Far Cry 4

Anthony wonders whether this series is staying rooted or branching out

Trees. Wonderful, glorious, luscious trees. Yes, if you want a videogame series that treats you to thick, sprawling foliage, then the *Far Cry* games have always delivered. They've also given us huge, open-world environments to explore, interesting vehicles to drive, tons of bad guys to shoot at and memorable characters and stories that make you want to keep playing. And did I mention the trees?

As well as packing all these qualities in again, the fourth installment of the series also follows the *Far Cry* tradition of having a story mode that has absolutely nothing to do with the previous games. This time round, it's set in the fictional Himalayan region of Kyrat, which is ruled by the ruthless and somewhat psychopathic Pagan Min. Fighting against his tyranny is the Golden Path, a rebel group that was started by the parents of the game's protagonist, Ajay Ghale, whose mother fled to America with him as a child. He has now returned to scatter his deceased mother's ashes but soon finds himself being dragged into the continuing conflict.

As with *Far Cry 3*, the primary antagonist is central to the game's cover and publicity materials, because like Vaas Montenegro before him, Pagan Min is undoubtedly the most interesting character in the story. That said, the rest of the voice work is also top-notch, and the plotting is strong too, although Ghale's transformation from unwitting tourist to unstoppable badass seems a little rushed.

Perhaps, though, that's because there's no need for a learning process, because *Far Cry 4* is largely the same as its predecessor, with many of the changes being cosmetic. For example, once again you're able to kill and skin animals to make upgrades like ammo pouches and weapon holsters, but the types of animals you encounter are different (instead of sharks, for instance, you now have demon fish). And if you decide you'd like a change from slaughtering innocent beasties, you can sit on an elephant and ride it around like a huge, very impractical taxi.

Also, in addition to the story missions, you're again asked to take down enemy outposts (preferably without any alarms being raised) and to climb radio towers to reveal areas of the map. The only real changes are that enemies are wearing different uniforms and the radio towers are made from wood, rather than metal.

In spite of these similarities, or perhaps because of them, *Far Cry 4* is still hugely entertaining. Everything that worked well in the previous game has been included again, but Ubisoft has also tweaked and refined the formula to produce a more substantial experience.

For a start, players are now able to produce their own maps for challenge modes, using the built-in editor. As well as letting you express your creativity in the form of new things to blow up and kill, it also adds some long-term appeal beyond the main game, because you can play maps created by other players.

Also new is a more integrated co-op experience. Whereas *Far Cry 3*'s co-op mode was a set of unique challenges, separate from the main game, now it's a drop-in/drop-out affair, which allows players to join in at any time to take on all but the story missions.

Clearly, then, this game is more evolution than revolution, but at this stage, that's all that the series really needs (well, that and a price cut). Ubisoft has done just enough to make this game better than the previous one, and it's all still feels new enough to be interesting. It will only become a problem if it continues like this, because by the time *Far Cry 5* touches down, players might be getting a bit bored of doing the same things and using the same tactics – no matter how pretty the trees are.

mm Anthony Enticknap

The same game as the last one, but a bit better

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Quality **9**

Value **7**

8 Overall