

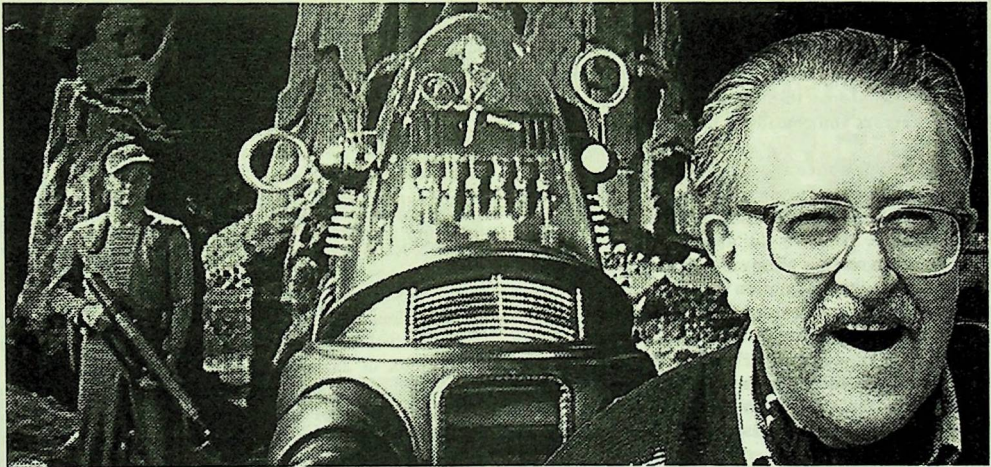
The Rubbish Bin(ns)

Number 8 September 2000

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MERV'S MOVIE MANIA

MOVIE NEWS AND REVIEWS

MOVIE MEMOIRS

RUBBISH BIN(NS) #8

September 2000

SPECIAL MOVIES ISSUE

Dear Readers,

I have been writing so much stuff over the last couple of months to go in this issue, it has got a little out of hand. There is so much about movies that we have decided to do this issue as a special movie issue and follow it up soon after with everything else. First of all there are my comments on movies we have seen, both new and old, on video or TV. That is followed by my memories from childhood, through my adult life, of the movie theatres and special shows I have seen. I will follow this up later with a survey of the movies I have liked or hated, relying on my memory as best as I can.

Replies to letters, comments on zines, and various reports on places we and others have been and things seen, will be covered in issue #9 which we hope to produce simultaneously with this issue. Meanwhile the movies, and I hope that all you movie fans out there will be interested in my comments and do please write and tell me what you think, and especially do pick me up on any errors you consider I have made.

Old friends will notice a marked improvement in my publications and lists, due a lot to my having computers to work with, but my co-editor, my wife Helena is the big difference. I have to thank her for all the formatting, correcting all my typos and grammar and obvious errors in information details. AND we thank our good friend Dick Jenssen who luckily lives just five minutes drive away from us, not only for getting us on track with our computers, by adding programmes, giving us CDs and equipment and organising our second computer and modem, (which we do hope to have on line SOON), courtesy Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner, but also for scanning, formatting and producing illustrations for us. The cover illo was produced by Dick with his marvellous computer graphics programme. Like all the other fans he is producing artwork for, such as Bruce Gillespie, Elaine Cochrane and of course Bill Wright, we appreciate his efforts very much.

I am selling off a lot of the books, sf mags and fanzines I have to help pay for the costs of producing my publications, so if I have not sent you copies of my For Sale lists please ask me to do so, and I hope that you will find something of interest.

M.B.

MOVIES & TV IN REVIEW

To August 2000

There has been an upsurge in SF&F movies recently and we have been able to catch up with a few. The Tom Hanks movie based on Stephen King's *THE GREEN MILE* was very well done and you have to hand it to King, he comes up with some ideas that you think you have come across before, but you somehow cannot put your finger on them.

More likely it is just his ability to twist various concepts around, which he is very clever at. If you missed this one at the theatre, don't miss it on video. We saw *DARK CITY* finally, on video, and we were suitably impressed. I liked Helena's description of it as "film noir in colour". Movie makers are making full use of the incredible special effects that can now be generated by computers, and *DARK CITY*, *MATRIX* and *STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE* are prime examples. I want to borrow the video of the latter as soon as I can, and just continually freeze frame through it, which will allow me to fully appreciate the marvellous background scenery. Getting back to *DARK CITY*, the final scene of the city in space would make us all think of James Blish's *Cities in Flight* stories, no doubt. Devotees of Isaac Asimov will probably have lots of criticisms of Robin Williams' starring movie, *BICENTENNIAL MAN*, but we really liked it. Here again the visual aspects are great, with some stunning scenes such as the robot workshop, with body parts hanging on the walls, a view of a future San Francisco, other impressive interiors and Robin William's robot costume and makeup is great. Appreciate this movie for what it is, like *STARSHIP TROOPERS*, which had little to do with the original Heinlein novel, but that was really a great spoof on space war stories and we enjoyed it.

And if you want to see the best sf parody yet, don't miss *GALAXY QUEST*, with Tim Allen, Sigourney Weaver (looking very different from her roles in the *Alien* movies) and Alan Rickman, taking the mickey out of *Star Trek*.



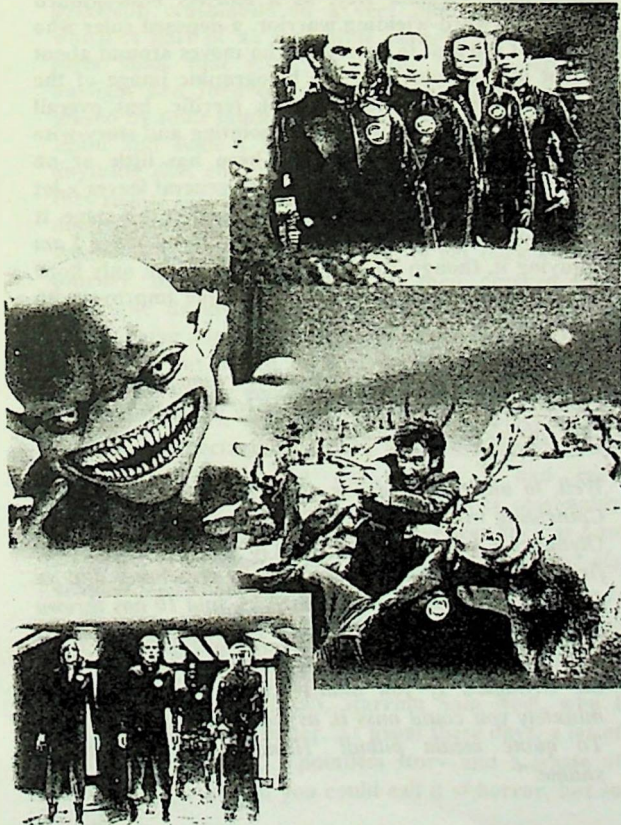


The story begins at a convention for a defunct sf TV series, *GALAXY QUEST* where amongst all the costumed fans appears an original group of funny speaking characters, who turn out to be real aliens. They want the cast of the TV series, who they think are really conquering the galaxy and not just in a TV series, to come and help them fight their enemies, who turn out to be even more grotesque monsters than even they really are underneath their human disguises. There are repeated digs at *Star Trek* and perhaps other sf TV series, all the way through the movie, and ST fans will love it, but even if you are not a ST fan and especially if you hate it, I am sure you will all appreciate this zany movie also.

Another release was *MISSION TO MARS* starring Tim Robbins, Gary Sinise, Jerry O'Connell (*Sliders*, *Joe's Apartment* etc) and others. This one comes out as a sort of homage to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in that the face on Mars that has been purported to be seen in photographs of the planet, is really there, and how! Before we get to the alien contact mumbo-jumbo part, which sort of borrows bits from *Close Encounters* as well as *2001*, the voyage to Mars lets us see some great space stuff, which might have come right out of actual NASA footage. The camera work in the space vehicle for instance not only makes it look like the crew are in free fall, but the way the camera swings around makes you feel it. I would not pretend that this movie is another *2001*, but it is most definitely worth seeing. The makers are obviously fans of *2001*, but where Kubrick left us a bit in the dark so to speak at the end of his film, *MISSION TO MARS* makers let it all hang out.



It seems that we will be seeing a lot more science fiction and fantasy movies, with computer animation and other sfx to the fore. They have even resurrected the historical epic set in ancient Rome yet, with Russell Crowe starring in *GLADIATOR*, directed by the maker of some outstanding movies, but of most interest to us, *ALIEN* and *BLADERUNNER*, Ridley Scott and using today's special effects to make an even bigger spectacle than all the Roman extravaganzas we have seen in the past.



We can look forward to seeing lots more sf&f at the cinema, but TV is another question. All we have had from the people at Channel 9, is tired old, many years behind, episodes of *Star Trek*, and on the other channels rubbish like *Seven Days*, and *Stargate* which is only slightly better. A made-for-TV special, *THE LEGEND OF THE LEPRECHAUNS*, screened here recently, was made by the same people who made the TV special *MERLIN*. What a load of crap it was! Even the accomplished Irish actor Colm Meaney (*ST Deep Space 9*) as the head Leprechaun and the pretty sfx, including a fairy floating city, could not save it. Young viewers, who I think by now expect a bit more sophistication in such things, would not have been impressed.

Meanwhile however there is some light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to series. An Australian made sf series promoted months ago, was finally shown on Channel 9, titled *FARSCAPE*. It has been on the drawing boards since 1993, when Creature Shop's Brian Henson asked Rockne S. O'Bannon (*Alien Nation*, *Seaquest*, *Twilight Zone*) to come up with some ideas for an sf TV series.



Ben Browder

The producer David Kemper, who has also has some involvement with *Star Trek*, was at that time co-opted as scriptwriter, but it was shelved because of production costs. Now with all the new computer animation techniques it was found to be financially viable and Australia had the facilities and people to work on it. Dave Elsey (*Alien*, *Hellraiser*) was brought out from England and he is responsible for the aliens in the series. Watching some of the clever animation work in TV commercials in Australia over the recent years, and knowing personally some of the people who have created great alien costumes here and been involved in sfx work. I thought that it was only a matter of time before something big was done in the way of sf movies or TV in Australia. In an article in the *Age Green Guide*, producer of the first series Matt Carroll says that they found that Australia had an abundance of talented people who could work on an sf series and that there was "a wealth of untapped power here", which was great to read. Series two is being made in a studio at Homebush Bay in N.S.W., not far from the Olympics complex, while series one has been sold to U.K, U.S.A. and Sweden. Its Australian content encouraged Channel 9 to support the production, and they have been screening it at a reasonably decent time at 8.30 pm on a Saturday night.



Virginia Hey

Well! We watched the first episode of *FARSCAPE*. It stars Australian actor Ben Browder as an American astronaut whose experimental space flight lands him somewhere on the other side of the galaxy, in the middle of a space battle between escaping convicts and the authorities. However the escapees are not all that bad and when our hero finds himself also in trouble with the nasty boss of the "peacekeepers" spaceship, he joins them all in their escape. A woman who is one of the pursuing space fighters' pilots, played by another Aussie, Claudia Black, also finds herself in trouble with her boss and joins the escapees. And that is really all that happened, but the second episode comes up with more space opera adventure and although it is a load of crap I love it. Visually with great sfx, costumes and sets and looking a bit more like *Babylon 5* or *Star Wars* than *Star Trek*, it looks good. The aliens, including another Australian, Virginia Hey, as a hairless blue-skinned beauty, a sword-wielding warrior, a deposed ruler who I will not attempt to describe, who moves around about a foot of the floor, and the holographic image of the living spaceship's pilot, all look terrific, but overall *FARSCAPE* is somewhat disappointing and story-wise more like *Lost In Space*. The hero has little or no presence, the dialogue and script in general leaves a lot to be desired, but let's not be too critical at this stage. It has a lot going for it and despite its shortcomings I am enjoying it, though Helena is not. All we can only hope for is that the story lines and dialogue improve with future episodes.

After about 8 episodes it has not reappeared. Typical Channel 9! And what is Channel 10 doing with *XENA*? One episode in July and none since.

Well, to answer the above questions, a further update: Coinciding with Channel 7's presentation of the Sydney Olympics, Channel 9 has chosen to use up its remaining first season *FARSCAPE* episodes by presenting one on Friday nights and two on Saturdays, and 10 has thrown away the long-awaited missing episodes of *XENA* by showing one each weekday at noon for the duration of the Olympics. If you didn't scrutinize the TV guide minutely you could miss it, as we did for the first week. To quote media pitbull 'Hunch': "Shame, shame, shame!"

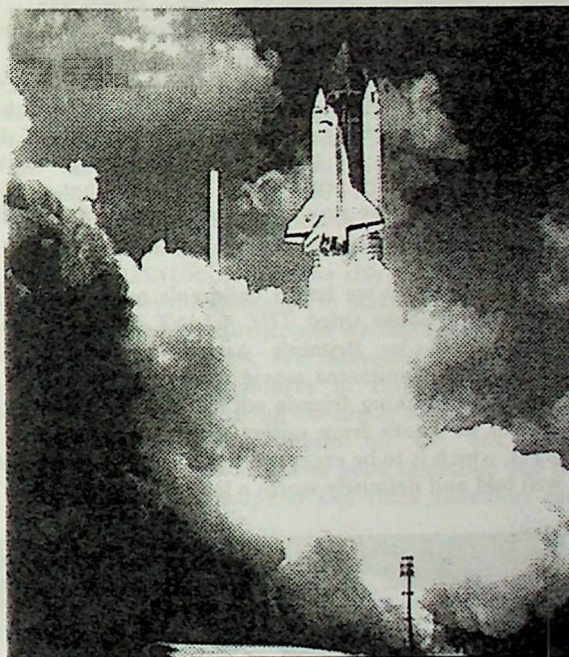


Another Australian made movie - I emphasise Australian made, with a lot of Australian input, the same as *Farscape*, *Matrix* and *Dark City*, but produced and mainly originated by overseas movie makers - is *PITCH BLACK*, that was largely filmed in the desolate outback regions of Queensland, Australia, which provides an ideal landscape for an alien world. A spaceship crashlands on a very inhospitable planet, which is part of an incredible planetary system with three suns, that gives the world a long period of daylight and then complete darkness. The survivors, played by some familiar actors including Claudia Black again and some I have no recollection of seeing in anything else, endeavour to survive on the planet and they realise that trouble is in store when they discover a deserted mining base. They find water and a space vehicle, which they decide to use to get back on their journey, using power cells from their crashed ship. Then the darkness comes and their troubles really start. Owing a lot to *Alien*, this sf horror movie I would rate seven out of ten. It has reasonable sfx, with the hardware looking good and functional and the scene of the giant Saturn type planet rising and blocking the suns, quite spectacular. In the wave of sf and fantasy movies we are seeing now, which I had been anticipating and hoping for, this one rates reasonably well and far better than some we have seen such as *Lost In Space* or *Event Horizon*, despite the spectacular sfx of those. See it, but do not expect too much.

On the following Sunday after the first episode of *FARSCAPE*, Channel 10 screened the load of crap called *EVENT HORIZON*, starring Sam Neill, who I guess did not know better. As usual these days, a lot of spectacular sfx, but a pointless story and a waste of time entirely. At best you could call it sf horror, but so what.

On channel 9 we saw a very unusual version of the *ARABIAN NIGHTS*, which was clearly a British production, but filmed in Turkey, with some familiar British actors including Alan Bates. It was shot in a rather subdued colour and the sets, costumes and special effects were all done in styles which complemented each other splendidly. Of course they played around with the stories and the dialogue, with occasionally jokingly pinched phrases from Shakespeare or even contemporary idioms and language, but that was not overdone. It was fun and we enjoyed it.

Another locally made sf series, which, like a lot of other things, we did not get to see at *AUSSIECON 3* is titled *DAMON DARK*. I hope we catch up with that eventually. We did record an episode of a British series, *SPACE ISLAND ONE*, which was screened at 1.30 AM and this is written by our old friend John Brosnan, late of Sydney sf fandom, author, editor and ensconced in Britain for about 25 years now. The sets are sparse though adequate, but obviously shot on a low budget, featuring life on a space station orbiting Earth. This series was made in 1997. It is interesting but certainly not worth staying up all night to watch.



For real "space stuff" we have been watching *THE CAPE* on channel 9 on Sundays, which for the average viewer is probably pretty slow moving, but for space buffs like us, this slick series, using the actual NASA locations and shots of real launchings, is a must see. The episode screened May 28th featured a space jaunt that almost becomes a disaster and was probably the most interesting episode so far.

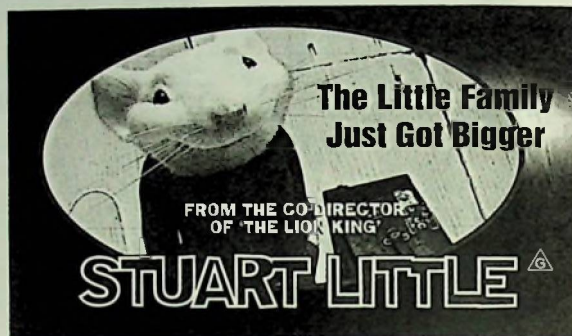


I have been a fan of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas most of my life, so it was great to see the new movie release *TOPSY-TURVY*, which won an Academy Award this year. Unlike another G&S film made in 1953, featuring Robert Morley as Gilbert and Maurice Evans as Sullivan, it probably came closer to the true story of these colourful Victorian Age characters. It concentrated largely on the production of their most popular show, *THE MIKADO*, with great sets, and it came very close, for me at any rate, to creating a very authentic atmosphere of the time. The behind-the-scenes depiction of the original stage production of the *MIKADO*, I think for anybody really interested in the theatre, was really great and I am sure that people connected with the production of theatre will identify with those scenes.

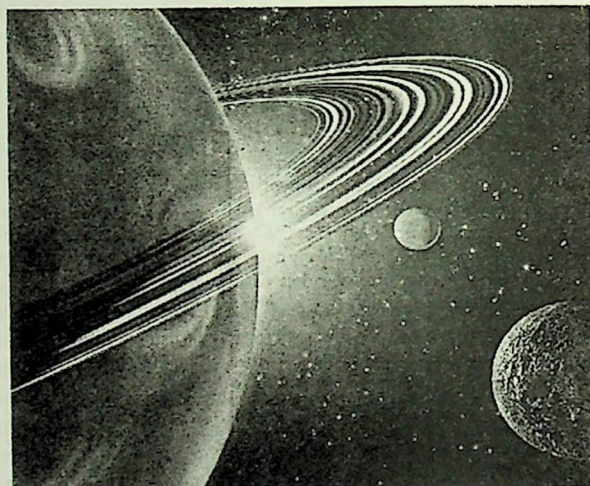
Back in the '70s we had a children's book on sale at Space Age Books titled *THE GIANT ROBOT*, which was written by Britain's Astronomer Royal, Ted Hughes. This animated movie is an ET style tale of a young boy making friends with a gigantic robot that arrives on Earth from outer space. The animation is great, which is to be expected, but it is also a good story well told and definitely worth a look see.



We also saw the kids' show *STUART LITTLE*, with Michael J. Fox doing the voice of a humanified white mouse, which is pretty cute of course, but it has lots of laughs and we enjoyed it.



Coming from Disney is a new version of the classic animated production *FANTASIA*, which includes various musical pieces such as Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, plus some sections from the earlier movie as well. The new animation looks sort of stiff and reminds me of what little I have seen of the Japanese animation style, but as I have always loved the original, I am sure we will see it. The European film *ALLEGRO NON TROPPO* had its moments, but never reached the heights of *FANTASIA*.



On the 5th of May we attended THE SCIENCE SHOW at the new Exhibition Centre on the Yarra River, laughingly called Jeff's shed, after our previous Premier Jeff Kennett, who apparently had a lot to do with it being built. It is the second or third time this show has been staged, during the Australia-wide Science Week. Various government facilities, hospitals, and people like CSIRO, all had displays and hands-on demonstrations, along with lectures and screenings, largely aimed at encouraging young people to take up scientific careers.

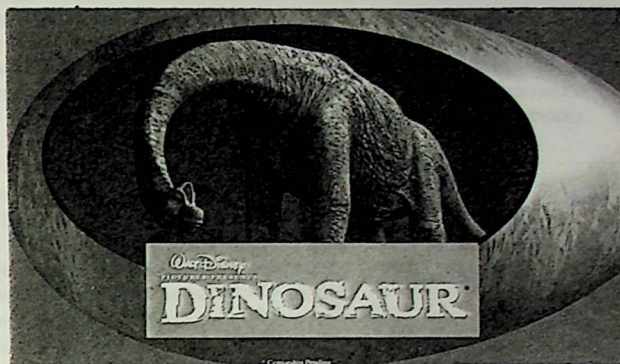
We attended three lectures held one afternoon, the first featuring Nigel Henbest and Heather Couper ('HenCoup'), the makers of the TV program screened on the ABC, *UNIVERSE*, who alternately presented the arguments for life in the universe and what we are doing to find it. This was followed by David and Elizabeth Parer, who made the award-winning documentary on the Galapagos Islands, telling how they battled the elements and how they persisted and finally got all the wonderful film that they did. Then there was as panel on the science in sf movies. chaired by Rod Quantock, God knows why him. However it did not turn out quite as bad as we expected, with excerpts from various movies including a *Flash Gordon* serial, *2001*, *Mission Mars*, *King Kong*, *Godzilla* and others. Panelists included the ABC's Gail Jennings, Heather Couper, David Vaux, David Smith, film critic Barbara Creed and a NASA man. Kevin Manning. Things started out well but they lost the plot trying to analyse the monster movies. though with the right moderator and more thought put into the subject matter, it could have been much better. An idea for an sf convention, which I am sure we can handle much better.



LEIGH DAYTON of *Quantum* with HEATHER COUPER and NIGEL HENBEST at the Science Show

We caught up with a load of rubbish on TV recently, titled *GATTACA*. We had been anxious to catch up with it after we bought tickets at the cinema and I lost them, and then it went off. OK, it is interesting, if only to compare it to the classic silent movie *METROPOLIS*. Filmed against stark, sterile sets, with people marching around like robots, and from the opening scene it reminded us of the old film. But the whole premise was silly! Stylised, pretentious, self-indulgent crap, would be a good way of describing this movie. In an abstract art sort of way it looks good. I will not dispute that, but the story makes little sense. Passing himself off as someone else, because he is not physically fit to join the space program, is very cleverly contrived by the main protagonist, with fake blood samples, passing DNA tests with a guy he is impersonating and so forth. Even being very careful not to leave his own skin flakes and hair on his computer terminal for instance, is all very well, but although he is a vaguely similar type to the guy who is lending him his persona, he was known to the people in the institute as a cleaner, and expecting

people not to recognise him is too much. My impression was that the director was more interested in what the movie looked like than the story. Well, it did look good at times, sort of like a modernist painting, but the actors were practically expressionless all through the movie, and over all it did not impress us at all.



Like many people, I am sure, I have always been fascinated by dinosaurs and so has Helena, so we were absolutely wrapped in *Jurassic Park*, although the second movie from the same source, *The Lost World* was very disappointing. The old silent movie of the same name was a much better story, also even *King Kong*, when it came to depicting dinosaurs, despite being in black and white, and the animation was of course not in the same class although state of the art at the time. The ABC's production, *Walking With Dinosaurs*, is not likely to be surpassed as a documentary on the dinosaur age, with superb computer animation, but Disney Studios animated movie *DINOSAUR*, despite the silly story and talking animals, allows the animators to make the movement of the animals more realistic, and we thoroughly enjoyed it for different reasons. We marvelled at the perfect movement of the creatures in comparison to old animated movies, although looking at some of the kids' movies and animated things on the box, even commercials, does indicate how good animation and sfx have become. The computer and video animators can almost do anything.

We await with eager anticipation the new version of *The Lord of the Rings*, because the various, mainly loads of rubbish, that have been dished up in the fantasy style, such as *Hercules* and *Xena* or comic-strip garbage such as *Batman and Robin* have shown what can be done. Incidentally, LotR is being filmed in New Zealand where the two aforementioned TV series are made and don't get me wrong, we do enjoy both of those. A snippet from the upcoming LotR, which we may see by the end of 2001, was screened on TV's *Entertainment Tonight*, showing some of the people playing hobbits and all, and a great battle scene, with apparently thousands of combatants.

It would not have been possible for filmmakers to do justice to the grandeur and sheer physical scale of the epic saga of *The Lord of the Rings*, let alone the magic and mystique of it, without the range of special effects, particularly computer graphics, now available. *Batman and Robin*, which we saw for the first time, on TV recently, was phenomenal. Special effects, whether used to create fantasy worlds or to recreate lost ones as in *Walking With Dinosaurs*, to envision futuristic sf scenarios, or to enhance the realism of live action as in the current epic sea adventure *The Perfect Storm*, are certainly making movie going very interesting.



Another "pretty" movie we caught up with on TV recently was *FAIRYTALE A True Story*, featuring Peter O'Toole as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harvey Keitel as Houdini, which related the famous story of two little English girls in Yorkshire, finding fairies and even photographing them, at the bottom of their garden. It is based on

a true mystery that has never, ever been satisfactorily explained, which was very nicely filmed, even if the script did treat the story in the end with more than a bit of fantasy and humour. Worth seeing just for the scenery and sfx.

One of the fantasy novels most respected by the literati and general readers alike is Mervyn Peake's *GORMENGHAST* trilogy. At some great cost, I believe, by their standards at any rate, the BBC sponsored a TV series based on the books, which we viewed at a marathon sitting on a Saturday, at one of Race Mathews' fannish film evenings. Starting at 4 PM, prior to a break for dinner, we viewed the whole production, in four parts (on a DVD kindly provided by Dick Jenssen), finishing about 10 PM. It is a beautifully produced series, with gorgeous sets and costumes, marvellous, breathtaking scenes, even if they were obviously matte paintings. The characters were wonderfully brought to life by actors such as Ian Richardson, Christopher Lee, Warren Mitchell as the secretary, who played the role way over the top and was marvellous, and Richard Griffiths, the star of the TV series *Pie in the Sky*, playing inevitably the cook, but rather loathsome in this case. Other characters such as the two crazy sisters and the nasty, over-ambitious kitchen hand come secretary, whose machinations almost destroy everything in the dukedom of Gormenghast, are also admirably played, while the duchess, the sister and the young Titus

himself well suited to their roles. Readers of the book told us that much was left out of the story on screen, but the major events were presented and well stitched together, so there was no break in the continuity. A dark tale, but colourful in its presentation on the screen. Somebody said that the ABC will be screening the mini-series later this year. Don't miss it! One can only regret that the author, Mervyn Peake, was never able to continue the story of Titus Groan and the land of Gormenghast.

Mid July we saw the latest moneymaking blockbuster movie, *X-MEN*, which we heard has already set new box-office records in the USA. Again the incredible sfx steal the show from the actors, including Patrick Stewart (Star Trek's Captain Picard) and yet another Aussie actor, Hugh Jackman, who made a big impression as a stage musical star in *Sunset Boulevard* and a London production of *Oklahoma*. In this impressive movie debut he looks like a star in the making. I have never been a Marvel Comics fan, but they tell me that *X-Men* is the "thinking man's" superhero series. I do not know how close the movie sticks to the comic mythos, but the concept as depicted in it features the classic sf plot about mutants or super-beings having to deal with a conflict with normal humans. In this case some of the super-beings are attempting to protect the norms against other nasty super-beings. Sounds like the typical super-hero plot, but it comes over very well as a movie, with some substance to the plot, admirably enhanced by the great special effects. You do not have to be a Marvel comics fan to appreciate *X-MEN* the movie, but just appreciate a very well made typical Hollywood "fantasy adventure" that you will not forget in a hurry. And a sequel is already in production.



American moviemakers have a "thing" about disaster stories! *TITANIC* may be regarded as the ultimate, but for a prime example of Hollywood ingenuity, *THE PERFECT STORM* takes some beating. The scenes of the raging ocean, with waves that appear to be one hundred metres or more high are simply amazing, but the movie makes the obvious observation that men who go down to the sea take their lives in their hands. This film was based on a real event during the "storm of the century" a few years ago. Coincidentally, the day after we saw it, there was a news report on TV about the carrying of the Olympic torch through the seaside fishing town of Port Campbell on its way to Sydney for this year's Games. It featured one of the torchbearers,

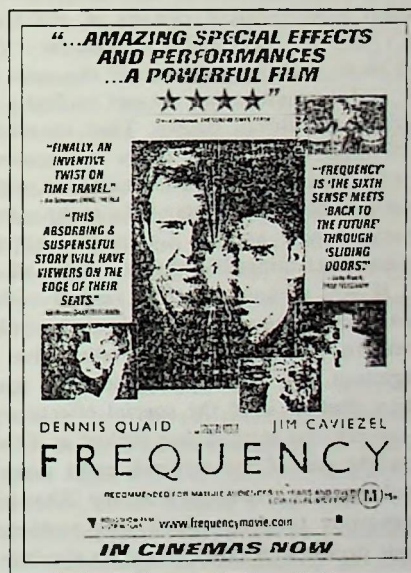


a woman who early this year had lost both her husband and son in circumstances similar to those depicted in the movie. Another type of disaster movie that Hollywood loves to make are those set on planes in flight. One we saw on TV recently featured a plane carrying a nuclear device that could destroy not only Washington, but all electronic equipment halfway around the world, with an electromagnetic pulse emitted by the exploding bomb. *MEDUSA'S CHILD* is suspenseful, even if the concept is, as this type of movie often turns out to be, a bit silly. And the only well-known actor in the cast is Martin Sheen, who once again gets to play the President of the U.S.A. and he is doing it again in a new TV series, *The West Wing*, due on here soon. If you missed *Medusa's Child* on TV, the video would be just worth a look-see.

A while back we saw an IMAX movie, featuring an early air mail service, a crash landing and survival in the Andes, on the giant screen and with spectacular 3D effects. We did enjoy that, but we knew that movies in this format had also been released covering actual NASA space missions, and we were anxious to see them. We still haven't managed that, but we finally caught up with a movie titled *L5*, at a screening organised by the Space Association. This film is fictional, but based on NASA plans and simulations for the space station, extrapolated into something reminiscent of the more grandiose big-budget concepts of far-seeing futurists such as Gerard O'Neill. The story, such as it was, featured a community living in a space habitat on the 'high frontier', and revolved around the attempt of a spaceship from the station to capture a comet, which

was composed largely of water, to bolster their diminishing supplies. Quite short, it runs for less than an hour, and the story line is weak, but the 3D effect was great and much of the movie was quite breathtaking, though I hope that anything in this format we see in the future is better done than this one. We were a bit disappointed in this show, knowing that there are authentic NASA films in this format that we have not seen, and we would rather have experienced the "real stuff". A brief animated cartoon introduction to the movie session, promoting 3D animated movies to come, really made full use of the extremely spectacular full-on 3D effect, and how!

The film *FREQUENCY* is a typical Hollywood nice little movie, making use of a time travel gimmick, in which father and son, played by Denis Quaid and Jim Caviezel, communicate through freak circumstances caused by extraordinary sunspot activity, evidenced by spectacular aurora borealis displays. The son makes contact with his dead father on short-wave radio, through time. The opportunity arises for them to fiddle with past events and in so doing change the present, though I won't tell you exactly if that is for good or bad, but I will say that there is a fair share of excitement and tear-jerking involved and we enjoyed it. It becomes quite exciting and at the same time poignant. It is one of those little imaginative movies that Hollywood has often turned out in the past relating to time travel, such as *Final Countdown*, or movies featuring ghosts, rebirth, body swaps and such, that are quite silly really, but turn out to be very entertaining.



To October 2000

Our movie going has eased off a little since my last report, but we still have a few things to mention to bring us up to date.

We have not seen Kevin Bacon in *THE HOLLOW MAN*, and we are not sure we want to. It has been done before. The classic Claude Rains, James Whale directed movie, based on H.G.Wells *THE INVISIBLE MAN*, was made way back in 1933 and was sfx at their best for that time and it impressed me greatly as a child. I always wanted happy endings though, and the reconstruction of Rains' body when he is dying was impressive but "what did he have to die for?" I said as a child. *The Invisible Man Returns*, 1940, featuring Vincent Price and Sir Cedric Hardwick, has been said to be Price's best horror film. The Chevy Chase, John Carpenter directed movie, *Memoirs of An Invisible Man* makes use of 1992 sfx and promos indicate *Hollow Man* has the sfx again as the star of the movie. I vaguely remember a 1940s comedy, with Cary Grant I think, and possibly based on a Thorne Smith novel, and that was fun.

Jackie Chan's movies can be fun, but the lack of continuity in those we have seen has been a bit off-putting and his spoof on the *Kung Fu* TV series, *SHANGHAI NOON*, is little better in that respect and not quite as funny as it might have been. A palace guard is sent to America to bring back a princess who has done a bunk, and he fails in his quest, though after teaching the gun-toting cowboys a few things, our hero does get the girl.

For a completely wasted four hours, over two nights, we watched a bastardised version of *JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH*, made for TV. It was supposed to be set on an island off the coast of New Zealand, and a small group set out to find a missing scientist/explorer, Bryan Brown. They encounter very strange dinosaur-like people, and a very unconvincing human tribe, all in a very unconvincing set, with forest foliage painted blue and shots of the rocky outcrops of the Victorian coast at Port Campbell, supporting a rocky ceiling that shines like the sun; all in all, second-rate sfx. If you reckon the 1959 version with James Mason and Pat Boone was bad, and rated it at best five out of ten, we would rate this one minus five. Despite our misgivings, we watched it with the reasonable expectation that at least the special effects would be state-of-the-art, but instead they looked as if they were lifted straight out of the original, right down to the phony-looking cave scenes. At least the '59 version had some humorous touches, which this ponderous and pretentious production sadly lacks. An absolute load of rubbish and even Bryan Brown, hamming it up, could not save it. Why bother making such an abortion?

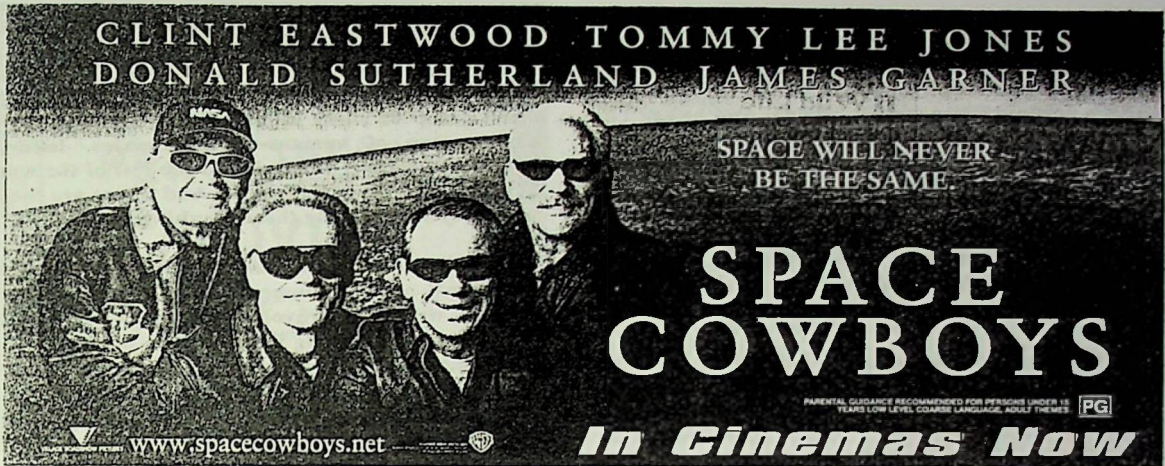


There has been a small trend towards horror in some of the recent sf movies like *Pitch Black* and *Event Horizon* and we expected the worst from *SUPERNOVA*, but we were pleasantly surprised. Set in a universe that could easily have been the same as the *Alien* movies or Sean Connery's *Outland*, it features a med-ship that is cruising deep space, ready to answer any calls for help. A call is received from a mining colony, where they discover that a momentous discovery has been made. But evil is at work and a nasty guy, who has become even nastier than when some of the crew previously knew him, wreaks mayhem with an alien artifact he has found, and must be subdued. So, a reasonably good story, well told and the sfx are good and appropriate. Definitely worth watching.

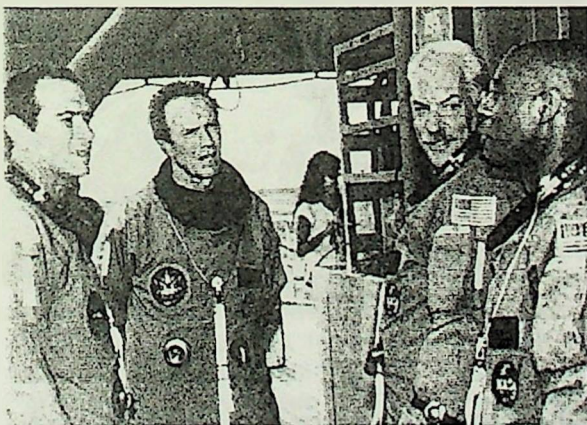
We noted a report in the *Melbourne Age* about *The Lord of the Rings* upcoming movie, in that Gandalf will be played by British actor Ian McKellen whose voice will approximate that of the author, J.R.R. Tolkien. McKellen also said that elvish will be spoken by the elves, with sub-titles.



Ian McKellen



I may have mentioned this previously, but for the last couple of years we have been attending video screenings at the home of our old friend Race Mathews, on his relatively large screened videodisc and DVD player, with the movies more often than not supplied by Dick Jensen. We have caught up with some great stuff such as *Gormenghast* and *Dark City*, with the latest screening being *THE CRADLE WILL ROCK*. Based on true events in the late 1930s, it features a group of theatrical people including Orson Welles, John Houseman and others, such as Nelson Rockefeller, and their attempts to put on a play, which has very strong socialistic features, aimed at attacking President Roosevelt's New Deal. Accused of being communists, authorities bring out the big guns to close them down, but an abbreviated performance is eventually staged and a point has been made. It was easy to see how the anticommunist paranoia of post-war days developed: it had begun much earlier. My main interest was in Orson Welles and the theatre business, but I found the whole movie quite interesting and entertaining, as it covered events I had never come across previously.

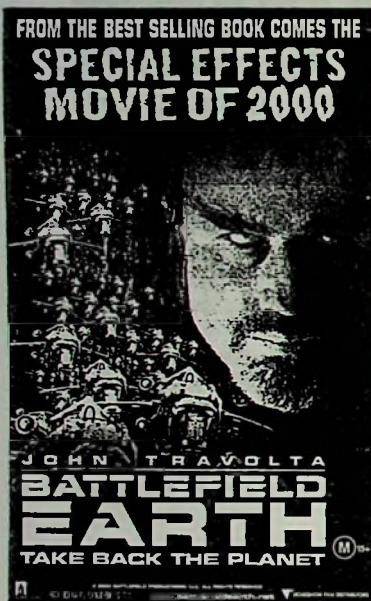


As I get older I can't help feeling some affinity with many of the actors whom I have enjoyed watching in their movies over the years, with some of them managing to carry on, such as Sean Connery, in great roles forever. I feel a certain amount of loss and sadness when people like Walter Matthau, who made me laugh as much as any other characters on the screen, pass on. Sir Alec Guinness went also in August. Although the latter made a mint out of the *Star Wars* movie (as the only cast member canny enough to take a percentage rather than a flat fee) he said that he hated it, the script and all the attention that it engendered by the fans, but I still loved him in that and many of the other movies he appeared in.

It was great to see a few other old curmudgeons together in a movie released here early in October - *SPACE COWBOYS*, which features Clint Eastwood, James Garner and Donald Sutherland, who are all pushing seventy, and a relative youngster in his fifties, Tommy Lee Jones, as retired astronauts on a special space mission. The movie is directed by Clint Eastwood. We saw it in the company of members of the Space Association, at Hoyts Cinemas, Chadstone. Our friend, Radio Southern FM's 'Space Show' presenter Andrew Rennie, pointed out the goofs or exaggerations in the movie, but our whole group, including Andrew, enjoyed it immensely.

The plot revolves around four long retired air force pilots, who were originally testing experimental planes. They were selected as crewmembers for a proposed air force space flight but were dumped when NASA came into existence, never making it into space. They finally get their chance forty years later, on a mission to save a piece of technology as antiquated as they are. A Russian space platform, ostensibly a communications satellite, is in a decaying orbit, thus posing a threat to Russia's communications network, not to mention whatever it might land on.

It turns out that the character played by Clint Eastwood is the only guy around who can fix the problems on the satellite, whose control systems are inexplicably identical to those he'd designed for NASA's original space station, Skylab. And he can't do it without the assistance of his former astronaut candidate crew, his old test pilot buddies played by Donald Sutherland, James Garner and Tommy Lee Jones, on the mission. Things get very complicated but the old geezers carry out their mission with all guns blazing. It was great seeing these old "cowboys" in roles that were made for them, and we can thoroughly recommend this movie to one and all.



STAR WARS part two we hear is already in production in Sydney, but meanwhile for crappy sf we have *BATTLEFIELD*

EARTH, based on the L. Ron Hubbard 1000-plus page sf novel, starring dianetics devotee John Travolta who we believe was "cleared" for the part some time back. The trailer we saw showed Mr Travolta hamming it up for all he is worth, looking even more revolting than ever, with some of his equally unpleasant cohorts, as an incredibly menacing alien. Screwing up our courage after the

critical reports we had seen on *BATTLEFIELD EARTH*, we finally went to see it. I have not read the book by the late L. Ron Hubbard that it is based on, but I would think that the story has been condensed a lot in the movie. The theme of our world being under the domination of alien invaders and being won back by us is not uncommon. In this case however the remnants of humanity have degenerated to cave dwellers, and it is stretching things a bit to have them turn the tables on the technologically advanced and physically superior alien invaders. It is entirely unexplained how the humans in this story manage to learn how to access and use sophisticated old Earth weaponry, presumably covered by hundreds of years of dust, including fighter planes apparently fully fuelled and combat ready. This is just one of the completely illogical things that "suspending my disbelief" simply cannot overlook. Another is the attitude of the invaders to the humans. Although the aliens have access to humans' libraries and historical records and know that they were technologically competent and socially sophisticated, they display ignorance of the most basic

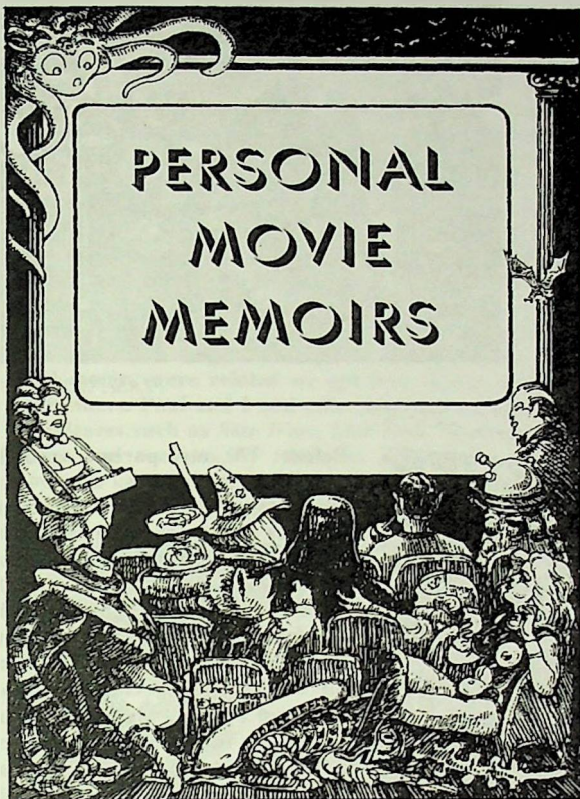
facts about them, and treat them like animals. To further his own ends security chief Travolta allows one captured man to access the aliens' teaching machine, which leads to a revolt, but there seems to be only a small group of aliens mining Earth, confronted by a small group of humans - in America, naturally. Meanwhile what is happening in the rest of the world? Where is the rest of humanity? And where are the rest of the Psychlos keeping them in subjugation?

Despite its logical shortcomings, however, this film is not devoid of entertainment value. There is a bit of humour, with John Travolta as the alien security chief and his minions looking like mutant Klingons, literally larger than life and twice as ugly. The sfx are huge, but overall the visual aspects of the movie are very stark and dismal. However, despite the movie being a load of crap, we did enjoy it with some reservations and suggest that you just enjoy it for what it has and not what it might have had going for it.

And now for something completely different - a genuine Australian production by 'Working Dog', makers of *The Castle*. Like *Space Cowboys*, *THE DISH* is an affectionate tribute to the 'right stuff' that made the space program work - in this case the Australian contribution to the Apollo 11 moon landing. The 'Dish' is the Parkes radio telescope that formed a vital link in communications between the astronauts and Mission Control, and *THE DISH* is about the people who ran it, and about the intervention of Murphy's Law which could have made the right stuff go wrong. With Sam Neill and a strong supporting cast, including two actors from the popular ABC television series *Sea Change*, and 'Working Dog's characteristic quirky humour, what's not to like?



We just keep adding to these reviews, but that must be the last one for this issue!



Artwork by Chris Johnson

PERSONAL MOVIE MEMOIRS

When I was very young my father used to go off about once a week playing drums in a little dance band, and when he went out on his gigs my mother often took me to the movies. We lived in Preston and I can remember going to theatres, with my mother and later both my parents, in Preston such as Hoyts Circle, and the St James which screened all the MGM movies. Other cinemas in the area we attended included the Planet in Thornbury, which had a very distinctive art deco style of architecture, the Gowerville which I think was in Plenty Road, East Preston, the Regent in Thornbury and one right near the Northcote Town Hall, where the old man was often pounding the pig-skin for the dancers just across the road.

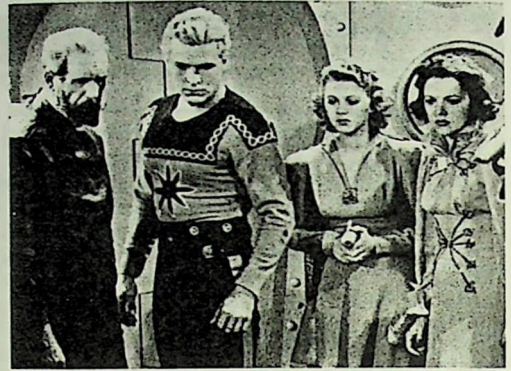
The first movie I can remember however was in Melbourne, City, where my mother took me to see Walt Disney's *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS*, a year or so later *PINNOCHIO* and somewhat later *BAMBI*. Of course in between. I imagine, we went to the local cinemas, but these movies stuck in my mind and I was probably only five when I saw the first one. Apart from the Planet in Thornbury and possibly the Regent up the road, all the local theatres were architecturally insignificant, but I have early memories of the Regent in the City and the Wurlitzer Organ being played and the State, now the Forum, where

there was an orchestra playing at interval, which came up out of a pit in front of the stage. And who could forget the ceiling with the stars and moving clouds, looking down on the pseudo Greco-Roman statuary around the sides of the stage. The Regent of course was in the grand style, with its chandelier and all, and I was very pleased to see that it was finally returned to its former grandeur in recent years. I hope it was with the Wurlitzer organ or at least a replacement. Regretfully I did not get to see the musical version of *SUNSET BOULEVARD*, which appropriately played there recently, nor anything else yet, but hopefully we will get to see the restored Regent sometime soon. My parents and I saw numerous movies there, including I think the first Cinemascope epic, *THE ROBE*, starring Richard Burton. The Regent would have been great for the production of the musical *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*, but that went to the even more appropriate live theatre, The Princess, which is of course based on a French Opera House design. Under the Regent was another theatre, The Plaza, with its unique Spanish American sort of decor and in particular ceiling, was where I saw the Cinerama movies and I believe the second time I saw *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*. It was there, following the original screening I think at the Metro up the hill in Collins Street, from which I exited with other MSFC members in free-fall, or so it seemed. Other City cinemas such as the Savoy, in Little Collins Street, which screened mainly British, and later foreign language films and the ones in Bourke Street, such as the Odeon, all of which I attended if not with my parents, on my own or with friends when I was working. Further up the hill in Bourke Street, close to the Tivoli live theatre - where I saw vaudeville shows featuring comedian 'Mo' (Roy Rene), and pantomimes, in my early years and the final live production there, *The Merry Widow*, starring June Bronhill - which in its final days was also showing movies, there were two theatres screening B-grade movies, the Lyceum and I think the Liberty.

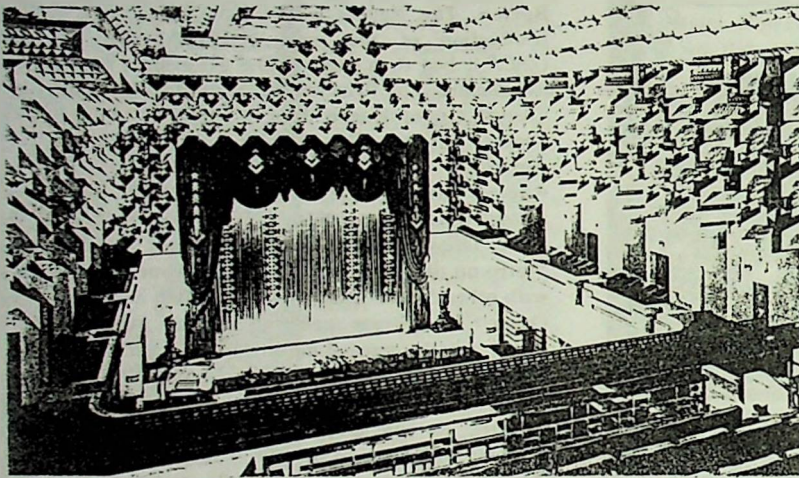


Merv's father ERN BINNS playing drums in a dance band in the 1930s

The one opposite in its final days screened the movie *TOMMY*, and they had installed giant speakers for the rock sound track, which caused cracks in the walls of the Coles store next door. All these have now gone, replaced by the Hoyts and Roadshow complexes further up the hill in Bourke Street and the Russell Cinemas in Russell Street. The Athenaeum, which has alternated as a live theatre and movie house, screening many of the top British comedies and dramas, is still there, and recent live performances have included Shakespeare plays, comedians and a variety of other performers, and I think that it is now a National Trust concern.



FLASH GORDON



The CAPITOL Theatre, Melbourne

The most unique of all the movie theatres was the Capitol which was designed by the architect Walter Burley Griffin, with its unique sculptured ceiling and screen surrounds, that were lit by lights which were continually changing colour. My mother told me that she attended the opening of that theatre, which would have to be the most unusual I have seen. I don't think that it is now operating as a theatre, but I hope that the ceiling and all has been retained in its present use.



STAR TREK

Before TV my parents and I usually went to a movie on Saturday nights, at the local theatres and more often than not the old Circle, Preston. I used to go to the kids' matinees and I always wanted to see a *Flash Gordon* serial. However it was not to be, and the best they could do for me was Gene Autrey in *The Phantom Empire*, which believe it or not was sf, about an underground city, with robots, a wicked queen, mad scientists and all. It was about thirty years later before I did get to see a *Flash Gordon* serial, but that is another story.

My most memorable moment at the Circle Saturday matinees was when I won the door prize, a big Christmas stocking full of junk games, lollies and such. (About the only thing I have ever won in my whole life!) We never went to any drive-ins as far as I can remember, but I did attend some of those with friends, watching horror and sf epics, when I was much older. In the '60s though, we got into the habit of attending theatres in the city on Saturday nights and I missed many of the early *Star Trek* episodes on TV, because in the black-and-white days they were on at about 7PM on Saturday nights. So I guess that you could say my parents and I were avid moviegoers, but in the later years we watched a lot more TV. People were saying that movies were finished, especially when all the drive-ins were closing down, which were very much family orientated, but how things have changed. We all got sick of TV and wanted bigger and better movies to watch. Consequently the moviemakers obliged and we now have a bigger choice of films, continually changing, plus Video, cable TV, film festivals, giant screen movies from IMAX, and the TV industry and the moviemakers work hand-in-hand.

I think that the big movies like *James Bond*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Superman* and the like, helped change people's movie-going habits forever, and I will talk more about my views on the films I have seen and why I think the industry has changed and developed during my lifetime, along with my favourite films and actors. I used to go to movies at the intermediate sessions on my way home after work, when I was employed by McGills Newsagency. However it was not until I started Space Age Books, that more often or not in tow with my friend and employee Paul Stevens, I got to see a lot more movies. We had customers from the Village Roadshow company, Alan Finney and Jim Sale, who saw to it that we got to see previews, and when books and movies were related we got free tickets from the publishers. Paul and I and other staff got to see all the sf releases such as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Superman* and more and occasionally talked to actors who were in town for local premieres, such as Sam Jones from *Flash Gordon* and Sarah Douglas from *Superman 2*.



PAUL STEVENS interviewing 'Flash Gordon' SAM JONES

Yes, Paul and I were movie fanatics as much as we were sf fans, and some sf "fans" denigrated us for trying to introduce more movies into conventions and endeavouring to get sf movies regarded as a legitimate part of sf fandom. Paul and other friends also insisted that comics were also part of sf fandom, but you have to draw the line somewhere don't you? OK, many comics have been sf related and certainly the basis for movies, but just because you are an sf reader does not necessarily mean that you have to like comics. The Buck Rogers comic strip in my mother's copies of the *New Idea* in the 1930s, got me interested in sf and I have always shown some interest in comics, but mainly only the sf ones such as Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Superman, and Brick Bradford. In later years however I have had better things to do with my time. TV and movies have probably interfered with my sf reading though and I have not made the time to read more. But I have no regrets about my obsession with the movies, and they have been a very large part of my life. Most people need an "escape" and movies, in a frustrating, often unfulfilled lifetime have kept me sane, along with sf. Then again, I have heard it said that all sf fans are mad, if only slightly.



Merv's mother MYRTLE BINNS with Merv aged about 18
(Merv still has that pullover, but it doesn't fit him any more!)

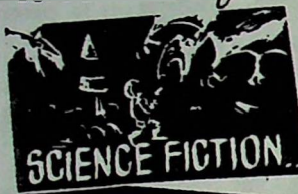
I know that I enjoyed watching movies with my mother in particular, who had her favourite actors and had her strong views on things, and I often had heated arguments with her about who was in this or that movie. When I found myself attending movies on my own, with no one to discuss them with after, I began to lose interest in going and spent more time watching TV. I did have a lady friend who worked in another bookshop, for a while and really the only thing we had in common was our jobs and an interest in the cinema, and we attended a few shows together. I can remember attending movies such as *Forbidden Planet* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* with sf club members and friends, and it was great to talk about those after the show, and this is why I was so pleased during the Space Age years that I had a kindred soul to communicate with in Paul Stevens. After Space Age I was short of cash and I had my father to take care of, so I hardly got to the movies at all in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A good friend of Dad's and mine, Jack Westphal used to have a meal with us nearly every week and he used to turn up with a video that he had borrowed or bought, so I managed to see lots of comedies that Jack liked, James Bond and various adventure type films, but missed a lot of stuff, though many I have caught up with later.

Since teaming up with my wife Helena, who is also a movie lover, we have been seeing movies at the cinema, especially all the sf stuff, lots of things on TV and at the regular video screenings that our old friend Race Mathews puts on for his friends. There are still many movies, old and relatively recent, that I want to catch up with, but we are getting there and it is marvellous having someone to share the pleasure or otherwise and talk all about what we have seen afterwards.

* FANTASY * FILM GROUP

FEATURING
REGULAR
SCREENINGS

of



PLUS OTHER
PROGRAMMES
FOR
MOVIEGOERS
INTERESTED
IN THE

UNUSUAL

19 SOMERSET
PLACE MELB.

Talking about my "life and movies" I cannot ignore the Fantasy Film Society. In the very early days of the Melbourne SF Club we acquired a 16 mm movie projector and began screening films usually in members' homes. The projectionists included. Don Latimer. Dan Bicknell. Merv Barrett. Cedric Rowley who also got the old projector going again when it played up and in the later times Graham Shannon. We borrowed movies from the State Film Film Centre as it was called then, including many of the old silent classics like *Metropolis*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Cabinet of Dr Caliguri*, *Intolerance*, *Birth of a Nation*, numerous

During this time we decided that most of the people attending the sf club's shows were not necessarily sf fans, so we decided to form a different organisation to screen movies. We had big ideas, considered finding a theatre that we could show all sorts of old movies, and new, on a regular basis, but you need time and money to do such things. Meanwhile other people had similar ideas and theatres like the ASTOR in St Kilda, which is still going very strong and The WESTGARTH in Northcote, started carrying out exactly what we knew was a great idea.

In the 1970's when I started Space Age Books, Lee Harding and others helped us publicise the society and we had screenings of some great movies such as *METROPOLIS* and *FAUST* (scenes from which Disney studios stole for *Fantasia*, and we discovered that while checking records to play while the silent movie was screening and Moussorsky's *Night On Bald Mountain* fitted almost exactly during one scene, and if you have seen *Fantasia*, you will remember the devil wrapping his wings around the village) at the Nicholas Hall in Lonsdale Street. One night there also we screened a vampire movie and members, including Paul Stevens in his regular role as Dracula, was carried into the hall in a coffin, with dry ice smoke filling the theatre and other members chasing him around with a stake and mallet.

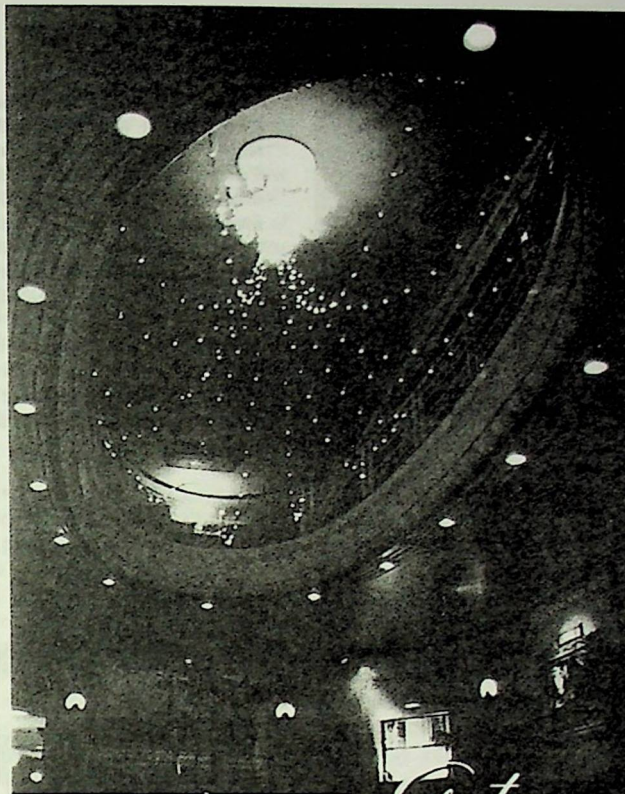
Later on we worked with a guy named Bob Johnson, who put shows on for us at a restaurant in Collins Street, after we all had dinner there and later at an old theatre in North Melbourne. Bob imported all his films from overseas and we saw some wonderful stuff such as Marx Brothers movies, which I have always loved and could watch again and again, as well as Star Trek TV episodes, which he later screened on a regular basis for ST club people. Then there was another guy, Jim Ness, who helped me personally in a big way and also enabled Paul, often my father and I to see new release films in a small theaterette at a film company's offices in King Street. We met some TV personalities and journalists at these screenings, which were primarily publicity junkets. Jim actually had worked for the owners of the building that Space Age Books moved to in 1973, at 305-397 Swanston Street, the Kerrs and introduced me to them. Now Slow Glass Books, run by my "protege" Justin Ackroyd, is situated there. Jim also enabled me to finally see the *Flash Gordon* serial that I had been waiting nearly forty years to catch up with. (Incidentally I was very disappointed that circumstances prevented me from getting to see Buster Crabbe, the star of the serial at the World SF Convention I attended in Toronto, Canada in 1973, but so be it.) We had organised the screening of Jim's copies of the old serial at the Astor Theatre, which were of course nitrate film, old and very fragile. He wanted to handle the projection of it himself, but the "ancient" projectionist, who worked there and considered the bio box his domain, insisted on putting the reel on the projector, broke the leader and Jim said it was not on.

documentaries such as the NASA space films detailing missions already carried out and things to come. Canadian Film Board Experimental items, a short film detailing the work of the famous French special effects innovator George Milais and I saw things at those evenings that I would never have seen otherwise. It was great.

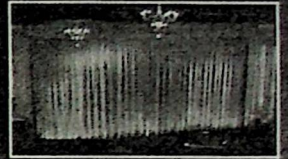
In the 1960s when we were holding the club meetings on the top floor of McGill's Newsagency's store and we had lots of room, we bought a better projector, and built a big screen made of masonite. Although we were not getting very many people coming to the club for regular meetings, other than borrowing books from the library, we had very good turn ups for the film shows. One night we screened *FRANKENSTEIN* and we put on an act with me in rubber mask as the monster, and I picked up a little guy named Eric Cohen and carried him down the stairs with the audience shouting "Kill. Kill!" People really enjoyed our screenings and appreciated what we were trying to do. We later had screenings at theatres, restaurants and old theatres such as the Capri in Murrumbena.

We consequently finished up at the Kerrs' home in Toorak Road, where they had a small projection room, built to seat about thirty people and we crammed in about seventy. They included the late Ivan Hutchinson and other press and media personalities. A night not to be forgotten.

Incidentally, Helena and I sometimes go to the double feature screenings at the Astor, which is a great old theatre, probably established in the late 20's or early 30's, and it has never died, being as much alive as it has probably ever been. Old Wally the projectionist is long gone.



the ASTOR theatre
1 Chapel Street • St. Kilda • Vic 3182



*Fine
films
and
Atmosphere*

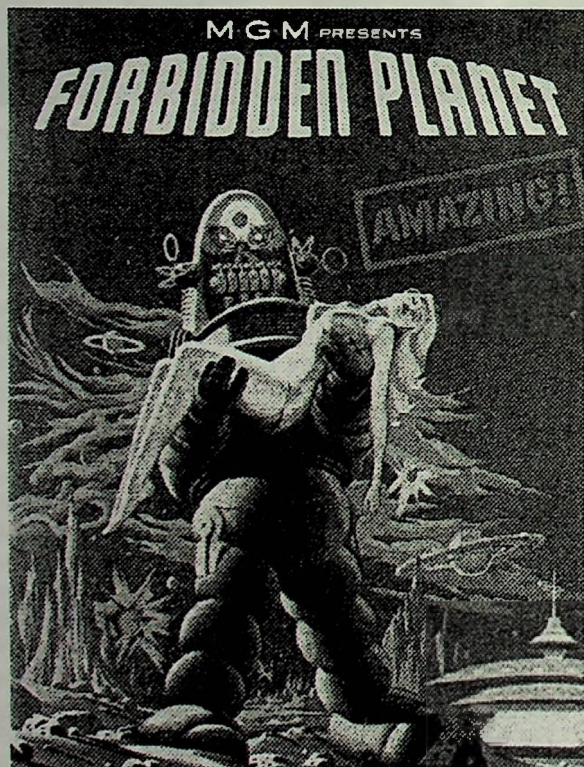
The Art Deco ceiling and stage of the ASTOR Theatre

The culmination of the Film Society's activities was the convention that we held in 1981, CINECON, at the Sheraton Hotel in Spring Street, Melbourne. I had met author, screenwriter and sf fan ROBERT BLOCH at Torcon World Science Fiction Convention in 1973 in Toronto, Canada. I knew that he was closely involved with Hollywood and the movie industry, having written the book *PSYCHO* and I think the script for the movie, along with other movies, numerous other books and stories, plus episodes of *Star Trek* and more TV episodes for such as *Twilight Zone*, so I invited him to be our Guest of Honour.





We put together a great programme of films including *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Forbidden Planet*, *2001:Space Odyssey* and the made for PBS TV in the USA, *Lathe of Heaven*, based on Ursula K. LeGuin's sf novel, - Ms Le Guin who had been our GoH at the world sf convention, AUSSIECON held here in Melbourne IN 1975, helped me import the movie from the USA - plus movies representing the various aspects of sf&f movies. Panels and talks by Robert Bloch and people such as well known actor and academic John Flaus, and it all went very well.



MGM PRESENTS
FORBIDDEN PLANET
 WALTER PIDGEON · ANNE FRANCIS · LESLIE NIELSEN
 WARREN STEVENS · THE ROBBY, THE ROBOT · CYRIL HUME
 FRED McLEOD WILDON · NICHOLAS MAYFAK · CINEMASCOPE · COLOR

On the last day we screened *PSYCHO* at the State Film Centre as it was then called, with talks on writing for the screen by the now late Robert Bloch and George Turner, along with journalist and writer John Pinkney, director Richard Franklin, who incidentally had attended our club film shows, and authors Damien Broderick and Lee Harding. Richard Franklin made a name for himself in Hollywood, working with Alfred Hitchcock and directed movies such as *PSYCHO 2* and *WITNESS*. I was very pleased with the way that CINECON went, but I had hoped that more people would attend. Interest in sf&f movies was not as big then as it is now, but over 200 people did attend, which all things considered was a reasonably good turn up.



ROBERT BLOCH at CINECON

Photo by Merv Binns

In 1973, yes, I did make my first overseas trip. On the way to Canada for the World SF Convention in Toronto, I stopped overnight in Hong Kong, where I saw my first colour TV in action, then on to London where my friend Mervyn Barrett from New Zealand. He took me to a movie, now forgotten, at the British Film Institute and I also got to another theatre, program forgotten, where I was surprised to find tea, and alcoholic drinks being served at interval. The best I had ever experienced at home was malted milks at the nearest milk bar, which was often so far away you were battling to get back to the theatre before the second half of the show started, or a crowd ten deep trying to get an orange cordial or a sarsaparilla at the theatre refreshments bar, before the bells rang indicating that the interval was over and the movie was due to start. Of course you could sometimes get a Peter's ice cream wafer or dixie from the lolly boy or girl. City theatres were not much better in that respect in the 40s and 50s, but I particularly remember the Ernest Hillier establishment next to the Regent and their great malted milks. After the short stop in London I got to the World SF Con in Toronto, where they did screen the movies

that were nominated for the Best SF&F Dramatic Presentation for the year, which incidentally turned out to be *Slaughterhouse Five*, based on Kurt Vonnegut's novel. Many sf fans were still grappling with the idea of any movies being worth recognition as "good" sf, and fandom had already split into the "written" sf fans and the media fans, and the establishment of *Star Trek* fandom with even thousands more fans turning up at the ST cons than the regular sf. With the advent of the *Star Wars* movies media fandom grew, but these movies and films like *2001:Space Odyssey* and *Dune*, encouraged more young people in particular to read sf. So in today's sf fandom, locally at any rate, there seems to be little or no barrier between the literature fans and the movie and TV devotees.

After Toronto I went to New York, but all I could find there was porno movie theatres, apart from The Radio City Music Hall, which is a great barn of a theatre, with an auditorium large enough to act as an airship hanger. So I saw *NIGHTWATCH*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Lawrence Harvey, which did not grab me, but the stage show featuring the famous Rockettes, which I did not even know was part of the admission, plus just taking in the size of the theatre (the foyer alone was as big as the Melbourne Cricket Ground) made it all worthwhile. My other love, the musical theatre was unfortunately not satisfied, as I did not have the time in the short two days and a bit stay to find out what was on. Debbie Reynolds was playing in *IRENE*, I found out later, and that would have filled my ambition to see a Broadway show.

But it was not to be until my next trip in 1971, when my friend Cherry Weiner, a literary agent who was looking after the interests of local writers such as George Turner and Wynne Whiteford, said that she would



CHERRY WEINER

take me to whatever show I liked that was currently playing. A lady she had working for her booked the tickets for *ANNIE*, which I missed the Melbourne production of, and off we went, only to learn that the tickets were for the night before. They let us stand at the back, so I did finally get to see a Broadway musical show at any rate. During a later trip in 1983 I saw two shows, *Forty Second Street* and *A Chorus Line*, two shows which effectively covered the gamut of the "putting on a show" story that I had so enjoyed in the great movie musicals over the years. I grew up on the great MGM movies and those like James Cagney's *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, so I reckon my dream had been fulfilled.

Hollywood! How could I go to the U.S.A. and not visit there. During three trips I stopped each time at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, where the first Academy Award Presentations were made, and it is just across the road on Hollywood Boulevard from the famous Grauman's Theatre, where many stars have left their handprints and signatures in the cement. The pseudo Chinese style of architecture looks quite spectacular from the outside, but I do not remember being impressed too much with the inside. I went to a couple of other theatres, visited a famous movie book shop, Larry Edmunds, visited Disneyland and spent some time with friends in the Los Angeles Science Fiction fraternity, but otherwise nothing spectacular. I did not even see one movie star on any of my stops there.

Of course I did visit Mr Science Fiction himself, once editor of the magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, Forrest J. Ackerman, and I did renew my acquaintance with him on each trip and at the various world SF conventions we both happened to attend, here in Melbourne and



FORREST J. ACKERMAN

overseas. His collection of sf&f movie memorabilia had to be seen to be believed. Other friends and my wife Helena, on their visits to Hollywood and Forry, got to meet those such as Elsa Lanchester, and Martin Landau and his wife Barbara Bain (both of whom appeared in the TV series *Space 1999*, and have made many other TV and movies appearances. Landau more recently starred as Bela Lugosi in the movie *Ed Wood*).

Following my invitation to Bob Bloch to be our Guest of Honor for *CINECON* in 1980, I met him in Hollywood on my 1979 trip. We had lunch in a Hollywood Boulevard restaurant and next day he took me up to his home in the hills, where he introduced me to his lovely wife Ellie and we had dinner at a plush restaurant, where all the patrons were turning up in chauffeur driven Rolls and Bentleys. BUT no movie stars! I had to wait until I was home at local cons, to meet a few minor movie actors. I did the inevitable Universal Studios tour and saw episodes of some TV series being shot away in the distance. I might just add that earlier on this 1979 trip, while attending the Worlds SF Convention, *SEACON* in Brighton, England I met many people, fans and authors and managed to say hello to Arthur C. Clarke, whom the Melbourne SF Club had entertained on his brief visit to here in 1953.

When it comes to live performances I have only seen about a dozen musical shows all told, most recently *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Miserables* with Helena at the Princess Theatre, and the first theatre production I ever saw was with a school party in the late 1940s, when I saw Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Princess Theatre in Melbourne. The next was again at that theatre, when my parents and I went to see *Kismet*, starring Hayes Gordon. I saw *Camelot*, *Can Can*, *Irene*, *Evita*, *Cats* and other shows, some with my parents prior to 1970 and with dad only or friends, such as Jack Westphal in later years, at the Princess and Her Majestys Theatres. All musicals of course, which I had grown to love through seeing the movie musicals over the years. Now

having seen three shows on Broadway and finally catching up with *The Phantom of the Opera*, which Helena took me to as a Birthday present, my musical theatre ambitions are fulfilled. Anything I see in the future will be a bonus. I do love Gilbert and Sullivan and I would like to see a live performance of one of their operettas, but other than that, I am happy. Musicals have always been my main interest, but my parents and I did see a couple of mystery plays.



They were *Witness for the Prosecution* and even earlier than that, British actors Roger Livesy and Ursula Jeans in my only trip to the Comedy theatre in Melbourne. in *The Great Sebastian*. He was a favourite actor of mine in movies such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *I Know Where I'm Going* and he overshadowed Laurence Olivier in *The Entertainer*, when he played Olivier's father, who I believe was miscast in that role. Other live performances included singers such as Frank Sinatra, Frankie Lane, Johnny Ray and Spike Jones and His City Slickers, either at the Stadium or the Palais Theatre in St Kilda. I sold books at McGills to Gregory Peck and his wife when they were in Melbourne, during the filming of *ON THE BEACH*. I also dragged Dad along to see Bette Davis when she was on a speaking tour, publicising her autobiography, I think in the early '80s. A well known Aussie actor who called in to see us from time to time at Space Age, and who gave us a ticket to the show he was starring in, *The Rocky Horror Show*, was Max Phipps. Paul Stevens went to the show at a Theatre in Fitzroy and Max gave him an autographed poster for Space Age, which I still have. He was seen in many movies and TV series in the following years, and gave a great performance as Gough Whitlam in a TV special titled *The Dismissal*. He cropped up in what must have been one of his last roles in an episode of *FARSCAPE* seen last week, as it

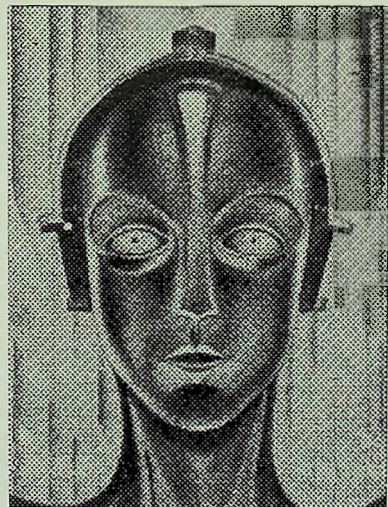
was with sorrow and regret that I learned last month that he passed away and we will not see him at work any more.

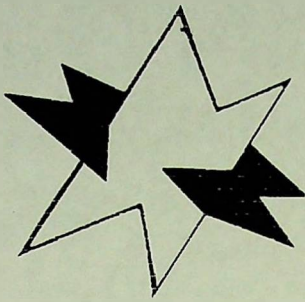
The masses have always had to be entertained, as in the classical Greek Theatre or the Gladiatorial combat of ancient Rome, and all forms of music and acting through the ages, and we all have our specific interests. My great uncle Ernest, whom my father was named after, ran pier shows in England early last century and my parents both loved music, so I guess it is in the blood. I tried to learn the piano but gave up, not ever being able to coordinate my left and right hands. I envied my father a little in that he had been a musician, playing drums in the Collingwood Citizens Band, the Army Reserve, and in small groups playing at dances, but we did enjoy listening to music together and watching movie musicals, very much. My musical interests are varied, but shows, movie soundtracks, specially Morrocone's work, and the classics, mainly the Russian composers, are my main interests. I even like some rock and roll, loved the Beatles, hate the Rolling Stones.

One last word about old theatres. The Melbourne SF Club and Fantasy Film Society, put on a number of shows at the Capri, in Murrumbeena, which is only a few miles away from where Helena and I now live in Carnegie, and we have what used to be the Carnegie Theatre in our street, but it is now part of a printing works.

Yes, movies and music have been a big part of my life, but I know I am not alone!

Merv B.





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7 December 2000

Dear Friend,

Well, here we are almost at the end of another year and the real end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. 2001! If you saw the famous Kubrick/Clarke movie twenty five years ago, did you wonder if you would live to actually see the year itself? I certainly did, as I wondered even earlier if I would live to see them land on the Moon. As for Mars, well at least I know that they will get there even if I do not live to see it, and as I am 66 now that is unlikely. Then again, my father lived to 90. Talking about death and dying, I have lost a few friends and customers this last year, and some of the icons both in my science fiction and movie worlds have left the scene, but so be it.

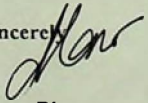
I never thought that I would ever really retire and so far, touch wood, I am able to keep doing a few lawn-mowing jobs, which I need to do, as our pensions only pay our rent and leave very little for anything else. Our own garden is not all that big, but it is full of decorative plants and at the moment, with lettuces, silver-beet, beetroot, tomatoes, potatoes and numerous herbs, lots to eat. It keeps me busy looking after it. I do not do a lot of reading since getting this computer going, as I am spending a lot of time recording my memories and views about things, which I hope my friends are finding time to read when we do manage to get my zine *The Rubbish Bin(us)* into print. Now about *RB!* Back in July I almost completed twenty pages of memoirs, reviews - both books and movie news and replies to people who had written to me and sent me their zines, but we needed to get photos printed and find other illustrations and get them all copied. While this was going on Helena was working on the movie section, for which we had all the illos, but as it went along we kept adding the new reviews almost ad infinitum. Now, Helena who is very diligent and somewhat of a perfectionist, in direct contrast to me, just does not have time to finish the all the other things that were to go in the second half of a double issue of *RB*. So we are sending out the special *Merv's Movie Mania* issue, #8 now and we will get the next issue out early in the new year. I would like to do an e-mail version, but we have run into trouble with our old computer, though, as I have been promising for months now, we will get there eventually, with a little help from our friends.

So I apologise if I have not replied to your letters or thanked you for sending me your zines, but I will, and I hope to do a lot better in the future. Meanwhile, like you all, we will be preparing for the Christmas season and our annual New Years Eve party, which means that we have a lot of things to do - tidying up, and finishing jobs around the house and garden that have been moving along very slowly.

All that leaves is to give you Helena's and my **BEST WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR!**

Sincerely

Merv Binns


E. Helena

