

Winning friends and alienating people

SCIENCE-FICTION buffs were in Bradford at the weekend for some extra-terrestrial encounters. They visited Bradford Film Theatre, Chapel Street, to see eight classic science-fiction films of the last 30 years — all depicting invasions of the Earth by aliens.

But the audience, members of the Yorkshire regional group of the British Federation of Film Societies, invaded Bradford in more modest style. An audience of only about 30 sat through the 614 minutes of spaceships and inter-planetary battles.

The event, which included showings of "Invaders From Mars," "Fantastic Planet," "It Came From Outer Space," and "Alien," was a special interest weekend organised by the group for members of its 37 film societies in Yorkshire.

There are now 550 member societies in the British Federation split into 11 regional groups which correspond roughly with county areas. The Yorkshire group was founded 28 years ago.

Its chairman, Paul Hussey, who is also chairman of the Wakefield Society, said: "The purpose of film societies is to promote films as an art form and give people the chance

of seeing ones which would not otherwise be available to them.

"There is a need for us because the commercial cinema shows films which are good for business and many excellent ones, which may not be so financially viable do not get seen.

"These include foreign-language films, any with sub-titles and many not made by the major companies and issued to their distribution network. We are also able to show films which only had a limited London release."

Mr. Hussey said that film societies do not feel threatened by the growing home-video market. He said: "There is an atmosphere when an audience sees a good film. Films made for the big screen look best shown on one. Pictures like "Superman" don't have the same impact on a small screen in a lit room as they do in a cinema."

The weekend, which

Reeling with laughter: The audience enjoys a light moment.



included showings of films on Friday evening and throughout Saturday, including the modern science-fiction classic "Alien," also featured a talk by the cinema critic Phillip Strick, author of the book "Science-Fiction Movies."

He said: "It is hard to define science-fiction but the earliest film of that type was made in about 1896. In those days they were able to use only the simplest camera techniques for effects but because there was a sense of wonder about the

cinema then it must have seemed like magic at the time.

"A French director, Millie, who was formerly in theatre, produced a film called 'A Trip to the Moon,' in 1903 and the first version of 'Frankenstein,' which is a horror movie but can be classed as science-fiction because it is about the consequences of a scientific experiment, was made in 1910.

"The first great era of science-fiction cinema was in America in the late 1950s when a couple of hundred were made. Many were dreadful but there were some classics such as 'Forbidden Planet,' 'War of the Worlds' and 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers.'

"We are now in the second great era which started with 'Star Wars,' and has reached a peak with 'E.T.' Some people have said 'E.T.' is an old-fashioned story, which it is, but the film works, because of the fantastic advances in cinema technology in the last six years.

"Science-fiction will not work unless people feel there is an element of truth in it. Audiences must be able to relate to science-fiction in some way or they would be unsympathetic."



From left, Phillip Strick, John Bingham of Leeds and Geoffrey Bull of Halifax.

