

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

Twenty years before Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley boards the doomed *Nostromo* and comes face to face with the scariest alien in movie history a crew of space colonists heads into similar territory oblivious to the dangers that await. Here star **Michael Fassbender** and director **Ridley Scott** explain how *Alien: Covenant* fits into the big picture ■ BY JULIDE TANRIVERDI

It's a rainy, chilly day in L.A., but Michael Fassbender is all smiles during an interview at the city's London Hotel. "They put me back together, and I am back," he says with a grin. Fassbender is of course talking about *Alien: Covenant*, the latest installment in director Ridley Scott's horror/sci-fi franchise.

Our last visit to the *Alien* universe came in 2012 with *Prometheus*, a film that ended with Fassbender's android David losing his head and having it carried off the spaceship in a bag by crewmate Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace).

The movie got mixed reviews and didn't connect with the franchise's passionate fan-base. But expectations are high this month as Scott returns to the world of Xenomorphs and the series' horror movie roots. Just don't call it that!

"I don't like the word horror," says Scott, also in L.A. "I think we're better than that. It's a very loose genre term, and I think a lot of movies in the horror genre are bad, and sometimes I think just flat-out irresponsible."

That doesn't mean *Alien: Covenant* won't be scary as hell.

This time a group of colonists, mostly couples, are on board the spaceship *Covenant*, which is named after the Ark of the Covenant, the chest containing the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were said to have been inscribed.

During their trip to a remote planet the colonists intercept a human distress call and divert to a different planet inhabited by the mysterious Engineers — the pale, muscular human progenitors you'll remember from *Prometheus*. The crew is led by Captain Branson (James Franco) and chief terraformist Daniels (Katherine Waterston who cut her hair short for this role, à la the first film's hero, Ellen Ripley).

Things escalate from there in a familiar fashion as unsuspecting crew members come into contact with facehuggers — vicious creatures that attack by attaching to one's face — on the planet's surface. What happened to Shaw, Noomi Rapace's character, will also be explained.

Fassbender thinks, this time, fans will be excited. "In terms of an experience, this film has got those horror and thriller elements that we had in the first *Alien* but it's got the scope of *Prometheus*."

The actor had a particularly good time filming *Covenant* because he's not only playing

David again but also another android named Walter. How are they different?

"Walter is like one of these things 10 years later. What was your mobile phone like 10 years ago and what's it like now? That's the time that has passed between when we left David in the last *Prometheus*. There have been updates to the model. The fact that David was a prototype means that there was a lot in there that was experimental," Fassbender explains cryptically.

He dismisses the notion that David was evil in the previous film. "The thing that's interesting about David is he's synthetic but he's been

designed with certain human personality traits introduced into his programming. That's fun to play with, things like vanity and pride. In terms of him being evil, again, I would never approach something and go, 'This is an evil character,' because it's just such a weird word. It's such a cloudy word in terms of approaching and putting the character together."

He loved shooting the scenes where both characters are on screen at the same time.

"I finally got to act with myself, which I must say was an exceptional experience," Fassbender jokes, before continuing in a slightly more serious vein. "It was cool because

there's a technical aspect to doing those scenes, which I found pretty interesting."

The franchise has come a long way, and not only because of its special effects. When *Alien* was released in 1979 it had an unknown actor named Sigourney Weaver as the lead, warrant officer Ellen Ripley. The low-budget film hit the mark and became a phenomenon, starting a franchise that now spans 38 years and has traumatized generations with its chest-bursting monster. James Cameron, David Fincher and Jean-Pierre Jeunet all made sequels.

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Michael Fassbender (far right) and his colonist crewmates in *Alien: Covenant*

MEET MICHAEL
FASSBENDER'S
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Go to CINEPLEX.COM/ALIENMOVIES for a recap of the franchise so far

ALIEN: COVENANT
HITS THEATRES MAY 19TH



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KATHERINE WATERSTON TALKS ALIEN: COVENANT



Director Ridley Scott on the set of *Alien: Covenant*

SHORT STORY

Some have wondered whether Katherine Waterston's short haircut in *Alien: Covenant* (top left) is an homage to Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley, whose hair got progressively shorter in the first three *Alien* films — from long and curly in *Alien*, to a short mop in *Aliens* and a shaved noggin in *Alien 3*. But that's not the case. At a New York showcase of upcoming Fox movies, Waterston revealed the inspiration was her co-star Ezra Miller's "dumb haircut" in her previous film, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (bottom left).

"When I got this job I was still shooting that...and in the hair and makeup trailer they were making wigs, just in case we had to do pickups and people's hair had changed. And so I put [Miller's wig] on, and I showed it to Ridley, and begged him to let me do it and he did." —MW

▶ Fassbender has a few ideas about why *Alien* still fascinates us, even today.

"I watched the first *Alien* again on the flight over to New Zealand when we were shooting this, actually," he says. "How Ridley approaches the sci-fi world visually, I think there's a great sophistication to that. But also the characters are really fun and interesting and quirky and human."

He thinks the film's legacy comes from casting a female lead. "The fact that our hero was Ripley, in an age where we're talking about equality within the industry he gave us Ripley 40 years ago and set the standard."

And, he says, it speaks to our inner fears. "Space and the idea of aliens, I think that sort of gets into our psyche. I suppose what is really disturbing about it is that aliens use us as hosts, that something can grow inside of you that's alien to you, that sort of creeps us out and makes us engage," says Fassbender.

His co-star Demián Bichir, who plays military man and security chief Sergeant Lope, thinks the story mirrors our society. "This film is about us as humanity and where we are right now. It's about what you believe in, what your fears are, what your love is all about, what caring for others is all about. This is a micro cosmos on this ship, in this

Covenant ship that we're out there in space."

Some assumed the plot of *Alien: Covenant* would come full circle with the first *Alien* movie. Well, not quite.

"This film will back into the original," Scott confirms, adding, "Right now, *Covenant* is about 20 years behind *Alien*. We're already writing the sequel to *Covenant*."

This might be good news for the fans who just can't get enough of the monster with the phallus-shaped head, originally designed by Swiss artist H.R. Giger. If you ask the master himself why *Alien* has such longevity and is so beloved, Scott offers this explanation with a laugh and a bit of pride.

"My films don't age. They do well," he says. "*The Duellists* still looks great! There's nothing worse than false modesty."

Julide Tanriverdi is a freelance journalist who lives in New York and writes about movies, TV and pop culture.

