

shown what life *might* be like. In spite of some faults, this is, I think, a film that comes off.

THE WONDER KID

(Karl Hartl-London Films)

AFTER sitting through *The Wonder Kid*, following a very dull first-half, in a heat wave, I came away with the feeling that here was a film with much charm which didn't quite come to life. Even more dissatisfied with my impressions than with the film itself, I went back a second time and looked more carefully at some of the things that had worried me. I'm glad to say I found it much improved.

Filmed, apparently, mainly in Austria, *The Wonder Kid* is based on an original story of Karl Hartl, who also produced and directed it. But I think filmgoers in this part of the world will be mainly attracted to it because Bobby Henrey (best remembered, of course, for his part in *The Fallen Idol*) has the title role, and because Robert Krasker (who photographed *The Third Man*) has done some of the camera work.

The story is about an English orphan child pianist, Sebastian Giro, exploited by an unscrupulous manager, who is about to become his legal guardian. His kindly governess steps in and has him kidnapped by a mixed bunch of crooks whom she knows nothing about. In the lonely house in the Tyrol to which they take him they discover his name and what he might be worth to them. Sebastian is happy and, shown the way, is able to make his own terms when he gets back to his master.

Bobby Henrey adapts himself pretty well to the role of child prodigy, though I didn't find his performance as moving as I expected to. The best moment in this respect is attended with some good comedy, when he sits at the piano to convince the incredulous gendarmes that he really is the kidnapped boy. There is a good deal of pathos, too, in his parting from the young couple who have given him so much happiness. Among the other players I found Oscar Werner, as the leader of the gang, quite the most unpleasant character I have seen in recent films. I'm not sure that the beauties of the Austrian Tyrol haven't been a little overplayed, though they help to give the film its charm. Some of the most interesting camera work covers an exciting chase through the night when the kidnappers fall out, and effective use is made of super-imposed shots at the end of the film.

I think a great many people will find something to their liking in *The Wonder Kid*. It might be argued, of course, that it shouldn't be necessary for a film critic to see a film twice to discover its merits. But it's at least equally true that it isn't every run-of-the-mill film that improves on a second and (remembering that heat wave) more critical examination.

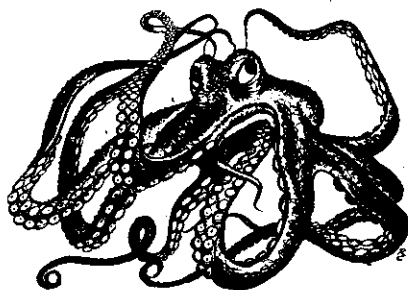
THE HARASSED OCTOPUS

Spotlights on Nature
from 3YA

THE biggest sucker in the world is the octopus, and he's had more raw deals put over on him than anything else on eight legs. So states his defence counsel, Reg Williams, in the first of his four-talk series, *Spotlights on Nature*.

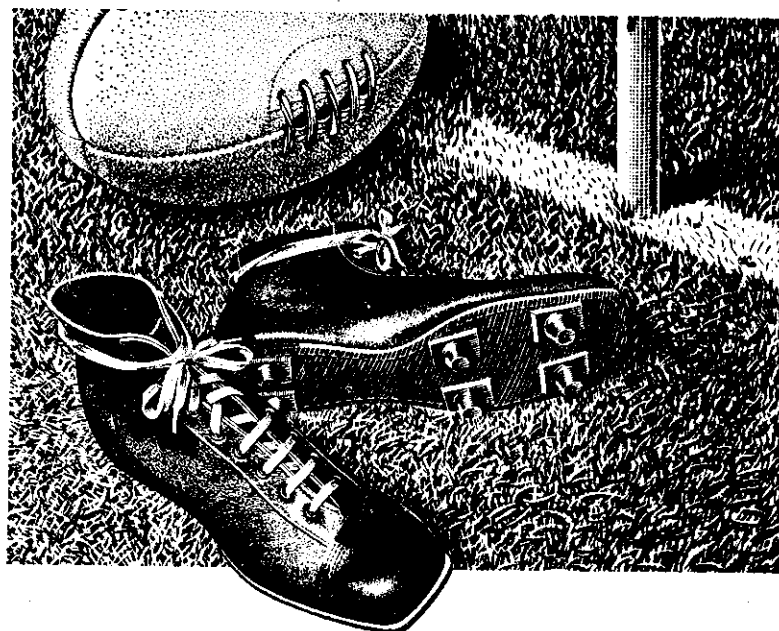
Not that the jet-propelled clinger is a beauty by any standards, but for pure innocence in the face of unfair discrimination the octopus has all other deep-sea monsters licked. He is, according to Mr. Williams, "a timid, retiring, harassed creature that will never cause trouble to a human being unless he is first molested or disturbed," and yet he has managed to head most people's nightmare lists for a long time. But, as the author explains, even with the armament odds four to one in favour of the cephalopod, a good counter-attack by the biped can dispose of the octopus and send him on his way like a Canberra on test run. This knowledge is invaluable in view of the fact that some of the prize specimens of the race live in the pleasantly adjacent Cook Strait area.

The whole trouble is that octopuses (*octopi* is said to be on the way out) have a trick of looking like lumps of ocean bottom and therefore frequently get themselves stomped on by clumsy tourists. As Mr. Williams justly points out, "no self-respecting octopus appreciates having his face trampled on." To disengage from the embrace of a down-trodden octopus is simple enough, but Mr. Williams has the secret, and those interested—it's the sort of knowledge than can come in handy practically any time—can receive instructions by listening to 3YA at 7.15 p.m. on Friday, February 29.



At the same hour on the three following Friday evenings, Mr. Williams will take up the subjects of "The Tuatara," an advocate of longevity and the simple life; "The Story of the Barnacle," a novel with a stiff cover; and "Lost for Sixty Million Years," a study of living creatures "whose ancestry disappears back into the dim mists of antiquity and who could be most fittingly described as 'living fossils.'" This serves to introduce our cover-fish, *Latimeria Chalumnae*, a member of the Coelacanth group thought to have become extinct some 50,000,000 years ago, but dredged from oceanic depths off the coast of South Africa in 1938. A cousin of sorts of the Australian lung-fish, *Latimeria* belongs to an order of fringe-finned fish that declined in social popularity during the Cretaceous period, and had been known, up until 1938, only as the inhabitant of fossil-bearing rocks.

A man who quite clearly knows just what he is talking about, Mr. Williams has the knack of making laymen know it also; he does not dazzle them with science but presents his four talks in such a way that they become amusing and highly informative glances at some of the lesser known aspects of nature. (For more information on marine natural history, turn to page 7.)



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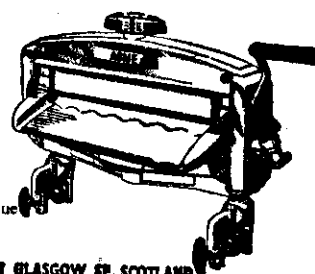
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