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leads you
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LABYRINTH

John Carpenter's **BIG TROUBLE**
Inside the kung fu monster movie!

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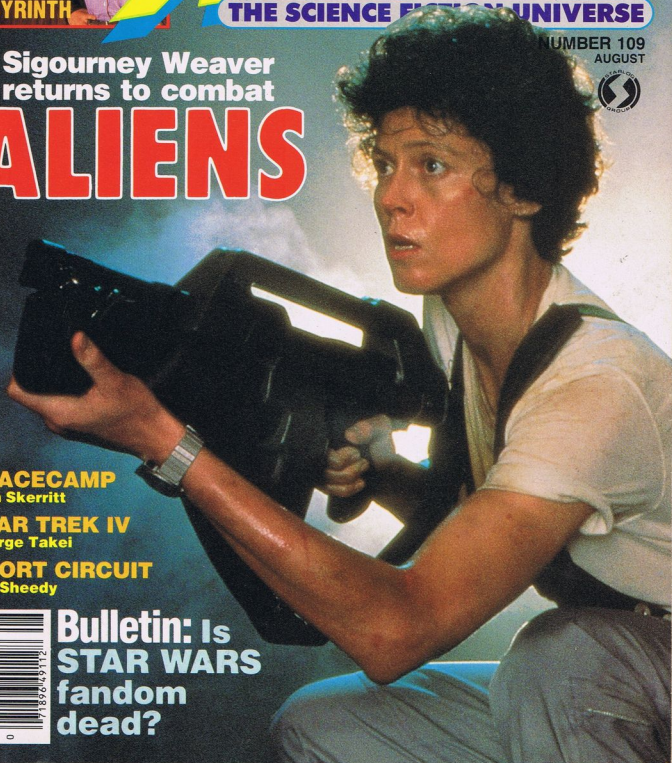
THE SCIENCE FICTION UNIVERSE

NUMBER 109
AUGUST



Sigourney Weaver
returns to combat

ALIENS



SPACECAMP

Tom Skerritt

STAR TREK IV

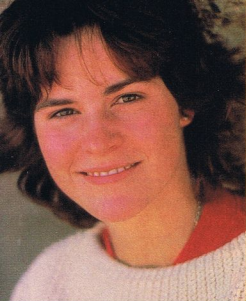
George Takei

SHORT CIRCUIT

Ally Sheedy

**Bulletin: Is
STAR WARS
fandom
dead?**





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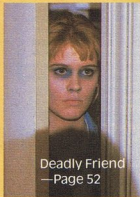
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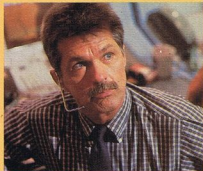
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Captain Dallas (Tom Skerritt) is the late commander of the cargo ship *Nostromo* and an early victim of the *ALIEN*.

Tom Skerritt

Supervising "SpaceCamp"

Captain Dallas of "*ALIEN*" takes an earthbound view as adolescent astronauts blast off into accidental adventure.

By LEE GOLDBERG

Tom Skerritt won't tell you that *SpaceCamp* is the best movie ever made, or even the best movie he has ever done. "*M*A*S*H* is my favorite role and *Top Gun* was my best part," says Skerritt, best known to SF fans as Dallas in *ALIEN*. "*SpaceCamp* falls in the middle."

This middleground includes roles in movies such as *Silence of the North*, *Fuzz*, *Turning Point*, *Ice Castles*, *Fighting Back* and *The Dead Zone*. And, like those films, Skerritt is sure "this will be a pretty good movie, one I would pay to see."

SpaceCamp is set at a training center, based on an actual facility in Huntsville, Alabama, which prepares teenagers for careers as astronauts.

Skerritt plays the former astronaut who runs the camp and Kate (*Dreamscape*) Capshaw portrays his wife, an astronaut who is also an instructor. Lea (*Back to the Future*) Thompson is one of the students in the film, which is produced by Leonard (*WarGames*) Goldberg and directed by first-timer Harry Winar from a script by Clifford & Ellen Green, the team who wrote *Baby*.

"In the film, NASA permits the kids, and Kate, to sit in the space shuttle while they test the main engines," explains Skerritt. "The computer goes haywire and the shuttle is launched. The body of the movie is spent trying to get Kate and the kids back."

Which means, for most of the movie, Skerritt is stuck in a Mission Control set, his character organizing the rescue effort. It certainly isn't the meatiest role an actor could hope for.

"Yeah, it wasn't a real exciting part, but there are many reasons for doing a movie. Certainly, you have to make a living," he remarks. "There are three things I look at—the part, the movie and the money. In this case, I liked the movie as a whole and the

Zach (Tom Skerritt) is the ex-astronaut who now heads *SpaceCamp*.

money was good. *Top Gun*, on the other hand, was the movie and the part and not so much the money."

It was also convenient. He finished *Top Gun* on a Thursday and began shooting *SpaceCamp* on Monday.

"It was an easy job for me," says Skerritt. "It was tough for Kate."

Because Skerritt's role is limited to an earthbound post at Mission Control, he was able to shoot his scenes "in a few days" while the others, with the bulk of their scenes in the orbiting shuttle, had to spend hours hanging from wires to simulate weightlessness, a difficult task that meant, according to Skerritt, "some days they only got one shot completed."

"Kate is pretty level-headed, straightforward and has a good sense of humor," the actor notes. "That's how she got through the ordeal."

An ordeal is what the crew of the *Nostromo* endured in the movie *ALIEN*, Skerritt's previous foray into science fiction, a film that he hasn't thought about lately. Nor cares to. "I don't look behind much," says Skerritt, who has heard "the sequel is terrific," but admits, "I don't feel one way or the other about it."

Although *ALIEN* may have made Skerritt a more familiar face than he had been before its release, he says, "It didn't change my career as it did Sigourney Weaver's. She came out of nowhere and did well on *ALIEN*."

Skerritt thinks he could have taken more advantage of *ALIEN*'s success, but claims he just doesn't know how.

"I have never really capitalized effectively on the successful films I have appeared in," he says. "And I have been in some pretty damn good films. What it comes down to is what someone told me years ago—if you have one hit and the next two are not successful, then you have to start from scratch again. That's what happened to me. It's like a game, I suppose, and I've been doing OK."

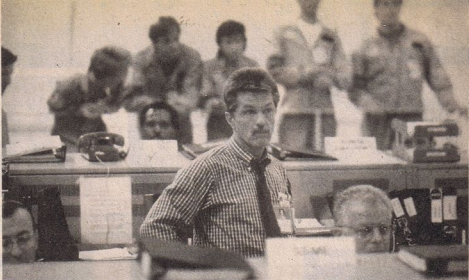
But there's more to stardom than a crude formula, and Skerritt knows that, too.

"It's concentration and luck. There are many prominent people in this business who choose certain types of pictures and play a derivation of a certain character they always play so they are immediately identifiable—and they are commercially successful because of it," he observes. "I have never pursued that. I just do films that I would pay five bucks to see."

That includes *The Dead Zone*, one of the more faithful screen adaptations of a Stephen King novel, in which Skerritt played a local sheriff who asks a psychic, Christopher (A View to a Kill) Walken (STARLOG #97), for help in solving a brutal series of murders.

"In that case, it was the filmmaker, David Cronenberg, who made the project appealing," says Skerritt, "and Dino De Laurentiis pays a lot of bread. The part was not very significant, but *Dead Zone* was a good film. I was pleasantly surprised—it was better than I thought it would be."

There are "a few" movies, Skerritt reveals "and never mind what they are," that he



Skerritt's character must deal with the command and the tension of running *SpaceCamp*.



In the infamous dining area, Dallas (Skerritt) tries to explain to his crew (left to right)—Parker (Yaphet Kotto), Ash (Ian Holm), Kane (John Hurt), Lambert (Veronica Cartwright) and Ripley (Sigourney Weaver)—why Mother has taken them off course.

wishes he never did and some he regrets turning down, like *Ordinary People*. "Robert Redford called me two weeks after I signed to do *Silence of the North* with Ellen Burstyn so I couldn't do it," he recalls. "If I had been a bastard, I suppose I could have gotten out of the thing in Canada somehow, but I felt that wasn't right."

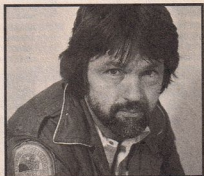
Silence of the North was never released in the United States "because Universal didn't know how to sell it and didn't care to try." But Skerritt doesn't blame them. "I felt disappointed in the movie itself because it never captured the essence of the Canadian country and the director never really envisioned the film's scope."

He has no such complaints about *SpaceCamp*. Skerritt thinks this movie could become "one of the summer's big hits," expecting it to serve as a "national catharsis for the space shuttle tragedy."

The movie is "uplifting, ends well, and is so damn well done," claims Skerritt, that you can "bet your ass" that *SpaceCamp* will reinstate pride in the recently much-maligned space program.

Skerritt, meanwhile, is currently finishing up several scripts he has co-written with his wife and that he hopes he can someday produce and direct.

"One is about an 1890s bounty hunter who has lived past his time," he notes. "Another

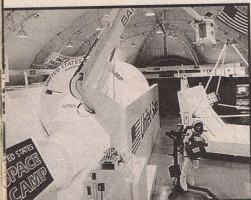


Tom Skerritt in *ALIEN*.

has to do with an old fella in today's world who is terminally ill but wants the dignity of dying the way he wants to—and *not* in an old folks home. The third is a comedy about two young guys who come out of film school and go to Hollywood to start a career."

Although he has had some positive feedback on the scripts but little encouragement to produce and direct them, Tom Skerritt says he has "no complaints in the world about what I'm doing in this business. I've been very lucky." ☆

LEE GOLDBERG, *STARLOG*'s West Coast Correspondent, profiled Martin Landau in issue #108.



Space Camp is the training ground for tomorrow's stargazers.

TRAIN FOR SPACE

Think you have "the right stuff?" Always wanted to earn your wings and be a certified space cadet? Well, now you can, at the United States Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama. Founded by Wernher von Braun as part of the famous Space and Rocket Center complex, the camp was the real-life inspiration for the film, *Space Camp*,

now in release.

Operating from March until November, the Camp offers students, fifth through tenth grades, and adults, age 19 and older, the chance to fulfill their astronautic fantasies, training for a simulated NASA Space Shuttle Mission. Campers get plenty of hands-on experience, using actual NASA equipment and spacecraft from the neighboring Marshall Space Flight Center, home of the U.S. Space Program; it is here that NASA trains its shuttle payload crews. This training program has been adapted for use by the Space Camp.

The Camp's Youth Programs are divided into two levels: Level I for kids grades five through seven and Level II for grades eight through 10. Level I campers learn the basics of life in space, study the history and development of the U.S. Space Program and discover the wide array of aerospace careers and their prerequisite courses of study.

But Space Camp isn't just educational—it's fun! Level I campers get to try on space suits, endure three Gs of gravity during launch in the Lunar Odyssey and experience reduced body weight when they work on the Moon Walk Trainer. On the last day of camp, Level I cadets simulate a Space Shuttle Mission. Teams split into Mission Control,

Ground and shuttle crews and conduct a mission from countdown and launch to orbit and return.

Level II campers partake in many of the same activities as Level I "cadets" but Level II sessions are geared almost entirely to a simulated mission aboard a full-scale Spacelab Module. The first three days of camp are devoted to preparations for the mission, with all campers training simultaneously for both ground and crew positions. A reproduction of Houston's Mission Control Center trains campers to track the upcoming mission, while an authentic payload crew training model of the Shuttle cockpit prepares them for the on-board portion of their camping experience.

Before they "blast off," cadets learn about satellite deployment and the use of both Shuttle pallets and the large remote arm—all in preparation for experiments to be conducted during the mission. In addition, campers also experience the difficulties of space construction when they actually build a structure in an underwater Weightlessness Simulator.

Their ground training complete, Space Campers are now ready for launch; ground crews track the shuttle's flight using a multi-screen computer system while the shuttle crew pilots the craft to its destination—an orbiting space station. The two crafts "dock" and crews are exchanged; the station crew assumes command of the shuttle and brings it back safely to Earth.

The Space Camp Program for Adults is very similar to the Level II sessions, except it takes place in one, very busy three-day weekend. From September to November, adults can take to the heavens on their own *Columbia* and *Discovery* missions, and train on some of the more complicated and sophisticated equipment, such as the 5 Degrees of Freedom (5DF), a rotating high chair that simulates weightlessness and the Manned Maneuvering Unit jetpack, which shows the peculiarities of motion in a micro-gravity environment. The weekend's highlight is a simulated space walk during which campers erect a tetrahedron on a large scale pallet (see STARLOG #108 for a personal report on a Space Camp mission).

Registering for US Space Camp is easy; a full color brochure and application form are available from: United States Space Camp, Tranquility Base, Huntsville, Alabama 35807. Or call, toll free: 1-800-633-7280. The cost (including meals and accommodations) for the 1986 season is \$400. Be advised that camp can be rigorous and a physician's signature, attesting to a camper's fitness, is required with each application. Applicants should register as early as possible since the available openings for each session are quickly filled; as the Camp's director, Edward Buckbee says, "Sign up early so we don't launch without you!"

—Scott Zachek

Space Camp provides a simulated mission aboard a full-scale Spacelab Module.

