

# Monsters vs Aliens

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It's one of those sorts of questions that we all had as kids: Who would win in a fight out of my brother and your brother? Could Wonder Woman beat Cat Woman? And so on. Dreamworks has largely followed the same premise with their latest film *Monsters vs Aliens*. Unfortunately the Aliens have nothing in common with Ridley Scott's beast other than they both come from outer space. But hey, this is for the kids and, well, Mum wouldn't really approve of a slavering acid-for-blood Xenomorphs. As with many of today's blockbuster kids CGI movies there's a game tie-in, and this one is courtesy of Beenox (*Bee Movie*, *Kung Fu Panda* and more). Given the publishing power of Activision is this game a truly worthy film tie-in or just another lazy cash-cow piece of shovelware?

Let's face it, today's kids have a fairly limited attention span, and that's understandable given the wonderful entertainment thrown at them day-in, day-out. Take the movies; everything is ultra-colourful, super-detailed and produced with a glossy sheen that I could have only dreamed of as a youngster. *Monsters vs Aliens* in both film and game has plenty to capture young peoples' interest not least with the fun monster characters. There's Ginormica, previously just a normal woman known as Susan, who was hit by an alien meteor on her wedding day. So what happens when otherworldly space matter hits you? Of course, you're transformed into a 50ft giant! Dr. Cockroach is a mad scientist, who basically did a bit of a 'Fly' on himself and now has the head of a bug. And there's The Missing Link, a sort of ape/fish crossbreed who was thawed from an iceberg. Finally (and my favourite) there's B.O.B. a gelatinous, indestructible blue blob with a Cyclops eye. These unlikely compatriots are the would-be saviours of us all, and indeed the very world we inhabit. As we all know monsters are very dangerous, so the group of oddities initially find themselves locked up in a high security military prison. A distraught Ginormica discusses the hopelessness of their situation and out of frustration throws her spoon (as you do). Her super-giant strength results in the spoon being buried into the reinforced super-steel cell wall. This does nothing to ease the mood of the giant lady previously known as Susan, she angrily wrenches the spoon out of the wall and unwittingly opens the cell door. Freedom! A cut scene shows Ginormica running out of the cell and collecting a couple of cars on her feet to use as roller-skates. However the monsters' captor, General Monger responds to the security breach by releasing a huge robot to try to halt the escape. With the story set the game begins. The first level sees you playing as Ginormica, on her 'car'-skates, making a break from the military prison. This gives an introduction to controlling Ginormica and her unique abilities. The level plays out as an on-the-rails ride where you simply have to either duck or jump obstacles, leap pits and smash through enemy robots. The pursuing giant military robot does its best to chuck in a few extra obstacles as well. The controls are simple, intuitive and the first stage breaks you in very gently indeed. With Ginormica's introduction done Missing Link takes centre stage to show off his party pieces. Being half ape and half fish you'd think he might have a bit of swimming to do, but no, his job is to take on the majority of opposing enemy forces, mainly comprising of small round robot minions. Although Missing Link is strictly land based he's nonetheless quiet proficient at delivering a good slapping with his rudimentary fins. He can punch, tail-spin, throw, perform aerial assaults and even pull off a Matrix style slo-mo multi target attack. So, yep, there's lots of grabbing smashing and destruction of small cute looking robots. Besides the cartoon violence, Missing Link also has a few basic puzzles to overcome. As you'd expect the challenges aren't taxing and range from pulling bolts out of the giant robot to actuating switches that allow further progress through the level. Once again the end of the level comes without too much trauma. Next up it's the turn of the blue blob B.O.B. (try saying that quickly after a few beers), his events are certainly the most cerebral and to me the most fun as well. Now although there are what I would define as proper puzzles, worry not, as they don't tax a full grown adult like 'wot i am'. Beenox have made the most out of B.O.B.'s architecture, or rather lack of. He can 'gloop' from floor to ceiling, pass through gratings, swallow enemies and spit them out and even double up as an effective turret. B.O.B.'s levels are very much maze orientated and relatively clever in their design, with a combination of solid floors and floors made from gratings. Should B.O.B. walk, errr, slide over a grating, he'll simply fall through. Sometimes this is desired although often he'll need to cross it. So what does a jelly monster do in this situation? The answer is to swallow something solid like an enemy or a crate and it's problem solved. B.O.B. can also swallow security guards to open doors, which adds a nice unique twist to key collecting. One of the monsters I haven't mentioned as yet is Insectosaurus; he makes an appearance as a non-playable character. B.O.B. has to save the 350-foot bug from General Monger's helicopters that are hypnotising the giant grub with bright lights. A few blobby spitballs in a form of turret mini-game do the job to free the huge insect from its apparent stasis. The story progresses with the slightly maniacal Dr Cockroach giving tips along the way (just in case the puzzles are too tough). In addition a second player can jump in and take on the role of Dr. Cockroach, but this is simplistic at best. Calling it 2-player co-op is in my opinion a little bit of a con; all that the second player gets to do is essentially play a glorified 'Duck Hunt'. With an onscreen crosshair Player Two can only shoot and collect stuff. Sure this is better than a friend or sibling just watching, but only just. A trial with my very own young 'guinea pig' children quickly revealed the biggest flaw with this... They both wanted to be the fun monster and not the boring crosshair! Fortunately 'Dad' was on hand to prevent the inevitable controller tug-of-war competition. I'd like to add at this point, that no small offspring were harmed in the making of this review. With the characters introduced and their abilities explained the game progresses in a monster rotation. Ginormica is permanently skating, The Missing Link is continuously scrapping and B.O.B. keeps 'blobbing' in his mazes. As with the film, the megalomaniac alien Gallaxhar turns up and sends a gargantuan robot to Earth. With this General Monger decides that rather than trying to fight the monsters he should put their abilities to use against the greater threat. So, skate, fight, and maze, you begin to see a rather familiar pattern play out throughout the game. The presentation of *Monsters vs Aliens* is generally good, the graphics are bright

and colourful, if not particularly detailed. The game is not blisteringly fast during the skating sections and certainly no challenge for the Xbox 360 hardware. Oddly the game's cutscenes don't borrow from the film counterpart, but I would imagine that is largely due to the plot inconsistencies. The game only loosely borrows the bare skeleton of the film story, so don't expect too many spoilers if you play the game before seeing the movie. Also missing is the voice talents of the big-screen actors so a lot of the comedy feels a bit hollow. To tempt you back to the game is the DNA lab where you get to spend your collected items (DNA orbs). The more orbs and multipliers you collect throughout the game's levels then effectively the more you have to spend on 'extras'. The unlockables are arranged in a DNA tree and you must progress largely in order. Colour codes on the tree represent different bonuses from movie stills, monster challenges (timed re-runs of levels etc), monster upgrades (extra health) and co-op power-ups (more powerful crosshair – woohoo!). It's a good addition, except I would imagine only the most die-hard fans will want to re-play the levels after they've completed the 6-8 hour story mode. Is Monsters vs Aliens for you? Well, if you're a hardcore FPS fan then I would say probably not. But, let's not forget, this is a game based on a film aimed at kids, so why would adults like a game such as this? Believe it or not there is a valid argument here. You see, when I take my kids to one of these big budget CGI movies I do find myself invariably entertained. Yes, it's aimed squarely at the kids, but the filmmakers always do their bit to entertain Mum and Dad with the odd 'higher-level quip'. I believe the same is true of games aimed at the kids; there should be something there for Mum, Dad or even the older brother. Unfortunately, the co-op mode in Monsters vs Aliens is a poor attempt as my experiment proved. As far as film tie-ins go Monsters vs Aliens isn't a bad game, fans of the film will have fun, but only for a limited time. It's a little unimaginative, very repetitive and doesn't provide enough entertainment for Player Two. Invariably if a game aimed at a younger audience is fun for the adults to join in, then it usually lasts multiple replays. But how can I put this in a way that a child thinks? Ok... I know! Which would win out of Monsters vs Aliens and Lego Star Wars? I really don't need to answer that one. Discuss this in our Forum