

AMSTRAD COMPUTER USER

ALIENS



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Don't argue with Rod Cousins

Let's hope you've either seen *Aliens*, don't want to see it or are too young to get into the cinema because this is about to ruin the start of the film.

At the end of *Alien*, Ripley, played by Sigourney Weaver is left floating through space in an escape capsule after an alien picked up on an otherwise uninhabited planet had devoured the rest of the crew.

She goes into suspended animation (deep sleep) and drifts for decades until the capsule is picked up by a salvage team. On awakening she learns the planet has been inhabited and but that all contact has been lost with the colonists. A SWAT squad is sent in to destroy the aliens, with Ripley acting as adviser on the mission.

In the game you control the six members of the squad, including Ripley, Bishop the android (who prefers to be known as an artificial man - with white blood) and Burke, the man who has been sent on behalf of the company. He wants to safeguard



Ripley's in trouble - you can save her

A L I E N S

the company's interests since it owns the recycling plant on the ill fated planet.

The foe

The six members of your team must seek out and destroy the aliens to prevent them from taking over the base. There are four types of foe, Alien warriors, face huggers (yeech!), alien queens and eggs. A slight deviation from the film allows there to be more than one alien queen - otherwise shooting her would end the game far too quickly.

Your mission

In the film the squad enters the alien base in a Captain Scarlet style tank. The lucky guy who gets to stay inside the tank can watch what is going on with a control panel. It is this which is mimicked by the game.

You view the action through the eyes of Ripley, Gorman, Hicks, Bishop, Vasquez and Burke. You can monitor ammunition and room number for each person, your overall score and status - fit, ill or under attack.

The game allows you to control each of the individuals, move from room to room and fire the smart guns. Beware of being trigger happy. One shot is enough to draw a nearby alien to you. To kill an alien requires one shot to the head or three to the body - and you need to be fast. After the first body blow the alien is on you like a ton of slime.

You know if you are not alone - the proximity meter sounds to warn of approaching creatures, friend or foe. As your character turns the view scrolls in a kind of Battlezone way. It is the sense of not knowing who, or what, is behind you that makes *Aliens* scary.

In between attack waves blast shutters close to show your score and the number of aliens, face huggers and eggs which have been blasted, shot or fried.

You can have some characters

obeying orders while you take control of another. So you can get Burke to move forward nine rooms while you take Ripley through another area a room at a time - the game comes with a map of 255 rooms showing the shape of the base.

You can use your gun to jam doors open or shut, but having seen the film makes me doubt the merits of the latter course. It is useful if you are being chased but you need to be quick - if you shoot an alien in front of a door then you can't get past as it bleeds acid which blocks your path.

Special rooms

There are some special rooms. There is a medical block and the queens' chambers at the end of a maze and you need to get to the armoury to obtain rounds for your smart gun. And the central control room contains the generator - if the aliens take that over you lose all the lights and have to work within a torch beam.

To stop the rooms from being taken over you need to shoot the bio-mechanical stuff which oozes over the walls. This is quite fun but beware of shooting when there are aliens about.

Playing the game

The game has been programmed by SoftMachine: The Amstrad graphics were ported from the Commodore 64 and look excellent. We only saw a



Mev Dinc showing how to play Prodigy



A warrior stalks the base

pre-release version and the scrolling was a bit jerky, but the animation of the aliens was superb. When you know there is an alien about and you can't see it you tremble, if you find the creature as it homes in for the kill you jump.

Film tie-ins are often used as an excuse for a poor game. With Aliens this is not the case, it is an excellent program - just don't play it in the dark.

More than just Aliens

Though owned by Activision, an American giant based in L.A., software house Electric Dreams does not live in big brother's shadow. It has a lot going on with several projects nearing completion.

The two companies are kept very separate, with Electric Dreams based in Southampton and Activision in London. The former has established its independence over the last year, after a time when it looked like being another Activision label.

The two now have different flavours, Electric Dreams being more arcade oriented and Activision concentrating on programs like Hacker which have a strategy element.

Both have well known titles in their stables - Howard the Duck and Labyrinth are two films to which Activision has the rights while Electric Dreams has Aliens, Big Trouble in Little China and its greatest hit, Spindizzy.

Working with Activision has given Electric Dreams much greater buying power and a route into the difficult American market. This has been so successful that the American Electric Dreams label has been used by other British software houses to sell games like Transformers.

There are some great things planned too...



A scene from Prodigy

Hijack

You are a troubleshooter, head of a security division in the Pentagon, with a hijack to resolve and hostages' lives resting on your decisions.

You're not alone: you have people who will help you - and the president keeping an eye on you.

The program is a 2D sprite game, a little like Mission Elevator. You start in your office and as you walk around, a window on the screen shows what you can pick up.

You move through the building using lifts, look through filing cabinets or even empty the bin. In your searches you will find the codes needed to open doors later in the game.

There are three ways to solve the problem - financial political or military - and a cast of thousands: Military and political advisers, assistants, financial and publicity officers, a secretary and of course Mr President himself.

He can authorise finance but it is easy to upset him - to placate him, get the publicity officer to send out press releases. The CIA and FBI can be called into play when the need arises.

To resolve the hijack you will need to pool resources and investigate avenues. Manipulate your employees and finally save the hostages. Good luck.

Prodigy

This is a non-violent game, written by Mev Dinc. You have to escape from a huge lab complex and protect your baby, Nejo.

The lab consists of four zones, Veggie, Ice, Fire and Tech. You need to maintain your oxygen level by entering the ice zone and popping balloons in the correct order. Solving puzzles, dodging monsters and stealing the security cameras helps you to escape.

A system of teleports moves you from zone to zone, so despite the distance involved you can flip back to get more oxygen when you need it.

Tools within the game include a bucket of water which can be used twice to put out fires before you need to re-fill it. Refilling is done in the shower, which is also used to clean the baby.

A major obstacle is a moving maze which stubbornly refuses to slide in the way you want unless you turn your back on the tiles.

A novel feature is that action carries on even when it is off the screen, such as the baby continuing to do baby-like things.

Completing the game - even if you are really good - will take two or three hours.

Electric Dreams