Let’s start this competition – which is all about ladies – *80s Horror Ladies* to be exact – off with a big bang as we look to the most female of all female things – *motherhood*.

This first step into the ring brings us smack-dab into a place you best not find yourself – between a faithful mother and her missing child.

This inaugural contest finds Sigourney Weaver of James Cameron’s horror/sci-fi/action classic, *Aliens* up against JoBeth Williams of the Tobe Hooper-helmed/Steven Spielberg-produced, suburban haunted house legend – *Poltergeist*.

And no arguments regarding *Aliens* “horror” placement. There are a bunch of dead (or nearly dead) people stuck in goo in an honest-to-goodness living nightmare. Then one of them lifts her head to say, “Please, kill me”. If that isn’t bad dream material, I don’t know what is!

In *Aliens*, Sigourney Weaver returns to the big screen as Ripley (we find out her first name is Ellen in the outstanding director’s cut), after having done battle with the lone xenomorph of the first film. Her return to alien territory finds her taking on the role of a devoted foster mother to a young orphan – affectionately known as “Newt” (Carrie Henn).

Weaver won an Oscar nomination as well as a Golden Globe nomination for this 1986 film, and deservedly so. It still boggles the mind that a horror/sci-fi/action film garnered acting award recognition! And this rarity certainly speaks to the rich quality of Weaver’s performance.

\*\*Kathy Bates would win Oscar gold for *Misery* a few years later, with *Silence of the Lamb*’s Jodie Foster following suit one year after that – for horror flicks! Wonders never cease!

Weaver’s is a fantastic performance – evoking our respect, our awe and our forever fanboy/fangirl loyalties. Bottom line, Ripley kicks ass!

Despite the rock-n-roll, non-stop action of the film – which Weaver knocks out of the park – it’s some of the few quiet moments where she really shines.

Take for example – the exchange in the medical center, as Ripley puts Newt to bed (this was Weaver’s Oscar clip at that year’s ceremony). Newt complains of bad dreams. Ripley takes the disembodied head of “Casey”, Newt’s doll, checks inside the hollow area and says something along the lines of, “I’ll bet Casey doesn’t have bad dreams. Nope, nothing in there.” To which Newt replies, “Ripley, she doesn’t have bad dreams because she’s just a piece of plastic.” The warm exchange goes on from there, until Ripley firmly states, “I’m not gonna leave you Newt. That’s a promise.”

Newt believes – as do we – that Ripley will not fail her. And in the end, she doesn’t and she makes us believe in love and loyalty – even while acid-bleeding monsters are hot on their tail.

Best moment: It’s the scene in which she confronts Burke (Paul Reiser) about his sending the colonists to their death by instructing them to find the alien ship. Weaver’s sharp features become even more pronounced as she practically hisses at Burke, taking him by the lapels and pushing him around. “I’m happy to disappoint you.” Oofta, that’s some good stuff.

I’ll leave it with this image from the climax (which one?) Ripley has Newt firmly in hand and they are now right in the middle of the alien nest. The Alien Queen has her warriors withdraw from the situation. Ripley and Newt slowly back up. With one look to the Queen, and that legendary cock of the head, Ripley pulls the trigger on the flame-thrower, dousing the alien nest in flames.

I don’t know if that small movement was Weaver’s idea, perhaps on the spot – or Cameron’s direction – or both – but it is a cinematic moment that gives you goose-bumps and makes you cheer.

Sigourney Weaver probably wouldn’t consider herself a scream queen, or a potential “Ultimate Horror Lady of the 80s”, but we all know better, don’t we?

Weaver’s solid opposition in this battle is Diane Freeling herself, JoBeth Williams in 1982’s *Poltergeist*. While Ripley goes to a type of hell to save little Newt, Diane goes to hell – for real – HELL.

We all know the tale: Little girl is abducted by nasty spirits in her bedroom closet. Family turns to para-psychologists and psychics to help out the family. Things go great, they get the kid back and then things get even worse. Gravestones, flying Incredible Hulks, a swimming pool, a clown and lots of corpses.

Oh, I’m sorry, were those spoilers? Jeepers!

Apparently, MGM put out a campaign for an Oscar nomination for William’s role as the terrified, but strong-willed mother. And it’s kind of a bummer that she didn’t get such recognition (horror films – the red-headed stepchild of cinema – sigh), since it’s really a tremendous performance!

My go-to example for touting Williams’ brilliance in *Poltergeist*, is her chilling, non-verbal response (acting is reacting) as Tangina (the late Zelda Rubinstein) explains to the small, huddled group what exactly it is that shares space in this other dimension with our darling little Carol Anne (the late Heather O’Rourke).

“To her, it simply is another child. To us, it is The Beast.”

They cut to a close-up of Williams, and the tears are heartfelt, real and heart-breaking. The look on her face, her mouth hanging open in disbelief – it’s an acting moment worthy of study and praise.

The rest of the time, you buy her devotion to her kids, and you believe her. She’s real – no more so than when she and her husband Steven (Craig T. Nelson) are alone in their bedroom, smoking a joint. She laughingly discusses her trials and tribulations as a sleep-walking child. It’s a genuine exchange, sold by the actors. And it brings us into their lives and their home. We *like* these people, particularly Diane. She’s our heroine – and for true – we will and do follow her to hell.

JoBeth Williams was nominated for a Saturn Award for this role… and that’s it. Such a shame – an awesome showcase for Williams’ talent. Good thing it’s now considered a classic, a fan favorite.

And it’s good to know that that rattling, ever-moving remake train hasn’t caught onto this gem.

*Oh, wait…*

So who is it going to be, voters?

Which mother do you like more? Which of these amazing horror actresses will take that next, coveted step toward being crowned, “The Ultimate Horror Lady of the 80s”?

The winner of this battle will move onto the semi-final round, and will fight it out once more!

Cast your votes now!

And stay tuned for the next battle, as well as the results from this “Gimme Back My Kid!” fight – IN JUST THREE SHORT DAYS!