

Aliens: Colonial Marines

Not your average bug hunt

The *Aliens* films have cast an undeniably large shadow across the games industry. Elements from the influential series have been cribbed throughout the years. Halo's Sgt. Major Avery Johnson is essentially Gurney Sergeant Al Apone with a different voice actor, and *Aliens*' USMC squad has provided archetypes for nearly every space and military shooter since its 1986 release. The fact that the series has provided so much inspiration makes it all the more difficult to reconcile the lack of a truly great *Aliens* game. I can't say whether Gearbox's *Aliens: Colonial Marines* is that game, but after spending a few hours playing it, I'm certainly leaning in that direction. Here are a few reasons why.

It's as tense as I'd hoped

Aliens was more of a straight-up action movie than its predecessor, but that doesn't mean that those slow-burn horror moments are gone. If you thought being stalked by a single xenomorph was tense, Ellen Ripley and a squad of Colonial Marines had to deal with hundreds of the creatures.

Gearbox does a great job of doling out moments of intense action with long sections where seemingly nothing happens. As any horror fan can attest, the scariest moments are also often in those quiet stretches. Walking in the tight corridors of the abandoned ship *Sulaco* is undeniably creepy, especially once I start noticing strange touches such as video cameras pointed at cocooned humans. Those xenomorph eggs placed at their feet couldn't have been mere coincidence. Something terribly wrong happened here, which adds an additional layer of tension and urgency to my actions. I cautiously sweep rooms with my pulse rifle ready, lighting up corners with my flashlight and agonizing over every ping of the motion tracker.

Those environments

Based on some of the demos I'd seen of the



game, I was concerned that *Colonial Marines* was going to feature too-long corridor sections with a sparse selection of larger areas. I was happy to see that the *Sulaco* itself is huge, and filled with plenty of visual and geometric variation. One of the coolest sections takes place in the ship's gravity well, a towering cylindrical room with a huge spinning centrifuge. It's hard not to be distracted by the device's constant motion, which adds an additional layer of paranoia when waves of xenos start popping out of vents and scampering down its sides.

I also explored Hadley's Hope, the colonist outpost from *Aliens*. There are tons of subtle references to the film, such as a corridor with

two nearly depleted sentry guns. That sense of familiarity made me geek out in moments like wielding the all-powerful smartgun. Casual fans might miss out on some of those references ("Hey! That's the facehugger that Burkes unleashed on Newt and Ripley!"), which is another incentive to rewatch the movies.

Xenomorphs are awesome

In multiplayer, players don't face off in teams of marines vs. marines. Instead, groups are divided between marines and xenomorphs. Players who take control of the xenos get a different experience, including a change in their vantage point. Instead of the first-person view that the rest of the game is built on, the camera pulls back and shows the aliens in all their chitinous glory. Gearbox's design director John Mulkey says the decision came in part because the creatures can scurry up and around walls and ceilings, which can get confusing without a reference point. Also, the xenos look sweet, and the team wanted players to appreciate every tail-lashing, acid spit, and claw strike. » Jeff Cook

Xenomorphs are adept at hiding in their environments. Nothing gets past the handy motion tracker, however.



The xenomorphs are just as agile and deadly as in the films. That whole "acid for blood" thing doesn't help, either.

