

## **Missed Opportunities: Alien Nation (1988, directed by Graham Baker)**

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Through the Shattered Lens

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### **Body**

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[https://unobtainium13.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/alien\\_nation\\_poster.jpg](https://unobtainium13.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/alien_nation_poster.jpg)**Alien Nation** starts out with an intriguing premise but sadly doesn't do enough with it. In 1988, a spaceship lands in Mojave Desert.

Inside are 300,000 humanoid **aliens**, known as the Newcomers. Intended to serve as intergalactic slaves, the Newcomers are now stuck on Earth. (Of course, in the view of many humans, it's Earth that's stuck with them.) Three years later, the Newcomers have settled in Los Angeles and they have adopted human names. Some of them, like businessman William Harcourt (Terrence Stamp), have become successful and have been accepted by the human establishment. The majority remain second-class citizens, facing discrimination and feeling alone in a world that doesn't seem to want them. Detective Matthew Sykes (James Caan) does not like the Newcomers but, after his partner is killed by one of the **aliens**, he ends up working with one. Sam Francisco (Mandy Patinkin) is the first Newcomer to have been promoted to the rank of detective and is eager to prove himself. Sykes renames him George and enlists him to investigate a series of recent Newcomer deaths. Sykes's real goal is to use Francisco's Newcomer connections to investigate the death of his partner. What the two of them discover is that the deaths are linked to a drug called Jabroka, which has no effect on human but was previously used to keep the Newcomers enslaved. **Alien Nation** starts out with an intriguing premise. I love the early scenes of Sykes driving down the streets of Los Angeles and seeing Newcomer prostitutes, Newcomer families, and even a Newcomer dance studio. There is a lot promise in those scenes and they capture the feeling of a familiar world that has been irrevocably changed. Both Caan and Patinkin give good performances and the **alien** makeup is still impressive. Unfortunately, once Sykes and George start their investigation, the movie becomes a standard-issue police movie with a plot that could easily have been lifted from a Lethal Weapon rip-off. So many interesting ideas are left unexplored, making **Alien Nation** an intriguing missed opportunity. (There was later a television series based on the movie, which explored the Newcomer culture in greater detail.) **Alien Nation** still has a strong cult following and I wouldn't be surprised if it influenced District 9. In 2016, it was announced that Jeff Nichols would be writing and directing a remake. Nichols seems like the ideal director for a film like this and this is the rare case of a remake that I'm actually looking forward to. <https://unobtainium13.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/alien-nation-1988-graham-baker-03.jpg>

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