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P3Zine

Issue 21 | November 2008

Free Magazine For PlayStation 3 Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates...

PLUS!



RESISTANCE 2

Hands-on Preview

SHOUTING LARA LARA LARA

TOMB RAIDER™

UNDERWORLD

Massive review inside

REVIEWED!



Bioshock



GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR

Definitive review

REVIEWED!



Far Cry 2

REVIEWED!



Fallout 3

REVIEWED!



WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

Welcome to P3Zine



Titles are coming thick and fast now that the festive seasons of Thanksgiving and Christmas fast approach and this issue we have full reviews of no less than five Triple-A titles. Ms Lara Croft kicks things off with her latest Underworld adventures but we also have full and frank reviews of Guitar Hero World Tour, Bioshock, Far Cry 2, Fallout 3 and SmackDown vs RAW 2009.

Resistance 2 is also shaping up nicely, so don't miss our hands-on report of the current multiplayer beta, and finally we have previews of 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand, Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard and X-Blades.

Enjoy the issue...

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
p3zine@gamerzines.com

MAGAZINE FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of the magazine

MEET THE TEAM

There's nowt they don't know about PlayStation



Richard Melville
Wrestling with SmackDown vs RAW 2009



Steve Hill
Ready and waiting for Resistance 2



Chris Schilling
Living it up with the latest from Lara

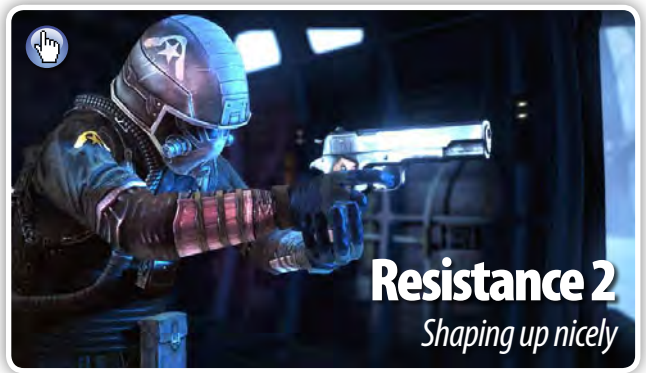
DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights...

The latest & greatest titles on PS3



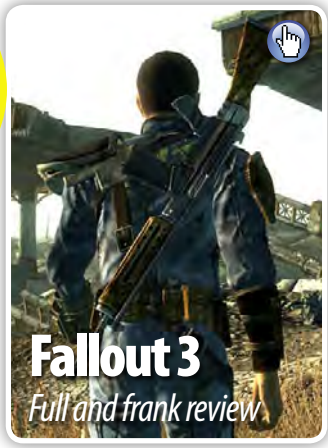
Tomb Raider Underworld
Exclusive review



Resistance 2
Shaping up nicely



Far Cry 2
Out of Africa



Fallout 3
Full and frank review

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand
Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard
X-Blades
Burn Zombie Burn
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe
Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix
The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
Wheelman
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel
Resistance 2
Guitar Hero: World Tour
Tomb Raider Underworld
Far Cry 2
Fallout 3
Bioshock

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"Bursting with imagination and potential, Prince of Persia is surely up there with the most promising titles in development"
- Eurogamer -



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED



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Publisher: D3Publisher
Developer: Vicious Cycle
Heritage: Dead Head Fred, Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords
Link: www.eatlead videogame.com
ETA: Q1 2009

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

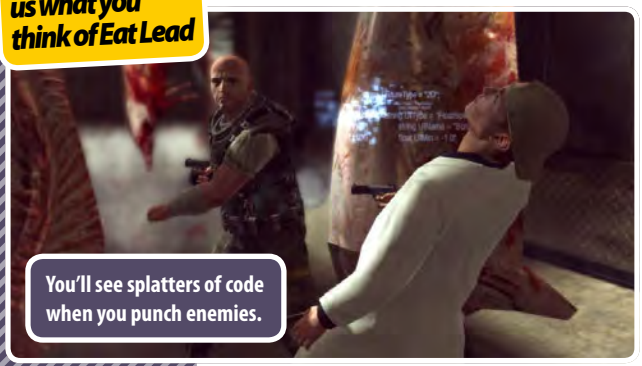
FIRST LOOK

Self Awareness +1



A zombie emerging from a Portal? Eat Lead is clearly going to pack in a lot of gaming references.

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



You'll see splatters of code when you punch enemies.



"Eat Lead's mechanics are essentially nabbed from other games. Gears of War with funnies is the vibe we're getting"



From sci-fi through to westerns, it seems no-one is safe from Eat Lead's scabrous sense of humour.

What's the story?

Matt Hazard is a fictional washed-up videogame character who appeared in loads of games in the Eighties, but hasn't been around for some time. Think Duke Nukem with neuroses and you've just about got the measure of the man. Anyway, he's been given the chance to make a new-gen return to battle all the enemies he once faced off against.

What do we know?

The comedy third-person-action genre isn't exactly a crowded one, but elements of Eat Lead will feel very familiar, as its mechanics – quite appropriately, if a little cheekily – are essentially nabbed from other games. Gears of War with funnies is the vibe we're getting, with the game using a similar cover system and the now de facto standard stop-and-pop mechanics. Solid rather than spectacular seems to be the order of the day so far, but if Eat Lead's humour can maintain the level of inventiveness shown by its first trailer, then this could be a very enjoyable actioner. And it has at least one inspired idea – the environments will radically change throughout owing to Matt's enemy 'changing the game's code.'

When do we get more?

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard is due for release in the first quarter of next year.

Anything else to declare?

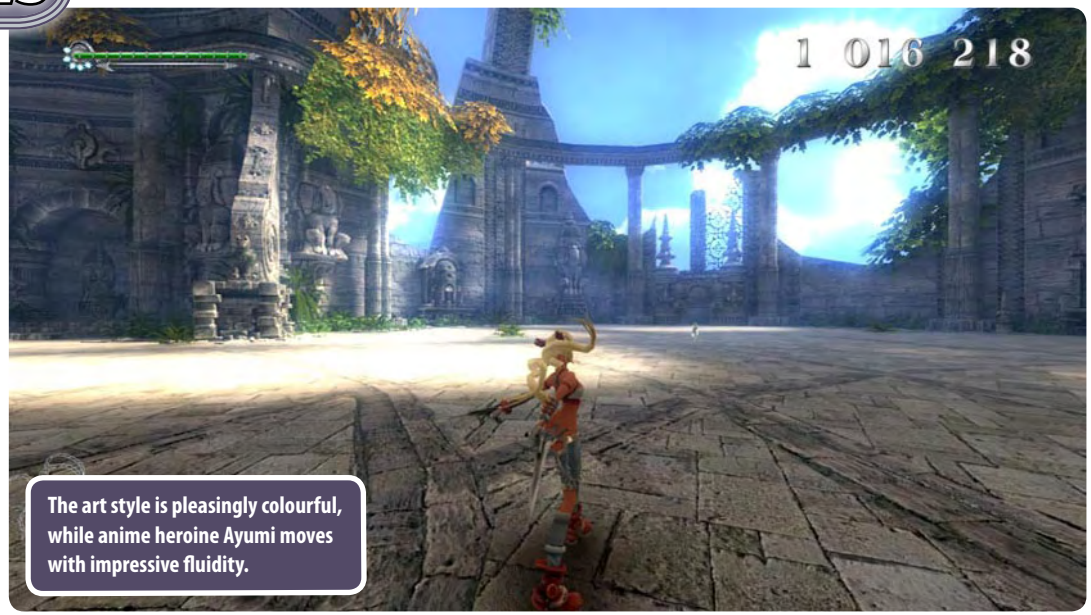
The game's two main leads will be voiced by Will Arnett of 30 Rock and the resurgent Neil Patrick Harris, both of whom are talented actors with great comic timing, which should hopefully make the game even funnier.



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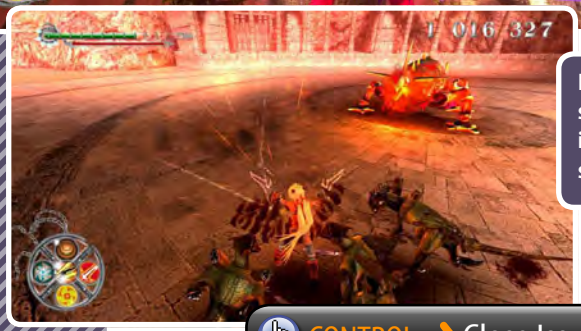
Publisher: Southpeak Games
Developer: Gaijin Entertainment
Heritage: Adrenalin, Oni Blade
Link: www.x-blades.com
ETA: 9th January 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of X-Blades



The art style is pleasingly colourful, while anime heroine Ayumi moves with impressive fluidity.


This is Ayumi's dark form – you definitely don't want to mess with her when she's in this kind of mood.



From what we've seen of X-Blades, it moves incredibly smoothly.

X-Blades

FIRST LOOK

Swords and sourcery

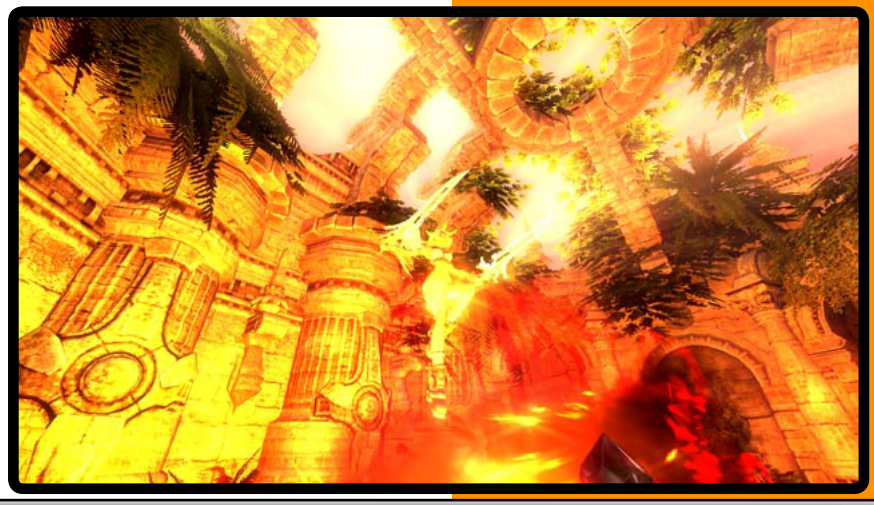
What's the story?

X-Blades tells the tale of Ayumi, a clothes-hating Croft-alike who is hunting an ancient artifact which apparently holds the fate of the world in its grip, as these things tend to do. What's perhaps unusual about Ayumi – apart from her reluctance to put a warm cardie on in these cold, dank lairs – is that she's after harnessing the power of said orb for her own gains, hoping to gain fame and fortune by nabbing it before anyone else does.

Why should we be excited?

Our scantily-clad heroine is a bit handy with her two swords, using both to hack - and, indeed, slash – her opponents to ribbons, as well as the hordes of creatures she encounters on her way to the mystical artifact. The X-Blades of the title are pretty powerful weapons, and Ayumi also has magical powers to call upon when beasties require more than just sword-based smackdowns. Gameplay-wise it's not a million miles away from something like Devil May Cry, though the fluid movement of the heroine brought Heavenly Sword to mind. You'll be able to upgrade both weapons and spellcasting powers as you progress, spending cash earned through killing enemies on new abilities.

"You'll be able to upgrade both weapons and spellcasting powers as you progress"



When do we get more?

After an initially vague 'Winter' for the game's release, it's now going to appear on January 9th.

Anything else to declare?

Publisher Southpeak recently launched a fan art competition, asking people to submit their drawings of Ayumi. The three winners will have their entries included in the art book package with the Royal Edition of the game.

ENDWARGAME.COM

Tom Clancy's
ENDWAR
07.11.08



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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UBISOFT

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Publisher: THQ
Developer: Swordfish Studios
Heritage: World Championship Rugby, Cold Winter
Link: www.50bloodonthesand.com
ETA: Q1 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

FIRST LOOK

No, wait! Come back!



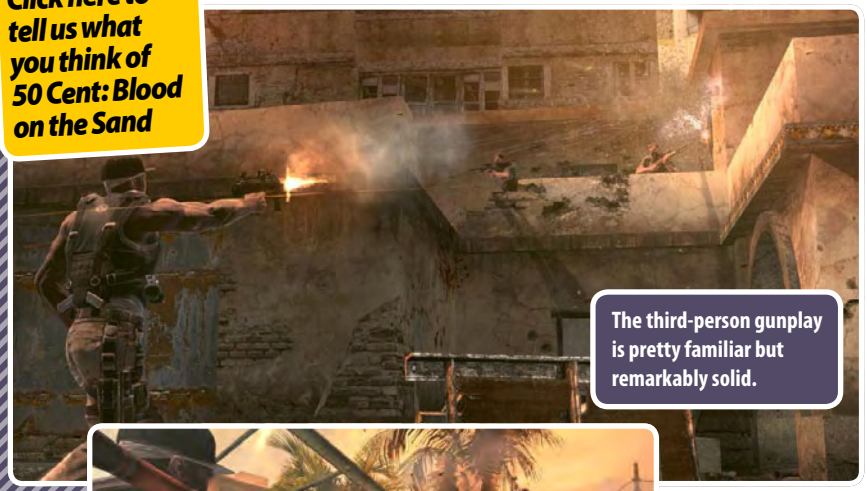
Naturally there's a cover system in place, and also the option for a second player to jump in and out of a game.

What's the story?

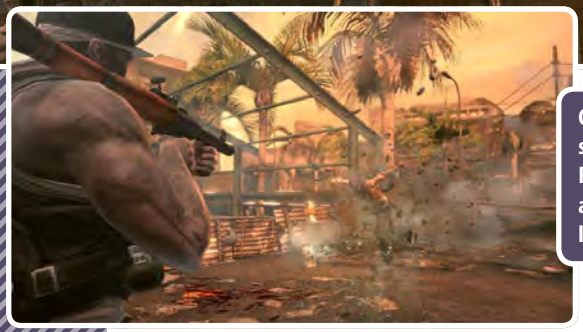
A victim of the recent industry trend for mergers and acquisitions, Blood on the Sand has been picked up by Saints Row 2 publisher THQ. Rather appropriately as it turns out, because BotS could be another surprisingly good sandbox game, after Fiddy's original venture into gaming territory, the mediocre Bulletproof, hardly set anyone's pulses racing. This looks much better, though.

Why should we be excited?

The plot is so ludicrous it beggars belief – suffice to say that you'll be playing as Fiddy and his G-Unit crew, gunning down hoodlums on your way through a warzone to pick up payment from some kind of evil crime boss. It offers run-and-gun blasting, but you'll also be able to take on opponents with your bare fists, while the game also offers online co-operative multiplayer, and will feature a whopping 18 brand new rap tracks from the maestro of mumble (don't tell him we called him that). Vehicles? Yes – you'll be able to drive through the desert should you feel the need, while you can also engage in aerial battles as you take to the skies in (presumably) blinged-up choppers.



The third-person gunplay is pretty familiar but remarkably solid.



Colour us faintly surprised, but Fiddy's latest is a really good-looking game.

"It offers run-and-gun blasting, but you'll also be able to take on opponents with your bare fists"



When do we get more?

The game is tentatively set for release in the first half of next year, though some US retailers have a January launch date, so hopefully it'll arrive sometime in the first quarter.

Anything else to declare?

Fiddy's lending his vocal talents for a more authentic avatar, while the game uses the Unreal Engine 3 and looks all the better for it.



CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

INCOMING

Another secret six heading your way…



Burn Zombie Burn

Publisher: Pinnacle Software | **ETA:** Q1 2009

A Smash TV-style old-school top-down shooter, Burn Zombie Burn is yet another reason to get excited about PSN next year. The idea is simply to kill as many of the titular brain chewers as possible, with an interesting risk/reward mechanic – setting them on fire increases your multiplier but immolated zombies will move faster. Plenty of stages, a pleasantly low price and multiplayer options should make this indie shooter a great value proposition.



Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

Publisher: Midway | **ETA:** 21th November

Mortal Kombat vs DC Universe should hopefully sate the needs of those looking for a good beat-'em-up to fill the gap before Street Fighter IV arrives. With a host of multiplayer modes plus a single-player adventure, it's not going to be lacking in content.

Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix

Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** TBA

Still no concrete release date for this, one of the most eagerly anticipated PSN titles since the service started. It's a hi-definition take on one of the greatest 2D fighters of all time, and advance word is very positive. Assuming the finished game can live up to the hype this will be worth downloading… whenever it arrives.



The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

Publisher: Atari | **ETA:** 2009

Starbreeze Studios, creators of the excellent original Riddick game on the Xbox, return to the game which made their name, with this follow-up that also includes a remake of the original. So the first game in HD clothes, an additional full-length campaign and an online multiplayer mode? Could be the best value package since The Orange Box.

Wheelman

Publisher: Midway | **ETA:** 13th February 2009

Another Vin Diesel vehicle, Diesel plays Milo Burik, a driver-for-hire who gets caught up in various criminal shenanigans while trying to infiltrate an underground gang in Barcelona. With plenty of cinematic sequences and thrilling stunts, we're itching to get behind the wheel of this one.



Sacred 2: Fallen Angel

Publisher: Koch Media | **ETA:** Q1 2009

An action-RPG offering two very different campaigns of light and shadow, Sacred 2 makes the journey from PC to console in fine fettle. Key among its features are its seamless game world. And with no limits to the level you can reach, the real hardcore will be kept busy for quite some time.



IN THE PIPELINE

DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	QUARTER 1 2009
PRINCE OF PERSIA	LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST	KILLZONE 2	ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES
SINGSTAR ABBA	RED FACTION: GUERILLA	ETERNAL SONATA	ROCK REVOLUTION

ShaunWhite SNOWBOARDING

See you on the mountain!



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

November 14th

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Wii XBOX 360 LIVE PLAYSTATION 3

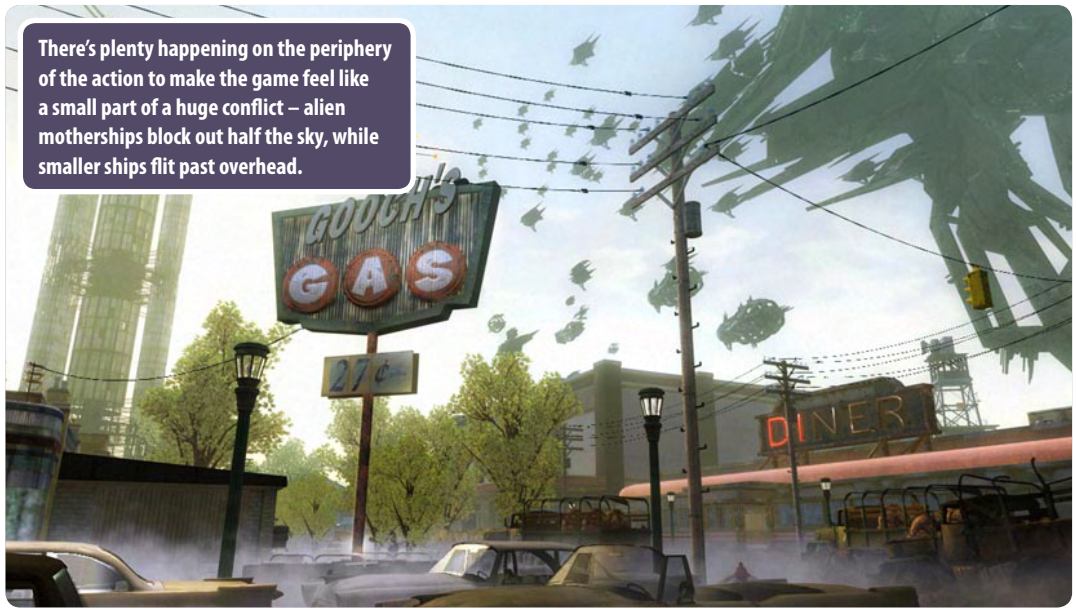
RESISTANCE 2

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Insomniac Games
Heritage: Resistance: Fall of Man, Ratchet and Clank series
Link: www.us.playstation.com/PS3/Games/Resistance_2
ETA: 28th November

HANDS ON

Resistance 2

Extensive hands-on play with the online beta



There's plenty happening on the periphery of the action to make the game feel like a small part of a huge conflict – alien motherships block out half the sky, while smaller ships flit past overhead.

The original Resistance was a decent launch title for the PS3, though over time its flaws became more evident: the single-player game taking some time to get going and rarely truly impresses, while the online multiplayer offered 40-player matches which were chaotic but not quite as solid nor as well-balanced as its peers. Yet its issues could be forgiven thanks to Insomniac's inexperience with the hardware – and let's be honest, few launch games wind up being among a console's best.

Yet it looks like the Ratchet developer has learned from its mistakes – offering a single-player campaign that seems far more epic in scope and scale, with better pacing and greater variety. Yet that's nothing compared to its online side, and it's the latter that we've been spending quite a bit of time with recently, with a sizeable portion of the multiplayer game available to those with access to the online beta.

First up was the co-operative mode – one level of an entirely standalone campaign, designed to be played by eight players simultaneously. Set in Orick, California, we enter a forest location as part of a special ops team named SPECTER – the Chimera have seized areas along the US border and it's up to this crack cabal to recapture them. It's a class-based system, so you'll have a specific role to play within the team, whether you're sniping enemies from a distance or getting up close and personal with heavy weapons. Medics can hurl medikits at colleagues low on energy, while you can also revive downed team-mates. You might even have to supply ammo to others – or even yourself. It seems a bit strange to run out of bullets only to magically produce a pack from thin air and then collect it yourself to top up your total, but at least you're not stuck with an empty gun.

"Medics can hurl medikits at colleagues low on energy, while you can also revive downed team-mates"

Though you'll likely be running low more often than you think – ostensibly a tactical strategic mode, Resistance 2's co-op, if this level is anything to go by, is blisteringly intense, fast-paced and chaotic throughout. You'll face off against huge waves of Grims, followed by well-armed standard Chimera troops and much larger behemoths who take several minutes of constant blasting to kill. While the game suggests near-constant communication and players taking responsibility for their >


Each area seems to have its own distinct colour scheme.

RESISTANCE 2

> Resistance 2 continued

own role within the squad, the best tactics seem to involve blasting and retreating, stopping only to heal any team-mates. It's certainly exciting – some pitched battles filling the screen with enemies as shots zip back and forth between both sides – but while it's too early to suggest the other stages will be like this, it does all seem a little one-note. That said, it's a generous addition to have an extra mode which takes place away from the solo campaign, and so it seems a little churlish to complain too hard about its faults.

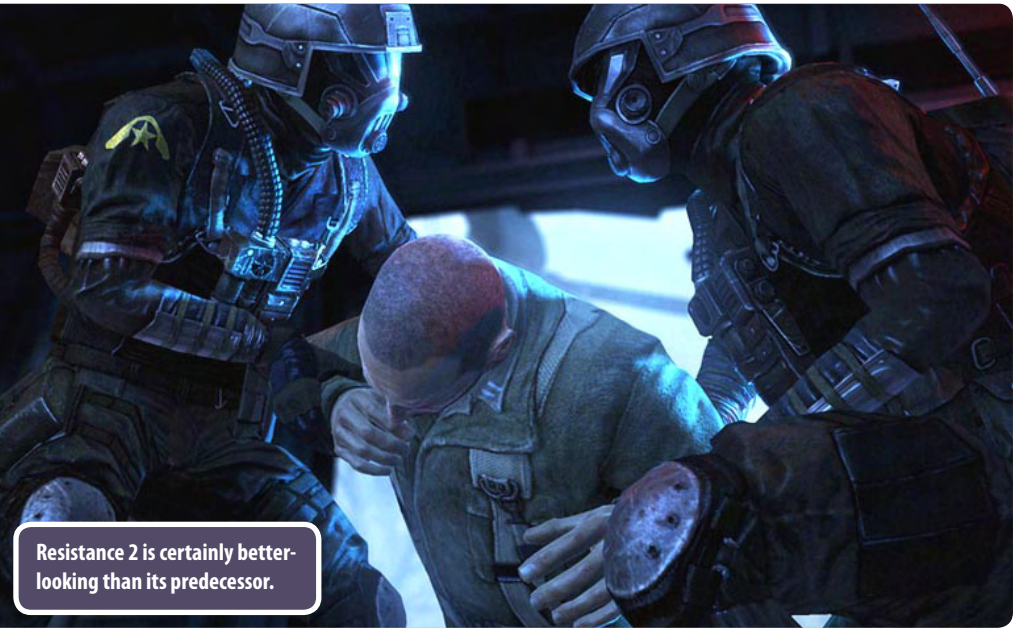
As for the more traditional competitive modes, there are more options and battlegrounds than ever, and on certain stages the maximum number of players has been raised from 40 to 60. There's only one single-player deathmatch arena featured in the beta, and it's set in San Francisco, in the Sub Docks area. With just 10 players involved, it's a smaller map than most of the rest, but offers plenty of places to hide, as well as some vents which shoot you up to higher areas. Graphically it all looks very orange, but it's an interesting map which gives you some fast-paced deathmatch thrills.

You can also return to Orick, which has four different areas, with Gray Territory the biggest of the bunch, as that's the only 60-player

"On certain stages the maximum number of players has been raised from 40 to 60"



Resistance 2 offers temporary 'berserks' – special abilities powered up when you gain experience, and which can turn the tide in your favour.



Resistance 2 is certainly better-looking than its predecessor.

In the multiplayer modes at least, the action gets incredibly intense, with many enemies rushing you at once.



RESISTANCE 2

> Resistance 2 continued

map available in Team Deathmatch. Again, with that many players it can seem a little too hectic, though as long as you're prepared to be shot every few seconds during the initial bedding-in period, then you'll have a lot of fun. Elsewhere, the alleys and subways of Chicago provide a backdrop for online Skirmishes, and the Core Control mode rounds out a pretty comprehensive package.

And that's before we get to the array of options you're able to tweak to create or join a game that truly suits you. You can choose the number of lives, whether to show enemies on the map or not, the amount of damage weapons cause, whether health can be regenerated, if late players can join the game… and that's before you choose your character and his accessories (you can even choose the design of his water canteen and backpack).

For our money, Resistance 2 feels almost like it's trying too hard at times, admirably trying to provide quantity but at the slight expense of quality. It occasionally feels a little unpolished and loose, compared with the tighter, more balanced multiplayer experiences of some of its peers. Though it's certainly not without its charms, and for those who fancy fighting battles which feel more like a war than a small-scale skirmish, Resistance 2 more than delivers on that front.



What we've seen of the single-player suggests a leaner, yet more epic experience, increasing the scale while ensuring stages don't become bloated.

"Resistance 2 feels almost like it's trying too hard at times"



Let's hope there are no Leviathans in the multiplayer – the mid-sized enemies take enough hits to die, so we dread to think how long it would take to finish one of these off!



The game's weapon set in the main will be familiar to those from the first game, but we expect more new guns in the finished game.

P3Zine RESISTANCE 2

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE 95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 85%

Bigger and better, but can the solo campaign cut it?

TAG TEAMS EXPLODE ONTO WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2009...
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NEW CREATE A FINISHER



NEW INFERNO MATCH



ROAD TO WRESTLEMANIA CO-OP



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2009

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TOGETHER YOU'RE UNSTOPPABLE

15

PSP. XBOX 360 LIVE PlayStation.2 PLAYSTATION 3 NINTENDO DS. Wii

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Guitar Hero World Tour

Striking the first blow in the battle of the bands

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Neversoft
Heritage: Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock, Tony Hawk
Link: www.guitarhero.com
ETA: 7th November

It seems quite some time since Guitar Hero was thought of as the king of rhythm action games, Harmonix having long since established Rock Band as a format on its own, creating and building a community through regular downloadable content – dozens of tracks from dozens of bands providing the soundtrack to many rock fantasies lived out through this multiplayer masterpiece. Yet with the release of its sequel rather late to the party, and host to a number of small tweaks rather than a wholesale reinvention, it seems as if Neversoft may have nipped in and stolen Rock Band's thunder, as Guitar Hero World Tour is no ordinary Guitar Hero game, providing a band experience that easily rivals its musical opponent, with better peripherals and a recording studio to boot. Packed with features and options, World Tour can at least temporarily regain its throne – with Rock Band 2 still to arrive in Europe, if it establishes its own following, Harmonix could forever be playing catch-up in this territory at least.

"Packed with features, World Tour temporarily regains its crown"



It's a game that shows its developer has well and truly bedded in – more confident in its approach and presented with a swagger that proves Neversoft definitely knows what it's doing now, something which was suggested might not be true after Guitar Hero III disappointed many with lacklustre note charts and abysmal 'boss battles'. The former have certainly been improved beyond all reasonable expectations – rarely adding extra notes where there are none to be played, and seemingly much more rhythmically sensible. It's difficult to overstate how important this is, and while the guitar parts aren't always perfect, the drum and bass patterns are >


Most of the familiar guitarists return – joined by a few new faces – and you can create your own rocker, too.

P3Zine GOLD

INSTRUMENTAL

The peripherals that will rock your world



Get on the mic | Axe to grind | We bang the drums

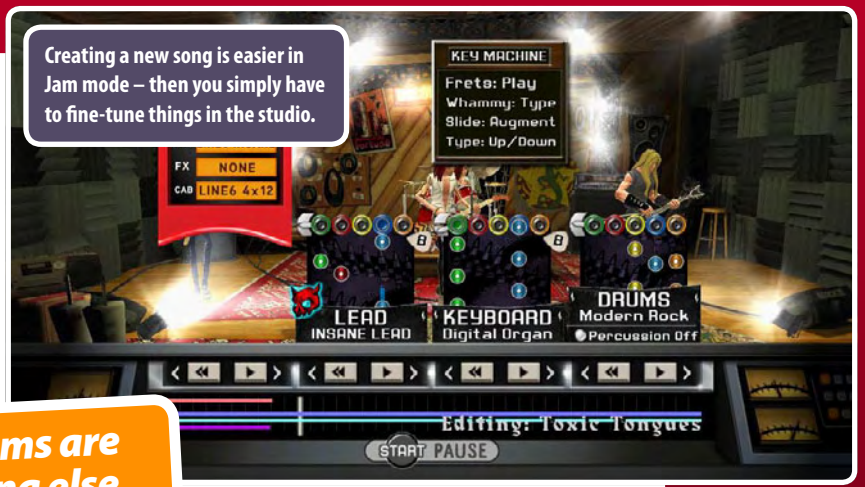
Get on the mic

The microphone peripheral is pretty standard, really, but it fulfils its purpose more than adequately. Singing is generally rather forgiving, only offering a real challenge on Expert difficulty – even pretty average vocalists should breeze through Hard.


Even the less glamorous among us can become virtual rock stars with Guitar Hero. It's just sad when you have to see yourself play…



These linked notes can be played by sliding up and down the touch-sensitive lower part of the guitar peripheral's neck.



Creating a new song is easier in Jam mode – then you simply have to fine-tune things in the studio.

> Guitar Hero continued

excellent. Meanwhile, there are only two guitar battles, which eschew the rather silly power-ups from Legends of Rock and using a style akin to the Face-off mode – offering a call-and-response mechanic which is more entertaining and makes more sense.

Naturally, this isn't just a showcase for virtual axe-wielders either, as you'll no doubt already be aware that this offers the full band experience that Rock Band seemed to have made its own. Yet World Tour has an ace up its sleeve in Activision's deal with peripheral maker Red Octane. Simply put, these instruments are on an entirely different level from those of its rival – the guitar is solid and satisfying to hold and play, with a touch sensitive portion of the neck allowing you to slide rather than tap to play certain solos, a longer whammy that can be reached more easily, and a tweaked strum bar which is also longer but a little quieter. There's still the satisfying click from having played a note, but it's less noticeable this time round. Meanwhile, the drums are something else – the rubber pads are both bouncy and sturdy, and even sensitive to velocity. During fills and finales, the harder you hit them, the louder you'll sound. The loose kick pedal is the only downside – it can move around quite a bit during a song – but it's a quirk you learn to work around.

"The drums are something else – the rubber pads are both bouncy and sturdy"

The soundtrack is a curiously eclectic mix once again – a few of >



FREEZE FRAME

Going from zero to hero in five easy stages…



10 MINUTES
You'll likely start on the drums because they're new – and great fun, too.



1 HOUR
Playing your first multiplayer gig (after a few practice sessions, obviously).



4 HOURS
Blasting through the Career mode – and enjoying every minute.



8 HOURS
Starting the Studio mode and starting to sketch out your own rock epic.

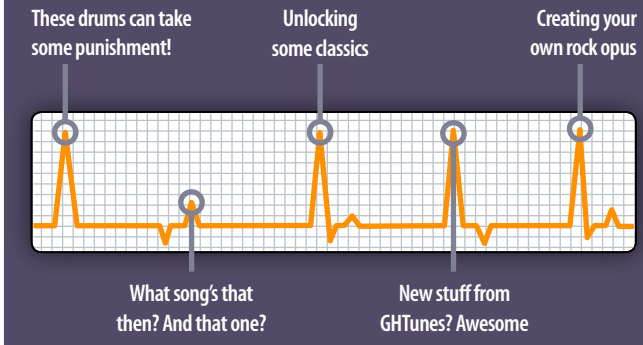


15 HOURS
Applying the finishing touches and uploading your tune to share online.





PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Guitar Hero continued

the songs will be unfamiliar to most, though it's actually quite gratifying to see some fairly obscure tracks nestling amid the more obvious anthems – and the beauty of Guitar Hero is discovering something different you weren't previously aware of. Besides, the vocals are generally forgiving enough to allow for quite a few mistakes to be made, so humming an approximation of the tune could well be enough to pass.

It's the amazingly well-featured studio that offers the biggest surprise in World Tour, though. A quite amazing array of options is at your disposal to create your own song and upload it to the dedicated GHTunes service – songs can be created through loose jam sessions with band mates and then tweaked in the studio, or painstakingly crafted from scratch note by note. A host of amp settings allow you to tailor your sound to your own requirements – from Britpop to hard rock, your created songs can cover a range of genres. It's going to take some time to make your own musical masterpiece but the tools are all there – and the tutorials are detailed yet accessible, easing you into the process gradually.

It remains to be seen whether Rock Band 2's many small tweaks can make a difference in this particular face-off, but this is a masterful reinvention of a series which should make the battle of the bands that much tighter. For now, at least, Guitar Hero is back on top. ●

"It's the amazingly well-featured studio that offers the biggest surprise in World Tour"





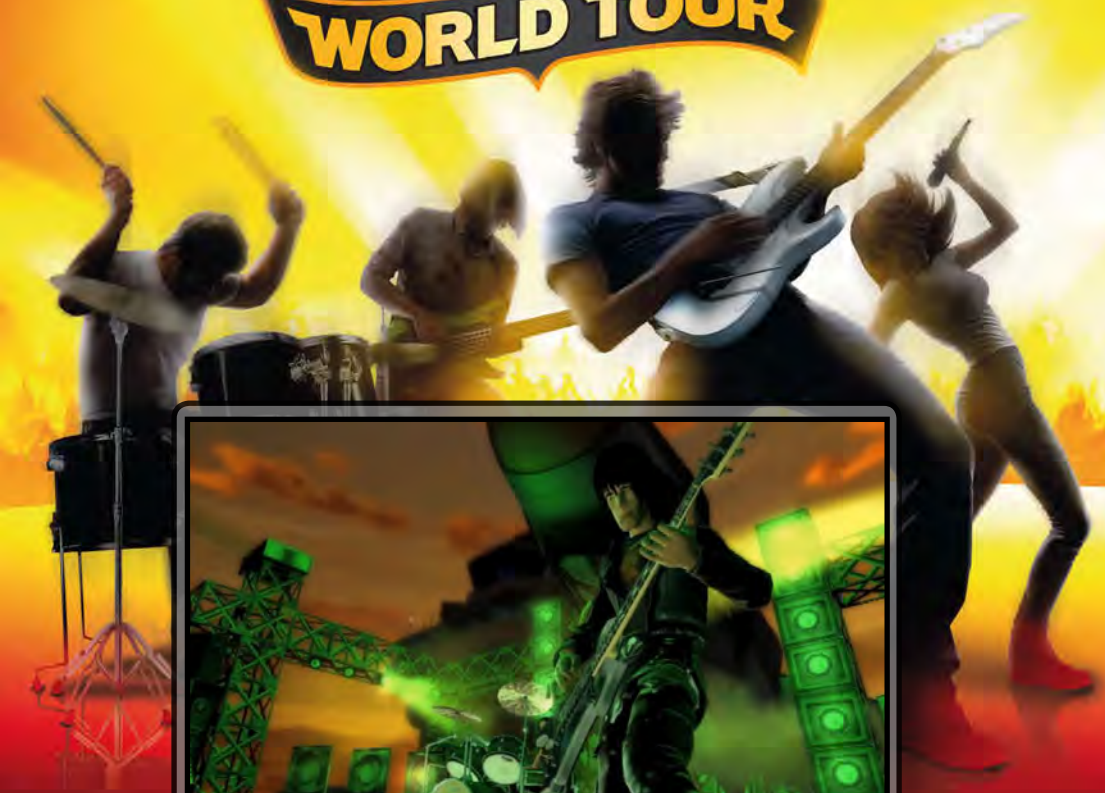
P3Zine Verdict

A rock renaissance – Guitar Hero is back in a big way

- \+ Huge changes – all for the good
- \+ Eclectic soundtrack
- \+ Superior peripherals

90%

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- Interchangeable faceplates for customising your look *
- Also compatible with Guitar Hero® games for the Xbox 360®



WIRED MICROPHONE:

- Sing along using the mic and infuse your own style into the music

ROCK OUT ON THE GUITAR CONTROLLER OR ADD A DRUM KIT CONTROLLER AND A MIC FOR THE BAND EXPERIENCE

WIRELESS DRUM KIT:

The most authentic drums available, including:

- Quiet surfaces so you can hear the music
- Pressure-sensitive pads allow creation of a wide range of sounds
- Authentic arrangement of the pads to mimic an actual drum set with raised cymbals



Create your own rocker, choose from your favourite Guitar Hero icons or take the stage as the biggest rock stars around.



Compose, record, edit, and share your own music online. Download and play community-created content for free! **



Rock out solo, with another guitarist or with a band. Kick it up with 4 vs. 4 Battle of the Bands play. **

COMING AUTUMN 2008

*Additional faceplates sold separately **Some features may be limited in the Wii™ and PlayStation®2 Guitar Hero World Tour games

PlayStation.2 PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360 LIVE Wii

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ACTIVISION. activision.com



Tomb Raider Underworld

Norsey but nice

As one of gaming's most prominent characters, it's quite a shock to see Lara Croft seemingly turn to the dark side. At the outset of her latest adventure you see Croft Manor burning, its interiors being gradually consumed by licking flames, scorching the walls and crumbling the furniture. Then we go into reverse, the camera panning outwards until it's revealed that Lara herself is the architect of this destruction, setting off an explosive via a handheld detonator. It's a shockingly iconoclastic intro, particularly if you're familiar with the >



Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Heritage: Tomb Raider Legend, Project Snowblind
Link: www.tombraider.com
ETA: 21st November

> **Tomb Raider** continued

series and the mansion in which everyone's favourite archaeologist has made her home.

After a brief jaunt through the collapsing mansion, dodging flames and getting accustomed to the controls, we flash back to one week earlier in an attempt to find out what exactly is eating Lara Croft. As it turns out, some of the problem is her obsession with discovering the truth behind the mysteries surrounding her parents. It leads her down a dark path, to the degree where she's potentially putting the world at risk merely to find out what happened, forcing conflicts even with friends Zip and Alister.

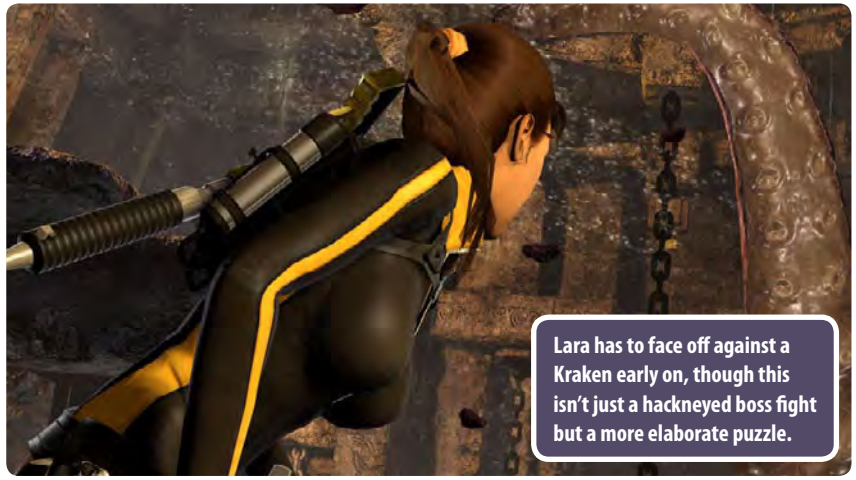
Not that you'll be spending much time chatting to those two – Underworld is very much Lara sans assistance – you're left to your own devices pretty much entirely throughout, with little but a PDA giving you a map and the occasional oblique hint to help you if you're really stuck. Not that either are much assistance – the former is pretty difficult to read effectively, while the latter offer suggestions that range from the blindingly obvious to the truly unhelpful. We know we have to find an item, just don't tell us that when we've got a gigantic ruin with about 20 massive rooms to explore, as it's really, *really* irritating.

Hardcore uproar

This is one hardcore game, make no mistake. While you can tweak options to make combat a little easier and more forgiving – with adjusters giving Lara more energy and her enemies less, for example – the core mechanics are even tougher than Anniversary. It's not that Lara's particularly difficult to manoeuvre (far from it) but that finding where to go and what to do is less obvious than it was before. It's entirely intentional of course, with each level delicately constructed so that in theory there are a number of ways to approach a given puzzle, though invariably there's one route which seems noticeably easier than the others. But you'll no longer find Lara's head nodding towards a handhold, ledge or beam – it's up to you to find your own way around.

In some respects this works very well – it increases the immersion and atmosphere by making you feel truly alone in your world. It's as if you're finally discovering what it's like to really be Lara, and find your way around these ancient ruins without everything being telegraphed. In >

"While you can tweak options to make combat easier, the core mechanics are tougher than Anniversary"


Lara has to face off against a Kraken early on, though this isn't just a hackneyed boss fight but a more elaborate puzzle.

TOOLED UP

What's new in Lara's world

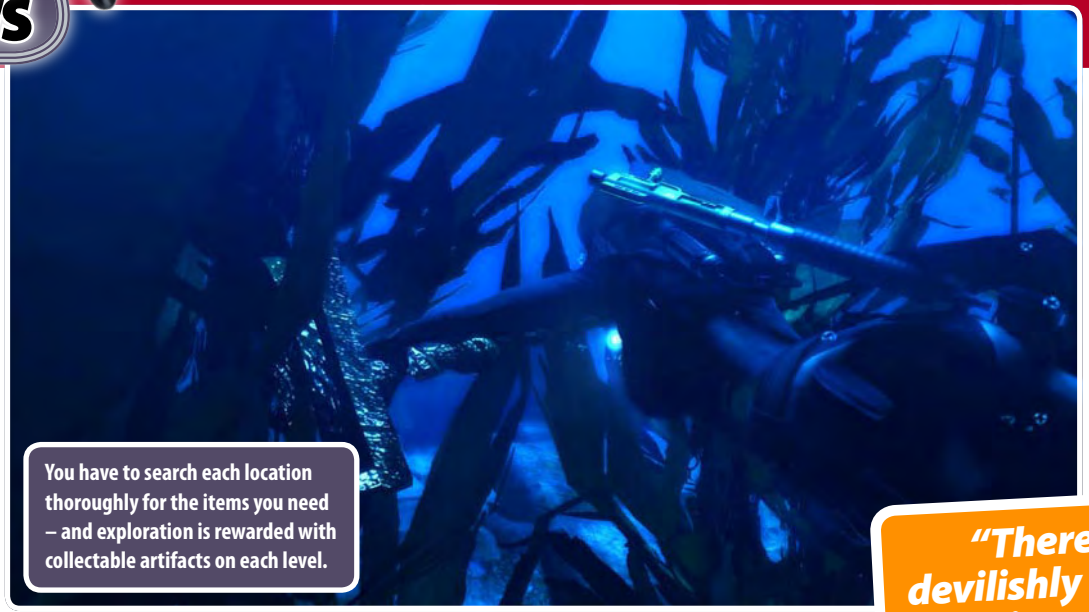


Grab **Swim** **Shoot**

Grab

Lara's grappling hook is a multi-purpose tool, used for swinging, wall-running, and often for some kind of environmental manipulation. For the most part it's used to pull or twist levers, gears and switches to activate the ancient mechanisms which drive the game's complex puzzles.


Lara's quest takes her to some memorably lush locations.



You have to search each location thoroughly for the items you need – and exploration is rewarded with collectable artifacts on each level.



There's a consistency to the game's logic that avoids the incongruity of some puzzles in the earlier games.

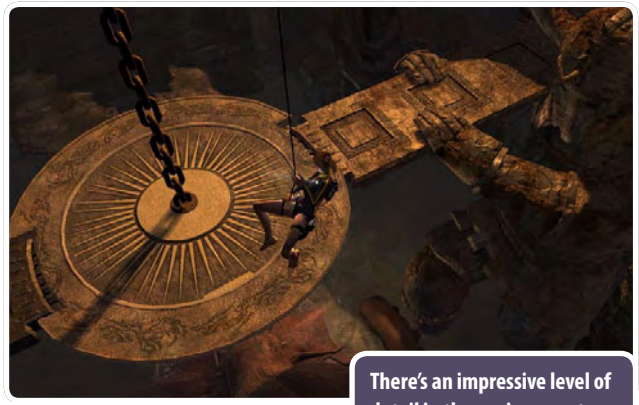
> Tomb Raider continued

some cases, it makes the exploration and puzzle solving incredibly satisfying. There are some devilishly constructed multi-room puzzles, with one of such beautiful intricacy that it brings to mind something like Ico with its astounding castle environs and enormous devices spanning several areas. The fact that these sights are really something to behold undoubtedly helps through the trickier parts, too – the lush foliage, the gorgeous underwater sections and these detailed, fantastically constructed archaic mechanisms are all terrific to >

"There are some devilishly constructed multi-room puzzles"

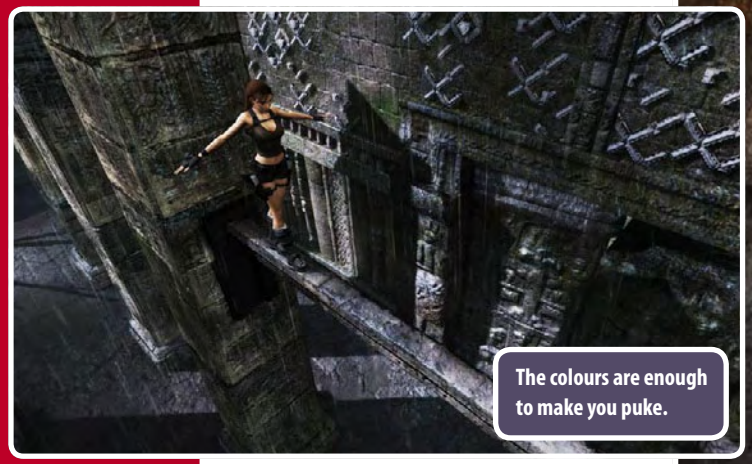


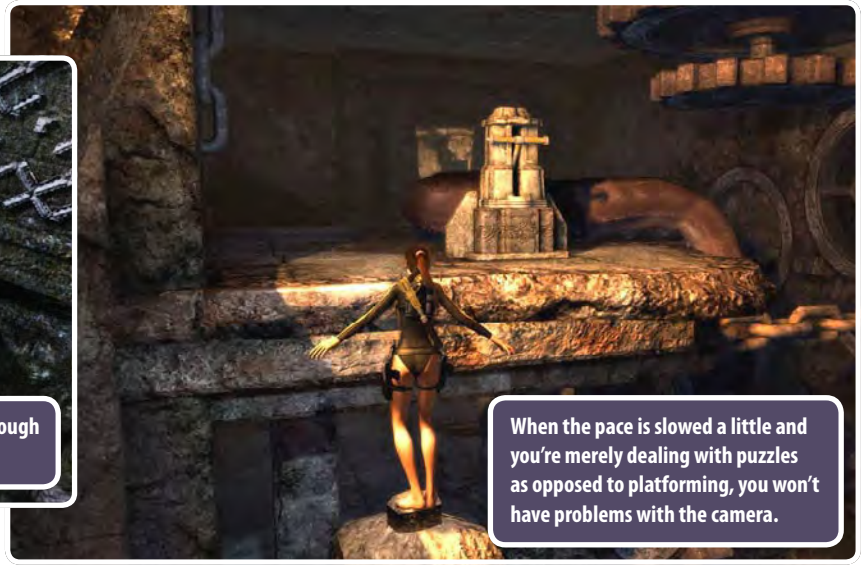
These rain effects look stunning when the game's in motion.

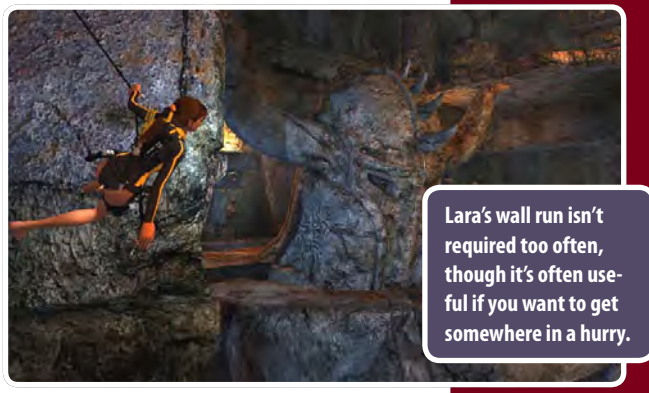


There's an impressive level of detail in the environments.

Animation is seriously impressive throughout, with just the occasional glitch to blot the graphical copybook.


The colours are enough to make you puke.


When the pace is slowed a little and you're merely dealing with puzzles as opposed to platforming, you won't have problems with the camera.


Lara's wall run isn't required too often, though it's often useful if you want to get somewhere in a hurry.

> Tomb Raider continued

look at, while Lara's animation seems smoother and more fluid than ever.

Unfortunately, there's a caveat, and it's a really big one at that. All this cleverness is almost completely undone in a single stroke by the game's camera. We're not exaggerating when we say it's absolutely atrocious. It's perhaps a by-product of the level design – the simpler Legend certainly didn't have anywhere near as many problems as this does – but it completely ruins some sections. Generally whenever there's a tight space to move around you'll have issues. Find yourself in an alcove and it can take several seconds just to find a spot where you can see what you're doing. We often found ourselves jumping completely blind because the camera simply wouldn't move to show where Lara was about to leap to. Couple that with the high difficulty of some of the puzzles and you've got a recipe for frustration which just about kills the game stone dead at certain points.



Persevere, and you'll find some of the best Lara moments yet – not just in gameplay terms, but the story, which is surprisingly accomplished. Many of Lara's past adventures have been fairly light-hearted and throwaway, but this ventures into darker territory quite frequently, and is probably what will inspire most players to continue past those sticking points. A little more work on the camera and this could have been Lara's greatest adventure to date. As things stand, it raises hopes for the next game, while sadly just failing to live up to Croft's two most recent outings. ●

"All the game's cleverness is almost undone in a single stroke by the game's camera"

P3Zine Verdict

Flawed, with some glimpses of brilliance

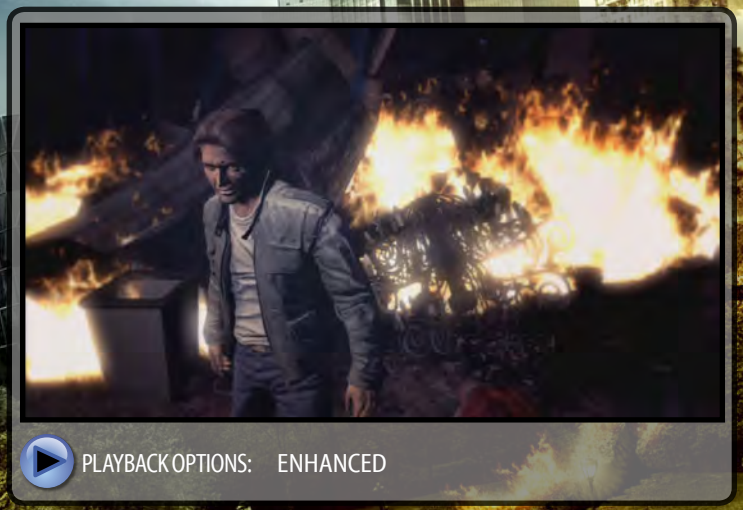
\+ Sprawling, gorgeous levels

\+ Satisfying when it works

\- Awful camera

79%

Coming November 2008



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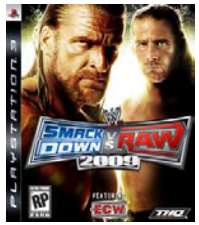
centraldark.com

PLAYSTATION 3

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Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Heritage: The SmackDown series
Link: www.smackdownvsraw.com
OUT: November 7th

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

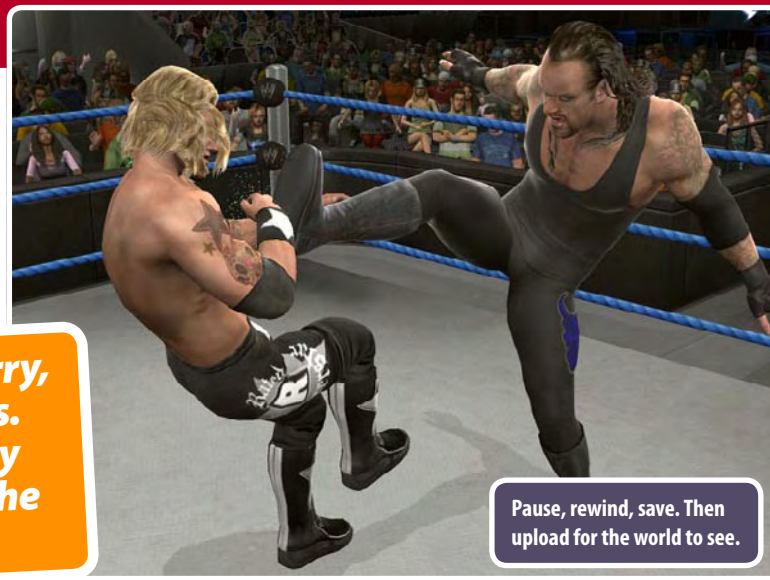
SmackDown is back, and fighting fit too

"Fans need not worry, as SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 is easily the best game in the series so far"

The SmackDown vs. Raw series has been getting a lot of stick in recent years, and not always without reason. After slipping into the old rinse-repeat method of churning out sequels with very few changes, the series has been starting to tilt itself in the right direction over the last two iterations, with the dual analogue control system, and the fighting styles adding a lot more depth to what was otherwise becoming a stale series. With that in mind, we could easily forgive WWE fans for awaiting this year's game with slightly baited breath, but you should worry no more, as SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 is easily the best game in the series so far.

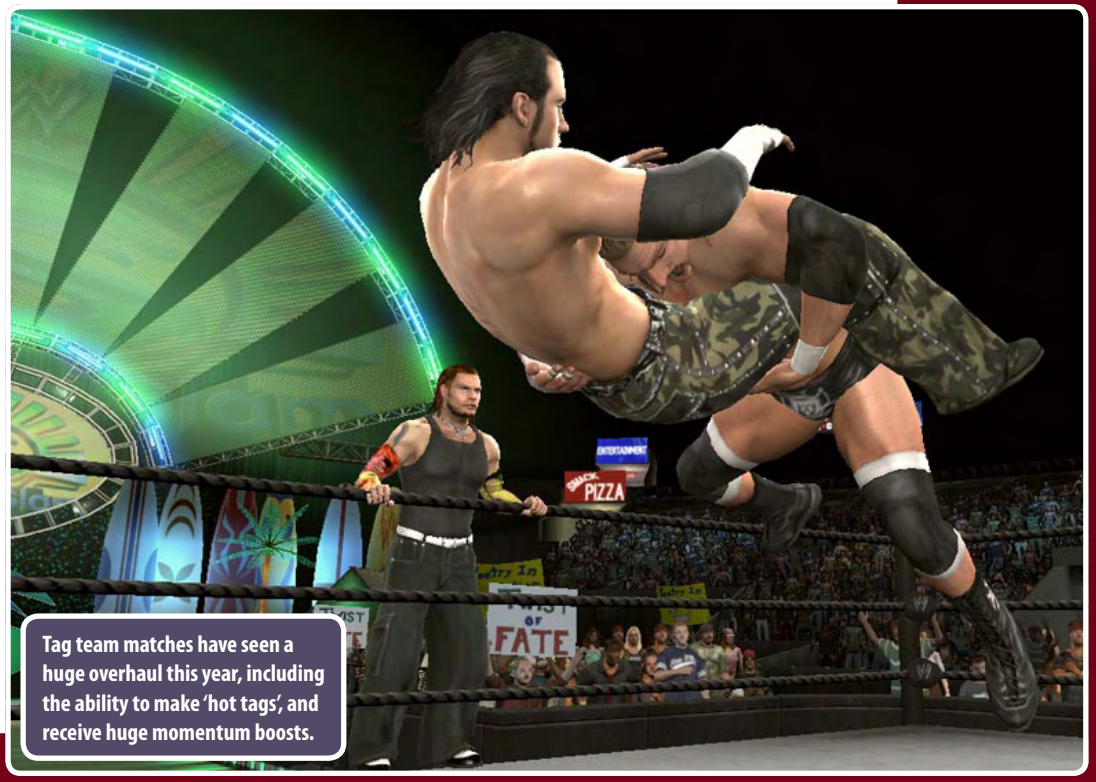
First and foremost, one of the biggest bones of contention with the WWE games has always been the story mode. After the failed experiment that was WWE 24/7, this year we've been treated to the greatest story mode since Here Comes the Pain, in the form of the Road to Wrestlemania. While people will instantly balk at the idea of only being able to guide seven wrestlers through three months of storyline, the new focus on individual personalities has led the game to be able to mirror its real-life counterpart a lot more accurately. Feuds are carried over, old relationships often come to boil, and several storylines are real nostalgia trips for life-long fans, with nods back to Evolution, DX and even the original ECW.

>



Pause, rewind, save. Then upload for the world to see.





Tag team matches have seen a huge overhaul this year, including the ability to make 'hot tags', and receive huge momentum boosts.



The prospect of DLC wrestlers has us pretty excited.



Things don't look good for the Undertaker. He's about to be sucked into Edge's mouth.

"Another great feature in this year's game is the Create-a-Finisher option"

> SmackDown continued

You'll progress from week to week by winning your matches, following a tightly knit, branching storyline that takes you through three months of action, from the Royal Rumble to Wrestlemania itself. The story may be heavily scripted, but there's still plenty of variety, both in terms of matches and narrative, with plenty of spit and polish. In a nice touch, the commentators actually discuss the implications your match could have on your storyline – referring to events that you've just played through, giving everything you do that much more meaning. Even better, in many matches you'll be provided with an optional goal – from winning in a certain amount of time to putting your opponent through a table, and if you achieve it, you could unlock anything from CAW parts, to WWE Legends.

Carrying on with the new features, one of the best – but also sadly overlooked – ones this year is called the Highlight Reel. Much like in Halo 3, upon pausing the game you can select the Highlight Reel option from the menu and view the last 30 seconds of match over again, this time with free reign over the camera. Once you've chosen the angle, and chosen where and when to cut, you can create a DVD boxart for your clip and upload it to a central server, where the whole world can view it.

Another great feature in this year's game is the Create-a-Finisher option, which when combined with the slightly update Create-a-Wrestler, should help keep your in-game creations up to date with their real-life counterparts for ages to come. It lets you string together up to 10 moves and then give it a suitably devastating name (including several real world, non-WWE finishers). It's a lot of fun giving your custom character a custom finisher, and >

FREEZE FRAME

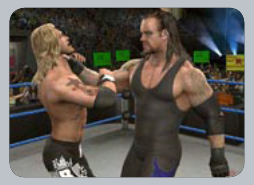
The science of violence…



1 MINUTE
Jump to an exhibition to check out the new roster of fighters you have.



10 MINUTES
Start your thrilling journey on the Road to Wrestlemania



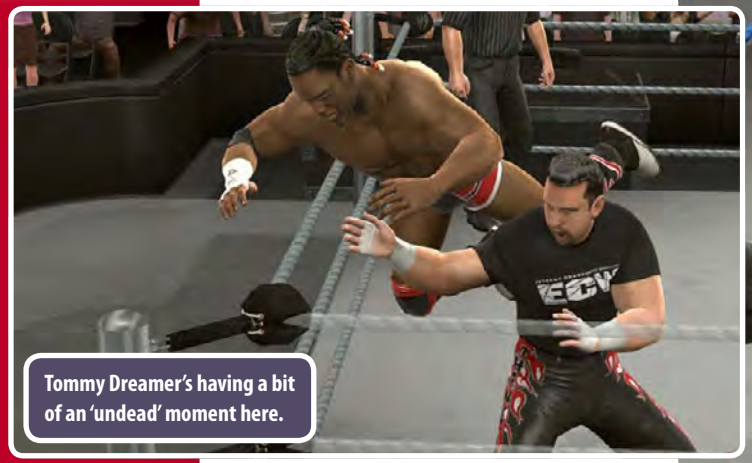
30 MINUTES
Go and make your own wrestler. And now your own finisher!



60 MINUTES
Venture online with your new creation. And lose. It gets easier, though.

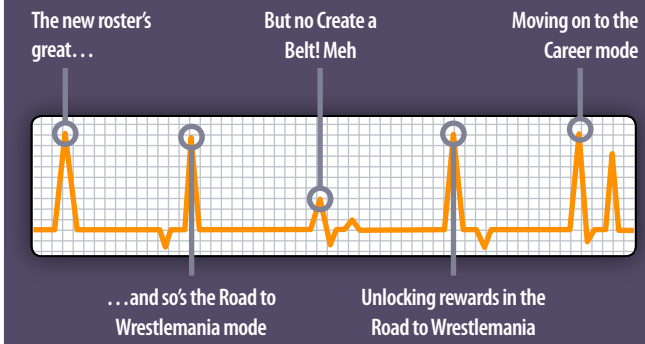


90 MINUTES
Go into career mode, and build your stats. It's a long way to the top…


Tommy Dreamer's having a bit of an 'undead' moment here.


The likenesses seem to get better every year.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> SmackDown continued

then setting him lose on the world to maim and disfigure.

The in-ring action's been refined as well this year, with the fighting styles making their triumphant return, albeit in a slightly more watered-down form. This is something of a disappointment to us, as we really enjoyed the fighting styles in last year's game. Seeing them take something of a back seat seems like a bit of a step in the wrong direction to us.

Also disappointing is the lack of the Create-a-Belt option, which has apparently been removed due to 'lack of support from fans'. We know we used this feature a lot, and we'd imagine plenty of you did too. If you did, why don't you write in and maybe we could get it back next year.

All in all though, this year's SmackDown game is a huge improvement on the previous years, if only for the revamped story mode, which has to be one of the greatest yet. With a surprisingly up to date roster, new CAW parts, the Create-a-Finisher mode, the Highlight Reel, and hundreds of other nice little touches, everything comes together to make SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 feel like a labour of love once again, and certainly not just another annual update.


There are so many divas on the roster this year, you won't know where to stick them.

"This update is a huge improvement on the previous years"



P3Zine Verdict

A polished return to form for SmackDown

\+ Road to Wrestlemania is brilliant

\+ Excellent new modes

\- No Create-a-Belt option

87%



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Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Bethesda Softworks
Heritage: The Elder Scrolls series, Star Trek: Legacy
Link: http://fallout.bethsoft.com/index.html
OUT NOW

Fallout 3

Apocalypse how?

"The world of Fallout has clearly been a labour of love to Bethesda"

As you emerge from Vault 101, your home for the first 19 years of your life, blinking and twisting into the light, you'll gaze out onto the huge vista unfurled in front of you with a mixture of shock and awe. It's Fallout 3's version on the moment in Oblivion where you first come out of the sewers into Cyrodiil, and it's every bit as effective as the first time you do it, if not more so given the horrific nature of your surroundings.

The world of Fallout has clearly been a labour of love to Bethesda – venture into ruined villages and what impresses most is the attention to detail throughout, as the true horrors of the nuclear war that has destroyed the world hit home. Fallout 3 is a bleak, sombre, affecting experience at times, and the irradiated wastelands that become your new residence offer the most significant emotional punch of the Fallout experience.

Yet the game itself is far from perfect – the third-person camera might as well have not been included at all, for all the use it is. The missions just aren't as consistently interesting as Oblivion's. The VATS combat sometimes looks extremely silly, while realtime shots that clearly hit their target but fail to register – even at short range – just don't look and feel right. We understand that the statistics-based nature of combat means that >


Seeing a child's playground lying in ruins is really rather sobering – it's these images which will rattle around your head after playing.



You can take conversations in different directions with your unique skills.

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

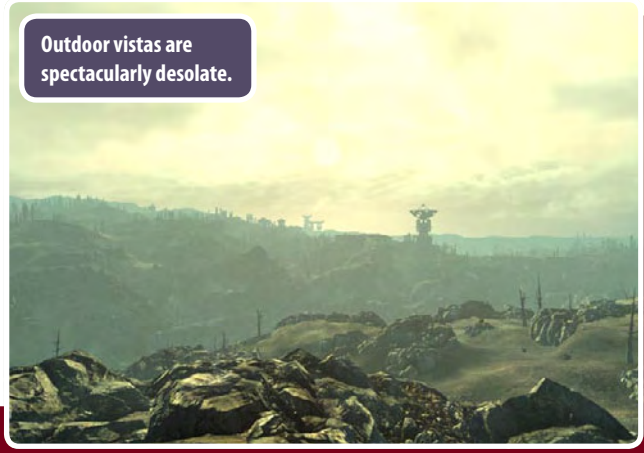
It's gore galore with VATS



Distance over time | **Target practice** | **Pieces of hate**

Distance over time

If you can, it's wise to tread very carefully through the wastes – don't worry, the game won't let you walk very fast anyway – and aim for higher ground, which enables you to see enemies earlier. Picking up a sniper rifle is a must, as you can take out enemies from a distance, or at least soften them up. As long as your accuracy rating is high, that is.


Outdoor vistas are spectacularly desolate.



Build up your Stealth skill and you can sneak fairly close to enemies without them noticing – generally though, most are fairly alert and will spot you easily.



You can take conversations in different directions with your unique skills.

> Fallout 3 continued

inexperienced characters are bound to miss, but when you're unloading a full clip into someone's head from a few feet, and blood-spatter evidence suggests insta-death, to see your opponent immediately return fire as if entirely unaffected is jarring. In a world like Fallout's where immersion is key to everything, it constantly drags you out of the game.

Having said that, Fallout 3 isn't meant to be like Oblivion. It's quite old-school in its role-playing elements – the focus on building statistics, developing skills and the world responding accordingly is true to the original Fallout games. Certain characteristics affect dialogue choices which affect missions which affect other events… the game can play out very differently depending on where you go and which way you decide to take your character. Some of the moral choices are very intriguing – one of the better quests involving what appear to be human vampires may well throw you for a loop, as it reveals that the lines between good and evil have been well and truly blurred.

"Fallout 3 is quite old-school in its role-playing elements"

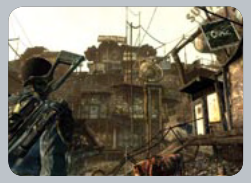
It offers more dialogue options than Oblivion, making conversations more interesting, but the game opts for the rather static, awkward talk mechanic, which ensures that the chat lacks the dramatic kick necessary to make you care for >

FREEZE FRAME

How to survive a nuclear winter



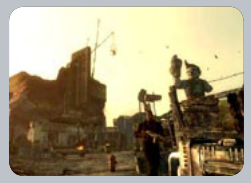
30 MINUTES
It's your birthday! It's here you'll get the ever-useful Pip-Boy 3000.



1 HOUR
Finally venturing out into the wastes – time to get walking.



3 HOURS
Wandering into cities and getting your arse kicked – Fallout is tough in places.

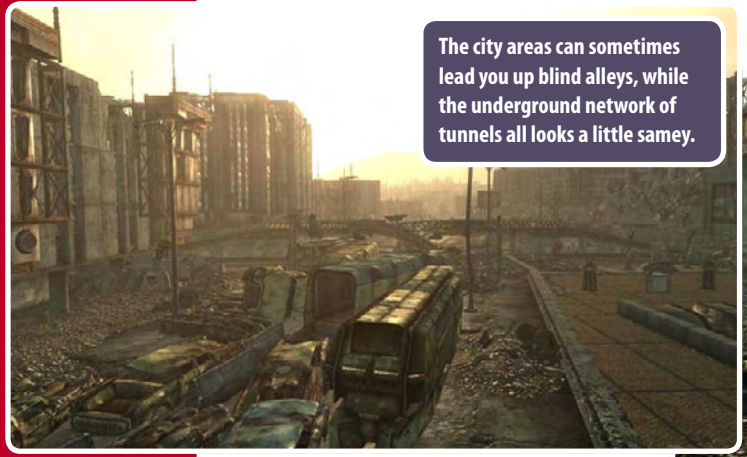


12 HOURS
Mopping up a few sidequests before getting back to the story.



30 HOURS
It's game over, so if you want to explore some more, you'll have to start again.





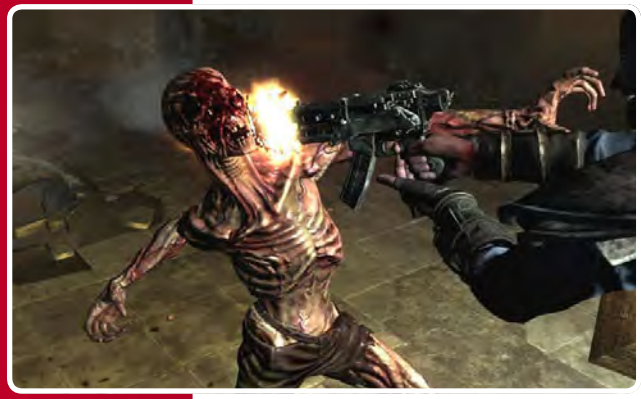
The city areas can sometimes lead you up blind alleys, while the underground network of tunnels all looks a little samey.



You'll see some horrific sights when wandering across the Capital Wasteland.

> Fallout 3 continued

the characters. You'll more likely take to canine pal Dogmeat – assuming you find him, which is by no means certain – though he's more awkward to interact with than your four-legged friend in Fable II, and his tendency to disobey instructions can get you and him into trouble. On one occasion we told him to venture back to Vault 101 when spotting a dangerous group of bandits some distance away, only for Dogmeat to run up to attack, getting himself killed in the process. And once he's gone, he isn't coming back.



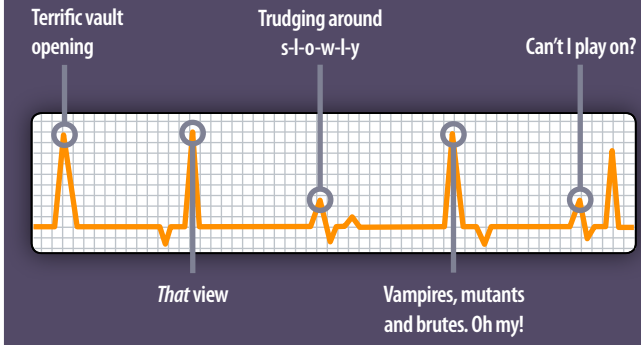
Hit and miss

So it's very hit and miss in places – you'll adore the freedom the game seemingly grants you to roam the nuclear wastes, but then you'll wander into hugely overpowered enemies without any warning who'll tear you to ribbons. Given the funereal pace at which you move, you can be exploring for upwards of half an hour, only to lose your progress when this sort of thing happens. Prior knowledge is certainly helpful, so be sure to save often. You're afforded an autosave at certain points – usually when entering or leaving an area – but it's always best to keep a few others handy in case of the occasional freeze or glitch.

While it's not without it's problems, Fallout 3 is difficult to dismiss. It's ambitious, has tremendous scope, it offers a number of paths to go down (and a series of endings to match) and proves hugely compelling despite the flaws. And you can't deny you're not getting your money's worth – while the main quest can be completed in about 10 hours, you'd be missing out on a wealth of sidequests and other pursuits that can extend that play time well into three figures.

Perhaps our expectations were too high, but whichever way you cut it, this is a slight disappointment. That it still manages to entertain and enthral for the most part is testament to how much Bethesda has got right.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"While it's not without its problems, Fallout 3 is difficult to dismiss"



P3Zine Verdict

No Oblivion-beater, but an epic, involving RPG

- \+ Compelling storylines
- \+ Plenty of chills and thrills
- \- Same old flaws

80%



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Bioshock

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: 2K Marin, 2K Boston, 2K Australia, Digital Extremes
Heritage: Dark Sector, Pariah
Link: www.2kgames.com/bioshock/ps3/us/launch.html
OUT NOW

Underwater love

"Bioshock is full of hidden secrets and depths"


This plasmid allows you to freeze certain enemies – once fully iced, a shot will shatter them into bloody pieces.

It's taken quite some time for the PlayStation 3 to get its first taste of Rapture, Ken Levine's wonderfully crafted undersea utopia-gone-wrong. Since Bioshock landed on the 360, we've had other first-person shooters which have broken new ground (Far Cry 2), masterfully realised dystopic environments (Fallout 3) and games offering more flexible and interesting moral choices (Mass Effect, Fable II). So does that mean that Irrational's seminal adventure is – just one year on – already starting to look a little rough around the edges?

The answer has to be no. While Bioshock might never have been the out-and-out masterpiece some claimed at the time, it remains a thoroughly compelling trek through one of the most immersive gaming universes yet created.

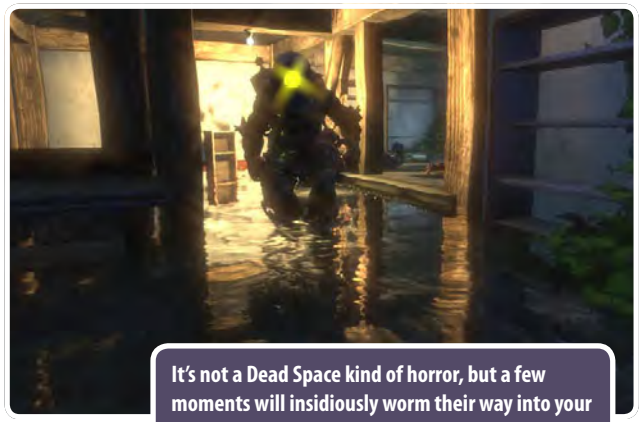
A second chance

Your correspondent may have been a little harsh on the 360 version of Bioshock first time round. A second playthrough reveals that the game, like its world, is full of hidden secrets and depths. Played away from the hype, its mechanics don't seem as repetitive or linear, while time spent luxuriating in Rapture's atmospheric splendour – and with fore-knowledge of the rug-pull the game introduces in its final, divisive act – proves it's almost as clever as those initial critical raves would have had you believe.

>




Little Sisters were supposedly the emotional hook, but it's the Big Daddies you'll sympathise with most.


It's not a Dead Space kind of horror, but a few moments will insidiously worm their way into your head, possibly to resurface in your nightmares.



> Bioshock continued

Moreover, a repeat play allows you to take in your surroundings a little better, to listen to the dialogue in a different context, even to completely change your approach to the game's combat. Most players – including this reviewer – used one or two plasmids to soften up opponents before finishing them off with a gun, thus letting skirmishes get dull before the end, simply because it seemed the easiest way to finish off those splicers. But then again, it's up to the player to mix things up to create more interesting and exciting encounters. Hurling wasps at enemies and seeing them scrabble around madly before smacking them with a wrench, or hacking security turrets before luring foes into your neatly laid trap is hugely satisfying. Perhaps if certain plasmids weren't quite so overpowered more people would have tried to experiment, but the choice is always there – it's just up to you to make it.

Speaking of choices, the decision whether to harvest the life-improving Adam from the zombie-eyed Little Sisters now seems a little insignificant in the light of virtually all the games we've mentioned in the intro, pretty much all of whom have done this kind of thing in more subtle and interesting ways – the disappointing diptych of endings turning you into either a saint or a force of shuddering evil. But, more than ever this time, we felt sorry for the Big Daddies – the lumbering behemoths you'll see on the game's box. More than the first time, we felt as if we were invading their territory, impinging upon their own private little routines as they stomp through the ruined city, there only to protect their scampering charges. >



It's best not to play the game on Easy mode – the lack of challenge removes the tension from some encounters.

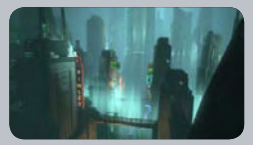
"More than ever this time, we felt sorry for the lumbering Big Daddies"



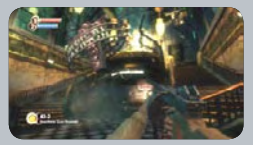
Full of freaks and mutants, Rapture isn't a pleasant environment to be in, despite the faded beauty of its art deco interiors.

FREEZE FRAME

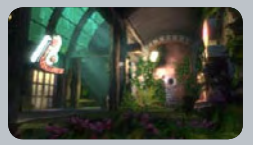
A whole new world…



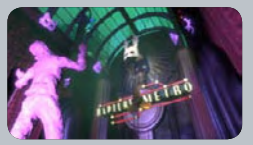
10 MINUTES
A crash and a splash and the world is yours. But who are you? And, more importantly, where?



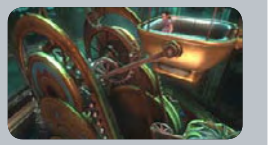
30 MINUTES
Sadly for you, the medical pavilion isn't particularly that good for your health. Enter the splicers…



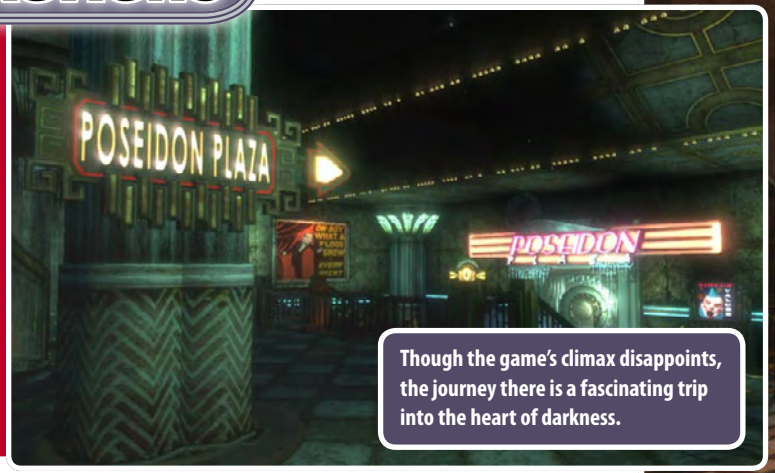
3 HOURS
Lies of Arcadia – fetch quests aren't our favourite thing, but thankfully it's not a pointless one.



5 HOURS
Frolicking good freaky fun to be had now as you witness Sander Cohen's 'masterpiece'.



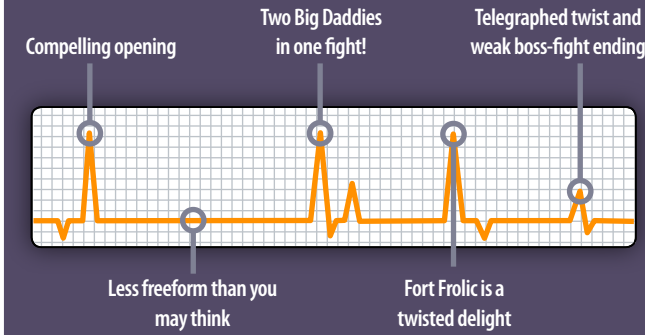
10 HOURS
Twist and shout – the ending might make you scream, but you'll be very glad you played.



Though the game's climax disappoints, the journey there is a fascinating trip into the heart of darkness.


Stealthy tactics can be used more often than you think, though a few sections won't open up until you've killed all the nearby enemies.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



RAPTUROUS RECEPTION

Three aspects that make Bioshock a very different kind of shooter



Gene and tonic

Hack and splash

Say Cheese

Gene and tonic

Gene tonics are split into several categories, but they all improve your character's skills in some way. Combat tonics increase your strength and quicken your reflexes, Physical gene tonics allow you to boost your general abilities, and Engineering tonics allow you to hack into Rapture's security systems more easily.

> Bioshock continued

They might be scripted rather than reactive, but the moments where you hear one wail and bang on a wall, searching in vain for the waif-like creatures that are their raison d'etre, brings to mind the guilt felt standing by the corpse of a slain Colossus.

It would be nice to think that the PS3 version has had a number of tweaks given the lengthy delay of this release, but there's essentially nothing new at all. It still looks great – artistically more so than technically, though things still move pretty smoothly, and it still tops quite a few more recent games, so it's not showing its age just yet. The sound design is still out of this world – approaching the very best videogaming has to offer, and just falling short of the majestic work from EA with recent horror Dead Space. Indeed, the comparison with that title is a pertinent one – both are fairly linear journeys through worlds gone pear-shaped, both offer intense and intoxicating atmosphere, and both hold their fair share of scares. But Bioshock feels a little more like its own game – more likely to influence others than be influenced by them – even if playing it so close to Fallout 3 shows how much it owes to the predecessors of Bethesda's latest.

With most of the new stuff still to come – a series of chambers which test your genetically enhanced skillset due to be made available as downloadable content later in the month – Bioshock can't have the same impact as its debut. But if you're a PS3 owner who has long coveted this inventive, mature FPS, then Bioshock is well worth the investment in a trip somewhere beyond the sea.

> *"Bioshock feels like a game likely to influence others than be influenced by them"*



P3Zine Verdict

This will have newcomers in total Raptures

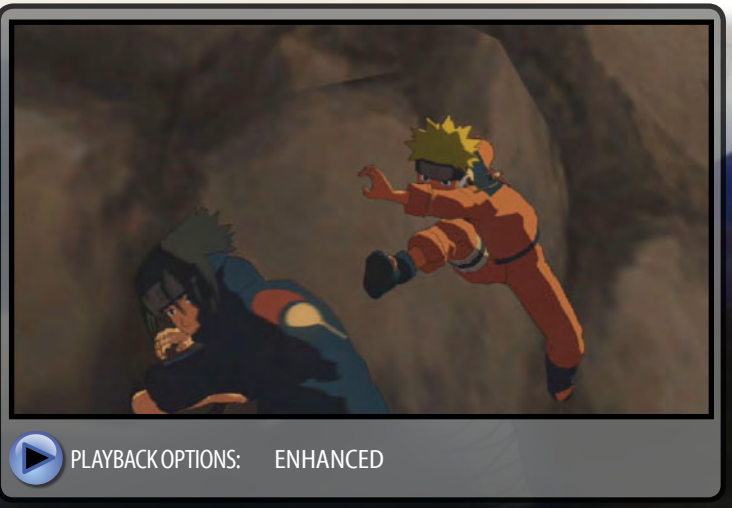
\+ Incredible atmosphere

\+ Fascinating story…

\- …which ends badly

85%

AT LAST, THE LINE BETWEEN ANIMATION AND GAMING TRULY DISAPPEARS*!





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www.naruto-videogames.com

PLAYSTATION 3

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* THIS IS AN ACTUAL SCREENSHOT FROM THE GAME



Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Heritage: Assassin's Creed, Rainbow Six Vegas
Link: www.farcry2.com
OUT NOW

Far Cry 2

Safari so good…

"There's around 50 hours of gameplay for those who like to explore"

Vision blurring from malaria, you're taken through Africa by a taxi driver jabbering away ten-to-the-dozen, as a plane passes by full of people escaping the madness of the region you've just been driven into. Collapsing from your illness just as you arrive at your location, you're woken by the man you've been sent to kill – the infamous Jackal, a weapons dealer who is arming rival factions in a war being fought across the jungles. Scrambling outside as pockets of fighting get closer, you fall to the floor once more, eventually revived by someone who just might be your new best friend in this hellhole.

It's one hell of a welcome to Far Cry 2, an Africa that's been beautifully realised by Ubisoft in amazing detail, 50 square miles of which provides the backdrop to a series of missions set to lead you back to your nemesis who you must assassinate to end all this chaos.

Environmental damage

Its world is Far Cry 2's trump card, a wonderfully immersive environment which carries you through its weaker moments – like the missions themselves. Both story-based quests and other inessential tasks generally require you to travel somewhere to kill someone or destroy something.

And if they don't, then you'll have to do plenty of blasting on the way – each road has plenty of checkpoints manned by armed guards who tend to shoot first and ask questions later. Yet the combat itself is only limited by the player's imagination – the weapons and tools you're given allowing you to change your approach as often as you feel like injecting some variety into the rhythm the game settles into. AI is smart, gunplay works nicely, and you'll struggle to find any serious glitches. The repetition is the only real issue.

With around 50 hours of gameplay for those who like to explore and tackle sidequests, an incredibly complete map editor and a robust multiplayer mode, you'll certainly get your money's worth with Far Cry 2. ●



Enemies will often chase after you in cars if you run away – sometimes it's best just to stay and fight.



The game's dynamic fire is impressive.

DIAMOND GEEZER

Pal up for a buddy for extra benefits



Friendly fire | **Trouble maker** | **Rescue mission**

Friendly fire

Your first buddy is chosen from one of the characters you didn't choose as your avatar at the outset. They'll phone you to offer alternative ways to complete missions, often subverting the objectives entirely. Buddies tend to provide backup in a firefight, though they're not always so helpful – you'll sometimes have to use your health-giving syrettes on them.

P3Zine Verdict

One trip abroad you won't soon forget

+ Wonderful atmosphere
+ Varied gunplay
- Repetitive missions

85%

LittleBIGStruggle?

It's won over the critics, but can LBP be a smash hit with the public?



Hopefully positive word of mouth will help shift plenty of units.



Chris Schilling
Chris is the proud owner of all three 'next-gen' consoles. Every issue Chris will chart the progress of PS3 and commenting on Sony's latest and greatest initiatives.

It's undoubtedly one of the most important releases of the year, for many reasons. LittleBIGPlanet marks a huge step forward for user-created content in gaming, bringing level construction to the masses in a dazzling and totally unprecedented way. Well, in theory at least. LBP undoubtedly represents a bit of a gamble for Sony, and it's betting the farm on it being a huge success. Sackboy has been adopted as a mascot for the PS3, the game is being advertised in magazines like Heat and FHM as much as in the specialist press, and it's been hyped beyond belief for so long that it surely can't fail to be a sizeable hit.

Or can it? While Sony has been successful in communicating its appeal to gamers, it may find things more difficult when it comes to the wider audience it is clearly hoping to attract with the game. In theory, its cute-but-still-cool lead character should have universal appeal – particularly given the number of ways you can customise your Sackboy and make him more expressive, which is one aspect likely to appeal to casual players. Yet for some it's still going to appear a little wacky, a little too 'gamey'. It's not quite got the kind of inoffensive simplicity – some would say blandness – that makes Nintendo's Miis so hugely popular.



Its unique visual style and sense of humour will surely find favour with plenty of open-minded gamers.

Serious issues

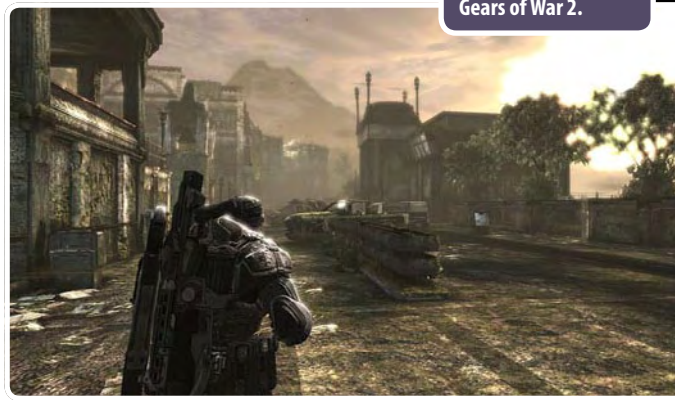
The other issue is a little more serious, as there's simply no escaping the fact that LittleBIGPlanet is not a universally accessible game. It may be riotously colourful, fantastically inventive, full of delightful little touches and bags of humour. It may have some amazingly thorough and surprisingly enjoyable tutorials voiced by the wonderfully charming, witty and eloquent Stephen Fry. It may offer a toolset that's as simple as it could possibly be, given what Media Molecule wanted players to be able to create. But those tools still aren't going to be accessible enough for most people. It's genuinely difficult and time-consuming to create something decent in LittleBIGPlanet. A fun plaything or your own personal take on an existing level might not take too long, but making something that everyone can enjoy is painstakingly hard work. Of course, you can always just rely on the content created by others who've mastered the creative tools. But then again…

> **"There's no escaping the fact that LittleBIGPlanet is not a universally accessible game"**

The problems with the servers in the first few days since its US release are worrying for a game which is so reliant on its online side. Factor in the enforced delay thanks to the furore about those Muslim-offending lyrics in one of the game's songs, and you start to wonder if the game might be cursed before it's even truly arrived.

But enough negativity. There's something we can all do to ensure that LittleBIGPlanet is a big success, and that's to support it. Buy the game, play it, and do your best to create something. Inspire others with your efforts. Get friends and family members involved, and show them that with a little effort they can create something rewarding, even if it's only a gigantic Sackboy cutout made from sponge and cardboard. Stick with the game and help the community thrive. Talk about it incessantly to workmates and other acquaintances until you've got them interested enough to give it a go.

LittleBIGPlanet deserves to be a monster hit. Let's all do our bit to make sure that's the case.



The release delay means that LittleBIGPlanet is coming up against sure-fire hits Guitar Hero: World Tour and Gears of War 2.

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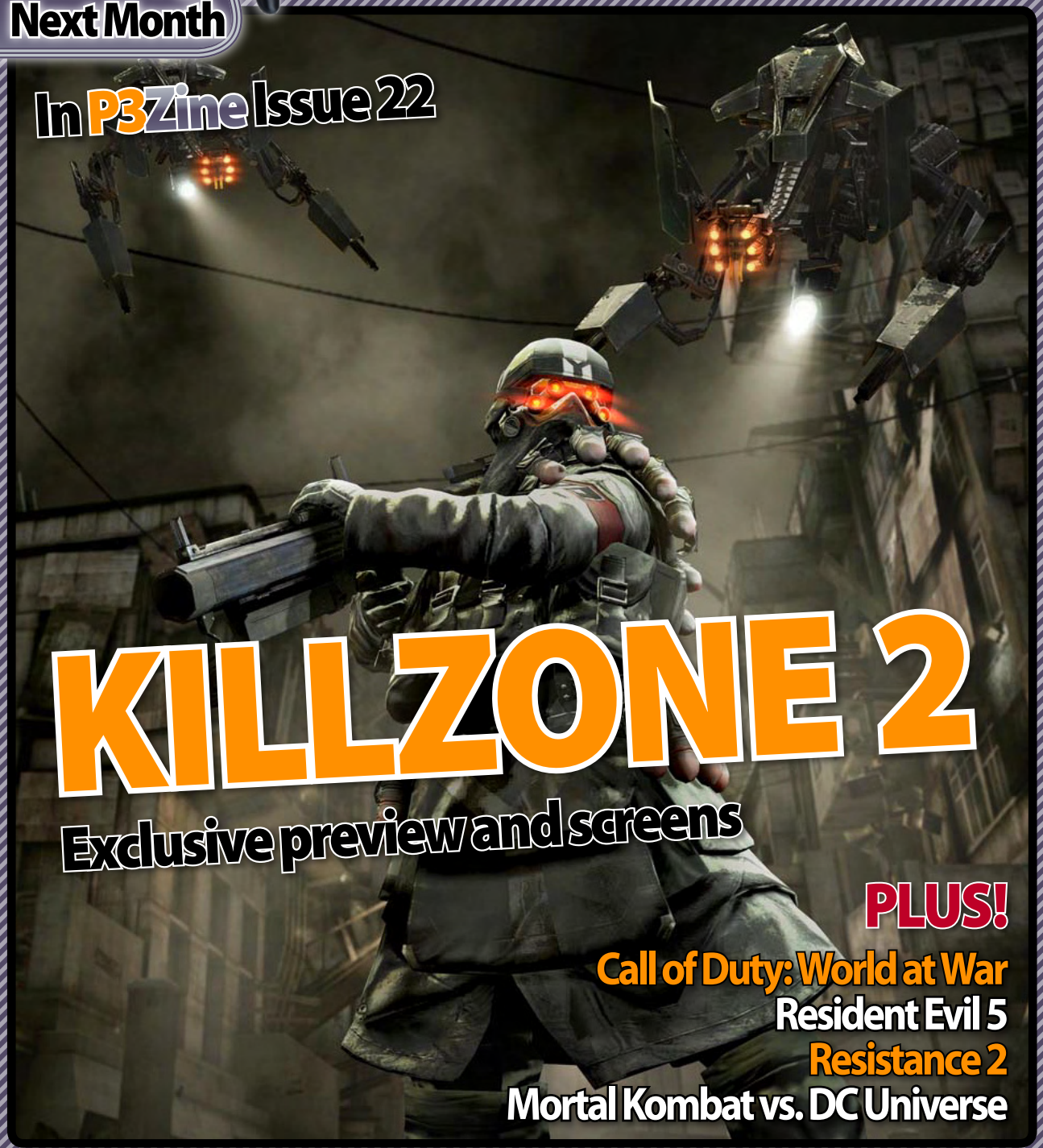
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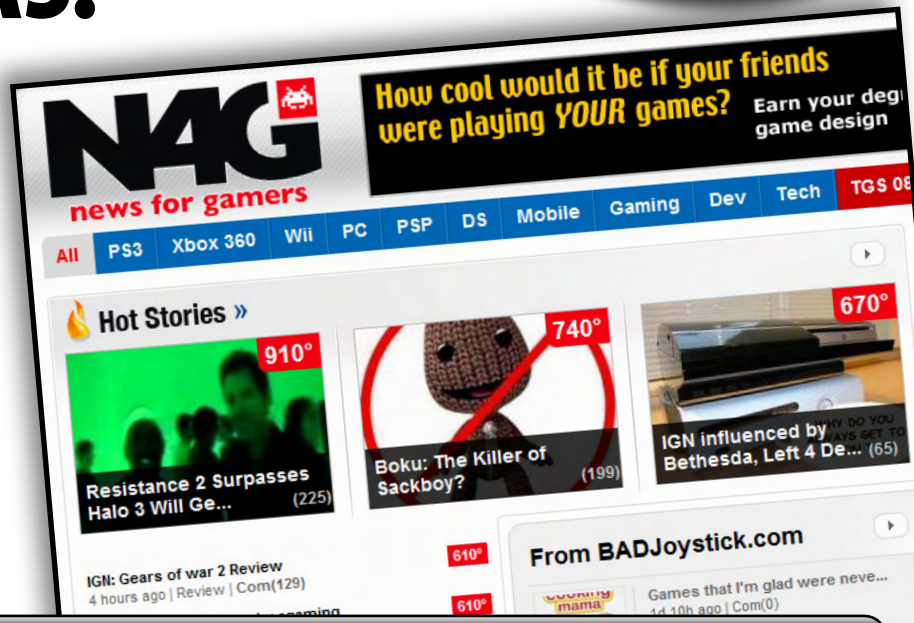


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