GameOn MAG

LEFT 4 DEAD 2 PREVIEWED

GameOn Visits E3
Read all about the previews, free merchandise and sneek peeks

Lego taking over the world?
Read all about how the Lego franchise seems to have conquered the consoles

Captions, Crosswords & Cut-outs
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Fallout 3: Broken Steel
New downloadable expansion for Fallout 3 reviewed

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Project Director
**Steve Greenfield
(Rasher)**

Chief Editor
**Chris West
(Kaostic)**

Support Editor
**Steve Dawson
(djdawsonuk)**

Graphics
**Simon Bonds
(Si^)**

**Bob Hall
(Bobster)**

**Chris West
(Kaostic)**

Journalists
**Chris Wakefield
(evilgiraffeman)**

**Matt Studd
(Beanz)**

**Sarah Collings
(angelfromabove)**

**Simon Bonds
(Si^)**

**Pete O'Brien
(POBMaestro)**

**Neil Hetherington
(Wedgeh)**

**Kevin Malone
(Dead Alive)**

**James Bralant
(TheGingerKid)**

**Stuart Gunn
(Gunn)**

Welcome to Issue 12 of the GameOn Magazine.

This month, GameOn were lucky enough to recieve an invite to one of gaming's biggest events on the calendar, E3. We have exclusive previews of Left 4 Dead 2, Modern Warfare 2 and many others.

Our thanks go to the dedicated team that headed out to Los Angeles to cover the event. Chris Wakefield, who spent most of his time with a biro firmly attached to his notebook. Steve Greenfield for reminding us that Left 4 Dead 2 was on display, and Stuart Gunn for picking up the hardware on show.

On E3 exclusives, you will notice there is no comments button, instead you will see this:

Click this to view comments.

## THE EDITOR

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES

Plants vs. Zombies - the latest in a long line of successful games from PopCap - is a curious game that succeeded in catching my eye immediately. I would in fact be surprised if somebody didn't have a raised eyebrow upon the sight of singing sunflowers, peashooters and zombies with traffic cones on their heads.

It might all sound silly, and in truth it is, but that is what makes this game stand out from the crowd. Whereas most casual games won't appeal to the average mouse-twitching gamer, I cordially invite everyone to take a time-out and read about an accessible and truly fun game. The basic principle of Plants vs. Zombies - PvZ for short - primarily involves planting different types of flora to defend your house against waves of

zombies, mildly akin to a tower defence game. Plants are "bought" using suns, a resource which periodically falls from the sky during the day, or it can be generated by planting sunflowers. During night time sieges you will need to rely on cheaper but less effective nocturnal mushrooms, resulting in a slightly different play style. The game area is comprised of up to six rows with Zombies moving in straight lanes, meaning you
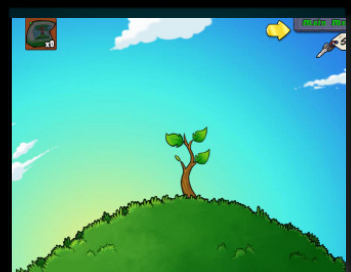
SCREENSHOTS

need to plan ahead and have a type of plant which can effectively combat each type of zombie. Both plant and zombie come in wonderfully surplus varieties. A great amount of imagination has been shown by developers PopCap, both visually and in function. In total there are 40 plants and 26 zombie types to keep you thinking dynamically. Each has an amusing description and I had a keen enthusiasm to see what new plants I would be able to play with, how I could make my setting-up process more efficient and what sort of brain obsessed zombie would come knocking on my door next. Highlights include the "Thriller" zombie who dances his way across your lawn dressed in red leather, though I did take an instant liking to the Potato Mine, a defensive plant who takes a while to pop up out of the ground - as he is "too busy thinking about his investment strategy" - who on contact with an unfortunate zombie obliterates them with potato.

Graphically PvZ could fit in the era when 1994 classic Beneath a Steel Sky was cutting edge. However, the caricature style, slick animation and vivid colours combine to form a cute and effectual graphical style. The sound effects are also basic but again effective, with the plants and zombies promoting quirky characteristics via the use of sound. There isn't enough variation in the music though, so the already catchy tunes become repetitive and eventually annoying. Above all that, PvZ boasts an excellent selection of ways to play. To begin with there is a fifty-level adventure mode which superbly

gets you into the swing of things, even if you have no prior experience of defending your house from zombies with plants. The adventure is split into five areas, ranging from your basic front lawn to a pool in the back garden. There are also twenty mini-games to experience, ranging from bowling with wall-nuts to

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PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES

Harvest Moon style, though in a far more basic fashion. The cash you require to upgrade your plants and bring your Zen garden to life is often dropped by zombies, or it can be earned by conquering a level in each of the game modes, and is all spent in Crazy Dave's somewhat ominous looking car-boot sale. This may sound all well and good, however the majority of the aforementioned game modes are not unlocked until you have completed all fifty of the adventure levels, yet sadly I found my interest waning by the 31st level.

PopCap spin-offs Beghouled and even Beghouled Twist. There is also a Survival mode: twenty long levels featuring hordes of zombies that soon, and rather sadly, felt like a chore to complete. Further to this there are two sets of puzzles to complete, with ten levels to progress through in each.

One is a dull vase breaking exercise, while the other sees you deploying zombies against carefully placed plants, albeit cardboard cut-outs of plants to avoid hurting the real thing. Alternatively, if you fancy some time-out from hordes of hungry zombies, there is a Zen Garden to dip in and out of. In this garden you can buy, water and grow plants

Each level takes around 5-10mins to complete and these adventure levels essentially involve the same routine of planting similar, if not the same defence of plants, with a little variation in plants and zombies not enough to shatter the layer of boredom which inevitably sets in. One major contributing factor to this problem was the game difficulty. Rarely did a zombie manage to get through the first line of my intricate plant set-up and eat my brains. Never getting close to losing meant the challenge

factor was gone and I just couldn't play for more than an ironic 90 minutes in one sitting. PvZ is touted as a casual game which may explain the easier ride, however PvZ is more than a casual game - it's a cute action adventure strategy game, and as such it borders on being addictive fun. I just believe that if the various mini-games and puzzles were implanted in-between the adventure levels more than they were, then the game would feel as varied as it actually is.

Fortunately I soon got through this tedious phase and completed the adventure mode, which ended in a rather entertaining final boss fight. The brilliant ending credits song "Zombies on your Lawn" which follows, easily rivals the "I'm Still Alive" song from Portal for pure hilarity. The fifty-level adventure mode is then reset and made a littler harder, but still not enough to give me the willpower to battle on past the third level. Some of the mini-games are hard enough to result in a tasty snack for team zombie, yet I found myself unusually angered by this, presumably because I wasn't used to losing.

I think it's clear that a lot of love and care has been put into PvZ by developers PopCap. The gameplay is accessible by anyone and is, for the most part, a lot fun to play. There are moments when the same planting routine becomes a laborious process, with the recurring music and generally low difficulty not helping. That all said, PvZ is definitely

a worthwhile purchase because of the amount of fun which can be extracted from a budget game price. A continuous stream of new plant and zombie types, a plethora of game modes, relaxed humour and "jump-in" mentality all mounts up to a game which could keep you hooked for weeks. Currently available on Steam for £6.99, its time to get green fingered for the sake of plant-kind.

REVIEWER: **PETE O'BRIEN**	PLAYABILITY: **8**
GAME: **PLANTS VS ZOMBIES**	REPLAYABILITY: **8**
PLATFORM: **PC**	SOUND: **7**
DEVELOPER: **POPCAP GAMES**	GRAPHICS: **6**
PUBLISHER: **POPCAP GAMES**	
RELEASED: **MAY 5, 2009**	OVERALL: **8**

OUTRUN ONLINE ARCADE

Remakes are never an easy task to accomplish. The rocky road of taking a beloved classic dear to many hearts in the world and breathing a new lease of life into it is difficult. Especially as it should offer something new whilst remaining close to the original piece of work.

Sumo Digital were brave enough to accept the challenge of creating OutRun Online Arcade for the PSN and Xbox Live Arcade systems and is essentially a home port of the OutRun 2 SP arcade machine. Previous home console and PSP title OutRun Coast 2 Coast featured a veritable feast of additional content and all the courses from OutRun 2, whereas this is what I would consider Tesco Value Outrun; very much what you might expect to get for £7.99/800 MS Points.

The core of the game is your standard point to point arcade racer, pitting you in the driving seat of one of ten officially licensed Ferrari's, ranging from the classic Dino up to the current Ferrari flagship; the Enzo. There are a couple of other modes to increase

longevity such as performing certain tasks like drifting within a certain area on a bend or simply passing cars in the Heart Attack mode, or simply trying to strive for perfection in Time Attack. Finally if you wish to simply cruise through all 15 stages of the game then the final mode is the choice for you as you simply get to do just that.

The main gameplay addition to this over the original OutRun 2 arcade machine is slipstreaming. By tailing opponents or other traffic you gain extra speed, propelling your car past your rivals. Other than this things are more or less as you they were in the original. You are still able to fling your car around corners as if attached to the circuit with super glue, performing power slides at break neck speeds while the physics are bordering on comical as collisions have all the believability of a

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16-bit racer and the sense of speed is incredible which actually adds to the charm of this title. OutRun 2 has always looked great, with its fantastic palette use and wondrous blue skies, and for the most part Sumo have done a cracking job in converting this game over from the arcade box. It certainly doesn't look up to par with modern racing game standards such as Grid or Gran Turismo, but the 720p visuals are sharp, giving the game a real arcade appearance that was missing in the Xbox and PS2 versions.

All 10 Licensed Ferrari's are modelled beautifully and the scenery is crisp and inviting. However the traffic models for the rest of the vehicles on the roads are very basic and box like, though you

don't tend to focus much attention on these cars as they are simply an obstacle to be overtaken. OutRun's soundtrack is one of the most memorable and iconic of its time, and the tunes here live up to the past games. Though while the music side of the game can't really be faulted, I do however

have a couple of gripes with the rest of the audio. Every single Ferrari seems to have the same default engine note and personally I would have liked to have heard the subtle variations in the different V8's/V12's that were used in the actual cars.

Also after selecting which musical track was to caress my ears, I noticed the speech that told me which track I plucked from the selection got cut off as the game was in transition from selection screen to actual game, yet this is a minor mark against the Sumo team.

The multiplayer side to OutRun is what the majority of gamers will be purchasing this classic for. The chance to race against up to 5 other opponents in the various game modes is a delight. Whilst being relatively short over a standard race, just making the slightest mistake could determine if your finishing position is on the podium or in the pits like a loser. Six player races are a fantastic laugh, with numerous set-up options for the host to tweak, such as collisions, catch-up and car class (normal or tuned). There are also online leaderboards for each of the game modes (split into each of the five goals and for tuned and normal cars). It's a decent package overall.

OutRun Online Arcade is definitely worth the price tag once you get used to the drift style arcade racing, and at 800 MS Points/£7.99 it feels like good value for money. Whilst being a very solid title, a few minor flaws and the occasional frame rate drop in heavy traffic drops this short of remake perfection.

REVIEWER: **NEIL HETHERINGTON**
GAME: **OUTRUN: ONLINE ARCADE**
PLATFORM: **PS3**
DEVELOPER: **SUMON DIGITAL**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
RELEASED: **APRIL 16, 2009**

PLAYABILITY: **8**
REPLAYABILITY: **8**
SOUND: **8**
GRAPHICS: **7**

OVERALL: **8**

FALLOUT 3: BROKEN STEEL

The Capital Wasteland, the post-apocalyptic landscape in which Fallout 3 is set was perhaps the game's biggest star. The game's high calibre gameplay is still great and ironically reducing an opponent from evil psychopath to assortment of exploding limbs never gets old.

The main criticism I levelled at the title was its relatively brief main story and sudden end after the last quest. The abrupt climax took away the chance of exploring with your main character. Thankfully, Broken Steel rectifies these issues and allows you to explore this bleak landscape with a few new quests thrown in for good measure. Broken Steel is the third downloadable content pack for the game and continues the main quest beyond the previous ending. Not only does it carry on the story but it offers the ability to increase your character's level beyond the previous

maximum of 20. With considerable time and effort it is now possible to reach level 30, with some fresh perks and abilities along the way. As always a large body of the new content is taken up with some extra quests which pick up after the ending of Fallout 3. If you haven't reached the end of the game yet, then look away now! After the success of the Brotherhood of Steel in recovering Project Purity from the Enclave the player is revived after being unconscious for two weeks.

You are then tasked with assisting the Brotherhood in wiping out the remaining Enclave strongholds across The Capital Wasteland. Essentially there are only three new quests here but don't expect them to be easy. The first involves a seemingly simple operation to gather information from an Enclave communications

SCREENSHOTS
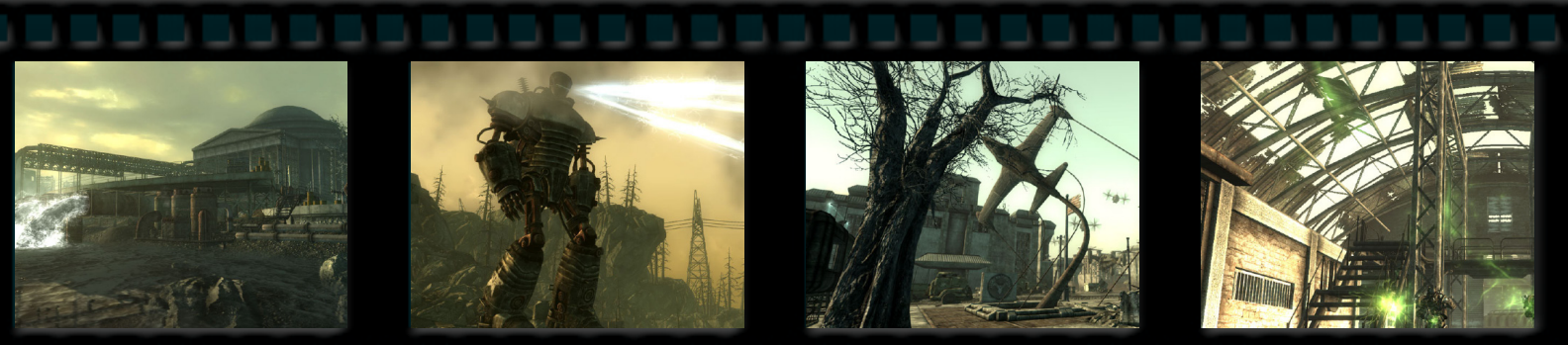
station which doesn't go to plan. From here on in the gameplay is typical Fallout style and can be approached in a number of ways.

The second quest stands out as being challenging and enjoyable with a series of tough locations to battle through. The final mission is typically epic in scale and involves treks and battles worthy of a piece of historical fiction. You face hordes of enemies who are all armed to the teeth and can and will cause you to load previous saves on a regular basis. These quests feel like they should have belonged at the end of Fallout 3 rather than being an expansion as they tie things up far better than the previous finale.

Whilst these three quests would struggle on their own as a piece of downloadable content, the new levels, perks and enemies help to boost the pack into something far more appealing.

As I was feeling hardcore I started a completely new game to see how much effort it takes to max out your character to the level 30. In short: a lot. The amount of experience needed to reach the top is very high and completing every quest still leaves you needing plenty more from combat and successful skill use. Helping you to get that experience is a selection of new enemies who begin to appear at level 20. These are the Feral Ghoul Reaver, the Albino Radscorpion and the Super Mutant Overlord: their one defining characteristic is that they are incredibly hard.

The first time I encountered an Albino Radscorpion I sauntered up to it armed to the teeth with a selection of high powered armour and health items. I left with a sliver of health, no ammunition and a very battered character. These new enemies make this downloadable content pack the most challenging especially if you make the mistake of tackling some of the main quests at a high level. During one of them I encountered six or seven Super Mutant Overlords in a matter of minutes and ended up using over 40 health packs. No matter how good your character is be well prepared for a challenge, bring plenty of ammo and save often. Whilst I relished the challenge of these new enemies they don't appear to give you any more experience than their regular counterparts which is very disappointing. It is a huge increase in difficulty but you aren't rewarded for finishing them off any more than a relatively basic enemy.

This gets especially frustrating when faced with the lethal Super Mutant Overlords who carry Tri-Beam Laser Rifles which will have you shouting in rage as your health evaporates faster than the skin from your super-heated bones. However the increased difficulty makes the pack last longer and you must now carefully utilise your collected arsenal and perks more than ever to survive. This really does feel like harsh survival in a ruined wasteland. Whilst it is hard, it never feels unfair and when you utilise some dastardly cunning to eliminate the hard-as-nails super opponents you feel particularly smug. With the increased levels comes a selection of perks which are a little underwhelming. Out of the fresh perks the only really useful one comes at level 30 which raises all of your S.P.E.C.I.A.L stats to almost maximum. This effectively turns you into a virtually invincible opponent when combined with all your previous skills. However the real benefit for the extra levels is to get all the perks you really wanted the first time but couldn't quite take. Special mention needs to be given to the "Puppies!" perk which makes Dogmeat respawn upon death. No longer do you need to worry about your faithful canine companion being sent to the kennel in the sky by a Super Mutant with a missile launcher.

Broken Steel feels like an expansion which should have been in Fallout 3 all along. After completing it, it seems odd to think it wasn't there to start with, which is surely the mark of a good addition. If you are new to Fallout 3 then I would strongly suggest downloading this pack to add to the experience as you play through. If you have already finished the main quest then there is enough here to draw you back to The Capital Wasteland.

REVIEWER: **CHRIS WAKEFIELD**
GAME: **FALLOUT 3: BROKEN STEEL**
PLATFORM: **XBOX 360**
DEVELOPER: **BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS**
PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS**
RELEASED: **MAY 5, 2009**

PLAYABILITY: **9**
REPLAYABILITY: **8**
SOUND: **8**
GRAPHICS: **9**

OVERALL: **8.5**

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

Volition were onto something big when they started the Red Faction series. The prospect of smashing your way through the game not only provides an opportunity for varied gameplay, but is also highly satisfying.

As such, Red Faction: Guerrilla continues the series with as much focus on destruction based gameplay as the previous two. The question is; is it as innovative and enjoyable as its predecessors,

or does it just crumble under its own weight?

As you start the game you're quickly introduced to the main character, Alec Mason, who lands on Mars looking to work as a miner. His brother Dan, who is already on Mars, greets him and sets him to work. You learn the Earth Defence Force controls Mars through brute force; and with superior weaponry, money and a heap of soldiers, that's unlikely to change. This is where the Red Faction come in. The rebel group, of which Dan is a prominent member, are looking to overthrow the EDF and replace it with a more honourable 'Voice of Mars'. Alec wants none of this, and instead just wants to be a miner, but a short tutorial mission and a couple of cut-scenes later and he quickly changes his mind.

Moreover, without actually doing anything, he's suddenly notorious within Red Faction and is called upon to attend to many a mission. I hate to say it, but it's all very generic. The characters seem to lack any kind of feeling and it's hard to really understand Alec's intentions bar the fact that the EDF are the bad guys and thus should be attacked.

This is, however, forgivable. What the game lacks in storytelling, it makes up for in abundance with pure fun. In a way, the to-the-point storyline is a necessity, because anything too serious would just detract from all the fun you'll have playing this game. It also has to be said that this is not the best looking game you'll have seen. The graphics won't offend your eyes, but some of the models on vehicles and people are a little less than realistic. Again, though, this is

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RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

forgivable considering the nature of the game. Mason is tasked with helping the Red Faction build their power in each of the six sections of the game world. This is accomplished by lowering the EDF's control over the area and completing missions for that section. You are then required to complete another mission which will drive the EDF from the section.

You have a variety of ways in which to lower the EDF's control; guerilla actions, missions or simply destroying the EDF's structures. Guerilla actions are basically the side-missions for the game, and include a variety of objectives. Some are timed missions, requiring you to destroy a building with a particular weapon in the time limit or deliver a vehicle to a specified safehouse as fast as possible.

Others include raiding (or defending against a raid) buildings, rescuing hostages, chasing couriers or just causing as much damage as you can riding shotgun with (crazy) Jenkins. Most of the time these missions are located on the map for you to find, however you can be radioed in for assistance from time-to-time. There's enough variety in these missions to never become tiresome

and there's no penalty for not completing them. This means you can get as much out of the game as you require, rather than having to complete each side-mission just to advance the story.

As for taking out the EDF's structures, it's as simple as it sounds. It only makes sense that a game which has emphasis on destruction, that it is done properly. The EDF has many buildings spotted about the game world, some more important than others. The more important the building, the more of EDF's control lost when it's destroyed. Smaller, less important structures a usually not worth much to destroy, but medium importance and higher are marked on the map and usually


TRAILERS

PLAY TRAILER

PLAY TRAILER

PLAY TRAILER

represent ten points worth of control. High importance targets are worth much more, but are often more difficult to destroy or are heavily guarded and require a little planning beforehand. The destruction itself is endless fun. The GeoMod physics based engine really improves upon the idea of the previous two games, with buildings collapsing under their own weight when enough damage is dealt to key areas. Think Mercenaries but much, much better. As it is all physics based, there are certain parts of a building that are more crucial than others, take that out and the building will collapse - and it is immense fun when it does.

Naturally, if you so wish, covering a building with enough explosives to send it sky high is just as fun, but there is a sublime beauty in finding a buildings weak spot, taking that out then watching as it slowly becomes too much for the building and it collapses. There are instances where the building is seemingly held up by a single piece of metal but they aren't too common. On the whole, GeoMod works brilliantly and should be incorporated into as many games as possible - it really is that fun.

Combat is, of course, a main focus of the game - as expected when you're fighting in a rebellion. The controls for movement and combat all work efficiently and intuitively and never was there a struggle to manoeuvre or fight. On your person you can carry four different weapons, one of which must be a sledgehammer. These can vary from mines and remote charges to assault rifles and rocket launchers - and even a favourite of mine from the series, the rail driver. There is a large variety of weaponry
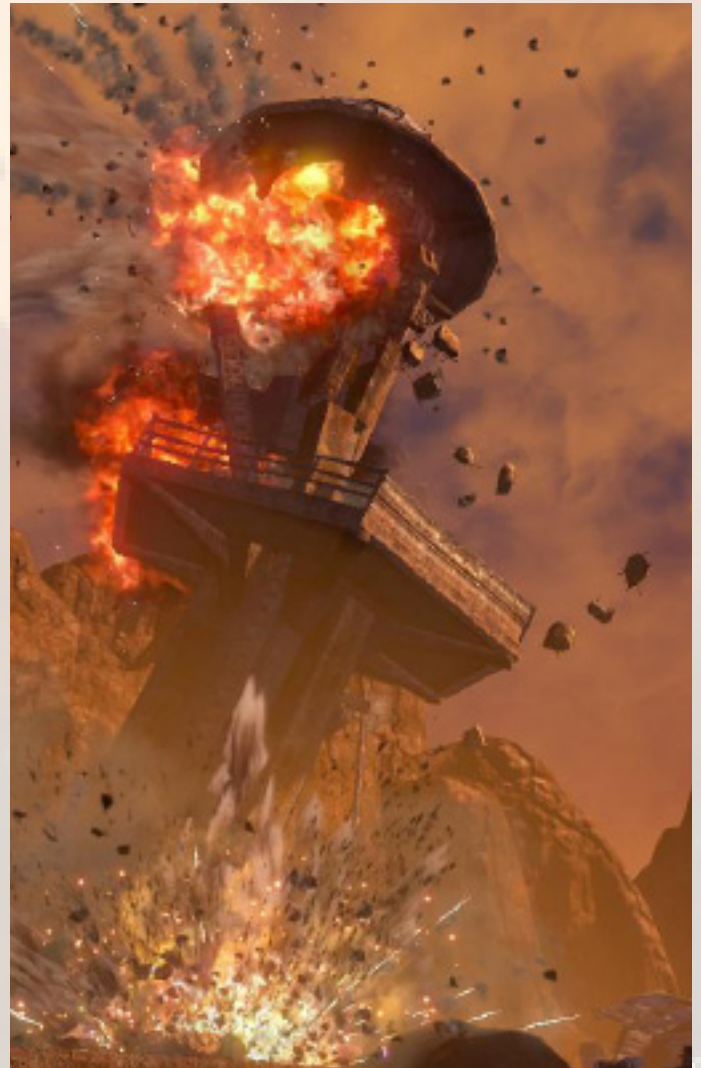
available, which are unlocked after completing set amounts of guerilla actions. These weapons are then bought using Salvage, the currency of the game earned either by destroying anything and collecting its scrap or completing missions. Once bought, upgrades become available, increasing a weapons damage or ammo limit.

It's a good economy that rewards the player for playing more of the side-missions, but never forcing you too. The best thing about the combat,
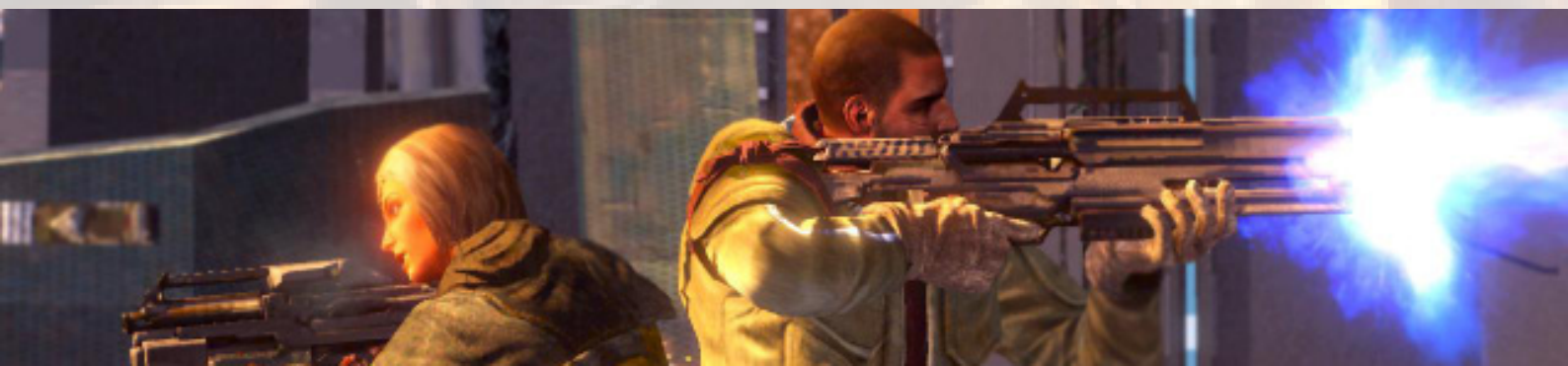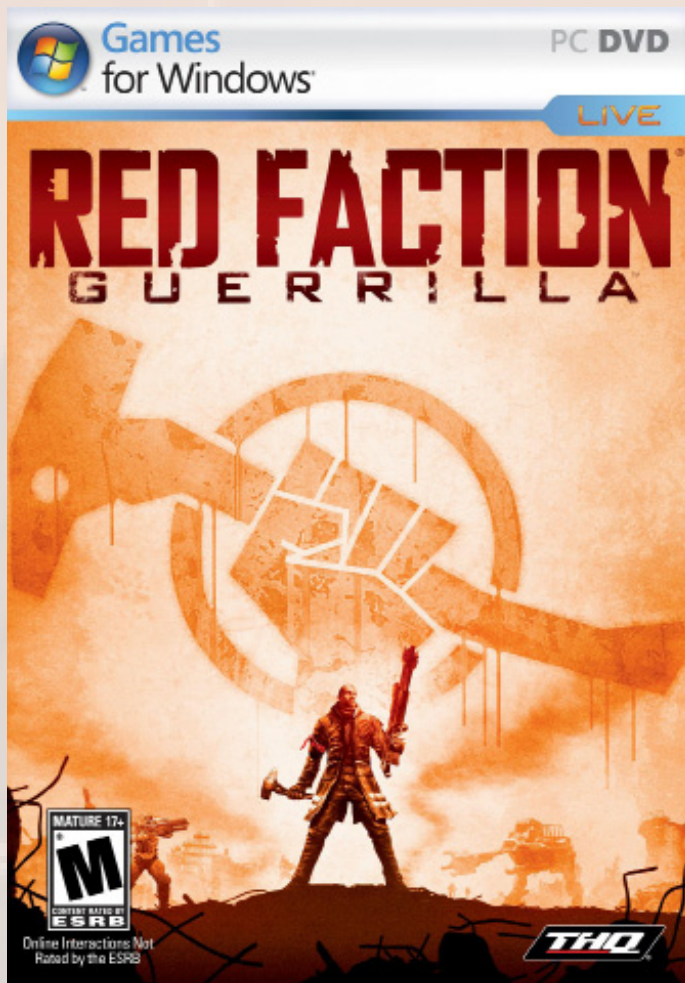
they do in the main game, with new modes, characters, sledgehammers and name colours being unlocked at intervals. Most different with this mode is the use of a variety of jetpacks, each of which can provide temporary effects such as invisibility, a speed boost or increased damage. This mixes up the online mode, and coupled with collapsing buildings this allows for some really hectic matches. Also worth mentioning is the addition of a local competitive mode, in the form of Wrecking Crew.

Personally, I'd like to see more of an emphasis from developers incorporating a local competitive mode, as too few do these days. Wrecking Crew is a turn-based destruction game, where each player attempts to earn the highest score by destroying as much as they can in a time limit. It's not going to keep you and a friend entertained for hours, but it is enjoyable nonetheless and a pleasant addition to a game already filled with extras.

though, is the fact that you can tackle a situation however you like - if you'd rather sneak about a base rather than flying your vehicle into the nearest building that's certainly possible. The game really lets to take on anything however you like, rather than being forced into the preferred method.

As most games these days, Guerrilla features a multi-player mode. It has a variety of modes available, from the staple deathmatch mode to a more true-to-the-game idea of destroying/defending a building. Unlockables feature as heavily in this as

All in all, Red Faction: Guerrilla is a highly enjoyable experience and Volition should be very proud. Personally, this is what a game should be. Hours of free-roaming fun and destruction, a wide (and I mean wide) variety of collectables to keep even the most ardent of completist's happy. Unlockable cheats and interesting multi-player options provides for a brilliant game and as many hours of gameplay as you're willing to put in. This game is a breath of fresh air in an era of games that are too short, too serious, too easy and lack any real additional content.

REVIEWER: **ADAM BARNES**
GAME: **RED FACTION: GUERRILLA**
PLATFORM: **XBOX 360**
DEVELOPER: **VOLITION INC.**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
RELEASED: **JUNE 5, 2009**

PLAYABILITY: **9**
REPLAYABILITY: **8**
SOUND: **7**
GRAPHICS:

OVERALL: **8**

GAMEON VS. THE WORLD (OF WARCRAFT)

"Feugen group slow down," says a voice on Ventrillo, "You're 5% ahead."

Depending on where you stand when it comes to MMO games, 25 people working together to kill two enemies within a matter of seconds of each other is either a testament to the level of organisation and teamwork required to succeed at the higher levels of the game, or just another group of socially inept gaming addicts who care more about their avatars than making something of their real lives. No matter what your opinion of it is, there is no denying that World of Warcraft (WoW) is the current king of MMO games.

With 11.5 million subscribers (as of December 2008), WoW has become a cultural phenomenon, so much so that it has even been parodied by South Park. Whilst for some players, their eventual aim may be to take part in the Player vs Player (PVP) content, most set their sights on conquering the game's many Instances (unique copies of a particular dungeon that allows a group to progress without having to compete with others) and then onward to the larger raid encounters.

Raid groups are by no means a recent development; the ability to expand a group beyond the normal size limits has existed for almost as long as the contemporary MMO, however the execution has varied throughout the years. Size limits of raids differ from game to game; most cap raid sizes to four or five times that of a regular group, although others allow groups to be significantly large – EverQuest initially allowed 72 player Raids whilst Dark Ages of Camelot has no limit beyond what the client and server can physically handle. Raid encounters have also differed in their implementation as time has progressed, especially in terms of PvE (Player vs Environment,

also called PvM, Player vs Monster) gameplay. Where once players gathered to combat major bosses in the main game world, now the focus has shifted to battling within instanced lairs. This key change in the raiding mechanic has resulted in greater accessibility to end-game content for a number of reasons.

Firstly, as there is only ever one raid group in any particular instance, the opportunity for other groups to interfere with an encounter has been removed. Often cited as a prime example of 'griefing', in situations where PvP combat was enabled, opposing players would attack key members of a raid (such as the party's healers), resulting in the entire party being killed by the enemy NPC (non player character). In circumstances where it was not possible for players to directly attack others, there have been numerous cases where players have engaged the enemy NPC, often triggering a 'frenzy' mechanic which causes the boss to overpower the main raid party. For some this is done purely to infuriate the party which engaged the boss first, whilst others intend to remove the competition, giving their party the opportunity to defeat the boss without having to wait out a predetermined respawn period.

This in turn leads to the second benefit of instanced Raid encounters; multiple copies of an instance can run simultaneously meaning any number of groups can be engaged with a single boss at any one time rather than having to wait many hours or even days for a boss to respawn. Instancing has also allowed developers to expand raid encounters from single boss battles to fully fledged dungeons containing multiple bosses, complete with more complex fight mechanics which would be otherwise impossible in an open world environment. The aforementioned Feugen and his counterpart Stalagg form the initial phase of one of the numerous bosses

within WoW's Naxxramas instance, regular visitors to which include GameOn's very own guild.

A large number of GameOn's users began playing shortly after WoW's launch and were initially scattered across the variety of European realms, but after a couple of months players began to gather on the Warsong server as part of the 'Black Dawn' guild. GameOn later formed their own guild called 'Frozen Throne' (although Blizzard's objection to the use of a trademarked name resulted in the guild being renamed 'Glacialis Per') and migrated to the Neptulon server following a number of technical issues and a sudden influx of Russian players to Warsong.

The guild briefly merged and subsequently split from Black Dawn offshoot 'In Hell', before going on to reform as 'Got Nerfed Last Patch' but this too eventually disbanded following a falling out amongst some guild members. "Guild politics and WoW drama led to a break up and requests made to myself to form a new guild." Explains current guild leader Hairy, "Naturally (with Rasher's permission) the old

GAMEON VS. THE WORLD (OF WARCRAFT)

guard came back together as 'Gameon' - I forgot to capitalize the 'O' when creating the guild." Prior to the release of the first expansion pack The Burning Crusade (TBC), raids were designed for groups of 20 or 40 players; new raids introduced in the expansion were targeted at 10 and 25 player groups. It was one of these 10-man instances, Karazhan that gave Gameon their first regular end-game experience.

With the release of Wrath of the Lich King (WotLK), Blizzard looked to overhaul the raiding experience; whereas previous instances were specifically designed for the larger or smaller raid groups, WotLK's raids were available for both sizes of raid which remained at 10 and 25 people. "So far we've managed to clear all the 10-man content introduced in WotLK." Comments guild member Monger, "We've built up a pretty steady core 18-20 players that are committed to progression and always available to raid on our scheduled nights (Sunday and Monday). 25-man content is proving to be difficult because we can't reliably fill the remaining slots."

A significant portion of this success can be attributed to a recent merger with PuG – a guild built upon a long standing friendship with many of the members having known each other for upwards of 15 years. Following a number of instance runs together, a decision was made for the PuG members to joined Gameon, albeit grudgingly at first. "We've played together since WoW first came in and have always been in PuG, hence the reluctance to be split from each other on 10 mans." Nubris explains, "We are a VERY close knit family who

have been brought into Gameon and as such has been difficult for us to embrace the wider picture of Gameon's philosophy of 25-man raiding." "The Ex-PuG guys bought raid experience and determination to GO that we didn't have previously. Before we just liked to level and play MSN with pictures if I'm honest" jokes Hairy.

There have been objections from some quarters of the games industry that an over reliance on raid instances as end-game content is lazy design. Individual boss encounters will follow the same pattern for every party that tackles them and those parties will use the same tactics, often developed by groups on the test servers weeks or even months before the content goes live.

There is generally little room for improvisation within a battle, nor is there rarely any need for it – each class has an ideal attack rotation and this is generally only interrupted when a boss encounter introduces the requirement to move or stand still based on some arbitrary factor included to differentiate between battles. The number of bosses in these instances can

GAMEON VS. THE WORLD (OF WARCRAFT)

also result in extended gameplay sessions; depending on experience and success within an instance, it's not uncommon for groups to spend upwards of 4 hours working their way through.

There are reports of a Link Shell (guild) in Final Fantasy XI which fought valiantly against a single boss for 18 hours before finally deciding to call it a day. That however is an extreme example and the guild in question have admitted that they would never normally spend anywhere near that long on a single session. Instances in WoW are saved for up to a week, so it is always possible to return and carry on a run the following day without having to fight against bosses that have already been defeated. "Time is rarely a major factor." Admits Monger, a father of two young daughters, "We raid twice a week and always the same days. They never start until 8pm and the children are usually in bed for 7:30 so it's tight but doable." Recent MMOs such as Age of Conan and Warhammer: Age of Reckoning have sought to break this cycle by focussing on large

scale open world PvP where the addition of human opposition significantly reduces the predictability of any particular battle. Whilst both games had a healthy number of subscriptions following their launches, neither has made any significant impact in WoW's user base; in fact both games have recently had to shut down servers to consolidate player numbers.

For now however, WoW's future remains in raid instances. April saw the game updated to version 3.1, the first major content patch since the release of WotLK, which introduced a new instance – Ulduar. With this new instance comes a focus on the addition of 'hard modes' for each encounter, which will increase the risks but also the rewards. Previously there was only one instance with a 'hard mode', Obsidian Sanctum, where players face off against the black dragon Sartharion; players have the option of defeating the 3 drakes which guard the boss prior to engaging him, or to leave them alive and have them join the throughout the course of the fight.

"I'm confident we will get through the 10 man content fairly quickly." Stated Monger prior to the release, "I doubt we will break any records but as long as each attempt is closer than the last, we will keep trying."

Matt Studd.

Most are familiar with Lego; the plastic construction based toy for children (no, of course I don't own any!) which has been around for many years. It has become an extremely successful name and franchise, and everyone knows what to do with a franchise - combine it with another to earn even more money.

Which is exactly what Traveller's Tales did in 2005 when they released Lego: Star Wars upon the world. It received acclaimed success and the company went on to develop Lego: Indiana Jones and Lego: Batman. It's unlikely anything will stop the phenomenal success of applying the word 'Lego' to anything and everything, and why should it? It's enjoyed by everyone and its unique style is likely to never stop amusing us. Until Lego: Rock Band was announced. Don't get me wrong, I love Lego (I told you, I don't own any) and I think recreating our favourite films in Lego based games is great, but I think there's a rule that needs to be built - and not out of Lego bricks.

Let's face it. Rock Band is popular. But somehow it just doesn't seem to make sense. Replacing avatars in a rock band for Lego characters in a rock band doesn't seem like much thought has been put in, in comparison to the other games. Most worryingly, though, is that this could merely be the start in the creation of "Brickination" - a totalitarian society where the very consoles we play on have had Lego versions 'built'. Here, GameOn examines some creations of just such a society…

Lego 4 Dead
Four Lego characters face a mass of zombie foes; to help them survive the player must outwit, outshoot and out-build enough walls to slow the attack. And don't forget to build yourself a closet to respawn out of should the plastic Infected take you down. Just make sure you get them in the head though - which is admittedly harder than it sounds, considering how some of those Lego heads can get stuck on tight. The game features a variety of four guns, made to resemble their real life Lego counterparts, interchangeable costumes (read: taking one characters head off and putting it on another's body) and the ability to assemble stairs and blockades to aid your escape. There's one thing for sure; heads will roll (literally).

A BRICK TOO FAR?

as you fight the underground Lego-ust. The tactical gunplay of the title is ramped up a notch by revolving around you building it. Tired of getting swamped with Wretches? A nice little containing barricade will keep you safe. Lego-ust snipers causing problems?

A couple of brick walls can stretch over the no-mans-land in between. There is now literally no situation that cannot be tackled without the assistance of your trusted plastic blocks. New improvements to characters mean that limbs can fall off, legs and bodies become separated and heads no longer explode; they sort of slide off. However, this is still wholesome family friendly fun for everyone.

Burnout Lego City
Race about a reassembling of Lego City, featuring hallmark locations such as the 'Police Station', the 'Fire Station' and the popular 'Coastguard HQ'. However, you'll probably want to be a little more careful with your Lego Racer, should you hit another car too fast you'll soon be in smithereens and have to spend the rest of the race reconstructing your vehicle. You can customise your car though - take bricks off to become a Speed class, add bricks to the front to change it into an Aggression class or build a spoiler to turn it into a Stunt class. You can even reassemble the nearby buildings to give you the fastest burning route to the goal.

This game includes a variety of locations based on Lego sets; from 'downtown' Lego City in the East, to Lego Castle to the North, Lego Pirates to the South and Lego Power Miners in the West. Visit each of these locations to gain your Lego Driver's License and become champion of Lego Racing.

Gears of Lego
The multi-million, bestselling and critically acclaimed game for adults meets the multi-million, bestselling and critically acclaimed toy for children. In this inevitable combination of arguably the two best things ever, you play Marcus Fenix and sidekick Dominic Santiago

Metal Gear Lego: Bricks of the Patriots
Help Solid Brick work his way through the war torn Middle East as he seeks to destroy the Brick System. Utilise the EightPieceCamo suit that can adapt to your surroundings with a simple switch of a brick or two. Construct your own hiding places, a variety of vehicles and your own Metal Gear Rex to destroy the Bricks of the Patriots. Features Plastic Gear Mk. II, a unique construct that will aid you in your

missions - carrying your array of bricks (in a Lego bucket) and gives access to Drebin, a toy dealer who trades bricks you collect from the battlefield for a currency with which to buy upgrades. Also includes shortened cut-scenes - to avoid a never-ending narrative - and no installation screens giving you health advice.

With the Lego Mini-figure characters managing CQC just like the real Solid Snake, it's time to take Solid Brick's fight to his ultimate nemesis, Liquid Mega Blok, as you play the final chapter of this legendary brick-builder's life.

Grand Theft Auto: Lego City
Ever wanted your Lego mini-figures to run their own crime rings? Well now you can! Play as Tommy Vercetti as he seeks to overthrow Lego City's drug baron and rule it for himself.

Includes mini-figures of Lance Vance, Ricardo Diaz and Kent Paul - though admittedly without the voice acting. Build up your empire, one brick at a time. Help the construction of strip clubs, 'used' car lots and drug-pushing ice-cream factories - all with the cheery fun of Lego!

Travel about a reassembling of Lego City, featuring hallmark locations such as the 'Police Station', the 'Fire Station' and the popular 'Coastguard HQ'. Borrow vehicles (but forget to give them back) from the kind civilians of Lego City, and then customise their vehicle by changing the brick colour or adding and taking bricks away. Use a variety of harmless plastic objects to defeat
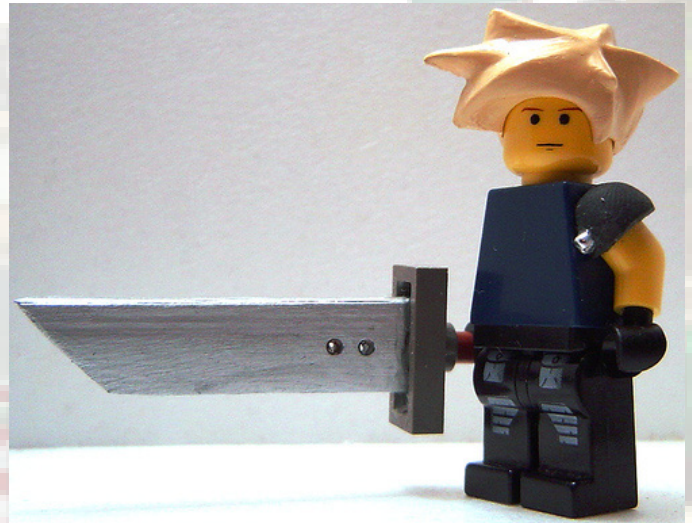
your enemy - they won't be injured, they'll just be 'deconstructed' - and build a wide selection of three vehicles; the Lego car, the Lego motorbike and the Lego helicopter. Take Lego City back, and deconstruct anyone who gets in your way. Rated U: It's made of Lego - how could it be immoral?

Lego: Final Fantasy: Plastic Brick Chronicles
The world's most popular RPG series is back, but with a Lego theme. Help your group of adventurers seek the holy Plastic Brick before the evil sorceress manages to use its power to destroy the world.

Equip your cast of heroes with a wide range of weaponry and spells; including 'Wall' which builds an impenetrable wall of Lego bricks to decrease the amount of damage done, or the powerful elemental spells, Redaga, Blueaga and Greenaga which hurls a coloured brick at your enemy and deals the corresponding elemental damage.

Use a variation on the ATB (Amount of Time Built) gauge to deal extra damage to
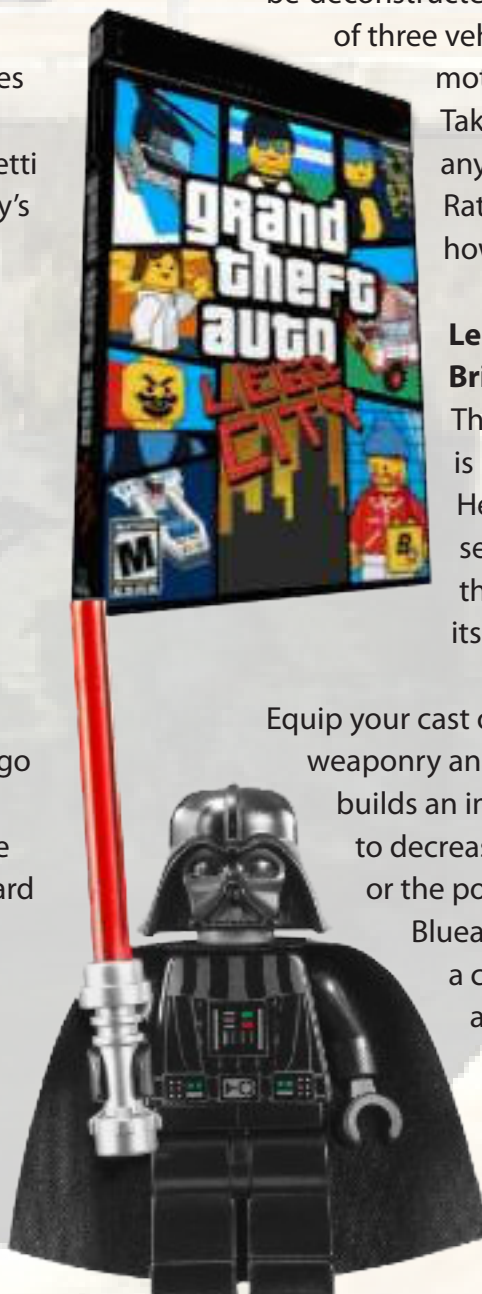
FINAL FANTASY
PLASTIC BRICK CHRONICLES

you foes - the longer your Lego character builds before taking their turn the more damage they deal! Construct up to six powerful monsters to aid you on your quest, summoning them in battle to deliver devastating damage. Unlock new and exciting Building Abilities, and combine them with Lego Breaks in this epic tale of life, love and Lego.

Lego: Lego: Star Wars: The Video Game
For when all else fails, remake your own game. Features all the same scenes and levels as the original, but now with extra added bricks! Almost twice as many! Improved graphics (now you can see the word 'Lego' on each brick!), enhanced gameplay (two new ways of attacking) and one more level not included in the original (or the Star Wars saga).

Features everything that was in the previous versions, but this time you can do it playing as Jabba the Hutt - though admittedly he doesn't move very far. Wield the force in one new way, as you play through exactly the same great game - again!

Thus ends our mockery. Naturally these are not predictions of the future, moreover a possibility of things to come. Should these predictions ever come to pass then I have no doubt they'll be done in the most agreeable of ways - I know I'd enjoy GTA: Lego City - but it might be worth registering these titles with a trademark office, just in case...

Adam Barnes.

Dust off your spandex and restock your utility belt, it's time to become a super hero again. Following on from the success of City of Heroes/Villains, Cryptic Studios is hard at work on Champions Online. Based on the popular pen and paper RPG, Champions, the game see players creating their own super heroes and teaming up to defeat the nefarious schemes of the evil Doctor Destroyer. Champions Online began its development in late 2006 as Marvel Universe Online which was subsequently cancelled just over a year later amongst rumours of a disagreement between Marvel and publisher Microsoft Games Studios regarding licensing rights - the official reason for the cancellation was an inability to compete in an already crowded marketplace.

Shortly after Cryptic announced that they had purchased the Champions IP and intended it to be the basis of their new MMO. In a break from MMO traditions there are no character classes - whilst the standard tank/healer/damage dealer roles still exist within gameplay, choices made during character creation do not limit the player's choice of abilities later in the game; abilities themselves vary from the mastery of elements and sorcery to gadgets and various forms of melee combat. Whilst this can be daunting at first, the game does contain a number of predefined archetypes as starting blocks as well as the option to create completely bespoke characters.

On top of the enormous number of ability combinations, there is the almost limitless visual customisation going far beyond the handful of hair styles and colours on offer from many other games on the market. Always fancied playing as a bare-chested zombie with robotic legs and fairy wings? Then this is the game for you. It is entirely possible to spend more time playing with the character creation tools than the game itself (but more on that later). Later in the game, the character creation is revisited as players are given the choice to create their own nemesis which helps to develop individual

storylines within the wider scope of the game. Cryptic are pitching the game as an "Action MMO" and it lives up to that. With simultaneous development for PC and Xbox 360 (and the intention of players on both platforms being able to play on the same servers), combat is fast paced and streamlined for support for the 360 controller.

With travel powers such as flight and super speed available during combat, it's common for fights to take place in three dimensions rather than on the just on terra firma. Unfortunately it is possible for travel powers to unbalance PvP combat slightly depending on character choices - a character with a vertical travel power such as flight can hover safely above a melee character with a horizontal power such as speed and pick them off with ranged attacks.

The game world is lavish and well imagined. Built on a modified City of Heroes engine, the pseudo cel-shaded look creates a convincing comic book effect whilst level design ensures there is plenty of conveniently throw-able scenery without object placement feeling contrived. Maps themselves are large enough to allow a variety of different characters levels worth of content however the travel powers ensure they never feel overly large.

Unfortunately during my preview period I was unable to experience much of this content due to an unresolved bug. Following an initial tutorial

in Millennium City, players have a choice of maps which are currently experiencing a crisis. Having selected their destination and completed a short series of quests, players are thrown into an instance, completion of which resolves the crisis and opens up the remainder of the map to explore. Or at least that's the theory.

With the instance boss defeated, I attempted to return to the main map and accept the rewards and praise I deserved, the game however had different ideas - "Map Transfer Failure" was the ominous error that greeted me. Accepting that this was still beta code I was playing, I raised a support ticket and patiently awaited a GM response.

An hour later, still stuck in the instance, I assumed that all the staff were operating to a US-centric shift pattern, and decided to create another character and tackle the other map available after the tutorial. Inevitably this character encountered the same error in the equivalent instance in this zone.

Both tickets remained unanswered at the end of the preview session over 24 hours later. One can only hope that a solid support system is implemented in time for the games release so that paying customers can actually experience the game, even if the press expected to encourage gamers to purchase it can't.

Matt Studd.

When Left 4 Dead 2 was announced earlier this week, the news came as a real shock. The announcement of a full sequel only 6 months after the release of the original was almost unbelievable. GameOn managed to secure an in-depth hands-on play test through several levels of the new game and one thing is clear: this isn't a rushed out follow up.

Valve were keen to emphasise that Left 4 Dead 2 won't completely override its predecessor and that they intend to keep developing extra content to provide players with plenty to do. Before the sequel is released another content pack will be available to download for Left 4 Dead sometime during the summer and beyond that content will still be provided.

After meeting our fellow survivors, GameOn were treated to the first two levels from The Parish campaign, set in the Southern American States. The survivors themselves are different from Left 4 Dead, comprising three men: Ellis, Nick and Coach and a woman, Rochelle. Whilst this is early days there was a sense of camaraderie between them and the voice acting and dialogue raised some chuckles as we played through the levels. Left 4 Dead 2's core gameplay remains very similar to the original with the mysterious apocalypse taking place and only the four protagonists surviving. The game is divided up into campaigns which are further sub-divided into chapters at the start and end of which you get the opportunity to heal and arm up before continuing. The weapons themselves remain largely the same, despite some cosmetic changes to their visual design. There are still the same tiers of weapons with which to dispatch the zombie hordes as well as secondary items such as pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails.

One of the best new additions is the inclusion of melee weapons. These act in a similar way to the fuel and gas cans you can collect and have to be carried. If you are attacked by a special infected whilst carrying them, they will be dropped but they are incredibly satisfying. Whilst playing through the campaign I encountered an axe and a frying pan. The former sliced and diced the hordes with ease whilst the latter sent infected flying with an amusing clanging sound. These weapons feel right and are a natural extension of the existing gameplay and battering a screaming zombie to death is nothing less than entertaining.

The other main inclusion is the ability to find different types of ammunition in the environment. In the first chapter of The Parish, we stumbled upon incendiary rounds in an abandoned outhouse. These can be used to fill your primary weapon with one magazine of ammo which ignites anything it touches. The pleasure of watching waves of the infected ignite under assault rifle fire was immense and again, feels like a great addition. Your enemies are still vicious, relentless and very angry and will chase you down in a blur of angry punches and kicks. The game is far more intense than its predecessor: a feat which doesn't seem possible. Hordes now attack from the front and

behind simultaneously and now drop in from all directions being spread out, making things seriously challenging. The numbers of infected you face are also far greater requiring even better teamwork to make it through each chapter.

One of the most noticeable changes is the visual design of the game, immediately being different from the dark environments of Left 4 Dead. Here the action takes place in the heat of the day with the sun beating down. This creates an altered atmosphere and you can almost smell the stench of the corpses littering the streets. The graphics are relatively crisp and effects are much more detailed, the fire of lit fuel being particularly stunning. The infected also model damage far more realistically than the exaggerated gore of the original. Now limbs blow apart, heads disintegrate and body shots reveal the jagged bone of ribs coupled with the bloody ends of damaged intestines. It is pretty surprising and shocking, but you rarely have time to notice due to the fast paced and relentless action.

Your enemies are now very different with greater variety amongst and they now sport terrifying glowing eyes. If this wasn't intimidating enough they now have enraged facial expressions which are noticeable as they swarm around you. The design is superb offering an insight into their former lives and hinting at the events leading up to the outbreak. Some infected are now found in biohazard suits which gives them an added level of protection meaning it is best to send several bullets their way first.

The special infected return with the Boomer, Hunter, Smoker and Tank all possessing the same abilities from Left 4 Dead. The witch is also back but now has the nasty habit of wandering around the level meaning the usual policy of sneaking past her is far more difficult. During our demo, things didn't go to plan and instead of a stealthy bypass we ended up face to face with the clawed and not very happy girl. Suffice to say it ended it tears.

A new infected appears in Left 4 Dead 2 in the shape of The Charger. This monstrous abomination has the build of a Tank but far greater speed, dashing into survivors sending them flying, leaving them vulnerable to a pounce from a Hunter or separating them from the rest of the group. There were a number of times when the AI worked together to split the group up which was impressive and really showcased the improved Director AI. As we neared the end of the second chapter, we encountered a trailer which acted as a sort of miniature Safe Room, allowing us temporary respite whilst we prepared for one of the set pieces. In it, we had to activate an alarm in order to get past a doorway and then dash through hordes of infected until we could deactivate the siren and stop the flow of enemies. The set piece was different and challenging but really worked and the sense of satisfaction as we closed the Safe Room door was met with cheers and shouts of congratulation from our team mates.

However, whilst there was the pleasure of beating the demo it was also tinged with sadness. The demo was of such good quality and had such a level of polish that it is going to make the 6 months until November 17th all the more difficult. Left 4 Dead 2 is already very special and GameOn can't wait until we are fighting for our lives with friends once again.

Chris Wakefield.

SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND SPECIAL EDITION

The Secret of Monkey Island is without a doubt one of the greatest adventure games of all time. The title's clever puzzles, witty dialogue and humorous tone made the whole experience great fun and the rest of the series followed suit. 19 years on and Secret is being remade as a special edition heading to both the PC and Xbox Live. Whilst this initially had me worried, after seeing the game in action, this is the kind of faithful update that fans dream of.

Staying true to the original but bringing a game up-to-date is always a difficult task but LucasArts appear to have hit the nail on the head here. The team behind The Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition know the series well and are clearly huge fans which allows this remake to capture the feel of the games. Instead of just being a simple update there are plenty of new features present to make this appeal to a different generation. The most immediate change is the visual style of

the special edition which is markedly different from the 256 colours of the original. The update has over a hundred richly detailed hand-painted backdrops which are not only beautiful but true to the series. Moving through the locations they are instantly recognisable and somehow still retain the atmosphere of their pixellated counterparts. Characters too have been given a digital overhaul and seem familiar but noticeably crisper. The new design is impressive and easily does the series justice, capturing everything that was great about Secret.

Not only are the graphics improved but the game's soundtrack has been completely rerecorded. The classic background music is still recognisable but is now recorded on a range of instruments and sounds more elaborate without being overbearing. Things don't stop there and perhaps the most exciting new feature is the addition of voice acting. Using most of the voice cast from Curse of Monkey Island, including Dominic Armato as Guybrush Threepwood, the spoken dialogue feels right at home. As a Monkey Island fan I found revisiting classic encounters and conversations with voice actors ridiculously exciting.

Not stopping there the menu system has been stripped down and revised. Whilst in the original it seemed second nature to have the various actions listed along the bottom of the screen, in the special edition they have been altered. No longer do you lose so much space and the menu now pops up at the press of a button. This streamlined and improved process is much better and means that you can enjoy the game in full screen 1080i.

SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND SPECIAL EDITION

In order to keep The Secret of Monkey Island as accessible as ever, the developers felt that a new strategy was needed for today's gamers. With so many people resorting to guides from the internet these days, this update features a three level hints system. This decision was made to avoid breaking people's immersion in the game and to keep within the spirit of the series.

At the first level of hints, an oblique clue is displayed suggesting you go to a certain location or think about a certain clue. The next stage will give you a little more direction and the final step is to display a gigantic arrow pointing to where you need to go or to the object you require. Whilst this will no doubt have fans gasping in horror, for new players, it is nice to know that it is there and is done in good humour. Alongside all these innovations The Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition

provides the original game.
This isn't some kind of unlockable bonus, but the new version has been built entirely on top of the original. At the press of a button it is possible to switch back and forth, almost seamlessly, from new game to old. This is a little strange at first, but the transition is great and it is a real joy to have this option. Considering the difficulty of obtaining copies of the original today, it is welcome to have this remake which comes complete with the original. The attention to detail found in this update is fantastic to see. When I was chatting to LucasArts they mentioned that they had reinstated the close up of Spiffy the dog. The infamous canine, found in the Scumm bar early in the game, had a close up during Guybrush's "conversation" with him, but this was removed as the game was 2kb over its space quota for the disc. This level of commitment and understanding of the series is rarely seen in remakes and I am thoroughly looking forward to revisiting such a classic title when The Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition is released this summer.

Chris Wakefield.

We approached a darkened room, the door's ajar. There's a flickering light coming from inside, creating shadows of a disorientating nature upon the walls. As we enter the room, not knowing what to expect, we were greeted by the Rebellion development team responsible for the new 'Aliens vs. Predator' game.

Following on from the Jaguar version of AVP in the 90s, and Rebellion's previous AVP instalment in 1999, Rebellion are excited about joining forces with SEGA to bring AVP back to life - the prospect of which is something that they clearly have a passion for. Gaming has moved on, technology has moved on, bringing AVP to a new generation of gamers is their goal.

The game takes place 3 decades after the events of the third Alien film where the Weylands-Yutani Corporation still have an active presence in the galaxy. The main scenario is the Company discovers a planet called 'BG-386' and setup a colony there called 'Freya's Prospect'. The colonist's uncovered ancient Predator ruins, which sent a signal alerting the Predators of an intrusion. Within the ruins they also find the 'eggs', which of course sets the starting basis for the Aliens to horde their army. So, as you can guess, a distress call is put out from the planet and the Marines are sent in to investigate...

You will be able to play within 3 different campaigns, a character for each race (the Alien, the Predator or the Marines). Unlike previous versions, you will be able to start all 3 without the need of completing any of the others.

The game is developed using Rebellion's own technology engine, which allows them to concentrate on the dynamic lighting and shadow. An example of this was seen when a flare was thrown on the floor behind some steps, the illumination from which allowed you to see the shadow of the steps on the wall. This is hard to imagine, but to see this effect was quite outstanding. There were also some very impressive effects when you kill an alien in that there was a green mist effect (acid vapours?) in the air above the dead body, warning you not to go near it.

The demonstration focused on the Marine single player game, starting part way through the first mission. With the thirty years since their last encounter, the marines are much better equipped this time around - we hope. You come across some Marine survivors barricading themselves in a building and your task for this part is to keep them alive. The first corridor you walk down, you can see acid burns on the floor and even holes in the ceiling where you can see through to the outside.

It is obvious from this that a big battle has already taken place here between Aliens and Marines, but judging from the damage the Marines were not victorious. The building is in disarray as it feels like everything has been broken and nothing is left working.

When you meet up with your fellow Marines they inform you of an imminent attack from the Aliens, the motion sensor sentry guns are all in position, and anyone that is not wounded has a pulse rifle or shot gun in their hand.

The lights suddenly go out!

The music score developed along with the game contributes to the tempo of the action, and along with your motion sensor going crazy due to picking up movement, everything is telling you something bad is about to happen. Distant banging sounds on the metal barricade and structures give you a depth perception of how close they are, but it's clear they are not holding. Then the noise of gun fire starts.

And stops abruptly!

You are then ordered to investigate why a sentry gun down stairs just stopped firing. Why did it stop firing? That is for you to find out, the battle has begun! How good is the game play interaction with the Aliens you may well be asking? Is the AI intelligent and unique to the characters?

In a nutshell, the game play is as you would expect and the AI has been tuned to mimic more closely the Aliens from the movies. To give you a more in depth insight into the Aliens, picture this scenario. There are three Aliens coming at you, jumping from the walls to the stairs and onto the floor, taking out any Marines on the way. You manage to kill 2 of them but 1 is left hunting you down. The Alien then jumps up to the ceiling.

As it is pitch black up there, you can no longer see him and he is aware of this, so he keeps still so that your motion sensor will not pick him up. You wait for something to happen but nothing does but you know he is still up there. You throw a flare towards the ceiling, which illuminates the Alien creature. He then lunges towards you ...

Like this scenario? You will love the game!
Steve Greenfield.
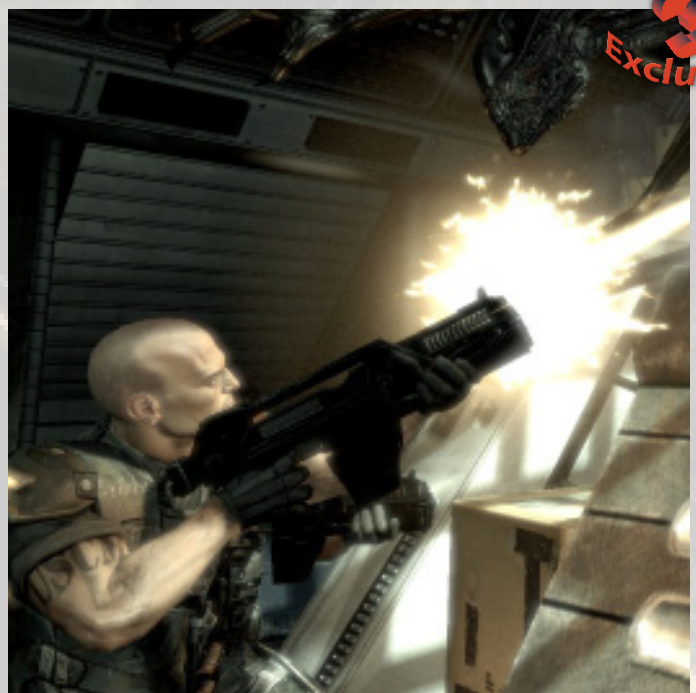
In the last couple of years, first-person shooter titles seem to have dominated video game genres. From futuristic space stations to war-torn locales, it seems that gamers have shot their way through virtually every conceivable narrative device available to writers. So, at this year's E3 it was nice to see an FPS game which comes up with a fresh concept. Homefront is undoubtedly a shooter, but one that aims to bring some new elements to an over-populated genre.

The game is being developed by Kaos Studios the team behind Frontlines: Fuel of War and its background is unusual. Taking inspiration from invasion films, like Red Dawn, Homefront is set against the backdrop of a North Korean occupation of the United States. Set roughly 20 years in the future, a global energy crisis has left the US vulnerable and after being abandoned by its allies the North Koreans launch an invasion. Kaos Studies have gone to a lot of effort to recruit top talent and the story is written by John Milius who helped to write Apocalypse Now, Dirty Harry and Red Dawn.

An early level is set in the remnants of an American suburb which has been partially fortified and altered. Scaffolding, wind turbines and satellite dishes are silhouetted against the sky and the surrounding roads are
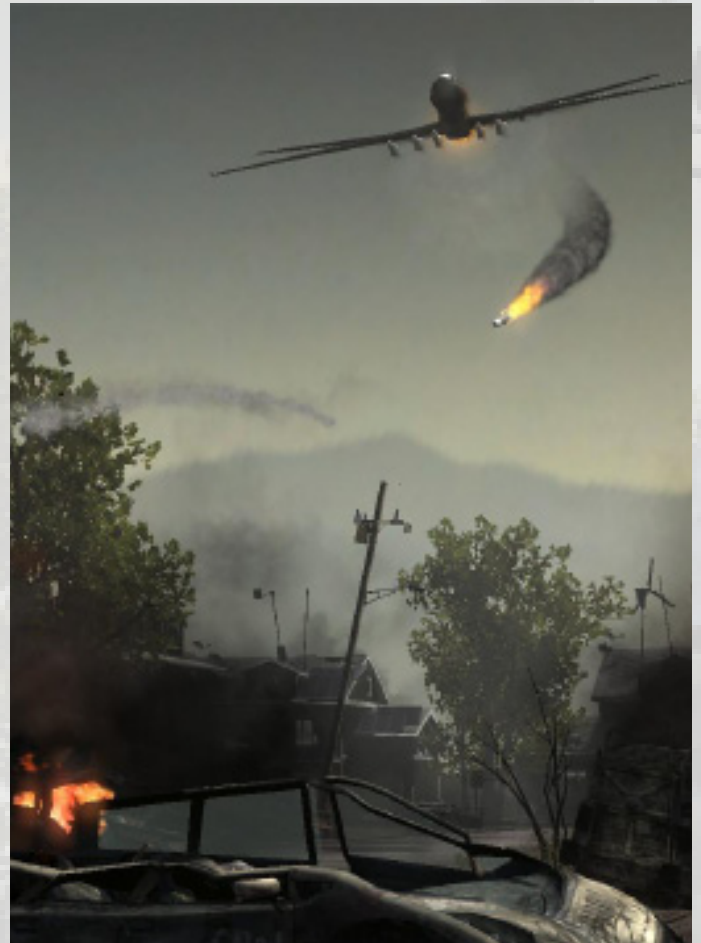
littered with concrete barricades. The game's visual style is realistic and goes a long way to creating an eerie atmosphere as you notice something wrong with familiar locations. Waking up in a house in the aforementioned suburb, a man appears warning you that there are incoming enemy troops; it quickly becomes evident that your character, Connor, is involved with the resistance. Walking outside, the environment is pretty impressive and the graphics are clearly next-generation with some rather nice lighting effects and an impressively rendered sky. You don't have much time to stand and gaze though and soon you are instructed to move to another house to collect a rifle. As you move along, a rag-tag bunch of civilians pace dejectedly around with many commenting on how they are sad to be leaving. The environment is unsettling and has a "calm before the storm" feeling. Entering the house, you are handed an assault rifle and suddenly all

hell breaks loose placing you in the thick of the action. The sudden transition is surprising with gunfire and explosions echoing around the room.

The "adaptive combat rifle" seems to be a fairly standard FPS assault rifle, but it is loud and drops enemies effectively as you fight your way into the street.

Dashing behind cover, Connor takes out a grenade and places it into a nearby window sending an enemy flying as well as destroying a section of the wall. Scenery in the game will be "partially destructible", so don't expect Red Faction's GeoMod technology. However, from what we saw it helped to give the game a cinematic feel as walls collapsed and debris flew.

Homefront's other key feature is a form of "action magnetism" which sounds rather over-the-top but was evident in the level. As Connor continues to attack he gets a little too near a vehicle as it is hit by an RPG. The explosion sends him reeling leaving the camera in first-person as he scrambles to his feet. The event wouldn't have looked out of place in an action scene and it was emphasized that these weren't pre-scripted sequences. The system "charges" the player and any events are drawn towards Connor to help create an action-orientated game. Shortly afterwards the technique was shown again as the protagonist destroyed an oncoming jeep with a rocket. The burning wreckage careered straight towards him forcing him to dodge out of the way, which was pretty impressive.

The combat in the game looks like a traditional mixture of first-person action games with a regenerating health system and cover forming the core elements. However, if the integration of the "action magnetism" system is as impressive as it appears, then Homefront is shaping up to be something different from anything out there. The title also keeps an ace up its sleeve: the control of "The Goliath".

As we neared the end of the demo, Connor acquired the controls to this monster. Essentially, The Goliath is a controllable autonomous combat vehicle looking like the bizarre offspring of a 1980's mobile phone and a weapons convention. Put simply, it was impressive. Making an entrance by tearing through a wall, Connor proceeded to paint targets with a small laser designator sending the killing machine off on a rampage. The vehicle's 50. Cal machine gun tore through the enemy forces like a knife through butter, and as the demo ended a lot of the neighbourhood was either very dead or very much on fire.

Homefront was surprising for a number of reasons, as not only was it refreshingly different but the systems in place to help keep it fresh haven't been seen before. If Kaos Studios can keep the action as intense as this early section then fighting off the North Korean occupiers could be one of the most entertaining titles of next year.

Chris Wakefield.

Things only get better as Sanderson works his way up the vertical cliff using two ice axes to ascend, which is rather nerve-wracking as cracks slowly appear as the axes hack their way into the mountainside.

After a precarious climb to the top, you make your way towards the base with the assistance of MacTavish. Working forwards slowly, both men quietly dispatch a group of guards with silenced weaponry when the storm hits reducing visibility significantly. At this point, Sanderson uses a heart-beat sensor attached to the side of his weapon to proceed to hunt the guards patrolling the area. Slipping along like a ghost he carefully dispatches the numerous patrols and plants charges on fuel tanks on the runway. Sanderson then rendezvous with MacTavish and the two proceed to infiltrate a building stealthily to extract data from a hard drive. However, things don't go to plan and soon events kick off into a full scale battle between Sanderson and MacTavish and what seems like a large portion of the Russian army.

Here the game looks as polished and smooth as ever with the brutally realistic weaponry making short work of the enemy forces. Clever use of cover is essential as is crouching and making use of the prone position. The regenerating health system returns so finding a safe spot in between bouts of gunplay is necessary. There appears to be a wide range of weaponry available and grenades are as

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare was undoubtedly one of the most critically and commercially successful releases of recent times having sold in excess of 13 million copies. When Infinity Ward announced the sequel earlier this year, anticipation grew to feverish levels and GameOn are pleased to announce that they have seen footage of an early game mission.

The mission, "Cliffhanger" follows MacTavish from Modern Warfare and the new player character, Sanderson as they infiltrate an air base in the snowy mountains of Kazakhstan. Immediately noticeable are the incredible visuals which manage to surpass its predecessor's already impressive graphics. The mission begins on a precarious snowy platform high up on the side of a mountain with a storm approaching. You are informed that you need to ascend the side of the vertical cliff in order to reach the base and the level starts.

In true Call of Duty style everything is done in the first person perspective and the effect is immediately immersive. As MacTavish leans in to tell you the plan you can see the snow nestling in his beard and the frost glistening on his clothing, the quality is outstanding.

lethal as ever, with one well placed grenade taking out a cluster of the troops.

One of the biggest surprises of the gameplay was the sudden appearance of a group of snowmobile riding troops wielding sub-machine guns. At this stage the action really moves up a gear with gunfire and explosions coming from all angles. Snowmobiles go flying in all directions alongside the bodies of their riders as Sanderson and MacTavish shoot there way out of the tight spot.

With enemies descending from every direction the two men grab two of the vehicles and a high speed chase starts. What follows is one of the most thrilling and adrenaline pounding set pieces I have seen in years which refused to let up. The first person perspective really made it stand out and it easily matched up to any of the jaw-dropping moments in its predecessor.

Whilst the Modern Warfare 2 demonstration was short, it clearly demonstrates that Infinity Ward is serious about the series and after the relatively lackluster World at War this is exactly the direction the series needs. The demo featured amazing visuals which showcase the improvements and development of the game engine even further. We chatted to the developers who are determined to push the technology as far as it can go getting

everything they can from the engine.

The weather effects are really looking special and the games levels are larger than ever thanks to some clever streaming technology. When I asked Infinity Ward about the volume of enemies that you would face they emphasized listening to player feedback from Call of Duty 4. Whilst the "invisible line" spawning enemies isn't completely removed from this sequel it has been tweaked to never seem like it is generating endless waves of opponents. Instead it now encourages you to move in the right direction with enemy positioning which makes it easier for you to move in the right direction. The developers also pointed out that they are aiming for the right balance in opponent numbers so you have enough baddies to shoot to be entertained but not to feel like you are fighting an entire country of troops.

Modern Warfare 2 looks set to build on the enormous success by providing more of the high octane action and edge of your seat moments that were found in Call of Duty 4. There is still plenty more to learn about this title including more about the multiplayer but if the single player missions can all deliver on the grounds of this one then Modern Warfare 2 will be a must buy in November.

Chris Wakefield.
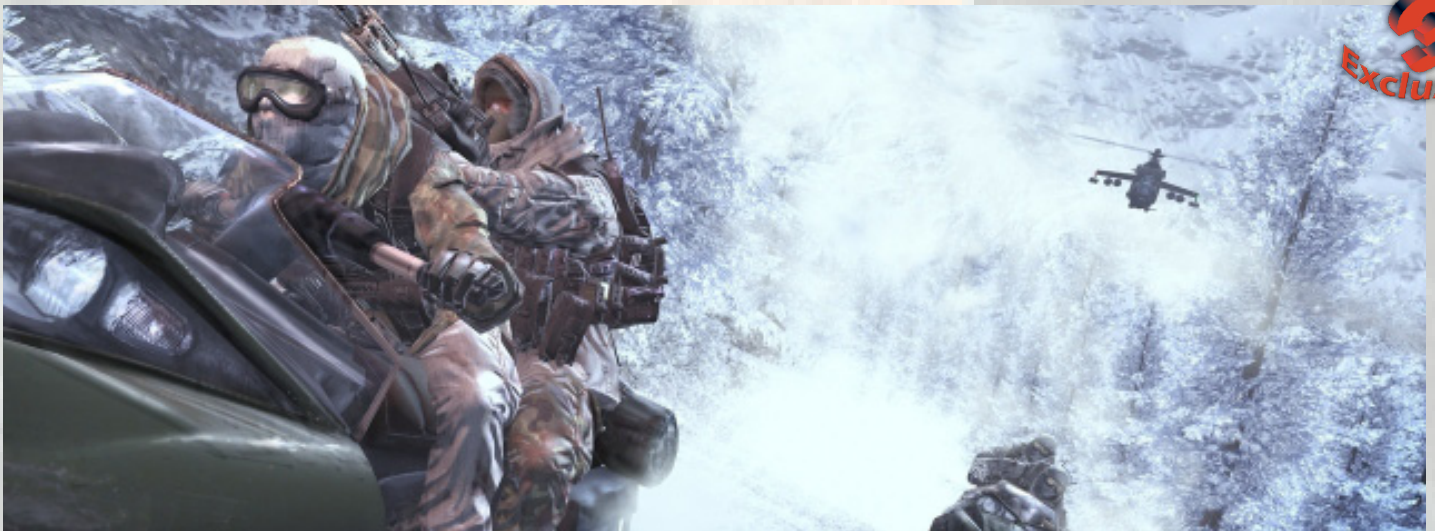
BORDERLANDS

In recent years developers have tried combining multiple genres with varying degrees of success. Gearbox Software's Borderlands is the latest to fuse two genres together in the form of an FPS/RPG hybrid and from what GameOn saw at E3, it works.

Borderlands is set on a distant planet located towards the edge of the galaxy known as Pandora. The planet attracted people to it when word spread about alien technology and resources, yet in the end neither materialised. Most people left the planet, leaving only a battered group of misfits to fight over what little there was. However, the main player characters of the game are all searching for the mysterious "Vault".

The Vault is a legendary mystery, a location somewhere on the planet which is said to house enormous amounts of wealth and technology. The ultimate aim of the game is to find the Vault and to work out how to open it. This quest forms the main series of missions however a plethora of other tasks are also available. Gearbox mentioned that there were around 160 missions at the moment and it is estimated to take around 40 hours to complete all of them.

The game itself is an interesting fusion of styles and genres. The visual look of the title has undergone a fairly radical change since the early screenshots were released and now has stylised and bright overtones. Silhouettes are very noticeable and most characters and objects have black outlines accentuating their profiles. It is a little hard to get used to at first, but by the end of the preview I was impressed and it is different from anything I've seen before.

The combination of role playing game and first person shooter is also surprising as there don't seem to be any concessions in either genre. The shooting seems fluid, developed and meaty whilst the RPG elements are obvious with a multitude of on-screen statistics and menus. To begin with it is a little intimidating having numbers and phrases popping up frequently but it soon all clicks into place and never looks cluttered.

Borderlands can be played in co-op with up to 4 people either online, split screen or via system link. There are four characters to choose from all of which have different roles in the party. Brick is the tank class, strong and powerful but slow with an emphasis on hand-to-hand combat. Mordecai is the sniper specialising in more long range attacks and augmenting the group's abilities. Roland is a more general soldier class with a mixture of damage and the ability to heal the party. Finally, there is Lilith who possesses some more sci-fi abilities such as "phasing" where she can temporarily turn invisible.

Combat is certainly a heavy part of the game and it is either against the hostile humans left on Pandora or a variety of aggressive indigenous species. There are raider parties left in traditional post-apocalyptic wasteland style with plenty of Mohawks and leather. The hostile wildlife is varied, ranging from aggressive and toothy lizards to "spider ant" enemies with frontal armour plating. Arguably the game's main feature is the large amount of randomisation. All enemies and guns are randomised to help keep things fresh and interesting. Enemies can vary in size, what weapons they carry and what effects those guns can have. For example you could find yourself facing a vicious lizard, called a Skag, which could potentially be on fire or

charged with electricity. Similarly you could also come face to face with a shotgun wielding midget or a gigantic towering meathead. The variation is intense and throughout the preview there were no two enemies the same. This randomisation extends into the weaponry and there are literally thousands upon thousands of different variations. In the demo guns ranged from an elementally charged sub-machine gun to a drum-fed shotgun: the numbers on offer were simply staggering. Weapons are also graded on a scale with the rarest weapons having a different colour making it immediately obvious if you get something valuable and unusual. Weapon trading will be possible in any of the co-op modes to allow you to maximise the effectiveness of a gun by giving it to the individual with the attributes best suited to it.

In true RPG style, experience is awarded upon quest completion and on killing enemies, allowing you to further develop your characters by selecting special skills from a special development tree. This means you can tailor the experience even more to your specific play style which is all the more useful when playing in a group.

The preview only scratched the surface of what is clearly an enormous game and there is far more that I could mention. Vehicles are available to traverse the 4 huge open game world environments which each have separate areas for further exploration in RPG dungeon-crawling tradition. Friendly-fire is very much a danger, but if you find yourself face to face with an annoying player you can challenge them and enter into a duel to settle the matter once and for all.

Borderlands will be available on PS3, Xbox 360 and PC towards the end of the year and its interesting combination of genres makes this one to watch.

Chris Wakefield.

MAFIA II

The original Mafia was something of a sleeper hit when it was released in 2002, providing an authentic and atmospheric period backdrop. Mafia II looks set to develop that format further with smoother driving, improved gunplay and a more detailed environment.

GameOn were shown a mission from the game which looks well on the way to completion. The plot of the game follows Vito, an Italian immigrant to the US forced to leave Europe in 1945. Driven out by the war he finds himself living in poverty in Empire City and is forced to turn to crime to find a way of becoming a made man. The story isn't new but is handled with a cinematic flair reminiscent of classic crime films. Immediately obvious is the attention to detail which has gone into the creation of Empire City, a fictional location which has been influenced by a selection of real life American cities. The

game spans a 10 year time period between 1945 and 1955 and the city is set to alter slightly as time progresses. In the gameplay we saw, it was early on in 1945 and set in a gloomy and snowy winter with the streets covered in a layer of ice. Vito was tasked with driving through the rough Sand Island area to an illegal distillery which had refused to pay protection money. Needless to say, Vito's employers weren't too happy and he's sent to sort out the trouble maker.

Leaving the Diner where he receives the mission he climbs into a nearby car and speeds off down the icy roads, which make driving difficult at high speeds. The developers commented that changes in season will have different effects and the changing environment will influence the gameplay. The setting is very authentic with everyone costumed in period dress and propaganda posters littering the roads.

After navigating the treacherous streets, Vito waits inside a nearby building with two Mafia wingmen. Here a cut-scene is shown demonstrating some good voice acting and furthering the back story of these new characters. Soon they are interrupted by the arrival of the owner and a shoot out breaks out. In true Mafia style, Vito shoots back and the game's third person gunplay is shown. The camera angle is tight behind him and a regenerating health system is used to recuperate in between gun fights. As Vito moves inside the distillery a cover system is shown which works nicely as he smoothly moves between walls and pillars, occasionally leaning

gameplay of its predecessor but with far more refinement. The aggressive nature of the police has been toned down and you won't be relentlessly chased forever for running a red light. The developers emphasised that at the beginning of the game you'll have to be far more law abiding and discreet. As the game progresses however, you gain a reputation and have police on the pay roll meaning they won't bat an eye lid when you flout traffic restrictions. However, an arm hanging out of the trunk of your car might be a different story...

out to take down some hired goons. The cover seems natural and blends in with the environment rather than being as obvious as some other third person titles. As Vito progresses he collects some new weaponry including a shotgun and a Tommy gun which makes short work of the enemies.

The gameplay feels traditional but the setting helps it to look different and the animations are superbly motion captured. Vito's two companions help him out without getting in the way and both of them move fluidly and convincingly around the environment, ducking under low walls and even drinking from bottles. Soon, things turn sour and the police join the battle, eventually leading to a chase away from the burning distillery with a wounded companion.

This showcases some of the game's fire effects and the real time destruction of the environment. The buildings walls have been damaged to reflect the gunfire from the earlier encounters and as the police shoot, bullet holes appear and masonry crumbles. As the trio flee in a car, the falling snow stays on the vehicle, a small but impressive touch. As our demo concludes, Mafia II looks like a classic story driven title. The title will feature the sandbox

With around 20 hours of story to play through as well as side missions, Mafia II will feature around 2 to 3 hours of cut-scenes which aim to involve the player with the immersive environment. The title is due for a release in early 2010 and will be ideal for players seeking for a classic organised crime fix. With versions available on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC this is making shaping up to be an offer that's going to be difficult to refuse.

Chris Wakefield.

GameOn have been lucky enough to see brand new footage of Take-Two's upcoming sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed games of recent years. Bioshock 2 is in development by 2K Marin and looks well on the way to completion. In the footage we saw there were some exciting new gameplay elements as well as glimpses of some of the locations that you'll be visiting.

Take-Two are understandably keeping much of the plot secret but the set-up is torturously enticing. The story takes place a decade after the events of the first game with Rapture having changed significantly. Instead of an outsider venturing into the depths of the underwater utopia gone bad, you play someone who was present from the very beginning: the original Big Daddy.

Instead of being the lumbering armoured behemoths of the first game, you are much faster, more agile and most importantly: very powerful. The prototype Big Daddy has access to vicious weapons including the Rivet Gun and the Drill. In the gameplay we saw, Splicers were shredded with flying bolts and rather nastily dispatched at the sharp end of the aforementioned borer. This Big Daddy means business and nothing will stand in the way of him and his Little Sister.

Thankfully, being a prototype, the Big Daddy can use Plasmids which have developed much further than those in Bioshock. Upgrading plasmids has much more of an impact and in the footage, Incinerate returns and its upgraded version now acts as a stream of napalm, igniting anything it touches. Other plasmids set to return are Winter Blast, Electro Bolt and the Cyclone Trap and it is now possible to combine them to increase their effectiveness. This means that the Cyclone Trap can be charged to burn people as they are flung up into the air, which is sadistically satisfying.

Rapture is still very much Rapture and ADAM is more important than ever. As a Big Daddy you can act as a Little Sister's bodyguard, escorting her around areas as she extracts the valuable substance from corpses. You'll have to protect her from Splicers and when she has collected enough make the decision to harvest her, or to set her free. However, your actions in Rapture will not go unnoticed and the footage GameOn were shown featured your nemesis, The Big Sister. Wearing a suit similar to the Big Daddies but made from other materials the Big Sister is an incredibly nimble and agile person who was once a Little Sister. Angry at the changes in Rapture she is now trying to return it to how it once was and this means that the two of you will inevitably clash. It seems that any Little Sisters you are protecting as the prototype Big Daddy will warn you if the Big Sister is approaching and give you a little time to prepare for the fight. This sounds like an interesting mechanic as you can be hunted through the levels. It seems there will be a mixture of new and

old areas, with the familiar having changed since they were last seen a decade before. One of the new areas seems to be Fontaine Futuristics, signs for which featured prominently in the content we watched. How the story will proceed isn't known at the moment, but let's hope it is a complex and twisting narrative similar to the original.

One of the biggest surprises of the demonstration was the announcement of multiplayer content for Bioshock 2. The multiplayer element acts as a prequel to the events of the original Bioshock and is being developed by Digital Extremes, who have a lot of experience in the field. The narrative behind this prequel is that the player

takes the role of a character employed by Sinclair Solutions to test out combat plasmids and tonics to help them in their war profiteering during the civil war raging before the events of the original. When you sign into Bioshock 2: Fall of Rapture you enter an apartment which acts as a hub in which you choose your plasmids, tonics and weapons. Once you are happy with your load out you then enter a Bathysphere and choose the map you want to fight on as well as the game mode.

There will be three different modes available including standard deathmatch, team deathmatch and an as yet undisclosed third game type. The map we saw played took place in the Kashmir Restaurant familiar to players of the original.

Plasmids form a key weapon weakening players whilst you work on them with conventional guns. The Electro Bolt plasmid followed by a few shots does a lot of damage, but Incinerate and Winter Blast also burn and slow opponents respectively. The weapons varied and characters start off with a pistol and shotgun but more can be acquired.

The environment plays a big part in Fall of Rapture as players can hack turrets to help them as well as vending machines to give them more EVE and ammunition. One of the most interesting elements is that during multiplayer it is possible to acquire a random pick up which will transform someone into a Big Daddy. These players have access to powerful weapons and armour and require a lot to take down, usually requiring turrets and several individuals attacking them.

Character customisation is also important and as you play more matches you level up giving you access to more plasmids, tonics and weapons. When GameOn asked Digital Extremes about balance issues they stressed the quality of the match making system and that it would be difficult to find yourself in a server with players far above your character's level.

Bioshock 2 is looking incredibly polished already with an innovative multiplayer mode utilizing the series' plasmids and tonics sitting alongside an atmospheric single player experience. With a release date of October 30th in Europe, Bioshock 2 will definitely be one of the hottest games of the year.

Chris Wakefield.

Packed into a small room resembling a Jedi temple, GameOn is here to see a preview of BioWare's upcoming Star Wars massively multiplayer online role-playing game, The Old Republic. The tension in the room is palpable with a hush descending as the presentation begins. What follows is gameplay that goes beyond the expectations of any current MMORPG title. It is clear that BioWare are here to make their mark on the genre.

A jaw-dropping cinematic trailer featuring an epic battle between Sith and Jedi sets the scene for the game. Events of the title take place 300 years after the Knights of the Old Republic series and over 3,000 years before the rise of Darth Vader. Choosing this setting is a great move as it taps into a largely unexplored area of the rich Star Wars fiction. This is a period when the galaxy is divided in two by the warring Sith Empire and the Old Republic and players

will be able to choose their allegiances. BioWare stressed that they were focusing hard on all the elements necessary to make a truly great MMORPG with particular emphasis on combat, exploration, progression and story. This last element is going to be as innovative as possible with huge amounts of time and effort going into crafting a meaningful and complex narrative for players. To help with this, every character in the game, including all non-playable characters has full voice acting on all dialogue, a first for any MMO. However dialogue means little without choice and BioWare are giving players the chance to make their own decisions in game. In order to develop their story players will be tasked with selecting the outcome of various events in missions and this won't be some arbitrary and meaningless action. A simple example of this system in action is the choice of different replies and topics in conversation, familiar from the developer's other games. In the gameplay we saw there was a pleasingly diverse selection from the sympathetic approach to the downright rude, which is encouraging to see.

As well as working on a deep and complex plot, BioWare are concentrating very hard on making the gameplay itself different from other MMORPG titles. In the demonstration two of the game's classes were shown, The Bounty Hunter and The Smuggler. The Bounty Hunter is designed to live up to everyone's morally ambiguous desire to enslave people and generally fly around with

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

a jet pack and wrist-mounted flamethrower. In the section we saw, the player character was looking to take part in "The Great Hunt" an event across the galaxy to find the greatest hunter who must prove himself in a series of tests. Upon receiving his goals he arrived at the planet Hutta (home of the Hutts) and battled with some enemies. The combat was dynamic and involved much more than most MMORPG's and wasn't just stacking up attack commands.

The Old Republic's visuals are impressive and BioWare used the term "stylised realism" which gives the game a distinctly Star Wars feel without resorting to overly cartoony graphics. The sound effects are also excellent with the classic Star Wars lasers feeling authentic and bringing back that sense of familiarity.

After the short Bounty Hunter preview draws to a close a brand new class is revealed. The Smuggler fulfils the role of everyone's favourite reckless reluctant hero, Han Solo. The class is more vulnerable and favours ranged weaponry which is demonstrated during a mission to Ord Mantell, a Separatist planet where smugglers provide guns for cash. Taking on a series of opponents the Smuggler takes cover behind objects before returning fire with a blaster. The cover system will be another first for an MMO and will be an important element in the game's combat. In the final gameplay demonstration, BioWare

showed a level called "Flashpoint" in which the Bounty Hunter and Sith character are faced with a battle on board a space ship. At the beginning of the level both characters are faced with a decision, whether they execute or spare the ship's captain who has disobeyed a direct order. This is one of the examples of choice that will play a key part in the experience and your actions will greatly effect how other characters behave towards you. With different actions come alternate rewards as well as potentially changing your character towards the dark side or away from it.

After the decision is made there is a frantic battle as the both characters fight their way to the hold working together to make short work of the enemy. In a few memorable instances the Sith character used force choke to lift enemies off the ground whilst the Bounty Hunter peppered them with blaster fire making short work of several Jedi Padawans. As they neared the end of the mission a Jedi Knight appeared proving a challenge and forcing the two to work together using both their skills to take him down using both blaster fire and impressive looking lightsaber combat. At times the Jedi would deflect blaster fire back at both characters but ultimately was defeated. In true MMORPG style the fallen character drops loot and in a final closing shot, the Sith now wields two lightsabers.

The Old Republic is being designed by a developer with an excellent track record and complete support from LucasArts. After seeing the gameplay and the enormous amount of effort being used to recreate the Star Wars universe this is a game with the potential to become one of the most successful MMORPG's of all time. If the story can deliver as much as it promises and the gameplay can be as enjoyable as it looks, this could well be the definitive Star Wars experience.

Chris Wakefield.

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

The Silent Hill series has been around for a decade, providing some of the scariest moments ever seen in gaming. When Silent Hill: Shattered Memories was first announced as a reimagining of the 1999 original, it was met with some trepidation from fans. After playing the opening section of the game at E3 I found it is noticeably different but retains a lot of the atmosphere.

With a premise straight from the original, you play as Harry Mason searching for his daughter in the town of Silent Hill after a car crash. However, despite sharing the same set-up the two games play entirely differently. As the opening section of the game loads it becomes clear that Shattered Memories is designed to be as psychological and unsettling as its predecessors.

Before the gameplay begins a warning appears on screen explaining that the game will psychologically evaluate your actions. Whilst this seemed like a bold claim, it was evident that different decisions would lead to alternative characters and even other locations appearing.

To begin with Harry was tasked with filling out a psychological profile with questions ranging from drinking habits to sexual role-play. This took place under the guise of a psychiatrist's appointment acting as a prologue to the game. At one stage the psychiatrist even queried an answer asking for truth which felt like the game was digging deeply.

Soon enough the fateful car crash occurs, leaving Harry stranded in the snowy town with his daughter missing. With only his PDA for company the gameplay starts and it is clear that this is a title designed for the Wii. The control system is innovative and natural and makes navigating the town simple. One of the nicest features is mapping the flashlight control to the Wii Remote so as you move the controller the flashlight moves about the screen. This is a very intuitive and simple design which works very well making exploration painless.

As Harry sets about exploring the deserted streets and buildings some of Akira Yamaoka's evocative and haunting soundtrack kicks in, creating that traditional Silent Hill atmosphere. Whilst there were only a handful of music tracks in the demo they were of a typically high standard and they really helped to focus the game, providing a chilling backdrop.

Graphically, Shattered Memories is also impressive and really seems to be getting the most out of the Wii. The snowy streets are different from anything the series has seen before and the cool palette is both oppressive and uninviting, just what a Silent Hill title needs. The falling snow and icy environments are well rendered and some of the new locations are cleverly used and centred on this theme.

Exploration and puzzling are still key features and there are some great examples using the Wii's

SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES

motion sensitivity. One example involved removing the bolt from a locked door by highlighting the bolt and sliding the remote in the same direction. Whilst this wasn't exactly ground breaking, it was a nice example and was different from the item searching and combination of previous games. Elsewhere the puzzles were a little more complex. In a dress shop it was necessary to search clothes for a key to a door which was pleasingly unusual.

Perhaps the best demonstration was using the remote to shake different cans in order to find a key by listening for the rattling. It was then necessary to tip the can upside down to get rid of the key, which is a subtle but clever application. Hopefully other puzzles will be as well designed as these early ones.

As the demo progressed further we reached a location and met one of the early characters, a policewoman in a local diner. However, when we witnessed a second play through, there was a completely different character and location: a barmaid and a tavern instead. These changes are all influenced by a variety of factors which is sure to help keep Shattered Memories unusual and unpredictable.

Soon enough though, in true Silent Hill style, the town took on its demonic alternative which instead of being rusty metal and blood was even more icy and frozen.

In real time the environments changed with icy columns emerging from the road and buildings being locked behind walls of snow. Here the game's PDA became important with its camera being able to detect images not visible to the naked eye. A photograph of a nearby child's swing revealed your daughter creepily sitting in it.

Not only does the environment change, but nightmarish enemies appear to hunt you. With combat removed entirely from Shattered Memories, this means you have no option but to run and hide leading to some excruciatingly tense chases as you desperately try to escape the creatures. In the demo I found myself hiding in a cupboard as a faceless monstrosity stood outside until it moved away and I could leave. As I explored the building further, I was soon cornered in a room and hid underneath a bed. Suddenly I found myself pulled out by my legs by one of the monsters and needed to frantically wave the controller to escape.

The lack of combat makes you feel seriously vulnerable and really raises the fear levels as at times you find your heart in your mouth as multiple enemies race after you. In one memorable section I was surrounded in a deserted swimming pool with the "things" approaching me from all angles. Thankfully, a mysterious item lay in the centre which turned out to be a flare. This drove them back giving me precious seconds to make a dash for the exit.

Silent Hill: Shattered Memories is surprising as it is clearly taking the series in a new direction. After some found Homecoming a little lacking, this fresh twist will be a reimagining that cleverly moves away from comparisons with the original and looks set to provide some scares a decade after the original first arrived. Available on the Wii, PS2 and PSP the title is set for release later this year.

Chris Wakefield.

The first term which springs to mind when faced with Brink, Splash Damage's recently announced title, is integration. The game combines different gameplay elements in new ways which leaves you wondering why on earth no one else has done this before. At E3, GameOn was treated to a preview of two early levels as well as talking to Splash Damage's Senior Game Designer, Edward Stern.

Brink is fundamentally a first-person shooter; however this is a serious over-simplification. Alongside the FPS element there are RPG and class-based systems which form core parts of the gameplay and this helps to set it apart from anything else. Yet the real innovation of the title is its unique approach to multiplayer, single player, online and offline components. In virtually every other game these are separate entities: Brink on the other hand combines them.

Not only is the gameplay refreshingly different, the visual design and setting is also very distinctive. The action takes place on The Ark, a floating eco-platform of multiple islands clustered around an enormous tower. Designed as a self-sufficient experiment it became a refuge for much of humanity as sea-levels rose and it became isolated. However, true to its dystopian vision of the future, conflict inevitably broke out forming two distinct factions: Security and the Resistance.

Visually the game is striking with an unusual art design that feels realistic but at the same time slightly more colourful. This is reflected in the characters and the environment both of which are at times almost cartoon-like while maintaining a gritty overview. The locations are also fresh, especially for a first-person shooter not taking place in your standard warehouses and sewers. In the footage the action took place in an eerily deserted airport terminal and in a dilapidated and fortified Resistance dockyard complex.

In the first demonstration of the game, Splash Damage showed their system of movement, nicknamed SMART (smooth movement around random terrain). This is more than a fancy acronym and in the footage it seemed intuitive and simple to use. As well as controlling like a standard FPS you can use SMART to help you navigate over objects in the environment. By hitting a button and moving as normal, the system automatically moves you over whatever is in your way. In the demonstration this included mantling over a rail, clambering onto a terminal and jumping over a drop. There is also a degree of control over your actions. By tilting the view down slightly you can choose to slide under an object and by raising it you can choose to climb over it.

Splash Damage emphasised that this system is far more than an auto-pilot which moves you around the environment. During the latter portion of the demonstration it seemed to be practical, allowing for characters to vault terrain, slide under gaps and clamber to higher ground all during the frantic bouts of gunplay. SMART looks like it will be important during the combat and will be something other than just an impressive way of getting from place to place.

After explaining their impressive new technology, Splash Damage jumped into a game mission. Players can choose to side with either Security forces or the Resistance and playing as either class will give you different choices as well as a distinct appearance. The campaigns for both sides are very diverse and will be far more than the same missions played from the other side. The campaigns will take place in new areas of The Ark and will feature objective-based class combat with 8 players per side. In a first of its type, the campaign can be played in either single player or multiplayer, online or offline with AI taking over wherever humans aren't playing.

This means that during campaign missions you can be facing 8 human opponents from your enemy faction with 7 human companions. This integration of both the story and the multiplayer hasn't been attempted before and the system already appears to be strong. Whatever mode you play in rewards you with experience points for kills and completing objectives which are carried over online or offline. Splash Damage were keen to emphasise their desire to get as many people online as possible. The offline modes act as a good starting point to get people used to the experience before taking them online for even more intense combat against real opponents with team mates to back them up.

The gameplay itself is team based with a series of objectives to complete which are dynamically generated in game. Whilst there is constantly a set objective for either team, such as to escort a bomb-defusal robot through the level as in our preview, there are also smaller micro-objectives. When you pause the game you can see these as well as the experience rewarded upon their completion.

Either team has access to four classes: the soldier, medic, operative and engineer, all class-based combat staples. At certain points in each level however, one of each class will be needed to progress and changing to certain classes will earn the players greater experience points. This kind of rewards system is designed to encourage people to work together as a team rather than by forcing them to. Dynamically generated objectives are also a mechanic for encouraging players to co-operate with everyone being rewarded for completing different actions.

Experience points can be spent on upgrading your character's skills, weapons and appearance which will act on a level-based system. A robust match-making mode will mean that players will find themselves in games with people of a similar level and will prevent people being outclassed by superior players. Brink is shaping up to be a seriously impressive title especially when supported by Splash Damage's excellent pedigree in the class-based online multiplayer titles (Enemy Territory: Quake Wars). The title is in development for the PS3, Xbox 360 and the PC and is due for release early in 2010. Personally, I can't wait.

Chris Wakefield.
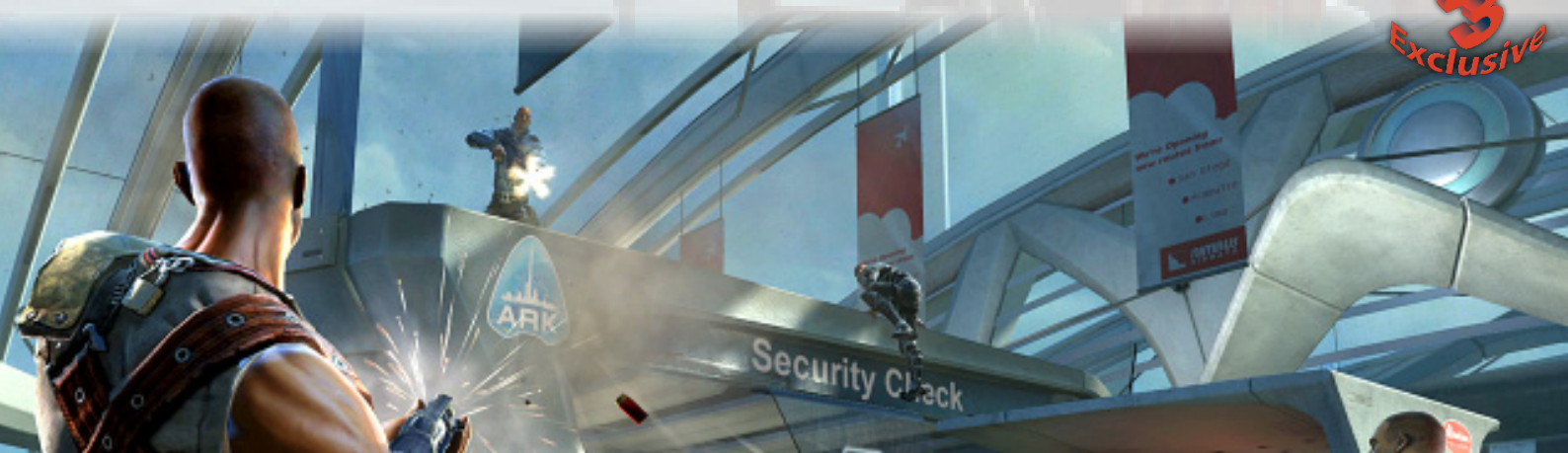
Last week we put it to you to create a witty caption for the image(s) below. We were very pleased by the amount of responses that we got but sadly, there can only be one winner. This months winner is:
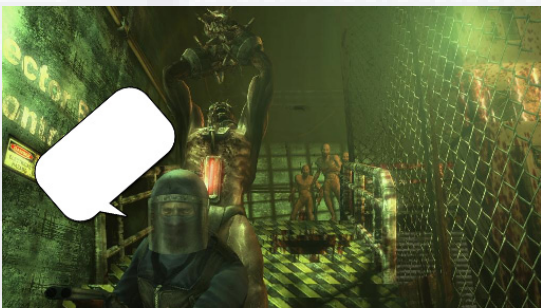**"ExcessNeo"**

Who the hell names these rooms anyway? I mean comeon Sector Base Control?

Carefully does it, once I get to the Sector Base Control room I'll be safe.

The original screenshots can be found here among past competitions. You can still show us these on the forum but they will not be counted into the competition.

CAPTION COMPETITION

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

This months caption competition is based on an upcoming game, Aliens vs. Predator.
To take part in this months competition simply click on the speech
bubble located next to this and edit the image in any editor!
Good Luck!

No editing tool? No problems!
Click the above link to our forums, where you can find free software to
use to have a bash at our caption competitions.

Top 20 Multi- Platform Games

1. Prototype
2. The Sims 3
3. Wii Fit
4. Ghostbusters: The Video Game
5. Call of Duty: World at War
6. Red Faction: Guerrilla
7. UFC 2009: Undisputed
8. EA Sports Active
9. Virtua Tennis 2009
10. Grand Slam Tennis
11. Professor Layton and The Curious Village
12. FIFA '09
13. Indiana Jones and The Staff of Kings
14. Mario Kart Wii
15. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
16. Pokémon Platinum
17. Guitar Hero: Metallica
18. Infamous
19. ARMA II
20. Resident Evil 5

Aliens Vs. Predators Wordsearch

```
N G S C N S S U V N F P S O
B A E A P C E A U Y L E S R
T Y F L U I N E S E C S S P
T C E P S O R P S A Y E R F
S K L V N G M A R I N E O Y
R A B E P I G S T T D A V R
N O I L L E B E R A A E I E
S L S R S B V Y T E E I V L
A C I F G O G O I E E O R E
G E V S E U R N E A S V U T
N I N E N S P I A T N R S S
L V I F B O L A L E E S E T
I N A T U Y S D N A L Y E W
E R Y V N S A I T G R R E M
```

This month's word search is based on the game

Aliens Vs. Predators

All words are related to the game.

Alien
Eggs
Invisible
Races
Sentry Gun

Atari
FPS
Marine
Rebellion
Survivors
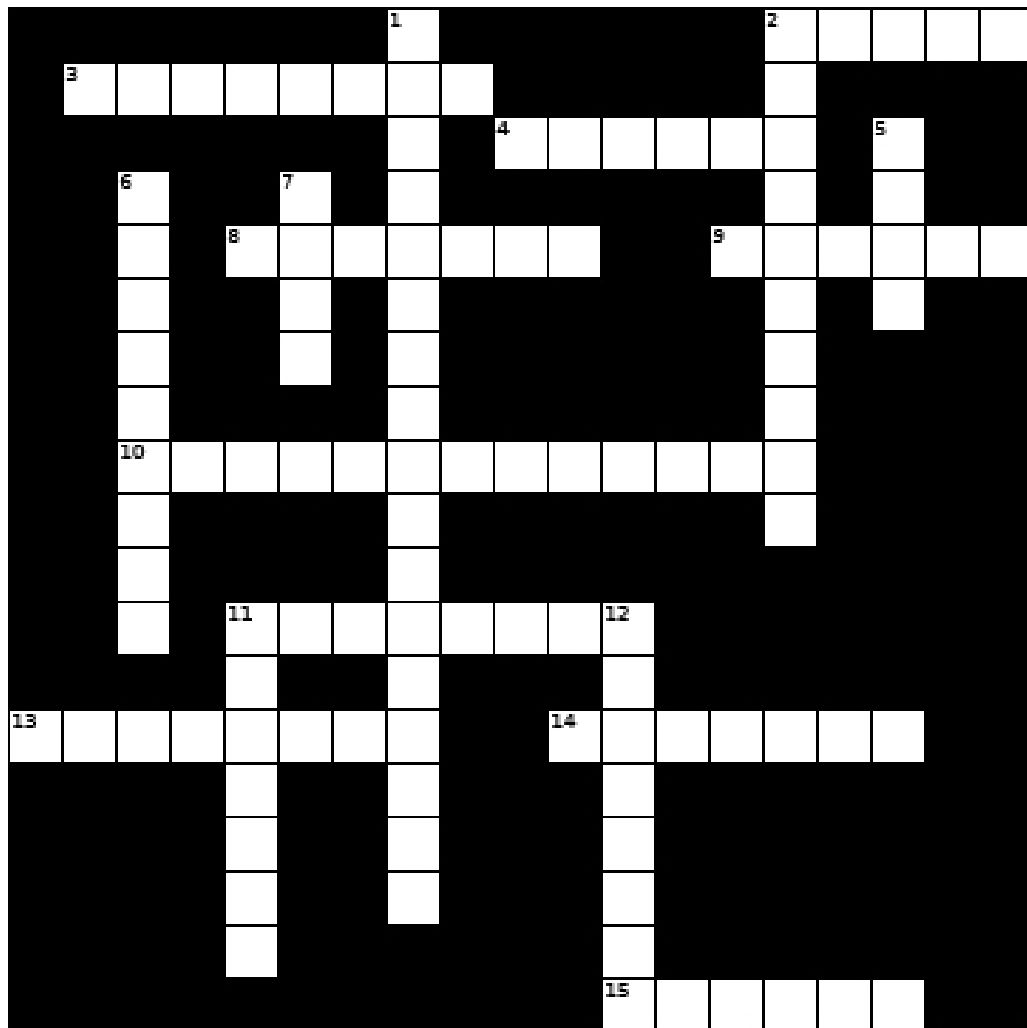
Cloak
Freyas Prospect
Predator
SEGA
Weylands Yutani

Printer friendly version can be downloaded here

Halo Wars Crossword

Across

2 Collective parasite organism
3 Used to in-power units
4 Senior Office in the UNSC Navy
8 The M12 Ground Unit, used by Human Forces
9 Units used by both teams
10 Warship commanded by Captain James Cutter
11 Building to create ground units
13 A religious hegemony of multiple alien species
14 Supersoldier units are called
15 Another name for Type-47 Ultra Heavy Assault Platform

Down

1 Name of the Genre of game
2 Translated name of the ancient enlightens
5 The Console that this game is on
6 Name of the Creators
7 Name of the Game
11 The Type-26 Ground Support Aircraft
12 Primary resource

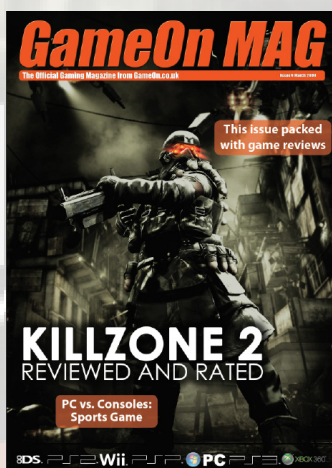Printer friendly version can be downloaded here

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SEE YOU NEXT MONTH