

A large, dark, industrial corridor with a metallic floor and walls. A bright light source is visible at the end of the corridor, creating a strong silhouette effect. A large, dark, mechanical structure is visible in the foreground, partially obscuring the view. The overall atmosphere is dark and ominous.

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THE WORLD'S MOST INFLUENTIAL GAME MAGAZINE

## *The Horror Issue*

featuring **Alien: Isolation** & The Evil Within  
plus our Top 25 Horror Games of All Time



# Stalked By A Stowaway

by Jeff Cork



PLATFORM PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC STYLE 1-Player Action  
PUBLISHER Sega DEVELOPER The Creative Assembly RELEASE October 7



# *Alien: Isolation*

Ridley Scott's *Alien* was appealing because it explored ordinary people facing an unknown threat they were unequipped to handle. One by one, the crew of a spaceship was hunted and killed by a threat that was almost too horrible and foreign to comprehend. Ellen Ripley survived not because she was the best shot or was the strongest, but because she was intelligent and methodical (as *Aliens* would show us later, the creatures aren't to be taken lightly, even if you are armed to the teeth).

The team members at The Creative Assembly are big fans of the influential film, and they wanted to capture the vulnerability and sense of terror that those crewmembers aboard the *Nostromo* must have felt. The result is *Alien: Isolation*, a game that also challenges players to be methodical and intelligent, rewarding stealth and adaptability over twitch reflexes.



I've seen a lot of *Alien: Isolation* over the past year, and I've been impressed with its atmosphere, tension, and overall quality. I have been missing one critical part, however: context. Is it a slow burn? Are there moments of crazy action out of the gate? What's it like to be trapped in Sevastopol Station with the creature for more than an hour at a time? I played the game from its opening sequence to when Sega wrenched the controller away from my sweaty hands almost eight hours later. Now that I have more understanding of what to do, I'm even more excited to play it at home.

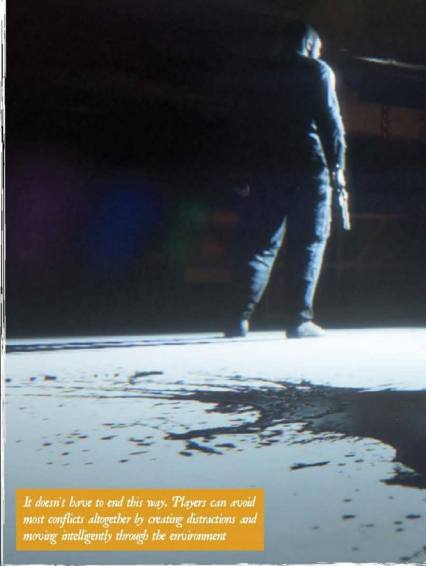
## The Mission

When we begin, Ripley's daughter Amanda is approached by a Weyland-Yutani executive named Samuels with a proposition she can't say no to: find answers about her missing mother. As viewers, we know that Ripley jetted from the *Nostramo* in a shuttle before destroying it, but her fate has been a mystery to everyone else in the fiction. Fifteen years after that incident, Amanda has become an engineer, finding work in the area of space her mother disappeared in — perhaps hoping for answers. Weyland-Yutani has caught word that a ship, the *Anesidora*, retrieved the *Nostramo*'s flight recorder and brought it to a nearby port, Sevastopol Station. It's a relatively simple handoff that could provide closure to both the company and Amanda.

Ripley, A three-person team is scheduled to visit the station, meet up with head of security Marshal Watts, secure the flight recorder, and be on their way. Convinced, Amanda signs on for what sounds like a simple mission.

She emerges from the hypersleep station, with the pod's clear door rising open from a first-person perspective. The slapping sound of her bare feet on the tile accompanies her steps until she retrieves her uniform from a nearby locker (sleeping in skivvies is just part of the *Alien* deal). She walks around the station (and I soak up the retro '70s-era visual design) meeting up with a Weyland-Yutani legal representative named Taylor, who seems to be having a hard time adjusting to space travel, and Samuels. His comment about not needing sleep immediately fires off a "This guy could be an android" flare, but that could be my prejudices from watching the films. Either way, he was nothing but a nice guy in my time with the game.

Approaching the station, it's clear that something's amiss. Watts attempts to warn the *Torrens* about something, but communications — notoriously unreliable in *Alien* — cut out. The pilot attempts to land, but the dry dock is damaged. An EVA spacewalk is required, so the



*It doesn't have to end this way. Players can avoid most conflicts altogether by creating distractions and moving intelligently through the environment.*

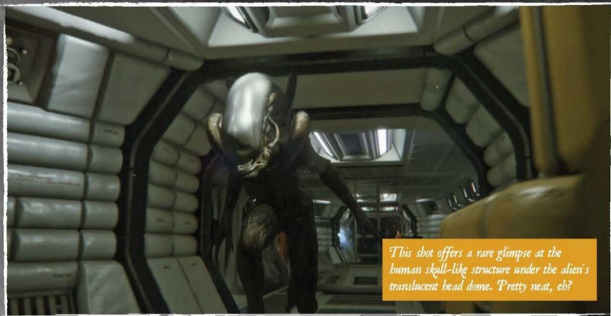
three characters head out in their suits. It's too late to leave empty-handed at this point, after all. An explosion rocks the area, and the trio is split up. Amanda launches herself toward an airlock and enters the station.

I immediately save the game at a wall-mounted registration station, and am confronted with signs of the damage. A floor grate has been cast aside, as flames lick upward from a now-exposed pipe. The lighting is incredible, with shadows wavering behind the traffic cones surrounding the incident. Safety first. This area is clearly off limits, so Amanda has to use the utility shafts instead. These shafts are instrumental to survival, providing access to areas that would otherwise be off limits, like around the flames in this case, or a temporary hiding spot. Of course, you aren't the only one using these handy passages to your advantage, as I learn over the next few hours.

Amanda continues to work her way through the station, encountering signs that the explosive event was just one in a long line of unfortunate events to have befallen Sevastopol Station and its parent company, Seegoon, in recent times.

"Seegoon was a company we created, because we didn't want to say, 'You're on another Weyland-Yutani-operated station and you get there and they're another finger in the pie,'" says design lead Gary Napper. "It just felt like something that needed to be our own creation, and it allowed us to do much more with the fiction behind the station and the pitch that they were this company that weren't quite as advanced as Weyland-Yutani."

"At some point, they were sort of neck and neck with Weyland-Yutani, and they really were on the edge," adds creative lead Al Hope. "As the years have gone by, Weyland-Yutani has really forged ahead, and they haven't been able to keep up the pace. Where we meet them, the space station is a really good snapshot of



*This shot offers a rare glimpse at the human skull-like structure under the alien's translucent head dome. Pretty neat, eh?*





## KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

The night before my demo, I rewatched *Alien* to make sure it was as fresh in my mind as possible. After playing the game, I'd recommend following a similar course. There are loads of nods to the movie – some overt, and some far more subtle. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- The opening sequence mimics the way the film's title dropped into place, one letter segment at a time. We're zoomed much closer in *Isolation's* tribute, however, letting every pixel in the pseudo-CRT display shine thrown in an unsettling glow.
- The *Torrens* ship is quite similar to the *Nostromo*, making it an explorable reference. Keep an eye out for the distinctive helmets on the bridge; they're a focal point in one scene in the film, where a computer display is reflected on a similar helmet's visor.
- I could have sworn I heard a cat in the distance during an early jump scare. Obviously, Jonesy wouldn't have made the trip to Sevastopol station, but it seems like cats and space travel are just part of the deal in the *Aliens* universe.
- One detail that popped out during my viewing was how much people smoked during the movie. That habit carries over to the game, too. Cigarette packs are strewn throughout the world, and I even took cover behind a case of them during a big encounter near the end. Keep an eye out for the brand, too. They're a nod from The Creative Assembly to the man who wore the alien suit in the film, *Belaaji Badojo*.

where they are. They're struggling to find their feet and they're way behind."

The station was envisioned as an outpost that would eventually become the center of commerce in that region of space. It was built near a gas giant, KG-348, with the hope of mining it for resources. There ultimately wasn't enough business in the area to sustain Sevastopol Station. Before Amanda and the *Torrens* arrive, the station is in the midst of being decommissioned, and it's currently operating under a skeleton crew. Or, more accurately, it was before hell was unleashed.

Amanda enters a darkened room, but she's able to turn on a generator and use a newly active terminal to restore power to the area. As it whirs back to life, a few people run past, the first sign of life she's seen since first arriving.

Chaos abounds, like the arrivals terminal that's filled with abandoned luggage. In one particularly unsettling moment, Amanda enters the baggage area and

discovers that it's been turned into a makeshift morgue. Bagged bodies are lined around the hall, even on the baggage carousel. Who killed these people? The easy answer is the alien did it, but it all seems too methodical for that as the sole explanation. An overturned table with "Waits lied to us" spray-painted on the surface raises a few questions; the blood splashed over the text reads more like an exclamation point.

## Not A Killer

Amanda meets Waits later during the demo, and I have a hard time figuring him out. Hope provides a little help. "He's trying the best he can, he's trying to stick to rules, and the situation is getting beyond him," he says. "He's trying to cling to an order that no longer exists, and I think he feels maybe not guilty, but responsible for everyone. He's a character who's trying to solve a problem, and he feels it's his responsibility to solve the problem."

Regardless of his motivations, Waits has used his authority to lock down areas of the station with brace devices – like a parking boot on a car, but for doors. After exploring the accessible areas, Ripley eventually finds a wrench on a body, along with an audio recorder nearby that talks about Waits' lockdown plan. Now Amanda is able to open those doors, using the wrench like a hammer to smash the padlock and then unfastening a bolt. It's going well until she meets a paranoid survivor who introduces himself by pressing a pistol to the back of her head.

Amanda is able to convince the man, Axel, that he'll have a seat on the *Torrens* if he can help her find the ship's communications area. He agrees to lead her there, first stopping by his hideout in a vent (like Newt in *Aliens*, these kinds of places have secret areas for enterprising souls). He gives her a flashlight, which is an improvement over the flares she's previously had to use to light her way.



We work our way past some looters, distracting them by turning off the generator and then using a floor vent to run under them undetected. Eventually he's attacked, and Amanda comes to Axel's aid, smashing her aggressor in the back with the wrench. Axel fires on the attacker, killing him. Amanda is revolted by his actions, and she lets him know in no uncertain terms.

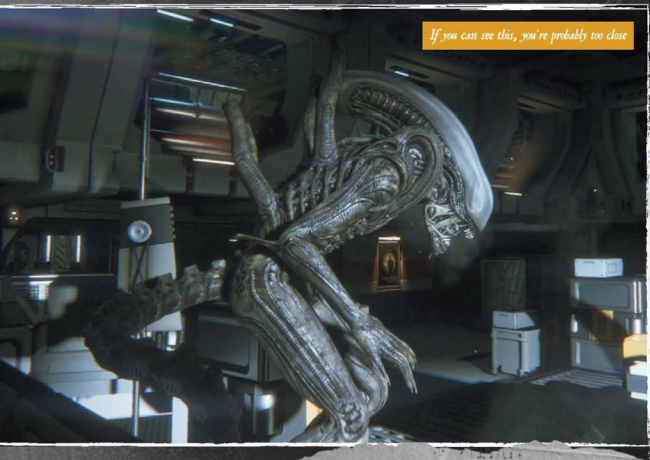
A lot of games give lip service to heroes that aren't trained killers, but when it comes time to actually play the game it sure doesn't feel that way. Amanda might be an engineer like Dead Space's Isaac Clarke, but she's not the stone-cold killer that he is. When she holds a

revolver, you get the sense that it's heavy and alien in her hands, that it's not something that she's ever comfortable holding. "I think that's us trying to work on your subconscious and say, 'This isn't the answer to your problem, there is a massive consequence to using this, and this isn't your everyday tool.'" Hope says. Playing stealthily and avoiding confrontation isn't just an option, it's almost always the best option. That philosophy was one of the reasons that The Creative Assembly was able to reunite the original voice cast, too (see sidebar).

As I play, I track down a variety of junk and crafting components that Amanda can use to build various

tools and items, provided she first finds their blueprints. Some components can be used in multiple creations, so you have to determine if you'll have more immediate use for a stun grenade or a medical kit; for instance, and use the limited resources accordingly. I scrounged around for as many components as I could, and they're scarce. Each time I chucked a noisemaker at a group or healed myself, I felt like I was making a tough choice – adding to the already escalating tension.

The game isn't called *Looter*. Isolation, however, and it's about this time that we finally meet the real star of the game. Once it enters Amanda's world, she – and the player – isn't going to be the same.



If you can see this, you're probably too close

## Threats Detected

In a lot of stealth games success is dependent on learning A.I. paths and working past them. The alien is a different beast altogether, with a sophisticated set of behaviors pulsing under a terrifying exoskeleton. It's unpredictable, fast, deadly, and – paradoxically – is exhilarating to be around.

"The way we built the alien was to start thinking of the way it would search for the player, or just the target – because it's not always looking for the player," Hope says. "The way it searches is that it looks in a wide sweep sort of behavior. If you imagine you're in a new building that you've never been in before and you were told to look for someone, you'd do fairly casual searches on each floor. But if you heard something in an area, you'd think, 'Right, there's something there,' and then you'd do a bit more of a detailed search and spend more time there and you'd maybe look underneath things and inside things – that's the way the search behavior works. On top of that, we've got this very detailed sense system, where he can see, he can hear, he detects things like light and movement, and then we have very complex sets of behavior that are driving those senses. If he's seen you a couple of times before, he might be on high footing and a little more heightened and it would take less time to see you, and other times you might be able to dash across the corridor and see him react to the movement and go and investigate where he saw that movement as opposed to chasing after you."

## REUNITED

The Creative Assembly is telling its own story with *Alien: Isolation*, even though it's fairly rooted in the universe that Ridley Scott established in his film. That doesn't mean that players who want to experience moments from *Alien* won't be able to do so. A while back, Sega announced that the voice cast had been reunited for special preorder bonus missions (the publisher later elaborated by saying they would be available to everyone later). I asked about the DLG during my conversation with the developers.

"From a creative perspective and a fan perspective, it's absolutely amazing that we managed to reunite the cast for

the first time in 35 years," says creative lead Al Hope. "For many of those actors, it was the first time they had reprised their roles since they left the sets at Shepperton [Studios] in 1979. For Sigourney Weaver to reprise her role for the first time in a video game as Ripley was just unbelievable."

"You have all of these light-bulb moments when you're first starting out on a project like this. You start thinking, 'Wow, wouldn't it be cool if we built the *Nitram*, and wouldn't it be cool to walk around and maybe confront our alien?' And then of course you make the natural leap of, 'Wow, what if we could get the original cast

to come back and try to survive?' I guess we're just really lucky with this, and we were able to put the game in front of these guys and talk about what we were doing and tell them that this game was focused on survival and not about killing, and they could see the attention to detail that we'd poured into the world that they originally created. So really happily they agreed to come on board and be a part of this project."

"At the same time, it is a side bonus piece of content, and it has nothing to do with the main game. It exists independently. I have to pinch myself that we were able to do this and work

with these guys and hear them reprise their roles in the dialogue sessions and hear them talk to each other again."

We've spent so long working on this game, and everyone is completely passionate about that first film, and I can still remember the cheer when I announced that Sigourney Weaver had agreed to reprise her role and come on board the project. That was a really significant day for us, because it felt like a testament of all the work the guys had done to show the guys who had created it originally that it was in good hands, and that we were going to put that world in front of a whole new audience."



Amanda gets a motion tracker early on, which allows her to get vague updates on what's going on around her. If a looter is walking nearby, she'll hear a thumping sound and see a blip on its screen. The game doesn't feature a HUD or any on-screen UI, so players have to pull up the tracker by pressing a button if they want to use it. When it's out, they can't have a weapon or tool out, making it a risky trade-off. People generally follow the rules on motion trackers. You see a glowing dot, and even though walls and other environmental elements aren't represented on the screen, you get a sense of where they'll be walking. The alien doesn't care for rules. His blip is unpredictable and kind of scary when you first start playing. He can travel in the vents, and he's really, really fast. You might see him run straight at you, stop, and then move in a completely different direction. Or, even worse, your screen can make it look like he's in front of you at full charge, passing through you, as you realize he was above you the whole time. That's when you learn to trust your ears.

"You notice, we don't use any hologram markers in the world or any indicators that the alien has seen you, aside from his sounds and his animation," Hope says. "When you're hiding, you start to learn what those sounds are and how he moves. You can recognize when he's given up or when he's going to attack and things like that. And then all of a sudden when there's a bunch of sirens blaring and a massive amount of noise, that encounter becomes so much more difficult because you can't actually hear the state of the alien."

Looters and the alien aren't the only threats that Amanda faces during her stay at Sevastopol Station. The station is filled with Working Joes. Seegson's alternative to Weyland-Yutani's lifelike androids. While their competitors went for lifelike simulacrum, like Ash and Bishop, Seegson realized they lacked the resources to create machines that passed as human. Instead, they

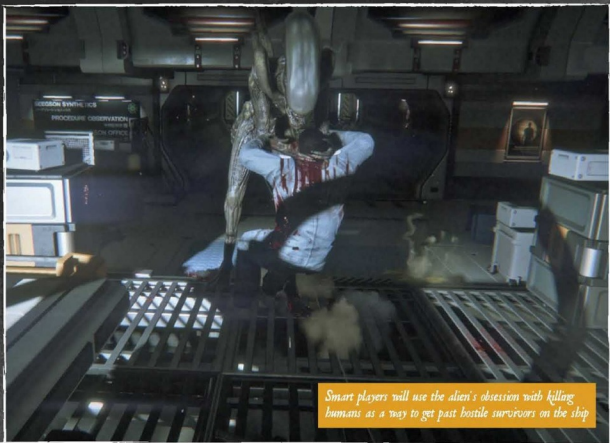
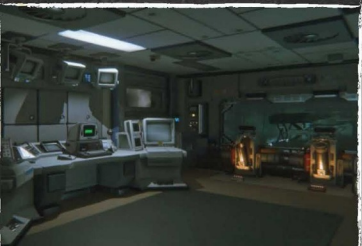
decided to capitalize on their creations' phoniness, or at least attempt to spin it as a positive. While the androids walk around and are able to communicate with people, their rubbery, ill-fitting skin amplifies their otherness.

"They see themselves as a competitor to Weyland-Yutani, but they're actually way behind the tech race," Hope says. "If Weyland-Yutani is capable of producing an android such as Ash, then this is Seegson's best attempt at a synthetic, biomechanical character. So they've taken an alternative path, whereas Weyland-Yutani are obviously making very realistic androids that you can't tell between real and not real, they've decided to go down the path of making their synthetics overtly synthetic, hence the Working Joe name. You always know a Working Joe, because they're not trying to look like people, they're supposed to be

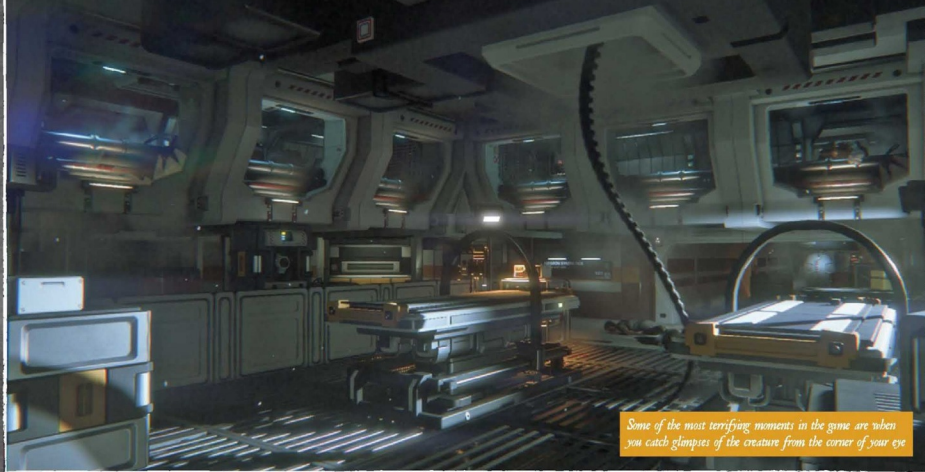
*In addition to pinning out enemy locations, you can use the motion tracker to see where your next objective is*

service maintenance and support the crew in these types of situations. When we meet them in the game, they're highly unpredictable."

That's an understatement. Working Joes are governed by a central A.I., and they're now running counter to their original programming. The androids, once subservient and helpful, are now aggressive to Amanda and other humans. Regardless of whether it was a sensible way of keeping the station secure or a sign of something more sinister remains to be seen. In the meantime, Amanda has to avoid being seen by the Joes, lest they respond with detached and effective brutality. Unlike the comparatively fragile looters, Working Joes take a beating. Perhaps as distressingly, the alien doesn't seem to show much interest in the androids, so you can't use them as bait to stay alive.



*Smart players will use the alien's obsession with killing humans as a way to get past hostile intruders on the ship*



*Some of the most terrifying moments in the game are when you catch glimpses of the creature from the corner of your eye*

## Danger Lurks Everywhere

The encounters between the alien are memorable, whether it is a one-on-one interaction, or if other humans are involved. Even though *Alien: Isolation* is a single-player game, it's been designed in such a way that players can experience their own unique moments as various scenarios play out.

"The longevity in the game is seeing how [the alien] reacts to the different abilities that the player can develop by finding items in the world, crafting things, getting ahold of different weapons, and each one of those has something that the alien can react to," Hope says. "The real beauty of it is that he doesn't react the same every time, and he adapts his behavior according to what you do as a player."

What I appreciate most about the alien is that, while it is terrifying, it's not infallible. If you manage to break line of sight with the creature or cause a distraction, it's not going to be able to hunt you down with 100-percent accuracy. I got to see that first-hand while in the medical wing looking for supplies. I hadn't seen the creature in a while, and I turned in time to see it walk past the open doorway. I froze. It paused and looked right toward me. If I'd moved, it would have noticed, and gone for the motion. For whatever reason, I decided to keep going down the hallway.

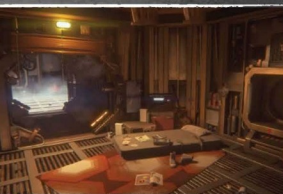
In another section, I was at the base of a T-junction. A few humans were patrolling the area, and I wanted them to move to one side so I could sneak past. I pulled out the motion tracker, and we were all alone — no alien in sight. I tossed a noisemaker down the hallway and hid behind a medical cart. Just for fun, I pulled out the motion tracker again, and got to see a bloodbath reduced to a series of green dots. A large blip charged down the hallway toward the source of the sound from seemingly out of nowhere, before noticing the people. The smaller dots raced in the opposite direction, but they were outpaced. In a matter of seconds — accompanied by screams and gunfire — three dots became two became one.

Hope says that humans aren't automatically going to shoot you, even if they're hostile. If you back away from

they warn you, odds are you're going to be all right. That's why it came as such a surprise when I encountered a looter on patrol and he immediately shot at me. It missed, and I ducked and moved behind cover. A split second later, I realized I wasn't the target after all. The alien was behind us, and that shot was probably a lifesaver. It charged after the most immediate threat, nearly bowling me over in its haste, and slaughtered the man. Once he was gone, the creature leapt up into an exposed vent.

Finally, this wasn't my finest moment, but it's worth mentioning. After luring the alien over to some people who were blocking our way, I hid in a vent. I couldn't help but peek out to watch what would happen next. After the alien was done killing its prey, it crouched in place until it noticed the vent opening. I don't know

*Fire looks gorgeous, but it also attracts attention. Move along*







what I was expecting to happen, especially since I knew just how much time the creature spends in those vents. I will say that seeing the animation of it pulling me out and killing me was worth the reload.

I'd be remiss in not mentioning those reloads. Make no mistake, *Alien: Isolation* is a difficult game, particularly before you get a good sense of how the alien reacts and behaves in various situations. You'll want to save at registration terminals (manual save points) whenever possible—in large part because the game doesn't auto-save after mission objectives are complete. It can be frustrating at times, but it's by design.

"We put [the manual save system] in to give the player a bit more tension, so you feel a sense of relief when you saw one," Napper says. "What we found was, when we put them off the beaten path, off the main game route, it encouraged exploration. The people who played for five, ten minutes and then died, they're thinking, 'Oh, I've missed something,' and they spend longer exploring the environment, and then they're finding more things to build and then giving themselves more options."

"I think with horror you have the idea of small victories, as if you're building tiny moments where you think, 'If I keep doing this, I might ultimately survive,' and having manual save points kind of taps into the horror, but it's something that you're self-conscious of, and you strive to find and to use." Hope adds. "I think you get a sigh of relief when you actually reach them. It was a really conscious decision on our part to stay away from the automatic checkpoint system and make it part of the actual

mechanics of the game." You can pull up a map to get your bearings, and fill in unexplored areas by tapping into special terminals. Keep an eye out for save points on your map, and plan to visit them whenever you can.

I won't delve into much more of the mission content, because discovering what happened at this station is one of the most interesting parts that I played. The Creative Assembly has built a fantastic world and filled it with mystery. Some of it's filled in by text logs and emails that you read on computer screens. Other bits are simply part of the environment, and you learn by observing. I can't wait to learn more about the doomed station.

I was concerned that the environments would take on a sameness after a while, but that didn't appear to be the case. Sevastopol is filled with a variety of different environments that made me wonder what life was like before the disaster. I could imagine crowds waiting for their flights, stopping for a bite in a now-abandoned restaurant. The swirling marks on the floor of the medical quarters made me wonder if the person who waxed the floor now filled a bag in the terminal. The factory floor filled with nonoperational Working Joes made me anxious as I scanned their dead eyes. It's a gorgeous, unsettling, and powerful place to explore—and as I paused at a particularly stunning view of the fiery KG-348 one moment, I wished it was safe to just soak it all in. **E**

For more on *Alien: Isolation*, head to [gameinformer.com/horrorissue](http://gameinformer.com/horrorissue)

## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

After seeing and playing the game several times over the past year or so, it's difficult to imagine that the *Alien: Isolation* players will be getting this October could have been considerably different. How different? Imagine being hunted by the creature from a third-person perspective. When the team visited our offices with an extremely early version of the game—before any preview coverage—that's what we saw. What happened there?

When we first envisioned the game it was in first person, and it seemed at the time it felt like a really natural thing, and then we experimented with third person, recalls design lead Gary Napper. "I think we kept going back to what we originally created, which was first-person, and thinking about how this experience would be at its most powerful if it was completely direct, if the alien was actually hunting you, if you were actually hiding behind this crate, not your avatar."

Putting the action directly from the players' perspective served two purposes. First, Napper says it eliminated the ability for players to move the camera around for a better view of the action. The peek function does allow players to see what's just beyond cover or a corner while retaining a sense of danger. According to Napper, the perspective taps into something primal. "It's a really immersive cat and mouse experience. You can dive under a gurney really rapidly and really simply. There's a really nice shortcut between your brain having an idea of how to survive and how you can actually execute that action in first person."

Keep an eye out for the posters and other background details as you explore. They're more pleasant to look at than a bunch of corpses.

