

STARLOG PRESENTS **SF ACTORS & ACTRESSES**

PLATINUM

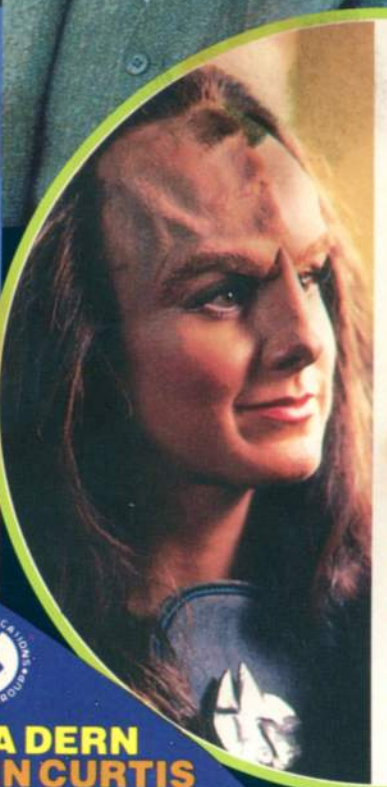
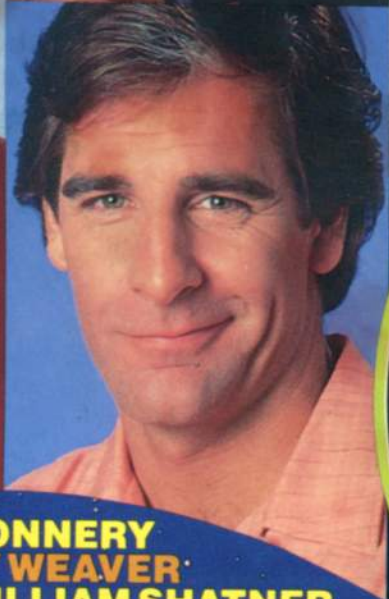
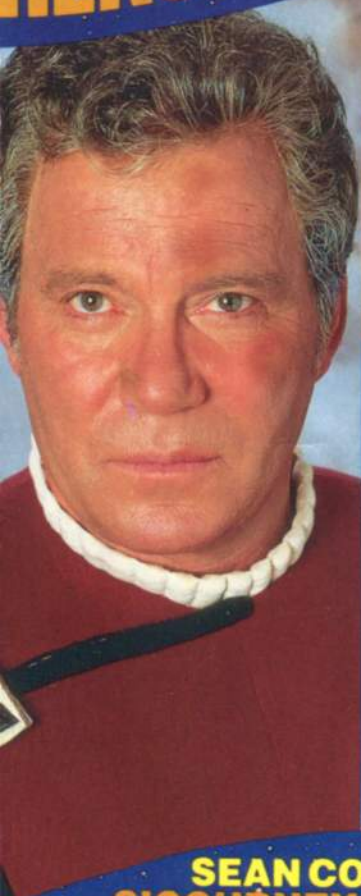
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**AMAZING
INTERVIEWS**

EDITION

VOLUME #2

**SCIENCE FICTION'S
HEROES &
HEROINES**



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04



Heroic Stature

"I'm one lucky woman."

On screen and off, Sigourney Weaver in her own words is "one tough broad." The six-foot-tall actress was the first woman to play the lead in a blood-and-guts SF film. In both *ALIEN* and its sequels, she was the savior—or merely the survivor—of the predominately male crew. In the third installment, Weaver even sported a crewcut, though her character didn't quite survive the experience. Until *ALIEN* in 1979, the hero in an SF action film was always a square-jawed man. The female was usually off whimpering in the corner while the hero saved her from the evil extraterrestrials. Weaver had a hand in changing that.

Off-screen, Weaver is just as tough. In an industry where being "difficult" can get you unemployed faster than you can say blacklist, Weaver has had the temerity to threaten to sue the movie studio that produced her biggest hits. When her future husband turned her down, she kept after him for months until he agreed to go out with her. She isn't afraid of 400-pound apes either. While making *Gorillas in the Mist*, she managed to charm her simian co-stars to the point of allowing her to live with them.

Human Charm

Fortunately, in person, Weaver's charm and openness belie her tough-as-nails image. And although she is a giantess, she curls up in a chair in her hotel suite and shrinks down to a more manageable size. When she talks about motherhood, the actress becomes so misty-eyed it's hard to believe she, as Ripley, wiped out a swarm of hideous Aliens.

"I don't set out to play tough broads," Weaver insists, "but I'm never offered the nice little mommy roles. And I really try not to play well-educated, fancy young women. They're usually too innocuous to interest me."

Perhaps that's why even when she played a wealthy, well-educated financier in *Working Girl*, she was a *mean*, well-educated financier. On the other hand, there's something inescapably patrician about Weaver. So, even when

FRANK SANELLO is a LA-based writer. This is his first article for STARLOG.



Whether battling Aliens or busting ghosts, Sigourney Weaver is tough & tender & tall.

By FRANK SANELLO

War is hell, even more so for Lt. Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and Sgt. Dwayne Hicks (Michael Biehn), under siege in *ALIENS*.



n't want his children learning to play these rich people's games because they should all have to go out and make a living."

Earning her own living was something Weaver was determined to do after graduating from Yale. She was so determined that after a series of rejections, she burst into an agent's office in New York and demanded that he sign her up. And he did. "I guess he thought I was such a crazy woman he might as well humor me."

Alien Attraction

As desperate as she was for work, Weaver still had a mind of her own. When she was offered the role of Ed Asner's protégé on TV's *Lou Grant* (ultimately portrayed by Linda Kelsey), Weaver turned it down flat. "I didn't want to play the same character for three to five years," she says firmly.

Her gamble paid off when a year later she was offered her first film and starring role as

As Dana Barrett in *Ghostbusters II*, Weaver reprised her penchant for sequels—and got paid very well in the process.

she portrayed a prostitute in *Half Moon Street*, opposite Michael Caine, Weaver's hooker had a Ph.D.

It's not just her height that makes her seem naturally aristocratic. Her background has an air of American royalty. Her father, Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, was the president of NBC, and a pioneer in TV programming. She grew up on New York's fabled Sutton Place, took ballet lessons and had not one but two debutante coming-out balls in her honor. She went to college at Stanford and earned a Master's degree from Yale's ultra-prestigious drama school, where Meryl Streep was a classmate.

Weaver attributes her toughness to her father. "My father was loving but very strict. He believed in the strong virtues of ancient Rome. He named my brother after the Roman Emperor Trajan, and my sister Flavia, after a Roman Empress." Weaver's first name is Susan, but she always felt that wasn't nearly as exotic compared to her siblings. So, typical of her strong-willed identity, at age 16, she ordered her family henceforth to call her Sigourney, after a minor character in *The Great Gatsby*.

Her mother, Elizabeth Inglis, was a successful British actress who appeared in Alfred Hitchcock's classic *The 39 Steps*. Inglis gave up her career to become a housewife. Long before that, another man, Sigourney's grandfather, had quashed her mother's dreams.

"My mother was qualified for Wimbledon tennis when she was only 16," Weaver says. "She was among the best players, but her father wouldn't let her play. He said he did-



Photo: Bruce McBroom/Copyright 1989 Columbia Pictures



Gorilla Photo: Copyright 1988 Warners Bros. Inc.

Lt. Ellen Ripley in *ALIEN* (which she discussed extensively in STARLOG #109). The role was originally conceived for a man, as all action films are, but when the producers saw the statuesque actress, they rewrote the role expressly for her. Modestly, Weaver downplays the effect her imposing presence had on the producers.

"It was a commercial decision," she explains. "The producers thought, here's this movie about six guys landing on a planet.

What can we do to make it more interesting to a wider audience?" Contradicting press accounts that the part was changed specifically for Weaver, she also insists, "They made the decision to make the hero a woman long before I got the role."

Weaver managed to charm the rage out of her simian co-stars in *Gorillas in the Mist*. "I came to love them, and I'm going to do what I can to save them."

While off-screen, Weaver's strength comes through. The actress was promised part of the profits from *Ghostbusters* (1984). When Columbia claimed the movie hadn't turned a profit, she threatened an audit and a lawsuit. To gain her services for the sequel, the studio anted up and offered her a flat fee of \$1 million for *Ghostbusters II*.

In matters of the heart, Weaver is just as persistent, as though getting her man was the same as getting her fair share of a film's profits. At a Halloween party in return.

Bald and bad, Weaver shaved her head and became a co-producer for *ALIEN*³, Ripley's not-so-triumphant return.



Her statuesque beauty and intellectual charm made Weaver a tough actress to stereotype...until *ALIEN* made her the first female action hero.

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Weaver's first Oscar nomination was not for some of her more mainstream roles, but came on the asteroid LV-426 with a hive of *ALIENS*.

AIDS research.

"Nobody refuses. Some people even say, 'Here's \$20.' I got the idea from Celeste Holm, who solicits 50-cent donations in exchange for her signature. Celeste gives the money to UNICEF. She told me she raised \$20,000 in 20 years.

"It changes the whole experience of giving out autographs. It stops it from being about a celebrity and becomes two people sharing."

Weaver managed to work her charm on giant apes when she played Dian Fossey in *Gorillas in the Mist*. "I wasn't afraid of the gorillas. I came to love them, and I'm going to do what I can to help save them from extinction." One of the only other humans who had managed to get that close to the giant apes was Fossey herself. After a few months of charm and perseverance, the gorillas began cozying up to Weaver, too.

In fact, the apes came to trust her so much that although they usually kill people who approach their babies, by the end of filming, the mothers actually presented their offspring to her to cuddle!

Successful, strong-willed and happily married, Sigourney Weaver says, "My parents are alive and healthy. I've been spared major sorrow in my life. I love my husband, I'm one lucky woman." ☆

STARLOG PLATINUM 13



1982, she and actress Dianne Wiest were commiserating together about the "lack of good men." Weaver spotted *avant-garde* theater director Jim Simpson and marched over and asked

"I don't set out to play tough broads."

him to dance. He turned her down.

"I had heard so many good things about him, what a talented director he was. When he refused to dance, I was crushed," she admits. But not defeated.

A year later, she invited him to a party. "We had such a good time, I asked him to dinner the next night. Two months later, I asked him to marry me. When I move, I move fast."

Their relationship was blessed with a baby daughter, Charlotte Simpson, born in April 1990. "My husband loves life. His values are solid. He's really talented and positive. He's a strong man. I guess he would have to be, to be married to someone more famous. I know how hard that must be, but he handles it with grace."



ALIENS Photo: Bob Penn/Copyright 1986 20th Century Fox

Weaver's fame has made her a natural target of autograph hounds. But if they want her to sign on the dotted line, they have to pay. She charges \$1 for her signature and has collected thousands of dollars. But greed isn't the problem—she donates the money to

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