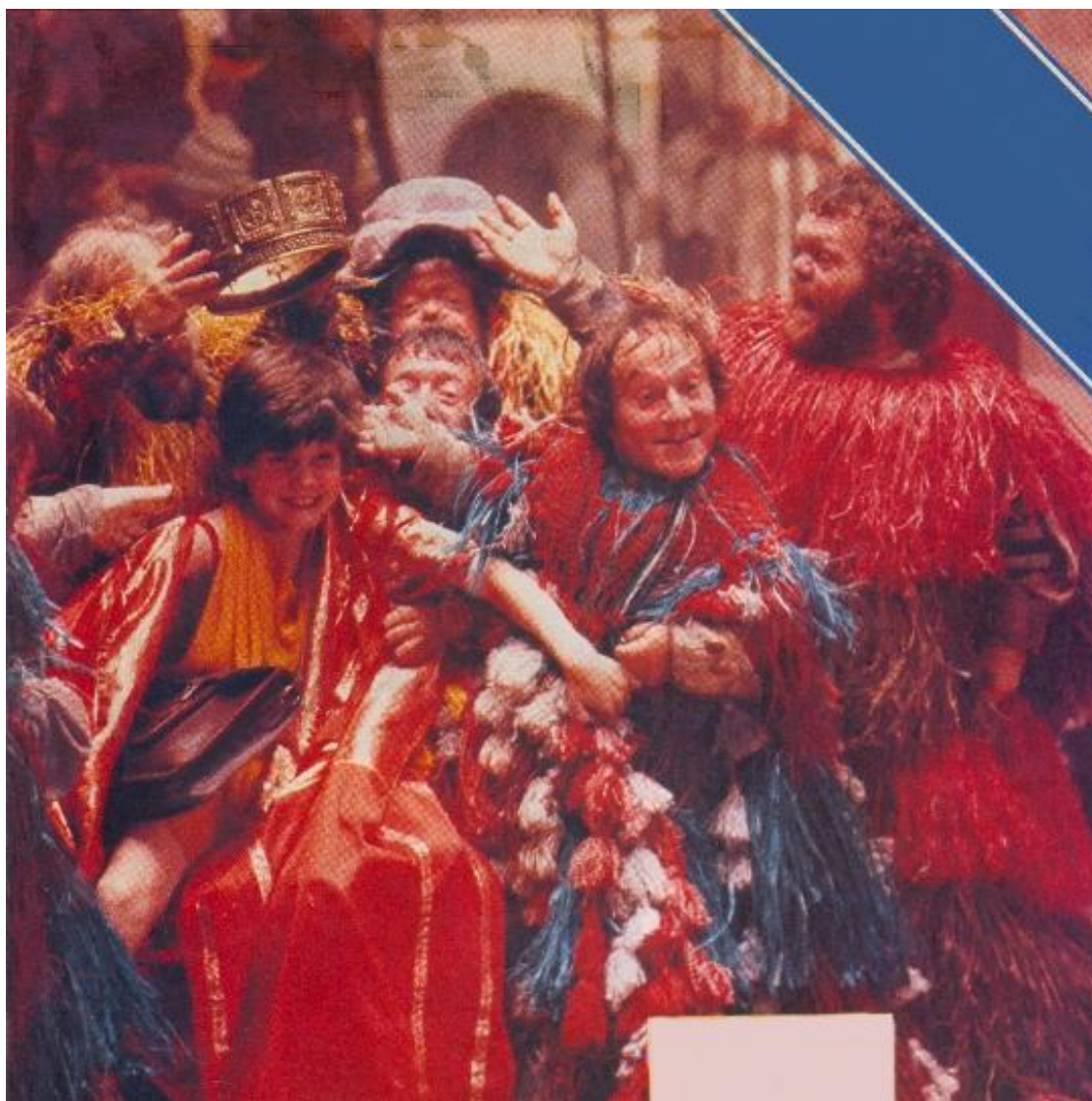


Time Bandits

UK : 1981 : dir. Terry Gilliam : HandMade : 113 min
 prod: Terry Gilliam : scr: Terry Gilliam & Michael Palin : dir.ph.: Peter Biziou
[Craig Warnock](#)
 John Cleese; Sean Connery; Ian Holm; David Warner; Ralph Richardson; Shelley Duvall;
 Michael Palin; Katherine Helmond; Peter Vaughan; David Rappaport; Jim Broadbent

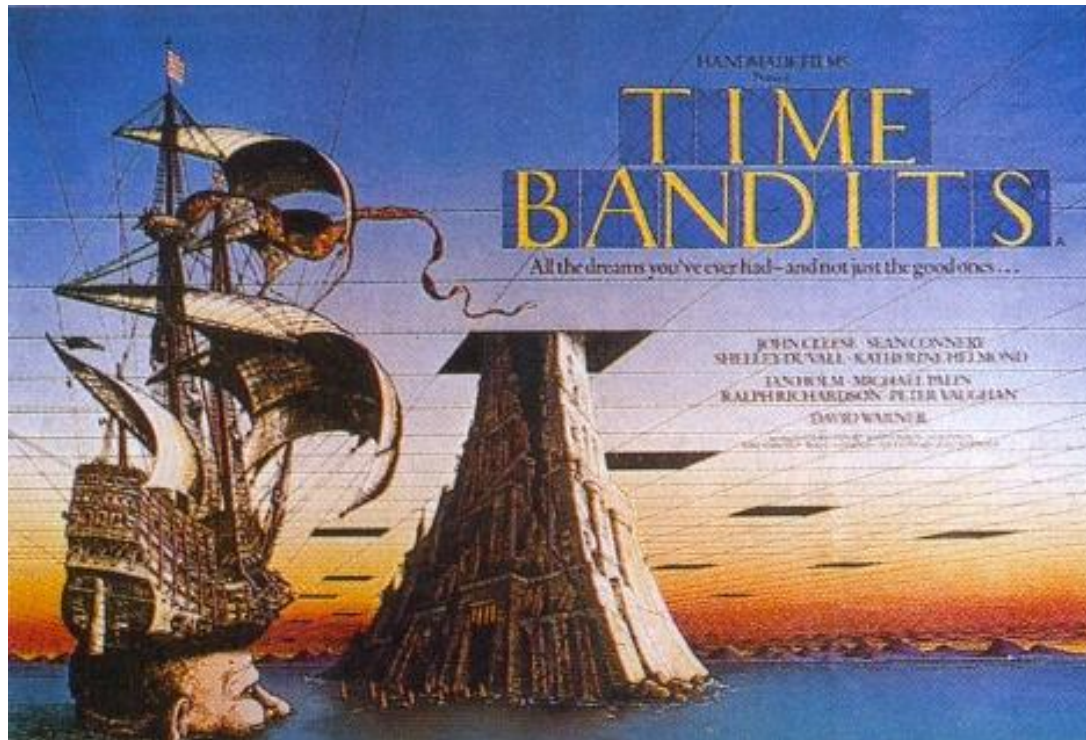
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**“All the dreams you’ve ever had...
 And not just the good ones...”**



Kevin at the court of Agamemnon, pre-Trojan war

Source: TV Times



Gilliam's poster design for the film recalls his Monty Python animations, but he resisted any temptation to incorporate animation work in this most fantastic of his film creations.
 Source: Radio Times

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Six dwarfs, pursued by the "Supreme Being" (Richardson), escort a young English schoolboy through time; they meet Robin Hood (Cleese), Napoleon (Holm), King Agamemnon (Connery). Imaginative, but not as funny or as thrilling as it should be. Written by Gilliam and Palin, of Monty Python fame American running time 110 minutes. **½ "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above, adding:

"..Written by Gilliam and Palin, of Monty Python fame, and naturally made in that style. **½ "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A schoolboy is taken through time by a group of demonic dwarfs. Curious tall tale in which schoolboy fantasy alternates with violence and black comedy. In general, much less funny than it intended to be, but with some hilarious moments. * "

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"A sci-fier in which a child (Craig Warnock) gets trapped in a battle between the Supreme Being (Ralph Richardson) and Evil (David Warner), but also comes across Napoleon (Ian Holm), Robin Hood (John Cleese as Basil Fawlt), a medieval couple (Shelley Duvall, Michael Palin), two ogres (Katherine Helmond, Peter Vaughan) and, in by far the best sequence, Agamemnon (Sean Connery). Often crude, noisy and violent; sometimes it's like the Monty Python version of "STAR WARS", but mostly it's *sui generis* – for which be thankful. *

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
 review:

"A fantasy film in the heavy-handed vein of "DARK CRYSTAL" and "THE NEVER-ENDING STORY". Although it moves at a faster clip than those films, it's a disappointing melange of Monty Pythonisms and frenetic cleverness which can't always mask the paucity of true imagination at hand. Modeled in part on C. S. Lewis's "Narnia Chronicles", the film features a military-minded boy through whose



Homeric Greece dares show its face in the cinema – whatever is the world coming to? Mercifully, it's only a comedy. And pricey Sean Connery repays the investment in his star name with a pleasing and self-effacing performance as Agamemnon, king of Mycaenae, who thinks Kevin a messenger from the gods. Source: Radio Times

bedroom window¹ passes a time-hole, by which some would-be thieves plan to escape. ** ”

Rating the Movies review:

“A lively fantasy film, done in an imaginative style, which mocks science fiction stories, history, and good-vs-evil conflicts. An 11-year old English lad, played by Craig Warnock, joins a band of dwarfs in a rollicking romp through time holes in space, where they meet such historical figures as Napoleon (Holm), Greek warrior Agamemnon (Connery), and Robin Hood (Cleeese). The film will appeal to children of all ages, and it boasts a playful script, tasteful direction, and splendid special effects. Also with Katherine Helmond, Michael Palin, Ralph Richardson, Peter Vaughn, and David Warner. *** ”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“An extraordinarily inventive fantasy in which schoolboy Warnock is rescued from a dull

suburban existence by a band of renegade dwarfs, who emerge from his wardrobe and whisk him off on an incredible journey through time and space. Guided by a "Time Hole Map of the Universe", Warnock and his diminutive pals gatecrash history, meeting up with Robin Hood and Napoleon, and turning up uninvited in Ancient Rome² and on the deck of the ill-fated Titanic. Sometime Monty Python animator Gilliam fills the screen with bizarre images, and directs with a breathless ingenuity.”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

“For most of its length a cross between a sword-and-sorcery adventure and "MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL", this fantasy from director Terry Gilliam (later to make "BRAZIL") becomes exciting and really imaginative in cinematic terms only when our six dwarf heroes reach the fortress of Ultimate Darkness. Otherwise it's a comic-strip trip through time and space. Devotees of Python humour, however, will undoubtedly savour John Cleeese's Robin Hood. ** ”

¹ Or wardrobe, to be precise

² Close, but no cigar



Six small thieves have their picture taken with a bigger one (a publicity still – not a scene from the film). John Cleese's name appears first on the credits, though he's scarcely on screen five minutes, but it's David Rappaport (centre) who has the defining central role of Randall, would-be arch-brigand. Source: TV Times

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"When you can count the laughs in a comedy on the fingers of one hand, it isn't so funny. **"TIME BANDITS"** is a kind of potted history of man, myth and the eternal clash between good and evil as told in the inimitable idiom of Monty Python. Not that the basic premise is bad, with an English youngster and a group of dwarfs passing through time holes on assignment by the Maker to patch up the shoddier parts of his creation³. What results, unfortunately, is a hybrid neither sufficiently hair-raising or comical.

The plot's grand tour ranges from ancient Greece and other parts to the Titanic to the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness, the latter gothic region presided over by a costume-heavy David Warner as one of nine above-title and mostly cameo parts. Of which the funniest, near pic's conclusion, is the Maker himself as none other than Ralph Richardson in business suit. John

³ Entirely wrong

Cleese as Robin Hood, Ian Holm as Napoleon, Sean Connery as a Greek warrior-ruler with a passion for magic, and Michael Palin as a plummy English upper class type all acquit well enough in the limited circumstances."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Anyone with a sense of adventure will find a lot to like about this delightful tale of a boy and six dwarves – no, this isn't **"SNOW WHITE"** – who travel back in time via a map that charts a course through holes in the fabric of the universe. Rated "PG" for violence and adult themes⁴. **** "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"Gilliam and Palin, from **"Monty Python's Flying Circus"**, masterminded this madcap journey through history. A curious boy, Kevin

⁴ What "adult themes"?

(David Warnock ⁵) is whisked out of his dreary English home by six mischievous dwarfs who possess a map stolen from the Supreme Being (Sir Ralph Richardson) that reveals gaps in the universe. Utilising these "time holes", they travel through history, encountering the likes of Robin Hood (Cleese), Greek warrior King Agamemnon (Connery), and Napoleon (Holm) - and robbing them of their treasures. God wants his map back and he keeps popping up at the most inopportune times for Kevin and the time bandits. The Evil Genius (David Warner) also wants to get his hands on this great treasure. Who will win?

This wild and sometimes woolly fantasy is delivered in the customary chaotic Python style, resulting in an onslaught of witticisms and slapstick. We can also see definite signs of the major filmmaker Gilliam (director of "**BRAZIL**", "**THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHHAUSEN**", "**THE FISHER KING**") would later become. In many ways, this remains his most satisfying film. However, be warned; this film is unusually dark for a modern children's film⁶. At times a grimly comic fairy tale, "**TIME BANDITS**" offers little reassurance. It's a tough world out there - even in our imaginative life. Perhaps that is why we need heroes so badly.

Connery, in particular, stands out in a sterling cast. His portrayal of Agamemnon emerges as an idealised surrogate father that any boy would love to have. Cleese is priceless as a primly officious Robin Hood. Richardson as the majestic Supreme Being is initially terrifying in his displays of power a la "**THE WIZARD OF OZ**" but ultimately a pleasant absent-minded old man. Shelley Duvall and Palin shine in multiple roles as various put upon couples throughout history. They also portray Kevin's deadened consumerist parents⁷. The band of little people is also splendid, especially the late David Rappaport as their leader, Randall. Chances are good that this eccentric film will gain in stature in the years to come. **** "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Film Review 1980-81" or "The Films of the Eighties"]

⁵ *Would it be too much trouble to get the name of the actor right?*

⁶ *And all the better for that!*

⁷ *They certainly don't*

Sunday Times review:

"A brilliant time-travel fantasy in which a young boy is transported from his bedroom by a horde of perky dwarves to meet Agamemnon, Robin Hood and Napoleon and other historic figures, and to witness a battle between the Supreme Being (Ralph Richardson) and the Evil Genius (David Warner). Michael Palin co-wrote."

"Visual fantasy from Monty Python alumni about a bored schoolboy who is taken on an adventure back through history."

Radio Times reviews:

"Children's fantasy flick for adults from Python's Terry Gilliam, with tremendous visual flair, many funny and exciting moments, and engaging guest turns from the famous - Sean Connery, Ralph Richardson and John Cleese - playing characters from the pages of history. One of Gilliam's most pleasurable films with wit and imagination galore, and a clever script co-written by Michael Palin. ****"

"Craig Warnock encounters a regal Sean Connery in a fantastic journey through time."

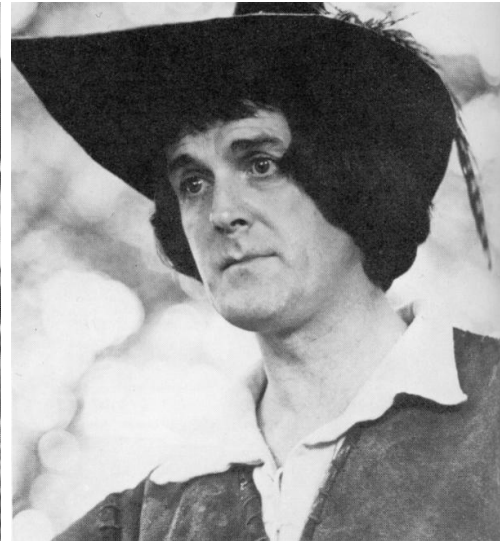
"Fantasy comedy, directed by former Monty Python member Terry Gilliam and co-scripted by him with Michael Palin, starring John Cleese, Sean Connery. A young boy called Kevin is transported through time by a group of dwarves who has a map [sic] revealing gaps in the universe. Robin Hood and Napoleon are among the characters they meet on their bizarre journey."

"Children's fantasy with Sean Connery and John Cleese "

"Before Terry Gilliam went pompously ape with his current "**TWELVE MONKEYS**", he made a series of wondrously inventive fantasies, of which this was one of the best, produced by British company HandMade Films while still in its infancy. Anti-suburbia and parents, its story of the schoolboy accompanying a group of outlaw dwarfs on a jolting trip through time has some great astonishments - John Cleese as Robin Hood, Sean Connery as a Greek warrior-king, Ralph Richardson as God and a vast ship worn like a ten-galleon hat. Ex-Python Gilliam is one of the great conjurers of cinema. It is a pity that what he pulls out of his hat is so

unpredictable. Contains some violence and swearing. **** ”

“Opening the "HandMade in Britain" season that celebrates independent British company



Top left: In the "Time of Legends", Katherine Helmond and Peter Vaughan fish something tasty out of the water – and it isn't prawns. Top right: Cleese; Bottom left: Connery. Bottom right: Randall (David Rappaport) explains to the Supreme Being (Richardson) how they made off with his map in a bout of high spirits.. The creator refrains from any extrovert displays of wrath, and mutters "Yes, well... I am the nice one."

Sources: bottom left: Rating the Movies; others: John Willis Screen World 1992 Film Annual

HandMade films. Fantasy comedy starring John Cleese, Sean Connery. Young Kevin is transported through time by a group of dwarfs who have a map revealing gaps in the universe. Robin Hood and Napoleon are among the characters they meet on their bizarre journey. Showing in widescreen format. **** ”

“Age-travelling dwarfs rob the rich through centuries - John Cleese and Sean Connery.”

“A tall order: Robin Hood (John Cleese) helps rescue a young boy from his dull suburban life.⁸”

⁸ *He certainly doesn't*

Excerpt from Barry Norman film column - July 96 - on HandMade Films:

"...HandMade [was] the independent production company founded in 1979 by the former Beatle George Harrison and the



Titanic passenger Shelley Duvall, fireman Sean Connery, ogress Katherine Helmond

Source: TV Times

financial consultant Denis O'Brien. Their first action was an even more spectacular rescue operation than the one they performed soon afterwards on **"THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY"**. When EMI declined to produce **"MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN"**, for fear that it would outrage religious groups, the Pythons turned to Harrison for assistance. And Harrison promptly mortgaged his house to help raise the budget. The result: success and handsome profits all round, not to mention the launching of HandMade on its, alas too brief, career as one of the most inventive production companies in Britain.

For a few years in the eighties, while the rest of the movie industry was more or less sunk in torpor, HandMade was responsible for a string of lively, idiosyncratic hits including, in 1981, Terry Gilliam's **"TIME BANDITS"**. This, written by Gilliam and Michael Palin, is an excellent choice to launch Channel 4's welcome tribute to HandMade and its works. It's a funny, imaginative fantasy that involves a small boy being snatched from his dreary suburban

home by a bunch of runaway dwarfs and wafted away on an amazing journey through time, encountering en route the likes of Robin Hood, Agamemnon, God, Satan and, memorably, Ian Holm as a vertically-challenged Napoleon brooding obsessively on heightism.

"TIME BANDITS" was followed by such comedies as **"THE MISSIONARY"** and **"A PRIVATE FUNCTION"**, the thriller **"MONA LISA"** and the recently re-released cult movie **"WITHNAIL AND I"**, and for a while it seemed that HandMade had the golden touch and could do no wrong. But as it turned out, **"WITHNAIL"** was pretty well the last of its real successes and, besides, HandMade was no more immune than any other film company to making its share of disappointments and duds, turkeys and downright stinkers... Along with the flops there were one or two ill-judged distribution deals and financial squabbles, and by the end of eighties it was virtually all over for HandMade..."

TV Times reviews:

"The critics called **"TIME BANDITS"** (1981) "indescribable". But Monty Python's Terry Gilliam, who directed and co-wrote the film - which features Katherine Helmond, Sean Connery and Shelley Duvall - doesn't know why. "It's a children's adventure story" he says, "about a small boy and six dwarfs who keep falling through a time warp into different periods of history." Gilliam says he made the film because "I wanted to write something that the whole family could watch without embarrassment. " "

"Fantasy adventure. Six dwarfs steal a map of the cosmos, together with its "time holes", and resolve to become bandits who travel across time. The first hole they tumble through leads to the bedroom of Kevin, an English schoolboy in 1980. ** "

"First-rate fantasy - still, for me, Terry Gilliam's best film to date, and that includes **"TWELVE MONKEYS"** - in which a suburban youngster called Kevin (Craig Warnock) is led into a thrilling adventure through a hole map of the universe by some amiable dwarves. With John Cleese as a terribly polite Robin Hood, Sean Connery as Agamemnon, and Ralph Richardson as God."

What's On TV notes:

"Fantasy comedy. A bright 11-year old lad is whisked away for time travel adventures by a bunch of dwarfs who emerge from his wardrobe. They've stolen a map from God, and are seeking out the great men of history to rob them."

"A gang of dwarves go on a spree through history using a map they've stolen from the Supreme Being, in this fantasy comedy from ex-Monty Python man Terry Gilliam."

"Fantasy-adventure from ex-Python Terry Gilliam, starring John Cleese and Sean Connery. A group of dwarves steal a map from god and set out through the ages, changing the course of history."

"John Cleese and Sean Connery star in this comedy-fantasy from ex-Python Terry Gilliam."

Jolly Robin glad-hands Randall and his crew before relieving them of their ill-gotten gains. "Have you met the Poor?" Robin asks, "Such nice people. They haven't two pennies to rub together of course, but that's because they're poor! Ha ha!" Rumour has it Tony Blair studied at the same school of public oratory. Source: News of the World (heave)

"John Cleese stars in this fantasy-comedy from fellow ex-Python Terry Gilliam."

"The fantastical tale of a gang of dwarves travelling across time. Compulsive comedy starring John Cleese, Sean Connery, Shelley Duvall."

"More time travel in this fantasy-comedy from ex-Monty Python Terry Gilliam."

"Ex-Monty Python man Terry Gilliam's fantasy-comedy about time travelling dwarves."

John Willis Screen World Film Annual 1982 - vol 33 - credit listing:

"(AVCO EMBASSY) Producer-Director: Terry Gilliam; Screenplay: Michael Palin, Terry Gilliam; Photography: Peter Bizios; Editor: Julian Doyle; Songs: George Harrison; In Dolby Stereo and colour; 116 minutes; November release.

CAST:

Robin Hood.....John Cleese
King Agamemnon.....Sean Connery
Pansy.....Shelley Duvall
Mrs. Ogre.....Katherine Helmond
Napoleon.....Ian Holm
Vincent.....Michael Palin
Supreme Being.....Ralph Richardson
Ogre.....Peter Vaughan
Evil Genius.....David Warner
Randall.....David Rappaport
Fidget.....Kenny Baker
Wally.....Jack Purvis
Og.....Mike Edmonds
Strutter.....Malcolm Dixon
Vermin.....Tiny Ross
Kevin.....Craig Warnock





Source: John Willis Screen World 1982 Film Annual

The bemused reception from some critics suggests they failed to recognise this as a film primarily for children, but one executed with greater flair, panache and sheer visual invention than anything we've come to expect from "family oriented" films. Gilliam did not baulk at showing firing squads at work in the Napoleonic section, or making some of the creatures in his fortress of darkness a frightening sight. He recognises, as good children's storytellers always have, that children crave the darker side of the imagination too. Just as Spielberg was later to do with "**JURASSIC PARK**", Gilliam kept the violence and cruelty within limits that would pass the censorship criteria laid down for older children, but without compromising on his budget or production design. "**TIME BANDITS**" was released a year ahead of "**E.T. THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL**". Both directors were aiming to make a film that would delight children, but that adults would also enjoy without the condescension attendant on Disney products. Spielberg, however, works within the mainstream of American culture, something for which Gilliam has never had an unqualified admiration.

Some critics, perhaps, were expecting a much darker film, along the lines of his later "**BRAZIL**" and "**TWELVE MONKEYS**". Others may have looked for the iconoclastic humour of "**MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL**" or "**THE LIFE OF BRIAN**". There is much fun in "**TIME BANDITS**" at the expense of suburban consumer culture, humiliating TV game shows, physical size, and ultimately the mental faculties of god, but it is a side dish to the time travel adventure which builds to a climax of pure Tolkienesque fantasy. In one sense it was a mistake to use former Python cadres Cleese and Palin in his cast. Although their names obviously helped to generate box office interest, they also reinforced expectations of the wrong sort. Palin has two quite meaningless cameos as travellers – first in Sherwood Forest,

later on the deck of the Titanic – with whom the dwarfs collide on their scurrying in and out of the “time holes”. John Cleese for his part flits on and off the screen in five minutes.

One evening in bed, young Kevin is startled by a visitation from a mediaeval knight on horseback, who vaults over his bed and thunders howling into the forest beyond, where the bedroom wall by rights ought to be. It is only the first of many breathtaking images to come. The following evening, Kevin is much keener than usual to get off to bed, and lies in wait with a torch for the knight to put in a showing. His eyes grow heavy and he drifts off to sleep, and at once we groan inwardly, sensing the “it was all just a dream” payoff further down the line.

This time it isn't the knight who emerges from the dark, of course, but six shifty-looking dwarfs who immediately pounce on the boy. They are closely pursued by a disembodied head demanding “Return What You Have Stolen From Me!”, and the terrified dwarfs push at Kevin's bedroom wall until it recedes down an infinite corridor before them. “It's never done *that* before!” Kevin remarks, much impressed, and before he knows it the whole party have pitched through a void in space-time to land in a barn somewhere during Napoleon's conquest of Italy. The receding bedroom wall is another marvellous visual conceit, as simple as Lewis Carroll's looking glass or rabbit-hole, and serving exactly the same function.

What follows is the first in a series of cameos – essentially one-gag sketches – but each one fleshed out with Gilliam's rich visual textures and keen eye for detail. Ian Holm had previously played Napoleon in the 1974 Thames serial “**Napoleon and Love**”. Here he is a sulky conqueror enchanted by a Punch & Judy show (“Zat's what I like to see – little people, *hitting each other!*”) and reciting from heart the diminutive height of Alexander, Charlemagne, Oliver Cromwell. The always dependable Holm would work for Gilliam again in “**BRAZIL**”.

Cleese bounds momentarily across the screen as a foppish Robin Hood surrounded by Geordie thugs — he redistributing wealth to the poor, they collecting it back to themselves under his nose. “And how long have you been in the robbery business?” he asks one of the dwarfs, “Four foot seven” comes the reply. It's a lazy performance, essentially retooling a Monty Python highwayman sketch, but the merry men are a hoot.

Next up is Agamemnon, and the awfully expensive Sean Connery. Kevin has become separated from his companions by this time and plummets out of the sky to save the King of Mycaenae, locked in a duel with a minotaur – the minotaur again splendidly visualised. A grateful king takes this presumptive messenger from the gods back to his city, and in due course announces him his heir. Kevin, pottering about the city in a Greek chiton and enormous English school-satchel, taking Polaroids of the locals, is delighted, but before he can protest he is whisked away again by the dwarfs to the first class deck of the Titanic.

The stolen map to these loopholes in the universe (“It was a bit of a botched job to be frank” Randall confides in Kevin, “We only had seven days you see”) has also attracted the notice of David Warner as Evil, imprisoned by the Supreme Being in a fortress in the “time of legends”. Using the dimmest of the dwarfs for a mouthpiece, he lures them closer to him with promises of the greatest treasure of all. As the film enters this phase, Gilliam is able to give his surrealist fantasy free reign. The dwarfs and Kevin are fished out of the ocean by an ogre with back pains and narrowly evade the cooking pot, only to find his galleon is no more than a hat being worn by a giant stomping across the ocean floor. Today such images would be a doddle to achieve with computer graphics, but Gilliam did it the old way, and very impressively too.

The robbers blunder across the fortress of ultimate darkness, are swiftly captured by the Evil one and imprisoned in a cage dangling from a rope above a bottomless abyss. While Evil, now in possession of the map and planning his conquest of the universe, is studying the mysteries of fast breeder reactors and subscriber trunk dialling, the dwarfs escape their cage and scatter to various time zones to raise reinforcements for a final battle to repossess the map. They leave Kevin behind to hold the fort.

I don't know why several sources identify Kevin as 11, since his age isn't mentioned anywhere in the film.

Note that Fidget is played by Kenny Baker, better known as R2D2.

See subject index under **COMEDY, FANTASY, GIANTS & LITTLE PEOPLE, HISTORY, RECOMMENDED TITLES** and under **SCIENCE FICTION** for very many more time travel tales.