



Gears of War 2: interview with lead developer Epic's Cliff Bleszinski speaks to John Gaudiosi

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Gears of War 2 lead developer Cliff Bleszinski describes the benefits of the Unreal Engine 3, destructible environments, multiplayer chainsaw duels, and explains why you won't be able to customize your guns in Gears of War 2.

Cliff Bleszinski has spent the past 10 years in the Raleigh-Durham area, which has become something of a hotbed of game development with the recent studio announcement by [Insomniac Games](#) and established developers like [Epic Games](#), [Red Storm Entertainment](#), [Virtual Heroes](#), [Funcom Studios](#), [Icarus Studios](#) and [Vicious Cycle Software](#). Bleszinski has grown as the surrounding area has blossomed and Epic Games has become a major two-pronged force in the game industry with its Unreal Engine 3 technology and its original franchises like **Unreal Tournament** and Gears of War.

Bleszinski, who's now 33, currently serves as the lead games designer at Epic. The first Gears game bought him critical accolades, record global sales, and a brand new Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder. With **Gears 2** shipping this November, Bleszinski took some time to discuss his latest creation with GamePro in this exclusive interview.

Epic has made a lot of buzz about their new Unreal Engine 3 tech, but how will this make the world of Gears of War 2 come alive? We've heard of better lighting, better water effects, and "soft body processing." It all sounds fancy, but how will it improve Gears 2 from a gamer's perspective?

I think you can directly look at every single tech video we've released and you can extrapolate a lot of how that's going to be used in the world. When you see hundreds of Locusts pouring out into the street and you're unloading a certain unannounced weapon into them, you're going to be a happy camper. Just the other day I was driving in this icy level with a tank and power-sliding through Locusts and Gus goes, "Locust roadkill, baby. Squish. Squish. Squash. Squash." It was just freakin' great. And then when you shoot you're knocking over trees because we have more destroyable objects and you shoot your Boomshot and everything shatters apart. Gears was heavy and Gears was chunky and Gears felt satisfying. And Gears 2 is just really taking that to the next level. It's just cooler and more visceral.



Will the new tech allow for destructible environments? If so, how might this impact gameplay?

That's what the fracturables allow. You really feel like you're chipping away at stuff and really interacting with the world. In a game like this, not only does Marcus slam into the wall, but shooting is your base form of interaction. When you're targeting a guy and he goes back behind cover and you have another unannounced weapon which is doing serious damage...We have this whole chart of things we've announced and things we haven't...I always have to cross-reference it in my head. Let's just say we leverage as much as we can where the feature.

Will there be any character customizations or weapon customizations in Gears of War 2? If not, why so?

We're not really that kind of game. We're not going to allow you to bling out your gun. The Lancer's a Lancer, Gus is Gus, and Marcus is Marcus. Those are the identities we're sticking with.

There was one vehicle scenario in the first game. Are more vehicles something that would enhance Gears 2?

Absolutely. We've already announced the Centaur. And there are other levels that are unique in a similar vane to that. There are some really nice surprises that haven't been announced.

Will online co-operative play be limited to two players, ala Gears of War 1? Is there any chance for three or four-player co-operative play?

We haven't announced our co-op plans yet.

Will that be at E3?

Probably.

Is Epic streamlining or refining the controls in Gears of War 2?

Eight billion tasks have been cycled on for improving the cover system. You can interrupt the swat turn and go right into a roady run so you're not stuck swat turning. The angle of cover entry for roady run has been tweaked so you don't necessarily get cucked into cover as often when you roady run. Mantling's a little more crisp. Just evading into cover is more crisp. Every single last action has been tweaked. The angle at which you cover slip when you move forward has been tweaked. Every single bit of the cover system has been massaged this time. I went back and played Gears 1 and I still think it's a great cover system, but what I missed was tremendous and I'm so happy with a lot of the results that have come out of the tweaking for Gears 2.

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There were some complaints of players getting "stuck" to walls when trying to hide behind scenery. How will you refine that?

I felt like the Gears cover system worked like 85 percent of the time and we want to get as close to 100 percent as we can. We also offer an alternate control scheme, which is pretty similar to **Uncharted**, where we decouple the cover and the evade button so players can have those on separate buttons if they want.

So you played Uncharted and thought their cover style was a good idea?

Well, we thought some players would want it. Personally, I can't stand it. I like our system, but it's okay to have that option. I don't like my Y-axis inverted but some people do, so we want to make everybody happy.



What feedback did you receive from the multiplayer modes in Gears 1?

People loved it but they didn't like the host advantage. They got tired of the shotgun inconsistencies. We're fixing all of that. They didn't like the randomness of the chainsaw, so we put the chainsaw duel in -- may the best man win! A lot of players wanted respawning, but we added in some modes for downloadable content on Gears 1 that added respawning, but even then it was a 15-second cue. So we have game modes now, like Guardian, where players cycle in and out a lot more often. And Wingman, which is kind of like our version of Last Man Standing Free-for-All, where you have five teams of two each. So it's you and a buddy versus the world, which feels really good. We've added a lot more depth to the multiplayer.

It sounds like there will still be 4 on 4 matches, but will there be new game modes or other multiplayer features?

We're doing 5-on-5 and with all of the other modes if you fill it up you have 10 players. Once you have the matchmaking in there it's really nice.

What does this do to multiplayer?

You know, it doesn't change the game too much, to be honest. It makes it a little bit more exciting, but it allows for two more friends to come in and kick ass with everybody. The great thing about playing Wingman, for instance, is that when I normally play the game and I'm on one team I only have five possible guys I can kill and four buddies that can help me. When I play Wingman I've got one buddy and there are eight possible guys I can kill. You can get a lot more kills and it's a lot more gratifying. At the same time, you can flank a lot easier.

It seems like close-quarters combat has seen an overhaul, based on the GDC teaser video. Will close-quarters chainsaw battles see any changes?

To be honest, it's just a really intense moment because you don't always expect it to happen. What happens is when you come at somebody with a chainsaw and they're just holding the chainsaw, it will automatically engage in the duel. The guy doesn't have to press B to engage in the duel initially. And then of course he needs to press the B button to win. We've tightened it up a bit since it was last demonstrated. It's a little bit faster now. In multiplayer, the length within maybe 200 milliseconds or so is basically the same as if you were to chainsaw and win somebody. The time that you spend dueling, once a guy wins he slices through the other guy really quickly. That's by design so that you're not a sitting duck for five seconds, since you're no longer in God mode when you're chainsawing, which is important to keep in mind. In keeping with all of that, it's a nice way to solve the whole random thing with the chainsaw when players go at each other. It's a cool cinematic moment to see the chainsaw teeth grinding on each other with the sparks and the sounds and everything.

Based on what you've announced so far, what are you most excited about players experiencing with Gears 2?

I want them to see how it ends. I want them to spend more time with the guys in Delta squad, Carmine and everybody, too. I want them to get to know these guys better and I want them to enjoy the cool places we take them in this game. I want them to enjoy the roller coaster of the campaign mode and then take a friend in and play with a friend. That's the great thing about co-op.

What are you playing now?

I've been playing [Boom Blox](#) and that is really f*cking fun. My girlfriend and I are knocking down each other's towers or we'll play the little puzzle mode where you have to knock it down in one shot. That game is really freakin cool. I beat [Condemned 2](#), which I really enjoyed.

You were telling me about that game at E3 last year.

It's such a dark game but I get a kick out of it. I like that genre. Once you get too dark it limits your sales.

Like Manhunt.

Exactly. It goes from being war to snuff. That's the thing, Gears is not snuff. Gears is definitely war. I thoroughly enjoyed Condemned. I love the idea of an alcoholic bum protagonist. That's cool.

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