

GameOn MAG

Issue 27 - GameOn.co.uk

August 2011

BATTLEFIELD

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FIFA 12

Does EA's latest FIFA score a winner?



BIOSHOCK

GameOn travel to Columbia!



EA GAMES
ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT

E3 Edition:

The best games from E3 in one special issue. More inside...



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After a few months break, GameOn's free gaming magazine returns, bigger and better than ever. We've had a very busy 2011 so far with plenty of huge games to review, preview and discuss. This trend looks set to continue after the summer with a massive list of blockbusters waiting in the wings for a Christmas appearance.

In this issue we bring you the highlights of our E3 coverage. The following previews are from games which impressed us, surprised us and even one or two that left us truly astounded. It was a busy show with most of the major developers presenting very strong selections of their top titles, so it was by no means an easy list to create.

Whether it's the scorching level of excitement surrounding Battlefield 3, the bleak post-apocalyptic thrills of Metro: Last Light or the latest additions to FIFA 12, there should be a little something for everyone.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

The Editor



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ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT

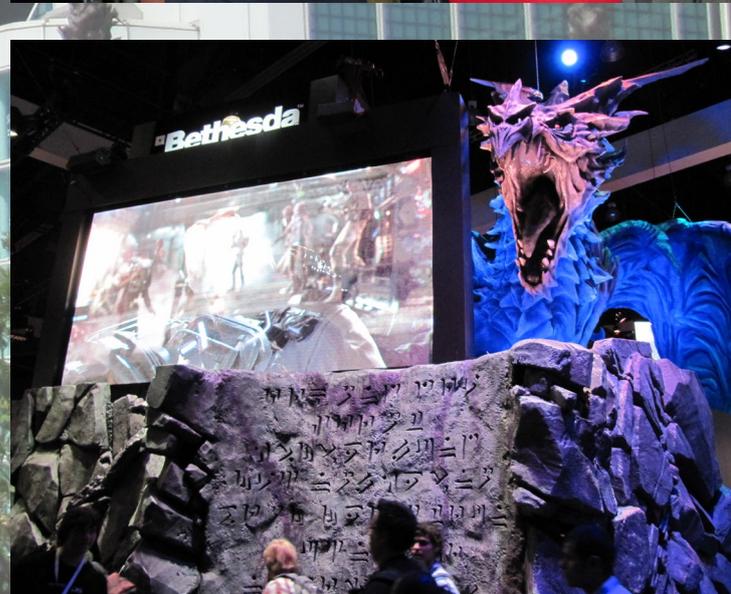
ABOUT E3

Every June the gaming event of the year strikes as thousands of journalists from across the globe descend on the Los Angeles Convention Centre and E3 begins. It's an insane few days of important announcements, hundreds of exciting games, scantily-clad booth babes and litres of geek sweat.

This year was no different, with Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo all competing with one another for the most exciting announcements. Microsoft unleashed news of Halo 4, Nintendo brought the Wii U and Sony showed off the features of the PSP Vita. It was a crazy week with constantly breaking news and plenty of surprises.

Keeping up with the latest and greatest stories is no easy task and required a dedicated team of staff in the UK as well as those writers lucky enough to enjoy the sun, sand and aforementioned booth babes. Now that the dust has finally settled the GameOn team want to share their impressions of some of the hottest future releases and highlight our best titles from E3.

Enjoy the latest, up-to-date previews of the hottest games including Batman: Arkham Asylum, Battlefield 3, Bioshock Infinite, FIFA 12, Metro: Last Light and The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim.



MENT EXPO

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



With *Arkham Asylum*, developer Rocksteady was successful in creating a neat formula of storytelling, third-person beat-em up combat and action-adventure stealth. *Batman: Arkham City* is set about one year after *Arkham Asylum* and the plot development is crucial to the gameplay. After being seen to be the one who stopped Joker in *Arkham Asylum*, Quincy Sharp, the former boss at the prison, has become the mayor of Gotham City and consequently buys a large chunk of the slums to set up a new super prison called "Arkham City". This prison is overlooked by the aptly named psychiatrist Hugo Strange and prisoners are free to roam so long as they do not attempt to escape, with a group of private armed mercenaries called "Tyger" manning the perimeter. This obviously sounds like a worrying mix and Batman is inescapably going to have to be involved once again.

Our play-test began on the roof-tops of Arkham City where Catwoman is being held by super villain Harvey Dent (Two-Face), who plans to execute the irresistible antihero to recruit thugs to his cause. We used an audio decipher - one of Batman's many gadgets - to listen in on the communications of the super villain's thugs (after accidentally tuning into Arkham radio station), and discovered that Catwoman is in a spot of bother inside an old courthouse building. Here the player can choose to either explore the surroundings in order to find side-missions or collectables, or just deal directly with the main mission. This adds an open city element and the side-missions are also promised to be appealing and compliment the main game, not just add a shallow extra depth.



BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW



The true shadowy Batman areas are littered with detail while bright windows and neon lights break up the run-down city and dark night sky. The prospect of exploring is an exciting one but unfortunately after admiring the ambience we had to press on with the main objective. The gameplay will be instantly familiar to Arkham Asylum players but new to Arkham City is the ability to glide continuously using Batman's cape to nose-dive in order to build speed and upwards momentum. We used this, along with Batman's grapple hook, to glide down the streets and onto a balcony on the Courthouse. The detective mode from Arkham Asylum returns and provides a means for analysing a scene for extra information on the area and enemies. Unfortunately there was no secret way in here so we had to drop down and start battling the thugs outside the main door.



PREVIEW

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW



BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW



Please note that the latter part of this paragraph contains minor spoilers from early in the game.

Combat remains a familiar affair of punching and kicking enemies with great flair and combo variations. This violence remains rapid but is now smoother than before and is thoroughly satisfying and pleasurable. We knocked-out all the hoodlums and moved inside. A cut-scene followed where Catwoman was her characteristic cheeky self, but more henchmen had to be dealt with before we could save our feline friend. With Two-Face dispatched and Catwoman saved the next super villain, The Joker, attempted to snipe the duo from afar. Sadly this is where our demo ended and we were left with a desire to play more.

At its heart Batman: Arkham City looks and feels similar to Arkham Asylum. Whereas some developers feel the need to add a wealth of new features to spice up their sequel, at the end of the day (or night, as is usually the case with Batman) if it 'isn't broken then don't fix it'. Arkham City has more freedom but the stealth remains classic Batman, the combat is lively and quite literally punchy while the story promises to be compelling and involving. Expect to see Batman: Arkham City hit shelves worldwide during the week of October 18th 2011 on PC, Xbox 360 and PS3.



Written by **Pete O'Brien**

OPERATION RACCOON CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



Reinventing Resident Evil as a co-operative shooter for 4 players from the developers behind SOCOM: Confrontation was an unexpected decision. It was also one which raised a lot of questions and no small degree of scepticism from long-term fans of the series. So, after spending some hands-on time with Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City can it dispel fans' doubts?

Perhaps the most important thing to accept about Operation Raccoon City is that it sits separately from the main series, both in terms of gameplay and plot. While it is set during the events of Resident Evil 2 and Resident Evil: Nemesis it is more of an alternate timeline. This "reinterpretation" of the outbreak brings to mind the themes of Resident Evil: Outbreak and its sequel. These two largely forgotten releases, at least in Europe, had broadly similar

concepts but radically different executions. Therefore, Operation Raccoon City acts as a distinct off-shoot from the series and should not be compared to the survival horror roots of the franchise.

The game sees you take the role of one of a team of Umbrella forces sent to "clean-up" the outbreak of various undead creatures milling around the streets of Raccoon City. There are a choice of 6 different playable characters on offer, each with their own distinct powers and abilities. The team consists of Four-Eyes, Beltway, Spectre, Vector, Bertha and their leader Lupo. Their unique skills are diverse ranging from an ability to cloak temporarily to being able to drop mines to lay traps for your infected enemies. During the short time that we had with the title we weren't able to see how effective all of these were. However



OPERATION RACCOON CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW



the potential for each member of a co-operative game picking a team member to create the best combination does seem appealing.

We experimented with the single player portion of the title to gauge how enjoyable this would be without friends. One of our biggest concerns was your companion's AI, a notorious issue when it comes to this genre of co-operative action. Yet, we were pleasantly surprised that your fellow squad members were satisfyingly competent and could not only defend themselves but occasionally bail you out of a tight spot. The only issues we really encountered were them very occasionally blocking you in tight corridors or on staircases, but this was far from game breaking. If the AI can be this capable consistently then this could help make the game be fun even when playing on your own.

The mission we played found us alongside three of our team in the

wreckage of Raccoon City which instantly brought to mind the opening, early Resident Evil sequels. Burning cars, rubble everywhere and, of course, swarms of the staggering undead. The third-person action does not feel like Resident Evil 4 or its successor, as the ability to move and shoot gives you far more freedom. However, aiming and keeping on the move is important as you find yourself facing large numbers of zombies. These are very much the staggering reanimated corpses of old and not the faster paced ones we've seen a lot more of lately.



OPERATION RACCOON CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW

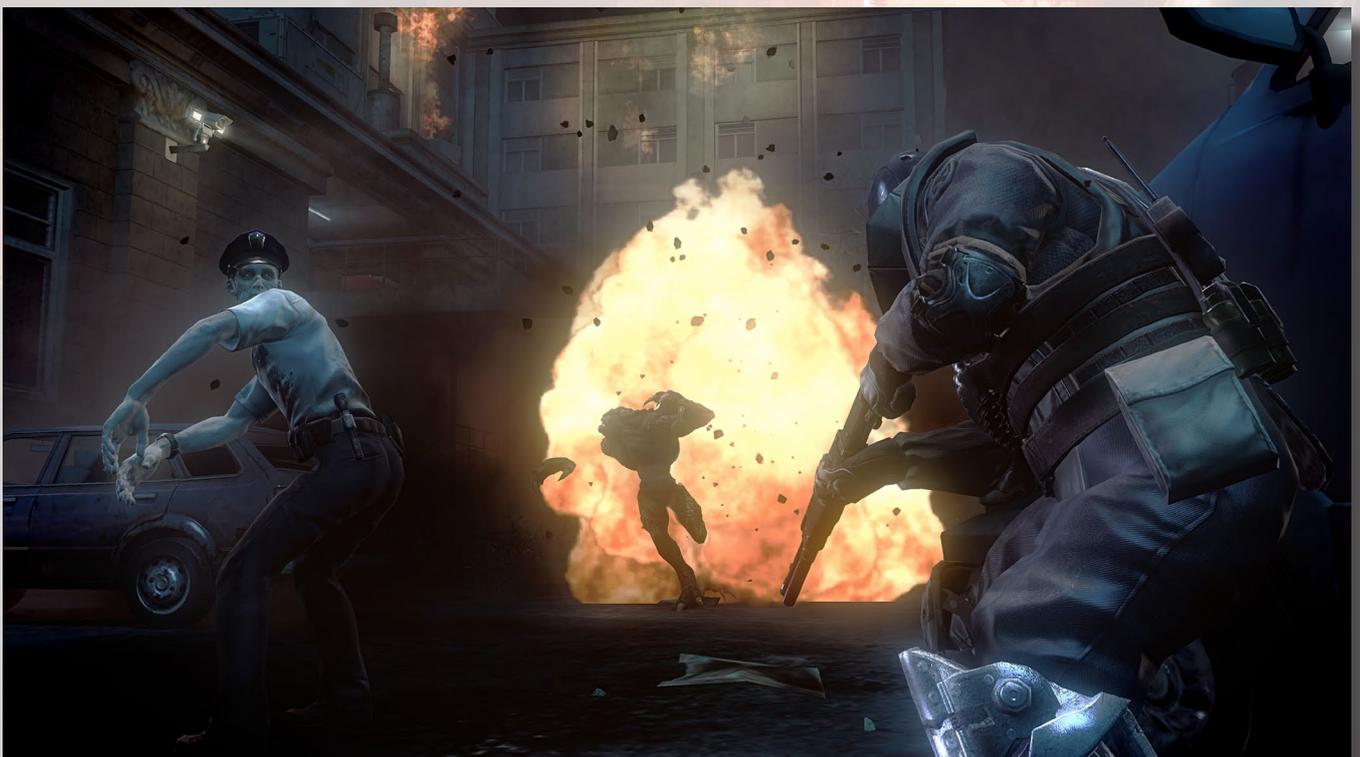
Enemies will attack you en masse but largely from only in front of you, so as we progressed down the apocalyptic street we seldom had to worry about a sudden surprise from behind us. This was in contrast to other titles, such as Left 4 Dead where you had to constantly be alert as attacks could pour in from any direction at any time. Admittedly though, things weren't too easy as the zombies don't stop coming until you make progress to certain points. While this is often considered a rather cheap tactic it did help create a constant sense of threat and build the impression of a city filled with zombies. Equally, it didn't feel like a lazy design choice and provided a constant challenge. It appears that the numbers of undead that you'll face will adjust depending on the amount of human players in the game in order to always test your abilities.

Combat is relatively hectic as you'll have to line up headshots quickly in order to best conserve your limited supply of ammunition. Simply adopting "spray and pray" tactics will not work in the long run and being left with only your knife is not a situation you want to find yourself stuck in. After reaching the end of the street we activated a large metal shutter and entered into a parking garage, the door closing behind us blocking the flow of zombies.

Breathing a sigh of relief and collecting a few herbs and a crate of ammunition, our break was short lived as a pack of Lickers suddenly attacked.

This was a difficult battle and we were forced to aim and fire quickly as they moved from floor to ceiling. Their attacks were particularly speedy and we quickly ran through several first aid packs while we adopted new tactics in response to their attacks. This change of pace was good and provided a new set of challenges and definitely added variety. However, it wasn't long before we were back onto the streets fighting waves of zombies. Here we were introduced to a new danger, a team of human snipers with red laser sights that would target you alongside the undead.

Getting shot by one of these distant troops wounded us and brought on a phase of bleeding. This proved to be a significant downside as it meant that we began to attract zombies towards us, a function that seems oddly familiar to Left 4 Dead's Boomer attack. However, with the aid of our AI teammates we managed to avoid getting damaged as we chose to hide in a narrow passage that funnelled the flesh-munchers straight into our teams' guns. At this stage we then used a nearby building for cover to peak out and take a few shots



OPERATION RACCOON CITY HANDS-ON PREVIEW



at the distant snipers before ducking out of sight and continuing to clear the streets. The battle felt fairly conventional for any action game and didn't really have a sense of being unique to the Resident Evil world.

As our time with the game drew to an end a large Tyrant-esque enemy appeared giving us a quick glimpse at what we assume is a boss enemy for your team to face. Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City was both a bit of a surprise and a disappointment. We felt it positive about it working as an action game but all sense of the horror has been removed, more so than Resident Evil 5. However, it didn't necessarily feel like we were playing a Resident Evil game at all; it felt more like a third-person Left 4 Dead. Comparisons with the latter will be unavoidable with both featuring four player co-op, similar enemy types and even gameplay mechanics (such as the Boomer Bile/Bleeding effect).

Our hands-on time with the title was relatively short, so we really hope that our misgivings are more a consequence of not having an extended session with the game rather than a reflection of the experience as a whole. If this is not the case than developers Slant Six Games will have their

work cut out to deliver an experience that will be satisfying to Resident Evil fans. Even on a wider level there doesn't necessarily seem much to differentiate it from other co-operative shooters, so hopefully there will be more to the unique abilities of the playable characters. Equally, there is potential with the story to offer fans more in the plot, although we weren't able to see any of this during our time with the title. Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City still has us feeling hesitant that it will deliver on its premise but we hope to have more time with the game later this year.



Written by **Chris Wakefield**

F1 2011 HANDS-ON PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



F1 2010 was well received last year and was widely regarded as the best Formula 1 racing game since the Geoff Crammond Grand Prix days nearly one decade ago. While F1 2010 succeeded in getting the bread and butter stuff right, there were still areas that had room for improvement and the developers have looked to plug these gaps, listen to community feedback and build upon the strengths of the original.

As would be expected, F1 2011 will feature all of the new updates, tracks and rule changes of the real-life Formula 1 2011 season. That means the inclusion of the short 80BHP boost called KERS, the use of the Drag Reduction System (DRS) on straights and finally the contrasting 'Prime' and 'Option' Pirelli tyres. These rule changes have already proved to be an exciting addition to the real F1 season and should also add extra depth and tactics to the game.

Car handling was a strength in F1 2010 and this

has been further enhanced to improve realism while remaining accessible for all driving abilities thanks to the diverse range of driving aids available. Graphics have also been improved with greater detail in the tracks, pit garages, paddocks and even the steering wheels. Tyre wear is also now visible which will help the player know when their tyres become shot to pieces. Complete authenticity remains at the heart of F1 2011 and this is certainly looking to be the case. Building upon its predecessor with more feedback on press interviews and new driver reaction cinematics, F1 2011 also features an overhauled AI system so that AI skill and behaviour is more realistic and fairly represented on track.

The main focus in F1 2011 is to "Go Compete" and one welcome new multiplayer mode is the two-player split-screen with a full 24 driver AI grid. This is what we were able to experience hands-on as we played three short races: two against different journalists and another



F1 2011 HANDS-ON PREVIEW



however is the online co-op championship. You and a friend can join a team together and race through an entire championship, with the ability to save progress after each race. The potential for this mode is superb – imagine driving together under the same team objectives but competing with a friend to be the number one driver. If the Webber-Vettel partnership of Red Bull is anything to go by then the term ‘co-op’ here should be used rather loosely.

against one of the developers. Racing on the Montreal circuit in Canada the tweaks to the handling were evident as the car felt looser on the track with the cold tyres. The car also felt more free as we danced through the field off the start line using the KERS button. The racing was true wheel-to-wheel but we managed to swerve around an opponent and out brake late in the corners to take another place.

We managed to sweep the other journalists aside in the first two races as they got caught up in minor accidents. This kindly showed off the improved damage model, which now extends to the added potential of having long term mechanical failures should you carelessly knock the car about. In the race against the developer however we were pipped by one position but the gradual learning of the racing line and braking points adds to the satisfaction of putting in laps. The overall drive was a pleasurable one, and although the plethora of changes are all quite subtle, they neatly combined to add to the immersion and create a more enjoyable experience.

Also new is a full online 24 driver grid with up to 16 human players and the balance made up with AI drivers. By far the most exciting prospect

F1 2011 will clearly take the path of being a yearly released title and the developers admit that having the game released towards the end of the real F1 season isn't ideal. However what is also clear is that this is an exciting time to be a gaming F1 racing fan. The blotches from the first F1 title by Codemasters look to be cleaned out and F1 2011 is set to be a well polished and enjoyable piece of F1 interactive entertainment. Take the drive online when F1 2011 is released on September 23rd 2011 on PC, Xbox 360 and PS3, and later on Nintendo 3DS and Playstation Vita in November.



Written by **Pete O'Brien**

BATTLEFIELD 3 MULTIPLAYER HANDS-ON PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



It's clear from the outset that **Battlefield 3** is very similar in a number of ways to its predecessor, **Battlefield Bad Company 2**. The HUD icons are familiar and so are the squad mechanics. The focus is very much on environment destruction and immersive urban fighting, both of which **Battlefield 3** appears to do very well. The visuals and audio enjoy slight but effective improvements but this all neatly combines with the actual gameplay to create one of the most immersive battle sequences we have experienced to date.

Our multiplayer co-op mission using the 'Rush' mode was to arm and destroy a number of M-COM stations over several advancing areas. We got to team up with about a dozen journalists (attackers) to battle it out against the QA testers (defenders). Initially taking the new Support class we started in an open city



park area. It wasn't long before gunfire began to unravel and it became apparent that this was going to be an assault on an impressive scale. We moved forward towards the first objective, taking cover behind whatever we





could, be it stone walls, fences or indeed bushes, laying down suppressing fire along the way so our team-mates could move up the line. This type of progress, combined with the crackle of gunfire and bullets whizzing overhead, ignited the visual and aural senses to create an authentic and gritty gunfight.

A LAV25, an armed APC and one of the many customisable vehicles in the game, then rushed towards the front line. We took this chance to hop in and spray machine gun fire from the flanks of the vehicle. This action, coupled with the large pounding the main gun-turret was dishing out,

rewarded us with an enemy RPG round which left the APC crippled. We were forced to quickly evacuate and hide (read: cower) behind a fallen tree. We soon built up the courage to poke our heads above the cover and start laying down fire on the enemy again using our bi-pod mounted heavy machine gun. Once the first charges were set we moved forward to help prevent them from being disarmed. This effectively reverses the role of the teams and gave us the chance to defend. We lobbed some grenades towards the enemy with unsettling effect but in doing so we got caught in a hail of fire in both the chest and face.



BATTLEFIELD 3 MULTIPLAYER HANDS-ON PREVIEW

We respawned as the Assault class which now utilises close range and precision weapons but with the added benefits of having the old healing and reviving medic class rolled into one. We rejoined the action just in time to move from the open setting into an underground close-quarters subway which showed off the improved interiors. Suddenly the gameplay felt more like a S.W.A.T. game, especially with the addition of gun mountable flashlights. We carefully navigated the narrow corridors and as a team we pushed the enemy back and destroyed the second M-COM station.

Now moving out of the dark confines of the subway and out onto the urban streets our team immediately started taking positions in the surrounding area and buildings. The Recon class can now hold their breath to aid accuracy and reduce the unrealistic tactic of 'quick scoping'. These snipers took the upper floors of the buildings, but in doing



so would become vulnerable to RPG fire from the Engineer class. The new Frostbite 2 engine promises improved destructibility of walls, cover and even whole buildings, although sadly we did not get to witness this in our playthrough.

Back to the action and we decided it was time to shock the enemy by running ahead and then behind their front line. We took them by surprise and managed to melee kill one and shoot another in the back before sensibly making a tactical withdraw to the relative safety of our own front line.



BATTLEFIELD 3 MULTIPLAYER HANDS-ON PREVIEW

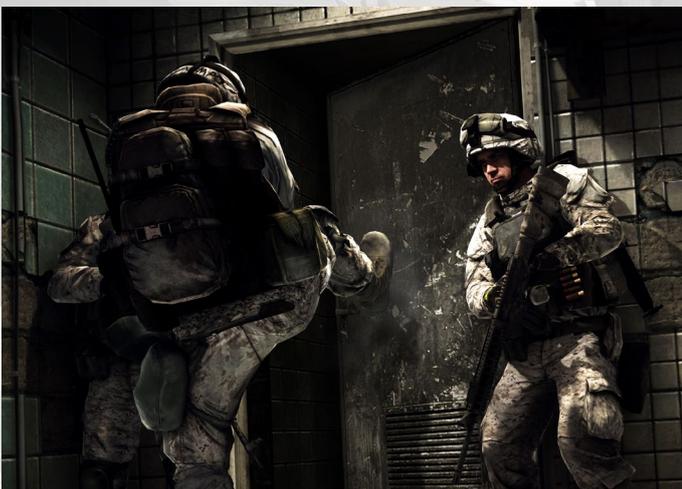


Our team managed to set the remaining charges and to destroy the remaining objectives, thus winning the mission.

Our overall experience was an engaging and immersive one. Despite the fact that our team was a group of strangers with no easy way to communicate, the four-man squad system aids teamwork and the potential is there for well conceived team moves.

One worry is that most of the team went for the Assault class since this boasts good weapons and the medic abilities which could prove too powerful a combination.

The game is currently shaping up to be similar in gameplay and style to Bad Company 2, however the refinements and new locations will no doubt add to what is proving to be an exciting proposition. Expect to join the battle on PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 on October 25th.



Written by **Pete O'Brien**

FIFA 12 HANDS-ON PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



Before embarking on how our hands-on session went, let's start by explaining the three most major components intended to make the gameplay more realistic. Firstly there is the 'Player Impact Engine'. Aimed at improving the flow and momentum of a player whilst reducing animation bugs and clipping, this should provide a smoother and truer experience. Next we have 'Precision Dribbling', which allows for tighter control using just the left stick, while at the same time the AI player will be more aware of their space and surroundings to help find a way around their opponents.

Finally we have 'Tactical Defending', a redesign of how defending works in FIFA. Pressing an opponent with the ball has been altered so that the additional player no longer charges towards the challenger like an angry bull straight away. Instead the player pressing will now 'contain' the player; essentially standing-off to shadow the opponent and restrict their movements. Of course the player can charge in if you want them to, and the distance they

stand-off can be controlled using the left stick. The other side to the new defending mechanics is the removal of the auto-tackle. Now that tackling is done with a button press, timing will be crucial and should prove to be more involving.

So how do all three of these new gameplay features combine? Well really rather nicely actually. Firstly we were shown a demonstration that showed how the momentum from a well-timed tackle could send the player flying, but conversely a poorly timed standing tackle can open a window of opportunity for an acute dribbler to dart through. In reality the changes from the last FIFA title are relatively subtle but it will still take a returning FIFA 11 player a little while to learn and get used to the new playing characteristics.

In our match we played as Arsenal against another journalist who was Chelsea. The match was a close run affair, and although both sides created decent chances the game ended 0-0

draw. The game was gritty and physical but the feeling of space and time on the ball was more evident and tackling required more care and forethought. That's not to say the game can't be fast paced; we still had to deal with a frantic goal-line scramble before launching our own rapid counter-attack.



PREVIEW

FIFA 12 HANDS-ON PREVIEW



PREVIEW

FIFA 12 HANDS-ON PREVIEW



FIFA 12 HANDS-ON PREVIEW

In our first match in FIFA 12 we only just begun to get to grips with the new gameplay elements, but it is still clear from the outset that the new and improved engine does exactly what it sets out to do: provide a more realistic and authentic experience.

Also worth a mention is the EA Sports Football Club, a new social arm for FIFA 12. The main feature here will be to have a player support their favourite real life club in a special league where playing well and frequently gains extra experience for the player and also points for their chosen team, with one week equating to one season. Clearly this mode cannot be properly judged in a pre-alpha state, but our early opinion is that although this is a welcome addition it would seem to be a superfluous one in order to bulk out this year's update. The best stories are made in matches, not in statistics.



Claiming to revolutionise the gameplay in football title now entering its 19th instalment is a fascinating statement. What we played gave us a good impression that the game has certainly managed to improve again, but it is still getting harder for EA to justify that £40 for a yearly title. That said there is no doubt in our minds that FIFA 12 will sell like hotcakes as players crave the latest team and kit updates, but at least they will be able to enjoy the new gameplay features. It does beg this question though: why has it taken so long to fix some of the underlying issues in order to smooth out and vary the gameplay?



Written by **Pete O'Brien**

METRO: LAST LIGHT IN-DEPTH PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



As game journalists we're all nihilistic and depressed. This is probably why we love post-apocalyptic games so much and Metro 2033 fitted in with our bleak world view perfectly. Its gameplay was gripping and challenging, offering something much darker than the ultra-generic shooters that currently dominate the market. Could this follow-up recapture that same atmosphere and threatening sense of survival that permeated every pixel of its predecessor?

Sitting in an ominously lit abandoned train carriage for our hands-off demonstration, we were excited to learn that everything that was shown was live gameplay. Thankfully, Metro: Last Light did not disappoint and proved to be one of the most jaw-dropping experiences of E3. The follow-up takes place directly after the events of Metro 2033 and the ruins of Moscow are still a ravaged wasteland, but changes are beginning to take place. The ash cloud is beginning to gradually lift, the world is becoming less irradiated and the air is no longer toxic.

These developments were artfully shown with a flythrough of the devastated cityscape featuring some new small mutants feeding off the corpse of a Ranger and the return of the terrifying Demons

swooping overhead. The already impressive graphics engine seems to have been improved upon and the exterior locations look far better than in Metro 2033. After detailing this changed apocalyptic landscape the camera focused on two individuals lifting a sewer cover before switching to the traditional immersive first-person the series is renowned for. Descending into the darkness was particularly tense and instantly brought back the claustrophobic feelings invoked by the last title.

4A Games were quick to emphasise that this E3 demonstration was deliberately action packed to highlight the new advances in the combat. Fans of the series need not fear that the tension will be lost and there are going to be plenty of more subtle, chilling sections in the game that will hopefully be showcased in the future. After arriving at the bottom of the ladder, returning protagonist Artyom found himself in an underground tunnel. The way ahead was blocked by an enormous web covered in mutated, hairy spiders. Using his trusty bullet shaped cigarette lighter to ignite the creatures and burn the silk away he advanced to an ominous looking steel door which slowly began to open.

Acting quickly he silently unscrewed a nearby light bulb plunging the tunnel into darkness. Emerging



METRO: LAST LIGHT IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



from the opened door came a small patrol that began to search the tunnel, forcing Artyom to hide behind some boxes. This stealthy section was almost unbearably tense as the torches swept back and forth, almost detecting the crouching protagonist. Waiting for one of the men to turn his back, Artyom walked up behind him before brutally executing him leaving the remainder of the patrol none the wiser. Switching to a silenced pistol, he proceeded to dispatch several others with swift headshots before turning his attention to the steel door.

Before heading through into an industrial checkpoint area that was manned by several enemies, he proceeded to begin to create cover in order to increase the odds in his favour. Shooting out several lights increased the darkness in the entrance and allowed him to advance right into the doorway. However a camp fire was still casting too much light to allow Artyom to progress, prompting him to shoot several rounds into a cooking pot suspended above. These caused the liquid inside to splash over the edges and extinguish the fire, which took everyone watching by surprise. Hopefully there will be more of these interactions in the game and this level of detail in

creating a better environment for stealth.

Carefully making his way into the new area, Artyom patiently waited for guards to move away from their compatriots or get distracted. Once they had been separated he moved in for the kill while using several tables and crates for cover. However, this did not go entirely to plan and an enemy inside the guard checkpoint quickly became suspicious leading to a large-scale, very intense shoot-out. Artyom struck first, shooting the sentry in the head through the glass before he had time to react. Dashing inside, pausing to fire a few more shots at the opponents circling the building, he made it upstairs and recovered one of the highlights of the demonstration: a minigun.

Grabbing this enormous weapon he quickly headed outside and opened fire, causing sheer devastation. The gun was so powerful it tore through the concrete cover his enemies were hiding behind, which was a great illustration of the new destructible terrain 4A Games have implemented. Even a wave of reinforcements couldn't stop Artyom as he ripped through their numbers, setting fire to boxes and sending concrete fragments flying. As the last few enemies

PREVIEW

METRO: LAST LIGHT IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



METRO: LAST LIGHT IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



hit the floor this portion of the demonstration ended and it could not have made a bigger impact.

As the second portion loaded up, it was immediately clear that the factions inhabiting the Moscow Metro in Last Light would be returning. Artyom and a mysterious compatriot were seen trapped in a Neo-Nazi fascist station that was all too aware of their presence. Choosing to “hide in plain sight” the two brazenly walked through the corridors trying to avoid suspicious glances and being stopped to talk to. This was an unbelievably tense section, even more so than the previous stealth one, and was unlike anything that we’ve seen in a videogame for some time.

The two eventually found themselves in a gigantic hall crammed full of fascists listening to a speaker preaching from a podium. This was so chilling that it created a sense of utter silence in the preview room and barely anyone seemed to breathe. As they slowly filtered through the crowd, jostling people out of the way and pushing forward, people began to get more suspicious and turn

and stare. Just when the tension couldn’t build anymore, Artyom’s partner suddenly fired into the air causing everyone to scatter leading to a death defying chase sequence, heavily reminiscent of the “Armoury” section from Metro 2033.

Dashing through corridors while taking shots at the Nazis to keep them back had a lot of impact and a sequence in which your partner helps to carry you to a commandeered rail runner was particularly memorable. The next section seemed especially challenging and took the format of a, literally, on-rails shooter. Having to fight off various fortified trains packed with fascists was eye-watering and Artyom had to administer stims to restore his health in the same manner as the last game.

A few new weapons were shown off, including a strange combination between a rifle and a sub-machine gun which was highly effective in mid-range shooting. Once enough of the fascists had been taken out, Artyom jumped onto their train leading to a close-quarters series of encounters that were truly brutal. Wielding a new pistol that

PREVIEW

METRO: LAST LIGHT IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



METRO: LAST LIGHT IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



fired shotgun rounds, Artyom fought his way through the train, one carriage at a time. This gun was so powerful at close quarters that most enemies were finished off in a single shot and pieces of the scenery went flying. It was a battle that not only showcased the improved combat but also the new particle and lighting effects.

The final area of the preview was again very different and demonstrated another characteristic aspect of the Metro universe: the mutants. Taking place in a dark cave littered with bodies and discarded weapons, Artyom faced off against a gigantic, 4-legged beast. With a bloated stomach and large forearms the creature smashed through scenery while attempting to crush him, forcing him to keep on the move as he unloaded clips of ammunition into it. Before much more could be glimpsed of this encounter, 4A Games faded out the picture and promised more at a later date.

Metro: Last Light was a truly fantastic experience and was easily one of the highlights of the week. With so many other first-person shooters being

unveiled and showcased it was even more impressive that this title managed to emerge as one of the best. The tension and claustrophobia invoked during the playthrough was truly superb and the improved combat options available provide even more player choice. While the playthrough was overwhelmingly action-orientated, the shooting seems definitely enhanced and we cannot wait to see more of the subtler, atmospheric side of the title. There aren't many games at E3 which felt that they could supersede their predecessors but Metro: Last Light was undoubtedly one of these.



Written by **Chris Wakefield**

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:

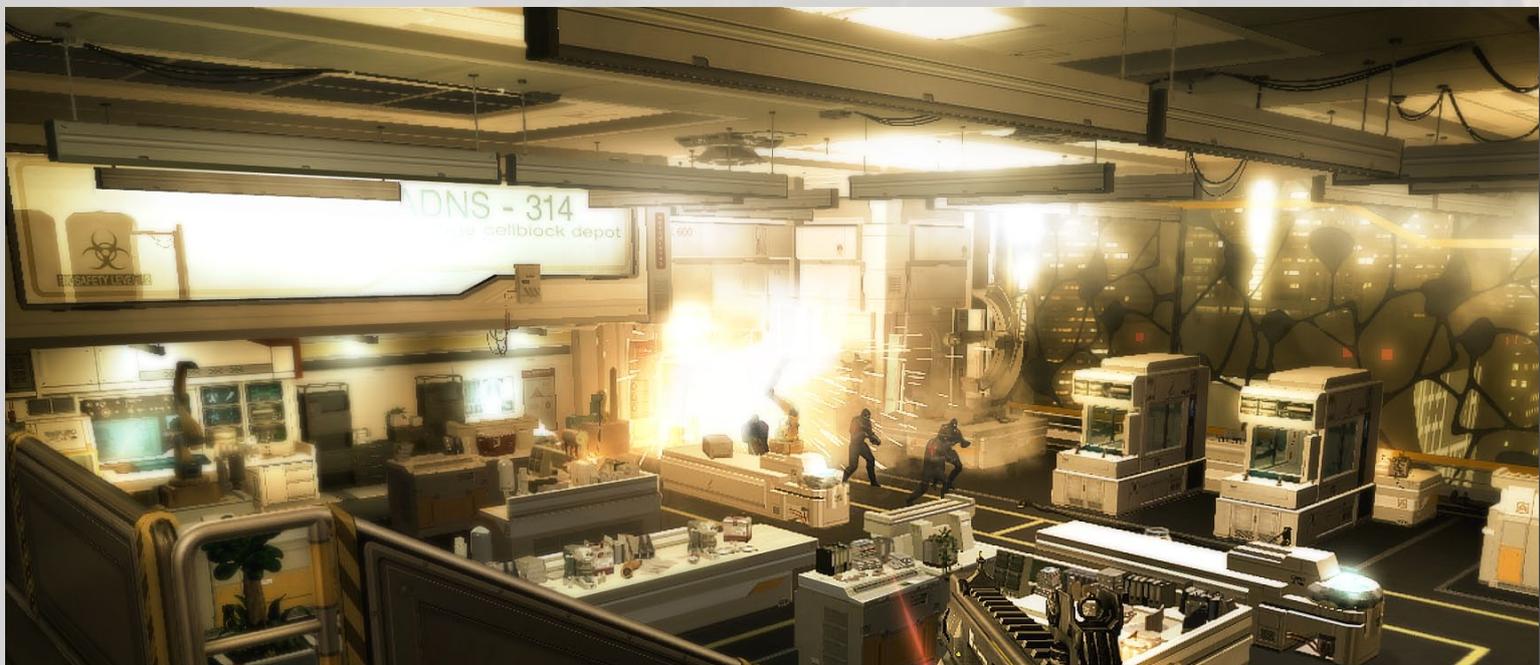


Deus Ex: Human Revolution is set in 2027, around 25 years before the original Deus Ex. There is no requirement to have played the first two games to understand the events of Human Revolution, but no doubt those who have will be rewarded by way of filling in some of the back-story. Human Revolution follows Adam Jensen, a security officer working for a human augmentation company called Sarif Industries. At the beginning of Human Revolution the company is attacked leaving Adam badly injured, who is then himself required to be augmented in order to survive. This is where the player takes over to unravel the plot and thus the classic Deus Ex conspiracy theory begins.

Players familiar with the Deus Ex universe will comfortably feel at home as the same action, stealth and RPG mix returns in Human Revolution. Before having a hands-on session we were given a demonstration of a level set in Hengsha City, around half way through the game. This city is essentially two cities built on-top of one another, with a transition area called the Pangu separating

the two. In this mission Adam needed to make his way up the Tai Young Medical (TYM) building in order to find a secret recording by a chap named Van Bruggen. This would mean infiltrating the building and then finding a lift to the top. All typical Deus Ex so far.

The demonstration started inside the lower levels of the biotech facility, and the developer took Adam further inside before access was blocked a guard. This is where the multitude of gameplay options first becomes apparent. There is the choice to bribe, try to blag it or simply attack the guard. Here the developer decided to bribe the guard, who accepted but warned to stay out of sight or face trouble. From here there were several routes to the first lift which would take Adam to the Pangu. The easy access routes will usually be harder to progress, so here the developer hacked a crane walkway to open a route over the security guards and cameras.



DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION PREVIEW



Hacking in Human Revolution is more involving than the previous titles. The hacking system is complicated to explain in writing but believe us it is a well thought-out 'mini-game' which involves getting to the desired files before the security tracing system catches you. This can become a tense affair though don't expect anywhere the same sort of depth seen in dedicated hacking game Uplink. With the terminal hacked and the bridge moved Adam could climb up to the walkway to get across. Unfortunately taking the higher path meant there was an inhumanly drop to get back down again. Lucky for the developer then that Adam is heavily augmented. Augmentations in Human Revolution are a lot more accessible and varied than Invisible War. Split into four areas - combat, stealth, hacking and social - augments can be bought and upgraded using 'Praxis Points'. Everyone will be familiar of experience points (XP) by now - these are gained by performing stealthy takedowns or completing objectives, for example. Once Adam has collected a certain amount of XP the player will receive a Praxis Point, which can then be spent on the augments. In this deep fall situation Adam can make use of a body augment that allows him to drop down and not agonisingly break both his legs. This drop was done in a third-person mini cut-scene, but the third-person view is actually

more widely used for being stealthy, as Adam can move about cover Metal Gear Solid style.

This cover system was used to sneak up on two unsuspecting guards. Here Adam can either perform a non-lethal or lethal takedown - being non-lethal earns more XP but the guards can later wake up. The developer in control of Adam took the non-lethal option - though it should be noted this was still very brutal - and then proceeded to drag the bodies into a nearby cleaning closet. Now Adam could make his way up to the Pangu - the area in-between the two city levels. Here Adam could walk around unopposed but a key card would be required to get the lift to the top level. Conveniently Adam overheard one of the workers talking to a guard about losing his card, so the developer set about using augmented strength to move a heavy vending machine into position below an air vent to the office, before using a high jump augment to actually get into it.

Clearly the augmentations are a big part of Deus Ex: Human Revolution, but it's clear that they have been well implemented for what is essentially a super-hero experience. Four augments can be mapped to the D-pad (or PC equivalent) so Adam can rapidly adapt to any situation. Need to see what's ahead? X-ray vision check. Want to quickly

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION PREVIEW

bypass some foes? Cloak check. Surrounded by enemies and don't know what to do? 360 degree tornado attack check. These augments use battery power though so are not unlimited in use. What works best though is how the XP and augments work hand in hand. It's up to the player to unlock and upgrade different augmentations as they progress to suit their playing style.

With the demonstration over it was time for us to take a stab at the level in our own personal way. We did a bit of exploring first and stumbled across a scientist who needed our help as he just had an accident - the kind which damaged his bio-suit and released a load of toxic gases into his enclosed room. Fortunately we had enough Praxis Points to purchase the 'Implanted Breather' augment which allowed us to enter the room and shut off the gas valve without falling to the floor dead. We had to shift some debris out of the way to reach the scientist who was very grateful for our help. In addition to gaining some XP for this secondary objective the scientist said the front guard owed him a favour, so would let us through unopposed if we dropped the scientist's name.

This we did and the guard true to his word let us through, this time without needing the bribe. Instead of taking the walkway route we opted to use the slightly more complicated ground route. Using a stun gun we disabled a security camera and then got to the room with the two security guards.

Here, instead of activating the cloak we accidentally hit the 360-degree tornado attack button which alerted the guards to our position. Some gun play followed but we only had use of a pistol against their automatic weapons. A gunner robot soon joined the party and it wasn't long before we were mincemeat.

Slightly red-faced we had to start the whole sequence from the beginning (though progress can be saved anywhere), but this time we wanted to try out the combat properly. We stunned the initial guard before properly using the tornado attack to deal with the next two guards. Unfortunately for us this set off the alarms and the robot still came out guns blazing. We used an EMP grenade to disable this but more guards were on their way. We picked up the automatic guns, but our inventory was full. The inventory system works in the same way as the original Deus Ex, so we cleared some space for the machine gun. A radial inventory can also be brought up to quickly change items.

We changed to the machine gun and started to fight off the incoming guards. Sadly this fast paced combat felt clumsy on the controller and wasn't all that enjoyable compared to dedicated shooter titles. Health is of the regeneration type but we were soon outnumbered again and were filled with too much lead before dying. Clearly it was easier to progress through the level in a slow and careful manner - planning the best route and



DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION PREVIEW



selecting your battles - which requires more time and forethought. Hopefully when it does come to a fight the PC controls will be better suited for the raging battles.

Graphically the demo we played on the Xbox 360 wasn't all that impressive. While the view of the city was quite breathtaking, the rest of the textures were bland and there was no anti-aliasing either. While gameplay is the most crucial component to Deus Ex our hope is again with the PC version for a more visual feast. It might not seem like it now but we have had to miss out a lot of detail in our preview. The level of in-game depth is extraordinary, with NPCs chatting to each other (including some amusing stories) and literature such as newspapers and tablets can be read to add extra depth if required. There would also seem to be a lot of optional exploring to do should the player wish to find extra quests or items to help Adam in future situations.

Overall Human Revolution looks set to blend the best components of the first two Deus Ex titles

while adding a few new ideas along the way. A wide range of players should feel at home with Human Revolutions; there are three difficulty settings which can be changed on the fly and there are even video tutorials to explain all the game concepts. As mentioned before we do feel the game will be better suited to the PC as the gunplay and graphics were a little uneasy in our Xbox 360 experience. Adam Jensen came across as too brutish and cocky a character for our liking, but to fully appreciate the potential of a game like Deus Ex: Human Revolution a play-through of the whole story will be required, which we look forward doing closer to its August 26th 2011 release date.



Written by **Pete O'Brien**

BIOSHOCK INFINITE IN-DEPTH PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



Bioshock Infinite astonished everyone here at the GameOn offices when we were treated to a presentation of the title at GamesCom 2010. The radically different setting, highly detailed, stylised visuals and a complex story certainly made an impression. So, it is fair to say that Bioshock Infinite is one of our most hotly anticipated titles. At E3 this year we were shown a gameplay demonstration taking place around one third of the way into the story. Could the game live up to the high expectations and match the impact of the original preview that we witnessed?

One of the most notable aspects of the Bioshock series is the complex, twisting narratives and the setting of Infinite certainly sets up another intricate story very well. The game takes place on board Columbia, a floating city initially set up as a demonstration of values and achievement by America that was transformed into a deadly

aerial weapon. After attacking China, the United States disowned the city and it disappeared into the clouds, occasionally exerting its influence in certain locations from time to time.

The player takes the role of Booker DeWitt, a rather dubious character who is tasked with retrieving Elizabeth, a girl who has been locked in a tower aboard Columbia for 15 years. Elizabeth has a range of powers: however she doesn't understand exactly what they are, or how to control them. The gameplay portion we witnessed saw the two protagonists searching for an important individual named Comstock, who may be able to help them.

The most immediate and striking element of Bioshock Infinite are the bright and crisp visuals, which are a stark contrast to the dark, watery corridors of Rapture. Initially it seemed difficult to detect the same atmosphere of a utopia



BIOSHOCK INFINITE IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



gone wrong that was so crucial in creating the unique mood of the original game. However, as the demonstration progressed a sinister feeling of unease began to creep in, as subtle hints indicated dark goings on. DeWitt and Elizabeth entered into an eerily quiet fireworks shop, with the wind slowly blowing through the silent aisles.

Searching it for any useful supplies, DeWitt rummaged through a number of containers, collecting a handful of dollars and ammunition in the same style as previous entries into the series. He also collected a pistol and a "Vigor", a container which confers a number of limited-use powers and abilities that function like the Plasmids from Bioshock. However, the unnatural silence inside the store was broken with an ominous shriek and the appearance of Songbird. This bizarre, mechanical winged machine was Elizabeth's only friend and protector who kept her imprisoned for 15 years and is now searching relentlessly to recapture her. This means the two share a strange and far from straightforward relationship, which is genuinely intriguing.

As the two hid from Songbird the changes to DeWitt are especially prominent. Choosing not

to have another silent protagonist, à la Jack and Delta, this time the player character is especially vocal, a decision that might take some adjusting to. As DeWitt is a rather grizzled ex-Pinkerton agent, many of his lines were "American anti-hero" wisecracks. Part of the appeal of the Bioshock series was that the player was always an "everyman" you could apply your own personality to, but this is no longer the case. However, Elizabeth's character was incredibly well animated, with some truly outstanding and subtle body language animations that communicated a great deal of information.

Having managed to shake off their pursuer temporarily, DeWitt and Elizabeth exited outside. They immediately encountered the bloody aftermath of a conflict between two of the warring factions seeking to control Columbia. The Founders are one such group, who act as the opponents in the early trailer for Bioshock Infinite. Their rivals are the Vox Populi, a rather sinister group who are ruthless in their persecution of their enemies. As the two heroes moved through the wreckage of a battle, they encounter a grievously wounded horse writhing in a pool of blood. Here a choice appears, similar to the Little

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Sister decision options from previous games in the series. DeWitt has the option to euthanize the horse with a swift bullet to the brain or to allow Elizabeth to attempt to use her powers to fix its serious injuries.

Here DeWitt allowed Elizabeth to attempt to save it, leading to a somewhat unexpected and jarring portion of the demonstration. Elizabeth's powers initially worked, bringing the horse back and also mended the destruction caused by the factions' battle. However, this did not last long and with a sudden flash the two found themselves in the middle of a street in an American city during the 1980s. Apparently, Elizabeth's powers are linked to "tears", which apparently involve the fabric of time and space. While this was only a temporary scene, it felt incredibly out of place in the series and was both surprising and bizarre. On this early evidence it is difficult to make a judgement, but hopefully these tears will be handled with caution by the development team and be more than just a strange sideline.

After this unusual occurrence, Bioshock Infinite seemed to get back on track and felt more in keeping with the style of the series. DeWitt and

Elizabeth found themselves walking through the aftermath of the battle, which the Vox Populi had won. They were busy rounding up any Founder survivors issuing beatings and hurling explicit insults at their unfortunate prisoners. It seemed that DeWitt could have intervened at any stage, but it was easier for the two of them to avoid attention and leave the Vox Populi to their sadistic fun. Yet, as DeWitt reached the top of several long staircases, a young Founder member was about to face execution. This finally prompted the protagonist to intervene and shoot his would-be killer.

Here the demonstration became incredibly hectic, with around 10 minutes of large-scale combat and, for want of a better term, platforming. This is something which equally felt alien to the Bioshock universe and no doubt many fans will feel particularly hesitant. While there have been some epic set-piece battles in previous titles, this particular sequence was something very different and was much faster paced than anything from either existing Bioshock games. Perhaps the biggest change to the combat is that DeWitt can no longer carry multiple weapons permanently. Instead it is necessary to chop and change between arms depending on their availability and weapon

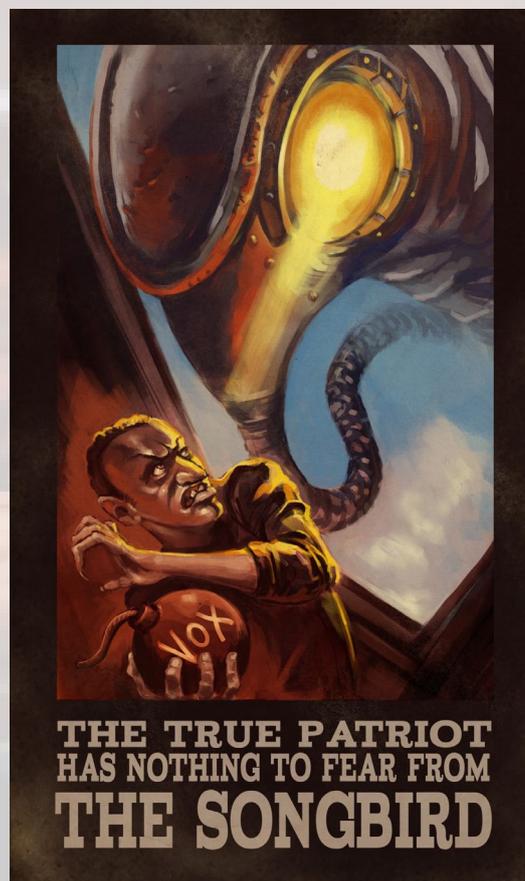


BIOSHOCK INFINITE IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



supply. Throughout this sequence we saw the use of RPGs, handguns and rifles which had to be routinely swapped as their clips ran dry.

The combat was very fast paced and involved DeWitt having to avoid fire from multiple directions while trying to take out the biggest threats. Elizabeth was able to use her powers to strategically tear out objects, including extra weapons and boxes that could be used as cover. In one particular section, she tore out a large cargo container that crushed several of the attacking Vox Populi. The speed and intensity of the combat was rather confusing and their seemed to be little direction or guidance on how to tackle the situation, suggesting

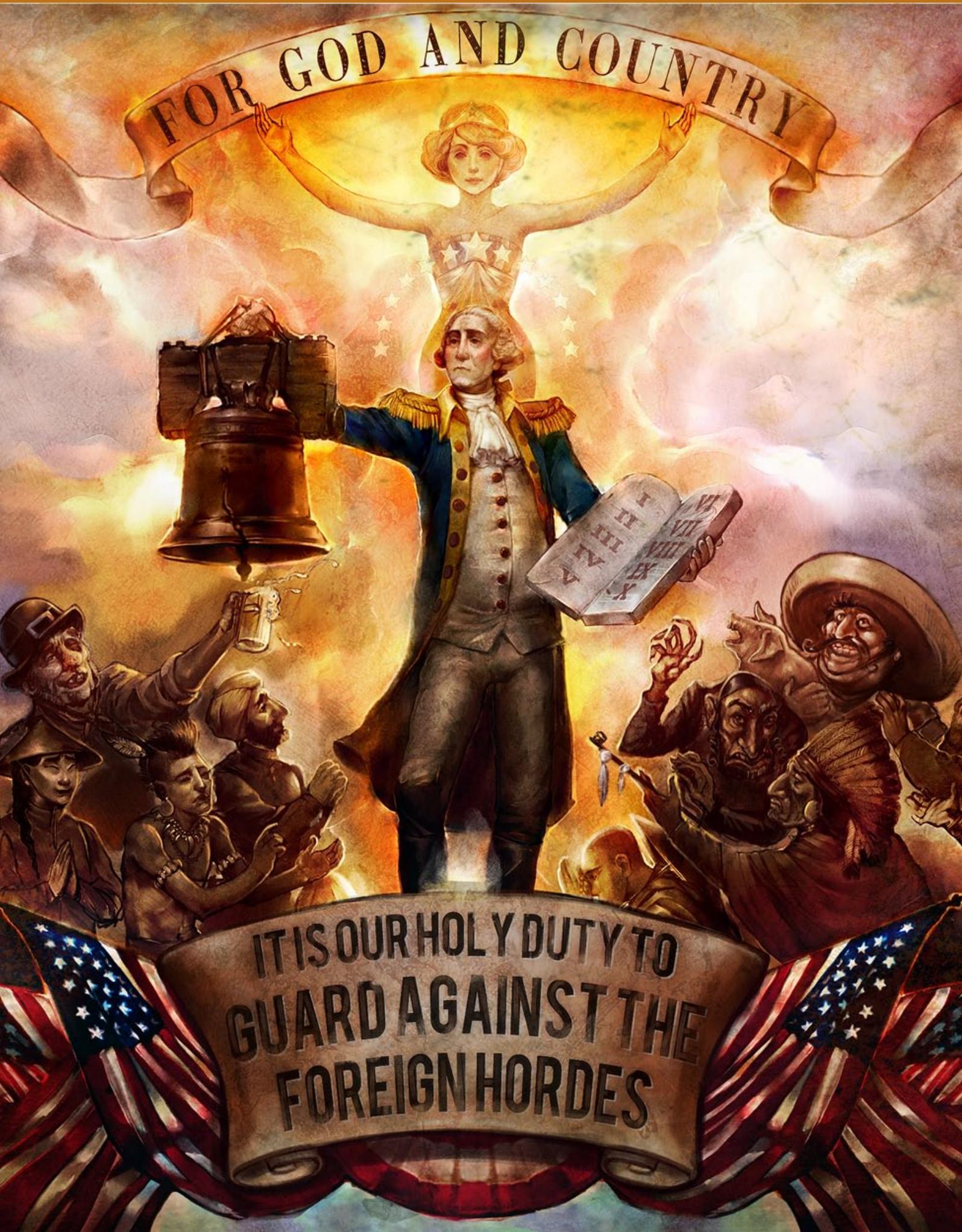


there is freedom on how to fight.

Key to the battle was the use of the Skyline transport system, which is very similar to the grind rails from the Ratchet & Clank series. This form of monorail that is ridden using a wrist mounted hook could be used to rapidly move around the environment and reach critical, tactical locations. DeWitt jumped onto it early in the combat and rode it to a small ledge, taking out a troublesome opponent carrying an RPG. At this stage an enormous airship loomed out of the sky with a devastating series of missile launchers attached that began to carpet bomb the area. However, the RPG DeWitt had recovered was not sufficient to take down the beast and he was forced to improvise.

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BIOSHOCK INFINITE IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



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This prompted a long and violent chase along the Skyline as he fought off enemies and routinely swapped tracks, in order to get close enough to jump on board the zeppelin and sabotage the engines. The combat on the Skyline seemed pretty disorientating at first and DeWitt was limited to using only one handed weapons to fight off the Vox Populi. After the airship was repelled, the two heroes were afforded only a brief pause to recover before an ominous shriek filled the air. Suddenly, Songbird emerged out of the clouds prompting a tantalising end to the demonstration.

Bioshock Infinite is still an incredible looking game, but some portions of this preview raised some concerns. The “tears” that can be accessed by Elizabeth, in particular the time travelling ones will need to be handled with caution in order for them to fit in with the universe and not feel so jarring. Perhaps the biggest concern is in retaining the spirit and atmosphere of the Bioshock universe, as the large scale, fast-paced combat that ran over large areas seemed very different to the familiar. However, Irrational Games’ experience and

knowledge will surely be able to mitigate these worries. Similarly, we have a lot of respect for them for trying something brave and fresh with the series. Bioshock Infinite is still one of our most anticipated titles, but we’re anxious to see that the unique ambience and feeling of the series remains intact. E3 demonstrations always showcase the most intense and action packed elements, so hopefully Irrational will showcase some different and more subtle portions before the projected release sometime next year.



Written by **Chris Wakefield**

ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM IN-DEPTH PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



The Elder Scrolls series has an unprecedented pedigree in the RPG genre and the last entry, Oblivion was one of the finest games of its generation. So, when a follow up was announced in 2010 the anticipation reached extraordinary levels. Bethesda Game Studios are undoubtedly feeling a huge pressure, so can Skyrim meet the expectations of thousands of fans?

Our 30 minute hands-off demonstration began with a truly jaw dropping snowy vista that was a perfect showcase for the brand new engine that the studio have created. The environment seems as detailed and involving as ever with plants littering the sides of a mountain stream which even had fish swimming upstream in it. The lighting was also very impressive and the dynamic snow littering the rocky outcrops looked truly amazing throughout the early stages of the preview.

Switching from first to third-person highlighted that there have been improvements to character animation, with Havok technology being implemented. The animations were particularly fluid and lifelike, flowing seamlessly from running to jogging. Early combat in the demonstration involving these new movements really impressed us as the main character fought off a pack of rather vicious timber wolves. While battling the lead wolf of the pack a finishing move kicked-in showing the hero brutally stabbing it with an overhead blow. These dynamic camera sections are similar to those introduced in Fallout: New Vegas and seemed to add a satisfying sense of closure to each tough encounter.

Not long after the wolves had been defeated a small group of bandits started to rain arrows in the direction of the lead character. Here the developers were keen to emphasise how they have tailored the combat skills to be much more



ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



relevant and useful to the player. Instead of dividing abilities between "Blade" and "Blunt", as per Oblivion, now weapons are divided by handedness allowing people to favour long swords and maces rather than one or the other.

Magic has also been given a radical overhaul with certain skill categories being culled entirely and their spells transferred to alternatives. Spells can now be assigned to different hands, allowing for you to wield a sword and cast at the same time making it immediately more relevant to characters with broader play styles. Two of the same spell can be equipped in both hands, increasing effects such as potency and duration, something that proved especially useful in dispatching the bandit archers.

After the combat concluded the developers showcased the very different menu system which has been streamlined and designed to be as user friendly as possible. The inventory is divided up into 4 key areas in a very different manner to Oblivion, allowing for easier item management. Every item in the game has a fully rotatable 3D

model when inside the inventory, which generally seems rather pointless practically but allows the artists to display their hard work. Rather worryingly one of the items that was shown was a Nirnroot but the developers remained rather elusive whether you'll have to track down a hundred of these tricky plants again as part of a quest.

However, when looking at documents and notes, this function seems far more useful and can be used to read any of the 300+ books included in the game. These tomes won't generally advance the story but will provide an additional layer of story for those that are interested. The developer tantalised the room by showing off a "Mysterious Note", which simply contained a very sinister black handprint and the ominous text "We know". It seems clear that Bethesda Game Studios are still providing a rich and highly detailed world full of things to discover.

Skills are shown to the player as constellations and are now accompanied by a progression tree where you can pick perks as you level up. This

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ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM IN-DEPTH PREVIEW



method seems like a fusion between Oblivion and Fallout 3 and seems far more understandable to the average player, although whether or not a degree of complexity has been retained remains to be seen. One thing the developers were keen to emphasise is that now every skill is useful and more limited ones including Acrobatics and Athletics from Oblivion have been omitted.

The in-game map has also been overhauled and is now more 3D in nature showing the topography and terrain of Skyrim allowing you to plan walking routes more effectively. Fast travel returns, as do horses, to enable you to move around the vast game world quicker than on foot. Towns are also still key locations and we were shown around Riverwood, a logging town situated high in the mountains. Walking around the settlement was impressive with people going about their daily lives chopping wood, sharpening axes and generally living. The inn in the town could be searched for gossip, leading to quests or you could go around and even sabotage the logging mill: a move that would sabotage the local economy. Dialogue functions differently from Oblivion and now takes place in real time. Conversation options are still present but the talking seems more

streamlined and fluid.

Leaving the peaceful tranquillity of the snowy mountain community, the main character began to ascend a perilously rocky outcrop where a snow storm began to appear. Checking the map, the developers guided the hero toward a nearby map marker. Bleak Falls Barrow is just one of the 150 dungeons present in the game and would be the location of the demonstration of one of the in-game quests: "The Golden Claw". However, the character had to get into the cave first which was easier said than done with a dragon standing in the way. This huge, fire breathing behemoth towered over entrance and immediately began to attack breathing a fountain of fire and snarling viciously. The animation of these creatures was truly astonishing and it is clear that these enemies will be intensely challenging opponents.

Heading through the early areas of the dungeon, our hero wielded two one-handed swords simultaneously, while utilising a new form of spell: "shout magic". The central character of Skyrim is "Dragonborn" giving them a special form of magic that can be used while wielding other spells, weapons or shields. They are upgraded through defeating dragons and absorbing their souls,

ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM IN-DEPTH PREVIEW

eventually creating incredibly potent, devastating abilities. The main shout power that was utilised was one that used sound to push back enemies, knocking their guard down and allowing time for some quick attacks.

The range of monsters that populated Bleak Falls Barrow was pretty diverse including a giant Frostbite Spider that would certainly give arachnophobes severe nightmares. This eight-legged monstrosity was eventually dispatched using a flame staff and a sword. Other beasties included Frost Trolls which were equally vulnerable to fire and a selection of undead creatures known as Draugrs. These skeletal monsters were particularly tough and could summon creatures from the planes of Oblivion to help them. However, the use of a chain lightning spell, which damaged every enemy in a room, was

enough to send them back to the grave.

The titular golden claw from the quest's title was recovered from the body of a traitorous bandit and was essential for progressing through the dungeon. Skyrim will feature more puzzles than before and the claw was actually a key needed to solve a simple rotating symbol lock. Hopefully the inclusion of some puzzles will provide some more variety than simply finding a particular key for a certain lock, although how complex these challenges will get is currently unclear. A handy new spell is "Clairvoyance" an ability that will provide you with a glowing line, similar to Fable's "Breadcrumb Trail" mechanic. This seemed a bit of a needless inclusion, given the excellent quest markers from Oblivion and seems to be a move to cater for those with short attention spans. The highlights of both Morrowind



ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM IN-DEPTH PREVIEW

and Oblivion were exploring and questing alone without hand-holding and excessive guidance to dilute the experience.

As the quest reached its conclusion and the player character emerged into an open area there was a sudden roar from above and the dragon from the entrance to the dungeon reappeared. Bethesda Game Studios highlighted that dragons have complex AI and can pursue the player if they decide to. Here an epic battle began, involving some of the local wildlife including a Giant and a herd of Mammoths. After a protracted and difficult battle with the beast, involving a range of different weapons and spells, the dragon finally crashed to the ground. As the creature collapsed its soul was absorbed by the Dragonborn protagonist, earning a special form of experience that can be spent on shout magic spells. This was a surprisingly emotional and impressive display and once the soul was fully consumed, the only remnant of the dragon was a charred skeleton.

However, there wasn't a chance to recover before another dragon, clearly angered by the death of its fellow, swooped out of the sky and began to immolate the landscape. Dashing to the relative safety of a nearby tower, the player temporarily took refuge while some guards attempted to take down the beast. This was not a smart move as one was toasted and the other savaged by the rows of razor sharp teeth. Entering into the menu for a final time, the protagonist utilised his dragon soul experience from earlier to upgrade his shout magic to a particularly high level, unlocking a new storm-based ability.

Climbing to the top of the tower and activating this new power, the weather suddenly changed and a massive thunderstorm loomed overhead. Suddenly huge bolts of lightning rained down from the clouds, crippling the dragon's wings and causing it to spectacularly crash to the ground

and in a cloud of damp earth. Jumping down and approaching the writhing creature, the hero clambered on top and initiated a finishing move. As this monster's soul was absorbed the demo came to a spectacular close which had unquestionably showcased the enormous variety in the game.

Skyrim has an awful lot of expectations attached to it. For Bethesda to follow up Oblivion with something as successful and complex is certainly going to be a difficult achievement. But on the basis of this, admittedly limited, showing at E3 it seems that they are handling this pressure admirably. Skyrim was without doubt one of the highlights of the show and the potential for true greatness is clearly a very real possibility.

Indeed, the only real worries are some of the simplifications that seem to have been implemented to help new players which may alienate some of the most ardent original fans. Similarly, the notorious reputation for bugs and glitches may well continue with this instalment, although hopefully with a November release there will be time to significantly reduce them. It's difficult to fault the gameplay that we saw this week, as building on an already incredible model from Oblivion can surely only be a good thing. If you aren't as excited as seemingly every gamer worldwide about The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, you might want to check your pulse. Otherwise, you might be a Draugr.



Written by **Chris Wakefield**

HITMAN: ABSOLUTION PREVIEW

AVAILABLE FOR:



The Hitman series has lain dormant for some time, since the last entry into the series five years ago. Rather like its dark protagonist, Agent 47, the latest entry seems to have been carefully biding its time and waiting for the right moment to strike. That moment seems to have been at this year's E3 convention and it went straight for the jugular.

After IO Interactive's controversial Kane & Lynch series was met with a lukewarm response from critics, it is nice to see the developer on more familiar ground with their genre-defining assassin simulator. After the heights reached by Hitman: Blood Money and Agent 47's five year absence there is a great deal of pressure for Hitman: Absolution to deliver. From our E3 demonstration, IO Interactive was both brave and confident that this latest chapter will live up to fan expectations and deliver another quality slice of stealth-based murder.

Very little has been detailed about Hitman: Absolution's plot aside from Agent 47 finding himself in the centre of a "dark conspiracy" after being betrayed by the people he trusted. It has been hinted at by the developers that long-term character Diana from the mysterious agency that

Agent 47 works for will again feature in the game. Interestingly the long term composer for the Hitman series, Jesper Kyd does not appear to be returning. This seems like a bold move considering his previous award winning work on the franchise, but the music featured in the demonstration felt comfortably familiar.

The developers were very keen to stress that the mission that they were showcasing was not one of the more traditional "hits", where Agent 47 had to stalk and dispatch a target. Instead it was more story-based and involved a number of set-pieces which would showcase the new innovations in the series. The level took place in Chicago that was experiencing a torrential rain storm, where Agent 47 was hiding out in an abandoned library building. However the entire city's police force seemed to have been informed of his location and promptly surrounded the building. Our preview began with the police entering the main atrium and beginning their manhunt for everyone's favourite bald contract killer.

As the camera panned up, Agent 47 was revealed to be hiding on an upper walkway and soon began to stealthily work his way along the balcony using the low railing for cover. Switching

HITMAN™

A B S O L U T I O N

HITMAN: ABSOLUTION PREVIEW



from cover-to-cover is something more familiar from third-person shooters than stealth titles but seemed to work well here. Evading the patrolling guards' lines-of-sight looked challenging and it wasn't long before Agent 47 had dropped to a ground floor and taken cover in a small secluded area well in the darkness. Before he could move forward, a cop was ordered to investigate the shadowy corner, prompting Agent 47 to activate one of Hitman: Absolution's new features: "Instinct".

This addition is a form of "assassin vision" that is the product of the contract killer's years of experience and knowledge. It creates a coloured view of the environment that highlights enemies through the walls and visualises their eye-lines and patrol routes. This mode cannot be activated infinitely and must be earned by performing well such as by evading and incapacitating opponents. At first, this seemed like a radical simplification of the classic, complex gameplay but as the demonstration progressed it appeared much less so.

"Instinct" allowed Agent 47 to the inquisitive police officer by hiding outside his vision before continuing to work his way forward through the patrols. Pausing to disable the library's lights, he

gradually worked forward across the crowded atrium making good use of several low check-in counters. Along the way he made use of several improvised weapons including a power chord that was used to strangle an unfortunate officer. Not long afterwards he used a marble bust to cave in the skull of another cop, before pausing next to a large drop through a broken floor. Climbing upwards he waited for a patrolling policeman to walk past before leaping up and grabbing him sending him to the bottom of the drop with a sickening snapping noise.

Agent 47's death-dealing abilities certainly haven't been compromised in this instalment and his kills were as brutal as ever. However, as he made his way around the upper section a number of pigeons were startled prompting an additional officer to be dispatched to investigate the disturbance. This led to Agent 47 clambering on top of a ledge above a doorway, just as they entered through it. There were a few tense moments as Agent 47 stood silent, while the officer glanced around before heading back down the stairs. Without pausing, Agent 47 pursued and took the poor individual hostage using him as a human shield in between the exit and the crowds of police.

HITMAN: ABSOLUTION PREVIEW

This led to a tense stand-off as the assassin began to edge slowly backward as the Chicago Police Force followed. As he neared the doorway the officers abandoned their principals and promptly opened fire on their helpless colleague. Forced to improvise, Agent 47 made a break for the stairs and made it up several flights before pausing and picking off a few pursuers with a handgun. Using this brief lull in the action, he fired upon an old chandelier which crashed down the stairs cutting off the flow of officers.

Making his way out onto the roof a helicopter had joined in the search, alerted by the radio messages of the trapped police. Using cover to sneak through several abandoned buildings he stumbled across a single officer who was clearly highly vulnerable. Waiting for him to move, Agent 47 incapacitated him and took his uniform. While in disguise he walked out in plain sight of the chopper and was promptly hailed by its pilot using a loudspeaker. When asked whether he had seen the suspect, he remained motionless fooling them into thinking nothing was amiss. Unaware that anything was wrong the pilots promptly flew elsewhere to resume their search.

In Hitman: Absolution acting is an essential part of disguising and hiding in plain sight is particularly important. The enemy AI has also been overhauled to try and reduce the “trial and error” approach that was needed in some of the early titles. Enemies will now have more stages of suspicion and their reactions will be more nuanced, not simply flipping

between “normal” and “alert”. In order to avoid suspicion IO Interactive claim it will be necessary to “surf on the ‘fringes’ of being discovered”. This system sounds suspiciously over-elaborate but the evidence from the preview did seem to boast improved AI from Hitman: Blood Money.

After avoiding the attentions of the police helicopter led Agent 47 into a stoner apartment that was littered with marijuana plants. Here his disguise as a member of the law would count for nothing forcing him to slowly sneak and bide his time. After waiting for the growers to become distracted and start attempting to flush their stock down the toilet, he made a move and worked his way into the main living room. A seated junkie was too baked to even really notice Agent 47 take down an investigating police officer, mumbling contentedly to himself about “police on police brutality, cool”.

This final chapter was especially tense as the contract killer began to make his way out of the apartment complex in the midst of the huge manhunt. Making his way down the stairs past several inquisitive officers was intimidating especially when they began to turn and focus their attention on him. Activating Instinct, Agent 47 drew his police cap down over his face and looked away, fooling most of the officers who commented he had probably been allowed to leave.

However, before he could get out of the front door a S.W.A.T. team blocked his way forcing him to think





quickly. Moving to one side of the corridor he spotted a box of donuts and busied himself with eating one as the special weapons team made their way behind him. Heading through the doorway he made it out into a bustling crowd which had gathered to observe the police operation. Blending into the throng of people he disappeared into the rainy Chicago night.

Hitman: Absolution was definitely worth the lengthy wait for its appearance and as the developers noted, it feels similar but different. The sense of still being a powerful hunter in the midst of prey is definitely still present and Agent 47's chilling professionalism also returns. The new Instinct mode feels like a good inclusion and doesn't seem to dumb-down the complex gameplay.

However, the biggest issue we had with this demo was the amount of freedom on display. Freedom is being touted as the main theme of Hitman: Absolution but there was little of this evident in

the preview. While this would admittedly have been difficult to showcase in a brief playthrough there didn't really seem to be multiple routes or options available. When challenged on this issue IO Interactive were understandably defensive and promised that there were lots more features that they were desperate to show off in the coming months. We are very excited about returning to the shadowy world of professional, clinical killing. Knowing the developer's reputation for variety Hitman: Absolution looks set to be another satisfying stealth experience.



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