

# Gears on Film

*Gear Technology's* bimonthly aberration — gear trivia, humor, weirdness and oddments for the edification and amusement of our readers. Contributions are welcome.

**O**n our unceasing attempt to further educate our readers—and find new and creative ways to waste time at work—the Addendum staff has spent many long hours (and many dollars on popcorn) to bring you our latest research on gears in film.

We'll be assigning ratings (1 gear = pretty awful; 4 gears = terrific) to the movies based on the following qualities: impressiveness of the gears, relevance to the plot, prominence in the film, star quality and dramatic interpretation.

*Modern Times (1936)*. Our nominee in the Classic Gear Movie category is Charlie Chaplin's last film without dialogue (or almost without it anyway), and may be one of his finest. In it Chaplin plays a hapless victim of modern factory life, while a very young Paulette Goddard plays his love interest, known only as "The Gamin."

The plot, which might have been co-written by Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Scott Adams and the Monty Python gang, is a darkly comedic look at the Depression-era struggles of ordinary people trying to survive in an industrialized society.

We're sorry to say that the gears play metaphorical villains, but they're nasty in the grand tradition of movie bad guys. If not quite as evil as Olivier's Richard III or as funny as Alan Rickman's Sheriff of Nottingham, they make worthy symbolic opponents, and they're considerably more obvious as symbols than Charles Foster Kane's Rosebud. They're also very sexy, as gears go, and they film wonderfully in black-and-white.

Our only quibble is that in a couple of crucial scenes, some of the gears are

running backwards. But then maybe it's not fair to expect someone to be both a directorial genius and a gear engineer. Rating: ○○○○.

*The Rock (1996)*. An action/adventure flick with Nicolas Cage as an FBI biochemical weapons specialist and Sean Connery as the only man ever to have escaped from Alcatraz.

The gears—or in this case, gear segments—come into play after terrorists steal some chemical weapons and take over "The Rock." Connery, Cage and a small band of Navy SEALs must sneak into Alcatraz, disarm the weapons and save San Francisco from total destruction.

At a crucial point in the plot, Connery must roll underneath a series of giant pendulums with gear teeth on their bottoms while avoiding spouts of flame shooting up from the floor. We're not entirely sure what this contraption is supposed to be. The gear teeth don't

appear to mesh with anything, and we don't know why flames are shooting up from the floor, but it's really cool and scary-looking. Rating: ○○○○.

## The Metaphysics of Gears

To answer the question, what is a real gear, we have consulted no less an authority than Eliot K. Buckingham. Mr. Buckingham comes down on the side of the stationary objects. He says, "... to my mind, a single gear is a piece of metal with projections on it. A gear is designed to be operated with another gear or gears. You do not design a single gear ...

"If a gear has to be moving to be a gear, what are all those things in planetaries, and often differentials, that don't move, but are absolutely necessary to proper performance, and have all the appearance of being gears, with teeth and all?"

He approaches the "Biggest Gear in the World Question" using the same logic: "Actually, the largest gear in the world is a cog railroad, since the rail is a rack, which is a segment of a gear of infinite diameter."

Since no discussion of either philosophy or movies is complete without a dissenting point of view, Addendum is waiting for yours. If you have nominations for our Gear Movie Hall of Fame or another philosophical viewpoint on the ontology of gears, let us know. We have a new referee's whistle we'd love to try out. ○



**The Addendometer:** If you've read this far on the page and enjoyed it, please circle 225.