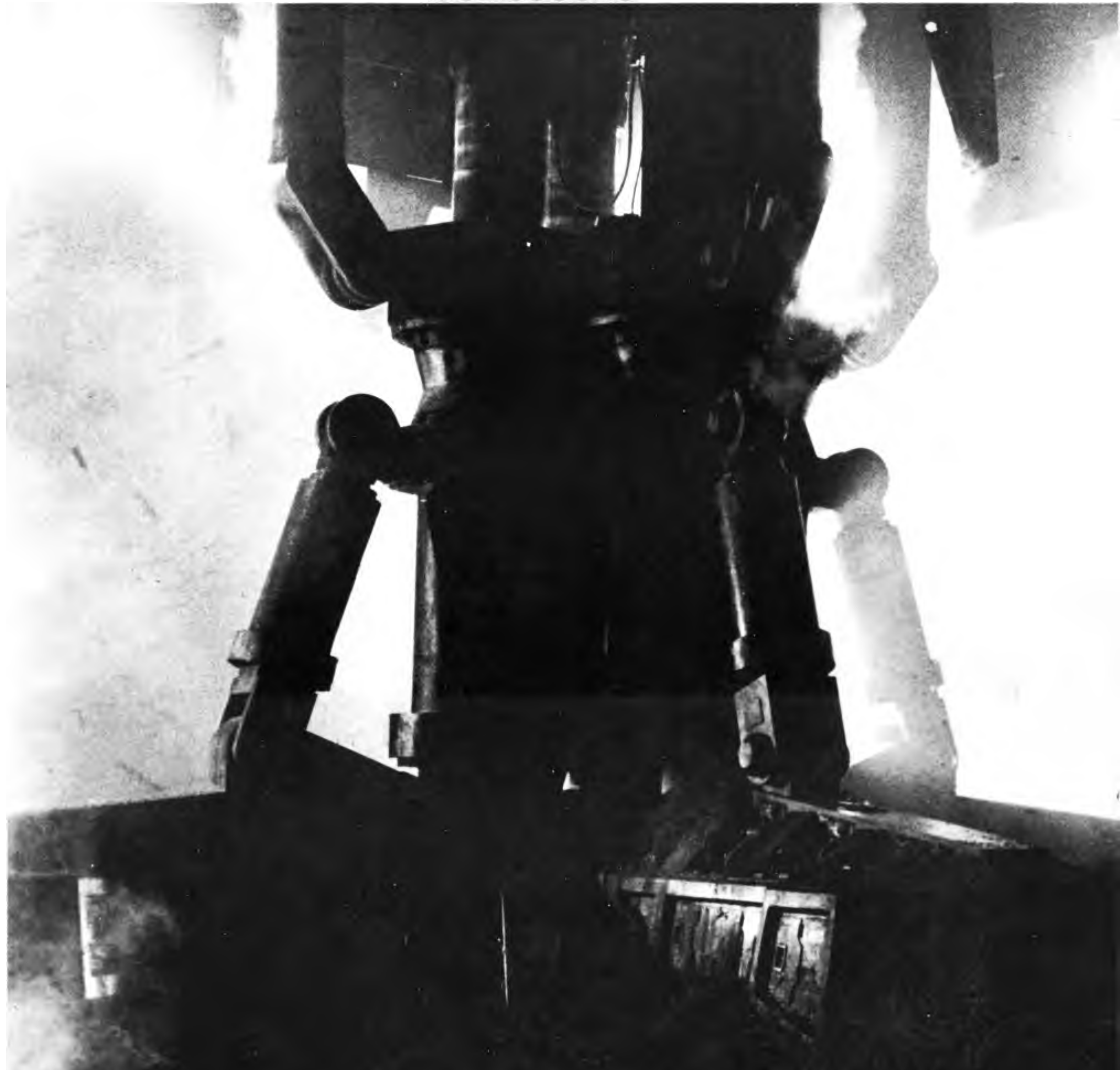




If Alfred Hitchcock were to make a suspense-thriller about the future, the result might well be more than a little like **Alien**.

As one of 1979's most anxiously awaited films, **Alien** combines the elements of suspense and shock-thrills in a science fiction motif with galactic settings and miraculous (but authentic) technological starships and accompanying hardware. Add lashings of horror, death and disaster, and mix in seven very different people working within the claustrophobic confines of a workaday factory spacecraft, and

you have the ingredients of a unique motion picture. And all that is not even to mention some of the most remarkable special effects yet seen on film.

Alien is elemental in its concept, but staggering in its realization. It is a film that can be described only partially, since to tell all would be telling too much. It is a tension-filled shocker about seven astronauts—five men and two women—working on a battered commercial starship far away in space and time, who encounter an awesome galactic horror, and of their desperate attempts to

combat it.

Suffice it to say that **Alien** is a story and a motion picture that you could never imagine in your wildest dreams. Or nightmares.

Presented by Twentieth Century-Fox, the same company that struck gold with **Star Wars**, **Alien** is a breakthrough level science-fiction film of chilling terror, starring Tom Skerritt, Sigourney Weaver, Veronica Cartwright, Harry Dean Stanton, John Hurt, Ian Holm and Yaphet Kotto.

Dan O'Bannon, the writer of both the original story and the screenplay described the basic concept behind **Alien** for **MEDIA-**

SCENE: "Close Encounters was about contact between human beings and nice aliens. This is about contact between human beings and aliens that are *not* nice. As a matter of fact, they're downright disgusting. They're semi-humanoid, but quite unusual. They look more bizarre than you can imagine, than *anyone* can imagine, except for Giger, the artist who designed and built the one for our film."

Much of **Alien's** power comes from the imagery of the eternal loneliness and isolation evoked by deep-space. In fact, the film begins with a foreboding air of

desolation as the factory-ship *Nostromo* rockets silently through the trackless cosmic void. The ship's controls are quided by a programmed computer; the entire crew is in hyper-sleep for their long-distance journey.

Then, in the middle of nowhere, at a place which should contain nothing, a distress signal sounds, alerting the crew and automatically halting the ship's trajectory through the galaxy. The emergency call which perhaps has sounded for a thousand years, is being broadcast from a large asteroid, upon which appears to

AMONG THE
STARS THEY
FOUND
COSMIC
TERROR

ALIEN

PART ONE:
THE ACTION
AND THE
ACTORS

be the ruins of an incredibly ancient space colony.

Disembarking, they find a massive derelict spaceship crashed on the asteroid's forbidding surface. Exploring the bizarre hull, the crew discovers the skeletal remains of a ten-foot tall, insect-like "space-jockey," long dead at the console of an immensely powerful cannon, his claw-like appendages still frozen on the firing grips. Exactly what killed the gunner and what he was trying to destroy remains a mystery, but the solitude of the silent ruins is shrouded by an eerie, evil presence.

The first quarter of the film takes place on the deadly asteroid where the groundwork is laid for the terror to come. And little by little it does, as the *Nostramo* continues its journey homeward. The seven crew members gradually realize that they are not alone.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the alien is among them, taking a terrible toll in an environment on which there is no place to escape. The crew, and the audience, never know when the alien in their midst will strike, but when it does, the impact is as jolting to the senses as the

blow of a sledgehammer.

Directed by Ridley Scott, *Alien* is a paranoid's delight of skin-crawling assaults on the rational mind. Scott has approached the project with a stylish technique that combines classic horror and the impressionistic look of the great 40's thrillers. Unlike those, however, *Alien* is shot in color, with an emphasis on dramatic lighting and hard-edged contrasts that enhance the claustrophobic set designs.

A pervasive air of menace lurking around every corner is maintained, and the story itself

is laden with *noir* traits of overwhelming odds, emotional and physical isolation, and a hard-bitten portrayal of violence as a necessary element for survival.

Alien sustains itself primarily through the building of suspense, and is admittedly striving for comparison in film territory pioneered by Lang, Siodmak and Hitchcock. Unlike most Hitchcock films, however, *Alien* does not foreshadow its shocks by letting the audience in on upcoming danger in advance. It is more in the vein of *Psycho* and *Jaws* in that the alien strikes

without warning of any kind, jolting the viewer with the unexpectedness of its appearance and ferocity.

Part of this impact is achieved by the fact that *nobody* in the film or the audience will know *exactly* what the alien looks like at any given time. It constantly changes and evolves throughout the film.

And, while there are clues given concerning the alien's actions and characteristics, the film's point of view is mostly subjective to the crew, so that the information comes in small segments which must be put

together to make sense—and, putting it all together *during* the film will be taxing to even the most seasoned viewer.

Though the basic plot bears a fundamental resemblance to *The Thing* and *It, The Terror from Beyond Space*, the handling and construction of *Alien* elevates it to an entirely different level. There are five major shock sequences, each shatteringly unexpected, and always opening the door to even greater terror.

Every scene and action of *Alien* was meticulously choreographed through the extensive use of storyboards, which Scott followed scrupulously during shooting. Coordinating the actors with the post-production special effects required a thorough knowledge of every movement before and after the actors' filming was undertaken.

As an example of the level of perfection sought for *Alien*, Scott held extensive rehearsals with his seven actors several weeks before filming was scheduled to begin. Yaphet Kotto commented on this: "*Alien* was only the second film I've ever worked on that held preparatory rehearsals. Lines were rewritten and characterizations tightened-up so that we functioned like a crew that has been traveling together in space for a long, long time."

In addition, the actors were assigned NASA literature to study so that they could familiarize themselves with the technical slang and equipment functions. Every character was also given a complete background of previous jobs, home-life and childhood to embellish the depth and motivations of their actions. As a consequence, *Alien* is as much an actors' showcase as it is a director's playground and special-effects setpiece, perhaps the first of its kind ever attempted.

On the whole, *Alien* stands as a *tour-de-force* effort by Ridley Scott. He not only executed the painstaking direction of *Alien*, but also served as his own cameraman, capturing each shot in the view-finder to suit his demands. Such precise attention to photographic detail has been indigenous to Scott's work in over three thousand British and American TV commercials, and in his award-winning feature debut, *The Duellists*, in 1977. Interested in all aspects of the film, he was also on hand for many of the special effects sequences, and supervised the final editing of *Alien*, so that the two hours seen on the screen will bear his personal stamp. This also allowed him to make last minute decisions and cuts which would help clarify the continuity while heightening the taut suspense construction. The entire process was so exhilarating that Scott hopes to line up another fantasy project which will allow him to explore various ideas and possibilities stimulated by *Alien's* extensive special effects work.

The original concept and story for *Alien* is a collaborative effort between Executive Producer Ronald Shusette and Dan O'Bannon, who was the writer/director/

editor/special-effects creator/star of the sci-fi comedy *Dark Star*, special effects consultant for *Star Wars*, and pre-production advisor for the abandoned *Dune* film. When *MEDIASCENE* asked O'Bannon to recall the events leading up to *Alien*, he recalled its genesis vividly:

"When *Dune* fell through I came back from Paris broke, and only survived by living on Ronnie Shusette's sofa. That was in the spring of 1976, and we wrote *Alien* on his sofa until he and his wife got tired of having me around and threw me out.

"Soon after, Gary Kurtz called me to work on *Star Wars*' animated computer printouts until about February 1977. By that time, we had made a deal with Fox on *Alien*. Then I was immediately stricken with a debilitating stomach disease, still undiagnosed, and spent most of '77 in the hospital, making decisions by phone. So I was feeling really miserable and in intense pain when Gordon Carroll called up and says 'We're



Alien screenwriter Dan O'Bannon stands on one of the *Nostromo's* gigantic landing pods during the filming of the movie.

all going over to London to make *Alien*. Let's go!

"I groaned and bitched, but everybody persuaded me I'd better do it. I'd already spent thousands of dollars from *Alien* option and preliminary money on medical bills, and it looked like I'd need more, so I went to England. Lo and behold, in the process of working, I made what appears to be a complete recovery. It was the first time I'd felt normal in better than a year.

"The budget kept escalating from the very first day they took it to Fox. I think the original figure proposed was \$4.5 million, but it went up to \$6 million. By the time I finished my work in London and came home they were into shooting and planning on \$8.9 million."

The actual final figure for *Alien* apparently topped \$10 million, several hundred-thousand more than *Star Wars*. The problems and procedures are completely different in the two films, however, and among the most difficult were those concerning the alien, which O'Bannon had a hand in solving:

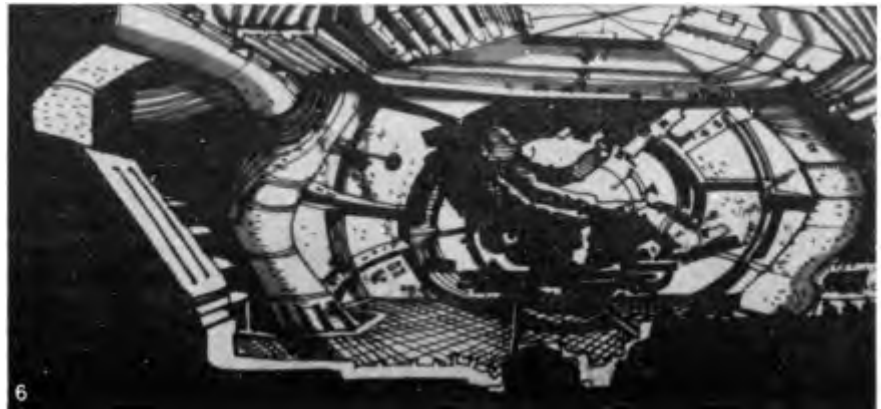
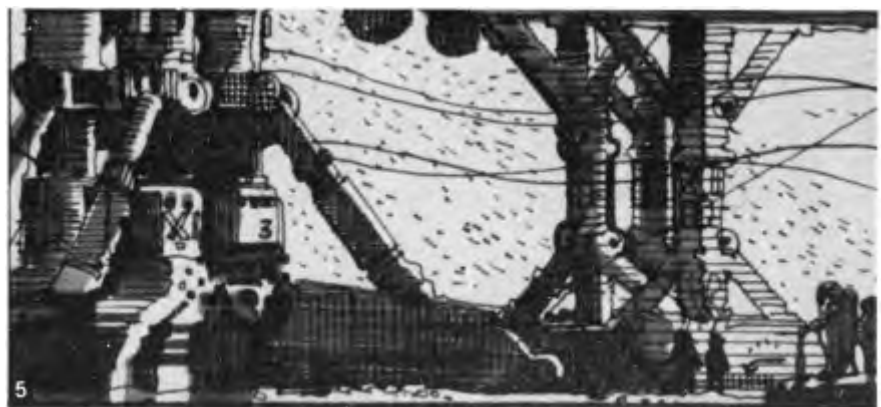
"Sometimes it will be a man in

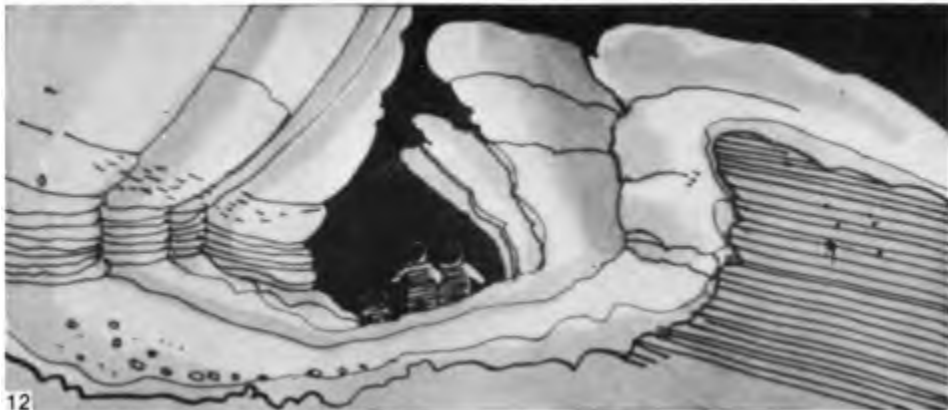
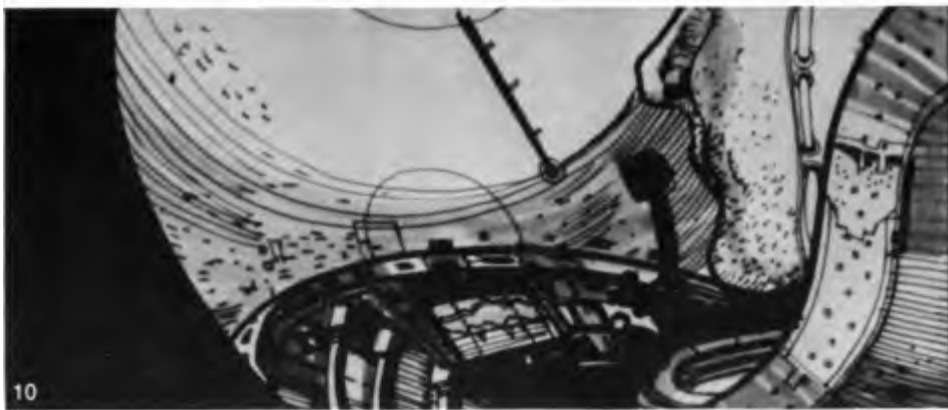
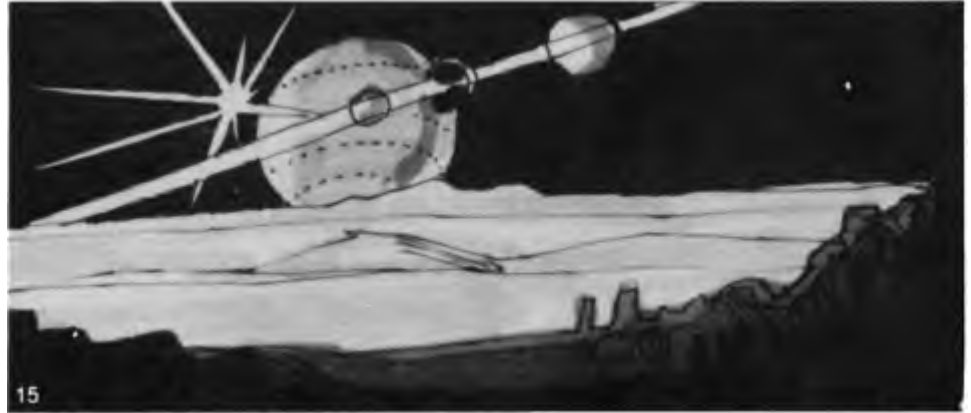
a suit, but overall it's gonna be bits and pieces of different techniques. There'll be some mechanicals, some marionettes.

I wish I could say something clean and neat like, 'we built a robot that does everything.' What it is, is a mixture of techniques, but no stop motion animation, because they decided that the strobe effect would be too phony."

From the first appearance of the *Nostromo* to the last shot of the escape ship *Narcissus*, *Alien* remains a powerful, absorbing film of survival, brought into sharp focus by Scott's singular visual approach, and fleshed out by the cast of comfortably familiar faces. Despite its title and overwhelming emphasis on

THE ALIEN STORYBOARDS reproduced on these pages were drawn by the film's director, Ridley Scott. They represent scenes 50-63, the disembarking sequence, and have been condensed here for narrative purposes. (1) Interior of the *Nostromo*: Ash enters the ship's observation blister, and seats himself on the monitor chair. (2) Interior of the airlock: in the glow of the flashing landing light, three suited astronauts prepare to exit from the ship; the airlock opens (lighting change) and they emerge into the asteroid's oppressive wind and gaseous atmosphere. (3) Exterior of the *Nostromo*: gas fills the airlock as the trio step forward into the hydrolic lift. (4) Exterior: the three figures (articulated dummies) are lowered to the surface—model shot. (5) Exterior of landing leg of the *Nostromo*: the spacemen emerge through the planet's eerie mist (see the previous two pages for the actual scene from the film). (6) Interior of blister: Ash continues to monitor the trio on his instrument panel. (7) Interior: close-up of screens as Ash's hand punches up the controls of the TV monitor and the ordinance survey map with its three moving green dots. (8) Interior: Dallas, "Are you receiving?" Ash, "Read you, etc." Dallas: "Getting you free and clear..." The figures are seen out the blister's side. (9) Exterior: the trio continues across the planet's surface aided by their helmet lamps. (10) Helmet close-up: they proceed through the night storm, walking blind, aided by the monitors inside their helmets. (11) Exterior: as they appear over the crest of a ledge, geysers blast violently, unexpectedly out of the rocks around them. (12) Exterior: Dallas, Kane and Lambert continue out of sight. (13) Exterior: the spacemen go on searching for the distress signal against a spectacular stellar view. (14) Exterior: their tiny figures are almost lost in the bizarre landscape. (15) Exterior: they mount a rocky crest. (16) Exterior: the trio is frozen in astonishment. Kane, "Jesus Christ!" (17) Exterior—their point of view: a gargantuan alien ship is crashed among the rocks (model). (Compare Scott's storyboard with H.R. Giger's pre-production painting.)







science-fiction and special effects, **Alien** is also a dramatic picture about people in a crisis situation. The ensemble cast is a cross-section of film character "types" who were chosen not for their superstar bankability, but because they "fit" the roles.

Dallas, Captain of the factory starship, is played by Tom Skerritt, whose recent films have included **Ice Castles** and **The Turning Point**. His earlier credits include the original **M*A*S*H** and many TV productions.

Sigourney Weaver is a young actress who has appeared in off-Broadway productions, and appears frequently in Joe Papp's theater in New York. She makes her motion picture debut in **Alien** as Ripley, the starship's warrant

officer.

Veronica Cartwright plays Lambert, the navigator. A noted child star in Hollywood, her films include **The Birds** and **The Children's Hour**, and the more recent productions of **Inserts** and the remade **Invasion of the Body Snatchers**.

Harry Dean Stanton has appeared in many movies over the years, including **Cool Hand Luke**, **Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid** and **The Wind and the Lion**. In **Alien**, he plays the role of Brett, the *Nostramo's* engineering technician.

British John Hurt is the ship's executive officer, and has won acclaim for his notable BBC-TV appearances in **I Claudius** (as Caligula) and **The Naked Civil**

Servant. Apart from his many stage roles, his films have included **A Man for all Seasons**, **The Shout** and **Midnight Express**.

Ian Holm is an actor most noted for his Shakespearean roles, playing the part of Ash, the science officer. He has also appeared in such films as **Young Winston**, **The Man in the Iron Mask**, **Les Miserables** and **Holocaust**.

Distinguished black star Yaphet Kotto, who plays Parker, the engineer, has made memorable appearances in many films, including **Live and Let Die**, **Raid on Entebbe** (as Idi Amin) and **Blue Collar**.

The other creative and technical credits are equally impressive, and feature the talents of a

comparatively young crew who, nevertheless, have an impressive track record of films among them.

Co-producer Gordon Carroll has previously supervised such pictures as **How to Murder Your Wife**, **Cool Hand Luke** and **Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid**.

David Giler, who also co-produced **Alien**, co-wrote **Myra Breckenridge**, and later scripted **The Parallax View**. He also wrote and directed the **Maltese Falcon** sequel, **The Black Bird**.

Co-producer Walter Hill has written a number of screenplays which includes **The Getaway**, **The Mackintosh Man** and **The Drowning Pool**. He wrote and directed **Hard Times** and **The Driver**.

The special effect are supervised by Brian Johnson and Nick Alder, veterans of **Space—1999** and **2001**, and O'Bannon is both screenwriter and visual concepts consultant. The production designer is Michael Seymour, the editor Terry Rawlings, costume designer John Mollo, and the art directors are Les Dilley and Roger Christian. The latter three won Oscars for their outstanding work on **Star Wars**. The music is to be provided by Jerry Goldsmith, whose **Omen** score won an Academy Award. His credits include **Planet of the Apes**, **Logan's Run**, and the upcoming **Star Trek—The Movie**.

The merchandising aspect of **Alien** is not being left to chance



either. Charles Lippincott, whose position was to oversee the licensing and publicity for **Star Wars**, is performing the same function for **Alien**. One of the first manifestations of the **Alien** promotion campaign is this *exclusive* feature spread in **MEDIASCENE**, which will be followed by the novelization by Alan Dean Foster (who also wrote the **Star Wars** novelization) in May, from Warner Books.

A hard-bound comic format adaptation of **Alien**, written by Archie Goodwin and illustrated by Walt Simonson will be released in June. **The Alien Book** a compilation of notes, production drawings and photos from the film, will also be printed by **Heavy Metal's** parent publishing company, Twenty-First Century Communications, slated for June release.

The mind boggles at the potential of **Alien** merchandising should the film take off as expected. "I keep trying to imagine it...**Alien** dolls?" Dan O'Bannon reflects. "I don't see how they have any merchandising potential whatever. But I'm sure they'll find it—maybe a little rubber **Alien** dolls that sneaks across the room and bite your foot off. Great for people with kids and pets."

Whether it is remembered as an extravagant science-fiction movie or an exciting new exercise in 24th-century gothic film-making, **Alien** is almost sure to register with seismic impact on summer filmgoers.

Just as **Close Encounters** renewed the public's enthusiasm for speculative science fiction, and **Star Wars** brought heroic space opera back from its galactic limbo, **Alien** will undoubtedly elevate the science fiction thriller to a new level of entertainment—establishing the missing third leg of the generic tripod.

As an homage of sorts to the current leader of science-fiction cinema, and maybe just for good luck, Twentieth will unleash **Alien** on May 25—the second anniversary of the release of **Star Wars**.

That gives us a few months to prepare ourselves—and to see if lightning really does strike twice.

Ken Bruzenak

THE ALIEN PHOTOS: (19) Dallas, Lambert and Kane enter the *Nostromo* lift. (20) Seeking the source of the signal, the trio approach the derelict ship. (21) Crew of the *Nostromo*, 1. to r. — Brett (Harry Dean Stanton), Ash (Ian Holm), Kane (John Hurt), Lambert (Veronica Cartwright), Dallas (Tom Skerritt), Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), and Parker (Yaphet Kotto). (22) The astronauts awake from Hyper-sleep. (23) Ash tracks the three crewmen from his observation blister. (24) Entering the derelict ship. (25) Ash attacks Ripley as a result of the alien's presence. (26) Brett demonstrates the electro-shock instrument he has made to hunt down the alien for Dallas and Lambert. (27) Tom Skerritt suited-up for the asteroid's unearthly atmosphere. (28) The space jockey.





Imagine a bus towing the whole of Manhattan island. Or a bicycle pulling along Times Square. Or a normal-sized movie shooting stage tugging an area a mile-and-a-half square.

Then you'll have a rough idea of the relative sizes of the unique *Nostromo* starship and the vast oil refinery it tows through interstellar space in *Alien*.

The script calls for a well-used, slightly battered starship which acts as a kind of massive tug, to tow a series of three vast oil refineries—rather like a huge intergalactic articulated truck—the whole supposedly one-and-a-half miles long, and weighing an awesome 200 million tons.

"We started by building model sets, then an actual section of a starship corridor from part of the operational bridge," explains production designer Michael Seymour. "Then, after further discussions, we began building the sets in earnest."

The *Nostromo* has three levels or "decks" and the designers first toyed with the notion of building a huge three-story set, but it was decided that this would prove impractical for filming purposes. So the "A" (or top) level was constructed first, filling much of the giant "C" sound stage at Shepperton Studios.

The "A" level comprised the astronauts' living areas, mess-room, computer annex, infirmary, many linking corridors and, most important and spectacular, the operational bridge. Here, amidst a veritable technological fairland, the seven astronauts sit at their own individual and immense, leather seats to navigate and operate the starship, surrounded by forty television screens (variously sized 5", 9", 13", 15" and 22") showing different pictures of computer readouts, technological and navigational information, maps, and views of the space area outside. Masses of other technical equipment were packed together, plus hundreds of switches and literally thousands of flashing indicator lights. The many TV screens were fed pictures and films from an intricate special video-center situated at the side of the sound stage, headed by video coordinator Dick Hewitt.

The numerous banks of circuits and electronic equipment on the walls were prepared by the props and construction departments and ingeniously made up from old aircraft, automobiles, and radio and TV sets.

"We must have spent thou-

ALIEN PROPS AND SETS: (1)

Sign outside the soundstage at Shepperton Studios in England showing typical eathing graffiti. (2) Land vehicle originally conceived by Ron Cobb. (3) Director Scott operating camera. (4) Magnetic tracer. (5) Hand weapon. (6) Astro-chart used by Navigator Lambert. (7-8) Corridors of the *Nostromo*. (9) The ship's commissary. (10) Space suit storage area. (11-13) The bridge of the *Nostromo*—compare these with the drawings on the following pages.

sands of dollars on scrap, from old jet-aircraft engines particularly," said Les Dilley (co-art director with Roger Christian). "And it's paid off handsomely because it all looks so authentic." Dilley and Christian, incidentally, both won Oscars for their work on *Star Wars*—Dilley as co-art director and Christian as set decorator. *Alien* costume designer John Mollo also won an Oscar for his contribution to *Star Wars*.

The operational bridge on the *Nostromo* is probably the most technologically detailed and authentic scientific movie set ever constructed, especially when you realize that *everything works!* Walk onto the bridge, push a button or throw a switch and something happens, whether it's a light flashing, a door closing, an alarm buzzer sounding or a TV picture zooming into closeup. As Michael Seymour said: "This starship does practically everything but fly."

Walk down a corridor from the bridge and you come to the mess-room, where the crew eat and relax. To one side is a small kitchen area, with every modern convenience you could wish for, and various foods neatly capsuled into powder and tablet form, often easily identified by tiny models of the food available, such as a miniature banana, orange or apple. Unbreakable crockery is neatly arranged on shelves, and there's a sink too—even astronauts have to do the washing-up sometimes!

Stroll down another padded and illuminated corridor and you come to the infirmary, equipped with everything a doctor or nurse might need, including medicines, drugs, an operating table which glides out-of-sight into the wall, and a fearsome overhead-suspended set of surgical instruments.

In another section of "A" level is the remarkable "hypersleep" area where, in flower-petal-like, perspex-enclosed beds, the crew are able to sleep for any period they choose, from an hour to a year or more.

In an intersecting lobby you find two large, perspex-fronted wardrobe cases, containing spare space suits for the crew, complete with helmets and other accoutrements.

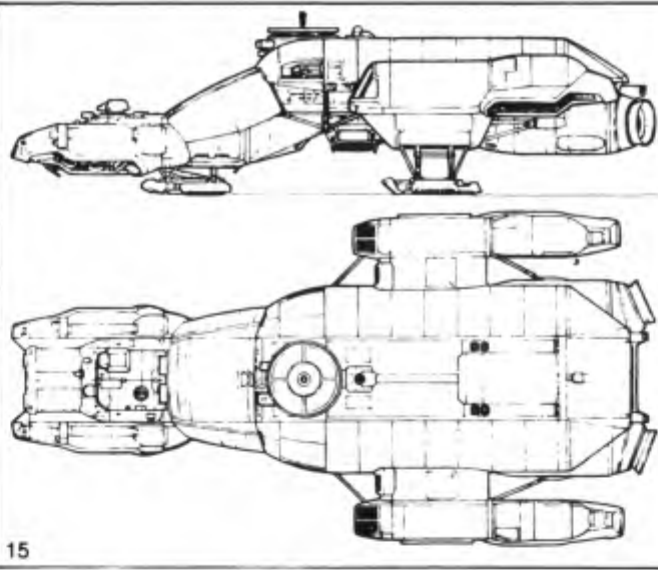
The *Nostromo's* movements are guided by a remarkable computer called "Mother," at the command of the seven astronauts, who also rely on it for all kinds of other information and facts. Why "Mother?" Because its official technological identification is "MU/TH/UR/6000."

Later sequences for *Alien* were filmed on the two lower levels of the starship, built separately on other stages: "B" level, the general maintenance area, and "C" level, containing the vast engine rooms plus a seemingly-endless network of complex machinery-filled corridors, and the giant "claw-room," into which the huge landing-claws of the starship retract when not in use.

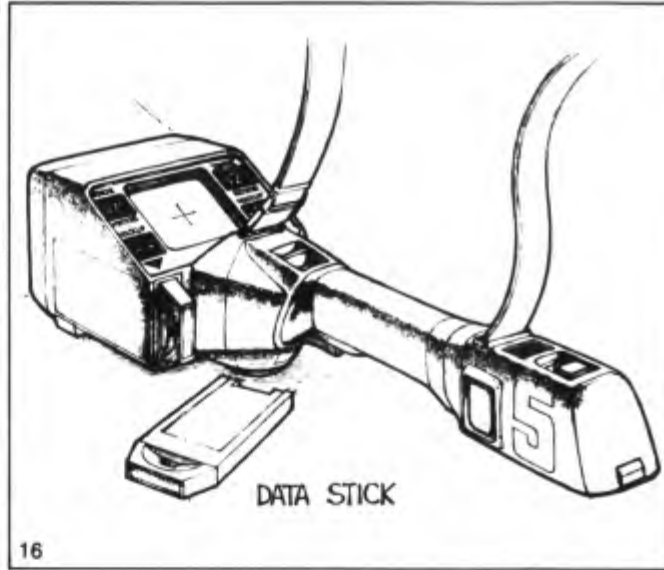
"One of the basic ideas of all these complicated starship interior sets is that you can



14



15



16



17



18



19



21



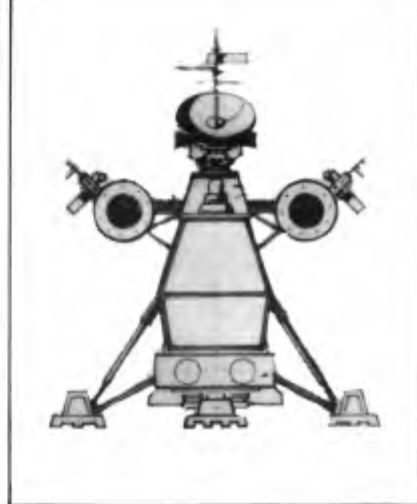
22



23



24





25

actually walk from corridor to corridor, from bridge to mess, from mess to infirmary, and so on, thus giving both the actors and the audience the feeling of being inside a vast starship, both huge and claustrophobic at one and the same time," says production designer Michael Seymour. "We want people to have the impression that it's a real place, that it's more science-fact than science-fiction, and also that the whole ship is well used, lived in and slightly battered after years of service. After all, the crew are really interstellar truckers who are just doing, what is to them, ordinary day-to-day work. They're really like top-level truckdrivers who happen to operate a complex starship in space instead of a truck along the motorways on Earth.

"They're freebooters, in a way, who extract appropriate oils and minerals from planets, tow them back to Earth, and share in the proceeds.

"Then their whole lives change when they're awakened from their hyper-sleep by the mysterious planet's distress bleeps—which may well have been sounding out for millions of years, who knows?—then land on the planet and encounter the Alien for the first time."

The *Nostromo* is a set to remember, a technological miracle come to movie life. While it doesn't actually achieve "lift-off" it does almost everything else.

All the interior and planet surface sequences for *Alien* were filmed in England, at Shepperton Studios. But the six months of special effects and model photography were based at Bray Studios, Windsor (once the home of Hammer horror films), about fifteen miles away.

There, special effects director Brian Johnson, and supervisor Nick Alder, both of whom worked on 2001 and *Space: 1999*, were in charge of the highly-complex and technical magical work that goes into the breathtaking sequences that movie audiences will eventually see of starships hurtling through outer space amidst galaxies of stars and planets.

The majority of the outer space effects sequences take place early in the film, and are photographed in the single-negative technique of 2001, as

ALIEN PRE-PRODUCTION ART:

(14) Early concept of Cobb's Heli-Jet. (15) Two views of a jet transporter craft. (16) Electronic Data-Stick by Cobb. (17-19) Various space suits designed by Moebius. (20) Early concept by Moebius of the discovery of the space jockey. (21) Mobile tracking vehicle. (22) *Nostromo* personnel lift and airlock exterior (23-24) Another version of the Heli-Jet. (25) The *Nostromo* infirmary. (26) Corridor by Ron Cobb. (27) Observation room on "B" level. (28) Cobb's final concept drawing of the bridge. Note how closely the finished sets followed the design drawings, almost down to the last detail. The sets have now been disassembled.

opposed to *Star Wars'* Dykstra-flex multi-layered image style, which ostensibly will give viewers clearer, more perfect screen visuals.

Alder and director Ridley Scott's attention to detail is staggering, extending to the point of reshooting some of the earlier footage completed by Brian Johnson, who left *Alien* soon after the initial problems were solved to meet his *Star Wars* commitments.

Special effects supervisor Nick Alder explained some of the methods being used in *Alien*, without giving away any of the drama. "Our main model of the *Nostromo* starship is eight feet long, which represents 800 feet in the story. In the film, the starship is also 1 ½ miles across! With our special techniques we're able to camera-track right through space, stars, planets and so on, into a closeup shot of the craft, and actually show the astronauts moving about inside—all in one continuous shot. But I won't tell you how we did that!

"Generally, we use multiple exposure techniques, employing the original negative, thereby obtaining far better quality than we might otherwise have.

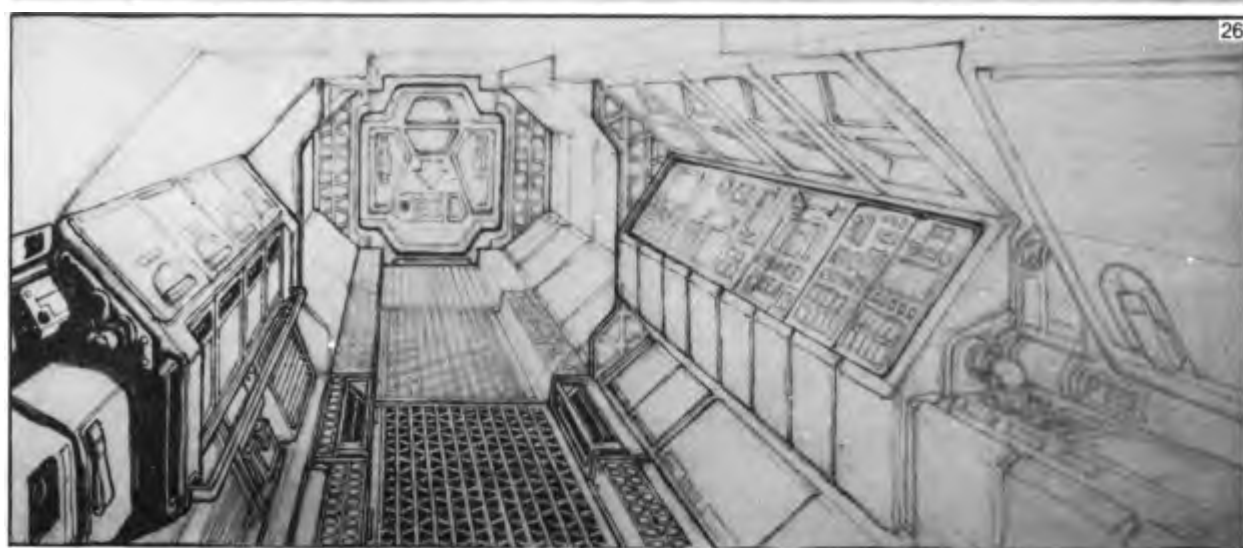
"We're not using 'travelling matte,' or blue-screen backings for this picture for various reasons. The whole picture is shot in rather low-key lighting, so we can't suddenly cut from the starship interior to outside space and terrific high-contrast quality, because it wouldn't appear consistent. Consequently, our lighting of the models has to be fairly low-key as well. Using travelling mattes wouldn't work in these circumstances.

"We use the system of 'rotoscoping' quite a lot, which involves taking a sequence frame by frame, making line-drawings, then hand-painted mattes, and shooting them in high-contrast, to actually create our own very tight mattes and their eventual effects."

If all that sounds complicated, then it is. Except to the "sfx" technicians who know exactly what they're doing.

The alien itself was a unique source of problems, and required unusual ingenuity due to the decision to avoid stop-motion animation, such as that used by Ray Harryhausen. The inability of stop-motion to create totally smooth and naturalistic results dictated that full-size models of the creature be made, and carefully filmed to achieve highly realistic effects.

The dark, moody technical approach of *Alien* facilitated the handling of many of the alien sequences by allowing the mood of the film to superimpose the viewers' imagination on the screen's images—a welcome change from the usual fright mask approach to horror films. This is not to say that we never see the alien in full shocking close-up, but the film's style forces the viewer to participate by creating in his mind what he can't see on the screen, and we all know that the darkest visions of all come from within. •



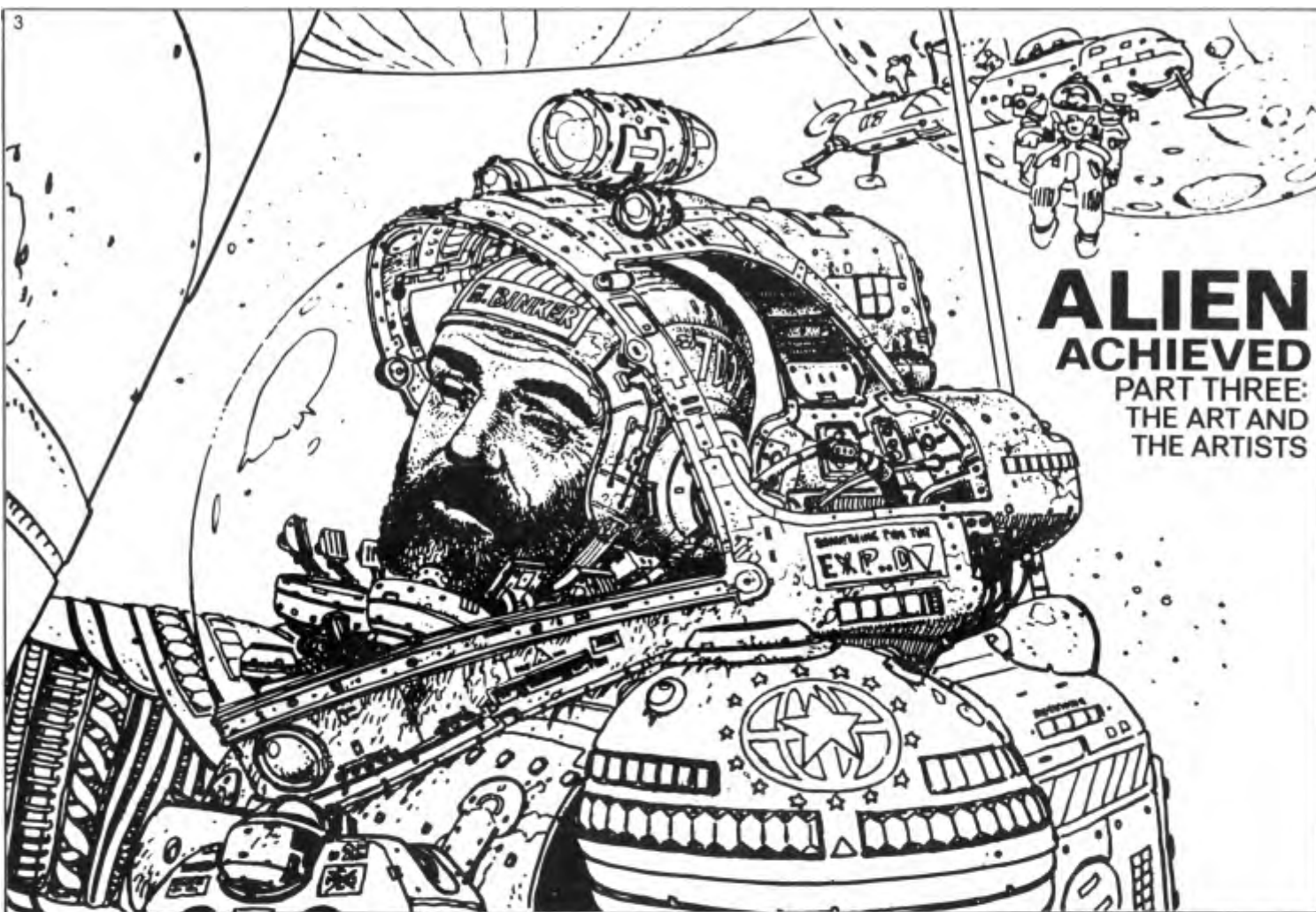
26



27



28



Like **Star Wars**, **Close Encounters** and a host of other films that rely on their extraordinary visual appeal, **Alien's** most important building blocks began to take shape on the drawing board when artists turned the original ideas into meaningful images.

Art directors and production designers have been important contributors to the craft of movie-making for decades. Their vision is second only to the director's in determining the "feel" and "character" of a film, such as Ken Adam's sophisticated chromium James Bond sets, William Cameron Menzies' deco futuristic **Shape of Things to Come**, and Ralph McQuarrie's evocative technological **Star Wars'** designs.

Like those, **Alien** is a film with many requirements, fantastic ones that could well make history in cinematic achievement and at the box office. Few, if any, multi-million dollar productions have so small a cast to keep the action going—especially a cast of what really amounts to a group of character actors and unknowns. The settings are also limited, as least in number, to the starship *Nostromo* and the asteroid on which it lands. It stands to reason that this kind of economy calls for a powerful story and overpowering visuals. Those special requirements call for special talents.

To handle those requirements, Brandywine Productions (formed by the film's three producers) hired four top-notch SF illustrators whose work has extended well beyond the common perimeter of their field: Ron Cobb, H.R. Giger, Chris Foss and Moebius. All four have contributed their efforts to make **Alien** the most unique science fiction fright film of the decade.

Ron Cobb is a working cartoonist and illustrator whose career just happens to overlap into the movie business. He took time out from his commitments of **Conan** and **Jedediah Smith** to talk with **MEDIA-SCENE**. **Alien** stands out as one of Cobb's biggest film assignments, and came about through his previous association with Dan O'Bannon, dating back to the early 70s and **Dark Star**:

"I met Dan some years back because of his interest in fantastic films, then didn't see him again for a number of years. He contacted me next when he was in the middle of **Dark Star**, and wanted to know if I'd be interested in giving him some of my comments on it. When I got there, he had an exterior design for the spaceship, and I started suggesting things. He was very enthusiastic with that film, and I've been working with him ever since.

"So basically, it's all been Dan. He went to work on **Star Wars** and **Dune**, and each time he tried to get me on those projects. But since I didn't have a great deal of film experience, producers were quite reluctant to hire me—except for George Lucas, who'd been familiar with my cartoons. George thought I

might like to try designing some of the aliens in the cantina sequence, and he liked them very much.

"Then Dan finally sold his script, and *Alien* was underway. He suggested that they use me, and the same problem arose, but I was taken on sort of a trial basis for about seven months in California, before the entire production moved to London.

"I did a lot of preliminary designs with Chris Foss before they picked a director, and it was a real opportunity for me to show them what I could do. We went through hundreds of designs, many of which were thrown out when Ridley Scott came on the film. Truthfully, I can't say I didn't expect it."

Most of Cobb's early work based on a division of labor that quickly changed with Scott's take-over of *Alien*. Initially, Ron worked on the Earth-based technology designs, interiors, space suits and hardware. British SF illustrator Chris Foss, concentrated on the Alien ship designs, and was assigned the *Nostramo* because of his reputation for spacecraft conceptualization. The crucial alien creature sequences were exclusively reserved for the bizarre imagination of Swiss artist, Giger.

Famed French artist, Moebius (the science fiction pseudonym used Jean Giraud), is best known in America through his contributions to *Heavy Metal* with the existential SF strip, *Arzach*, and *The Airtight Garage of Jerry Cornelius*, in addition to his series of Lt. Blueberry books. It was while Moebius was working on the European production of *Dune* that he first encountered Dan O'Bannon, who was responsible for bringing him into *Alien* as one of the production designers. Moebius was primarily responsible for the creation of the space suits used in the film, which were among the nine drawings he produced in the early stages of the movie's development.

When the creative design shop finally moved to the Shepperton Studios, in London, and director Scott entered the picture, things began to change.

"Ridley wanted to move me into hardware design," Cobb revealed, "because he liked some of the ideas I'd come up with. So, an additional six months slipped by while I worked further on *Alien*, during which time I had a larger and larger role in designing the overall technology.

"Altogether, I did about a year's worth of art for *Alien*. Of course, it's the latter six months you'll be seeing on the screen. All the early stuff was Foss' work, and I suppose it had some influence on the thinking of the later designs, but not directly. I probably ended up creating about two-thirds of the Earth technology, both interior and exterior sets.

"Ridley is an excellent designer himself, incidentally, and greatly influence the look of the film. I did some preliminary work on the design of the monster, but that was really Giger's responsibility.

"Actually, we probably weeded out as much material as we kept. They didn't end up using too many of Chris Foss' pieces, either. All that's left of Moebius' art is the basic design of the space suit. Giger did the final design for virtually all of the alien technology, the space ship and everything, and they followed his work very closely. He also wound up designing the alien planet on which the *Nostramo* lands."

Perhaps because of the sheer abundance of visual material to draw upon, *Alien* took a while to settle into a singular cinematic approach. Cobb's work focused on a fairly straight technical portrayal of spaceflight. Scott and the producers wanted to avoid a sterile science-fiction approach, and leaned more toward a fantastic concept.

"They pressured us a lot to bend the technology to have a somewhat similar look to *Star Wars*, sort of half-believable, but rather highly stylized—or perhaps a better word would be romanticized. The interior of the ship finally looked like a deco dance hall, or a World War II bomber, and a genuine projection of what a space ship of the future might really look like—or a combination of all of them.

"The theory was to give *Alien* more of a horror look, but I never personally agreed with that, and I didn't have as much influence as I'd like to have had.

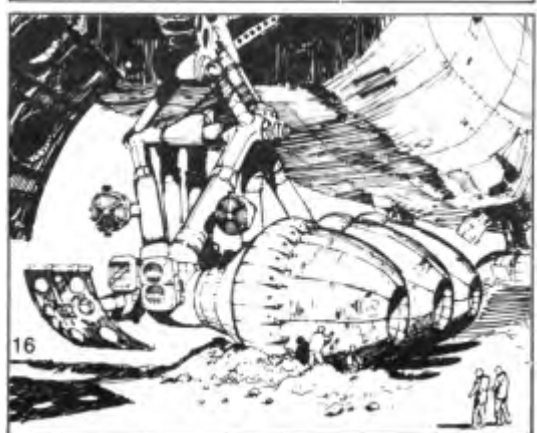
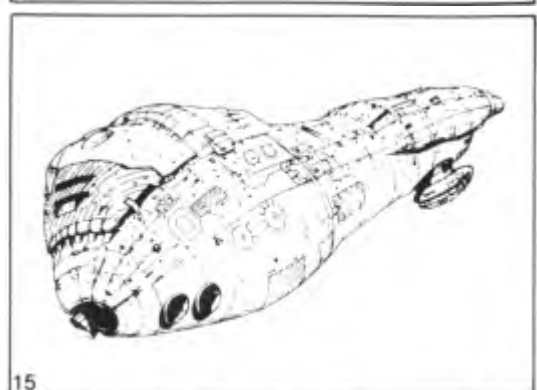
"There's a certain awkwardness in the naturalistic portrayal of the space flight, partly because most of the people involved in this film had never made one line it before. They didn't understand what they were getting into, and were put off by concepts like no sound in space, and all the gravitational effects. They didn't want to be bothered, so it's all just kind of forgotten about.

"On the other hand, I wanted the ship to look like a gothic castle, but resisted that approach—it might have been a bit *too much*."

Cobb's last few months in London allowed him to do more than draw, however. There was enough time for him to work with the draftsmen who translated his designs into working blueprints, and even watch the construction of the sets.

"On the whole, I'm pretty happy with the way my ideas were eventually realized. It was fascinating to watch the process all the way through, even some of the set dressings. I was pleased with things I had a fair amount of control over, but those I didn't oversee were a little disappointing.

"Then there were always surprising contributions from draftsmen and other people who would occasionally design a set that would turn out very, very well. It was a mixed bag of many styles and many approaches. "The look of the film kept evolving as it went along. I would like to have stuck to a particular style or approach, but there were a lot of other people involved who kept changing their minds, so the ship went through





many phases of design. Almost everything, including the acting, evolved and grew as it went along."

While *Alien* provides an auspicious debut for Cobb's design talents, the fact remains that the real star of the film will be the creature in the title role.

The assignment of visualizing the alien went to a distinguished Swiss painter and designer, H.R. Giger (pronounced Geeger, with a hard "G"), and came about through the dedicated efforts of Day O'Bannon:

"From the moment I met him in Paris and stared at his work, I knew that he could paint what others couldn't begin to imagine. I fought for a year to get him on the picture, because I feel he could paint Pickman's model if he wanted to."

Giger's paintings have been exhibited in leading art galleries throughout Europe, and appear-

THE ART OF ALIEN: (1) Early version of the space tug by Chris Foss. (2) Concept painting of colonized asteroid by Foss. (3) Close-up detail by Moebius of the astronaut's helmet and space suit markings. (4) Unused machine concept by Foss. (5) Ron Cobb's original design for the escape ship, *Narcissus*. (6) Pressurized space suit by Moebius to be worn inside the ship. (7) Moebius' final version of the space suit. John Mollo incorporated a Japanese influence into the actual finished suits—see Part One. (8) H.R. Giger's design for the derelict ship. See Scott's storyboard in Part One. (9) Entrances to the derelict ship by Giger. (10-12) A sampling of Giger's biochemoid concepts which combine semibalances of the human form with radically unhuman counterparts. (13) Another version of the space suit by Cobb. (14) Early version of the space tug by Foss, showing the oil refineries hooked up in tandem. At this time, the ship was called the *Leviathan*. (15) Another version of the same ship. (16) Undercarriage details of the *Leviathan* by Foss. Note the similarity between this illustration and the actual scene as shown in Part One. (17) Swiss artist H.R. Giger in his studio, working on a pre-production painting from the film. The scene illustrated is from the chilling "egg chamber" sequence that occurs while the spacemen are exploring the derelict alien ship—and suggests the kind of souvenir they pick up on their way. (18) One of the most unearthly, yet fascinatingly bizarre paintings from Giger's *Mordor* series. (CENTERSPREAD ART) This is one of Moebius' original concept drawings showing the astronauts as they encounter the derelict ship. It is evident in this early stage that the idea of a gothic alien ship was under consideration, and that Moebius attempted to visualize the notion by adding towers and spires to the very baroque architecture of the basic design. Absent from the scene is the planet's tortured landscape; at this point, simply an arid desert waste.

ed as best-selling posters, yet they virtually defy description. One has to see, indeed experience, a Giger painting to realize what a remarkable artist he is.

When *Alien* is released many people throughout the world will have their first glimpse of H.R. Giger's unique work. They will either love it or hate it, for there are no two ways with Giger's paintings and designs. Two things are certain. They're never boring—and they are unforgettable.

Giger's art combines eroticism, several kinds of symbolism, beautiful but highly-stylized women, machinery, bones, skulls, demons, intricate and exquisite designs, babies, blood, birds, landscapes, bondage, misery, despair and often beauty of a terrible but elegant kind. It hovers on the edge of a frenzied and almost three-dimensional hell. It has echoes of the work of Hieronymous Bosch, Salvador Dali and Richard Dadd, but is purely and originally the products of Giger and his incredible imagination and conceptual vitality.

Giger's main assignments have been to design the terrifying alien itself, the surface of a mysterious planet and the interior and exterior of a strange alien spacecraft, apparently thousands of years old. He has done other designs for the picture too, but these have been his major contributions.

"Obviously, I cannot describe the alien creature at this stage," explains Giger, who always dresses in black, in his soft Swiss-German accent. "But it is elegant, fast and terrible. It exists to destroy—and destroys to exist. Once seen it will never be forgotten. It will remain with people who have seen it, perhaps in their dreams or nightmares, for a long, long time. Perhaps for all time. I even dream about the alien myself—so much that I'm often frightened of going to sleep."

Perhaps Giger has good reason to be frightened—many of his paintings are visions straight from the doors of hell. The most unsettling are reminiscent of grotesque cyborg mutations—he refers to them as Biomechanoids. Some appear as legions of scabrous, slobbering babies chewing cigars with Charles Laughton faces and arms ending in machine-gun barrels. Others have no spines, but instead feature exterior spiked steel-cable tails held on by Pincer-like insect claws, and have exhaust jets in their skulls. A number of them simply defy description, and have engendered critical condemnation for their heavy sexual and Satannic content, even as they sell by the thousands in books and on posters.

Several documentary films have been made about Giger and his paintings and sculptures. A number of books have also been published on him, including the oversized *Necronomicon*, containing most of his best work to date.

Giger does not like to talk

about his paintings too much, preferring that they speak for themselves. But he does have this to say:

"Some people believe my paintings show a future world and perhaps they do. But I paint from reality by putting ideas together, and perhaps, when I have finished, it could show the future—who knows? If people want to interpret my work as warnings about too much overpopulation, disease and mechanization in the future, that is up to them! I like to combine human beings, creatures and biomechanics. And I love to work with bones—they are elegant and functional and, after all, are part of human beings. I have many bones in my home in Zurich and I study them and use them as models. Skeletons too.

"The colors I use are usually grey, white and brown—these are the colors of my beloved Siamese cat. I use black ink too and like to make use of an airbrush quite a lot. I like white on black also—it gives my paintings a kind of translucent look, and, sometimes, almost a three-dimensional appearance.

"They say my work is often depressing and pessimistic with an emphasis on death, blood, overcrowding, strange beings and so on, but I don't really think it is. There is hope and a kind of beauty in there somewhere, too, if you look for it. The creatures I design and paint are very much like their own environment, one comes from the other.

"It all began when, years ago in my youth, I had many strange dreams—and nightmares. When I awoke I would paint the things I had seen in my dreams, which made me feel much better and the dreams would go away. Until next time.

Apparently, straight science-fiction has already become commonplace and *passe*, so Giger's monster will be the true centerpiece in the *Alien* tapestry. His medieval visions of a Necronomic horror among the stars strikes just the right note in the abstract chord of O'Bannon's original story.

Understandably, the producers are keeping a tight security lid on these special effects sequences, and only a few people directly involved with the technical aspects know exactly how the entire film will eventually look. Expectations are high, and the preliminary art on these pages shows the promise of things to come.

Ron Cobb, while admittedly biased, has seen about two-thirds of *Alien* in rough cut form, and feels: "It looks very good, surprisingly good.

"I think Dan will be pleased. You know, for a while they strayed pretty far from his original concept, but eventually they found their way back into the primary science-fiction/horror framework. By the time the principal photography was finished, everybody was looking forward to seeing how all the pieces fit together.

"At the very least, Dan won't have to sleep on anyone's sofa for a while—I hope." •