

# ***JONOSPHERE 16***



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FAN-PRO COORDINATING BUREAU**

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A row of Js there. Join our bureau and help break the spell.

IO's purpose is improvement in fan-pro relations, and it is also an interchange with the membership.



## CONTENTS

Editorial, page three

Facebook SF Groups, JT, page four

Behind the Scenes, column by Jeffrey Redmond, page five

Space Is the Place, by Daniel Slaten, page twelve

Back From Space, by John Thiel, page fourteen

Letters, page twelve

Ad Astra, by Will Mayo, page sixteen



# EDITORIAL



## **It's a Pleasure**

Doing fan activity is considered a lot of work, with a lot of problems involved, and with scant reward. I'd like to present some disagreement with that. Since becoming involved with the N3F, I've gotten two bureaus to work with, and have been put on the recruitment activity, as well as being a director, which might be considered taking on a work overload, especially with time so priceless in the course of a day. And it is difficult to work things up together and maintain them, especially at a time when things are rather slack. But consider this: if I were not doing these things, I wouldn't be doing anything at all but reading TNFF and TIGHTBEAM, which is pleasant enough, but it doesn't amount to doing anything, and I like to be doing something with my time and making my presence known when I have joined something. Probably some of the members would like to know what it is like to be working at these activities, and I think I have provided some answer that would apply to other people connected with the bureaus also. It is pleasant to contemplate what one is working with, and when things

aren't going along as well as they might, to take a hand at trying to solve some of the problems and get things going better. There is a real feeling that one is accomplishing something and doing valuable work, and that one might be contributing something to the general good. When there isn't a lot of response to what one is doing, it doesn't detract from the visible accomplishments managed through working with what is on hand. Indeed, getting some response is another problem to be worked with, seeing if one can find out what will draw responses. Some like to meet with a challenge, and I feel there is something to be said for that as well. I have been getting something out of these activities, and I can vouch for the fact that there are good feelings involved in doing a job.

Speaking less plainly and matter-of-factly, I've found a place in the sun. I could have expressed it existentially, too, as it is an existential matter. Rewards are found in the doing of things.

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*The motion pictures have become a new outlet for science fiction; it might be well to have some contact with the directors and actors. Here we have a look*

## **BEHIND THE SCENES by Jeffrey Redmond**



### **Perhaps the Ten Best Science Fiction Movies of All Time**

Science fiction has produced some of cinema's boldest and most glorious flights, in every sense. Though often patronized as mostly being kids' stuff, the genre seeks to look beyond the parochialism of most realist drama. To see other worlds and other existences, and thus to look with a new, radically alienated eye at our own. Perhaps something in the limitless possibilities of cinema itself spawned sci fi.

George Melies's *A TRIP TO THE MOON* (1902) was one of early cinema's biggest hits. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, sci fi inhabited the B picture world of monsters and rockets, and intuited a scary anxiety about aliens. And at the end of the 60s, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* broke through into a new level of poetry and wonder. Films like *DARK STAR* and *ALIEN* worked a satirical and pessimistic darkness into sci fi, but George Lucas and Steven Spielberg together expressed its lighter and more hopeful strain.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Wachowskis' *THE MATRIX* and Christopher Nolan's *INCEPTION* have explored new, interior landscapes. The inner world of the mind may be the genre's new frontier. These ten sci fi films may be the greatest of all time (so far):

## 10. THE MATRIX (1999)

The Matrix is a teenage boy's dream. There's action, fighting, cutting edge special effects, murderous robots, evil authority figures, an overriding pseudo conspiracy theory and, most wonderful of all, an ineloquent social outcast who eventually becomes a flying kung fu master. The Matrix even has girls in skin-tight PVC catsuits.

By selecting as many key ingredients from action films as they could, and shooting it through with a timely dose of pre-millennial unease, the directors single-handedly managed to reinvigorate an entire genre. The Matrix marks the point where fans demanded more. They wanted to see themselves on screen. And that's why the casting of Keanu Reeves was such a masterstroke.

## 9. THE TERMINATOR (1984) and TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY (1991)

A seven million outlay brought spectacular returns of over seventy million dollars for James Cameron's first great sci fi action thriller. This spawned a three sequel franchise, a powerhouse directorial career, and made robotic, former iron pumping Austrian Arnold Schwarzenegger an unlikely 80s superstar. It's a time travel thriller, whose closed circuit in time mechanism is a straight lift from Chris Marker's LA JETEE. Its more cerebral notions of man *versus* machine, grey matter versus computer, and past versus present versus future, are cleverly pondered alongside some of the most visceral and exciting action sequences ever filmed. And the monster, unstoppable and remorselessly murderous, can take on the voices of others, and later (in the sequel), even adopt their outward fleshly appearance, allowing it to take on the form of LAPD cops, step-moms, pet dogs, and everything else.

(The excellent special effects were enhanced when Schwarzenegger gave one million dollars from his salary advance back to the producers. This enabled them to finish the film, including the scene where the robot gets smashed in a stamping press machine.)

The follow-up, made for millions more dollars, was a hit on a far larger scale. It offered a metal-based morphing psycho robot (Robert Patrick) and a more sympathetic Schwarzenegger cyborg, this time assigned to protect and not destroy future rebel leader John Conner (Edward Furlong). One of the most likeable aspects of this and several other Cameron features is his eagerness to put a tough, resourceful and sexy woman at the head of the cast. Look at the muscle tone on that Sarah Conner in JUDGMENT DAY! No one is needed to rescue her. State of the art in their day, they still pack a knockout punch.

## 8. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (1977)

Steven Spielberg revived and revitalized the alien invasion genre after the 50s rush of ray-gun wielding creature features. In his luminous 1977 special effects extravaganza, he saw alien contact as a gateway to new knowledge, new experiences, and a higher level of consciousness.

Its suburban hero Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) is both an everyman and a prophet. He's a family guy who is haunted by sounds—the film's signature five note whale-call—and images of a rock formation in Wyoming, to the horror of his wife and their children.

Spielberg flirts with thriller conventions, though this is ultimately a cozy ride, lightened by a spirit of evangelical zeal concerning Neary's obsession. While the encounter itself plays out like an intellectual version of the rapture, in which only true believers are taken by the sylph-like visitors.

The film is also as close as Spielberg gets to social comment. The ending, expanded for the 1980 special edition, sees Neary, after an unpleasant grilling by the government and the military, turning his back on a U.S. where Watergate and Vietnam were still recent and painful memories.

## 7. STAR WARS (1977)

The original Star Wars starts right off with its awesome opening shot. A gigantic, evil-looking spaceship chasing down a smaller craft. Like the rest of the movie, you can watch it with the sound off and completely follow what is going on. It's the purity of the story that has made this film endure, with its classic themes handed down through the ages. It may be dressed up with robots, spaceships and trash compactors, but it has the old as time hero journey. George Lucas said he consciously modelled his screenplay on Joseph Campbell's study of comparative mythology. The Hero With a Thousand Faces.

In the cynical 70s, the notion of making a movie that mixed Kurosawa and Flash Gordon must have sounded as ludicrous as it does today. The film industry wasn't ready for such an ambitious technical feat, and at such a modest budget, as Star Wars. So Lucas changed it by bringing in untested youngsters from experimental and independent movies, or from fields like industrial design.

Lucas had a talent for mixing disparate influences, and making them fit perfectly. He brought together acting stalwarts like Alec Guinness and Peter Cushing, experimental film makers like Adam Beckett (who supervised the effects), and military uniform historian John Mollo. It would otherwise be inconceivable that these people would have all worked on the same project.

Much has been made of Lucas' repeated direction to his cast ("Faster and more intense!"), or that the dialogue was easier to type than say. Guinness, Cushing and James Earl Jones gave it all the gravitas it needs, with the younger members fitting their roles perfectly. Mark Hamill's wide-eyed earnestness, Carrie Fisher's dignity and, perhaps best of all, Harrison Ford looking so mortified and embarrassed to be there. For audiences it resulted in a film unlike any before, or since.

## 6. ET: THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL (1982)

After 1977's Close Encounters, director Steven Spielberg reversed the alien encounter formula to wonder not what we would make of them, but what they would make of us. The result was this 1982

blockbuster, which eclipsed even the original Star Wars, and received nine Oscar nominations. It won four—a feat unheard of for a film with such overtly sci fi content.

Despite its genre trappings, ET balanced its fantasy content with an Academy-pleasing dose of sentiment. It was played out in the home life of Elliott (Henry Thomas), a lonely ten-year-old whose parents are separating. Little time is spent revealing where the film's ET has come from, or how he came to be left behind. Instead, Spielberg focuses on the film's unlikely buddy story. The middle child of three, Elliott takes in the ET as the friend and confidant he doesn't otherwise have. Drew Barrymore is the sweet but clingy younger sister, and Robert MacNaughton is the cynical teenage big brother.

Largely filmed from an adult waist height perspective, the film prioritizes this world of children and indulges them in their harmless naivety. So when the mean-minded authorities find out about the presence of ET, the effects are doubly shocking. The faceless hordes of uniformed, flashlight-toting militia make an intimidating and brutal sight. After a lighthearted first half, the film takes a plunge into darker drama in the second, when ET is captured and quarantined. Pale and half dead, the creature draws uncanny performances from its child cast, and the religious parallels in ET's subsequent resurrection have never gone unnoticed. Spielberg has said he sees his film more as a minority story about two outsiders who join forces in isolation.

There is also more than a hint of fairy tale about ET, notably in the film's final, famous chase sequence, where Elliott takes to his bicycle with ET on the handlebars and soars up into the sky. As in *Close Encounters*, there is a healthy skepticism about authority on show. But *ET: The Extra Terrestrial* is a less worldly film. Like much of Spielberg's work, it was heavily influenced by his own parents' divorce, and based on an imaginary friend he created at the same time as Elliott. He explained, "A friend who could be the brother I never had, and a father that I didn't feel I had any more."

## 5. SOLARIS (2002)

Andrei Tarkovsky started work on an adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's philosophical science fiction novel in 1968, in an attempt to find a popular cinematic subject. After the usual labyrinth of negotiations with the Soviet authorities over the script, what emerged was a space film unlike anything before or since. Lem's novel posited the existence of solaristics, the study of an outlying star system that had bizarre effects on human psychology. Tarkovsky took this idea and turned it into a dreamlike interrogation of faith, memory, and the transforming power of love.

Tarkovsky begins his version of the story with some of the most magically earthbound images ever filmed. His protagonist, a psychologist called Kelvin (Donatas Banionis), contemplates his garden. He then embarks on a voyage to the space station circling Solaris, there to investigate the reports of eccentric behavior of previous visitors. Kelvin undergoes an ordeal by memory, as Solaris'



psychoactive properties trigger the reappearance of his dead wife, Hari (Natalya Bondarchuk). The space station becomes a place of mysterious hauntings and apparitions. His colleagues hardly inspire trust, and Kelvin attempts to make sense of what is happening to him, as he retreats further into an internal world.

Tarkovsky was barely interested in Lem's main preoccupation, to theorize about what might constitute alien life. *Solaris*, and its apparently animate oceans, are simply a conduit to, and externalization of, deeper spiritual matters. It's fair to say that no other director could have gotten anywhere near the mystic uplift of this film, and that includes the Steven Sonderbergh remake with George Clooney. Lem didn't like the way his novel was adapted. Tarkovsky himself considered it a less than successful film. But the clarity and beauty of *Solaris* ensures that its majesty will live on.

#### 4. ALIEN (1979)

*Alien* is a perfect collection of remarkable talents. Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett's tight screenplay, Derek Vanlint's moody cinematography, Jerry Goldsmith's haunting score, Brian Johnson's miniature effects, and a cast including Sigourney Weaver, Harry Dean Stanton, Ian Holm, and John Hurt.

The most noticeable and revolutionary work on this film was, of course, on the design side. O'Bannon had previously worked on Alejandro Jodorowsky's ill-fated adaptation of *DUNE*. For that he assembled an incredible assortment of artists, who he regrouped for *Alien*. Talents such as Moebius from the **Metal Hurlant** magazine, Ron Cobb from *Star Wars*, and Swiss artist HG Giger. Years before, Giger had a vivid nightmare where a lavatory and surrounding plumbing came to a queasy, pulsating life. And so his biomechanical style was born. His creations are bizarre, organic machines, and his designs for *Alien*, such as the huge derelict spaceship the astronauts investigate, seem as much grown as constructed.

*Alien* uses a similar story framework to the 50s cheapo monster flick *IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE*, but adds so much to it that it becomes a far deeper film. There are plenty of subttests at play here, such as having the lead role played by a woman, or the male Kane giving birth to the creature in the still powerful chest bursting scene. However you approach it, this is a wonderfully immersing and terrifying film. It was such a shock to the system when it was released, that you can still see its influence in countless sci fi and horror films decades later.

#### 3. BLADE RUNNER (1982)

Most directors who have finished a science fiction film tend to choose something a little more down to earth for their next project. Ridley Scott, coming off *Alien*, launched himself into something even more stylized and visually dense.

Based on Philip K. Dick's novel *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*, and borrowing the title from William S Burroughs, *Blade Runner* follows a detective called Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) as he hunts down a group of replicants. These synthetic humans, almost impossible to discern from the real thing, have escaped from one of the off world colonies and returned to Earth. Deckard's mission is to retire them, but the reason behind the replicants' return is interestingly emotive. They wish to lead their own lives, as is the right of any sentient being.

*Blade Runner* was completely misunderstood when it was first released. Ford was an action man, and audiences could be forgiven for thinking this was going to be another sort of Indiana Jones picture. It also wasn't helped by the clumsy violence and coda that the studio insisted upon.

Now, though, there's no denying its classic status. There are several versions available, each showing that with even a few minor differences, this film can be read in different ways. Is Deckard a replicant? Even Scott and Ford can't agree. Designer Syd Mead also pulled his weight. Mead was a visual futurist, a designer of advanced concepts for companies like Chrysler and Phillips. However, it is Rutger Hauer's final speech, as the dying replicant leader Roy Batty, that people remember the most. It's an emotional end, adding unexpected heartbreak to a film that seemed so baffling at first viewing.

## 2. METROPOLIS (1927)

Although many sci fi films followed, none have had the lasting, seemingly self-regenerating appeal of Fritz Lang's silent classic. Perhaps because, after its Berlin premiere in 1927, it is arguable that no authoritative version of it has ever really been established. Originally clocking in at two hours and thirty-three minutes, *Metropolis* has since become a movable movie, with new scenes and scores. Giorgio Moroder issued a derided, color-tinted synch version in 1984, and this has kept Lang's epic current.

For its time, *Metropolis* was a milestone. The innovative miniatures and camera tricks created its city of the future, taking two years to shoot, and bankrupting its producers (in modern money, the budget was close to two hundred million). But the real key to its longevity is its thematic content. More of a warning than a romance, it deals with issues of modernity that have never gone away. Class conflict is its main thread. Freder (Gustav Frohlich), the idle son of a rich businessman, discovers the primitive conditions the city's workers are living in. The scenes of a dehumanized proletariat, using a cast of more than thirty thousand extras, still have power today.

Lang's fetishising of machinery scarcely predicts the costs of heavy industrialization. But what many remember most is an extraordinary sequence in which a woman pulls the scales from Freder's eyes. Maria (Brigitte Helm), a good-hearted workers' rights agitator, is kidnapped. She is replaced with a sinister, violence-inciting robot double, created by evil scientist Rotwang, at Freder's father's

command. This hydraulic beauty, with cantilevered breasts, morphs into a wide-3-eyed, unblinking Maria in a moment of pure magic.

Many of Lang and writer Thea von Harbou's original subplots have been lost. But even in its shortest form (ninety minutes), *Metropolis* remains a timeless tale. Though made to fit a genre that showcases the possibilities of the future, Lang's film never loses sight of its rights and wrongs.

## 1. 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968)

When *2001: A Space Odyssey* was first released, few would have predicted it would still be feted nearly half a century later. In fact, few would have considered it for even a short-lived glory. At its premiere there were two hundred and forty-one walkouts, including Rock Hudson, who asked, "Will someone tell me what the hell this is about?"

Even its champions were stumped. "Somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring," thought the **New York Times**. "Superb photography major asset to confusing, long unfolding plot," reckoned **Newsday**. But bafflement was the intention, explained its creators. Said Arthur C. Clarke, whose 1948 story "The Sentinel" was the starting point for Stanley Kubrick, "If you understand *2001* completely, we failed". "We wanted to raise far more questions than we answered," Kubrick explained.

*2001* is magisterial. Its impeccable serious-mindedness is nothing to scoff at. What some saw as ponderous now seems merely prescient. It was both the last space travel movie shot before men actually landed on the moon, and the first to turn a genre that had been the preserve of B movies into the highest form of art.

It looks not just as fresh as the day it was made, but as fresh as the day you first saw it. Ape costumes aside, it's one of the few 60s movies that stands up to contemporary technical scrutiny. At the time, it must have marked a quantum leap forward. Suddenly, space seemed credible. To watch even now is to be awestruck. All those exacting details, the pacing at once lulling and urgent, the audio soaring Strauss waltzes spliced with dead air. In space, of course, no one can hear you scream.

And so to the difficult matter of what on earth it's about. On a bare bones level, it concerns three artifacts—one left on Earth at the dawn of man by space alien explorers keen to steer the evolution of the apes, another buried deep in the Lunar surface, and programmed to signal word of man's first journey off our planet (In Kubrick's words, "a kind of cosmic burglar alarm"), and the third in orbit around Jupiter. Another alarm, this time for when man breaks out further into the solar system.

And that's what happens in the film, when a team of five men (three in hibernation) go off to investigate the second. But the mission goes awry, arguably the fault of the sinister command computer, Hal. The sole surviving astronaut (Keir Dullea) is swept into a force field that hurls him on a journey through the Galaxy. From there it's to a human zoo, built from his own subconscious. There he

ages quickly, dies, is reborn, and enhanced, before returning to Earth to advance evolution. “A star child, an angel, a superman”, Kubrick said of him.

2001 is a film whose ambition is only matched by its achievement in pulling it off. It was the world’s first, and perhaps only, metaphysical exploration of the workings of humanity. From the beginning of time to the far-flung future, it’s small wonder science fiction has never really recovered. It has only been going backwards, relying either on special effects, or psychological conundrums, handled so badly that they barely seem related to 2001 at all.

Some complain that it is chilly, inhuman. But the dying song of Hal, warbling out Daisy Bell (A Bicycle Made for Two) as his plug is pulled, must be one of the most haunting scenes in cinema, mechanical or not.

2001 certainly provides the most open and shut case for cinema being primarily a visual medium, from the twirling, dancing orbits to the extended light trip at the end. And it features Leonard Rossiter as a Russian astronaut. The question back in 1968 would have been, how could this possibly be number one? The question today is: how could it not?



Blue moon





## Letters

John Polselli: Thank you for including my poem “Snow Walker” in the December issue of Ionisphere. I enjoyed reading the interesting and informative interviews with George Phillies and Rajnar Vajra along with the photos and artwork. Great work, John!

*Glad you liked the issue. (I'd like to explain that Mr. Polselli hasn't been getting Ionisphere because he doesn't have an email and that I finally sent him one, as ought to be done when he is a member of the bureau. I have been having a problem about conserving ink cartridges, and also my earlier printer was malfunctioning on printing out publications. Now that I'm set up, he'll get this and also Origin.)*

Note: Amazing Stories on the net has reports of fandom doings and convention reports. <https://www.amazingstories.com>

Steve Davidson reports: “The Experimenter Publishing Company LLC is building its EMPIRE!” Experimenter is the publishing company doing the new Amazing; Steve is its head.

*Much interest that was once centered in fandom went to matters involving the development of space flight after Sputnik was lofted. There has not been much direct contact with general fandom among the space program followers, but that would seem to be an area with which contact should be made. We present here some of the latest in space news, with quotes from a story in Purdue University's student newspaper, the **Exponent**.*

### **BACK FROM SPACE**



**Scott Kelly**

An astronaut named Scott Kelly returned to Earth after spending five hundred and twenty days, or over a year and a half, in space. He spoke at Purdue's Loeb Playhouse on March 5<sup>th</sup>. He said he had seen one of his colleagues in the Navy filling out an application to become a NASA astronaut and decided he wanted to become one too, although he feared he might be unqualified. He filled out an application and was granted an interview. He became an astronaut and describes how the view was from his first launch:

"As the sun came up, I saw how breathtakingly beautiful planet Earth is. Ever since this mission, I've always had this fascination for what Hubble has taught us about our place in the universe. Now we know anywhere we look the universe looks like galaxies, millions of stars. There are more stars than grains of sand on every beach and desert on

Earth.” He said of the first flight, “I remember thinking to myself, ‘What’s that film over the surface’? Then I realized: that’s the atmosphere.”

The long amount of time spent in space had physiological effects on him. “We lose bone mass at one percent a month,” he said. “My telomeres, which are the ends of our chromosomes, scientists thought would get shorter because of stress and radiation.” But the opposite happened and his telomeres ended up getting longer. “Also, seven percent of my gene expression changed when I was in space.” He complained upon his return of being very sore and not feeling well. “I could barely stand up, and when I did, I would feel all the blood rush out of my head and see my ankles swelling up. It lasted for weeks. I had hives and rashes anywhere my skin had touched anything. My skin had not touched anything in a long time with any type of pressure.” He called the trip the hardest thing he would ever have to do in his life and he liked to share his success at doing it with everybody. He called space flight the biggest team sport there is, and said much was learned from meeting people with all sorts of different backgrounds on this nationwide project. “When you look at the Earth from space and you see continents without any political borders, it looks like we’re all on this planet together. The way we solve problems is working as a team. Hopefully as time goes on more people will have this perspective.” A student said of him, “Kelly was so open to facing the hardest challenges with the acceptance of some failure along the way.

He stressed influences he had had in becoming an astronaut and had an influence on the students who listened to him, some of whom were interested in joining the NASA program, so you might say there was activity between amateurs and professionals going on in the space program.



**Scott aboard the International  
Space Station**



**Scott in space**



## **AD ASTRA** by Will Mayo

### **MY FAVORITE RIDE**

*Between the dark and the light a man finds himself.*

I've ridden in a lot of cars in my time and driven some to places as well, but I have to say that the car I most enjoyed riding in was an old Buick station wagon about fifty years ago that had a child's seat in the back with a skylight above it. There, I was just small enough to lay across it during my family's travels and gaze out at the passing clouds as I would pause now and then to look down and turn another page of my paperback novel. Every once in awhile thunderstorms would sweep our way across the sky and rain down water upon us and I would drift in dreams as the sound of the falling rain surrounded us. Then the stars would come upon us as my father would pilot his way through the night and I would wonder awake at the darkness and the light as sleep once more came upon me. Yes, in my whole life of having ridden about this old world I have to say that was my favorite ride.

### **A DAY FILLED WITH DREAMS**

*Because this old life is made for dreams such as these*

And then one day in Auburn, Alabama about fifty-five years ago my brother, my sister and I were lying back upon the edge of the campus where my father had just received his master's degree in veterinary medicine, leaning our heads back upon the little hill of grass and dreaming up at the clouds in the sky with our eyes wide open.

"Look!" my brother said. "That cloud looks like a horse."

"And look!" my sister said. "That one looks just like a man."

"Oh, but," I said, "all those clouds in between look like a castle with archers in every window."

"A castle!" my brother and sister said. "Wherever did you get that?"

"There," I said. "And there. You can just see the towers pushing out the sky."

"No, I can't see that," my brother said.

"I can't either," my sister said.

"Come on," my brother said. "Let's fly a kite."

"Yes," my sister said. "Let's do."

And off I followed in their wake as I would for the next half century and more, equally blessed and cursed by an imagination that was not theirs. An imagination that leads me to write these words now. Read along with me, if you will. Or go fly a kite, if that is your wish. The dream lives on regardless.





ENDPAGE