

Les Disparus de Saint-Agil

("The Vanishings at Saint-Agil's")

France : 1938 : dir. François Caron :

: 90 min

prod: Christian-Jacque : scr: : dir.ph.:

Serge Grave; Jean Claudio; Marcel Mouloudji; Jean Buquet; Gabriel Farguette; Michel Retaux

Erich von Stroheim; Michel Simon; Armand Bernard; Aimé Clariond; Claude Roy; Robert Le Vigan; Charles Aznavour

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 € M ☺	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2398a	2.5	4	8	1,694	3 7 - - 7	No	unseen

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Mysterious disappearances at a boys' school, and the murder of one of the masters, are solved by a pupil with the aid of the German master. Surprising twists in an atmospheric and original crime thriller, with an unusually sympathetic role for von Stroheim. (A very young Charles Aznavour features as one of the pupils.) *** "

Film Review 1947-48 review:

"Charming, quite unpretentious French picture about some boys who do a little sleuthing on their own account. Incredible plot with plenty of amusing incidents and an overall freshness which makes you warm to it. Splendidly acted by Eric von Stroheim as the English master who wants the boys to like him and several of the (un-named) boy actors."

Collins Film Book synopsis:

"St.Agil was a boarding school for boys in France. With its rows of cubicles in the dormitories, its dusty playground and rather shabby classrooms, it was very much like a lot of boys' schools in England. But, under the surface, St.Agil was a place of mystery, and strange events were to take place there to prove that St.Agil was a very peculiar school indeed...

First of all, the school housed a secret society. It was not a very sinister one, for

its members were three of the boys called Baume, Macroy and Sorgues; but there was certainly something gruesome about the president, for the president was the skeleton in the science classroom! On certain nights, the three boys would creep from their cubicles to the science-classroom, salute their "president" with great courtesy and respect and then settle down to the meeting of the society.

Now the object of the society, the name of which was the "Chiche-Capon" (that is, "The Beastly Sneak") was an ambitious one. Baume, Macroy and Sorgues had decided to become millionaires, and they thought the obvious place to go to set about it was America. Once there, they were sure that they could all easily make fortunes by making chewing-gum or tinned milk, and they were busy with grandiose plans for getting to New York by stowing away aboard a ship.

One night the boys met as usual in the presence of their benign but silent "president". At the end of the meeting, Macroy and Baume went back to their dormitory, but Sorgues remained behind to do some writing. It was quite a lot later before he finished, and when he came out of the classroom into the corridor he was amazed – and terrified – to see the dark figure of a man apparently walk out of the wall straight in front of him. He was so scared that he closed his eyes very tight, and, when he opened them again, the figure had vanished again.

Next day he told Macroy and Baume what had happened, but they said he must have been dreaming. But Sorgues knew perfectly well that he had seen the extraordinary appearance and disappearance with his own eyes. The same day there was a period under the English master, Mr Walter, who was a rather stiff and unlovable man. For his subject, Mr Walter took a chapter from H.G.Wells's "The Invisible Man".

He explained that, of course, the whole thing was fantasy, but Sorgues promptly contradicted him and said that there was such a thing as an "Invisible Man", and described just what had happened in the corridor the night before. The staid Mr Walter became very irritated when Sorgues insisted, and in the end he ordered the boy to go and tell his story to the Headmaster, Monsieur Boisse.

The Headmaster was more sympathetic than Mr Walter had been and asked Sorgues quite a lot of questions, but there was obviously no change to be got out of him. Sorgues left the Headmaster's study, and was walking back along the corridor outside to his classroom – when he disappeared into thin air!

There was naturally a tremendous fuss about it. The school was searched from top to bottom for the missing boy, but not a trace of him was to be found. And then, about a fortnight later Macroy received a post-card signed "Chiche-Capon". The post-mark on the card showed that it had been posted in New York. Had Sorgues succeeded in the main objective of the secret society and smuggled himself out to America on a ship? Macroy was ready to believe so – but Baume was not so sure.

Then, a few days later, there was another sensation. Macroy disappeared as well!

Baume was utterly miserable. He thought that, in all likelihood, Macroy had been right in the first place: Sorgues had managed to get off as a stowaway to New York, and Macroy, impressed by his friend's success, had followed him. Now Baume was left alone, and he felt that his friends had deserted him.

Now the big event of the term was a Fête which was held every year in honour of St Agil, the saint after whom the school had

got its name. The big moment of the Fête was a play which was acted by the boys, and, although they meant to be serious, they were very funny indeed, although the unhappy Baume was in no mood to laugh.

And on the night of the play everybody else was stopped laughing very abruptly. First of all, there was a violent quarrel between Walter and monsieur Lemel, the temperamental drawing-master, on one of the upper landings of the staircase. They both became so angry that it seemed likely that they would start hitting each other, and the Headmaster himself had to come between them and prevent a first-class scandal.

But the excitable Lemel would not be pacified. He declared that he had discovered somebody's guilty secret – a secret concerned with Sorgues' disappearance – and he said he was determined to proclaim what he had found out.

But, before he could speak, the lights fused and everything was plunged into darkness. Then there was a terrible scream. At length the janitor was able to get the lights on again. And when they did come on, a frightful tragedy was disclosed. Lemel had fallen from the third floor to the floor of the hall and lay there dead.

It might have been an accident, but most of the boys were convinced that somebody had pushed him over the bannisters deliberately. They all suspected that it had been the unpopular Walter's guilty secret that the unfortunate Monsieur Lemel had been about to reveal, and that Walter had murdered him to prevent him speaking.

Baume was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, and he began to wonder if there wasn't something after all in Sorgues' "Invisible Man" story. He took to patrolling the science-room and the corridor outside it every night, and sure enough, one night, he had his reward. He saw the figure of a man walk out of a wall, and then, some time later, walk back through it again. But Baume did not close his eyes as Sorgues had done. He kept them open till they nearly popped out of his head, and he saw that the mysterious intruder had gone through a hidden door in the wall.

Baume followed, He was led along a secret passage, at the end of which was a trapdoor and, looking down, found himself gazing into the cellar of a disused mill that stood near the school. In the cellar were some ruffianly-looking men, obviously crooks – and Sorgues. Sorgues was plainly their prisoner.

Baume hurried back to the school to summon the other boys to the rescue. When he arrived, he found that Macroy had turned up again. Really believing that Sorgues had got to New York, he had smuggled himself aboard the big French liner, "Normandie", but had been discovered and sent back to St Agil.

In a body, the boys sallied out to the mill. Sorgues was rescued, and the gang of crooks were rounded up. At the same time the identity of their leader was revealed – the man who had come in and out of the school through the secret passage, the man who had kept Sorgues under guard because he had found out too much about his plotting, the man who had murdered monsieur Lemel because he was afraid that he too had found out something of his connection with the gang.

And who do you think this man was? No, it wasn't Mr Walter at all. It was the RETSAMDAEH!"

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Jean Buquet:

"The leader of the anti-Rozet faction in "NOUS LES GOSSES" was an aggressive, rather sneering 15-year old (with faint touches of Jean Gabin and Farley Granger) who three years earlier had been a treacherous little wimp in "LES DISPARUS DE SAINT AGIL". However he could, on occasion, be quite a dear.

In his late teens Buquet was in four more films: in 1942 "LES CADETS DE L'OCEAN" and "FOU D'AMOUR", in 1943 "LUCRECE" and "LE CARREFOUR". Then, in 1944, he volunteered for military service, and was in the liaison section of Leclerc's army during the final invasion of Germany. After the war he became a press reporter."

No further information currently available.

See subject index under **BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL, FOLLOW-THE-LEADER / CHILDREN'S GANGS, KID DETECTIVES** and **KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS**.