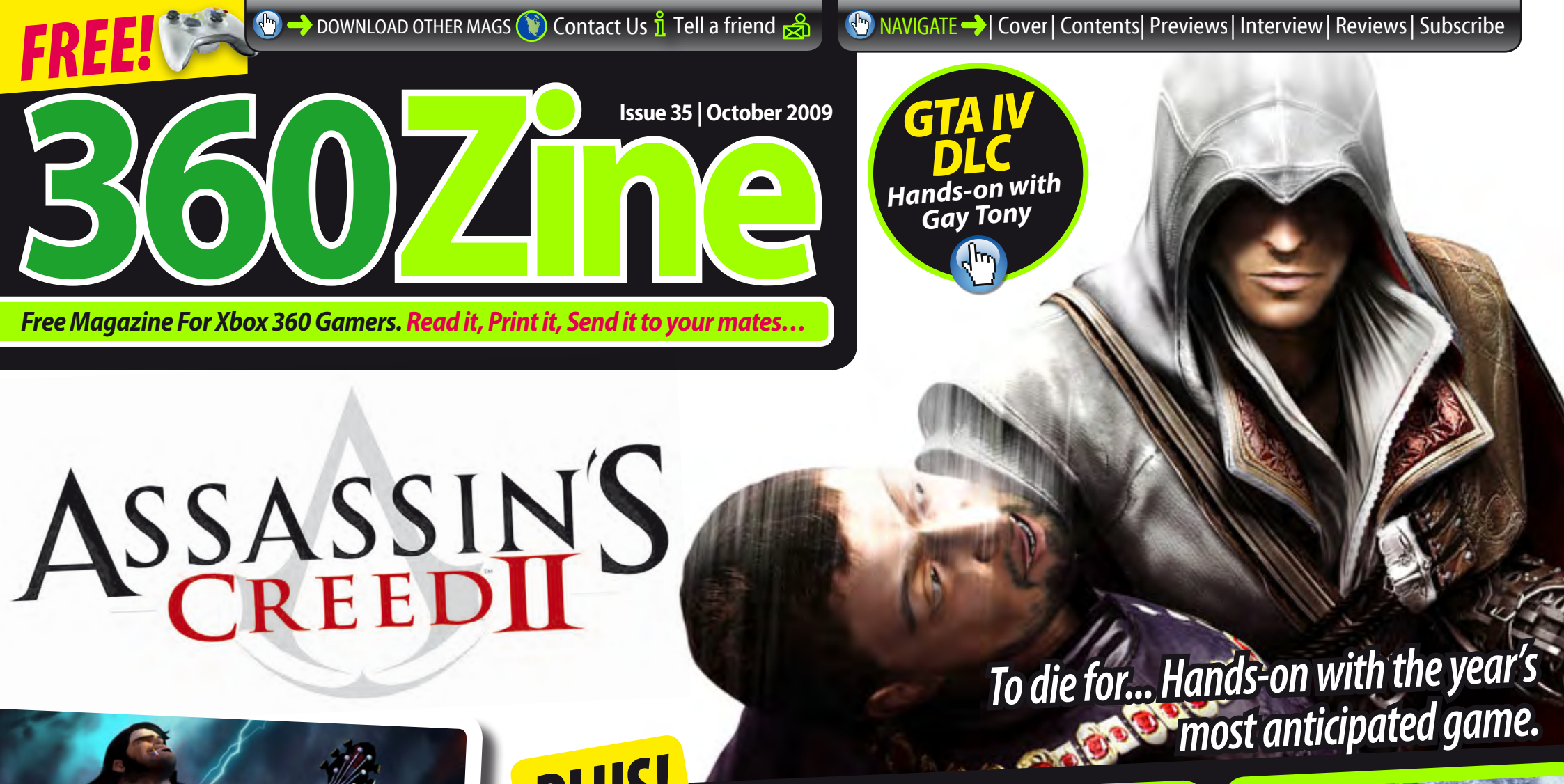
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360Zine

Issue 35 | October 2009

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

GTA IV DLC
Hands-on with Gay Tony



To die for... Hands-on with the year's most anticipated game.



PLUS!







Welcome to 360Zine



The weather may be getting colder now as we creep slowly into autumn, but the forecast is that the games are definitely getting warmer. If you take a look to the right, you'll see shots of five very different games, covering practically every genre possible, and all of them are shaping up to be essential purchases.

Having now been lucky enough to get a hands-on play with DJ Hero, we can also confirm that this new music game is going to be amazing. Yes, the price tag is shocking at first, but there's a lot of game there to help cushion the financial blow. Even if you've always considered yourself more of a rock god than a DJ superstar, this could be the game to convert you. Enjoy the issue.

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
Took another trip to Liberty City



David Scammell
Has played Modern Warfare 2. Like, really

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



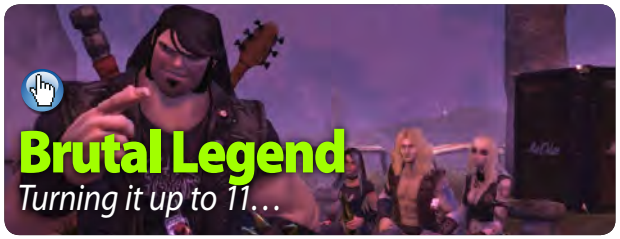
Assassin's Creed II

DOES IT PLAY AS GOOD AS IT LOOKS? FIND OUT IN OUR EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



Modern Warfare 2

The very latest info on the shooter of the year



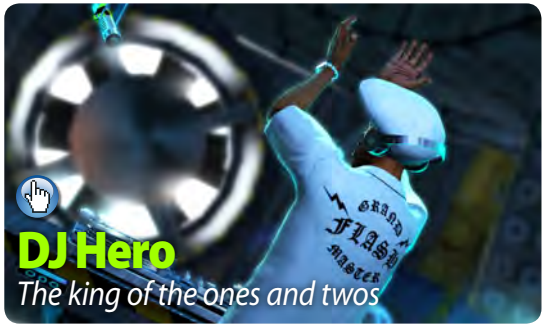
Brutal Legend

Turning it up to 11…



Need for Speed: Shift

Will it make a podium finish?



DJ Hero

The king of the ones and twos

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Tony Hawk: RIDE
Blur
Fairytale Fights
Assassin's Creed II
Modern Warfare 2
Brutal Legend
Grand Theft Auto: The Ballad of Gay Tony
DJ Hero
Need for Speed: Shift
Halo 3: ODST
Risen

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SLAY DEMONS. BANG HEADS. BECOME A LEGEND.



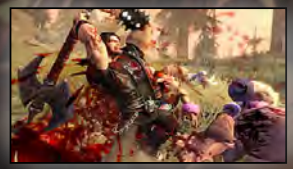
PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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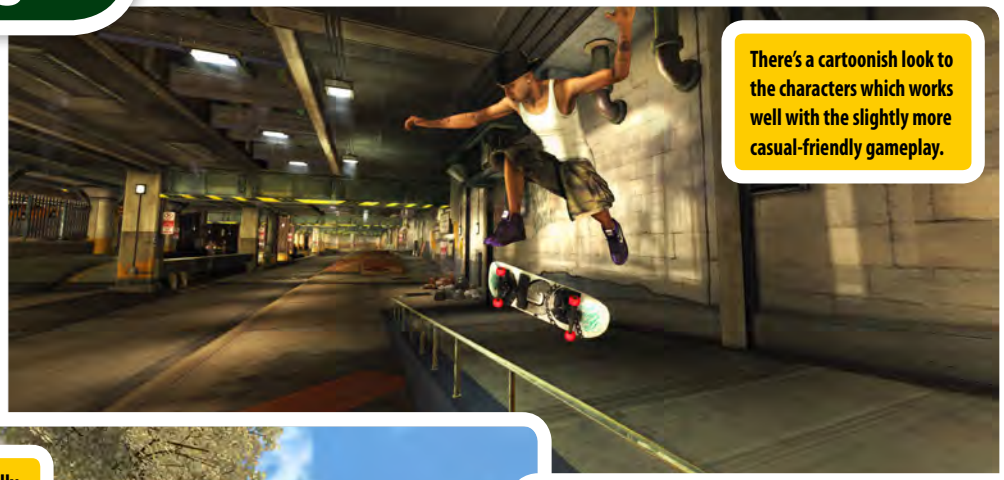
PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE

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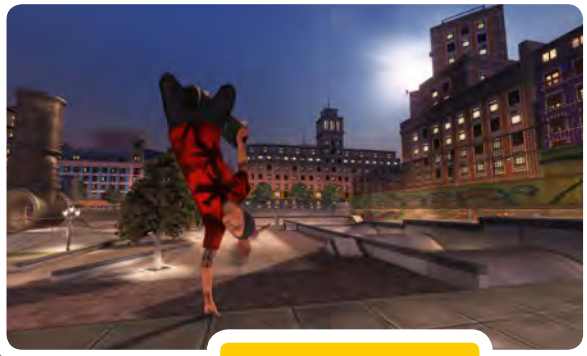
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Robomodo
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.thride.com
ETA: November 20



There's a cartoonish look to the characters which works well with the slightly more casual-friendly gameplay.

Levels aren't as geometrically simple as you might expect – though you can expect plenty of long rails to grind.





We really hope you don't actually have to hang upside down to pull off this move.



"RIDE's skateboard peripheral is a seriously impressive bit of kit"

FIRST LOOK

Tony Hawk RIDE

Baby I'm board

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Tony Hawk RIDE

What's the story?

If you feel you've not quite got enough Activision-branded, expensive-but-very-well-made peripherals cluttering up your lounge space, then you're in for a treat this winter. RIDE and its motion-sensing skateboard controller might cost you just a penny shy of a hundred nicker, but we've heard whispers that it's the real deal – sensitive, responsive, and other things ending in 'ive'. Activision will be hoping that one of those is words is 'festive', as it's positioning it as a (fairly hefty) stocking-filler with its late-November release.

What do we know?

'Shift your weight to turn and balance grinds, kick back on the tail of the board to ollie, and lean into airs to pull off huge spins' – the PR blurb just about sums it up. But while promotional doublespeak often masks the truth, here it's as your friendly neighbourhood rep says. Put simply, RIDE *works*. Initially, developer Robomodo puts the training wheels on, restricting your movement and getting you to learn how to use the board for the basics, before gradually letting go, offering far finer control than you might expect. More advanced than Nintendo's Wii Fit balance board, it's a seriously impressive bit of kit, capable of handling tricks and grabs with sensors to the front and side of the peripheral responding to hand movements. Anyone who says videogames are a sedentary pursuit clearly hasn't played this, and we're very much hoping to go hands-on with it in the next few weeks.

When do we get more?

November 20th is the PAL release date, though it won't be available in all European countries. A demo? Unlikely, given its dependency on the board.

Anything else to declare?

So far, Activision has revealed 15 pro skaters on its roster. These include the Birdman himself (obviously), and he's joined by the likes of Rodney Mullen, Cara-Beth Burnside and Daewon Song.

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

20.11.09

PlayStation Network

"IN A WORD, INSTABUY"
vg247

"THE MOST ANTICIPATED GAME OF THE YEAR"
ZOO



18
www.pegi.info

UBISOFT



PS3
PlayStation 3

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Publisher: Activision
Developer: Bizarre Creations
Heritage: PGR series, The Club
Link: www.blurgame.com
ETA: 7th November



Like Mario Kart, it's easy to waste those all-important power-ups. Be sure to bide your time and wait for the right moment to unleash them.



Compared with the more serious racers of recent months, Blur's fresh look is starting to stand out more.





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

FIRST LOOK

Blur

"It's looking sharper, curvier and feels more exciting than it used to"

They thought of cars…

What's the story?

It's Activision's 'Mario Kart meets Facebook' racer, where car combat mixes with social networking and PGR4's handling model, in a neon-flecked environment where success is measured in the number of fans you have, not the car you drive or the position you finish in. Though obviously, you'll have more chance of gaining support if you do achieve a podium finish.

What do we know?

We've been flirting outrageously with Black Rock's Split/Second over recent months, cooing over its explosive action and hot looks. But that whirlwind fling is over, and now we're back to the warm, comforting bosom of a developer we love, handling we're familiar with, and a knowledge that we're getting something which looks nice and plays well. Blur, we're sorry we ever strayed.

In our absence, the game seems to have dolled itself up a bit – it's looking sharper, curvier and feels a more exciting than it used to. And it's got a few new tricks up its sleeve, too – its social networking isn't just a gimmick, but an opportunity for players to get creative, offering the chance for users to create and share their own gameplay types with friends. With the PGR series (particularly PGR3) Bizarre Creations fostered a healthy and welcoming community, and with any luck, Blur will do exactly the same. But it's not forgotten those who like to play together locally, with four-player split-screen support as well as its 20 driver online events. The closer it gets to launch, the more excited we get - could Blur upset the odds and become the year's best racer?

When do we get more?

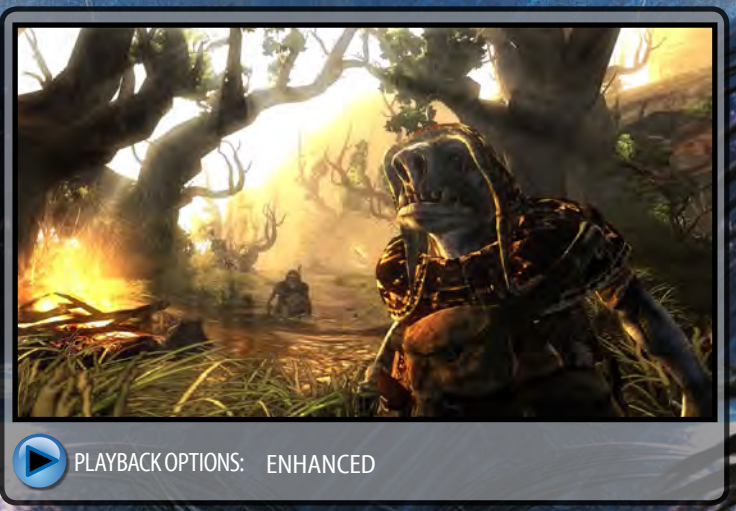
Blur has just been put back to early 2010, which when you consider the large amount of driving games coming out in the next few months, is probably a good thing.

Anything else to declare?

There's an event called 20 Car Carnage which really has to be seen. For all the serious sims being released, we think this could be one of the most outright *fun* racer around. Fingers crossed that its online community gets going.

"A highly original, appealing fantasy epic" X360

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2nd October 2009





16
www.pegi.info

PIRANHA BYTES
DEEP SILVER
PC DVD ROM
XBOX LIVE

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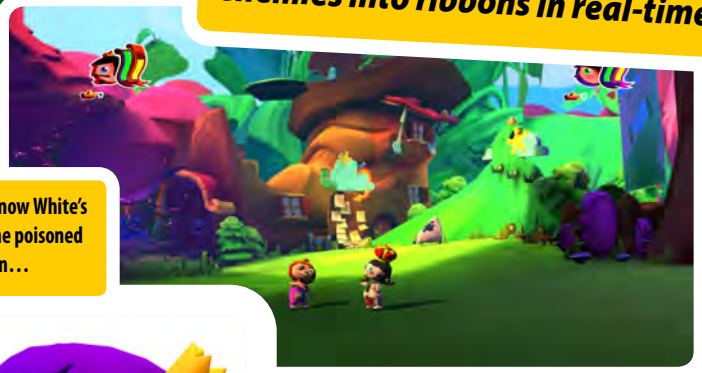
Games for Windows

XBOX 360

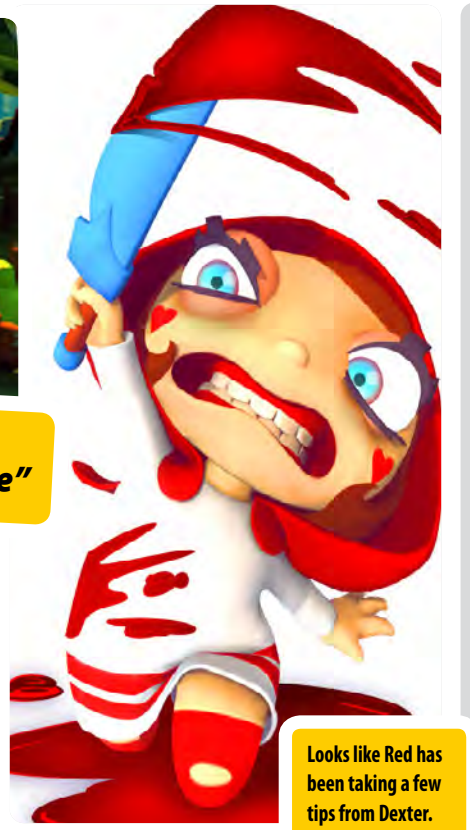
Publisher: Playlogic
Developer: Game Factory
Heritage: Code Lyoko
Link: www.fairytalefights.com
ETA: 23rd October



"You can dynamically slice enemies into ribbons in real-time"



Uh-oh – Snow White's been at the poisoned cider again…



Looks like Red has been taking a few tips from Dexter.





FIRST LOOK

Fairytale Fights

Putting the red in Red Riding Hood

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

What's the story?

Putting the 'grim' in Grimm Brothers, these are classic kids' characters the way you've never seen them before, as Playlogic and developer Game Factory get subversive with Red, Snow White, Jack (of Beanstalk fame) and, er, The Naked Emperor. Apparently, the land of fairytales is in chaos, and the only way to get things back the way they were is to slice and dice through hundreds of enemies. And they seemed like such pleasant characters, too…

What do we know?

It might not look a million miles away from Sony's Fat Princess, but this is more action-focused rather than offering anything too strategic. It's basically a cartoony hack-and-slash, where you can dynamically slice enemies into realistic pieces in real-time. The game features special tech which allows the gore to flow in disturbingly realistic ways, spattering flora with claret as you swing your sword, and even sending you skidding when you step in a pool of grue. It's quite gleefully nasty in that sense, and so fans of the likes of Itchy and Scratchy and Happy Tree Friends will be in their element here. Meanwhile, you'll be able to tackle a series of quests across a single-player campaign, with friends able to join in and help, while a multiplayer battle mode offers four-player carnage both on and offline. The game reportedly went down a storm at GamesCom, and has been tweaked thanks to player feedback, with 'friendly fire' now entirely optional during co-operative play.

When do we get more?

We were hoping to squeeze a review in this issue, but code didn't show up in time. We'll try to cover this in our next packed issue, otherwise you'll find our thoughts on the finished game on the GamerZines website close to release date.

Anything else to declare?

It's not just the nasty characters that can be hurt by your weapon of choice – cute, fluffy bunnies scamper about the countryside, just waiting to be turned into rabbit stew. As if it needed to be explained any further: this game is absolutely *not* for kids.

FORZA.XBOX.COM



THIS IS NOT JUST ABOUT POINT A *to* POINT B THIS IS FOR ALL THINGS 4-WHEELED *and* FAST

IT'S FOR THE RACERS *and* DRIFTERS THE PAINTERS *and* THE DREAMERS

BECAUSE THIS IS MORE *than* PIXELS AND POLYGONS THIS IS ALUMINIUM AND CARBON FIBRE

THIS IS NOT A SIMULATION

IT'S AN *invitation.*

FORZA MOTORSPORT 3

WHERE DREAMS ARE DRIVEN

3

www.pegi.info

AVAILABLE 23.10.09

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Jump in.

XBOX 360

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ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Heritage: Assassin's Creed, Far Cry 2, Rainbow Six Vegas
Link: http://assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com
ETA: 20th November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Assassin's Creed II

HANDS ON

Assassin's Creed II

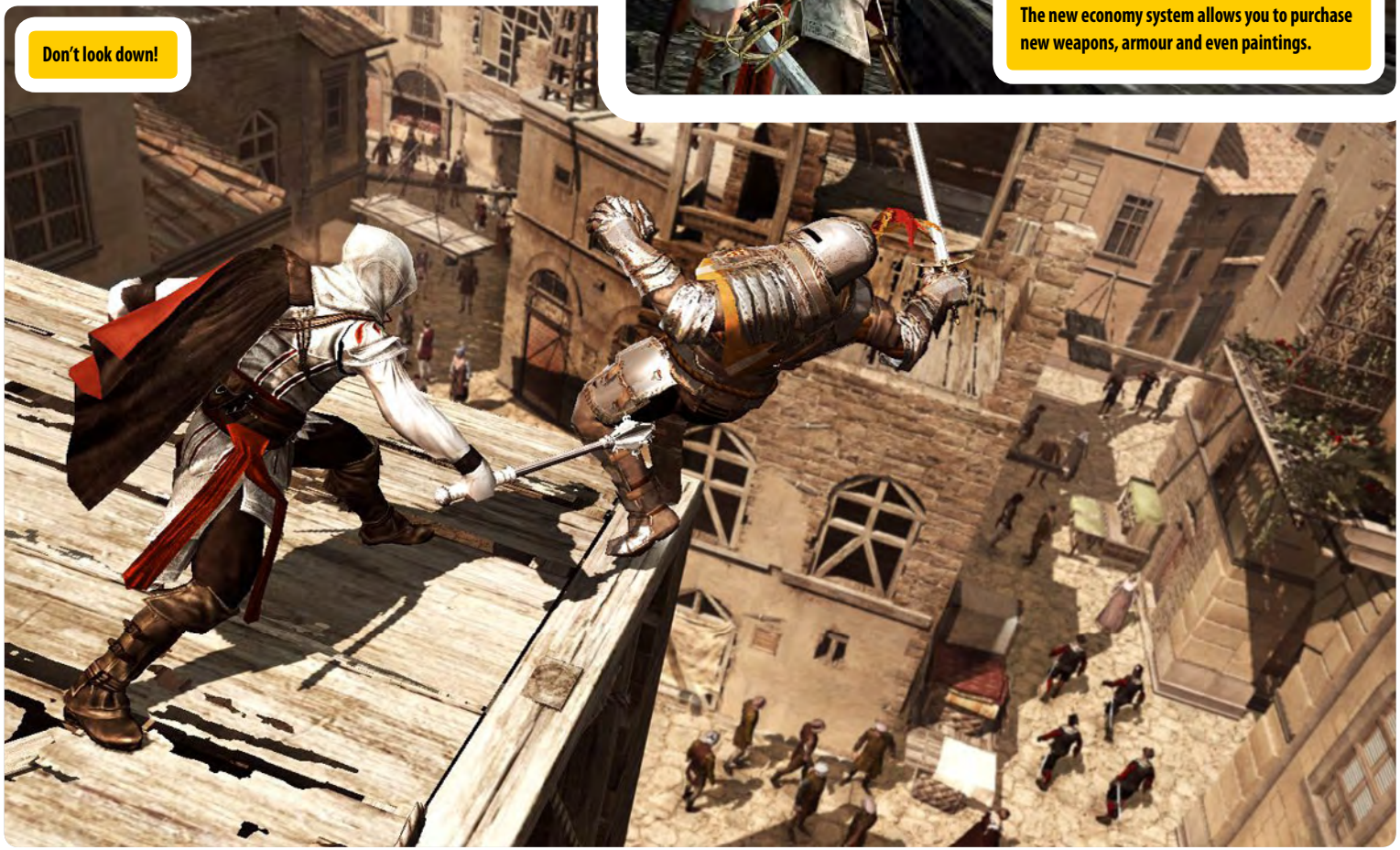
We hit up the hitman



The new economy system allows you to purchase new weapons, armour and even paintings.

The beginning may surprise you. We took a risk, I think," says Game Director Benoit Lambert, preparing us for the opening of his upcoming murder-'em-up Assassin's Creed II. Indeed, within the very first hour of playing Ubisoft's big Christmas title, you'll have already witnessed your character's birth, made a daring escape through the bowels of the mysterious Abstergo corporation and gotten into the knickers of a beautiful Italian maiden. But perhaps we're getting ahead of ourselves…

Assassin's Creed II kicks off immediately after ACI, with Desmond attempting to decipher the curious block of red text painted on his cell wall. Breathless and bloodstained, undercover operative Lucy Stillman soon interrupts him, pleading with him to get back into memory machine 'the Animus' before 'they' find out what she's been up to. Confused? Don't worry, as everything is then explained via a short prologue video for those that haven't played the original game.



Don't look down!





> Assassin's Creed II cont.

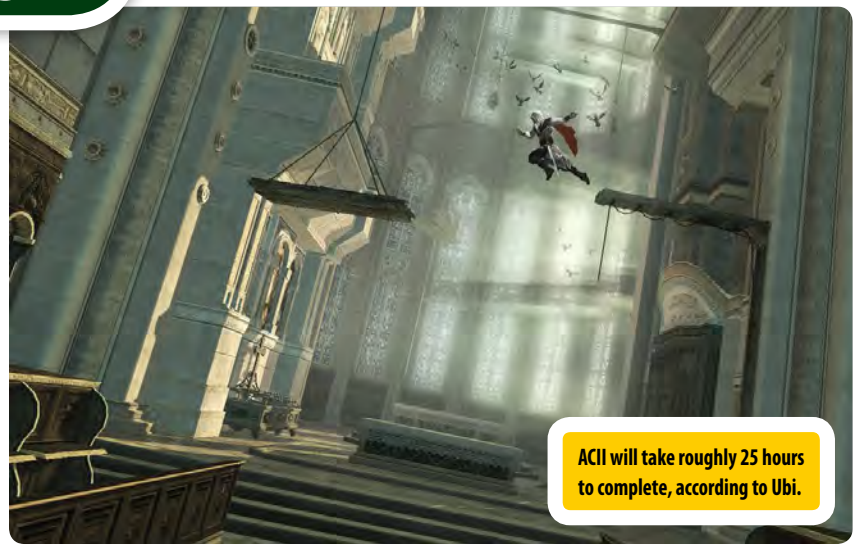
What follows is a fleeting and oddly Fallout-like segment as Desmond plugs himself into the Animus and recalls the first memory of ancestor Ezio Auditore de Forenze. Of course, that happens to be a surprisingly graphic birth sequence, shortly followed up by a bizarre mini-game that asks you to wiggle baby Ezio's arms and legs as he's cradled in his father's arms. And no, we're not entirely sure of the relevance either, to be honest.

Of course, it might have something to do with the huge emphasis being placed on ACII's character progression, and we can only assume that this is the first of many attempts by Ubisoft Montreal to bond the character of Ezio with the player, charting the life of the normal, albeit fairly cocksure Italian nobleman from his humble beginnings to murderous adult life. And ultimately, that's the biggest difference between Ezio and Altair. Rather than being a mere puppet, Ezio is his own person, driven by revenge after watching his father, brother and friend falsely hanged for treason. He hasn't been trained in the way of the Assassin, and his penchant for women is far greater than any lust for blood – he is, for all intents and purposes, a civilian >

"A bizarre mini-game asks you to wiggle baby Ezio's arms and legs as he's cradled in his father's arms"



ASSASSIN'S CREED II



ACII will take roughly 25 hours to complete, according to Ubi.



There's a very tight window of opportunity to counter attacks.



Ezio will meet roughly 30 characters during his quest.

> Assassin's Creed II cont.

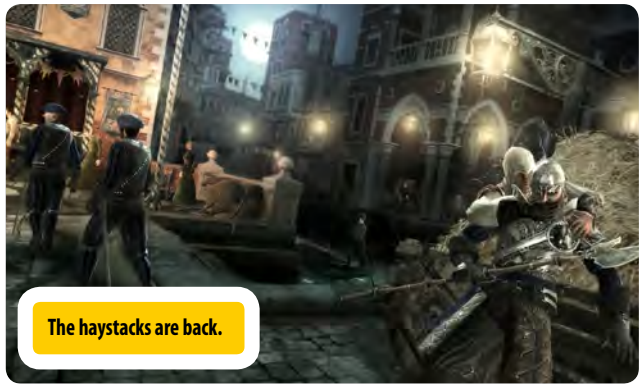
caught up in the midst of a conspiracy, who gradually transforms into Italy's most-feared killer.

"We wanted you to feel like how it is to be this guy," says Benoit, "and how he became an assassin." And from what we've seen of the game so far, they've got that much right.

"Each weapon has its own set of characteristics, with different values for damage, speed and deflection"

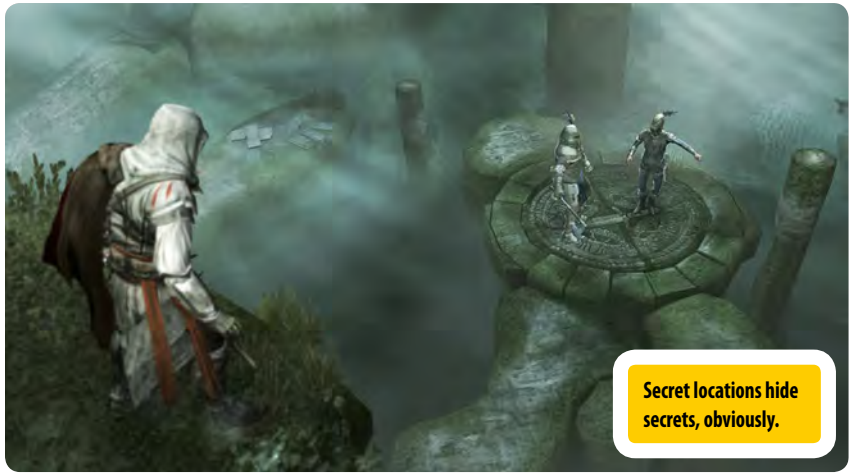
Ezio's transformation plays a key part in Assassin's Creed II's gameplay, with the player able to shape the character however they see fit as he gradually learns new moves and experience on his way to becoming a master assassin. The introduction of an economy allows players to purchase a variety of new weapons and armour along the way too (and dye their clothes different colours, if they so wish), with each upgrade modifying Ezio's abilities.

Each weapon has its own set of characteristics, with different values for damage, speed, and deflection, while armour increases Ezio's health. Other shops and services will also be available for Ezio to take advantage of during the course of his journey. Armour can become damaged and must be >



The haystacks are back.







> Assassin's Creed II cont.

repaired by blacksmiths, while a variety of NPCs can be hired to help Ezio on his mission, including busty cortisans which are used to distract guards from their posts, or mercenaries that attack enemies on sight.

Of course, to do this you'll need a healthy bank balance, and currency can be earned in multiple ways, either by looting dead soldiers for cash, finding secret treasure chests or investing in businesses. Though it wasn't clear from our hands-on time how deep the micro-management system actually goes, it works similarly to that of Fable II, with Ezio receiving an income at the end of each day, and investments in businesses bumping up the cash. On a similar note, nor did we get to see the full extent of the new Notoriety system, though Ubisoft were keen to tease us with information surrounding its implementation. Similar to Hitman: Blood Money, should Ezio be spotted plunging one of the many sharp metal objects into someone, a notoriety bar will gradually fill. Fill it completely and soldiers will attack Ezio on sight – somewhat of an annoyance when you're attempting to pull off those assassinations. But there are ways to circumvent it. Firstly, silent kills will go by unnoticed, as will killing any civilians or soldiers witness to the crime. Tearing down any wanted posters also helps reduces your notoriety level, while adding a collection-esque mini-game to the proceedings.

But while this variety of new features is perhaps to be expected from a sequel, it was the realisation that Ubisoft Montreal had learned from their mistakes that encouraged us most. Every mission has its context and reason for being included within the story arc, while every sub-element of the gameplay, such as the feather collecting or exploration of secret locations carries its own reward. Admittedly there *are* areas we're still wary of, and big ones too. The combat system simply doesn't feel as tight or cohesive as that of Arkham Asylum, for example, but nevertheless Assassin's Creed II seems every bit the stunner that the original could, and *should* have been. Roll on November.

360Zine — Assassin's Creed II

HOW COMPLETE? 80%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 90%

A superior sequel in every department? Almost certainly



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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HANDS ON

Modern Warfare 2

Right on target

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Infinity Ward
Heritage: Call of Duty 2, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
Link: http://modernwarfare2.infinityward.com
ETA: 10th November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Modern Warfare 2

When we started on [Modern Warfare 2], we didn't just want to make another sequel."

The opening words to Lead Multiplayer Designer Todd Alderman's speech are a peculiar way to introduce us to the first 'direct sequel' in the Call of Duty series, let alone one where the idea of change would undoubtedly upset its thriving, passionate and often outspoken community. Altering too much for the follow-up to the most influential online game in recent years would be a surefire way to lose friends, you would think, but nevertheless, Alderman continues to straddle the frontlines with his choice of words. "We stripped everything out, started from scratch and just built a new game that we wanted to play." Has Infinity Ward gone insane? It crosses our mind momentarily, but Alderman eventually comes to his senses. "We wanted to keep the heart and soul of the game so it's familiar," he continues, "but we wanted to make everything bigger and better, [with] more options, more accessibility, [and with] lots of customisation." Stop seething, Modern Warfare devotees, MW2 is still the same game you all know and love. >

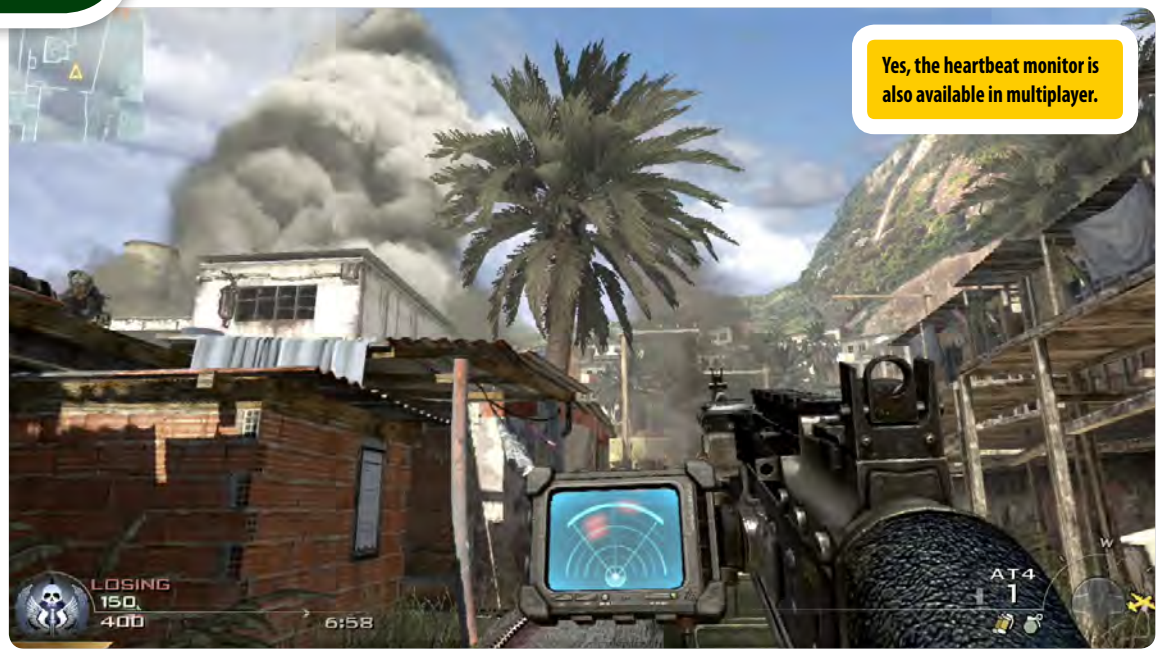
"Pushing the envelope appears to be the Infinity Ward way"



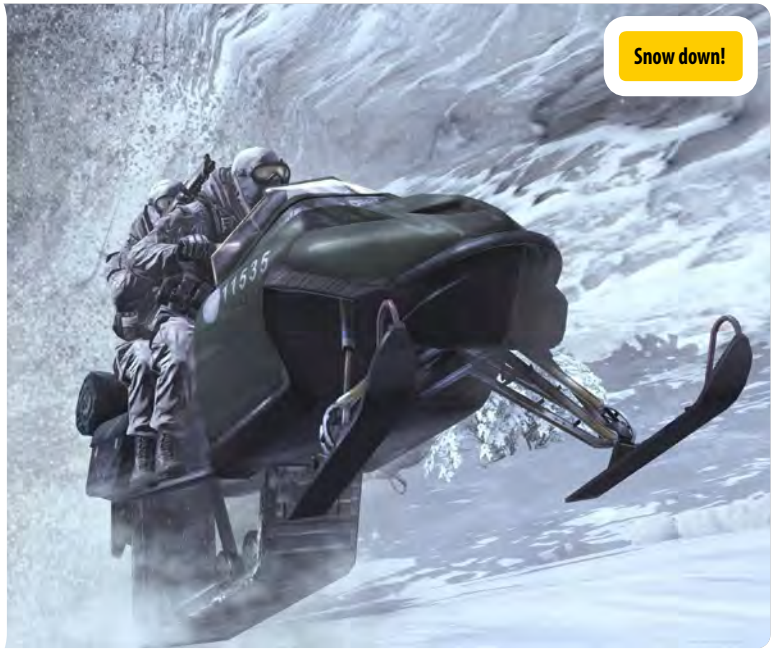
Capture the Flag is one of two new game types featured in Modern Warfare 2.



Can you spot the new Frag Grenade icon?



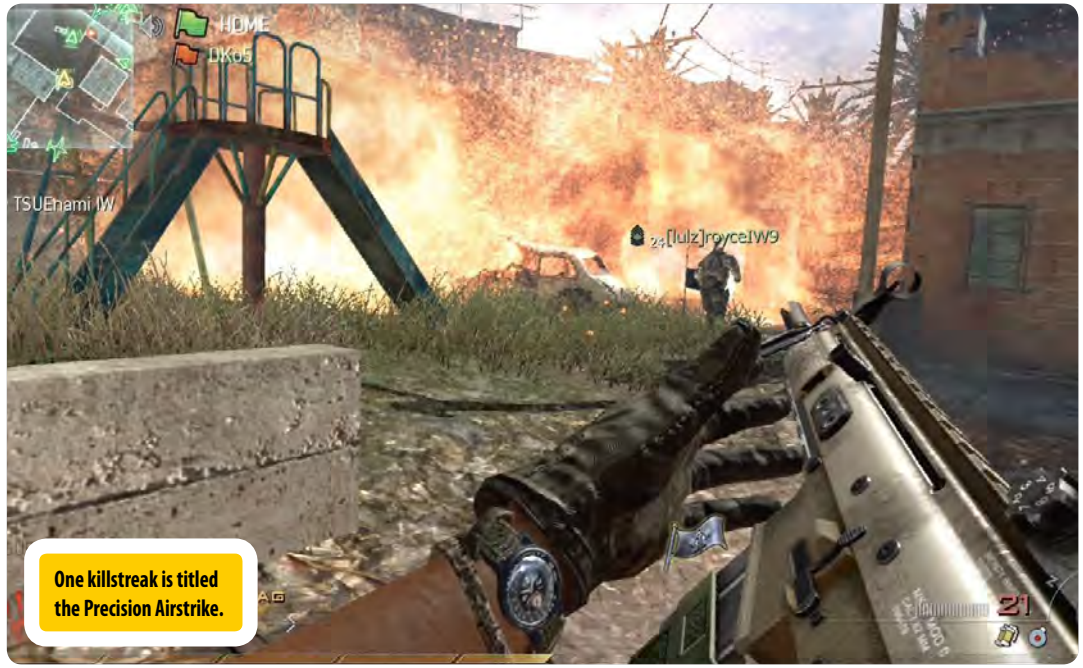
Yes, the heartbeat monitor is also available in multiplayer.


Snow down!

> Modern Warfare 2 cont.

Pushing the envelope though, in case you hadn't already worked it out, is Infinity Ward's way, seeing fit to expand on the renowned customisation and reward options of the original almost tenfold. And the tweaks, enhancements and additions crop up all over the place – not just within the celebrated Create a Class (though Infinity Ward hasn't skimped on perfecting that with a variety of improvements) but in almost every area of MW2's multiplayer mode. They start by making the player feel like more of an individual within the world, rather than simply a faceless soldier amongst the millions of others, providing players with a variety of customisation options to make them stand out from the crowd. Primarily, this comes down to your Callsign, a new feature introduced to make players *very* aware of who it was that killed them and to let them know what's going on elsewhere in the environment. Do something cool like taking out the enemy AC-130, for example, and your callsign will flash up on screen for all to see – which means you'll want to make it look nice. There are hundreds of unlockable titles to choose from within the game which >

"There are hundreds of unlockable titles to choose from within the game"

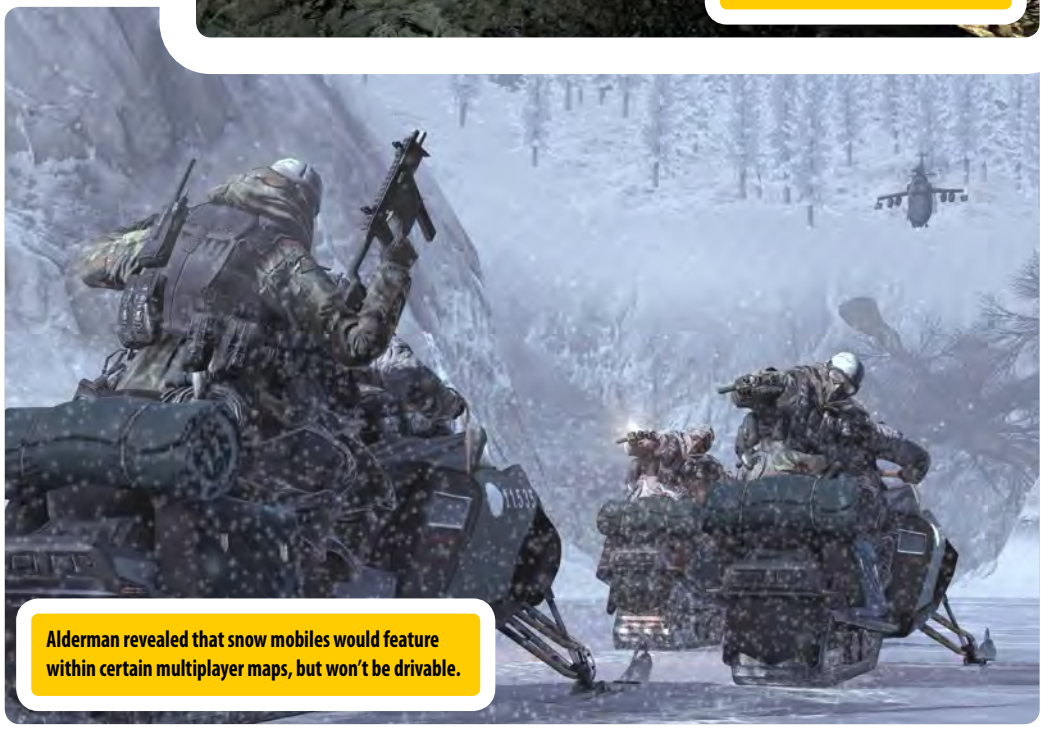


One killstreak is titled the Precision Airstrike.

MODERN WARFARE 2



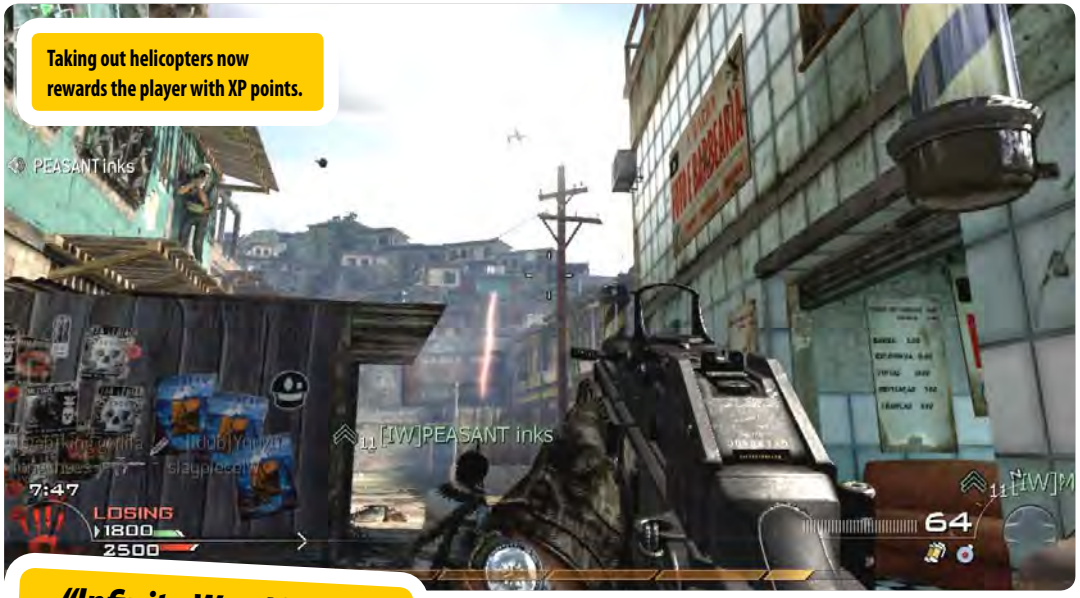
If at least one of those barrels isn't explosive we'll be disappointed.



Alderman revealed that snow mobiles would feature within certain multiplayer maps, but won't be drivable.

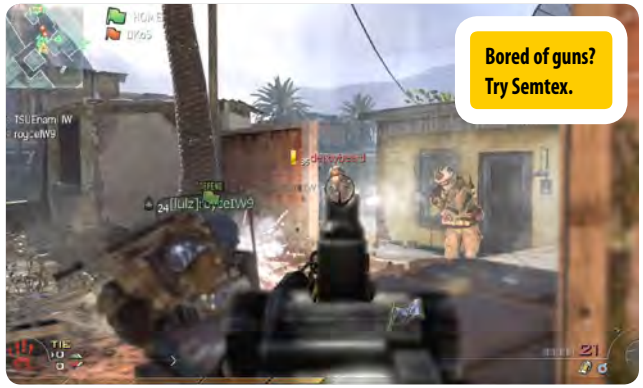
> Modern Warfare 2 cont.

work similarly to those of Street Fighter IV, with each unlocked upon fulfilling certain requirements based around your play style. Become a player obsessed with the new bullet-blocking Riot Shields or the delightfully destructive Predator Missile, and you'll unlock titles tailored to those, while further unlockable emblems also give a graphical representation of your personality, with the player able to unlock a multitude of icons to display alongside their title throughout their multiplayer experience. Of course, on a deeper scale, the inclusion of such elements also encourages diversity within the gameplay too, and fans of collecting will have to vary their approach to combat if they wish to unlock them all. So collectors are in for a long, hard slog then, but regardless of how many times you may end up shooting people in the face or blowing them up with rockets, Infinity Ward is well aware that nothing can beat the satisfaction felt by getting that final kill. Enter the 'Game Winning Killcam', a slow-mo variant on the standard Killcam that pops up on everybody's screen at the end of each game to bask in the victor's glory – and laugh in the victim's face at the same time, obviously. 'Cool' is simply too small a word. >



Taking out helicopters now rewards the player with XP points.

"Infinity Ward is well aware that nothing beats the satisfaction felt by getting that final kill. Enter the 'Game Winning Killcam'"



Bored of guns? Try Semtex.

MODERN WARFARE

THE SUPER ELITE

Console yourself with another Xbox 360 SKU



You didn't think you had seen it all when it comes to Xbox 360 hardware, did you? As the name suggests, this new Modern Warfare 2 'Super Elite' Xbox 360 is perhaps the most attractive iteration of the console yet, packing in a standard edition copy of Modern Warfare 2, two black wireless controllers, a black wired Xbox LIVE headset, a 250GB hard drive and a Modern Warfare 2-themed Xbox 360 console.

Alongside the Forza Motorsport 3 Super Elite, this Modern Warfare 2 package will be the only place where you'll be able to pick up a 250GB hard drive at any time in the foreseeable future, and quantities are said to be strictly limited and available exclusively from the GAME Stores Group, which includes GAME, GameStation and Gameplay.co.uk. The £249.99 bundle launches day and date with Modern Warfare 2 on November 10th.



This map, titled Highrise, has two office blocks at either end and a helipad to fight on in the centre.

> Modern Warfare 2 cont.

But despite the big changes elsewhere, it's Create a Class that has been given the most attention. The Primary and Secondary weapons slots have been given the largest overhaul, with less frequently used weapons like shotguns and rocket launchers joining the ranks of pistols in the secondary slot, negating the need to reserve a specific slot for the off chance that a Vacant-alike shotgun-happy map turns up on your playlist. And unlike the first game, you're also able to strap an attachment to your secondary weapons, or two if you settle for the Bling perk. And talking of perks, there are plenty more in store and each are upgradeable by completing challenges too, though Last Stand seems MIA for the time being. Whether or not it appears in the full game is something Infinity Ward isn't yet ready to reveal.

The use of your right bumper too has been expanded upon, now with options to select weapons far beyond your basic frag grenades, including sticky Semtex bombs, replenishable throwing knives, blast shields and, more interestingly, a function called 'Tactical Insertion', which lets you lay down your spawn point manually anywhere on the map.

That Infinity Ward is able to introduce such features while retaining Call of Duty 4's impeccable balance seems an impossibly difficult task, but one in which they've done a remarkable job. Indeed, that we're confident Modern Warfare 2 will far surpass the playability, accessibility and fun factor of its predecessor even after only a few hours of playtime says much of what you need to know. We would be lying if we said that the game's core wasn't almost identical to that of its predecessor, but expecting anything different would have been foolish. Instead, it's a polished, tweaked and vastly expanded version of its former self, yet amazingly, a title that feels utterly fresh – and as Alderman puts it: "not just the next step."

360Zine
MODERN WARFARE

HOW COMPLETE?	FIRST IMPRESSIONS
95%	95%

Multiplayer game of the generation? Very likely

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PREPARE TO DROP

\\22.09.09



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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Jump in.

XBOX 360



This is Metal

We sit down with industry veteran Tim Schafer to talk Brutal Legend, Psychonauts 2 and… Super Mario 64?

From no-hoper pirates to Mexican grimreapers, axe-wielding roadies to maniacal purple tentacles, Tim Schafer is the man, nay, the legend, behind some of the most revered and imaginative titles of our time. So what do you say to the funniest man in the industry when you're lucky enough to be sat down with him?

Read on over the next four pages to hear all about his upcoming action game Brutal Legend, the possibility of a second Psychonauts game and *that* Activision lawsuit…

>



> **Interview** continued

We've been told that the intro video to Brutal Legend is one of the funniest things ever seen in a videogame. Is this true?
Good! That's awesome! I was worried about that because we have this band in there, Kabbage Boy, whose lead singer throws the horns like this [throws the horns], which is wrong. This is metal [changes finger position] but this [changes fingers back] means 'I love you' in sign language and people do it at concerts all the time – it drives me crazy. So we deliberately have the lead singer throwing the horns wrong because they're a really shitty band, and I was terrified that some metal guys would watch it and be like, 'they don't even know how to throw the horns'.

You've spoken a lot about Brutal Legend's musical influences and your personal history there, but where did the game's art style come from? It's not the typically gritty environments we're used to seeing at the moment…
There were two things, really. Heavy metal album covers, they have this unbounded creativity as far as I can see it. They mix together all these different elements of Tolkien-esque fantasy, religious icons, blood, gore, medical equipment, laser beams… you know, whatever looks cool. And no one worries about it being too much; no one ever thinks 'did we go too far with that album cover?', it's just like, 'no, go crazy with it', which is why it's the perfect world for videogames. But then also, I would say artists like Frank Frazetta, with the covers for Conan etc. He has these crazy, stylised warriors with their extreme poses and the skies lit in a really epic way, so that's been a heavy influence on our game.

Is taking a more realistic approach something you'd be interested in doing in the future, because even mature themes like death in Grim Fandango you've handled fairly comically? Do you think that is your style? >

"Artists like Frank Frazetta with his crazy, stylised warriors and extreme poses have been a heavy influence on our game"



BRÜTAL LEGEND

Publisher: EA
Developer: Double Fine
Heritage: Psychonauts
Link: www.brutallegend.com
ETA: 16th October





> Interview continued

I just like expressive art. Photorealistic stuff just doesn't seem like the most interesting thing to pursue. It's like photorealistic painting – why would people really want to do photorealistic painting when you have photos? I don't know, some day if it made sense to do it with the story we were trying to tell I would do it, but I like working with artists and I like the creativity involved.

What was it like working with Jack Black? Did you always have it in mind for him to play the character of Eddie Riggs?
I never thought we'd get someone like Jack Black, but we were always inspired by him, and when we were designing the character we thought about him a lot and how his character in School of Rock just loved music so much. I always secretly hoped he would play the game and like it.

Yeah, he seems quite behind it with his promotional work.
Yeah, we showed it to him and he said he liked it, which meant a lot to me, let alone wanting to be in it – just the fact that he liked it meant a lot.

Brutal Legend has more of a focus on action than anything you've done before. Do you think that a true point-and-click adventure is lost on today's audience?
I don't know. I personally just got interested in other kinds of games by playing console titles. When Grim Fandango was done I started playing Super Mario 64 and Rayman 2, and those games that are fun to drive the character around with that direct control method. I thought that even if we did an adventure game, I'd like to control them like this because there's no reason to be separated from the character through point-and-click. You get to be the character, which is why Psychonauts ended up how it did.

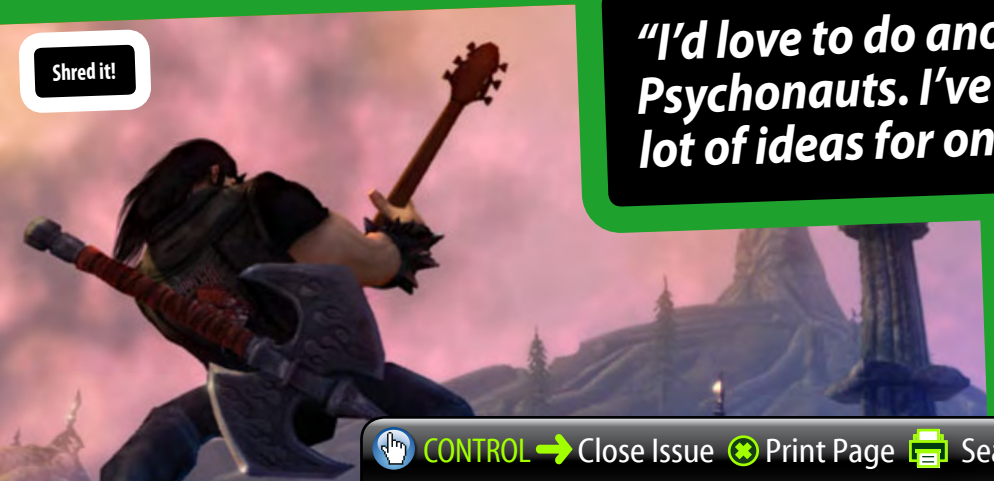
Do you see Psychonauts as more of a transitional game for you, helping you to understand what worked and what didn't within the framework of an action-oriented game rather than a point-and-click one?
Looking back, it definitely fits in the space between adventure games and Brutal Legend, which is an action game. But it's not like that's the direction I was moving in, it happened to just fit in there. If I was to do another Psychonauts it would still be like it was, a platform adventure game.

More importantly, would you want to do another one?
Oh, I'd love to do another one. I've got a lot of ideas for one, but we also just want to do new stuff too, so…

Would it be fair to say that your focus at the moment is purely on creating new IPs, then? Would you not want to revisit older titles outside of Psychonauts?
I do want to. I would love to revisit all of them because I had a good time working on them, but if I did that I wouldn't be making a new game. You know, if I made Full Throttle 2 I would never have made Grim Fandango. >



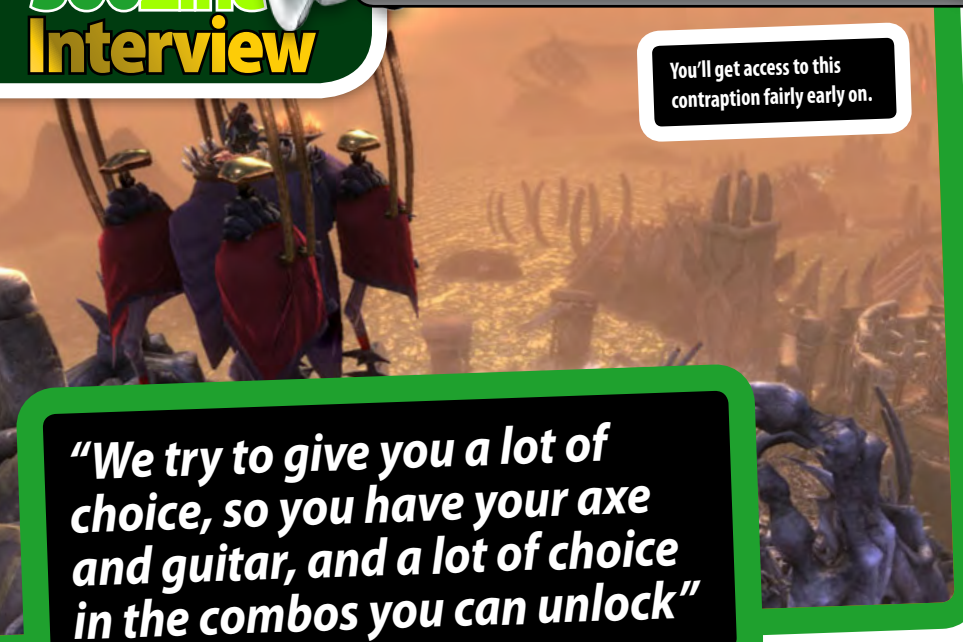
"I'd love to do another Psychonauts. I've got a lot of ideas for one"



Shred it!



Multi-man brawls are a staple part of every rock-fest.


You'll get access to this contraption fairly early on.

"We try to give you a lot of choice, so you have your axe and guitar, and a lot of choice in the combos you can unlock"

> Interview continued

People might have asked for Full Throttle 2, but did they really want that or did they want Grim Fandango? I think when people ask for sequels they want something new, really.

Do you have a lot of different ideas then, or is it simply more difficult to craft a sequel?
I don't know – I've never done it except for Day of the Tentacle. And Monkey Island, of course.

Talking of that, have you played the new Tales of Monkey Island?
No, not yet. I've been in crunch mode where I haven't been playing anything except for Brutal Legend. Like, at night I come home and write down a bunch a bugs and log them all the next morning. But I actually just started playing games again and that's definitely going to be one of the first games I play.

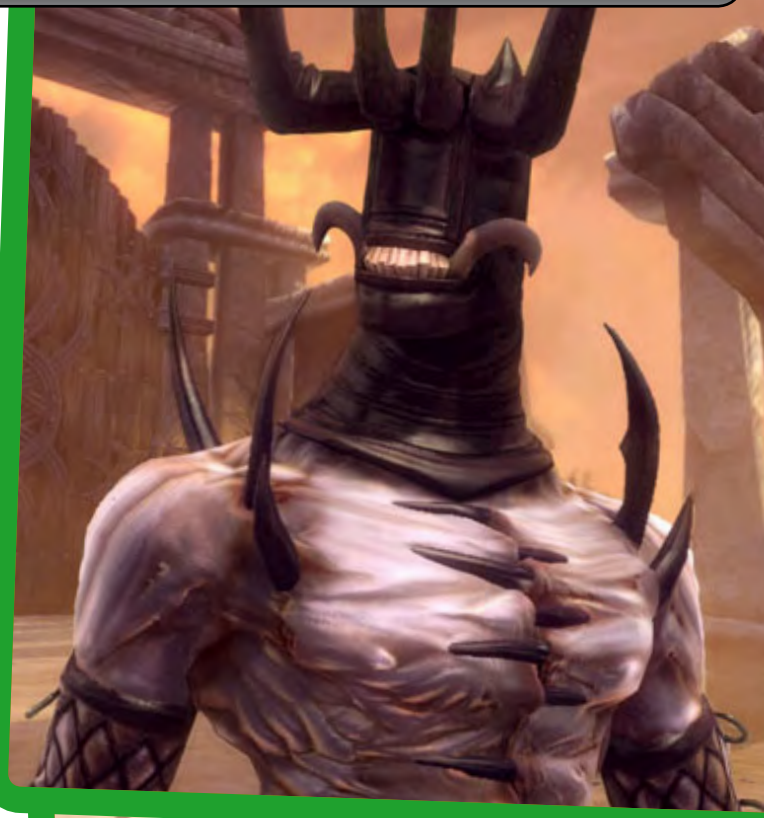
On the idea of creating sequels though, do you think it would be difficult to come up with new ideas and scenarios for the same set of characters?
It wasn't for Monkey. It was hard to reset the relationship between Guybrush and Elena, that's the tricky thing. Because the first one was all about them getting together, and then in the second one they've got to have problems so they can get together again, but you can only pull that off twice – you can't have them constantly breaking up and getting back together again. Or you could, and that would be fun. I mean, I'm hopeful that people want you to make the old games again, but then that they play the new game and forget all about the old one…

Yeah, but we're sure we speak on behalf of many when we say we would love to see a new Grim Fandango game…
Yeah…

No…?
That's what makes it special though, you know? It's like wishing that the British version of The Office kept going. It was good, but…

Brutal Legend places a big emphasis on fighting. How deep does the combat system go?
We try to give you a lot of choice, so you have your axe and your guitar, and a lot of choice in the combos you can unlock. But we also have these things called double-team attacks which every friendly warrior that joins your battle can do. Press the Y button and they do a special move together, so the headbangers will form a mosh pit around you or the razor girls will jump on your shoulders and shoot with their special weapon. So whenever you're fighting you have the choice of using any of these double-team attacks, and some of them give you a vantage point high up over the battlefield, some let you step on your enemies with their giant feet. [laughs]

Were there ever any plans to implement co-op then, with these double-team attacks?
No. In the multiplayer mode you can have cooperative teams of four versus four in the stage battle mode of gameplay. But the combat is a focus of ours; it is a game about batting in a heavy metal world.




As well as fighting, you'll also be driving around the rock world.

> Interview continued

A large part of the game is made up of vehicle sections, but driving is sometimes seen as the low-point in action games. How have you countered that to make driving just as enjoyable as the rest of the game?
Well, we started with the cars; it was one of the first things we implemented. It uses Havok which takes care of a lot of the driving for us, but I just like Hot Rods – we had Hot Rods in Grim Fandango with the Bone Wagon. The action is the core of Brutal Legend's gameplay, and this is how it started and what we worked on first, so it's not like we tacked it on at the end.

So is Brutal Legend what you'd call *your* game? The game that you've always personally wanted to make?
It's definitely a culmination of a lot of ideas and thinking back through the years, and a lot of things I've toyed with in games for a while. Like having a roadie character in Day of the Tentacle or having cars driven by demons like we did in Grim Fandango, and all the stuff we did in Full Throttle with the bikes and the music, so it's great to finally just do it.

Are you able to comment on the Activision lawsuit?
You know, it's funny. It wasn't really a big thing for us, it was just something the lawyers worked on – I never had to get that involved in it and the team never had to worry about it. There was never any case there; they were just trying to intimidate us for money.

Did it all go sour with them during development?
No, it's just that the company we were working with, Vivendi, went away. When we heard about the merger we were like 'uh oh'… I've never met Bobby Kotick [Activision CEO].

What's going on with the PC version? *Is* there a PC version?
No, just PS3 and Xbox 360.

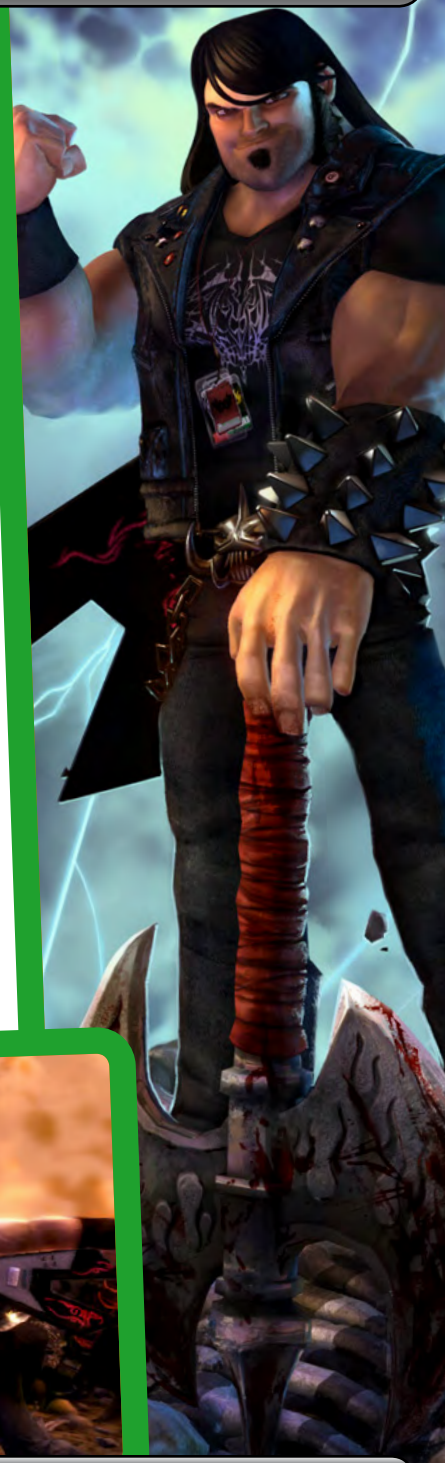
You have no desire to make a PC version?
Well, that's more of an investment decision made on the part of the publisher. That's how that decision is made; is it worth the money? It's not like it would be impossible to do, but is it worth it?

So do you see yourself as more of a console developer going forward then?
I'm definitely playing them more these days, as there are so many great games on the consoles.

A big thing on consoles at the moment is the idea of DLC…
[laughs] We have no official plans but a lot of ideas. So maybe.

You can't talk about those ideas, then?
No! [laughs] They are just ideas.

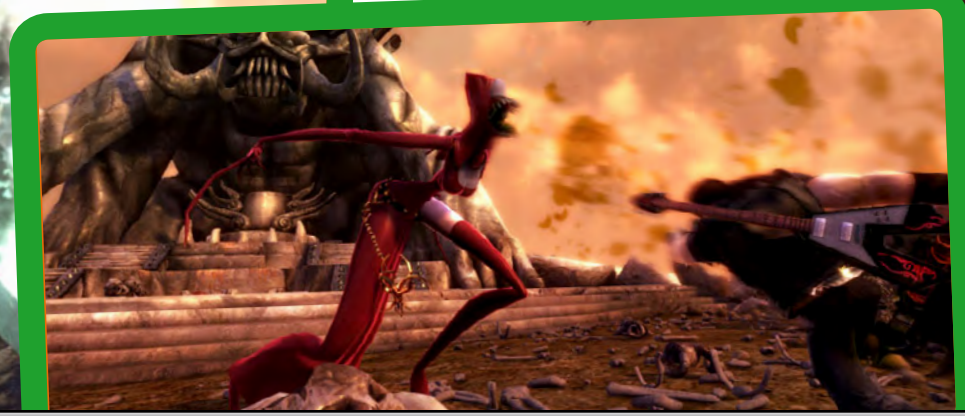
This time last year EA launched new IPs with Dead Space and Mirror's Edge, but they were initially quite disappointed with their lower-than-expected sales. Is it a concern for you launching Brutal Legend at this time of year?
I think that in general EA know how to do it more than most publishers. It's not a strength of some of the other publishers we've been talking about; it's not something they've pulled off, but EA definitely has pulled it off in the past. It's not a small task because you're launching a brand. It's like a Cadillac; you're launching something that big, and you have to tell people about it. No one knows about Brutal Legend and so you have to start from zero, but I think EA has a really good track record with that. ●



On the Activision lawsuit: "There was never any case there; They were just trying to intimidate us for money"



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PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED



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*Any reference to instruments - Guitars, Drums, or Microphones - refers to Guitar Hero controllers. Online features not available on PlayStation®2

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HANDS ON

Grand Theft Auto IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony

Glitz, glamour, grandeur… and guns. Lots of guns

Publisher: Rockstar Games
Developer: Rockstar North
Heritage: Grand Theft Auto series, Manhunt
Link: www.rockstargames.com/theballadofgaytony
ETA: 29th October

The second and final episode of Rockstar's full-blown fling with downloadable content, The Ballad of Gay Tony completes GTA IV's triptych of tales from Liberty City. Tonally, it was quite a leap from Niko's American Nightmare to the tragedy-tinged downfall of The Lost, even if the general theme of 'things going badly wrong' was somewhat similar. Ballad is another sizeable shift, this time focusing on the gaudy world of nightclub impresario Tony Prince and his right-hand man, business partner and lead protagonist Luis Lopez. While we're not expecting a happy ending as such – the title alone suggests we're looking at something of a riches-to-rags tale – there's very much the sensation that this is GTA off the leash a little bit, the Housers relishing the chance to amp up the ultraviolence to operatic levels, with action very much on the agenda from start to finish.

Prince is one of Liberty City's old guard – he's been a major player in the city for 10 years, though it seems his time at the top may be about to end. Prince is involved in what can euphemistically be termed a business dispute with some local gangsters, and so he calls upon his friend and confidante Luis Lopez to help. Prince is still a rich man, though, and with money exactly what you need to obtaining the right tools to get the job done – by any means necessary – it's no surprise that Lopez has an impressive arsenal of weapons to choose from. The powerful P-90 machine gun can spit out 900 rounds a minute, while the AA-12 shotgun comes in two variations – one with explosive shells which can make short work of a police car or chopper.

You'll need this kind of firepower, too. Ballad throws out some epic set-pieces at the player, with some spectacular and explosive sequences in the handful of missions we got to try at Rockstar's London HQ. The first, Dropping In, sees Luis helping out a gangster named Timur, who wants to take over the city's hockey team, Liberty City Rampage. With the current owner refusing to sell up, it's your job to 'persuade' him otherwise.

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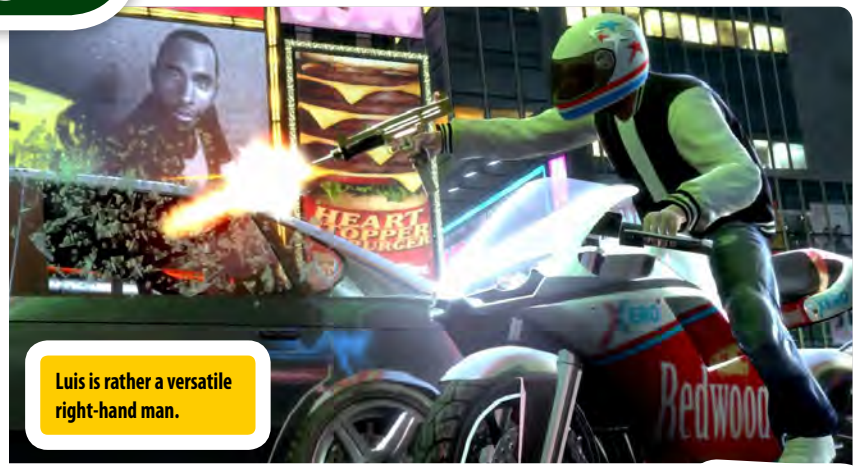


That's one way of regulating traffic.

"The P-90 machine gun spits out 900 rounds a minute, making short work of a police car or chopper"



Holding X and A unleashes a barrage of rockets and machine gun fire.



Luis is rather a versatile right-hand man.



Ridiculous? Yes, but ridiculously fun, too.


It's non-stop action throughout.

"The new sticky bombs are suitably devastating"

> GTA IV: BoGT continued

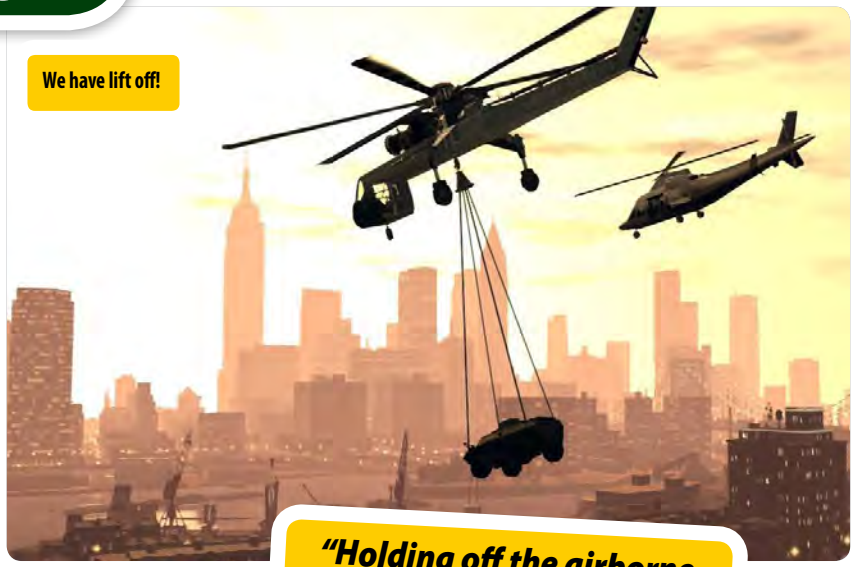
The mission sees the welcome return of San Andreas' base-jumping, as we're encouraged to fly high above the penthouse location of our target and parachute onto the roof's helipad. But when Luis is picked up by CCTV cameras, things hot up inside as a team of security guards arrive to give you a special Liberty City welcome.

Yet dealing with these goons is a breeze with a P-90, and to encourage them to leave cover, you can shoot nearby pipes to send a hot blast of steam their way to flush them out – and into your line of fire. Upon reaching your cowering mark, a single blast sends him flying backwards through the window, plummeting dozens of storeys to a bloody and unpleasant death. But with further alarms triggered, you'll need to deal with the boss's cohorts attempting to prevent your exit. A few sticky bombs around the lifts and surrounding corridors is more than enough, with a well-timed detonation – executed by tapping down on the D-pad – taking the majority out before we mop up any stragglers left and leap from the building, parachuting down onto a truck driven by Timur.

Before the next mission starts, we're given the opportunity to go nuts with the game's new weaponry, via a handy cheat code programmed in by our PR host. Thus we go on a bit of a rampage with the AA-12, destroying police cars and their occupants with just one or two shells per vehicle – at one point getting clobbered by a flying door sent hurtling our way by a gargantuan explosion we set off.

The sticky bombs once again play an important part in the next mission we try, Going Deep. It involves driving >





We have lift off!



"Holding off the airborne LCPD with the AA-12's explosive shells feels like the cartoonish GTAs of old"

Once the game's completed, you can replay any single mission as many times as you like.

> GTA IV: BoGT continued

a van to an underground car park, luring in a gang of corrupt cops before triggering sticky bombs and making your escape. You're able to throw the bombs as you drive away, though it was a little too much for our fingers to cope with staying ahead of our pursuers while looking behind to detonate the bombs at the appropriate moment – we just 'threw and blew' and hoped for the best.

The final two missions we tried are even more explosive – the first taking place aboard a moving subway train as Luis has to uncouple a carriage for The Man Who Has Everything, a multi-millionaire gangster named Yusuf. This is a role comic Omid Djalili clearly had a ball with, chewing up and spitting out some on-the-bone dialogue with real relish. Holding off the LCPD with the AA-12's explosive shells while you wait for Yusuf to swoop down and collect the carriage via chopper feels like the cartoonish GTAs of old – though it feels much more appropriate than such a mission would featuring Niko or Johnny. Fittingly for a game whose eponymous character lives the good life, there's an almost hedonistic quality to the violence. It's taken a step further when you're tasked with stealing an expensive chopper from a luxury yacht, turning its military-grade weaponry on your ultra-rich victims before gunning down those fleeing the scene on speedboats.



There's a number of separate base-jumping challenges.

With menus draped in gaudy colours, objectives and GPS routes marked in pink, and the missions taking the new Liberty City to extremes it's not seen since its last-gen incarnation, The Ballad of Gay Tony is clearly a very different beast from its predecessors. Rockstar has gone from the motorcycle emptiness of The Lost and Damned to the neon loneliness of a powerful man on the way down. But his loyal compadre Luis – touchingly protective of his boss when others criticise him – is just as complex and interesting a hero as messrs Klebitz and Bellic, and we're looking forward to spending more time in his shoes when the full game arrives at the end of the month.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of The Ballad of Gay Tony

360Zine
HOW COMPLETE? 95%
FIRST IMPRESSIONS 93%
Liberty City is really going out with a bang!

"It's the funniest game that we've seen in a very long time"
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XBOX 360 THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

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PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED





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DJ Hero

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Freestyle Games
Heritage: B-Boy
Link: www.djhero.com
ETA: 30th October

HANDS ON

DJ Hero

Grandmaster Flash got nothin' on our plate-spinning skills

"It might be a cliché, but for once it's true: playing is believing"



The dial next to the Euphoria button chooses between your pre-chosen samples, with the red button triggering them.

Sometimes, life is all about good timing. We expected to go hands-on with just a few tracks from a GamesCom build of DJ Hero. We left having played around 30 mixes of a near-finished version, our fingers aching but our fun glands crying out for more. We even pondered the logistics of getting a later train home, even as we were being ushered out of the door by our PR hosts. Ladies and gentlemen, DJ Hero's just *that* good.

In truth, we didn't think for a minute we'd like it this much. Here at GamerZines, we're old-fashioned rockers at heart, and the thought of a day spent pretending to play other people's tunes didn't exactly fill us with excitement. And even if you're a fan of dance music, DJ Hero might be a difficult sell – it's expensive, it's got a steeper learning curve than Guitar Hero, it's definitely less suited to party play than its labelmate, and while logic suggests plastic instruments are the natural next step for air guitarists, it's not often we happen across air-DJing. Perhaps we're just hitting the wrong nightspots. One thing's for sure, Activision needs to get demo units out there and to get people to sample the game – it might be a cliché, but for once it's true: playing *is* believing.



Grandmaster Flash talks you through the game's basic and advanced tutorials.

It starts with an effectively thorough tutorial presented by Grandmaster Flash himself, one of many musicians adding their star power to this euphoric plate-spinner. Firstly, you learn the basics – tapping the three buttons resting on the platter, with green representing the left record, blue the right and red triggering effects or samples in the middle of the two. Then you're taught how to scratch – holding down the appropriate button and rapidly moving the deck up and down for the length of the highlighted section. Then it's the dark art of crossfading. The fader switch itself is perfect – just a nice size and with a satisfying sticking point in the middle so it's not too hard to find the sweet spot where both records are in the mix. Then it's just a matter of putting all those skills together. The advanced tutorial, meanwhile, focuses on >





You can select from a number of DJ avatars, with more unlocked as you progress.



Decks can be customised, while characters have alternate outfits and unlockable headphones. Not that you'll notice – you'll be too busy concentrating on the perpetually spinning vinyl display.



DJ Shadow is one of many contributors, having supplied several original mixes. Indeed, all DJ Hero's mixes are completely exclusive to the game – you won't have heard any of these before.

> DJ Hero continued

directional scratching – not as tricky as you might think in this setting, but likely to be much more difficult when playing the harder mixes. Then you're taught how to deal with crossfade spikes (basically moving the fader out and in again extremely quickly), and Euphoria – this game's Star Power, and activated by a flashing red button above the fader switch. Like Star Power, this doubles your multiplier while it lasts, but to accumulate Euphoria you'll need to play a mix's glowing sections absolutely perfectly.

Rewinds form the fifth advanced tutorial – if you play perfectly for long enough, a meter on the right of the scrolling onscreen vinyl gradually fills up. You'll be informed when a Rewind is ready, after which it's a case of spinning the platter backwards in a full circle and repeating the section you just performed to earn a better score.

Finally, there's freestyling – a dial next to the Euphoria button allows you to add effects to certain sections of the mix, with a translucent, orange-rimmed dial above the tracks onscreen to show you where to twiddle that knob. This is also used to select one of a bank of five samples you can preselect before each gig, triggering them on special sections of the red track by jabbing the red button as little or as often as you wish.

Once you're happy with your tutorial performance, it's time to move on to >

DJ Hero

> DJ Hero continued

the main game. Initially you're given a choice of 'setlists', each with between three and five mixes to play through, with further ones unlocked by collecting stars for good performances on those initially available. You're given little time to relax between mixes, as the next one starts as soon as your star rating and score is announced. While in general the setlists increase in complexity, you'll sometimes find tougher mixes rubbing shoulders with much easier ones – on a couple of occasions we struggled to get a three-star rating before five-starring the next with plenty of time to boost our score thereafter. It's understandable, given that tracks are grouped more by type than by difficulty, and it shows that Freestyle Games doesn't add extra trickery to potentially compromise a great-sounding mix, just to make the game a little more challenging. That said, on the default Medium difficulty – even without directional scratching, which comes into play on Hard or above – it's definitely a steeper learning curve than Guitar Hero. It's a pat head/rub tummy situation – after a while you'll be moving your hands independently as it becomes second nature. After nailing one particularly tricky bit of rapid-fire crossfades and scratches, we actually let out a whoop of delight, which sounded even better when combined with a triggered Flavor Flav "YEAAAHHHH BOYEEEEEE!" sample.

Tight PR restrictions sadly prevent us from waxing lyrical about the mixes we most enjoyed, but suffice to say that it was often the ones which blended dance standards with tracks from other genres which really floated our boat. And the guitar/DJ mixes which we're calling 'scratch and riff' (you watch, it's bound to catch on) are brilliant if you've got a spare guitar peripheral lying around. Put simply, DJ Hero's well worth a spin, even if you think it's not your bag. Time to extend that overdraft once again then… ●



We played a couple of 'scratch and riff' mixes, in which a second player can join in on guitar. Great fun.



Crossfading rapidly back and forth is a fine art, but it's ludicrously satisfying to master – and often you'll have a rewind so you can showboat all over again.





Daft Punk have contributed 11 mixes, including a couple of top-notch mash-ups.

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

360Zine DJ Hero

HOW COMPLETE? 90%

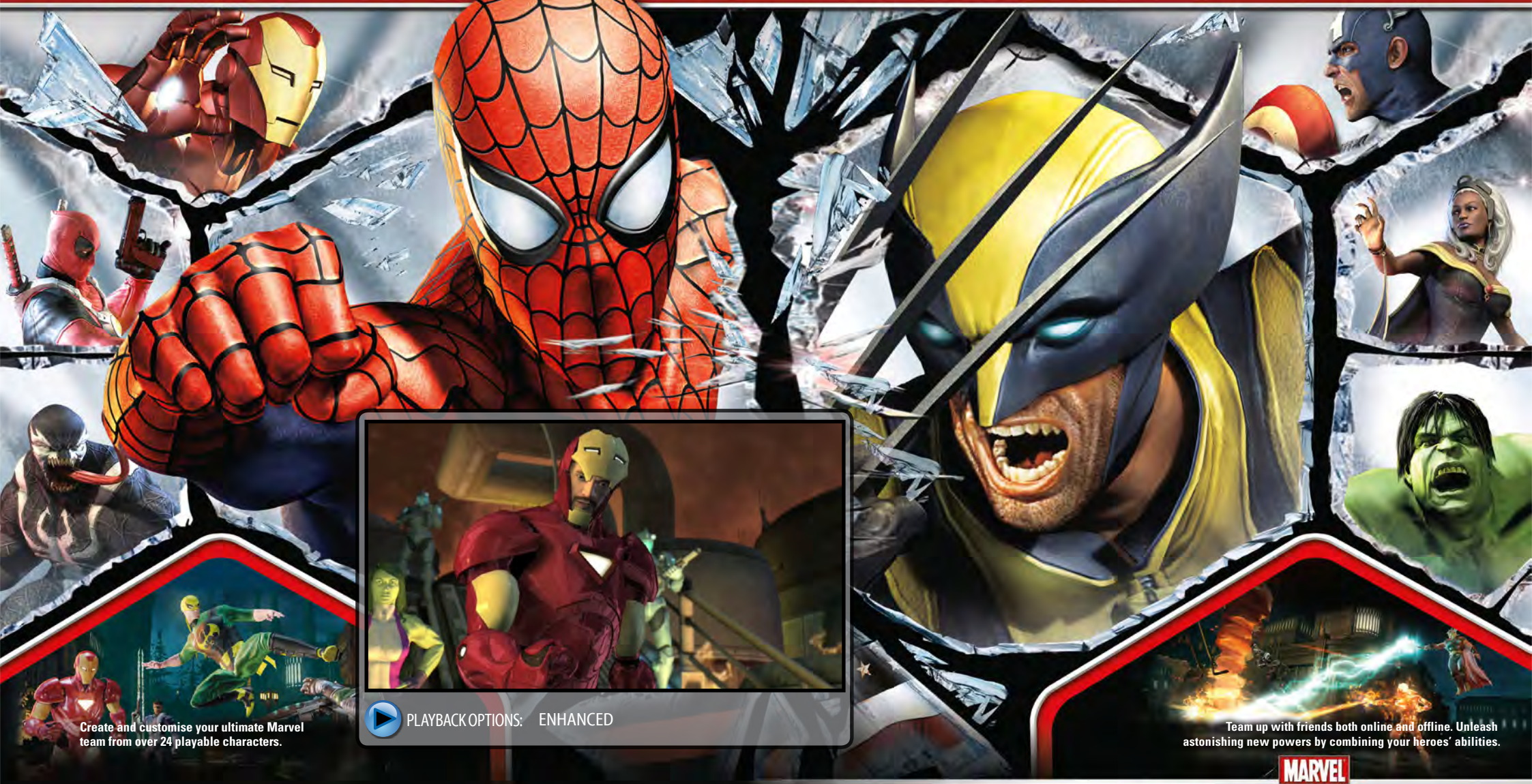
FIRST IMPRESSIONS 90%

A genuinely euphoric and brilliant music game

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MARVEL

OUT NOW ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2

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SMG Studios n SPACE Vicarious Visions MARVEL www.marvel.com

www.MarvelUltimateAlliance.com



Publisher: EA
Developer: Slightly Mad Studios
Heritage: GT Legends, GTR2
Link: http://shift.needforspeed.com
OUT NOW

"Shift represents a metaphorical gear-change into fairly radical new territory for the series"

Need for Speed: SHIFT

Driving in a new direction

SHIFT isn't just a name; it's a statement of intent. After years of big-selling but poorly reviewed games, last year's Undercover represented a critical and commercial nadir for a franchise rapidly losing its appeal both for the hardcore and the casual player. It's too early to say whether SHIFT can recapture either or both of those audiences, but it's an excellent racer in its own right – a metaphorical gear-change into fairly radical new territory for the series.

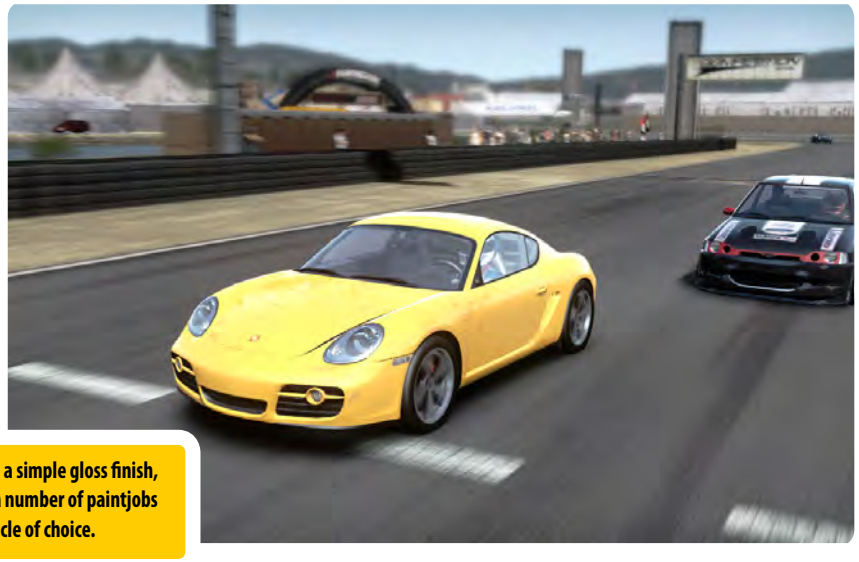
It's not quite a sim, nor is it anywhere near as arcadey as the series has been of late. Instead, it occupies that curious middle-ground between realism and accessibility that a surprising number >

> Need for Speed Shift cont.

of modern racers seem to find themselves in. Perhaps the best comparison would be Codemasters' GRID – it's a game that errs on the side of authenticity, while providing the kind of slam-bang action you rarely see in your Gran Turismos and your Forzas. And like Codies' game, it has a handling model likely to divide audiences.

Developer Slightly Mad Studios has previous when it comes to sim racers, with its various team members having worked on games like GT Legends and GTR2, but SHIFT is a different beast in its focus on sensation. It's all about how it *feels* to drive, rather than the drive itself. It's no happy accident that the default viewpoint is the in-car camera, because it's clearly how the game is intended to be played. There's the standard bonnet cam and external views, but here SHIFT feels slightly compromised from its original vision. Step into the driver's seat, and you're treated to something of a sensory assault as you race. Screaming downhill in an Elise 11R at Aremberg, the car interior and steering wheel blur out as the view focuses intently on the track, tyres noisily (and rather tinnily) scuffing the tarmac, as the engine's whine batters your ears as if a plane's taking off in your front room. Every bump and bobble sends the screen wobbling as you floor the accelerator, the turbos kicking in with a high-pitched wheeze as you glance to either side with quick flicks of the right analogue stick, making sure no rivals are likely to trade paint with you. But you're not ready for the corner which seems to be on you before you know it. You apply the brakes, which screech and the tyre-scrape gets louder as you desperately try to turn in time. It's too late – you skid off-road, the camera jerking all over the place as you smash sideways into the barrier, the objects through the windshield suddenly little more than fuzzy and indistinct shapes. With a big telly and a top-of-the-range surround system, this is going to be one hell of an experience.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves, because SHIFT takes a little while to get into top gear. Upon starting the game, you're instructed (by an oddly unenthused host) to drive a test lap, which determines your recommended play settings for the game. It's arguably too short to really get a proper feel for how the game handles, but we were pleased when the game recommended us to use the Experienced handling – one down >



Though we've opted for a simple gloss finish, you have the choice of a number of paintjobs and decals for your vehicle of choice.



Venturing even slightly off-road is a dangerous game – meanwhile, inside the car it's jerky-cam all the way.

"With a big telly and a top-of-the-range surround sound system, this is going to be one hell of an experience"

SPEED DEMON

Earning your racing stripes



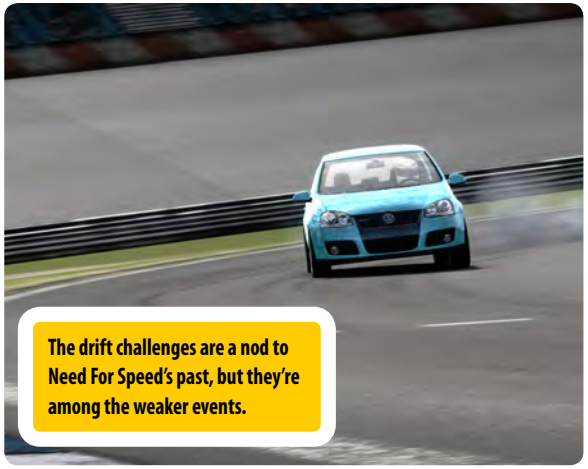
Thrill of the chase | **Taking over** | **Lining up**

Thrill of the chase

A Driver Battle is a short but sweet event which sees you engage in motorised combat with another driver. It's a best-of-three event, setting you as either the Leader or the Follower, starting either just behind or ahead of your rival, and tasking you with beating them to the finish line or getting five seconds ahead.



Once you reach Tier 3 and 4, the challenge ramps up quite significantly.



The drift challenges are a nod to Need For Speed's past, but they're among the weaker events.



> Need for Speed Shift cont.

"You're treated to something of a sensory assault in the driver's seat"

from Pro, which turns all assists off and full damage on. But initially at least, we decided to ignore the game's advice and opt for the Normal settings, which provide a small amount of steering assist and braking advice on corners, with a helpful racing line indicator glowing amber or red when your approach is too quick. Unhappy at having to face Easy opponents, we switched that to Normal, too – where's the fun in using one of the trickier handling models when your rivals are simple enough to beat even with a few mistakes? For the most part, that was absolutely fine for us. We switched to Experienced once we seemed to be winning a little too easily, but a brief experiment with Pro was a disaster, the handling just the wrong side of twitchy, with jerks and slides all over the place from anything but the most delicate touch on the analogue stick. Even with the steering assists switched on, providing greater traction, anything other than the default camera angle makes car movement feel strange, alien even. The cars just don't seem to be making proper contact with the track, skidding in a disturbingly exaggerated manner that feels entirely disconnected from reality. It's only once you're looking through your windshield that things feel relatively normal. As long as you stick to the in-car cam, you'll be fine, but those who like to view their car from the outside might find the upper difficulty levels take quite some getting used to.

But then it's hard to stay mad at SHIFT for too long, especially given the way it rewards the player, even offering consolation prizes for non-podium finishes. There's a light, RPG-style >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time…



10 MINUTES
The initial practice lap determines your recommended settings – be sure to tweak them if you're not happy.



2 HOURS
Though they're not the quickest, the Tier 1 races still feel plenty intense thanks to very competent AI rivals.



4 HOURS
Time Trials, Invitation Events, Driver Battles – the Career mode's really starting to open up.



8 HOURS
With no GRID/DiRT-style rewinds, you'll be restarting more than a few races on Tier 3 and above.



15 HOURS+
It'll take some time before you're a Level 50 driver – and you can always try to beat your friends' times.



The sensation of speed is terrific – though you don't really get quite the same feeling outside the car…

…get behind the wheel, however, and the action will get the adrenaline pumping. You'll feel every jolt and bump.



"It's nice to still feel like you've accomplished something when you lose a race"



Driver Battles are often thrillingly tight – the very best have the lead changing hands several times, with the result in the balance right up to the finish line.

> Need for Speed Shift cont.

mechanic which sees your driver level up from points gained via certain track manouevres, split into two categories – Precision and Aggression. You'll score highly on the former for sticking to the racing line, mastering corners (the track map ticks off the ones you've bested), and overtaking cleanly. Aggressive drivers, meanwhile, will get points for trading paint, blocking opponents, drafting behind other vehicles, sliding around corners, and smashing rivals off the track. It's not as if one cancels out the other, either – you won't lose precision points for aggressive driving, for example – and so sometimes your progress can seem a little arbitrary. You might be a driver that likes to buffet and skid their way to the head of the pack, but you'll often earn more precision points once you're in the lead, and so your personal logo – which develops according to your performance – will pin you as a precise driver, despite you having unceremoniously shunted four or five vehicles on your bludgeoning mission to hit the front.

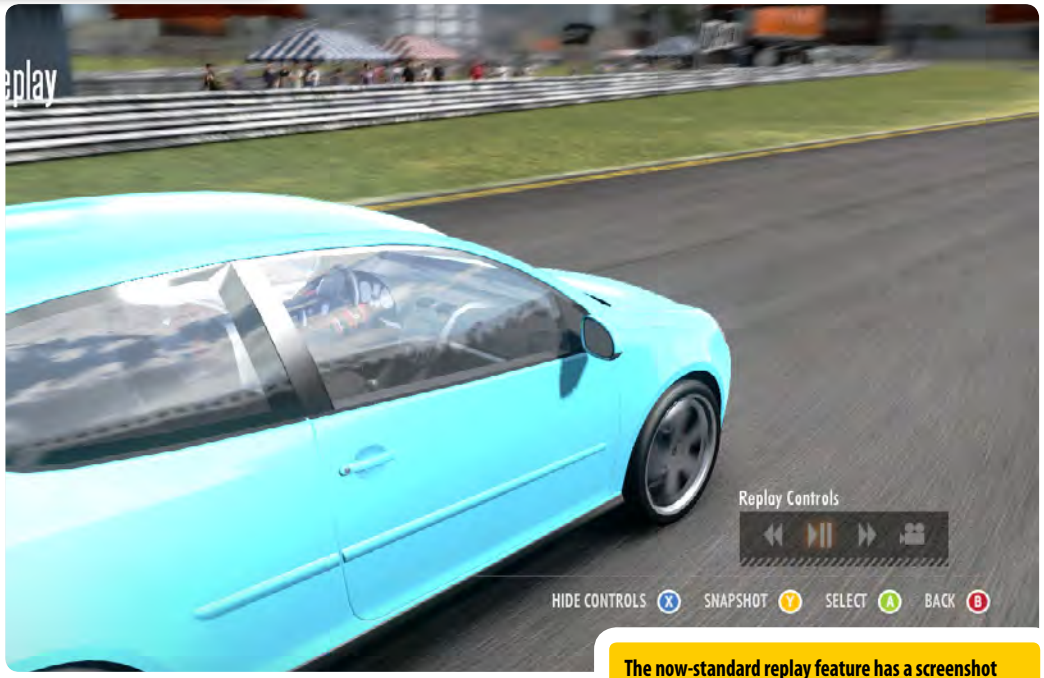
Meanwhile, you'll achieve stars for podium finishes, profile points and bonus objectives, which vary from race to race. These unlock further events, and new tiers, with more powerful vehicles available to purchase, eventually leading up to the signature Need for Speed World Tour. And on top of that, you're offered minor and master badges for certain achievements, many of which represent little more than a progress bar towards an Achievement. It's nice when you lose a race to feel like you've still accomplished something, but it feels like the kind of mollycoddling attitude that refers to failure as 'deferred success'. >



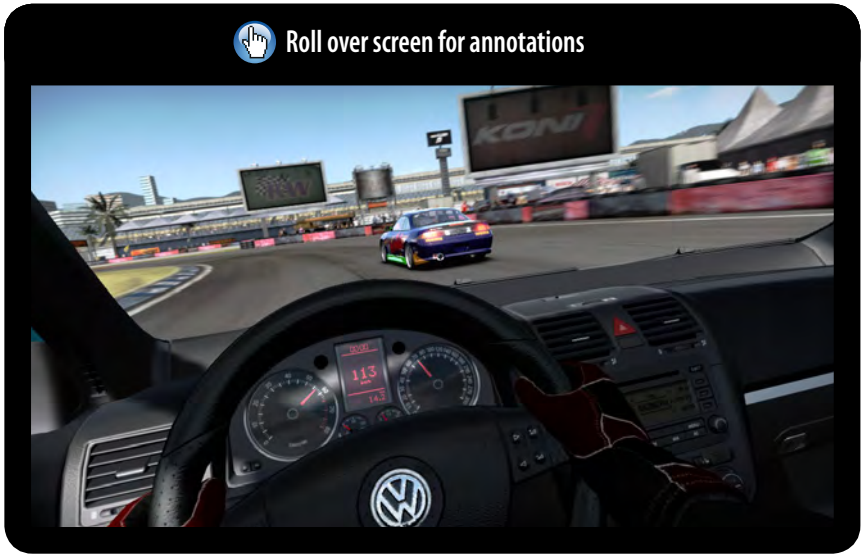
AI drivers are generally aggressive – expect plenty of jostling for position…



…though they're also prone to the odd error, making them feel pleasingly human.



The now-standard replay feature has a screenshot mode – you can upload your best snaps via Xbox Live.



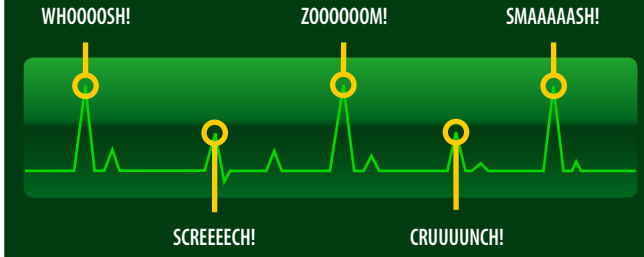
"SHIFT is grittier than Gotham, more grounded than GRID"

> Need for Speed Shift cont.

Indeed, it's not the only clumsy element here. EA's trademark polish machine obviously missed a spot when it came to the front end, because the whooshes, crashes and bangs when you select anything feel very five years ago, while EA Trax very rudely barge in after the post-race postmortem. At least the in-game graphics are more than up to snuff, with some very decent car models, impressive damage, and plenty of trackside detail.

Above all, SHIFT is a very different kind of drive to the arcade-sim hybrids you're used to. It's grittier than Gotham, more grounded than GRID, and when you unlock the really fast cars, the sensation of driving an absolute beast of a vehicle is pretty much unmatched. It still feels like there's room for improvement in places, but when you're haring around a circuit at top speed with all sorts of noise assaulting your eardrums and you realise you've not blinked for a good minute and such is your intense concentration, you won't really care. Slightly Mad Games has made Need for Speed an essential series again – and next year's game could well see it vying for pole position with the very best of its genre.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*







360Zine Verdict *An intense and immersive sim, and the best Need for Speed in years*

- In-car cam is genuinely thrilling
- Top-notch visuals
- Handling takes some getting used to

86%

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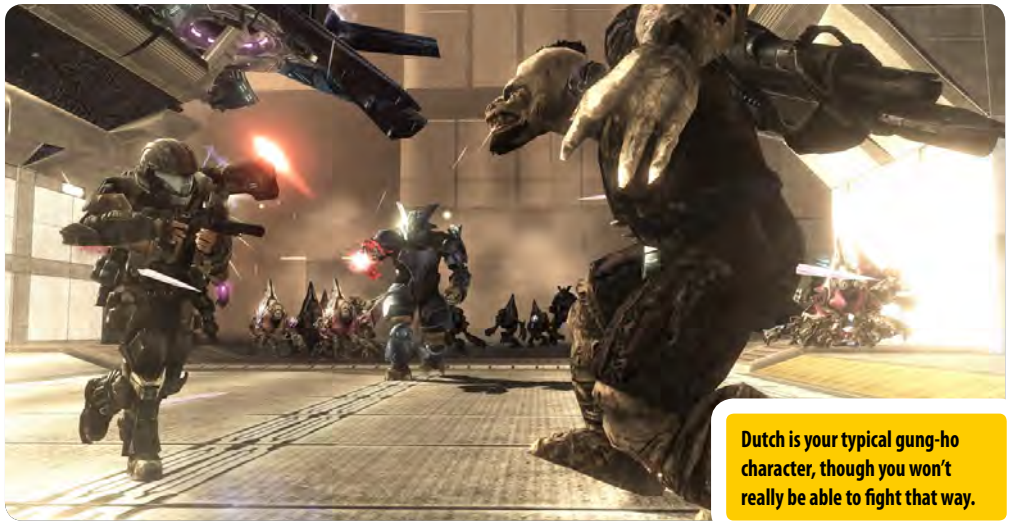
Halo 3: ODST

I am a leaf on the wind… watch how I plummet

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Bungie
Heritage: Halo series
Link: http://halo.xbox.com/en-us
OUT NOW

Wandering around the Blade Runner-inspired city of New Mombasa at night, in the boots of the mute Orbital Drop Shock Trooper known simply as Rookie (that's you, greenhorn), we're oddly reminded of Raven's recent Wolfenstein – a game criticised for its unusual structure, with a large hub leading out to its main missions. Yet ODST (nee Recon) has been widely praised for the same approach, offering some moody, atmospheric exploration in-between the flashback set-pieces that represent the stories of his missing cohorts. A curious double-standard, or further proof that Bungie really can do no wrong?

We have to admit that we enjoyed both. Though Wolfenstein's hub became progressively more populated, New Mombasa remains fairly empty, with small pockets of Covenant activity requiring you to be careful as you traipse around searching for clues to the last known locations of your squaddies. You can download and listen to audio logs from the city's residents, but otherwise it's a slow-paced meander around an empty city. The music, the impressive art design and the occasional flurry of Brute- and Grunt-blasting made it a trip we quite enjoyed making, but we can understand those who claim it's little more than padding – a way of >



Dutch is your typical gung-ho character, though you won't really be able to fight that way.

New Mombasa looks great at night (and it also plays host to one of the best Firefight maps).



FIRE, FIRE, BURNING BRIGHT

Here's why we love Firefight



Enemy hordes | **Wave goodbye** | **Skull f***ed**

Enemy hordes

It's the intensity that makes Firefight so great. It's not quite as 'backs to the wall' as Gears 2's Horde mode (after all, there's no Bloodmounts!) but as the difficulty ramps up and the waves come thicker and faster, you'll be furiously shouting instructions at your team-mates and desperately looking for cover.



Yes, you'll still be able to carry a Spartan Laser, even though you're a humble ODST.



The ODST visor highlights enemies in red and friendlies in green, allowing you to see in the dark more easily.



> Halo 3: ODST continued

extending a campaign that's perhaps a little on the anaemic side.

The flashbacks are triggered by finding a beacon signal and then hunting around for an object highlighted bright yellow – be it a sniper rifle hanging from overhead wires, or a helmet embedded in a monitor. You'll then be in control of one of your squadmates, where a more traditional Halo experience awaits. It's almost like a Firefly reunion, with three of your four buddies played by Nathan Fillion (Buck), Alan Tudyk (Mickey) and Adam Baldwin (Dutch) and so it's little surprise that the voice acting is excellent. That doesn't really extend to the audio logs, sadly – while they tell an interesting story about New Mombasa's residents, there's some amateur-hour melodramatics on display here, contrasting wildly with the subtle work from the leads. Surprisingly, the story doesn't really go anywhere. There's a melancholy tone to the Rookie's exploration, partly down to the fantastic soundtrack, but anyone expecting anything of dramatic significance will likely be disappointed. Though the action beats are easily as good as anything in Halo 3, the plot is dramatically inert. Even the action stutters. A Warthog section during the second flashback feels clumsy – not helped by the imbecilic friendly AI – while the final stretch features a trundling set-piece, followed by a fairly ordinary stand-off. Those 30 seconds of fun are still there, but fans should rightly expect more of this series.

> "A Warthog section during the second flashback feels clumsy"

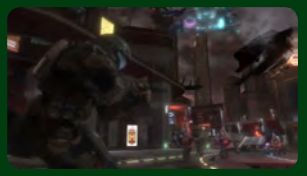
And when we talk about the action being as good as in Halo 3, that's both praise and criticism. There's little here that you won't have seen before, particularly if you've played the previous game recently in anticipation of ODST. There's a Scarab battle, vehicle sections, a sequence where you get the chance to pilot an enemy Banshee… it's all just a touch too familiar. It repeats itself even during its six-hour campaign – Phantoms arrive, drop off Grunts, Jackals and Brutes, you defeat them, >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time…



10 MINUTES
The drop sequence could well be the most dramatic opening in Halo game – terrific stuff.



1 HOUR
Getting your bearings in New Mombasa – just why *is* your captain's helmet embedded in a monitor?



2 HOURS
A great performance from Nathan Fillion as Buck – it's like controlling Malcolm Reynolds!



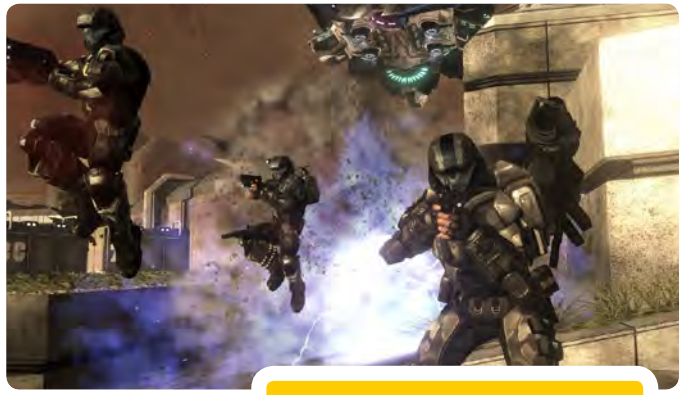
5 HOURS
Ramping up the action with the ONI Alpha Site set-piece and the excellent defence of the Pelican.



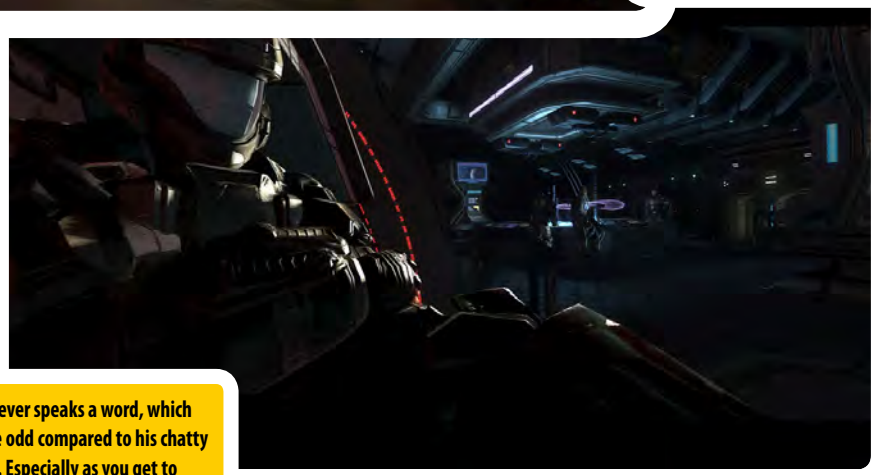
10 HOURS+
Firefight will keep ODST at the top of the online charts for a while… at least until Modern Warfare 2, that is.



The new silenced SMG has significant recoil, but it's pretty handy at times.



Security Zone isn't our favourite Firefight map, but some will like its more open areas for additional tactical opportunities.

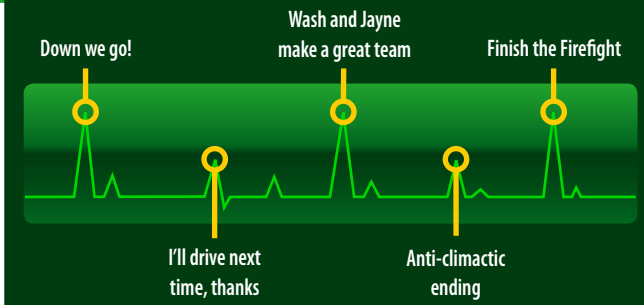


The Rookie never speaks a word, which seems a little odd compared to his chatty squad mates. Especially as you get to play as the latter on several occasions.



The new health system means you'll have to take even Grunt encounters seriously – there' no recharging shield here.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Halo 3: ODST continued

and the cycle repeats a couple more times. Mission over, job done. It's not quite going through the motions, but it's close.

Thankfully, the gunplay remains as enjoyable as ever. The AI is still unrivalled, the balance almost perfect, and the guns hugely satisfying. The silenced SMG is a welcome addition, and the new pistol is a return to the glory days of Halo: Combat Evolved. Slightly overpowered, but perfect for one-shotting Brutes whose armour you've removed with a plasma weapon.

With that in mind, it's little surprise that the highlight is the new co-operative Firefight mode, which might well be a direct lift of Gears of War 2's Horde mode, but it's easily the best reason to pick up ODST. Though some of the maps are a little too open, there are a few stages you'll want to try time and time again. In particular, the ONI Alpha Site is one of the picks of the bunch – no real surprise as the single-player set-piece there is one of the campaign high points.

It's hard to forget that ODST was originally planned as an expansion before being bumped up to full-price status, and it's a millstone the game struggles to carry, despite the excellence of Firefight. We imagine that we'd be a little more generous had we seen a LIVE release at the same price as, say, The Lost and Damned. But as a full-price game, it's lacking compared to some of its contemporaries.

Still, it's Halo, and if more of the same is what you wanted, then you'll almost certainly be glad that that's what Bungie's given you.

360Zine Verdict

Short but sweet – it feels expensive at full-price, but you'll love Firefight

- Terrific voice acting and music
- Firefight is superb
- Nothing new, and the engine feels old

83%

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Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Piranha Bytes
Heritage: Gothic series
Link: http://risen.deepsilver.com/game/index.html
Out: 2nd October

Risen

Adventures of might or magic

"Right from the outset you're given important decisions to make"



Though some of the creatures are little more than variations on well-worn ideas, a few of Risen's creations are much more interesting.

Curiously similar to publisher Deep Silver's recent PC-to-console RPG Sacred 2, Risen bears a few of the hallmarks of a rocky road from lead format to secondary. Granted, the original was no stunner, but 360 owners are treated to muddy textures, frequent frame-rate judders, rampant pop-up and the general sensation that you're playing a game that looks for the most part like it belongs to the last generation of consoles, with only a decentish draw distance and some nice lighting effects to prove that it's a 2009 title. Fortunately we're no graphics whores, and ultimately once you're past the shonky visuals, Risen turns out to be ample proof that you shouldn't judge a book by it's cover. Or, indeed, it's unintentionally amusing title screen.

The plot's not wildly original, we'll admit. You play as a rather waxy-faced young stowaway hiding aboard a ship until, buffeted by storms, it splits in two, shipwrecking you on a mysterious island. Initially, it seems there's only one survivor, the impressively proportioned Sara, with your first task being to escort the young lady to safety, fending off hungry Sea Eagles with a long stick on your way inland. It's almost exactly what you'd expect from a Western PC-centric action-RPG – you explore from a third-person perspective, engaging the island's various creatures and human enemies in fairly basic attack-block-or-dodge combat, before looting corpses and settlements, cooking the odd piece of raw rat meat on fires and stoves, and trading items with the island's residents.



Where Risen differs from its peers is in its structure, which is far more open-ended than usual. Right from the outset you're given important decisions to make, without necessarily being aware of them. Rather than rousing Sara from her prone position on the beach, you can simply choose to ignore her and look after number one. Who wants a tagalong on a creepy, mysterious island anyway? Especially when she rejects every cave you come across as a potential safe haven. She might have had a point about the first one, mind, as it was full of gnomes which >

THE ART OF FIGHTING

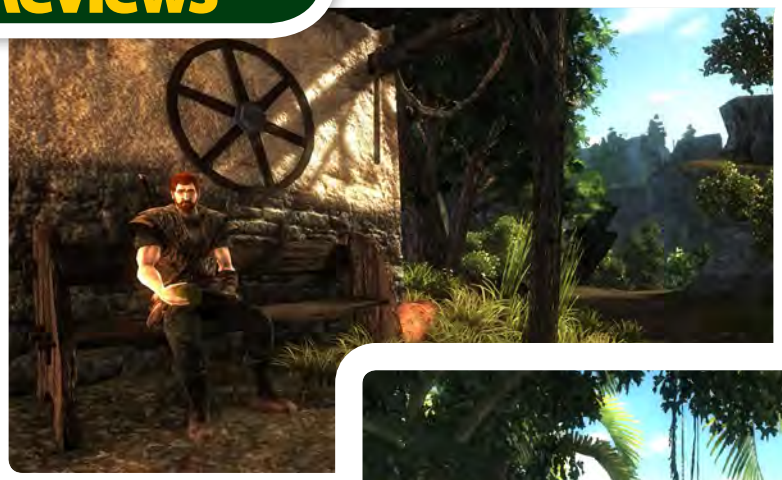
Swords and sorcery on the isle of Faranga



Ice creamed | **Staff meeting** | **Chop and block**

Ice creamed

Join the Inquisition and you'll be trained to use magic. This is just as effective as swordplay at dealing with the deadly local wildlife, and while a few of the spells look pretty feeble, it's fun to put your foes in deep freeze with a few well-aimed bolts of ice magic.





It's Jeremy Irons! What's he doing here?



It might look like an island paradise from this shot, but believe us when we say you wouldn't want to be stranded here.

Roll over screen for annotations



> Risen continued

our as-yet-undeveloped combat skills were unable to defeat. Venture inland and you'll meet ranger Jan, who'll warn you about the mysterious robe-wearing Inquisition, deriding them as a brainwashing cult. Choosing whether to ignore him or to heed his advice and train as a fighter makes a huge difference to the rest of the game – picking might over magic naturally affects your character progression, but it also changes the game world and the quests you're offered. This isn't a binary 'harvest or save?' or 'sacrifice yourself for others?' choice which produces little more than a few different lines of dialogue. Not 20 minutes in and you're essentially deciding how a major part of the game will pan out. It's brave – some would say foolhardy – for Deep Silver to leave many potentially game-changing developments undiscovered if the player happens not to wander in a particular direction, but those who don't like their big decisions telegraphed or spoon-fed will undoubtedly relish the chance to genuinely shape their avatar's life and world.

"Players will relish the chance to genuinely shape their avatar's life"

All of which makes Risen quite a tricky game to review. After all, a single 30-hour playthrough feels like you're only scratching the surface of what the game has to offer, but then that's just encouragement to start again. Though it's extremely rough around the edges, and its Gothic-like combat won't be to everyone's tastes, anyone looking for a game whose choices have a real meaning and significance over and above minor cosmetic difference will find Risen hard to resist.



360Zine Verdict

An awkward but oddly engaging RPG for the loot-lover in you

- Choices have real consequences
- Huge game world and lengthy story
- Looks and feels like a last-gen game

78%

In 360Zine Issue 36



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Email: dave.taylor@cranberrypublishing.com
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Commercial Director: Duncan Ferguson
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