

GameOn MAG

The Official Gaming Magazine from GameOn.co.uk

Issue 3 Oct 2008

SONY PSP RANGE

There's soon to be three different flavours of Sony's portable gaming monster, and here is how they all size up to each other.

WII FIT TESTED!

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FAZZOUT 3 IS COMING...

Issue 3 - OCT08 - £FREE



8DS. PS2. Wii. PSP. PC. PS3. XBOX 360

ISSUE 3

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Ahh, time for the third issue already! This issue we have plenty of Fallout (and we're not talking about the night after a curry) content for you to feast your eyes on.

We're talking previews, reviews and an in-depth look at the history of the series. This should be enough for you to keep your eyes busy until it is released. As if this wasn't enough, our dedicated columnist is putting his fitness on test, performing a rigorous analysis on his own body to see if he can benefit from a Wii Fit exercise regime.

With all the usual bits and bobs in the mag as ever, this should be another packed issue of top notch gaming entertainment for your eyes!

Yours,

THE EDITOR



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WHAT'S IN ISSUE 3

meet the team

project director
steve greenfield

chief editor
steven dawson

graphics editor
simon bonds

graphics artist
robert whetton

journalists
chris wakefield
pete o'brien
neil hetherington
johan dahlberg
stuart gunn
mohamed magdy

- 3 • Preview: Fallout 3
- 4 • Preview: Cryostasis
- 5 • Console Breakdown: Sony PSP
- 7 • Article: Where Did The Line Go?
- 8 • Blast From The Past: Half Life
- 9 • Post Apocalypse - The Fallout Story
- 11 • Review: Chuzzle
- 12 • Review: Gears Of War
- 14 • The Experiment: Wii Fit
- 15 • Review: Speed Racer
- 16 • Review: S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Clear Sky
- 18 • The Column: Gender Equality
- 19 • Coffee Break
- 20 • Top Trailers
- 21 • URL Index

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PREVIEW

FALLOUT 3

I emerge from the gloom of a dark nuclear bunker into dazzling sunlight which blinds me temporarily. Slowly, the world emerges from the glare and the impact is staggering. Stretching out as far as the eye can see in all directions lays a bleached, irradiated wasteland populated by ruins and bomb craters. This was my introduction to Fallout 3 and the game couldn't have created a better atmosphere.

After acquiring the rights to the game, Bethesda seems to be taking the series in a new direction, while very much retaining the feel of the original. The classic top down view has been replaced with either first or third person perspectives which can be changed in game at the press of a button. This feels fresh and paints the vision of a bleak future in a new and more authentic manner.

You create your character, a resident of nuclear bunker "Vault 101" and set out to investigate your father's disappearance. While this forms the main storyline of the game, lasting between 20 to 30 hours, there will be a large number of side quests that can be performed for various factions, such as the noble Brotherhood of Steel, the remainders of the US government known as The Enclave, or other groups such as the Raiders or the Super Mutants. This level of variety will add an extra 100 hours of gameplay if the player chooses to complete them.

Bethesda appears to be keeping to their ethos by offering an unprecedented level of variety and choice. The freedom found is reminiscent of Oblivion, which is an easy but far too simplistic comparison to make. Fallout 3 offers so much more and Bethesda have gained experience and taken heed of feedback from their previous title. The game doesn't feature an enemy levelling up system but instead presents the player with a variety of opponents from the very beginning, some easy and some virtually unbeatable at a low level.

This seems promising as it reduces the impression that the world revolves around your character and instead

places you in the environment. Tackling the bigger opponent's nets you more experience points towards levelling up, as does increasing the difficulty setting. Thankfully the game features an excellent management tool to provide an overview of your character in the form of the Pip-Boy 3000.

This marvellous tool gives details on everything you could ever need to know, from the weapons and items you are carrying to the level of radiation that you have absorbed. It also manages your perks and stats which are awarded with each level gained. With a level cap of 20, there are plenty of options to tailor your character to your own style and the perks themselves are intelligently designed. These include the jet black humour found in the series and choosing from the excellent range is difficult. The "Bloody Mess" trait caught my eye in particular, which increases the chance of reducing your opponents to a pile of dismembered limbs and bloody entrails. The variety on offer is expansive, and improving your character is satisfying and challenging. In my play test, seeing the experience point's increase already had me planning ahead and developing my own style to tackle problems almost subconsciously. It's this immersion in the game world Bethesda seem to create effortlessly through carefully crafted environments you can't help but explore.

The environment itself is impressive, ranging from small deserted hamlets to enclosed post-apocalypse communities, who all have a use for your unique talents. The wasteland itself is hauntingly desolate and brings to mind classic apocalypse fiction as a key source of inspiration. The authenticity of the 1950s era is also rather chilling and offers a sense of familiarity which taps into the sense of isolationist horror.

The game's opponents you face help to reinforce this, with many of them mutated almost beyond recognition. Hideous bloated flying creatures, gun wielding abominations and radiation spewing monstrosities all attempt to tear you limb from limb. The design is excellent and only serves to make

this horrific vision of the future all the more plausible by taking sci-fi conventions and subtly altering them.

In order to fight off these mutants you have the option to either use real time first person or to use VATS (Vault Assisted Targeting System). VATS essentially pauses the action, allowing you to assess a situation and then use a quota of action points to perform attacks on your enemies. Enemies' individual body parts can be targeted to disable them and make subsequent attacks easier. The system is very smooth, simple and looks excellent. After your actions have been selected they are replayed in a cinematic style slow-motion scene which shows the aftermath. The Fallout series has had a reputation for violence and this game is no exception. Taking a brutally realistic approach, your attacks have shocking consequences. Limbs are torn off by gun fire, bodies turn to ash and heads are literally disintegrated under sustained attack. While this inevitably will be controversial, any less would undo the game's unflinching and uncompromising nature as it helps to paint a bleak vision of the future. Fallout is undoubtedly an adult gaming experience.

In my short time with Fallout 3, I only scratched the surface of a game with meticulous attention to detail and design. This is a game which places so much emphasis on decision making that there are over 500 endings based on a plethora of player choices. Your character feels believable, real, human. Even down to the imperfections such as becoming addicted to medication or alcohol with their own associated withdrawal symptoms just feels right. Lock picking using a pin and screwdriver, sneaking through a Raider encampment or bartering with a weary trader all combine to make Fallout 3 a very promising game.

With a release date of October 31st I am going to prepare by stockpiling canned goods in my garage and starting to convert my basement into a blast shelter.

Bring on the end of the world.

Chris Wakefield.



PREVIEW

CRYOSTASIS

The Arctic Circle, Russian North Pole station 'Pole 21', 1968 - Alexander Nesterov is a meteorologist sent to investigate the final hours of the North Wind, an old nuclear ice-breaker trapped in an icy grave. This steel beast once fought for its country, but during a dangerous mission it drifted into an ice trap slowly freezing to death every living thing on board.

This is the story of Cryostasis, the upcoming survival horror FPS from 1C and 505 Games, which I've been lucky enough to grab a preview screening down in the bowels of the Absolut Ice Bar in London which to me seemed to be quite an apt location considering the concept of the game itself.

You see there is no health bar in this game, nor any of that awful regenerating health malarkey which I have a personal dislike, what we have in this title is a temperature gauge or to be exact, two temperature gauges. Now the outer ring of the gauge represents the external temperature of your immediate vicinity while the inner ring represents your body temperature. This representation of the elements in the game add an element of survival to your game style as there are no health packs or dispensers to help raise your body temp, you must actively seek sources of heat for that job, combined with your enemies dispensing cold damage to the main protagonist, it becomes essential to find something to warm you up before you keel over and die due to prolonged exposure to the extreme cold.

The harsh arctic conditions are very well represented visually too, with all the surfaces covered in frost, including your gloves and weapons, surfaces glisten as the light reflects off the frost that has coated everything in sight. Move to the external areas of the North Wind and you're greeted with harsh arctic winds blowing into you, which in turn drops your body temperature also drastically decreases your view distance to maybe 3 or 4 foot in front of you. Along with this attention to detail visually, a lot of work has gone into the audio side of the game too, down to how the sound spreads in hot and cold environments. The development team meticulously recorded sounds in both temperature conditions so there is a notable difference in the audio aspect for the game.

Another feature of Cryostasis is the thermal dynamics, an example shown by Anatoly Subbotin, PR and marketing manager for 1C, was a generator being switched on which in turn warmed up the room. The ice and snow which was visible slowly begins to melt into water and

starts to run down the walls, the frost visible on your hands and weapon begins to fade and all of this is generated and calculated in real time.

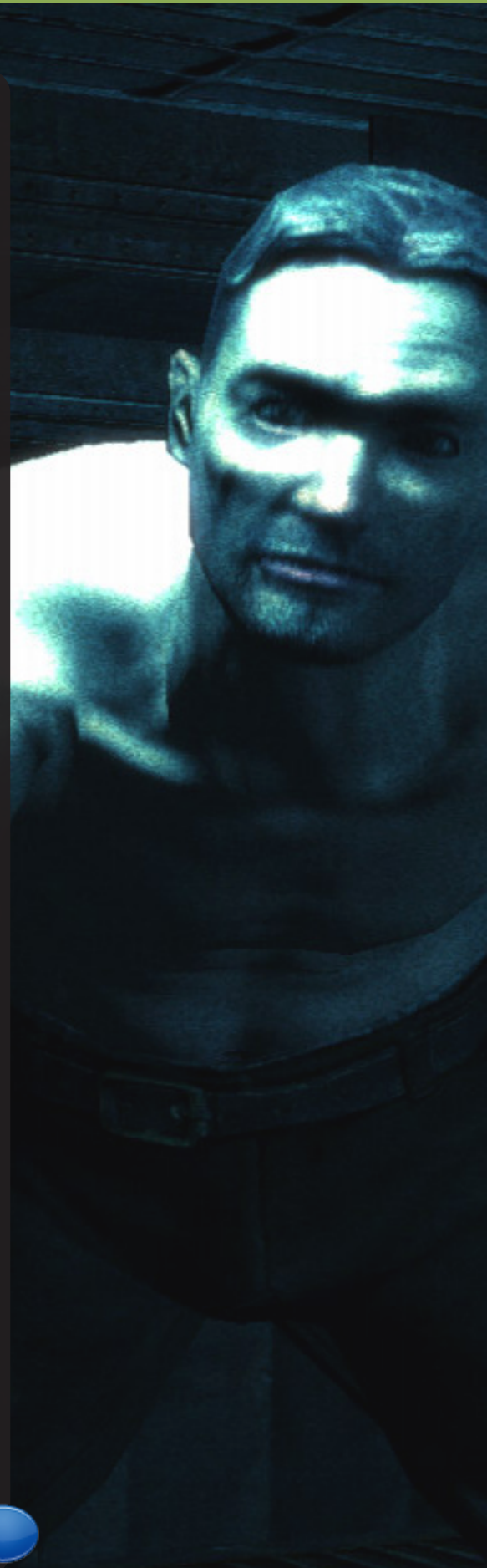
During your time aboard the North Wind, you discover that the crew were split into two factions preceding the last moments of the doomed vessel, those who fought against the cold and those who succumbed to the cold, the latter of which comprise to be the enemies you encounter in the game. There are puzzles and riddles to be solved throughout the game including those from mental echoes, an ability the protagonist possesses.

A mental echo allows the player to replay the last moments of a dead crew member giving you insight into what happened along with the chance to change the outcome of what happened to that one person, this also links in with the bigger mystery of what happened aboard the North Wind. Weaponry is scarce along with ammunition but the usual FPS assortment of weaponry is present, ranging from axes to bolt action Mosin Nagant rifles and PPSH-41 sub machine guns, as this is a Russian operation then Russian weaponry is the preferred flavour for use.

Though don't expect this to be a visceral experience, this is portrayed as a survival horror FPS title so enemies won't be swarming into your eyelids forcing you to ward off battalion sized divisions akin to Painkiller or Serious Sam, think of this more along the lines of the early stages of Doom 3. Areas will be relatively dark making you rely on a flashlight to illuminate the surroundings in cases, also thankfully there is no need to holster your weapon to use the flashlight but I do find it a shame that somehow mankind lost the ability to attach torches to weapons somewhere between the 1950's and whenever Doom 3 is set, maybe duct tape isn't sticky on Mars? Anyways your torch will have a limited time frame of usage so don't think you can run about with it constantly switched on.

During the short presentation of the game it was evident that the graphics were on par with current generation of shooters also it seemed to be fairly polished too which indicates that it is not far from that final stamp of approval and mass shipping to various gaming boutiques, also system spec wise it should run nicely on mid range PC's so thankfully it's not a system breaker like Crysis is. Overall it is a title to keep in view of your gaming radar as I can see this being a very enjoyable game indeed.

Neil Hetherington



CONSOLE BREAKDOWN

SONY PSP

Almost all of you out there have at least heard of Sony and its PlayStation franchise, and many have heard of the PlayStation Portable, more commonly known as the PSP. What you may not know is this little bundle of technology is on its 3rd generation.

The first PSP (PSP1001) was launched at the end of 2004 in Japan, but didn't come across to North America and Europe until between the mid and end of 2005 respectively. Its smooth looks and appealing compact design, together with the successful Sony PlayStation 1 layout of controls, made this an instant hit with gamers. But it's not been an easy road. Sony's main rival Nintendo, released their own portable gaming systems, the old classic Game Boy and the new smarter DS system. This caused the first generation of PSPs to only sell a handful and made Sony re-think how to get ahead. Their solution was to upgrade the processing power, RAM and main layout, creating the PSP Slim and Lite in the process (also known as the PSP2001).

This was a turning point in the battle with Nintendo's DS, as sales were through the roof compared to the old PSP1001. The smaller, more compact and faster Slims allowed for bigger and better games, thus pushing the new PSP2001 further into the handheld market. However, even though to date the Sony PSP has collectively sold over 40 million units world wide, the Nintendo DS has sold over 77 Million units. Today the PSP2001 is widely used in a variety of ways, be it either travelling, watching movies, using the internet Skype system as a phone, GPS navigation, or even the occasional music tune.

So what's in the PSP?

Starting off with the PSP1001, it utilizes a 333MHz speed MIPS R4000 32-bit core CPU, with 32MB of main RAM, a graphics GPU of 166MHz and an extra 4MB of DRAM. Not much but when you think that it all fits inside a 17 x 7.3 x 2.2 cm casing, with room for a Sony Memory Stick Duo, the 1800 mAh 6 hour battery and the UMD optical disk (holding 1.8GB), it's not a bad package. The PSP also boasts stereo speakers, phone jack for headphones (and remote headphone controls), Mini-USB connectivity for file transfer to and from a PC, an IrDA compatible infrared port for quick connection to another PSP (thus enabling dual gaming battles on some games), and an inbuilt IEEE 802.11b Wi-Fi device, thus allowing true remote gaming and access to the World Wide Web.

So what's the difference between the old and the new?

Well, technically not much has changed from the PSP1001 to the PSP2001 with regards to internal workings. The internal RAM was raised to 64MB, thus improving the loading time of the games, the speed of Wi-Fi and applications. However due to the dimension and weight changes, the PSP1001 battery is incompatible with the PSP2001 system. There are also tweaks like the position of the stereo speakers and the D-Pad buttons were raised slightly, the Wi-Fi button was also relocated to where the UMD door was (which now simply needs to be 'flicked' open) and the headphone socket has been moved slightly. The only addition that the PSP2001 has over its



predecessor is the ability to output video to a compatible TV, the old remote connection for the headphones has gone and replaced with the connection port for the video. However with current software there is no support to play games over this port, so only movies and music can be shown.

OK, so it was a tweak on the old. What's so special about the PSP3000?

Not much is known about the PSP3000 as yet, just that it has the same integrated parts as the PSP2001, except for the addition of a microphone. This could lead to the PSP3000 acting like a Phone with Skype, and the introduction of voice communication over Wi-Fi gaming. From an interview with John Koller, GameSpot SCEA's director of hardware. He revealed to the world that the new model has a shorter battery life than its predecessor, a snippet from the interview explains why.

"Battery life will decrease by a small amount; it's material, but it's about 20 minutes, maybe 30 minutes," said Koller. "And that's because there's a little bit of a larger power draw with the brighter screen."

The new handheld is set to go on sale on October 15th in the UK for £149.99, so keep your eyes peeled!

Now all of this is all well and good, but how does the PSP (collectively now) cope with games, movies and all the 'other' things it claims to do?

Well, as a pure handheld gaming device, the PSP does work extremely well. The already mentioned layout controls from the PlayStation do give it an ease for 'Pick up and Play' gaming. The variety of games now available means that you're almost spoilt for choice on what to play, and as the game makers get better at writing for the PSP, the better they play and look.

As a media device for movies, pictures and music, it's not that bad. OK so the screen is only 4.3 inches wide and the speakers aren't exactly 5.1 Dolby, but to watch a film away from home, it's easier than one of those portable DVD players.

The only down side is you need the movie on UMD, which can be a big waste of cash if you're the only one who has a PSP. However movie rental places like Blockbusters and Netflix are starting to do movies on UMD, so renting a movie for a trip might be a good alternative.

Also with the PSP having the ability to upgrade the firmware, Sony have recently added the function to watch WMV files so now you can watch home movies as well. For the music it's just like an iPod, but since you use the memory card for



CONSOLE BREAKDOWN

SONY PSP

storing the data, the amount of music is only limited to the storage room. The controls are a tad complicated to get used to and changing the tune in a pinch takes a little practice. To get information onto the PSP is up to you; either use one of the many 'Starter Kits' that contain a PSP Manager software (thus using a PC and connecting via the USB), transferring the data directly onto the memory stick via any compatible PC (remembering it's a Sony Memory Stick Duo, not all memory card adaptors can take these), or finally you can download from the Sony PSP Website.

Browsing the web via the inbuilt Wi-Fi is a little tricky. You obviously need an internet connection with Wi-Fi capabilities and downloading large amounts of information can take a while. The PSP browser does have inbuilt web links so you can download demos and other free items, however a lot have found that the Wi-Fi does take up a lot of battery juice when used. Sony does recommend you connect the mains adaptor when using the Wi-Fi capability to upgrade the firmware.

As yet I have not had the chance to test the IrDA Infrared port; in fact there is little known about the IrDA port apart from speculation. Some gamers believe it is for 2-way gaming (but this means both PSP have to be motionless while playing, yeah right!), others believe that it may allow the PSP to act as a universal remote for consumer appliances like DVD players and TV's, and others

believe that it could be used as an additional controller for the PS3. Sony don't actually state what the IrDA port is for just yet, which is a little strange. However some 'other' users believe the IrDA is used to diagnose problems with the PSP, i.e. used like a communication port with specific trouble shooting software and thus locked for normal use, but this is only speculation.

Other PSP uses like Skype come via the firmware upgrades (Skype was in version 3.90), but some of these features are only available to certain models. Skype is only available to the PSP2001 models due to the addition of the microphone, which makes some believe that the PSP1001 cannot have the capability of having a microphone added. This is perfectly reasonable if Sony used different internal components on the models, but it has angered a lot of PSP fans who have the PSP1001.

What else is in store for the PSP?

Well, Sony has just recently launched a GPS module that attaches to the USB port. It is not yet known if this is compatible with either of the current PSP models, or for the upcoming PSP3000. And since so little is known about the PSP3000, it's anyone's guess what's next.

What is certain is that the PSP is here to stay. The PSP3000 is to be launched at the end of this year, and with the fan base and homebrew firmware writers being as strong as ever, the PSP will continue to grow.

Stuart Gunn.

Do you have any PSP related stories?

Or have you found something that makes the PSP stand out above the other handheld consoles?

If so, lets hear about them!

Simply pop on over to our forums at www.gameon.co.uk, hit the "Forums" link at the top of the page, register and post your comments!



WHERE DID THE LINE GO?

I was sitting with a friend a couple of days ago, we were talking about the new game releases and how magnificent the technology of game making has advanced through the decades. Suddenly he struck me with a question that I did not see coming.

He said... "Don't you think that games are getting more realistic than it should be? I mean we play games to escape reality, not to find ourselves on another real world. What happened to the old games? Where did that line go between reality and games?" To be honest the question dazzled me... I was cornered and could not answer it... However, I am a man that does not let go of things that easy, especially in a field I claim to know so much about. Therefore, I did not stay put but went on for a little quest of my own, to bust the game developers (or designers) methods.

In the past, a year to be exact, we as gamers have seen such a major change in games. In fact, we have gone through a tremendous outbreak in the game technology. If you don't know what I mean then pick up any game that was released prior to 2007, and then pick up any new game, for example S.T.A.L.K.E.R, Half Life 2 (episode 1 or 2) or even Portal.

(I know that S.T.A.L.K.E.R was released way before 2007 but it was one of the first games that started this outbreak). What I would like you to look at and compare, are games like "Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots", "Crysis", "Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes", "Hitman 2: Silent Assassin" or even "Code 47". Those will show you exactly what I am talking about. However, to understand what

games have gone through, we have to know what games consist of, right? So what do games have? Games have three main components: Visuals, Gameplay and Storyline. As you see, the first two are the ones that have had major technological advancements, and have been tinkered to a level I don't know how they would advance in it any more.

The third however depends on narrative and creativity of the game designer. To be more specific, it is in the hands of the game storyteller. These would only be found in the major game companies, like Ubisoft, Bethesda Software or Eidos. Mostly I would have liked to take each to discuss and analyse alone, but games are a one package deal. You cannot discuss gameplay without talking about graphics, and you cannot discuss graphics without talking about storyline and so on...

When games were first being introduced in the 80s, there was little people dedicated to working on games, and it was more of a personal hobby. So most games at that time were nothing but text based games. Contributing to that as well is the limited technology featured, after all the first computer (actually, it was only a mainframe calculator) was created during World War II to calculate various aspects of ammo and weapon storage. The text-based games were just lines and lines of text.

At that time too, the only games made were based on books. It was a major outbreak mind you. After all, it is a big step forward from reading a book to be given the ability to change the outcomes of such book depending on your choices. That was what games were all about. Therefore, there was no graphics, no

hideous tedious controls that would freak you out and no 101 menus to go through just to get your hero to fire an ice shard on your enemy.

Then with the pixels discovered, everything has changed, even story telling. People were not naïve anymore, they wanted more, they wanted something to represent what they are reading about and they became ... less imaginative by time. Nonetheless, they had little to no time to imagine things and this is when the 2D graphic system known as Kernel appeared (which is widely known by retro developers).

Examples of such games are the old and classical games you played on the Atari 2600. The gameplay even changed to involve a more complex setup, and now instead of you choosing (or writing) what you need to do (for example to move the character or jump), now all you have to do is pressing a button.

The storytelling however was not all that shiny, but after coping with the new system, the storytelling advanced a little and even surpassed the old bookish style.

Following through that era many good games surfaced, a lot like Prince 1 and Prince 2, and in fact, all the DOS based games. I remember even a particular game that was known by the name of Full Throttle, which was a DOS based game. It presented puzzles and choices for players inside the game, combining the good storytelling element and the graphics of the retro game, along with easy to use controls.

Nevertheless, game developers were aiming high and there was nothing but open sky to aim at.

In the mid 1990s, the concept of "Game Engine" was produced, along with the birth of the 3D graphics. Then games came to be one of the largest industries, and many people knew this by it becoming a main job. No longer was it a hobby pursued by one individual or one team, but rather a group of hundreds of people. That time came when games like Doom, and Quake surfaced; people went frantic about how marvellous the graphics were.

That said, "Game Engines" started to float around in the market, and the developers licensed the core portions of the software and designed their own graphics, characters, weapons and levels. That meant a more varied and enlarged team to work in games.

In other words, games got to be more complex, and with that came more complex controls, which is when they advanced from the mere keyboard layout to using the mouse as well.

By the time the Game Engines spread around, developers were realising how much profit they could make out of it (Warcraft III engine was licensed for an estimated \$3,750,000), and that began the start of Doom III and Quake III Arena, but it just wasn't enough. Storyline started to resurface and then games started not to be all about graphics, gameplay or even storyline. Gamers from all over the world started to seek freedom as they no longer want to be rooted down to a single situation. They don't want to be guided through the game, in other words, they don't want developers to tell them how to approach a certain situation.

Mohamed Magdy



BLAST FROM THE PAST

HALF LIFE - 10 YEARS ON

It is hard to believe that Half Life was released almost 10 years ago. In the decade that has passed it has influenced countless games and even today its' impact is far reaching. The game created a unique atmosphere and style supported by a gripping story, ground-breaking technology and unparalleled gameplay.

In 1996 the newly set up Valve Software began work on a 3D action game using id Software's Quake engine as the basis. After modifying huge amounts of the engine they eventually created GoldSrc which gave them the ability to create an incredibly detailed 3D world. This allowed for skeletal animation, direct 3D support creating believable environments and a level of artificial intelligence in enemies that was astonishing.

With the potential for an incredibly strong game, Valve wanted to ensure that the plot could match it. Drafting in author Marc Laidlaw to help with the game's story, characters and plot helped to create the distinctive atmosphere combining sci-fi horror with slick action.

It seems hard to believe now, but Valve initially had difficulty finding Half Life a publisher. Many companies felt that this was a far too ambitious project, especially one headed by a small studio. Eventually Sierra On-Line took a chance and signed them for a one game deal.

When the game was released on November 19th 1998, it took the gaming world by storm. Half Life

was a first-person action game like no other. From the very beginning you knew that this was a special game. The opening sequence carefully crafted a believable environment and introduced the characters and story perfectly. From here things just got better.

The entire game is played in first-person creating an incredible sense of immersion, making each confrontation tense and each challenge memorable. The lack of cut-scenes and distinct levels meant that Half Life stood out and played like a continuous unbroken story. The use of scripted events was also previously unseen, which kept the gameplay tense and exciting. There are so many unforgettable moments: the military clean up squad, the mysterious appearances of the "G-Man" and an outdoors level full of set pieces.

Half Life continually refused to resort to conventions. Bosses were rare and usually could only be defeated by turning their environment against them, essentially becoming a puzzle. Enemies were unique and provided a significant challenge. They worked together against you and some even teleported in behind you, leading to desperate last stands as you frantically tried to find effective cover.

Rarely had a game been this exhilarating. With a perfect selection of weapons ranging from crossbows to energy weapons, there was always a tool for the job at hand. Half Life was complex grown up gaming with a story to support it and it worked magnificently. There were occasional missteps.

The later levels, set on the alien homeworld featured some torturous first person platforming sections. The inclusion of a few conventional bosses towards the end seemed a little out of place, but these were minor imperfections in an incredible game.

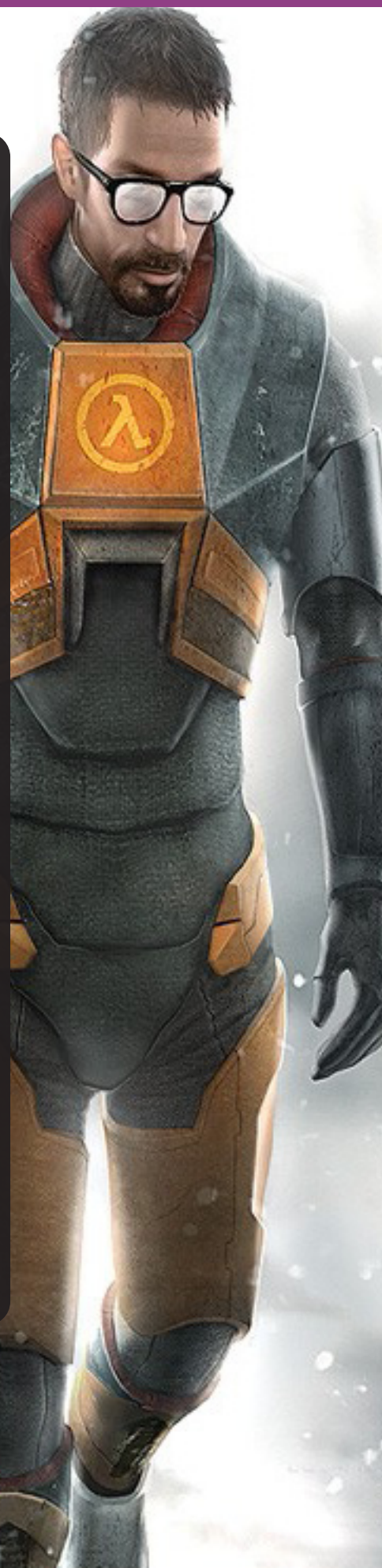
The game was unanimously praised for its innovation in virtually all departments. To date it has been awarded with over 50 Game of the Year awards, consistently maintains very high positions on greatest game ever polls and has sold over 16 million copies. The critical reception and huge popularity meant that the Half Life series was bound to continue.

Third party mods were encouraged by the developers and many led on to successful series of their own, Counter Strike, Team Fortress and Day of Defeat being key examples.

After four years of hard work, Valve released Half Life 2 and is continuing to develop the series through expansions. Half Life captured the imagination of the gaming community and the range and frequency of mods helped to propel it to one of the most played online games of all time.

Now arguably the biggest PC franchise, the Half Life story began as an ambitious 3D action game that struggled to find a publisher. Having revolutionised an entire genre as well as an enormous number of games, Half Life is an undoubtedly the PC classic.

Chris Wakefield



POST APOCALYPSE - THE FALLOUT STORY

“War. War never changes.”

The opening line of Fallout is one of the most iconic aspects of the series. It sets the scene for the game to come as well as the subsequent chapters. The Fallout series has influenced many RPG's and the games can still stand up as absolute classics. With Bethesda taking the series in a new direction with the upcoming Fallout 3, it seems like an excellent time to revisit this iconic franchise.

Fallout was released in 1997 after being developed by Black Isle Studios and published by Interplay. The situation was interesting and moved away from most conventional RPG territory. The setting was unflinching in its depiction of the aftermath of a nuclear conflict taking place in a savage post-apocalyptic United States. The plot now is worryingly more plausible than ever, with a series of resource conflicts leading to a full scale nuclear skirmish between the US and China in 2077.

In anticipation of the seemingly inevitable atomic exchange the US Government constructed a series of vaults. Essentially a bunker safe from the initial blasts as well as the radiation, these were the havens that would keep the population protected. However all was not as it seemed. These bunkers were actually designed for scientific experimentation on the people trapped inside them. Some contained a single woman whilst the rest were men, others only children and one was even designed never to be opened. This was dark subject matter.

The plot of the game follows one vault, whose water chip has broken. The player is tasked with recovering a replacement else the population of the vault will perish. However as the game progressed new plot strands emerged and a dangerous new threat appeared which needed defeating. Fallout had a strong story that was littered with smaller sub plots that rewarded exploration.

The style of the game was iconic and helped to create a unique ambience. Using 1950's retro styling on a game set almost 200 years later was a masterstroke and the design of your PIPBoy 2000 (a device to

manage stats) is still brilliant today. The character creation system of Fallout was something SPECIAL. Using a series of criteria (Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility and Luck) you could tailor your character to your own playing style. These fundamental statistics affected your skills and perks which determined what you could and couldn't do effectively. The skills your character had were represented by a percentage score (from 0 to 200%) ranging from melee combat and lock picking to first aid and speech. There were 18 different ones to choose from.

There were also traits and perks which affected your player. Traits were more complex as you had to weigh up the positive effects they brought alongside their negatives. You could select two which would have an impact upon your skills. Perks were acquired after leveling up a certain number of levels and were generally always beneficial. The depth of character creation meant that replaying the game using different playing styles was rewarding.

The Karma system awarded points for positive actions and subtracted them for negative ones, meaning you could be good, evil or a morally ambiguous mixture. Having a good character made the game somewhat easier, an evil one usually meant more opposition adding an extra challenge.

The gameplay itself was something different. The game world was large and there was a large variety of side quests on offer though inevitably combat would arise. This was turn based and based upon action points. Each turn you had a set number of points available and multiple attacks could be performed until you ran out. Combat could either be melee based or the player could utilise one of the many weapons. The violence was over the top and almost cartoon like in style with a vein of jet-black humour running through it.

Fallout was an incredible achievement, was warmly received critically and commercially and still regularly features in lists of the greatest games ever. A follow up was inevitable. The sequel was released in 1998

and takes place 80 years after the original. Refining the gameplay of the original and offering a new story, Fallout 2 was another hit. With a story that was different and followed the descendant of the Vault Dweller, Fallout 2 explored some new themes and locations whilst largely maintaining the atmosphere of the original.

The gameplay remained more or less the same with new additions. The recruitable characters were expanded on with more control over them as well as the ability to manage their items and armour. Weapons, items and armour were also expanded upon making combat more complex than in the previous game. Skills were improved and could now be improved up to 300% also making more use of the previously underused ones (such as Doctor and Traps).

Reputation was implemented to complement the Karma system meaning you could be a slightly different character from either good or evil. Reputation was awarded for bigger deeds and completing sub-quests. Because of the environment and more complex quests a drivable vehicle was introduced called The Highwayman.

Fallout 2 was slightly different to its predecessor. The game had a different tone and was less gritty than the original, which tended to split opinion. The more adult content occasionally felt too forced and this worked to undo the mature environment by turning it into a caricature. Others complained that the game had many problems including several frustrating bugs. However it was still a distinct Fallout title. Many feel that gameplay wise, Fallout 2 is the definitive title in the series.

In 2001, Fallout Tactics was added to the series with a very mixed reception. Considered non-canon the game was a strange hybrid of strategy games. The player assumed the role of a member of the Brotherhood of Steel and followed their campaign to help preserve humanity's interests and to fight against the mutants. The game was an interesting departure for the series, introducing different gameplay styles, different races (including super mutants,

POST APOCALYPSE - THE FALLOUT STORY

ghouls and even dogs) and new settings. Whilst the combat was still similar to that of previous titles it was presented in a more strategic manner and the focus was on small squads of individuals rather than a single player character creating a different experience.

The change in style from the previous games was not immediately popular. Fans were disappointed. They were hoping for a direct sequel and were annoyed at the inconsistencies in the storyline. However, in more recent years Tactics has found a new lease of life and is now appreciated as a respectable game with influences of the series.

When Fallout 3 was announced fans quickly grew excited. A new installment sticking to the original top down view, now in full 3D was an exciting prospect. Yet all was not well at Black Isle Studios.

In 2003 the project was cancelled and the game disappeared. It was a disappointing outcome, as the game was largely complete with 95% of the engine complete and a significant proportion of dialogue

and maps finished. The initial plot concerned a prisoner who escapes when his penitentiary is attacked. Sadly the game was never completed and was cast aside when the studio was closed.

The series seemed to be in trouble and when Interplay released Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel exclusively for the consoles things went from bad to worse. Turning the game into a completely different style was a serious mistake which managed to alienate the series' fans. Giving the game semi-naked females, guns and blood were all designed to try and make it popular which was clearly a mistake. Very little of the Fallout atmosphere was captured and the game managed to go against most of the previous conventions. The game performed incredibly badly and only managed to sell 17,000 copies.

In 2004, Bethesda acquired the rights to Fallout 3 and began creating their own version of the game, choosing to reinvent the series. Using the same engine as Oblivion and aiming to keep in the same style as the original games, Fallout

3 is choosing a different path. Whilst there is some negativity from original fans regarding the changes in style and gameplay the latest installment looks set to deliver something original and fresh whilst respecting the Fallout roots.

The Fallout series has experienced highs and lows over the years with the originals regarded as some of the greatest games ever created. With Bethesda's latest entry being released on the 31st October it remains to be seen what sort of reception the game will receive but initial gameplay appears to be highly promising (for a more detailed preview of the game see elsewhere in this issue).

The series began with a nuclear war and it seems unlikely that people will stop playing these games until fiction becomes reality...

Chris Wakefield



REVIEW

CHUZZLE



reviewed by:
neil hetherington

platform:
PC

developer:
raptisoft & popcap

publisher:
popcap games

genre:
puzzle

released:
12/05/2005

Well here I am about to break from the norm for my reviews and dip into the relaxing waters of the world of casual gaming. Now casual games have been around in some form, albeit flash based web games to occupy the workforce while they pretend to be working on their spreadsheets, to the mundane Solitaire that's bundled with Windows.

Now I'm presented with Chuzzle from PopCap Games, a company who has pretty much risen to become the leading developer and publisher of casual games, whose flagship title Bejeweled has sold more than 10 million units across several platforms including PC and Xbox 360.

Now Chuzzles are akin to those little rubber Koosh balls that we all had as a child back in the late 80's to early 90's, and appear in a 6x6 grid, the goal is to move the Chuzzles in this grid so that you may arrange a chain of 3 or more Chuzzles to score points and fill up the Chuzzle bottle on the left hand side of the screen, once this bottle has been filled then you may progress to the next level. The Chuzzles themselves are moved by dragging rows and columns as the line of Chuzzles is able to wrap around as you drag your line off the grid, in your attempts to chain your Chuzzles, once you have a chain complete the Chuzzles explode with the remaining Chuzzles falling via the grace of gravity with new Chuzzles appearing from above to keep your grid topped up. The game itself is presented well as everything is brightly coloured with cheerful, yet slightly annoying, music and everything is easy to navigate so that players of all

ages should be able to pick up the game quite quickly. The Chuzzles themselves are in a variety of colours and it is these colours which you have to chain up to score points, though the thoughtful chaps at PopCap Games have also added an option for those who are colour blind so not only are the Chuzzles colourful but will also appear with a symbol on them too making this game accessible to nearly everyone. Along with your bog standard colourful Chuzzles you are also presented with some special friends too, the fat Chuzzle is one that occupies the space of four normal Chuzzles and will move 2 rows or columns whilst being dragged.

Then we have the super Chuzzle, this fellow appears after you have formed a group of five or more Chuzzles to be exploded at once, this new Chuzzle will appear on the grid with a flashing ring, once you have chained this fellow, all adjacent Chuzzles will explode along with the super Chuzzle. Finally we have the rainbow Chuzzle, this fellow does not have any super abilities or take up extra space, they are merely there to offer bonus points if you manage to chain these Chuzzles together.

Throughout the game you will probably unlock various trophies such as "Speed Master" for clearing two levels within the Speed Chuzzle mode without getting a lock, a lock being 1 Chuzzle locked into place therefore that row or column is unable to be dragged, to a "Chuzzbomber" for exploding 1,000 super Chuzzles throughout your play time. The game contains four game modes to occupy your time. Classic mode is your basic game where the difficulty and frequency

of locks increases over time.

Speed mode is a race against the clock, you have a bar at the bottom of your grid, as this fills up you are penalised with a lock, chaining your Chuzzles clears the bar from the time that has already been accumulated, so the quicker you are able to chain, the less likely you are to receive a lock. Zen mode is the basic game but without any restrictions or penalties, it is purely you and the Chuzzles, so you may take as much time as possible to rack up a high score.

Finally Mind Bender mode, this deviates from the main game and offers you the same 6x6 grid but with only 2 different coloured Chuzzles, the aim here is to replicate the picture that is on the left hand side of the screen, similar style of play to those sliding jigsaw puzzles, so



that you can progress to the next puzzle and onto harder difficulties.

Now I'm not one for casual games really, but their purpose has provided millions of players hours of joy through their simplistic, yet addictive, design and presentation, while through my time playing the game for this review I can safely say that I have been entertained by the wonderful world of the Chuzzle.



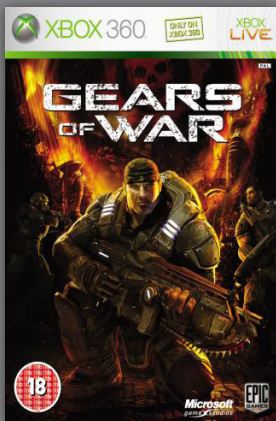
playability
re-playability
graphics
sound
overall



7/10

REVIEW

GEARS OF WAR



reviewed by:
chris wakefield

platform:
xbox 360

developer:
epic games

publisher:
microsoft studios

genre:
action adventure

released:
17/11/2006

With *Gears of War 2* looming on the horizon, I felt it was worth a look at the game which helped to breathe new life into the third person action genre. Developed by Epic, veterans of the Unreal series, on a budget greater than the income of several small European countries, *Gears* is a revelation.

The game takes place on a planet colonized by humans where things have gone horribly wrong. After cities were set up an alien race known as the Locust tunneled up from below the surface on Emergence Day, slaughtering the humans and destroying all that they came across. Humanity was forced to retreat to a granite plateau immune to the Locust tunnels and make a last stand.

The Coalition of Ordered Governments (COG) was formed and squads of trained soldiers (*Gears*) were created with the goal of destroying the Locust horde once and for all. You play as Marcus Fenix, a Gear soldier imprisoned for disobeying an order who is accompanied by his friend Dom for the duration of the game. These men are 7ft tall armour-plated killing machines who are so masculine that they sweat pure testosterone, put simply: they are great.

The interplay between the characters is excellent with macho bravado being used to give each distinct

personalities. Throughout the game they frequently have shouted conversations during bouts of gun play with the Locust. I was initially skeptical but soon found myself enjoying these instances immensely.

The core element to the game is third person action which is outstanding. Using a traditional over-the-shoulder camera view in a similar manner to *Resident Evil 4* you use the left stick to move and the right to aim. However, in order to survive you have to use cover effectively. By tapping A you flatten yourself against an object and have the options to pop out and fire a few shots off or blind fire over the top. Moving between cover and flanking the enemy is critical and whilst seeming simple, can prove to be challenging and very tactical.

The fact that you can only carry 2 weapons and a side arm alongside a handful of bolas style grenades adds further depth to the combat. Whilst the weapon numbers are only in single figures they are all

refreshingly different and feel meaty and real. A lethal shotgun, ridiculously great sniper rifle and an exploding bow and arrow are all amazing, but the real star is the basic assault rifle. Not only is it invaluable at putting down the enemy from a distance it has a chainsaw bayonet attached. A chainsaw bayonet: awesome.

The combat itself requires a good deal of strategy though you don't realise it as the action is so slick and realistic. Animation is very lifelike and slamming into a wall to avoid bullets feels weighty and tense. It must be said that the game is



REVIEW

GEARS OF WAR

violent, enemies come apart with sustained fire, heads explode and blood sprays the screen as you cleave people in two with your chainsaw. In other games this would seem excessive, yet here it fits in with the authenticity and uncompromising nature of war. The very fact you can curb stomp injured enemies and play grenade tag is so over the top that it becomes ludicrous and provides a release from the tension.

The game's graphics are gritty and look astonishing with the Unreal Engine being used to great effect. Lighting is top notch during day and night and the textures really show off the 360's capabilities. The AI of the enemies is also notable, with the Locust employing various tactics to try and outsmart you which is unsettling but provides a real challenge on any difficulty. The number of enemy types is relatively small but the AI of the standard grunt makes this barely noticeable.

Perhaps my favourite point about this game is the multiplayer options.

An excellent online mode which carries the single player combat into deathmatches is challenging and satisfying. Having a human opponent is perhaps the ultimate challenge and team games are ridiculously fun and brutal.

Yet the multiplayer mode which shines the most is the humble co-op. Instead of just being an afterthought the entire game becomes even better with a friend as you work together to outsmart the Locust. Flanking becomes a joy, the split paths where you cover each other from the side and reviving one another when injured is just brilliant. Whilst this makes the game somewhat easier it is really fulfilling and there are some amazing set pieces which are immensely rewarding when you both manage to survive seemingly against all odds through teamwork.

Gears of War does have some issues. If you haven't got a second player to assist you in the single player, the AI takes over which has some frustrating problems. On numerous occasions I had a character repeatedly charge into locations where he couldn't be revived or death was imminent which on one occasion meant an hour of irritation as I tried to keep him away from enemies.

A terrible misplaced driving level also manages to undo a lot of the game's hard work at establishing a good pace and proves to be infuriating. In a

stupid twist of logic, in single player, the AI doesn't assist you, leaving you to both drive and gun at the same time which I found impossible on the hardest difficulty. In the end the game seemed to take pity on me and after 9 failed attempts simply moved me onto the next level.

Gears of War is a brilliant game which really personifies what next-generation gaming is all about, a game which feels realistic but doesn't deny you moments to make you feel amazing. Inevitably a franchise has just begun, but what a franchise this could turn out to be. It remains to be seen what direction the series will take, but whatever happens

Gears is a truly Epic game. An Epic game with a chainsaw bayonet.

playability ★★★★★★☆☆
re-playability ★★★★★★☆☆
graphics ★★★★★★☆☆
sound ★★★★★★☆☆
overall ★★★★★★☆☆



9/10

THE EXPERIMENT

WII FIT

I'm sure you all know Wii Fit, the exercising game for the Nintendo Wii. In case you're unfamiliar with this exhaustingly entertaining game, the basic idea is that you exercise on a board – the so called balance board – in front of your TV.

The board works by tracing how you shift your balance while standing on it. Arguably, this is not the best workout tool ever – after all it is just a game – but if you really take the exercises seriously, it sure beats playing traditional games from within the comfort of your chair or sofa.

We here at GameOn wanted to test what Wii Fit can do for the average guy by applying a two-month workout schedule to a test subject – me – and log the progress during the two months. The test began on the 22nd of September and will end on the 22nd of November. You will be kept up to speed in the GameOn Mag's November issue and the final verdict is planned for the December issue.

The plan is that I'm to work out three times per week, about 45 minutes per session. Each session is designed to focus on a certain type of workout, but variation is also important. A session may thus contain a warm-up phase and room for other activities than just the main focus of the day. After each session compulsory stretching applies, and plenty of water is to be available at all times.

And hey, even though I've already started by the time you read this, why don't you join me? You have a general plan outlined here on the page already. Race you to the TV!

SUBJECT

Name: Johan Dahlberg
Age: 19
Gender: Male
Height: 179 cm
Weight: 64.7 kg
BMI: 20.19
Previous level of exercising: Modest

GOALS

During this experiment, I hope to improve on the following points:

Balance & coordination
Posture
Flexibility
Body strength & muscles
Endurance

Weight loss is not a set goal as I'm already at my ideal weight.

THE SCHEDULE

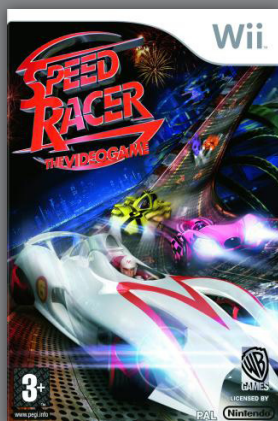
Three sessions/week. Every other week, the sessions are repeated from session 1.

- Session 1 – Fitness session: 15 minutes jogging, 15 minutes yoga, 15 minutes aerobics
- Session 2 – Muscle session: 10 minutes aerobics, 2x15 minutes muscle workout combined with 10 minutes coordination/balance exercises
- Session 3 – Yoga session: 45 minutes yoga
- Session 4 – Fitness session: 15 minutes aerobic, 30 minutes of jogging
- Session 5 – Muscle session: 10 minutes aerobics, 2x15 minutes muscle workout combined with 10 minutes coordination/balance exercises
- Session 6 – Coordination session: 20 minutes yoga, 20 minutes balance exercises



REVIEW

SPEED RACER



reviewed by:
neil hetherington

platform:
wii

developer:
sidhe interactive

publisher:
wb games

genre:
racing

released:
09/05/2008

So here I am sat in front of my TV which is currently adorned with the wailings of Sidhe Interactive and WB Games' latest movie/video game offering of Speed Racer. Now the game itself takes place 1 year after the events of the movie, which I have not actually seen yet, but this apparently explains how the character of Trixie is racing in this title whereas in the movie she doesn't even have a car to race yet displays a measure of driving talent.

Now the characters and cars are fully represented as they are shown in the film including the film cast providing the voice talent for the game too which these days seems to be an obligatory part of movie contracts if a game is to be made from the film. Each character's custom ride seems to be accurately modelled after the film's counterpart from what I have seen from trailers and screenshots, as I said I've not actually seen the film, also each characters' car varies within the four attributes set to determine the speed, handling, acceleration, and weight characteristics of the car on the track.

The single player mode pits your selected character in the World Racing League, starting off in what is generally regarded as the rookie league, with the opening championship consisting of only 2 tracks both of which are only a couple of laps long. While racing you will notice a boost bar constantly filling up as you drive your chosen chariot around the long and often twisty, gravity defying tracks of this futuristic racer. Once full this bar will empty itself again but storing a full boost in a little icon just next to the bar itself, this boost may be used for its intended usage of increasing your speed further or it

may be used in the action of healing your cars accumulated damage, this is also visible on the game hud. Car damage comes in the form of nudges, shunts, poor driving resulting in running head first into that barrier of fail, or via the games combat system of "Car-Fu". Car-Fu basically consists of shunting the opponents car via straight forward ramming, side slamming, or spinning your car 360 degrees or finally by launching your car in the air in the attempt to land on the back of your opponent to flip their 4 wheeled chariot of internal combustion.

As you would expect for the Wii, the control system is motion controlled via the vanilla Wiimote usage or the Neapolitan flavour via sticking your Wiimote into your Wii Wheel, now there's basically only two buttons to use, the "2" button for your velocimatrix and the "B" button for boosting, though technically "1" is for healing your car whilst the "D-Pad" is meant to do things while performing Car-Fu but I couldn't notice any difference at all so in my opinion the "D-Pad" is as useful as a Rowntree's Jelly being used to suppress towering inferno like fires.

A reservation I have to add about the controls is that very little effort is required in steering your car while racing, it seems like the cars are able to guide themselves around the tracks requiring millimetres of actual input from myself, that is until I get relentlessly Car-Fu'ed up the tailpipe by the number of rivals and disgruntled allies I've constantly slipstreamed.

While on the topic of the computer opponents, during the game you can create alliances with other races to reduce your chances of

them ramming you out of the way, concurrently you will invariably create rivals during your career and these drivers will make it their mission to ram you at every available opportunity. Another note I have to make is that no matter what sort of lead you may pull out over the opposition, there appears to be some sort of evil catch up system in place as you may have a 7 second lead but 2 seconds later your rival is sniffing around your rear bumper like a pig hunting for truffles.

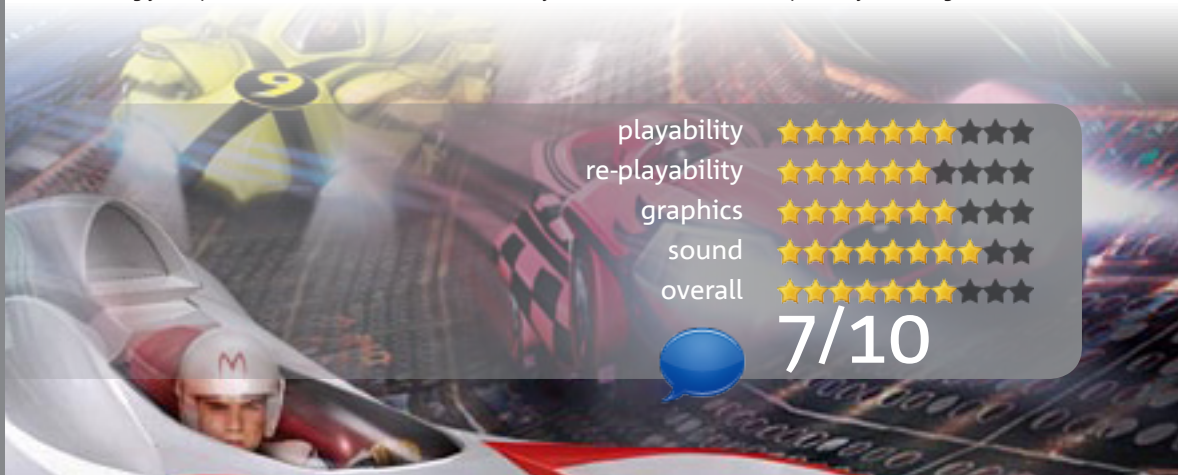
Visually Sidhe have done a very nice job in presenting the game, everything looks bright and colourful whilst the game engine itself appears to be solid though I suspect that it would be better suited to a more traditional style of racing title than some futuristic racer but even so it still does the job admirably. To go along side the nice eye candy is also the soundtrack, some of which is also heard in the film, which adds to the tension of your races though personally it annoyed me but it works in the context of the game itself.

Sadly there is no four player split screen or online capability within this title, so multiplayer joys are limited to 2 players only which I feel is a big letdown for the game. In this age of online gaming, it seems that Sidhe have taken a step backwards by limiting to a split screen affair.

Overall Speed Racer is a good game, but not amazing, it's not for the diehard Gran Turismo simulation nuts, but more aimed at the younger age groups along with the more casual gamer. Maybe a rental first before purchase type of title but for around 18 quid it's probably worth a gamble.

playability ★★★★★★☆☆
re-playability ★★★★★★☆☆
graphics ★★★★★★☆☆
sound ★★★★★★☆☆
overall ★★★★★★☆☆

7/10



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. CLEAR SKY



reviewed by:
pete o'brien

platform:
pc

developer:
gsc gameworld

publisher:
deep silver

genre:
first person shooter

released:
05/09/2008

Having already sold over 2 million copies worldwide, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Clear Sky has clearly demonstrated the success of the original's reputation, with the pun clearly intended. But with two game fixing patches released in as many weeks, what can be said about the actual quality of this stand-alone prequel compared to the original Shadow of Chernobyl?

The immediate answer to that particular question would simply be "disappointing", thanks to a number of reasons. The easiest to comprehend is the obvious: crashes and bugs. I sadly believe Clear Sky falls into that uneasy category of not being ready for release, i.e. it's been rushed out. The opening swamp sequences are truly excellent fun, which rightly shows the true quality of the developers' potential. But as the game progresses those moments of quality become flaky, as if it was suffering from radiation poisoning.

Playing the role of a mercenary, your ultimate goal is to reach the centre of the zone and stop the protagonist of the original S.T.A.L.K.E.R., with a number of weaving plot references to the original thrown in for good measure. The actual story isn't exactly awful, but the scripted scenes are often broken or poorly done. Sequences not working are examples of the former, while invulnerable and infinite spawning enemy sections are of the latter.

The general gameplay of Clear Sky is very similar to its predecessor: FPS action with a peppering of RPG frolics. The basics of these two genres are done well, with shooting things satisfying and the inventory generous and easy to use. A reasonably sized game world can fulfil your non-linear desires to a certain extent, with a limited range of optional missions and chores available.

But being a more recent sibling to Shadow of Chernobyl, you would expect a number of improvements and changes from the original. One of three proud bullet points on the back of the DVD case is the new "Dynamic War of Factions", which certainly sounds exciting. Choose a faction to fight with and battle

alongside your faction's fellows for control of various control points, with the enemy factions base the ultimate target. It sounds like a familiar flavour of Battlefield, but dejectedly it just doesn't work.

Joining your chosen "clan" is initially rather exciting. You're given a warm welcome, a powerful weapon, ammo and armour, and are then sent on your way to help your comrades capture territory. However the ultimate and critical flaw is that you can't capture points yourself. The other faction members are the only ones who can, but seldom do. In my saved game this cascaded into the whole faction war grinding to halt before it really began, purely because of an AI bug. I tried walking into and wiping out the whole 25 man enemy faction base, but nothing happened after my remarkable personal victory.

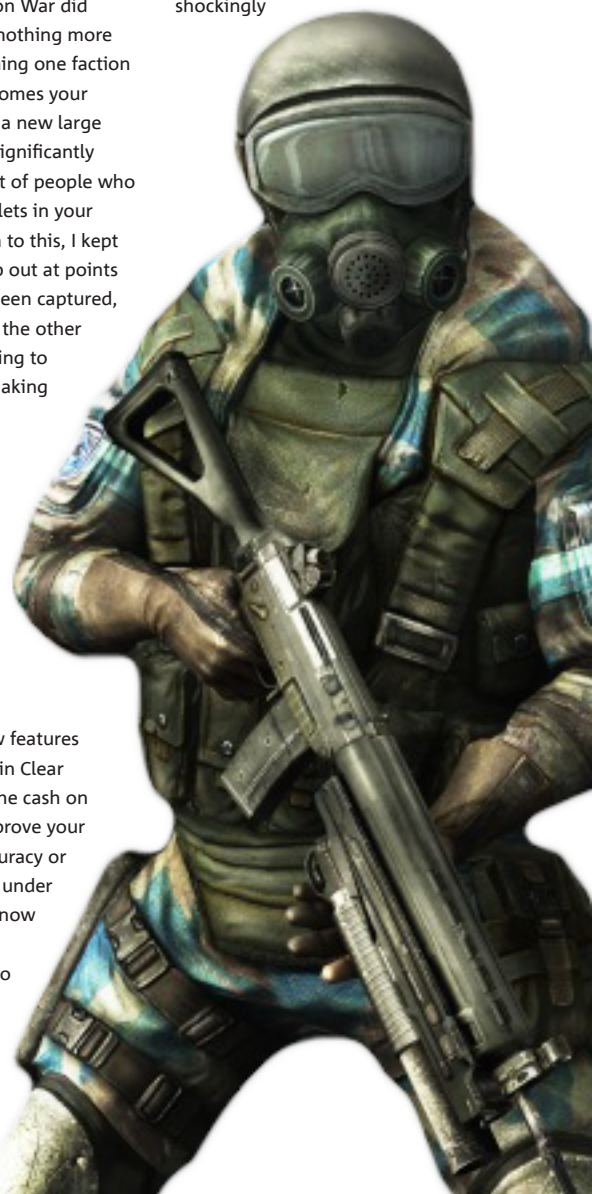
Even when the Faction War did function, it was still nothing more than a nuisance. Joining one faction means the other becomes your enemy, i.e. you have a new large scale enemy, which significantly increases the amount of people who awkwardly spray bullets in your direction. In addition to this, I kept getting asked to help out at points which had recently been captured, just as I had reached the other side of the map. Having to go back and forth, making little or no progress is frustrating to say the least. You can ignore the faction war all together since it doesn't really materialise if you don't join, but I was hoping for a lot better.

In fact enjoyable new features are hard to come by in Clear Sky. You can splash the cash on new upgrades to improve your chosen weapons accuracy or firepower, but this is under used since money is now a lot harder to come by. Fast travel has also been introduced, but it's in the form of a guide who requires large sums

of money for his services, when things are already cash-strapped as it is. That can, to a certain extent, be undone by doing a rather easy and tedious shooting mini-game over and over. Enemies do now at least make an effort to use cover, though seemingly not very often.

Unfortunately things get exasperating elsewhere, with a range of bizarre and annoying bugs. One shocking bug, which was at least amusing at the time, was when I first attacked a bandit camp. At the exact moment when I notched up my first kill they sent a radio message, asking me for help to help protect them from an attacker: me. Crashes to the desktop for no reason are too frequent, as are corrupt game saves, meaning saving regularly is a must.

Other moans include the new grenade indicator, which is shockingly



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. CLEAR SKY

actually somehow manages to point you in the wrong direction, which usually leads to a game over status. Load times are still around couple of minutes, even with 2GB of RAM, and there are no alternate endings; just a short mediocre cut scene. The stat changing artefacts of the original are now rarer, in addition to being invisible, meaning I managed to completely forget about them. The new "Emissions" feature is a good idea, but the fact you are told to hide from this character killing storm while all the other NPC's just continue with their normal routines shatters what's left of the atmosphere. Mournfully I could go on.

It's not all bad news though; the graphics do at least remain impressive. The lighting effects are second to none, with everything casting its own shadow by order of the sun, which is in addition to the finest HDR and "God-Ray" effects on show. To my eyes the game somehow appears out-dated, which I believe is down to the "gritty" look it portrays, which in fairness is no bad thing. A second of the three bullet points on the game case mentions the "Exclusive DirectX 10 support", which as expected amounts to nothing special. It all boils down to some extra "nice to have" effects, if your graphics card can handle them that is.

Speaking of performance, Clear Sky is going to be demanding on most peoples computers. A Dual Core processor with 2GB of RAM and a relatively modern 512mb graphics card is recommended. There are

many options on offer to tweak and optimise performance though, so owning something above the minimum specification of a 2GHz P4 processor, 512mb RAM and a 128MB DirectX 9 graphics card may make the game run, albeit in a rather mutated and ugly form.

Aurally, Clear Sky is a mixed affair. Sound effects are generally re-used from the original, which feels like a big let down. For those who have played Shadow of Chernobyl, the highly effective spooky groans, rumbles and wails no longer spark fear, but instead induce a dull and stale atmosphere.

The music has improved dramatically though, with a new "dynamic" option providing pumping Half-Life 2 style music during fire fights, while reserving the slow atmospheric (but again re-used) music for exploring. The new music is so well done and surprisingly catchy that I felt tempted to engage in battle just to hear it. But the original was so special because of its wonderfully atmospheric auditory, and I feel that has to some extent irradiated away.

In Clear Sky you do at least get six new and six old reworked areas from the original. The new areas are very well done, showing an excellent calibre of level design, ranging from highly tactical swamps and forests to a beautifully war torn town. Typically though, these new locations are usually only used for a brief amount of time. The older, so called re-worked areas are almost exactly the same; the only differences noticed on my travels were the

locations of the faction strongholds. This meant that everything felt too familiar to induce the need to explore, which was another of the originals great selling points.

As you have more than likely noticed, the resultant feeling of my Clear Sky experience is that of disappointment. The final of the three bullet points on the game case is "The official prequel of S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl", which I feel is the key to the commercial success of Clear Sky. Were this to be the first in the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. franchise with no reputation behind it, I believe it would be thrown aside and branded as another lacklustre and average shooter. Developers GSC Gameworld have littered the game with their superb talent potential, but the general feeling I had swamp me after the initial marsh scenes was one of dissatisfaction.

As soon as fun and excitement loomed over the ashy horizon, it was always abruptly flattened by a game breaking bug or crash, an invisible anomaly or an AWOL grenade indicator. The fact I was more scared of the game crashing than the atmosphere means that the 10-15 hour game time was one for me to forget. I should think this will change if you play the game in a year's time by the time the 52nd patch has been released, at which time you can add one point to the overall score. Hardcore fans of the original might be able to extract enough fun from this purchase, but for everyone else, we can only hope for a brighter, clearer future.

playability ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
re-playability ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
graphics ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
sound ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆
overall ★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

6/10

THE COLUMN

GENDER EQUALITY



Not too long ago, a guy revealed in a forum how his mother had entered the room once while he was playing a PC game. She stood and watched for a while, then commented on the fact that most game heroes are men. "Where are all the women?" she asked, annoyed by the morals games were teaching her kids. "But mom," the boy said. "There are plenty of female heroes. There's, ehm..."

Desperate to prove his mother wrong, the boy fired up another game from his shelf to demonstrate. "There you go," he said proudly. "Lara Croft!" I doubt I have to tell you that he quickly realised his mistake. And this story got me thinking. Sure, there are plenty of important female characters in the games we love, many of whom we'll remember in years to come: Alyx Vance from Half Life, Nina Williams from the Tekken series, not to mention the lovely Cate Archer from No One Lives Forever. But what do they all have in common? That's right, where the men wear suits and play around with their big guns, the women tend to wear much less and play around with their charm and, well, other big guns. Unlike the case with most male characters, we'll remember the female ones for qualities other than those of saving the world. And yes, to some extent, this also works the other way around, but it's far less common that men are portrayed as charming, half-naked puppets and the women as well-dressed intellectuals.

But are videogames really that far off track? I mean, we see this all the time: in movies, advertising, music, and so on. Are videogames any different? The answer is of course no. However, it's easy pointing fingers at others rather than doing something about it yourself. It would be nice to see steps being taken in the gaming industry where a certain amount

of equality was achieved. Dressing down the men might not be the answer, but dressing up the women would. Because that's how it is: to create equality between the genders, they not only need to be equally present, they also need to be equally decent. Then again, that's not going to happen, because sex appeal sells. Charming women sells. And as with any product, it all comes down to money, earnings and how high you climb on the charts. After all, the majority of players are men, so why create games for women?

It is, however, possible to create good female characters who will stick to our minds not because of their looks but because of their intelligence, personality and more ethical qualities. It's only too sad that we, the consumers, make it so difficult for the developers to feel comfortable taking that path rather than sticking to what they know works. As a comfort, at least Alyx didn't wear a skirt or tiny bikini (even though she did seduce us in other ways).

I don't believe the lad I was talking about earlier will introduce his mother to Lara Croft again, and probably shouldn't. And while I'm sure there are a few decent female heroes out there (that's odd, I can't think of one), we sure could use a lot more.

That's not only to have something decent to show our mothers, but to create a stronger sense of gender equality within videogames. It might not save the world, but it could broaden our children's views on the opposite sex, thus making room for a brighter future even outside the world of videogames. In the end, it's all about what we demand from those who make the products.

Johan Dahlberg



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TOP QUOTES FROM THE GAMEON FORUMS:

Posted by Physicist regarding last months magazine...

“Tbh i thought the quality of writing was equally as good in the low quality version although the pictures of lara were less tasteful than the high quality version.”

Posted by INTOXiCATION...

“Cant think of something to contribute at the moment as the next door neighbour is getting undressed, but will post as soon as something comes up.”

GET OUT! - GEOCACHING.COM

Get Out is your GameOn Mag ticket away from the screen. In every issue we bring you a tip on interesting activities that may motivate you to get up and get out – websites, sports, social activities, you name it! This month: Geocaching!

Geocaching can be summarized as a modern treasure hunt. Using a GPS receiver, people all over the world go out to find so called ‘geocaches’ (pronounced ‘geo-cashes’) hidden by others. The activity is in fact so popular odds are you’re passing one or several geocaches on a daily basis! They can be anything from small film canister hidden on street signs or under park benches to large containers deep in the woods. In each cache there should at minimum be a logbook and a pencil, but it could also include items for trade. Find the cache and write your name and the current date in the logbook.

To search for geocaches in your area, simply log on to www.geocaching.com. Here you’ll be able to use Google Maps as a search tool. When you find a cache (and even if you don’t find it) you can – and should – also register this on the site. That way you’ll be able to track how many caches you’ve found, which ones you’ve found, and the owner(s) of those caches will get a notification that you’ve been to their hiding spot.

So what are you waiting for? Get out and join the treasure hunt!

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MOST VIEWED IN AUGUST



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- 2 • Warhammer 40,000 Dawn Of War 2 E3 '08
- 3 • The Making Of The Incredible Hulk - The Beast Within
- 4 • The Incredible Hulk Game Trailer: By Sega (HD)
- 5 • Operation Flashpoint 2 Dragon Rising Tank Fire Trailer
- 6 • Warhammer Mark Of Chaos - Battle March E3 '08
- 7 • Team Fortress 2 Trailer - Meet The Engineer
- 8 • Wall-E Game Trailer VideoGame #1
- 9 • Warhammer 40,000 Dawn Of War E3 '08
- 10 • Mirror's Edge Teaser: Game Trailer #1

Click the above titles to view the videos!

Code Of Honor 2 proving most popular last month,
Wonder whether this will be reflected in the sales?



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