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360zine

Issue 54 | May 2011

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



PORTAL 2

Game of the year already? Find out inside



PREVIEWED!

CHILD OF EDEN

Hands-on with Mizuguchi's masterpiece

PLUS!



REVIEWED!
SHIFT 2: UNLEASHED



REVIEWED!
MORTAL KOMBAT



PREVIEWED!
GEARS OF WAR 3



PREVIEWED!
BATTLEFIELD 3





Welcome to 360Zine



Is anyone having a better year than Electronic Arts? Already this year the publishing giant has given us Dead Space 2, Bulletstorm, Crisis 2, Fight Night Champion and now the magnificent Portal 2, an early frontrunner for game of the year.

Not to be outdone, Ubisoft is bringing the thunder in an altogether more artistic fashion. The glorious Child of Eden adorns our cover this issue and rightly so – it's a real journey for the senses, and a trip inside the mind of its ingenious creator, Tetsuya Mizuguchi.

If all that sounds a little bit too fancy for you, we've still got our fair share of bloodletting this month, with a review of the surprising Mortal Kombat and an in-depth preview of the Gears of War 3 Beta. Toasty!

Jon Denton, Editor
360zine@gamerzines.com

360Zine FEEDBACK!
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MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



Dave Scammell
An FPS machine.



Thomas Worthington
Getting his Capcom on.



Mortal Kombat
Reviewed and rated

Don't miss! This month's top highlights



CHILD OF EDEN
HANDS ON PREVIEW



Battlefield 3
In-depth preview



Gears of War 3
Beta tested



Portal 2
Reviewed inside

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Dragon's Dogma | Battlefield 3 |
| Spider-Man: Edge of Time | Gears of War 3 |
| Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City | Portal 2 |
| Child of Eden | Shift 2: Unleashed |
| | Mortal Kombat |

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ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS

L.A. NOIRE



20 MAY

ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/LANOIRE



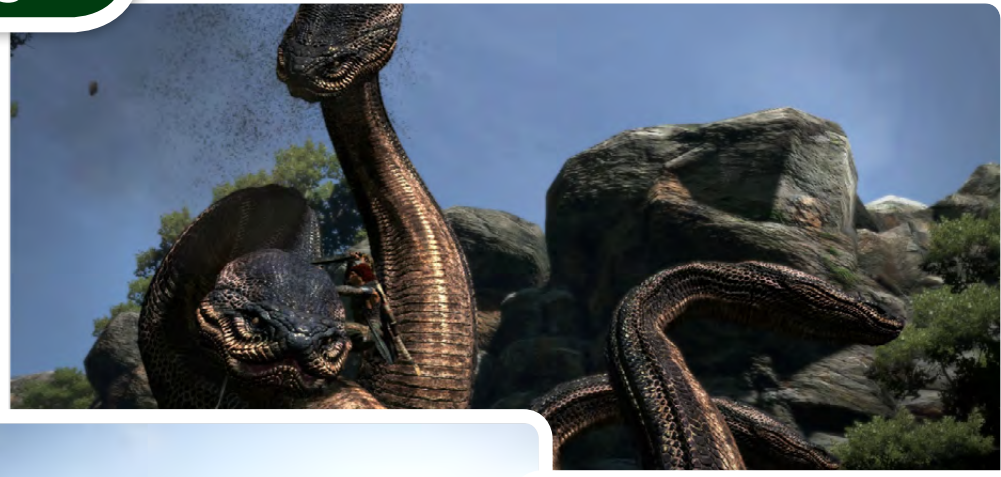
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**PREVIEW
FEEDBACK!**
Click here to
tell us what
you think of
Dragon's Dogma



Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house
Heritage: Monster Hunter
Link: www.capcom.co.jp/dd
ETA: 2012



FIRST LOOK

Dragon's Dogma

How to train your dragon

What's the story?

If you were to tell us that Dragon's Dogma was the result of collaboration between two Producers and Directors whose works included Resident Evil 4 and Devil May Cry 4, we'd ask if you were mistaken. Far from the realm of floppy-haired gunslingers and spooky goings on, Dragon's Dogma reeks of something far more Western.

What do we know?

In an openworld terrorised by dragons and other mythical beasts, one hero is driven to traverse this landscape after a dragon attacks his home and steals his heart. There's a story here, one that will make itself more apparent over time, but at the centre stage of Dragon's Dogma are the beasts you'll be tasked with slaying. It's a tough job and ultimately, one that can't be done alone. A Pawn system which allows up to three teammates to be employed allows you to mix and match a plethora of fighters, striders and mages.

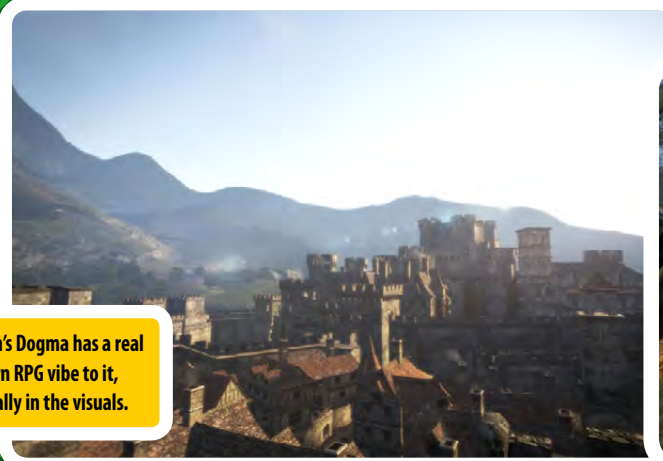
From four-headed Hydras to Griffins and the game's namesake, players can deal heavy damage while another scales the beast and another cast's healing spells. Think Monster Hunter meets Shadow of the Colossus and you're not far off.

When do we get more?

After just a glimpse of what Dragon's Dogma has to offer, we're eager to see what other creatures accommodate the game's gargantuan overworld. Expect to see more as the game nears launch early next year.

Anything else to declare?

While co-operative play seems like an obvious fit for Dragon's Dogma, Capcom is remaining tight-lipped on just how the confirmed multiplayer features will work. Will we be able to bring in friends to join the fight? We hope so.



Dragon's Dogma has a real Western RPG vibe to it, especially in the visuals.



Picture something between Monster Hunter and Oblivion and you'll be halfway there.



"An open-world terrorised by dragons and other mythical beasts"



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FOR THE GEARS AGE"
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Publisher: Activision
Developer: Beenox
Heritage: Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions
Link: www.herohq.com/spidermanedgeoftime
ETA: Autumn



FIRST LOOK

Spider-Man: Edge of Time

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
 Click here to tell us what you think of Spider-Man: Edge of Time

Is that tingling Spider senses or just pins and needles?

What's the story?

If developer Beenox learnt anything from last year's Shattered Dimensions it's that too many Spider-Men can ruin a plot. Knowing this, Edge of Time spins a different weave, one with just two web-slingers working from different points in time.

What do we know?

When an evil scientist from the Spider-Man 2099 universe tries to rewrite his past, heroes from the present and the future must team up to undo his work and prevent the death of Peter Parker. Edge of Time spins its yarn in the timelines of Peter Parker's Amazing Spider-Man and Miguel O'Hara AKA Spider-Man 2099.

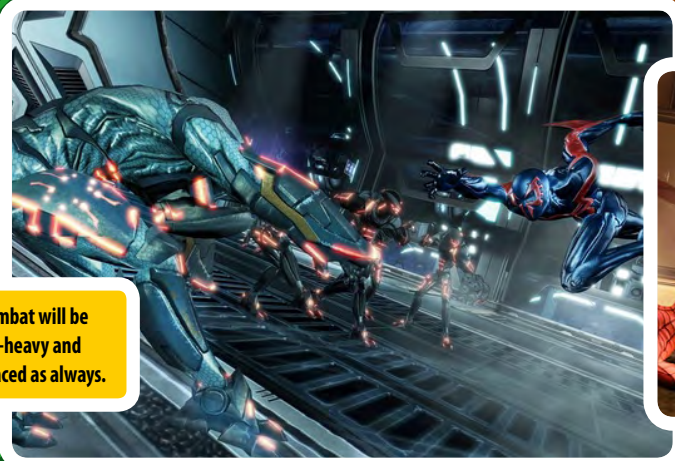
While they're each kitted out with their own unique powers, players will want to see the new 'Cause and Effect' mechanic in motion as Spider-Man 2099 directs the Amazing Spider-Man to perform actions that will affect the future. For example, a large robot causing trouble for Spider-Man 2099 can be visited by the Amazing Spider-Man in the past where our mechanical foe is just a prototype and therefore easily sabotaged. As this happens, you'll see the immediate effects in a picture-in-picture cubbyhole showing how your work has benefitted or hindered Spider-Man 2099's progress.

When do we get more?

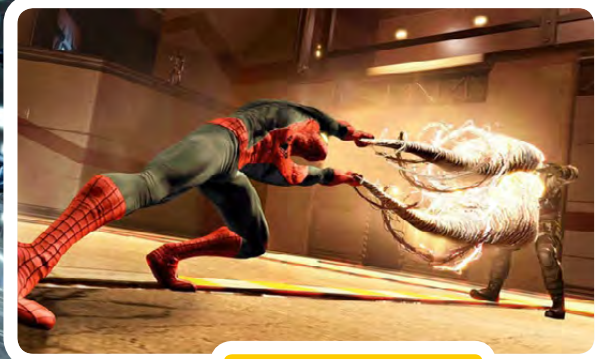
Assuming, of course, that no one goes back in time and does something to change the course of history, Edge of Time will be swinging onto shelves later on in the year.

Anything else to declare?

Expect plenty of witty banter, subtle digs and a big manly hug when it's all



The combat will be combo-heavy and fast-paced as always.



Visually, Edge of Time is a step up compared to previous Spider-Man games, helped by the 2099 styling. It's about time Spidey joined Batman at the top of the superhero tree.



"Players will want to see the new 'Cause and Effect' mechanic in motion"

RESIDENT EVIL
 Operation Raccoon City

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Slant Six Games
Heritage: Resident Evil series
Link: www.residentevil.com
ETA: Winter 2011



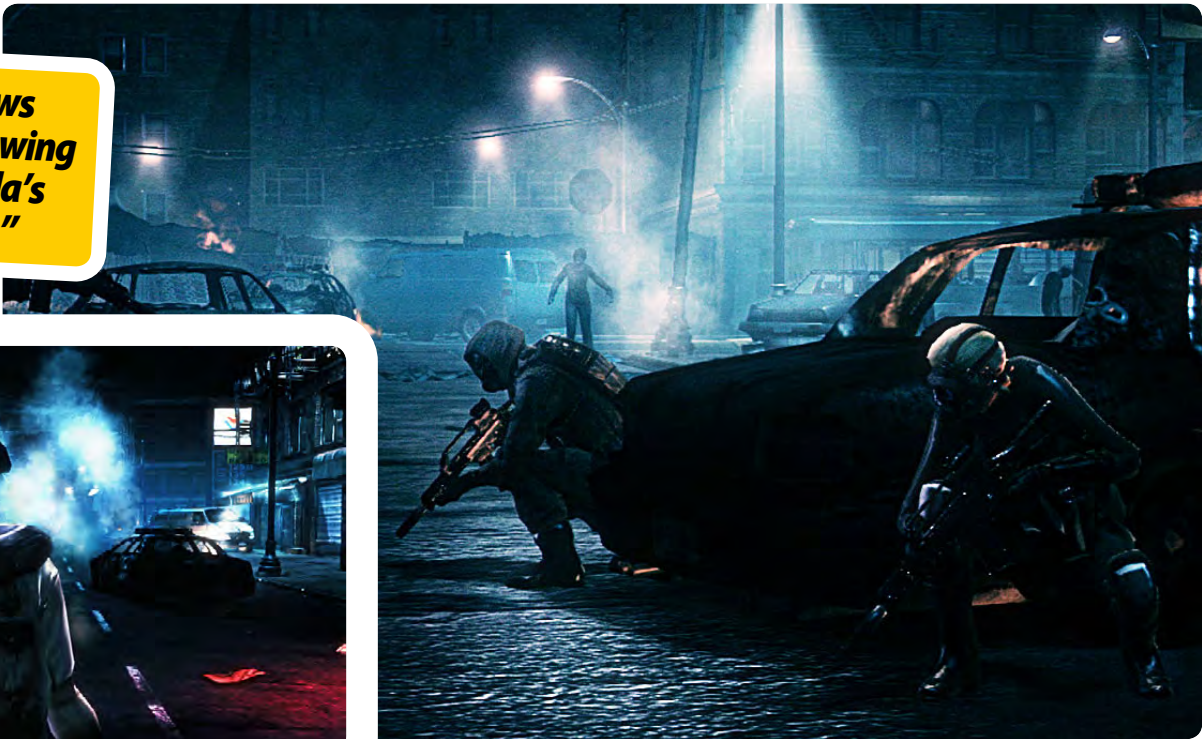
FIRST LOOK

Resident Evil Operation Raccoon City

You can take the horror out of the city, but...

"The game throws players into the glowing masks of Umbrella's Security Service"

**You can move...
 AND SHOOT!**



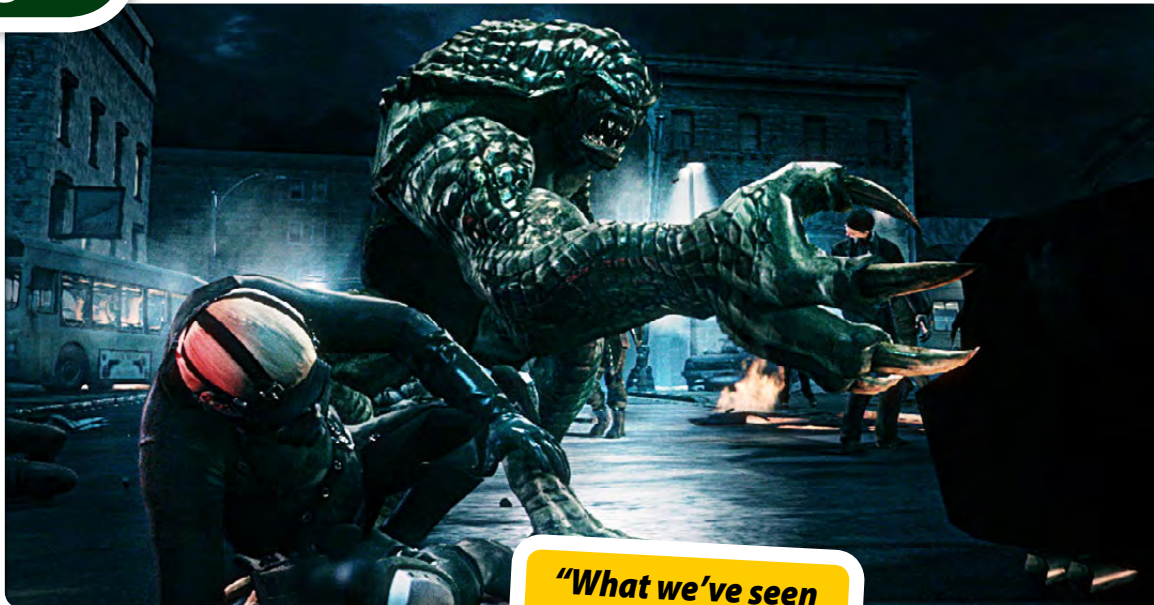
What's the story?

'Forget what you know about Resident Evil' – it's a phrase that is met by the moans and groans of fans as they watch a beloved horror series shuffle towards its next identity crisis. Still, those words couldn't be truer for Operation Raccoon City, taking us back to the quiet mountain city where it all began for an action-packed twist you'd never have expected...

What do we know?

Operation Raccoon City throws players into the glowing masks of Umbrella's Security Service, a team of four elite soldiers sent into the original T-virus outbreak. Their job is to cover up the pharmaceutical corporation's involvement, and to do it by any means necessary.

You may not feel comfortable playing the role of the bad guys but you'll easily settle into the game's new familiar format that's more of a Gears of War meets Left 4



"What we've seen so far looks very promising indeed"



> Resident Evil continued

Dead hybrid that's then dipped generously in the Resident Evil universe. You'll duck behind cover, roadie run through streets (which is where the Gears of War comparisons are most evident) and yes, move and shoot at the same time – all up to today's standards but relatively new features for this series.

Each member of your team has something unique to offer to the mission's success, from Bertha's medic skills allowing her to heal and boost players to Vector's camouflage, which enables him to sneak up on his prey for a stealth kill.

They're skills that are necessary to take on everything in your way, from Umbrella's unpredictable B.O.W.s to the Government's Spec Ops sent in to interrupt your clean-up operation. This turns zombies, the most readily available resource, into something of a pawn. Causing an enemy to bleed will attract nearby undead to their freshly prepared feast and there's something reassuring about

having a limitless number of meat shield readily available. We have to say: sometimes it sure is good being bad.

When do we get more?

What we've seen looks very promising indeed. We've already begun recruiting our teammates for when Operation Raccoon City drops later this year, and will bring you a full preview very soon.

Anything else to declare?

Running between the events of Resident Evil 2 and 3, we're promised our paths will cross a few familiar faces along the way, the most important of these being floppy-haired officer Leon S. Kennedy – as he's one of the team's primary targets. It will be up to you to decide whether Leon lives or dies, thus changing the fate of the Resident Evil story. This one has multiple endings written all over it.

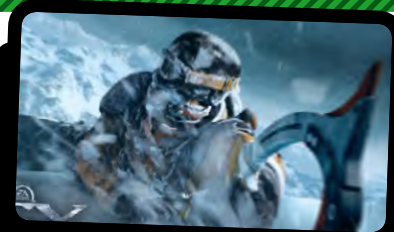
INCOMING

A fistful of top new titles coming to 360...



Red Faction Armageddon

Publisher: THQ | **ETA:** June
 The sequel to Guerilla is almost upon us, and bringing the kind of volume of destructibility that should bring a smile to many a man-child's face. Most of the game is now set underground, with a malevolent alien race causing all sorts of problems for our bald space marine. It's not about story, it's about smashing.



SSX

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** 2012
 The early teaser trailer had series fans worried, but recent developer diaries suggest that SSX is still the all-tricking, melon-flipping slice of madness that it really should be. It's all about careering down enormous mountains as quickly as possible, avoiding certain death and hauling together as many trick points as possible. A much welcome return for one of gaming's greats.

UFC: Personal Trainer

Publisher: THQ | **ETA:** 2011
 It's not often a fitness game will make it into the hallowed pages of 360Zine, but our love for all things Mixed Martial Arts has our interest piqued. Also, if you want to get in shape, following the example of UFC fighters is probably the best way to do it. This Kinect-only effort features workouts from highly respected industry names, and will get you dangerously close to kneeling your TV in half. Awesome.



EDF: Insect Armageddon

Publisher: Namco Bandai | **ETA:** July
 The second Armageddon this month, and the sequel to cult favourite EDF 2017, Insect Armageddon is a balls-to-the-wall shooter with giant insects, huge destructibility and a wry sense of humour. It's B-Movie gaming at its finest, and just the kind of nonsense we all need from time to time. Aim for the thorax!



Max Payne 3

Publisher: Rockstar | **ETA:** 2011
 With L.A. Noire now finished, Rockstar turns its attention to its favourite soliloquy-spewing antihero. Max Payne 3 is actually the first in-house developed Max in the series, with the first two coming out of Finnish superstudio Remedy. It's not straying too far from its roots though, with the focus still very much on bullet-time diving, two-gun firing madness, and the kind of story that makes a Cradle of Filth video seem like an episode of Rainbow. It's good to have the big man back.



RAGE

Publisher: Bethesda | **ETA:** September
 It's been a long time coming, but RAGE will finally be with us shortly after this summer. At its simplest it's Quake meets Fallout, a giant post-apocalyptic world to explore but with proper id-powered shooting underpinning it all. It also looks absolutely stunning. To be honest, John Carmack wouldn't have it any other way.

UPCOMING

MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● L.A. Noire ○ Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shadows of the Damned ○ Duke Nukem Forever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Catherine ○ EDF: IA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deus Ex: Human Revolution ○ DiRT 3



Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer:
 Q Entertainment
Heritage: Lumines,
 Meteos, Rez
Link: www.childofeden.com
ETA: June

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

SPECIAL PREVIEW

Child of Eden

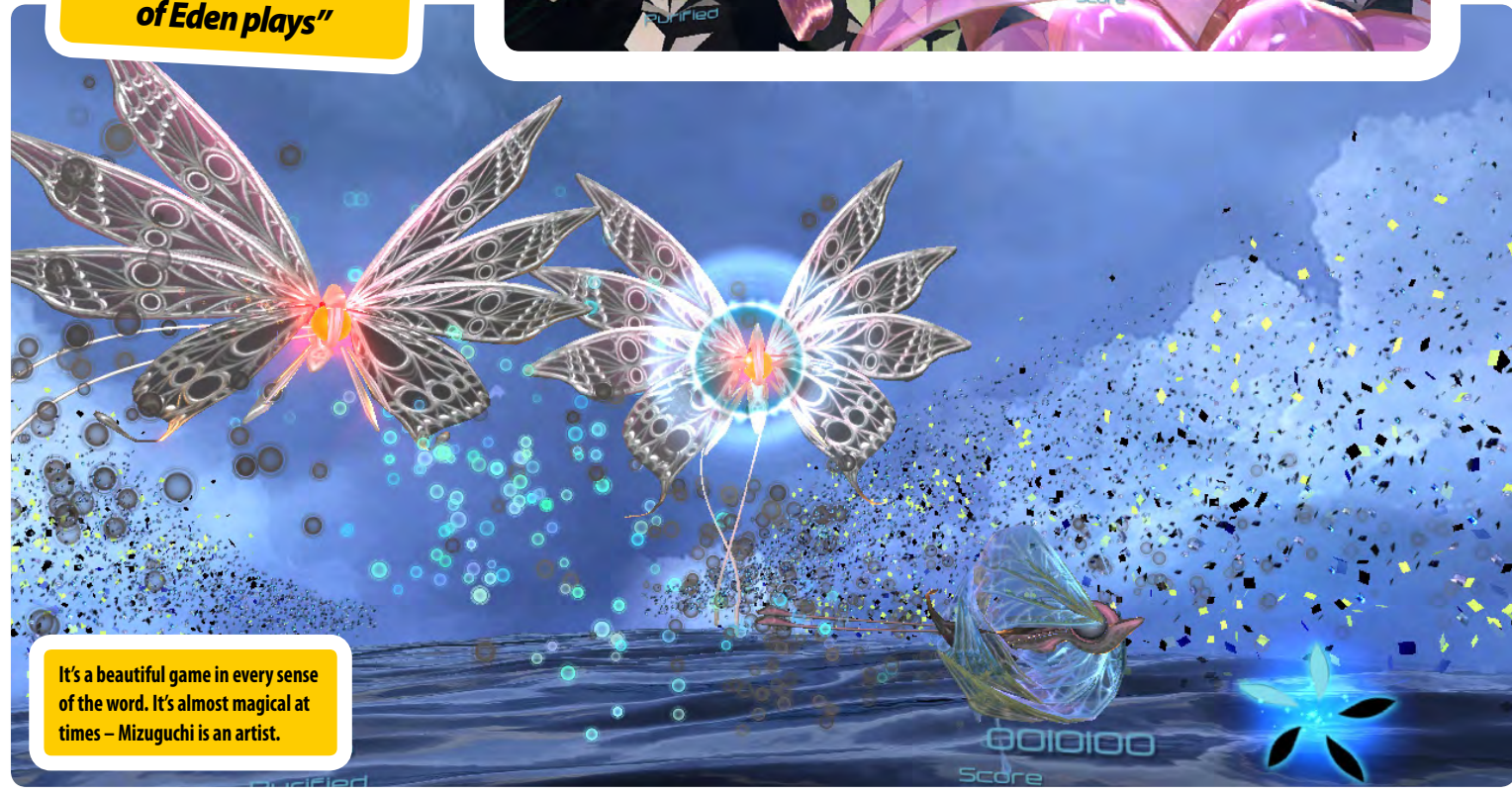
The day Kinect arrived

So, how's that camera doing on top of your TV? Getting much use? When was the last time you nearly kicked in your TV screen playing Kinect sports or danced around like an idiot on Dance Central? Yeah, it's been a while for us too. In truth, we always knew it was going to be this way. Kinect, for all its good intentions and fantastic technology, was never really for us. The 'hardcore'. Well, until now.

It was always going to take someone with the creativity, vision and guile of Tetsuya Mizuguchi to really turn Kinect's potential into reality, and that's exactly what the mind behind Lumines and Rez has done with the startling Child of Eden. It's a first-person, on-rails shooter that you control with your hands. But it's so much more than that.

If you've played – or should that be 'experienced' – Rez, then you should have an idea of how Child of Eden plays. Basically, you have to save a girl called Lumi, who exists within the digital collective of all human thought (Eden) from viruses. To do this, you have to shoot down these viruses

"If you've played – or should that be 'experienced' – Rez then you should have an idea of how Child of Eden plays"



It's a beautiful game in every sense of the word. It's almost magical at times – Mizuguchi is an artist.



Child of Eden



If you've played Rez, you'll know what to expect. Kinect does add a layer of depth, though.

> Child of Eden continued

using your hands. This is all just a convenient excuse for Mizuguchi and his team of talent to create some of the most gorgeous visual and aural playgrounds in gaming history.

As in Rez, there's pumping music playing the whole time. Every action

you take within the world creates a sound, be it a snare snap or the tinkle of a synthesised chime, and without really knowing it or meaning to, you begin to create music on the fly as you play. This drags you into the experience in such an unusual way that it almost becomes transcendental – you can play Child of Eden without even

realising you're doing it, as your brain drifts off into its subconscious to sort out some of the crap you've left lying around back there.

So far, so Rez, then. So how does Child of Eden differ from that 11-year-old masterpiece? Well, firstly it looks incredible. Mizuguchi told us that he wanted a much more organic look than Rez's collage of wireframe surrealism, and that has permeated Child of Eden's every pixel. In one level, we saw a phoenix build itself out of fiery crystals, butterflies metamorphosise from larval cocoons and even flew around a translucent blue whale. In space. It's not even worth trying to analyse Child of Eden the first time you play it. Just

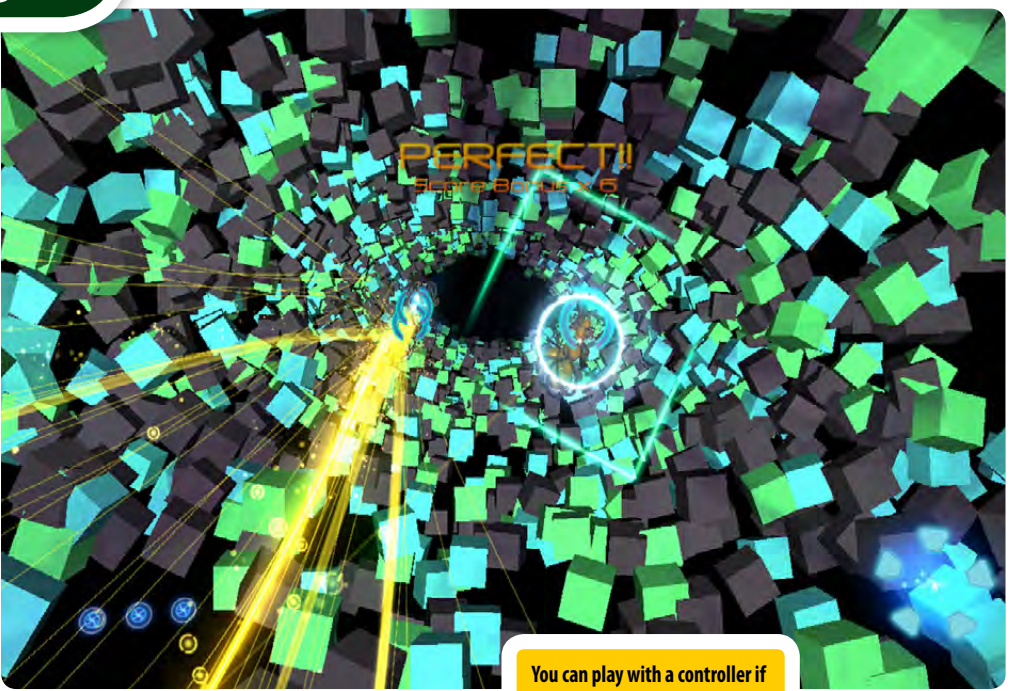
accept it for what it is, sit back and enjoy the ride.

So how exactly does it work with Kinect? In short, very well. This is unquestionably the most sensitive and accurate Kinect has been since its inception, and we had no problem with it failing to detect motion or position at any point. It uses both hands, so your right paints a multiple lock-on target over the screen (a la Rez) and a flick of the wrist fires missiles into the screen. It's oddly tactile, especially when you have it down to just a subtle sweep of the fingers.

The left hand is tracer fire – a rapid stream of pink bullets with their own snare track, ideal for quickly taking



Child of Eden



You can play with a controller if you'd rather. Or, of course, if you don't have a Kinect camera.

> Child of Eden continued

down fast-moving enemies. You can only use one at a time, and you'll soon learn to switch hands based on colourful cues. Put both mitts in the air, and you'll unleash Euphoria, a smart bomb effect that clears the screen of baddies for its short duration.

It makes you feel like a conductor of sorts, directing the action and the music with easy yet deliberate hand movements. It feels like Kinect is actually enhancing the experience rather than shoehorned into the game as a gimmick.

Of course, you *can* play Child of Eden with a controller, and here is where it most accurately resembles Rez. In truth, it's probably easier to lose

yourself in the hypnotic world when you're just moving your thumbs rather than your arms, but even that small barrier between you and the screen feels like a step backwards once you've played it with Kinect.

As with Rez too, vibration plays a crucial part in proceedings. Having a constantly buzzing pulse that deepens as you head further into the levels is not only satisfying, it helps to pull you into that transient state. During his demo, Mizuguchi popped a controller into his back pocket as he played with Kinect, so the vibrations could be felt on his butt cheeks. Each to their own. If you have the capability, up to four vibrating 360 pads can be used, each





Child of Eden



***"Gaming needs
Child of Eden. And
therefore, so do we"***

offering a different kind of frequency. Use that however your imagination sees fit. What is recommended, though, is getting some sort of buzz going when you're playing Child of Eden. Interpret that however you want, too.

The real question then with Child of Eden, is will it appeal to the people? Rez, despite being a darling of games critics, was a failure at retail, and child of Eden's similarly brave visual style could prove off-putting to Kinect owners used to seeing day-glo avatars leaping

across their HDTVs. Hopefully people will be drawn into Mizuguchi's gorgeous world and will truly unlock the power of that thing above their TV.

For the rest of us though, this is what we've been waiting for. Not only is Child of Eden the long-awaited sequel to Rez that we all thought we'd never get, it's a beast all of its own; a glorious journey into the mind of an artist and a glimpse at what this medium is capable of when bald marines are left on the Apache for a few hours. In short, gaming needs Child of Eden. And therefore, so do we. ●



BATTLEFIELD
3

Publisher: EA
Developer: DICE
Heritage: Battlefield
Bad Company 2
Link: www.ea.com/uk/battlefield3
ETA: 2011

PREVIEW

Battlefield 3

The new champion?

Call of Duty has a hell of a fight on its hands. The world's biggest game has been dominating the software charts with relative ease for the past few years, but the chaps at EA and DICE have clearly had enough. After years of posturing and rumours, Battlefield 3 is finally coming, and it's about to blow the bloody doors off.

By now, you've probably seen some of the tantalisingly action-packed trailers that DICE has drip-fed the slaving shooter junkies out there, and while they are showing off the glorious-looking PC version, we've been assured that the 360 effort will not be far behind. It's an absolutely beautiful-looking videogame, featuring detail, lighting and human movement, the likes of which we just haven't seen before.

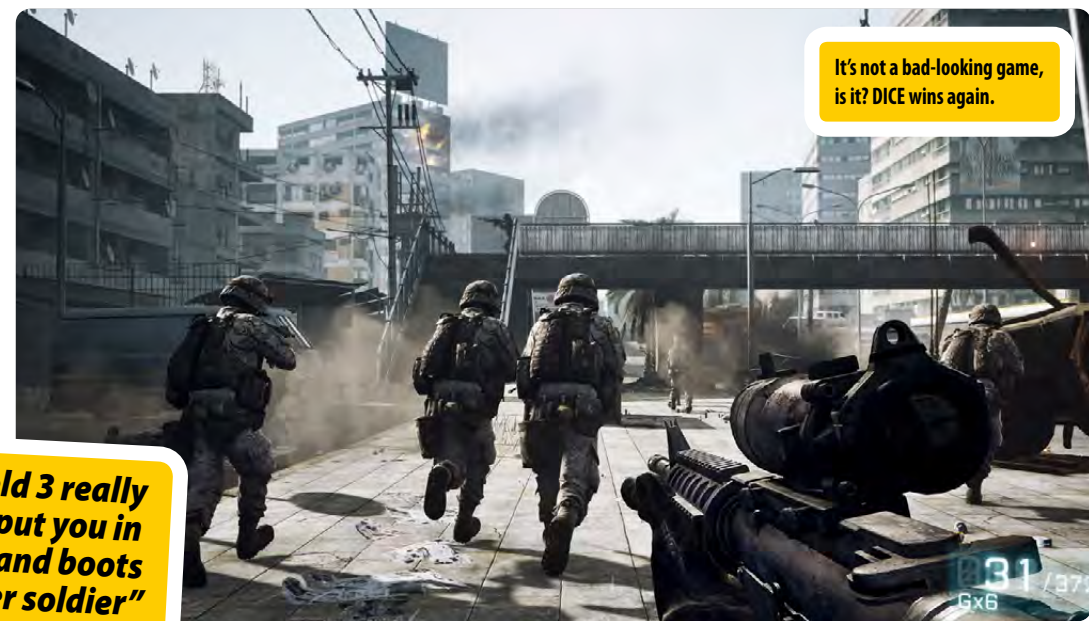
The single-player, a renewed focus this time out, is set in a very modern-day conflict, as is the fashion. In fact, it's all based in or around the Iraq/Iran border, so you know what to expect visually. Harsh light, swirling dust, tall buildings that look like they're plucked from a 1970's satellite town and earthquakes.

In an effort to show off the beautiful new Frostbite 2.0 engine >

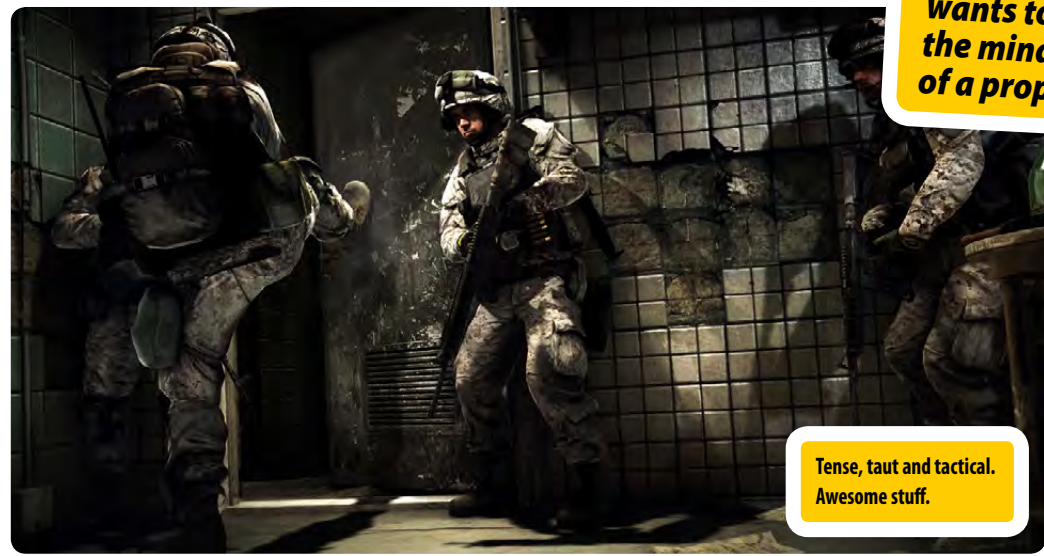


Maps... Instructions...
Important army things.

BATTLEFIELD 3



"Battlefield 3 really wants to put you in the mind and boots of a proper soldier"



> Battlefield 3 cont.

and all its destructible madness, DICE has thrown in a natural disaster to spice up an already danger-strewn battleground. Yes, the ground can literally rip up beneath your feet in certain scripted sequences, as well as all

the usual destructibility we've grown accustomed to through Battlefield Bad Company and its impressive sequel. Fire a rocket launcher at a building and its knows about it. DICE is promising that this scenery-tearing brilliance will fully affect the story and the mission, as well as the gameplay, too.

So, there's no denying that Battlefield 3 looks the part, but DICE has struggled with single-player campaigns in the past. What makes this one different? Well, it's not just about the shooting. Battlefield 3 really wants to put you in the mind and the boots of a proper soldier on the frontlines of a modern conflict, where your every decision is crucial to your own – and your squad's – survival. At points, one of your teammates might go down under fire, and you'll have to drag them to safety before you can even think about firing back. This isn't just your run-of-the-mill duck shoot. Battlefield has always been brainier than that, and it looks like Battlefield 3 really captures the drama and terror of being in a conflict.

Of course, there's still plenty of shooting to be done. By now, everyone who owns a 360 has played at least a

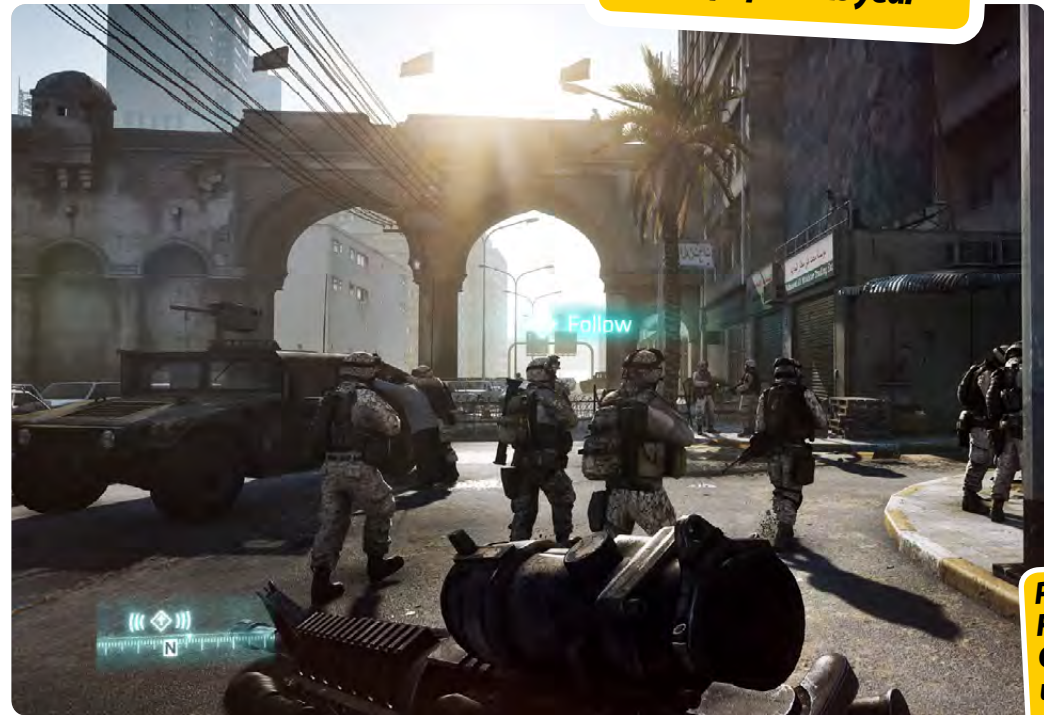
few first-person shooters, so the excitement of looking down a scope and blasting an enemy is diminishing with every shooter that passes through. To counter this, DICE is making sure that Battlefield 3's AI is top notch, and also that its sound is even better than previous efforts. And if you've ever heard the delicious crack of a Bad Company 2 >



BATTLEFIELD 3



"EA is really fighting for the top spot this year"



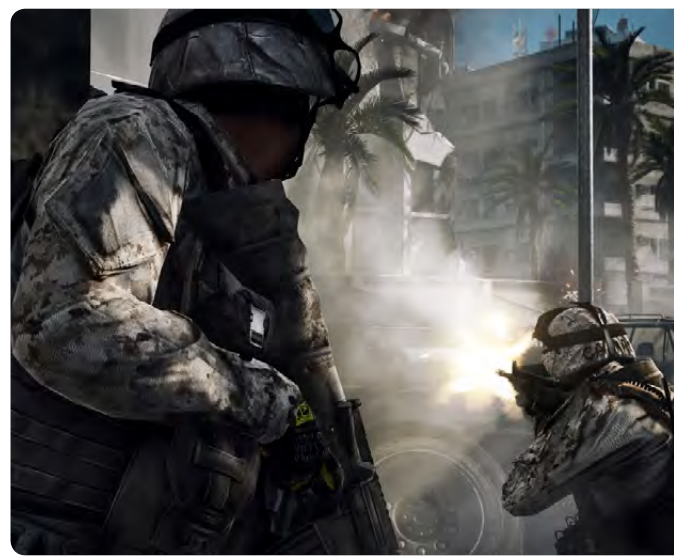
**PREVIEW
FEEDBACK!**
Click here to tell us what you think of Battlefield 3

> Battlefield 3 cont.

sniper rifle, you'll know that's no mean feat. This will be one seriously loud and meaty aural experience.

Despite all the hard work DICE is putting into the single-player mode, though, Battlefield 3, much like the competition, will live and die by its multiplayer. Many, including ourselves, would argue that Bad Company 2 is currently the finest multiplayer shooter out there, but it lacks the absolute 'junk food' immediacy of Call of Duty. If Battlefield 3 can combine its outstanding looks, destructible maps and thunderous volume with an even tighter and slicker combat engine, then this could be the new heavyweight champion of the world.

What Battlefield online has always done better than its competitors is to create moments. Every match in Battlefield has unscripted set-pieces that you'll remember and recount – a tank smashing through the building you were hiding in, or dashing across no-man's land to revive a fallen squad mate. It makes the experience almost cinematic in a way – you feel like you're part of something more than just a digital game of paintball. With Battlefield 3's looks and the power of Frostbite 2.0 behind it, this feeling should be amplified considerably.



So, EA is really fighting for the top spot this year. It has already give us the mighty Bulletstorm and the gorgeous Crysis 2 in 2011, but Battlefield 3 is definitely its Weapon of Mass Destruction. Time will tell if the console versions can match up to the absolute spectacle that is the PC edition, but even if it's not quite on par, this should still be on a technical level far beyond Modern Warfare 3.

Will that matter to the public, though? One thing's for certain, and that is that CoD will sell like hot cakes, but don't be surprised if this grizzled war vet makes a serious challenge this year. It's going to be a hell of a battle. We'll see you on the frontlines. ●



HOW COMPLETE?
80%
Absolutely stunning

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
95%



Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Epic Games
Heritage: Unreal,
Gears of War
Link: www.gearsowar.com
ETA: 20th September

HANDS-ON

Gears of War 3

Hands-on Beta impressions!

There's no denying it... Epic dropped the ball. After Gears of War brought a new kind of multiplayer melee to the table with its combination of cover-led tactical taunting and balls-out blood and guts. It was fast yet measured, explosive yet intelligent. And people loved it.

Gears 2, though, decided to change a few small, but hugely significant things. Everything slowed down – power weapons became more crucial than ever, and the joy of shotgun

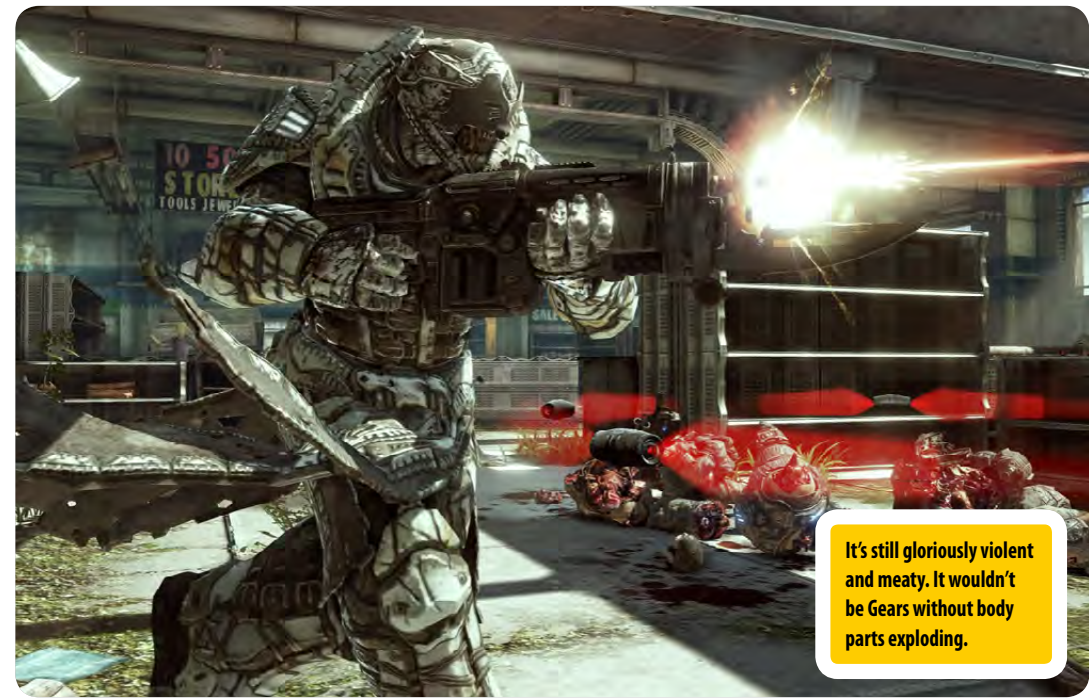
"It's quicker, smoother and feels like Gears of War again"

battles had been eliminated. In trying to make the game more accessible, Epic shunned the very audience that it had created.

With Gears 3 though, everything seems right in the world of Sera again. Well, apart from the relentless march of the Locust, of course. It's quicker, smoother and feels like Gears of War again. And you know what that means. It means it's stupidly good fun.

The Beta features a generous four maps, Checkout, Thrashball, Old Town and Trenches, all of which feature the kind of symmetry, choke points and heavy-weapon scrambles you'd expect. They're nice and easy to learn – helped by the new overhead map shown between rounds – and are already beginning to take on their own personality as battles naturally bias towards particular sections.

At the moment, three game types are available – Team Deathmatch, Capture the Leader and King of the



It's still gloriously violent and meaty. It wouldn't be Gears without body parts exploding.





> Gears of War 3 continued

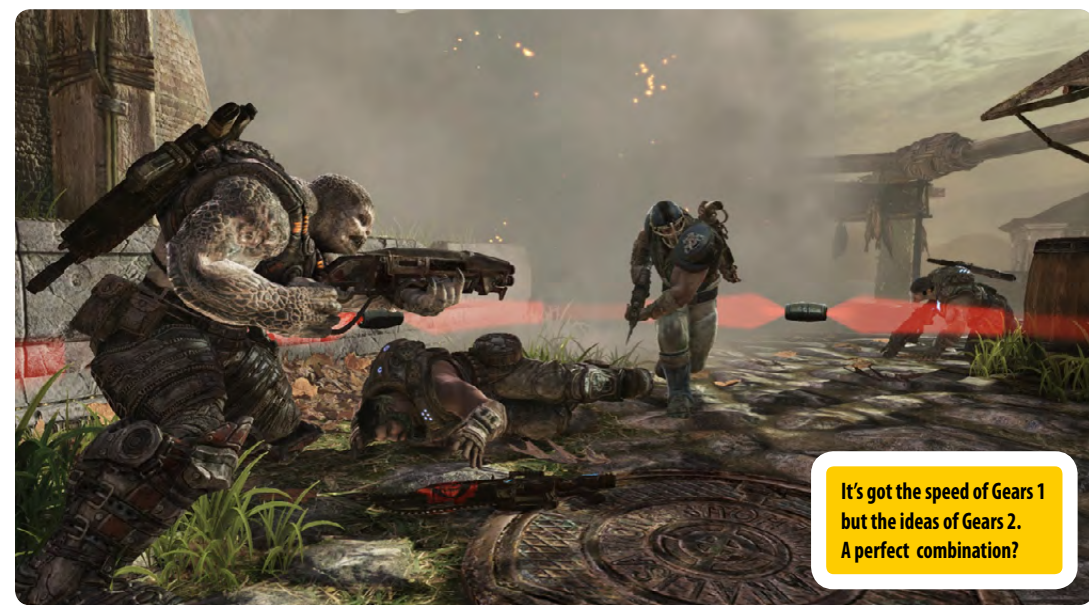
Hill. In truth, the latter two feel like a practice for Team Deathmatch's main event. This is clearly the way Gears will be played this year.

Basically, both teams have 20 lives each, shared among the five members. If you die, then one of your 15 respawn tickets goes with you. Get the opposition down to zero respawns and then all you have to do is kill them to win the match.

It makes games flow dynamically in a way that Gears hasn't really managed before. With a complement of full lives, a team might pour forward in search of the big weapons and some quick kills. As the lives tick away though, everyone

will become more reserved, working together to maintain order. It still has that tight, tactical edge that has always made Gears stand out from the multiplayer pack, but this time it's not as punishing if you make a mistake or get caught by an errant shotgun blast.

What all of this really means, though, is that Gears of War 3 wastes little time in giving you the good stuff; the hidden shotty-blindfire kill, the chainsaw from behind, the boomshot triple-murder-blood-explode from hell... it's all there, just as it should be. And taking note from the current crop of multiplayer masters, Gears 3 features a levelling, unlock and XP system that keeps you locked into its expert matchmaking. Dangerous stuff.



It's got the speed of Gears 1 but the ideas of Gears 2. A perfect combination?

Outside of TDM, Capture the Leader plays like a cross between oddball and a normal Deathmatch, with teams trying to 'down' then meatshield their opponents' leader, and King of the Hill being exactly like any other territory-domination game type.

With these two modes offering the Beta a touch of variety if little else, Team Deathmatch will be huge if Gears 3 is going to climb up the Xbox Live charts at the end of this year. So far, everything is looking extremely promising. It's surprisingly robust and

balanced for a Beta, and with another four months for polishing, we should be looking at one of the most complete and accomplished online experiences available on the Xbox 360. ●



PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Gears of War 3



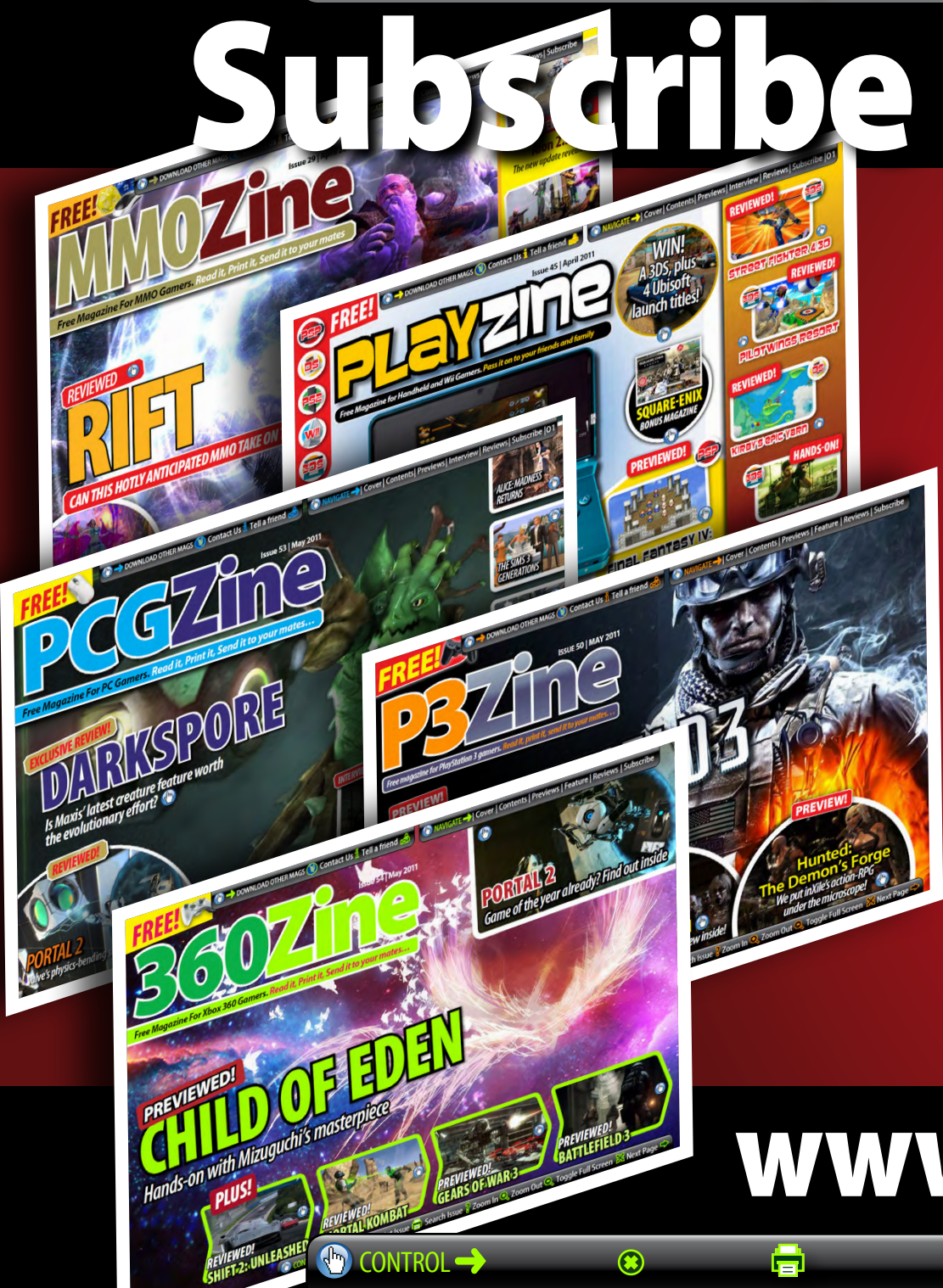
360Zine HOW COMPLETE? **80%** FIRST IMPRESSIONS **90%**

GEARS OF WAR 3 The ultimate multiplayer experience? Quite possibly

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Portal 2

This surprising delight could be the finest game you'll play all year

Publisher: EA
Developer: Valve
Heritage: Half-Life, Portal, Left 4 Dead
Link: www.ea.com/portal2
OUT NOW

One of the more interesting debates around gaming circles at the moment involves this question: how do you make an action game that doesn't involve combat? Sure, there are point-and-click adventures and puzzlers that don't ask you to kill anything, but generally, the rule is, if you want thrills, something's gotta die. Portal 2 is different. This is a game where you barely hurt anything, bar your own mind, yet it's relentlessly exciting, pacy and exhilarating. It would take Valve to show the rest of

the world how it's done, wouldn't it? This feature-length sequel to 2007's masterful miniature sees the return of mute heroine Chell and malevolent and sarcastic AI GLaDOS in another brain-bending quest to see just how many ways two gun-fired portals can be used ingeniously in one videogame. Spoiling a single detail of the story beyond the opening salvos would be utterly criminal, so we'll say nothing more than this...

You wake up in some kind of facility, and are immediately greeted by a

chirping Bristolian robotic eyeball, played by none other than the lanky goggle-eyed freak himself, Mr. Stephen Merchant. And from the second he appears on-screen, he steals the show.

You know what to expect from Merchant – that self-deprecating pseudo arrogance spouted in his own bumbling West Country way, but the combination of his delivery and the razor-sharp script means his little



PORTAL POINTS

The highlights of the game



Women in charge

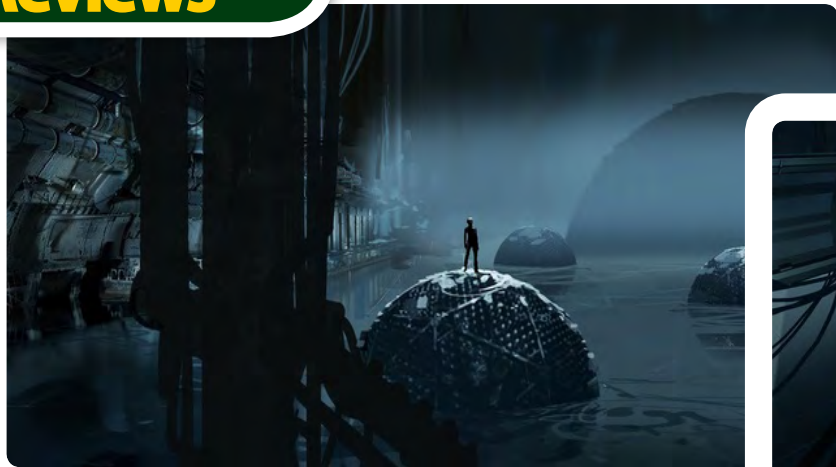
Too human

Laugh a minute

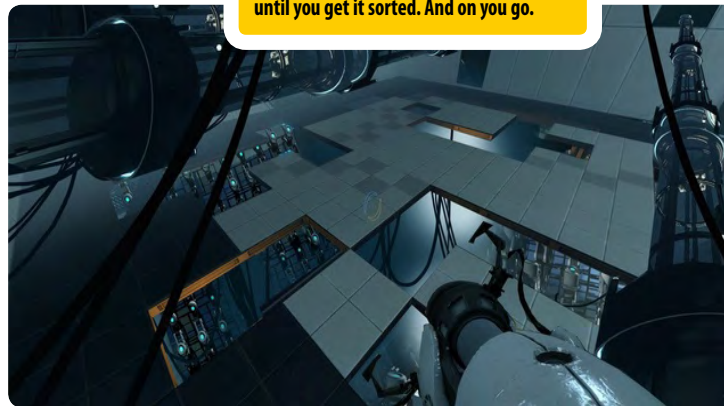
Women in charge

Portal 2 is a rare beast – a game story driven by females. Proper females too, not boobs-out husks. It's brilliantly written too, gloriously sarcastic and bitchy in parts. Other games really need to step up.





When you first enter a test chamber, it can seem utterly overwhelming. Bit by bit, you'll chip away with flashes of inspiration until you get it sorted. And on you go.



> **Portal 2** continued

eyeball (Wheatley) is set to go down as one of gaming's all-time great characters. It's not known if Merchant is a much of a gamer, but his turn here has so much gusto, reverence and invention that he puts most Hollywood voice talent to shame. And he's joined by a small cast of perfectly played characters – there's never a wasted line of dialogue here, or a joke that misses the mark.

If Merchant steals the show, he's still not the star of the piece. Smartly, and probably unavoidably, the portal gun is

Portal 2's headline act, still devilishly simple in its two-hole action, but offering up so much raw potential.

In stretching what was a flawless three or four hours into a 10-hour plus experience, Valve has had to throw in a few new elements to the portalling mix. So, you'll now see light bridges that can pass through the inter-dimensional doors, new jump pads that hurl you through the air, and three types of surface-covering gel, whose effects you'll have to find out for yourself.

In the hands of a lesser developer, all of these elements could end up being overwhelming, but Valve eases you into each new feature without ever resorting to dowdy tutorials. In fact, in

"Smartly, and probably unavoidably, the portal gun is Portal 2's headline act"

the hands of lesser developers, Portal wouldn't even exist. As you progress through the chambers and back rooms of Aperture Science, you can literally see the facility building itself in front of your eyes, and every moving part is animated with its own personality, be it scientific cool or twitchy, fractious mania. It's truly amazing.

By the time you reach the dizzying conclusion to Portal 2's brilliant story, you'll have been assaulted with the kind of restless idea-driven gameplay that is usually reserved for Nintendo's first-party output. Every room is a new concept or a devilish combination of previous ones, seemingly impossible when you first attempt it, before you apply your own science and eliminate possibilities before finding that glorious Eureka moment and strolling smugly through the exit door.

It doesn't end there, either. Portal 2 features a quite fantastic and cerebrally intimidating co-op mode, that remains separate from the single-player story. It features two brilliantly animated robots who manage to convey the breadth >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time



10 MINUTES

You've already met Wheatley, brilliantly voiced by Stephen Merchant. Things are good.



1 HOUR

Those Portal mindbenders have crept back into your consciousness. Are you ready?



3 HOURS

The full brilliance of the game is starting to reveal itself. It's a true Valve epic.



6 HOURS

Marvellous writing, ingenious puzzles and breathless inventiveness.



10 HOURS+

The story is lengthy, and there's the small matter of co-op to get your teeth into as well.





There's not a dull moment, a repeated idea or a single second that isn't perfectly pitched.

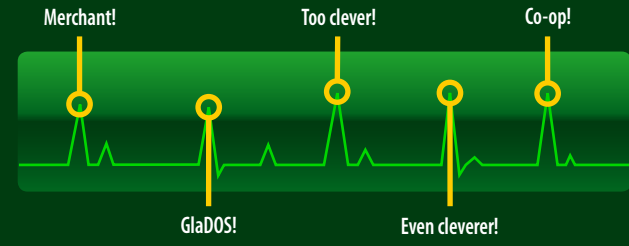


> Portal 2 continued

of human emotion without ever saying a word. It can be played through split-screen, system linked or over Live, but whatever you do, make sure you play it with someone you know. A brief encounter with a random saw him repeatedly jumping off a ledge and trying to fire his portal gun at our robot. It would appear that some people just don't 'get' Portal.

If you do manage to recruit a sensible partner, then prepare yourself for the type of mind-melting hilarity that you probably haven't felt since botched Chemistry experiments at school. It's at its best when you're in charge of your teammate's destiny, where one misplaced Portal (deliberately, or otherwise) can see him squished by a crushing spiked-plate or falling to his watery doom. With four Portals to deal with, co-op can get awfully tricky at times, but as with every puzzle in the game, its fiercely logical, and of course, a lot easier when discussed at length. Just don't try

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



playing it hungover or too tired – your partner might end up punching you.

As a package then, Portal 2 more than justifies its full-price tag and allays any fears many had about Valve diluting the purity of the original. In fact, even without the sizeable co-op mode, Portal 2 would be more than worth the price of admission. This is a videogame of rare quality, a new benchmark for scriptwriting, comedy and pacing, all backed up by gameplay that will leave you slack-jawed in wonder and swelling with pride for what our industry is capable of when talent meets inspiration like this.

So, an action game with no violence. It can be done. Valve has set the mark down, world. Time to play catch up. ●

360Zine Verdict *Brilliant. A benchmark videogame from the masters of the craft*

- Relentlessly inventive
- Genuinely hilarious
- Nope. Nothing

96%





Shift 2: Unleashed

Buckle up – Need for Speed is back already

Remember the last Need for Speed? Of course you do, as it came out about three weeks ago. This is why Shift 2: Unleashed has dropped the Need for Speed moniker. Its time for EA's more realistic racer to stand out on its own. And that's a pretty tough thing to do in a very crowded market.

If you've played a 'realistic' racer before, you know what to expect in Shift 2. A series of race tournaments, a succession of cars with increasingly impressive performance, tuning options, liveries, corners where you have to brake and a cash reward mechanic that lets you buy new shiny things. Nothing new there, then. Where

Shift 2: Unleashed does differ from its foes, though, is in how it actually presents the racing.

The first Shift gave us a glimpse of Slightly Mad's take on vehicular action, with its benchmark-setting in-car view. Shift 2 takes this even further, with the cockpit camera lurching, swinging and juddering as you hurl the glistening beasts around the track. At first, it's disorientating, especially as it naturally leans to the outside of corners, throwing off your racing line. After a while though, it begins to make sense and is actually extremely realistic. And if it was in 3D then the effect would be even better.

It all helps to really drag you into the action, making the usually dry and stale act of realistic videogame racing feel altogether more vital. It's fast too, especially when you unlock the higher tier of vehicles, and as the engine whines as you fly towards top speed, there's a genuine sense of fear and nervousness that you might lose control. It makes the idea of actually

"The cockpit camera lurches, swings and judders as you hurl the glistening beasts around the track"



Even the early cars are suitably powerful. There's rarely a dull moment behind the wheel.

Publisher: EA
Developer: Slightly Mad Studios
Heritage: Need for Speed Shift
Link: www.needforspeed.com/shift2unleashed
OUT NOW



SHIFTING GEARS

Racing the Shift 2 way



Night and day



Tokyo drift

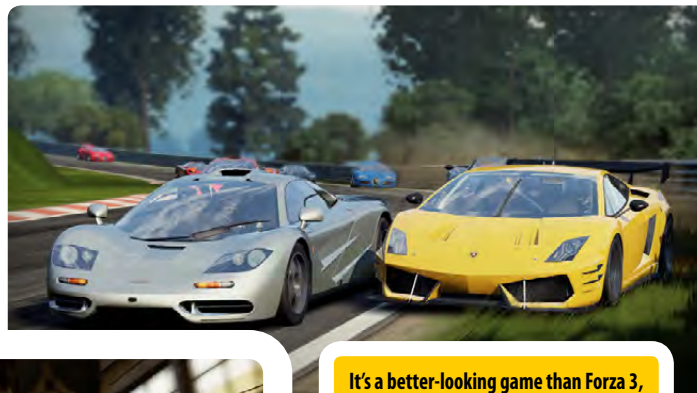


Auto tune



Night and day

Although Shift 2: Unleashed is ostensibly a realistic racing game, it's a lot more visceral and downright exciting than its competitors. You really feel the speed and threat of driving a high-performance car flat out.



"To avoid bumping the edges constantly you have to make enemies with the accelerator pedal"

Sometimes you just want to go all 'Need for Speed' and hurl yourself around corners. Don't. You'll crash.



It's a better-looking game than Forza 3, but it doesn't quite have the detail that Turn10's effort enjoys in spades.

> **Shift 2** continued

racing in real life far less appealing than it had previously seemed – well, it did to us anyway.

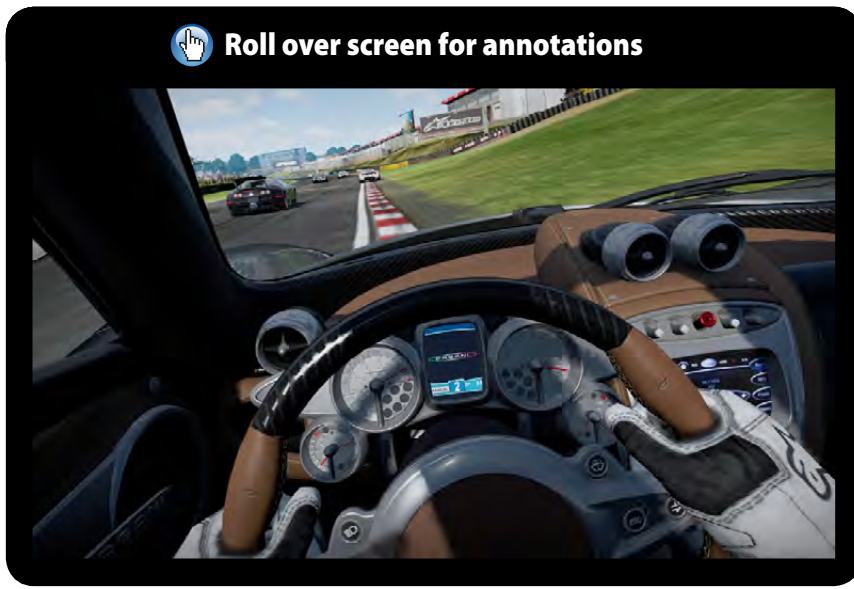
In that way, it's oddly like Call of Duty. You really feel like you're on the frontlines here, stuck headlong into an automotive melee that you might not survive. When Shift 2 is at its best, it's as visceral as the great arcade racers but grounded in reality.

Unfortunately, that reality drags Shift 2 down too often. Hammering large, fast cars through tiny, thin tracks might be a test of skill and dexterity, but it's not actually much fun. To avoid bumping the edges constantly you have to make enemies with the accelerator pedal, which is as frustrating as playing golf with a shuttlecock. Shift 2: Unleashed is a game that practically begs you to put the pedal to the metal, but then punishes you for doing so.

Also, it doesn't quite have the robust physics model that Forza 3 boasts. It's definitely a step up from its

predecessor and any other Need for Speed game, but the effects of the tuning system aren't hugely noticeable (outside of top speed), and true petrolheads will likely find Shift 2 underpowered.

So who is it for then? In truth, Shift 2 is at its best with a few assists turned on, the open track ahead of you and a driver who generally doesn't 'do' realistic racers. And in that respect, it's still very much a Need for Speed game, even if doesn't want to be. ●



Roll over screen for annotations

360Zine Verdict As exciting as 'realistic' racing can possibly get. Good stuff indeed

- Fantastic cockpit view
- Great scalable racing
- A little formulaic

86%



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Mortal Kombat



"Mortal Kombat has the strongest single-player component a fighting game has ever enjoyed"

Publisher: Warner Bros
Developer: NetherRealm Studios
Heritage: Mortal Kombat series (as Midway Games)
Link: www.themortalkombat.com
OUT NOW

Flawless victory

Who was expecting this then? After years in the wilderness, sequel after sequel of Mortal Kombat mediocrity, Mortal Kombat has come back from the dead with more fire than Scorpion and more cool than Sub Zero. Unquestionably, this is the best Mortal Kombat has ever been.

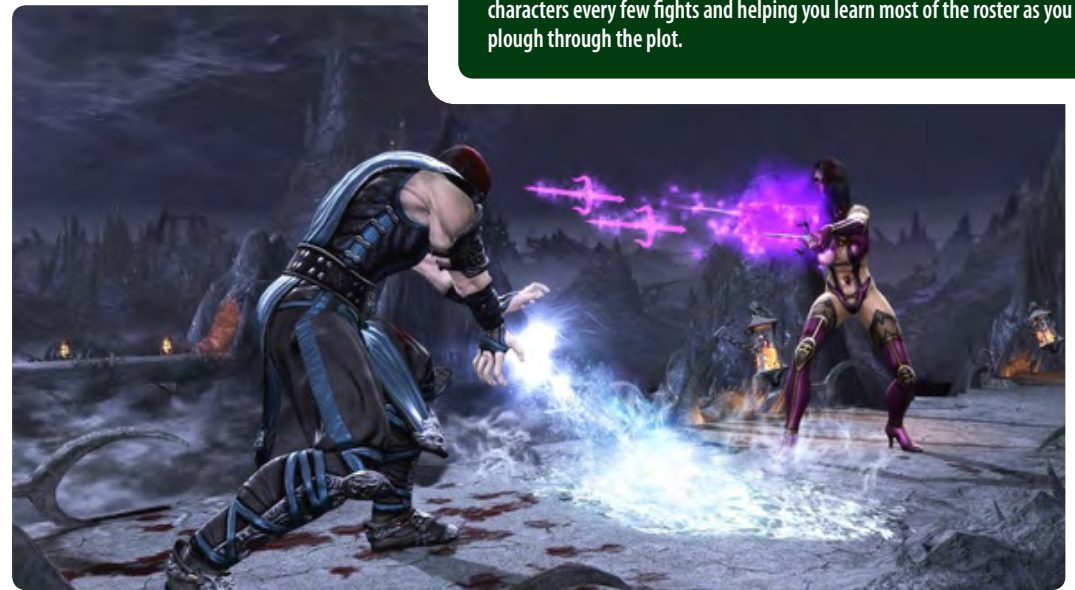
So how has this happened? Well, the answer is twofold. Firstly, the passion. NetherRealm studios, headed up by Mortal Kombat creator Ed Boon, is

clearly still completely in love with the universe and the characters it created nearly 20 years ago. Every inch of Mortal Kombat is crammed with content, all unashamedly enthusiastic and proud to be back in the spotlight.

Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in story mode, NetherRealm's love letter to Raiden, Liu Kang et al, and the strongest single-player component a fighting game has ever enjoyed. Basically, it's a tour of most of the roster,

played out three or four fights at a time, and interspersed with endearingly cheesy cut-scenes straight from the cutting room floor of a long-lost Mortal Kombat movie.

What's brilliant, though, is how it transitions from cut-scene to fight, almost seamlessly, and how by forcing you to play as a host of



FINISH HIM!

How has Mortal Kombat raised its game?



Gory stories

Ultra kombo

Live wire

Gory stories

Who knows why it hasn't been done before. Mortal Kombat's cut-scene heavy story mode is hilariously cheesy and great fun, flitting between characters every few fights and helping you learn most of the roster as you plough through the plot.



Everyone's done it. 'FINISH HIM!' roars from the speakers, and an expectant crowd collectively holds their breath... And you stand there, crouch twice and slap 'em in the face. Oh well. Next time.



> Mortal Kombat cont.

different fighters, you get a real understanding of the line-up, and of the mechanics. It's lengthy, too – nearly seven hours, with rarely a dull moment.

The story mode is backed up by a 300-strong challenge tower, reminiscent of Soul Calibur's Edge Master mode, with constantly innovative match types and ideas. One sees you throwing your own limbs at your opponent to win!

The second key to MK's new-found success comes from the fighting engine itself. The game has returned to

its 2D roots, much like Street Fighter IV, but it has plenty of added depth and freeform brutality that it has never had in the past.

At first, it seems like good old Mortal Kombat fun, blasting projectiles across the screen, coating the floor in blood and fluffing a fatality at the end. Dive into practice mode though, and a whole new world of freestyle combos awaits. By combining launchers, dashes and pre-scripted combos, you can create huge links that feel immensely satisfying to pull off. And because of

MK's control scheme, you don't need a stick to do it.

There's a real balance then, between accessibility and depth that makes

"Victory comes from instinct and intelligence rather than just ludicrous dexterity"

Mortal Kombat hugely immediate. Just bashing buttons and firing off a few specials will be enough for many, and so it should be, but if you want to get better at it then the game is more than accommodating.

It's not as deep or as technically gifted as Street Fighter IV, but then again, perhaps it doesn't have to be. It might not become a tournament favourite, but that would only be appealing to less than a per cent of its market. What it does brilliantly is allow good players to get better, by simplifying the link windows for combos and allowing victory to come more from instinct and intelligence than just ludicrous dexterity.

Of course, it's not faultless. Some characters – Ermac and Smoke, for example – appear overpowered at the moment, and the general lack of variety in fighting styles is disappointing when compared to Street Fighter IV's, but this does mean it's easier to cross over to try out new fighters at will, rather than having to study them at length.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time...



10 MINUTES
You'll probably leap straight into a fight, and it's familiar territory for series vets.



1 HOUR
The story mode has its hooks in. It's daft, cheesy and hilarious. Just what it should be.



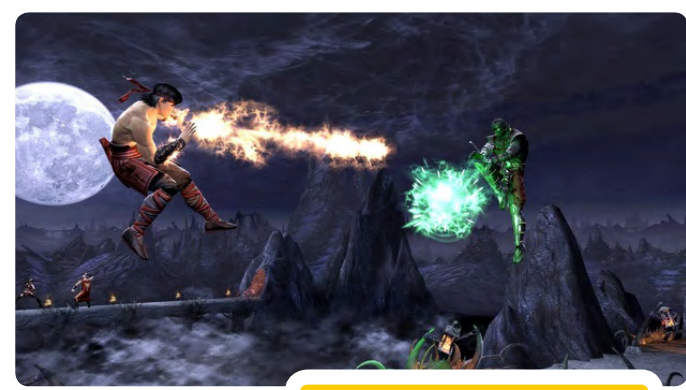
3 HOURS
The plot is in full swing, and the action is improving all the time as you learn its systems.



6 HOURS
Straight into challenge tower, online and the training room. The game keeps on giving.



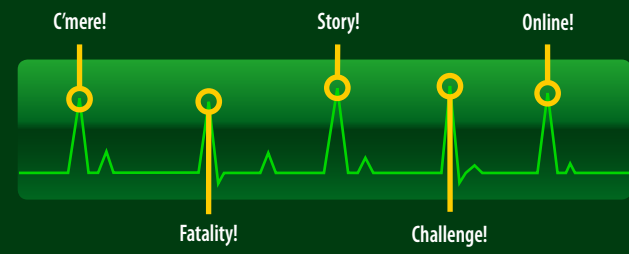
10 HOURS+
Somehow, NetherRealm studios has made Mortal Kombat into a genuinely fantastic fighter.



Fireballs, teleports and brutal fatalities... It's like the Nineties never died. Awesome.



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Mortal Kombat cont.

This is perfect when you take the dive into the online arena, too. Along with ranked and player matches, Mortal Kombat offers an eight-player King of the Hill mode, essentially a winner-stays on lobby. Where it differs from the pack though, is in spectator mode. Your Xbox avatar sits at the bottom of the screen along with the other viewers, cheering or booing the action, and scoring it out of 10 at the end. It's a really nice little touch that sums up the personality and humour of this Mortal Kombat rebirth.

In fact, there's a third facet to the game's success, and that's content. Or should that be Kontent. Mortal Kombat is absolutely crammed with stuff to do, see and unlock. There's a well-realised tag mode that is barely even used but works brilliantly, an arcade ladder mode complete with endings, about 10 million pieces of art (although that might be a slight exaggeration), fatalities and costumes to unlock, and

even a well-thought out and detailed training mode. Even if you aren't the type to play fighting games competitively, there's so much to do on your own in Mortal Kombat, you'll still get your money's worth.

All in all, then, this is a real crowd pleaser. Even through the dark times, Mortal Kombat still holds a special place in many gamers' hearts, especially those who remember the shocking violence those digital dudes did to each other back in 1992. The fact that it's all backed up by a fighting engine that is almost as good as the premier Japanese games out there (almost), then you've got a real winner. NetherRealm has showered itself in glory. Flawless victory indeed. ●

360Zine Verdict

What a surprise. Mortal Kombat is back, and much better than ever

- Brilliant single player
- Seriously deep
- Some balancing questions

91%

In **360Zine**
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ALICE: MADNESS RETURNS

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