

# Alien<sup>3</sup>

Science fiction has always held a fascination for me. It has the potential to construct alternative worlds where you can create utopias, while actually talking about what concerns us today.

The *Alien* trilogy framed a whole genre of science fiction film with its three very different narratives linked by the character of Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver), a strong assertive female lead not prepared to submit to either the company or the Freudian monster that seeks to possess her.

If the first film, *Alien*, introduces the idea of body horror, of the boundaries of the body under threat, the second, *Aliens*, is a Vietnam war film with high tech guns aiding marines on a rescue mission. The third—*Alien<sup>3</sup>*, directed by David Fincher—is fundamentally different and worth watching. Written by Vincent Ward, who made the excellent film *The Navigator*, the film sees Ripley crash landing on an isolated prison planet.

From the beginning this instalment of the trilogy is very different from the others. The other two survivors from the previous film—Hicks, a soldier, and Newt, a young girl—turn out to be dead and so the neat

nuclear family unit that is part of the right wing message of *Aliens* is shattered in the 1990s version.

The bleak, desolate planet on which Ripley finds herself is populated by a colony of male prisoners beyond the pale of even other prison populations. Its talk of contagion, viruses and the iconography of the prisoners all point to what the film is about for me—an allegory for Aids.

What the film turns on is the growing realisation amongst these men that they have no choice but to fight for their very existence because, along with

Ripley, who carries an alien foetus inside her, an alien has also landed on the planet. Some of the prisoners seek to blame Ripley for unwittingly bringing the monster with her but she is defended by the leader of the group who sees her as much a victim as the rest of them and unites with her to try and destroy it.

Most effective in the film is the strength of resistance of Ripley and the prisoners who are fighting not just the monster but the corporation that wants it as a weapon. The parallel experience of gay men in America and Britain fighting not just a virus but state



Ripley in the *Alien* trilogy: a strong female lead

indifference and prejudice couldn't be clearer.

In one scene they gather to decide on their course of action. The company lackey says they should wait for it to rescue them and not do anything that might rock the boat, but Ripley argues they should remember that in the eyes of the corporation they are all expendable. Dillon, the leader of the prisoners, continues in the same vein, 'You're all gonna die. The only question is how you check out, on your feet or on your knees begging. I ain't much for begging. Nobody gave me

nothing. So I say fuck that thing. Let's fight it.' This could be straight from the speech by Larry Kramer which launched Act Up (the militant gay activist group) in New York when he said, 'If my speech tonight doesn't scare the shit out of you, we're in real trouble. If what you're hearing doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage and action, gay men have no future here on earth.

How long does it take before you get angry and fight back?'

Ripley soon realises that she is carrying an alien foetus inside her and this makes her a valuable commodity to the company. She refuses to let them control her body and rather than allow herself to be taken alive to breed the alien, she throws herself into the fire. Some people might view this as a negative ending, but I think it's like the ending to *Thelma and Louise* where rather than let the state take away the freedom

they have come to discover they carry on driving.

*Alien<sup>3</sup>* isn't a cheery film but then the experience of the last 15 years of Aids hasn't been either. However, it has been one where a group of people marginalised and considered expendable have learnt to fight back and not accept the status quo. The 'fuck you' that the remaining survivor exclaims at the end of the film to the company thugs isn't the clearest declaration of socialist thinking, but the spirit of resistance is where socialists start.

John Lynch

