

Stan Winston

# STAN WINSTON:

## Maker of "ALIENS"

### Part Two

*After creating Tobe Hooper's "Invaders from Mars," the noted FX artist unleashes an army of galactic grotesqueries in the smash "ALIEN" sequel!*

**F**or creature FX pro Stan Winston, putting *ALIENS* on screen didn't prove to be the easiest of tasks.

First, there was his respect for the movie's 1979 predecessor, *ALIEN*. "The original was a brilliant film—everything about it was memorable," Winston observes. "For me, it was the horror film of the decade. I'm a big fan, and I have a great deal of respect for all the work that went into it, so it makes it that much more difficult for us."

Second, there was the sheer amount of work involved in showing a number of aliens at different stages of their life cycle—a quantum leap beyond the first film's single evolving biomechanoid creature. "It's the largest effects film I've ever been involved with," reveals Winston. "I can't think of any one, historically, that has its scope, with a completely articulated moving, screaming, killing 14-foot monster and dozens of little screaming, killing monsters—and numerous humans that are killed by these screaming creatures!"

Winston (who discussed his earlier career last issue and in *Fango* #14) had previously worked with *ALIENS* director James Cameron and producer Gale Anne Hurd when he made the robot version of *Terminator*. The Cameron-Hurd team later hired him for their spacey sequel. Once in production, a major part of Winston's *ALIENS* job was the construction of a new creature, the Alien Queen.

"She's Jim Cameron's concept, idea and design," Winston acknowledges. "Jim wanted to put two men inside the body to accomplish the four-limbed look, extend the body from a crane arm to hold it up, and puppet the legs exter-

nally. Two of the men's arms produced the Queen's small arms and the others, the long arms. The large arms were created by one arm extended and holding onto something like a ski pole; the short arms are similar, operated by the other arm.

"There were two operators lying almost back-to-back inside the Queen; her head was hydraulically and cable controlled. The major part of the head and neck movement was hydraulics; the face and lip and jaw movement used cables—because not only does her head move, but the face area of her head has its own independent jaw and lip movement, and a larger version of the extending tongue.

"We puppeted her legs externally," he continues, "the tail was partially mechanical at the base, which was hydraulically controlled and also wires. We also used another insert mechanical tail and insert arms for close-up work. They were completely cable-operated to do all the finger manipulations necessary."

Winston's crew utilized one Queen body predominantly throughout filming, though an additional body for rear angles (with a different closing mechanism for the operators inside) was also used. The process of creating the Queen was closely supervised by director Cameron in pre-production. After Cameron and Winston agreed on a final design for the fearsome Queen, seven sculptors went to work on a miniature. The molds were handed over to Doug (Videodrome) Beswick (*Fango* #26) who built the miniature's mechanics. The miniature served as a model for the full-size Queen which Winston's FX shop constructed once the production settled in London.

As indicated, the Queen was built in just two scales: full-size, and also at quarter scale for miniature photography. "The quarter scale one that Beswick did is cable operated, and also has complete movement," Winston notes. "And a rod-actuated puppet for other miniature work was built."

A major shock effect involving the giant Queen was the mutilation of the android Bishop, portrayed by Lance Henriksen (*Fango* #54). "We accomplished that with a flexible tip of a tail coming up through a tube; it was literally pulled out of his body," explains Winston. "The front of Lance's body was built out slightly with a false front to allow the flexible tail to appear to be coming straight out of his chest, although, in fact, it made a curve.

"The Queen's tail was attached to the back of his body, and then a rigid duplicate of the tail was attached to his front—the way the old arrow-through-the-head gag works. The harness for that particular shot was built by John Richardson's effects team, who handled all the floor effects. Lance was standing on a teeter which made it look as if the tail was lifting him up in the air.

"And we built a complete duplicate dummy of Lance, which Richardson rigged to break apart at the center and to close back up. The Queen's hands were attached to that dummy. Then, off-camera, two wires were also attached to the dummy; when they were pulled, it looked like the Queen literally pulled the body in half. When she threw it aside, we cut into a close-up of Lance, with a phony upper body attached to his chest, and him under the floor."

With the exception of the Queen,



It's chestbuster time again on the planet Acheron.

*ALIENS*' other creatures are based on the popular Ridley Scott film's monsters, including the memorable facehugger, chestbuster and adult Alien originally designed by Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger. "We tried to be as true to the original film as we could, without disallowing ourselves a little bit of artistic freedom to do things that we considered—if not improvements—something to keep our heads above water so we were not just doing what was done before," Winston adds confidently.

The alien warriors comprised the only instance where Winston wished the design could have been changed for the sequel. "The first film's weakness was that they had this wonderful monster that you hardly saw throughout the entire film. And when it's finally blown out of the hatch, you get a man in a suit which, for me personally, was a letdown. Therefore, we were strapped to the Alien's original design—literally, a man in a suit.

"So, for the scenes with our men-in-suits aliens, we wanted them to move in a way that a man in a suit *couldn't* move. We used various

Sigourney Weaver fends off a facehugger attack in *ALIENS*.







Bishop does not receive a royal reception in the court of the Queen Alien. Stan Winston and John Richardson accomplished the "bisecting" of actor Lance Henriksen.



The fearsome Queen—built by Winston and crew—readies for war.

tricks: wire harnesses enabled them to jump from wall to wall, plus undercranking the camera made them move a little bit quicker and more insect-like.

"We created approximately 15 Spandex suits, plus almost 10 articulated puppets that are larger than the suits. They stand almost eight feet tall. We put the puppets into different positions that a human can't get into to help get the Alien effect across. They were manipulated externally, either by strings, rods, or radio controls for head-jaw movement. We also have an insert puppet and insert arms. We even redesigned the hands and fingers so that they're longer than the original."

Ripley and Newt's Med-lab confrontation with the facehugger pro-

vides another example of the laboriousness and complexity involved in creating otherworldly life forms. Approximately 15 facehuggers were fabricated to make it look like one living creature.

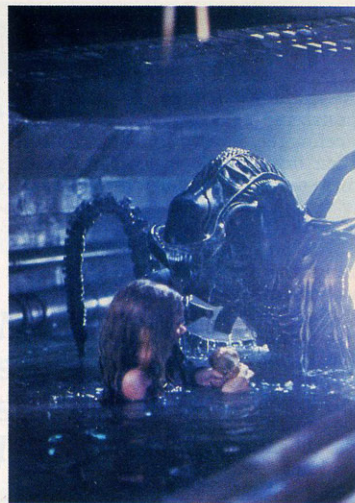
"The one that scurries across the floor," explains Winston, "is basically a rather sophisticated pull toy that could be moved in any direction across the floor. It literally glided through the air on a very fine wire, and the faster the facehugger was pulled, the faster the legs moved.

"Another facehugger, which had completely articulated fingers and an articulated tail, whips from all sides, and curls up. Each finger was double jointed which allowed them to reach out and grab, and thus became much more organic looking. A tubular extension comes out of the facehugger's body—another version of the creature—to implant the eggs into the human being.

"We also developed facehuggers for leaping off the walls—they're holding onto the wall, then they spring off at you—which had articulated legs that were also magnetized to hold onto whatever

**"We tried to be as true to the original film as we could, without disallowing ourselves a little bit of artistic freedom."**

they're gripping until they're pulled free, and then they spring into a position that looks as though they're leaping. As used in a scene that cuts in a few seconds," Winston concludes, "all of these facehuggers end



*Psycho* had its shower scene but in *ALIENS*, not even the baths are safe. And the saunas are savage!

up looking like one *very* active little facehugger."

The most parasitical stage of the Alien's development is Ripley's recurring nightmare. "The chestbuster that we developed is based on the original," Winston acknowledges, "the changes were so subtle that they appear basically unrecognizable—we added tiny working arms. Although it's the same basic effect, it's more dramatic because we did more with it. We didn't just give people another chestbuster, we gave them one that comes out and is quite alive—it's animated in a way that the first one was not."

The chestbuster scene in the first *ALIEN* was one of its most unforgettable and shocking moments. Winston observes that trying to match the work of the first film's creature designers created a keen sense of competition. "To say otherwise would be a fib," he admits. "There's *always* a bit of competition—not just with people who have done something before you—there's always a bit of good rivalry within your own crew; one person working on one facehugger, another person on another. Whose is going to work best? That's human nature."

Describing *ALIENS* as Winston's toughest project comes as a bit of an understatement, especially since he wasn't only involved with supervising the creature FX. "I also directed the second unit," he reveals, "which was a very demanding and trying experience because of the amount that we were trying to shoot and the time limitations. Every shot seemed to be an enormous setup because most in-





The android race suffers further abuse in *ALIENS* as the Queen roughs up Bishop. There oughta be a law!

involved effects or stunts. And when you're working as second unit director for Jim Cameron, you're hopefully directing the shot *exactly* as he wants to see it. It was very rewarding and I'm very happy for the experience, but it's a drain to be directing *and* in charge of such an enormous effects unit."

The Queen Alien holds court in her chamber, newly-laid eggs all around her. as she continuously gives birth to a nation of nasty critters.

The intensity of Winston's involvement in *ALIENS* is proof of the strength of his two-film working relationship with director Cameron. "There is a great deal of mutual respect between Jim and myself," the creature designer relates. "In many ways, we think alike."

Winston also finds considerable praise for his *ALIENS* crew, crediting them for much of the movie's success. "I'm fortunate enough to have surrounded myself with the finest artists and technicians in the world, headed by my key U.S. crew, Shane Mahan, John Rosengrant, Tom Woodruff, Richard Landon, Alec Gillis and Rick Lazzarini. Then, I

**"The first film's weakness was that they had this wonderful monster that you hardly saw."**

must add some wonderful British artists and technicians to the list: Ray Lovell, Steve Norrington, Graham High, Ian Rolph. I had an enormous crew, and from that aspect, I've been very lucky."

Though most makeup artist usually describe their latest film jobs as "their hardest work ever," when Winston puts that label on *ALIENS*, it's tough disbelieving him.

"Without a doubt," Stan Winston observes of his space scream adventure, "*ALIENS* was the most difficult film I've ever been involved with, and hopefully, the most difficult I'll ever be involved with. Fortunately, it shows on screen. I hope audiences are as excited with *ALIENS* as I am proud of it."



The Queen tries to end Ripley's lucky streak. Two of Winston's FX assistants operated the space beast from the inside.

