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THE MUMMY



DOCTOR WHO



TWIN PEAKS



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN:
SALAZAR'S REVENGE

PARADISE POSTPONED

by Michael Coldwell

A L I E N

C O V E N A N T

P R E V I E W



Missed him/her/it? Ridley Scott's *ALIEN: COVENANT* is a follow-up that promises answers to the many questions left hanging by 2012's enigmatic *Prometheus*. *STARBURST* gets all warm and fuzzy at the imminent return of our favourite acid-drooling biomechanoid star beast...



"David himself. True to form, he's been very busy tinkering away with that life-creating black goo he found back on LV-223."

The *Alien* series has taken us on a long and – to put it mildly – very strange journey since a hibernating circle of seven dreamers returning from a deep space towing mission were awoken by a mysterious signal from a storm-blown planet known only as LV-426.

Released back in 2012, *Prometheus* rode in on one of the most head-scratching movie publicity campaigns ever devised. In summary, it went like this: 'This is not a prequel to *Alien*. Alright, it sort of is. Look, it's about really BIG concepts, see for yourselves, OK?' As risky strategies go, it was up there with 'Star Trek Into Darkness is definitely not a rubbish re-tread of *The Wrath of Khan*!' and yet it paid off to the worldwide box office tune of \$403 million, proving that the sense of mystique created around *Prometheus* had worked out rather well.

As the final credits rolled over Elizabeth Shaw and her android companion David flying off in search of the Engineers' planet in a hot-wired juggernaut spacecraft, one mystery had definitely been cleared up: *Prometheus* was indeed a prequel to *Alien* – we saw so many would-be versions of the creature it might as well have been called *Alien: Prototype* – but by no means a conventional one. Many were perplexed at the least popcorn-friendly major studio sci-fi movie in recent memory, a film that posed many intriguing questions and provided few easy answers. Here was a visually stunning prequel that dared to attempt something different and quite radical with its source material, promising to take the long way round to the Nostromo massacre via a sequence of further movies that explored themes of creation and destiny through a classical SF framework. But five years on, while these core themes are still at play in *Alien: Covenant*, it appears the original course for the series has been re-routed...

A key through-line from *Prometheus* back to the original *Alien* was the 'Engineer' species that the crew of the Nostromo found fossilised within the downed juggernaut spacecraft on LV-426. This sequence – perhaps the closest the first movie came to putting the genius of Swiss artist H. R. Giger's dark vision onto celluloid – evidently played on director Ridley Scott's mind a lot over the years to the point where it was the Engineers, not the Aliens, that took centre stage in his original plans. Never shy of controversy, he also made it known he wasn't intending to feature the Xenomorphs at all in these prequels, saying in 2014 that despite being in the series' chronological future, the creature was history: "There's only so much snarling you can do. I think you've got to come back with something more interesting. And I think we've found the next step. I thought the Engineers were quite a good start."

Well, maybe not such a good start after all, because the mixed reception to *Prometheus* seems to have mutated this belated follow-up into a more familiar, crowd-scaring form. And what of those mysterious Engineers – will we be seeing much of them this time around? Reports suggest their originally intended role is much reduced in *Alien: Covenant* but they still feature in at least one major scene.

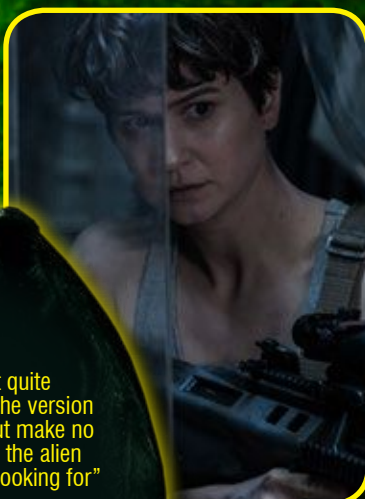
Whether or not the new movie addresses all of the questions left hanging by *Prometheus*, there's no doubting that *Alien: Covenant* sees the return of H. R. Giger's immortal creature. This rather large cat was let out of the bag back in 2014 with a name change from *Prometheus 2* to *Alien: Paradise Lost*. Here was another title swathed in classical allusion but slightly at odds, it had to be said, with the idea of a ferocious, omnisequal, flesh-ripping space bastard. We can think of worse names for an *Alien* movie (*Alien: Brideshead Revisited*, *Alien: Loose Women*) but not many. Luckily, common sense prevailed and in November 2015, Scott announced the final title had changed to *Alien: Covenant*. Not that 'covenant' (which means a formal agreement or alliance) isn't another odd subtitle, but it sounds suitably ominous and looks quite nice on the poster under that familiar blocky logo, don't you think?

Taking place a decade on from the events of *Prometheus*, the story centres on the crew of the good ship *Covenant*, comprised entirely of couples (of all gender permutations) who are headed for a remote planet they believe will be a lush and welcoming paradise to settle upon (minor spoiler: it isn't). They have a familiar face along for the ride in the form of android do-all Walter (Michael Fassbender) who is clearly from the same production line as David from *Prometheus*. Speaking of which, who should pop up on the planet when they land but David himself. True to form, he's been very busy tinkering away with that life-creating black goo he found back on LV-223. One might even say his experiments have come on in leaps and bounds...

Filming on *Alien: Covenant* kicked off in April 2016 in New Zealand before moving to Sydney, Australia then back to Leavesden Studios in the UK. The production ran a very tight ship so set reports were thin on the ground, but it's believed at least two types of pre-Xenomorph alien will feature: smaller critters called 'neomorphs' that are capable of infecting and erupting from humans in the grand tradition of the chestbuster and facehugger, and the 'protomorph', that larger, rather pissed-off looking chap seen clinging onto the outside of the ship in the latest trailer. We're told he's still not quite evolved into the version from 1979 but make no mistake, he's the alien you've been looking for. Fans of practical effects will be pleased to know that this creature was realised not with CGI but with life-size animatronic suits courtesy of effects house Creature NFX. Speaking in February, the company's director Paul Telfry expanded on the process: "The main guy was a hybrid between a suit and an animatronic. There were quite a few suits, and the headpiece is obviously an animatronic because you can't operate it by hand." This more classical approach is mirrored by the production design of the *Covenant*, which strongly echoes Ron Cobb's much loved (and much imitated) 'lived-in' look for the *Nostromo*. A hugely accomplished designer in his own right, Ridley Scott's talent for creating vividly beautiful storyboards was well exercised during production to ensure it is very much his vision we'll be seeing on screen.

As with the original 1979 crew, the cast is a mix of familiar and less well-known faces.





"He's still not quite evolved into the version from 1979 but make no mistake, he's the alien you've been looking for"

Continuing the *Alien* series' reputation as a province for kick-ass action heroines, UK actor Katherine Waterston (*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*) leads as Daniels, a character whose rather obvious gun-toting similarity to Ripley in production stills has led to speculation that she might even be the mother of Sigourney Weaver's character (a rumour that Ridley Scott promptly shot down last month but we're keeping a small wager going anyway). She's joined by James Franco (*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*) as Jacob, her husband and the Captain of the *Covenant*, and Billy Crudup (*Watchmen*) as the ship's first mate, Christopher Oram. The rest of the crew includes another *Fantastic Beasts* alumna, Carmen Elizabeth Ejogo, as Oram's wife and HBO comedy stalwart Danny McBride as Tennessee, the chief pilot. Despite early rumours to the contrary, it has also been confirmed that Noomi Rapace reprises her *Prometheus* role as Elizabeth Shaw, although quite how we come to encounter her after all this time remains one of the film's best-kept secrets. We're also promised a reappearance from Guy Pearce as Peter Weyland, the billionaire founder and CEO of the Weyland (now Weyland-Yutani) Corporation who died in the previous movie. We're guessing he appears in a flashback but there's just a chance he's found yet another way to re-start his already over-stretched lifespan. We certainly wouldn't put it past the old rogue.

The fact that Ridley Scott, now a youthful 79, has chosen to see out this new cycle of *Alien* movies from the director's chair speaks volumes for his enthusiasm for this universe. Last year, emboldened by progress on *Alien: Covenant*, he went so far as to suggest he could even be back at work on the next chapter as early as this year. That seems a tad unlikely, but this is Ridley Scott we're talking about, a cinematic Speedy Gonzales when compared to his successor in shaping the *Alien* universe, James Cameron. Not that everything Scott touches turns to gold; you spin the wheel going into one of his movies hoping for 'Ridley Scott' but sometimes land on 'diddly squat'. Since *Prometheus*, he's delivered *The Counselor* (2013), *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), and *The Martian* (2015), with only the latter hitting big but, crucially, it did so on a grand scale, netting multiple accolades including a Best Director Golden Globe gong for Scott himself. Add in his Executive Producer credit on Denis Villeneuve's much-anticipated *Blade Runner: 2049* (due this October) and you have a man astute enough not to allow any one project to tie him down, as Cameron appears to have done with those multiple, career-guzzling *Avatar* sequels we're all really looking forward to.

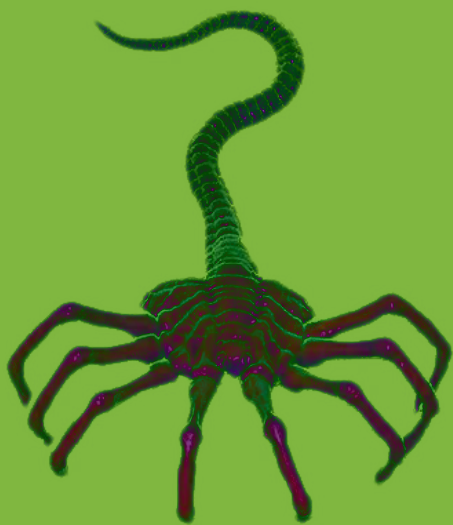
Not that Scott doesn't have big plans for more *Alien* films in between his other projects – a lot more, in fact, having just revealed plans for at least four more in the series before they join up with the point where the original movie began. He also let slip a possible title for the next film, which, just to keep us on our toes, will take place chronologically before the events of *Alien: Covenant*: "It will go *Prometheus*, *Awakening*, *Covenant*... if this is successful, and then the next one, and then there will definitely be three more." Even with our dodgy maths, we make that six movies in total before the events of *Alien* take

place. Anyone still hoping to see that Neill Blomkamp sequel to *Aliens* with Sigourney Weaver? No, us neither. Shame, that.

Anticipation for *Alien: Covenant* shot into overdrive in March this year when Scott screened 20 minutes of advanced footage to audience members attending the opening night of the SXSW film festival in Austin, Texas. Having filtered out the usual over-excited claptrap that typically gets reported from such pre-release events (hello *Batman v Superman*), all signs point to this being a full-throttle return to the kind of high tension, body-ripping sci-fi horror Scott gave us in his original masterpiece. Get ready to re-experience that special kind of claustrophobic terror that comes with being stuck on a spaceship with the cinema's greatest party pooper. Expect also a certain symmetry to the first *Alien* in the initial set-up, as the landing party from the *Covenant* explore the new planet only to end up returning to the ship with a couple of painfully infected colleagues. As a final teaser, we are promised a revelation about the origin of the alien species that could well have fans dashing straight from cinemas to the nearest bar to dissect what they have just seen in a frenzy of booze-fuelled excitement. Well, that's our plan, anyway.

Whatever your strategy, you won't want to miss the first out and proud *Alien* film since 1997 when it comes ripping through the ribcage of your local multiplex.

ALIEN: COVENANT will be inseminating cinemas from May 12th.



"We are promised a revelation about the origin of the alien species"





DATA TRANSFER: HIGHLY CLASSIFIED
 NOSTROMO CREW MEMBER XANE (EXECUTIVE OFFICER)
 CHEST BIO SCAN: UNIDENTIFIED SPECIES
 INSTRUCTION: RETRIEVE INTACT (ALIVE) PRIORITY
 MAINTAIN AND PRESERVE AT ALL COST
 CREW: EXPENDABLE



THE ALIEN CHRONICLES

by Robert Martin

As excitement levels start to reach fever pitch in anticipation of Ridley Scott's new film, *ALIEN: COVENANT*, it's worth reminding ourselves that, remarkably, it's almost forty years since he first introduced us to that creature of countless nightmares, the Xenomorph. In that time there have been sequels and prequels of varying quality, a separate ill-fated spin-off, plus countless books, comics, and at least one absolutely stunning game in *Alien Isolation*. In terms of scope, ambition and longevity, only the *Star Wars* franchise comes close, with neither it nor the *Alien* series having fallen to remakes or re-imaginings like, for example, *Star Trek*.

Whether or not *Covenant* takes *Alien* into a new direction will have to be seen but, for now, let's rewind and go back to 1979 and where it all began...



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Welcome to the haunted house in space movie which changed sci-fi/horror cinema forever.

IN SPACE NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM

In 1997, Sigourney Weaver's salary for *Alien Resurrection* was \$11 million. She'd come a long way since her starring role in the first film of the series in 1979. Back then, \$11 million could get you a whole lot more for your money. In fact, it was *Alien's* entire production budget (although some reports have it as \$9 million - bargain!). And for that, we got Ridley Scott making only his second feature after *The Duelists* (1977), we got a brilliant cast of superb character actors, we got the birth of a new star in Weaver, some Oscar-winning design and effects, a hauntingly effective music score from Jerry Goldsmith, one of cinema's most terrifying creatures and one of the most talked about scenes in cinema history. Oh, and a hero to rival any before or since in Ellen Ripley.

For those old enough to remember, the arrival of *Alien* into UK cinemas was heralded by reports of audiences throwing up in the aisles and fleeing the cinemas in terror. But this masterpiece of suspense turned out to be something far more affecting than those scaremongering stories could suggest. Scott's meticulous eye for detail meant

that, to this day, *Alien* looks incredible - the sets, design and lighting alone are enough to rank it as a visual classic - but it was his skill at taking a familiar story from Dan O'Bannon and Ron Shusett and turning it into something unprecedented which created a true masterpiece.

A large part of that is thanks to the combination of superb terrestrial sci-fi design mixed with the otherworldly horrors from the warped imagination of H. R. Giger, creating something truly, well, alien. Having infused the look of the film with a sense of reality, Scott ensured that, by the time we landed on the alien planet, the contrast would shock with its originality.

And it's easy to forget just how jaw-droppingly outlandish those designs were at the time. That strange bone-like craft, with its suggestion of body parts and sex organs, looked like nothing we'd seen in a film before. To get inside, Lambert, Dallas and Kane crawl through what look like giant organic holes and wander down rib-caged corridors before finding the space jockey, all skeletal without seeming fossilised, creating an unsettlingly familiar unfamiliarity. The sexual theme continues with the eggs, their openings designed

to resemble vaginas, and the spider-like facehugger forcing its protrusion down Kane's throat, planting a seed, only for Kane to give bloody birth and start the alien life cycle again. Talk about twisted!

That sexual theme continues throughout the film (why does Ash use a porn mag to stuff down Ripley's throat to choke her? What's all that white stuff he ejaculates? Is Lambert really raped by the alien's tail?) providing a thematic richness lacking in so many movies and elevating *Alien* to something much more than a standard horror.

Paced on a knife edge, *Alien* works so effectively because it takes its time, revealing itself slowly until you are simply barraged by light, sound and a creature from the depths of nightmare. By the end, you feel like you've survived an assault to the senses and - like Ripley - made it through to the other side.

It's a classic, perhaps one of the greatest films of all time. And it has THE best film poster ever made. How could a sequel possibly live up to it?





THIS TIME IT'S WAR

It may have taken seven years to arrive, but the brilliantly (and simply) titled *Aliens* is a sequel so good that, for some, it's the best of the franchise. Even so, those seven long years are nothing compared to Ripley's fifty-seven year sleep aboard the Nostromo's shuttle craft with Jones the cat snoring at her side, the premise that kickstarts this truly spectacular second instalment.

James Cameron's approach turned out to be a stroke of genius; taking the finest elements of the *Alien* story and creating something which is a true development of it rather than an attempt to simply mimic. If *Alien* was a horror film, this time, it really was war.

Much like the structure of *Alien*, *Aliens* takes its time. It establishes Ripley as a woman haunted by events that, for her, feel like yesterday, not fifty-seven years ago. Her fear is portrayed as current and, at least in the extended cut, we see that the life she thought she'd be returning to no longer exists. So, given a chance to exercise her demons and go back to the alien planet with a bunch of marines to find out why the colonising group of terraformers who have been living there in recent years have disappeared, there's no real choice to be made.

That set-up is perfect. Cameron takes a beloved heroine, a woman who managed

to survive something horrific, and gives her a good enough reason to go back into her nightmare. He sends her with a bunch of cocky, overconfident doubters who behave like she's a joke. He plants a corporate man and a robot for good measure. And we watch agape as the whole thing descends into chaotic hell, forcing our heroine to take charge and save the day once more. Along the way, we remember why we found the Xenomorphs so terrifying in the first place, this time their sheer volume providing the horror, are introduced us to something altogether new and monstrous...

In the Queen alien, Cameron gives us a whole new development of the Xenomorph itself; creating another level to the species life-cycle ('whose laying all those eggs?') and providing us with a maternal fight for survival that pitched a gigantic and terrifyingly realised monster against a woman in a forklift loader.

And he makes us care so, so much. We love the pretend family that has become Hicks, Newt, Bishop, and Ripley (an Oscar-nominated Weaver), and audiences back in 1986 cheered at the now iconic and culturally landmarked line "Get away from her you bitch" until the climax that promised a life less deathly for these now-beloved characters.

But in Hollywood, you can't take anything for granted.

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THREE TIMES THE SUSPENSE. THREE TIMES THE DANGER. THREE TIMES THE TERROR.

Oh, what might have been had *Alien³* gone according to plan. But which plan? The version from original writer/director Vincent Ward set on a wooden monastic planet will forever be a great lost movie, only traces of which survive in the finished version. Deemed too expensive and mostly scrapped, a new director was brought on board... David Fincher was a risky choice to helm *Alien³* having specialised in music videos up to then, and his vision was bold and uncompromising. It was a shoot legendary in its difficulties, studio interference blocking Fincher at every level and to this day, he refuses to talk about it. Fans hated being so cruelly robbed of Newt and Hicks and reviews mostly gave it the thumbs down. And yet...

With the benefit of distance, *Alien³* is a dark, brooding, daring examination of despair. Thematically based on the seminal work by Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, we follow Ripley through the different stages of her own demise, her realisation that she must die leading to the devastating finale. The imagery is striking - Ripley really looks iconic with her shaven head - and the film features one of the tensest scenes in the series, the alien snarling against Ripley

before realising that she's a host. It feels like all that's gone before has led to that moment and it's very powerful.

It's true that some of the early CGI is less effective and, whilst the shots from the alien's perspective make for good cinema, they make no sense given the creature's lack of eyes. But the sets are magnificent, the alien redesign is sleek and menacing, the religious tones work and this tale of redemption is a return to the mood of *Alien*.

Fincher's rough version, whilst not really a director's cut, provides a fascinating insight into the film he wanted to make and has some incredible set pieces.

And that was that. *Alien³* killed our beloved Ripley, sending her and her baby into a fiery furnace forever, providing a neat film trilogy with an epic arc.

THE OTHER ONE...

Without even a poster tagline for guidance, along came the 'does what it says on the tin' *Alien Resurrection*. A genius writer, a bold director, a big budget and some fascinating story ideas should have made this a triumphant last hurrah. Should have...

Joss Whedon's script sees a cloning process dragging poor Ripley back from the dead two centuries on from her death. But she's not alone. Not only is her cloned

self carrying the embryo of an alien queen, the cloning process has mixed alien and human DNA, giving us Ripley plus and a Queen with a womb.

Bursting with ideas, the best of this film lies in Whedon's clever play on identity (just who's side is Ripley on?) and the inevitable culmination of her relationship with the aliens. There are thrills to be had in her evolved state, in her interactions with human and alien species - neither of which she seems to belong to - and Whedon wrings plenty of drama and tension into his story. There are some amazing set pieces, ably handled by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, including the underwater chase, Ripley's descent into the alien lair and one of the most affecting of the whole series, Ripley confronting the failed versions of her cloning.

Tonally, though, the film throws in occasional bursts of humour that detract from the tension rather than act as relief. Weaver is great in a real development of the role, but Winona Ryder seems to have wandered in from another film. And whilst the finale's hybrid alien makes perfect sense, it isn't a satisfying creature, not in the same class as previous alien incarnations, and its icky demise, sucked inside out through a hole in the window, doesn't have anywhere near the same impact as any of the conclusions to the previous three films, making *Alien Resurrection* a definite case for the law of diminishing returns.





WHEN FILM WORLDS COLLIDE

In a fanboy nod to *Alien*, there's a scene in John McTiernan's 1987 *Predator* where a throwaway shot of a trophy cabinet contains a Xenomorph skull amongst the treasures. The result? 2004's *Alien Vs Predator*, a spin-off inspired by the notion that, at some point, these two great alien species must have fought for that trophy to end up inside a predator's spaceship.

As written and directed by Paul W. S. Anderson, *AVP* is a fun premise. Its contemporary setting and careful plot contradicts neither the *Alien* nor the *Predator* films and there's much pleasure to be had, despite its almost universal panning by critics and fans. Anderson's concept: that the predator species have been visiting the Earth for thousands of years and helped man to create huge pyramids, including the one where the film takes place and in which the predators must fight in a rites of passage battle against Xenomorphs, works well, providing some fantastic opportunities to let the aliens show how vicious they are.

Taken with a pinch of salt, it's nowhere near the abomination you'd think from the reaction to it. No, that description can justifiably be handed to its sequel. *Alien Vs Predator: Requiem* brings the fight to the USA and, whilst the idea of an alien/

predator DNA mix is promising, the film fails to make us care about anyone or anything happening on screen. The story of a group of townspeople escaping the battle between the two species and then the army who are going to nuke the place offers as few thrills as any film in the *Alien* universe, hammering a nail into *AVP* as a franchise of its own.

Where could the *Alien* series go from there?

THE PREQUELS

Remember the whole 'is it a prequel or isn't it?' thing that was going on before the release of *Prometheus*? With Scott back at the helm and the promise of a film that, as he put it, "shared its DNA with the *Alien* series", this prequel of sorts had a lot to live up to as fans reached feverish heights of anticipation. Did *Prometheus* manage it?

The film's lofty ambitions are obvious from the title, and the story deals with issues of faith and god versus science and man, of creation, of hubris, and eventually asks the big question - where do we come from and what's it all for? It pits creators against creations, it gets artificial intelligence in the shape of David to question why man needs to know why it was created and, like some of the best science fiction, *Prometheus* is happy to leave some of its questions unanswered.

As you'd expect, the film delivers on a visual

and visceral level. Scott's cast serve him well, particularly Michael Fassbender as David and a spirited Noomi Rapace. The engineers are fascinating and the end, with its direct nod to *Alien*, was enough to get fans salivating for the next film in the series. For some, though, too much remained elusive, and fan reaction was mixed.

However, *Prometheus* is at the very least a considered reintroduction to the series that continues with *Alien: Covenant*. Rarely has a franchise been so beautifully realised, and rarely has a series of films been so beloved by fans and critics.

Little wonder, then, that *Alien: Covenant* is one of the most eagerly awaited films of 2017. Apparently, the now 79-year-old Scott has said he'd happily make *Alien* films for the rest of his life, so don't expect too much closure from *Covenant*. We may have more to come...

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INFORMATION CONTAINED WITHIN THIS
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CLASSIFIED: UNKNOWN SPECIES



THE MU/TH/ERLOAD

ALIEN 1979

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$272M
IMDB SCORE: 8.5
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 97%

ALIENS 1986

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$188.5M
IMDB SCORE: 8.4
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 98%

ALIEN 3 1992

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$115.6M
IMDB SCORE: 6.4
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 44%

ALIEN RESURRECTION 1997

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$90M
IMDB SCORE: 6.3
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 54%

ALIEN VS. PREDATOR 2004

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$111.2M
IMDB SCORE: 5.6
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 21%

ALIEN VS PREDATOR: REQUIEM 2007

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$51.2M
IMDB SCORE: 4.7
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 12%

PROMETHEUS 2012

ADJUSTED US GROSS: \$135.3M
IMDB SCORE: 7
ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING: 73%

CLASSIFIED: LV 223 DATA



XENOMORPH QUEEN

2

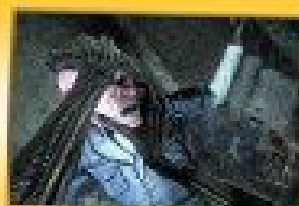
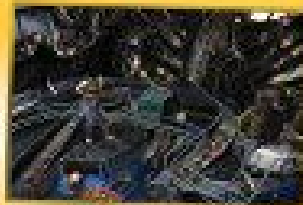
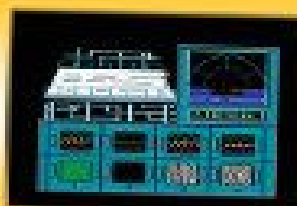
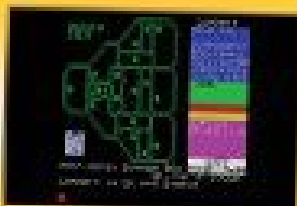
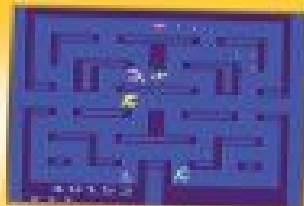
GAME
OVER
MAN!

A HISTORY OF ALIEN VIDEOGAMES

by Joel Harley

In space, no-one can hear you scream. Gaming, in your pants, on the sofa, however, is another matter. As if it wasn't so already, as soon as the ALIEN franchise turned gung-ho action movie with James Cameron's sequel, it was guaranteed that the franchise had a future in video game adaptation. Rarely has a series presented so much opportunity for variation in gameplay: from shooter to beat 'em up to point and click adventure to (of course) survival horror, the Xenomorph has done it all.

← LEVEL 8



ts journey would start, however, prior to *Aliens*, and as a shameless Pac-Man rip-off. *Alien* for the Atari was released in 1982. Getting the drop on *E.T.* as one of the worst video game tie-ins to be based on a thing with an alien in it, *Alien* would see the player collecting eggs, spaceships and planets aboard the 'Nostromo', while attempting to avoid 'aliens'.

The other *Alien* (1986) was more inventive, integrating the Nostromo and some story into its framework. While about as clunky and non-visual as the computers of the Nostromo, it put the player as overseer of the movie's characters, searching the map for the alien. It utilised their emotional states, making them unreliable or unlikely to follow orders if stressed or scared. Watch out for android betrayers, too. Such mechanics came to vivid 3D life in the PS2 generation with *The Thing*, to great effect (off-topic, but *The Thing* is one of the best horror movie-based video games of all time. Play it now, if you're not a graphics and gameplay snob).

To *Aliens*. It didn't take long for the hit movie to get numerous tie-ins, which began with *Alien: The Computer Game* (1986), and is not to be confused with *Aliens: The Computer Game* (1987), one of which was a conversation-based adventure game, and the other an 'action'/puzzler with some occasionally grisly imagery based on the movie ("get away from her, you BITCH" is there; the game's capitals, not mine). Other *Aliens* games are available, including the stupidly titled *Aliens: Alien 2* (1987) but the technology simply wasn't there to make the most of Cameron's incredible template.

Leave it to Konami to unleash the Xenos' potential with their 1990 arcade machine. Players took control of Ripley (now blonde) and Hicks in a side-scrolling shoot 'em up with a decent selection of weapons (including the Power Loader!), aliens (pink and purple and with various abilities) and, um, zombies. Sadly, it was never ported to home devices, and remains tucked away in the odd retro café or collector's garage. Who knows, maybe it is terrible (nostalgia is a BITCH) but it remains up there with a *Simpsons* game and *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* as one of the finest arcade games of our memories.

The next truly great *Aliens* game came, of all places, from *Alien³*, one of the most openly disliked movies in the series. The single alien on the prison planet had to go; this side-scrolling third-person shooter pit Ripley against hordes of aliens, rescuing

prisoners and dying a lot on the way. *Alien³* (1992) is still available for a reasonable price in many second-hand stores, and can be downloaded online with a little Internet know-how and a good SNES emulator. Even today, it remains one of the better-looking video games out there, making the most of the movie's dirty locale and miserable weather conditions. The movie is even more widely available, and should be watched and re-assessed on a regular basis until everyone realises how great it truly is.

All three movies served as the inspiration for the PS1's *Alien Trilogy* (1996), a first-person shooter that loosely tied it all together into one overarching story, running from *Aliens*' infested colony to the prison planet (the 'trilogy' bit is something of a misnomer then). A quite blatant *Doom* rip-off, it is nevertheless one of the more playable *Alien* games to date, with decent action and a variety of weapons, aliens, and bosses.

This was followed up by *Alien: Resurrection* (2000). Most amusingly, the game was panned by GameSpot for its analog control system – one stick to move, one to aim – which has now become industry standard. Oops. Like *Trilogy*, this one was a first-person shooter, but with a much higher difficulty level than its predecessor and graphics deemed too murky and bland. Unlike the movie, which can be accused of being many things, but never bland.

Weirdly, given how popular they were in *Aliens* and what a good fit they make for gaming, the Colonial Marines have yet to give us a decent outing. *Colonial Marines* (natch!) was supposed to be the big one, a first-person shooter set in the *Aliens* universe. *Colonial Marines* emerged on the PS3 well after its time was due (over ten years!). Such delayed games rarely turn out well, and this one was no different, and it's the series' nadir, wrecked by buggy AI, bad graphics and shoddy gameplay. *Colonial Marines* can be found in second-hand game shops everywhere, usually for a very low price. How bad can it be? Well, you have been warned...

There is, of course, far more, including mobile, Game Boy, online, and point n' click adventure games (*A Comic Book Adventure*, pre-empting Telltale Games' shtick by years) and four different *Alien³* tie-ins, but many of them are as terrible as the worst *Alien* movie. Maybe the most bizarre is *Aliens vs. Pinball*, in which the battle between Ellen Ripley and the alien is retold in the form of a computer animated pinball game. Really.

So far, we have kept to the *Alien* franchise proper, but it would be remiss of us not to mention the most curious offshoot of the Xenomorphs' video game history: its rivalry with the Predator. The seeds were sowed all the way back in *Predator 2* with a cheeky wink during that film's finale, and the two species have a long comic book history together, but the video games would be their first proper meeting outside of printed media and fan imagination. When they first met, it was during a side-scrolling beat 'em up arcade game (1993), which hardly does the Xenomorphs' lethality any justice. Even if you're a Predator, taking on a Xenomorph in unarmed combat is hardly advisable.

Thankfully, *Aliens vs Predator* (1999) is more sensible. This minor classic allowed gamers to choose between alien, predator, and Marine, offering a different story and style of gameplay for each. In 2001, a sequel duly followed and the strategy-based *Extinction* (2003). They would finally hit next gen in 2010, with the disappointing *Aliens vs. Predator*, lacking in story and with now-tired gameplay. The alien and predator have since come full circle back to beat 'em up mode, guest starring as unlockable characters in *Mortal Kombat X*. Still not advisable, but beautifully gory.

But now, the main event. 'A haunted house in space' is how the first *Alien* movie has often been described, so it's surprising that the franchise took so long to give survival horror a go. Enter *Alien: Isolation* (2014), set between the first film and its sequel. In it, we play as Amanda, daughter of Ripley, who takes to space in search of her missing mother. On board space station Sevastopol, Ripley Jr. is attacked and stalked by a sole Xenomorph, responsible for wiping out the crew and with its jaws and claws set on her, too. *Isolation* is as authentic to the spirit of the movies as a game has ever been, with a thrilling story, beautiful graphics and often terrifying alien menace. It's the best sequel to the *Alien* trilogy yet made, the best *Alien* game ever made, and one of the best survival horror games out there too. Depending, of course, on one's level of masochism.

While critically successful and a minor commercial hit, no sequel to *Isolation* has been forthcoming, and (*Mortal Kombat*-style cameos aside) the alien is currently between projects. It's only a matter of time though, before the alien makes its return to consoles. You can't keep a good Xenomorph down. Or, indeed, in.

ELECT



IN SPACE NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU ROLL

by Ed Fortune



The *ALIEN* movie franchise has survived for so long due to the way it draws people in. The movies that everyone talks about are the ones that make you feel part of their world, and with Ridley Scott's classic and its spin-offs, you can practically feel the monsters breathing down your neck. Obviously this is an experience that we've tried to emulate many times, and thus there are a great many games and board games that try to emulate the experience. Let's take a look at a few.

Space Hulk is perhaps the most famous and recognisable game that evokes the movie *Aliens*, though it is in no way set in the world of Weyland-Yutani and Ripley. Instead, it's a Games Workshop product and is thus set in their Gothic space opera world, *Warhammer 40K*. The design is pretty bang on when it comes to the *Alien* experience, however. It's asymmetric, which means one side plays the sinister alien Genestealer aliens and the other side gets to play the Terminator Marines. Aesthetically, the detailed models are nothing like the movie; the Marines are in giant power-armoured suits that look like a mix between Tony Stark's better work and a 13th century cathedral. The Genestealers have four arms, ovipositors, and slick heads with wicked

teeth. The game board is a jigsaw-style set-up of narrow corridors and thick walls. The aliens swarm the corridor in the form of blips; little counters that could represent one, two or three aliens. Only when the marine has line of sight will he know how many foes he must face. The marine, of course, has a very big gun and can shoot wildly. For the most part, this will take out the aliens as the marine player rolls lots of dice. However, doubles means the gun can jam and if that happens, it's usually lights out for the brave human as the monsters are really good at ripping people apart.

Space Hulk is a design classic, with an easy to adjust board, quick intuitive design mechanics and some fun bluffing elements. The game's nuances mean that

you're never quite sure what your opponent can do. Games Workshop tend to release the game on a limited run every few years or so. Back in the '80s, we had expansions (called *Genestealer* and *Deathwing*), and though they're long out of print, rumours abound that these will someday return as full versions of *Space Hulk* with some thematically appropriate changes.

If aliens are more your thing, there's always Tom Wham's *Awful Green Things from Outer Space*. Again a two-player game, one of you plays the hapless crew, the other the Awful Green Things. The board is a cutaway of a large spaceship, filled with crew. The things run round, eat the crew, grow, lay eggs, hatch and generally cause havoc. The other side has no idea how to kill



the invaders, and can try all sorts of random tools to get rid of the horrors. Typically, it ends with one crew person taking on some huge beast. Very atmospheric and quick, with very silly art.

For those looking for a slightly more authentic Aliens movie experience, the best licensed Aliens game is *ALIENS: This Time It's War* by Leading Edge. The set-up will be familiar to you if you've ever seen the movie. The marines are trapped in the reactor room, and need to get out. The aliens want to kill everyone and the reactor will eventually explode, killing everyone and everything. The base set was simple tactical strategy wargame, and expansions just added scenarios and cool stuff like powerlifters and Alien Queens. It had stats for the whole crew, including Burke and Newt, and unsurprisingly Burke always died. Every. Time. The board was basically a very big poster and the counters were all cardboard. You could buy models, but they weren't really needed. Back in the day, hardcore gamers would mix the rules with *Space Hulk* to create twisty corridors and scenarios, which added to the fun.

Leading Edge also produced an RPG version of *Aliens*, the less said of which the better. Suffice to say it had a rule for every possible bit of fun you might have had with an *Aliens* RPG, or to put it another way, it was rubbish.

Speaking of tie-in games, *Alien* did get its own official board game, but in the oddest way. Back in 1979, Kenner was on a roll when it came to space toys, and had the licence for the *Alien* movie. Despite it being a movie for grown-ups, someone in Kenner thought that the best use of the licence would be to rebrand pre-teen board game *Trouble* and

slap the *Alien* logo on it. Basically, you move your astronaut round the board to the escape square, and move an alien pawn around as well. Hit an opponent's astronaut with your pawn and pop, their game ends. It's as simple and as boring as it sounds; a game for children. Presumably very tall children who can sneak into movie theatres.

Tie-ins are better these days, of course. 2006 collectable miniatures game *HorrorClix*, alas, isn't with us anymore, but during its short run the range produced a pile of licensed horror movie-related pieces. This included everything from the movie *Aliens vs. Predator*. The game itself is played on a large grid map, and the rules for each of the models are on the dial. The pieces came pre-painted, making it the ultimate wargame for the lazy gorehound. Of course, the models included a pile of slick-looking figures. Pride of place was the Alien Queen. The model came with a diorama in which she was chained to pillars. This allowed people to play a default scenario in which Xenomorph drones and facehuggers kept hatching and attacking your pieces. The Queen also popped out of the diorama so you could have her chase your models around the board.

Though the game was designed to pit horror heroes against other creatures (such as Freddy Krueger versus werewolves), it was compatible with *HeroClix*, the superhero game. Which meant you could have Superman, Ironman, or Judge Dredd go up against a pile of Alien horrors.

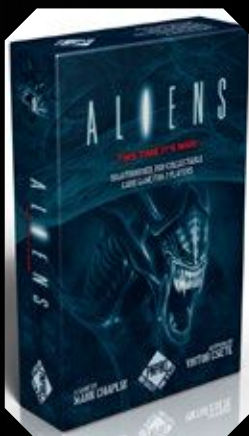
Of course, the *Alien vs. Predator* franchise also spawned an inevitable card game, Precedence Publishing's *Alien vs. Predator CCG*. Launched in the late '90s,

when card games were a licence to print money, this was rare gem in a sea of dross. Players collected cards for Aliens, Marines, or Predators, and gameplay began with your lead characters out on the table. Your hand supported your marines (or monsters) and this made it a sort of card game skirmish combat affair. Potential crew included Jonesy the cat, who was, of course, the most powerful thing in the game. Mostly due to cuteness.

The most recent iteration of all things *Alien* is 2015's *Alien vs. Predator: The Hunt Begins*. This lush big box of things is filled with Marines, transparent Predators and many, many Aliens to keep you awake at night. Essentially a wargame-style update of what has gone before, it's the whole experience in one box.

An honourable mention has got to go to *Alien War*, the short-lived *Alien*-themed live action experience that ran in London and Glasgow in the late '90s to early '00s. Best described as a 'walking ghost train', it featured actual props from the various movies, lots of people quoting the movies and some rather nifty prop-style guns. Similarly, laser-tag franchise Quasar ran *Aliens*-inspired games as one of their special scenarios, with small bands of nerds donning high tech armour to shoot the 'Alien' (usually a member of staff with a special rig). Most of these places closed in the '90s, but they are still a few Quasar sites still open in the UK and beyond.

Those familiar with the UK LARP scene will be familiar with the likes of *Mandala LRP*, who also run their own 'atmospheric' immersive experiences for the lucky few who can afford it (and can book in time).



The Deadliest Form of Flattery...

by James Evans

Every success story has its fair share of imitators and Ridley Scott's *ALIEN*, with the perfect blending of sci-fi and monster movie traits is no exception, as we find out...

At the time *Alien* was released it was still a common thing for a film to hit big with audiences and then be followed by numerous cheaper, sometimes overt imitations hunting for a piece of those box office returns. This was in a time long before instant streaming and in the infancy of the video rental boom. Some countries had entire film industries based around making unofficial remakes, sequels, and prequels to hits of the time. Take George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. Even as it was being released, opportunistic producers could smell something in the water that suggested zombies would be the next big thing - for a little while at least. It led to a wave of cheaply made but generally very profitable knock-offs that took Romero's basic formula and frequently added in more violence, gore and a generous amount of sex and nudity. And so it was with *Alien*, with the few years after the film's release finding cinemas and video store shelves inundated with movies that shared alien DNA with Ridley Scott's classic. Although the creators of these films would often state vociferously they had nothing to do with each other (lest litigation ensue) there's little likelihood any of them would exist without the big success they sought to emulate.

Although *Alien* could be accused of being at least 'inspired' by earlier classics like Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* (1965) or *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958), it certainly did it with style. Those that chased *Alien*'s revenue would really struggle to make that claim. What makes these *Alien* rip-offs (we don't need to be shy) just that? First and foremost, they involve an alien or mutant creature that seems to want



Contamination

to do nothing but kill. They often involve a spaceship in some way. Add in a small group of protagonists desperately trying to stay alive and you're pretty much there, especially if you add in some gloopy gore as the creature rips in or out of a human. They could be set on Earth (cheap!) or in a *Who*-style landscape filling in for a planet (cheaper still!) and will involve one or all of the above ingredients.

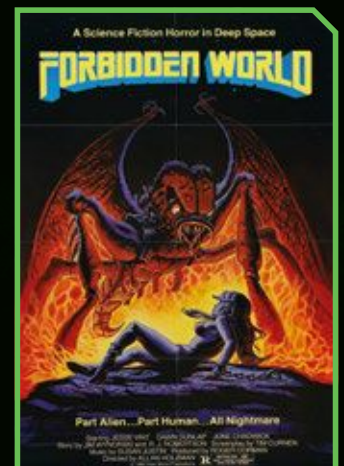
We start with the most blatantly named but also arguably the film that has least to do with the original. From 1980 comes Italy's *Alien 2: On Earth* (aka *Alien Terror*), in which nothing much happens. There's a psychic dream, a crashed ship and a cave but it's not as exciting as that sounds. In amongst all that nothing (it's sadly boring for the most part) there's a bit of gore and it's all over. Next up in 1980, and considerably more enjoyable was Luigi Cozzi's *Contamination* (or to be more obvious, it was also released as *Alien Contamination*) which bases the action on Earth. This Italian-German



Inseminoid

co-produced sci-fi horror was briefly controversial for being included on the Video Nasties list. The reason for its notoriety was the stomach-bursting special effects that followed the alien infection for those that came into contact with the eggs. This is Italian 'homage' done right, even including as it does a Goblin soundtrack.

Britain wasn't to be left behind, either. From the underrated exploitation director Norman J. Warren came 1981's *Inseminoid*. It has a group of scientists out on a distant planet, excavating the ruined civilisation of a long dead race. After some pulsing crystals that seem to have intelligence of their own are discovered the group quickly find themselves in danger. When one of the female scientists (played by '70s starlet Judy Geeson, now part of Rob Zombie's go-to troupe) is fairly graphically inseminated by an alien creature (that resembles nothing so much as a giant penis itself), she goes through a rapidly accelerated pregnancy. It also turns her into





Galaxy of Terror



Creature



Deep Star Six

an inhumanly strong murderer who sets about killing all of her colleagues until her 'babies' can be born. *Inseminoid* doesn't have the greatest of reputations, viewed more as a cheap, sleazy bit of exploitation, mainly due to the undeniably unpleasant 'alien rape' plot, but it's actually a little better than this suggests, a strange mix of queasy body horror, slasher riff and grimy science fiction. Sure, it's not the most tasteful of films (an understatement to say the least) but perhaps more by accident than design it's more thematically rich and open to reading and re-interpretation than expected for an exploitative rehash to be. Also in 1981 we got a TV movie attempt at 'inspired by' with *The Intruder Within*, which follows an oil rig crew who have brought prehistoric eggs to the surface, one of which hatches a dangerous creature. It's worth mentioning as it was the first of a minor run of 'alien under the sea' flicks that peaked in the late 1980s.

It wouldn't be right if Roger Corman didn't get involved somewhere in here, and so he does, twice, starting with 1981's *Galaxy of Terror*, an utterly shameless cash-grab. With more alien rape (sadly, a theme develops)

and creepily sexualised production design it's the real cheap, sleazy exploitation deal from a time when Corman was loading his films with sex and sexualised violence, sometimes after shooting was complete and without even the film's director knowing until release, with *Humanoids from the Deep* being a prime example. And yet here, too, there are some underlying themes - again likely by accident - running through. By taking a mix of body horror and Freudian psychosis even further and deviating from the template by becoming almost completely cinematically insane, for a quickly produced money maker, it's more interesting than it has any right to be. Of course, Corman knows movies and despite being undeniably unabashed and tasteless nonsense *Galaxy of Terror* is also deserving of its status of entertaining cult film. It also stars Ray Walston (*My Favourite Martian*), Erin Moran (*Happy Days*) and genre icons Robert Englund and Sid Haig. Staying with Corman, and recycling some of the sets and production work of *Galaxy*, came 1982's *Forbidden World* (aka *Mutant*). More restrained than its predecessor, it's also more obviously an *Alien* clone. Restrained in this context doesn't mean much, however, and this iteration of the template still finds time to pack in plenty

of gore, nudity, and sex. It's the most trashily enjoyable of the two.

After this first blast of films things kept going with mixed results. There was 1985's *Creature* (with a typically bizarre Klaus Kinski cameo), *Star Crystal* from 1986, and even well into the 90s we still got the cheap straight-to-video likes of 1993's *Dark Universe*. Going back to the 'alien under the sea' point, there was a brief late '80s set of releases including *Leviathan* (starring *Robocop* himself, Peter Weller) and *DeepStar Six* that relocated the deep space horror under our oceans with gory and grisly results. Outside of the *Alien* franchise itself, things got briefly cinematic again with 1995's *Species*. This is more linked with H. R. Giger than any other as he provided the creature designs for Sil, the alien-human hybrid that must be stopped before it mates with a human male. Since *Alien* was released, there's been a veritable industry of loose and more overt homages and direct rip-offs. Some are great, some are good and a lot are terrible but if they do nothing else, they underline *Alien*'s place in popular culture as it continues to inspire.



Forbidden World



Leviathan



Inseminoid

