

You've heard of Ridley Scott, James Cameron and David Fincher. But when you come to take delivery of the stonking new *Alien Anthology*, the name you want to address your thanks to is one that's probably less familiar: Charles de Lauzirika.

One of the world's most renowned DVD and Blu-ray special features specialists, de Lauzirika has been responsible for assembling some of the finest special editions known to man - most notably the gargantuan, obsessive five-disc 2007 Final Cut of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, quite possibly the greatest, most comprehensive DVD and Blu-ray release of all time. So it's safe to assume what was previously known as the *Quadriology* will be the absolute last word on the space-terror franchise from hell.

Ah... the *Quadriology*. A hard act to follow for even this man - what could you possibly add to such a landmark release? Will *Anthology* merely prove to be no more than a nominal upgrade to excuse a studio cash-grab? As the uber-producer explained to *Review* when sat down to an exclusive preview of the new set in New York last year, *Anthology* is a labour of love, not just an epic contract...

## Remasters Of The Universe

De Lauzirika says the real reason to care about a Blu-ray upgrade is its "superior video and sound", and he's made sure to deliver both. Thankfully, we're talking less neurotic George Lucas levels of endless tinkering, more subtle edge-sharpening. De Lauzirika even managed to sweet-talk James Cameron, at the time busy fiddling around with a little project called *Avatar*, into taking some time off to personally oversee the project. And the tech wizards at Lowry Digital - responsible for the immaculate remasters of the Bond movies - were enlisted to carry out the subtle job of tweaking the film to Cameron's new specifications without creating anything that looks at all like a digital fiddle.

Cameron promised that the new version would be "De-noised, de-grained, up-rezzed, colour-corrected" - and that's exactly what we get, the director personally supervising a transfer of the film that has seen the grain content reduced significantly. There's no noise, only a fine, well-judged level of grain, and a wonderfully precise colour palette throughout. Most strikingly, there's more depth to the image than ever before, largely as a result of better managed contrast. The work maintains the intentional elements of the film's distinctive look. As de Lauzirika says, "*Aliens*, of all four films, is the most different visually. You can't just shoehorn it into the look of the other three."

Indeed, in the case of *Aliens*, the reworking is quite extensive. It includes two versions of the film: the theatrical cut and James Cameron's extended edition



from 1991. The former at last gets the transfer it always deserved, with great care being taken to preserve how it looked in its original 35mm production, and it easily surpasses any of its troubled DVD incarnations. Meanwhile Cameron's preferred cut has undergone some extensive adjustments.

There's been extensive work on *Alien*², too, most specifically on its audio track. As de Lauzirika explains, "People said the sound was bad, and it was, but we had the best we could muster at the time. This time we did a whole new mix, bringing back some of the actors to re-loop their dialogue. Lance Henriksen came back, Charles Dance came back, so a lot of the stuff that was really muddy and you couldn't make out the first time - a lot of the lines where you hear it's just blowing fans, that's now been cleaned up.

**TOP:** Ridley Scott directing a scene in *Alien*; facehugger versus Kane.  
**ABOVE RIGHT:** Scott with a spacesuited Sigourney Weaver.  
**ABOVE LEFT:** Ian Holm gets a coating of gunk as android Ash.

It's yet another new version of the *Alien*³ special edition with much better sound and picture quality."

The transfer of *Alien Resurrection* tells a different story. While the digital encoding is absolutely top-notch, there's a small but noticeable amount of print damage. The impact is minimal, but a small amount of flecks and specks are there, and they suggest that less respect was given to the fourth installment than to any of the others. Essentially, what we have here is a very strong representation of a good quality archive print, but de Lauzirika clearly doesn't afford *Resurrection* the same affection he does to the other films in the series. Discussing a promo trailer for the set, we can tell he didn't cut it personally, he quips, because "I wouldn't have used so much *Resurrection* footage if I had."

## Extra Time

With extensive work on the quality of the films in the bag, the team turned their attention to the supplements - but with such an huge collection already out there de Lauzirika initially doubted that he could

beat his previous efforts on the DVDs. "When Fox came to me about the Blu-ray set I kind of scratched my head - what more is there to do after 50 hours of content?" he said. "But believe it or not, we kind of blew the doors off the *Quadrilogy* set. *Alien Anthology* Blu-ray is pretty much everything you've seen before plus a whole bunch of new stuff, and really amazing material that I frankly thought would never see the light of day on home video at all, period."

The official count is that there are now more than 60 hours of special features - which, when considering the various cuts of all four movies, makes for a heaving package. According to de Lauzirika, however, this is something of a rarity - in today's climate, budgets for the production of extra features are suffering from shrinkage. "It's not entirely hopeless out there right now, but it has been a bit bleaker than usual," he says. "The bloom is certainly off the rose when it comes to bonus features."

This may explain why the special features in *Anthology* are derived from the same sources, and almost always the same production sessions, as those on the *Quadrilogy* set. Although, when it came to hunting down new material, they left barely a stone left unturned. "If we don't have someone on the disc, it's not because we didn't ask," maintains the producer. "We asked everyone we could find. If they're not there, chances are it's because they said no."

He notes that with newer films: "People definitely have more to say because it's fresh in their minds. But there's no historical perspective, so it's a double-edged sword." The time difference between the production of the films and the creation of the *Quadrilogy*



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was enough to afford some degree of hindsight, but by now some foggy memory might well have gotten in the way, especially regarding the earlier pictures. These existing supplements were produced in a sweet spot with just the right distance from production. All four key documentaries from the DVDs have been included again, but while it isn't readily obvious on screen or in the menus, they're not quite the same. Most notably, the notorious behind-the-scenes exposé on *Alien* has finally been released in an uncensored form.

De Lauzirika admits that only a couple of the *Alien* interview subjects were "brutally honest", but there's more to this doc than talking heads. Among the previously unseen footage are several shots of Fincher on

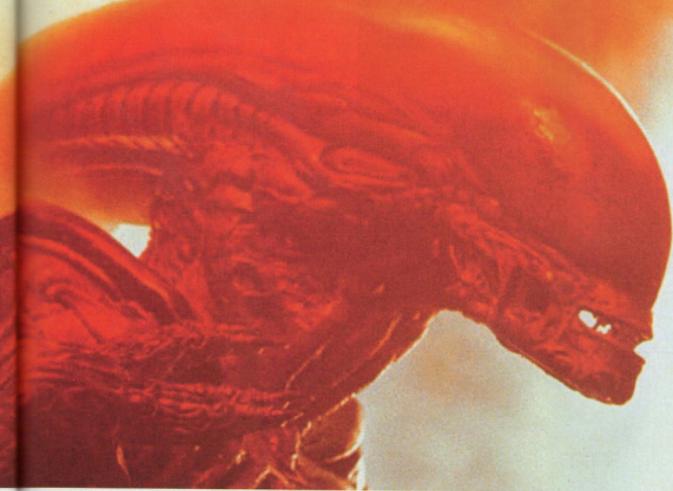
**TOP:** Guess who's coming to dinner? John Hurt and phallic friend.  
**RIGHT:** Sigourney Weaver during the climax to *Aliens* - a challenge to remaster for Blu-ray.

set, visibly frustrated and, in one shot, verbalising it. We get to see the director get up from his canvas chair, grab a mic and declare, "It's amazing to me that Fox is the number one studio in the country because they're all such a bunch of morons." It's surprising that this particular outburst made the cut even now. De Lauzirika padded the edit with some additional footage to bear the brunt of Fox's censorship but says he was amazed that they didn't cut anything. "What we've ended up with is even stronger stuff than what the studio rejected first time around."

The doc was originally titled *Wreckage And Rape*, after a music cue on the *Alien*?

soundtrack. On the *Quadrilogy* release, the censored version was simply called *The Making Of Alien* but this time out, it's become the slightly toned-down *Wreckage And Rape*. And where even the chapter headings were censored before, they're now back to their angry originals: 'Development Hell', 'The Colour Of Blood', 'Requiem For A Scream'.

So how is it that we have been able to go from the bitter acrimony of making *Alien* through the censorship of the *Quadrilogy* to finally letting it all hang out on the *Anthology*? "Time heals wounds," says de Lauzirika. Simple as that. Perhaps, but the healing appears to have



been a little one-sided. Fincher turned down Fox's invitation to be involved in either the production of *Quadrilogy* or *Anthology*. The only time you see him in the supplements is in archive footage from the *Alien* set. What's more, the extended version of his film presented here was not supervised by him, but was instead constructed from what could be construed to be his intentions. It's definitively not a director's cut. De Lauzirika says that Fincher "had virtually nothing" to do with the project "aside from giving Fox his blessing to do whatever they wanted." He quotes Fincher as saying, "The only way to get a director's cut of *Alien*? would be to burn the negative and start over."

## Pod People

It gets even better, and way geekier, outside the main documentaries. De Lauzirika has included more than four hours of supplementary segments under the title of "enhancement pods". These are interviews and behind-the-scenes pieces that play like deleted, or in a few cases, extended scenes from the documentaries. Where the main thrust has been covered so well in the chief docs, the pods wander into more esoteric territory. "We've really raided

**TOP:** One of cinema's most-admired monsters.  
**ABOVE:** *Alien: Resurrection*, the least-admired *Alien* movie.

the archives to bring out every last scrap of cool stuff for this release," Lauzirika asserts.

A few of the pods are actually new material filmed since the days of the *Quadrilogy*. Most notable among these is possibly an explanation from Jon Finch (who played the title role in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*) of how he was almost in *Alien* and why John Hurt took over his role, intercut with footage from his couple of days of shooting.

For all the unseen material, however, it's perhaps surprising that little here that has been newly minted. Particularly when there was a significant weight of expectation: Sigourney Weaver had said that she would record a new commentary track for each film, but for whatever reason these have not materialised and de Lauzirika could have created new commentary tracks for the release had he wanted to.

Each of the tracks on the *Quadrilogy* was an edit of several separate full-length recordings, cut together as a highlights package, and there would've been an option to break these cuts down. Instead, de Lauzirika has decided to preserve his edits. "Splitting up the commentaries might be easier said than done. For instance, I actually really love the current

## BEST OF THE SET

Five cracking features from the *Anthology*...

### THE INFLUENCE OF ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY'S DUNE

*Alien Resurrection's* concept artist Sylvain Despretz is one of the more thoughtful contributors to the special features. His explanation of how the whole saga owes a debt to Jodorowsky's unmade version of *Dune* is a fascinating lesson in the history of big-screen sci-fi.

### ALIEN EVOLUTION

Three are now two versions of the much-loved Channel 4 documentary included. The first was also packaged in *Quadrilogy* and focused on just the first film, while the new version has content relating to the entire saga. Now with added Mark Kermode, for better or worse.

### STAN WINSTON'S CHALLENGE, STAN WINSTON'S LEGACY

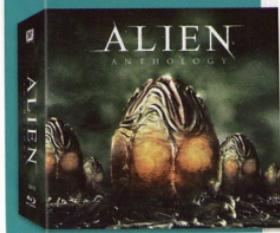
A conversation with, and a feature about, the great monster-maker who built the aliens for *Aliens*. All the more touching considering that the honest and sincere tributes predate Winston's premature death. Supplemented by test footage of his creations in action.

### SAUSAGE-MOTIVATED ALIEN WHIPPET

Some bonus behind the scenes time with Touch, the whippet who drew the short straw and ended up in an alien suit on the set of *Alien*?. Worth watching just to discover what the hell that title's all about...

### THE ART OF SLIME

FX builder Alec Gillis talks about the seminal slime that drips from the *Alien's* maw, what it symbolises and how it improves the film's aesthetic. Better still, he's aware of how it can be used as a storytelling device with great psychological impact. Attention to detail without pretension.



edit of the *Aliens* commentary as it incorporates the absolute best of each recording session and flows together nicely. I'd hate to ruin that flow and have to use less interesting material to fill in the gaps generated by breaking up the single track."

While there's no new commentary, there are new audio tracks. You can find, for the first time, an isolated 5.1 version of the score for each of the four films but with an extra twist. As de Lauzirika explains, "In the case of *Alien* and *Aliens*, you'll get two versions of isolated scores. You'll get the composer's original versions, how Jerry Goldsmith and James Horner wanted the score to appear in the film, and then how the director finally got his way and got his version of the score."

### What's On The Menu?

The sixth and final disc is a virtual warehouse stuffed full of archive interviews and documentaries that predate the *Quadrilogy* or were made for television. It overflows with quirky oddities and *Alien* bric-a-brac including screen tests, deleted scenes and parodies from TV shows like *Saturday Night Live* and *Family Guy*. Even the menu pages themselves are extra features. Every screen you see is designed to look and feel like you're using a Weyland-Yutani console delivering blueprints, measurements and arcane trivia.

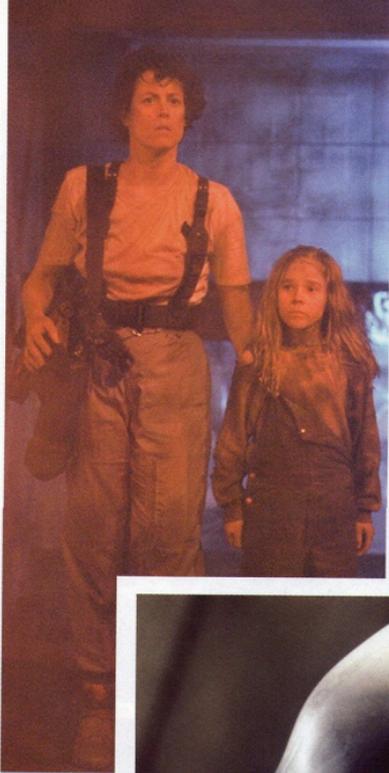
It's fast moving stuff, so you'll have to be paying full attention - but these may

**"WHERE DID THE EGG COME FROM IN ALIEN? BECAUSE IT MAKES NO SENSE WHEN YOU SEE THE FILM, THE MENUS TELL THAT STORY."**

well be the first Blu-ray menus to have serious replay value. De Lauzirika reveals that the menus even step up to resolve some fan niggles. "The *Alien*? menu actually helps fill in a plot hole. A lot of fans have asked, 'Where did the egg come from in *Alien*? how did the story even start?' because it makes no sense when you see the film. Well, the menus attempt to tell that story."

Some innovative new Blu-ray tech has also been employed to filter and sort through the reams of content - chief of which is the MU-TH-UR mode. "This is the biggest interactive goody in this set," explains de Lauzirika. "MU-TH-UR was the computer in the first film. And with MU-TH-UR mode activated, you'll be able to tag topics as you watch the film, a variety of topics coming up relating to the scenes you're watching, and you'll be able to create, basically, shopping lists. Everything you just tagged watching whichever film or films you watched, those topics will now carry over in the memory of your Blu-ray player so when you get to disc five, which is basically

TOP: Ripley and Newt in *Aliens*.  
TOP RIGHT: The interior of the abandoned ship in *Alien*; replete with facehugger receptacles...  
RIGHT: This + dark alloy + you = uh-oh.



the MU-TH-UR disc where all of the documentaries are housed, MUTHUR will basically tell you, 'Oh, these are the topics you were interested in,' and she will take you right to where the topics are in the documentaries. This also continues on to disc six where there's even more archival material. It's allowing you to refine your search parameters and create the experience you want. If you just want to know about nothing else except chestbusters, you can just do that. You can select chestbusters, and you can learn the hell out of chestbusters across all four films and the supplemental discs. "Recognising that this method of viewing may not be to everyone's tastes he quickly adds, "Or, you can just sit back and watch the whole thing if you have about a month of free time."

We would expect plenty of people to be making the necessary arrangements come 25 October. There's little chance these supplements will ever be improved upon in future - the memory of the participants is waning and there's nothing more that can be done to salvage *Alien*?, with even the most esoteric nuggets of archive now in the menu waiting to be searched out and enjoyed. There's nowhere else to go. At least, not with the *Alien* franchise. Could Lauzirika get the chance to revisit some of his other old works? "I suppose there's a part of me that would want to go back into every project I've worked on. At some point, you have to let it go and move on. But gosh... if only I could just do one more little..."

**The Alien Anthology is out on Blu-ray on 25 October and will be reviewed in a future issue.**