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P3Zine

Issue 23 | January 2009

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

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SKATE 2

PREVIEW!

THE BEST PS3 GAMES FOR 2009

BEST OF 2009!

Every games worth its salt on PlayStation 3

PREVIEWED!

Street Fighter IV

PREVIEWED!

50 Cent: Blood on the sands

PREVIEWED!

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

HAWX

PREVIEWED!

White Knight

PREVIEWED!

Flower

Welcome to P3Zine



There's no doubt that PlayStation 3 has been something of a slow burn. But there's also no doubt that it continues to burn bright... and long. As 2008 built upon 2007, so 2009 looks set to turn up the heat on the year that was. To whet your gaming appetite we've brought together the Top 20 titles that /should/ be coming to a PlayStation near you this side of Christmas. Our Most Wanted isn't supposed to be a prediction of the biggest selling titles of the year, but rather a countdown of the titles we're most looking forward to. Take a look at what's in store and then drop me a line to let me know what's floating your boat this year...

Enjoy the issue,

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
p3zine@gamerzines.com

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

MEET THE TEAM

There's nowt they don't know about PlayStation



Steve Boxer
Takes to the skies with Tom Clancy's HAWX



Steve Hill
Looking forward to Street Fighter IV



Chris Schilling
Grinding it up with Skate 2

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights...

The latest & greatest titles on PS3



Big in 2009

The Top 20 titles coming to PlayStation 3



Street Fighter IV

The definitive smack-'em-up?



HAWX

Take to the skies with our hands-on preview...



50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

Don't mess! Preview inside

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

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White Knight Chronicles
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50 Cent: Blood on the Sand
Tom Clancy's HAWX
Skate II
Crash Commando
Savage Moon
Soldner-X: Himmelssturmer

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Flower

FIRST LOOK

A force of nature

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: thatgamecompany
Heritage: Flow
Link: http://uk.playstation.com/games-media/games/detail/item114776/Flower
ETA: Mid-February



Ken Kutaragi (remember him?) always told us the Sixaxis was elegant, but Flower's arguably the first time that's ever felt like an accurate description.



Change direction without any wind power and the petals blur as everything goes into slow motion.

"In Flower you're essentially playing the wind itself – tilting the controller to change direction"



Gliding high allows you to see any flowers you may have missed, but we prefer to sweep along the grass, with the blades parting as the wind swooshes through.



Each level is a flower's 'dream' – upon exiting you're back in a dingy apartment in the city, whose appearance will improve as you collect more for your window display.

What is it?

Small indie developer makes beautiful, relaxing aquatic gobble-'em-up, which becomes big seller on PlayStation Network. Developer is given much more money (and loads more time, too) by Sony for sequel which has similarly peaceful approach. Flow becomes Flower, tilt control remains, action junkies remain nonplussed. Everyone with a taste for the esoteric rejoices.

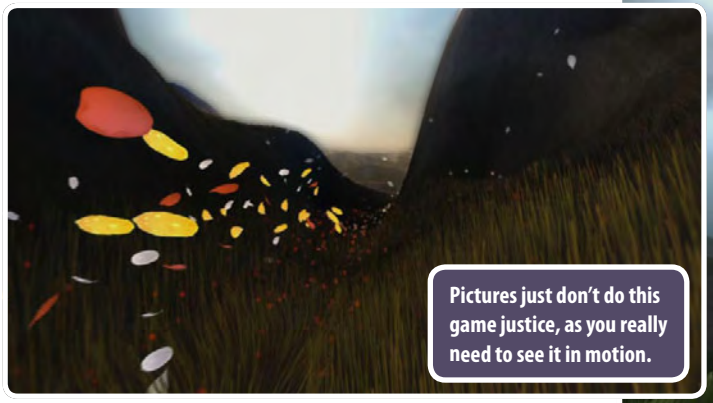
Why should we be excited?

In Flower you're essentially playing the wind itself – tilting the controller to change direction, and pressing any button to blow, holding it down to increase the force of your bluster. It's used to separate a single, tiny petal from a lone flower residing within a huge, virtually empty field. Eventually, you'll find another flower, and you'll pick up another petal to add to your collection, then another, spreading pollen which gradually lets more flowers to spring to life.

Certain flowers just add to your petal collection (which in turn makes it easier to catch groups that are a little more spread out), while others have a more transformative effect – making a dry, barren patch of yellowing grass suddenly turn a verdant green, bringing with it more flora to sweep past.

Flower reminded us of Okami at times, but arguably even more beautiful, with millions of individual blades of grass swaying and parting as you swirl around and about them. Eventually you'll activate the level exit – a miniature whirlwind which leaves one final flower. How well the >

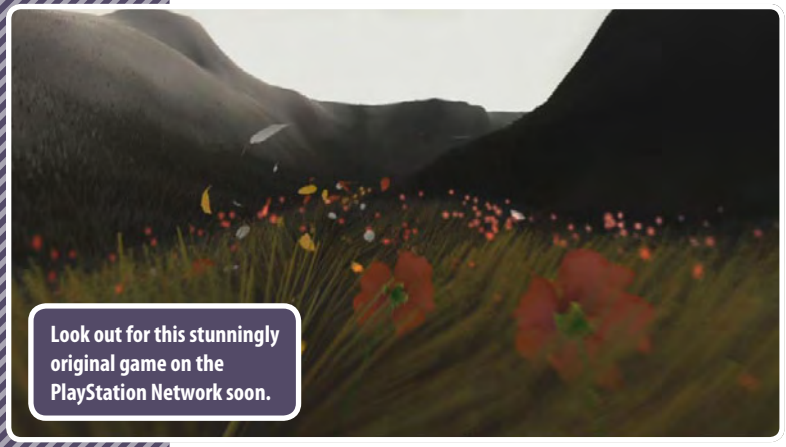
PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Flower



Pictures just don't do this game justice, as you really need to see it in motion.



It seems each stage will add its own tweaks to the basic formula – the third level's windmills effectively make for short on-rails sections.

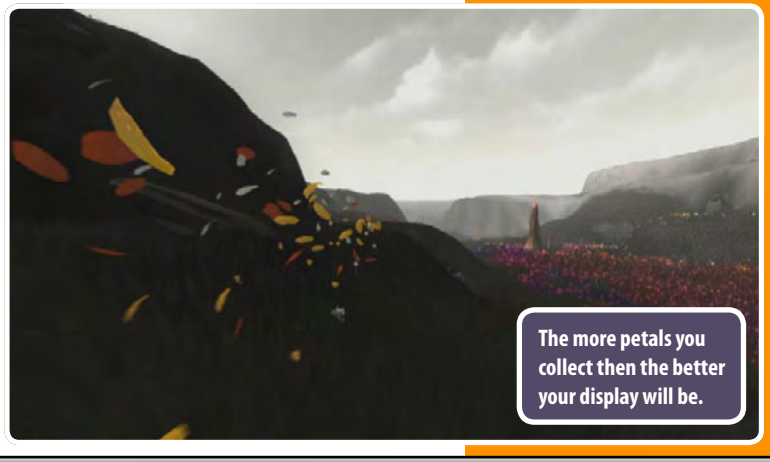


Look out for this stunningly original game on the PlayStation Network soon.

"One stage's sepia-toned landscapes painted cerulean blue and neon pink as you whizz over the grass"



The one wind turbine in Lincolnshire that hasn't been hit by a UFO.



The more petals you collect then the better your display will be.

> Flower continued

flower is blooming depends on how many you collected – sweep them all up in your spiralling, pirouetting flow and it will open fully, transporting you back to its starting position in the window of a city apartment, whereupon it will be joined by another flowerpot containing a bud of a different hue.

The two other stages we played added slight wrinkles to the gameplay, the second stage's sepia-toned landscapes painted cerulean blue and neon pink as you whizz over the grass, while the third level's windmills funnel you down pathways at great speed, requiring dextrous tilt control if you want to pick up all the petals along the way. Needless to say, despite the relative lack of objects on the levels we played, it's absolutely beautiful – the sunset in the third stage is probably the most beautiful we've ever seen in a videogame.

When can we expect to see more?

Sony is aiming for a mid-February release on PSN for Flower, so we'll let you know our thoughts on the finished product next month. But, barring any major disasters in the development process between now and then, we're expecting big thing of it.

Anything else to declare?

There's a light rumble and a musical sound effect as you touch each flower, ranging from plucked harp strings through chiming glockenspiel strikes to Enya-esque vocalisations. Combined with the gorgeous, ethereal visuals, it's quite the sensory experience. So if you're looking for something very unique that also manages to showcase your PlayStation 3's many talents, then this could be the game for you.

White Knight Chronicles

FIRST LOOK

Level-5 levels up with the biggest PS3 RPG so far

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Level-5
Heritage: Jeanne D'Arc, Professor Layton and the Curious Village
Link: www.level5.co.jp/products/shirokishi/index.html
ETA: TBA 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of White Knight Chronicles



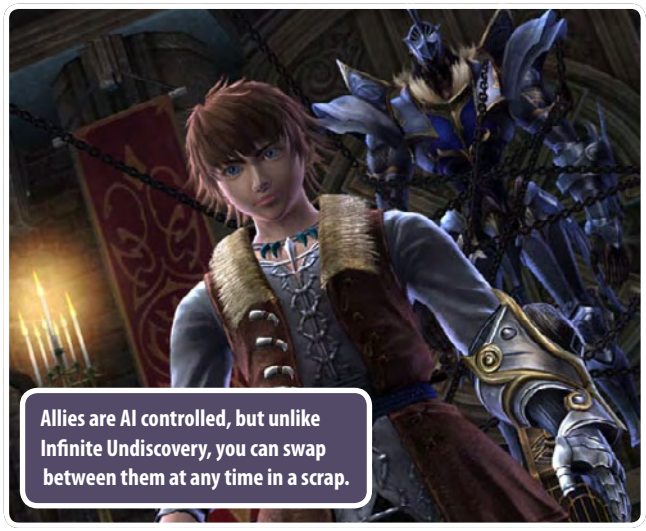
Despite Leonard's size in his White Knight suit, he's still dwarfed by some of his foes.



The tactical element of battle comes into play with the 'function palette' – a list of commands which can be changed at any time outside combat.



"The massive solo adventure reportedly runs to around 100 hours, and unusually features a real-time combat system"



Allies are AI controlled, but unlike Infinite Undiscovery, you can swap between them at any time in a scrap.

What's the story?

A young boy unwittingly coming into contact with an ancient artifact which makes him incredibly powerful? It must be JRPG time again! This Sony-published role-player has already had great success in Japan, and coming from Level-5, creator of the charming and hugely popular Professor Layton series, that's no surprise. You play a heroic chap named Leonard who, attempting to rescue a princess from an evil corporation, happens across a suit of armour which allows him to transform into the White Knight – a warrior who stands over seven metres tall.

What do we know?

Despite a fairly tepid reception from Japanese gaming bible Famitsu, White Knight Chronicles has found favour with many Eastern gamers, with its blend of single-player questing and online adventuring. The massive solo adventure reportedly runs to around 100 hours, and unusually features a real-time combat system, as opposed to the turn-based battling usually favoured by Japanese role-playing games. While it may seem that Leonard is overpowered in his White Knight form, some enemies he faces are much bigger still – indeed, the game has a preoccupation with excessive size, featuring a gigantic turtle that carries an entire city on its back. Aside from the real-time combat, the game is fairly traditional – whether that will put off Western gamers remains to be seen.

When do we get more?

There's no information regarding a Western release as yet, but it's extremely likely to get localised, given that SCEE has already announced it will be publishing the title.

Anything else to declare?

Certain materials and items will only be available in the online quests as an incentive to get more gamers playing in groups.

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COMING AUTUMN 2008

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ACTIVISION. activision.com

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Dimps/ Capcom
Heritage: Street Fighter, Dragon Ball Z
Link: www.street fighter.com
ETA: 20th February

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

Street Fighter IV

Round Four… FIGHT!

It's no exaggeration to say that we've played our preview copy of Street Fighter IV for longer than we play 99% of other code this month. What's perhaps even more surprising is that we've played it more than most full games. A restricted roster, one mode and just three fights, but they've been played over and over and over. And over…

Coming home

Quite simply, Street Fighter IV feels like a homecoming. It feels like Street Fighter II has gone away for a number of years, come back older, wiser and even better-looking, and with a few new tricks up its sleeve, almost all of which are seriously impressive. It essentially completely supersedes what is regarded as one of the greatest beat-'em-ups of all time, and manages to make just about every other fighter of this generation look amateurish by comparison. Not even the superb Virtua Fighter 5 can compete – this is the return of the master, who looks likely to dominate the genre for years to come. Time will tell whether Capcom can get online right, but if it can provide a solid, lag-free service, then this is an undoubted masterpiece that we're looking at here.

What's clear from our time with the PS3 version is that its D-pad is a better fit than the 360's, but it's still a game that's undeniably going to benefit from a proper arcade stick – expect to see quite a few emerging in the run-up to the game's February release. Otherwise there's negligible difference between the two home conversions, both of which are essentially arcade-perfect ports.

What impresses us most is how balanced it all seems – Capcom appears to have >

"It makes just about any fighter of this generation look amateurish"



Time will tell whether the backdrops wind up being as iconic as those in SFII.



All your old favourite moves are back – Ryu and Ken's hadokens look particularly fierce this time.

> Street Fighter IV cont.

offered some kind of counter against every type of player. Aggressive fighters can be undone by the calm, measured Focus moves, while those specials seem easier to pull off when you're backed into a corner. Most importantly, the Revenge gauge allows you to come back from a seemingly impossible position, as it fills the more damage you take. Once over half way, you can execute your character's Ultra, which is a more powerful version of their sole Super – and if it hits, the move is played out in all its three-dimensional glory, the camera closing in and sweeping around in a manner that makes the Ultra that much more brutal and satisfying.

Fans of Third Strike are likely to carp that SFIV isn't quite as intricate – that its hardcore edges have been sanded down and smoothed over – but it means the game is no longer about learning a series of complicated inputs and studying move lists for hours on end. The comparative ease with which specials and EX moves can be pulled off, and the addition of Focus attacks and the Revenge gauge, makes it more of a battle of wits than ever.

It's just hard to see how Capcom could reasonably have improved this – we'd complain a little about Crimson Viper, with her irritating super jump and ground attack, were it not for the quality of the other newcomers. Rufus might not be much to look at, but he's a surprisingly effective scrapper, while Gouken is slowly turning into one of our favourites, with his variations on Ryu and Ken's specials not only great to watch but pretty devastating in the right hands. It looks fantastic, sounds great and plays like an absolute dream.

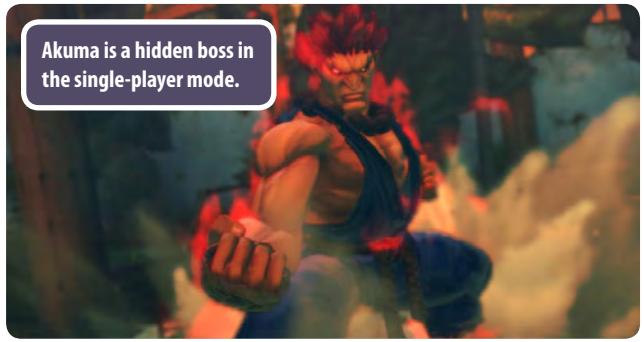


Sakura seems a little too weak by our reckoning, though apparently she has a legion of fans.


The blobs of ink – or is it paint? – which fly as the more powerful moves hit home really add to the impact.



The longer you leave your Revenge gauge to build, the more damage your Ultra will do.


Akuma is a hidden boss in the single-player mode.



"Most importantly, the Revenge gauge allows you to come back from a seemingly impossible position"

P3Zine

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE 95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 95%

Utterly exceptional – the ultimate fighter?

FIRST LOOK

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

Curtis Jackson and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Swordfish Studios
Heritage: World Championship Rugby, Cold Winter
Link: www.50bloodonthesand.com
ETA: 20th February

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



Fiddy has an impressive arsenal at his disposal, which he can build up further by collecting loot from fallen enemies.

It's very hard not to have preconceptions about some games, Blood on the Sand being a case in point as it follows up an insipid predecessor – the mediocre 50 Cent: Bulletproof – and its story involves the titular rapper gunning down hundreds of enemies in an unnamed Middle-Eastern country in order to get his hands on a crystal skull which has been stolen from him. But ignore all that, and the uncomfortable marriage of hip-hop and the sort of brutal gun violence the music has often been accused of glamorising – arguably never more egregiously than this vicious run-and-gun – and you've got a hugely accomplished third-person shooter that's made up from two parts Gears of War and one part Bizarre Creations' underrated The Club.

The significant leap in quality from Bulletproof is genuinely staggering. Whatever your thoughts on the game's dubious themes and wonky morality, there's no denying that it's a hell of a lot of fun. Indeed, it moved Epic Games to praise the game as one of the best games it had seen using Epic's Unreal Engine 3, and it's definitely deserving of such plaudits. While it's hardly the most colourful game we've ever seen – an abundance of dusty brown may be appropriate given the setting, but it's still a little unexciting – the beefy character models, the explosive effects and the terrific animation make it among the best-looking titles in the genre, perhaps second only to Gears itself.

Naturally, you play as Fiddy himself, who has over 20 weapons to choose from to take out the waves of faceless enemies he comes up against. From rocket launchers to machine guns to explosive >



Grenades and rocket launchers provide some satisfying explosions, with destructible environments and ragdoll enemy animations making the mayhem more realistic.



> 50 Cent continued

grenades, he's a bit of a dab hand with any weapon, and he's ably assisted by one of three other members of his G-Unit crew, each of which has his own speciality in combat. Friendly AI is impressive, but it's much more enjoyable to play the game in the online co-op mode, where it's genuinely satisfying to take down opponents as a team. It's not just about gunplay either, as Fiddy will get the chance for some more up-close-and-personal moments with his enemies, and is able to engage in hand-to-hand combat, and execute powerful counter-kills.

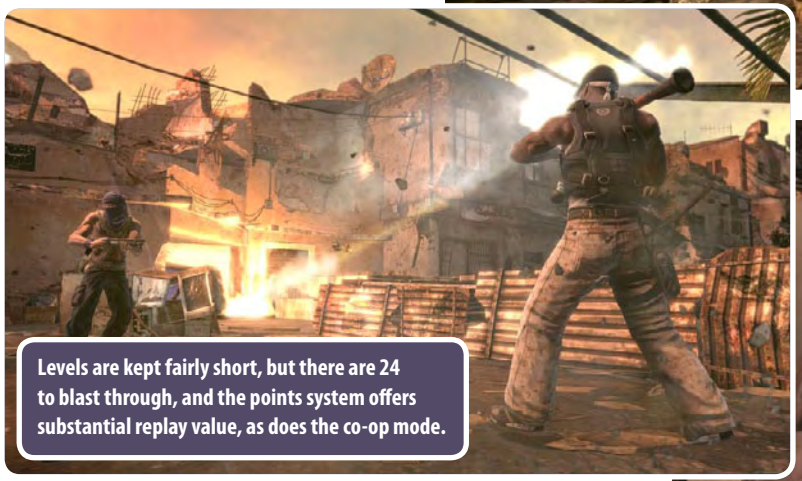
Cover me

The game's cover system is intuitive, but the idea is to spend more time out in the open – you're rewarded with additional points for more impressive kills, with explosions and headshots earning you more than blasting an enemy several times in the chest. You're also given the opportunity to increase your points tally by chaining kills, while the game often chucks different tasks your way, such as collecting a certain amount of swag, or finishing a level within a set time limit. Top-up your tally enough and there's the opportunity to enter a kind of bullet-time, where everything in Fiddy's world slows down but the man himself, allowing you to take down multiple targets without them firing back.

It's all so gleefully over-the-top that it's hard to find it truly offensive, even as you're knifing Generic Arab Grunt #3748 in the gut from close quarters. Some will find it morally reprehensible, but while the swaggering machismo might put some off, the rest of us can enjoy a fast-paced, addictive blaster that just happens to star one of the world's biggest rappers.



Its cover system may be inspired by Gears of War, but at least Swordfish is snaffling ideas from the very best.



Levels are kept fairly short, but there are 24 to blast through, and the points system offers substantial replay value, as does the co-op mode.



Fiddy's G-Unit crew prove themselves equally adept in battle, each with their own strengths to draw on in a gunfight.

P3Zine

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE 95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 85%

Gloriously violent, but also damned good fun, too

HANDS ON

Tom Clancy's HAWX

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Bucharest
Heritage: Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
Link: http://hawxgame.uk.ubi.com
ETA: March/April

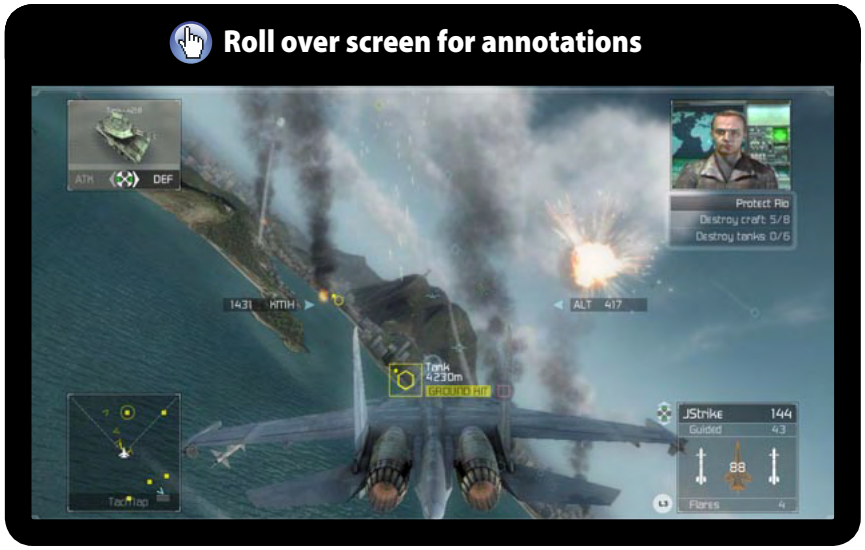
Ubisoft takes the Tom Clancy universe into the skies

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



"HAWX aims to drag the air combat genre into the mainstream, and early indications suggest it could achieve just that"

HAWX, Ubisoft's latest foray into its expensively licensed alternate Tom Clancy world, could initially be seen as a bit of a punt. It's the first game bearing the stamp of the future-military expert which takes place in the skies (the likes of Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon have been firmly rooted on the ground). Air combat games, though, have always been seen as a bit tricky to get to grips with unless you're a devotee of flight sims. But HAWX aims to drag them into the mainstream, and early indications suggest it could achieve just that.



Story time

The plot is thus: you're David Crenshaw, a pilot in the HAWX special-ops flying division of the US military. As it's 2019 (and Tom Clancy), private military companies have taken over from national armies, so HAWX has been disbanded and you start the game flying for an outfit called ARES. Soon you become embroiled in a war in South America, fought between Brazil and a coalition of countries called Las Trinidad. Surprisingly, at the outset, this means you fight against the Americans, but as the war spreads to North America, HAWX is reconvened and you end up back in the fold.

This premise cleverly allows HAWX to send you off on a set of pleasantly varied missions enacted over some seriously exotic locations – such as defending Air Force One from waves of incoming fighters, defending Rio de Janeiro from a full-on ground and air assault and even escorting the Space Shuttle as it blasts off to plug the holes in the US's satellite defence system. It puts you at the controls of 60 of the world's finest military aircraft (both existing and prototypes), including the Eurofighter Typhoon, the F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter, the deadly A-10 tank-buster, the F/A-18 Hornet and various Russian Sukhois.

The first thing that will leap out at you – particularly if you're a devotee >

> HAWX continued

of the Ace Combat games – is that, at last, the ground you fly over has proper 3D relief, rather than looking like a giant aerial photo. So you can fly between skyscrapers in cities, fully exercising your hooligan tendencies. The 18 missions are satisfyingly meaty, multi-stage, checkpointed affairs with more variation than you might expect. In the first, a sort of prequel, you are in Mexico in 2014, supporting ground-based Ghost units in a clever replay of a GRAW 2 mission. There are stealth missions – avoiding radar detection – aerial protection missions, full-on dogfights and so on.

Ubisoft Bucharest has come up with two cleverly conceived elements which move HAWX from the realms of flight-sim geekery and into the hands of less specialist gamers. The first is the concept of assistance. Initially, this is turned on by default, and its upside is that it gives you a barrage of on-screen information – primary targets, missile lock-ons, video windows and even, if you choose, trails on your HUD which you can follow in order to engage enemy aircraft in close-up dogfights. But when assistance is on, your aircraft won't exceed its safety limits, so it becomes less manoeuvrable. A neat touch.

Calling for assistance

When you turn assistance off, the view backs out, and you lose most of the HUD info, but you can see a lot more of the battlefield and engage in Red Arrows-style aerobatics



Airborne targets are probably easier to take out than ground ones – especially when, as in this case, you're locked on good and proper.



This is where assistance comes in handy. Having selected a ground target, the safest way to take it out is a good old dive-bombing.



In the heat of battle, it's not always easy to differentiate enemy types – it's certainly not an issue in the single-player, but takes some getting used to in the multi.

>HAWX continued

– handy when avoiding incoming missiles or dogfighting. In one early mission, you end up being awarded an "assistance-off" certificate. Lead game designer Thomas Simon says: "Assistance is useful for giving you the trajectories which can allow you to intercept enemies or make a surgical strike. You turn it off when you need to react quickly or when things start to get out of hand – which could be when you have too many enemies to deal with."

The second element is the Enhanced Reality System (ERS), which is just the barrage of HUD information coming in when assistance is turned on. Different planes have different head-up displays, but the game's future setting allows Ubisoft to invent a retro-fitted, consistent interface across all the planes – the ERS. Cannily, according to HAWX's storyline, the ERS can be updated with downloads, allowing it to acquire mission-specific attributes – such as the radar direction-finder used in the stealth missions.



We reckon that the four-player multiplayer dogfights could be huge amounts of fun.

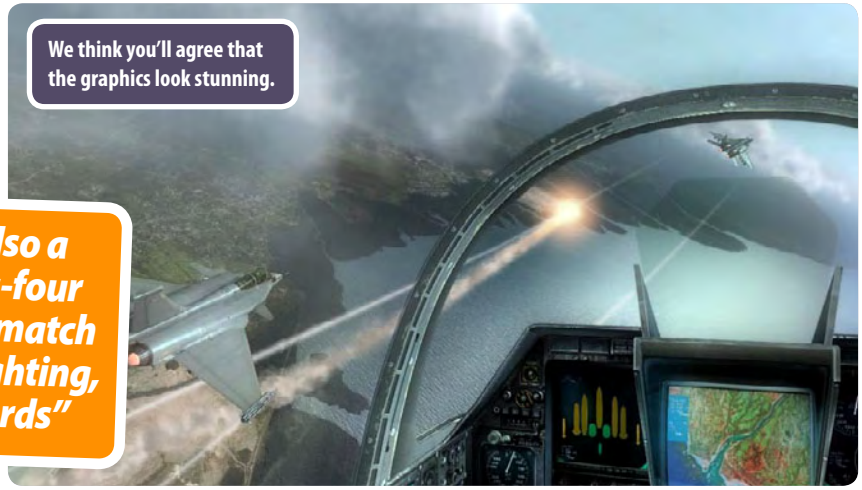
Multiplayer mayhem

The whole of HAWX's single-player game can be tackled by up to four people co-operatively, either locally or via the PSN, and dropping in or out whenever they want. According to Simon, the mission objectives remain the same, but: "The pure level design evolves from the single-player to the multiplayer, so you really have to co-operate with your teammates. Enemy units will come from new directions, and will have to be intercepted in a different way." There's also four-versus-four Team Deathmatch – pure dogfighting, in other words.

HAWX won't be a life-changing, PS3-shifting blockbuster – too many people simply aren't interested in air combat. But it's intelligently conceived and immaculately executed, with a smooth, progressive learning curve, and we've found it more engrossing to play yet accessible than any previous game from the genre, so it has every chance of reaching a more mainstream audience. It certainly makes the likes of Ace Combat 6 feel like something from the Ark.



Expect some intense aerial battles.



We think you'll agree that the graphics look stunning.

"There's also a four-versus-four Team Deathmatch – pure dogfighting, in other words"

P3Zine

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE 85%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 85%

Tom Clancy takes to the skies impressively

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BIG in 2009







2008 was a good year for PS3 exclusives, but it didn't quite live up to the 'year of the PS3' billing. 2009 could well be a different story, with a host of console exclusives and some multiformat crackers set to burn even larger holes in gamers' wallets over the next 12 months. So here are 20 PS3 games which we're looking forward to in 2009...

20 Noby Noby Boy

OUT QUARTER 1

PUBLISHER Namco-Bandai **DEVELOPER** Namco-Bandai

THE LOWDOWN

The brainchild of Katamari creator Keita Takahashi, Noby Noby Boy is set to hit PSN in the first quarter of the year. You play as a quadruped with a worm-like body, the idea being to stretch your abdomen as far as you can, to gain points. These points will be uploaded online, with certain tallies unlocking new environments for the Boy to stretch in.

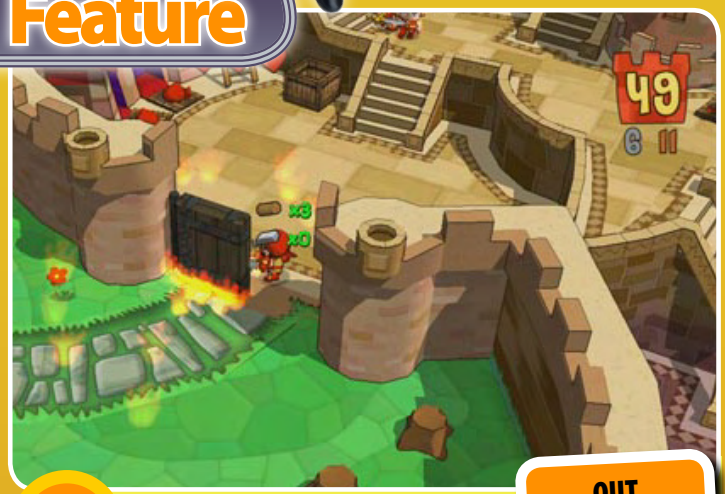
WHY WE'RE EXCITED

If you've played Katamari, you'll know why. From what we've seen of Noby Noby Boy so far, it's every bit as crazy as its predecessor, and despite being a completely different game to Katamari, the two share several ideas – the idea of expanding your avatar, and the twin-stick control (here moving the front and back ends of the titular Boy. The presentation is simple but reliably charming, and it's got more charisma in five seconds of footage than most other games manage in their duration. And it may be a little bit childish to admit, but we have to say that the name makes us giggle like schoolboys.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

A little too weird for some, but those of a certain mindset will find plenty to love here



19 Fat Princess

OUT 2009

PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment **DEVELOPER** Darkstar Industries

THE LOWDOWN

One of the surprise hits of last year's E3 was this cute yet gory team-based PSN game, which tasks players with rescuing the titular obese maiden from their enemy's stronghold. Its art style is charming, even as a copious amount of blood flies across the screen, while the action is both hugely strategic and fast-paced. With up to 32 players in each game, it could well be one of the PlayStation Network's strongest games of 2009.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

It says something about the quality of Fat Princess that, of all the PS3 games shown at E3 2008, this was one of the ones with the most buzz about it, seemingly coming from nowhere to steal the thunder of much bigger, more expensive titles. We're particularly intrigued to see how well the character class system works out, as well as experience the hilarious sight of tiny men straining to carry the hefty, cake-munching royal while fending off the attentions of their opponents. Best of all, it's further proof of Sony's investment in innovative new titles.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

If Darkstar gets the balance right, this could be one of the multiplayer games of the year

18 SuperCar Challenge

PUBLISHER System 3 **DEVELOPER** Eutechnyx

THE LOWDOWN

Another PS3-exclusive racer follows Ferrari Challenge to the grid, with the developer of that under-appreciated sim Eutechnyx on handling duties once more. Rather than sticking to the Italian stallion (Ferrari not Stallone, obviously), the range of vehicles has been beefed up significantly, with stunning motors like McLaren F1 cars rubbing bumpers with Aston Martin DB9s and Lamborghini Murcielagos.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

Ferrari Challenge was a little restrictive in some ways – not least because it alienated those who didn't want to drive something that was both red and also Italian – but it made for a cracking serious racing sim, offering numerous assists for newcomers, while building up to a super-realistic expert setting, with handling which many feel is among the best in the genre. The new game features over 20 tracks to choose from, allowing you to race around Spa, Silverstone and the legendary Nurburgring, while Tiff Needell commentates. What more could you want from a racer?



OUT SPRING

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

With Gran Turismo 5 on the horizon, SuperCar Challenge has its work cut out on the sales front, but it's sure to provide an excellent drive



OUT 2009

17 Quantum Theory

PUBLISHER Tecmo **DEVELOPER** Tecmo

THE LOWDOWN

Gears of War with spikes, basically. Quantum Theory isn't quite as boring nor as complicated as its name suggests, instead taking the form of a cooperative third-person shooter with a cover mechanic not a million miles away from Epic's Locust-fragging franchise. The one difference being that chunky meathead Syd and lithe pistol-packing heroine Fillena have to negotiate a 'living tower' with the cover rarely staying in one place.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

GoW2 fans will know all about moveable cover, but here it's not just a one-level novelty, but an important component of the game. Masonry will often change positions as the tower tries to slow your ascent, and sometimes it even zips into mid-air, encouraging you to clamber on top to enjoy an on-rails ride, offering a high vantage point from which to zap your enemies. It looks like a Western-focused shooter with a Japanese twist, some of the enemies resembling JRPG bosses, except here you'll find that they're wielding huge guns rather than mighty swords.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

A spiffing trailer has whet our appetite, and we're curious to see exactly what else this enticing blend of East and West has to offer

16 Red Faction: Guerrilla

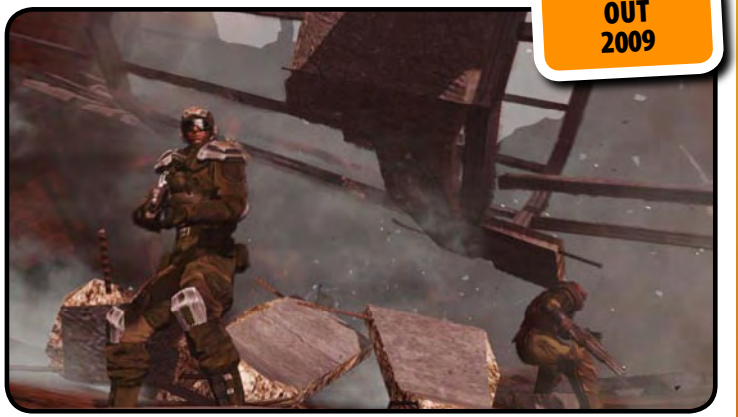
PUBLISHER THQ **DEVELOPER** Volition

THE LOWDOWN

After the success of the gloriously chaotic Saints Row 2, Volition returns for more environmental destruction, this time of a slightly different hue. Returning to Mars from a third-person perspective this time, Red Faction's combat involves plenty of building-levelling moments as you tackle the dictatorial forces of the Earth Defence Force, attempting to liberate the colonists from their oppressive regime.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

The Red Faction series has given us masonry-loosening weaponry before, but never on quite this scale. Entire buildings will crumble when peppered with enough rounds, with unscripted, unrestricted mayhem created by every explosion. It looks a lot like Saints Row, in the sense that it'll be a game where you make your own fun to a certain degree, with creative players likely to get more out of it than those who simply blast their way to the finish.



OUT 2009

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Red Faction: Guerrilla should be with us by the end of March, so we've not too long a wait to see if this delivers the destructive goods



15 Mafia II

OUT AUTUMN

PUBLISHER 2K Games **DEVELOPER** 2K Czech

THE LOWDOWN

As if the name didn't make it blindingly obvious, this is the sequel to the 2002 PC free-roamer, once again taking place around the late Forties to early Fifties period. The console port of the original was a heavily-diluted version of the PC game, missing several key features, but we're expecting much better things from the PS3 take on this epic crime sequel.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

Our first experience with Mafia was the Xbox port of the PC game, and despite its issues, we found it a compelling and immersive sandbox title, with some terrific period detail. The sequel takes place in a city loosely based on New York and San Francisco, with 10 square miles of environment to explore and drive around. With a screenplay running to 700 pages, and two hours' worth of cutscenes, Mafia II screams 'epic', though this is no glassy-eyed tribute to gangster movies like Godfather or Goodfellas, but a grittier, more realistic depiction of a life of crime. Exciting stuff.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

We're overdue a sequel to the excellent original, and we're personally confident that 2K Czech is more than up to the task

14 Team ICO's next

OUT LATE 2009

PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Team ICO

THE LOWDOWN

Were we certain this was set to arrive in 2009, this would be 13 places higher in the list, but we've had to temper our expectations given the knowledge that Fumito Ueda and his team of coding wizards like to take their sweet time over the game-making process. All we know so far is that it features themes common to Ueda-san's previous works, and will be set in the same universe as Shadow of the Colossus and ICO.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

Stirring, emotive storytelling combined with gorgeous audiovisuals – little wonder that Sony allows Team ICO all the time it needs to craft its melancholy masterpieces. While for many ICO remains the more emotionally satisfying experience, Colossus married atmosphere with excitement for an experience truly unlike any other in gaming. A single shot of a chain disappearing into a hole is all we have so far, but that's enough to whet our appetite for another classic. Expect it to be unveiled this year, but as far as a release goes, our ETA of a pre-Christmas release is more optimistic than realistic. Still, you never know...



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Will surely be amazing when it arrives, but when is that going to be? Hopefully we'll hear more from Sony in the coming months – the wait is agonising



13 I Am Alive

OUT 2009

PUBLISHER Ubisoft **DEVELOPER** Ubisoft Montreal

THE LOWDOWN

Taking its cues from games like SOS: The Final Escape and Raw Danger (Nintendo's Disaster: Day of Crisis may have a similar theme, but that's far more arcade-like in style) Ubi's forthcoming survival adventure sees you navigating a ruined city, rescuing others and locating supplies to keep you on this mortal coil. Last year's E3 trailer was one of the best in the entire show, with an impressive cutscene showing an eerily convincing earthquake and subsequent urban devastation.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

One – it's different. Two – it's from Darkworks, creator of underpraised Resi 4-alike Cold Fear. Three – it's unique from the aforesaid survive-'em-ups because it's viewed from a first-person perspective, which is an admirably ambitious choice. Four – it looks like it won't feature any aliens, weird monsters or expletive-spitting terrorist groups. Five – the first gun you find won't have any bullets, instead it's used to threaten antagonists who don't know it's not loaded. So it's a bit of a convention-breaker in many senses. It all sounds satisfyingly realistic – let's hope it doesn't go down the path of least resistance and wind up as a pseudo first-person shooter. Mirror's Edge's guns soured the experience, and it'd be a shame to see this fall victim to gaming's weapon fetish, too.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Little info so far – we expect to hear much more about this in May, if not before. Either way, this is shaping up as one of the most original big-budget games of 2009

12 PES 2010

OUT QUARTER 3/4

PUBLISHER Konami **DEVELOPER** Konami

THE LOWDOWN

With FIFA rather stealing its thunder this year, Pro Evolution Soccer has its work cut out to fall back into favour with footy fans. Last year's effort was far superior to its insipid predecessor, offering a free-flowing game that seemed far removed from FIFA's more realistic alternative. Will PES 2010 continue down this road, or will it adopt EA's serious sim-like approach to the game? We're very intrigued to find out.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

After a couple of years of coasting on past successes, Seabass and squad now have a real challenge to prove that PES isn't the Beckham of videogame football – in so far as it's now starting to show its age and looking like a shadow of its former self. PES 2009 was a step in the right direction for our money, distancing itself from FIFA's slower, more thoughtful style of play. A few additional licenses would help this time, and we fully expect the Become a Legend mode to be expanded – that certainly showed real potential, and hopefully Konami can craft something that very much feels like a current-gen game rather than a last-gen title in HD clothes. We'll find out for sure this autumn.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

It's a big game for Seabass and the lads. Let's hope the big occasion doesn't get to them and that they deliver on the day



11 Ghostbusters

OUT JUNE 19TH

PUBLISHER Atari **DEVELOPER** Terminal Reality

THE LOWDOWN

Set two years after the purple slime and laser-shooting paintings of Ghostbusters II, the spook-slaying foursome return in videogame form, offing spirits in New York alongside a new recruit, played by you. There's been a rise in paranormal activity, which somehow leads to a host of battles against old favourites like Slimer, Vigo, the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man and Gozer. Whatever the tenuous reasoning for the events of the game's storyline, we really don't mind one bit – it's Ghostbusters!

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

It's Ghostbusters! Anyone who grew up in the Eighties will immediately find this exciting, and we're sure even youngsters born within the Noughties will have an idea who the Ghostbusters are. Brilliantly, most of the original cast will be returning for voice-over duties, adding further authenticity, while Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis have also written the script, so expect liberal dollops of humour to punctuate the tension of the serious business of ghost busting. Unusually, the PS3 is lead development platform on this, so we expect this version to be the best of the bunch.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

We ain't afraid of no ghost, and we're not worried about the quality of this terrific-looking tie-in either

10 DC Universe Online

PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment **DEVELOPER** Sony Online Austin

THE LOWDOWN

2009 is the year that the MMO finally hits big on consoles. One of the most exciting propositions is DCUniverse Online, an RPG with a difference – developer Sony Online Austin claiming sandbox building-smasher Hulk: Ultimate Destruction was one of the biggest influences on gameplay. It's reportedly lighter on traditional RPG elements while still including a level of stat-building, but there's an increased focus on action, with the potential for player-on-player battles given that you've a choice of heroic and villainous characters.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

The idea of an MMO that's not just going to be about basic questing and level-grinding fills us with joy, as does the thought of leaping and flying around familiar comic-book worlds with Batman, Superman or one of many other famous superheroes and villains assisting or hindering the player. At the outset you're given a choice of city – Gotham City and Metropolis are both available – and will share your world with other online users rather than owning your own patch. To us, the evil missions sound a lot more fun, but saving the world definitely has appeal, too. No concrete release date yet, but expect this sometime later in the year.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Lex Luthor fighting Wonder Woman while Two-Face looks on? Where do we sign?



9 Assassin's Creed 2

PUBLISHER Ubisoft **DEVELOPER** Ubisoft Montreal

THE LOWDOWN

Altair returns – or does he? – in Ubisoft's tentatively confirmed follow-up to one of 2007's biggest new IPs. While feudal Japan was hinted at as a possible setting, industry analyst Michael Pachter claimed the game will be set in the 1700s, venturing that it could take place during the French Revolution. Ubisoft has remained tight-lipped on the subject but the Assassin's Creed team is said to be hard at work on the follow-up as we speak.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

One word: potential. The unusual plot of Assassin's Creed means we could get a sequel that's similar in theme but has a radically different setting – whether or not Pachter is on the money, we'll almost certainly be in a different part of the world. The original had some nice ideas which were blighted by repetition – hopefully the sequel can mix things up a little better and improve on the combat. Oh, and no irritating beggars nor random fight-starters this time, please Ubi. The baffling ending of the first game is likely to at least be partially resolved, too – and as long as the enjoyable chase sequences and terrific graphics remain of similarly high quality, this could finally live up to the promise shown in the original.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

The first was good, the second should be great. With criticisms taken on board, a more varied and exciting experience is planned. Time to get excited, we think

8 Yakuza 3

OUT 2009

PUBLISHER Sega **DEVELOPER** Sega

THE LOWDOWN

After the sojourn into Edo period sword-slicery in the Japanese-only Yakuza: Kenzan!, Kazuma Kiryu returns to patrol the streets of Kamurocho, handing out beatings to sweary suit-wearing assailants with bicycles and giant traffic cones. Yep, Yakuza's gone current-gen, with a shiny HD remodelling job of fictional Tokyo districts featuring more authentic Japanese minutiae and bottles of Suntory whiskey than ever before.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

Yakuza was, and remains, a PS2 classic. It was a return to old-school Sega – when Sega used to do ambitious, expensive stuff like Shenmue rather than endless iterations of Sonic that don't work. What we've seen so far of the third in the series (the second getting a much-too-late Western release) is extremely impressive, with the fighting engine having been refined, and the various shops, bars and other buildings offering more and more alternatives to the main quest. It's a bit like a Japanese GTA really, except with more RPG elements. It hopefully represents a new start for Yakuza in the west, and marketed well could certainly be a sizeable hit for Sega. For us, it's the return of one of the most charismatic protagonists we've seen in an age which excites us the most – Kazuma is a sharply dressed, witty and enigmatic hero, likeable even as he's shoving someone's head into a wall.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Yakuza goes HD, with what could be one of the PS3's games of the year. Let's hope Sega gets it localised a little quicker this time



7 God of War III

OUT 2009

PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Sony Santa Monica

THE LOWDOWN

Kratos makes his eagerly awaited comeback with the third in the series of bloody carve-'em-ups. There's a sense of finality about this – the trailer features Kratos saying 'everything must come to an end', suggesting this might be the last we see of the franchise, with a promise of epic confrontations between titans and gods. Creator David Jaffe has said that the game will ultimately explain why there are no more Greek myths. Sounds suitably apocalyptic.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

The teaser trailer is quite something, showcasing some phenomenal graphics, and featuring Kratos battling a series of enemies – including a Centaur, a Cyclops, groups of what appear to be zombies and huge bats. Sporting two giant gauntlets used to bludgeon enemies, he looks more fierce and fearsome than ever before. Expect plenty of growled dialogue about vengeance, and a series of epic battles, particularly against the sort of huge bosses the series is famed for. The two previous God of War games are essentially hugely polished Hollywood blockbusters, both expertly paced, beautifully constructed but ultimately fairly shallow experiences. But who cares when hacking up foes is this much fun? If God of War III simply provides more of the same, almost all of the franchise's fans will be very happy indeed.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

The same stunning mix of hardware-pushing visuals and deliciously violent gameplay that made the others so great is in evidence from what we've seen

6 Prototype

OUT QUARTER 2

PUBLISHER Sierra **DEVELOPER** Radical Entertainment

THE LOWDOWN

The creator of Hulk: Ultimate Destruction returns with what is, to all intents and purposes, a spiritual sequel. It's an open-world action game where you take control of a shape-shifting creature in human form, attempting to discover the truth behind your identity by running up walls, jumping into helicopters, shooting tanks and even assuming the identities of the city's populace, together with their memories and abilities.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

It looks a lot like the 360's Crackdown but on very weird, very powerful drugs. Protagonist Alex can leap from the ground to a low-flying helicopter, punching it out of the sky, or ripping its pilot from his seat and taking control himself. He can run across the side of skyscrapers, plunge distances that would kill an ordinary human, and turn his arms into weapons. He can sidle up to citizens and take over their bodies, assuming their form and using their memories to help piece together his own. Quite simply, it looks like enormous amounts of fun, offering concrete-cracking, vehicle-smashing, crazily explosive action, mixed in with expansive, free-roaming parkour moves that make skyscraper-scaling a doddle. It's due for a release in the second quarter of the year, and is looking better and better every time we see it.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Questions over the game's depth remain, but this could be the dark horse smash hit of the year. Keep your eyes peeled for more on this soon.



5 The Agency

OUT 2009

PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** SOE Seattle

THE LOWDOWN

Another in the new breed of console MMOs, spy thriller The Agency is the one which has our pulses racing the most. It's a shooter with both first-person and third-person gunplay, offering driving sections as an aside, and minigames such as poker as a diversion from the core gameplay. While it retains certain RPG elements, it's much more of an action game, where skilled players can triumph over level-grinders – players can be killed by a single perfect headshot, for example. Character classes are handled in an unusual manner, too – rather than creating new avatars, your protagonist will simply have to wear different equipment in order to pursue a different role, with more options being offered as your character progresses through the various set tasks.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

The MMO genre is populated by a number of fundamentally similar games, but this is something a little different, and the idea of a massively multiplayer online FPS – which this essentially is, but slightly deeper than that description suggests – is certainly very appealing. With missions inspired by espionage films, you'll get to tackle delivery, patrol and assassination missions, with vehicular challenges across land and sea and in the air.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

A genuinely unique spin on both MMO and FPS, The Agency has the potential to be one of Sony's most important first-party releases

4 Killzone 2

OUT FEB 27TH

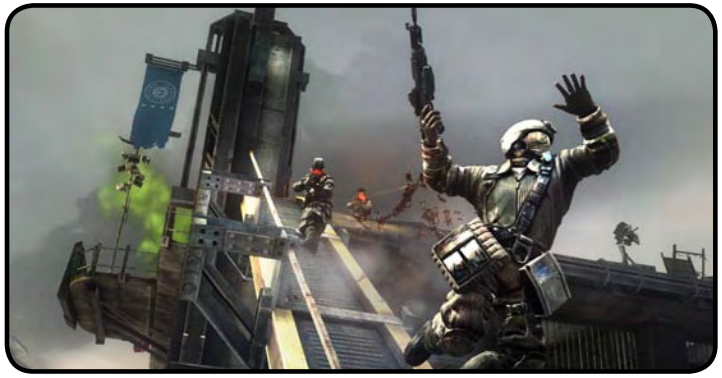
PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Guerrilla

THE LOWDOWN

Arguably the biggest and most expensive FPS of 2009 is with us in just a few short weeks. Guerrilla has crafted a bleak, imposing universe, with a tough enemy and a feeling of constant threat. Helghan might not be the most colourful world we've ever seen, but it's suitably hostile and its atmosphere is palpable. Alongside the single-player campaign, there's an online mode that's more thoughtfully-paced than you might expect – tactical and pretty damn hardcore, it's not for everyone, but those who get into its mindset might find it among the most satisfying multiplayer experiences they've ever had.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

Having played a substantial portion of the single-player and experienced the online beta, we can't see this being anything less than superb. Short of a spectacular drop in quality in the latter stages, Killzone 2 is, quite simply, the first essential purchase of 2009. What impressed us most about our time with the preview code was the sheer solidity of both the gunplay and how much you feel a part of the environment. We'll have the review for you next month.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

On 27th February, the doubters will be chowing down on a huge slice of humble pie. This is a truly terrific first-person shooter



3 inFamous

OUT QUARTER 2

PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Sucker Punch

THE LOWDOWN

Here you're playing an everyman hero, imbued with strange electrical powers, and helping the survivors of the explosion that levelled your home. Yet not all the citizens are friendly – some believe you to be the cause of the blast, while others are taking the law into their own hands. Which is where you come in – assisting the innocent, and dealing electric justice to the ne'er-do-wells. All superpowers have their drawbacks, however – protagonist Cole can't use guns, nor can he swim. And while he can't leap tall buildings in a single jump, the city's been modelled so he can climb any and every wall he comes across.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

For us, this just has the edge over Prototype because it just seems that little bit more polished. And not only that, but we're particularly interested in the way side missions are often presented – you could be on one mission when you're given the opportunity to rescue a citizen, which could earn you karma points. It's a tricky balancing act being a hero, and inFamous seems to capture that idea perfectly. There's a slight edginess to its heroics which appeals, and we actually like the fact that the story mode is reportedly quite short – as that will undoubtedly mean the developer is confident in the amount of outside variety its game provides, and everything we've seen points to a game with substantial replay value.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Call it a hunch, but we're tipping this for very big things indeed. We like the aesthetic, we love the ideas. Fingers crossed Sucker Punch can pull this off

2 Uncharted 2

OUT QUARTER 4

PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Naughty Dog

THE LOWDOWN

Likeable rogue Nathan Drake returns, this time hunting for the lost ships of Marco Polo, and with a new female sidekick named Chloe, voiced by sci-fi favourite Claudia Black, Farscape's Aeryn Sun. Naughty Dog has stated that it was keen to take Drake's adventures out of the jungle and into more varied environments – hence the trailer showing our hero dangling over a snowy peak in the carriage of a derailed train. His quest takes him through a ruined city, which offers a greater variety of platforming than before, with the climbing sections refined so that Drake can move freely across walls rather than following a linear route.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

The first Uncharted borrowed heavily from other titles – most notably the Tomb Raider games and Gears of War, but ended up feeling oddly fresh, with its mix of styles blending well, and its witty, sparky dialogue lending it a charm which carried it through its weaker moments. We're not too chuffed to hear that there will be stealth sequences this time round, but if anyone can make them enjoyable then it's Naughty Dog. Given that Uncharted is one of the PS3's best-looking games, we were staggered to discover that this somehow has even better graphics, with improved lighting, superior animation and more detailed environments. What excites us most is that Naughty Dog clearly isn't resting on its laurels here, tweaking the gameplay to mix things up and make this feel anything but an identikit sequel.



EXCITEMENT LEVEL

Delicious looks, amazing new levels, added features and no loading screens. Roll on winter







1 Heavy Rain

OUT 2009

PUBLISHER SCEE **DEVELOPER** Quantic Dream

THE LOWDOWN

David Cage's Fahrenheit was one of the most exciting games of the last generation – until it collapsed into sci-fi silliness in its third act. But for the most part it made a genuine attempt to explore new ways of storytelling – something which Heavy Rain takes several steps further. Cage has hired several actors, motion-capturing their performances for use in his new interactive experience – a totally non-linear branching story which revolutionises the concept of player choice in videogames. It's controversial, that's for sure – its reliance on the overused idea of quick-time events during certain sections and its comparatively restricted character movement will undoubtedly deter some, but this is an interactive thriller that – for once – is more than worthy of the name.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED

Daring, ambitious, innovative – it's a brave company that would fund this vision, so major credit has to go to Sony. Eschewing standard analogue movement for an adventurous new control system, which requires the player to pull the right trigger to move the current character forward – with the analogue stick used for head movement – is bound to be divisive. But it's all part of what makes the game different, and we're glad to experience something entirely new. What's perhaps most exciting of all is the freedom of choice – while interactions with most objects are merely context-sensitive button presses, there are so many ways through the individual scenarios that you'll want to immediately replay them to find out how things would have turned out had you done things differently.

Amazingly, it's even possible to die and still carry on playing, with control apparently reverting to one of the other three protagonists, and the game continuing on without the deceased. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the execution can match the concept, but if it comes anywhere close to achieving what it sets out to do, then this will almost certainly be 2009's game of the year.

EXCITEMENT LEVEL

It looks incredible, and plays like nothing else. If the script is right, then this will be something very, very special indeed

BUBBLING UNDER

There are other big games due out in 2009, which we've not included simply because so little is known about them. Here are some other titles we're tipping for greatness in 2009…

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

Publisher Activision **ETA** Late 2009

Nothing is really known about the sequel so far, but we're hoping for – and expecting – something stunning. And if the voice cast can top the superstar tag-team of Sutherland and Oldman, then we'll be even more excited.

NEW NEED FOR SPEED

Publisher Electronic Arts **ETA** November 2009

With EA boss John Riccitiello emphasising the importance of quality, hopefully we can see a significant improvement in performance this time around over Undercover.

TONY HAWK'S ADRENALINE

Publisher Activision **ETA** TBA 2009

With original developer Neversoft now creating new Guitar Heroes, Activision has brought some fresh blood in to revive the videogame career of the Birdman. Whispers suggest that Adrenaline will be controlled with a special board-shaped peripheral – now where have we seen that idea before?

GUITAR HERO: METALLICA

Publisher Activision **ETA** March/April

45 songs are provided, with 28 coming from the band, and the remainder from other groups which have influenced Metallica.

THE BEATLES HARMONIX PROJECT

Publisher MTV Games **ETA** Q4 2009

This latest music game from Rock Band creator Harmonix is set to bring the most popular band ever to a whole new audience.

RATCHET AND CLANK: NEW EPISODE

Publisher SCEE **ETA** Q3 2009

If the next Ratchet and Clank episode can match the quality of Quest for Booty, then roll on this Autumn for another chuckle-worthy action romp.

DJ HERO

Publisher Activision **ETA** Q4 2009

With Guitar Hero on hiatus after the Metallica version, it's time to hit those decks and get mixing with the forthcoming DJ Hero.

FINAL FANTASY XIII

Publisher Square-Enix **ETA** 2009/10

The footage and screens shown so far look stunning, while it will be interesting to see how the battle system compares to the progressive combat in XII.

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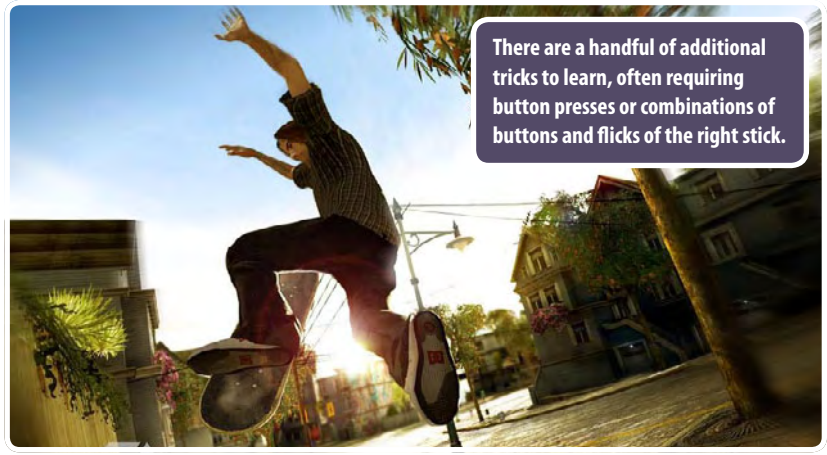
www.gamerzines.com



Publisher: EA
Developer: Black Box
Heritage: Skate
Link: http://skate.ea.com
OUT NOW

Skate 2

Not quite as gnarly, dude



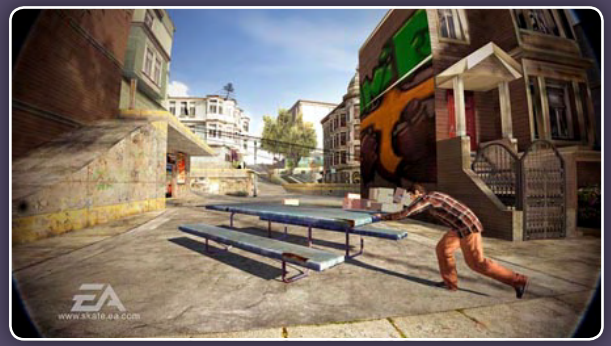
There are a handful of additional tricks to learn, often requiring button presses or combinations of buttons and flicks of the right stick.

Black Box, developer of Skate 2, crafted a predecessor that was always going to make life difficult for any sequel. Skate was bottled lightning – it came along at a time when were tired of pulling off the same sick tricks with the Birdman, and Neversoft was starting to go through the motions with Tony Hawk and his Jackass chums. Forcing players to relearn all that they knew about videogame boarding, Skate managed that rarest of tricks – reinventing the wheel within its genre. Skate 2 has a few new moves in its locker, but most of these only serve to emphasise the fact that the original was a true one-off.

Of the new additions, one of the most trumpeted is the ability to hop off your board and traverse the city on foot. In theory this makes a lot of sense – allowing your boarder to navigate awkward areas more easily, but it's far clunkier than it sounds, with a slow transition between your button-press and your avatar picking up his board, >

PICK YOUR SPOT

Setting up your own tricks



Bump and grind | **Bench press** | **Play, create, share**

Bump and grind

You'll find plenty of moveable objects wherever you go, which you can move into position to create a brand new line. These range from garbage cans to rails, ramps and tables. Grab them with R1, then move them with the left analogue stick and rotate them with the right.

Roll over screen for annotations

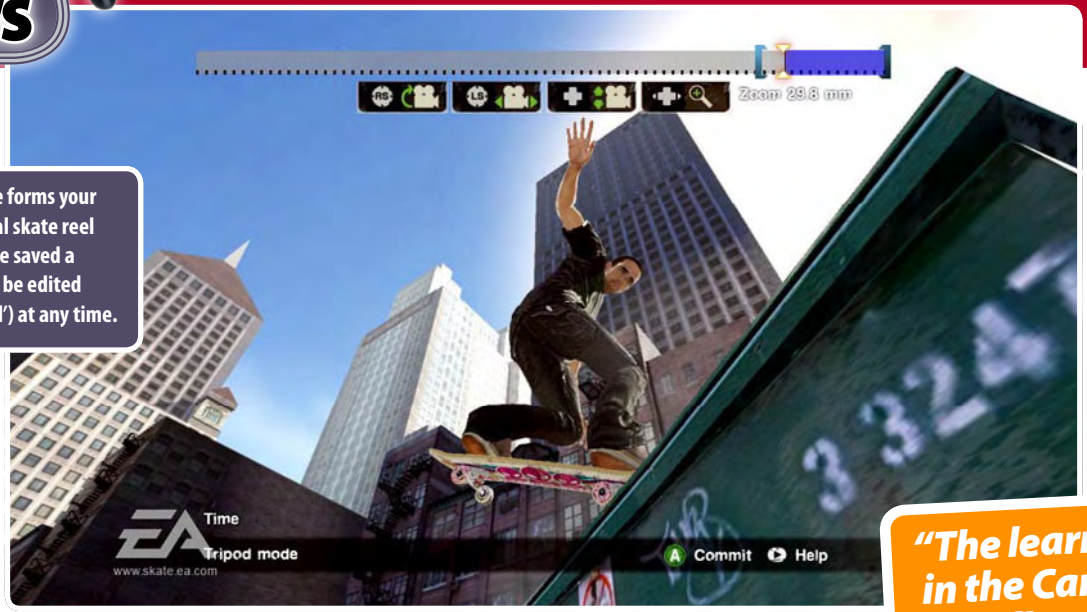




Curiously, we managed to pass some tasks we clearly failed – after crashing in-between two bins we were told we'd cleared them both.



Grabs extend your range of tricks – simply press R2 while getting some air, and you can pull off more complex manoeuvres.



Your footage forms your own personal skate reel – once you've saved a replay it can be edited (or 'scrubbed') at any time.



> Skate 2 continued

not to mention the cumbersome movement and slow turning circle. Nevertheless, this feature does allow you to manipulate certain objects, moving loose rails, trashcans and other paraphernalia suitable for creating your own lines. In Story mode, it's sometimes a necessity for you to pull off certain tricks, which makes for unsatisfying busywork as you spend as much time lining up a trick as executing it, but it's a useful addition in its flexibility and relative ease of use. It really comes into its own when online – which is integrated in a similar way to Burnout Paradise, but is sadly nowhere near as seamless – offering outlets for the more creative player to express their skills.

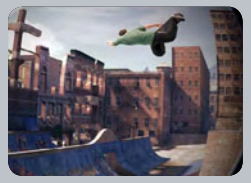
"The learning curve in the Career mode is well-moderated"

As ever, it will take new players a while to get to that stage, particularly given the new tricks to be learned. As long as you follow the Career mode fairly rigidly, the learning curve is well-moderated, gradually giving players the confidence to string together lines in Free Skate. Even in the early stages though, the game can be needlessly fiddly, with a couple of challenges taking place in areas seemingly geared towards making you fall off at every given opportunity. Not good.

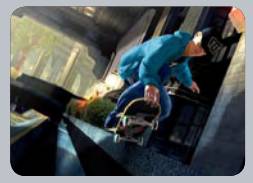
Though even that is now a feature in itself – bailing spectacularly is the name of the game in the Hall of >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time



The replay editor is very simple to use. Pause your game and you can instantly rewind…



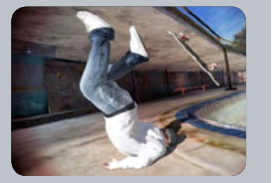
…the last 40 seconds of action. Within that timeline you can select a start and stop point…



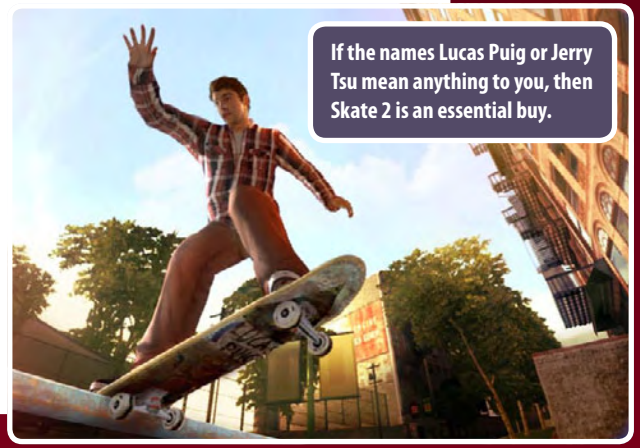
…and choose from three camera types – Follow Camera, Tripod Camera and Game Camera.



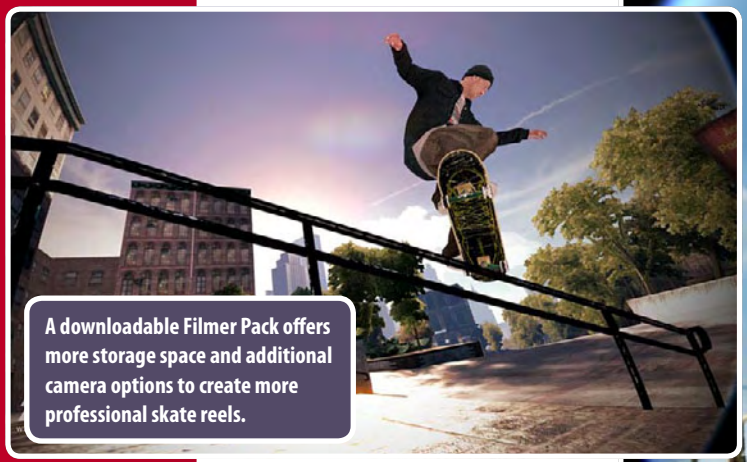
The latter offers only a zoom function, but the other two can be positioned anywhere…



…with Tripod remaining static and Follow doing as it suggests – keeping pace with your boarder.



If the names Lucas Puig or Jerry Tsu mean anything to you, then Skate 2 is an essential buy.



A downloadable Filmer Pack offers more storage space and additional camera options to create more professional skate reels.



Replay mode allows you to slow down the action, while you can add different effects to your footage.

> Skate 2 continued

Meat mode, another feature which owes a small debt to Burnout, this time Criterion's Crash mode. It's never quite as precise an art, though there's always an enjoyable element of schadenfreude to those moments when your unfortunate character grinds a rail with his crotch. We could do without the few seconds pause every time your skater falls, though – given the number of times it'll happen to most players in the early stages of the game, it has the definite potential to become a major irritant unless you're actually aiming to injure.

The game's smoother framerate would seem to be a boon, but it has the effect of making the game feel somehow less authentic – there was much more of an 'amateur video' vibe about the original, and it makes the moments when it drops a little harder to excuse. Yet after that shaky start, Skate 2 starts to come into its own. Perhaps it's the game's increasing familiarity with the controls or locales, perhaps it's the exemplary replay mode (which seems at once easier to use yet offers more dynamic creative control of the action). Or perhaps it's that the later areas seem better-designed than the earlier ones, opening up a little, while retaining some simple lines for those who've ventured outside their comfort zone.

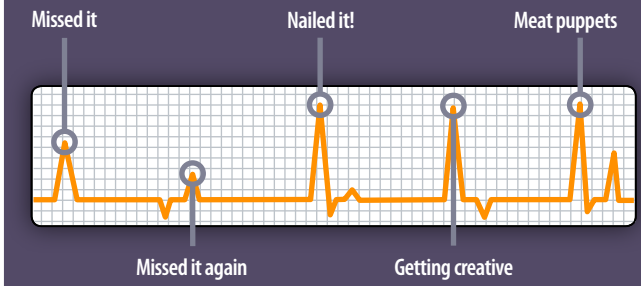
Occasional glitches

San Vanelona itself is a nice-looking place, and the graphics still have that earthy, robust feel – worlds away from the cartoonish excesses of the latterday Tony Hawk games. And while the speech can get a little repetitive – particularly the outbursts when your boarder's on his backside, which repeat after about the third fall – the soundtrack is excellent, offering a real mix of genres, blending the modern and the old-school seamlessly without simply resorting to type.

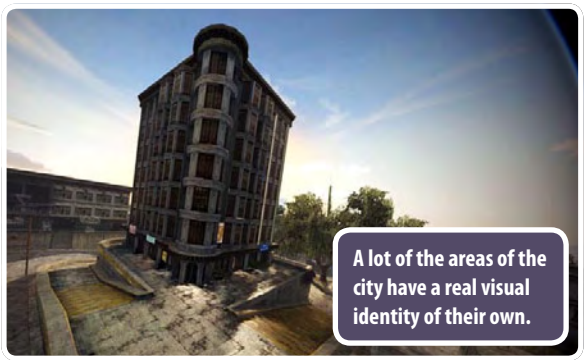
If Skate 2 proves that lightning doesn't strike twice, it at least provides enough compelling reasons for its creation. Its new features don't all function as well as they perhaps should, but the core skating is as solid as ever, nailing a trick at the seventeenth time of asking is every bit as punch-the-air satisfying as it was in the first game. Those who've exhausted Skate's trickset will probably find this a worthwhile purchase, but many might just be better sticking with the (by now) much cheaper original.

Chris Schilling

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"Those who've exhausted Skate's trickset will probably find this a worthwhile purchase"



A lot of the areas of the city have a real visual identity of their own.

P3Zine Verdict

Solid sequel can't quite recapture the magic

- \+ New Flickit moves work well
- \+ Hall of Meat is fun and brutal
- \- New features add little

81%

PlayStation Network

Download 'em today!

Crash Commando

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Epos
Price: £7.99

Crash Commando is definitely a curious game in that at once it's the kind of game we'd really like to see much more of on PSN, but at the same time it represents something that we really don't want to see. To newcomers it will undoubtedly feel both fresh and fun. It's hugely polished and has some nice ideas, but unfortunately most of those ideas were present in freeware PC game Soldat, which has been around for a few years now. Except this time you're paying a penny shy of eight quid for the privilege of owning it.

To be fair to Crash Commando, it's definitely a more polished game than Soldat, and its controls seem better suited to a joypad than keyboard control. It's a multiplayer-focused team-based 2D shooter which sees a team of small yet chunky soldiers jetpacking around various well-designed levels, attempting to take out their opponents. Gameplay is fairly shallow, but it's undeniably enjoyable when real players are involved, as the solo mode's bots aren't too much of a challenge. Taken on its own merits, Crash Commando is a definite success, but it's hard to ignore the fact you can get a very similar experience elsewhere for no outlay whatsoever.



P3Zine Verdict
Attack of the clone
+ Enjoyable gameplay
− A little expensive
75%

Savage Moon

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: SCEA
Price: £6.99

The rise of the tower defence genre continues with a rival to PixelJunk Monsters in the form of Savage Moon. Tower defence games are almost always difficult, but this is pretty unforgiving stuff, requiring incredibly quick thoughts if you want to survive the waves of alien attackers. As ever, you set up turrets to try and take out the swarms of insectoid foes, while you can also block paths to funnel them towards your best weapons. It looks the part, and some great sound effects add to the appeal, but the lack of multiplayer spoils things.



P3Zine Verdict
Savage is the right word
+ Terrific music
− Brutally difficult
70%

Soldner-X: Himmelssturmer

Publisher: EastAsiaSoft
Developer: SideQuest Studios
Price: £7.99

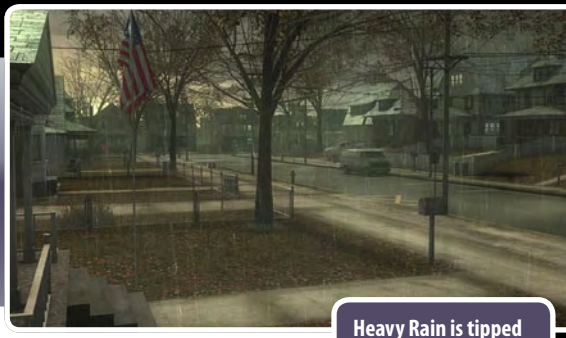
Soldner-X's developer SideQuest Studios deserves praise for resisting temptation to overburden this shooter with any gimmicks, but ultimately this conservatism is the game's undoing – it's simply not memorable enough to compete with the best. It's not helped by graphics, which can often confuse the player – backgrounds blending into foreground objects and causing unfair deaths. That aside, it is a well-made 2D scrolling blaster, offering thrills for a time, but lacking the verve and inspiration of a Radiant Silvergun or a Gradius V.



P3Zine Verdict
Well-made but charisma free
+ Solidly produced
− Lacking inspiration
62%

Kings of innovation?

New experiences in 2009 for PS3



Heavy Rain is tipped for greatness. Can it balance story and gameplay well enough to appeal to a wide audience?



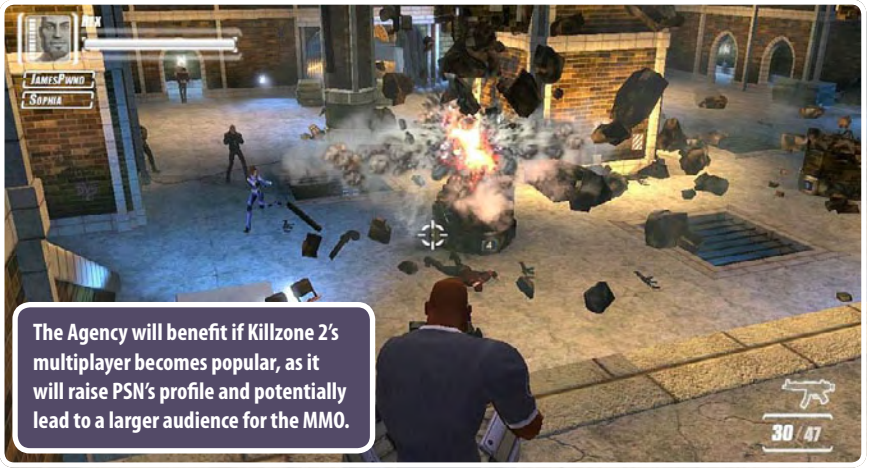
Chris Schilling
Chris is the proud owner of all three 'next-gen' consoles. Every issue Chris will chart the progress of PS3 and commenting on Sony's latest and greatest initiatives.

Sony's never really recognised for its innovation, but its gaming division has always been ahead of the game, and 2009 has several titles which should offer new experiences for PS3 gamers.

Quantic Dream's stunning Heavy Rain has the potential to take interactive storytelling to new heights, while the little-known Tears of Blood could revolutionise the beat-'em-up genre. Meanwhile, the PlayStation Network plays host to the inventive PixelJunk games, with original titles like this month's Crash Commando and Savage Moon add their own twists to familiar genres.

Then there are online titles like the epic MAG – set to offer 256-player warfare with online battlefields unrivalled in size and scope – and spy-themed MMO The Agency.

Indeed, Sony hopes its recent internal restructuring will lead to even more innovation. Sony Liverpool – creator of the WipEout games – and MotorStorm developer Evolution are set to work together under the same roof, while Sony Online Entertainment will likely assist Sony's European studios in crafting multiplayer experiences, having now been amalgamated with Sony Computer Entertainment.



The Agency will benefit if Killzone 2's multiplayer becomes popular, as it will raise PSN's profile and potentially lead to a larger audience for the MMO.

"LittleBIGPlanet will continue to innovate in 2009, with regular content – like the Metal Gear Solid level pack"

It shouldn't be gone unnoticed that LittleBIGPlanet has seen impressive sales for what must have been quite a difficult sell. Media Molecule's creative platformer finding itself a sizeable audience, with good word-of-mouth helping it to a decent performance in a busy Christmas market. And it will continue to innovate in 2009, with regular content – like the superb recent Metal Gear Solid level pack – keeping its sizeable online community happy.

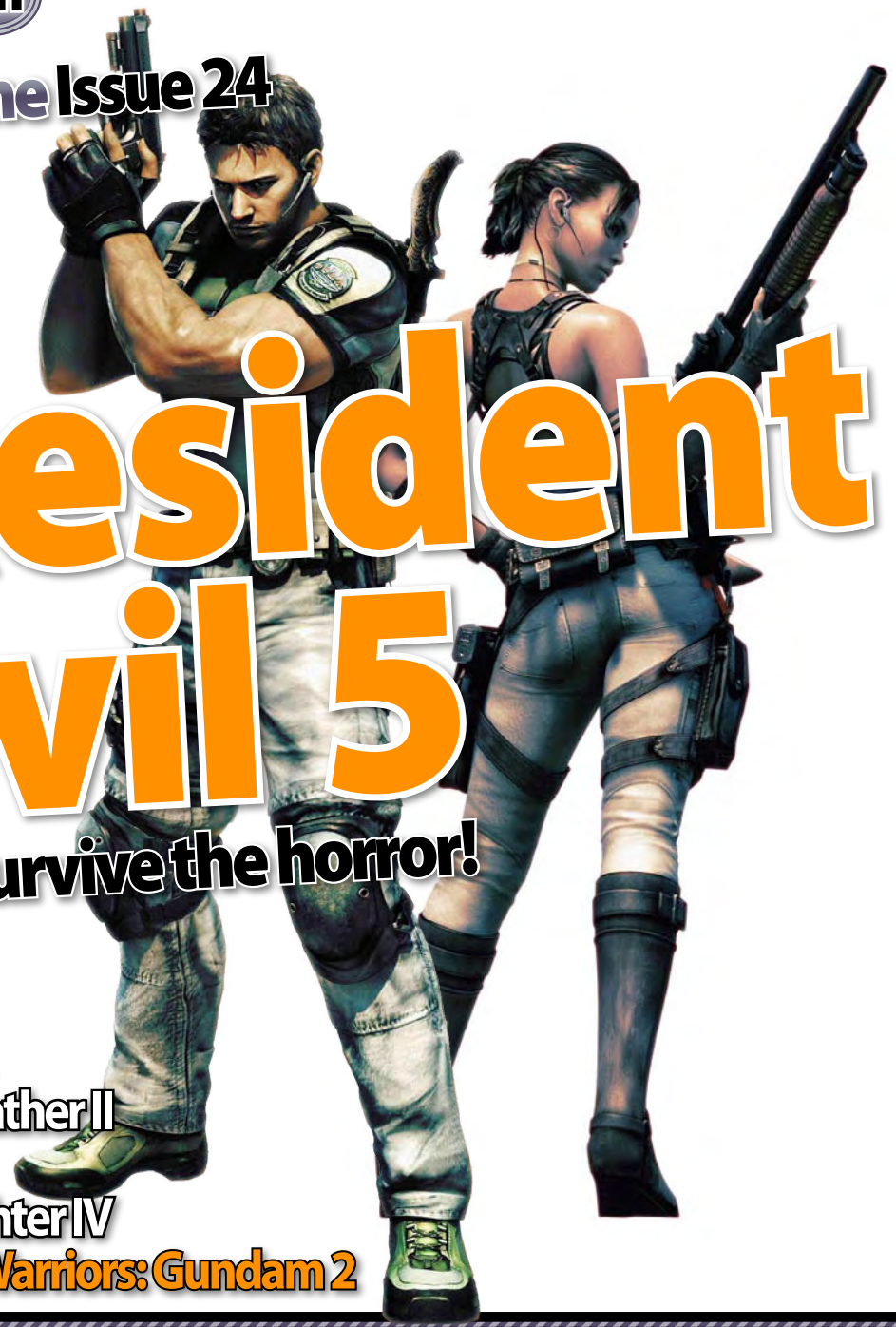
Polished genres

2009 will also see a wealth of polished genre titles to bolster the PlayStation 3 line-up, with the sequel to Uncharted one of the games which most excites us. But it's the first-person shooter Killzone 2 on which many hopes will be pinned. We've already played a substantial portion of the game, and it certainly looks and plays well enough, but whether that can translate into sales remains to be seen. It's been a lengthy, costly production, and Sony will be keeping its fingers crossed that it performs at retail. An unnamed Sony representative was quoted as saying that he did "see the game breaking a barrier with a huge variety of groups" and expected it "to see sales as good as Metal Gear Solid 4 if not beyond it".

Killzone 2 has to win over the doubters first before it approaches the sales of Kojima's opus. Selling over a million copies in its first week on sale in Europe alone, and reaching a total of 4.3 million sales worldwide by November of last year, MGS4 was a huge hit, and Killzone 2 would have to more than double the sales of its PS2 predecessor to top that impressive figure.

With the global recession looming over us all, it would be easy to Sony to play it safe. But its priority remains to push the industry forward, even at a time when innovation is more risky than usual. And for that it deserves to be loudly applauded.

In P3Zine Issue 24



Resident Evil 5

We survive the horror!

PLUS!

Killzone 2
The Godfather II
F.E.A.R 2
Street Fighter IV
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2

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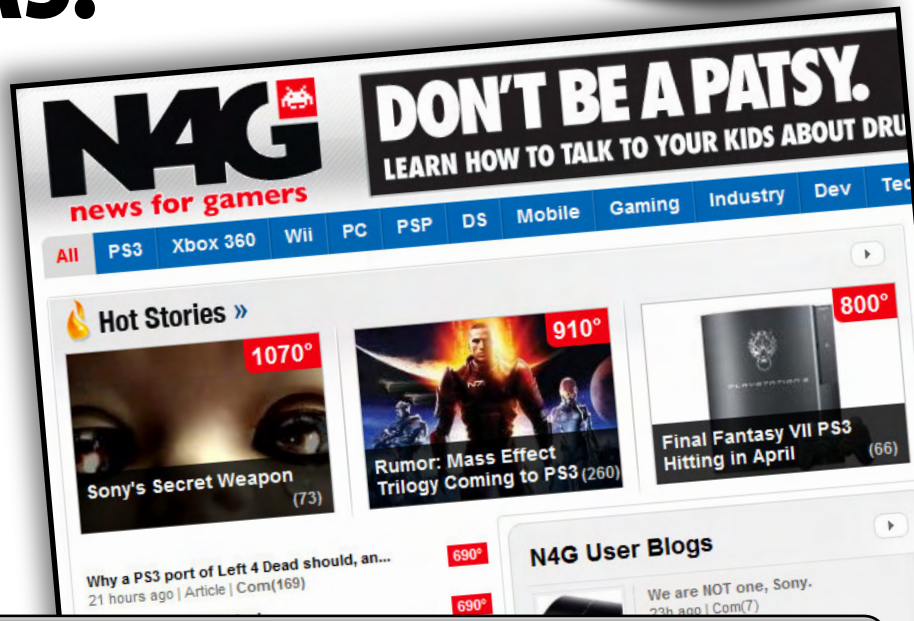


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