

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR

Platform: **PC**
 Publisher: **Fox Interactive**
 Developer: **Fox Interactive**

Over three years in the making, and with the backing and pressure of one of Hollywood's biggest action licenses, a lot was expected from *Aliens versus Predator* (*AvP*). Fortunately, Fox has managed to pull it all together in a product destined to have a similar impact in shaping game design as *Half-Life*.

That's not to say that *AvP* is in *Half-Life*'s consummate class. It lacks much of Valve's masterful style and shape, but in their place is a level of tension that surpasses even that created by the daddy of them all, *Doom*. With the option to play as either the Colonial Marine, the Alien, or the Predator, *AvP*'s single-player levels are only of average design, but have a pacing normally reserved for the movies that spanned them.

Six different levels for each creature constitute a variety of familiar settings — space station, alien hive, and outdoor environments — that highlight the flexibility of an engine sporting many visual similarities to *Quake II*. What's different is the use of dynamic lighting and sound effects. Lights can be blown out — which is fine for the Predator, with its separate alien- and human-targeting sensors, or for the Alien, which has a view enabling it to navigate in the dark — but it's terrifying for the poor Marine.

Finite ammunition for the Marine and the Predator (the Alien uses its claws and tail attacks) makes every burst critical. No mid-level save option adds to the tension but also makes successfully navigating the levels unnecessarily frustrating. Every move has to be carefully calculated, and here *AvP* treads that fine line between having a danger-filled atmosphere and simply being fun to play.

Varied multiplayer modes re-create many epic scenes from the movies and comic books, and although the game lacks *Quake II*'s pure visceral action quotient, it makes up for it with immersive gameplay design. Played as the Marine, late at night with the lights out and the movie-inspired music cranked up, *AvP* is a totally absorbing, even terrifying,



Aliens versus Predator is one of the most frightening titles ever released for PC

experience. It's a shame that the engine didn't have the graphical clout of, say, an *Unreal*, or some more inventive level design, but it's fine for creating atmosphere, a commodity it oozes at every step, making it one of the most memorable gaming experiences you're likely to survive.

RATING **★★★★☆**

REDLINE

Platform: **PC**
 Publisher: **Accolade**
 Developer: **Beyond Games**

On paper, *Redline* sounds good: a mission-based car-combat game in which the player can exit the car and fight on foot. But whatever points *Redline* gets for its high concept, it loses in flawed execution.

To begin with, the game's 3D engine just isn't that great. Sure, there are all the requisite flashy special effects, but otherwise, it just looks bland, even when using 3D acceleration. Worse, the image onscreen occasionally just freezes while the engine continues humming underneath — the net effect is that nothing moves for a second or so, and when it starts up again, you find yourself instantly slamming into the wall on the other side of the arena.

Admittedly, the car combat is fast paced, and the enemy vehicles are nothing if not tenacious, but the constant need for hand braking and 180° power slides (the game's single "hook") gets old fast. The first-person action is just plain bad — the control isn't any better than *Doom*, enemy AI seems to mostly consist of standing in

place and shooting in your general direction, and the weapon selection is pure "seen it all before."

Add in other, smaller deficiencies like poor character animation, silly dialogue, and the occasional moment when you're left with no idea what to do next, and you've got a title that's a misfire all around. Combining two different types of gameplay into one game is a terrific idea, but someone should have mentioned that welding a mediocre first-person shooter onto a mediocre car-combat game is not the way to make the whole better than the sum of its parts.

RATING **★★☆☆☆**



There are two distinct types of gameplay in Redline, but they don't make the cut, either separately or together

REQUIEM: AVENGING ANGEL

Platform: **PC, Mac**
 Publisher: **3DO**
 Developer: **Cyclone Studios**

First off, *Requiem* has a great story. With a plot pulled straight out of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the player assumes the role of Malachi, one of the faithful angels, who is sent to Earth to stop the fallen angels from bringing about the Apocalypse.



Requiem won't win any awards for its technology, but a great story and a few clever touches make it well worth your while

Like *Half-Life* (to which inevitable comparisons will be made), *Requiem* blends its storyline into a first-person shooter and is, in some ways, even more successful at it than Valve's trendsetter. Certainly, its nightmare vision of purgatory in the game's first level grabs your attention right away.

Still, it's not without its annoyances, either. The graphics engine, while serviceable, is barely state of the art, coming up a bit bland when set next to *Half-Life*, much less *Unreal: Tournament*. This "split hair above average" leaks into the game's control (it's too easy to get hung up on corners), and weapon design (pretty much seen 'em all before).

Likewise, while the enemy designs are imaginative, the AI isn't that smart. Most of the bosses can be defeated by relatively simple

patterns, but can withstand so much damage that they still take forever to kill. While some levels are strewn with NPCs, very few are interactive.

But if some aspects of the game are simply "good enough," other things largely make up for them. The aforementioned story, for example, is given life by better-than-usual voice actors. Also, Malachi slowly gains a large number of divine powers, which enable him to do nifty things like throw lightning, turn enemies into pillars of salt, and resurrect dead foes to fight on his side (it's a thrill to charge into a room with your undead army right behind you, then quickly exit and watch them all fight it out).

In the final analysis, *Requiem* is no technical marvel, but its uniqueness is divine.

RATING **★★★★☆**