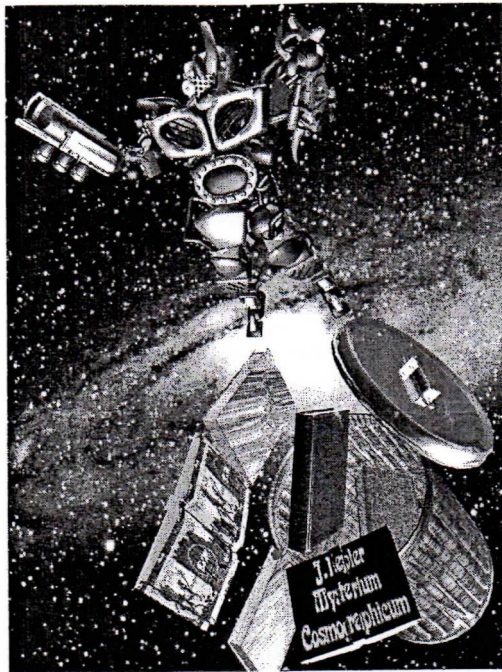


Out of the Bin



'Robo Bin' Artwork by Ditmar

Issue #22 March 2004

A Newsletter from MERV BINNS
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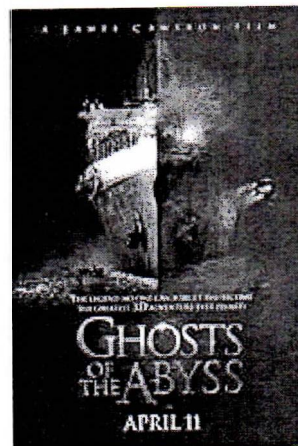
Dear Readers,

The saga of the Ditmar heading featuring the spacefaring Rubbish Bin continues this month, with #20's superhero and menacing black hole replaced by an enigmatic robot shepherding the runaway Bin spilling its contents beyond the galactic rim. Is the robot emerging from the Bin? Or is it seeking its origins by studying humanity's ancient texts? Or is it just wondering (like the rest of us) how the Bin and books got way out there?

SENIORS WEEK

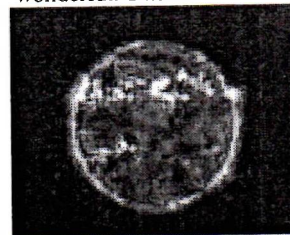
The annual Seniors Week came up again this month and we had a pretty good time seeing movies for only a dollar a time, as well as visiting other venues offering special deals for the week. There was free travel for seniors on all public transport, which it would have been a sacrilege not to take advantage of. The 'gold coin' (a token admission fee of a \$1 or \$2 donation to charity) movie offer, however, was only on for the first three days of the week, and only for sessions starting before 5pm, so some fancy footwork was required to see all that we wanted to in those few days. First up we got to see *Whale Rider*, at the government sponsored Australian Centre for the Moving Image, a high-faluting name for the organisation which took over the functions

of the old State Film Centre. They also call themselves by their acronym ACMI (a title which somehow strangely reminds us of the old Warner Bros. *Road-Runner* cartoons!) *WHALE RIDER* is a wonderful little film, with elements of fantasy but giving an interesting insight into New Zealand's Maori culture. Beautifully filmed, taking advantage of the natural beauty of the area where it was shot, as did *Lord of the Rings*. The young actress playing the lead role, Keisha Castle-Hughes, fully deserved her nomination for an Academy Award. The film was late starting – due, we were told, to some long-winded speeches by dignitaries opening the proceedings earlier in the day – so it finished later than we'd anticipated. After hastily (and somewhat belatedly) consuming some lunch that we took with us, we went along to the Village Theatre complex in Bourke Street and watched Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton in *SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE*, which was a romantic comedy that we related to with pleasure. This was largely no doubt because Helena and I got together at about the same age as the characters in the movie. I never liked Nicholson but I have grown to appreciate him in comedy roles.



The next day we went to the IMAX Cinema, situated in the same building as the new Melbourne Museum (a structure I do not appreciate and have previously commented on), which has only been in existence for the last few years. We watched three movies on the big screen, each of which ran for just under an hour. Helena saw another one, *BUGS*, which I missed. The first I saw, in 3D, was *OCEAN WONDERLAND*, an underwater doco in which sea creatures came leaping out of the screen

at us or you felt you could reach out and touch all the tiny little fish floating in front of your face. An enjoyable hour, but the colour filming could have been a lot brighter, which other underwater docos seen on the TV managed to attain. Next up in 3D also was James Cameron's sponsored dive to the real *TITANIC*, the subject of his award winning movie. Some exciting moments interspersed with some great photography featuring two individual mobile robot camera units, actually going inside the wreck. One got caught when the power ran out but the second was sent in to rescue it. Shots of the ship as it originally was, interspersed with what they could see, such as the stained glass windows of the dining room, still intact, were quite wonderful. I have not seen the movie *TITANIC* but this look at the real ship has whet my appetite. Then right up our alley was a movie about the Sun, *SOLAR MAX*, which was not in 3D but still spectacular on the big screen. Some marvellous photography and information about the star we call The Sun.



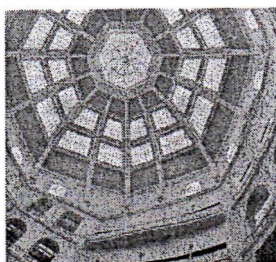
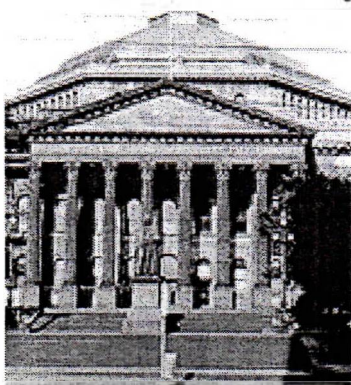
made me more aware than ever before just what it is that makes us what we are and how we exist. So this vast roiling mass of matter at indescribable temperatures, which is a rather minor star in comparison to many other points of light up in the sky, will continue to put out radiation and heat to nurture our little planet for perhaps another three billion years or so. But the thought of it actually eventually ceasing to exist is rather scary, even though by that time we humans probably won't be around any more to worry about it.

The third day we started out at the relatively recently refurbished Victorian State Library. It is situated just across the road from where Space Age Books and then Slow Glass Books used to be, but in the fifteen years or so of Space Age, even though I worked so close to it I never had call to visit the library. In the AUSSIECON ONE movie the final scene where I presented Aussiefan with his medal, was shot right in front of the library.

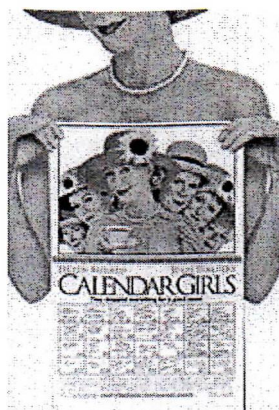


*Valma Brown (left) holds the ceremonial cushion for the Medal for Extraordinary Services to Fandom that Merv Binns presents to AUSSIEFAN (Malcolm Hunt in superhero garb), while Bill Wright (far right) reprimands the rubbernecker and paparazzi on the steps of the State Library.
(from the making of the Aussiefan film 1973)*

The wonderful glass dome, formerly covered for years by copper, is now seen in all its glory, and illuminates the great reading room as it was originally designed to do. The library building also houses a historic collection of paintings. As well as representing many of the "important" people of our state capital's early days, it includes paintings of our city as it grew from a group of tents and shacks to the metropolis of today. It was interesting not only seeing how Melbourne had grown, but also visages of people for whom some of our suburbs and streets are named. As a book lover though, just being in the library was an awesome experience.



The State Library and its great glass dome above the La Trobe Reading Room



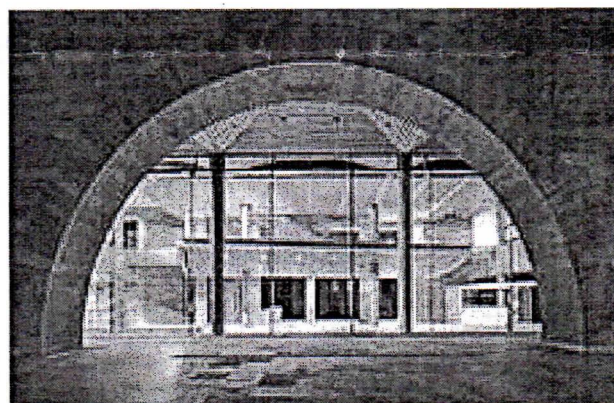
In the afternoon we were back at the "Moving Image" to see *CALENDAR GIRLS*, the "girls" answer to *The Full Monty*, and it was just as entertaining. Some leading British, not so young actresses led by my all time favorite Helen Mirren and Julie Walters, get their gear off for a charity motivated calendar. As you can imagine, the "Women's Institute" group they belong to, which might be somewhat similar to the Australian CWA, does not look on their idea very favorably.

They go ahead with it however and it is a financial success, raising money for a leukemia charity in memory of Julie Walters' husband, played by John Alderton of TV's *Please Sir* fame. It was set in Yorkshire and I am always pleased to see something of the part of England my father and my grandparents came from.



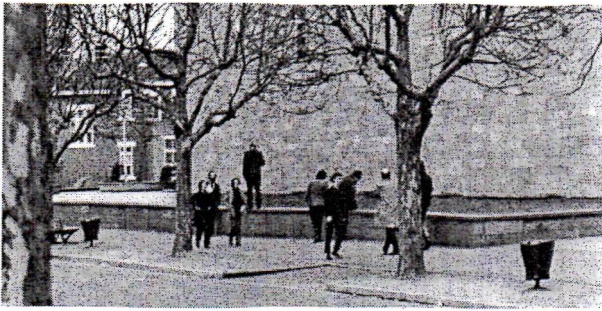
The 'Calendar Girls'

In the basement of the building housing the "Moving Image" and TV station SBS, on Federation Square, we visited a moving image art show, which included a graphic animated representation of DNA and associated microscopic views of what makes us tick. I realised that the "dungeon" where all this was situated where the old Princes Bridge Railway Station used to be and where I walked up a ramp over many years coming from the Melbourne suburb of Preston, where I was born and lived for over thirty of those years.



The remodeled National Gallery of Victoria in St Kilda Road, Melbourne

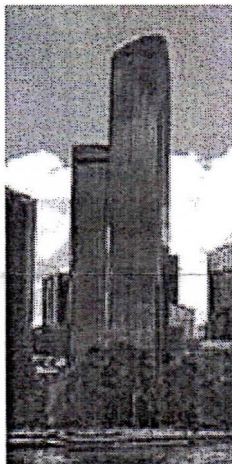
On the fourth day we visited the remodeled National Gallery of Victoria in St Kilda Road, accompanied by Helena's friend Megan from Deniliquin, who was in Melbourne for the day. The gallery has just recently been reopened after an architectural onslaught that saw it closed to the public for a couple of years.



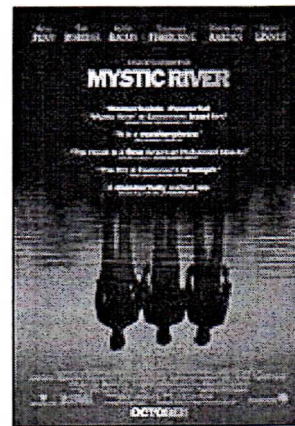
Senior members of Melbourne fandom gather at the Gallery to seek a solution to the sinister schemings of arch-villain Anti-Fan.
(From the making of the Aussiefan film 1973)

Thank goodness the famous stained glass ceiling is still in place! The pools and fountains are still there too. The famous water wall, seen briefly in the AUSSIECON ONE Movie as the committee marched to a meeting there, is still there despite threats to scrap it. I find it hard to believe that was even considered. *Is nothing sacred?* They have taken away our wonderful old green trams, which many overseas visitors to our SF World cons thought were great, which also appeared briefly in the movie. We now have these "silver streak articulated monsters" that look like they belong in a SF movie, with "Star Trek" like control panels. What *is* next? Among the innovations at the Gallery are translucent glass sloping ramps to enable the visitor to trudge up or down from one floor to the next. They don't instill any degree of confidence in the user, but fortunately for the squeamish, escalators and elevators are still available as alternatives. We spent a couple of hours there, getting the hang of the layout of the place and finding the things we were most interested in. We managed to see artefacts and paintings representing the periods from Ancient Egypt to 18th Century Europe.

Just before sunset we made it up to the 'Observation Deck' viewing platform of the highest building in Melbourne (and the tallest office building in the Southern Hemisphere, so we're told) THE RIALTO, and what a view it was. It was great to see our city in all its 360°majesty and to take in the changes that have taken place in some areas that I have as yet not seen from the ground. We could see the Tasmanian Ferry waiting at the pier, the new freeways we have not been on yet and buildings that have climbed up like mushrooms over very recent times. My late parents if suddenly brought back to Melbourne would not recognize the city where they grew up. Helena and I have both independently visited The Empire State Building in New York. I saw Chicago by night from the top of the Sears Tower with my friend Ross Cozens and I visited both with friend Robin Johnson and my father on another occasion, The Black Mountain Tower, which gives a great view of Canberra. But nothing could compare to a view of the city where I was born and bred. Coincidentally we spoke to a woman in the Rialto Tower from Seattle, Washington, which houses a tower I saw first in *Colliers* magazine in the 1950s. I always wanted to visit there, but alas bids by Seattle SF fans to hold the World Con in Seattle failed when I might have afforded going there, so I never made it. Anyhow, our visit to the Rialto was the 'peak' experience of seniors week for us, in more ways than one!



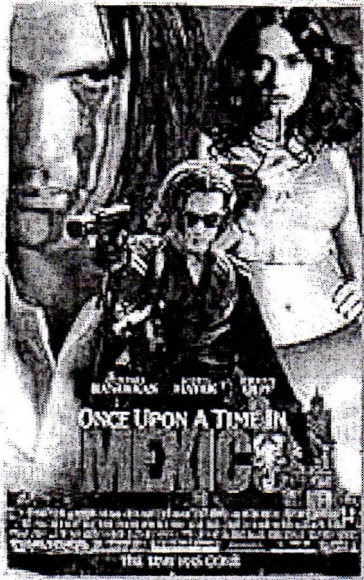
Even though Seniors week with its movies for a dollar each was over, we still had some special cut-price vouchers that had to be used before the end of March. Since there were still several more movies we wanted to see, this worked out well for us. On our wedding anniversary, the 22nd of March, we went to see a beautiful movie titled *GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING*. Based on a novel about an imagined episode in the life of the artist Vermeer, inspired by the painting of the same name as the movie, it faithfully recreates the scenes and costumes of the time and some of Vermeer's paintings. The story featuring a young housemaid caught between desire of the artist to paint her and a jealous wife, is almost irrelevant to the visual aspects of the movie. The whole movie is like a painting itself and simply beautiful to see.



But our movie marathon did not finish with that one. During that week we made use of a couple more of our reduced price offers, Hoyt's two-for-one vouchers from Kellogg's Corn Flake packets. So we got to see actor Sean Penn in his Academy Award winning performance for Best Actor in the Clint Eastwood directed *MYSTIC RIVER*. I have not seen much of Penn in other movies but his brooding demeanor, which reminded me of James Dean a little, was ideally suited for this role. The Supporting Actor Academy Award was presented to Tim Robbins who gave an outstanding performance as the mentally disturbed friend. I only went to see this extremely down-beat movie because of the Academy Awards it won and my interest in anything Clint Eastwood does. It was certainly not a nice story and not my cup of tea at all and even less Helena's, who had warned me what it was going to be like and objected to my dragging her along to see it.

We followed that with *THE MISSING*, featuring Kate Blanchett and Tommy Lee Jones, which features a vaguely similar theme to the John Wayne, Natalie Wood movie, *The Searchers*. Lots of blood and guts with Indians and others biting the dust in all directions. The beautiful scenery *was* worth looking at, at any rate. A little bit of Carlos Casteneda style Apache Indian influenced mythos added a fantasy element that made it more interesting to me. I enjoyed it. Helena had mixed feelings about it. She enjoyed the visual grandeur and the human interest story as well as the mystical elements (and just the sheer novelty of seeing a modern version of an "old-fashioned" western), but was perturbed by the violence.





To top it all off, the same afternoon we saw *ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO* on a one-free-movie-in-three deal that Village Cinemas were offering, again for only until the end of March. Although extensively advertised as a light-weight humorous action-adventure film, it turned out to be yet another blood-bath, which had so much graphic violence and so many pointless killings in it that it was far beyond any humour it purported to have, such as might present

itself in the James Bond, Bruce Willis, Steven Segal or Mel Gibson action-adventure epics. It was worse than even Quentin Tarrantino's *Pulp Fiction*, and that's really saying something! Again my better half was appalled, so it looks as though in future I will have to attend many movies on my own if I want to see them at all.

Having seen these movies over the last few weeks prompts me to review my ideas of what I really like in any movies and what I really do not like. Taking notice of reviewers' comments should be done with a pinch of salt also. Okay! I knew what to expect with *Mystic River* and I had good reasons for wanting to see it, but I have deliberately avoided many other award-winning movies and performances because I knew that I would be put off by the story. *Titanic* is a prime example. (Who wants to see thousands of people facing certain death? We all know how it turns out!) But I admit the visual aspects of the movie tell me now that I really should have seen it. I detested many of the movies that I saw with my parents during Hollywood's *film noir* period, which we went to because we just *had* to go the local Hoyts *Circle Cinema* in Preston at least once a week in those days. (Joan Crawford epics in particular!) Movies or plays such as *Street Car Named Desire* or *Death of a Salesman*, are simply not my thing. Yet I can appreciate a Shakespeare drama simply for the language and the performance, so why can't I appreciate the performance of actors in other dramas? Well I guess I do really, but if I have my choices.....I guess I am really a romantic at heart and like a happy or at least a satisfactory ending and in many cases a movie is spoilt for me by what happens to the characters or everything ends in a way that I do not like. I hated the ending of the recent *Planet of the Apes*, and the way the original story was interpreted, which spoilt an otherwise good movie to look at. One of the worst that I have ever seen is *Pulp Fiction* which is full of violence for violence' sake and in no way humorous. *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* is really just as bad, being full of murder and mayhem that early in the movie I thought was funny, but by the end I was not laughing. Where do you draw the line? I loved all the *Bond* movies, *Die Hard*, the Clint Eastwood westerns and many other movies full of violence. In SF, fantasy and horror movies if I can "willingly suspend my disbelief" I can enjoy a movie, however silly it may be, and I guess with violent stories it is really only a movie after all, it is not real. But movie making has become so realistic it becomes too easy to relate to what you are watching. Some horror movies I can take because I have always been interested in ghosts and the occult and pure fantasy, but the blood and guts of such as *Friday the 13th* and that ilk turn me right off.

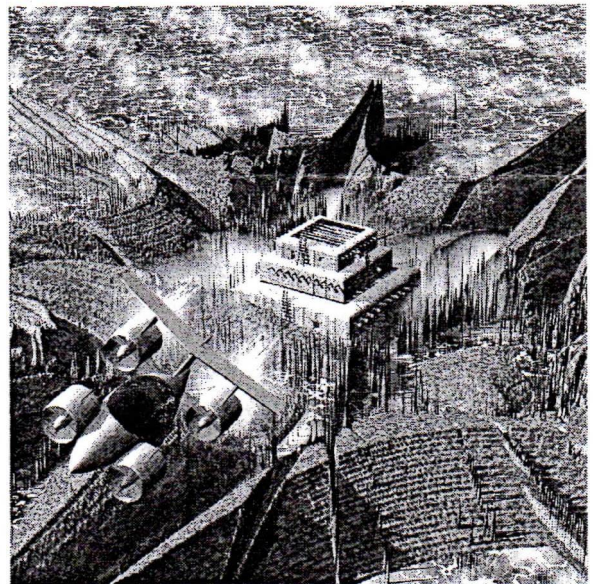
We saw a preview of a new Johnny Depp movie for instance, *Secret Window*, that I really want to see, based I think on a Stephen King tale and for some reason I cannot explain, I have liked most of the movies I have seen based on his stories. At the end of March we went to see *THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT*, despite largely unenthusiastic reviews that almost put us off it. We were reminded of Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, but things were not happening on such a grand scale. (*Groundhog Day* also came to mind). We found the movie interesting and entertaining if not spectacular. Yet another SF adaptation that we were thinking of seeing but didn't get around to, due to inconvenient session times, was *PAYCHECK*. Based on a Philip K. Dick Story, it didn't receive very favourable reviews compared with previous Dick adaptations *Bladerunner* and *Minority Report*. Talking about SF movies there have certainly been some disasters and the one I dislike very much is *Gattaca*, for reasons I will not go into again here. I thought *Minority Report* was great and I see that Tom Cruise is making another SF movie, this time with Stephen Spielberg.

CONVENTIONS

We cannot afford to go to this year's National SF Convention in Canberra on the Anzac Day weekend, but we will be attending this year's Melbourne SF con, Continuum, in June.

And last but definitely not least, I am very pleased to announce that *I have been invited to be the Fan Guest of Honor for THYLACON in Hobart, Tasmania next year in June!* Thanks to the committee for asking me. The Australian Professional Guest of Honour is **Marianne de Pierres**, a children's writer, Aurealis Award judge and author of the recently published SF novel *Nylon Angel* (first in the *Parrish Plessis* series).

Merv B



SECRET GARDEN Artwork by Ditmar

"Shall we take the ferry, the plane or the shuttlecraft to THYLACON?"