



DRINK TANK

The Iron Giant: An Alternate Take From The Target Audience By Katie Hartlove (almost 12)

The Iron Giant is a great movie. It is told from the point of view of a boy my age named Hogarth. Hogarth finds a giant robot from outer space, and the two become best friends.

The robot is like a big six year old. Hogarth has to teach it to do everything, like speak, not to freak out if he sees people, and to stay away from towns, because people will freak out. In return, the robot teaches Hogarth that putting other people's needs ahead of your own wants is sometimes important.

Even though the movie is set in the 1950s,

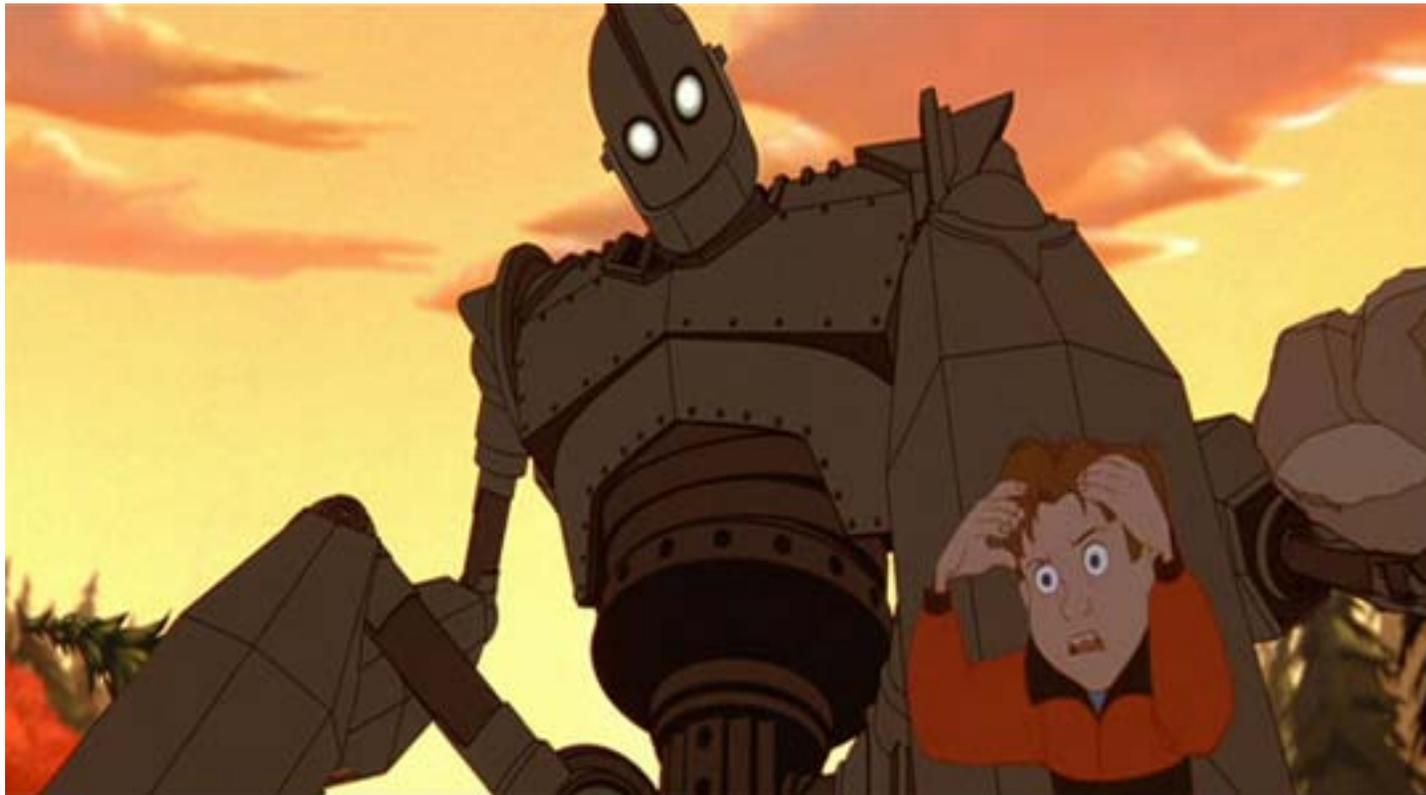
it still makes sense today. People are paranoid – we always think there's something out to get us, even though there's not. And then this out of this world thing shows up and we don't know what to do with it, so we go bang-bang and it gets mad. Instead, we should try to befriend it.

The animation in this movie is very realistic, kind of like you're looking through a window into a world that is made of cartoons. They actually put color and texture on the trees and on the metal. Even when Hogarth hits his head on a tree, the branch shakes and there's blood,

it's not just *bang* oh well I broke my face. (I should know because I've hit my head on low hanging branches too.)

The Iron Giant is one of my favorite movies. It has a good moral. The robot sacrifices itself to save his friends and even the people who wanted to blow him up. I like the ending that they gave it more than if it just ended with the robot blowing itself up, however.

I recommend it to anyone who likes science fiction movies about children and their strange friends.



Letter Graded Mail

Sent to garcia@computerhistory.org

By Our Gentle Readers

Loc to Drink Tank 328, 26 Oct 2012
From Taral Wayne!

If there's nothing else you have in common with Marc Schirmeister, the fanartist, it's that you both have a reaction to *The Iron Giant* that approximates that of having eaten tainted meat in a lunch cafeteria. Schirm hates that movie – along with a few others – to a degree I've never understood. When I've asked him about it, his reasons never seem to amount to anything. For instance, Dean, the Beatnik artist in the scrapyard, is out of his period – that sort of Karouac Beat is more in character with the early 1950s, according to Schirm, than with 1957. Or maybe it was because the right period for that sort of Beatnik was the early '60s. I dunno. A knife switch that Hogarth uses to turn off the power transformer in which the Iron Giant has gotten tangled isn't the right kind of switch, said Schirm, and furthermore, it wouldn't be out in the open, where any kid could come along and plunge half the county into darkness like that. Schirm may have a point about whether that switch – whatever sort it might be – would be so easy to get at, but it seems a minor cavil to me. Schirm's other points seemed to grow weaker after those

... with one big, glaring exception.

The sacrifice of the Iron Giant at the end makes no sense whatever. Only moments before, he has shown ample potential for destruction at a distance. Why did he choose to collide with the incoming ICBM and sacrifice himself when he could have simply laser-phasered it out of existence, without ever leaving the ground? Think about it. A child is chasing a ball into traffic and you could grab him by the arm to stop him, or you could jump out in front of the oncoming bus. Both would save the child, I suppose, but ...



Mind you, this was not too huge a plot hole to fix. A little tinkering with the script earlier to establish that the Iron Giant couldn't help being what he is – that, even knowing it was wrong to kill, he was designed as a weapon and would always be one – would have explained sacrificing himself needlessly. His collision course with the missile removed both threats to the people below – the Iron Giant as well as the nuclear missile. Instead of mumbling “Superman” to himself, he might have said something more meaningful, like “I am just a weapon too.”

Or maybe, “I yam what I yam, and that's all what I yam.”

What can I say? Animation is full of missed opportunities.

In defense of the *Iron Giant* – a film I like very much for its period-feel and design – it must be pointed out that there were quite a lot of details it did get right. I don't know about knife switches in power substations, but I do know that those warships out in the bay were specifically Baltimore class heavy cruisers. The tanks were accurate Pattons or Pershings. And while the film might have filled the air with any generic fighter planes, the jets scrambled to attack the Iron Giant were all-weather interceptor models

of the Sabrejet, the F-86D. By 1957, the Sabre was a second-line defense aircraft mainly operating from National Guard units throughout the country – a day fighter model such as the F-86C would have been wrong because of the snow.

It's interesting that a single film can provoke such radically different reactions in so many viewers. Me, in most respects I'd put the Iron Giant up there in lights with *Cats Don't Dance*. (Incidentally, Schirm hates *Cats Don't Dance* too.)

So, even though my reasons for disliking it are much more emotional than logical, I KNEW there were massive logical problems! I finally saw Cats Don't Dance (after your piece on it!) and I thought that it was pretty good!

From the moment I sent you "Troubled Waters," I knew I'd have to loc my own article. How could I just leave the readers hanging in the air about Sailor's fate? Did she stop peeing on my stuff, or was my optimism misplaced?

Unfortunately, she didn't stop. There were repeated incidents, in which I dismissed one speculative explanation after another. Prov-identially, one fan I was in touch with – Sheryl Birkhead – is also a veterinarian, and she spent a great deal of her time gathering information for me, and finding ways I might have Sailor tested for feline leukemia, diabetes, bladder or kidney infections, and possibly even alien possession. The problem was that these days I have the greatest difficulty getting myself around the neighborhood, and carrying a cat in her carrier would not make matters easier, especially if repeated visits to a local vet had been necessary. Also, I had no money for such things. Whatever

the diagnosis, Sailor could not have been treated, so she would have had to be put down. That alone might cost \$75 to \$100. Her only chance, then, was to have nothing wrong with her. So that became my first hypothesis.

Eventually, I worked out a second hypothesis – that she didn't like the new cat litter.

It wasn't the brand I usually get, and I had no idea what I had bought. Instead of ground up bits of clay, which is all most that cat litter is, the new stuff was made from recycled newsprint. The bag read "environmentally friendly." So far, so good. I pictured little bits of compressed paper, ground-up, similar to other cat litter. But this stuff was pressed and formed into noodles, about the same size and shape as something you'd boil, add pasta sauce and serve with mushrooms! It was horrible! It got wet and never dried, forcing the user to dispose of it right away – so much for cutting down on waste. It also wouldn't flush down the toilet, so I had to keep a plastic bag of stinking, green piss-noodles in the bathroom – at a time when Toronto has passed a by-law to phase out plastic shopping bags. I could see I'd end up having to buy bags to throw away, too. The whole business was growing more "environmentally hostile" by the minute. From Sailor's point of view, I suppose the paper kitty litter must have been like walking on a surface of rolling pencils, not to mention that she couldn't dig in them very well, or bury her scat. So, after a brave effort to adapt, she resorted to other "kitty" friendly locations ... such as our bedding.

I'm happy to say that once I figured out the problem and brought in some regular litter, the problem was solved the same day. In the weeks that followed, there have been no more

incidents. I still had an apartment that smelled like a public urinal, but that too had a solution. I paid rather handsomely for that solution – an enzyme spray cleaner – and used about half the bottle on my bed and chairs. It took several applications, but I'm happy to say that my apartment has returned to its usual musty, stale, dirty-laundry odour.

The old dame is dancing yet.

To my readers, my next contribution to Drink Tank will be the 99th. While I don't altogether know what I'm writing for it, the title is "99 Down and I to Go." Number 100, of course, will have to be something Very Special. ***Awesome! I can't wait to see it! Also, there is no phrase I thought I'd say less frequently than "I'm glad your cat is no longer peeing all over the place..."***

And now we start with Mr. Eric Mayer!
Chris,

Okay now, imagine this. Here's a real true blooded sf fan. Goes to the Worldcon. Loves Doctor Who. Reads all the Hugo nominated novels, sees all the new sf movies. So this fan for the first time ventures to eFanzines to download a zine by the illustrious Christopher Garcia, Hugo award winner, and behind the enticing robot cover he finds that long time staple of science fiction -- an essay about an incontinent cat!

Ah Taral.Ya gotta love him. I mean, somebody has to write for aging fringe fen like me. And incontinent cats are right up my alley. (A noisome alley to be sure but hopefully not to narrow to step around the puddles....)

Well, it's sad but old cats usually do begin to relieve themselves in inappropriate places.

Not unlike people. As someone once said, you know you're getting old when you forget to zip up afterward. You know you're really old when you forget to zip down before. But when you've had a cat for many years it is hard to contemplate having them put down. You know the deal. Grow old with me, the best is yet to be. (Like hell, but it is a comforting thought)

Unfortunately, the smell of cat pee can be almost impossible to get rid of. They do sell stuff that's supposed to do the trick. When our cat got ancient she began to drop the random turd on the floor. But that wasn't a big deal because all our floors are finished wood. No rugs to soil and she peed in her box nicely, so as long as you watched where you were walking it was bearable. Hope Taral's Sailor improves. Seventeen is old for a cat. Doing the cat equivalent of forgetting to zip down.

I'm not a cat person, I'm allergic, but Linda has two cats, Saba and Hamachi, and they are pretty good. They don't pee around the house, they're not that old (9 years, maybe?) but they tend to leave little presents on the floor from the mouth. That is a bit disconcerting, but at least it's not an assault on the senses over than sight... or maybe touch if you're barefoot. Of course, anyone whose first introduction to fanzines is through The Drink Tank has much bigger problems!

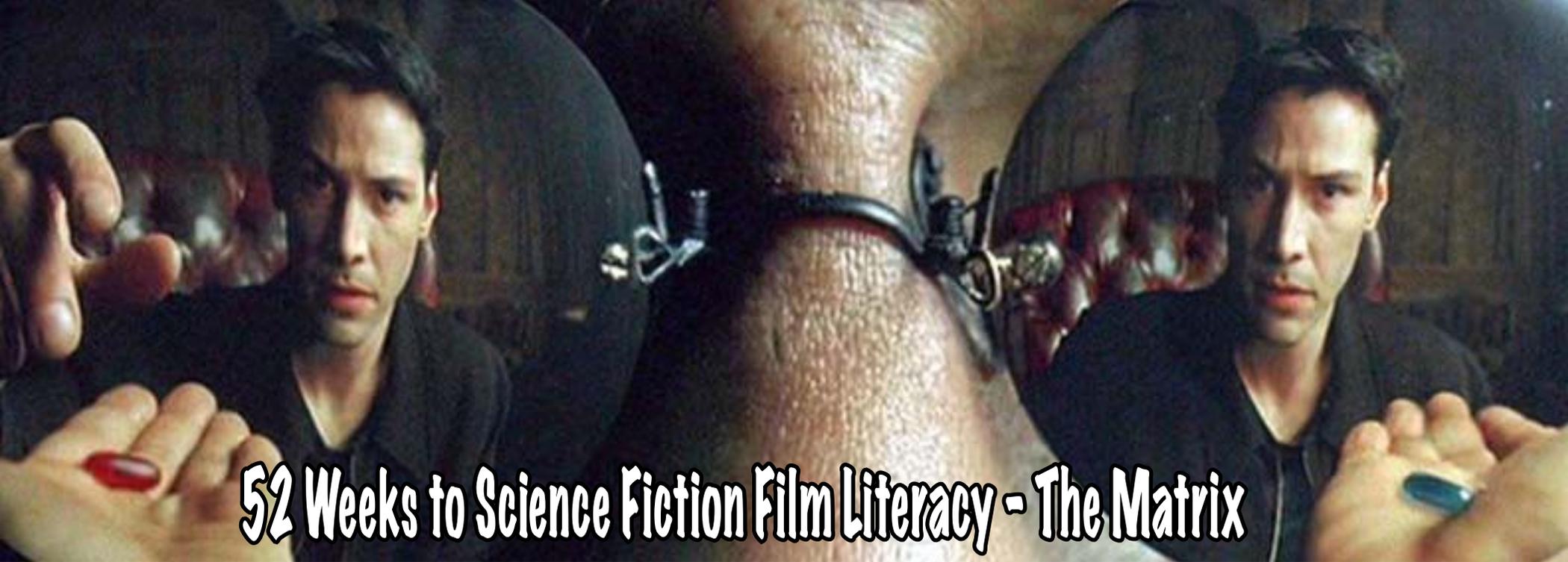
The rest of the issue was educational. I'm not sure if I want to finally read some steampunk or not. I grew up reading sf, now Mary and I write historical mysteries (even one set in Victorian times) so sf and history sounds enticing, but who knows, I might get hooked. (Was the Wild Wild West steam punk. I loved that show.) I've read some Jules Verne recently and that's perhaps not unlike reading steampunk.

Thanks for another good read.

Best,
Eric

I'd argue Wild Wild West was steampunk, and certainly the movie was, though it was terrible. The best Steam-punk TV was probably The Adventures of Briscoe County Junior.





52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy - The Matrix

There are moments in the history of film where everything changes. In the silent era, it was first *A Trip to the Moon*, then *The Great Train Robbery*, and then *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*. The *Jazz Singer* happened, possibly the most influential film ever made, and everything went talkie. *The Wizard of Oz* changed everything, and so did the actor films of the 1950s and 60s. Then, and possibly most important to you, gentle SF reader, was *Star Wars*. The most recent of these moments happened in 1999, when a pair of brothers released a film that changed not only SF film, but all films, influenced a generation that is now starting to be seen on the screen, and has become one of the most referenced films of all-time. The brothers were The Wachowski brothers (now Wachowski siblings after one of them transitioned, though I'm not sure which one and really, they're interchangeable) and the film was *The Matrix*.

Let us start with Fanboy Theory. There have been fanboys dating back to the beginning of film. Some point to *Forry* as the first true fanboy, and I'd give that some thought. He was certainly the most visible for much of the 20th century, and if you read early *Famous Monsters*, you could tell that he was doing what fanboy blogs and websites do today. *FanboyPlanet.com* (the best comics and movie podcast and website in the world right now!) is a direct outflow from the kind of stuff that *Forry* was doing all those years ago. The concept of the Fanboy didn't really hit mainstream attention until *Star Wars*. Think about the image of the teenaged male of the 1970s and you're likely to come up with one of two images: a weed-addled loser in flares with a bad haircut, or a pimply-faced kid who went to *Star Wars* a hundred times in the theatre. My dad was one of those kids, though he was 22, I think, at the time. I remember seeing it dozens of

times at the drive-in. The Fanboys that came out of *Star Wars*, and *Star Trek* to a lesser degree, really started to influence the world of television and film. You'd see marketing campaigns targeted towards them, and with the addition of the internet and the founding of websites dedicated to fanboying, they became a force. *Ain't It Cool News* being the most important of them, but the general rise of ComicCon also shows the power of the Fanboy, which is a gender neutral term, it turns out. These sites, as well as the reaction from screenings at events like ComicCon, started to have a serious influence over the production of films starting about 1997, but was in full-swing by 1999. It was out of this and the championing of sites like *Ain't It Cool* that led to *The Matrix* gaining a huge following.

The story is basically Joseph Campbell's wettest dream. The world is a dream, there's a messiah named Neo whose eyes have been

opened to what the world really is. There's a whole thing about death and resurrection, prophesy and a whole bunch of other stuff too. You know, the typical.

None of it really matters. What matters isn't the story being told, but the way it is told.

Here, taking the lead on the stage is the visual component. While most effect-driven films of the 1990s had focussed on a single technique, here, dozens of different kinds of effects were employed. Yes, computer editing, finishing and all sorts of other applications had been happening in all sorts of films, but here, intensive graphics work happened ranging from Morphing (the focus of T2), to insertion (Jurassic Park), to manipulated backgrounds. 1999 was a big year for effects, with a new Star Wars movie coming out that heavily relied on the effects. In a way, it was the way that the Wachowski Bros. let their brushmarks show that separated their use from other films. The most visible example of this in the so-called "Bullet Time", which is a form of roto-scoping that allows an image to remain stationary in a shot that is moving. The images move, but when we see objects move within the frame of bullet time, they leave trails and traces. It slows movement down, but it also forces each movement to leave a mark upon the screen, show what was where. This concept had been used to a degree in high-end Hong Kong productions in the 1990s, but to nowhere near the extent in The Matrix. More on Hong Kong in a minute.

There were complete digital backgrounds created for The Matrix, as well as digitally inserted characters. Not to the level that we would see in the Star Wars films, or more

notably in Sky Captain & The World of Tomorrow, but it was all there. This was a film that used digital effects to great success largely because that was the theme of the film: that we don't know what's real and that what our eyes and senses tell us may well be a bigger lie than we can imagine. That idea, that so much of what we see is false, is what changed film. Yes, we've always had to suspend disbelief to enjoy films, but here, we no longer have that luxury. It's no longer necessary to let go of your disbelief, you can simply accept what you see on the screen as real. It is a fundamental change in how films, and all media, are accepted. It's not necessarily the effects, it's the inability to detect so much

of what is an effect that the viewer simply takes one of two paths- either it's all fake, that there's no reality at all, and it doesn't matter, or that it's all real, and what's better than real? This change has made it possible to play with film visuals in a far more unrestrained way. We still have The Uncanny Valley, where digitally created characters that are too human are rejected, but we've reached the point where an animated film and a live action film are both having the same effect on the brain. This is something new and has opened up the world of adult animation in a way that no film has before.

It has also made effects-driven film a much bigger part of the cinematic landscape.



Look at the films that were directly influenced by The Matrix such as V for Vendetta and the general oeuvre of director Zac Snyder, you can start to see beyond the effects. The effects are no longer wonders, like they were in Jurassic Park of T2, where you were dazzled by the imagery, but they are the accepted reality of the film world.

This is what filmmakers have been trying for since the Lumiere Brothers first debuted their films in 1895. The story of the train coming at the screen and the audience panicking thinking it was coming right at 'em may be apocryphal, but the idea that the audience believed that the presentation was the real deal is important, and it wasn't until The Matrix came along that the training of the viewers' brains was completed. Everything after The Matrix is playing with a different set of rules.

Getting away from effects for a minute, you can see the influence of a century of science fiction, but especially of three guys - Phillip K. Dick, William Gibson, and George Lucas. Lucas is obvious, largely because of the use of effects, but also because several specific technologies that were used to create The Matrix. Plus, the structure of the Matrix Trilogy is certainly influenced by his form of storytelling, which is interesting as you can see that Joseph Campbell influence on Lucas and then it's boiled down by the Wachowskis into what we see here. Dick's interest in what is reality, and on both how drugs effect consciousness and what really constitutes a drug, are both shown in full detail in The Matrix. Gibson's Cyberpunk and cyberspace ideas are the firmament beneath the entire production. I'm not sure what has a greater influence

on those working in the Cyberpunk vein today - Gibson's writings of the imagery of The Matrix. Even reading Mirrorshades today I was moved by how much my interpretation of the stories was colored through The Matrix.

The Wachowskis were relatively young, I think they were in their early 30s, and had twice been in the spotlight, once as the writers of a less-than-successful film Assassins (no relation to the Sondheim musical) and as the directors of Bound, one of the greatest Noirs of the post-1960s era. This was their break-out, but it was really tempered with the fact that they forced this film to their vision. The auteur concept of filmmaking certainly applied here, as the vision of the Wachowskis is all over the film. From the images to the distinct sexuality of the film, it's all from their powerful force moving things. The script's no great piece of literature, but the way they use it as a structure to hang the film on is remarkable. They draw the most out of the least of the script, which is ultimately what you hire a director to do. I've got a friend who says that a director can only ruin a good script, but a great director can turn an average script into a great movie. They manage it beautifully.

The music is good, though not much to mentioned. The acting, on the other hand, is really interesting. Keanu Reeves is an actor I always respect, and here the somewhat tone-deaf Reeves' performance is strong. He is playing a role where he is out of his depths, and not only that, he also has to expose his own wonder at the world he has stepped into. He does both of those things very well, but it also feels like it's a natural condition for him. Lawrence Fishburne as Morpheus is solid, and when is he not? He

provides that visionary role that every Up-and-Coming Prophet needs, and he installs such a powerful sense of gravitas that it imbues the entire film. Carrie-Ann Moss made her big breakthrough here, playing the essentially emotionless Trinity, who then comes around and falls in love with Neo and makes it all happen, sort of. It's actually a tricky role, and I'm not sure she got it 100%, but she did look good in those outfits.

There is no one better at playing the untrustworthy than the great Joe Pantoliano, aka Joey Pants. Dating back to her turn in Eddie & The Cruisers and Goonies, he's a bad guy, and usually the snitch, the liar, the turn-coat. That's what his character Cypher is in The Matrix. It's awesome! He is a wonderfully devious actor and the idea he has, that living in an illusion is better than living in a reality, is actually a very deep concept, copped totally from the idea of Plato's Cave. He wants to go back to the illusion, even though he is a prisoner in that scenario. Better to rule in Hell and all that. He provides an interesting counterpoint to Morpheus, who is all about loyalty and faith in the prophesy. Cypher is all about the personal reality. It is not that which is real, but that which we experience as real that is important. Some would say he was wanting to live in denial, and was willing to sell out the entire crew of the Nebuchannezer to do so. That's one way to look at it, but who is to say that which the brain experiences is not reality? It's basic Phillip K Dick for ya!

The film is so very beautiful. Go back, watch it again. The Blu-Ray even looks better than it did on the big screen, and for the love of Ghod stop after the initial Martix movie. The rest are no bueno.