Saturday morning science fiction has come a long way since the rayguns and rockets of Flash Gordon, but it still retains the essence: lots of action and human drama. One of the current successes is Ark II, a "post-holocaust" series following the exploits of a group dedicated to re-civilizing what remains of humanity. The late, lamented Planet of The Apes (inset) was an animated series based on the movie classic. Captain Marvel is part of the Shazam/Isis Hour—a superhero fantasy.

Once a week the youth of America join in a massive orgy of imaginative adventures while their parents close the door and (in most cases) look the other way . . .

SATURDAY MORNING TV

By JIM BURNS

During the decades of the 30s and 40s and into the 50s, Saturday morning was a special time for children. Unbridled fantasy ran rampant throughout the country on the screens of local movie houses. This phenomena was called "Kiddie Matinee." It was the time when you could see the latest adventures of Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Superman, Commando Cody, or even Captain Marvel. It was also the ideal time for parents to catch up on their sleep, clean up the house, chat on the phone, and generally have a rest from the noise and activity that is usually associated with children.

Then, with the development of commercial TV broadcasting in the 50s, kids found that they could stay at home for their weekend treat. Many of the early kid shows stuck with a formula that had already been proven successful—they ran weekly episodes of the movie serials! Many of them were fantasy or science-fiction-oriented, and they set the tone for weekend entertainment in the following decades.

It wasn't until the early 60s that TV networks began producing new fantasy series for Saturday A.M. showing. When they did, they combined the perfect technique for giving the imagination free reign with "space-age" themes, and animated science fantasy came into its own.

1964 saw the release of Space Angel, an intriguing, serialized space opera. Produced by TV Comic Strips, Inc., Space Angel utilized Syncro-Vox, a process in which human lips are superimposed over animated characters.

Another 60s Saturday cartoon was Richard Ullman's Colonel Bleep, originally produced in 1957. Other similarly syndicated 50s shows included Johnny Jupiter and Captain Z-ro.

In 1963, Japan's Mushi Productions aired Astro Boy on national weekend television in association with NBC. The series detailed the adventures of a robotic boy and in later episodes, his specially-designed robot sister. Mushi Productions was also responsible for many other TV cartoons. They produced Eighth Man, Gigantor, Jet Boy,
THANKS . . .

to the following people who supplied information and materials for STARLOG's Show Guide to Saturday Morning TV: Janet Storm and CBS-TV; Dom Gionef and NBC- TV; Vic Ghidalia and ABC-TV; Malcolm Klein and Filmation Assoc.; Susan Devaney and Hanne-Barbera Productions; Sid and Marty Krofft Productions; Constance Martel and American International Television; Sibyl Roberts and Scotts and Roskin; Independent Television Corporation; and Tom Rogers.
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Johnny Sokko and His Flying Robot, Kimba, the White Lion, Prince Planet, Sollan—Boy From Outer Space, and Speed Racer, in association with Osamu Tezuka.

NBC's 1963 schedule also debuted ITC's Fireball XL-5. Produced by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson (U.F.O., Space: 1999), this Saturday morning show centered around the Galaxy Patrol's "Space City" headquarters where a futuristic police force protected the solar system from enemies trying to destroy the peaceful status quo. Fireball XL-5 was shot in Supermarionation, a technique pioneered by the Andersons.

Below: a cel from the Star Trek animated episode, "The Ambergris Element." Although it was produced in "cartoon" form, this series offered some of the most sophisticated science fiction ever put on television. Many of the creative people who worked on the live-action show also worked on this one.

Above: Three famous horror figures played strictly for laughs on The Monster Squad. Top right: Kathy Coleman and Wesley Eure survey their Land of the Lost, which features superior special effects. Bottom right: Joanna Cameron as the goddess Ivis, as popular a video superheroine as Wonder Woman.
for working with marionettes. This involves a computer to synchronize the moving mouth of a puppet, plus computer commands to work the strings of the puppet while the humans sit back and watch. Other Supermarionation shows which sometimes appeared during the early weekend hours were Super- car, Stingray, Thunderbirds, and Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons.


Many other 60s SF-oriented shows enjoyed Saturday morning exposure. They included The Adventures of Sinbad Jr., The Adventures of Tin Tin, Batman, Bravest, Courageous Cat and Minute Mouse, Daktari, Doctor Who, The Kid From Outer Space, Johnny Cypher in Dimension Zero, Journey to the Center of the Earth, King Kong, Space Boy, Marvel Superheroes, The Mighty Heroes, Rod Rocket, Roger Ramjet, Samson and Goliath, Spiderman, Super President, and Ultraman.

By 1968, various activist groups were insisting that "excessive violence" pervaded Saturday morning television. This resulted in the 70s plethora of inane A.M. weekend programming, made "safe" for children.

The forerunners of these series, 1969's H.R. Pufnstuf, was actually quite good. Produced by master showmen Sid and Marty Krofft, Pufnstuf lasted three years. Its success spawned the Krofft's other children's vehicles: The Bugaloos, Lidsville, and Sigmund and the Sea Monsters.

Filmaton Associates also provided pleasant weekend fantasies. Headed by Emmy Award-winners Norm Prescott and Lou Scheimer, they produced the 60s' Fantastic Voyage, Aquaman, Batman, and Superman cartoons. More recently, they were responsible for the animated Star Trek (see STARLOG No. 6) and My Favorite Martian.

The 70s have already seen an abundance of Saturday morning science fiction. The networks have given us The Addams Family (cartoon), Ghost Busters, Josie and the Pussycats in Outer Space, Korg: 70,000 B.C., an animated Lost in Space film, Mission: Magic, Partridge Family 2200 A.D., Speed Buggy, Valley of the Dinosaurs, and Return to the Planet of the Apes.

Science-fiction-oriented live-action and animated shows now dominate Saturday morning TV viewing. Here is a typical listing, taken from TV Guide, for the morning of April 30th, a Saturday:

9:00—Channel 2 has Scooby-Doo and Dynomutt; Channel 4 has Star Trek (animated). 10:00—Channel 2 has Tarzan (animated), Channel 9 has The Invisible Man Returns (film), Channel 11 has Batman (live-action). 10:30—Channel 2 has Batman (animated), Channel 4 has Monster Squad, Channel 7 has Krofft Supershows. 11:00—Channel 2 has Shazam/Ibis, Channel 4 has Space Ghost, Franklin Jr., 11:30—Channel 4 has Big John, Little John. 12:00—Channel 4 has Land of the Lost. 12:30—Channel 2 has Ark II.

The science-fiction/fantasy programming doesn't stop there, but the morning does.

Saturdays are again the home of unbridled fantasy entertainment. The only difference is that now some parents who grew up on Kiddie Matines have become early risers, too, hoping that even in adulthood they can follow the latest adventures of their favorite heroes—from the comfort of their own beds.

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Science Fiction MINATURES

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