

FILMS FANTASTIC 6



Films Fantastic number 6 is published by Eric Jamborsky for the N3F Film Bureau.

Note: Apologies to all for the lateness of this issue. The real world intruded far too much.

THE 7th VOYAGE OF SINBAD (1958) opened new doors to the Fantasy film fans. It was filmed in color which added a new dimension. Previously, most films utilizing stop motion animation had been in black and white. I know it affected me. In fact I walked to our neighborhood theater twice to watch this wonderful movie.

Ray Harryhausen grabbed filmgoers previously with his work on THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS, IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA, EARTH VS THE FLYING SAUCERS, AND 20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH. He was ready to go to the next step with the addition of color and improved methods of integrating effects shots with live action. Today, sixty-one years later, it still hold up against the CGI of contemporary films.



The story involves Sinbad (Kerwin Matthews) faced with the skulduggery of evil wizard Sokurah (Torin Thatcher) who is determined to return to his island to claim a magic lamp and its Genie (Richard Eyer). To do so he uses his magic to shrink the Princess Parisa (Katherine Grant Crosby) say he can only restore her with ingredients found on his island. Sinbad must assemble a crew and return to the deadly island.

Creatures encountered include a cyclops, a two-headed Roc, and a dragon. Elements are borrowed from the Arabian Nights and Greek mythology and are blended nicely into the story.

This movie made a big impression on my nine-year old self and I wanted to know how everything was done. Fortunately, a couple of years later I discovered Famous Monsters of Filmland and the gates were thrown open. But that is a story for another time.

A strength of this film was the cast. Kerwin Matthew was an excellent choice for Sinbad. His ability to play convincingly against a non-existent monster really helped the audience believe what it was seeing. Torin



Thatcher was the perfect actor for Sokurah. Sometimes I still find myself rooting for him to get the magic lamp in the end. He may be the bad guy, but you can't help liking him. Katherine Grant is good as the Princess, being suitably spunky when required. The biggest weakness is portraying the Genie as a young boy, but Richard Eyer carries it off and avoids being annoying. One of my favorites in the film is Alfred Brown as Harufa, Sinbad's friend.

Of course the various creatures are just as important as the actors and this movie has some good ones. Above we see the lady in waiting of the Princess after she has volunteered to help the Magician entertain the big wigs. (Life upon the wicked stage ain't never what a girl supposes.) But the outstanding creature is the skeleton brought to life to fight Sinbad. In just a few years Harryhausen animated an army of skeletons in JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS.

Another major contributor to this film was Bernard Herrmann who provided a wonderful score. Herrmann also provided scores for THE THREE WORLDS OF GULLIVER and JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS. His score for SINBAD is pure magic and does much to bring this world to life.

Ray Harryhausen later made two sequels to 7th VOYAGE OF SINBAD, THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD with John Philip Law as Sinbad and Tom Baker as the villain, and SINBAD AND THE EYE OF THE TIGER with Patrick Wayne as Sinbad. Together they make an excellent triple feature. Give them a try.





Film Reviews by Tom Feller.

Sorry to Bother You-

The protagonist of this excellent satire is Cassius “Cash” Green (Lakeith Stanfield). He and his artist girlfriend Detroit (Tessa Thompson) live in the garage of the house of his uncle (Terry Crews) in Oakland, California. They are four months behind on their rent, and their uncle is also behind on his mortgage. Green and his best friend Salvador (Jermaine Fowler) take jobs at a telemarketing firm, and Detroit later joins them. They are all African-American. One of their co-workers, Langston (Danny Glover), also an African-American, advises them to speak in their “white voice”, that is, they should sound like European-Americans while on the phone. Cassius is so successful that he is promoted upstairs to become a “power caller”. Meanwhile, an Asian-American co-worker (Steven Yeun), who also becomes a rival for Detroit’s affections, is trying to unionize the callers. Cassius does not join them and is hit in the head by a full soda can while crossing the picket line. He then comes to the attention of the firm’s CEO, Stephen Lift (Armie Hammer), a European-American. Lift offers Cassius a job with his other company, Worry Free. Publicly, Worry Free offers its employees housing, food, medical care, and other benefits if they sign a lifetime employment contract, and its business is providing menial labor. However, Cassius discovers that there is a catch, and this is a key plot twist that changes this movie from one in the tradition of the 1976 film *Network* to one resembling the 2017 film *Get Out*. The twist is a comic book/B-movie sci-fi premise only slightly more plausible than the one in the *Sharknado* movies. However, this is really not important, because this very funny film’s intention is to satirize telemarketing, corporate America, reality television, race relations, social media, game shows, and other subjects. On the other hand, I was disappointed to learn that Cassius’s white voice is not provided by Stanfield but by European-American actor David Cross, and Detroit’s is done by British actress Lily James.

Dark Phoenix—

Sophie Turner began filming the *Game of Thrones* when she was fourteen years old, and my wife and I have had the pleasure of watching her grow up on screen. She reprises the role of Jean Grey in the latest and twelfth *X-Men* movie and even plays the title character. Unfortunately, the film has not met box office expectations and garnered mostly negative reviews, and we hope that she will not get the blame.

This is the second *X-Men* movie that uses the “Dark Phoenix Saga”, originally created in *The Uncanny X-Men* #’s 129-138 (1980) by Chris Claremont and John Byrne. The other movie is *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006) with Famke

Janson in the role. This version has a prologue set in 1975 in which Jean inadvertently causes the death of her parents in an automobile accident, or so she is told. She is then adopted by Professor X (James McAvoy) and goes to live in his boarding school for mutants. The main story, set in 1992, begins when the space shuttle Endeavour has an emergency that leaves it unable to return to Earth. A team of X-Men (Turner, Jennifer Lawrence as Mystique/Raven, Tye Sheridan as Cyclops, Nicholas Hoult as Beast, Alexandra Shipp as Storm, Evan Peters as Quicksilver, and Kodi Smit-McPhee as Nightcrawler) are dispatched to rescue them. During an EVA, Jean is exposed to some sort of cosmic force that increases her powers exponentially. Among other things, her enhanced telepathic powers enable her to read Professor X's mind, and she learns that her father is still alive. She seeks him out, but their meeting goes unsatisfactorily. She then seeks out Magneto (Michael Fassbinder), who also rejects her. The principal villain is Vuk (Jessica Chastain), a member of the alien species D-Bari who seeks to exploit Jean's abilities.

My main objection to the film is that it messily recycles an old story line. This would not be a crippling defect, but the dialogue is clichéd and the fight scenes are poorly choreographed. Lawrence is just going through the motions to fulfil a contractual obligation, and Chastain, McAvoy, and Fassbinder have very little material to work with. They really miss Hugh Jackman's Wolverine, especially his irreverence.

Yesterday—

My wife once had the opportunity to attend a Beatles concert in Memphis, but it conflicted with college exams and she was unable to go. Since our marriage, we have heard both Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr in concert. We are old enough, of course, to remember their appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show way back in 1964. What would the world be like without the Beatles? According to this movie, it would be pretty much the same.

Jack Malik (Himesh Patel, who does his own singing) is a 27 year old struggling singer/songwriter in Suffolk, England. Ellie (Lily James) is the girl next door, his biggest fan, best friend, manager, and roadie. During the daytime, he works at a warehouse, and otherwise he sings in coffee shops and on the street for tips. Ellie gets him a gig at a music festival, but only about a dozen people show up for his set. He drives a motorcycle, and one night he is hit by a bus during a twelve second period when no electricity works all over the world. When Jack wakes up, he discovers that the Beatles, Coca-Cola, cigarettes, and Harry Potter never existed, although the world otherwise is almost exactly the same. (Toward the end of the movie, he meets John Lennon (Robert Carlyle), who has lived to a ripe old age working as an artist instead of

as a musician.) Jack starts singing their songs in public, takes credit for writing them, and becomes the biggest music superstar in the world.

This is a very entertaining movie with many good jokes and, of course, lots of Beatles music. Patel actually sounds like McCartney, Ed Sheeran, who cites the Beatles as his biggest inspiration, plays himself in a self-deprecating role that is quite effective, Joel Fry is quite funny as Jack's sidekick, and Kate McKinnon is excellent as a unscrupulous record label executive. On the other hand, Jack is so dense that he doesn't realize that Ellie is in love with him, which is even less plausible than the movie's premise. On the other hand, this absence of emotional intelligence may explain his lack of success as a songwriter. However, my main problem is that the world the filmmakers show is not only not worse for their absence, but may even be a little better because Lennon was not killed by an assassin at the age of 40 and cigarettes were never invented. I'm sure this was not the intention of the filmmakers.

Spiderman: Far From Home—

This Spiderman's secret identity in the 23th Marvel Cinematic Universe movie is not as secret as in the original comic book. Among the people who now know that he is really 16 year old Peter Parker (Tom Holland) are Aunt May (Marisa Tomei), Peter's best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon), Happy Hogan (Jon Favreau) and an indeterminate number of people in the Stark organization from which he receives technical support, Nick Fury (Samuel R. Jackson) and an equally indeterminate number of people in S.H.I.E.L.D., and the surviving members of the Avengers. (There are hints of a romance between May and Happy.) MJ (Zendaya) is smarter than the average superhero's girlfriend and has also figured out that Peter is Spiderman. One thing that has not changed is that Peter's personal life is as messy as ever, and he still has not figured out, if he ever will, the way to juggle to responsibilities of being a superhero with the desire to lead the normal life of an American teenager.

Eight months after the events of *The Avengers: Endgame*, Peter is back in high school in Queens and going on a class trip to Europe led by two clueless teachers (JB Smoove and Martin Starr) and including Ned, MJ, and Brad (Remy Hii), who, unfortunately for Peter, is his main rival for MJ's affections. Peter hopes to spend time with MJ, but Fury gives him a new costume and recruits him to fight new monsters known as Elementals. A new character named Mysterio (Jake Gyllenhaal) also fights the Elementals and claims to be from a parallel Earth that was wiped out by them.

The first movie in the Marvel Cinematic Universe since *The Avengers: Endgame*, this is a very effective transition film. It simultaneously functions as an epilog to that movie while serving as an introduction whatever is the next movie in the series. Special effects are excellent, Gyllenhaal more than holds

his own with the other actors, and the script contains abundant comedy relief. On the other hand, if you're familiar with Mysterio from the comic book (he first appeared in *Spiderman #13*) or just familiar with superhero stories in general, the big plot twist in the middle is predictable. Overall though, this is a first-rate comic book movie.

Tolkien—

This film biography J.R.R. (John Ronald Reuel) Tolkien (Nicholas Hoult) has a framing story of his service in the trenches during the Battle of the Somme in World War I in which he has a fictional sidekick named Sam (Craig Roberts). These scenes are quite horrific. Then there are flashbacks to his earlier life, where he is also portrayed by Harry Gilby. Both parents die when he and his brother Hilary (James MacCallum) were boys, and a Catholic priest named Father Francis (Colm Meaney) becomes their guardian. They live in a boarding house run by an old woman named Mrs. Faulkner (Pam Ferris) in Birmingham, where he meets his future wife Edith Bratt (Lily Collins), also an orphan. The Catholic Church sends him to the King Edward “public” school there in Birmingham as a day student, and he meets three other boys (Ty Tennant, Albie Marber, and Adam Bregman in the earlier scenes, Anthony Boyle, Tom Glynn-Carney, and Patrick Gibson in the later ones) who become his best friends. Then he goes on to Oxford, where after a false start studying Greek and Latin, he finds an English philology professor (Derek Jacobi) who mentors him. During his four months in the trenches, he contracts Trench Fever, a disease spread by lice which, by the way, also infected C.S. Lewis and A.A. Milne. At the end, it skips ahead to the time when he begins writing *The Hobbit*. This is a very watchable movie, the history is mostly accurate, although it says that he and Edith were married after his service in the war while they were really married before it, the film is beautifully photographed, and Hoult is excellent, but it minimizes Tolkien's Catholic faith, the script is clichéd, and Jacobi's screen time is much too brief. Tolkien's family was not involved in the production in any way, and they have not endorsed it.

John Wick, Chapter Three—

Some people are dog people, and others are cat people. The title character of this film, played by Keanu Reeves, and one of his allies, Sofia (Halle Berry, who broke three ribs during filming), are dog people. One of the bad guys, Zero (Mark Dacascos), also a sushi chef, describes himself as a cat person. This film

is an immediate sequel to the previous John Wick movie in which he killed a fellow member of the High Table, a kind of assassin's guild, and a \$14 million bounty is placed upon him. (All three films take place within the same month and should be watched in order.) Most of the film consists of him fighting and killing other assassins. Wick is considered the best of them all, and several of the people trying to kill him also tell him what an honor it is to engage him in combat. To call the violence over-the-top is an understatement and to describe it as "comic book violence" or "video game violence" would make it sound even less realistic than it is. The fight scenes are so carefully choreographed that sometimes it seems as if you are watching a ballet, and they were supposedly influenced by the work of Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton. According to the web site Rotten Tomatoes, Wick kills 94 people in this movie, up from 77 in the first film but down from 128 in the second.

Speaking of ballet, Angelica Huston runs a combination ballet/wrestling school, Ian McShane is manager of a hotel where much of the action takes place, and Laurence Fishburne is some kind of crime lord called "The Bowery King". They all add a lot to this overly long film. Reeves's limited acting ability is actually an asset in a movie like this, because he never reacts to the mayhem taking place around him and has so little dialogue that he makes Charles Bronson and Clint Eastwood seem positively chatty by comparison.

