



## Introduction

I grew up with a hero. I'll never forget the day my father approached me and said, "Have you seen Alien?" My eyes widened at the thought. It wasn't too long after that, that my father and I were at our closest retail store purchasing the first four films. Once we were home, my father turned on the TV, put the DVD into the DVD player, and from then on my life would never be the same. I believe there are films out there that can ultimately change a person's life. This is that film for me.

I was roughly around the age of 10/12 when I first watched Alien(1979). I was right around that age where children really start to come into their own person. I was developing my own sense of existing. Yet, all of the strong and powerful role models I had grown up with watching in films were men. I wanted to be Simba from the Lion King and Brendan Fraser from the Mummy Series(1999) at the same time. Men here and men there. But Ellen Ripley played by the forever incredible, Sigourney Weaver, was completely different than any female lead I had ever seen. She was strong, she was independent, and she was the only survivor of the Nostromo Crew. She showed me that being tough was not just a role for men. That women ultimately had the power to be whatever they wanted to be; that women had the power to survive all odds.

My father passed away my freshman year of high school. While he left me with numerous happy memories, this moment is one I will never forget. Him showing me this film sparked my love for the Horror Genre and gave me the female hero I needed at that critical time in my life. In honor of him, I got the alien tattooed on my right wrist. If anyone questions my love of this franchise and this film, all I have to do is show them the tattoos.

## Personal Response



Alien(1979) directed by none other than the iconic Ridley Scott is a film that combines the genres of Sci-Fi and Horror in a beautiful symphony. To do horror right, you have to make sure that all of the layers fall perfectly together like you're conducting an orchestra. Not too many jump scares, the right amount of music, the right amount of characters, and not too much gore.

Artistically using sound(or the sense of no sound at all) and building tension, Scott creates a world that casts the viewer into an inescapable nightmare; small corridors, no where to run, and a crew getting killed off one by one. I personally believe that Scott created the perfect horror film. Still to this day it holds up to the same amount of fear that it gave its audience thirty years ago. I could watch this film on repeat and still find new things to research and analyze deeper.

125/5, Alien(1979) is a must see for anyone interested in film history and development, especially the development of the Horror genre.

"In Space No One Can Hear You Scream."

## Summary of Critical Article



Alien : Essay By Brian Eggert | June 4th, 2012

Eggert examines the deeply interwoven horror techniques within the film Alien(1979). This critical article focuses on the abundance of no sound, the sexuality within the monsters of the film, and the art of suspense. Looking at Ridley Scott's directing technique, it was his intention to have the audience wait for the monster. That build up of fear and the unknown is what makes the Alien most terrifying.

Eggert opens up the article with a strong introduction to the film, quoting it as "Visionary and terrifying." From there he jumps into the creation of the sub-genre of Horror and Sci-Fi. This combination resulted in one of the most perfect combinations a horror film could ask for. "Scott's artistry elevates the material inside. His majestic frames of industrial machine drifting through space, debris-swept planetoids, and a ruined spaceship contrasted by a close-quarters spacecraft setting and empty corridors packed with claustrophobic fright."



This idea actually was spawned from a student film that the screen writer Dan O'Bannon and director John Carpenter created in school; "Dark Star(1974)". John Carpenter, being one of my other favorite directors, directed Halloween(1972), The Thing(1982), and the Prince of Darkness(1987), all timeless horror films.

Dark Star(1974) though was more of a comedy than anything else. Looking back at this film, O'Bannon incorporated horror ingredients to the original plot and Alien(1979) was born. This idea was originally pitched to Brandywine(a production company) as "Jaws in Space." Who wouldn't take the bait for that idea?

Bringing Ridley Scott onto the project as the director was beyond the correct choice. As his growing popularity was earning him credit, "A spectacular visualist, the strength of Scott's storyboards incited Fox to double their original budget." Scott then proceeded to craft the ambiance of the film. Working closely with Jerry Goldsmith, the "white noise, vacuum of space score" was created. Scott has always been known as a very hands on director. Fun Fact, stated by Eggert, is that all of the handheld camera scenes were shot by Scott himself. He had a clear vision in mind and wanted to be the one working the camera.



From there, Eggert goes into the main plot of Alien. After setting his readers up with the first steps to creating the film, knowing the plot aids in the presentation of these facts. But what is critical within these two paragraphs, is the focus on the speed of the film. Scott wanted to ensure that the Alien got as much screen time but as little screen time as possible at the same time. Not knowing the thing you are afraid of is the most terrifying. "Scott's technique leads Alien distinction amid its respective genres at the time; rather than have the alien leap at the viewer from the start, he builds suspense through a meticulously controlled intensification of anxiety." Normally in horror films one may want to close their eyes and hide from the monster, but with Alien(1979) you can't look away due to that curiosity of finding out what the alien looks like.

This slow reveal of the Alien is paired with the "dominating silence and jarring bursts of audible terror." I personally touched base on this aspect in my personal response to the film, but making

a horror film is an art. You can not have too much of anything, otherwise the audience will lose that fear factor. Moving through the film, slowly the audience is faced with more sound until the ending, where the audience is faced with strobe lights, overbearing alarm sounds, and screams. The film does a beautiful job of orchestrating all of these factors to have the final symphony at the end that a viewer will never forget.



Eggert then takes time to break down the cast. Similar to expanding on the plot of Alien, it's important for readers to understand the characters they are faced with as well. What I found most interesting about this section is how Scott did not want the top named young actors. He wanted to cast a crew that appeared strong and would be able to adapt to the surroundings in the film and make it feel most real. Eggert also mentioned the fact that Ripley was intended to be a man originally.(Which I personally believe would have ruined some of my love for the film.)

But Sigourney Weaver blew the team away with her audition. Taken from a later paragraph, "Weaver's initial presence as an iron-willed heroine afforded audiences a touch and noble hero, whose femininity was downplayed but not all together forgotten." From that moment, they switched the role to a woman.



Eggert then goes on to explain the creation of the Alien. "What remains so haunting about the film is how little it tells us about the alien." In one way the alien is like a disease, invading the body and destroying from within but on the other hand it is similar to a predatory parasite. Ash, the AI within the film quotes the alien as being, "A perfect organism." What adds to the fear of this creature is the life cycle that humans play a key part in. O'Bannon and Shusett wanted to create a monster that struck men with fear; something that went after men opposed to women. With this, the aliens have sexually under toned symbols hidden within them. "Leaping from a vaginal egg whose opening was conceived by Giger(the artist of the alien) to appear like an X-shaped Vulva, the Facehugger's process of impregnation exacts an oral invasion on Kane, who is then subject to sexual reassignment as he becomes the mother of the penile chestburster. Once grown, the alien's tube-like head, resembles a penis." Playing with the audiences sexual aspects can ultimately add to the fear they are experiencing. Sex is seen as something cherished and to have it ripped apart by a creature resembling a spider? Even I still get the creepies about it.

"Unknown is far more terrifying a notion than full disclosure." Alien(1979), while prequels and sequels were made, the original holds the key in what an incredible horror film is. Ridley Scott will go down in film history as owning the right to say, "ah yes, I directed Alien." "The risks taken by this film make it a rarity, while its methods yield a paradigmatic specimen whose combination of genre thrills, bound by great artistry and innovation, have yet to be bested by imitators."

### **Response to Critical Article**

I do not believe it was the just the article that made me see deeper into the film, but it was also the time that I read the article. Due to having seen Alien(1979) numerous times, I decided to read the article while we were watching the film in class. This experience allowed me to read a paragraph of the article and then watch a portion of the film, analyzing what I just read first hand to what I was watching.

Reading the artistry behind the silence within Alien(1979) was something I never really noticed at first. I knew the film was quiet, but not until I took it that step further did I realize the quietness was a critical aspect in making Alien(1979) stand out among other horror films. In the article, it breaks down the scene where Ash is trying to suffocate Ripley with a magazine. I'm not sure how I timed it so perfectly, but as I was reading that paragraph, the film was at the same part. There are portions of Eggert's article where he quotes Ash and I was able to read those quotations as Ash was saying them on the screen. This added even more depth to my understanding of that scene and the article itself.

I also enjoyed the breakdown of characters. This helped me in understanding who is who and what their position on the Nostromo was. My Signourey loving self always thought that she was the captain right from the start. But that was actually Dallas, with Kane second in command. Overall, Eggert does an amazing job of breaking down before Alien(1979), the film itself, and where the franchise went after the initial film gained popularity. I agree with his statement that no other horror film has ever bested the artistically crafted suspense that this film has. Alien(1979) is not only the original, but the best of the franchise. Even though Aliens(1986) directed by James Cameron is pretty close to being just as good.

### Film Analysis



The scene from Alien(1979) I will be breaking down is the opening. I decided to analyze the opening to truly showcase the speed of the film. I believe the first 15 minutes of a film is where the audience learns how to watch it. Ridley Scott did an amazing job at setting the audience up for terror.

This scene starts out with the camera focusing on a doorway to another side of the ship. The inside of the doorway is light with the walls and ladder being white. While the outside of the doorway is dark and mysterious. I believe this is a symbol for the positivity of escaping. Ladders to me mean a way out. It's almost a reference to the fact that this is the last moment the audience has the chance to escape before being trapped in the darkness of the ship.



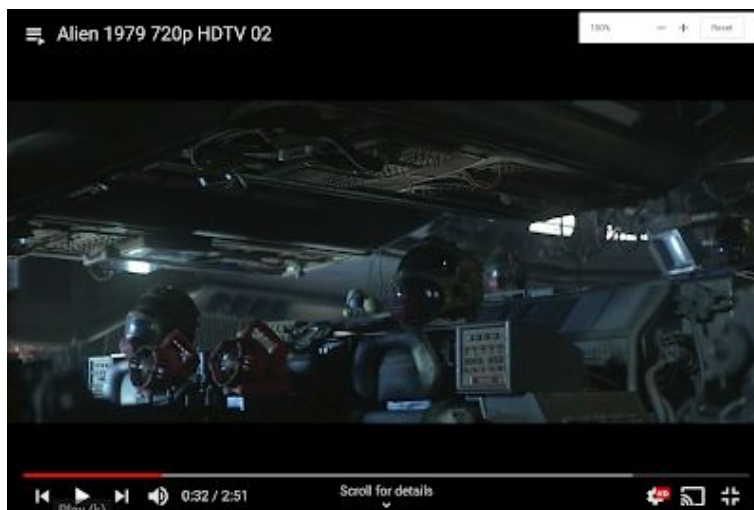
The camera makes a left pan leaving the view of the white room to showcase the piping and the walls of the ship. A dawning music soundtrack fills the open space for just a split moment. While watching the camera move, the audience is able to pick out some red lights and ship machinery, but other than that, it's all dark. The camera then continues panning left but starts to pan up as well. Now the audience can see with the lights in the room. The camera's focal point appears to be a overhead control system in the middle of the lighted room. As the camera is panning, the sound is empty. Soon pages flipping fill the air. There's a quick movement, maybe a crew member of the film production on set getting ready to flip the pages. But still, the sound, due to the silence besides the music that tones in and out, is almost like a baby jumpscare. This sense of silence is exactly what the audience will be experiencing for most of the film.



As the camera continues panning left, the audience is now able to see helmets and computers of the ship. From quick assumptions, one can predict that this area is the main control room. The visual of the helmets without a crew leaves the audience questioning where the crew members might be. Has the alien already killed them? Are they hiding? Not included in my clip, but in the opening of *Alien*(1979) itself, there is a quick lineup of the *Nostromo* ship. On this lineup, it gives the audience the information that there are seven crew members. Having this information, the silent pan through the ship almost symbolizes the audience searching for these seven crew members.



An entire empty control room is both visually intriguing, yet terrifying at the same time. It seems too quiet to the audience. The camera continues panning left over all of the machinery and technology with the only sound coming from a bobbing machine. From the quick glance you have at the angle below, it almost looks like a toy, but it is most likely working to keep the ship moving.



As the camera is continuing to pan left, it starts to move around the equipment so that the audience can get a front facing view. Again, the only movement in the scene other than the camera is the bouncing piece of technology behind the helmets. The camera pauses for just a moment to let the sense of no human life truly sink in.

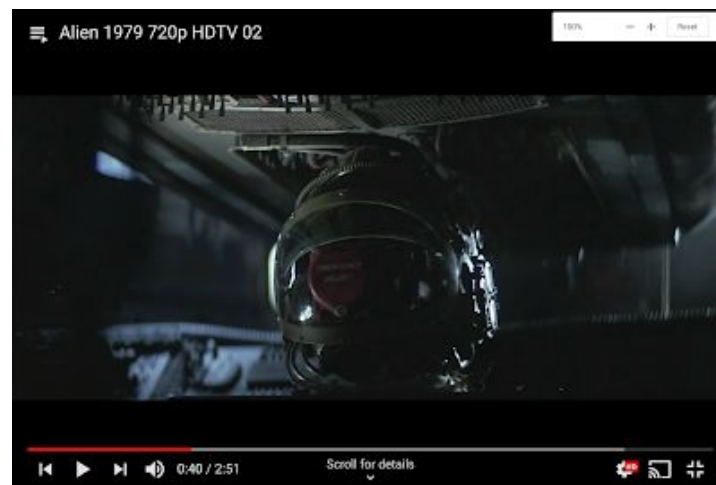


The scene switches view to a close up of a helmet. The first view adjustment of the scene that we, the audience have seen so far. The entire scene started off with a single shot. Single tracking shots like that allow the audience that sense of actually being on the ship. As though they're walking the same corridors that we are seeing. The camera remains focused on the above image for roughly 5 seconds before transitioning to the next quick shot.



The next shot features a closeup of the one of the control monitors. The screen is black and no lights are flashing. This lets the audience know that all of the technology on board is almost set on a cruise control. This spaceship is navigating itself through space. Which that thought alone is daunting. At this point, we do not know where the crew was, but wherever they are, they are

placing a lot of trust in the technology on board and hoping that it will continue to steer them in the right direction.

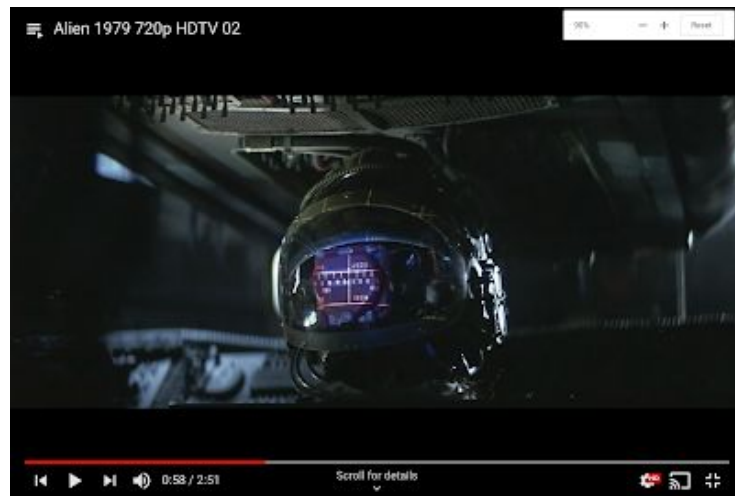


Next, we get a still shot of one of the helmets. Within the helmet we can see a red circle which showcases the words, "Emergency helmet." Behind the helmet we are also able to see some of the switches to the overhead control system, yet clearly, the focal point is to draw our eyes towards the red circle. It is the only not muted color in the shot. Which to me, indicates that the idea that these helmets are only used for emergency means that the crew, wherever they might be, does not need to wear the helmets at all times. But that also means that once the helmets go on, the crew could be walking into danger.



The camera faces back towards the computer, which we can now see is directly in front of the helmet. The helmet is a little blurred out, but we can see a side of it on the right side of the shot. This shot starts out with the computer completely black like it was in the first shot that we saw it in, then lights flash on, technology noises fill the silence, and we see Nostromo 180924609 on

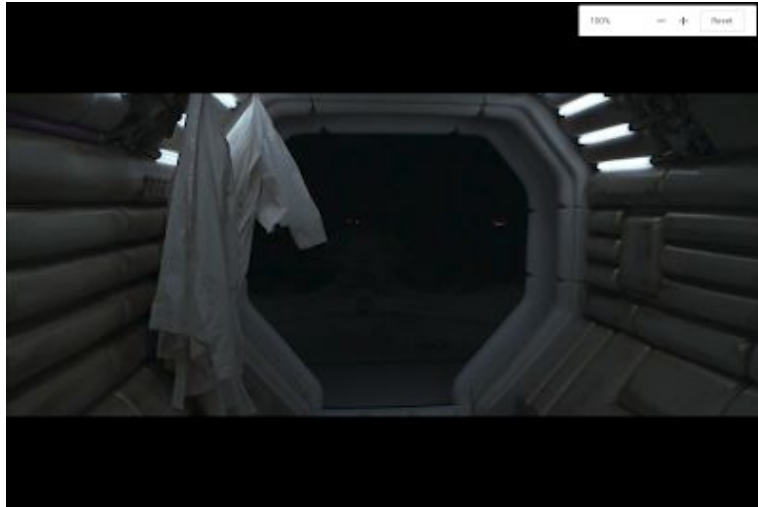
the screen. Something clearly has woken up the slumbering system. Was this the crew? or something else?



The speed of the shots quickens as the technology all wakes up. Some artistically gorgeous shots show the lights reflecting off of the helmets laying patiently waiting for the crew. Computer after computer we finally see some sort of movement besides paper within the ship. A quick booting up sound starts and then the screen goes black. Slowly lights turn on and we see that more corridors of the ship are being woken up as well.



Again, empty, no humans in sight. Just piping, machine style walls, and empty corridors. The camera focuses on this room, panning slowly forward to the door. This gives the audience that full sense of not only how empty the ship is, but how big. Within this ship, you could play a never ending game of hide and seek. While to us that may seem fun, to a monster, it's the perfect jungle gym to capture its prey.



As the camera approaches the door, it opens. Other than the subtle soundtrack in the background, the door opening is the loudest sound in the shot. Within this next room, there are 7 pods laying next to each other in the shape of a flower. The camera moves in slowly as the lights come into focus in the room. On the left side of the camera you can see the white coat swinging. This is an amazing attention to detail to show that the door opening created wind and movement. As we follow the camera in, we are able to see that there are people within the pods. Finally we have found the crew that was stated almost 7 minutes ago.



A sound similar to the effect of opening up a freezer fills the room; the sound of escaping air. The music dawns in, the lights get brighter, and the doors on the pods all rise up in unison. The crew lays there sleeping with white stickers on their chest and by their ears. Similar to the first shot of the white laddered room, the color white almost seems like a safety color. In the pods they were safe, but now that the pods have opened, their exposed to the danger that awoke the ship.



The shot transitions by fading into the next shot. This shot features a closeup of Kane, second in command on the Nostromo. We can see his chest moving, which indicates that the crew is in fact, still alive. Kane moves his head and lifts up his left arm up towards the white sticker by his ear. Pulling it off, he grabs the sticker in his right hand and sits up.



The shot transitions via a fade again into the same shot we saw when we first entered the room. At this point, Kane is the only member of the crew who is up. He sits forward, holding his legs, and exhales out. At the sign of this slow awakening, we, as the audience, can piece together that the crew had been asleep for a very long time. We watch Kane breath in and out for about 5 seconds before the shot fade transitions into a close-up of Kane. It is fascinating to me that the first member awoken from the slumber is also the first member of the crew that dies.



He slowly opens his eyes and that's the end of the clip. Moving forward in the movie, the camera goes back and forth slowly between fade closeups to fade wide shots, showcasing Kane getting up. After he finally gets up, he walks towards the camera and the shot transitions into a meal scene, with the crew at the dinner table.

After watching this opening, going all the way back to the very beginning with the title sequence, we get that slow paced, dawning music, jump scare sound effect style filming that we will see during the entire movie. Having the opening go as slow as it did was critical to set the stage for Alien(1979).

#### Self-Assessment of Critical Frameworks



Alien(1979) is a feminist film. Sigourney Weaver alone altered the entire life what this franchise would become. I believe that my blog not only showcases my love for the film and for what it

does for little girls everywhere, but it also uses excellent analysis skills when breaking apart the critical article and scene from the movie itself.

I branch into the psychological framework when deepening into the audience's personal take on what colors and symbols can do for them mentally. Interpretations of *Alien*(1979) are crucial to how an audience will accept the film. Understanding all possible interpretations is how a film can truly outdo others in its field. Scott clearly had a distinct vision in mind and covered all his bases.

I also touch base on the historical context framework when exploring the history of the film itself, the director, and the writers within the critical article I read. Deepening my understanding of the history behind the film allowed me to appreciate it more. Especially considering, like I mentioned before, that I read the article as I was watching the film.

#### Works Cited

“Alien 1979 720p HDTV 02.” *YouTube*, 18 Dec. 2017,  
[youtu.be/jZR2CYa2JoA?list=PLpmXHyMLR6-rZj2IVPdM4lzkJ-diGNMH9](https://youtu.be/jZR2CYa2JoA?list=PLpmXHyMLR6-rZj2IVPdM4lzkJ-diGNMH9).

Eggert, Brian. “Alien.” *Deep Focus Review*, Deep Focus Review, 25 May 1979,  
[deepfocusreview.com/definitives/alien/](http://deepfocusreview.com/definitives/alien/).

Trailers, Movieclips. "Alien Trailer HD(Original 1979 Ridley Scott Film) Sigourney Weaver."  
*Youtube*, Youtube, 22 May 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?=jQ5lPt9edzQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?=jQ5lPt9edzQ).