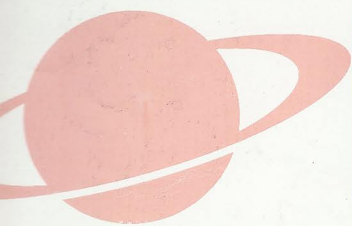


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sci fi

EXCLUSIVE:

Star Jar fights back

Trek tor-directors tell all

BEHIND-THE-SCENES:

travolta talks

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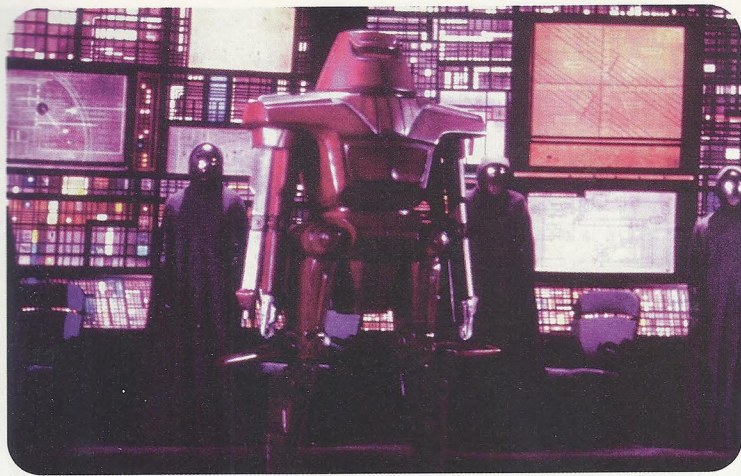
battlefield earth

JUNE 2000

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make you cringe. If the video-game-styled quick-draw contest between robots isn't ludicrous enough, how about the ship's hull getting ripped off by a meteor, with no substantial effect on the room's air supply? Colorful, yes; but that can't hide the movie's scalding lack of imagination.



Not all space operas were spawned in the United States, of course, and the Japanese Sci-Fi/Fantasy *Message from Space* (HBO) is proof of that. Released in 1978, director Kinji

Fukasaku (whose career has veered from the campy *The Green Slime* to the arthouse *Black Lizard*) was

LEFT: Disney provided some stunning FX, but the storyline apparently fell into *The Black Hole* of the title.

given an enormous-by-Japanese-standards \$5-million budget, and the result was a colorful yet tortoise-paced space romp. In starring roles, there's Sonny Chiba (best known for his ultraviolent *Streetfighter* flicks, but here, remarkably drab), plus the late Vic Morrow in one of his last roles.

Again using *The Seven Samurai* as a framework, the planet Jillusia has been conquered by the ruthless steel-skinned Gavanans, despite resistance from their leader Kido. Going for help in an intergalactic Spanish galleon, Kido releases eight flying Liabe Seeds (which look

Maximilian Schell stars as their egomaniacal host, a Dr. Nemo in space, who's spent the past 20 years studying this swirling cosmic void with his robot crew. He invites his visitors (including an irritating, comic-relief robot) to stay, but it only leads to standard ray-gun battles and last-minute rescues. The less said about its wrongheaded finale (a trip into the black hole), the better. Just be forewarned that

you'll feel like chucking your remote control at the TV screen.

A handful of the special effects are outstanding, due to Disney's wealth of matte artists and production designers, even though they lack basic logic (e.g., the title hole consists of red and blue swirls, because a black one wouldn't be as pretty). Gary Nelson's direction is serviceable, but the script will

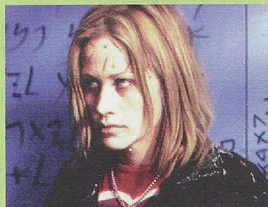
new on video

Prophecy 3: The Ascent Heaven's war on Earth continues in this direct-to-video supernatural sequel. Christopher Walken returns as the bedraggled archangel Gabriel, with Vincent Spano as Zophiel, a newly Earth-bound angel who's determined to destroy a human/angel half-breed. Brad Dourif costars as a psychotic zealot and, no surprise, Walken gets all the best lines. Still, this fitfully amusing tale lacks the edge and originality of its excellent initial outing. (Dimension). **Grade: B**

Stigmata Mixing half-baked theology, lurid special effects, and flashy MTV-style filmmaking, this supernatural thriller stars Patricia Arquette as a Pittsburgh hair-dresser who receives an ancient

relic and suddenly bleeds from the hands and feet (in a physical manifestation of the wounds of Christ on the cross). Soon the

Vatican is conspiring against her. Costarring Gabriel Byrne as the investigating priest and Jonathan Pryce as a Cardinal; both actors

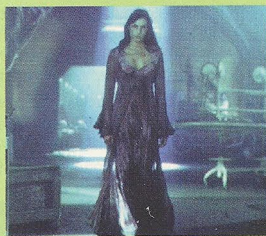


deserve better material. (MGM/UA). **Grade: D**

Leprechaun in the Hood The fifth entry in this Horror-franchise gets a shot in the arm with an idea so ludicrous that it's almost [dare I say it?] entertaining. Warwick Davis

returns as our diminutive demon, with Ice-T signing on as a magically successful record impresario. Mixing absurd comedy and cheap gore, ambitious young rap artists awaken the Leprechaun from a 20-year slumber, steal his golden flute and are soon on the run from this half-pint and his zombie babes. (Trimark). **Grade: C**

The House on Haunted Hill A remake of William Castle's 58 B-movie fave, in which guests are challenged to stay overnight in a creepy locale. For this enjoyably cheesy flick, director William Malone ups the ante with an abandoned psychiatric institute for the insane, outrageous grue, and several recognizable stars. Oscar-winner Geoffrey Rush takes on the role of their droll host, with Famke Janssen, Taye Diggs, and Chris Kattan along for the bloody 'n' amusing ride. (Warner). **Grade: B**



Desecration Weaving dreams and reality, and steeped in overwrought Catholicism, this is a remarkably assured indie debut from filmmaker Dante Tomaselli. Danny Lopes stars as a traumatized teenage boy whose hallucinations of a demonic nun are only the beginning of the supernatural events and gory demises. Fueled by surreal dreams and solid performances, what it lacks in budget is made up for in passion, and the result is a chilling tale of psychological Horror. (Image). **Grade: B+**

Steven Puchalski