ALIEN

Release date: 6 September 1979 (UK)
Running time: 117 mins
Director: Ridley Scott
Worldwide box office: $104,931,801 million

PRINCIPAL CAST AND CREW

CAST IN CREDITS ORDER
Tom Skerritt .............. Dallas
Sigourney Weaver ........ Ripley
Veronica Cartwright .... Lambert
Harry Dean Stanton .... Brett
John Hurt ................. Kane
Ian Holm .................. Ash
Yaphet Kotto ............. Parker
Bolaji Badejo ............. Alien
Helen Horton .............. Mother (voice)

PRODUCERS
Gordon Carroll
David Giler
Walter Hill

WRITERS
Dan O’Bannon
Ronald Shusett

CINEMATOGRAPHY
Derek Vanlint

EDITING
David Crowther
(Teacher's Cut)
Terry Rawlings
Peter Weatherley

PRODUCTION DESIGN
Michael Seymour

Dallas
Tom Skerritt

Ripley
Sigourney Weaver

Lambert
Veronica Cartwright

Brett
Harry Dean Stanton

Kane
John Hurt

Ash
Ian Holm

Parker
Yaphet Kotto

Alien
Bolaji Badejo
In testament to Ridley Scott’s original vision, *Alien* is thought of not only as one of the greatest sci-fi epics ever made, but also as a seminal horror classic…

Ridley Scott always intended to make *Alien* as a horror film. Despite this, the director has readily acknowledged the influence of such popular science-fiction movies as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and, in particular, *Star Wars* (1977). “That was the fairy story,” said Scott of George Lucas’ box-office phenomenon. “I was gonna do the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* of science fiction.” What emerged in *Alien* was the perfect hybrid of two genres, an unholy union that was summed up in the chilling tagline…

"In space no one can hear you scream."
THE MAKING OF ALIEN

STORY ORIGINS
Like the alien itself, Scott’s monster hit started out small. Dan O’Bannon, the writer of the film, made his first foray into sci-fi with the micro-budget satire *Dark Star* (1974), which was also about an alien running amok on a spaceship. “I decided to re-do *Dark Star* as a horror instead of a comedy,” recalls O’Bannon, “and that was the germ of *Alien*.” Together with co-author Ronald Shusett, O’Bannon pitched his movie to producers as “Jaws in space...”

Odd as it may now seem, British director Ridley Scott wasn’t the first choice to direct *Alien*. 20th Century Fox had insisted on Walter Hill, but Hill passed on the opportunity. Scott graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1963. He worked as a trainee set designer at the BBC before forming his own company. His work in advertising led to his first big-screen outing, *The Duellists* (1977), which won the Best Debut Film award at Cannes.

When the *Alien* script landed on Scott’s desk he had just seen *Star Wars*, which he remembers, “blew me away”. Within hours of reading it he was on a plane to the U.S. to make the deal! After the success of *Alien*, Scott went on to direct another landmark sci-fi film: *Blade Runner* (1982).

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GREAT SCOTT!

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GREAT ASPIRATIONS
Early drafts of the script were called *Star Beast*, but the writers soon hit on the elegantly minimalist title that would set the tone of the film – and raise *Alien* out of B-movie territory into a different class. “I was convinced that this wasn’t a small picture,” said producer Gordon Carroll, though many of the big-name directors that he asked to take on what was, essentially, a ‘creature feature’ didn’t share his view. It wasn’t until the name Ridley Scott was suggested that the production process began to take off.

Although he wasn’t well known, and had previously directed only one feature-length film, Scott was someone that 20th Century Fox believed could give their film a unique look and the commitment it needed. As soon as he showed them his amazingly detailed storyboards the studio executives became convinced that Scott was their man, and Fox immediately doubled the film’s budget to $8.4 million. With the money in place, all the director and his crew had to do now was bring the grand and terrifying imaginations of *Alien* to life.

RIDLEY’S VISION
At first, just two concept artists were employed to work on the film: Chris Foss, a British-born illustrator strongly influenced by the decaying industrial landscape of his youth, and the French comic-book artist Jean Giraud (also known as ‘Moebius’). They were soon joined by American Ron Cobb and together began toiling away on endless design drawings. Each of the artists was encouraged to focus on a different aspect of design, with Foss working on the exterior of the
Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) is often thought of as the first female action heroine.

Nostromo and Cobb on the heavily engineered interior of the ship.

The stricken alien spacecraft – and the beast itself – became the design domain of H.R. Giger. Both O’Bannon and Scott had become so bewitched by the nightmarish visions of ‘psycho-sexuality’ on display in the Swiss surrealist’s work that the director flew to Zurich to meet him. Before long, Giger had joined the production team and was given free reign to create a sci-fi monster unlike any seen before.

**FINDING THE CREW**

With the Nostromo itself taking shape on the drawing boards – and then, gradually, on the huge soundstages of Shepperton Studios in England – Scott began his search for the ship’s crew. The script had been written so that any of the ship’s seven-strong team could be played by either a man or a woman. In a bold move, Fox decided that the lead, Ripley, should be female. “I thought it was no contest,” Scott recalls. “Why not?”

Auditions for *Alien* were held in both America and England, and Scott soon found his Ripley in the form of a little-known off-Broadway actress called Sigourney Weaver. With the lead in place, Scott filled out the rest of the cast with a combination of British and American actors, as befits an international space expedition. Among them were two English actors with impressive theatre credentials – John Hurt as Kane and Ian Holm as Ash. “Ian I thought was going to be a lovey….” remembers Scott. “Oddly enough he was the easiest of them all!”

**BUILDING TENSION**

The intense 12-week shoot began at Shepperton on 5 July 1978, with more than 200 craftsmen and labourers working on the massive and complex sets. “It got tense in those corridors,” recalls Scott, who found himself under pressure from nervous studio executives, who were anxious over the amount of time the director seemed to be taking in setting up each shot.

Many of the actors were also feeling uneasy at having to work in such tough and claustrophobic conditions. But, unpopular as it may have made him at the time, Scott felt this atmosphere ultimately helped...
his cast to craft a set of realistically paranoid performances. “I didn’t want to sit there and have a heart to heart,” he explains. “I wanted them to be insecure and afraid, and that’s why I didn’t show them the alien.”

Scott did indeed hold back on showing Giger’s monster to the actors for as long as was practically possible. But it wouldn’t be long before the alien was revealed to the world in all its horrifying glory.

**ALIEN UNLEASHED**

*Alien* first opened in the U.S. on 25 May, 1979, though without an official U.S. premier. This didn’t stop legions of fans besieging the Grauman’s Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, where various props from the film had been put on display.

The audience reaction to early screenings was extreme: an usher fainted and someone tried to set fire to the prop of the petrified alien pilot, believing it was the work of the devil. The film’s editor, Terry Rawlings, remembers people “screaming and running out of the theatre”. But, for all its shock value, *Alien* was far more than just a gore-packed B-movie. Critics hailed it a triumph, and the film’s place as both a sci-fi blockbuster and a lasting masterpiece of visceral horror was assured.

**LEGACY**

Fox knew it had a huge hit on its hands and set about planning a follow-up to *Alien*. At the time of writing Scott’s film has spawned three direct sequels: James Cameron’s *Aliens* (1986), David Fincher’s *Alien³* (1992) and Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), along with two spin-off entries in the form of *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* in 2004 and *AVPR: Aliens vs. Predator – Requiem* in 2007.

In 2002, the original film was classified as “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant” by the National Film Preservation Board of the United States, while the influential American Film Institute ranks Scott’s movie as the seventh greatest sci-fi movie of all time. Weaver’s Ripley came in at number eight in their countdown of greatest heroes (just behind Rocky Balboa), while the alien itself was number fourteen in its list of immortal movie villains, just one place below Ridley Scott’s favourite: Hal 9000 from Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

*Alien* is often referred to as not only one of the greatest sci-fi films ever made, but as one of the greatest horror films too – a testament to the original visions of both Ridley Scott and Dan O’Bannon. Without them, no one would have been screaming in space in the first place.
The other-wordly style and ‘biomechanical’ technique of Swiss designer H.R. Giger was largely responsible for creating one of the greatest screen monsters of all time.

Alien’s three monsters – the Facehugger, the Chestburster and the adult creature in the title role – were each based on the disturbing imaginings of H.R. Giger. Even before a director was assigned to the movie, Alien writer Dan O’Bannon contacted Giger and hired him to produce some early concept art for the Facehugger. Later, after Ridley Scott was hired to direct, O’Bannon showed him Giger’s book, Necronomicon (1977). Among the pages were reproductions of two paintings titled Necronom IV (1976) and Necronom V (1976), which depicted a nightmarish yet beautiful creature. Scott was completely bowled over. “I nearly fell off the desk… That’s it! I’ve never been so certain of anything in my life.”

Giger offered to redesign them for the film, but Scott was adamant that these images were what the alien should look like. The final design was made up from a combination of the two paintings, with the body being taken from Necronom IV while the head was taken from Necronom V.

Giger in the Movies

Hans Rudi Giger was born in 1940 in Chur, Switzerland. He is a painter, sculptor and set designer, and his work on Alien won an Academy Award in 1980. His movie work began with his contributions to the doomed 1970s Dune film project after its proposed director Alejandro Jodorowsky was taken to a Giger exhibition in Paris by the man who was to write Alien – Dan O’Bannon. Even though the Dune project was to fall through, in the summer of 1977 O’Bannon wanted to employ Giger’s distinctive artistic talents again and he called him about his new sci-fi project – speaking “very slowly, so that, in spite of my poor English, I can understand the important things in store for me…”

All H.R. Giger paintings featured in this article can be viewed in person at the H.R. Giger Museum in Gruyeres, Switzerland. To learn more about the artist, please visit his official websites: www.hrgiger.com and www.hrgigermuseum.com
I nearly fell off the desk. That’s it! I’ve never been so certain of anything in my life.

Ridley Scott, on seeing H.R. Giger’s vision for the adult alien
The gritty atmosphere of *Alien* was greatly enhanced through brilliant production design and the amazing sets that were created. A production crew worked flat out for six months to build sets that would transport audiences to another time and place.

H.R. Giger designed the landscape of the planet and the derelict spacecraft, giving them an organic look by using real animal bones, some of which had come straight from the slaughterhouse. This certainly had an effect on actress Veronica Cartwright. “Giger’s sets were so erotic. I mean, there’s big vaginas and penises, the whole thing is like you’re going into some sort of womb. And that’s what really makes it work.”

The model of the Nostromo, built by Martin Bower, was about 16 feet long and took more than a year to finish. At one stage Bower spent eight weeks modelling the cathedral-like spires of the Refinery only to have director Ridley Scott smash bits off with a hammer!

The Nostromo’s interior sets were built using scrapped parts from old bomber aircraft. The sets were all connected, with the engine room, cafeteria and hospital all linked by corridors. This helped create a sense of being trapped inside a nightmare from which there was no escape.

As producer Gordon Carroll says, “Walking on those sets, seeing the richness of design and texture, it began to get to you physically and, when you pumped the smoke in there, you were in ghostly surroundings. Ridley was bringing this picture to the highest creative level.”

An incredible amount of time and effort was poured into the creation of *Alien*’s sets, scenery and ships, helping to evoke the otherworldly mood of the film.
Ridley Scott literally walked around the models with a hammer and chisel and started chopping off all the spires on the Refinery!

Martin Bower, Supervising Model Maker

An early inspirational design for the Nostromo ship. The final ship was very different, as the production crew wanted to create an industrial, Gothic look.

The set above cost about $500,000 to build. The petrified alien pilot was designed, sculpted (with the help of the crew) and painted by H.R. Giger.