

Review By: WoLf | Posted: 21/02/2006

Final Word:

It's a mod, a free one and an excellent addition to Max Payne 2. The HoM team should be proud of themselves and I will certainly be looking forwards to the next offering from these guys. If you have Max Payne 2, get it, and remember to take your Prozium.

Are you playing with me Cleric?

Way back nearly a year ago and many moons on, Mr. Anderson of the Hall of Mirrors, mod team for Max Payne 2 founded a mod based on *Kurt Wimmer's: Equilibrium* we were lucky enough to get a sneak peak at the first version and finally after a lot of time and a great deal of hard work, Rico, Anderson and the mod team released the whole thing to the public.



What is the Hall of Mirrors mod?

There's no long-winded story in this mod, it is an attempt by the team to put Gun Kata into a game and get it working, plain and simple. It isn't meant to be a full recreation of the movie. What you do get is several gameplay elements that are based on the film, that work within the limits of the *Max Payne 2* engine.

Rico, the team's animator and Gun Kata guru has pushed the engine into new directions and his animations are impressive to say the least. The team has pulled out all the stops, polished and refined the Kata for the final release and I have to say they've done an excellent job with it.

So what do you get, what does the mod add?

- A short story mode: You take on the role of John Preston and relive his final confrontation with the Sweepers and even Father, in the last battle of the movie. The team has done a fairly faithful job, whilst adding some of their own gameplay elements to the confrontation, since what they have done works better in a game than a movie.



- Several Dead Man Walking levels: You can pick a Cleric, including Mr Anderson and Rico skins – go toe to toe with endless waves of Sweepers and even Clerics, survive, rack up the points and go for the high score.
- An objective based gameplay mode where the Sweepers try and destroy EC-10 materials (priceless works of art) and you lead a team of Resistance fighters to stop them. Similar in a way to the previous DMW levels, except that the addition of AI buddies and an orders system allows you to play tactically.
- Gun Kata in the full Max Payne story mode.
- A Training Room: Here you can bring in any enemies and test out your Gun Kata skills against them.
- A short instructional video showing you the basic moves of the Gun Kata, this has been done extremely well and the presentation for this section is excellent, on a par with most professionally produced games.

Along with this the team has put in custom maps, weapons (including the Cleric's sidearm and the Sweeper's various rifles) models and of course several customised special effects.

Seen here is the trademark Tetragrammaton muzzle flash of the Grammaton Clerics, for example. There are also visor breaking glass-shattering effects and numerous other little visual tweaks.



Gameplay and Gun Kata

The chances are if you downloaded this mod then you're one of the many fans of the movie, specifically of the Gun Katas, the mathematical geometric based gun art that allows a skilled Grammaton Cleric to shoot first, second, third and fourth then ask questions of the corpses, without taking any return fire.

It is easier said than done however and what looks effortless in film isn't so easy when you're playing. Within the game environment it requires a great deal of practice to get away without taking a hit or two. The team has done an extremely admirable job with the Gun Kata however and they have implemented a fairly responsive system based on the original game control system and utilising the shoot-dodge, combination and direction buttons to pull off the various moves.

Once you select Gun Kata mode (The Tetragrammaton symbol on the GUI) it is time to learn the basics and then you should be able to hold your own, pressing a couple of buttons will make your Cleric (or Max if you're playing Single Player) fire off a pre-defined Gun Kata combination (Named based upon the Latin for: In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost) – In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti for example.

Each of these moves forms a cohesive whole and at least one of them ends with the traditional crossed-guns final phase of the Cleric's Kata, which is instantly recognisable from the movie. The Gun Kata as a whole functions very well albeit that they are going to be confusing to use for the first few times, as you settle down with the system you should find that you do become more accurate and deadly with your shots.



I stress right now that none of this is automated, you won't be able to press one button and instantly kill a room full of Sweepers with a single shot, ala the movie, but you will be able to even the odds quite considerably.

There are a wide variety of moves that can be accessed with these combination buttons and referring to the tutorial video, the team hasn't skimped on them at all and the animations are pretty much spot on. They have done incredible things with the game's core engine and deserve a golden accolade for that in-of-itself.

Architecture

The mod's mappers have done themselves proud in recreating

several key locations from the movie, the Hall of Mirrors and the adjacent Father's chamber are all very well done and certainly resemble their movie-like counterparts, again, they have done this within the limits of a very unforgiving game engine so all kudos once more goes to the mappers and modellers.

Models

The Sweepers are in, the Clerics are in (even the HoM team are there) and these models are nicely done. They are pretty clean and there are no obvious faults that I could detect when playing, the visor shattering effect on the Sweeper's motor-bike helmets really adds to the whole feeling in the game as well, and we had to administer several shots of Prozium to other movie fans that were fortunately enough to be around at the time of our testing/reviewing of this particular mod.



Sound/Music/Video

The team has made sure that there are several key pieces of music from the movie, integrated into the game. They have tuned some of the sound effects it seems whilst adding various quotes from the Sweepers and enemies and certainly once more the big thumbs up have to go to Mr. Anderson for his excellent work on the tutorial video, this piece of work certainly needs to be seen since it takes an inventive approach to the task and provides an excellent atmospheric tool for the player to soak up even more of the movies' atmosphere.

AI

The Sweepers are aggressive and they take no prisoners, they're a relentless foe that will hunt you down no matter where (or if) you try to run. The other Clerics are likewise pretty tough and troublesome, they will use their Gun Kata moves and acrobatics to try and take you down at every opportunity.

Overall thoughts

There are some glitches now and then, a few bugs with the sound dropping out and the control system will give you a headache until you get used to it. The mod will seem short to some people but those people need to take a look at the meat and bones of the mod, the skin is important but under it there's a lot going on and the team's had to do all of this from scratch – making use of the engine, and the engine is a pain to work with from personal experience. Rico's fine work on the animations allows gamers to experience Gun Kata in a game as close as they are ever going to get, since the *100 Bullets* game was canned and would of featured a simple Gun Kata style system/gameplay.



The HoM mod team has done a pretty incredible job with this addition to Max Payne and they produced a fine product at the end of it, with pretty much top-class production values and a wealth of content for the *Equilibrium* fan.

As always the HoM team are available through the unofficial fansite forums, where they have promised to listen to feedback

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The mod is fun and frenetic in places, the Gun Kata system is quirky but works and you can play the original game storyline with it. Which does definitely even the odds when Max – goes Cleric. There are some good maps that the HoM team have created and it all goes a long way to making the mod pretty special.



Best of all it is: **FREE!**