

GameOn MAG

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STAR TREK ONLINE

CHECK OUT OUR EPIC
FIVE PIECE PREVIEW



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Mass Effect 2

Commander Shepard finds himself in a whole new hole...



Bioshock 2

The eerie world of Rapture awaits you... again.

8DS

Wii

PSP



PC

PS3



XBOX 360

Bioshock 2 Review

- Page 21



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It's been a busy few months for the GameOn team with one of the biggest MMORPGs coming to the PC - Star Trek Online. You can read the exclusive BETA preview within this very magazine.

Also driving our way has been the preview of the upcoming carting game, Modnation Racers. Will it be as highly loved as it's rival Mario Kart, or crash at the first corner, read up here!

Bioshock 2 has come rising back out of the ocean complete with the Big Daddies and now a whole new weaponry - The Big Sister. Check out what our thoughts were of this game, a wave review (sorry!) or a tidal crashing ship wreck?

With guns blazing we've got full reviews on the new Mass Effect 2 game as well as the second installment of the Army of Two: The 40th Day review in the firing line.

Topped off with a preview of the Battlefield Bad Company 2 upcoming game. Can it be as good as it's previous installments, only one way to find out - on with the reading!

Happy Gaming!

- The Ed.



CONTENTS



P4 PREVIEWS

Star Trek Online: Part 1.....	5
Star Trek Online: Part 2.....	7
Star Trek Online: Part 3.....	8
Star Trek Online: Part 4.....	11
Star Trek Online: Part 5.....	13



P4 PREVIEWS

Modnation.....	15
Battlefield Bad Company 2.....	19



CONTENTS

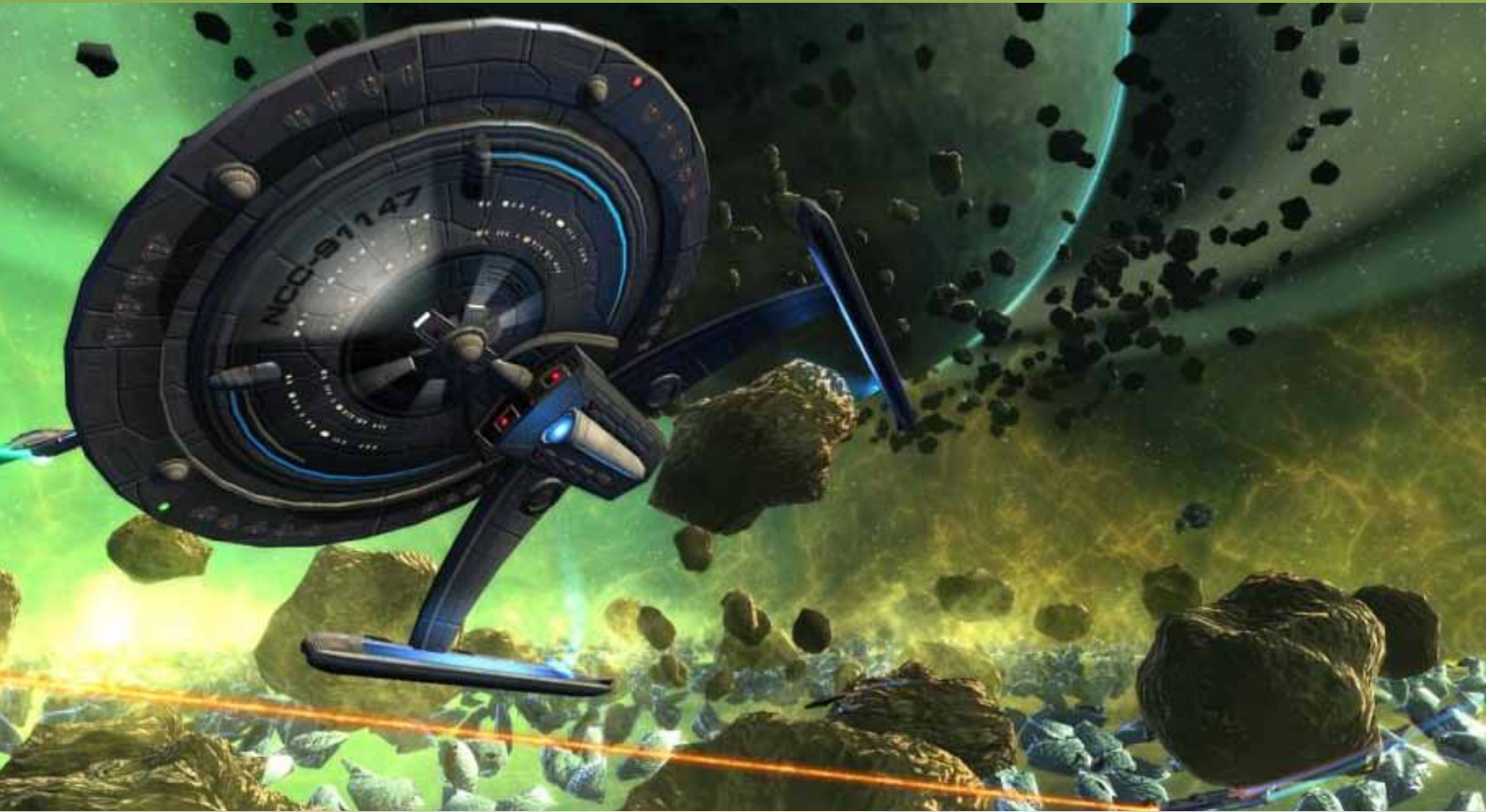


P6 REVIEWS

Bioshock 2.....	21
Mass Effect 2.....	25
Army of Two: The 40th Day.....	29



STAR TREK ONLINE PART 1



Star Trek MMO - The Final Frontier, these are the voyages of the Star Ship GameOn, Its mission? To Explore the strange new world of the Star Trek MMO and how many Cliché references I can add into a preview. So here we go, this will be a short review which will be added to over the next couple of weeks to show how I am getting to grips with the game and while in beta, how I feel the game is getting on. In this first part I will be explaining how I am getting to grips with this new MMO, as well as what we think of this game.

Make it so number one. After a wonderful 7GB download and about a 100MB patch I finally got to load up the game for the first time and get started with the character creation. During this beta there are only two factions that are available to play: The Federation and The Klingon Empire. As it is getting you to the grips with the game, you can only start your character at the Federation and then later on you will be able to play as the Klingons. In the Federation character selection you can select between three different unique classes.

You can choose from a Science Officer, which will allow you to do healing, you can be an Engineer which will help boost your repair time on your ship as well as upgrading weapons easily and also creating weapon turrets. The final is Tactical; you get better offensive capabilities in space as well as on the ground and get boosts to your health.

Once you have picked your class you can then customise this one step further by adding a species to your character. This will have unique boosts, ranging from increased health and attacks to better health regeneration. All of these will be added to which class you have picked. Finally you finish off your character by adding three unique boosts to help your character even more. These range from allowing you to get better resistance to certain weapons to increase your health regeneration and also allows you to get better boosts from your ship. Once all of this is out the way you can then proceed to advancing on customising your character, this ranges from the look of your character, this includes all the nitty gritty stuff like nose

STAR TREK ONLINE PART 1

mouth teeth etc. You can either use the default options which uses simple sliders or you can go to a advanced mode and really tweak everything again. Also the uniform which you are wearing as default. You can use this to make them look like yourself. Once you have ticked all your boxes you will then jump into the first few tutorial missions.

These missions will teach you the basics of combat on the ground, as well as in space. What you will notice is that a lot of the brief information you are given in this is quite concise and is information you will need to get ahead in the game. A lot of the battles and the action you can repeat as many times as you want giving you chance to fully stretch your legs before moving on. During the opening missions you will be fighting against the Borg, which have attacked a fleet of ships and are currently putting up a strong offence. During this mission you will be able to choose your first Bridge officer. These are Crew members which you can use to boost your current ship and how it performs. All the Bridge officers are divided up into the three original classes which you could choose for your character. Again these have different skills and its best to have a balanced crew.

So this is it after a few days of play I've already

got a full crew of bridge officers and I'm currently doing missions to start levelling up my character. On the whole it really plays out like a normal MMO. I don't think the Star Trek universe takes anything way from this as you dont have to be a big fan of the Sci-fi genre or even a Trekkie to have fun. I must admit the bit I'm loving so far is the space battles and the amount of action that is on the screen at one time.

The fact that parties are joined if there is one or more of you on the mission is great too. This allows for the difficulty and the amount of enemies to rise up and gives bigger and more fantastic visuals throughout the game. The AI is pretty basic, but all enemies have different styles with which you need to attack them and this brings variety in what I would think would be a standard standoff in fighting. As most of the missions I have had are just go here do this, patrol this area, I thought there wouldn't be much variety, but I have been shocked. I currently fought Kilingons, been to strange new worlds and even had some awesome upgrades.

It's a great MMO and next time I'll be explaining how I'm getting on so far with the game and some of my best bits and worst bits I have found, so stay tuned.



STAR TREK ONLINE PART 2

So when you left me last I had a full crew, a ship to use and a whole galaxy of space to explore.

After doing some of the simple ensign missions it soon became apparent that I was moving up the ranks quite quickly. You see in each rank there are ten levels and once you have done all the levels within a rank you'll get promoted. This works out nicely as you are always levelling up your character quite quickly and it's not having one massive slog to get to the next rank. The way the levelling works is that you're rewarded with points which you can use to level up your character. And as well as giving you points to level up, your character you also get points to level up your bridge character but the problem starts when you only get some many points to split between three bridge officers. Each time you level up the character it boosts up those special skills you use throughout the space

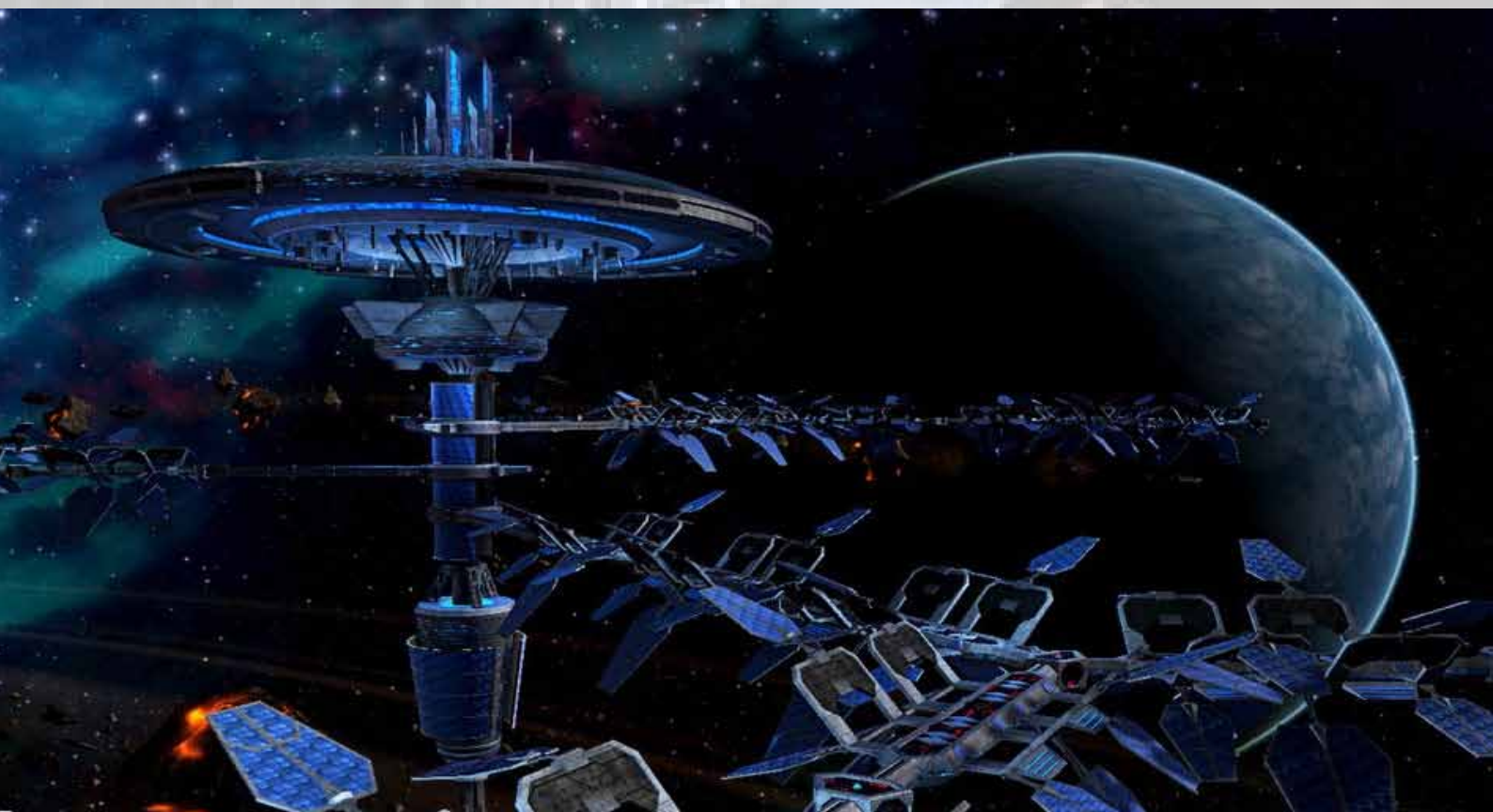
combat and ground combat. Again this is pretty much up to your personal tastes as if you are finding that you're using a skill more than others then this is probably what you want to boost.

Once you are a certain rank and you have spent enough points on a Bridge officer, you can then

"Once you have done all the levels within a rank you'll get promoted."

promote them to a higher rank. This allows you to unlock more skills for them to use and also for you to upgrade. Speaking of upgrade, you can find parts for you and your ship by killing enemies or completing missions. A lot of the equipment that you will need to get started in the game will come via the missions, so don't go off on a spending spree as the things that you need will be given to you through the course of the game.

If you do feel however, that you need a little something extra then the best place for you to go would be one of the many space ports that are around the galaxy. These give you all the basic

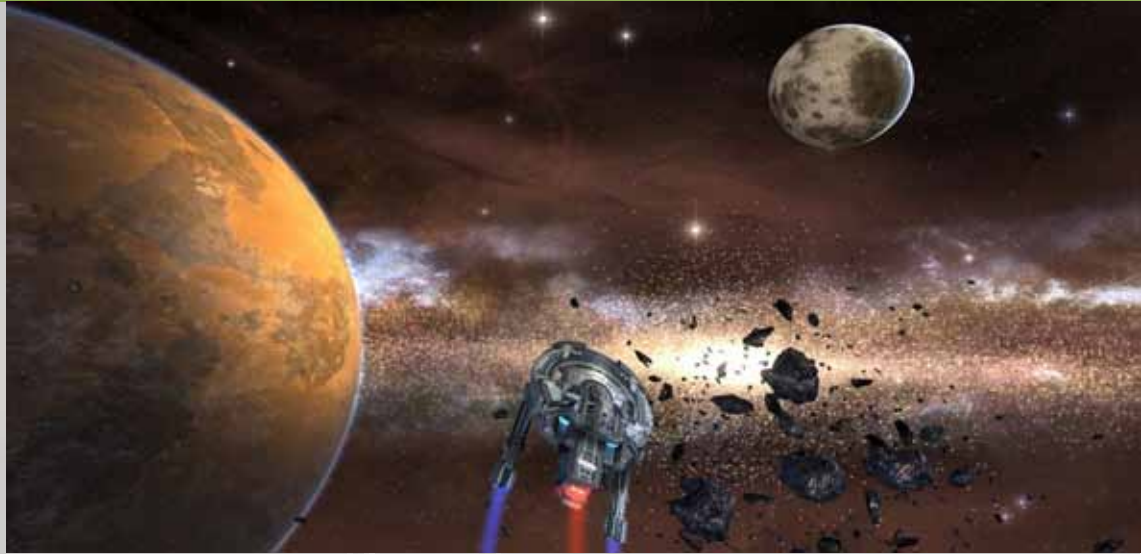


STAR TREK ONLINE PART 2

shops you find in MMO's, from allowing you to buy weapons for both you and your ship as well as redesign the uniforms of your Bridge officers so you all match. They also allow you to bank items so you don't have to carry them around.

These shops also serve to trade weapons and items that you have found using the trade system. However when I was trying to use the trade system there wasn't anything to buy on the system already. I suppose this could be because of the game is still within beta or the fact that most people will be keeping everything for themselves as everyone doesn't know what will be needed in later missions yet. As well as customising your characters again, you can also customise your ship allowing you to pick three default ship styles or you can create your own using the pieces of the ships you have already purchased (In my case, the three default styles that are given to you at the start). You can also have different colour styles and finishes to your ship which really allow you to give your ship that custom feel. If everything gets a bit too much for you there is also a bar which you can pop into and just sit, relax and watch space go by.

As far as playing, I've notice a few awesome features as well as some I don't like. I am going to say now that at the current levels, some of the features that are getting on my nerves but I may come back and say that they are useful in later level. This can be because I am not seeing the true potential of the feature. A major example of this is once you get to the Space Docks, you are not sent directly inside the dock but you are left outside to sit, while you fire up your engines and



move for about 30 seconds before you finally dock and get into the port. This, at the moment, is quiet annoying as all I really need the space port for is to sell items or take new missions. However I can see how this could be useful if you are doing missions which require you to go from one side of the galaxy to the next, this would save you time as it could jump you straight to the port rather than having to travel back and forth.

I have also noticed bugs and glitches within missions that make them impossible to complete. I have also had issues with ships clipping in an asteroid which makes them impossible to kill but they can still attack you. While these bugs have been reported and it should be noted that we are still in beta, these are some of the bugs which have been bugging me.

So for this part of this section, this is all from me. In the next part I will be speaking about the missions I have been undertaking as well as how the combat system works.



PREVIEW

STAR TREK ONLINE PART 3

Okay you have seen me previously speak about how the combat system works in part one. In theory pretty much all ground combat is like any other RPG or MMO that you have played. You click your target, use your attack or special power, then rinse and repeat until you or your target is dead.



Since you will be taking your Bridge officers, or at least some security staff on most missions with you, you can either get these characters to focus attacks on certain targets or let them do their own thing and attack the nearest target or the someone that is attacking them. The combat is quite fluid on the ground and doesn't take long for you to realise that every class of Bridge officer has their own skills which will help you out a lot. The standard security team members are good for taking some flak but I would always suggest taking your bridge officers with you.

However space battles and ground battles are the equivalent of chalk and cheese they are completely different. This time instead of having

a few people to help you out it is your ship versus whatever comes your way. As your bridge officers are now at their stations they can give you special abilities to use during combat. Space is a lot more fast and furious within the combat as you will have to balance controlling the ship as well as firing at the same time. The 'dog-fighting' style you have to adopt to the way you fight the space battles really does depend on how well you do multitasking and making sure you stay on top of what is going on around you. An example of this is the fact that you have to make sure your shields stay strong as you try and direct your ship into a position where you can maximise the damage of your next attack and you are doing this solely on your mouse and keyboard. When it works, it works

brilliantly and the feeling and satisfaction that you get for killing one or three ships in the same battle cannot be revelled in this game.

To try and give you the best strategies to use, I would say that you will want to try and make sure your shields are as strong as possible. My personal favourite is to not just go head strong into a group of ten enemies



as that's the quickest way to die. The best idea is to just take it slow and steady, picking off your targets one at a time. In some cases you can't do that and you will be overwhelmed but this is normally when help is available upon your call.

Speaking of help this is how the system works for missions. If you go and do a mission and someone, could be any other player is on the same mission as you and enters at the same time you then become part of a team. This team will then be held to finishing that mission on whatever planet you are on until you leave the team or the mission is complete. During this instance no one else can join the team and if you decide to leave then you will be removed from that instance and have to re-enter that planet. This is an awesome way of sorting things out as it allows the battles to become more intense and also giving you the experience of playing this multiplayer game

with other people. Yes there are a few flaws in the system, first off you can't really pick who is in the team with you so you could have someone who is completely rubbish or even worse someone has decided to take a break and have just walked away from their machine and left the game running. So the group system can sometimes be a little hit and

miss but like I've said when it does work it works really well but it's normally human error that causes the groups to go south quite quickly. Speaking of missions a lot of the ones I've been on are just explore this planet, blow things up or stop Klingons doing bad things to complete the mission. As well as these bog standard missions you will also get random areas within the galaxy where you

can have instances between you and a group of enemies. These normally reset every five minutes after the final ship has been destroyed these are great for testing out new weapon configurations or just for some extra EXP.

"Space battles and ground battles are the equivalent of chalk and cheese they are completely different."





As I logged onto the game for the last time I was saddened in a way. For the past week and a bit I have been playing the Beta solid and keeping you up to date with my thoughts and feelings on the game. However, as I have been doing this preview I feel that there has been a question in the back of my mind ever since I first fired up the Beta of Star Trek Online: is this game going to make a dent in WOW, and is this up to the same high standard? In a sense yes and no; I admit, even not being a major WOW fan, I have played some, and I must say I clicked quicker with Star Trek.

I am not sure if it's more of a Sci-fi fan thing or because the game starts off with a bang, as you are immediately thrown into a ground and space battle. I have been really enjoying the missions a lot during my play time and everything that I have been doing within those missions. Yeah okay the premise of the missions is pretty much the same as you play through but there is a lot of mix up. This can be due to the groups or teams you are in with either friends or even other players on

the server if you are on the same mission. This leads to a new dynamic meaning that for once I don't feel like I am playing a single player game in what is supposed to be a multiplayer game. Also, as well as the mix and match on the teams, I feel that there is a lot of different tactics and approaches to defeat a lot of enemies. I for one went in gun-ho and went all out on the first few of my missions, but as you learn the tactics and how to use the powers of your ship more effectively, you begin to learn that there are certain ways and procedures for taking down big enemy groups, and different styles of fighting which can be useful in different situations.

With all of this within the combat and the missions you would feel that the graphics wouldn't be as good as they are, but if you have seen any of the screenshots you will see that the game looks amazing, and I do truly mean this. If it's just watching a planet roll by as you orbit it, searching for clues and objectives or seeing a 10 on 10 battle between ships with lasers and torpedoes flying everywhere, the graphics really do stand out

STAR TREK ONLINE PART 4

and make the game so much more breathtaking to play, as well as just beautiful to look at.

Star Trek Online is well rounded and that's the thing - even though a lot of the same MMO stuff has been repeated it doesn't feel the same. It's weird how everything seems fresh and exciting and I supposed that most of has been masked by the Star Trek genre.

With all of this in mind we must say that Star Trek, in the race of the Sci-Fi MMO's, has struck first, with the Star Wars MMO being the next one to be released next year. It will be exciting to see how the Star Trek MMO will transform and what expansions and extras will be added over the next few years to keep the game fresh and maintain player interest in the game. So back to the initial question: is this better than WOW? Well yes it is in my opinion, for reasons I've stated throughout.

I thought Star Trek Online was a better quality of MMO and it just makes me feel like it's more exciting and faster paced. However, as much as I think this is a good MMO, I can't help but say I

don't think this will take the top spot overnight from the power-house that is the WOW, but it's getting there. With the Beta now closed and me quitting the world of Star Trek for the final time, I feel that I may come back to this game with some of the deals at the moment, allowing you to buy a lifetime subscription for the game at the price of a two year subscription. It certainly gets me tempted to get an

account and play a little more and have some fun.

So that's it, my time has come and we need to beam up. I hope you have enjoyed this four part mini-series and hopefully it has given you an insight on how the beta has shaped up, and an idea on if you should purchase this or not.

"This leads to a new dynamic meaning that for once I don't feel like I am playing a single player game"



PREVIEW

STAR TREK ONLINE PART 5

Originally, we were going to add this as part of the beta preview we did a few weeks ago. However I made the decision to try and explore the Federation character further to gain a more rounded overview of the game as a whole, instead of trying to cram everything in a short period of time.

As we were also given access to the Pre-Order Head Start event, this gave me the opportunity to experience one of the other races which I did not have time to fully explore during the Beta event. But before I speak about the Klingons, I want to first speak about the differences I noticed when I was trying to level up my character so I could unlock the Klingon storyline. From the beta screen shots to these shots - which are now the final live product - you should see a few UI changes which have helped the system feel a little more complete, as well as keeping it looking great. I have also noticed that during the missions that I did partake, that a lot of the loot drops seem to dramatically risen. I am not sure if this because of the amount of people on the servers due to the head start, or the fact that they have done some fine tuning to the game to increase the loot. I have also noticed that a lot of the small annoyances that occurred throughout the beta have been fixed.



Another tweak which I noticed was the fact that most of the enemies I have been facing in the missions that I had done previously in the beta have been either the same level as me or only one level above where as in the beta I found enemies would come a lot more in a bigger packs and would be at least two levels ahead of me. Again this could have just been my play through or it could have been so you didn't rush through the content. I have also found that the graphics in the final game seem a lot smoother and everything seems to flow a lot better. Also the extra storyline parts we get at the beginning of the game allow you to find out where you are in the Star Trek Story line as well as also giving you a starting point.

**“..There will be plenty
of people to play
with and against”**

So anyway, enough of the catch-up on how the game has been in progress, it's time to speak about how the Klingons storyline is different to the Federation storyline. Like I have said you have to be at least Lieutenant level 6 to unlock the Klingon storyline. So once you have done this you can then create your very own Klingon. As well as the race of Klingon, you again can create your own character or use some of the other species that are available to use. Again as when you created your Federation character, you get to pick some traits which will be boosts for your character and every species has its own unique boosts for you to choose. Once you have chosen your species and if you are female or male and have chosen your new uniform, you will be thrown in to the world of the Klingon race. Again you get a little back story before you arrive on the first planet for you to make contact with some of the leaders who

STAR TREK ONLINE PART 5

will give you some small tasks which will level you up to the rank of Lieutenant level 6 which means you will be back to where you were before you know it. This is useful because that you won't have to go through a lot of levels just to get your characters back on par with each other.

The main differences that I have found between the Klingons and the Federation are the type of missions that you go to. A lot of the Federation missions are about keeping the peace and balance to the space that you need to patrol.

Whereas a lot of the Klingon missions that I have played are all about blowing things up and killing the enemy. This is great fun and does mean that levelling up a Klingon character is a different approach to the Federation which makes it fresh to play. The bonuses for playing the Klingons is the fact that you start off with a bird of prey, with a lot of the weapons that you would have looted while playing Federation and also their unique ability - the ability to use a cloaking device. This allows you to position yourself without the enemy detecting you, the problem with the cloaking device is the fact that you cannot use any weapons while you are cloaked so it's more of putting yourself in a good position to do a surprise attack, or even to get out of trouble if needs be. As well as the differences in the missions, I feel that the graphics within the style of play isn't the neat and futuristic look of the Federation and to have



the look of an old race with traditions and huge amounts of art texture it's almost like walking around a pyramid with blasters and fazers. Again with the Klingon race there is a lot of traditional ways, as you will again be put through a trail as a test of strength to earn your Lieutenant level. In a sense everything is the same in the Klingon race but as well as this everything is slightly tweaked and worked around to almost become something completely new. Now I know I've just contradicted myself in my last sentence but hear me out on this one. For Klingon, you know everything that you need to know to get going, there is no learning curve for you to get used to or new controls to master; you are ready to go as soon as you get your hands on the ship. This is what makes these unlockable races great. Since everyone will be on Federation for a while this will there will be a lot of people around and not everyone running to different races straight away. In a sense it allows you to get to grips with everything and also ensure there will be plenty of people to play with and against.

So hopefully over the next few weeks or months we should be previewing a lot more of the races and trying to give you the full picture on how the Star Trek game is developing and how the races have been developed.



PREVIEW

MODNATION RACERS



While it's not being touted as such, many who are interested in ModNation Racers are calling it 'Mario Kart mixed with LittleBigPlanet' - and there is some truth in that. But how well does ModNation combine these two huge titles, and is there reason to be excited?

As the BETA begins, you'll start in what is called the ModSpot. This is basically the central hub for the game, from where you can access all the other content the game provides. Similar to the hub of

LittleBigPlanet, however this brings together a number of other players from around the world. You can interact with them how you please, searching their profiles for statistics or created content, chatting in the group chat in the left of the screen or simply ramming your kart into theirs. You're also likely to take part in an unspecified game of King of the Hill as people try to fling their kart atop the central pedestal and knock those that are already there. It's a fun way to while away the time as you wait for a friend to turn up online.

From the ModSpot there are a number of options; racing, creating or viewing that week's top content. Two pedestals show the top three created Mods (the cute little characters that you control and design) or karts of that week, as voted for by the players. There are screens to tell you who is currently joining you at the ModSpot, as well as events that are beginning (and are joinable). It's a streamlined way of providing everything the game has to offer in one single location - though you do often have to follow extra loading screens before arriving at your desired place.



PREVIEW

MODNATION RACERS

Create, then, is probably the game's biggest selling point - allowing players to design not only the character they control, but the karts they drive and the tracks they race. Combined with the cute, yet unique, art style of the game - this is likely to be one of the places you spend much of your time with ModNation. While the BETA tools were limited, the promise of detail available in stickers, outfits and additional items makes crafting a very unique-to-the-individual character or kart. Of course, there is a randomise button for those who don't wish to create their own, as well as a selection of pre-created choices from creators, United Front Games. The BETA showed upwards of 300 eyes being available to the player in the full game, and while some of the other parts and pieces didn't seem to have quite so much choice we'd like to believe it is purely the fact that it is a BETA that limits how much there will be to use.

Creating a track is where we spent most of our time with ModNation, recalling the days of Mario

Kart classics and replicating them as well as we could. You begin by selecting a landscape setting, currently only 'Alpine' was available - though options seemed to suggest jungle and desert will also be available. There were only four options available on show, so whether or not there will be more we cannot speculate.

"Track designing is as simple or as complex as you want it to be"

Track designing is as simple or as complex as you want it to be. You start by 'driving' the track out. Using accelerate, you push the machine forward to lay track, raising it and lowering it or adding turns as you see fit. You can reverse to delete a mistake or hold triangle to auto-complete.

Literally in a matter of minutes

you could have your very own karting course and, once complete, you're given the option to 'auto populate' - meaning the game will add decoration in for you - for those not willing to waste time on petty things like that.

If, however, you do want to customise your track, then you'll find an endless supply of items to use.



PREVIEW

MODNATION RACERS

You use a circular brush to paint the landscape, from raising mountains and lowering the ground to form rivers or add in trees and buildings. The options here were, of course, limited - but to see what was capable just from the relatively small toolbox shows just how in-depth this process could be. You could add a spread of trees anywhere on the track, for instance, or individual trees alongside (or even on) the track. Then there are power-ups and boosters to be added and the full game shows promise of even fancier objects and machines available. In truth, anything you have seen in past karting games has made its way here for you to use.

Once you've crafted your Mod, kart and track you can upload them to the online community, where people can download and use or play with your items. It's very LittleBigPlanet in its presentation, with 'Yay' or 'Nay' allowing people to vote how good your item is. You can easily search for items, or filter through just your friends, to find any track, kart or Mod you like. And already the level of detail and effort put in to many of these are outstanding.

"United Front Games have come up with their own take on the classic karting genre."

The racing then, which may seem like a side-note but is of course the main point of the game, should hope to live up to all the fun of creating. And it does. The BETA came with four United Front tracks, which were quite obviously a whole other level in terms of quality. It is important to note, that the tracks designed by these guys were developed using the very same tools available to the player - so a similar level of quality is a possibility.

Racing itself will come naturally to any self-respecting Mario Kart champ. To truly succeed in a race you'll need to utilise the drift function. Just like Mario Kart, you hop then turn to activate a handbrake turn, altering your direction as you do. However, there's no stick-wagging here to earn yourself a mini-boost, as was the case with Mario Kart. Instead, as you drift you add to your boost collection.

As soon as you collect any amount of this you can activate a boost to zip past rivals, draining your total. This is also used to activate a temporary shield - useful for shaking of those nasty rockets. It's a unique idea to karting, which so often



PREVIEW

MODNATION RACERS



directly copy the Mario Kart original feature.

The weapons of the game are all new too, there's no green-shell/red-shell wannabe here - though naturally the rockets can be compared. It'll take a while and a little practice before you're certain of what each weapon does, but you'll soon know what to use when. An interesting feature to this is the different stages the weapons can come in. Collect a weapon and hold onto it, since picking up more power-ups adds to that weapon's abilities. There are three levels for each weapon; a single rocket can become a barrage of explosives that can quickly turn the tides of the race. A turbo is upgraded to last longer then, on its third upgrade, create a portal in front of you which zips you ahead of the pack (this is interesting since any racers behind you can also follow in the portals slipstream to benefit from turbo too). It's an enjoyable idea that gives you a wait-and-see option, rather than unloading the weapon as soon as you collect it.

It could probably be said that the more powerful weapons are a little too powerful, hindering and distracting a player a little too much - but since a shield is readily available to those with enough boost stored, the argument can be that they should've been better prepared. The races themselves are highly enjoyable affairs, whether in private matches with friends on in a larger group against unknowns. The tracks are well designed to allow a satisfying mixture of racing and manic combat, and enjoyable to pull out all the stops right at the last moment to finish in first.

All in all, ModNation Racers is as much Mario Kart and LittleBigPlanet as it needs to be. With its unique additions it is clear United Front Games have come up with their own take on the once-classic karting genre and with an interesting and enjoyable art style, shipload of customisable options, simple-to-use track design and an easy to access online community, it's hard not to expect great things from this game. There are complaints, such as not being able to join a larger ranked game (the one everyone joins) with a friend - and a few issues to be ironed out - but by the end of the year it'll be interesting to see just how important ModNation Racers will be in the gaming scene.



PREVIEW

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2



Look sharp soldier! It's time to return to the Battlefield. Well, almost. With just a month to go before release, GameOn have had a chance to check out the multiplayer beta of Battlefield: Bad Company 2. The sequel to 2008's console-only Battlefield: Bad Company, the game sees the series' first full PC release since Battlefield 2142 from 2006 and is the first PC edition to feature a fully-fledged single-player campaign.

Fans of the classic Battlefield games may feel a little short-changed, especially the pilots; like its predecessor, BC2 focuses on infantry and armoured combat with only the occasional helicopter thrown in for good measure. Flyboys will most likely have to wait until the as yet unseen Battlefield 3 to get their air combat fix.

Part of reason for this smaller scale is the destructible scenery, which would most likely cause performance issues on the wide open maps of the early titles. A refined Frostbite engine

brings even more destructive possibilities to the environments with the ability to completely flatten a building rather than simply taking out sections of walls - a feature being touted by developers DICE as "Destruction 2.0".

Players first got the chance to experience the new game back in November with a PS3 only beta featuring the Arica Harbour map set in the deserts of Peru. This month Xbox and PC gamers get the opportunity to get in on the action with the significantly colder Alaskan Port Valdez map. Whilst the console version of the release is slated



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

as a demo, the PC build is still officially a beta due to the complex variety of hardware that will require testing for performance and compatibility.

As with the original PS3 beta, the current build focuses on the Rush game mode. Based on the Gold Rush mode that initially shipped with the first Bad Company game (albeit it with 100% less gold this time around), the attacking team must destroy a series of crates. Once the first pair of crates has been destroyed, the play area shifts and the defenders must fall back to the next set of crates. Attackers win if they successfully destroy all four pairs of crates, whilst defenders must hold out until the attackers run out of tickets.

Other confirmed game modes currently include Squad Rush - a smaller 4v4 variant of the standard Rush mode, Squad Deathmatch - a 4v4v4v4 free-for-all, and the traditional control point based Conquest mode.

As with all previous Battlefield games, players pick from a selection of classes, this time narrowed down to a choice of 4 - Assault, Engineer, Medic and Recon, each with a variety of weapons and upgrades available to unlock. Interestingly, DICE have seen fit to give the Medic class an LMG (light machine gun for those not so familiar with military acronyms) - given the prevalence of medics on the infantry heavy maps of Battlefield 2, it seems strange that they would be gifted with such a significant piece of firepower, potentially increasing their numbers even more.

If anything, the decision to concentrate on smaller scale engagements rather than the larger open play areas has only served to increase the intensity of the action. Parachuting into the initial spawn point as the attacking

"Only the occasional helicopter thrown in for good measure."

Russian team, players get a brief view of the objectives before being engulfed in anti-air flak. Fighting your way through the oil refinery, your view is often obscured with smoke and mist from the sea; tracer fire and bullets

whistling passed your ear serve as a reminder of which direction you should be heading.

Alongside the traditional mix of light and heavy armour, there are a number of new vehicles to play with - the quad bike provides a quick transport for two, whilst the new UAV (a personal favourite) is ideal for covering advances. Unlike the Commander asset from Battlefield 2, the UAV in BC2 is remotely controllable by a player. Capable of spotting distant targets and calling in a missile strike, it is also very fragile and has a long respawn timer so it must be treated with care.

Despite fears amongst PC gamers that the game may have been watered down for their console counterparts, it only takes a couple of rounds to find that, whilst streamlined slightly, this is still classic Battlefield at heart. I personally, will be eagerly counting the days until release and hoping nothing major changes in the meantime.



REVIEW

BIOSHOCK 2



Bioshock, one of the few game titles that can have me grinning like a Cheshire cat as I think back to the first time I set my eyes upon Rapture, rescued a little sister and yelped in fear at the noise of the Big Daddy's drill. Since the teaser ending of Bioshock 1 fans have been waiting eagerly for the release of the sequel to this epic underwater title and finally after many trailers, screenshots and highly amusing You Tube clips of the 'Uber Limited Edition' they have finally released, Bioshock 2 and boy have we been rewarded for our patience.

The game starts with setting the scene based in 1960s Rapture, a city built under -the-ocean by the magnificent Andrew Ryan. If you don't recognise this name I highly recommend you play through the first Bioshock as Bioshock 2 refers a great deal back to its big sister in the sense of character names and the back story of Rapture itself. Offering new plasmids, weaponry and an alternative view on the Rapture story, Bioshock 2 also comes with a new feature; multiplayer mode, something I will cover later in this review.

Following the opening sequence you take in your first breath, as a Big Daddy. Yep, that's right, Bioshock 2 you are all about the metal slugging, drill wielding maniac who those cute little girls call 'Daddy'. The story is based upon your experience as one of these submarine knights who must rescue the Little Sisters, but as with the previous Bioshock something in your bones is telling you that there is something not quite right about the whole thing and the Sherlock Holmes magnifying glass and hat comes out as you keep your eyes and ears wary of any hints towards what the secret might be.

The game play itself is all based in first person shooter mode, with the plasmids upon one hand and your weaponry swung across your other, you are given clear tips and instructions on how to wield each to your advantage, although it can take a bit of getting used to quickly stunning an enemy with an electrical bolt before bonking them on the noggin with your drill. The weapons available to you are collected at specific stages of the game, often including some challenge to achieve them first. There are upgrade stores where you can increase their fire speed, damage or

REVIEW

BIOSHOCK 2

prevent overheating but these are spread widely across the game so choose wisely when upgrading as often it's best to upgrade your favourite weapon first, leaving the least used 'til the final stages.

Plasmids work in the same manner, ranging from electric bolts to telekinesis and incineration - just be sure not to blow off wind near yourself whilst using this one otherwise you may find you set your behind on fire. The EVE is still the source of energy to use your plasmids, much like a can of Red Bull to you or I, it's highly sought after by everything in the game - enough to die for it which many a splicer has found on occasion. The plasmids are available to upgrade through select machines in the game, but again, they are widely spread throughout the levels so be wary of splashing out on one specific plasmid as you will use these for

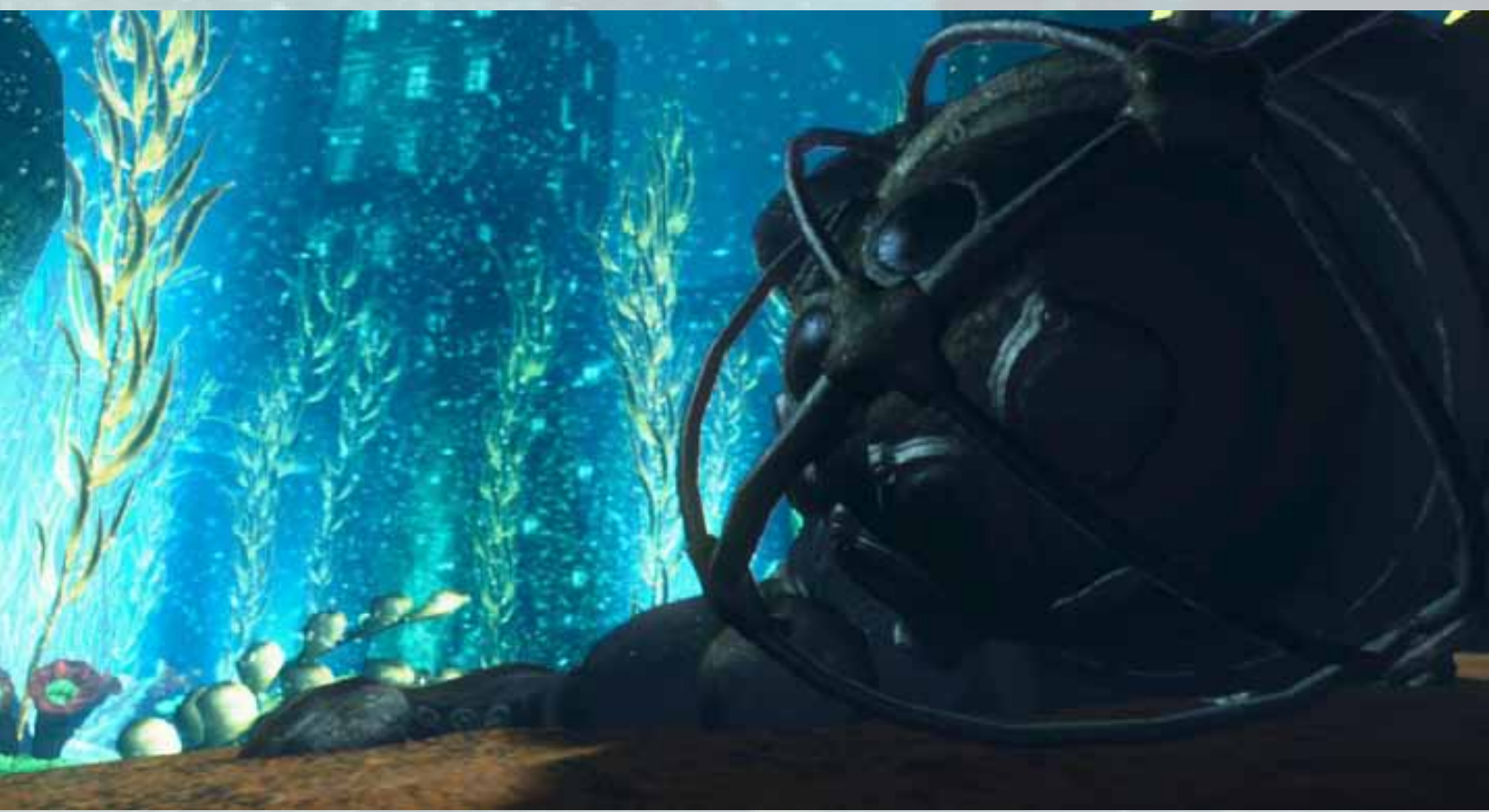
constantly changing occasions unlike the weapons.

Although nothing has changed in regards to the use of EVE you will find yourself becoming frustrated by the short amount of EVE hypos and first aid kits you can carry around with you at any one time. However, as with Bioshock 1 you are given the option to spend the ADAM you collect on increasing the size of your health and EVE bar. This won't often be enough though when you come face to face with the newest enemy of the Rapture gang - the Big Sister.

No matter how many trailers of gameplay you watch before

you begin Bioshock 2, the moment you hear that screech of a Big Sister your heart starts pumping faster, your ears twitch as to where the noise came from and your palms sweat rivers. The Big Sister is twice as mean, noisy and angry

**"Bioshock 2 you
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REVIEW

BIOSHOCK 2

as the Big Daddys; designed to take you down by any means necessary, this includes their own use of plasmids, unique needle piercing weapons and if it happens upon a splicer mid-fight, well I will let you see that experience for yourself, but I assure you - it's not pretty!

As the story develops and you meet your first splicer, Little Sister and Big Sister you will also begin to meet more of the metal clad enemies held within the Rapture walls. The Big Daddys have not left since their appearance in the original Bioshock but there is two new versions known simply as Alpha and Rumbler, these both appear often throughout the game, with the Alpha version playing a large part in the storyline as you continue through to your watery destiny. Each with their unique skills and abilities as well as the 'perfect' method of killing them, you will find yourself gaining more confidence with each you kill but the first time is always the worst. Although there is no particular advice to offer, remembering the wide range of plasmids you have available and your nearest Gene Bank will help you along the way.

Speaking of new enemies Bioshock 2 has gained a whole new gameplay this series with the introduction of the multiplayer. Now, I will be the first to admit that I am not a fan of FPS

"Bioshock 2 can safely say that it does live up to the expectations of its Big Sister."

multiplayer, mostly due to my lack of experience and skill when it comes to being quick enough off the mark, but I have found the Bioshock 2 multiplayer is designed for everyone to enjoy. The character selection is limited to a set number each with their own different style, from a deranged house wife in a dress and apron; to a goggle wearing psychotic doctor.

Once your character is selected you are given the opportunity to add a mask, choose their melee weapon - my personal favourite being the frying pan, as well as arranging their weapons and plasmids, although the down side to this is there are only 2 slots for each when you first start out. The games themselves are split into your standard multiplayer style selections of; Free for All, Capture the Flag (or Little Sister in this game),

Territory holding and Last Man Standing. These can be played either in a team or as a single person, the game hosting from 2 up to 10 players with the option to play specifically with your friends or in an open match. If you play as an open match you join as the lowest rank, number 1; you earn yourself points by killing enemies, researching their corpses, getting an



REVIEW

BIOSHOCK 2

assist on a kill, capturing the territory or little sister and many others. Once the match ends these points go towards your score which allows you to level in rank. Number 2, offering upgrades to your weapons, increasing your damage and adding a plasmid slot, I did not play long enough on the multiplayer to discover the top rank but I did find myself up against a rank 9 whose shots would tear a whole through my chest even if he looked at me.

This was the main negative issue I found with the multiplayer, there are no matches for each rank, so if you are just starting out you find yourself dying quickly to the hands of rank 5+ players, often leading to you spending most of your time dead than alive. There is the opportunity to grab the rare spawning Big Daddy suit that will appear once in each game, if you are lucky to be standing next to it as it spawns prepare yourself for mayhem as you one shot enemies, have

constant use of ammo and EVE and the fun jump-stomp-on-head ability. In all, the multiplayer has an excellent design idea and the plan was clear for what the developers wanted it to offer players, but for someone who finds the graveyard being the new hang out spot it's something I will leave to the professionals.

As I reach over to grab my water suit helmet and shotgun, I find myself thinking that Bioshock 2 has everything a gamer wants; excellent graphics, fantastic sound and music (you may find yourself chilling out to your grandparents vinyl following an hour in Rapture), enemies that will offer even the most experienced gamer a challenge in the

hard mode setting. As well as the multiplayer which although does have its flaws can be a great deal of fun when playing with friends who know to go easy on you. Bioshock 2 can safely say that it does live up to the expectations of its Big Sister.



REVIEWER: **HEATHER COOK**
GAME: **BIOSHOCK 2**
PLATFORM: **PC**
DEVELOPER: **2K**
PUBLISHER: **2K GAMES**
RELEASED: **FEBURARY, 9TH, 2010**

PLAYABILITY: **9**
REPLAYABILITY: **9**
SOUND: **10**
GRAPHICS: **10**

OVERALL: 9.5



REVIEW

MASS EFFECT 2



WARNING: This review contains spoilers!

Mass Effect was a big hit on the Xbox 360 when it was first released, hailed as being a truly magnificent sci-fi tale where your character, Commander Shepard, was trying to rid the galaxy of the evil Saren, who was in turn working for a race of ancient machines intent on destroying all life in the galaxy – the Reapers. The game suffered from bad texture pop-in, but the PC port - along with its redesigned control scheme fit for mouse and keyboard - came along and solved most issues. Here we have the sequel, but does it stand out as much as its predecessor?

Just as a spoiler warning, the first half hour or so of gameplay is mentioned in this review, but if you don't mind, please do read on. Now that's out of the way, we can get down to it. In the sequel we again take control of Commander Shepard,

who can either be a brand new character, or an imported Shepard you have from the original game. In the games prologue, we see Shepard and his crew aboard his ship, The Normandy, which promptly gets blown to bits by an unknown ship. Our good Commander makes sure everyone gets to the escape pods, but as he is saving the ships pilot, Brittle Bone Disease sufferer Joker, he gets blown into the vacuums of space, and meets an untimely end. This is where our real game begins.

Moving forward two years, we find out Shepards body has been recovered by the pro-human group, Cerberus, who are genetically rebuilding him. This is where the character creation comes in – if you have started from scratch, you can choose a male or female Shepard, then select class / background and so on. If however you have imported a Shepard from ME1, then you can

REVIEW

MASS EFFECT 2

change everything except the sex of Shepard. This can make it a more personal experience for the player, as you can stick to your previous Shepards exact looks, and if you so choose, abilities. Of course, you will have to earn these abilities again through levelling up as the game progresses – you will start at level one, unless you imported level sixty Shepard, who will begin at level five. Once you have created your character, you are awoken by a woman called Miranda, who will then guide you through the Cerberus facility you are on, which is currently under attack by their own mechs. This serves as a training level of sorts, which will accustom you to the games new shooting mechanics, wholly Gears of War style with you sticking to cover like glue and popping up to take a few shots.

After this training mission you are brought before the head of Cerberus, the Illusive Man (voiced brilliantly by Martin Sheen). He informs you that you were brought back at great expense, to help with the current problem facing the galaxy. Human colonies have been disappearing and suspicion has fallen on the Reapers. It's your job to find out who is really abducting the colonists, and if the Reapers are truly involved. From here you will get classic Mass Effect gameplay, where you can travel from planet-to-planet, seeking new

crew members for your newly rebuilt Normandy, all leading up to the games conclusion.

As with the original Mass Effect, conversation plays a big part in the way things around you turn out.

As an example, at one point, you will recruit an Asari alien, Samara into your crew, and she – like all other squad members – has a specific side-quest. During this side-quest, your actions can result in two totally different outcomes, one of which will potentially have consequences later on in the game.

The Paragon and Renegade options return here, and while they are largely the same as before, there is a new interrupt system in place, where you can forcefully interrupt a conversation

with a positive or negative action. For example, the scene shown in a few trailers, where you can interrupt a man talking and push him to his death through the window. While these can be ways to get results quick, they can have some unexpected consequences so you have to think before you just jump and hit the button to perform an action,

“..There is a new interrupt system in place, where you can forcefully interrupt a conversation with positive or negative actions.”



REVIEW

MASS EFFECT 2

as it's wholly possible to ignore these interrupt actions altogether.

In-between recruiting new crew members and doing main missions, you will be able to embark on a number of side-quests that will take you off the beaten path. These can be found randomly by scanning planets, or by chance if you have a conversation with a certain NPC. These are massively improved from the original game, as each new side-quest I've found so far has been just as exciting as the game's main missions. The collection of minerals from the previous game has returned, but it's far less tedious. To get minerals from planets, you need simply scan them until you find an area with high activity. From here you can launch a probe from the Normandy down to the planet, which will find the minerals for you – no more driving about in the fiddly Mako vehicle, which is now gone.

The minerals you collect can be used to upgrade your armour, weapons and the Normandy itself. While I didn't see the importance of this the first time round, I certainly saw it necessary the second time I played as it changes things dramatically towards the end. The game looks downright gorgeous sometimes, with some of the alien species in particular standing out having been terrifically designed, and they look



perfectly in place in the game world. The sound is great in general, but the voice acting stands out as being fantastic for the most part. I preferred playing as a female Shepard, as Jennifer Hale does a better job as the female Shepard than Mark Meer does for the male counterpart.

Nearly everything you do will have some impact on

the game world. Be it big or small, something will have changed, from someone living or dying, to you getting a discount in a shop somewhere. Things are always affected, and that's what makes Mass Effect so compelling. There have been many games which have promised consequences for all your actions, but only a few have delivered this. Mass Effect 2 is one of these games; and while the decisions you made in the first game aren't massively important in this game, they do add a little personality to it,



REVIEW

MASS EFFECT 2



allowing you to meet certain characters again, depending on your actions in the original game.

The game was released with DLC readily available through the Cerberus Network, an in-game network giving you various news stories from the Mass Effect world on the main menu. Everyone who buys the game new will get a code to connect to the Cerberus network, and those who buy the game second hand will be able to purchase a code from Bioware to access it, as the codes are single use only. We have been promised a trilogy, and certain

actions taken in this game are obvious nods to things that will possibly happen in the third game. But Bioware has made a bold move in this one, which you will find out for yourself.

Only time will tell where Bioware will go with the franchise, but as a middle game this stands out as one of the best games so far this generation. It's a good mix of shooting, story, light RPG elements and has plenty of charm and character to keep you hooked right through to the end. Highly recommended.



REVIEWER: **KEVIN MALONE**
GAME: **MASS EFFECT 2**
PLATFORM: **PC**
DEVELOPER: **BIOWARE**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
RELEASED: **JANUARY, 28TH, 2010**

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

OVERALL: 9



REVIEW

ARMY OF TWO THE 40TH DAY



Army of Two: The 40th Day sees the return of lovable mercenaries Tyson Rios and Elliot Salem, set to wreak havoc upon the streets of Shanghai when a “simple” contract turns into total chaos. The whole city starts to collapse around you, entire buildings start exploding around you, the civilian populace fleeing for their lives, and even at one point you even see a plane fly into the very tower block you’re trying to ex-filtrate from. This scenario quickly turns into one of simple survival as you try to escape the armageddon.

The first Army of Two had issues, there’s no getting away from the fact that while the game was decent, the bad points definitely got in the way of fully enjoying the game. Thankfully EA have taken the criticism on-board with a myriad of changes, most of which I shall not bore you with. but in brief the changes make for a more fluid gaming experience. You will notice that your control over either Rios and or Salem is more intuitive

than the first and it does not take long to have them dancing around like an extension of yourself.

The basics of the game have not changed a great deal since the pair’s first outing, instead they’ve had a spring clean and a bit more attention given to them. Firstly the weapon customisation is definitely more varied than the first game with more paint jobs, more parts and more implements of ‘stabbyness’ to be attached to your weapon of choice. Fancy a Screwdriver on the end of your AK? Perhaps an empty beverage can



ARMY OF TWO THE 40TH DAY

as your silencer? Well go right ahead as you're free to do so, hell you can have two of them gaffer taped together if you're feeling greedy.

While this weapon customisation is all fine and dandy, I do feel that some of that time spent on figuring what appliance can be stuck on what gun could have been used in expanding the selection of sidearms as to be quite frank, a total of three handguns to choose from is rather turd. However, this is a minor gripe on the arsenal on offer with the selection of primary and special weapons being more than adequate.

when the time comes to restrain and subdue your foe in the aid of rescuing civilians.

While on the subject of civilians, it is really your choice if you decide to rescue them or just be a cold blooded bar-steward and leave them to die at the hands of these mercenaries. These questions of your own morality have an impact with on your relationship with your partner in the single player and how your game progresses further on in terms of aid and gathering new items. There will be moments in the game where you have to decide the outcome of a cut-scene, the impact



Just like the first outing, you have an aggro meter to gauge who has the majority of the attention from the enemy forces. Using this to your advantage is key in being able to sneak up on enemies or letting your partner do the same while you spray lead like a sprinkler to keep the focus on you. To aid you in your 'sneakery', the face masks have been upgraded with a GPS system which enables you to tag enemies. This is especially handy to see the rank of soldiers

of your decision majorly effects your morality status and the result shown in an animated still slideshow which could show that you may have not necessarily taken the right action.

Visually the game is quite varied for being set within a single location, flowing from back streets, to offices and even a zoo, you do get the feeling that this was once a living breathing landscape before someone blew it to hell and back. The

ARMY OF TWO THE 40TH DAY

subtle details like the dust and broken electrical cables sparking in the street add to the atmosphere, also some of the cover you may hide behind can be chipped away with automatic fire or just simply blown up with a well placed RPG shot, so you'll have to be on your toes when deciding what cover to use.

Both characters have a decent and believable script with some nice voice acting. There were times where I was giggling to myself after Salem delivered another one liner which was drier than Gandhi's flip flop, and the repertoire between the characters really does add to the overall experience of the game. It seems EA have managed to balance the chatter just right in this outing, while in the first game you were starting to wish the pair had some sort of mute button.

On the multiplayer side of things, the game ships

with three game modes which can accommodate a total of four players, however for those who pre-ordered the game, a fourth mode is available to them. This I don't agree with, why should those buy this without pre-ordering miss out on game content already on the disc? Now after a little digging around it seems this mode unlocks after a certain amount of time from the day of release but all those who did pre-order will have a leg up on that game mode and more than likely annihilate the newcomers to this.

Moving to the game modes themselves and you're faced with Co-op Deathmatch in where you and your partner face off against other pairings. Control mode is like Headquarters in Modern Warfare, in where you must capture and hold a control point somewhere in the map until points are awarded. Warzone is an interesting one, this is an objective based mode which can give you a random objective to accomplish in the map. It may

"Rios and or Salem is more intuitive than the first and it does not take long to have them dancing around like an extension of yourself"



REVIEW

ARMY OF TWO THE 40TH DAY

start off with giving you a computer controlled AI in which any team may seek and eliminate for points, or give your team a waypoint in which to plant explosives while the others attempt to stop you. The final mode, which is the exclusive pre-order one, is Extraction. This is strictly limited to four players where you simply have to survive against increasingly difficult scenarios in which waves of enemies spawn to face you. Again you are tied to your partner so Co-operation is key to survival.

Overall the game has been thoroughly enjoyable, while I encountered moments of questionable AI in the single player campaign, this did not really deter from the value of the game. The Co-op component is where EA have decided to focus on and it definitely shows, on-line or off-line you're in for a ride and a half, definitely one for your collection.



REVIEWER: **NEIL HETHERINGTON**
GAME: **ARMY OF TWO: 40TH DAY**
PLATFORM: **XBOX360**
DEVELOPER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
RELEASED: **JANUARY, 15TH, 2010**

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

OVERALL: 8.5





SEE YOU AT THE FINISH, NEXT ISSUE!

