

TIME IN

Had enough time out on the town? Check out these home entertainment options



Space opera: Commander Shepard in action.

GAME REVIEW

CAUSE & EFFECT

Mass Effect 2 opens two years after Commander Shepard, hero of Mass Effect, was believed killed. In the meantime, a mysterious force has been stripping whole human colonies bare.

Recruited by a shadowy organisation called Cerberus, Shepard must re-assemble the crew of the starship *Normandy* for a deadly mission to stop the harvest of humans, and prove that the genocidal Reapers, thought defeated at Mass Effect's end, still threaten every living being in the galaxy.

As with my review of Mass Effect last week, it's hard to pick which of Mass Effect 2's two discs' worth of good bits to write about.

For starters, Mass Effect 2 is even more watchable. Developer BioWare buffed Mass Effect's impressive graphics to a very high polish that my Xbox 360 handles well. Mass Effect 2's detailed, branching plotline is also improved over Mass Effect's (no mean feat).

The story is delivered through lots of great characters, especially Martin Sheen's Machiavellian head of Cerberus, the Illusive Man. Fellow star voice talent includes Austin Powers' Seth Green, Battlestar Galactica's Tricia Helfer and Chuck's Yvonne Strahovski (delivering her natural Aussie accent) in major roles. Shoreh Aghdashloo (*24, FlashForward*), Adam Baldwin (*Chuck, Serenity*) and Carrie-Anne Moss (*The Matrix*) also make notable appearances.

Every line of dialogue, including

Mass Effect 2

(BioWare)
XBOX 360 / PC
RRP: \$109.95

★★★★★

BY ROB FARQUHAR

overheard conversations, news-blips and ads, is performed well, making you feel like you're really there. Then there's the sheer amount of work that BioWare puts into making Mass Effect's awkward parts – inventory, abilities and travel – more accessible.

While stat fanatics may weep, Mass Effect's huge list of guns, armour and tools is reduced to a few base models which improve through researching upgrades. BioWare also trimmed the large lists of abilities, like tech skills and biotic (psychic) powers, to a handful per character. Abilities only improve in four increments, forcing you to save for powerful advances.

This streamlining helps combat run smoothly. Grenades and special ammo are now wrapped up in your character's abilities, of which your two favourites can be easily mapped to your controller's shoulder buttons.

Space travel is great. Each star system with a hyperspace point has surrounding systems which you can also explore. You scan planets for minerals (used when upgrading) and missions; a shuttle will take you right to the latter.

If you kept your Mass Effect save file, Mass Effect 2 will not only import your Shepard's face (which, in a neatly presented justification, you have the option of changing) but also incorporate your key choices: Who died, who you fell in love with and the state of the galaxy at the end.

The biggest, most subtle change, though, is the pace.

The longer you delay the Suicide Mission to explore and improve your crew, the more people will die. You can keep exploring once the mission is complete, so in theory you shouldn't have to load a pre-mission saved game to play any downloadable content.

On the downside, those who loved Mass Effect's experience system might find the sequel's too simple, and scanning planets can be almost as tedious as driving was. Also, the gorgeous graphics make the odd blips stand-out.

Finally, I was disappointed that none of Shepard's potential/actual love interests from Mass Effect rate more than a guest appearance. Sure, there are new potential romances, but ... well, my Shepard's a one-Asari guy, ya know? Must it be a long-distance relationship, BioWare?

Even so, Mass Effect 2 provides so much entertainment that I feel like I'm getting a bargain at \$110. The sheer depth of character development options and branching conversation paths mean that a second (or third) play-through may be quite different from the first. If you pace yourself, it might even last until Mass Effect 3 is released.

TO

CD REVIEW

We Love Machine
Way Out West

★★★★★

(HOPE RECORDINGS)

BY JESSE KUCH

IT MAY have been released a few months back now, but *We Love Machine* is so damn good that it deserves a review. Make no mistake that Way Out West, a production duo featuring international superstar DJs Nick Warren and Jody Wisternoff, have created a modern classic of electronic music that will stand the test of time, which is no mean feat in a scene where music is often viewed as disposable. Created on an array of vintage analogue instruments, the end result is nothing short of outstanding.



CD REVIEW

Nice, Nice, Very Nice

★★★★☆

Dan Mangan
(UNIVERSAL MUSIC)

BY JESSE KUCH

CANADIAN folk master Dan Mangan triumphantly returns to the fray in 2010, and, as the title suggests, it's *Nice, Nice, Very Nice!* The beauty of Dan Mangan is his good, old-fashioned simplicity. He doesn't pretend to push the envelope or fill his songs with vague folk pretentiousness, instead focusing on solid songwriting and easy-to-digest, yet insightful, lyrics. Highlights include the horn-tinged lead single *Robots*, the gentle beauty of *You Silly Cat* and the gypsy jazz of *Some People*. Fantastic.



BOOK REVIEW

The Humbling
Philip Roth

★★★★☆

RRP \$29.95
RANDOM HOUSE

BY JESSE KUCH

PULITZER Prize-winning author Philip Roth is back with *The Humbling*, and what a book it is. This haunting work is a deep character study that examines much more than the initial chapters suggest. Telling the story of an ageing actor and his struggle to come to terms with his descent into obscurity, Roth takes all our life's performances – talent, love, sex, hope, energy and reputation – and strips them away to reveal what lies beneath.



TOP 5

Legal internet music download websites

1 iTunes: It wasn't the first, but with the advent of the iPod and iPhone, it emerged as the clear market leader in legal internet music downloading. You can find anything on iTunes, from the latest pop, rock and dance hits, to classical and jazz and even a bit of obscure stuff, too. A benchmark, but you'll need to download the iTunes software to use it. www.apple.com/itunes



2 Beatport: If electronic music is your thing, don't look any further than Beatport. The clear market leader in its category, browsing and downloading from Beatport is easy and allows you to save your favourite artists and labels in your account so you can have all the latest releases. It sells .wav (CD quality) files, too, if mp3s aren't your thing. www.beatport.com



3 Destra Music: Destra Music was one of the first internet sites in Australia to offer paid music downloads, and its simple interface and reasonable prices still make it a great place to shop for tunes online. It also powers the online music stores of shops such as Sanity, JB HiFi, Leading Edge and owns top legal download site MP3.com.au as well. www.destramusic.com.au

4 MTV Music: MTV Music's internet download site separates itself from the pack by allowing you to buy tracks online and through your mobile account if you're an Optus customer (and download them to your phone, too). For those who don't have an Optus phone, it still offers downloads via a regular PC or Mac. www.optusmusicstore.com

5 Jamendo: Jamendo is a great, and totally free, music download site that centres around up-and-coming and emerging artists and bands. There is a wide variety of styles and genres. www.jamendo.com