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How the Pink Panther Came Alive and How the Thin Man Grew Fatter: Hungry Franchises and the Adaptation Industry

The Pink Panther Strikes Again (1976) was the first of the *Pink Panther* films to be released after the summer of *Jaws* (1975), so naturally, it had to include a reference to Steven Spielberg's gargantuan shark. In the end credits, the animated Panther can be spotted sneaking up on the unsuspecting swimmer, a cartoon Inspector Clouseau. Clearly, at this stage, the *Pink Panther* franchise had already turned rather flirtatious in terms of its intertextual affiliations and increasingly "Hollywood literate" (Wasson 2009, 178). Not just the cartoon sequences but also the live-action portions of the films were brimming with references to popular movies of the day, quoting everything from the James Bond franchise to *The Godfather* (1972). But the Panther's teeth-bearing in the direction of Clouseau has a few other implications, too. Not only does it invert the plot constellation that is at the heart of the films in that the Panther comes alive to go after Clouseau (rather than be chased by the latter), it also suggests that the Panther is not simply the cuddly trickster figure that had been popularised first by the credit sequences of the Blake Edwards films, and later by a series of animated shorts. In fact, more than four decades after the heyday of the *Pink Panther* films, the Panther can be read as yet another one of those 'hungry beasts' that have propelled modern franchise filmmaking.

Ever since Spielberg's Great White Shark set out to haunt the beach of Amity Island, more animals and large-scale monstrosities have followed suit: hungry beasts that are as guilty of chewing the scenery as they are of going after those "summer dollars" that *Jaws*'s other teeth-bearing shark, the mayor of Amity, talks about in one of the movie's most famous exchanges. This line in the *Jaws* script already betrayed a considerable degree of meta-awareness, given how *Jaws* made 'going after the summer dollars' the *sine qua non* of big studio releases. Almost two decades after *Jaws*, Spielberg was to deliver an even more self-aware, tongue-in-cheek take on the topic of the devouring blockbuster creature with *Jurassic Park* (1993).[1] But the phenomenon of the 'hungry franchise' was arguably never limited to large-scale filmmaking about prehistoric, monstrous creatures. In fact, *Jaws*' oft-quoted description of the shark's perfect organism (as delivered by Richard Dreyfuss in the role of Hooper) holds equally true for the idea of franchise filmmaking per se: "What we are dealing with here is a perfect engine, an eating machine. It's really a miracle of evolution. All this machine does is swim and eat and make little sharks, and that's all."

The metaphor comes in many shapes, of course. For some, high capitalism is the shark that swims in order to produce little sharks; Marx, on the other hand, talks about the *vampiric*

nature of capital that feasts on 'dead labour' to sustain its revenant existence (1867/2007, 242). Either way, franchises have been quite adaptable in order to generate material that would guarantee an eternal return not of the same, as Nietzsche would have it, but "of the Similar", as Deleuze has suggested (1990, 264), and as my subsequent discussion will reveal, they exhibit a remarkable degree of hunger in the process, lapping up whatever they can to satisfy their needs. This chapter will take its cue from Simone Murray's call for "a *sociology* of adaptation" that acknowledges the importance of the "commercial contexts [...] within which adaptations come to be" (2012, 4-6), though without neglecting the idea of textual analysis per se. By offering a reading of *The Thin Man* and, in more detail, the *Pink Panther* series that takes into account their production apparatus, I hope to demonstrate that a detailed look at the 'adaptation industry' must necessarily do justice to both the historical, contextual aspects *and* to the level of interpretation, as one inevitably impacts the other, with the production history finding surprising and often rather uncanny echoes in the diegesis of the films.

The Thin Man's Hunger

The history of movie franchises is full of hungry beasts and predators, going back all the way to *King Kong* (1933) and its sequel, *Son of Kong* (1933). But the insatiable appetite of the franchise beast was never strictly limited to big-budget studio extravaganzas about supersized, prehistoric animals willing to sink their teeth into anything that moves. In fact, various methods of generating story material precede the modern blockbuster by far. Look no further than *The Thin Man*, a series of whodunits produced between 1934 and 1947. *The Thin Man*, based on a Dashiell Hammett novel, has remained a beloved and frequently revived property, adaptable enough to be adjusted to changing requirements during its heyday: while the first few films were very much infused with the spirit (no pun intended) of the roaring twenties, sending their suave, urbanite protagonists on merry post-prohibition benders while exchanging witticisms, the fifth film (produced and released during the Second World War) cut back on the protagonist's drinking and sung the virtues of rural America instead of glamorising life in the urban *demimonde*, the studio finding it increasingly difficult "to merge the high-living Nick and Nora with the needs of the pre-World War II decency code and family values" (Isaac 1994, 59). *The Thin Man* was subsequently revived as a TV show (NBC, 1957-1959) and as a musical (*Nick & Nora*, 1991), while a reboot starring Johnny Deep was announced in 2011 but failed to materialize. *The Thin Man* arguably prefigured strategies of generating story content that would become properly institutionalised in the post-

Jaws era and the emerging sequel craze. This inevitably meant that *The Thin Man* gradually outgrew the grasp of its creator; in fact, the 'thin man' exhibits a remarkable hunger as a franchise property; even though, given the drinking habits of its sleuthing and boozing protagonists, Nick and Nora Charles, it might be tempting to call it a *thirsty* rather than a hungry franchise.

In Hammett's novel and in the first film, the 'thin man' refers to the murder victim, the inventor Clyde Wynant, "one of the thinnest men I've ever seen" according to the detective narrator, Nick Charles (12). The success of the first film (directed by W.S. Van Dyke, an efficient craftsman who accumulated nearly 30 directing credits during the 1930s alone) made the studio rush out a sequel, appropriately titled *After the Thin Man* (1936), yet the subsequent instalments made it clear that the moniker no longer referred to the deceased Wynant, but to the detective himself.[2] The third film was released as *Another Thin Man* (1939) and revolves around the Charles family having a baby (i.e., *another* male Charles), while *The Thin Man Goes Home* (1945) is about Nick Charles reconnecting with his parents. The trailer for the last film (*Song of the Thin Man*, 1947) is even less ambiguous and introduces the two lead characters as 'the thin man and his ever-loving bride'. Already in 1939, the *Los Angeles Times* commented on this curious constellation, arguing that the character of the Thin Man had shifted "from its original owner to William Powell" (qtd. in Rivett 2012, 221), though it's worth adding that the 'original owner' may not just have been the fictitious character of Wynant but also Hammett himself, yet another 'thin man' whose lean silhouette was used prominently in the marketing of the novel and the film.[3] Tellingly, the opening credits of the first *Thin Man* film are placed over the cover of the book's first edition, which features a photograph of Hammett, though viewers might easily mistake him for William Powell, the actor playing Nick Charles – a merging of fictitious hero and creator unrivalled in the history of adaptation, at least until Mickey Spillane starred as his own creation Mike Hammer in *The Girl Hunters* (1963). Promotion materials for *The Thin Man* had already recreated the book cover with Powell in place of Hammett; one trailer for the film sees Powell's Nick Charles strike up a conversation with his version of Philo Vance, a detective he had played in several films between 1929 and 1933 (fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The actor replaces the creator in the role of *The Thin Man* (1934).

Throughout subsequent instalments of *The Thin Man*, the whole paratextual apparatus surrounding the films would put more and more emphasis on the fact that the 'thin man' *was*

the detective himself, and that this thin man continued to eat up what he could: most of all his creator, Hammett. After the immense success of *After the Thin Man*, the studio was certain that they had a valuable franchise on their hands, which led them to offer $ 40,000 to Hammett for complete rights to the characters of Nick and Nora. Hammett also found himself strong-armed into an uneasy alliance with Frances Goodrich and Albert-Maurice Hackett, the studio's *Thin Man* writers, who would flesh out whatever storylines Hammett came up with (see Mooney 2014, 50-51). Additional MGM-produced films starring the *Thin Man* couple, Powell and Myrna Loy, underlined that the series now "belonged more to its stars than to Hammett, and to MGM, which focused on maintaining the profitability of the franchise" (ibid. 71), a constellation somewhat mirrored in the plots of the films. Most of them revolve around the continuity of the extended Charles family and the problem of producing an heir. At the same time, MGM was committed to rewriting the family history, having Nick and Nora abandon their boozing and partying in favor of middle-class amenities, with Nora turning into a far more subservient companion in the process.

Hammett never completed another novel after the release of the film, and his efforts to contribute material to the sequels were increasingly over-shadowed by self-hatred and disdain for Hollywood, culminating in a bizarre treatment for a fourth film that was not picked up by the studio bosses, who preferred to have their own writers draft the final three films.[4]

The Pink Panther and the Family Jewels

The thin man's hunger was indicative of things to come, once the studios had reconstituted themselves. After the collapse of the old studio system, the blockbuster as a box-office dominating spectacle was arguably (re-)born in 1975, during the summer of *Jaws*, the same year that also brought the Pink Panther back to the screens following a decade-long hiatus. To this day, there have been eleven *Pink Panther* films, which makes the series one of the longest-running comedy franchises, even though there are different opinions as to what constitutes the *Panther* canon. Some only count those films directed by Blake Edwards, some will put emphasis on the presence of Peter Sellers in the role of Inspector Clouseau, while others expect a *Pink Panther* film to feature an appearance (or rather, a *dis*-appearance) of the eponymous diamond. At various times, the *Pink Panther* franchise itself has attempted to exert some degree of canonical authority over its own family history, but these efforts are rendered hopelessly futile by various factors: the untimely death of the lead actor, Peter Sellers, subsequent efforts to loot the property by adding new chapters, and by a selective studio policy when it came to packaging the films in DVD collections. There have also been

some wildly inconsistent casting choices that make for uncanny encounters in the *Pink Panther* family album: the character of gentleman cat-burglar Charles Lytton, for instance, is played by two different actors over the course of three films, Clouseau himself is impersonated by other actors, while Claudia Cardinale appears in two different roles in the *Pink Panther* cycle.

The films themselves are not very helpful either when it comes to formulating a canon; indeed, they are far from consistent as to the meaning of the Panther itself, which is a rather elusive beast that means different things to different people. In the diegetic logic of the films, the Pink Panther is the world's most precious diamond, named after a pink discolouration that resembles the shape of a leaping panther, and it is introduced in the bizarrely orientalist prologue to the first film (*The Pink Panther*, 1963), a sequence brimming with the kind of unabashed Old Hollywood orientalism that was on its way out in the 1960s. Not that the subsequent *Panther* films are completely devoid of ethnic stereotyping; after all, it is the later films that add Clouseau's "little yellow friend" Cato to the *dramatis personae*. In *The Pink Panther*, a young Princess Dala is presented with the diamond by her father. Allegedly a gift to the royal family "by my grateful people", the diamond becomes a token bestowed upon the heir apparent and takes on political significance. A subsequent scene in *The Pink Panther* has Princess Dala, now grown up and forced into exile, insist that she alone is the rightful owner of the family jewels: "I shall never surrender it. [...] When the present government seized power, they claimed the diamond was the property of the people. There's even some talk of the international court deciding the issue." The follow-up films boast an increasingly uneasy relationship with the diamond itself and with the question of its ownership, and its phantasmagoric, shape-shifting nature suggests that the Panther has much in common with a fetish. Laura Mulvey discusses cinema's long association with fetishism, and the Panther arguably bears traces of both the Marxist and Freudian understanding of the term which inform that reading. Not only is it a prestige object that has been forcefully detached "from the literalness of object exchange" and that no longer bears any indexical trace of labour (Mulvey 1996, 3), it also disavows "the traumatic sight of absence", particularly traces of the non-existent, maternal penis (ibid. 5) – a reading that resonates with Clouseau's troubled relationships with strong women and the Oedipal nature of the detective narrative in general, as well as with the glamorous surface of the *Pink Panther* series, that is: the dominant Hollywood style that employs phantasmagoria and commodification as part of its fetishist aesthetic (ibid. 9).[5] While both the Princess and Clouseau's treacherous wife and mother-substitute disappear from the series after the first film, the Panther sticks around. By the time

we get to *Return of the Pink Panther* (1975), the Shah dynasty appears to have regained control over the fictional country of Lugash (details remain scarce), and the diamond now resides in a museum. It is now introduced as the nation's "religious symbol", with the government doing "a bit of political cleansing" in the Panther's name. The family history of the diamond is further rewritten in the reboot starring Steve Martin, which attempts to get rid of the colonial baggage yet clings to it at the same time. In *The Pink Panther 2* (2009), the only 'exotic' element is the thief herself, played by Aishwarya Rai, and when she threatens to shoot the diamond, she is accused of "destroy[ing] the sacred symbol" not of the India surrogate Lugash, but "of France". The exact history and status of the diamond is not discussed, though: Is it a piece of looted art? A nostalgic reminder of colonial greatness that Lugash is renting out to former colonial powers? Or simply a much-cherished commodity that has become absorbed into the culture industry? The latter seems the likeliest option, and in a franchise-loving world, this might just be enough to make it a 'sacred' signifier – even David Niven's original cat burglar in the first *Pink Panther* film is brand-savvy enough to always leave behind his monogrammed white glove, while the second film of the reboot cycle is about how one thief appropriates the identity and trademark style of another. *Trail of the Pink Panther* (1982) is honest (or rather, indifferent) enough to characterise the diamond as "a symbol of continuity"; the film might as well be saying that the diamond is its sole *raison d'être*.

The release of the reboot was preceded by a picture book, *Meet the Pink Panther* (2005), co-authored by the daughters of Friz Freleng (the animator who, together with David DePatie, produced the successful *Pink Panther* shorts and who adds to the property's complicated family history) and similarly elusive when it comes to the origins of the Panther. Not only does it thoroughly whitewash the diamond's previous screen history, substituting the Shah for a bald king with a Santa Clause-like ermine coat and his daughter for a Disney-inspired fairy princess, it also provides the reader with the paradoxical set-up of casting the Pink Panther in all the main roles: as the shape inside the diamond *and* as the person who digs up the diamond.

Of course, the Pink Panther is also a much-needed MacGuffin in all of the films, providing a reason for Inspector Clouseau to leave France and to engage in some transnational high-jinx. But even though the diamond only makes a few token appearances – it is even absent from a number of films that boast its name in the title –, it clearly exercises control and is inextricably bound up with the franchise itself, ultimately serving as an emblem of ownership questions and the greedy and hungry nature of franchises per se. In fact, the

production history of the series itself underlines what kind of grasp the Pink Panther holds over everyone that comes into contact with it. This is evidenced in the prologue to *Return of the Pink Panther*, where a guard demonstrates the museum's impressive safety measures and argues that "the Pink Panther is protected, and by forces more impenetrable than any army", and that any "would-be thief" will find himself "a prisoner of the Pink Panther". One could go even further and say that the Pink Panther does not simply take prisoners or hostages, but that the Panther *devours* whatever it can, in the spirit of *Jaws*' "perfect eating machine", and in order to 'make new sharks' (or new *panthers*, as it were), Blake Edwards' film series went into different directions over the years.

Feeding the Panther

The first *Pink Panther* film came out in 1963, and was born from the idea to have a charming jewel thief hook up with the wife of the detective who is on his trail. When the role of the buffoonish inspector went from Peter Ustinov to Peter Sellers, said detective grew into the film's unlikely slapstick hero, with the producers urging Edwards to write a sequel. The opportunity arose sooner than they had anticipated: around the same time, the Mirisch corporation had acquired the rights to *A Shot in the Dark* (1961), a Broadway hit starring Walter Matthau, William Shatner, and Julie Harris. The play was itself an adaptation of another property, the French comedy *L'Idiote* (1960) by Marcel Achard. While preparing *A Shot in the Dark*'s film adaptation, to be directed by Anatole Litvak and starring Matthau, Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers in the Shatner role, Sellers threatened to walk unless they brought in Blake Edwards, and together with the author William Peter Blatty, who was later to revolutionise the horror genre with his novel *The Exorcist* (1971), they reworked the farcical murder mystery into a second Clouseau film, the hungry franchise thus absorbing an unsuspecting property (see Wasson 2009, 88-89).

This procedure is, of course, quite common in franchise filmmaking, as properties are acquired by the major studios and then appropriated for their own on-going series. A spec script like Jonathan Hensleigh's *Simon Says*, sold to Fox in 1993, underwent various attempts to merge it with existing franchise properties: initially set to become the next instalment in the *Lethal Weapon* series, it was finally adapted into into *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), the only 'buddy movie' in the *Die Hard* franchise.[6] In the case of *A Shot in the Dark*, this process of absorption results in the paradoxical constellation of a murder mystery where the detective has no narrative agency whatsoever (Wasson aptly observes that the film is "driven by a passenger", 2009, 81), as Edwards and his collaborators abandoned the straightforward

whodunit element and the witty interrogation scenes in favour of slapstick set-pieces like the famous billiards sequence or Clouseau's trip to a nudist colony. They also introduced new characters that would become *Panther* staples, like Chief Inspector Dreyfus, the franchise's most explicit director surrogate, the sorely afflicted boss who is unable to extricate himself from Clouseau and who remains the only one to know that the detective is a fraud.[7] In promoting Clouseau from supporting character to dim-witted hero and 'master of disguise', *A Shot in the Dark* (in spite of the absence of the Pink Panther diamond) provided the template for future Clouseau films: a crime is committed, and after a series of stellar failures, the Sûreté's most incompetent detective manages to emerge as the unlikely hero and wind up with a glamorous love interest.

A Shot in the Dark was a success at the box office, and the only thing that stopped the Mirisches from continuing the franchise immediately was the bitter falling-out between its director and star, with both men vowing to never work with each other again. Things looked different a decade later, however, once Edwards had fallen out of grace with Hollywood and both he and Sellers found themselves in need of a box-office hit after a string of flops. The franchise may have been dormant for almost a decade when Edwards and Sellers returned to it (1968's *Inspector Clouseau* starring Alan Arkin having sunk without much trace), yet the Panther had grown stronger and more animate over the years, courtesy of the cartoon series that turned it into a global brand and into "a feline Hugh Hefner with monocle and cigarette" (Wasson 2009, 195). Paradoxically, in spite of its gradual commodification, the Panther's trademark narrative agenda – to escape the law, to create havoc, and to insist merrily that the world needs a coat of pink paint – had turned it into an icon of the Left. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/2003), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari celebrate the Pink Panther as an idiosyncratic beast that "imitates nothing, [...] reproduces nothing" and that serves as an example by virtue of "paint[ing] the world its color", thus turning it into its "becoming-world" and following its "'aparallel evolution'" (11). In their emphatic insistence that the state of becoming is preferable to standstill, they even encourage their readers to "[b]e the Pink Panther" (25).

Deleuze and Guattari might not have thought so highly of the Panther or claimed that it 'reproduces nothing' had they been aware of the production history of the franchise. *A Thousand Plateaus* came out in 1980, the year of Sellers' death, and at this stage, the jungle-cat had already evolved into a *copy*-cat, fully intent on ditching out more of the same, devouring other projects that were in its way, lapping up cinematic trends and thus turning the Panther into a highly adaptable brand,[8] though not quite a transmedia endeavour. While the

Pink Panther activities of the 1960s and 1970s certainly indicate some aspects of what Henry Jenkins characterises as transmedia activities – namely, a media conglomerate's efforts "to spread its brand or expand its franchises across as many different media platforms as possible" – these efforts do not, for the most part, constitute "a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins 2007). It remains franchise-building of the Coca Cola variety, emblematised in *The Pink Phink* (1964), the Oscar-winning animated short film that Deleuze and Guattari are alluding to in their account, where the Panther sabotages the work of a painter by applying a coat of pink to everything the painter is working on. 124 of these cartoons were produced until 1978, at which point the movies had already taken over again.

The producer Walter Mirisch has attributed the success of *The Return of the Pink Panther* directly to the post-*Jaws* environment of film distribution (Mirisch 2008, 171), and by all accounts, Edwards and Sellers quickly settled into a pragmatic though at the same time unhealthy mode of production, with both of them drawn back into working with each other. This would result in several box-office hits, but also in a series of increasingly bizarre clashes. The two men would come together for a new *Panther*, lock horns, then cool off with other projects in-between, before starting work on yet another Clouseau adventure, with the studio forever edging them on. Edwards himself described his arrangement with United Artists as a rather pragmatic *quid pro quo* arrangement: "You let me make this film, and I'll give you another *Panther*" (Edwards in conversation with Cameron 1986/2018, 57). The cycle could have continued forever, had it not been for Sellers' untimely death from a heart attack in 1980, during pre-production of the subsequently abandoned *Romance of the Pink Panther*.

In retrospect, it is tempting to read the actor's demise as 'death by Panther', though this remains contested; it is worth remembering that the authorities of Amity were similarly reluctant to certify 'death by shark' because this would have endangered their revenue. *Romance of the Pink Panther*, which Sellers had scripted himself and planned to shoot without the involvement of Edwards (who was plotting his own Panther spin-off[9]), had taken the livelihood out of the actor. The *Panther* films themselves, in spite of Clouseau's indestructibility, were starting to revolve around the notion of mortality and destruction, even though Clouseau is constantly reborn in the process; "deathlessness" being "likelier than death" in the *Panther* films (Wasson 2009, 189). This makes Sellers' later *Panther* films echo with one of the most spectacular but no less meta-reflexive flops of his career, the infamous James Bond spoof *Casino Royale* (1967). This film, in spite of its many shortcomings, production troubles, lame jokes and notoriously incoherent plotting, was rather ahead of its time in this respect, given how it toys with doppelganger tropes and pokes fun at the

franchise's self-inflicted need to continue and 'reproduce' at all costs, with or without its most valuable asset – Sean Connery was yet to retire from the role of 007 when *Casino Royale* went into production. *Casino Royale* features Sellers himself in the role of a mild-mannered gambling expert who becomes involved with MI6 just as the 'original' incarnation of James Bond, now promoted to head of MI6, hatches a plan to rename all of their agents into James Bond 007 to confuse the enemy. Bond is played by David Niven, making this a sort of *Pink Panther* reunion even though he shares no scenes with Sellers.

The Pink Panther and James Bond make for interesting bed-fellows throughout the 1970s, not just because of shared personnel and production facilities, their stylistic overlap and their strong tendency towards commodity fetisishm where the consumer will always take priority over the labourer, and a love for light-hearted exoticism; both were major sources of revenue for United Artists during that decade (Bach 1999, 68), before the box-office disaster of *Heaven's Gate* (1980) sunk the studio. But where the Bond franchise had little trouble securing its longevity beyond the era of Sean Connery and that of United Artists, there was little life left in the *Pink Panther* after the death of Sellers. Rewatching the films after the release of several well-publicised biographies and a critically acclaimed biopic (*The Life and Death of Peter Sellers*, 2005), it is tempting to read the hazardous master/slave relationship between Clouseau and his servant Cato, who is paid to attack Clouseau as viciously as possible and gets beaten mercilessly for his efforts, as an emblem for the toxic Edwards/Sellers liaison. Sellers' biographer, Ed Sikov, has likened their relationship to "a screwball marriage", with "comedy and combat in equal measure" (2002, 344).

The Panther itself is not as easily aligned with either man; in fact, it makes more sense to conceptualise the Panther as an emblem of the adaptable, hungry franchise itself. This idea is borne out by the title sequences, easily the most interesting scenes in the later *Panther* films and effectively their subconscious, as they reveal a number of hard truths about their production history and the nature of franchise-making. The *Panther* credits are stellar examples of how the titles of a film can serve as a transfer site between diegetic elements and extradiegetic information, drawing the audience in via recognisable, serialised elements and setting the stage for what is to follow (see Prokić/Schlicker 2019). The first film's credits introduce the Panther as an inventive trickster with a massive ego, who takes delight in playing pranks on the filmmakers. The Panther takes creative charge of the individual departments in symbolic vignettes, by acting as a stand-in for composer Henry Mancini, the creator of the Panther's omnipresent theme, or by cheekily adding its own name to the list of screenwriters. The Panther even jumbles up the letters in Blake Edwards' directing credit

before it is forced at gun-point to sort out the mess (fig. 2). In subsequent credit scenes, the Panther becomes more and more greedy and aggressive, particularly towards Clouseau's avatar, who is forever on the trail of the Panther, no matter if the diamond features in the film or not.

Fig. 2: The Pink Panther messing with the credits (*The Pink Panther*, 1963).

At the same time, the Panther becomes increasingly difficult to control, as it absorbs the spare parts of other movies and turns against its creators, like a feline Frankenstein stitched together from various kinds of dead matter. The notion of the artwork as Frankenstein's creature has been examined in detail by Julie Grossman in her insightful study of *Literature, Film, and Their Hideous Progeny* (2015); she uses the metaphor to conceptualise adaptation as a form of "difficult offspring" that is tied to yet also obliterates its sources (8-9). This uneasy relationship is very much present in the *Pink Panther* credit sequences, as Clouseau (a stand-in both for the director and the star) is, at various points, trapped inside a movie screen (*The Pink Panther Strikes Again*), shot by the Panther (*Return of the Pink Panther*), or even buried beneath one of the letters that are in the word 'panther' (*Revenge of the Pink Panther*). *Revenge* sees the Panther light a fuse that eats up Blake Edwards' name, and while it was arguably Sellers and not the director who was eventually swallowed whole by the animal, it is worth noting that Edwards never directed another feature film after the box-office failure of *Son of the Pink Panther* (1993). The 2006 reboot sees the Panther double for the MGM lion in the opening credits, the feline con artist flirting rather provocatively with the role of the ever-so-hungry beast.

The notion of Frankenstein-like adaptive work overshadows *all* of the post-Sellers films, two of which were assembled from spare parts, that is: unused and recycled materials. The credits of these films – *Trail of the Pink Panther* and *Curse of the Pink Panther* (1983) – are remarkably frank in this respect, and they also serve as Blake Edwards' confessional: the place where the franchise comes clean about its own contradictions, and the Panther about what the director has called its "greedy little heart" (Edwards in conversation with King 2002/2018, 119). *Trail of the Pink Panther* boasts a rather hypocritical dedication "to Peter, the one and only Inspector Clouseau", only to reanimate Sellers by using doubles and stand-ins; the resulting films are rather painfully unfunny forays into the universe of simulacra. Their credit sequences see the Panther act the role of PacMan, coming after Clouseau, before both merge into a hybrid creature; most strikingly, Clouseau urinates Edwards' screenwriting

credit, which suggests a degree of self-contempt on behalf of the director (fig. 3). In *Curse of the Pink Panther*, the Clouseau character is replaced by a hollow, disembodied successor (a stand-in for that film's Clouseau surrogate, the comedian Ted Wass), who eventually walks off together with the Panther, the pair cuffed together at the leg, thus acknowledging their mutual interdependence.

Fig. 3: The panther's greed and the director's self-contempt (*Trail of the Pink Panther*, 1982).

Conclusion

The *Pink Panther* family may have eventually died out, but the franchise has arguably produced at least a kind of spiritual legacy that is now acknowledged not just by fans, but also by comedians who have drawn inspiration from Peter Sellers' versatile performances. The list includes Steve Martin, who rose to prominence at the time when Sellers passed away and who played Clouseau in the two most recent films, and Rowan Atkinson, whose various appearances in the Bond spoof series *Johnny English* (2003-2018) owe a considerable debt to the *Pink Panther* films; Atkinson's first feature-film credit was as the comic sidekick in the most Panther'esque of all James Bond films, *Never Say Never Again* (1983). Even before Johnny English was to conquer the big screen, Atkinson had saluted the *Pink Panther* franchise in his iconic role as Mr. Bean. In *Mr. Bean*'s pilot episode (1990), the eponymous character takes a maths exam and adorns his desk with a Pink Panther toy, the creature's tail caught between its legs so that it resembles an absolutely terrifying erection (fig. 4), providing yet another reminder of the Panther's fetishist nature. If this was meant as a battle-cry for virility, it remained an empty threat, the franchise having turned barren at that point.

Fig. 4: The Pink Panther's mighty erection (*Mr Bean*, 1990).

Had it not been for the box-office failure of the last few *Pink Panthers*, the genealogy might well have continued forever, though franchises have a tendency to run out of steam when the baton passes from one generation to the next, at least until 'illegitimate' children like Johnny English step up. What films as diverse as *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Thin Man*, and *The Pink Panther* have in common is that they invariably try to add 'next generation' chapters when the lead actors retire or when the original threat has been killed. *Son of Kong* was the first (and failed) attempt to do this, yet the template remained popular and brought us *Son of the Pink Panther*, *Son(g) of the Thin Man*, as well as *Jaws 3D* (1983) and *Jaws: The Revenge*

(1987), both of which play up the family angle to such a degree that they might as well have been released as *Son of Jaws*.[10]

The growing family tree inevitably means more mouths to feed and more hunger to be satisfied; and ultimately, a hungry franchise will swallow everything that is in its way, including its creators, most emphatically so in *Jurassic Park*. If the Panther was Sellers' death and destiny, then the same could be said of Blake Edwards, who retired from feature-filmmaking following the disastrous reception of *Son of the Pink Panther*, a film that takes rather bizarre steps in order to supplement *and* rewrite the family history, but ends up eating up the Panther himself, who goes from 'king of the cartoon jungle' to scaredy-cat and is nearly crushed by the title sequence. It is hardly a coincidence that the credits for the 2006 remake report that the Panther and, by implication, Blake Edwards himself appear to have gone missing.[11]

Clearly, the *Pink Panther* franchise has a lot to offer when it comes to illustrating some of the processes that must be investigated in discussions of the adaptation industry. This entails, in Murray's words, "a thorough understanding of whose financial interests" are served by "spin-off" properties, as well as the various effects of licensing and ownership (Murray 2012, 15). Not only are the *Pink Panther* films quite frank about this, as a closer look at the credit sequences reveals, they also exhibit a remarkable degree of determination when it comes to seeing this through.

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[1] *Jurassic Park* is not just a transmedia franchise that has so far spawned five films, several videogames, and endless merchandise, but it is also a film *about* the problem of franchise-building, where people are strangely attracted to potentially deadly carnivores. The park's attractions eventually start to feast on the paying customers themselves, only to have the cycle play out time and again.

[2] Judy Geater, in her reading of *After the Thin Man*, suggests that James Stewart (who plays the murderer in the sequel) is a candidate for the eponymous moniker too: "a thin man who might just be even more famous than William Powell" (2014, 75).

[3] Lilian Hellman, in her introduction to a posthumous collection of Hammett stories, famously wrote about the author's brief time in prison in the 1950s that it "had made a thin man thinner" (Hellman 1966, xi).

[4] Hammett's untitled story outline revisits the characters and plot of the first film (see Hammett 2012, 227-233).

[5] A similar case could be made for the *Thin Man* series, where the detective often jokingly refers to his wife's motherly way of looking after him, and where the mise-en-scène also revels in the clothes and furniture owned by the wealthy elite. Mulvey argues that the fetishistic style of classic Hollywood filmmaking derives from a suppression of pre-Code racy sexuality (Mulvey 1996, 41). Interestingly, the first *Thin Man* film was one of the last major pre-Code releases, the Production Code Administration having been set up three months after its release.

[6] The *Die Hard* franchise has a history of such adaptive encounters: the first one was based on a Roderick Thorp novel featuring the same detective character played on one occasion by Frank Sinatra (*The Detective*, 1968) and was initially set to be adapted into a sequel to the Arnold Schwarzenegger film, *Commando* (1985). The screenplay that the producers initially tried to appropriate for *Die Hard 3* eventually wound up as *Speed 2: Cruise Control* (see Lambie 2011).

[7] In *The Return of the Pink Panther*, Clouseau voices a rather meta-reflective comment when he suggests that Dreyfus "knows that I'm unique and therefore indispensable".

[8] Ed Sikov points out that the plot of *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* lifts elements from another classic Sellers comedy, 1959's *The Mouse that Roared* (Sikov 2002, 343).
[9] Edwards had written a script called *The Ferret* which was to expand the *Pink Panther* universe but never went into production (Sikov 2002, 378). In a bizarre twist of events, Edwards ended up making three million dollars from *Romance*, even though the project died with Sellers (Horne 1983/2018, 51).
[10] The 2014 edition of Bernard A. Drew's reference guide to series and sequels lists no fewer than 21 *Son of* ... sequels, many of them dating back to Hollywood's classic period (see Drew 2014, 400).
[11] In terms of the 'selective' family history, it is worth pointing out that the reboot's opening credits name only Blake Edwards as the creator; it is up to the *end* credits to add that Maurice Richlin co-created the property with his work on the first *Pink Panther* film. Other collaborators like William Peter Blatty (Edwards' co-author on *A Shot in the Dark*, which added the characters of Cato and Dreyfus) are not mentioned at all.