



Hub

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You are not wanted here. Go away. We don't need you, so close your eyes, close the book, get out. You are only as important as we think you are, and that's not very.

So much anger!

We grow weary of your presence. Do we not have enough burdens? You watch us, but who watches you?

You wonder what gods the gods pray to.

Who said anything about gods? We just want to be left alone. When you are gone, we will build a wall.

A wall won't keep me out.

Not you, but it will the others. We hear them snuffling in the wild, closer every season, every day. Their language, if that is what it is, sounds like the grunting of pigs. They blight everything they touch. They have brought the pestilence that ravages our young — or is that your doing?

I only watch.

Then you must see how hideous they are.

They are the same as you, identical.

Are you blind? Even they would scoff at such a notion. Our difference is the one thing we and they would agree on. That is why they are coming, why we are building a wall. If they were the same, we would let them in. They are not.

You let me in.

You came without invitation, and stay, although we bid you to go.

I have brought no disease, no harm at all.

You sweat filth from your pores, if you have pores.

Your hatred is deep. It is a foolish emotion.

Let us be foolish, then.

I did not poison your children.

If not you, them. We will build our wall.

They do not look to the sky for answers to mysteries. If it rains, it rains. If lightning blasts the trees, that is simply something the sky does every now and again. They don't fall to their knees in awe or fear; they simply pull their animal skin hoods over their heads and retreat into their leafy lean-tos until the storm has passed. Afterward they come out to forage. Rain forces worms from their holes, and worms on hooks entrap the fish whose flesh is so sweet in their mouths. The swollen river deposits mud, which can be used to reinforce their shelters. Wild fruits and vegetables would not grow without the water and light from the sky.

They do not question what it chooses to give, or to withhold. The world enfolds all that is alive and dead, and the sky enfolds the world.

It is enough.

It is enough.

In the time it takes to erect the wall, twelve of our children succumb. The sickness starts with an aching in the joints, first the knees, then the ankles, the elbows, the hips, the shoulders, the wrists. Stiffness follows. If they are ever to recover — and a few have, a precious few — it must be at this stage, for once the fever strikes, there is no hope. Paralysis locks their muscles into sinews of iron, their bones harden like stone, and their skin thickens to waxy chalk. Only their eyes move — and oh, those eyes! Moist little lights glisten out from rigid husks, terrified, pleading, *Help us*, but there is nothing, *nothing*, we can do. We feed them for as long as their jaws can chew, we give them water until their throats close off,

we keep them warm, or cool, we mop their foreheads and kiss their faces, we sing the songs of our people to ease their minds, and we promise they will run again in far fields with our ancestors.

This is the lie we tell them, the lie we wish we could believe ourselves.

So far the pestilence has struck down only children. We know they are dead when the light dims in their eyes, for there is no other sign. Their bodies do not decay. They stand, or sit, or lie, perpetually frozen in whatever position they occupied when the disease took its final grip. We bury most of them, but some of us cannot bear the parting, and so we keep their remains in our homes, silent as statues, impassive as art: stony reminders of lives we once delivered, and raised, and shared, and no longer do.

And yet you only watch.

Your wall will hold the disease in, not keep it out.

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The forest is dark and damp even on the sunniest of days. Rabbits and foxes inhabit the underbrush, squirrels nest in the canopy with insects and birds. The river flows out of the northern mountains, slashes through the woodlands, and empties into the sea near the stone city.

Fishing has been poor today, and the fruits and vegetables have grown scarce, so the men form a hunting party to track deer or wild pigs. Sometimes the trees descend right to the shoreline; sometimes they thin out and give way to rocky beaches; and in one place they cling to three sides of a bluff overlooking the city. The hunters gaze down the hill in wonder. The people there have built a wall. Mist blown from the waves transforms the sea wind into whorls of white and gray. It breaks against the wall's stone surface and spills over the top, shrouding the city in gloom.

Such a strange thing, this barrier. Perplexed, the hunters move down the bluff and into the forest toward a clearing where abundant prey once fed on soft mosses and buried roots. The animals are fewer this season.

We turn away all ships from the sea and caravan wagons from the south. Nobody may enter or leave our city. We must stay together to protect ourselves. Our children are gone, all of them, calcified in death's cold embrace. The disease has spread to young adults. Only the old remain.

They did it. They've moved on, but they were here long enough to curse us with this pestilence. We still hear them at night, ghost voices laughing on the wind.

Your wall didn't save you. Come out, and live.

Go away. We will make our stand here.

What do you stand against?

Them.

They are gone. They are not a threat, and never were.

Leave us alone!

You are foolish.

Let us be foolish, then.

Seasons turn, and seasons turn. The sky opens up with sun and rain. New fish have spawned in the river, deer and wild pigs once again feed among the soft mosses and buried roots of the clearing. Fruit hangs from the trees, vegetables sprout from the ground.

The forest people return, too, from a long migration. Near the shore a walled city rises against the sea. Its wooden gate, cracked and rotted by the elements, stands open. Curious, they peer in. They wonder what goes on in this odd settlement, what kind of folk live here.

When they enter and creep along mist-slickened streets, no one comes to greet them, or to chase them away. In the town square, though, they find hundreds of statues, people made of stone, their faces contorted in fear or hate, their bodies huddled in masses as if warding off some great catastrophe.

So you've finally come.

They hear, but sounds from the sky are nothing new, and they pass out of the city and into the sheltering trees.

Big Screen Future

by Alasdair Stuart

ALIEN³

Our regular series, in which Alasdair Stuart examines films of the past that deal with stories of tomorrow.

To say that *Alien 3* has a storied history is something of an understatement. The initial idea, conceived by Giler and Hill with help from Sigourney Weaver, was to produce two sequels back-to-back; one exploring the cold war as it had evolved in the future Ripley inhabited and one that would place the survivors of *Aliens* in the centre of that conflict, with the alien as a pivotal weapon that could turn the war finally and irrevocably hot. The earliest version of this was written by Cyberpunk author William Gibson and included the intriguing concept of the alien as a virus, mutating sufferers into new alien warriors.



Despite this, the script was turned down and another idea was proposed. David Twohy, whose work is appearing twice here with *Below* and *Pitch Black*, was hired to re-work the central concept and did so, with a Russian ship threatening Gateway Station as seen in the opening of *Aliens*. This time, the script was scuppered by MGM's release of *Leviathan* that year, a film about an alien life form released from a sunken Russian science vessel and notable for an unusual combination of beautiful design, eclectic cast and terrible script.

Twohy duly reworked his idea and this is where the concept of a prison planet enters the picture. Twohy's second effort, introducing an entirely new cast, was very well received and, when it was rightly pointed out that Weaver and Ripley were the centre of the franchise, he provided a second rewrite that folded in Ripley and Newt as well.

At roughly the same time, Walter Hill saw an art house screening of Vincent Ward's *The Navigator*. A unique and uniquely odd film about a medieval boy who, in search of a cure for the plague afflicting his village, tunnels through to the modern world, it remains a cult classic that plays like nothing else. Hill was so taken with it that he lobbied for Ward to direct *Alien 3*. His concept, of a hollow wooden world slowly being consumed by the order of monks living on it was intricate, fascinating and proved almost impossible to fit the alien into, despite scenes involving Ripley hallucinating that a stained glass window of the creature was coming to life as well as other striking images. With Ward unwilling to shift from his original concepts, first John Fasano then Greg Pruss, who worked on no less than five drafts of the script with Ward, then Hill and Giler, Larry Ferguson, the writer of *Highlander*, Hill and Giler again and finally Rex Pickett took turns at the script. Twohy's script was paid off and never produced and, finally, production began in 1990 under David Fincher, a music video director and former ILM staffer.

Even then, the film hadn't finished evolving. On the Special Edition DVD, Charles Dance jokes about how it was always possible to tell where Fincher was on set just by looking for the vast knot of producers surrounding him. Entire concepts, somehow, never made it to the script despite appearing in the film, and the end result, combining the prison planet first suggested by Twohy with elements of the monastic world of Ward's script is, in its theatrical version, a spectacular failure. The gothic sets feel completely out of place, the genesis of the alien itself is incomprehensible and the vast majority of the film is little more than a wide variety of shaven-headed English character actors shouting at one another for over an hour. Pilloried on release, it marked not only the start of the downturn in the franchise's fortunes but also, for a time, seemed set to be the albatross around Fincher's neck. An astonishing seventeen years later, the lie has clearly been put to that with *Se7en*, *Fight Club* and *Zodiac* all fantastic pieces of cinema and Fincher established as one of the most impressive directors of his generation.

But everyone has off-days and, given that at one point script pages were being sent to Fincher as they were being written instead of chronologically, it's hard not to sympathise with him. It's also worth

noting that Fincher is the only director who didn't return to introduce the special edition of his film when they were released on DVD.

As it stands, the special edition is a vast improvement on the theatrical cut and actually manages to play not only to Fincher's strengths but the strengths of all the many hands that worked on the film. The ear for dialogue that Hill and Giler demonstrated in the previous film is married with Twohy's brutal pragmatism and Ward's incredible gothic vision to create a film which when it works is the darkest of the entire series.

Front and centre in all this is Ripley, who in this instalment is arguably at her most physical, her most direct. Whilst the rescue of Newt in *Aliens* is an iconic moment, there's something about Sigourney Weaver, head shaved, wearing cast off work clothes that gives the impression that Ripley has come full circle. This is a woman reduced to absolutely nothing, losing her surrogate family, her chance at freedom, a major signifier of her gender identity and ultimately control of her own body. Ripley has lost, again and again and again and her choices in this film are powered as much by fatalism, by the realisation there is nothing left for them to take away, as they are by heroism. The moment where she goes to find the alien and literally drags it into the trap they've laid for it is equal parts epic heroism and pitch black nihilism. This is a woman who wants to die, who just wants it to end and when she does, in this version, the scene is presented with a surprising honesty. Whilst the sequence with her cradling the alien queen embryo to herself can be read as either a symbol of her eternal struggle with the alien, a grotesque parody of the mother and child or a moment of high opera, Ripley's fate and the emotional weight it carries is strengthened by the sequence's removal. There's also an argument for saying that this is Ripley at her purest; stripped of her future, her past, her body and her gender. With nothing to lose, Ripley finally realises who she really is and, to her surprise, likes what she sees. Both versions ultimately give her a measure of peace, but the special edition does so in a way which is oddly respectful instead of operatic. It also fits with Weaver's performance here, arguably the equal of her work in *Aliens* but with a far more sombre, desolate edge to it. The scene where Clemens autopsies Newt is very difficult to watch and that's entirely down to the close up of Weaver barely holding herself together as Clemens works. The scene where he clears Newt is particularly effective as Ripley clearly has no idea whether to be relieved, grief-stricken or both.

The world in which Ripley lives what appear to be her final days is, for all its troubled history, beautifully designed. The idea that Fury 161 is a facility designed for far more people than the custodial crew who remain there allows Fincher to create threat with empty space. Some of the film's best scenes are literal translations of Friedkin's old line about how true horror is seeing something approach, with the alien glimpsed behind an infirmary curtain or a line of candles being extinguished one by one, moving ever closer to the characters. Fury 161 is a world where the chairs have been put on the tables and the lights turned out, a world that is as irrelevant as it is forgotten. From the spiral staircase in the corner of its vast morgue to the oxen used in lieu of haulage trucks and, occasionally, food it's a world that doesn't matter, that's been forgotten and as a result has a tremendous faded grandeur to it. Echoes of Ward's surreal world of wood and even Gibson's cold war in space complete the picture, creating a world of immense scale and ambition inhabited by tiny, fragile humans,

Of those humans, the real stand-out is Dillon; played by the magnificent Charles S. Dutton. Dillon is the head of the extreme Christian sect that many of the inmates belong to. He's a massive figure in the film, a moral centre and compass whose presence is somehow made all the weightier by his open admission to being 'a murderer and a rapist of women'. This is a man who has done terrible things, faced them down and found himself still standing. Much like Ripley, he has nothing left to lose but unlike Ripley, he uses his faith as both sword and shield, notably shown in the moment where he helps Ripley fight off three would-be rapists. Telling her to leave as he needs to give his brothers some spiritual re-education, Dillon is a savagely articulate figure who, it's worth noting given Twohy's involvement in the script, embodies many of Riddick's most interesting qualities in *Pitch Black*.

His equal and exact opposite in many ways is Clemens, played by Charles Dance. The base doctor is charming, educated, reticent and quietly broken, a man who buries his guilt under a façade of civility just as Dillon embraces his guilt as something to push against. Where some of the other convicts obsess over Ripley because she's female, he begins to obsess over her because she's someone he can talk to, someone who won't judge him. Ultimately, Clemens is a quietly tragic figure, not because of his eventual fate but because of the fact the one person he can't help is himself and his scenes in the film are amongst some of the best.

The other prisoners, despite featuring some of the best English character actors of the last twenty years, fare less well. Danny Webb has great fun as the cheerfully angry Morse whilst the superb Brian Glover and Ralph Brown as Andrews and Aaron, the only two official staff members left on site are both an

entertaining double act and in Aaron's case, an oddly affecting and endearing part of the film's final act. Aaron's struggle, the conflict between his desire to go home and his need to help the other residents of Fury 161 mirrors Ripley's struggle and like her, he eventually chooses sacrifice over survival.

Two other cast members also register, albeit for very different reasons. Paul McGann's Golic, a character reduced to literally seconds of screen time in the theatrical cut gets an entire mini-arc in the special edition. After seeing the alien he becomes convinced that he's been chosen by it and, after it's successfully trapped, releases it again, triggering the events of the second half of the film.

Lance Henriksen, quietly, has the most difficult work to do. His cameo as Bishop, somehow still functional after taking still more damage in the crash is one of the film's most affecting moments. The line 'It's dark here, Ripley, I'm not what I used to be,' in particular is loaded with meaning and Bishop's final moments are as poignant as Ripley's own.

It's his scenes as Bishop II however, that carry the most weight. Bishop has been established as such a calm, benign presence within the films that Bishop II's arrival has the same effect on the viewer as it does on Ripley; relief. There's a real element of doubt, of tension to his scenes and the viewer changes their perception of Ripley at the same speed Ripley does. He's as alien, in his own way, as the Xenomorph; a human who is somehow less compassionate than the equipment that wears his face.

Alien 3 is a massively troubled, flawed film. The cast of near-identical, shaven-headed prisoners never quite register, the practical effects on the alien range from competent to disastrous and there are gaping holes in its life cycle even in the Special Edition.

Yet, for all that, the relentlessly grim, fatalistic tone of it, and Weaver, Dutton and Dance's work in particular is frequently astonishing. This is a film where nothing goes right, on or off screen, a film about a group of people making the best of a desperate situation. The gritty practicality of Aliens is present here, but the sliver of optimism that film was able to find is gone. This is a film about endings, about turning to your fate, about running towards it and how, sometimes there is heroism in acceptance. It's an incredibly difficult concept to accept, let alone enjoy, but if you can make the adjustment, it's one of the most rewarding films in the series.

Next time, Alien Resurrection, a film that manages to simultaneously learn from Alien 3's mistakes and make some entirely new ones.

This article was first published online at Hivemind (<http://www.sfcrownsnest.com/hivemind/home.php>)

REVIEWS

Black Ships Reviewed by Cathy Hill

Doomsday Reviewed by Alasdair Stuart

Clonerwars Reviewed by Richard Whittaker

Black Ships by Jo Graham

Orbit, £7.99

Gull is born the daughter of a slave. Her mother is one of the People, taken from her devastated city by the Achaians as a spoil of war and set to work in flax fields of Pylos. When an accident damages Gull's leg her mother takes her to Pythia, the oracle of the Lady of Death. Gull is dedicated to the Lady's service and trains to become the new Pythia. Pylos is attacked by a refugee group of the People come to free their enslaved kin. Gull goes with them and becomes Pythia to Prince Aeneas. The remains of the People sail around the Mediterranean looking for a place to belong. Gull guides Neas so that he can lead them to the destiny she sees in her visions.

This retelling of *The Aeneid* doesn't follow the style of Virgil's glory-filled, Trojan-centric epic. Jo Graham writes a more human story about a group of refugees facing loss, uncertainty and changes in their



traditions and way of life. The story is told in first person by Gull and so it is first and foremost a personal tale. The main characters are very realistic, each has their own talents and flaws and the author shows how these affect their reactions to the hard times they face. Gull's priestess training means that she is able to make insightful observations about the peoples and countries she travels through, providing glimpses at the wider world. Her goddess-given premonitions and visions guide her but it is her own personality that drives her to do what is right even if it is hard.

The book includes the wider context of the Mediterranean on the edge of the Dark Age. Graham doesn't claim to provide the answers to this mysterious period of history but she does show how a variety of factors can destabilise different societies and how people cope when this happens. It is clear that the author has an interest in ancient history and has done research for the book; references to people, places and events create a fully realised setting that exists beyond the perceptions of the characters. One of the main deviations from *The Aeneid* is the relocation of the Carthaginian plotline to Egypt; a change that the author says is more historically accurate. Knowledge of the period or myth are not necessary, although those familiar with it may understand more of the occasional references, and a glossary and author's note at the back provide explanation where needed.

The fantasy elements of the book are low key and in most cases could be read with a more prosaic explanation. The main goddesses of the book act through their priestesses; the Lady only makes Her will known as a voice in Gull's head or as an impulse that guides her actions. Unlike the three-dimensional and interfering gods of ancient epics Graham writes more subtle deities better suited to modern ideas of divinity. The only exception is one scene where fantasy comes to the fore; this is also only scene which goes beyond the world of the characters and hints at things known in our own time in an obvious wink to the reader.

This is a very interesting and enjoyable read.

DOOMSDAY

Written and Directed by Neil Marshall

Starring Rhona Mitra, Adrian Lester, Malcolm Mcdowell, Bob Hoskins, MyAnna Buring, Craig Conway, Alexander Siddig, Darren Morfitt, Sean Pertwee, David O'Hara & Lee-Anne Liepenberg

2000AD's demented, manic, frequently very violent energy is arguably what's kept the title going so consistently over the decades. From Judge Dredd to ABC Warriors, from The 10-Seconders to Stone Island, 2000AD never stops dancing, never stops trying to do something new or, at the very least, trying to blow something new UP.

I mentioned this because the best way to describe Doomsday is like being shouted at by 2000AD for a couple of hours. If that sounds like your bag, then this is the film for you. If it doesn't, run and don't look back.

Following the outbreak of the Reaper virus, an insanely destructive, contagious disease that has no cure, Scotland is walled off. The international community, disgusted at the English government's decision abandons the country and England becomes an ostracised, over-crowded and increasingly dystopian country. Well, London does anyway.

Thirty years later, Eden Sinclair, the last refugee out of the country is an embittered police officer with only an address to remember her childhood by. But when Reaper cases are discovered in London, Eden is assigned to lead a team of soldiers and scientists back behind the wall to try and find a cure. Because thirty years later, people are still alive back there...

And that's about it. The moment Eden meets her unit, which consists of returning cast members from Dog Soldiers and The Descent and led by Adrian Lester, you know pretty much where this is going. People die, a lot. Stuff gets blown up, a lot. There's a colossal amount of violence, shouting and Rhona Mitra beating the living hell out of people in increasingly decorative ways.

As I said, being shouted at by 2000AD for two hours.

The thing is, it's actually really good fun. There's a tendency at the moment for any piece of genre fiction in particular to be judged to impossible standards. Everything has to deep plots, massively angst-ridden characters, endless and frequently crashingly unfunny political satire and, frequently, a script by

Alex Garland. In fact, for me, *The Descent*, Marshall's second film fell at least partially into this category, swapping the welcome and frequently very funny low-budget pragmatism of *Dog Soldiers* for action scenes which somehow managed to be dour.

Doomsday, which at one point features a character being cooked and eaten, and at another features Malcolm McDowell as a frankly unbalanced King Arthur wannabe in a post apocalyptic castle that still has a gift shop, is significantly less precious.

This is an unapologetic love letter to '80s action movies and the sheer spectacle is at times, staggering. Sol (Conway) in particular has a staggering moment where he makes his grand entrance, one part rock concert to one part orgy whilst the closing car chase, on the one hand a clear nod to *Mad Max* is the most flat out, frankly demented action scene you'll witness this year.

Make no mistake this is a fairground ride disguised as a movie and as a result is designed to do nothing but entertain and as a result, the performances are spotty. Mitra has good physical presence but little charisma as Eden, whilst Lester under acts so consistently he steals very nearly every scene he's in. On the other end of the spectrum, Conway's leering, demented punk is as repulsive as he is fun, McDowell clearly does not know how to turn in bad work at this point in his career and Hoskins, O'Hara and Siddig are all fun as Eden's boss, the PM and his aide respectively.

Some people will deride this as big, dumb film making and they're right. It is big, it is quite amazingly dumb in places but it's also immense fun. And fun is never a bad thing.

The Socratic Star Wars by Richard Whittaker

A quick note of explanation: From well before the cinematic release of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, self-professed fans of the films have been taking great pleasure and a lot of time in ragging on this latest addition to the saga; sadly and with surprisingly frequency, some without actually having seen it. So, as the amount of energy it would take to get into arguments with every single one of them is, well, not worth this writer's time, we present this Platonic idealized version of such a discussion. This is based on real complaints or criticisms of the film found on forums, blogs and talkback boards across teh interwebs. Seriously, you could not make this up. With apologies to Plato and his most noted translator, Benjamin Jowett.



Persons of the Dialogue: X; Y; Z

Scene: Exiting a theatrical presentation of *The Clone Wars*.

Y: Well, that was rather fun.

X: George Lucas raped my childhood.

Y: What?

X: George Lucas raped my childhood.

Y: What does that even mean?

X: *The Clone Wars* is childish and silly. It looked ugly. The CGI animation wasn't up to Pixar standards. I hated it.

Y: You seem to be taking it awfully personally. And with a strange degree of glee.

X: Because George Lucas raped my childhood.

Y: OK, aside from the fact that that may be the dumbest thing anyone has ever said, *The Clone Wars* didn't look cheap, it was cheap. Well, cinema-cheap. The estimated \$10 million budget is well below that of the average widely-released movie. It's an amped-up feature-length opener for the TV animated series, and they've obviously taken a stylistic decision, rather than going down the hyper-real route. All CGI companies develop a trade-mark style: Pixar have obviously been inspired by classic Disney's hand

animation in the way their CGI has an almost plastic fluidity. Or Blue Sky Studios. You liked their *Ice Age*, right? Well, they use CGI to create an affect similar to claymation but without the animator's fingerprints left in the fur. *Clone Wars* looks like hand-painted balsa wood marionettes, angular but still organic. You can even see the individual brush strokes. It's stylized, yes, but it's a huge step forward over the off-the-peg journeyman work from Korean sweat shop animation houses that clog up most TV animation.

X: So why wasn't Anakin more evil?

Y: Because that's the whole point. The film is about the possibility of Anakin being the good guy, the hero of the Republic, nearly the greatest Jedi that ever was. When everyone – well, you – complained that there should have been more of the Clone Wars in the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, they missed the point. Those films were about the drama of the fall of Anakin, and putting that in the middle of the war would have clouded all that. By only showing the opening chapter of the war in *Attack of the Clones* and its closing moments in *Revenge of the Sith*, Lucas deliberately left the door open for this kind of story, and to show the great spread of the war at length. If you add together the first two Clone Wars animated series Genndy Tartakovski did for Cartoon Network, and the rumored 100 planned episodes of this Clone Wars, then there'll actually be 40 hours of the war to 13 hours of the original movies. Plus, if you don't like them, no-one's making you watch them.

X: But George Lucas ra -

Y: Yes, I heard that. I also heard that when you said it after seeing *The Phantom Menace*.

X: And I stand by that.

Y: Ah, but you said it six months after watching it, not at the time. You said it when it had become inexplicably cool to hate George Lucas.

X: Because he raped my childh-

Y: Stop that.

X: But all he's interested in is selling toys.

Y: By which you mean he doesn't go on TV all the time talking about his work with his George Lucas Educational Foundation, or that he was one of the leading proponents of giving US libraries internet access in the mid-90s. He doesn't need to do anything to sell anything, Mister I-Only-Get-My-Force-FX-Lightsaber-Out-For-Special-Occasions.

X: Ah, but he's a racist. Look at Jar Jar Binks. He's a stereotype of a whacky Jamaican.

Y: He's not even in this movie.

X: But he still proves that, ever since *The Phantom Menace*, Lucas has been making kids' movies.

Y: Well, apart from the fact that the *Star Wars* films were always kids movies in that they were mythic, with fairy tale elements, it's no grimmer or more childish than many iterations of the Arthurian myth cycle. Plus, if you want something darker, just wait for *The Force Unleashed* game to come out, then you can butcher as many Wookies as you like. And, back to Jar Jar. What about Captain Tarpals?

X: Who?

Y: The extremely competent Gungun military commander? Same species and the same accent as Jar-Jar? Nothing? Nothing at all? Nothing about the fact that the most evil characters in the franchise are all tall, thin, and have English accents? In fact, this is probably the most ethnically diverse film released through a major studio this year. How many other American movies will be put out with two characters with Scottish accents in a conversation? Admittedly, one is a blue, long-snouted separatist alien general, but it does seem that people are picking and choosing things to hate.

X: Speaking about things I hated, Ziro the Hutt is a gay stereotype. George Lucas should be ashamed. Several bloggers told me so before they saw the film.

Y: Funny, I don't remember you getting upset about the even more camp HedonismBot from *Futurama*. Or Roger the camp alien in *American Dad!* Anyway and actually, like all Hutts, he's supposed to represent debauchery. In being an obvious homage to Truman Capote, he sums up the amoral libertine. In fact, if one recalls that the core plot driver is that Jabba, a hermaphrodite single parent, would risk a war to rescue his/her child, that puts a significantly different spin on any perceived gender politics. Any more serious complaints?

X: It felt weird when the titles started and it said Warner Brothers, not 20th Century Fox.

Y: Really? You're complaining about George Lucas NOT giving more money to Rupert Murdoch?

Z: And it needed to be darker.

Y: Who are you?

X: And it was too dark for children.

Z: And there was not enough war.

X: And it was nothing but a series of extended fight sequences. What is this, a war movie?

Y: Well, that is what it says in the title.

X: It should have been more like *ET*.

Z: It should have been more like *Saving Private Ryan*.

X+Z (Together): You're so right.

Y: You do realize that you're actually holding contradictory viewpoints. Anyway, of course it's for children. Look, one of the core joys of the Star Wars universe is that it is so adaptable. It's big, fun adventure with some grim elements and some cute elements. And, before you start, the cute has always been there in Star Wars, right from R2-D2 to the Ewoks AAAAAAND before you start, everyone loved the Ewoks when *Return of the Jedi* came out. This is posthumous fan-boy revisionism of something that was core to the mythos from day one. Frankly, I blame Kevin Smith and the Death Star construction workers segment in *Clerks*. But then again, being responsible for *Jersey Girl* is punishment enough.

Z: Speaking of girls, Ahsoka, Anakin's padawan, has never been mentioned before. Isn't that a continuity error?

Y: We haven't discussed how much time you could have spent doing something useful and constructive rather than getting annoyed about a movie. Doesn't mean it's not an issue, but continue.

Z: But isn't Ahsoka just an attempt to get teen girls interested in the franchise?

Y: You say that like it's something new. Part of the original success of the films was Princess Leia. I know it's now mandatory to have a strong, argumentative young female character in pretty much every movie, but in 1977, when the first film was released, the job of an actress in an action movie was to show some cleavage, swoon, and possibly die. Leia helped break that mould. If you're going to complain about Ahsoka, you should complain about Leia. Just like, if you're going to complain about Gunguns and Ewoks, you should probably start bitching about Jawas too.

Z: Ahsoka calls Anakin "Sky Guy". That's childish.

Y: Leia called Han flyboy. Move along.

X: But the Jedi keep making jokes.

Y: Look, if the Sith are supposed to be about hatred and anger, surely aren't the Jedi about untrammelled joy? They are, even in the darkest moments, optimists. That's why Obi-Wan smiles when he lets Vader kill him in *A New Hope* – Jedi embrace life.

X: Speaking of embracing, is Anakin going to sleep with Ashoka?

Y: You mean his prepubescent padawan?

X: Yes!

Y: You are a very, very sick man.

X: George Lucas raped my childhood.

Y: Idiot.