

Past."

In keeping with the concept of time travel, and returning to the same events over and over (a major element of Hogan's book), we decided to revisit the book and discuss it anew. Perhaps we will have a better turnout than last time, when everyone canceled out at the last minute (there's probably a pun in there, but it's not worth looking for).

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A British scientist has invented a time machine, of sorts. This device cannot send you back in time, but it can send tau particles. With an amiably plausible bit of pseudoscience, the physicist tells us these particles can not only travel in time, but they can carry information, although the initial baud rate is slow, and the "distance" traveled is only ten minutes. From this modest beginning, though, the time travel process is enhanced... Imagine bootstrapping a computer, backwards through time...

The best part of this book is not the hard science fiction content, although Hogan delivers that in his typically engaging fashion. No, the best part of T_h_r_i_c_e_U_p_o_n_a_T_i_m_e is the almost playful examination of time travel paradoxes. For example, a romantic side-plot revolves around the grandfather paradox (if you went back in time and shot your grandfather before your father was born, then you were never born, hence you could not have gone back in time... etc., etc.). The characterization is quite good, unusually so for a Hogan novel, and I was surprised by how well Hogan had me gripped with suspense with the various subplots. After all, the main characters are forced (in several senses) to use the time machine to save the world -- not once, not twice but thrice upon a time.

Hogan has written a fascinating and fun book on time travel, with several twists that keep the novel fresh, not a rehash of old ideas. Highly recommended!

And no, we haven't yet scheduled the third discussion of the book.
[-jrrt]

2. A while back I wrote a series of articles for the notice about what were then popular beer ads which starred the incredible "Spuds" Mackenzie. I was not keen on the ad campaign, which

featured several despicable falsifications. (First, Spuds was passed off as being a male, and Spuds was definitely female. Second, dogs are mostly logical animals and it is unlikely that Spuds would have anything to do with drinking beer. Then there was the poster showing Spuds standing on a surf board which was captioned "Hang Twenty." The proper number was, of course, eighteen. Nineteen if you count his tail.) Still, no beer salesman has had Mackenzie's roguish appeal since the days of Al Capone.

Well, since Spuds has left, beer ads have not been the same. As far as I am concerned, there is no interest value to Bud-man, a fat beer drinker with a bullet-shaped body, a mask, a cape, and a two-day growth of beard. And if this ad campaign were not proof enough that alcohol rots brain cells, there is a new one that goes even further.

Picture the scene. Smallpox is ravaging Europe. A young doctor with a sparse beard is talking to a milkmaid. No, she is not

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afraid of smallpox because people who work with cows just never seem to get the dreaded disease. The doctor muses aloud to himself, "Why should working with cows protect you from smallpox?" From stage left a character sticks his head in the scene and asks, "Why ask why?"

That's the slogan: "Why ask why?" What does it have to do with drinking beer? The only connection I see is that if you are seeking answers you are probably not drinking beer. And vice versa.

I take this beer ad as a personal affront, because since I was small, my favorite w-question (you know: "who," "what," "why," "where," "when") was "why." No question is as important as "why"-with the possible exception of "what." "Who," "where," and "when" rarely have profound answers. There just isn't much to chew on as a rule. Generally they are short-answer questions unless you are asking, "Who died in Vietnam?" Even then, most of the answer is dull. It is hard to get much interesting out of a "who." "Where" can be fun for those of us who travel, but it is limited. "When"

could be as much fun if the opportunities for travel to a when were not so limited. Still, these three are very limited questions.

"What" can be fun, but it can also be as dull as the rest. Usually when a "what" is good, it is a "why" in disguise. "What is the capital of Montana?" is as dull as any of the others. "What made you put banana slices on your shoulders?" There, "what" is really a "why."

The best of the questions for me has always been "why," though I profess a certain predilection for "how" also. Most of humanity's progress from the caves has been from asking "why" and "how."

This is my answer to the beer commercial's question of "why ask why?" One might better ask, "Why drink beer?" So now that I have answered the question of "why ask why?" let me ask a question that has been perplexing me. "Why ask why ask why?" I hope it will be clear why I am asking.

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We ought to stand up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, and if it is not so good as we wish, after all it will still be better than what these others have made it in all these ages. A good world needs knowledge, kindness and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past, or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time towards a past that is dead which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.

-- Bertrand Russell

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ALIEN 3

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Fury is a dreary, ugly prison colony planet, made up of "double-Y-chromosome" criminals who have rediscovered monastic life. To this planet comes Ripley and her alien. And Ripley's nightmare starts over. A l i e n 3 will probably kill the series. Director David Fincher's previous major credit is music videos for Madonna. Rating: -1 (-4 to +4).

In 1979 Ridley Scott directed A l i e n. Scott had previously directed the moody story T h e D u e l l i s t s. The inspiration for A l i e n was the weird surrealist paintings of H. R. Giger. The world Giger creates has the feel of an alien culture, the feel of a mind incomprehensible to humans at work. In 1986 James Cameron directed A l i e n s. Cameron had directed T e r m i n a t o r. His inspiration was apparently to show how a company of marines reacts when faced with something like the alien threat of the first film. While many of the sequences are lifted from the previous film, Cameron brought complexity to the character of Ripley and had a reasonably complex plot. Now 20th Century Fox has made A l i e n 3. For a director they got David Fincher, who has had a successful career directing music videos and television commercials. The inspiration appears to have been an empty slot at the beginning of the 1992 summer release schedule.

I thought the first film was the best of the series and the second film was a step down. It borrowed whole sequences and ideas from the first film. Also it seemed to sidestep very lightly the moral issue of the earth people stealing and transforming a planet already colonized by an intelligent alien race. It is genuinely surprising and more than a little disturbing how many of the audience were rooting to see the aliens exterminated because they were hostile to humans and not cute and dewy-eyed. Unintentionally, A l i e n s was an intriguing test of whether the audience would still buy into attitudes that had caused major foreign policy failures in the past. (And the answer was an undeniably "YES!" Audience cheered ideas as blatant as, "Let's withdraw and nuke 'em from orbit." Perhaps what it showed was that in the end we are just only to those we find appealing.) There were many who preferred the second film for its realistic treatment of marines in space.

The third film is easily the weakest of the three. On one of the ugliest planets ever portrayed in film, human criminals and an

alien tear away at each other in the cinematic equivalent of a pit bull fight. The pit is Fury 161, an evacuated lead mine and prison

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colony. There the worst outcasts of the galaxy have been isolated and have formed a sort of monastic order living in the lead mining facilities. They have no weapons and, to make the place even uglier, they all have to shave their heads because the planet is infested with lice. On this delightful planet crashes Ellen Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver), the future equivalent of Typhoid Mary. When deaths start occurring on Fury 161, Ripley realizes what she has done but--for reasons never explained--still refers to tell the inhabitants even while people are being killed. Most of the rest of the film is running and screaming through the ugly lead mine.

Fincher has filmed A_ l_ i_ e_ n_ 3 with a lot of superficial attempts at style. The foundry seems like one big dark and ugly basement. One or two scenes with odd camera angles, shooting up or down on characters, would be welcome. Fincher, perhaps used to short music videos, does not seem to know that eventually this becomes very tiresome. The plot takes a long time to advance and in the first half is also short on action. Without sympathy for Ripley from previous films and some minor flashes of humanity from the prison doctor, the film is without sympathetic characters at all. The screenplay is by three people with two different conjunctions: it is by David Giller & Walter Hill and Larry Ferguson.

This is a film that I can recommend only to people into the "Alien" series as a series. (And since this is a third director with a third concept and a third style, this is much more loosely a series than it might be.) As a film it is no better than much of the low-budget productions that show up only on cable. I rate this one a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

[Minor spoiler]

The way the alien is killed ranks with one of the most absurd sequences I can think of in a major science fiction film, and is arguably inconsistent with previous entries in the series.

[End spoiler]

