



PLAYER



1997 is already looking like the best year ever for PC games. It's only February and we've already found a game worthy of a nine out of ten score and an essential award. So, turn quickly to page 50 and read about our Game of the Month, Diablo, from the people who made Warcraft 2. Just as that seminal game spawned its imitators, we predict that Diablo will be next Christmas have a host of eager little pretenders. Enjoy the Player section. See you next month.

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ALIEN TRILOGY VS TERMINATOR SKYNET

The latest PC screen versions of two of the biggest action horror movies ever go head to head this month. In space, they'll be back.

While blockbuster movies inevitably spawn inferior sequels, it used to be the video game versions that really drew the files. A few years back gamers were 'graced' with the most wretched of platform-based Terminator games. And while Alien has made it to '97 with its reputation relatively unscathed, licences such as Dracula and Robocop haven't been so lucky.

Now the trend of recycling a movie licence is actually working to restore the reputations of the offspring of the silver screen, with better game designs, bigger budgets, and an understanding of the importance of familiar sights and sounds. The latest two such offerings are typical of recent game-of-the-movie attempts, in that they both take their cue from the omnipresent

Doom, opting for first person views of their respective sci-fi/horror settings. Similarly both do their best to retain the flavour of the subject matter using video footage designed to mirror sequences from the movies, not to mention make the most of familiar characters. Skynet manages to bring both Kyle Reese and John Connor into its briefing sequences, while Alien Trilogy features the familiar shaved pate of Sigourney Weaver's Ripley character, as well as using voice samples to remind players that it's her they are controlling.

What with both games tapping into a whole series of film classics rather than one particular film, and both featuring legendary movie monsters, it's





Not only does Skynet feature a far greater range of individual-looking types, there's even the option to play a Terminator, making it a real battle of good vs evil.



Alien Trilogy's 3D might be dated, but some neat transparency effects bring smoke to life and create effective valled doorways.



All Skynet's enemies are true polygonal objects. Get up close and you can see a Terminator's joints. And the barrel of its gun.

► Only fitting that they should get in the ring, give the camera their most menacing stare, and prepare slug to it out for the highest PC REVIEW score. Let battle commence.

Round one: playability

Just how do our titans compare as a one-player experience? *Alien Trilogy* scores points from the off, offering over 20 levels that pretty much follow the path of the three movies, and include one or two set-pieces to keep things on the move.

And while the reliance on tried-and-tested *Doom* gameplay robs it of any real surprises or inspiration, it also means that pretty much every element of the game has been road-tested for reliability. One look at *Alien Trilogy* and you know exactly what to expect, from the massed Alien attacks to the switch-operated doors and secret passages.

The only fly in the ointment is the way the behaviour of the alien creatures has been modelled. Basically, it hasn't. Instead these supposed death machines tend to trot around like headless chickens. Surprise lunges, cunning traps, moments of sheer terror – none of these feature in *Alien Trilogy*. Skynet, on the other hand, has the advan-

tage of using pretty much the same game engine as *Terminator Future Shock*, albeit with the addition of an SVGA graphics mode (using *Skynet* in conjunction with an existing copy of *Future Shock* will actually make that game playable in SVGA mode, too).

And what an engine it is, offering full viewing and movement in all directions, and making the most of the full 3D effect in the mission objectives and the way the Terminators and other enemies attack. Here is a game as likely to have the player battling against Terminator sentries in an underground maze of computer screens, as driving a jeep through the city ruins while fending off an attack from the skies. And while the enemies may not exactly be overflowing with intelligent attack styles, the game designers have at least positioned them wisely, building the game up from brutal one-against-one battles on the first couple of levels to all-out bloodbaths in the later stages. All good stuff, and thanks to the huge variety in the missions Skynet manages

to both retain interest and work its narrative into the action with great success. Round one just has to go to Skynet, then.

Round two: look and feel

It's no good whacking a famous name on the box if the game looks nothing like your favourite Hollywood creation. *Alien Trilogy* scores points immediately here, for managing to include a version of Ripley which actually looks something like the real character, as well as whacking familiar scenes and military hardware from the three movies in the between-level rendered animations.

Then there are the in-game locations, with loads of dingy corridors and familiar HR Giger wall detail immediately bringing the first two *Alien* movies to mind.

Even that tension-inducing scanner has been included, as well as a number of comments and wisecracks from Ripley. Shame they sound as if they belong to the mouthy Vasquez rather than our heroine, though. (Confused? Go rent *Aliens*.)

ALIEN TRILOGY VS TERMINATOR SKYNET

THE BITCH IS BACK (AGAIN)

Just when you thought the *Alien* movies had run their course, a fourth – *Alien Resurrection* – is currently in development. Sigourney Weaver will appear again as Ripley, thanks to the a plotline involving cloning, while Winona Ryder will provide support. The *City Of Lost Children's* Jean-Pierre Jeunet will direct, *Trainspotting* man Danny Boyle having apparently turned it down.

Alien Trilogy casts multi-play participants as Company Synthetics (remember Bishop?). Sadly, there's no option to take on the guise of an acid-spitting alien.



Skynet's character detail is enough to differentiate other players in multi-player mode.



Skynet features plenty of familiar hardware from the *Terminator* movies, much of which can be used as well as blown to pieces.



Alien Trilogy packs its fair share of blasting, but the aliens never really get scary.



Practically every aspect of a level can be altered in Skynet's multi-player mode.



One of the alien handlers. Ripley is fighting the minions of the mysterious Company.



The narrative linking Alien Trilogy's levels together builds up to confrontations with Alien queens. Here's one of the bitches in full flow.

And come to think of it, the actual level designs hardly convey the claustrophobic atmosphere that pervades all three *Alien* outings. Most disappointing, however, are the aliens themselves. Thanks to the use of crappy old 2D sprites, they resemble an accident in a paint package more often than the heartstopping biomechanoid terrors that fuel so many nightmares.

Who cares if they scream in just the right way when torched with a flamethrower? It doesn't mean a thing when the dreaded Alien Queen bounces around the screen like a ton of lego.

And then there's *Skynet*, which has an immediate disadvantage in that it portrays the robot-dominated future Earth that's only briefly glimpsed in the two *Terminator* movies. And as capable as Bethesda's Xngine 3D system is, the results can't help but look too clinical and ordered. No amount of overturned cars and craters can help recreate that moody, laser-strewn warzone look. And while the game world feels wonderfully three-dimensional, what with six degrees of freedom and almost every visible object benefiting from polygon rather than

sprite modelling, those all-important Terminators still look rather scrappy.

Still, the booming music is spot on. And the level detail is hugely impressive, with all manner of ruins, hidden areas, and buildings with fully explorable interior networks. To play through a level of *Skynet* is to explore an incredibly vivid 3D space, one which fits snugly into the game's ongoing storyline. Compare this with the sub-Doom layouts of *Alien Trilogy* and the winner of this round just has to be *Skynet*.

Round three: gameplay

It's time to weigh up the multi-player appeal of each of our contenders. Again it's *Alien Trilogy* which suffers here, failing to understand that the whole point of a multi-player option would be to give players the opportunity to step into the body of an alien, ready to tear human opponents to shreds. Instead,



Bizarrely, the world of *Skynet* seems largely populated by refugees from *Star Wars*. At least they're not as scary as the Terminators.

there's a network mode which gives no more than four players the opportunity to take on the role of 'Company Synthetics' (i.e. regular humanoids), in alien-free versions of any of the one-player levels.

Even worse, each player needs to own a copy of the *Alien Trilogy* CD.

Skynet sensibly goes down the Deathmatch route, tailoring every aspect of the game for multi-player carnage. It still lacks the single-minded brilliance of *Quake* or *Doom*'s Deathmatch modes, but the result is up there with

Duke Nukem's magic multi-player moments.

Which means that *Skynet* is once again the winner. Antiseptic visuals, disappointing Terminators, and slightly fiddly controls mean it's not quite the *Quake*-with-added-Armie some might have hoped for. But it's still a world away from the movie licence of yesteryear. And that's something to be very thankful for. (MR)



A twist on the old adage: always shoot your eggs before they hatch.

ALIEN TRILOGY

PUBLISHER
Acclaim
DEVELOPER
Probe
CONTACT
0171 344 5000
PRICE
£39.99
MINIMUM SYSTEM
486/66, 8Mb RAM, 2Mb
hard disk space,
double-speed CD
drive, soundcard.

PC REVIEW VERDICT
Moderately fun
but dated, and it
doesn't even
begin to make
the most of the
Alien heritage.

5

SKYNET

DEVELOPER
Bethesda
PUBLISHER
Virgin
CONTACT
07777
PRICE
£39.99
MINIMUM SYSTEM
486/66, 8Mb RAM,
20Mb hard disk space,
double speed CD
drive, soundcard.

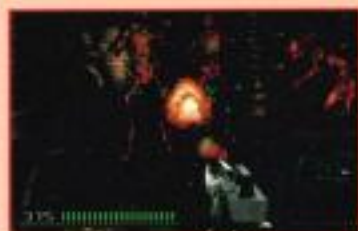
PC REVIEW VERDICT
Dodgy Terminators
aside, a
glorious and
hugely varied
movie romp.

8

CD REVIEW

Playable demo of
Skynet. Oh yes.

THE BATTLE OF THE BEASTS Just which game brings the movie monsters to life the most effectively?



These creatures are supposed to be the mutated dog-Aliens from *Alien*, but look like they were drawn by a ten year old. And the aliens themselves are a disappointment too, owing more to Lego Corp. than H R Giger.



This individual, on the other hand, needs absolutely no introduction. The character detail isn't quite up there with *Quake*'s, but the effect is pretty impressive nonetheless. *Skynet*'s game environment feels a bit clinical.



The Alien Queen is a much more impressive effort, until she breaks free from her egg-laying section and begins chasing Ripley. Then that sprite bitmapping problem rears its all too familiar head.



Compare it with this attempt to bring a legendary image to life. Even better, *Skynet* lets players take on the role of an Armie-style Terminator in the multi-player mode, where it thrashes the pants off *Alien Trilogy* - again.