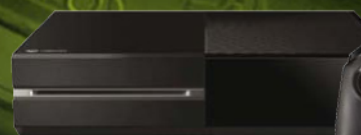
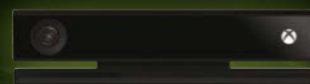


#1 FOR XBOX ONE - WELCOME TO THE NEXT-GEN REVOLUTION



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# ALIEN

## ISOLATION

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**TOMB RAIDER:  
DEFINITIVE EDITION**

A WHOLE LARA FUN OR  
JUST SLOPPY SECONDS?

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# THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE

Before there were Pulse Rifles, APCs, Power Loaders and hives (and before the awful videogame that featured them) there was a lone Xenomorph on a lone ship, picking off unarmed crew members one by one. Ridley Scott's *Alien* was always perfect for a survival-horror adaptation – and now, British developer The Creative Assembly is making the nightmare come true...

Do you remember the tagline for the original *Alien* film? We're sure many of you can recite it down to the letter, but in the interest of getting this piece off on the right foot, we're going to spell it out: "In space no one can hear you scream." It plays on the fact that sound can't travel through a vacuum but, while it's an undeniably solid scientific statement, this tagline also paved the way for one of the most iconic creatures in cinematic history. We are of course talking about the original *Alien*, a being that made the entire bestiary of *Star Wars* look like a teddy bear's picnic.

Compared to James Cameron's bombastic sequel, the original pace and premise was much less frantic. There was just one Alien hunting the crew of the *Nostromo* and, without

so much as a Pulse Rifle or Smart Gun to spray its corrosive blood all over the floor, that singular threat was more than enough to put the audience members on the edges of their seats. That sense of isolation and hopelessness against a seemingly unstoppable force is something that has never really been explored in the various *Alien* videogames; it's always been more about mowing the creatures down with stacks of ammo rather than cowering in fear behind a stack of crates.

This original 'haunted house in space' is something that *Alien: Isolation* aspires to be. It's set in the same universe as the last *Alien* game to "grace" our consoles, but while Gearbox Software kept *Colonial Marines* largely under wraps –



Is that one of those watches with the built-in TV remote? They were the bomb back in the Eighties!





presumably because it didn't live up to expectation – The Creative Assembly is much more confident that *Isolation* will be a worthy addition to the franchise. To this end, the Horsham-based studio invited us to its headquarters to meet the team while getting some serious hands-on time with the game – a level of transparency you don't see very often, which suggests that the developer wants its work to speak for itself.

That being said, the team was eager to talk about the project's history. One design goal it set early on was a high level of authenticity, which was sparked by the three terabytes(!) of original source material that 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox (the owner of the Alien IP) sent the studio after searching through its archives. With such a vast quantity of

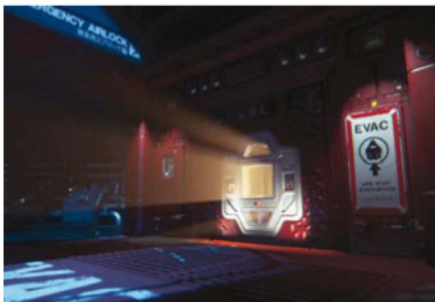
original references to work with, the team set itself the challenge of crafting an environment that would be utterly faithful to the original film – so if the film crew couldn't have built it on the set in 1979, it wasn't allowed in the game. The knock-on effect of this is an antiquated future that appears less digital and more analogue.

In terms of story, *Alien: Isolation* is set 15 years after the original film and puts the player in control of Ellen Ripley's daughter. Amanda Ripley hardly played a significant role in the *Alien* films, or even the novels, but the disappearance of her mother after the *Nostromo's* destruction makes for an interesting plot device. It's her search for answers that prompts Seegson – a corporation that shares more than a few similarities with Weyland-Yutani

**ABOVE:** The Alien's natural height makes it easy to spot from behind cover. Just don't get too close.



**RIGHT:** Meet Amanda. She has abandonment issues and a keen aptitude for survival.



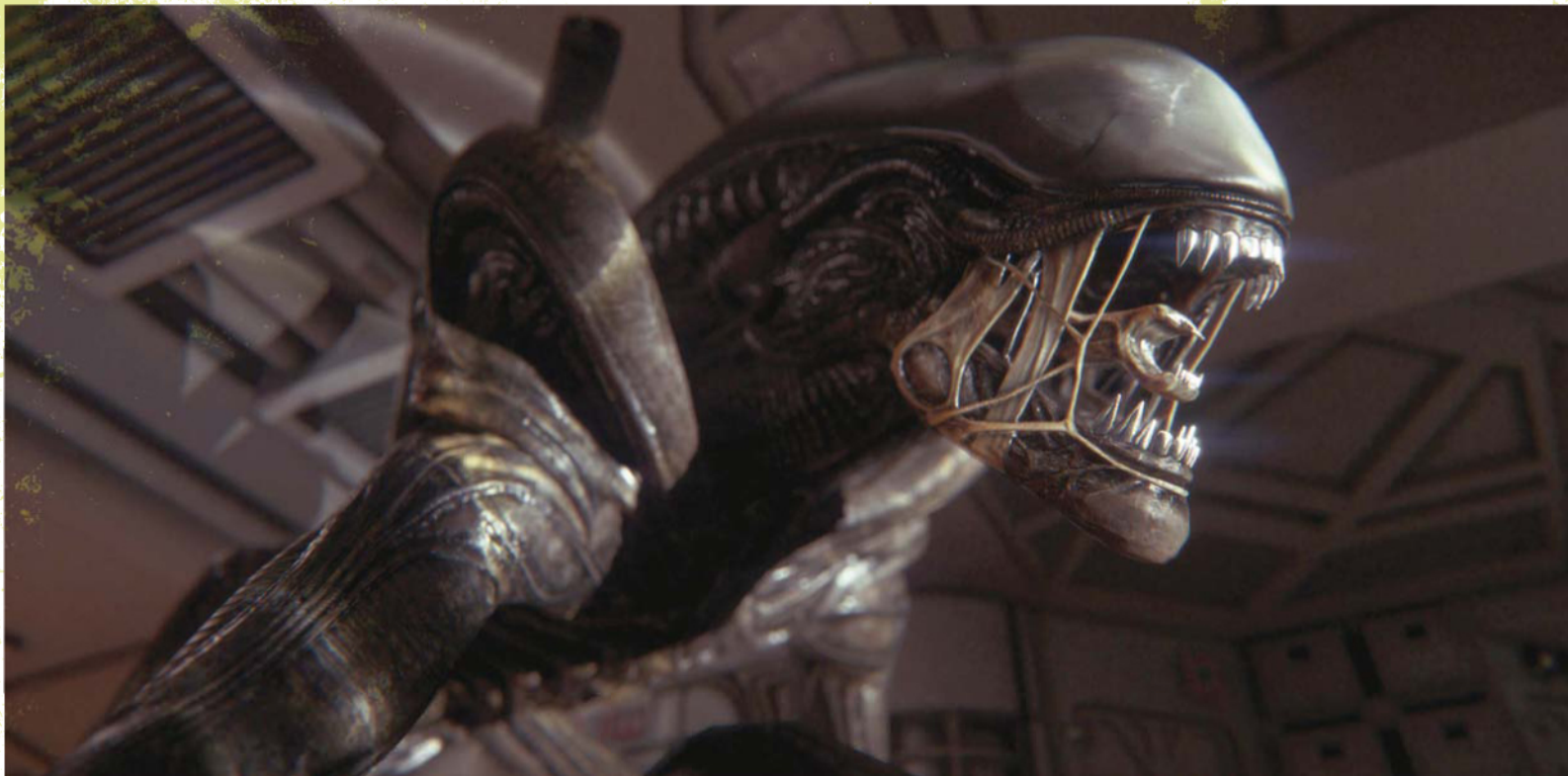
**"WE BELIEVE THAT THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY CAN TURN THE ISOLATED PREMISE OF THE FIRST FILM INTO A GAME WORTHY OF THE ALIEN LEGACY"**



# GHOST TOWN

Amanda's entire journey is focused on the Sevastopol space station. It was originally designed to accommodate 5,000 people, but now that it's in the last stages of operation there are only around 100 left. The team described it as a failed commercial experiment that's enormous in size – it's essentially a city in space that has everything from spaceports and hangars to hospitals and shopping centres. And of course, you will be free to backtrack between areas.





**ABOVE:** With just one Alien to design, the game has really gone to town on sculpting the definitive Xenomorph.

**BOTTOM:** If you fitted two Motion Trackers together, wouldn't you be able to monitor your six as well?

– to send Amanda on a mission to retrieve the Nostromo's black box. Why Seegson chose her specifically remains unclear, but we know that the search leads her to a space station called Sevastopol.

This city-sized complex is where the bulk of the game takes place. After sitting through a short presentation that highlighted the lethality of the Alien and the importance of the Motion Tracker, we were escorted to a pair of surround sound headphones and a controller

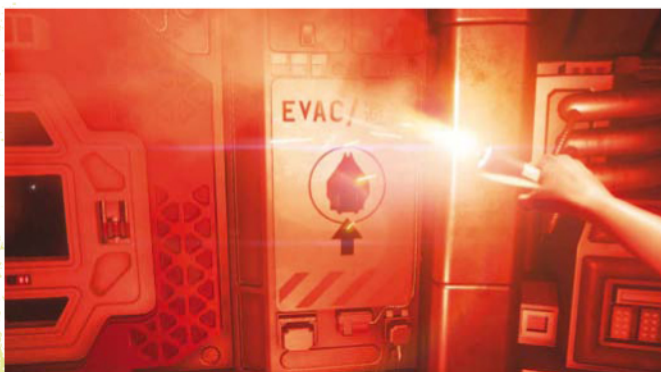
to see it for ourselves. The section of the game we played was set towards the middle of the story and tasked us with restoring power to a rundown part of the space station. We knew that the Alien was lurking somewhere in the environment but, with only a flashlight and an unimposing melee attack to Amanda's name, it was clear that staying out of sight was the key to survival.

Despite playing out from the first-person perspective, *Alien: Isolation* is as much an FPS as *Mirror's Edge* or *Portal* – it's an interesting mix of survival-horror, stealth and puzzle

solving, as you cannot kill the Alien that's hunting you. We began our hands-on by pulling out the Motion Tracker to see if it was in the immediate vicinity, moving up and down the starting passageway a few times to make sure the coast was clear, before exploring the nearby crew corridors to see if we could find anything useful. Aside from a discarded razorblade and a few bottles of petrol, all our search turned up was an empty locker and a handheld blowtorch.

After hiding in the locker a couple of times for kicks – while also wondering

**"DESPITE PLAYING OUT FROM THE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE, ALIEN: ISOLATION IS AS MUCH AN FPS AS MIRROR'S EDGE OR PORTAL"**



The team has really nailed the low-fi sci-fi look. You won't find any LCD screens on this desk!







why videogame lockers are almost always empty – we came across a sealed door that barred our way. A friendly voice on Amanda’s radio informed us that the blowtorch could be used to access the manual override, but the instant we pulled back on the switch and watched the hatchway open, we caught our first sight of the Alien terror. Its tail, an unmistakable giveaway for even the most casual sci-fi fan, was disappearing up a ventilation shaft as a mutilated android lay in two pieces on the floor.

We've lost count of the number of Xenomorphs we've gunned down over the years, but without the comfort of a well-oiled Pulse Rifle at the bottom of the screen it was surprising just how much the Alien presence made us panic. Bringing up the Motion Tracker, the rhythmic beeps were all the



Much like Weyland-Yutani, Seegson builds synthetics. Hence there are plenty of androids.



**ABOVE:** The blowtorch is useful for cutting open access panels, but it won't be much cop going up against the Alien.

**BELOW:** We hope you're good at playing hide and seek, because you're about to go up against the grand master.



## STRAIGHT TO VIDEO

In an effort to give the game that authentic Seventies feel the development team recorded many of the in-game computer screens and menus directly to VHS before recapturing the footage. The slightly washed-out look will be familiar to anyone who grew up with cassette tapes in the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, but for those who are younger than that, it'll just look like the television screen is on the verge of dying.







could use to evacuate the station. The only problem was that it was several rooms away, so our only option was to sneak past the Alien like a field mouse evading a lion drenched in silicon and K-Y Jelly.

Considering how central the Alien is to the gameplay, we're pleased to report that its movements were far

**ABOVE:** Unless Amanda is looking at the Alien through a foot of reinforced glass, she's probably screwed right now.

**BELOW:** If the Alien is standing still it won't show up on the Tracker. You have to use your eyes, too.



## THE MACGYVER EFFECT

One thing the development team confirmed but didn't go into detail about was the crafting system. While exploring the interconnected areas of the Sevastopol space station, the player will come across a range of useful materials that will include razorblades and petrol canisters. The specifics on how these items will combine together and whether or not you'll need a workbench aren't entirely clear, but our best guess is that you will be able to slow the Alien down with simple traps and improvised weapons.

It would also make sense if the player had some way to distract the Alien, especially when trying to get past an area with limited cover. But while the devs wouldn't go into details, they did say that the Alien will learn from its mistakes, so don't expect certain tricks to work more than a handful of times.

from scripted. Using the sound of its nine-foot-tall footsteps in conjunction with the Motion Tracker and the equally necessary peek mechanic, we were able to track its movements from the shadows. If it caught sight of Amanda the thing moved in for the kill with alarming ferocity but, as long as we remained patient and picked our moments, it was possible to get past the Alien without being stabbed, impaled or worse. Even so, there was a prevailing sense that the creature always knew roughly – if not exactly – where Amanda was.

Determined not to end up like the savaged android we encountered earlier, we used everything we'd learned to stay out of the immediate danger zone. It was possible to get really close to the Alien without triggering its senses – and in those moments where all that stood between us and certain death was a flimsy desk, we were able to appreciate the attention to detail that had gone into every aspect of the creature's design. In terms of the extended Xenomorph mythology this Alien is a standard Drone, but while we've seen our fair share of Warriors, Praetorians and Queens in other games, this recreation of the original HR Giger design is by far the most striking. And its relentless pursuit of Amanda also makes it the most terrifying by far.



As the demo drew to a close we were forced to break from cover and make a mad dash for the lifeboat – a nail-biting gamble that only just paid off. The screen then went dark as an unfamiliar voice said, “I’m Samuels, I work for the company. It’s about your mother. We think we may have found her, Amanda. We get to shut the book...” And with that, the demo was not only over but any fears we had that *Isolation* would follow in the unfavourable footsteps of *Colonial Marines* were largely laid to rest. Both games are set in the same universe and feature the iconic Alien yet, in terms of ambition, they’re more than worlds apart.

Still, by keeping the Pulse Rifles and Power Loaders out of the mix, the development team has presented itself with a tricky conundrum: how do you turn one Alien into a steadily evolving challenge across an entire game? Simply put, there needs to be more to it than just hide and seek. The answer may come in the form of the undisclosed crafting system, the mysterious reload button and other mobile threats that are secondary to the Alien. Based on this evidence, we can't help but lower our guard and believe that The Creative Assembly can turn the isolated premise of the first film into a game worthy of the enduring Alien legacy. Thus far, at least, Ridley would be proud. ■





# ALIEN: ISOLATION

## INTERVIEW

**ONE Gamer:** What was it that inspired The Creative Assembly to make an Alien game?

**Gary Napper:** We wanted to make the Alien game that we've always wanted to play. There's never been a game that's really represented the original film; there's one Alien and everything you do relates to surviving. This team was formed to make this game specifically. I joined The Creative Assembly to work on *Alien: Isolation* and we've been developing it for over three years.

**Was the game designed to be a survival-horror experience from the very beginning?**

**Jude Bond:** We knew what we wanted to do right from the start. Sega didn't ask us for ideas; we pitched the idea to Sega. The original demo was focused primarily on the atmosphere. There was no team in place at the start of

"We're exploring a character that has only been touched upon in the past"

WE BUCKLED DOWN WITH GARY NAPPER AND JUDE BOND, RESPECTIVELY THE DESIGN LEAD AND ART LEAD AT THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY, TO DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES OF GOING BACK TO THE SINGULAR ROUTE OF AN INFAMOUSLY PLURAL FRANCHISE...

the project but Sega gave us the necessary backing. Thanks to their support, we now have an excellent team. Our designers have worked as far afield as Rockstar, Crytek and parts of the film industry. We recruited from some of the best studios and a lot of that's been down to the draw of the franchise, especially as we're focusing our game on the first film.

**Being a footnote in the film – and in *Aliens*, rather than *Alien*, from a deleted scene at that – Amanda Ripley seems like an odd choice as the lead for an Alien game. What was the attraction with using Ellen Ripley's daughter?**

**Napper:** When the internet first got wind of Amanda Ripley being the lead, there were lots of comments about her being 60 years old and dead. But as soon as you tell people that the game is set after the first film, the criticism turns to curiosity. After the *Nostromo*

disappeared without a trace, it made sense that people would go looking for it – and that led us to Amanda. We're not messing about with the established Alien history. That would be sacrilege. We're exploring a character that has only been touched upon in the past, and this gives us a real opportunity to add a meaningful story to the Alien franchise.

**Bond:** We wanted to get as close to the original film as possible, but without telling the same story. At the beginning of the project, it seemed like we'd have to build a circuitous story to tie ourselves in, but once we came up with the Amanda Ripley idea we knew we could be part of the bigger picture. It was a really gratifying moment when Fox gave us the green light.

**How does Seegson compare to Weyland-Yutani?**

**Bond:** We created Seegson to fit in with the Alien IP. It's not as influential as Weyland-Yutani but its industries overlap in several areas. It's a powerful company but not to same degree as Weyland-Yutani.

**This must be the first Alien game we've played that doesn't feature a Pulse Rifle. Will guns feature in the game at all?**

**Napper:** This game isn't about laser rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns. It's about scavenging what you can from the environment and using those bits and pieces to enhance your life expectancy. Making this game

**BELOW:** Bulkheads. Great for keeping nasty things out, not so great if they're the only way forward and you don't know what's behind them.







"This game isn't about laser rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns"

about the Alien changes the dynamic considerably. In one of our earliest demos, the player had a gun and could shoot the Alien if they wished but, nine times out of ten, people chose to back away rather than take the Alien on. That's the reaction we were aiming for.

**One of the things we took away from the demo was the unmistakable weight of the Alien. Was it your intention to make the creature feel heavy-footed?**

**Napper:** This is the Alien from the first film in every sense; it's three metres tall and it carries its weight well, but it's no ballerina. We also had to find ways of telegraphing its current behaviour to the player. When you hear those footsteps stop, and the Alien starts to make a different sound, that's a big hint that something's about to happen.

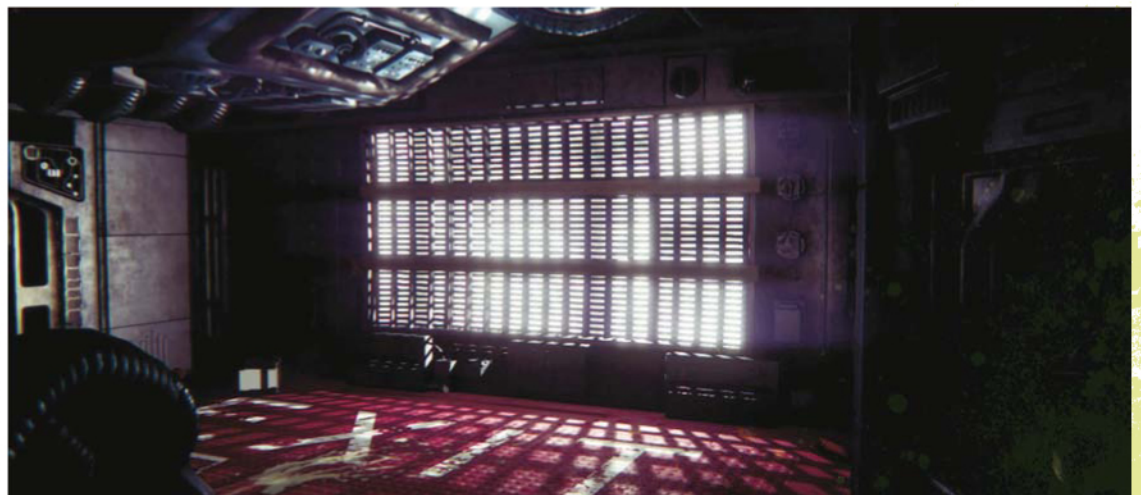
**Will the game feature any kind of levelling or ability system?**

**Napper:** No, you won't suddenly be able to leap an inhuman distance just because you levelled up a jumping skill. That's not how our game works. We want Amanda's journey to feel grounded and believable, and a lot of that comes down to the tools you find

**ABOVE:** This is Samuels. He works for the company and wants to help Amanda find the black box, but why?



**RIGHT:** It's like playing through Dead Space, only without any weapons.







**ABOVE:** Some of the musicians that contributed to the game's soundtrack also worked on the original film.

and how you use them to navigate the environment. The Motion Tracker, for instance, is the only way of telling where you need to go. There are no objective markers that suddenly pop up on the screen.

**Aside from staying one step ahead of the Alien, what other challenges will the player face?**

**Napper:** We're building a single-player campaign, so the story ties everything to the environment and the player's abilities. The game becomes more complex as you introduce new threats and more mechanics. There were lots of story elements that we wanted to explore and gameplay elements that we wanted to use, but they had to be relevant to the situation. In the end, we

"There are other threats on the station, but they don't overshadow the Alien"

focused the story on Amanda's journey and the Alien that's pursuing her. It's a core thread that we're running through our story and mechanics. There are other threats on the station, but they don't overshadow the Alien. The Alien is the primary threat.

**With everyone from Kezia Burrows (the voice of Nilin in *Remember Me*) to Sean Gilder (Paddy Maguire in *Shameless*) on the voice cast, realising the game's characters is clearly a priority. How did you find the right voice for each role?**

**Bond:** In an effort to make our

characters believable, we contacted various casting agencies so that we could get the best talent from TV and cinema. We purposely stepped outside the usual game development circles so that we could speak to people who do this on a daily basis. It was a bit of a learning curve but it really paid off.

**Designing an Alien that's terrifying yet fallible must've been a challenge. How hard has it been getting the balance right?**

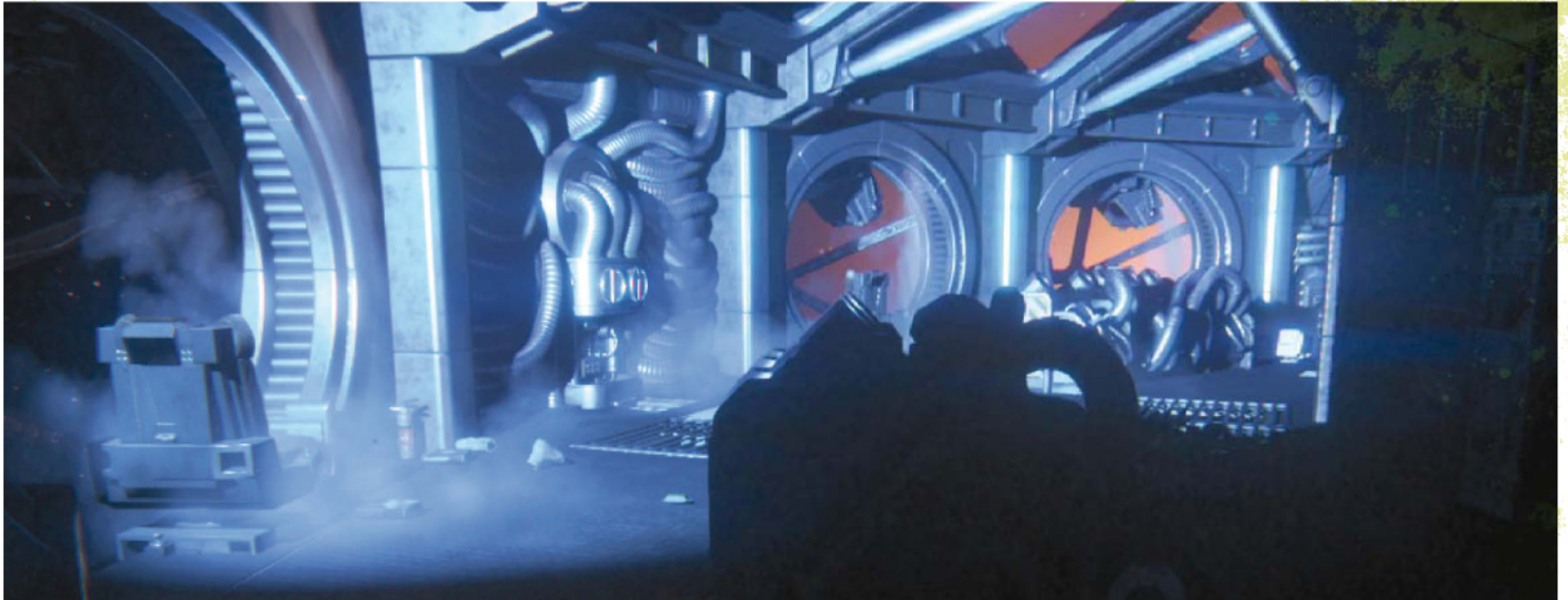
**Napper:** As soon as the project began, we wanted to design an Alien that was faithful to the original film. It needed to be an intelligent predator that was going to stalk and kill. With this in mind, the AI team developed this ruthless killing machine. We tried it out in some of the early level designs and it was an absolute nightmare – it tracked you down and killed you without fail. After that, we started to slow it down a bit. The idea wasn't to make it dumber, we just wanted the cat-and-mouse dynamic to be less lopsided. That's when the core gameplay really started to take form.

**If the Alien is the primary threat, how does it become harder to deal with it**

**BELOW:** Scenes like this provoke visions of Kane's chest exploding.







It may be in a state of disrepair but the Sevastopol space station is still home to some 100 residents.

## as the game progresses? Will it gain new tricks of its own?

**Napper:** One of the defining characteristics of our Alien is we're never entirely sure what it's going to do. It's systematic in the sense that it runs on a defined set of rules, but there are also a wide range of variables. We know how long it'll stay in a particular area and we know how aggressive it'll be at a given moment. But the player won't be able to hide in the same spot for 20 seconds and just assume that the Alien will go away. Sometimes it'll come back and sometimes it won't.

We have access to a lot of these variables and we group them to specific behaviours. The Alien could be anywhere from intense to mild, but if a particular behaviour doesn't work in an area for whatever reason, we can create a new one on the fly. We can create a brand new set of rules that change the Alien's behaviour, and just from its base behaviour alone we've got a lot to play with. We can also adjust these variables in a way that suits the player's ability or counters the way that they play. That's something we're focusing on at the moment.

## With such a strong emphasis placed on the story, will the game feature optional audio logs and other collectable files?

**Napper:** Environmental storytelling

## "You'll be able to revisit locations that you've explored previously"

is an important part of the game. Amanda isn't the only person on the space station and there are lots of collectibles which flesh out the story.

**Bond:** The missions take you from pillar to post, so you'll be able to revisit locations that you've explored previously. You'll be able to learn more about the station while collecting salvage that you may've missed on your first visit.

## Finally, for fans that know the first film inside-out, just how deep will the nostalgia run?

**Napper:** You remember that big breaker lever you pulled in the demo? That's the same lever that triggers the self-destruct sequence in the film. When our art guys designed the environments, they dismantled the original film in intricate detail before rebuilding it in new ways.

**Bond:** I can't even begin to list the homages to the original film - they're literally everywhere. Some of them are more noticeable than others, of course, but it's like you're viewing all the components of the first film in a different combination. ■



This character is called Verlaine. She's a day-walker that wears a funky shirt, but that's all we know.