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P3Zine

Issue 24 | February 2009

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REVIEWED & RATED!

KILLZONE 2

Is the game of the year already here?

REVIEWED!



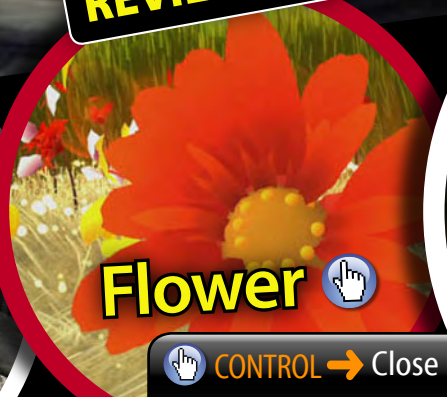
STREET FIGHTER IV

PREVIEWED!



Resident Evil 5

REVIEWED!



Flower

REVIEWED!



Silent Hill

PREVIEWED!



Drake Uncharted 2

Welcome to P3Zine



It's a bumper issue for reviews this month with no less than three new-comers picking up a coveted P3Zine Gold Award. The headline act surely has to be Killzone 2- yet another title that Sony seems to pinning its hopes on to drive significant uptake of PlayStation 3. Will it succeed? Well it certainly looks the part...

Elsewhere, and with spring around the corner, it seems apt that Flower makes itself known on PSN. Another beautifully innovative offering we have the review backed up with a developer interview for you to peruse.

We also have a mighty hands-on preview of Resident Evil 5 and a first-look at Uncharted 2.

Enjoy the issue...

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
p3zine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

There's nowt they don't know about PlayStation



Chris Schilling
In the Killzone



Steve Hill
Silent Hill

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

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights...

The latest & greatest titles on PS3



Resident Evil 5

Hands-On Preview



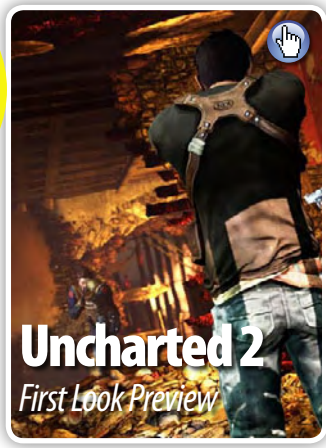
Street Fighter IV

The beat-'em-up to beat all comers



Killzone 2

Utterly stunning



Uncharted 2

First Look Preview

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

Red Dead Redemption
DC Universe Online
Batman: Arkham Asylum
Resident Evil 5
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves
Killzone 2
Street Fighter IV
Silent Hill: Homecoming
Persona 4
Battle Fantasia
Flower

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"This is heaven!" 8/10 – EDGE

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NIS Europe

Batman: Arkham Asylum

FIRST LOOK

A Dark Knight of the soul

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Rocksteady Studios
Heritage: Urban Chaos: Riot Response
Link: www.batmanarkhamasylum.com
ETA: April/May

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Batman: Arkham Asylum



Combat in the open is hardly encouraged – stealth kills are recommended – but sometimes you'll have little option but to go toe-to-toe with Arkham's thugs.



Plenty of familiar faces can be found inside Arkham Asylum, Killer Croc representing a particularly hefty challenge.

"The Detective mode gives our hero the chance to use gadgets to gain information about the game's characters"



Character models are almost comically chunky.



What's the story?

Tricked by the Joker, our hero finds himself in the titular loony bin, forced to fend off the attentions of henchmen and bigger adversaries as he tries to both escape and restore order to the asylum of the game's title. With hefty dollops of both stealth and action, this looks closer to Manhunt rather than your average license – albeit with fewer scenes of gratuitous evisceration.

Why should we be excited?

Eidos is confident that it's publishing the best Batman game ever. Granted, the competition's not amazing, but it's looking likely to be streets ahead of the rest. Developer Rocksteady Studios worked on the 2006 shooter Urban Chaos: Riot Response, so there's a decent pedigree here, though this is quite a different animal. Combat seems straightforward, offering a series of simple moves which are executed with directional commands in conjunction with button presses, while the game changes tack with the intriguing Detective mode, which gives our hero the chance to use gadgets to gain information about the game's characters – including gauging their heart rate. With some stealth mechanics thrown in, this looks like an engaging and varied experience with more thought put into it than 99 per cent of the usual comic-book conversions.

When do we get more?

It's due out some time between April and June, and we're hoping to get a demo prior to launch.

Anything else to declare?

The game utilises the voice talents of The Animated Series, with Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill reprising their roles as the Caped Crusader and his smirking arch-nemesis respectively.



Jump in.

XBOX 360

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DC Universe Online

FIRST LOOK

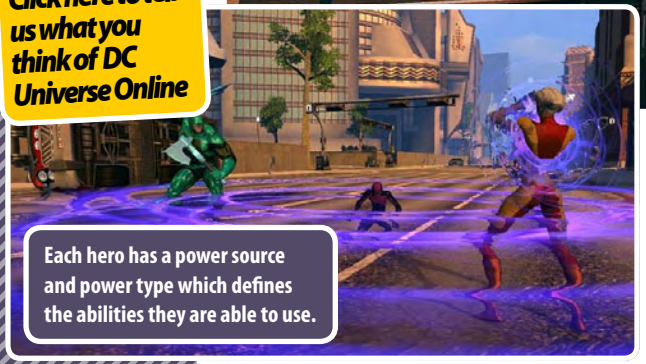
Sony's superhero MMO is taking shape

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: WBIE
Heritage: N/A
Link: http://dcuo.station.sony.com
ETA: TBA



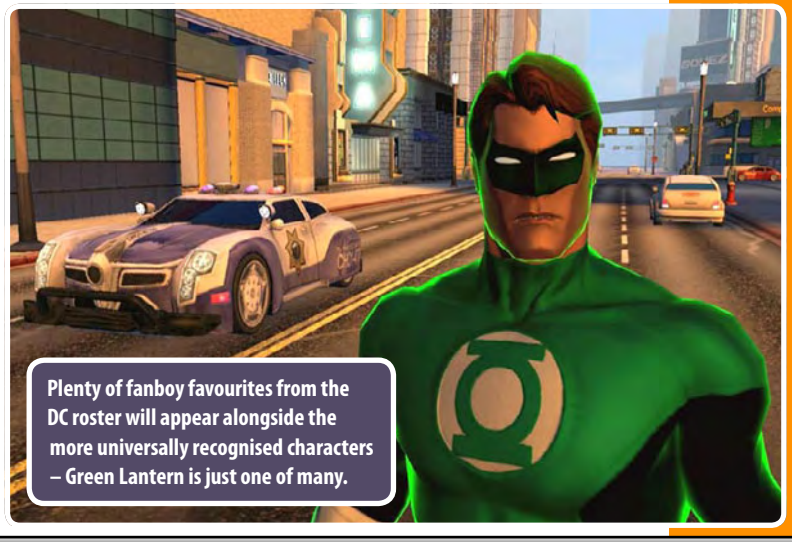
Metropolis is a beautifully realised environment, teeming with the sort of fine detail you don't often find in MMOs.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of DC Universe Online


Each hero has a power source and power type which defines the abilities they are able to use.

"DC Universe Online's controls seem to suit a PS3 controller far better than you'd think an MMO would"




Plenty of fanboy favourites from the DC roster will appear alongside the more universally recognised characters – Green Lantern is just one of many.

What's the story?

The title just about says it all, really. It's the universe of DC comics rendered in a style fitting the concept, and it's online. This MMORPG allows you to create your own superhero and engage in quests involving more famous heroes. With both Superman and Batman on its books, DC might not quite have the range of Marvel, but it has two of the biggest comic-book names around.

What do we know?

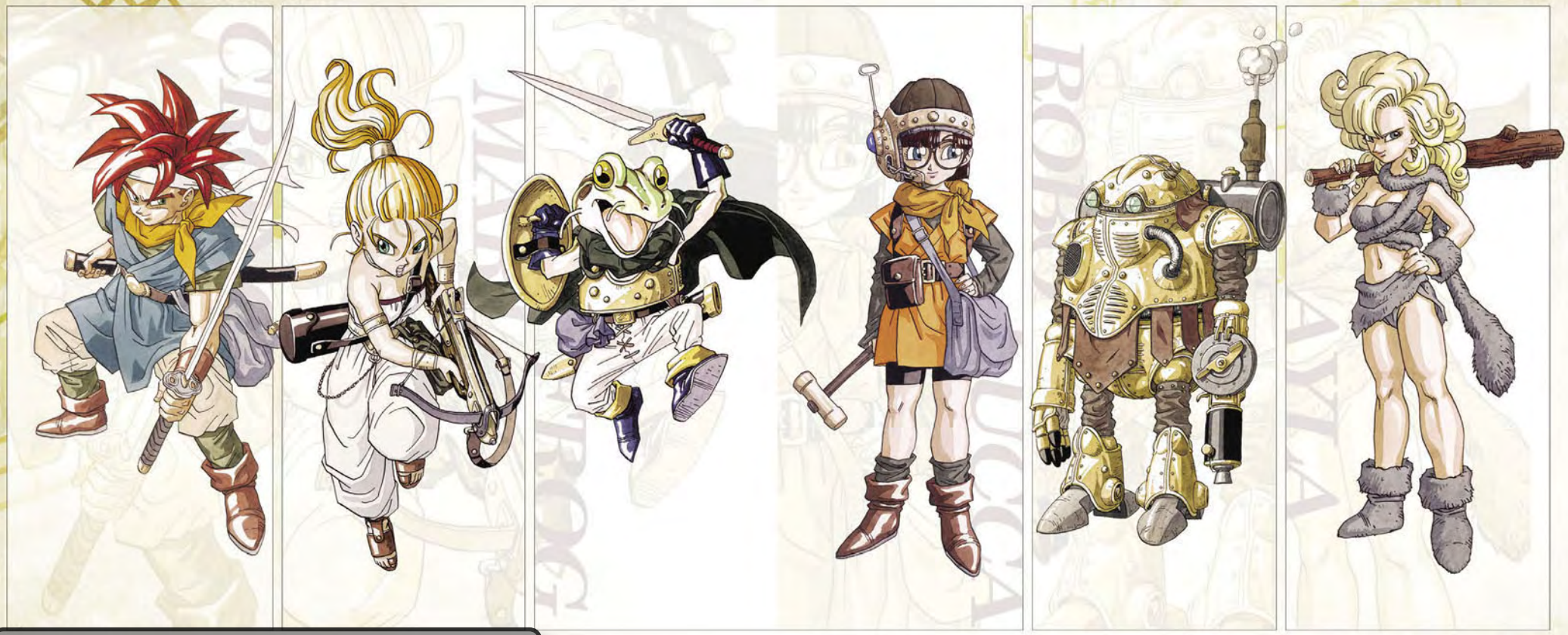
As MMO players know, the genre is all about questing – in this game, they're appropriately referred to as 'cases', and most will involve some kind of impending disaster which needs to be averted, or henchmen and evil masterminds who require a bit of a super-kicking. While heroes have their own superpowers, it seems your slightly less able avatars will carry weapons, from guns for ranged combat to swords and knives when you need to deal damage at close range. You'll still have skills, of course, and these can be upgraded and further developed as you level up, with the ability to instantly adjust your repertoire to fit any given situation. It's already a very good-looking game, while the controls seem to suit the PS3 controller far better than you'd think an MMO would.

When do we get more?

All we know is that it's coming at some point this year. Any further release date info isn't forthcoming just yet.

Anything else to declare?

Rather than owning areas of the gameworld – though you will be able to choose your home city – each area is shared, with dynamically generated content, which could potentially lead to some epic player-versus-player battles. Exciting stuff.





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Red Dead Redemption

FIRST LOOK

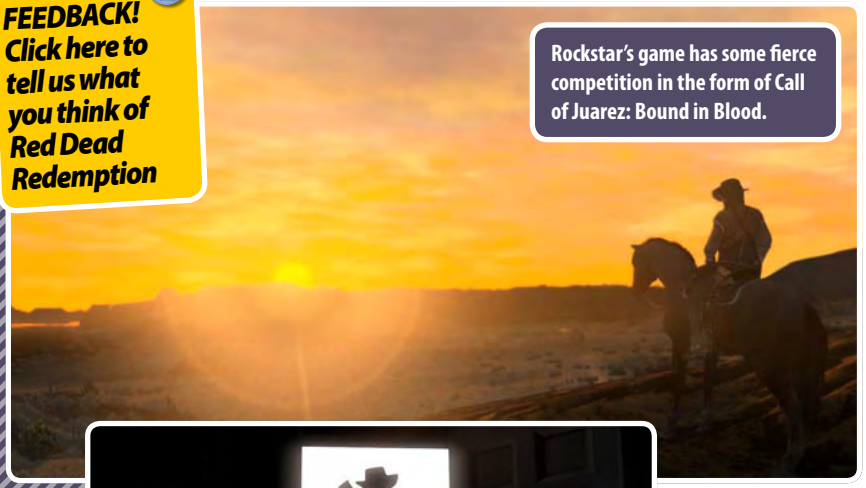
How the West was won

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

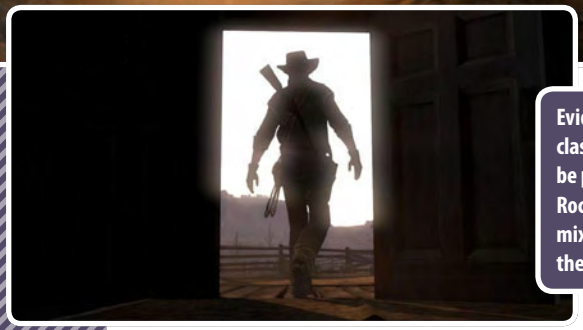
Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar San Diego
Heritage: Red Dead Revolver, Midnight Club Los Angeles
Link: www.rockstargames.com/reddeadredemption
ETA: Autumn



A free-roaming West has the potential to be a little featureless and dull, but Rockstar has expertise in this area.



Rockstar's game has some fierce competition in the form of Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood.



Evidently references to classic Western films will be prevalent. Knowing Rockstar, they'll be a mix of the subtle and the utterly blatant.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Red Dead Redemption

"There should be rootin', tootin' shoot-outs and bar-room brawls with bad guys"



What's the story?

A follow-up to the 2004 hit Red Dead Revolver, Redemption tells the tale of a former outlaw, John Marston, who is sent across the frontier to uphold the law – which means rootin', tootin' shoot-outs and bar-room brawls with bad guys. Set at the turn of the twentieth century, it plots the expansion of government at the start of the Industrial Age, when the lawlessness of the old west clashed with the law-abiding ways of the new order spreading across the country.

Why should we be excited?

It's certainly a good time for videogame Westerns, with a Call of Juarez sequel just around the corner, but Redemption promises to be a very different beast. While the original was level-based, this seems more like GTA on a horse, with a vast open-world environment which utilises Rockstar's RAGE engine. Like the publisher's most infamous series, there will be plenty of distractions from the main missions, and we predict the game's Dead Eye bullet-time shooting will make a return. Besides that, we just have these lovely shots to whet our appetite.

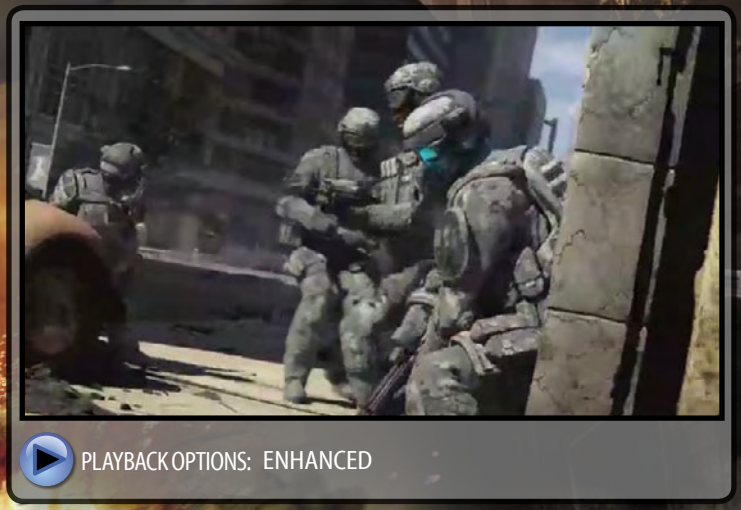
When do we get more?

It's out in the Autumn. Rockstar likes to remain fairly secretive about its games until it's absolutely certain they're ready to show them off, so don't expect previews until much closer to launch.

Anything else to declare?

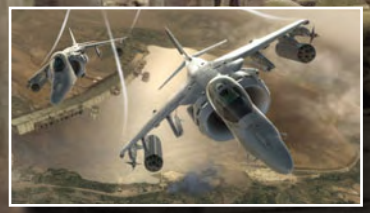
Revolver's Ennio Morricone soundtrack really helped it capture the feel of Western films – we have every reason to believe that Redemption will have a soundtrack of similarly epic proportions.

TAKE WARFARE TO A HIGHER LEVEL

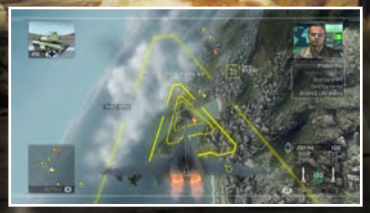




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HANDS ON

Resident Evil 5

Rout of Africa…

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Heritage: The Resident Evil series
Link: www.resident evil.com
ETA: 13th March



Resi 5 is certainly a good-looking game, with plenty of fine detail and some expert use of lighting throughout.

Just when all the furore seemed to have died down, Resident Evil 5 finds itself in trouble once again. Yet the latest accusations are arguably far more ruinous to its chances of success than those initial pointed fingers, eagerly jabbing at Capcom's latest with suggestions of racism. Capcom then introduced a second character, an African resident named Sheva, and made the parasite-infested villagers more multi-cultural. The addition of a second character – controlled by AI in single-player or co-operatively by another player – seems to have been fairly controversial, but it's the game's controls which have apparently polarised opinion.

It's strange to think that this could whip up such a fanboy frenzy, particularly given the existence of four different control setups – one aping Resident Evil 4 almost to the letter. But two Gears of Wars later, people want to be able to move and shoot at the same time. Resi 5 forces you to stop and take aim (as it always did), and apparently in 2009 that's simply not good enough. Poppycock.

Taking control

The fact is that Resi 5's control scheme is exactly as it should be. While the frantic toing and froing might look a little inelegant at times, in the context of the game it works just fine. Gears and Dead Space have their own control restrictions to induce a sense of panic at the overwhelming odds you face, and Resi's limitations are entirely appropriate. Whether they fit the design of the game quite as well as its predecessor isn't quite so clear, but we're glad that Resi has stuck to its guns while offering something a little more flexible to newcomers.



These hounds make the original window-smashing dogs of old look like poodles.

Capcom has issued several stipulations regarding the game's story, and going in cold is definitely best if you want any plot developments to surprise you, suffice to say that everything we've played so far proves that Resident Evil 5 will tie the fourth game to the rest of the series – both in ways you may expect and some that you may not. There's one flashback cut-scene which is particularly good fan-service, involving two characters from past games, who might make a reappearance later in this one. All you really need to know is that Chris Redfield from the original Resident Evil is the returning protagonist, and along with newcomer Sheva Alomar, you're tasked with investigating unrest in an African village.

"Chris Redfield from the original Resident Evil is the returning protagonist"

> Resident Evil 5 continued

As ever with Resi, the pauses before the action are filled with foreboding, ratcheting up the tension beautifully before you suddenly find yourselves under attack. The opening here is no different, as Sheva and Chris walk past a group of men viciously kicking a wriggling sack, and happening across the remains of slaughtered animals. Then they witness a brutal execution, get spotted by the ringleader of the baying mob, and the action starts. And then barely stops for the duration of the three lengthy chapters in our preview code.

While some questioned the intelligence of a computer-controlled Sheva in the playable demo, here she's of invaluable assistance, only rarely making bad judgment calls in battle, and often helping you out of trouble, whether it be healing you when you're injured or twist-kicking enemies that have grabbed you from behind. Indeed, these melee moves will likely be used more than in Resi 4 – their inclusion there offering more of a flourish to the game's combat rather than a vital part of your armoury. They do seem faintly overpowered, but that just encourages tactical shooting; a window of opportunity opening when you stun villagers with a well-placed shot. Blast an >



This huge Executioner sets the tone – when the opening stage puts you under attack from this kind of enemy, you know you're in for an ordeal.

"Sheva is of invaluable assistance, only rarely making bad judgement calls in battle"



It wouldn't be a Resi game without levers to pull or valves to turn.



This on-rails section sees you fleeing large groups of infected villagers on motorbikes and trucks – it's short but undeniably pulse-quickening stuff.





Chris and Sheva are both likeable characters with a palpable chemistry as partners.

> Resident Evil 5 continued

enemy in the face and Chris can hit them with a powerful straight punch; a bullet to the arm and you can smash them with a hook. Best of all, forcing them to their knees with a leg shot gives you a chance to execute a jaw-cracking uppercut, often knocking several foes back with one swing of Chris's mighty arms. Enemies are more plentiful than ever, which, coupled with the paucity of ammunition, makes simply running away an extremely valid tactic. Though all enemies drop gold or ammo, you'll do well to take each and every one out within a given area – but you'll be rewarded for doing so with the end of each level offering a ranking and points total based on your combat accuracy, number of enemies killed, number of deaths, and the time you took. Presumably these tallies will equate to bonuses in the finished game, though no hint of that was given in the code we played.

Anyone concerned that the African setting wouldn't offer as enticing a mix of locales as in previous Resident Evils can rest assured that the game mixes up the locations as well as it does the action. An on-rails sequence involving enemies on motorbikes is a definite highlight, while the game's first boss battle proper is an epic >

"Enemies are more plentiful than ever, making running away an extremely valid tactic"

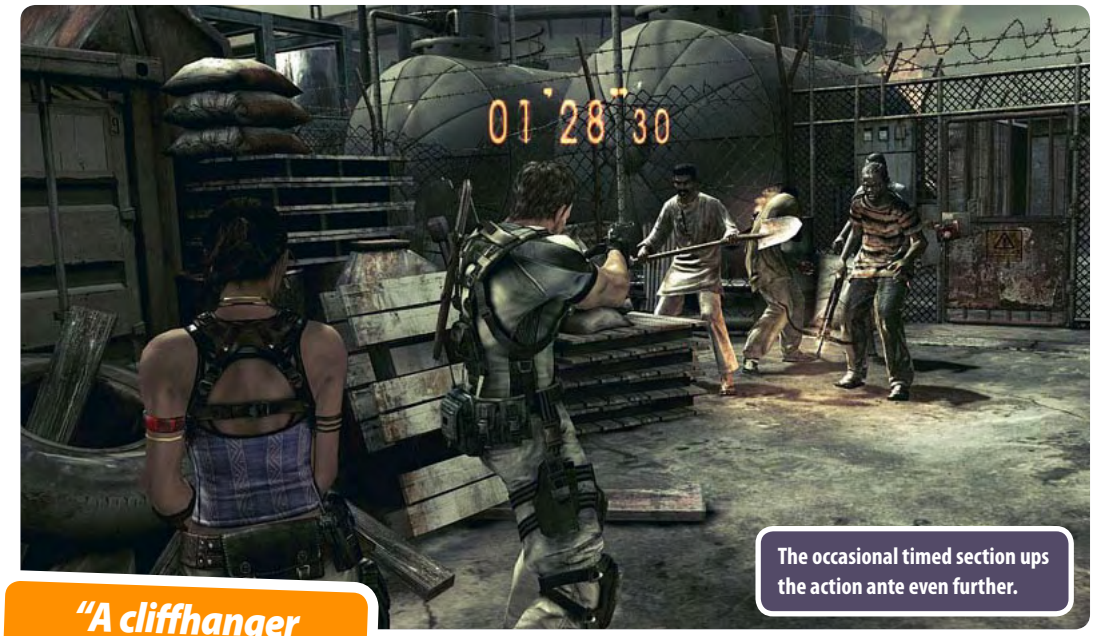


> Resident Evil 5 continued

outdoor encounter which left us breathing a huge sigh of relief once it was finally over. One particular area (which we're also forbidden from mentioning) offers up some very sturdy opponents – let's just say that anyone with an intolerance for huge spiked clubs should steer clear, while there are two enemies which will bring back fond memories of 5's immediate precursor.

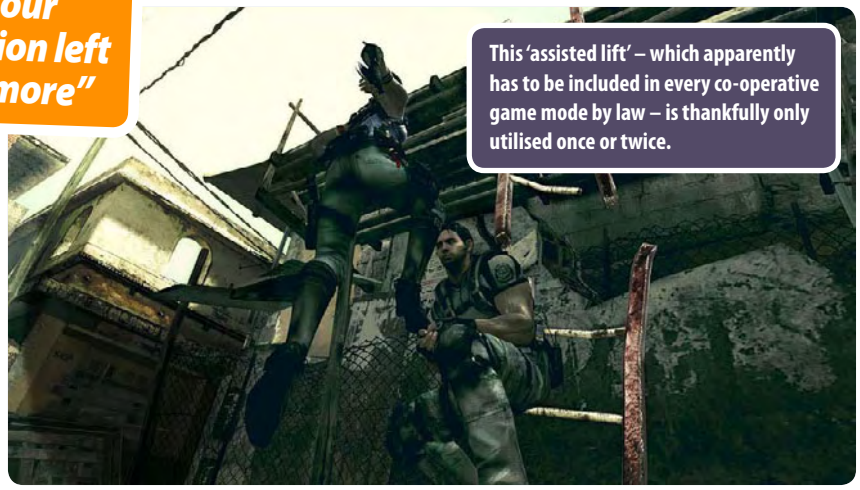
Indeed, perhaps Resi 5's biggest failing is that it seems too frequently enamoured to that superb fourth game, one or two sequences echoing it just a little too closely for comfort. It's a pity, because when it has the confidence to forge its own path, it begins to feel a little more than just a hi-def retread. But given that we're of the opinion that Resi 4 is one of the best action-adventures ever made – and that this matches it stride-for-stride in intensity– perhaps that's not such a bad thing.

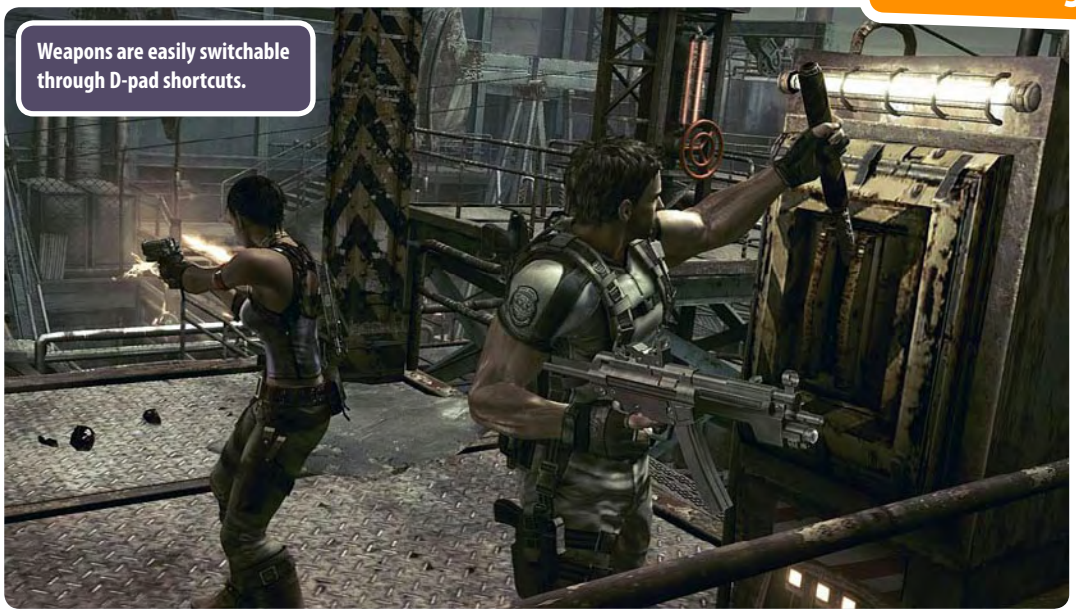
A cliffhanger climax to our preview version certainly left us wanting more, and if it can offer enough of its own ideas in the final stretch, then this stands every chance of becoming a worthy sequel. And with the promise of more multiplayer options and unlockables than ever before, those who wrote off Resi 5 on the strength of that demo might just find themselves having to eat a few words come March.



The occasional timed section ups the action ante even further.

"A cliffhanger climax to our preview version left us wanting more"


This 'assisted lift' – which apparently has to be included in every co-operative game mode by law – is thankfully only utilised once or twice.


Weapons are easily switchable through D-pad shortcuts.

P3Zine

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE 90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 90%

Control freaked? Trust us – Resi 5 is worth sticking with











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UNCHARTED 2 AMONG THIEVES

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Naughty Dog
Heritage: Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Jak series
Link: N/A
ETA: November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

FIRST LOOK

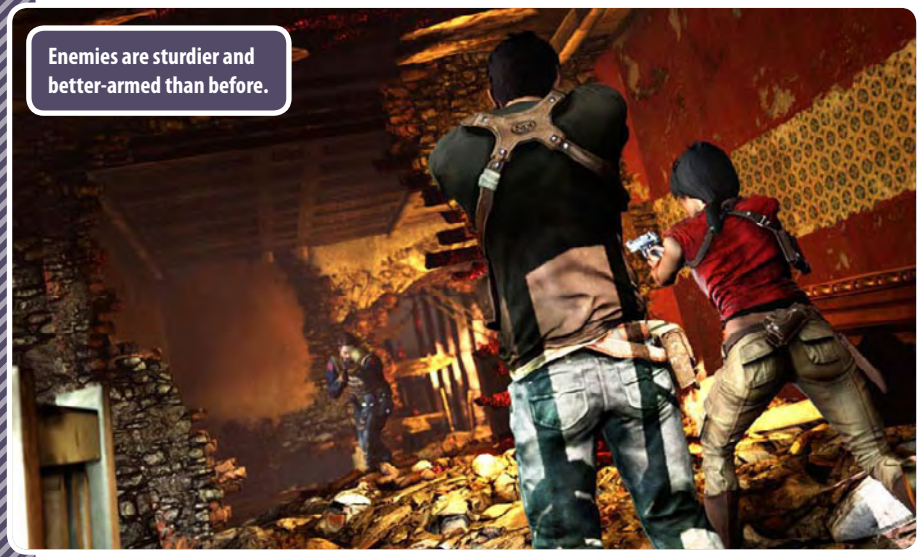
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Drake amore…

With dashing good looks and a roguish charm, Nathan Drake stole the hearts of many with 2007's Uncharted: Drake's Fortune. One of the most likeable protagonists in ages was the star of Naughty Dog's superb action-adventure, which had more than just its hero to recommend it – a blend of Gears-esque third-person blasting and Croft-like exploration marked it out as a franchise to watch. Its sequel is already on the way, and even with around eight months to go until it's finished, it already looks the business.



Drake looks a little less carefree than he once did. The game promises to explore why the character is a thief – hence the title.



Enemies are sturdier and better-armed than before.

That's partly down to the developer's increasing familiarity with the hardware, enabling Naughty Dog to utilise the Cell processor's SPUs to their full capabilities. It's been suggested that Drake's Fortune used just 30% of their power. As easily one of the top five best-looking games on the console, it's incredible to think that its sequel could be three times more gorgeous. Certainly from what we've seen so far, there's a noticeable leap in graphical detail, animation and environmental interaction.

Running and ducking

On the subject of the latter, the gameplay has been tweaked to allow Drake to outmanoeuvre his opponents in more athletic ways than just running and ducking behind cover. The game will allow free movement across its walls, with the mechanics adopting a system very similar to that of Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed. It seems once again that Naughty Dog is set to be a bit of a gaming magpie, pinching the best ideas from other games and amalgamating them all into one incredibly polished whole. While hardly completely innovative, it's rather appropriate given the thieving nature of its hero – has the developer been influenced by character it created? It would certainly seem that way.

"The game will allow free movement across its walls, much like Assassin's Creed"

Yet while the first game had little that felt truly new, it still had

>

UNCHARTED 2 AMONG THIEVES

> Uncharted 2 continued

a freshness about it that many games lack. Undoubtedly, this is partly down to the skill with which the developer combined its ideas and influences into a cohesive whole. With these Altair-aping new moves, it looks like Nate will be more controllable than ever – and that's a good job given the improved artificial intelligence of his enemies. Their field of vision has been widened so they'll be able to spot Drake from the corner of their eyes, and will follow him while he's climbing – so it's not as if you're automatically safe when you clamber out of reach.

There's more of a stealth focus to the action. Instead of simply blasting away all enemies, it's now better to stay out of trouble as much as possible. If we're honest, the first game did get a little gun-happy at times, so while we've never been massive fans of stealth sections in games which don't really benefit from their inclusion, the need to be a little more careful is more fitting here. Drake will also be able to create his own cover from various objects – flipping over tables to hide behind, for example. It all adds up to make the encounters that much more organic and interesting.

Drake himself has changed, too – not just in the cut-scenes which are now realised using the in-game engine so you're not stuck with two different character models. He's a more complex character than in the first game, as the developer looks to explore the dark side of the >



More detailed and destructible environments are a good start for the sequel's improvements.



The draw distance, as in the original, is phenomenal.



Naughty Dog wanted to venture outside the traditional jungle setting for Drake's new escapades – hence a greater variety in the locales.

UNCHARTED 2 AMONG THIEVES

> Uncharted 2 continued

character. Could Among Thieves be Naughty Dog's Empire Strikes Back? Well, the game does open in a snowy setting, and while the white peaks of the Himalayas are hardly Hoth, it could well be a good indication of where we're headed. Let's just hope that the character doesn't lose his sense of humour, as his earlier tale of derring-do becomes something more bleakly contemporary. Too few wisecracks though, and we'll be forced to ask "Why so serious?"

Fantastic adventure

Yet while early evidence suggests we're looking at a Drake of a somewhat darker feather, the emerging details of the game's plot hint towards an adventure that still borders on the fantastical. There mightn't be any submarines in the jungle (or monsters at the game's climax) but wish-granting crystals

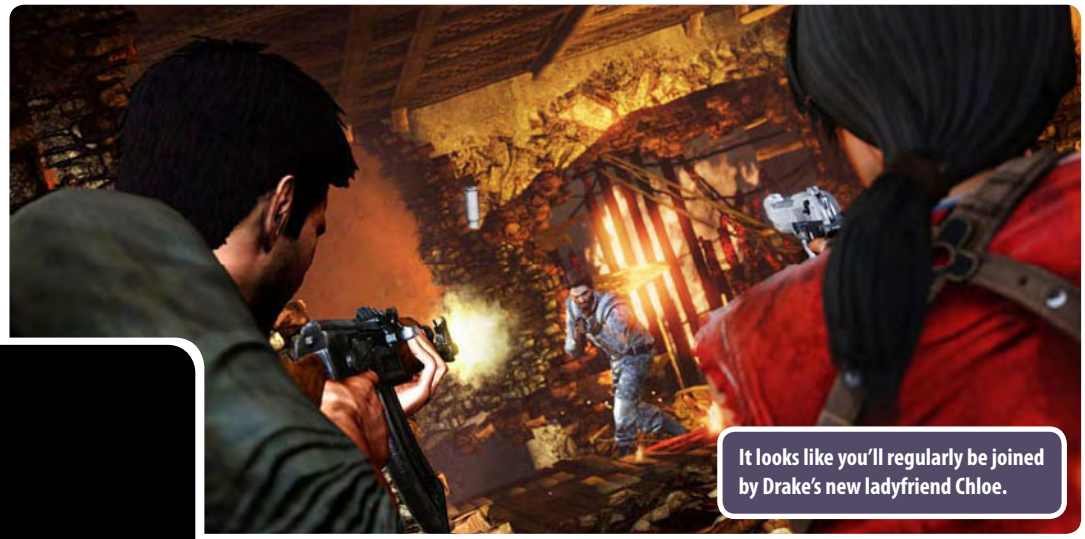
"The game's plot hints towards an adventure that still borders on the fantastical"

and the lost ships of Marco Polo sound like thrillingly old-fashioned adventure plotlines to us. Another hint that there could be a bit of fantasy behind the gritty realism is the casting of Claudia Black – whose stints on Stargate and Farscape make her a bit of a poster girl for sci-fi fanboys – as Drake's love interest.

Assuming it hasn't abandoned the lightness of touch that made the first game such a joy, we're optimistic that Drake's fortunes taking a turn for the worse might just have the opposite effect on his sophomore adventure. Uncharted territory for its developers it may be, but we're looking forward to a walk on the dark side when Among Thieves is launched this coming winter.



The sequel comes with roughly the same budget as the first game – a cool $20 million!



It looks like you'll regularly be joined by Drake's new ladyfriend Chloe.





P3Zine UNCHARTED 2 AMONG THIEVES

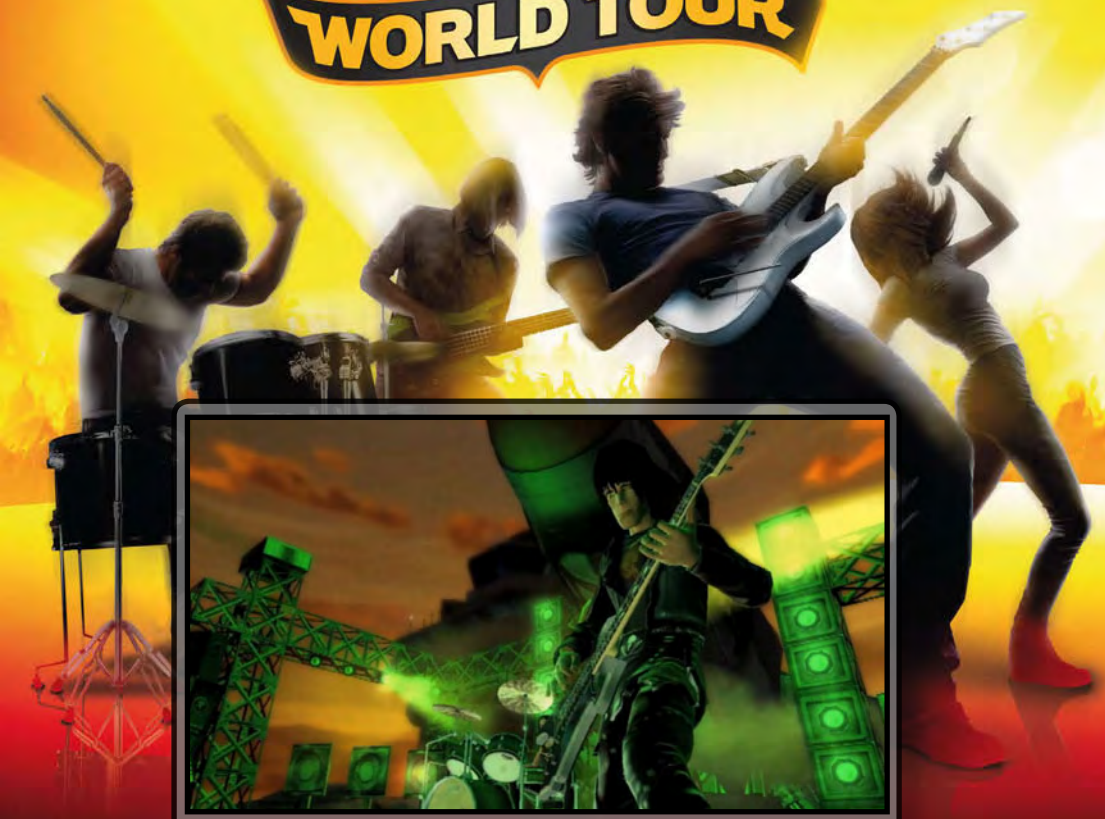
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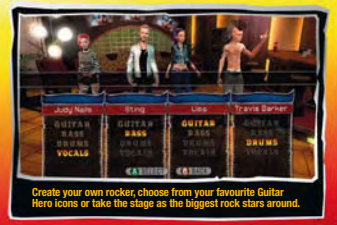
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ACTIVISION. activision.com

PETAL POWER

What happens when the boundaries between game and art gets blurred?



Thatgamecompany's Flower is the most beautiful and unique game on PS3, as we're sure you can tell from our review elsewhere in the issue and the screenshots scattered about these pages. So what's it all about? We spoke to Kellee Santiago, president of this talented development team, to find out more.

When you first started creating Flower, what exactly did you want to achieve with the game?
The idea for Flower grew organically (no pun intended) from a number of inspirations. One was to try and capture the feeling of being in a large flower field; to capture both the sense of beauty when you see them all, but also the visceral feeling of being up close to an individual flower. If you do a Google image search for "flower" you discover photographs from people all over the world, all fascinated with this aspect of nature. Technically, it was an exciting challenge. What would happen if we took this aspect of videogames that is normally an afterthought on the edge of the world – the bushes and grass – and make the entire game about it?

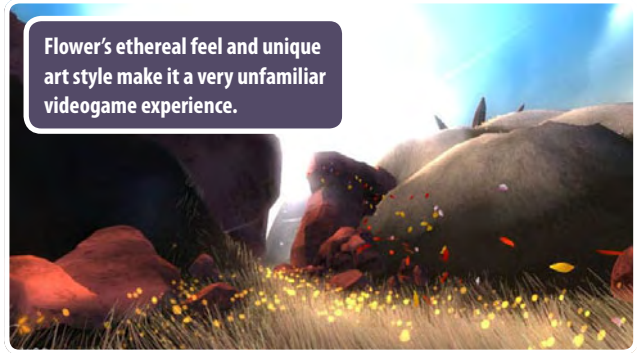
What I really like about Flower though, is that it feels like a very personal expression of Jenova's [Chen, Flower's Creative Director]. The story and the themes that are expressed in the game really evolved from what I see as his current interpretation of the world around him, and the game invites the player to participate in that space. It has an intimate feel to it.

Flower is a very similar game to flOw in a number of ways, not least in the circular life-begets-life theme – was it a conscious decision to explore similar ideas to ensure a sense of continuity?
We think of Flower as having similar DNA as flOw. Flower is another game by thatgamecompany that attempts to push the boundaries of what can be communicated in a videogame. Beyond that, there weren't really conscious decisions to make them similar in theme or content. Maybe it's just a phase we're going through!

Kellee Santiago is President and co-creator of thatgame company. They're contracted to release one more downloadable title for PSN after Flower.



thatgamecompany was founded in May 2006 by Kellee Santiago and Jenova Chen as a team dedicated to making small, experimental videogames.



Flower's ethereal feel and unique art style make it a very unfamiliar videogame experience.

> Interview continued



Flower blurs the lines between interactive art and game.



The game's fourth level is particularly beautiful, and more fantastical than the earlier stages.



There are hundreds of thousands of realistically animated blades of grass.

"We aren't making arthouse games – we're making games with mass appeal"

Would it be fair to describe Flower as an 'arthouse' game?
I think that we are trying some unconventional methods of leveraging videogames as a medium, and that could be a definition of arthouse games. However, our goal is to express our ideas to players in a wide scope, so in that way we aren't making arthouse games – we're making games with mass appeal.

Your official website describes Flower as 'a videogame version of a poem' – do you agree with Jonathan Blow's assertion that perhaps gaming should start taking cues from works of art – poetry, paintings, sculpture – rather than constantly attempting to ape Hollywood?
To clarify that statement, film is a work of art. It's just that it shouldn't alone be the basis of comparison when it comes to developing videogames. Similarly, other videogames shouldn't be your only source when you create a game.

We examine all manner of art and expression during our development process, especially when we're starting on a new idea. I think game developers often try to reinvent the wheel when it comes to storytelling, when we have thousands of years of history to draw from!

Do you think the very existence of Flower is proof that gaming as a medium is really beginning to mature?
I think it proves that Sony isn't joking around when they say that they want PSN to be a place for players to find unique, quality content. Flower would have existed either way, but you wouldn't be playing it if it wasn't for their support.

Is Flower a reaction to the level of violence present in most videogames these days? Or is it simply a way of exploring emotions and ideas uncommon within the medium?
Definitely the latter. I enjoy Gears of War just as much as the next gamer. The problem is, I sometimes just want something else. With other media, there's something for every taste. I can find music to match any mood, for instance. I want to reach a point where instead of asking myself >

> Interview continued





"Am I in the mood to play a game?" I ask "What kind of game am I in the mood for?"

Were you surprised at the success flOw enjoyed on PSN? And do you think that success proves that gamers are genuinely keen on brand new gaming experiences?
Like I said before, we aim to make games with mass appeal. So, our plan all along was that lots of people would enjoy playing it.

"Our games confirm our feeling that players are in search of something different"

But to have players confirm that… that was amazing. It was similar to the feeling we had when Cloud [thatgamecompany's first game, on PC] became so popular. It confirms our feeling that players are in search of something different. It seems so obvious to us now that I'm surprised more developers aren't going in this direction.

Do you foresee the download services as the breeding ground for new gaming concepts and ideas, or do you think that it's possible for larger-scale, more expensive products to realistically innovate?
I think that as people get more used to downloading their content instead of purchasing a physical item, that it will open up the opportunity for larger-scale games to be developed solely for download, and offering a unique boxed item for those people that like to own a physical game. I just hope players understand that shipping disc-based titles is such a financial waste, that it seriously hinders the developer in what they are able to do. Downloadable content is good for everyone!

Do you hope that Flower will inspire players to appreciate the beauty of the natural world a little more?
We hope that Flower evokes the feeling of appreciating beauty, and that, in turn, will inspire players to do more of it in their lives.

Finally, will your next game be a spiritual sequel to Flower, or are you keen to explore other avenues within the medium?
Like with flOw and Flower, I think players are beginning to get a sense of the thatgamecompany brand. However, the emotions that we explored in flOw and Flower are somewhat similar, and so players should expect us to go beyond 'Zen' gaming, and that we'll take what we've learned into another, unexplored direction.



Publisher: SCEE
Developer: thatgamecompany
Heritage: FlOw
Link: http://uk.playstation.com/games-media/games/detail/item114776/Flower
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Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Guerrilla Games
Heritage: Killzone, Killzone: Liberation
Link: www.killzone.com/kz
ETA: 27th February

Killzone 2

Set visuals to 'stun'

"Killzone 2 could, and perhaps should, have been as good as everyone hoped it would be"

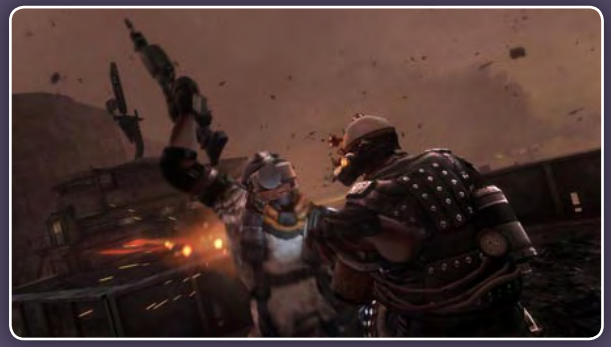
No-one ever said it was going to be easy for Killzone 2, but it's fair to say that it arrives on PS3 burdened by the weight of unreasonable expectation. That it almost lives up to the frenzied hype surrounding it is one hell of an achievement. What's slightly frustrating though, is that, despite its conservatism – this is an incredibly traditional first-person shooter – it could, and perhaps should, have been as good as everyone hoped it would be.

That said, it's a substantial improvement on the pretty but vacant Killzone – Guerrilla clearly having learned a few tricks in the meantime. Sadly, that acquired knowledge doesn't stretch to story and dialogue – while the plot ticks the right boxes (despotic madman, gritty battles on alien planets, token 'moving' death scene) it's little more than the most basic of templates to frame the action.

As Thomas Sevchenko – Sev for short – you join your four-strong Alpha Squad in an invasion of the planet Helghan to find and kill General Visari, who's managed to get his hands on a nuclear weapon which could turn the tide of battle in the favour of the Helghast. A few mild plot twists aside, there's little to mark it out from the crowd, while the dialogue – liberally peppered with F-bombs – is faintly ludicrous in places, particularly when it comes to the Helghast, who are far better as a silent foe. In battle they're effective opponents, but their >

GUERRILLA WARFARE

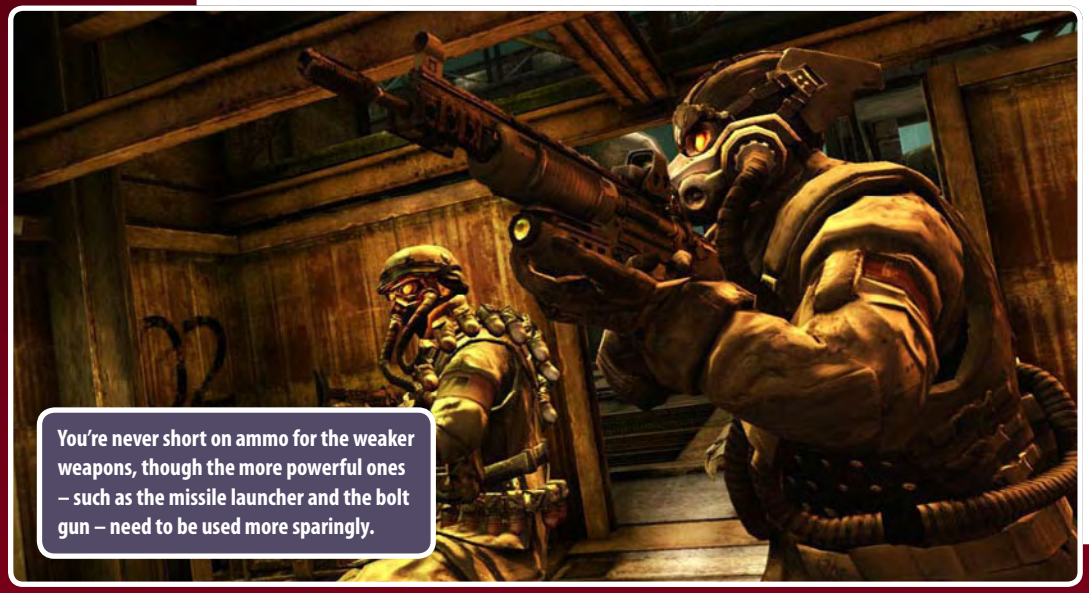
Why Killzone 2 is ahead of the FPS pack on PS3



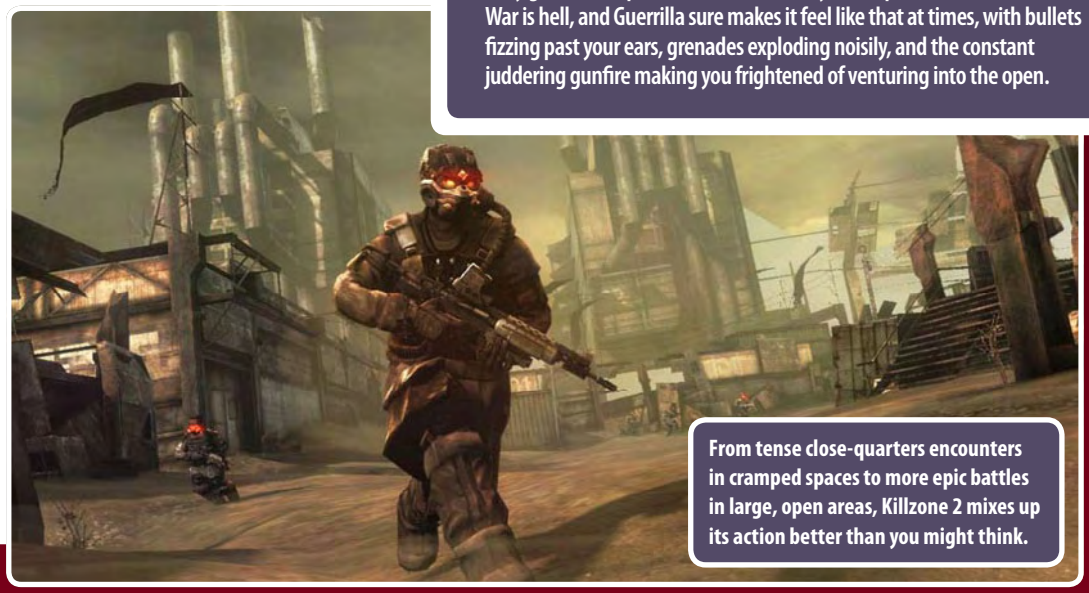
Blunt force trauma | WMD | Attack of the clones

Blunt force trauma

The ferocity of Killzone 2's combat is its trump card. Not even the Call of Duty games can quite match the intensity of the pitched battles here. War is hell, and Guerrilla sure makes it feel like that at times, with bullets fizzing past your ears, grenades exploding noisily, and the constant juddering gunfire making you frightened of venturing into the open.



You're never short on ammo for the weaker weapons, though the more powerful ones – such as the missile launcher and the bolt gun – need to be used more sparingly.



From tense close-quarters encounters in cramped spaces to more epic battles in large, open areas, Killzone 2 mixes up its action better than you might think.



Snipers are rarely encountered during the campaign, but can pose a serious threat in the online modes.



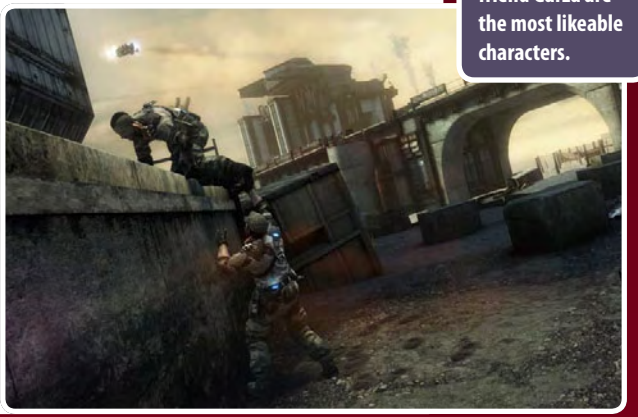
> Killzone 2 continued

incidental utterances make them seem comical. By all means give us a giant chaingun-toting trooper to face, but don't make him shout "Shit… so slow" when he's stunned by a grenade. It ruins the effect.

It's a shame, as otherwise the Helghast are enemies to be feared and respected. Their movement in battle seems incredibly fluid and natural, and they often use clever tactics – flanking you, blind-firing from cover, lobbing grenades and then running and gunning for you in the confusion that follows. It makes Killzone 2's combat an ordeal in the best possible way – these are wars of attrition, fought between sides who feel all but equal in every way. It takes some work to out-think them, and you'll often find yourself pinned down, fearful of moving forward for the possibility of taking several rounds in the mush. And you'll be keen to avoid that, given how unforgiving the game is in the damage you're allowed to take before you drop.

"The Helghast are enemies to be feared and respected"

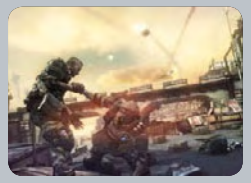
Other shooters treat you as a bit of a bullet sponge, offering you the chance to spend a little time in the open taking punishment while you line up your shots. Killzone 2 isn't like that. Try to run and gun and you'll be cut down yards from the >



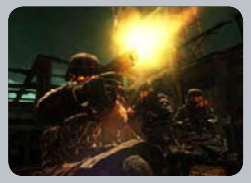
Hero Sev and best friend Garza are the most likeable characters.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game one step at a time



10 MINUTES
It's hardly plain sailing down the Corinth River as you're plunged in at the deep end.



3 HOURS
The scrap at Salamun Bridge is a long, drawn-out battle for territory.



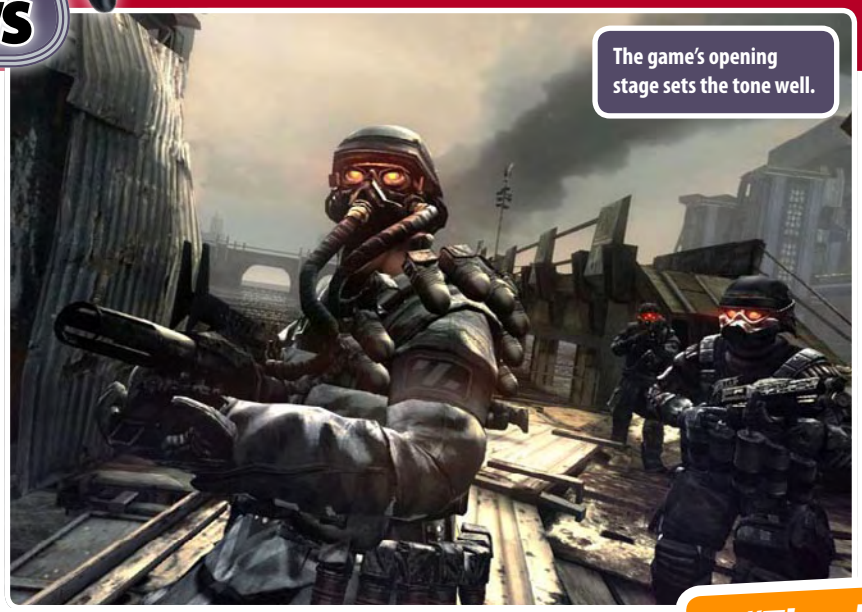
5 HOURS
Suljeva Village might seem pretty quiet, but an ambush lies in wait…



7 HOURS
Action on an epic scale – keep an eye out for the giant exoskeletons.



10 HOURS
The final assault is over and now the multiplayer can take over your life.



The game's opening stage sets the tone well.



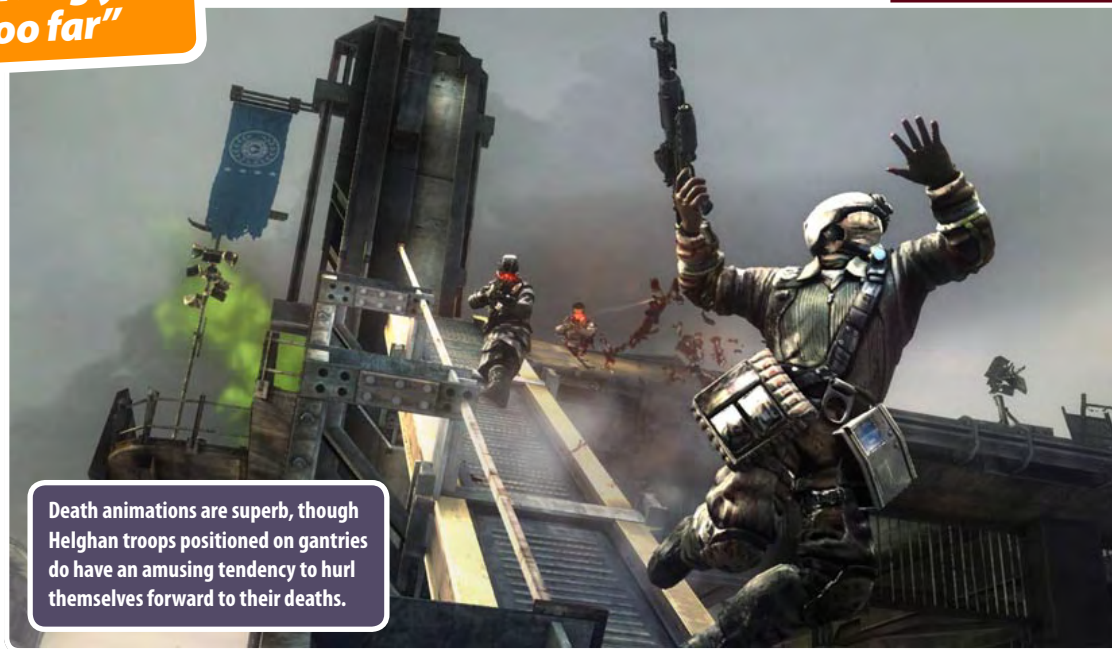
An early highlight is this set-piece where you're pinned down with two squad mates, and with Helghast dropped in regularly.

> Killzone 2 continued

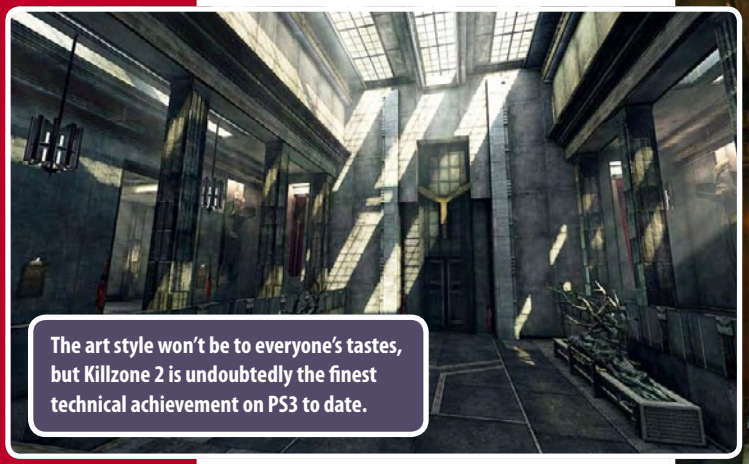
point you emerged from cover. It's a case of staying back, biding your time, then pushing forward to the next available wall to hide behind. It uses a first-person cover system, which feels more immersive and real than a third-person alternative, but unfortunately lets you down once or twice, when it becomes difficult to see where your enemies are coming from. It's rarely a major issue, but given that the display can become muddied with blood spatters, smoke and dust in the heat of battle, you'll suffer a few unfair deaths. Thankfully the checkpoints are fairly generous, rarely sending you back too far once you're mortally wounded.

The campaign often sees you fighting alongside another member of Alpha Squad, whether it be profanity-spewing Sergeant Rico, potty-mouthed Corporal Natko or the comparatively swear-free Corporal Garza. All of which makes the omission of a co-operative mode all the more noticeable. It's not a deal-breaker, but it's curious that the game seems to have been designed with a second player in mind, offering alternate routes during most levels which no player is going to discover all of in a single playthrough. That niggle aside, the brutal, muscular action carries it through 10 stages, which will take the average player around 10 hours to complete – that said, over an hour of that will likely be spent on the game's final battle, which is a >

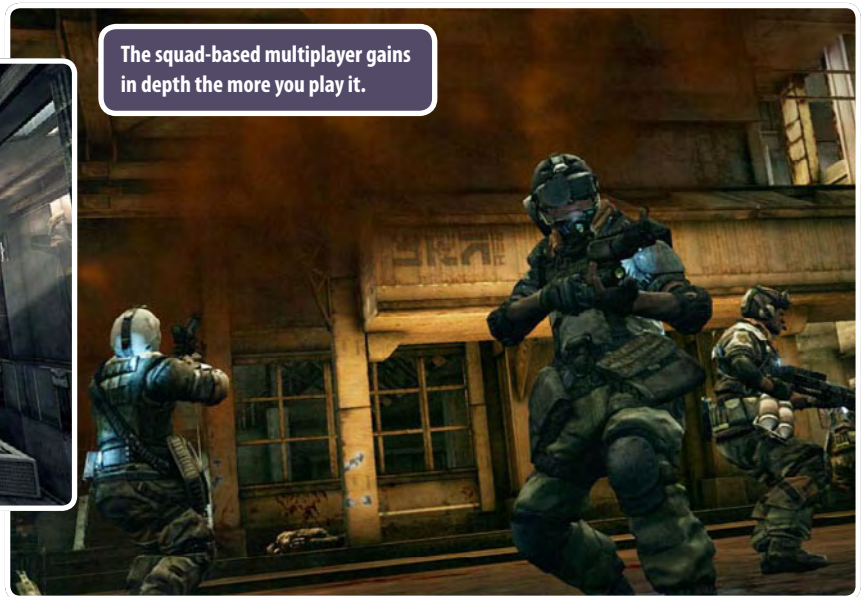
"The checkpoints are fairly generous, rarely sending you back too far"



Death animations are superb, though Helghan troops positioned on gantries do have an amusing tendency to hurl themselves forward to their deaths.



The art style won't be to everyone's tastes, but Killzone 2 is undoubtedly the finest technical achievement on PS3 to date.



The squad-based multiplayer gains in depth the more you play it.

> Killzone 2 continued

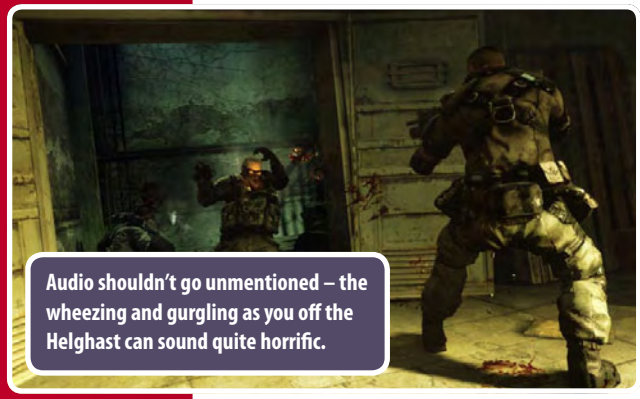
sizeable spike in difficulty, and one which some gamers will completely fail to pass, even on the game's Recruit setting. Again it's a pity, as what goes before is at times quite spectacular. While it can't achieve the peaks of the genre's best set-pieces – perhaps because the game feels like one giant set-piece – it maintains a very high standard throughout, throwing in the occasional boss battle, vehicle section (of sorts) and an on-rails turret gun sequence which is quite stunning to behold.

Indeed, the graphics can hardly be criticised. Given that the setting of Helghan doesn't initially lend itself well to visual variety, there are subtle palette changes which allow each area to stand out. The orange-brown dust and rust in Suljeva Village is a particular highlight, while a battle along the length of a train immediately afterwards is another visual triumph. At times, it's almost too much of an assault on the senses, particularly when coupled with the bruising sound effects, which capture the noise of war well.

A very solid campaign is bolstered by a multiplayer offering which is once again unapologetically hardcore, but is also an undeniably polished and refreshingly individual take on the multiplayer FPS. It offers offline play against bots to brush up on your technique before venturing into battle against real opponents, at which point some players will die far too often far too early and simply give up. Yet the class system which initially seems so unforgiving – you start with just one available class, and a couple of fairly weedy weapons – adds real depth to the experience.

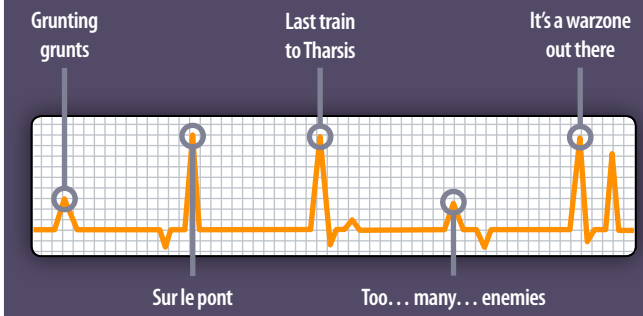
Get a few kills and you can start tweaking your character, moulding your online soldier in ways that fit your own personal play style. Warzone mode offers a game with ever-evolving objectives, and with up to 32 players supported, it could well be the biggest online hit the PSN has had. Let's hope Sony's servers are up to the job. ●

Chris Schilling



Audio shouldn't go unmentioned – the wheezing and gurgling as you off the Helghast can sound quite horrific.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"The multiplayer offering is unapologetically hardcore"



P3Zine Verdict

A technical tour de force and the best shooter on PS3

+ Deep, thoughtful multiplayer
+ Astonishing graphics
- Climax is awful; Dialogue worse

88%



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

Street Fighter IV

Make way for the champion

P3Zine GOLD

In the blurb accompanying our review copy of the game, excitable PR pixie Leo Tan describes Street Fighter IV as 'the greatest game of all time'. We're not sure we'd go quite that far, but equally, we don't think he's too far off – and if the 2D beat-'em-up happens to be your favourite genre, then his description is almost certainly spot on. We had a strong suspicion it might just be brilliant when our three-fight preview code arrived and we played it for so long our PS3 nearly melted. And now the final version's here, it's clear that Capcom has crafted a title that will surely be the benchmark for all others to beat.

While IV can't really have the iconic significance of Street Fighter II – though, given time, who knows? – in every way it bests its illustrious predecessor. As soon as we sat down to play we were transported back to our childhoods – that time we beat a cocky older kid in front of his mates at a Rhyl arcade, or when we imported the SNES version at an extortionate price. Yet it's more than just nostalgia – IV is so complete, it almost makes II feel like a work-in-progress. It feels like Capcom has spent its entire career balancing the game – adjusting, tweaking, prodding and poking it into shape until it's virtually impossible to pick fault. There are slight niggles – end boss Seth is as cheap as a final character in a beat-'em-up usually is, Zangief's spinning piledriver is perhaps a touch too effective (though that's why we often pick

THE WORLD WARRIOR

Why SFIV can't be beaten



The ink spots | Eye-popping | Arcade wire

The ink spots

Focus Attacks are probably our favourite addition besides the easier-to-execute specials, if only because they're a cool-as-you-like answer to cheap or aggressive opponents. Simply hold the medium punch and kick buttons simultaneously and charge it up as long as you want.

Roll over screen for annotations





You might encounter a few cheap Blanka players online who'll spam his electric thunder move.



Watch and learn Battle Fantasia – this is how you make backgrounds more vibrant.



Chun Li doesn't seem to be quite as strong as she once was, but that might just be us struggling to get to grips with her moveset.



> Street Fighter IV cont.

him), Sagat is overpowered and the menu music is godawful – but the overall package is so thorough, so polished, so nigh-on perfect, that it seems churlish to quibble.

Even beat-'em-up novices will plenty here to appeal here. The easier difficulty levels offering a way in, with the inputs for specials really rather forgiving, allowing even the most tricky moves to be pulled off without too much hassle. You'll still struggle to nail an Ultra Combo finish, but you'll be executing shoryukens and hadokens with greater ease than in any other Street Fighter. While it's still going to be a little too fast for some, the new Focus Attacks offer a moment of almost Zen-like calm in the middle of battle, as your charged-up move absorbs an enemy attack, allowing you to turn the tables on aggressive opponents in a stroke.

"Even beat-'em-up novices will find plenty to appeal here"

Of course, the big question was whether Capcom could get the online to work – a botched implementation could have killed the online multiplayer stone dead, even if it still would have been a masterpiece for those able to play locally with a friend. But it's been masterfully executed – we've played several matches without even a hint of lag, even against opponents across the other side of the globe with a poor connection. Granted, >

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time



10 MINUTES
Hmm, pretty tough on Medium. Shall we put it down to Easy?



30 MINUTES
Nah, I think that we'll try and stick it out. Oh, hang on – here's Sagat…



1 HOUR
Back on Easy mode. Perhaps it's time to learn the ropes a little better.



5 HOURS
Just. One. More. Battle. Arcade mode bested with a few characters now.



40 HOURS
So we're online battling until the wee small hours. Who needs sleep, eh?



Sagat's a beast of an opponent – really tricky to deal with when you're against him, pretty devastating when you're in control.



Good to see Cammy back in there.

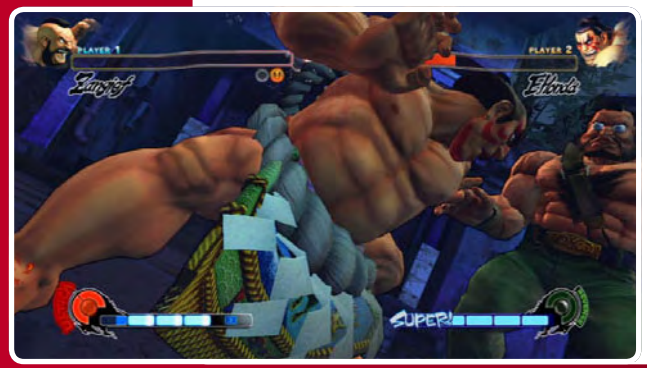


Sakura is a fanboy favourite, but seems one of the weakest scrappers.

> Street Fighter IV cont.

once more players are online and the servers start to fill up, you're going to want to look for a fight against someone where the signal strength is at maximum. Fortunately, the game allows you to prioritise matches by that particular criteria, as well as being able to choose similarly skilled players or – for a greater challenge – those better than you.

Capcom has implemented a feature which allows anyone online to challenge you while you're playing Arcade mode – designed to be reminiscent of the offer of a bout in an arcade. It works extremely well, but can also be turned off if you don't want to be interrupted. There's a Training mode, and a Challenge mode which contains several time attack, survival and trial challenges – for every character. It's an embarrassment of riches – an array of options so comprehensive that it's hard to see anyone exhausting them all any time soon.



Immortal combat

Above all else, it's the core combat that impresses. Thanks to its terrific graphics, animation and detail, it's almost as much of a pleasure to watch as it is to play. But it's only once you pick up a pad or a stick (and we strongly recommend you invest in a decent arcade stick rather than use the traditional controller, no matter how forgiving the command inputs are) that you can truly discover Capcom's genius.

A roster of much-loved favourites, some welcome newcomers and a few wildcards from previous games represents a line-up that a new generation of fight fans will surely grow to cherish – memorising their moves until they're as indelibly imprinted upon the collective consciousness as the spinning bird kick and the dragon punch.

Sometime in the future a beat-'em-up (which, to be honest, will probably be from Capcom once again) will top this, but for the foreseeable future, Street Fighter IV sits proudly upon its throne as the best one-on-one fighter ever made.

Chris Schilling

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"Street Fighter IV sits proudly upon its throne as the best one-on-one fighter ever made"



Effects on special moves are more dramatic than ever. Fireballs have never looked so good.

P3Zine Verdict

Teaches all beat-'em-up pretenders a lesson

- Looks stunning
- Plays better
- Online works like a charm

93%



Publisher: Konami
Developer: Double Helix
Heritage: Enter the Matrix, Buffy the Vampire Slayer
Link: www.konami.com/games/shh
ETA: 27th February

Silent Hill: Homecoming

"Perhaps surprisingly, Homecoming marks the franchise's next-gen debut"

Quiet at the back…

The Silent Hill series has been through many guises since its inception on the original PlayStation a full decade ago, gradually declining from a touchstone of the survival horror genre to a pale imitation of its former self. Perhaps surprisingly, Homecoming marks the franchise's next-gen debut, and as such it gets the full reboot treatment, replete with a brand new story, and crucially, a new Western developer. There's a clear parallel to be drawn with Japanese horror films here, as if the original games are the equivalent of art house movies such as The Ring or The Grudge, then this is the dumbed-down Hollywood popcorn version starring Sarah Michelle Gellar or whatever dead-eyed showbiz skank is doing the rounds. Alternatively, it's an accessible introduction to a classic series that draws from the past to create a more coherent whole compared to the often ponderous foibles of its predecessors.

Either way, you play Alex Shepherd, heading back to his >

WHERE'S YOUR TOOL?

Choose your weapon…

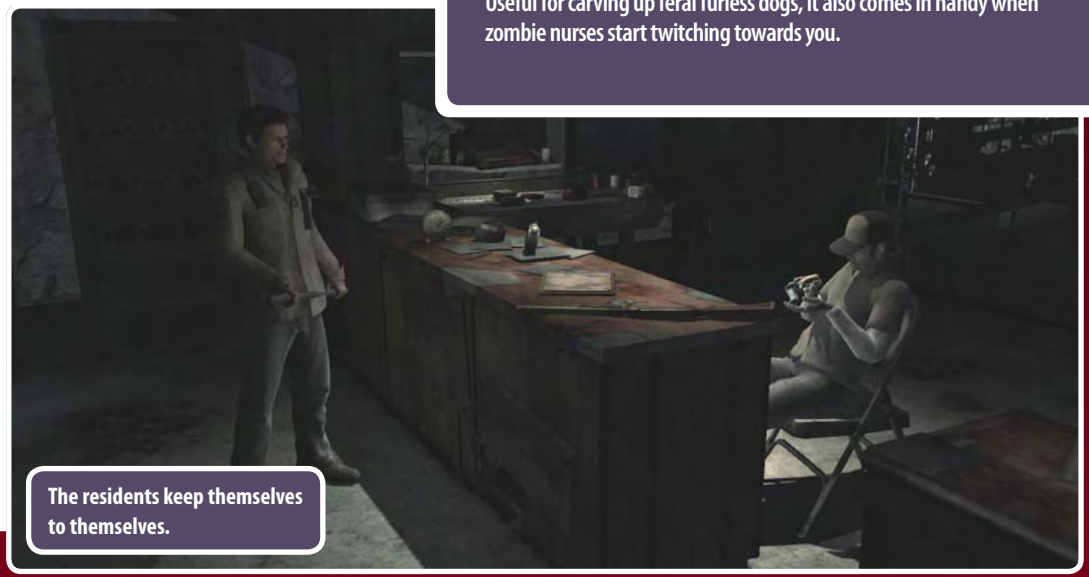


Knife crime | Pipe dream | Axe attack

Knife crime

This is a knife. The handy Combat Knife is your friend, so use it well. Useful for carving up feral furless dogs, it also comes in handy when zombie nurses start twitching towards you.


Cue the moody silhouette shot…


The residents keep themselves to themselves.



Yeah, there's definitely something not quite right going on here.



> Silent Hill continued

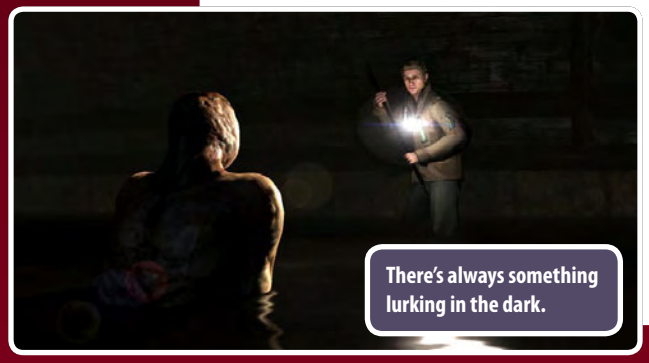
hometown of Shepherd's Glen – aka Silent Hill – where everything, clearly, is not as it should be. His Dad is nowhere to be seen, his Mum is drooling in a rocking chair, and his younger brother appears only in fleeting glimpses. And of course there are ten-foot monsters prowling the streets eating people, something that the often stilted dialogue singularly fails to point out, instead concentrating on the fact that something is not quite right…

In the original games, the ever-swirling fog hid a multitude of graphical sins, and it makes a return here, occasionally clearing to reveal visuals that while not quite on the cutting edge of next-gen are still the right side of tolerable. It pulls no punches on the gore front, with dismembered corpses and blood-spattered rooms that have more in common with the Saw series than psychological Japanese horror. In general though, the thrills are more about in-your-face action, and less about the creeping fear associated with the series, and indeed the survival horror genre.

This has a lot to do with the fact that Alex is pretty handy in a fight,

"Homecoming pulls no punches on the gore front"

with a robust combat system that enables you to lock onto enemies and beat them upside the head with a variety of tools including the obligatory steel pipe and a particularly satisfying fire axe, enabling you to make mincemeat of furless dogs, zombie nurses, and a few hi-def monsters of yore. Or simply shoot them in the face. And, as appears to be briefly fashionable, there are a number of quicktime events that require

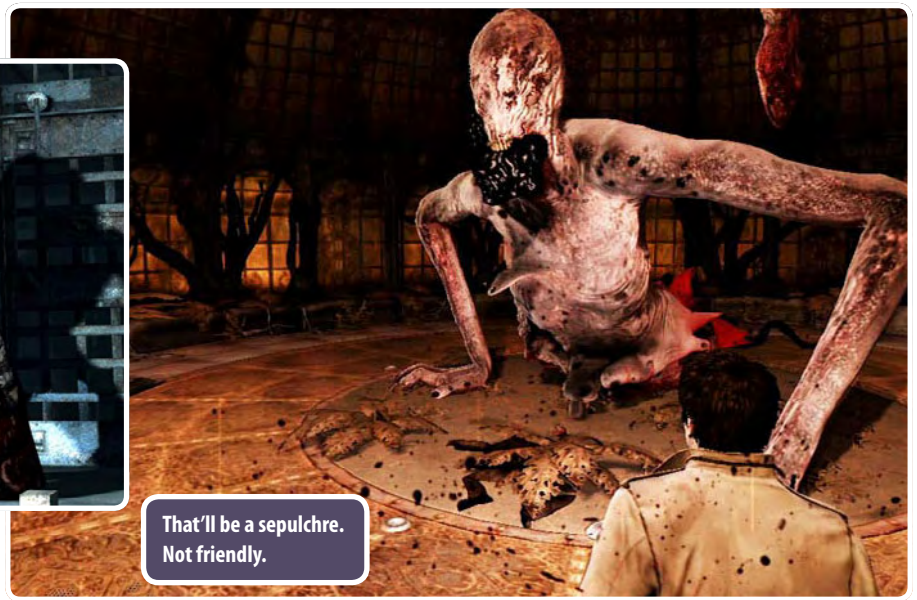


There's always something lurking in the dark.



You appear to have been clamped.


This is Siam, who isn't house-trained yet…


That'll be a sepulchre. Not friendly.

> Silent Hill continued

you to relentlessly pummel a pre-determined button in order to get out of a certain situation. It's an approach that will irk the purists, but content-wise there are still enough nods to the past to appease aficionados of the series. Crucially, this game includes an all-new soundtrack from acclaimed series composer Akira Yamaoka.

While the inventory management isn't quite as severe as some hardcore survival horror games, there is still an element of it, and going into one of the laborious boss battles without a full rack of ammo can be an oversight. On the puzzle front, they range from fairly insulting to mildly annoying, and only really serve to slow down the pace of the game. Particularly when you spend an hour or so scratching your head over a tile puzzle.

Hardcore fans

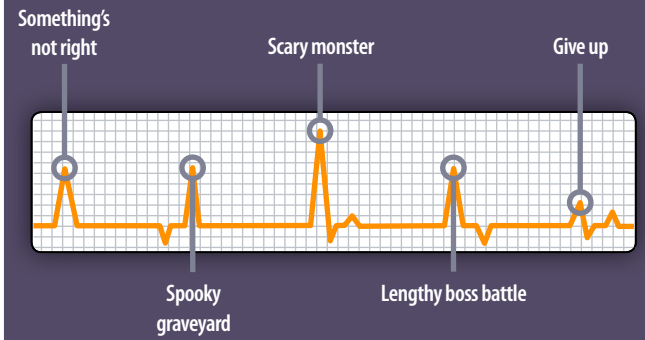
Hardcore devotees of Silent Hill 2 are probably never going to embrace Homecoming as one of their own, but judged on its own merits as a third-person action-adventure with survival horror pretensions, it makes a reasonable fist of things. The cut-scenes are mercifully skip-able, action is never far away, and you are given a clear outline as to your objectives, with the conveniently placed maps generally making it clear as to where you're heading in the game.

Though the pantomime scares don't really come that close to the stifling psychological terror of its predecessors, it can be mildly unnerving, and there's enough going on to keep you on the edge – perhaps even enough to encourage you to press on through the multiple endings, which again cleverly pay tribute to previous games.

Homecoming may be little more than a shiny tribute act to the bigger talent that's come before, but with source material as strong as Silent Hill, a little bit of quality has managed to filter through.

Steve Hill

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"Fans of Silent Hill 2 are probably never going to embrace Homecoming as one of their own"


Now that's something you don't see every day.

P3Zine Verdict

A facsimile of its former self

\+ Occasionally scary
\+ Robust interface
\- Westernised

78%



Publisher: Square-Enix
Developer: Atlus
Heritage: Persona series, Trauma Center series
Link: www.atlus.com/persona4
ETA: 13th March

Persona 4

Midnight murder mystery magnificence

P3Zine GOLD

The Shin Megami Tensei series has been quietly carving itself a niche over the years, the esoteric RPG franchise acting as a dark, adult antidote for some to the candy-coated excesses and hackneyed plotlines of certain role-playing giants. Yet rarely did it manage to meld its undeniably inventive ideas into a cohesive whole – and when it did, budgetary constraints led to the series lacking the polish of its more successful peers. Until now, that is.

A slow start

It starts slowly, with an introduction that eases you gradually into its world, giving you a feel for the place and its characters, allowing you to build a bond with the residents of the troubled town of Inaba, just as your unnamed protagonist does the same. And then layer upon layer of intrigue is added – you get to know the idiosyncrasies of your new schoolmates, find out secrets about the townsfolk, get drawn into the dinner-table stories from your uncle as he tells tales about the murders he's currently investigating, and which you soon realise you're going to be involved with, too.



The game is steeped in Japanese culture, but the characters are recognisable to anyone who's ever been a schoolkid.



Yukiko is one of the first people you'll make friends with.

"Like its predecessor, the game is split into two very distinct sections"

Like its predecessor, the game is split into two very distinct sections. Again, your day-to-day decisions inform the night-time dungeon battles, but this time instead of taking place in one gigantic labyrinth, you're battling through otherworldly physical manifestations of each character's emotions – they're literally trapped by themselves. And all the time spent getting to know these >



Voice acting is exemplary throughout, and Square-Enix has polished up an already-impressive translation.

> Persona 4 continued

people provides a satisfying payoff when you've beaten the boss – you've helped them conquer their demons in a physical and metaphorical sense.

Social benefits

As well as an emotional reward, there are plenty of other benefits to socialising, most prominently realised in the personas which you can summon during the game's frequent but refreshingly brief encounters. As friendships grow and level up, you'll be able to craft new personas, eventually fusing them to conjure ever more powerful deities to do your bidding in battle. It's an incredibly deep system, and like much of the game, you'll get more out if you put more in – experiment with different strategies and fusions and you'll uncover personas that can deal with most enemies.

Persona 4's real triumph is in the way its two disparate gameplay styles are blended – the simple fact that they're interdependent means both aspects are equally compelling. While some RPGs depend on a well-constructed battle system, and others are more about the story and the characters, here both facets are integral to the game's success.

You'll have played technically superior games, but Persona 4 has a real sense of style which carries over to its HUD, dialogue boxes and menus. Monster and character designs are impressive, while those tired of tapping through reams of text chat in most story-led RPGs will be happy to learn that all key dialogue is fully voiced. It's quite an epic, too – dedicated adventurers will still be playing when the hour tally has ticked into three figures.

It's rare that we'll take two pages to tell you why you should be spending 30 of your pounds on what is essentially a last-generation game, but Persona 4 is a game which no role-playing fan worth their salt should be without. In fact, if you're after something dark and a little different, then this could be the best PS2 RPG you've ever played. ●

Chris Schilling



You develop a real sense of camaraderie with your circle of friends, which further draws you into the game and its unique universe.



Kanji is an initially aggressive character who is hiding a surprising secret…

STUDY TIME

How to make friends and influence people



Hit the books | **Card sharp** | **Game of the weak**

Hit the books

Studying in the school library is essential to develop your skills, as is joining after-school clubs, and even working part-time. All these activities help build relationships – essential to upgrading your persona, and affecting your approach in battle. A wide range of abilities is useful, given that combat is all about exploiting enemy weaknesses.

P3Zine Verdict

Weird and utterly wonderful

+ Exceptionally rich gameworld
+ Emotional stories
+ Will last you months

91%



Publisher: 505 Games
Developer: Arc System Works
Heritage: Guilty Gear series
Link: www.aksysgames.com/battlefantasia
ETA: 6th March

Battle Fantasia

Another kind of fighting fantasy

If you're looking for a snappy soundbite to describe Battle Fantasia, it'd be 'Guilty Gear meets Disney with RPG overtones'. It's not nearly the confusing muddle that suggests though, as Arc System Works' latest is a rare beast among one-on-one beat-'em-ups – an accessible and inventive fighter



Missed throws are punished by a very brief stun animation where you can't action any more moves.

A game of two halves

The game's setting is a world split into two countries – the Magic Kingdom and the Steam Empire, while the story is your average generic darkness-about-to-engulf-the-land guff, told in a flat manner with text descriptions and dialogue and no attempt to change the Japanese voices in the localisation. It doesn't really matter too much, except during the game's story mode, where the chain of battles is punctuated by tiresome waffling as the characters find some tenuous reason to fight, like the refusal to buy a drink or a bit of sibling rivalry boiling over. That said, it's fair to say that the hand-drawn character art does hold a certain amount of charm, and as long as you're not put off by grammatical slips then you might find that the endearingly daft tales for each character are reasonably appealing.

The fantasy theme is consistent throughout – bouts are referred to as 'chapters' while the 2D backdrops appear to have been pulled from Disney films. They're a little lifeless, but there's plenty in the foreground to catch your eye, with the 3D rendered brawlers offering a Japanese twist on the sort of cartoon characters you wouldn't ordinarily find beating seven bells out of each other. The >



Knowing when to heat up adds a tactical consideration to the fighting – if stored, it can help you to unleash more powerful attacks.

WHAT'S THE STORY

A tale of pirates, and 'Scions of Ill Presage'



Basilisk | **Freed-om fighter** | **The bringer of death**

Basilisk

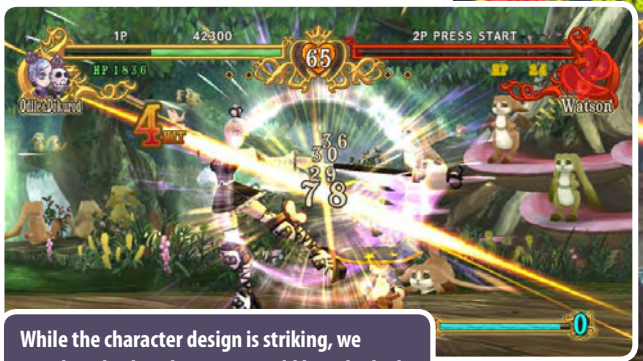
Urs has easily the coolest weapon in the game. It's called Basilisk and is a jet-powered chainsaw which the young hero uses in battle to devastating effect. But it's the weapon's alternative purpose that makes it so fantastic – upon defeating an opponent, Urs will flip the Basilisk, climb aboard and zoom off, powered by two jets on the base.

> Battle Fantasia continued

RPG elements are mainly cosmetic – characters lose 'hit points' in battle, while some characters can level-up mid-stage. Though it seems unfairly balanced, with larger characters sometimes having three times the number of hit points of a smaller character, you'll find their bar depletes at roughly the same rate, with your attacks reducing their HP tally by more than their blows affect yours. It begs the question why it was included in the first place, given that it confuses what would ordinarily be a traditional and easy-to-understand system.

That said, the fighting itself is superb – toning down the blisteringly hardcore pace of Guilty Gear for something a little more approachable and tactical. Move lists are fairly straightforward, and the specials look particularly great. As you fight, your MP meter increases, allowing you to 'heat up' the battle – pressing L2 to activate the ability, which increases your offensive and defensive power. Allow it to charge up to its highest level and your specials will have devastating effects. There are even appeal moves which can replenish health or raise your heat level.

With a host of modes, including online multiplayer battles, Battle Fantasia is an attractive package for fighter fans.



While the character design is striking, we wonder whether the game would have looked nicer with the hand-drawn art used in the story sequences and on the character select screen.



As ever, the larger characters' downfall is their lack of speed.

Roll over screen for annotations



Elementary my dear Watson

Its characterful fighters, ranging from tiny rabbit Watson to the enormous Viking-esque Donvalve, are well-drawn and animated, and the presentation is charming. Its one problem is that it's coming up against a real behemoth of the genre in Street Fighter IV, which could leave this unusual effort unloved and ignored. Yet it doesn't deserve that fate. If you're finding Capcom's effort a little too tough and fancy a break from the beat-'em-up norm, then Battle Fantasia offers an alluringly different set of world warriors to scrap with.

Chris Schilling

> *"Battle Fantasia is an attractive package for fighter fans"*

P3Zine Verdict

A stylish and very playable beat-'em-up

+ Delightful art style
+ Balanced battling
- Weak story

82%

PlayStation Network

Download 'em today!

Flower

Publisher: SCEE
Developer: thatgamecompany
Price: £6.29

P3Zine GOLD

A select few games have the power to immerse you so completely in their world that reality seems to be nothing more than background noise, particularly when the lights are dimmed and you've got your sound system turned right up. Some games do this through the sheer force of their audiovisual presentation, others manage to make the outside world unimportant by virtue of their addictive gameplay. With others, it's all about the experience – games where the mechanics aren't as important as the emotions they invoke, simply by positioning you within their universe and allowing you to explore according to your own personal whims. Flower is very much within that third group – transcending its medium to become something perhaps closer to art than any game has managed yet.



The game's second stage allows you to colour the grass, with special flowers giving your petal trail a painterly quality.

You actually play as the wind – a breeze which increases to a fierce gust the longer you hold down any of the controller's buttons, with gentle tilts of the pad guiding its path through impossibly lush fields. Its dreamlike feel is entirely deliberate – beginning in a rundown city apartment, you see the clash between the hustle and bustle of urban life and the natural world, with a wilting flower in a sad window display 'dreaming' perhaps of its afterlife in the Elysian Fields that make up the game's levels.

Bursting with colour

The flower begins alone amid a sea of swaying grass, and as your breeze gently picks up a petal it blooms, with life and colour flooding back to dry patches of yellowing blades as your collection increases. The objective is to collect enough flowers to open up the next area, eventually reaching a miniature whirlwind, where the petals spiral together, transporting you back to the apartment where your bloom has now sprung to life – opening wider if you've discovered any of the three groups of aqua-toned flowers which appear once you've collected all the petals within an area.

And that's all there is to be done, for six levels and approximately two hours of content – if you're rushing through. But, assuming you're in possession of a soul, you simply won't want to. Flower not only offers PS3's most beautiful environments, but a sensation of freedom and flight quite unlike any other videogame.



Gaming's most gorgeous sunset? Quite possibly.

Whether whispering between the millions of individually animated blades of grass, or soaring high above these colourful fields, this is perhaps the most gorgeous digital world your eyes have ever been treated to. The sparse sound effects and musical flourishes as you add to your petal collection are a sufficiently lush audio accompaniment, and the additional gameplay tweaks added to each stage mean you'll be reluctant to leave an area, but also aching to move onto the next.

So intense is the experience that, once you've truly 'completed' Flower, return visits won't have anything like the same impact as your first play, making it more of a one-shot deal than most other games. But at just £6.29, Flower's special kind of bliss represents an absolute bargain.

P3Zine Verdict

One of the PS3's best games

- Astonishingly beautiful
- Totally original

91%

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The Catalyst

Can Killzone 2 kickstart PS3 into top gear?



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.

While we've rated two games higher this month, there's no doubting which is the most important game for PS3 this issue. Killzone 2 arrives on a huge wave of hype, with a massive bill to accompany its development. Estimates are all over the place, but the fact remains that it's likely to be the most expensive videogame ever made. And to be fair, you can see where the money's gone.

Sony evidently realises how much of a key release Killzone 2 could be, with half of its £4 million spring advertising budget earmarked for a substantial marketing campaign.

This could be read one of two ways: Either Sony is concerned that awareness of the game isn't strong enough so it needs a huge marketing push to recoup its costs, or (more likely) it knows the game is of exceptional quality and that an appropriate campaign could potentially make it PS3's biggest shooter by some distance. And given the success of the Call of Duty games, that could be enough to keep it on top of the charts for a few weeks between February and March.

That's only a small part of the bigger picture, though. The real question is whether Killzone 2 can kickstart thus far sluggish sales of Sony's console. While its executives would claim otherwise, there's no denying many within Sony will be disappointed (nay, shocked) that the PlayStation brand now finds itself firmly in third place in the home console race. It's not too far behind the Xbox 360 (and indeed is forging ahead in certain territories, notably Japan) but the soaraway success of Nintendo's Wii must have been sobering to Sony, regardless of its supposed 'ten-year plan'.

"Few can say that PS3 doesn't offer enough over and above what's on Xbox 360 to consider buying both"

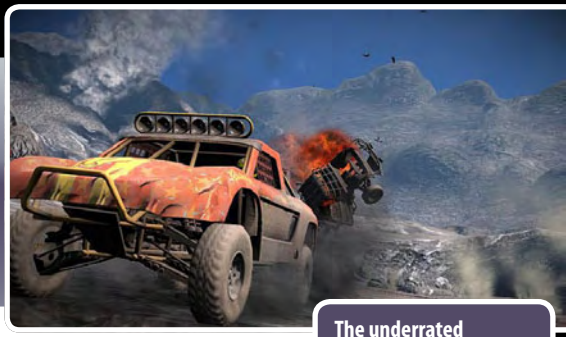


Guerrilla's shooter is proof of the power of PS3. For the first time it looks like something that just wouldn't be possible on its rival, the 360.

Reading the signs

Is it a system seller? It's too early to tell, but signs suggest it could be. As the most expensive game ever made, it certainly should be, and a series of ads showing the game in action (if ever there was a game that surely wouldn't have to rely on CGI 'representations' it's this) could well tempt those who've resisted the call of the current gen to take the plunge, or for Xbox 360 owners to purchase a second console. Or even for Wii owners to upgrade to something a little more technically advanced. What's clear is that it's proved itself to the doubters – only time will tell if it has done enough to convince non-PS3 owners that the most expensive console on the market has reached that all-important tipping point.

Regardless of whether Killzone 2 does prove to be the catalyst for significant Sony success in 2009, few can now say that PS3 doesn't offer enough over and above what's available on the Xbox 360 to consider buying both. Those with backwards-compatible consoles can still benefit from new PS2 classics like Persona 4, while digital downloads, like the sublime Flower, prove that PSN has real range. Finally, full-price retail titles like LittleBigPlanet and MotorStorm: Pacific Rift – both due for a PR boost in the coming months, but you should've already seen the ads for both of these on the TV – are good adverts for the console's free online service. With the likes of Home and Heavy Rain to bolster PS3's line-up, 2009 could well be the year Sony's star goes supernova.



The underrated MotorStorm: Pacific Rift will be re-promoted soon – last year it was a little lost in the Christmas rush.

In P3Zine Issue 25



Aliens: Colonial Marines

The monsters are coming!

PLUS!

Resident Evil 5

Tom Clancy's HAWX

Wheelman

Sacred 2

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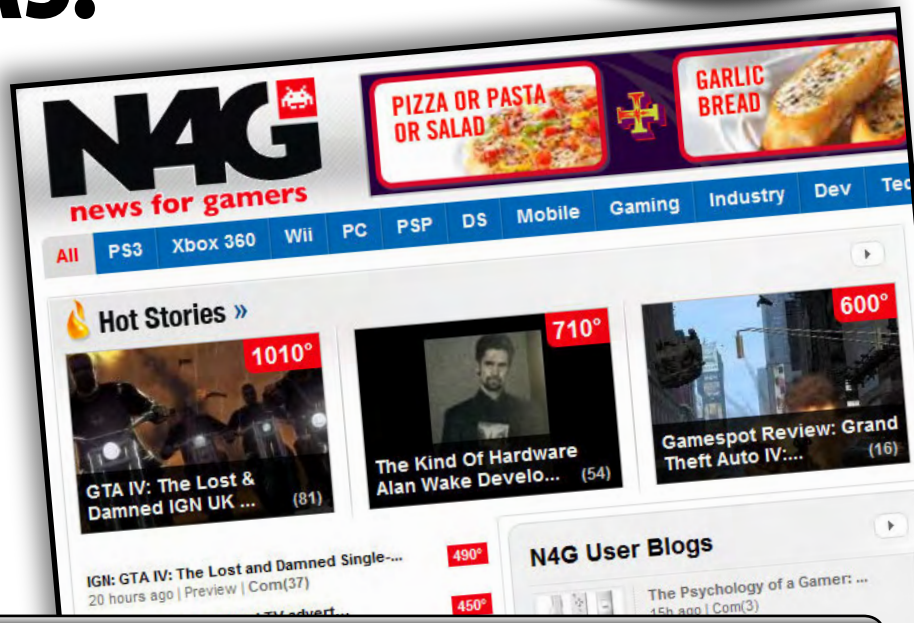


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