



THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Segment One: Directed by John Landis

"The aim of this movie is to recapture the atmosphere of eeriness and imagination the show so successfully created," says John Landis, who not only produced the film but also scripted and directed his segment. In it he tells the story of Bill (Vic Morrow) a bigot of frightening dedication. But Bill travels the road that leads to the Twilight Zone and in so doing finds himself deposited in various points in time as the victim of bigotry and racial hatred.

As Landis points out, his episode contains one of the traditional elements of the original *Twilight Zone* TV series – a strong moral point

of view. "Twilight Zone dealt with big themes – love, hate, ambition, war, peace, fear and racism." At one point in the story, Bill becomes a suspected Jew in Nazi-occupied Paris and on the run from the Gestapo; in another he finds himself about to be lynched by the Ku Klux Klan and in yet another he is in Vietnam, hounded by American and Vietcong troops alike. Wisely, all references to the helicopter sequence in this segment in which Morrow and two children died have been excised prior to the film's release. Interestingly Landis continued to explore similar themes in his current feature, *Trading Places*, although with that film Landis used the more pointed weapon of comedy to underline such human weaknesses and injustice.

"This film is a homage to both the show and Rod Serling," Landis has said of the *Twilight*

Zone movie, and fittingly his segment recalls, if only vaguely, an episode of the original *Zone* entitled *A Quality of Mercy*. This starred Dean Stockwell as a hard-nosed American soldier in the Pacific during WW2. He is about to attack a cave in which a group of half-starved Japanese soldiers can offer little resistance. Suddenly he finds himself as a Japanese soldier holed up in a similar cave many miles away on Corregidor. Despite pleading with the Americans to spare him and his men, they advance. Just as death seems certain he is whisked back through time and space and is once again the American about to attack the Japanese. Almost at the point of no return he hears a message that the atomic bomb has been dropped on Japan. Having seen both sides he relents, understanding the quality of mercy.



Segment 2: Directed by Steven Spielberg

In many ways it is only fitting that Steven Spielberg should have chosen a story about childhood regained for his segment of *The Twilight Zone*. For it is the world of children and a "childish" sense of wonder which has bewitched the director on many occasions in his films, most notably *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* for the former and *Close Encounters* for the latter.

Based on a third season episode, *Kick the Can*, it tells the tale of a group of old people who on entering the Twilight Zone, discover a means to return to the world of their childhood and once again rediscover the joys of life with a child's appreciation and "sense of wonder". As the number one director says of his segment, "There's a real symbiosis that occurs between young children from the ages of 6 to 7 and older people from the ages of 70 to 90. They both go back to a kind of natural daring – and that's wonderful about working with them. They both have trouble memorising their dialogue, and yet they're both spontaneous beyond reason."



Segment 3: Directed by Joe Dante

If a horror movie is going to be a positive experience – which I think it should be – you need to play with people's fears by relaxing them at certain points in such a way as to allow them the freedom to be scared," is how director Dante describes (in part) his attitude towards the macabre. And that's exactly what he did in his previous two frightworks, *Piranha* and *The Howling*. It's also the basis for his segment of *Twilight Zone – The Movie*.

It's a *Good Life* aired in the third season of the series and was written by Rod Serling, based on a short story of the same title by Jerome Bixby. It told the story of a small boy,



Anthony Fremont (Billy Mumy) with enormous and frightening powers – as Serling said in his introduction to the episode, "He's six years old, with a cute little boy face and blue, guileless eyes. But when those eyes look at you, you'd better start thinking happy thoughts, because the mind behind them is absolutely in charge." The kid's parents and friends are ruled by the tiny-tot terror, for among his arsenal of party tricks is the ability to turn a human being into a jack-in-the-box and cause snow to fall, thereby ruining local crops. He holds the entire town of Peaksville in the grip of fear, and does so right up to the fade-out and Serling's closing comment – "...if by some strange chance you should run across him, you had best think good thoughts. Anything less than that is handled at your own risk, because if you do meet Anthony you can be sure of one thing: you have entered the Twilight Zone." ▶



The original TV version was written by George Clayton Johnson, an SF author who was also responsible for several other *Zone* shows of note. For the movie version, Johnson has rewritten his original in collaboration with Richard Matheson and Josh Rogan. In the original, actor Ernest Truex played the old man who initiates the action in an old people's home when he extorts his aged friends to be young by acting young, through playing an American street game called "Kick the can". Ultimately they find their lost youth...in the Twilight Zone.

Essaying the Truex role in the movie is Scatman Crothers, the remarkable black actor who commenced his career over sixty years ago as a singer-guitarist-drummer in Prohibition era "speakeasies" at the age of fourteen. In recent years Crothers has discovered a new career as a character actor in such successful films as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Lady Sings The Blues* and most notably the Stanley Kubrick adaptation of Stephen King's *The Shining*. An inveterate composer, Crothers wrote and dedicated a song to his director during the shooting of *Kick the Can – A Remarkable Young Man*. ■

Of the three stories adapted from original *Zone* shows, *It's A Good Life* is the one which has departed from its source the most, although the premise remains the same: a small child holds his family in fear through his otherworldly powers. But in adapting the story for the big screen Dante and scriptwriter Richard Matheson have availed themselves of the advances made in movie special effects technology in recent years. Set in a highly expressionistic version of all those "family home" situations which prevailed through such popular 50s and 60s sitcoms like *My Three Sons* and *Leave it to Beaver*, Dante makes considerable use of famous television cartoon characters seen in the background on the TV. In the dazzling, effects laden finale, little Anthony (played by Jeremy Licht) unleashes his powers bringing some of the more monstrous cartoon creations to life – right out of the television screen.

Trivia buffs should note that Billy Mumy – the original Anthony makes a guest appearance at the beginning of the movie segment.



Segment 4: Directed by George Miller

Nightmare at 20,000 Feet provides one of the highlights of the fifth season of *The Twilight Zone*, thanks to the talents of Matheson and director Richard Donner. Likewise the same tale, re-adapted by the famed screenwriter and novelist performs a similar function in the big-screen version directed by the creator of *Mad Max*, George Miller.

As Miller explains, "The wonderful thing about doing this film is that it's the same challenge Rod Serling had with each *Twilight Zone*. You have to tell a story and establish a number of characters in just a short period of time, so everything you do has got to be very concentrated." And that's just what the Australian-born director does with his story of a man aboard a plane during a storm who sees a monster, or gremlin, systematically destroying the aircraft's engines. The only hitch is that he is the only person aboard who can see it!

Miller directs his segment with knowing panache, delivering a thrilling exercise in mounting paranoia with which all those with a genuine fear of flying can identify with. In the original episode it was a young William Shatner who played the freaked-out passenger who no one will believe, not even his wife. For the update, Miller has dispensed



with the spouse, further heightening the man's alone-ness and sense of rising paranoia. As George Miller says of his handling of the tale, "Everything is heightened – every sound is louder and more significant; he watches the stewardesses' eyes, waiting for any sign that something is wrong. He is simply a rational man afraid of flying. It could be you or I."

Where Dick Donner had to make do with ex-circus performer Nick Cravat wearing a furry suit "off the rack" from the MGM costume department and some crude model work, producers Spielberg and Landis utilised a combination of talents to produce the many and varied effects for Miller's episode, including animator David Allen and visual effects wizard Peter Kuran, and the gang at George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic.

Miller is well-served by his cast, in particular John Lithgow as the put-upon passenger. Perhaps better known for his stage performances (he has a self-imposed pace of a play a season), he is gradually becoming equally well respected as a film actor since his debut in Brian DePalma's *Obsession* in 1976. He followed this with featured roles in *All That Jazz*, *Blow Out* and *The Big Fix*. He also performed the voice of Yoda in the radio production of *The Empire Strikes Back* for National Public Radio. However it was his performance as Roberta Muldoon in *The World According to Garp* which won him rave notices as well as an Academy Award nomination.

THE DIRECTORS

Feature by Phil Edwards

George Miller, in the space of only three years, has become one of the most accomplished film makers. Born in Chinchilla in Queensland, Australia, Miller forsook his chosen profession as a doctor to enter the somewhat more uncertain world of film making. In 1977 he attended a Summer film workshop conducted by the Australian Union of Students in Melbourne. The event marked a drastic change in his life. It was here that he met Byron Kennedy. The two became firm friends and finally business partners.

Kennedy and Miller commenced their film making association with a series of short experimental movies of which *Violence In The Cinema... Part One* caused something of a stir in its satirical look at a subject which had long been the bane of the Australian film censors. Miller's first feature would further upset these guardians of public sensibilities in 1980. Unable to raise backing from the various federal and state film commissions for his film *Mad Max*, Miller turned to friends from his old profession for support.

Mad Max burst upon the film scene in Australia like a breath of fiery carbon monoxide air, winning a combination of rave reviews for its sense of pure cinematic exhilaration and an equal number of brickbats for its seemingly casual view of no-holds-barred, gut-wrenching violence. Although failing at the American box office (probably more due to a thoughtless ad campaign and the unnecessary dubbing into trans-Atlantic-ese which made it sound like a third rate Spaghetti Western) *Mad Max* rapidly became a cult hit throughout Europe and Japan. It should be noted that the film was originally slapped with an X rating in France, something usually reserved for hard core sex films. The Japanese saw in *Mad Max*

George Miller Director *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet*



modern day Samurai hero and the film's star, Mel Gibson found himself an idol overnight in that country.

With *Mad Max 2*, Miller consolidated his position as a virtuoso director of hard hitting action sequences and proved that between the two *Max* features he had learned his craft more than well. Released in America as *The Road Warrior* and sans the simply awful dubbing which had destroyed *Mad Max*, the film was lauded by critics and Miller's contemporaries alike. If Steven Spielberg has a serious rival in his understanding of the plasticity of the film medium then it's George Miller.

With the enormous profits generated by the two *Mad Max* features Kennedy and Miller set up their own film making facility in an old cinema in Sydney's King's Cross, once the haven of artists and hookers alike. It was from here that they set about making their most ambitious production to date, *The Dismissal*. A television mini-series, it details

the fall of the Whitlam Labour government with each leading episode being directed by a leading Australian film maker, including Miller himself.

With *Mad Max 2* being such a success it was no surprise to anybody that Miller should find Hollywood offers coming his way. Rumours abounded: Miller was to direct a spectacular motorbike chase for Spielberg's second Indiana Jones movie; Miller was slated to direct the third *Raiders* adventure; Miller was going to finally make his homage to Brian DePalma, *Roxanne* (*Carrie* is reportedly the Australian's favourite film); Miller was not interested in making a third *Mad Max*; Miller was going to make another saga with the existential hero and so on.

Miller went to Hollywood where he was signed by Spielberg and Landis, joint producers of *The Twilight Zone*, to helm the last episode in the omnibus feature, *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet*. And it is Miller's episode which is garnering the majority of critical praise.

With *The Twilight Zone* successfully behind him, Miller returned to Australia to continue with his own projects. First up is another mini-series this time about the infamous Bodyline Test Cricket series of 1932-33, a project which is also consuming the energies of England's David Puttnam (producer of *Chariots Of Fire*) who is producing the strange story for the cinema screen. Kennedy/Miller have also announced that *Mad Max 3* will out-*Max* 1 and 2. Shooting starts in June 1984, although Miller has evinced a desire to get away from the white-line nightmares of the first two films and may only direct the action sequences, giving someone else the responsibility of taking care of business in the other departments. ■





Joe Dante should be a source of inspiration for any fantasy film journalist who dreams of making films themselves. Born in New Jersey, Dante was bewitched by the cinema of the weird and wonderful from an early age and like so many of his contemporaries grew up in the early issues of Fory J Ackerman's *Famous Monsters* and the 50s output of such studios as American International and Universal. When old enough – probably when he could first hold a pen – he wrote for Uncle Fory and contributed articles to *Castle of Frankenstein*. His infamous piece, *Dante's Inferno*, in which he made no-holds barred statements about fantasy films, still makes incredibly entertaining reading.

After pursuing a film journalistic career following graduation in 1968 he took up the position of editor of *Film Bulletin*. But Dante wasn't satisfied writing about films – he wanted to make them as well. In 1974 he landed a position in Roger Corman's New World Pictures set-up in California through an old college friend Jon Davison, with whom he had concocted *The Movie Orgy*, a seven hour feast of film which played college campuses through the sponsorship of Schlitz beer.

Like so many then-aspiring and now-successful directors, Joe Dante learned his craft from the whily Corman. For two years he devised and edited trailers and ad

Joe Dante Director It's A Good Life



campaigns for such schlockers as *Big Bad Mama*, *Deathrace 2000*, *Tidal Wave* and *Starcrash*. And then came *The Big Break*, or put another way, Roger Corman said, "Here's two bucks – make a movie for me." Dante teamed with editing partner Allan Arkush and the two co-directed *Hollywood Boulevard*, a send-up of cheap-skate New World pictures, for \$60,000. Of course it made money and Corman let Dante loose again, this time on his own.

Piranha, sporting one of John Sayles' typically witty and knowing scripts, assured Dante of a future. Though New World had dished out the dough to Dante to make a *Jaws* swipe, the director turned in a deftly crafted horror film which contained enough good humour to ensure that the gore

quotient never outweighed the entertainment value and gave Dante a chance to pay homage to one of his old idols, Jack Arnold.

With *Piranha* biting chunks out of the box office, Dante next turned his sights (and silver bullets) to the legend of the werewolf. Again scripted by Sayles, *The Howling* was even more good-naturedly scary than *Piranha* and contained enough in-jokes to keep Fory Ackerman himself guessing – it even contained Ackerman, flaunting a copy of *Famous Monsters*. *The Howling* also featured some early work by *The Thing's* monster maker Rob Bottin, protege of Rick Baker, and pre-empted Baker's superior effect's in Landis' *An American Werewolf in London*. Bottin's bladders may have been bigger but Baker's bladders were better.

For *The Twilight Zone*, Dante was originally slated for the Miller episode, *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet*. In the various reshufflings that take place during the setting up of a production as complex as that of *The Twilight Zone*, Dante is now responsible for *It's A Good Life*.

Following the completion of his episode, Joe Dante immediately went into production on *Gremlins* under the aegis of Steven Spielberg's company. Advance reports indicate that the film will return the highly talented Dante to the world of humorous horror.

John Landis made a monkey of himself at the age of 21. Or rather let his long-time friend, Rick Baker, construct a gorilla suit for the writer/director to wear in his first film, *Schlock* in 1972.

Prior to that Big John had worked his way around Europe as a stuntman in a variety of Spaghetti and Sauerkraut westerns after finishing up chores as a "gopher" on Brian Hutton's WW2 comedy-actioner *Kelly's Heroes*. And prior to that he'd emptied out-trays for one of Hollywood's bigger studios as an office boy.

The award-winning *Schlock* brought Landis to the attention of the producers of *Kentucky Fried Movie* and the then (and still) ridiculously-talented-for-his-age film maker scored his first commercial hit. With success begetting success, the way it sometimes does in Hollywoodland, John found himself hired to helm *National Lampoon's Animal House*, which introduced the small-screen, big talent of John Belushi to the world and in so doing created a cult and, as a by-product, the most successful film comedy of all time.

Belushi and his *Saturday Night Live* partner Danny Aykroyd had been winning additional underground fame as The Blues Brothers. Their first album, *A Briefcase Full of Blues*, went platinum overnight. *Saturday Night Live* was topping the ratings and Landis was HOT with round-the-block queues to see *Animal House*. Hollywood execs being Hollywood execs put two and two together and got one hundred million dollars. So, with this kind of corporate arithmetic, *The Blues Brothers* movie came about. The film was rushed into production without a final budget and the movie just grew and grew.

John Landis Director Prologue/Segment 1



Despite many rumours to the contrary, *The Blues Brothers* proved a huge financial success for Universal and with the unlimited resources of a major studio at his disposal, Landis showed that he was indeed a talent to be reckoned with. *The Blues Brothers* fairly bristles with a wealth of comedic ideas and displays Landis' razzle-dazzle style of film making to the full.

Landis next turned his talents to *American Werewolf in London*, a story he had first concocted as early as 1968. The unusual idea of a horror film that was played

straight yet contained a strong element of humour hadn't proved too popular with the numerous producers that Landis had sent his script to over the years. But with 3 smash hit films in a row, Polygram Pictures backed *American Werewolf*. Unsurprisingly, under Landis' sure and understanding hand, the movie fulfilled all expectations, winning good reviews from even the severest critics. Rick Baker's make-up effects were nothing short of extraordinary and he deservedly won an Oscar for his contribution.

For *The Twilight Zone* Landis, as well as writing and directing his episode, also devised and directed the framing story which stars Dan Aykroyd and Harvey Brooks.

On completion of his work on *The Twilight Zone*, during which the fatal helicopter accident took place, John Landis threw himself into work on *Trading Places*, a highly satirical comedy. Resembling a cross between a Frank Capra "social awareness" tragi-comedy and the best of Preston Sturges (screwball style), the film displayed in Landis work a new maturity. With Eddie Murphy, fresh from *Saturday Night Live* and the success of *48 Hours* and Danny Aykroyd it became an instant hit and continues to keep the cash registers jangling at the box office. Also worth noting is the performance of Jamie Lee Curtis – one would have never guessed that the lady was so talented from the run of slash and stalk thrillers she had been condemned to following the success of *Halloween*.

John Landis has several more films in various stages of preparation, including *Clue* (based on the popular Parker Bros game), *Dick Tracy* and the director's long-cherished, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.





There's a certain amount of irony connected with Steven Spielberg's participation as producer and director on *The Twilight Zone*. For it was another creation of Zone mastermind Rod Serling which gave Boy Wonder his first professional break in the form of the pilot TV movie of *Night Gallery*.

Spielberg served his apprenticeship by putting the likes of Peter Falk and Robert Young through their paces in such popular TV series as *Colombo* and *Marcus Welby, MD*. He also helmed the above average telemovies *Something Evil and Savage*; but it was the highly regarded television film *Duel*, based on Richard Matheson's short story for *Playboy* which led to the director making the break from the small to the big screen and a series of successes which have placed him as the top money making director of all time.

Released theatrically throughout Europe, with additional footage, *Duel* rapidly captured a cult reputation, fired in part by *Sunday Times* critic Dyllis Powell's enthusiasm. Spielberg was on his way in a career which can only be described as genuinely meteoric.

The moderately successful *The Sugarland Express* followed, but it was Bruce the Shark, star of *Jaws* which assured Spielberg of his place in the Hollywood Hall of Fame. The 1975 production grossed somewhere in the vicinity of \$400 million worldwide, but more importantly than this financial consideration, *Jaws* showed that Spielberg was a film maker who not only understood the medium in which he worked – he revelled in it.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (in

Steven Spielberg Director Kick the Can



either its original or 'Special' edition) further consolidated his position as *numero uno* and revealed the director's now famous (and well publicised) "sense of wonder". With everything he touched turning to gold, the last thing on Steven Spielberg's mind was a flop. But that's what his next film, *1941*, turned out to be.

The failure of *1941* cannot be put down to any one reason, rather it's a combination of several. By this time Spielberg's manic attention to even the most minute of details was becoming legendary and reached new heights on the WW2 comedy. Certainly *1941*

is considerably overblown in all departments and the director's lack of understanding that for a comedy to work it must build to zaniness. *1941* started at lunatic level and just stayed there. There is also the aspect that at the time of its release there were still a group of hostages held in the American Embassy in Iran and feelings of patriotism were running at a high level. Not an opportune time to release a film which parodied patriotism, but with a final price tag of something like \$40 million attached to it, Columbia Pictures couldn't bide their time and wait for a more favourable political climate. The film landed at the box office like some giant lead turkey. Suddenly Boy Wonder was considered not so wonderful by Hollywood.

But George Lucas bailed him out when he connected with Spielberg to make *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. This entertaining pastiche of 101 old Republic serials mined real box office gold and put the director back on top. It also guaranteed that Spielberg would get to make *E.T. The Extraterrestrial*. And if you don't know about *E.T.* and its success, then you must be a recently landed alien yourself.

While embroiled in the production of the Cute One's adventures on Earth, Spielberg found time to produce and generally oversee production of *Poltergeist*, an effects-laden shocker finally credited to director Tobe Hooper.

For *The Twilight Zone*, Spielberg chose to film a remake of the Zone episode, "Kick the Can". With that in the can, Spielberg is once again putting Harrison Ford through hoops and in the path of all manner of rolling destruction and danger in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. ■