



FIVE



BORING CAT SCRATCHINGS

Cinema Tricks, and other stories

First, a question. How many of you have seen *Airplane?*¹ Actually, it should be more like “How many remember the bit at the end, right *after* the credits²?” In a similar vein³, how many people actually read the end credits in this?⁴ Staying on the subject of films, here are a few “alternative” film reviews⁵. *Last Action Hero* is even more self-referential than this, and does at least prove that Arnie is big enough to take the piss out of himself. Being the hip, switched on people that you probably aspire to be, you should already know the plot premise⁶, so I’ll skip over that part. Despite what some of the critics have said, it really isn’t that bad⁷, with some nice touches⁸ that are straight out of *Airplane’s* old jokes bin. In these ‘caring’ times of ours, there is a Message, namely “real guns do real damage; Hollywood doesn’t”, or some such. As Messages go, I’ve heard worse...

Moving swiftly on, Allison recently had the opportunity to see *Dracula*⁹. Her erudite film comments were as follows: “Gary Oldman is a bit of all right when he isn’t dressed up as a monster.” Clearly the rest of the film made a big impression...¹⁰

¹ It’s probably a good idea to put your hand down now. People will talk...

² You know, the ones with *Clapper Loader, Clapper Clapper* and *Loader Loader*, and *Tale of Two Cities* — *Charles Dickens*, amongst others.

³ No, no, I’ll do *Dracula* later...

⁴ Don’t you just hate all this self-referential stuff...

⁵ Alternative = off beat (ish)

⁶ Oh all right then: Boy uses magic ticket to jump into the action of a film. Film hero crosses the divide from celluloid into reality. Satisfied? Film bores will go on about the idea having been done already in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*— and why not, as Barry Norman claims never to have said himself.

⁷ Not that bad = worth seeing at your local cinema, but don’t pay over the odds for it.

⁸ “These dogs are very well trained - watch” [the dogs form an instant canine pyramid]

⁹ *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, is a bit like *Agatha Christie’s Poirot*. I mean, who else would create those characters?

¹⁰ Actually, there were a few other comments, such as “Boring in places”, and “Very spectacular”, but they don’t

Dinosaur Alert!¹¹

OK, so we succumbed to all the media hype. We went to see *J***** P****¹² at the “Empire” in Leicester Square, and we had to book up five days in advance, and we were still only in edge seats, but it was worth it. Visual jokes seem to be in, this year, as I recall seeing a couple of *really* old gags getting (hopefully) a final airing being turned into merely visual ones¹³.

I’ll skip over the computer bits, as I’m sure everyone knows what most of the machines were, by now¹⁴, and while having to turn off the electric fences just to reboot the computer system seems a bit far fetched, no doubt someone will come forth and say that they know of one system where a machine restart required turning off a local power station, or something similar¹⁵. On the other hand, the bit that did make us both smile was when the brachiosaur sneezed over the girl¹⁶. “Ruddles!”, we said in unison. Now Ruddles¹⁷ has a hole in her palette (the result of attempting to fly out of a five story building as a kitten), and has this tendency to really have the same impact.

¹¹ No, not Bob Dylan — he was mentioned last month (yet more self-referential stuff).

¹² I’ll try and save your Media Hype Overload circuits by not giving it’s full name...

¹³ Think yourself lucky that I can’t now remember them. I lied — one involves three people attempting to do their seat belts in the helicopter, which Billy Connolly was doing back when he still had hair and hadn’t even *heard* of Pamela Stephenson, let alone alcohol-free lager...

Come to think of it, the other one was an old Billy Connolly joke too. Is this one of Spielberg’s interests? Should we be told? Does anyone care?

¹⁴ However, the graphics firm Intergraph would like everyone to know that they were *not* involved in the film in any way...

¹⁵ “You were lucky. When we had to reboot our system, we had to smash the universe apart in the Big Bang, wait a few billion years, condense the gases to start the Sun’s nuclear reaction, form the Earth, evolve life and finally wait for some kid to come along and say ‘I know UNIX’, so that she can hack into the system and bypass having to do all this again next time round!” “You were lucky...”

¹⁶ Obviously felt that being wiped out 65 million years ago just to help a system reset was going a bit too far...

¹⁷ The one on the left of the title — oh you’ve only just noticed that it’s different? Well, take another look.

sneeze after eating or grooming. So... we both felt that the dinosaur should be called after her¹⁸. As for the rest of the film, apart from Dickie Attenborough's *really* bogus accent¹⁹, was really good, and well worth the money. But don't waste it on the merchandising²⁰.

On the gossip front, I am indebted to Ryan Johnson, who says that there is likely to be *another* spin-off series from *Star Trek*, apart from *Next Gen* and *Deep Space 9*, with Captain Ryker, and some of the other current crew on board another ship. *ST:TNG* is being wound up so that they can start making the films...

By now, there's probably a lot of sneering lips out there and comments like "Oh, he's a *meejah* fan, and a Trekker to boot" Not true²¹. From several different sources come the following not quite unrelated bits and pieces. Terry Pratchett, I am reliably informed, is currently in the States doing story consultant work for *ST:TNG*. This is despite Terry once saying that most *Star Trek* fans are so low that they could slide under a snake while wearing a top hat.²²

At Helicon²³, John Brunner was going on about how hard it was to sell a few books. As far as I could tell, the problem was less in the publishing, and more in the publicising, as the books that were printed seemed to vanish without trace. He wondered why. After reading *Children of the Thunder*, there is perhaps a reason²⁴. Firstly, it is not a bad book. In fact it is a good book, but the back cover blurb was enough to make

¹⁸OK, so it seems a pretty lame joke, but simple things...

¹⁹Christopher Lambert's accent in *Highlander* was better, and that's not saying much. (Since when do you have a Frenchman playing a Scot, and a Scot playing an Egyptian who's been to Japan?)

²⁰Is there going to be a crossover between the merchandising for *J***** P**** and the *Flintstones*? Since good ole' Fred was heavily into his bronto burgers, they could revise the *Watership Down* joke about "Seen the film, eaten the cast" Perhaps not.

²¹Not totally true, anyway.

²²One offshoot piece of advice: be very careful what you say the next time you talk to Terry Pratchett, as he has this habit of including the good bits into his next book. *Lords and Ladies* has two such bits that I know about (or at least, the people responsible/involved told me about)

²³Yup, the con that wouldn't die is back.

²⁴Not a good one, but then that's promoters for you.

several of my work colleagues make comments like "What a really fun-filled book²⁵ — just the kind of thing to make you want to slash your wrists" Now, book promoters are human too (or so we are led to believe), and they probably figure that punters would much rather have a bit of Action Hero Adventure stuff than some all too realistic piece that reminds us all how bad the state of the Economy/ Country/ Planet is these days. As a contrast, pick any of Lois McMaster Bujold's *Barrabar* series²⁶, and you will find SF with the emphasis on the Fiction²⁷, set in the far future so that there is no direct connection with the here and now²⁸. *CotT*, on the other hand, is set very much in the here and now, and has almost non-stop connections with the real world. If you were a book promoter, which would you rather plug? This is a pity, as some bits of the book are positively spooky in their predictions. For a book written over three years ago, an awful lot of things mentioned have happened recently, like this year, such as the floods in the States, or the rise of Fascism worldwide. The truth always hurts...²⁹

And finally, the bizarre bits: how come ABBA are undergoing a resurgence?³⁰ And when the going gets tough, and you want an expert opinion, who ya gonna call? Socks the Cat³¹



²⁵Sarcasm plays a large part here.

²⁶Or don't, since most of them aren't yet widely available in this country. Not even the Hugo winners.

²⁷*Falling Free*, which isn't quite in the same series, also has scientific / engineering problems to deal with.

²⁸Actually, that is not true, as there are a lot of analogies and metaphors for current society in the books; but then metaphors can be ignored.

²⁹This also proves that someone *does* read his more modern stuff...

³⁰You must have seen it all being re-released: ABBA the Album, ABBA the Movie, Armageddon the Musical... nor scratch that last one.

³¹'Strue. You can now write letters to Socks, the First Cat at the White House, 7800 Pennsylvania Ave, Washington D.C.

This has been the fifth edition of *Beer Cat Scratchings*, produced by Alasdair Hepburn and proof read by Allison Ewing. The Beer Cats finally appeared in the title, and Arnie failed to print "The Flying Apple". LoCs and other stuff can be sent to us at 123c Chobham Rd, Stratford, London, E15 1LX, if you actually read this far...©1993 for all the original bits... Thanks to Jim Samuel for scanning the Cats and tidying up the results.