

# Film

## ALIENS

Director: James Cameron

And so the saga continues from Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*. The monster is no longer confined to the starship *Nostromo*, but has taken over a colonised planet and Sigourney Weaver's Ripley, rescued from her 57 year hypersleep, goes along with a corps of space marines on a search and destroy mission.

Although Cameron's *The Terminator* was not an attractive movie on moral terms, it did prove how skilful the director is in sustaining cinematic drive and action. *Aliens* may not be cast in the same fascist paranoia mould as the Schwarzenegger vehicle, but once

again Cameron has come up with a film which, after 15 minutes or so of scene-setting, never relinquishes its grip on its audience. Beside this sequel, Ridley Scott's initial *Alien* film seems positively low key, an elegant exercise in the poetry of alienation.

*Aliens* is not without its humour. There's some snappy dialogue, especially amongst the marines, with some of the best lines going to Jeanette Goldstein's ultra-macho Private Vasquez. The high-tech machinery also raises a few chuckles, as when Ripley masters a walking crane-frame early in the film. Later, in a clever twist, she uses the same vehicle in her fight to the death with the Alien Queen.

Weaver's character is central to the film, and it is that it should be a woman who takes on Ripley's responsibilities. The science fiction genre has not accorded too

much initiative to its female characters, but *Aliens* puts an end to such revisionist thinking: the image of a sweating Weaver edging her way along deserted corridors with a child in one arm and a computerised space-age machine gun in the other, shows that Stallone and Schwarzenegger may have met their match.

William Dart

## BACK TO SCHOOL

Director: Alan Metter

Rodney Dangerfield is one of America's most popular comedians and this film, his first starring vehicle, has been a mega-success in the States. How well it will fare in this part of the world is a matter for some conjecture as New Zealanders have not always taken to American comedians — the failure of the Steve Martin/Lily Tomlin *All of Me* being a case in

point.

*Back to School* has a shamelessly rudimentary plot. To encourage his son to stay at university, millionaire Thornton Melon (Dangerfield) enrolls himself at the institution. To gain entrance, he bribes the eminently corruptible Dean (Ned Beatty) by contributing a new business school to the campus. Once enrolled, he proceeds to play the system for all its worth, hiring NASA officials to do his son's astronomy homework, and calling in Kurt Vonnegut himself to help him on his Vonnegut paper.

There are few surprises amongst the jokes: "She gives good headache," cracks Dangerfield about his wife (Adrienne Barbeau recycling her *Creep Show* haridan). On another occasion, lounging in a spa pool for four curvaceous starlets, he asks one who

professes to be studying poetry whether she might straighten out his Longfellow.

Predictably, when Dangerfield is on screen, no one stands much of a chance, least of all the bland company of younger players (the trio of sultry ladies in the rock band backing Dangerfield's 'Twist and Shout' look much more promising). Sally Kellerman, 16 years on from *M.A.S.H.*, and looking distinctly ravaged, plays an English professor with a self-conscious, gangling casualness that is quite bizarre. Emotional states are complemented by her wardrobe colours — co-ordinated pink boots and jumper for lecturing on F Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, a simple khaki shirt when Dangerfield has disappointed her.

On the surface, *Back to School* seems a harmless romp for the teenage summer market, but it's difficult to ignore the philistinism and cynicism that lie beneath. For one thing, I'm not too sure the film's equating of money and power is intended to be ironic or not. There's also an undercurrent of violence that is disturbing — "I put one son through college and the other through a wall," remarks Dangerfield's chauffeur-come-bodyguard at one point. When the violence is integrated with the character, as in Sam Kinison's mad Vietnam vet history professor, it works, otherwise one is left with the suspicion that somewhere the Moral Majority is flexing its collective muscles. After all, Reagan is said to quote this Dangerfield man.

William Dart

# Video

Music and television are made for each other. But ever since Elvis was shot from the waist up, then forced to croon 'Hound Dog' to a basset hound, rock and TV have been uncomfortable bedfellows.

The problem is obvious — television has always used rock music (and anything else) for its own purposes — until, that is, the video promo came along and turned the tables. We've had 10 years of video overdose of the latest flavours on RTR and RWP, but classic footage has always been badly treated, (with the sole exception of the sublime 1979 ABC special *Heroes of Rock 'n' Roll*, which cries out for a repeat).

However this is slowly being remedied by rental videos. Although up till now all that's been available has been your B-grade 12 O'Clock Rock fare (Jethro Tull or the Cars live), things are changing. If we're never going to see some of the best rock films on TV (for starters, *The Last Waltz* has been shown in Oz, *Monterey Pop* must be available, and the cinema verite classic *Gimme Shelter* could be repeated for a new generation), and although many videos are of the greats at their least great (eg, Marvin Gaye's *Greatest Hits*), now we're getting a choice which common denominator television can't provide. There are some gems available already (*Spinal Tap*, *The Rutles*, *This is Elvis*) and it can't be too long before we see *The TAMI Show*, *Don't Look Back*, *Let it Be*, *The Kids are Alright*...

Until the legendary *TAMI Show* becomes available, we'll have to make do with *James Brown Live in London* (Virgin), recorded at the Hammersmith Odeon last year. Brown may look like a living waxwork, but he's still a gripping performer from whom everyone can learn something. He might only spin around twice rather than five times before the microphone hits the ground, and though he leaves his sideways shuffle dancing to set pieces rather than constant pyrotechnics, Brown's still the world's most beautiful mover. This concert is split in two distinct halves, the first rather restrained, with Brown squeezed into a blue tux and an unruffled coiffure. Half way through, he loosens up with a bang, changing to a purple jumpsuit and a funkier hair-do. Okay, sparks don't fly out of the TV, but that's mainly due to the dispassionate filming — you can't smell the sweat. But all the classics are there, and this session with the Godfather of Soul is essential, and addictive to devotees. *Jaaaaames Brown!*

The availability of Elvis' 1968 comeback TV special exemplifies the part video can play in researching rock history. Now 20 minutes of outtakes from the best portion of that show can be seen on *One Night*, in which Elvis, Scotty and Bill go downhome and sing some of their old favourites in a campfire singalong setting. Elvis is always worth watching, and here

he's at his most beautiful, with a self-deprecating wit. But outtakes are still outtakes and there's a helluva lot of pissing about before Elvis gets going on 'Trying to Get to You.' Like James Brown, however, he's a born entertainer and more than a few performers could benefit from a session with the masters.

Chris Bourke

## Bronze Rocks (Virgin)

Here's a compilation of the better known HM/rock groups on the Bronze label. Beginning with 'Iron Fist', Motorhead's heavy classic clip, makes it tough on the other acts to follow, but Uriah Heep do very well with 'Stay on Top' and two others. Followers of female rockers Girlschool will be right into this since they take up almost half the tape, then it's more Motorhead in for the 'Overkill'. Music videos may be back on the box but they won't be screening any of these ones. If the price is right, get it and see for yourself.

Geoff Dunn

## Eating Raoul (Palace Films)

Paul and Mary Bland just want to escape the waste lands of East LA, where their genteel sensibilities are attacked by deranged swingers after some poontang, sex-crazed bank managers and macho Chicano hoodlums. They just want a quiet place in the country for their dream restaurant, but alas money is tight. A way out is found when Paul accidentally kills an over-heating swinger and empties his wallet. A scheme is born, with Mary as sexual bait, and Paul with the killer frying pan; things are on the up and up until the devious Mr Raoul turns up.

A great middle-class revenge movie, with lots to say about sex and commodity consumption. There's nothing wrong with swinging, it's just the people who do it, that makes you want to murder them. The best scene in the movie is when Paul wastes about 20 of the suckers in their own hot tub, better than anything in *Death Wish 3*.

Directed by Paul Bartel, who earlier had made one of the greatest American films ever in *Death Race 2000* and featuring Mary Woronov ex-Warhol starlet and B-movie queen. A good example of a comedy that takes risks that work. Super fine entertainment with a twist.

Kerry Buchanan

## Rebel (Roadshow)

Good God this is pathetic. Matt ("I wish I was Marlon Brando") Dillon does some r&r in Sydney, 1942, taking a break from the "big one" (WW2), falls in love with a local chanteuse, and decides to go AWOL and leave the rest to the marines.

A plot with so many holes in it, it makes a Mills and Boon novel seem like Hemingway, the last thing the art director worked on must have been his school play. Real tacky stuff. Even worse are the attempts at doing musical production numbers; Glenn Miller it ain't. The whole thing has the look and feel of a music video — in a weak attempt at modernisation, the director destroys all the good things about this genre.

This must be why Matt Dillon mumbles and twitches all the time, almost thought he was doing a John Wayne imitation, but the Duke was never a wimp like this. Look, this just stinks.

Kerry Buchanan

## Return of the Jedi (CBS Fox)

I thought *Star Wars* was great, a genre mix of John Ford's *The Searchers*, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, RKO's adventure serials and Japanese samurai epics. Nifty kidult stuff that became a cultural phenomenon and reached religious heights, with "God" being replaced by "Force". Part three has its moments, with the wonderful Jabba the Hut sticking his lascivious tongue out at Princess Leia, the bike chase through the forest and Harrison Ford.

But those Ewok creatures are like an attack of terminal cuteness, sort of Chip and Dale without a cutting edge. The worst feature is the transformation of one of the screen's greatest baddies into a real wimp. When Darth Vader changes his mind near the end of the film and renounces the dark side of the force, you could almost hear the weeping violins. He makes his final appearance with Yoda and Obi-wan-kenobi smiling benignly at his son and the furry Ewoks.

Maybe it's a trick and when he's in Jedi heaven he'll plan his big comeback, kill Yoda and Obi for good, and then really kick some ass. May the force be with you.

Kerry Buchanan

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