

# Out of the Bin



*"I don't think that was the Cassini-Huygens probe!"*

*Our Christmas card for this year, designed by Helena.*

*This goofy looking card was inspired by the fact that, if all goes as planned, on December 26<sup>th</sup> this year, the day after Christmas ("Boxing Day", as it's known to some of us) the Huygens unit of the Cassini-Huygens Saturn exploratory spacecraft, will take a dive into the atmosphere of Saturn's gigantic moon Titan, the only satellite in our solar system with any atmosphere to speak of, in search of answers to a lot of questions about the formation of the solar system, the origins of life etcetera (the really big stuff!)*

## Issue #32 December 2004

### A special Xmas issue of Out of the Bin

A Newsletter from MERV and HELENA BINNS  
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Dear Readers,

Well, another year is almost over and things did not change very much. The things we see on the News have been the same, the same political leaders faces haunt us, my football team had a bad year again, the TV channels keep repeating our favourite shows and wont show the new episodes, we have had a fair bit of rain but the situation for water use in our gardens and in general is that

water use is still restricted. On the good side we have had some good times with friends, seen some great movies like *The Lord of the Rings*, my garden is looking reasonably good, our health is reasonable although we do have a few ongoing complaints and despite our low income we manage to eat well and do some of the things we want to. Helena is having a ball with her digital camera thanks to Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber, and every time I look for her now she is off taking pictures of the garden or sky and then I can't get her away from the computer.

### COMMUNICATIONS

For the past couple of years we have been besieged by advertisements for cable internet. Then late in November a young Indian computer geek turned up on our doorstep on behalf of Optus (our current telephone and Internet service provider) and made us an offer that he claimed would cost us no more than our present dial-up arrangement. We had our doubts, but when he assured us that it would be a lot faster and that free virus protection went with it, we decided to give it a go. He also said that we could choose a new User ID, so we decided on one that comprises both our names. It's not installed yet, though it should be by the time you get this.

The new e-mail address just under the heading is probably going to be the best one to use in the future (and it could turn out to be the only practical one) but it's not official just yet, so for the next few weeks if you need to e-mail us it would be best to send your messages to the *mandhbinns* and the *mervbinns* one, just to be sure that at least one of them reaches us.

### POSSUMS AND PLUMBING

Since we moved into this decaying rented house, possums have become the bane of Merv's life. Smugly resident in our roof and walls all day, they startle us and sometimes wake us in the middle of the night, galumphing heavily on the ceilings and hissing and snarling - a diabolically menacing sound, though it seems that to possums that's just love talk. They emerge only to wreak havoc with

Merv's vegetable garden. From time to time he broods over solutions, mostly involving recipes from New Zealand cook-books, but since possums are a protected species in Australia, there is not much he can do except try to fence in every vegetable patch. It tends to be a losing battle, as they are quite resourceful and will track down and devour any unprotected morsel of new growth.



*One of the culprits*

*(All Photos in this issue by Helena)*



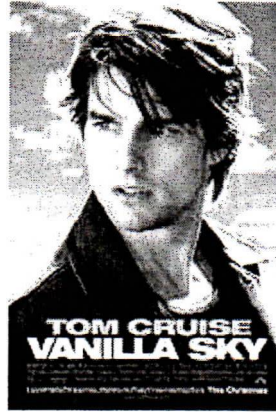
Other ongoing problems include numerous minor (and from time to time a few major) problems with the plumbing – everything from dripping taps to blocked drains to ruptured pipes. In May this year, the overflow pipe from the water tank in the roof cavity broke away, gushing water onto the ceiling – and through it, into one of the rooms. Fortunately we were at home when it happened, and turned off the mains supply before it could do too much damage. The plumber who came to fix the pipe said that the ruptured ceiling panel would have to be repaired, otherwise it could collapse. Now, nobody wants to find themselves and their treasured SF collection underneath a collapsing ceiling, enveloped in a noxious cloud of ancient roof dust contaminated by all sorts of stuff including generations of possum poo. (And maybe even a live, screeching, hissing, panicked possum, for that matter. Considering the exuberant way they gallop on the ceilings, including the damaged section, it's a wonder it hasn't happened already!) But despite our repeated requests, neither the agent nor the owner would come and look at it to assess the damage. Then the agent told us that the owner refused to authorise the repair, even though it would be covered by insurance! Then in late November, the outlet pipe for the bathroom sink, which had always drained reluctantly at best, became totally blocked. After trying everything from plunging it with the trusty plumber's helper to (as a last resort) drenching it with the dreaded Drano, it remained steadfastly stuffed. On Friday we phoned the agent, who wouldn't call a plumber because the owner would as usual want to try to deal with it himself. By Tuesday the owner still hadn't showed up, so we phoned the agent again. Late Tuesday afternoon the owner turned up, with his usual 'plumber' assistant in tow. They finally fixed the blockage, making a predictably destructive, amateurish mess of it. They also fixed the dripping shower taps that had been driving us crazy for months, and finally looked at the ceiling. When the owner



saw the extent of the damage, he got on his mobile phone to the agent and berated *him* for not having the ceiling fixed! (Who did he think he was kidding?) Needless to say, we have heard nothing from either of them since. (And the possums are still tap-dancing on the ceiling!)

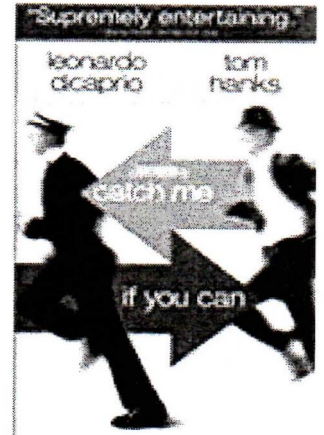
## MOVIES AND NEWS

I have been reading a bit more and enjoying most of what I have read, the Alastair Reynolds titles in particular. I have not been able to see many movies recently, with the last theatre trip being for *Alien V Predator*, but we have been watching a lot of TV. We watched Tom Cruise in *VANILLA SKY* which turned out to be SF and despite all the clues I missed the obvious outcome. (Helena adds that *Fight Club*, lent to us by John Straede, also has elements of SF, or at least speculative fiction, about it.)



I do not like Leonardo di Caprio very much as an actor, but he was okay in *CATCH ME IF YOU CAN* and it turned out better than I anticipated. There have been quite a few movies passing through that I would like to have seen but we will no doubt catch up with some of them on the box or on DVD, but I must see *NATIONAL TREASURE* and *POLAR EXPRESS* some time over the Christmas period.

I noticed in the news that Sigourney Weaver of *Alien* fame and other movies, has joined William Shatner on the booking list for the first passenger space flight that Richard Branson is organizing. It is great to see that space flight has taken a step forward with the recent success of private enterprise endeavours. Meanwhile NASA's news from the Mars probes continues but it tells us no more than what we



expected. If water is found soon, the chances of a manned trip in our lifetime becomes remotely possible, but they will no doubt get there eventually. Following President Bush's announcements about the shape and aims of near future space exploration by NASA, it seems that despite the usual short sighted views of some, the US government will continue to spend a bit of their budget on it. Some people say we need to find other planets to inhabit because we are destroying this one, or to at least from my point of view, to fully explore the development of artificial environments. No doubt sources of needed raw materials will be found in due course and the establishment of appropriate industries on such as the Moon and Mars I am sure will happen. However, no matter how much money, time and energy is spent on space exploration and development, we must stop the degradation of the world we live on now and a lot of time money, time and energy must be spent on that.

Thanks to TIM MARION for copies of his "Slanzines" sent to us via Dick Jensen, *Out & In Again*, *Steeleye Slan* and *Haydazed*. Tim mentions the crackdown in New York during the Presidential Election campaign and what he says enforces my view that government in general in the USA reflects the attitudes of the federal administration. They are getting tough with any opposition just as they have in Iraq. I wonder where the world in general is heading. Will we ever learn to live with one another, and will we ever stop despoiling this beautiful planet of ours?

MERV



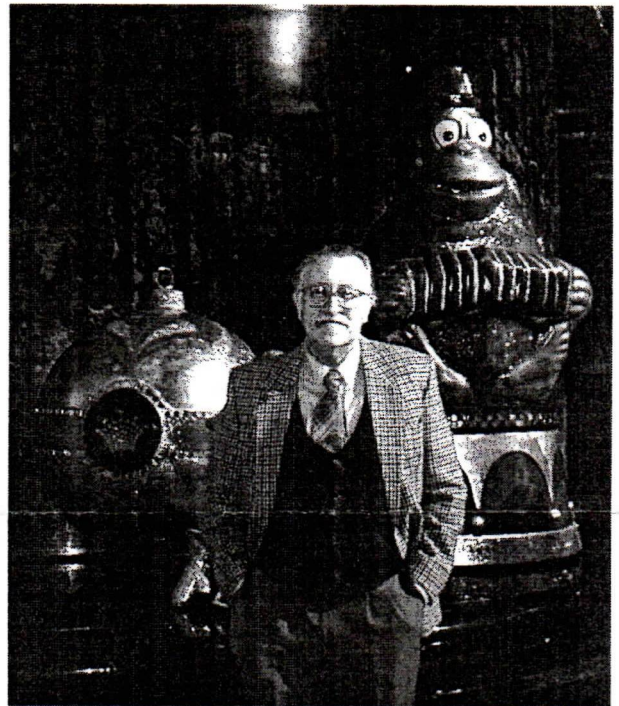
## CHRISTMAS CHEER



Well, that's enough doom and gloom for this issue! Like Merv, I am looking forward to seeing *NATIONAL TREASURE* and *THE POLAR EXPRESS*. I haven't read the book of *The Polar Express*, and had not heard about it until this movie came out, but it seems to be a kind of modern Christmas classic. I have some reservations about the style of the movie, animation over live action. One critic described it as "creepy realism", which just about sums up my response to it. (No matter how well it is done, it never looks quite right.) If you're going to film Tom Hanks and other real actors, why not just matte them into a CGI fantasy world? As an artist, though, I am impressed by the creative skills and technical expertise - and the sheer volume of work - that must have gone into it. And there is probably some justification for the movie makers doing it that way (other than just to show that they *can!*) If it is an established book well loved by its younger readers, there is something to be said for paying some homage to the style of the original illustrations, and the illustrative qualities of the movie do give it the look of a living picture book.

And speaking of *THE POLAR EXPRESS*, Melbourne's Myer department store has made it the theme for its Christmas windows with their animated displays this year, and it seems to have stuck very faithfully to the appearance of the movie. We saw them a month before Christmas, to avoid the Yuletide crush. It seems that the Xmas shopping season starts earlier every year!

(For overseas readers, the Myer Christmas windows are as much a tradition of the holiday season in Melbourne as Macey's Thanksgiving Day Parade is in New York.)



*Merv with one of the many groups of figures in the Atrium Xmas display at Crown Towers.*

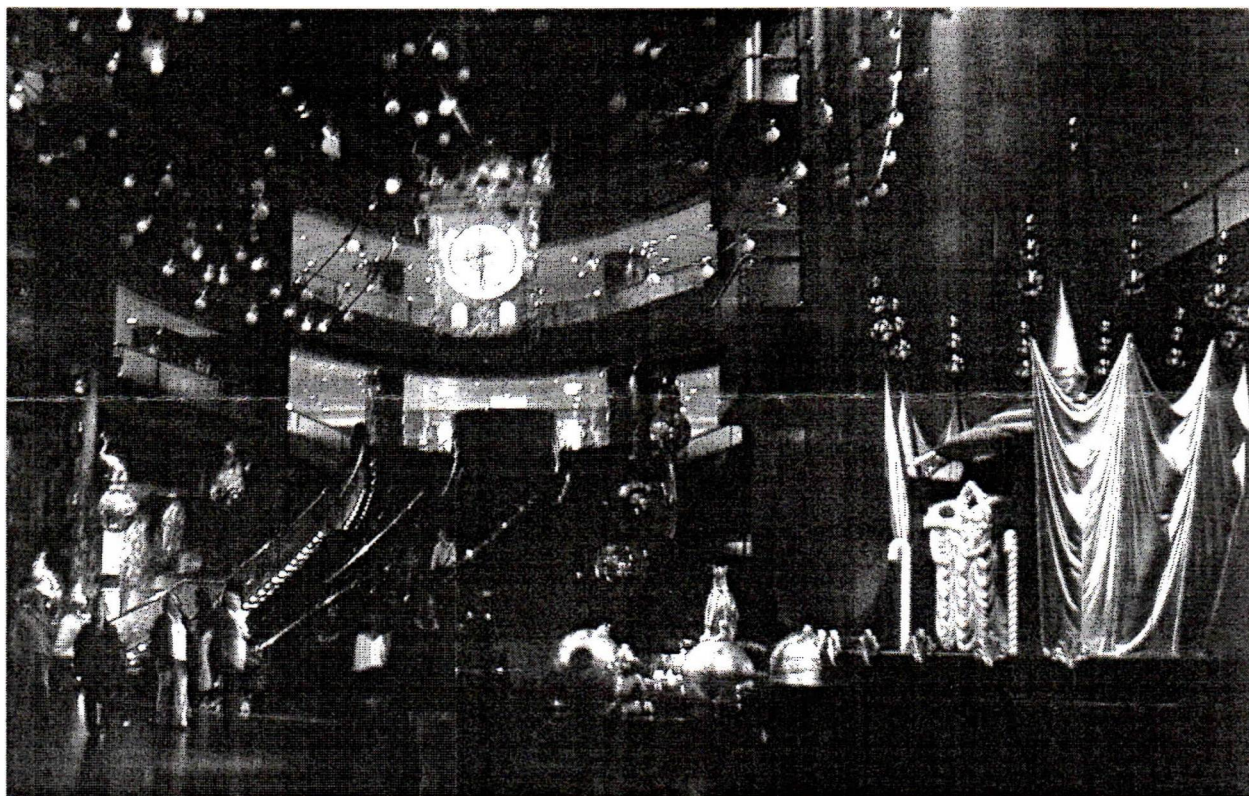
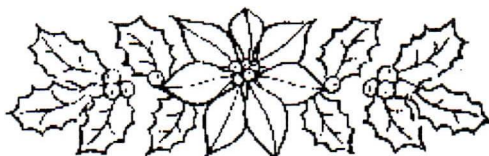
Melbourne's Crown Casino also seems to be staking its claim on the Festive season by establishing a tradition of its own over the last few years. The Christmas show in the Atrium of Crown Towers Hotel is becoming more and more elaborate every year, with large colourful ornamental displays, an animated sound and light show every half hour or so, and a choir singing Christmas Carols a couple of times a day.



*Merv enjoying the 2004 POLAR EXPRESS displays in the Myer Christmas windows.*







*The 2004 Christmas display in the Atrium at Crown Towers*

HO! HO!HO!



*PETER KEMP stars as Santa at David Jones*

And last but not least, our old friend Peter Kemp, a veteran 'extra' in TV shows and commercials too numerous to mention, as well as the occasional movie, has taken on a role he has never played before - that of Santa Claus, for the David Jones emporium at Chadstone Shopping Centre. We went along to inspect his performance and we agree that he makes a pretty convincing Santa. There is also a professional photographer there who will take snaps of children - or adults, for that matter - who want to be seen with Santa, for a reasonable price. So if you have any children or grandchildren who might be interested, bring them along. (Tell them not to bounce on Santa's knee, though, he's still recovering from a reconstruction!)

We hope everybody who reads this has a happy Christmas or whatever other seasonal celebration you are involved in, and have a great new Year 2005!

MERV & HELENA

