



ALIEN 1979 (U.S. • U.K.)

Director Ridley Scott **Producers** Gordon Carroll, David Giler, Walter Hill

Screenplay Dan O'Bannon (story by Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett)

Photography Derek Vanlint **Music** Jerry Goldsmith **Cast** Sigourney Weaver, Tom Skerritt, Veronica Cartwright, Harry Dean Stanton, Ian Holm, John Hurt, Yaphet Kotto

Along with *Star Wars* (1977) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Alien* is a landmark science-fiction film. Its historical significance lies in the way it mixes Kubrick's slowness of space with the special effects and marketability of Lucas's franchise, but keeps the film within the domain of gory adult entertainment.

The crew of the mining ship *Nostramo*, returning to earth after a long voyage, is brought out of cryogenic sleep by the ship's computer, which has received an emergency beacon message asking for rescue. Arriving on a desolate planet, the crew discovers a room filled with strange egg-like sacks. Investigating further, one of the eggs bursts open and a strange alien creature attaches itself to Kane's (Hurt) face. Kane is brought back to the ship and put into isolation. The creature detaches itself after a few days, and the crewmember seems to be recovering. During one final meal before they return to their frozen sleep, however, the "face-hugger" had apparently laid some kind of an egg in Kane's chest for incubation, for it is at the dinner table that the alien (named in the literature and in later films as a xenomorph) graphically bursts forth from Kane's chest in what is now an iconic moment of screen terror.

◀ *Alien* has an immediately recognisable, unique look. It won an Oscar for Best Visual Effects, and received a nomination for Best Art Direction.

The creature scurries off and quickly grows to monstrous size, picking off each remaining crew member one at a time, until only Ripley (Weaver) is left. The two do battle before she blows the monster from the ship's airlock out into space.

Not since the classic 1950s films of inter-galactic invasion has science fiction been so closely linked with horror as it is in *Alien*. While the monster and its gory rampage is clearly the generic

“IT’S EXOTIC BEYOND YOUR POSSIBLE EXPERIENCE, BUT IT’S ALSO VERY REAL”

RIDLEY SCOTT (DIRECTOR)

property of horror, *Alien* is equally successful as a sci-fi movie, particularly in its depiction of a future society where human beings are secondary to corporate interests, and the gradual revelation that, while the *Nostramo*'s primary concern was its mining mission, it was equally important for the ever-present company that they bring back a xenomorph specimen for the company's bio-weapons interests. The crew is expendable.

The alien creature itself, based on a design by the Swiss artist H. R. Geiger, fuses the industrial, sexual, and the human. From the film's very opening, tracking through the sleeping ship, the engine's thudding sounds like a heartbeat. As the crew awakens from their cryogenic sleep, the images evoke birth; but clean and antiseptic, particularly in juxtaposition with the bloody and visceral birth images of the alien baby at the dinner table. **MK**

Steven Jay Schneider is a film critic, scholar, and producer with M.A. degrees in Philosophy and Cinema Studies from Harvard University and New York University respectively. He is editor of *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die*, and author and editor of *Fear Without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe* (FAB Press), *New Hollywood Violence* (Manchester UP), *100 European Horror Films* (British Film Institute), and *The Horror Film* (Taschen).

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