

THEY'RE BACK...

ALIENS

VS

PREDATOR

Richie Shoemaker comes out of an unusually long hypersleep

DEVELOPER Rebellion PUBLISHER SEGA [WEBSITE sega.co.uk/games/aliens-vs-predator](http://WEBSITE.sega.co.uk/games/aliens-vs-predator)

WHEN YOU THINK about it first-person shooters are pretty darn amazing: all-pervasive, all-conquering, and almost always excellent. There are some duffers, but most are far beyond average compared to when the first *Aliens vs Predator* game appeared... back when Atari and SEGA made consoles and *Doom* set the benchmark for FPS fun.

And it's in this arena of game design excellence that we await the arrival of a new *Aliens vs Predator*, a full 10 years since Rebellion last had a go at the best movie mash-up since *Godzilla* went Technicolor on a guy in a gorilla outfit.

Overlooked for the 2001 *Aliens versus Predator 2* in favour of Monolith

the Oxford-based team have every right to consider the franchise as theirs. This is in spite of Hollywood going *Phantom Menace* on what was a serviceable premise in the time since Rebellion last pitted US Colonial Marines against the galaxy's most persistent stalkers.

THE PRODIGAL GAME

"It feels like the franchise is coming home in many ways," says Tim Jones, *AvP*'s project leader, who like many on the team was around, albeit in a more junior capacity, when the original PC game was being crafted.

"I joined Rebellion just as *AvP* was being finished up," adds lead designer Alex Moore.

"I played the title at university," chips in producer Paul Mackman, keen to establish his veteran credentials at the expense of arousing the suspicion that, being a student, it wasn't a legit copy he was addicted to. "I'm coming to it as much of a fan as a developer."

"I think that's true for all of us," interrupts Jones, pointing out that Rebellion have changed a lot since 1999. "Our passion for the *AvP* franchise has

never diminished. One way or another we've been working towards making this game for a very long time."

The three senior developers fail utterly at revealing any inner turmoil that might exist over how the *AvP* backstory has been developed in the time that it's been outside Rebellion's influence. However, there's the sense that the team are pleased to be going back to the source material that directly fed the Dark Horse comics, and Rebellion's own early game translations.

"I don't think it's fair to say that we're ignoring the *AvP* films," says Paul Mackman. "There's good stuff in there..." (true, the credits were particularly pleasing) "...but to be fair our primary

ETA
EARLY
2010

reference point, film-wise, is James Cameron's *Aliens*, Ridley Scott's *Alien* and also the original *Predator* movie. But we take inspiration from anywhere that's appropriate really."

Of all the movies, the underrated *Alien³* probably provides the better entry point for those keen to immerse themselves in the new game's timeline. This latest *AvP* is set roughly 200 years from now; 30 years on from the events on Fiorina 'Fury' 161 shown in *Alien³*; 20 before *AvP2* (movie) and 170 before the comical happenings in *Alien Resurrection*. Basically, you can be fairly certain that Ellen Ripley won't be making an appearance.

This time the setting is Freya's Prospect – a colony not unlike *Aliens'* Hadley's Hope.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Avoids prequel nonsense
- ✓ Uses survival horror with action
- ✓ Trophy kills for added giggles
- ✓ Hints of multiplayer awesomeness
- ✗ You might shit yourself

"It feels like the franchise is coming home"

Tim Jones, *Aliens vs Predator* project leader

THE STORY SO FAR...
ALIENS VS PREDATOR

JAGUAR? WHAT?
A real kid at school got an Atari Jaguar and said AvP was good.

PC VERSION
The proper version arrives. There is much celebrating.

TAKEN ELSEWHERE
Months build on AvP with their own sequel.

Colony Wars
GOT THEIR GROOVE BACK
AvP returns to its spiritual home.

1995

1999

2002

2009

Check out those dreadlock physics!



Aliens come from all directions, especially "directly above".

ALIENS THE RPG: RIP

What happened to the other *Aliens* games that were smudges and bleeps on the motion tracker of PC gaming? Well, the *Aliens* RPG has bitten the dust and melted through five separate floors at developer Obsidian's digs; while Gearbox's *Alien: Colonial Marines* has gone AWOL, presumably bumped into late 2010 or beyond by the more imminent release of *AvP*. With the added development time the latter will hopefully become a co-op barnstormer, but it's sad to see the *Aliens* RPG go. Beyond BioWare's *Mass Effect* there aren't many sci-fi RPGs – even if the concept art dug up from the game's grave does raise eyebrows: were they making an *Aliens* game, or a new *Gears of War*?

Not quite rock, paper, scissors. Unless rocks bleed acid and paper tears out spines.

which is on a planet bearing a slight resemblance to *Predator's* Guatemalan jungle setting. The doomed colonists have stumbled across a cache of alien eggs, each one a home to one of those oh-so insistent and creepy facehuggers.

The difference between the site of the eggs in the *Aliens* movie and this game, is that they are found in the apparent ruins of another alien civilisation – that of the Predators. Obviously the colonists are soon host to the acid-blooded uglies, while the silenced airwaves attract the intervention of US Colonial Marines.

"The Company is still up to its

movies it was in establishing the early years of the Company and why it might have become so driven to 'build better worlds'. No doubt this *AvP* game will develop the theme that greed and profit have always been a bigger threat to humanity than any creature.

JUST ADD STORY

"Our brief for the original game was never narrative focused," says Jones, "but with this one it was absolutely one of our key goals for the game: to deliver a really rewarding and cinematic story that would make the most of the three perspectives that the game's campaigns

trouble.

The point is that we all know what each race is capable of, as well as their methods and technology, so where can we expect surprises to come from?

"I think it's fair to say that in a world where first-person military shooters are commonplace, this is really an opportunity for us to deliver fresh gameplay that most gamers won't have experienced," says Jones. In particular he's proud of the ability of the Predator to use his vision modes and leap around the environment in order to stalk prey and remain stealthy.

"The leap mechanic is unique to our version of *AvP* and that's really enabling for the player," says lead designer Alex Moore. "It's not something I've seen in very many first-person shooters at all."

Having seen this leap mechanic in action it appears to work by you seeking a green go-here area with the crosshair and pressing a button that will zip you across to that spot. That may not sound all that impressive, but since players playing the Predator will be able to launch onto vertical surfaces as well as the obvious horizontal

As a xenomorph your tail whip will be a lethal technique.

"We all know what each race is capable of so where can we expect surprises?"

nefarious ends," says Mackman, referring to Weyland-Yutani, the all-pervasive corporation that finances extra-solar expansion and is hell-bent on capturing specimens of alien life, regardless of the long-term risk to humanity, or short-term risk to its staff.

"They're still pursuing their weapons programme, which was established by Ash in the first film and Carter Burke in *Aliens*."

If there was good stuff in the *AvP*

will provide."

Regardless of what people recall from previous games in the series, most will be familiar with how the game's cast operates: the aliens have acid for blood, attack with tooth, tail and claw and are utterly relentless in their pursuit of flesh to press their drooling quartz teeth into; Predators skulk in the shadows and rattle their mandibles; while the Marines spit out pulse rounds and quotable lines at the first sign of



PLANET HOLLYWOOD

Predator does *Aliens* - Ripley might re-emerge



AvP2's Loader was just scenery. Here's hoping...

It seems even Hollywood has realised that the *Aliens* vs *Predator* movies were complete shit. News reaches us that Robert Rodriguez will be directing *Predators*, which appears to want to do for the original Arnie movie what *Aliens* did for *Alien*, only 20 years after the fact. Earth forces going after an extraterrestrial and invisible nuclear superpower is an interesting idea.

In related movie news, Sigourney Weaver, nearing 60, has expressed an interest in playing Ellen Ripley again. Given that the new *Alien* film is reputed to be a prequel, Ellen's mum might be the best she can hope for.

HUNTERS AND HUNTED

Who's packing what in *AvP*

MARINES

Your average United States Colonial Marine comes heavily armed. Besides their ballistic armor, they pack an M41A pulse rifle with an under-slung grenade launcher; the M56 – a massive machine gun that automatically tracks targets; and an M240 flamethrower able to kill aliens without the hassle of acidic blood spraying everywhere. Despite this, Marines rarely live to claim their dinner, let alone a pension.

PREDATORS

Creatures of tradition, the Predators tend to use remarkably low-tech weapons: wristblades, telescopic spears, spear guns, daggers, and net guns. The only high-tech gear they seem to carry are the shoulder-mounted plasma cannon (which is just cool), the smart disc (fantastic against aliens), and that nuclear bomb wristwatch.

ALIENS

The aliens don't use weapons of any kind. But then when you have skin that is really armor plating, blood that is molecular acid, hands that end in claws that punch through plate steel, and a tail that slices people in two, you don't need a gun.



The Predator's got a range of ultra-violent kill moves. What happens next?

Marines need to be separated before they can be taken out...

...which makes them a bit more deadly than mere alien fodder.

A TRIUMVIRATE OF DEATH

Will Porter reports on *AvP's* E3 appearance

IN MANY WAYS you already know the score with the new *Aliens vs Predator* – it's essentially taking the much-loved PC model of years gone by and sprucing it up for the teenagers who weren't around at its beginning. This in itself is no bad thing, and the fact that it's being developed by Rebellion – the chaps who did the original *Jaguar*

version and subsequent PC follow-up (you know, the one that people actually played) – gives this game much respectability.

It's hard not to feel a pang of longing when you first see the Predator's gameplay – leaping cloaked from tree to tree, listening in on red/orange Colonial Marine blobs on the infrared HUD as they talk amongst themselves, and then warming up the old shoulder-mounted triangle-o-death plasma gun.

THE JUNGLIST

Playing as the ugly dreadlocked one is all about vertical gameplay – keeping your balance, and scanning the environment below you for enemy movement. The tree-top gymnastics are aided by a marker that you place on viable spots that then triggers your Predator to leap there.

Another enticing feature though is the ability to record the voices of people you listen in on – then later drawing soldiers out into ambushes by replaying the voices of their dead associates. It's a ploy that certainly worked on Arnie's gang.

As for the Colonial Marines, well you know what to expect: a misty,

As a marine, set up and maintain turrets to fend off alien attacks.



"There's little doubt *AvP* will be an absolute blinder"

metal-encased base with grids for floors and ceilings and all the pulse rifles, beeping motion trackers and screaming soldiers that Weyland-Yutani can provide. Oh, and the automated turrets from the director's cut of *Aliens* – the one people judge you over, should you not have seen it.

There's no doubt here, as you move between wounded Marines soldering doors and shoring up defences against an imminent onslaught that Rebellion

have nailed the feeling of tension – although whether it'll be rattetted up to the levels seen in Monolith's *AvP2* is still unknown.

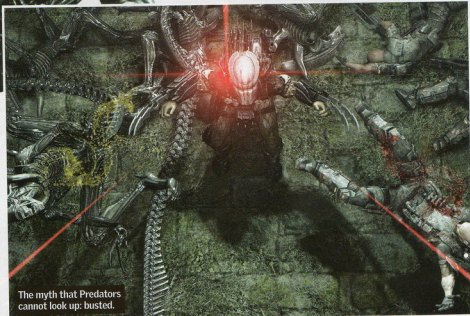
What's definite, however, is that when the aliens do put in an appearance their AI isn't lacking – they're always in different and unexpected spots and they're always noticeably hunting you down. You can pretty much guarantee that most of your Marine chums won't be making it through the night.

This said, if we're being over-cautious in extolling *AvP's* virtues then there's a good reason – the last notable PC game Rebellion developed was *Shellshock 2: Blood Trails* (issue 206) which was truly an abomination: an indelible black mark in the history books of gaming.

With this in mind, if there's something to be feared other than acid-riddled xenomorphs then it's that mission objectives will seem a smidge bog-standard. Having to knock out a bunch of generators to gain access to a Marine base while playing as a Predator, for example, isn't a crime – but we've knocked out similar generators plentiful times before.

So while there's little doubt that the new *Aliens vs Predator* will be an absolute blinder, with the game's release so far away we're not going to tempt fate with rampant pre-ordering just yet... **PET**

Aliens are still as phallic as Geiger intended.



The myth that Predators cannot look up: busted.

ones, they'll also have to take into account their profile in relation to their prey, since even when cloaked a Predator isn't truly invisible.

"The Predator is about being in trees and monitoring the people below him, making sure that he picks the right moment to attack rather than just blundering in there like a tank," says Mackman. "It opens up all sorts of gameplay possibilities. We're taking those kinds of steps forward with the alien player as well."

MARINE SNACKS

As Jones is quick to add, regardless of what people will expect, and what their experiences are with other games in the series - "crawling on the walls and ceilings and hiding in the dark to pounce on your prey and then kill them in gruesome ways" - isn't an experience you're going to get from *Call of Duty*.

As for the Marine player, it's not about shooting guys behind cover. "You have to enter the darkness and find your foe as much as it finds you," says Mackman, hinting that the AI isn't simply concerned with overwhelming the player with numbers.

The xenomorphs may be relentless killing machines, but there are situations

where they'll know when to hold back.

Likewise the Predator will likely use surprise and fall back into the shadows if overwhelmed.

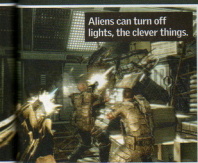
So although *AvP* is being designed as an FPS, survival horror and stealth is as much a focus of design as all-out action.

The Marine is clearly there to fulfil the action side of things, with his pulse rifle and under-slung grenade launcher, moving up to the smart gun and a trademark shotgun (handy for close encounters, obviously). It's those pesky shadows and his bleeping motion tracker that will help lade on the tension.

For the aliens, the trick is to make use of all the surfaces, use the shadows, get in close and strike hard and fast.

"It's important for us to make sure that a single alien is a deadly threat to the player, because they are one of the scariest monsters in the universe," says Jones, highlighting a problem that has blighted many an *Aliens*-themed game in the past. "Even when you're up against two or three of them you're really in trouble, so the times when we really ramp it up and throw significant numbers of them at you, you're really going to have to be very tool-up with weaponry to even stand a glimmer of a chance."

"I don't think players are going to be in any way disappointed with the number of enemies that they face at any one time. It's going to keep people on their



Aliens can turn off lights, the clever things.

"So what are you guys doing after this?"

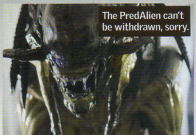


BROKEBACK HORIZON

You know you want to

There'll be no contradiction to any of the movies in *AvP*. In fact there appears to be an aim to create entry points for players, whether people are coming to the game directly from the original PC titles, from the recent movie abominations or any movie in general for that matter, whether it's *Event Horizon* or *Brokeback Mountain*.

"However you come to this title it will make sense to you and you should enjoy it," assures Mackman. "There should be something for everyone here. And that's our intention: to make something that meets a much wider audience."



The PredAlien can't be withdrawn, sorry.

Get too close to an exploding alien, and you'll catch a face full of acid blood.

"Hello, have you considered letting Jesus into your life?"


THREE'S CAMPAIGNY

All-new *Aliens vs Predator*, like its predecessors, will ship with three campaigns and three stories that will, we're told, make sense in their own right. "They interlock," says Paul Mackman, *AvP*'s producer, "so you as one species will be reacting to the actions of another species, in the same environment potentially. There are crossover moments, small and large, but you can enjoy each campaign and each story in an independent fashion, so while you could play one campaign and understand one story, playing all three will give you a full understanding of the narrative."


Monolith's *AvP2* offered a similar framework upon which the three main protagonists intertwined and affected the missions of the other. But for *Rebellion* this is new ground, and as they like to point out, it's been more than eight years since *AvP2*. The vast majority of gamers who'll be playing the new game will have minimal experience of those that preceded it. If *AvP2* was so well constructed, why not build on it's foundation?

AvP2 is worth seeking out if you haven't played it.






"Safety in numbers has been the lesson we should all take away from the movies"



Playing as the alien, you'll be able to scale walls and ceilings.



Predators can tear out aliens' inner jaws, which doesn't go down too well.

toes and make them terrified."

There will be times in the game when teamwork is an essential part of strategy.

Safety in numbers has been the lesson we should all take away from the movies (that, and, don't open the damn airlock), and while *AvP* isn't a squad-level game other characters you meet and fight alongside – regardless of which species you're playing as – will be there to offer respite from the sense of vulnerability that will play out.

"One of the key things we're trying to achieve with the game is that it feels very physical – that everything you do is fully connected with the world," explains Jones. "That helps us with making you feel vulnerable because you're not a disembodied game entity in the world. That ties into when you connect very physically with the characters right in front of you."

Such physicality is demonstrated by visceral nature of melee combat in the game. Previous games required only blind pummeling of the attack key when up close, whether you were swiping alien claws or a Predator's wrist blades. The new *AvP* will open up trophy kills if you put a decent sequence of blows together, or are about to make

a surprise attack. For the alien it might be the old pierce-and-lift tail manoeuvre, or a diagonal slice that carves a person in two parts. For the Predator it's the swift removal of the spinal column (although having seen it repeated four times in one brief play session, it's already becoming passé).

"The gore kill moments are really a pay-off that you have for successfully completing a series of melee attacks," says Paul Mackman. "We're offering a relatively simple but hopefully deep melee combat system, such that your success can be gauged on the kind of kill moves you can pull off."

LEAVE HIM, HE'S DEAD

The three-way battles that will identify the single-player side of *AvP* will be mirrored in the multiplayer. Of course *Rebellion* are in no mood to reveal anything specific about what gameplay modes to expect, only that, according to Jones, there will be a variety, "from the traditional, to ones that really make the most of the different species and the way they interact."

A full co-operative multiplayer campaign is on our wish list, but even just the traditional would do us fine, since it was *Rebellion* that did much to nail co-operative survival years before

Left 4 Dead was even thought of. Suggestions that Valve's zombie shooter might have stolen *AvP*'s thunder prompts a response that could be telling: "L4D takes the approach of a parody," says Mackman, "it's not a scary game as such. It's tense, but it's not the same kind of game as *AvP*. Yes it's co-operative, yes it's got a run-through area if you're comparing it to the original *AvP* but compared to what we're doing with multiplayer..." A-ha! "Well, we're not talking about that at this point. We're only saying that fans won't be disappointed."

Regardless of whether *L4D* is influencing the design of the multiplayer side of *AvP*, *Rebellion* are aware that although an endless parade of games have borrowed from *AvP* over the years, there are games that are paying back that influence in return. However, it's not any one title that is inspiring *Rebellion* to get this one game just right.

More than the template of the classic games in the *AvP* lineage, *Rebellion* are holding up the increasing levels of polish and accessibility that modern action games offer. Like us, *Rebellion* are of the opinion that today's FPS games are pretty amazing, and, like us, they want *Aliens vs Predator* to be counted among the very best. **PC**