

# GameOn MAG

The Official Gaming Magazine from GameOn.co.uk

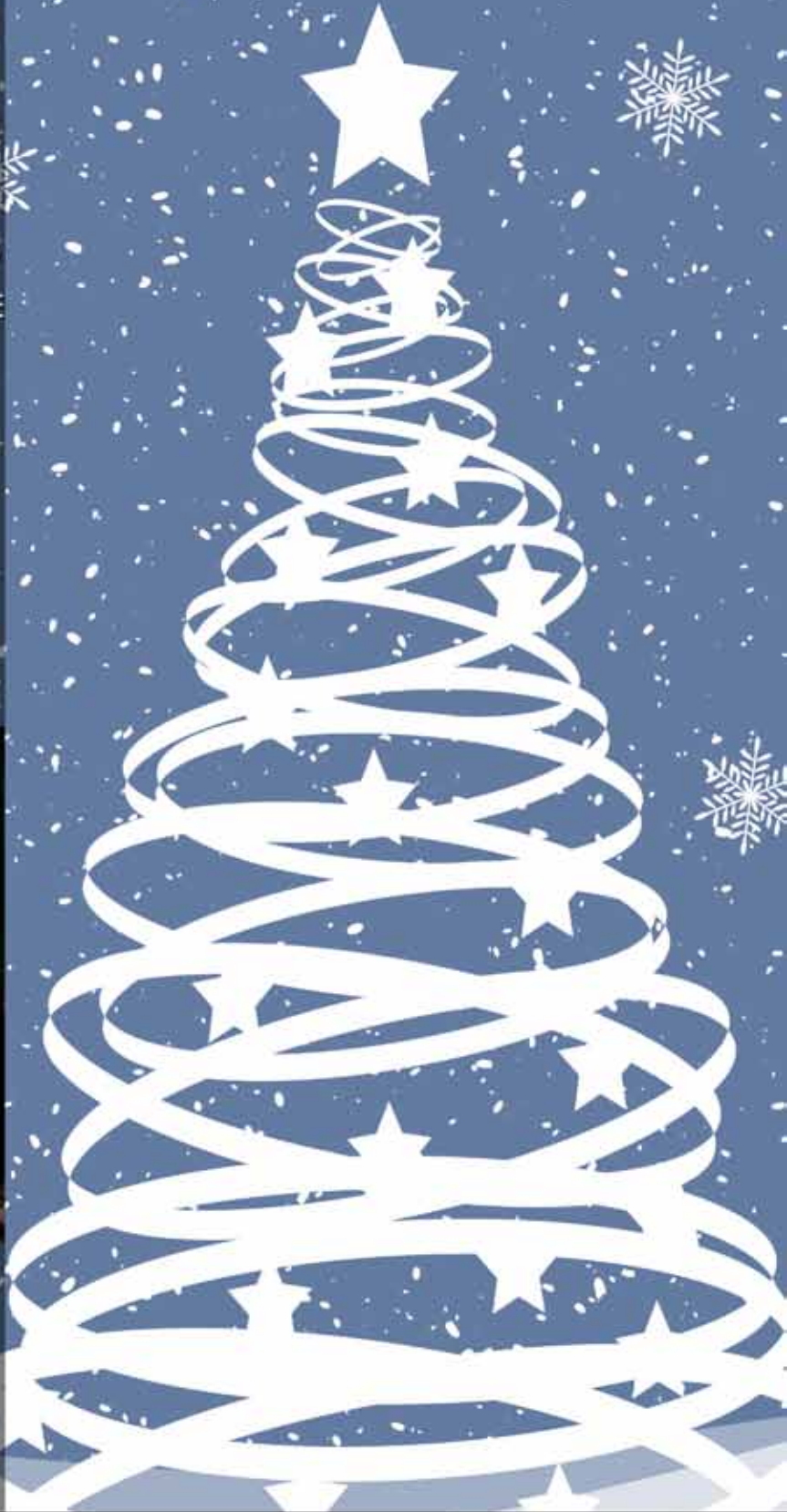
Issue 6 Christmas 2008

## SONIC UNLEASHED

FOLLOWING LAST MONTH'S PREVIEW OF SONIC'S LATEST OUTING, HERE COMES THE FULL REVIEW FROM THE GAMEON TEAM

## LEFT 4 DEAD REVIEWED

SURVIVE THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE WITH THREE OF YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS IN THIS EXTREME SURVIVE EM UP FROM VALVE



8DS PS2 Wii PSP PC PS3 XBOX 360



A close-up photograph of a red gift box wrapped in gold ribbon. The ribbon is tied in a bow, and the gold has a textured, woven appearance. The red box is visible through the ribbon's folds.

merry christmas  
from the gameon mag team



# ISSUE 6

## WELCOME

meet the team

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In light of the christmas spirit, we've created this mini-issue for you to enjoy in the few days before Santa comes down your chimney, and leaves a present or two under your tree.

The GameOn magazine team wish you a Merry Christmas, and all the best for the new year!

## THE EDITOR

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Disclaimer: The content featured throughout this magazine may contain links to your forum where there may be unsuitable language for children or those of a sensitive nature. We highly suggest that you are at least of the age 13 to visit the forums or click the links within the magazine.

# ARTICLE

## THE GAMES OF 2008

**As 2008 draws to a close, this year has brought a great selection of games. We have seen the release of some huge sequels, the resurrection of some old franchises as well as some truly magnificent creative innovations. Gaming is constantly growing and evolving and is now recognised as an important part of the media, with sales revenue continually putting to shame Hollywood blockbusters. We hope this recap brings back some memories from the year and the hopes that 2009 can be better than ever.**

### Fallout 3

This was a glorious sequel which managed to reinvent one of gaming's greatest series as a textbook example of how an RPG game should be done. Bethesda managed to live up to the huge expectations placed on the game before release and delivered something which was dark, rich and perhaps most importantly: fun. Using a 1950s alternate timeline meant that the game's atmosphere was perfect and clever touches helped to make the post-apocalyptic nuclear wasteland a joy to explore. The level of detail was exceptional and the sheer size of the game world, alongside a variety of approaches meant this was one of the best titles of the year. Additional content released almost monthly has been announced in early 2009 for the PC and Xbox 360 to add even more to an already outstanding game.

### Mario Kart Wii

Fun and frolics in surplus measures make Mario Kart Wii an envious Wii exclusive. Wonderful presentation and pleasant graphics provide a layer of sheen on top of Nintendo's excellent gameplay, which adds new features from previous outings and succeeds in creating a more enjoyable experience. A huge range of tracks and well known characters are joined in harmonious matrimony with superbly addictive online racing. The battle mode and AI have been criticised, but it isn't enough to knock this off track and spoil the hours of good laughs on offer. The bundled Wii Wheel works well and helps make this a must have for all Wii owners looking for a great time.

### Left 4 Dead

Since Valve announced a co-operative online zombie survival title in 2006, gamers have been excited. Two years later, the wait was definitely worthwhile as Left 4 Dead is an adrenaline-fuelled throwback to every zombie B-Movie.

Satisfyingly, the recent trend for co-op wasn't just a lazy gimmick but an essential gameplay element which helps to separate this game from the pack. You are forced to work together to simply survive and are constantly challenged by Valve's ingenious AI "Director" who controls the challenge you face. By offering a different game each time you play, as well as the trademark polish Valve is known for, Left 4 Dead is definitely a game that you should experience and should be supported by a wealth of content in the future.

### Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

Always managing to put a smile on your face while remaining tactically adept, Red Alert 3 pleurably continues the successful trend of its two predecessors. The highly amusing full motion videos return with superb casting and production values, with paranormal schoolgirls and lightsaber wielding samurai's reminding us of the extremely ridiculous originality which made us fall in love with the series. The gameplay remains largely untouched from previous outings, but you can now play the whole single-player campaign co-operatively online, and let's not forget the soundtrack which has you screaming to Hell March once again. This all means that while Red Alert 3 isn't genre defining, it is a whole lot of fun.

### Grand Theft Auto IV

Rockstar could have easily thrown anything together and put a Grand Theft Auto title on it and people would have bought it in their thousands. Yet, despite an underwhelming PC conversion, the game was an astonishing achievement. Creating an incredibly detailed and believable game world was something Rockstar managed, with Liberty City seeming to live and breathe with a sense of familiarity. Creating a darker story with some more complex characters was a brave decision, and whilst this sometimes felt at odds with the satire, the story was never boring. The addition of 15 multiplayer modes was an inspired addition, if only for the chance to get together with friends and cause some havoc.

### Super Smash Bros. Brawl

The third instalment of the mighty Super Smash Bros. legacy is especially worthy of the impressive critical triumphs it has received. Bringing together a fine selection of Nintendo favourites like Link and Wario, and also third-party characters such as Sonic the Hedgehog, Super Smash Bros. Brawl is a grand exclusive and pinnacle for the Nintendo Wii. The outstanding musical score and sound effects will bring back and generate new fond memories, whilst the elation of the traditional gameplay is even more

refined with smashing entertainment values. Commended for being accessible to beginners and veterans of the series, Super Smash Bros. Brawl also provides extraordinary staying power on solo and multiplayer modes alike.

### LittleBigPlanet

This much needed PlayStation 3 exclusive was a revelation on release. Whilst many expected something good, what we got was something truly special. A well refined platform game at heart, the game naturally gives you a wealth of levels to try with a huge number of awards available. However, the real beauty of the title was in the creation and sharing of your own levels, as well as trying out some of the frankly bizarre ideas other people have had. The ability to try levels from any region, Europe, Asia or North America is great and helps to reduce the usual notions of regional lockdown. With an enormous amount of replayability, LittleBigPlanet is a title which looks set to build on its already strong community.

### World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King

The second expansion to the extremely addictive MMORPG could have easily just cashed in on the aforesaid addiction, but instead provides superior quality and polish, showing why World of Warcraft is the best in its class. The graphics and audio remain dependably solid, but it's the gameplay where the real success of the series remains. Adding a large new snow and ice continent, Northrend, the Wrath of the Lich King also contains the first complete player versus player (PvP) zone in Wintergrasp, which provides large scale assaults with a fresh and exciting pace. With a new story and class to play, plus a more interesting levelling process, players have little hope of escaping their addiction in the near future.

### Rock Band 2 and Guitar Hero: World Tour

After the phenomenal success of Guitar Hero III and Rock Band, the rival franchises were bound to fight it out in the sequels. Whilst there was much criticism over the outrageous price for the European version in comparison with other regions, the games themselves were well received and sold enormously. With a degree of controversy over which title was better, the consensus is Rock Band 2 due to a generally better soundtrack and better notation for songs. However, in a good move by both publishers, instruments are cross compatible with the other games meaning you don't have to splash out even more money on new peripherals.



# ARTICLE

## THE GAMES OF 2008

In the long run, it remains to be seen if the popularity of these games will continue, but at the moment they can do little wrong.

### **Burnout Paradise**

The fifth in the long standing high octane racer series brings with it an open city to drift around. While the lack of retry options and reliance on using the map brought criticism, Burnout Paradise is still the fastest racing game out there and one of the most enjoyable too. The sound effects pack a world class punch, and the graphics aren't bad either, with the usual flamboyant car designs and remarkable crashes. The ultra high speed antics and varied long lasting campaign further heightens Burnout Paradise profile, with the free downloadable content making this an outstanding title. For the first time in the series, a Windows version of the game has also been announced.

### **Gears of War 2**

Arguably the most anticipated title for the Xbox 360, this exclusive title chainsaw-ed its way onto million of consoles in November. The game further refined the already excellent tactical gameplay by adding a variety of new weapons and enemies. Gears of War 2 responded to criticism of the original by developing characters further and weaving a more complex story which helped to boost the motivation to continue. Whilst the multiplayer experience isn't as satisfying as the original, it does include a new co-operative "Horde" mode where you are forced to make a last stand against waves of Locust.

### **Sins of a Solar Empire**

Brilliantly weaving real-time tactics and empire play, Sins of a Solar Empire has deservedly put its name on the strategy map. The graphics engine is beautifully efficient at transitioning from viewing an entire solar system right down to a lone ship. A wealth of options and customisation means individual games can last weeks, but the satisfying gameplay and exciting exploration provides a long lasting appeal. Three small expansions are planned with the first, Entrenchment, planned for early 2009. But if you are yet to play and discover Sins of a Solar and Empire and you love a good strategy game, look no further and try this now.

### **Call of Duty: World at War**

With some big name voice acting and action set in the Pacific Theatre and The Eastern Front (again), this title by Treyarch was good if unoriginal. Returning to World War 2 felt to

many like a step backward after the outstanding fourth instalment, but the game was engaging and the multiplayer was still enjoyable and entertaining. The inclusion of co-op was a wise move helping to make the campaign more enjoyable with a group of mates supporting you, and the revive feature helped to ease the otherwise irritating difficulty curve. The jury remains out on the "Nazi Zombies" mini-game: outstanding and hilarious multiplayer mode or an irritating Left 4 Dead knock-off? You decide!

### **FIFA09 and Pro Evolution Soccer 2009**

Every year FIFA and Pro Evolution Soccer vie it out, not just for commercial success, but for a place in gamers' passionate hearts. FIFA09 provides the most realistic gameplay feel to a football game to date, and provides a fantastic fun factor hundreds of matches down the line. Pro Evolution Soccer 2009, meanwhile, provides a completely different gameplay feel, with arcade and fast pace the first words coming to mind. The all new Legends mode tries to intimidate the FIFA equivalent of Be A Pro, but distinctly lacks sufficient quality. Overall, FIFA09 is widely seen as superior in all aspects, with sharper and more vivid graphics, a more varied and enjoyable sound and reliable online play.

### **Far Cry 2**

Far Cry 2 managed an impressive achievement, managing to reinvent the series into a completely different location with a different style to the original. The game world was impressive and the graphics detailed, with the African savannah looking beautiful but threatening. The dedication to realism was impressive with very few menus or inventory screens, though this was at times let down by several problems. With a multitude of graphical and technical issues reported, Far Cry 2 is in need of a patch and several gameplay tweaks for it to fulfil its potential, but it nonetheless represents a game that is original and carefully thought-through.

### **Spore**

Controlling the development of a species from a single celled organism to an advanced space race, and just about everything in between, is a unique and individual experience. While not living up to the massive hype, Spore still manages to create countless new ideas and innovations. The Sporepedia has become a big part of the game, tracking nearly every gameplay experience, with the ability to share them online. The different stages in this evolution simulator will satisfy and appeal to different players, with the creature,

craft and construction creators proving the most popular with the large Spore community, who, despite critically acclaimed success, often dub Spore as a "dull and repetitive experience."

### **Tomb Raider Underworld**

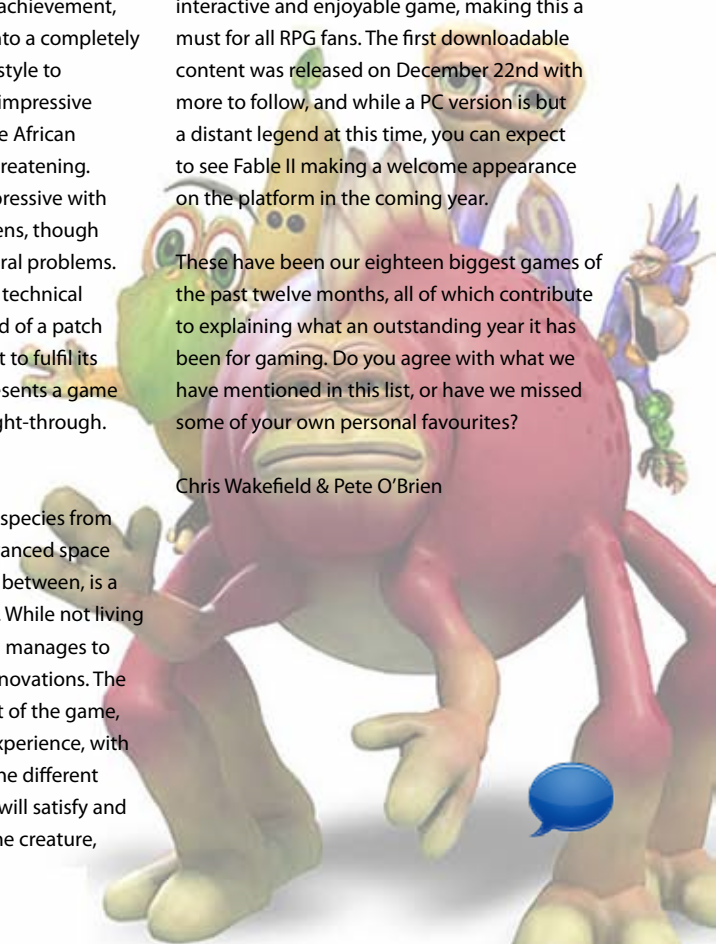
Crystal Dynamics intelligent re-imagining of the Tomb Raider series continued with this excellent sequel to Legend, which also picks up on some elements of Anniversary, their remake of the original game. With a classic Tomb Raider plot involving Norse mythology and some other characters familiar to veterans of the series, the title is an excellent exploration of what it is that makes the series so great. Choosing to focus on exploration, puzzles and platforming the developers helped to revisit why the series was popular, although combat and camera were still, at times, woeful. Despite this, Underworld is an excellent Tomb Raider game which proves that Lara can still perform after 10 years as an icon.

### **Fable II**

An action role-playing game which needs no introduction, Fable II is an exclusive which Xbox 360 devotees can use as proud ammunition for loving their console. While the online co-op failed to live up to its hype, the interesting and dynamic world coupled with a successful combat system provides the basis for what is a highly interactive and enjoyable game, making this a must for all RPG fans. The first downloadable content was released on December 22nd with more to follow, and while a PC version is but a distant legend at this time, you can expect to see Fable II making a welcome appearance on the platform in the coming year.

These have been our eighteen biggest games of the past twelve months, all of which contribute to explaining what an outstanding year it has been for gaming. Do you agree with what we have mentioned in this list, or have we missed some of your own personal favourites?

Chris Wakefield & Pete O'Brien



# ARTICLE

## NEWS ROUNDUP

### **Strong as a diamond – two new games added to the exclusive list**

Mario Kart Wii and Wii Fit have joined the exclusive “diamond sellers” list in the UK, making a total of nine since 1999. A diamond seller is a game that sells more than one million units on a single format, and currently features PS2 games GTA III, GTA: Vice City, GTA: San Andreas and The Simpsons: Hit & Run. The other UK diamond seller games are the two Brain Trainers and New Super Mario Bros. on the DS, with Wii Play and Mario & Sonic At The Olympics completing the list.

### **A Nintendo DS is for life, not just for Christmas**

A warning has been issued by Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs about a sudden invasion of “fake” Nintendo DS and DS Lites. Such bootleg handheld consoles are not official Nintendo products and, furthermore, these batches have dodgy power adaptors, which could result in a Christmas tree or pudding catching alight with disastrous consequences. These consoles are predominantly being sold online from Asia, in particular Hong Kong, and are priced at around £40, much lower than the usual £100-130. Potential buyers beware!

### **Empire: Total War delayed**

But don't panic; it's only by a few weeks. The game was due out on February 6th, but has now been given an ominous new date of “early March”. Considering the superior reputation of Creative Assembly - the Total War developers - it's most likely that they are again targeting quality over a rushed release. Empire: Total War is one of the goliath spring releases for the PC in 2009, promising smoke flooded battlefields and cannonball flinging contests out at sea.

All news by Pete O'Brien

### **New online rental service from GAME**

In an effort to expand their horizons, the self-explained seller GAME has set up their own online rental service. Similar to its competitors, such as LoveFilm, you set up a rental list, GAME will send out the game(s) for you to play and then send back, at which point they will send out another one. There are currently two subscriptions available on their site: 1 Disc at a time for £9.99 and 2 Discs at a time for £14.99. Both of these costs a little bit more than some other rental options available, but it could be more worthwhile if the range of games and speed of service prove to be superior. There is also a 10 day free trial available on their site, should you wish to touch the water before jumping in.

### **Woolworths closure effects, Sony job losses**

The Woolworths subsidiary Entertainment UK (EUK), which distributes games, DVDs and Music to UK high-street retailers, also went into administration last month. It has also been claimed by UK tabloids that Microsoft is owed £26 million and Nintendo £21 million from the distributor, which both companies will lose should EUK declare bankruptcy. Sony, meanwhile, has announced that it is to cut 8000 jobs from its global workforce in an attempt to save £740 million. It was later announced that the job losses would not affect the PlayStation department.

### **Free Radical Design smashed by administration**

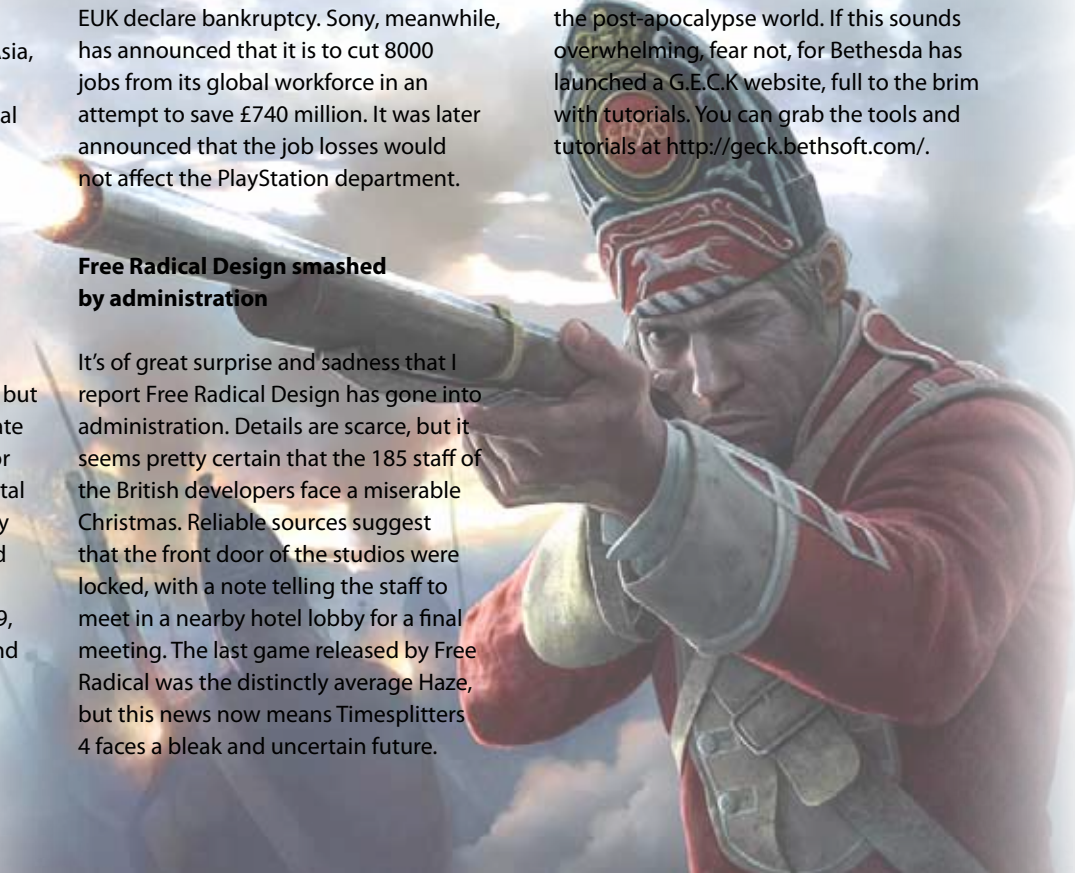
It's of great surprise and sadness that I report Free Radical Design has gone into administration. Details are scarce, but it seems pretty certain that the 185 staff of the British developers face a miserable Christmas. Reliable sources suggest that the front door of the studios were locked, with a note telling the staff to meet in a nearby hotel lobby for a final meeting. The last game released by Free Radical was the distinctly average Haze, but this news now means Timesplitters 4 faces a bleak and uncertain future.

### **Wii makes profit, 360 breaks even, Sony makes loss**

By compiling download data via BitTorrent – the peer-to-peer file sharing protocol – TorrentFreak have compiled a top-ten list of the most pirated games of 2008. The estimated data shows that EA's Spore is top of the list, having been illegally downloaded around 1.7 million times. Considering the game is subjected to the controversial Digital Rights Management (DRM) software SecuCOM, and has only actually sold 2 million copies, these statistics will make grim reading to EA. To add to their tales of woe, The Sims 2 is placed second in the list, with 1.15million copies downloaded illegally. The full list and raging debate can be viewed on the GameOn website and forums..

### **Official Fallout 3 mod tools released for the PC**

The official Fallout 3 mod tools have just been released for the PC. The amusingly named “The Garden of Eden Creation Kit”, or G.E.C.K. for short, allows you to create and edit game content for Bethesda's popular RPG shooter. You can now pour your creative juices into creating your own towns, dungeons, creatures and stories for the post-apocalypse world. If this sounds overwhelming, fear not, for Bethesda has launched a G.E.C.K website, full to the brim with tutorials. You can grab the tools and tutorials at <http://geck.bethsoft.com/>.





# ARTICLE

## RELEASES IN JANUARY

06/01/2009

### **Star Ocean: Second Evolution** – PlayStation Portable

A remake of Star Ocean: The Second Story, a Final Fantasy mimic. Featuring new content, such as new playable characters, this remake is promised a “different feel”.

16/01/2009

### **SOCOM: Confrontation – PlayStation 3**

This fifth outing of the third person action shooter franchise has been given mediocre reviews in America, where the game has been out for three months.

### **Lord Of The Rings Conquest –** **Xbox 360/PlayStation 3/PC**

Think Star Wars: Battlefront with Orcs and Elves. The premise sounds exciting, but can it be pulled off with great quality? Published by EA, this is likely to be at least a commercial success.

23/01/2009

### **Skate 2 – Xbox 360/PlayStation 3**

A skateboarding sequel to the well rated 2007 original Skate. Developed and published by EA, this sequel features more tricks and skateboard customisation, in addition to an “in-depth graphics creator”.

### **50 Cent: Blood On The Sand –** **Xbox 360/PlayStation 3**

Can the sequel to the woeful 50 Cent: Bulletproof be any better? Using the Unreal Engine 3, this action shooter should at least look great.

### **SimAnimals – Nintendo Wii/DS**

This is The Sims with animals. Developed by Electronic Arts, the game will feature 30 species of animals and actually looks quite promising.

30/01/2009

### **Race Pro – Xbox 360**

A racing simulator developed by SimBin, who created popular PC titles Race 07 and GTR Evolution. Focusing on the World Touring Car Championship, Race Pro is likely to be a quality racer for the Xbox 360.

### **The House Of The Dead:** **Overkill – Nintendo Wii**

A spin-off from the main franchise, this on-the-rails shooter for the Nintendo Wii uses the Wii Mote as a light gun and will feature an option for two player co-operative play.

### **Battlestations: Pacific – Xbox** **360/PlayStation 3/PC**

This real time tactics plane action game is set in the Pacific during World War Two. Developed and published by Eidos, this should provide good amounts of fun.

### **Harvest Moon: Tree Of** **Tranquillity – Nintendo Wii**

The ever popular farming simulator finally germinates on the Nintendo Wii in the UK. Expect more of the same strangely addictive gameplay.

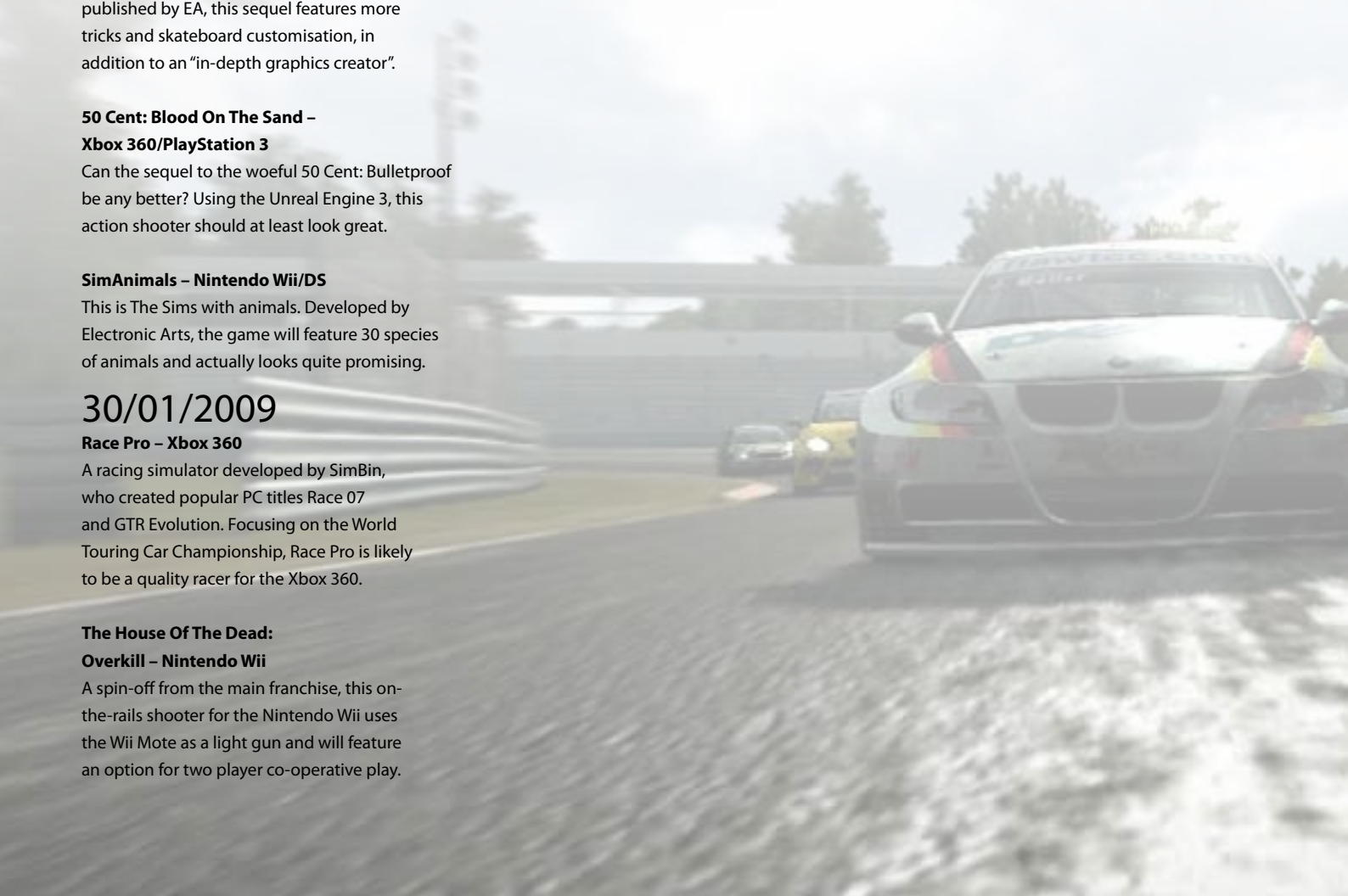
### **WSC Real 08: World Snooker Championship** **2008 – Xbox 360/PlayStation 3/PC**

A must have for all those who adore snooker and don't yet own a snooker table or simulator.

### **Tomb Raider: Underworld – PlayStation 2**

The latest in the Tomb Raider series was fairly well received, and now finally arrives on the PlayStation 2.

*Disclaimer: Release dates are subject to change without prior notice.*



# ARTICLE

## MMORPGS...

Nowadays people all over the world play them. If I am allowed to be more precise, they live them, for these games are nothing less than a life (more or less). You can make friends, marry a wife/husband, become rich, and have adventures not for the faint of heart. A world where anyone can be whoever they want as long as they can believe it.

As we all know most games were made simply for the single-player mode. But we humans tend to act in "packs". We hate to be loners most of the time. So the need for a new perspective in gameplay modes was raised. People needed to play the games they loved with each other at the same time. I remember when I had to play Doom 2 with my cousin. We had to go home and each open his computer and play the same level at the same time while keeping a telephone line open as we describe our finds as we play. It was almost as if we were together. The only thing missing is the space and time concept.

Then the invention arrived: multiplayer availability. Quake 3: Arena was one of the first titles that came to the multiplayer existence, though some would argue what exactly was the first game. I would like to think it was the Quake series since I am a big fan (there I said it).

The system grew bigger from 8 players to 16, and then from 16 to 32. However, the people of gamesville are never satisfied; they want more. They wanted hundreds, thousands, even millions all playing at the same time. Not only for killing each other, but to have their own Single Player mode implemented in a multiplayer form. The term MMOG appeared. But before walking into details, we should know the basics. What is a MMOG?

It isn't something you can eat or drink, but you can get pretty attached to it. Massive Multiplayer Online Games is their true name, offering a new mode for players so they can play with hundreds of friends (or generally people) around the world. Back then MMOGs were simple; they offered a basic game just like a single player campaign, with one difference: you don't play alone, you play with everyone else.

One of the first MMOG was a Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) - not the stuff you used to play in when you were a kid, but games that pretty much resembled text-based-games, but played online. MUDs then developed into full scale state of the art 3D graphic games. A well known example of such a game from the early era is Ultima Online, which was one of the first. It had the feeling of Diablo 2 but online, albeit on a smaller scale.

Developers, along with gamers, didn't just want to play a game that stops at a "Single Player Campaign". In fact they wanted to keep going and never have to stop. That is when the MMOGs started to be "unbeatable" in a sense. You can reach the final level in the game but still have lots to do. This allowed players to continue having fun and never have to replay the whole game again if they don't want to.

With the structure of MMOGs a lot was available (in all levels in various stages in the game). You can spend your life as a trader selling goods or merchandise from one city to another, and from one player to the other. You can be a mighty hero that kills a lot of monsters. You can even be a peace loving man that plays only to have fun with his friends exploring new places or chatting with his friends. MMOGs offered total freedom in a player's actions. Not only that, but MMOGs usually allowed you freedom in choices that weren't there. For one thing in Diablo 2 you always played with humans and for the good side. In MMOGs such as World of Warcraft you can play for either side: good or bad. With whatever race you want, be it orcs, humans, elves, or even gnomes, you can play whatever class you want ranging from the typical warrior, paladin and mage to the more specific like shamans, hunters, and rogues.

MMOGs at first were independent titles. A MMOG was a game that was made by itself and for itself. In other words there were no sequels to MMOGs nor were they made as part of a sequel. For example Asheron's Call (Yet after some time Asheron's Call 2 was created, but the intention to make it wasn't there in the first place), Ultima Online, and Anarchy Online. In the later examples there are Expansion Packs. Expansion Packs made it possible

for MMOGs to apply more content to their structure. But the concept of sequels changed. The first to make a game involved in a sequel was the infamous Blizzard with its ever famous Warcraft games. Blizzard had created World of Warcraft which provided players to play and choose one of the races known in the Warcraft trilogy. What followed next were SquareSoft and its Final Fantasy XIII, where a MMOG was made as part of the Final Fantasy franchise.

However, it seemed that all that diversity and freedom wasn't enough. Genres started to appear in MMOGs, where they were later modified according to the genre they followed. For example, a game like Anarchy Online which followed the RPG genre was called a MMORPG, while a game like PlanetSide was called a MMOFPS, where you were allowed to play as a member of a squad in a war growing between three factions over a world consisting of 6 contents on a "capture the flag" premise. Playing in that environment made it easy for you to earn ranks and advance in the chain of command, which is remarkably run by players.

So many MMOGs now exist that you can never fail to find something that suits your taste. But you will have to remember something important: MMOGs aren't like normal games. You can't just buy The Matrix Online from the nearest store and go on playing for free forever. No sir. You will have to pay a fee for such grand names each month. Ranging from a 5\$ - 30\$ per month, it depends roughly on how popular the game is and what company made it. Yet you can find free ones here and there. Games like Guild Wars have a fee to purchase the CD (or CD key if you download the game itself online), and it will then let you play forever for free, but if an expansion pack is released you have to pay for that too. Other games offer some of its content for free, such as Anarchy Online. On the release day of Shadowlands Expansion Pack, they announced that the original Anarchy Online will be free to play for a whole year. It has been free for years ever since. Even on the new released expansion pack called Lost Eden they gave the froobs (a term known by in game players as Free Player Newbie, referring to all free players in the game) the first Expansion Pack Notum



# ARTICLE

## MMORPGS...

Wars as a gift celebrating that release.

But that is not the end. There are also the absolute free MMOGs such as Lost Chaos, Space Cowboys, and Second Life. Such games are free to play, only offering some content in the form of items for purchase with real money (since in game there is an economy system which deals with "local" currency). But those purchases aren't really necessary. Other games will give you the ability to exchange items or "islands" for real money, a concept that many other game companies claim to be stealing. This raises another flaming debate.

MMOG developers have stated that no inside content of their games should ever be sold to other players by players. With this statement (which you agree to in the EULA) players have gone in a rage. They claim that they own items and characters they play within the game because they paid every penny for it. Yet developers claim that they have made those items so they are have more rights to own them.

Backdoor and under the table deals surfaced. Even today they exist. If you want to see the living proof of such deals you can visit Ebay and search for World of Warcraft accounts. If you are a little informed in one of the games you can then search for a particular item. A Runescape item called Santa's hat could cost as much as \$10000 per item. A level 70 hunter account can cost almost a \$7000 for someone to buy. Huge figures indeed.

Before diving head first into such a vast growing world I would first pick a side. Even in the real world you can "play" the side you want. If you are one of the people that think it is ridiculous to pay for something you buy over and over again with no control over what you bought, like me, you should just stick with the free games dreaming about the day that will come when such games will be made free by a Third World War or even by a cyber revolution. In the meantime you can check out games like Guild Wars, Lost Chaos, Anarchy Online, Asheron's Call, and Second Life.

On the other hand if you really think that the dark side has the cookies and you want to join in with the big boys, I advise

you to think about World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy XIII, The Matrix Online, and Lord of The Rings Shadows of Angmar. Whatever the choice you will have fun and will earn you some new friends. But remember one thing: you are doing it for fun.

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*If you still want more information about MMOGs. If you want a list of games that are free or even with a fee a list is available at [www.mmorpg.com](http://www.mmorpg.com) or [www.onrpg.com](http://www.onrpg.com).*

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Mohamed Magdy



# REVIEW

## SPORE

**Ready to take your own species on an epic journey of evolution from cellular creature to galactic god? The galaxy is yours. Let's get started."**

If you know of the video game phenomenon, 'The Sims', you may or may not know that their creators were Maxis. They haven't really had much success next to their name apart from 'SimCity' or the ever popular 'The Sims' series, so they thought they could astound the globe with a brand new and original title in the form of Spore.

Spore focuses on the well known theory of evolution. Maxis then stick various objects to it to create their very own theory. You start off by choosing a planet out of seven, and plummeting onto it, into the sea, from a meteor in the form of a single celled organism. You choose whether you start as a carnivore or a herbivore and this is where your five part story begins.

As you start the so named "Cell stage", your small oddly shaped looking cell swims around looking for food in the form of your specific type. With a herbivore, you swim around looking for algae and with a carnivore, you swim around looking for tiny creatures and pieces of meat. As you continue eating these, you begin to grow. This is one of my favourite parts of the cell stage. You noticeably see all the bigger organisms around you shrink as you grow in size. As you do so, the things that

were once trying to kill you, are now able to be eaten in one gulp.

As well as swimming around and eating, you collect parts for your creature. To add these parts, you mate with others in your species and create a new cell. Usually in games where you focus on a single character, you stay with that character for

the length of the game. Not in this case. In Spore, you are encouraged to continue mating and evolving. Each time you mate, you can edit your newly created cell in any way, and add the parts you collected during the game. You can turn it from a carnivore to herbivore, you can make it have new limbs or parts like defensive spikes and you can make it have 10 eyes. This however, is just the start of the creature creator.

There were a few problems I had with the cell stage though. The camera on the stage isn't too good. You are looking at your cell from above and as you are moving in each direction, the camera can be very slow to catch up with you. There is no limit to how far you go left, right, up or down, but the camera can sometimes cut part of you off the screen as it is very unresponsive. The game looks good on the cell stage, but how it is played, could be more suited as a beefed up flash game.

Once you have gained enough DNA (the currency for most of the game), you swim to the surface of the sea and evolve into a land creature. The editor once again appears and you are treated to even more things to put onto your creature. This is where the editor really shows you what it can do. You can now change where you put your head, legs, how long your body is, what shape it is and how fat each and every single part of you is. At this point I was pretty impressed at how well you can change parts around the body and at the large variations of each created creature. I was to be even more impressed later on.

Once you have finished editing your creature, you move onto the next stage: The fittingly named "Creature Stage".

Just before the start of the stage, you are shown the timeline of your cell stage. This is a really cool part of the game as it shows you how many times you died, how and when you evolved and what you did during the prior stage. The timeline takes all of your actions together and decides whether what you did in the water makes you a Carnivore, a Herbivore or an Omnivore on land. If your actions were more vicious, then you would be a carnivore, if your actions were balanced, you would be an omnivore.

As you have grown legs, you begin at your nest. The game lets you familiarise yourself with the control system and tips in the top left of the screen help you with what you need to do. It does indeed take a lot of time to work out what you need to do on this stage, but once you get the hang of it, it is quite good to play. Your main goal is again to collect as much DNA as possible to help you evolve. You can do so by either killing or making friends with other species. Killing them gives you more DNA, but befriending them adds them as an ally to help you in fights. A balance of both is probably best.

As in the cell stage, you collect new parts so when it comes to the point where you want to evolve because of sheer boredom of your present creation, you can attach them as you wish. Each part you attach, gives your creation a boost in something. It doesn't matter where you put each part as its purpose is still the same. For example, you could put a large spike on its behind and it would still have a good attack.

The Creature Stage is where things start to get very familiar. If I didn't know any better, the Creature Stage is a dumbed down version of World of Warcraft. You have specific abilities such as Biting, Charging, and Poisoning which can be used when in fight scenes by pressing numbers on your keyboard just like WoW. They also take time to recharge, just like WoW. The creature stage is also a free roaming one, just like WoW. It's identical.

Once you have gained enough DNA once again, you are able to progress to the next stage of evolution: The "Tribal Stage".

Your creatures now have a more developed brain. They are able to understand how to use hand tools and are able to make a tribe. This is where I was simply gob-smacked by the sheer unrivalled editing within Spore. This is the last time that you are able to edit your creatures, and it's the most extensive. You can now put arms on your creatures so they are able to use tools. They can have as many legs or eyes as you want, their body can be altered in an unlimited amount of ways, no matter how many sets of anything you put on your creature, it will still be able to walk, move, and interact with its surroundings. I have seen many creations





# REVIEW

## SPORE

online that take full advantage of the editor and make things such as Pokémon, cartoon characters and other various look-a-likes. The editor is something that rips up anything else that has come before.

Your main goal in the Tribal Stage is to gather food, which is used as currency rather than DNA and build up your tribe. You meet other Tribes along your way and you can again choose to either befriend them, or attack and defeat them. To make them your ally, you bring them gifts, sing them songs and generally are nice to them. To kill them, well, it's self explanatory.

How the stage is played, is once again a carbon copy of another type of game. This time, we see the Real Time Strategy Genre creeping in. To boost your creatures with weapons, you need to build new huts (buildings). The game is played with the same camera angle (overhead). You can produce more creatures (men) to help fight and collect food (resources) or to try and defeat other Tribes (bases). All this sound familiar? Well it is, very much so. The only thing that is different is that in Spore, the mini-map is a load of rubbish.

Once you have made allies or defeated all of them, then you can move on to the next and penultimate stage of evolution. The Civilisation Stage takes the theme RTS, copies it identically and then adds a few new parts to it. I could leave it at that, but I won't, as that would be bad reviewing.

OK, in the Civilisation Stage, you build a base, choose a strategy (Economy, Religious, Military) and kill everyone else using various weapons, tactics and (dare I say it) vehicles. Yes I am still talking about a so called original game. The only thing that really sets it apart from it being a copy is that you can make allies during the game. If you tell them that they are nice people,

then they like you. If you tell them that you think they are 'Lower beings' then they don't like you. No I'm not being sarcastic. Although you can make allies, you have to in the end kill them to progress. This is stupid as a lot of the time you have to give them money for them to be your allies.

After you have defeated all of your friends, you can progress to the final stage of evolution: The "Space Stage". Other than the Cell Stage, this Stage is not (that I know of) a copy of anything else. It is good stage and is an enjoyable stage to play, although some parts are a bit confusing at times. Maybe I just get confused easily, or Maxis haven't explained some of the game stages properly. Both instances are likely, but I would think more of the latter.

You begin by creating your very own spaceship. Again there is a large amount of variables you can choose from, but many of them are the same ones you use to create cars, boats, and aircraft in the civilisation stage. Once you have completed your spaceship design, you can test fly it to get you used to the controls. The flying is bad and the camera isn't inside the cockpit but works as an overhead camera. You have to use either the right mouse button or arrow keys to turn, and move. And the scroll wheel on the mouse, to move higher and lower in the air. It's very tricky indeed.

Once you finish test failing, I mean flying, you are asked to complete missions. These can be going to other planets and studying them or abducting creatures and testing them to get info on them. The travelling to other planets is brilliant, there are hundreds of different stars, planets and galaxies to go on, but the abducting can be hilariously rubbish as picking up creatures can become tricky when you end up with them flying half way across the map.

Spore is a game that doesn't have a genre. It mixes numerous different game types into one single game; and I have to admit this does acts as a double edged sword. It's an original concept that copies others. The idea of the evolution system is a great one, but the way it is played is that of several different games. The game's main superiority is that of its creature creator, the vast amounts of editing that can be achieved in it is amazing. People's imaginations can come to life with it, but without the original game play to go with the original idea, it could be seen as something that is an incomplete package.

REVIEWER: **JAMES BRALANT**  
GAME: **SPORE**  
PLATFORM: **PC**  
DEVELOPER: **MAXIS**  
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**  
RELEASED: **SEPTEMBER 5, 2008**

PLAYABILITY: **8**  
REPLAYABILITY: **9**  
SOUND: **7**  
GRAPHICS: **7**

**OVERALL: 8**



# REVIEW

## LEFT 4 DEAD

**Left 4 Dead makes one thing very clear: Valve know what people want. An online cooperative game in which you and three friends fight off legions of infected humans could quite possibly be one of the best combinations ever. When you consider the fact that the game has been fine tuned and expertly crafted by a company who knows their genres inside out, this is easily one of the games of year.**

The game's premise is simple and places you straight into the action. You play as a survivor who has managed to survive the initial outbreak of a mysterious virus alongside three other survivors. This strange outbreak has transformed most normal people into insane and aggressive enemies who attack en masse and will do everything they can to stop you staying alive. Your goal is simply to escape, using whatever means possible with four different scenarios to test your abilities.

Working together with three others (or the computer controlled AI in single player) you battle your way through the hordes to "safe rooms", which act as checkpoints between the levels. The gameplay is well refined first-person shooting which requires skill and precision due to the game's friendly fire settings, which ensure that teamwork is required.

Weapons are limited with a restricted selection available which gradually gets upgraded as you progress through the scenario. The weapons are relatively different; however the three later firearms

are simply upgraded versions of the Uzi and Shotgun: the game's default weapons. Whilst the rifle offers a new dimension you still yearn for some more creative ways to dispatch the hordes of zombies. Thankfully a pipe bomb (with added siren to attract the infected), the good old Molotov Cocktail, petrol cans, gas tanks and even oxygen cylinders can be used to fend off your attackers.

This brings us to the horde itself, who are the real stars of the game. They are brilliantly designed reflecting their previous lives before becoming the blood stained dead-eyed zombies you face. Military troops sent in to try and control the situation, airport runway workers and office workers now try and mercilessly batter you to death and must be fought off with any means necessary. They will smash through windows, batter down doors, climb up objects and reach their arms towards you through gaps and the sensation is intimidating to say the least.

Whilst the horde forms the bulk of your enemies and is fairly easily dealt with by an organised team, the special "boss" infected are where things get scary. These more advanced opponents can destroy a team easily and must be dispatched as soon as possible. The Boomer is a bloated, sore-covered abomination which spews bile over the survivors alerting the horde to your present and attracting them to you. The Smoker can snare victims with its enormous tongue and drag them into trouble. The Hunter is a fast and agile attacker who pounces on top of

its victim before tearing at their body. These enemies are an excellent addition and require some careful thought and tactics to eliminate, especially as you are normally besieged by the standard enemies at the same time. However, there are another two foes that are much more dangerous. The Tank is a huge hulking infected which can soak up ridiculous amounts of fire and can easily kill an entire team, especially on the hardest settings. Careful teamwork is necessary to defeat the beast usually alongside a petrol bomb or two. The Witch is the last of the special infected and resembles a frail young woman who sits crying. If she is disturbed she will tear into the team at high speed with razor sharp claws. Needless to say she it is best to sneak past her if possible.

The game itself looks and sounds excellent and really carries the feeling of an epic apocalypse horror theme. There are plenty of filmic effects on show such as a slightly grainy feel to the camera and not to subtle indicators such as spotlights at moments of fear. The sound is generally good, with audio cues of music being used instead of on screen hints which is a nice touch. The character voice acting is also great with plenty of variety and little repetition despite numerous plays through the same scenario.

The gameplay itself is satisfying and enjoyable and the excellent Versus mode is a brilliant edition. Replacing the boss infected with human characters and turning it competitive ups the stakes and makes the game challenging and much tenser. It becomes a game of teamwork and skill





# REVIEW

## LEFT 4 DEAD

and it really elevates the experience.

However, whilst being highly polished Left 4 Dead has some niggling flaws which mar its otherwise outstanding appearance. The game lacks a proper server browser and instead you can't choose the server you want to play on, the game does it for you. This is a problem as you can't check

to start with is also a disappointment; presumably the others will follow.

Thankfully the AI director manages to keep things interesting with slightly different item places and enemy locations each time. Yet, this comes predictable after some time with Tanks and Witches having a few specific locations where they tend to appear. On

latency prior to joining the game, and whilst problems don't occur too often when they do it is incredibly frustrating.

Other issues are the short length of the main game; there are four campaigns each with four levels and a dramatic last stand finale. Valve has promised that they will release updates to develop the title in a similar manner to Team Fortress 2, with the first updates due sometime in 2009. The fact that only two campaigns are playable in Versus mode

the harder difficulties a lot comes down to luck rather than skill on where the enemies will appear which does get frustrating.

Yet despite these problems, these are easily addressed in future patches and knowing Valve's dedication and commitment, these will be rectified. Overall, Left 4 Dead is an exciting and innovative original idea and there is no other game like it. With a group of friends covering your back, this is quite simply an essential experience.

REVIEWER: **CHRIS WAKEFIELD**  
GAME: **LEFT 4 DEAD**  
PLATFORM: **PC**  
DEVELOPER: **VALVE**  
PUBLISHER: **VALVE**  
RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 18, 2008**

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

**OVERALL: 9**



# REVIEW

## SONIC UNLEASHED

**Now when I normally review a game I never look at anyone else's reviews until I have finished mine. This is so I don't steal any good ideas or base my opinions on what someone else has said about this game. Unfortunately, when it came to reviewing Sonic Unleashed made by SEGA, it was hard not to see the bashing this game off some of the bigger names.**

While it isn't my place to say if their opinions were right or not, I hope my review can shed some light onto what can be a truly epic game.

With the new game engine in place this has been a long time coming for Sega to finally re-visit old ground and start looking at revamping the Sonic saga again. I have always been a fan of Sega and the Sonic saga, so it was really hard for me to lock my fan boyism in the cupboard while I played this and not be jumping around the room again like I was the first time I saw Sonic on the Sega Mega Drive.

Once again, like all Sonic games, it starts out that Dr. Eggman has some other fiendishly evil plot to take over the world. However, this time it seems he needs Sonic alive to complete his task. After a long intro movie explaining what has happened, you are launched into the game. Sonic Unleashed is split into three different areas of playing. There are the daytime levels with you as normal Sonic going ten to the dozen around set paths, making split decisions to make or break you in that level.

After that there are the night time levels where you play as the new "Warehog" version of Sonic, which is best described as an exploring game mode where you fight your way through bad guys and are left to explore new areas of the

levels. In between these areas there is also a story side to the game where you can ask questions to passers-by, where sometimes you need to ask the right people the right questions to get along in the game. While this part of the game does feel a little lost and seems to break up the flow, it seems needed as without it most people would miss the story line all together, which I feel would be a shame.

As in all Sonic games the graphics make the game and in this one there is no exception. The graphics in this game have been described as 2D/3D, due to the day-time levels. In these parts of the game the camera will pan back and forth as you hurtle pass most of the level in a split second, only ever pausing if you have fallen off or have a combo jump which allows you an extra speed boost and a better path than before. The realism and sense of speed on these levels is crazy making you really having to concentrate to get the job done on every level. While there is always a chance to go back and revisit levels, I feel that this is a must due to the fact that you will have missed 90% of the level on the first play through, as you will have been sticking to one line and that's it.

However, once the sun has set you (Sonic) now turn into a 'Warehog'. These levels are of a slower pace than the previous day levels, and give the player more chance to explore and have fun with the levels. While as the 'Warehog' you have loads of different moves to pull off, and you also have stretchy arms that allow you to jump to new areas and also grab enemies from afar. While most of the night time levels seem to end in a big boss fight battle, the action is split up with puzzles that allow you to use your brain as well as your brawn.

After you have finished a level you will notice one of the new features and also one of the fresh ideas that Sega have put into this Sonic game: a levelling up system. While at first I can see your eyes roll as this isn't a) new or b) exciting, hear me out on this one.





# REVIEW

## SONIC UNLEASHED

As you fight baddies and complete levels you get experience which you can then use to level up your characters this ranges from health to speed. While the only disappointing factor is that there is only two things to level up on daytime Sonic, you will have plenty of fun levelling up your 'Warehog', as you can pull off loads of different combos or even have a enough health to take a good kicking and still survive.

For a game with such a vivid depiction of speed you wouldn't think it would still look as good as it does, but with 720p on my screen while playing everything looks bright and detailed with barely any noticeable slow down or fps loss while running through the speed sections.

While I would say this isn't the most detailed of games - some of the elements in the game do look still rather 2D, like the grass - everything seems crisp and doesn't undermine the game in any way at all. The music's tracks are typical Sonic the Hedgehog tracks that will stick you your head when you are not even playing the game.

While most tracks in the daytime areas are upbeat tracks to gets the blood flowing, the night stage tracks are more relaxing and chilled out, again slowing the pace in this game mode.

It's great to see the Sonic franchise back where it's supposed to be, but after playing for a while the tale tail signs of issues have started to appear. And while the fan boy in me could have ended my review without speaking about these issues,

I feel that I really have to air out a few problems which I have seen in this game. This game unfortunately sometimes suffers from laggy controls, especially during the daytime stages with Sonic, which also has annoying camera angles throughout the game.

While these really aren't a major issue, these do take the shine off the game and make it more annoying. An added factor into this is that most checkpoints start you off in some bizarre places and don't really give you any momentum to get back on the track you were before you pressed A but it never responded. While all the modes in themselves give a new idea to the game it is the Story mode that really slows the game down. Having to chat to people is not only boring but god damn annoying, especially when you really just want to get to the next stage in the events.

The second thing I also found annoying with this mode is the time it takes for you to actually enter into a stage. While I can see where Sega were going with this idea I can also see that it seems that they have been trying too hard to get everything right in the first instance.

While Sonic hasn't been around adventure plat-forming, it has become a tough market to work into, especially with Nintendo doing some ground breaking work with the Mario franchise.

While I can see why Sega have given you two gaming styles to play the game with, it would of been better if the user could play the levels through as either Sonic or the 'Warehog', so all levels can be played multiple times with different parts for different characters.

This would then allow for back tracking to be more fun and imaginative as well as giving us the user more choice.

To sum the game up, it can really be a truly epic game when you are playing well and everything is following together, and that is what this game was all about. I can see that this game has set the bar back in Sonics sights, but unfortunately he has just missed it on this occasion. If this is what we can expect to see from the new and improved Sonic saga then I can't wait for more.

REVIEWER: **SIMON BONDS**  
GAME: **SONIC UNLEASHED**  
PLATFORM: **XBOX360**  
DEVELOPER: **SONIC TEAM**  
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**  
RELEASED: **NOVEMBER 18, 2008**

PLAYABILITY: **7**  
REPLAYABILITY: **6**  
SOUND: **8**  
GRAPHICS: **8**

OVERALL: **7.5**



A night sky with a large, bright firework exploding in the upper right. The firework has many long, thin streaks of light radiating outwards. Below the firework, a dark silhouette of a crowd of people is visible, looking up at the sky. The overall scene is festive and celebratory.

happy  
new  
year

we look forward to  
seeing you in 2009