

# FANTASTIC VOYAGE

THIS MONTH, AS PART OF OUR ONGOING STARBURST SF CLASSICS SERIES, WE PRESENT A MOVIE RETROSPECTIVE WITH A DIFFERENCE BY REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TISE VAHIMAGI.

Below: The wires that suspended the stars of *Fantastic Voyage* twenty to thirty feet above the studio floor, were wiped with acid to cut down light reflection. Unfortunately this caused them to snap too easily.



**W**e're told that listening to other people's conversations is rude. My feeling is that it may be rude, but only if you're caught doing it. Most of the time it can be several things: funny, informative, curious, frightening, enlightening or just plain dull. It is something that can also be highly addictive, leading on to the "hard stuff" such as taking up lip reading.

One of the best places to practice the art of eavesdropping is on the London Underground system. The tube trains, especially on London's Northern Line, can be the Mecca for Those-Who-Listen, a veritable Albert Hall for connoisseurs of other people's conversations.

The "concert" of the year came along quite by accident one morning on the aforesaid Underground line. It was the morning following BBC-TV's network screening of *Fantastic Voyage*.

Of course, nobody ever really sets out

with the specific intention of listening-in on the conversation between two people they've never seen before in their life, but maybe that's half the fun of it. The London Underground system, following the rush-hour stampede of getting to the office on time (or if you're late, at least before the boss gets in), leaves the trains looking like King Kong has chewed on them and then spat them back out. Into

*Fantastic Voyage* stars Raquel Welch in a skin-tight wet-suit.

this debris you come, open up your newspaper/book/magazine and pretend nobody else in the world exists.

It was a morning like this that the two "virtuoso performers" of loud conversation stepped onto the train. Same car, next station up the line.

One was the Talker, clearly a fanatical film buff, and the other the willing Listener. Questions from the captive

audience were not invited.

The whole thing went something like this:

"What? You didn't see *Fantastic Voyage* last night? Didn't get home in time, eh?"

The Listener meekly shakes his head.

"Well, it wasn't a new film. About thirteen years old . . . made in 1966, I believe. By Fox, you know, 20th Century-Fox. It starred Stephen Boyd, Edmund O'Brien, Donald Pleasance, Arthur Kennedy and — wearing a white, sprayed-on wet suit — Raquel Welch."

The Listener's eyes light up for a second at the mention, and thought, of Raquel Welch in a skin-tight wet suit. The lecture continues.

"It was a science fiction story. Well, sort of science fiction. Instead of all that outer space stuff, this time it was inner space, in a way. You see, there's this important Czech scientist in America who

suffers a serious brain injury after being attacked by enemy agents who want to keep him quiet. His mind is full of all these important things that the Americans want to know. So they take him to a special place they called Combined Miniature Deterrent Forces for an operation on his brain. The trick is, though, that the operation can only be performed from inside the brain. You know, from inside his head."

The Listener looks up and forms an expression that says either "Absurd" or "Wow, great!"

"No, honest, You see, they have a

**"They reduce a submarine and inject it into a scientist's body."**

highly advanced new way, a new discovery that can shrink men and machines down to any size they want. Now, what they're going to do is shrink down a specially designed submarine and a special crew of experts and inject them all into the scientist's bloodstream. Great, huh? Then the rest of the film shows us the journey this submarine has to take through all the arteries, capillaries, ducts, through the inner ear, and then into the brain itself."

The Listener is now hooked. And so are most of the other people within earshot who also didn't see *Fantastic Voyage*.

"I know the story sounds a bit silly at first. In fact, I did read somewhere, in a book — called *Future Tense*, I think — that if it were actually possible to shrink five people and a submarine down to the size of a human cell, the combined mass would be so concentrated that it would straight away fall through the floor and end up in the centre of the Earth."

The Listener, and everyone else around, casts the Talker a suspicious glance.

"No, honest. I'm telling you that's what it said. Anyway, the crew of this submarine have two problems. Well, actually they have lots of problems but the two big ones are that one of the crew

**"When an hour is up the submarine returns to normal size."**

is an enemy agent — and we don't know who, yet — and that they have to finish the job and get out in one hour because when their time is up they will automatically return to their normal size. Can you imagine that... a submarine bursting out of a man's head?! Well, anyway, they eventually get to the brain and repair the damage — and they find out who the enemy agent is. Maybe I shouldn't tell you. Nah, you'd guess, anyway... it turned out to be Donald Pleasance."

The Listener remains quite calm considering the high-tension of this revelation.

"You should've seen the sets they had. Incredible stuff. I read somewhere once —

I forget where, now — but they built a gigantic model of the heart, and it was the largest working model ever built. It was about forty feet wide and thirty feet high. I also read somewhere that the film's director, Richard Fleischer, said that the whole film took about a year to make. Apparently, one of the biggest problems they had making it was using the wires for the actors to appear as if they're swimming around. Underwater, like, know what I mean? Anyway, with these actors suspended about twenty or thirty feet in the air, pretending to be swimming about, the whole thing became quite dangerous. You see, in order to keep the wires sort of hidden — especially with all those studio lights — they wiped the wires with acid. That way they didn't reflect light. Anyway, what happened was that the acid weakened some of these wires and they kept snapping."

The Listener raises an eyebrow to show that he's impressed with this information.

"You've heard of Richard Fleischer, haven't you? You know... the director. Well, he directed *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* for Disney back 1954. You must know it, it was the one with Kirk Douglas, James Mason and the "Nautilus." Well, anyway he did that one and both films — *20,000 Leagues Under*

*know*. Did you ever see George Pal's *The Time Machine*? Oh, well, David Duncan did the script for that."

The Listener looks up at the ceiling, as if searching the corners of his mind for a memory of *The Time Machine*.

"Did I tell you that the guys who did the special effects on *Fantastic Voyage* — L. B. Abbot, Art Cruickshank and Emil Kosa Jr — did most of the effects for Irwin Allen, he did *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Towering Inferno*, as well as the *Lost in Space* and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* tv series. Come on, you must have seen at least one of them? Oh, well."

**Other films about miniaturised people were planned.**

The Listener looks away, now feeling as if his life is incomplete.

"I wonder what ever happened to those other films that they were going to make? You know, other films that feature 'miniature people' like *Fantastic Voyage*. There was supposed to have been *The Micronauts*, one of those multi-million dollar epics. Hey, did you know that an early title for *Fantastic Voyage* was *Microscopia*? They were also going to make *Cold War in a Country Garden*, if you remember. Now *that* could've been really good! Oh, by the way, did you notice James Brolin as one of the tech-



*the Sea* and *Fantastic Voyage*, I mean — are similar in many ways, don't you think? Sorry, that's right, you missed *Fantastic Voyage*, didn't you? The film was based on a story by Otto Klement and Jerome Bixby — which was later novelised, you know, turned into a book by Isaac Asimov. Jerome Bixby also wrote *The Mirror, Mirror, By Any Other Name, Day of the Dove* and *Requiem for Methuselah* episodes for *Star Trek*. Oh, you didn't see those either, eh? The guy who adapted Klement and Bixby's story was David Duncan. David Duncan, you

nicians in *Fantastic Voyage*? Sorry, that's right, you didn't see the film. Well, anyway, he appeared as one of the technicians. He later turned up in *Westworld*, you know — one of the two guys, the one that got shot. Hey, did you ever see *Westworld*? Now that was good. You see, there's this huge, futuristic pleasure resort and... Hey, here's our station. Come on."

As the train doors open, the Listener turns to his pal and says: "Now I remember *Fantastic Voyage*! Yeah, I've seen it before!" ●



Opposite: The crew of the miniaturised sub. Above: The special effects were by L.B. Abbot, Art Cruikshank and Emil Kosa Jr. Below: The poster.

FOUR MEN AND ONE WOMAN ON  
THE MOST FANTASTIC, SPECTACULAR  
AND TERRIFYING JOURNEY  
OF THEIR LIVES ...



# FANTASTIC VOYAGE

A CINEMASCOPE PICTURE COLOUR BY DE LUCA

STARRING STEPHEN BOYD · RAQUEL WELCH  
EDMOND O'BRIEN · DONALD PLEASANCE  
ARTHUR O'CONNELL · WILLIAM REDFIELD  
AND ARTHUR KENNEDY

PRODUCED BY SAUL DAVID · DIRECTED BY RICHARD FLEISCHER  
SCREENPLAY BY HARRY KLEINER · ADAPTED BY DAVID DUNCAN  
BASED ON A STORY BY OTTO KLEMENT · AND JAY LEWIS BIXBY  
MUSIC BY LEONARD ROSENMAN