

We're not sure you'll get to space walk, but there's clearly ground to cover here.

PUBLISHER SEGA / DEVELOPER CREATIVE ASSEMBLY / FORMAT XBOX 360/XBOX ONE

Alien: Isolation

We can't lie to you about your chances, but you have our sympathies

Fear is to structured thought what searing heat is to a pane of glass. All sense of past and future disintegrates, blown apart by the panicky pulsing of the present tense. So while I'd love to write a preview for *Alien: Isolation* with a proper conclusion and everything, the best I can manage is a series of vaguely connected episodes – moments of fumbling ineptitude and terror, deep in the heart of a half-dead space station. The most vivid is of a serene, chalk-skinned man with neon blue irises throttling me till I shake him loose with frenzied taps of A button. Reeling back, I pull out a fat futuristic revolver and put three bullets through the android's chest, to no obvious effect. Then he's gone, and all I can see are teeth. There's no time to fire, not that this would have made the slightest bit of difference. As the Alien forces me to the floor, inner jaw flexing, I hear the android calmly observe that running is a common cause of injury. Shooting things doesn't seem to be good for your health, either.

Bluffer's Guide

First-person survival horror with just the one Xenomorph, which can be deceived but not destroyed.

Alien: Isolation has guns – very nicely modeled guns, in fact – but they won't get you far. When Creative Assembly hinted at other kinds of enemy in the game, many cynically assumed that there would be “palette-cleanser” shooting gallery sequences – steam vents along the pressurized pipe that is the campaign. They aren't. Here's another recollection to illustrate this: sneaking along a corridor, I bump into one of the Sevastapol's surviving crew.

He levels his weapon, shrieking at me to get away. I foolishly try to slide beneath a table and out of sight, and he shoots me in the arm.

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Playing with fire

I switch to my flamethrower, straighten up and manage a token belch of fire before the second bullet finds my head. As the scene fades from view, I derive a little satisfaction from the idea that the Alien has probably heard the exchange, and will

Survivor's toolkit

The items you'll use to avoid becoming the Alien's breakfast

Aside from EMPs, ammo and flares, you can craft noisemakers that can be thrown or placed, IEDs and medical kits for healing up after a gunfight (the Alien will kill you in one hit). Gathering the resources entails exploration, however, which entails putting yourself at risk, and you'll often have to decide which item you can least do without. Resource and item distribution is partly random, partly determined by the situation.





Pretty much every main story character you meet will have secrets.



These dinky office props are a nice counterpoint to the gothic set design.



The space station is falling apart. Which is best - asphyxiation or getting eaten?



surely descend from the darkness to rip my killer's guts out. Of course, had I managed to kill the guy I'd have had to deal with that eventuality myself.

Isolation's other non-player characters aren't your enemies, at least to begin with, but you may be obliged to antagonize them if you want to escape the Alien's clutches. Twitchy human refugees may open fire on anybody who tries to push past. Androids will leave you alone until you start meddling with the technology under their supervision, after which they'll pursue you relentlessly.

Humans can be killed, providing you have ammo to spare, and it's even possible to put down an android, using EMPs to paralyze it and fire to boil its skin off. This is also a great way to get the Alien's attention. Memory #3: after hacking a terminal, I EMP an android

and take refuge in a vent, emerging in the corridor outside the chamber. The Alien drops down directly in front of me. My thumbs seize up, my heart leaps into my mouth... but my trigger finger involuntarily squeezes off a gout of flame. Startled, the Alien slides back up into the ceiling like a switchblade into a sleeve, and I'm permitted to run shrieking for a few

Metadata

BEST BIT...



Isolation's art direction and audio are magnificently horrible. Environments are awash with bulbous objects and mechanical noises that can be mistaken for... something else.

The entire game takes place aboard the Sevastopol station - there are no planetary levels.

seconds before it reappears and impales me from behind.

Clever girl

The Alien is smart. It can be tricked, avoided or even driven off, but it doesn't follow a set pattern. It *learns*. A flare tossed into a corner might distract it. The second time, it might glance at the light source and resume its search. The third time, it may start to think about where the flare came from...

The result is a survival horror game that looks like a corridor crawler, but which is actually a sophisticated sandbox, responding efficiently and believably to your choice of routes, items and tactics. A cautious player could navigate an entire area without rousing the Alien once. A reckless player... well, here's a final anecdote. I'm sprinting towards the objective, the Alien behind me. A trio of humans open fire from the front. I stampede past them, dive into a locker, pull out my motion tracker and watch as one blip sets about the others like a fox among chickens. The screaming is brief. Edwin Evans-Thirlwell

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