



PS3™
PlayStation®3

PS4™
PlayStation®4

PSVITA™
PlayStation®Vita

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - UK

ISSUE 092 FEBRUARY 2014 £5.99
officialplaystationmagazine.co.uk

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

ALIEN ISOLATION

Behind the screams of PS4's scariest game



_After Colonial Marines, Sega needs an Alien resurrection of its own. How about a first-person horror game on PS4, from a studio famed for RTS excellence? Phil Iwaniuk investigates the unlikelyst of comebacks ■

[illegible]

oly crap, there's no fire button. The alien, all three metres of it, lurches towards me after reacting to my footsteps, narrowing my options with every sickening thud of its tread. Using every bit of FPS training I have, I mash all the shoulder buttons on the DualShock 4, hoping for an ironsight. A super-soaker. *Something*. But those skills won't save me here – I was never supposed to kill the alien, just survive. I got reckless, and now without any means of defence I'm going to get dead. I can't stop grinning with delight.

Alien: Isolation, a first-person horror from PC strategy specialists Creative Assembly, is the Alien game you've always wanted to play. And I don't say that lightly – Gearbox's bombastic Colonial Marines show floor presentations, empty promises and "we're all really big fans of the movie" platitudes are still ringing in my ears as well as yours. So it's natural to be cautious – cynical, even – about the

IP, but if you're looking for a firm indication that Creative Assembly's vision is something to believe in, consider this: they let me go hands-on with it straight away during the reveal at its Sussex HQ, before anyone uttered the word 'authenticity' or showed us any 'target footage'. Also, I don't know if I mentioned this earlier, but *there's no fire button*.

RIPLEY REDUX

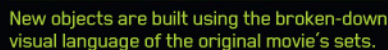
This isn't a shooter any more than its source material – the original 1979 movie, *Alien* – is an action flick. No, it's a first-person survival horror game – an unbearably tense round of cat and mouse between yourself and a nine-and-a-half foot xenomorph in an abandoned space station. An adventure that "takes you back to the roots of the original series, to Ridley Scott's haunted house in space", creative lead Alistair Hope tells us.

You play as Amanda Ripley, a Weyland-Yutani engineer with some lingering mummy issues since Ellen and the rest of the *Nostromo* crew disappeared without

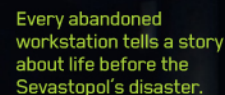
IT'S A TENSE GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE WITH A NINE-AND-A-HALF FOOT XENOMORPH.

trace 15 years ago. *Isolation*'s narrative arc begins with a chance of some closure for poor Amanda when the *Nostromo*'s flight recorder is found at the decrepit Sevastopol space station. Company execs Samuels and

Look closely and you'll see the eye sockets that also featured in the original movie costume.



Except, of course, they don't. This is a videogame, silly. Something dreadful happens that separates Amanda from the others, leaving her alone (hey, I just got the title!) on a mysteriously abandoned space station with your friend and mine, the alien. It's a situation she's "underpowered and unprepared" for, as Hope puts it. No handy pulse rifles lying around, then — just a motion tracker, a flashlight and a melee attack that looks too weak-wristed to finish off a kitten in one go. The underpowered and



Creative Assembly's art team has indulged in some method acting to achieve this: the original movie's concept artist Ron Cobb sketched his concepts in felt tip pen, so they followed suit and thought like Cobb. They even deciphered all the Nostromo's



That line on the outside shows the location of your latest objective.

► peculiar signage and turned it into a system that you'll begin to understand as you play the game. It's been a process of dissecting the Nostromo into its components parts, helped in no small part by the 3TB of previously unreleased material Fox gave the team, and using those parts to build a visual language with a wider vocabulary capable of endowing the much larger Sevastopol space station with the same atmosphere and validity of its inspiration. The

but the results speak for themselves. Most striking is that the game captures a uniquely retro view of the future, and visually that sets it very much apart from the crowd. "Games based in this franchise have always steered towards the Jim Cameron aesthetic," says Hope. "For us, we saw this incredible opportunity to dive right back into the '70s view of the future." Beyond the obvious Colonial Marines comparison, let's face it: most of the futuristic locales we

► MOST STRIKING IS THE WAY IT CAPTURES A RETRO TAKE ON THE FUTURE. ◀

Nostromo's med bay informs the look of the Sevastopol's larger hospital, for example.

RETRO CHIC

One dreads to think how many burned dinners and what-time-do-you-call-this moments resulted from late nights at CA poring over blueprints for chairs and door handles,

visit in videogames are built using the 'everything's smooth, shiny and there are touchpads and screens on every object, for some reason' blueprint.

One particular room catches my eye as I inch along in trepidation. It's a dining area with a circular table, plenty of chairs, and those ubiquitous CRT screens.

ALIEN EVOLUTION

The changing face of HR Giger's xenomorph through the console generations



Alien 3 (SNES, 1993)

Ah, sweet 16-bit horror. Taking their inspiration directly from David Fincher's scuttling dog-aliens, the xenos in this Contra-like shooter arrived in hordes with little regard for suspense and boasted cutting-edge detail for the day. They exploded real nice when you shot them too, jettisoning limbs everywhere.



Alien Trilogy (PS1, 1996)

The creature's first foray into the era of PlayStation came in sprite form. They usually appeared from nowhere, writhed around in your pulse rifle rifle for a few seconds, then crumpled in a heap of molecular acid and indistinguishable black lumps. We're still very much at the cannon fodder stage in Alien Trilogy.



Alien Resurrection (PS1, 2000)

At the time, these fully 3D beasts were cause to pop the lights back on. Their animations have grown much more convincing by the twilight of PS1, and their acid blood now causes surfaces to billow corrosive smoke. They're also more likely to lurk in the shadows instead of launching a full-frontal attack.



Alien vs Predator (PS3, 2010)

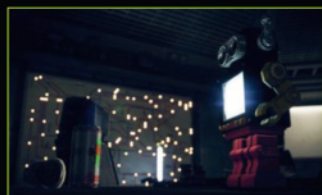
A decade on, the James Cameron, biomechanical quadruped becomes the accepted alien design in games. Rebellion's horde are grounded with a convincing physics engine and twitch dramatically under fire, but they're prone to some odd animation glitches and their fear factor wears thin after you shoot the first 1,000.



Aliens: Colonial Marines (PS3, 2013)

Gearbox's xenomorphs aren't the worst thing about the ill-fated Colonial Marines – except when they doggedly walk against a wall or enter that bizarre tip-toe animation. But they veer off from the movie designs in some strange, canon-flouting directions, and they're pretty dumb, too.

At three full metres tall, the xenomorph dominates everything in the environment.



At this range, the tracker's simply telling you how screwed you are. So: totally.

the characteristic Nosferatu walk that Bolaji Badejo, the man in the rubber suit back in '79, imbued the beast with. It reacts to any visual and aural stimuli you give off and enters a new behaviour accordingly, investigating and finally getting its murder on when it discovers you.

SMART MOVE

The really clever part is that the alien learns from you. Throughout the game you'll pick up salvage parts, which can be crafted into makeshift weapons to deter, rather than kill, your phallic pursuer. The devs won't go into details, but they're adamant every object in the game could have been built on set in 1979, so don't expect SMART guns. Whatever you manage to cobble together, your adversary won't be fooled by it twice: it adapts its behaviour according to yours. Just knowing that creates a deeper sense of horror than any jump scare ever could.

There are no such implements to hand during my playthrough, which means having to use my motion tracker almost constantly. By distancing myself from the radar dot, I keep the alien off the screen for the next five minutes — there's that low frequency, high impact dynamic at work again. It might be saving my

hide, but it's also a horrible device to travel around with.

"The motion tracker in [the movie] Alien is almost just there to show you how close you are to death," Hope points out. "It's not particularly useful — it's actually supporting the horror more than the idea of escaping." That's almost true of Isolation — those beeps won't

do know the alien's hanging out incredibly near it. There's no other option than to move towards both, hoping it'll slink off somewhere and give my shot nerves a freakin' break. Initially the plan seems like it'll work — I make my way into the console room and locate the clunky old/new computer screen that controls the door. Then it flashes

I'M HOPING THE ALIEN WILL SLINK OFF AND GIVE MY SHOT NERVES A BIT OF A BREAK.

save you if the xenomorph corners you, but there's also an objective marker outside the display which is incredibly handy. Until it lines up with the alien's dot. When that happens, you're firmly back in 'supporting the horror' territory.

I know this, because it's just happened to me. I need to manually override a locked door (of course I do). I don't know where the console is that does this, but I

past a doorway, sending my motion tracker into an apoplectic fit. It's really near.

Panicking, I run out of the room and dive into a locker. Of course,



You hardly ever see the stealthy xenomorph on-screen — do and you're already dead.

A large, dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a large object, with a small, bright light source visible in the upper right corner. The surface has a mottled, almost crystalline appearance with various shades of grey and black. The light source is a small, bright white spot with a slight glow.

Hope mentions something interesting about the original movie: "After 30 years, it's still in the Top 50 on IMDB. Danny Boyle calls [it] one of the holy trinity of serious sci-fi, and it's a guy in a rubber suit. We're so used to seeing CG now, It's amazing we can see that rubber suit and still get an emotional reaction from it." It's crucial that there's a man in a suit in those scenes of

ISOLATION PUTS THINGS IN PLACE THAT'LL PRODUCE TERRIFYING SITUATIONS.

The visual fidelity here is staggeringly beautiful, in a 'think I might vom' way.

By the way — you *are* going to be scared when Isolation hits PS4 (and PS3) later in 2014. This

you dared dream up, which means it also has terrible timing — this is about the worst time a genuinely promising game within this franchise could emerge. But it'd be a crime if *Isolation* suffered for *Colonial Marines*' shortcomings. They literally exist in different genres, they're being developed by different studios — and only one will make you grin at the freshness and craftsmanship of the haunted house ride you just went through. ■

is the most effective survival horror since Visceral's *Dead Space*, and it works by putting systems in place that produce terrifying situations organically rather than scripting jump-scares. It plays like the very best fan-pitched *Alien* project

Making the best of a bad situation with some opportunist sight-seeing



5 Pretend you're in the movie

It really does feel like walking onto the set of the original flick. Everything's scaled 1:1 and objects are built to the original prop blueprints, plus the film's score follows you round as you explore the dangerous corridors of the Sevastopol. Now's the time to recite 'The food ain't that bad, baby' in the dining area, away from prying ears.



_Senior designer Gary Napper and art lead
Jude Bond on bringing the bitch back_■

confidence of its developer, which is trying to achieve something unprecedented within this storied franchise. We caught up with two of their key men to talk eye sockets, bucking trends and jumping the shark.

Gary Napper: That's everybody's first question. How can we maintain that tension for the length of the campaign? And it's just down to the game design, balancing, the flow of the story and the mechanics, when you introduce things to the player. Obviously, we work in peaks and troughs with

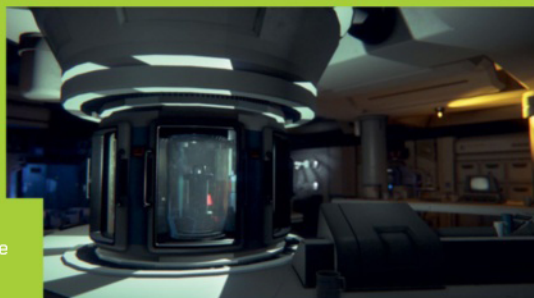
Jude Bond: The player is one of the things that's really unpredictable, and you can't always tell what they're going to do. So we've got an alien that can act in a nice way and support that. So when the alien is prowling around in the ceiling just under the

vents, if you make a lot of noise it does come down. So you have some players who will sprint through the level, collecting things, scavenging in the world and trying to defend themselves, yet other players will take that careful slow approach, gripping the motion tracker for dear life and just getting through it. That's been reflected today in the styles of the playthroughs. A couple of guys managed

JB: We had to start largely from scratch. The absolute first point of reference was the original '79 alien, but we all know that's a man in a rubber suit, and that's not going to stand up in our game. One of the first things we did was make the guy 9-10ft tall. From that we were like, 'well, a 9-10ft tall bloke isn't going to be able to walk around this space that's designed for 6ft humans in a very convincing way.' We ended up iterating on the actual physiology in the alien, so it kind of could work in that space. We built an alien that physically can't work, and that informs how the thing moves, and how the creature chooses to behave.

JB: We have mixed feelings about that. The reason we had those there is because that's

OPM: In the first movie, you only see the alien's



- how the original prop was built. That was there in the original movie. [It's obscured by] the back-
- lighting in the movie so it may not be clear to some people, but others are aware of it. That may or may not be perceived by the player, but we're still going to care about having that kind of detail in there.

GN: You look at the tiny details that some of the art guys have put into the world, and it's just incredible. The coffee grinder in the kitchen, the boxes of cereal from the Nostromo. I don't know if you noticed, but the circuit breaker from the handle in the demo you played is the exact handle from the self-destruct sequence at the end of the film. The thing about the movie props, and it's just a personal thing, is how real they appear. You see Sigourney struggling to pull that thing down, and I absolutely loved it.

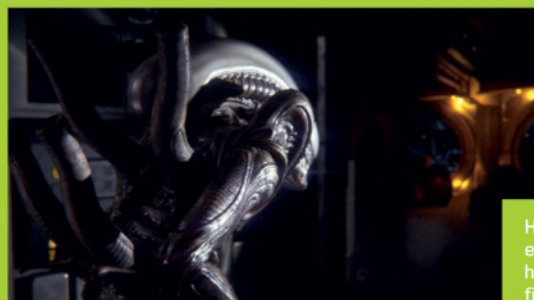
JB: One of the things we've done in the art is to ensure that there is something in every room that ties us back to the original film, be that something as insignificant as a lever on the wall, or the shape of the door. There's something everywhere that will tie us back to the original movie. That's not to say that we're over-egging the connection there, the environments we produced are hugely diverse. We've managed to build what could be authentic, just by virtue of understanding how the original stuff was built, deconstructing that and putting it back together. We understand the aesthetic of the original film. Once you've

deconstructed everything and understood how it works, you can build anything and it'd be in keeping to that stuff.

We've tried to limit ourselves to only things which could've been or were available in 1979. Down to the pieces of equipment, we've built from components which pre-date '79 and could've been built on the set at Shepperton for example. We've maintained that authenticity almost to ridiculous levels really. It gives us a framework in which to check our work and make sure we're delivering what we want and not jumping the shark.

OPM: So much of what I've enjoyed about today has linked to the fact this game goes against the grain with what's going on elsewhere in first-

Gary Napper is undaunted by the somewhat cursed Alien franchise.



He might not have eyes, but he can hear and see just fine, thanks.

person games. I think for many hardcore gamers and journalists, it's a dream scenario. How did this game come about, and how did Creative Assembly come to be making it?

GN: I came to this studio to make this game. I signed the [non-disclosure agreement] in my interview and I played the little slice they had, and I knew the second I

THE SECOND I SAW THAT ALIEN APPEAR, I KNEW I HAD TO WORK ON THIS GAME.

saw that alien on screen and the way it was being portrayed, I needed to work on this game. The design challenge about making it about that one alien was incredible. I think that's why we've also managed to attract so much talent from across the industry.

JB: Exactly. We built the team from the ground up for this game. The premise was there three years ago, and Sega was right behind it after our prototype. We had room to create an amazing team. We've got people from EA, Ubisoft, Crytek, Rockstar, people from all over who have come to join this game. Like we said, it's a dream project for a lot of people. As soon as people see what we're doing, they sign the NDAs, and get on the next plane.

OPM: As well as building up a team from

scratch, you've built a new engine, too. How did you approach such a process?

GN: It's been a big challenge. Developing a new IP with a new team and a new engine in the same period was a massive task.

JB: It was the right thing to do. We knew from the inception of the project what we wanted to do, what we want at the end, and we were very much aware that on the horizon somewhere there was next-gen too — we didn't know what that was, but we didn't want to paint into a corner. We needed to create an engine that would make the alien agile, yet still move with the times.

GN: Our scripting tools alone are just fantastic — they allow our designers to build something super-quick, get it in, have a look at it and play it.

JB: To the point of it looking good now. Please remember we're pre-alpha, it's going to look a ton better than it does at the moment.

GN: That's what makes me so confident. We're so proud of the game we're making. What you saw was a very small slice of the game. We're due to release at the second half of 2014, and right now we've got a game that's playable from start to finish. So it's like: iterate, polish, get that content at its best. We've still got the time to make this an incredible game. ■