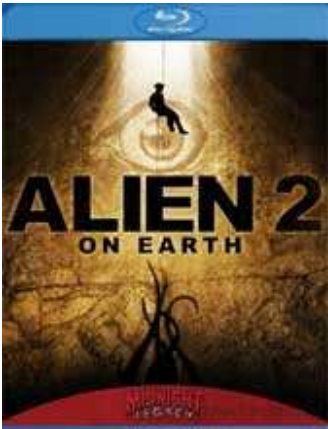




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## **ALIEN 2: ON EARTH (1980) (Blu-ray)**

*Director: Ciro Ippolito*

*Midnight Legacy*

A sequel to Ridley Scott's ALIEN in title only, ALIEN 2: ON EARTH is one of many pseudo-sequels to popular American films to make its way out of Italy. Perhaps the most well known of such misbegotten sequels is Lucio Fulci's ZOMBIE which was originally titled ZOMBI 2 in order to pass itself off as a sequel to George A Romero's DAWN OF THE DEAD, which was released in Italy under the title ZOMBI. Such a tactic would prove popular to Italian filmmakers as several sequels in title only features would continue to pop up in Italy throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including Bruno Mattei's TERMINATOR II and Umberto Lenzi's LA CASA 3, which was labeled as such to fall into the lineage of EVIL DEAD films. I'm not quite sure why Midnight Legacy chose ALIEN 2: ON EARTH as its inaugural release, as it is pretty awful, but it is hard to deny that they have released one of the most attractive turkeys I have ever seen.

When a space capsule crashes to Earth absent of its crew, the scientific community is left bewildered as to the whereabouts of the missing astronauts. Distracted by the spaceship's lack of human cargo, little attention is paid to the small alien rocks which have been popping up throughout California. Seemingly brought to Earth by the recently returned space mission, the little blue rocks are unique in that they have a tendency to glow, pulsate, and if you're not careful, burst open to reveal an alien life form that will rip off your face. One such rock makes its way into the possession of Thelma (Belinda Mayne) a cave explorer who has recently been plagued with psychic visions. After descending into a massive California cave cluster, Thelma and her fellow explores find themselves trapped underground with an awakened alien life form. Slowly (and I do mean slowly) they are killed one by one by an alien creature of ever evolving power and shape. As her friends die around her left and right, it is up to Thelma and her unexplained and rather convenient psychic abilities to save not just herself but all of humanity.

Watching ALIEN 2 is a lot like talking to my grandmother. At first she seems to makes sense, but as she keeps talking you start to realize she has no idea what it is she is talking about or where the conversation is going. They are also both mind numbingly slow. ALIEN 2: ON EARTH is full of illogical set ups that rarely produce anything close to a payoff. At one point early on, Thelma is seen standing on the coastline while her psychologist disembarks from a ship, gets into a row boat and rows to shore. They then have a walking, one minute counseling session about her bad dreams. The scene is bewildering at best, as it initially appears to be setting up something dramatic; why else show the doctor taking his sweet time to make his way to shore, only to conclude with the briefest therapy session known to man?

Thelma is the only character to receive any real attention, a point which becomes glaringly obvious once she enters the cave with her fellow explores. With no clear explanation as to how many people are in the caving group, or who they even are save for colleagues of Thelma's, it

is hard to decipher who is who early on. Eventually, as people are killed, the group's number becomes manageable. I initially thought there was only two women in the group and was surprised to discover there was a third, one whose sole purpose was apparently to get lost from the others and die. I might have felt something from her loss if the film had bothered to let me know that she was even there in the first place.

There are several gory deaths to be had if you are willing to wade through 50 minutes of filler. Scenes of aliens bursting from faces and heads getting severed from bodies are all rather impressive, particularly given the picture's low budget, but reveals of the aliens themselves are rather uninspiring. The aliens, when seen, fall somewhere between THE DEADLY SPAWN, sans teeth, and the killer zombie intestines seen in the conclusion of Peter Jackson's DEAD ALIVE (aka BRAINDEAD). They don't exactly inspire fear so much as they do disgust but they are effective nonetheless. Much like their human co-stars, there is very little information given about the aliens. Early on they appear to be small creatures capable only of disfigurement, however later on they are seen taking over the body of victim, or possibly replicating his appearance, again the picture is never quite clear on these things. Their size is also thrown into question as the film's conclusion features the once minute creatures towering over its victims via a POV shot through what I am hoping is the alien's mouth but could just as easily have been its rectum. Save for an ever so brief flash of gratuitous nudity and a lone rat attack that was pretty humorous, it is the picture's gore quotient that is the only reason I could imagine anyone sitting through this film more than once.

So yes, ALIEN 2 is pretty bad. But how does it look? Stunning! Transferred from the original 35mm negative, ALIEN 2 is presented widescreen (1.85:1) in 1080p HD resolution. The picture opens with NASA stock footage that bares an appropriate amount of grain and an expected softness. The juxtaposition of this stock footage with the film's original content does a superb job of showcasing just how crystal the transfer looks. Colors and fleshtones are rich and detail throughout is simply astounding. Grain is present but in an appropriate, non obtrusive level and there is not a speck of dirt or debris to be found. The Audio on the other hand does have a few issues. Presenting the film's original mix, audio is on hand in an English language DTS-MA 2.0. Forgetting a few pops here and there, the biggest problem with the audio is a hiss which comes and goes like a crackling tide. It is a minor annoyance that only stands out given that the film's visual presentation is so spot on. Extras include a special effects out take reel, in HD, and the picture's Dutch trailer which has been culled from a video transfer.

While their initial choice in film has left little to be desired, their attention to detail is cause to take notice. If Midnight Legacy continues to give the same respect and care to future releases as it has with ALIEN 2, then they will no doubt prove themselves to be a company to keep an eye on. *(Jason McElreath)*

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