

SUBJECT INDEX:

MUTTON DRESSED AS LAMB

(or: TV footage released as “films”)

Television and cinema have long interbred, and produced many a withered gangling creature in the process. Initially, successful big screen comedies generated small screen sitcoms and series (rarely with the original cast), but later the most popular TV action series and sitcoms themselves span off onto the big screen, with larger budgets and more exterior shooting. See the subject index under **SPINOFFS** for these.

An altogether less acceptable phenomenon was the repackaging of television footage – almost invariably under a disguised name – for the cinema distribution circuits, conning audiences into the belief they were getting new footage, when in fact they were paying to see a few TV episodes stitched together to feature film length. It was not the only way the cinemagoing public were defrauded – sometimes a feature film would be reissued under a completely new name to dupe the unwary, or a low budget production would cannibalise expensive spectacle footage from an earlier, larger budget film. But palming TV episodes off as feature films was – to my way of thinking – particularly egregious, and “family shows” like “**Lassie**” and Ron Ely’s “**Tarzan**” series have been among the worst offenders, presumably in the belief that children are a less discerning public, thus more easily cheated.

Audiences who paid to see, for example, a “**Man From U.N.C.L.E.**” movie, or the big screen versions of “**Dads’ Army**”, “**Till Death Do Us Part**” or “**Steptoe and Son**”, would not have been amused to find these were merely recycled TV episodes. The hugely popular “**Batman**” series hit the big screen in 1968, but for the price of their seats fans were offered some new hardware (a Batboat, Batcopter), locations and exterior stunt footage not feasible for television, and all four Supervillains together in one campy, wisecracking package. In other words, the successful TV formula was expanded and beefed up for the larger screen. This did not make it a decent film, of course – few TV to big screen spinoffs made the transition successfully – but at least it was implicitly understood that a paying audience needed to be offered something “extra”.

The “film” titles below are all shameless examples of studios palming off on the public previously seen footage they would not knowingly have paid to watch again.

1964 GUNS OF DIABLO

From the US TV series “**The Travels of Jamie McPheeters**”, starring [Kurt Russell](#)

1972 HAR KOMMER PIPPI LANGSTRUMP

(“Here Comes Pippi Longstocking”) From the Swedish ch TV serial “**Pippi Langstrump**”, starring [Inger Nilsson](#)

1957 SOUTH SEA PIRATES

From the Australian TV series “**The Adventures of Long John Silver**”, starring Robert Newton, and with [Kit Taylor](#) as Jim Hawkins

19xx SPACE ISLAND

From the Italian ch TV serial “**Treasure Island in Outer Space**”

1967 TARZAN’S DEADLY SILENCE

From the US TV series “**Tarzan**” starring Ron Ely, with [Manuel Padilla Jr](#) as “Jai”

1954 UNDER THE BLACK FLAG

From the Australian TV series “**The Adventures of Long John Silver**”, starring Robert Newton, and with [Kit Taylor](#) as Jim Hawkins

~ 6 titles ~