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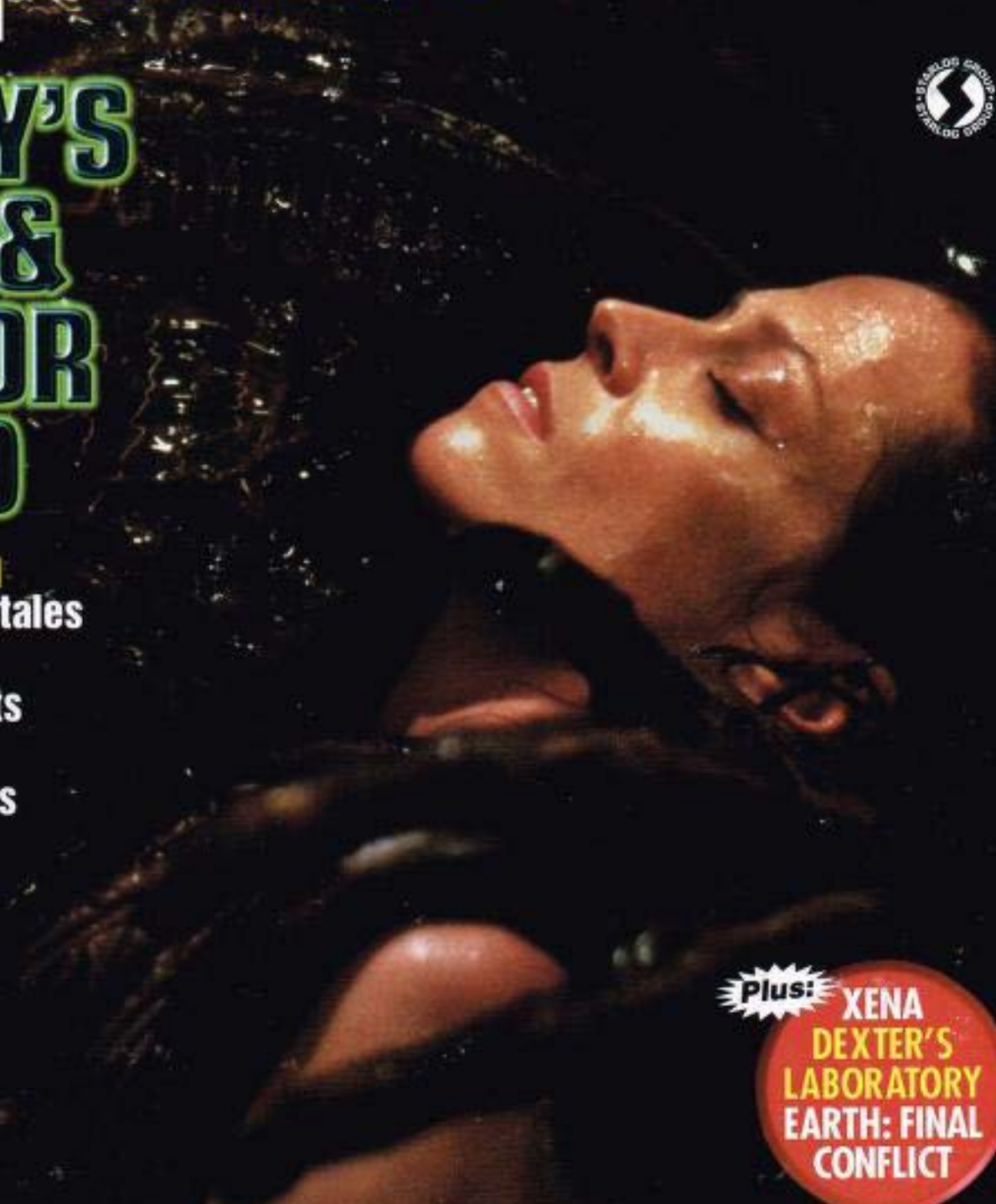


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ALIEN

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They're trying to revive  
far more than Ripley in  
*ALIEN Resurrection.*

By IAN SPELLING



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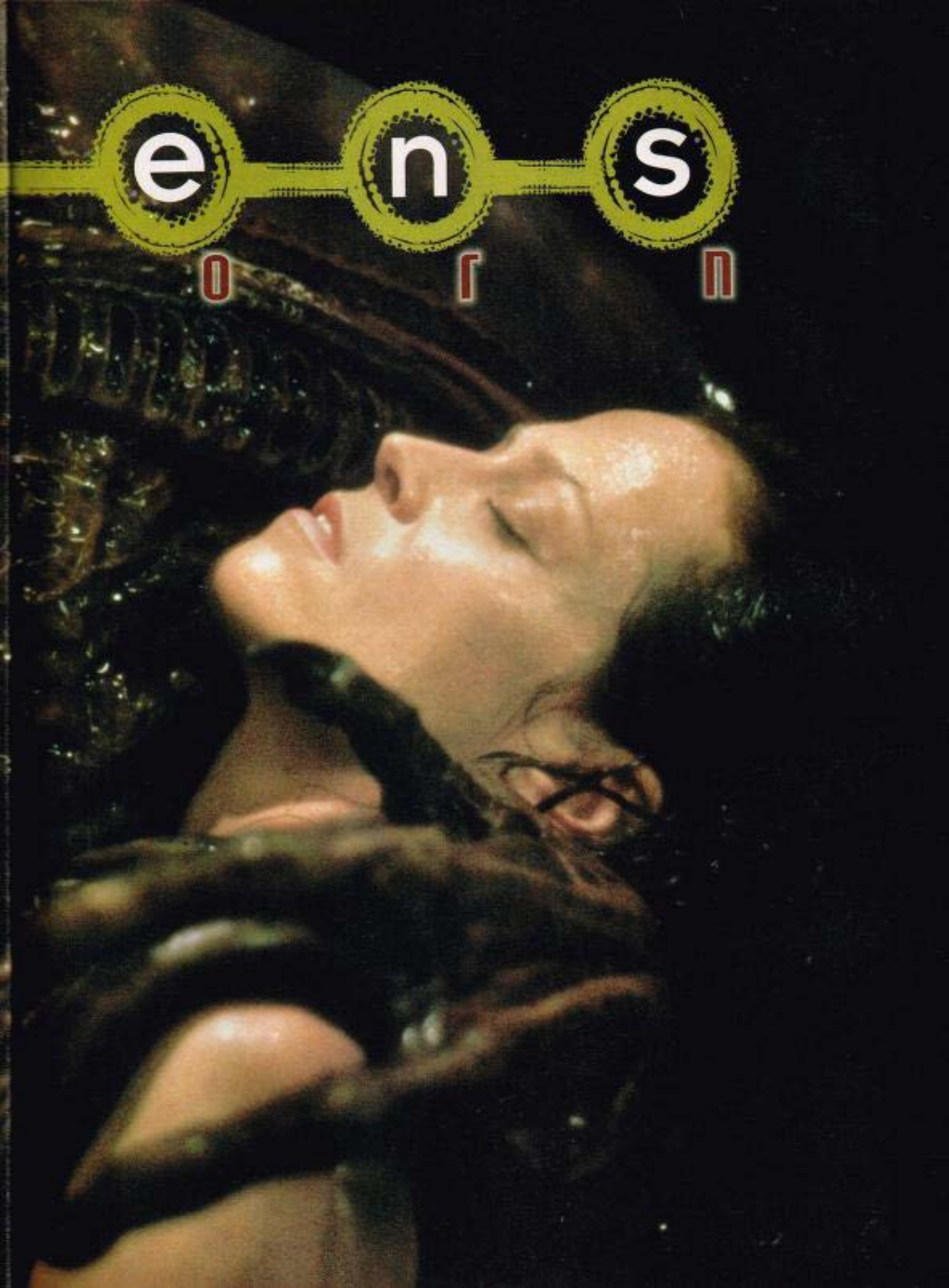
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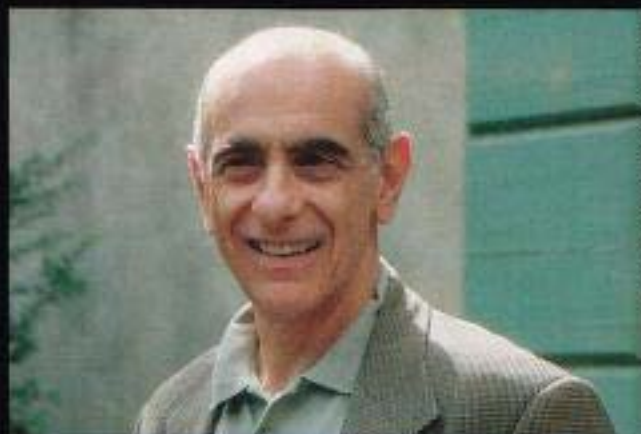






Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) isn't heading off the Company's Alien-breeding project alone. A band of smugglers (including Ron Perlman, Brad Dourif and Winona Ryder) assists.

If at first you succeed, try, try again. That has long been Hollywood's truest truism, and it's being put to the test once more with the release of the fourth chapter in that long-running saga of the perils of Ripley: *ALIEN Resurrection*. Unlike most sequels, which are usually follow-ups to box-office hits, *Resurrection* follows *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*, which fared rather poorly upon its 1992 release (though it performed admirably overseas). Debate rages to this day over whether the film was outright lousy, a missed masterpiece or an all-right flick unjustly maligned. Either way, a flop of questionable quality doesn't exactly inspire excitement for a fourth outing—and then there's the matter of Ripley's demise in *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*.



Badalato Photo: Melinda Sue Gordon

"It's going to be visually compelling and ominous," says producer Bill Badalato. "You're going to see a dark, uncertain side of the *ALIEN* drama."

"The fact is, I think we've invigorated the series and come back really strong," claims Bill Badalato, who produced *ALIEN Resurrection* with *ALIEN* series vets Gordon Carroll, David Giler and Walter Hill. "Joss [*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*] Whedon's script is really strong. He's a really sharp writer. The concept is really strong. Sigourney is really strong. It's not like a sequel. It's a new aspect of the *ALIEN* franchise. It's a different Ripley, which is the brilliant aspect of the screenplay."

### Conflicted Clones

The storyline goes like this: A cloned Ripley must fight the menacing Aliens—which have been foolishly tampered with yet again by the Company—and to do so she must team up with a band of smugglers—among them a mysterious android mechanic named Annalee Call (Winona Ryder)—who crew a ship called the *Betty*. "The timing is perfect," says Badalato. "We're very excited about it. You see the cloning. We resurrect her, and when we do, you see she has some of the old Ripley in her, but also some new Ripley. There is a whole aspect of symbiosis between her and the Alien now, which was *not* part of the *ALIEN* philosophy."

"You're going to see a dark, uncertain side of the *ALIEN* drama. It's going to be visually compelling and ominous, and it's going to have that wonderful combination of SF and horror.



*ALIEN Resurrection* unveils familiar threats (warriors, facehuggers, a Queen) as well as introducing the monstrous Newborn.

Design & Layout: Mike Stewart



In the latest sequel, the resurrected Ripley finds new adventure beside the deadly Annalee Call, a mysterious android smuggler.

Everybody is half-something and half-something else. It's a study of people not being quite all one thing, but a combination of things. So, the ambivalence for Ripley of being torn between the Alien world and the human world is an interesting concept. The symbiotic relationship between Ripley and the Alien is fascinating. It's really a quirkier film than the other *ALIEN* movies. It has dark humor. It's ironic. That's what will separate it. Jean-Pierre really gives it an extra spin here."

Jean-Pierre, of course, is Jean-Pierre Jeunet, the acclaimed French director of the decidedly offbeat *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children*, two of the most inventive movies in recent years.

First, however, there's Sigourney Weaver and Ryder to discuss. When last heard from, Weaver was vowing that *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>* was her swan song—farewell, have a nice death. And what of Ryder, considered the best actress of her generation, a young lady so often seen on screen in some kind of period outfit? What's she doing here? Badalato laughs. "Sigourney created the Ripley role. She's the archetype action-heroine and she's very strong in the piece," the producer says. "She knows the character. I never knew there to be talk of an *ALIEN 4* without Ripley. It was nothing I was privy to. It's not inconceivable that it came up. My life with the picture started after the screenplay had been completed, so I'm not familiar with its early history. Sigourney just forged this role so effectively, and she's so terrific in it, that I

don't think you could separate Ripley from the story.

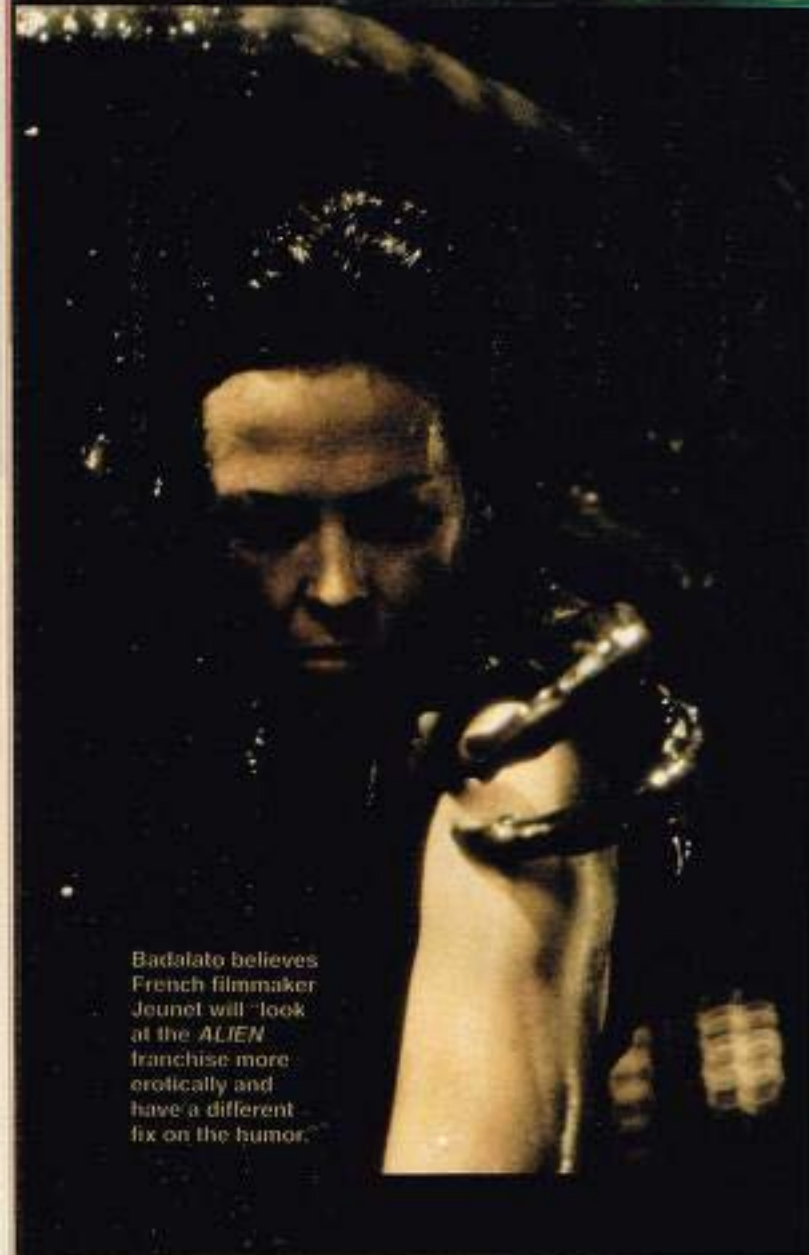
"Winona always had an interest in SF and the role was very appealing to her, as was working with Jean-Pierre. She liked the character. It's not a particularly sentimental character, which I think appealed to her a great deal. The film was attractive to both Sigourney and Winona for slightly different reasons, but all that mattered is that it appealed to them. It was great to have them come together on it."

Though the cast also includes Ron (*Beauty and the Beast*) Perlman, Dominique (*City of Lost Children*) Pinon, Michael (*The Crow*) Wincott and Brad (*Dune*) Douif, after Weaver and Ryder, it's the Aliens that most intrigue everyone. Lots of Aliens fill the *Resurrection* landscape, from the Queen to the standard facehugger to a little something called a Newborn, and they're brought to life via a combination of rod puppets, men in creature suits and CGI. "It's mostly puppets," Badalato says. "There's an underwater sequence for which we created a CGI Alien, a swimming Alien that's really quite amazing. The animatronic Newborn is just fantastic. They're intricate pieces of work with eyes, mouths and expressions. The Aliens are truly characters in the story and not just background. The characters interact with the Aliens in a way we haven't seen before in an *ALIEN* film. It's extremely effective."

Now on to Jeunet, the true wild card in the *Resurrection* deck. While he's a genuinely inspired choice to helm the film, 20th



Ripley and her team swim dark and turbulent waters, thanks to filmmaker Jean-Pierre Jeunet, noted for co-directing *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children*.



Badalato believes French filmmaker Jeunet will "look at the *ALIEN* franchise more erotically and have a different fix on the humor."

Century Fox must be nervous about the prospect of Jeunet lending too personal, too idiosyncratic a touch to the proceedings. After all, for all the well-deserved raves, *Delicatessen* and *City of Lost Children* were not designed to compete in the blood-stained, heads-rolling world of blockbusters. An *ALIEN* film—like any major studio epic—is supposed to make big bucks, drive frenzied devotees into stores to buy movie merchandise and spawn yet another sequel.

"They were really looking for somebody with a *different* sensibility, who could look at the *ALIEN* franchise maybe more erotically and have a different fix on the humor," Badalato explains. "Jean-Pierre's style is so specific. There is no air in his movies. They are very tight. Each frame is perfect and frames flow one into the next. So, he mesmerizes you with his style. It may have taken this third-eye kind of director to do what has been done with *ALIEN Resurrection*."

### Alienated Aliens

Though *Resurrection* may very well turn out to be terrific, the buzz out of Hollywood was that the shoot went poorly, that Jeunet alienated the Americans in his crew, that the language barrier only exacerbated the situation. Rumors even surfaced that Fox wanted to dismiss Jeunet in mid-production and bring in *Trainspotting* director Danny Boyle, who had turned down the job before it went to Jeunet and who was directing another film for the studio, *A Life Less Ordinary*. "Jean-Pierre had *never* filmed in Hollywood before. Although *The City of Lost Children* is a pretty big picture, he had never seen the likes of the physical production possibilities that exist in Hollywood, just the sheer scope of the stages, the amount of equipment, the size of the sets, the manpower," Badalato notes of the *Resurrection* production, which took up four soundstages (including one on which a huge, Olympic-size tank was erected for an underwater chase sequence) and features numerous miniatures and visual FX. "An army of people was brought together to service him. I think, at the beginning, he just found it hard to believe the volume of it all. Then, there was a period of adjustment. He did not speak fluent English, but he understood a great deal. He worked with an interpreter.

"There was also an adjustment because, even though we're all making movies, the approach to making movies is different from country to country. The attitude is different. We all had to figure,



# Ripley Resurrected

"I'm such a pathetic coward about some things," insists Sigourney Weaver. "If I were ever stuck in an elevator, because I'm a little claustrophobic, I know exactly what I would do. I would just pretend I was Ripley until I got out. If it were me, I would just snap. But if I can summon up Ripley in me—and I don't know where she comes from, frankly—I would be OK."

Fortunately for Weaver, she hasn't been stuck in any elevators lately. But even if she had, she would have been ready, since she spent a good part of the last year summoning up her best-known screen alter ego for *ALIEN Resurrection*, the fourth film in the *ALIEN* franchise. When last seen, of course, Ripley was dead, dead, dead. And, so it seemed, was the franchise itself after the somewhat tepid audience and critical response to the David (Seven) Fincher-directed *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*.

In *ALIEN Resurrection*, however, both Ripley and Weaver return to action in a story that involves cloning, the Company, Winona Ryder as an android and, for good measure, some facehuggers and an Alien Queen. Though Weaver knew she would nab a hefty paycheck for her services, it took more than money to convince her to go back to the future. "I thought I had done this noble thing, freeing the series from the burden of Ripley waking once again and saying, 'Blah, blah, blah,'" she explains, laughing. "It was difficult for me to make that decision to have her die, but I felt it would make the movie better. We did not have that many great story elements going for *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*. I thought that if I died, it would help the movie."

"So, with *ALIEN Resurrection*, it was hard to convince me that they were serious about doing it. But they were. In fact, they were very passionate about making not just an *ALIEN 4*, but an *ALIEN* as good as the first one. They kept talking about *ALIEN* and how they wanted to get it back to that idea of spookiness and elegance. Then, they hired this great director, Jean-Pierre [Delicatessen, *The City of*

*Lost Children*] Jeunet, instead of one of these people who could just sort of get the job done. That wasn't easy. We had a schedule, but weren't able to find anyone. The studio had to postpone the film while looking for the right person. So, they convinced me because of their dedication and idealism about the project. Then, of course, the script [by Joss Whedon] was so great, with so many twists for me as Ripley. This Ripley is Ripley, but she's a very different kind of Ripley."

"And there was also the chance to work with Winona. I liked her as soon as I met her. She's very funny and as soon as they say, 'Action!' she's just very alive. When they say, 'Cut!' she's there cracking jokes. There's never anything going on with Winona. She's not competitive or anything like that. She's just very smart, very beautiful and very much herself—very unique. She's an old soul. So, it became impossible to say no. I'm excited about *ALIEN Resurrection*, because I don't think it will be just another installment at all. It's so different."

Weaver, who most recently appeared in the drama *The Ice Storm* and the straight-to-cable production of *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, knows that *ALIEN Resurrection* could be a bit of a tough sell. While SF is about the hottest genre at the moment in Hollywood, *Resurrection* does follow a failed entry in the series and comes during a period in which countless low-rent *ALIEN* video knock-offs and even big-budget descendants such as *Species* have glutted the marketplace. Weaver's take on the situation is short, sweet and simple: "We are competing with ourselves, but I'm not worried about this one," she says confidently. "I think *ALIEN Resurrection* is really, really good."

Though Weaver has high hopes for *Resurrection*, she says that the original *ALIEN*, directed by Ridley Scott, remains her favorite of the bunch. "What I loved about the first one was that there was just one Alien and it was so incredibly smart," she says. "And we've tried with the



*ALIEN* is Sigourney Weaver's favorite, but she says, "*ALIEN Resurrection* is really, really good."

*ALIEN Resurrection* script to get it back to the idea that the Aliens are not just eating machines, which they never were. Why would they want to eat us? They would use us for purposes much more horrible. If you're just afraid of them eating you, then they're like tigers. Not knowing what they would do with you should be part of it. So, I had some things I wanted to be sure were observed in the script and, in many ways, my model was the first film."

The buzz on *ALIEN Resurrection* is that, despite a trouble-plagued production, it's a winner and that, much like Ripley herself, the series has been reborn as something fresh, exciting and different. In other words, there's already talk of a fifth film. "I know Fox is already thinking about it," Sigourney Weaver acknowledges. "I would hope that, if they do want to do one, that we wouldn't have to do it tomorrow. Everybody needs a break from these pictures. I think [doing] another one would depend on how this one is received. But I would consider the idea."

—Jan Spelling

"OK, how's it going to be here? What's it going to be like?" His expectations and the crew's had to be realigned. It wasn't easy to just wake up one morning and discover that you're working with a director whose expectations were a little different from those of the kinds of directors you have worked with in the last 20 years. That was a big part of the beginning. Every scene was so complicated that there wasn't much time for a get-to-know-you. We all had to get to know each other while we were working."

Fair enough, but what of the reported feeling that Jeunet was in over his head? "I don't think Jean-Pierre was in over his head at all," Badalato replies instantly. "It was frustrating to have the kind of responsibility he had and to not be working with a lot of people who knew his style and vice-versa. There was a great frustration in not working with a crew that anticipated his needs the way they did in France, but in the way we work in America. Jean-Pierre was not in over his head. He's a very smart, very clever director. He's an

auteur. There's a bit more of a democratic process in the American filmmaking industry, maybe, than abroad. But it didn't get in the way of the picture at all."

Had *Resurrection* been directed by Danny Boyle, it would have been, no doubt, another film entirely. Badalato comments on just how different the movie might have been like had Boyle called the shots. "The characters would have been different. We're getting a visual style with Jean-Pierre. He focuses very deeply on visual style and he's very plot-oriented," the producer says. "Danny might have been more character-driven in some of the supporting roles. It's hard to tell. Danny's film would have been good, but it would have been a different film."

Throughout every stage of *Resurrection's* production, there were other matters with which to contend. Beyond the very basic questions of overcoming the stigma of *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>* and Ripley's death, the filmmakers needed to deal with the possibility that audiences





"I don't think the emphasis was ever on spectacle, explosions or FX," says Badalato, who claims that drama and story will motivate all the ALIEN action.



Resurrection's highlights include an underwater sequence with Badalato says, a CGI "swimming Alien" that's really quite amazing.

## "ALIEN Resurrection is a very provocative film."

had seen enough SF in recent years, that the market was glutted with an array of genre films, many of them obvious ALIEN knock-offs. "People are looking forward to Ripley coming back. The franchise has a tremendous following and I think we live up to the expectation," Badalato says. "ALIEN Resurrection is a notch better than the last one and it delivers what I think the audience expects. ALIEN<sup>3</sup> had its own sort of problems that maybe didn't result in the best film possible. I think that Fox gave us the full treatment, starting with the best script possible and going with a director who could give it a unique approach. Our preview screenings have been really encouraging. Audiences love it. If you do a good job, you're going to get the audience. Good pictures succeed and bad pictures don't. ALIEN Resurrection is a very provocative film, very dark and interestingly done. And it's very loyal to the concept of ALIEN."

### Maladjusted Monsters

Badalato reports that Fox did not pressure Resurrection's filmmakers to craft their movie with dollar signs in their eyes. The studio, of course, wanted a film that could compete at the box office, but, all by itself, the decision to hire Jeunet indicates that they were genuinely willing to take a risk in an effort to revitalize the ALIEN franchise. "There was pressure not to go crazy with the budget, to make a good film for a decent amount of money and not just shovel money at a movie. I don't think the emphasis was ever going to be on spectacle, explosions or FX for the sake of FX. The idea," Badalato stresses, "was to really try to maintain some integrity with some through-line of a story and let those other things work off the storyline. We didn't want all the CGI effects happening without anything beneath them. Any FX in this movie are driven by plot and character. There was no pressure to make a huge action-ALIEN. I don't think that works. They're almost mutually exclusive."

ALIEN Resurrection now belongs to Badalato's eclectic canon, which includes *Bang the Drum Slowly*, *Nighthawks*, *Benny & Joon*, the *Hot Shots* films, *Unstrung Heroes* and *Broken Arrow*. Currently, he's producing the next Jim (*Airplane!*) Abrahams

spoof, *Jane Austen's MAFIA!* starring Lloyd Bridges as a comedic Godfather. "I like to mix it up and go from a big picture to a small picture," says Badalato, who began his career in economics, but then shifted to an interest in film production. "I went from *Unstrung Heroes* with Diane Keaton to *Broken Arrow* with John Woo. I also like to take on challenging pictures, try to analyze them, figure out how to make them and then work with the director to put the elements together."

In fact, that's precisely how Badalato envisioned his challenge on Resurrection, to assist a French director who had never worked in America and help him pull it off. "We tried to figure out what personnel would make Jean-Pierre's life simpler. It was my idea to bring over the French composers. One of the key visual FX supervisors is Pitof, who works with a company called DuBoi [the Paris-based digital FX house that handled similar chores on *Delicatessen* and *City of Lost Children*]. I realized that Jean-Pierre would only be comfortable if he could work with a team of people he had earlier success with," Badalato reasons. "I talked to the studio and we all agreed that we would set up a visual FX company which would be headed by Pitof and American representative Erik Henry. It was my feeling that I needed to have as many of Jean-Pierre's mates as possible, that I needed to surround him with people who were going to give him a comfort zone."

"So, we brought over Darius Khondji [the cinematographer who worked with Jeunet on *Delicatessen* and *City of Lost Children*]. We brought over a French assistant director and a French editor [Herve Schneid]. This was Jean-Pierre's family, which allowed him to blossom. Also, my job, as I look at it, is to analyze the elements of the movie and schedule things, and make it so that Jean-Pierre could work effectively without having to worry about things he shouldn't have to worry about."

As he speaks, *Alien Resurrection* is heading into theaters. "I think it'll be a big hit," Bill Badalato proclaims. "The movie really works, and I think it will get a terrific response. I'm extremely proud of it. I look at ALIEN Resurrection and I go, 'Wow! Was I a part of that?'"