

The Story Behind

By Rob Swanson

I don't venture out to movies too often. The sticker shock of ticket prices makes it hard to enjoy the movie. But let's face it; certain movies have to be seen on the big screen to really enjoy the impact.

"Impact" by the way, is a bit of an in-joke in the movie world. Travel back with me to just over a hundred years ago when film first struck the screen.

The setting was a converted stage theater. People were invited to enjoy an innovative new technology for pennies a seat. The theater was sold out, the lights were dimmed, and somewhere in the back of the auditorium a switch was thrown.

There was no story attached to this movie. It was grainy black and white projecting at only 12 frames per second, making it extremely jerky – pitiful to us, but magic to them. The first scene was people around a railroad track, waiting for the train. Then, to the rousing sound of a piano (played in the wings) a train came 'round the bend heading straight for the audience...

Panic erupted from the seats as people scrambled to get out of the path of the charging train!

Before you shake your heads at their naiveté, let me tell you about a more recent filmic innovation. But first – a primer... Film runs through a projector at the rate of 24 frames per second: the minimum speed at which the human eye converts still images into continuous motion. Filmmakers have created "3-D" effects by tricking our binocular vision with red and blue offsets or polarizing images, each requiring funky eyeglasses for the effect to work.

Recently, though, filmmakers have discovered they can trick the *brain* instead of the eye. By ratcheting the frames per second to 144 instead of 24, the brain does not perceive them as a string of still images, but as 3-D reality. The proof? By creating a film with no story, just a bullet-train barreling down the tracks straight at an unsuspecting audience... where every single viewer panicked and ran out of the way! They were all embarrassed afterward, saying they knew it was a movie but they couldn't control themselves. When it was shown again, the audience again bailed out. The mind's flight reflex completely takes over.

You won't be seeing this in your movie theater anytime soon, however. It requires special cameras, film, and projectors. At last estimate, a movie ticket would cost \$2000... How's that for sticker shock?