[music]

Paul Thies: 45 years ago, a crew began working on a film with a modest budget under the helm of a director making only his second picture and starring a cast of very talented and accomplished actors who were yet largely unknown. The filmmakers themselves acknowledge it was by all accounts a B-Movie but by virtue of emotionally compelling performances, a well-crafted story, and visuals that were out of this world, they created a stunning experience that literally exploded into a lasting cultural phenomenon. Hello, I'm your host, Paul Thies.

On this episode of *If/When*, it was my privilege to sit down with two of the legendary cast members of that singular film, Tom Skerritt who played the role of Captain Dallas, and Veronica Cartwright, who played the Ship's Navigator Lambert. They shared their memories of shooting Alien back in 1978 under the direction of Sir Ridley Scott, working with an amazing casting crew to create what has become widely regarded as one of the greatest science fiction films in history. Their performances alongside those of Yaphet Kotto, Ian Holm, John Hurt, Harry Dean Stanton, and Sigourney Weaver provided a rich and very human context that amplified the intensity, fear, and emotional impact of the movie.

It was a great thrill, personally, to be able to spend this time with Tom and Veronica and I hope you enjoy the discussion that follows. Tom and Veronica, thank you so much. It's a real pleasure to be able to sit down with both of you and talk about what I think is one of the greatest films in film history. It's definitely one of my favorites, and of course, that is *Alien*. I'm very delighted to speak with both of you and to be

Five minutes into it I said, I got to work with that guy. I don't care about anything else. Everything's going to work out. The budget went up to $10 million and I went to England. That's where it all started for me to work in going to Ridley's office and I saw this group of wonderful actors, most of all, Veronica, who I felt was the best thing in the film and away we went. I remember we got two pages into reading, remember that, Veronica, two pages into reading the script and cast and all that. He starts saying I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. He starts explaining the whole movie. He says this, "I'm going to do *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*."

Then he says, "The less you see the bad guy, the more frightened you become," and that was it. Then some guy came in and said, "We need you on the set." That was the end of it. I thought at the time, I don't know if you remember Veronica, we were all just sitting with our mouths open having just met one another. I remember thinking, "Okay." As the captain, I think I said something like, "Since I'm the captain of the ship, I guess I should say something to you all, and I'm wondering if we're going to be the ingredients for this movie as I put it." What it turned out we were, but I think we all just started to laugh and say, "How are you doing?" That's really how--

Veronica Cartwright: What was interesting is John Finch was playing the part that John Hurt ended up playing. Our first cast meeting was with John Finch and we started shooting which he started in the engine room. There was tons. Ridley loved smoke and in those days, that was the smoke they made out of beeswax and they would just pump it in. John Finch had just apparently gotten out of the hospital from having pneumonia and he was back in that night because there was so much

Tom:

those things with Ridley where he just-- It was reactionary, not like this is what you're

marvel of working with this guy, and then **[unintelligible 00:17:19]** the rest of this gang and the ship and also having, coincidentally **[unintelligible 00:17:25]** before I

Veronica:

In the '70s, which is the best decade for movies of the 20th century, I happened to stumble on the best directors ever, William Hal Ashby and Altman, and now Ridley. I said, "How did I get to be so fortunate?" My whole approach was never about do they--

Tom: No doubt, because they're running on tires. The tires