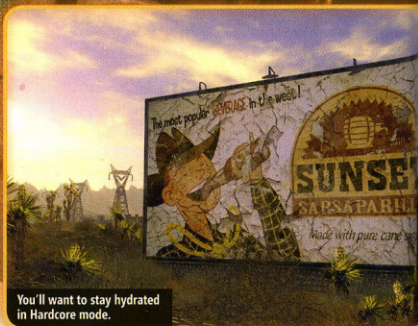


PODCAST
SPECIAL

Bethesda's Pete Hines
talks about the game
in the new OXM
podcast: find it on
oxm.co.uk



More slices of blasted
Americana to be enjoyed.



You'll want to stay hydrated
in Hardcore mode.



>> Info

Publisher Bethesda
Developer
Obsidian Entertainment
Players 1
Co-op No

State of play

Must buy!

Can't wait

Looking good

Shaping up

Needs work

Words: Mike Channell

Fallout

NEW VEGAS

It's survival of the fittest in Sin City and the stakes are high...

Tricky business, sequels - and be assured, *Fallout: New Vegas* is definitely a direct sequel to *Fallout 3* rather than a lightweight spin-off. Clearly, you have a responsibility to push the series forward, but there's also nothing worse than a misguided attempt to differentiate a follow-up that only ruins what everyone loved about the original. Throw in a new developer - *New Vegas* is being developed by Obsidian rather than Bethesda's in-house team - and there is no doubt

that a fair few *Fallout* fans will be more than a little concerned that this could be a recipe for nuclear disaster.

Allow us to defuse that particular bomb. As soon as Obsidian fired up the early demo version of the game, it was obvious that *New Vegas* is the familiar *Fallout* experience, but in a fresh setting. We believe the saying goes 'if it ain't broke, don't start prodding it with a spanner'. Anyone who spent time with the previous game will recognise the same menu system, interface and graphical style. If anyone is going to be committed to making sure this is worthy of the *Fallout* name, it's Obsidian - check out 'History Lesson' (next page) if you don't believe us.





Sunny Smiles is one of the first friendly faces you meet.



Unlike *Fallout 3*, which began at the very beginning as you popped out of the womb in Vault 101, *New Vegas* kicks off in almost the opposite fashion - with you, a Wasteland courier, taking two bullets in the head from a mysterious assailant and ending up in a shallow grave in the middle of the Mojave desert. Fortunately, a robot called Victor finds you and carries you back to Goodsprings, a small Nevada mining town with a distinctive schoolhouse and a handful of locals struggling to survive in the Wasteland. There you're patched up by a friendly chap called Doc Mitchell, who pulls the lead from your head and guides you through a streamlined introduction to the game - Bethesda reckons there will



"Who tried to kill you? Why? And just what was in that package?"

be plenty of seasoned Wastelanders who want to dash out into the wider world as soon as possible.

You have the option to change your appearance, including a new slider for age. You'll then undergo a brief psychiatric examination (including an amusing Rorschach test) which, like the GOAT in *Fallout 3*, determines a baseline skill set. As before, if you're unhappy with the results, you can manually

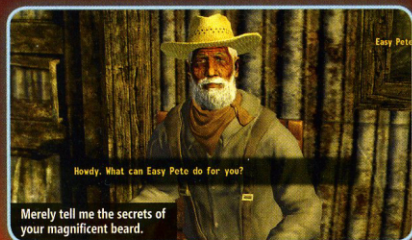
tweak them to your liking. All that's left is to select your SPECIAL attributes, using a fairground sideshow machine called the Vit-o-matic Vigor Tester. This time, each point you spend in each category has its own wry description - spend no points on endurance and you're described as 'basically dead', max out charisma and you're a 'cult leader'.

Into the fray

Based on what you've chosen, Doc Mitchell will give you a few relevant supplies before you head out into the town of Goodsprings. No matter what skill loadout you've picked, you will get a couple of series stalwart items: a pistol, a Vault 21 jumpsuit (presumably the vault that Mitchell himself came from) and the all-important Pip Boy 3000. Within the first ten minutes of the game, you're launched into the Mojave Wasteland, tasked with finding out three things - who tried to off you, why they did it and what was so

HISTORY LESSON

Fallout 3 was both developed and published by Bethesda. *New Vegas* is being made by Obsidian. Why the change? Bethesda's Pete Hines explained on the OXM podcast (get it from oxm.co.uk). The original team are working on 'new projects' (likely an *Oblivion* sequel) so Bethesda turned to Obsidian as a studio that had delivered other successful sequels like *Knights of the Old Republic 2*. As a fanboy bonus, Obsidian was founded by former members of Black Isle Studios, which developed the original *Fallout* games on the PC - there won't be any explicit connection to those, though.



Howdy. What can Easy Pete do for you?

Merely tell me the secrets of your magnificent beard.



FALLEN HERO

Your quest in the Wasteland involves finding out who tried to murder you and what was in the package you were carrying, but you'll have other objectives, too. For a start, the robot who pulled you out of the hole, Victor, isn't exactly forthcoming about his reasons for saving you.

valuable about the package you were ferrying across the desert.

Viva Las Vegas

The Wasteland around Vegas differs considerably from DC's version. According to Obsidian, the bombs didn't hammer America's party capital as hard as they did the political capital, so the skies are clearer and the damage is more down to weathering and disrepair than sheer destructive force.

The landscape itself is dustier in the Mojave - it's peppered with Joshua trees and Mesquite bushes - and Goodsprings is a traditional old-West ghost town. One of the first people you'll meet is the town's cheery protector, Sunny Smiles.



The new Fore! attack is a powerful golf swing.

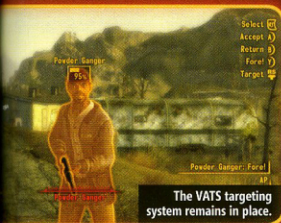
You have the option of heading out with her to shoot some mutant Geckos, a new enemy, but if you're familiar with *Fallout 3*'s combat system you might want to give it a miss.

A more pressing issue is a group of escaped convicts called the Powder Gangers. Lead by a nasty chap called Joe Cobb, they are looking for a traveller called Ringo and are threatening the town unless he's turned over. This being *Fallout* you can, if you want, team up with the gang and ruin the town. If you don't, you'll need to persuade a bunch of townsfolk to take up arms. This gave Obsidian the chance to show off one of *New Vegas*' major new changes: the updated conversation system.

This has been overhauled to make it more specific to your character. There are now options that relate not just to charisma and perks, but to a high rating



Your companions will be less unruly this time around.



The VATS targeting system remains in place.

in other skills, such as sneaking or bartering, as well. For example, if you're keen on persuading grizzled prospector Easy Pete to give you dynamite to help defend the town, you'll need to have a high explosives skill to convince him that you're not going to blow yourself and the other townspeople into small meaty chunks.





MOD-ERN CONVENIENCES

We're interested to see how the weapon modification system works in the final game. The best part is, a modification will only have a positive effect on your weapon - you'll never have to balance decisions as to whether one modification is better than another.

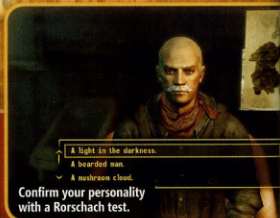


If you haven't got enough skills, the option will still appear, but it'll be clear from the language that your character is unsure and that you're likely to fail. If you have got a high explosives rating, you'll sound like a professional pyromaniac and Easy Pete will happily dig out the firesticks for you. What this means is that even if you don't really want to focus on speech-related skills and perks, you'll still get benefits outside of the battlefield. Similarly, when you head to store owner, Chet, and try and persuade him to provide you with armour, you can use a high barter skill rating to convince him that if all the townsfolk are dead his business will

suffer. It's no longer just for getting better prices.

Make do and mend

In addition to providing you with something to protect your hide from bullets and teeth, Chet can also help you take advantage of another new feature. In keeping with the theme of scratching out an existence by scavenging in the Wasteland, you'll now be able to modify your weaponry by taping and bolting bits together. Fancy adding a scope to your pistol? Simply head to your friendly neighbourhood arms dealer and you can modify it to your liking. You'll see the difference in both first- and third-person views and, if you've added a larger magazine of ammo, you'll notice slower (but less frequent) reload times. While there was the opportunity to build weaponry in *Fallout 3*, this will allow you to personalise your favourite gun and encourage you to keep and repair it



Confirm your personality with a Rorschach test.

rather than just lobbing it away when it rusts solid. We can't wait to see what kind of ludicrously overblown armaments are possible with this system.

Melee weaponry receives a boost as well. Now, each weapon has a unique attack that can be activated by hitting Y in VATS. Obsidian demoed this using the 9 Iron, a slightly mangled golf club, which has a special attack called 'Fore!' - activate it and your character will deliver a crunching upward swing to the enemy's undercarriage. It's a small change, but should add plenty of extra character to combat. Another tweak the team has made is that each weapon has its own knockback when it connects with an enemy. Blast a baddie with a shotgun rather than a weedy pistol, for

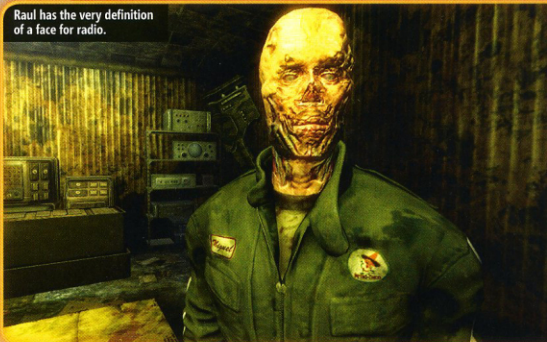


That controller looks a bit rude, we think.

"You can now modify your weapons to your liking"



Raul has the very definition of a face for radio.



FACTION PACKED

You'll meet many groups, including the Brotherhood of Steel from *Fallout 3*, but the backdrop for your adventure will be a conflict between two major factions.

NEW CALIFORNIAN REPUBLIC With the largest maintained army in the post-war world, this bunch have set their sights on expanding eastwards. Originally formed from survivors of Vault 15, their structure is similar to pre-war US government, with a president, vice president and other elected reps.

CAESAR'S LEGION This huge band of slavers from the East is due to collide with the NCR in Vegas. They're likely to adopt quasi-Roman style armour and weaponry and we expect them to be ruthless. Still, if you fancy it, you'll no doubt be able to align with them as part of the new faction system.

example, and their corpse will go cartwheeling across the Wasteland.

Moral grounds

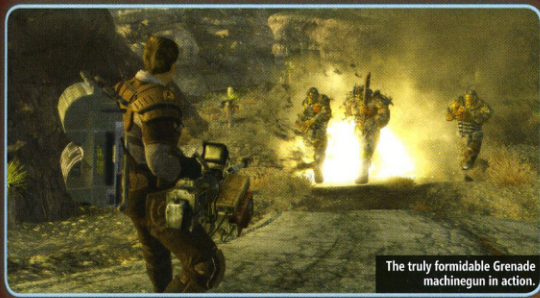
Once you've thumped the Powder Gangers and saved the town, you'll notice that your reputation among the people of Goodsprings has been given a boost. Reputation in *New Vegas* is as pivotal to your experience as Karma was in the first game, and Obsidian has hinted that it would be just as important to the type of ending you get.

One of the things *Fallout 3* was criticised for was its predetermined black-and-white moral choices - the developers decided which actions were right and which were wrong. Karma still plays a part in *New Vegas*, but now it's more about which groups and ideologies you most agree with. What's more, these various factions interact with each other, and while certain groups will always be opposed or aligned together, you will often be able to massage relationships to your own ends. After all, if two groups are busy knocking chunks

out of each other because you've wound them up, you'll be able to sneak past without being noticed.

Radio Ga Ga

That's certainly a strategy that works in the next area Obsidian demonstrated to us: a huge peak in the centre of the map called Black Mountain. You discover the place via a radio signal, coming from a station at the top of the peak. The broadcast is delivered by a super-mutant who is a few sandwiches short of a hamper. Her name is Tabitha and she's holding a ghoul called Raul captive up in the radio base. The entire place is crawling with two flavours of super-mutant: the relatively intelligent and articulate 'first generation' super-mutants, similar to Fawkes from the previous game, and the violently thick ones we're used to turning into a bloody pulp. The most dangerous, though, are the Nightkin, a bunch of blue-hued super-mutants who have been made schizophrenic through persistent use of Stealth Boys. These cloaked monstrosities barrel towards you like an overweight Predator, only deactivating their invisibility in time for you to see an enormous club heading for your face.



The truly formidable Grenade machinegun in action.



These mutated Geckos featured in the old games.



SURVIVAL SKILLS

If you found making your way across the wasteland just a little too easy in *Fallout 3*, Obsidian has plumbed in a Hardcore mode for the Ray Mears-style survivalists. Hardcore mode is separate from difficulty and can be activated at any time during the game, and switching it on makes changes primarily to your health.

For a start, Stimpaks and Rad-away are no longer instant shots. Instead, they take time to take effect and then heal you gradually, so you'll have to duck out of a conflict in order to use them effectively. Stimpaks also no longer heal broken limbs. The other major change is dehydration – wandering around the Mojave in the day will cause your hydration level to drop severely. You will have to make the tough call of drinking from contaminated water sources.

Ammunition has its own weight in Hardcore mode, meaning you'll be able to carry far less gear before you become over-encumbered.



Plus, because you can only target them in VATS when they're visible, it makes them far tougher than a vanilla mutant.

Fortunately, with a bit of canny social engineering, you can fool Tabitha into thinking the 'dumb-dumb' supermutants are organising a revolt against the second generation mutants. Cue a messy battle between the two factions, leaving you to power up the hill and rescue Raul, who can be equipped and ordered around far more efficiently thanks to a new pop-up Companion Wheel system. In order to mop up the final few stragglers, Obsidian whipped out another new weapon, the formidable Grenade machinegun, which pumps out pineapples at an alarming rate. These explosive treats are a good way to deal with Tabitha herself, who is understandably perturbed that you've made off with her prisoner. Aim for the comedy wig and Elton John spectacles and you should be fine...

Solar strike

The final area we saw is the most intriguing. The Helios One energy plant is a pre-war solar array power station set-up by Poseidon Energy, a company with a shady past. Turns out that, in addition to providing electricity for the Vegas area, the company was also developing a solar weapon called Archimedes II. The plant is currently controlled by the New California Republic, but the egotistical nutter they've placed in charge, Fantastic, hasn't worked out how to activate the plant, or the weapon, yet. But if you've got the relevant abilities, you can wrest control and redirect power to various areas in the Wasteland.



The Helios One solar power station doubles as a weapon.

"Aim for Tabitha's Elton John wig and comedy spectacles"

Alternatively, fire up Archimedes II and start using it for your own ends – the only problem being that it has a test sequence that will turn anyone in its radius into a smoking crater. Of course that's also the most exciting thing to do, and there's a neat vantage point on top of the plant. As NCR troops rush across the array, they're picked off by beams of solar energy. The first few blasts are relatively small, but the final 'Oracle' laser is an enormous column of blue light that incinerates a large chunk of the yard below. A fitting end to an impressive public debut.

It's clear that *FNV* uses a large chunk of *Fallout 3* as its foundation, but that's no bad thing. It means we can launch straight into a fresh story, knowing that we'll be just as lost to it as we were to the DC Wasteland. The future's not just bright, it's positively thermonuclear.

