



▲ Old slimychops sums up our feelings on Colonial Marines perfectly: "Nrrrg-ugh."

Bugged hunt

# Aliens Colonial Marines

I got signals. I got readings, in front and behind

As you might hope, fighting aliens is the best bit of *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. They leap and scurry over walls; they scuttle across ceilings and rush in to attack, leaving you backpedalling amid sprays of panicked gunfire. There's almost a retro feel to the action as you spiral and circle to hit them, the concept of cover a long-distant memory. As the Pulse Rifles spit and flare to a backing of Xeno screams and marine shouts it really shows the game at its best, capturing the flavour of the movie beautifully and giving you the chance to take a starring role.

Colonial Marines – finally here five years after it was announced – most succeeds when Gearbox dials into that atmosphere. Creeping through corridors, Motion Tracker outstretched. Panicking when aliens come from every direction. Looking up at, er, something I'd



better not reveal (too spoilery) and getting excited to go there, even if it *makes no sense*. In fact, you'll do well to approach this as an *Aliens* theme park ride rather than a serious take on the story, as key elements pop out like rubber masks on a spring. The option to buy the T-shirt isn't presented at the end, but its inclusion wouldn't have been remotely shocking.

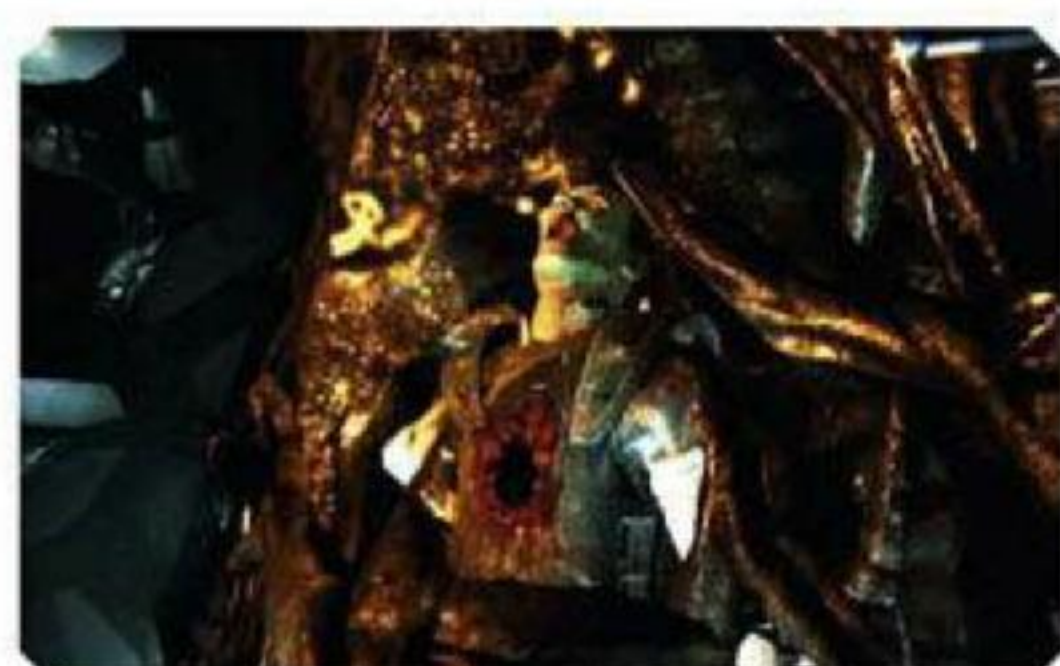
Almost anything you can think to name makes an appearance at some point here, and it doesn't so much stray from the established plot as waltz off into an alternate dimension. "Its atmospheric processor exploded like a 40-megaton bomb," says one marine of the surprisingly intact Hadley's Hope. Then there's a categorically dead character making a surprise return from the original film. When directly challenged by the game's own cast as to why they *cannot possibly be there*, they simply

reply, "Ah, well that's a longer story." Is it? You're meant to be dead and in another star system, so I'm pretty sure I can make time. When one of the red laser 'Pup' probes from *Prometheus* flies past at one point it confirms a fan fiction level of homage – enthusiastic and loving, but clumsy. Had Ash appeared and started making out with Bishop, I'd barely have blinked. You can't fault Gearbox for trying to please, and the attention to detail is impressive. That said, the Sheldon Coopers of the world will likely have an aneurysm at more than one point.

## Close encounters

Inconsistencies aside, this a serviceable shooter: entertaining but never more than perfunctory. The best of it takes the cinematic source material and works it into gameplay to create satisfying 'I'm in the movie!' moments (say it in





■ You meet the remains of the movie's cast early on. They're the lucky ones here, unfortunately.

a Ralph Wiggum voice for best effect). A perfect example has you trapped in a claustrophobic, shadowy room with a bunch of hit-and-run aliens dashing about. It leaves you spinning around with the Motion Tracker, nervously chasing signals as tails dart out of view.

Distressingly, this is the only time the Motion Tracker lives up to its potential. Its ability to scare has been nerfed by making it ping on-screen warnings

■ Face-Huggers make appearances, mainly as irritating QTE moments.

whether you're using it or not. It entirely removes any sense of threat, because you're consistently forewarned when something's coming – and even warned mid-battle if there's still stuff on the way. This reduces arguably one of the most effective cinematic devices for increasing tension to nothing but window dressing. Another less than successful addition

without using your mouth does go a long way, but where Colonial Marines falls is in its inability to break away from a very standard shooter mould. Things such as Weyland-Yutani troops stomping into the mix – presumably because we had to have some man-on-man gunplay in there somewhere. The cover-based conflicts they generate are acceptable

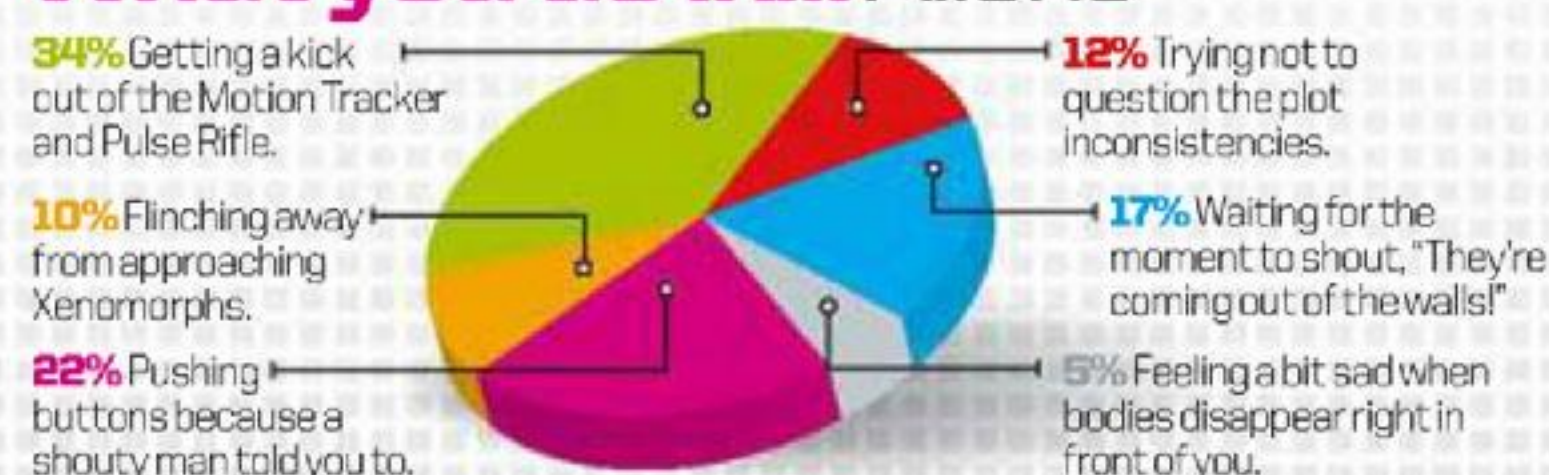
## “There's a fan fiction level of homage: enthusiastic but clumsy.”

is the door welding/cutting. It offers no strategic purpose (bar one level): it's simply a longer way to open doors. Then there's Bella. Not exactly game-breaking but certainly annoying, she's meant to be a battle-hardened marine yet sports long hair tied into adorable little buns and hoop earrings. Vasquez she is not.

Getting to see famous locations, iconic monsters and make all the right noises

but unspectacular. Another indication of the constraints Gearbox seemed compelled to squeeze the game into are the upgrade and challenge systems. The weapons have an embarrassingly limited off-the-shelf range of attachments to unlock – things like red dot sights, silencers and stocks – while there are rewards for things like 'gibbing five opponents in one mission' – the

### What you do in... Aliens







▲ The Power Loader fight is a glitchy low that feels forced.



▲ Best not get too close, as explodey acid alien blood can be nasty.



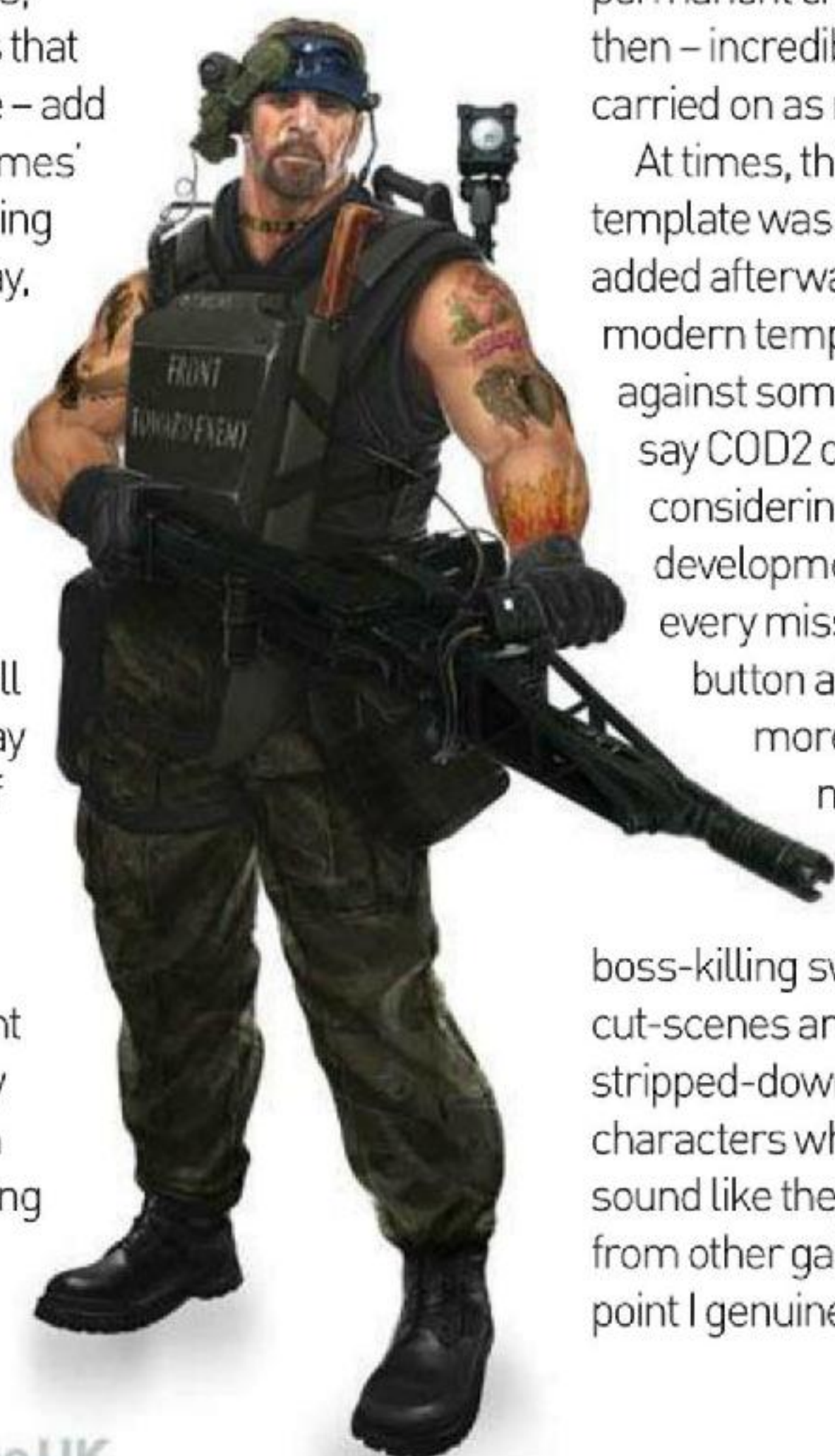
notifications for which can pop up in the middle of the action, instantly ruining the mood like a fart on a date.

### Mixed up

Other additions – acid-spitting aliens, tank-like Bull variants or blind ones that home in on sound and then explode – add little because they feel like other games' ideas. They at least don't take anything away, as it's never unpleasant to play, but you can't escape the fact that when Colonial Marines strays from its source it uses rote mechanics slotted in with little imagination. If you're fresh from Dishonored or Far Cry 3 (or even Black Ops II) the lack of creativity will be a shock. Those comparisons may seem unfair, but are an indication of the quality bar in 2013.

Visually, it's acceptable at best. There's some evocative lighting, but poor textures and oddly low-rent touches – aliens explode in chunkily modelled lumps, and bodies vanish almost instantly. Glitches and clipping issues are everywhere, the worst involving a boss fight with a Power

▲ These fraught alien encounters are the game's best moments, and capture the film perfectly.



Loader that kept getting punched through a wall and having to respawn. I also saw a companion NPC get scooped up by an alien and have her face bitten off. Clearly there was no prep for killing a permanent character, so she died twice, then – incredibly – popped to her feet and carried on as normal, very much alive.

At times, this feels like a basic FPS template was made and then aliens added afterwards. And not even a modern template. If I had to line it up against something of equal quality, I'd say COD2 or 3 – a telling comparison, considering Aliens' protracted development. Structurally almost every mission is a linear trek with a button at the end, often with little more result than revealing a

new button. Even boss fights mainly involve reaching a boss-killing switch. The cut-scenes are also very stripped-down, with characters who look and sound like they're on loan from other games. At one point I genuinely lost track of



#### Fighting the aliens

Combat is a trigger-twitching mess as you track Xenos and backpedal down corridors.

#### Attention to detail

Firing a Pulse Rifle. Hearing the Motion Tracker. Seeing Dropships. It's great fanboy fuel.

### LOVING

### HATING

#### Fighting human soldiers

If there are going to be Weyland-Yutani forces why can't they at least be the commandos that turn up in Alien 3?

#### Canon be damned

While certain elements are exciting, you'd need several parallel universes to explain them all.

#### Spit and polish

It's a rough and ready experience at times, with less than amazing looks combined with plenty of clipping and glitches.



▲ Spitters fire acid to create a ranged alien threat.

who was talking, and after scanning the crowd to see whose lips were moving I had to conclude it was me.

Online adds a little life – the excellent 'get to the choppa' Escape mode, which sees you racing to a dropship, basically is the film. The melee-based aliens never feel effective against soldiers, though, and as such are always your second team choice. We'll offer a full online review once the game is out. Until then, this adds up to something playable and occasionally atmospheric, but never extraordinary. I finished it twice (it's better on hardened difficulty) and enjoyed my chance to play at being a Colonial Marine – but ultimately it's let down by

its formulaic FPS frame and lack of polish. If Gearbox's quality scale has Borderlands 2 at one end and Duke Nukem at the other, Colonial Marines sits somewhere in the middle. **Leon Hurley**

