

Alien: Isolation

Putting fear back into the Alien franchise

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
- » **Publisher**
Sega
- » **Developer**
Creative Assembly
- » **Release**
2014

I hack into an archaic computer, trying to gain entry to a door that’s across the hall. I’ve already used a plasma torch to force my way into this section of Sevastopol Station, so I’m accustomed to improvisation. Sanctuary may only be a few hundred feet away, but in a few short seconds it seems impossibly far. A dark behemoth drops from the vents above, unfolding into a hulking nine-foot-tall form that’s instantly recognizable. It’s a xenomorph, and it’s hunting. It skulks down the hall, leaving me with one question: “What now?”

“Games in the past have looked at James Cameron’s ‘Vietnam in space’ angle, but

people haven’t really dived into the wealth of the original source of *Alien*,” says Alien: Isolation’s creative lead, Al Hope. Aliens has provided a reliable template for games – take a small squad of soldiers, put them in a sci-fi world, and watch things fall apart as alien hordes attack – but the original film has generally been overlooked. After playing Creative Assembly’s survival-horror game, I’m astonished it took this long.

Isolation taps into the feelings of helplessness that made the first film so great. You play as Ellen Ripley’s daughter, Amanda (see sidebar), and you have one mission: survive. Past Aliens games have diluted the

power of the xenomorphs, downgrading them from fearsome hunters to cannon fodder. In Isolation, you’re stalked by a single alien. The alien is driven by sense-based AI, meaning that he doesn’t follow scripted patrols or exhibit predictable behavior. He reacts to your actions and decisions, which creates a terrifying cat-and-mouse dynamic.

Unlike earlier Aliens games, the familiar motion tracker doesn’t highlight the direction I need to point my weapon. The thumping pings simply reinforce the terrifying feeling that I’m not alone. You have to manually pull the device up to see telltale blips on its screen, and Creative Assembly has added another

interesting dynamic. When the tracker is out, Amanda’s gaze is focused on its retro green display. Players can choose between focusing their eyes on the device or the environment, but not both simultaneously. Considering how adeptly the alien blends into the darker corners of the station, that decision can be vital.

As I crept through the station, I spent much of my time rooted in place. The alien was clearly stalking me, so I had to judiciously monitor its rough position on the motion tracker and through quick glances from behind cover. Some of the tensest moments came while hiding in lockers. Looking through the vents, I could see the creature warily

approach the door and move its domed head around for clues. Amanda has to hold her breath to avoid detection, adding an additional layer of tension. The creature isn’t dumb; if it sees the door close, it’ll rush after you and yank you out.

From what I learned from my demo and talking to Creative Assembly, the team is dedicated to delivering an uncompromising vision for their game. They’re intent on making a classic survival-horror game. It’s not a shooter. There won’t be any multiplayer. It’s the Alien game they say they’ve always wanted to play. On that front, they definitely won’t be alone. — Jeff Cork

Who Is Amanda Ripley?

Alien fans know that Ellen Ripley left a young daughter behind on Earth before the events of the first film. Alien: Isolation tackles several big questions, including what happened to Amanda Ripley and The Company’s relationship with the ill-fated Nostromo in the time period between *Alien* and *Aliens*.

“Sixty years have passed [since the end of *Alien*], and nobody had ever gone looking for it? That doesn’t make sense,” says Alien: Isolation design lead Clive Lindop. “In the modern day, when an airplane disappears in the Atlantic or a ship disappears, we spend millions of dollars looking for it to recover the black box or whatever it is. Who went looking for it, and if they did find it or if they didn’t find it, what happened to them, and why at the start of the second film does nobody know what happened?”

Amanda is an engineer, a career path that she drifted toward in the hope that she might eventually learn more about what happened to her mother. “When we meet her, which is in her mid-20s, her entire life has been driven by that question and all the different drama that’s surrounded it, and she’s been deeply affected by it,” Lindop says. “Then out of the blue one day, somebody from The Company turns up and says, ‘Look, the black box has been recovered, do you want to come and find the answers that you’re looking for?’”

It’s understandable why Amanda might leap at the opportunity to visit Sevastopol Station. “As for The Company,” Lindop says, “it kind of makes sense for them to take her along, because it makes a nice PR story and there are motivations for them to take her. It’s a simple collection drop; go and get it, bring it back. And then it all goes horribly wrong.”

Armed And Dangerous

Amanda was unarmed for the portion I played (which took place about halfway through the game), but players can scavenge parts to build weapons and defensive items. Creative Assembly wouldn’t provide specifics, but considering some of those parts included gasoline and pipes, a flamethrower seems likely. Design lead Clive Lindop says that even though players are armed, the alien remains a threat from start to finish. It will learn from player actions, so don’t be surprised if the AI begins to associate the telltale click of a reloading weapon with vulnerability.