Video Game Reviews: Microsoft's new shooter is an unreal experience

by Jeb Haught

Game: "Gears of War"

Publisher: Microsoft

System: Microsoft Xbox 360

Cost: $59.99

ESRB Rating: M

Review rating: 4 stars

The wait is finally over. Renowned "Unreal Tournament" designer "CliffyB" Bleszinski has unleashed the ultimate shoot-'em-up, "Gears of War," for the Xbox 360.

Featuring a unique system that lets players take cover behind almost any surface, an intriguing story line, and intense combat that stresses strategic maneuvers, this game is sure to make the wait for "Halo 3" much more bearable.

â€˜GEARS OF WARâ€™ - â€œGears of Warâ€• has an intriguing story line and its intense combat emphasizes strategic planning. CNS Photo courtesy of Microsoft.While the "aliens-invading-Earth" story isn't exactly original, the fact that they seem to be coming from deep inside Earth instead of outer space adds a new dimension to the story line.

Before too long, mankind is losing badly. So badly that the Coalition decides to recruit anyone into its ranks, even criminals. Eager combatants take on the role of a court-martialed soldier named Marcus Fenix who is freed from captivity only to fight against seemingly endless hordes of deadly aliens.

This isn't your typical run-and-gun first-person shooter, as players must move from cover to cover if they want to stay alive. Advanced artificial intelligence makes enemy movement unpredictable and their gunfire extremely accurate.

Players can take cover behind walls, vehicles, buildings or anything else nearby. With the press of a button, players can pop out from cover and spray the enemy with lead. But beware: Enemies use the same tactics.

"Gears of War" campaign is playable cooperatively online, and the game features intense four-on-four combat in three deadly modes. You won't find a better-looking console shooter in the horde of games released this holiday season.

Game: "Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom"

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment

System: Sony PlayStation 3

Cost: $59.99

ESRB Rating: T

Review rating: 3 1/2 stars

Recently, Sony Online Entertainment lured fans of action role-playing games (RPGs) onto hand-held gaming systems across the world with the release of "Untold Legends" for the PSP. Now the popular series is taken into the next generation with the release of "Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom," and the result is sure to please fans of all ages.

This game lets players take a powerful, magical mage, a mighty warrior or a nimble scout into battle against throngs of lethal creatures and demons.

â€˜UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOMâ€™ - In â€œDark Kingdom,â€• you battle throngs of lethal creatures and demons. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony Online Entertainment.In addition, two players can attempt each level cooperatively offline, and four players can band together for an epic online adventure.

One great addition to the series is independent cameras for each online player so they don't have to all remain on-screen at once. This lets the player change from a top-down camera view to a much closer behind-the-backview at any time to enjoy the high-definition visuals and impressive particle effects.

Part of what makes "Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom" so fun is the ability to upgrade characters every time they reach a higher level. In addition to enhancing basic attributes like health, attack power and defense, players can acquire devastating special moves. For example, the warrior can improve his battle shout to add more attack power, and the mage can upgrade his chain lightning attack to hit more enemies.

My only gripes with the game concern the limited amount of classes that are available and the occasional obtrusive camera angle that occurs when players are in confined spaces. Aside from that, PlayStation 3 owners will be thrilled to have such a great hack-and-slash RPG so early in the console's life.

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RATING KEY

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

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Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older)

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