

Gearing up to become the holiday's killer app

Gears of War

Xbox 360
Epic Games
Microsoft Game Studios
Rated M

RYAN HEISE
Arts & Entertainment Staff

The ground shakes and the street in front of you gives way, swallowed into a cavern below. Running full speed towards a burnt-out car, you slam your back to it and bunker down as bullets begin to whiz past your head and ricochet off of your makeshift cover. A stream of Locusts—seven-foot-tall monsters that live underground—emerge from the hole and immediately begin searching for cover of their own. With a quick reload of your assault rifle and a deep breath, you pop up, return fire and reduce the enemy to a blood-soaked bag of flesh.

After being on the market for nearly a year, the Xbox 360 is going to have some competition this holiday season with the Playstation 3 and Nintendo's Wii coming onto the scene. With the release of *Halo 3* still six months away, Epic Games, the team that created the *Unreal Tournament* series, is hoping that *Gears of War*—an intense third-person action game—will be the 360's killer app for the holidays.

Set in the future on Sera, a planet colonized by humans, you play as Marcus Fenix—a soldier imprisoned

during a massive civil war, and you've only been released to help fight against humanity's new threat: the Locust, a race of creatures that were secretly living under Sera's surface, who now want their planet back.

The first noticeable characteristic of the game is its stunning graphics. Using Epic's own *Unreal 3* engine, the war-torn cities of Sera look almost photo-realistic. Architecture is clearly defined and even the smallest details don't go unnoticed. Characters move smoothly, and seamlessly transition between animations. *GoW* is easily the best looking game on the Xbox 360 to date.

But graphics don't necessarily make for a good time; game play is what really matters. Epic chose to mix up the tired action-game genre by combining elements from both run-and-gun and stealthy tactical games. The result is what Epic calls stop-and-pop—an emphasis on smaller, close-quarters skirmishes in which taking cover and flanking your enemy becomes incredibly important.

This system works quite well, for the A button handles all methods of cover: just get near an object, hit A and you'll stick to it. You can then pop up, squeeze off a few rounds and safely drop back down out of sight. It can be quite exhilarating to scramble for cover when an enemy gets the drop on you.

Holding down the A button while



running will initiate the roadie run—a low tucked sprint used to cover ground quickly. This is accompanied by an amazing bobbing-camera effect—reminiscent of many war films—that chases you. However, if you get too close to an object while performing the roadie run, you may stick to it as if you were taking cover. Not a huge problem, but it can become frustrating at points.

The game clearly deserves its mature rating, as the gore is nothing short of spectacular. Blood splat-

ters the environment as characters are shot, bodies are ripped apart and globs of the thick red stuff obstruct the camera. But nothing says gore in a video game like a chainsaw, and Epic has reinvented the flesh-ripping machine by mounting it like a bayonet. Get in close to an enemy, hold the B button and you'll rip into your opponent with a blatant disregard for their personal health. But be forewarned, the chainsaw is not a melee weapon for those with a weak stomach. Let's just say the game's graphics

are put to good use when hacking up a foe.

The only real issue with the game is its length. Clocking in at around ten hours for the average gamer, the single player portion is relatively short. Thankfully, a solid eight-player online death match, as well as a two-player online co-operative mode, help stretch out the game's replay value.

GoW is a solid, gruesome and addictive title that will definitely help the Xbox 360 stay noticed amidst the launch of its two rivals.

Hit me baby, one more time—and maybe again



AMANDA
ASH

I guess you could call me a hipster. My ability to coordinate vintage-style blacks and browns with denim provides me with a fashion sense that trumps any glossy glamour girl. My innate passion for English literature and philosophical argumentation gives me licence to don wire-rimmed glasses. And most importantly, my acute awareness of the Edmonton music scene—or music in general—gives me the power to spew out obscure musicians' names and rave about their revolutionary sound.

I'm not going to lie about my musical

knowledge. I've listened to a plethora of albums, chatted with numerous artists and witnessed my fair share of live shows. Indeed, if I'm to be labelled as a hipster, then I'm proud of it. I'm proud of my high-top runners. I'm proud of my ability to name drop. But most importantly, I'm proud of the shitty Top-40 songs I openly listen to.

Shitty Top-40 music, you say? That's not a hipster trait. And that's definitely something to be pleased about. To be honest, though, the ability to listen to "bad" music and enjoy it should be a hipster characteristic. Yes, Bryan Adams' "Summer of '69" has a special spot on my iPod. So does Justin Timberlake's "Sexyback" and Nelly Furtado's "Promiscuous."

There's a reason these sorts of songs become mainstream and end up being played, non-stop, on radio stations like The Bounce, or in skanky clubs on

Whyte. They're popular, they're catchy and they spark a certain *je ne sais quoi* in the souls of those who just want to dance. Sure, Top-40 songs may be cheesy and shallow, promoting nothing more than libidinous acts or feelings of nostalgia, but there's something to be said about the way they go down—and will go down—in musical history.

Really, what are the chances of hearing "This Is The Dream Of Win And Regine" by Final Fantasy being completely butchered by a vodka-soaked cougar on karaoke night? Sure, the violinist himself is a fantastic musician who takes his music seriously and actually knows art. But can you tell me that we'd ever be presented with the opportunity to point and laugh at pubescent cover bands adding screaming guitars—and screaming, in general—to Amy

Millan's folk-country ballads, or to Chad VanGalen's carefree jubilation?

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To put things simply, mainstream music is fun. It's fun to act stupid to, it's fun to get drunk to and it's fun to sing to on a road trip. Listening to music is a form of entertainment, and once you

being scrupulously criticizing anything and everything about a genre, a musician or how many times they've been played on the radio, you're missing the go-out-and-let-loose point those little notes and chords are trying to make.

A real music lover doesn't discriminate, and most importantly, welcomes every tune and track with open arms. Indeed, there's nothing wrong with listening to crappy music sometimes, especially if you're a hipster. Don't be ashamed; dig out the old CDs you threw into the corner of your room when your nose was stuck up in the air, and load them onto your iPod. Your hipster friends might scorn you, poke fun at you or look down upon your supposed "musical tastes" for a while, but when you're walking to school, freely jamming on your air guitar to "Livin' On A Prayer," you'll thank me.

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