

Prometheus



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DIRECTED BY: Ridley Scott

CERTIFICATE: 15

RUNNING TIME: 123 mins

COUNTRY: UK/USA

YEAR: 2012

KEYWORDS: science fiction, film franchise, action heroine, faith

SUITABLE FOR: 14–19 media/film studies, religious education

SYNOPSIS

Ridley Scott, director of 'Alien' and 'Blade Runner,' returns to the genre he helped define. With *Prometheus*, he creates a groundbreaking mythology, in which a team of explorers discover a clue to the origins of mankind on Earth, leading them on a thrilling journey to the darkest corners of the universe. There, they must fight a terrifying battle to save the future of the human race.

BEFORE VIEWING

THE ORIGINAL 'ALIEN' SERIES

Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979) – *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) –
Alien 3 (David Fincher, 1992) – *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997)

Prometheus is an eagerly awaited science fiction adventure from *Alien* director Ridley Scott. In the run-up to its release, anticipation for this film was at fever pitch because it returns to a world created by Scott in the sci-fi horror classic *Alien*.

The four original *Alien* films share certain things in common:

- All were directed by visionary filmmakers at the very beginning of their career (*Alien 3* was David Fincher's first film and *Alien Resurrection* was the Hollywood debut of *Amélie* director Jean-Pierre Jeunet).
- Each film features the same female protagonist - Ripley (Sigourney Weaver).
- Whilst all four are science fiction films, each has the framework of other genres.
- All four films feature a version of the same alien creature: extremely strong, fast and vicious, with double jaws, a hard exoskeleton and a parasitoid life cycle.

Alien and its first sequel *Aliens* (directed by James Cameron) are regarded as genre classics, but *Alien 3* and *Alien Resurrection* are less well-loved in part because they strayed from the characters and conventions established in the first two. Before viewing *Prometheus*, it is important to understand the impact the original films had on film and culture.

Use online research to help you fill in the table on the next page. A handful of answers have been suggested already. Some spaces may be more difficult to fill in than others!



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Film	Director's other films	genres and sub-genres 'in the mix'	key moments/ scenes/ premise	tagline	find a positive review	find a negative review	box office
<i>Alien</i>		horror; haunted house movie		'In Space, No-one Can Hear You Scream'			
<i>Aliens</i>			Ripley/ Queen show-down				
<i>Alien 3</i>	<i>The Social Network, Se7en, Fight Club</i>						
<i>Alien Ressurrection</i>							\$161m

Now discuss the following:

- How far would you agree that UK film craftsmanship and industry is crucial to the first three *Alien* films?

- In what other films might you have seen the Alien creature alongside another famous Hollywood movie monster? What directors and film studios were responsible for these spin-offs?

TOO MANY TRAILERS SPOIL THE MOVIE

Many moviegoers and fans have stated on message boards, user comments, Facebook comments and Twitter feeds that their enjoyment of *Prometheus* was diminished because of the high level of promotional material that preceded its release, particularly articles that discussed the plot in detail. There were even trailers for forthcoming *Prometheus* trailers! In this day and age it is difficult to avoid the frenzy surrounding a release like this, but does this put viewers off or just raise anticipation even further?

- How much did you hear about *Prometheus* before you saw it?
- When you see a film, do you like to avoid the buzz or do you seek out as much information as you can?
- Where do you go to find out about upcoming releases?
- Look back through the features archives of the websites for the movie magazines Empire and Total Film. How many announcements or features are there for *Prometheus*? What different types of promotional materials and media are mentioned? What kind of comments do these articles receive from readers in the 'user comments' sections?

PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

Prometheus enjoyed a prominent and persistent promotional campaign that was also highly innovative. There were numerous trailers, teaser trailers, 'making of's', clips, viral clips, viral ads, images, posters and exclusive set reports.

Before investigating the material below, it would be beneficial to seek out and watch the trailers for the following: *Alien*; *Aliens*; *Alien Resurrection*.

Search for the following promotional material and articles below and consider the questions that follow...

- *Prometheus* Teaser Trailer
 - how is this trailer similar to those of *Alien* and *Aliens*?
- *Prometheus* Trailer - Channel 4 Homeland/Twitter trailer
 - What is new and original about this method of promotion? What rewards are viewers offered to encourage them to participate in this televised promotional event? How have Fox and Channel 4 maximised the likelihood of a large audience seeing and participating in this trailer?
- *Prometheus* viral clip #1: TED 2023
 - How does this viral video connect to contemporary culture? Why is Weyland's T.E Lawrence reference significant? Who else has done a TED conference in 'real life' and what cultural/industrial significance they have?
- *Prometheus* DAVID 8 Viral clip
 - What format does this clip imitate? What sensations does the clip create?

AFTER VIEWING

PROMETHEUS AS SCIENCE FICTION

Many were expecting *Prometheus* to resemble the first two *Alien* films but aside from one or two similar alien creatures, the alien spacecraft and the presence of Weyland industries, *Prometheus* could easily be completely unrelated to the *Alien* series. Rather than being constructed like a horror movie (*Alien*) or action film (*Aliens*), *Prometheus* embodies the more traditional narrative aspects of science fiction. How are the following science fiction codes and conventions used or subverted in *Prometheus*?

- exploration of other worlds
- discovery
- science
- humanity
- robots
- technology
- an enemy hidden amongst the crew
- government or corporate duplicity

FAITH IN FILM

While mainstream Hollywood action and sci-fi films often have a moral compass that reassures viewers (good conquers evil, hero overcomes or rejects his faults and failings, hero reunited with family at the end etc.), it is rare that religion and faith are given thorough exploration. In fact, in pre-9/11 action films, religion and faith was often the motivation for villainous schemes. *Prometheus* raises tantalising questions about faith but also takes deliberate steps to ensure that the theme does not take centre stage or dominate over the action and gore. Elizabeth Shaw wears a crucifix on her necklace and has a flashback to a crucial discussion about religious belief with her father, but the word Christianity is never mentioned, neither is her denomination. In a film about the origin of humanity, does *Prometheus* do enough to tackle this big issue?

- What kinds of characters stereotypically display or reference their religious faith in Hollywood films?
- Of all religions, why might the writers have chosen to explore Christianity?
- What debates about Creationism and Darwinism are made in the film? Which characters represent these two opposing viewpoints?
- To what extent do the filmmakers use Shaw's religion to represent all faiths?
- How is Shaw's belief system challenged or tested?
- Are there any sequences that are critical of religion or that could be potentially offensive to some viewers?

STAR STUDIES

The *Alien* series has always had a surprising and innovative approach to the stars it features. Casting is often crucial in big Hollywood blockbusters but sometimes the fantastical creations within a film can be so well established that money needn't be spent on huge megastars (e.g. *Transformers*). In many ways, the alien itself is the star of the series, but the saga has always used strong, dependable character actors. Let's look at how the *Alien* films have utilised their stars...

- Tom Skerritt was the biggest star in the original *Alien* but in a surprise twist, his character was one of the first to be killed off, leaving Ripley (played by newcomer Sigourney Weaver) to become the only survivor – one of horror cinema's earliest 'Final Girls' – and defeat the alien. Killing off a big-name actor is now a common tactic in action films (see *Deep Blue Sea*, *Executive Decision*, *Doom*, *The Hurt Locker* etc.)
- Despite being surrounded by lots of heavily armed marines in *Aliens*, Ripley is the last uninjured survivor and, armed with a flamethrower, grenades and machine gun, wins the day again. Remember this film was made in the mid 1980's when Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone dominated action movies. Weaver received an Oscar nomination for *Aliens*.
- In 1992, Sigourney Weaver was a huge star and closely associated with the *Alien* franchise. Her name appears above the title of *Alien 3* on posters. This time, the filmmakers took huge, unconventional risks: she crash lands on a lice-ridden planet and finds herself in a male-only prison. She shaves her head bald and discovers she has been impregnated with an alien. She sacrifices herself at the end of the film, killing the alien in the process and seemingly closing the series.
- *Alien Resurrection* was the first film in the series to pair Weaver with a notable co-star – Winona Ryder. Weaver plays a cloned version of Ripley and the implication was that Ryder would take over as the heroine of the series.
- *Alien vs. Predator* (2004) and *Alien vs. Predator: Requiem* (2007) abandoned Ripley's story and because the idea of seeing these two famous creatures battle it out onscreen was so enticing, no big stars were used in either film. Though these films weren't popular with fans of the originals, they introduced the alien creatures to a new generation.

Fill in the following table for *Prometheus*. Have the producers of the film gone for big stars or dependable, recognisable actors? Do any of the actors appear above the film's title on promotional materials? What could you say about how the characters conform to, or break away from, any theories of character that you know of?

character	actor	actor's other films/series	character type	fate of the character	audience demographic for actor
Elizabeth Shaw					
David					
Vickers					
Holloway					
Janek					
Peter Weyland					
Fifield					
Millburn					

RECEPTION

The reception to *Prometheus* was mixed. Some were hoping that the feeling of seeing the original *Alien* would be replicated; others felt the film was toned down to secure a lower rating (all the original *Alien* films were 18 certificates).

Check out official and fan reviews for *Prometheus*. What criticisms were there for the following issues?

issue	positive criticism	negative criticism	source
plot			
Ridley Scott as director			
visuals/effects			
creatures/horror			
main characters			
supporting characters			
actors			
influence of original <i>Alien</i> films			
genre			
music			
themes and subtext			

ACTIVITIES

1. Compare the synergy, effectiveness and variety of the *Prometheus* campaign to these other 2012 blockbusters:

- *Marvel Avengers Assemble*
- *The Amazing Spider-Man*
- *The Dark Knight Rises*
- *Judge Dredd*
- *The Expendables 2*
- *The Bourne Legacy*
- *Total Recall*
- *The Hobbit*

- What advantages or disadvantages did each of these films have in attracting audiences?
- Aside from the fact all these films are fantasy and/or action films, what is the one contextual factor they all share with *Prometheus* and each other?

2. Create an innovative e-media or broadcast promotional item or campaign for a forthcoming movie blockbuster or retrospectively for a film that has already been released.

3. Look back at the table at the beginning of this guide. Add a section for *Prometheus* and fill it in the same as the four previous *Alien* films.

4. Look at the magazine cover on the following link:

<http://www.insun.com.cn/develop.aspx?pram=/pu/swen/201203/201203291028531940.jpg%7Cw=640%7Ch=240%7Cmakemode=W>

- How is Shaw presented as 'the new Ripley'?
- How are the characters similar from what you can analyse of the image?
- What anchorage is used to create 'must see' anticipation?

Written by Gareth C. Evans

¹ All are remakes/reboots/sequels