

# 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  
(Director'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



# ALIEN

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...

**R**idley 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.”

## 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..."

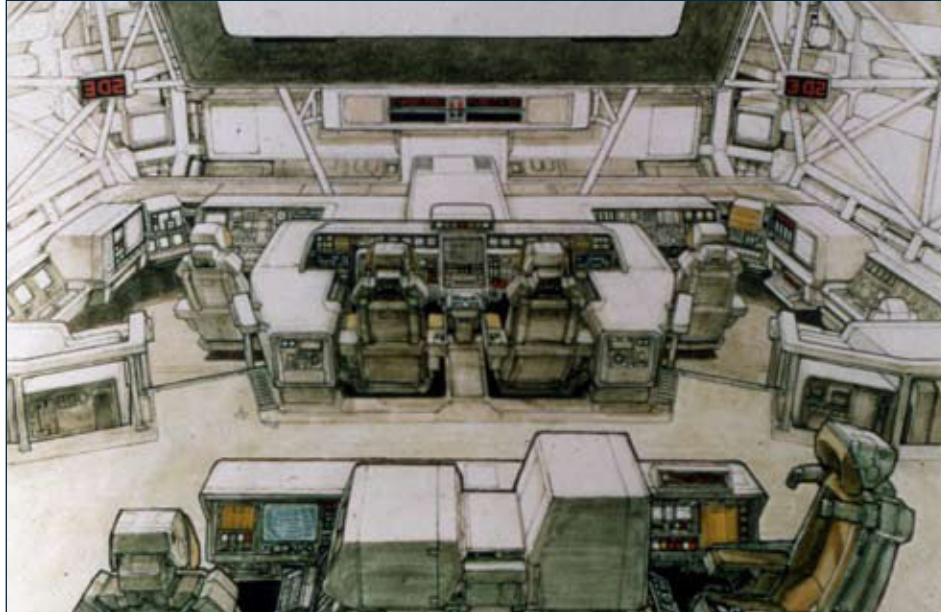


Director Ridley Scott flew to Zurich to meet artist H.R. Giger to talk about designs for the alien.

Photo © 1978 Mia Bonzanigo Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

## 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



Dozens of illustrations were produced by concept artists Ron Cobb and Chris Foss for the Nostromo interior, including the one above, which shows a possible design for the spacecraft's cockpit.

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 imaginings 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



## GREAT SCOTT!

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).

In 1995, he and his brother Tony – also a director – formed the production company Scott Free. The pair then bought a stake in Shepperton, the studio at which *Alien* had been filmed nearly 30 years previously...

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



Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) is often thought of as the first female action heroine.

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

## FACTS AND FIGURES: *ALIEN*

### OSCAR-WINNING CREATURES

Carlo Rambaldi, who won an Academy Award for his work on *Alien* after building the creature’s mechanical head, went on to win another Oscar for making an entirely different kind of alien in Steven Spielberg’s *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*.

### HOT SUITS

The spacesuits worn by John Hurt, Tom Skerritt and Veronica Cartwright were incredibly bulky and let very little air in. With temperatures rising to 100°F under the hot studio lights, the actors kept passing out – so an oxygen supply had to be kept on standby to help them recover.



### GARGANTUAN LEG

A 45-foot tall landing leg of the Nostromo was built on the set of the planet to show the scale of the ship. Even then, Ridley Scott felt it was not big enough, so for some long-shots he had smaller spacesuits made up for his and cinematographer Derek Vanlint’s children, making the landing leg appear larger.

### SCAREDY CAT

The ginger cat, Jones, was played by not one, but four ginger cats. The ‘hissing cat’ scene was made possible by suddenly revealing an Alsatian dog from behind a large board.



### COMIC BOOK INFLUENCE

Legendary French comic-book artist, Jean ‘Moebius’ Giraud, designed the crew’s casual wardrobe and the spacesuits worn on the planet.

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.”

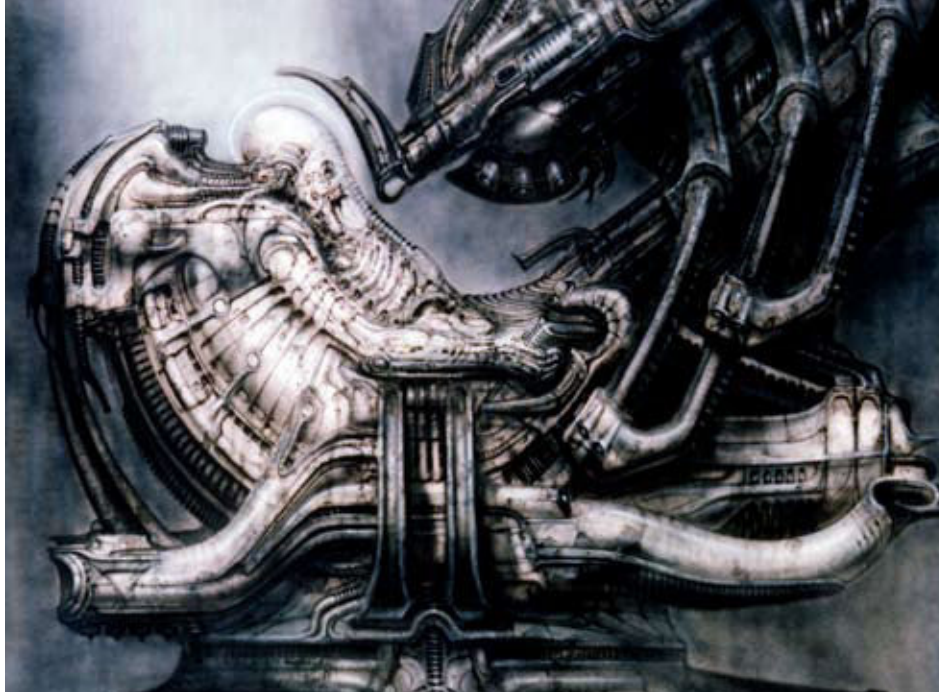
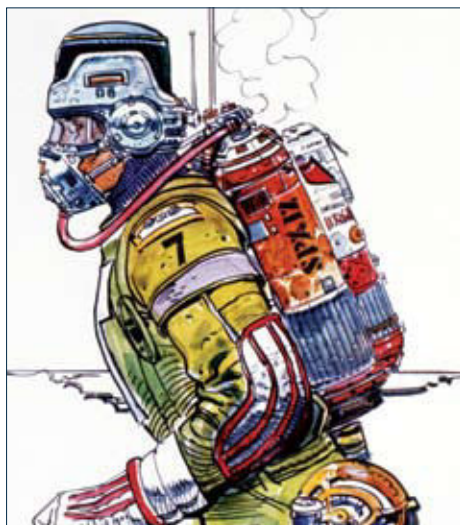
Scott did indeed hold back on showing Giger’s monster to the actors for as long as was practically possible. But it wouldn’t be long before the alien was revealed to the world in all its horrifying glory.

### 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



A huge prop of the petrified alien pilot, based on Giger’s design, was built for the film and later placed in the lobby of a cinema where someone tried to set fire to it, believing it to be the work of the devil.

Pilot in Cockpit, © 1978 H. R. Giger, 100x140 cm, acrylic on paper, Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

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

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

*It's simple, it's one word, and no one's ever used it! It never changed, from that moment on, the title stuck. That was amazing to us!*

Ron Shusett, writer

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*

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.

### MOEBIUS

Jean Henri Gaston Giraud, or ‘Moebius’, is a French comic-book artist best known for his Western series *Blueberry*, which began in 1963. He was involved in the design process on *Alien* from the film’s earliest stages, when he provided concept art for spacecraft, landscapes and, perhaps most significantly, spacesuits.

Ridley Scott has often credited Moebius’ sci-fi comics as a major influence on the storyboards that he presented to Fox – and indeed the look of *Alien* as a whole. The director would later draw on the artist’s illustration of the Dan O’Bannon short story ‘The Long Tomorrow’ (1975) for his second foray into science fiction, *Blade Runner*.

# GIGER's VISION

The other-worldly style and 'biomechanical' technique of Swiss designer H.R. Giger was largely responsible for creating one of the greatest screen monsters of all time.

**A**lien's three monsters – the Facehugger, the Chestbuster 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 Alexandro 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](http://www.hrgiger.com) and [www.hrgigermuseum.com](http://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

**Main image:** Necronom IV, © 1976 H.R. Giger, 100x150cm, acrylic on paper on wood. Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

**Top left:** Necronom V, © 1976, 100x150cm, acrylic on paper. Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

**Bottom left:** Dan O’ Bannon (left) and H.R. Giger (right), Photo © 1978 Mia Bonzanigo. Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

**Right:** Alien III, Front View III, © 1978 H.R. Giger, 70x100cm, acrylic on paper. Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

**Far right:** Alien III, Side View III, © 1978 H.R. Giger, 140x100cm, acrylic on paper. Courtesy of the H.R. Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

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# Spaceships AND SETS

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.

**T**he 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."



Wreck, © 1978 HR Giger, 70x100 cm, acrylic on paper. Courtesy of the HR Giger Museum, Gruyeres, Switzerland

## BONES OF DECAY



Real animal bones straight from the slaughterhouse were used in creating the interior of the derelict spacecraft, which made the whole set stink.





“ 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

## CONCEPT ARTISTS



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 ALIEN PILOT



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.