



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

In the blood-splattered corner, weighing in at 450lbs and with a fetish for collecting human skulls... A Predator. In the pitch-black corner, weighing in at two tons, with a penchant for ripping out people's intestines... An Alien Queen. Running away quickly in the opposite direction... *A Martin Korda*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monolith Productions
PUBLISHER Vivendi
WEBSITE www.lith.com
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Late 2001

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's got Aliens and Predators in it
- Enhanced LithTech 2.5 engine
- Separate campaign and storyline for each race
- Huge array of weaponry and gadgets
- Improved lighting, sound and AI
- Loads of new multiplayer options

Be honest, how many really crap film sequels have you seen in your life? Now this is only going to work if you're ruthlessly truthful, which means (and I hate to have to break this to you), including the likes of *Karate Kid 2*. Close one I know, but it's gotta go on that list, sorry. Anyway, take your time. No hurry. In fact, while you're having a think, here's a reminder of a couple that bear more than a passing relevance to this preview. For starters, how about *Predator 2*? What the hell was that all about? Following on from the non-stop action of its predecessor, which

brilliantly cast a group of ultra-fit commandos against a seemingly invincible alien warrior in the claustrophobic and humid jungle, came... Danny Glover. For the majority of the film, Mr 'I'm too old for this shit' Glover looks like he's about to keel over and die from excessive sweating, even when faced with a relatively untaxing task. Like getting out of a chair. *Alien 3* wasn't much better, providing us with about as many thrills as an afternoon visit to an incontinent auntie and engaging in a three-hour conversation about crochet.

Hopefully by now you've come up with enough films to justify my incredibly sweeping statement



about sequels generally being rubbish. As with the *Predator* and *Alien* films, it's obvious that not even the near irresistible lure of brain-eating, rabid creatures with acid for blood and hugely powerful and technologically enhanced aliens can guarantee success. And, of course, the same can apply for games. However, before you start panicking that the follow-up to one of the finest FPSs of all time is going to turn out to be a turd the size of Bognor Regis, let me put your mind at rest. *AvP2* definitely won't be falling into the same pit of mediocrity inhabited by its celluloid counterparts, because it's looking incredible. No, actually I lied, it's looking nothing short of stunning.

The reason I'm being so cocksure about this game is because I got to play it first hand (smiles smugly, gets kicked in by reader lynch mob). From the moment you enter the first level, it's obvious how much work has gone into the three character types, which are as dynamic and exciting as they are varied. You're immediately struck by an atmosphere of unseen fear and rising tension - created by all-new subtle audio tricks and masterfully erratic lighting effects - which take the FPS genre to new psychologically scarring heights. In fact *AvP2* is so terrifying that it will no doubt lead to months of intense therapy sessions for scores of



Dark, blood-stained teeth? Try new Arm and Hammer Whitening.

fat insecure American teenagers - and a few hundred moistened Mrs Tiggywinkle pyjama bottoms for soft boys the world over. Be warned now, *AvP2* won't be for you if you're the kind of person who cries when they see a wounded bird with no beak lying in the road having its brains strained out of its ears by a passing lorry. You'll need iron balls (or the female equivalent) if you're going to survive this horror fest.

HERE'S THE INTERVIEW PART

As well as playtesting the latest build of the game (for the lowdown on the multiplayer side of things, check out the Multiplying The Carnage panel), we also caught up with the team from Fox Interactive. We grilled David Stalker, the producer, about what we can expect in the finished product and the exclusive demo we'll be running in *PC ZONE* (hopefully next month). We even managed to get some info out of him about a possible *AvP* film. Another *PCZ* exclusive perhaps? Well, it would have been if he'd actually said anything conclusive. Anyway, here's what he had to say for himself...

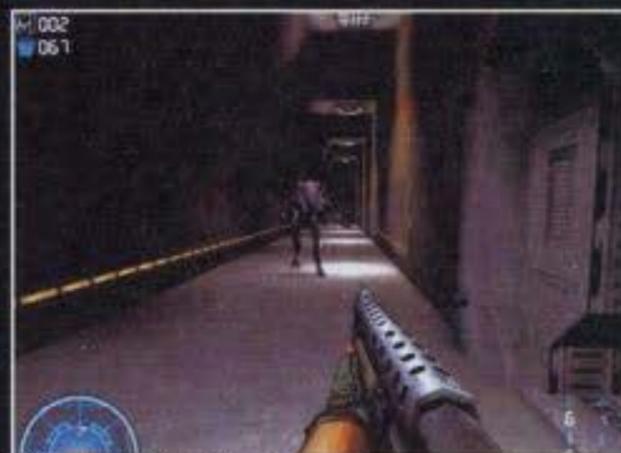
How do you think you've improved on the original game?

We started *AvP2* by carefully looking at the things we dug in *AvP1*, then looking at what we didn't like, then what we thought would've been cool but didn't make it. When we discussed this stuff with *Monolith*, they clearly had a lot of similar thoughts as well as their own whole fresh perspective that we knew would bring a lot of energy to the game. So we definitely see this game building on the first.

The LithTech engine technology allowed us to create much more detailed worlds (including some gorgeous exteriors) and



"Just die will you."



"OK, who put the holes in my gun."

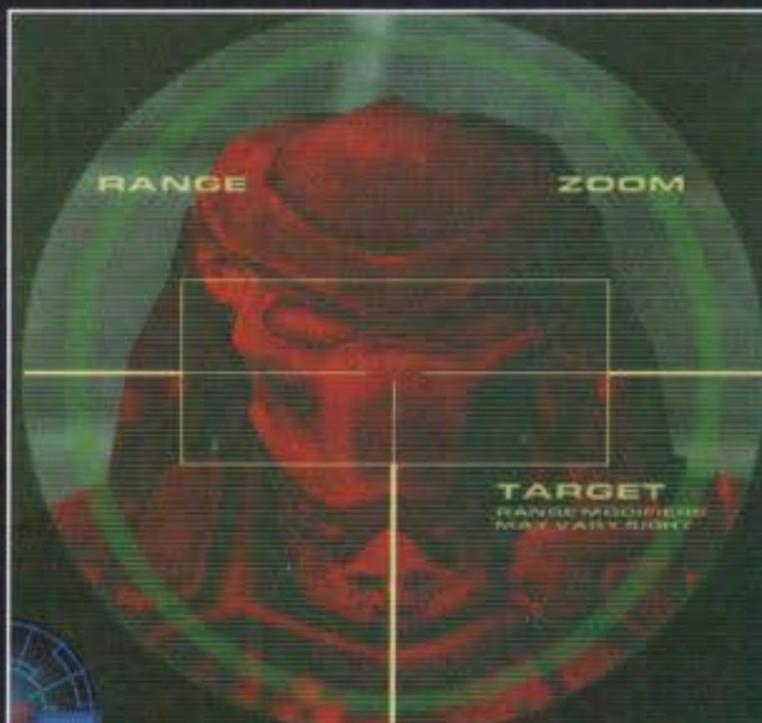
characters than before, which is really great when it comes to depicting such well-known movie monsters. Trying to create the feeling that you were in an *Aliens/Predator* movie was one of the major goals.

There's also more subtle stuff, like how the game draws you in, growing more challenging in a gradual way rather than just dumping you in at the deep end (which, admittedly, the first kind of did).

Then there's the story. *AvP1* relied mostly on the atmosphere of its locations and your previous acquaintance with the universe. This time we have a story of our own, which will really help the player get into their character (and their species). We're using in-game cinematics to help communicate this story -



One, two, cha cha cha. Three, four, cha cha cha.



I'm afraid it's going to be glasses for you Mr Jones.



Remember kids: never swallow boomerangs.

the FMV budget for the kind of stuff we're doing with the engine would've made it totally impossible.

There was no storyline in the original game. Will there be a storyline in this sequel and if so, what will the plot be?

Whaddya mean there was no storyline? It was there – you just had to look really hard for it and use your imagination... a lot. *AvP2* is definitely much, much stronger in the storytelling department.

The story takes place on the planet bearing the designation LV-1201. Events transpire which bring all three species together during one six-week period, with everyone fighting for survival.

Recently, LV-1201 was discovered to be home to an Alien hive of indeterminate age, as well as to

(what with the ready supply of Aliens for game) but, upon arrival at their familiar hunting grounds, they are incensed to find humans there as well. All three species are on a collision course with each other.

Having selected which species to play, the player will play through a complete story of connected 'missions' as that species. However, the story will only become fully clear as they play the other two species and see that there are three intersecting stories and that only by playing all three can they fully grasp what happened on LV-1201.

***AvP* was famed for its use of lighting. How is the new Littech engine improving on this?**

Monolith has been hard at work on their lighting models to make *AvP2* even more impressive than *AvP1*. This includes 32-bit animated light-mapping and dynamic light sources to make for some great effects – like shadows cast by lights behind fans and light spilling out of doorways as they open. Let's not forget all of the different vision modes the different species have that render the world in different lighting conditions. You've also got muzzle flashes,

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ancient structures clearly belonging to some other extraterrestrial species. A gigantic expedition, led by Dr Arnaud Eisenberg (lone survivor of an earlier expedition) is sent to study the Xenomorphs, the hive and the mysterious structures.

At some point, things go awry and a passing Marine destroyer is diverted to investigate what happened to the expedition. Unbeknown to the humans, LV-1201 is periodically visited by Predators

explosions, shoulder lamps, flares... is that enough lighting for you?

Not bad, not bad at all. How many weapons are going to feature for each of the three sides and what are they? Do any of them have a dual fire mode?

Many weapons have a dual fire mode. The Predator has modified versions of his equipment from *AvP1*



MULTIPLYING THE CARNAGE

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but what's it like in multiplayer?

While it's always fun to blow away hordes of alien scum, it's even more fun to shoot hordes of your friends instead. I was lucky enough to spend around an hour trying out the multiplayer side of the game.

The first level was a massive open arena with buildings towering in the night sky all around me. As an alien I traversed one of the walls, camouflaging myself in the darkness before pouncing on an unsuspecting developer who yelped like a three-year-old girl who's just found a dead rat, as I rearranged his internal organs. But before smugness could set in, another adversary picked me off from a distance with the Predator's devastating shoulder-mounted laser.

The next level I tried out was set in a science lab, with a huge balcony looking down on the level. Playing in this more confined space, the gameplay wasn't too dissimilar to *Unreal Tournament*, only infinitely more terrifying. Because the action is fast (but not ridiculously so like in *Quake III*) you have time to think of how to use the environment and your character's strengths to your advantage. Using the alien to dodge bullets by running onto walls and ceilings may be disorientating at first, but once you master it, it's a deadly skill. And it's this kind of innovation which makes the multiplayer games in *AvP2* stand out from its rivals. As an alien I hid in high corners and waited for my prey to pass under me. However, as a commando, I found that staying in open areas was the best way to play, in order to make the most of my massive arsenal of weapons without the threat of being ambushed. Finally, I gave the Predator a whirl, but he proved to be the least complete (in terms of programming, not ability) character of the three. However, I still got to pummel someone's head in and pull off a couple of fantastic (if hugely flukey) shots, so I was pretty satisfied with what I'd seen of him.

From the 60 all-too-brief minutes I spent playing the multiplayer game, it's clear *AvP2* is going to be a cracker – in fact it could have the most versatile and original multiplayer action ever to grace a FPS. In order to get a clearer idea of what to expect from the multiplayer games in the finished version, I had another brief chat with the lads at Fox, who revealed the following...

Will you be able to create your own deathmatch levels and if so, how?

One of the nicest things about LithTech games is that players are usually able to get their hands on the actual game creation tools fairly soon after the game comes out.

What other multiplayer game types will there be?

We're planning around 12 maps (with, we hope, many more on the way) with a variety of play modes, including: Deathmatch, Team (Species) Deathmatch, Hunt (a tag game similar to the one in *AvP1*) and a couple of others with saucy names like *Overrun* that are still being worked on. You will be able to choose from a large number of different player characters and these can impact what you can do in the game.

Are there going to be bots you can play against without going online?

Right now this is beyond our reach, so it will not be in the shipping product. However, with a game available online for continuing play, I like to think there are always possibilities of later additions to do this stuff in the future.

Will there be co-operative play against the computer?

There won't be any co-operative play against AIs at release in the single-player or multiplayer maps. Trying to get multiple players through levels designed for a detailed single-player story was not possible at this time.



pouncing ability that can be useful for both attacking and navigation.

AI is the Holy Grail in first-person shooters at the moment. What advances have you made with *AvP2* and how have you adapted the AI to suit the three distinctly different species in the game?

Our main focus has been to make sure that the species feel real and yet intuitive.

Aliens will ram doors, and if they're pissed off enough, can actually bust through and get you

On the 'real' front, we focus on the AI's senses. If an AI can cheat all the time and you can never trick it, then it isn't going to be much fun. Our AIs really 'see' and 'hear' their enemies and allies. Lighting, distance, field of view, cloaking, sound volume (and more) all affect the senses. This has gone a long way in providing a sense of life to our AIs. And by the way, they will fight their enemies as well as fighting you.

CV

MONOLITH

MONOLITH CV

When it comes to the FPS, Monolith Productions is one of the most experienced developers around. And here's why...

1997 Although *Blood* used the durable *Duke Nukem* engine and was full of intelligent AI, it failed to compete with the likes of *Quake*.

1998 After feverishly working on a brand new 3D engine for 18 months, Monolith knocked out two fantastic FPSs in quick succession – *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* and *Blood II*. Of course, they were both buggered as *Half-Life* had appeared just a month before either of them.

2000 We didn't think *No One Lives Forever* was brilliant. But many of you did. Running on the all new LithTech 2.5 engine, it cast you as a spy who has to save the world. Despite the wide array of gadgets at your disposal, *No One Lives Forever* had poor AI and proved far too linear for our liking. So there.

Perfect senses aren't enough, though. If you can't tell what the AI's intentions are, we might as well not bother. So the inhabitants of *AvP2* talk and move when they get suspicious, run and hide when they're afraid, call for help when they're overwhelmed, or just cry like a baby and hope not to die.

Is the Alien Queen going to make an appearance in the game?

Yes they will.

Will you be able to play as any of the different types of Aliens, eg will you be able to play as the Queen or a facehugger?

Wow, what a good idea. But no, you won't.

Maybe next time round eh? Anyway, how about the acid from the Aliens? Will it burn through floors or your head?

You will see acid damage existing in the environment (including the ever-lovely melted floors) and acid from wounded Aliens will damage you and damage the surroundings somewhat.

Will there be team orders and teamwork?

The game isn't designed to be a squad-style game but the player will find themselves interacting with and being helped out by AI characters at points.

What new technology that hasn't been seen before in either the last game or the films will be on show here?

At some points, the Marine will get to use an Exo-Suit, which is a militarised Powerloader with weapons.

What other first-person shooters do you admire/have taken inspiration from?

I like the ones with story and atmosphere, and obviously there have been a few of these recently; for example *Half-Life*, *Undying* and *Deus Ex*.

We saw at E3 that the Aliens can smash through doors. What other new things will they be able to do?

As you mentioned, Aliens will actually ram doors and will dent them repeatedly. And, if they're pissed off enough, they can actually bust through and get you. They can also do the same thing with floor gratings. You can walk over a floor grate and it gets buckled as an Alien below tries to get at you through it.

← plus he has some new items such as the much-requested Net Gun and the Combi-Stick (the telescoping spear). The Net Gun is great (especially in multiplayer) because it bundles the victim up in this big net, allowing you to close in for the kill. The Combi-Stick allows you to do close-up damage, similar to the Wristblades but with greater reach.

Similar to the Predator, the Marine has almost everything from *AvP1* but improved and upgraded. Some of the weapons we've added are a knife (think about it: Net Gun, knife), a pistol and a shotgun. We've also added the functioning shoulder lamp, a Welder and the ComTech (or 'Hacking') Device. The Welder lets you open certain doorways and ducting (remember to seal them behind you) and the ComTech Device is the little tricorder-style thing Hudson uses to run a bypass and open the big door in *Aliens*.

With the Alien, we wanted to try and keep it as intuitive as possible and not twist the character so that it suddenly stopped feeling like an Alien. So you still have the jaw, claw and tail, but we've refined what's there and added some more control options (such as allowing you to toggle wall-walking on or off). We're also giving the Alien a really great



"I'm Billy and this is my friend Oscar. We both work in IT."



Play as an Alien, Predator or Marine.



"Are you thinking what I'm thinking."



It's a machine. It's a human driven wrecking machine.

Sounds scary... What new sound techniques have you used to heighten the atmosphere?

The biggest thing that's been added has been a specially adapted version of Direct Music to create a soundtrack that both fits in with the movies and the previous game but is also context-sensitive to what's going on around the player at the time. The goal is to give players a much more visceral response to situations they encounter since, after many years of movies and TV, we're all attuned to what soundtracks tell us is about to happen.

Can you tell us about all the different types of Aliens that will be in the game, and what their roles will be?

There will be some Aliens of slightly different physical shapes and abilities, usually based on which species they were hosted in. This plays out as different speed, strength, resilience and so on.

With the success of the AVP games, what do you think is the likelihood of there being an AvP film?

I think it's safe to say that (as far as I know), it's being seriously considered. I think it's got a better chance of happening now than it's ever had before.

I think with the standards and the success of the games we've done, we've been able to demonstrate to the chaps in feature production that bringing the two together can actually be done without being cheesy, and that moreover, it can be scary and thrilling.

How many missions does each side have in the single-player campaign?

There are seven missions in each species' storyline. Obviously, each campaign isn't as big as a single dedicated game would be because that would take triple the time to get done. We look at this as being one nicely proportioned game with three incredibly

cool characters that you get to play (with all that entails, including completely different weapons, tools, physical abilities and styles of gameplay).

What can our readers expect to see in the exclusive playable demo we'll be running on a future CD?

We're releasing a single-player demo to give a sense of how that experience is going to play, and then we're looking at releasing a multiplayer demo later as well so they can see that side of the game too.

What is the current shipping date for the game?

When it's done. No really, it will be out before Christmas - not sure of the exact date yet.

What plans have you got for the AvP licence next? Do you plan to take the Alien or Predator universe into any other genre?

My take on AvP is that it means the three different species in conflict with each other. The first-person games are just one expression of this three-way conflict concept. Don't be surprised if you start hearing about another game soon.

Which of the Alien and Predator films were your favourites? And what particular elements have you taken out of them and used in AVP2?

Aliens. That movie is clearly the jumping-off point for the AvP games. I love the idea of filling out the background and world around that point in the history of the movies.

I don't know about you, but after what I've seen and been told, I can't wait until the end of the year when AvP2 hits the shelves. In fact, I've already started stocking up on man-sized Huggies and portaloos. Until then though, I'll just have to while away the time by saving injured sparrows from unobservant drivers. Gotta go now... (I'm welling up again, don't let the readers know guys)... You bastards. [E]