

# LOST IN SPACE

Feature by Richard Hollis

In 1964, when Gene Roddenberry submitted his story treatment for *Star Trek* to the CBS tv network the bosses turned the show down because they had already bought a science fiction series for the new season. The series was *Lost in Space*, produced by Irwin Allen who had earlier created the highly successful *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* for the ABC tv network.

Allen started work on *Lost in Space* in 1964. At first he planned a television series of his enormously successful 1961 film *The Lost World* using the same cinema-to-tv principle that he utilised for *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*. Foiled by the failure to put this idea into practice Allen went ahead with a purpose-made tv pilot originally calling it *Space Family Robinson* and basing it on the stories published in the Gold Key comics of the same name. Irwin Allen's pilots are always vastly expensive and *Space Family Robinson* was no exception to the rule, laden with excellent special effects and model work, it told how the Robinson Family crash-land on an alien planet and encounter all sorts of dangers. The photography was by Winton Hoch, academy award winning cinematographer and cameraman on pre-

vious Irwin Allen features including the *Voyage* tv show.

The CBS television bosses loved it and the cast chosen for the pilot were given the go-ahead to feature in the series. The first season was to be made in black and white and consist of twenty-nine episodes, though Irwin Allen changed the title to *Lost in Space*.

Guy Williams already familiar to tv viewers as *Zorro*, in the Disney series of the same name, played Professor John Robinson. June Lockhart star of the *Lassie* films played Maureen, his wife. Angela Cartwright, fresh from her role as Brigitta in *The Sound of Music* played Penny. Marta Kristen played Judy and Billy Mumy, Disney tv child star played Will. Mark Goddard star of *A Rage to Live* portrayed Major Don West, a romantic interest for Judy.

Allen, who involves himself in every aspect of his own tv shows, also added an "environmental control robot" a fascinating machine operated by Bob May with voice supplied by Dick Dupell and a new member of the crew Dr Zachary Smith played by Jonathan Harris. Irwin Allen

described the actor as, "the United Nations of the show world. He can portray any nationality and make you think he is a native of the country in question". Jonathan Harris was already well-known to viewers as Bradford Webster, Michael Rennie's assistant in the tv series *The Third Man*. So with the pilot supplying the adventures for the first five stories in the series (the pilot itself was never originally screened) *Lost in Space* went into production.

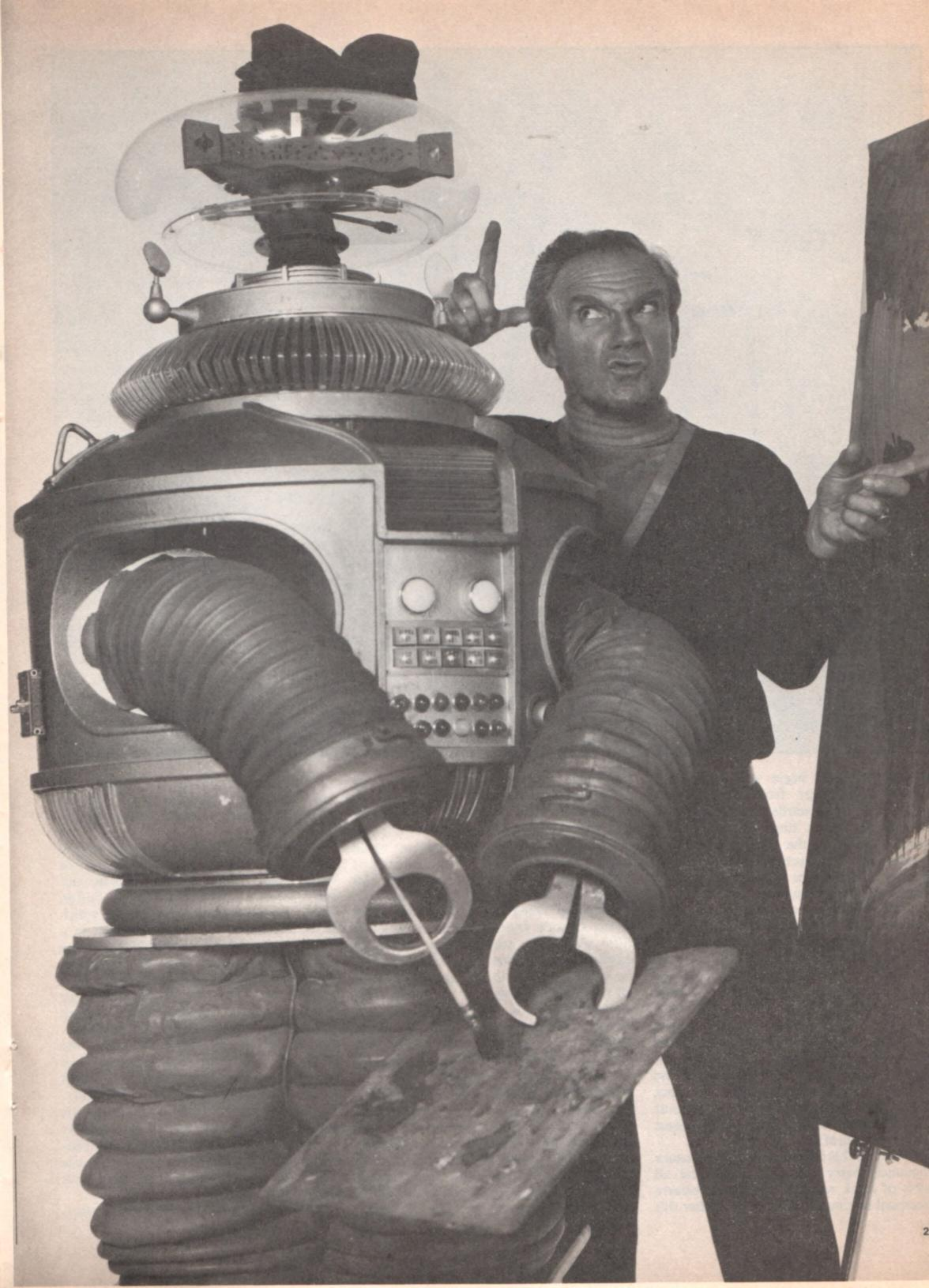
The year is 1997 and the first episode *The Reluctant Stowaway* shows the Robinson family, as a result of Earth's overpopulation being chosen to become the first pioneers into outer space. They are checked to be medically sound for the trip by Colonel Smith (the title only later became *Dr Smith*) and so happily board their spacecraft, a saucer-shaped, sophisticated rocket that will initiate man's thrust into space. The craft is called the Jupiter 2 and for most of the five year journey to Alpha Centauri the family are to be in a state of suspended animation. To pilot the spacecraft, Earth scientists install a robot, a fully functioning automaton that will act as a kind of "HAL 2000" checking on the family's state of health throughout the voyage. But Colonel Smith, an undercover agent for a foreign power, re-programmes the mechanical man to interfere with the ship's guidance control system causing it to malfunction after liftoff. It is because he is finalising the details of this sabotage that he becomes trapped on board when the Jupiter 2 blasts off. Once in space Dr Smith tries to prevent the renegade robot from accomplishing its task, but in the attempt the Jupiter 2 becomes helplessly lost in space. To try to regain control of the spaceship, Smith awakens the Robinsons from their frozen tubes.

Because of Dr Smith's continual interference in the voyage and his attempts to return to Earth, the Jupiter 2 crashlands on an uncharted planet. In fact this is a deliberate step taken by Major West in an effort to save Professor Robinson who is trying to repair the exterior hull of the spaceship. Consequently the spaceship remains grounded for repairs for the duration of the first season. This allows for some really solid adventures which gave the series a popular following. These first few episodes are exceptionally strong and the description "serial" could be used here rather than series, as each week a new

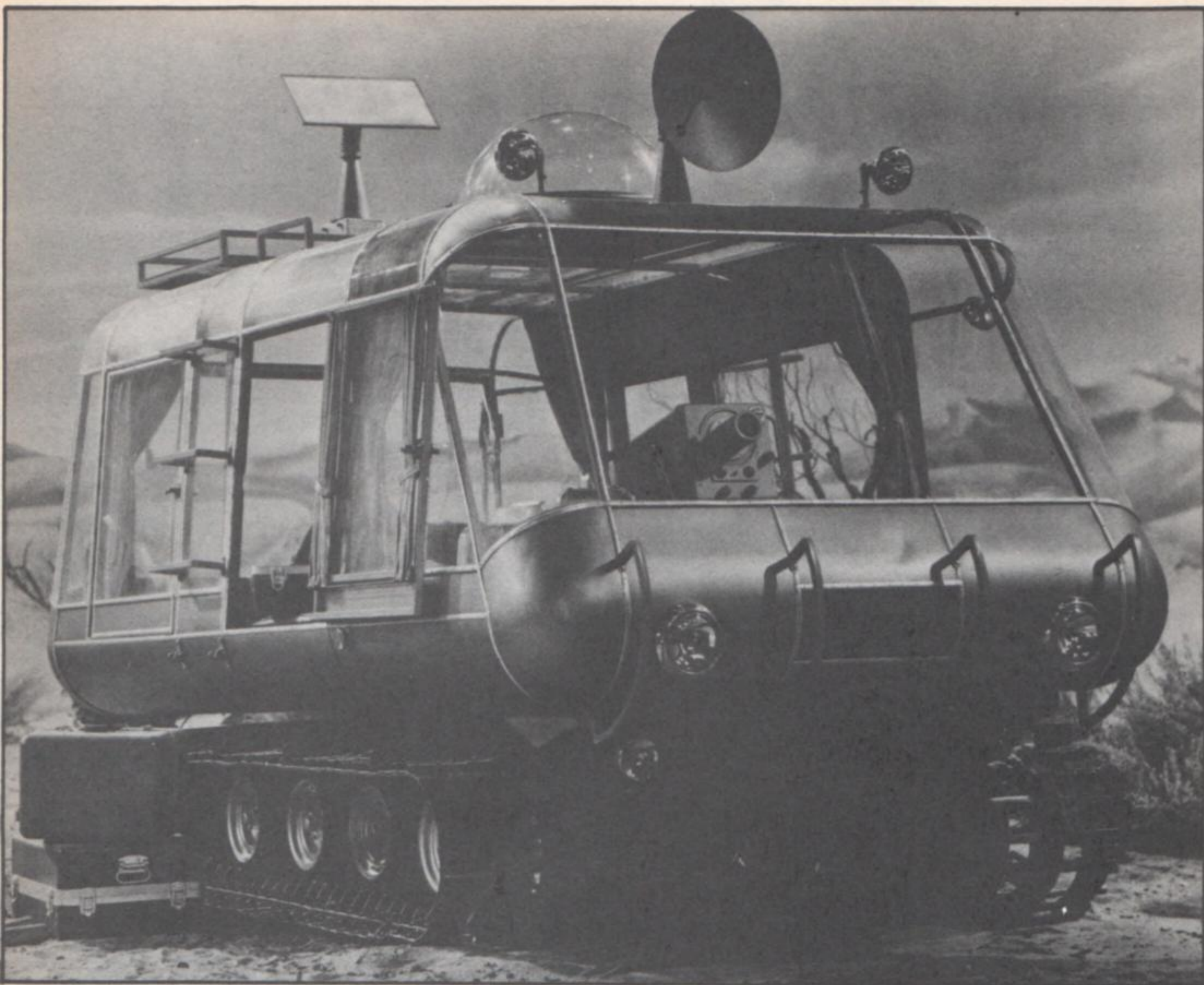


Above: Verda, the debt-collector from space (Dee Hartford) was so popular that she appeared in both "The Android Machine" and "Revolt of the Andoids" in the second season. Opposite: The real stars of the show were Dr Smith and the robot as this publicity still shows.









adventure would begin with some hair-raising cliff-hanger from the previous episode. And the words "To be continued next week, same time, same channel" would appear at the conclusion of each instalment. This technique was used to greater advantage in the *Batman* tv series from the same studios.

After setting up an impenetrable force field around the grounded spaceship, the family construct their excursion vehicle, an amazing land tractor called the Chariot. (A working life-size version was built and could be driven on or off of the set.) With the Robinson family and Major West aboard, it trundles off across the planet to escape the incredible climate changes in the area where the Jupiter 2 crashlanded. Dr Smith refuses to go and remains behind with the robot and here we have a chance to witness the beginnings of a rapport between what would soon become the most popular duo in sf tv.

Whilst all this is going on, the Robinsons encounter hairy one-eyed giants and all sorts of freak weather conditions, bizarre electrical storms and frozen seas. After this

spectacular guided tour of the planet the viewers had to settle with adventures based in and around the Jupiter 2. The Chariot was used only occasionally, if at all, and considering the hostile environment made apparent in the first few episodes, the planet calmed down rather too suddenly. All subsequent threats seemed to stem from outer space. One excellent example of this is the episode entitled *Invaders from the Fifth Dimension*, when strange luminous creatures land on the unknown planet in a fantastic spacecraft designed - along with all the other hardware of the series - by the very talented team of designer/builders Robert Kinoshita and special effects experts L. B. (Bill) Abbott ASC and Howard Lydecker. Leith Stevens (composer for George Pal's sf classics *War of the Worlds*, *When Worlds Collide* and *Destination Moon*) supplied the atmospheric music and the story relates how the invaders want Dr Smith's brain to replace one of their burnt-out computers. He manages to trick the aliens into settling for Will's mind instead and only Will's quick thinking saves him from disaster.

A well-written episode to establish Dr Smith's obvious intentions to risk the lives of the Robinsons, in order to save his own neck.

Other episodes in this first series worthy of mention are *My Friend Mr Nobody*, in which Penny meets a cosmic force, and *Wish Upon A Star*, directed by Sutton Roley, an incredible adventure in which Dr Smith discovers a strange helmet in a derelict spaceship. It is capable of granting the wearer a certain number of wishes. Using this magical device Dr Smith wins himself back into the affections of the family, but John Robinson has to banish him from the Jupiter 2 because the helmet's powers create greediness amongst the Robinsons. Undaunted Smith returns to the derelict spaceship and using the helmet wishes himself into a life of luxury. Surrounded by all kinds of opulence, he wishes for a servant to wait on him. A door at the misty depths of the spacecraft opens and the helmet's original owner - a strange rubberoid alien - appears, to claim back its property.

In a two-part story entitled *The Keeper*,



Michael Rennie (*Day the Earth Stood Still*, 1951) stars as an alien, who arrives on the Robinson's planet in a gigantic spacecraft, collecting animals for an intergalactic zoo. In the first episode we discover how he tries to kidnap Will and Penny and cage them as examples of Earth creatures, but the constant battle to save them by the family wins his admiration and so he releases them. Unfortunately Dr Smith sees The Keeper's spacecraft as a chance to return to Earth. But in an attempt to work out the spaceship control panel he unwittingly releases all the caged animals - an amazing array of one-eyed monsters, flying bats, two-headed creatures, werewolves, a giant lizard and a monstrous spider. Together with Herman Stein's fabulous musical score, a section of the music from *Day the Earth Stood Still* featured in the episodes. In fact Michael Rennie's portrayal of The Keeper closely matched the cool intellectual Klattu of the 1951 film.

In *War of the Robots*, Will finds a disused robotoid (Robby from *Forbidden Planet*) and by repairing it unknowingly unleashes an evil power that is only just stopped in time by the Robinson's own faithful robot. By this time the robot was becoming an excellent foil for Dr Smith's witty remarks. An example of this from the episode, *The Raft*. Smith is addressing the robot about a large balloon outside the spacecraft.

**Smith:** Are you quite familiar with that bag of wind out there?

**Robot:** Quite familiar with bag of wind right here!

**Smith:** Indeed!

When the second series of *Lost in Space* appeared in 1966, it boasted 30 episodes all of which were in colour. The theme music, written by John Williams (*Earthquake*, *Towering Inferno*, *Superman*, etc.), remained the same although the credit sequence had altered slightly. The format was also the same, except in the opening episode the Jupiter 2 blasts off into space to escape the unknown planet's disintegration. This episode was directed by Nathan Juran as were other popular episodes during the series. Juran, who also directed Ray Harryhausen's *Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* and *First Men in the Moon*, had a good visual flair which became apparent in episodes *The Ghost Planet*, *Prisoners of Space*, *West of Mars*, and *Wreck of the Robot*. Paul Zastupnevich, an assistant to the producer designed the clothes worn by the cast. Zastupnevich was recently nominated for an Oscar for his costumes in Allen's *The Swarm*. The stories constantly pitted the Robinson's against all sorts of adversaries, futuristic powers and evil aliens, fuelled at first by Dr Smith's wicked intentions (although by now a much more subdued villainy) and then defeated by Will's moral determination for good to triumph over evil.

With episode four of the second season,

the Jupiter 2 had crash-landed on another uncharted planet not unlike the first in landscape and atmosphere. Certainly the special effects of the Jupiter 2 swooping low over the alien terrain were convincing though the landscape reminded one more of Monument Valley than the lush semi-vegetation world the stories finally took place in. The planet-sets took up one of the largest sound stages at 20th Century-Fox. All location work was filmed in Red Rock Canyon, some miles from Hollywood.

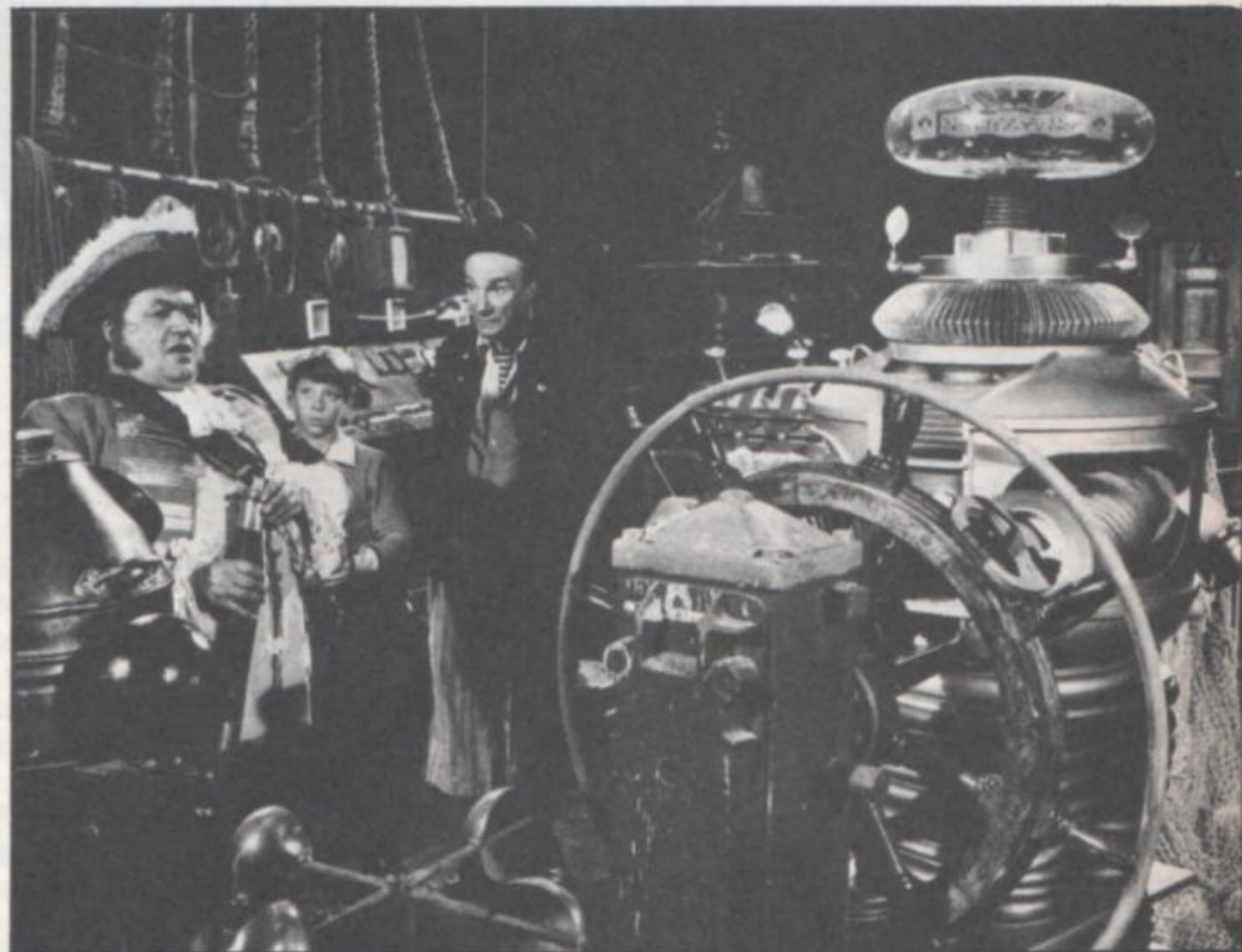
The second season of *Lost in Space* also 'unfortunately' introduced the buffoonery that was to alienate the more critical sf viewers and a silliness that the more ardent fans hoped would only be a short term dissention. But the tongue-in-cheek approach continued to rear its head in such episodes as *Space Circus*, *Curse of Cousin Smith*, *West of Mars*, *Space Vikings* and *The Astral Traveller*. The latter depicted Will and Dr Smith travelling back through time and space to 19th century Scotland, where the Doctor clashes with ghostly enemies of his ancestors.

By now the producers had thrown serious sf themes and in most cases logic out of the window. Dr Smith was the most popular character of the *Lost in Space* cast according to the fan mail, with the robot a close second. So if Dr Smith needed an ancient mariner's uniform or convict outfit, he would get one. This is known in show business as "theatrical licence" and featured prominently in the show.

With the commencement of the third season, *Lost in Space* had slipped slightly in the all-powerful Nielsen ratings, so

Irwin Allen gave the series a completely new look. The credits were changed, given a more streamline appearance with photos of the cast and John Williams added a new score. Gone were the cliff-hanger endings and viewers saw instead a compilation of next week's adventure. By now the main leads in the show, Guy Williams particularly, had complained to their agents about becoming secondary characters in the stories, not that this bad feeling affected the cast's behind-the-scenes relationships. However to keep the peace Irwin Allen re-directed the third season back towards family adventures. *Condemned of Space*, was the first of these which again featured Robby the Robot, this time as mechanical guard on a drifting prison ship. *Visit to a Hostile Planet* relates how the Jupiter 2 spirals back in time and lands on the Earth in the year 1947. Dr Smith decides to use the ever-present UFO scare in the local townspeople as a means of securing his chances to remain on Earth.

Probably the most far-fetched story of the third season was *Collision of the Planets*. Four space hippies are sent to destroy the Robinsons planet so they will become accepted by their own society. (A very topical subject in America at the time). Some of the space hippie's explosive chemicals fall into Dr Smith's hands turning him into a green-haired Samson. With the planet due to be destroyed, the Jupiter 2 sets off into space once more and all sorts of weird encounters take place. The family meet a creature that feeds on fear, before the Jupiter 2 plunges down and crashes on yet another alien world. Here



Opposite: *The Chariot* was a working, full-sized tractor which appeared in only a few episodes. Above: In the episode "Mutiny in Space" an insane space pirate, Admiral Zahrk, kidnaps Will (Billy Mumy) and Dr Smith (Jonathan Harris) and sails in search of his mutinous first mate.





Don West (Mark Goddard) and Dr Smith (Jonathan Harris) are framed and sent to the toughest prison in the Galaxy in the episode "Fugitives in Space". There they meet a criminal called Creech (Michael Conrad) who is planning to break out. So while Will and the robot are trying to free them, Don and Smith argue over whether to go along with Creech's escape plan.

they are forced to suffer evil female robots, a creature resembling the Metaluna mutant from *This Island Earth* and a fire-breathing dragon (footage from the AIP 1960 movie *Goliath and the Dragon*), Dr Smith turning the Jupiter 2 into a hotel called 'Smith's Happy Acres', an ice princess and a Mexican bandit who arrives via a comet and proceeds to threaten the Robinsons.

But in the last three episodes of the final season all kinds of strange alien creatures reared their heads. A survivor of a vast warrior race challenges the Robinsons to a battle in space. Dr Smith's interference causes a strange carrot creature to attempt turning the Robinsons into plants in *The Great Vegetable Rebellion* (He almost

succeeds when he transforms Dr Smith into a giant stalk of celery), and in *Junkyard in Space*, the Robinson Robot is captured on a strange world by a junk man who collects old space metal. But all is resolved in the end, the family are safe, the Jupiter 2 intact, the robot and Will united and only (as it should be) is Dr Smith unhappy with his lot.

And so ended the final episode of *Lost in Space*. By this time the cast were fighting an uphill battle against the fantastic adventures the writers kept dreaming up. A fourth season was not bought by CBS, so the sets were dismantled and the stars moved on to other things. In truth not much is heard of Guy Williams or Mark

Goddard. Marta Kristen married. Angela Cartwright after a spell in television commercials became Linda Williams in the comedy series *Make Room For Granddaddy*, and recently returned to the Irwin Allen fold to appear in his latest film, *Beyond the Poseidon Adventure*. Billy Mumy landed an ongoing role in the series *Sunshine*, a comedy drama made in 1975. June Lockhart moved into guest star roles. Irwin Allen went on to make *Land of the Giants*, a series by no means as popular as *Lost in Space* but containing some outstanding special effects. It only completed two seasons, so Allen moved back into feature film production with *The Poseidon Adventure*, the very popular *Towering*





Inferno and more recently *The Swarm*. Jonathan Harris' popularity on *Lost in Space* encouraged other producers to sign him up in guest star roles on *Ghost and Mrs Muir*, Rod Serling's *Night Gallery* and even as an eccentric pied piper in *Land of the Giants*. Since then his voice has been heard on Hanna-Barbera's *Banana Split* shows, as Dr Smith in an ABC Superstar movie cartoon show of *Lost in Space* which featured the adventures of the original crew's children, plus the robot and the Chariot, (all other voices were changed) and back in the flesh as Professor Issac Gampu in Filmation's *Space Academy* and most recently as the voice of Lucifer in *Battlestar Galactica*.

Compared to *Star Trek* - and it will continue to be - *Lost in Space* hardly ever came over as the kind of science fiction that would be accepted by the sf intellectual. Certainly the programme never suffered because of it. In fact in America today an ever-expanding fan club has sprung up in support of *Lost in Space*. And when the series first appeared, quite a lot of merchandise accompanied it. Aurora hobby kits produced three models from the show. In Japan various models of the Jupiter 2,

Above: In "*The Sky Pirate*" Will is kidnapped and later befriended by a space pirate, Tucker (Albert Salmi). Below: Will and his metallic friend pose for a studio publicity photograph.



the Chariot and the robot were also marketed. A series of gum cards appeared in 1966 featuring the first season and as already mentioned, 1973 heralded the premiere of an animated tv special of *Lost in Space*, with Jonathan Harris as the voice of Smith, picking up the part perfectly from where he left off in 1968.

*Lost in Space* was criticised in print recently as the worst space programme ever, a very unfair statement. On the contrary no other sf show of the sixties was so well-made and so technically exciting.

#### **Lost in Space (1965-1968)**

Guy Williams (*Prof John Robinson*), June Lockhart (*Maureen Robinson*), Mark Goddard (*Don West*), Marta Kristen (*Judy Robinson*), Billy Mumy (*Will Robinson*), Angela Cartwright (*Penny Robinson*), Jonathon Harris (*Dr Zachary Smith*), Bob May (*Robot*).

Executive producer and creator Irwin Allen, Story Editor Anthony Wilson, Special effects by L. B. Abbott and Howard Lydecker, Makeup by Ben Nye, Music by John Williams, Directors of Photography Gene Polito and Frank Carson, Costumes by Paul Zastupnevich. 83 episodes (54 in colour).