

Review: 'Alien: Isolation' delivers sci-fi terror

October 9 2014, by Lou Kesten



This image released by Sega shows a scene from the video game "Alien: Isolation." (AP Photo/Sega)

Ridley Scott's "Alien" has inspired dozens of video games since its debut in 1979, but "Alien: Isolation" (Sega, for the Xbox One, Playstation 4, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC, \$59.95) is the first in a while that has aspired to the claustrophobic terror of the original film.

Is "Isolation" that bone-chilling and nerve-wracking? Not quite, but it does deliver some thrills.

It takes place 15 years after the events of "Alien." The protagonist, Amanda Ripley, is searching for her mother—Ellen Ripley, Sigourney Weaver's character in the movie—when she gets a lead drawing her to the decommissioned space station Sevastopol. Unfortunately, the joint has also attracted a visit from one of the toothsome [alien](#) xenomorphs that wiped out most of the crew of Ellen Ripley's spaceship.

The Sevastopol is a fascinating environment, with a retro-futuristic design that looks like something you'd see in, well, a 1970s sci-fi movie. The computers run on a primitive version of DOS. The emergency check-in points—where you save your progress—look like wall-mounted pay phones. There aren't any high-powered plasma rifles; the most effective weapon you'll find is a flamethrower.

Amanda has to scavenge everything she needs to survive, including medical equipment, bullets and the material to build bombs. There are a few friendly humans still onboard, but most have degenerated into a desperate survival mode and aren't too welcoming. Worse, the androids that help run the station have gone haywire and are more likely to strangle you than assist you.

Of course, the nastiest threat is still that hungry alien. You can't kill it, and if it sees you, you have only a few seconds to live before it turns you into lunch. You do have a hand-held motion detector, which starts beeping and displays a moving dot if the xenomorph is in the neighborhood. When that happens, your best option is to stay hidden until the beast goes away or finds some other people to chomp on.

It's a unique game mechanic that requires a lot of patience. If the alien kills you—and it will, frequently—you're sent all the way back to your last save point, which can mean losing up to a half-hour's worth of progress. I've had few gaming experiences more frustrating than being inches away from the next save point, only to suddenly realize an alien

claw had just penetrated my intestines.

Your overall goal is simple—get off the Sevastopol—but "Isolation" requires you to go back and forth across the [space station](#) so many times that it becomes awfully repetitive. The 20-hour mission could easily have been cut in half and still been rewarding. And I never jumped out of my seat like I did in the movie theater decades ago. Still, fans of the original will find much to savor—even as the beast is sinking its teeth into them. Three stars out of four.

More information: alienisolation.com/

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