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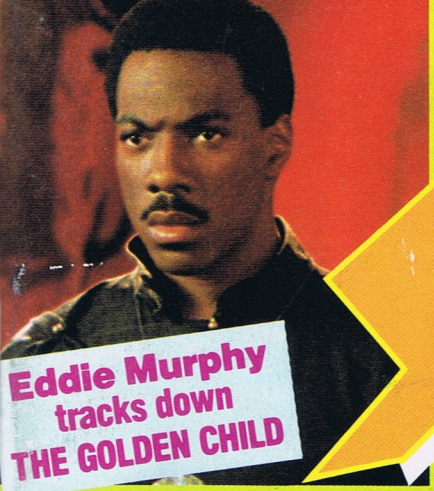
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JANUARY #114



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tracks down
THE GOLDEN CHILD

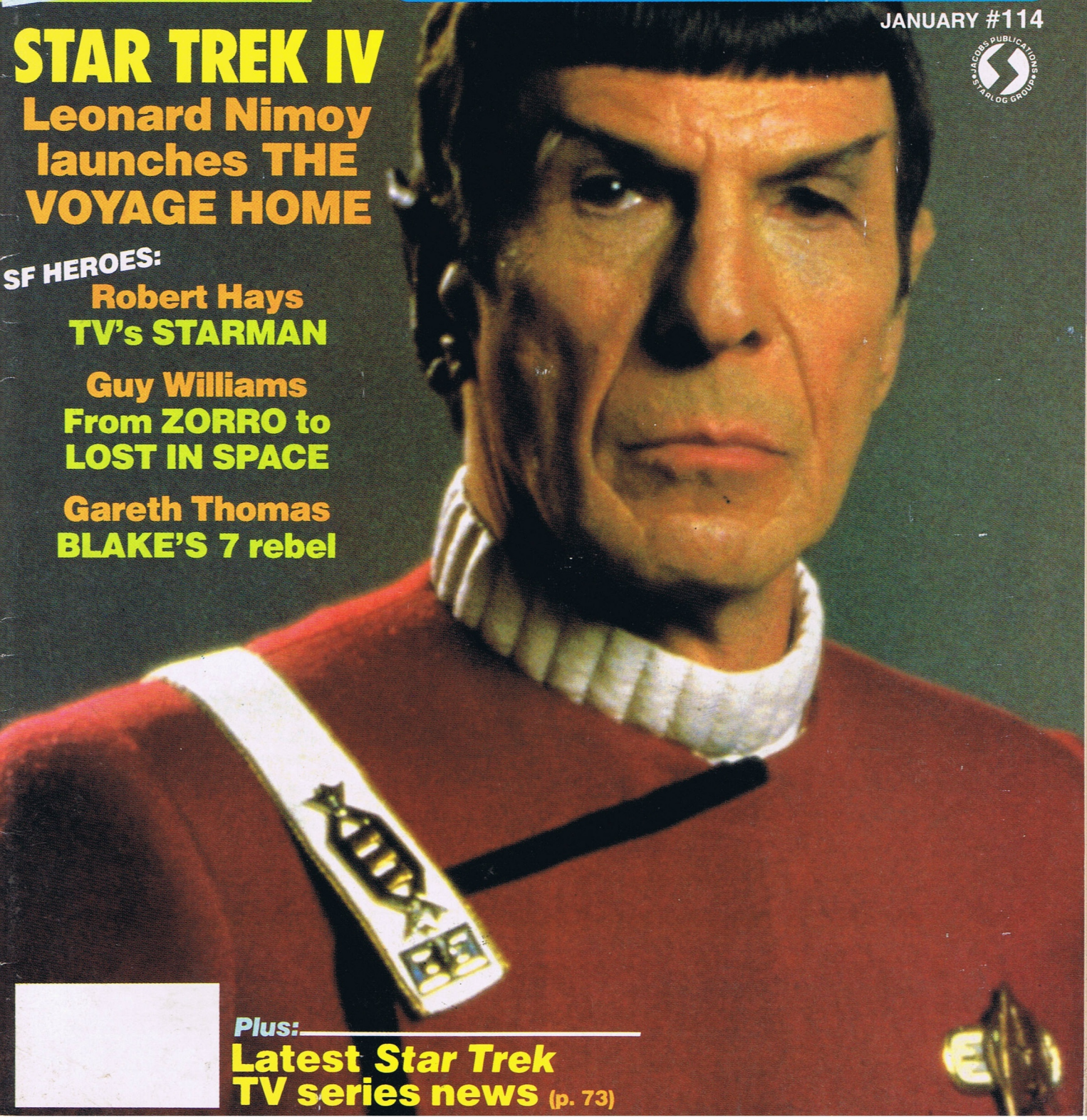
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TV series news (p. 73)

— Guy Williams —

Relaxed, Retired & "Lost in Space"

A Hollywood refugee by choice, the dashing actor who made his mark as Disney's "Zorro" contemplates his cosmically adrift years as the father of the Space Family Robinson.

BY MIKE CLARK



Zorro (Williams) made his way across the plains and into the heart of Mrs. Juan Peron and Argentinian fandom.

It was spring 1968 and Guy Williams had just finished filming the final third season episode of *Lost in Space*. The annual wrap party was over, Williams' sleek uniform had been returned to wardrobe, and the cast was looking forward to a short hiatus before next season's shooting began. Four years had passed since Williams first donned a silver lamé spacesuit and ended up *Lost in Space*. At the beginning, Williams was the star; by the series' conclusion, he still had star

MIKE CLARK, senior STARLOG correspondent, profiled David Hedison in issue #108. He wishes to thank Steve Catalano, Judie Lawson and Bill Cotter for their assistance in coordinating this article.

billing, but was featured behind three other characters in the stories, and one of them, the Robot, wasn't even *human*.

An article in *TV Guide* portrayed Williams as bitter and jealous over Jonathan Harris' domination of the series, but it's a view that Williams disowns. "The article was a little on the nasty side, saying I was unhappy with Dr. Smith," the actor reveals. "My real feelings were that I would have preferred to do a space show involving more *real* elements—survival on an alien planet, and all that goes with it. To have Smith betray Will week after week or get into trouble with aliens got to be tiresome."

Harris' rule of *Lost in Space* had to be a strain for the easy-going Williams, who had long since quit complaining about the Dr. Smith-oriented scripts. Besides, another season of employment now beckoned, the money was good, and Williams was ready to sign up for another hitch on the *Jupiter II*. A few weeks after the third season wrap party, Williams met producer Irwin Allen (STARLOG #100, 102) and a CBS representative at a plush Beverly Hills hotel. On the agenda were publicity pictures and some questions by the press about the fourth season of *Lost in Space*, but Williams didn't know that Allen was sitting on some important information.

"I found out about the cancellation in typical *Lost in Space* fashion," says Williams. "A reporter at the photo session asked me when filming would begin on the next season. I was about to answer when the network person said, 'That isn't certain yet.' I said to the reporters, 'You heard him... it's not certain yet.'" Allen took Williams aside and quickly explained why he didn't tell anyone about the cancellation. "Irwin told me he wanted to fight it first, and hand everyone a new season on a 'silver platter.' He tried and failed, and shortly afterward, we were definitely cancelled."

Williams wasn't too concerned about the future, having been steadily employed in Hollywood since the early 1950s. His career had its ups and downs, but there was always another job sooner or later. "My career has this kind of 'checkering' all through it," explains Williams. "I've been leaving the business all the time." As it turned out, Williams' exit from series television and movies has so far been permanent—he hasn't

acted in front of a film camera since that last day on the *Lost in Space* set.

A Guy Named "Guy"

Taking his career so casually is a way of life for Williams, who was born Armando Catalano in New York City, the son of recent Italian immigrants. As Armando, he grew up tall (6'3") and handsome, and, in keeping with his "laidback" lifestyle, earned his living as a photo model. "I was studying acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse, and modeling was a simple and profitable way of working around financial problems," Williams recalls. "It required little time and paid well."

The name Guy Williams emerged during this time, when anyone with a foreign-sounding name or appearance was quickly typecast and offered only a narrow range of jobs. "'Guy Williams' was about as non-specific as I could imagine!" he laughs. Like many New York-based actors, Williams was drawn to the movies and relocated to California. He was soon under contract as a stock player at the most prominent of studios, MGM. "They put you under contract on a yearly basis, and used you in little filler spots... walk-throughs and such. If the part was of any consequence, they would usually pick someone from outside to play it."

Williams eventually moved on to Universal for more of the same. His first picture there included a monkey and the future President of the United States—*Bedtime for Bonzo*. "The least known thing about the picture," adds Williams, "was the picture itself. It was eminently forgettable."

By the mid-50s, Williams was married, had two kids, a mortgage and a growing dissatisfaction with the movies. His latest appearance was in the low-budget thriller, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, as the policeman who eventually shoots the werewolf played by a young Michael Landon.

Meanwhile, TV was becoming more popular and Williams considered defecting to this new medium, despite its tiny screens and equally tiny budgets. "I had a rather personal way of looking at television then," says Williams, "because in those days, I really didn't believe that the worst of television was that much different from the best. And when I heard about the new *Zorro* series, I knew that Disney's shows were as good as anybody else's best."

The Disney Studios had scored major success on the fledgling ABC network with *Disneyland*, *The Mickey Mouse Club*, and the Western adventure, *Davy Crockett*. Created in 1919 by Johnston McCulley, Zorro (Spanish for "The Fox") was mild-mannered Don Diego by day, a sword-wielding, black-caped avenger of the oppressed by night who used his fox-like cunning to outwit the cruel military governor.

Auditions for Disney's *Zorro* were attended by every leading-man type in Hollywood. Many actors could handle the Spanish accent of *Zorro*, but almost none were prepared to engage in the skillful swordsmanship required by the script.

Enter Guy Williams, who not only looked the part of a young Spanish aristocrat, but was physically suited for the role and *could actually brandish a sword*. Williams' father, a noted swordsman in Italy, began training his son Armando at age seven. Up to the point of his Disney audition, Williams fenced for recreation, but now, it would be the turning point of his career—he was promptly signed to star as Zorro.

With Williams aboard, Disney built an expensive replica of a Spanish pueblo on the backlot, moved most of *Crockett's* writers and directors onto the new series, then hired veteran stuntman Yakima Canutt to supervise the action sequences and Fred Cavens to keep Williams' fencing fine-tuned. Perfectly cast were Gene Sheldon to play Don Diego's mute servant Bernardo, and robust Henry Calvin as the comical Sgt. Garcia.

Williams now faced the problem of how to bring reality to a dual-identity character. Zorro was scripted to be on-screen only about a quarter of the time, so Don Diego's character portrayal was very important. Zorro was played in the movies by Douglas

I make 'nothing' interesting?"

The answer was for Williams to play Diego as a dandy, but a dandy with a quick wit. The clever comeback suited Diego, who would sometimes argue down the town's evil commandant, Captain Monasterio. "Don Diego became acceptable," says Williams, "not peculiar, an OK guy."

Catching Zs

Production of *Zorro* began smoothly, but Williams still hadn't worked out all the kinks, at least according to his boss. "I had auditioned with a heavy Spanish accent," explains Williams, "knowing I could drop it instead of starting out light and adding on. For the first couple of weeks, somebody would be tapping me on the shoulder as I'm walking around the set, and it would be *Walt*. He would say, 'Can you bring it down a little, Guy?' He didn't know what he wanted, so I

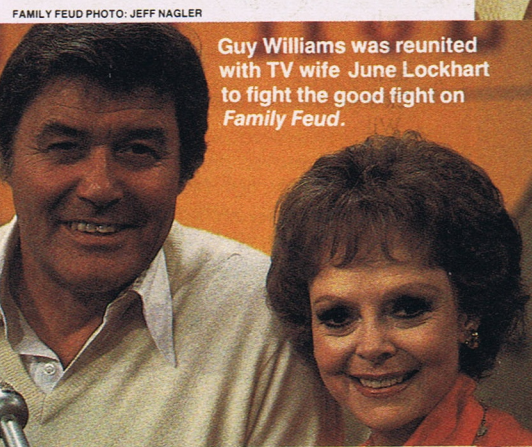
kept 'bringing it down.' One day, I finished the show and Walt didn't tap me on the shoulder, and that was the accent I kept."

Zorro was aired during the 1957-58 season on ABC, and became an instant hit. Kids from coast to coast drove their parents and teachers crazy by marking Zorro's trademark "Z" on sidewalks, book reports, clothing, even automobiles.

Adults feared that their kids would imitate Zorro's behavior, i.e. brandishing swords and leaping from great heights. "Occasionally, some parent would come up and say, 'My kid jumped off the roof and broke his leg,'" admits Williams. "There was nothing I could say but 'I'm sorry.'"

Williams got his first taste of the good life while starring in *Zorro*. Besides his generous weekly salary, he also received two-and-a-half percent royalties on the sale of *Zorro* merchandise. "It would have been more, but

John (Williams) and Maureen (June Lockhart) prepare for their trek to Alpha Centauri, not suspecting that Dr. Smith (Jonathan Harris) would be taking them on an alternate route that would leave them *Lost in Space*.



Guy Williams was reunited with TV wife June Lockhart to fight the good fight on *Family Feud*.

Fairbanks (silent) and Tyrone Power (sound), with Diego always written as a "cowardly" type of man—only Power had given his Don Diego an "extra" dimension. "Power played Don Diego as a sissy," explains Williams, "a real *gay* caballero. It was OK for him to do that once in a movie, but I knew that wouldn't work every week on TV. It would get tiresome, not to mention this was the '50s and a show with an audience including kids. So, I had to play Don Diego 'neutral,' which is difficult because it means *nothing*. How do

Blade in hand, Guy Williams made his mark as Zorro in the Disney TV series.



Disney was determined to make sure that I would never receive what Fess Parker got in *Davy Crockett* merchandising revenues." Disney had given Parker a large percentage of merchandise royalties in lieu of a salary increase, and lived to regret it when \$50 million (1955 money) worth of merchandise was sold. Considering that \$11 million worth of Zorro costumes, toys and books were purchased in a few months, Williams' small percentage was a shrewd move, benefiting the Disney stockholders.

Now, however, Williams could indulge his taste for expensive cars, art, food and travel abroad. He also made many lucrative personal appearances at rodeos and shopping centers, in addition to non-paying appearances at Disneyland.

His busy schedule continued through 1959. Disney's *Zorro* filming would last Monday

through Friday, with all stuntwork reserved for Friday. "Friday was 'fight day,'" Williams explains, "so we would do all the stuff you could get injured in. If you banged your head or hurt your arm, you had until Monday to recuperate. All of our visitors would come on Friday to watch the fighting." Williams did most of his own fencing, but had a stunt double for the more dangerous 'gags,' and another double for second unit work at Disney's Thousand Oaks ranch.

"We used to make jokes about the show," Williams laughs. "*Zorro* was set in California, we didn't call it a Western, but a *South-Western*. We called the actors 'stuntmen' because the scripts were being changed at the last minute, and to learn new dialogue and film it immediately was the *real* stunt. The work on *Zorro* was interesting. Nobody was

doing any better fencing than we were, and working with the production people was fun. I could have kept doing it on and on."

Zorro finished its second full season on ABC with good ratings, and another year guaranteed by the network. However, Walt Disney was having second thoughts about the network, having received a better offer from NBC to move *Zorro* and *Disneyland* over to the land of the colorful peacock. ABC bound Disney to an old exclusive contract, and Disney fought back by suspending production of *Zorro*. Williams remained on the payroll, but aside from filming four *Zorro* hour-long specials, was on vacation.

Cowboys & Aliens

Zorro was officially laid to rest in 1961, and true to form, Williams wasn't concerned about finding more work—and he didn't have long to wait. Offers came in from Europe for him to star in two pictures, one made in Italy (*Captain Sinbad*), the other in Germany (*Damon and Pythias*). Taking his entire family, Williams spent two years filming and traveling throughout Europe. "Traveling in Europe was a big plus, especially with the family," remembers Williams. "In the meantime, my agent didn't know where I was and I was missing opportunities. But the trip was worth it."

Another six months passed from the time that Williams and his family set foot back in the U.S. until they reached California. "I missed two seasons of pilots," the actor explains. "I needed a job, to get into something highly visible, and *Bonanza* did just that."

NBC wanted to throw a scare into Pernell Roberts, who played Adam Cartwright on the show and was reportedly creating prima donna problems on the set. Williams was brought in as another Cartwright, a potential replacement for Roberts. "I realized I was being used," laments Williams, "and I didn't get any help from the other actors, because if Roberts left, they would take up his slack. The whole session was very negative for me."

Roberts settled down for the time being, and Williams moved on to other TV guest-starring roles until late 1964, when another series offer came from 20th Century Fox. "When they said it was a space show out at Fox," deadpans Williams, "I was interested because I knew the lot wasn't far from my house!"

Was Williams excited by the outer space antics of *Lost in Space*? "I wasn't taken with the script," he answers. "It was typical TV. If I had been asked to do *Richard III*, that would have been a surprise, but to go into *Lost in Space* after having done *Zorro*, it was just standard TV subject matter."

Williams played father to the Space Family Robinson in an episodic pilot directed by Irwin Allen. "The main idea of *Lost in Space* was the special effects," explains Williams. "Irwin is great at them, and our struggle was to stay away from all the flashing equipment when we were doing our scenes. They would stick us in front of equipment that was whizzing or whirring, and I knew that the audience would watch the machine. So, we moved to

ZORRO PHOTOS: COPYRIGHT 1956, 1959, 1960 WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS

the left or the right, and the camera would hopefully follow, and we would get away from the machine.”

The Robinsons endured a crash landing, giants, caves and an extended scene where their ground transport, the Chariot, crosses a turbulent sea. Tanks full of water were dumped on the actors, but Williams wasn't complaining. "Nothing is uncomfortable if you're doing it for a lot of money. In *Captain Sinbad*, they had *boxcars* full of water releasing on us," he says. "The wave would hit you and *Wham!* The Chariot sequence was a piece of cake."

Filming of the *Lost in Space* pilot was finished by Christmas 1964. CBS had expressed an interest in doing the series, so the cast was told to be ready for production in early summer.

While Williams and the other actors bided their time, the characters of Dr. Zachary Smith and the Robot were added to the series. In the first episode, "The Reluctant Stowaway," Williams, along with the other characters, was in suspended animation while Smith had a field day mucking things up. By the time the Robinsons were awakened, Smith had established his pattern of stealing scenes and sometimes entire episodes.

Robinson was highlighted in several *Lost in Space* episodes, such as "Follow the Leader," a first season finale where he is possessed by a long-deceased alien king. Robinson is tricked-into an alien version of "Wrestlemania" in "Deadly Games of Gamma 6," and joins forces with Will to battle a mysterious intruder aboard the *Jupiter II* in "Space Creature." Williams pulled his *Zorro* sword out of mothballs for "The Android Machine," but the most strenuous outing for him had to be "The Anti-Matter Man." Williams played both Robinson and the professor's evil twin from an alternate universe, with the script calling for several vigorous fistfights and a great deal of running through the airborne corridor between worlds. During the rest of the series, Robinson was there to protect his family and occasionally give Smith the boot.

Initially, Williams was open to Smith's inclusion in the storylines. "It solved one of my problems with the show, which was 'What are we going to do out there with three kids, June [Lockhart], Don [Mark Goddard], and me week after week?'" Williams comments. "I knew that the scripts could be nothing, so when they put Smith and Will together, they could write lots of stories, and my hours got shorter."

Back From the Future

By the end of season one, most of the shows were centered on the Will-Robot-Smith threesome. Williams demanded more involvement in action-oriented scripts for the

Even while *Lost in Space*, the family Robinson (left to right) — Don West (Mark Goddard), Judy (Marta Kristen), Will (Billy Mumy), Penny (Angela Cartwright), Maureen (June Lockhart) and John Robinson (Williams) — found the time to wish viewers a happy holiday.

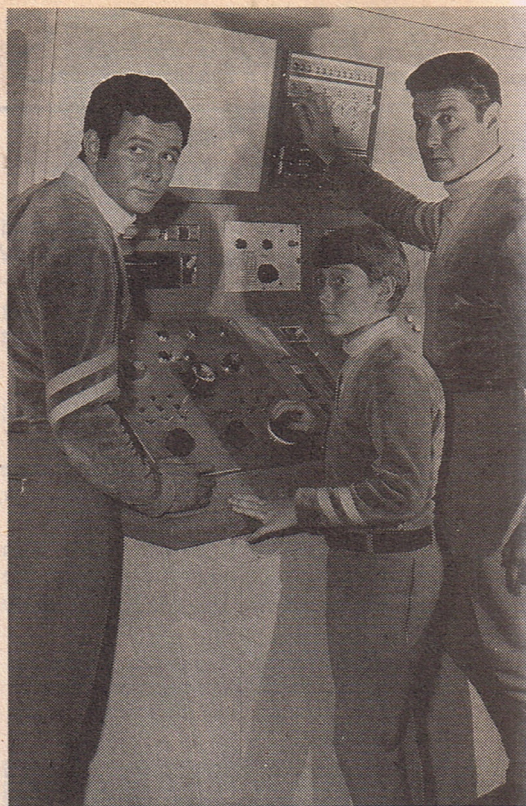
Don (Mark Goddard), Will (Billy Mumy) and Prof. Robinson (Williams) get ready to face whatever alien menaces the *Jupiter II* may encounter.

second season, and for a while, it looked like things were improving, but the "Smith Cycle" soon returned and according to Williams, he decided to "grin and bear it."

Critics have complained that Smith's comedy made *Lost in Space* campy, as a way of competing with its principal rival, *Batman*. "Campy" wasn't the right word, even though everyone was using it," says Williams. "The correct word is the 'cutes.' When a show gets the 'cutes,' it kills itself. You can get campy and do stunts with style, and you can get away with amazing things and have people love it. In *Zorro*, we did outrageous things but we did it in style, first class."

Lost in Space finally generated a few good scripts in the third year, but then the plug was pulled. In 1968, Williams and the *Lost in Space* cast found themselves available for other work. Bill Mumy went to Disney for movies, June Lockhart to CBS' *Petticoat Junction*. Mark Goddard became an agent. Angela Cartwright returned in *Make Room for Granddaddy*. Marta Kristen acted in

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ALL LOST IN SPACE PHOTOS: CBS/20TH CENTURY FOX

Williams

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movies and theater. And Jonathan Harris found a new career in voiceovers and the stage. Williams did what he does so well... he coasted.

By then, reruns of *Zorro* were being shown worldwide, and children in Europe were imitating American kids by slashing bedsheets with a "Z" and jumping off rooftops. Williams had one very important fan way down in Buenos Aires, Argentina—Mrs. Juan Peron, wife of that country's President Juan Peron. Mrs. Peron was hosting a charity show and asked Williams to appear. In return, he would receive *carte blanche* for personal appearances in her country—no government red tape. Williams quickly accepted. The actor found Argentina with its large ranches and leisurely way of life much to his liking and quickly established a residence. He has since ping-ponged back and forth from Buenos Aires to California, spending a year or two there, and then a year in Los Angeles. And he hasn't spent a moment in front of film cameras since.

Of course, there have been offers, particularly one from the Disney Studios to revive "the Fox" in the CBS series *Zorro and Son*. By his request, the studio sent Williams first class airline tickets, and he gladly returned to his old stomping grounds. Unfortunately, things had changed. "I found out that CBS was *really* in charge, not the Disney people. They decided to give *Zorro and Son* the 'cutes,' and then, in typical network fashion, they 'cuted' the 'cutes,' and it was an abortion. It happened because Walt wasn't there. I've seen Walt throw network people off the lot. If he had seen their script, he would have yelled bloody murder."

Williams passed on the series, but CBS and Disney proceeded and hired Henry (*High Chaparral*) Darrow to play Don Diego. *Zorro and Son* lasted six episodes, and was never heard from again.

The press and public hasn't forgotten Williams—a French magazine tracked him from California to Argentina for an interview, and Williams was sent first class tickets again to appear on ABC's *Good Morning, America*. On this jaunt, Williams also made an appearance with other *Lost in Space* cast members on the game show *Family Feud*.

The actor is aware that *Zorro* and *Lost in Space* are still playing worldwide, and a new generation of fans comes along every few years. He has even heard the rumors of a *Lost in Space* movie. If called, would he serve? "I loved *Lost in Space* from the standpoint of the people, just like I enjoyed working on *Zorro*," he answers. "If the pay was right, I would think about it. It might be fun to do, although I understand Bill Mumy is something like seven feet tall. We don't look as much older as Bill does *taller*."

Until then, Guy Williams will be relaxing at his Argentine hacienda, living the good life, waiting patiently for that call... and a pair of first class airline tickets. ❄️

Ritchie

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of *Big Trouble in Little China*. Although there are some similarities between the two scripts, Ritchie isn't worried that *Big Trouble*'s difficulties presage bigger troubles for *The Golden Child*.

"Their film doesn't begin with the skepticism, it begins with belief in the supernatural, and I think that's the *only* reason *Big Trouble in Little China*, which was quite wonderful, failed to reach an audience," Ritchie says. "All the things that happened that are fantastic, the hero sees right from the very beginning. So although he is a shitkicker and gives a kind of 'aw shucks' reaction, he believes it. He can't *not* believe it—you must believe it if characters are flying through the air right in front of your truck. There's no naturalistic explanation possible for any of that. Therefore, the base of the humor is a guy thrown into a wild and woolly jeopardy scene behaving as if he's not in jeopardy. That's quite a different type of milieu for storytelling than ours.

"Also it would be very hard to recount to anybody what the story of *Big Trouble* is. I mean, what is the one-liner on that story? Who knows? I think that's the director of *Buckaroo Banzai* [writer W.D. Richter, STARLOG #107] having some more fun with conventional perceptions of narrative. I loved the film and my kids loved it, but if people say to me, 'Are you worried about *Golden Child* being similar?', I say no, because ours begins with a fantastic opening but is nevertheless in the realm of reality."

Which doesn't mean that Ritchie is already counting the millions of dollars his *Golden Child* points are going to bring him. He has been around too long to fully believe that prediction.

"When we previewed *Smile* in New York, the audience went crazy," Ritchie recalls. "I went with my agent, Sam Cohn, to dinner, and because we were socializing, he didn't want to talk business, but he passed me a little card that said, 'This is how much money you'll make from *Smile*.' Well, *Smile* didn't make a nickel! Its total domestic grosses are something like \$242,000, which is just insane. Since then, I gained a real perspective on prediction. The one thing we know is that *The Golden Child* will be in a tremendous number of theaters, that Paramount is extracting very good terms from exhibitors, and because of *Ishtar* dropping out of the holiday release scene, there are not many films for people to choose among at Christmas."

Which means that *The Golden Child* could do quite nicely. It had better—with Eddie Murphy's popularity at an all-time high, anything less than a \$100 million gross will be seen, amazingly, as a disappointment. Ritchie isn't too worried. He's already got the good word from one important source.

"Let me put it this way," Michael Ritchie says with a smile, "we ran it for Eddie and he said it was a bad mother. From him, that's the highest compliment." ❄️

Bluth

(continued from page 31)

before attempted an animated feature. Spielberg himself comes from a regular, live-action background. But this wasn't an obstacle in *Tail*'s production.

"The rules of film producing are fairly universal to both live-action and animation," the director indicates. "In both, you are in the business of entertainment. The play is the thing.

"All of the things that Steven knows, all of his filmmaking experience, he brings to animation. He just applies them, building character, dramatization, editing, etc. He brings his considerable experience to bear on an animated feature, and it works."

With his *American Tail* behind him, Bluth has new projects in the works.

"We are doing a second picture with Steven, along with George Lucas," Bluth reveals. "This will be my first time working with George. So far, it has been really terrific."

But the biggest new project for Bluth and his partners will coincide with *Tail*'s opening, when the entire animation operation moves to Dublin, Ireland.

"We have some European projects underway, and the move makes sense to support them," the animator explains. "The Dublin location will give us good access to London, Spain and France. Also, we are looking for new animation talent that we believe we'll find in Europe.

"The European culture has been more attuned to the concept of animation as adult-acceptable art, rather than just kiddie fare. And we're trying to make classical animation an art form, have it grow in acceptance, and help it stay alive."

Bluth reports that Spielberg himself is working out of England now, and this move will help cement the working relationship begun with *An American Tail*. "He'll be right across the bay, and we hope to work on more projects with him."

Though the story of these rodent refugees has been released during the 100th anniversary year of the Statue of Liberty, Bluth insists that the film's immigrant angle is not its most important theme.

"*An American Tail* is more the story of a little creature trying to find his way home," says Bluth. "When Fievel falls overboard, there he is in the Atlantic Ocean, a little mouse—what chance has he got? But by some miraculous means, he does arrive on the American shores. Now, he must find the rest of his family.

"Of course, animation is all symbolic. The little characters are symbols that touch chords inside all of us. What Fievel is doing is what we are all really trying to do—trying to find home. How do I get back? Where is home?"

In the end, Fievel finds that home is not a place, but that home is where his heart lives—with the rest of his family. Like many hopeful immigrants, the Mousekewitz clan finds its heart in its new home, America. ❄️