, and Karl Volbrecht, inspired by sketches by Arnold Böcklin. Costumes by Paul Gerd Guderian. Produced by Decla-Bioscope and released through UFA February 14, 1924. Sound version of Siegfried released through UFA May 29, 1933. Music by Gottfried Huppertz from classical themes. Narration spoken by Theodor Loos.

Directed by FRITZ LANG

Please note: SIEGFRIED is presented in a complete version with a musical track and some narration added; the titles are in German. KRIEMHILDS RACHE has French and English titles and is condensed. Because of this, a synopsis of the films is necessary.

SIEGFRIED: The film opens with a minstrel telling the Burgundian court of the early adventures of Siegfried. Having spent his youth with Mime, a dwarf, Siegfried is sent home when he has fashioned a strong sword. On his journey he slays a dragon and accidentally tasting the dragon's blood, finds himself understanding the language of the birds. They tell him that bathing in the blood will make him invulnerable. His next adventure is with Alberich, the King of the Nibelungen, from whom Siegfried wins the Tarnhelm (which renders the wearer invisible) and the treasure. Alberich curses the treasure and condemns everything "to return to stone which he fashioned from stone."

The narration of the minstrel is interrupted when Siegfried is announced asking entrance to the court of Burgundy. Hagen Tronje, the king's advisor, warns King Gunther to refuse welcome to Siegfried. But Gunther will not hear of such unfriendly treatment of a traveling king. Meanwhile, Kriemhild tells her mother of her bad dream in which a dove was attacked by two hawks. Siegfried has come to the court to ask for Kriemhild's hand. Hagen, however, suggests that this be granted only if Siegfried helps win the Icelandic queen, Brunhild, for Gunther. The queen is defeated in a competition, but she is disappointed that Siegfried is not to be her husband. For that reason, she asks Gunther before the wedding how he can give his sister to a vassal. Gunther explains that he and Siegfried will swear blood-brotherhood this very day.

But Brunhild refuses to behave as a wife to Gunther, so Hagen compels Siegfried to overpower her for the king. About this time, Siegfried has his treasure brought to the court, which arouses much envy. Brunhild, to show her power, calls Kriemhild back on the steps of the cathedral, saying that she may not enter before the queen. In retaliation, Kriemhild tells her that it was Siegfried who overpowered her.

Hagen needs to know the vulnerable spot left by a linden leaf which fell when Siegfried bathed in the dragon's blood. Kriemhild marks the spot on his coat, after Hagen has told her she must do this to protect her husband from possible enemies during the hunt.

Under the pretense of a race to a spring, Hagen follows and kills Siegfried. His body is brought back to the court but no one reveals that Hagen was the murderer. When he enters the

room, the corpse begins to bleed. Kriemhild demands vengeance from Gunther, but he and his brothers stand protectively around Hagen. Kriemhild swears vengeance. When she comes to hold vigil, she discovers Brunhild dead at Siegfried's bier.

KRIEMHILD'S REVENGE: (This film exists only in a condensed version made up from small fragments; the print quality is extremely poor.) After Siegfried's death, Kriemhild's brother decides to marry her off to Attila the Hun. She journeys to the barbaric court, where Attila falls immediately in love with her. They are married, although she tells him that Siegfried was her only love, and recounts his death. In time, Attila's son and heir is born. Kriemhild tells Attila to ask her brothers and Hagen to the court. When they arrive, she tries to force Attila to kill them, but he refuses on the grounds that hospitality is sacred. Since he will not act, Kriemhild goes to his army and bribes them to kill the Burgundians at a feast, promising them Siegfried's treasure in exchange. When the soldiers break into the feast, Hagen kills Attila's son; the building is set on fire. Kriemhild offers the Burgundians their freedom if they will turn over Hagen to her, with her brothers. When they are brought in, Hagen refuses to tell her what he has done with Siegfried's treasure and goes defiantly to his death. Her vengeance satisfied, Kriemhild bids Attila kill her, which ends the saga.

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Fritz Lang's two monumental films on the Nibelungen Saga sum up all the virtues and liabilities of the German studio system during the silent period. The virtues include the beautiful sets and costumes, and the stunning compositions of individual scenes. The liabilities mainly center on the exaggerated acting, as if the director was more concerned with using scenery than people. And the atmosphere throughout is stultifying; the prevailing theory was that everything possible should be shot in the studio; a forest of papier-mâché trees was considered preferable to the real thing.

The film is an excellent example of stilkunst, which was a reaction to naturalism. General outlines were preferred to realistic detail. More importantly, the characters are split into those representing light and those who live in darkness; only Gunther strikes a grey compromise. In the final scene of SIEGFRIED the opposites are well drawn with Brunhild in the dark, Kriemhild in the light.

Whether the film is a success or a failure depends on the viewpoint of the spectator. It is an intensely German film and appealed not only to the audiences of 1924 but to the Nazis of 1933, who re-issued the film despite the fact that Lang was Jewish. Political considerations apart, DIE NIBELUNGEN is still a controversial work and few critics have ever managed to agree on the film as a work of art.

In the canon of Lang's work, the film follows the two DR. MABUSE thrillers and precedes METROPOLIS. It is a film which should be seen and studied by anyone interested in the art of the film, although its value as entertainment is somewhat questionable in our realistic film world of 1966.

David Hull

Films of Fritz Lang since 1923: SIEGFRIEDS TOD (1923); KRIEMHILDS RACHE (1924); METROPOLIS (1926); SPIONE (1927); FRAU IM MOND (1928); M (1931); DAS TESTAMENT VON DR. MABUSE (1932); LILION (1933); FURY (1936); YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE (1936); YOU AND ME (1938); THE RETURN OF FRANK JAMES (1940); WESTERN UNION (1940); MAN HUNT (1941); CONFIRM OR DENY (1941); MOONTIDE (1942); HANGMEN ALSO DIE (1942); THE MINISTRY OF FEAR (1943); WOMAN IN THE WINDOW (1944); SCARLET STREET (1945); CLOAK AND DAGGER (1946); SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR (1946); HOUSE BY THE RIVER (1949); AMERICAN GUERRILLA IN THE PHILIPPINES (1950); RANCHO NOTORIOUS (1951); CLASH BY NIGHT (1951); MOONFLEET (1954); WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS (1955); BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT (1956); DER TIGER VON ECHNAPUR and DAS INDISCHE GRABMAL (1958); DIE 1000 AUGEN VON DR. MABUSE (1960). Lang also played himself in Jean-Luc Godard's film CONTEMPT (1963).

Our next film is LIFEBOAT (1944) directed by Alfred Hitchcock. It is screened on Saturday February 5 at 11 pm and Sunday, February 6 at 4 pm.