



Game Review "Halo 3"

Platform: Xbox 360
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Bungie Studios
Released: Sept. 25, 2007

Overall Rating

Gameplay: **5/5**
 Graphics: **4/5**
 Sound: **5/5**
 Value: **4/5**
 Originality: **4/5**

The wait is over but the end is too near

BY CHRIS VERNACI
Index Staff

Gamers and non-gamers alike anxiously waited in lines congregated throughout electronic stores and departments around the globe to get their hands on the final installment of the Halo trilogy that has attracted a cult-like following. Some even went as far as sporting their favorite Halo clothing and drinking Halo 3 Mountain Dew while waiting in line.

Years in the making - three, but who's counting - and surrounded by quite a bit of hype, Halo 3 brings a battering assortment of thrills to the table. After being left with the obnoxiously obscure cliffhanger at the end of Halo 2, I found myself wondering two things: Does the Master Chief live, and when do I get to continue blowing the living hell out of the alien creatures who plague our very existence?

The answer? Of course he lived,

and the chance for satisfaction is here.

Settling in for the long haul with my two esteemed colleagues in action, each with 64 ounces of Mountain Dew in tow, I was disappointed that the four-player co-op play was not possible on a single Xbox 360. But in true athletic fashion, the game went on. We instead employed the healthy three-man rotation to our advantage.

The game begins where its predecessor left off, with the Master Chief plunging towards earth. The marines check his vitals, he shakes off the wounds and the battle ensues. Right off the bat the cinematic scenes are quite impressive, enough to bolster my boyish excitement over the game. Gameplay graphics offer vivid colors and a dense, detailed environment that tickles my imagination. The storyline journeys through thick jungles to the vast deserts of Africa to immense frozen tundras.

The catch to many sequels is that there is so much deviation from the previous version that it almost feels disconnected from the trilogy family. Fortunately for Halo 3, the same old guns and vehicles are now accompanied with a slew of new toys to indulge the player. From flamethrowers to the mongoose - a four-wheeler-esque two-man ride - I simply could not get enough of the

fresh hell-raising arsenal.

The third installment also combines and improves upon various features from its two predecessors. The developer, Bungie Studios, included both battle rifles, added a gunner to the scorpion and now turrets are detachable, allowing the blistering firepower to be taken to go.

One slight drawback to the game is that the end is near, maybe too near. After about six hours of intense in-your-face explosions capped off by a dramatic sprint to the finish similar to that of the first Halo, the battle is over and the epic conclusion is revealed.

If the game is so short, what accounts for the three years of top-secret development? Well, the online

multiplayer features are simply amazing.

Similar to the campaign mode, Bungie certainly didn't cut any corners with the Xbox Live features. A seemingly limitless array of new game variants and maps are enough to keep the player coming back for more.

As for myself, I wouldn't go as far as calling Halo 3 the end-all-be-all of video

games. Is it better than most? Yes, but it still leaves room for something bigger to come along and knock my socks off.

"Right off the bat the cinematic scenes are quite impressive, enough to bolster my boyish excitement over the game."

Third book of 'Twilight' series gets rave reviews

BY CHRIS BONING
Index Staff

Anyone who hasn't devoured Stephanie Meyer's "Twilight" series so far should probably stop reading here.

For everyone else, oh, what an emotional ride "Eclipse" has been.

"Eclipse," the series' third installment, is probably Meyer's best book yet. Unlike its hollow predecessor, "New Moon," "Eclipse" makes incredible advances in the story of ordinary teenager Bella Swan, her vampire boyfriend Edward Cullen and her werewolf best friend Jacob Black.

In "Eclipse," reflecting on the decision she made in earlier books to become a vampire with Edward, Bella finally comprehends what it will mean to no longer be human. Jacob pushes his relationship with her to its limits, and Edward learns how much he injured Bella with his six-month absence in "New Moon."

Meanwhile, trouble looms in the distance as a mysterious string of murders and a break-in at

Bella's house appear to be linked. When it becomes apparent a small army of ruthless vampires are looking for Bella, the Cullens and Jacob's werewolf pack ally to protect her.

A battle featuring the return of the Volturi and Victoria, who has been stalking Bella since the first book, ensues. "Eclipse" concludes with the protagonists dealing with the aftermath of the battle and Bella considering her impending marriage to Edward.

In "Eclipse," Bella has much more depth than she does in the previous books, and she is more mature and thoughtful. No longer does she continually gush about how perfect Edward is or how lucky she is to have him. Her adolescent blathering was becoming a nuisance. She finally has begun acting like an adult, and although still annoyingly prone to self-injury, she seems much stronger and more confident. The Bella of "Eclipse" is a vast improvement to the weak protagonist from the first two books.

Edward, on the other hand, shows signs of weakness in "Eclipse." Normally so calm and collected, he is prone to act on impulse, especially

when getting physical with Bella. He is not as flawless as Bella believes him to be, evidently.

The relationship between Jacob and Bella is more frustrating than in the previous books. In "Eclipse," back and forth, back and forth they go - friends one day and something more the next. Their strange relationship, as well as Edward's complacent reaction, is rather nerve-wracking and confusing at times. After the battle between the Cullens and the vampire army, everything seems resolved with Jacob and Bella. However, a somewhat cryptic epilogue told from Jacob's point of view - a first for the series - indicates things aren't over for them quite yet.

Also, the Cullen family is more prominent in "Eclipse," and less focus is placed on Bella's human family, perhaps as a nod to Bella eventually becoming a vampire.

Anyway, readers learn more about the background stories of two of the more mysterious of Edward's kin, Rosalie and Jasper. Rosalie's past answers a lingering question of the series, and Jasper's proves crucial in the showdown between the groups of vampires.

Book Review

"Eclipse"

by Stephanie Meyer
Little, Brown Young Readers
Released: August 7, 2007

Rating

Although not exactly a pinnacle of fantasy literature, the "Twilight" series does have its merits. The books are a light, pleasant read, and it probably helps that vampires are nearly always an interesting topic. Meyer is an imaginative author who has a lot of potential in this genre.

At any rate, considering the many developments of "Eclipse," the next book, "Breaking Dawn," promises to be an intriguing adventure.

Artist produces first solo album, reminiscent of a superior wine

BY JONATHAN STUTTE
Reviewer

Cover art featuring confetti unicorns and the colors of the German flag shouldn't work for any artist. But earnestness in sound and style can convince anyone that if you're serious about your art, you can make it work.

"Spirit If..." Kevin Drew's first album, is the first from a supposed series of Broken Social Scene Presents. It features Kevin Drew as chief songwriter but also many of his collaborators from Broken Social Scene (BSS), the band which Drew co-created with Brendan Canning and also stars members from Metric, Feist and Apostle of Hustle.

With a single songwriter dictating to a handful of collaborators, the music comes out feeling like a full-band effort, not a solo record or the stylistically inconsistent previous works of BSS.

"Spirit If..." kicks off with "Farewell to the Pressure Kids," a literal kick of "crazy synths" (as described in liner notes), drum kicks and oppressive guitar licks. It's kickin'.

The barrage of sound is a bit distressing when first turning on the album, but the song settles down to a slow quiet marked by a rhythmic

breathing pattern as if Drew forgot to catch his breath earlier in the song.

"Farewell to the Pressure Kids" might be the closest the album gets to standard BSS fare. The hazy production that made BSS's last album sound like an analog mess in a digital clothes washer gives the mostly organic (non-synthesized) instruments a warm but flat texture. The production tends to homogenize some of the sounds, but when less is happening, it's extraordinary to see how many different shades of one color there can be.

A difference in the production is the prominence of vocals. Rather than instrumentation commanding the melody of most tracks, Drew leads the melodies while the instruments follow and make pleasant flourishes behind him (check out "Brock Me Up" for the best example).

"Safety Bricks" and "Gang Bang Suicide" represent the quieter, more pastoral and spacious side of the album, using just as much instrumentation as even the most sonically adventurous tracks but using them sparingly and, well, quietly. "TBTF" and "F-ked Up Kid" are upbeat with loping, cheery rhythms, pleasant flutes and acoustic guitars.

"Frightening Lives" is an odd duck amongst a bunch of preening

swans. Its distorted synths, barely distorted but dower guitar and Drew's downbeat delivery bring down whatever good feelings one has up to that point.

Those in love with Scott Kannberg (of Pavement and most recently Preston School of Industry) and J. Mascis (of Dinosaur Jr.) will be disappointed to know that although their songs are driven and sound good, they lack decent pop hooks (Kannberg's "Lucky Ones") and even a catchy chorus (Mascis' "Backed Out on the...").

Closing out the album is "When it Begins," a loose and friendly folk diddy (all too common at the close of today's indie pop records) that stays too long before deconstructing into a fuzzed out dirge. "When it Begins" does do a good job of summing up the record: "It's gonna be really hard when we get to the end - well, you love the start but really it's just to begin."

"Spirit If..." begins well but is overlong. At one hour, the album can be a bit overwhelming, and you might find yourself stopping it three quarters of the way through.

So treat this album like you would a good bottle of wine: drink it slowly. If you take it all in at once, you become too drunk to remember what it tasted like in the first place.

What's on your iPod?



Design by Andrea Bailey/Index

Music Review

"Broken Social Scene Presents Kevin Drew: Spirit If..."

Kevin Drew
Arts and Crafts
Released: Sept. 18, 2007

Rating

