

Aliens (1986)

Major Actors: Sigourney Weaver (Ellen Ripley), Micheal Biehn (Corporal Dwayne Hicks), Carrie Henn (Rebecca 'Newt' Jorden), Paul Reiser (Carter Burke), Lance Henriksen (Bishop), Bill Paxton (Private Hudson), and Jenette Goldstein (Private Vasquez).

Executive producers: David Giler, Walter Hill, Gordon Carroll

Line Producer: Gale Anne Hurd

Director of photography: Adrian Biddle

Produced by: David Giler, Walter Hill, Gordon Carroll, Gale Anne Hurd

Screenwriter: James Cameron

Director: James Cameron

When one thinks of iconic 80's movies, James Cameron's *Aliens* definitely comes to mind. Not only did it amaze me back then, but it still does. Cameron's imagination and vision for this action-packed, science fiction blockbuster; was way before his time. He was limited to using animatronics in bringing the aliens to life, and didn't have access to computer-generated imagery (CGI) to create the space scenes and other scenes that are easier for movie makers today. Yet, Cameron was able to bring an alien planet to life on screen and scare people half to death in the process.

This film falls into a couple of genres, and horror is most certainly one of them. He also created one of the most iconic, female heroine characters of all time, Ellen Ripley, played by Sigourney Weaver. *Aliens* was filmed at Pinewood Studios in England and grossed \$131 million dollars worldwide, a large amount of money at that time. This movie set the standard for a lot of science fiction genre movies to come in the years following it's release, and it definitely opened doors for many aspiring film makers. It

also earned major acclaim and won two Academy Awards for Sound Effects Editing and Visual Effects, proving the hype behind this movie gem was well founded. *Aliens* is a sequel to the 1979 film, *Alien*. Some have claimed that it's one of the best sequels ever. I would have to agree. I actually think it was better than the first one. But I really enjoyed *Alien* as well. Whatever the arguments may be about this film, it's hands down one of the best action/science fiction/horror movies ever made.

This movie happens in real time and there are no flashbacks. The story begins with Ellen Ripley (Weaver), the only survivor on the space freighter Nostromo, being found alive. She is found 57 years later floating around in space in stasis and is brought back to safety. After an interview with a panel of executives from her employer, the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, they don't believe her and take away her flight license. Ripley (is what they call her), was a warrant officer in the previous movie aboard Nostromo, when an Alien got on board and killed all but her and one other. Ripley is traumatized and has horrible nightmares while recovering in the spaceship's hospital.

Meanwhile, on planet LV-426 (terraforming colony), the Aliens have attacked and taken over the colony, showing a family having a run-in with the Aliens in the first part of the movie. Weyland-Yutani Co. realizes Ripley was right, thus asking for her assistance with a team of Colonial Marines, to find survivors if still alive. Carter Burke (Paul Reiser), is a Weyland-Yutani Co. representative who asks Ripley to help assist the mission on planet LV-426 because they have lost contact with the colony. Reiser is one of the major characters in the film along with Lt. Gorman (William Hope), who asks Ripley to go as well. She declines at first, but after the night terrors she keeps having, she

realizes

she must help find these survivors to help face her fears and recover from her terrifying experience. She agrees to come on as a consultant and they journey to the Alien invaded, desolate planet.

The unit Marines team on the warship Sulaco, consists of several key characters who add some humor to the film as their playful banter lightens the mood. The main characters from the Marines are Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn), Private Hudson (Bill Paxton) and Private Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein). There is also a cyborg or android, named Bishop, who has a small role in the beginning but then later becomes one of the most important characters towards the end. Ripley doesn't like the android at first because of her previous mission when she encountered a bad one on Nostromo named Ash.

They end up in a nuclear-powered atmosphere processing station, and this is where most of the movie takes place. They have a ton of weapons in this movie and these are used as stand out props in the film, and are also a gun lovers dream! So basically, this team and Ripley land on the stormy, dark planet LV-426 and proceed to search for survivors with loads of guns blazing. They eventually find one survivor, a little girl they call Newt (Carrie Henn), who is extremely traumatized, as the Aliens have probably been hunting her for quite some time. She is shy at first but then latches on to Ripley, who takes on a motherly role towards the little girl. Ripley earlier found out her own little girl had grown old and passed, so this is a heartwarming aspect of the film because you know both of them need each other to recover from both of their traumas.

The movie in the middle then shows them looking for other survivors in the nuclear plant, when they find some almost dead people in gross, slimy Alien pods. The Aliens attack and kill most of the unit while Ripley escapes with Newt, Hicks, Vasquez and Hudson. They try and figure out how they're going to get off the planet after Gorman gets knocked out. Ripley and Hicks devise a plan to get a dropship to come get them and the survivors and get back to the ship to kill the Aliens from up above. But this doesn't work out as planned when an Alien gets on board the dropship and kills the pilots, crashing one of their two chances to get off the planet.

They then barricade themselves in the colony complex, with machine guns set up to ward off the Aliens in front of a sealed door. Here, Ripley accuses Burke of bringing them there to become impregnated with the Aliens, to bring them back to Earth to use as biological weapons. They have a little spat when Bishop comes and tells them that they have bigger problems. The nuclear plant has become unstable and will detonate with a nuclear sized blast and kill them all. Bishop then goes to hopefully control the Sulaco's remaining dropship by remote control to get them off planet before the plant explodes.

Ripley and Newt have another tender moment when they take a nap together in a lab room. But it doesn't last long when one of the baby Aliens ("facehuggers") they were experimenting on gets loose and attacks them. Burke sees them in trouble, but ignores them and turns off the camera because he sees Ripley as a threat. But the other members eventually see them struggling and rescue them. Ripley then accuses Burke again of wanting to impregnate her and Newt to bring embryo's back to Earth and also of him wanting to terminate the team while in stasis on the return trip. They don't have time for

much arguing though when the power goes out and the Aliens attack from up above.

Burke dies, as well as the hysterical (and comical) Hudson, Vasquez and Gorman. The Aliens end up kidnapping Newt and Hicks and Ripley find Bishop. But Ripley refuses to leave without Newt and gets geared up to go blast some Aliens to find her new friend.

Ripley finds Newt all gooey and in a pod and saves her from the Queen Alien's hive in the processing station. But the Queen breaks free and follows them after Ripley burns all her eggs with a mega gun. They narrowly escape when the colony is about to be vaporized as Bishop picks them up with the other dropship. The blast goes off and they barely make it back to the warship Sulaco. Everything looks like it's going to be okay, but then the grossest part of the whole movie happens. Bishop is seen with white, milky goo coming out of his mouth as the Queen's sharp insect-like arm tears him in half. You then see the Queen coming off the dropship, as she obviously stowed away as the ship left the plant.

This is where the movie really gave the audience a thrill, when the iconic scene of Ripley putting on a yellow, robot suit takes place. The exosuit cargo-loader then battles the Alien with Ripley at the helm, with Weaver uttering one of her most famous lines ever when defending Newt from the Queen. "Get away from her you bitch!", has got to be one of the most infamous lines from an action movie in history. Ripley and the Queen fall into a huge airlock and Ripley defeats the Alien when she opens it up (holding on somehow), and the Queen gets sucked into the vacuum of space.

Bishop is obviously pretty beat up but alive and Newt and Ripley are safe. Hicks is beat up too but alright and the three of them end the movie falling asleep in the chambers

to return to Earth. I believe the ending to be the best part of the movie because when I first watched it back in 1986 (I was 10 and allowed to watch R rated films), I remember thinking it was going to end when they got off the planet. But Cameron is a master film maker and gave it a real twist when Bishop got torn in half and the awesome battle commences between Ripley and the Queen. I like the way Cameron left the ending open, so that there could be a third movie made if needed. And there were two more made actually, along with a couple of *Aliens vs. Predators* movies as well. All were relatively successful financially, but not as critically acclaimed as *Alien* and *Aliens*.

As far as my take on the movie, I have always enjoyed the installments of these horror/science fiction flicks immensely. I am what you call a comic book dork and love movies about space and aliens. The beginning of this movie didn't grab me as much as the end of it, but that is to be expected sometimes with a sequel. They start off telling the back story and have to set up scenario for those people that didn't see the first film. I read that the filming was in England, but I'm sure a lot of this movie had to have computer enhancement as well. But not with CGI, that didn't come along till the 1990's. The Alien Queen had a whole crew of puppeteers operating the arms, legs and head in a synchronized manner to make her look so real that it's still amazing today. You don't see that in movie making anymore and it's kind of sad that everything is computer enhanced now. But those last two major scenes still scare me to this day, and whatever movie magic Cameron used to make the Queen so realistic worked fantastically with the limited resources he had.

The lighting was something that I'd never noticed before until I really analyzed this

movie. There was almost a bluish-white tint to the whole film except for two scenes.

These were at the end when the fire is contrasting with the soft blue haze at the nuclear plant. And the tender moment when Ripley puts Newt to sleep in the laboratory. She turns on a light for her to help her feel safe and it had a warm, orange glow to it. Other than that, the planet was dark, rainy and cold looking from the lighting they used. Inside the colony and plant itself, the fluorescent lighting was cold as well with a bluish tint to it. I theorized that this use of blue color, gives an overall cold feeling to the film to make one feel like they're on that hell-hole planet with them. It almost gave it an creepy, extraterrestrial feel to the whole thing. There were some use of camera flares, to add some drama to the shooting, which get old to me if used too much. So overall, I think the lighting was really well done and conveyed the right emotional feel for the movie.

To tie into the lighting, the camera shots were great to convey emotion from the actors and story. There were three main types of camera shots I noticed- steady shots, hand-held shots and long shots. When inside the colony, and during action scenes, there were shaky shots that looked like someone was holding the camera with their hand. There were also steady, panning shots when a mellow scene was occurring. Like when inside the warship in the cafeteria or when Ripley is putting Newt to sleep. There was also a lot of use of camcorder type shots when Ripley and other members of the team are watching several Marines look for survivors from the dropship. This made it even more realistic and scary and reminded me of later horror movies like the *Paranormal Activity* franchise. There were also a couple shots of the actors from down underneath them that added drama and suspense to the feel of the movie. Like when Vasquez was walking down the

hall of the colony with that enormous gun. Overall, I think the cinematography was very well done on this particular film. It was diverse and that kept it interesting.

The introduction to the movie as far as producers and such was a little different than other movies in my opinion. It started off by saying it's a James Cameron film of course (he's a rumored narcissist) and then it listed the major actors. It then jumped to the title of the movie and then listed the effects crew and Director of Photography. Then it listed who the story was by, the screenplay writer and only one producer was listed (Gale Anne Hurd, Cameron's then wife). The last person listed was the director, James Cameron. This didn't surprise me all that much, as I've heard that Cameron is quite egotistical.

As far as the dialog, I could hear most of it properly. There were some quiet moments that I had to turn it up because I couldn't hear, but that's my sound setup on my television's fault, not the movies. I was told that on a surround sound system, I would have been able to hear it better. The movie was made back in 1986 however, so I've noticed in the past that old movies are super loud during action or music scenes, and super quiet at other times, like dialog scenes.

I believe the film was reaching out to a demographic of about 18-35 during its initial release. Now, I think it speaks to a broader demographic because a lot of people find it to be nostalgic and vintage, like myself. There isn't much I don't like about this movie except for the part at the end when Ripley isn't sucked out to space with the Queen. It was kind of unrealistic, but then again, it is fiction.

Aliens is by far one of my favorite science fiction/horror movies ever. Ripley's character introduced me at a young age what a strong, powerful, heroic woman should be

like. She had a softness and a calm, coolness to her character that appealed to me too and

I thought Weaver did an excellent job in this role. I can't tell you how many times I've seen this movie over the years. Every time I watch it, it gets better and I grow to love it that much more. And as I get older, I appreciate the master film making that took place while creating this alien world and story. I remember seeing this movie with my dad at a theater and the way it scared me then, still scares me now. As a film maker, Cameron excels at his craft, and movies like *Avatar* only prove his genius that much more. I hope that the rumors are true and Cameron makes and *Alien 5*. I bet Weaver could still rock the role as Ripley too! This particular film is my favorite out of all the ones Cameron has ever made though, and I don't think making another one could hurt. I'd love to see what he could do with a CGI Alien Queen, but the old way wasn't that shabby either. I give mad props to the team that made this iconic movie and I'm itching to see what Cameron has up his sleeve next.