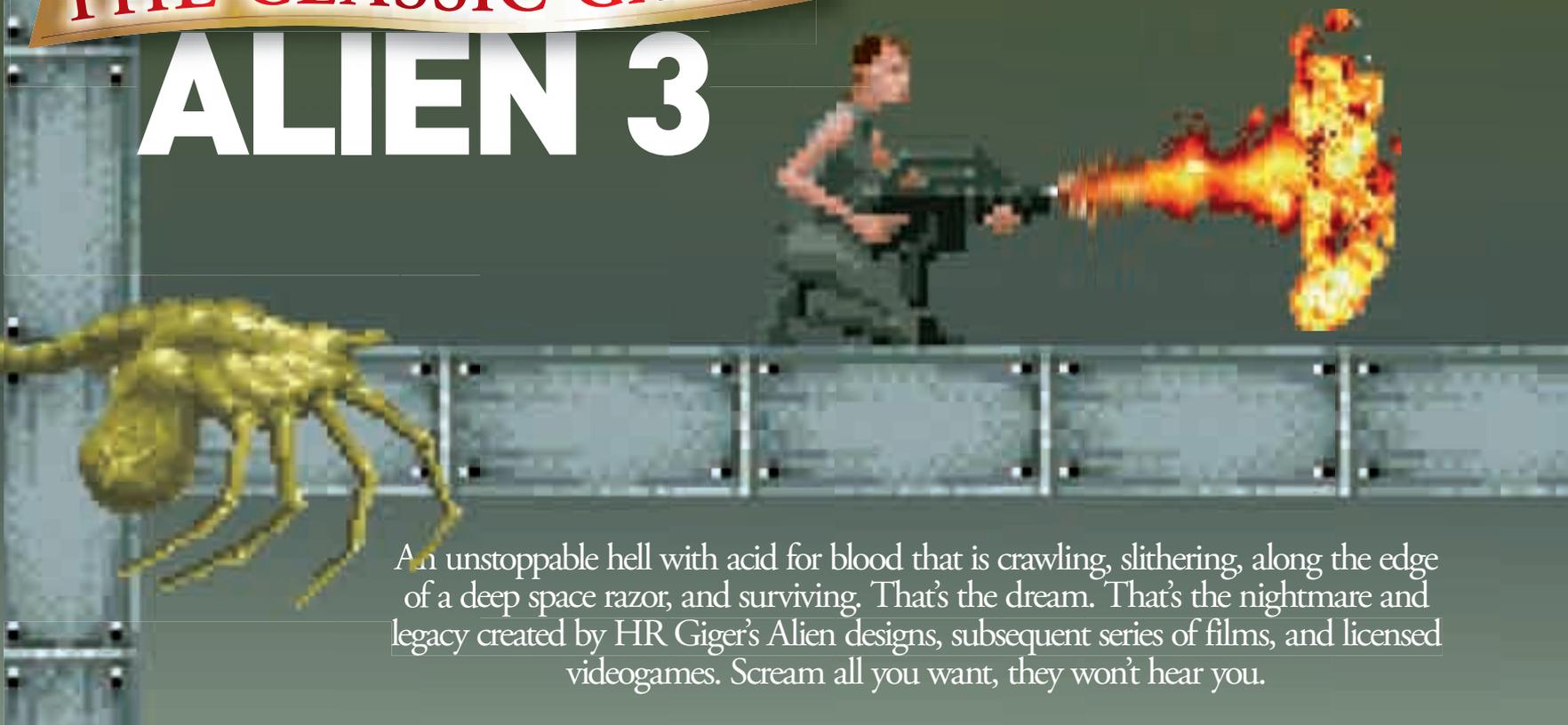


# THE CLASSIC GAME

# ALIEN 3



An unstoppable hell with acid for blood that is crawling, slithering, along the edge of a deep space razor, and surviving. That's the dream. That's the nightmare and legacy created by HR Giger's Alien designs, subsequent series of films, and licensed videogames. Scream all you want, they won't hear you.

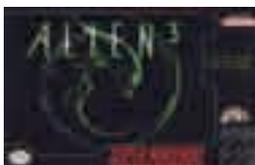


» In later stages the number and strength of aliens greatly increases, and, as you can see here, the air ducts become infested.



» Though infrequent, the cutscenes are perfectly recreations of the film.

## IN THE KNOW



- » VERSION FEATURED: SNES
- » DEVELOPER: PROBE SOFTWARE
- » RELEASED: 1993
- » GENRE: ACTION/PLATFORMER
- » EXPECT TO PAY: £5

The majority of film-to-game licences are such garbage that it's now become a cliché: an in-joke among gamers which symbolises so much and revives countless memories of poor past purchases. But it shouldn't be this way, and occasionally, a film license of epic quality will actually appear. *Alien 3* on the SNES, and, specifically the SNES version, is not only a classic antithesis to all bad film licences ever released, but was a superb game in its own right.

Dusting off the connector edges and booting it up today reveals that *Alien 3* has aged incredibly well and is still as supremely playable as we remember. Most noticeable is that it actually controls more fluidly and smoothly than even some modern games; this is the key to why it's still excellent. Pushing down just once results in a permanent crouch and the ability to walk whilst ducking down. Alternatively you can run while standing and still be able to fire in all forward facing directions – each of the three weapons is mapped to a separate face button. Ladders can be grabbed in mid-air and disembarked at any point, while overhead railings are simple to grab hold of and allow firing in eight separate directions. Everything is easy and seamless. For someone being consumed internally by an alien parasite, not to mention actually being a woman, Lieutenant Ellen Ripley is quite the agile and dextrous vixen of small-bosomed-gun-toting destruction.

Graphically it also excels, with the exceptional level of detail and animation putting to shame some of the lazier 2D games which appeared on even CD based media. The subtle details create an amazing atmosphere very much

like the movies, with drizzle battering against windows, mist and steam in the alien corridors, a heavy downpour in the muddy outside areas, and a smothering cocooned darkness whilst trapped within infested air ducts. The environments feel cold and gritty, enhancing the desperate struggle for survival against the orifice-probing Xenomorphs. These enemies too are incredibly well animated, screeching and hissing while exploding with visceral splendour. All of it helps to recreate the acid-dripping menace of the films.

Backing this atmosphere is a level of gameplay which was seldom bettered on the SNES. It's worth noting that this was exclusive to the SNES version, with the (admittedly fantastic) Game Boy version (by an unrelated London company) taking a top-down *Zelda* approach, and the prior released C64 version (later updated and modified for release on the Mega Drive, NES, Master System, Game Gear et al), adopting a much shallower and ultimately dire arcade style of gameplay. The SNES game was built anew and entirely from scratch, abandoning nearly everything found in prior releases bar the obligatory Alien Queen and cohorts.

Rather than the frustrating and totally separated stages found in the C64 school of design, the SNES title contained 6 major, non-linear, and massively expansive stages which could



» The areas to explore are varied and large, though all of them contain aliens. There is no respite from the carnage.

be explored freely. Best of all was the complete omission of any time limit; the entire game world (of each of the six stages) was there to be tamed at your leisure. In fact the levels are so large and sprawling, you're given computer terminals which provide detailed and intuitive blueprints for the entire prison complex. On these, every single point of interest (eggs, weapons, prisoners, and the rest) is noted for convenient access.

While other console versions limited the player to simply saving all prisoners within the strict time limit (a repetitive action which soon becomes boring), the SNES game had a wide variety of mission objectives to be completed within each stage. Along with the standard prisoner rescue objective, there were cooling pipes which needed

"ALIEN 3 ON THE SNES, SPECIFICALLY THE SNES VERSION, IS A CLASSIC ANTITHESIS TO ALL BAD FILM LICENCES"

## GUNS, LOTS OF GUNS

Admittedly the third film didn't feature any weapons at all, but that wouldn't have made for a very exciting game and so you're given three of the main weapons from the second film (*Aliens*). You've got your standard 10 millimetre M-41A Pulse Rifle, 99 rounds plus additional clips; a 30 millimetre pump-action Grenade Launcher, which has realistic bounce physics; and a flamethrower which comes in three colours. Red is the weakest, green is average, while the powerful blue flamethrower will cook just about anything in seconds. Sadly there's no shotgun or those massive body-rig guns they carried in *Aliens*, but the weapons available are ample for thwarting the Xenomorph threat. Pushing select also brings up a motion-tracker, which as long as you're not firing any weapons, is actually quite useful for avoiding tougher enemies. The image you see here is one of the many secret weapons caches you'll find.



» Several missions, like the welding of these cooling pipes, involves the general maintenance of the prison.



» These slimy mist-filled corridors normally join two sections of the prison together – tread carefully.

welding, junction fuse boxes that had to be repaired, doors which must be melted shut (thereby permanently sealing the adjoining room), alien eggs to scramble, and a selection of other tasks. The objectives can be selected in any order and help to avoid repetition, while also easing the pain should any particularly difficult sections be reached. Simply play them in any order you want!

After years of experience playing games, when you look back on Probe Software's efforts with *Alien 3* it all looks so easy to create a decent film licence. Despite not following the film's plot precisely, coming across more as an amalgamation of the trilogy, this humble British company (yes, again the British isles show their superiority when it comes to games design) has done an amazing job with the source material. So why have so many others failed when it comes to translating cinematic offerings into interactive media? There are many subtle nuances in the SNES version of *Alien 3*, from the precision of the controls to tiny graphical touches, and it shows what a strong understanding of game mechanics the development team had, when tasked with using another person's ideas. Based on the technical limitations of the era, it's arguable that it couldn't have been possible to craft a better film-licence than *Alien 3*. If only all film licences, no, make that all games, had this much effort put into them.



» There are several outside areas to explore, and all of them are beautifully rendered like here.

THEY SAID:  
**“NICE GRAPHICS AND CLEVER ANIMATION HELP TO MAKE ALIEN 3 BOTH AN ENJOYABLE GAME AND A SPLENDID RENDITION OF THE FILM. HURRAH!”**

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## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

### ROBOCOP 3

SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64  
 YEAR: 1991

### STARGATE

SYSTEMS: SNES, GENESIS  
 YEAR: 1994

### EXTREME G

SYSTEMS: N64  
 YEAR: 1997

