

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 218 APRIL 2010

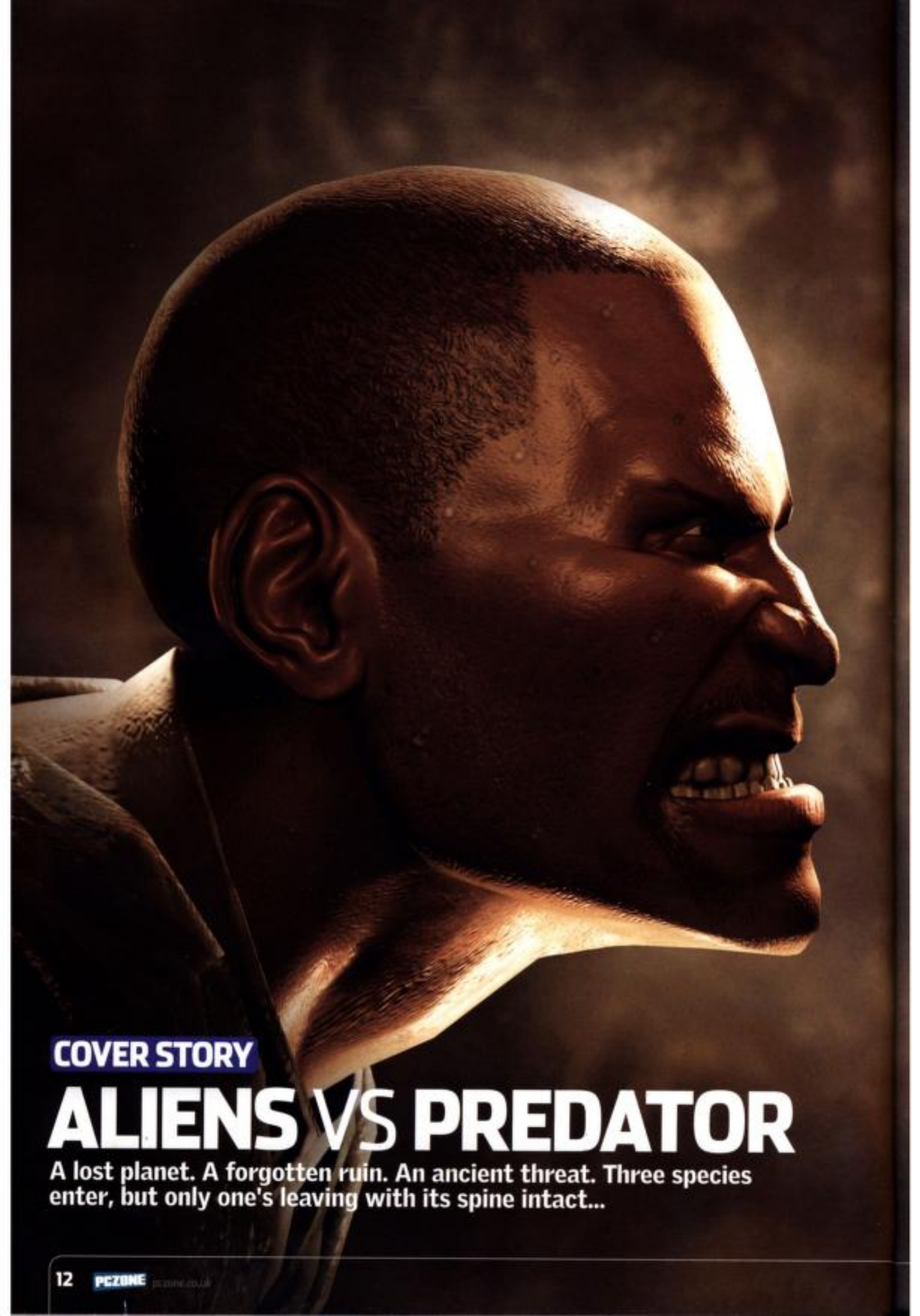
THE WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW

ALIENS

VS

PREDATOR

SAVAGE. DARK. AND ULTRA VIOLENT



COVER STORY

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

A lost planet. A forgotten ruin. An ancient threat. Three species enter, but only one's leaving with its spine intact...



WE DIDN'T THINK it'd be easy to rekindle a love of all things *Alien*. Sure, you can talk about the Ridley Scott film down the pub, wet-eyed and powered by a mixture of nostalgia and booze, but it's been a long time since it's felt current. The *Aliens vs Predator* films, as you know, never happened and don't exist. Nor does anything past the third film. So our passion for our soggy chitinous friends remained in hypersleep, until we were awoken to find Rebellion taking the helm of the series they created a decade ago. A triptych of adventures, one mired in fear, the others saturated with the most diabolical sort of violence you ever did witness. Get the sick bag ready.

PAGE

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"There was one leap, from 2D to 3D, but we're still playing the same games that we've always played"



Gary Bracey, today.

it to be 100% accurate. We don't want your avatar to be mistaken for you in a game scene getting your throat cut, getting your eyes gouged out, or even just walking along.

When you're talking about photorealistic representations – Digimask taken to its nth degree of accuracy, so that the light framing your hair is perfectly right or whatever – I think at that point you start becoming just a little bit disconcerted about it. It is a bit like artificial intelligence.

We've never really considered the philosophical implications.

The sea change for videogames still has not happened. There was one leap, from 2D to 3D, but, really, we're still playing the same games that we've always played. The interaction in over 90% of new games is similar to what we were playing 25 years ago. I don't think core game design has moved on as much as the technology. And that is a real shame.

There could be someone out there right now with the most revolutionary interactive gaming idea who cannot get it off the ground, because the publishers he or she has seen have said, "I'm sorry but this does not conform to what we know as being a videogames and therefore we cannot risk millions of dollars being spent on the development."

There's some interesting tech on the horizon.

In 10 years from now you'll have a set-top box that'll be your entertainment delivery system. It's the smart people coming up with genuine ways of revolutionising the control method of gaming.

I went into a 3D virtual environment in France made by Dassault Systems. It was amazing. I wanted to be sick, but it was incredible. That holodeck-style utterly immersive environment is where we'll be in 2020. **PC**

Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

PCZONE Swears

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
- ✓ To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

PCZONE Badges



CLASSIC
(90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-scoring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED
(75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP
(0-19%)
PCZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know - it's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.



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ALIENS VS PREDATOR

The triumvirate of terror returns.
Is it as good as you remember?



74

74 MASS EFFECT 2

You've seen all 200 trailers. Can the game be as good as they promise? Yes it damn well can!



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88 BORDERLANDS: THE ZOMBIE ISLAND OF DR NED

BORDERLANDS: MAD MOXXI'S UNDERDOME RIOT

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LEGO INDIANA JONES 2



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As the months have gone by, have Cryptic built a better game?

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PCZONE Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



REVIEW SALIENS VSPREDATOR

Alright boys,
break it up.

AT A GLANCE...

Perhaps the most gut-wrenchingly violent game we've ever witnessed, a terrifying single player game, and a clever multiplayer experience to boot.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

3.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 256MB NVIDIA 7900/GTI X1800 or better.

HOW IT STACKS

ALIENS VS
PREDATOR 2 93%

ALIENS VS
PREDATOR (2000) 91%

ALIENS VS
PREDATOR 82%

"Yep, this is your problem
right here - severed trachea."



ALIENS VS PREDATOR

It's not a nice thing, having *Steve Hogarty* hug your face

DEVELOPER Rebellion
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE [sega.com/
games/aliens-vs-predator](http://sega.com/games/aliens-vs-predator)
ETA 19 February
PRICE £29.99

MY FAVOURITE SOUND, probably out of all of them, is the ones made by aliens when they're being horrifically slaughtered in their second film, *Aliens*. It is, I think, based on a heavily distorted recording of a trumpeting elephant, sped up to make it absolutely terrifying in a way only the panicked, high-pitched scream of a flailing pachyderm can be.

In second place it's the dense, tinny shred of a pulse rifle. Then there's the muffled, static veil draped over your ears when the Predator switches to thermal vision, married with his exotic, guttural clucks as he lops his tongue about inside his mandible box-mouth. Sexy.

Every *Aliens vs Predator* game has understood the importance of replicating the most aurally recognisable aspects of its characters, and this release continues

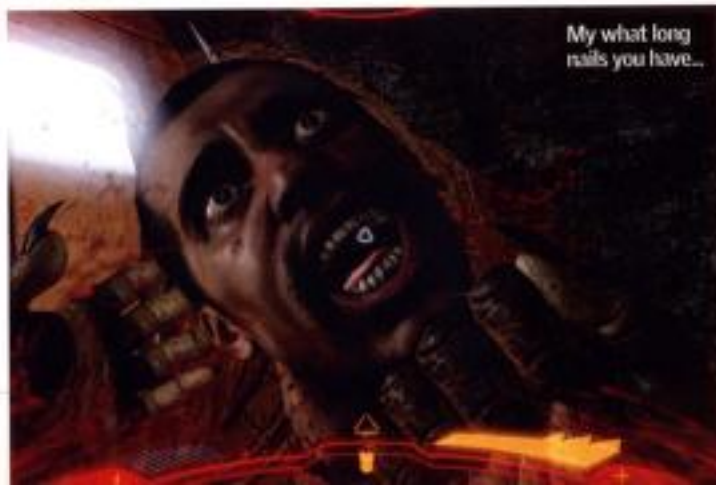
that tradition. It sounds incredible. Incredible enough to make me want to say words like "aural soundscape" and "crunchy sonic feast". Here's a game that's mostly about inflicting horrendous injuries on deserving creatures, and it's one in which you'll appreciate every sinewy crunch, gargled howl, bloody slosh and hollow snap.

Aliens vs Predator is sickeningly violent - more so in one of the three campaigns than the others, admittedly - in ways that are borderline comical and dancing on the periphery of decency.

GORE-TASTICAL

Lovely, spine-tearing, eye-socket spearing madness then. Where the films lost credibility the moment they went PG, Rebellion's *AvP* wears its 18 certificate with pride. These are Schwarzenegger's Predators and Ripley's aliens. Sadly, these

My what long
nails you have...



"This game doesn't flinch in showing you brutality on a level not seen since the early films"

"Now that I've got your full attention..."

are the same one-dimensional barking space marines you've seen a thousand times before, but the point stands – this game doesn't flinch in showing you brutality on a level not seen since the early films. The good ones.

NO YUTANI

So, evil megacorp Weyland-Yutani have found some ancient ruins on a distant planet, and in their efforts to exploit the artifacts found within they've attracted the attention of the ruin's guardians: the tribal, dreadlock-sporting Predators. (Bit of a pedant's minefield, this review, but we'll stick to calling the angry monsters 'Predators' for the sake of our sanity). The planet also happens to be home to a colony of Giger's xenomorphs, thereby allowing for the classic three-way struggle seen in both of the previous games to erupt all over again.

These campaigns straddle the same plot arc, giving you three perspectives from which to view the various goings-on, and three markedly different experiences. The Marine draws the short straw, a panicking, fleshy sack of prey permanently seconds from being



This sort of thing happens when you're not the main character.

scythed in two by a swishing xenomorph tail. It's a campaign of fear, into which Rebellion stir a steady stream of ratcheted tension. The cautionary beeping of your motion tracker is such a recognisable device that it hardly needs explaining, but here you go: the closer a moving object is to you, the higher pitched and more rapid the beep. The thing generates fear.

Registering false positives in nearly every darkened corner, the environment

takes pleasure in suggesting random shadows might contain dripping alien death, and for the first 10 minutes you won't even meet one of the things. You'll be yelping at vents, alarmingly shaped shadows and dangling bits of wire which, in a case of misjudged engineering, look identical to the tails of lackadaisical, ceiling-dwelling aliens.

The Alien campaign, on the other hand, is a reduced affair. Weapons and frippery are replaced by tooth and claw,

and the unique ability to climb on any surface allows you to stalk marines from the darkness like a pervert Spider-man. You're the smarter-than-your-average specimen known as Number Six, receiving curiously detailed orders from your Queen (who's kind enough to mark objectives on your HUD, in between shitting out a thousand eggs) and fighting to save her and your colony from the nefarious human threat.

Rookie

STIMS • C • • •

NOW AND THEN

Nostalgia is wrong, everything really was shit 10 years ago...

2000



MARINES (2000)

The original AvP opened with you standing in a giant, hollow box, while a man on a tiny TV awkwardly told you that everybody was dead and you were to make your way to an airlock via a room full of sterilised alien eggs. It was rather silly.



ALIENS (2000)

So excited were Rebellion about their xenomorphs being able to clamber up walls, the first level of the Alien campaign resembled an Escher painting. Felt less like you were an Alien, and more like you were a large, sweating hamster.



PREDATOR (2000)

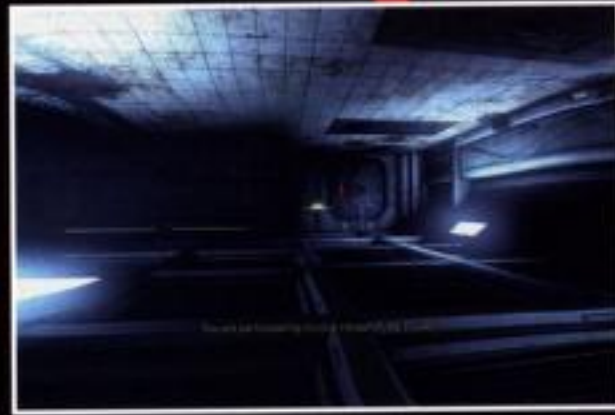
You appear from somewhere, for some reason, and chase low-poly humans around. You feel confused, incapable of understanding why you exist, or why your face splits open like a Terry's Chocolate Orange.

2010



MARINES (2010)

Now, you wake up after the team dragging your unconscious body to the infirmary are ambushed by aliens. You've only got a pistol and some flares, and all of the corridors are doing their best to scare you. It is rather scary.



ALIENS (2010)

You're the most awesome drone around, formed by Weyland-Yutani's research division and studied by one Doctor Groves. When you climb on the ceiling, it really feels like you're climbing on a ceiling. Truly magical.



PREDATOR (2010)

You arrive from space, very annoyed at the humans for dicking about in your temple. Your mates give you a tutorial, before you set off to help out some "Youngbloods". It's like *Saving Private Ryan* crossed with a road trip movie.



Predator fingers taste awful.



As ever, it's behind you.



Behind door number three is the Predator campaign, a more technical character who boasts thermal optics, camouflage, a plasma cannon, proximity mines, a big spear and a sharpened Frisbee. He can leap great distances; holding down the Shift key projects a cursor on to platforms you're pointing at, and, if it's a valid platform, the spacebar will cause him to jump to that place in a very dramatic fashion. Separating the marines and ambushing them individually is the Predator way.

DIFF'RENT FOLKS

That's the cast, of which some work better than others. The Marine's campaign has clearly had the most time, care and attention paid to it. It's the longest of the three, features real voice actors, where the others use subtitles and squeaks, and starring a spunky lady marine alongside captain something, who you must save from an alien death.



Best fearful, panicked expression in games?

As encounters with the indigenous population increase, you waver pleasingly between the roles of predator and prey by virtue of occasionally dropping all of your best guns down a hole, leaving you with a pistol, your wits, a dark corridor and an infinite supply of extremely short-lived flares.

Your odds are regularly being shaken up in this way, ensuring that you spend enough time genuinely fearing the blinking dots on your motion tracker, swiveling and starting at the flickering shadows cast by your tossed flares, and enough time happily and fearlessly popping their acid-filled phallic heads with grenades and smartguns.

It's worth mentioning just how pretty Giger's skittering sex metaphors are, too. Great greasy things, are the aliens, moving unpredictably along walls and ceilings, at all times beautifully animated and intricately detailed. As absurd as it sounds, their flowing, flicking tails are their most convincing component, snaking behind their skeletal forms as they corner and leap from surface to surface. In the Alien campaign, you'll spend real minutes chasing your physics-powered tail.

Your armoury increases to include a shotgun and a powerful scoped rifle,

"The campaigns are linear, checkpoint-pocked trots from one area to the next"



Stand too close and aliens' acid blood will ruin your complexion.

around about the same time you begin to encounter acid-spitting aliens and the Freud-baiting facehuggers.

Inevitably, when your objective changes focus and you find yourself pitched against human opponents, the change in pace throws the Alien's combat into sharp relief. Instead of frantically searching walls and ceilings for scuttling enemies, you're seeking out enemies who intelligently find cover. The notion of an enemy who, at this late stage, doesn't simply sprint towards you

in an attempt to stab you from every angle at once feels oddly unnatural but wholly welcome.

Otherwise, you're dragging your lonely self through some scenic environments, locations through which all three campaigns pass. Marines have their cold, metallic, space-age grime. Aliens prefer their homes to resemble the interior of a giant decaying anus: dank, maze-like hives peppered with facehugger-bearing eggs. Predators have their vaguely Mayan tombs, riddled

"In the Alien campaign, you'll spend real minutes chasing your physics-powered tail"



with switches and temples and at least one ancient combat arena (inside of which every campaign gets to have a boss fight).

No matter who you choose to play as, the campaigns are linear, checkpoint-pocked trots from one area to the next, and one from which every ounce of fat has been trimmed. AvP's campaigns are worryingly short – you could race through the Alien campaign in under two hours, and the Marine's in four – but they're densely packed with well-constructed set pieces, engineered scares and often striking locations. The Predator campaign, in particular, is almost puzzle-like in delivering small

arenas of patrolling humans and tasking you with murdering the lot of them. Your distract ability allows you to target a single marine and lure him to a point using a voice recording, a highly telegraphed (they shout things like "I think the noise came from here!" when they reach the bit of floor you told them to go to) but useful tactic which creates an opportunity to grab and violently dismember the wandering victim.

Aliens grab too. And where Predators jab wristblades into eye sockets, aliens spear chests on barbed tails and plunge their inner-mouths through foreheads to regain health. You'll gag on your



"Right, now how do I series link Mock the Week on this?"



own nostalgia gland as, when playing as the Alien, you realise you can still slash limbs off corpses and leave them lying about the place for their friends to find. Scooting up and down walls is at first disorientating, but soon becomes second nature – and as long as you're in the dark you can take a moment to relax and figure out if you're upside-down or not, just like a real alien probably does.

Darkness effectively makes you invisible to marines who aren't alerted to your presence, working very much like the Predator's cloaking device. Once they know you're nearby however, they'll poke about with flashlights until they've found your hiding place, requiring you to move and jump between shadows, hissing to lure individuals before tearing their faces off in showers of blood, skin and bone.

ALL IN

So those are the campaigns. Three discrete experiences, each one adapted to suit the mechanics of its given species, with the Marine's more fully realised than the others. Number Six's journey ends all too abruptly, and does away with the fun larval stages in *AvP2*. It literally (and this isn't a spoiler) winces and dies (maybe) of sadness, three hours before you'd expect.

The Predator's amazing and explosive murder-jant, on the other hand, doesn't offer the level of tension you experience as a huddled, terrified Marine. What it offers instead is glorious disgust. Hitting

those fear-notes by draping silhouettes of scary objects in front of you is something Rebellion excel at, and the Predator campaign, while a panacea for the feeling of vulnerability, isn't left with having finished the Marine section, certainly isn't where *AvP*'s best bits lie.

They lie instead in the game's multiplayer, a collection of game modes lifted from the popular sports of the day: straight deathmatch; a *Left 4 Dead*-style Survival mode in which you and three other marines defend yourselves against waves of xenomorphs; a Domination game mode in which aliens and marines fight to control three points of the map; Infection, in which a team of marines is whittled down by aliens, with each fallen human joining the ranks of the increasingly powerful alien brood; and Predator Hunt, which pitches one player as the Predator, slaughtering other players before passing the mantle on to the one who bests him in battle.

Crucially, they all work within the context of the three characters and their abilities. Survival is the co-op mode you dreamt of after watching *Aliens* – a desperate last stand against an unending tide of flashing claws and teeth. It's a basic, boiled down affair though, featuring nought but players, their guns (with an occasional auto-aiming, xeno-seeking smartgun drop), and an endless supply of angry, angry scuttling enemies.

"I've got something on the end of my wristblades, could you take a quick look?"



This is blood. Get used to it.

Elsewhere, the straightforward three-way deathmatch appears finely balanced. Both aliens and Predators can perform their unblockable trophy kills by moving behind enemies and hammering the E key. Once locked into the gruesome animation, the attacker is then at his most vulnerable, creating the potential for a ridiculous conga line of trophy killers, or for one intelligent player to hold back and toss a few grenades or plasma cannon rounds into the fray. Marines lack the ability to tear bones right out of another player's body, and

instead rely on countering melee attacks, which gives them more than enough time to pile a few shotgun rounds into their stumbled victim.

THE BEST BIT

The multiplayer modes are fast paced – which makes sense, as more people are being stabbed and speared than shot – but it remains faithful to the fiction. Few concessions are made in porting abilities from the single-player campaign to multiplayer – admirably, you'll be cloaking and leaping from shadows as a Predator, dropping from the ceiling as an alien, and running away from moving objects as a marine.

The constant exchange of what are essentially backstabs doesn't grate either, instead the experience is closer to playing on an instagib server – that is, you'll kill, die and respawn with enough regularity that you'll place little value in your continuing existence, scoffing nervously at death as it buzzes by you over and over again.

Aliens vs Predator is a brilliantly authentic and cinematic experience, tinged with a vague sense that more could've been done with the single player to properly spear our eyeballs into attention. It's savage, dark, and ultra violent, just like we said on the cover, but holding it back from a higher score are

"Survival is the co-op mode you dreamt of after watching *Aliens*"



Maybe, out of all the aliens, this one just wants a hug.



The tiny mouth is the brains of the operation.

Yes it's Lance 'Bishop' Henriksen, and yes he does the voice.

Unarmed humans can be harvested.

These contact lenses can be buggers to take out.



"Why I oughta!"



Aliens are hard to surprise.

Alien and Predator campaigns that end too soon and don't reach a satisfying conclusion. Does it compare well to the rest of the series? Yes, of course it does, at times it tears the throat out of the previous two games and dances on their acid-speckled, increasingly decrepit corpses. But will it make as big an impact? No. It's old-school, a shooter from a decade past, and with that comes all the baggage you'd expect: often startling linearity, irrelevant plot and scenes two steps away from the *Modern Warfare*-style blockbuster set pieces to which we're fast becoming accustomed.

I'd argue that we wouldn't want it any other way when it comes to *Aliens vs. Predator*. It's deliciously gory, unwaveringly confident and spectacular fun. And, at the very least, it's far better than the dogshit films. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Dark. Very dark.
SOUND Straight from the movies
MULTIPLAYER 18 players. Lovely

- ✓ Looks and sounds authentic
- ✓ Shocking gore
- ✓ Marine campaign's terrifying
- ✓ Multiplayer will last
- ✗ Single player won't

82

Spine-tearingly fantastic