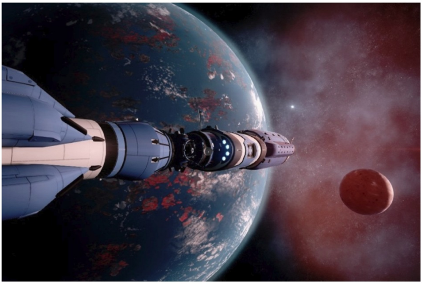
You're Humanity's Last Hope and We're All Screwed in 'The Solus Project'

By Phil Hornshaw

May 4, 2016



The Solus Project is a survival game set on an alien planet in which you not only have to explore the world and figure out what's going on—like most video games, really—but also have to keep your dumb frail body alive. That means eating, drinking, sleeping, and avoiding freezing to death.

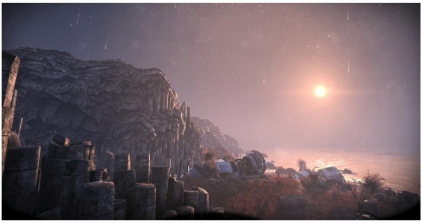
What follows is a short accounting of what happened to one astronaut involved in *The Solus Project*, what he saw and discovered, how he almost died a few times, and what he tried to eat.

* * *

Earth is ruined and the last of the human race is hoping to find a new place to live. So we're in a spaceship, headed to a distant alien planet, to see if it'll work out and—oh shit the ship's on fire.

Bad news, humanity: our savior of the race ship is about to crash.

DAY 1



Oh good, I'm not dead. Seems my escape pod did its job—it was a pod that helped me escape, and it crashed on Gliese-6143-C. Supposedly, this might be a nice place for all us humans to set up shop on.

Popping out of the pod, it *does* seem like a nice place to live. It has cool rocks, it's already has its own grass, and it has a nice beach. Spectacular views. Romantic-looking supermoon every single day, so obviously great for dating. Seems pleasant enough as I crawl onto land. I don't immediately choke to death on the alien atmosphere, so things are going pretty well.

Apparently my ship literally fell apart in orbit, scattering useful material all over the archipelago where I am now a permanent resident. So the good news is, there are cans of food everywhere! And water! Not going to die immediately. Let's go exploring!

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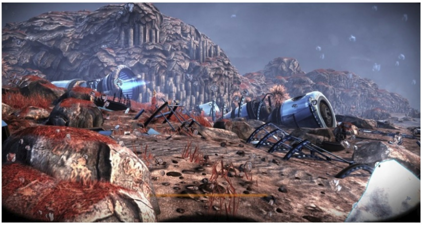
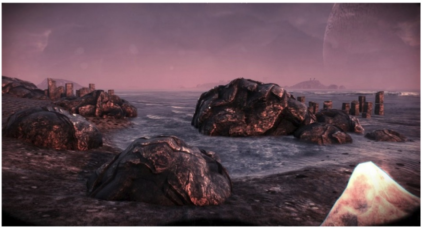
Pretty cool so far.

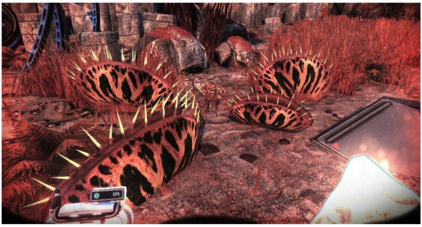


Oh hey, debris that's probably filled with the dead bodies of my friends.



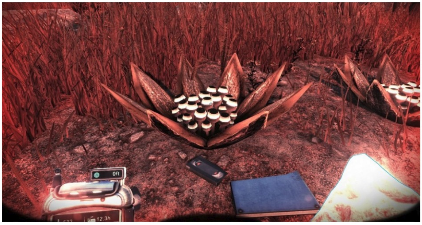
Walking along the beach, I've decided this planet is kind of amazing-looking.

And then I step on something that moves and FREAK OUT because there's something alive here and it's going to kill me.



A few seconds pass. I'm not dead. In fact, these plants seem a little lazy in general. They close really slowly, which seems to defeat the purpose of pretending to be an unmoving plant to capture live animals and insects that wander in.

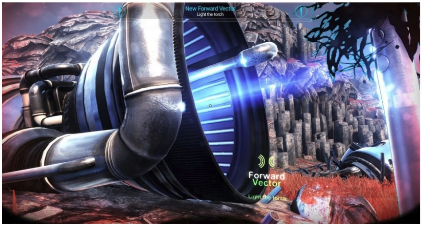
I'm not as shocked by the other creepy-ass plants I discover, some of which appear to have a million eyes to stare deep into the well of your soul. Overall they seem more afraid of me than I am of them.



It's getting pretty cold as the sun goes down on Gliese-6143-C. Also, apparently I have to sleep, and eat, and drink water, or I'll die, according to alarms going off on my little Siri-enabled tricorder.

But hey, here's an engine from the ship that's still spewing flame. That's probably an OK place to sleep, right?

DAY 2



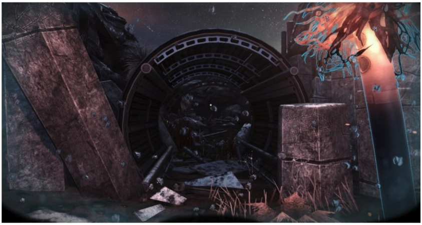
OK, awake and eating some food out of one of these cans. Time to find somewhere to go and not die. I'm definitely going to need additional food and water. I'm told I'll need a torch also, but my little tricorder is pretty smart—it says I can just dip a stick in some oil from the ship, and then I'll just, uh, reach my hand into the engine to light it.

Please hold.

Not on fire! OK good. Kinda warm, got some light. Time to figure out how to get off this planet or some such goal.

Despite having crashed here, this doesn't seem like such a bad planet. Sure, it gets stupidly cold at night, but that's what buildings will be for. And yeah, maybe those, like, several giant moons are disconcerting from a climate and weather pattern standpoint, but humans are pretty adaptable.

We'll need some soil samples but clearly there are plants growing here. I ate one. Based on the fact that didn't die, agriculture is a thing we can do. All in all, Glies seems like it could be a pretty solid option for—WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT.



I find a big cave and from that big cave are issuing some ridiculous noises. Imagine the whooping of huge-sounding, probably deadly monkeys, intermixed with the deep bellows of a giant Cthulhu-like elder god just waking from its cosmic slumber, probably real hungry. It sounds like that. It's coming from underground. And it's freaky loud.

Of course my little science computer is like, "you should go check that out!"

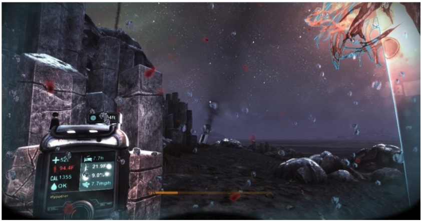
I don't wanna go check that out.

I get close to the cave just to have a look when I discover something else: a box of survival stuff from my ship, its contents pilfered. The entrance to the cave is blocked by metal and pieces of the ship, but just inside is a human-manufactured-looking glow stick, one of the few on the manifest of that box from the ship.

Someone else made it! I'm sure nothing bad has happened to them.

Seeing as there's no way through the cave, I head back toward the beach to explore more. First, it starts raining. Did you know that being wet plus being cold equals hypothermia? Today I learned.

Just as I'm starting to worry about freezing to death, something appears in the sky, hurtling toward the ground and on fire. It crashes into the beach and as I go to check it out—because of course I do—I realize it's some kind of little supply rocket. Inside: some especially good food, and a portable teleporter.



So I guess I'm going to temporarily render myself down to individual molecules to get into the scary cave. Just as I'm thinking "screw that," since despite the fact that I'm slowly going into hypothermic shock the cave is still making some absolutely terrifying sounds, I get a new warning from my little computer: "climate anomaly detected."

Uh, what kind of climate anomaly?

HOLY SHIT.

I look up as scary, bassy music rises to see a tornado forming just off the coast. It's hurtling toward me. It cuts across the beach, tearing debris into the air, as I haul ass back toward the cave. The cave making hungry elder god noises.

Stay here and die in the rain or go in there and die in the dark.

I chuck that teleporter thing through the blocked cave doorway, zap myself through, whip out my still-burning torch, and I delve into the darkness.

OK. OK. OK. I didn't get murdered like that cow from *Twister*, or Kevin Costner in *Man of Steel*. Live to fight loud underground creatures for another day, I guess. Time to head down.

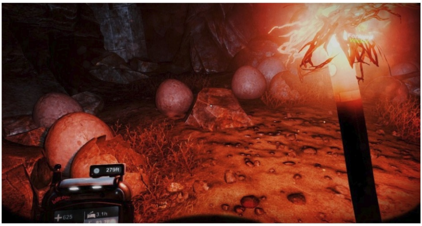
It is dark as *hell* in this cave. Luckily my trusty torch dipped in jet fuel never runs out.

Spooky noises: increasing. Total, impenetrable darkness: overwhelming. Occasional crazily shaking earth: occurring more frequently and now I'm in a place where I'll definitely be buried alive.

Despite knowingly traipsing toward what's very likely something that will murder me and use my corpse to nourish its young, or will remove my skull and treat it as a trophy in its advanced honor-based hunter society, I have to admit that it's a pretty cave. Some of the rocks have an iridescent glow, so it's not all torchlight and thickening fear.

Maybe there's nothing to worry about down here. Maybe it's just a weird cave full of water and light-up rocks and on this planet, light-up rocks occasionally make shrill noises that sound like horrific creatures being birthed from an icy void of pain and despair.

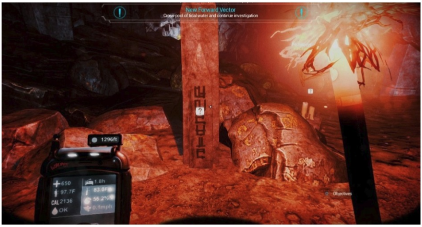
Maybe—



Ah, goddammit.

Best not to linger in the giant dinosaur-like alien monster nest. Pushing forward, the cave twists and turns and then—something that might be creepier.

A sign. A literal description of the location. With writing. *Somebody* lives here.



Science-loving brain: Holy crap, sentient alien life! Awesome!

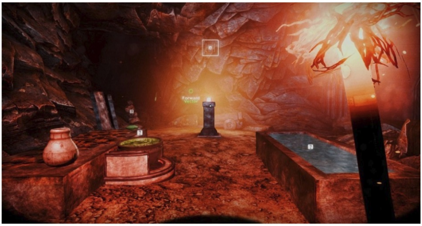
Terrified lizard brain: Holy crap, sentient, cave-dwelling alien life! Run!

But no green people appear from the shadows to vaporize me, so that's good. And as I press on, passing a few things that look disconcertingly like sacrificial altars, I find doors that open with switches and gears, and I find helpful little piles of green discs that are apparently food. Well, I ate them, and they did not immediately melt my organs.

More cave. Nothing has leaped out of the ample shadows to disembowel me yet, so maybe this isn't that kind of planet. That'd be a nice twist.

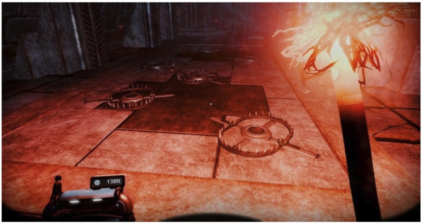
Even further, it's starting to seem like maybe it's *not* that kind of planet, when I hit what is apparently a little alien house in the middle of the cave. It's got a bed and some light-up rocks, a couple candles, a big thing of water that could be an alien bathtub but I drink out of it anyway, and a huge, boiling pot of green stuff. My little computermachine says I can eat it like alien porridge. And then I take a nap.

DAY 3 PROBABLY



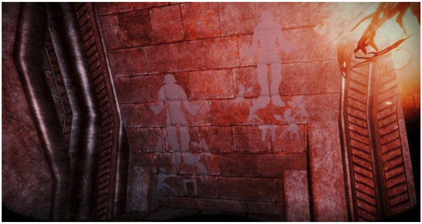
Just as I'm vaguely remembering some kind of bear-related cautionary tale about sleeping in strange beds and eating strange gruel, I find a ladder. Up until now, it seemed like these aliens were basically pretty simple, what with their stone-slab beds.

Down the ladder, though, is something altogether different.

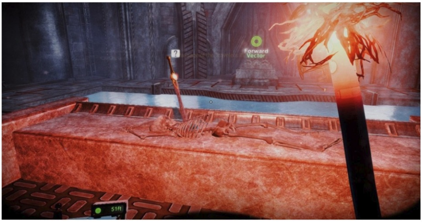


There are definitely aliens, they are definitely smart, and they're definitely concerned about visitors.

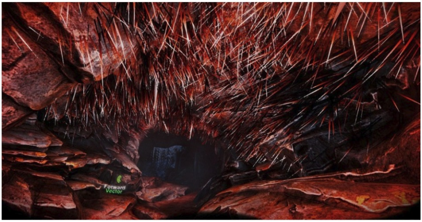
There's a whole story told in wall paintings. The gist of it: there's more than one kind of alien. The bigger, smarter ones came and brought gifts to the little ones.



Hey, a sword. Sticking out of a guy. This troubles me.



And we're back to the cave. For all the strangeness, the murals, the alien genesis story, what looked like a sacrificial altar, literal bear traps, and spooky noises, this hasn't been that bad. In fact, I never found the source of that spooky noise, but it seems to have gone away. Maybe this planet is just weird but not really anything to worry about—

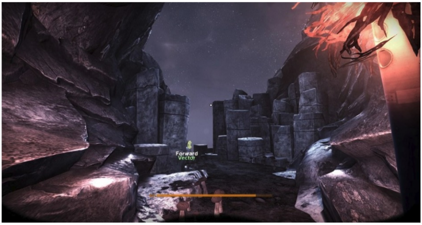


That seems odd.

Aaaand the walls stabbed me.

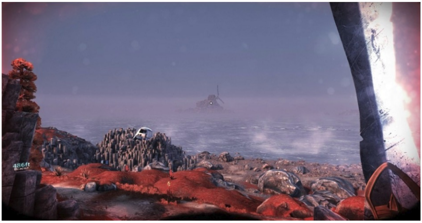
I'm not dead but I definitely don't want to be here so it's time to ruuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuun.

Suddenly, I'm back outside.

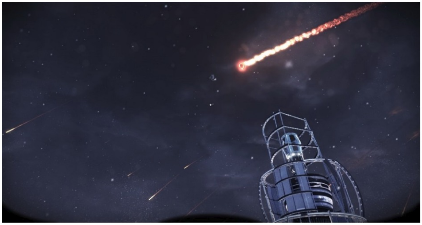


No elder gods. No facehugger babies. Not even a long-headed alien janitor to clean up the bits of guts that might get stuck in those bear traps. Maybe all the aliens are dead. Maybe nobody's been here in awhile. Maybe Gliese isn't a planet we should avoid at all costs.

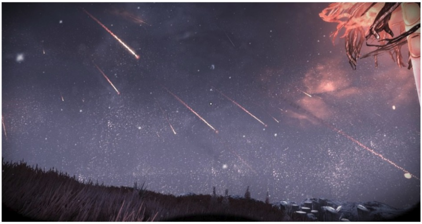
As I head down a hill I catch sight of another of the escape pods from the ship. More survivors! Surely nothing tragic has happened to them as they've wandered this slightly hostile world for the past few days.



Further investigation reveals that, yes, my friend Yuri is dead. He'd been hanging out in a cave beneath the pod for a few days, but he managed to break his leg and die from the infection or blood loss or something, according to his increasingly delirious journal entries. *But* he started building a communications tower to call for rescue! Great!



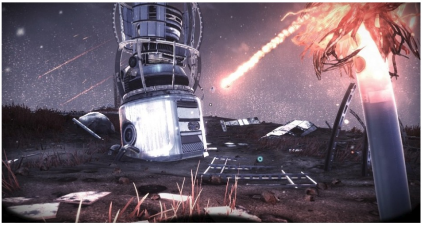
Hey what was that?



COME ON.

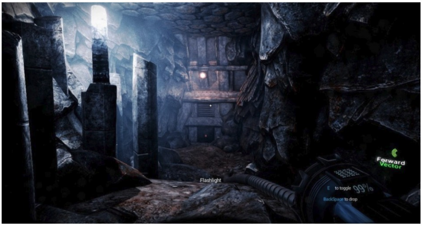
Time to haul ass to avoid literally being exploded by flaming spacerocks raining out of the sky. This is not a good week to be hanging out on Gliese-6143-C.

DAY 4 AND BEYOND



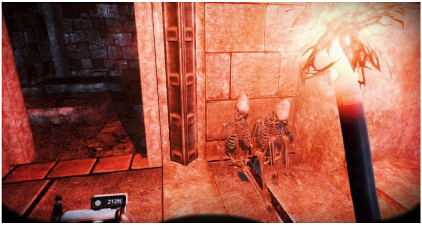
I slept in a small alien house with more of that porridge, because apparently that's just lying out everywhere, but no walls. Maybe this planet used to be awesome and then got crappy, like when the dinosaurs all died on Earth. RIP poor alien dinofolk.

Meanwhile, no meteors hit the comms tower, which is good. I just need to power it, and apparently I can use alien power from some of these buildings. Also good.

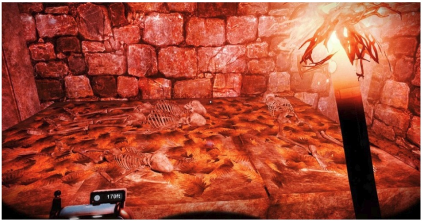


But I gotta go down there. Bad.

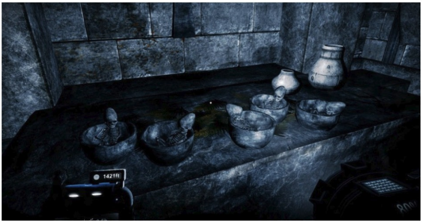
OK here we go. At least it's not a cave. Although there are a lot of dead bodies.



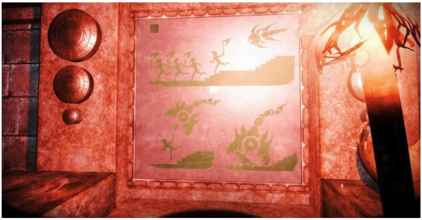
Like a lot of them.



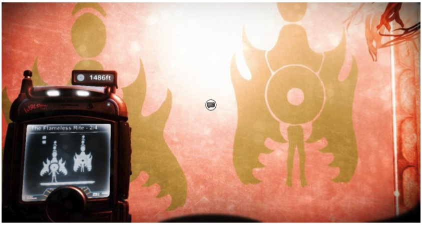
Hmm.



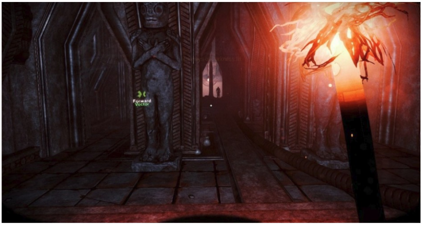
Hey, a bunch of bowls of dead babies. This is great.



Venturing further, more murals start to appear. They're, uh, worrisome. I think these aliens are trying to tell me something.



Specifically this part.

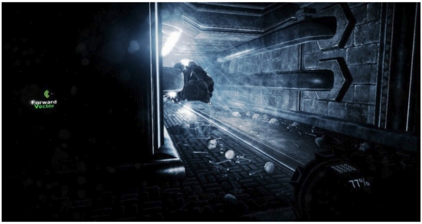


But just as I'm starting to get worried—hey! An alien bro! Who is actually alive!

I figure I'll just go say hi and explain myself with pictograms and maybe he'll share some more of that porridge with me. So I follow.

It's getting a bit cramped. And there are a few more bear traps. And it's kind of weird that he didn't, like, wave or anything, probably.

And then:



Ah crap. That appears to be a monster made out of smoke and electricity and spikes.

Yes that's exactly what it is.

There's more to be seen on Gliese-6143-C for astronauts looking to rescue humanity, provided you don't get murdered by a spikey electric smoke demon (among many, many other hazards). *The Solus Project* is currently being released episodically on **digital PC game portal Steam**, with the full release set for May 2016.

Phil Hornshaw is a freelance writer and the co-author of So You Created a Wormhole: The Time Traveler's Guide to Time Travel *and* The Space Hero's Guide to Glory. *He was hoping the latter would help him get Han Solo hair, but so far he's been unsuccessful. He lives with his wife and annoying cats in Los Angeles.*

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