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2002



2011 has been a pretty good year, though not without its ups-and-downs.

There was the period where I had to more-or-less live in my car because the massive mould bloom in my kitchen. There was the moving, which wasn't that bad, though my new place is more expensive and a bit of a stretch every month to pay for. There were minor ailments and so on. Fandom lost some wonderful people, including Rusty Hevelin just yesterday. I'm working on a Tribute issue and if you've got stories about the man, send 'em my way. He was a great guy and I wanna do him justice.

There were also wonderful parts. I got a lot of visitors to the old Garcia place. Daniel Kimmell from Boston, James a couple of times, John The Rock Coxon, James Shields all came and stayed with me at one point or another. Got to hang with Helen Montgomery, with John Coxon AGAIN, and so many others.

And I won a Hugo. That was really cool!

This issue is pretty chill. I've got the 52 Weeks piece on Alien, there's a Taral in here, and that Mo Starkey cover. It's pretty standard, really.

I've been going to the movies more lately and saw the new The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo movie by David Fincher. It was a very good film, one of the better films I've seen this year. The key to its success is far different from the Swedish version. There, it is about the acting and the very Scandanavian feel. There is a much more powerful influence of sex as a thing that drives the characters while in the Swedish version, it's more that it is merely a thing that happens. Both films deal with the story in similar ways, though the American version is much more focused on Daniel Craig's Mikel Blumkvist than on Lizbeth Salander, which throws the story into a better balance, I think. I've not read the books, but I imagine that the Swedish version is probably a little closer to it.

The ending has gotten a lot of flack. It softens Lizbeth quite a bit, and I've read that it's much closer to the book. The Swedish film leaves out what appears to be the best motivation that Blomkvist could have for taking the gig, and the US version puts it in. It also handles the part where Lisbeth steals the bad guy's money much better. The Swedish one is maybe paced a bit better, but the US has amazing cinematography and especially sound design. All of Fincher's traditional shots and tricks are there, which I really enjoyed.

All in all, a very good end of the year film. The opening sequence was especially enjoyable.

I'll also be talking about the National Film Registry, which was just announced. A very interesting crop.





The National Film Registry 2011

This year, it seems like they were both going deeper and responding to criticism of the absence of certain popular films that have been passed over. Increased were the number of films from the 1980s and 90s, which is good, and a couple of things that were very important on the technical side, but not widely known to the average viewer.

Two things that I have nominated over the years got in, which makes me very happy, but there are still some very significant gaps that need filling.

Alures – 1961

Jordan Belson. I've got stories. One of the most significant experimental filmmakers in the history of film, and one of the best Art/Cinema crossovers. His works were more paintings than films in many ways, and it was in his use of sound and color that he excelled. I met him in the 1980s at a retrospective of his work and again at the Sonoma Film Festival, I think. He was a good guy. This film is so stunningly beautiful and abstract that it's hard to believe it was made without the use of computers. It really does remind me of the first fifteen years of computer animation and you can see the influence on those very folks in almost every frame. He did a lot of work with NASA and a lot of space-y imagery. Jordan passed away this year at the age of 85.

Bambi - 1943

Of all the films that Walt Disney produced, his favorite was Bambi. I don't blame him, it's easily the most heartwarming of all the films he produced. I have always had a soft spot for the character Flower, the unaptly-named skunk. It's an adorable film and a powerful one. The animation here is pretty impressive, but it's the story that's

amazing. Dumbo is the most beautiful of all the early Disney films, Snow White the most groundbreaking, Pinocchio the most affirming, but Bambi might be the most human, which is odd considering it's all about deer...

The Big Heat – 1953

Fritz Lang's Noir masterpiece. It has the feel of a 1970s drama instead of a 1950s Noir. It also reminds me a lot of Akira Kurosawa's Stray Dog. Glen Ford, an actor who has largely been forgotten despite being one of the true greats for a few decades, is a masterful cop, and Lee Marvin – well, he's Lee Freakin' Marvin! I haven't seen it in years, but it is one that I have seen more than once and should certainly see again!

A Computer Animated Hand – 1972

Ed Catmull is one of the central figures in the history of computer animation. His work with Pixar is what's most talked about, but before that, there was his time at places like The University of Utah. He was one of the first to explore the possibilities in 3D computer animation, and this was one of his first pieces. It's a one minute film of a wireframe human hand opening and closing. At the end, the shot goes up through the wrist of the animation and then away. It was one



of the most important pieces of computer animation and was even incorporated into the movie Futureworld. The Computer History Museum has a copy of it, both on 16mm and 3/4 Tape. It's exactly the kind of film that I am happy to see preserved.

Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment - 1963

Cinema Verite is the documentarian's dream. Completely cut-off from the interpretation, it is supposed to be the recording of events as they unfold without comment or interference. Think Reality TV, only real. This one united some of the most important documentarians of all time, folks like the late Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker and Patricia Powell. This is a look at what happened and how things were decided when Gov. George Wallace tried to keep out two black students from the University of Alabama. It's fascinating because they follow Robert Kennedy, Gov. Wallace, and the two students, providing amazing depth of coverage of those who are making the decisions and the ones who are being effected. Wallace has been a figure of high esteem in Alabama, later in life he changed his tune, but this shows the delicate balancing act that was the Federal and States response to the Civil Rights Movement.

The Cry of the Children – 1912

There were many saw the early couple of decades of film as excellent times to get certain messages out. One of the topics that was tackled was Child Labor. I remember seeing part of it in a Film History class at Emerson. It's not as widely known as other silent of the era, partly because it wasn't made by a Big Name Director, and despite being hailed as one of the finest works of its day, hasn't received a large revival.

A Cure for Pokeritis – 1912

John Bunny, The Most Famous Man in the World! Bunny was one of the best-known silent comics of the period between 1900 and 1915. His work with Flora Finch in films often called Bunnyfinches laid the ground for the next decade of silent comedies. He made more than 150 films, very few of which still exist. I've never seen A Cure for Pokeritis, but it is regarded as one of his best pictures.

El Mariachi – 1992

I took Sandra Chavez to see this one. My Ghod I had a crush on her. She was beautiful and cute and sexy all at once, not an easy combo. She also spoke Spanish as her first language, so she was a natural to take to this one, presented a full two months before it went national. I should talk about the movie, shouldn't I? El Mariachi introduced the world to Robert Rodriguez, who reinvented the Latina action film, the western, had a big influence on Family-themed SciFi and has created many middle-brow works that truly turned around into great films. He also made some true failures, but who hasn't? Along with Quint Tarantino and Kevin Smith, he made the traditional exploitation genre into a viable, bigger-budget playground. He followed up El Mariachi with Desperado, not nearly as good, but responsible for making Selma Hayek a star. The final film the Mariachi Trilogy, Once Upon a Time in Mexico, was easily the best of the three films technically, and had both Johnny Depp and Antonio Banderas giving outstanding performances. This is one of the best films to make the list and I think it shows that they are seriously looking more and more at the 1990s, which is something a lot of folks have been calling for.



Faces – 1968

John Cassavetes. He might have been the finest director of the twentieth century. His work is amazing and Faces is usually pointed to as the emergence of the Fully Formed Cassavetes. I tend to agree. It's got an amazing set of performances, particularly out of Seymour Cassel, one of the greatest actors of the 1960s to today for my money. He got an Oscar Nom for his work. The Cassavetes Spirit is pretty impressive, especially since he was an independent. His other films included some real gems that did not get nearly enough exposure.

Fake Fruit Factory – 1986

OK, get yourself out to see this one. Chick Strand is one of those documentarians who you should go out of your way to see. This is a look at a group of women who make paper mache fruit. The way she made her films was along the lines of a slightly more linear Joseph Cornell, almost collage-y, but at the same time fully emerged in the subject. One of the finest of American Avant Garde filmmakers, she passed away in 2009.

Forrest Gump -1994

Grrrrrrrr... I hate this film. I mean I hate every simpering moment of it. It's perhaps the single most emo-

tionally manipulative film ever made. While some of the techniques used were both innovative and well-played, it is by far the worst film ever to win Best Picture. To me, this started Tom Hanks' long slide in mediocrity. I hate that they passed over films like Reservoir Dogs, Jackie Brown, State & Main, Fight Club, or Being John Malkovich in favor of Gump. Any of those would better represent the best of what 1990s Cinema was about.

Growing Up Female – 1971

I don't think I've ever seen this documentary about six females between the ages of 4 and 34, but I do know the work of Julia Reichert, the director of films like The Last Truck and Emma & Elvis. This is one of the first films to come out of the world of the Womyn's Liberation Movement, but it's also an inside look at the working of the female mind at various stages in America in the 1970s. It sorta compacts Michael Apted's Up series into one film.

Hester Street – 1975

Carol Kane is an Academy nominated actress because of the direction of Joan Micklin Silver in this classic 1970s low-budget masterpiece. I only saw it once, about fifteen years ago, and it's one of the best pieces of 1975 film to come from outside of the major studios. The story focuses on Kane's character dealing with coming to New York. It's partly in Yiddish and it's a really good watch.

I, An Actress – 1977

The 1970s continue to be over-represented on the Registry, though I can not argue this one. George Kuchar was a nut, his brother Mike not so much. The two of them made dozens of movies, as many as 200 of them, many while teaching at the Art Institute in San Francisco. I have never seen I, An Actress, but I know and love The Naked And The Nude. John Waters has cited the Kuchars as a major influence, and it shows. They were Lo-Fi and over-the-top. I have to track this one down...

The Iron Horse – 1924

John Ford. Perhaps the finest director of the twentieth century. This silent was one of the biggest films of it's day. 5,000 extras of all stripes. This was the start of the majestic Western as the vehicle. Films like How The West Was Won and even Tombstone owe a lot to The Iron Horse. It's worth watching, even in the truncated form that is available for 2 bucks on DVD.



The Kid - 1921

This is the film that Charlie Chaplin is best known for. Well, this and The Gold Rush. And maybe City Lights. If there was any justice, The Circus, but The Kid was the one that folks remember, largely for the brilliant performance of Jackie Coogan. The kid was brilliant, and Chaplin thought so too. Coogan and Chaplin met again when Chaplin came to accept his Honorary Oscar in the 1970s. Jackie introduced Charlie to Mrs. Coogan and Charlie "Madame, you are married to a genius." Coogan was a big child star, quickly used up and largely spit-out, as always seems to happen. Charlie was a big deal for another twenty years, though not without his own rocky road. This one stands the test of time, even though I've always thought it way too sentimental. I prefer Harold Lloyd and Keaton.

The Last Weekend - 1945

The drunkard movie, as I called it in college. Billy Wilder, perhaps the finest director of the twentieth century, at the peak of his powers. It was the one that made him a household name, really. Here he has Ray Milland to work off of as the drunk writer who

will do anything for a drink. I love this movie. The best scenes have Milland not only going the route of the great actor, but putting on serious movie star charisma, something that he was accused of not possessing in great quantity. I watched it blitzed off my ass once. It seemed quite appropo...

The Negro Soldier – 1944

Frank Capra. Perhaps the finest director of the twentieth century. This was a training film. This film was produced by the US Army after reports of racial intolerance were reported from black soldiers. Capra, perhaps the finest filmmaker when you are trying to get an emotional and an intellectual response, details the travels of a black soldier from basic training to the front line are re-inacted and allowed to have full impact. It's a great film and one of Capra's most humane films.

Nicholas Brothers Family Home Movies - 1930s-1940s

The Nicholas Brothers were legendary dancers who headlined all sorts of shows, became especially connected with The Cotton Club. They did an amazing job in the film *Stomy Weather*. The films have some amazing footage. The only known surviving footage of the inside of The Cotton Club is from their home movies and it's been used in all sorts of documentaries and History Channel shows. There's also a bunch of Broadway shows and stuff from Harlem in the 1930s. Some of the rarest kinds of footage you'll ever find!

Norma Rae – 1979

Sally Field's performance in *Norma Rae* was one of the real highlights of her career. It's an activist film, the story of a woman trying to Unionize her factory. It's brutal at times, but it's awesome. I haven't seen it in ages, but one of the best times at the movies I've ever had was watching it with Crystal Lee Sutton in the audience who answered questions at the end. She said that the film had made it difficult for her to live her life from day to day.

Porgy & Bess – 1959

Possibly the greatest work of "Folk Opera" ever produced in films because the depiction of black people at the time was seen as demeaning. This was a great film, I've only seen it once, and it was magical. It was also directed by Otto Preminger. I love that guy. The score and the lyrics was amazing, and the performance of Dorothy Dandridge was particularly impressive. I hope it'll get another bigger release because no matter what the politic thought about the entire concept, it's an amazing film with amazing music.

The Silence of the Lambs – 1991

Now THIS is a hugely important film from the 1990s. This was the definition of a thriller. It's a beautifully made movie, a wonderfully dark film and a story that can't be looked over. The performances are exceptional, not only our favorites like Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins, but especially from Anthony Heald as the psychologist. It's just about the perfect psychological thriller and one of the best films of the 1990s as well. The adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs* was also brilliant, and the result, while not as visceral as the novel, was almost equally intense.

Stand and Deliver – 1988

Edward James Olmos plays Jaime Escalante. I've met both of them over the years, Jaime was a good, kinda gruff guy, EJO was



an awesome human, and the film... well, I always thought it was OK. There's a great scene where it's hot in the classroom. That is one of the best scenes of the 1980s. That film was shown in classroom for a couple of decades. We had to watch it. One of the things that is most important about *Stand and Deliver* is that it was directed by a Latino filmmaker named Ramon Menendez. His work following *Stand and Deliver* wasn't very good, but he wrote a couple of decent movies.

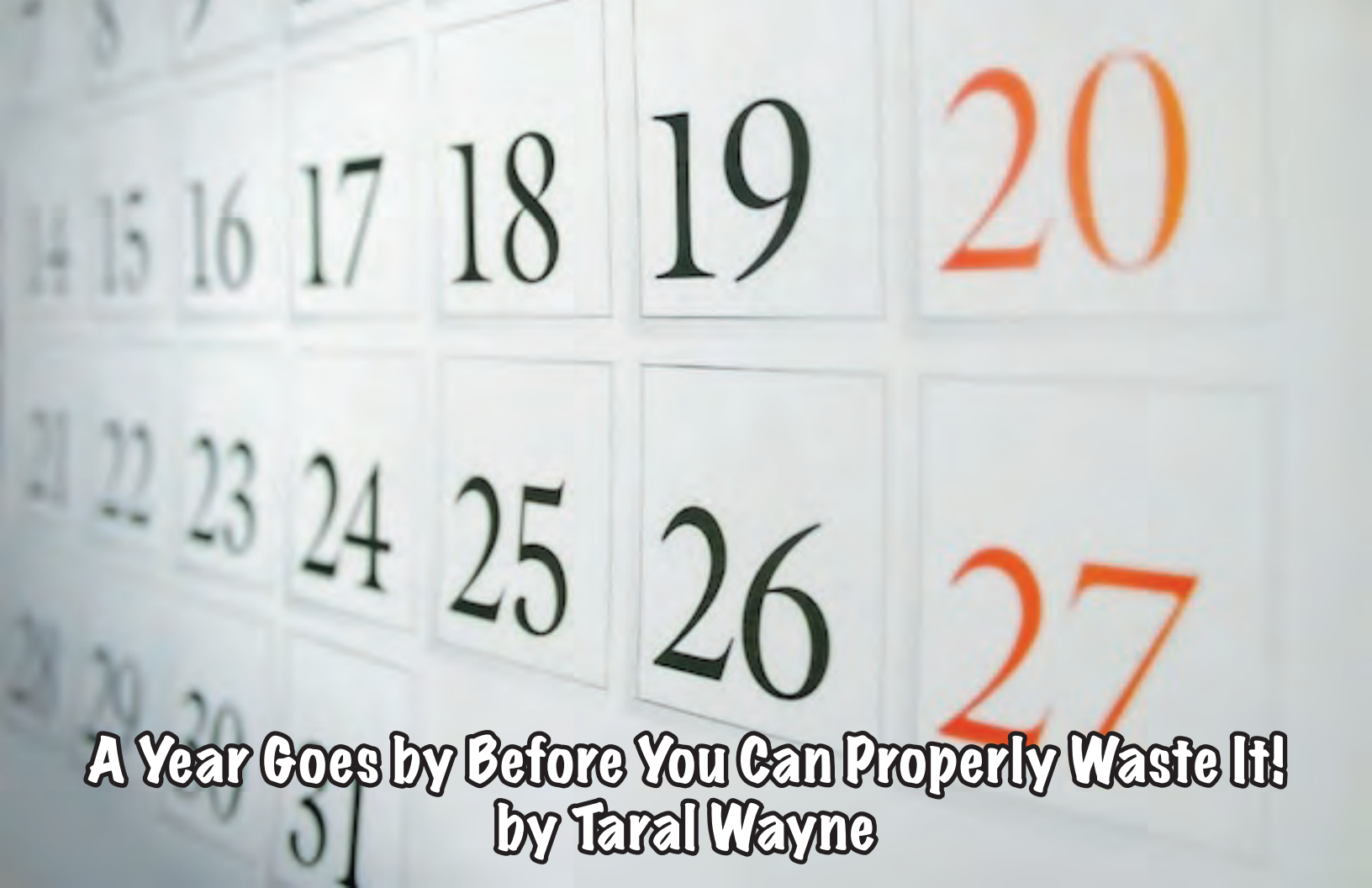
Twentieth Century – 1934

Howard Hawks. Perhaps the finest director of the twentieth century. This is a frenetic comedy that features perhaps the best of all John Barrymore's performances. Carole Lombard is still very young here and makes the most of it. Hawks, always one to keep genre on the trail of the traditionalist, is at his best here, though it didn't do too well when it was first released.

War of the Worlds – 1953

George Pal's *War of the Worlds*. He didn't direct it, he just produced it, but it worked and the style of the production is pretty much what sells it. The opening, a series of images from Chesley Bonestell, influenced so many films that came after, specifically adaptations that required set-up. *Dune*, one of the versions, used a very similar take. The acting is solid, the production values are huge, and the most important thing, it's just so pretty. One of the best shot films of the 1950s. It's interesting to think that this is the only SF film on the list this year.





A Year Goes by Before You Can Properly Waste It! **by Taral Wayne**

Christmas is tomorrow. Shortly Christmas will be yesterday. Soon today will be next year. Time has flown at the speed of procrastination, and I don't think I've accomplished a single one of my resolutions made last New Years. The only thing to do is try again in 2012.

However, it hasn't been an uneventful year by any means. I went to the Worldcon in Reno last summer, lost the Hugo again, traveled around the desert with Marc Schirmeister, visited old friends, saw a smashing automobile museum and attended the very last meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society in their old clubhouse. I ditched my old doctor – who was slowly killing me – and found one who seems genuinely interested in my welfare. I'm taking a prescription medication which appears to be improving the condition that closes my right eye. With his assistance I've put in for a disability pension. Last, but not least, my old DVD player broke down but I've got a new one for Christmas that will even play Blue-Ray.

I'm looking at a number of options for next year. One is that I have to cut down on the things I own. While I don't find them encumbering in the least, my sisters have made it clear that, when the time comes, they're cleaning out my apartment with a pitchfork – they have no intention of spending all their vacation time on mollycoddling my things when I'm gone. First edition books, video and DVDs, music, collectible die-casts, the toy guns, the thousands of fanzines, my artwork, everything I've written and that has been published, and everything on the hard drive will all get an extended vacation in the dumpster. Everything but the coin collection, that is... since my sisters know it can be quickly sold. It makes a person wonder if one's eventual demise is absolutely necessary. But, since it is, the time will come when I had better think of better options for my possessions.

Another consideration is the amount of time I spend on fandom. Writing two thousand word journals for FurAffinity is a case in point. If I go by my own example, only a handful of people are likely to have the patience to bear with me when I stray beyond one-or-two-hundred words. In fact, the only reason I do write such long journals is that I can almost always put them to some other use in the fan press. This week's FA journal is next issue's article in some fanzine. Still... it might be better to cut down. I wrote more than 60 articles this year.

That's more than some professional humour columnists in the newspapers. Unlike them, I don't get paid for my corny jokes.

I'm looking at a "steampunk" fanzine... Steampunk is all the rage in Science Fiction now.

It's a sub-genre about parallel histories in which the 1890s never ended, and the future is full of steam-powered rocket ships, robots with visible cog-wheels and thousand-foot Zeppelins powered by broadcast Tesla rays.


Browsing through this fanzine -- whose theme really doesn't spark my interest, I confess -- I'm picturing a cartoon of Saara Mar at a steampunk con. All the fans are there, dressed in their idea what a nuclear scientist in the 1890s would look like. This seems to consist mainly of lab coat, leather riding gloves, pince-nez glasses, pith helmet, jackboots and a revolver the size of jackhammer... steam-powered jackhammer, of course. A mechanical prosthetic arm is optional. While the fans are dressed in the appropriate fashion, they're all staring at Saara... who is dressed, as she usually is, in her mirror-bright silver tunic. After a bit she stares back at them and says, "What? I am wearing what I wore in 1894!"

Saara was born on June 10th, 1732 by our calendar, and is about 291 years old as of this writing.

Finally, I need to be more mobile. I've hardly been able to walk more than a single block before I have to sit down and rest. Some of the problem has been Myasthenia Gravis, some may be garden-variety arthritis, and the rest is likely due to simply falling out of shape. But which of each is responsible for how much of the problem? All that's been suggested to me, so far, is to try to get more exercise. If I can get into better shape, I may find the other issues manageable. If I can't... at least I'll know my limits.

Then I can put in for one of those government-subsidized electric scooters and terrorize the neighborhood with my reckless driving. As I discovered at Anticipation, one motorized invalid can cripple any number of other people!



A close-up shot of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in her iconic white alien suit, looking forward with a serious expression. The background is dark and filled with mechanical details of the suit.

52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy - Alien (1979)

Science Fiction films of the late 1970s and early 1980s was largely about exploring boundaries. In fact, I'd say that film of the 1970s was about genre, about seeing how they melded, how we could redefine them and look at their bases. It was a time of experimentation, not to mention increases in budgets and ticket sales. One of the areas that was very fully explored was the intersection of science fiction and horror. None looked at it better than Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

Alien's story is pretty damn good. The *Nostromo* is on it's way back to Earth with millions of tons of ore. Along the way, they encounter a signal and have to investigate. There, one of their researchers is attacked by an alien and brought on to the ship. The alien then escapes, and grows into a monster. That leads to it running amock and the crew dealing with it, dying off and Ripley, played brilliantly by Sigourney Weaver, blowing up the ship and escaping in the shuttle. It's an interesting, and very simple story. It's of the *Haunted House/Dangerous Island* kind of horror film. They're all trapped together and they have a limited escape possibility, only three can fit on the shuttle, and there's a monster who jumps out and eats you. They discover that the mission was not what they were told it was and that they are all listed as expendable. Great. Also, the doctor, who has been pushing for them to collect the *Alien*, is a robot, programmed to make what happened happen. Sucks to be him.

I should start with the technology Ridley Scott always had a good idea of what technology of the future should look like. The screens have nothing but green type, which is a great idea. Think about it: it is much more expensive and power-consumptive to use GUIs, so a monochrome, even if it's just green and black, is a good idea. I've thought a lot about what it would take to maintain a long-term space mission, and the resources that you use and the maintainability of them is paramount. While *Mother*, the ship's computer system, is a major system with a great number of capabilities, it is also rather simple, with a system that seems to be set-up for limited power consumption. Smart.

There is a lot of technology in *Alien* that is used with a lot of intelligent subtlty. There's the deep sleep methods. Cryogenically held for months at a time (or maybe it's years) the team is in deep sleep when the movie



starts. There's the robot, and one of the most disturbing scenes in the entire film is when the robot, played perfectly by Ian Holm, goes bezerk and tries to kill Ripley after she's discovered the real mission that they're on, he starts to vomit, and only then do we discover that it's some form of coolant or something and that he's a robot. It's a brilliant and disgusting way to go about it. I had trouble watching that scene, which is saying something.

The film ultimately asks two questions: how do you survive in a situation where you are trapped without hope of escape and is the objective more important than the lives of those who make it happen? The trapped part is why *Alien* is so good. Scott and his team certainly came up with a way to ramp up the terror by being very sparse. It feels like the universe is that ship and the seven people on it. There's so little wasted sound, imagery. It is a simple place and it makes it so much more scary that you're not competing with walls of sound. It's one thing that a lot of the horror and scary SF films of the 1970s understood: the power of quiet. Of course, it makes the punctuations of blare so much more effective.

Let's take a look at that last question, about objective vs. humanity. We're given a robot who is the doctor in charge of trying to keep the *Nostromo* on-path.

He comes up with a way to bring the Alien onto the ship, and then to keep it alive so it can come back. It's an interesting choice, having him as a robot, because he feels so real, so much like that suit who runs a company a particular way. He feels human, but also inhumane. He is that coldness that we associate with the world of Corporate Capital pursuit. He turns out to be a monster, which is what we all suspect that suits are from the get-go, no?

This is a film of performances and intelligently thought-out casting. Tom Skeritt gets top billing. And I believe that John Hurt is second or third. Veronica Cartwright, Yaphet Koto, Ian Holm, Weaver, Harry Dean Stanton, all of them amazing and all of them give great, claustrophobic but real performances. I think four of the seven were nominated for Saturn Awards in acting, and I think at least one of them won. The thing here is that all of them, with the exception of Weaver and Cartwright, were over 30, the age that has traditionally been assigned to SF heroes and Horror victims. Chris Pine as a Starfleet Captain doesn't work nearly as well as Skeritt, who was nearly 40 at the time. It's an age thing that is seldom considered, but here it is perfect.

As is Sigourney Weaver. She plays both tough and vulnerable. She also strips down to her skivvies on the shuttle and that was kinda hot! Anyhoo, she plays a very intelligent role, and at first it seems as if she'll just be there along for the ride, but she is constantly calling for them to follow the rules, to obey the laws. She tries and stop the Doctor from bringing the Alien on-board, but he over-powers her calls, and even the demands of the captain. She is the heart of the movie, but not for the first twenty minutes. In fact, there's no real heart for the first twenty minutes. It's just stuff happening, a discussion around a dinner table about percentages, a few moments of just stuff happening. It's the way you establish terror, by making sure that the viewer understands what is normal and then you can understand why and how things go awry. It's an impressive technique and one that Scott is pretty good at.

Alien would be followed by *Aliens*, directed by James Cameron, and it worked, though it's more of an adventure/Sci-Fi film instead of a horror film. I think the the third one was horror again, though I never got around

to seeing it. There was also a fourth one, and I believe there's a fifth one in play. Go figure.

Oh yeah, and a monster pops out of a guy's chest.

It's John Hurt's chest too, which I never knew. It's one of the most impressive moments in the history of science fiction film. It's been imitated in so many other films and television shows it's no longer surprising. The best of them is from *Spaceballs*, where the little Alien guy does a little dance. The scene is visceral and intense and perfect. While I'm partial to the destruction of the Robot Doctor, the chest-popper is the one that gets all the press.

One thing about *Alien* is how it slowly turns into a horror film. The start is bright, clean, white, shining. It's a clean bit of set direction, and at the end it's an amazing bit of tangled and grotty and dirty and messy. There's fluid and steam and mist and dripping saliva from the mouth of the Alien and it is a horror film. The first twenty minutes could be *2001*, the last twenty looked like the end of *Prom Night*. Or Maybe it was *Horror High*. The one where the principal is the killer. That one. It is how Scott made it a horror film.

Alien deserves a lot of credit for riding both the post-*Star Wars* boom and the post-*Halloween* boom. It was pretty amazing how it worked.

Alien is one of the movies that made it possible to go horror in mainstream science fiction. In written SF at the time, we were seeing more extreme stuff as well, leading to the Splatterpunk revolution in the mid-1980s. Here, science fiction in the written field and SF Film were as close as they've ever been. I am rather annoyed that I waited so long to give it another chance, but when something scares the bejeezus out of you when you're 10, it tends to stick!

