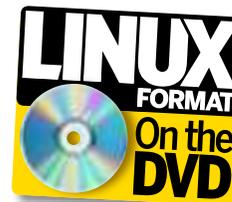# Alien Arena 7.30

They come from space to steal your cows. **Nick Veitch** is out standing in his field and gibbering at the potential of this futuristic FPS.

In brief...

» Shooter based on classics such as *Quake/UT*. Alternatively, wait for a new version of *UT*, or try out space-combat based *Terminus*.

Specification

» OpenGL graphics card (an Nvidia 6600 or better is recommended)
» 256MB Ram
» 1GHz processor or better
» 650MB disk space
» glibc6

Take an engine from a amazingly successful first person shooter, throw in some weird aliens and season with a few ideas. What do you get? Well, if you're COR Entertainment, you get a deathmatch game called *Alien Arena*. As you might expect, there's no genre-defining originality here, but it's a solid hardcore shooter nevertheless.

Although the game is based on open source code released by Id Software (creators of the *Doom* series), many aspects of the gameplay resemble another title familiar to Linux gamers – *Unreal Tournament*. Indeed, it wouldn't be hard to believe you were playing *UT2004* with a few graphics changes.

The similarities extend to the weapons too, although there are a few alien-oriented twists here. These include laser-esque weapons such as the disruptor and beam gun, but extend to the disturbingly named violator gun.

As with all competitive team FPS games, *Alien Arena* is waist-deep in tweaks, gameplay mods and mutators. These run the gamut of useful (anti-camp, quick weapons) through interesting (Instagib, low gravity, Vampire) right up to insane (joust). These game changers are more than just novelties, though; they can alter the whole dynamic of the game and eke out more dribbles of enjoyment from each of the 60 standard maps included.

At the game's most basic, you can play a single-player game from the menu. After setting the difficulty, you'll be dumped in an arena with two bots and a fragfest will ensue. Strategy-wise, the bots don't have much to recommend them, but they can use a rocket launcher to good effect. If you want to experience the different game modes, use the Host Server option and set up your game accordingly. Hosting a public match is just as easy, and then strangers can come kick your arse too.

Server mode offers its own bewildering world of options and, in a

❯ There's something uncommon in a Linux game. No, not Deathchimp's success, but the bloom effect you can see through the tree branches.

Alien Arena game modes

» Deathmatch
Kill them before they terminate you, unless they're on your side. In which case, give the enemy a good trashing together.

» Capture the flag
Grab their glowy thing and take it back to where your thing lives. If they steal yours first, kill them and get it back pronto.

» Cattle prod
Herd the robocattle into your barn. Sounds easy, but it's done while shooting the other team and vaporising their cattle. Really.

Beaming it up

Alien Arena is open source and free. It's also cross-platform, so you can enjoy teaching Windows and Mac users a lesson too. While there are Linux binaries available on the website for download, we had some difficulties in getting it to run on all systems due to the OpenAL dependencies. If you don't have **/usr/lib/** **libopenal.so.1**, try downloading the *openal-soft* package for your distro, which should fix the issue. However, previous versions were available through distro repositories, so if you still can't get it to work, wait for the updates instead.

If you're desperate, try **http://kcat.strangesoft. net/openal.html**.

manner reminiscent of *Quake II*, you can drop down the console and issue commands to load maps, boot irksome players and mess with the engine.

Probing further

Of course, the ultimate challenge is to take on strangers and show them a close-up view of your rockets. *Alien Arena* works with the Fuse server browser (**http://chaingun.org/cms/ index.php?id=6**), so you can always find someone to play against and view your latest stats – a great way to wind down from your adrenaline rush.

The in-game server finder seems a little quirky, though, so refresh often to make sure you're seeing the latest lists. Fortunately, the game is popular enough that you'll often find three or four games in progress even at strange hours of day. Since the default hosted game mode is to create a public server, many of these games are populated with lone newbies getting in some practice against the bots, so won't it be a nice surprise when you turn up to frag them mercilessly?

A lot of work has gone into the engine as well as the game. The original Id engine didn't have support for 32-bit textures, or many of the shading and lighting effects now included, for

❯ There's little time to gaze at your reflection in the mercurial waters, but it's pretty, isn't it?

❯ The weapons in *Alien Arena* are often big, loud and vicious – what else could you want for a frag-filled night of gaming bliss?

example. And it's pretty efficient too – you'll still need some modern hardware to take advantage of all the possible lighting effects, but your GPU won't melt when trying to run it at full screen size. Many of these effects are also configurable through the menus, but your best bet is to pick the maximum quality option and see how it runs in single player mode.

Sound off

The sound quality is good, and is the reason for the updated requirement on OpenAL. A female commentator charts notable events during gameplay, although, unlike *UT* there are no voiceovers for specific feats. Yet. There's also work in progress to implement player-to-

player communication in future versions as well.

Ultimately, however, *Alien Arena 7.30* isn't going to dethrone *UT2004*, even though it recycles much of *UT*'s goodness with aplomb. After all, why bother playing a derivative when you can have the original?

There are elements of originality in *Alien Arena*, though, and we hope to see these evolve to the point where it can stand apart in the future. **LXF**

Bigger, better, more

There's so much more to be done with the shipped binaries than using them as they are. Community-contributed maps, guides, graphics and sounds are a must for the modern gamer. While there's nowhere near as much extra stuff as for some commercial games, there's a thriving community of modders. One of the best places to visit for extra information is the handy guide you'll find at **http://alienarena.co.uk**.

LINUX FORMAT Verdict

Alien Arena 7.30

Developer: COR Entertainment
Web: www.alienarena.org
Price: GPL

Gameplay	8/10
Graphics	7/10
Longevity	8/10
Documentation	7/10

❯ *It's progressing from being a homage to* UT *to being a great game in its own right, but it's not there yet.*

Rating **8/10**