

DVD



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SPOTLIGHT

LASER



Question: How many cigars does it take Ridley Scott to get through the DVD commentary for **ALIEN** (Fox)?

Answer: At least two. The first thing you hear on audio track #4 is a lighter going off (which is repeated about an hour later) with the sound of Scott chomping on his stogie persistent throughout. If Scott had

nothing to say, that might be a bother, but he has plenty to discuss, and his tour through *Alien* is an enlightening experience. He goes about it as both a filmmaker and a viewer but never once forgets his place, complimenting his collaborators, noting his influences (2001 comes up often) and remarking on what he accomplished 20 years ago and how it holds up today. His comments are thoughtful and concise, as if he's not only passing through the film but teaching us about what it takes to make a movie of *Alien's* size and scope. You couldn't ask for a better instructor, and once it's over, you'll want to procure a box of Cubans to thank him.

If the new 20th-anniversary *Alien* DVD contained only the commentary, it would be satisfying, but Fox has really taken the trouble to please fans and cineastes alike. *Alien* has all the trimmings you might expect (letterboxed, THX-approved,

16 x 9-enhanced transfer; Dolby Digital 5.1 audio; trailers, etc.), along with many of the extras that were found on the 1992 laserdisc box set (mostly production art and deleted scenes, including the legendary Dallas "cocoon" bit, now with commentary). The new transfer blows all the old ones away, with almost no grain and magnificent sharpness, plus the effective and loud soundtrack (your speakers will rumble!). But the real treasures are the audio extras. Jerry Goldsmith's score is presented on an isolated track and is worth experiencing on its own. Fox has also included an early temp track, with alternate music, sound FX and dialogue, and it's fascinating—not only as part of *Alien's* history, but for anyone interested in a film's soundtrack evolution from production to early post to final product.

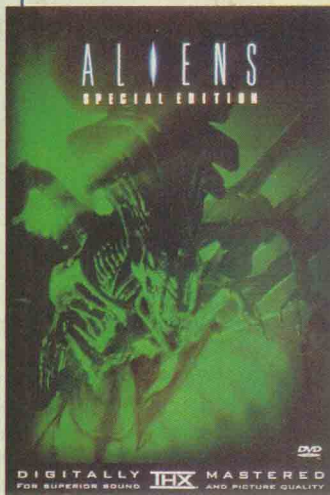
The time and care that Fox spent on *Alien* would be enough, but they've also gone out of their way to present an *Alien* fan's dream: VHS and DVD boxed sets of all four letterboxed movies, plus a documentary on the making of the first film. (The documentary is offered in the VHS box, but DVD owners must send a mailer away for it. However, some retailers received box sets without coupons; they may be obtained by calling 1-888-223-4FOX.)

This collection's other highlight is the rerelease of the complete director's cut of **ALIENS**, previously available only on the much sought-after 1991 laserdisc box. Again, Fox has improved the picture and audio (as they have with all four films), and although the graininess of the laser trans-

fer hasn't been 100 percent rectified, it's still a much nicer, sharper (and darker) picture than before. **ALIEN³** finally gets the quality transfer (and may hopefully win the respect) it deserves, although it and **ALIEN RESURRECTION** get short shrift in terms of supplements (merely production featurettes and trailers for each). Some may be resistant to purchasing the entire boxed set for lack of interest in one (or more) of the films (I wasn't all that enthused about owning a copy of *Resurrec-*

colors and contrast, and the Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack does much for the reorchestrated Bernard Herrmann score and director Gus Van Sant's use of sound FX. The extras, bridged by nifty animated menus, include a letterboxed trailer that's more interestingly experimental than the film itself and, most significantly, a half-hour documentary and audio commentary from Van Sant and stars Vince Vaughn and Anne Heche.

The docu packs a lot into 30 minutes, ranging from an early Van Sant short that parodies the shower murder to behind-the-scenes footage of his recreation of that famous setpiece. There are also comparisons of new and old takes on numerous scenes and (my favorite moment) a peek at actor James LeGros lip-synching the lines of his 1960 predecessor. The commentary is more philosophical than anecdotal, but it becomes more enthusiastic as it goes along, with the director and actors practically getting into fights over the comparative motivations of the characters in each version. Both Vaughn and Heche deconstruct the process of playing their roles, and the latter makes a convincing argument that Van Sant's approach is stronger



tion myself), so they are available separately. But even the most casual of *Alien* fans shouldn't pass up the opportunity to spend some more time with one of the most terrifying movie monsters ever and the people who brought it to life.

—M.K.

To be sure, the remake of **PSYCHO** was a lousy idea and a worse film, but those curious about the whys and hows will find much of interest in MCA/Universal's DVD Collector's Edition. To start with, this release is quite impressive on a technical level; the 1.85:1 transfer boasts strong

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

ALIEN



DVD

DIGITALLY THX MASTERED FOR SUPERIOR SOUND AND PICTURE QUALITY

F#186

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