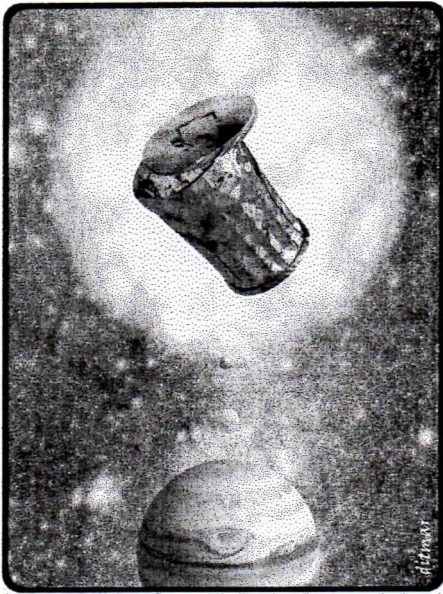


Out of the Bin



'Space Bin' Artwork by Ditmar

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A Newsletter from MERV BINNS
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Dear Readers,

Well, winter is upon us and we are having some relatively cold mornings, for us at any rate, but some of my American friends I am sure would experience lot colder periods with snow and all, during their winters. I have been doing a lot of garden work for people but not much for myself, but then again I get paid for doing other people's gardens. But I will get around to mine in due course. Lots of pruning, repotting and digging up and replanting my dahlias. It is becoming a lost cause trying to grow things like lettuce and silver beet, as the possums scoff them all as soon as they grow. But I will cover the beds with netting and such and keep trying to beat the blasted critters that frequent the roof cavity of our residence. They are a protected species by the way and even if I had a gun I would not be allowed to shoot the varmints. They can in New Zealand however, as they were introduced from Australia and have become a pest there also. It is a good time now for making soup, (no, not possum) and other cooking, catching up on some reading and watching TV, but before all that...

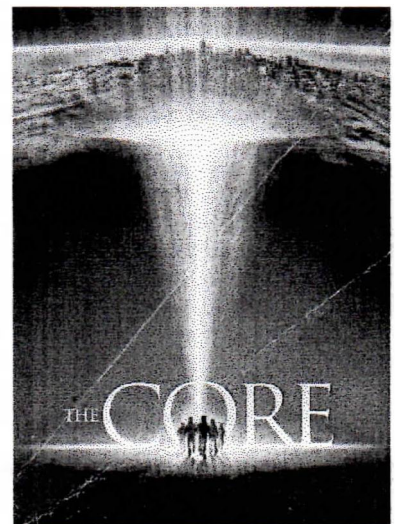
MOVIES AND TV

Apart from watching my football team inconsistently win and lose on the TV (and they won when it was not televised), we have been watching the Wimbledon Tennis and seen our Aussie champs battling to win, but at least it is good to see the flamboyant American Williams sisters win as usual. We watch many interesting documentaries on cable, including interviews

with leading actors such as Ian McLennan and Michael Caine. And there are lots of wild animal shows – an American show 'Funniest Animals' was shown on the cable's Animal Planet channel, and it was quite hilarious. There are still lots of re-runs of all the *STAR TREK* series, *STARGATE* and the regular new shows on the free-to-air channels.

There has not been much worth watching recently that we have not already seen in the way of movies. One we did watch, *LIVING WITH THE DEAD*, featuring Ted Danson, which was obviously trying to cash in on the popularity of *The Sixth Sense*, was spoiled by a lot of fictional bullshit added to the "true" (more or less) bio-drama loosely based on the life of psychic James van Praagh. Perhaps Mr van Praagh is a genuine psychic. He was even brought out to Australia some years back to try and provide some clues on the disappearance of two children, in South Australia, but without any success, I believe. I would like to believe that there are such people. I knew one young woman personally, who seemed to perhaps have some psychic abilities and she became absolutely terrified at the dreams and such that she was experiencing. Consequently she turned to religion for solace but I have not heard from her since. No doubt there are quite a few charlatans, as the Skeptics Society are quick to discredit when they get the opportunity, but American expatriate TV personality Don Lane was very quick to defend the late British lady psychic Doris Stokes, whom he had on his show, when the skeptic James Randi had a go at her. *Living With The Dead* had its moments, but degenerated into straight-out fantasy in the end, as the credits indicated: "some fictional sequences have been included" or something to that effect. I still have an open mind on the subject of spiritualism, ghosts and all and I am still very interested in the subject. An experience with friends and a Ouija Board years ago was quite fascinating, with messages being "received", which could have been explained in a number of ways and proved nothing. One is reminded of the style and type of movie that may have been based on a Stephen King tale and writing it as pure fiction, he would have done it better. The Australian movie *CHOPPER*, starring Eric Bana, currently featured in *HULK*, was screened on the same night on the box, but we will catch up with both of those movies in due course.

We had to see the SF disaster movie *THE CORE* on the big screen before it went off at the theatres and spectacular, with tons of special effects, as it was, it was still a load of rubbish. However it was one of those tales where you could "suspend your disbelief", at least while watching it and we enjoyed it. The whole premise of the Earth's core acting up the way it does in the movie is almost believable, but the way they go about fixing the problem is strictly 1930s pulp fiction. I do not like having to say it is simply worth seeing just for the SFX, it does have a lot of exciting moments but the visuals are the "star" of the movie. The plot reminds me of other implausible SF movies about voyages like Bruce Willis' *Armageddon* and in particular *Fantastic Voyage* with simply more and perhaps better SFX, as we are coming to expect with movies now. It starred among others Aaron Eckhart, Delroy Lindo, Stanley Tucci and Hilary Swank (who reminds me very much of Joelene Blalock in TV's *Enterprise*.) See it but keep your tongue in your cheek.



It is inevitable that as one gets older the people and things that have been part of our lives gradually depart and over the last year this has become very evident to me. Friends such as John Foyster and Bob Smith join the people we may not have known personally, but we have appreciated their work, be it writing or acting or what ever, such as the SF icons I have previously mentioned and most recently movie stars such as Gregory Peck and now Katherine Hepburn. What pleasure she has given us over the years with such as her movies with Spencer Tracy, *The African Queen* with Humphrey Bogart, *The Philadelphia Story* with Cary Grant and James Stewart and so many more. She continued to appear in movies well into her later years but her last act was on the 29th of June this year, when she passed on at the age of 96. Another actor who has left us and future generations a wonderful legacy of great performances to enjoy again and again.

Also seen on TV, what must be one of the silliest movies ever made by a leading director, in this case John Frankenheimer, *THE EXTRAORDINARY SEAMAN* starring David Niven, Alan Alda, Faye Dunaway and Mickey Rooney. Hilarious at times, admittedly and David Niven was great as usual as the ghost of a British naval officer who was killed in the first World War in 1914, still trying to prove his worth by sinking a big enemy ship. It seems he is doomed to follow the Flying Dutchman, as although his attempt to sink a Japanese warship was successful, it was a bit late and after the 1939-45 war is over. So he still has to prove he is not a complete failure to his famous and highly successful departed ancestors. The narrative is interspersed with newsreel shots of the second world war, including a classic clip of President Truman's wife unsuccessfully trying break a bottle of champagne on a ship's bow.

At Race Matthews' we watched the Australian movie made by Peter Weir and starring American actor Richard Chamberlain, *THE LAST WAVE*. I had seen it a few times previously but a long time ago and I was pleased to see it again. Quite unique in premise, the idea of a gigantic wave sweeping across the South Pacific and hitting the East Coast of Australia seems quite plausible. The aboriginal involvement and the idea of people from South America landing on the ancient New South Wales coast, you could take with a grain of salt, but it makes it an intriguing and original tale.

BOOKS

I saw that *Harry Potter* was again being banned in certain school libraries here. When can we expect them to start calling for author J. K. Rowling to be burnt at the stake as a witch and for teaching young people about witchcraft? I thought that went out with the witch trials in Salem about two hundred years ago. What a lot of rubbish! Kids more than ever now are well aware of the difference between the real world and the fantasy world of books, movies and TV and the Harry Potter books are pure fantasy and a lot of fun. The intolerant religious groups give me a pain. When are they going to join the real world?

I am finally finishing reading Peter Hamilton's *NIGHT'S DAWN TRILOGY* and I do not know which was the greater battle, me reading it or the conflict in the story. It was much too long; it had too many characters and too many different scenarios. Jumping from place to place, chapter by chapter became very confusing. However it was a great idea, an enormous panorama with incredible complex societies involved. People who read faster than me and who like the big space operas will love it and as it was published a few years back, if you like that sort of thing you have probably caught up with it by now at any rate.

Opposite, clockwise from bottom right-hand corner: JOHN BAXTER (cut off), Jack Dann (Jack's back), Lucy Sussex, Julian Warner, Elaine Cochran, Bruce Gillespie, Dick Jenssen, Race Mathews, Helena Binns, Merv Binns, Lee Harding, Janeen Webb. (Photo by Madeleine Harding)



Lee Harding, JOHN BAXTER and Merv Binns, Melbourne July 2003
(Photo by Helena Binns)

PEOPLE

An old acquaintance, fan and successful author and editor JOHN BAXTER who was originally based in Sydney, spent a lot of time in England but now lives in Paris, France with his French wife, was in Melbourne in July this year. Lee Harding and daughter Madeleine, Dick Jenssen, Bruce and Elaine Gillespie, Race Mathews, Damien Broderick, Jack Dann and Janeen Webb, Lucy Sussex, Julian Warner and Helena and I, had dinner with him on July 9th at a Lebanese restaurant, *The Kanza Man*, in Richmond. John, who has produced along with SF novels and books on the movies, a number of biographies of movie people such as Ken Russell, is working on a bio of artist Norman Lindsay. John and Lee Harding had made a trip just prior to the dinner, to the provincial town of Ballarat, where Lindsay and his family once lived, to check out the Ballarat Art Gallery and its Lindsay family display. The last time I met John was at the convention in Adelaide in 1985 and he had been endeavoring to get an SF movie made in Australia with little success. Things have changed a lot in the Australian movie industry since then and he was just a bit ahead of his time. The following evening we joined John Straede and Dick Jenssen for a belated birthday celebration for Dick and me at a restaurant serving Italian type food, not far from our homes. The next four days were spent attending CONTINUUM SF Convention, so it had been a long week of meeting people and enjoying their company.

