

# THE HUMANOID

Rather than present a straightforward review of Columbia's current science fantasy offering *The Humanoid*, *Starburst* has come up with a batch of rare production drawings from the early planning stages of the film and together with a review from *Starburst* regular Tony Crawley, presents an exclusive look at how the planned version differs from the final movie.



The other evening I was sitting having a quiet drink with some contributors to **Starburst**.

One of them, a gent prone to such misfortunes as facing a pizza after seeing **The Incredible Melting Man**, eating spaghetti after **Squirm** and developing a neck swelling after **The Manitou**, had a new tale of woe.

Apparently he'd had another crack at a fantasy film script (his previous attempt is a story for another day). The plot concerned an organic UFO landing in the Lake District, with the media descending on the incident, and being turned into edible

fungus. (I think the intent was a somewhat humorous end product).

He sent the script to the head of an American international picture company who had been interested in his previous work.

Much to his surprise (being an unassuming Australian sort), he was delighted to receive a positive reaction, and an invitation to discuss the storyline further with a visiting executive at Pinewood studios.

Upon arrival, he was asked if he could turn it into a rip-off of **Animal House**.

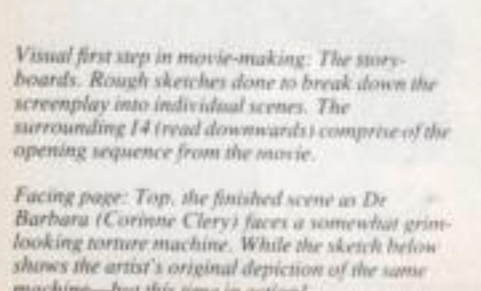
Which brings us very nicely to **The Humanoid**, the new Italian science fiction

movie.

Following the success of the syndicated **Thief of Baghdad** strip produced for Columbia Pictures (see **Starburst** 7), moves were made towards a similar project for **The Humanoid**. Countless storyboards, sketches, stills and synopses were handed to **Starburst** for our perusal, along with a screening of the finished film.

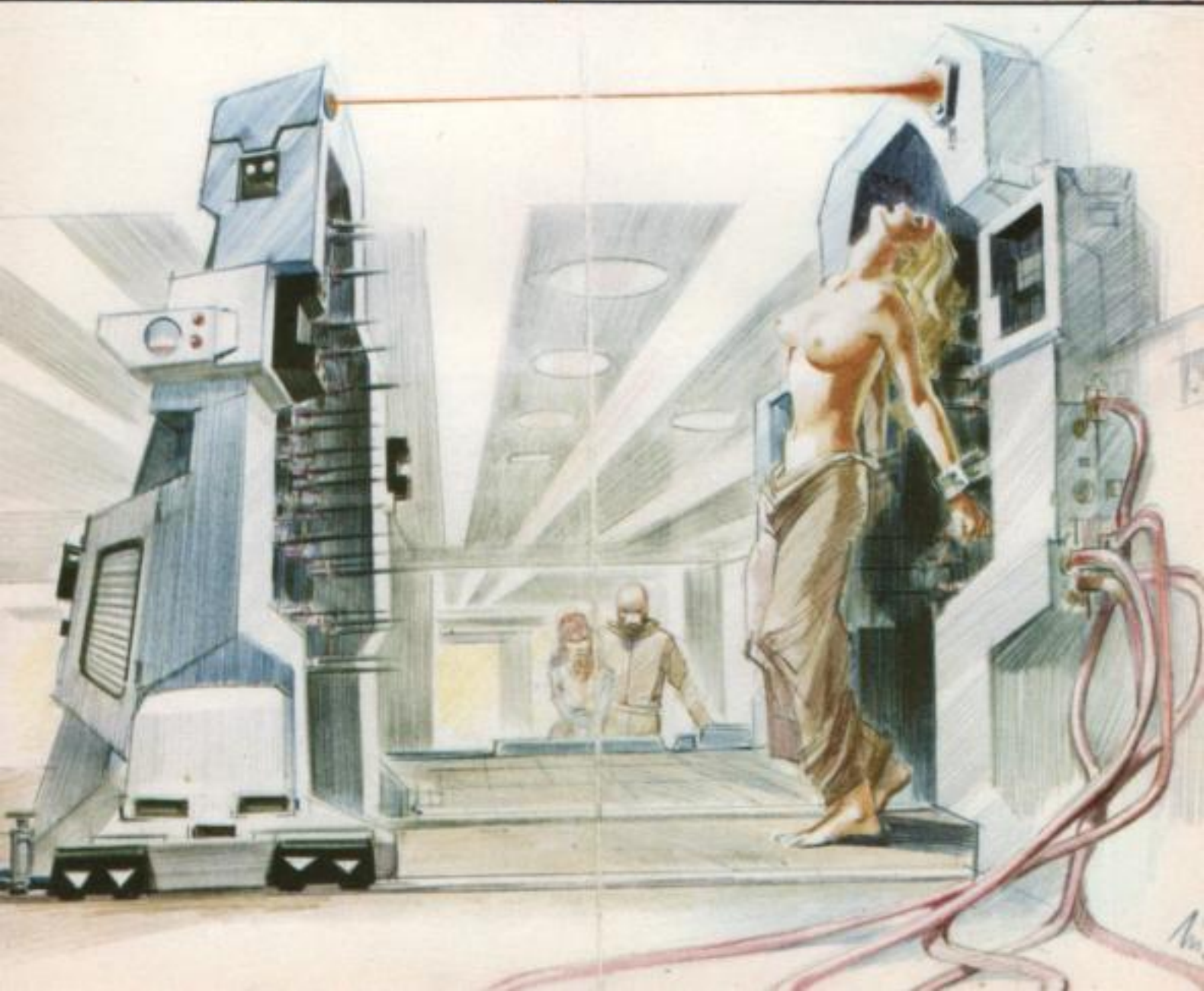
And so with the fantastic material released to us, it seemed an ideal chance to look at an area of movie making other than the favourite of special effects.

It would appear that **Cosmos King** (the Italian title for the movie) has an origin



Visual first step in movie-making: The storyboards. Rough sketches done to break down the screenplay into individual scenes. The surrounding 14 (read downwards) comprise of the opening sequence from the movie.

Facing page: Top, the finished scene as Dr Barbara (Corinne Clery) faces a somewhat grim-looking torture machine. While the sketch below shows the artist's original depiction of the same machine—but this time in action!



similar to our unfortunate **Starburst** contributor's story. For, among the papers, sketches and prints we received was what must have been the original synopsis.

It tells us that a sailor is shipwrecked and cast ashore on a supposedly deserted island. But he soon discovers it inhabited by a scientist bent on revenge against his old associates. The scientist intends to change the sailor into a being different to normal men, with increased strength and an animal rage, and set the being on his enemies.

A familiar plot? Could it be that Merope Films of Rome intended to cash in on the expected success of the **Island of Dr Moreau**

re-make, in the same way another Italian company had intended with **Queen Kong**, hot on the tail of the **King Kong** remake?

Whether that was the case or not, plans were (fortunately) interrupted by the timely release of **Star Wars**. You can almost hear the voice of Merope shout out "Setta it in space!"

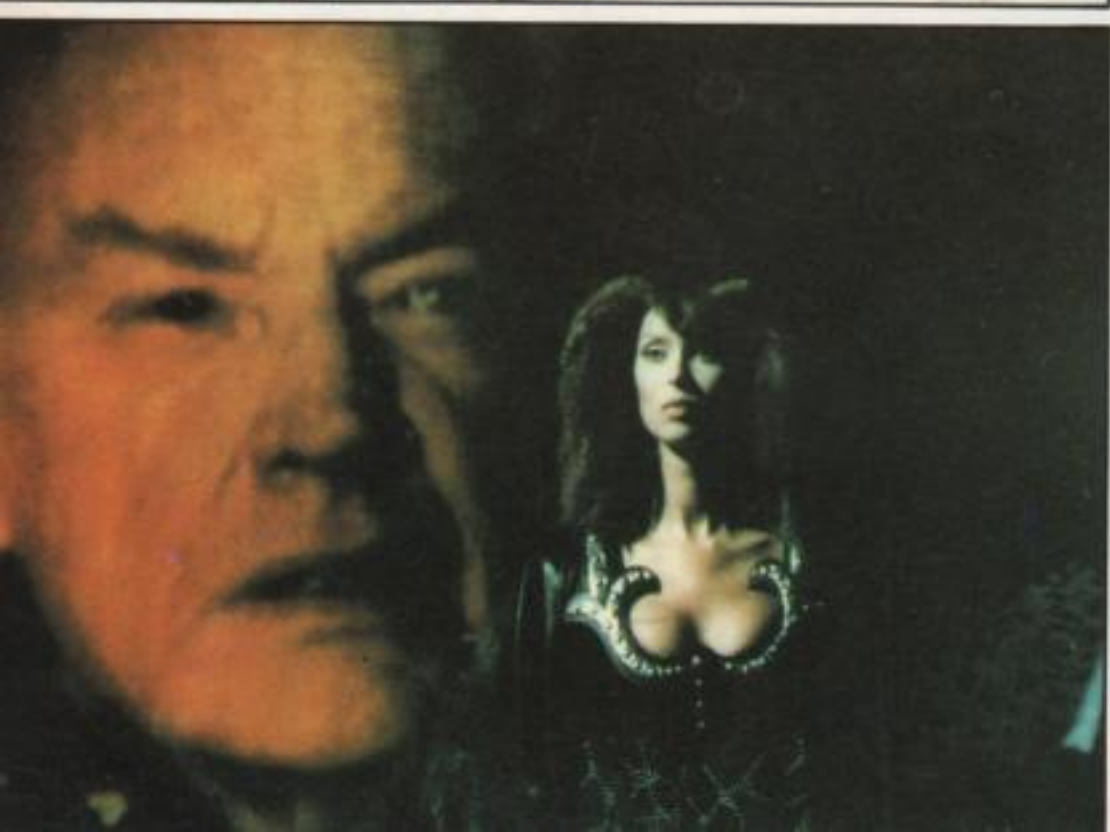
So the shipwrecked sailor becomes a star ship-wrecked pilot, the sea becomes space, the island a planet, the manimal a humanoid, and there you have it . . . **The Star War of Dr Moreau**.

But, still no real criticism. After all, had not the Italian-produced Dollars/Eastwood

movies made more than ten years earlier been almost direct swipes of Kurosawa's excellent samurai films starring Toshiro Mifune?

Re-makes, follow-ups and stolen or borrowed themes have worked many times over the world. Hammer's (official) Universal-inspired boom saved a whole genre of cinema, for instance.

And, with their four million dollar budget, Merope could hardly be accused of a *cheap* rip-off. But does it work? No, Richard Kiel, who stars as the science fiction Frankenstein creature, can hardly be blamed for seeing a great potential in the



film (see our interview next month), after all he can hardly speak a word of Italian, and we'll never know what ended up on the cutting room floor. But, even if you *haven't* seen *Star Wars*, you'll find little to enjoy beyond the special effects.

The biggest disappointment is that it isn't a cheap exploitation. It's an expensive one, wasting talented actors (Richard Kiel, Barbara Bach, Arthur Kennedy), Ennio (Dollars) Morricone music and a great deal of above average effects and pre-production work.

Worse yet, it was made with the American/English audience in mind, rather

than a home (Italian) market movie.

Even Sensurround would be hard pressed to save it, for despite the talent and money, the key thing it lacks is imagination.

We seem to be living in an age where a solid script and good direction takes second place to the big dollar special effects.

**Superman the Movie** was a perfect example. The most expensive star, the most expensive film, yet the most disappointing plot holes—especially noticeable in its time travel "solution" and short-sighted Kryptonian scientists.

So—but *moreso*—suffered **The Humanoid**. However, over the next few

pages we'd like to display some of the more interesting facets of the film, so that should you see the movie you might not dismiss it as just a cheap rip-off of *Star Wars* and criticise everyone connected with the film. Instead, pity the man who took such an amount of potentially great material, but didn't have a fraction of the imagination needed to realise it.

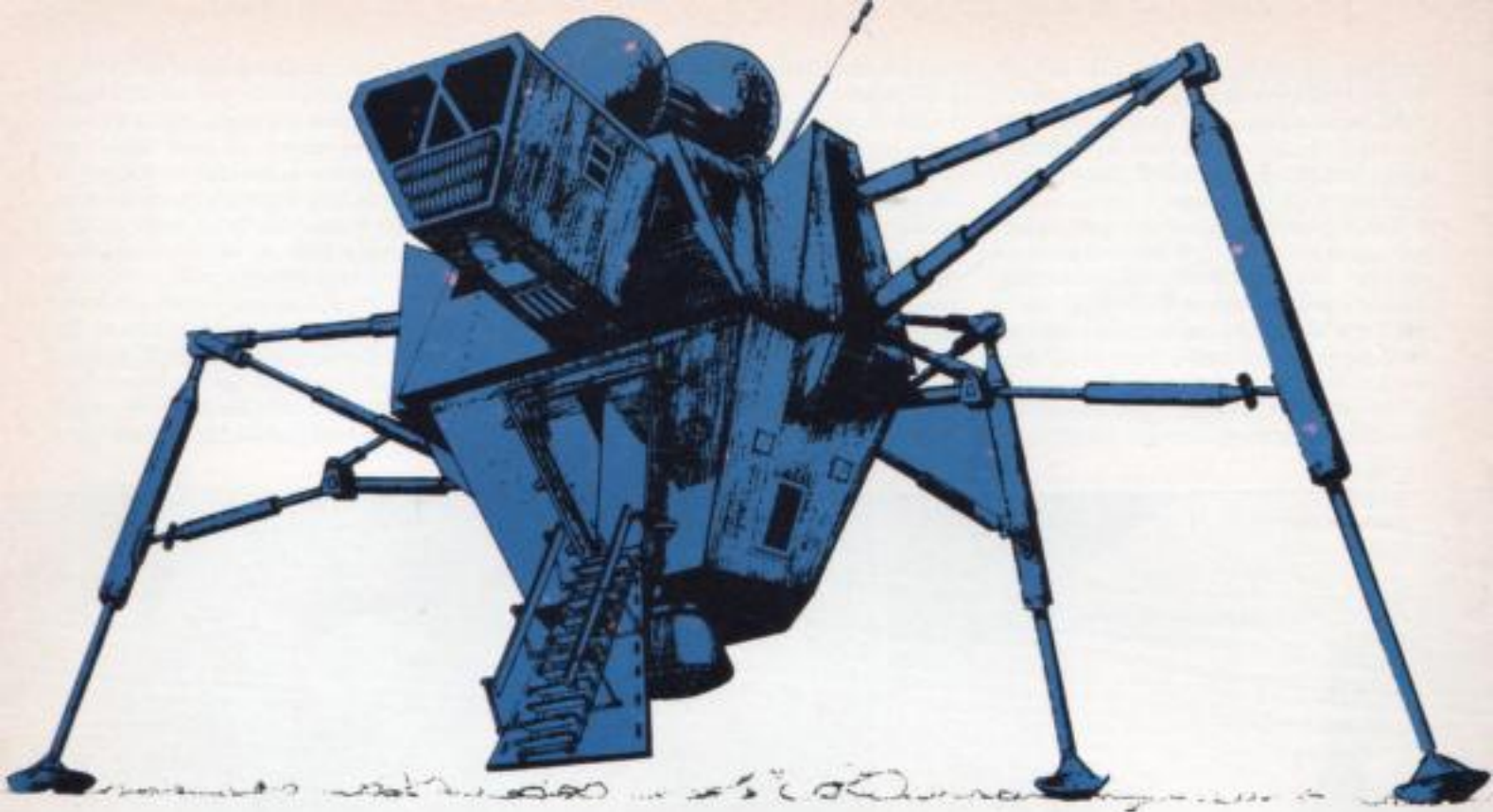
Maybe it's about time movie producers were reminded that their audiences *are* intelligent thinking human beings, who can only be sold publicity hype a few times before they dismiss the whole of cinema and settle for the free movies on television. ●



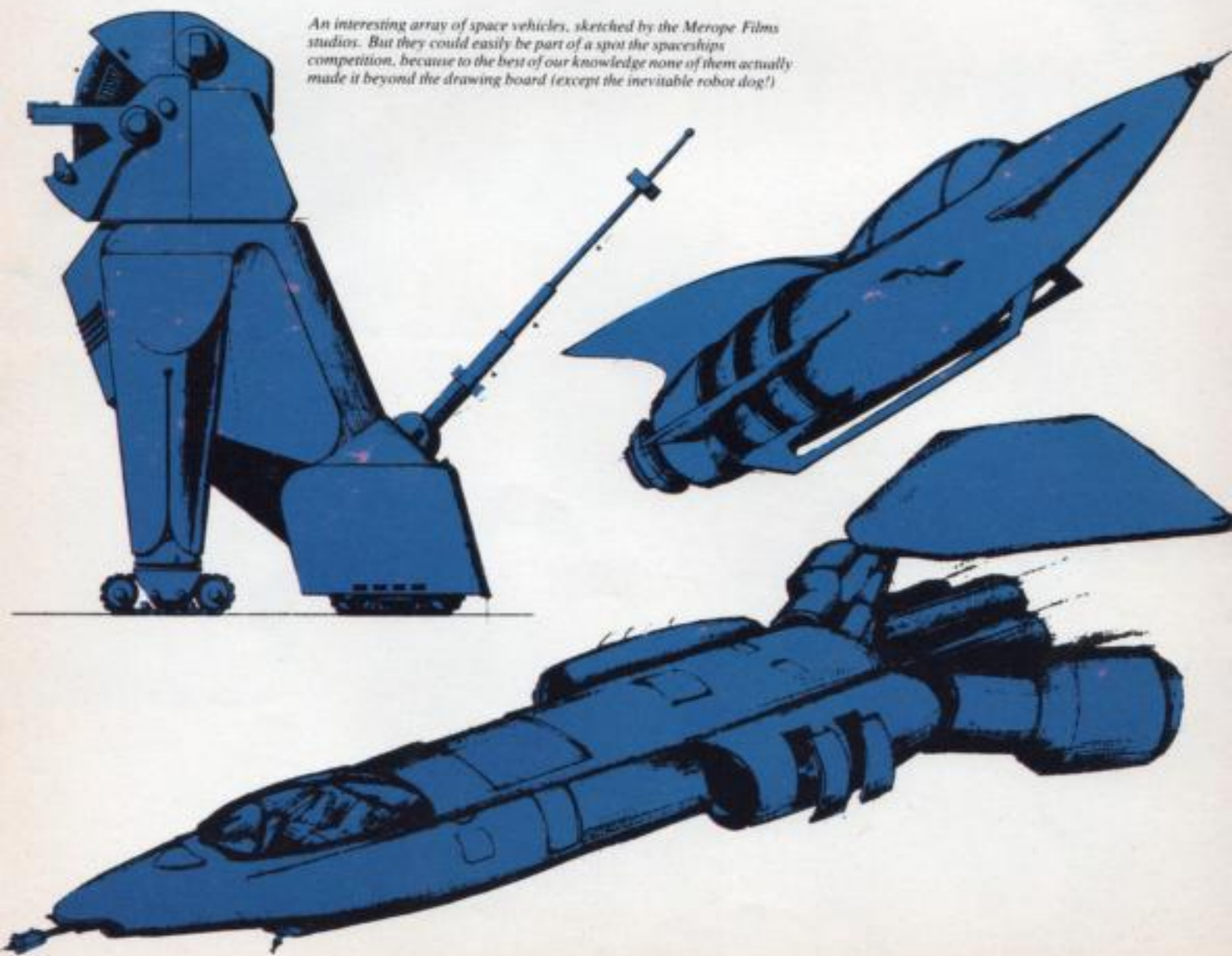
No prizes for guessing the originator for the Humanoid villain. But, *Humanoid* supplies the face behind the mask of *Lord Greed*.



Six scenes from the finished film (reviewed on page 27) featuring the laser-arrow shooting archers, Barbara Bach and Arthur Kennedy below (the bad guys), Richard Kiel and Corinne Clery centre (the good guys), an action scene and two more shots of the lovely Ms Bach.



*An interesting array of space vehicles, sketched by the Merope Films studios. But they could easily be part of a spot the spaceships competition, because to the best of our knowledge none of them actually made it beyond the drawing board (except the inevitable robot dog!)*



# HUMANOID

Review by Tony Crowley

Since *Star Wars* changed the face of the motion picture industry almost two years ago, every one and his father has leaped upon the briskly-moving handwagon to produce science fantasy fodder. The result is a deluge of good, bad and indifferent movies pouring into our cinemas from around the world. Even with Italy's latest offering, *The Humanoid*, starring Richard Kiel, George Lucas has little to worry about.

The mixture is the same as before. As with most science fantasy product made outside the upper Hollywood echelons (with the obvious exception of the shameless *Battlestar Galactica*), *The Humanoid* appears to be another *Star Wars* clone. George Lucas rejigged a bit. Not much.

Though not as shaggy, Richard Kiel is very much the Chewbacca of this particular space-opera. And his friends and foes are very familiar, indeed.

For Prince Leia read Corinne Clery's Barbara heroine, clearly more shapely than Carrie Fisher. For Han Solo read Leonard Mann's security chief, Nik, basically half-Han and half-Luke. For C3PO and R2-D2 read Marco Yeh's Tom-Tom, a Tibetan youngster with what might be called De Palmian powers, and Kiel's robodog, Kim, a metallic canine figure that messes the floor when it's unduly alarmed. A nervous malfunction, perhaps.

The only real switch, if switch it be, is that

the evil forces are both male and female. For Peter Cushing read Arthur Kennedy's mad scientist, Kraspin, rescued from his sentence in *The House of Lethargy* by Barbara Bach's Lady Agatha of the planet Noxon. And for Darth Vader, read Ivan Rassimov as Graal, alias The Brother of the Night, alias the leader of the fiendish Nurek rebels. And for the plot, don't read on—it's more muddling on paper than it is (almost) on screen. But we'll give it a try.

After yet another of those futuristic nuclear set-tos, which all good sf insists we will suffer, Earth is now known as Metropolis; so is its capital city. Our old planet has been the solar system's peaceful fulcrum for centuries under the rule of The Elder.

Lady Agatha has a touch of Countess Dracula about her, remaining forever young, if not from the blood of virgin lasses, then from a similar youth serum discovered by Kraspin. No wonder she rescued him... He, though, is far more into experimentation about the mutation of human beings. He needs earth's supply of K-element—or Kappa—to continue his foul deeds. Graal and his Nureks are sent to get it—and kill the lab assistant who turned in demented Kraspin to the law and order boys.

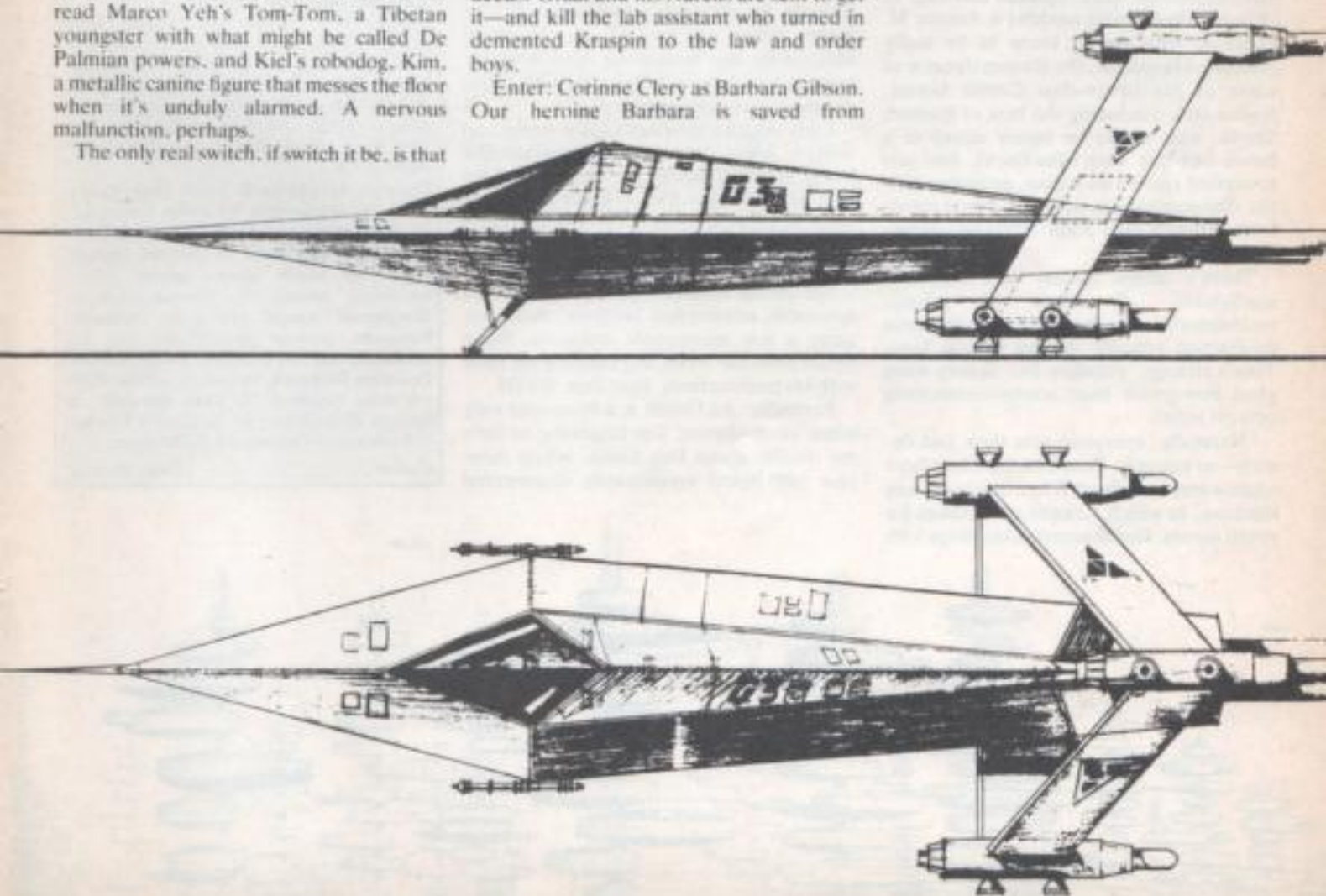
Enter: Corinne Clery as Barbara Gibson. Our heroine Barbara is saved from

annihilation by her prodigiously metaphysically-talented young friend, Tom-Tom. The devastation of the Nurek attack alerts Metropolis to the awful fact that war has returned to outer-space. The Elder makes plans accordingly. Nik, head of Security, is ordered to capture Kraspin and thwart all further attacks from The Brother of the Night. Not easy. But Nik proves to be the Mann for the job, so to speak.

But where I hear you all asking—where is Richard Kiel?

He's due any minute now in the guise of bearded, mild-mannered Stellar Colony Inspector Golob of Metropolis, accompanied by his ever-faithful canine robot, Kip. Unfortunately there is a malfunction in their spaceship and they have to make a forced landing on the oily surface of one of Noxon's stagnant seas.

And that's how Richard Kiel's happy-go-lucky giant of a space man becomes the first victim of Kraspin's plans for creating humanoids endowed with superhuman strength and capable of resisting all energy weapons. The scientist lets fly with a nuclear projectile. Big bang! And once the dust and



debris have settled, Golob is... a humanoid. Beardless and hefty with it.

This particular transformation is something of a non-starter, of course. It would have come off better if Richard Kiel was not 7ft 2ins high to begin with. He looks as if he could knock over planets even before he's Kraspinised.

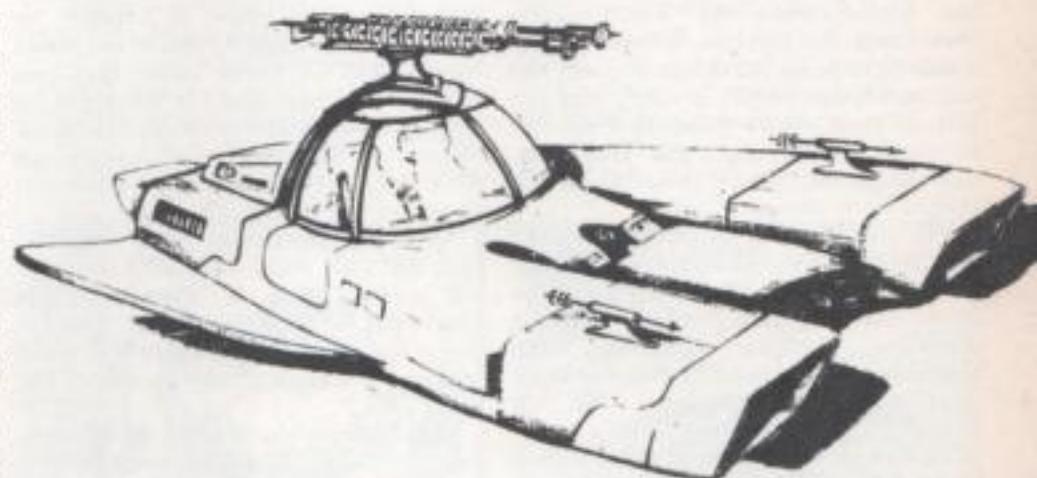
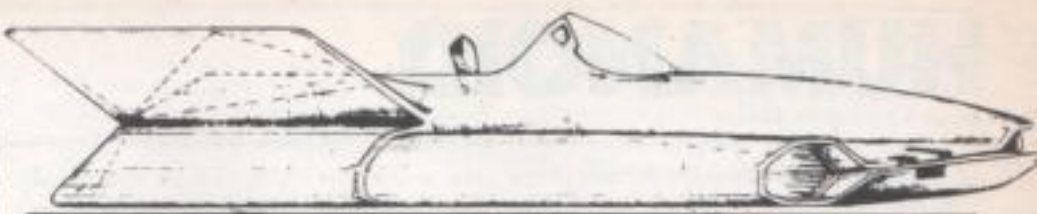
His limitless strength and aggressiveness (well, how would you feel about such treatment?) is subdued by narcotic gas and he's captured by Kraspin's men. In his Noxon lab, the noxious villain opens up one of Golob's wrists and implants a remote-control sensor. Golob's is now in his power. The humanoid's first test will be to return to Metropolis and eliminate The Elder—and anyone else rash enough to get in his way—and destroy the central government.

In places, the film is rather better than it may sound here. Basically though it's *Frankenstein Meets Countess Dracula and Star Wars*.

The credits read like an Italian menu. The script, covering so many possible genres at once, stems from Adriana Bolzoni, Garry Rusoff and Aldo Lado. George B. Lewis, who directs, is really Aldo Lado, himself. He shot the film at the Dear studios in Rome, with locations in Israel, the Canary Isles and, so we're informed, Moon Valley in South Africa. Supervising the varied effects (process work, opticals and bags of occasionally-obvious models) is Antony M. Dawson, who we all know to be really Antonio Margheriti, the Roman director of some of the better-class Gothic horror, Italian-style (including the best of Barbara Steele, who would be better suited to a movie like this than Miss Bach). And just to remind you it's all Italian, no matter how the dialogue sounds now, the music comes from Rome's own John Williams—Ennio Morricone.

There's action aplenty with starships, starfighters, all kinds of galactic mechanicalia—as shown in our exclusive production artwork. Battles include Tom-Tom's strange, guardian-like figures using glass bows with laser arrows—something new, at least.

Naturally, everyone gets their just deserts—or rewards. Poor Corinne Clery faces a fate worse than Pearl White inside a spikey machine, in which Kraspin now makes his youth serum. Golob smashes buildings with



Above: Two angles of a *Humanoid* landspeeder sketch, and below: an artist's impression of the futuristic city of Metropolis.

the ease of a rampaging *King Kong*, but fortunately soon comes under the extraordinary powers of young Tom-Tom.

Together they thwart the evil plans of Kraspin by destroying the rocket full of Kappa which will turn all the citizens of Metropolis into humanoids. Golob simply tears the nuclear warhead off it with a flick or two of his enormous mitts.

Lady Agatha runs out of her serum and withers away into a *Countess-cum-She* finale. Kraspin dies in the heat-blast of his own deadly rocket. Graal simply disappears when he dies—all that remains of him is his armour. And well, for Italy, it's not at all bad, if you haven't seen *Star Wars* first.

For all the mayhem, effects, rip-offs and inevitable, unintended laughter, there are quite a few memorable moments. None better than the robot dog messing the floor with his malfunctions. Beat that, R2-D2.

Footnote: As Golob is a humanoid only when clean-shaven, I'm beginning to have my doubts about Dez Skinn, whose nine-year old beard mysteriously disappeared

last week. If it doesn't grow back soon, I'll start mailing in my manuscripts!

#### **The Humanoid (1978)**

Richard Kiel (as Golob), Barbara Bach (*Lady Agatha*), Corinne Clery (*Barbara Gibson*), Arthur Kennedy (*Kraspin*), Leonard Mann (*Nik*), Ivan Rassimov (*Graal*), Marco Yeh (*Tom-Tom*), Massimo Serata (*Great Brother*), with Vanentino Venantini, Vito Fornai, Giuseppe Quaglip, Attilio D'Isa

Directed by George B. Lewis (Aldo Lado), produced by Giorgio Venturini, screenplay by Adriana Bolzoni, Aldo Lado and Garry Rusoff, photographed by Silvana Ippoliti, edited by Mario Morre, special effects supervisor Antony M. Dawson (Antonio Margheriti) special effects by Armando Vulcaudo, process photography Jan W. Jacobson, opticals Studio 4, Studio Vazzini, Ermanno Diamante, models by Emilio Ruiz, costumes designed by Luca Sabatelli. A Meropie Film (Rome) production for Titurus. UK release by Columbia-EMI-Warner.

Colour.

Time: 99 mins.

