

ARENA

A *Quarterly* PC Games Magazine

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Reviews

ASSASSIN'S CREED
REVELATIONS

MODERN WARFARE 3

Previews

BATMAN: ARKHAM
CITY

MAX PAYNE 3

INTERVIEW

Cliff Bleszinski

Gears of War 3 design director

NEED FOR SPEED
THE RUN
Race to New York

BATTLEFIELD 3

Exclusive

A massive shooting experience
you have never seen!

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- XFX ATI Radeon HD 6750
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- EVGA GeForce GTX580
- EVGA GeForce GT440
- Evga GeForce GTS450

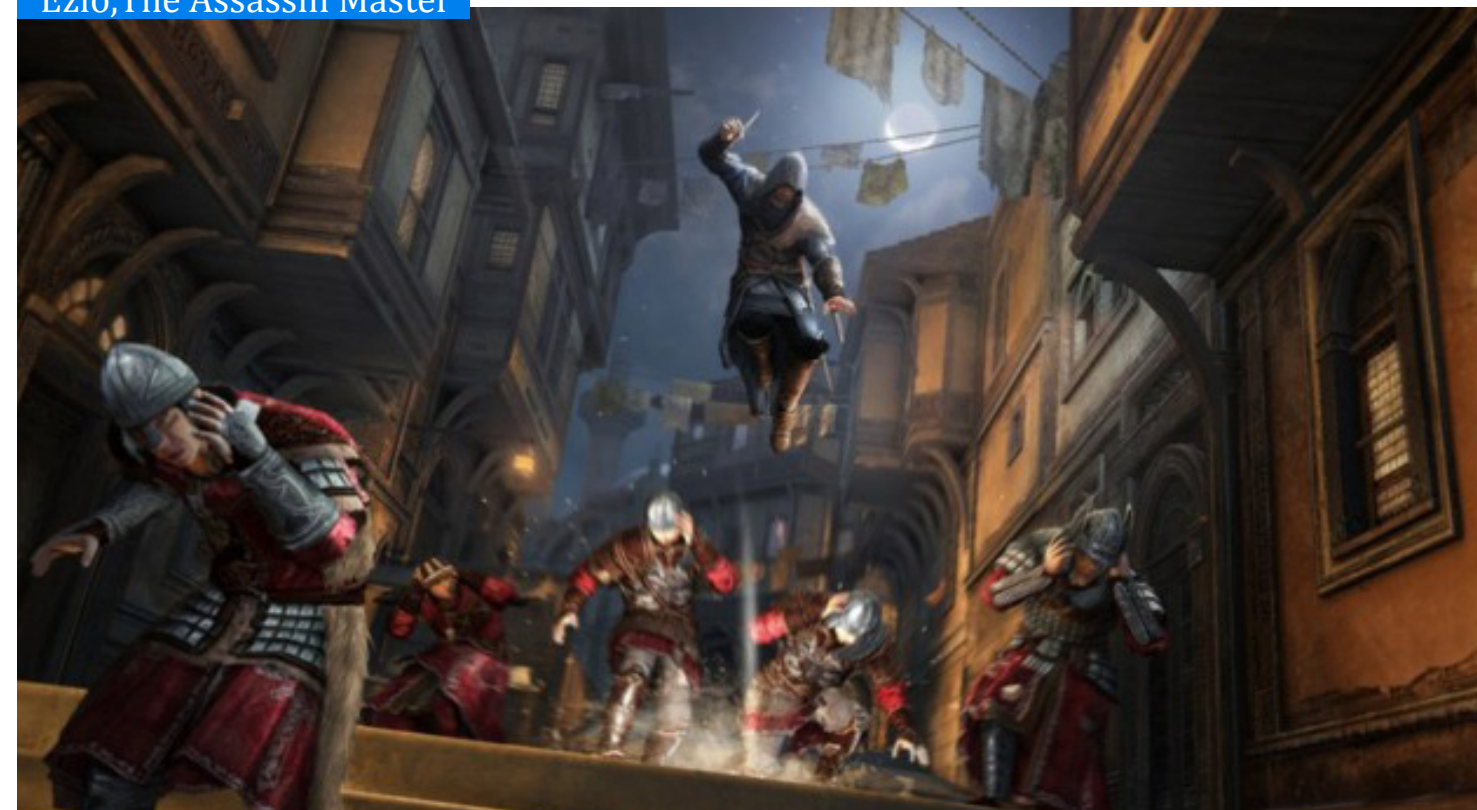


Review PC

ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS

Another great historical adventure

Ezio, The Assassin Master



Like many sequels, Revelations giveth, and Revelations taketh away, so you lose certain elements (horses) in favor of a slew of new ones that is (bomb crafting). Lots and lots of new ones. Assassin's Creed: Revelations is sometimes a lumpy Frankenstein's monster of a game, half-formed appendages stitched into place regardless of whether they belong there or not.

In Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood, Desmond was becoming a full-fledged assassin, and you guided him through dank caves and across rooftops as a sort of Ezio-lite.

Expectedly, Revelations isn't all Ezio's story. It's also Desmond's. You remember Desmond's, the bartender-cum- assassin whose mind is probed to discover truths that could potentially prevent the earth's destruction. Desmond looks different than you might remember: faces have been redesigned, features elongated, making your old comrades-in-conspiracy feel a bit unfamiliar, as if they have had plastic surgery since you saw them.

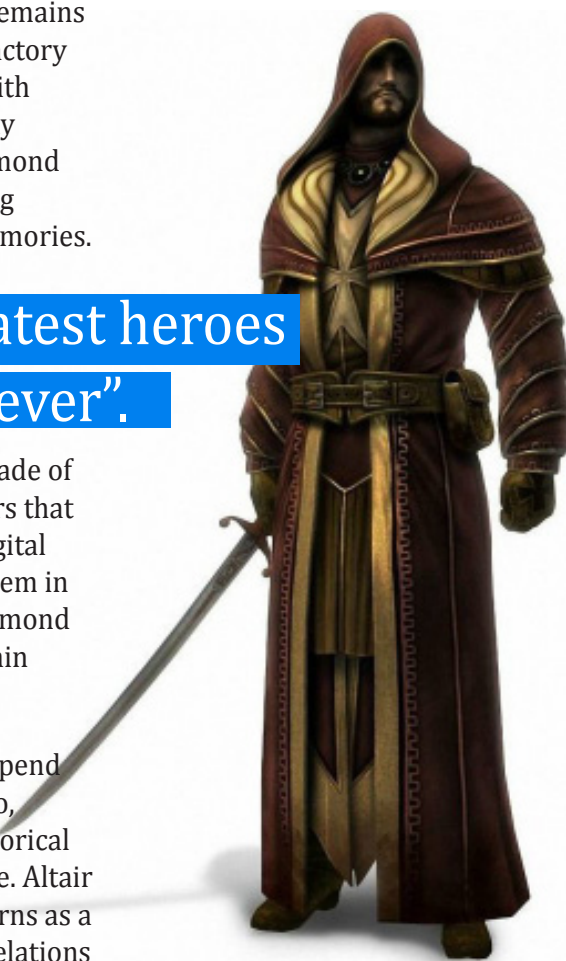
The character arc matched the gameplay arc: Desmond was gaining confidence, and this was reflected in his ever-improving abilities.

Revelations tries a more thoughtful approach but falls short. Subject 16 starts as a mystery and remains one, making for an unsatisfactory replacement for the team with which Desmond has typically interacted. Meanwhile, Desmond passes through those shining portals and into his own memories.

“Even the greatest heroes can’t live forever”.

These memory levels are made of gray columns and tiled floors that glisten and undulate like digital rivers. You move through them in first-person view while Desmond talks himself through the pain of his past.

The good news is that you spend the bulk of your time as Ezio, though he isn't the only historical presence taking center stage. Altair from the original game returns as a playable character, and Revelations makes good use of the parallels between the heroes' lives, and scenes near the conclusion resonate with great emotion.



8.0
Great



It introduces new characters, the best of whom is Sofia, an Italian bookseller who welcomes Ezio's formidable charms. But the main plot, involving political unrest among the sultan and his family members, is merely serviceable, lacking the personal touch that made Assassin's Creed II's narrative so enthralling.

Nevertheless, Revelations is as absorbing as its predecessors, because it's so much fun to move through Constantinople and other key areas. This is due in part to the world's sheer beauty.

Deep golds and reds make a stroll through the grand bazaar a feast for the eyes, and famous landmarks like Hagia Sophia cut striking silhouettes against the night sky. Row a boat across a strait, and you marvel at the authentic wake that ripples behind. On the PC, the smallest details are as impressive as the grand, sweeping vistas.

The other reason exploration is so joyous is that the simple act of moving from place to place is so satisfying and amazing.

Climbing a tower and reaching into the heavens, admiring the view, and then making a leap of faith into a hay bale hundreds of feet below is a delight, as it always has been.

You can also buy parachutes and activate them in midair, which feels free and easy, like wafting downward on a cool breeze.



Review PC

NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN

Race to Newyork

There's a whole lot of America between San Francisco and New York City. Need for Speed: The Run's greatest achievement is the way it sometimes captures the thrill of hitting the open road and experiencing the varied beauty of the American landscape, from the mountains and the prairies to the small towns and skyscrapers.

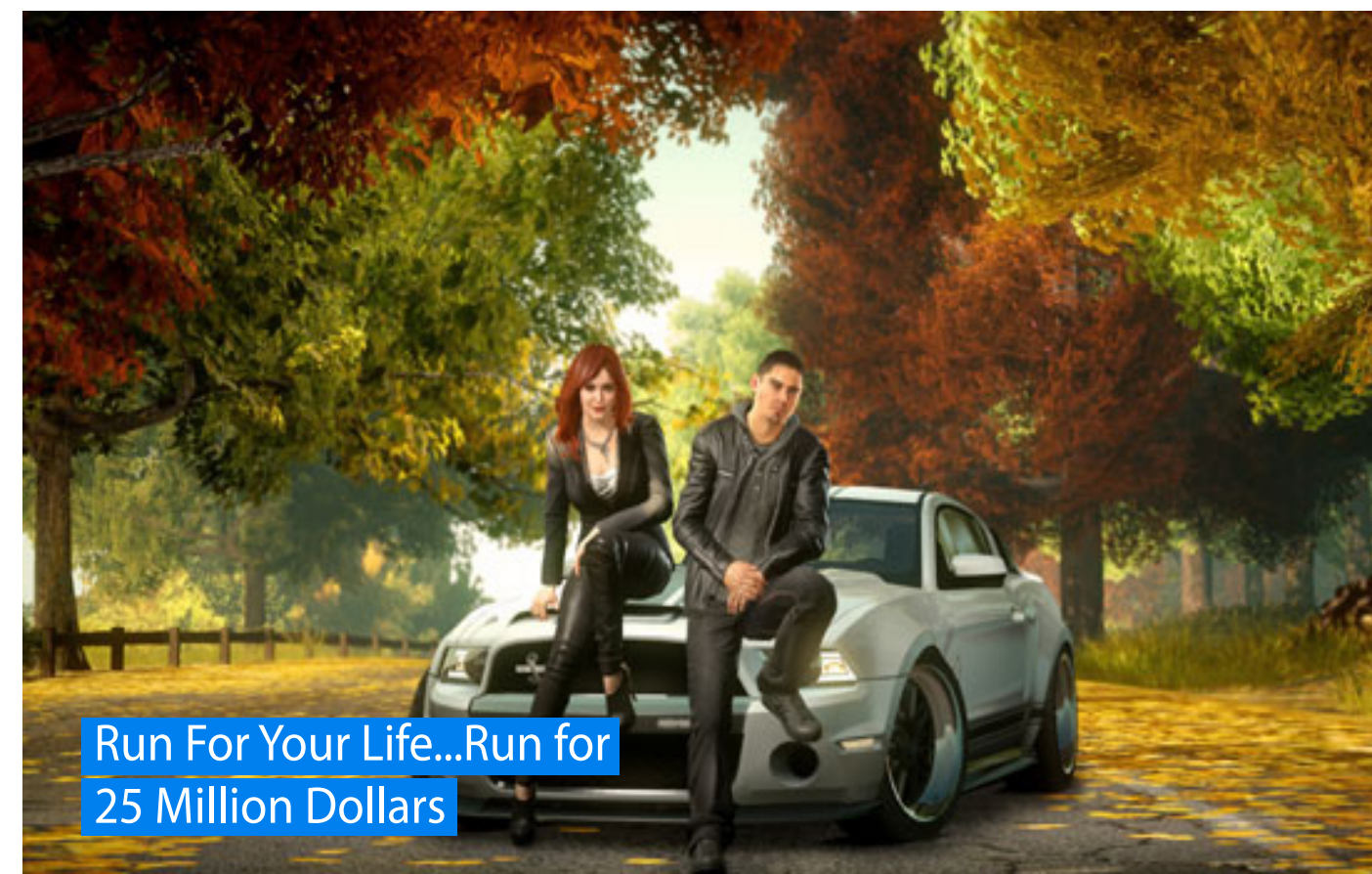
Unfortunately, issues arise that sap some of the momentum from your cross-country trek, but The Run spends enough time doing what it does best to remain an enjoyable journey.

You play as Jack Rourke, a racer who has gotten in way over his head with the mob. His friend Sam promises an end to his problems if he can win a cross-country street race and the huge payout that comes with victory and passion.

Sadly, The Run's attempts to make you care about Jack's plight fall flat. The talents of actors Sean Faris and Christina Hendricks as Jack and Sam are wasted; their voices emanate from character models with mouths that move oddly and faces that express no emotion. What's more, the story doesn't even make sense.

Certain rivals whom you pass early in the race show up again when you're in the home stretch. Thankfully, after an early cutscene that sets up the premise, the game wastes little time with its flimsy storytelling and lets you focus on driving.

The cars in The Run feel good to drive. The wide range of vehicles on offer includes sports cars that respond tightly to your every command and muscle cars that are tough to tame, but regardless of what you're driving, racing in the Run is about balancing speed with control.



Run For Your Life...Run for 25 Million Dollars

L.A. NOIRE

Rockstar engages in some suspect behaviour



It's drenched in so much authentic late-'40s style that you'll practically be able to smell the acrid mix of glamour and corruption in the air. This PC release comes complete with the five cases that were released as downloadable content on consoles, making it the best version of L.A. Noire you can buy.

Your journey takes you from filthy flophouses and hobo camps to elegant mansions and the sleek, modern offices of a company that's shaping the development of postwar Los Angeles. The architecture, which includes cookie-cutter housing developments that are springing up in droves to capitalize on the return of soldiers from the war, as well as jazz clubs where cops and gangsters alike relax after night falls.



"The Run is about balancing speed with control".

The Run keeps the pressure on in each event by requiring you to meet one of a few objectives. On some stretches of road, you need to pass a certain number of other racers before reaching the finish line.

The roads in The Run aren't entirely faithful to the real roads that inspired them, but they admirably evoke the beauty one might witness on a scenic trip across the United States.

It's not just the cars themselves that make driving in The Run enjoyable. It's also the places you go. Starting in San Francisco, your path takes you through Yosemite National Park, the Rocky Mountains, downtown Chicago, and plenty of other locations.



Using your brakes effectively, maintaining a smart racing line, and speedily exiting the turns is crucial to maintaining a good time, and it feels great to put these powerful cars through their paces.

Unfortunately, you may sometimes find yourself in the wrong car for the job. With a few story-related exceptions, Jack can only change cars at gas stations, and in some stretches, these are few and far between. As a result, you may get into a muscle car to power through a stretch of highway, only to wind up facing a particularly twisty road that the muscle car is not ideal for in the next event.

What awaits Cole Phelps at the next crime scene? Will it be a couple of hopheads who overdosed on morphine and are now on the midnight train to nowhere? Or maybe a young lady whose dreams of Hollywood stardom were chewed up and spit out by the studios and who now lies naked in a park, the victim of a brutal murder?

L.A. Noire confronts you with these sad situations and many more. Inspired by film noir classics and hardboiled crime fiction, this tale of a complicated and troubled cop in postwar Los Angeles makes the business of detective work absorbing and rewarding.



Phelps is played by Aaron Staton, best known for his role on *Mad Men*, and thanks to L.A. Noire's use of an impressive motion capture technology, his performance goes far beyond voice acting. Phelps' face is Staton's face, and while motion scanning doesn't quite capture all the soul of an actor's performance, it nonetheless allows for a great deal of the subtlety of that performance to come through.

L.A. Noire is a unique game with a terrific sense of period atmosphere. Pick up an official document while rummaging through some files and you'll see that it looks genuine right down to the fine print. This attention to detail makes the often unsavory business of being a detective deeply absorbing.

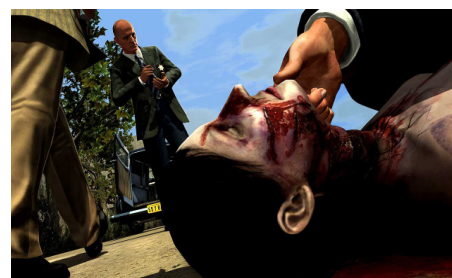
On top of this, the period fashions, actual automobiles, and music of the era--along with a score that evokes the style of some of the great composers of film noir--weave an intoxicating spell that's sure to stir the heart of anyone with a fondness for 1940's style. The art direction that pervades every aspect of *L.A. Noire* is simply outstanding, and it's a huge part of what makes this game such a memorable experience.

But all that attention to detail wouldn't amount to much if it weren't in the service of a game that was worthy of it. Thankfully, *L.A. Noire* is worthy. You play as Cole Phelps, a young veteran of World War II who enlists in the L.A.P.D. in 1947.

“L.A. Noire's absorbing investigations and intoxicating sense of style make it an unforgettable journey through the seamy side of the city of angels”.



These unlocks come into play solely during Survival games. It may take a bit of adjustment, seeing almost-but-not-quite-real faces on these characters, and there's sometimes a bit of a blurriness around the lips that can be distracting. But for the most part, it's very effective, allowing for rich and nuanced performances that seem to fully inhabit the world of the game. And this isn't just for show.

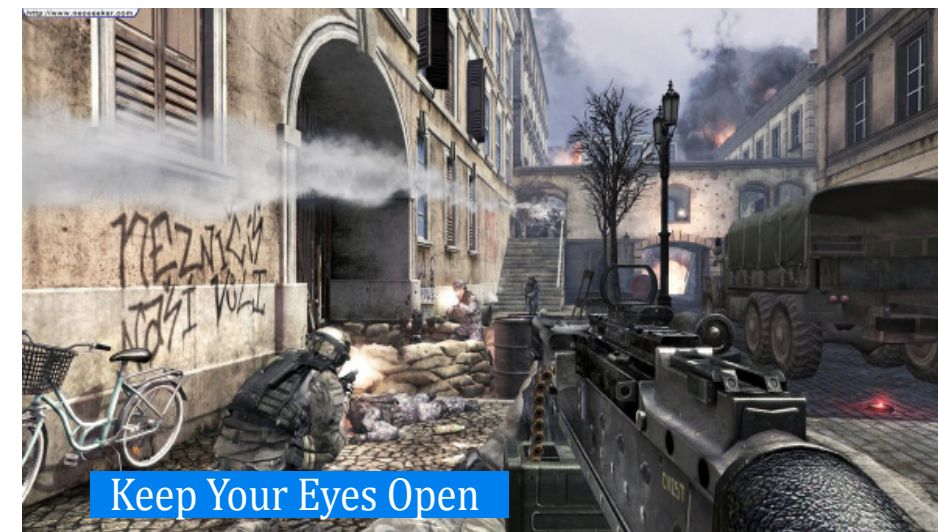


L.A. Noire is a unique game with a terrific sense of period atmosphere, absorbing investigation mechanics, and a haunting tale with plenty of moments that would be right at home in a classic film noir.

COD:MODERN WARFARE 3

One of the best shooting game around

Spec Ops also includes the new Survival mode, which offers even more opportunity for cooperative or solo slaughter. Survival pits you against wave after wave of increasingly difficult AI enemies on the same maps you encounter in competitive multiplayer. Playing either Survival mode or Spec Ops missions levels up your Spec Ops profile, which in turn channels that familiar satisfaction by unlocking guns, attachments, and equipment.



These unlocks come into play solely during Survival games. As you progress through waves and earn money for killing enemies, you gain access to hotspots where you can purchase items from your unlocked arsenal. While you can always pick up the guns your enemies drop in a pinch, the weapons you purchase are likely to be the ones that give you staying power.

Refilling grenades and ammo regularly is a necessity, and as the waves get tougher, so is making use of the more powerful assets in your repertoire. A sentry gun can help you stay safely entrenched in one corner of the map, while a squad of AI allies can help cover you when things get hairy. With good gun choices and savvy equipment use, you can make solid progress, but there's always another wave waiting to outflank and overwhelm you that is disastrous and mind blowing.

Spec Ops is a great destination for those seeking a stiff, surmountable challenge (missions) or the thrill of seeing how far sharpshooting and smarts can get you (survival). But the most fiendish challenge comes when you take your skills into the realm of online competitive multiplayer.

The action will be instantly familiar to anyone who has braved a Call of Duty battlefield in the past four years. The speedy action and rewarding experience point system are just as thrilling and addictive as ever, and some welcome refinements make it even easier to enjoy. Interface improvements make it easier to customize your loadout and view relevant challenges, which offer hefty XP bonuses.

Those thirsty for more information about their weapons and statistics can use the free Call of Duty Elite application.



8.5
Great



The 16 maps provide an excellent array of arenas for the action to play out. Bomb planting, flag grabbing, territory controlling, and straightforward killing form the backbone of most matches, with the notable new addition of Kill Confirmed.

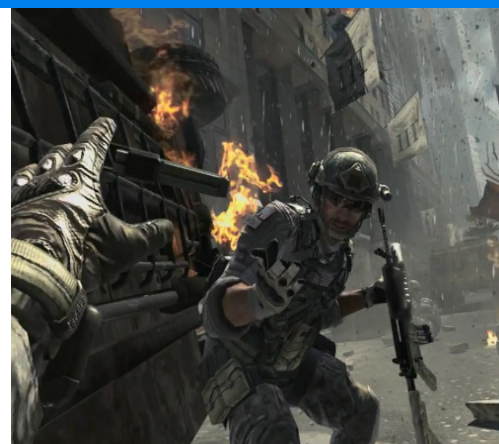
This mode mixes things up by requiring you to collect tags from dead bodies in order to actually register your kills. Confirming a kill or denying an enemy kill by collecting a downed ally's tags is as important as making sure your bullets hit the target, giving this mode an enjoyable new tactical dimension.

These tweaks alter the flow of rewards into your arsenal and onto the battlefield, but Modern Warfare 3 doesn't take any chances with the tried-and-true formula. At launch, even the matchmaking playlists feature standard fare, but the robust Private Match customization options let you tweak the standards to your liking (even offering some of Black Ops' more interesting modes) and hold the possibility of odd permutations to come.

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"Modern Warfare 3 sticks to its competitive, cooperative, and single-player guns and minds you why the series is one of the best in the business".

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BATTLEFIELD 3

Exclusive

In the realm of online combat, Battlefield 3 provides thrills that few games can match.



When it comes to virtual battlefields, nobody does it quite like the Battlefield series. It has a long history of creating sprawling conflict zones where players have an exhilarating range of ways to make powerful contributions to the war effort. The competitive multiplayer mode in Battlefield 3 stays true to tradition, delivering an online combat experience that is amazingly addictive, immersive, and exciting, with refinements and new elements that make the familiar action feel fresh. Unfortunately, the stale single-player campaign fails to capitalize on the strengths of the series and feels like an off-brand imitation. The six cooperative missions fare better and offer a tougher challenge.

There are many factors that combine to make these battlefields as good as they are, most of which will be familiar to series veterans. Nine great maps set the stage for up to 64 players to fight it out in a variety of urban, industrial, and military locations. These places all look beautiful, though the grassy hills and blue skies of the Caspian Border are naturally more appealing than the drab urban corridors of the Grand Bazaar.



The maps vary widely in size and offer diverse environmental elements, including claustrophobic tunnels, coastal roads, desert plains, and a variety of multistory buildings.

Many man-made structures can be damaged or destroyed by the explosive tools at your disposal, creating new infiltration routes or removing cover positions. The maps are designed to create opportunities for combat.



Combat is not just about where you are, but also about how you get there, and the variety of vehicles is one of the things that makes Battlefield so uniquely engaging. Small maps might only have a Humvee or a light armored vehicle, while larger ones boast buggies, tanks, amphibious transports, helicopters, and jets

There are a few variations within each class of vehicle that make them better suited for troop transport, anti-infantry, antiair, or anti-vehicle combat, and learning how to get the most out of each one is a blast, even if you're sometimes the one getting blown up. Whether you're piloting, gunning, or just going along for the ride, vehicles offer a key tactical element that can change the tide.

Regardless of what loadout you choose, there are a lot of ways to earn points for your actions. In addition to kills and kill assists, you can now earn points for suppressing enemies who are subsequently killed by your teammates. When a player is suppressed by enemy fire.

"Almost frightening in its realism" - Computer And VideoGames.com

they suffer from blurred vision and decreased accuracy. This disorienting tactic can help you mitigate the effectiveness.

The maps and vehicles allow for a great degree of strategic freedom, but choosing your class and loadout is the first and most important decision you make before spawning into combat. Abilities and weapons have shuffled around a bit since Battlefield: Bad Company 2, so now the assault class slings health packs and totes defibrillators, while the support class carries light machine guns and ammunition boxes. Nevertheless, it will be immediately familiar to veteran players of either game, though fans of Bad Company 2 will encounter a few other small



New gadgets like robots that can arm charges (engineer) and mark targets (recon) give players more to look out for on the battlefield, and claymores and mortars (support) ensure that the engineer class isn't the only one packing an explosive punch. Unlockables include class-specific weapons and gadgets, gun-specific sights and attachments, and specializations that can make you tougher and deadlier.

Buildings are not easily destroyed in Battlefield 3 and underslung grenade launchers are, as of now, far less prevalent. Furthermore, you can't just run up to someone and stab him in the face for an instant kill; you need to get in two swipes or sneak up from behind. Nor can you simply rely on explosives to destroy M-COM stations in Rush mode because arming and detonating the charge is now the only way to progress.

As with the previous Battlefield games, the focus is on teamwork. Diverse loadouts encourage you and your squad to make complementary choices, and point bonuses reward you for working together. Every vehicle is better with teammates in it, and even the simple act of spotting enemies is an effective way to contribute to your team's efforts. Teamwork is woven throughout the fabric of Battlefield 3's multiplayer action, and when your team is working well together, it's one of the most gratifying experiences you can have in a game.



“The most realistic-looking shooter yet” - New York Times



"Frostbite 2 looks bloody magnificent" - Eurogamer.net

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This disorienting tactic can help you mitigate the effectiveness of enemies who are peppering you from a prone position, which returns in Battlefield 3 after being left out of the Bad Company games. Battlefield 3 may be a successor in name to Battlefield 2, but in spirit, the competitive multiplayer is a refined version of that offered in Bad Company 2. Nevertheless, it will be immediately familiar to veteran players of either game, though fans of Bad Company 2 will encounter a few other small but notable differences.

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Your foes are fairly tough, even on normal difficulty, though some unexpected quick-time events can also catch you off guard. The most notable mission here puts you in the cockpit of a helicopter, which provides the only chance outside of multiplayer to practice your flying skills. Earning all of the weapon unlocks requires repeat play-throughs of these missions, so it's a shame there aren't more of them to keep you busy.



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MAX PAYNE 3



It's about (bullet) time



When we finally got our first look at Rockstar's reboot of the Max Payne franchise, the man at the centre of the action was a rudderless, burnt-out husk of a man. But, hey, what's new? While Max had left the chilly New York winter seeking out the more tropical shores of Brazil to do contract security with friend Raul Passos in Sao Paulo, old habits die hard, as Max once again tried to protect the women around him. We recently got an exclusive look at some more of the single-player story in action.

The fact that our hero was still sporting healthy-looking locks of dark hair meant that the events of our latest demo predate those of the bus depot shoot-outs in our last preview.

Upon arrival at Branco's office, the conversation flitted between unsubtitled Portuguese and English, as a high-ranking member of the local law enforcement, Marcelo Branco (the hard-partying yin to brother Rodrigo's wealthy, but respectable, yang) and members of staff discussed Fabiana's disappearance. Ever the trooper, once the group dispersed Max found himself back in his comfort zone: less chat and more splat. Armed Cracha Preto gunmen stormed the building, and while Branco had taken the initiative and installed an elaborate, and expensive, alarm system, it was immediately clear that there was a problem with the plan when it failed to activate on command.



Branco hunkered down in his office while we played babysitter to the IT guy, who shared more than a passing resemblance to Moss from British comedy series The IT Crowd. Bullets flew, and while our sidekick didn't know one end of a gun from the other, we stalked the hallways with confidence, pumping round after round into enemy soldiers.

Bright sunshine streamed in through the floor-to-ceiling windows in the office building. Desks appeared to be worked at, stocked with piles of carefully filed paper reports, knickknacks, and architectural model mock-ups of buildings in progress. All became casualties of battle as we returned fire, bullets whizzing past, and the glass of desk dividers shattered as we inched our way towards the server room to reboot the security system. Cover quickly became shredded, necessitating our need to push forward, while a combination of low-slung furniture, diving jumps, and bullet time provided its fair share of dramatic Hong Kong-cinema-style action and intensified moments. While we half expected a survival-style mission where waves of attackers would descend on our position as we protected our frail, intellectual buddy, it wasn't the case. In true help-desk style, all it took was a flick of the power switch and a few keyboard strikes to get the system back online, and only moments later, large metal doors slowly began to slide down from the ceiling to seal us in.

With the bodies finally beginning to pile up, we were presented with one last challenge: a significantly more heavily armed soldier wielding a machine gun. Our rounds appeared to bounce off his helmet and thick body plating at first, but after working him for a bit with a mixture of blind fire from the remaining cover and some well-placed bullet-time shots.



Branco may be wealthy and connected, but he's certainly no Tony Montana. Commanded by Max back to the safety of his office, he scuttled off, pleading with us to "try not to completely destroy the place." Our move to the lobby revealed a slain receptionist with her phone headset still attached. The image didn't have much time to sink in, though, as another of the game's set-piece moments was triggered: a jeep smashed through the glass doorway of the building.

"This is Max as we've never seen him before, older, more world weary and cynical than ever"

Time slowed, and reloading and bullet conservation were no longer our concerns as we took aim at the driver first. Gun-toting passengers were second on the list, closely followed by the stream of armed men rushing in through the now destroyed awkward entrance. Reinforcements arrived when a white van pulled up and the doors flung open. Anyone we hadn't already filled with lead was picked off one by one as we ducked behind pillars and returned fire. The foyer's opulent facade was stripped bare in the skirmish, revealing a functional, but unattractive, steel rebar below.



FIFA 12



Fifa unveils its formation for the upcoming season

One Man Show



The FIFA series needs no introduction to football fans, having grown a loyal audience and brought the beautiful game to life on the virtual pitch. Today at EA's E3 2011 presentation, it revealed that 42 million players have played in excess of 1.3 billion games online across platforms, including Facebook, smartphones, PCs, and current-generation consoles.

The presentation was thin on details about this year's version of the game, but it did allude to a reworked tactical and impressive defending system.

which is significantly more reliant on timing and tactics rather than being in the right place at the right time and putting your body on the line to stop strikes at the goals. Ball precision will also play a more active role in FIFA 12, receiving a spit and polish and allowing players better, more precise dribbling of the ball, as well as improved deft touches for setting up plays.

The game will also include a brand new player impact engine. While FIFA 11 included the chance to jostle for possession, real-world perfect physicality.

Momentum will allow you to jump over downed players and continue on your run toward the back of the net with pace as well. Push and pull will be at play, and from the snippet of footage shown, it appears to be similar to previous games, giving players with a weight advantage the chance to knock lighter players off the ball.

Celebrity endorsements from Lil Wayne, Drake, and various international football personalities extolled the publishers adherence to faithfully re-creating the sport.

with some even going as far as to suggest that the new game provides real football players with a cheat sheet on the footedness of players and the intricacies of their individual play styles.

FIFA 12 will also benefit from the addition of a new online social feature called EA Sports Football Club, which is a live service that will connect players and provide a single persistent online profile across all devices. Again, though details were scarce, EA did confirm that the company will inject new challenges and storylines into a player's experiences. We're hoping for wrestling-style face-offs with a good start. Players will pick a club side (and we have our fingers crossed for inclusion of national teams to help fuel international rivalries) and swear allegiance to it. Playing matches online will reward players with

achievements regardless of whether the matches are being played on a mobile handset, through a web browser or on a console from the comfort of your couch.

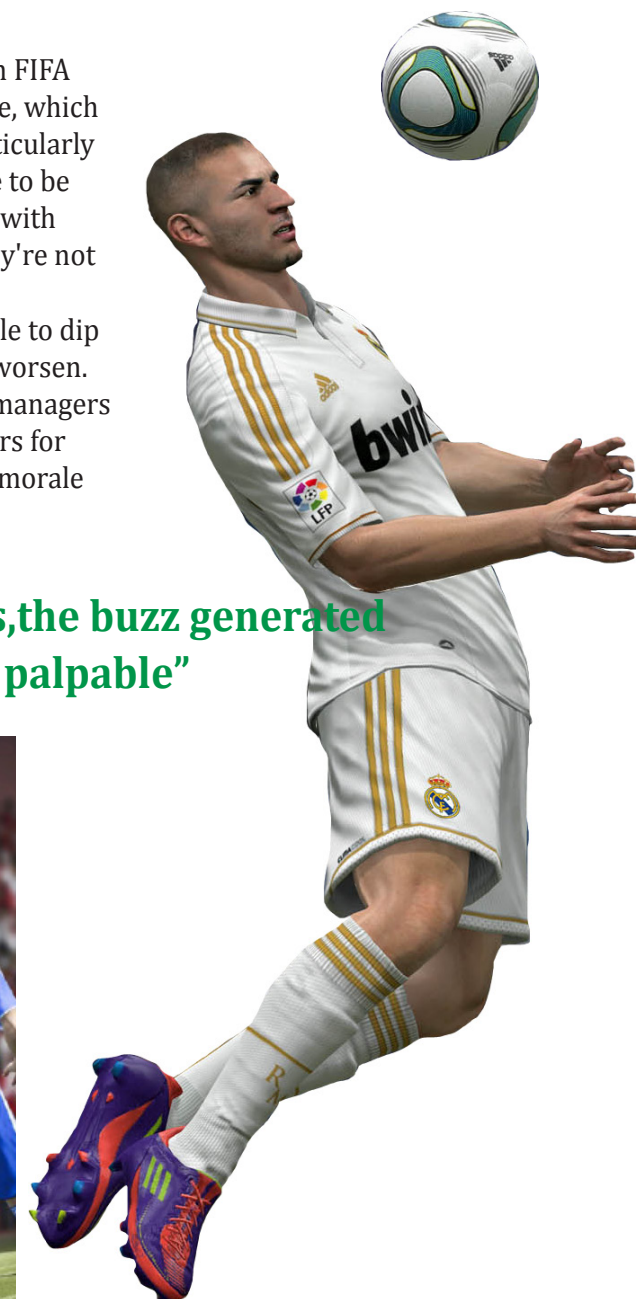
Success will also propel your supported side up the league, with the example we saw, Tottenham Hotspur, powering up the virtual league when its supporters won

Gameplay footage was few and far between during the presentation, but FIFA 12 appears to keep the same visual styling of the last release, with more work seemingly going on under the hood than at surface level. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to try out the new physicality elements for ourselves once the show starts. Stay tuned to GameSpot's ongoing coverage from E3 2011.

Much of the emphasis is on FIFA 12's improved career mode, which promises more depth, particularly for managers. Squads have to be managed more effectively, with players getting upset if they're not paid enough a true to life feature causing their morale to dip and their performance to worsen. Conversely, AI-controlled managers can come in and make offers for your players, raising their morale but ultimately costing you more money.

"For football fans, the buzz generated by match-day is palpable"

While the focus is on career mode, additions have also been made to the game on the pitch, including precision dribbling, tactical defending, and a new player impact engine. Improvements to precision dribbling are subtle but give you greater control, letting you shield the ball from the opposition. Less subtle are the tweaks to defending, which take away the "homing missile" effect that players had when going in for tackles, replacing it with more realistic movements, such as grabbing shirts as players race by and coercing them into dangerous positions



KING ARTHUR II



adventure, diplomacy and battle

If the blaring music is any indication, E3 2011 is still going strong, and one of the many exciting new games on display is King Arthur II - The Role-Playing Wargame. Like its title suggests, this is both a sequel to the first King Arthur and a hybrid game that incorporates elements of both traditional turn-based wargames and story-driven role-playing games. The story in this sequel picks up after the events of the first game, and things are decidedly darker in the court of Camelot.

The holy grail has been destroyed, and Arthur, King of the Britons, has been mortally wounded. And because of the magical connection between the monarch and his lands, the anguish of the dying ruler has corrupted the land beyond recognition; thus, dark things have emerged to plague the countryside. In the game, you play as a new hero who fights to restore order to the beleaguered realm of Brittonia by doing battle against its enemies.

For our E3 demonstration, we jumped right into the game's campaign map. It was a fully realized 3D map of Brittonia, which was a lush, green realm full of rolling hills, divided up into individual provinces by easily visible glowing yellow lines. Like in the original King Arthur, provinces in the sequel will be home not only to the kingdom's subjects, but also to special event locations, which can be captured. In some cases, they can also be upgraded to provide persistent bonuses throughout the campaign. And like in the original game, you'll frequently happen upon quests of three types: adventure, diplomacy, and battle.

Adventure quests play out just like they did in the first game as a series of choices that lead to more choices that lead to consequences (not unlike the structure of the popular Choose Your Own Adventure novels from the 1980s). Diplomacy quests often take the form of pleas for help from the populace, and you can either respond to them by sending your own armies, hiring mercenaries for gold, or contracting the services of the shadowy Guild of Outlaws if you happen to have the right connections. Or, you can simply ignore these pleas. Battle quests are what they sound like: quests that challenge you to take on a foe in the game's 3D real-time battles.



In all cases, your choices may affect your ruler's alignment between benevolent and tyrant. (You can also choose to have your ruler subscribe to Christianity or follow the "Old Ways," the land's pagan religion.) Religion and alignment have no direct bearing on each other but will affect the types of skills and magic spells your ruler will learn. Quests may cause you to earn or to lose gold, but they will also get you access to powerful artifacts, let you rescue ladies in waiting who may join your court as eligible brides for your vassals, and affect which types of troops and heroes you eventually end up enlisting. Like in the original game, your forces will gain experience over time, and heroes will still belong to one of three classes: warlord, knight, or sage. But in the sequel, your hero units will all have full-on skill trees you can use to customize their abilities over time.

After running through the new features in the game's strategic layer, we jumped into a tactical battle to see some of the game's other new features, including an entirely new graphics engine that renders King Arthur II's battlefields in much more detail and lets you zoom in close to inspect any individual unit. What's more, King Arthur II will introduce flying units to battles. While flying units can be countered in a variety of different ways, including enemy flying units, archers, and various magic spells, they will be advantageous to have on your side.

This is because they can navigate almost any terrain quickly without any kind of penalty (while your grounded troops will, of course, suffer movement and combat penalties when traversing rough terrain). In addition, terrain will continue to play an important role in King Arthur II's tactical combat. The open field will be most favorable for certain types of infantry, while the high ground will be advantageous for archers.

The original King Arthur offered an intriguing combination of strategy and role-playing elements.

"King Arthur II will once again combine the strategy of a wargame"



BATMAN:ARKHAM CITY



The Dark Knight returns

It's one thing to hear the development team members at Rocksteady say that Arkham City is much bigger than the island in Batman: Arkham Asylum, but it's quite a different thing to see it and realize just what they mean. Batman: Arkham City is an absolutely massive game, and we were able to get a taste of just how grand it is in a short demo that featured Batman once again attempting to track down his nemesis, The Joker

The demo begins with Batman standing on a rooftop, overlooking a courthouse in Arkham City a district of Gotham that has been walled off from the rest of the city. Its new warden is Dr. Hugo Strange, whose armed guards maintain brutal control over the inmates and will shoot anyone who tries to escape. By hacking into Strange's communications and with the aid of Alfred, Batman learns that Two Face (also known as former district attorney, Harvey Dent) has captured Catwoman and that he's keeping her in the courthouse below. Naturally, the building's facade is designed to represent its new inhabitants one side is perfectly fine while the other is completely mangled.



"The Dark Knight returns in a sequel that takes him to the streets of a transformed Gotham"

Before heading into the structure, we were shown one of the ways Batman can get around in Arkham City. By leaping from rooftops, or other suitably high locations, Batman can glide over the streets of Arkham. He can continue gliding to the ground and perform a high-impact landing by using his dive-bomb maneuver, or he can use the same maneuver to quickly lose altitude and then swoop back up toward the sky. If you're already on the ground, then you can easily grapple up the side of a building (or even onto the landing struts of a helicopter) to get back to higher ground. What's interesting is that while you're doing all of this, you can use detective vision to check out what's going on in the city and choose to fight crime elsewhere, if you are so inclined.



But for the purposes of the demo, Batman heads back toward the courthouse and makes his way in, dispatching some thugs near the entrance with some slick melee moves that smoothly transition from one punch to the next. Once inside, we see a cutscene that shows Two Face rallying a group of inmates and proving how powerful he is by attempting to kill Catwoman, who happens to be dangling over a vat of acid.



By using detective vision, Batman can see that most of the people in the group are holding machetes or led pipes; nothing that he can't handle. But just above his location is a thug with an automatic weapon who can easily take Batman down if the Caped Crusader goes right for Two Face to improve your chances you can climb up to the platform and quietly take the enemy out.

you can climb up to the platform and quietly take the enemy out before leaping down into the crowd to dispatch justice with feet and fists. It's worth pointing that over the course of this fight enemies will use anything they can as a weapon against Batman. We saw a couple of inmates pick up chairs and hurl them in a sad attempt to do some damage, but Batman can also catch these objects and throw them right back.

With the crowd under control, Two Face suddenly shoots Batman and then makes his way over to Catwoman. Just as he's ready to shoot her, Catwoman escapes from the trap and manages to knock Two Face down. Just as soon as she does this, the former district attorney pulls out another gun and tries to shoot her, but Batman saves the day with his grapple hook



With everyone safe, the courthouse becomes a crime scene, which gives Batman an opportunity to investigate a little more. Using his detective vision, you can scan for the entry point of the sniper's bullet and where it landed, which then lets Batman figure out its trajectory. He learns that the bullet came from a gun located in the bell tower of a church nearby. Like what we saw earlier, you can have Batman go immediately to the bell tower or stay inside the courthouse to do some more investigating

Turning on detective mode reveals that there's still a person in a holding cell in a lower level of the courthouse. Going downstairs, he finds Calendar Man locked behind bars. What's particularly cool about a supremely uncool villain is that what he says is tied to your system clock, so if you happen upon him on the same day that he has committed some horrible crime, Calendar Man will go into greater detail about it. In the cell next to him is a Riddler trophy yes, the collecting element from the first game returns in Arkham City

With his job in the courthouse complete, Batman then makes his way out of the building (through an alternate exit to avoid enemies in front). But before heading to the bell tower, we get a closer look at another form of transportation for Batman. Nearby, a helicopter floats over a hot spot in the city. Batman seizes the opportunity to grapple up toward the helicopter and grab onto its landing struts.



Batman eventually makes it to the church where he encounters some armored enemies that can easily fend off some of his standard attacks. Thankfully, Batman has a new special attack called the beatdown that lets him launch a flurry of punches that help break the armor and let him take down stronger thugs



Online and RPG: **Cliff Bleszinski** ponders the future of shooters

Gears of War 3 design director Cliff Bleszinski talks to Tom Hoggins about the new game.

So Gears is done and ready to come out. How are you feeling? Relieved, nervous?

I feel good, the reviews are coming in pretty strong. Confident that we'll get the online in really good shape, getting the dedicated servers rolled out. I feel like we've wrapped it up as a trilogy, put a bow on it and put it under the Christmas tree for gamers.

Do you pay much attention to reviews?

Oh yeah, between every interview I'm on my iPad like an addict. Sometimes I don't really care what people say, and sometimes I care too much. When it comes to reviews I want to make sure everybody loves and enjoys it. And I want to make sure the right person is reviewing it, if you're a Final Fantasy Tactics guy, you probably shouldn't be reviewing Gears of War.

If there was one thing you were most keen on improving for Gears 3, what was it?

Making sure the online actually works. Because gamers have gotten savvy to the world of rentals and used games, so if you ship a game with a campaign that isn't 300 hours, you're going to be a rental. We want to make sure we have a deep multiplayer suite. So making sure the online works is huge to combat that issue. We don't want to do the whole online pass thing. God bless each publisher for having to battle this battle their own way. EA are fighting their own way through it. But for us, we want to make sure that we have a game that's big enough, that's worth \$60 on day one and you'll want to keep through a steady trickle of DLC.

How much did the beta help you to achieve that?

It was huge. It was immense for us. We weren't originally going to have it when we were shipping in April, so being able to suss out the issues to make sure the game is rock solid for September was absolutely enormous for us as a studio. We were so glad we were able to do it.

It was your first beta, right?

Yeah. We were pretty beta and demo averse previously. I had gone on record and had a really bad quote a while back I said something like "It's like hooking up with a girl, you know, once you do it, you've been there done that." And as well as being inappropriate was also very short sighted. Especially in this world, where we needed to regain gamers trust after Gears of War 2 and that was what the beta was able to for us.

What kind of problems did you feel you needed to fix?

Matchmaking was incredibly slow. We also completely redid matchmaking after every match, so you would have to find new people which added to the search times. And while Warzone and Execution are loved by Gears purists and are great ways to play the game, we have a world where people are increasingly distracted by social networks and things like that. And a game in which you die in the first five seconds and you're out for three minutes isn't necessarily the one that's going to be the most sticky.



Were there any other games you looked at while rebuilding the multiplayer?

You know, it's hard to ignore the kind of RPGish grind that's infiltrated games like Halo and Call of Duty, so that was a big influence on us. We wanted to make sure players had a steady stream of unlocks, kind of like fighting games in their heyday, where you had to unlock all the characters to add longevity.

"Online gameplay is going to be the future. It's the ultimate way for us to keep players playing our games"

CLIFF BLESZINSKI EPIC GAMES

That was an influence on us. As well as making sure that we have servers, I believe we're in a world where shooters need to have dedicated servers on day one, regardless. I hope gamers are going to feel spoiled by us and start demanding it from other games.

As a third person shooter, do you feel you have any inherent disadvantage to first-person when it comes to multiplayer?

First person is always going to be successful, but we provide a nice alternative to first person. We're always talking about Call of Duty and how it's so big now, why is it so big? Because it's a world you easily understand, much like football or whatever your sport of choice would be. And we have to teach people what a lancer is, what a Locust is and what an emergence hole is. But at the same time we thought if we just had a typical AK47 and iron sights and you were going down Flatbush Avenue in New York, we would get lost in the holiday shuffle. It's the fact that we're third person, and we have the chainsaws and monsters is what makes us stand out.

IGN score "AMAZING" 9.0

Story-wise, 3 seems slightly lighter in tone than 2, is that true?

We certainly have our share of giggles, but we also have our share of dark moments. The thing that is different is that we use a lot more colour to bleed into the game. We're at the point where Modern Warfare 3 looks less saturated than Gears of War does now. We're not Uncharted, and let's be fair, Uncharted is amazing. It's travel porn as a game, lush and gorgeous. But we've maintained the core Gears roots while allowing a bit of colour to come through, because it can be exhausting to be in such a desaturated environment for such a long period of time.

How do you feel about boss battles personally?

As a gamer, I love them. As a developer I find them incredibly frustrating and difficult as it is finding that sweet spot.



"Driver has been massive in the past and there is no reason to suggest that it couldn't be just as great in the future"

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