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What country owns epic games.

Despite a new platform, a new development team and a new-ish set of muscled heroes on its box art, Gears of War 4 isn't some grand reimagining of the series that helped Xbox 360 go supernova back in 2006. But then again, such a revelation shouldn't come as a shock - this is the cover shooter that made cover shooters a fad-filled genre all unto itself, so messing too drastically with that special sauce was never a viable option. Instead, the Xbox One and Xbox One S get the Gears of War template we all know and love with a few extra features gently stirred into the pot. For a start, the jump to current-gen tech has made all the difference to The Coalition's first full-fat Gears title. Spend a little time in the previously remastered Gears of War: Ultimate Edition and you'll see how small and confined those original level designs were, even with a graphical upgrade to make it feel relevant again. Now, with the Unreal Engine 4 purring away under the hood, you suddenly realise how much difference that extra horsepower really makes. Just take a trip through its opening slew of levels - fighting your way through a construction site still being erected while waves of automatons (a first for the series) fall from the sky like sentient debris, or braving a raging electrical storm that tears an old mansion apart with captivating brutality. Everything pops with a sheen and frame rate stability the early Gears games could only dream of. This is, after all, one of Microsoft's flagships for the power of HDR, but it still looks incredible running on a regular old vanilla Xbox One. Gears of War 4 multiplayer tips and tricks

Gears for fears This being a Gears of War game, all the familiar elements are present and correct. You'll spend most of your time hunkered behind cover, popping your head over the top to shoot everything from the Swarm to DeeBees (a new, ever so slightly cliché robotic foe introduced near the start of the game) while the screen slowly fills with a bloody COG logo. You'll cut through things with your Lancer and definitely have to fight giant mini-bosses on a regular basis. The story, as you might expect, is full of fairly predictable twists and turns, but hey, it's Gears of War - some things never change. That reliance on the old ways can get a little tiresome at times - the call back to previous points in Gears canon in the game's prologue and the quick introduction of Marcus' voice like a chainsaw with a bad throat? Fenix feels like a series too afraid to jettison its most recognisable assets from the off. Even a revelation around halfway through the game, involving new enemy the Swarm, takes the series backwards in terms of both narrative and gameplay. Such a step, without jumping too far into spoiler territory, suddenly makes parts of Gears 4 feel a little dated. Thankfully, new hero JD just manages to avoid falling into the generic void of 'dude with a gun', mainly because he's paired with two other funny and interesting companions in the form of Kait and Del. Along those lines, JD, Del and Kait are good friends that snipe, bicker and laugh together and it makes them a far more rewarding group to follow for the 10-to-12-hour-long campaign. Sure, JD is made more interesting by the quality of his company (and the fact actor Liam McIntyre sounds eerily like Nathan Fillion when doing an American accent), but it works nonetheless. The saw is the law

Considering The Coalition had to rebuild every last element of the game from scratch to make Gears 4 work on a new engine and a new platform, everything feels familiar yet fresh and exciting. Weapons such as the Lancer feel more accurate and far more satisfying to use, while the new cover-based executions (where you push up on the left analog stick and hit X) give you new ways to take out foes in close quarters with your tactical knife. The only problem is, the AI in Gears of War 4 is so restless and creative that you'll rarely get the chance to get close enough to use such a move that often. Most foes will either rush you, or regroup to a safer position. In an age where triple-A games are still shipping with AI that act irrationally and moronic, it's brilliant to see enemies pull away when exposed or use flanking tactics to bring you down, but it's odd when such behaviours render new mechanics useless. Some tweaks are far more subtle, yet make all the difference when facing the broad roster of foes you'll encounter in Gears of War 4. Take the Roadie Run - the awkward yet iconic sprint of the series returns, however, now you can vault over scenery with a simple tap of B. It's a small change but it gives you far more versatility when maneuvering during a firefight and makes controlling JD far more fluid than the tank that was his father. There's even new weapons added to the mix. Some of them work (such as the Ember sniper rifle that shoots bursts of electromagnetic energy or the Ratchet & Clank-style Buzzkill, which shoots reams of bouncing sawblades at your foes) and some of them don't (such as the DropShot, which is meant to fire explosive drills from above, but proves too unwieldy to aim correctly in the heat of battle). Regardless, it's comforting to see The Coalition avoid relying on overused features like the Hammer of Dawn. Strength in unity

Gears of War 4 also tries to unify the elements of its overall package by bringing Horde-style sections direct into the campaign. At key points in the story, you'll be given a Fabricator - a 3D printer of sorts that enables you to build any weapon and a variety of fortifications for a price. You can fashion barricades, turrets, decoys or explosives and use them to trap foes or incapacitate them while you're busy elsewhere. It's a brilliant way to create a synergy between modes and serves as a great way to coax players into trying out Horde 3.0. Should you stray into/commit your life to the return of Horde mode, you'll find The Coalition has revamped the classic format and made it better than ever. The aforementioned Fabricator gives you power to build fortifications anywhere on the map, and the better you perform in a wave, the more currency you have to spend. There's also a new class system, where roles such as scout or engineer give the intrinsic team spirit of the mode that extra bit of cohesion while battling each of the 50 waves it throws at you. It's the most egalitarian version of Horde we've ever seen, rushing about repairing barbed wire fences while a teammate snipes the Swarm from afar. Each element doesn't feel tacked on either - rather than add bloat, these elements feel natural like they should have been there from the very beginning. Add in skill slots and bonus cards and Horde 3.0 becomes Gears of War 4's most attractive feature.

Social slaying Much like the campaign and Horde mode, Gears of War 4's online multiplayer mode knows its strengths and avoids messing with that formula too drastically. Those mechanical changes to character movement - the ability to vault over obstacles at pace, slide directly into cover and drag enemies over cover for a quick execution - make the biggest impact online as you dive about each of its ergonomically designed maps. Such tweaks to movement are hardly going to transform Gears of War 4 into a John Woo flick, but that extra fluidity gives you a little extra maneuverability when navigating a firefight. The new weapons added in the campaign can add a little extra spice - the random death-dealing of the BuzzKill being one such highlight - but, truth be told, the deadly combo of the shotgun and the Longshot still rule the roost in most matches. This being Gears of War, there's all the usual modes you'd expect for a game centred mainly around decapitating folk with a shotgun blast to the face, but the slew of new ones do add a little extra depth to the usual capture the flag, domination and deathmatch variants. Dodgeball is brilliant fun, where you can tag defeated teammates back in by eliminating enemy players, while Arms Race doles out new weapons as the match progresses (a bit like Call of Duty: Black Ops' memorable Gun Game mode).

Verdict: Play it Sure, Gears of War 4 is hardly a grand transformation for the series, but much like Uncharted 4 on PS4, it manages to find a balance between the new and the old. New set pieces - including a brilliant run-and-gun battle on an armoured motorbike and a butt-clenching escape out of an ore mine - proves Gears can be just as captivating as anything Sony has to offer in the first-party stakes. While Horde 3.0 evolves the classic wave-based experience into its perfect self, making it a veritable feast for the cooperative mindset. Gears may be in new hands, but it's still moving in the right direction. Gears of War 4 was reviewed on Xbox One. TechRadar's review system scores games as 'Don't Play It', 'Play It' and 'Play It Now', the last of which is the highest score we can give. A 'Play It' score suggests a solid game with some flaws, but the written review will reveal the exact justifications. Price: \$60 Company: Microsoft Games What's Nice: Plays a lot like the original; deeper storyline; great voice acting; awesome bloody action What's Naughty: Plays a lot like the original. What's the Deal: The Gears thought they'd ended the war with the devious Locusts, but it turns out the bugs just dug deeper to survive the onslaught that concluded the original Gears of War. The solution: go underground and bring the fight to the Locusts. You again take the role of Marcus, a huge, tough-as-iron super soldier. His sidekick Dom is back as well, and Dom's not happy as he can't locate his beloved wife. This leads to some surprisingly tender moments between the two massive tough guys, which take place between intense and almost relentless combat. Gears of War 2 regularly introduces new enemy units (plus a rookie Gear that Marcus and Dom practically have to babysit), including an enemy so large your only hope is to kill it from the inside. Eew. Although one level is almost cut and pasted from a platform game, it somehow works, and Gears of War 2 turns out to be an incredible ride with a far better and deeper storyline than the original. More Games and DVDs Gifts >

