

Max Payne Review

Max Payne is the story of a undercover cop whose family was slain three years ago. He becomes an undercover cop and as the game start stumbles upon some trouble. By the end of the second 'level' he is a fugitive on the run no real friends to speak of and nothing to lose.

The Basics

- Company & Author: Max Payne was developed by Remedy Entertainment, published by God Games, and produced by 3D Realms.
- Price: When new it sold for about 50 dollars.
- Type of game: The best classification I can find for this game is perhaps action/fps. However for several reasons most notably the fact its all in third person, it stands out among 'shooter' games.
- Requirements: The box states that the minimum requirements are a 3DMark 2001 score of 900. In terms of hardware the requirements are:
 - 450Mhz Intel or AMD Processor
 - 96MB of ram
 - 16MB Direct3D compatible graphics card

The box recommends a score of 2200 on the 3DMark2001 benchmark. In terms of hardware the recommended requirements are:

- 700Mhz Intel or AMD Processor
- 128MB Ram
- 32MB Direct3D Compatible Graphics Card

My machine scores a paltry 1640 on the 3dmark2001 benchmark and is configured like this:

- Windows 2000 Professional
- AMD Athlon 1.2Ghz
- 512MB Ram
- ATI Radeon 32MB DDR

I'm fairly happy with the performance of the game with my configuration, I don't have any anti aliasing on because with my card it can cause some low frame rates in places.

I have at least a few of the graphics settings set to full on the system and I don't notice any real problems while playing the game. I left things like texture detail and level geometry at medium settings. The engine seems to perform very well for the level of detail this game provides. Though I think that playing it on the minimum recommended machine would probably be a nightmare.

Game Summary

Quick Overview

Max Payne is the story of an undercover cop with nothing to lose, on a quest to find out who is responsible for all trouble in his life.

Story Line

The game's story begins with showing a part of the same cut scene you will see at the end if you complete the game. From there it goes back three years to when his family was killed, you play through the scene where they are killed, and it jumps ahead to Max being an undercover cop. During the first two stages we find Max at a closed subway station trying to figure out what is going on. You eventually discover and foil a bank robbery, but not before the cops get called and you get placed at the scene. After finding your way back to the subway you meet up with your contact and have a very short conversation before he is gunned down by an unknown assassin. You of course leave the scene and, as you later find out, are the prime suspect in the case. To add to the mayhem, your cover as an officer has been blown and not only do the cops want you but the Mafia wants you dead as well. So now it becomes a quest to stay alive, find out who is behind all this. As the game progresses you start to uncover clues to both your contact's murder and your family's murder. Slowly things go from investigation to retaliation. The story is moved along by somewhat random clues laying around and interactions with key characters that bring up a comic book like story board to progress the game. In between stages this method is also used along with a few cut scenes. The writing for these story boards as well as Max's dialogue is very good in my opinion. Of course I'm a CIS major not a writer. However I was very interested to figure out what was going on and the story boards were involving enough for me.

Player's Role

The player is always the character Max Payne, whose main goal throughout the game is to find out who is responsible for the trouble he's in and get revenge.

User Interface

The user interface employs the tried and true health/weapon display to give you information about your characters status. When the player changes weapons, a weapons select H.U.D pops up above the character. It stays out of the way and has yet to interfere with game play. Life is measured by a little Max Payne silhouette in the bottom left corner. As you get injured a red shading moves up from the feet to the head. Once it reaches the top, you die. Beside this silhouette is a hourglass shape full with blue shading. This is the 'Bullet Time' indicator, I'll explain bullet time in more detail in the special features section. Next to the hourglass is a little pill bottle picture with a number next to it, this tells you how many pain relievers you are carrying, up to a maximum of eight. Pain relievers are used to heal your character. On the lower right is a current weapon display, showing you ammunition remaining the name of the weapon.

Installation

The installation of the game is fairly simple, next, next, finish. Each time you run Max Payne you get a dialogue for graphics configuration so that is omitted from the install program.

Game Play

The game play is fairly simple, walk around the levels, kill the bad guys. Most of the time there aren't any true puzzles to solve, just the typical 'maze' plot device. Somehow every obvious way you can think of to get through the building has been blocked. There are a few breaks from this pattern however. In at least two parts that I can recall someone else has to open a door for you. In one case a scared subway worker, in another case a junkie that you take hostage. Naturally killing either of them ends the game instantly. Of course along the way there are interactions with the environment or

items to look at that keep the story going. Max's head will actually turn to look at items that should be picked up, this and a large exclamation point on the screen will tip you off as to when/where there are items to read or look at. There is also a level in which you must escape from a burning building, the only puzzle of its type in the game, and I'm thankful for that. Once and awhile 'boss' or 'mini-boss' fights(with characters with more than the normal amount of hit points, or a combination of too many henchmen) are thrown into the mix to add some more challenge. Another aspect of added challenge is the health system. It is indeed possible to get killed by a single shot. Life can fade away quickly in a fire fight and to add to the challenge the painkillers don't instantly heal you, its a gradual process. The same applies to the enemies and a simple head-shot can be very effective. The enemy intelligence/difficulty is also auto-adjusting. If the player is having trouble and taking more fire than normal the game will dumb it down a bit and the enemies will get easier. On the other hand if the player keeps pulling off awesome moves and never gets shot they will eventually run into VERY heavy resistance, usually at the worst time.

Scoring

There really isn't any scoring to speak of, no special quests, or extra points for killing off guys a certain way. If you do a good job your only reward is the enemies getting smarter.

Artwork

The artwork in Max Payne is very good. The environment in the game varies a lot in this game. You go to such places such as Subway Stations, seedy hotels, office buildings, parking structures, and a mansion just to name a few. The art in each of these locations is very fitting with the surroundings. Be it graffiti or stains on the hotel walls and bathrooms or fine art hanging in the mansion the art designers of the game put a lot of work into this.

Sound and Music

Sound design in the game is excellent. Ambient sounds in the city/buildings add a hint of realism to the game. Little things like water drops from leaky pipes and sirens outside. The weapon fire and ricochet sounds are also nice too. There is also dialog between the enemies at certain points. Sometimes you will be walking through a building and you'll hear two guys engage in some pointless conversation. At one point they are actually discussing the aforementioned 'The Matrix' movie.

Manual

The manual included starts with the background story. It then goes on to explain the various weapons in the game. It also explains the user interface components like the H.U.D and controls. As for bugs I didn't really notice any.

Special Features

To add to the games appeal a new twist is added in. The game has 'bullet time' technology which slows down time in the game's universe to allow the player to aim better and to literally dodge bullets much like in the movie 'The Matrix'. Bullet time isn't unlimited however and is earned by killing enemies. A small hourglass next to your life meter indicates how much bullet time you have left. Its a very useful tool when jumping into a room with several guys surrounding you.

Game Review

I've played this game through twice so far and still haven't really gotten bored with it. The best part of the game is probably the game play, the health system isn't so easy that you can just walk around and shoot everyone. You actually have to take cover sometimes and wait for them to reload, or employ the bullet time technique and dodge out of the way of fire. This little added realism cuts both ways. At times I had to try multiple times to complete certain areas because the sheer number of people shooting at me emptied my health too fast and killed me, or left me with too little to really complete the next couple stages of the game intact. Luckily the authors also included a quick save/load feature that makes the re-trying of stages a bit easier to tolerate. The

intelligence of the enemies is sufficient to be entertaining, they don't really jump out of the way when you shoot at them but they can be seen taking cover behind objects sometimes. However that may be part of the games script not some sort of behavior of the characters. The game itself is very involving and the story line keeps the player interested. I also enjoyed how much thought was put into the surroundings your playing in. Little things like pop machines actually dispensing pop, and faucets actually working, give the game a bit more depth and immersion. The only real comparison that I can draw to other games in the 'shooter' genre is the simplistic kill everything that moves goals of the game. Those simple goals however really don't make it any less of an entertaining game. The only thing I think could be classified as 'worse' than other games would be the health/healing system, and perhaps the weapons switching methods when ammo runs out. The character will not ditch the gun right away sometimes when it runs out of ammo, unlike other first person shooters which often switch right over to another weapon. This can be pretty deadly in the middle of a fire fight. Overall though things like the health system and weapons switching aren't really flaws so much as they are attempts at bringing some realism to the genre. Of course the bullet time feature, story boards, and dialog are what makes this better than any of the first person shooters I've played since Duke Nukem 3D. I only wish they had some multi player support, but it would only be useful for cooperative play, otherwise its just another death match. The target audience would likely be people who enjoyed games like Quake or Doom but hoped for some more story and immersion like Duke Nukem 3D boasted. The target audience of course is mature, some innuendo here and there and lots of blood makes the game suitable only for 17+.

Summary

Strengths and Weaknesses

Overall the game is very good. A good story that is actually in the game and not between missions. Some non-gamer guests at my house actually enjoyed sitting and watching me play the game for a while and enjoyed the way it played out and the story. However when we switched over to an unnamed FPS shooter they really didn't care for it. A character you can get behind and enemies you get really angry at for what they've done

tend to make the player more motivated. The game's different approach to the genre enhances game play as well. Things like bullet time, small out of the way H.U.D status displays, and auto-adjusting enemy AI give it an edge over your average FPS game.

Room for improvement

The only thing It lacks is perhaps a multi player mode. Adding cooperative play, even without bullet time would be a nice feature. Of course the nature of the plot makes it in a way less believable if there are TWO Max Paynes running around in a level. Of course no one had a problem with up to 8 Duke Nukems running around with different color pants on in Duke Nukem 3D coop mode. It would still be entertaining to be able to go through the levels with friends.

Worth purchasing?

I think this game is definitely worth purchasing.