What?

This is story feedback given from both the perspective of *marketing* as well as *Diversity & Inclusion*. What would make things easy or challenging to bring to market? How do we ensure the story we are telling hits our bar for inclusivity in a franchise where diversity has always been a core element?

Why Story Matters to Cold Iron

* **Keeping True to the *Aliens* Franchise:** *Aliens* as a franchise was originally [an allegory for sexual assault](https://screenrant.com/alien-movie-chestburster-sexual-assault-meaning/)that sought to [create empathy in men who rarely experienced sexual trauma](https://www.gq.com/story/alien-covenant-body-horror)*.* It centered a strong female protagonist overcoming stacked odds from the very first film, which was released just [6 years after Roe v Wade first legalized abortion](https://www.thoughtco.com/1970s-feminism-timeline-3528911). As Roe v Wade was recently overturned, current public discourse is in a similar place as it was at the time the original film was released. [Likewise, themes of anti-capitalism/corporations and critique of War, militarism and jingoism have always been relevant to the franchise](https://filmobsessive.com/film/film-analysis/beyond-the-screen-4-everything-is-political-especially-the-alien-saga/), and are just as relevant today with 2 major Wars dominating the international news cycle and at the forefront of consumers’ minds. Not only did *Aliens* feature a female action protagonist in a sci-fi film for the first time, it also has had a [canonically trans character](https://screenrant.com/alien-trans-woman-joan-lambert-lgbtq/) (at a time when that was highly taboo), [has centered](https://www.tor.com/2023/10/03/not-much-choice-disability-and-monstrosity-in-the-alien-franchise/) [disability](https://avp.fandom.com/wiki/Dom_Vriess) in multiple films, and has always leaned heavily POC in its casting. *Aliens* affords us a huge opportunity to make a powerful, impactful statement, but without nuance and finesse we risk losing our message or even being perceived as being on the wrong side of issues entirely. Modern *Aliens* installments that have achieved this successfully [have done so to massive critical acclaim.](https://www.theastromech.com/2023/09/alien-romulus-themes-and-social.html)If we don’t tackle at least some of these issues, then why make a story in the *Aliens* universe at all? How are we different from IPs like *Call of Duty,* [*eSports*](https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/article/3244620/military-esports-how-gaming-is-changing-recruitment-morale/)and [*Marvel* films](https://gamerant.com/marvel-military-propaganda-explained/#:~:text=At%20least%20six%20Marvel%20movies,was%20made%20with%20military%20support.)which exist in part as militaristic propaganda machines?
* **It is Essential to our Company Pillars:** The pillars ofDiversity through Belonging and Trusting Environment for Collaboration mean sensitive and difficult topics such as inclusion, women’s and minority rights can’t take a backseat - no matter how uncomfortable they may be to talk about.
* **Note on Accessibility**: Inclusivity goes beyond story representation and also needs to extend into accessibility. There is no inclusivity without accessibility. [19% of people in the United States have some form of disability](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html), an [estimated 14% of adults in the US have difficulty reading](https://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/overview.aspx), and [estimated 10% of males have some form of color vision deficiency](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/color-blindness-risk). Data has also shown that users who use accessibility features are more likely to complete the game, and in turn are more likely to purchase subsequent DLC or installments. Accessibility has become a topic of great industry importance in recent years (including becoming a [common](https://vgaawards.com/) [category](https://www.cbr.com/game-awards-2022-innovation-accessibility-nominees/) for [awards](https://caniplaythat.com/2022/12/02/public-voting-opens-for-gaconf-awards-22/)). Cold Iron should be making active efforts here - not just for publicity and priority store placement, but also because *Aliens* has historically been an inclusive IP and because it is ethically the correct thing to do.
* **Employee Safety and Confidence**: As a company that purports to value women, LGBT+ and marginalized groups it is essential we strongly message this internally and externally and that the messaging is consistent in the products we make.
* **Establishing a Corporate Brand/Voice**: Currently Cold Iron has no distinct voice - we do not post regularly to our branded channels for [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ColdIronStudios), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ColdIronStudios), or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cold-iron/mycompany/). References to Cold Iron are spoken about through the lens of past accomplishments of our previous founders/current directors at previous companies, but not in regards to Cold Iron as our own studio. We have none of our own IP. We have won no awards. We have very little established pedigree as our own studio, having released only one game in 8 years. We are so unknown we have even been previously co-opted as part of NFT/crypto scams, because who outside of our studio would even know to refute that information? As a studio, what do we want to be known for outside of “fun, action shooters” - is strong narrative an important part of what we want our studio to be known for?
* **Curating Our Community**: Fostering a dedicated community that aligns with our company values is important - by explicitly taking a stance within our story, we filter out some of the most toxic people in the gaming community. People with a “keep politics out of games” approach are almost always extremely toxic in other ways. Being strategic about who we do and do not want as part of our audience in turn protects vulnerable people within our community and our company. We don’t need to (and shouldn’t) aim to appeal to everyone, and it is essential we actively remove people who make our community unsafe. Are we looking to appeal to the *Call of Duty* audience, or the *Aliens* audience? [Who even is the audience](https://quanticfoundry.com/2023/11/07/sci-fi/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)?
* **Opportunities for moderated panels/B2B discussions**: Narrative is one of the most important elements of interactive media and how players engage with the product. Because of this, there [are entire events](https://www.ludonarracon.com/) and [awards](https://gamechoiceawards.com/archive/writing) [centered](http://narrative/) [around](https://awards.bafta.org/award/2023/games/narrative) [narrative](https://twitter.com/larianstudios/status/1723041045754040765) in games, and it is [one of the most popular topics at B2B events such as GDC](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2e4mYbwSTbYD6zfuWTwz2nTfvKOZBWMe).
* **Marketing story**: While this is a secondary or tertiary goal, staying relevant in the fast-moving gaming/world news cycle is important. Using our story as a vehicle for a message that is relevant to the real world helps us [stay visible](https://www.axios.com/2022/06/24/game-studios-roe-overturn) during periods outside of releases and major beats, helps create legitimacy and trust with media, players, and other people within our industry (which in turn helps for hiring and retention). A compelling narrative creates a strong marketing opportunity, especially in combination with being a female-led studio.

Why Story Matters to the Public

* **Games are art**: Art is inherently political, and artists have a moral obligation to use their platform to enact change and give a voice to the voiceless.
* **Morality can be gray, but sometimes the message is clear:** If the intent of our narrative is to make a statement about the world and critique those in power while uplifting the powerless, then it is important to go all-in and be clear in that messaging.While we don’t have to be hamfisted in how we position our message (the message can be subtle), we also *can’t have it both ways*. We can’t glorify the War machine while likewise condemning it if we expect to be taken seriously.
* **Art is a tool of the people:** When researching “[What is the role of art in Society](https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+the+role+of+art+in+society&source=hp&ei=uVG7YoqXFqTXkPIP-N6kqA8&iflsig=AJiK0e8AAAAAYrtfyZBOENRd6kwGqEU4Pe_mg-LN1IKv&oq=what+is+the+role+of+art&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAMYBDIFCAAQgAQyBQgAEIAEMgUIABCABDIFCAAQgAQyBQgAEIAEMgUIABCABDIFCAAQgAQyBQgAEIAEMgUIABCABDIFCAAQgAQ6CwgAEIAEELEDEIMBOhEILhCABBCxAxCDARDHARCjAjoOCC4QgAQQsQMQgwEQ1AI6CAgAELEDEIMBOggILhCxAxCDAToOCC4QgAQQsQMQxwEQowI6CwguELEDEMcBEKMCOggIABCABBCxAzoICAAQgAQQyQM6BQgAEJIDOgUIABCxAzoLCC4QgAQQsQMQgwE6CwgAEIAEELEDEMkDUABY6A5gyipoAHAAeACAAWaIAc4PkgEEMjEuMpgBAKABAQ&sclient=gws-wiz)” the answers are unanimous: “Artists are a vehicle for expressing universal emotion,” “Artists are responsible for unearthing the truth,” “Artists work to illuminate the margins and make societal changes,” “Artists connect with and inspire people globally,” and “Artists offer messages of hope.” Art has regularly been several steps ahead of the world, holding up a mirror to the failings of society and advocating for change. There are countless essays written about the history of [art as a tool for social change](https://www.bing.com/search?q=art+as+a+tool+for+social+change&pc=COS2&ptag=D021022-N0640AF30FAE38D3&form=CONBDF&conlogo=CT3334466). This has always been a primary purpose of art.
* **The games industry is historically dominated by cishet, white men:** [Thegames](https://www.pcgamer.com/chris-avellone-accused-of-sexual-misconduct-by-multiple-women/) [industry](https://www.espn.com/esports/story/_/id/29401903/evo-2020-canceled-sexual-misconduct-allegations-co-founder) [continues](https://www.shacknews.com/article/118833/mrgrimmmz-cohh-carnage-more-exit-opg-amid-ceo-sexual-harassment-allegations) [to come](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53391689) [under](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/aug/08/activision-blizzard-lawsuit-women-sexual-harassment) [fire](https://www.gamespot.com/articles/insomniac-games-responds-to-allegations-of-workpla/1100-6478897/) [for being](https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/28/tech/riot-games-settlement/index.html) [unfriendly](https://www.zippia.com/game-designer-jobs/demographics/) to women and marginalized groups. [Less than 12% of design and narrative roles are held by women](https://www.zippia.com/game-designer-jobs/demographics/), which in turn bleeds out into the games that are made. Within stories, [female protagonists make up only 38% of major characters](https://www.vintageisthenewold.com/game-pedia/are-male-or-female-protagonists-more-common#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20females%20accounted%20for,the%20action%20of%20the%20story.), and [only 15% of games have a female protagonist, with 41% having no female characters at all](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_representation_in_video_games#:~:text=Collected%20data%20shows%20that%20only,of%20victims%20or%20sexual%20objects.). This is a way to show we are willing to put in the work to make the change, and that we are doing it visibly and authentically. This is not just word service - it’s tied to the games we make.

Strategy

There are several ways we can actively contribute to ensure our story adheres to our intended narrative goals and tone. Below are a few potential initiatives:

* **Think about our work critically**: When and how do we open it up for direct or anonymous feedback? Do certain parts of the narrative actually add to the worldbuilding, advance the story? Are they necessary or are they gratuitous? What are we trying to achieve with certain plot points, both from a narrative and gameplay perspective? What is our process for editing our work, ensuring we have clarity, that we catch issues while they can still be addressed? How can we be objective while also being candid and tactful about how we give, receive and address feedback?
* **Align internally on our goals:** Equip our team with guiding pillars to contextualize the story - what are the overarching themes, goals, and tone of the story? Are we communicating this to them so they have the right context when working on their tasks and thinking about the overall vision?
* **Ensure we have a diverse team at critical decision-making moments**: Include a variety of people in meetings/processes/teams in which major decisions that affect the organization, the game(s) and the team are being made.
* **Trust the experts**: By involving impartial consultants/subject matter experts as sensitivity readers (HalpNet and/or Intelligame), we can receive objective third party feedback.