

ALIENS

Electric Dreams, £9.99 cass, £14.99 disk, joystick with keys

Alien is back... and this time it's not alone!

Ripley, the only survivor of the doomed star freighter Nostromo, is picked up floating in deep space. Woken from the solitude of her hyper sleep-capsule, she is taken to a giant complex high above the Earth. There she is interrogated by disbelieving officials about her tale of parasitic creatures, capable of growing within, and eventually consuming, their human hosts.

By now, the remote planet upon which the crew of the Nostromo first encountered the Alien has been peopled by space engineers and their families. When contact with them is lost, it is Ripley who reluctantly agrees to lead a select team of marines to investigate.

Ripley, the erratic Gorman, Marine Hicks, Bishop the android, Vasquez (the feminist Rambo), and Company man Burke, have blasted their way into the colonists' base. The operation is co-ordinated from a MTOB (Mobile Tactical Operations Bay) set up near the crew's landing point. You control individuals on the team from the security of the MTOB - directing them towards any part of the base or ordering them to stand and fight against the Aliens. The



This is really quite good. There is a nice tense atmosphere generated as you progress toward the Queen's chamber, and the Aliens come thick and fast. The graphics are good - not exceptionally eye-catching, but functional. The backgrounds scroll quickly and the Alien characters work fairly well, but the crew portraits are disappointing: a digitised picture would have been much neater. The lack of a decent soundtrack also lets it down - background music or the sound of heartbeats would have helped generate even more atmosphere. Aliens could have been better, but should still provide a good few hours of Alien blasting.

Marines are equipped with video cameras and smart guns that follow the gun sight that appears on the viewscreen - the camera carried by the Marine under you control generates the main display on



△ With only two crew members remaining, the chances of success look slim - especially if Bishop isn't quick enough with his trigger finger...

the control console, and can be panned around the current location.

Progress is made by passing through a series of corridors and rooms, inter-connected by doors that may be unlocked, sealed, or blasted through. However, once a door has been destroyed it offers

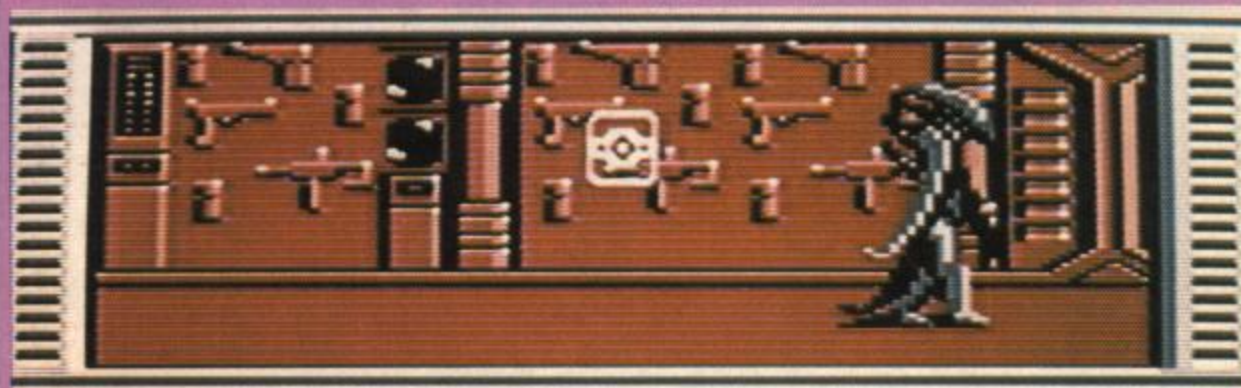
no further protection against Alien intrusion.

Aliens move about the base, leaving bio-mechanical growth in their wake. If this is not cleared, it grows to close exits, block entrances and spawn Face Huggers

▽ Not an Alien in disguise, but a harmless - and extremely helpful - child called Newt



▽ You're in the armoury now (ouch)... an Alien casually walks past Ripley's gunsight



Aliens surprises me - it's the first film tie-in I've seen that actually captures the flavour of its celluloid counterpart. The action doesn't contain enough variety, but it is atmospheric and engrossing - although the overall effect would have been enhanced greatly by the inclusion of a heartbeat and radar blip (instead of the hum). Strategy doesn't play a great part, but a fair bit of forethought is required to synchronise the movements of the team through the complex - and keep them alive! There are a few things about Aliens that irritate me though. For example, the six characters all behave exactly the same - it would have been better if they had their own personality and characteristics. Also, Bishop the android tires, but he shouldn't - he is synthetic after all. Still, these are minor gripes - congratulations to Electric Dreams for succeeding in an area where so many other companies have failed.



△ An Alien Face-Hugger takes a fancy to Ripley – so, to show its affection it leaps at her face, in an attempt to impregnate her with Alien seed...



△ After a very brief gestation period, the Alien egg inside Ripley's stomach has hatched and resulted in an unwanted Alien birth...

and Eggs. Aliens attack on sight, their presence being indicated by the high pitched note of a proximity meter. The further the Marines pass through the base, the more active the Aliens become.

Smart guns are used to cut through bio-mechanical growth, to blast locks and doors and to destroy Aliens – a well-aimed shot to the head, or several to the body disposes of an intruder. Remember, the Company pays credits for Alien corpses. Use your weapons sparingly, as ammunition is limited and can only be replenished by dangerous, time-consuming ventures to the Armoury. And be warned, the

acidic blood that dying Aliens spill is fatal – don't attempt to pass through it.

Life status bars appear on the MTOB console for individual squad members to indicate their stamina reserves – these are depleted by every move they make. Should the status bar begin to pulse beneath a squad member's name, exhaustion is approaching and rest is the only alternative to death. The number of the room each Marine currently occupies appears by the status bars.

A crew member confronted by an Alien has to kill it immediately – or face capture, in which case the

corresponding status bar turns yellow. Survival then depends solely upon the destruction of the guard Alien by another squad member. Should a rescue attempt fail, or not be launched, the captive squad member is quickly impregnated with an Alien egg, and their status bar turns purple or pink. Death follows rapidly...

Ripley's task is to pass through the base with as many of her squad as possible and reach the breeding chamber of the Queen Alien. Though your main aim is to

reach the Queen's Chamber and destroy its occupant, vital parts of the base must be defended; the Armoury that supplies the ammunition, to which each character must periodically return; the Control room, that provides lighting; and the Generating room, that provides light and power, are all vital to your cause. Without them, your ultimate task is hindered... if not rendered impossible.

As you move from room to room, watch out for the little girl Newt, the only surviving colonist. She may attempt to hide, but credits are earned when she is spotted.



Film tie-ins have been the worst type of computer program – bad gameplay and

terrible execution usually fail to capture the atmosphere of the film. Aliens, however, is an exception. It's exciting to play, and captures the film's atmosphere very well. The gameplay is pretty tough going, and a few tactics have to be worked out if the mission is to be accomplished. Even though Aliens is good, there is still room for improvement – good sound (like the blap, blap noise of the trackers in the film) would have given the game an incredible atmosphere. A really annoying niggle is the keyboard layout – having M as a quit key is a stupid idea, especially as it's right next to the space bar which gets pressed a lot during the game. Apart from these detractions, Aliens is the best film tie-in to date – and a good game to boot.

PRESENTATION 66%

Useful map supplied, but no demo mode or options, and the restart key is awkwardly positioned.

GRAPHICS 81%

Effective room interiors and Aliens, and some neat visual effects.

SOUND 27%

Very limited: no music and few spot effects.

HOOKABILITY 81%

Easy to get into, and the action makes repeated play compulsive.

LASTABILITY 76%

Enormous complex to explore and a strong urge to 'get even further this time'.

VALUE 76%

Slightly overpriced, but fans of the film should be satisfied.

OVERALL 81%

The best film tie-in to date, and a good game to boot.