



## 2009 PARAMOUNT SUMMER FILM SERIES

### ALIENS

(1986) COLOR 137 MINUTES

**Director:** James Cameron. **Screenplay:** James Cameron from a story by James Cameron, David Giler and Walter Hill. Based on characters created by Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett. **Music:** James Horner. **Special Effects:** Stan Winston, Bob & Dennis Skotak, John Richardson, Doug Beswick. **Cast:** Sigourney Weaver, Carrie Henn, Michael Biehn, Paul Reiser, Lance Henriksen, Bill Paxton, Jenette Goldstein.

### ALIEN 3

(1992) COLOR 115 MINUTES

**Director:** David Fincher. **Screenplay:** David Giler, Walter Hill and Larry Ferguson from a story by Vincent Ward. Based on characters created by Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett. **Music:** Elliot Goldenthal. **Cinematography:** Alex Thomson. **Editor:** Terry Rawlings. **Cast:** Sigourney Weaver, Charles S. Dutton, Charles Dance, Paul McGann, Brian Glover, Ralph Brown, Danny Webb, Christopher John Fields, Holt McCallany, Lance Henriksen, Pete Postlethwaite.

Up to a very definite point in time, the science fiction cinema of the 1970s was composed of, for the most part, eminently forgettable fare. As in almost any film genre in any decade, there was a plethora of B product, blink-and-you-miss-it drive-in movie fodder that later found a home on late night cable television. But how about a show of hands for anyone who remembers such major films as *Silent Running* (1971), *Zardoz* (1974), *Rollerball* (1975), *Westworld* (1973), *Logan's Run* (1976), *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), or *Damnation Alley* (1977), just to name a few?

George Lucas changed all of that, for better or worse, with the release of his seminal space fantasy *Star Wars* in the summer of 1977, a film that marked the beginning of the second great golden age of science fiction films following the first such age in the 1950s. Following close upon the heels of *Star Wars* came two other hugely influential films, Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). These three films became the holy trinity of late seventies science fiction films with *Star Wars* and *Alien* both generating lucrative franchises that have survived and flourished to this day. *Alien* is a masterpiece of horror, brilliantly conceived and superbly executed and although a sequel was perhaps unnecessary, the one we got was a doozy.

James Cameron's first film as a director was the seldom seen (and deservedly so) *Piranha II: The Spawning* (1983). It's a long way from flying killer fish to the self-proclaimed king of the world. But with his second film, Cameron established himself as a genre stylist to be reckoned with. *The Terminator* (1984), in addition to giving Arnold Schwarzenegger his best role, established a new benchmark in the evolution of the science fiction film while simultaneously spawning yet another cash cow action film franchise. The action quotient was high in the film but Cameron kicked it up a notch or twelve in *Aliens*, an ass-kicking sequel that is every bit as good as the first film (albeit in a very different way).

Fifty-seven years after the events of *Alien*, Ripley (Weaver), the only human survivor of the alien encounter, is found floating in deep space. She is revived in order to lead a contingent of space marines back to the planet of the alien eggs. A colony of humans has been established there but they've almost all been wiped out. The cause is a gigantic nest of aliens, all whipping tails and snapping jaws, that have infested the settlement. The marines, though heavily armed, are merely prey for the beasts.

Ripley's maternal instincts come into play as she takes the young Newt (Henn) under her wing, but a mother of a different sort is lurking, the Queen Mother Alien, an enormous monstrosity that is convincingly brought to life without any computer generated special effects by the sheer genius of the late Stan Winston. Ripley becomes "Rambo-ette" in the film's action-packed finale, squaring off mano-a-mano against the Alien Queen.

*Aliens* is a nonstop thrill ride of a movie which is so well constructed you hardly notice that the monsters don't show up until almost an hour into the film. Once they creatures appear, Cameron relentlessly assaults the senses with sound and fury filled action sequences, jacking up the tension to "11." *Aliens* received three Academy Award nominations including: Best Actress (Weaver), Best Visual Effects (winner) and Best Sound Effects Editing (winner). Given the success of the sequel, was it any surprise that a third film came later?

*Alien 3*, the feature film directorial debut of David Fincher, had a difficult production, with various screenwriters and directors getting involved in the project, and shooting even started without a finished script. After the film was finished, 20th Century Fox reworked it without Fincher's consent. Released to mixed reviews and so-so U.S. box-office business, *Alien 3* still grossed over \$100 million outside of North America.

Following the events in *Aliens*, the Colonial Marine spaceship Sulaco experiences an onboard fire and launches an escape pod containing Ellen Ripley (Weaver), Newt, Hicks, and the damaged android Bishop (Henriksen) who are all in cryonic stasis. The pod crashes on Fiorina "Fury" 161, a foundry facility and penal colony inhabited by all-male former inmates with "double-Y" chromosome patterns. As the inmates recover the pod and its passengers, an alien face hugger is seen approaching their dog.

Ripley is taken in and awakened by Clemens (Dance), the facility's doctor and learns that she is the only survivor of the crash. Many of the ex-inmates have embraced an apocalyptic, millenarian religion which forbids sexual relations, and Ripley is warned that her presence among them may have extremely disturbing effects. To say nothing of the presence of whip-tailed, bi-mouthed, fanged, clawed, and slaving killer aliens among them.

The rest of the film is an amalgamation of the action of the second entry with the creeping dread of the first. Fincher turns the humans and aliens lose in a chokingly claustrophobic environment that is coated in grime, filth and sweat. The sexual tension between Ripley as the lone female and a prison planet full of disturbed men adds greatly to the suspense. The ending is a fitting finale to what should have been the end of the series but, alas, that was not to be.

*Alien 3* while not as good as the first two entries, is nonetheless a compelling film and one that is well worth seeing. Weaver is solid as usual and it's interesting to watch director Fincher establish a visual style that he would later put to use in such films as *Seven* (1995), *The Game* (1997), *Fight Club* (1999), *Zodiac* (2007) and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008). *Alien 3* received an Academy Award nomination for Best Visual Effects and was followed by *Alien Resurrection* (1997) and two entries in the monster mash cross-over franchise *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* (2004) and *AVP: Alien vs. Predator: Requiem* (2007).

— Frank Campbell

#### UPCOMING FILM SCHEDULE CHANGES

**Ben-Hur & Monty Python's Holy Grail** - SAT 08/15 only. SUN 8/16 cancelled.  
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