

104

alienation

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The Alien franchise comes full circle back to where it began all because Monique didn't want to pay Pinewood rates. Monique caught wind that Pinewood was toying with the idea of razing the Shepperton site, but they were not going to shut it down until they found a buyer for the land and, as things go, a new subsidiary of hers had a contract signed and a check cut before the week was out.

Here is where it pays to read the fine print because three months later, when the last production wrapped and left, her people had control of the facility and soundstages that weekend before the wrecking balls arrived the following Monday.

The demolition crew had bulldozers and her goons had guns, but it was the injunction in hand that won out. Pinewood Studios was not at all happy about this turn of events because Monique now has a secure foothold in the United Kingdom.

The rich history of Shepperton Studios may go back centuries, but on the business end all of the media companies here have either moved out or merged with Pinewood. On the facilities side, except for a few brick exteriors, most everything here is reasonably new with nothing older than seven decades.

Today they are filming in the latest build of Soundstage-H, a 3,000 square meter interior tank superstructure that's all set up as the Promenade of a space cruise liner from the long gone Princess Cruises where, on storyboard timestamp 033:060, it has docked with the Alien infested Orion Nebula station...

And the airlock between them is going to be opened shortly.

Connie looks over everybody and asks, "Ya'll ready for this?"

With the cast and crew giving a quick cheer, Connie motions towards Monique who steps out, then clasps her hands together while speaking up for all to hear, "*Mesdames et messieurs*, here we are on day one of shooting number four, Alienation!" With everyone nodding and saying things like, *yup*, she continues, "It's a tight schedule so my desire is for you to cooperate with *Mademoiselle Sanchez* and keep our sites on target. Her eye, *mise en scène*, in preproduction is very much like her father's. And, remember, early and under means?"

The crew laughs, "Bonuses!"

She smiles, "*Oui!* So, with that in mind...break a leg."

Carlos speaks up with, "As second unit director on Alienus, Connie did a fantastic job with the pick-ups and stunts, and you all know it, but here on Alienation *she* is large and in charge—not me." Carlos points to Monique, himself, then Connie, "It's her money, my production but, as director, the final word is hers. Don't forget that."

Carlos gestures towards his nineteen-year-old daughter.

Connie steps out and soon points towards Angela, "Aliens ran three months over schedule because of her shit."

Angela, standing between Monique and Brittney, having pulled away from the makeup chair, goes, "Wha'? The fuck!"

Connie laughs at her, "Yea, 'cause of you, bitch!"

The camera assistant quietly snickers one of her impromptu lines from Aliens, "Hey, there's a monster under my bed! Anybody?"

With everybody laughing at that, the key grip finishes the line, "Okay, fine, I'll just be dead then!"

Connie says to Angela, "So, when am I right?"

Monique throws out, "We love Angela's *joie de vivre!*"

Carlos smiles at Angela, "Don't listen to 'em! Just be yourself, hon. Don't change you."

From the back, Jessica pipes up, asking, "Do I get a vote?"

With Angela shaking her head, *no*, and everyone laughing, Connie points out, "With her mouth the shooting script becomes a moving target, so we have to look to the storyboards as our bible. Between the DOP, scripty, continuity and me, we got our work cut out for us so..." She looks to Brittney and the other actors, "If she strays from the sides just roll with it. I want your natural reactions and any snappy comebacks if they pop into your head!"

Eight asks, "Even if it's a serious scene?"

"If you get rattled or flustered, I'll be honest, sometimes that

shit is gold! Think on your feet and do your best to finish the scene without breaking stride. Going forward, instead of us changing the boards on the fly, we'll shoot from-the-hip footage and angles around her "*script enhancements*" and deal with it in post."

Angela snarks, "Didn't know I was that popular 'round here!"

"I wouldn't go that far!" Connie laughs, then motions for the cinematographer, aka the DOP, to take the floor, "Benny."

Benny says, "We had the extras here this last week shooting atmospheres so we're ready to run the skinny's in to trash the place." He waves towards the thirty very thin motion actors in green screen outfits, with long alien heads strapped on, who give him a thumbs up. Benny then goes, "Now, this is for everybody, let's stick to the day's call sheet, don't stray from it and, for fuck's sake, get out of the way of the C2's so they can get their bloody scans between claps!"

With him done, Connie throws out, "Most of you have asked so, to clear the air, yes, we're shooting two endings. In the last five minutes before the credits, either our beloved Corporal Hicks lives or he dies, but this all rides on the contract with Mikhail Popov."

The funny thing is, it's only Samantha, standing in the back with Jessica, Jacob, Michelle, Brie, Diego and little Nigel, who can get away with talking to Mikhail Popov like this, "Why ya whinging poofter! You gonna keep these people hangin' by their wobblies?"

Mikhail was not expecting that so he belly laughs, "Well, with my contract up after this one we're tryin' to determine if it's the fans the story or budget that should be served in the end?"

Brittney asks, "But, you already know what it's gonna be?"

She shakes her head, *no*, when Connie asks, "He tell you?"

Carlos throws out, "Remember your NDA's! Talk 'bout any of this and you won't even bonus a breadstick from Olive Garden."

Connie speaks up, "Guys, yea, we already know the ending but we're still shootin' both, but this I can say. We're purposefully leaking the rushes two months before release, so what is leaked—"

Angela drolls, "Is not the ending, d'uh!"

"Right, it'll be a red herring." Connie nods, then shifts her posture to say, "Look, proper fan service is tossing 'em curve balls when we can. Episodes four and five is virgin territory and the outside has no idea what's comin' to the screen." Connie then points towards Angela with a laugh, "Oh, and your idea for an alien popping out of a walrus, we're gonna write that in for five!"

Angela chirps, "Cool!"

Everyone perks up hearing that one, with Carlos laughing, "She's not outrunning it, she'll be able to outwalk the thing!"

Mikhail snorts, "Can you imagine the shit that'll come out of her mouth with that one?"

Connie nods, "Exactly!"

Angela goes, "You'll hear it when we shoot it!"

"Anything else?" Connie then checks the time and announces, "If that's it, then it's a hot set in fifty minutes, people!"

With Monique and Carlos walking over to see Jacob and the rest of their visitors on the side, the Makeup Supervisor barks at Angela, "Get your lil' booty into my kitchen, girl!"

Before she walks away, Connie asks, "Got the veneers?"

Angela bares her teeth, showing both of her top secondary incisors covered with a green dental veneers, where Connie nods with approval while Angela points to the hairdresser, "Gotta go get fugly!"

A student film crew has been following Connie, making a documentary of her as a director on a major production at such a young age, so Connie says to them, "You got ten until lunch."

The producer/interviewer says, "Let's pick up on what you were saying about Angela. Why she's a problem?"

"What did we cover earlier?"

"We talked about her being underage, which is a given for any child actor. Then her being short and petite, which you said is a huge plus when casting younger characters like Newt."

Connie nods, "Okay, I remember. For her those are positives because she's so flexible. The negatives specific to her consists of two things. The biggest one is Angela going off script constantly."

"How often does she do that?"

"It's all the time. Then, did you just see that face of hers?"

"Yes, she's beautiful."

"That's without makeup! We gotta tone it down a bit, like she said, we gotta fugly her up or her lines don't work." Connie then puts her hands out like a set of scales, "In this industry, the more beautiful someone is—the more they and comedic delivery are in opposition. Her mouth and her face are polar opposites so they can cancel each other out if we didn't dog her up just a tad. When we give her face character, every line she nonchalantly pukes out work miracles!"

"That makes no sense."

"Well, that's just the way it is! Maybe when she gets older the people will see her for what she really is and it won't matter then, but that's what we gotta fight with right now. As for what we're calling "the mouth" going off script, the first take is inevitably the one we wanna use but the reactions from the other cast members who are in frame don't always jive because they weren't ready for it. Nobody is, so after two films under the belt we got a fix. If we can think on our toes we can shoot in counterpoint immediately. If not then we'll have to mask or CG around her going off script in the edit. We already blocked for the extra shots to stay on schedule and on budget."

"How often does she go off script again?"

"Almost all the time?"

"You're kidding!"

"Yea, purdy much!" Connie puts up a hand to emphasize, "Look, we've learned how to work around it so, now, the writers and the cast love having her on set. Where my father was pulling his hair out during *Aliens*, with all the impromptu work arounds, it was not near as bad during the *Alienus* shoot. This time in preproduction we think we figured how deal with *the mouth* and prepared for it."

"She doesn't take any of this seriously, does she?"

"Truth? If she ever does she'd be out of a job."

Monique and Carlos step up to their visitors and Monique says to Jacob and Michelle, "The wedding was *un délice!* Thank you for having us in attendance!"

Michelle points out, "Aaah, you're family?"

"One should always show appreciation, *madame.*"

Carlos asks Diego, Brie and Nigel, "You guys enjoy the tour?" With all three nodding, yes, Carlos then springs on them, "Connie has a surprise for you...wanna get eaten by monsters?"

With Diego laughing under her breath, Brie rears back going, "What, you want us to extra, like right now?"

Carlos smiles big, "We had wardrobe ready for you, but what you three are wearing would work perfectly! We'll get some shots in right now in the Promenade gift store and shoot you guys getting jumped and eaten in there after the main rush."

Monique points out, "The clock is ticking!"

Michelle smiles big, "I think you three should."

Brie asks Nigel, "Wanna get eaten by some monsters?"

They all crack up when he grins and says, "Bloody brilliant!"

With Carlos taking the three over to Benny, Monique says to Jessica and Samantha, "We were not expecting you on set today?"

Jessica goes, "We're here to see pop."

Monique turns to Samantha and quips, "Would you like to get eaten by monsters? I think we can arrange something?"

Samantha smiles, "You would like that, wouldn't you."

Monique stares at her for a moment, then, "As competitors, on paper, the fact is we have very little actual cross-over, so I've been giving it some thought. When you are done talking to Jacob in the SCIF outside, I would love a moment to slip in and bend your ear."

"Bend it now if you think you can?"

"We're both being hounded by...stars who want a slice of the pie on top of their normal compensation, and my effort to move as much from the return column to load and costs brings *moi...a toi!*"

Samantha looks around for the wrong ears, then, "So, you too are building ancillaries to gobble up your prod-budgets."

"Competitively, yes, for quite some time, and since the two of us together control, what, sixty-five percent of the studio square footage in the core English speaking countries, well, I have a modest proposal for you to consider."

"Elevator pitch, love?"

"Think of the possible benefits if we predate on each other?"

Samantha understands clearly, "Net should remain a fiction."

"Indeed!" Monique smiles, "With today's gargantuan budgets and box office it's a tragedy how little we realize for the effort."

Jessica calls out to Samantha, "Let's do this."

With Jacob and Jessica heading to the SCIF, Samantha turns back to Monique and, "Okay, come see me when they step out."

Monique goes, "I'll keep Madame Kiel entertained!"

With Samantha catching up to Jacob and Jessica, when she's out of earshot, Michelle says, "It's Michelle now."

"Even though the strings are tenuously thin, you are family. Yet, per your station, you deserve respect."

"I'm just a gunship pilot."

"Who has made a huge splash for the good in her new post. So, let me know what I can do to help you succeed."

Michelle wonders, "You think I can make a difference?"

"You already have." Monique wonders while nodding towards the three entering the SCIF, "Is this what I think it is?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, but yea, it's obvious."

Monique tries to do a brit accent, "Oh, how bloody dreadful."

Michelle almost laughs at the bad accent, turns to look at her, "I'm curious, why would that be dreadful?"

Monique shrugs, then throws out, "If Madame Hartcourt and I become family then...I'll be obligated to play nice."

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Inside the SCIF security conference room, Jacob turns around towards Jessica and asks, "Ready for the first?"

Jessica shrugs, "Same thing as always, right?"

Samantha dares to ask, "Same thing...as...as what?"

Jacob tells her, "Scarab here goes in and fiddle fucks around for an hour or two. Shopping, whatever. On her way out she does a pick up for us and skedaddles at least half an hour before we drop."

"And you can keep getting away with this because?"

Jacob shrugs, "She has City of New Sydney immunity."

"She's riding around in one of your vessels!"

Jessica points out, "It's registered as a lease."

Samantha's eyebrows rise, "That's just...bonkers!"

Jacob goes, "It's within the ROE's, Sam."

Jessica thinks about what Seth said a couple of days ago, and asks, "How long do you think we can keep getting away with this?"

"Just make sure you're out before you need to be out."

Samantha asks, "What kind of load we talkin' 'bout?"

"People, ya know, on the ground observers."

She points at him, "You mean, spies."

"I wouldn't put it that way, but—"

Samantha throws out, "I'm coming with!"

Jacob's face scrunches up, "Unless you two are married or engaged to fit a cover story, then that'll be a hard no."

Jessica and Samantha glance at each other, where Jessica breathes deep and says, "Since you brought it up."

That went right over Jacob's head when he says, "What up?"

Samantha snorts a small laugh and turns to Jessica to say, "You weren't kidding!"

"He's a guy-guy!"

"Subtlety not a strong suit?"

It dawns on him as Jessica says, "It depends on the subject."

Jacob nods, "No...I get it. It took a second to sink in."

Samantha goes, "By the look on your face, my father was on point about you. You are a closeted traditionalist."

Jacob starts to chuckle, "No, I'll be okay with this."

With him laughing harder she asks, "My father was wrong?"

"No, he was right, but after Diego I can cope with anything!"

Jessica throws out, "Told you two not to worry."

Jacob is full on laughing while saying, "I...I was always worried about the poor dumb slob you were going to marry, but NOW I have nothing to worry about!" Trying to catch his breath, he points at Samantha, "You're just as much of an asshole as she is!"

Samantha beams, "Why, thank you!"

"Don't mention it!"

"So, I'll be happy to go now!"

Jacob huffs like a bull, saying to himself, "Jacob, you had to open your big fucking mouth."

Jessica points out, "Father, these missions are a cakewalk, and this will be the only way to shut her up about what I do."

Samantha laughs at Jessica, "Speak for yourself!"

"We have a deal! This will be your one and only ride-along."

Jacob wonders, "Why does my gut say, no?"

"Your gut always says no when it comes to me."

"Promise that you'll leave Maui on time."

"When does something ever fuck up on these runs?"

"There's always a first!" Jacob shakes his head, then says, "Okay, the pickup is in fourteen days. I want her fitted for a JACC and trained inside ten or it's a no-go."

Samantha is delighted, "Smashing!"

Jacob snarls, "This run had better be fucking uneventful."

Jessica asks, "Why so stressed over a simple pick up?"

"It's not the recon team on this one. We'll grab 'em up during the assault. This time you got squishies to get out of there."

Samantha asks, "Spies?"

"Not exactly, but we're obligated to get these people out."

Jessica demands, "Who then?"

Jacob looks to Samantha, "You gonna shut the fuck up?"

She grins big, "Oh, most assuredly it's mum's!"

He turns to Jessica, "Stiller."

"Vince?"

"Yea."

"What the fuck is he doing there!"

Jacob shrugs, "Stuff?"

"Come on! Can't he get a ticket out?"

"Because of the recon flights, the Co-op revoked all of their travel permits. They're stuck. Vince is on an unrelated case but if we drop they're gonna be all over 'im."

"These people, plural? Like his wife and grandkids plural?"

"Yea." With Jessica throwing an internal fit over this, Jacob adds, "I can't have Michelle intervening on this one. You are the best Razorback pilot alive." Jacob then snorts a laugh saying, "Also, you happen to be flyin' the Millennium Falcon."

Jessica grits her teeth, "I hate when people call it that."

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