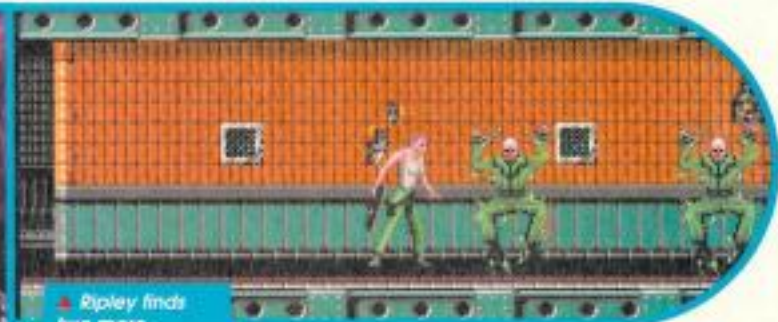


ACTION REVIEW SHOOT'EM UP

Chest bursters, face-huggers, ultra-fast aliens in severe need of a dentist... This is not one for the faint of heart.



ALIEN 3



As anyone who loves the first two alien movies must know, Alien 3 is one of the worst films ever. It would be hard to imagine a more dismal way to conclude such a fine series of films. Everything about it is naff, from the use of a largely English cast (Brian Glover, anybody?) to the utterly disastrous decision to change the alien from a lethal and imperturbable killing machine into some sort of nasty rabid dog-type thing.

Alien 3 the computer game, seems to have taken an eternity to hit the Amiga screens, causing a flurry of vague rumours about the possibility of it not being any good, and as a result having to undergo extensive re-working (kind of like the frighteningly accurate rumours which preceded the opening of the film). Well, I don't know the reasons for the delay, but I can now report that the finished game is certainly by no means as bad as the movie was.

In fact it seems as if the programmers noticed the weaknesses of the film's storyline and so they opted to design the game round a plot more reminiscent of the second movie where Ripley and a posse of troops try to find some colonists who've been captured and impregnated by the aliens.

The game is played over a series of large levels featuring ladders, moving platforms, secret passages

and a vast quantity of aliens. Ripley has to search round each level, avoiding or preferably wasting her extraterrestrial adversaries and trying to locate any poor souls who've had the misfortune to be glued to the wall by alien mucous. Furthermore, she has to find all of them and get off the level within a certain time limit. If she doesn't manage this, the baby aliens growing inside the captured humans burst out of the chests of their still-living hosts. Youch! This game is certainly no Rainbow Islands.

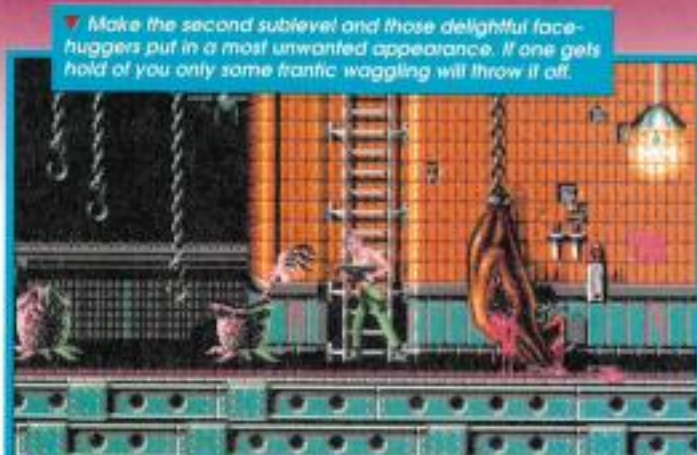
Chestbuster

Ripley has four different weapons available to her: grenades, a machine gun, a rocket launcher and a flame thrower, each of which comes into its own in different types of situation. Unfortunately the ammo for these weapons is limited, so on top of everything else she must be careful to waste as few shots as possible and keep her eyes peeled for any more stocks left lying around.

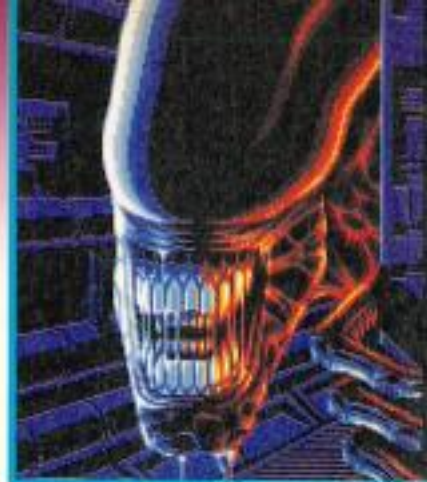
And rest assured, nobody will get very far in this game without a full complement of weaponry. Yes, once again we are in the 'blinkin' hard' niche of the games market. The aliens sometimes appear so suddenly and move so fast that it is all but impossible to avoid suffering an energy-reducing bite before you can blast them to pieces. Toughest of all are the total bar-stewards who drop on your head - not even Clint Eastwood would be able to get a round off quick enough to avoid these posky varmints.



▲ Looks like Ripley's a little too late to save this poor chap.



▼ Make the second sublevel and those delightful face-huggers put in a most unwanted appearance. If one gets hold of you only some frantic waggling will throw it off.



▼ An end of level guardian. Ripley reels as she suffers a close encounter of the hallois kind.

▲ This alien's days are severely numbered. Serves it right for having a head shaped like a marrow.

Also some of the levels are very cunningly designed so that you may actually be able to see a trapped human on the screen but be completely unable to get to him from where you are. Add this to the fact that when you run out of lives you have to restart the game right from the beginning (no passwords here, I'm afraid) and you can see you're going to need a pretty good memory to remember where all the captives are each time you play.

In fact this lack of restarts is one of my biggest niggles with the game. There's no doubt that Alien 3 is vast, but constantly having to retread the same old territory does get rather tedious. Initially it looks likely to just extend the game's play-span, but once you start to get far into the later levels, having to do the early ones again really starts to put you off playing all over again, especially as there's so little variety to the action.

First impressions of the game are not really that good. Apart from the big and genuinely unpleasant-looking aliens, the graphics on the first levels are less than inspiring. The sound is similarly disappointing – the spot effects are a bit sparse, and not all that meaty even when they do occur. It's actually better to play with the music on instead of the sound effects, which isn't really the way it should be.

But Alien 3 is by no means a bad game. As I said

earlier, the aliens themselves are nicely done, and they attack frequently and fast enough to keep you right on edge from start to finish. Saving the colonists is sufficiently addictive to keep tempting you back for more. Finding that one remaining captive is also a challenge which is hard to resist, especially when you can sometimes see him on the screen but are not able to get to him from where you're standing. It's not until you've already played the game for a good few hours that the tedium of retreading the early levels begins to sink in.

The game has also got some excellent features. My particular favourites are the face-huggers, aliens which can ram down doors if they know Ripley's behind them and the way the game shows all the unrescued captives dying a hideous death if you don't find them in time. This really does make you determined to try that little bit harder next time.

Finally, the game does include an option to adjust the difficulty level and increase your number of credits – but believe me, you'll still have to put in a good many hours (and maps, probably) to get anywhere near the end.



▲ These aliens aren't just a pretty face, you know. They also make smart buffering rams.



▼ Incubation over, an alien bursts out of Ripley's chest.

THE LOW-DOWN

PUBLISHER: Virgin
CONTACT: 081 960 2255
TEAM: Probe
PRICE: \$25.99

SCORING	
GRAPHICS	81%
SOUND	74%
PLAYABILITY	81%
DIFFICULTY	VERY HARD

A very tricky game to put a mark to. The graphics vary from poor to fairly good, the sound is barely average and the action slips between being too repetitive and being surprisingly fast and engrossing. Also the control method is a bit awkward at times. Alien 3 certainly won't appeal to the impatient among you, and the need for maps will put off most action freaks. But I'm sure there must be some of you out there who, like me, will really quite like it.

REVIEWED BY: John

SECOND OPINION

Average. That's all you can say about Alien 3. It has some very nice features, but the gameplay is just too bland to encourage the player to return very often.

OPINION BY: Steve

OVERALL SCORE

78%