GameOn MAG

Issue 14 - GameOn.co.uk

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RAGE
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Brutal Legend
Guitar Hero 5

and more...



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Scribblenauts

Best get thinking of new ways to complete these puzzles

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WELCOME

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Issue 14, oh where has the time gone. It seems like only yesterday we had the launch of the first issue, the subsequent issues have just been a blur of reviews and previews.

This month brings us even more previews than ever before, all stemming from the GamesCom 2009 event.

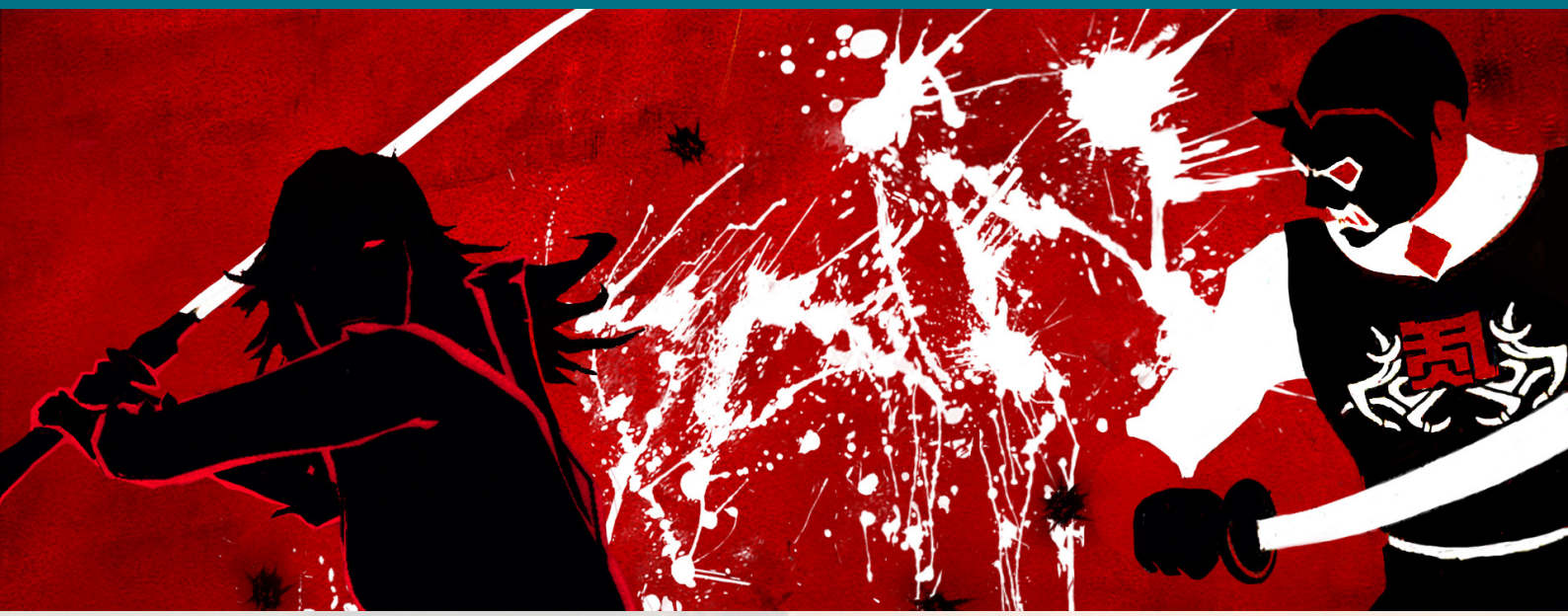
GameOn were there, covering every aspect the show had to throw at them, including some swag, currently being given away over on our website! Head over that way to grab yourself a chance to win some freebies!

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REVIEW

WET

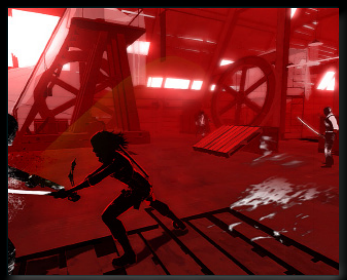


WET, the new third-person action title from Artificial Mind and Movement, is as subtle as stabbing someone in the crotch with a sword. Mixing twin-fisted shooting, limb-severing sword attacks and acrobatic platforming, the game can never be described as slow. However, some repetitive set pieces and frustrating sections mar what is an otherwise enjoyable action experience.

Clearly influenced by the exploitation genre of the 1970s, WET's grindhouse style sits well with its clear-cut shooting, stabbing and slashing. The visuals are striking with a faded colour palette and the blemishes associated with an old, battered film print. Continuing this theme the game features cheesy advertisements and intermission breaks at various points during the missions. At first, these raise a wry smile but do get a little bit tired towards the concluding chapters. With a mass of source material to draw from, WET takes every action cliché, character and environment and makes them even more elaborate. The story follows action heroine Rubi, your typical femme fatale who could kill you in one of several hundred ways as she goes about solving problems for clients. As expected, she gets double-crossed and then sets out killing (or maiming) everyone who gets in her way.

The plot is as complex and philosophical as most exploitation films get, choosing to squeeze in as many exotic locations filled with enemies as possible in its 8 hour runtime. At the core of the title is a kind of kill-heavy excessive violence that is difficult to compare to any other games. Taking elements from Max Payne, Devil May Cry and Total Overdose and

SCREENSHOTS



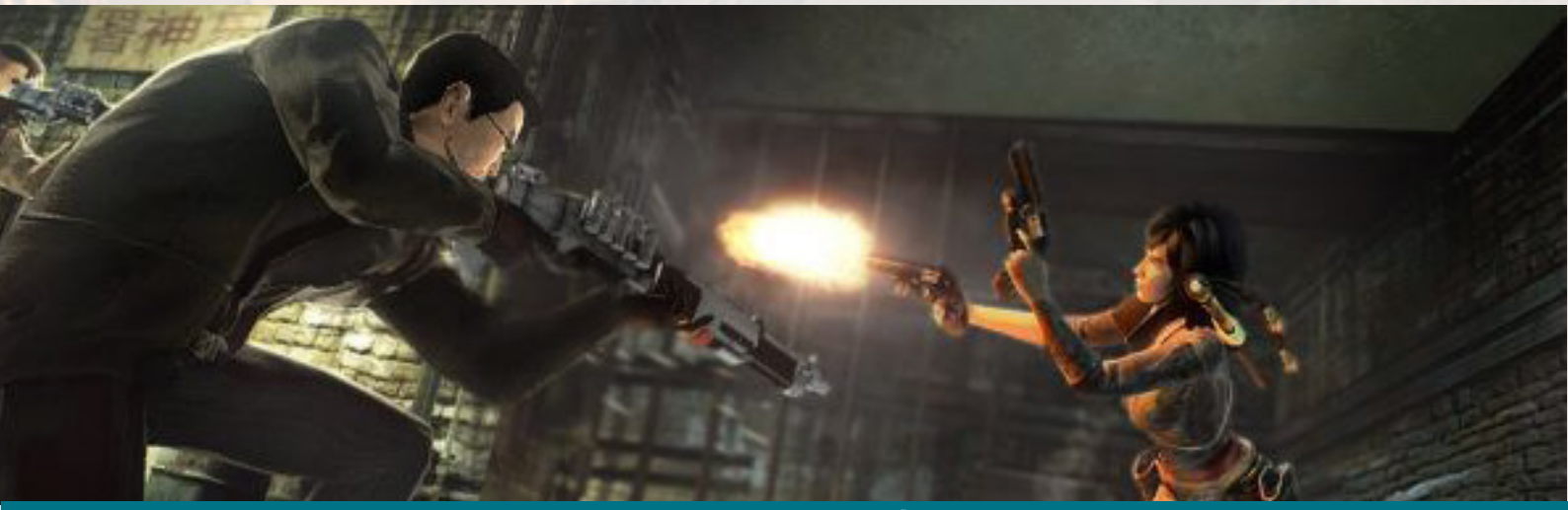
WET

mixing in acrobatics creates a very different style of slaughter. WET gives you a set of tools to deal death and encourages you to use them. Jumping into the air, sliding along the floor and running along walls all initiate slow-motion allowing you to dispatch enemies far more easily.

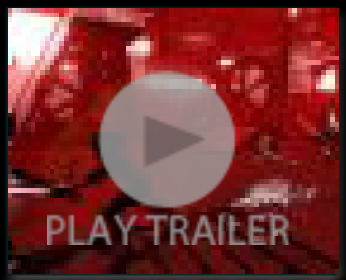
Wielding two of each weapon allows Rubi to fire on different targets, which is an essential skill in the latter portion of the game. One automatically aims at an enemy while the other can be manually aimed with the right stick, leaving the left stick free to move her through the air.

Killing enemies and finding pick-ups in the levels gains you style points which can be used to purchase upgrades. These can be new moves for Rubi such as slashing with the sword while sliding along the floor or improving the firepower and ammunition capacity of her weapons. The system is effective and as the game progresses you unlock more weapons, of which there are 4 different types. Despite the small number, each feels different and they all have moments where they excel. Aside from the default pistols, each weapon requires ammo collected in the levels, which means it is best to save them for special occasions.
The game takes place over 13 chapters which vary in length and make-up. WET's bread and butter action involves traversing levels filled with enemies, dispatching them as efficiently and flamboyantly as possible. Mixed in are frequent "arena" battles in an enclosed area where you are required to eliminate your opponents while sealing off the entrances they appear from.

These are where the title excels with cleverly constructed environments that allow you to maximise your lethal athleticism. You can work out your own "killing line" through the surroundings in a manner not dissimilar from skateboarding games. Running along walls, back-flipping off the scenery and finishing the battle off with a ludicrous somersault from a jungle gym makes gunning



TRAILERS









WET



down the baddies tactical and fun. In order to add variety these battles are interspersed with patchy and sometimes frustrating platforming sections. Using Rubi's athleticism to climb lift shafts, navigate minefields and traverse the outside of buildings looks impressive but it grows a little weary. The controls can frustrate and a restricted move set means many of these segments feel repetitive. Perhaps most vexing is the erratic camera which at times leaves you off screen as you try to work out where to go to next.

At various points Rubi also experiences "Rage" events where she develops a psychotic anger that transforms the screen blood red and her enemies into dark silhouettes. Here the emphasis is firmly on taking down as many people as possible and these moments are invariably good for some stress relief. Sadly, it could well be that you'll need some anger management thanks to some difficulty spikes which will likely mean you have to replay sections over and over. During one typically ludicrous set piece you are forced to dodge

objects hurtling towards you, and if one barely brushes you, it is straight back to the beginning. Thankfully, these moments aren't too frequent but seem like an arbitrary method to extend the game's somewhat brief length. WET's focus on cinematic and dynamic elements helps it to feel like an overblown Hollywood blockbuster, but this doesn't always extend into the gameplay.
During several portions of the game, quick-time events dictate most of the action which is impressive to watch, but not to play. There are several frenetic highway chases which essentially boil down to a little bit of shooting coupled with button pressing which turns a visually impressive level into something really rather dull to "control".

Perhaps most disappointingly, the final level of the game is done entirely in these button presses which manages to be hugely underwhelming after a great build-up. At this stage, you have finally mastered the techniques and then can't use them, which seems like an odd design decision to make. There are several other issues which nag, including some suspect enemy AI and tutorials which break up the pace and flow of the story.

Perhaps my biggest reservation with WET is its level of replayability. The single player story is a fairly decent length, with most levels lasting around 40 minutes on a hard difficulty, but with some taking only 10 minutes to complete. With six different difficulties there is certainly plenty of challenge, but whether people will want to play through again on these remains to be seen.

There are also hidden toy monkeys in each level to collect as well as some fiendishly hidden scorpions in Rubi's base to track down. The game doesn't seem to carry the lasting appeal of other single player titles but then again, this fits in with its source material.

I really like WET for its simplicity, you get exactly what you expect: unashamed over-the-top action and there is plenty of it. With some of the most overstated and explosive set pieces of recent years there is plenty to enjoy. Yet, if you are expecting complexity and replayability then you'll be left disappointed. Still, it is nice to know that for every pretentious and emotional protagonist, there is still someone more than happy to stab an enemy in the crotch. I respect that in a person.



REVIEWER: **CHRIS WAKEFIELD**
GAME: **WET**
PLATFORM: **XBOX 360**
DEVELOPER: **ARTIFICIAL MIND & MOVEMENT**
PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS**
RELEASED: **SEPTEMBER 18, 2009**

PLAYABILITY: **8**
REPLAYABILITY: **5**
SOUND: **8**
GRAPHICS: **8**

OVERALL: **7**



REVIEW

THE CONDUIT



The Conduit, developed by High Voltage Software, is being seen as a saving grace of sorts for the Wii - giving hardcore gamers a first person shooter worthy of praise. Call of Duty and Medal of Honour came up short with their Wii versions of the popular first person shooters, but is The Conduit worth the hype it's been receiving, or is it another piece of shovelware?

You play as the rather generically named Michael Ford; a new agent for shadowy government group, The Trust. Your first mission is to clean out a terrorist threat which quickly goes into sci-fi territory when aliens – known as The Drudge – appear and all Hell breaks loose. It's your job to stop the alien invasion now swarming over Washington DC.
The Drudge use portals, or Conduits, to get around to different areas of the city, however disappointingly you only ever seem to be sent to the dull, grey areas of the city. This is a theme you'll notice as you play through the single player campaign. Everything is pretty much standard FPS fare, there's nothing really new about any of it. You go to a location, you kill all the aliens then you go the next area. This wouldn't be so bad if there was a good story behind it, but it just turns into conspiracy theory 101 by end-game leaving you feeling disappointed at the lack of effort that has gone into the story – especially when considering the amount of effort that's gone into the games engine and controls.

The controls are one of the finer points of the game. Initially, they're just basic Wii FPS controls - i.e. the Wii-mote is used to aim and the nunchuck to move Ford around. But all the

SCREENSHOTS









THE CONDUIT



sensitivity and actions can be altered, with the game giving you a myriad of options – some of which you probably won't even understand – to change at your leisure. This is good as it lets you play the game exactly how you want to.

As mentioned, the engine the game runs on is impressive. However, the developers seem to have gone to all the trouble of making a great engine for The Wii and then forgot to add anything of interest to their game. All the corridors, streets, office buildings and sewers are the same as you'll have seen a dozen times already in this generation alone. The Alien weaponry is interesting though, with some of the more exotic weapons looking particularly nice.

The graphics alone are nice to look at, given the Wii's hardware limitations, but it would have been better if some more effort went into making them interesting to look at, instead of just nice, as you look at them during the 8-10 hour campaign. I have no doubt the engine will be used in the future on other Wii games, though I'm hoping it'll be put to better use than it is here.

Sound is about on par with graphics. You get your exotic sounding weaponry as well as the standard military issue weapons you're accustomed to.



TRAILERS









THE CONDUIT



The alien weaponry in particular stands out when you release a charged blast and you hear the echo of it coming from the Wii-mote's speaker. The games main hook is the All Seeing Eye.

In theory it's supposed to be a powerful tool you'll use to help you in your good fight against the bad guys, when in reality, it merely acts as a flashlight, being used for uncovering things and unlocking doors. It would have been interesting to have some more secrets only detectable by the ASE, but there were only a few, which were pretty obvious to find.

One of the games crowning achievements is the implementation of a good multiplayer online game. It's standard FPS game types, but it's good fun to play as you can imagine people frantically waving their arms about when the games get hectic.

The only problem is, the online system is good, but there were hardly any games during my time with it. When I got in a game, it was packed full, but if there were no games on at that time, there were literally no games. It's a shame there aren't more people playing it online as it's well designed and as mentioned, more importantly, it's fun.

Time will tell how popular the online component will be.

One of the main problems here, which isn't the fault of the game, is the Wii requires constant

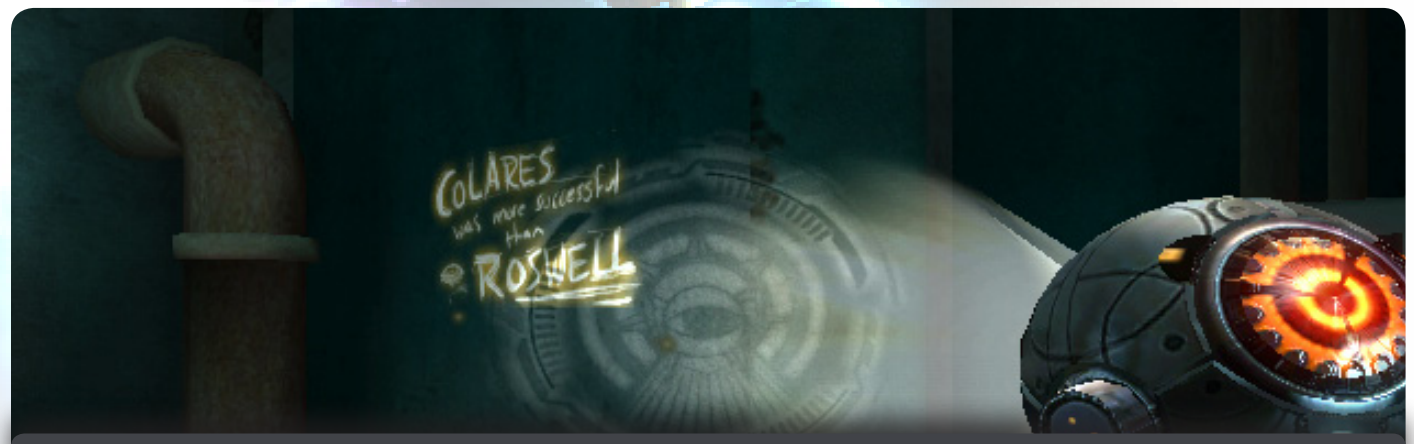
REVIEW

THE CONDUIT



movement from the player, be it waving your arms about like a mad man, or flicking the nunchuck forward to throw a grenade. This has a detrimental effect to the game directly, as I found myself playing for no more than two hours maximum at a time. There are a number of disappointments with The Conduit, but it does a few things right. I just can't bring myself to say the good outweighs the bad.

For a game that was hyped to get the more hardcore gaming crowd drawn to the Wii, it doesn't seem as though it's had too much of an effect. Cries the world over can still be heard by people misguidedly saying "The Wii is for casual players". While this may be in part true, there are plenty of games the more serious gamers can play on the Wii, this is one of them. However in relation to the effect it was supposed to have, the game is disappointing. By no means bad, it's just nothing new, and in a generation where most serious gamers own a PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 or a gaming PC, there's nothing here that will make people go to it as opposed to the crowd of other, better first person shooters available on other systems.



REVIEWER: **KEVIN MALONE**
GAME: **THE CONDUIT**
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO WII**
DEVELOPER: **HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
RELEASED: **JULY 10, 2009**

PLAYABILITY: **7**
REPLAYABILITY: **4**
SOUND: **6**
GRAPHICS: **7**

OVERALL: **7**



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM



There are few superheroes to have such an impact as Batman. Having spawned several iterations of comic books, films and games, it is obvious that we're never going to be fully satiated on Batman themed products. But is Eidos' latest Batman game, Arkham Asylum, all Dark Knight, or should it be committed?

With the varied and deep world of Batman, Eidos' had a pick of ideas and storylines to pursue. In this case, they chose to focus on the story of Arkham Asylum, the place where many of Gotham City's super-criminals are taken. At the start of the game, Joker has been recaptured by Batman who hurries him back to the asylum. He soon realises that all is not right, and continues on to make sure his arch nemesis is safely locked up. Which, of course, he is not.

Thanks to Joker's antics, Batman is stuck on Arkham Island, and must fight his way through many of the bad guys. The storyline is an enjoyable one, albeit not as epic as it initially begins with. Joker's promise of many of the super-villains coming to Arkham Island never truly comes to fruition, with encounters with only four of them. It would be nice to have a few more of Batman's greatest enemies showing their face throughout the game.

The game is semi-open world - once you finish the starting area, you are allowed to travel anywhere you like. However, there are a variety of obstacles that prevent the Bat from continuing on - thus

SCREENSHOTS

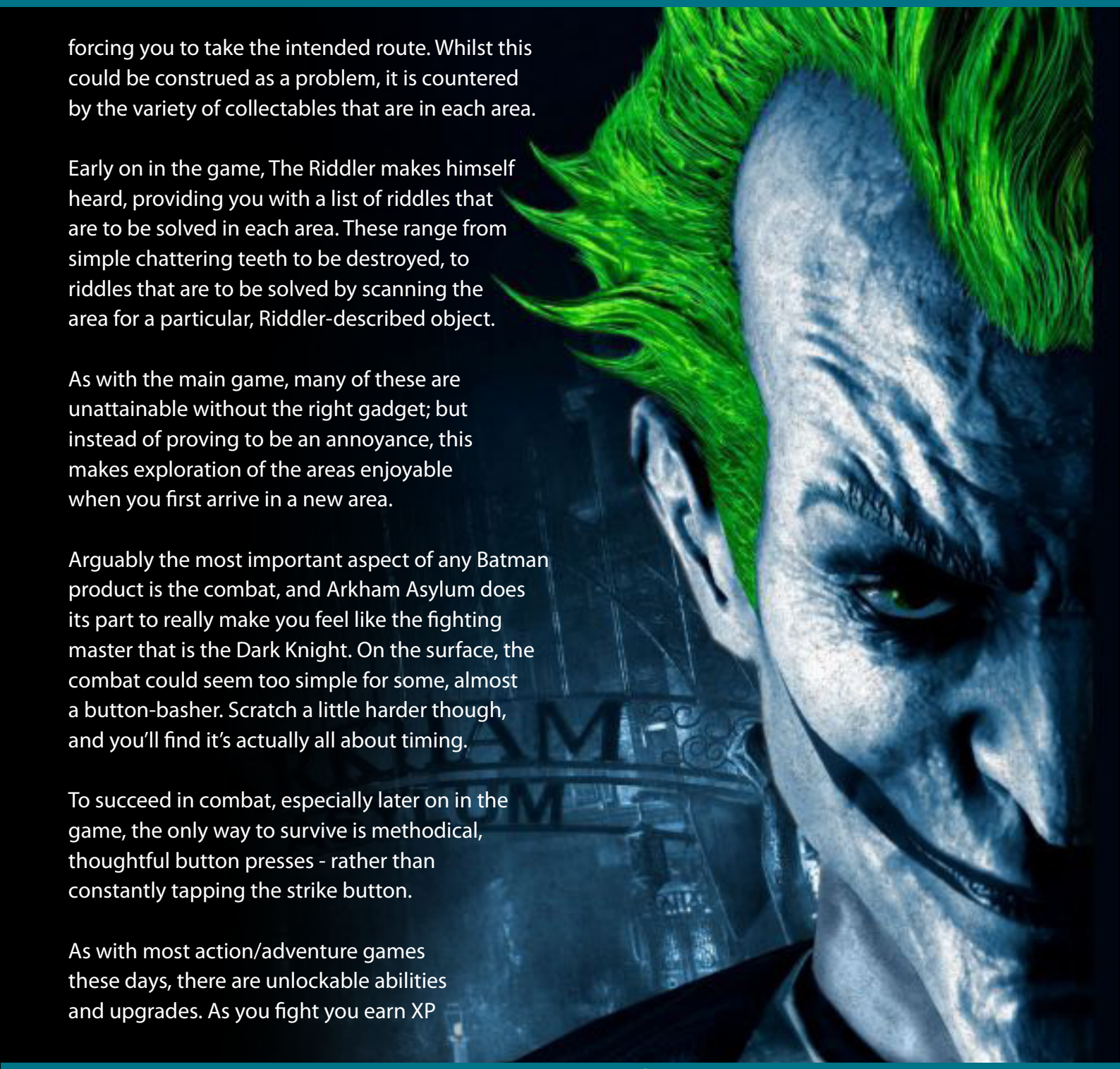








BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM



forcing you to take the intended route. Whilst this could be construed as a problem, it is countered by the variety of collectables that are in each area.

Early on in the game, The Riddler makes himself heard, providing you with a list of riddles that are to be solved in each area. These range from simple chattering teeth to be destroyed, to riddles that are to be solved by scanning the area for a particular, Riddler-described object.

As with the main game, many of these are unattainable without the right gadget; but instead of proving to be an annoyance, this makes exploration of the areas enjoyable when you first arrive in a new area.

Arguably the most important aspect of any Batman product is the combat, and Arkham Asylum does its part to really make you feel like the fighting master that is the Dark Knight. On the surface, the combat could seem too simple for some, almost a button-basher. Scratch a little harder though, and you'll find it's actually all about timing.

To succeed in combat, especially later on in the game, the only way to survive is methodical, thoughtful button presses - rather than constantly tapping the strike button.

As with most action/adventure games these days, there are unlockable abilities and upgrades. As you fight you earn XP

TRAILERS









BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

which, at predetermined intervals, will allow you to purchase an upgrade; from health upgrades, to increased gadget damage, to new combo moves. It's always nice to be given a choice over how you form your character, even if the options here are basic.

As the game continues, at major points you'll be given access to some of Batman's many gadgets. Naturally you start with the famous batarangs and grapple, but by the end you'll be making use of explosive gel, a batclaw, a variety of enhanced batarangs and a line-shot for traversing large holes in the ground. Making good use of these adds to the Batman feel of this game, with many of them being used on-the-fly in combos during a fight.

The graphics of this game are glorious; from the heavy rain of the opening cut-scene to the cluttered environments of the asylum, there isn't a moment in this game where the graphics don't hold up. The dark and moody setting is a perfect place to play out this story of the Batman, add this to some excellent voice-acting - done mostly by the animated series' cast - and it's hard not to become absorbed into the game's world. It's never been this fun to play as the Dark Knight.

The game itself, however, is rather short. It's possible to see the game through to completion within ten to twelve hours. Now, for a game of this type, this is above average, but so perfectly crafted is the flow of the game it's hard not to want the game to last much longer; especially considering the vast number of possible bad guys that could add just as much entertainment to the game. As I say, though, the storyline of the game is well paced and it's unfair to judge the game simply because it ends. However, while the storyline is well measured, the gameplay itself is far more stuttered. Each new room you enter provides a new challenge but, unfortunately, it is very specific in the way that it is solved. For example, you may enter one room filled with unarmed inmates which means the only solution is to take them out in combat.

Enter a room with armed inmates, however, and it is obvious that the only way to survive is to stealthily take them out one by one. Again, the gameplay is never unlikeable and it is just as well paced as the story, but it'd be nice to be given a little more free reign over Batman's abilities, rather than being ushered into a predetermined tactic.

And herein lies the beauty of the game; being given control of one of the most deadly and popular superheroes of all. Every aspect of the Dark Knight, the gliding, the combat, the stealth, the gadgets - everything that makes Batman the popular character that he is - has been perfected into what can only be the best Batman game to date.

Even once the game has ended there are the challenge rooms to attempt. These take two modes, Predator or Freeflow (Stealth or Combat in other words). To succeed in Predator Challenges, you are required to take out the armed inmates as stealthily as you can. Each level has three different challenges, which require you to take out your enemies in certain ways. Manage all three in one challenge and you'll receive three medals.

Freeflow Challenges are much simpler; you earn a score for taking out your enemies, with the difficult ramping up over four rounds. This is where the combat of the game truly shines. To get anywhere near achieving three medals in these modes you will need to be able to string together all of Batman's abilities, as well as making sure you're not hit by anyone,

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM



to achieve the highest bonus points. With a leaderboard and the inevitable one-upmanship from your friend's list, these will provide a lot of extra replay value once the game is over.

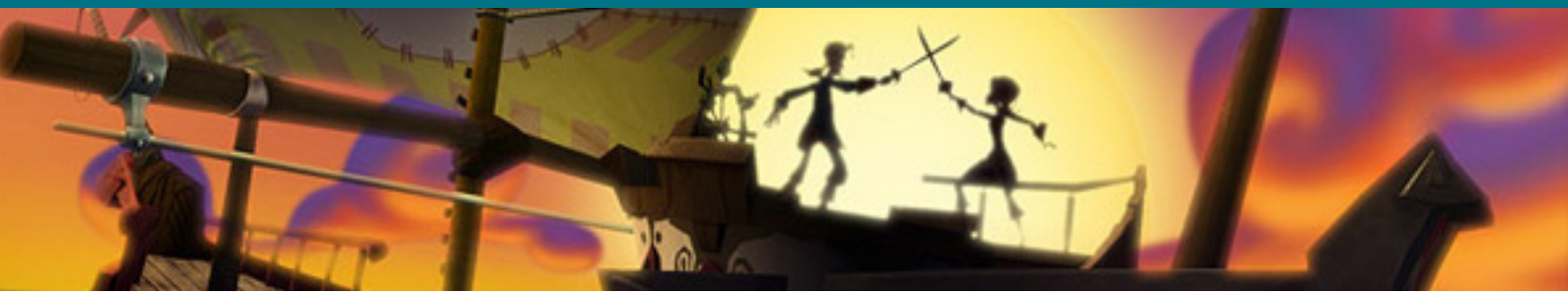
All in all, Batman: Arkham Asylum is a fantastic feat. It's not without its minor flaws, but everything about the Big Bad Bat has been perfected, and it is definitely a must-play for anyone, Batman fan or not. Now all there is left to do, is to wait for Eidos to bring this perfected Dark Knight to a sprawling open-world Gotham City.

REVIEWER: **ADAM BARNES**
GAME: **BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM**
PLATFORM: **XBOX 360**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS**
PUBLISHER: **WARNER, EIDOS**
RELEASED: **AUGUST 28, 2009**

PLAYABILITY: **8**
REPLAYABILITY: **6**
SOUND: **9**
GRAPHICS: **8**

OVERALL: **7.5**

TOMI: SIEGE OF SPINNER CAY



If you haven't noticed by now Monkey Island has come back with vengeance, whether it's the special edition or the tales of Monkey Island you have been playing - I'm sure, like me, you are welcoming the return of such a good game; which seem to have kick started the need for adventure games once more.

If you haven't already played the first part of this five part adventure game then I suggest that you grab yourself a copy or even the demo and settle into the game and if you're still unsure try reading our review of the first part right here. So grab your pirate hat and practice your ARRG!! as we settle in for this part of Tales of Monkey Island.

To start off with; because this is episodic series you will soon notice that this part won't take you long to complete. In fact it took me four hours to run through this part and probably even less if you look at the hints and walkthroughs that are on the internet if you do get stuck. In this new episode there are six new islands to explore as well as other areas which you can visit on the ocean at certain points throughout the game. The Flopsome Island from the first game is no longer available to go back to but there are cut-scenes that still showing that something maybe left to do on this island. The six new islands are great to walk around and there is plenty to do on most of them, with this episode there is now a lot of to and fro-ing between islands and many of the challenges require you to visit multiple islands even before you get close to solving the puzzle. If you were sick with jungles last time round I doubt you will be fond of the new one either. Instead of having certain areas that once you have found you can revisit, you have to manually go back to the same spot every time. This is time consuming and sometimes damn right annoying, there is a puzzle later on in the game where you will need to utilise your knowledge of the jungle but, hey, at least there is no map puzzles this time around!

The graphics again are brilliant and really does show how good these game look now with 3D backgrounds and the some of the backdrops within this game are wonderfully detailed - which you should just take a minute to look at before you continue on your questing.
The storyline does pick off where we last left your hero, Guybrush Threepwood, but to avoid spoilers

SCREENSHOTS






TOMI: SIEGE OF SPINNER CAY

I won't mention how the cliff hanger of the last episode is resolved or a lot of the main detail out of the story just to make sure you go and play it for yourselves. You may think this is a bit of a cop out as a review, but due to so many of the events and storyline twists that do happen in the game happen as a bit of a surprise I'd rather let you find out by yourself rather than give the game away. Elaine and LeChuck are back in this episode and the storyline continues from where we left them in the opening credits and, yes, we still have the nice and human LeChuck but your guess is as good as mine as to how long this will continue.

The story of the Pox of LeChuck carries on well and there are even more characters now that seem to be engulfed in this disease that is spreading its way around the Caribbean. Some of the characters involved are starting to appreciate the pox, enjoying the fierceness it invokes, while many other main characters are beginning to fall prey to the disease (I would tell you but I would have people sending me evil e-mails again!). Whilst we leave Guybrush heading for the cure of the Pox of LeChuck at the end of this chapter, I feel that there is going to be some definite twists and turns before this problem is resolved. While I still have a few issues with the game, like the reuse of character models throughout the game, which in a sense feels lazy and does affect the immersion of the game.

Also, the controls, which I know is in the current trend in adventure games, still feel as if they need some work as they do still feel clunky. I don't understand the point of having a point and click game that needs a keyboard to be navigated well.

My final point, though, has to be about the humour in this game. While the first game had me quietly chuckling to myself, I have to admit that on more that on occasion this episode had me laughing out loud. The jokes have always been there in the first episode, it is the little things in this episode that make it so much better.

For a second chapter this does exactly what it needs to do, expanding on the storyline and keeping us interested to wait for the third one. This episode more than successfully keeps us hooked and I really am looking forward to the next chapter - which will be out next month.



REVIEWER: **SIMON BONDS**
GAME: **SIEGE OF SPINNER CAY**
PLATFORM: **PC**
DEVELOPER: **TELLTALE GAME**
PUBLISHER: **STEAM**
RELEASED: **AUGUST 20, 2009**

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

OVERALL: **7.5**



COMIC CON - ONE ATTENDEE'S IMPRESSIONS

The Wednesday before this year's San Diego Comic Con, I'd stopped in my regular comic book shop to pick up the books of interest that week. I got to talking to the owner of the store, and he said that this was the first year in the past twenty that he wasn't going to be able to make it to the convention. He wasn't particularly disappointed, however - in his eyes, Comic Con isn't really about comics anymore.

It's hard to disagree with him. Comic Con has evolved into something resembling a pop culture supernova that has somehow been shoehorned into the San Diego Convention Center, a location that seems huge when you have to walk it and all too small when you're trying to make your way through the crowds. And the lines. Oh - the lines.

They've become worse over the scant three years I've been there. The big crowds tend to be for panels that aren't exactly comic book-related. True, the Iron Man 2 panel was in Hall H, the 6000 seat room. A comic book movie is perfectly relevant. Batman: Arkham Asylum, the video game that had perhaps the most buzz at the convention, also holds a lot of interest for comic fans. But Twilight? A bit less so. And that was the panel for which the line wrapped around itself, headed across the street, and disappeared beyond the bend.

The exhibit hall showed more evidence of the shift in focus. Sure, the comic book companies, particularly DC and Marvel, had booths that are as big as or bigger than any of the studios. But the dealers with boxes of back issues and discounted trade paperbacks for you to peruse?

Those were all on one end of the floor where the jam-packed mobs were quite a bit less jam-packed. The displays were far less eye-catching than the other end of the hall, where the video game companies had their big, vibrant booths. It was here that Stan Lee made a rare appearance for signings - at the Marvel Ultimate Alliance



COMIC CON - ONE ATTENDEE'S IMPRESSIONS



2 booth, not the Marvel Comics booth. But there were still plenty for comic book fans to enjoy. I personally attended parts of the Blackest Night panel for DC and the Dark Reign panel for Marvel, the two big company-wide events this year.

The animation panels for both companies were fairly eventful, particularly DC's, which had the incomparable Kevin Conroy as a guest. But I'm certainly more than just a comic geek.

The line I spent the most time in was for the Doctor Who panel with David Tennant. My roommates and I got up at 5AM for that one - it was well worth it for eleventh row seats.

I'm neither a long-term attendee nor a purist, but even I've seen a shift in the feel of the convention during my brief period of attendance. Each year is bigger and busier than the one before. I have several friends who've expressed disinterest in attending next year.

Have the crowds ruined Comic Con? Have video games and Hollywood ruined Comic Con? Has Twilight ruined Comic Con as one sign proclaimed? Or does the convention represent the progression of pop culture, the more mainstream acceptance of what was previously a fringe hobby? It's something to consider the next time you have to spend an hour or two in line for a panel.

PREVIEW

DJ HERO



We're all familiar with Activision's Guitar Hero franchise, that shining little gem where we emulate being rock stars using Fisher Price plastic instruments in our living rooms, blasting out the iconic rock tracks of yesteryear. So where now for Activision? What path do they now tread in the name of musical entertainment?

Well folks may I present to you DJ Hero, one of the latest offerings from the womb of the 'Hero' franchise shack. The game pits you as a budding DJ striving to achieve the accolade of your peers by delivering toally whack mixes into the ears of the hedonists that are your crowd.

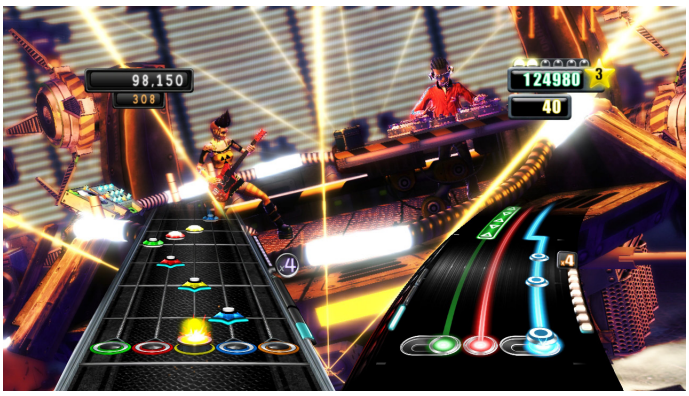
Naturally, as this is a brand new franchise, a brand new controller and play style had to be developed that could provide an experience that is entertaining yet relatively close to the work of club DJ's. For the music side of the game, around twelve DJ's created over 100 mixes specifically for this title, including mixes from the likes of Grandmaster Flash (who is your guide and mentor throughout the game), DJ AM, DJ Shadow, DJ Z-Trip and DJ Zip Zap RapFish. Okay - so I made that last one up, but you get the idea.

The gameplay itself surprised me; while I don't mind the whole club scene, I'm not a fan of its musical offerings, yet once I got my sweaty paws on the controller and gave the game a go I was filled with a sense of 'you know, this is rather good, I could get into this'. This is a good sign for the game; if it can entertain the likes of me, who is hardly a fan of the genre, then it bodes well for generating a large fan base of the game.

The control method of the game on first impression seemed to be easier than that of Guitar Hero, only three buttons to utilise rather than five on the highway, yet in practice there is a lot to concentrate on. On the deck you get a turntable control with your three buttons,

green for the left track, red for samples and blue for the right track. You also have a box to the left, which can be positioned on the right of the turntable for left handed users, which houses the cross fader, euphoria button and effects dial, this dial allows you to change what sample is played when you press the red button.

As the markers come round the highway - I say roundsincethe track has been designed to look round like your favourite Simon & Garfunkel LP - single markers indicate a single press of the corresponding button, if the marker is of any length then it will display in which direction you have to 'scratch' your record. On top of this your green lane will jump left and blue lane will



jump right, when you see this coming round on the highway you must flick your cross fader to that relevant direction then return it to centre when the line returns to its original position. So there is a lot to take on board and look out for.

As I mentioned above, you have a euphoria button on your controller, which is the equivalent to your star power from Guitar Hero. Once hit, you double your multiplier to rack up even more points - so it seems scoring is what you would expect from a 'Hero' game. However, the game does bring into play a unique feature which could prove crucial when pushing for the top spot in the online scoreboards, the ability to rewind the track by a certain margin. Now you cannot constantly rewind sections of tracks as you have to build up a meter via certain markers that have a coloured arch above them, which adds time to the meter if you successfully hit them. Once filled just simply spin the turntable 360 degrees to activate and the track rewinds. As I said, it could prove crucial in gaining points, nailing a particularly tricky section which offered a lot of points, then rewind and nail it again for more. Or on the flip side of this, if you just simply enjoyed a section of the track, rewind and do it again instead of having to wait to the end to retry the mix.

The fun and games does not end here, got a friend that prefers Guitar Hero? Then get him over with his Fisher Price instrument and go co-op, you can spin the mix while he plays guitar tracks in the tried and tested method he's used to as there are a number of specifically created mixes just for this very purpose. This is one of the multiplayer elements of the game, alongside this you can battle it out DJ vs. DJ, or go co-op DJ + DJ and DJ + Guitar, and all modes offer a great deal of entertainment for the users.

It is becoming a recurring theme here from my time at GamesCom, entering in an air of scepticism and leaving feeling refreshed, entertained and genuinely looking forward to the release of what I have seen. DJ Hero is no exception to this theme, with its unique twist on the musical colour matching game genre, I believe it will be the surprise hit of this years' Christmas sales. Look towards your favourite geek huts towards the end of October to pick this up.

Neil Hetherington.



SHATTERED HORIZON

The last time we covered Shattered Horizon, we were introduced to a game that has awesome potential to redesign how we think in FPS and multiplayer encounters.

The zero-g element of this title offers so much freedom of movement to the player you literally do have to think outside the box when trying to predict where your adversaries may be gathering. The past 12 months of progress on this title is visually noticeable and the Futuremark team were kind enough to allow me to get some hands-on time with this highly anticipated game.

Essentially what was shown at the Futuremark booth will feature in the beta client of the game, and for those successful applicants, you are in for one hell of a treat. To begin with don't assume that you will need some god-like super computer to run this just because you associate Futuremark with system-breaking benchmark software. The team have gone to great lengths to ensure that the lower end of today's gaming rigs will be able to enjoy it.

Visually the game has come on leaps and bounds since our previous visit last year and certainly looks even more atmospheric and awe inspiring than before. Each of the three maps displayed were all varied while in keeping with the cold harsh space theme.

While the sound of traversing the expanse of space may seem initially daunting, the way Futuremark have created the control system is intuitive and keeps your movement within the standard FPS control layout. This makes the title accessible for players and in no time at all you will find yourself flying around performing



SHATTERED HORIZON



complex manoeuvres to out-think the enemy. Even though your superman antics though space would make you a difficult moving target, you will have to keep in mind that your weapon accuracy will be greatly reduced, so a balance between sure footing and aerobatics is key to your kills.

There will be three game modes which feature within the beta, firstly we have Battle which is a capture and control style of gameplay. In Battle two teams compete to capture control points and dominate the map. Teams must defend their own control points while attacking the enemy's. Secondly we have a team deathmatch affair named Skirmish which is pretty self explanatory, finally an attack and defend scenario named Assault whichis a turn-based control point capture game. Teams take turns attacking and defending. Control points cannot be recaptured by the defending team once lost. The attacking team must capture all control points in order to win the round. All of the game modes will support a maximum of 32 players, 16 per side, and will offer some really intense firefights and interesting tactical decisions on how to accomplish the map objectives.

Entry level requirements were hinted at dual core CPU's with Nvidia 8800GT or equivalent graphics card, however Direct X 10 will be required for Shattered Horizon so those still on Windows XP would have to start looking at upgrading in the near future. As for the distribution side of the game, this will be digital download only with no physical retail copy available. With this being a multiplayer only title, it will be priced sensibly on the various content providers. So keep an eye on your favourite digital distribution website for this corking game appearing later on this year.

Neil Hetherington.

PREVIEW

VANCOUVER 2010

Sega and Eurocom are partnering up again for another Olympics based title, but fear not for they have listened to the criticism and feedback from Beijing 2008 and made Vancouver 2010 into something completely different.

As you may have guessed, this title will be based upon the Vancouver Winter Olympics which begins 12th February 2010, The game however should hopefully arrive just before this to whet your appetites for the competition.

Unlike Beijing, This iteration of the game will focus on the fast paced, exciting events including, bobsleigh, ski-jump and downhill skiing.

This cuts down the number of events in-game from 36 to a more manageable 14. This cull of events has enabled Sega and Eurocom to concentrate on projecting the player as close to the event as possible, meaning all the events are playable in a first person perspective and thankfully, no god awful controls that plagued some events in Beijing 2008.

First up for viewing was the Ski jump and in traditional Track & Field style it's button mashing ahoy to get you going. Everything looked pretty enough and accurately modelled after the real life ski jump ramp just like the one the competitors will use in Vancouver. What was a nice touch was the introduction of snow flakes hitting your visor as you hurtled at breakneck speeds before launching out to break records and/or all of your skeletal frame in the name of obtaining Olympic gold.

Once reach the bottom of the ramp, then its the usual method of pressing something to get your angle just right for take-off, then after a short animation of you flying through the air with the grace of Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards, you then have one final task of pressing a button to execute the perfect landing.

Aside the usual Olympic mode to strive for the gold medal, the team have also added a challenge mode into the game, but with a twist. There will be certain objectives within the event you pick to achieve to beat the challenge,



such as hit X amount of flags in a downhill ski consecutively, these will add a fun element to the game but where this type of game excels will of course be its multiplayer capabilities.

The chance to humiliate your peers in competition has been the main source of arguments between friends since the days of conkers in the school yards, the shouts of cheat when your friends discover that your conker is really an iron ball craftily painted to look like the fruit of Mother Nature... or perhaps that was just me?
Moving swiftly on. Yes, the multiplayer aspect of this title is where the game will shine, two player split screen and four player online, all at the same time in some events, is what Vancouver 2010 has on offer, additionally with the prospect of online leaderboards which are grouped by country, providing a basis to show off your skills worldwide is definitely something to savour, beating your peers is one thing but to beat people from foreign soil is a taste that is so much sweeter.

Having viewed the improvements the team has made since Beijing 2008, I can safely say that control frustration is a thing of a past and will not impede your enjoyment of this title, also the more streamlined event selection and emphasis on pick up and play all sums up to a gold medal for Sega and Eurocom in my book. Look towards your favourite retailer towards the end of January 2010 and pick up this little bundle of snow covered joy.

Neil Hetherington.



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Battlefield Bad Company 2 managed to really surprise me during my hands-on demonstration at GamesCom this week. Not only does the title look impressive but the gameplay itself feels new and updated thanks to an expanded role for the Frostbite engine which powers the game. Focusing on the multiplayer aspect, I was soon jumping straight into a 24 player match to enjoy the carnage.

Staying true to the Battlefield format of team-based first-person combat on a large scale, Bad Company 2 feels familiar but different. One of the most important aspects of the series has been the strength of the maps, with large scale environments that cater for both on-foot and vehicular warfare. On the level I played the map expanded over a huge distance making good team work essential for mounting effective offenses.

Using a modified version of the Frostbite engine the locations look stunning and especially crisp. The area was situated in a snowy landscape with several small settlements creating bloody choke points around the buildings. Within the environment there was a great deal of variation which had a direct impact on the combat. Fighting inside the villages was a brutal close-quarters affair



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2



whereas the more open planes were dominated by tanks and helicopters which is just the way it should be. At this early stage the map already felt well balanced with both teams having to fight incredibly hard for each kill and capture point.

There are four playable classes in the title which are broken down into Assault, Medic, Recon and Engineer and each has its individual role to play. Bad Company 2 allows you to develop your position in the team further by allowing you to customise your weapon load out and the weapons themselves. There are over 15,000 kit variations possible to allow each player to tailor their character to the play style that they prefer.

The game features over 40 weapons with a total of 200 different customisation possibilities. These can vary from the type of sight you want on your weapon to the type of ammunition for the grenade launcher. Battlefield 1943 players will also gain access to 3 exclusive weapons which they can vote for on the Battlefield website at the moment. Alongside firearms there are also 15 gadgets and accessories ranging from motion sensors to defibrillators. Players will also be able to choose from 13 different "specialisations" ranging from improving scopes to increasing clip capacity.

Ranks return from previous Battlefield titles which are earned through experience gained from killing enemies and completing objectives. Bad Company 2 features 50 ranks to rise through however there will also be several other awards to earn. There are 40 Pins to acquire which are gained by single-round efficiency with weapons and 228 Stars awarded for good performance with each weapon and item. Finally there are 40 Insignias which are designed to appeal towards long-term hardcore players who will select particular classes to focus on. An example was shown where a medic could earn an Insignia for resuscitating 1000 teammates which clearly isn't an easy task.

With 24 players on a server matches feel intense especially when taking part in the classic Conquest game mode. There will be 4 game modes in total with Rush returning from the original Bad

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2



Company and two currently unannounced squad-orientated modes. Conquest features the traditional ticket system from previous titles and is as exciting as ever with the strategic capture locations being typical pressure points where much of the fighting takes place.

However, the biggest and best change is the improved role of the Frostbite engine which has been upgraded to allow for a huge level of destructible scenery. At first I was sceptical about the level of impact that this would have on the gameplay but it adds a new dimension to the multiplayer. Taking the level of destructibility from Red Faction and placing it into an intense warzone means that you have to play the game in a different way. The "Destruction 2.0" from the engine is a lot more than pretty visual effects and can have lethal consequences.

Not long into the first round, a group of enemies had barricaded themselves into a building and were dug-in killing anyone who tried to enter whilst covering a capture point. Storming up to the building I used my assault rifle's attached grenade launcher to blow apart a side wall before shooting them in the back. Whilst I have experience scripted moments like this in games before it felt completely different to do it to a group of human players in a live multiplayer match. It is a little unsettling to have this much choice and realising you don't have to always use a door to enter a house is a special feeling.

Soon afterwards I found myself as a gunner in a Black Hawk helicopter strafing enemies across the map whilst below all hell was breaking loose.

A heavy firefight was taking place between two of our team in a building and a tank outside whilst we attempted to provide support. The building, which had been taking heavy fire, suddenly collapsed after a blast from the tanks cannon, killing our team inside. The level of destructibility is scary as there really is nowhere left to hide; developers DICE explained that they have been receiving complaints from campers who can no longer remain untouchable.

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2



Heavy machine guns can rip straight through concrete, missiles punch holes through walls and pistols leave tiny pockmarks in fences. Part of the fun lies in discovering what you can actually do and grabbing explosives and levelling half the scenery is unbelievably enjoyable. To discover that this actually directly impacts on the gameplay though is good news and it is possible that Bad Company 2 could well make a serious impression amongst online shooters. Squad based interaction will be very important but due to the nature of the demonstration I couldn't really test this out. The 15 vehicles in the game are promised to be very different and to have specific roles on the battlefield. I would have liked to experience more time with the different classes and their weapon load-outs but much of this is still to be finalised and tweaked which will be interesting to follow. Hopefully each multiplayer map will have the same opportunity for destruction as well as the tactical advantages that it brings.

With a release date of March 5th 2010 on PC, PS3 and Xbox 360, Bad Company 2 is looking impressive and is surprisingly now one of my most anticipated titles. With fine tuning and a selection of varied and balanced maps this could well become one of next years top FPS titles.

Chris Wakefield.

RAGE

Veteran game developers id Software first announced RAGE over two years ago as a post-apocalyptic fusion of first-person shooter and third-person vehicular combat. At GamesCom this week, GameOn were able to see how far the title has progressed and to get a flavour of several different sections of the game.

RAGE is set on Earth in the aftermath of a comet strike which transforms the planet into a combination of steampunk settlements and barren desert landscapes. As the demo began a vast desolate expanse of wilderness spread out underneath a pure blue sky. The bleached scenery looks very impressive with the id Tech 5 engine promising to bring new levels of detail.

Using a technique id is calling "Virtual Texturing" it is possible to create incredibly detailed and varied landscapes without having to worry about huge memory usage. Development across platforms has also benefitted from the system with the Playstation 3 and Xbox 360 systems looking almost as good as the PC. It should be noted that the PC version is intended to have additional graphical options for machines at the higher end of the market.

Splitting gameplay between first-person shooting and vehicle-based combat is an unusual decision from id, but it is good to see something ambitious from the studio. Not long into the demo the player snuck up to an enemy positioned across a canyon. Using one of RAGE's unusual weapons, a three-winged boomerang, the player stealthily took out the opponent. This seems a long way off the explosive excesses of both Doom and Quake and there is a more varied arsenal present to provide more diversity for the player.

Taking the form of a relatively open-world environment, with some guidance for players, you are tasked with completing missions across a variety of the distinct regional areas. One goal of the level design was to make the locales distinct to reflect the fact that most areas in the game are owned by factions. These include bandits, settlers and mutants as well as others yet to be revealed





which all go towards creating the game world. After taking out a few enemies, the player climbed into one of the game's many vehicles which looked similar to one of Motorstorm's dune buggies with added miniguns. Setting out into the desert it wasn't long before similar off-road vehicles began attacking initiating a frantic chase between the player and the bandit groups. Bringing to mind the vehicular combat of the old Twisted Metal series the action was exaggerated and seemed easy to control. Different vehicles are unlocked and earned as missions are completed with certain key quests required to gain access to the more powerful variants. Vehicles can be bought a range of different parts and weapons ranging from armour and suspension upgrades to boost capabilities and wheel scythes.

Arriving at the ramshackle town of Wellspring, one of the game world's many settlements, the player chose to explore, speaking to several of the residents. id commented that when arriving at a new location you'll be treated as an outsider until you help out the town in some way. Exploring and talking to the residents will provide you with more of the game's back-story and a chance to mingle with some strange folk. Each character has been designed to be memorable and to have a specific personality to make each encounter unusual and to fit in with the mixed world aesthetic of the title.

Meeting with Wellspring's sheriff brought up a mission to take out a series of bandits who had been attacking vehicles with remote control cars fitted with explosives. The sheriff also provides a schematic which can be used to build cars using various parts in a system almost identical to Fallout 3's custom weapons. Upon arrival at the location, the game's first-person combat was demonstrated. To start with the player uses a crossbow to silently take down several guards before a larger firefight began. Here a series of items were used to augment the battle including a sentry turret and a robotic spider drone which hunted down enemies.

Using the mixture of classic weaponry such as a meaty shotgun and an assault rifle in conjunction with the sentry gun and spider



drone created an interesting dynamic. Whilst the character was outnumbered by the enemy, the automated assistants helped to even the score and pick off several opponents. However, the computer AI was impressive with the bandits taking cover and even dashing out to kick over sentry guns. Proceeding further into the base allowed the use of the radio controlled bombs to take out numerous enemies as well as to solve a puzzle unlocking a new area to explore.

RAGE



RAGE's combat looked like a fusion between a classic id corridor shooter and the more diverse weapon and sandbox combat of Bioshock. The latter seems to have influenced the title with the inclusion of multiple ammunition types for weapons, including a similar electric bolt for the crossbow. id promised that the ammunition types would have a distinct impact on the gameplay and weren't going to be there for the sake of it. With 4 ammo types available for each of the game's weapons it should open up more variety to the gameplay.

Most settlements also have a race or series of races to compete in where you can earn cash prizes and new vehicles. One of the events, the "Southern Highway Combat Race" involves driving around a track whilst destroying your opposition. When the race begins no one has ammunition which must be picked up from power-ups hovering over the track. Not only must you contend with your fellow drivers but groups of bandits appear during the race to try and eliminate the competitors. Points are earned not only for placing in the top positions but for eliminating both bandits and fellow competitors.

Fusing first-person gunplay and vehicular combat doesn't appear to be the most natural combination and achieving an effective blend could prove difficult. If id can effectively blend the two without either genre's gameplay being compromised then RAGE will certainly be onto a winner. Striking that careful balance will prove tricky but could offer rewarding and unusual gameplay.

In the final chapter of the demo the player finds himself at the headquarters of "Mutant Bash TV" requiring the help of the sinister "Producer". In order to gain sponsorship to reach the next tier of vehicles he must take part in a fight against hordes of mutants.

Taking place over a series of sinister circus-like arenas against hordes of demented mutants this really showcased the frenetic first-person combat reminiscent of Doom. If Rage can continue to provide set-piece moments like this while building on the solid first-person and vehicle sections then there is going to be a lot to look forward to in 2010.

Chris Wakefield.

NECROVISION: LOST COMPANY

Now some of you may remember my review for Necrovision from the fine fellows of 1c and The Farm 51, well they have returned with a sequel/prequel for the game, putting you into the boots of the very enemy you sought to defeat in the original. Yep, you play from the perspective of a German soldier in this new offering from the barn doors of The Farm 51.

So what's new in the sequel/prequel? I hear you ask. Well read on and I shall divulge.

First, it was immediately apparent that they have improved the visuals of the game since the last outing, also they have added extra features such as an enhanced depth-of-field, soft shadows and new shaders with optimized renderer and data loading system. This means everything looks prettier and will load quicker than the original game.

The new game contains several unique levels, characters, weapons and gameplay elements, as well as a new main hero that tells the original game story from an opposing perspective. Players can now take on the role of one of the WWI German soldiers that discovers the evil forces unleashed by the war, and start to fight against them. Eventually they lead soldiers from all the nations gathered on the front through massive battles against zombies and demons. Finally players become the first Necromancer that will fight against Simon Bukner, the protagonist from the first Necrovision.

So as you have probably gathered that this game enters you into the Necrovision world before the events of the original game, as you fight through your war, the initial catalyst which created this nightmare scenario will unfold before your eyes as the back story is being played out, questions from the first game answered while new questions will remain unanswered until the next instalment of the Necrovision world.

So up first in the world of new gameplay elements was the introduction of a controllable tank, traversing the wastelands of war, launching rather large shells of death at your adversaries. Next up to view was aerial combat which looked rather



NECROVISION: LOST COMPANY



nice, albeit poorly piloted by the demonstrator. After a couple of failed attempts of strafing runs it was quickly moved onto the new multiplayer game mode, Gas Mask. And to top things off, for those who have played the original Necrovision will remember the huge dragon that you rode in a mission or two, well dragons are back in this encounter, just not rideable. Pack your asbestos underwear as you'll be shooting them down in a blaze of glory with your boomstick.



In this mode, there is one single solitary gas mask somewhere in the level, with the aim of capturing said mask to survive the clouds of gas slowly dispersing throughout the map. Essentially it's a mixture of King of the Hill and Last Man Standing game modes, grab the mask, keep it and survive to win. An interesting addition to the multiplayer arsenal of this game, which in my opinion seemed like an afterthought in the original Necrovision.

In conclusion it seems that the team has taken on board criticisms from the original game and have made sufficient changes to the core of the game in order to make this outing rather enjoyable indeed. It should be hitting your retailer shelves early 2010.

Neil Hetherington.



I wasn't too sure what to expect from Scribblenauts, a puzzle game that allows you to use whatever your mind is creative enough to think of to beat the level. What I experienced however, is something that is entertaining and unique to the waters of gaming.

So if you are unaware of this little gem on the DS then allow me to elaborate on the mechanics. You take control of Maxwell, a curious little fellow with a rather dashing cap, his objective is to obtain a star somewhere in the level. Now these could be very easily placed or out of reach behind a multitude of problems, yet the solutions to these is only limited to your own vocabulary. Let me give you an example.

A cat is stuck up on the roof of a building, the cat's owner is crying as she is unable to get the cat down, you come in with a great idea, type the idea into the keyboard or handwrite your suggestion and it manifests itself into the game world, where you can utilise the, well whatever you spawned to aid you in rescuing the cat. Well when this very scenario was presented in our demonstration, I naturally had to think of something obscure yet humourous to let the designer input into the game, sadly though all I could muster from my head at the time was a brick. Yes, a brick to be launched at that feline for being stupid enough to get stuck on a house.

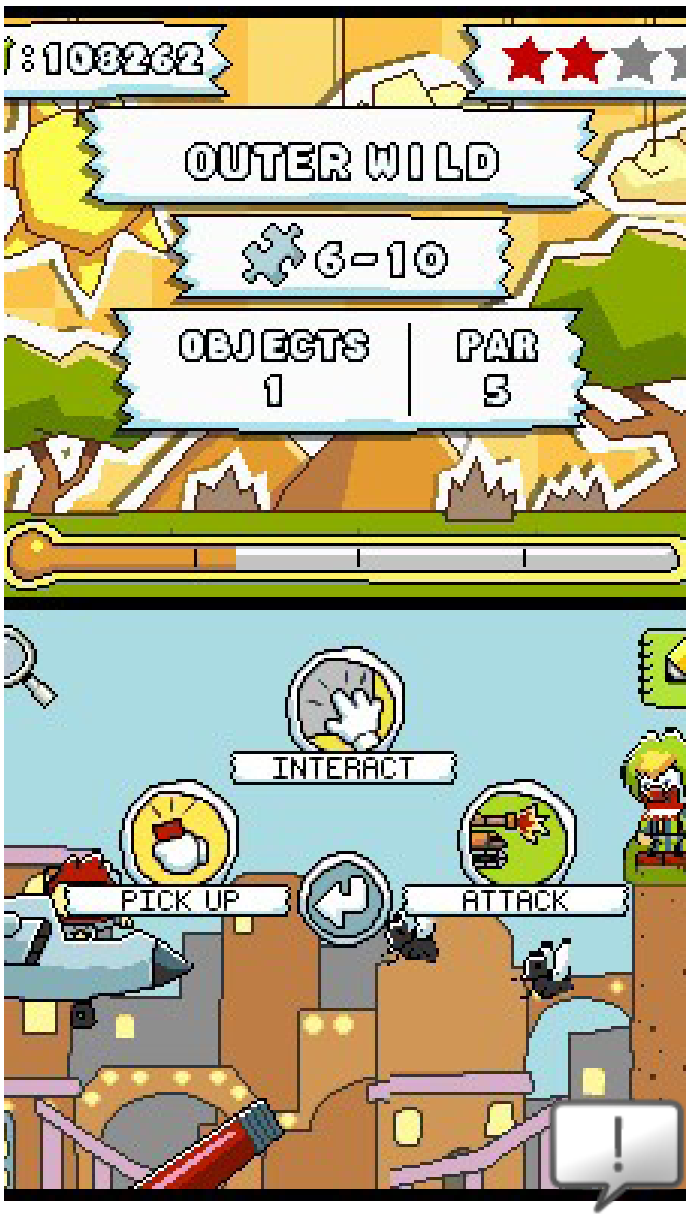
After some laughs at my suggestion, the brick was magically created and promptly hurled at the cat, unfortunately it wasn't enough to persuade puss to remove its furry ass from the slate tiles. So another suggestion of using a fishing rod with a



fish attached to its line could persuade the kitty to come down from it's perch, however when casting the rod it had unfortunately got caught in the head of the girl while the cat just jumped down for the fish, owner and pet are re-united and the star. Whilst containing a vast amount of nouns in the



database, it does have limitations. You cannot use copyrighted objects, for example you can't call upon Batman to slay a dragon for you, nor can you use actions against things, another example would be I suggested using an air strike to kill a dragon. However the system is clever enough to get a rough idea of what you ask for, if you misspell a word it will give you suggestions of what it thinks you are after, also if you use a word with different meanings you get the choice of which one you would like. Oh and for those with a mind like a gutter, no you cannot use those words either.



There are hundreds of levels already on offer in the game via the puzzle and story modes yet if this does not satisfy your needs for scribbling, then the game will come with its own level designer so you may create your own fiendish levels. If this does not quench your thirst then you may share your levels with other Scribblenauter's via the DS's WIFI capability, giving you access to potentially thousands upon thousands of user created levels to pit against your witty vocabulary. So be sure to pick this one up when it hits our shores sometime in October as not only will you have fun with it, I'm sure it will be a hit with the kids too.

Neil Hetherington.

gamescom

PREVIEW

MARIO & SONIC: OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES



The second Mario & Sonic game follows the same approach as the original: a sports game revolving around the use of different control methods to participate in various events at the Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver 2010. This Mario & Sonic title boasts all the official arenas, locations and events of the 2010 Winter Games, but warmly forgoes all other realism with a showcase of the Mario and Sonic characters and visual chic.

All of the characters from the first Mario & Sonic game return, but with the addition of Donkey Kong and Metal Sonic, and officially announced at GamesCom, Little Bowser and Silver the Hedgehog. The biggest new gameplay addition to Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games is the optional support of the Wii Balance Board, which happily opens up new potential methods of playing. The player can also use their Mii's in the game and there will be a new Festival Mode, whereby the entire Olympic Games is played from start to finish.

Demonstrated to us first was the downhill Skeleton event. Here the Wii Balance Board was used to show how balance and weight can be used to move the Skeleton board from left and right, with the aim being to match up the perfect and thus fastest line down the track.

It was also shown how the Balance Board can be used in whatever way the player desires. In this case the presenter first sat on the board, and then lied down in a more realistic position. This control method looked well implemented and provides a unique level of realism to the experience despite the graphical style.

The Wii Balance Board was then used in the Half-Pipe event, where the player directs their weight to generate air and then pull-off tricks. This looked a little difficult to get the hang of and performing tricks looked like a dance mat game, however again this seemed to give the player a greater level of interactivity which is going to be fun to try in a party scenario.

This being a Mario & Sonic title means there are the usual distinct cartoony graphics style and different gameplay elements. For starters, the various characters have different qualities like in Mario Kart, so essentially Donkey Kong is big and strong but lacks speed. There are also a number of additional Dream Events, which are normal Olympic sports, such as Skiing or Snowboard races, but with an extra layer of special Mario and Sonic bonuses thrown into the mix. For example, there are box power-ups which can be used in the same way as Mario Kart, whilst picking up

MARIO & SONIC: OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES



Sonic rings will give the player access to a special ability, for example a speed boost for Sonic.

A 4 vs 4 snowball fight was the last event shown to us, after which I played a game of Mario & Sonic hockey. While both showed how well the Wii motion sensor controller was adapted to all shapes and forms of events, there seemed to be less in-depth gameplay to keep the player hooked and more focus on quantity. The snowball fight mainly involved making a throwing motion with the Wii remote for one minute to score points, while the hockey match I played involved only simple gameplay mechanics. At least the two Dream Events I played, Skiing and Snowboarding, showed more promise of being a fun interactive gameplay experience, but learning the different controls for each event could lead to problems.

While there is still some fine tuning and optimising to do, it is pretty clear that the Mario & Sonic formula will once again succeed in being a massive commercial success. Whether or not the game will address the shallow gameplay criticisms of the original remains to be seen, but it appeared that the controls will be interactive and unique while remaining fairly easy to grasp. The multiplayer and party element of the game will once again be where most fun is to be had, but I still generally had a good laugh whilst playing solo. Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games will also be making an appearance on the Nintendo DS, though it will instead focus on an Adventure Tour mode which adds a single player RPG element to the game. Both versions are to be released on October 16th 2009.

Pete O'Brien.



MAFIA II

The main story follows Vito, lead protagonist of Mafia II, in his rise from street punk to mafia affiliate in the fictional city of Empire Bay during the years of the 1940's and 50's.

This demo at GamesCom was set during the 1950's when Vito is firmly established as a Mafioso. The scene opens with Vito in an apartment with another gangster, Joe, along with a couple of prostitutes for good company. It's not long before the phone rings and Vito is summoned into action by a fellow named Giuseppe, who asks Vito to pick up some illicit papers. The day starts, naturally, by getting dressed, so here we were shown how Vito can visit the wardrobe and the player pick an attire of their choosing.

As the presenter walks Vito down the stairwell and out of the apartment, we begin to see and feel the immersive level of detail and atmosphere. These indoor locations are incredibly comprehensive and authentic, with lots going on around you - in this case other people were going about their daily business, causing a racket in the process. We then seamlessly moved outside and headed towards Vito's garage to choose a car, of which there are fifty real-life inspired models. As Vito drives out of the garage we see one of the prostitutes from earlier getting a hard time from an unreasonable lad. This situation could be ignored by the player, but as this is the perfect opportunity to show the hand-to-hand combat, Vito gets out of the car.

Melee combat involves a simple system of light attack, heavy attack and evade. This street fight looked gritty and brutal, but it showed a promising system which is hopefully more than just button bashing. After successfully winning the fight, and receiving a warm invite from the hooker, we continued on with our journey. Driving around I was flattered by the immersion Empire Bay hits you with. It still very much attains the general feel of the original Mafia, but its looks so much more slick, detailed and varied. The sun began to sink behind the buildings, but it was explained how instead of a opting for a realistic day and night cycle, the developers want to fix the mood and setting in missions to attain optimal atmosphere.



MAFIA II



Once we make it to Giuseppe's place we run into a chap called Steve, who offers Vito a cash reward should we choose to help him by trashing cars belonging to a rival dealer, whilst avoiding killing anybody of course. This is an example of how the optional side missions are neatly entwined into the players exploration, which can provide extra enjoyment should the player want it, which they almost certainly will. We accepted this mission offer and proceeded on to talk to Giuseppe, who gave us the papers, a pistol, Molotov cocktails and a lock pick.

Upon exiting the building we were confronted by some muggers, who were soon fleeing the scene once we brandished our gun. Unfortunately this move got the attention of a passing police officer. This situation presents the player with three options: show a gun license (if one is available), attempt to bribe the cop or just run off. The presenter of the demo decided to leg it, which immediately saw us sprinting down an alleyway. A mug-shot of Vito appeared in the top right of the screen which indicates how Vito is now wanted by the police. As we run we jump a fence and hide behind some boxes, with the cops typically running past unknowingly. Luckily for us a clothes shop happened to be nearby, which allows Vito to lose his wanted status.

Pursuit over and we needed another vehicle, as we found ourselves pretty far away from our original set of wheels. Finding a car parked on the street the player is presented with two options: choose to lock pick the door which takes longer but draws less attention, or smash the window for a quicker but noisier approach. Not being in a much of a hurry we chose the former option, and soon we were driving back on our way. On route one of the 100 licensed period music tracks was playing in background, which showed the new radio stations similar to those in Grand Theft Auto.

Before long we arrived at our destination, but it was soon apparent that the car garage was protected by a couple of guards. The method of approach on missions is up to the player, but a silent one was chosen here to maximise the time before the police would inevitably arrive. A cover system was used to sneak around unnoticed, and an opportune moment arose to take out a guard while he was relieving himself. With just one guard left, we engaged into some more brutal combat, with victory once again Vito's.



Left alone with the sporty motors, the demonstrator got Vito to throw one of the Molotov cocktails towards one of the cars. This motor caught fire and soon exploded, taking a gas tank and the other cars with it. This caused a cascade of explosions and beautifully showed off the destructible indoor environments, with objects obliterated and blown around the room with the roof also collapsing.

This commotion soon attracted the attention of the police force, which shortly arrived and gave chase to Vito in his car. The car wanted system is similar to the personal wanted system, but to loose these cops we were going to need a body shop garage to change the number plate and a different colour sprayed onto the car. In these shops you can also buy upgrades to the car, such as a supercharger to boost the power output. With the cops now lost we could drive to a phone booth to deliver the good news. Sadly, that was the demonstration over.

This was obviously a set-up demo to neatly showcase all these new features in one go, but it is still an exciting prospect to think about encountering all these kind of events during the game. There will be a lot of scripted moments in Mafia II, but even in this staged demo things didn't go to plan.

Whilst being chased by the police, the car Vito was driving flipped onto its roof whilst turning on a curb, which meant that the art of improvising was needed to find another car. This is after-all an open world, so the player can go around and

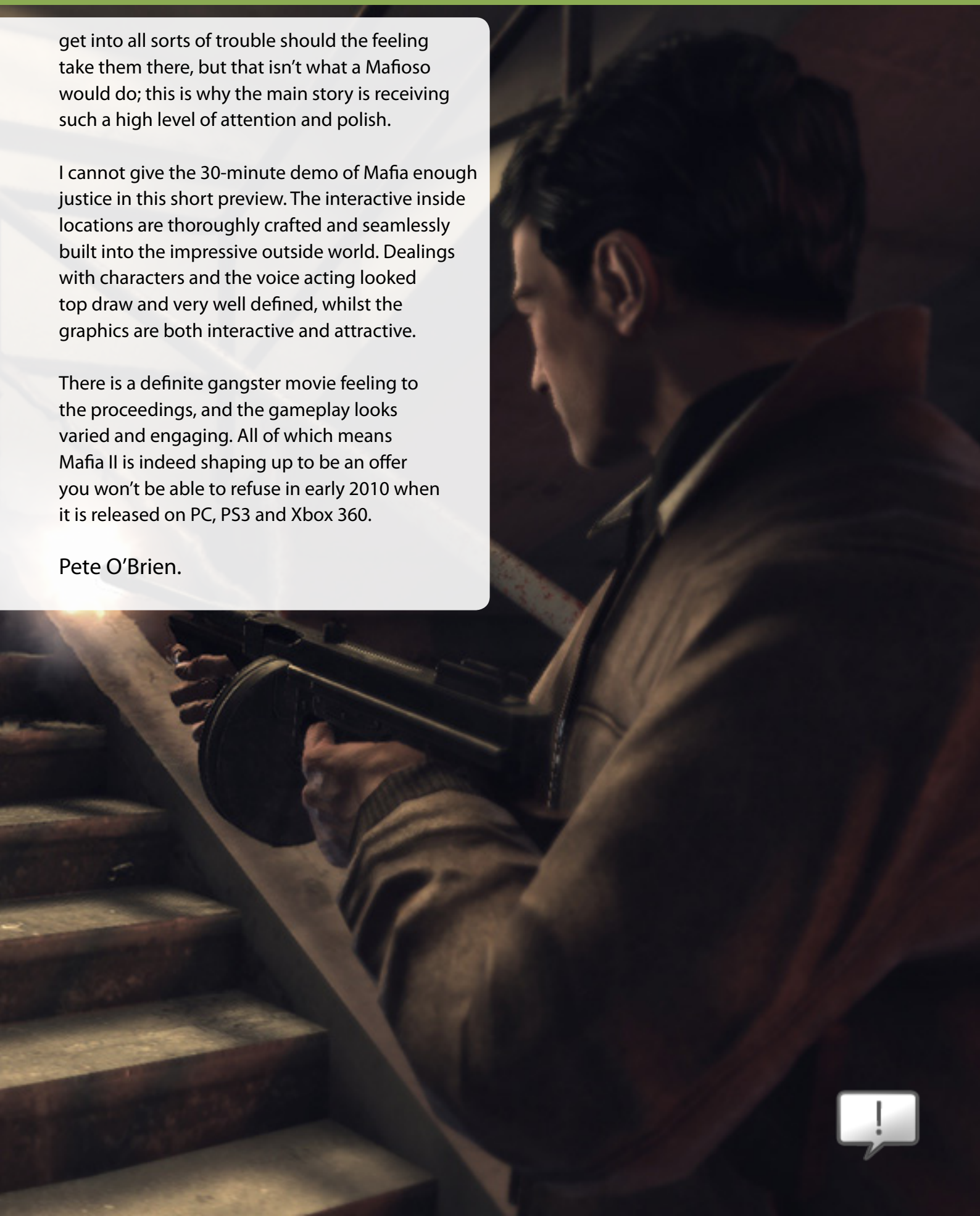


get into all sorts of trouble should the feeling take them there, but that isn't what a Mafioso would do; this is why the main story is receiving such a high level of attention and polish.

I cannot give the 30-minute demo of Mafia enough justice in this short preview. The interactive inside locations are thoroughly crafted and seamlessly built into the impressive outside world. Dealings with characters and the voice acting looked top draw and very well defined, whilst the graphics are both interactive and attractive.

There is a definite gangster movie feeling to the proceedings, and the gameplay looks varied and engaging. All of which means Mafia II is indeed shaping up to be an offer you won't be able to refuse in early 2010 when it is released on PC, PS3 and Xbox 360.

Pete O'Brien.



FIFA MANAGER 10

Developed by Bright Future and published by EA Sports, FIFA Manager 10 is football club management game which is easy on the eye, feels accessible and contains significant depth.

The grumbles the community have made about certain aspects of the previous games have been listened to and addressed, and quite simply, it really is a promising sign when developers do that. Even the representative I had from Bright Future for the demonstration was clearly passionate and highly enthusiastic about what they were trying to achieve in FIFA Manager 10. With these positive foundations in place, what can you expect in this latest yearly update?

To begin with, the menus in FIFA Manager 10 are looking very smooth and concise, with subtle fading effects and decent background music too. One quirky new addition to this interface is the customisable manager's desk, where mini-menus, numerous background textures, a notepad and more than 50 unlockable personal effects, such as a scarf or cup of coffee, can be added or removed to create a tailored and functional user interface. Another personal touch in FIFA Manager 10 is the photo album, which fills with pictures over the course of your career.

As I mentioned earlier, the fan based community have been catered for in terms of requested improvements. You can now set up automatic substitutions from a variety of triggers and options, staff can be moved to and from different positions and money can be transferred around the budget easier. Players can now have more than one training target, four different line-ups (A-D teams) can be set up and scouting players is easier and is now available for national teams. The list goes on, but it is also



worth mentioning that the unique love or hate private life feature of FIFA Manager can now be turned off at the start of the game if desired.

The fully 3D match engine also receives a fresh lick of paint. While not exactly FIFA 09, this match engine looks infinitely better than its rivals and provides a more engaging match feel than simply watching dots. You, the manager, are now displayed on the touchline in 3D, complete with over 60 animations. At any point during a match you can also shout any one of 15 commands to your players, such as shoot or pass immediately. Just don't over-do the shouting, or else the referee may get irritated and ban you to the touchline, giving you no control over the match.

Each player on the pitch can be focused on to display information about them, and you can also choose to scout them or write in your notepad about their performance. I am unable to ascertain from this one match how realistically the match engine in FIFA Manager 10 can portray a match, but it looks to be on the right tracks. Should watching the match in 3D not be in your best interests, there is a highlight mode which shows a 2D pitch along with text commentary.

FIFA Manager 10 also now sports a basic but more accessible version of the complex stadium editor, so the user can decide on what level of depth they wish to delve into. Other club matters like the stadium infrastructure will need your attention, with catering, public facilities and transport, VIP areas, match-day programmes and locker rooms all open to tweaking. If the day-to-day routine of a club manager becomes too much then a large number of options can be set to automatic, leaving it up to you to decide what you what to get out of the game. There is also a handy little information button on every screen to provide advice should you need it.

Quite possibly the biggest new asset to FIFA Manager 10 is the new free online mode. There are no subsequent costs or subscription fees, just you and up to eight players together in one of around 40 first divisions from around the world. Seasons are promised to take between 2-3 hours, with matches played out in ticker mode and most of the options simplified, including the player stats, which are reduced from the 1-99 range to 1-20. This is all to allow for fast and competitive gameplay; the first set-up turn allocates you with just 10 minutes to tinker with your team and players, whilst with each subsequent turn/week you have just 1 minute to make any necessary changes.

Players in the online mode are bought using an auction system similar to eBay, which should provide an exciting contest of outbidding, and there is also a live chat box for chitchat or maybe a bit of harmless taunting. Matchmaking can be set up for similar starting conditions on the EA servers, where manager points and cups are also submitted to for improving your global ranking. Only time will tell how well this online mode will turn out in the future, but the fact it's a separate and free mode to the main manager campaign means there is no harm experimenting.

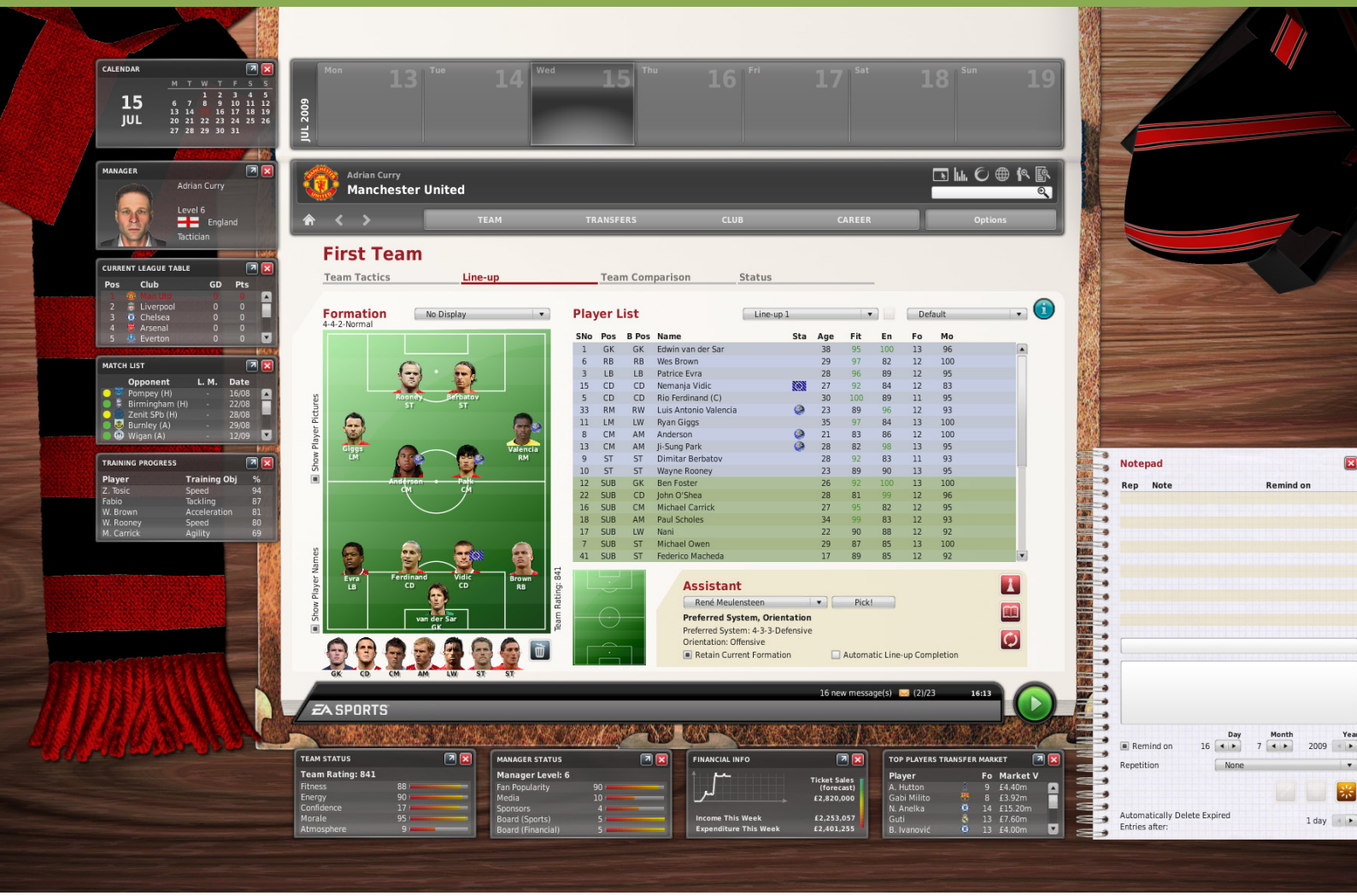
Let's also not forget the fact that FIFA Manager has all the official licences you will ever need, with over 3,600 clubs and 31,000 players, 9,000 of which are represented by real-life pictures. With realistic



gamescom

PREVIEW

FIFA MANAGER 10



media features like a branded in-game website and pre-season magazines to explore, there looks to be an impressive degree of immersion to make the user feel like an actual manager. The amount of depth and detail included is impressive; there are extensive club details to dwell on, and even the locker rooms before a match vary depend on what sized club you are playing at.



Unfortunately, from this demonstration there is no way I can tell how well a season will play out, nor do I know how many seasons you will be able to maintain interest in. What I do know, however, is FIFA Manager 10 looks to be a warm and welcoming game to play, whilst still being an all-encompassing club management game.

I hold a positive stance on FIFA Manager 10 not only because of the way it's being developed, but by what I seen with my very own eyes.

If you are a fan of the genre then you will want to keep your finger very firmly on the pulse of FIFA Manager 10 when it is released at the end of 2009 on the PC.

Pete O'Brien


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BLUR



British based developer Bizarre Creations, creators of the highly successful Project Gotham Racing, make a move away from its roots with a less realistic but more accessible arcade racer.

Blur takes a few tried and tested fundamentals, adds several new ideas to the mix and then fuses them into something which is hopefully original and creative. Ben Ward, Studio Communications Manager of Bizarre Creations, started the presentation of the game by stating that their goal is to create a fun, exciting racing game, focusing on instant fun instead of simulation. Blur is also designed to address the frustrating areas of a racing game.

This arcade racer features up to 20 opponents on the track at the same time, which provides a genuinely fast-paced and electrifying experience. One of the unique gameplay components are the power-ups, such as nitro, mines and shock, all of which add inter-car combat and thus a veneer of strategy to each race. Vehicles have a health bar, meaning that a number of cars may not even finish a race, particularly if things get personal.

A protective shield is on hand to help defend against such attacks and a repair power-up is also available. This repair power-up has an instant effect, whereas offensive powers can be stored in a three-way slot on the HUD and then used one-by-one on demand or all at once for various effects.

The cars - split into A, B, C and D categories - are all specially modified real-world cars such as BMW's and Dodge Vipers, complete with damage effects to boot. The cars are also varied by way of six different stats, ranging from acceleration to strength to drift. Locations are real world and include Barcelona and London, though each location has been tweaked to make them



a little more vibrant and interesting to race through. There tracks also possess small parts of interactive scenery and multi-route sections.

The handling of the car I drove felt drift like, almost loose, and at first I found myself spinning around helplessly. I got used to the controls soon after a minute and I began to enjoy flinging the car around corners, at which point I was able to starting thinking about what strategy I was going to advance up the ranks. A nice flow started to emerge as I began to learn the track, overtaking cars by use of racing flair and also good use of power-ups, though being on the other end of these moves is obviously going to be a tad annoying.

Looking through the stylish menus we essentially have a number of single and multiplayer modes. The career mode is designed such that the player is given a reason to continue playing-on, with the story and characters delivered through a modern approach including in-game fictional social networks and texting. Power-ups and hints on how to use them are introduced gradually to ensure they are used to their maximum potential, whilst 'fan points', gained in various ways such as racing competitively, are used to progress through the game - effectively the equivalent to PGR's Kudos points.

The online element of Blur will also boast 20 cars on a track while a social network interface is also promised, with online features including messaging and custom groups. Multiplayer can also be played out locally with up to four players on split-screen. While gathering around the same TV with mates on a title like Blur has the potential to be a riot of fun, trying to make out a track at high speed on a smaller 4-way split TV screen could, as usually is the case, be difficult. To make Blur accessible on demand, Bizarre Creations will have to be careful not to make it so that veterans of the game can spoil the game by thrashing new players on arrival; with any luck the power-ups will even help things up.

There is also plenty of customisation to be had when setting up a race - power-ups can be disabled individually or removed altogether to create a purer racer. A god-send to some players will be the World Tour mode, whereby every setting is set to random and you can just keep on racing through different tracks in a random set list, making life that little bit easier.

As this Xbox 360, PS3 and PC racer cruises ever closer to its November 6th release date, Blur is on course to become a focal point in the racing calendar, and not solely becasue of the big name developer and publisher. There is an interesting blend of different gameplay ideas and social networking elements, which could all come together for a modern off- and online game. A play of an inevitable demo in the near future should help decide whether Blur can meet expectations and if the actual gameplay meets your tastes. To summerise in one line: this may just become one of those games which makes you want to come back again and again until you're blurry-eyed.

Pete O'Brien.



PREVIEW

TROPICO 3



The basis of Tropico 3 is formed around the role of "El Presidente", whereby the player rules a lush and resource-rich island during the Cold War era, with an amusing layer of tongue-in-cheek humour throughout.

The level of depth to the gameplay and the detail of the graphics are both equally impressive, with this being the most advanced game of its type on the Xbox 360. Tropico 3 is comparable in style to SimCity, but the differences between the two are in favour of the former.

The player starts by either selecting a pre-made tyrant or creating their own dictator avatar, choosing gender, appearance, qualities and flaws. You are then whisked away to your tropical paradise, given a presidential palace, a few workers and a dock. Money is made in lump sums by collecting various resources, such as through agriculture and mining, which are then exported abroad via the abovementioned dock. Cash can also be generated by way of attracting tourists to the island or there are shady deals you may wish to partake in.

It isn't all plain sailing though; this island is full of workers, residents and tourists who all need to be kept in check to make sure they don't dare start a protest or even a revolution. Happiness levels are primarily improved via conventional factors such as providing power and reducing pollution and unemployment, though your dictator can influence problems by performing public speeches or introducing edicts such as martial law and arranged papal visits to name just two. Relations with the US and USSR will also need monitoring, though each superpower has its own interests in your country.

They will provide you with additional funds should you play nice but may blockade your vital port with warships should you irritate them. There is a tutorial to get you into the swing of how to be an efficient totalitarian which is followed by 15 missions to progress through, each with individual goals and targets to reach. Or, alternatively, there is the main attraction: a randomly generated never-ending sandbox mode which is set-up to meet your needs, where the sole aim is to grow your banana republic

island into a thriving and unique city. This mode was surprisingly addictive to play, and I can see many hours being poured into keeping things ticking over while trying to continually expand. The new 3D visuals of Tropico 3 demonstrates a vivid and impressive level of detail - the environmental setting looks calm and lush, while each of the 80 buildings are so varied and detailed that every city will look lovingly different to one another. Every resident of the populace can be seen going about their daily business on the streets and each can be selected to see their individual statistics and wants, with several interactive options - such as assassinations and bribes - available should the need arise.



Day and night cycles, dynamic weather and god ray lighting all make this a pretty paradise. The Xbox 360 version, though not as sharp as the PC, still looked smooth and impressive, and we are promised that low specification PCs from years ago will be able to at least run the game. Two online features to speak of are high-score leaderboards and the ability to upload and play other player's islands, both of which should provide a continued reason to play. The PC version will also benefit from a challenge editor. From my play-test I was able to pick up the controls fairly easily, and the various menus were well integrated into both PC and Xbox 360 control systems. The ability to force your island's citizens into doing something they may not initially want to provides a strangely satisfying and efficient gameplay style. I am unable to ascertain how well balanced and overwhelming Tropico 3 is going to be without a longer play-test, but this alternate take on city building has the potential to be more enjoyable and accessible than the older in-depth SimCity generation. With the recent SimCity titles faltering, Tropico 3 may not have to bribe or assassinate its way to triumph; only time will tell how successful and long-lasting Tropico 3 will be, but with a September 2009 release date, we won't have long to find out.

Pete O'Brien.



COMMAND & CONQUER 4

The Command & Conquer series helped to build and shape the RTS genre becoming synonymous with the base building and resource management template that countless others followed.

However, increased competition and a change to the fundamental gameplay of many titles in the genre has left recent C&C games feeling a little old fashioned. With the announcement of Command & Conquer 4 developers EA Los Angeles are attempting to bring the series up-to-date while providing the classic C&C experience.

Choosing to move away from the exaggerated and, at times, camp nature of the cut-scenes and overall tone, C&C4 possesses a much darker tone. Continuing the story arc of the Tiberium saga, this instalment will be the final chapter and aims to tie up the various loose ends surrounding Kane and The Brotherhood of Nod. The story centres on the evolution of Tiberium threatening to make the entire world uninhabitable which drives Kane to bargain with the Global Defence Initiative. Both sides agree that it would be best to work together to try and control the spread of Tiberium so a temporary alliance is created between the sides. However, eventually the history between the two factions proves too great and conflict breaks out. Not only has the tone of the title become more serious but the gameplay has developed significantly since the previous instalment. At the start of each game you have the option to choose between one of three classes: Offense, Defence and Support.

Each of them looks very different and possesses a large number of its own unique units. Offense is suited to the standard aggressive player with plenty of frontline vehicles that can deal, and take, large amounts of damage. Defence is a more traditional C&C template; you can create a base, build defensive structures and gain access to powerful infantry. Finally the Support class is a little different with a focus on providing buffs to units and healing yourself and allies, making it arguably the most tactical choice.

Removing the fundamental base building element of the series is a brave and controversial decision. In its place is the inclusion of a unit known as the "Crawler" which acts as a centre for production, upgrades and even as an offensive tool. The Crawler can be moved around the map to bring new units directly to where they are needed and is as durable as a construction



COMMAND & CONQUER 4



yard from previous titles. During games the unit can be upgraded to have offensive capabilities such as turrets and machine guns.

If the crawler is destroyed you are given a second chance and can choose to drop another onto the battlefield. The number of respawns you are awarded differs according to the difficulty setting you choose and before you select your location you can opt to try a new tactic by changing class. The ability to respawn in a C&C game, or even an RTS in general seems a little strange so it will be interesting to see how this is balanced. Already steps have been made to avoid spawn camping, as when a Crawler arrives it decimates the surrounding environment to allow players time to get back into the action. There are other significant benefits to the Crawler; any unit in close proximity is automatically repaired allowing a defence to be set up around it.

C&C4's interface has been altered from the traditional sidebar with the mini-map and is now spread along the bottom of the screen. During missions the traditional talking heads pop-up in a smooth outline on the right hand side which is more welcome than temporarily obscuring the map at crucial moments. The interface appears easy to navigate with upgrade and unit tabs appearing fairly different from other C&C games. In an RTS communicating information quickly and efficiently is very important and C&C4 looks determined to do this as effectively as possible.

Perhaps the biggest change is the decision to focus on experience, not only with individual units but with players themselves. Units can still level up to Veteran and Elite levels making them more powerful but for the first time in the series you will earn experience in both single and multiplayer



COMMAND & CONQUER 4



modes. Advancing in levels will allow you to invest in special abilities, upgrades and units across the three different classes. Experience is persistent so if you play hours of multiplayer and then tackle the campaign you will have a slightly easier time. The game will acknowledge your level and tailor the experience to still provide a challenge but it was emphasised that this would never be unfair.

Gameplay looked largely true to the origins of the series during one of the GDI missions. Here the player was tasked with repairing a large transport ship before Brotherhood troops arrived to destroy the damaged craft. GDI units were impressive with Sandstorm hovercrafts, Titan tanks and the Mastodon heavy weapon platform proving imposing. Tiberium harvesters are no longer used; instead resources are collected by capturing Tiberium Control Networks which provide you with the finances to build units. In a new move there is now a unit-cap reminiscent of Dawn of War, which has never been seen in a PC C&C title until now.

The Brotherhood of Nod has several classic C&C staples returning including the Nod Flame Tank which now does damage over time, with each flame attack inflicting 5 seconds of damage. The Engineer is also back and is the only common unit for all classes and sides; in the mission he was able to repair a damaged Mastodon providing a great deal of extra firepower. When combat occurs, units now showcase damage effects with side panels being blown off revealing the working machinery inside. Nod stealth and burrowing units are also present and proved problematic for the GDI during the mission.

Multiplayer will be where the majority of C&C4 will be played and it is being geared towards a 5v5 scenario which is designed to make the most of the different class systems. Having



COMMAND & CONQUER 4



a mixture of Offense, Defence and Support should add a new tactical depth and allow players to build on their teams strengths and defend against their weaknesses. The campaign story will be playable in co-operative mode, but there won't be an AI general to help you if you don't have a second player.

Without an in-depth hands-on session with the game it is difficult to get a feel and the gameplay we saw came from an early, but polished, pre-alpha build of the title. The radical overhaul of the formula looks interesting and seems more than a knee-jerk reaction in the wake of titles such as Company of Heroes and Dawn of War II. At this early stage, C&C4 retains the classic feel of the series but already looks different. Whether this will be popular with fans remains to be seen and a large amount will depend on the careful balance between classes and units. Yet, EA Los Angeles has tried something different and it will be interesting to see what other new developments C&C4 will have in store early next year.

Chris Wakefield.

BRÜTAL LEGEND

Brütal Legend, the latest title from the mind of veteran game designer Tim Schafer, is a metal fans dream. The combination of skull-shatteringly heavy songs, gory over-the-top action and the cast of impressive real life rock gods is almost too good to be true. At GamesCom this week, I was lucky enough to get a preview of the game from Schafer himself which showcased the opening chapter of this heavy metal epic.

The story follows roadie Eddie Riggs, voiced by Jack Black, who is stuck working for a terrible heavy metal group. After an unfortunate guitar-related accident, his blood drips onto his belt buckle, which turns out to be cursed, and sucks him into an alternate world. Here humans are tortured by various supernatural demons and Eddie becomes the leader of the resistance against these creatures.

Brütal Legend's game world has a rich and detailed fiction and is heavily inspired by heavy metal artwork and various fantasy elements. This depth is nice to see and promises music fans plenty of references to classic bands and albums. Schafer commented that a key development goal was to make every location in the world look like it could be artwork from a metal album. The first



few locations certainly fulfil this criterion with mountains of bones, gigantic engines and enough black spiked armbands to keep a goth unhappy.

After the accident, Riggs finds himself inside a real version of the stage that was set-up at the gig he was helping with. However, the plywood has been replaced with stone and the prop blood is no longer fake. To make matters worse a sinister group of hooded and fanged demons don't take kindly to his presence moving ominously towards him with swords held aloft. Thankfully, a gigantic dual-handed medieval battle axe is only a few metres away and Eddie discovers he has an uncanny ability to use it.





"The Separator" axe is Eddie's first weapon and it forms part of the core arsenal allowing you to dismember your opponents in brutal ways. There are plenty of different combos to use including a rather nice jumping downward slice which decimates groups of enemies. The gore becomes apparent and is largely exaggerated to keep in feeling with the stylised metal environment. Jack Black's voice acting is also very well written and kicks in at random moments during the combat which had me actually laughing out loud on several occasions.

Alongside The Separator, Eddie has brought along his own electric guitar: Clementine. However, in this strange universe the guitar is much more powerful and allows him to attack opponents using the power of rock to fight. When the guitar is played enemies are thrown into the air by stage pyrotechnics or struck by supernatural lightning. It is even possible to perform The Earthshaker power chord, a note so heavy it crumbles the scenery and sends opponents flying.

Both weapons can be upgraded and modified as the game progresses at a certain location by improving the strings on Clementine or sharpening The Separator in a certain way to provide different effects.

Combat is standard hack and slash affair with combos initiated through different button presses in sequence. Weapons can be used in

tandem, so a power chord with Clementine can throw up enemies into the air and The Separator can be used to dice them as they fall to the ground. The presence of a target lock to focus on particular enemies is included and proved particularly useful in the larger battles.

As the demo progressed Eddie teamed up with another human, Ophelia, who soon fought alongside him. At various points throughout the game it will be possible to fight alongside other characters, each of which has a special co-operative move that can be used to inflict serious damage.

In this case Eddie throws Ophelia directly at the enemies which is very effective against the standard "Druid" enemies. Alongside the hack and slash combat, vehicles will play an important role in the game, especially once the linear introduction is over and the 64km^2 world becomes open. The land was created by a race of Titans who created everything in the world including engines, amplifiers and music.

Leaving a series of cryptic clues that only Eddie is able to decipher it is possible to perform a guitar solo through a series of button presses to summon various items they have left.

One such item is The Deuce, a flame-decorated hot rod that Eddie refers to as "The Druid Plough" due to its effectiveness at mowing down enemies. The vehicle can be destroyed but can be summoned again and can be taken on some of the games missions. It is also upgradable to have different weapons such as front mounted miniguns or gigantic speakers that can defeat enemies.

The Deuce went on to feature heavily in the latter part of the demo where Eddie uses it to defeat a gigantic fanged tentacle by dodging its



attacks before ramming its weak point. Here the humour of the game was emphasised with some great dialogue ("I can't believe you fell for that trick three times!") that had everyone laughing. In a final epic set piece Eddie and Ophelia are forced to drive down a collapsing highway while classic metal tracks blasted from the car's radio.

Here, Brütal Legend's sound was particularly impressive with a soundtrack of over 100 well known metal tracks from a variety of sub-genres.

Jack Black's voice acting was also very entertaining and the mixture of Schafer's dialogue and improvisation kept things fresh and different. The mixture of songs in the game can be controlled by the player so they can select what they want to hear and remove what they don't. Many of the licensed songs can be found hidden as collectibles throughout the landscape so completionists and metal fans will have plenty to do.

From the short time I spent with Brütal Legend it felt like an unadulterated and over-the-top experience. It remains to be seen whether the hack and slash combat can remain fun and diverse over a game experience which is estimated at between 15 to 25 hours. The other issue with the game is whether it can attract find an audience outside of hardcore metal fans which I sincerely hope that it can. With such ambition and creative talent behind the title here's hoping that Brütal Legend delivers on its unique premise. With a release on PS3 and Xbox 360 prepare for Brütal combat, comedy and more metal than you can shake a guitar at.

Chris Wakefield.



gamescom

PREVIEW

GUITAR HERO 5



In the last few years Guitar Hero's popularity has increased enormously and now the game is arguably as famous as many of the artists featured on the series' soundtracks. Since the introduction of drums and microphones it has been hard to see what direction future instalments would take. Smash Hits also raised some doubts about milking the series through its "updating" of existing Guitar Hero tracks. After getting the chance to play Guitar Hero 5 at GamesCom this week it feels like a true sequel rather than an expansion or a cash-in.

The most immediately noticeable change is the game's appearance which now boasts vastly upgraded graphics. It is now good to see the visuals reflecting the next-generation consoles' potential with much more detailed backgrounds and character models. While this is purely a cosmetic overhaul it helps to make the game feel fresh and to distance it from the impression of a simple expansion. Animations are also fluid and much more realistic with a slight movement away from the stylised and cartoony motions from the previous versions.

Alongside these aesthetic improvements are a wide range of additions and improvements to the tried and tested formula. The core gameplay of Guitar Hero remains true to form with the player tasked with strumming on time as a series of notes crosses the fret board. Whereas World Tour made several tweaks the gameplay, Guitar Hero 5 sticks to the series' conventions. Hammer-ons and pull-offs still feature prominently and there is now an expanded role for sequences of notes which require one to be held down while others are played. After working on the series for so long it now seems that the gameplay has struck the balance between casual and hardcore players and it doesn't seem necessary to make any more additions purely for a sequel's sake.

Where Guitar Hero 5 impresses is in the new modes it introduces to help improve competitive play alongside making the game easier to get into. Perhaps the best new addition is that up to 4 instruments of any type can be used, so it is no longer necessary to have two guitars, drums and a microphone. This proves to be particularly useful as there doesn't have to be a scramble to avoid singing or a bitter argument over who is the real lead guitarist.

This compatibility was demonstrated in the new "Party Play" game mode where you can simply jump straight into a track from the main menu. As the group of us played through several songs, various players joined and left with very smooth transitions. Rocking out with four players on guitars felt a tad strange but ultimately fitted with the spirit of the game. It isn't possible to fail in this mode and looks ideally suited for people looking to have some fun with friends.

Most of the new additions relate to improving the range and scope of the competitive multiplayer

modes which have, until now, been relatively restricted. During the preview I went up against a fellow gamer in the new "Momentum" mode which has both players begin at Medium difficulty. If you hit twenty notes consecutively you move up a difficulty setting, but by missing three you drop back down. The mode proved challenging due to the alternating speeds between Hard and Expert but felt satisfying.

The second mode we played was a particularly tense face-off between four guitarists in the "Elimination" battle. Here, the player with the lowest score is axed every thirty seconds or so. As the song ended and it became a duel between me and my opponent I really felt the pressure and in the end there were only a handful of points between our final scores. The "Perfectionist" game mode hands victory to the player with the most points whereas "Do or Die" locks a player out of the song until the next section if they miss several notes. Finally, "Streakers" gives players a greater multiplier the longer they can maintain a successful series of notes.

This overhaul of the competitive aspect of the game is a welcome addition and provides more challenge than the simple "Face-Off" and "Pro Face-Off" modes from the previous Guitar Hero games. The songs themselves now feature a set challenge to complete to different degrees. For example in the song "Fame" by David Bowie the challenge is to sing the word "Fame" correctly as it changes at the end of the song. If you hit a set number you can earn either a gold, diamond or platinum reward and a new item. Different songs require various instruments and the variety of achievements and items helps to boost the replay value significantly.

As ever, the set list contains a healthy mixture of songs with 85 included in the game with several high profile figures including Johnny Cash and Carlos Santana featuring as characters. The music is diverse with artists ranging from Rammstein to Elton John and the difficulty looks set to be a nice balance for players of all abilities. Most of the downloadable content from World Tour can be played in Guitar Hero 5 and some tracks from Smash Hits and World Tour can be transferred for a fee. Another nice innovation is the incorporation of Xbox 360 avatars into the game, including any clothes they are wearing, which adds a personal touch.

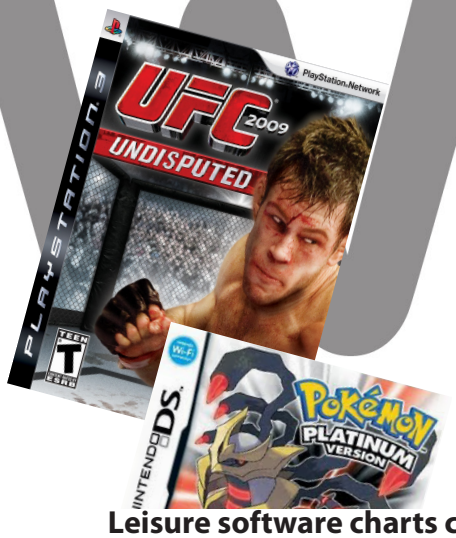
If Guitar Hero 5 can maintain the combination of entertainment and accessibility that the series is known for, then this latest chapter will continue to keep it at the top of the genre. The biggest danger that Guitar Hero faces is to keep pushing out new titles too frequently, but with strong DLC support hopefully this won't be an issue. The title will be released on September 11th for the PS2, PS3, Wii and Xbox 360, so dust down your guitars and prepare to rock.

Chris Wakefield.



Top 20 Multi- Platform Games

1. Batman: Arkham Asylum
2. Wii Sports Resort
3. Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
4. Wii Fit
5. Ashes Cricket
6. IL2: Sturmovik: Birds Of Prey
7. Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
8. Call Of Duty: World At War
9. Fight Night Round 4
10. Dissidia: Final Fantasy
11. Wolfenstein
12. Mario Kart Wii
13. Call Of Juarez: Bound In Blood
14. Lego Batman: The Videogame
15. Grand Theft Auto IV
16. Fifa 09
17. The Sims 3
18. Champions Online
19. Fallout 3: Game Add-on Pack #2
20. Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen





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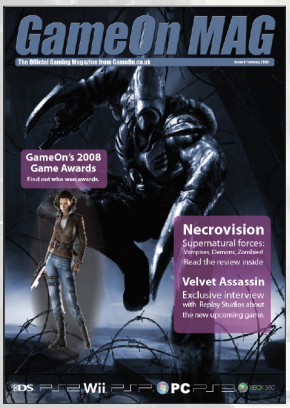


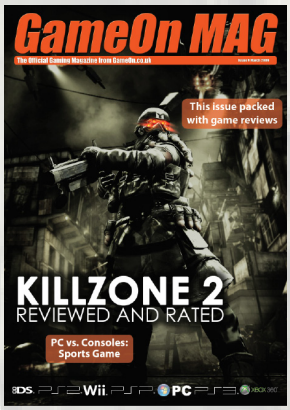






















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