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PCGZine

Issue 24 | November 2008

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EXCLUSIVE #1 PREVIEW & INTERVIEW

CHAMPIONS ONLINE

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EXCLUSIVE #4

ARMA II

Hands-on preview and exclusive interview

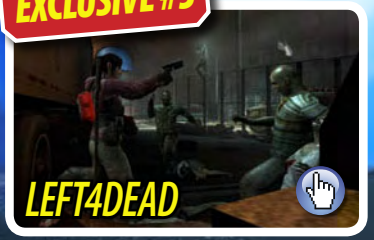
EXCLUSIVE #2

CALL OF DUTY WORLD AT WAR

The definitive review

PLUS ALL THESE GAMES & MORE

EXCLUSIVE #3



REVIEWED!



REVIEWED!



PREVIEWED!



Welcome to PCGZine



It's 'that time of year' so it's with no great surprise that this month we bring you a bumper issue of PCGZine. There's a stack of fantastic new games to load up on your gaming rig including the mighty Left4Dead, Call of Duty World At War, Fallout 3, Football Manager 2009, Red Alert and Sacred 2. If that little doesn't take care of the next few weeks and months I'm not sure what will. We have full reviews of each and every one of 'em so spend your hard earned cash wisely...

We also have exclusive previews and interviews for ArmA II and Champions Online - both are shaping up nicely come the new year.

Enjoy the issue...

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

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

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



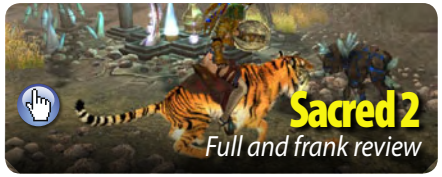


QUICK FINDER
Every game's just a click away!

Dragon Age: Origins	Warhammer 40,000:
Silent Hill Homecoming	Dawn of War
F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	Champions Online
Spore: Space Expansion Pack	ArmA II
Postal 3	Call of Duty: World at War
Battlestations: Pacific	Left 4 Dead
APB	Football Manager 2009
FUEL	Fallout 3
BioShock 2: Sea of Dreams	Red Alert 3
The Sims 3	Sacred 2













MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



Ian Morris
Falling over himself to play Fallout 3



Chris Schilling
Champing at the bit for Champions Online



Steve Hill
Managing another year glued to Football Manager 2009

ALIENWARE
To experience games at their best PCGZine uses the Area 51-ALX from Alienware. Packed with cutting-edge power and technology, if a game can't perform on this it has to be a dud.

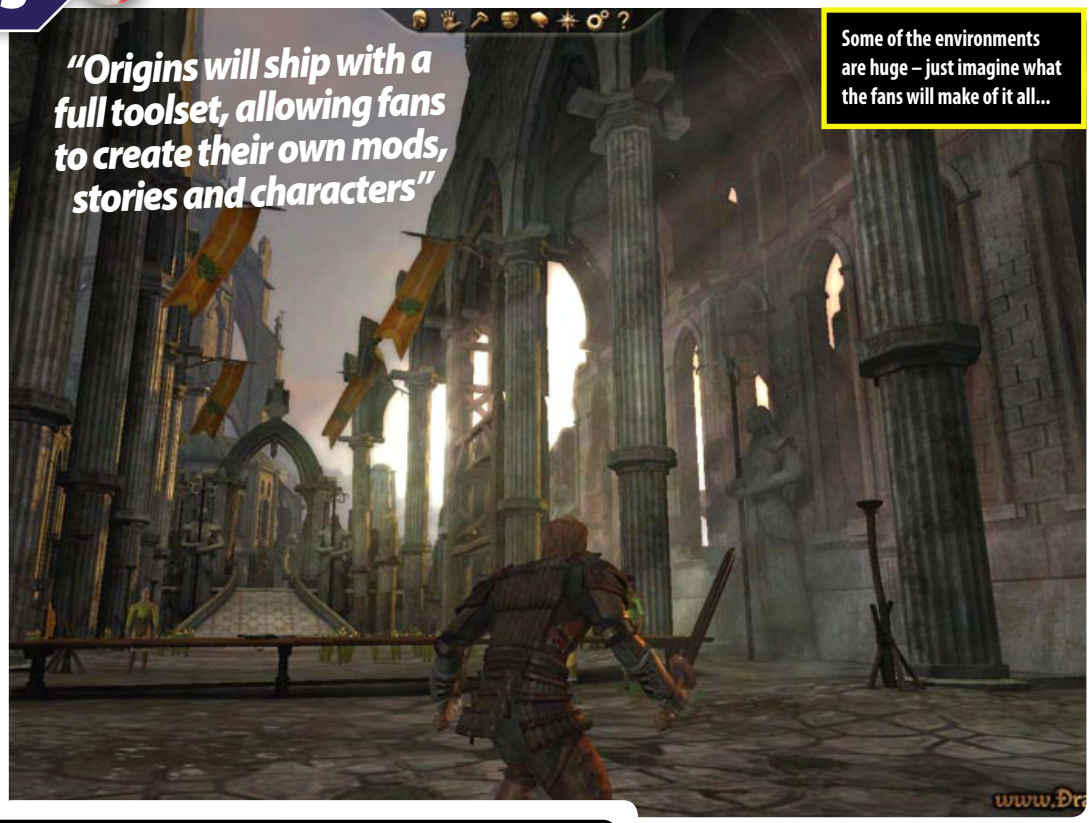


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Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare
Heritage: NeverWinter Nights, Mass Effect
Link: www.dragonage.com
ETA: 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Dragon Age: Origins



Some of the environments are huge – just imagine what the fans will make of it all...

Dragon Age: Origins

FIRST LOOK

Something wicked this way comes

What's the story?

BioWare are the masters of the fantasy RPG. With NeverWinter Nights and both Baldur's Gate games under their belt, it's safe to say the company knows how to make a good RPG, and Dragon Age is shaping up to be one of the best. Abandoning the Forgotten Realms D&D setting, and instead choosing to create its own entirely original world, Dragon Age looks set to become the RPG of 2009.

What do we know?

When the people who brought you Mass Effect promise an emotionally charged and compelling story, you can bet we sit up and listen. As NeverWinter Nights' solo campaign was somewhat lacking, the idea of a fully fledged single-player mode excites us, verily. To make matters even better, Dragon Age sees the return to party-based combat of old (see Baldur's Gate for examples of what we're talking about there) and after the solo affair that was NeverWinter Nights, that can only be a good thing.

Anything else to declare?

Dragon Age: Origins, like NeverWinter Nights before it, will ship with a full toolset, allowing the fan community to create their own mods, stories and characters. NeverWinter Nights still has a thriving mod community, and we're sure this will be no different. We hope to bring you much more on Dragon Age over the next few issues, and we recommend that you keep your ears to the ground for this one.





It's safe to say this looks a damn sight better than NeverWinter Nights.

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



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED



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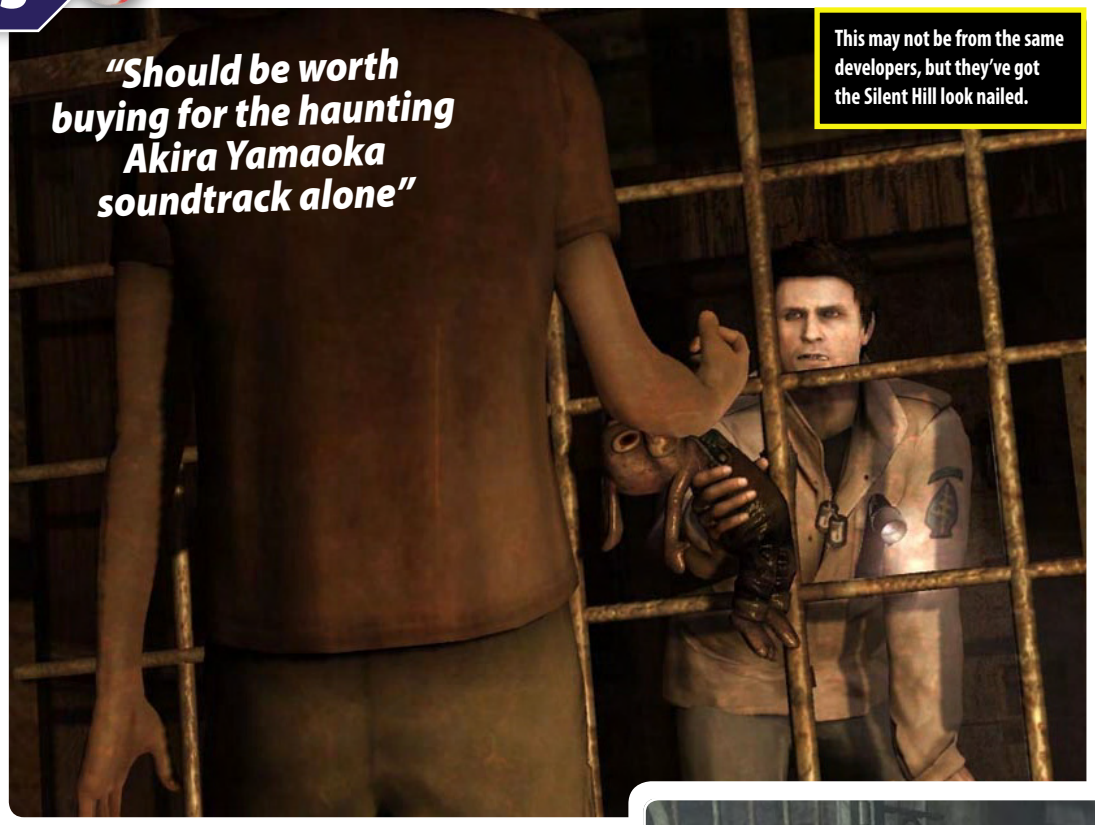
Silent Hill: Homecoming

FIRST LOOK

One more soul to the call…

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Double Helix Games
Heritage: Messiah, Earthworm Jim
Link: http://online.konamimobile.com/KDEOnline/SilentHill_Widget/index.html
ETA: February 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Silent Hill: Homecoming



This may not be from the same developers, but they've got the Silent Hill look nailed.





Are you gonna tell the dog he's got his skin on inside out, or shall we?

What's the story?

Silent Hill 5 in all but name, Silent Hill Homecoming is the spooky sequel to the rather average Silent Hill: The Room. And we're very glad to say that it's already showing a lot more promise.

What do we know?

You play as Alex Shepherd, a war veteran who's recently been released from hospital, only to find his brother and father missing. As he searches his hometown of Shepherd's Glen, it soon appears that things are somehow… different. Nothing's as you left it and the people all seem traumatised, and sooner or later all signs point to Silent Hill. With the same intriguing puzzles, terrifying environments and erotic zombies the series is famous for, this time wrapped in an impressive next generation engine, Silent Hill Homecoming's looking better than ever. It's just a shame we've got to wait so long to get our hands on it.

Anything else to declare?

With the US version receiving middling-to-average reviews, the European release has been delayed till February 2009. Hopefully, this extra time should give DHG plenty of breathing room to fix any glitches and bugs, leaving us with a perfect release come the new year. Should be worth buying for the haunting Akira Yamaoka soundtrack alone, which is easily one of the best of the series so far.



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7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin



Publisher: Warner Bros. | **ETA:** 2009

One of the beneficiaries of the recent Activision/Vivendi/Blizzard merger is Project Origin, now known by its official moniker of F.E.A.R. 2. The merger of the two companies saw the F.E.A.R. license fall to the wayside, and Warner Bros were more than eager to pick it up.

Battlestations: Pacific

Publisher: Eidos | **ETA:** 2009

The sequel to Battlestations: Midway, Battlestations: Pacific looks to put right all the shortcomings of the original by providing a deeper, more involving campaign, and giving the planes simulation-style handling. New units include kamikaze planes and paratroopers, making this definitely one to watch.



Postal 3



Publisher: Running With Scissors | **ETA:** 2009

The game that loves to court controversy is back, and it's looking just as gory as ever. Postal 2 gained significant notoriety for allowing you to urinate on your fallen foes – hopefully this one may do something more noteworthy. Look out for the predictable Daily Mail headlines sometime next year.

FUEL

Publisher: Codemasters | **ETA:** 2009

Recently announced by Codemasters, FUEL is a free-roaming, off-road racing game with a huge world to explore. With 5,000 square miles to play with, a draw distance of over 40 kilometres and a huge range of cars, bikes and monster trucks at your fingertips, there should be plenty to see and do here.



ON THE RADAR

Q2 AND BEYOND
- Champions Online — April

Q1 2009
- Red Faction: Guerrilla — January
- Dungeon Hero — Spring
- Edge of Twilight — 2009

DEC 2008
- Prince of Persia — December 5th
- F.E.A.R. 2 Project Origin — 13th February

NOV 2008
- SilkWood Spring — 26th December
- Still Life 2 — 2009
- Cryostasis — November 7th
- Orchard — Christmas
- Σ3 — 20th February
- Men of War — November 7th

Spore: Space Expansion Pack

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** 2009

Presumably the first of many, this expansion pack for Spore lets your creatures beam down from their spaceships to explore uncharted worlds and complete all-new missions. Brilliantly, the expansion also ships with an Adventure Creator, which will let you make your own missions, and share them with the community.





APB

Publisher: Realtime Worlds | **ETA:** 2009

From the makers of Crackdown, and one of the original creators of GTA, APB or All Points Bulletin is effectively GTA online. Playing as either the police or the criminals, it's up to you to bring justice to the city, or wreak havoc as you see fit. Sounds interesting.

BioShock 2: Sea of Dreams

Publisher: 2K Games | **ETA:** 2009

Officially revealed to the world via an unlockable trailer on the PS3's version of BioShock, BioShock 2: Sea of Dreams now has a subtitle and a premise. All we've seen so far is a picture of a Little Sister, clutching a Big Daddy teddy, but it's already got us excited.





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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

FIRST LOOK

THE SIMS 3

It's the little people!

Publisher: EA
Developer: Maxis
Heritage: The Sims
Link: http://thesims3.ea.com
ETA: 20th February 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of The Sims 3

The Sims is something of a Marmite for gamers – you either love it, or you hate it. There's no denying it's been a huge success – with over 100 million copies sold to date, The Sims is easily the best-selling PC franchise of all time, and has become something of a gaming institution.

But, as is often the way with money-spinners, it can be all too easy to sink into a rinse-repeat scenario, where sequels aren't really sequels so much as minor tweaks. Like or not, Sims 2 was a very similar game to The Sims, just with better graphics and a few more options. Thankfully, EA realise this and for The Sims 3, they're throwing out the rulebook, with a whole caboodle of changes that'll change the way you think about The Sims forever.

Whereas previous games have kept you confined to just one house, on The Sims 3, the door's blown open. For the first time, your Sims can freely leave the house, and totally explore your neighbourhood. If you want to walk to the centre of town then you can, or if you just want to pop round to your neighbour's house for a chat, you can do that too. This not only gives the Sims 3 a greater sense of freedom, but it also gives your Sims a feeling of place. Likewise this gives your neighbourhood more of a personal feeling, and also expands the number of places you'll be able to visit. If you fancy a trip down to the beach then you can, or if you're feeling more adventurous, you can even go for a tour up to the mountains. If history's told us anything, it's that new expansions will add more areas, but there's plenty to play with here.



Create life!

The Create a Sim mode has also been completely redesigned, not only to take advantage of the new, higher polygon models, but also to give you a lot more freedom to play God. The likenesses you'll be able to create of people you know are scary, as the game gives you the ability to edit everything, from hair colour to eye socket depth, until >



Just like in real life, bullies and chavs are rife in Sims 3.



If you really like camo then why not go the whole hog?


There's a huge area to explore.


Become a rock star, and the girls will love you.

> The Sims 3 continued

you've got the perfect likeness.

But perhaps even more interestingly, the new, more human feel of your Sim isn't just cosmetic. One of the more intriguing features of The Sims 3 is the ability to give your Sim traits – little elements of your personality that shape how your Sims behave. You can choose up to five from a pool of hundreds, including things like vegetarian, kleptomaniac, emotional, hot-headed, ambitious, or brave. These all combine to make your Sims – and others you meet – feel more like a rounded, individual person, and less like an AI in a game.

With all these new features, The Sims 3 is looking to be just as much of a success as its predecessors. Taking the Sims formula, and expanding on it in a way that both fans of the Sims and newcomers alike should love, this should easily be one of the highest selling games of next year.


These people would appear to be against jellyfish. And why not.


The new engine can handle loads of people on screen at the same time, so gigs like this one are finally a reality.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 70%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

New features galore, with more rounded Sims



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NEW SHOTS

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR 2

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Relic
Heritage: Dawn of War, Company of Heroes
Link: www.dawnofwar2.com
ETA: Spring 2009

Get ready for the WRRAAGGHHH!

It's a rare occasion when a game like Dawn of War gets released. As an RTS with no single revolutionary mechanic, games like this are usually cast aside by the press and fans alike, condemned as an average game that does nothing to make itself stand out. But Dawn of War was different. Yes, it did nothing very new, but everything it did was given such an incredible layer of polish that the overall experience was near perfect. From the small, squad-based combat, to the upgradable troops and the lack of resource management, Dawn of War was arguably the peak of PC RTS gaming. At least, until the sequel came along.

Due for release next spring, Dawn of War 2 looks to continue the series' strategy revolution, with a redesigned Company of Heroes engine powering the visuals under the hood. Hopefully, that means the system requirements are going to be low, but if the shots we've seen are anything to go by, it's gonna be a monster!

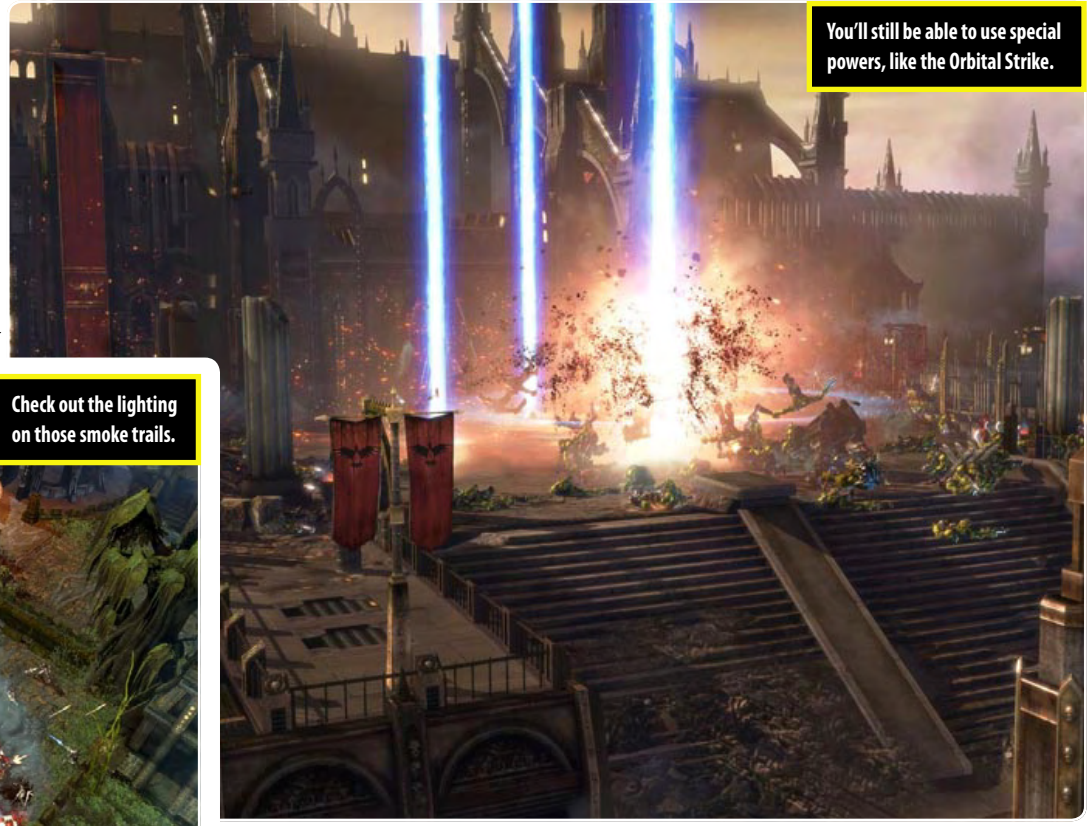


Battles will be on the same scale as before, but now more than ever, you can't afford to lose your troops.





Check out the lighting on those smoke trails.



You'll still be able to use special powers, like the Orbital Strike.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War 2



The environments are larger, and more futuristic than ever. This one, particularly, doesn't look very inviting.



Relic haven't quite figured out how squad reinforcement's going to work yet, but it's safe to say you'll be more limited than last year.



Melee combat retains the same visceral feel.

> Dawn of War 2 continued

The graphics engine isn't the only thing that's been redesigned for the sequel, though. Forming the meat of the Dawn of War 2 experience, the Campaign mode has been fully fleshed out, taking the best bits of Dawn of War and its three expansions, before putting them into a blender to form a smoothie of campaign delight.

Giving the campaign a much more fluent feel than in the original, while playing as the Space Marines in Dawn of War 2, you'll be able to pilot a spaceship and fly freely from planet to planet. In a style not too dissimilar to Mass Effect, on each of the planets you find, you'll be able to take up missions, each of which will be story based and offer a variety of risks and rewards.

What's interesting is that you won't actually be able to complete all of the missions, as your performance in one mission may block the way to another. This works in both ways, as if you totally obliterate your enemy then you'll weaken the enemies' presence in the sector, making other missions easier and securing your foothold on the planet.

As has been the way with previous Relic RTS games, Dawn of War 2 comes with a strong bent towards squad mechanics, but this time things have a more personal feel. You'll start the campaign with around six squads, and these are expected to last for the entire campaign. There's minimal base building and next to no resource management, meaning once you're on the planet, you're on your own, with your very survival down to how well you can control your troops.

The release date just slipped, but we're already counting the days down until we get hands-on with Dawn of War 2. Though we are a bit concerned about the total lack of base building – we liked that aspect of Dawn of War – this looks set to be another huge hit for Relic, and a great RTS for PC gamers.

PCGZine

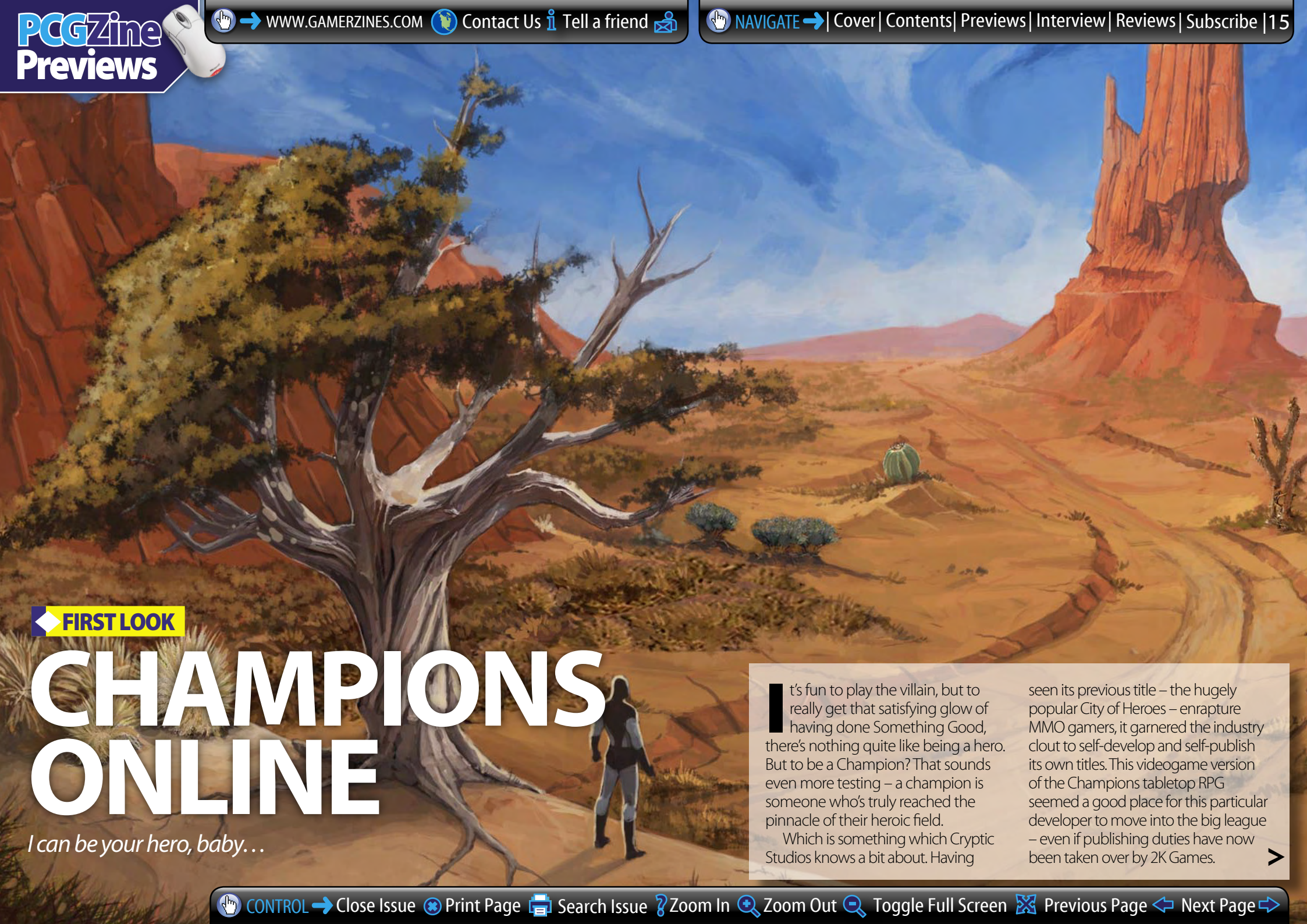
HOW COMPLETE?	FIRST IMPRESSIONS?
60%	90%

Could be a RTS masterpiece. One to watch



Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE



FIRST LOOK

CHAMPIONS ONLINE

I can be your hero, baby…

It's fun to play the villain, but to really get that satisfying glow of having done Something Good, there's nothing quite like being a hero. But to be a Champion? That sounds even more testing – a champion is someone who's truly reached the pinnacle of their heroic field.

Which is something which Cryptic Studios knows a bit about. Having seen its previous title – the hugely popular City of Heroes – enrapture MMO gamers, it garnered the industry clout to self-develop and self-publish its own titles. This videogame version of the Champions tabletop RPG seemed a good place for this particular developer to move into the big league – even if publishing duties have now been taken over by 2K Games.

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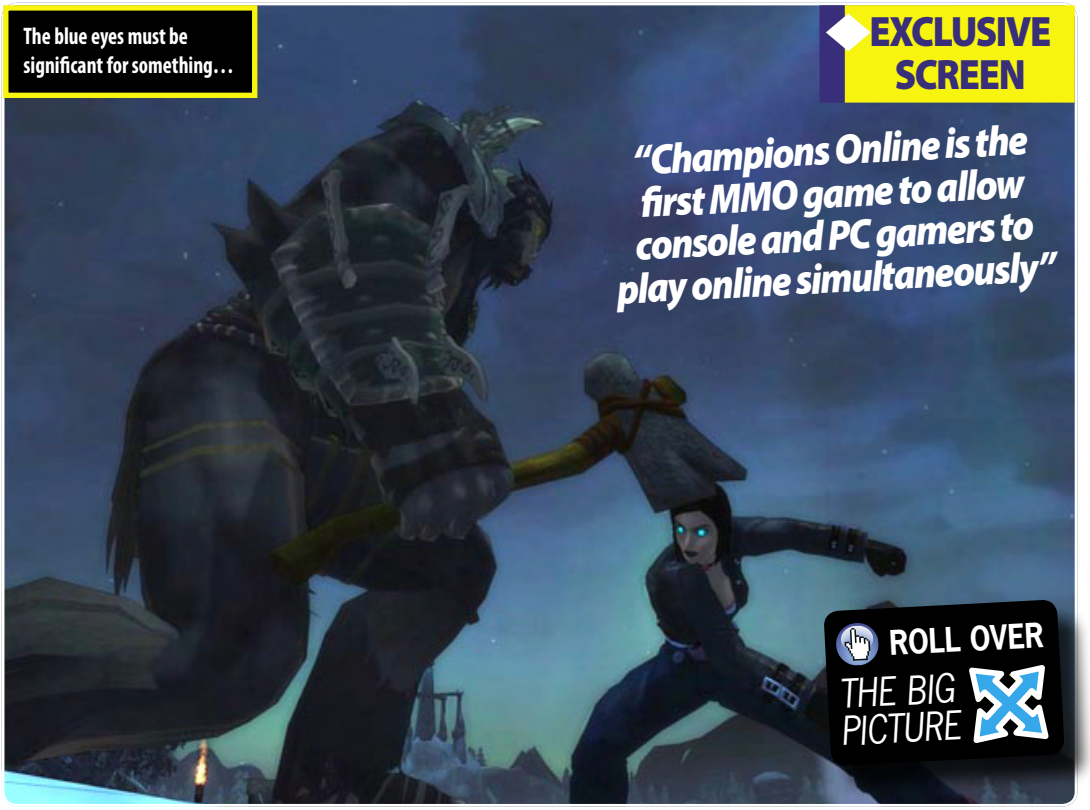
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Cryptic Studios
Heritage: City of Heroes,
Link: www.champions-online.com
ETA: April 2009

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

> Champions continued

One of the most notable things about Champions Online is that it's the first MMO game to allow console and PC gamers to play online simultaneously. With MMOs not so prevalent on consoles, it feels pretty unique on that format, and the upshot of developing a game of this type for a console audience is that Champions Online feels like a break from the norm on PC, too.

That's not to say it's been dumbed-down any. Far from it. Indeed, the character customisation is one of the most complete we've ever seen. The one in City of Heroes was really something special – allowing players to create totally unique avatars. Champions Online takes that a step further, with a series of parameters offering an almost infinite amount of options. As well as adjusting your hero's powers and skills, you'll be able to select from a bewildering array of costume pieces, recolouring them to your own personal preferences. You can even change the colour of your superpowers – if you've ever fancied obliterating enemies with a lurid pink electro-blast, then you can do so. More interestingly, you can craft your character's own back story, and even >







CHAMPIONS ONLINE





> Champions continued

that of your champion's arch-nemesis. Brilliantly, you can really affect the way your avatar moves, with a number of different stances and animations which will alter your gait – whether you want to make giant loping strides, or scuttle along in a crouched animalistic manner, you'll find plenty to keep you busy, even before you've jumped into the game proper.

It's the game's combat that bears all the hallmarks of a more console-focused title – eschewing the polite click-wait-click exchanges of old and introducing something more akin to a hack-and-slash title. It's telling that Cryptic is demoing the PC version with a 360 controller – not only to emphasise how the game will work on both platforms simultaneously, but proving the pad's suitability as a control scheme. It feels more natural, more physical, to lay some superhero smackdown on various evildoers by pressing the attack button rather than clicking away. It's faster and more frenetic, but >



HEROES AND VILLAINS

A very different kind of Champions League



Beta by far | Thrills and skills | Get creative

Beta by far

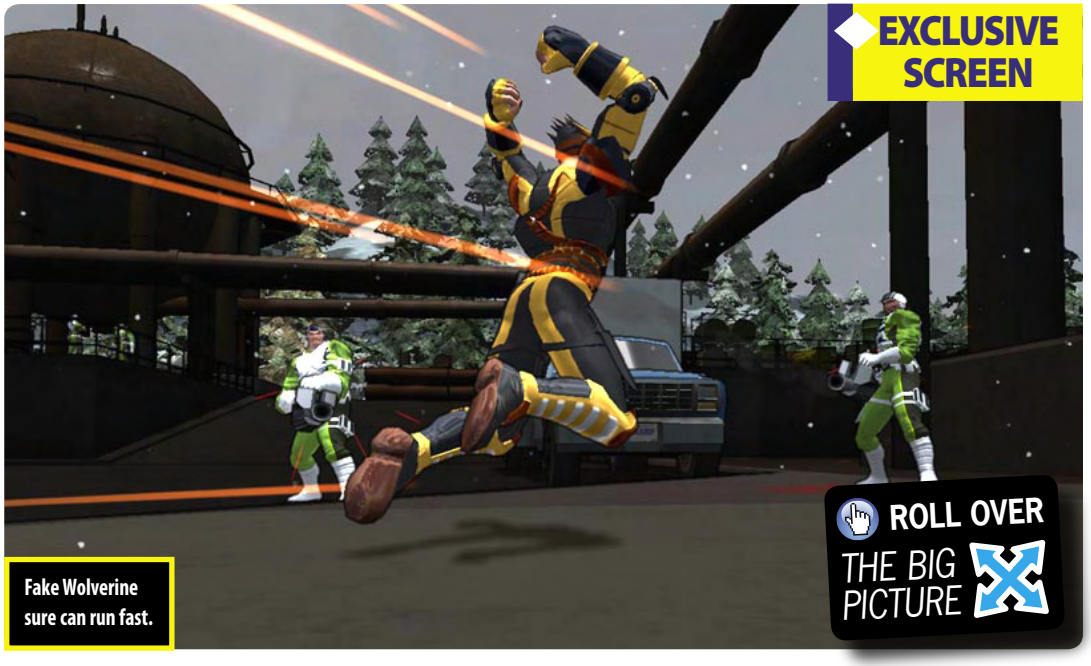
The current beta for Champions Online looks set to shape the game's development, as there are a number of features which haven't been fully finalised. While the game's engine is very smooth and its central mechanics all seem to function very well, it won't be until the beta's over that many of the minor tweaks and so on will be evident.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



The cel-shaded, comic book styling should help Champions Online stand out.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



Fake Wolverine sure can run fast.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

> Champions continued

equally, PC gamers shouldn't be concerned that any strategic element has been eroded by this more action-packed approach. The idea is that attacking with your current power offers the reward of a resource called Equilibrium, which is then used to build up your other powers. If you really want to build up your move set, you can even spend the skill points earned through levelling up on additional powers, though it seems best to concentrate on improving a few rather than having a particularly wide range.

Elsewhere, Champions Online retains the gleefully daft feel of City of Heroes – rather than a single environment, your adventures will take you across the world – and even into space – and the environments you'll be flying and running around are exaggerated comic-book locales instead of hyper-realistic cityscapes.

Fans of the pen-and-paper version will be pleased to hear that Hero Games will be releasing a special book to accompany the game, allowing players to recreate their favourite Champions characters and scenarios in the game. It's one of many thoughtful additions from Cryptic that look set to offer something for every audience – a more action-packed MMO for the console crowd, with the depth of a traditional PC role-player and providing plenty of fan-service for those familiar with the tabletop game. Champions Online might have some big name competition in its field during 2009, with DC Universe Online offering superhero favourites right off the bat. But if you want to forge your own more personal heroic path and become a Champion on your own terms, there's only one game which truly offers you the freedom to do that.

"Rather than a single environment, your adventures will take you across the world"



You can customise your superhero's powers to that of your choosing.

PCGZine CHAMPIONS ONLINE

HOW COMPLETE? 75%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

The Champion of the MMO genre? We'll find out soon



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Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Cryptic Studios
Certificate: TBC
Features: Super powers, massive game world, customisation
ETA: 2009

Hero worship

Cryptic Studios' Jack Emmert slips into his tights and flies in for a quick chat



Jack Emmert from Cryptic Studios

For starters, how much of the groundwork from Marvel Universe Online will be carried over into Champions?
Very little. We obviously spent a lot of time thinking about what would make an awesome superhero MMO, but the nature of the games is very different.

So why did you choose the Champions tabletop game as a starting point?
It's a terrific game, with two decades of lore and fans. What Marvel and DC are to comics, Champions is to RPGs.



The game's cel-shaded art style really makes it feel like a comic book adventure.

For those who don't know anything about it, can you give us an insight into the Champions world?
Champions is a RPG where players customise their own superheroes. Super powers mainly started flaring up during the 40's, but the signature event is the destruction of Detroit in the early 90's. The world's most powerful villain, Dr. Destroyer, has attempted yet another scheme to take over the world. A bunch of teenage heroes stumbled across his secret hideout underneath Detroit and alerted the world's heroes. A huge conflagration occurred that took the lives of many superheroes and Detroit was decimated, but America resolved to rebuild it into a gleaming city of the future. And that was what eventually became Millennium City.

The character creation tools received a lot of press, but will there be any limits on what we can create?
The sky is the limit with our customisation tools, and I think that we just scratched the surface with our previous games. We've added a ton of options so that players can generate whatever their mind can imagine. We certainly don't want people creating trademarked characters, though!

Aside from character creation, what other customisation tools are you providing?
Players can create their own personal Nemesis, whom they'll battle throughout their heroic career. Players can also customise



There are specific dungeon areas geared towards team-based gameplay.

"Champions is a RPG where players customise their own superheroes"



Tense, nervous headache? Or just the charging up of a powerful mind ray? You'll need more than Nurofen to deal with this.



Gigantic brains and henchmen lackeys – Champions' fantastical feel is a ray of sunshine amid a sea of brown, pseudo-realistic videogame environs.





> **Interview** continued

the look of their powers, so that if they'd like purple flames, instead of the generic red and yellow then they can!

We heard that the battle against evil will take you to new planets. How varied are the environments you're providing?
We're trying to create a game that captures the world-travelling themes of comic books, so players will go around the globe to combat evil.

We've also heard about the real-time combat in Champions Online – can you tell us a bit about how this works?
We've tried to create the first true action MMO. We're trying to capture the thrilling superhuman battles and make them come alive on the computer.

Will Champions Online let us create our very own Justice League – but cooler?
Yes, players will be able to form leagues with other players in order to better bring justice to the world.

Does having a less well-known license like Champions give you more creative freedom?
Champions has always been about creating your own character. The universe has always been set up so that the players assume centre stage. The standard comic book games are all about the well-known characters, so if someone doesn't get a chance to be one of them, I think the game suffers.

How does Champions compare to your other superhero role-playing game, City of Heroes?
We've made combat a lot more open and full of action. There's a ton more opportunities for customisation. And instead of being restricted to a city, players will travel across the planet.

The beta should have gone live as we go to press – about how far through the development are you at the moment?
At the moment, we're trying to focus on polishing our current content and features. We're also reserving time to respond to input from beta testers.

We've heard Champions Online will be featuring PC/360 cross-platform compatibility from the start. Will this be a completely transparent cross-over, or will there be limitations on what 360 and PC owners can do together?
We've just started the beta program for the PC version and hope to have more information about cross-platform compatibility some time after that. >

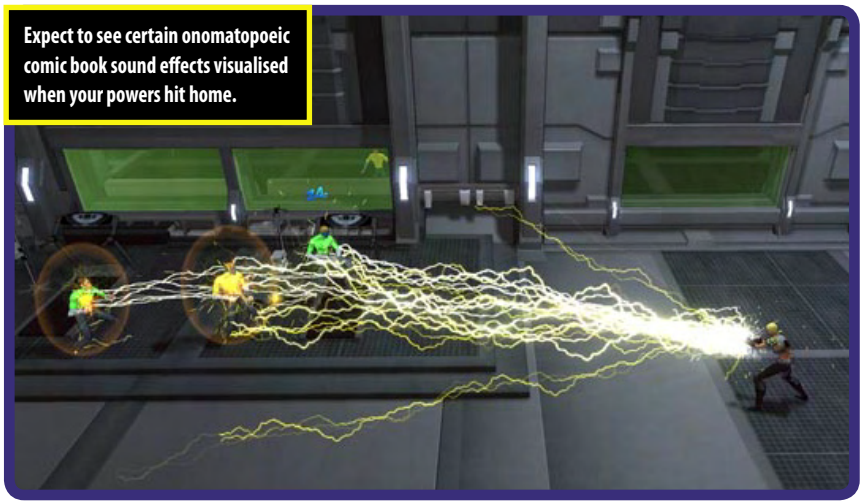
"We're trying to create a game that captures the world-travelling themes of comic books, so players will go around the globe to combat evil"

There's a terrific range of powers for you to exploit, and even customise.





Some enemies even have dinosaur guards, programmed to do the bidding of their master.



Expect to see certain onomatopoeic comic book sound effects visualised when your powers hit home.

> Interview continued

It's also been mentioned that you'll allow for user-created content on both the 360 and PC. What does this entail?
Cryptic as a whole believes in user-generated content, and we are working towards it. Champions has a taste of this, with its customisation and Nemesis, but nothing else at launch.

How will a lesser-known game licence compete with the upcoming – and also cross-platform – DC Universe Online?
Cryptic Studios created the superhero MMORPG and I think that experience counts for something. There's no doubt that DC is a great licence (personally, I read their comics every week), but does it compare to the customisation that Champions provides?

Can you tell us what form the questing system take?
Players will interact with NPC's in a traditional fashion, but they'll also stumble across many adventures just through exploration and foiling crimes.

How will levelling work, and is this hard to make convincing in a super-powered MMO? Surely, you either have a power, or don't?
As players level they'll gain access to more super powers and increase the abilities of their current powers. I think this is a pretty natural extension of the comic IP: Superman, for instance, couldn't fly at first, and Wolverine didn't demonstrate his immense healing capabilities in his first appearance.

How many different classes of heroes and villains will there be in total?
We don't use classes – players can choose any power they want! Total customisation is a theme we carry not just in costumes, but also gameplay.

"As players level they'll gain access to more super powers and increase the abilities of their current powers"



Naturally your arch-enemy has to have his or her evil lair…

What other gameplay ideas are there in the game, such as crafting, customisation (haircuts, etc), trophies, that people might recognise from other MMOs?
Crafting is part of our Skill system and we have a full reward system, too.

What gameplay ideas are there that aren't in other MMOs? What will make Champions unique among MMOs?
Where to start? Design your own Nemesis, total customisation of your character, action gameplay, unique ways to get missions…

And lastly, do you have a release date set in stone at the moment?
2009 for sure.

YOU'VE GOT 6 FANTASTIC WORLDS TO EXPLORE, BUT AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF WAYS TO ENJOY THE RIDE.



BANJO-KAZOOIE NUTS & BOLTS

7+
www.pegi.info

The dynamic duo are back in their most constructive adventure yet. Battling against the evil witch Gruntilda across 6 fantastic worlds, Banjo and Kazooie need you to help them build an amazing array of vehicles in order to overcome more than 150 challenges and secure the future of their homeland. It's going to be quite a ride.

Microsoft game studios

RARE

Jump in.

XBOX 360

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FIRST LOOK

ARMA II

The Russians are coming! Sort of…

It may be 90 years since the end of World War 1, but it seems that the only real progress made has been in the efficiency of the available killing machines. A large number of those weapons are being replicated in ArmA II from Czech developer Bohemia Interactive, who made their name with the million-selling Cold War classic Operation Flashpoint.

The rights to that game have since reverted to publisher Codemasters, with Bohemia releasing an unofficial pseudo-sequel in the shape of ArmA: Armed Assault.

ArmA may not have shifted as many units as Flashpoint, but number two has been in development for some time, which is why we were recently driven deep into the Czech >

Publisher: 505 Games
Developer: Bohemia Interactive
Heritage: Operation Flashpoint, ArmA: Armed Assault
Link: www.arma2.com
ETA: Spring 2009

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

> ArmA II continued

countryside to be greeted by a man in a plastic helmet and a replica gun (hopefully). Based about an hour from Prague, Bohemia are a close-knit unit, with many of the team living on the premises, and living out their military fantasies in the nearby woodlands.

In fact, when the game is booted up on the big screen, the foliage bears an uncanny resemblance to the Autumnal scenes outside, with a helicopter soaring dramatically over the browning treetops. This is no coincidence, as the action in ArmA II takes place in October, with the landscape accurately recreated from real geographical data. This extends to some particularly exact detail, and as the dev team were keen to point out, a nearby TV tower even makes a guest appearance in the game.

That's where the basis in reality ends though, as the near future conflict takes place in the fictional quasi-Russian country of Chernarus, comprising rural countryside, mountainous wilderness, industrial cities and military installations. It's made up of some 225km2 of real world data, and to put that into perspective, it boasts a million 3D objects, 350 km of roads and 50 >



"The map is made up of 225km2 of real world data, and boasts a million 3D objects and 350km of road"

I'd duck if I were you, mate.



Say hello to Sykes from Team Razor.



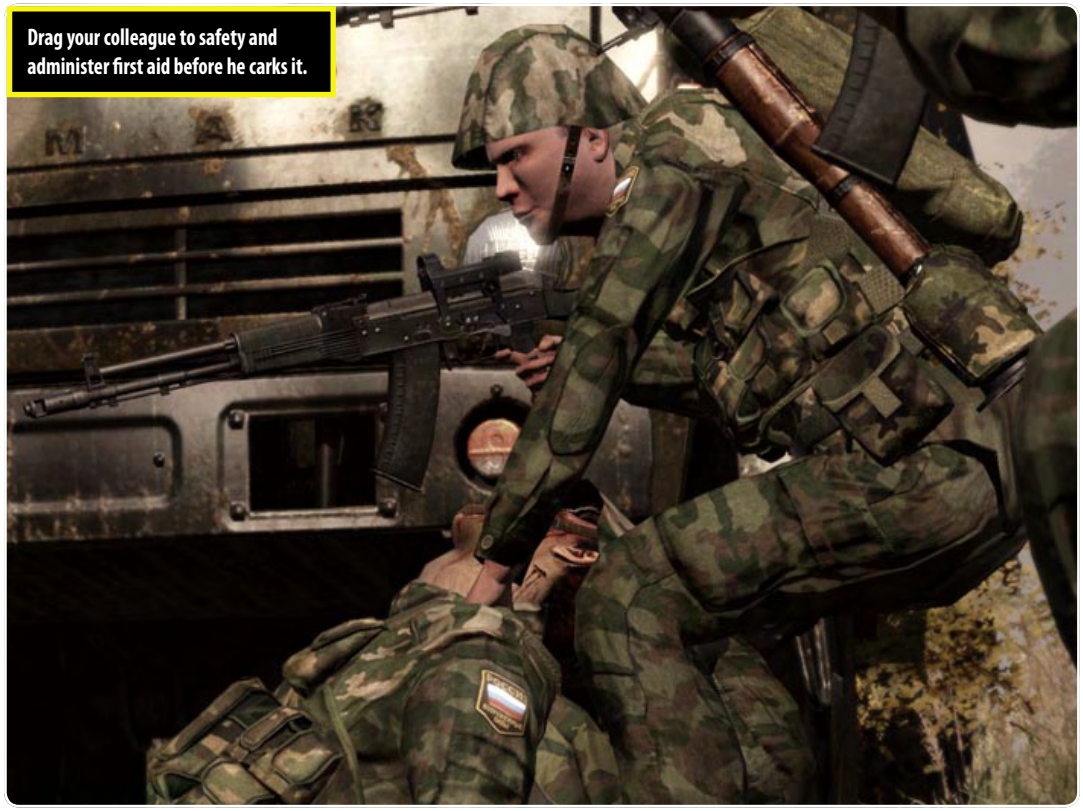
There are 13 different helicopters in the game.



There are 136 variations of vehicle. We're not making this stuff up.



…and eight animal species, including dirty feral hounds.



Drag your colleague to safety and administer first aid before he carks it.

> ArmA II continued

cities and villages. Throw in a civilian population and a wide array of wildlife, and Bohemia can genuinely claim to have created the perennial living, breathing world. Impressively, it all exists on one big map, with no loading times between areas.

Un-civil war

As for the storyline, civil war has been raging for two years, to the extent that one side has called for the marines. This is where you come in, making up part of Razor Team, a five-strong unit of hard cases who wouldn't look out of place in a Channel 5 movie. Step forward Eightball, Coops, Ice Cold, Scarlet and Robo, all with various backstories and larger-than-life personalities. In reality, they'll be controlled by the AI or by other players, with a strong emphasis on co-operative multiplayer. It's essential to work as a team, and necessary to stay close to your buddies, as if a teammate is downed, he'll die within a minute unless you carry or drag him off and administer first aid. Despite the multiplayer emphasis, single-player hasn't been ignored, and you'll be able to switch between all team members and issue some complex commands. The game will also employ so-called micro-AI, with the soldiers thinking on a smaller scale, to the extent that they will hide



Helicopters are subject to the Doppler effect – ask your physics teacher.



A telegraph pole doesn't offer the best cover, sadly.

> ArmA II continued

behind buildings and remember where enemy bullets came from.

As for the bigger picture, the campaign has multiple endings, and promises non-linear freeform gameplay including dynamic conversations with non-player characters. However, as a barometer of the game's hardcore approach, many of those NPCs will be talking in the local dialect, which only one member of Razor Team understands.

Entering the War Room

With this in mind, we were mildly nervous before the hands-on playtest, a sensation heightened by being locked in the dark while 'The War Room' was unveiled, which turned out to be a concrete bunker housing a bank of PCs and some biscuits. Thrown into the thick of it, we leapt into the nearest vehicle and hit the open road. A few minutes, and an unseen assailant later, we were dead, a brutal reminder of the necessity of teamwork. Further forays were more successful, particularly when we learned to get out of the vehicle and establish a base, effectively a respawn point.

We were then given an extensive demo of the in-game editor. Via a menu that looks more like a development tool, you can set up almost infinite scenarios, which then play out as a kind of first person strategy game, with you giving the orders as well as getting hands-on.

Back to the main game… while we mainly stuck to land-based vehicles, looking over other people's shoulders we saw them at the helm of a jet plane and, at one point, a seagull and a rabbit, with wildlife perversely proving playable, which is a concept that's somewhat at odds with the simulation approach. Perhaps that's what they *really* mean by the dogs of war?

"The campaign has multiple endings, and promises non-linear freeform gameplay"



Ewww, this man doesn't appear to have any eyebrows. Or eyelashes.

PCGZine

ARMA

HOW COMPLETE? 75%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 80%

As close to war as you ever want to get

ArmA Chameleon

Why Armed Assault II could be the future of war

Publisher: 505 Games
Developer: Bohemia Interactive
Players: 5
Features: Massive battlefield, player-driven story, extensive multiplayer, mission editor
ETA: 2009



Marek Spanel – Director, Bohemia Interactive

"A near-future setting allows players to get their hands on some gear that's not even fully in service or had just started to be fielded"

There appears to be a strong political element to the game's conflict. Did you draw from any real-life situations when it came to planning the storyline behind ArmA II?
It took around three years to end up with a political background for ArmA II, to really build up Chernarus as a believable post-Soviet country. We did a lot of deep research but still it was quite scary to see similarities between the conflict in Georgia earlier this year and some of the concepts we've created for ArmA II.



A great big chopper.

What do you think is the appeal of near-future combat compared to more historic wars?
We really like the near-future setting of the game. It allows us to create a very realistic and believable setting, while at the same time it gives us plenty of flexibility. We also can use projections of new vehicles to be used in near-future conflict and allow players to get their hands on some gear that's not even fully in service or has just started to be fielded.

The game is running on a 10-year-old engine. How can that compete with more recent technology?
ArmA II is powered by Real Virtuality 3, our very own game engine that has been in constant development for 10 years, so it's not really a 10-year-old game engine at all. If you check out most of the industry-leading engines, you will see that most of them have roots that are even deeper in the past. We really see this as an advantage, because no other developer can offer such a great heritage in creating open-world military shooters.

In fact, we at Bohemia Interactive are so skilled at producing realistic warfare simulations that our engine is used as the basis for training simulators that's used extensively by armies across the globe, including the United States Marine Corps, UK Ministry of Defence and the Australian Defence Force.

It's fair to say that it's very realistic, but have you had to sacrifice any realism in favour of gameplay?
We had to sacrifice a lot, otherwise no users would be able to use the majority of gear that's available in the game. >



Check out the realistic grass.



Tanks for the memory.



Civilians play their part in the game.



Meet Cooper from Team Razor.



Not the time to get caught short.

> Interview continued

We try to go as far as is possible, but we also want many things to be quite simple, and create a game that's actually playable! For example, in ArmA II you don't need to press 50 buttons to start a helicopter as in the real world, and you can easily fly it just using a keyboard. On the other hand, you still need to be careful when flying as it's quite easy to crash.

There's no definite answer to what is the right balance between fun and realism, but it's all about long term extensive playtesting. Ultimately we want to ensure that the game is enjoyable to play for gamers, while still maintaining an incredible amount of realism at the same time.

There's a lot of swearing. Do you think this is important to the game?

We use some strong language but definitely less than any modern warfare movie I have ever seen, so I think it's perfectly justified. We display war, and expecting soldiers not to use any strong words would be quite strange.

Have you seen much of Operation Flashpoint 2, and how will your game compare?

I have seen very little of the game, probably like everyone else, only around two minutes of in-game footage, and it is very difficult to compare at all. From my perspective, it looks that Op Flash 2 will be missing some of the parts that we feel were an integral part of the Flashpoint experience that we designed back when we were making the games. But it's impossible to judge before we can play both finished games. It's also good to have some competition out there, to ensure that we really push ourselves to create a game that's bigger and better than anything we've done before.



Call of Duty: World at War

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Treyarch
Heritage: Spider-Man 2, Call of Duty 3
Link: www.callofduty.com
OUT NOW

Coming back to what you know

As players of Activision's latest opus have been told, war never changes. But if there was one thing which last year's thrilling addition to the Call of Duty series – the superb Modern Warfare – proved, it's that war can change. Ignoring the series' WW2 roots, it took this popular FPS franchise in a different direction, with a fictional conflict providing plenty of memorable moments. Given its success, it was a surprise when Activision announced that the fifth game in the series (presumably we're doing away with numbers these days) was to return to history's bloodiest conflict. Yet Treyarch has clearly learned a few tricks from Infinity Ward, as World at War feels closer to CoD4 than the developer's previous attempt.

It's helped, no doubt, by the fantastic game engine already in place – everything here looks superb, from the character models to the detailed backdrops, the lighting and the many, many effects. Dust, bullets, sparks and blood fly around, while the framerate remains buttery smooth. You're always shepherded down a linear path but the detail on the periphery always makes you feel like a small cog in the war machine as battle rages around you. If there's one thing the series always gets right it's the chaos of combat. Teammates ingloriously die right in front of your eyes, Japanese banzai soldiers charge you with bayonets drawn. Burning troops scream and flail their arms around wildly. Mortar shots send corpses flying, often with limbs missing. If Modern Warfare raised the bar for brutality then World at War nudges it a notch higher. It even shows old newsreel footage of Japanese

"Dust, bullets, sparks and blood fly around, while the framerate remains buttery smooth"


Reznov is a fascinating character.

BACK IN TIME
Why returning to WW2 wasn't a bad move

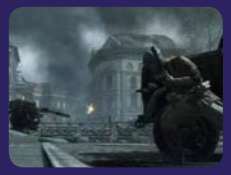


Pacific state | Red steel | Banzai!

Pacific state
It's not often we've had the chance to see the conflict in the East, save for the awful Medal of Honor Rising Sun. The atmosphere is tremendously tense here, with Japanese soldiers emerging seemingly out of nowhere from the grass, sometimes coming from all angles.

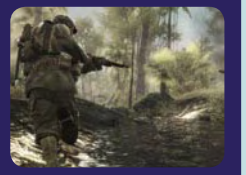
FREEZE FRAME
Don't mention the war!


30 MINUTES
Little resistance? Really? These Japanese genuinely do fight to the death.


1 HOUR 30 MINUTES
Revenge is a dish best served cold. And with a sniper rifle, too.


3 HOURS
Burn baby, burn! This has to be one of gaming's most effective flamethrowers.


5 HOURS
Flushing them out – venturing into Berlin's metro station.


7 HOURS
The campaign's over, but unfortunately the Nazis don't stay dead for long…



Weapons generally feel satisfying to shoot, though some are a little lightweight while others feel all too familiar.

> Call of Duty continued

soldiers executing prisoners. It's such an unflinching look at the horrors of war that it occasionally makes you feel a little uncomfortable that this is a piece of entertainment, particularly when the contemporary leanings of the soundtrack kick in and you're immolating Japanese troops with a flamethrower to what sounds like a Linkin Park instrumental. Also, it seems a little ill-advised to immediately launch into a game of the new game mode, Nazi Zombies upon completion of the campaign, while some of the jokey references (there's a Private Pyle in the opening level) tend to jar with the more serious tone.

These are minor quibbles though in what's otherwise a hugely entertaining campaign, as you control two very different characters in different parts of the world. You begin as Private Miller, rescued from imminent death at the outset before teaming up with a small cabal attempting to push the Japanese back on Peleliu Island. After storming a beach (the game's Omaha moment) and capturing an airfield, you then shoot off to Germany, playing this time as a Russian soldier who is discovered among the corpses of his squad-mates by the charismatic Sergeant Reznov, who is pursuing a personal vendetta against a Nazi General before commanding troops to take the Russian fight to Berlin.

There aren't actually too many story sequences, which makes the plot feel rather episodic rather than weaving together two potentially compelling tales – the between-level events are handled in voiceover while you're waiting for stages to load, while the rest of the story is essentially just action – go here, take these emplacements/soldiers out, push further forwards with your squad. In a way, it's almost a waste of the two Hollywood stars called up for vocal duties – Kiefer Sutherland and Gary Oldman are both superb, and really add a sense of gravitas to proceedings, but they're not given anything particularly meaty to chew on (unless you count Oldman's excellent >



You'll briefly be riding on tanks during one or two sections.



It wouldn't be a Call of Duty game without some huge explosions.



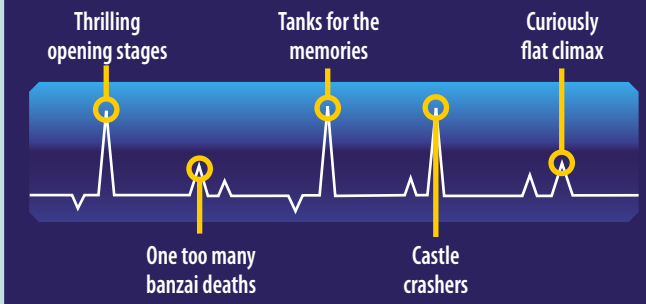
Though your flamethrower rarely seems as effective as this shot suggests, it's a powerful weapon.



The further you march into Berlin, the more ruined it seems to be.



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Call of Duty continued

Russki accent). Still, you get to hear Sutherland bellowing orders in his best Jack Bauer voice – there's even a "dammit!" thrown in which will undoubtedly please 24 fans.

It's still a linear shooter then, but with a cinematic intensity that no other franchise can really match. While it may not mix things up quite as well as Modern Warfare, this is still a rollercoaster ride you won't want to get off, with stages like the terrific Ring of Steel and Blowtorch & Corkscrew likely to linger in the memory. Even the vehicle sections work – a tank assault on Berlin's last line of defence, and a tenuously linked aerial sequence which sees you gunning down Japanese ships and fighters from your seaplane, swapping positions throughout as your craft tries to stay in one piece.

It's a pity then, that the online game is weaker than last time around – albeit not for the want of effort on Treyarch's part. The campaign can be played online with up to four players, as can Nazi Zombies. But without doubt the competitive multiplayer is found wanting when compared with Modern Warfare's treatment. Sadly, almost all the changes are for the worse, and it's not nearly as well-balanced nor as enjoyable as last year's game.

"Call of Duty 5 offers plenty of bang for your buck"

It says something about how much Infinity Ward spoiled us that a game of this undoubtable quality can be seen as disappointing. World At War may not quite match up to its modern-day predecessor, but it offers plenty of bang for your buck, whether you're playing alone or with friends.

Chris Schilling





PCGZine Verdict

Tremendous, but starting to tread water

- Outstanding graphics and sound
- Hugely exciting set pieces
- Grenade deaths hard to avoid

86%



Left 4 Dead

Valve do zombies? Time to get very excited…

Publisher: Valve/EA
Developer: Valve
Heritage: Half-Life, Team Fortress
Link: www.l4d.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements: 3.0 Ghz processor, 1GB of RAM (2GB for Vista) and a 128MB graphics card. A headset/microphone so you can talk to teammates is also strongly recommended

To be honest, they had us at zombies. Yet with Left 4 Dead Valve have powered beyond expectation and delivered a multiplayer experience that breaks away from traditional fragging and delivers camaraderie, four exploding craniums every 30 seconds and what is, frankly, an obscene amount of vomit.

Fast zombies

The essence of the game has you and three companions teaming up against the 'fast' 28 Days Later variant of zombie; blasting the Infected off each others' chests, accidentally shooting one another in the back and healing everyone up when the AI generator humming in the background decides to give you a rest.

Four campaigns await you, each with two hours or so of gameplay, with replays guaranteed by the randomised zombie flow, weapon placement and appearances of the game's more specialist flesh-hungering foils. Hunters leap from the rooftops, invariably ending up crouched on someone's chest intent on eviscerating them. Smokers cough and wheeze as they fire projectile tongues at your team, pick out stragglers and drag prostrate strangled bodies back into the danger zone. Obese, belching Boomers appear as if from nowhere – vomiting green bile over all and sundry, making them irresistible to every zombie lurking within every henhouse, outhouse, doghouse and spawning point within sprinting reach. These enemy abilities >

"Obese, belching Boomers appear as if from nowhere – vomiting green bile over all and sundry"



All covered in bile, and nowhere to go…



The NHS these days… I blame the Tories.

PCGZine GOLD

FREEZE FRAME

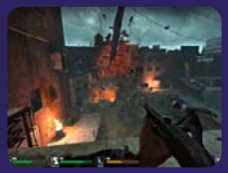
Shuffling through the game, one zombie at a time…



45 MINUTES
Is there any game that has a petrol station that cannot be exploded? Euro Truck Simulator perhaps…



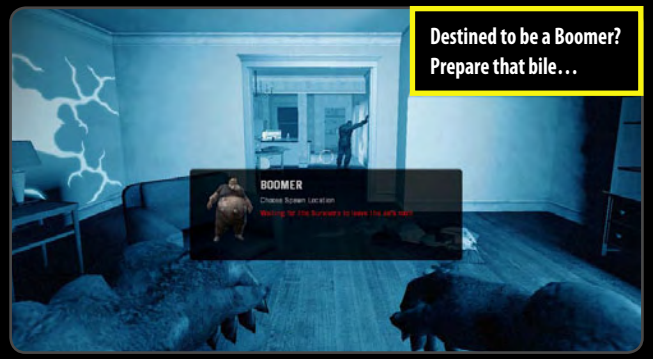
1 HOUR
A basement, a pool of zombie blood and a lawn-mower. A clear reference to Peter Jackson's Braindead.



2 HOURS
Blood Harvest has you defend a farmhouse that has a few too many doors and windows.



2 HOURS+
Before the climactic battle on the city Airport runway, a passenger jet comes in to land. Badly.



Destined to be a Boomer? Prepare that bile…


What cowboy put in those windows? Honestly.

> Left 4 Dead continued

are designed to encourage, nay demand, varied styles of co-operative play – albeit generally of the "Jesus Christ! I'm being tongued! Help! Help!" variety. Above all, nothing bonds the team quite like the distant rumble of an approaching Tank – a goliath wad of muscle that's prone to casually flick cars and rubble at you.

Your team traverses five levels in each campaign – through spooky woods, airport terminals, graveyards, sewers, 'small-town America' streets and parking lots. Each one then ends in a protracted climactic face-off against the hordes while waiting for rescue in environs designed for impeccably well-imagined zombie battles – an abandoned farmhouse, a lonely boathouse with a handy supply of molotov cocktails, the rooftop of a skyscraper hospital… all of them


Fire: your friend if used intelligently. So mostly not.

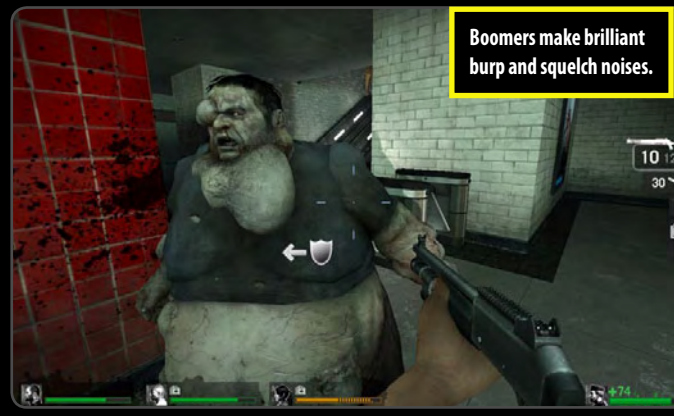
demand that you hold out that little bit too long before your tactics slowly dissolve into L4D's own brand of chaos.

Clearly it's the simple pleasure of you and your closest of friends waving automatic weapons in the face of 30 or 40 screaming, sprinting milk-eyed corpses that propels L4D into the halls of the multiplayer greats – but it's the smaller details that will secure its place there. For example, the way that fellow survivors, similarly unaffected by the

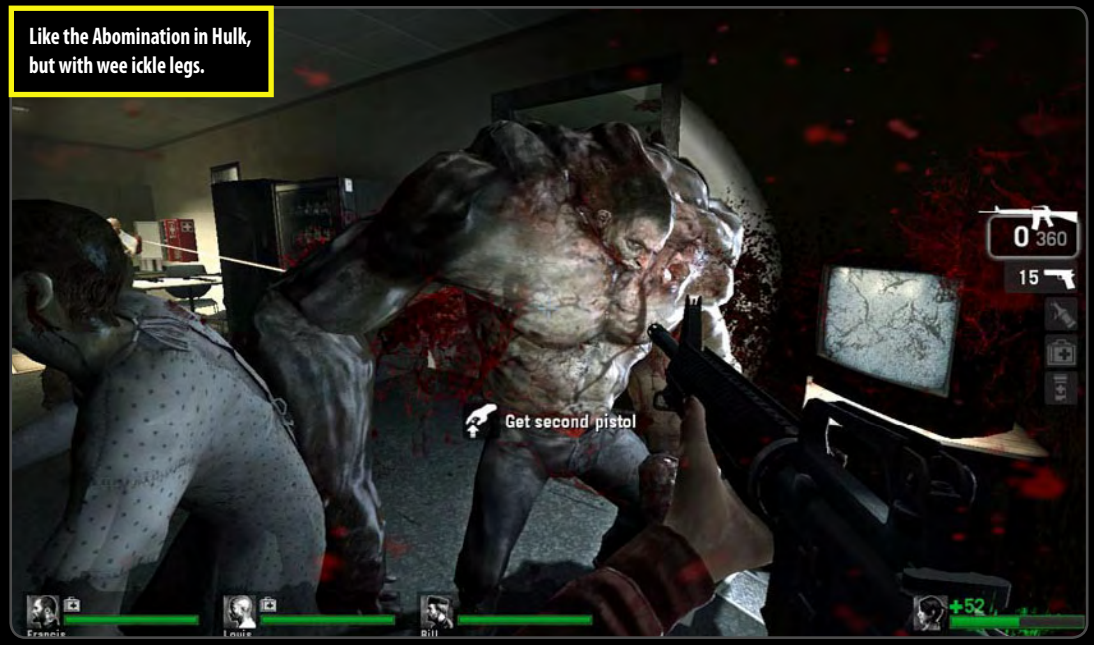
"Jesus Christ! I'm being tongued! Help! Help!"



plague, cover the walls of the ammo-packed safehouses that punctuate your journey with desperate messages to loved ones is both haunting and ingenious. Get close to a non-enraged


Boomers make brilliant burp and squelch noises.

zombie, meanwhile, and it may well stare vacantly past you and mutter "Run! Run!". The decaying foe will even always be dressed in a way that befits its surroundings to boot, so flabby-bottomed patients in surgical gowns will attack you in Mercy Hospital and airport workers in fluorescent jackets will swarm you at baggage reclaim. >



Like the Abomination in Hulk, but with wee ickle legs.



They only understand the language of bullets. And struggle with that.

> Left 4 Dead continued

To top it all off we have Versus mode, in which your charming four-some face the usual hordes and specialist Infected, controlled by up to four human opponents. The campaign plays through as usual, but each level that lies within is played twice – so one time it's a mad dash for you as a human to get to the safehouse, the other you're waiting to spawn as a Boomer, Hunter, Smoker or Tank to vomit, eviscerate, tongue or charge around breaking the scenery. Infected can see allies, enemies and the non-spawned through walls – as well as secret paths up onto rooftops and breakable walls to hide behind – and as such, playing them is nothing but a joy. It's a solid, engaging and frequently exhilarating mode that may be unlikely to overtake your CS or your TF2 in terms of popularity, but remains an outright must-play experience.



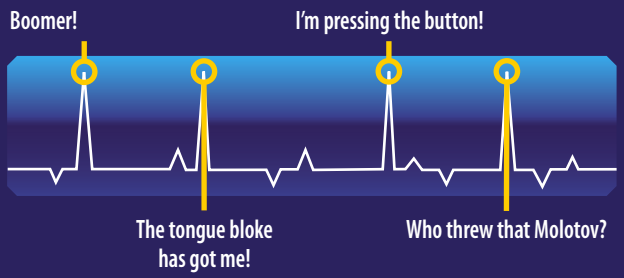
Stupid robots

Any caveats? Your main concern should be that you must always play with the full complement of players – not only does having AI bots dull the experience, but they are a little clunky and prone to occasionally irrational behaviour. Similarly, playing the game without the ability to talk directly to your allies is a sin. The standard difficulty level also isn't quite challenging enough, and experienced FPS players should definitely choose themselves a higher setting from the off.

Left 4 Dead is a triumph, and one Valve are promising to make even more triumphant through the magic of Steam, with fresh Infected creatures, unlocked Versus modes and even new campaigns. To not give it a whirl would frankly be offensive to the magnificent hobby that is PC gaming.

Dean Mortlock

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



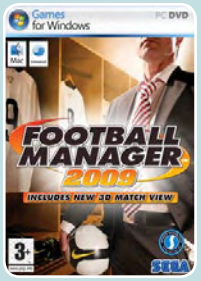
"Left 4 Dead is a triumph, and one that Valve are promising to make even more triumphant"

PCGZine Verdict

It's the end of the world, and we feel fine

- Brilliant co-operative fun
- Makes you yelp with pleasure
- Valve magic sprinkled everywhere

93%



Football Manager 2009

PCGZine GOLD

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sports Interactive
Heritage: Championship Manager, Football Manager
Link: www.sigames.com
OUT NOW

PITCH PATCHED!
This review is based on the patched version of the game. Ensure you apply the free patch.

Coming back to what you know

Imagine trying to get Football Manager published today. You'd be laughed out of town. Nevertheless, the game that has practically defined the phrase 'gameplay over graphics' since it was known as Championship Manager has triumphed using little more than text, and in recent years a rudimentary 2D match engine. This time round however, it's all change, as the world's favourite football management game finally steps into the terrifying world of 3D graphics, albeit of a standard that wouldn't have looked out of place 10 years ago.

The 3D match engine is the arguably the biggest thing to happen to the franchise in its history, and is an event that has sent long-time devotees reeling, many of whom had scarcely come to terms with the 2D version. For such Luddites out there, the good news is that the 2D engine remains, enabling you to enjoy the action in the same way as for the last few years, blissfully unaware of the thrills taking place on thousands of other PCs.

"The 3D match engine is arguably the biggest thing to happen to the franchise in its history"



As for that action, don't go expecting the televisual delights of FIFA 09. In modern gaming terms it's borderline risible, a rudimentary version of the beautiful game played out in empty stadiums by glorified stick men. The point is, while they may look basic, the players are reacting exactly as they have done in previous versions of the >



Chester never score from corners.

THE POWER OF THREE

Enter the third dimension…



The old view | **Overhead** | **New and improved**

The old view

If you're scared of making the leap to 3D, ease yourself in with the traditional 2D view. And breathe…

FREEZE FRAME

Match day routine…



TEAM SELECTION
Pick your team and choose your tactics. Player ratings now appear as a decimal.



THE OPPOSITION
Have a quick look at the opposition. Perhaps do a job on their star player.



3D ACTION
Check out the 3D match action, with the traditional options on the left.



TOP ADVICE
Your Assistant Manager offers some sound advice at halftime.



TV VIEW
Make the changes and opt for the fullscreen TV view. Then hope for the best.



Onscreen info lets you track your player ratings.

> Football Manager cont.

game, with your tactics being employed and their individual attributes displayed. Other football management games have used 3D graphics for some years now, but there was always the suspicion that you were simply watching arbitrary footage over and over again. And while we're not claiming that every single goal in every single game in Football Manager 2009 is entirely different, there definitely does seem to be a more organic approach to the on-field action.

All the same, it takes some getting used to, with the stop-start nature of the highlights often leaving players frozen in time while the match engine moves on to the next highlight, something that proves more disconcerting than in the previous 2D and text versions of the game. The matches also seem to be more time-consuming, a particular irony given that Football Manager is arguably the most time-consuming game ever devised. It is nonetheless, definitely progress, and for a company that has never previously dabbled in the medium, a reasonable effort that achieves the goal of a quasi-realistic visual representation of the match day, while crucially retaining the integrity of what goes on under the bonnet.


Watch the action from a variety of camera angles.

Three's the magic number

As for Sports Interactive's motivation to go 3D, presumably it is to attract more players, although graphics whores will probably not be among them. That said, it does now at least look like a football game of some sort, as opposed to the spreadsheet visuals long mocked by the unbelievers. Those of course are still in here, with the core game proving as complex as ever, albeit with a further concession to newcomers in the form of the Assistant Manager, who now offers extremely in-depth advice for you, even updating his valuable opinion of a live match every 15 minutes. >



A largely superfluous new 2D view.



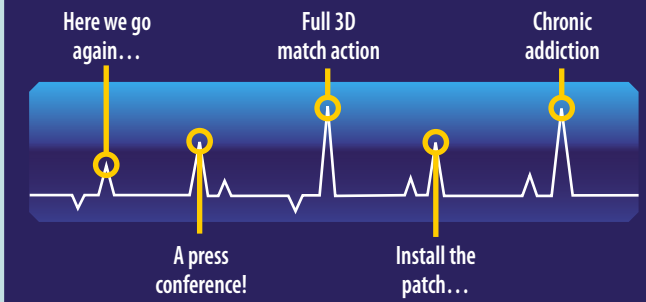
The familiar tactics screen, and a familiar score.



You can tell from here that was a definite penalty.



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Football Manager cont.

For those who crave autonomy, the game is still as hardcore as you want it to be, enabling you to tweak pretty much every aspect of running a football club, from the training regimes to the players' contracts to the dimensions of the pitch. There is also a further attempt to replicate modern football with the obligatory rumour mill throwing up players that you are allegedly keeping an eye on. And while you can strenuously deny these allegations, they can often prove self-prophesising, as the player in question can often be a useful acquisition to your team. By the way, strenuously denying rumours isn't simply a case of bellowing at your monitor in disgust, but an in-game feature, as you will regularly be asked to attend press conferences where an array of baying hacks will attempt to wrong foot you via a multiple choice question and answer session. And if it all becomes too much for you, you can always send your trusty assistant to the face the media.

"Despite the 3D graphics, this is still Football Manager"

Despite the fancy 3D graphics, ultimately this is still Football Manager, and still capable of getting under your skin. When you find yourself lying awake pondering how to solve that tricky left-back position, you know that it has you under its spell once more. While the match engine is far from perfect (and sure to be improved in future versions), the bottom line is that even without it this is still a classic game, and one that will eat up the bleak winter months.

Steve Hill



The slider lets you review key moments.



Face the press. Beware the Fake Sheikh.

PCGZine Verdict

Thankfully, the updates make this classic even better

- 3D graphics
- Absorbing gameplay
- DRM problems

90%



Publisher: Bethesda
Developer: Bethesda
Heritage: Oblivion, Star Trek: Legacy
Link: http://fallout.bethsoft.com
OUT NOW

Fallout 3

PCGZine GOLD

Now is the nuclear winter of our disc-content

The original Fallout was something of a seminal experience for PC role-players. Putting more of a bent on an entertaining narrative than any game that had come before, Fallout became renowned for its style of humour, and deep, character driven gameplay. Eight years later, and a lot has changed in the land of Fallout. With a new developer at the helm, a stunning graphical style, and the same original sense of humour, Bethesda had a huge task on their hands if they were ever going to recreate the dizzy heights of the original, but thankfully they've more than raised the bar, and the result is something very special indeed.

As you may have already guessed by its name, Fallout 3's set in a world plunged into nuclear war. You play as one of the survivors, having lived your entire life inside a huge underground nuclear bunker, called a vault. And from the second you load the game, Bethesda waste no time in getting the ball rolling, as you actually play through flashbacks from your youth. This not only makes menial tasks – such as picking your name – a lot more interesting, but it also serves as a perfect introduction to your family and life in the vault. Instantly, you know who your friends are, and who you need to look out for – you're even introduced to a possible power struggle and conspiracy within. The tipping point however, comes when your Dad runs away from the vault, preferring instead to take his chances in the wastes outside.

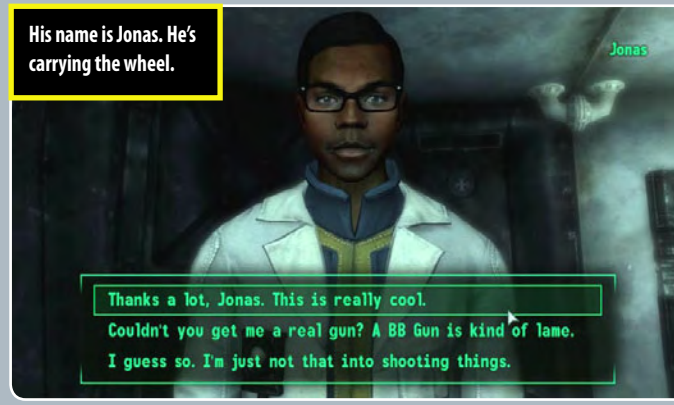
In an effort to search for your Dad, you too step out into the outside world, and after walking around the gloomy bunker, stepping out into the post-apocalyptic wasteland for the first time is an awe-inspiring experience. The landscape rolls over the horizon, burnt-out buildings are scattered everywhere you look, and giant >

"Bethesda has raised the bar and the result is something very special indeed"



Radiation has its side effects. But two-headed cows? Count us in.





His name is Jonas. He's carrying the wheel.


These things fly around towns, playing music to you. Nice, really.

> Fallout 3 continued

cow/horse/cockroach hybrids roam the land. There's more than a touch of Oblivion to the visuals, but this is even better, with a huge draw distance and a more organic visual style.

Thankfully, the graphics aren't the only things that have improved since Oblivion, as the dialogue and the combat have both seen huge overhauls. One of the focal points of the first Fallout was its witty dialogue, and thankfully, the spirit's been very much retained here. Emotional, driven, and often quite tongue-in-cheek, the conversations really help you form an attachment with the characters – something that's important in the much-touted branching quests.

The combat too is a lot better than in Oblivion, as it suffers from none of its random nature. Instead, by pressing V, you can activate V.A.T.S. mode, slowing down time and effectively making the combat turn-based. All you have to do then is select the part of your enemy you want to attack, and click to stack the command. You can queue several different orders, letting you attack several different body parts at once. When you shoot someone's gun out of their hands, then blow their leg off before landing the final blow, you'll appreciate all of the intricacies of the system.

All in all, Fallout 3's one of the best RPGs of the year. Though the dialogue and narrative doesn't quite reach the heights of Mass Effect, as an overall experience, Fallout's up there with the best of them, and is every bit as good as, if not better, than its namesake.

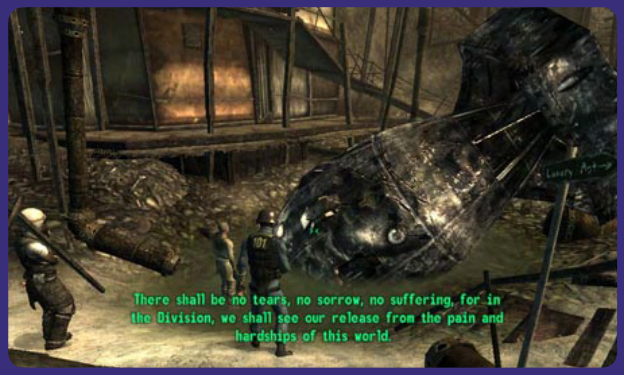
Ian Morris



Although ranged weapons work well in VATS, there's sometimes no alternative for a quick blast to the face.

A GUIDED TOUR

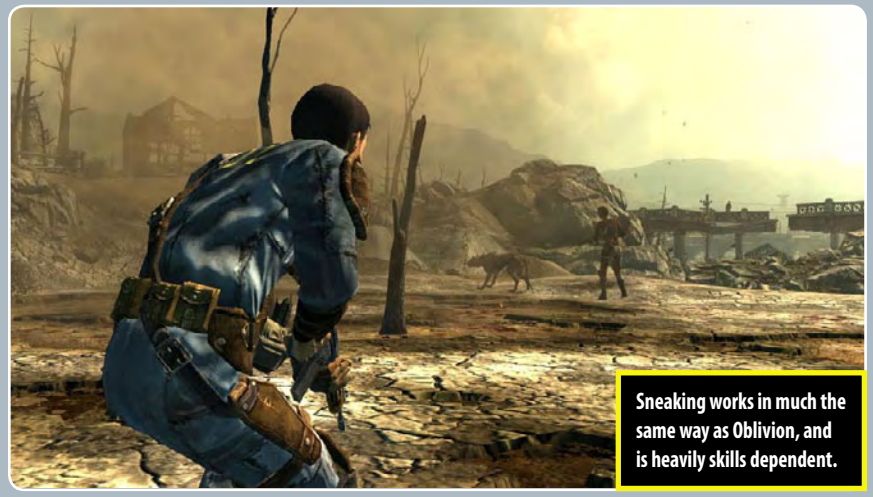
We show you round the town of Megaton



Guided tour | Bomb's away! | It's the law

Guided tour

Megaton has its fair share of history. To your left, you'll find the site where Jefferson once bit into a tasty scone. On your right, there's a spot where Abraham Lincoln tripped on a rock and slightly grazed his knee. And just behind you, there's the huge-unexploded-megaton-nuclear-bomb-that-if-it-ever-went-off-would-surely-kill-us-all. But no-one ever talks about that.



Sneaking works in much the same way as Oblivion, and is heavily skills dependent.



This is VATS, but what do you do? Go for the head, and risk missing, or try and disarm them first?

PCGZine Verdict

A fine RPG, and a great addition to the series

- Great dialogue
- Inventive quests
- Original combat

91%



Publisher: EA
Developer: EA LA
Heritage: Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth 2, C&C 3
Link: www.ea.com/redalert
OUT NOW

Red Alert 3

Pay attention soldier, it's time for war!

"One of the bigger changes to the game is the ability to build your bases anywhere – on water or on land"

If you know Red Alert, you'll soon feel at home with Red Alert 3. With the familiar sounds of the Hell March blaring over your speakers, it feels good to be back in the crazy, Russian time-travelling world of Red Alert, but don't let the nostalgia trip last for too long…

This being the third game in the series, it seems to make sense to have rounded the number of factions up to three, as you can now play as the middle ground of the Allies, the blunt but brutal Soviets, and the hi-tech Japanese Empire of the Rising Sun.

Were it not for the addition of the Empire of the Rising Sun, Red Alert 3 would feel pretty much exactly the same as the previous instalments, but playing as the high-tech Japanese gives the game a refreshing feel. With giant mecha-robots and high-tech jets at their disposal, the Empire of the Rising Sun are perfectly balanced to give their enemies a run for their money – and no faction has a distinct advantage.

One of the bigger changes to the game is the ability to build your bases anywhere – on water or on land, which actually adds a lot of strategy to the otherwise docile base building. And the more you play, the more you'll feel that



EA LA have really tried to address the problems with the last games. It's now much harder to simply amass a huge army and trounce your enemy – you'll have to think carefully about which troops work well against which units, and construct your army accordingly. Also, several missions see you start out with a limited number of troops, and no base to construct more, flinging you out on your own, Company of Heroes style.

>



The Japanese make use of flying units a lot, so make sure you're packing AA.



Tesla coils should work well against anything metal. Physics tells you that.



Stereotypes live on in Red Alert 3. Japanese robots, Russian brute force, and the British stiff upper lip.

Roll over screen for annotations



> Red Alert 3 continued

The campaign in Red Alert 3 is actually quite different to that of previous games in the series, as the entire thing's been designed to be played in co-op – something that feels quite strange when you're playing on your own. For people with plenty of friends on tap, this may be fine, but there's no option to play exclusively on your own – if you want to solo, you'll have to buddy up with an AI player instead. Thankfully, the co-op AI is more than passable, but they do have a habit for just marching into a fight, rather than taking the most strategic route.

Disappointing intelligence

However, more disappointingly, Red Alert 3's general AI leaves a lot to be desired. If you're standing in a huge group of 20 soldiers, and one of them gets shot, you'd imagine everyone would react. But in Red Alert 3, only the two soldiers immediately next to the deceased will bother to turn around and shoot. And the pathfinding is also incredibly annoying. When you command your troops to move to the other side of the map for a final assault, you expect them all to go. You don't expect them to gradually manage to free themselves from each other, then filter across the map in groups of two, making them prime picking for enemies.

And this is all quite saddening, because you can tell EA LA have made a real effort. There's much more strategy than ever before, and it all feels so Red Alert-y, but sadly, the AI lets it down.

Ian Morris



One thing's for sure – the Empire of the Rising Sun certainly give Red Alert a different look.



To win in Red Alert 3, it's not enough to dominate one front – you need to own the sky, land and sea.

PCGZine Verdict

Not quite a contender

- More strategic
- Lengthy campaigns and missions
- Poor AI

78%



Sacred 2

Ancaria's in trouble. Time to get slashing

Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Ascaron
Heritage: Silverfall, Sacred
Link: www.sacred2.com
OUT NOW

Those who remember the original Sacred will no doubt remember it fondly. Bringing an easily accessible brand of Diablo-esque hack and slash, the German-developed pseudo RPG quickly gained a hardcore fanbase, sucked in by its addictive nature. For the sequel, you'll be pleased to hear that there aren't as many changes as you may think – but then again it doesn't really have to, as the Sacred formula is still as horribly addictive now as it was back then.

In fact, other than the graphical engine, one of the only things that's changed for Sacred 2 is the character classes, as only one from the original has been carried over. Sadly, the difference between the six playable characters seems to be only cosmetic, but once you get into the game, you can customise your abilities as much as you'd want to anyway.

Roll over screen for annotations





As is the standard for fantasy games, the women are scantily clad.



Mounts are a new feature for Sacred 2, ranging from the strange to the fluffy.



Another innocent tourist learns why tigers aren't as cute as they look.

Story time

Somewhat more disappointingly though, the story here is a bit thin on the ground, but it does its job in giving you an excuse to smack some Trolls in the face with the business end of a sword. Set in the land of Ancaria, a war's broken out over the control of some blue goop that's meant to be something of a lifeforce for the people. You come into the game playing for >

> Sacred 2 continued

either the goodies or the baddies, and join the struggle for control.

But while the main storyline may be a little bit lightweight, you could be forgiven for never having heard of it, as Sacred 2's land is so utterly expansive and full of additional quests that you can easily lose yourself in it for hours without even touching the main story.

Taking place in a land that's one-and-a-half times the size of Oblivion, Sacred 2 treads the fine line between expanse and sparsity, by providing a world that's so full of landmarks, quests and notable people that it's easy to find your way around and get to what you're meant to be doing next. It's rare that you'll ever get lost – and in a game this big, that's no mean feat.

A large part of Sacred's appeal came from its online multiplayer mode, and with support for up to 16 players in PvP, and five players in co-op PvE, fans of the original won't be disappointed here. Brilliantly, quest progress online is also reflected in your offline game, with your character retaining their level, items and equipment, as well as saving you from having to trudge through the same quest again.

Major quibble

However, if we have one major quibble with Sacred 2, it's a problem with its performance. Yes, the game looks good – the land stretches literally as far as the eye can see – but it doesn't look good enough to warrant how shockingly badly it performs. Our framerate was in single digits on 'high' detail, yet we saw nothing to warrant the slowdown – this from a machine that runs Dead Space, Crysis: Warhead and others on high with absolutely no problems whatsoever.

All in all, if you're up for a bit of online co-op, or frequent LAN parties, Sacred 2 is sure to prove a hit. While it ultimately won't win over any new fans, until Diablo 3, nothing does hack-and-slash better than this.

Ian Morris



We can understand when the game slows down with this much fur on display.



You'll want to pair together with your friends to take on some of the bigger enemies.



The eviler you are, the angrier your mount must be.



PCGZine Verdict

Chopping 'em up, good and proper

- Addictive, refined gameplay
- Great in multiplayer
- A few bugs and a dodgy framerate

82%

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DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

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GEARS OF WAR 2

THE MAGAZINE

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF 360ZINE, THE FREE XBOX 360 MAGAZINE

EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST

GEARS OF WAR 2

Every level played from start to finish!



INTERVIEW

CLIFF BLESZINSKI

Get the lowdown on GOW2 from the man himself...

INTERVIEW

MIKE CAPPS

Epic's president discusses GOW2 and beyond...

GEARS OF WAR 2

WELCOME

It's not every day you get the opportunity to play one of the year's most anticipated games over a month before its release, but we got that chance with Gears of War 2, and grabbed it with both hands. Quite literally, in a way – we managed to get prime spot in front of the one giant telly at the Microsoft event, and proceeded to blast through the first few acts of the single-player game before anyone else. Dedication to our cause saw us blitz most of the rest of the game throughout the night, resting for but a couple of hours before resuming hostilities with the Locust and finishing the following morning, with a completion time of around twelve hours.

So yes, it's longer than the first game, and we're sure most players will take a little more time than was afforded to the attendant journalists. With the campaign done and dusted, we then played several hours of the game's multiplayer modes, joining forces with Epic's Dr. Mike Capps, and being congratulated for a double grenade kill that he described as "beautiful", taking on the Locust during one particularly satisfying game of Execution single-handedly.

So it's fair to say we're in a prime position to reveal all about Gears of War 2 – and exactly how it compares to the much-celebrated original. Embargoes forbid us from rating the game, but suffice to say this extensive preview is the result of exhaustive playtesting of the final version. Would it get a Gold Award? The next issue of 360Zine will carry our final verdict, but for now you'll just have to read on and see what you think...

Enjoy the issue,

Chris Schilling

"At around twelve hours, Gears 2's campaign is longer than the original"



GEARS OF WAR 2 Click here to watch the video!

Contents

Playtest 03
We've played through the entire single-player campaign and spent hours on multiplayer too.

Cliff Bleszinski 06
Cliffy B talks us through the thrills and spills of the GOW sequel.

Mike Capps 12
Don't miss our video interview with the president of Epic.

GEARS OF WAR 2



Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Epic Games
Heritage: Unreal Tournament series, Gears of War
Link: http://gearsofwar.xbox.com/
ETA: 7th November



EXCLUSIVE SCREENSAVER

HANDS ON

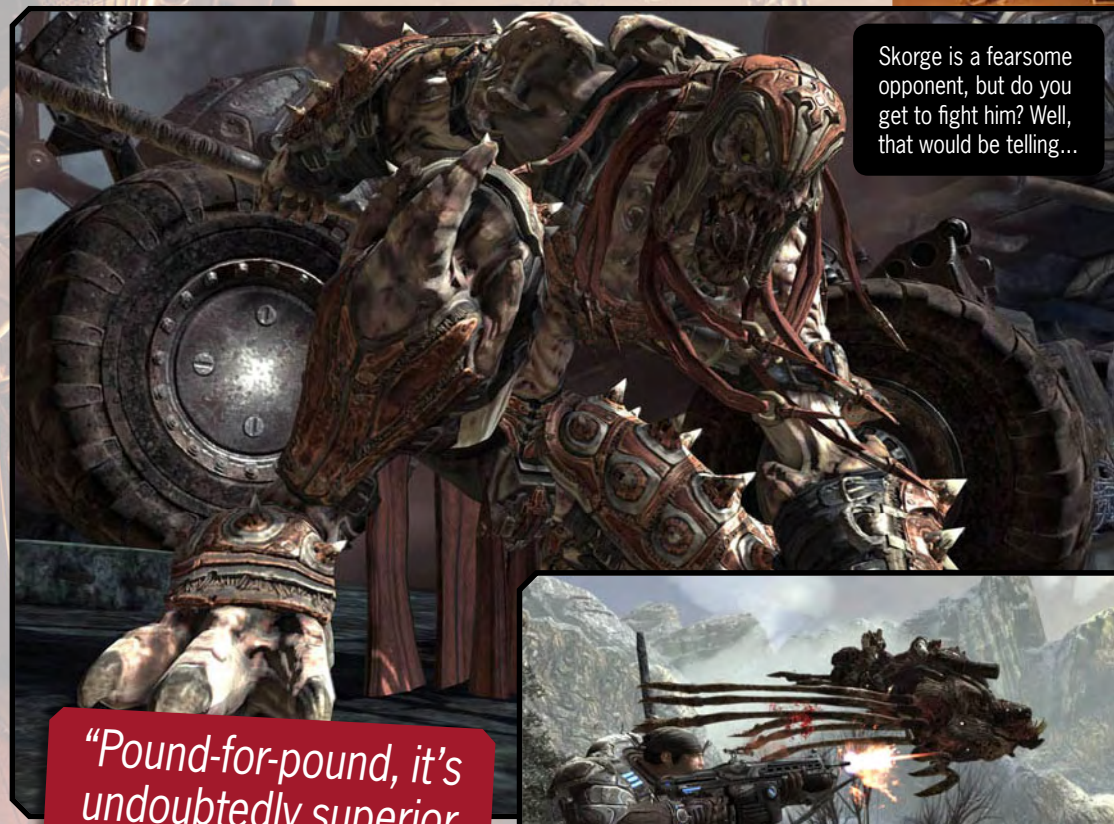
GEARS OF WAR 2

Played to completion – will this be 2008's greatest game?

When we spoke to Cliff Bleszinski last month, he explained how his assertion that Gears of War 2 was "bigger, better and more badass" was just marketing speak. But it's hard to see a summary that's any more appropriate than that. We've played Gears 2 from awesome opening to ferocious, frantic finish, and it is indeed bigger, and better, and more badass than the first. Pound-for-pound, it's undoubtedly superior to the original, with enough new in there to make it feel very much like Gears 2.0 rather than just Gears 1.5.

CAMPAIGN TRAIL.

Epic is clearly keen to talk about the game's story – a much criticised aspect of the original, which forewent a truly compelling narrative to focus purely on its fast-paced tactical action sequences and exciting set-pieces. We admit that we feared the plot might become a little too intrusive, getting in the way of more Locust-blasting action, but we can quell those worries immediately – while there's plenty of mythology-expanding, universe-building content, a driving narrative arc, and even a few sombre moments, it's still very much action first, story second. Indeed, given the amount of talk about the role of Dominic Santiago and the search for his wife Maria



Skorge is a fearsome opponent, but do you get to fight him? Well, that would be telling...

"Pound-for-pound, it's undoubtedly superior to the original"

An early set piece sees you taking on Locust atop the deadly flying Reavers

Thrills, spills and kills

What's new in Gears 2



Vehicles | Maps | Weapons

Vehicles

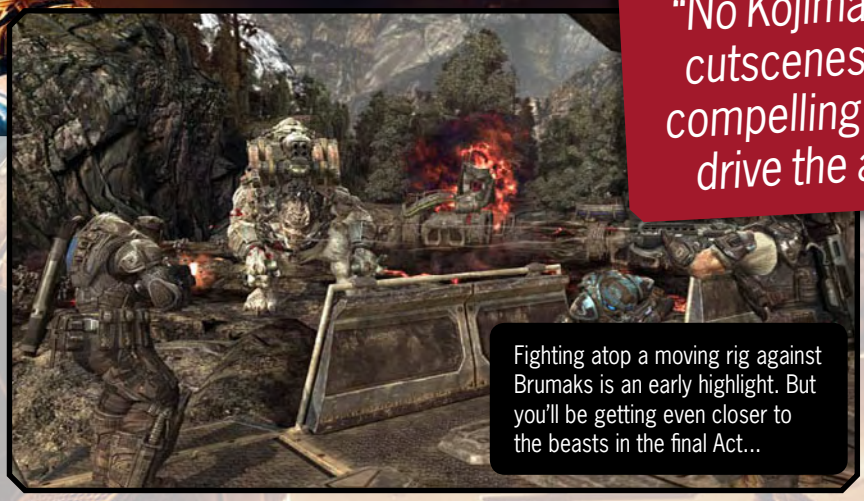
Strictly speaking, most of Gears 2's vehicles aren't really vehicles, as they have legs rather than wheels. During the single-player campaign you'll witness the Locust riding bloodmounts, Reavers and even Brumaks – and you'll have access to the latter two during the game. One memorable sequence sees you taking to the water in a Locust barge, while you'll also travel in a vehicle that's almost a cross between a tank and a monster truck. Then there are the huge rigs which transport you to the drilling point, where you'll travel through the earth in grindlifts, ready to take the fight to the Locust... underground.

becoming the emotional anchor of the plot, some players will be surprised that it doesn't feature more heavily.

WAR STORIES

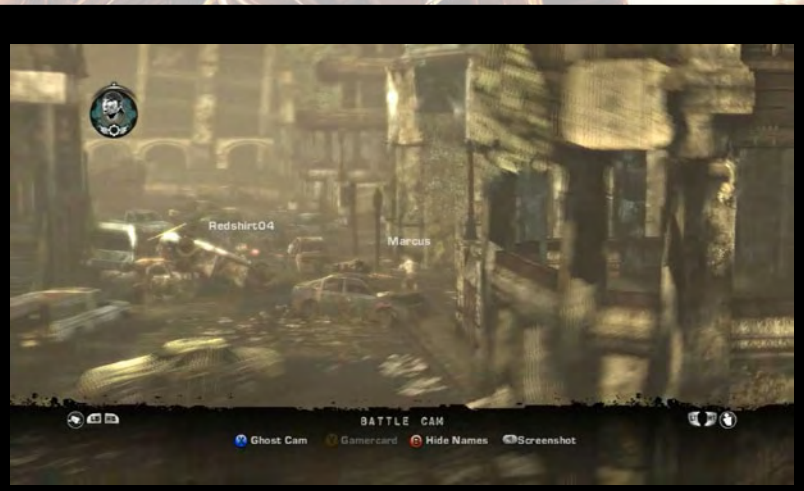
Bleszinski always talked about giving gamers the choice of following the story or skipping the cutscenes (and even cutting short some of Marcus's radio conversations with Control) but we're confident that most will invest in the narrative to the finish – at least first time round. So no Kojima-length story sequences, just an interesting story to propel the action. And those spending some time wandering down the road less travelled will find items to be added to their war journal – diary entries, COG tags and more that flesh out the background to the Gears universe, and obviously offer replay value for completists.

As far as plot details go, our lips have to remain pretty firmly sealed. Not only are we unable to talk about much of the overall story arc, but we'd be unwilling to anyway, as we'd undoubtedly spoil some of the game's biggest surprises. It's fair to say that events don't necessarily progress as you

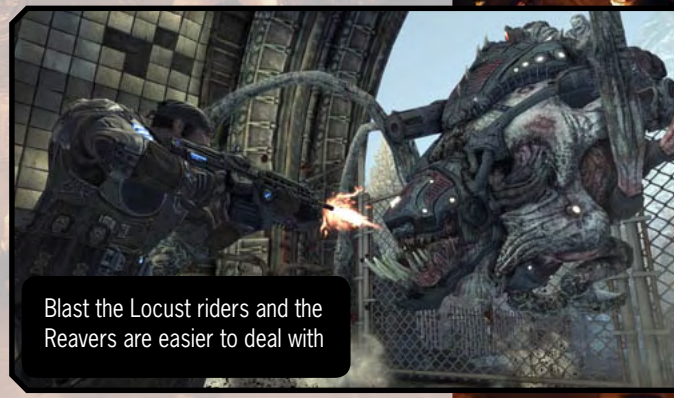


Fighting atop a moving rig against Brumaks is an early highlight. But you'll be getting even closer to the beasts in the final Act...

"No Kojima-length cutscenes, just a compelling story to drive the action"



GEARS OF WAR 2 Click here to watch the video!



Blast the Locust riders and the Reavers are easier to deal with

PARTY OF FIVE

Why you'll all be playing Horde this Christmas

"Horde is intense, brilliant and very, very hard"

There's nothing that says 'festive' more than chainsawing a Locust to tiny, bloody pieces, but that's not the only reason that many, many Xbox 360 owners will find themselves addicted to Horde, arguably the finest and most addictive of Gears 2's new online modes. It's Epic's way of compensating for the lack of a four-player co-operative campaign mode – indeed, it supports a fifth human player, too - and it's pulse-quickeningly intense, breath-snatchingly brilliant, and very, very hard indeed. In many ways, it's as basic as they come – merely offering waves of Locust enemies, gradually increasing in size and number – but it soon reveals itself to be a game of remarkable tactical depth. Because it's so tough, you'll need to rely on all your team-mates to get through each wave – players will take different positions on the map and attempt to hold their ground while yelling warnings to others. High positions offer the opportunity to thin numbers out from a distance with sniper rifles and other long-range weaponry, while also providing a vantage point to gauge enemy locations and movement. Stay on the ground, and you might be able to pick up useful Locust weapons to use against your foes, while you can execute any seriously wounded enemies with a swift melee attack. There's a very definite difficulty hump as you reach each tenth wave – after that enemies get stronger, withstanding more attacks, but they won't increase in number. But either way, reaching that fiftieth wave is going to take some doing, even on Casual difficulty. At the time of writing no-one at Epic has finished the mode – we're sure some talented gamer will manage it on Insane difficulty one day, but it's going to take some serious hardcore skills to get to that stage.



might think – while we're allowed to say that the COG armies are fighting back against the Locust as they attempt to protect the last remaining human stronghold of Jacinto, the resolution – as with the outcome of the Dom/Maria subplot – will be predicted by very few players indeed. It's testament to writer Josh Ortega that the deeper story doesn't feel too incongruous – while Dom's initial pining for his missing wife seems a little out of place and character for a man who barely mentioned her in >



Fallen enemies can be used as temporary meat shields



Well-timed shots into explosive barrels can be more effective than bursts of Lancer fire directly at your enemies

the first iteration, the game soon settles into a nice rhythm, integrating short sections of narrative into the stages pretty effectively and seamlessly. Put it this way: you'll rarely have chance to put down the pad for more than a minute at a time.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

When the game begins, you're once again taking control of Delta Squad, attempting to take the fight to the Locust, who are sinking entire cities (and you'll find out fairly soon how that's happening – but we're not telling). If you're new to the game, you can take newcomer Private Benjamin Carmine out on a brief tour of duty which doubles as the tutorial, and immediately after that it's straight into the action. While Gears focused on relatively small scale battles against enemy Locust with the occasional fight against larger beasts, you feel much more part of an epic war this time round.

> "You feel much more part of an epic war this time"

Before Act One is over, you'll have already tackled several flying, tentacled Reavers and taken down some Brumaks along the way. Those bemoaning the latter's omission from the original (particularly once it was reinstated in the PC version) will no doubt be delighted that you won't just get to battle one, but several - and you'll even get to ride into battle atop a Brumak during the latter stages.

Indeed, Gears 2 is definitely more of a creature feature than the original, introducing several new enemy types to ramp up the variety. Among the most memorable are the Tickers – small, skittery suicide bombers, who'll scuttle up towards Delta Squad and detonate the explosives on their backs. One early highlight



New team member Tai is a huge, powerful tattooed Maori



The blood and gore is messier than ever before – those chainsaw kills are even more gleefully nasty

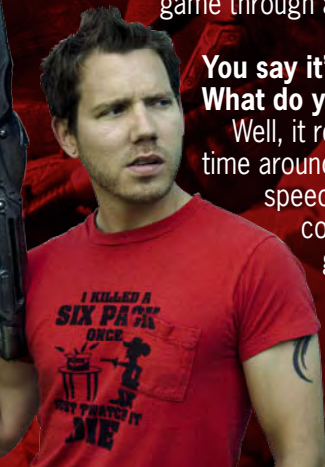
INTERVIEW

SQUAD LEADER

Having helmed the first Gears, Epic Games' Design Director Cliff Bleszinski has been in charge of Delta Squad for several years now. We caught up with him recently to ask him about the changes facing Marcus Fenix and co, and his thoughts about videogaming in general

The original Gears felt very streamlined. Given the size of the budget and the increased number of people working on the game, has it been difficult to stop it getting bloated?

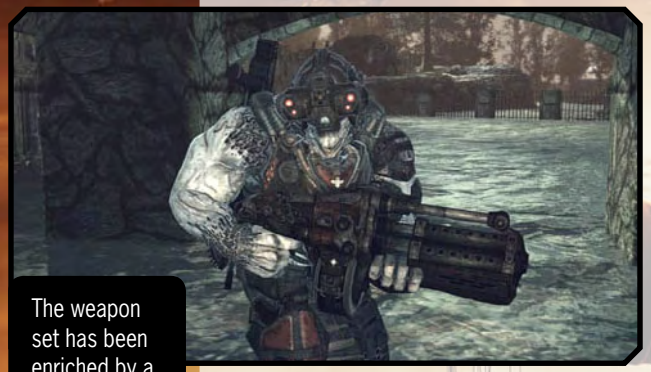
Oh, like featureitis, things like that? I think it's just a matter of keeping focused – it's not like we at Epic have quadrupled our team size. We've probably increased by 33 to 45 percent over the last couple of years, and of course not all those people were working on Gears, some were working on Unreal Tournament 3 and whatnot. So we've grown a bit but not that significantly, and we kind of kept our wits about us regarding the kind of game we were going to make. And not wanting to feature creep, you know. Yes, we have a party system, we have great new executions, we have Horde and things like that, but it's still Gears – a tactical, cover-based action game through and through.



You say it's "epic yet intimate". What do you mean by that?

Well, it really feels like a war this time around - with the chairman's speech, seeing the armoured columns getting ready to go into Landown, and drill down and take on the Locust, things like that. But it's also very much a personal story. I mean, I

> Gears of War 2 continued



The weapon set has been enriched by a few new additions

sees you tackling a large group of these in a darkened tunnel, illuminated only by the lights on the transport rig behind you, and that effectively represents the difference between Gears 2 and the original – it's not afraid to really mix things up, and while not everything comes off – there's a short vehicle section which is pretty woeful – it's a small price to pay for the effort Epic has expended in ensuring the action remains constantly varied.

WEIRD SCIENCE

There's a level which gives a whole new meaning to the phrase 'belly of the beast', while one extraordinary section has you creeping around a disused scientific facility, ratcheting up the tension to almost unbearable levels before an explosion of extended, astoundingly intense violence provides the eventual release. We fully expect that some players will be talking about such moments for years to come. There may be a slight dip in Act IV – though the slower pace is very deliberate, given that one whole stage is dedicated to a significant plot development – but Bleszinski and co turn all the dials to 11 for the climax, with one blistering on-rails sequence which plays homage to Return of the Jedi, but provides more excitement than Lucas's similar set piece ever did. Which is a little ironic given that Gears 2 feels like Epic's Empire Strikes Back – a darker, more complex and interesting game than the first – which offers a few moments of levity, but feels like a more mature and accomplished work throughout.

That's not to say that it's

"Some players will be talking about the highlights for years to come"



One of four melee attacks can be performed when you're standing over a floored enemy. Punching is the least gory, but arguably the most satisfying

> Interview continued

love big sci-fi experiences, but I'm also a big softie deep down – I love movies like Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – to have Dom looking at this picture [of him and wife Maria] and holding it up, to see a big tough guy like that have these little cracks in his personality I think adds a little humanity that you don't see a lot of in a sci-fi shooter. And that's something that we're really going for this time around - yeah it's a little risky, but I think it's pretty damn compelling

Why is Dom the focus of this particular story and not Marcus?

Dom was very much chosen for this and that was intentional because when you create a videogame like this and you have a primary character, it's usually better to err on the side of caution for your primary guy in regards to the amount of personality he has. There's a reason why Gordon Freeman doesn't say anything ever, there's a reason why Master Chief doesn't say very much, there's a reason why Marcus isn't a chatty kind of guy – it's because the majority of players are projecting themselves onto this character. And the fact that Dom is the second player and he's along with Marcus - we can start playing with his emotions a little bit more, and leverage that, and that's definitely by design.

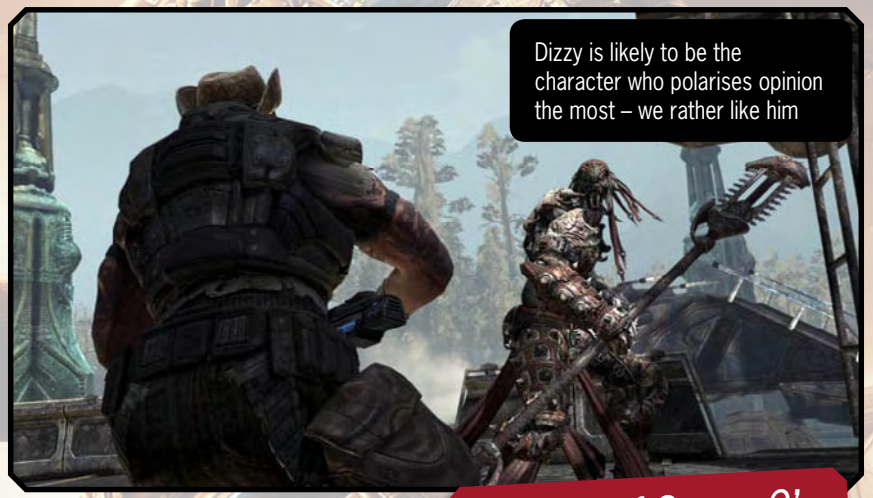
Is it fair to say the game has a more sombre tone to it than last time round?

Well, it's definitely darker. Sombre is not a word that's been used a lot but it's an adequate way to describe it. Any time you create a world like this, of course there are moments of levity and things like that – that's what the Cole Train is for, and whatnot. But you have to take some things seriously. If we don't take this world seriously, or the fact that humanity and this planet is struggling to survive – this man's lost his wife, his kids are dead, and everyone's lost something since the Locust have attacked, and this world has been at war for multiple

GEARS OF WAR 2

> Gears of War 2 continued

unafraid to go old-school on occasion though – indeed, some of Gears 2's finest moments are where it most closely apes the frenetic, small-scale conflicts of the original, pitting your two or four-man team against small but significant groups of Locust. The only differences here are in the enemies you'll face and the weapons you'll use – a few more of each makes for some surprising tactical changes. The huge but slow Maulers carry shields and wield



Dizzy is likely to be the character who polarises opinion the most – we rather like him



If you're playing through again, Marcus can silence radio instructions with the press of a button. Just one of many neat touches to speed things along

"Some of Gears 2's finest moments are where it apes the small-scale conflicts of the original"

maces that almost take you down in one hit, though once down, you'll be able to pick up the former for your own protection, with your free hand wielding whichever pistol you have equipped.

The Grinders (rather appropriately) yell "GRIND" shortly before unleashing a volley of shots from the chaingun-like Mulcher, which can also be picked up –

> Interview continued

generations... I think that's one of the problems with videogame movies, is that they don't take their videogame world very seriously. It's like "wink wink, hey, it's a videogame, whatever", and that's a shame. But it is sombre, and it's a little sad in parts.

Would you say part of that is related to real world issues?

I think any good sci-fi extrapolates from real world themes – moments in history or current events, that sort of thing, and there's a lot of that in Gears, but, I don't like throwing it in people's faces – I think if they get it out of the game, good, but if they don't, that's okay, I don't want it to get in the way, I don't want whatever my political agenda is to be sticking in people's faces or anything like that. It just feels like something's preaching, or like propaganda. I think any political angle we use in Gears is in the background. Real world metaphors are very much secondary – you know, war over an energy source, I mean, it's not a very thinly-veiled metaphor. An enemy that uses more technology from the underground, that's kind of like the Vietcong, right? So it's there, but it's secondary to the chainsaws that people always notice first.

You've mentioned recently the need to simplify game controls a little more – is that something you'd like to tackle with the Gears franchise, or are you thinking more of other games?

Well, when I was talking about simplifying controls I was talking about console controllers featuring fewer buttons – we could honestly maybe do Gears with one less button, possibly two. I just believe that context-sensitivity is an incredibly important way of working round things in the game, and I think future consoles will have more features like cameras that are built in, and microphones, certain motion sensors and things like that can supplement the ever-growing amount of buttons you get on controllers. I just don't always think you need every single button



> Gears of War 2 continued

albeit with difficulty – by Marcus. It can be fired from the hip or hoisted up onto cover, with walls and sandbags taking the weight while you turn Locust enemies into bloody meat paste. Mortars offer the opportunity to take out larger enemies much quicker – slam it into the ground and hold down the trigger button until your shot reaches the required distance – while poison grenades offer distraction and destruction.

You'll now be able to crawl when downed, with a short window of opportunity to move back into cover and get revived by your partner – though you need to be wary that the Locust can do this, too. To prevent that from happening, you can choose from one of four melee attacks – executed with the face buttons - to finish them off as they struggle to reach safety, or you can grab them to use as a temporary meat shield.

Gears 2 is incredibly cinematic even when you're fully in control





MEAN FLAG

The differences in combat are most keenly felt in the multiplayer modes – again, Epic has outdone itself here, providing a host of new game types without compromising on quality. The idea of taking a Locust hostage has been explored in Submission (originally titled Meat Flag before Microsoft intervened) which is essentially a Capture the Flag variant where the flag happens to be a COG soldier or a Locust.

It's a game which gets rather chaotic, as dragging your opponent slows you down immensely, forcing team-mates to provide protection – or simply a temporary barrier - as you attempt the journey back



A few sections are essentially on rails, but they're every bit as enjoyable as the familiar 'stop and pop' sequences

"Epic has outdone itself in multiplayer, with a host of new game modes"

> Interview continued

to be used and every finger doesn't need to be active. I think in some ways that was one of the issues with accessibility of PC games back in the day. And that if your game came with a placard that showed what every single button did, then you weren't making a game at that point, you were making a sim - something for the hardcore which ultimately limits your audience.

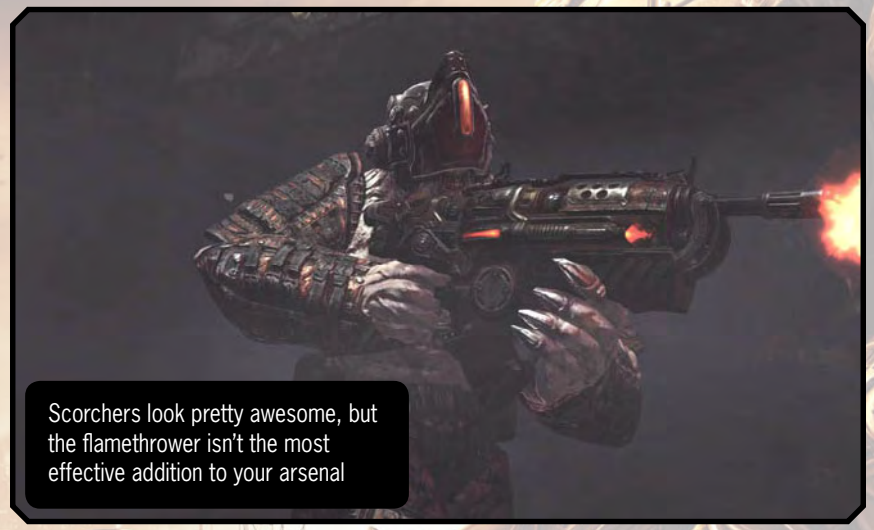
With that in mind, with the new Casual difficulty in this game, did you consider trying to implement an even simpler control scheme?

Well, I'll be honest – when you play Casual, you can probably get by without taking much cover. Because it's that easy. It's only when you get into Normal, and of course Hardcore and Insane that cover becomes very necessary...

So there are a lot of buttons you wouldn't necessarily need to use?

I think it just kind of cascades out of it with Casual, the way you can just run up to enemies and kill them, and just meander through the game, stumbling through it, and probably not needing to use cover or the roadie run - and that just naturally simplifies the game. Your average newbie gamer has a tough enough time with two sticks as it is.

> Gears of War 2 continued



Scorchers look pretty awesome, but the flamethrower isn't the most effective addition to your arsenal

to base. There's a brand new King of the Hill mode, too – while Wingman is a xenophobe's dream, as you're joined by a clone, with the objective simply being to kill whoever doesn't look like you. We've spoken about the superb Horde mode already – suffice to say the increasingly large waves of Locust make for some thrillingly intense backs-to-the-wall moments for your five-man team.

Meanwhile, Guardian offers a slight tweak to Assassination from the first game, where enemies respawn until the team leader is killed. There are nine maps to choose from – some of which employ environmental effects to spice things up – and revamps of five arenas from the original available as a free download to those who buy the game brand new. A better party system and numerous options to customise your experience are just the icing on the cake.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

So: bigger? Yes. Better? Definitely. More badass? Absolutely. Gears 2 offers just about everything you could possibly want from a sequel – and provides a whole lot of stuff you almost certainly weren't expecting. Game of the Year? It's too early to call – but based on our experiences, it's going to be nestling near the top of most critics' top tens come December 31st. ●



Venture into the wilds at night, and you're asking for trouble.

"Gears 2 offers just about everything you could want from a sequel"



The Cole Train returns with his special brand of OTT humour – indeed, he and Baird get the funniest exchange of the entire game

GEARS OF WAR 2

"The pacing is immaculate – Gears' mix of story and gameplay is spot on"

FENIX DOWN

Does a darker tone suit Gears?

While the original Gears was hardly all candy canes and puppy dogs it never felt quite as bleak as end-of-the-world sci-fi often can. That's because it was a pretty gung-ho actioner, with the script only infrequently touching on the human cost of war. Meanwhile, characters like the Cole Train brought significant levity to the script with plenty of whooping and hollering, his rapid-fire trash-talking providing plenty of humour throughout proceedings.

It's fair to say that Gears 2 is a very different beast in that respect. That's not to say that it doesn't have lighter moments – many gamers will be pleased to hear that Cole returns and is in fine (bellowing) voice as ever – but the general tone is darker and more emotional. That's not to say that you'll be shedding any tears – that may be what Epic hopes, but we'd be surprised if certain events give you any more than a slight lump in your throat. But the story is definitely successful in making you think about the wider consequences of the war against the Locust.

In our extensive preview in this special issue, we talk of how Gears feels very much like an Empire Strikes Back moment for the franchise – it's more complex, and deals with more adult themes than its predecessor, and in a mature fashion to boot. But it's important to note that the time spent on the relationship between Dominic Santiago and his wife Maria is roughly equivalent to the space given to the Han/Leia subplot in Empire. Which is to say that, while it's a key ingredient in the narrative, it hardly dominates the game like some feared it might.

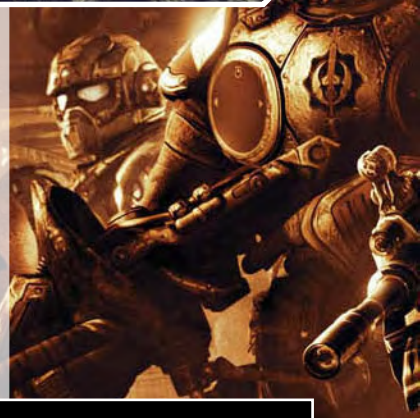
Much more than the first game, the humour feels like a release – a tension-reliever meant to relax the player. It's telling that most of these sections come either just after or prior to a particularly intense battle or set-piece, and increasingly it seems like Delta Squad's own way of dealing with the situation. Rather than jarring against the serious themes the game explores, it actually complements them – and the script's light sprinkling of humour ensures it never feels crass or insensitive. Indeed, one moment deftly references an oft-criticised fault with the first game in such an effective manner that it genuinely made us laugh out loud.

Yet those concerned that the plot might get in the way should stop worrying – it's not a replacement for the intense third-person shooter gameplay, merely a device that both drives the action and encourages you to keep playing. And the pacing is just about immaculate – it's not until you play other games that you realise just how spot-on Gears' mix of story and gameplay is. It blends short, sharp shocks of action with sections that force you to adopt a slower, more measured approach to combat. Vehicle sequences rub shoulders with traditional stop-and-pop battles. Open areas follow tight, enclosed spaces. And just when you think it's settled into a rhythm, you'll be handed a story revelation, a boss battle, even a more puzzle-based stage, and all bets are off once more.



Chainsaw fights - well, you would, wouldn't you?

We won't reveal just yet whether Gears 2 has a happy ending, but we're convinced that it suits its darker clothes just fine. And with plenty of sobering background story provided by collectable COG tags, diary entries and other human detritus worth scouting out in the nooks and crannies of each level, it's all the motivation you need to really kick some Locust ass. ○



GEARS OF WAR 2

EXCLUSIVE DESKTOPS

Click on an icon to save the image to your PC for use as a desktop background.

INTERVIEW

DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE

Epic's president talks tech, Gears, and looks to the company's future

President of Epic Games, Dr. Mike Capps, flew into London recently to talk about Gears of War 2. We caught up with him for a lengthy chat about what it's like to create one of the biggest gaming blockbusters of the year...

Gears 1 was always set up to be a big hit – it was intended to be the game equivalent of a Hollywood blockbuster from day one. Even with that in mind, were you surprised at just how successful it was?

Oh yeah, I mean we were scared to death. We were overhyped really, coming into 2006. We were really scared everyone would get it and say "oh, you know, it doesn't also give me sliced bread and give me great gas mileage, f**k this", so yeah, we were really glad that everyone liked it, and that it



Dr. Mike Capps is one of the figureheads of the current-gen technological revolution



Gears 2 takes 'destroyed beauty' to new levels, with vastly improved lighting and much more environmental detail

> Gears of War 2 continued

stood up to the hype.

What exactly do you think made gamers respond to it in such a positive way?

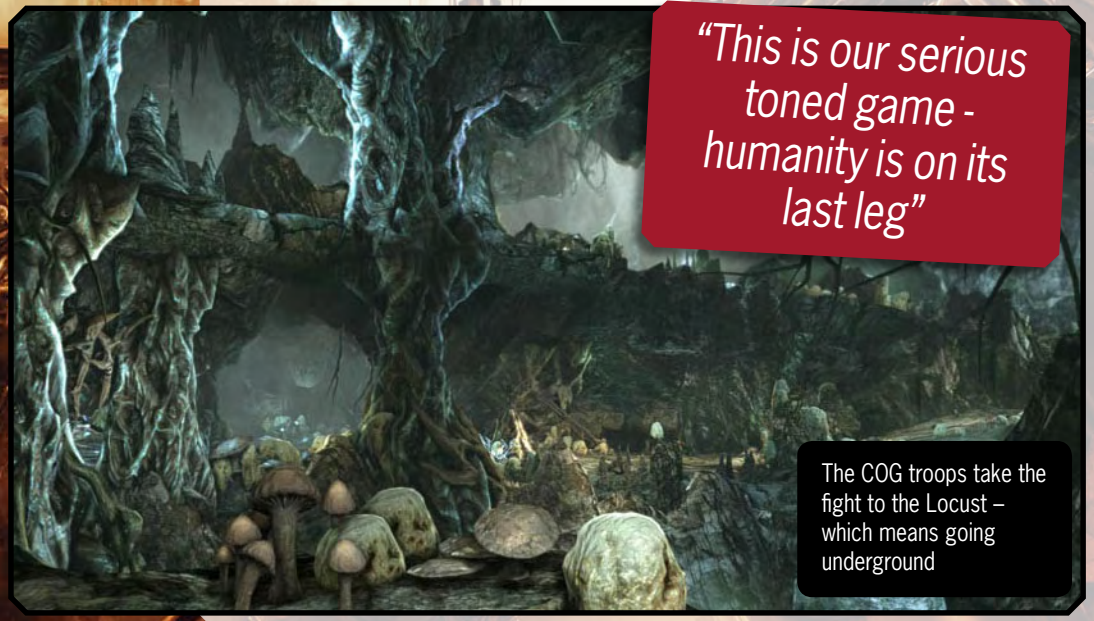
Well, visuals are a very big part of picking a game up for the first time. I feel like we set the bar for next-generation gaming. That's what everybody wanted their 360 and their PlayStation to do, and so that got a lot of focus. And then we just had a really cool, intimate experience, with good pacing. We had some good breaks in the middle, and really high action scenes and moments giving you a chance to rest. It's like an action movie – if you get the pacing right, then it's a lot of fun.

Were you ever concerned about the level of violence in the game? And did you consider that the game could be criticised for that?

Oh, all the time, yeah. Microsoft, as you can imagine, had some concerns about our game because we were setting the standard for Mature gaming at the time. So it was a little scary, but we decided to make the game we wanted to make and play - and we figured it's made for 18 and up, parents should know better than to buy Gears for their six-year-old kid for Christmas, and we just hope the rating system works. There's been some backlash, there are some stores we can't sell it in, and folks who don't like our advertising campaigns and won't run them, but overall I think I'd rather have the game that's cooler.

The first game was a little more gung-ho in terms of its story, while the second has a bit more of a sombre tone – is that a reaction to the changing views of war in the interim?

Hmm, yeah. I mean, the cowboy American stereotype is not particularly popular worldwide, you know. And this is our serious toned game - humanity is on its last leg, right? I mean, we're barely surviving. We're worried about gathering enough food to keep people alive, it's not really a "woo-hoo!" game. But that said, we try to mix it up with some funny [moments], and some good old-fashioned action.



"This is our serious toned game - humanity is on its last leg"

The COG troops take the fight to the Locust – which means going underground



MIKE CAPPS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW Watch the full interview here on the page. Enjoy!

> Gears of War 2 continued

Has it been difficult to balance the human aspect of the game – as Dom searches for his missing wife – with the visceral nature of the action? Was it a risk that one could compromise the other?

Yeah, I mean we've always been worried - by telling what is, in essence, boiling it down, a love story as well as a story of hope and redemption - that it could take away from the action. So we were very careful to make sure that our cinematics [fit] – Dom doesn't sit there and cry like a little girl, he hits a car and gets mad when he's upset about not being able to find his wife. These are tough soldiers in the middle of the worst war ever who are dealing with human emotions.

The Unreal Engine tech has advanced significantly in the years between the first Gears and its sequel – has that been the key to making a game that's very definitely Gears 2.0 and not just Gears 1.5?

Oh, that's a great question. Sure, technology is a big part of Gears 2 being separated from Gears 1. It's the same box, there's only so much we can do from a technology perspective. We can make more optimal use of the graphics hardware and the CPUs, but at the end of the day, it's about artistry – it's about knowing the platform well, and knowing what we can get away with, and being smarter about using it. But where we separate Gears 2 is the features.

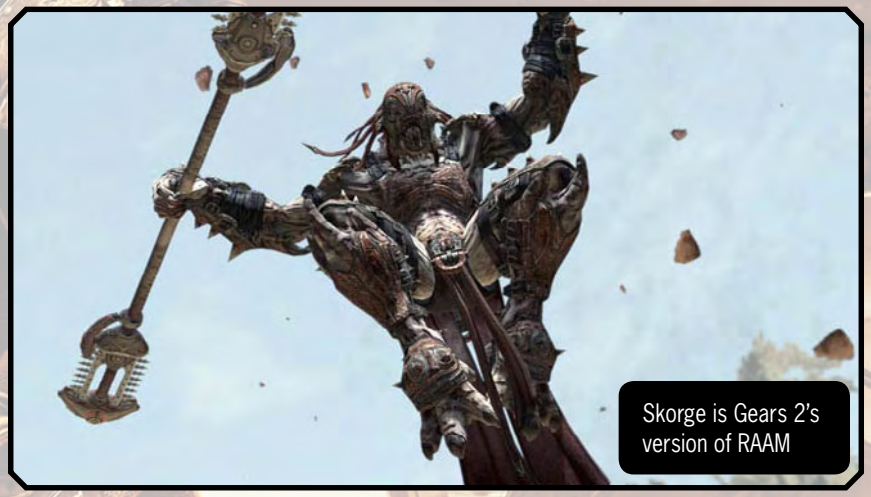
Sure, it looks better, but honestly people remember Gears looking so good that when we show them Gears 2 they remember it looking better than it really did. You have this classic memory of "Gears of War was so much better than everybody else", and so for this one, it's about the new game modes, it's about the thicker story – I think that's what separates Gears 2 from the original.

While the first game garnered much critical acclaim, as with any game, there were criticisms. Which ones in particular have you tried to respond to most with Gears 2?

Good question. For everybody who said they loved Gears, there was someone who said they had a problem with it. I think the most heard complaint we had about Gears 1 was the lack of a driving story. We had a simple story, it's a nice, simple plot arc, but there's not a lot of character depth in the first one, and you need something to carry you through lots of ripping the

>

"Dom doesn't cry like a little girl – he hits a car and gets angry when he's upset"



Skorge is Gears 2's version of RAAM



Ironically, while the tone of the game is darker, the graphics aren't nearly as gloomy thanks to improved lighting

> Gears of War 2 continued

Locust horde up for hours on end. So that's an area we really wanted to step up, and I think the team really impressed me there. Other areas... the party system was something everyone wanted – Halo did such a great job with the party system, and we said "we can take that, we can make it better, and we can do our own thing with it", and I think we have.

When we spoke to Cliff last month, he talked about how Epic tried to avoid 'feature creep' – were there any aspects of the game which had to be dropped for that reason?

Yeah, I mean we can't just add fifteen new weapons and keep all the old ones, because there's a balance there and you don't want to overwhelm people with too much. So yeah, we tried to delete things out – there are monsters that were very popular in Gears 1 that don't show up at all in Gears 2 – quite purposely, because we need to give it a break, and put something new in there instead.

So yeah, of course, every time we start we have crazy ideas of all the things we want to do, and things have been cut. I don't think we've got any good stories about great things that we cut, because we kept all the great stuff! It's the junk that we cut that you don't want to hear about.

Moving onto the multiplayer modes, how did the idea for Horde come about? And which is the multiplayer mode of choice in the Epic offices?

Well, it's sort of a two-parter there because Horde is definitely the mode of choice in the Epic office. We like Guardian, we like Wingman – I mean, we play them all, because we need to test them all, but Horde just catches you. What I love about it is that it's tactical. More than any other mode. You've got five guys playing together, and one goes down and he's going "there's a Boomer coming up the steps, watch out!" and "Flamer! Flamer!" You're like a military squad fighting against crazy odds, and that's so funny. You know, we've shipped game modes similar [to Horde].

"We don't have good stories about what we cut, because we kept the great stuff!"



The Locust enemies are more varied than before – some have protective armour, making headshots tricky

Unreal Tournament had one called Invasion, which had the old Unreal baddies coming at you wave after wave, so we've done something similar before. But you get to see all the monsters that you don't normally get to see in Gears unless you play through the whole darn thing. I don't know – it just really resonated. First time we tried it, we loved it, and then the question was how do we make it last? How do we make you want to play it again, and get to the highest wave you can, and the next day do it again? And I think we hit that.

The first game was hugely popular online, but soon developed a balance problem with the grenade-tagging, while the game as it is now seems to favour the shotgun. Will you be keeping a watchful eye on the online game and respond to any problems which may occur?



Gears' wintry atmosphere makes for some oddly beautiful scenes

Oh God, yeah. We play constantly online, making sure there's no exploits, anything that takes



Dizzy is a new character introduced during the opening Act. His cowboy hat makes him instantly recognisable in multiplayer!

> Gears of War 2 continued

the fun out, right? Because we want people playing online until we make a next game. So yeah, we solved the roll and shotgun problem – well, not really a problem, it just became a golden tactic that everyone was using, and that's no fun if everyone's using the same thing, so we've added stopping power in, so if someone comes in charging with a shotgun, you just put a few bullets into them, that slows them down real quick.

So yeah, we'll absolutely be online watching. Epic's had a reputation for years of patching and upgrading, and giving away downloadable content – whatever we have to do to make sure our guys online are happy.

Gears has a new, easier difficulty level for beginners, and the option to filter the blood and language, to make it accessible to more people. Do you think it can genuinely break out from its hardcore roots and become a game for casual gamers to truly enjoy?

"We'll do whatever we have to, to make sure online players are happy"

I'd love to think that Gears would be "the game anyone can play". Sure, we start with a hardcore audience, and I think we expand from it. For example, a hardcore player plays co-op with his girlfriend or their friends, who aren't maybe the kind who play every shooter that comes out, but hopefully they'll get into it. They'll find it easy to play, exciting, and then they want to play it through – maybe buy a copy even! – and then we'll spread out to their friends and all that.

Did you consider bringing out a version of the game which contains no blood or bad language, and selling it to a younger audience?

A teen version of Gears – how would you do that? The story's too mature to be a teen story, really. And there are markets like Japan and Germany who have pretty strict rules on that and we just decided to skip it. We'd rather make the game we want to make, and hopefully, gamers are going to like it again. The turning off the gibs, and turning off the bad language is really for hardcore gamers whose kids are in the room.

That's what it's for, it's not because we want to create a Teen experience, because you're using chainsaws man! It's not that [type of] game.

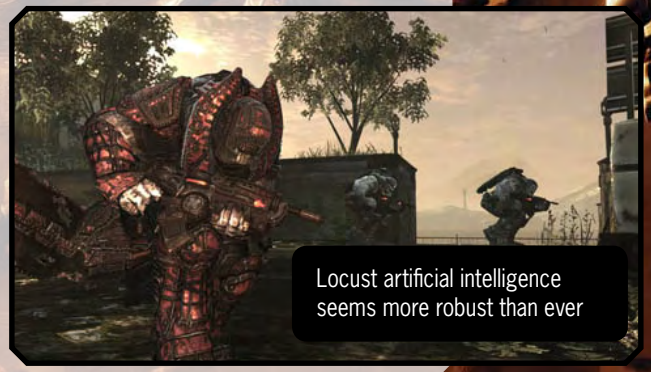
Where do you see the franchise going next? Can we expect a Gears 3 in two years' time, or is it time to look at a new direction for the series?

I think just as we said after Gears 1, we'll see if people like it, we'll see if we sell any, and we'll make a decision then. There was a lot of interest for more Gears, and it was awesome, and so we jumped on it, and I think we made a better game. So we'll see what folks say.

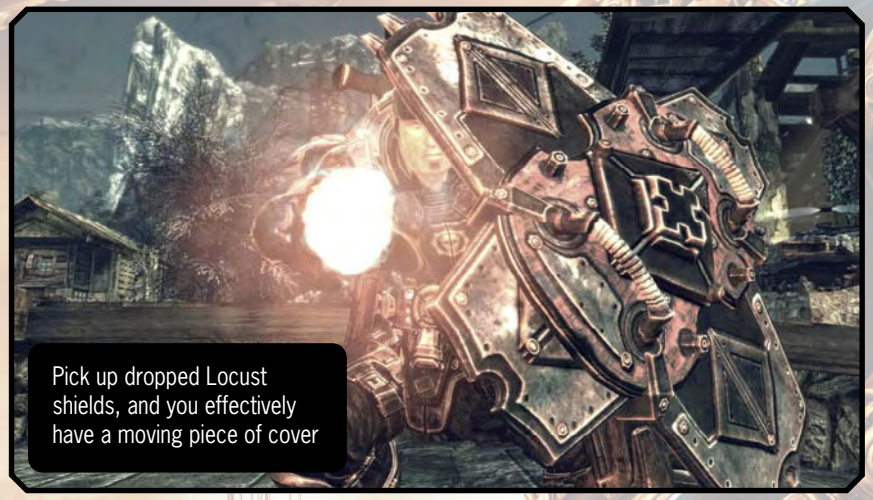
Will Gears remain an Xbox exclusive series?

Well , we don't have any plans for another game, so it's hard to answer that one. Let's just say that as a developer being able to focus just on the Xbox has been

>



Locust artificial intelligence seems more robust than ever



Pick up dropped Locust shields, and you effectively have a moving piece of cover



The opening intro set in an abandoned hospital is an effective scene-setter, but things get much more intense later on

> Gears of War 2 continued

great, because we can take that one machine and just make it sing. And of course Microsoft was pretty darn good to us – we got a lot of attention with the first Gears, and we're getting it again this time. No compromise there.

Can you tell us what downloadable content there will be for Gears 2?

We've only announced the first one, which is the five maps – the [free] Flashback pack which you get if you buy retail, so you'll have those on day one. But yep, can't say anything yet. More good stuff!

What else is Epic working on currently? Can we expect more from Unreal in the near future? How about new IP?

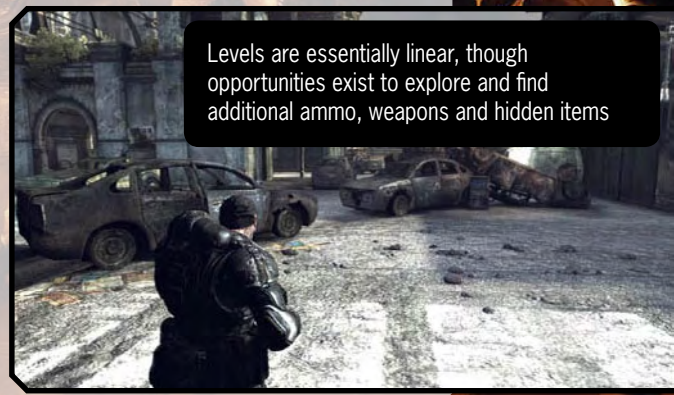
Well, we're working on next-gen engines, and we're thinking about next-gen platforms and Unreal Engine 4 – we've been on that for a year or two now. We're not quite sure when next platforms are coming but we all know they are,

"Making a jaded reviewer cry in one of our cinematics was gorgeous!"

right? So, we've got to be ready for that. We'll be out when the consoles are out, and we'll see when that is – 2012 or 2013 – I hope it's a long time. So that team's working on tech, but we're also working on Unreal Tournament – coming up with stuff for those guys, we're doing the big Make Something Unreal contest – a million-dollar contest for mods, and so we've got a team focusing on cool stuff for Unreal now. Because like I said, we make cool stuff available [for our games] long after we ship them.

Finally, what one single aspect of the game are you most proud of? Is there anything you've achieved that you previously didn't think possible?

Making a jaded reviewer cry in one of our cinematics was gorgeous! You know, I love to get great reviews, and all that but my fiancée played the game and she was really impressed with the story. And that doesn't happen. Girls don't play an action game like Gears and go "wow!" or whatever else. And making a jaded reviewer tear up a little bit was quite something. I mean obviously not you guys [UK journalists] but you know us US guys, we cry all the time! So that's been really gratifying – to do something more than anyone was expecting with a hard-M [Mature] shooter. ●



Levels are essentially linear, though opportunities exist to explore and find additional ammo, weapons and hidden items

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