

SECTION 8™

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF 360ZINE, THE FREE XBOX 360 MAGAZINE

PLUS!
10 facts you
need to know
about
Section 8

EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST



Hands-on with the brilliant multiplayer!



INTERVIEW



“32-player online
means it’s **TWICE**
as big as most console
multiplayer games”



CONTROL →



WELCOME

With giants of the FPS genre like Call of Duty and Halo both getting new games this year, it's a brave move to go up against them. Section 8 is the David to those two Goliaths, and yet this plucky contender from TimeGate Studios – the folks behind F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate – just might have a shot at toppling its huge rivals.

Section 8 is clearly a game made by people who play a lot of online shooters. It's a game designed with its players first and foremost in the developers' thoughts – it's considerate to the needs of the many rather than the wishes of a few, and it shows when you play the game. This is an accessible first-person shooter, yet it's also splendidly flexible, offering plenty of character customisation without bogging down players with meaningless options.

Refreshingly, it's a game that's also welcoming to newcomers – there's no levelling system that immediately offers elite players an unfair advantage over novices, while the core reds-versus-blues, objective-focused gameplay is straightforward enough to be instantly understood. And in its 'burning-in' mechanic, it has a USP which allows players to make a spectacular entrance onto the battlefield, while simultaneously eradicating the spawn-campers that plague so many online shooters.


It's a game full of good ideas like this, which is why we thought it warranted a much closer look – and you can find out everything you need to know about Section 8 in this supplement.

Enjoy the issue,


Chris Schilling

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How do you sum up a game like Section 8 in 351 words? A bit like this, actually.

SECTION 8 VIDEO 



CONTROL →





Section 8

"It's a shooter that will engage brains as well as trigger fingers"

SouthPeak's sci-fi shooter burns into view, but can it beat Halo at its own game?

Publisher:

SouthPeak Games

Developer:

TimeGate Studios

Heritage: F.E.A.R.

Files, F.E.A.R.

Perseus Mandate

Link: www.join

section8.com

ETA: 11th September

It's rare that you can really make an entrance in an first-person shooter. You'll sit in a lobby, waiting for a timer to tick down, perhaps chewing the fat with your team-mates, but then you just appear – plonked into a battlefield at a given spawn point and sent to find yourself a piece of the action. Not so with Section 8. Here you're given a tactical overview of the battlefield with a handy radar pointing out the areas covered by enemy artillery fire; you pick your spot and then you literally take the plunge.

You're then sent plummeting earthwards from a dropship at a rate of knots, controlling the rate and direction of your ascent, choosing whether to risk 'burning-in' to an enemy-occupied area and hoping you avoid the barrage from the ground for the opportunity to reach their base quickly, or to play it safe and land out of rage, with some

distance between you and your next target. It's an FPS which requires a surprising amount of decision-making before you've even fired a single shot. And that's before we get to the range of weapons and loadouts and the general barrage of options available to the player. It's clear that TimeGate hopes its game will engage gamers' brains as well as their trigger fingers.

Yet that's not to say that it doesn't embrace the baser pleasures of your average online FPS. On the contrary, as objectives are kept fairly simple, the pace is kept brisk and it's still highly accessible. With just one game mode – a simple game of red versus blue, with a given points tally for both teams to aim at – no-one could accuse Section 8 of over-complicating things. But there's a flexibility to its mechanics and ideas that mark it out as something different – even as it seems to

600 bullets should mean you're never shy of ammo, but there are depots should you need to replenish your stock.





Dive in!

The weapons and items that'll keep you grounded



- Weapons
- Active Gear
- Mechs & more

Weapons

While you're only able to carry two weapons at one time (not including the likes of knives and shoulder-mounted mortars among the Active Gear equipment), you're free to pick whichever two you'd like. These range from assault rifles, through pistols, to shotguns and sniper rifles. You'll be able to switch out weapons if you fancy a change, or reload any empty guns at the weapon depots. Favourite weapon? Well, there's little to beat the close-quarter action that a shotgun gives you...

> Section 8 continued

ape a number of past titles from this increasingly crowded genre. If Section 8 is a bit of a gaming magpie, it chooses its influences wisely, snaffling only ideas which benefit both its own central conceit and the experience of its players. So there may be something of Planetside or even Medal of Honor about the way you enter the fray, but it seems less about introducing a mechanic for the sake of a cohesive universe, so much as one in the eye to those irritating spawn-campers who kill players off seconds after their arrival.

"So much of it seems designed purely with the player in mind"

Indeed, so much of the game seems designed with the player in mind – without too much of a story to really concern itself with (although there's a single-player campaign which fulfils the requirements as a

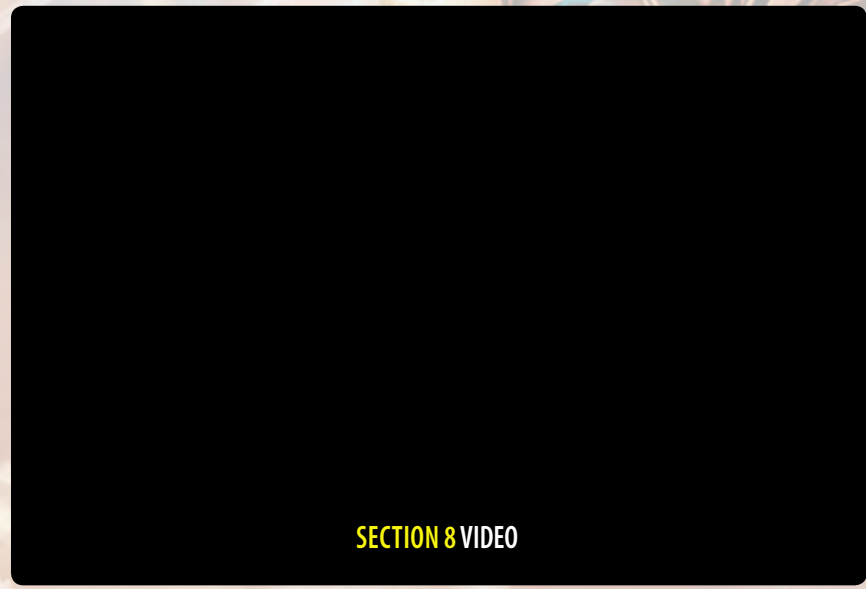


Though slowing down early on burn-in can make you easy to hit, you'll hit the ground running.

training mode for the multiplayer game), TimeGate has been able to rid its shooter of many of the frustrations that can plague online multiplayer for most people. For starters, you're playing as something of a super-soldier, so you can take a fair amount of punishment before you drop – there's little chance of you getting blown up mere seconds after burning-in, as you'll be able to withstand a couple of



Primary and secondary objectives are clearly marked.



SECTION 8 VIDEO



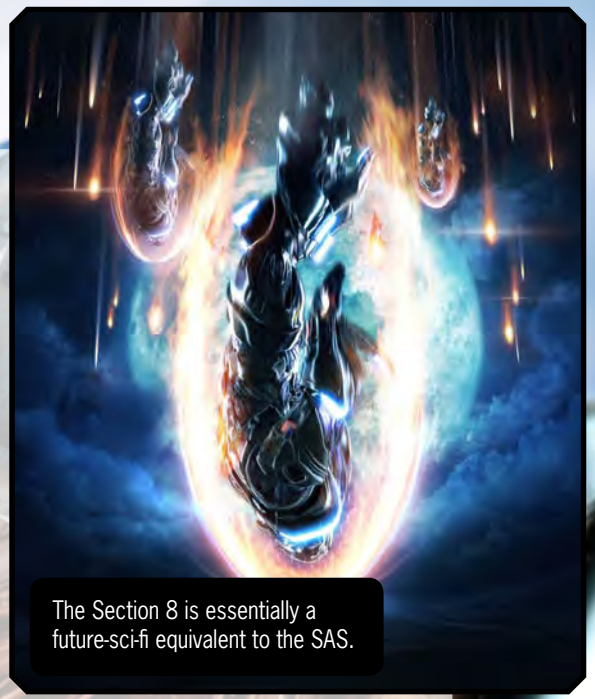


> Section 8 continued

“Many will be delighted with the lock-on feature”

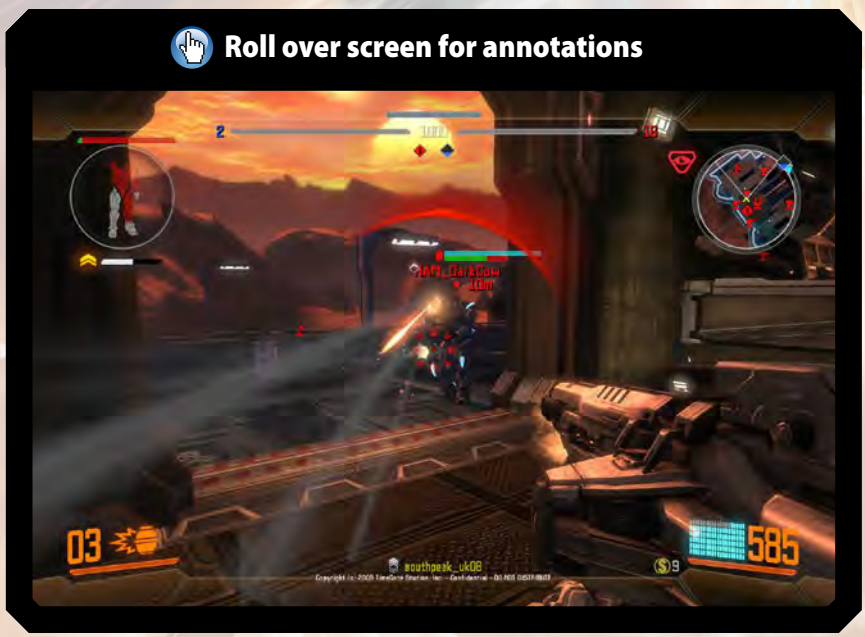


headshots. The guns – which are so massive they practically take up the entire bottom-right quarter of the screen – can carry plenty of ammo, with a high round-to-reload ratio, even for the meatier weapons. If you're infuriated by those who like to spend their time running and jumping away from your fire, you'll be delighted with the three-second lock-on feature, allowing you to get at least a few hits in on an agile opponent. Not that you can pogo your way out of trouble either – instead, you have a rather useful jet pack that propels you huge distances, but which has a cooldown period preventing you from making a



The Section 8 is essentially a future-sci-fi equivalent to the SAS.

Roll over screen for annotations



Enter Overdrive mode and you can cover long distances in mere seconds – though its use is limited, so you can't just run from any danger.



> Section 8 continued

similarly prodigious leap immediately afterwards. Similarly, you can't enter Overdrive (read: leg it) mode whenever you feel like it – your sprints being limited to running long distances rather than hotfooting it away from a firefight. It's as if TimeGate has had a checklist of Things Which Annoy People In Online Shooters and made sure it doesn't have one single box ticked.

The game's dedication to online multiplayer extends to its use of bespoke servers for the 360 version of the game – a rarity among its peers to the extent that you'd probably need less than one hand to count those who use such a system.

“It all seems to be remarkably well-balanced”

While the 360 version can't quite support as many players as the PC game – with the latter catering for a maximum of 42 players – it looks set to run far more smoothly than your average lag-heavy shooter. From what we've played so far, it all seems remarkably well-balanced – maps are large without feeling sparse and there are smaller versions when you've not got the full complement

of players, and the class system is remarkably flexible.

If you'd rather just jump into a game rather than concern yourself with your soldier's loadout, you can do so with a number of default classes that offer the kind of roles you'd expect. So Engineers, Infiltrators and Recons all fulfil the kind of team role their name would suggest, but if you'd rather equip your medic-type avatar with a sniper rifle, the option is available to you. And with weapon depots at every base – as well as deployable versions once you've earned enough Requisition Points – if your current loadout isn't working too well for you, you can switch them out during play. Again, all this



The more Requisition Points you amass, the more deployables you can call in.



You'll welcome Overdrive mode on the larger maps.

INTERVIEW

BIGGER AND BETTER?

With up to 32 players supported by the game's X-server functionality, it's little wonder Section 8 is being described as one of the biggest online shooters of the generation. But is it 'twice as good' as its competitors? We spoke to SouthPeak's Rob Burman to find out...

Where did the idea of 'burning-in' come from? Was that a way to reduced the problem of spawn-camping?

Absolutely. TimeGate played a lot of multiplayer first-person shooter games in the office and just got a little bored of those players who stick in the same area with their sniper rifle trained onto the same spot, ready to headshot someone the moment they spawn back into the battlefield. They thought it made games too predictable. As a result, they introduced the idea of burning into the map from 15,000ft above the battlefield. This means you can choose exactly where you want to land – as long as it's not an area covered by anti-aircraft guns. What's more, you can get back into the action by burning into a hotspot or squad spawning right next to your fellow squad members.

We've played the multiplayer, but can you tell us a little bit more about Corde's Story, the single-player campaign?

In the single-player you play as a member of the 8th Armoured Infantry called Alex Corde. The 8th Armoured Infantry are nicknamed 'Section 8' because it's an old military term that describes when soldiers were discharged for being mentally unfit. Section 8 earned this name because everyone else thinks they are crazy for burning into danger zones.

>Section 8 continued



If you're short of players or simply fancy a bit of practice, you can play a game against CPU bots.

smacks of consideration toward the player – it might not make logistical sense for a stealthy character to be toting a whopping great machine gun, but if it makes the game more fun, it's in. You've also got equipment packs which can make a big difference to how you play the game. A repair tool can replenish your power suit's armour, while the



mortars might be more to your tastes if you fancy something a little more explosive.

As far as objectives go, it's fairly straightforward stuff – capture installations and hold them as long as you can, kill enemies and complete side-missions to build your team's points tally. Initially, you'll spend most of your time heading to bases and standing by computer terminals while you or a friend gets to hack them as a bar slowly rises,

but when you achieve enough Feat Points – for captures, kills and other noteworthy acts – a Dynamic Combat Mission will begin. These can range from protecting and escorting a VIP to a specific location to intercepting a bomb, and you can have several on the go at once – they're not essential, but they can provide a significant bonus to your overall team score.

Ultimately, it's all about choice – do you choose to burn in at full tilt for a rough landing with a few seconds' recover time, or apply the brakes and risk a hit from a well-positioned ground foe or

"It's a game which genuinely rewards team play"



Tanks provide some protection, though they're by no means indestructible – it's good to have a repair man on-board to be safe.

> Interview continued

In this particular situation, Section 8 is called to a planet called New Madrid, which has been overtaken by a rebel group called the Arm of Orion. Corde and his fellow troopers must eliminate the Arm threat and also get to the bottom of who's leading the offensive of New Madrid and why.

There are a number of missions to play through and each is designed to teach you about the important aspects of the multiplayer. You'll be learning how to hack bases, call in deployable turrets, take a tank into battle... and many other elements that will be key to victory in the multiplayer. Plus, you're also getting valuable information about the best places to plan your offensive on the multiplayer maps.

Alongside Corde's Story, there's also the single-player Instant Action mode. Here you can take on a bunch of bots to hone your skills, ready to take the action online.

What's the thinking behind the character customisation? Was that simply to give players a little more freedom?

No, it's much more than that. The character customisation is key to being a good Section 8 player. Each player can customise their suit with a mix of any two weapons, secondary equipment – such as grenades or the repair tool – and also select 10 Passive Modules. The Passive Modules are like upgrades for your suit and include elements like bullet damage, shield strength and speed. Tweaking and customising your Passive Modules is extremely important and isn't just like adding a different skin to a character model or anything. They can actually make the difference between victory and defeat in the game.

> Section 8 continued

some accurate artillery fire? You can even choose which DMCs are activated by focusing on achieving specific Feat Points likely to trigger the type of Mission you excel at, or that you and your squad feel best equipped to pull off. It's a game which genuinely rewards team play, rather than the 'every man for himself' mentality which many online shooters foster. You might call in a mech for your pal to pilot into an enemy emplacement while you use

your sensor jammer to prevent the base's turrets from turning his robot limbs into hunks of scrap, or focus on defending computer terminals from intruders by hiding in the shadows and stabbing would-be hackers with your knife – another equipment option for those who like their kills to be a little more up close and personal.

Running on the Unreal Engine 3, the game's visually solid throughout, though its weapons in

particular are appealingly chunky. It's unusual for a sci-fi shooter to feature guns with such a pleasing weight to them, and though they're not the most explosive you'll ever see, they're far more satisfying to fire than the piddly ray guns you're often forced to handle in shooters of a similarly futuristic nature. There might not be any Michael Bay-rivalling moments of destruction here, but that's probably entirely

"There's a pleasing weight to the guns which sets them apart from those found in other sci-fi shooters"



The environments might not be hugely original, but they're well-detailed – it's great to see troops burning-in all across the map in the larger games.

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> Interview continued

Were you concerned that mixing loadouts could unbalance the game, and how have you managed to counteract that?

Of course there's always a concern that multiplayer games can become unbalanced, but we've done a lot of testing over the past few months to ensure it doesn't become a problem in Section 8 – including a Beta test for PC players. Also, each weapon has its own advantages and disadvantages, so it's not like one gun is absolutely awesome in all situations. For example, the machine gun has a high rate of fire and a large clip, but is quite inaccurate and takes a long time to reload. Whereas the assault rifle has a smaller clip but can actually pierce shields at close range – making it

potentially deadly if you can jet pack next to someone and then start shooting away. Plus, the Passive Modules also help to balance the game considerably.

It takes a number of shots – even from a sniper rifle – to kill a player. Was that a way of allowing less-experienced players to get more involved in battle without constantly dying and respawning?

Well, going back to the Passive Modules again – sorry, but hopefully you get the idea about how important they are – it's possible to get the sniper rifle down to just two shots by increasing your bullet damage. However, the idea is that we wanted people to have as much fun as possible, so we've avoided things like one-hit kills because there's nothing worse than running across the battlefield to a hotspot, just to be taken out by a sniper you can't even see. Instead, you've got a little time to assess the situation and use your jet pack or the Overdrive to escape if things look bad.



> Section 8 continued

deliberate. We'll happily take functionality over spectacle if it keeps the online running smoothly. Essentially, Section 8's lasting appeal will come down to two things:

how well TimeGate can balance the game, and whether enough people buy it to keep the servers busy. Early signs from the online Beta of the PC version are certainly promising – plenty are playing, and more importantly, plenty seem to be returning. It's not hard to see why, as the pacing is brisk without being overly frantic, kills aren't quite so ridiculously easy to come by (making each one all the more satisfying), tanks and mechs are fun to play with but not so overpowered that everyone automatically makes a beeline for them. The Dynamic Combat Missions keep the action fresh, offering a degree of spontaneity without overwhelming

"Section 8 offers a solid and smooth online experience that can certainly cut it with the big boys"



Burning-in at full tilt is certainly one way to make your presence felt.



the player, while the HUD is just on the right side of the informative/busy line. Section 8 is not a shooter that's easy to dismiss. It's a likeably solid and entertaining multiplayer blast that feels equally comfortable on PC and 360, offering a smooth online experience that can certainly cut it with the big boys. Whether it can do the same in the charts remains to be seen, but if the full game can entice as many online players as the Beta on a regular basis, then Section 8 looks set to have a very busy winter of frantic gaming ahead of it. ●



You'll have to stay close to each terminal as you're hacking – making you more vulnerable to attack than usual.

> Interview continued

The maps are fairly large – how do you plan to ensure they don't feel empty when there's not the full complement of players? There's the option to include bots on every map, so there's never a reason for them to feel empty.

What do you think in particular makes Section 8 stand out from the multiplayer FPS crowd? One of the most exciting things about Section 8 is the fact you can have up to 32 players on Xbox 360. Most console multiplayer games can only handle around 16 players, so that means Section 8 is officially twice as good as all those! Seriously though, there are plenty of other elements too – most of which we've covered here – like the Passive Modules, burning-in, the fact you can call in your own vehicles instead of waiting around for one to become available and the Dynamic Combat Missions, which alter the flow of battles depending upon your actions in the match. So we're confident there are lots of different features of Section 8 that will ensure gamers have a unique multiplayer experience.



In a nutshell

10 facts about Section 8 that you really should know

- 1 Section 8 has been created with the Unreal Engine 3, which is responsible for games such as Batman: Arkham Asylum, Gears of War and BioShock.
- 2 The term Section 8 is a recognised military one, which refers to a category of discharge from the US military for reason of being mentally unfit for service.
- 3 The game will support Microsoft's new X-Server functionality. And if you don't know what that is then where have you been? Basically, it allows players to run their own dedicated servers for Xbox 360 games using a PC. An X-Server can handle up to 32 players at once, which is around twice the amount of the majority of first-person shooter games on consoles.
- 4 Being able to 'burn-in' on the multiplayer arenas should enable you to banish that most
- troublesome of gamer, the camper. Burning-in allows you to drop into the exact point of the map that you want to, rather than spawn randomly.
- 5 In the single-player, you play as Alex Corde, a member of the 8th Armored Infantry Division (or Section 8, to give it its other name) of the United States Empire. Corde must dispatch the Arm of Orion, a rebel group that has taken over a planet called New Madrid.
- 6 The 8th Armored Infantry is nicknamed Section 8 because everyone thinks they're insane to drop into the battlefield from dropships 15,000ft above the planet. We're inclined to agree with them.
- 7 Although Section 8 is primarily a multiplayer game, lone gamers can still experience some frantic action for themselves by taking on dozens of AI-controlled bots in the Instant Action mode.
- 8 In the multiplayer, you'll need to keep an eye out for 'Dynamic Combat Missions', which are objective-based side missions. You may be asked to protect a convoy or steal some enemy data, and if you're successful then you'll earn yourself a hefty point bonus.
- 9 You'll no longer have to wait to get your hands on a vehicle. In
- Section 8 you can call-in a mech or tank as soon as you've earned enough Requisition Points. Then jump straight in to frag your foes.
- 10 The Passive Module options let you customise your character down to the finest detail. You can choose their armour strength, bullet damage and even give them a little extra speed.

