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Aliens: Fireteam Elite

Oscar Taylor-Kent isn't bad at this one... for a human

W We only review finished games, so in Viewpoint we go hands-on with near-final code of a game that just missed our review deadline. We've spent hours surviving waves of xenomorphs in the first half of the game, and have acid on our hands. Ouch!



Looking for a slow-paced horror follow-up to *Alien: Isolation*? You need to look elsewhere. And buy a magnifying glass. Just as film fans know, that tiny 's' in the title means a lot – this is more inspired by the action-heavy James-Cameron-helmed '80s sequel. Like the flick, *Fireteam Elite* has hordes of xenomorphs hungry for marines, and plenty of big guns with which to hold them at bay. But does it hold together, or is this *Nostromo* a bit of a space clunker?

You're not taking on the alien threat alone. As the name suggests, *Fireteam* is squad-based. Even if you play alone, you'll be joined by AI synthetics, so you always have three marines against many, many more aliens. Conceptually it's a little like *Left 4 Dead*, as you make your way through story-led campaigns split into a handful of maps each, dealing with partially randomised, partially scripted encounters (though this is a third-person shooter, so it's a little closer to, say, *World War Z*).

ACID BATH

You might think you're used to how a map plays out when replaying, only to be jumped at by a Prowler hiding in the shadows where one wasn't before, ending up pinned to the ground until a teammate helps you out.

It's not exactly reinventing the co-op shooter rulebook, though special types of xenomorph do conform to tactics we expect from the movies. Burststers, as you'd imagine, run at the team, exploding in a big blast of acid blood when despatched. Spitters pepper you with acid from a distance, often hiding behind cover. Warriors, the biggest of the bunch, act like tanks, striding at you like they're on a mission, ready to whack you over

and over again until you fall down, begging for a team revival.

Drones are the most inventive, acting like, well, we'd expect a xenomorph to. They attack suddenly before slinking off into a vent, ready to jump out at you from another hidden position. They require your squad to group up back-to-back to spot openings, and are thrilling to take on until you figure out their fairly basic AI. At least in the first half of the game, we find ourselves wishing more of the xenos acted like hunters in this way, rather than running at us by the dozen, ready to be mowed down by pulse rifles and flamethrowers alike.

There's more to the game than surprises, however. Sometimes you'll have time to prepare knowing that calling, say, an elevator will alert nearby aliens to swarm. That gives you time to ready tools collected from out-of-the-way crates, like mines, or prepare class abilities like the Tech's turret or Medic's healing station.

GAME OVER, MAN

Making this game a third-person shooter where you can take cover behind waist-high objects might seem like an odd choice on the part of the developer, given how mobile the aliens are (they literally climb out of vents, and scamper along walls and ceilings) but it clicks into place when you encounter angry Worker Joes. These milk-fuelled androids have an interest in the xeno-infested environments, and have the guns to literally prove they called shotgun. Some of the ensuing cover-based shooting can be a little uninspiring. Perhaps in the real world's future some weapons' recoil *will* have been ironed out, but we feel the gritty sci-fi of *Aliens* demands weapons with heft and recoil that feel weighty.

Even on easier difficulties, enemy androids can be tough, with snipers

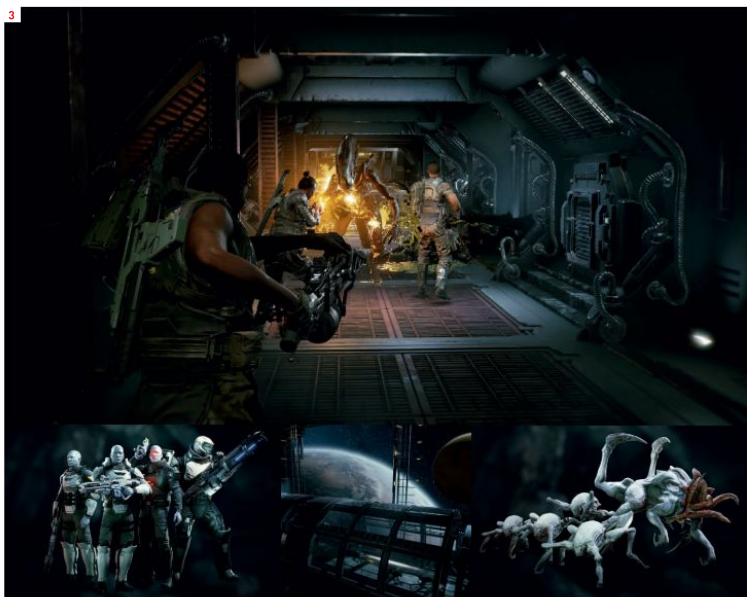
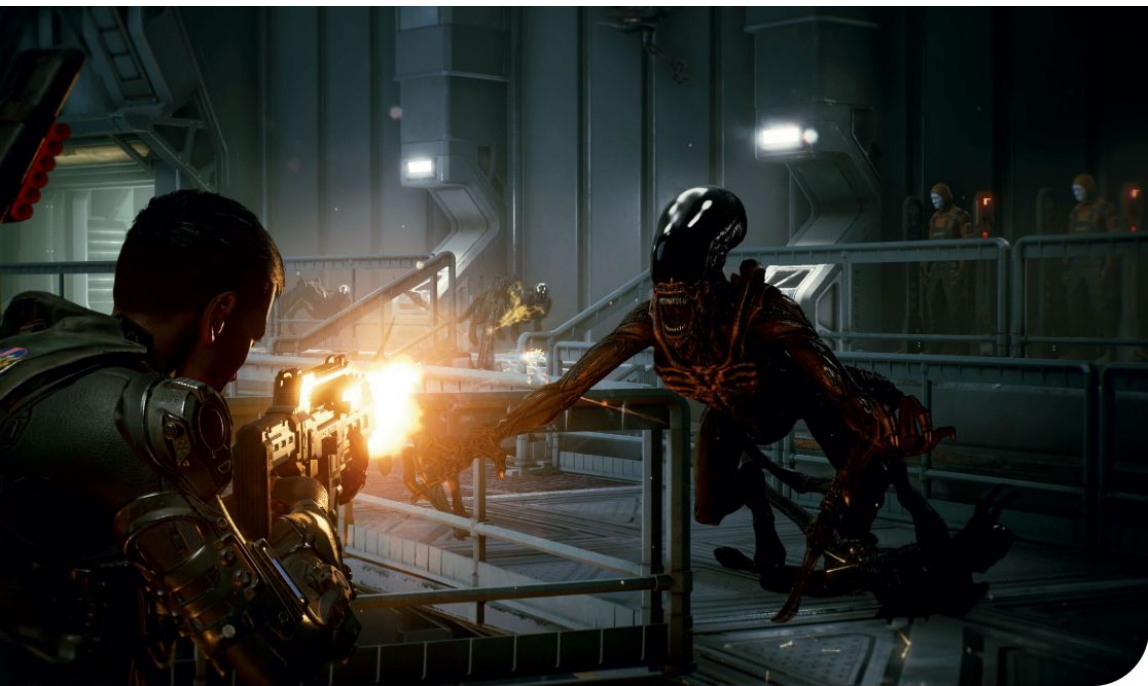
seriously reducing your health (which doesn't recharge over time, so you need to be careful). But firefights can alert xenomorphs, who want to tear both your marines and the androids limb from limb. Taking advantage of the chaos to take androids by surprise leads to moments that feel genuinely unique. We hope to see these sorts of clashes pop up more frequently in the game's second half.

It's possible to customise the weapons each class can equip, and their passive and active skills. It'll take multiple replays to improve them, with higher difficulties and challenge modifiers allowing you to score more. But while the maps have some random elements, we don't find them varied enough to encourage much replay. Higher difficulties are more intriguing, enabling things like friendly fire, allowing acid blood to deal major damage, and permitting xenos to kill in a single hit with grapples. The hardest modes seem almost too difficult, but feel like a more accurate *Aliens* experience. After all, (spoilers) the marines in that film get slaughtered. For the most part, there's not enough pushback or grittiness here for it to feel truly like *Aliens* so far.

VIEWPOINT

"A FUN CO-OP SHOOTER WITH SOME SMART USE OF THE LICENCE, THOUGH RECREATING THE GRITTY DREAD AND ATMOSPHERE OF ALIENS MIGHT BE TOO TALL A TASK."

W We'll have our full, in-depth review of *Aliens: Fireteam Elite* in our next issue.



1 Each type of xenomorph has a unique design that makes it clear what it is, despite being recognisably related to the others. It feels in keeping with the designs from the movies. **2** Anyone who's seen Alien knows these flower-like things aren't for sniffing. Expect some creepy stalkers to crop up later in the game. **3** Big guns are available, so Jess can finally live up to her '80s hero, smartgun operator Vasquez. **4** Just like The Thing [p108], xenomorphs don't like fire. But as we keep asking, who does?