

Space Saver

BY PATRICK COX

Stan Kent is a successful aerospace engineer who recently quit his job at Lockheed to devote full time to his personal goal of encouraging Americans to "get into" space. Over the last two years, in his spare time, he has raised almost \$200,000 in contributions to fund research in space-related activities. He speaks regularly before school, civic, and technical groups about the economic promise of space development. He acts as a space broker, putting businesses interested in space exploitation in touch with those who can manage it. And he's starting up Astrospace, a profit-making research firm.

The most surprising thing about Kent is what he is not. He is no one's stereotypical vision of a research scientist. The 26-year-old English expatriate often looks, from his hair and dress, like a new wave rock star. Standing over a synthesizer in the back room of his offices in San Jose, California, Kent plays with the chords and the programmable harmonies that he uses to provide sound for the presentations that he and his group of volunteers give all over the country. The room is filled with electronic paraphernalia and computer hardware. Kent looks as happy as a kid playing video games, but he is working toward more than a mere arcade simulation of space travel.

The name on the office door is Delta Vee, taken from the mathematical symbol for a change in velocity. Kent and those who have rallied to his call are dedicated to changing the pace of the human progression into space. "Space is too important to be left to the government," he told REASON. "It's really a question of marketing. Last year, \$2.1 billion in quarters was spent on space-related video games, which is public participation. That figure shows that the people behind the space program have got to wise up."

Stan Kent was born and raised in "the working-class slums" of London. "There was no future," he says. "You would get out of school when you were 15 and go to work in the coal mines or the steel mills and that was it. That's what kids do for the rest of their lives, and when they retire the government puts them on the dole and they live happily ever after."

About the same time Kent started

thinking that "there had to be something better," the US government was sending the *Apollo* rocket to the moon. "It said to me," Kent recalls, "Boy, there's a country on this planet that wants to do something."

He wrote a letter to NASA and was astounded when they sent him information about how to get into space sciences. Though no one else in his family ever



STAN KENT

considered higher education, Kent won scholarships to American universities and has not been back to England since. While earning his masters degree at Stanford University, he developed a method for converting a discarded fuel tank into a freight delivery system for goods manufactured in space. At the International Astronautical Federation Congress at Dubrovnik in 1978, his work was chosen as the most outstanding student paper in the world, winning him a gold two-ounce Hermann Oberth medal.

Kent started Delta Vee, the nonprofit corporation that has raised \$200,000 so far, when the government cut funding for receiving and processing data coming in from the Viking lander on Mars. With an initial free ad in *Omni* magazine, Kent started raising money with his plea to "Feed a Starving Robot." Thirty percent of Delta Vee's funds now comes from the sale of T-shirts and trivia related to space.

But it proved almost impossible to give

the money to the Viking project. NASA officials told Kent that the law prohibits donations to government agencies for specific purposes. But Kent made history with the help of a group of NASA engineers who zeroed in on an obscure civil code allowing businesses to hire the government to perform services, as when AT&T pays NASA to launch a communications satellite. So Delta Vee has "hired" NASA to collect and analyze the Viking data. "That just goes to show you," Kent beams, "that if you are bloody-minded persistent, you can even change the US government."

Delta Vee is now trying to raise funds to contribute toward the exploration of Halley's comet, due in 1986, an effort that the government has nixed. Though Kent's stated goal is to free the space program from dependence on government money, one does have to wonder whether the purpose of the Halley's Comet Fund is to help pay for the \$250,000 cost of a probe into the comet or to shame the government into funding the project. If the US government does not send its own mission, the money will presumably go toward the European effort.

Though Kent is generally supportive of the free market, he hasn't brought himself to oppose the spending of tax monies on space exploration. The space program, he says in his defense, is the only government program that ever yielded a positive return to the American public.

The young engineer worries that there is no more "west" where freedom and initiative can flourish. "I'm seeing things happen in the United States that were happening in England 15 years ago, and I'm afraid that this country could end up like so many other European countries, run by unions and bureaucrats." He doesn't regret leaving England and notices that many of Great Britain's most innovative, individualistic minds are coming to America. He says, "If I thought the English wanted to change, I would have stayed." And if America becomes more like England? "I've gone as west as I can go. Now there's only one way left," he says, pointing to the sky.

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arts & letters

MOVIES

Reviewed by John Hospers

Split Image

Almost a year ago a Canadian film, *Ticket to Heaven*, was released but was shown in only a few theaters in the United States. Its protagonist was a young man who, lacking assurance and independence of mind, became involved in a religious cult. Through the charismatic personality of cult leaders and the repeated chanting of slogans, the cult gradually transferred control of his mind and will from himself to the cult. His parents hired someone to kidnap him and forcibly deprogram him while he was locked up in a bedroom over a period of weeks.

Now an American film has appeared, *Split Image*, with an almost identical plot: the vague dissatisfaction with life, the emotional dependency on the approval of others, the psychological attraction of the cult, the quelling of doubts, the enforced rituals, the kidnapping, the deprogramming. The best scenes in *Split Image* are those involving actor James Woods (the killer in *The Onion Field*) as the determined deprogrammer, whose behavior induces revulsion but at the same time a certain grudging admiration for the effectiveness of his methods.

Split Image contains several powerful scenes, but it is no better than its much less publicized predecessor. The most dramatic part of the story, the deprogramming, is in fact more convincingly done in *Ticket to Heaven* than in *Split Image*. Example: when the new recruit in *Ticket* accompanies the seasoned veteran of the cult selling flowers on the street to raise money, he is told to say, "It's for our drug rehabilitation program." But after the sale the new recruit says, "But that's a lie—we don't have a drug program." The veteran smiles sympathetically: lying in the service of a good cause is all right. "That was Satan's money—we just got it back again, to use for God." But how can God command lying and stealing? "Ah, you're doubting again—doubts come from Satan," and they kneel on the sidewalk together to pray that no more doubts shall cloud the mind of the new recruit. Later, during the deprogramming, it is these very

doubts, never fully suppressed, that are played upon to get the ex-recruit to reclaim his self-identity. In *Split Image*, by contrast, the means employed to deprogram are more physical than mental, and they carry less conviction. There is less emphasis than in the earlier film on getting the subject entrapped in his own inconsistencies, and hence the newer film misses an opportunity (fully exploited in the earlier one) to generate a unique tension and power. Both films, however, deal intelligently with the same subject, and both are eminently worthy of being seen.

Inchon

In most respects *Inchon* is an extraordinarily bad film. The script contains more tired clichés than any other in recent memory. The dialogue would have seemed inane even in 1930. The plot—the part dealing with the personal lives of the participants, not the military operations—is simplistically contrived. Example: when a nice officer has both a wife and a mistress, and the background is war, you can be sure that one of the two will be killed before it's over, and predictably this happens. In real life, General MacArthur, the central character in this film, was eloquent in speech and master of the *bon mot*; in this film, many of his pronouncements have been reduced to religious platitudes and remarks worthy of a functionally illiterate high school dropout. And Laurence Olivier as MacArthur has substituted for his British accent a form of American speech so flat and dreary that the real MacArthur would have retched at the sound of it.

Yet there are reasons for some people to see this film. Like another aesthetic turkey last year, *Lion of the Desert*, which dramatized to most audiences for the first time the horrors of the Italian invasion of Libya in the 1930s, this one tells the story (\$50 million worth, with no expenses spared) of the savage North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950 and culminates in a step-by-step presentation of the counterattack at Inchon by the UN forces, under virtually impossible conditions, to cut off the invader at the most strategic point. MacArthur's invasion plan was one of the most brilliant strategic moves in military history, and it is thoroughly detailed in this film.

This is a stridently anti-Communist film, and those critics who can forgive

the anti-Communism cannot forgive the stridency. Nor can they forgive the financing of the film by Rev. Sun Myung Moon, though it was done not as propaganda for his religious cult but as a cinematic record of the invasion of his country, lest the world forget that it ever happened. The ordinary viewer, who is quite indifferent to critical acclaim or condemnation, is not likely to forget it. It isn't as good as reading history, but it's something.

Sleeping Dogs

Increasing numbers of citizens are unhappy with the current government. Some become revolutionaries and start shooting people down in the streets to replace the established order. The prime minister declares martial law in order to deal with the revolutionaries. But in doing so the government increasingly uses the same methods as the revolutionaries: some innocent people are shot; others are rounded up for interrogation and confinement without trial. Gradually the moral distinction between the two regimes becomes blurred. What is the individual to do who is caught between these conflicting forces, threatened by each with torture and death if he does not attempt to discover and disclose the secret plans of the other?

Sleeping Dogs is a minor but well-done political thriller from New Zealand that it would be easy, but unfortunate, to miss. It illustrates some of the recurring problems involved in political allegiance. If you need order through law, and the law or its methods of enforcement become more and more imperfect, should you go along with those who want to change it by force, including the use of methods of which you disapprove? And in the process, what happens to the revolutionaries themselves, who begin as idealists but end up as despots who would use any kind of terror to squelch those whom they oppose? The film shows dramatically why it is that violent revolution usually causes a regime that is semi-totalitarian to be replaced by another that is totally totalitarian and how the ideals of even the most conscientious and nonaggressive people become corrupted by the methods they are made to use as they seek to institute changes.

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