THE BOOK OF ALIEN

From the new Twentieth-Century Fox film

by Paul Scanlon and Michael Gross
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TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX PRESENTS

ALIEN

TOM SKERRITT
SIGOURNEY WEAVER
VERONICA CARTWRIGHT
HARRY DEAN STANTON
JOHN HURT
IAN HOLM

and YAPHET KOTTO as Parker

Executive Producer
RONALD SHUSETT

Produced by
GORDON CARROLL, DAVID GILER and WALTER HILL

Directed by
RIDLEY SCOTT

Story by
DAN O'BANNON and RONALD SHUSETT

Screenplay by
DAN O'BANNON

Music
JERRY GOLDSMITH
Associate Producer
IVOR POWELL

Film Editor
TERRY RAWLINGS

Director of Photography
DEREK VANLINT

Production Designer
MICHAEL SEYMOUR

Art Directors
LES DILLEY
ROGER CHRISTIAN

Alien Design
H.R. GIGER

Alien Head Effects Created by
CARLO RAMBALDI

Special Effects Supervisors
BRIAN JOHNSON
NICK ALLDER

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JIM SHIELDS, G.B.FE.

Dialogue Editor
BRYAN TILLING

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DERRICK LEATHER

Rerecording Mixer
BILL ROWE

Rerecording Assistant
RAY MERRIN

Dolby Sound Consultant
MAX BELL

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BOB HATHAWAY

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PAUL IBBETSON

Assistant Directors
RAYMOND BECKET
STEVE HARDING

Production Assistant
VALERIE CRAIG

Continuity
KAY FENTON

Production Accountant
BILL FINCH

Assistant to Producers
ALICE HARMON
LORI COVEL

Assistant to Director
SANDY MOLLOY

Trainee Assistant Director
BOB JORDAN

Production Executive
MARK HAGGARD

Costume Design
JOHN MOLLO

Wardrobe Supervisor
TINY NICHOLLS

Makeup Supervisor
TOMMY MANDERSON

Makeup
PAT HAY

Hairdresser
SARAH MONZANI

Set Decorator
IAN WHITTAKER

Assistant Art Directors
JONATHAN AMBERSTON

Property Master
DAVE JORDAN

Production Buyer
JILL QUERTIER

Concept Artists
JEAN "MOEBIUS" GIRAUD
CHRIS FOSS

Visual Design Consultant
DAN O'BANNON

Concept Artist
RON COBB

Casting
U.S.A.—MARY GOLDBERG
U.K.—MARY SELWAY

Production Manager
GARTH THOMAS

Construction Manager
BILL WELCH

Floor Effects Supervisor
ALLAN BRYCE

Special Effects Technicians
DAVID WATKINS
ROGER NICHOLS
NEIL SWAN
PHIL KNOWLES
DENNIS LOWE
GUY HUDSON

Visual Design Consultant
DAN O'BANNON

Concept Artist
RON COBB

Production Manager
GARTH THOMAS

Construction Manager
BILL WELCH

Floor Effects Supervisor
ALLAN BRYCE

Special Effects Technicians
DAVID WATKINS
ROGER NICHOLS
NEIL SWAN
PHIL KNOWLES
DENNIS LOWE
GUY HUDSON

Visual Design Consultant
DAN O'BANNON

Concept Artist
RON COBB

Production Manager
GARTH THOMAS

Construction Manager
BILL WELCH

Floor Effects Supervisor
ALLAN BRYCE

Additional Alien Mechanics
CARLO DeMARCHIS
DR. DAVID WATLING

Alien Effects Coordinator
CLINTON CAVERS

Matte Artist
RAY CAPLE

Supervising Modeller
PETER VOYSEY

Modellers
EDDIE BUTLER
SHIRLEY DENNY
PATTI RODGERS

Main Unit

Camera Focus
ADRIAN BIDDLE

Key Grip
COLIN DAVIDSON

Lighting Gaffer
RAY EVANS

Electronics and Video Coordinator
DICK HEWITT

Miniature Effects

Director of Photography
DENYS AYLING

Operator
DAVID LITCHFIELD

Focus
TERRY PEARCE

Key Grip
PETER WOODS

Supervising Model Makers
MARTIN BOWER
BILL PEARSON

Still Photographer
BOB PENN

Special Optical Effects
FILMFEX

Special Graphic Effects
BERNARD LODGE

"Alien"
BOLAJI BADEJO

Stunt Coordinator
ROY SCAMMELL

Stunt Work
EDDIE POWELL

Voice of "Mother"
HELEN HORTON

"Jones" Trained by Animals Unlimited
During the summer and fall of 1978, a visitor to England's Shepperton Studios might have found that making the forty-five minute drive back to London would be easier than trying to get past the main gate. Four of Shepperton's massive sound stages—one of them is among the largest in the world—were housing the sets for Alien. Twentieth Century-Fox wanted to make sure that the sixteen weeks of principal shooting would only be witnessed by authorized eyes.

Still, a pass from the production manager would allow a visitor a brief glimpse of what was going on inside. Alien's story basically takes place in only three settings: the interior of the United States space tug Nostromo, the surface of a barren planetoid, and the interior of a derelict, extraterrestrial spacecraft. The most impressive sets belong to the inside decks of the Nostromo. The elaborately constructed bridge, teeming with functional equipment, thousands of blinking lights, and computer readout terminals, had the feel of a distinctly real, lived-in, working environment. So did the infirmary, or "autodoc," the commissary, and the giant lower levels of the ship. A crew of more than two hundred workmen and technicians had labored many months to give these sets the proper weight and feel.

On another sound stage, the surface of the planetoid, looking barren and hostile in a subdued, bluish light, had been built from tons of plaster, fiber glass, rocks, and gravel. Immense ovoid portals—as tall as two men—dominated one end of the set. They were entrances to the derelict ship.

But chances are that a visitor wouldn't get to see anyone—or anything—pass through those portals. Sets were routinely cleared of all but essential personnel whenever the Alien was around. The movie's biggest secret would be kept.

Alien is a futuristic suspense story set entirely in deep space. The space tug Nostromo is returning to earth with a cargo of mineral ore. Even at light speed, home is still some months away. The crew—five men, two women, and a cat—are tucked away in hypersleep chambers. When the on-board computer monitors a strange transmission—apparently of nonhuman origin—it alters the Nostromo's course and prematurely awakens the crew. They're not explorers, these space travelers; their job is to tap the resources of the universe. Still, corporate law dictates that any signal indicating possible intelligence must be investigated.

The signal is traced to a small planetoid. The Nostromo makes a successful—if harrowing—landing, and a three-member scouting team sets out across a desolate, storm-lashed surface to discover an immense, derelict craft. They enter, and find a chamber containing the obviously nonhuman, skeletal remains of the derelict's pilot, and the source of the signal. A few minutes later they discover something else, and the horror begins.

What the scouting party doesn't know is that the extraterrestrial space jockey is a victim, and the signal is not a distress call, but a warning. Before long, the crew is engaged in a life-or-death struggle with a superior and treacherous life form.
Four of the people who would help lay the foundation for Alien, and who share some responsibility for the movie's design, were together in France in 1975, working on a project to adapt Frank Herbert's novel Dune for the screen. Writer Dan O'Bannon describes that project today as a wonderful dream, part of which came true. That part, O'Bannon says, "...was the gathering together of the best fantasy artists in the world, putting them in one room, and having them design the movie." But even the efforts of artists such as Jean "Moebius" Giraud of France, Chris Foss of England, and H.R. Giger of Switzerland couldn't save the ambitious project. "It collapsed so badly," O'Bannon says, "that I ended up in L.A. without any money, without an apartment, without a car, with half my belongings back in Paris and the other half in storage."

He retreated to the sofa of a friend, screenwriter Ron Shusett, and didn't leave it for a week. But depressed or not, O'Bannon knew he had to get back to work. He got his files and typewriter out of storage, and he and Shusett went to work on stacks and stacks of partially completed ideas.

"We pulled out one that I liked very much," he says, "an old script called Memory that was half-finished and was basically what the first half of Alien is now. I told Ron I'd never been able to figure out the rest of the story. So he read it and said, 'Well, you told me another idea you had once for a movie. It was the one where gremlins get onto a B-17 bomber during World War II and give the pilots a lot of trouble. So why don't you make that the second half and put it on a spaceship?'"

"That was a great idea, but then we had to figure out the monster. Well, I hadn't been able to get Hans Rudi Giger off my mind since I left France. His paintings had a profound effect on me. I had never seen anything that was quite as horrible and at the same time as beautiful as his work. And so I ended up writing a script about a Giger monster."

The working title was Star Beast. O'Bannon had a fortunate brainstorm late one night as he continued to write while Shusett slept. "I was writing dialogue and one of the characters said, 'What are we going to do about the alien?' The word came out of the page at me and I said, 'Alien. It's a noun and an adjective.' So I went in the other room and shook Ron awake and told him and he said, 'Yeah, O.K.,' and went back to sleep. But I knew I had found a really hot title."

While he and Shusett were still plugging away on the first draft of the script, O'Bannon paid a visit to another friend, illustrator Ron Cobb. The gifted and versatile Cobb had worked on the design of Dark Star (which O'Bannon co-wrote and appeared in) and was also part of the Star Wars team. He listened as O'Bannon outlined the story, then agreed to do some preliminary drawings and paintings. At this point the film was being thought of as a small budget project. Cobb was unconcerned: "I just sat down and started blocking out a ship—which I love to do. Anyway, Dan's original script called for a small, modest little ship with a small crew. They land on a small planet. They go down a small pyramid and shake up a medium-sized creature. That's about it. He meant it to be a low budget film, like Dark Star, and I loved the idea. So I did a few paintings and Dan scurried off with them and a script."

After three months of writing, O'Bannon and Shusett began to circulate their modest little script and some Cobb illustrations. There were surprises. "We took it around," O'Bannon says, "and immediately started getting the most incomprehensible positive reaction. People started hurling deals at us, in essence; but so many things had fallen through so many times in the past, I never believed any of these offers."
It took a production company named Brandywine to make a believer of O'Bannon. Brandywine consisted of producer Gordon Carroll and writer/directors David Giler and Walter Hill. They were fond of the project. There was a protracted period of negotiations. A contract was drawn up and signed. "From that point on," says O'Bannon, "it just sort of exploded in all directions."

Brandywine made a production agreement with Twentieth Century-Fox; the budget for Alien was eventually set at eight million dollars. More than three hundred people were at work on the film during the height of production. A special effects team headed by Brian Johnson and Nick Allder spent thousands of man-hours developing special floor effects and miniatures of the spacecraft. The smallest scale model Nostromo was slightly over a foot long, and it was built to 1/800 scale. That would make the "real" Nostromo about eight hundred feet long, a far cry from the originally conceived little spacecraft.

Producers David Giler and Walter Hill reworked the script. A major subplot involving the Alien was dropped; another involving an android was added. Hill, who would remain involved in the production, withdrew as the prospective director because he had another film in the works. He was replaced by Ridley Scott, who had only one feature film—The Duellists—to his credit, but who had become one of England's most successful and respected directors of commercials over the past decade.

Directors often have somebody filter prospective scripts, but Ridley Scott doesn't believe in hiring readers to select screenplays for him; he eyeballs whatever is sent to him whenever he can. The Alien script, now terse and spare in the characteristic Walter Hill style, came to him. "I was in the middle of developing another project," he says, "and this script dropped on my desk. I read it in forty minutes... and bang! The script was simple and direct; it was the reason why I did the film."

The Dune team, in the meantime, was in the process of being reassembled, but it would only be for a brief period. Moebius contributed some costume designs before choosing to return to France and other work. H.R. Giger submitted some drawings, but they were not deemed suitable. Ron Cobb had been working up preliminary drawings in Los Angeles with Chris Foss, who was concentrating on the Nostromo and its "lifeboat," the Narcissus. His conceptions would eventually be synthesized into the final designs of Cobb and Scott. Cobb, in fact, would stay in London and perform heroic services right into production, churning out hundreds of drawings as the interiors and exteriors of the spaceships took final shape.

Reenter H.R. Giger. Alien was gradually moving toward its shooting schedule and there was still no acceptable monster. One sketch proposal looked sort of like an octopus, another like a small dinosaur. One artist brought in a model that Gordon Carroll says looked like a "Christmas turkey." So O'Bannon, remembering those inspirational days on a sofa back in Los Angeles, with Giger always in the back of his mind, paid a visit to Ridley Scott.

"Dan came in," Scott recalls, "with this book I'd never seen before, opened it up and said, 'What do you think of this?' I looked down and saw this stunning picture... this remarkable drawing. I think it's one of the best Giger has ever done. I have never been so sure of something in all my life." What Scott saw was a picture from a Giger collection called Necronomicon, a picture that might best be described as the Alien's second cousin. "And I said to Dan, 'Well, either my problems are over or they've just begun.'"
He needn't have worried. Giger did a remarkable job, designing the Alien in its three phases as well as the surface of the planetoid, the derelict craft, and the dead space jockey. And when he sculpted and crafted the final Alien costume, it was, when photographed, the furthest thing from what Scott dreaded: "A man in a rubber suit."

One drizzly weekend in December, four visitors from the States were invited to look in on post-production proceedings at Bray Studios. The remaining crew was still putting in seven-day weeks as the film began to take final shape. On one stage, Nick Allder and his special effects crew were filming the Nostromo in flight. An impressive twelve-foot model—rife with detail—was suspended from the ceiling by a web of chains and pulleys. (In miniature shots, it's actually the camera that does the moving.) In another, smaller room, Ridley Scott, surrounded by a dozen technicians, was peering through his camera lens into the uncomfortably close face of a drooling Alien, shooting more close-ups. There wasn't much talk.

Earlier that day, the visitors, carrying beer and sandwiches to appease their jet-lagged stomachs, were ushered into a screening room and allowed to see a rough cut of Alien. It was actually more of an assemblage than a rough cut. There were no titles and no sound effects. The score had not yet been written, but a substitute amalgam of music had been tacked on for mood. There were a lot of frames that said Scene Missing. The rhythm and pacing was distorted because there was still much editing to be done—inserts and pick-up shots to be completed.

But as the film was being shown, these things happened:

One visitor choked on his beer.

Another knocked over a plate of sandwiches when he lurched violently in his chair.

Yet another, who has viewed practically every science fiction and horror movie ever made, was seen to be peering through his fingers, which were often covering his face.

The lights came on and the visitors turned to look at Gordon Carroll. "Well," he said with a trace of a smile, "what do you think?"

Writer Dan O'Bannon (top) makes himself comfortable in the Nostromos bridge. Bottom, left to right: Director Ridley Scott, Producer Gordon Carroll.
Nostromo, the human spacecraft in *Alien*, is the end result of thousands of drawings, twice as many working hours, blood, sweat, and ink, a lot of second and third-guessing, and above all, imagination. Ron Cobb was there at the beginning and at the end. A renowned cartoonist and illustrator and a *Star Wars* alumnus (he designed several of the Cantina creatures), he made preliminary sketches and paintings of things both alien and human, but later reduced his focus to the human ships, inside and out.

"I resent films that are so shallow they rely entirely on their visual effects," says Cobb, "and of course science fiction films are notorious for this. I've always felt that there's another way to do it: a lot of effort should be expended toward rendering the environment of the spaceship, or space travel, whatever the fantastic setting of your story should be—as convincingly as possible, but always in the background. That way the story and the characters emerge and they become more real. If you were to set a story on an ocean liner, there would be bits of footage to explain what the ship was like docked or at sea, but it would remain in the background of the story. It should be the same with science fiction."

Cobb doesn't have too much difficulty applying the ocean liner analogy to deep space: "I'm sort of a frustrated engineer because I have lots of opinions about how certain problems could be solved using present technology or even speculating about near-future technology. So in working on a film I like to take this challenge and design a spaceship as though it were absolutely real, right down to the fuel tolerances, the centers of gravity, the way the engines function, radiation shielding, whatever. And after I do that, I like to deal with how I can take this idea and hammer, bend, and twist it into something that will be appropriate to the film."

A lot of bending and twisting took place in a dingy little room above a workshop at Twentieth Century-Fox in 1977. Cobb was working mainly on interiors; Chris Foss was doing exteriors. Next, at the producer's request, they were both doing ships (which seemed to be getting bigger and bigger), and Cobb finally outdid Foss and himself with a highly rendered drawing that he and Gordon Carroll eventually agreed looked more like a luxury liner than a spaceship. Everything seemed stalled.

But the film effectively gained another designer when Ridley Scott came on as director, and the logjam was eventually broken. Scott attended the West Hartlepool College of Art and London's Royal College of Art before moving into his career as a highly successful commercial director. He is very visually oriented, as his highly detailed storyboards for *Alien* demonstrate. And, as in every other visual element of the film, spaceship design came heavily under his influence. The end result was that the *Nostromo* became a tug—an eight hundred-foot-long tug—towing a gigantic refining platform two miles long by one and one-half miles wide.

No matter how you'd want to reduce that down to scale, time was beginning to run short; and special effects supervisor Brian Johnson and his staff had to start building models. "The crunch came," Cobb says,
Top: Foss visualized the refinery platforms built on asteroid chunks; below: a platypus-like Leviathan
“and Brian just came over from England, grabbed some drawings, and headed back. The final is pretty much patterned after two of my drawings, and the platform is a combination of Ridley's refinery towers with some of my little modifications to make it more believable.”

Back in England, the models began to take shape with the help of the usual pre-production frenzy. Using the drawings, and in some instances, Cobb's interior blueprints to guide the external shapes, technicians came up with some reasonably good prototypes. The refinery towers took longer. “We did some test shootings and they looked pretty good,” remembers special effects supervisor Nick Alder, “and then we’d shoot a tower from a certain angle and it would start looking like a Disneyland castle. So we’d tear all the detail pieces off and start over and keep doing it until we had it right. Finally we had the towers sort of chunkied out, so they’d have this enormous, heavy feeling.”

A small army of model-makers handled the detail work. Once the basic outline of the ship—built with wood and plastic—was assembled, the craftsmen would swarm over it, using their own mold forms to create window sections and hatches, or any part of the ship in which specific requirements were dictated. Much of the fine detail work came from plastic model kits, the model-maker's ultimate life saver. “Certain parts are very useful,” one technician explained. “It saves a lot of time, because if you had to cast every piece, the movie would be finished about 2,000 A.D.” So like many movie spacecraft before it, the Nostromo contains minute traces of battleships, tanks, and World War II bombers.

They wound up with three Nostromos: a twelve-inch version for medium and long shots, one four times that size for rear shots that would make the jet burn realistic, and a seven-ton rig used for an undocking sequence and scenes on the planetoid surface. The models were shot by a camera moving on a rail track while shooting at a snail-like two and one-half frames per second, rather than the usual twenty-four. This, Alder explains, “was to keep the models in focus. We were shooting very, very close to them and there’s nothing worse than a model shot out of focus. Our system was a modification of the one used in 2001. The Nostromo moves very slowly, like an oil tanker that takes eight miles to slow down and another four to turn. We didn’t need the kind of system used on Star Wars. But we were holding shots a really long time. Some of them were running a minute, a minute and one-half, and that gives you a long time to look at the ship. First the detail, and then the shots themselves, had to be perfect.

You could get away with murder a long time ago, you know. The thing it comes down to is that people won’t accept it today unless it looks right.”
Top left: at one point, the script described extensive damage to the interior of the ship. Foss designed a robot device to make repairs on board the ship in the engine room.

Top right: another repair vehicle for the Nostromo that was not mentioned in the script but that Foss created for possible emergency conditions. This mechanical manipulator, the Picador, was controlled by human guidance.

Middle: Foss designed the rear of this large craft with a unique form of propulsion. The strange pincers had a ray shooting between them. The movement of the pincers somehow operated the stardrive.

Bottom: one of Foss's earliest designs was a snake-like spacecraft. The flexible craft was segmented like a train, and the space tug could be separated from the cargo.
Foss is influenced by more conventional large earthcraft (or vehicles).

Top left: one of Foss's wildest ideas for the Nostromo features three prongs at the front of the ship. The profile of this spaceship is adapted from the basic design of a submarine. The influence recurs in several sketches for the film.

Top right: this alternative control room design is based on an upside-down submarine conning tower.

Bottom, left and right: two concepts of fantasy engine rooms for the Nostromo designed by Foss. Each features massive curving surfaces connected by large curling pipes and tubes.
The following three designs show variations of the same craft by Foss. The basic concept of the craft is a later version of the submarine influence with a 747 nose.

Top: Deep Space Condition features the upside-down conning tower in the rear.

Middle: Atmospheric Condition design retracts deep space equipment on the top surface of the craft.

Bottom: Landing Configuration design is supported by these unusual barrel-like landing wheels.

Bottom of page: the idea of barrel-like landing gear was adapted from Foss's previous work on film projects Dune and Superman.
These are some of Foss's first designs for the Leviathan, later named the Nostrom. The style of his futuristic work features enormous spacecraft with close attention to characteristic details.
Foss was influenced by nautical craft. This sketch shows the rear view of the "riverboat" design.
The front of the riverboat design features braking engines, barrel-shaped vertical lift engines, and cargo modulars in the rear.
This Foss craft bears a close resemblance to a tramp steamer. Its similarity to seafaring cargo hauling ships can be seen in the large rectangular cargo containers bound to the midsection of the craft.
BASIC LOCKHEED CM 855 BISON TRANSPORTER FRAME MANUFACTURED AND FITTED WITH A YUTAN TEN MILLE STELLAR DRIVE THE ORIGINAL GEMINI 1,3000 ENGINES HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY 2 JOWLS RANGE 1866 CYCLONE THRUST TUNNELS WITH 8:1 PHASE VECTORIZATION FOR MID LINE LIFT FUNCTION. EACH POWER UNIT DEVELOPING 1.230,000 TONS THRUST (M, 300,000,000 POUNDS) GIVING A HIGH IMPULSE TOTAL OF 7,380,000,000 TONS.
The Nostromo, as drawn by Ron Cobb. Cobb's notes on the drawing bear out his self-description as a frustrated engineer. "I like the challenge of designing a spaceship right down to the fuel tolerances and the way the engines function," he says. "Films are ideal for at least demonstrating the premise. It's an excitement I have to communicate."
Top: Cobb commented, "These Foss repair machines are "waldo-like" vehicle concepts developed by Robert Heinlein." Bottom: this detailed Foss drawing shows a version of the Leviathan bow with vertical lift capability.
Top: when Ridley Scott joined the project late in the California pre-production period, he asked Cobb and Foss to rethink their spaceship design concepts. One of the results was this inverted pyramid-style Nostromo by Cobb. Bottom: an early Cobb rendering of the Nostromo’s ramp, door, and air lock.
Stuart Rose of the Alien art department in England produced this rendering of a Nostromo landing leg featuring an elevator. Bottom: this vehicle doesn't appear in the final script, but it demonstrates Cobbs penchant for engineering.
Filming the Nostromo (top of page and right) and the Narcissus (bottom left). Using sketches by Cobb, the special effects team evolved the final designs by building and rebuilding the models. The cathedral-like spires of the refinery were a late innovation.
Shooting a landing "leg" of the Nostromo. Michael Seymour: "We wanted to establish the ship's scale, so we built this enormous leg on the landscape set. It's made out of fiber glass and wood, but it looks rather impressive because of the way it's lit."
The sum total of elements involved in production design is always large. In a special effects film it is awesome. *Nostromo* is divided into three levels. Each has a specific character, or personality. Each, because of the future technology involved in the human environment, is incredibly complex. And each, sitting up there on the big screen, must look real.

In this case, it begins again with Ron Cobb’s drawing board, along with Ridley Scott’s storyboards. In one way or another, Cobb was involved with the design of every room on the spaceship. Following his thesis of the “frustrated engineer,” Cobb designed rooms and details that were meant to look functional, and in many cases were functional. But this was only the beginning. To the actual overall design strategy, add the creative counsel of Gordon Carroll and Scott. To the implementation of same, add production designer Michael Seymour, and art directors Roger Christian and Les Dilley. For the cementing of reality include Brian Johnson and Nick Allder and their special effects team. And throw in three hundred more technicians and workers, each bringing their own special talents to the film.

In a sense, Scott’s storyboards loom over this cornucopia of elements. “The film was done fairly quickly, all things considered,” he says. “I was an art director before, and when time got tight I’d say, ‘Well, it’s time to turn back to the old roots and art direct or draw a sequence very specifically for myself.’ It helps me think; once the pictures are right, everything else starts to occur from them.

“But there’s also a certain thing about storyboarding that can work against you. It comes very close to comic strips, where you use single images in sequential form. When you get to the film, you have the image move, and there’s a connection between the images, which creates a different aesthetic effect. But it’s still good for me because I’ve done huge amounts of celluloid. And that’s why I think the boards work for me; it’s a way of expressing awareness of the medium.”

So there were Cobb’s drawings, Scott’s storyboards, and then there was a lot of good, old-fashioned interaction. “Ridley showed us *Dr. Strangelove*,” Roger Christian recalls, “and he kept saying, ‘That’s what I want. Do you see? Not that it’s a B-52 in outer space, but it’s the military look.’ You can’t really draw it…but I knew what he was saying because I had done it in *Star Wars*, so I said to Michael Seymour, ‘Let’s have a go at it.’ So we recruited some dressing prop people, got a hold of several tons of scrap, and went to work on the *Nostromo’s* bridge.

“We spent weeks and weeks building it up, encrusting the set with pipes and wires and switches and tubing and just about anything we could lay our hands on. Then we painted it military green and began stenciling labels on everything. Ridley came back from the States and said, ‘That’s it; you’ve got it,’ and then told us to keep going. For instance, we made a control panel out of airplane junk and about a million switches, and we just built banks and banks of switches and put lettering on them, and suddenly it was real. Sometimes you can spend weeks laying on layers of stuff and it looks terrible, and then, one day, it finally works.”
The hypersleep awakening sequence was in and out of the script half a dozen times until the art directors came up with an appropriate design. Says Les Dilley: "We really wanted the sequence, but we couldn't get it right. Then we got the idea of hydraulically operated tops that open like a flower. It worked." Here, crew members Parker and Kane (Yaphet Kotto and John Hurt) shake off a deep-space slumber.
It’s not as chaotic as it may sound. Christian explains: “You need a crew that is mechanically minded. Instead of painting a wall you’re directing it with scrap. You can’t just stick it up at random, because it looks terrible. So you start, say, with pipes and you put them in neatly, then a bit of wiring, then some tubing, and if this underpinning looks good, you start putting on the barnacles.”

The bridge was one of the first sets constructed, and it was to establish the standard of realism for all the “human” sets in the production. Ron Cobb explains how it evolved: “My first version of the bridge was very spacious indeed: sort of split-level, California style with these huge windows. I had this idea for a spectacular shot where you’d see the approaching planet rolling by on console screens, and then suddenly the windows would open and light would flood in and there would be the actual planet outside doing the same roll as the one on the screen. But it was decided that we couldn’t afford it, and we’d have to go to a kind of Star Trek bridge with no windows and a viewing screen.

“But by the time I got to London, Michael Seymour decided he liked the window idea and came up with this hexagon-shaped bridge that was radially symmetrical. Then Ridley wanted overhead consoles, and wanted to make the set tighter, more claustrophobic, like a fighter bomber, and I just sort of started suggesting shapes and forms that would conform to that. The windows eventually became bubbles you could sort of get to in outrigger seats that would overhang the windows.”

There was a good reason for the shrinking bridge. “The set is deliberately designed to make you feel claustrophobic,” Ridley Scott says. “If you take the ceiling above the set, you never see it. When it’s there all the time—coming at you all the time—that’s different.” He chuckles. “The ceiling wound up at about six-foot-six, and we would have endless discussions with Gordon Carroll, who is about six-foot-three. He’d stand there, and he’d start muttering: ‘Gee, aren’t these a bit too low?’”
But there was also more to the bridge than encrusted detail and low ceilings. Much of it actually worked. “Brian Johnson’s team came into it,” says Christian, “and pretty soon it was no longer just a realistic façade.” Christian did a breakdown of the actors’ movements on the bridge, and then a decision was made as to what had to actually work. “Suddenly we were into actual technology; if you need to seat a real television within a console panel, you have to figure out how to work it in.”

Nick Allder found himself developing real hardware from sketches, and, occasionally, on a verbal request from Scott: “Whatever Ridley wanted, we actually gave to him. Luckily, we never had to strike a compromise anywhere down the line. A lot of things were basically programmed so that the actor could hit a button and something would really happen. For instance, the chair that rolls out over the viewing blister is completely remote; all we had was a fail-safe cutout switch if anything went wrong. The actor could push a button and go forward, or turn left and right. Of the panels in the bridge that work, we made sure that every button had a function so that the actors wouldn’t have to fool with dummy controls. After two or three days on the set, the actors really got into it, and I think it helped them.”

Allder and his associates would also be called on to construct such things as functional (and dangerous) flamethrowers, tracking devices, a laser scalpel, and a harpoon gun. “There is a sequence,” he says, “where Tom Skerritt is firing up a tight corridor and then he turns and pans the flame gun in front of the camera. If he had hit the button at the wrong time, Ridley and a technician, who were crouching behind the camera, would have been roasted.

“I think this points up the major difference between the shlocky science fiction films of the fifties and the things we do today. If you want a flamethrower, you can’t just make something out of wood and epoxy. It has to handle correctly—it has to have weight—and it has to shoot.”
Interior sets for the Nostromo under construction (top center) and some of the results; an inspired combination of Ron Cobb's designs, Ridley Scott's visual influences, and Roger Christian's demon hoard of buyers and builders. Christian: "A lot of the bridge is aircraft junk. For the autodoc, we purchased actual medical equipment. Ridley would look at a panel interior and say, 'I want it to look like hair,' and the buyers would have to keep bringing in miles and miles of different colored wiring." And the computer video monitors worked, too. All of them. Above: an A-level corridor. Right: commissary.
Left: air lock, upper right: top video terminal on bridge.
Above: bank of equipment on bridge.
Science officer Ash (Ian Holm) in his observation blister. "The blister is on the lowest part of the ship," says Les Dilley, "so when they're down on the planet, Ash can sit there and watch them go by, and then he can monitor their position. He loves being down there all alone. The blister is his glory. It's sort of the ultimate disc jockey's booth." Bottom: an early Foss design of a control room seat on one of his big spacecraft features a free-floating concept for landing purposes.
From the top down: science officer Ash at work in the infirmary; the main computer room, home of "Mother"; and two views of the autodoc. Left: Ash's blister. Cobb completely designed the autodoc, the air lock, and the blister.
Three views of the “C”-or garage-level of the Nostromo: a passageway, top; two shots of a storage area, below. Ridley Scott strove for a "cathedral-like" effect in lighting these sets.
Some early Cobb renderings: Top: a rough sketch of the left-hand wing seat facing a control console on the bridge. Middle: a C-level passageway designed to look like the moldering interior of a tramp steamer. Bottom: a low-budget blister—dropped from the final script—where a love scene would have taken place. The lovers would have been interrupted by Kane's body floating by the bubble.
Left: Cobb's early hypersleep chamber looked a little like a Pullman sleeper.
Right: the autodoc, the first actual set design built to Cobb's specifications.
Below: a wide-angle look at Ron Cobb's first bridge design, one he affectionately termed California Split-Level. There were to be both giant video screens and two large viewing bubbles that would also feature computer readouts. The proposed set was deemed far too expensive, and only the wing seats shown here survived in the final film.
Top: a more refined Cobb bridge, with a viewscreen but no windows. Bottom: an early autodoc. The whole apparatus containing the body would roll out on tracks to the seat in the foreground.
Cobb kept churning them out. Top: the lock for lifeboat B. A turntable system would get the passenger to the boat and still keep it sealed off from the ship's main interior. Middle: the lifeboat interior. The chairs face back to back, and there are two hypersleep vaults on either side of the cabin. A spacesuit locker sits at the left, rear. Bottom: an air tank room with apparent casualty. This is from an early sequence not in the final film, in which the crew attempts to trap the Alien in an air lock.
Top: Sigourney Weaver gives a practical demonstration of Roger Christian's flamethrower on the lawn at Shepperton Studios. Center: Weaver as Ripley in the film, stalking—or being stalked by—the Alien. Bottom: a hand pistol adapted from a real sidearm—a Roger Christian special.
Testing the hardware: Brett (Harry Dean Stanton) demonstrates a make-shift stun device that will hopefully herd the Alien into an air lock. Dallas and Lambert (Tom Skerritt, Veronica Cartwright) look on with approval. Ripley (Sigourney Weaver, right) cradles a lethal flamethrower. All the hardware was designed to work efficiently, and it did. In a corridor scene involving a flamethrower, the director and a technician almost got barbecued.
The necessity of detail: a design crew worked long hours to produce a realistic chart of the "Middle Heavens." It can be seen—barely—in the background on the bridge. The special effects team built—from scratch—a blinking, beeping probe device that appears in the film. A data stick that functioned like a tiny video camera was in the original screenplay, but was dropped. Right: a Ron Cobb design for a surface suit.
The Nostromo's crew are professionals seeking and mining the resources of deep space so they can get their share of the profits. Accordingly, John Mollo's costumes are designed to convey a funky, informal, lived-in quality. Only science officer Ash maintains a semblance of military bearing. Left to right: Engineer Parker, Warrant Officer Ripley, and Ash (Yaphet Kotto, Sigourney Weaver, Ian Holm); middle: ship's navigator Lambert (Veronica Cartwright); right: Captain Dallas (Tom Skeritt).
Although Jean (Moebius) Giraud was involved with the film for only a few days, his basic surface suit design can be seen in the final production.
Michael Seymour: "I responded to Moebius's drawings with the thought that they looked like medieval Japanese armor. John Mollo took that idea and developed it in an incredible way. I mean, they're space suits, but they're also very Gothic, with very rich surface texture." Ron Cobb (right) also had a fling at emergency space suit design.
Although Moebius's stay on the film was brief, his basic costume renderings proved to be adequate blueprints for the final product by John Mollo. The four middle drawings show interior and exterior suit designs, featuring cricket batters' padding on the shoulders and knees.
“You can walk on it...”
—Ash, Nostromo’s science officer

There’s a subplot concerning the planetoid that’s not in the final script. It could be called “The Secret Life of Aliens.” It offers some clues about Alien culture—if you can call it that—and none of the clues bode well for humans or any other race.

As in the final version, the Nostromo’s search party finds the derelict ship and the remains of its pilot. But that’s all, except that the space jockey has managed to scratch the image of a triangle in his “dashboard,” apparently his last act. The searchers return to the ship, mystified. A short time later, the planetoid’s endless dust storm has briefly settled, and the crew can see a huge pyramid on the horizon. Another crew is sent to explore. They scale it, find an opening on top, and a volunteer lowers himself down the hatch.

He finds a giant chamber that seems like a tomb, or maybe a place of worship. There are weird statues and some sort of hieroglyphics (which later prove to be representative of Alien reproductive cycles). This, of course, is where the Alien spores lie waiting for someone to come along.

The sequence offers a thoughtful contrast among three cultures: human, Alien, and the unfortunate space jockey. “The pyramid and the derelict—two different elements—were still the subject of a seesaw debate when I came on the project,” Ridley Scott says. “I would love to have shot it, but the more I thought about it the more I realized it would have been wonderful in a three-hour version. What finally cracked it was the budget. We just had to get rid of it. And you know, sometimes financial practicalities force you to do a certain amount of editorial work, and I’m glad we simplified it.”

With or without the pyramid, the planetoid segment signals a crucial turning point in the story; a rapid sequence of events that will determine the fate of the Nostromo’s crew. It was up to H.R. Giger to design the planetoid surface, the derelict ship, and its pilot. As he would do with the Alien itself, the Swiss surrealist applied his very personal vision to the designs. He calls it “biomechanics,” and the simplest definition might be “half-machine, half-human.”

But the response that Giger’s style evokes is much stronger and more complex than that. The derelict’s interior—running more than forty feet from floor to ceiling and taking up almost an entire sound stage—has something uncomfortably familiar about it. The cross-ribbing running up the walls, separated by a median structure, looks like...well...ribs; the median structure like a spinal cord. The entrances to the derelict look sort of sexual. Someone once wrote that Giger’s work could be called “machine age eroticism.” But here’s the punch line: none of it looks human.

Sure, it isn’t supposed to be human, but persistence of vision teaches us to recognize familiar humanoid structures and patterns. Giger takes these patterns and skillfully combines them with mechanical images. The end result can be profoundly unsettling. Giger modeled the planetoid surface with real bones, bits of motors, pipes and wires, using Plasticine as the equalizing agent. The end result was a curious, surreal, and vaguely
Two Cobb drawings based on O'Bannon's script. Top: in the final script, searchers find a lost earth base where previous travelers fought a losing battle with aliens. Bottom: the interior of the temple from the original script. Alien spores lie waiting in the base of the altar.
threatening environment. The crescent-shaped derelict spaceship, if seen from the air, would look like a bone. The space jockey skeleton is, of course, all bones, but it’s not so much a skeleton sitting in a chair as it is a skeleton that has become part of the chair. It’s not clear if the space jockey has become ossified by time or was always an organic part of its craft.

Les Dilley, who, with Roger Christian, served as art director for the film, was faced with the task of translating Giger’s designs into working sets. “It wasn’t easy,” he says, “to translate them into three dimensions. In usual straightforward construction—say, the interior of a set—it’s all done on the drawing board. A series of working drawings evolve, starting with a quarter-inch-to-the-foot scan and eventually broken down to three-inch-to-the-foot details.

“In the case of the Alien planet, we had to make clay models about one-half-inch-to-the-foot scale to get the shapes right. Then we’d take a mold, cast it in plaster, and slice it up. We’d lay the slice down on a paper grid, multiply it by twenty-four, and would then be able to make formers at full size, in plaster, or occasionally fiber glass.”

The exterior and interior of the derelict were something else again. Taking Giger’s overall drawing, Dilley did working drawings of the piece that was to be built, sixty feet long by thirty-five curved feet high. It was modeled curve on curve, using huge wood formers to cast it in plaster. The interior set was even larger, a section of a curving bowl forty feet high and seventy feet wide, constructed, again, of plaster and fiber glass. “We actually used that piece of set twice,” Dilley explained, “both the scene with the jockey and the next one in the egg chamber. It’s called remount. The jockey was sitting on a big circular disc, and we’d take that out and redress the set with other props.

In the jockey scene, that disc would actually revolve so reverses could be photographed. We’d just have to remember the relative positions of the actors when we changed the camera positions. Otherwise, we would have had to build a complete set, which would have been about four hundred feet in circumference.”

The surface of the planet, as seen from space, posed another problem inherent in science fiction films: planets that look like they were painted. “Artwork is one of those things that never, never stands up on a big screen,” Nick Allder explains. “I don’t care who the genius is, he can’t paint a planet to look like a perfectly round ball. So we took a globe and spray-painted it white. Then we developed these special transparencies and projected them onto the globe. When the picture hits the ball it sort of spreads around it and enhances the spherical look.

“For the transparencies, we mixed various chemicals in a tank and injected dyes into them. They would start making patterns. We had a camera mounted vertically over the tank, and when we saw something we liked, we photographed it. And in the end it helped give the planet a very real, very eerie feeling.”

Well, a description of all this demon inventiveness still doesn’t explain how a muted feeling of tension between two extraterrestrial cultures could be presented without the pyramid sequence. The hint of an answer lies with Giger. He designed both the Alien and the space jockey. Both are "biomechanical."

And yet, while the Alien is a terrifying, nightmarish creature, the jockey—while certainly inhuman—is not. Sitting in repose in its doomed derelict ship, the jockey somehow appears to have been a benign creature. People involved in the film tend to agree on this. But they can’t explain why.
Top: this version of the derelict ship by Foss continues the "crustacean" influence with a variation on a scorpion tail and a long, trainlike body that disappears into the sand. Giger’s final version of the planetoid surface appears, below.
Top: the interior of the Alien temple by Foss shows Kane descending the shaft into the tomb. Middle right: Dallas and Lambert watch Kane descend the shaft of the Alien temple in Foss's story illustration. Middle left: Giger's first version of the pyramid was conceived for O'Bannon's original script. Bottom: Giger's final version of the egg chamber featured curved sides like a small breast.
Two early versions of the derelict ship by Foss and Moebius.
Ridley Scott’s elaborate storyboard technique is an outgrowth of his background in art direction. In this case, his strong visual sense is also influenced by Giger’s eerie renderings of the derelict ship and the surrounding landscape. Note the “organic” portals at the ship’s entrance.
Giger's concept of biomechanics is fully realized in his designs for the film, as these interior and exterior drawings of the derelict ship demonstrate. In biomechanics, machines appear to be organic; organisms have a mechanical quality. And above all, says Giger, "I like to work with bones."

Top: Giger also painted the planetoid landscape.
The derelict model (above) and Giger’s rendering of same. The entrance under construction (below) and the way it appears in the final film.
Wind, ice, and fog machines were used to simulate the planetoid's storm-lashed surface (above). The surface suits also vented carbon dioxide through their helmets—brainchildren of the special effects team.
Left: Giger's drawings of the space jockey in his chamber. Above: Giger at work on the full-sized jockey, sculpting with Plasticine, fiber glass, and bones. Below: an early Ron Cobb rendering of the jockey for O'Bannon's original script.
The interior set for the derelict ship. There was only one "wall" to provide the background, but the jockey sat on a rotating disc, facilitating different shots in relation to the actors.
Kane is lowered by mechanical winch into the hold beneath the jockey's chamber. Surprises await him.
Left: two views of the derelict's egg chamber and some vintage Giger design.
Right: Dallas and Lambert, back on the Nostromo air lock, struggle with an unconscious Kane.
“The Alien is the star of the movie.”
—H.R. Giger

Here’s an eyewitness account of Hans Rudi Giger at work during the pre-production days of Alien:

“When Giger first started working, he went to the production secretary and said: ‘I want bones.’ And I remember seeing all these trucks pull up one day loaded with boxes. They had been to medical supply houses, slaughterhouses, and God knows where else, and the next day the studio was full of bones and skeletons of every possible description. There was a whole row of human skulls in flawless condition. Three snake skeletons in a perfect state of preservation. A rhinoceros skull. He had everything. And he started sculpting with these bones and with styrofoam.

“So you’d go into Giger’s studio and you’d see this guy looking like Count Dracula, dressed all in black leather, with his black hair, lily-white skin, and blazing eyes. He was surrounded by a room full of bones and he was carving away frantically at this giant block of styrofoam, and his whole black leather costume and his hair were covered with snowflakes from the stuff.

“It was very hot that summer in London, and one day we were out on the lawn, having a picnic, and we all had our shirts off. Except Giger, who was still decked out in his leathers. And everybody tried to get him to take off that jacket, but he wouldn’t do it. You see, I don’t think he dares take off those clothes, because if he did you’d see that underneath he’s not human. He’s a character from an H.P. Lovecraft story.”

H.R. Giger, in fact, cites Lovecraft as an inspirational force. Also Edgar Allan Poe, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Frank Zappa, and Elvis Presley. But his true inspiration comes from deep inside himself… very deep. “About fifteen years ago,” he says, “I had a diary—a dream book. I had been having the same dreams again and again, and they were nightmares. They were horrifying. But I found that when I made drawings about them, the dreams went away. I felt much better. It was sort of self-psychiatry.”

Not that the nightmares went away. He once wrote in his notebook of a dream in 1970 where he found himself trapped in the confines of a narrow, claustrophobic bathroom in Zurich. The mouth of the toilet yawned at him menacingly. The whole room began to grow narrower and narrower. The walls and pipes began to look like loose skin with festering wounds. Small creatures appeared to glare at him from the corners and cracks. He turned and fled. When Giger gratefully awoke he wrote it down and later sketched what he had dreamed, and eventually the unpleasantness resulted in a series of extraordinary paintings.

“Sometimes people come and see my paintings,” Giger says, “and they see only the horrible, terrible things. I tell them to look again, and they may see that I always have two elements in my paintings—the horrible things and the nice things. I mean, I like elegance, I like art nouveau; a stretched line or a curve. These things are very much in the foreground of my work.”

This strange and terrible beauty was enhanced in 1972, when Giger began using the airbrush: “The airbrush was very new for me then, and
only a few people in Switzerland were using it. Now, when I begin I sit before a white canvas with no imagination. I don't know what will happen. So when I begin with the airbrush it's like a cloud, you know, a cloud that retains more and more substance. It grows and suddenly I can see the eye or the nose or something, and then it transforms into a head, and in the end there is a creature.

"Work for a film is different because I know what I have to do, but I also try to be completely free and let myself go. I had a lot of freedom on Alien because Ridley Scott and I would discuss the story, and sometimes use my book as a guide, and then I knew where I had to go."

Giger had plenty of territory to cover with the Alien itself. The Alien comes in three sizes: small, medium, and large. Around the set, these versions were known, respectively, as the Face Hugger, the Chest Burster, and the Big Alien. Giger refers to the latter, affectionately, as the "Alien Dessert." He designed all three; he sculpted and constructed the Hugger and the big fellow. A group of technicians put together the Chest Burster.

But why are there three forms of the Alien? Ridley Scott offers this explanation: "I would have loved to have had a third dimension on the creature, including the fact that there was a civilization and that maybe the derelict ship was a battlewagon, or a freighter that was carrying either its own kind or a weapon from A to B, and something went wrong. But without that, you still have to put perspective on the danger of the thing, like showing that even its reproduction is frightening.

"I try to put that across in the end sequence. I want to show that the Alien has a limited life cycle, like a butterfly. And within that period of time, once it decides to expose itself—to coin a phrase—once it jumps out of the egg, it has to reproduce and spread as fast as possible, maybe in a cycle of only days. And so in the last sequence, you see slime emanating from the Big Alien's body because we're trying to convey that maybe he's sealing himself in again, like in a cocoon. Also, by that point, he has to be provoked to attack, because he has to get on with his life cycle."

Here's a slightly different version from Dan O'Bannon, who includes an insight on Alien psychopathology: "The whole idea is that they have a very complicated life cycle. They have a spore that contains what amounts to an ambulatory penis, and they require a host to reproduce. And when a host approaches the spore, this thing springs out and attaches itself to the host and deposits eggs in the nearest available orifice and then it dies and falls off. The host is just an incubator for the thing that will ultimately emerge. And it grows to maturity with incredible speed, it's tremendously hungry, and it has a need to reproduce.

"But the creature that pops out onboard the spaceship has never been subject to its own culture; it's never been subject to anything at all except a few hours in the hold of a ship. And therefore, quite literally, it doesn't have an education. The Alien is not only savage, it's also ignorant."

Right from the beginning, the Alien wouldn't want to listen to reason, that's for sure. The character Kane, played by John Hurt, is the unfortunate object of the Face Hugger's intentions. Kane is exploring a chamber in the derelict ship when he discovers rows of large, leathery "eggs" (Giger calls them "organic footballs"). He touches one and it reacts by forming strange protrusions on its surface. Fascinated, Kane peers closely as the top begins to open. "He realizes something is inside there," says Giger, "but he keeps watching as the egg opens slowly, slowly like a handbag, and then the Hugger springs out and clamps to his face. It's a real nightmare!"

The original design called for a much bigger Hugger, which used a large, muscular tail to spring out of the egg like a jack-in-the-box, but
Scott wanted something smaller, more face-sized. "Now," says Giger, "we have this creature who looks a little bit like a spider with a tail. His body is very small and the biggest things are the two hands and a tail. The hands hold onto Kane's face, and the tail wraps around his neck."

Poor Kane. The Face Hugger would eventually fall off and die and he would appear to recover...but only long enough to become the centerpiece of what could be one of the most horrifying scenes ever filmed. The crew, including a revived and hungry Kane, are having a last meal before returning to their hypersleep vaults. There is a lot of amiable chatter. Suddenly Kane groans and pitches forward onto the table. He rolls over and a blossom of blood appears on his white T-shirt. Something begins to pulse beneath the shirt, and then, a gruesome head the size of a man's fist bursts from his chest. As the crew recoils in horror, the infant Alien pulls itself from Kane's body, speeds across the table and out of the room.

"On the day we shot that scene," says special effects man Nick Allder, "everyone was very nervous, especially the actors. The crew were all wearing white smocks, and it made the set look like an operating theater. Also, the set was very, very tight. You see John Hurt's head and real arms on top of the table, and a very shallow chest piece in front of him where the little Chest Burster comes out. Roger Dicken and I used a series of hydraulic rams to make him work.

"And besides all the equipment packed under the table, we had stuffed the chest cavity full of offal fresh from the slaughterhouse. We had to use the real thing; you just can't manufacture something like that. Then, we had gallons of artificial blood, and a lot of the cast really got sprayed when the head burst through. Poor Veronica Cartwright jumped behind her chair on the first couple of thumps, so when the head actually did burst out she was right in the line of fire, and she took about two pints right in the face. She just did a back flip and disappeared behind the chair. All you could see were her two feet sticking up. In the end, we found the effect so amazing that too much blood detracted from the impact of the scene. There is very little blood in the final version."

Of course, as Giger is fond of pointing out, the Big Alien is the star of the movie. And once the producers were satisfied with the Alien concept, they had to find a big human to satisfy the concept's requirements. "Well," says producer Gordon Carroll, "we couldn't figure out who was going to be inside the suit. We interviewed karate champions, a mime artist...we even considered one of those tall, skinny fashion models. Then we got a call from an agent here in London, and we went to meet him and someone he had told us about. So we were sitting in the pub and this man came through the door practically on his hands and knees. When he straightened up he was seven-foot-two. And the agent looked at us, looked at him, and said: 'How would you like to be a movie star?'"

Bolaji Badejo is the gentleman's name. A member of Africa's Masai tribe who is studying graphic design in England, he decided that he wouldn't mind appearing in a film—even if he had to be highly disguised. Badejo's first task was to stand patient and naked while a full-body plaster cast of his tall and reed-thin physique was taken. Then Giger, armed with his bones, styrofoam, and a complex mixture of rubber and latex bases, went to work.

"As I do with all my work, I made the creature look biomechanical," Giger says. "Starting with the plaster core, I worked with Plasticine, rubber, bones, ribbed tubes, and different mechanical stuff like wires. The whole costume is translucent; the head is fiberglass. It also had to be flexible because he had to pose in various ways and sometimes jump very quickly, like an insect."
There was another head and torso for close-ups, one that the special effects people were justly proud of. “That head will do literally anything,” says Allder. “It will snarl, it will smile, it will bear its teeth like a dog, open its mouth and stick out its tongue—which also has a mouth with teeth that opens—and it will breathe in the throat.” All this was accomplished, again, by a complicated series of hydraulic rams run from a control box.

The final problem, of course, was how it would all look on the screen. “I’ve never liked horror films before,” says Scott, “because in the end it’s always been a man in a rubber suit. Well, there’s one way to deal with that. The most important thing in a film of this type is not what you see, but the effect of what you think you saw. It’s like a sort of afterburn—what you think you saw.”

Actually, the Big Alien has quite a few scenes, but you never see it lurching and stalking around the set in the time-honored Hollywood tradition of men in rubber suits. Allder remembers the real turning point: “This was one of the decisions that came about when we first had Bolaji dressed up and we did tests of him on one of the sets. He looked very good and very menacing, and someone suggested that we have him running around. And Ridley said, ‘No, I don’t want to see him running around. Every time we see him, I want him in a new pose. I want him basically balancing on one finger on occasion, you know? Every movement is going to be very slow, very graceful, and the Alien will alter shape so you never really know exactly what he looks like.’”

Near the end of the film, there’s a scene that bears out this thesis. The last surviving crew member, played by Sigourney Weaver, attempts to escape from the Nostromo. Running hard, she rounds a corner and pulls up with a gasp. The Alien, in profile, is hunkered almost contemplatively in a corridor. It is bathed in a curious half-light. Despite the fact that the film is rushing toward its explosive climax, this scene—a strange interlude—makes the viewer stop and wonder at its eerie beauty.

The first time he saw Giger’s work, Ridley Scott said: “Either my problems are over or they’re just beginning.” Fortunately, Giger sculpts and constructs as well as he illustrates. Here are three early versions of the Alien spore, home of the dormant face-hugger.
Giger first conceived of the face-hugger as a malevolent jack-in-the-box that would use a powerful tail to spring on its victim. The evolving creature got smaller and smaller until it was literally face-sized.
Evolution of the Alien. Cobb's early creature for the original script (lower left) easily gave way to the monstrous Giger apparitions. Giger originally conceived of the chest bursting incubus as a "bloody turkey," but an attempt to model the creature came out looking like the Christmas variety. The final version is a small Alien, its head the size of a man's fist.
An arresting sequence omitted from the final version: the Alien weaves cocoons around its victims' bodies. Objective: more Alien eggs.
Giger at work on his "Alien Dessert." Note (above) the skeletons on the wall.
Giger really put his biomechanical theories to the test with the Alien tongue. He figured if the cranium was going to be elongated, why wouldn't it be able to house a retractable—and viciously practical—tongue? At right, a look at the skull-in-progress (above), and the Alien hand compared to Nick Allider's.
Above: the first Giger version of the egg chamber floor made from an egg carton and chicken eggs. Giger calls them “organic footballs.” Right: Kane gets too curious in the derelict ship’s egg chamber.
Left: an immobilized Kane in the clutches of the Face Hugger. Below: Dallas and Ash place Kane on the autodoc table. Right: Ash brandishes a laser scalpel, but he'll soon realize that the creature is not about to relinquish its grip.
The Alien assumes full potential. While the extent of its intelligence is never made clear, the creature's savage and aggressive tendencies are more than most of the Nostromo's crew can handle.
A practical demonstration of Alien mandibles, external and "tongue" versions.
Left: a fleeing Ripley rounds a corner and sees this lurking in the passageway.

In the film's final confrontation, the Alien—for once—gets outmaneuivered and buys a one-way ticket to oblivion.
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