

# GameOn MAG

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October 2010



## MAFIA II

Can this game make you an offer that you cannot refuse? Find out inside!



## RED DEAD REDEMPTION

How much fun can one man have with a lasso and a pistol? Find out inside!



## GameOn At Gamescom

gamescom

GameOn travels to Germany for Gamescom. Read more inside!



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# Mafia II

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Hello and welcome to another action packed GameOn Mag!

This month the GameOn team hit the road and headed to Cologne to attend Gamescom. After polishing our bratwurst we hit the halls of the koelnmesse in order to bring you the hottest news from the developers attending europes largest gaming trade show.

The Editor.





## gamescom

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## MAFIA II

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# *GameOn's*

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## BIOSHOCK: INFINITE

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**2007's BioShock successfully merged a complex story with an incredibly memorable dark and twisted setting. With gameplay as deep as its narrative, the game went on to be one of the best titles of the last few years. Despite a successful sequel that lacked the scope and emotion of its predecessor, it seemed that returning to Rapture for a third time might be one trip too many. However, the recent announcement of BioShock Infinite and our Gamescom preview had everyone here at GameOn blown away: literally!**

Instead of returning to the underwater dystopia of the first two titles, BioShock Infinite reinvents the series, setting it atop a vast flying city, known as Columbia. Supported by vast hot-air balloons, the metropolis was built and launched in 1900 as a physical embodiment of everything that made America great. Designed as a mobile World's Fair which could travel the world and spread the ideals of democracy, it wasn't long before the peaceful utopia was at the centre of

a violent struggle. With various factions fighting for control of the city, it soon disappeared into the sky and was never seen of again. That is until 1912, when BioShock Infinite begins...

You play the role of Booker DeWitt, an ex-member of the notorious Pinkerton National Detective Agency (a private law enforcement company from 1850s America). His methods were seen as too extreme even for the infamous group and as such he finds himself taking whatever work comes his way. DeWitt is approached by a mysterious individual who asks him to track down a missing woman, Elizabeth: the only problem is her last known location was on Columbia. Providing him with details of how to get to the flying city, DeWitt soon finds himself onboard the crumbling utopia. It soon becomes clear that finding Elizabeth will be fairly straightforward, but leaving alive will be far more problematic.

One of the first thing that strikes you about BioShock Infinite is how astonishingly different the

art style and visuals are from the first games. The oppressive and shadowy atmosphere is gone and replaced with a truly beautiful picture-postcard blue sky, with vibrant colours as far as the eye can see. Graphically, this sequel impresses with some fantastic textures and environments at this early





# PREVIEW

## BIOSHOCK: INFINITE



stage. The demonstration began with DeWitt awakening on a crumbling side street, with large propaganda posters covering the decaying brick walls. Working his way slowly down the road, he encountered a run-down horse drawn cart, its driver ignoring his presence entirely.

As DeWitt reached the end of the street, the entire city's foundations shook, sending an enormous bell tower crashing to the ground only a few meters away from his feet. Moving around the wreckage it became very clear that BioShock's unsettling atmosphere will carry over into this follow-up as a woman continued to sweep the entrance to a blazing building. While a fairly subtle touch, it created a chilling atmosphere of a once-great civilisation turned into a nightmare.

Walking through an archway covered in sinister propaganda posters, a distant voice slowly became

more distinct, talking about preserving the purity of Columbia's citizens. DeWitt gradually moved through a small park, passing a young man sat surrounded by dozens of crows, until he reached a large bandstand. Decked out in radical political banners, evocative of extreme right-wing isolationism a man stood preaching to a non-existent audience. As we drew nearer and picked up a rifle, from an enormous stack of armaments, the man suddenly wheeled around calling for reinforcements. The young man from earlier soon appeared calling his birds to attack and initiating a large battle as DeWitt was forced to use the rifle to take the man down. Activating a crow shaped bottle found on his corpse led to the acquisition of the "Murder of Crows", a plasmid-like ability that could be used on enemies.

However, before this power could be put into action, the bandstand came under heavy fire



# PREVIEW

## BIOSHOCK: INFINITE



from a distant gun emplacement, manned by the preacher who had fled along “The Skyline”. This looping rail connects the different areas of Columbia together and before another barrage of shells arrived DeWitt was forced to jump onto it and zip towards the distant turret. As he neared the bottom the preacher rushed onto the opposite end and zoomed towards

him, but was soon sent plummeting to his death with a well-timed smack of a pipe.

As DeWitt landed he was soon attacked by large groups of enemies, very reminiscent of the splicers from the previous BioShock games. Using telekinesis to steal a shotgun from an opponent’s hands, he then used it to gun several of them



# PREVIEW

## BIOSHOCK: INFINITE

down, with the weapon hovering in mid-air, which looked incredibly satisfying. The crows also proved very useful, pecking at enemies in huge swarms and thinning their numbers. DeWitt's telekinesis extended to taking down the gun turret, as he waited for an explosive round to be fired at him before catching it and throwing it back, leaving only a pile of rubble.

At this point, Elizabeth suddenly emerged and some of her powers were demonstrated. As a large group of foes advanced menacingly, she summoned a storm soaking the enemies, allowing DeWitt to use an electrical attack to take out all the opposition. Irrational Games explained that using Elizabeth's powers cause her physical harm, creating a moral choice. Taking advantage of these abilities will injure her which will be communicated through her responses with DeWitt. While it is not quite clear exactly how this companionship will work throughout the game, it has been designed to involve the player with the characters and the story in a more meaningful manner.

The demonstration ended with DeWitt and Elizabeth being attacked by a mechanical monstrosity, which was both similar but different to the Big Daddies from Bioshock. Seemingly powered by a human heart housed in the centre of its body, it required a great deal of ammunition and powers to subdue. However, before either character could breathe a sigh of relief a gigantic, robotic creature with wings appeared on an adjacent building. Gradually, the game faded to black with Elizabeth's ominous dialogue, "That, is the thing that's been following me..."



With most of the room sat in an awed silence, the Irrational Games developers smiled and coyly asked whether we were impressed with the title. BioShock Infinite has already been in development for over two years after Ken Levine finished work on the original title and the degree of work that has gone into it certainly shows. With a release date due sometime in 2012 on the PC, 360 and PS3, this was undoubtedly the game of Gamescom 2010 and one of the most exciting projects currently on the horizon.



# PREVIEW

## DUNGEON SIEGE III

AVAILABLE FOR:



**Fans can rest safe in the knowledge that Obsidian Entertainment have plenty of experience in the RPG genre, having developed Knights of the Old Republic 2 and Neverwinter Nights 2, albeit with a less successful Alpha Protocol under their belt more recently. As an added perk, though, Chris Taylor, who developed Dungeon Siege I & II with Gas Powered Games, has an advisory role with this, the third incarnation of the monster slaying, loot grabbing experience.**

The first and most obvious upgrade to notice about Dungeon Siege III is the new Onyx engine. The demo we were shown displayed a lush environment with huge out-of-focus backdrops that you should eventually be able to explore. The dynamic lighting and physics keep the franchise modern and the new free camera system looked to add immersion. You will also be able to fix it to 3rd person behind the character to make the most of the new action RPG gameplay, but the same top-down view as per the original Dungeon Siege titles will be available should you feel the urge. There will also be 'vanity' and 'vista' views - the former used to admire yourself, the latter to enjoy any panoramic surroundings.

In the mission GameOn we were shown, we were presented with a special Gamescom 2010 level through a crypt to eventually destroy the evil within and grab plenty of loot along the way. A basic quest, but a good way to show us some of the new features. First of all there is the new optional breadcrumb trail that will guide players to quests should they get lost. Some spider minions were then the target for the new stance system available with the Guardian class which was the focus of attention for this playthrough.

Bringing Dungeon Siege III to the consoles threatens to make the control system more simplistic, but in actual fact it would seem like the controls and combat are more effective. The player can easily switch between quick agile attacks with a single hand, or a more powerful sweeping strike with both hands. Each stance and class has a different set of special abilities, such as shield bash or 360 degree slash. The inventory will be grid based and the menus streamlined, with the controls said to include the depth and complexity of PC, but refined for each of the platforms.

Each class is promised to be diverse with different abilities, but so far only two classes



# PREVIEW

## DUNGEON SIEGE III



have been announced: the aforementioned sword swinging Guardian and the spear-throwing, spellcasting Archon. These different classes will compliment each other through the use of companions, who will become more than just henchmen. Strong relationships can be formed through the dialogue tree and there will even be story implications for each character, though no examples could be explained at this time.

One of the biggest new features for Dungeon Siege III is the ability for a second person to jump in or out of the action on a single system at the press of the start button. We were shown this with another person instantaneously taking control of a companion, but it is evident that later on you will be able to have up to four people playing co-operative at one time and I would imagine online options will be announced later on as well. Companions can form attacks together, whilst fallen friends can be revived simply by standing next to them and holding down a defined button. This co-op system is promised to be a lot more than a simple quick bit of fun, but we will have to wait and see how exactly this turns out.

Slaying enemies will give the player experience points and also add to the character's focus bar, allowing the use of said abilities. As the player uses these abilities they will gain power orbs to unlock a second, more powerful tier of abilities. Another new feature will be the use of 'causeways', a method of adding a degree of effort to instant fast travel which has been taken for granted in recent years. While many of these features are new to this series, it would seem like having loads of battles and receiving a ton of loot are still at the forefront of the gameplay experience, with the quests and

the story driving the player forwards further. The first two Dungeon Siege titles had strong stories, and Obsidian Entertainment hope to continue with their premise of having a deep story and conversation tree, with consequences to the actions you make. Little is known of the story of Dungeon Siege III, though what has been released, about the player trying to restore the balance of power and stopping the kingdom of Ehb from falling into darkness, doesn't strike a particularly original tone with me at this moment in time.

After battling through a number of enemies our quest came to the crescendo of a boss fight against a sizable skeleton king. Each boss will have different phases of attack and often you will have a choice on how exactly to take them down, with team-play and a combination of attacks perhaps the most satisfying approach. Once the boss was defeated the rewards could be reaped but it was time for the demo to end. Down for a 2011 release and still in a pre-alpha state, Dungeon Siege III is visually looking great but could struggle scoring originality points and will have to dig deep to achieve its promises of involving multiplayer and PC-console action-RPG gameplay. A new direction is clearly being sought for the series, and with veteran developers at the helm and Chris Taylor as an advisor, one would hope that the series is in safe hands.



Written by **Pete O'Brien**



# PREVIEW

## MORTAL KOMBAT

AVAILABLE FOR:



**Mortal Kombat titles of recent years have been a shadow of their brutal former selves, Mortal Kombat Vs. DC being the most recent of the less than favourable offerings in which the characters dear to our hearts fought against the likes of Batman and Superman in some weird inter-dimensional clusterf\*\*k.**

Since then Midway have gone bust with Warner Bros. Interactive picking up the license. On board for the Mortal Kombat reboot is none other than the games' original co-creator, Ed Boon and his development team Netherrealm. GameOn were lucky enough to obtain some hands on time with this highly anticipated title.

Mortal Kombat will be returning to its roots, gone are the elaborate 3D environments with multiple levels, returning to the classic 2D fighting plane yet still keeping 3D characters and scenery, akin to Street Fighter IV.

Opting for more of a Tekken style control system where each of the controllers face button represents a limb, for example A and B would be left kick and right kick respectively, this sort of control works so fluidly for MK as you'll be stringing hits together with no problem whatsoever, additionally this makes the game intuitive to pick up for newcomers to the series.

As this is a reboot of the franchise, the development team have had free reign to create the Mortal Kombat they want, therefore graphic violence is at the top of the list, gushing blood, broken limbs and elaborate fatalities make a welcome return. Your selected character will even bear the scars of battle over time as your opponents blood will stain your clothes, cuts and gashes will be visible as you fight and even chunks of flesh will be noticeably absent after particularly brutal bouts.

The violence theme continues with the games' new feature of 'X-Ray' moves, these are only available when you have a full super meter. Once activated the game will display an extremely brutal beating, exposing the areas struck showing





# PREVIEW

## MORTAL KOMBAT



what sort of damage they are doing to the skeletal structure and organs of your opponent. For example you will see ribs fracture, jaws get dislocated and organs ruptured in this graphic super move.

As expected, right at the top of the graphic scale are the characters' fatality moves in where the losers are literally sliced and diced by the victor. For example, Scorpion will slice his prey at the waist, then slice through the neck, after a hefty boot to the chest to send the sliced parts flying, Scorpion will then spin round and cleave the airborne head in two. As for Reptile, he will literally just barf acid down the throat of his victim, melting them from the inside out. Now this level of gratuitous violence may be too much for some, but will no doubt appease the fans of the series who have been yearning for some old school MK.

Not all the game modes were revealed during our hands on time with the title, only the standard one on one combat, two on two tag team mode where you can switch fighters mid round like calling an assist as seen in MvC titles, this opens up some interesting combo opportunities as the

open ended nature of the combo system means players have a huge scope of experimentation in order to pull off devastating moves.

The roster screen was pretty barren with only a handful of characters were available to select, though old favourites of Scorpion, Sub-Zero, Johnny Cage, Cyrax, Reptile and Kung-Lao were evident, though there seems to be space for around 26 characters in total so there is plenty of room for other classic characters.

The game is set for a Spring 2011 release date on both Xbox 360 and Playstation 3.



Written by **Neil Hetherington**



## DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

## AVAILABLE FOR:

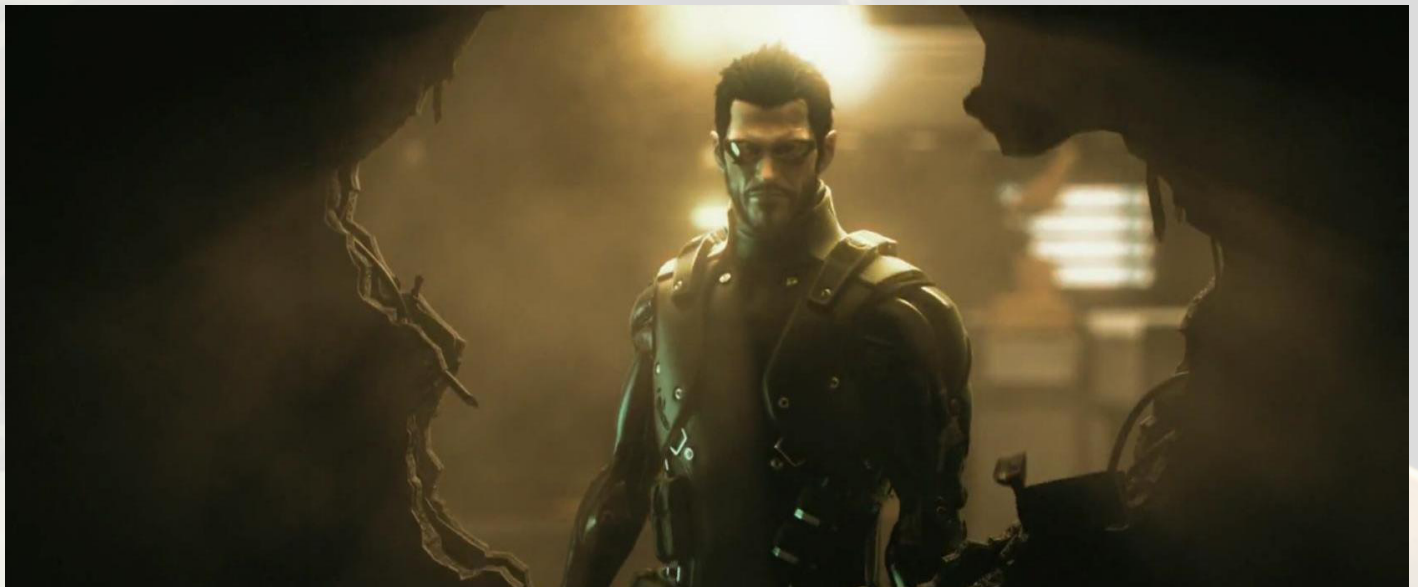


**Deus Ex remains one of the most widely acclaimed and well received PC games of all time. However after the disappointing 2003 follow-up Deus Ex: Invisible War and the closure of development studio Ion Storm, the series seemed finished. So, it was something of a surprise when a third instalment, Deus Ex: Human Revolution was announced to be in development by Eidos Montreal. GameOn were recently treated to an in-depth showing of the title at Gamescom. Has it been worth waiting for?**

Deus Ex: Human Revolution has remained something of an enigma until very recently. With an impressive showing of the game at E3, publishers Square Enix and developers Eidos Montreal seem to really understand what made the original title truly special. In fact the development team spent the first 4 months of work replaying the first games, in order to get a better idea of how to construct this new entry into the franchise. With similar complex open-ended gameplay and an intricate story promised, there is certainly a lot of potential here.

Taking place prior to the original game, this prequel focuses on events which created the world seen in Deus Ex. You play as Adam Jensen, a security worker for the multinational Biotech Corporation. The company develops biomechanical augmentations, which act as a precursor to the nanotechnology from the first title. After being injured, he is augmented in order to survive, continuing to work for Biotech as they come under attack by a group of anti-technology terrorists known as Purity First. Much of the remainder of the plot is shrouded in secrecy, although we were promised that Jensen will find himself embroiled in a conspiracy.

Our demonstration of Human Revolution consisted of the same mission, played in 3 different ways in order to demonstrate the enormous range of options available. The level we saw was set in a police station and the surrounding streets as Jensen was tasked with recovering a cerebral augmentation chip. The device is situated in the head of a dead terrorist whose body is locked away in the morgue of the police headquarters, under strict supervision.





## DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION



From here it soon becomes clear that in true Deus Ex style, you have a plethora of options available for how to approach this delicate situation.

The game's visuals are impressive and stay true to the general visual style of the series, with futuristic locations that have a distinctive grimy and downtrodden feel. As Jensen worked his way through the streets, homeless people milled around aimlessly while litter blew along the gutters. It was atmospheric and brought to mind the early Hell's Kitchen levels of the original game. Futuristic cars and advertising billboards were prominent along the skyline which was also littered with high rise buildings. Here one of the developers pointed out Jensen's own apartment, which acts as a base and will also feature a selection of secrets and tasks that can be accomplished as the game progresses.

Back to the mission at hand, Jensen arrived at the police station, immediately identifiable by its guard outside. To begin with, Jensen took the least subtle approach and simply walked in the front door, all guns blazing. This gave the developers the chance to show off a number of unusual innovations, some of which look truly spectacular. Human Revolution is primarily a first-person game, though it has a "contextual" third-person camera, which activates when in cover, performing takedowns and various other actions. After walking into a restricted area, the

entire police station turned hostile forcing Jensen to improvise. Using his strength augmentation he picked up an entire photocopier machine and placed it in the centre of the corridor, before taking cover behind it. Here the third-person camera seamlessly kicked in allowing him to take out several guards from relative safety. Despite being initially sceptical about this system, it had won us over by the end of the demonstration as it really appeared to enhance the gameplay rather than acting as a gimmick.

As Jensen continued to battle his way forward, the enemy AI showed some rather impressive tricks, including characters attempting to flank and others laying down suppressing fire. In order to counter this, the developers had to use some powerful explosive ammunition to thin the police officers' numbers and use an X-ray vision augmentation to see them through walls. In combat non-lethal means are also available and Jensen finished off the last few opponents with an energy weapon which emitted a concussive blast. Upon reaching the morgue it was necessary to breach the locked door with an explosive charge, before Jensen recovered the chip and made his escape via the sewers.

Eidos Montreal were quick to stress that combat is designed to be a challenging option and won't be as straight forward as most other first-person or third-person shooters. Perhaps most controversial



## DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

has been the announcement that Human Revolution will use a regenerating health system. While many see this as a simplification to cater for the console market, the developers emphasised that the decision was made in order to maintain the flow of the game. When replaying the previous games, the developers felt that constantly breaking off the combat to backtrack for health machines or extra medical supplies killed the pace and this was something they wanted to avoid. During the playthrough this certainly seemed to be the case, but how it will work across the different difficulties remains to be seen.



Moving onto a “social” playthrough, the developers adopted more subtle tactics. Approaching the police station this time, Jensen talked to one of the guards outside, who happened to know him from his past as a security officer. Learning that an ex-colleague is now in charge of entry to the station, he headed inside and proceeded to persuade him to let him into the morgue. Using a mixture of different emotion-based responses he was able to subtly manipulate the man by exploiting his knowledge of his past in order to get free rein of the station. The developers also explained that it would have been possible to blackmail him

using a special speech augmentation, which would have forced him to let you in. However, your actions will have consequences as later in the game you may run into characters again, who will treat you differently depending on how you approached them to begin with.

With the ability to go anywhere on any of the floors, this made accessing the morgue incredibly easy and opened up a plethora of new characters to talk to. This also allowed Jensen to pursue a new range of side quests from both inside and outside the police station. While talking to people he was constantly earning experience points, which replace the augmentation canisters and are used for upgrading your various enhancements. For example in Human Revolution you are no longer limited to one leg augmentation and instead can spend experience points on augmentations within the same slot. However, Eidos Montreal made it clear that you would not be able to upgrade all of the slots fully and would still have to make a tactical choice. Similarly, the inventory system is based on space, as in Deus Ex, so players will have to choose very carefully what equipment to take on each mission.



After descending to the basement in an elevator, Jensen was simply able to walk into the



## DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION



morgue and collect the chip from the pathologist. Earning a lot of experience for subtly infiltrating the building gave him a series of boosted points with titles like “ghost”, which will presumably be in place for every level. From here, he was able to walk back out of the building with no opposition without having harmed anyone. The developers stressed that it was possible to complete the entire game in this manner, with only certain situations where you will be forced to dispatch opponents.

The final playthrough was an entirely stealth based option, with Jensen having to infiltrate the building without being seen or detected. This would mean having to sneak past the police officers, laser grids and cameras: a difficult but viable choice. Choosing to explore a side alleyway by stacking a series of crates next to a fence and leaping over, revealed a number of possible routes into the building. Both the sewer system and the roof would provide access, but Jensen chose to use a doorway on the first floor. Using a hacking augmentation on the locked entrance initiated a mini-game where Jensen had to hack the computer mainframe without being detected. The game seemed surprisingly complex, and was oddly reminiscent of a scaled down defence grid game mechanic.

Once this was cleared things became quite tense as Jensen had to make his way through the patrolling guards. Here the X-ray vision mode worked really well, allowing each guard’s route to be mapped out in advance. Using a cloak augmentation allowed

him to slip past some of the more difficult sections, including a bustling office. However, the developers emphasised that this was a very energy consuming option, meaning it could

only be employed in short bursts. Reaching the basement of the police station, a laser grid presented an impassable obstacle which could only be deactivated when an officer walked nearby. Sneaking up behind him, Jensen silently incapacitated him before dragging his body close the laser grid to deactivate it. This allowed him access to the morgue and the data chip.

What became so clear was the sheer range of things to see and do in Human Revolution: whether this was exploring the hub-worlds of Detroit or following the main components of the game. The title really felt like the original, with the same broad scope and the accommodation for so many different styles of play. Eidos Montreal clearly has a lot of respect for the original games and this prequel looks like a very worthy entry into the classic series. With a release date scheduled for early next year, there is still plenty of time for more information to surface and here at GameOn, we can’t wait.



# PREVIEW

## NAIL'D

AVAILABLE FOR:



**As the announcer shouts "GO!" a thread of adrenaline clings on to me, tying itself around me. I speed through the track; I'm disorientated by the blurred objects around me. I have to make fast decisions with each turn, being specific, knowing exactly what I'm doing as any false, imprecise move will lead you into a wall of rock. Dirt is smothered into my face like a vigorous night with a Chelsea footballer as the wheels violently turned, and the deafening roar of the engine fills my ears with sound, nevertheless I can just about see the jump. This is it. This is my chance. Pressing the nitrous button, I approach the ramp at such high speeds that my cheeks are flying back because of the high G-force.**

My quad bike reaches up high, higher than I've ever been before, and then all of a sudden gravity kicked in, making my stomach feel giddy. I then noticed a train underneath me. If only I could land on that, then I could have an advantage over the others... But doubt filled my mind as I saw other bikes attempt it, and fail. I decided to go ahead with it. To my astonishment I landed on the train, but with so much force I almost flew out of my seat. I did it. I was on the train. I could feel the stares of the racers gawping at me in awe and envy. As I turned off the train sharply to head towards the opening gap which I had to enter, I felt a sense of pride just as I crossed the finish line.

Obviously this didn't happen to me - because to be quite frank I am terrible at racing games - however this is how I imagine the experience to be like for someone else that could, and would, win. The reason I started this preview with a wall of text is because the graphics are so good they made me feel like I was there.





# PREVIEW

## NAIL'D



As you can see in the confines of my first paragraph, you can interact with the landscape during the levels, like the train which you can jump onto. You go at such an immense speed you don't get much of a chance to see the beautiful backgrounds unless you are doing a really big jump. Details on the landscape, like trees and mountains, are very dynamic and adds to the immersion thanks to the tiny details Nail'd provides.

The tracks are very large with alternate routes and because of this it does take a while to memorise the layout. This makes the game more challenging since, as with most racing games, you always find yourself playing on much simpler courses that you tend to memorise quite rapidly.

The musical theme of the game leans heavily towards the heavy metal genre and features songs from the likes of Slipknot, Queens of the Stone Age and many more. Furthermore, one song was made exclusively for the game and was made by a multitude of popular heavy metal groups. In total the game features fourteen songs with more to be announced closer to its release.

There is a twelve player multiplayer mode as well alongside online leaderboards and achievements, so you can compare yourself to the rest of the world.

Nail'd will have a lot to live up to as it resembles Pure or MotorStorm, however I have a feeling this is still going to be big. It will be released October 19th 2010, so keep a look out. If you enjoy a rush of adrenaline in your racing games, then this is the one for you.



Written by **Jessica Greenfield**



# PREVIEW

## THE 3RD BIRTHDAY

AVAILABLE FOR:

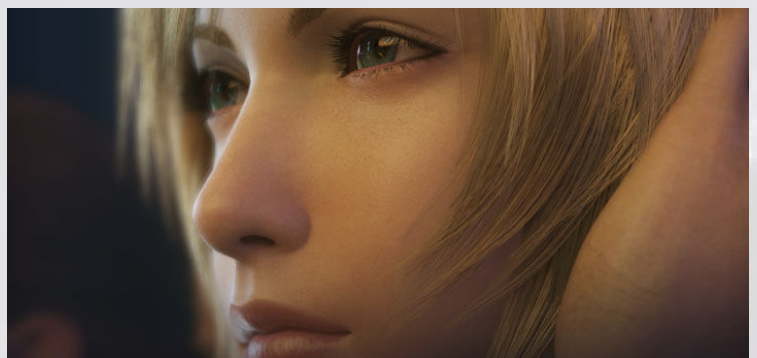


**Many European players may not have heard of the series or this title as the original Parasite Eve was not released outside of Japan and North America and the sequel, which was released more globally, is good ten years old. Luckily then players new to the series won't need to have played the original titles to understand the plot of The 3rd Birthday. Set in the snowy suburbia of New York, deadly monsters known as the Twisted have suddenly started attacking the city. A new Counter Twisted Investigation (CTI) organisation is set-up and the eye-catching but powerful Aya Brea returns as the female protagonist for the third time.**

The 3rd Birthday is primarily centred on gun-action gameplay. Aya can switch between four weapons with her arsenal including hand guns, shotguns, machine guns and even a grenade launcher. Combat is done in real time and aiming is all done automatically via a lock-on system. This allows the player to concentrate on battle tactics, which The 3rd Birthday does well with some original tactical concepts.

Sadly here I'm going to have to cut a long but interesting story short: our heroine Aya unknowingly acquired a special genetic structure when she was young. Not only does this DNA prevent Aya from wrinkling and going grey but it gives her special abilities from that of a normal human being.

The biggest of these in The 3rd Birthday is the "Overdrive" ability which allows Aya to switch with the body of a CTI team member. These NPC team members will aid you in combat but you can swap with them to hijack their health and weapons for the greater good. This also allows you to quickly nip around in a battle situation and target the weak points of various Twisted enemies. Put simply, if an enemy is strong at the front but weak at the back, rather than trying to sneak around Aya can simply switch with a well placed combatant. Aya can also use this ability on enemies, causing large amounts of damage from within. This might all sound rather ridiculous but this method of combat is actually quite satisfying.





# PREVIEW

## THE 3RD BIRTHDAY



There are also a few RPG elements to give a feeling of progression and keep the battles fresh. Aya will gain experience points, level up and then learn new abilities - such as an invincible mode - or just upgrade existing ones. In the meantime, the controls are well mapped and the graphics, although nothing special, are respectable for a hand-held game and it is clear to make out what's going on screen. Being on the PSP I feel The 3rd Birthday will act well as a drop-in drop-out game as well as being a more involving long term game.

My play test opened with a fierce fight in a large open courtyard with Aya and a handful of CTI members battling a swarm of Twisted monsters. I fought through them using the cover based combat and the various weapons and then destroyed their nest to prevent any more from spawning. Once I'd mopped up the remnants I was then faced with a large Twisted monster boss. Here I could really put the Overdrive system to good use as I jumped to different locations around the fiend, avoiding its phases of attacks and dealing effective damage at the same time. Amusingly I could also passively command these soldiers. For example I climbed up to a platform above the monsters and then swapped places with a CTI member.

This NPC then starting shooting but stayed put which gave an extra dimension to our attack. Unfortunately by the time I took down the boss we'd run out of time. Listening to the developer and playing for about 20 minutes I conclude that The 3rd Birthday already plays well and seems to have a decent premise. I would hope that the story will be strong throughout and the combat remains engaging, however it difficult at this time to gauge how well The 3rd Birthday will eventually turn out once released in around 3-6 months in Japan and then 2011 for the rest of the world. However, with a development team including Yoshinori Kitase (Chrono Trigger, Final Fantasy 6-8) as executive producer and Yoko Shimomura (Kingdom Hearts to name just one) as composer The 3rd Birthday is shaping up to be an absorbing game just nicely.



Written by **Pete O'Brien**



## AVAILABLE FOR:



**Whilst at Gamescom, we were given the opportunity to gain some hands-on time with Fable III, Lionhead studio's newest offering and the latest part of the epic RPG series, Fable.**

We were lucky enough to be able to play through the beginning stages of the game. This gave us an insight into the main storyline and a chance to have a mess around with other aspects of the game, such as the combat system and the intuitive interactions with the inhabitants of Albion.

Fable III is set 50 years after the events of Fable II. The hero of Fable II has gone on to be ruler of Albion, a torch which has since passed to his son, your character's older brother Logan. The inhabitants of Albion are far from happy about this arrangement, they live in fear of King Logan, the economy is terrible, and they face strict punishment if their treatment is complained about. The game begins with you, the prince or princess

of Albion being woken up by your butler Jasper. In bed with you is your trusty canine companion. Upon choosing what to wear, you are then sent to meet up with your love interest, either named Elliot if you're a princess, or Elise if you're a prince. Taking your beloved by the hand you lead him/her to the kitchen where your first moral choice is presented to you. The kitchen staff have heard rumours of the King executing some of the staff. It is up to you whether you give them a motivational speech, promising that things will be alright or berating them for putting their nose into business that does not concern them.

This particular choice does seem clear cut, but whilst speaking to a Lionhead developer, we were assured that the choices wouldn't be as obvious as they were in Fable II, it will be more difficult to see in which way your decision will contribute towards Fable's 'good and evil' system.



Shortly after this first decision, you are shown to the armoury where you are given a brief run down on how the combat works. The combat has remained very much the same, X button to attack with a sword, Y to attack with a gun. The only addition to this system is that you can now use both weapons at the same time. You can swing your sword and as the hit lands, whip out your gun and fire at them too. It's a simplistic addition but one which does work. It makes the fights a bit smoother as there is no stopping to change weapon like in the previous game.

Continuing with the game, an unfortunate series of events sees your brother turn against you and forces you to make a horrible choice. So whether to sacrifice the life of the one you love to save a few or save your loved one and send a group of innocents to their death. It's a tough choice to make and it really makes you feel guilty for doing it. In previous Fable titles I found it quite easy to just say 'yes' or 'no' to these choices but in Fable III it seems as though you are really going to have to think about things in a more open way i.e. how will this effect the story, how will people's reactions to me change, how will this change my future.

Your decisions not only effect your appearance, the same as Fable II, but they also shape the world around you. Certain events see you take the throne later on in the game. The decisions do not stop there. in fact there are bigger things relying on these decisions, the fate of Albion itself. If you choose to ignore poverty and let Albion as a whole suffer, you will see this reflected in the aesthetics of the place. This can be seen in decrepit, crumbling buildings, villagers wandering around in rags. Being good will result in heavenly cities, beautiful architecture and happy loyal subjects.

Also new to Fable III is a 3D menu system. Designed to maintain immersion the start menu now comes in the form of a 'Sanctuary', a handful of rooms that the player will use to change weapons or attire. John Cleese is also on hand to amusingly voice a butler called Jasper who advises and provides hints. To top it all off is a swanky looking 3D map which allows the player to zoom right down and see the world go about its business. The 3D menu has already proved controversial, but Peter Molyneux has explained how it is what users want and it should only take around four seconds to get in, change weapon and get back to the real world.

It's an interesting concept being able to see your choices and decisions throughout the game, and having them really shape the world around you. With plenty of added content, an overhaul to the multi-player side of things and a deeper more involving storyline involving evil monarchs, bad blood and treason, Fable III looks set to be a big success.



gamescom

Written by **Sarah Collings**



# REVIEW

## MAFIA II

AVAILABLE FOR:



PC



XBOX



PS3



WII



DS



PSP

### NEED TO KNOW

- **Publisher** 2K Games
- **Players** Single
- **Released** August, 2010
- **Age Rating** Mature



**Any open world sandbox game faces stiff competition in what has become a popular, but crowded genre. With titles like Grand Theft Auto IV, Saints Row 2, Red Dead Redemption and Crackdown all selling extremely well, it must be an intimidating prospect for developers to enter into competition with some serious gaming heavyweights. Does Mafia II impress and can we get through this review without exploiting any gangster quotes?**

Mafia II acts as a successor to the largely forgotten and generally underappreciated 2002 PC title, Mafia: The City of Lost Heaven. While there are a few clever nods to the preceding game, this sequel follows a new group of characters in a different setting: Empire Bay. Mafia II focuses on Vito Scaletta as he works his way from a tough immigrant background to the ranks of one of the world's most famous criminal organisation. Taking place during the 1940s and early 1950s, the game takes an unusual step of moving forward in time in small jumps in time with certain narrative events. This is a particularly nice touch as it leads to both the characters and Empire Bay changing in the post-war era, a feature which is rarely used in games.





# REVIEW

## MAFIA II



It's clear that developers 2K Czech have put a lot of work into the plot in an attempt to steer it away from typical gangster film clichés. In some ways they are successful, with the story covering a lot of ground with a few really unusual missions and locations that definitely keep your interest. The characters themselves though are far more familiar, with the usual selection of enforcers, boss-figures and crooked accountants feeling like a best-of compilation of Hollywood crime films. However, this is by no means a criticism and some well-judged voice acting from a strong cast helps to lend real life to these figures.

Empire Bay is a very impressive and immersive game world, creating a lifelike and believable backdrop to the story. It's a location which has been carefully researched, with the architecture, vehicles and fashions bringing to mind classic black and white photographs of the time. In-game radio stations also play authentic licensed period music which

changes as the narrative progresses, alongside the world around it. In some ways the setting feels like a story of its own, making it the perfect location for Vito's violent quest for wealth and status. Technically, Mafia II impresses with some excellent visuals and a host of realistic weather effects. Generally the character animations are fluid and lifelike, with some occasional exceptions that appear jarringly odd in an otherwise credible environment.

However, while Mafia II has a great environment and engaging plot the gameplay is much less remarkable. Split very clearly into driving, shooting or driving and shooting there is very little else on offer. The driving is fairly satisfying with cars having initially challenging, but realistic, handling. Each vehicle does feel different to drive and there is a healthy variety of transport on offer, from muscle cars and hotrods to milk trucks and flatbeds.



Empire Bay's police are both aggressive and temperamental and flouting the Highway Code usually results with them hot on your tail. As such it is often easier to drive slowly and carefully, obeying the traffic signals and not smashing that incredibly annoying slow, old driver off the road to their death. It's an unusual feeling, obeying the law, but considering most of your criminal





# REVIEW

## MAFIA II

actions need to remain silent it does make sense. Yet, it's not terribly empowering to have a brutal killer as a passenger moaning at you for running a red light.

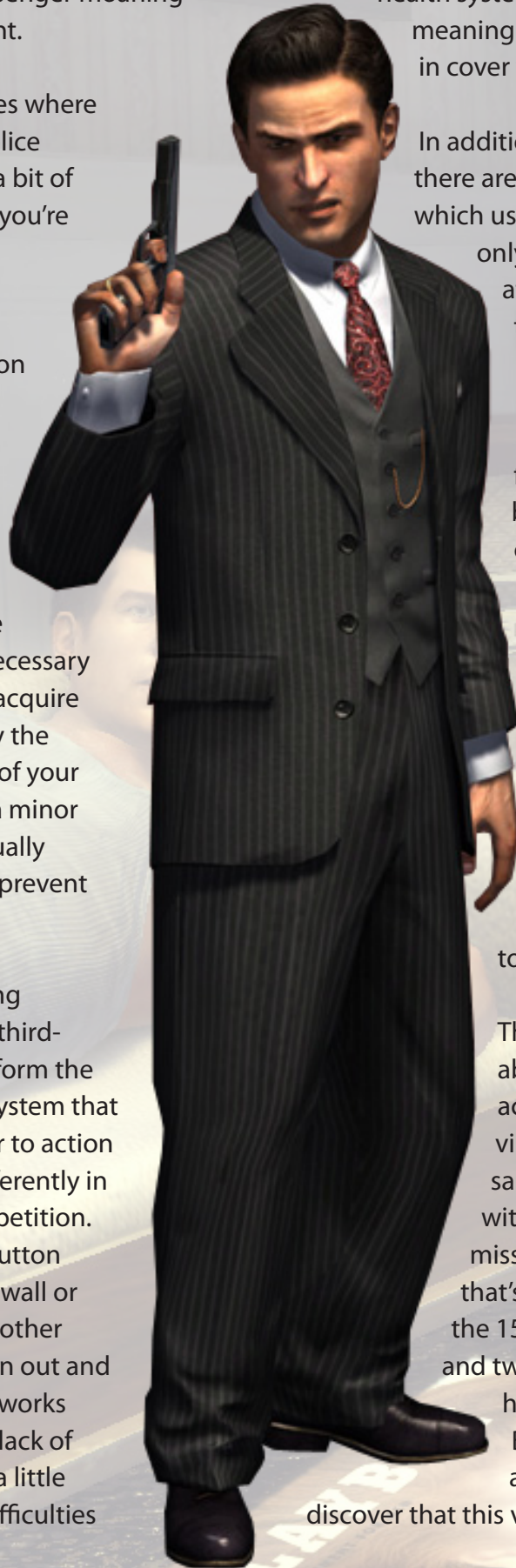
Inevitably there will be times where you'll be pursued by the police and losing them is initially a bit of a daunting task. As long as you're in sight of the cops, they'll actively pursue you as well as submitting your vehicle registration and a description of your clothes to their colleagues. This means you'll usually have to outrun your pursuers until you can reach a garage that will change your vehicle's number plate and colour. It will also be necessary to get to a clothes shop to acquire a different outfit. Thankfully the system judges the severity of your crime, so if your offence is a minor misdemeanour you can usually merely outrun the law and prevent any further repercussions.

Alongside the game's driving gameplay is a cover-based third-person shooter, which will form the bulk of the missions. It's a system that will be immediately familiar to action gamers and it works no differently in Mafia II than any of its competition. A context-sensitive cover button will lock you to the nearest wall or object, before the tap of another button will allow you to lean out and fire. It is a solid system and works well enough, although the lack of a blind-fire button can get a little frustrating on the harder difficulties

especially when you find yourself being rushed by a shotgun wielding henchmen. The regenerating health system is also fairly standard, meaning you'll be spending a lot of time in cover waiting to pop out again.

In addition to the third-person shooting, there are fairly frequent fist-fights which use a very simple interface. With only three buttons, one for light attacks, another for heavy and the final for blocking, it's like a toned-down fighting game. The camera can irritate during these encounters when you frequently find your opponent obscured by Vito's body as you circle one another. Similarly, these encounters are made very easy by simply holding down block at all times, before landing one punch at a time. It's time consuming, but seems the most effective way to take out your enemies. The only other variation is a few stealthy sections of missions which are never challenging and are too short to make much impact.

The biggest disappointment about Mafia II is the lack of activities to occupy you. In virtually every other recent sandbox game, you're presented with dozens of side-quests, hidden missions and mini-games. However, that's not the case here, you have the 15 missions the game gives you and two sets of collectables hidden around Empire Bay and that's it. It's a real letdown to discover that this vibrant setting has





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## MAFIA II



nothing to occupy you beyond the missions. Similarly, the limited gameplay types mean that each level is similar and towards the end of the title, a nagging feel of repetition creeps in.

Despite the pull of the story, the progression of the narrative also leads to a rather dull and monotonous opening. As Vito is a lowly hoodlum to begin with, the early missions are all very menial involve tasks as dull as handing out cigarettes to customers, driving people to destinations and back-alley scuffles. Thankfully later on in the game, the missions really pick up and become far more epic in proportion. However, even here most levels involve you having to drive people back and forth from location to location, which begins to grate after 15 missions. Another potential misstep is setting the opening levels of the title in icy conditions, making the driving difficult, which when combined with these rather tedious early missions, might be enough to put some people off.

Mafia II is by no means a bad game; in fact it's a solid, well-rounded title. However, the limited range of activities to engage in and the somewhat repetitive nature of these tasks hold it back. The story and environment are worth experiencing, but there's very little replay value in a game that is essentially 15 missions and very little else. So if you're looking for a purely single-player experience with some nice ideas, then Mafia II will provide something to entertain you. Yet there are so many other sandbox games out there that come with fewer criticisms to recommend above this title, which is a real shame given the amount of effort that clearly have gone into developing this long-awaited sequel. As such, Mafia II struggles at making you an offer you can't refuse: and to think, we almost made it to the end without saying that.

Written by **Chris Wakefield**

playability	★★★★★★★☆☆
longevity	★★★★★☆☆☆☆
graphics	★★★★★★★☆☆
sound	★★★★★★★☆☆
overall	

7/10



## KAYNE &amp; LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

AVAILABLE FOR:



PC



XBOX



PS3



WII



DS



PSP

## NEED TO KNOW

- **Publisher** Square Enix
- **Players** Multi
- **Released** August, 2010
- **Age Rating** Mature



in virtually all the same areas as its predecessor and even manages to add new annoyances.

Two incredibly short paragraphs in the game's manual provides all the back-story you're going to get, with virtually no references made to Kane & Lynch: Dead Men and barely any explanation to what either of the protagonists are actually doing in Shanghai. As Kane and Lynch were already two of the most unlikeable characters we've ever encountered, having even less justification for their actions encourages you to hate them even more. With one being a deranged psychopath and the other a self-absorbed, greedy killer it's difficult to empathise with them. Especially considering they proceed to murder their way through what seems like most of the police force of China. However, before any pathetic moralists object it's all ok because they're on the payroll of a crime lord who is just a little bit more evil than our titular duo.

**Underdeveloped. Unresponsive. Unsatisfying.** No, I'm not talking about my sex life, these were all words I used when reviewing the original Kane & Lynch: Dead Men. Thankfully, they'll all come in handy when describing the recently released sequel. Buckle up everyone: it's going to be a rough ride...

From the very go, Kane & Lynch: Dog Days sets out to be a "gritty and brutal" third-person shooter. The BBFC rating detailing "strong bloody violence, torture and frequent strong language" more accurately describes my experiences playing the title than the game itself. Having failed to properly address the numerous criticisms, Kane & Lynch: Dog Days still frustrates





## KAYNE &amp; LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

The plot then proceeds to blitz past at a lightning pace, which is fortunate as it leaves little time for it to crumble under the metric tonne of desperate adult bravado and macho testosterone-fuelled grimacing. Most obvious is the new visual style of Kane & Lynch: Dog Days which is clearly designed to reflect the gritty, life-like hand-camera footage of the internet. It's a unique visual style which sets it apart from the nearest genre rivals and does certainly build an intense atmosphere a lot more than the clichéd, expletive-laden storyline. However, chances are the shaky camera will have your stomach churning within the first few seconds of playing though thankfully this can be disabled in the options menu.

Whilst the gameplay remains a familiar blend of cover-based third-person action and occasional



on-rails shooting sections, developers IO Interactive have thankfully implemented some changes. Having listened to the plethora of complaints against the first game's lack of a snap-to-cover button, there is now an easy-to-use system in place. At the tap of a button you can now enter and exit cover quickly and efficiently and with the press of a movement stick you can roll between available barricades

at will. It's a system effectively borrowed entirely from Gears of War, Uncharted and virtually every other third-person game out there but it's a godsend when compared with Kane & Lynch: Dead Men.

Yet, despite this huge improvement the cover-system is somehow still horrendously broken, just in a brand new way. Some of the cover is destructible, meaning you'll soon get shot through it unless you keep on the move. This keeps things challenging, forcing you to change your hiding spot frequently. However, at times you'll be





# REVIEW

## KAYNE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS



safely nestled behind a 6ft thick wall of concrete and somehow still keep getting shot. Now either the enemy can bend bullets, are using futuristic rail-guns or there is some huge unexplained problem with the cover, but at times it is controller-smashingly frustrating on the harder difficulties.

Other maddening problems include the weapons, which feel atrociously unbalanced between when the enemies use them and you get your hands on them. In a bid to increase the realism of the title, guns are generally inaccurate over medium-to-long range. However, when the enemy use them you'll be shot in the face from a metric distance of over 2km by someone who doesn't even have a direct line-of-sight. Yet, if you try and return the favour you'll use 3 entire clips of ammunition before you manage to put one bullet into their foot. At times the enemy AI is actually fairly impressive and they have the ability to group together

and flank you. Yet, instead of being gracious in these defeats it is generally the source of frustration as you'll have spotted this but been powerless to stop them with a rifle that couldn't hit a barn door if you were sitting on it.

Perhaps most unbelievable is the length of the campaign, which simply ends after around 3 to 4 hours. It's barely signposted, hugely unsatisfying and insulting for a game with a retail price of £39.99. With levels lasting between 10 to 20 minutes on average, the only lifespan extender is





## KAYNE &amp; LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS



playing on the hardest difficulty which will likely drive you levels of rage powerful enough to cause an aneurism. Playing with a human player rather than the computer AI is an essential skill here, as at times it feels like you're babysitting, a fact not helped when your partner starts whining that he is out of ammunition and needs to reload.

To bolster the brief single player campaign are a selection of offline and online multiplayer matches. The interesting and rather enjoyable Fragile Alliance mode returns, but is still riddled with all the faults of the third-person shooting mechanics. Expect the frustrating cover system and woefully inaccurate weapons to constantly rear their ugly head as you try and win. With perhaps the most promising and original idea in the game, Fragile Alliance sees you initially working together as a team of criminals pulling a heist. However, at any point your teammates could shoot you in the back, steal your cash and make a break for it. Most of the multiplayer modes are variations on this, with the Undercover Cop mode putting a police agent with the heist team, tasked with bringing the heist down from within.

Even here there are issues though, with games frequently taking time to find and people quitting before the match has ended due to its format.

If someone is killed near a round's end there is no incentive for them to stay and watch people continue, as they'll be returned to the lobby at the finish. This means that most matches never see completion, as chances are the host will leave and the match will be abandoned. The offline multiplayer version of Fragile Alliance, Arcade Mode follows the same format but with computer AI instead. It's entertaining at first, but soon gets tiring without the benefit of the unpredictable human element. With only 6 maps included in the game the levels you are faced with soon become routine and tiresome.

Kane & Lynch: Dog Days obviously tries hard to address the problems criticised in the original title. However, the sheer number and range of frustrations present makes it incredibly hard to enjoy the game. With unsatisfying and below-average third-person shooting mechanics, a clichéd and fairly abhorrent story, a campaign lasting less than 5 hours and an exasperating multiplayer mode, this is a game that's very difficult to recommend at any price. Like Kane and Lynch, this is a game which should be approached with extreme caution.

Written by **Chris Wakefield**

playability	★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆
longevity	★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆
graphics	★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆
sound	★★★★★☆☆☆☆☆
overall	

4.5/10



## RED DEAD REDEMPTION

AVAILABLE FOR:



## NEED TO KNOW

- **Publisher** Rockstar
- **Players** Multi
- **Released** May, 2010
- **Age Rating** Mature



**Rockstar Games is undoubtedly one of the most widely recognisable developers with a reputation for controversial sandbox titles. Despite the media storm that usually follows every release, their games never fail to perform incredibly well, both critically and commercially. Their latest release, Red Dead Redemption has been described as “Grand Theft Western”, but is this necessarily true?**

Inevitable comparisons will be drawn between Rockstar’s hugely commercial franchise and it is easy to see why. Both games are sandboxes, have a wealth of side missions and feature similar protagonists who are forced into a life of crime. However, Red Dead Redemption somehow manages to be more engaging, compelling and fun than Grand Theft Auto IV and any of its expansions. The radically different setting and time period manage to shake off any feelings of déjà vu and as the game begins it feels like you are playing an open-world sandbox for the very first time.

Acting as a successor to the largely forgotten 2004 Red Read Revolver, instead of a direct sequel, the main story follows John Marston and his quest for a simple life. An ex-gang member, Marston is drawn back into the life he tried to leave behind by a pair of federal agents who use his kidnapped family as leverage. The story is surprisingly deep, featuring some excellent and well-drawn characters that you become attached to. The sheer range of odd-balls, psychopaths and heroes that you meet is enough to keep you playing and the quality of the script is never less than impressive.

The outstanding production values are reflected everywhere, most obviously in the visuals which are jaw-dropping. Whether you’re riding across the desert landscapes of Mexico in the baking heat, hiking up a snowy mountain or getting caught in an enormous storm it is always astonishing. Similarly the sound effects here are just brilliant, and often terrifying, never more so than when you find yourself being savaged by a rampaging grizzly bear. With a soundtrack that brings to mind classic westerns and some fitting songs at key moments in the game, the music always adds to the experience. Technically, the game creates an unprecedented level of immersion and it is very easy to find





# REVIEW

## RED DEAD REDEMPTION



yourself losing hours simply exploring, gunning down bandits or even collecting plants in the wilderness.

Following the main story is likely to be your main concern and each mission carefully introduces new gameplay elements, without feeling patronising. The core mechanics of the game revolve around gunfights, as this is the American West. The targeting system is simple, third-person aiming with a handy reticule which has an optional aim assist should you require it. To sit alongside this is your Dead-Eye meter which transforms you from a wannabe cowboy to a truly badass gunslinger. At the press of a button time slows down allowing you to place your shots more accurately. As the game progresses you unlock upgrades and once you reach the second act of the game, you'll be able to paint multiple targets, allowing you to wipe out entire rooms of enemies in one quick motion. It's an incredibly innovative and easy-to-use system which never gets old and is always useful.

So, while many of the missions revolve around shooting up a host of Old West baddies there's a lot of variation in how this happens. One minute you can find yourself in the midst of a bloody street fight in a ghost town, the next you'll be facing-off in a tense mini-game duel against someone who has bad-mouthed your reputation. The level design is always fantastic, exploiting the entire landscape over the course of the story, taking you from one memorable encounter to the next. There are plenty of other things to do as part of the missions, including horse taming, cattle herding and even playing political factions off against each other. Rockstar has definitely perfected the art of keeping you playing and avoiding repetition as much as possible.

Outside of the missions, of which there are around 60, Rockstar has included a wealth of extra pursuits to keep you occupied. Scattered around the enormous game world are "Strangers", who have a series of tasks for you to accomplish. These unusual individuals are diverse and many of the missions deal with incredibly dark themes, but it is certainly true that these are some of the most memorable aspects of the title. Completing these quests often rewards you with additional Honour and Fame points, stats which will influence a variety of in-game benefits. Honour affects how other people in the





# REVIEW

## RED DEAD REDEMPTION

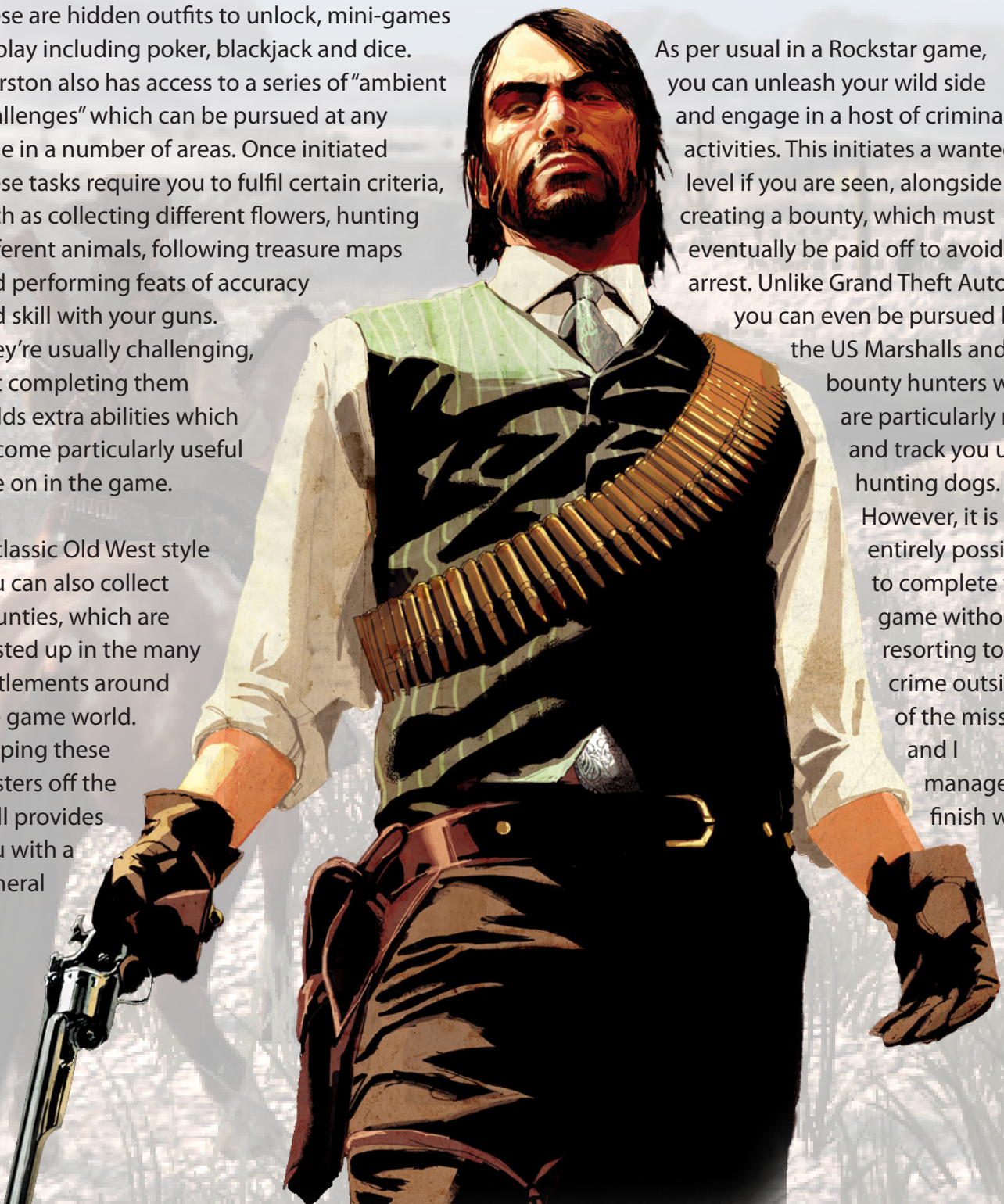
game treat you. The nobler you are the more the people love you, with shopkeepers offering you discounts across their wares. Fame acts in a similar manner, with extra perks being unlocked after news of your deeds spreads across the country.

There is so much to see and do across the game world, from night jobs which reward you with extra cash, to gang hideouts which unlock some of the best weapons in the game. Alongside these are hidden outfits to unlock, mini-games to play including poker, blackjack and dice. Marston also has access to a series of "ambient challenges" which can be pursued at any time in a number of areas. Once initiated these tasks require you to fulfil certain criteria, such as collecting different flowers, hunting different animals, following treasure maps and performing feats of accuracy and skill with your guns. They're usually challenging, but completing them yields extra abilities which become particularly useful late on in the game.

In classic Old West style you can also collect bounties, which are posted up in the many settlements around the game world. Ripping these posters off the wall provides you with a general

location, allowing you to stock up on ammunition and medicine before heading out to bring them back dead or alive. Killing them is easy, but doesn't pay, and keeping them alive is where the real fun lies. Eliminating their entourage, shooting them in the foot and then lassoing them, allows you to drag them back to the nearest jail in more-or-less one piece. However, you have to be prepared for their friends riding after you leading to some truly epic horseback gunfights.

As per usual in a Rockstar game, you can unleash your wild side and engage in a host of criminal activities. This initiates a wanted level if you are seen, alongside creating a bounty, which must eventually be paid off to avoid arrest. Unlike Grand Theft Auto IV you can even be pursued by the US Marshalls and bounty hunters who are particularly nasty and track you using hunting dogs. However, it is entirely possible to complete the game without resorting to crime outside of the missions and I managed to finish with





# REVIEW

## RED DEAD REDEMPTION



absolutely no felonies whatsoever, which felt particularly pleasing.

Red Dead Redemption's multiplayer component feels more robust than Grand Theft Auto IV, providing you with more options to sink into. A free roam mode returns, where you can posse up with some friends before doing whatever you please, against the AI or fellow human players. However, the competitive multiplayer against other players in one of the game's numerous modes is a real highlight. Each round begins with a Mexican stand-off which soon descends into madness, starting the match which is always entertaining and fun. With a recently released free-to-download co-operative mission pack there is even more replay value on offer.

Rockstar Games has managed to create an immensely memorable and powerful gaming experience with a strong story and unparalleled

sandbox gameplay. If you haven't experienced Red Dead Redemption yet, then you are truly missing out. Despite very occasional bugs popping up after extended playing sessions, this is a game with few flaws. Whilst it is admittedly similar to the Grand Theft Auto titles, from which it clearly gets much of its source material, the experience is a more streamlined and refined one. Put simply: Red Dead Redemption is a true modern gaming classic and one that you should definitely play sooner, rather than later.

Written by **Chris Wakefield**

playability	★★★★★★★★★
longevity	★★★★★★★★★
graphics	★★★★★★★★★
sound	★★★★★★★★★
overall	★★★★★★★★★

9.5/10





Coming Next Issue.

