



Ripley finishes the edited sequence by frying the generating monster with her flamethrower.

ALIEN SECRETS

A motion picture is filled with magic. It is also filled with intrigue, confusion, frustration, omission, and impatience.

ALIEN, like many of its cinematic counterparts, was no exception. Within its making are many untold stories of what was, and what might have been. But unlike many other movies, the stories that filter from backstage on **ALIEN** are incredible!

Shocking! Monumental!

Most of these stories tell of changes which would have altered the form of the finished film completely. They tell of fascinating techniques created on the spur of the moment which did much to heighten the film's frightening effect.

Here, then, are . . . the secrets of **ALIEN**.

FACT: The original Dan O'Bannon script called for three distinctly different alien forms to be found on the planetoid of the derelict. And, as initially conceived, the **ALIEN** was to be a sexually driven

creature. A monster only by the fact that its biological purpose for existence is to procreate. Its only fault is ignorance of the frailties of the human form.

FACT: In the reworked O'Bannon script by Walter Hill and David Giler, the female characters were integrated so deeply that a romantic subplot was introduced between Dallas and Ripley. A subplot that was set to culminate in a love scene inside an observation blister. A love scene which would be interrupted by the floating corpse of the chest-bursted Kane!

FACT: Ridley Scott's love of Joseph Conrad's literary works dictated a change in titles. Originally, the space tug was named "The Leviathan" while its escape ship's moniker was "The Snark." In an obvious homage to one of his primary influences, Scott had the ships renamed "Nostromo" from a Conrad novel of the same title, and "Narcissus" from another Conrad work.



The ultimate ALIEN secret! The huddled corpse of Brett peeks out from the top of the maturing cocoon. This was a chilling scene cut out of a film already too full with frights:

FACT: Given that 20th Century-Fox imposed such a tight deadline on filming, the technical crew had precious little time to prepare for filming. Indeed, Bill Welch, the Construction Manager, pleaded for the picture to be delayed for two weeks while his crew tried to meet the schedule. But the date had been set and shooting began on time . . . even though the sets were not finished! While Scott shot one angle, often the crew would be feverishly working to finish the other.

FACT: Ridley Scott is a master filmmaker who can only feel fully secure directing from behind a camera. Throughout the filming of ALIEN, two cameras were always in use. One was handled by Scott himself, and the other by the Director of Photography Derek Vanlint. There were constant problems keeping the two cameras out of each other's way. The only time complicated sightlines did not have to be doubly worked out was when a hand-held shot was required. At that point, Scott was the *only* cameraperson, since he was an expert at running *backwards*!

FACT: Lighting problems assailed the crew throughout the shooting schedule. These problems were aggravated by the wide range of lighting fixtures

used and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the sets. Besides the tube lighting, the brutes and the tungsten spotlights, the set was filled with neon and 747 aircraft lights! Then, to supplement scenes that grew too dark, Mike Seymour replaced some ceiling sections of the set with plastic so overhead light could be used out of camera range. When the worst happened and no extra lights could realistically be brought in, Vanlint asked the actors to hold their portable flame-throwers close to their faces. Things got hot on the ALIEN set in more ways than one!

FACT: Every frame of ALIEN was shot indoors, on interior sets. This fact is all the more incredible when one considers the scenes set on the wind-swept, stormy surface of the Alien planet. It seems that the three exploring astronauts are walking much further than a studio set could stretch. To facilitate that illusion, *children* were hired to stand-in for Tom Skerritt, Veronica Cartwright, and John Hurt, and spacesuits were *scaled down* to fit them. The impression onscreen is that the full-size actors are going through their paces!

FACT: The space jockey, that beautifully detailed fossil sitting in its decaying ship, had to be seen from several different directions during the course of the action. Building such a large creature was expensive enough, so building an entire enclosure representing the chamber of the derelict was definitely prohibitive. The answer came from more of Michael Seymour's clever designs. Only one small section of the wall was built, but the space jockey itself was constructed upon a turntable—a huge lazy susan. So instead of the actors moving about the set, the space jockey moved about them!

FACT: The Alien itself was not entirely the work of H.R. Giger. Though the visual "look" is his—Ridley Scott got his inspiration for the final form of the monster from Giger's paintings—its evolution was a



The children who led them. Here are the two young actors who stood in for Tom Skerritt and John Hurt during some long walking scenes on the ALIEN planet.

matter of committee. First it was agreed that the Alien should mature three times. Next, the Face Hugger was reduced from a big bird-like beast with claws to the crab-like creation seen in the film. Then, after the Chest Burster sheds its skin, the final monstrosity is so unlike anything seen before, the only nickname the crew could think of attaching to it was the *Little Rascal*.

FACT: The scene in the hold of the derelict ship called for more than its share of devilish special effects work. The moment when the Face Hugger first comes leaping from its egg onto Kane's helmet will long be remembered by audiences, but the actual filming of the scene will long be remembered by actor John Hurt . . . for entirely different reasons. While the on-screen demon seemed to be a combination of an octopus, slug, and crab, what was actually hurled at Hurt was a model whose underbelly was made of three pounds of liver and a sheep's stomach!

FACT: Another unforgettable scene is when the Chest Burster comes ripping from Kane's chest. And if some critics felt that the sequence was too strong for audiences, how'd they think the cast and crew felt? For them, even though they had been prepared, it was *actually happening*. Derek Vanlint, the Cinematographer, remembers that filming the entire scene was no great problem, but it was a different story when he saw his own film in the screening room. "The first time we shot it, we showed some pretty hairy things," he remembers. "It was the only time I ever had to walk out of rushes. I went out and was rather ill . . . and I was ribbed quite a bit about that for the rest of the picture!"

FACT: There was much more to the Alien than met the eye. Since Ridley Scott used a painting by Giger as the basis for the adult Alien, he had to work backward to create the first two phases. During this process, the director came to understand the organism completely. "The nasty one," he says, "the thing that sprung out of the egg—the 'perambulatory penis' as we used to call it—is the father. All it does is plant the seed. And the next generation takes on characteristics of whatever form it landed on." This means that the ALIEN may not always be a biped! It could conceivably be a combination of the original Face Hugger and whatever host it uses!

FACT: Every phase of the Alien's growth is shown on screen except for the final stage. Once the monster is fully developed, the film does not elaborate on how the initial egg was created. However, while it was not shown in movie houses, such an explanatory scene *was filmed!* It showed Ripley, running from the corpses of Lampert and Parker, coming upon a pair of huddled masses on C level. Upon closer examination, these two things turn out to be the bodies of Dallas and Brett! Each is bound tightly to the walls by a gooey, metallic cocoon. And each is being used as food for the beginnings of a new race of Aliens. Brett is too far gone, but Dallas manages to open his eyes and plead for execution. Ripley, horrified but determined, grants the Captain's last painful wish. The scene was suitably powerful, but the director felt that it slowed the momentum of the fast-moving finale. So the decision was made to excise it from the finished film. (It was too late, however, to keep the scene from appearing in the paperback novelization of the story.



The final fate of Captain Dallas. Again, in an edited scene, the still-living body begins a terrible transformation.

FACT: The film's climax, the scenes where Ripley races the Nostromo's automatic destruction orders, were extremely trying to film. In order to heighten the effect, Derek Vanlint pulled out all the lighting stops. Most of the lights used in that scene were "spinner lights," which are remarkably similar to panic lights or police siren lights. Added to that were what is called "scissor arcs": incredibly bright lights made up of two carbons which are moved back and forth manually. "They produce just a series of flashes," Vanlint says, "but they make a hell of a noise. I noticed that Ridley even used the sound of the scissors for one of the explosions!"

FACT: When the nearly completed ALIEN was first shown to executives, artists, visitors and guests, the reaction was anything but professional. According to an eye-witness one person choked on his drink while watching, another knocked over a tray when he leaped up in surprise, and many other filmmakers were seen covering their eyes in panic. The premiere showing to the public was little different. The screams, shouts, and jumps came at regular, perfectly timed intervals. Ridley Scott and company had accomplished what they intended to do: scare the world out of its wits.