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Alien 2: On Earth (Blu-ray)

[Midnight Legacy](#) // Unrated // March 22, 2011 // Region Free

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Review by [Adam Tyner](#) | posted March 9, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

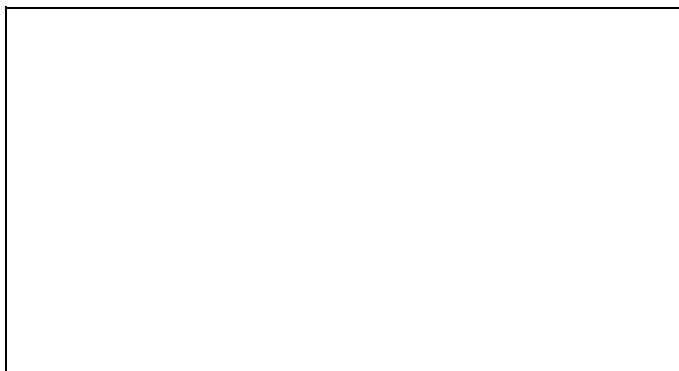
In space, no one can hear you scream.

Oh. Wait. Wrong movie. This is *Alien 2: On Earth*, and as you could kinda guess from the title of this no-budget Italian knockoff, the vacuum of space doesn't factor in so much. Let's try that one more time...

On Earth, no one can see you yawn.

A movie with a psychic cave-diver tormented by oversized alien tongues that explode out of people's faces really, really shouldn't be this boring. Yup, before *Aliens* was so much as a gleam in Jim Cameron's eye, writer/director Ciro Ippolito decided Italy needed its own horror/sci-fi flick about alien creatures that burst out of their hosts' bodies. The only thing is that seven foot tall creature suits and artfully designed spacecraft sets don't come cheap, and you couldn't feed a family of four at the Sizzler on *Alien 2*'s budget. So, Ippolito changed the backdrop to an underground cave on Earth, recycled stock footage of space shuttle stuff from NASA, and made the creature a blobby red organ that looks completely different every time it's in front of the camera.

Alien 2 opens as a NASA space capsule returns to Earth without any creamy astronaut filling inside. It's completely empty. Huh. Strange. But wait, does that have anything to do with the pulsing blue paper maché rock a dweeby speleologist (played by future *Cemetery Man* director Michele Soavi) stumbled upon on the side of the road? Maybe. First, though, you have to slog through a really long round of bowling, a gripping scene where a guy buys Italian candles at a skate shop or something, one of the most endless driving sequences this side of *Manos*, like, eight minutes of some old guy rowing across a river, and lots and lots of scenes where people stand around and talk but don't really ever get around to saying anything in particular. Oh, but it's all worth the wait when instead of slowly meandering around *outside*, they put on jumpsuits and slowly meander around *in a cave*. It's completely different because now there are ropes and stalactites. I guess this is supposed to pass for characterization, like one guy rambling on about how he prefers to type by candlelight which is exactly what you expect in a cave where a sloppily-painted



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candlelight, which is exactly what you expect in a cave where a sloppily-painted breathing rock has a facebursting alien inside. I can't remember the name of a single character in the movie, let alone anything about them other than "psychic chick who had a migraine on a local news show" or "candlelight cave typist", so I guess that didn't pay off. Anyway, though, some aliens eventually explode out of people, and the fate of the world rests in the balance or something.

James Cameron once summed up his followup to *Alien* as "forty miles of bad road".



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Alien 2, meanwhile, is "eighty-four minutes of bad, period". You could trudge through the first twenty-something minutes of *Alien 2* and have no idea it's supposed to be a horror flick.

Nothing happens until 22 minutes in, where you finally get a blink-and-oops-you-missed-it shot of

an eight year old girl with her face shredded off. Reset the clock and wait another twenty-something minutes for something else to happen. You're 50 minutes into an 84 minute flick before you ever see the creature, introduced with one of the most excruciatingly slow tracking shots in the history of cinema. There are really only a couple of money shots, most memorably one poor schlub's head getting torn off. Other than that, it's either goopy red makeup slathered on someone's face or it happens off-camera. What seems like it should've been the climax comes a little after the hour mark, and that's followed by a twenty minute epilogue of absolutely nothing. I get that "nothing" is completely the point, but it's unwatchably boring to suffer through that anyway. Who wants to watch an alien movie that ends in an empty bowling alley where you really can't even see the creature?

There's no buildup and no payoff. There are only a couple of minutes of anything at all happening throughout *Alien 2*, and they're surrounded by vast, endless expanses of *nothing*. There's zero tension or suspense. What few scares the movie bothers with are limp and lifeless. There's a little shameless nudity, some of the briefly-glimpsed splatter is pretty nice, Ippolito accidentally snaps some very striking shots inside the cave, and I love the Fulci-esque closeups on the eyes before some *Scanners*-flavored head-kaboom-ing, but it's not even a little bit worth wading through such an agonizingly dull movie to get there. *Alien 2* doesn't even have so-bad-it's-good going for it, although some of the dubbing -- especially the black dude behind the counter at the bowling alley -- does come awfully close. I mean, I watch *Alien 2* and feel like I'm being punished. I've been churning out movie reviews for around twelve years now, and I've suffered through a **lot** of dreck. Out of all of 'em, *Alien 2* seriously is in the running as one of the most boring movies I've ever had to endure. There's no logic or consistency behind the way the aliens function either. The flow seems to go (1) critter bursts out of rock, (2) creature shreds its host's face, (3) the alien completely restores its host's face to normalcy, I guess to keep the effects budget down, and (4) explodes out of that newly-restored face. What's the deal with the female lead being psychic again? No idea. Blah. Can I just write **Skip It** now and move on?

Video

The first twenty-something minutes of *Alien 2* are dragged down by soft, grainy, speckled 16mm stock footage that's spliced in every so often. That's also the very first thing that spills onto the screen, but don't let that trip you up. When the meat of the movie starts less than a minute in, *Alien 2* is kinda gorgeous. I mean, this is a Criterion-grade presentation. The image is completely free of any flecks of dust, nicks, tears, or warping...minus what's baked into the few minutes of stock footage that are dished out, at least. It's consistently natural and filmic throughout too, with no contrast boosting, digital noise reduction, or edge enhancement ever creeping in. The texture of the film grain is completely unintrusive, and the AVC encode never once sputters or stutters under the weight of it. Its colors haven't faded at all, and the yellows and oranges of the jumpsuits in particular are eye-catching once everyone's trudging around beneath the earth. The brilliant reds also look fantastic whenever the splatter is sloshed around, and black levels are consistently deep and inky. Honestly, this is a world-class effort, one that's only limited by the way *Alien 2* was produced. A few scattered shots aren't quite in focus, and there really isn't much of anything that could've been done with that battered stock footage. Other than that, though...? I could keep rambling on about how spectacular the detail and clarity are, or...well, I



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could just post a couple more screenshots. As great as these images are, *Alien 2* looks even better in motion, splashed across an overpriced home theater rig.



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I'm still kind of in awe, and this high-def presentation is such a knockout that I almost -- *almost!* -- want to recommend *Alien 2* based on that alone. I really hope we can expect this same dizzyingly high quality from everything Midnight Legacy puts out.

Alien 2: On Earth is served up on a dual-layer Blu-ray disc. The movie is very lightly letterboxed to preserve its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1, and the video has, of course, been encoded with AVC.

Audio

Alien 2 doesn't heap on any gimmicky remixes or anything. Nope, this 24-bit, monaural DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack keeps it pure. Bass response sometimes sounds like someone's pounding on a cardboard box, but it's a little meatier than I expected, especially the



thrilling bowling sequence and the throaty growl of that station wagon. A mild hiss is lurking in the background, but it's easily shrugged off unless the volume's really cranked up. As a lifelong synth geek, I kind of love all the plinky, Moog-y drips in



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the score too. The rest of the audio is kind of all over the map, though. The first twenty minutes or so are generally clean, with only a couple minor pops and some spiked hiss creeping in, but it gets much more crackly after that. The looped dialogue will sometimes be dazzlingly clear, and then another line will be annoyingly sibilant or really show its age. None of these hiccups are overwhelming, though. This Blu-ray disc doesn't sound anywhere near as wonderful as it looks, no, but it's still perfectly listenable.

That 2.0 lossless soundtrack is it as far as audio options go: no dubs, no remixes, and no subtitles. The credits and intertitles are all in Italian in case anyone's wondering.

Extras

- **Special Effects Outtakes** (11 min.; **HD**): A silent reel of outtakes lobs out different passes of a facebuster leaping towards the camera, a mouse in mid-air, an alien wriggling its way out of a chick's skull, and a little more decapitation.
- **Trailer** (3 min.; **SD**): Also included is the only trailer of *Alien 2* that anyone could dig up, and it's nicked from the Dutch VHS release.

Alien 2: On Earth is an all-region disc and comes packaged in a shiny cardboard slipcase.

The Final Word

Midnight Legacy has made an exceptionally impressive statement with their inaugural release, unearthing an Italian genre flick that had never before been released on these shores, serving up an impossibly gorgeous high definition presentation, and faithfully reproducing the original soundtrack as intended. The only downside is that...well, *Alien 2: On Earth* is a terrible, terrible movie, and it's a drag that Midnight Legacy couldn't come storming out of the gate with a better choice for their first Blu-ray disc. I'd steer clear of *Alien 2*, but Midnight Legacy is clearly a force to be reckoned with, and I'm really looking forward to seeing them direct this same spectacular care and attention to a movie that's maybe a little more deserving.

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