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360Zine

Issue 34 | September 2009

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

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey



SECTION 8
BONUS MAGAZINE

PLUS!



REVIEWED
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM



REVIEWED
WOLFENSTEIN



PREVIEWED
DIRT 2



PREVIEWED
OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2

Welcome to 360Zine



It's coming close to gaming's silly season – the part of the year where there are far too many outstanding games to buy and just not enough money to purchase them all. And it would appear that it's started already with the stunning Batman: Arkham Asylum. The Caped Crusader has had a chequered gaming past, but the combination of a tight storyline, pixel-perfect combat and an intuitive control system makes this one a definite winner.

If you really want to know about the games that you need to be saving for now though, then check out our behind-the-scenes look at the recent GamesCom show in Germany. In it we list the five games that you're almost certainly going to want to own – and you probably won't be too surprised to find out what's top of the list…

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
360zine@gamerzines.com

360Zine FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of the new issue

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Chris Schilling
…is more Christian Bale than Michael Keaton



David Scammell
David is feeling very DiRTy this month

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



IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey

CHOC'S AWAY!



Batman: Arkham Asylum

A super superhero?



Colin McRae: DiRT 2

It's DiRTy, but we love it



Operation Flashpoint 2

Enter the Dragon



Wolfenstein

The classic returns

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Conviction
Lucidity
Fable III
Colin McRae: DiRT 2
GamesCom preview round-up
Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising
IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey
Batman: Arkham Asylum
Wolfenstein
Shadow Complex

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We recommend you close and re-open the magazine and select "Play" when asked about the multimedia to enjoy the magazine as intended.

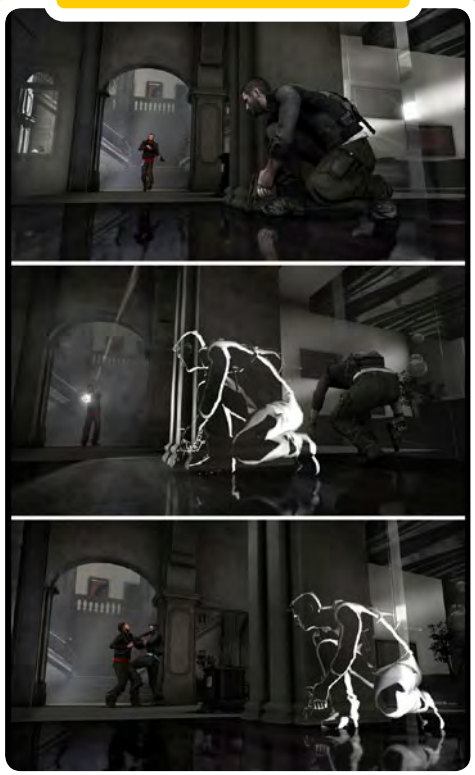
Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Heritage: Splinter Cell series
Link: http://splintercell.us.ubi.com/conviction/
ETA: Q1 2010





Key info is projected onto the environment so as not to have you delving into menus to read objectives. It looks incredibly cool too.



The Last Known Position mechanic leaves a translucent outline of Sam to show you where guards will investigate, allowing you to catch them unawares from behind.



"The new 'mark and execute' system sees you tagging enemies outside a room before bursting through doors and windows to take them out"

FIRST LOOK

Splinter Cell: Conviction

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Splinter Cell: Conviction

Sam Fisher's out for revenge…

What's the story?

It's been a rough time for Sam Fisher. After spending some time seemingly as a hobo in the aborted first version of Conviction, he's re-emerged from development hell in smarter gear and with a neater hair-do, but at the cost of a murdered daughter. As he's no longer part of Third Echelon, out go those iconic three green lights, in comes a lean, mean, Bourne-esque baddie-torturing machine. In other words, he's mad as hell and he's not going to take this any more.

What do we know?

It dazzled at E3, and also at GamesCom – the criticism of that early version having apparently galvanised Ubi into making what could well be the best Splinter Cell yet. It's less obsessed with tech – Sam breaks off car wing mirrors to look under doors – but still offers a wealth of methods for him to get the jump on his opponents. The new 'mark and execute' system which sees you 'tag' enemies before bursting through doors and windows to take them out is essentially an even more satisfying take on Call of Juarez's concentration mode. Throw in environmental interrogations, one of which sees Sam making sure a man's head is well-acquainted with a porcelain sink, and you've got a brutal but beautiful stealther. We can't wait to see more.

When do we get more?

It has slipped to early 2010, but we'll hopefully be going hands-on with the game before then.

Anything else to declare?

Sam's hand-to-hand combat skills are based on the Israeli martial art of Krav Maga – Ubi roping in an expert in the style for use in motion-capture sessions.

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PREPARE TO DROP

\\22.09.09



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

HALO 3 ODST
ORBITAL DROP SHOCK TROOPER

16 www.pegi.info

XBOX LIVE

Microsoft game studios

BUNGIE

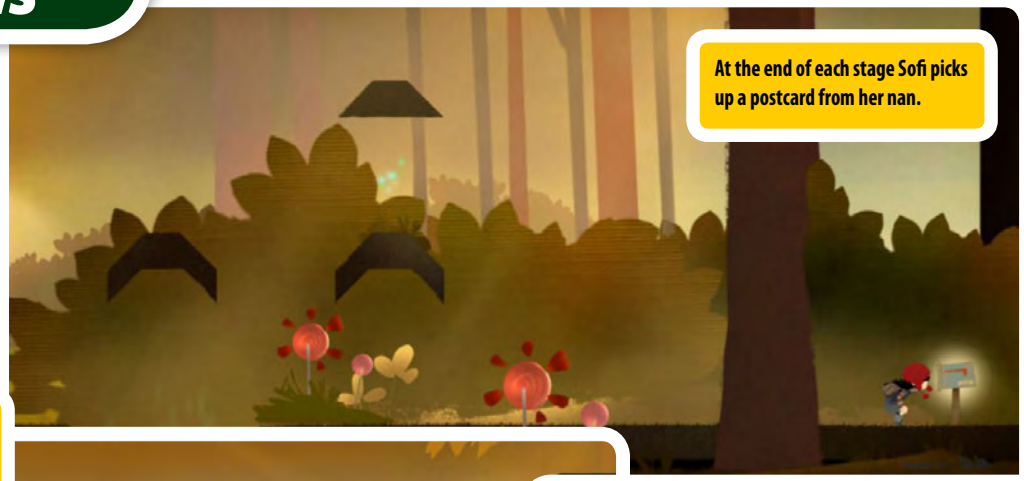
HALO.XBOX.COM/HALO3ODST

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Jump in.

XBOX 360

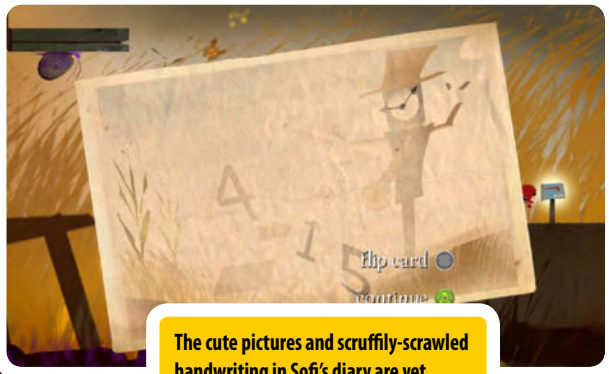
Publisher: Lucasarts
Developer: Lucasarts
Heritage: Monkey Island series
Link: N/A
ETA: Autumn



At the end of each stage Sofi picks up a postcard from her nan.

At times it becomes a seriously tricky platform challenge – you'll need careful and clever placement to avoid getting hurt here.





The cute pictures and scruffily-scrawled handwriting in Sofi's diary are yet another delightful touch in a game already packed with charm.



FIRST LOOK

Lucidity

Sofi, so good in Lucasarts' picturebook fantasy

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

What's the story?

Sofi, runner-up in a Little Red Riding Hood lookalike competition, lives with her nana. One dream-like evening she nips out of the house to collect fireflies: cue an adventure that sees you controlling not the adorable Sofi herself, but some kind of omnipotent guiding force, helping her past obstacles and enemies by placing objects in her path.

What do we know?

This XBLA release is very much one for the arty crowd. If you thought Braid was the bee's knees, then chances are you'll take to this endearing picturebook fantasy. Cute-as-a-button Sofi looks so happy and innocent as she naively skips around a series of increasingly treacherous environments that you'll be desperate to keep her safe. Place wooden beams down to help her cross gaps, stairways to climb to unreachable platforms, slingshots to send her zipping forward over longer distances, or bombs to blow up sections of scenery. Just making it to the end of each level is a fine art – to collect all the fireflies secreted in each stage (don't worry, you don't have to get them in one go) takes dedication, clever strategising and not a little luck with the pieces you're given. A Tetris-like box shows what object you'll be handed next – you can swap this with the one you're currently holding if it's a better fit for your present dilemma, while you can combine items to affect Sofi's trajectory – positioning spring shoes where she's about to fall can get her over an enemy's head just as well as a protective platform or stairway.

"As Sofi skips around these treacherous environments you'll be desperate to keep her safe"

When do we get more?

It's not part of Microsoft's Summer of Arcade, but we wouldn't be surprised to see it arrive around September or October.

Anything else to declare?

There's a haunting and melancholic piano theme which is a fitting backing for the equally beautiful art style.

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

THE LARGEST ARMY OF SUPER HEROES IS BACK!

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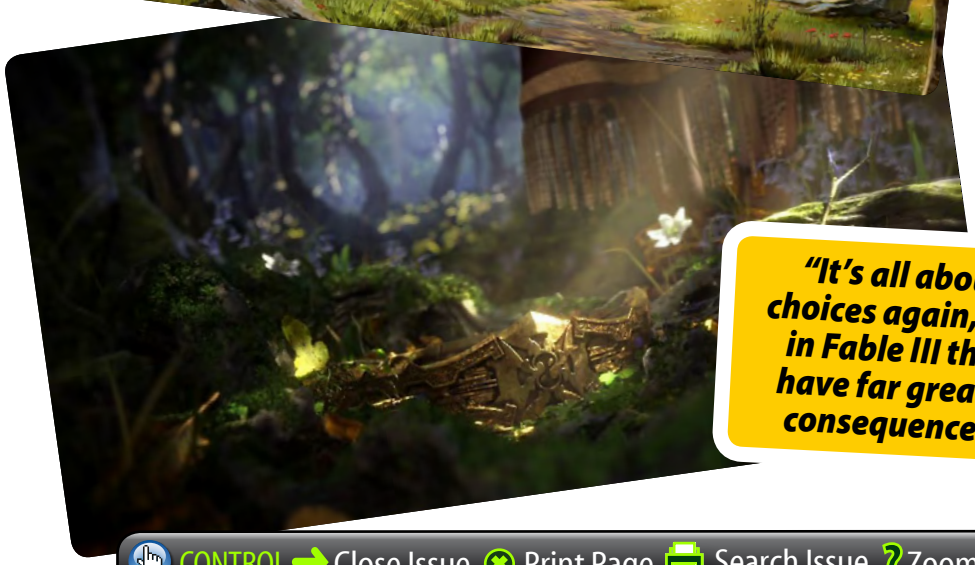
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Lionhead
Heritage: Fable II
Link: www.lionhead.com
ETA: Late 2010



The enigmatic Theresa (Zoe Wanamaker) is set to play a key role once more, if her appearance in the trailer is anything to go by.



We just hope natural beauty spots such as Bower Lake remain as picturesque as ever.



"It's all about choices again, but in Fable III they have far greater consequences"

FIRST LOOK

Fable III

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Fable III

King for a day, fool for a lifetime?

What's the story?

Easily the biggest software reveal of GamesCom was Peter Molyneux taking to the stage to announce a sequel to our game of last year. Set for a 2010 release, the third incarnation sees you play as the son or daughter of your character in Fable II, rising up against the current rule and eventually ascending to the throne to become ruler of all Albion.

What do we know?

"The land of Albion is changing," intones Zoe Wanamaker as blind seeress Theresa in the game's teaser trailer. It certainly is – we are entering something of an industrial revolution, as steam power brings forth a host of new inventions, giving Albion's residents the opportunity to travel, and also to take up arms. As king or queen, you'll get the chance to decide just how the land is going to develop. Will the rustic beauty of areas like Oakfield be ruined by the advances in technology? Will you travel beyond Albion's boundaries or be a stay-at-home ruler? Will you make snap decisions on those brought to you for judgment or investigate their cases and gather evidence to help you make the right decision? Yes, it's all about choices again, but ones which have far greater consequences. Expect Albion to change a great deal depending on whether you rule with an iron fist or a gentler touch. Oh, and talking of touches, there's a new mechanic which sees you getting a little more hands-on with your subjects – from shaking hands to big hugs to full-on sloppy snogs.

When do we get more?

Molyneux claimed it's set for a 2010 release but warned not to expect it too early next year. We reckon Christmas is a fair bet, but then something this ambitious could well take longer to come to fruition.

Anything else to declare?

While the life-sim aspects of Fable II will be brought to the fore in III, Lionhead are insistent that they are not going to turn into an RTS. So you'll be hands-on in more ways than one, it seems.



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

NEED FOR SPEED SHIFT

IN STORES 18.09.09



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PLAYSTATION 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network EA mobile PC DVD ROM

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Best of GamesCom

While it didn't throw up too many surprises, Cologne's 'European E3' GamesCom show had plenty of exciting games making their presence felt. We've picked the five titles we felt stood out from the crowd, and rated them with our patented Hype-O-Meter™, so you can see why you should be adding these games to your pre-order list immediately…

5 FORZA MOTORSPORT 3

Microsoft / Turn 10 / ETA: 23rd October

What's new?

We all know that Forza is set to trump its predecessor in terms of sheer numbers (400 cars, 100 tracks, a rock-solid 60fps), but evidently, it's trying to distance itself from Gran Turismo's sim-centric dryness, too – a new, optional points system for powerslides encourages drifting for those averse to braking before corners.

What's so good about it?

Its predecessor remains one of the console's best racers, and this looks to supersede it in every single way. The tech is seriously impressive, and the gameplay's deep yet accessible. Despite what Turn 10 might claim, you'll probably still need to be a fan of the racing genre to really want this, but only the most ardent car-hater could deny Forza's quality. Early impressions seem to suggest that the handling is exemplary, while the game employs realistic physics, too.



The physics under the hood are seriously impressive.

HYPE-O-METER

More (much more) of the same, and a bit extra besides. The complete racing package?

4 FIFA 10

EA Sports / EA Canada / ETA: 2nd October

What's new?

In short, 360-degree player movement. That's the biggie – offering the finest, most accurate player control in any footy game.

What's so good about it?

That alone would be enough for some people, but not EA Sports' President Peter Moore, who is determined to get a Metacritic average of higher than 90%. So we've got an improved Manager mode with detailed Scout Reports, a brand new set-piece creator which allows you to attempt those tricky training-ground manouevres. There's improved goalkeeper behaviour, more dynamic refereeing (no cutaways this time) and a wealth of other tiny tweaks to make things more fluid and realistic. In other words, enough new stuff to have Konami sweating even more profusely – FIFA looks set to extend its lead over Pro Evo this year.



Player behaviour has been noticeably improved, with a number of additional animations.

HYPE-O-METER

Let's just say that the 90% average Peter Moore wants looks well within FIFA's reach. This year's game is looking increasingly like the best FIFA yet.

3 ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

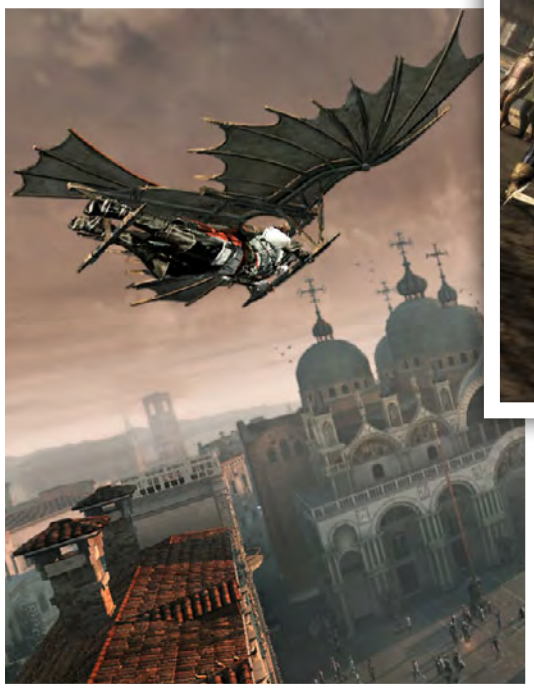
Ubisoft / Ubisoft Montreal / ETA: 20th November

What's new?

Replacing sulky Gary Neville-lookalike Altair with Italian nobleman Ezio Auditore da Firenze in Renaissance times is actually one of the least significant changes in Ubi's sequel to its bewilderingly popular stealth-actioner. Along with greater variety in side-missions and a host of extra gadgets courtesy of Leonardo da Vinci, Assassin's Creed II introduces optional Prince of Persia-esque platforming challenges for a more linear twist to its open-world murdering.

What's so good about it?

It seems to have fixed all the problems with the first game while keeping all its best bits. Of course, every sequel claims to do that, but Ubi's improvements seem to genuinely make this a much better game. And its environments are some of the most beautiful you'll see – and clamber around – in *any* game.





Two blades are better than one – Ezio is a more flamboyant assassin than his ancestor.

HYPE-O-METER

It's everything you could really want from a sequel – Ubisoft seems to have delivered on all fronts, and we can't wait to play the full game.





Could Split/Second be the most explosive racer ever?

2 SPLIT/SECOND

Disney Interactive / Black Rock Studio / ETA: Spring 2010

What's new?

Pure creator Black Rock Studio's thrilling course-asplode racer has seen a very significant change, recently – its handling veering from arcade-like to something approaching Sims. The result is a Project Gotham-like halfway house, offering slightly finer control without making players worry *too* much about how heavily they should apply their brakes.

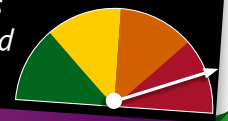
What's so good about it?

It's just really, really exciting. The destruction is now more heavily influenced by realistic physics, making for much more unpredictable results when you trigger trackside explosions, while the variety of these Powerplays is seriously impressive. Flying buses? Collapsing towers? Crashing planes? Split/Second's got the lot.



HYPE-O-METER

Potentially the best thing to happen to the racing genre in years. It's a genius concept that seems to work brilliantly – fingers crossed the finished game pulls it off.



1 CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

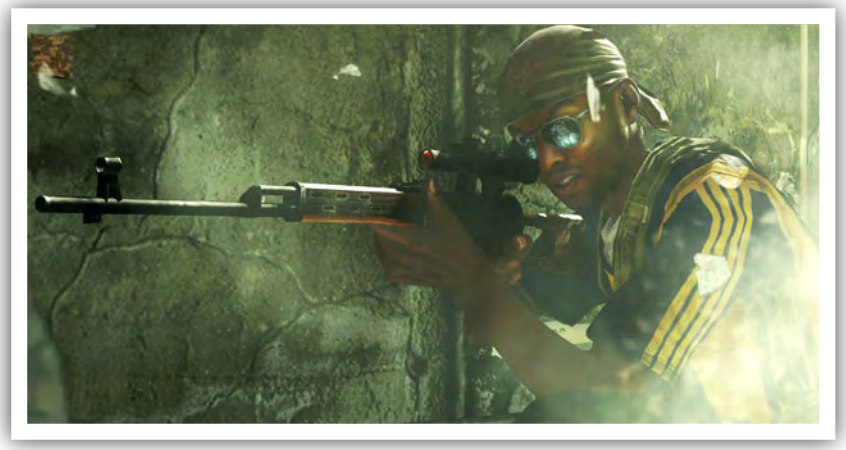
Activision / Infinity Ward / ETA: 10th November

What's new?

Arguably the most significant addition to Modern Warfare 2 is a new game mode. Spec Ops is Modern Warfare's third pillar, standing proudly alongside the solo campaign and possibly the best multiplayer in the business.

What's so good about it?

You might be expecting another Horde or Firefight-esque small-group-against-heavy-odds type of game, but you'd only be half right. Spec Ops is actually a time trial mode which sees either one or two players face off against a large number of enemies, the objective being to finish them off in the fastest possible time, with those all-important leaderboard positions at stake. If you need another reason to get this, then we can tell you that the campaign is looking great and the multiplayer is going to be enormous… it's got Game of the Year stamped all over it.



ANTICIPATION RATING

Set to be one of the biggest Xbox 360 releases of all time – we can't wait!



An impressive voice cast is promised for Modern Warfare 2 – Fiddy Cent might be an unusual inclusion, but we're thrilled to hear that Glenn Morshower (24's Aaron Pierce) will be lending his recognisable Texan drawl.

Best of the rest



■ While GamesCom was short on announcements, we did see some more of a few titles which weren't particularly prominent at E3. Ubisoft's game version of James Cameron's stunning 3D cinematic extravaganza Avatar is looking great. Sure, it may well be yet another licence, but Ubisoft did a grand job with King Kong, and this tie-in could well be approaching that game in the quality stakes.

■ The long-delayed sequel to Just Cause is starting to come together quite nicely, too. The original was a bit of a guilty pleasure, with some great ideas married to a slightly empty environment and some underwhelming objectives, but the sequel has more to do, and more ways to do it – a cache of new weapons increasing the destruction.

■ It's still flying a little under the radar at the moment, but the more we see of Castlevania: Lords of Shadow, the more impressed we are. It's got high production values, fluid and exciting combat, lush environments, chunky and imposing bosses and plenty of Hollywood talent on the cast list.

"ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING TITLES OF 2009"
GAMESMASTER

BATMAN
ARKHAM ASYLUM



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED



28TH AUGUST

PLAYSTATION 3 · Games for Windows LIVE · XBOX 360 · XBOX LIVE · rocksteady · eidos

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Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Heritage: DiRT, Race Driver GRID
Link: www.dirt2game.com
ETA: 11th September

HANDS ON

Colin McRae: DiRT 2

Get behind the wheel of a Block-rocking beast

"Whether barrelling around Battersea or motoring through Morocco, you'll often feel you're spending more time skidding than driving"



The Baja races bring in the buggies and other rougher, tougher vehicles – you can even roll up in a Hummer!

Whatever you think about Codemasters' racer-centric output, it's hard to deny that it gives good menu. We marvelled at the sleek front end of DiRT and gawped at GRID's camera swooshes and gorgeous, thick floaty text. DiRT 2's no different, plonking you outside a battered trailer at a race event, with a first-person view of your surroundings, chunky fonts popping up as you turn your head… MY RIDES, OPTIONS, NOTICEBOARD, RACE! Pick the former and you're shown Top Trumps-style cards of your purchased cars, with Top Speed, Acceleration and Drivability stats. Venture into your trailer and you'll examine a world map to pick your next destination, an event lanyard dropping into place when you've selected your next race. You'll automatically turn to the TV in the corner of your home from home to see footage of your chosen event, while Travis Pastrana, Ken Block and chums tell you what Raids and Land Rushes are all about.

While you're waiting for the race to load up, you'll see little slips of paper drop onto the map, detailing your current statistics – races completed, favourite vehicle, average finishing position… it all looks fantastic. Yet it doesn't get the balance between the ornamental and the utilitarian quite right. You might just want to jump into the next race, but you'll have a good 30 seconds – at the very least – of menu navigation before you can do that. Sure, it's nice to see an eerily realistic approximation of those weird inflatable waving men the first couple of times, and perhaps Codies want you get a feel for the build-up, rather than just flying between a series of disparate race events. But sometimes you'll simply want to get on with things, and you can't.

A case of over-egging the pudding, then? Perhaps. It's a nagging feeling you might just get once or twice when you're racing. We know it's called DiRT, but GRaVeL feels like a more appropriate moniker at times. In just >



Despite what this screenshot might suggest, Codies haven't gone overboard on the bloom lighting this time.





Expect the handling to get even trickier in the wet.



Liveries and other unlockables are gained through decent performances. You can even have a bouncing Avatar as a dashboard toy!



The graphics are eye-massagingly beautiful – it's just a shame your car rarely looks quite so attractive at the finish line.

> DiRT 2 continued

about every race your tyres will be kicking up loose stone and mud. Whether you're barrelling around a Battersea circuit or motoring through the wilds of Morocco, you'll often find yourself skidding more than driving. There's always the sense that you're never quite fully in control of your vehicle, that you're merely guiding it in roughly the right direction and hoping that those skids don't send you careering off the track, or into an obstacle or wall.

Admittedly, you'll be able to correct some of your mistakes with the Flashback function – a feature GRID fans will be more than familiar with. Get spun out by a rival or slide into a barrier which turns you in the wrong direction and you can hit pause to rewind the action before your mishap occurred. The clock can only rewind so far, so you'll have to hit the button just as soon as the accident happens, but it's a welcome return for a feature that can certainly soothe the frustration of having skidded off course for the third time in a matter of minutes.

Depending on the difficulty level selected – ranging from Easy to Hardcore – the worryingly-named Savage is only the third-hardest mode – >

> DiRT 2 continued

the number of Flashback opportunities and the amount of money you earn for a win is affected. Naturally, on the higher difficulties the margin for error is much slimmer, but the reward's greater. Perhaps not great enough to make a massive difference – novice players will still be able to purchase some decent drives with their winnings, so it's not as if you're punished for taking things easy at first.

An Experience system unlocks new races, allowing you to grind to a certain extent – if you can't seem to best the winding roads of the Croatian rally, you can race again in Japan to pick up some extra money and experience points. While different races require different vehicles, you'll rarely be left unable to compete – conversion packs are available for most cars, so you can instantly transform your Mitsubishi Eclipse into a ride suitable for a Rallycross event, while the generous sum you're handed at the outset of the game is more than enough to purchase a couple of cars to experiment with and pick a favourite.

Whether you're a petrolhead or a racing noob, you'll find plenty of options to customise your race experience. Petrolheads are given the option to tweak their car's setup, though this can be turned off if you don't like playing mechanic, while the damage system can be set to Full – which affects handling should you suffer anything more than a minor bump – and Visual Only, where your car will look like a write-off but still go like shit off a shovel.

With a nice sense of camaraderie among your racing rivals – even when trading paint they're a surprisingly friendly bunch – there's certainly a charm to DiRT 2's race day experience. Whether it betters the first game is a little less clear. It could be just our own ineptitude but we don't remember struggling quite so much with the handling in the original. If Codies can fix this for launch, then we'll happily get our tyres DiRTy once more.

"The Flashback function will certainly soothe the frustration of having skidded off course for the third time in a matter of minutes"





Famous figures will frequently invite you to races across the globe – there's no fierce rivalry here.



Damage modelling is effective, and you can really notice the difference in handling when you suffer a major bump.



The environments seem more varied than the first game – indeed, DiRT 2 mixes up the events a little better, too.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Colin McRae: DiRT 2

360Zine

COLIN McRAE DIRT 2

HOW COMPLETE? 95%

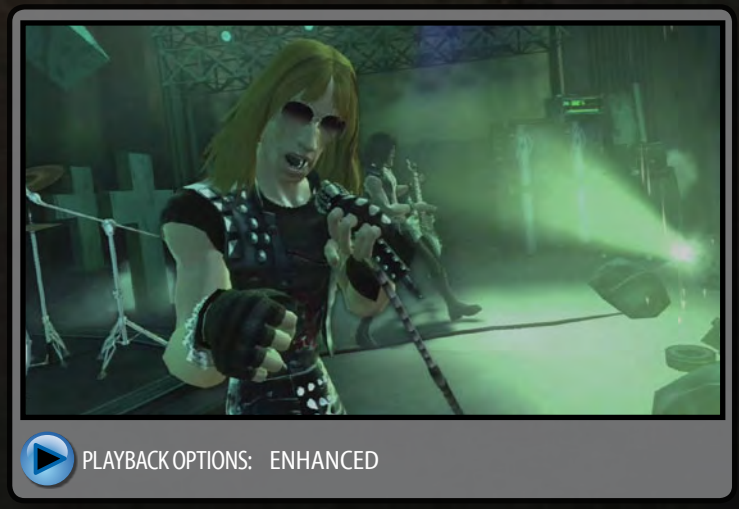
FIRST IMPRESSIONS 85%

A fitting tribute to the late, great rally champ



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THEY'RE THE GODS OF METAL,

AND YOU'RE JUST A MERE MORTAL.

GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

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12 PlayStation.2 PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE Wii NEVERSOFT BUDCAT redoctane ACTIVISION

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activision.com

HANDS ON

Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Heritage: Race Driver GRID, Colin McRae DiRT 2
Link: www.codemasters.co.uk/flashpoint
ETA: 25th September

Live by the gun, die by the gun…

"Just one bullet is enough to incapacitate or even kill you"



Anti-tank troops might be handy against vehicles, but they're pretty ineffectual against infantry from mid to close range.

We've been cosseted over the years, we gamers. Pampered. Spoiled. Bullets in FPSs don't harm like they do in real life, do they? A quick leap behind a handily-placed wall, a wait of a few seconds and we're good as new. Several skin-piercing rounds are no match for a short stop in cover, a shot of adrenaline, a bandage or two, or a first-aid kit. Bullets? We sneer at such puny armament.

Ignoring the furore over its heritage for now (we'd need at least another three pages to discuss the ins and outs of its fractured history), Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising's greatest achievement is to make you fear the humble bullet once more. Just one is enough to seriously incapacitate or even kill you. Stand up on a hillside for just a second, and the next moment could see you lying where you stood, blood pouring from a fatal head wound – and from a completely unseen enemy at that. Bullets hurt. They cripple. They kill. From the first minute of this game, you'll never be allowed to forget that. You'll spend half your time creeping at a painfully slow pace through undergrowth, either crouching or slithering along on your belly. The other you'll spend sprinting across open ground or between trees, desperately trying to get the hell out of the way. Two of your squad-mates are lying injured on the floor, but you know if you venture out of your relatively safe hiding spot, you're a sitting duck. So you leave them, dying, agonisingly slowly, crying out for help. Gulp.



Flashpoint deals with the horrors of war in a no-nonsense way. Soldiers don't die glorious, heroic Hollywood deaths. They slump to the floor, either screaming or in a dead silence. It's perhaps the purest kind of survival horror there is – that name might bring to mind supernatural enemies like Silent Hill's nurses or Resident Evil's >



Dragon Rising even manages to make you feel vulnerable in a tank. Impressive feat, that.



There's a slightly washed-out look to the graphics – it makes the atmosphere that much more oppressive and bleak.



Plumes of smoke rise from any areas that have seen some serious action. Approach with caution.



Villages like this offer a rare opportunity for relatively close-quarters combat. Otherwise it's mid to long range all the way.

> Operation Flashpoint continued

zombies, but the fearsome opponents you're facing off against are just men like yourself. Again, gulp.

Our two-mission preview disc of Dragon Rising starts with a typically-polished Codemasters front end. Stark, monochromatic war images. Text from The Big Book of Awesomely Cool Fonts, outlined in a bold Setanta yellow. Music that pairs melancholic wailing in an unfamiliar tongue with moody synth backing. It sets the tone perfectly – this game means business. Half a minute into your first mission, when you've been shot in the arm and are bleeding to death, you'll know for certain it does.

We're on Assisted difficulty (too wussy to attempt Normal or Hardcore) which gives you a bit of extra visual help on your HUD – for example, a small triangle on your compass point shows the direction of any enemies you or one of your three pals has spotted. We're told at mission's start that our primary objective is to destroy an early warning radar. Ignoring the secondary objective (destroy some surface-to-air missiles) because it's a little too out of the way, it's not long before we're lying prone, desperately squeezing off a few panicked rounds at >

> Operation Flashpoint
continued

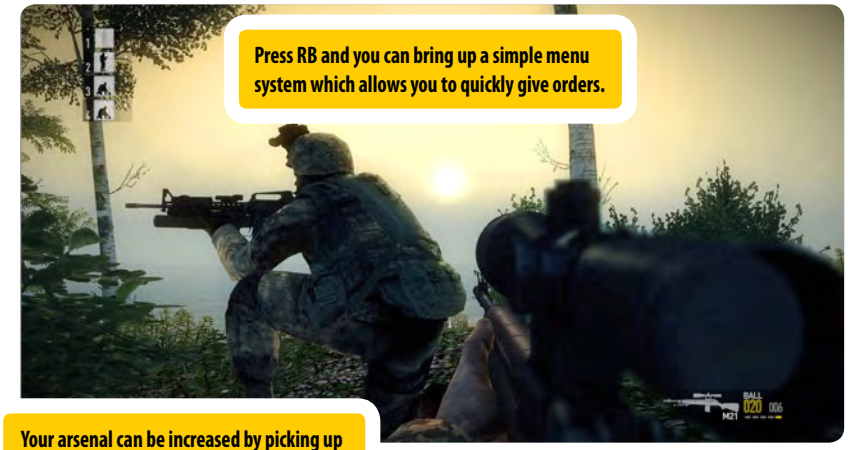
random as bullets snap by our head. Eventually recovering our composure, we order two men to flank right, drawing the enemy fire, as we sneak up the other side to finish them off. Sprinting up the hill, we lay a charge next to the radar and immediately the order comes over the radio to abort the mission. Fortunately, we are just in time – the explosion shakes the ground just as we receive the information that it's all over.

Onto the second mission and things get a little more complicated. This time we have to protect some AAVPs from anti-tank teams as they rumble forwards, driving the PLA back. Heading for the trees in the vague direction of our objective, we surprise a launcher-carrying foe and kill him before he can react. Legging it up a hill on the right to eliminate a small group of 'spotters', we're told to try and secure a village holding a number of enemies. We send our men in, thinking we're being clever as we strafe around to the left – only to be taken out by a single blast. Missile? Grenade? We don't know. We just know we're very dead.

So yes, Dragon Rising is hard – but rewardingly so. When things do go right, it can often feel as much by accident as design (on our third go at Mission Two, we flukily took out an enemy with a hastily-thrown grenade) but then again that's all part of the chaos of war, isn't it?

The hyperreal, bleached-out, Band of Brothers visuals have seen a number of improvements (impressive draw distance, detailed undergrowth, quality smoke effects) since our last preview, while the sound effects are exceptional – sparse but undeniably effective.

Basically, it's all shaping up rather nicely. Whether or not realistic war games are your bag, there's no denying this is a quality package. But while we're not averse to difficult games, we do fear that the lack of assistance may have players giving up all too soon. We only hope the finished version sorts this out with some well-constructed tutorials – if so, then Codemasters are onto another winner, and the 360 has another quality FPS to shout about.



Press RB and you can bring up a simple menu system which allows you to quickly give orders.



Your arsenal can be increased by picking up new weapons from enemy troops you've killed. Corpses are always worth searching.



The prone position is one you'll find yourself in more often than most shooters. Stay low to survive.



It's not essential to keep your tanks intact on the second mission, though it makes the rest a little easier if you do.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising

360Zine

HOW COMPLETE?	FIRST IMPRESSIONS
90%	80%

Raw and uncompromising – this FPS demands your respect

AION



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

A WORLD DIVIDED. A JOURNEY UNCHARTED.

WWW.AIONONLINE.COM

12+ www.pegi.info

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AION NCSOFT



IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey

Air today, bomb tomorrow

Publisher: 505 Games
Developer: Gaijin Entertainment
Heritage: X-Blades battlestations.net
Link: http://www.il2game.com/
OUT NOW

"The beauty of IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey is that you can play it exactly how you want"

If you recall our review of Battlestations: Pacific earlier this year, you may remember that we said we were rubbish at dogfights. Well, scratch that - we're *awesome* at them, at least if IL-2 is anything to go by. Soaring up through cloud cover into a sky turning from a deep lagoon blue to a stunning fiery orange at dusk, Basto machine-gunning Messerschmitts out of the sky and watching from our Spitfire Mk II, as they spiral downwards, smoke billowing from their tails, it feels like we were born to do this. You still get the occasional clumsy airborne tango, as you and your Nazi opponent awkwardly turn back for another pop at each other, but for the most part when you're chasing

>

> IL-2 Sturmovik continued.

your quarry through the air, it feels like just that - a pursuit. Okay, maybe we were cheating a little playing it on Arcade settings, but that's the beauty of Birds Of Prey - you can play it how you want. Sim, Arcade or the halfway-house of Realistic mode - you're not punished for keeping it simple, though the satisfaction is all the greater when you force yourself to work a little harder for your rewards.

It's clear from the outset that IL-2 takes its WWII setting extremely seriously, using archive footage and sombre but characterful voiceover to add a little gravitas and even some useful historical context. So if you thought The Battle of the Bulge referred to Kerry Katona's struggle to lose weight, some of this might be a bit of an eye-opener. For those who know their history, the campaign's route to the finish won't be entirely unpredictable. Starting with the Battle of Britain, the conflict takes you through Stalingrad, onto the invasion of Sicily, through Korsun Pocket and onto the Ardennes Offensive before finally the Battle of Berlin kicks off, culminating in a terrific assault on the Reichstag.

If you're not a regular player of flight sims, then it pays to study the extensive tutorials, which don't just teach you the basics, but offer some more advanced assistance, taking you on interesting training missions rather than just telling you about pitch, yaws and barrel rolls and then throwing you in at the deep end. The left analogue stick rolls your craft to either side, and raises or lowers your nose. The right stick represents the throttle, while pushing it forward when you're going at full tilt gives you an extra burst of emergency speed - useful for when you're in a hurry to reach an objective (or conversely to get the hell out of there when it all kicks off). Even on Arcade settings, you have to be careful not to stall the plane - though here the game will tell you when you need to lower your nose because you're at 'critical speed', while an alarm will sound when you need to pull up from flying a little too close to the ground.

Missions, while ostensibly offering a decent variety of objectives, tend to fall within one of two distinct types - either shooting planes out of the sky, or bombing structures or enemy forces on the ground. While some missions put you on the offensive, others might see you defend a number of allied boats or even transport planes over >



Don't hold the trigger down for too long, otherwise your guns will overheat.



You might have to attempt some risky manouevres to outwit the faster fighters.

"It's clear that IL-2 takes its World War 2 setting very seriously, using archive footage and sombre voiceover to add gravitas and historical context"

SHOOT YOU DOWN

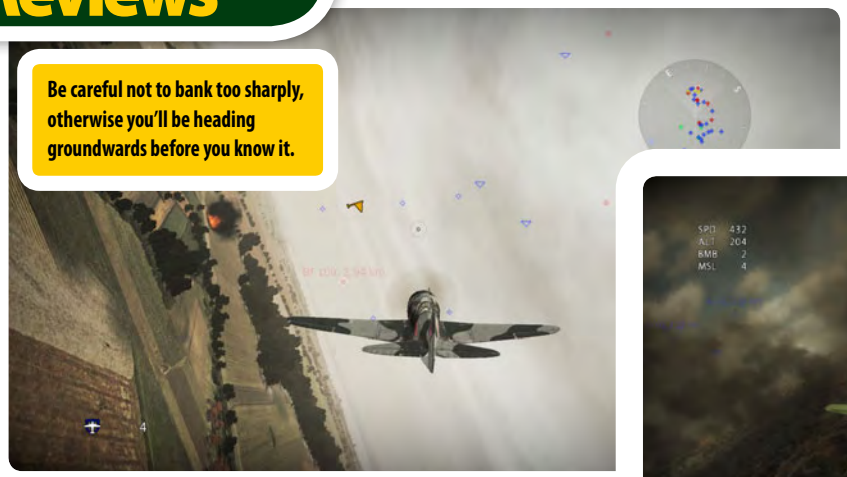
How to pull off the perfect airborne assault



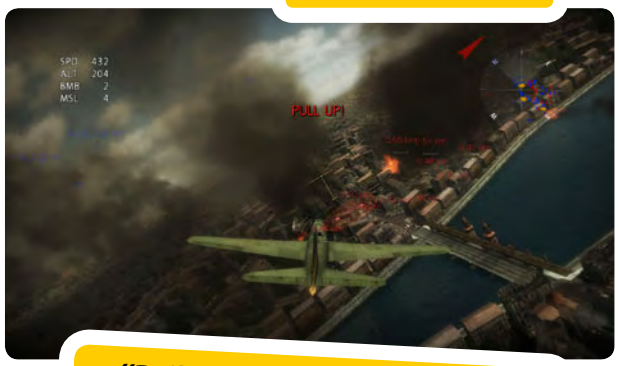
Line 'em up | Follow the leader | Let them eat lead

Line 'em up

In Arcade mode at least, you can target enemies from quite a distance - simply point your crosshairs in the vague direction of the foe you want to shoot next and press A. Hold LT to focus the camera on them, and you can keep track of them easily, even when they've flown out of your line of sight.



Be careful not to bank too sharply, otherwise you'll be heading groundwards before you know it.



The final stages are a suitably explosive reward for your hard work.



>IL-2 Sturmovik continued.

Bastogne, for example. Yet ultimately they both boil down to shooting enemy fighters or bombers, while occasionally swooping down to take out any ground forces.

It's not as big a problem as it might sound, mainly thanks to the episodic nature of the game. Few missions last beyond the twenty-minute mark (indeed, it only took us fifteen to finish the final campaign mission) and the variety in setting and the aircraft you're piloting makes a noticeable difference. There are always secondary objectives to pursue which add to the sense of satisfaction at completing a stage successfully, even if it's simply an instruction to return to base and land (the latter part sounding a lot easier on paper than it is in practice). Simply changing the time of day, as developer Gaijin Entertainment often does, works to make things feel a little less repetitive, and while most changes in mission objectives are blatantly telegraphed (if someone suggests a task is going to be easy, you can be assured it'll be anything but), at least some thought has gone into how levels play out.

What's more, it's a game with a bit of character to it. You play as several different pilots throughout the game, defending old Blighty as rookie Owen Wright, or patroling Stalingrad as Lieutenant Andrew Danilov. There's enough missions for each that you feel you're playing a key role in the war, but not too many that you feel like some kind of superhero. Voice acting isn't hugely memorable but it's more than solid enough, while the brass-heavy themes do their job nicely (although the main theme gets a bit repetitive by >

"Brilliantly, it's not all over when Hitler pops his clogs"

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time…



1 HOUR
The Battle of Britain sees you protecting ol' Blighty's coastline from those nasty Nazis..



2 HOURS
Stop the German ground troops from picking up those supply packages, which were dropped too early.



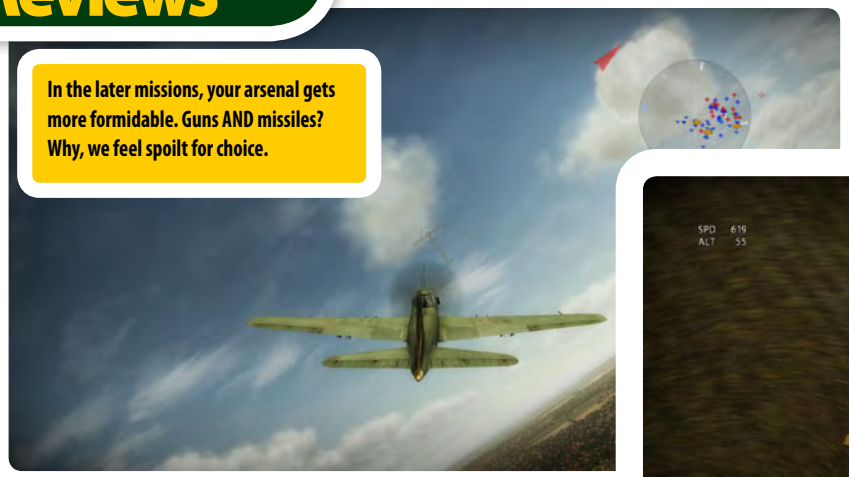
5 HOURS
Sunny Sicily sees plenty of action - there's some nice Mediterranean scenery here.



7 HOURS
Finally, it's time to bomb Berlin. Or shoot it with missiles. Or both. Either way, expect mass destruction.



12 HOURS+
With so many single-player asides and the online multiplayer modes, you'll be flying high for ages.



In the later missions, your arsenal gets more formidable. Guns AND missiles? Why, we feel spoilt for choice.



If you're this close to the ground, pulling up isn't going to do any good. Best hope you've got a rety spare...



The cockpit is good for fine-tuning your aim, but we prefer to stick with the third-person view.

> IL-2 Sturmovik continued.

the time you're bearing down on the Reichstag. The graphics are terrific, though - while the frame-rate can judder a little when things get really hectic - and we mean *really* - it's a small price to pay for the detail on the planes and on the ground. It's a sign of the game's confidence that you're often asked to swoop down - as if the developers were saying "go on, look at those houses down there!" Environments are huge, covering acres upon acres of land and sea - though that might suggest moments of boredom you'll rarely get chance to sit back and admire the scenery before being called on to chase down some fighters or to protect a boat or three.

"It's a great game to keep coming back to for a mission or three before bedtime"

Brilliantly, it's not all over when Hitler's popped his clogs, as completion unlocks a wealth of extra single missions, completely separate from the campaign, and offering a different angle on each of the key battles. So if you felt Korsun's Pocket was over a little quickly, then you might fancy tackling one of several extra stages, whether it be hunting down German transport planes at night, or babysitting a VIP's son on a sortie. And if you just want to knuckle down to a good old-fashioned dogfight, you can pit your squadron of Spitfires against the Luftwaffe over Sicily. There are eighteen individual missions in the Battle of Britain chapter alone, and though you won't want to play them all at once, it's a great game to keep coming back to for a quick mission or three before bedtime.

Faults? There aren't too many. Arcade difficulty might just be a little *too* easy for most experienced gamers, while the jump to Realistic is arguably a touch too severe. Admittedly, you can give >



When a Spitfire faces a Messerschmitt...

...there's only ever going to be one winner...



...swoop and bank down and round....



...and smile as you see the fireball pirouette downwards.



Shoot an enemy from close-range and watch the screen fill with debris.

"If you fancy a good old-fashioned dogfight, you can pit Spitfires against Messerschmitts over Sicily"

>IL-2 Sturmovik continued

yourself an infinite number of retries so it's not mission over as soon as you crash, but it's not the ideal solution. The friendly AI can seem a little wonky, veering from the ignorant (repeatedly failing to respond to your attack commands) to simply being far too good, seemingly taking out several Nazi planes in one burst of machine gun fire aimed vaguely in their general direction. And for all our bleatings about how cleverly the game disguises its lack of variety, sometimes bits of that disguise fall off or come loose, and you're left realising that you really *are* looking at a game which is all about shooting things with planes, all the way through - especially if you're playing this in several-hours-long chunks.

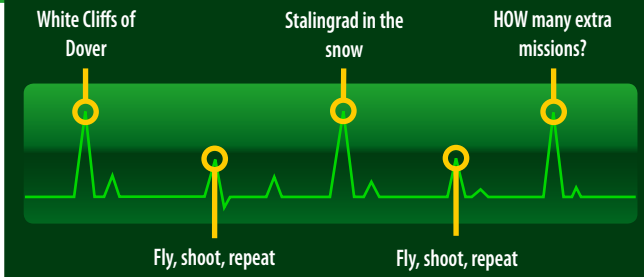
But can a game be blamed for carrying on doing something it clearly does very, very well? Especially when it doesn't try to pretend it's going to do anything different, and especially when most people will happily suffer the kind of numbing repetition found in, say, the vast majority of first-person shooters? We think not. Birds of Prey is simply a great game about shooting things with planes. And for our money, there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Chris Schilling

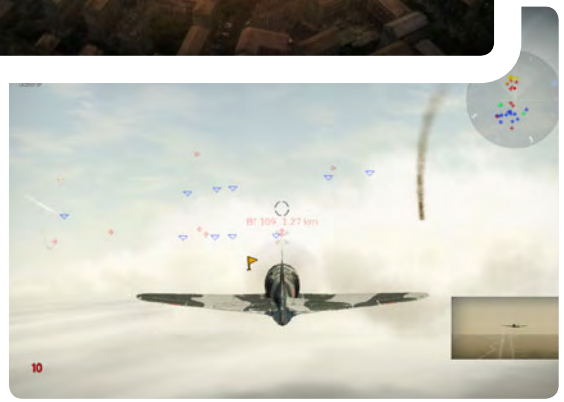
Roll over screen for annotations



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*





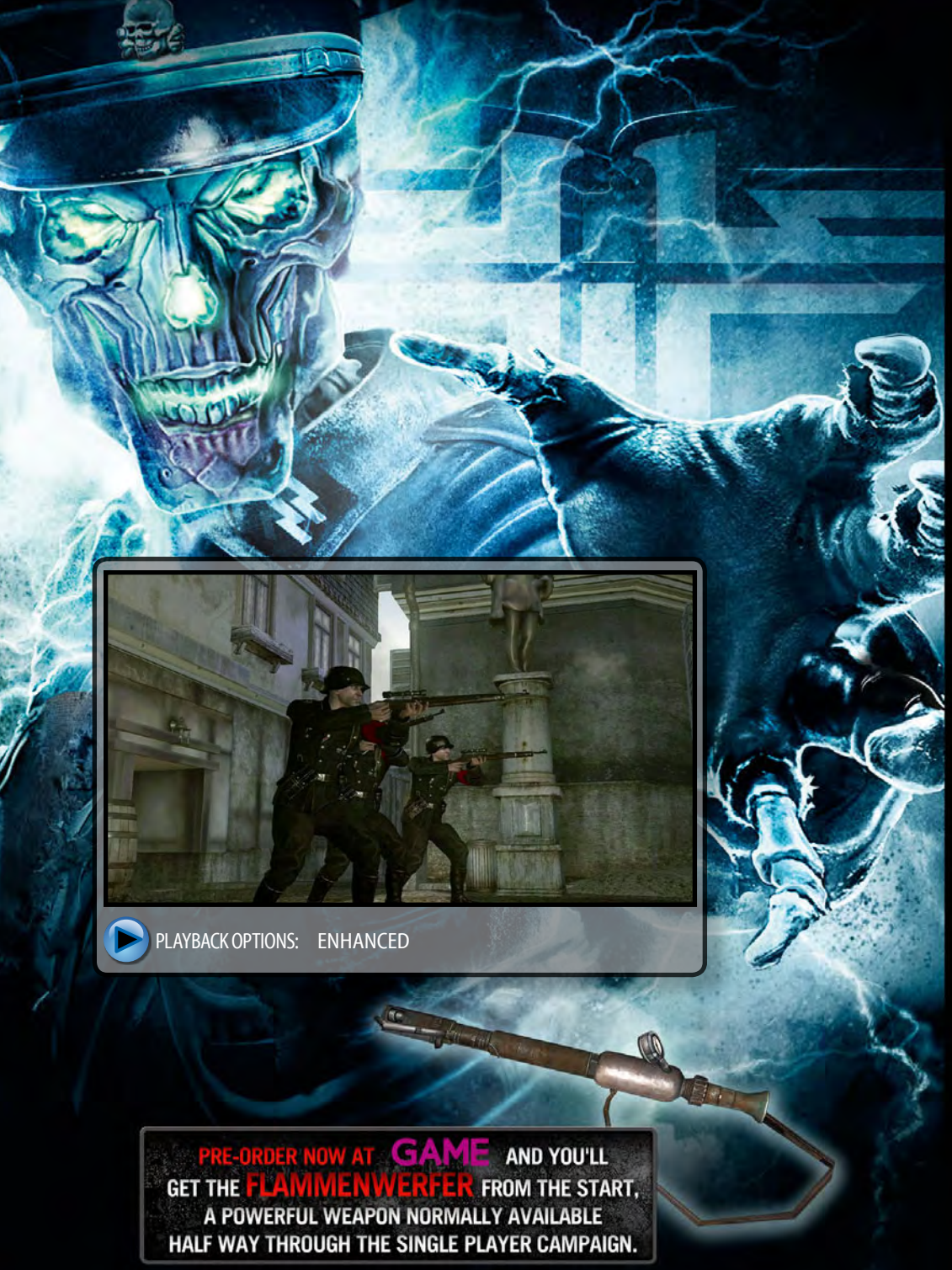


360Zine Verdict

Quite possibly the best console flight sim of the generation.

- Just a lot of fun
- Accessible for novices, deep for experts
- A little repetitive in long sessions

85%



"THE GODFATHER OF FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS RETURNS"

XBOX 360 THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

wolfenstein™

7TH AUGUST 2009





18 | PLAYSTATION 3 | Games for Windows | XBOX 360 | XBOX LIVE | id | RAVEN | ACTIVISION

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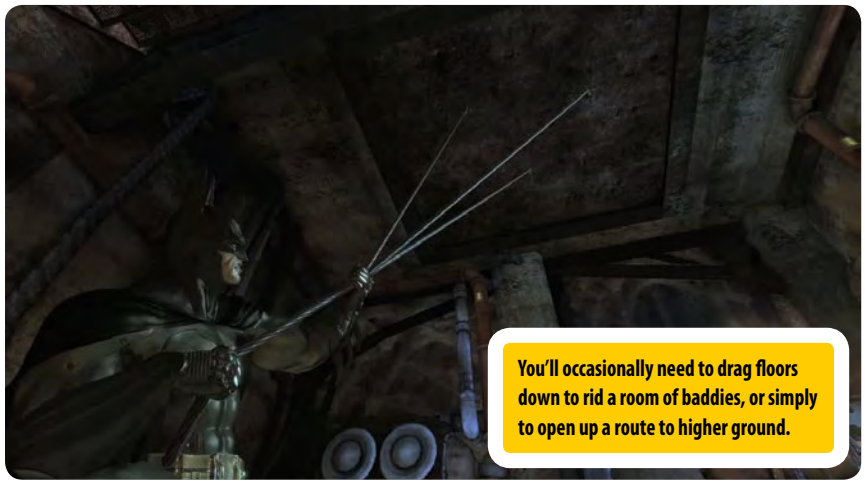
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Rocksteady Studios
Heritage: Urban Chaos: Riot Response
Link: www.batmanarkhamasylum.com
OUT NOW

Batman: Arkham Asylum

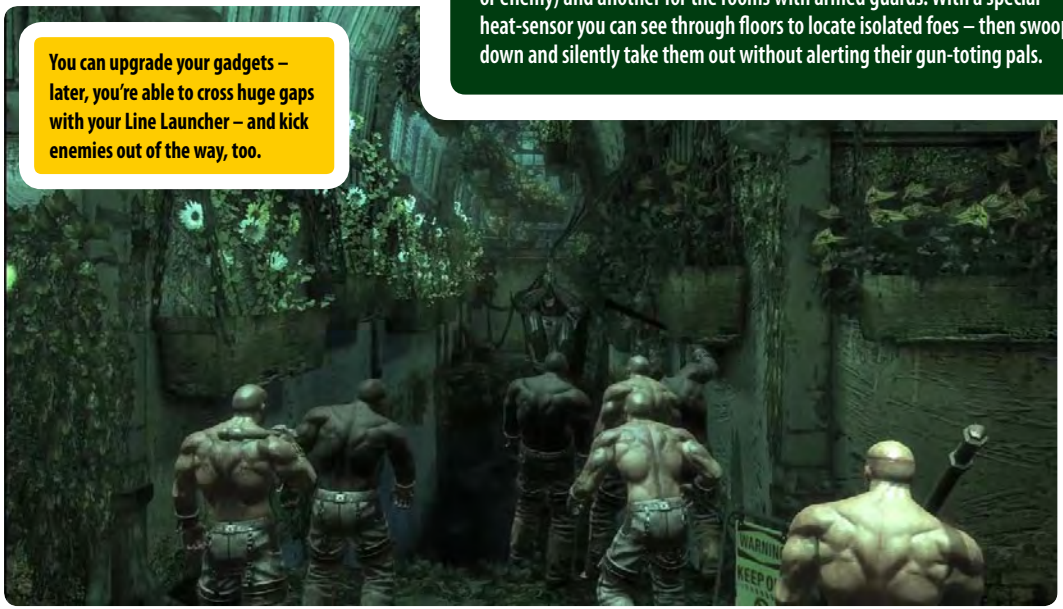
"Arkham Asylum bottles the essence of history's most enigmatic comic book hero"

A Bat into Hell…

Of all the accolades likely to be chucked Arkham Asylum's way (and believe us, there'll be a fair few) probably the most significant – more than any Game of the Year nods, or any Greatest Superhero Game Ever mentions – will be the praise aimed at just how well Rocksteady Studios has captured Batman himself. The Caped Crusader has appeared in many videogame outings, none of which has managed to bottle the essence of history's most enigmatic comic book hero like this has. Here, among the crazies and the cronies, Batman finally feels like he's come home. Controlling him just feels *right*. He's weighty, but agile. He's heroic but brutal. He's a detective; a puzzle-solver; a rescuer. He's silent but deadly – the calm, near-mute yin to the Joker's hyperactive, constantly chattering yang. The battle between the two is waged on a psychological level – the Joker constantly sets puzzles and traps for Bats as he spends the entire game stalking his whooping, giggling prey. Any conflict comes from the other supervillains, henchmen and asylum inmates our hero bumps into on its way. Perhaps that's why the final battle falls so flat – the thrill of the chase is >



You'll occasionally need to drag floors down to rid a room of baddies, or simply to open up a route to higher ground.



You can upgrade your gadgets – later, you're able to cross huge gaps with your Line Launcher – and kick enemies out of the way, too.

HOLY BAT-GADGETS!

Where does he get those wonderful toys?



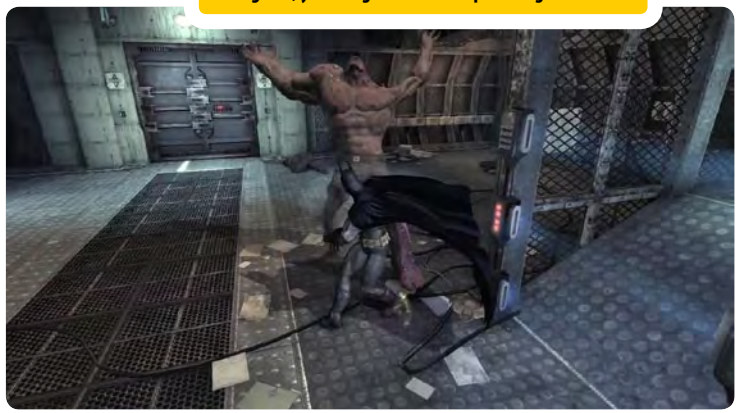
Bat-vision | **Grapnel gun** | **Explosive gel**

Bat-vision

Two kinds – one for detective work (spotting telltale trails to find a victim or enemy) and another for the rooms with armed guards. With a special heat-sensor you can see through floors to locate isolated foes – then swoop down and silently take them out without alerting their gun-toting pals.



Your Batarang can be upgraded, too – we're big fans of the explosive version which lures baddies in before sending them sprawling.



The attacks from these mutants need to be avoided – dodge and roll and then hop onto their back. If you're facing two, you can guide one into punching the other.

> Arkham Asylum continued

so much greater than the catch. Striking (if unlikely) twist aside, the ultimate encounter feels like the biggest misstep in a game that's constantly putting its best foot forward.

The build-up, however, is exemplary. After a brilliant, tense opening (you know what's going to happen, it's just a matter of when) with Rocksteady ratcheting up the suspense expertly, Bats finds himself trapped by his arch nemesis, forced to find his own way around the Asylum, guided down paths by locked security doors and various other countermeasures employed by the Joker – and his yelping harpy of a sidekick Harley Quinn – to prevent capture.

What this ultimately boils down to is three distinct gameplay types – action, stealth and exploration. You'll attack Joker's henchmen and various other baddies with fists, feet and batarangs in fast, fluid melee combat before stalking armed troops from behind grates, atop gargoyles and underneath floors. Then you'll have to negotiate the labyrinthine corridors and cavernous rooms, avoiding traps, rescuing security guards and doing the odd bit of detective work. Sure, the latter might involve little more than following a trail of cigarette smoke or whiskey-breath with Bat-vision engaged, but it makes for an engaging change of pace. And if you're a fan of puzzles, you can always try the Riddler's challenges – locating items from cryptic clues, getting your hands on secreted trophies shaped like question marks or destroying wind-up Joker's-teeth toys in return for a range of valuable unlockables.

Beating down goons always feels wonderfully smooth, accessible and satisfying, and the stealth sections – although occasionally contrived – are a genuine thrill, particularly when you take out a group of panicky enemies one by one totally unseen. But those plus a bit of MetroidVanian exploration are not enough to sustain an entire game and Rocksteady knows this. So it drip-feeds encounters with some familiar supervillains, just to keep you on your toes. Poison Ivy features heavily in the game's final third, while Killer Croc stars in one memorable nerve-shredding sequence in a sewer area. But it's the sporadic appearances of the Scarecrow that are the real jaw-droppers. These fantastic, >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time



30 MINUTES
Joker's escaped, and his not-so-lovely assistant Harley Quinn is taunting our hero. Grrr.



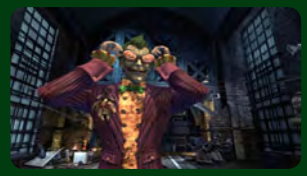
2 HOURS
Toying with the Joker's henchmen – you can string them up from gargoyles for added humiliation.



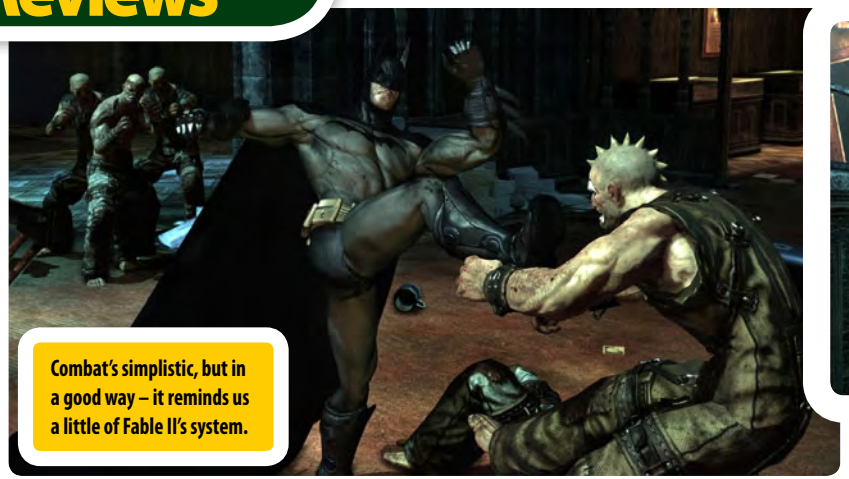
5 HOURS
Enemies are getting more plentiful… but then again, so are the combo opportunities. KAPOW!



9 HOURS
Out in the grounds of Arkham – the asylum is opening up, and the plants are taking on a life of their own…

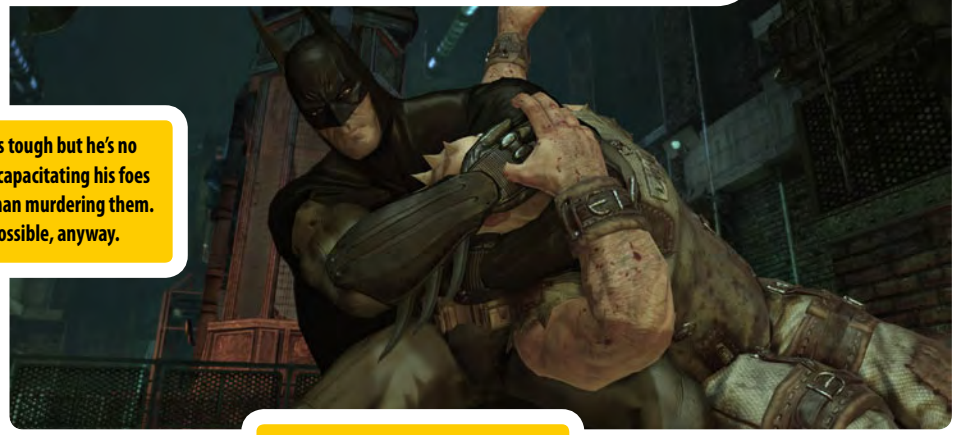


14 HOURS
The climactic face-off might be a damp squib, but you've still got Challenge Rooms to conquer.

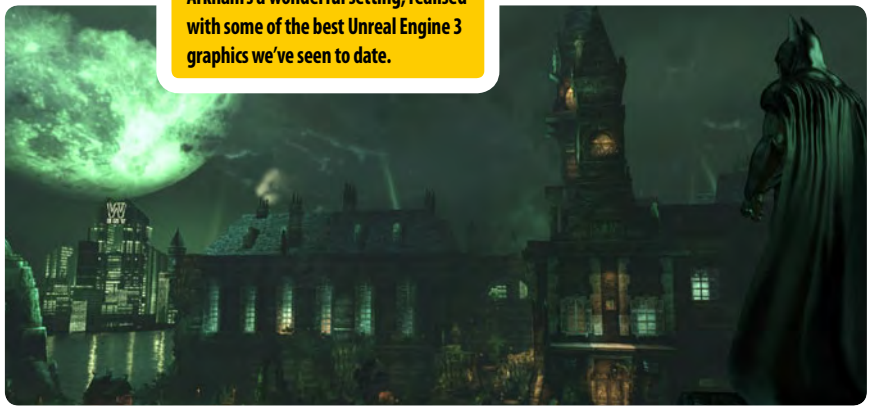


Combat's simplistic, but in a good way – it reminds us a little of Fable II's system.



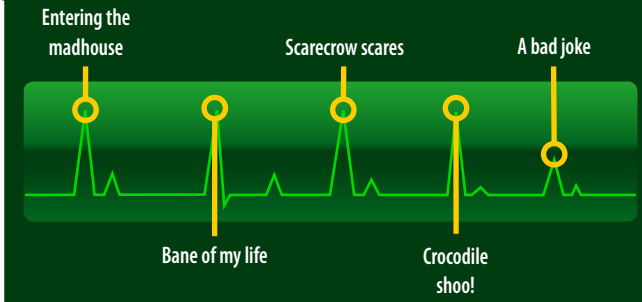


Batman's tough but he's no killer, incapacitating his foes rather than murdering them. Where possible, anyway.



Arkham's a wonderful setting, realised with some of the best Unreal Engine 3 graphics we've seen to date.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



>Arkham Asylum continued

nightmarish, hallucinatory sequences see the game at its darkest and most haunting, as Batman revisits moments from his past he'd rather forget, confronts terrifying visions and even visualises a horrific parallel universe where he's the one being wheeled into the Asylum. Brilliantly, these sections see you constantly in control of the action – any cut-scenes in this game are kept brief and to a bare minimum. Yet that's not to say that the story's not up to much – though straightforward, it's a compelling tale, well-told and well-acted. And the numerous nods to other villains – including a final hint at who might appear in a sequel – will have fans in raptures. And that's without mentioning the asylum interview tapes you'll discover on your journey.

A wealth of additional challenges extends the game's already decent lifespan – you're looking at 15 hours to complete the story, and that's without digging for the game's various secrets. Most players will finish this with much longer on their game clock – but more importantly, it maintains an amazingly high standard throughout.

Perhaps it doesn't *quite* have enough ideas of its own to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the all-time classics, but during that first playthrough you won't really care. You'll simply be having too much fun – dazzled by the various Bat-toys you get to play with, unreasonably pleased with the brutally beautiful slo-mo finishers when you've knocked out a group of face-painted foes, and thrilled at how this iconic character and his universe have finally been treated with respect and reverence by a developer that really knows what it's doing. Make no mistake, this is absolutely one of the year's very best games. ●

360Zine Verdict

Bold and brilliant. A breathtaking ride you won't want to end

- Terrific audiovisuals
- Top notch atmosphere and action
- Weak denouement

91%

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Publisher: Activision
Developer: Raven Software
Heritage: Wolverine, Quake 4
Link: www.wolfenstein.com
OUT NOW

Wolfenstein

For those who like their FPSs mean and Nazi

Your enjoyment of Wolfenstein will largely be affected by your expectactions going in. Some will see that legendary name stamped proudly on the box art and expect "the Godfather of first-person shooters", as the box blurb shrieks. Your more educated gamer who's been following the game's development will probably have adjusted their hype meter a little, realising that it has little chance of being anywhere near as iconic as its illustrious forebear (or even its more recent predecessor Return to Castle Wolfenstein). As has been clear from the first footage, it's a linear-as-they-come FPS, as old-fashioned as Kendal Mint Cake or Rainbow Crystals. That in itself needn't be a bad thing, and so it proves – Raven have crafted a thoroughly generic, dumb but entertaining shooter of the sort that you'll forget when you've finished but enjoy immensely while you're playing.

Returning hero BJ Blazcowicz (charismatic in deed rather than in word) grunts his way back into Nazi territory, attempting to prevent the Third Reich from completing further experiments with the occult. This time they've located an alternate dimension named the Black Sun, turning soldiers into bizarre, otherworldly creatures. BJ fortunately has a medallion which >

VEIL OF SECRECY

The results of Nazi dabbling in the occult



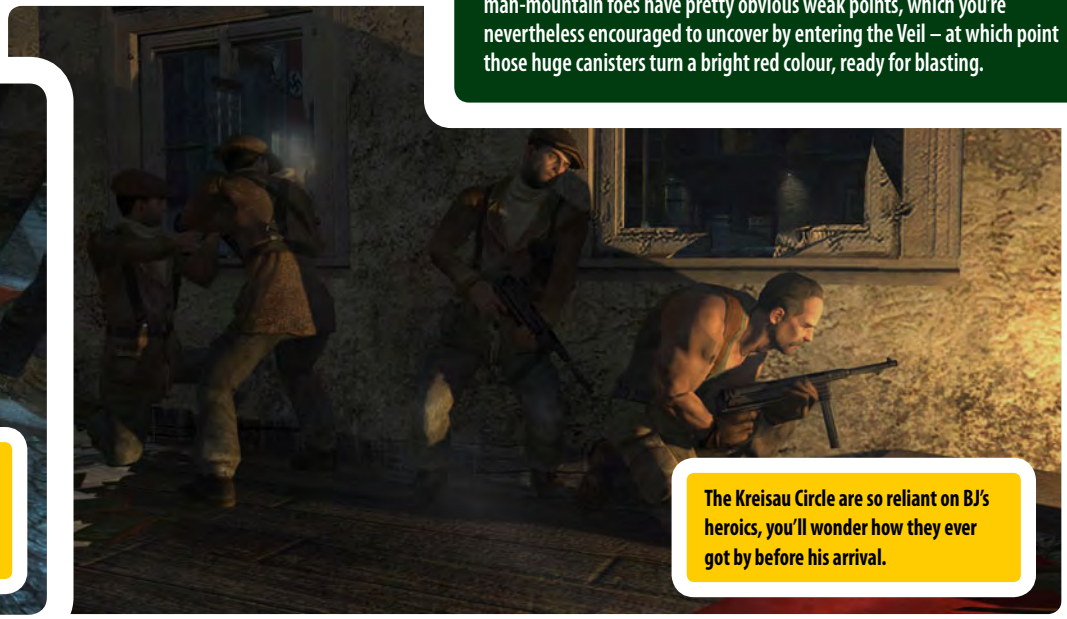
Super trooper | Geist busters | BJ's BFG

Super trooper

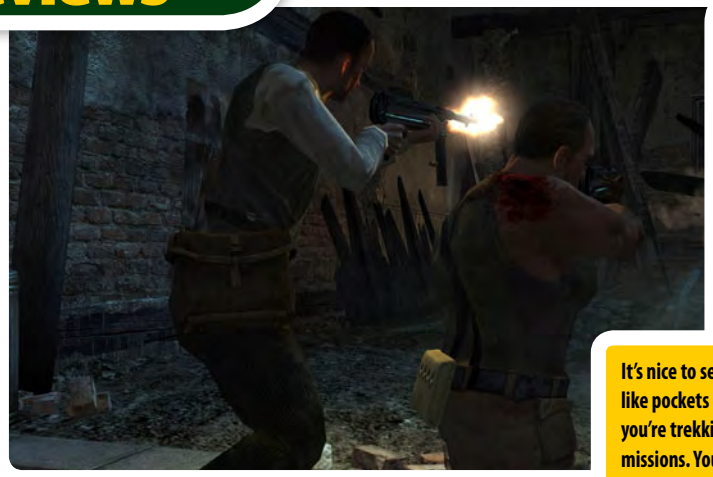
Powered by a strange substance which we're calling 'Veil juice', these man-mountain foes have pretty obvious weak points, which you're nevertheless encouraged to uncover by entering the Veil – at which point those huge canisters turn a bright red colour, ready for blasting.

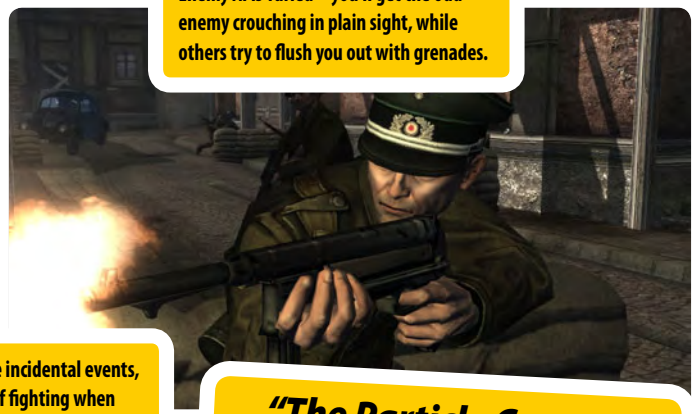


These Heavy Troopers are at least a little scarier than their Killzone 'inspiration', simply because they don't speak.



The Kreisau Circle are so reliant on BJ's heroics, you'll wonder how they ever got by before his arrival.





Enemy AI is varied – you'll get the odd enemy crouching in plain sight, while others try to flush you out with grenades.



It's nice to see incidental events, like pockets of fighting when you're trekking between missions. You can even help out if you've got the time.

"The Particle Cannon actually disintegrates your enemies"

> Wolfenstein continued

allows him to access the Veil, a barrier between the Black Sun and our world – here he can move faster and see enemies more easily (a real bonus given how well-camouflaged against the scenery they often are). For the most part, its main function is not-too-dissimilar to a set of night-vision goggles, allowing BJ to spot Nazis instantly from a distance, and also locate hidden doorways and objects. As the game progresses, crystals are used to upgrade the medallion's abilities, so you will soon be able to slow down time, activate a shield in emergency situations where there's little cover, and also shoot through the special Veil shields conjured by the Nazi occultists.

While each of the missions is wholly linear, the structure of the game is a little different. Working from a fairly sizeable hub, BJ has two groups who give him tasks to complete: the Kreisau Circle, a cabal of rebel fighters; and the Golden Dawn, a group of scholars studying the occult. Blow this up, rescue him, steal this document – the objectives might be different, but the results are the same; you'll enter a building (such as a farm or hospital), encounter Nazi resistance, discover some kind of huge underground base where experiments with Black Sun are taking place, and then hotfoot it out of there once you've destroyed, saved or snatched successfully.

The hub initially seems like a pointless addition, simply padding out the runtime for the sake of having a non-linear element. But after a while you being to see the reasoning behind its existence; you'll discover secret doorways, ladders and entrances to places where you can pick up extra gold, collect intel to unlock gun upgrades or take on additional quests from 'mission-givers' – members of the two organisations you'll find when you're wandering the streets of Isenstadt. And each time you complete a mission, things change. The war starts to visibly affect the streets – you'll see more and more Nazis patrolling the area, and witness the Kreisau Circle pinned down by enemy fire. As BJ's fame grows, more NPCs will start to speak to him when he's indoors, adding a little flavour and character to the experience. >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time



20 MINUTES
Your first encounter with the Veil – you can't spend too long in there, though that can change later…



3 HOURS
What can the Nazis possibly want with a church? Well, let's just say the wormhole goes a little deeper...



5 HOURS
By now Isenstadt is a scene of devastation – the inclusion of a hub suddenly makes more sense.



6 HOURS
Though you sometimes have allies alongside you, for the most part it's just you versus the entire Nazi army.



10 HOURS+
Time to polish off some side-quests, or perhaps move onto the slightly ropey multiplayer.



It's a pity the hub's various sections have to load in, as it's otherwise nicely realised.



The game's engine shows its age in one or two places.

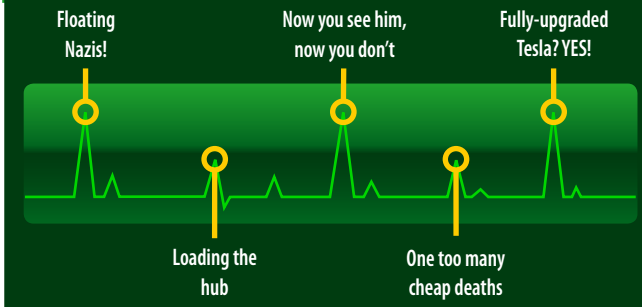


Though few characters besides BJ are particularly memorable, their inclusion makes your actions feel like part of a wider conflict rather than just a series of disparate missions.



The Veil allows you to see hidden doorways and ladders – and highlights hiding places for the Tomes that increase the medallion's power.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Wolfenstein continued

It's worth exploring, too – those extra missions and secret items will give you much-needed opportunities to upgrade your weapons on the black market. You'll need it, too – Wolfenstein certainly isn't an easy game, despite what the names of the difficulty levels (easy is Can I Play, Daddy?, normal is Don't Hurt Me) might suggest. At first your rifle hardly seems worth bothering with, given that its reload sees BJ slotting the rounds in as if he had all the time in the world – but max out its capabilities and it spits out pure Nazi death, blowing off limbs and exploding heads with a single bullet. And that's before you get to the sci-fi weapons, such as the Particle Cannon, which squeals slowly into life but which actually *disintegrates* your enemies, or the black-comedy classic that is the Tesla Gun – electrocute Nazis with this baby and they'll judder and spasm in a way that provides a real guilty snigger.

And that just about sums up Wolfenstein as a whole. It's a B-movie FPS – a little rough around the edges, not necessarily good for you, but it leaves you feeling fairly satisfied when it's all over. And even though it rips off other games left, right and centre (two enemy types resemble Killzone's shock troopers and Gears of War's wretches so closely that it's tantamount to outright theft), it does so with its tongue firmly in its cheek – it has a rogueish charm that carries it through its weaker moments. We still can't make our minds up whether the voice acting is terrible or utter brilliance.

Basically, it neither embarrasses nor truly lives up to its glorious heritage. It's just another solid, fun actioner from Raven, who, with this and Wolverine on their CV, are getting pretty good at exceeding low expectations.

Chris Schilling

360Zine Verdict

No disaster, but not a triumph either – just a bit of throwaway Nazi-killing

- Nice supernatural abilities
- Daft as a brush – in a good way
- Real meat-and-potatoes stuff

77%

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Xbox Live Arcade Round-Up

Another thrilling game available for download today…

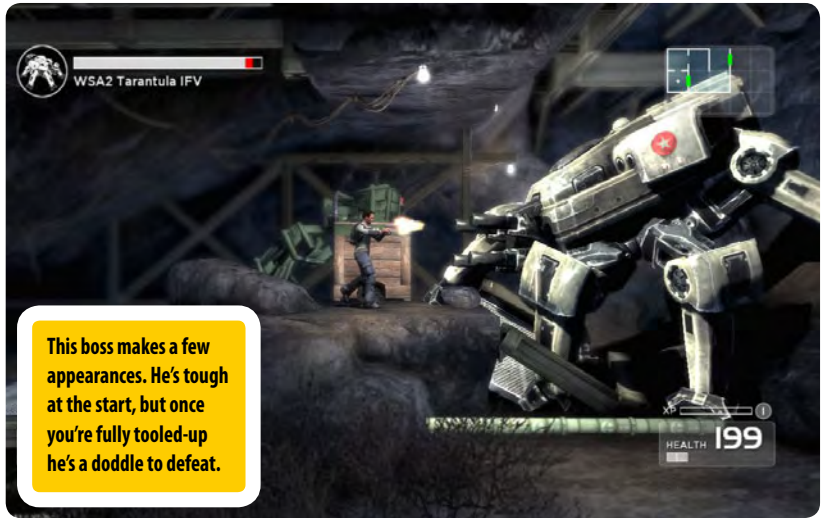
Shadow Complex

Developer: Chair
Publisher: Epic **Price:** 1200 MP (~£10.20)

"Hopefully one of Xbox Live Arcade's most influential titles to date"

Seemingly fed up of waiting for Nintendo to make another 2D Metroid (we guess they couldn't hang on quite long enough for Wii's forthcoming Other M), Undertow developer Chair has crafted a 2D adventure which plays almost as a modern-day homage to Nintendo's series. The developer readily admits the game's debt to the Metroid and Castlevania series, but while it shares a similar structure to those classics, it's got more than a few ideas of its own to keep things fresh.

You play as Jason Fleming, an everyman henpecked boyfriend whose girlfriend Claire goes missing on a hiking trip. He soon finds out the reason for her disappearance – she's been captured by a group of terrorists who've built an enormous underground base. Jason naturally goes in to rescue her, but soon finds out that he's in over his head when he has to try and prevent this underground cell from launching some kind of attack on US soil.



This boss makes a few appearances. He's tough at the start, but once you're fully tooled-up he's a doddle to defeat.

Starting off with just a flashlight, Jason finds his girlfriend's backpack, with which he can grab onto ledges. Shortly after entering the complex, he gets a gun, then grenades. New abilities are introduced at just the right time, keeping things fresh while conforming to those familiar Metroidvania tropes – previously inaccessible areas suddenly opening up when you've got the right item to get past them. If objects glow red, you need missiles. Purple? Foam grenades – and so on. The labyrinthine complex hides plenty of secrets, like gold bars, grenade packs and more. You don't need 100% to finish the game, but hunting down those final items will keep completionists busy for some time. And the reward is definitely worth it.

The 2.5D presentation is excellent – while the setting is fairly generic, it's far from just a series of identikit rooms. And though you're mostly up against faceless rent-a-grunt foes, it's a game with a sense of humour. At one point you'll crawl through an entire room of masked troops in the complex's canteen, chatting and eating, while the ubiquitous Nolan North offers some sporadic quips as Jason. And the melee attack which sees you run-up and kick insectoid robots never gets old. Indeed, while you'll amass an impressive arsenal by game's end, there's nothing quite like sneaking up to an enemy and watching the brief cutaway as you incapacitate the unsuspecting goon Bourne-style.


The outdoor environments look great – it's a shame there's not more of them.

Less detail would have made for greater clarity in some places – sometimes you'll be killed because a grenade or a hole was obscured – while the occasional technical niggles make you wish Chair had spent a couple more weeks polishing the game to perfection. And the right-stick aiming (which unusually and cleverly sees you firing on a 3D plane to hit enemies in the foreground and background) is sometimes a little flaky. But these are minor gripes, as Shadow Complex is yet another feather in Live Arcade's ostentatiously-decorated cap, and hopefully one of its most influential titles to date. ●

- Terrific presentation
- Fantastic Metroidvania structure
- Aiming can be awkward

Rebirth of the 2D action-adventure? **88%**

In 360Zine Issue 35



ASSASSIN'S CREED II

DEFINITIVE PREVIEW AND EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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HALO 3: ODST
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FORZA MOTORSPORT 3

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SECTION 8

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF 360ZINE, THE FREE XBOX 360 MAGAZINE

PLUS!
10 facts you need to know about Section 8

EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST

Hands-on with the brilliant multiplayer!



INTERVIEW

"32-player online means it's TWICE as big as most console multiplayer games"

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WELCOME

With giants of the FPS genre like Call of Duty and Halo both getting new games this year, it's a brave move to go up against them. Section 8 is the David to those two Goliaths, and yet this plucky contender from TimeGate Studios – the folks behind F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate – just might have a shot at toppling its huge rivals.

Section 8 is clearly a game made by people who play a lot of online shooters. It's a game designed with its players first and foremost in the developers' thoughts – it's considerate to the needs of the many rather than the wishes of a few, and it shows when you play the game. This is an accessible first-person shooter, yet it's also splendidly flexible, offering plenty of character customisation without bogging down players with meaningless options.

Refreshingly, it's a game that's also welcoming to newcomers – there's no levelling system that immediately offers elite players an unfair advantage over novices, while the core reds-versus-blues, objective-focused gameplay is straightforward enough to be instantly understood. And in its 'burning-in' mechanic, it has a USP which allows players to make a spectacular entrance onto the battlefield, while simultaneously eradicating the spawn-campers that plague so many online shooters.

It's a game full of good ideas like this, which is why we thought it warranted a much closer look – and you can find out everything you need to know about Section 8 in this supplement.

Enjoy the issue,

Chris Schilling



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Playtest 03
Read our in-depth impressions of the multiplayer game.

Interview 06
We speak to SouthPeak Games' Rob Burman about what makes Section 8 one of the biggest multiplayer console games around.

In a nutshell 10
How do you sum up a game like Section 8 in 351 words? A bit like this, actually.



Publisher: SouthPeak Games
Developer: TimeGate Studios
Heritage: F.E.A.R. Files, F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate
Link: www.join section8.com
ETA: 4th September

Section 8

SouthPeak's sci-fi shooter burns into view, but can it beat Halo at its own game?

"It's a shooter that will engage brains as well as trigger fingers"

It's rare that you can really make an entrance in an first-person shooter. You'll sit in a lobby, waiting for a timer to tick down, perhaps chewing the fat with your team-mates, but then you just appear – plonked into a battlefield at a given spawn point and sent to find yourself a piece of the action. Not so with Section 8. Here you're given a tactical overview of the battlefield with a handy radar pointing out the areas covered by enemy artillery fire; you pick your spot and then you literally take the plunge.

You're then sent plummeting earthwards from a dropship at a rate of knots, controlling the rate and direction of your ascent, choosing whether to risk 'burning-in' to an enemy-occupied area and hoping you avoid the barrage from the ground for the opportunity to reach their base quickly, or to play it safe and land out of rage, with some distance between you and your next target. It's an FPS which requires a surprising amount of decision-making before you've even fired a single shot. And that's before we get to the range of weapons and loadouts and the general barrage of options available to the player. It's clear that TimeGate hopes its game will engage gamers' brains as well as their trigger fingers.

Yet that's not to say that it doesn't embrace the baser pleasures of your average online FPS. On the contrary, as objectives are kept fairly simple, the pace is kept brisk and it's still highly accessible. With just one game mode – a simple game of red versus blue, with a given points tally for both teams to aim at – no-one could accuse Section 8 of over-complicating things. But there's a flexibility to its mechanics and ideas that mark it out as something different – even as it seems to



600 bullets should mean you're never shy of ammo, but there are depots should you need to replenish your stock.

Dive in!

The weapons and items that'll keep you grounded



Weapons | Active Gear | Mechs & more

Weapons

While you're only able to carry two weapons at one time (not including the likes of knives and shoulder-mounted mortars among the Active Gear equipment), you're free to pick whichever two you'd like. These range from assault rifles, through pistols, to shotguns and sniper rifles. You'll be able to switch out weapons if you fancy a change, or reload any empty guns at the weapon depots. Favourite weapon? Well, there's little to beat the close-quarter action that a shotgun gives you...

> Section 8 continued

ape a number of past titles from this increasingly crowded genre.

If Section 8 is a bit of a gaming magpie, it chooses its influences wisely, snaffling only ideas which benefit both its own central conceit and the experience of its players. So there may be something of Planetside or even Medal of Honor about the way you enter the fray, but it seems less about introducing a mechanic for the sake of a cohesive universe, so much as one in the eye to those irritating spawn-campers who kill players off seconds after their arrival.

> "So much of it seems designed purely with the player in mind"



Though slowing down early on burn-in can make you easy to hit, you'll hit the ground running.

Indeed, so much of the game seems designed with the player in mind – without too much of a story to really concern itself with (although there's a single-player campaign which fulfils the requirements as a training mode for the multiplayer game), TimeGate has been able to rid its shooter of many of the frustrations that can plague online multiplayer for most people. For starters, you're playing as something of a super-soldier, so you can take a fair amount of punishment before you drop – there's little chance of you getting blown up mere seconds after burning-in, as you'll be able to withstand a couple of



Primary and secondary objectives are clearly marked.

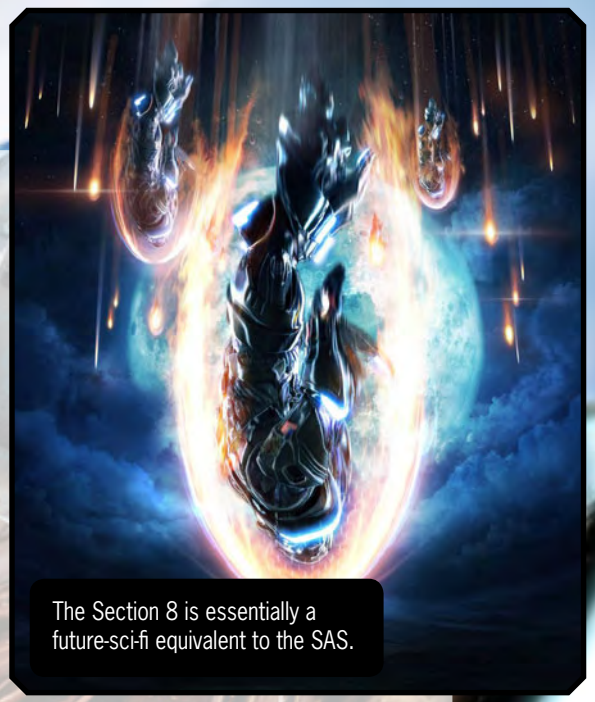
SECTION 8 VIDEO

> Section 8 continued



> "Many will be delighted with the lock-on feature"

headshots. The guns – which are so massive they practically take up the entire bottom-right quarter of the screen – can carry plenty of ammo, with a high round-to-reload ratio, even for the meatier weapons. If you're infuriated by those who like to spend their time running and jumping away from your fire, you'll be delighted with the three-second lock-on feature, allowing you to get at least a few hits in on an agile opponent. Not that you can pogo your way out of trouble either – instead, you have a rather useful jet pack that propels you huge distances, but which has a cooldown period preventing you from making a



The Section 8 is essentially a future-sci-fi equivalent to the SAS.

Roll over screen for annotations





Enter Overdrive mode and you can cover long distances in mere seconds – though its use is limited, so you can't just run from any danger.

> Section 8 continued

similarly prodigious leap immediately afterwards. Similarly, you can't enter Overdrive (read: leg it) mode whenever you feel like it – your sprints being limited to running long distances rather than hotfooting it away from a firefight. It's as if TimeGate has had a checklist of Things Which Annoy People In Online Shooters and made sure it doesn't have one single box ticked.

The game's dedication to online multiplayer extends to its use of bespoke servers for the 360 version of the game – a rarity among its peers to the extent that you'd probably need less than one hand to count those who use such a system.

> "It all seems to be remarkably well-balanced"

While the 360 version can't quite support as many players as the PC game – with the latter catering for a maximum of 42 players – it looks set to run far more smoothly than your average lag-heavy shooter. From what we've played so far, it all seems remarkably well-balanced – maps are large without feeling sparse and there are smaller versions when you've not got the full complement of players, and the class system is remarkably flexible.

If you'd rather just jump into a game rather than concern yourself with your soldier's loadout, you can do so with a number of default classes that offer the kind of roles you'd expect. So Engineers, Infiltrators and Recons all fulfil the kind of team role their name would suggest, but if you'd rather equip your medic-type avatar with a sniper rifle, the option is available to you. And with weapon depots at every base – as well as deployable versions once you've earned enough Requisition Points – if your current loadout isn't working too well for you, you can switch them out during play. Again, all this



The more Requisition Points you amass, the more deployables you can call in.


You'll welcome Overdrive mode on the larger maps.

INTERVIEW

BIGGER AND BETTER?

With up to 32 players supported by the game's X-server functionality, it's little wonder Section 8 is being described as one of the biggest online shooters of the generation. But is it 'twice as good' as its competitors? We spoke to SouthPeak's Rob Burman to find out...

Where did the idea of 'burning-in' come from? Was that a way to reduced the problem of spawn-camping?
Absolutely. TimeGate played a lot of multiplayer first-person shooter games in the office and just got a little bored of those players who stick in the same area with their sniper rifle trained onto the same spot, ready to headshot someone the moment they spawn back into the battlefield. They thought it made games too predictable. As a result, they introduced the idea of burning into the map from 15,000ft above the battlefield. This means you can choose exactly where you want to land – as long as it's not an area covered by anti-aircraft guns. What's more, you can get back into the action by burning into a hotspot or squad spawning right next to your fellow squad members.

We've played the multiplayer, but can you tell us a little bit more about Corde's Story, the single-player campaign?
In the single-player you play as a member of the 8th Armoured Infantry called Alex Corde. The 8th Armoured Infantry are nicknamed 'Section 8' because it's an old military term that describes when soldiers were discharged for being mentally unfit. Section 8 earned this name because everyone else thinks they are crazy for burning into danger zones.

>Section 8 continued



If you're short of players or simply fancy a bit of practice, you can play a game against CPU bots.

smacks of consideration toward the player – it might not make logistical sense for a stealthy character to be toting a whopping great machine gun, but if it makes the game more fun, it's in. You've also got equipment packs which can make a big difference to how you play the game. A repair tool can replenish your power suit's armour, while the mortars might be more to your tastes if you fancy something a little more explosive.

As far as objectives go, it's fairly straightforward stuff – capture installations and hold them as long as you can, kill enemies and complete side-missions to build your team's points tally. Initially, you'll spend most of your time heading to bases and standing by computer terminals while you or a friend gets to hack them as a bar slowly rises, but when you achieve enough Feat Points – for captures, kills and other noteworthy acts – a Dynamic Combat Mission will begin. These can range from protecting and escorting a VIP to a specific location to intercepting a bomb, and you can have several on the go at once – they're not essential, but they can provide a significant bonus to your overall team score.

Ultimately, it's all about choice – do you choose to burn in at full tilt for a rough landing with a few seconds' recover time, or apply the brakes and risk a hit from a well-positioned ground foe or

"It's a game which genuinely rewards team play"





Tanks provide some protection, though they're by no means indestructible – it's good to have a repair man on-board to be safe.

> Interview continued

In this particular situation, Section 8 is called to a planet called New Madrid, which has been overtaken by a rebel group called the Arm of Orion. Corde and his fellow troopers must eliminate the Arm threat and also get to the bottom of who's leading the offensive of New Madrid and why.

There are a number of missions to play through and each is designed to teach you about the important aspects of the multiplayer. You'll be learning how to hack bases, call in deployable turrets, take a tank into battle... and many other elements that will be key to victory in the multiplayer. Plus, you're also getting valuable information about the best places to plan your offensive on the multiplayer maps.

Alongside Corde's Story, there's also the single-player Instant Action mode. Here you can take on a bunch of bots to hone your skills, ready to take the action online.

What's the thinking behind the character customisation? Was that simply to give players a little more freedom?

No, it's much more than that. The character customisation is key to being a good Section 8 player. Each player can customise their suit with a mix of any two weapons, secondary equipment – such as grenades or the repair tool – and also select 10 Passive Modules. The Passive Modules are like upgrades for your suit and include elements like bullet damage, shield strength and speed. Tweaking and customising your Passive Modules is extremely important and isn't just like adding a different skin to a character model or anything. They can actually make the difference between victory and defeat in the game.

> Section 8 continued

some accurate artillery fire? You can even choose which DMCs are activated by focusing on achieving specific Feat Points likely to trigger the type of Mission you excel at, or that you and your squad feel best equipped to pull off. It's a game which genuinely rewards team play, rather than the 'every man for himself' mentality which many online shooters foster. You might call in a mech for your pal to pilot into an enemy emplacement while you use your sensor jammer to prevent the base's turrets from turning his robot limbs into hunks of scrap, or focus on defending computer terminals from intruders by hiding in the shadows and stabbing would-be hackers with your knife – another equipment option for those who like their kills to be a little more up close and personal.

Running on the Unreal Engine 3, the game's visually solid throughout, though its weapons in particular are appealingly chunky. It's unusual for a sci-fi shooter to feature guns with such a pleasing weight to them, and though they're not the most explosive you'll ever see, they're far more satisfying to fire than the piddly ray guns you're often forced to handle in shooters of a similarly futuristic nature. There might not be any Michael Bay-rivalling moments of destruction here, but that's probably entirely

> "There's a pleasing weight to the guns which sets them apart from those found in other sci-fi shooters"



The environments might not be hugely original, but they're well-detailed – it's great to see troops burning-in all across the map in the larger games.

> Interview continued

Were you concerned that mixing loadouts could unbalance the game, and how have you managed to counteract that?

Of course there's always a concern that multiplayer games can become unbalanced, but we've done a lot of testing over the past few months to ensure it doesn't become a problem in Section 8 – including a Beta test for PC players. Also, each weapon has its own advantages and disadvantages, so it's not like one gun is absolutely awesome in all situations. For example, the machine gun has a high rate of fire and a large clip, but is quite inaccurate and takes a long time to reload. Whereas the assault rifle has a smaller clip but can actually pierce shields at close range – making it potentially deadly if you can jet pack next to someone and then start shooting away. Plus, the Passive Modules also help to balance the game considerably.

It takes a number of shots – even from a sniper rifle – to kill a player. Was that a way of allowing less-experienced players to get more involved in battle without constantly dying and respawning?

Well, going back to the Passive Modules again – sorry, but hopefully you get the idea about how important they are – it's possible to get the sniper rifle down to just two shots by increasing your bullet damage. However, the idea is that we wanted people to have as much fun as possible, so we've avoided things like one-hit kills because there's nothing worse than running across the battlefield to a hotspot, just to be taken out by a sniper you can't even see. Instead, you've got a little time to assess the situation and use your jet pack or the Overdrive to escape if things look bad.

> Section 8 continued

deliberate. We'll happily take functionality over spectacle if it keeps the online running smoothly.

Essentially, Section 8's lasting appeal will come down to two things: how well TimeGate can balance the game, and whether enough people buy it to keep the servers busy. Early signs from the online Beta of the PC version are certainly promising – plenty are playing, and more importantly, plenty seem to be returning. It's not hard to see why, as the pacing is brisk without being overly frantic, kills aren't quite so ridiculously easy to come by (making each one all the more satisfying), tanks and mechs are fun to play with but not so overpowered that everyone automatically makes a beeline for them. The Dynamic Combat Missions keep the action fresh, offering a degree of spontaneity without overwhelming the player, while the HUD is just on the right side of the informative/busy line.

Section 8 is not a shooter that's easy to dismiss. It's a likeably solid and entertaining multiplayer blast that feels equally comfortable on PC and 360, offering a smooth online experience that can certainly cut it with the big boys. Whether it can do the same in the charts remains to be seen, but if the full game can entice as many online players as the Beta on a regular basis, then Section 8 looks set to have a very busy winter of frantic gaming ahead of it. ●



Burning-in at full tilt is certainly one way to make your presence felt.





You'll have to stay close to each terminal as you're hacking – making you more vulnerable to attack than usual.

> "Section 8 offers a solid and smooth online experience that can certainly cut it with the big boys"

> Interview continued

The maps are fairly large – how do you plan to ensure they don't feel empty when there's not the full complement of players?
There's the option to include bots on every map, so there's never a reason for them to feel empty.

What do you think in particular makes Section 8 stand out from the multiplayer FPS crowd?
One of the most exciting things about Section 8 is the fact you can have up to 32 players on Xbox 360. Most console multiplayer games can only handle around 16 players, so that means Section 8 is officially twice as good as all those! Seriously though, there are plenty of other elements too – most of which we've covered here – like the Passive Modules, burning-in, the fact you can call in your own vehicles instead of waiting around for one to become available and the Dynamic Combat Missions, which alter the flow of battles depending upon your actions in the match. So we're confident there are lots of different features of Section 8 that will ensure gamers have a unique multiplayer experience.

In a nutshell

10 facts about Section 8 that you really should know

1 Section 8 has been created with the Unreal Engine 3, which is responsible for games such as Batman: Arkham Asylum, Gears of War and BioShock.

2 The term Section 8 is a recognised military one, which refers to a category of discharge from the US military for reason of being mentally unfit for service.

3 The game will support Microsoft's new X-Server functionality. And if you don't know what that is then where have you been? Basically, it allows players to run their own dedicated servers for Xbox 360 games using a PC. An X-Server can handle up to 32 players at once, which is around twice the amount of the majority of first-person shooter games on consoles.

4 Being able to 'burn-in' on the multiplayer arenas should enable you to banish that most troublesome of gamer, the camper. Burning-in allows you to drop into the exact point of the map that you want to, rather than spawn randomly.

5 In the single-player, you play as Alex Corde, a member of the 8th Armored Infantry Division (or Section 8, to give it its other name) of the United States Empire. Corde must dispatch the Arm of Orion, a rebel group that has taken over a planet called New Madrid.

6 The 8th Armored Infantry is nicknamed Section 8 because everyone thinks they're insane to drop into the battlefield from dropships 15,000ft above the planet. We're inclined to agree with them.

7 Although Section 8 is primarily a multiplayer game, lone gamers can still experience some frantic action for themselves by taking on dozens of AI-controlled bots in the Instant Action mode.

8 In the multiplayer, you'll need to keep an eye out for 'Dynamic Combat Missions', which are objective-based side missions. You may be asked to protect a convoy or steal some enemy data, and if you're successful then you'll earn yourself a hefty point bonus.

9 You'll no longer have to wait to get your hands on a vehicle. In Section 8 you can call-in a mech or tank as soon as you've earned enough Requisition Points. Then jump straight in to frag your foes.

10 The Passive Module options let you customise your character down to the finest detail. You can choose their armour strength, bullet damage and even give them a little extra speed.

