

PUBLISHER: Sega **DEVELOPER:** Gearbox **PLAYERS:** 1-5
ONLINE OPTIONS: Co-op, Deathmatch **ETA:** March 2009

Aliens Colonial Marines

The daddy of the space marine genre, Aliens will be stalking your PS3 soon. Until then, avoid of the shadows and if you intercept an alien distress signal, just ignore it

This franchise plays host to the DNA of every sci-fi shooter ever put to pixel or oil. The dimly lit corridors, the unseen enemy, the lashings of gore and the chunky near-future weaponry and it's all centered around space marines. The original space marines too, not those *Turok* rip-offs.

So Sega has the daddy of all sci-fi shooters, and it's not likely to cock things up. The game has been hidden away in development at Gearbox, the US dev that has a solid track record in first-person shooters, and is most famous for its *Brothers in Arms* squad-based series.

Tactical accuracy

Best known for realistic presentation and tactical accuracy, Gearbox is the ideal developer to turn the *Aliens* franchise into the perfect space marine game. You'll control a squad of six pumped-up marines sent on a mission to search the ghost ship USS Sulaco after the crew has vanished. Now we know Ripley escaped, and her crew of gun-toting marines ended up as meat for the offworld critters on Hadley's Hope terraforming colony, but the Colonial Marines (to give them their proper name) don't know what to expect.

The game's story is being written by *Battlestar Galactica*'s writers Bradley Thompson and David Weddle and is set after the events of the *Aliens* and *Aliens 3* movies. The game not only features the adrift Sulaco, but also the Fiorina 'Fury' 161 prison facility and the derelict alien spacecraft from the original movie as



SHATTERED: You'll chase the evil alien bugs up tight corridors

backdrops to the action. One aspect of the story ties neatly into the *Aliens* universe is the use of the Weyland Yutani Corporation as an over-arching evil, a puppet-master pulling the strings behind the action. Though your immediate survival against the Sulaco's alien infestation is your primary concern, the game will build in a conspiracy story behind the gunplay. And who knows, maybe an unexpected betrayal.

Each mission will put you in the space armour of a different marine in the six-man squad. You'll use commands familiar to *Brothers in Arms* players to



SQUAD SHOOTER: These bugs sure take some punishment



SICKEN PUNCH: Get him on your face and it's GAME OVER MAN

DO YOU KNOW?

A previous game titled *Aliens Colonial Marines* was developed by Click Six Games and published by Fox Interactive and Electronic Arts for the PlayStation 2 in 2001, but was cancelled before its release. A more traditional first-person shooter, it shared the same subject matter and setting as this title.

guide your troop through the maze of acid-blasted corridors, trying to stay ahead of the critters. By focusing on one squad member at a time, Gearbox has been able to create an episodic feel to the action. Backstories, plot details and characters gently expand and you'll get a deeper perspective on the action. It also means that the game will have a very immediate feel – you can dip in for an hour at a time to play out one episode of the full story arc. And before you reach for the keyboard and start hurling abuse at Gearbox, this is no casual blaster. There will be more than six episodes to wade through, including some revelations that could affect the *Aliens* canon.

The game builds slowly, emulating the slowburn pace of the movies. Your first

Stay onto the abandoned USS Sulaco is a tense affair with few aliens to be seen and only the omegas, plugging from your handheld motion detector for company.

Face to facehugger

Given that first confrontation doesn't involve the guns blazing, space marine might fest you may expect. Instead the alien bursts out of the shadows and drags you kicking into an air duct where it prepares to poison you in slime. You survived it. This is a Quick Time Events where button presses have to be hit as the event unfolds. It works well, as the actions mimic the action perfectly. For example, pushing Right on the analogue stick smashes open a vent casing to the right, pressing Up raises your gun and lets your captor, forcing it to retreat.

The influence of the movie is all over the shooter, with Quick Time Events ensuring you never know what's around the next corner. The famous white-knuckle tension you got from the movie is central to Aliens CM. You won't know what's coming next. Scripted events blend into corridor shootouts, your goal being to stay alive.

Keeping each team-member safe is at the heart of the game. Each member of your squad has a unique skill needed to get through a mission. One marine will be able to hack security doors and another

will be able to set up portable gun turrets. If you've seen the movie, you'll recognize how these skills fit into a scenario. Also, each marine you play will have a different weapons loadout. The officer carries a pistol, while other squad members have flamethrowers, grenades or even an RPG.

Tactically, the Brothers In Arms

influence is all over the gameplay. Not

How do you flank an alien that can attack from above and below, as well as use airducts and service pipes?

Just as in relaying orders to the squad via the **○** button in combination with the D-pad, but in adding realism to the combat. The question is, how do you flank an alien that can attack from above and below, as well as airducts and service pipes?

The answer, for now, is partly by using familiar tactics. One mission emulates the

alien attack on Hadley's Hope, with you setting up portable gun turrets. It's in this mission that the game's tactical clout hits home. You can not only set up turrets but use technicians to hack and lock or weld doors, order your team to push tables and cabinets against windows and set up strike teams to cover weak areas of a room. You can even set booby traps to cover air vents, if your explosives guy is still alive. The pulse rifles feature a ticking ammo level, Hudson's Remington shotgun is here for close quarter escapes and the Smart Guns, as carried by Vasquez and Drake, make a welcome appearance.

Rechargeable health

The action resembles *Call Of Duty* in style, with down-the-scope targeting and a rechargeable health system. The big difference is the AI being implemented. Aliens will crawl out of every nook and cranny, scuttle up walls and scurry across the ceiling. Aliens Colonial Marines could be 2009's biggest challenge.

The squad set-up suggests that four-player co-op, including a drop-in, drop-out method online, and two-player split-screen co-op offline, will rival *World At War*. Though competitive co-op is still a secret, Gearbox has said new aliens will be introduced to ensure that there's plenty to shoot. Simon Bramble

FLASHBACK: Marines will visit the Sulaco after events in *Aliens 3*

GUN BATTLE: One thing's for sure, you won't be short of firepower