

# THURSDAY: ALIEN OCCUPATION

Since I missed a Monday post with a movie clip I think I'll whip out a golden oldie for today's post.

This movie – especially this particular scene – still gets to me 37 years after it was first released. The 'chestburster' as scene is commonly known is the culmination of a body horror trope in Ridley Scott's science fiction epic, *Alien*. The horror arises from knowing something happened to the spacecraft *Nostromo's* executive officer Kane when a 'facehugger' leapt from a pod in an alien ship, eating through his space helmet, leaving him unresponsive as long as the facehugger remained attached to his face. There is a brief sense of relief once the facehugger detaches and Kane returns to consciousness and normal daily functions. But something isn't right as the subtle extra scrutiny of the science officer Ash foreshadows at the beginning of this scene.

Director Ridley Scott employed a different variant of body horror in his second contribution to the *Alien* franchise, this time by way of a xenomorph implanted in her mimicking pregnancy in scientist Shaw. She is sterile, and she knows whatever this is growing inside her must be removed and destroyed or it will kill both her and the remaining crew. The clip shared here and others available in YouTube actually don't convey the complete body horror – immediately before Shaw enters this AI-operated surgical pod she is thwarted by the pod's programming for a default male patient. In spite of her mounting panic and growing pain she must flail at the program to enter alternative commands which will remove the thing growing inside her.

I suspect the clips available in YouTube were uploaded by men, or they would understand how integral to Shaw's body horror is the inability

to simply and quickly tell this surgical pod GET THIS FUCKING THING OUT OF ME RIGHT THE FUCK NOW.

I don't know if any man (by which I mean cis-man) can really understand this horror. Oh sure, men can realistically find themselves host to things like tapeworms and ticks and other creatures which they can have removed. But the horror of frustration, being occupied by something that isn't right, not normal, shouldn't continue, putting its host at mortal risk – and not being able to simply demand it should be removed, or expect resources to avoid its implantation and occupation in one's self? No. Cis-men do not know this terror.

Now imagine the dull background terror of young women in this country who must listen to white straight male legislators demand ridiculous and offensive hurdles before they will consider funding birth control to prevent sexual transmission of Zika, or fund abortions of Zika-infected fetuses which put their mothers at risk of maternal mortality while the fetuses may not be viable or result in deformed infants who'll live short painful lives. Imagine the horror experienced by 84 pregnant women in Florida alone who've tested positive for Zika and are now being monitored, who don't know the long-term outcomes for themselves or their infants should their fetuses be affected by the virus.

Body horror, daily, due to occupation not only by infectious agents alien to a woman's body, but occupation by patriarchy.

I expect to get pooh-poohed by men in comments to which I preemptively say fuck off. I've had a conversation this week about Zika risks with my 20-something daughter; she turned down an invitation this past week to vacation with friends in Miami. It's a realistic problem for her should she accidentally get pregnant before/during/immediately following her trip there.

We also talked about one of her college-age friend's experiences with Guillain-Barré

syndrome. It's taken that young woman nearly three years to recover and resume normal function. She didn't acquire the syndrome from Zika, but Guillain-Barré's a risk with Zika infections. There's too little research yet about the magnitude of the risk – this vacation is not worth the gamble.

But imagine those who live there and can't take adequate precautions against exposure for economic reasons – imagine the low-level dread. Imagine, too, the employment decisions people are beginning to make should job offers pop up in areas with local Zika transmission.

What's it going to take to get through to legislators – their own experience of body horror? Movies depicting body horror don't seem to be enough.

### Wheels

Put these two stories together – the next question is, “Who at VW ordered the emissions cheat device from Bosch before 2008?”

- Bosch asked Volkswagen for indemnification in 2008 (Bloomberg)
- Volkswagen and Bosch met shortly after ICCT revealed discovery of emissions cheat device in 2014 (WSJ)

Pretty strong incentives for Volkswagen to destroy email evidence. I wonder what Bosch did with their emails?

Self-driving electric cars are incredibly close to full commercialization based on these two stories:

- Michigan's state senate bill seeks approval of driverless cars (ReadWrite) – Bill would change state's code to permit “the motor vehicle to

be operated without any control or monitoring by a human operator.” Hope a final version ensures human intervention as necessary by brakes and/or steering wheel. I wonder which manufacturer or association helped write this code revision?

- California now committed to dramatic changes in greenhouse gas emissions (Los Angeles Times) – State had already been on target to achieve serious reductions in emissions by 2020; the new law enacts an even steeper reduction by 2030 in order to slow climate change effects and improve air quality.

I don't know if I'm ready to see these on the road in Michigan. Hope the closed test track manufacturers are using here will offer realistic snow/sleet/ice experience; if self-driving cars can't navigate that, I don't want to be near them. And if Michigan legislators are ready to sign off on self-driving cars, I hope like hell the NHTSAA is way ahead of them – especially since emissions reductions laws like California's are banking heavily on self-driving electric cars.

#### **Google-y-do**

- Google's parent Alphabet-ting on burritos from the sky (Bloomberg) – No. No.

NO. Not chocolate, not doughnuts, not wine or beer, but Alphabet subsidiary Project Wing is testing drone delivery of Chipotle burritos to Virginia Tech students? Ugh. This has fail all over it. Watch out anyhow, pizza delivery persons, your jobs could be on the bubble if hot burritos by drone succeed.

- API company Apigee to join Google's fold (Fortune) – This is part of a big business model shift at Google. My guess is this acquisition was driven by antitrust suits, slowing Google account growth, and fallout from Oracle's suit against Google over Java APIs. Application programming interfaces (APIs) are discrete programming subroutines which, in a manner of speaking, act like glue between different programs, allowing programmers to obtain resources from one system for use in a different function without requiring the programmer to have more than passing understanding of the resource. An API producer

would allow Google's other systems to access or be used by non-Google systems.

- Google to facilitate storage of Drive content at cloud service Box (PC World) – Here's where an API is necessary: a Google Drive user selects Box instead of Drive for storage, and the API routes the Drive documents to Box instead of Drive. Next: imagine other Google services, like YouTube-created/edited videos or Google Photo-edited images, allowing storage or use by other businesses outside of Google.

**Longread: Digitalization and its panopticonic effect on society**

Columbia's Edward Mendelson, Lionel Trilling Professor in Humanities and a contributor at PC Magazine, takes a non-technical look at the effect our ever-on, ever-observing, ever-connected technology has on us.

Catch you later!