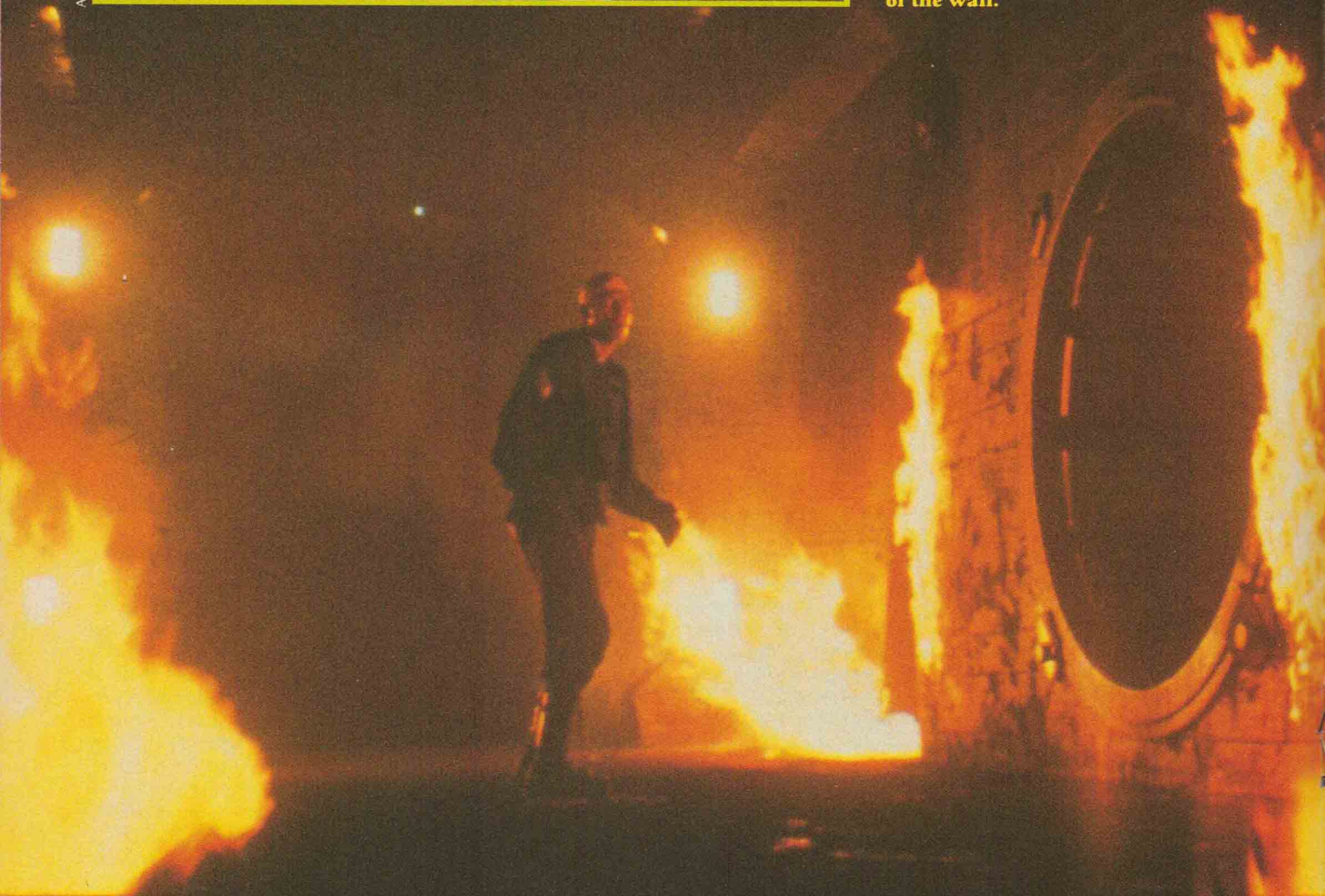




**T**he plot is as old as horror itself: A lone female is chased through a haunted house, an unspeakable evil just behind her. Not even God hears the woman's prayers, leaving the heroine with only her wits against pure evil.

No film made better use of this scenario than 1979's *Alien*, revamping the mansion into the industrialized confines of a futuristic spaceship, its sexy protagonist now liberated with guts and a flame gun. This claustrophobic setting was expanded for the even more popular *Aliens*, which multiplied the creatures into explosive horror-action. But now *Alien<sup>3</sup>* has returned to the original's Gothic atmosphere with a vengeance, making it perfect for the nihilistic '90s. 20th Century Fox

**That's not Humpty Dumpty on top of the wall.**



# THE MANY MUTATIONS OF



has scheduled this third edition for an apt Memorial Day release, as the \$50-million-plus film probably marks the end of the franchise.

*Alien<sup>3</sup>* begins as a facehugger causes the sleep chamber containing Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and the other survivors to eject from the space cruiser *Sulaco*. It crash-lands onto the toxic prison planet of Fiorine, with Ripley the only survivor; she soon finds herself shaved bald and surrounded by hostile inmates. When a surviving hugger attaches itself to a rottweiler, the most bloodthirsty extraterrestrial yet is hatched to terrorize "Fury 1."

*Alien<sup>3</sup>*'s greatest fight for survival, however, was waged by Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr., the FX engineers who were terrorized by a mutating script, pressured by a perfectionist director and nearly eviscerated when some of their most unusual creations were

tossed out of the studio's airlock. Yet the forces behind Amalgamated Dynamics have emerged triumphant after their fight with the beast, adding their grotesque vision to the revolutionary *Alien* designs of H.R. Giger. Most importantly, Gillis and Woodruff have accomplished their work with little help from mentor Stan Winston, moving out from under his shadow as creature coordinators on *Aliens* to FX supervisors for this sequel.

Woodruff and Gillis first met while under Winston's tutelage, their talents and responsibilities maturing through such creature-heavy projects as *Invaders from Mars*, *The Monster Squad* and *The Terminator*. "Stan delegates a lot of responsibility to his key people, but the effects always remained his," Woodruff comments. "As co-ordinators, Alec and I were always designing 'gags,' like Bishop getting torn in half for *Aliens*. We were

perfectly happy to work under Stan, and the only reason we parted company was that he scaled down operations to concentrate on effects for his own films."

Woodruff would play the *Alien*-inspired *Pumpkinhead* in Winston's moviemaking debut, the bony creature co-piloted by shop members Gillis, John Rosengrant, Shane Mahan and Richard Landon while their boss concentrated on the film's twilight mood and frenzied acting. Woodruff and Gillis' last collaboration with Winston would be *Leviathan's* hastily glimpsed sea monster. "It was good timing for us to leave," Gillis says, "and we parted with Stan's blessings. He'll always be our mentor, and he sometimes recommends us for jobs."

Setting up their FX warehouse in Chatsworth, CA, Gillis and Woodruff received their baptism by sand on *Tremors*. Ron Underwood's



Photo: Virgil Mirano  
FX Photos: Courtesy Amalgamated Dynamics

**The hellish environment of Fiorine just got hotter.**

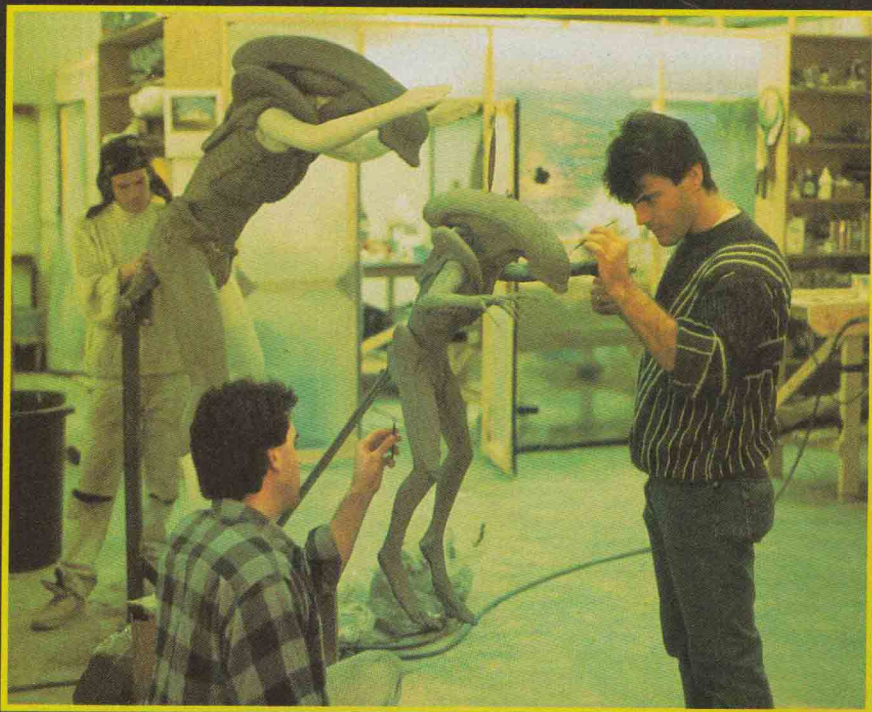
ALIEN<sup>3</sup>

**The creature creations of Tom Woodruff Jr. and Alec Gillis transformed behind the scenes as much as they did on the screen.**

**By  
DANIEL  
SCHWEIGER**

**Part One**





**"The early drafts had the Alien tearing a guy in half, and then dramatically tossing the head at someone's feet."**

**—Alec Gillis, FX creator**

**Alec Gillis (right) and Tom Woodruff Jr. begin sculpting their lithely-designed creatures.**

**Richard Edlund's Boss FX company supplemented Amalgamated's work on the sequel.**

retro-horror comedy would prove to be their most demanding film, with the pair designing giant, carnivorous earthworms in both full-scale and miniature editions. The film became a hit among genre fans and established Woodruff and Gillis as FX newcomers who could do the job right.

While work on *Tales from the Crypt* and *The Grifters* quickly followed, Winston's commitments would land Woodruff and Gillis their biggest assignment. With his fabrications for *Terminator 2* and *Predator 2* making him unable to take on *Alien<sup>3</sup>*, Winston and producer Gale Anne Hurd helped to get Gillis and Woodruff on the show. Now they were solely responsible for the Alien FX, even though the film's game of musical scripters hadn't finalized the Alien's abilities. "I've been in this business for 12 years, while Tom's been in it for 10," Gillis says. "*Alien<sup>3</sup>* isn't a new thing for us, but it's still exciting to be working on this kind of high-

profile movie. You go into it with enthusiasm instead of fear.

"It would have been an obvious approach to turn *Alien<sup>3</sup>* into a gigantic action picture," Gillis continues. "One script used a 'king' Alien, while another had radio-controlled power loaders fighting an army of Queens. But there were practical considerations against making a \$150-million movie, because the story's hook is dangling the threat of the Aliens getting to Earth. The sequel ideas were like the difference between *Psycho* and *Zulu!* *Alien<sup>3</sup>* finally went with a script that got back to the original's mood and suspense. It's harsh, brutal and dark, very daring for a big-money sequel."

Winston had been responsible for juggling the FX budget on *Aliens*, and now Woodruff and Gillis had to prove they could save money for Fox as the studio changed directors (from Vincent Ward to David Fincher) and writers. Once again basing their creature

shop in England, Woodruff and Gillis began making Alien victims in July 1990. However, they still had no idea about the monster's appearance until the end of November, and this confusion prolonged their six-month stay on *Alien<sup>3</sup>* to 40 weeks.

"We pride ourselves on being flexible enough to look at a film artistically, but also to see it from a business point of view, and know that there are certain limitations," Woodruff remarks. "The production shifted into neutral because of the rewrites, and we decided to stay in England instead of shipping everyone home for a month or two. Since every day was eating up money, we kept building corpses, which aren't the main thrust of effects work. A lot of people would say, 'To hell with this situation! Send me home and call me up later!' But you can't do that when you're working in this industry. Though Fox would tell us the Alien had to do certain things, it's odd to

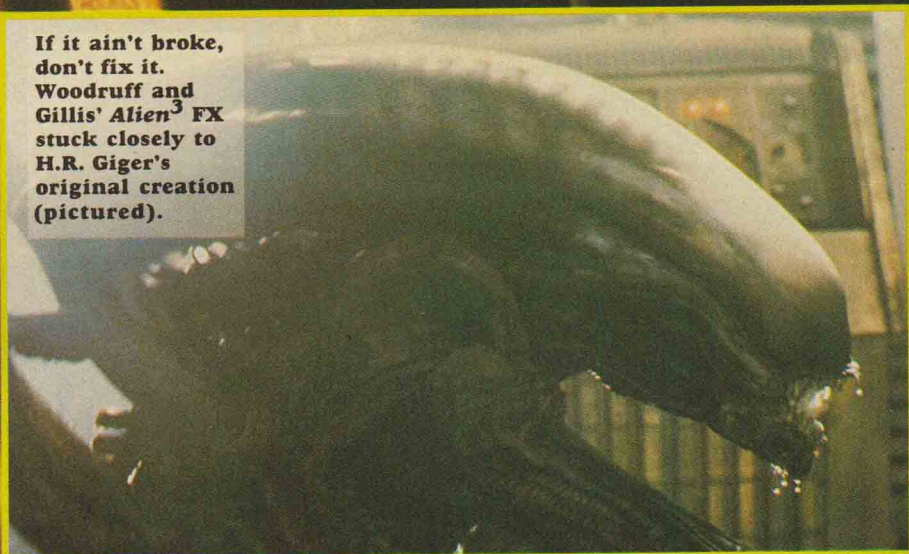
Photo: Virgil Mirano





Dental hygiene is a necessity at the FX shop.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Woodruff and Gillis' *Alien<sup>3</sup>* FX stuck closely to H.R. Giger's original creation (pictured).



think we spent all that time to build a creature. There isn't 10 months of work in that *Alien*."

Body construction would allow Woodruff and Gillis more time to flesh out their Alien designs. While the creatures' insectoid appearances had become as instantly recognizable as Jason's hockey mask, the FX men were still determined to add their imaginations to Giger's chrome-plated jaws. "You're working with set parameters on a sequel, so there isn't a whole lot of flexing your design muscles," Woodruff confides. "But ever since *Alien* came out, people have misinterpreted the 'biomechanical' style. They think it's a monster with tubes and cardboard stuck all over it. That's only a construction technique that Giger used when he sculpted for the first movie. We even had one of his original creatures for reference on *Aliens*, and it literally had plastic parts that you could read the catalog numbers off of! We wanted the monsters in

*Alien<sup>3</sup>* to look like they were growing into a mechanical being."

"Even *Alien* wasn't completely true to Giger's vision," Gillis says. "I don't mean to be pompous, but his own suit wasn't accurate to his paintings. Our goal was to sculpt Giger's designs into repeating organic textures, almost like deer antlers. We also put more color into the Alien, which was originally just black and sepia. Since the effects of *Alien<sup>3</sup>* wouldn't have the spectacle of the last film, we wanted to make this creature into a believable organism."

"This is still Giger's Alien, and we've done very little to change it," Woodruff insists. "In fact, we were breaking out his *Necronomicon* at the finishing stages, since this monster would be scrutinized more than ever. *Aliens*' theatrical lighting turned them into moving textures. This beast is animalistic instead of insectlike, since it's gestated inside a rottweiler. The Alien's picked up the dog's instincts, and can run

around on all fours."

During the even more tortured birth of *Alien<sup>3</sup>*'s plot, the face-hugger was originally seen latching onto an ox, its chestbuster hatching in a meat locker. Realizing that audiences might expect an Alien with udders, this concept was quickly scrapped. "Fox never had a problem with coming back and saying, 'Sorry, guys. We know you've built these things, but there's a new direction, and we're not going to use them,'" Gillis sighs. "We had to keep ourselves and the crew morally afloat, because people put their blood, sweat and tears into the stuff, and have a tendency to get upset when an effect's cancelled. There were six stages of *Aliens*, count 'em! But we're not griping about the script changes, because any story should constantly be honed. That only shows us the film's getting better, and if the effect doesn't serve the plot, then there's no reason for it."

The most conceptually interest-





and worked backwards, accentuating the head while making the arms and legs smaller."

As Ripley engages in a fight to the finish with the mature beast and the one wrapped around her innards, Gillis and Woodruff devoted most of their attention to the Alien's skin instead of its jaw-popping trickery. "There's nothing novel about our construction," Gillis admits. "This is a rubber-suit kind of thing, but we have gadgets that make it better than what the average Joe is doing. There's a mechanical head, tail and movable thumbs, but the strength of our Alien is always in its appearance."

The "adolescent" Alien makes its terrifying entrance to spit acid from a ventilation shaft. This quickly-glimpsed puppet was one of *Alien*'s nods to its forebear, equipped with a translucent dome and double jaws. Cables would pull back its fangs, while a plastic tube spewed the flesh-dissolving puke.

When it came time for the Alien to suit up, Gillis was insistent that Woodruff should play the monster instead of a taller actor. "This is a believable creature instead of a stylized nightmare, which made it important for Tom to play the monster," Gillis explains. "The actor in *Alien* had great proportions, but you never had the feeling that he was a performer. That monster's success was due to the fast cuts and obtuse angles that Ridley Scott used, while the warriors in *Aliens* were all stuntmen. But after playing every creature from Pumpkinhead to the Gill Man, Tom had more experience in suits than just about anyone. He knows exactly what his body's doing in a rubber costume, and can go for 14 hours without having to go to the bathroom. I've never met anyone who could do that!"

Though *Alien* generates its terror from the beast's vicious and unexpected attacks, Gillis and Woodruff needed to provide the monster with its "Method." "We wanted to avoid giving the Alien human traits, because this is a life form that's just doing its job of killing and procreating," Gillis explains. "The fact that the Alien terrifies the shit out of people is a byproduct of its actions. In nature, all behavior is controlled by intelligence or instinct. But this creature's instincts are pumped to such a high level, they become their own kind of intelligence."

"Some of the early drafts had the Alien tearing a guy in half, and then dramatically tossing the head at someone's feet. But that's pure

(continued on page 68)



**Dave Anderson assists Woodruff, who eventually donned the completed suit, on a clay sculpture.**

**In the shot seen 'round the world, the Alien whispers sweet nothings in Ripley's ear.**

ing stage is the "bambi-burster," a puppylike creature that jumps out of the rottweiler's chest and scampers across the floor. "David Fincher thought it would be more sleek if the monster came out of a dog, and the rottweiler is a pretty brutal animal to start with," Woodruff reveals. "David needed something that could walk and be photographed from every angle, which made him think about putting a dog in a suit to supplement a cable-controlled puppet. That seemed like a pretty dumb notion at first, but the more we thought about it, the better his idea sounded."

Since this weird chestbuster needed to be done with appliance makeup, Woodruff ended up going from a greyhound to a whippet for the thinnest canine possible. Using a life sculpture, the technicians constructed a creation of spandex and foam pieces, including a head that was covered with slime and blood, all to make the animal

resemble their mechanical effect. "The whippet looked great, but it wouldn't perform on the set," Woodruff says. "We couldn't even get it to trot down the hall, which was all it had to do! So I ended up sliding the dog into the shot."

Gillis and Woodruff's most novel contribution to the Alien evolutionary chain is a shocking discovery made by a prison doctor while doing a scan of Ripley's body: a chestbuster embryo. This puppet was placed inside an anatomically-correct Ripley mockup, with four cutaway sections to be shot with motion control passes. "The images were then transferred to video, so the effect would be like looking through Sigourney Weaver's body," Woodruff explains. "We even had her heart pumping at one stage. The embryo was made out of translucent urethane, and lit from behind. That gave it a glow that revealed the creature's nervous system, including its beating heart. We took the chestbuster's design



## ALIEN<sup>3</sup> FX

(continued from page 40)

bravado. Now the Alien walks right up to Ripley after murdering a person in front of her. It's deciding whether to kill her or not, but scurries off upon realizing that Ripley's carrying the embryo. If you watched that scene from the human point of view, you'd say the Alien's just killed Ripley's lover, and is sticking out its jaws like a kind of laugh. But that's the character we put into the Alien, getting across the fear of a wild animal."

"The Alien had to be threatening in every encounter with Ripley, yet pull back at the last minute," Woodruff adds. "You have to thrill people by making them think she's in danger, and that's difficult to get across when I'm wearing a fiberglass head! The infirmary scene, when the Alien's tongue caresses her cheek, gives us the best clue about their relationship."

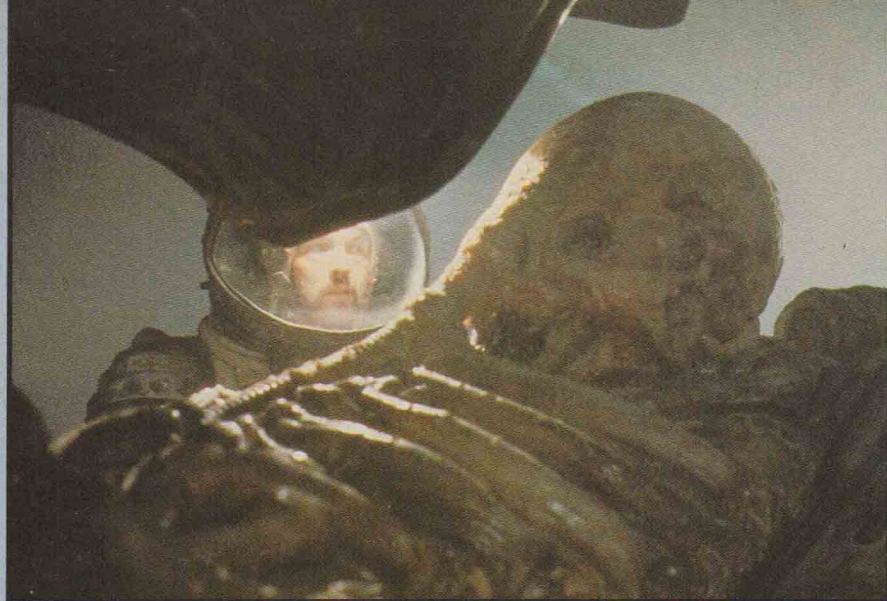
With Fincher's career built on MTV and Madonna, Gillis and Woodruff were apprehensive about whether this 27-year-old wunderkind would obscure their work with his visual fetishes. "When we asked who he was, some people said, 'It's David Fincher, king of the pop videos!' So we thought, 'Oh no! Another flash-and-trash kid!'" Gillis remarks. "But the more we worked with him, it became apparent that David's extravagance only showed that he wanted the highest-quality work. Since we like to push our effects to the max when everyone else is telling us to make things simpler, it was great to have someone who would push us!"

The movie that Fincher wanted would be uncompromisingly bleak, a rude shock to audiences who were used to seeing Ripley blow away any Alien threat. With the savage script virtually being written as the film was made, Fincher's attention to every minute detail and his slap at happy-ending horror would unleash a storm of negative publicity. Yet Gillis and Woodruff would stick by their auteur, even manufacturing an Alien suit for him to wear on set. "David was very demanding, because he knew the audience would be cheated if our effects were cut too much. He needed to see the Alien's actions occur in real time, without using stuff like reverse photography or undercranking. David wanted *Alien<sup>3</sup>*'s reality to exist beyond the film, and that would be our toughest challenge."

TO BE CONTINUED







Tom Skerritt's discovery of a derelict spaceship introduced the world to H.R. Giger's most memorable creation.

More than just shocking FX sagas, the first two films of this trilogy shed light on some of our darkest fears.

# THE ALIEN CHRONICLES

By DOUGLAS E. WINTER

Outside, in the light of day, the '70s were ending with a whimper; but in the darkness of our movie theaters, there was nothing but a scream. The films of a new and peculiarly American horror—notably Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*, John Carpenter's *Halloween*, George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* and Sean Cunningham's *Friday the 13th*—unleashed an awesome violence upon family and fellowship. They turned the silver screen into a savage mirror of a society under siege: America in the aftermath of Watergate and Vietnam, Love Canal and Three Mile Island, recession and energy crisis and racial strife—an America whose citizens were held hostage in foreign lands and their own neighborhoods. The most popular, if not the best, of these films was Ridley Scott's 1979 shocker *Alien*.

Scripted by Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett (with rewrites by producers David Giler and Walter Hill), *Alien* tuned the safe and scienceless fiction of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* two years earlier into the nation's urgent need for fear. From its opening title sequence—a view of



Yaphet Kotto seems remarkably calm in the face (?) of his *Alien* adversary.





**The android Ash clearly never heard of Asimov's three laws of robotics.**

deep space slowly pierced by a monolithic "I" to the white-lit womb in which its sleeping crew waits, *Alien* crosses from the hopeful finale of 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968) into a future that is terror incarnate. The result was a bona fide summer sensation whose stylish surface overwhelms its meager substance.

Seven crewmen and a cat inhabit the *Nostromo*, an impossible spaceship that is in fact a Gothic ruin—a haunted castle complete with shadowed corridors and secret passages, dripping water and rattling chains. The ship's name, taken from Joseph Conrad's sprawling novel of political corruption and revolution in South America, tips the moviemakers' hand. Conrad's *Nostromo*, like *Heart of Darkness*, is a stunning indictment of colonialism, its heroes cut off from civilization, lost in a nightworld of greed and exploitation—a world where ideals fall victim to material desires and nature is relentlessly violent. Its most vital passage could well describe the outer space of *Alien*: "No intelligence could penetrate the darkness of the Placid Gulf." Space, we quickly learn, is not the great frontier, but a third world

country to be stripped and enslaved. The spaceship *Nostromo* is a mining vessel, and both its crew and the shadowy Company that owns it have no apparent god but the almighty dollar.

The crew is extraordinarily ordinary, an ensemble of non-stars and character actors, including Tom Skerritt, Harry Dean Stanton and, of course, Sigourney Weaver, who made her film debut as Warrant Officer Ripley. Fore-shadowed in the O'Bannon-scripted *Dark Star* (1974), they are not the heroic rocket jockeys of '50s space opera but a mundane, blue-collar complement whose concerns are mostly grumbling, food and getting paid. These are the men and women who built the Pinto, and Scott strongly underscores their incompetence as if to suggest that they might well deserve to die.

When the master computer, MU/TH/UR 6000 (known, inevitably, as "Mother"), detects a distress signal on unexplored planet LV-426, the *Nostromo's* rescue mission unveils the wreckage of an alien spacecraft. At its helm is a remarkable corpse—"Bones bent outward, like it exploded from the inside"—and in its cavernous belly lies a payload of monstrous eggs. The inquisitive second officer (John Hurt, suitably named Kane) opens one of them, a literal jack-in-the-box that impregnates him with an alien lifeform, which soon explodes outward into our world.

This story is by no means original; its precursors include two classics of science fiction, A.E. Van Vogt's novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (1939) and John W. Campbell's short story "Who Goes There?" (1938), which inspired the



first of *Alien's* film precedents, *The Thing from Another World* (1951). The similarity of *Alien* to Edward L. Cahn's *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) was so striking that litigation resulted (the case was settled out of court); debts are also owed to Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* (1965) and Curtis Harrington's *Queen of Blood* (1966).

The obvious difference is the intensity of *Alien's* imagery; no major studio production since *The*







She's a  
killer...Queeeen!  
Not to mention  
one of the most  
memorable  
monsters in  
recent film  
history.



**And you thought the worm at the  
bottom of a tequila bottle was bad...**

*Exorcist* had been as wet or wild. But its singular achievement was the Alien itself: Hollywood had at last transcended the thing in the rubber suit. Sigourney Weaver notwithstanding, the true stars of *Alien* are its visual FX artists and designers—especially H.R. Giger and Carlo Rambaldi—who engineered a creature that was convincingly alive, and won the 1979 Oscar for Visual Effects.

The Alien is a walking compendium of white middle-class phobias—insect and reptile, parasite and contaminant, darkman and phallus—and worst of all, it subverts that dearest of American institutions: motherhood. It is no imaginary evil, but a terror that has burst from the midsection of our society—the suburban nightmare come true, the dark-skinned, intensely masculine intruder who has but one thought in mind: our destruction. The white men are the first to die, and the women the last, saved for a fate worse than death—underscored as the Alien's tail coils around and under the navigator Lambert (Veronica Cartwright) before the camera cuts away to the sound of her prolonged screams. The *Alien* soundtrack may as well have been Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet*—indeed, we learn that the monster is a would-be slave that the Company is

determined to bring back at all costs. And as with Romero's zombies, forget the green cards; there is no hope of integration, just a simple truth: Die, motherf\*\*ker.

The humans are helpless—not simply ineffective, but utterly incapable of responding to the Alien threat. There is no semblance of control: A broken chain of



**The humans are  
helpless—not simply  
ineffective, but  
utterly incapable of  
responding to the  
Alien threat.**



command allows the Alien onboard, and when danger erupts, the soft-spoken Jimmy Carter of a captain, Dallas (Skerritt), devises a plan that leads straight to his death. Without him, the crew responds in panic, embracing the impulse to be divided and conquered that is endemic in contemporary American horror. One by one, they walk right into the Alien's waiting arms.

Their one supposed advantage—technology—cannot save them. It

is no simple irony that the *Nostromo*'s science officer (Ian Holm) should prove to be a defective robot. The *Nostromo* may be capable of flight across galaxies, but nothing on board seems to work: it cannot even light its interiors. Science has not failed the crew; it has rendered them irrelevant, expendable.

When, in the film's closing moments, Ripley cries out to MU/TH/UR to halt the detonation sequence, the computer simply counts on; for science, like the Alien, is a creature "unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality." With words that have become the battlecry of the series, Ripley shouts: "You bitch!" It is a rebellion against the new mother, technology—the false promises of the television screen, the microchip, the nuclear age...and above all, technology's favorite bedtime story, science fiction. This is indeed a cinema of betrayal; Scott, like Joseph Conrad, warns that the pursuit of the material creates a justice founded on expediency; it is inhuman, and it is fatal.

Unfortunately, Scott's direction is uneven, particularly in the laborious opening act; later, when the bodies begin to pile up, scenes of







## ALIEN

(continued from page 44)

With an incompetent in command and no backup, the Marines revert from invaders to besieged in a matter of minutes; and *Aliens* reverts with them, embracing the body count aesthetics of the original as characters begin to fall like dominoes.

As we witness yet again the salient human urge in contemporary horror films—to be divided and conquered—it is all too apparent that these films exploit our growing fear that every social unit has broken down: friendship, the family, the team, the neighborhood, the school, the corporation, the Army, the government...all of them fail. It is left to the individual to pick up the pieces, and Ripley, unlike the better-trained and better-armed soldiers, survives not due to her compassion or humanity, but because of her fierce individuality. She has indeed been alienated, and this aloneness—this essential oneness—is her saving grace.

Cameron elicits captivating performances from his cast, notably Michael Biehn as the tough but sensitive Corporal Hicks, the irrepressible Paxton as the loud-mouthed Hudson, Lance Henriksen as the "good" android Bishop—and, of course, Weaver, who received an Academy Award nomination for a role she had initially declined. But like Scott, Cameron lets Ripley's character elude him in the final act, when, in order to rescue Newt, she Rambos her way into the depths of the colony to confront the sequel's "bitch," the egg-laying Alien Queen.

The showdown between the two finds Ripley flex-dancing in robotic drag for cinema's most cataclysmic catfight. Its climax is arguably the most frightening scene of the two films, as Newt, saved from the Queen, calls Ripley "Mommy"—simultaneously rejecting her natural mother, whose sole offense was to die at the hands of the Aliens, and embracing in her place a killing machine as violent and intense as any monster. This is a peculiar moral—to defeat the enemy we must become the enemy—and a forerunner of the awkward misogyny of the 1991 hits by both Cameron (*Terminator 2*) and Scott (*Thelma & Louise*): the "new" woman as exterminating angel. With the publicity for *Alien<sup>3</sup>* invoking the inevitable punchline—"The bitch is back"—one can only wonder aloud: Which bitch?

