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83

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Aliens: Colonial Marines

"ANOTHER GLORIOUS DAY IN THE MARINE CORPS"

072

After years without a ping on the motion scanner, Matthew Pellett sees *Aliens: Colonial Marines* finally burst back into existence

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078



cover game

Aliens: Colonial Marines

The Colonial Marines' last stand is hopeless. The squad's ranks have already been decimated and as the last dribble of marines filter into the USS Sulaco's hangar bay, it's painfully obvious this place is destined to become their tomb. As one engineer hangs back and frantically begins welding the entry door shut, the cargo shutter at the other end of the dock rips open as though its reinforced metal frame were made of nothing more than sodden tissue paper.

It thumps an alien the size of a Tyrannosaurs Rex. First it grabs a squad mate busy squirting a flamethrower in its direction from the relative safety of an iconic Power Loader J-5000 – promptly ripping him in two through the armour. And then, after a cold and calculated glance in our direction, it darts over to where we're standing rooted to the spot, picks us up, and bites off our head with a loud crunch – bringing OPM's private demo to a grim close.

Xeno saga

"We remember from Aliens that the marines did expect a rescue," states Gearbox co-founder Randy Pitchford, by way of explaining just whose giblets are now lining the Sulaco's cargo bay floor. "More marines would show up if something went wrong. No marines did.

Something diverted them or interrupted that process."

At least, that's how the films left things hanging. With the keys to the canon and the means to now expand Aliens' history, Gearbox wants to challenge the supposed lack of back-up. Yes, it's true the USS Sulaco witnessed the last stand of the Colonial Marines' 2nd Battalion, 9th Regiment during Aliens' events. But what if the doomed squad's cries for help didn't go unnoticed? What if its back-up turned up, admittedly late, but equally ready for a fight? And what if – if you'll entertain the thought just a little longer – a tiny piece of interference from the meddling Weyland-Yutani Corporation helped return the USS Sulaco into LV-426's orbit (the moon from both Alien and Aliens) and repopulate the diminished xenomorph ranks before the rescue team arrived, setting up this harrowing and not altogether accidental encounter?



"It grabs a squad mate and rips him in two."

"The game is about the squad on the USS Sephora," says Pitchford. "They come to LV-426, they see the Sulaco in orbit, and they quickly discover there are some unknown life forms on board. They're able to get into the computer remotely and discover that something had gone very wrong. Then come the inevitable orders: board the Sulaco, discover what happened and land on LV-426. Of course once the marines do that, all hell breaks loose."

Alien breed

This is where our exclusive live demo begins. In a cut-scene, we see that the limping, fire-damaged Sulaco doesn't handle atmospheric re-entry well and crashes into LV-426. Then we're thrust into the action as the camera cuts to player character Winters being hauled to his feet by his superior. His head is still ringing, his vision is slightly blurred, but he's got sense enough to know that he should grab a shotgun before doing anything else.

There's only one path through the debris and it's a golden opportunity for Gearbox to ratchet up the tension. We spy a

Yep, this area is completely clear, you can... no, wait, I'm dead."

cover game

Aliens: Colonial Marines

■ "Get off me, you big brute!" It looks like close-quarters attacks will be handled via a QTE-style mechanism. Not always a popular feature...

ALIENS TIMELINE

A brief history of human/xenomorph interactions...

2140-2150

At some unspecified point during the mid-22nd Century the human colony of Hadley's Hope is formed on LV-426.

2177

While Ellen Ripley floats undiscovered in space, her daughter dies of cancer.

2178 (July)

After all contact with Hadley's Hope is lost, Ripley is sent to the colony alongside the Colonial Marines 2nd Battalion. 9th Regiment aboard the USS Sulaco. Three weeks later they arrive, discover sole survivor Newt and a horde of xenomorphs who quickly whittle down the Marines' numbers.

2178 (August)

The alien egg hatches and impregnates Ripley during hypersleep. When its acidic blood also causes a fire, an escape pod is jettisoned and lands on prison planet Fiorina 161 a day later. Newt and Hicks are killed while the facehugger impregnates Prisoner Murphy's dog.

2178 (October-November)

The USS Sephora, responding to the 9th Regiment's original backup request, travels to LV-426 where it finds the abandoned Sulaco. The squad boards the ship then attempts to land (somewhat unsuccessfully) on LV-426, where it encounters a xenomorph infestation. Game on again.

2381

Spaceship Betty docks with the USM Auriga and a xenomorph outbreak begins when the research aliens break out of their confinement cells. After much fighting, Ripley destroys a Newborn alien-human hybrid and lands the Betty on Earth with android Call on board. The doomed Auriga crash lands in Africa.

2101

The United States Colonial Marine Corp is formed by the National Security Act for interplanetary colonial and transport protection of American - and later the United American - people.

2122

The USSG Neostromo picks up a distress signal from the moon Shanon 3.V-426 and discovers an abandoned spaceship commonly known as 'The Derelict', home to hundreds of unknown eggs. Executive Officer Kane is impregnated with a xenomorph embryo which then hatches, evades capture and promptly grows in size and kills all crew on board apart from Newt and Officer Ellen Ripley. Ripley then escapes the ship via the Narcissus shuttle taking with the ship's cat and blows the alien out the airlock.

2178 (May-June)

The Narcissus, with Ripley and cat safely onboard in hypersleep, is rescued. Information about The Derelict is passed on to the inhabitants of Hadley's Hope and the Jordan family is sent to investigate, eventually getting impregnated for their troubles. They carry the xenomorph to the colony.

2178 (late July)

The atmosphere production plant on LV-426 is destroyed in a nuclear blast but Ripley, Newt, Hicks and android Bishop escape to the USS Sulaco along with a stowaway Queen and egg. When on board Ripley once again blows the alien out of the airlock to survive the encounter. The egg is undiscovered.

2178 (August)

The resulting alien kills almost every human in the prison before Ripley and Morpheus return the board, attacking the xenomorph with a literally shattering combination of molten lead and cool water. Ripley then sacrifices herself to prevent the Shadow Weyland-Yutani Corporation from obtaining a xenomorph sample for research.

2178 (August-October)

The Weyland-Yutani Corporation find the USS Sulaco orbiting Fiorina 161, turn it around and drive it back to its previous destination, LV-426, in search of more xenomorph samples. They just don't give up, do they?

2380

The eighth clone of Ellen Ripley is created on the USM Auriga from DNA matter discovered in 2350, complete with Alien Queen inside.



seemingly dead facehugger in a tank, but as Winters treads close the creature suddenly spasms into life and attacks the glass. In the next corridor a ceiling vent comes clattering down in an ominous yet pretty shower of sparks thanks to unknown pressure from above. All well-worn tropes, but still effective all these years on. The famed motion tracker reads no contact but Winters is understandably reticent to rely on it too much: when equipped, his weapon is holstered, leaving him aware of nearby movement but momentarily defenceless should anything choose to attack.

■ The venerable power loader may have met its match in the form of the giant alien Crusher beast.



"The goal is the best engine anyone's seen."



★ Gearbox worked with Syd Mead, the conceptual artist on *Aliens* and *Blade Runner*, to get the visual style just right.



"You see the milky trail from Bishop's body."

Marines is a labour of love. "There are so many neat, fun things we've been able to do," grins Pitchford. "Like what happened to Burke, and Hudson? They're there somewhere. What about that vent where Vasquez and Gorman martyred themselves with the grenade as the aliens horned in? All those things are fun play spaces that not only will you get to visit after the events have unfolded and see what happened, but you get to do it yourself in the game."

Facehugs and kisses

Pitchford has a long and incredibly endearing history of continuously being surprised by his own games during press demonstrations, but the enthusiasm with which he talks about *Aliens* is infectious. "You'll explore the cargo bay and see the milky-white trail from Bishop's ripped-in-half body," he continues. "And his legs, I guess. The dropship Bishop piloted, and that Ripley, Hicks and Newt all escaped on? You'll actually ride that dropship: it's still in the hangar."

Gearbox wants *Aliens: Colonial Marines* to provide closure. Closure not just for the fans, but for themselves too. If moments of the pre-alpha demo leave us cool in a couple of places, it takes merely seconds for feelings of encouragement to seep back in when we listen to the team profess



★ The co-op mode should bring an extra layer of panicky intensity to stand-offs like this.



M41A PULSE RIFLE

The standard issue weapon of the colonial marines and likely to be your bread and butter throughout the game. Fires caseless or near-piercing rounds and features an understating pump-action grenade launcher. The firm prop was apparently designed by James Cameron himself and built from a Thompson M1A1 submachine gun, a Remington shotgun and a SPAS-12 shotgun.

their love for the franchise. The studio has worked hard to ensure the game fits seamlessly into the canon and includes enough fan moments to satisfy personal cravings. With those pointers now ticked off, the focus shifts to nailing the combat and the atmosphere. The expected four-player co-op mode also needs to capture the fraught, panicked interactions between the marines.

If one thing resonates in our demo it's that Gearbox is obsessed with *Aliens*. Anything less than perfection is unlikely to meet its own internal standards, let alone anybody's else's. Certainly, the return of Colonial Marines suggests that the xenomorph invasion is back on track after the thoroughly disappointing *Aliens vs Predator*. Gearbox now needs to push on hard to ensure it really is the *Aliens* game the world has waited 25 years to play.

