

Issue 22 - Game On co.uk





DEAD RISING 2 Is duct tape truely the greatest creation in the universe? Find out inside!



Could this addition be too much or just right? Find out inside!



PORTAL 2 Can multiplayer enchance the gameplay experience? Find out inside!



All the best from Gameon's Visit to The E3 Expo. Read all the previews inside!

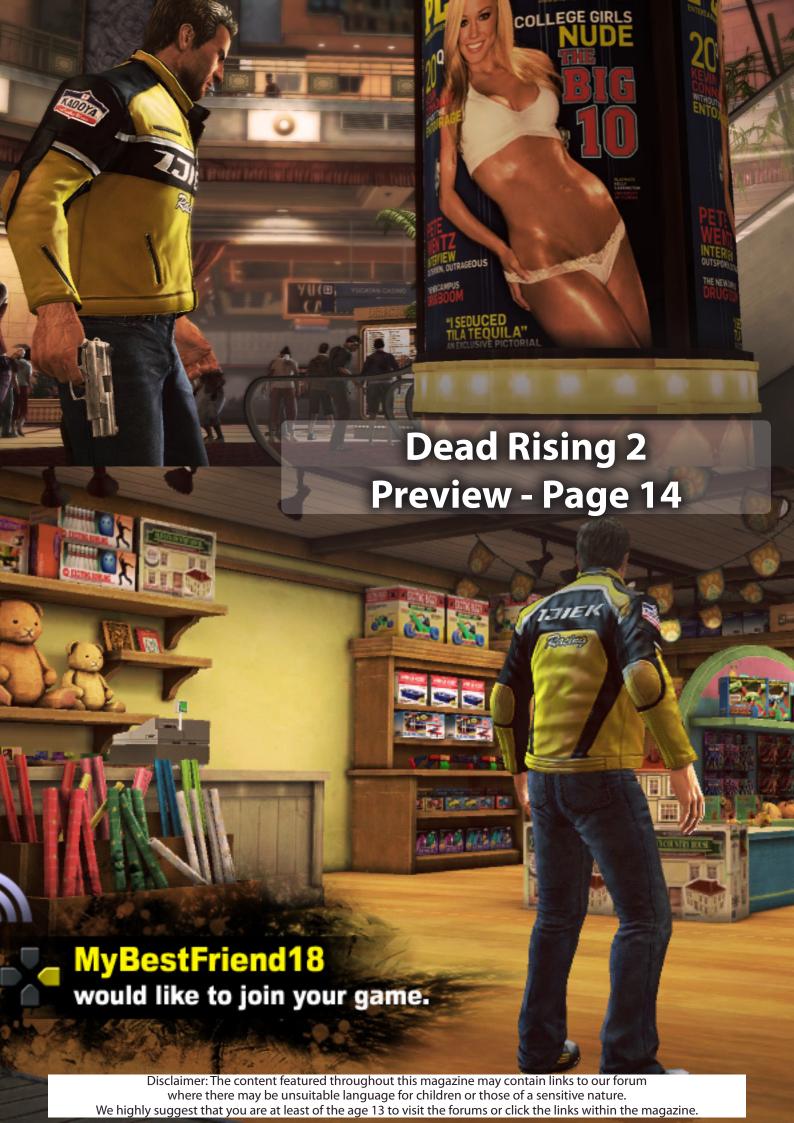












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Jessica Greenfield (Jessica) Hello and welcome to another action packed GameOn Mag!

As promised in last months issue, we have crammed as much E3 content in as possible. We think you will enjoy these previews of some of the most highly sought after new titles. Keep your eyes out for the next issue where we continue to bring you the hottest news from the shows happening right now, next issue we head to Gamescom.

The Editor.



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CRYSIS 2 E3 PREVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



The retina-scorching PC-only titles Crysis and its spin-off Crysis: Warhead brought countless machines to a standstill and triggered the upgrading of thousands of gamers' rigs. Using the nanosuit to plan and orchestrate different tactics in the more open sections of the game was extremely fun and memorable, but the vehicle controls and more linear portions were slightly disappointing. First announced at E3 2009, Crysis 2 moves the gameplay to a radically different location, New York City, where Nomad must battle with the alien forces.

Following on from the events of the original Crysis the sequel relocates from the exotic island in the Pacific to the steel and concrete of the urban jungle. With the aliens having been unleashed at the end of the last game, they're now attacking humanity who must fight for

their survival. With Nomad now sporting a newer and sleeker version of the nanosuit, defying his superiors, he will have to contend with both the alien threat and Crynet Systems. More specific details of the game's plot are being kept

under wraps for the time being and it remains to be seen whether any other characters from the series will make an appearance in Crysis 2. Developers, Crytek wanted to emphasise that the new nanosuit was designed to augment the two main playing styles that emerged from the original. The first predatory style mainly made use of the suit's stealth ability to cloak behind the enemy lines and pick your opponents off gradually. Alternatively making use of the enhanced strength and armour functions is equally viable and leads to a much more aggressive gung-ho approach. While all the original nanosuit functions have been confirmed to return, it is unknown whether or not there will be more abilities, though let's keep our fingers crossed.



CRYSIS 2 E3 PREVIEW





The first stage of the demonstration was designed to showcase how the suit could function in the new environment, with the action taking place on the streets of a ravaged and heavily damaged New York. As Nomad looked around, the series' trademark visuals were back with a vengeance displaying the city environments just as well as the lush jungles of the original. There have been significant changes made to the engine to allow Crysis 2 to appear on both the Xbox 360 and the PS3 and Crytek have suggested that the PC specifications will be less demanding than the first game. Both textures and the various particle effects looked very high quality and general debris and destruction littered the pavements.

After only a brief moment to take in the scenery, the action exploded with Nomad fighting his way along a raised intersection taking fire from a number of nearby high rise buildings. The action was fast paced and intense with vehicles exploding and huge glass office windows shattering realistically. Working slowly and methodically along, it wasn't long before we saw the alien enemies, some of whom had the ability to cloak. Using maximum strength to jump into the building the fire was coming from, Nomad then engaged in some close-range combat using the faithful shotgun. Here more aggressive tactics were predominant with enhanced armour being employed to help limit the damage. At one point the action slowed down, with the cloak used to slip passed a group of enemies before using the assault rifle to take them out from behind.



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At first it was difficult to see how the nanosuit's capabilities could be used in more enclosed environments, but the demo began to provide some hints at the variations in playing style. Hopefully there will be a lot of different areas to employ the nanosuit's range and Crytek have hinted that they will encourage players to mix up their playing style and explore the different gameplay strategies available. Similarly,

there should be a mix of more traditional open spaces from the first title and the more enclosed locations. We were given the opportunity to see another section of the game, taking place inside New York's heavily damaged Central Station. While this was definitely an interior portion, it comprised of a large open space, with plenty of cover, giving you the option to work with different tactics.



CRYSIS 2 E3 PREVIEW

The area acted as a form of arena with large numbers of aliens attacking as you attempted to hold them off, with a handy mounted turret close by. These aliens seemed stronger and some were equipped with armoured suits and heavier weaponry which made them much more difficult to take down. When one of the enemies managed to slip past the defence, Nomad had the ability to rip the turret off its mount and use it to remove the flanker. With fewer enemies present the battle seemed to be drawing to a close, but this was far from the case as a gigantic three-legged armoured tank crashed through the side of the station. Resembling one of the creatures from The War of the Worlds it began to hunt Nomad through the station with a variety of nasty weapons, including a particularly unpleasant missile attack. Using enhanced speed to slip into the narrower side corridors where the tank couldn't reach, Nomad collected a one-shot rocket launcher which only temporarily halted the machine. With aliens present in these smaller halls, Nomad had to contend with both and eventually used stealth to sneak back out into the main area and collect a larger multiplebarrelled rocket launcher which soon brought the titan crashing to the ground. The whole battle had lasted perhaps a few minutes, but was well and truly epic with barely a second of calm. If the pacing of the full game can provide these set-pieces then it seems that Crysis 2 will really deliver on the promises of varied gameplay.



As the demonstration drew to a close, Nomad looked upwards to see a large skyscraper hit with alien explosive and begin to buckle. At the same moment an armoured vehicle dashed into the station, picking him up. As the jeep drove through the streets, desperate civilians called for help, including a tearful man pointing to a trapped partner and crying for you to help. Looking upwards reveals the crumbling building, forcing you to drive away with the skyscrapers debris collapsing onto the people only second later. This level of human involvement and pathos was definitely not seen in the last title and it looks like an interesting and emotionally weighty inclusion. With Crysis 2 already looking astonishing, hopefully the gameplay will match these visuals and provide a title that has both style and substance.





Written by Chris Wakefield

DJ HERO 2 E3 PREVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



When DJ Hero was first announced early last year it was met with some scepticism from gamers, who were worried it was a spin-off designed to cash-in on the Hero franchise. However, British developers FreeStyleGames managed to make a title that was great fun to play and brought a whole new style of music to the rhythm-action genre. While the sales started slowly, they steadily increased and now the DJ Hero series has developed a dedicated following of players. The recently unveiled DJ Hero 2 promises gameplay additions, more game modes and a large number of new mixes.

One of the first things to note is that the sequel will not utilise a new turntable controller, choosing to opt for gameplay tweaks using the existing peripheral rather than creating a new one. These new additions are all designed around creating a more involved experience for new and existing players, with a focus on expanding the first game's freestyle sections. In DJ Hero this was restricted to playing select samples over the track at set points in the song, but in the sequel you have more freedom to experiment.

Freestyle sections now give you the option to mix and scratch at certain points during the tracks, allowing you to play sections differently each time you select a song. Freestyle scratching



is assessed by measuring your rhythm and timing, the better that it fits with the song, the more points you will score. Similarly, mixing gives you the opportunity to crossfade between the two songs so you can now choose which track becomes more prominent. While you are free to crossfade however you see fit, the game does provide some guidelines and suggestions on the highway that highlight important parts of the song, such as certain vocal sections and beats. These freestyle sections are limited to specific sections of each mix, but having a degree of freedom in how you play these is something not really seen before in the music genre. Hopefully these freestyle elements will help stop tracks from getting old and provide an incentive for experimenting with different techniques.

Despite the addition of these improved freestyle sections, the remainder of the gameplay seems largely unchanged from the first title. In several of the tracks there appear to be sustained notes, similar to those in the Guitar Hero series, where you'll have to hold down the corresponding button for the length of the section. This mechanic is only a small addition, which wasn't immediately obvious, but these notes look like a natural inclusion and should help to boost the challenge on the harder game difficulties. While there are only a few relatively minor new gameplay features, there are some bigger changes elsewhere in the title.

DJ Hero 2 now includes singing and rapping which will work with most existing rhythm game microphones using a karaoke-style system similar to the Guitar Hero series. Instead of simply using pitch as an indicator for the player's score, which would be inadequate for many of the game's tracks, the rhythm of singing or rapping will be monitored as well.

DJ HERO 2 E3 PREVIEW

With some very big songs from the last few years promised in the game, this should be a great addition to the series and offer a real incentive to get on the microphone with some friends. Currently there hasn't been any announcement about whether or not the "DJ vs. Guitar" mode found in the previous title will return for the sequel but it would certainly be a welcome inclusion.

The DJ Hero series always was best when played with friends, as is the case with most rhythm action games and this aspect has been focused on for the sequel. Emphasising having fun in a group there are 6 new game modes to enjoy. Most noticeable is the "Party Play" feature, familiar from Guitar Hero 5, which allows you to drop in and out of a song easily offering you the ability to change the difficulty at any time. In multiplayer the inclusion of a DJ Battle mode is a great choice and promises to be especially challenging with the new freestyle elements being key to building a better score than your opponent. Other modes include "Checkpoint" where the track is split into different sections with each player trying to outperform the other in these specific segments and one where the object is to "bank" your highest streak of notes. This greater variety in the multiplayer definitely looks promising and there's a definite emphasis on keeping the game accessible while still providing a challenge for the core fans.

Alongside the new multiplayer and party modes, the developers have promised a more expansive and detailed single player experience. Christened "Empire Mode" the story will follow your character as you start off as a lowly DJ before working your way up to progressively bigger venues as you attempt to eventually run a club of your own. Traditionally the single player aspect of the Hero series has always been its weakest, acting primarily as a means of unlocking more songs and weaning you onto the harder tracks. Hopefully Empire Mode can deliver and provide a little more substance to the experience in order to make it more involving and prevent it from feeling compulsory.



As ever in a music game the selection of tracks will be the most important element in providing a healthy variety that is challenging, contemporary and enjoyable. DJ Hero's set list was strong and managed to strike a good balance between mainstream pop songs and DJ classics. Only a few artists have currently been revealed but the developers promise 70 mixes from over a 100 varied songs. The success of the first game with consumers and the DJ's involved allowed for the developers to choose from a wider variety of music. Currently around 70% of these tracks will be playable from the start of the game, with the remainder being unlocked as you progress through the career. Artists as diverse as Dr Dre, Lady Gaga and Kanye West have been announced and several really tough songs have been promised to satisfy the hardcore players. With a strong development team behind it and the support of some big name artists, DJ Hero 2 looks set to deliver a strong sequel when it's released towards the end of the year.



STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED II

AVALIBLE FOR:



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed was the fastest selling original LucasArts title, shifting an impressive 7 million copies but the game was received less warmly by critics. While the story, soundtrack and setting were met with praise, the erratic camera and occasionally frustrating gameplay was singled out as letting the title down. Announced late last year, The Force Unleashed II aims to tackle these criticisms and develop the combat system and develop the story as it continues to bridge the gap between the original and prequel trilogies.

LucasArts were quick to get the biggest issue with the sequel's story out of the way at the beginning of our preview. Starkiller, Darth Vader's secret apprentice-turned-rebel died rather conclusively at the end of The Forces Unleashed in order to save the Rebel Alliance, after realising the mistakes he had made in hunting down Jedi. So, to learn that he is the protagonist of the sequel is something of a shock, but one that the developers are confident will work. It soon becomes clear that this Starkiller is actually a clone of the original, kept by Darth

Vader on the watery planet of Kamino, familiar from Attack of the Clones. Tormented by memories from the original Starkiller, especially those with love-interest Juno Eclipse, he soon clashes with Vader and sets about escaping the planet. Without wanting to give anything away, it seems that this might not be as straightforward as it initially appears so expect some plot twists as the story progresses. Series writer Haden Blackman commented that the team were aiming for an Empire Strikes Back style darker follow up to The Force Unleashed.

During our demonstration of the first few levels, the game engine looked fantastic and it seems that LucasArts have really learnt how to get the most from the Ronin engine. This technology, which incorporated no less than three physics systems (Havoc, Digital Molecular Matter and Euphoria), was one of the best features of The Force Unleashed. After working with the Ronin engine for the original game and its DLC expansions, the team have improved the graphics with some very impressive visuals. The preview began with



STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED II



Starkiller escaping his cell on Kamino and falling down the side of a building during a violent storm. This set piece was eye-watering as the torrential rain lashed against the tower with Starkiller moving side-to-side to avoid ventilation ducts, using his force powers to destroy platforms full of stormtroopers and even hitting a TIE fighter.

These set pieces were littered throughout the first level, as soon Starkiller found himself running from an Imperial gunship as it chased him through a corridor, shattering glass and firing rockets. Clearly a very cinematic element, these are all fully controlled rather than resorting to quick time events, which is a nice touch. To add further challenge stormtroopers littered the corridor, forcing you to either quickly dispatch them or avoid them using force speed leaving them to



their own ship's missiles.

From the early levels, these events seem rationed out carefully in order to help keep the pacing balanced, which the developers have emphasised as being important.

The bulk of the gameplay still revolves around combat and LucasArts have ensured that Starkiller will have a host of new moves and abilities in order to deal with his enemies. In order to help focus the action, the developers have reduced the total number of opponents to around 25 different types, in order to create foes that were unique to battle. This seems like a wise design move and in the gameplay footage we saw each of the enemies required different tactics to deal with. Fighting outside on a series of suspended platforms, Starkiller encountered groups of stormtroopers who were dispatched using his new twin lightsaber fighting style. This will open up a greater range of moves, including many that will utilise his force powers alongside the weapons.

The environment will also play a greater role in this sequel and killing enemies using their surroundings will give you a greater amount of experience. It is also occasionally necessary to continue and one small puzzle in the demo featured Starkiller using force pull to bring a platform crashing down on a group of

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED II

stormtroopers stood below. Soon after, one of his new abilities, mind control made short work of a group of new enemies. These stormtroopers came equipped with staffs which could block and deflect lightsaber attacks, although they were very susceptible to force powers. Using the new mind trick, the stormtroopers promptly ran to the nearest edge and flung themselves to their deaths. Alongside these new baddies there will be some fan favourites returning for The Force Unleashed II including the jet pack troops. When these stormtroopers are faced with force lightning their jetpacks lose control and they spiral helplessly before exploding in a ball of flame.

As the demo reached its end one of the mini-boss enemies made an appearance, the carbonite trooper, a large droid wielding a portable freezing device. If Starkiller stays still for too long ice appears on his body and slows his movement speed and if he can't escape the range he will become frozen solid. In order to defeat it, it is necessary to remove the robot's shield using force pull and then hitting it with everything you have while remaining mobile. This style of tougher enemy looks challenging to take down, especially when you have to face them alongside the standard enemies. Before the preview finished Starkiller showed off his other new ability, force fury, a new power which



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boosts the potency of his other moves. As a squad of a dozen stormtroopers rushed him Starkiller activated this and began to crackle with energy, before unleashing an enhanced force push. This sent all of the enemies hurtling into the distance, taking them all out in a single move. While the other boosted powers weren't demonstrated, they will all have similarly enhanced effects.

Other changes are being implemented across the title, including overhauling the enemy Al to make them more than just ragdolls to work your way through. Combat is still important, but LucasArts have tried to mix in a few other elements including some puzzles utilising your various force powers to help add some variety to the game. Smaller changes have been addressed including allowing more time to be spent on polishing the final experience, tweaks to the targeting and allowing you to have more powers and abilities from the beginning of the game. With a more personal, darker story that is linked more broadly to the Star Wars saga, The Force Unleashed II should iron out the problems of the first and deliver a more complete experience for fans of the franchise.



Written by Chris Wakefield

DEAD RISING 2 E3 HANDS-ON PREVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



In 2006, before the explosion of zombie-themed games with the word "dead" in the title (Left 4 Dead, Dead Space, House of the Dead: Overkill etc), Capcom's Dead Rising brought a fresh new approach to the genre. Taking a more comical and over-the-top approach to zombies and setting it in a location that clearly was an affectionate homage to Dawn of the Dead was a great move and helped make the title a lot of fun and one that was difficult to put down. Dead Rising 2 takes place in a new location, Fortune City, but still contains the ridiculous and entertaining combat as well as a host of new additions.

Despite the popularity of the original title's protagonist, Frank West, he has been replaced in the sequel with a newer and sportier model, a former motocross rider called Chuck Greene. Set

5 years after the events of Dead Rising, the story focuses on Chuck's quest to save his daughter who has been infected with the zombie parasite, along with what seems to be the majority of the US population. As the game progresses Chuck will be forced to either find or buy a medication, "Zombrex", which slows the infection preventing her from turning into one of the undead. To further complicate matters Chuck is being pursued by a mysterious female journalist who seems to be attempting to link him to the spread of the infection, although whether she will serve as the key antagonist remains to be seen.

We were lucky enough to get a lengthy hands-on with Dead Rising 2 in the title's new co-operative mode, which was huge fun to play. This mode is available in the game's single player campaign where a friend can join you online as a duplicate



DEAD RISING 2 E3 HANDS-ON PREVIEW



Chuck Greene rather than a new character. Both of you are able to earn experience as you kill your way through the zombie hordes and can essentially do whatever you like. You can choose to pursue some of the various side-quests and missions available (which act like the "Cases" and "Scoops" from the first title) or you can simply grab as many weapons as possible and conduct a zombie massacre.

As these butchering devices are so satisfying they deserve to be discussed in some detail, as most of them combine surreal comedy with the warped mind of a serial killer. The "Paddle Saw" takes a kayak paddle and straps two chainsaws to each ends, allowing you to slice and dice your way through crowds with ease. Elsewhere propane

While the photography mode that formed a key element of the first game is no longer present in Dead Rising 2, you still earn experience points which allow you to level up from killing the undead. One of the new additions in the seguel is the ability to create customised weapons that are usually not only sick and twisted, but absurdly fun to use. During the playthrough of the demo the number of weapons available was astonishing and a similar number of standard weapons to the original title and around 60 or so buildable ones are promised. These manufactured death-dealers can be created at any maintenance bench as long as you have the components but will break fairly quickly. In order to get the most from them, you can buy weapon cards which will extend the lifespan and durability of these weapons and give you an experience boost at the same time when killing with them.



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tanks can be studded with nails to make a brutally effective explosive, water pistols can be filled with petrol to make a flamethrower and a vacuum cleaner can be added to a circular saw blade of all things. However, the crowning glory of warped brilliance is the child's remote control helicopter which when used normally attracts the zombies with its loud noise. Adding

machetes to its rotor blades then turns an innocent aerial toy into a hovering decapitation machine which gorily mutilates anything in its path: it's great.

The zombies themselves are back in force, now populating the screen in even greater numbers than before. There was a lot of variation in their design and there was an odd charm about seeing them ambling around the various locations, before succumbing to their fate: again. The settings themselves look fantastic; with Fortune City being Las Vegas in all but name providing a backdrop with huge

potential for carnage. Wherever you go in the levels weapons can be found in abundance, from the packs of playing cards on the blackjack tables to decorative broadswords that line the walls of certain casinos. When we headed outside onto Fortune City's equivalent of The Strip it was really impressive, with hundreds of densely packed

zombies on screen creating a pretty epic experience. There are also plenty of location specific hijinx to get up to, including riding a mechanical bull in the midst of the undead and experiencing the consequences of drinking too much alcohol.

Dead Rising 2's support cast is comprised of similar characters with both survivors and psychopaths being found throughout the larger game world.



DEAD RISING 2 E3 HANDS-ON PREVIEW



Survivors all have different personalities with some joining you straight away while others will request you help them, all of which is familiar from the previous title. During our time with the game we encountered a few of these characters and their Al seems much sharper than the first title, although there were a few accidents with some of them. While trying to defend one of them from a group of zombies, a few wayward hits turned them against me, forcing me to fight them off, but this carried with it the added benefit of a shiny new shotgun. Sadly, we never bumped into any of the new psychopaths but if they are as colourful and outrageous as the first title then there will be a lot to look forward.

The variety of the weapons available in the game and their customisability should help to add a lot of replayability to the title, providing you with different ways to approach the game's situations and to dispatch your foes. Having listened to the criticism levelled at the first game, developer Blue Castle Games have added a further two save slots, providing a total of three. Hopefully this will mean less frustration when aiming to save all survivors and should help prevent having to restart due to complications towards the end of

the game. With a release in the next few months there is a lot to look forward to, so be prepared to take a trip to your garage to look for potentially deadly weapons, especially if you have a few spare chainsaws and a kayak paddle.



Written by Chris Wakefield

PORTAL 2 E3 PREVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



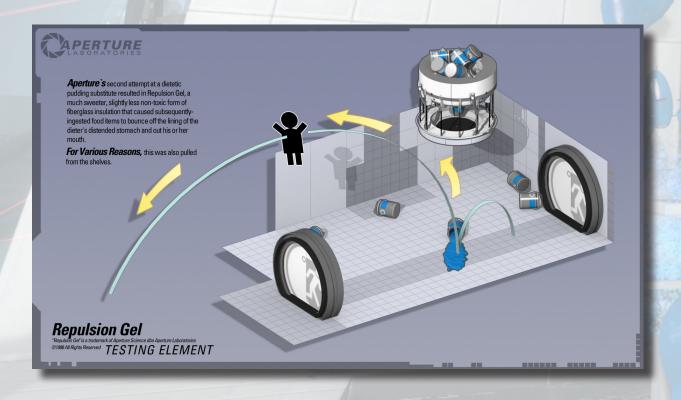
Portal, Valve's unusual puzzle game released as part of The Orange Box, was something of a shock commercial and critical success back in 2007. Taking a surprisingly simple concept, two connected portals which you can move through, and turning it into a full game was an impressive achievement. However, crafting something that was more than just a puzzle game with a rich and sinister atmosphere was truly remarkable. Continuing the story, Portal 2 adds a range of new gameplay elements, a co-operative mode and some interesting new characters.

Valve is certainly a developer that knows how to whip fans into a frenzy, aptly demonstrated by their unusual announcement of Portal 2. After subtly tweaking the ending to the original title earlier this year, the sequel follows on from Chell's apparent recapture by Aperture Science. Being placed in some form of suspended animation she is subsequently released by a new character, Wheatley, a personality core

similar to those you remove from GLaDOS during the final confrontation in Portal.

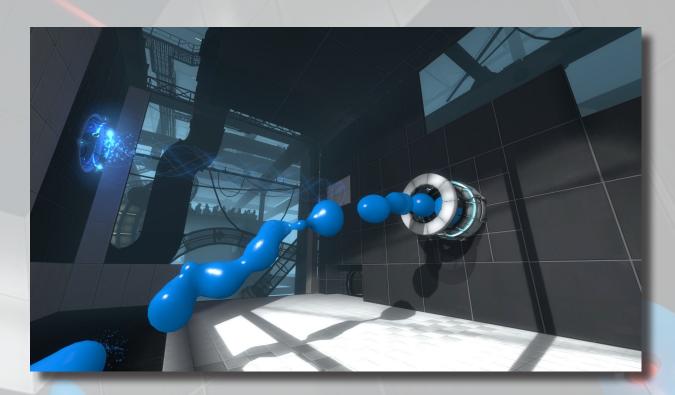
Wheatley seems to have the ability to roam through the facility on a series of monorail-like tracks although in the footage that we saw, he removed himself from these and was carried by Chell. The trademark humour from the series was very evident in these early scenes and it already brought to mind the sharpest lines of dialogue from the original.

Before long though, everyone's favourite psychopathic AI was accidently awakened and is still pretty bitter about Chell killing her ("I've been really busy being dead"). However, GLaDOS seems to be prepared to move on ("We can put our differences behind us. For science. You monster") although she clearly has some sort of sinister ulterior motive. With Valve being as secretive as ever during the preview, the remainder of the story is shrouded in mystery though there were hints that the Weighted Companion Cube could return.



<u>PREVIEW</u>

PORTAL 2 E3 PREVIEW



With GLaDOS lying dormant the Aperture Science facility has fallen into extreme disrepair with vegetation and general dirt covering parts of the facility. We were shown some rather impressive footage of the various test rooms being renovated, with shiny white tiles replacing the grimy ones. Interestingly, it seems that Wheatley will be able to, at times, lead you behind the scenes of the test chambers and temporarily escape the watchful gaze of GLaDOS. In the footage we were shown, the personality core asked you to temporarily avert your gaze as he opened up one of the walls ("I can't do it while you're looking at me"). How often this occurs and what implications it has are currently unknown, but it could certainly lead to some interesting situations.

However the most exciting new additions are undoubtedly the new test chamber features which open up a lot of new gameplay possibilities. The first of these we were shown was a tractor beam, a long cylindrical blue area which has the ability to slowly move objects in one direction. While you can stand in this yourself its main use seems to be for transporting objects around the various chambers. During the demonstration portals

were placed at one end of the beam and another on the floor facing upwards. This allowed the beam to move vertically from the floor, so any objects placed in it could reach the level's higher platforms. In the first test chamber that we saw, this was used to move several weighted boxes around so that they could be used to activate the pressure switches found in the first game.

The second new addition is the presence of lasers in several of the chambers, which are needed to activate certain switches. With a new type of weighted cube, with a mirror in the centre, it is possible to redirect the beam of the laser, in order to reach the required switch. This often needs to be done by guiding it through portals, but you have to be careful to avoid being hit by the beam as it will spell death. However, the hazardous beam can be turned to your advantage and used to ignite, and subsequently, explode any turrets that are in its way. The pneumatic tubes seen in the first title for transporting cubes and turrets around return, but can now be utilised. Anything placed near the end of one will be instantly sucked into it and transported along, which leads to even more ways to dispose of the

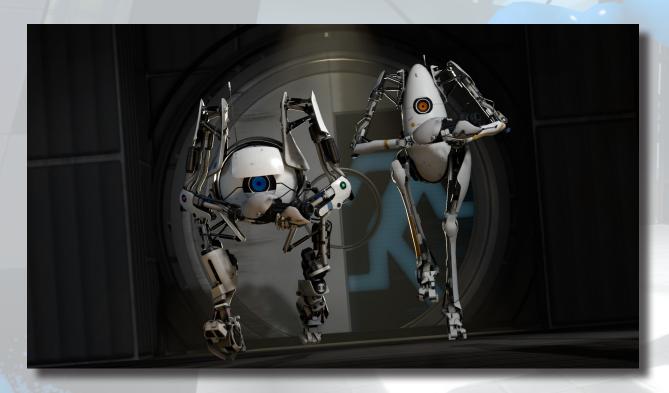
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turrets. Placing a portal underneath one allows you to move this destructive force throughout the level, sucking in groups of sentries at once and even removing smaller tiles from the walls. While we didn't see any use for these other than dispatching the sentry guns, their use as part of the game's puzzles is assured by the developers.

Perhaps the most radical new element is

the inclusion of various liquids all of which have different effects when placed in the environment. The first of these was a Repulsion Gel, a blue liquid which propels you into the air when you jump onto it. Using momentum and the portal device, it was possible to move this gel around the level, allowing you to reach new areas. The most useful purpose of the liquid was to propel it onto portal-proof floors, which would

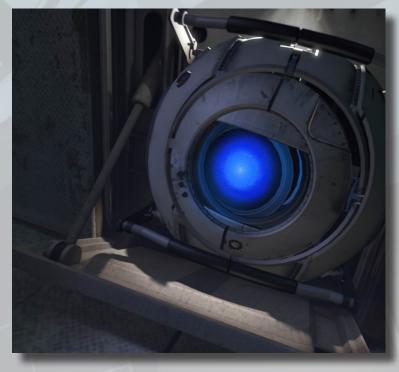


PORTAL 2 E3 PREVIEW

allow you to move vertically in a location the portals were unable to reach. The second orange liquid, Propulsion Gel, allows you to move much faster and gain momentum as you run along it. During the demonstration this was used to build speed and clear a series of vicious looking spiked traps which slammed together just after Chell made it through.

These new elements all look radically different and as the demonstration drew to a close with an impressive showcase of all of them being integrated together. It was an astonishing display as both the Repulsion and Propulsion Gels were combined with other elements, sending Chell flying through a series of hazards before making an enormous leap over a chasm. Already it is clear how these different elements will be able to link together and the possibilities and combinations look set to make things rather complicated. Valve were keen to emphasise that Portal 2 will be challenging but not based on twitch aiming or having particular skill with the mouse. In the same manner as the original, the learning curve is designed to be gradual, giving you the tools and then allowing you to feel like a genius when you figure out the solution.

A co-operative mode will be included featuring two robot companions which will act as a separate story, which also features GLaDOS. Currently there aren't many details and Valve was keeping very tight lipped, but the mode is designed to be highly challenging with some exceptionally devious puzzles being created. Valve also commented that it was a lot of fun to kill your co-operative partner, which could certainly make things interesting! Disappointingly, Valve may not include the bonus challenge map packs and more difficult versions of levels as they commented that they were met with a lukewarm reception. Let us hope that they revise this decision before the release as it would be a real shame not to have some more testing maps to extend the lifespan. Although Valve did highlight that Portal 2 was a complete sequel and will be longer than



the original, so these may not be necessary. With a lot of pressure from the dedicated fan community to follow up on an already outstanding game, Portal 2 is looking well on track to deliver challenging puzzles and a very dark and engaging storyline. Sadly, with a release a long way away in 2011, it will be some time before we find out if the cake is still a lie, but at

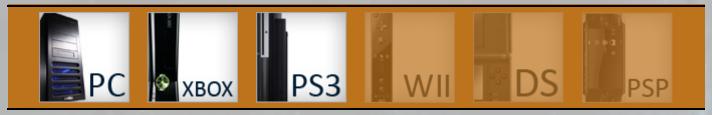
GameOn we're getting some paper plates and serviettes ready now. Just in case.



Written by Chris Wakefield

DEAD SPACE 2 E3 PREVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



The original Dead Space, like one of its
Necromorph monsters, came out of nowhere in
2008 and proved to be one of the surprise hits
of the year. Sporting an unexpectedly complex
and twisting story, a great setting and some
pant-staining scare moments it was everything
that you could ask for from a survival horror title.
The Wii prequel, Dead Space: Extraction acted as
an interesting prelude, but everyone was really
concerned about the fate of gaming's favourite
dismembering space-engineer Isaac Clarke. Now,
Dead Space 2 picks up where the first game left off
and from the demo we saw, expect to be scared...

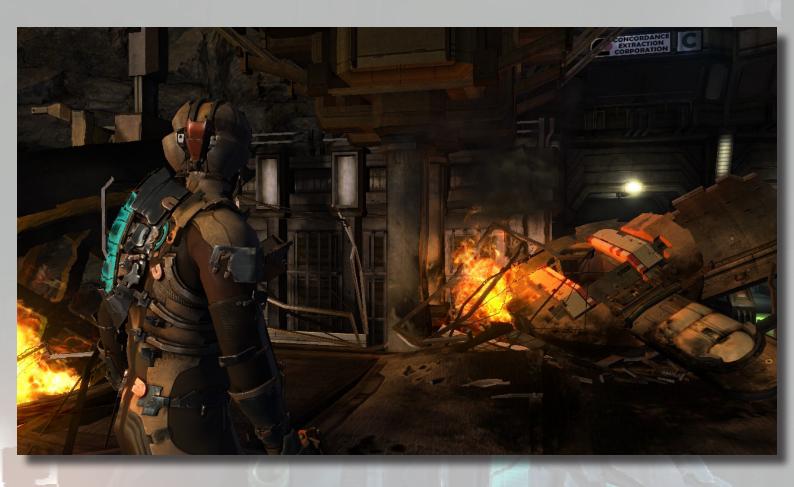
After the events of the first game Isaac has been left deeply troubled by events on the USG Ishimura with the mysterious Marker and, in fairness, who can blame him? Finding himself on a vast space station built around parts of a moon, called the Sprawl it isn't long before all hell has broken loose and you have to sever, stomp and slice your way through hordes of Necromorphs. While not

much of the story was revealed during the demo, the Church of Unitology look set to return and play a significant part in the story ark.

The playthrough began in the atmospheric and aptly named frozen crypts below the Sprawl's church with Isaac slowly working his way through the claustrophobic corridors. Wielding his trusty Plasma Cutter (which seems to be able to hold more ammunition this time), Isaac made his way through a number of freezing rooms with ice caking the walls and floor. It wasn't long before the first scare as a Necromorph suddenly jumped out of a side room as he passed, locking onto him and initiating a quick time event. These appear similar to the first title and Isaac was forced to mash the buttons as the creature proceeded to vomit a corrosive acid onto his face. This new Necromorph is pleasantly called The Puker and can prove a real hazard in tight spaces, although Isaac managed to force it off and quickly remove both of its arms before crushing its skull with his boot.



DEAD SPACE 2 E3 PREVIEW



Soon after a Necromorph resembling the Slasher from the first game attacked, with Isaac choosing to deal with it using one of his new abilities. Activating Stasis to slow down his opponent, he used the Plasma Cutter to remove one of its spiked limbs before hurling it at the creature and stabbing it with its own arm. Developers, Visceral Games were quick to point out that this is not just to impress but is a very valuable means for saving ammunition which will be much harder to come by on the tougher difficulties. Stasis is still as useful as ever, and slowing down The Puker lets you dodge the corrosive sick while removing its limbs. The Necromorphs displayed some of the same tactics found in the first title, with a group of frozen bodies suddenly jumping to life as you neared them.

As the demo progressed, Isaac was engaged in a conversation with a character off-screen who offered suggestions for how to progress. Hearing Isaac speak was a tad disconcerting at first, given his silence for the duration of the last game. Hopefully this can develop his character

and make you more engaged with him, rather than being a faceless and silent protagonist. The developers were keen to assert that he would no longer just follow orders to go from location to location and would show a little more backbone rather than blindly obeying. In order to move on, Isaac had to adjust the gravity, temporarily disabling it to reach further levels of the Sprawl. Adjusting a rather terrifying gyroscope using Stasis to lock the various spinning components eventually did this, allowing the new zerogravity gameplay to be demonstrated. Instead of moving to various surfaces, as in Dead Space, your mining suit now has small jets allowing you to move freely in the atmosphere. This led to some careful manoeuvring through the debris and using stasis to slow down some spinning fans and slipping in between the blades before they eviscerated Isaac. The new system seems very interesting and combat in these specific locations could prove challenging and pretty terrifying if enemies can attack from all directions.

DEAD SPACE 2 E3 PREVIEW

Once this area was successfully navigated, Isaac upgraded at a store to the Advanced Suit, a more military-looking armour with an impressive interlocking faceplate. Moving onwards into an immensely sinister gothic-style cathedral of the Church of Unitology, an immensely large

Necromorph suddenly appeared. Grabbing Isaac in a manner similar to the first game's shock moments, it was necessary to shoot the weaker areas highlighted by yellow areas of skin. This was a real shock moment which really made the room jump and the developers have promised more



DEAD SPACE 2 E3 PREVIEW



scares carefully spread out over the game. As soon as we had recovered from this, a group of horrific new enemies called The Pack attacked, which are sure to raise some controversy. Appearing as small, pale skeletal children they swarm after you with Isaac having to resort to the Pulse Rifle and Line Gun to push them back and take them out.

However, the action didn't let up and soon further Necromorphs, wearing strange purple cult robes were soon descending on the church, forcing Isaac to break out the big guns. Using the Javelin launcher unleashes large sharpened spikes which pin enemies to whatever surface they are unfortunate enough to be stood next to. This looked particularly impressive and will no doubt be a satisfying way to get rid of the game's various abominations. The action never let up during this portion of the demo with Necromorphs crawling over railings and smashing through windows to try and get you. It brought to mind some of the most frantic and stressful confrontations and set pieces from the original, which was definitely a good thing.

The demonstration ended with Isaac being attacked by both some form of assault spacecraft and the large monster from earlier. This climactic confrontation was eye-meltingly intense with many quick-time events and short sequences requiring you to target both weak points and

floating explosive barrels. The short time that we spent with Dead Space 2 was very impressive and looks set to build upon the already strong gameplay and atmosphere. Hopefully the story can continue to develop the strange goings on and being to tie together some of the unexplained events from the first title. With so few horror games

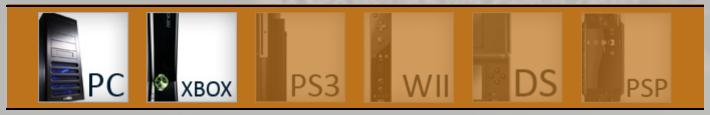
being released lately, it's nice to see a new series continuing the tradition of redecorating gamers' underwear. Expect to have several freshly ironed pairs ready for the beginning of next year, as well as plenty of ammunition for your Plasma Cutter.



Written by Chris Wakefield

XCOM E3 PREVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



The announcement of XCOM, a reboot of the classic PC strategy franchise, has divided opinion and stirred up something of storm amongst fans. With many highly sceptical about its radical overhaul as a first-person shooter, developer 2K Marin must weather the storm of pre-emptive criticism and prove that it deserves this reinvention. From our E3 preview of the game there are certainly familiar elements from the classic series but a host of new ideas to go with them.

Taking a beloved strategy game series which includes one of the greatest PC games of all time, UFO: Enemy Unknown, and transforming it into a completely new genre is a rather risky move by 2K Marin. Understandably fans of the series have expressed fears, especially considering how well X-COM: Enforcer was

received. This last entry into the series 9 years ago was a redesign of the franchise, turning the gameplay into a third-person action title and it failed to capture the essence of what had made the first few entries memorable. So, going into our E3 presentation of XCOM there were a lot of expectations but it seems that this successor has a lot of potential.

2K Marin is a studio well known for their firstperson shooter pedigree having worked on both Bioshock and its recent sequel and the developers were keen to emphasise that they have a lot of respect for the original series. Keen to create a fear of the unknown and enemy forces constantly lurking around the corner, they also want to combine strategy with shooting. Immediately obvious is the transition from the modern and futuristic settings seen



XCOM E3 PREVIEW



in the originals to 1950's America. With details regarding the plot rather vague at the moment, it seems that strange alien attacks are plaguing the country and more sinister forces are at work. In an age where the government was implicitly trusted disturbing events are taking place everywhere, even in the quiet suburbs. With 2K's history of strong narrative based shooters, it seems unlikely that this will be another X-COM: Enforcer.

ollowing the discovery of a mysterious alien artefact XCOM are formed, an organisation designed to research and combat extraterrestrial threats. Let by William Carter, the agent who discovered the relic, our preview of the game followed him as he walked around the centre for XCOM's operations. Housed in a huge aircraft hanger, there are many similarities with the bases from the traditional series. With a team of people based here around the clock monitoring the air waves for any sign of alien activity, this is where you will receive reports which act as missions.

Each report is presented on a large map of the United States alongside details such as emergency phone calls, photographs and other useful information. Missions will provide different rewards and incentives for completion such as money, resources, technological research and are divided into different styles. Completing a rescue mission will result in you gaining confidence from the public, but at other times you may want to complete a research mission to try and create better weapons to fight the aliens with. The level of depth to this system is currently unknown but it will be important to balance your resources across the different categories. This sounds like an interesting mechanic to add strategy into the title, but whether it can match the complexity and range of options available from past games remains to be seen.



XCOM E3 PREVIEW



Choosing from the wealth of missions available, Carter picked an emergency mission, answering the call from a panic stricken woman desperately calling for help against something that was attacking her. However, before heading off it was time for a trip to XCOM's technology expert, Mal, to gather some firepower. Collecting a standard issue pistol and shotgun for the mission, Carter also collected two new weapons crafted using technology gathered from the alien artefact. These were the "Blobatov", a type of Molotov cocktail and a hugely powerful lightning gun which had very limited ammunition. Carrying out research will be one of the only ways to unlock the more powerful alien weaponry, which will be especially useful later in the game.

Gathering two extra agents to assist him, Carter set off to investigate arriving in the neighbourhood the call came from. XCOM's stylised graphical style was very evident here, which worked nicely in building a different style of atmosphere from the previous games. Soon it was very clear that something was wrong in the guiet suburb, as the streets were deserted with abandoned shopping bags and children's toys littering the road. Soon, Carter heard a scream for help and dashing to a nearby building found a bloody trail leading to a body. The man's corpse lay in a pool of black alien liquid with smoke slowly rising from the remains. Taking out a camera and snapping a shot captured the scene and could be used for research to better

understand the enemies back at the XCOM headquarters. Seeming to follow a pattern very similar to Bioshock's research mode, gathering a better knowledge of your opponents will give you advantages and can unlock new weapons (such as the Blobatov).

Soon the group of agents reached the house where the call was made and almost as soon as they had walked through the door, the aliens attacked.



XCOM E3 PREVIEW



The creatures were strange blobs of dark ooze which crawled over surfaces before leaping at the XCOM team trying to latch on. It wasn't long before one agent was overcome and left dead, forcing the two remaining members to use the Blobatovs to create a wall of fire and buy them some time. Finishing these foes using a combination of the shotgun and burn damage, the dead body of the agent lay prominently in the room. The death of an agent is a significant event and will be a severe blow to XCOM, as in the original series.

Fighting their way upstairs the team rescued a woman from the creatures, who were emerging from under cupboards and even the bathroom taps. The gameplay was tense and fast-paced, forcing Carter to break out the lightning gun and fry the reaming creatures. Battling back out of the house, things took a turn for the worse with the appearance of a gigantic alien monolith. The hovering pillar proceeded to vaporise the other agent, forcing Carter to make a run for it as he lacked the adequate technology to deal with it. Instead, taking a chance and snapping a few photos of it for Mal back at the base, he made a final last ditch effort to get to his car, but a blinding white flash appeared and ended the demonstration. XCOM is looking to be a very different game to its

predecessors, that much is certainly true. However, this isn't the kind of lazy reuse of a famous "brand name" to cash in on the success of a popular genre. It is certainly true that 2K Marin will have to really emphasise the strategy aspects and make these count in the gameplay to separate this title from the slew of first-person counterparts. On this early evidence a lot of thought and planning has gone into the game to capture the spirit and feel of the X-Com series and it seems they are definitely on the right track.



TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON REVIEW

AVALIBLE FOR:



Review based on the PC version.

Now we all remember the Transformers in one form or another, from its humble beginnings as a Saturday morning cartoon, through it's multiple generations, the animated movie up to the more recent Michael Bay adaptation. The Transformers would have touched you during your life in some form, it would have shown its power to you.

The franchise has most definitely become a love affair with millions upon the planet. Now when it comes to games, Transformers has had mixed success across various platforms, the fairly well liked PS2 title was the previous cream of the crop while the the obligatory film to game tie in games based on the Michael Bay vision are better left forgotten in all honesty. However War for Cybertron has been able to do something no other development team has been able to do with the Transformers license, to go back to the Transformers roots and really sink their teeth into the events that led to the war between the

Autobots and the Decepticons on Cybertron. The start of Transformers: War for Cybertron lies within the Decepticon camp, allowing players to take the role of Megatron in his quest for Dark Energon and the eventual extinction of the Autobot race from Cybertron. Players will go through various levels, with a selection of three Transformers available to you per level, however in single player it's pretty much guaranteed that you'll be selecting the main names of the series; Megatron, Starscream, Soundwave etc..

From the discovery of Dark Energon itself, defended by then Sky Commander Starscream, to the forceful acquisition of the Omega Key out of the hands of Zeta Prime (Yes Optimus is just a normal soldier in the beginning) ending with an epic battle against Omega Supreme, who is quite literally a one Autobot fortress of impressive proportions.



TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON REVIEW



After you've completed the Decepticon campaign and witnessed the catalysts that ignited the eventual war on Cybertron, you are then brought forward in time to take control of the Autobots and their counter attack on the Decepticon offensive. The campaign is playable on your own or in co-op with another two players, while three player co-operative gaming seems like an odd number it does work rather well, once you've finally fought over who takes control of Megatron/Optimus in the campaigns. In addition to the campaign you may battle it out in the game's Escalation mode which is essentially a survival game style where you battle wave upon wave of oncoming assailants.

For those after even more wanton destruction, then War for Cybertron delivers in its various multiplayer modes. While the obligatory and self explanatory Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch modes are present, the bulk of the play will no doubt be in the control point or CTF variations. The game adopts a class based system with upgraded weapons and player models obtainable by the XP system in the game. You may choose between Scout, Soldier, Scientist or Leader, all of which have their own characteristics

and their own look when transformed. The Scout is fast and agile, with the ability to cloak, it's ideal for those who want to get behind enemy lines quickly to cause as much trouble as possible then get out as fast as they got in. The Soldier is the work horse class, able to soak up some damage while being able to increase your own by hovering. Scientists are your medic class, with an Energon ray that is able to heal your comrades in the thick of battle, and also may be used to dish out some damage in it's own right.





TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON



The game is your typical 3rd person shooter affair minus the cover mechanic, which is a good thing as you'll get to witness your character seamlessly morph between forms whenever you deem it necessary to transform. The single player campaign should span around 15 - 20 hours for the average player with plenty of replayability found in the coop and MP modes.

Visually the game is a treat, using Epic's Unreal Engine to great effect to recreate the Transformers homeworld of Cybertron in all of its scale and glory. As you would expect, it's all smooth surfaces and more metal than you can shake a recycling stick at. As this is essentially the prologue to the Transformers story, the development team had total freedom on the design of the characters themselves. You see as this is the beginning of the Transformers time line as we know it, the different alternate forms as we know them wouldn't exist, for example Optimus is not a huge truck like we know from the cartoons/film adaptaion purely because they have not reached Earth to simulate our vehichles to blend in.

Also on the audio side of things, you'll be glad to know that the game does have the voice talent of Peter Cullen, and if you don't know who that is, you're clearly not a Transformers fan as everyone should know he is the voice of Optimus Prime. Unfortunately we don't have Frank Weller as Megatron but we can't have everything can we.

Overall fans of Transformers will surely love this, even if you're not a fan of Transformers then I would still recommend the title as it is a fairly solid shooter, worthy of your playtime.

Written by Neil Hetherington

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8.5/10

SINGULARITY

AVALIBLE FOR:



Review based on the Xbox 360 version.

Singularity, the latest title from developers
Raven Software, mysteriously appeared on
shelves with virtually no publicity or fanfare.
With very few trailers and a general lack of
hype, the game was certainly intriguing and
was backed by a potentially unique concept.
Promising to provide time changing gameplay,
a complex science fiction narrative and unusual
first-person combat, there was a lot to suggest
this could become a cult classic. However, has
Singularity managed to stand out in an already
overcrowded genre?

Events kick off in 2010 where a highly generic American Black Ops team are sent to Katorga-12, an island off the coast of Russia. During the

1950s the Soviet Union conducted a series of experiments to attempt to create a weapon more powerful than the atomic bomb. A new and unstable source of power, a substance labelled "Element 99", was discovered to exist only on Katorga-12. However, sometime during the 1950s a catastrophic accident occurred, prompting the Soviet government to wipe out all traces of the research and quarantine the island. The Black Ops team are tasked with investigating a mysterious power surge on the deserted island and are flown in on a helicopter. Before you can say "sinister government experimentation" the chopper has crashed and you're fighting off hordes of flesh-eating mutants.



SINGULARITY



As you work your way through the levels the plot unfolds by reading notes and listening to more tape recorders than a 1980s Comet stock room. The story covers the events of the experimentation, which focuses on the work of two rival scientists and their work developing a device capable of distorting and controlling time itself. This creation, the Time Manipulation Device (TMD) inevitably comes into your possession and acts as the game's unique gameplay mechanic. The device has the ability to create a bubble in which time stands still, it can age people to dust and also move objects around in the same way as Half Life 2's Gravity Gun. Initially this is rather fun as you use it to solve some rudimentary puzzles in order to progress and access hidden areas, but it mainly comes into its own in the combat.

Fighting either the troops of a renegade Russian general or the bizarre creatures created in the aftermath of the accident, the TMD is a valuable asset. The device enables you to grab and throw back enemy projectiles and it can even transform

soldiers into mutants, turning them against their former allies. There are a few different functions, many of which become unlocked as the game progresses either through specific machines or purchasing them at stations using energy found in the levels. You only have limited power to use the TMD and must wait for it to regenerate or use special cells which act like a health kit, refreshing the energy bar.

The enemies are intriguingly designed and there is a decent variety to them. At first encounters are distinctly divided into either creature or human opponents, but as the title progresses you face mixtures of the two, which makes the battles more interesting. The first-person controls and shooting mechanics are competent and solid, but even with the TMD the encounters lack polish and sparkle and are seldom memorable. There are a handful of nice weapons, including an explosive spike launcher and a rifle with a controllable bullet, but most of your arsenal is made up of standard genre tools.

SINGULARITY

Thankfully there are a few interesting sections to hold your interest, mainly those which take place during the 1950s accessed through rifts created by "The Singularity", a large structure in the centre of Katorga-12 responsible for the accident. The pacing in the title is generally well managed, with some fairly simple puzzles breaking up the combat, but this is mainly a game about shooting people in the face or aging them to dust. Some sections can feel a tad repetitive and often you'll face groups of similar enemies who are wheeled out once or twice a level, before the same happens with each successive mission.

Perhaps the main problem with Singularity's single player campaign is how unoriginal it feels. The story telling is directly lifted from Bioshock, right down to the ghostly echo events that happen. Even the TMD borrows many ideas from Half Life 2 and the lesser known Timeshift, down to the puzzles and how it can be used in combat. Generally, the ambience and atmosphere of the island and setting takes inspiration from Metro 2033 and S.T.A.L.K.E.R. While being inspired by other games isn't always a negative, it feels that

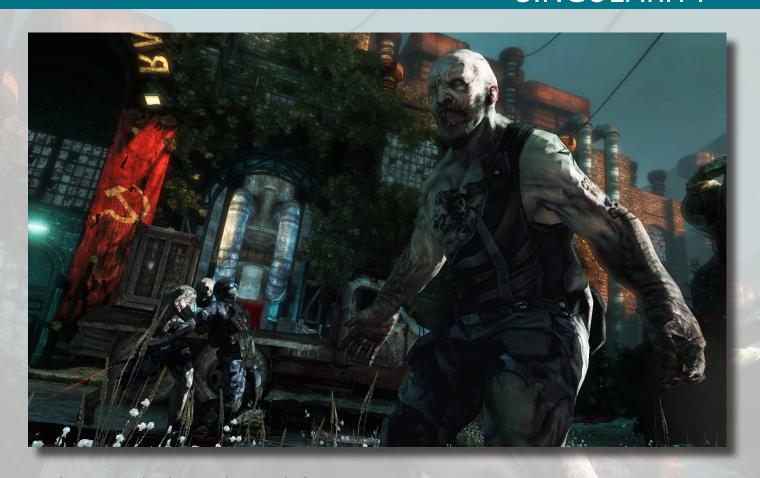
these ideas were handled better in the titles they originated from and Singularity rarely adds anything new to them. Both the visuals and the level design also lacks the degree of polish found in many of its competitors, giving it a raw and slightly unrefined feel to it.

Singularity's multiplayer is at least a little different to a simple, generic addition and pits the game's Russian soldiers against the mutants. Choosing from four classes on each side, you can then select perks and benefits allowing you to tailor the experience to your play style. The games then take on a standard deathmatch format or a capture the point game mode, with the two teams playing to attack or defend. This is pretty entertaining, using the creature's unique abilities and there was a pretty lively online presence so finding a match was never difficult. However, even this mode feels a lot like other games, most notably Left 4 Dead's multiplayer element which is a feeling that you can seldom escape.

As such, Singularity offers a dependable and relatively solid first-person shooter which



SINGULARITY



knows exactly what it is doing and what it needs to provide. Yet, you cannot escape the feeling that the title was designed to try and incorporate elements of other popular and successful games into a new one. There is some originality here, the story has an enjoyable science fiction plot and having a multitude of endings to choose from is certainly a nice touch. However, at its core, the gameplay feels unoriginal and somehow fails to be as satisfying as you would expect. If you're a big first-person shooter fan then you'll find something here to satisfy and the game has some longevity in the multiplayer. However, it is difficult to see Singularity standing the test of time, even with its TMD to help.





Written by Chris Wakefield

playability longevity graphics sound overall 0 5 /1 ∩



