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# 360Zine

Issue 26 | Jan 2009

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

**HANDS-ON PREVIEW**

# STREET FIGHTER IV

*The world's best ever beat-'em-up?*

**20 GAMES FOR 2009**

*The essential selection*



**PREVIEW & INTERVIEW**  
**WHEELMAN**



**REVIEWED!**  
**SILENT HILL**  
**HOMECOMING**



**FIRST LOOK**  
**WANTED:**  
**WEAPONS OF FATE**



**FIRST LOOK**  
**NINJA BLADE**



**FIRST LOOK**  
**AFRO SAMURAI**



CONTROL →







# Welcome to 360Zine



Happy New Year and welcome to the first issue of 2009. Despite the economic woes the run up to Christmas delivered a bumper crop of games on Xbox 360 and happily for all concerned videogame sales held up remarkably well to buck the trend on the horror of the high street. And long may it last. After all, games are a great way to see out the penny-pinching pain of recession offering hours, days, weeks and even months of entertainment for the cost of a single friday night out on the town. This issue we give a nod to the biggest and best games coming to Xbox 360 this year, and there's plenty to cheer about. Take a look at our Top 20 and then drop me a line to let me know your thoughts...

Enjoy the issue and don't forget to pass 360Zine on to your mates. It's free y'know!

**Dan Hutchinson, Editor**  
360zine@gamerzines.com

**360Zine  
FEEDBACK!**  
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you think of  
the new issue

## MEET THE TEAM

*Probably the best  
games writers on  
the planet*



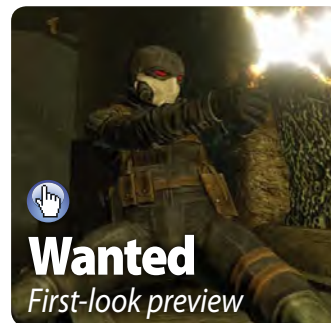
**Chris  
Schilling**  
Is looking forward to  
Street Fighter IV



**Steve Hill**  
Is looking forward to  
Wheelman



**Keri Allen**  
Is looking forward to  
Halo Wars



**Wanted**  
First-look preview

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



**Street Fighter IV**  
HANDS-ON PREVIEW



**Silent Hill:  
Homecoming**  
Definitive review



**Wheelman**  
Preview & Interview



**Top 20 new titles**  
Your essential guide to  
gaming in 2009

## QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

**Wanted:**  
Weapons of Fate  
Ninja Blade  
Afro Samurai  
Street Fighter IV  
Wheelman  
Wheelman  
(interview)

**Top 20  
Games 2009**  
Silent Hill:  
Homecoming  
Gears of War 2:  
Combustible  
Map Pack

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## AFRO SAMURAI

**Publisher:** Atari

**Developer:** Namco-Bandai Games

**Heritage:** Beautiful Katamari, Ace Combat 6

**Link:** [www.namcobandai.com/games/afrosamurai](http://www.namcobandai.com/games/afrosamurai)

**ETA:** Q1 2009

With Samuel L. Jackson once again on vocal duties as Afro Samurai, expect the voice acting to be a cut above the usual phoned-in performances.



There are a few stylistic flourishes which add drama to the combat – like the colour bleaching out.



It's a little more violent than your average anime game – expect plenty of blood and dismemberment.

*"Samuel L. Jackson reprises his role as the titular sword-swinging, while the game has some delightful cel-shaded visuals"*



## FIRST LOOK

# Afro Samurai

*Not the hair! Anything but the hair!*

**PREVIEW FEEDBACK!**  
Click here to tell us what you think of Afro Samurai

## What's the story?

Namco-Bandai introduces new Western label Surge. First job for Western label: produce game based on faintly obscure Japanese manga series. It sounds like a bit of a daft idea, but Afro Samurai is pretty much the dictionary definition of 'cult cool'. With voiceovers from Samuel L. Jackson and Ron Perlman, and a soundtrack from RZA, it's certainly got some clout behind it. And this is the game of the anime.

## What do we know?

Samuel L reprises his role as the titular sword-swinging, while the game has some delightful – and entirely appropriate – cel-shaded visuals, which are pretty accurate representations of the original characters. It's another fighter that's all about the hacking and slashing, but as you'd expect from something so achingly hip, the scrapping has more strategy than your average button-masher. Blocking and chaining is the order of the day, while the enemy AI is more intelligent than the genre standard, frequently leaping and dodging your blows like the agile little buggers they are.

## When do we get more?

It's out late January in the US, but Atari – on European publishing duties – has yet to confirm a European release date.

## Anything else to declare?

Though these names don't mean anything to us – because we're not cool enough to watch the series – we're informed that Brother Six, Justice, Ninja Ninja and Okiku will all feature in the game, as will a brand new character named Hitori.





**Publisher:** Microsoft

Game Studios

**Developer:** From Software

**Heritage:** Otogi series,

Tenchu series

**Link:** [www.ninja-blade.com](http://www.ninja-blade.com)

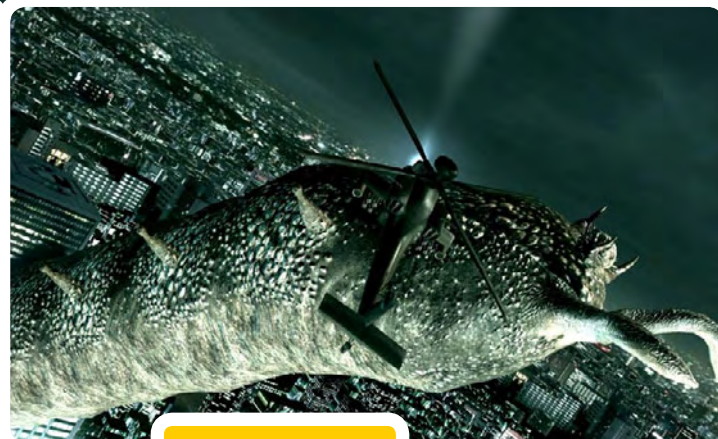
blade.com

**ETA:** Q1 2009

A ninja freefalling above Japanese skyscrapers at night? Hmm, where have we seen that one before?



The opening stage sees you attacking large demon enemies in mid-air after skydiving from a plane high above Tokyo.



The game's music comes from Norihiko Hibino, best known for his work on the Metal Gear Solid series.

**"Set in modern-day Tokyo, the plot sees our hero attempting to find a cure for a genetically mutating disease"**



## FIRST LOOK

# Ninja Blade

*Looking to give Gaiden a good hidin'*

**PREVIEW  
FEEDBACK!**  
Click here to tell us what you think of Ninja Blade

## What's the story?

A 'cinematic action game' is how developer From Software (Otogi, Tenchu) is describing its latest ninja-themed title, which will be published by Microsoft in the

West. Set in modern-day Tokyo, the plot sees our hero attempting to find a cure for a genetically mutating disease. 'Finding a cure' being a euphemism for 'slashing anything that moves to ribbons', of course.

## What do we know?

While the Tenchu games have been all about the stealthy side of ninja life, the focus in Ninja Blade is very much on the action. And, indeed, the 'cinematic' in the aforesaid description, with cut-scenes bleeding into real-time gameplay sections without a pause for breath. What we've seen of the game so far suggests a breakneck pace, with hack-and-slash sections coupled with quick-time events and other context-sensitive actions. For example, a Prince of Persia-esque fall-

slowing mechanic, replacing a clawed glove with a katana as the protagonist's braking device of choice. If it can keep this up for the entire game, then we could be looking at something very special indeed. As long as it doesn't spend too much time essentially playing itself, that is...

## When do we get more?

It's slated for a February launch in the US, so you can expect to hear details of a European date very soon.

## Anything else to declare?

It seems you'll also be granted access to a ninja motorcycle at some point in the game. Which sounds like one of the coolest things ever.







**PREVIEW  
FEEDBACK!**  
Click here to  
tell us what  
you think  
of *Wanted:*  
*Weapons of Fate*

## FIRST LOOK

# Wanted: Weapons of Fate

### Loom! Headshot

### What's the story?

Based on the film of the comic books, *Wanted* actually functions as a pseudo sequel to the events of the hyperactive thriller. If you've seen the film, you'll know that seems a virtual impossibility, but the game doesn't seem to mind. In it, you take control of Wesley Gibson, who's charged with tackling the French arm of 'The Fraternity'. Cue bullet-curving third-person gunplay.

### What do we know?

Dark Sector crossed with *Max Payne* is the vibe we're getting, with slo-mo analogue stick bullet guidance and stop-and-pop cover-heavy shooting. Developer of *Bionic Commando* remake GRIN has a few new tricks up its sleeve though, one of the most interesting of which gives the player a speed boost every time he flits between areas of cover, eventually allowing a brief time period to move from wall to wall without enemies noticing. And thus you can creep up on them unawares and dispose of them however you choose. Sneaky.

### When do we get more?

It's pencilled in for release in the US during spring of this year, but we've no concrete launch info for its European debut.

### Anything else to declare?

The game reportedly eschews QTEs for its more cinematic sequences, offering greater player control with certain restrictions or limitations depending on the current situation. It's also pretty gory too, which is never a bad thing.

It's not all twin-gun duels – get close enough to an enemy and you can execute a neck-snapping finisher, or a throat-slitting move which sprays blood on the camera.

The game seems to have captured the almost balletic brutality of the film. GRIN is already looking like quite an accomplished developer.

Blind-firing is pretty common in games these days, but while dual-wielding? That's a new one on us.

*"Wanted actually functions as a pseudo sequel to the events of the hyperactive thriller"*

Publisher: Warner Bros.  
Developer: GRIN  
Heritage: Bionic Commando, Bionic Commando Rearmed  
Link: N/A  
ETA: 2009



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## COMING AUTUMN 2008

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## HANDS ON

# Street Fighter IV

*This is how you finish the fight*

**R**ight, down, down-right, punch. The cry of "Shoryuken" as your avatar spiralled impossibly upwards and around, connected with his opponent's chin and sent them crashing to the floor. It's something you instinctively know, almost by osmosis. We don't remember playing that much Street Fighter II in our childhood – certainly not enough to know all of these moves by heart – but somehow we know them. Pulling them off... well, that was a different story. One in four attempts, maybe one in three if we're generous. SFII was fast – almost too fast – to have the chance to really work on these thumb-twisting manoeuvres. So when we boot up the preview code of Street Fighter IV and manage to execute three perfectly in our first fight, we realise that this is down to one of two possibilities. Either our gaming skills have improved so significantly in the intervening years that this feels more natural than ever before, or Capcom has made these commands a little more forgiving.

A little more time with the game, and it's obviously the latter – we're even chaining attacks and pulling off

Super Combos with style and aplomb. Of the many changes Capcom has made in updating this most celebrated of beat-'em-up franchises, it's the game's more forgiving, accessible



You won't often have time to take in the new facial expressions when you're playing, but they make watching even more enjoyable.

*"A little time with the game and we're chaining attacks and pulling off Super Combos with style and aplomb"*



Old moves return with a delightful new lick of paint – Hadoken and Blanka's electric attack are now much more impressive.

**PREVIEW  
FEEDBACK!**  
Click here to  
tell us what you  
think of Street  
Fighter IV





The obese but surprisingly fast-moving Rufus is a well-balanced fighter who can easily overpower opponents quickly.



Pull off an Ultra Combo and you get an impressive 3D rendition of the attack.



## > Street Fighter IV cont.

nature that is particularly significant. It's the difference between knowing the path and walking the path. And, for us, it makes Street Fighter IV not only a very worthy update to a series with a

truly imposing heritage, but arguably the best Street Fighter game yet. Which, obviously, would mean that it might just be the greatest 2D fighter of all time.

Veterans of the almost ludicrously complex Third Strike – whose ultra-



Blanka's quick jumping can make him a tricky opponent to pin down.

**"One of the biggest changes is in the form of the new Focus Attacks, which offers a more measured counterbalance to frenzied attacks"**

hardcore approach made it the preserve of the obsessed and the tenaciously dedicated – might sneer at the changes, but it makes IV a much purer fighting game. No longer can rigorously learned movesets automatically triumph over well-timed and executed punches and kicks. The fact that the specials are easier to pull off puts more emphasis on a fast brain than nimble fingers – the basics becoming every bit as important as the new Focus Attacks and the Revenge

gauge. You'll still struggle to execute the Ultra Combos the first couple of times, but we never said experience wasn't a bonus.

The second biggest change is in the form of the new Focus Attacks, which offer a more measured counterbalance to frenzied opponent attacks. By pressing medium punch and kick simultaneously, you can charge an attack which affords your avatar invulnerability from one single attack. The longer you hold the buttons down for, the more powerful the blow. This doesn't take very long – around three seconds for a full-power Focus Attack – but it makes for quite a tactical change, as players pinned back can suddenly find themselves back on the offensive, not least because their opponent will start to crumple, offering a brief window for a free hit. It's a moment of







The backgrounds offer plenty of incidental detail – our favourite is the distillery, when a powerful attack can dislodge barrels.



We'd never have thought Zangief would become a favourite, but we're quite partial to his new moveset.

Black splodges of ink somehow add to the power of the blows you land – it's a stylistic touch that has real substance.



The fluidity of the animation transitions has to be seen to be believed.

*"The animation is stunning, with the game running incredibly smoothly"*

## > Street Fighter IV cont.

Zen calm amidst a flurry of leaping and attacking, and feels more thoughtful and measured even as the game maintains a breakneck pace. Again, this potentially helps make for more evenly matched encounters between relative newcomers and experts.

The game's visual style looks pretty special in static shots, but in motion you realise just how effective a reimagining it is. Slighter characters like Ryu and Chun Li do suffer from an excess of cartoonish muscle, but the animation is undeniably stunning, with the game running incredibly smoothly, even when specials are called into play. It's the small touches which make battles such a delight to watch as well as participate in, whether it be a kilt-



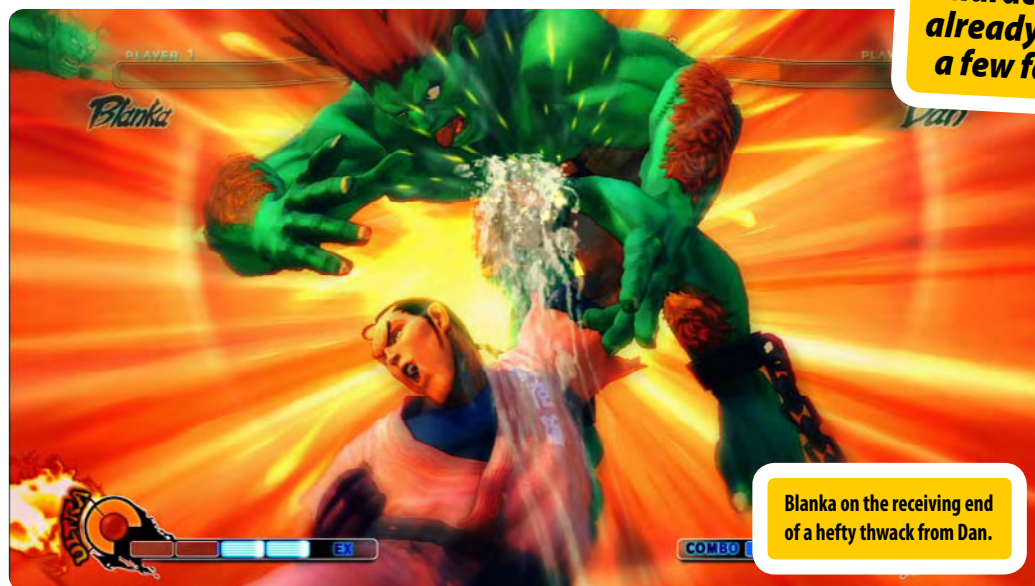




Is it us, or does he have enormous toes?



*"As for the new characters, we've already picked out a few favourites"*



Blanka on the receiving end of a hefty thwack from Dan.

## > Street Fighter IV cont.

wearing background character lugging around a barrel of scotch, the splashes of jet-black ink when executing Focus Attacks or Rufus's worryingly distracting belly-wobble. The bulging

eyes of your rival as you connect with a particularly vicious punch provide visual feedback as gratifying as the crunchy sound effects. To be honest though, the music is slightly less memorable, but that's the only presentational niggle we can think of.



We were very happy to see the return of Bison.

As for the new characters, we've already picked out a few favourites. French meathead Abel packs a powerful wallop, with a whirlwind throw that's easy to fall victim to. El Fuerte is a lucha libre wrestler with lightning pace, whose gallops across the screen can look quite comical, but whose comparative lack of punch is made up for by his blistering speed. We're not so taken with Crimson Viper – a female spy who has a tendency to spam cheap moves against you, but who is very effective under player control. Meanwhile, returnees have

been freshened up – we found Zangief a good starter character to begin with while we were struggling to get to grips with Chun Li's idiosyncrasies – which is a polite way of putting it.

As ever, only a significant time investment will clarify SFIV's position in the beat-'em-up pantheon. But even from this limited preview code – offering just three fights, with four of the final roster mode missing – it seems very clear to us that Capcom's masterful reinvention of this revered series is right up there with the very, very best the genre has to offer. ●

### 360Zine

#### HOW COMPLETE?

95%

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

94%

*Breathtaking, balletic beat-'em-up brilliance*



## WHEELMAN

**Publisher:** Midway  
**Developer:** Midway  
 Newcastle  
**Heritage:** L.A. Rush  
**Link:** [www.wheelmangame.com](http://www.wheelmangame.com)  
**ETA:** 13th February

### HANDS ON

# Wheelman

*Fill her up with Diesel...*

**S**carcely a day goes by without some self-appointed expert reminding us that games are bigger than movies. Perhaps with this in mind, Midway has cut out the middleman and cast a major Hollywood star in the lead role of a game. That star is classical actor Vin Diesel, who will take time out from treading the boards to appear as the titular Wheelman. It's not Diesel's first foray into videogames, as he reprised his character from the film Pitch Black in the excellent Xbox outing, The Chronicles Of Riddick, the interactive version of which garnered far more praise than the subsequent risible movie ever did.

### Diesel powered

Wheelman is a very different beast, though. For starters, it's set in the sun-drenched streets of Barcelona, where Diesel adds his unique gravitas to the character of undercover CIA agent, Milo Burik (no relation to Niko Bellic), who is in turn controlled by you, the player. Naturally, Diesel's likeness is being used, along with his voice talent, and the Hollywood-style plot sees Burik

*"Wheelman is set in the sun-drenched streets of Barcelona"*







WHEELMAN



Shoot him in the face first, ask questions later.

*"Having acquired the trust of the nefarious gangs, the idea is then to blow the whole crime racket wide open"*



Remember to check your rear view mirror.

## > Wheelman continued

embed himself deep into the city's gang culture by setting up as a wheelman, essentially a catch-all driver freelancing out his automotive skills to various ne'er-do-wells. Having acquired

the complete trust of the nefarious gangs, the idea is then to blow the whole crime racket wide open and presumably win some kind of medal into the bargain. In the meantime, the moral ambiguity of working undercover allows you to act like a

criminal, safe in the knowledge that you're doing it for the greater good.

Set within an open-world structure, there's no day-night cycle; instead the various missions either take place in the morning, daytime or at dusk. Three of those missions were recently revealed at an exclusive London event, and while Vin himself couldn't be on-hand to guide us through them, we did get an insight into what to expect when the game is released in February.

## Off to the scrapyard

For starters, expect a lot of vehicles to be destroyed. Featuring car melee, it's frantic stuff, with a tweak of the right analogue stick triggering an array of attacks. When it comes to a fight between two vehicles, bulk is an advantage, and in this case a petrol tanker caused mayhem, proving not

only a danger to fellow road users but also to the immediate environment, smashing through pretty much everything with total impunity.

As well as driving into other cars, you can stick your arm out of the window and shoot them in the traditional fashion, much like GTA. However, perhaps in recognition that the in-car shooting in Rockstar's classic was an imprecise affair, Wheelman features a slow motion mode that enables you to target such specific areas as tyres, petrol tanks, torsos or heads, all in a very exaggerated Mission Impossible, Hollywood style. Accruing enough Focus points from driving well enables you to trigger the Cyclone mode, whereby you perform a 180-degree spin, and see the action from over Vin's shoulder as you pop the various targets.







WHEELMAN



Vin doesn't stop for pedestrians.

**"Wheelman features a unique air-jacking move that enables you to leap from one car to another"**



Surely not the old exploding barrel routine?

## > Wheelman continued

While Midway's marketing department is keen to stress that (assume Hollywood voiceover tone): "The streets are his battleground, the car his weapon," Vin does occasionally get out of the car, as demonstrated in a further mission. Utilising a fairly simplistic targeting system, cover is employed in a naturalistic way, with Vin ducking behind any conveniently placed walls or discarded vehicles.

The final mission we were allowed to get our sweaty fingers on saw Vin at the wheel of a knackered car, with the added complication of having a gang member strapped next to him and rigged with C4 explosive. Racing against the clock to a bomb disposal expert while also having to avoid the police and any further obstacles was far from being the most relaxing moment of the afternoon.

## The G8 is gr8

As for the vehicles, they come in many shapes and forms, from the aforementioned tanker to motorcycles to the jewel in the crown, the officially licensed G8 Pontiac. While you can nick pretty much any set of wheels going, Wheelman features a unique air-jacking



This is what happens when you let an action-movie star drive a lorry through a built-up area.

move that enables you to leap from one car to another. In the midst of some car combat, if your vehicle is damaged, holding down the relevant button enables you to select a new car, an icon above it goes from red to green and you leap from your current car, swing your legs round, kick the driver out and then take control of his car.

It's action-packed stuff, and the Hollywood feel is emphasised by the dynamic score, which changes according to your onscreen exploits. As for generic music, there will be licensed tracks as well as songs from a number of up-and-coming bands. And while the in-car radio stations – by the developer's own admission – won't be able to compete with GTA, they do have a classical station, which should appeal to that exclusive crossover of Vin Diesel fans and Radio 3 listeners. ●

**PREVIEW  
FEEDBACK!**  
Click here to tell us what you think of Wheelman



360Zine

WHEELMAN

HOW COMPLETE?

90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

Vin Diesel stars in GTA Barcelona





# BEHIND THE WHEEL

We grill Midway's Studio Head **Craig Duncan** about Vin Diesel's upcoming *Wheelman*...



Typical Spanish driving? We couldn't possibly comment.

## Vin Diesel is obviously the big deal behind *Wheelman*. How did that come about?

Basically it's something we spoke about with Vin and his production company, Tigon Studios. We wanted to create an IP that really kind of captured what is being a *Wheelman*. A lot of games have tried it – *Driver* and *The Getaway* to name two – and never really executed on the promise of the ultimate car chase. And that's really what we wanted to do with *Wheelman*. The property we've created works equally as well as a film so obviously Tigon Studios have got a film script and they're looking at commissioning a movie. The game that we've created is its own IP in its own right, but we do a lot of

collaboration with Vin's people and are making sure that the Hollywood cinematic aspect all ties in to the game experience.

## Diesel has been involved with games before, notably *Chronicles Of Riddick*. Is he a big gamer?

He loves his games. We've sent our



Looks like Vin will be making a call to Autoglass.



Famous landmarks in Barcelona have been lovingly recreated.





**"The car combat is better than any game, and I'll categorically go on record as saying that"**

The best car combat ever, apparently.



It's usually a good idea to try and avoid the other traffic...

## > Interview continued

Exec Producer and Creative Director over to see him a couple of times. Although we don't speak to him that often because he's filming and he's got a ton of other scheduled commitments, we speak to the guys at Tigon Studios. They're always asking for builds so they can sit and go over them with Vin, and we get a lot of positive feedback on the builds so he has been actively involved. He loves the game and we get glowing feedback every time he sees it.

### What is the essence of being a Wheelman?

A wheelman is a getaway driver, a kind of expert driver that's there for hire. We're creating an open-world action driving game, so on one side of the fence you've got obviously your GTAs and your Saints Rows and on the other side you've got Burnout, Need for Speed and those kinds of game. Wheelman sits squarely in the middle of those, so we've got a lot of things that driving games have got but we've also got the third-person action and shooting and everything else an action game's got.

### What's the ratio of in-car and on-foot?

Probably about 80% in-car, 20% out. The main reason for that is in a lot of open-world games you obviously use the car to get from A to B, so you get in the car, you get to where you're going, you get out of the car, you do your mission. With Wheelman we want it to always be awesome when you're driving in the car.

### What does being set in Barcelona bring to the party?

It brings a lot of natural geography, a lot of great big freeways for having these car battles and a lot of narrow streets and alleyways, which again makes for great gameplay. The natural geography makes it very easy to familiarise yourself with where you are in the city at any time. You recognise landmarks; you see the harbour and the Sagrada Família. So setting the open-world game in Barcelona allows you to get that natural geography.

The other thing is that most open-world games set in the US have that gritty, smoggy and dark feel. We have blue skies and green palm trees. It's sunny and we have big draw distances, and the game looks lovely – almost like those Outrun games of old, with a great colour palette.

### What's the one big gameplay feature that will make Wheelman stand out?

The car combat is better than any game, and I'll categorically go on record as saying that. Better than any game past and any game present. ●

**WHEELMAN**

**Publisher:** Midway  
**Developer:** Midway Studios Newcastle  
**Heritage:** L.A. Rush  
**Link:** [www.wheelman.com](http://www.wheelman.com)  
**ETA:** February 2009



Craig Duncan,  
Studio Head,  
Midway Studios  
Newcastle





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# 20 for 2009

In terms of quality games, 2008 was Microsoft's year once more. So what exciting titles does 2009 have in store? Well, with Microsoft keeping pretty quiet about its forthcoming releases, information on first-party exclusives is a little thin on the ground. But those we do know about are very exciting indeed – and with a wealth of potential third-party classics stepping up to the plate, who would bet against the 360 playing host to the most memorable titles in 2009, too?

20

## RACE PRO Atari / SimBin / ETA: 13th February

### The lowdown

Pushed back from its January release, RACE Pro offers the sternest challenge to Forza as the serious racer of choice on 360. Its car models are incredibly realistic, and the game makes use of official FIA championships and tracks, providing an authentic racing simulation experience across 13 real-life tracks.

It's no Forza in the looks department, but RACE Pro handles like a dream.

### Why we're excited

It's the game's developer which has us most excited. SimBin is a PC stalwart, creating dauntingly hardcore but utterly satisfying sims in their popular GTR series, and this is their first effort on the 360. Early impressions of the game seem to suggest that the handling is exemplary, while the game employs realistic physics, making for some heart-stoppingly convincing races. Online play will support up to 12 players, while a substantial career provides plenty of meat for the solo player.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

Could be too hardcore for some, but if you're up to the challenge this will test your driving skills.



19

## HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE 3

EA / Valve / ETA: Late 2009. Maybe

### The lowdown

Only number 19? Well, we're still not entirely sure if the game will make it to the shelves of your friendly neighbourhood gaming retailer this year – this is Valve we're talking about after all – so we've had to dial down our excitement a little bit. But the next episode of gaming's best story-led first-person shooter (oh yes it is) is undoubtedly going to be something special when it does finally hit.

### Why we're excited

The pedigree of the developer is without question. Put simply, Valve does not make bad games. Indeed, it only ever makes bloody excellent ones. The Orange Box and Left 4 Dead were both serious contenders for our Game of the Year for the last two years. If Episode Three makes it in time for Christmas 2009, then we could be looking at a triple-whammy. Then there's the hint of a return for a certain portal-creating weapon...



### ANTICIPATION RATING

Sadly there's not enough real news so far, but once the first screenshots start to leak out then expect this number to rise. And rise. And rise...

Episode 2 is one of the finest first-person shooters we've ever played. If 3 makes it this year we'll be thrilled.







18

## MYSTERY AVATAR GAME

Microsoft / Rare / ETA: 2009

**360 EXCLUSIVE**

### The lowdown

We don't have a title as yet, but our spies tell us that Microsoft is working on at least one game based around its newly-minted Mii-alikes. And given Rare's hand in development of said creations, it's entirely likely the Twycross-based developer will be behind any future titles featuring the Avatars.

### Why we're excited

Microsoft's family-focused titles have so far stayed fairly close to templates established by Sony – for Lips read SingStar, etc. This is the first game where it goes all Nintendo on us. Avatar Sports? Perhaps, but we'd put money on MS being more savvy. It'll be family-focused for sure, and we're interested to see how it goes down with the casual crowd.



With greater customisation possibilities, Avatars could give Miis a run for their money in 2009.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

The Avatars are likeable, and a game centred around them could pull in a mainstream audience. We'll bring you more on this soon.



Are you ready to fly into the danger zone? HAWX's dogfights offer plenty of fast-paced thrills.

17

## TOM CLANCY'S HAWX

Ubisoft / Ubisoft Romania / ETA: Q1 2009

### The lowdown

It's basically a Top Gun for the Noughties. Set in a near future, after a massive attack on the US, you command one of a group of elite pilots sent into places like Mexico, Brazil and the Middle East. Indeed, the opening level recalls GRAW2, as you get a chance to actually pull off the Mexican air-strike you called in during that game.

### Why we're excited

We've played one of the missions, and it's really quite thrilling stuff. It's your typical Clancy game – loads of tech-speak and acronyms, all made much simpler than it sounds with an intuitive control scheme and a bespoke central system, which makes radar-reading and missile-dodging a doddle. Flitting between first-person bombing runs and third-person dogfights, HAWX offers plenty of high-octane action.



### ANTICIPATION RATING

We're keen to see if Ubisoft can keep things fresh with its mission objectives, but this is already looking pretty damn good indeed.





16

## SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Ubisoft / Ubisoft Montreal / ETA: 2009

### The lowdown

It's the much-delayed return of Sam Fisher, put back from its original release date, for various reasons, some rumouring that the result might be too similar to a certain other stealth-led Ubisoft action-adventure. Whatever happened, it seems Conviction is finally going to reach us at some point this year.

### Why we're excited

For our money, the Splinter Cell series offers some of the

most inspired stealth action in gaming. Indeed, it says a lot that Hideo Kojima offered a similarly manoeuvrable camera for Guns of the Patriots. We'd bet our mortgages on Ubi making use of Assassin's Creed's excellent SCIMITAR engine, which means this should be one of the best-looking and most exciting sneak-'em-ups on 360.



Sam's still the man for us.



Conviction looks like a bit of a series reboot. Fans should expect a few changes.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

New info on this is still pretty hard to come by, but we're assured that it is happening.



15

## DARKSIDERS: WRATH OF WAR

THQ / Vigil Games / ETA: Q2 2009

### The lowdown

Our dark horse tip for greatness this year is this action-adventure epic, which sees you take control of War, one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, who – along with his fellow riders – have accidentally (as you do) destroyed the Earth prematurely. Of course, you have to find out who it was that misled you so, and therefore you return to the planet to see angels and demons fighting among themselves and to find the other three missing horsemen...

flipping massive. And some of the demons he'll face off against are absolutely bloody gigantic. It makes for some epic-looking scenes as you smite enemies with your ridiculously oversized weapon and ride into battle atop your trusty steed. If Vigil Games can make the gameplay as compelling as the visuals appear to be, then this could be a surprise smash in 2009.

### Why we're excited

Everything in Darksiders is big. War himself is big. His horse, Ruin, is bigger. His sword is



Screen-high monsters and horses with flaming hooves. What's not to love?

### ANTICIPATION RATING

We're remaining quietly confident about this one.







14

## BIONIC COMMANDO

Capcom / GRIN / ETA: 13th February

### The lowdown

We've rarely seen such an example of a developer making life difficult for itself as with GRIN's superb XBLA hit Bionic Commando Rearmed. Because that was so good, it set itself a dauntingly high watermark for this full 3D reimagining of the much-loved grapple-swinging platform shooter. But in such safe hands this could potentially be something very special indeed.

### Why we're excited

GRIN proved that a 2D Bionic Commando could find a sizeable modern audience, and so those more accustomed to three-dimensional action epics

Swinging and firing could take some getting used to, but Commando is starting to look the business.

should be in seventh heaven with this. It's certainly a looker, and while its controls will undoubtedly take some getting used to, its swinging and leaping action will likely provide Capcom with one of the early big hitters of the year.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*Looks great, but can it work as well in three dimensions as Rearmed did in two? Well, we'll just have to wait and see.*



13

## TALES OF VESPERIA

Namco-Bandai / Namco-Bandai / ETA: 2009

360 EXCLUSIVE

### The lowdown

Namco's Tales series has provided consistently impressive role-playing over the years, and its 360 debut looks to be just as good. Vesperia is certainly the prettiest Tales to date, with delightfully animated cartoon sprites battling it out against pastel-coloured backdrops.

### Why we're excited

Upon the game's release in Japan, so many gamers snapped up 360s to play the game that the console completely sold out. With impressive scores from both the Japanese and the US press, and our love for the GameCube's Tales of Symphonia undiminished, we're really looking forward to this action role-player. Its combat system seems even more refined than ever, and it's a pretty lengthy adventure, which will keep RPG addicts playing for months.



Vesperia's simple, fun combat makes for a more accessible entry point for those ordinarily nonplussed by JRPGs.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*It's had very good reviews but few outright raves – can this Japanese role-player appeal to European gamers?*





12

**BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM**

Eidos / Rocksteady Studios / ETA: 2009

**The lowdown**

Few games have really done justice to the Caped Crusader, but the makers of Urban Chaos: Riot Response are giving it a shot with this tale of Gotham's titular loony bin, where the Dark Knight finds himself trapped by the inmates as he takes The Joker inside.

**Why we're excited**

It's Batman by way of Manhunt – dark, tense, stealthy action leading to brutal hand-to-hand encounters with various villains, and a brooding

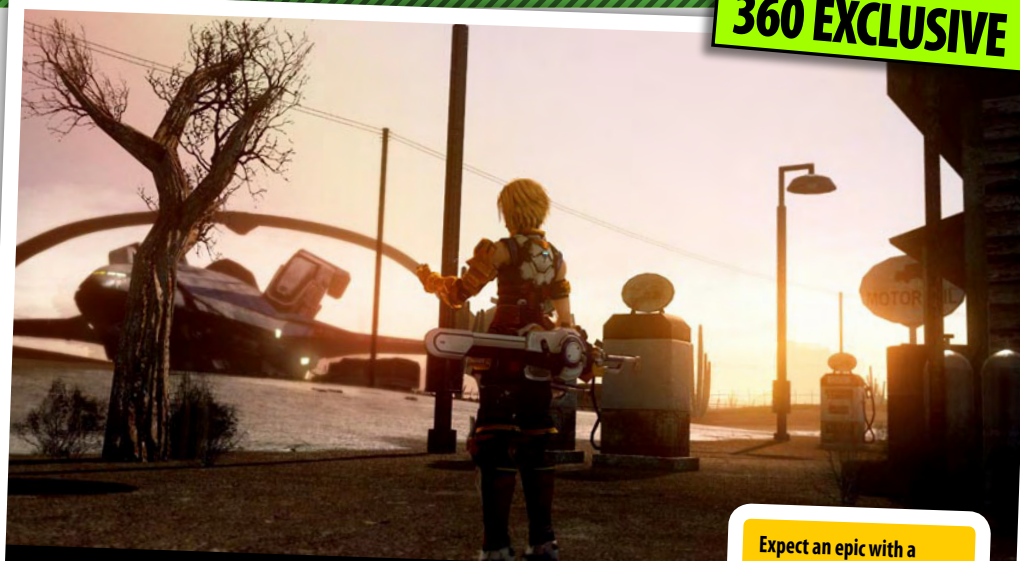
atmosphere which feels entirely fitting given the nature of Batman's recent cinematic outings. The graphics are tremendous – realistic yet exaggeratedly comic book in style – while the combat seems ruthlessly efficient. Urban Chaos was a hugely underrated shooter, and for once the Batman license seems in safe hands.

**ANTICIPATION RATING**

*Could well be the first truly excellent Batman game in a long while.*



*It's the best-looking Batman yet, but can the gameplay match up to the eye-candy?*

**360 EXCLUSIVE**

11

**STAR OCEAN:  
THE LAST HOPE**

Square-Enix / tri-Ace / ETA: March / April 2009

*Expect an epic with a capital 'E'. Star Ocean could be the best RPG of 2009.*

**The lowdown**

It's the long awaited return of the Star Ocean series – the PlayStation 2 iteration Till the End of Time is one of our favourite role-playing games ever, so this forthcoming adventure looks like it could make up for the slightly underwhelming Infinite Undiscovery. It's apparently going to be set in the aftermath of World War III, and will see players journey between several different planets.

**Why we're excited**

Like we said, we adore Till the End of Time, and if Last Hope even approaches that kind of quality, we'll be very pleased. The series' real-time battle system has been tweaked to make the action more thrilling, while the CGI story sequences have been produced by the team behind the cutscenes in the Final Fantasy games. With the level of polish we've come to expect from Square-Enix, it's an early contender for best RPG of 2009.

**ANTICIPATION RATING**

*It's a more Western-friendly RPG from the Japanese publisher, and we think this can be the success tri-Ace deserves.*





## 360 EXCLUSIVE

10

### HALO WARS

Microsoft / Ensemble Studios /  
ETA: 27th February

#### The lowdown

Real-time strategy isn't necessarily an easy sell to console owners, but Microsoft has an easy way round that: Halo-ise it! Set 20 years before the Halo event, it's an RTS very much with the focus on combat. That's not to say that it won't be tactical, because you'll still have to outwit the Covenant (or indeed the UNSC if you're playing competitive multiplayer) but the emphasis here is definitely on battles – your troops are set to auto-attack any enemies within a given range, which tells you all

you need to know about the leaning towards almost constant action.

#### Why we're excited

We're excited because it adds plenty of background to the Halo story, while providing an RTS experience very much geared towards console-based play. It's not a PC game retooled for a 360 audience, but a game which has been developed with its host console in mind from day one. So its controls are instinctive and easy to learn, while its familiar setting and technology will make normally strategy-phobic players feel more at ease. Ensemble is hoping it can do for the genre what Halo did for the FPS. If it manages that, then we're looking at one of the best 360 exclusives of the year.



With a pace that's relatively frenetic for an RTS, Halo Wars should attract plenty of gamers who aren't usually fans of the genre.

#### ANTICIPATION RATING

*It looks great, its controls are intuitive, and it combines non-stop action with plenty of tactical thinking.*



This beautiful backdrop is entirely at odds with the gory chaos that will soon unfold in front of it.



9

### BAYONETTA

Sega / Platinum Games / ETA: 2009

#### The lowdown

Seven years after introducing the world to Dante in the original Devil May Cry, Hideki Kamiya is once again attempting to give the third-person actioner a swift kick up the arse. This time he has an even more outlandish protagonist – the titular witch, Bayonetta, who has guns in her feet and can conjure dragons from her hair (yes, her hair) to finish off opponents. As if that wasn't enough, she's also able to magic up medieval torture devices to splatter enemies into tiny, fleshy chunks. Nice.

#### Why we're excited

It's exactly the kind of messy, silly, outrageously camp and violent fighter that the genre needs

right now. Ninja Gaiden was superb, but it ventured a little too often to the wrong side of the hard/unfair line, and had a pretty awful camera, if we're brutally honest. Bayonetta might once again be pretty tough – after all, the DMC series has never been known to be easy – but it's likely to offer plenty of crazy thrills and more than a few laughs, making those deaths at the hands of your powerful foes a little easier to take. And with so many ways of exacting painful vengeance, you'll want to jump back in and take those demons down as soon as you hit the deck.

#### ANTICIPATION RATING

*Could we have another cult hero in the making here? Very possibly.*







## BRUTAL LEGEND

EA / Double Fine / ETA: Autumn 2009

### The lowdown

It's a game infused with the spirit of rock. Eddie Riggs is a heavy metal roadie, who is sucked back through time into an alternate world where he has to help an oppressed people slay the demons and Goths who rule this parallel universe. Using his trusty axes (one of the wood-chopping kind, the other of the riff-strumming variety), he must create an army of rockers to bring this world kicking and screaming into the metal age.

### Why we're excited

The story's from the warped mind of Tim Schafer, who created the wonderful – but sadly unsuccessful – Psychonauts, and had a hand in writing some of

LucasArts' finest adventures (he designed Grim Fandango). After a period in development limbo – Activision Blizzard didn't think the game had enough franchise potential – the game has been picked up by EA, and we couldn't be happier that it's finally seeing the light. Though Psychonauts was more successful in its amazing design than its execution, we're hopeful this will be Schafer's crowning glory. With Jack Black voicing Eddie, Brutal Legend already has a hugely likeable protagonist. Let's hope it plays as good as the concept sounds.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*Schafer can do no wrong for us. If it can better Psychonauts then we're all in for an absolute treat.*



You cannot kill the metal! We can't think of a better bet to voice Brutal Legend's hero than Jack Black.



## FORZA MOTORSPORT 3

Microsoft / Turn 10 / ETA: 2009

360 EXCLUSIVE

### The lowdown

It's the return of the game which this writer maintains is by far the most accessible and enjoyable serious racing series around. Forza 2 was a wonderfully-crafted racer which offered a way in for newcomers with its numerous driving assists, allowing novices to become confident enough to gradually throw away those stabilisers and tackle the many and varied circuits featured therein. Forza 3 is very much a case of bigger and better, with so many cars and tracks that the game will come on two discs.

### Why we're excited

With a reported 400 cars and 100 tracks, it's clear that Forza 3 is aiming to be the most comprehensive racing sim around. The damage mechanics have apparently been upgraded for additional realism, while there are a host of new race modes – including drag racing, drift challenges and point-to-point events – which will offer something original for those who've memorised Forza 2's courses. We're particularly interested in the Collector's Edition of the game, which will offer players membership of a special program which gives them access to all future DLC and exclusive online racing challenges – complete with prizes!



### ANTICIPATION RATING

*Forza 2 seemed to be the complete racer on the market, but it seems we ain't seen nothing yet. Definitely one to watch out for.*



Potentially the most complete racer on 360, and likely to be a far more interesting ride than PS3's charisma-free Gran Turismo 5.





## RESIDENT EVIL 5

Capcom / Capcom / ETA: March 2009

### The lowdown

It's been a long wait, but Resi finally goes current-gen, with Chris Redfield returning to action, this time venturing into Africa to investigate the apparent breakout of another virus which turns humans into feral killing machines. Naturally, he doesn't get the friendliest of welcomes, but this time he at least has an assistant to help him out. The beautiful Sheva is AI controlled in solo mode, or can be guided by another player in co-operative mode, which is available in both online and offline flavours.

### Why we're excited

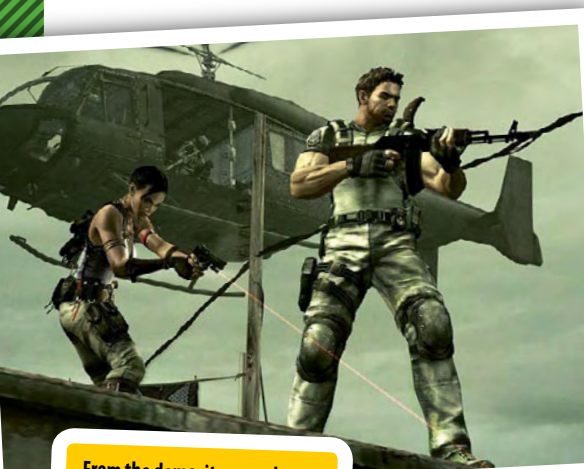
Well, for starters it's the follow-up to one of the finest videogames ever created. Resi 4 is a tough act to follow, and the very slightly disappointing 360 demo is the only reason this isn't a little higher, with the computer-controlled Sheva a little erratic in single-player. Yet co-op is absolutely superb, and once you're used to your partner's foibles, it's still as intensely thrilling as ever. The final game is said to be chock-full of heart-pumping set-pieces and fast-paced vehicle sections, and the franchise's ever-inventive boss fights are certainly present and correct. It's also one of the best-looking games of the generation – with huge character models, amazing animation and incredible background detail.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*If this ends up as immaculately paced and constantly inventive as Resi 4, then this is a strong contender for game of the year.*



The mine-cart ride was a highlight of Resi 4. Can 5's thrilling motorbike chase possibly top it?



From the demo, it seemed Sheva's AI needed a little work.



Will we get any super slo-mo replays of particularly nasty alien deaths? We had them in Brothers in Arms, so why not?



## ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

Sega / Gearbox / ETA: Before July 2009

### The lowdown

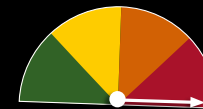
Sega's squad-based shooter has to be one of the most-anticipated licenses of the year. You'll play as part of a group of marines tasked with taking down a vicious alien force. While the game offers the same kind of creeping tension followed by bursts of horrific action from the Alien films – not to mention pinching some familiar technology and weaponry – it's an entirely original story, with a focus on tactical team-based shooting.

### Why we're excited

Gearbox's experience on the Brothers in Arms games makes it the ideal developer for a story-led squad shooter. We're assured there will be plenty of moments that will have players leaping out of their seats, and we're particularly looking forward to letting loose on the aliens with that flamethrower. Perhaps most excitingly of all, there's a four-player co-operative mode, with each player taking on a different kind of role in the Colonial Marines team. It's likely that the finished game will carry competitive multiplayer options, too. Very little has been shown of the game so far, but the initial screenshots certainly look impressive.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*To be honest, we can't see this not being brilliant. It seems like a perfect marriage of game and developer, and we're expecting big things.*





4

## GTA IV: THE LOST AND THE DAMNED

Rockstar / Rockstar North / ETA: 17th Feb

### The lowdown

Okay, it's not exactly a game *per se*, but what's surely the biggest and most important piece of downloadable content ever released definitely deserves a placing in our list. Interestingly, the content doesn't focus on the story of Niko Bellic – instead, the plot will follow a new character, Johnny Klebitz. He's a member of the Lost biker gang (if you spent any time listening to the radio stations then you'll know about them already) and is a very different character to Niko. That's not to say that our European hero

won't turn up, as he makes a few cameo appearances in the game as the stories of Johnny and Niko dovetail.

### Why we're excited

The chance to spend some more time in Liberty City sounds more than enough to us, but the opportunity to see the city from a different angle is a more than tasty bonus. It's nice to flesh out something which was previously on the periphery, and with the expansion also apparently offering more sandbox gameplay as well as story missions (no concrete info, but we're expecting more locations to open up – perhaps new bars and venues to offer more variety to your down time) this looks like one of the most substantial pieces of DLC ever created. With Rockstar's famous attention to detail, there's every chance Johnny's story could be every bit as compelling as Niko's.



### ANTICIPATION RATING

We can't imagine any 360 owners not being excited about this release.



3

## STREET FIGHTER IV

Capcom / Capcom / ETA: 20th February

### The lowdown

We've only just got over the ridiculously expensive fourth quarter of 2008, and already it looks like February's going to be another wallet-busting month. Capcom's beat-'em-up sequel is arguably the biggest release of the lot, and this spiritual successor to Street Fighter II (Third Strike being a very different beast) looks like it could make that epoch-making 2D fighter all but redundant. With all those famous characters – and a host of newcomers – rendered in a gloriously new art style, with exaggerated animations retaining all the charm of the original but proving much more expressive, and the same incredibly well-balanced scrapping mechanics, no other beat-'em-up in 2009 will come close. It's already been a hit in Japanese arcades (and a few US ones) but this is the first time

most Westerners will have experienced what could be the new pinnacle of the genre.

### Why we're excited

You only need to look at our preview in this very issue of 360Zine to see why. It's a hugely accomplished fighting game which is just as deep yet somehow more accessible than ever before – reliant as ever on timing and skill, but less exacting in how you pull off those tricky inputs for special moves. It offers an irresistible blend of nostalgia and newness which makes it as addictive as ever. If there's any justice in this world then this will be as big a hit as The World Warrior was back in the day.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

We're absolutely itching to get our hands on this one.







## HALO 3: ODST

Microsoft / Bungie / ETA: Autumn 2009

**360 EXCLUSIVE**

### The lowdown

It's Halo, but not quite as we know it. This standalone expansion is based in the same universe, and sees you taking charge of a member of the UNSC – an Orbital Drop Shock Trooper (the ODST of the title) – in the run-up to the events of Halo 3. The prequel takes place in New Mombasa, and you're charged with discovering the mystery behind the disappearance of your teammates. As you're not as powerful as Master Chief, and can't take as much punishment from enemies, the gameplay is a little slower than Halo 3, with an increased focus on stealth.

### Why we're excited

One, it's more Halo. Which is more than enough for most of us. Two, it offers enough differences from Halo 3 to sound like more than just a straightforward expansion. For starters you'll spend some time playing as other characters – as your protagonist locates clues to the

whereabouts of a teammate, you'll jump into their shoes and get to find out exactly what happened to them. This mechanic sounds interesting enough, but with rumours of more open-world environments (and thus rather less linear gameplay), the more thoughtfully paced, sneak-and-snipe approach, and the chance to discover a little more about the Halo universe, this sounds like quite a departure from Halo's '30 seconds of fun'. Plus it'll be nice to find out exactly what was happening elsewhere in the Halo universe while Master Chief was off fighting on Delta Halo in the second game in the series.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*A chance to flesh out the Halo universe a little more? Yes, please.*



Bungie steps outside its comfort zone with a more thoughtfully-paced shooter. A reportedly stingy runtime aside, this should be top-quality sneak 'n' snipe fun.



## ALAN WAKE

Microsoft / Remedy / ETA: 2009

**360 EXCLUSIVE**

### The lowdown

The secluded, sleepy town of Bright Falls is the setting for this psychological thriller from the developer of Max Payne. You play as Wake himself, a horror writer whose fiancée mysteriously disappeared, causing him to suffer from insomnia. The sleep clinic to treat his condition is in the aforesaid town, but soon he begins to have terrible nightmares which start to blur into reality, as Bright Falls turns out to be not quite as peaceful as he first thought...

### Why we're excited

Surprised this is our number one? Well, call it an educated hunch, but we think Alan Wake could easily be one of the best games of 2009. This psychological thriller is hugely ambitious, as you might expect from this developer – Max Payne was a game which had a few issues, but definitely felt ahead of its time. With Microsoft willing to give Remedy all the time it needs to finish Alan Wake, we're certain this is going to be well worth the wait. The footage we've seen is visually stunning, and the hints of open-world exploration (you'll even spend some time driving) and multiple solutions to the enemy encounters – players can set traps for enemies which activate lights to weaken them so you can kill them more easily – make us very, very excited indeed. Remedy can certainly spin a good yarn, and if this can live up to the blend of Max Payne, GTA and Silent Hill that we're imagining in our heads, then it's going to be incredible.

### ANTICIPATION RATING

*We're convinced that Alan Wake will be an immersive, atmospheric experience quite unlike any other. Be excited.*



Gloriously ambitious and thrillingly different, Alan Wake's lengthy development suggests Remedy wants to get things just perfect. Potentially the most exciting game of this year.





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# Silent Hill: Homecoming

**Publisher:** Konami  
**Developer:** Double Helix Games

**Heritage:** Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Enter the Matrix

**Link:** [www.konami.com/games/shh](http://www.konami.com/games/shh)

**ETA:** February 27th

*Beware of the fog!*

It's fair to say that not too many gamers had high hopes for Silent Hill: Homecoming. An ailing franchise still living off the second in the series, and suffering diminishing returns ever since; development reins being passed on from Team Silent to a relatively untested US developer; a poor demonstration at E3 – the signs weren't too promising. So it's something of a pleasant surprise to discover that Homecoming is

something of a return to form for the franchise – never coming close to hitting the heights of the masterful Silent Hill 2, but comfortably besting the two games that have been released since the divisive third.

You play as Alex Shepherd, returning from a tour of duty to discover that his town has been shrouded in fog, almost all its residents having disappeared, and the streets being patrolled by nightmarish creatures. Alex finds his

mother in a state of catatonia, and resolves to find his missing younger brother and absentee father in order to figure out precisely why his homecoming has gone so badly wrong. It won't come as a surprise when Alex starts to find a link between Shepherd's Glen and Silent

*"It's a pleasant surprise to discover that Homecoming is something of a return to form for the franchise"*

*The game's pacing works well for an action-adventure but there's just a little too much action for all the scares to really work.*



## VIOLENT HILL

*Making sure that those creatures really stay dead this time*



**Wheel of doom**



**Artful dodger**

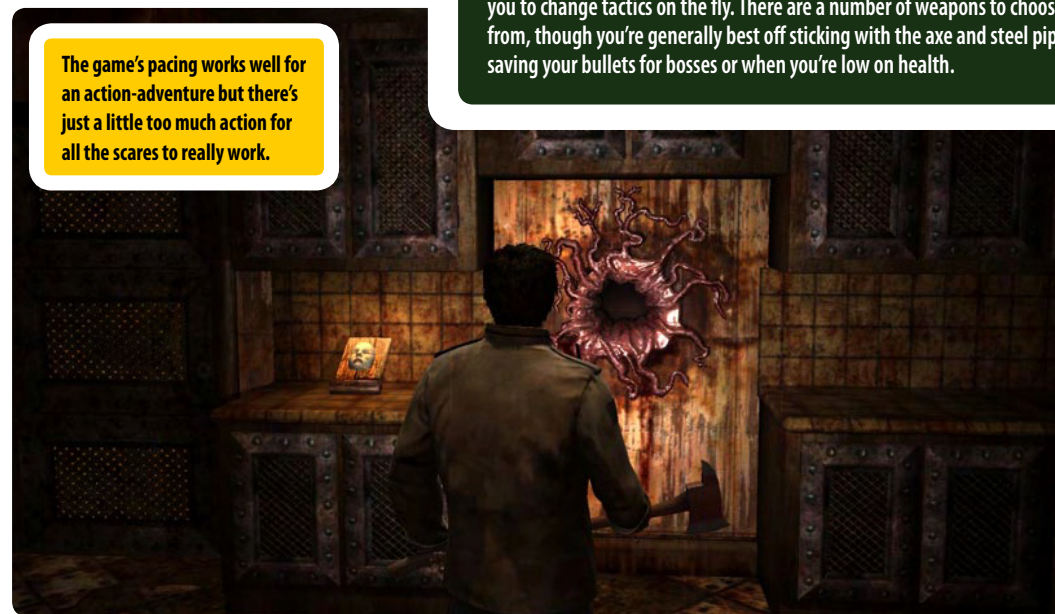


**Smash and grab**



## Wheel of doom

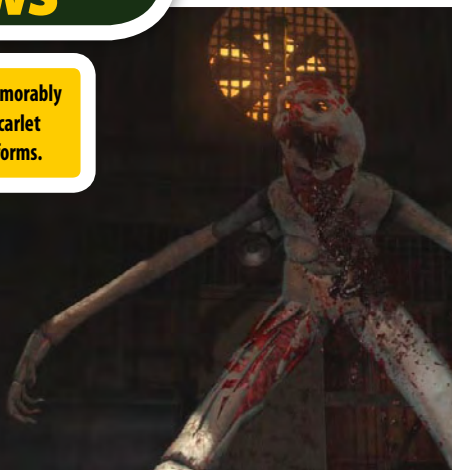
Your weapons can be swapped quickly using the Weapon Wheel, allowing you to change tactics on the fly. There are a number of weapons to choose from, though you're generally best off sticking with the axe and steel piping, saving your bullets for bosses or when you're low on health.







Bosses are memorably grotesque – Scarlet here has two forms.



Ah, that horror staple – the blood-filled bathtub. We don't think any game will ever top *Eternal Darkness* in that respect, though.



## > Silent Hill continued

Hill (all that fog's a pretty good start) and while the story is slow and occasionally clichéd, it definitely picks up as the game progresses. It's a little heavy-handed in places, with a few lines of eye-rolling dialogue, but is compelling enough to warrant sticking with until the bitter end.

Atmosphere has always been key to the Silent Hill experience, and *Homecoming* certainly excels in this area. Despite the character models disappointing in close-up during the story sequences, in-game everything

looks great – lighting in particular is terrific, while enemy design is a strong point, despite quite a few ideas being recycled from the fairly recent film. Moreover, the sound design is superb – the soundtrack from series veteran Akira Yamaoka is as effective as usual, while the crackle of Alex's radio when enemies are nearby rarely fails to unnerve you as you play.

Although it would undoubtedly disturb more had Double Helix rationed the scares a little better. There's plenty of payoff but never

enough build-up. One or two sections ratchet up the tension beautifully, but all too often you'll find plenty of enemies to fight. With combat never being a series strong point, you'd think this was game-breaking, but that's not

**"The lighting is terrific, while enemy design is a strong point"**

the case, because the melee scrapping here is the best ever in a Silent Hill title. Alex is rather handy in a fight, and whether bludgeoning or shooting, you'll rarely be too troubled in battle.

It's remarkable that the game still manages to feel fairly intense when you're fending off the creatures – perhaps it's the atmosphere generated by the terrific audiovisuals, but in most games Alex's proficiency with steel piping would dissipate the excitement. Here, despite being able to dodge and wield guns more effectively than any previous Silent Hill protagonist, it still works. And some of the boss battles are genuinely excellent, offering an unusual change of pace (and yet more of that excellent music). It's a

## FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time



10 MINUTES

Not exactly the homecoming Alex is expecting...



2 HOURS

We're not particularly happy with the service in this hotel.



5 HOURS

Puzzle fans will rejoice at this descent into Hell.



8 HOURS

The streets are paved with blood, and Alex faces a tough choice.



11 HOURS

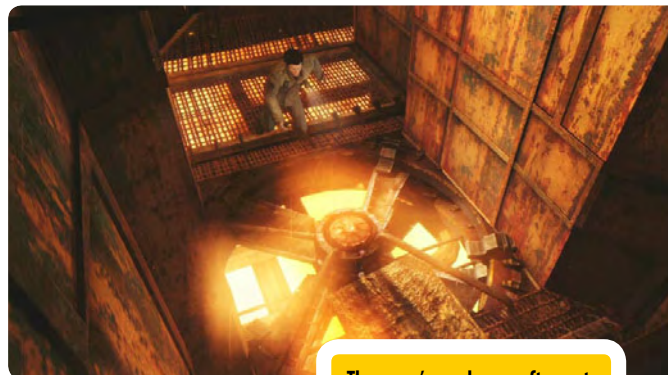
You've seen one of five possible endings – now for the other four!







Alex isn't always on his own  
– Deputy Wheeler makes  
for a pretty handy sidekick.



The game's puzzles are often out  
of place, but a surprising number  
actually make sense in context.



Alex's torch can alert  
enemies to his whereabouts  
– switching it off might  
make things a little dark,  
but enemies will often fail  
to spot him.

While it's not as psychologically affecting  
as previous Silent Hill games, Homecoming  
is still not for the faint of heart.



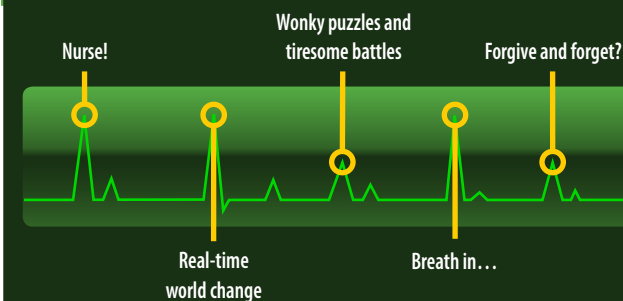
## > Silent Hill continued

pity that certain sections contain respawning foes, which return again and again until you've reached the right point or triggered a certain cutscene. It's here where the battles become a little more of a slog, even if it still manages to be disturbingly satisfying to see your blows inflict visible wounds on enemies.

Slightly less successful are the game's puzzles, which – for the most part – rely on that dusty, tattered old copy of *The Survival Horror Guide to Incongruous Riddles* for inspiration. Though, once again, they get better towards the end, with some multi-part teasers which require genuine thought. Though we'll be happy if we never see a sliding puzzle ever again.

Ultimately, *Homecoming* feels like a decent-quality facsimile of a *Silent Hill* game – never quite imprinting its own ideas on the franchise, but sticking closely enough to the series template to remain a worthwhile investment for

## PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



fans. It's lacking in the psychological horror which the franchise is known for, replacing it with a slightly more hackneyed and generic alternative, but it still has its moments. One or two of its jump-shocks may be a little cheap, but you'll have your heart in your throat a few times. And while the return of the iconic Pyramid Head may make little sense, his introduction (as long as you don't think about the rhyme and reason behind it too much) is a genuine spine-tingler. Despite innovating far less, it arguably represents a better horror experience than *Alone in the Dark*, though it falls short of *Dead Space* and *Siren: Blood Curse* as this generation's best chiller. ●

**Chris Schilling**

### 360Zine Verdict

*No classic, but a  
solid continuation  
of the franchise*

- Accomplished visuals
- Vastly improved combat
- Cheap scares and average story

# 82%





# Xbox Live Arcade Round-Up

Another thrilling game available for download today...

## Gears of War 2: Combustible Map Pack

Developer: Epic

Publisher: Microsoft Price: 800 MP (~£6.80)

So soon? It's perhaps telling that Epic decided to launch additional maps this early in Gears 2's life, presumably to create a bit of goodwill and to attempt to paper over the cracks which have plagued the online game since launch. While Gears 2 remains a gleeful multiplayer experience in Horde – or with friends who have decent Internet speeds – for

the most part, the multiplayer games remain infuriatingly laggy, with the matchmaking still iffy and the balancing still not as refined as the original. Perhaps a patch or three might have been better than throwing out premium DLC while internet goers are complaining in their hundreds.

It's not as if the maps provided were particularly lacking, and this

Flood is the most dynamic map – forcing players out of cover when the Imulsion rises.



*"What's here is of decent quality, but we wager that most players will stick with the bundled maps"*

inconsistent pack isn't really an improvement on what's already there. Flood is probably the weakest – the promised tide of Imulsion little more than a rumble and a slowly encroaching puddle, making a small map even more restrictive. It's fun for a quick wham-bam-thankyou-ma'am blast with a couple of small teams, but with a full set of players, it's far too hectic and will be over all too quickly for most. Still, it's a change of pace, it's just not really for us. That said, it makes for some terrifying games of Horde.

### Fuel for the fire

Fuel Station is much better, and we've particularly enjoyed a few King of the Hill games on that map. The station itself offers a high vantage point for some easy kills, though you need to really bide your time until it's safe to access. A good-looking map which offers some fast-paced thrills without being too cramped, it's a

Fuel Station offers two routes to the roof, but you can avoid getting caught from above by staying close to the building.



strong addition which seems to have found quite a few fans.

Gold Rush is probably the pick of the bunch. Taking place on an abandoned Imulsion refinery, it has several levels, offering numerous flanking opportunities, and chances to snipe enemies from high ground should you pick up the Longshot. The provided Mortar is a welcome addition and can create some havoc when used by skilled players. It's a little disappointing that this is just a port of a map which was available in the PC version of the original Gears, but its appearance here proves its quality as a multiplayer choice.

While Gears 2's online modes have now been tweaked – to noticeable effect – there haven't been the wholesale changes some demanded, making this a must only for those who've played the existing maps to death. What's here is of decent quality, but we wager that most players will likely stick with the bundled maps rather than pay extra for three solid but unspectacular additions.

- More Gears!
- A good mix of maps
- Nothing truly outstanding

For hardcore Gears fans only

80%



In **360Zine** Issue 27



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[www.cranberrypublishing.com](http://www.cranberrypublishing.com)

**Publishing Director:** Dave Taylor

**Email:** [dave.taylor@cranberrypublishing.com](mailto:dave.taylor@cranberrypublishing.com)

**Editorial Director:** Dan Hutchinson

**Email:** [dan.hutchinson@cranberrypublishing.com](mailto:dan.hutchinson@cranberrypublishing.com)

**Commercial Director:** Duncan Ferguson

**Email:** [duncan.ferguson@cranberrypublishing.com](mailto:duncan.ferguson@cranberrypublishing.com)

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**Contributors:** Chris Schilling, Steve Hill

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