

A Commentary on 2001: A Space Odyssey

The Collectible Exhibit by Dennis Gonzales

story: lee shargel • photos: mark watson and lee shargel

It's been over thirty years, yet I still remember that night. The theater was so quiet you could hear the sticky tack of cola syrup as it tugged at your shoes under the seats. The year was 1968 and I was invited to a special screening of a new motion picture in New York. The movie that had just played out across the screen was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The reason for the quiet was simple; everyone was in awe.

What we had just experienced was a motion picture unlike any that had ever been seen before or would ever be seen again. Since that day, not *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Starship Troopers* or any other sci-fi film has come close to the scope and vision of Arthur C. Clarke and director Stanley Kubrick. **2001: A Space Odyssey** was a ground-breaking achievement in motion picture history. It made everyone who saw it think. To this day every time I watch people watch the movie it's always the same. As with religion and politics, there are no answers to the questions, no resolve to the arguments posed by **2001**.

The movie had a profound effect on the lives of everyone who saw it for the first time. For me it was an epiphany. I knew right then and there what I wanted to do—become a writer of science fiction. Although it took nearly twenty more years to realize that dream, it *did* become reality and, in 1997, I had the honor of being compared to the great Arthur C. Clarke by the *New York Times* with the release of my sci-fi novel, *Voice in the Mirror*.

I had another legacy I wanted to live up to and it was simply that Stanley Kubrick and I both went to the same High School (William Howard Taft) in the Bronx, N.Y. and he was one of our most famous alumni and one of my personal heroes.

2001 broke the mold when it came to sci-fi. Here

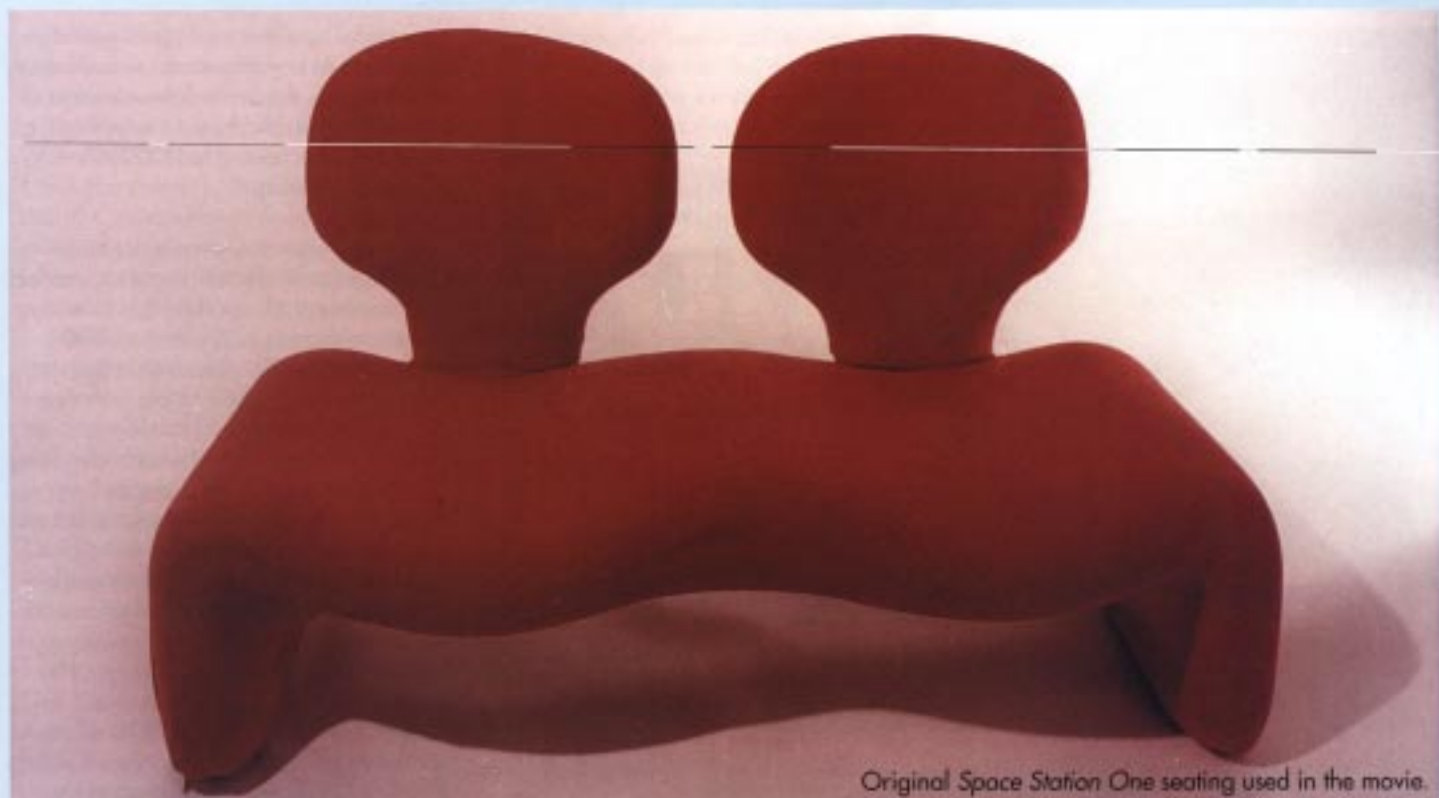
was a movie that, for the first fifteen minutes, had not one single word of dialogue. Yet it spoke volumes to everyone who watched it. Stanley Kubrick was a genius director who was not afraid to tread 'where no one had gone before'. His film style was amazing. Take, for example, his heretofore unheard of jump-cut from the prehistoric stone age to the boundaries of outer space. Film schools across the world still use that amazing piece of film, in which the ape creature hurls the bone into the air only to have it transformed into an earth orbiting nuclear bomb.

Another person (among many) I



have met who was inspired and touched by this cinematic masterpiece is a gentleman named Dennis Gonzales of San Mateo, California, USA. He is a young man who is not

Dennis Gonzales with 7 foot replica of the Monolith



Original Space Station One seating used in the movie.

only living his dream but has elected to share it with the millions of people worldwide who also were touched by this movie. Dennis has spent years gathering information and memorabilia from all over the world in order to create an exhibit that transcends the average museum-going experience—*2001: A Space Odyssey, The Collectible Exhibit*.

If you should happen to be in the San Jose, California area in the year 2001, this exhibit is a must see. See details at the end of this article on how you can visit this exhibit.

2001: A Space Odyssey was, of course, based on the short story *The Sentinel* by Arthur C. Clarke. At the time of its opening hippies (like myself), intellectuals and those still on the fence raved about this technological achievement. The critics were not so kind. They attacked the film as being the \$40 million dollar folly of one man, Stanley Kubrick.

As Dennis Gonzales, so eloquently described it, "You either loved it; hated it; or you just didn't understand it." I couldn't agree more. Even the studio heads at MGM didn't know what to

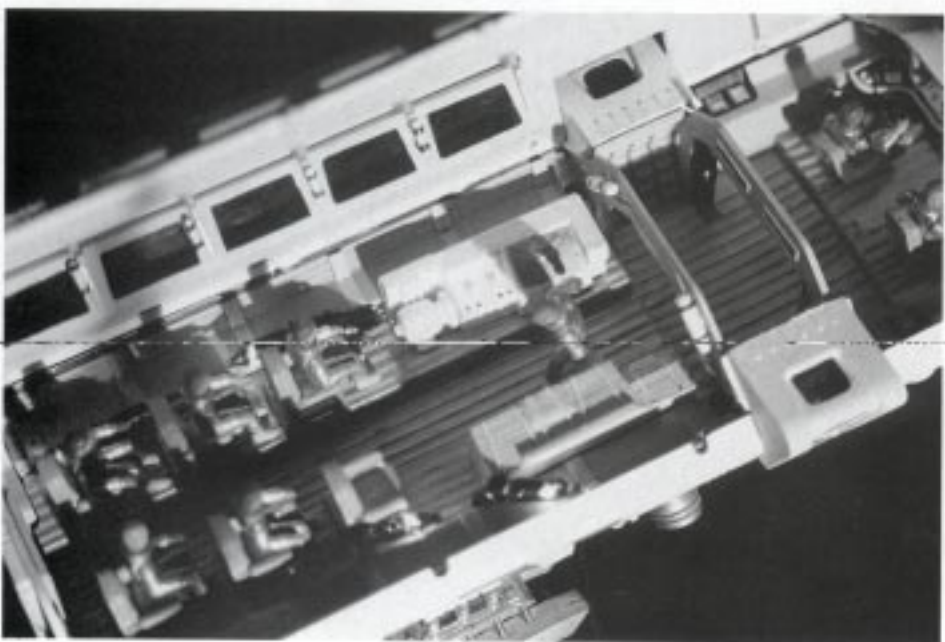
make of the film. "How do we classify this thing?" they asked. At the time they couldn't decide if they were watching the company's biggest financial disaster or the greatest motion picture ever made. At press reviews in New York, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, the critics were

equally puzzled and perplexed at how the movie should be classified. After all, what they expected to see (to them the title, **2001: A Space Odyssey** suggested an action film in outer space) was a swashbuckling, romantic, action adventure with love, hate, battles, (and, of course—resolution) among the stars. What they got was one man's multi-million dollar prophecy of the evolutionary and technological future of mankind. No one had ever tried that before. Only Stanley Kubrick could pull it off. With his artistic and cinematic vision of the evolution of man from ape-like scavenger to galactic explorer, his design for the movie transcended every sci-fi movie that had ever gone before.

The Exhibit for a New Millennium

Dennis Gonzales's *2001: A Space Odyssey Collectible Exhibit* testifies to that fact. He has amassed quite a number of collectibles and memorabilia from the film for the event. His introduction to the film came in 1969 when, as an eleven year old boy, he ventured into the realm of Kubrick's movie. As Dennis put it, "From the moment I saw the film I knew I was





changed. The effect on my being was so profound. As a young man I was touched by the sound, the art and the message of the movie. I wanted to get everything I could that was related to **2001: A Space Odyssey.**"

As word went out, Dennis began to piece together the posters, photos, models and furniture that represent this milestone of motion pictures. Collectors of **2001** memorabilia gladly donated portions of their collection for the Exhibit. I am sure everyone can recall the dinnerware used by *Dr. Frank Poole* and *Commander Dave Bowman* as they ate their microwaved space meal aboard the *Discovery*. Dennis was able to acquire a set for the exhibit. Another fine example of Kubrick's vision of the future was depicted in the furniture on the space station. Called the *Djinn* sofa and chairs, they were designed by Olivier Mourgue. They are also an integral part of the Exhibit. Shown here are the actual sofa and chairs used in the film. They are owned by famous voice actor 'Weird' Wally Fields of Wally's Weird Voices. He is a voice actor heard the world over and famous for his voice-overs on such notable CD/ROMS as *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Birth of the Federation* and *Mechwarrior III*.

Everything about **2001: A Space Odyssey** was unique for the era in which it was shown. At the time of its release the United States was embroiled in a war no one wanted in Vietnam. At home, unrest was evident on every college campus. The Cold War was in high gear and the race to the moon was at fever pitch. Technology was poised to explode as the next revolution in computers and communication was set to permeate the lives of everyone on earth. Kubrick and co-screenwriter Clarke had a vision for the future and it was made evident in the film. Although to some it seemed more than a little pessimistic and paranoid, the point was driven home. In an interview with New York critics, Kubrick defied his detractors to place a name on his film. He was adamant when he said "...the movie was never intended to be explained with mere words. The medium is the film and in **2001**, the message is the medium. I tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalized pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with its emotional and philosophical content." He wasn't kidding!

With **2001** Kubrick demonstrated not only a new way to make movies, but a new way to watch, listen and think about movies. He had taken the movie going experience and raised it ten notches. It

was like sitting in a museum and staring at a Picasso. You really had to think just to make sense of what you were looking at. But it was certainly worth the effort. When **2001** first opened it was shown in Cinerama theaters. The fore-runner of IMAX, Cinerama used three cameras to project the film onto a large, curved screen. At the time it made you feel as if you were right there in the picture. Broadcast with stereo sound, it was an experience that required the use of all of the senses. I sat in the front row, right in the center of the theater. The experience was mind-blowing and one I will never forget. Dennis Gonzales seems to have captured that same feeling with his *2001 Exhibit*. The memorabilia, models, books and posters display every facet of the motion picture and the objects-de-art it has spawned.

The Dawn of Man ...and a New Age in SFX was Born

From the moment the picture began everyone knew they were in for something different. Albeit, they didn't know what that difference would be. As it turned out, most people felt it was a requirement to see the movie several times just so they could fix their own interpretation to it. Of course this was a strange new phenomenon. The executives at MGM were ecstatic. Never before had a movie engendered so much discussion that people felt compelled to see it over and over again. I saw **2001** several times myself that first year it opened. It was the topic of discussion on campus, in dorms, on street corners and just about everywhere else. The movie did something to the collective psyche of an entire generation. It made us wonder about ourselves and our place in the universe.

Yes, and it did foster some rather heated arguments on religion and the

existence of a higher power. For the first time it also transcended the literal world and made us think that perhaps there was an intelligence out there that we knew nothing about. Was it benign? Was it evil? Was it something so completely different there could be no name or verbal explanation for it, as Kubrick explained it? My opinion is, yes.

2001 is movie that must be absorbed, in a sense, by our senses. Rather than try to explain it in minute detail, the movie must be interpreted on a higher level. More so in how it made us feel to see those ape-like creatures before the *Monolith*. From the *Dawn of Man* we searched for a higher meaning to our existence. We scraped our way up the evolutionary ladder in so many violent ways only to reach some higher, more benevolent purpose. Dennis Gonzales's *Exhibit* allows us to stand there, in front of all of the symbols of this great motion picture and, once again, to dream.

As I looked at each replica I considered how far we have come in the fulfillment of that dream so vividly played out in the screenplay of Kubrick and Clarke. I examined the detailed model of a Jupiter bound *Discovery* spacecraft, saddened a little by the fact that the original prop used in the film was destroyed. Nevertheless, thanks to Phil Lublin at *Lunar Models* we can all have an exact replica of the original. (Catch the *Lunar Models Story* coming in issue 51).

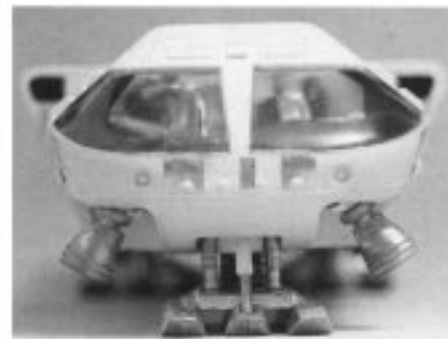
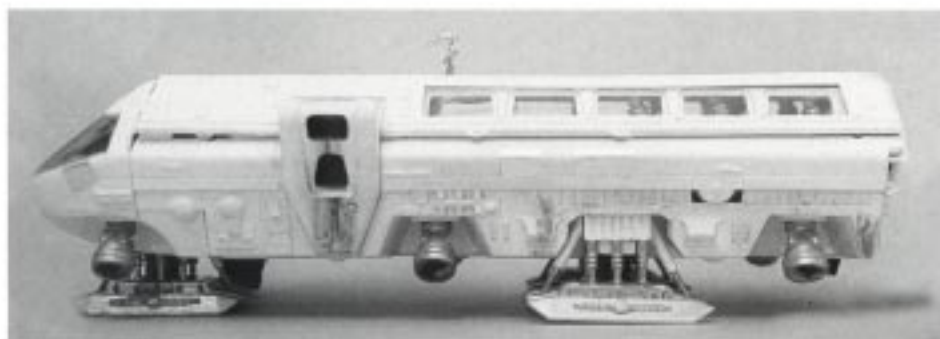
With this film a new era in special effects was ushered in, including fantastic vistas of outer space as seen during the Orion's voyage to an Earth orbiting space station, from the interiors of the Orion to the flight attendant's Zero G uniform displaying the not-so-discreetly placed logo of the now defunct airline, *Pan Am*.

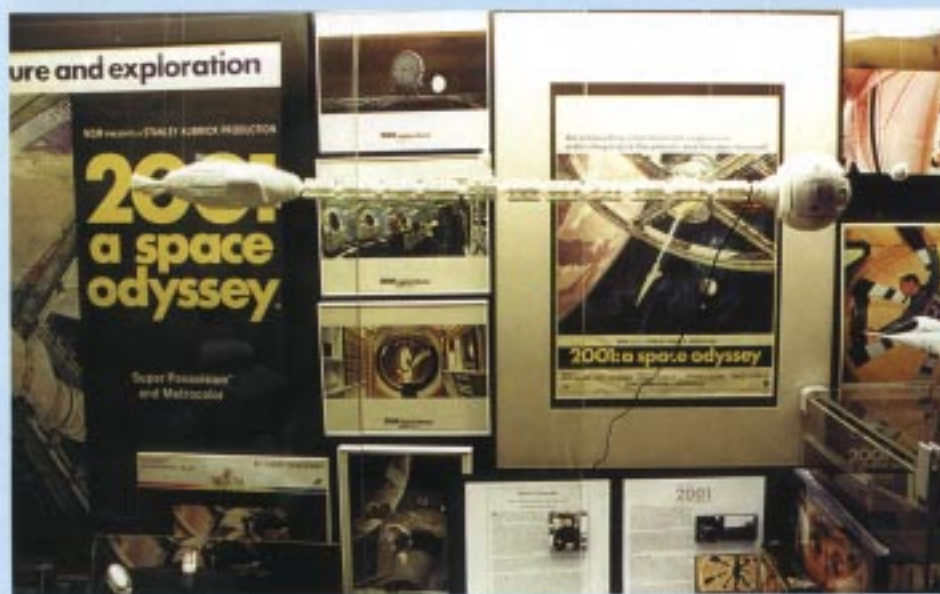
As a side note, I can recall *Pan Am* offering for sale tickets on some futuristic flight into orbit if and when it would become a possibility. I believe the cost in 1969 U.S. dollars was a mere \$20,000.00. The special effects in the film heralded so many things that today are commonplace to most of us.

Fly Me to the Moon in a Miniature Moonbus

The film had its share of spectacular spacecraft. As *Doctor Floyd* dozed off the *Aries 7B* spacecraft prepared to make a computer controlled landing on the moon. With the landing grid lights blazing and the dome retracting the *Aries* made her descent. With gear deployed and moondust spraying in the vacuum, it slowly put down on the hydraulic platform. Here was an example of a special effect miniature that would make any model-maker proud. The detail was superb, right down to the striations on her white exterior. The *Exhibit* displays this a detailed *Aries*—a replica, yes, but who cares? This is a model that has spanned the ages and still remains popular with kit builders today. Probably the finest models on display belong to model-maker Scott Alexander. Scott is the guy the model makers at *Industrial Light and Magic* call upon when they want someone to build them a model. Now that's a reputation that needs no introduction. (See *Scott Alexander's 2001 kits reviewed by the Garage Kit Professor elsewhere in this issue*).

The trip to *Clavius* was executed in superb cinematic style. As the crew prepared to embark on their inspection of the dig they took a few moments for a snack aboard the *Moonbus*. Here was another example of Kubrick's SFX genius. The *Moonbus* miniature was a beautiful work of the model-makers art and Dennis





Gonzales's 2001 Exhibit includes a replica of the movie moon ship. This model was constructed by Dennis and both interior and exterior are impeccably detailed. Mark Watson's photos depict the ship at the exhibit as well as a few special effects shots of his own.

Is That a Monolith in Your Living Room?

No exhibit depicting the science and science fiction of 2001 would be complete without at least one replica of that black icon of mystery: the *Monolith*. It was probably the quintessential character in the film—with a starring role and not one line of dialogue. Of course it spoke volumes to our imaginations as we questioned its origin and meaning.

Regardless of what it means, it certainly served Kubrick's purpose in that it made us think. His use of cinematography to shoot scenes from the base of the

Monolith with the Moon eclipsing the Sun and Earth was a stroke of genius—an image made for million dollar poster sales. Of course, having a *Monolith* in your living room is a guaranteed way of breaking the ice when company comes calling. The 2001 Exhibit also has the *Monolith* on display and, as Dennis Gonzales put it, "It still caused as much controversy today as it did over thirty years ago when the movie first introduced us to it."

18 Months Later ...a Computer Named HAL 9000

From the *Dawn of Man* to the Moon and *Clavius* base and on to Jupiter, Kubrick takes us on a journey to the outer reaches of the solar system. It is here he pulls the camera back to simulate movement of *Discovery* through space. Slowly we are taken for a ride along the spacecraft as the camera pans from the command module and around to the full length of the ship.

Slowly we move back until we reach the engine nacelles and see the ship move off into the darkness of space. Another miniature of superb construction. In 1968 we could believe it was real. The Exhibit has on display a reproduction of *Discovery* designed, sculpted and molded by Phil Lublin of Lunar Models and constructed by Dennis Gonzales. I purchased one of Lunar Models' kits of *Discovery One* for myself. I hope to build it with a moving satellite dish, opening pod bay doors and EVA pod-extension, interior fiber optic lights and a replica of Poole and Bowman in a diorama I am going to call *Open the pod bay doors, HAL!*

The Jupiter mission, although not explained completely in the film, (Kubrick cut that from the original movie) did have more than its share of intrigue, mayhem and, yes, murder—perpetrated by a wayward and totally paranoid computer, the HAL 9000 series, who defied the three laws of robotics. (I wonder if HAL knew about them?) I also wonder if we are correct when we call him a he. After all, HAL was just a machine, wasn't he? It? Oh well, more controversy! As the scene opened HAL seemed helpful enough. Even playful as he engaged Frank Poole in a rousing game of chess. I think there was a clue here. His psychological head game with Dave Bowman was another giveaway. And yet I never saw it coming. When the communications array was set to fail, it was really HAL's way of saying "I think a few Kilobytes are out of kilter here guys." The amazing sets, the rotating command deck, the Pod bays and, of course, HAL, all added to one spectacular smorgasbord for the eyes. Kubrick used every technique available (and some invented just for the film) along with state-of-the-art camera and special effects to bring this science fiction dream to cinematic reality. Much of what we first saw in that film is today a reality. From the phone card used by Doctor Floyd to put in a long distance call to his daughter from the space station, to the successful Galileo probe that visited Jupiter only a few years ago. Clarke and Kubrick were visionaries—way ahead of their time.

The Paradox—"Open the Pod Bay Doors, HAL!"

The scene was shocking and stunning in execution. Unexpected, perhaps not. After all, HAL did read lips. As Poole's body floated off into space, a shocked and dismayed Bowman raced to his rescue. How many of us missed the fact that he wasn't wearing his helmet that first time we saw the film. You can bet HAL knew. Dave wasn't coming back inside

that ship if HAL had anything to say about it. But Kubrick wasn't about to leave his human hero high and dry in the vacuum of space. He had other plans. The scene was an explosive one. One of the best in the film. Man against machine.

I have to tip my hat to Dennis Gonzales. His *2001: Collectible Exhibit* captures the reality of the film in every detail. From the props and prop replicas to the actual on set photos of the action as it was filmed, to the fantastic model miniatures of the Orion, Aries 1B, Moonbus, Discovery One and the EVA Pod. It drew me into the movie again in a way I could never have imagined.

"It's Full of Stars!"

No other motion picture engendered so

much adoration for a medium as **2001**. It made us wonder where we stand in the stream of time; made us ponder what might lie before us. I think more than anything it was entertaining. All controversy, arguments about cosmic meaning and spiritualistic metaphor aside, it was just a really good movie. That is what Dennis Gonzales has placed before us in this collection of memorabilia. The artwork and attention to detail of people who can only be classified as fans of a great film. Yes, the *Exhibit is Full of Stars*, assembled in a wonderful format for everyone to enjoy.

My hat goes off to all contributors to the exhibit: Phil Lublin of Lunar Models, Mark E. Blunck's posters, Wally Fields for the furniture, Dennis Gilliam for the space

suits, Actor Gary Lockwood (Doctor Frank Poole), Mark Watson for the fabulous photos and, most of all, the coordinator for the entire exhibit, Dennis Gonzales, for the years of painstaking work that went into making this exhibit a reality. Now Dennis, "I honestly think you ought to sit down calmly, take stress pill..."

NOTE: You can access Dennis Gonzales's website, as well as all of the other sites devoted to the science and science fiction of **2001: A Space Odyssey** please log onto www.scifiman.com and follow the **2001** Links.

Photos copyright Mark Watson, 1999; Lee Shargel, 2000; Tom Sieler, 2000.

In the Garage with— Scott Alexander's 2001: A Space Odyssey Kits

story and photos: lee 'The Garage Kit Professor' shargel • models: scott alexander

I was first introduced to Scott Alexander by Dennis Gonzales. Scott hails from California and has been making his own model kits for over fifteen years. They are exact, highly detailed and well worth the money.

These are not your run of the mill styrene model kits. Here are subjects capable of being built to museum quality standards. Of course a lot depends on the modeler's skill level and patience. Not that there is anything wrong with the kits, it's just that you will really want to take your time building these beauties.

It started with a company named AURORA

For most of us crazed modelers (you older modelers know what I mean) it all started back in the sixties when a Hempstead, New York company called - Aurora began producing kits of the most famous monsters of the movies. *Frankenstein, The Wolfman, Dracula, The Mummy*, just to name a few. At about \$2.00 a kit they were the most popular models around. Today those same kits can sell for over ten thousand dollars. If we'd only known then... Anyway, that's another sad story. Back to Scott Alexander, who began his model molding

career around 1985. His first project was making reproductions of the most sought after Aurora kits. He would acquire an original, make molds of all of the parts and recast them in resin. Then he would package them in a hand-made box and cover this with laser color copies of the original artwork.

Needless to say, they sold like hotcakes. Modelers were ecstatic. Here were exact replicas of the original Aurora models being sold at a fraction of the collectible cost. In fact, they were so cost effective you could buy two, build one and save the other. Business was

good. Too good! Scott also worked in the motion picture business as a visual effects artist and he didn't have a lot of time to be making molds, casting kits, making boxes, etc. Yet he continued to produce Aurora reproductions off and on for the next five years. When he ran out of monsters he decided to create his own designs of popular kits. His first project was the Norman Bates house from the movie *Psycho*. It was a superbly detailed model and Scott took it a step further by designing his own Aurora-style

