

## From the Files of FANGORIA: “ALIENS”

Written by Dave McKendry  
Monday, 29 March 2010 14:35

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Is this too much? Have I gone too far? Why must I analyze one of the greatest sequels of all time on one of the shortest-lived formats of all time? What could I possibly learn from ALIENS on its special-edition laserdisc format? Have my methods become unsound? And how many damn discs are in this package?

Traveling through the A's of the Fango files, I came across a rather large dossier that immediately set off my sequel alarm. When movies do well at the box office, studios have always worked overtime to milk as much as they can from their sacred blockbuster cash cows, which has meant throwing loads of cash at that golden teat. And of course, a bigger budget means a larger promotional package, which leads to me having a hell of a lot more to scan. Therefore, I see no better way to celebrate a bigger file than with a bigger (laser) disc.



Like all good and decent filmophiles, I have a collection that knows no format boundary. I own THE BROTHERHOOD OF SATAN on Beta, CELLAR DWELLER on VHS and ALIENS on both Blu-ray and laser. If you're unfamiliar with the latter, you should know that it was not an example of optimum picture quality even for its time. The widescreen transfer is about as grainy as your Super-8 home movies, and although the audio was remastered in both digital and analog Dolby Surround, for some reason my player preferred sending out the analog, making the movie sound like Perry Como's "Easter Parade" on a 78. Not only that, but disc two clanks around so loudly, at one point I swear my player said, "You've got to be kidding me." I did track down a once-missing special features disc containing some interesting behind-the-scenes footage, along with a novel's worth of reading material—but with four discs which, like an infant, require changing every 30 minutes, it's easy to see why this format didn't last long.

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But for all this pain, suffering and flipping, there was some good to the laserdisc. This was, after all, a filmmaker's format, and for some time, laser was the only place you could find the director's cut. This ALIENS Special Edition was James Cameron's "F\*\*k you, this scene is important" version of his 1986 continuation of Ridley Scott's classic. With that sequel strike against him, the sophomore director nonetheless proved he was no one-hit wonder (after 1984's THE TERMINATOR), making a follow-up just as monumental as the original.



ALIENS is full of moments no one can ever forget. I still giggle when Paul Reiser says, "tough hombres," and every once in a while when I'm out with my friends, I like to scream "Marines, we are leaving!" before we go. Who among us doesn't remember playing that knife game with a spork in the school cafeteria? But that's what makes ALIENS a landmark film that will never die, no matter how many formats—or bad sequels—came in its wake.

Spawned in a time when studios believed in good sequels, ALIENS has so much to teach us (I'm looking in your direction, SAW). For starters, it has a great script; it based itself on Scott's film, but still found its own direction, creating characters with depth who inhabited a well-rounded universe. The actors bring life to their roles, and Cameron saw importance in each one, no matter how much screen time they had. That's an apparently dated concept which, far too often, doesn't find its way into sequels—or originals, for that matter.

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The game is definitely not over, as this sci-fi shocker still stands up as an amazing film. In a world where sequels mostly suck, mostly, ALIENS is full of memorable moments sure to find their way into the viewing lexicons of many more generations to come, no matter what future format incarnations it sees. Hopefully, as the hovercraft of technology continues to move forward, filmmakers will look back at movies that start with a great script, a great cast and a great director, and end without a buttload of CGI. But what do I know? I'm just some crackpot who still owns ALIENS on laserdisc.



{comments on}