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'GEARS OF WAR: ULTIMATE EDITION' UPDATES A CLASSIC WITH CHAINSAW- REVVING LOVE

By Chris Barylick

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It may not be for everyone, but *Gears of War: Ultimate Edition* is a true labor of love. The developers at The Coalition have risen to the challenge of upgrading the original *Gears of War*, restoring the audio and visual grandeur to the must-have game that was released originally for the Xbox 360 in 2006.

Time hasn't actually been particularly cruel to it—the game is still downright fun to play—and *Gears of War: Ultimate Edition* doesn't totally redefine the classic original. But it *does* accomplish more than a mere spit-shining, with beautifully executed 1080p graphics at 60 frames per second, new Dolby 7.1 surround sound audio and assorted gameplay improvements.

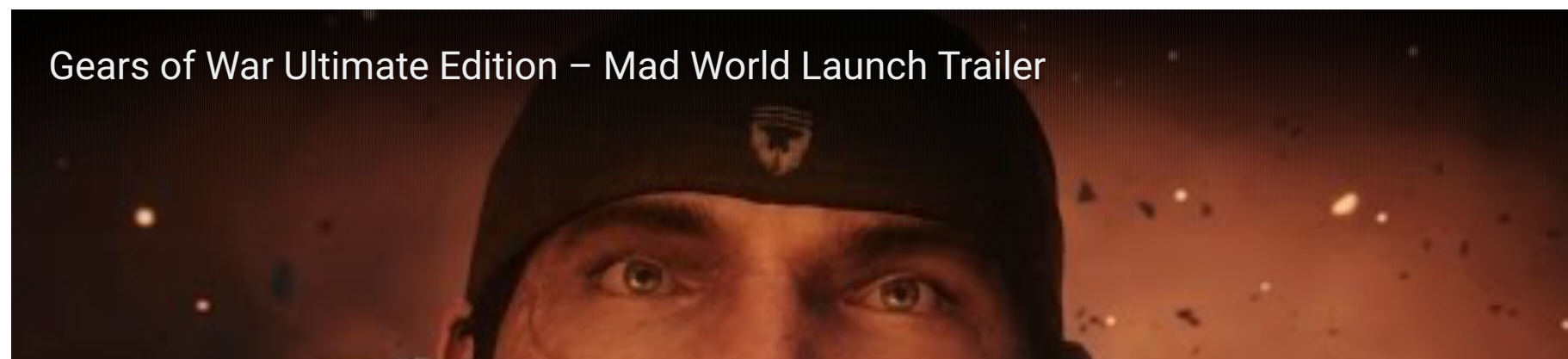
The Coalition never forgot what made *Gears of War* work to begin with. Yes, you're playing with characters who are essentially moose-like linebackers, and there's an omnipresent “bro” factor—dude-tacular levels of casual profanity and victory scenes involving telling your fallen opponent

to “suck it!” as you stomp them to bits or cut them in half with the chainsaw attached to the end of your assault rifle like a roaring, ripping dick extension. But there are also beautiful European-inspired backgrounds, epic landscapes, and a gritty sense of tension following a solid sci-fi story that holds the game together.

When Gears of War was initially released for the Xbox 360 and Windows, there was a fairly justified flap over the PC version’s exclusive content. It really didn’t help that the geniuses behind the game’s marketing at the time showed off some terrific footage of a huge battle that was exclusive to the Windows version. All these years later, that stuff is finally available on Xbox, in addition to many other maps, skins, and items that were previously sold separately as downloadable content.

Although there are still a few warts to contend with, *Gears of War: Ultimate Edition*’s gameplay is still as fun and visceral as it ever was. Other games may do a cover-based mechanic better after all this time, but it’s still fun to charge up to a wall or destroyed car, crouch behind it, study how you’re being flanked, and make a split-second decision as to what to do about it. Unfortunately, the developers did *not* make enemies or allies any smarter than in 2006, and both will make make idiotic and high-blood-pressure-inducing mistakes when fighting and navigating the battlefield. You still get the feeling that you’re fighting in a squad, not just by yourself, which was a big part of the original’s appeal.

Gears of War Ultimate Edition – Mad World Launch Trailer





Even with its warts, there's something beautiful here. The Dolby 7.1 sound upgrade adds a new presence to the music and sound effects throughout the game, the models and graphics look as though they are worthy of the Xbox One, and the game retains the larger-than-life feel that helped make the *Gears of War* franchise excel. Movement controls have been improved on, so it's easier to run, sprint and roll nimbly when you need to (this is greatly appreciated by anyone who spent too much time in the original and lost some lives to janky controls). Granted, the multiplayer aspects still feel a bit threadbare, with only limited game modes and the general rule of "He who has the shotgun or Hammer of Dawn will render his opponent into small/crispy bits" reigning supreme. But it's still fun to go co-op with friends, outflank your opponents, and carry the day.

Some fans of the original *Gears of War* may scream to the heavens that each and every bug should have been fixed, the AI should now be a masterpiece, and every item on their *Gears of War* wish list should have been addressed in this edition. This wasn't the goal The Coalition set out to achieve. Instead, the studio did a great job buffing the graphics, sound, and gameplay aspects to ensure that a classic was handed down to the next generation in fine style. The same elements that made the original and the franchise work remain: it's still fun to get lost in the action, the "bro" bits are nostalgic, the terrific music is still terrific and the sci-fi story is still well written. This is a good find both for established fans of the *Gears of War* franchise and a younger generation of gamers who have desperately needed a proper introduction to *Gears* for a while now.

It's hard to say where the game developers will go from here. There may be an "Ultimate Edition" remake in the works for *Gears of War 2* and *3*, while *Gears of War 4* heads out the door late next year and propagates the franchise. The decision will come down to sales, reception, project management, and the rest of the business on The Coalition's front.

But the developer has done great work here by taking a classic and restoring it for the next

generation. It was a classic on the Xbox 360, and thanks to these efforts, it now looks and plays like it well and truly belongs in the modern gaming landscape.



Chris Barylick is a gaming journalist living in Berkeley, California. He has written for GamePro, PC Gamer and the Washington Post and was once tackled by a heckler who looked exactly like George Lucas.

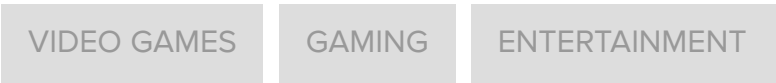
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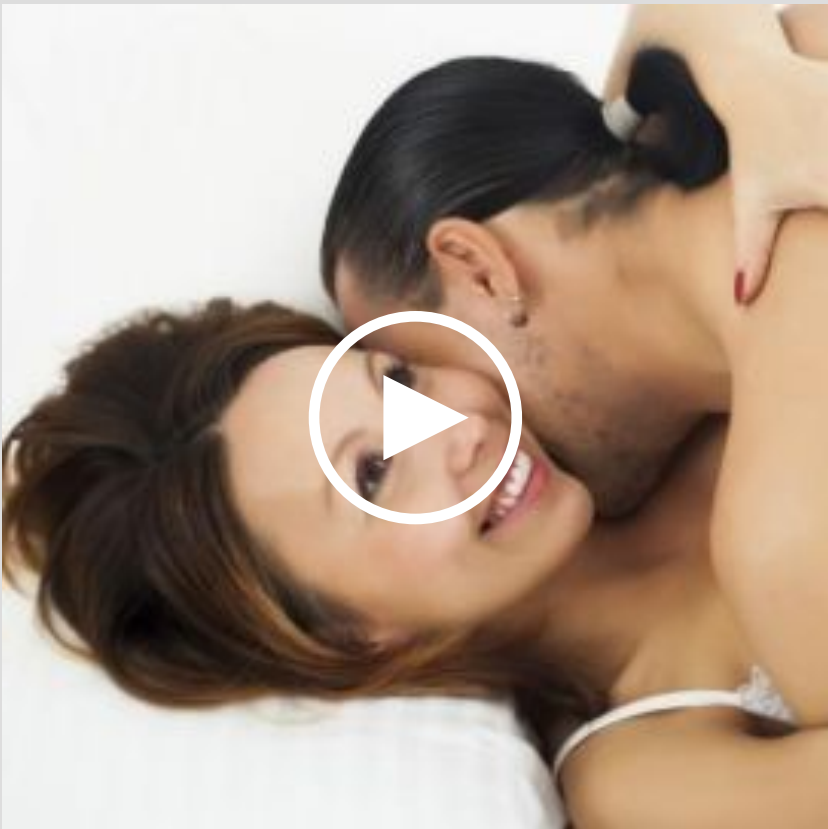
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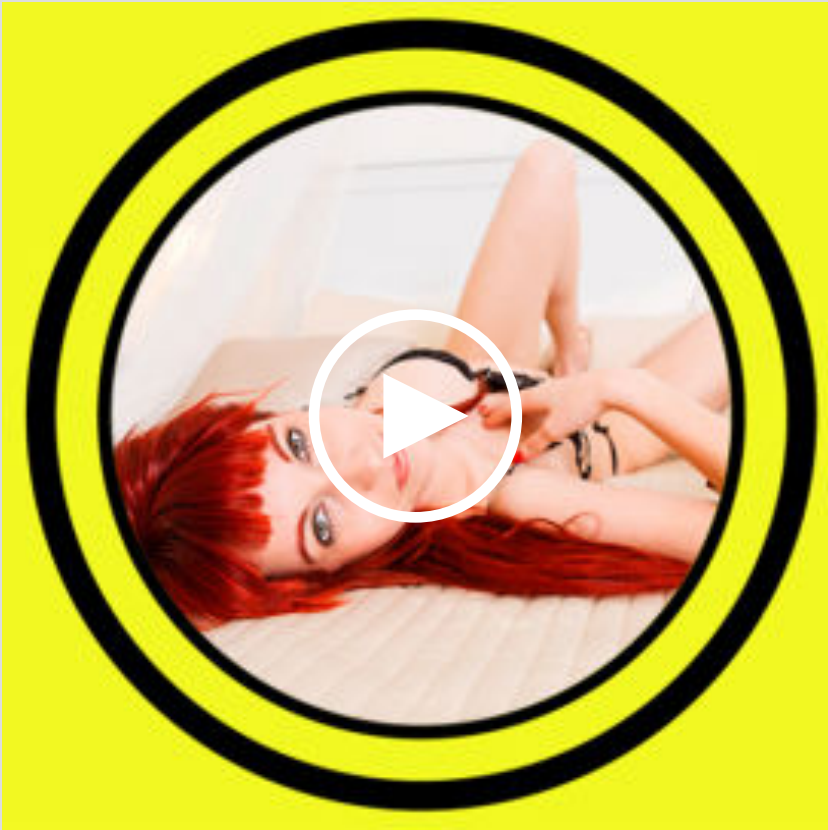


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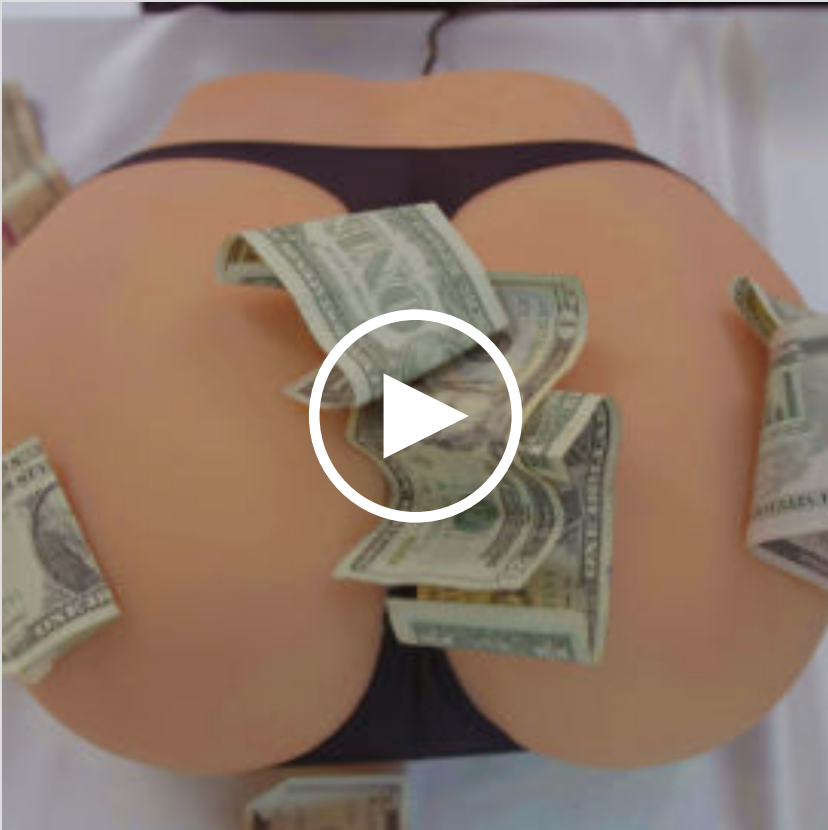
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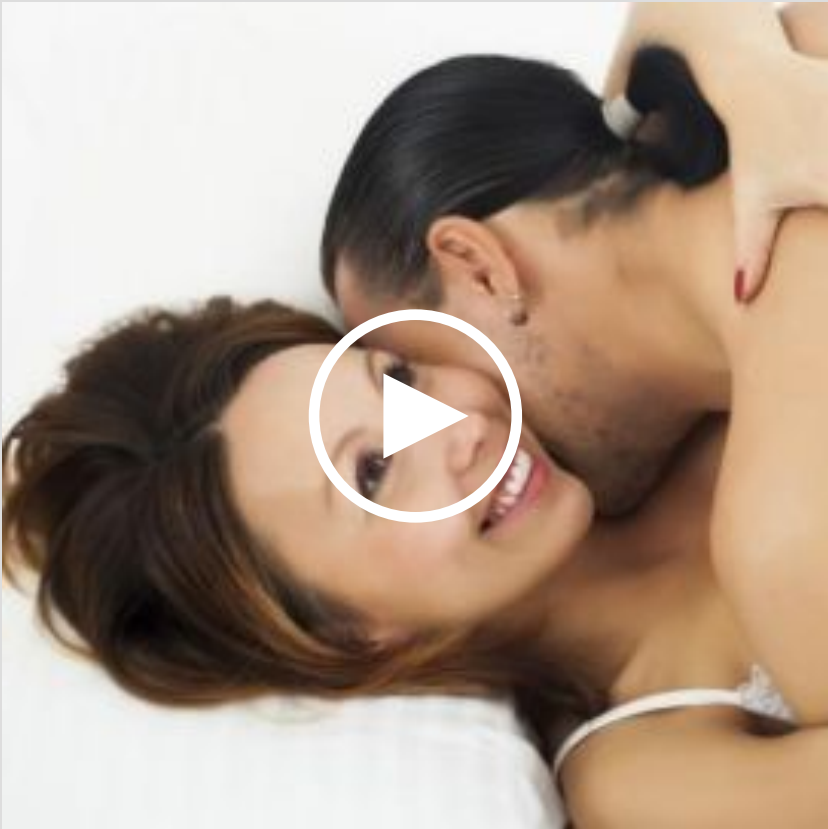
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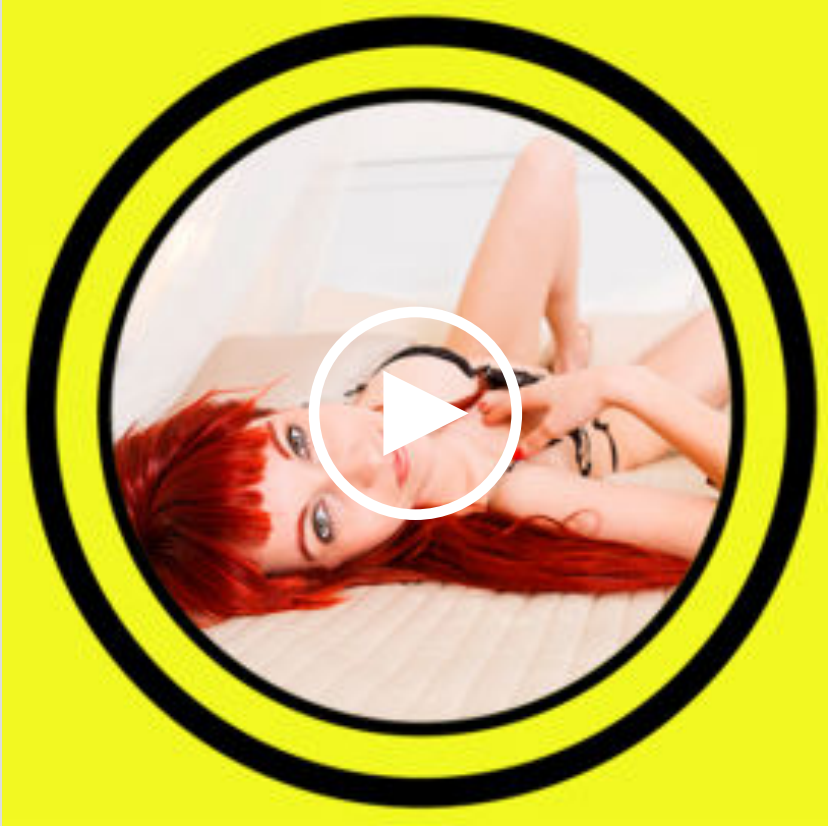
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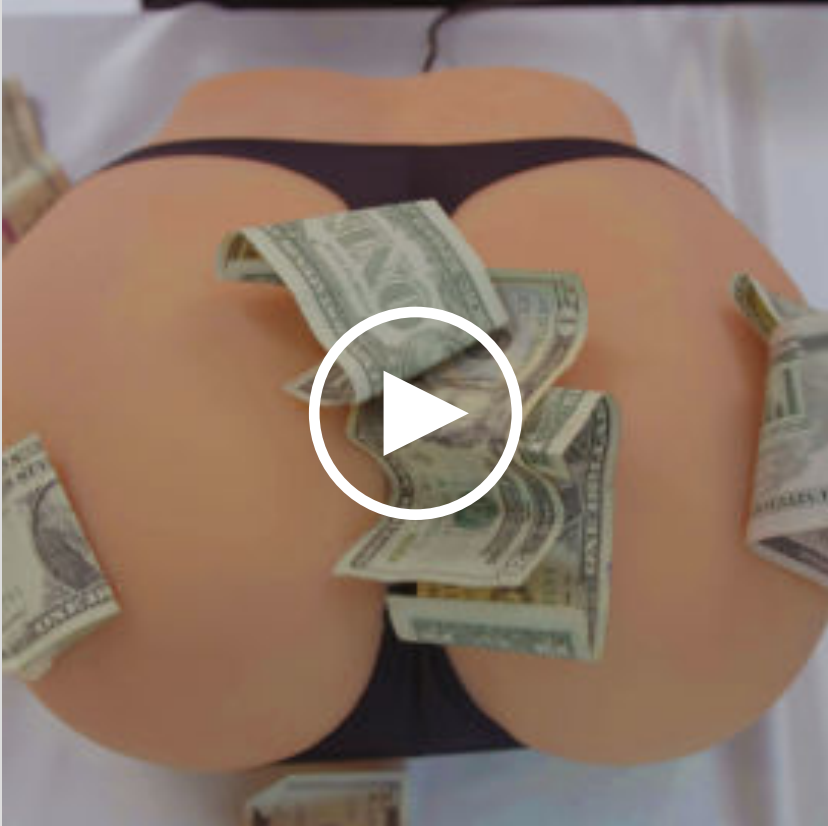
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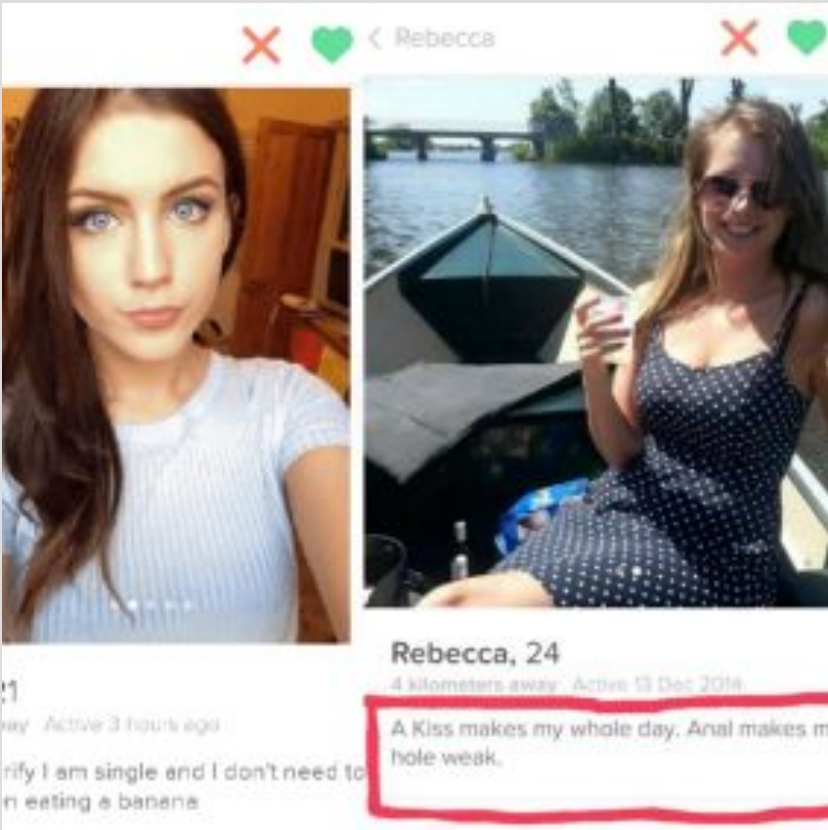


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