

Lost in Space

US TV series : 1965-68 : dir. : CBS / Irwin Allen : 83 x 50 min
prod: Irwin Allen : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Billy Mumy](#)
Jonathan Harris; Guy Williams; June Lockhart; Marta Kristen; Angela Cartwright;
Mark Goddard; Bob May (as the robot)

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	∞	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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*Beset on all sides by Barbie dolls and beach hunks, Dr Smith finds solace with the only other fallible human for light years around. Yep ! That's you, Will !
Source for all stills except where indicated – Bill Mumy's home website*

Halliwell's Television Companion review:

"A family of the future, on its way to colonise Alpha Centauri, is shipwrecked on an unknown planet. Cheerfully studio-bound adventure, mainly for kids: too much talk for grown-ups."

The Golden Age of Children's Television comment:

"The king of American science fiction was Irwin Allen, who brought us the futuristic adventures of super submarine Seaview,

commanded by Admiral Harriman Nelson



(Richard Basehart), in "Voyage to the

Bottom of the Sea"... Allen's next project was "**Lost in Space**", made in 1965 but set in 1997. It followed the trials and tribulations of the Space Family Robinson as they set out to colonise a distant planet, only for their plans to be scuppered by fiendish enemy agent Colonel Zachary Smith (Jonathan Harris) who sneaked on board and reprogrammed their robot. So they ended up in the middle of nowhere, a bleak, barren place with no sign of life. It was a bit like Mablethorpe in high summer. Then, following a comparatively unsuccessful journey

through history in "**The Time Tunnel**", Allen came up with last of his sixties classics, "**Land of the Giants**", where the spaceship Spindrift, on a routine 1983 shuttle service, passed through a dense white cloud and emerged in a world in which everything was twelve times bigger. This made Cyril Smith roughly the size of Africa..."

Radio Times notes:

"LOST IN SPACE MARATHON: Eleven hours of episodes from the sixties' US sci-fi adventure series. The Robinson family blast off into space in the Jupiter 2, but after the meddling of the villainous Dr Smith, they are thrown off course and marooned on another planet."

"A further 11 hours of the sixties' sci-fi adventure series with the Robinson family of space explorers. Today's episodes are:

- "Astral Traveller"
- "The Space Primevals"
- "Collision of Planets"
- "Treasure of the Lost Planet"
- "Deadliest of the Species"
- "Trip Through the Robot"
- "Flight Into the Future"
- "Visit to a Hostile Planet"
- "The Galaxy Gift"
- "Wreck of the Robot"
- "Prisoners of Space" "

"Adventures of a family of space explorers.

"Target: Earth"

Shapeless aliens turn themselves into duplicates of the Robinson party."

- The Jupiter gets trapped in a space prison.
- The Robinsons are forced to board a strange space lighthouse.
- The Robot is accidentally enlarged to the size of a house.
- When a bandito threatens to abduct an Ice Princess in the Robinsons' care, the Robot intervenes."

TV Quick notes:

- "Dr Smith lands Jupiter 2 on an alien planet run by Cyborgs. Whoops.
- The Robinsons are tried for space crimes by a mystery tribunal.
- Smith's involvement with a green-skinned girl causes problems.
- Will helps the Thief of Outer Space find his long-lost princess. "

What's On TV notes:

"Sci fi series.

- The Robot is accidentally enlarged to the size of a house.
- Will is tempted to run away with an intergalactic circus."

Square Peg deconstruction / demolition article "The Unsuitable Dr.Smith":

"I only vaguely recall the time when simply everyone looked like an astronaut's wife. People then thought little of eating liquid meat through a plastic tube. They would queue for hours to stare at a disappointing lunar rock sample, while boys clad in flame-retardant white polymers were strapped, prone, to take-off couches, while they talked to drip-dry shirtsleeves in Houston. Launch-pads and retros were almost as commonplace as space age launderamas, where beehives in trousersuits washed coloured casuals in appalling man-made fibres.

Anyhow my neighbour, a thin white man with bad teeth and orange hair sang a mysterious song in which, foolishly brave, he passed one hundred thousand miles and yet felt very still. He floated in a most peculiar way while sitting in a tin can, far above the moon. I leaned over the fence on one occasion and he said, rather dreamily from his sun lounger: "Planet Earth is Blue and there's Nothing I can Do"..

Meanwhile I met a bloodstained Mrs. Kennedy, in a cloud of rocket exhaust. Naturally I shook her warmly by the hand and sighed: "Isn't it wonderful? These days almost everyone is either blasting off or splashing down." I thought wistfully of floating on an umbilical over the Indian Ocean and performing a docking manoeuvre with a swarthy Russian cosmonaut. She looked at me blankly, and murmured softly: "It's a dream. It's only a dream." With that she drove off slowly in an open-topped limousine.

Naturally, though, I worried about space. Most people did: where it was, how big it was, and everything. So I was always most relieved when people came back from it, suspended beneath gaily coloured parachutes.

However, one family did not come back. The Terrible Accident that blew the Robinson family off-course, at the start of their mission, and left them "**Lost In Space**" was a source of

immense unease to me, and gave rise to a weekly sense of dread at their predicament. The Awful Unknown of Space: and being lost



in it, unable to come back. And that Terrible Accident was entirely the fault of one man. Which put Doctor Zachary Smith in a somewhat invidious position aboard the Jupiter

II, and he was never allowed to forget it. He was not supposed to be there anyway. His own treachery and foolishness had jeopardised the lives of all on board, and through their



wanderings he remained among them, like a canker.

Brandishing the latest space weapon, redolent of a food whisk, the unsuitable Smith, in a mauve sweater and mustard crew neck, is entangled helplessly in a series of maroon fronds. He struggles feebly and wails his lamentations. Had he the strength of character to defend himself, the weapon would not protect him from the outsize crustacean approaching offscreen. His only hope is the endeavour of a beautiful twelve-year old space boy in a lemon catsuit.

This is Will Robinson. The youngest member of the crew, and the only person to care two hoots about Zachary Smith. He is a sturdy, attractive boy. Intelligent, sensitive, yet good at rough games, with a muscular athletic body, and a bashful, upright, noble nature. A suspicion lurks in my mind to this day that Will was only included in the crew in order to breed with the space Barbie light years later when the macho "Professor" Robinson and the "Major" Don West had become impotent, through old age or some weird space virus or other.

As in any other American home, aboard the Jupiter II there were always the chores to be done. Mom was in charge of the catering, and thought nothing of spreading the checked picnic table cloth on bizarre lunar rock outcrops, and shouting "Come and get it!" to where the men would be setting up a force-field generator and Barbie would be pressing wild flowers. Dinner would invariably be southern fried chicken with a lightly tossed green salad and fries, served from aluminium lunchpails, apple pie after. Of course, there was always the nagging fear that the nuclear reactor would break down, and with it the supply of all-American foodstuffs.

Being the only European, Smith started out with a disadvantage. Clearly Europeans were not designed for space travel, and Smith evinces no real interest in the voyage, except to snivel and complain. But his unsuitability as a crew member did not stop with his effeminate lack of fortitude when confronted by privations en route, but in his position outside the charmed nuclear family circle. Plus, he lusted desperately after Will, a forgivable character defect perhaps, anywhere but in the hostile regions of outer space, Will's constant concern for Smith's well being normally amused the family, and they put it down to Will's good nature rather than the

perverse feeling of power it gave Will to have Smith under his control.



As the Jupiter II careened around the heavens, hopelessly lost, encountering pixie people with

ginger hairs, and fluffy white monsters with Max Factor talons, Will and Doctor Smith enjoyed a strange symbiotic relationship, to the exasperation of The Family. Will would lecture Smith on honour and nobility. Smith for his part was allowed to put his arm around the boy's shoulder in times of emergency, pat him on the head and so forth. This caused consternation among the others, to whom..."

[remainder of article presently missing – apologies]

Daily Mirror kids' page item:

"Danger! Danger! Wibbly cardboard space-ship off the starboard bow! Yes, now the crazy adventures and even crazier dress sense of the Space Family Robinson are yours to keep with this these out-of-this-world **"Lost in Space"** videos! You can buy them on Fox video, but being such a mega-STAR (geddit?) myself, I've got 10 sets of all three videos to give away. To win, just tell me which is the closest planet to the Sun. Is it: a) Mercury b) Pluto c) Jupiter? Answers on a postcard marked "Space" to the address below by 5 October please. Lift off! "

[no listing in "History of Television", "Television's Greatest Hits" or "25 Years of ITV - 1955-1980"]

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

"As Jackie Coogan should have been kid brother to Louise Brooks, the sandy-haired Billy

Mumy should have been to Sissy Spacek. Shy, freckled, pale-eyed and plucky, with a most charming smile, the young Bill was praised by James Stewart, his father in "DEAR



BRIGITTE", as "the only kid actor I knew who was worth a damn".

He was barely seven when he appeared in two little TV dramas ("The Door Without a Key" and "Bang! You're Dead") in the "**Alfred Hitchcock Presents**" slot. After a miniscule part in "**A CHILD IS WAITING**", Billy made his first film for the Disney studio, partnering the redder-headed Michael McGreevey as the saviours of "**SAMMY - THE WAY OUT SEAL**".

His last boyhood lead, in "**RASCAL**", was again for Disney, but in the meantime he had had his best role as the mathematical prodigy Erasmus, surprising child of a bewildered poet and academic (Stewart), flabbergasting computer operators and racing tipsters alike before

achieving his heart's desire in a meeting with Brigitte Bardot. His swooning adoration of the great lady – archly playing herself – is a joy.

Hereabouts, too, he became a national figure on TV as Will Robinson in the barely effable series "**Lost in Space**" (65-68), and between this and the claims of education had little time for major filming.

In 1971, following the boy-and-raccoon romance "**RASCAL**", the now gangling and long-haired Bill Mumy had a lead in the animal-rights drama "**BLESS THE BEASTS AND CHILDREN**". Subsequent films have included "**SUNSHINE**" (73), "**PAPILLON**" (73), "**TWILIGHT ZONE: THE MOVIE**" (83) and "**CAPTAIN AMERICA**" (89)."

Watching this series in the 1960s I was 10-13, and wanted my SF neat. But a noxious virus was infecting practically every American SF/fantasy series on TV at the time, if not instantaneously, then with progressive effect as the show moved into a third or fourth season. That virus was called "camp", and one show after another slid into blatant self-mockery, the tongue so far into the cheek it burst through and pointed rudely at the audience.

"**Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea**", for example, started out as a futuristic submarine adventure series, with good production values and halfway credible plots. By the end it lurched from one preposterous story to another, and the cast abandoned any pretense of taking themselves seriously. Even "**Star Trek**" – so far ahead of the game it was considered "too intellectual" when the pilot was screened – showed symptoms of the same infection in some later episodes.

The epidemic found its apotheosis in the "**Batman**" series – from start to last a huge guffaw at the comic-book superheroes Americans had taken to their hearts in childhood. No-one involved in that series (except, strangely, Burt Ward, as Robin) had any illusions of playing for drama, and the camper it got, the more the (adult) public seemed to love it.

But the Typhoid Mary of sixties camp was Irwin Allen, whose series degenerated one after another into limp, shoddy vaudeville. Prime example was "**Lost in Space**", originally conceived as a straight translation to SF terms of the "*Swiss Family Robinson*" adventures. Saboteur Dr Smith, and the ship's robot, were intended as peripheral characters, but sponsors felt the pilot film lacked any useful tension between the principals, who would merely reel on from one external threat to another in impregnable domestic harmony. The series required an extra ingredient, they felt, and the Dr Smith character quickly became the focal point of the show.

For the ship's robot, Allen wanted to use the still-impressive one from "**FORBIDDEN PLANET**" (and "**THE INVISIBLE BOY**"), but this was the property of MGM, who would not release it, so he approached the effects technician who built it and commissioned a similar, more durable, model for the punishing demands of TV production. He brought the two together in one episode for a battle of the robots, and ensured that his own Robby was victorious. "You have defeated me!" croaks the original Robby, and falls flat on its back.

"**Lost in Space**" began, like the BBC's own "**Dr Who**", with hopes of being a family drama series, but budgets were trimmed, scriptwriters grew more mocking, the monsters dafter, and by the second series all that remained was the music hall shenanigans of whimpering, conniving Zachary Smith, blundering into predicaments through his own perfidy and whittling vainly away at the *esprit du corps* of young Will Robinson, gadget-master. Jonathan Harris played Smith with all the menace of a Scoutmaster bent on world domination. He was a C3PO without the gold cladding, a Clifton Webb bristling with impotent spite at the world.

As a boy, I hated its lazy lack of conviction, its cheesy studio-bound planet sets and zipper-suit aliens, but mostly I was impatient with the blandness. There were no Klingons or Romulans to present any credible danger to the Jupiter 2, no adversary worthy of the name, while the crew themselves were as interesting as cardboard cutout astronauts and their Tupperware party womenfolk. Gene Roddenberry's first "**Star Trek**" series may look lame from this distance in time, but it was a "**2001**" by comparison to "**Lost in Space**".

When the series ultimately expired of its own mediocrity, Irwin Allen attempted to replicate the formula with the even more vapid "**Land of the Giants**" - all-American family crashland their saucer on an alien world which is spookily an exact replica of 1960s USA, except that everything is wondrously ten times bigger - coo! Once again there were the cardboard cutout astronauts, the Tupperware party womenfolk, a young boy (Berry) and a snivelling treacherous rogue with a vaguely unamerican accent. All the same faults were there again, with the added insult of setting an SF show entirely in contemporary locations (a great saving on wardrobe and props) - a Brobdignag scenario with no place to go.





Almost single-handedly, Irwin Allen destroyed the credibility of TV science fiction just as surely as the glut of repetitive TV Westerns killed off that genre in the cinema for a decade. But young Billy Mumy sensed nothing of this. Interviewed in 2001, he spoke of his role in the series with pride and affection. What young boy (in the sixties at any rate) wouldn't leap at the chance to don a spacesuit, port a raygun, and tinker with futuristic gadgetry? Will, he said, was always polite and obedient, but did get to rescue the grown-ups from danger through his own technical ingenuity. Thus Mumy, but in truth his was one of those "model kid" TV roles which conform to certain rigid but unwritten codes of "appropriate" behaviour. Behaviour which, TV executives believe, the viewing parents would endorse. So Will Robinson always showed due respect for his elders – even Dr Smith, was never too forward or independent-minded, trusted in what he was told, and generally minded his manners. He was the kind of child you could take on a picnic without too many qualms, or leave in charge of the house without giving the green light to mischief. American TV, even today, is more populated with such kids than America probably is, and as such Will Robinson was a phoney. Mumy's personality, to some degree, shone through all the same, and his character was far more prominent in the series than one would expect of a token kid, like the one in "**Land of the Giants**".

Mumy aged from 11 to 14 in the role, but at the same time made guest appearances on numerous other TV shows of the day – "**The Munsters**" and "**Bewitched**" among them. His passion for performing music was already taking shape, and several stills from his home website show him serenading cast and crew on the "**Lost in Space**" set. In the 1970s he performed with "America", "Bill Mumy and the Igloos" and "The Jenerators". He became a comic book writer for "The Hulk", "Spiderman", "Star Trek" and "Lost In Space", and was nominated for an Emmy for his music to Disney's "Adventures in Wonderland" series.

In 1998, following a wave of big-screen revivals of sixties TV shows – most of which only served to soil the public affection for those old favourites – "**LOST IN SPACE**" joined the queue, rehashing the pilot story which launched the series. With Gary Oldman hamming it up as Dr Smith, and a visual effects budget to dwarf the cost of the entire television series, it went nowhere fast and loudly. The womenfolk, 1990s compliant, cast away their Tupperware to scold the men for their testosterone displays, and the robot stooge of the series became a leviathan bristling with lethal weaponry, like a prototype for "Robocop 4". But what was most notably (and thankfully) absent from the big-screen revival was that thick vein of camp in the script. While science fiction spectacles continue to rake in hundreds of millions at the cinemas, and in video and DVD after-sales, nobody is going to kill that golden goose by resorting to self-parody, although films like "**MEN IN BLACK**", "**MARS ATTACKS**" and "**EVOLUTION**" have flirted dangerously with the idea. Once you lampoon a thing, audiences will not take it seriously again for a long while, which is why no airport disaster movies were made for years following "**AIRPLANE**".

See the 1998 remake, and subject index under [CIRCUS](#), [SCIENCE FICTION](#) and [TV SERIES](#).

The stills on these pages represent fewer than half of those available from the series. See the images section of the archive for more.