NEW!

360Zine

Issue 1 | November 2006

Free Magazine For Xbox 360 Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates...

GEARS OF WAR

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW INSIDE!

Don't miss this year's biggest & bloodiest blockbuster!

WIN! New games worth over £400

WWE SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2007

HUGE REVIEW



It's the fight of your lives!

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PLUS!
NEW FOR '07
PGR 4
Halo Wars
Kane & Lynch
The Darkness
Lost Planet
SWOS

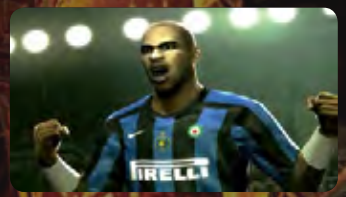
FULL REVIEWS



1 F.E.A.R
How scary can you go?



2 NEED FOR SPEED
Drive like a madman



3 PES 6 v FIFA 07
Football fever returns

38 PAGES INSIDE...

Welcome to 360Zine



Welcome to a new type of videogames magazine. Unlike other mags, 360Zine is only published digitally, is freely distributed across the net, and features interactive rich media. But, like some other mags, 360Zine is editorially focused and boasts full print quality.

The team behind 360Zine is passionate about games and has years of experience working on videogames mags such as Official Xbox Magazine, X360, PC Format, and Official PlayStation. We also pride ourselves on using the best games journalists to deliver no-holds-barred previews and reviews that you can trust.

Don't forget that 360Zine is free, so don't be shy - send a copy to your mates; post a link to us on your site; sign up for a free sub; and drop me an email to let me know your thoughts.

Enjoy the issue....

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
dan@gamerzines.com

Don't miss! *This month's top highlights*



Gears of War
EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!
Epic's blood-fest arrives on 360 PAGE 18

PGR4
Revving up for 2007? PAGE 3



WIN!
New games worth over £400

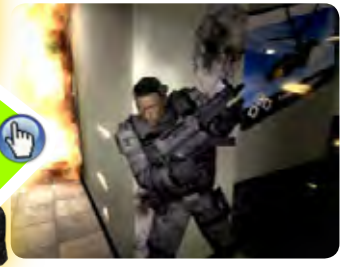


The Darkness
It really is very, very dark PAGE 9



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F.E.A.R.
MASSIVE REVIEW
Be very afraid PAGE 32





QUICK FINDER
Every game's just a click away!

Project Gotham Racing 4
Halo Wars
Sensible World Of Soccer
Bioshock
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men
Assassin's Creed
Halo 3
The Darkness
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition
Gears Of War
WWE SmackDown VS RAW 2007
Need For Speed
Pro Evolution Soccer 6
FIFA 07
F.E.A.R.
Tiger Woods
NBA 2K7
NHL 2K7

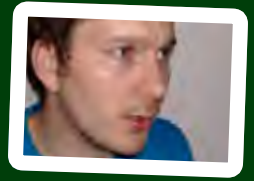




MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



Keri Allan
A videogames journalist, Keri writes for Flipside, OXM360, and The Sunday Times.



Lee Hall
A lifelong gamer, and one-time editor of Xbox World, Lee is now a well regarded freelance writer.



Kieron Gillen
Writing about games for over a decade, Kieron writes for Wired, the Guardian and Eurogamer.



Steve Hill
Industry stalwart Steve is a full-time games journalist. He writes regularly for Maxim and PC Zone.

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Bizarre Creations
Heritage: Metropolis Street Racer, PGR series
Link: www.bizarrecreations.com
ETA: TBC

FIRST LOOK

Project Gotham Racing 4

The most Bizarre Creation yet?

What's the story?

Project Gotham Racing, the motoring superstar in which players build-up kudos points by driving like a nutter, is back for a fourth iteration.

What do we know?

Microsoft has erected a wall of silence around PGR4, and the game's sexy trailer doesn't offer up many clues either. Developer Bizarre Creations is making some odd noises about the game, suggesting that PGR4 will be true to the spirit of Gotham, but offer something quite different…

Speculation is rife as to whether the series will be moving away from real world settings, while Lima in Peru has been mooted as a match for the seemingly fantastical trailer city. For sure, we're expecting plenty of concept cars – the likes of Peugeot are running competitions for budding designers to get their motor in the game.

What's more, the PGR engine is most likely being rebuilt from the ground up to capitalise on the power of 360.

"The PGR engine is likely to be rebuilt from the ground up"

When do we get more?

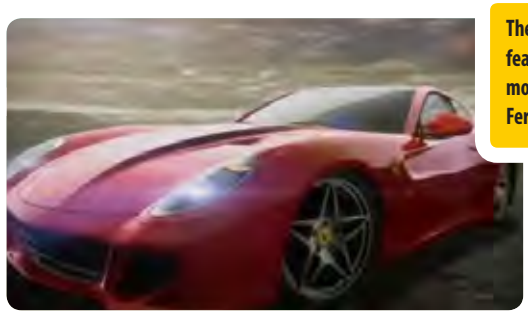
There's no release date confirmed yet, and PGR4 may not even get out off the starting grid until early 2008, so it'll be May's E3 conference before we can headlock Microsoft into giving up some secrets.

Anything else to declare?

This tasty little motor will be an Xbox 360 exclusive.



We've been ad… motion blur and fancy CGI make the PGR trailer look like a posh car advert.



The PGR3 trailer featured an in-game model, is this a PGR Ferrari?

Lima, Peru or a fantasy city? We may never know. Well, we will. Eventually.

VEGAS NEEDS A SAVIOUR



Las Vegas used to be America's playground. Now it's a battleground.



Manoeuvre through multiple-path Vegas environments utilising high-tech equipment.



Play in multiplayer mode with your friends, and create an online persona that evolves as you play.



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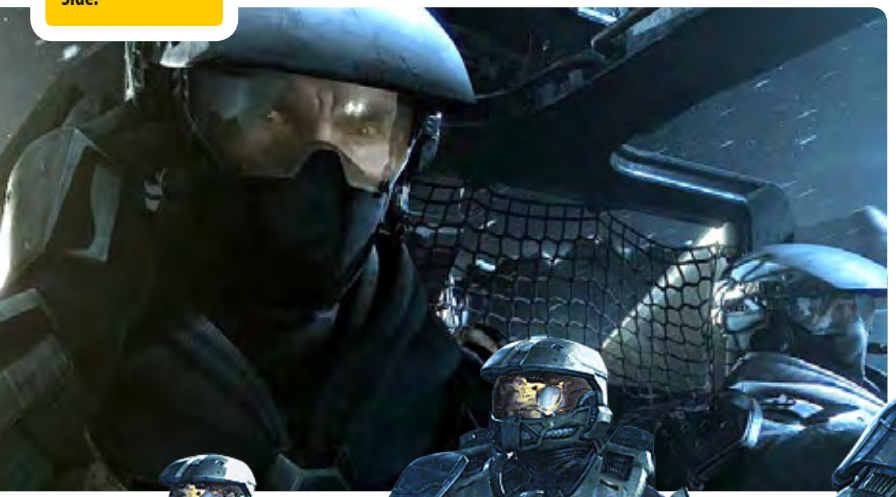
Roll over screen for annotations

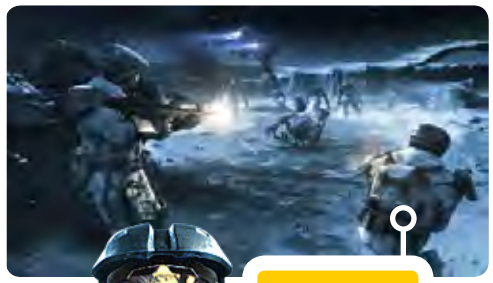


HALO WARS

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Ensemble Studios
Heritage: Age Of Empires series
Link: www.halowars.com
ETA: TBC

I said left onto the M60… now we've ended up in Moss Side.





Your heroes on the ground will buy you time to produce super weapons.

It's us. In the future. Only with much better clothes and guns!

FIRST LOOK

Halo Wars

Bungie jumps to make way for an Ensemble cast

What's the story?

Halo Wars takes the Halo universe and spins it into a real-time strategy in which you control human forces and (yet to be confirmed, but we'll eat our hat if not), Covenant hordes. This is war on a grand scale set before Halo 1 and plotting UNSC's first encounters with their alien foe.

What do we know?

First up, it's developed by Ensemble Studios, the team behind the most successful strategy gaming series on the planet, Age Of Empires. It's therefore bound to be accessible, intuitive and - most importantly of all - very, very good.

The shots we've snaffled of the game depict CGI segments that showcase a cast of SPARTANs, Elites, Banshees, Warthogs and all the other kit familiar to fans of the Halo series proper.

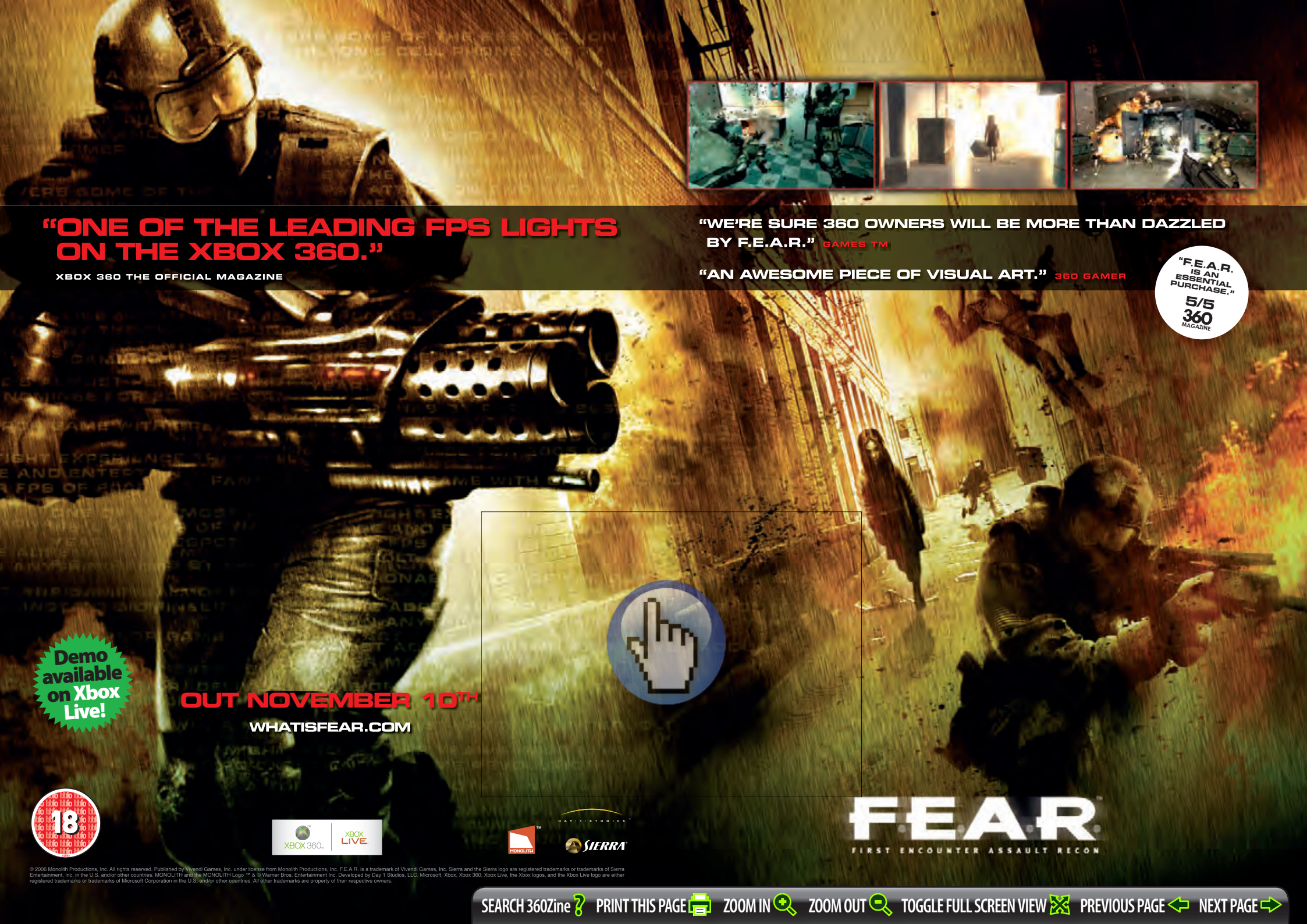
When do we get more?

Microsoft remains tight-lipped about a game it won't give any release date for. It's early doors on this one, but we're on it. If anything breaks, you'll be among the first to know.

Anything else to declare?

Halo itself started life as an RTS, but morphed into an FPS during the development process. Oh, and Halo Wars is an Xbox 360-exclusive title, so there's no faffing around to try and make a PC control system work here.

"Halo Wars should be accessible, intuitive and very, very good"



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INCOMING

Our pick of the new releases coming in 2007

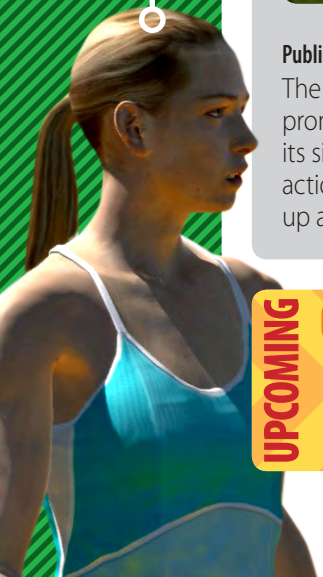
Sensible World Of Soccer



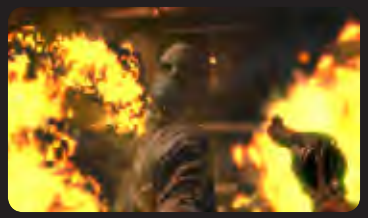
Publisher: Codemasters | **ETA:** April

The football legend will return on Live Arcade and promises to wow another generation of gamers with its simple controls, intuitive gameplay and super fast action. With management options, SWOS should build up a big fanbase of rivals battling it out on Xbox Live.

Virtua Tennis 3 will serve up in time for Wimbledon 2007



Bioshock



Publisher: 2K Games | **ETA:** July

This game is as close as you could wish to get to horror on your console screen. A first-person shooter that's splattered with the blood of countless foes, Bioshock is set in a ruined utopia where the streets are peopled with scavengers picking over the festered remains of fallen citizens.

Kane & Lynch: Dead Men



Publisher: Eidos | **ETA:** TBC 2007

Two of the most unstable game characters of all time unite for co-operative action in the form of Kane and Lynch. Troubled mercenary Kane is the subject of single-player action as you blast around seedy locales in filmic action sequences. Psycho Lynch is Kane's unwilling partner.

Assassin's Creed

Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** Late 2007

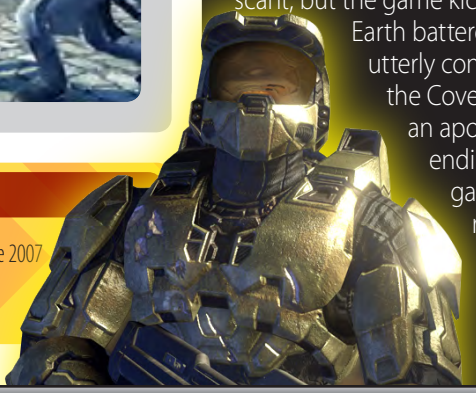
Set in Crusade-era Europe, you play disgraced assassin Altair who has just failed to kill the leader of the Templar Knights. This is a 12th century Hitman with a great story and unbelievable visuals. Sadly we'll have to wait until the arse-end of 2007 for Assassin's Creed.



Halo 3

Publisher: Microsoft | **ETA:** November 24 2007

The long wait will surely be worth it as Halo returns in time to fill your Christmas stockings next time round. Details remain tantalisingly scant, but the game kicks off with Earth battered and utterly conquered by the Covenant. Expect an apocalyptic ending to a game that's rumoured to be the final Halo. As if.



UPCOMING

SPRING 2007	SUMMER 2007	AUTUMN 2007	WINTER 2007
Stranglehold March	Virtua Tennis 3 June	Unreal Tournament 2007 October	Fall Of Liberty Late 2007
Resident Evil 5 March	Overlord August	Grand Theft Auto IV October	Fable 2 Late 2007

CALL OF DUTY 3

IN WAR, NO-ONE FIGHTS ALONE



Battle Actions

An all-new close-quarters battle mechanic allows players to fight hand-to-hand, improvise explosive devices, disarm traps and execute a host of other battlefield situations that require cunning and rapid reflexes to survive.



Branching Mission Paths

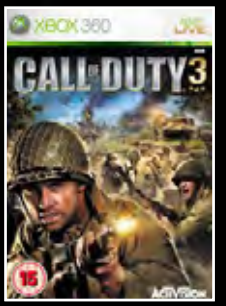
Next-generation level design provides multiple attack routes that let players decide how to confront the enemy – flank an opponent, or hit him head-on. Each unique mission path requires special tactics, from sniping and demolition to all-out head-on clashes.



Nowhere to Hide

Environmental physics allow players to destroy enemy soft cover hideouts, forcing foes out in the open. But be wary, opponents can eliminate your protective cover as well.

OUT NOW!



The follow-up to the #1 next-generation game, Call of Duty 3 delivers the intensity of being closer than ever to the fury of combat during the Normandy Breakout. Players assume the roles of four ordinary Allied soldiers—American, British, Canadian and Polish—and are thrust onto an authentic, living battlefield for an unprecedented variety of combat, with advanced high-definition graphics, detailed character animations and explosive on-screen action, delivering the most immersive and cinematically intense war experience ever.

SEARCH 360Zine PRINT THIS PAGE ZOOM IN ZOOM OUT TOGGLE FULL SCREEN VIEW PREVIOUS PAGE NEXT PAGE

FIRST LOOK

The Darkness

For those who prefer their action with the lights off

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Starbreeze
Heritage: Enclave
The Chronicles Of Riddick
Link: www.starbreeze.com
ETA: March

Sadly, The Darkness is nowt to do with the cock rock outfit of the same name. Fortunately, this first-person comic book conversion is set to be way more fun than dressing in lycra and playing your axe with your tongue. In fact, the axes here are strictly of the 'sliced through skulls variety' in a game that's plenty bloodthirsty and, well, as you can imagine, very dark indeed.

In a game where the story actually matters, you play the wonderfully drawn Jackie Estacado, a man who's really far too young to be a hitman for mafia crime family, the Franchettis. Jackie's coming of age sees him getting way more than a crap plastic key and a battered blue Vauxhall Nova. Instead, and rather pleasingly, the powers of The Darkness are awakened within him on his special day.

The aim of the game is to harness these powers to pan crimelord uncle Paulie and seize control of the whole freakin' Franchetti family. Your nascent abilities form the terrible toolkit of a game that borrows the twisted humour of the comic that inspired it. The story is in part penned by Paul Jenkins, respected comic scribbler, Darkness contributor,



Serpentine extensions make jacking up cars a doddle.

"It's plenty bloodthirsty and, well, as you can imagine, very dark indeed"


A Jesse Ventura in Predator-inspired Darkling.

The Darkness continued

and a man with a few videogame scripting notches on his literary bedpost (whatever one of them is).

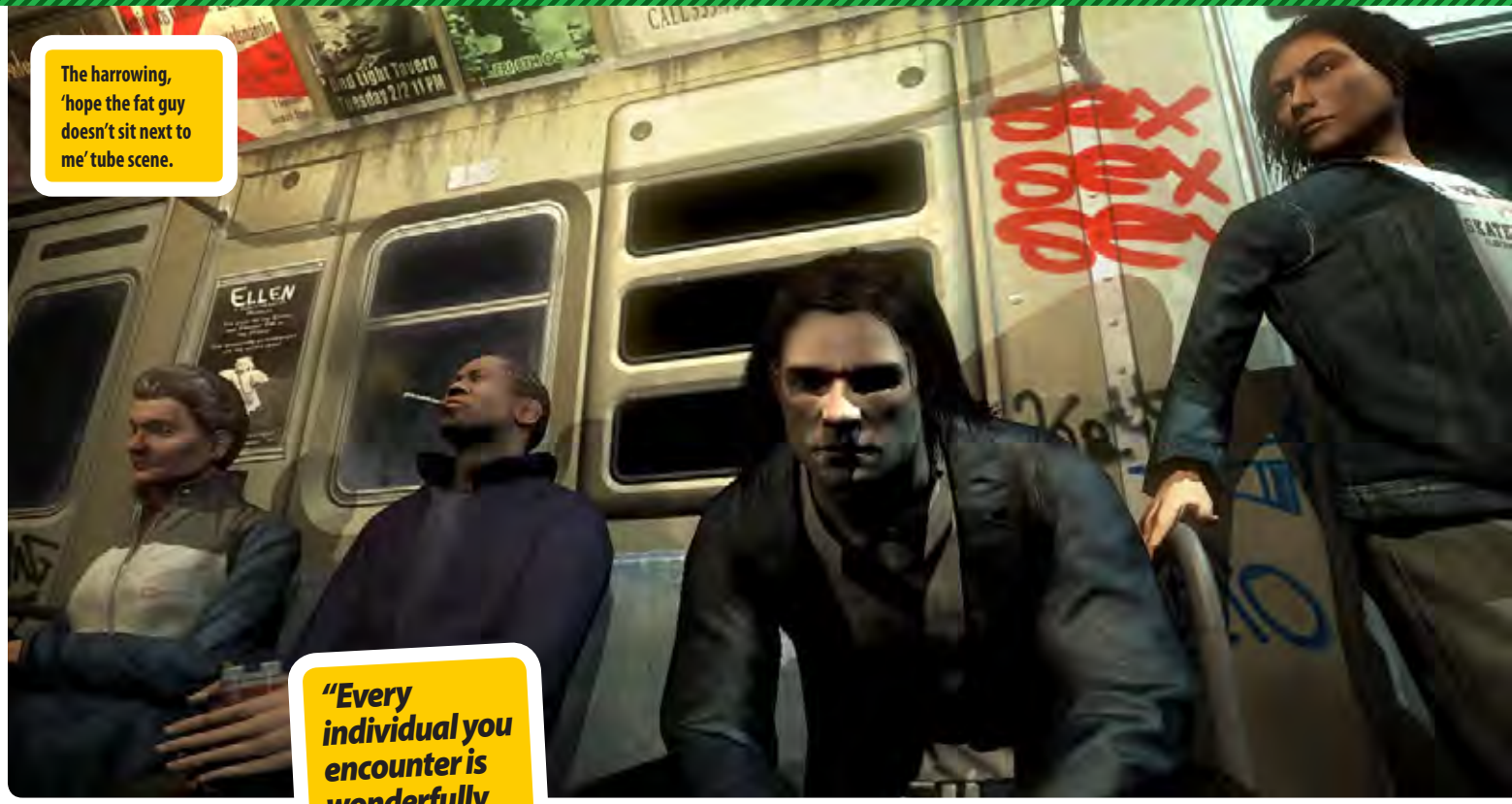
Harnessing the game's eponymous force of evil can prove quite useful. What onlooking girl, for instance, would fail to be impressed when you produce a black hole to swallow your foes?

Also quite handy is the fact you can use the extending, munching power of two summonable serpents that snake from your body to poke, harass, munch and hurl all and sundry. Another of your key powers is the ability to call up Darklings, physical embodiments of pure evil that can kick the living hell out of anyone you unleash them upon. They attack with weapons that will make most sane citizens' skin crawl. Pneumatic drills and bone-crushing hammers are just the barbed tip of their twisted arsenal. To power up these abilities you must skulk through blackness, knocking out lights to build your skills and bemuse the poor blighters you've earmarked for an early grave.

So what does it play like? In single-player mode the game is unashamedly inspired by the rather under-rated Chronicles Of Riddick, one of developer Starbreeze's previous efforts. Missions are episodic and have an RPG feel as you pick up quests from the characters you encounter.

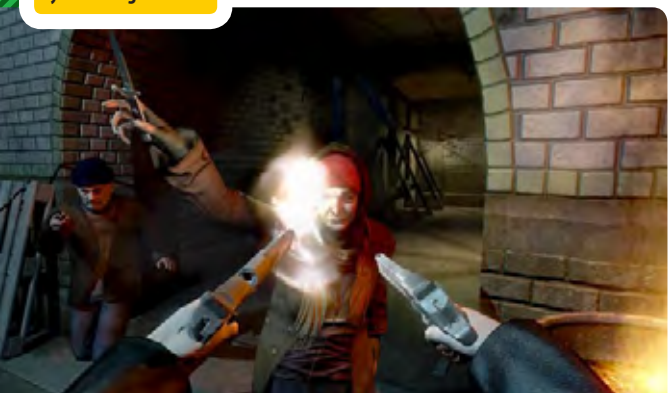
The game will also feature multiplayer action in all the usual flavours – from deathmatch to capture the flag, The Darkness will offer plenty of chances to draw blood in the Live arena. But, you don't have to go online to feel you're surrounded by real people here. The game's trumpeted "vo-cap" technology means every individual you encounter is wonderfully animated when it comes to facial expression, a fact that nicely complements the game's fine visuals.

Underneath the brooding good looks lies a title that celebrates a string of supreme special powers, promises a fine storyline and plenty of battling action. The Darkness could well be a shining light for next gen shooters.

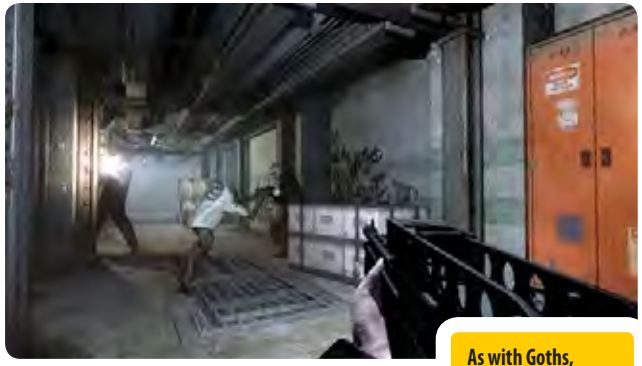


The harrowing, 'hope the fat guy doesn't sit next to me' tube scene.

"Every individual you encounter is wonderfully animated"



Knife… gun fight… ah, just die you old bag.



As with Goths, darkness is your friend.

360Zine

HOW COMPLETE?	FIRST IMPRESSIONS
75%	80%

Dazzling originality set against a murky backdrop.



The RPG for the Next Generation





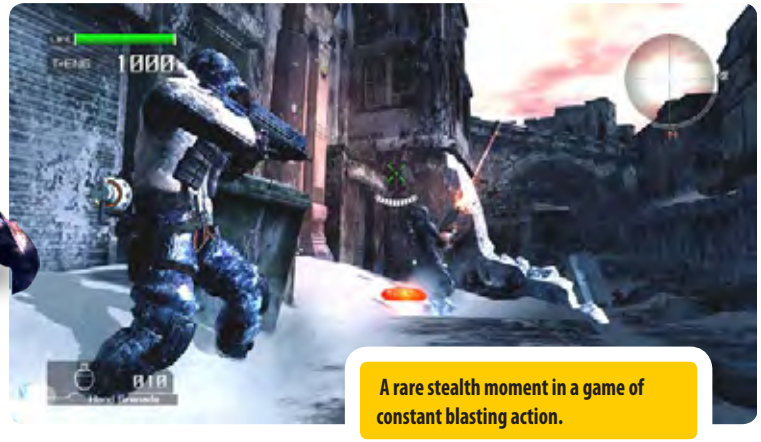

15 | PC DVD ROM | XBOX 360 | XBOX LIVE | BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS | Bethesda SOFTWORKS a ZeniMax Media company | 2K

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FIRST LOOK

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition





A rare stealth moment in a game of constant blasting action.

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Heritage: Resident Evil 2
Onimusha 3
Devil May Cry 3
Link: www.lostplanet-thegame.com
ETA: January 12

Non-stop shooter that's looking world's apart…

A headlong battle for survival, Lost Planet is a snowbound futuristic adventure from the guys behind some of Capcom's greatest triumphs… and so far it plays wonderfully.

The game is relentless, pitching you into a 22nd century setting on a hostile planet ravaged by icy winds and covered in white stuff... but it's soon to be covered in crimson stuff.

This is an all-out shooter at heart, giving you a third-person view of the action and keeping your weapons reticule trained directly ahead, even when you turn to run in different directions.

As a result, you'll find yourself blasting over your shoulder, from the hip and with your guns flailing, taking out hive-born creatures and mechanised enemies without prejudice.

Your range of firearms is almost as impressive as the game's sumptuous visuals. Rocket launchers, grenades and heavy machine guns make mincemeat of the hordes advancing against you as you duck incoming fire that explodes to fill the screen with fiery death and acrid smoke.





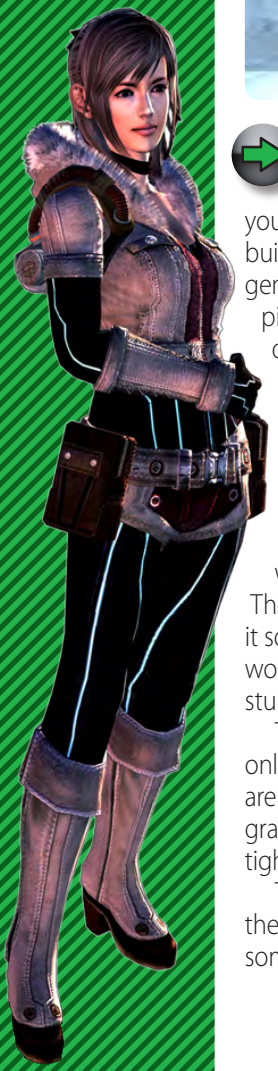
Take the weight off your feet with some serious, stompy robot fun.

Much of the beautiful scenery is destructible, so you can blast through light cover and take out cowering enemies by lobbing heavy fire in the general direction of their hidey-holes. Not that all the enemies in Lost Planet need to hide. Some creatures

"Rocket launchers, grenades and heavy machine guns make mincemeat of the advancing hordes"



Encounter monstrous creatures and cower like a baby.



Lost Planet continued

you encounter outsize neighbouring buildings and thrash wildly in your general direction with their deadly pincers. Other foes will take several direct hits from shoulder-mounted rocket-launchers before they crumble to their knees and expire.

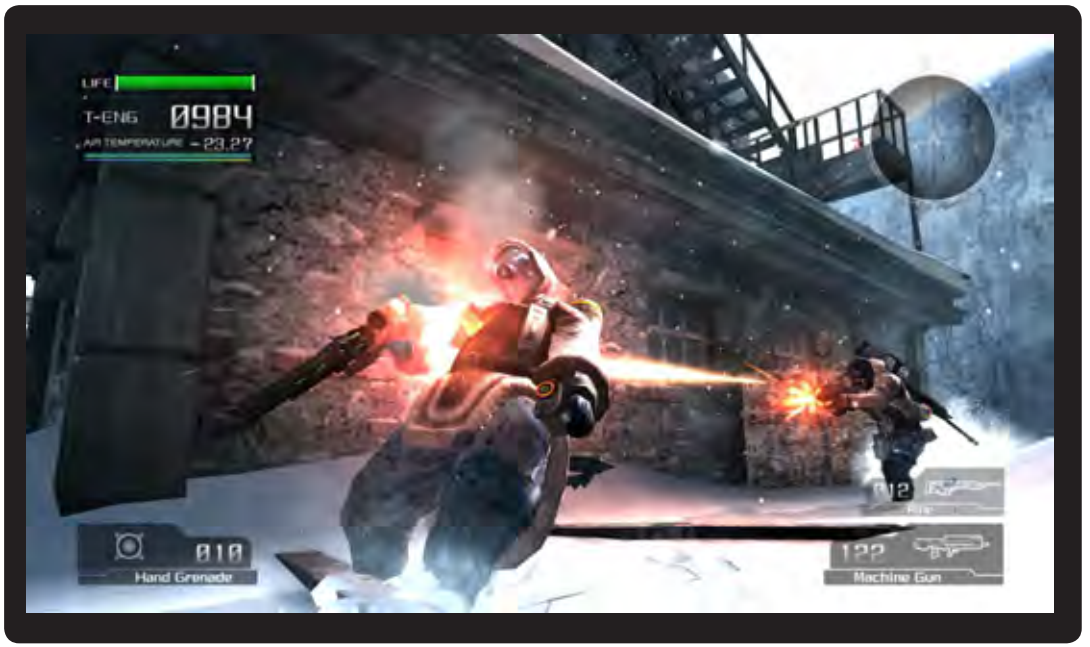
Luckily, you'll also be able to jump into giant mechs that are tooled up to blast the hell out of all that move, with whirring automatic weapons and heavy duty firearms. The fight, then, isn't always as unfair as it sometimes seems when your wonderfully animated character is stumbling away from merciless foes.

There's no escape in Lost Planet, only brief moments of respite which are usually grabbed when you use your grappling hook to pull yourself out of a tight corner, of which there are many.

The intelligent enemies react to your thermal heat patterns and will sometimes emerge from nowhere, tearing through the earth to assault you. They'll hunt for you in packs, with human assailants barking commands at one another as they seek you out for destruction. This contributes to a sense that you're battling to stay alive and fits into a storyline, which sees you picking up heat energy to sustain yourself.

And the fight for survival is nowhere more intense than on Xbox Live, where Lost Planet promises to be a continuous battlefield for up to eight gun-toting players. Trenches and the creaking remnants of devastated buildings provide cover for potentially epic battles. The harsh conditions mask the enemies who are out there… somewhere.

We're looking forward to raw fighting with gut-wrenching weaponry against human opponents, and it's also pleasing to discover that a melee attack has been introduced to play following feedback from punters. In a busily-peopled game you must use any means necessary just to stay alive.





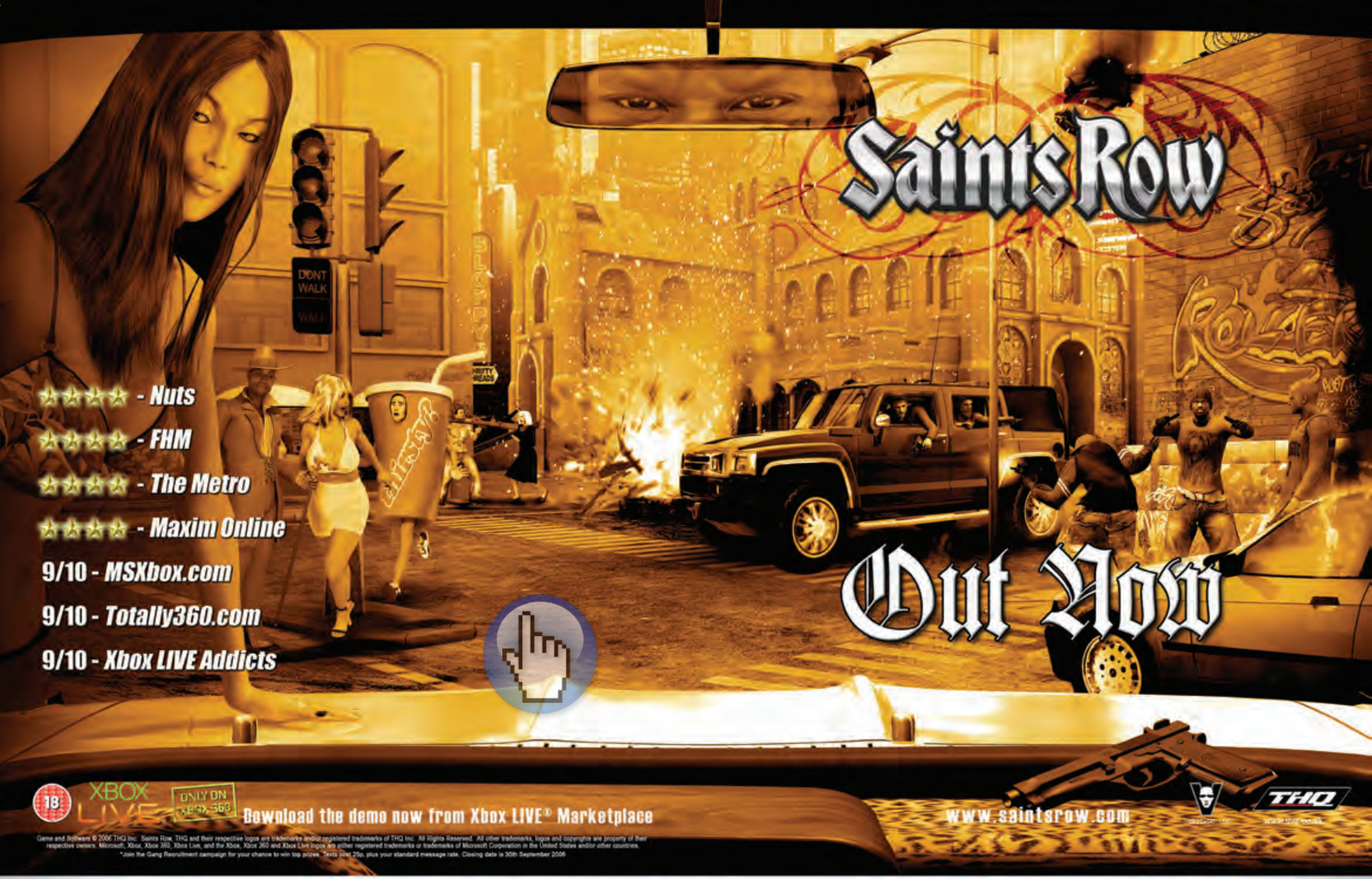
Co-operate with your team-mates to turn the tide in multiplayer battles.

360Zine

HOW COMPLETE? 90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 88%

Promises a winter of disc contentment.



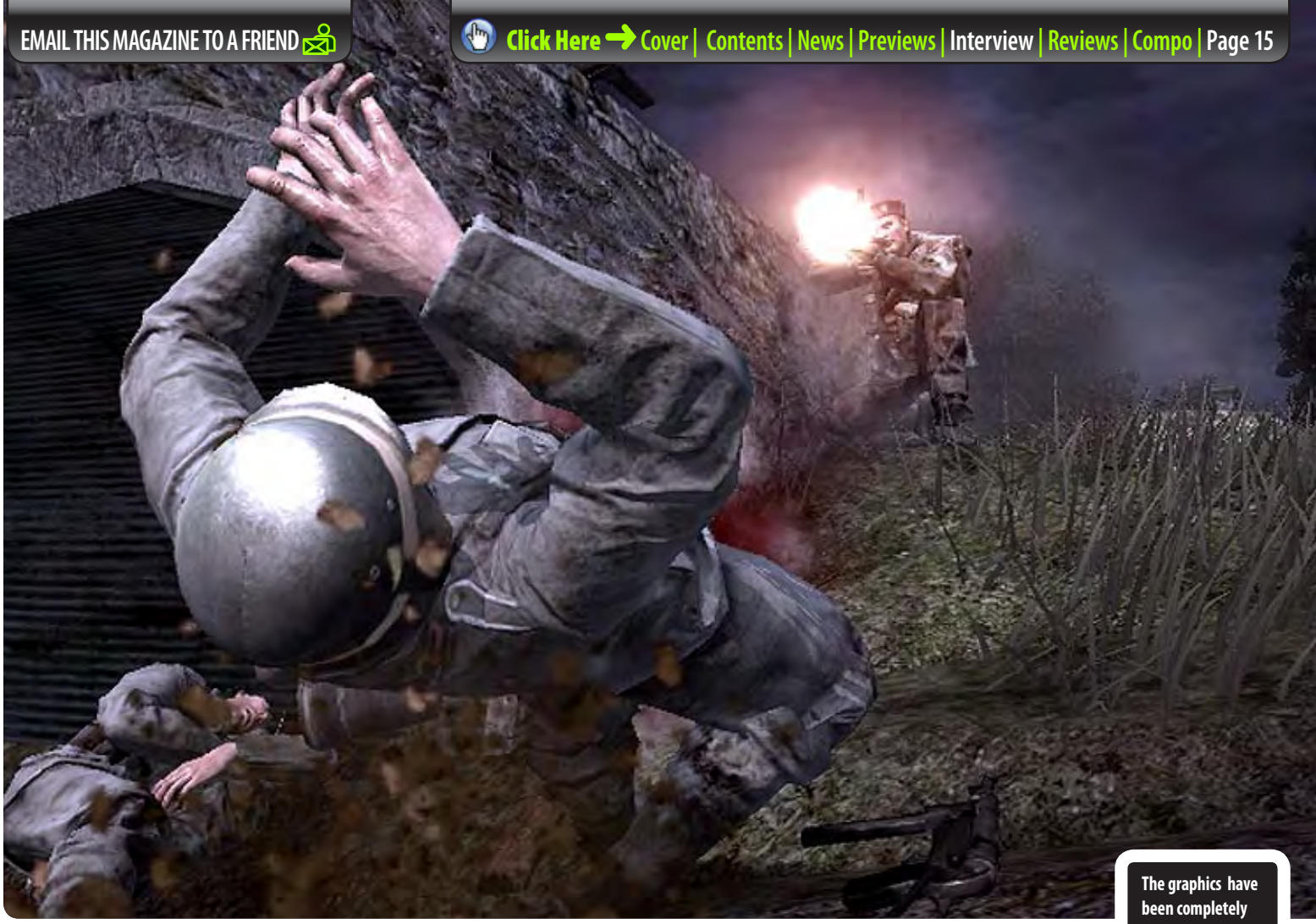
Jump in.
XBOX 360.

"THE WAR THAT NEVER STOPS

360Zine interrogates Call Of Duty 3's lead game designer ***Jeremy Luyties****…*



INTERACTIVE CONTENT:
CLICK HERE TO HEAR JEREMY TALK ABOUT THE MULTIPLAYER MODE



The graphics have been completely re-rendered... it looks stunning.

Famed for its visceral combat, chaotic battles and unforgiving first-person action, WWII shooter Call of Duty returns for a third tour this Christmas. The game promises to be a supreme multiplayer experience as soldiers battle it out on Xbox Live.

How important is the online aspect of Call Of Duty 3?
The multiplayer game is huge and we're working towards the kind of 'crazy huge' action you get in PC titles. For COD 3 we've got 24 players, and that's amazing. A lot of the team have come from an online background and from day one of development we've had a dedicated team of 20 guys running COD 3 maps to test them. We've got seven character classes in there, the ability to level up from rank 1 to rank 3 in a single session and a new mode that makes for truly intense battles, called War.

Tell us about War... What is it good for?
The mode is intense. It's the war that never stops. It forces online teams to fight for control of a single flag at a time, so the action isn't spread out over five pockets, for instance. You spawn close to the action and once one team takes a flag, the objective switches to the next one so you're always engaged in the fight. There are deaths every 10 or 20 seconds.



A cowardly tank hides behind five men.

"You hear the sound of the guys climbing on your ride. It's terrifying!"



Jerry uses the new 'mount-gun' option to set up a mobile turret.

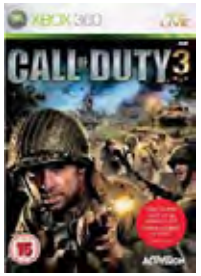
COD continued

As a single-player experience, how has COD evolved for this third instalment?
There's improved AI and the graphics have been re-rendered from the ground up, so you can see enemies making hand signals, for example. Gameplay splits give you several options of how to tackle a mission; Vehicle physics is in there now and some scenery is destructible, so you can take someone out through material cover, or use a grenade to destroy a small wall and expose your enemy.

And underneath it all is a great, chronological story in which you jump between Polish, Canadian, American and British forces on the break out from Normandy. In COD no one nation stands alone and we wanted to show how other guys were there to win World War II.

Is there a moment that sums up what's so great about COD3?
When guys step into vehicles they don't just instantly jump in, there's an animation and the camera cuts to a third-person view, so you can pick an enemy off before he gets into a tank and has all the pay-off of being inside armour. Once you're inside a vehicle, players can climb into your tank, lift the lid and drop a grenade in – and you actually hear the sound of the guys climbing on your ride. It's terrifying!

Looking ahead, what does the future hold in store for the Call Of Duty series?
Well, COD2's map pack was a huge hit with the fans, so we will be doing that. We've got so many great experiences for players to enjoy already earmarked for the next game in a list I wish I could show you, but you'll have to wait to find out what they are… ●



Developer: Treyarch
Publisher: Activision
Players: 24 on Xbox Live
Certificate:15
Features: Next gen engine, branching action, team-based multiplayer, new vehicle physics.
Heritage: Call of Duty 2: Big Red One, Ultimate Spider-Man
ETA: November 10

SEARCH 360Zine PRINT THIS PAGE ZOOM IN ZOOM OUT TOGGLE FULL SCREEN VIEW PREVIOUS PAGE NEXT PAGE



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360Zine GOLD

360ZineExclusive

Gears Of War

The Xbox360 accelerates into top gear



Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Epic
Heritage: Unreal
Link: www.gearsofwar.com
ETA: 17 November 2006

There are games which aim to widen the audience of videogames, bringing all the people of the world in one nature under a joypad. Gears of Wars isn't one of those games. Gears of War doesn't care about what your elderly grandparents make of it. Gears of War just cares about being the sort of macho which would make Dirty-Harry era Clint Eastwood back off. This third-person shooter is populated entirely with men (and aliens) who are seemingly recruited purely for having arms the size of most people's torsos, and it generally reeks and reeks of testosterone, aggression, blood, sweat and death. And it's all the better for it.

You play Marcus, a soldier in the COG military, which is trying to save the planet from the Locust aliens who emerge from beneath the planet to pillage and destroy, etc (across five chapters). In most levels

"Gears of War generally reeks of testosterone, aggression, blood, sweat and death. It's all the better for it"



With that much body armour, you'd think they'd want to wear a helmet. But no.



An age old tale. Man meets locust. Man shoots locust. Man meets another locust. Etc.

PICK A SIDE

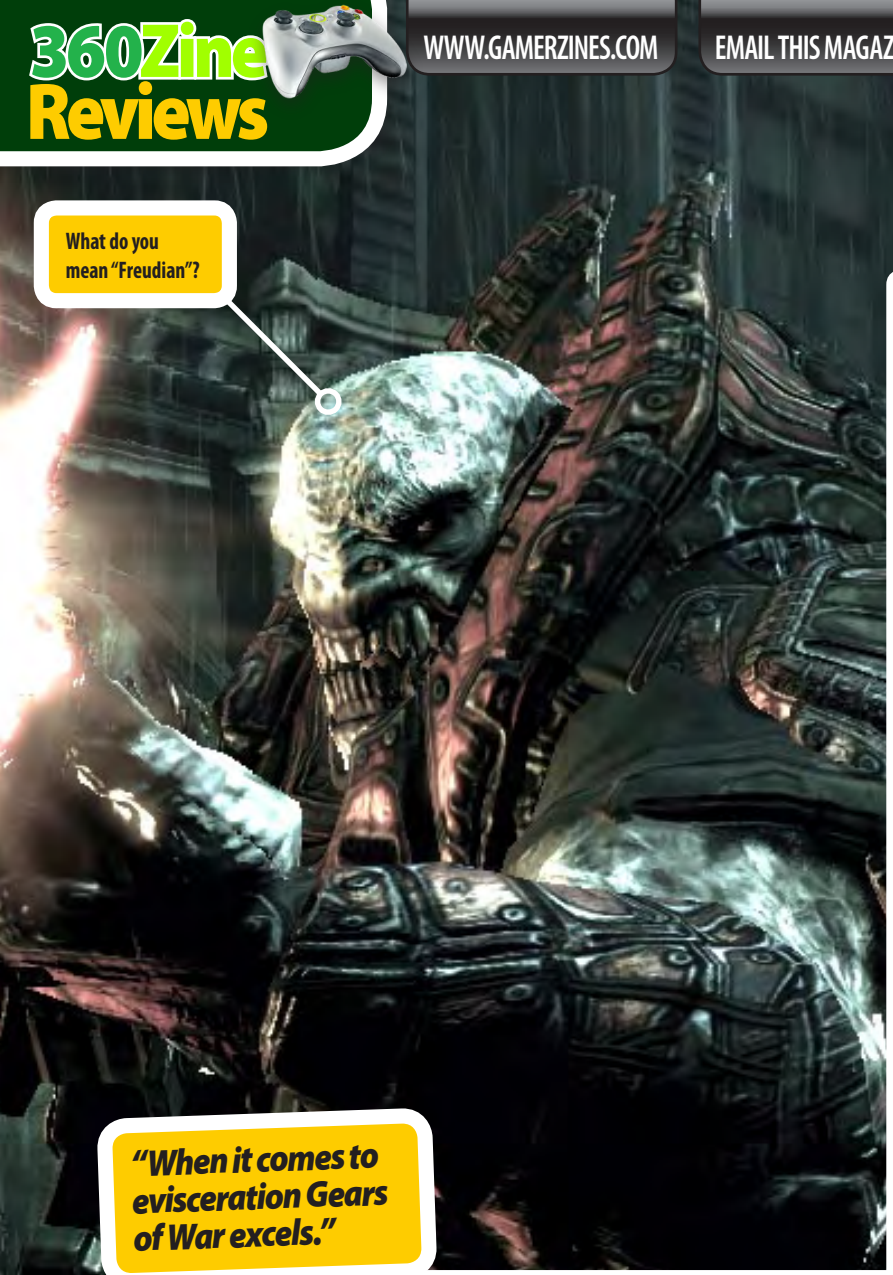
Friend or foe? Click on the tabs below...



Delta Squad | The Locust | Marcus and Dom

Delta Squad

Delta Squad are your group of merry team-mates, accompanying you on your way to (er) the gym, presumably. But before that, there's five acts of action to work your way through. The exact constituents of your squad changes throughout due to (double er) retirements. Yes, let's say retirements.



Gears Of War continued

you're positioned in a squad of four team-mates, who you eventually get to order around. It's not often necessary though, as when it comes to flanking, taking cover and generally filling the Locust with whatever projectiles that are to hand, they're more than fit to deal with the situation themselves. And when they're not, you're able to resuscitate them by running over and applying medical aid.

Heavy artillery

Now, while the characters don't look as if they've got more than a half-dozen brain cells between them, if you try and play in a manner to match their appearance, you'll be dead. And quickly. This is far from a dumb shooter in the run-and-gun mould, demanding you make serious use of the cover to progress. You're able to press against any particular buttress, emerging on holding down a button, then retreating back. Diving from cover to cover, leaping over barricades and inching towards a flanking position are all as essential as bullets in your gun to progress.

Not that there aren't enough bullets in the gun. When it comes to evisceration, Gears of War excels. The standards of shooters past are all present and correct, such as your Halo-esque assault rifle and the perennial shotgun, but it presses it into more interesting areas. Take the rifle's chainsaw-bayonette, which – like Unreal's impact hammer – when charged up kills people in a single hit. But the impact hammer never ripped the opposition open from shoulder to gut. Yum. The top prize has to go to the understatedly named hammer of God, where you target a laser to position an orbital space strike to annihilate literally anything. It's the definition of overkill. Sometimes, more is more.

Despite all the noise and thunder, there's also a keen eye for detail, innovating in a few mechanics which you can be sure to see re-emerge in many games that come after Gears of War. Take the elegant reloading mechanism, for instance. What


You're able to fire blindly over cover if things are a bit too hairy.


Smoke effects are suitably smoky.



GEARS OF WAR: REDUX


1 The first aspect is taking cover when the enemy aren't, and bombarding them.


2 The second aspect is firing at them when they emerge (er) emerges.


3 The third aspect is dealing with a scripted sequence and not dying.


4 The fourth aspect is whether you'll see the enemy close up like this.


5 And the firth aspect is being outnumbered. But never out gunned.


Wise application of the old tactic of shooting as many of them as you can.



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Gears Of War continued

could possibly be new about a reload? Well, at the basic level, nothing. You press the button and it reloads. However, if you correctly time a second tap, you get a faster reload. Get it absolutely on the nail and your firepower momentarily continues to increase afterwards too. Miss, and you fumble and take longer than a standard reload. Just expertly executed. Also consider the run button, which rather than simply speeding up your action, makes you crouch and hurtle directly forward, with your momentum to overcome if you want to turn. It genuinely feels like running, a sensation that's made all the more noticeable by the Saving-Private-Ryan styled hand-cam wobble.

Group hug

Multiplayer's another strong element. Co-operative play – both over Live and on a single computer – is included if you want to play through the entire campaign with your friends. There's also the competitive modes, like the standard Team Deathmatch and more unique Assassination and Resurrection modes. The former primarily circles around killing the opponent's team leader and the latter demands delivering a coup de grace on a fallen opponent or they'll just get back up.

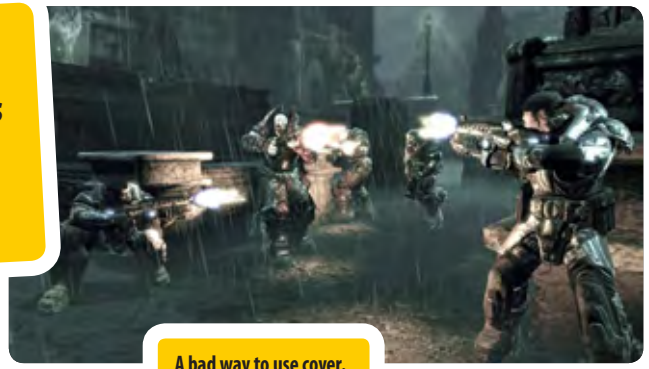
We haven't mentioned the graphics so far, because it's actually very simple: this is a phenomenal visual experience. When people talk about Next Generation visuals, this is the sort of thing they're hoping to see.

All of which leaves little room for flaws and luckily there aren't that many. It's not the longest experience in the world, and while its mechanics are polished, the game remains relatively repetitive and there's lots which shooter-fans may have seen before. In multiplayer, the lack of a jump button occasionally leaves your character feeling artificially trapped by the scenery when it won't let you vault over it. But that's it.

Gears of War is a technical tour de force, which realises that being a technical tour de force isn't enough, and so becomes one of the strongest games in the X360's line up. It gives macho a good name.

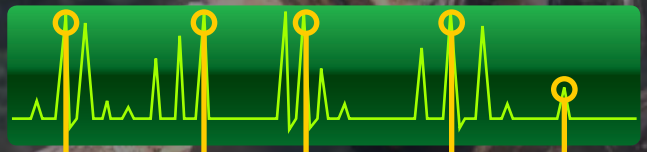
Kieron Gillen

"When people talk about Next Gen visuals, this is the sort of thing they're hoping to see"



A bad way to use cover. Not using cover.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



Hammer of God. Beautiful Death. | They're coming out of a hole! | Chainsawing someone in half. | Online Co-op mode? Oh yes! | Beserker can smell me? Eek!

360Zine Verdict

A finely-honed killing machine.

- Smart and brutal action
- Technically exquisite
- Not that long

90%



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360Zine GOLD

WWE SmackDown VS RAW 2007

It's fixed, it's fake, but it's frigging good fun



Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Heritage: SmackDown VS Raw 2006
Link: www.svr2007.com
ETA: 10 November 2006

Professional wrestling has always occupied a strange and unique place in the entertainment world. It boasts intricately choreographed fight scenes, yet fans of kung-fu films refuse to watch it. It has steroid freaks pounding the crap out of each other while reciting cheesy one-liners, but Schwarzenegger enthusiasts turn their noses up at it. And although it's packed with more scantily clad wenches, melodramatic wedding objections and unbelievable pregnancy whodunits than you can shake a badly written script at, even the most hardened Hollyoaks viewer won't give it the time of day.





"The action can be more cerebral than the most hardcore beat-'em-up"

IN THE RING

3 steps to stomping good fun

1 Is the battle not going your way? Perhaps it's time to ignore the usual rules of engagement.

2 In TLC matches you can use tables, ladders and chairs to scramble your opponent's brain cells.

3 Turnabout being fair play, if you make a mistake you can expect to get as good as you give.

WWE continued

Art imitates life, it seems, as wrestling videogames occupy a similarly insular niche in the world of gaming. Despite mile-a-minute brawling action, beat-'em-up fans won't give them a second glance. Though they provide wild multi-man marathons, party players wouldn't touch them with gardening gloves on. And while Fight Night and Tiger Woods can hook even non-boxing or golf fans, casual gamers are loath to give that same benefit of the doubt to a wrestling game.

Strength and depth

All of which is a genuine shame, because if you enjoy the frantic fisticuffs of Fight Night, the sleek, sophisticated combat of Dead Or Alive or just about any game that is best enjoyed with four pads, four friends, a box of pizza and a six-pack of beer, you're exactly the sort of person who would probably love what WWE SmackDown VS Raw 2007 has to offer.

The oily biceps and dodgy spandex belie a deceptively deep fighting game. The surprisingly refined combat



GM Mode is basically Championship Manager: WWE Edition. It's really rather good.



The Great Khali is here! Heavily post-produced matches for everyone!

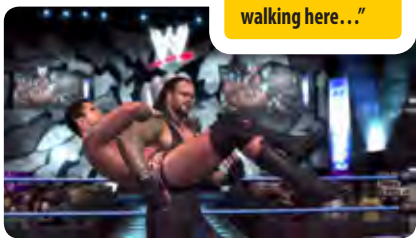
revolves around precise countering, chained reversals, careful management of Momentum and Stamina (in addition to health) and a timely selection of offensive moves, from ranged strikes to power attacks to high-risk manoeuvres. The fact of the matter is that the action – though few will admit it – is in many ways more cerebral than the most hardcore 2D Capcom beat-'em-up.

SVR2007 features an analogue control scheme that drags the traditionally clunky wrestling game interface kicking and screaming into the next generation, providing shorthand access to an arsenal of slams,



Despite his penchant for wrestling and violence, Chad can most often be found playing NBA 2K7.

The boys at THQ seem to have gone all Toby Gard on the WWE Divas. Nice.



"Dead man, we've got a dead man walking here…"

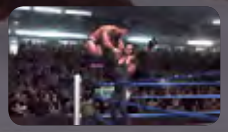
strikes and submissions. Another new addition is the variety of context-sensitive environmental attacks, from crotching your opponent on the top rope to ramming him face-first into the ring steps to throwing him into the crowd. Certainly the combat is as much about the orchestration of spectacle as it is about inflicting damage on your opponent, but given the abundance of style-over-substance attacks and combos in acclaimed fighters like Tekken, it's hard to construe this as a negative.

Wrestling fans are in for a treat, the game features nearly 70

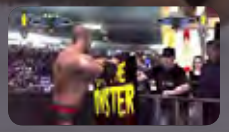
"SVR2007 features nearly 70 of the top bruisers in the biz"

FREEZE FRAME

Countdown to ecstasy...



Popping the crowd boosts your Momentum and helps you to crush your enemies.



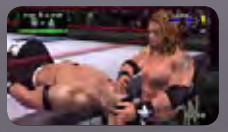
Tired of the fans' stupid signs? Snatch them and tear them up, right in their faces!



The Buried Alive Match is really more like a Casket Match, but we like the idea.



The all-new Money In The Bank: the ideal combination of violence and ladders.



The environmental hotspots turn nearly every part of the arena into a deadly weapon.

Here's a hint: don't lose to The Boogeyman…

WWE continued

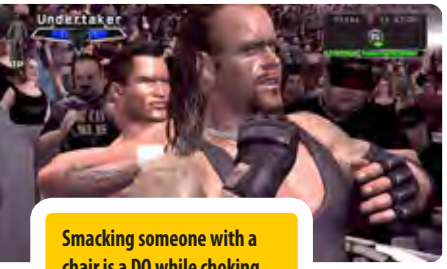
of the top bruisers in the business. There are current headliners like Triple H and John Cena, newcomers like Mr Kennedy (… Kennedy!) and Bobby Lashley, and a rake of WWE Legends such as The Rock, Hulk Hogan and Rowdy Roddy Piper. And if you're not a hardcore WWE freak, don't worry; the list includes a pirate, a Vanilla Ice knock-off, a Nacho Libre-looking dude and a couple of seven-foot sluggers made out of lycra and burgers – easily on par with the usual cast of colourful characters you find in fighting games.

Smack 'em up

There are an absolute stack of match types, including TLC (a human demolition derby involving tables, ladders and chairs), Money In The Bank (suitcase hanging above ring + ladder to go get it = maximum carnage), Elimination Chamber (six dudes locked in time-release capsules inside a giant cage) and Buried Alive (beat the other fella half to death, drag him into a coffin and shut the lid). The Season Mode perfectly captures the unique flavour of WWE television; you'll form alliances with fellow good guys or bad guys, your tag team partner will invariably turn on you and set the stage for a drawn-out blood feud, you'll chase the champion for his big gaudy belt and, best of all, you'll get caught up in all the wickedly ham-fisted soap opera theatrics, with wrestlers leaving you snarky voicemails and sneak-attacking you backstage. This is basically a Looney Tunes cartoon featuring men wearing only their underwear and unnaturally long boots – surreal, silly and undeniably entertaining.

We're preaching to the choir as far as wrestling fans are concerned, but beat-'em-up lovers and casual gamers really owe it to themselves to look past the stigma and give this a try, because it's one of the slickest, most colourful, refreshing and downright enjoyable experiences of the year. Sure, the first time you try on spandex can be an awkward and self-conscious occasion, but in this instance it's well worth it.

Chad Stehelski



Smacking someone with a chair is a DQ while choking them with cable is okay?!

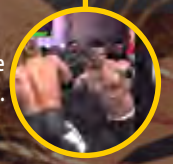
"Basically a Looney Tunes cartoon with men wearing only their underwear"

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*


Triple H's prancing intimidates nobody.


Sure they're legends, but they're getting wrinkly.




Mastering the hotspots: pure class.


HIGH risk manoeuvre!

360Zine Verdict

Best brawler on the 'box? "Belee dat, playa."

- A remarkably deep fighting game
- Environmental "hotspots" are a blast
- Combat can feel a little orchestrated

92%



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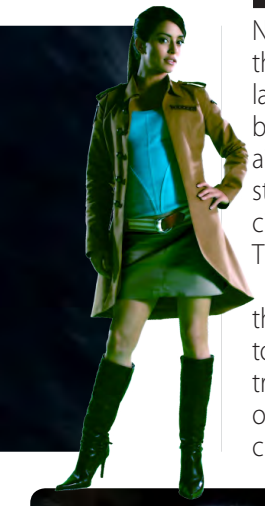
Need For Speed: Carbon

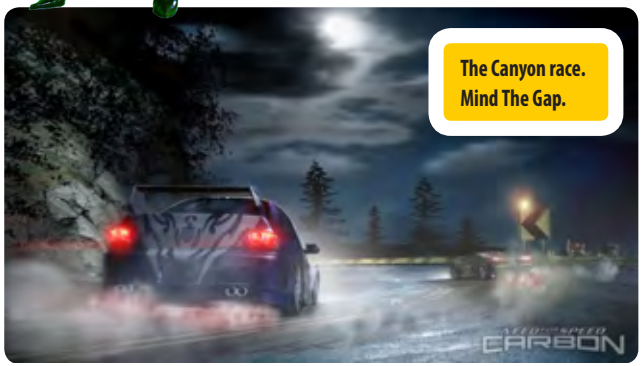
Publisher: EA
Developer: EA
Heritage: FIFA, NH
Link: www.ea.com
OUT NOW

The traditional Christmas number one, will this year's model put lead in your pencil?

Now as much a part of the festive season as binge drinking and rampant consumerism, the Need For Speed series has been through some ups and down over the last decade. The franchise has never been stronger though, undoubtedly aided by the current trend for illegal street racing, as glamorised by such cinematic masterpieces as The Fast and The Furious.

EA was unlikely to take its foot off the pedal, and has somehow managed to squeeze a new angle into the traditional street racing format, indeed one that is allegedly grounded in cultural authenticity. This year's big deal sees the action shift from the cop-infested cities into the canyon, as in Carbon Canyon. Apparently this reflects what is actually happening





The Canyon race. Mind The Gap.

"This year sees the action shift from the cities into the canyon"

THE CAR'S THE STAR

3 steps to stomping good fun



MUSCLE cars are all about straight line acceleration. Take care on the corners though as it's easy to get the tail out.



EXOTICS are for racing purists that live for top speed. Balance the gas and brakes through a perfect apex.



TUNERS rule the corners with tight, responsive handling. What they lose on the straight, they make up in the turns.

NFS: Carbon continued

in the street-racing scene – particularly in Japan – with the old bill cracking down on irresponsible driving in urban areas.

Either way, it creates a few new racing modes for this year's game, with rival drivers going at each other over a long and winding road. As well as basic sprint races, there are particularly tricky drift races to negotiate, and the even trickier showpiece Canyon Duels. Two drivers take it in turns to tail each other; points are awarded according to the overall time difference, with the key caveat that should you plunge off the road to a fiery death, you forfeit the contest.

Also new this year is the concept of a crew, with you and a few ne'er-do-wells attempting to claim territory from such hard gangs as The Scorpions. Your crewmembers play an active role in the races, and on your command will attempt to block a rival or even ram them off the road.

Praise the lowered

Fans of Pimp Your Ride are more than catered for with the introduction of the patented Autosculpt feature, allowing players to customise every part of their car to their own unique specification. Essentially an automotive version of Tiger Woods' Game Face feature, bumpers, hoods and spoilers can be tweaked to your heart's content.

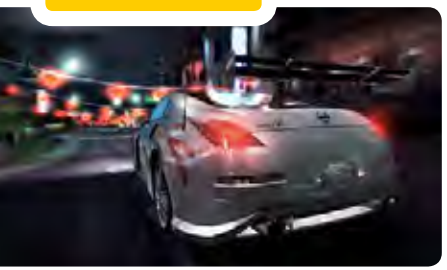
Elsewhere, there is a definite sense that you've seen it all before, largely because you have. Something of a cut and paste exercise from the last few games, all the old favourites are in there, including Circuit races, Drift races, Checkpoint races and Speedtrap affairs. It's a formula that works, and as ever it extends to the game being fronted up by a token Doris. This year's micro-celebrity is Emmanuelle Vaugier of Saw II fame, who introduces the whole shebang with the obligatory warning to drive carefully.

Obviously that's the last thing you'll be doing, and the fairly loose handling enables you to throw the car all over the road with impunity. The antithesis of hardcore simulation, it's a fairly unchallenging driving model that largely involves pointing the car in the right direction and hitting the nitro as and when you need a boost of speed. There are certainly worse ways of spending a few hours, but unsurprisingly NFS: Carbon is a mass-market affair aimed squarely at the man in the street.

Steve Hill



It's all about the neon.





"Fans of Pimp Your Ride are more than catered for"

You can see your face in that.

Jaunty angle not compulsory.

360Zine Verdict *Carbon copy*

- Canyon Racing
- Online modes
- Seen it all before

70%

The annual battle for football supremacy is here again. So will the title go to the Canadians or the Japanese?



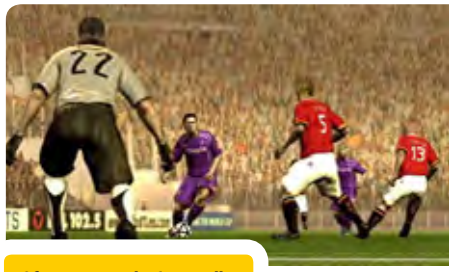
FIFA 2007



Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Sports
Heritage: FIFA 95-06
Link: www.easports.com
OUT NOW

What happened here? With the current generation release of FIFA being widely lauded as the best version yet, the 360 gets a completely different game. For starters, while the Xbox, PS2 and even PSP can manage some 500 teams, the 360 is mystifyingly treated to a mere 117. In the past, one of the most compelling reasons to buy FIFA over PES was the fact that if you supported Rag Arse Rovers you could still play as your team. However, here you're restricted to either the Premiership or the upper echelons of a few other leagues, as well as the obligatory international sides.

Cutbacks aside, on the pitch it's a completely different ball game. While the ball itself has allegedly been



Of course, you don't actually play it from this angle.

imbued with real life physics, the player movement is less than convincing. As well as the odd bit of moonwalking, a solid collision will often see a player propelled across the pitch in an unnatural fashion more akin to lag than a shoulder barge (although ironically the online game is

VS

Pro Evolution Soccer 6

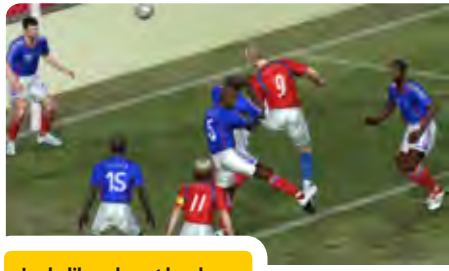




Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Heritage: PES 1-5
Link: www.konami.co.uk
OUT NOW

Traditionally the purist's favourite, PES can now justifiably claim to also be the punter's favourite, replacing FIFA at the top of the charts. To Konami's credit, they have resolutely refused to dumb the game down, insisting on a hardcore simulation of the sport rather than an arcade knockabout. Last year's version took this to extremes though, with goals proving rarer then rocking horse shit.

This time round, it is definitely easier to find the net, although it's certainly no walk in the park, with total concentration required to make progress. It's this intensity that gives PES the edge, as you know that if you're not at the peak of your game you're liable to be punished, with one



Looks like a decent header.

slip often enough to condemn you to defeat. Going forward, each and every goal has to be earned through a combination of split second timing, and often sheer hard work. It's frequently frustrating, but when it goes right it's a joyous experience, capturing in microcosm the essence of real football.



Tackle him, you berk.

FIFA 2007 continued

virtually seamless).

Dribbling has been massively overhauled, and it is a potent weapon, enabling you to surge forward and lean into your run almost like an ice skater. However, the flicks and tricks are so exaggerated as to be practically unusable. Attempting to knock the ball to the side sees it go so far away from your player that you're as likely to lose possession as gain any advantage.

Ultimately, you find yourself battling against the controls as much as the opposition, and rarely enjoy spells of comfortable possession. Due to the game's deficiencies you're forced to forgo any fancy stuff and simply stick to the basics: play the way you're facing and pass to the nearest man.

Once you've mastered the shortcomings, it is actually possible to enjoy a half decent game of association football, and perversely any quibbles are briefly forgotten about when you strum the ball into the back of the onion bag. It's too erratic to really recommend though, and in all honesty you'd be better off with the Xbox version. Someone, somewhere has dropped the ball.

Steve Hill



French, by the looks of things.

"Any quibbles are briefly forgotten about when you strum the ball into the back of the onion bag"

360Zine Verdict — Crippled

- Extreme authenticity
- Poor control
- Lack of teams

69%

VITAL STATISTICS

FIFA 07 vs PES 6

FIFA 07		PES 6
78	GRAPHICS	68
80	COMMENTARY	59
56	CONTROL	92
86	REALISM	75
88	ONLINE	64
70	MUSIC	00
68	GAMEPLAY	95



Don't just sit there, do something.

PES 6 continued

On the downside, the game's debut on 360 appears to be little more than a token effort, with - like FIFA – much less content than its current-gen counterparts. There are only eight stadiums in the game, and graphically it's not much of a step up from the Xbox version. And most unforgivably, there is even the odd bit of slowdown, surely unthinkable on the world's most powerful console. This continues in the online game, which is often irredeemably lag-ridden.

The game's Achille's Heel has always been the lack of official licences, which irked many purists to the extent that they'd buy the inferior FIFA instead. This has been addressed somewhat, with a selection of European leagues authentically recreated. Sadly, the Premiership is not one of them. While the player names are correct, all but a couple of clubs are saddled with ludicrous monikers such as West Midland Village and London Blues. For all this, it's testament to the game's inherent quality that despite the seemingly slapdash approach to the 360, it is still head and shoulders above the competition.

Steve Hill



Whip it real good.

"Every goal has to be earned through a combination of split second timing and sheer hard work"

360Zine Verdict — This is football

- Sublime gameplay
- More licenses
- Occasionally sloppy

88%



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Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Monolith Productions
Heritage: Half Life 2
Link: www.whatisfear.com
OUT NOW

F.E.A.R.

An FPS to scare your socks off…

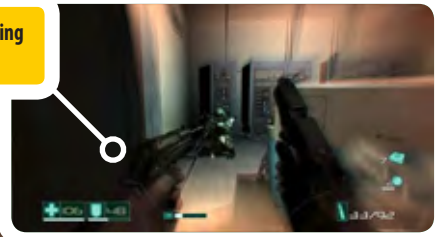
"One of the game's hooks is your ability to slow time down"

A PC hit back in 2005, F.E.A.R. has made the leap across to the console, and has done so well. Not just a simple port, this game has been refined to make the most of what the 360 has to offer, and will keep you coming back for more, even though you might be scared witless.

You play a nameless First Encounter Assault Recon member, sent into the field to put an end to the mad Paxton Fettel's stolen Replica (aka clone) army and the man himself. This involves lots of running around, shooting and blowing stuff up, all in the name of the government, but there's more to this mission than meets the eye, as during your travels you experience some unexplainable and truly disturbing things.

Sent in alone, one of the game's hooks is your superhuman ability to slow time down. Great for what are otherwise very hectic battles, this skill allows you to single-handedly beat even a full room of enemies as you can take your time in aiming and getting that coveted headshot,

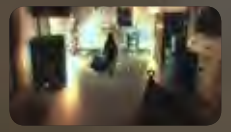



With a choice of weapons including pistols, you'll never get bored.

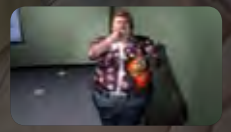
FREEZE FRAME

F.E.A.R in five easy pieces


You'll meet Mr Fettel when he hits you round the head with a heavy implement. Lovely.


A creepy little girl keeps making appearances as the game progresses. Not nice.


The game is broken down into missions, but it's more about violence than plot.


You don't interact with many characters, but you do meet the odd 'odd' character.

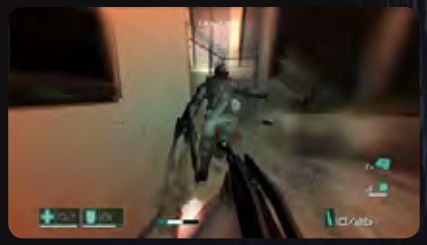

Your surroundings don't often change, but you get great views during the travel scenes.

GUNPLAY

Get ready to lock and load...



1 F.E.A.R. has a great array of weapons, allowing you to pick and choose for each specific scenario.



2 The shotgun is your best bet for maximum gore. You can leave your assailant without a head!



3 Automatic weapons are useful, especially when you're waiting for your slo-mo bar to refill.



Outdoor scenes are rare, but can look spectacular.

F.E.A.R. continued



The girl appears when you least expect it…

"Your range of guns can lead to some great gore-filled deaths"

complete with screen-filling clouds of crimson-red blood.

The fighting itself is what leads the game rather than the story; it's almost there in the background, whilst you're waiting with anticipated glee for the next slice of violence. Your range of guns can lead to some great dramatic and gore-filled deaths, complete with classic or comedic body poses that'll have you calling your mates to come see. It's almost as if you create your own 'beat that' goals with each massacre, and that's what drives you to continue playing.

The gameplay experience is highly enjoyable whatever your motivation, but the AI really adds to the overall fun, as enemies offer a real challenge. They'll work in groups to flank you, try to hide when you use your slo-mo ability, and gun you down as soon as they're given the chance. In addition, as the game advances you'll get to face larger and more challenging enemies who have their own skills (like irritating stealth suits), so you'll never get bored of the game's blood-led progression.

Be afraid

Then of course there are the random fear-inducing moments which will, indeed, creep you out. It's never really 'in your face', instead allowing you glimpses of shadows and outlines of people that shouldn't be there. Flickering lights, falling ceiling boards and shadows that flake away do up the fear ante, so unless you consider yourself to be 'rock hard', expect the hairs on the back of your neck to rise. All in all it does add a kick to the gameplay experience.

The audio also adds to F.E.A.R.'s

F.E.A.R. continued

atmospheric feel with minimal music; focusing rather on the sound effects. They're so ingrained into the gaming experience that you can find the enemies' radio comms, gunfire and death cries overly loud and in your face, offering a real contrast to those low, background noises.

Graphically the game also excels, with excellent lighting, water and shadow effects and good detail. Sadly however, the scenery itself gets monotonous and can put you off after a while. Very similar grey walls abound in both the offices and production facilities that you explore, and this lack of variety can make the game lose some of its appeal over time. There is a similar flaw in the audio too. The soldiers' shouts as they die always sound the same; a minuscule thing you might think, but with the hundreds of deaths you reap, you'll find that this can niggle after a while.

Bugbears aside, F.E.A.R. also offers 360 gamers some other quality experiences away from the single-player campaign. Its quickplay mode takes the best aspect of the game - that of death dealing - and allows you a mad 15 minutes to run around and score points for your battle skills. These are uploaded to 'Live, meaning you can fight for a top spot on the leaderboard. Great for short pick up and play moments, it's a really enjoyable buzz, as is the multiplayer option. Deathmatch, capture the flag and elimination modes will keep you busy, with additional maps to the PC version; but sadly, as with most games these days, although you can play with up to 16 players, you can only play one person per console.

A few small flaws may take away a little something from the game, but overall F.E.A.R. excels. Great gameplay, with a story mode that will take you around 10 hours to complete, hooks you in, you'll then keep coming back to either fight your way to the top of the rankings, or just to get in a good deathmatch with your mates. With some tough achievements to unlock, F.E.A.R. is a top notch fear-filled FPS that's definitely worth checking out.

Keri Allan

"Quickplay mode allows you a mad 15 minutes to run around & score points"



Hmm. Lots and lots of blood.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



Water and lighting effects are worth checking out.



Obliterating the enemy is always good fun.





Creepy shadows get your heart racing.



These guys' stealth suits keep you on edge…

360Zine Verdict

Top notch atmospheric FPS with slo-mo shooting for fun.

- Excellent shiver inducing moments
- Quickplay mode's a great idea
- Reptitive backdrops get dull

87%

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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007

The world's greatest golfer supplements his meagre income





Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Sports
Heritage: FIFA 07 NHL 07, NBA 07
Link: www.easports.com
OUT NOW

Tiger Woods' debut outing on the 360 was little more than a shell of a game, seemingly rushed out in order to snag a few quid from early adopters. A year down the line, there is definitely a lot more meat on the bone, and this is also a markedly different game from its current-gen counterparts.

The changes are clear from the off, with your golfer appearing in an elaborate practice facility, replete with greens, bunkers and targets, enabling you to limber up with a few shots before getting stuck in to the competitive action. Mini-games and training modes are available, which as well as helping you perfect your swing, actually improve the stats of your golfer. This is a theme that continues throughout the game, as you effectively 'level up' in RPG fashion, albeit with magic potions and wands supplanted by plus-fours and visors. A quick visit to the club shop between rounds does wonders, with various bits of equipment improving your game.

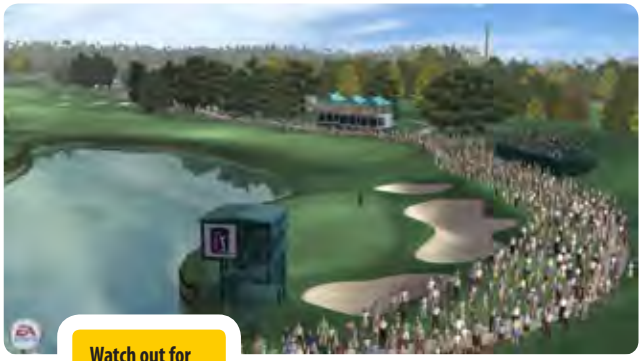
"Tiger uncannily recreates the despair and elation of golf"

Competitive action

And you'll certainly need to improve before you take on the PGA Tour, which is replicated in lavish detail. The courses look immaculate, and Tiger is joined by 14 of the world's top players, including John Daly, Vijay Singh, Ian Poulter, Michael Campbell, and Annika Sorenstam. As well as the real golfers, there are a host of larger-than-life fictional characters, at least one of whom is clearly drunk. These players come into their own in the Tiger Challenges, short games that enable you to gain experience and cash.

On the control front, a couple of tweaks have been made, but it's the time- honoured analogue swing method that wasn't broken and didn't need fixing. The best in the business, it uncannily recreates the despair and elation of real golf. It is the best golf game out, but ultimately it feels like more of the same.

Steve Hill



Watch out for that puddle.

360Zine Verdict

Put a Tiger in your tank

- Immaculate control method
- Extremely authentic
- Same old, same old

80%

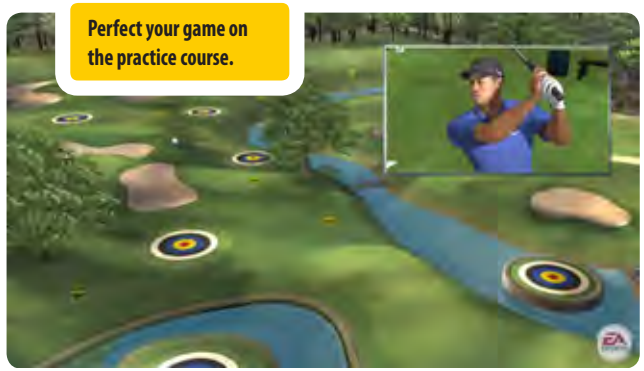


IN YOUR FACE

Create a virtual you to play on the fairway



The Tiger Woods Game Face facility has been much copied but rarely bettered. It returns in '07 in its full hi-definition glory, enabling you to tweak virtually every aspect of your golfer's face and body to create an idealised virtual version of yourself. Lose your beer gut without leaving the sofa…



Perfect your game on the practice course.



The main man himself. Nice T-shirt Tiger…

NBA 2K7



Publisher: 2KSports
Developer: Visual Concepts
Heritage: The Bigs Sega Soccer Slam
Link: http://2ksports.com/games/nba2k7/
OUT NOW

Shaq's on the cover again

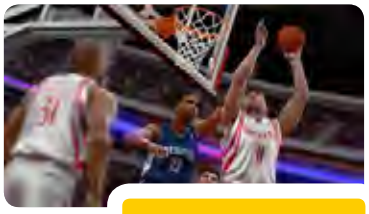
Funny thing about NBA 2K7: unless you're a huge fan of basketball, you're in no position to appreciate how good it actually is. It hasn't got NBA Street's backboard-shattering hyperdunks, the characters – especially the pastier ones – look a bit dodgy, and the commentary's been recycled from past games. It's not a good start.

For the Shaq-addicted superfan, though, 2K7's deep like the Marianas trench. Take the characters: though they might not be much to look at, even the b-listers are animated with signature moves that you'd need an ESPN subscription to recognise, right down to moves like Kobe's signature two-handed jumpshot. Defenders automatically paw at shooters' faces and attackers flop to the ground after a suspect challenge. In contrast to other games, you'll have to actually play basketball too: dribbling up the court for an easy dunk's almost impossible thanks to good AI, so you'll need to break down defenders and pick your shooting spots. Free throws are ridiculously hard – you might want to switch them to 'automatic', because the computer's more likely to score them than you – but this plays the best basketball around.

Joel Snape



Yes, some of the players have a slightly shop mannequin like look to them.



Layups seem slightly easier in this season's game.

360Zine Verdict

Wish you were a bit taller? Wish you were a baller? This is the next best thing.

- Super-realistic animation
- Mostly excellent AI
- Old commentary

80%

NHL 2K7



Publisher: 2KSports
Developer: Kush Games
Heritage: Major League Baseball 2K5
ESPN NHL 2K5
ESPN College Hoops
ESPN NHL Hockey
Link: http://2ksports.com/games/nhl2k7/
OUT NOW

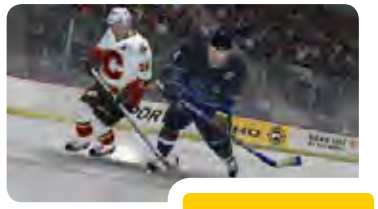
Smack the puck, then smack the opposition...

Yes, you can still get in fights. Getting into a face-crunching dust-up's only a prod of the Back button away in 2K7, and winning it is as easy as twirling the analogue stick. You can also knock the oppositions' helmets off in a scuffle and pull off some sickening hits: so that's the average gamer catered for. But what about hockey fans? Well, this season it's all about team play. One-time shots are trickier, so you'll need to pass the puck around and wait for chances to go three-on-two with the opposition. It's tricky, but you're helped by team mates signalling for set-pieces and coaches yelling advice. The nicest addition this year, though, is Pressure Control, which lets you tell your boys how much to hassle the opposition: one, two or three taps on the left bumper represent 'light shadowing', 'illegal bodycheck' and 'vicious double-team' respectively. The camera shifts in play to focus on your goalie or show your entire team on the break, which is a massive improvement on the traditional top-down view. There are also loads of minigames, online options and a rivalry-stuffed Franchise mode for seasoned puckophiles. Hockey fans will love it: everyone else can entertain themselves by punching people.

Joel Snape



Why is there *always* a little green bottle on top of the goal?



360 degree poke-checking returns, making defensive play a joy to watch.

360Zine Verdict

The best thing on ice since Walt Disney's head.

- Plenty of minigames
- Clever pressure-play
- One-timers: too easy

85%

The Microsoft Online Success Story

Xbox Live, the definition of the Microsoft Xbox 360

It's extremely hard to imagine owning an Xbox 360 without any online connection. Xbox Live has been the stamp of excellence Microsoft was so desperately looking for to define itself as a leader above the rest of the competition. It wasn't the first to tap into online gaming, but it was brave enough to grasp how connecting people all over the world could push forward a new era for console entertainment.

In it from the beginning

Having been a beta tester on the original Xbox for its new online service, I could see that right from the start, Xbox Live was capable of showing us new gaming horizons There's no doubt that the first Xbox was the testing ground for many features we now take for granted in its next-gen successor; be it Xbox Live Arcade, Media Center Extender or Xbox Live itself. All have been poked and prodded to be programmed into the heart of the Xbox 360.

The importance of standards in gaming is immense. Giving every owner the chance to use online multiplayer, voice communication, a friends list and cross game invitations allows developers to harness the potential of every system. This may not have been revolutionary as far as the concepts alone are concerned, but the way they have been implemented from day one has meant that everyone has had the same advantage.

Online or be damned

Just look how Microsoft has changed our own behaviour. We all now expect so much more from our console gaming experience. Witness the look of horror on our faces if we hear that the online features for a title are none existent or lacking in diversity. The most disappointing single player experience can still be saved thanks to a fantastic Xbox Live online element. It can make what would otherwise have been ridiculed as a failure into a must-buy game. Remember Midtown Madness 3 anyone?

At long last, all three console competitors seem to be taking online seriously. Microsoft has demonstrated that it's no gimmick or small addition to be ignored, but the heart and soul of the Xbox 360, powering downloads, updates and an ever growing community. Never underestimate this achievement - it really has shaped the connected console world in this next-gen battle. Everyone will compare any new service to the standards that the 360's Xbox Live has set.

One side effect though is for the publishers. If we see someone from overseas playing a game in our friends list, even just a couple of weeks before us, we flood every discussion forum and blog with our dismay at having to wait. Unlocking achievements and learning the new skills before we get a chance to get our hands on the latest release? How very dare they!

Xbox Live is truly online evolved, never mind combat evolved. For anyone still sitting in offline hell, get connected and open up the heavenly broadband doorway to a very close approximation of online perfection.

James Woodcock

XBOX LIVE

"The most disappointing single player experience can still be saved thanks to a fantastic Xbox Live online element"



James is the one-time Chief Editor of XboxRules.com, an independent Xbox website, which closed in February 2005 having achieved over 10,000 members. James now works on his personal website and currently enjoys the freelance lifestyle, where gaming and keyboard playing are his main interests.
Gamertag: GlideManiac

www.jameswoodcock.co.uk













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