

The *Time Tunnel* heroes with their romantic interest pose for publicity

IT seemed as if Irwin Allen could do no wrong. He had a mega successful show with *Voyage to the Bottom Of The Sea* and a second one proving just as popular, *Lost in Space*. He endeavoured to develop and bring to the screen a third series to complement the other two. He produced *The Time Tunnel*, and initially it seemed as if he had hit the nail on the head again. One common misconception worth correcting here is that many people believe this show was produced in 1968. In fact it was made and aired in 1966, but the laboratory sequen-

ces were set in 1968.

The basic premise, most of which is explained in the first episode, *Rendezvous with Yesterday*, goes something like this. A top secret government operation is in danger of having its funding stopped. A touch of the Gerry Andersons creeps in as we see the official Washington car disappear down a secret hatch in the middle of the desert and arrive at the gargantuan underground complex that houses the Time Tunnel. The two brilliant physicists, Tony Newman and Doug Philips are having some trouble ironing out the bugs, but

when they learn of the plan to finish the project they realize something must be done! Late at night Tony Newman sneaks into the Tunnel complex and transports himself back in Time. He proves that Time travel is possible but realizes the inadequacies of the machine he has created when the Tunnel cannot rescue him.

To make matters worse, he has landed up on the SS Titanic on its voyage to disaster. Armed with a copy of a newspaper proclaiming the sinking of the ship, Doug Philips also transports through Time in order to try and convince the ship's captain to take some evasive action. Needless to say, it does not work, and both get locked up as stowaways. Just as disaster strikes and the Titanic begins to sink, the Time Tunnel team obtain enough control over their equipment to transfer the pair through Time. This time Tony and Doug find themselves in a rocket destined for the Moon!

And so the die is cast — each week the two physicists find themselves in new and dangerous situations. The Time Tunnel team try to rescue them, but only ever seem to succeed in placing them in even more danger ready for the next week's episode. In essence, what Irwin Allen came up with was a potentially endless well of stories set against historical backgrounds. While the early adventures seemed to be living up to this expectation the writing staff seemed to run out of ideas shortly after half way and suddenly the series plumbed the depths of comic-book material.

## Promising Start

The series began with excellent production values. Irwin Allen sank a lot of money into the show's sets, without doubt the actual laboratory set, which houses the Time Tunnel, is one of the best seen in any of his shows. A decision had been taken by Allen that, to enhance the look of his series, stock footage from epic historical films would be used. This worked very well in many episodes, especially in *Revenge of the Gods*, which featured the story of the Trojan Horse. Unfortunately



The impressive Time Tunnel control room set

ideas ran very thin and some have blamed it on the lack of stock footage from which to take ideas. Others have laid the blame fairly and squarely with the series' producer/creator.

Was Irwin Allen a creative genius or was he a difficult eccentric? In recent interviews, the writers of the series have independently told how Allen did not want to bog the episodes down with what he called 'quibbling'. The writers called it dramatic exposition and character building. All Allen, it seems, was interested in producing was a 'running and jumping' show — the television analogue of a

comic book story.

The show featured five regular actors in the principle rôles. The Time travellers Tony Newman and Doug Philips were portrayed by James Darren and Robert Colbert respectively. The watchability of the show, even after its descent into silliness is probably due to the charisma of and chemistry between these two leading men. Darren went on to star with William Shatner in **TJ Hooker** and is currently preparing to direct an episode of **Quantum Leap**. Back at the Time Tunnel, coordinating everything and seemingly finding new ways to mess things up week

after week, were General Kirk, Dr Ann McGregor and Dr Ray Swain. These were played with equal conviction by Whit Bissell, Lee Meriwether and John Zaramba.

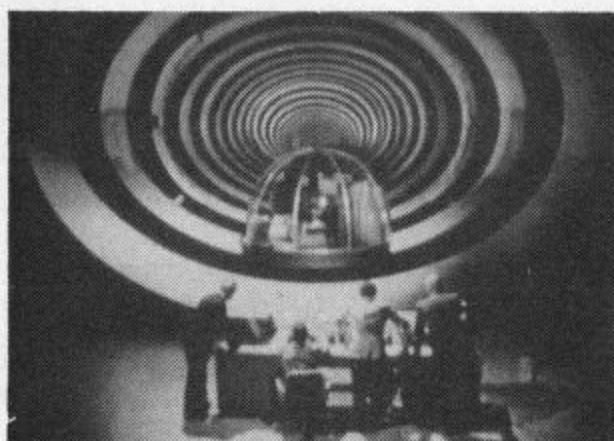
### Notable Episodes

The first few episodes were, in general, very good. The pilot, *Rendezvous with Yesterday* is fresh, interesting and highly watchable. Second episode, *One Way to the Moon*, is a competent spy thriller set on a rocket going to the Moon. The final episode in the first triad is a story set in 1910 when Halley's comet made a par-

Back at base, the Time Tunnel team wrestle with the controls



A weird materialization in the Time Tunnel!



Lt General Kirk and his absolutely historical ancestor, face to face



ticularly spectacular appearance. Tony and Doug leap into the story in a mine shaft moments before it collapses! Also contained in these first stories is a short sequence in which Tony arrives back at the Time Tunnel. Great on the face of it until he realizes that he has arrived several years before he joined the project and no one recognizes him; instead he is arrested by the security guards!

Next stop for Tony and Doug was Pearl Harbor, just before the Japanese attacked. Tony remembers his father dying in the raid and tries to save him this time around. Unfortunately he fails in this, but does manage to meet himself as a young child.

Originally, the series tried to maintain some level of historic accuracy, but as the first season dragged on that was lost altogether. What was brought in to replace the good writing was aliens, lots of them and most of them silver! Suddenly, instead of vaguely human tales, **The Time Tunnel** was telling B-movie stories that should have been left dead and buried in the 1950 Sci-Fi films where they first appeared. Of all the alien stories *The Kidnappers* is the most notable because it sees Ann united with Tony and Doug in the year 8433 AD. In this story we learn that Ann has had her eye on Doug for a long time instead of Tony, as it had seemed, since she used to go berserk when Tony got captured/tortured/threatened with death. The touch of human affection between Ann and Doug is actually quite welcome since it is, by and large, absent throughout the rest of the series.

Whether the stories were good or not, **The Time Tunnel** always featured inventive ideas. Examples of this were the Russian Time Tunnel developed in 1956 in the episode *Secret Weapon*. Ancestors of the regulars and people at younger ages were seen through the Time Tunnel and usually provided dramatic impetus to the story. For instance, General Kirk saw his ancestor in *Reign of Terror*.

One of the worst episodes has to be *The Ghost of Nero*. This was set during World War I and, accompanied by suitably eerie music, Nero's disembodied ghost would heft a sword (often on painfully visible wires) and kill anyone who got in his way. Later on in the episode he did a nice line in bodily possessions. Utter rubbish really.

## UK Screenings

The series has enjoyed quite healthy exposure on British television. It first showed up on BBC television in a children's slot but was soon dropped from the schedules when it proved unpopular. Later it appeared in a few ITV regions



**Dolly bird Doctor Ann McGregor (Lee Meriwether) — who did she really fancy? Was it Tony or was it Doug? All was revealed in *The Kidnappers***

before being networked by the ITV companies in a children's slot. It then disappeared from television altogether until Sky reshown it in the mid/late Eighties. This screening was complete except for the *Raiders from Outer Space* episode. Next, in the early Nineties **The Time Tunnel** again did the late night rounds of the ITV regions before being snapped up by Channel 4 and networked at 6.00pm on Thursdays last year. During the ITV's regional screenings, two episodes were not shown (*Idol of Death* and *Raiders from Outer Space*) but during channel 4's run the latter of these shows was reinstated.

**The Time Tunnel** is something of an oddity, a missed opportunity and an en-

gaging piece of nonsense all rolled into one. Quite rightly it now exists as a piece of cult television.

*Stuart Clark*

## The massive underground Time Tunnel project complex

