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THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

The Horror Issue

featuring **Alien: Isolation** & The Evil Within
plus our Top 25 Horror Games of All Time

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ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com

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Boo

Welcome to the horror issue. Game Informer spends a lot of time trying to forecast the next big thing – looking to reveal never-before-seen games that we believe will demand gamers' attention. This month we had the rare opportunity to put together an issue focusing on one of the hottest themes in gaming: horror.

We went big, with features on two highly anticipated games that hit this October in *Alien: Isolation* and *The Evil Within*, a look at the growing mass of horror titles on the horizon, and gaze into the past to select the greatest horror games in history with a Top 25 list.

I've put a fair amount of time into both *Alien: Isolation* and *The Evil Within*, and while they weren't ready to review quite yet, I have been impressed with what I have seen. I was so scared during my time with *Alien: Isolation* that I'm not even sure if I would describe the game as fun; my heart raced from the very real sense of dread the game made me feel as I tried to survive.

For those who don't know, *The Evil Within* is the work of *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami, who many credit as the godfather of survival horror. His unique style defines *The Evil Within*, and should please fans of his previous work. I walked away thinking a lot about how it reminded me of my experience with *Resident Evil 4*, the greatest horror game ever in this editor's humble opinion (see the staff's pick on page 67).

Horror is back with a vengeance, and the future couldn't be bloodier.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Two Collectible Covers

One featuring the famous *Alien* xenomorph and the other a peek into the insanity of *The Evil Within*.



2014

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The Horror Issue

The partnership between horror and video games is going through a resurgence. After years of publishers moving away from the genre, an indie boom and the re-emergence of prominent developers are ushering in a new wave of scares. Along with in-depth looks at *The Evil Within* and *Alien: Isolation*, we also look at fright fests coming in the near future and count down the 25 best horror games of all time.



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The Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 5: No Going Back

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» 4 Feedback

This month, readers thank us, tell us they judged Battleborn too quickly, complain about the difference between a 9.5 and a 10, and let us know how they felt about our E3 report card scores. They weren't fans.

» 10 Connect

We offer our report from Gamescom, a show that hosts hundreds of thousands of attendees every year. We shouldered our way through the crowds to bring you our feedback on a number of new games, and big news pieces. We also take a look at some of our favorite horror movies that deserve quality video game adaptations.

» 76 Previews

We're taking another peek at games we know a lot about, like Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare and Dragon Age: Inquisition. We also take a look at games we didn't know much about until recently, like Bloodborne and Quantum Break.

» 90 Reviews

It's the calm before the holiday release storm, so to speak, as we look at new versions of games we've already played like Diablo III, Metro: Redux, and The Last of Us, but there are some new titles in there, too. We offer our feedback on the new Madden, The Walking Dead Season Two finale, and more.

» 100 Game Over

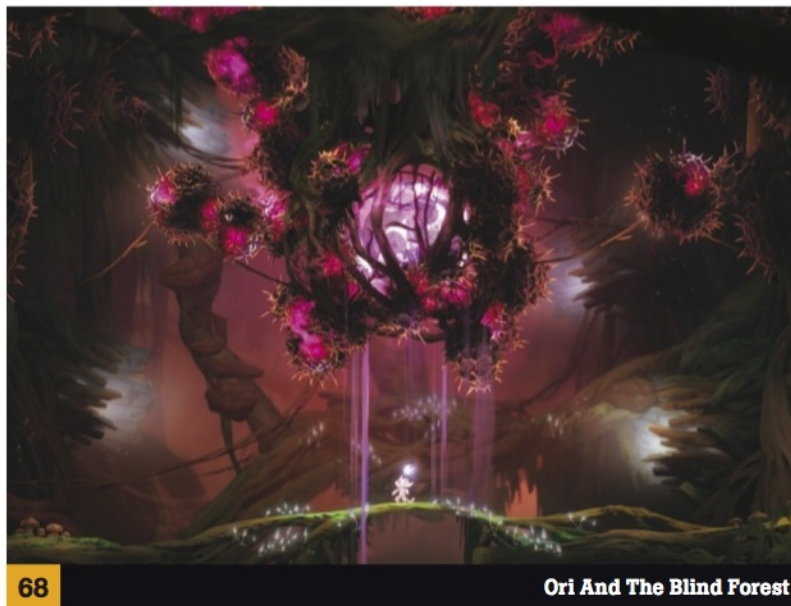
How good are you at staying alive in a survival horror situation? When do you use an herb, and when is holding onto that gnome or that jar of eyeballs the most important part of your mission? To find out, check out our Surviving the Scares quiz.



83 Quantum Break



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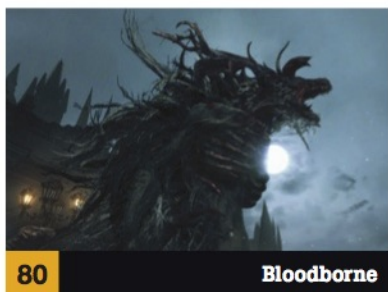
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SAVINGS THAT STAND OUT

EVEN IN A WIZARD'S BEARD.

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Anticipation builds for the crowded holiday lineup, but is it too crowded? Also this month, readers revisit an old review gripe, denounce some pervy DLC, and accuse us of all kinds of bias.

The Full Picture

I have to admit, some of your cover stories do not intrigue me as much as others. When I saw *Battleborn*, I thought it was a month that I would pass on and patiently await the next issue. After reading the full story, however, I can't wait for this game to come out! The more I read, the more appealing the game got. From the leveling system to the character descriptions, I couldn't stop reading. I love *Borderlands*' humor and I'm glad Gearbox will incorporate some of that into *Battleborn* as well. It's refreshing to see a large-scale game that's not a sequel.

Misael Bautista
via email

Still Complaining, Still Wrong

Last year, I wrote a letter about how your 9.5 review score for *The Last of Us* was too low, which you published in *Feedback* (*You Will Be Assimilated*, issue 246). I couldn't believe that the reviewer could give such glowing praise to the game without any negative comments except how brutal the game was. Fast forward to your recent review of *The Last of Us Remastered*; you have a different reviewer, and he gave the same game with updated graphics and DLC a 10. The gameplay is the same, but last year it was a 9.5. I call shenanigans.

Jack Fenter
via email

Sorry Jack, but we're still not the Borg; different editors have different opinions about games. Some A.I. problems and a few trial-and-error stealth sequences (which you have once again selectively overlooked in the original review) caused Matt to not enjoy *The Last of Us* quite as much Tim does. You're still silly for complaining about a .5 difference, but on the bright side, at least Tim shares your unfettered praise for Naughty Dog's masterpiece.

We're glad you didn't jump to conclusions, Misael. Like *Borderlands*, Gearbox's new competitive and cooperative shooter blends ideas and gameplay mechanics from several different genres into a unique experience. Our goal with every cover story is to provide readers with enough details and impressions to understand said unique experiences, but you still have to read them to get the full picture – a lesson many jaded gamers could stand to learn before flocking to the Internet to complain. For more on *Battleborn*, check out our month of bonus coverage at gameinformer.com/battleborn.



Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com

Dressed To Kill

Am I the only one who is sick and tired of perving Dead or Alive 5 Ultimate DLC costumes clogging up the add-ons queue on Xbox Live? These embarrassing nickel-and-dimers have been infecting the download line-up for months now. It's ridiculous. Not only have there been hundreds of them so far, but I thought we were over this sort of misogynistic, juvenile bulls---. I'm certainly not expecting you or anyone else to do anything about it, but seriously, they need to put a cap on that sh---. I can't be alone here.

Valen Jamason
Dallas, TX

We thought you were exaggerating, Valen, but a quick search of Xbox Live shows that there are currently 337 DLC costumes listed for Team Ninja's cleavage-obsessed fighter. With names like **Ultimate Sexy Costumes, Hotties Swimwear, and Bath & Bedtime Costumes**, we're also inclined to agree with your overall assessment of the situation. Hopefully there aren't enough perverts to keep Team Ninja's current business model afloat much longer.



Careful What You Wish For

I'm happy with my new PS4 and even though it has a limited library of games, it's still enjoyable because I can spend a month with a single game and beat it completely. That won't last much longer; in October alone, there are eight games I'd love to play but I won't have the time or money to play them all: Drive Club, Evil Within, Assassin's Creed Unity, Battlefield: Hardline, Alien: Isolation, Dragon Age: Inquisition, Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor, and Evolve. Why do game companies do that? Why don't they release games at least a few weeks apart? That way people with lives can enjoy them all throughout the year. I've been waiting for a few really good games since PS4 came out and now they want to release them all in October.

Kevin Morales
via email

The rush for publishers to get their games out in time for holiday shoppers leads to some very packed months at the end of the year, and with Call of Duty continually dominating sales in November, many companies are now targeting October for their new releases. That said, cash-strapped gamers have slightly less to worry about: Dragon Age, Battlefield, and Evolve have been delayed until November, March, and February, respectively, while Shadow of Mordor's release has been bumped up a week into September. While the delays may make your wallet a bit happier, we're guessing the fans anticipating those games aren't smiling.

Mii-a Culpa

I think your review score for Tomodachi Life was a little too low. I think 7.25 or 7.5 would have been better. I mean, Nintendo has learned how to add fun little details into its games. I know the events may get repetitive, but Nintendo makes fun of that! In the cafe chats, they say stuff like, "Do you feel like we talk about the same things over and over?" And if they have a similar news story twice, someone might comment, "I feel like I have seen this before..." So, you know, think about that.

Jhett McAdams
via email

While Tomodachi Life offers players some lighthearted fun, Nintendo's quirky friendship simulator is far too repetitive for extended play – the fact that Nintendo acknowledges the shortcoming doesn't fix it. The same goes for developers who mock their own one-dimensional characters and tired story tropes with self-deprecating humor; if amnesiac protagonists and riding basements of rat infestations are boring and cliché, don't just make fun of them – don't include them in the first place!



Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"Is there any information that you guys have on the Star Wars Force Unleashed?"

Yes. It came out six years ago.

"Is there a single 3DS game in development that could be considered a traditional hardcore game?"

Cooking Mama 5: Bon Appétit!

"How much do you folks get paid to shill for lousy video games?"

The same amount that you get paid for being an insufferable cranky pants.

Indecent Proposal:

"I have a game and three other that I need to get developed. I'm willing to partner up as soon as possible"

Strangest Opening Line To A Feedback Letter:

"I am infatuated with Betrayus from Pac-man and the Ghostly Adventures."

Question Of The Month:

What's the scariest game you've ever played, and why?



(Left) How many people does it take to make a new-gen Assassin's Creed game? A whole lot, as we learned during our recent trip to Ubisoft Montreal (Right) Actor Dan Jeannotte isn't quite as suave as his virtual assassin counterpart, Arno Dorian, but we can't fault him for being excited

PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

GI SPY
continued on page 8

On Your Mind



- 24% E3 Report Card Gripes
- 22% Holiday Lineup Excitement
- 18% Battleborn Love
- 14% Kickstarter Pitches
- 12% Destiny Beta Hype
- 10% "I Can't Wait For [Subsequently Delayed Game]!"



Make It Rain

In issue 256, we asked readers which game company they think will have the best holiday. The one-two punch of *Call of Duty* and *Destiny* make Activision and Bungie the stand-out winners among respondents. Here are some responses.

I believe that the company that will have employees driving new gold-plated Porsches is Activision for its release of *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. The character detail, exoskeletons, and futuristic setting say a lot about the company's boldness to move away from modern-day shooters.

Dave Roman

I honestly hope that all three console manufacturers have an amazing holiday. So far the stiff competition has me fighting over which system to play! *Mario Kart 8* is currently in the lead, but the *Last of Us Remastered* is up next. Then it's going to be a toss-up between *Halo: Master Chief Collection*, *Destiny* on PS4, and *Hyrule Warriors*!

Felix Diaz

I feel Ubisoft is going to have a big holiday season this year. *Assassin's Creed Unity* and *Far Cry 4* are two of the most anticipated games on the horizon, and they cater to different console audiences. Those who haven't made the transition to new-gen can still play *Far Cry 4*, while *Unity* is Ubisoft's first ever new-gen only game. In a packed holiday season, I believe those two games stand out, and I know I can't wait for *Unity* on PS4.

Sammy Caloras

Making The Grade

The grades you gave Microsoft and Sony's E3 showings don't hold much weight (E3 Report Cards, issue 256). Specifically, after reading about how little they showed for *Gears of War* and *Halo 5*, Microsoft's press conference should not have received the same grade as Sony. Your most negative assessment of Sony was that it didn't "go for the jugular" of Microsoft; it's unfair to ding Sony just because it did not perform a fatality on Microsoft and instead focused on their own company. It is so blatantly obvious that your equal grades for these two companies were unfair, and it frustrates me to see a lack of objective reporting done on your part.

Gary P. Hopkins
via email

Game Informer's final review of E3 2014 can be simply summed up as: Microsoft can't win and Sony can do no wrong. Are you guys really going to sit on the sidelines on this one? Microsoft was the clear winner of 2014 based on its upcoming catalog of games, alone. Sony on the other hand was all smoke and mirrors. You said Sony "clearly wasn't going for the jugular of competitor Microsoft." What?! That statement implies that Sony's conference could have devoured Microsoft if they wanted to. Please; Sony went into battle with a dull knife. Pick a side guys. I don't care which conference, but don't cop out on your readers.

Ben Hanfelder
via email

I completely disagree with the grade you gave Nintendo at this year's E3. Personally, I would give them an A. This is because they beat everyone else. Sure, Microsoft showed nothing but games, but only *Sunset Overdrive* really looked good. Sony only announced a couple games, and then spent the rest of their time talking about some new features no one cares about. Nintendo announced two new *Zelda* games, a *Kirby* game, a *Yoshi* game, a new *Toad* game, and a bunch of other games that look really cool. I just think Nintendo deserves more credit than they have been getting.

Yusuf Waili
via email

We heard from a number of disgruntled gamers this month who disagreed with our E3 grades for the big three console makers. While everyone's opinion is subjective, we're pretty sure the fact that we received an equal number of complaints accusing us of hating Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo means our scores are objectively perfect. Hey, you can't argue with science.

(Left) Comedians Louis Katz and Arj Barker stopped to admire our dragonborn after filming an episode of *Replay*. Watch it at gameinformer.com

(Right) What do famed game designer Richard Garriott, Supergiant Games' Greg Kasavin, and actress Felicia Day have in common? Find out in our video conversation at gameinformer.com



WINNER

1 Joshua Geier

This situation is best described as "screwed, learn how to play The Last of Us"

2 Hannah Webster

Amaterasu farts make children happy

3 Steven Starzinski

Big Boss sitting on a sack of letters, all requesting David Hayter return as his voice

4 Don Atizado

Here's hoping Clementine's story continues into her adult years

5 Samantha Tucker

You asked us to show Mario shirtless for over 20 years, and...well...here you go!



gallery



(Left) As summer comes to an end, we thank Game Informer interns Wayne Stainbrook, Dimitri Gedevanishvili, and Harry Mackin for all their hard work. Thanks, guys!

(Right) Kyle's such a big Zelda fan that he asked Koei's Hisashi Koinuma, Team Ninja's Yosuke Hayashi, and Nintendo's Eiji Aonuma to put him in Hyrule Warriors. After smiling politely for a picture, they had him escorted from the building



NOTABLES

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GAMESCOM

2014

Announcements, fresh looks, and eager fans from around the world

by Mike Futter

Last year's Gamescom, which played host to 340,000 people over the four public show days, was filled with the mystery and excitement of two new consoles

only months away from release. We expected that this year might not reach the same fever pitch, but fans flooded Cologne, Germany's 14-hall Kölnmesse to get their hands on the hottest upcoming titles.

This year, for the first time in memory, the convention organizers sold out all four days well in advance and had to shut down many of the halls on opening day. Standing at the top of the escalator in the middle of the building revealed a scene ripped straight from Capcom's *Dead Rising*, as the sea of smiling fans milled about (slowly) moving from one hall filled with pounding bass notes to the next.

Lines were extremely long for some of the hottest games. Reports suggest that *Assassin's Creed Unity* repeated the five-hour wait fans suffered through last year for *Black Flag*. Other popular titles included *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, and *Evolve*.

This year's event even hosted slightly fewer visitors than in 2013, though moving through the Kölnmesse, it was hard to tell. In total, 335,000 packed the convention hall, with visitors from 88 countries and exhibitors from 47. *Evolve* repeated its E3 victory, taking home five awards, including best in show.



Rise of the Tomb Raider

Filling The Xbox One Library



Last year's Gamescom was the final major event before the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One launches. This year, the focus was on momentum, as both Microsoft and Sony highlighted games for their new consoles. Microsoft's big announcement was the timed exclusivity of Rise of the Tomb Raider.

Head of Xbox Phil Spencer was open about wanting something to compete head-on with Naughty Dog's Uncharted 4. With little time to ramp up development on a new action-adventure game, Microsoft opted to open its wallet and entice Square Enix into a partnership.

While it's safe to assume that Lara Croft will eventually appear on PlayStation systems and PC, it could take up to a year after the Xbox One and Xbox 360 holiday 2015 launch. We wouldn't be surprised to see Ms. Croft get her own Xbox One bundle next year, too.

Speaking of bundles, Microsoft announced three new ones during its press conference, including a Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare version with a 1TB hard drive. Sunset Overdrive is being bundled with a white Xbox One, and Europe is receiving a FIFA 15 bundle as well.

None of the new bundles include a Kinect, and Microsoft is still unsure when the stand-alone Kinect units will hit retail (or for how much). All we know is that interested parties should expect to spend more than the \$100 difference that exists between the Kinect-free bundle and original launch configuration.

Despite struggles at retail, Microsoft has delivered on one of its key promises. The Xbox One continues to receive significant updates on a monthly basis. At Gamescom, the company announced that digital pre-ordering and pre-loading would begin this fall, with Forza Horizon 2 and FIFA 15 mentioned specifically. The program ramped up quickly, and Madden NFL 15 became the first title on offer just a week before its August 26 release. The game publisher makes this decision rather than Microsoft, so don't expect every title to be available in this way.

Microsoft also shared details on features coming later. The biggest is the upcoming media server support. Soon, users will be able to stream natively from any Windows 7 or 8

machine and from any other computer with a third-party DLNA server application.

This generation has been a slow start for last generation's champion, but success isn't solely defined through comparison. "At some level, it is a competition, and I've said before I want to win," Spencer says. "At the same time, I want to build a great platform for gamers. If somebody else does that too, and they do really well? Hats off to them, but I can have success in our own space if we're selling a lot of consoles and people are buying games."

Spencer acknowledges there is a competition though, and that Microsoft is currently behind. "We shipped at the same time and we're in direct competition with the PS4," he admits. "I'm not going to duck that. I want to win. I want to win this generation, but I want to win more than I want the other guy to lose. I own a PS4, and it's not like I want it to get dusty or not have games. But I do want to sell a lot of Xbox Ones, and for many people that's in direct competition with the PS4. As the Xbox team, we are the underdog."

The Xbox One's Indie New Wave

Microsoft announced a number of big titles coming via the ID@Xbox indie self-publishing platform. Standouts include Hi-Rez's Smite, which is the first MOBA experience coming to Xbox One. Here is the full list of new games headed to the platform.

- Blues and Bullets – *A Crowd of Monsters*
- Dungeon of the Endless – *Amplitude Studios*
- Fruit Ninja Kinect 2 – *Halfbrick / Hibernum Creations*
- Funk of Titans – *A Crowd of Monsters*
- Ghost of a Tale – *Seith CG*

- Goat Simulator – *Coffee Stain Studios / Double 11*
- Gunscape – *Blowfish Studios*
- Knight Squad – *Chainsaw Games*
- No Time to Explain – *tinyBuild*
- Plague Inc.: Evolved – *Ndemec Creations*
- Rivals of Aether – *Dan Fornace*
- Smite – *Hi-Rez Studios*
- Space Engineers – *Keen Software House*
- Spectra – *Gateway Interactive*
- Pneuma: Breath of Life – *Deco Digital / Bevel Studios*
- The Escapists – *Team 17*
- SpeedRunners – *tinyBuild / DoubleDutch Games*
- Superhot – *Superhot*



PlayStation 4 Grows Ten Million Strong And Counting

When Sony took the stage for its Gamescom press briefing, it kicked off the night with a bit of business housekeeping. The company announced it has sold more than 10 million PlayStation 4 consoles in just nine months. That's about two-thirds the time it took to sell that many PlayStation 3 units.

From there, Sony announced a number of exclusives and "first on console" titles that set it up well for the coming year (and that's without even mentioning Uncharted 4). Bloodborne continues to look like the kind of game Dark Souls fans are clamoring for, Ninja Theory revealed a new title called Hellblade (which makes us wonder if the antonymic name is inspired by Heavenly Sword), and teen slasher flick title Until Dawn has been reborn for a new generation sans the Move controls.

The biggest oddity of the briefing was Hideo Kojima's strange demonstration of Metal Gear Solid V's cardboard box. We've seen some of its functions before, but

spending valuable stage time on it made little sense. For more on Kojima's sly bait and switch, check out our coverage of the "P.T." trailer and Silent Hills on page 51.

Sony also announced a number of new features coming to the PlayStation 4 soon in system update 2.0. Long-awaited YouTube integration will allow players to upload gameplay videos.

Sony will also deliver on a promise it made in early 2013. Controller sharing over the Internet is being implemented with something called "Share Play." For 60 minutes at a time, players can virtually share a couch with friends, passing control back and forth. Details on exactly how this works are still forthcoming.

Sony also took the opportunity to remind us that PlayStation TV is still on track for North American and European releases. The device is scheduled to rollout first in North America on October 14, with a European release scheduled for exactly one month later.



Hellblade



Rime



Wild

Sony's Brings Big Game Announcements To Gamescom

In addition to Silent Hills, Until Dawn, and Hellblade, Sony debuted number of other titles. These include creative PlayStation 4 ports like Tearaway Unfolded (reconfigured for use on the DualShock 4), and the first game from Michel Ancel's new Wild Sheep studio, called Wild.

- Alienation - Housemarque
- DayZ - Bohemia Interactive
- Dreamfall Chapters: The Longest Journey - Red Thread Games
- Ether One - White Paper Games
- Hellblade - Ninja Theory
- Hollowpoint - Paradox
- In Space We Brawl - Reply Forge

- Papers, Please - Lucas Pope
- Pixcat - Pastagames
- QUBE 2 - Toxic Games
- Rime - Tequila Works (Confirmed as exclusive)
- Runemaster - Paradox
- Silent Hills - Kojima Productions
- Snow - Poppermost
- Tearaway Unfolded - Sony / Media Molecule
- The Tomorrow People - Q-Games
- Until Dawn - Sony / Supermassive Games
- The Vanishing of Ethan Carter - The Astronauts
- Volume - Mike Bithell
- Wild - Wild Sheep Studios



Fable Legends

Trending Topics

Everyone loves asymmetry

Asymmetrical action multiplayer is likely to dominate the conversation as we move into 2015. Fable Legends, Evolve, and now Shadow Realms all feature a spin on the four-versus-one gameplay model. Giving players the chance to be the boss monster is a reality, in part because of the new power afforded by Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

We don't expect it will stop here. Look for more mainstream games featuring this new form of player vs. player combat.

Revamp, reboot, remaster

We expect publishers and developers to capitalize on known brands and proven successes. Developing games is a risky business, so why not get a leg up with something you know fans love?

Capcom is the latest to join the remaster brigade, as it prepares to bring the GameCube-exclusive Resident Evil Remake to new audiences. That title hits Xbox One, Xbox 360, PlayStation 4, and PlayStation 3 in 2015.

Sony is updating Journey and The Unfinished Swan for PlayStation 4. Microsoft is getting ready to release all four numbered Halo games for Xbox One. This trend is gaining steam, and your favorite series might get a new-gen coat of paint before too long.

Indies continue to differentiate

Both Microsoft and Sony spent a great deal of time highlighting indie titles that are coming first to their respective platforms. While some gamers might shrug at anything that isn't AAA, titles like Cuphead, Smite, and Superhot on Xbox One and No Man's Sky, The Vanishing of Ethan Carter, and Volume on PlayStation 4 make a big difference.

Most of the exclusives coming to each platform aren't coming from major studios. They're in development at small studios, eager to put their labors of love in front of new audiences.

As Sony and Microsoft refine their support of smaller developers, the production values increase, the lines blur between the scrappy upstarts and the industry stalwarts. We haven't yet smudged those lines entirely, but with further cultivation and attention from platform holders, indies will continue to rise in mind-share and financial power. ♦



What About Nintendo?

Much like its approach to the 3DS, Nintendo region locks its press access. United States outlets can't get in to see the Big N at Gamescom, but the house of Mario didn't bring anything that we didn't see at E3 anyway.

Sierra Reborn

In a surprise announcement, Activision detailed the revival of the Sierra brand. The first two titles being released under that name are Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions from Lucid Games and a new King's Quest title by The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom developer The Odd Gentlemen.

We spoke to Activision about Sierra and found out that the company plans to use the label for working with smaller development houses. Some projects will be new intellectual property, and others will be revivals of classic Sierra franchises. We'll know more as titles are announced and detailed later in 2014 and beyond.



Superhot

PlayStation Now Brings Cloud Gaming To The Masses

Sony officially announced its PlayStation Now service in January, around a year and a half after it acquired cloud gaming company Gaikai in June 2012. In late July, the open beta for the service launched on PlayStation 4 in the continental U.S. and parts of southern Canada. We tried it out to see how it fares in real-world conditions. *by Bryan Vore*

On a basic level, games are played on a remote server and the video signal is sent to your console. At the same time, your controller inputs are beamed back to the source. As of mid-August, more than 140 PlayStation 3 games were available (other PlayStation platform games will appear eventually), though each installment of episodic games counts as a separate title. Current publishers onboard include Konami, Telltale, Sega, Square Enix, Koei Tecmo, Capcom, Sony, Deep Silver, and Bandai Namco. Heavy hitters like Electronic Arts, 2K Games, Ubisoft, and Activision have yet to sign on. Currently, games can be rented from a period of four hours to a maximum of 90 days at a wide range of prices set by the publishers (see sidebar). Save files are automatically stored in the cloud, so even if your rental runs out you can pick it up again where you left off.

"We've got the different tiers and then beyond that the publisher does have some flexibility on how they'd like to price their titles," says Eric Lempel, VP of Sony Network Entertainment. "They are looking to us to work with them to help them figure out what will work best...We're actually looking at making changes to some of the pricing right now based on some of the feedback we've received."

After playing several games on the service, I was most impressed by the speed in which a selection is up and running. Normally, for digital games, users face a significant download time on an average connection. Even with disc-based titles, there are usually a combination of required downloadable updates and hard drive installs that slow down start time. With PlayStation Now, games are up and running in less than a minute after a brief authorization process.

If you're in an experimental mood, this scratches that itch in a fast and convenient way. Players can jump around all kinds of titles quickly without the normal red tape. Currently, it's not cost effective to pay several dollars for each game you'd like to test out in an evening, but if PS Now ever incorporates access to several games into PlayStation Plus or some kind of new subscription model, low attention span players would have a potential ultimate gaming playground to zigzag through.

My connection isn't raging fast, but it passed PlayStation Now's connection test (a minimum 5mbps speed is required). At times the visuals were indistinguishable from a downloaded or on-disc game. However, in some instances the quality dipped to a blurry, gross mess for several seconds and then snapped back to normal. On another, worse connection, the video signal was consistently lower. Imagery wasn't as sharp and was full of artifacts. It's like playing a low-res, compressed, YouTube video of the game instead of the crisp original. Maybe some players don't care as much about pristine picture quality, but given the outrage on the Internet about anything less than 1080p and 60fps and the prevalence of remastered HD collections, I think many certainly do.

Concerns that controller input lag affect gaming are warranted. I noticed slight lag on every game I tried. These

experiences are all still playable, but the timing feels marginally off. Genres like fighting games, platformers, driving, and action require precise timing. Though I didn't play any examples, I imagine turn-based RPGs and strategy games, adventure titles, and card games shouldn't suffer at all from the slight controller delay. For Killzone 3, I had to deaden the sensitivity as much as possible to get it to feel somewhat natural. I was surprised to see the multiplayer portion of the game was playable, though audio chat is not currently supported.

Gaikai CEO David Perry sees almost every current limitation of PS Now as something they can tackle, and predicts someday cloud gaming will exceed the horsepower of current consoles. "You know developers like [Hideo] Kojima, right? He would love unlimited power and storage," he says. "If you think about what that will do as far as unshackling the developers that always had to be concerned about limitations. You could just completely let them go wild and free. It's hard to even imagine, but somewhere, someone at some point will do that and I'm excited to see what those experiences are going to be like. It's only going to be possible from the cloud."

If you'd like to try out PlayStation Now and don't have a PS4, separate beta tests are launching this fall for PS3, 2014 Bravia TVs, Vita, and the upcoming PlayStation TV device. Sony also mentioned

smartphone and tablets as part of the plan during the initial PS Now reveal, and Gaikai focused primarily on making big games like World of Warcraft work in a web browser. Strong bandwidth is crucial to PS Now's success and it's still inconsistent across the U.S. This is likely Sony's biggest hurdle for widespread adoption and unfortunately outside of its control. PS Now may not be perfect right out of the gate, but if Sony can fully trick your mind into thinking you're playing locally, address pricing concerns, and continue to expand to devices people already have, it could be an intriguing new branch of the gaming tree. ♦

PlayStation Now Limitations

Sony's streaming service has several areas ripe for improvement:

- Not compatible with DLC for downloaded or disc-based games
- Games may be streamed at reduced resolution
- No access to in-game stores
- Does not support user-generated content
- Games have stereo sound only, not surround sound
- DualShock 3 and 4 are the only controllers supported
- PlayStation Move, PlayStation Eye, the Blu-ray remote control, keyboards, microphones, headsets, and other controllers are not compatible
- The full XMB may not be accessible. A custom limited XMB allows access to some PSN features
- Audio and video chat are not supported
- In-game uploads to social media are disabled

PlayStation Now Pricing Samples*

TITLE	4 HOURS	7 DAYS	30 DAYS	90 DAYS
F1 2013	\$6.99	\$11.99	\$22.99	\$49.99
Darksiders II	\$4.99	\$6.99	\$14.99	\$29.99
Final Fantasy XIII	\$2.99	\$5.99	\$7.99	\$14.99
Lost Planet 2	\$2.99	\$3.99	\$5.99	\$7.99

*prices subject to change



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*Wireless broadband internet access required for online play. For more info, go to support.nintendo.com.
Game and system sold separately. © 2014 Nintendo. Original Game: © Nintendo/HAL Laboratory, Inc. Characters: © Nintendo/HAL Laboratory, Inc./Pokémon/Creatures Inc./GAME FREAK Inc./INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS/SEGA/CAPCOM CO., LTD./BANDAI NAMCO Games Inc. Nintendo properties are trademarks of Nintendo.

Quotable

"Originally, we were thinking of making a game that would make you pee your pants. [Now] we are aiming for a game that will make you s--- your pants."

— **Hideo Kojima**, discusses the development strategy for *Silent Hills*.



The Good



THE HALO 5: GUARDIANS

multiplayer beta on Xbox One begins on December 29 and runs until January 18. Beyond an online connection and a copy of Halo: The Master Chief Collection, the beta also requires a Gold Xbox Live membership. The beta revolves around four-on-four play, and some of the content will carry over into Halo 5 when it comes out in 2015.

The Bad

EVOLVE has been delayed until February 10 in order to give developer Turtle Rock Studios more time to polish the game. At the Gamescom convention in Germany recently, the title garnered the show's Best Of award as well as three others. In other Evolve news, the Xbox One will exclusively host a beta starting on January 15. Downloadable content for the title will also debut first on the system.



PUBLISHER DEEP SILVER acquired the Homefront IP from Crytek, which has faced financial troubles. The deal followed reports out of Crytek UK (formerly Free Radical Design of Timesplitter's fame) that the studio was not getting their paychecks, and things definitely got ugly when Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli characterized some of the employees as "unrealistic" about the situation in an interview with Eurogamer. "Those guys, when they get under pressure it can become emotional," he added.

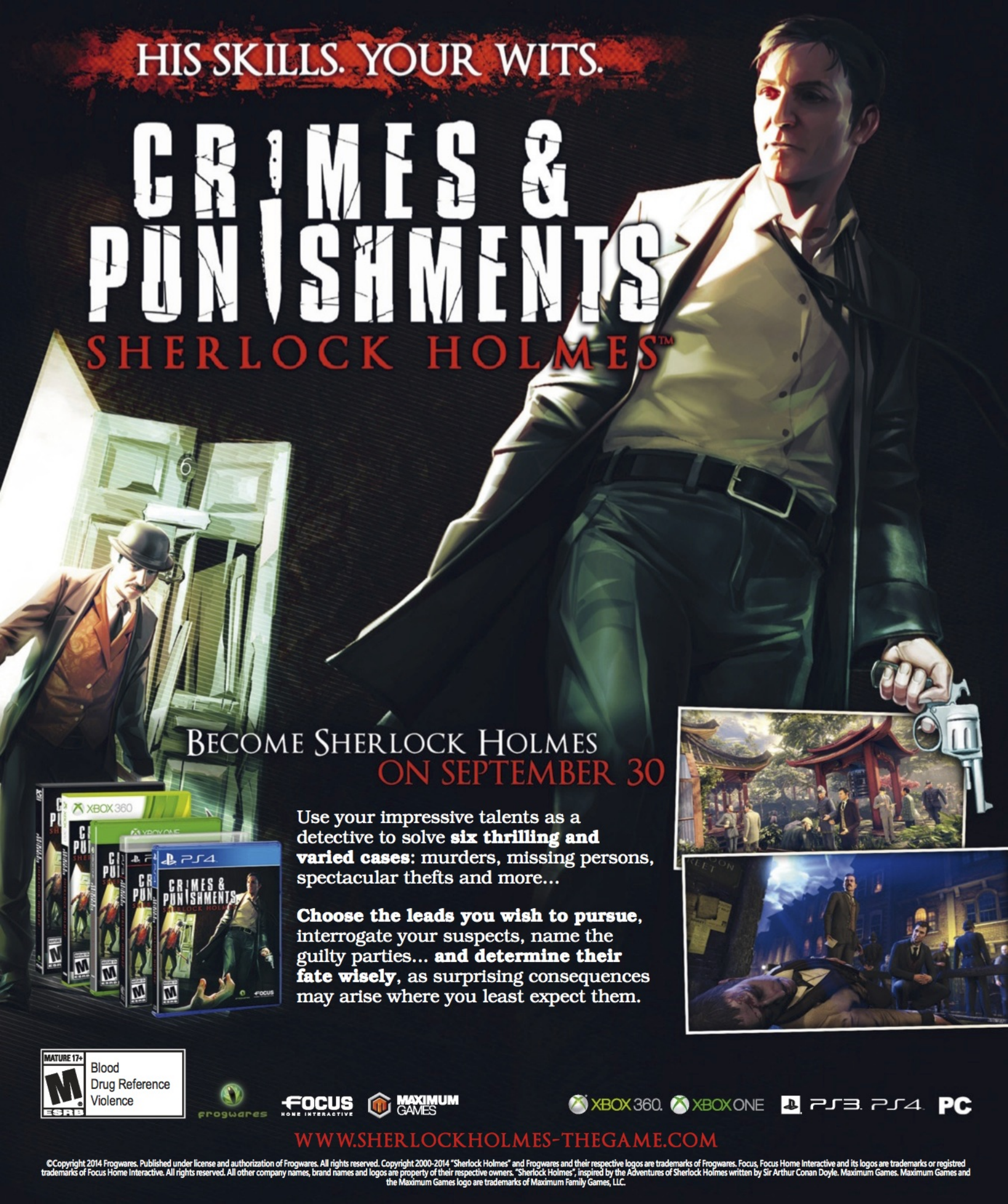
Thankfully, development on Homefront: The Revolution will continue at Deep Silver's Dambuster Studios, also based in Nottingham, England. 💎

The Ugly

HIS SKILLS. YOUR WITS.

CRIMES & PUNISHMENTS

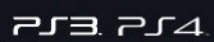
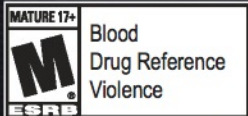
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Everything Old *IS* New Again

by Matt Miller

The fifth edition of Dungeons & Dragons channels its past to shape its future

Every few years, the world's oldest role-playing game does the same thing that all entertainment brands must do to remain relevant – reinvents itself. The fifth edition of D&D has been a long time coming, with a very public multi-year playtesting period to work out the kinks. With the final revision of the core rules rolling out as we speak, the new D&D offers a clear message. Rather than make sweeping changes, the latest edition is rooted in the game's legacy, with an eye toward drawing a broad base of players both new and old.

The fourth edition of the game caused a schism in the player base of D&D in 2008. Many players embraced the powers-driven tactical play it offered, but others remained loyal to the third edition and the many offshoot games it produced. The fifth edition is consciously built as an olive branch between the two groups and other even more ancient divisions between older editions.

To unite players, the new core mechanics are simple and clean, based almost entirely around the six core ability scores that have been part of the game for decades. Each of 12 thoughtfully designed character classes offers options that appeal to different player types. For instance, the classic fighter class provides one simple progression for

old-school players called the champion. Another fighter build called the battle master provides a broad selection of interesting maneuvers, while a third variant adds spell casting into the mix. All three archetypes are balanced with each other, but appeal to different players. This philosophy extends throughout the game, with a focus on letting players and their dungeon masters play the game in the way that feels natural.

Adventuring and combat are similarly rooted in established patterns, from determining who gains initiative in a fight to minutiae like the amount of damage taken from a fall. Hundreds of hours of playtesting have resulted in smart and balanced rules that walk the line between streamlined play and enough complexity to handle most situations. Where rules have evolved in notable ways, it's hard to argue with the designers' final decisions; decades of play have led to authoritative approaches to problem areas like grappling, critical hits, and movement.

While rooted in the past, the designers are sneaking in some fun new features as well, including several concepts that help boost the potential for role-playing interactions. Players choose character traits and backgrounds for their would-be heroes. Playing your heroes to their personality provides an inspirational boost for later actions, encouraging

narrative depth, and ensuring that D&D remains more than a combat simulator.

The Player's Handbook is a beauty, filled with lavish full-color art that notably displays a welcome broadening approach to gender and ethnic diversity. Info is well organized into three broad sections – creating a character, playing the game, and the rules of magic. More than enough is here to get your group going, even before the release of the Monster Manual and Dungeon Master's Guide in the coming months.

Wizards of the Coast also recognizes the need for social engagement and new tools with which to engage its players. The former goal is accomplished with a robust approach to organized play, where players can join in to an ongoing storyline through in-store, convention, or home play to further develop the game world. For the latter, we're getting Dungeonscape, a fully integrated digital toolset coming to mobile and web in which players can build characters, DMs can craft adventures, and digital versions of the books can be purchased. Taken together, these two initiatives offer options some players desperately want, but without demanding others must abandon more traditional approaches to play.

As a longtime player, I'm pleased with the new edition so far, and its potential to



draw both established players and new recruits. If there's fault to be found, it's that it feels a tad recursive, trading in a similar space with older versions in the name of broad acceptance. It may not feel revolutionary, but smart design and a richly imagined fantasy fiction pick up the slack. If you've been away from the gaming table, it's a perfect time to come back into the fold and bring some new friends along for the ride. ♦

Want more info on the new edition of D&D? We've got full interviews on D&D organized play and the Dungeonscape digital toolset at gameinformer.com

From Drag Racer To Match Maker

by Kimberley Wallace



A former Criterion creative director makes a fabulous splash with a new mobile project

What do you do after you've been in the industry for years working on triple-A franchises such as *Burnout* and *Need for Speed*? Pour your savings into an independent studio and try something drastically different. At least that's Richard Franke's story.

After years of working at Criterion, ascending the ranks to creative director, Franke is ready to do things on his own terms with a new game, **Kitty Powers' Matchmaker**, that's anything but ordinary. In his debut mobile game, Franke stars as a drag-queen dating-agency magnate who advises your fledgling dating service. To grow your business, you must successfully match up clients who are searching for eternal happiness. This is quite the departure from high-octane racing.

"I wanted to make a splash," Franke says laughing. "From a business and creative perspective, I felt like it was important because there's so much stuff on the App Store. I have to make something different. There are a million and one clones of *Clash of Clans* or any other game that's in the top ten on the App Store."

Franke got his start in the industry in 1996, working primarily as an artist on games like *Urban Chaos*, *Black*, *Need for Speed*, and a slew of *Burnout* titles before being promoted to creative director at Criterion. With *Burnout Crash*, Franke got a taste for smaller scale projects. "I've done a lot of big, really successful games, but working on a team that large is very difficult and complex and it gets in the way of the creativity a lot of the time because of the logistics," he says. "*Burnout Crash* was kind of a breath of fresh air. It was the first game where I really got to put my stamp on it creatively."

After the game shipped, Franke left EA and put his savings into founding Magic Notion, which was both terrifying and exciting. "At EA, as much as I learned and I loved it, I was still making games for other people," he says. "As creative as I got on *Burnout Crash*, for example, it was still a *Burnout* game and had to fit within that universe. I just wanted to make something where I had a blank sheet of paper to start from, so I took a plunge."

For the last several years, Franke has been dressing in drag and performing at local bars; being an artist, he always enjoyed putting costumes and makeup together. He formed his alternate persona, named Kitty Powers, in an unexpected way. Franke has been good friends with the developers at Media Molecule for years, even contributing to projects like *Tearaway*. When he was invited to the studio's holiday costume party, he decided to take dressing up to another level.

The party had a black and gold theme, but Franke showed up decked out in a glam gold mini-dress and afro wig. "I was the only one there in fancy dress, but that was the first time *Kitty Powers* appeared," he says.

This event led to Franke realizing he wanted to bring *Kitty Powers* to the world via a video game. His real-life image appears in the game, not a cartoon recreation. "*Kitty Powers* is kind of a personal thing to me, and since I felt like this was going to be such a personal project, I also wanted the project to stand out in some way," he says. "I wanted to use every weapon I had in my arsenal. Why not do this drag thing? I don't think anyone else has done a game with a drag queen in it that was actually a real drag queen."

Running a dating agency and matching up clients seemed fun to Franke – a game he'd want to play himself. "I'm sick to death of death and destruction," Franke says. "I love all games and I'm not going to slag anything off, but I wanted to challenge myself as well. How would I make a game about love and making babies rather than just shooting people in the head

and teabagging their corpse?"

Kitty Powers' Matchmaker challenges players to align dating candidates with different interests and preferences in a partner. You decide who to pair up and watch the date unfold. During the evening, you pick conversation topics and need to pay attention to special details while expecting the unexpected. You never know when an ex may show up, or you may have to suppress some flatulence. The minigames rely either on memorization or chance, but it's fun to watch the randomized characters interact. As you gain influence and get promoted, your dating agency grows, unlocking access to more clientele and different perks, like a gift shop. The constant progression keeps players hooked as dates get more involved and you unlock higher difficulty levels.

"I wanted to make a game that had a point of view and doesn't feel bland and gamey," Franke says. "[I hope people] remember the silly drag queen, the Britishness, and the stupid characters, and that they look forward to the next game we make." ♦



Kitty Powers' Matchmaker
iOS, Android





Harmonix Reveals A CITY SLEEPS

by Matt Miller

Like most of the mid-sized development studios in today's shifting landscape, Harmonix is exploring new avenues to reach its fans. The minds behind Rock Band and Dance Central have the Kinect game *Fantasia: Music Evolved* on the way, but that doesn't mean the rest of the studio is sitting idle. A small internal squad of developers is creating a brand-new project that fits comfortably into Harmonix's music background, but taps into a new genre of play – shoot 'em ups.

A City Sleeps is the story of Poe, a young woman who wakes up one morning to find that everyone in her futuristic city has fallen into a deep slumber, overcome by malevolent spirits within their own dreams. Poe happens to be an exorcist, so she starts hopping into individual dreamscapes to clear out the offending invaders.

This setup guides players into a surprising twist on classic shoot 'em up gameplay. Poe floats across a horizontally scrolling screen blasting enemy spirits as they pour fire in her direction. In addition to shooting, Poe can use her koto sword to slash enemies that get close. These close-quarters attacks fuel a bomb gauge that can be deployed for a wave-clearing attack, visualized as Poe's sword enlarging to sweep across the whole screen. There's enough chaos onscreen that staying alive is a big part of the challenge.

Music plays an integral role in the action onscreen, but not through traditional beat matching, like you might see in a game like *Rock Band*. Instead, every object on screen produces its own musical track that integrates into the larger tapestry of sound. The pace and rhythm of that music determines

how certain features and objects behave. For instance, in a level with a fast, continuous beat, Poe's ammo flies out like a machine gun. But enter a level with a slower, irregular beat, and her shots are more deliberate, and must be timed carefully.

In addition to Poe's shooting, the player also encounters idols as they journey through the level. By killing enemies, acquired spirits can be used to fuel allied ghosts to enter these idols and have them join the fight. The spirit resource Poe collects is used to fuel one of three distinct ghosts. Depending on which idol you place them in, the player has enormous flexibility to customize the aid provided. Angry ghosts become machine guns in one idol, or an area effect blast in a different idol. Similarly, mercy ghosts provide healing, either as pellets that shoot out like a gun to be collected, or by remaining close to the idol for a burst of recovery. Finally, master ghosts can be set in one idol to become a slow moving but powerful rail gun, or another idol to create a damaging trip wire that runs between the idol and Poe.

Each game level I saw is dramatically different from the last, and the enemies, idols, and

background art on display changes based on the individual dreamscapes you've entered. The team cites color and tonal art inspiration from high contrast anime of the '80s and '90s, like *Ninja Scroll* and *Wicked City*, and the stark color contrasts are beautiful. In the same way as the art, the musical soundtrack is an eclectic but compelling electronica mix that feels tied to the visuals of each level, and further helps to establish each dream as different from the last.

Harmonix is exploring a number of ways to customize difficulty in *A City Sleeps*. Five distinct difficulty modes offer escalating challenge, and curses like more enemy projectiles, one-hit character deaths, and slower bomb gauge accumulation can add up to a devilish fight. Talismans offer the reverse effect, providing increased shot damage, hit resistance, or other effects.

Harmonix's Unity-powered foray into shoot 'em ups releases on PC this October. Along with the studio's recent Kickstarter success for an *Amplitude* reboot, the new direction for the acclaimed music game makers is starting to take shape. ♦



Looking for more independent games? Check out gameinformer.com/impulse for regular updates, previews, and reviews. Read our feature on *Ori and the Blind Forest* (p. 68). You can also explore our previews of *Pillars of Eternity* (p. 81), *Life is Strange* (p. 89), and *Citizens of Earth* (p. 89), plus our review of *Hohokum* on p. 93.

Firefall

A mixed bag of sci-fi shooting



by Daniel Tack

Firefall has gone through many changes over the course of an extensive beta, but Red 5 studio's free-to-play massively multiplayer shooter is now officially available. The base concept is simple and accessible – take the core aspects of MMOs like quest, progression, ability slots, and gear acquisition/customization, and combine them with the frenetic action of a first-person shooter, with jump jets that bring vertical traversal into combat and travel.

Fighting a world that has been forever changed by a looming cloud known as the Melding, players attempt to push back and reclaim territory taken by an enemy threat called the Chosen. While the game has plenty of potential to continue an ever-changing story model as new patches and content arise, it never impacted the game for me. In Firefall you shoot a lot of things, and you're not going to find narrative motivation for these attacks unless you're really looking.

Players can participate in fast-paced, first- or third-person combat in various battleframes (the Firefall term for classes) and acquire a huge arsenal of customized weapons and abilities as they take on the denizens of this spacey open world. Players can work on leveling up all possible battleframes on a single character, eliminating the need for alternate characters. Swapping classes and loadouts is quick and easy at the many garages located in hubs across the world. I gravitated toward the engineer battleframe thanks to its host of turrets to choose from and an "ultimate" ability that drops down a giant turret players can man for an extreme bullet barrage. This drop and pop play style was perfect for me. While I had more than a few weapons to choose from, I found the sticky-grenade launcher to

be an excellent complement to my mechanical army, laying down reams of destructive bombs that can be detonated on command.

Using research and resources, players can make powerful items and abilities using an easy-to-use crafting system, but if that isn't your thing you can also simply find drops from enemies or use your currency at the marketplace (auction house) to shop for new gear.

Firefall offers content for all kinds of players. If you just want to explore the world and run into events, you can. A mission board located in major hubs allows players to take on quests suited for either solo players or groups. These missions reward tokens that can be used for spins

at vending machines for chances at additional loot. If you're not interested in any of that, you can always grab a Thumper (a high-tech mining machine) and search for a drilling hot spot. You can collect resources solo or with a squad, with appropriate challenges for each. The endgame contains special encounters versus massive monsters that require large squads to defeat, serving as Firefall's "raid" style content.

Combat is fluid and smooth, and the addition of jump jet flight makes things more interesting than just shooting plasma and spamming abilities. But despite all this, Firefall's combat is perhaps its weakest point. You may be taking on legions of Chosen, bandits, or bugs, but it all lacks in impact. The loop of blowing up swarms of foes and collecting loot feels repetitive and bland. I recommend taking advantage of grouping with a squad to take the edge off the dullness, but even that doesn't completely correct the sense of boredom that can set in. It's an unusual issue to have with a game that features fast and furious combat, which is why it stands out so much.

Firefall has a lot going for it with a variety of classes that can be swapped on the fly, crafting and customization both functional and cosmetic, and varied encounters. While the combat can feel stale and repetitive, the price of entry is right to hop in and see if Firefall is a good fit for your MMOFPS adventures. ♦



massive

interview



photo: Jason Henry

EA's New Vision

Last year, Andrew Wilson's 15-year career with Electronic Arts culminated with his appointment as company CEO. Since then, Wilson has tried to install a new, quality-first attitude in the company, and made overtures toward fans with more consumer-friendly practices.

interview by Mike Futter

You're coming up on the first-year anniversary of being appointed CEO. What have you learned in that first year?

I mean, there's a thousand things. You come into a role like this, there's no real training ground. I learn a thousand things every day, every week, every month. I came into this role with a belief that I had three key constituencies: players, for one, the people that work for our company, number two, and the shareholders that invest in us to allow us to do what we do, number three. You can get really confused as a CEO as to which of those you serve at any particular point in time. I came in with the belief that, if you put the players first and you make decisions in favor of the player, everything else would flow from that.

You mentioned that you made some decisions that are in favor of the player. What decisions in particular are you referring to?

There are actually a lot. Some of the most visible ones would be a decision [moving] Titanfall Xbox 360 out of the [fiscal] year. We felt it needed a few more weeks, and we wanted to give the team that time. That meant it went out of the year. That's a big deal for a public company, but we made that decision. Those few weeks had a magnificent impact on how good that game was. I think we've shipped Need for Speed every year for 17 years. We decided [to push] the game this year, based on the feedback from the team that they weren't going to be able to deliver creativity and innovation. The game wasn't going to be amazing with 12 months of development and they wanted two years. We gave them that time. Look at what we did with Hardline. We brought gamers in earlier than we ever have before. We let them play en masse like we've never done before, and ironically we solved a bunch of the problems from Battlefield 4 [with] stability and scalability. The feedback from the players has been amazing. If you saw it today, it's making unbelievable progress.

Was there anything that you realized after you got into the role that might not have been as refined or as ready as you had expected?

Right after coming into the role, we had NBA Live that launched and was a very low-rated product. That was done on my watch. That was challenging. We had the Battlefield 4 situation, which as a result of an amazing level of innovation didn't have the stability that you need. For that to happen in the first month of the job, that was kind of crazy. I hadn't anticipated that. But we rallied as an organization. The NBA Live team said, "G---ammit, we're sorry" to the players, and started delivering content straightaway: game mode updates,

visual updates, loading updates, to put us back in the right place with the player. The Battlefield team just went hard at work and just poured everything into making sure that game got stable.

That really comes to our third pillar, right? So, our first two are amazing games and services, creating innovation. The third one is engagement and action. If you are pushing the boundaries, stuff is going to break from time to time. At that point, it's how you act in that moment that really defines who you are as an organization. Do you turn your back on it and move on to the next thing? Do you go silent? Or do you stand up and say, "We hear you. We're going to engage with you, we're going to deliver, even where there's a financial cost to that delivery"? We're going to learn from that, and we're going to try to never make that mistake again.

The two consecutive years prior to you taking on the role of CEO, EA won the Consumerist's Worst Company in America award. What does that do to an organization?

I think it's hard on an organization. I can tell you we're a group of people who come to work everyday to inspire and entertain a global player base. In all honesty, hand on heart – and I've been coming for 14 years – that's the only reason I come to work everyday. So when that kind of thing happens, you go through phases. The first phase is a phase of disconnect, of "What do you mean? I just launched FIFA, it's a 90-rated on Metacritic game, it's got 20 million people playing it and they love it. How is this possible?" Then there's a phase of introspection, and what you recognize is two things: One, gamers are extremely passionate and have a sense of ownership over the games they play. The second thing is it's not just about the things that you do that make people like you, it's about the things you do or don't do that they don't like. We make some amazing games. But at the same time, there were some things we were doing that people weren't liking. That was having an impact on portions of our audience, and they reached out to tell us. That poll was the mechanism by which they did so.

Did you make changes based on that thought process?

We developed a player experience group inside the organization, a cross-functional group of leaders that was tasked with looking at not just how to do really good stuff, but how not to do stuff that would annoy people. We took a bunch of things away – season passes annoy people. We changed a lot of the strategy and approach that we have with Origin. We did a lot of things within the organization that was less about doing more good stuff and more about taking away stuff that we weren't really thinking about that was

annoying people. What you saw this year was we didn't "win" that award. We didn't make it out of the first round. I think we're a different organization as a result of that.

You've recently announced EA Access. What was the evolution of that idea and the thought process behind it?

We wanted to put a player-first service in place that gave gamers the opportunity to play games with a proposition that they would say, "Well, why wouldn't I do it?" versus a proposition that would need to justify in their head. I wanted to get away from the mental math that they would go through when they subscribe to these services. The monthly subscription part of that, the ability to pay by month, was very much by design. I had the opportunity to spend some time with Reed Hastings from Netflix. You can cancel Netflix at any time. You don't because the value just keeps growing every month, it gets better. I wanted us to have that kind of service. We wanted a team within this organization that and went and said, "What is the right value proposition for this model and how do we get something that is amazing at launch and gets better every month?" Sure, you can cancel out of it. You can subscribe for a month and then play whatever's in the vault and jump out if you want. But why would you? We believed it would have that effect and then let gamers decide.

Sony doesn't see the value in EA Access for PlayStation customers. What was your reaction to that?

Here's what I'll say: We're in the early days of this thing. The feedback so far has been positive. We are going to continue to add to it to a point where we think the value gets even better over time. It will likely go through a number of evolutions. We have a tremendous relationship with Sony. I speak with Sony, or someone from my organization speaks with Sony daily on a bunch of different stuff.

Sony announced an early access game on its platform, DayZ. Is that something you'd be interested in exploring?

We're not close to anything. What you have seen from us is a willingness to bring gamers in early and you'll continue to see that. You saw us launch a Battlefield: Hardline beta much, much earlier than we ever would before. You see us bring players into Dawngate over the last year before the thing was ready for prime time. To the extent that we'd run a model like the DayZ model, I don't know. It's an ongoing conversation. I would much rather do it in the context of a beta scenario where we bring people in and when it's time to ask them for money we're delivering them a great game, but who knows? The world will evolve and our job is to listen to how players want to engage. ♦

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1987

FIGHT!

A lifelong practitioner of martial arts, Wilson falls in love with Double Dragon, which is still his favorite game

2000

RIDING THE WAVE

Wilson joins EA Australia to work on a surfing simulation, followed by work on rugby and Australian Football League projects

2002

JOLLY OLD ENGLAND

Wilson moves to EA's UK branch to help guide several big franchises

2005

GREAT WHITE NORTH

After relocating to EA Canada, Wilson takes leadership of the FIFA franchise and begins revamping the series with a complete overhaul of the game engine

2006

NEW MASTER

Begins training with renowned Jiu Jitsu guru Kron Gracie

2009

PACIFIC RIM

EA appoints Wilson as the head of its Asia online publishing operations and EA's online organization. In this role, Wilson leads the inception of what becomes the Origin service

2011

BACK ON THE FIELD

Wilson is named head of EA Sports, overseeing the largest developer of sports video games in the world, including FIFA and Madden NFL

2012

THE OCTAGON

EA Sports signs a multi-year, multi-platform exclusivity deal with UFC

2012

CREATIVITY

Wilson makes *Fast Company's* list of the 100 Most Creative People in Business.

2013

THE BIG GIG

At the age of 39, Wilson becomes the first studio executive to be appointed CEO of Electronic Arts

great



AMAZON FIREPHONE

A

mazon used to be a company that sold other people's products, but in recent years the online giant hasn't been able to resist developing its own gadgets. The retailer has seen varied results with a series of e-readers, tablets, and a TV media streamer. Its latest tech piece, the Fire Phone, is a mixed bag as well.

Much like its older brother, the Fire Tablet, Amazon's new phone is based off a modified version of Google's Android OS. However, the software has been modified to such an extent that you might not recognize its origin (the Fire doesn't work with any of Google's Play services, for example). The home screen lets you scroll through a carousel of oversized icons, and the Fire keeps a running list of related content cycling under each app. At first, we were put off by this unique approach to mobile

OS design, but the Fire's gesture based shortcuts ensured that all of our favorite apps were never far away.

Some of the Fire Phone's unique features include integration with Amazon's Firefly technology, which scans the world around you, identifying songs, movies, and barcodes, and then linking you to related content on the Amazon store. With the touch of a button, you can troubleshoot phone problems using Amazon's Mayday service, which connects you to a specialist who can see your phone's screen and walk you through the issue.

While these Amazon-specific features are cool, the phone's guts are about what you'd expect from a phone these days. The 4.7-inch display looks crisp, and its hardware runs games like Minecraft, Telltale's The Walking Dead, and the mobile version of Injustice: Gods Among Us without a problem.

The Fire Phone's other big feature – a dynamic perspective system that uses the phone's four cameras and motion-tracking technology to create pseudo-3D visuals for certain apps and games – feels more like a gimmick and doesn't add anything relevant to most of the apps that make use of it right now.

The Fire comes with a free one-year subscription to Amazon Prime, but its trimmed-down app store, disappointing battery life, and lack of Android customization make this a product that will only appeal to a limited few. The Fire isn't a bad first phone for Amazon, but the company has its work cut out for it if it wants to compete with the iPhones, Galaxies, and HTC Ones of the world.

AVERAGE

\$199 (with 2-year contract) | amazon.com

by Ben Reeves, Jeff Cork, and Daniel Tack

1



1 Kingston HyperX Cloud Headset

One of the most important elements of multi-player games is quality audio. If you're into multi-player games like League of Legends or Dota 2, communicating with your team is often critical to success. With a detachable mic and compatibility with PC, PS4, tablets, and mobile phones, this wired headset is a convenient choice on the go. The mic mutes chaos around you to relay concise speech to other players. Exterior sounds are muffled, letting you focus on the action at hand. This headset is perfect for extended play sessions (we had no issues after even five hours of continuous play) thanks to the memory-foam construction of its over-the-ear cups. Your ears will thank you, even as your friends scream about mid-lane falling. Don't let the \$149 MSRP steer you clear of the HyperX; we've seen these cans online for as low as \$79.

VERY GOOD

\$149 | kingston.com

2 Hyperkin Retron 5

Hyperkin's latest device gives players another alternative for playing old-school games. Instead of downloading emulators or wrangling up ways to connect older consoles to contemporary televisions, the Retron 5 lets you enjoy the original classics – cartridges, controllers, and all. After firmly (and we mean firmly) pressing the original cart into the unit, the ROM is dumped to emulation and output to your TV via crisp HDMI. If you prefer a lower-fi look, a variety of filters can blur things up or even add scanlines. Every game we threw at the Retron 5 worked, including titles like Super Mario RPG, which didn't work on previous Retrons. Hyperkin is aiming for 100-percent compatibility, and the firmware can be updated if it misses any games. The pack-in wireless controller is chintzy, and we couldn't get it to sync without using a wired controller, but you can use any retro controller to play any game from the NES, Famicom, Super NES, Genesis, Game Boy Color, and Game Boy Advance games. If you want to enjoy these game platforms all from the same system, this isn't a bad buy.

VERY GOOD

\$139 | retron5.com

2



Media Shelf



ARROW: SEASON 2

After the death of his friend, Oliver Queen abandons his secret identity as Starling City's star vigilante, but when his company and his family are threatened, Queen is forced to return to crime fighting in Warner Bros.' hit television adaptation of DC Comics' Green Arrow.

\$69.79
wbshop.com

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY NAME IS PAUL HEYMAN

Beginning a career as a ring-side photographer at Madison Square Garden, Paul Heyman has risen to become one of the most influential managers in WWE. Using behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with WWE stars, this documentary series explores how Heyman has developed a following and personality as big as the wrestlers he manages.

\$24.99
shop.wwe.com

THE MAGICIAN'S LAND: A NOVEL BY LEV GROSSMAN

Quentin Coldwater once ruled a magical kingdom, but now all of his closest friends are sealed away in a land he may never see again. With nowhere else to turn, Quentin returns to his magic college, but his past soon comes looking for him in the final entry of Lev Grossman's best-selling Magicians trilogy.

\$27.95
levgrossman.com

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

When an unkillable army of Sentinels threatens to eradicate the mutant race, Professor X sends Wolverine back in time to rewrite the future in a time-spanning narrative. Bryan Singer's latest superhero epic cleverly bridges the X-Men's film fiction. It's one of the best entries in the series.

\$39.99
x-menmovies.com

Horror Movies Deserving Proper Video Games

by Matt Bertz



Friday the 13th

We prefer to pretend the NES adaptation of this series never existed. With an '80's style theme, clever kill mechanics, and an asymmetrical multiplayer mode that puts one player in the role of Jason Voorhees, this game is a smash hit waiting to happen. Both *Halloween* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* could work in a similar fashion.



The Strangers

We're still waiting for someone to create a home-invasion video game in the spirit of movies like *The Strangers* and *Them*. Imagine a procedurally generated frightfest where the home property and invaders are different every time you play the game.



Cabin in the Woods

Given the amazing collection of horror villains in *Cabin in the Woods*, we think a game based on this clever slasher film would be a blast to play. This concept works whether you are manning the control room trying to kill off the teenagers one by one or attempting to survive the waves of increasingly dangerous killers.



The Blob

Katamari Damacy meets sheer terror in this video game adaptation of one of the strangest horror movies of the 1950s, which TriStar rebooted in the late '80s. Running from the blob would create thrills of its own, but we'd prefer to be in control of the menacing substance, absorbing everyone and everything in our path.



Final Destination

Take the base experience of *The Sims* and add several clever mechanics for robbing these virtual humans of their lives and you begin to understand why a game based on *Final Destination* could be ghoulish fun. The first douche deserving of an early demise? How about *Far Cry 3* "protagonist" Jason Brody.



The Shining

Not every horror game needs to be entrenched in violent gameplay. Taking residency in the Overlook Hotel, imagine a game from the perspective of young Danny Torrance that toys with your mind as you explore its haunting environment.



The Hills Have Eyes

You'll never look at highway shortcuts the same after surviving a terrifying open world filled with the mutated remnants of a nuclear experiment gone awry. A four-player survival horror setup could really drive the horror of the film home.



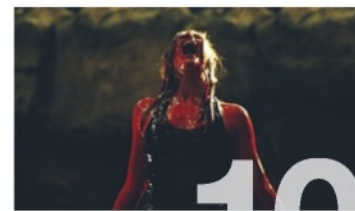
Eden Lake

Being chased by a masked man who won't die is undeniably scary, but *Eden Lake* pits you against an even more terrifying enemy – mean-spirited teenagers with no moral compass. Kids these days...



Evil Dead

Titular hero Ash has already starred in four *Evil Dead* games, but none of them have quite nailed the humorous vibe of the films created by Sam Raimi. Like the *Batman* video games, maybe it will take a special studio to crack this nut and deliver a game worthy of the series.



The Descent

What's scarier than being trapped underground with crazy bat people and no way to escape? A multiplayer experience where you work with your friends to find your way above ground, but with extremely limited resources and situations where you have to choose between cooperating with your allies or sacrificing them to stay alive.



01



03 Super Smash Bros.



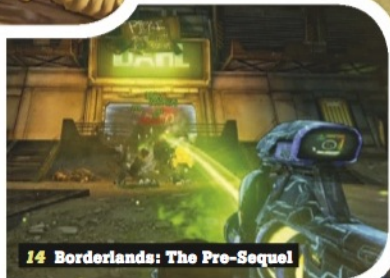
05 Skylanders: Trap Team



07 Alien: Isolation



14 The Evil Within



14 Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel



09



28 Assassin's Creed Unity



28 Sunset Overdrive

October

01 Marvel's Next Big Event

The Red Skull has found a way to broadcast hatred into the minds of everyone on the planet. No one can be trusted. The Avengers and X-Men unite to combat this threat. Marvel planted the seeds for this story over two years ago, and it finally comes into full focus in today's *Uncanny Avengers #25*. This event, called Axis, crosses over into most Marvel books.

02 Gigacon 2014

Norway's largest digital gaming festival kicks off today and runs until October 5. Held in Oslo's Telenor Arena, more than 15,000 fans are expected to attend this event each day. Over 3,000 LAN spots are available, and tournaments for most of the big competitive games take place daily.

03 New Releases

› Super Smash Bros. (3DS)

05 New Releases

› Skylanders: Trap Team (PS4, Xbox One, Wii U, PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS, iOS)

07 New Releases

› Alien: Isolation (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC)
› Driveclub (PS4)
› MX vs ATV Supercross (PS3, 360)
› NBA 2K15 (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC)
› NBA Live (PS4, Xbox One)
› Project Spark (Xbox One)
› Tenkai Knights: Brave Battle (3DS)
› Tropico 5 (PS4)

08 DC Goes All In On Weekly Books

Following the successes of new weekly series *Batman Eternal* and *Futures End*, DC is adding a third book that hits every Wednesday

called *Earth 2: World's End*. This series chronicles the final events of a world where Superman is the greatest villain.

09 New York Comic Con 2014

Starting today, comic fans and cosplayers alike will be out in full force at New York's Javits Center for Comic Con. A few comic book-related video game announcements usually occur at this show. On top of that, this year's show hosts the 30th anniversary reunion for *The Karate Kid*. Who doesn't want to see that?

10 Rogen and Franco = Comedy Gold

If you've seen *This is the End*, *Pineapple Express*, or *Freaks & Geeks*, you know that Seth Rogen and James Franco are great together. Their new venture *The Interview* opens in theaters today. In this film, they travel to North Korea to assassinate Kim Jong-un. This controversial premise may seem outrageous, but these guys' willingness to stray from convention has had hilarious results in the past.

11.1 Play Expo UK

True to its name, Play Expo is all about letting gamers get their hands on video games. This two-day event takes place in Manchester's EventCity, and offers a blend of upcoming and classic games. Almost everything is playable. A slew of tournaments and cosplay events are also planned.

11.2 Geek Girl Con 2014

Dubbed "the celebration of the female geek," this two-day convention is held in Seattle's Washington State Convention Center, and offers panels and events in video games, technology, science, comics, arts, literature, and pretty much anything falling under the "geek" category.

14 New Releases

› Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel (PS3, 360, PC)
› The Evil Within (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC)
› Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures 2 (Wii U, PS3, 360, 3DS)
› Raven's Cry (PS4, PS3, 360, PC)
› Tears to Tiara II: Heir of the Overlord (PS3)
› The Walking Dead: Season 2 (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360)

16 Con On The Cob

"Games, art, freaks, and fun" are what the organizers of Con on the Cob say this four-day event is all about. This show also offers art shows, concerts, game tournaments, parties, "debauchery," panels, sessions, and something called "adopt-a-geek." You'll have to travel to the Clarion Hotel in Hudson, Ohio, to partake in all of this madness.

17 Ex-Batman Turns Into Birdman

Michael Keaton has been in a lot of great movies, but the actor is probably best known for his role in Tim

Burton's Batman films. While we will probably never see Keaton in pointy ears again, his latest role has him portraying another superhero in *Birdman*. He plays a washed-up actor whose identity is wrapped up in an iconic role he played years ago. This should really put Keaton's acting to the test. Here's hoping he can turn his neck in the Birdman suit.

19 Portland Retro Gaming Expo

Numerous speakers, including the great David Crane (Pitfall), are a part of this year's Portland Retro Gaming Expo. An arcade housing almost every classic gaming system is set up with games for you to play. A rare-game auction is also planned.

21 New Releases

› Fantasia: Music Evolved (Xbox One, 360)
› Just Dance 2015 (PS4, Xbox One, Wii U, PS3, 360, Wii)
› Samurai Warriors 4 (PS4)
› Shadowgate (PC)
› The Walking Dead: Season 2 (Vita)
› The Wolf Among Us (Vita)

24 New Releases

› Civilization: Beyond Earth (PC)

28 New Releases

› Assassin's Creed Unity (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
› Disney Big Hero 6 (3DS)
› Lords of the Fallen (PS4, Xbox One, PC)
› Power Rangers: Super MegaForce (3DS)
› Sunset Overdrive (Xbox One)
› WWE 2K15 (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360)

31 Horny Potter

You might not know this, but there's a clause in Daniel Radcliffe's contract that states he will only play characters with abnormal foreheads. Harry Potter had the scar, and his character in today's release *Horns* has — you guessed it — horns. That may sound strange, but it's better than the guy who played Ron Weasley's contract of only playing characters that look utterly confused all the time.

2014

THE HORROR ISSUE



Alien: Isolation
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The Evil Within
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Horror on the Horizon
Pg 50

The 25 Best Horror
Games of All Time
Pg 56

Catalyzed by the increased power of new consoles and the growing ranks of scare-minded independent developers, the horror genre is undergoing a welcome resurgence

Surveying the modern media landscape, you don't have to wade trepidatiously into the darkened basement of entertainment to uncover horror's grip on world culture. With Hollywood blockbusters like *Paranormal Activity*, dozens of best-selling Stephen King novels, and ratings-winning

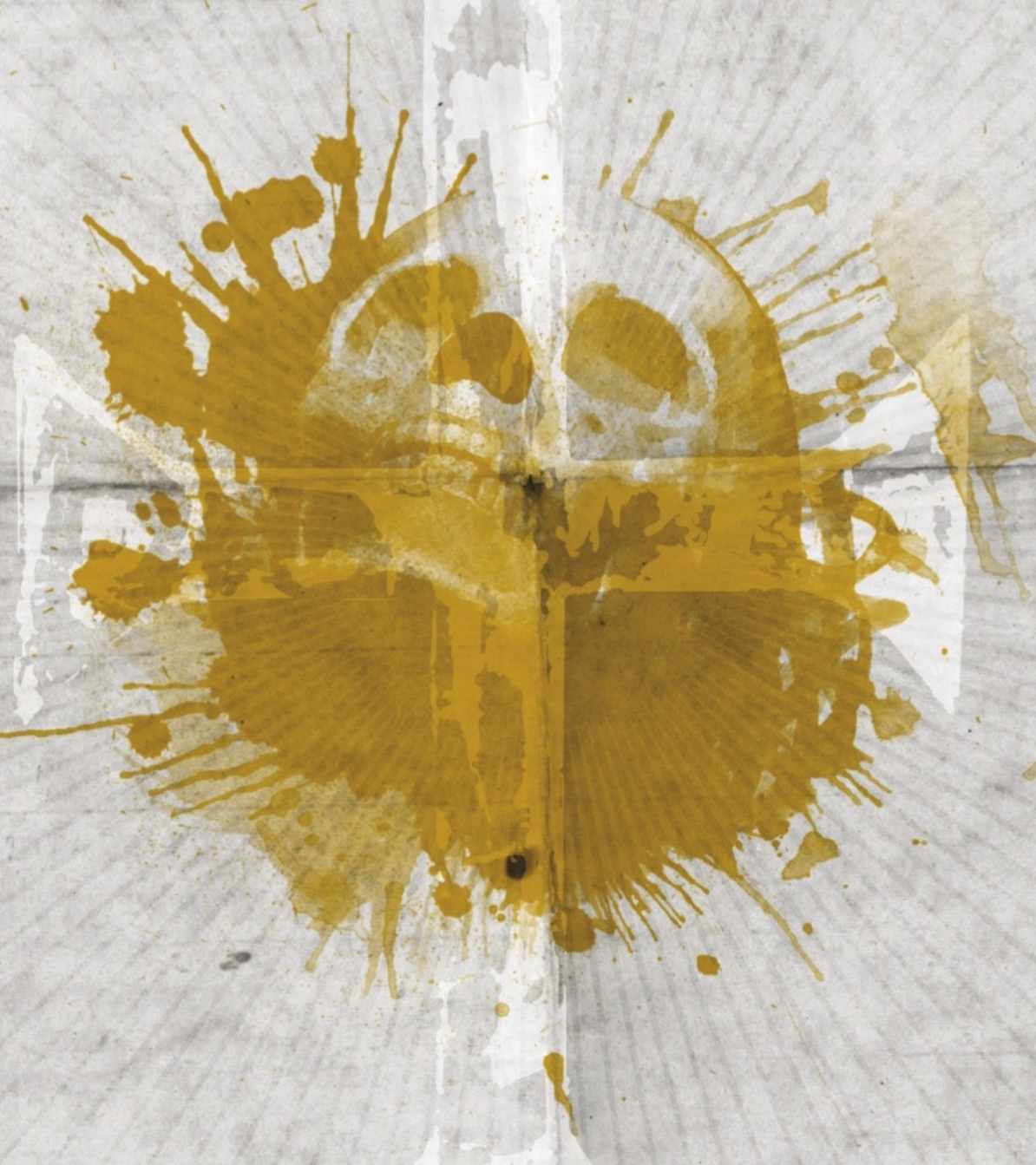
television shows like *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story*, these monsters are perfectly comfortable walking in broad daylight.

The same fascination holds true with video games. After years of seeing the quality and quantity of horror games recede, the industry is experiencing a major renaissance of terror-minded projects, from new big-budget fright fests like *The Evil Within* and *Alien: Isolation* to the growing legions of unsettling indie horror projects like *Soma* and *Routine*.

To celebrate this terror tipping point, we've put together a list of our favorite 25 horror games of all time, rounded up a selection of the most promising new horror games on the horizon, and braved the creaking halls of *The Evil Within* and *Alien: Isolation* to get a better understanding of where horror games are heading in the future.

Stalked By A Stowaway

by Jeff Cork



PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC* STYLE *1-Player Action*
PUBLISHER *Sega* DEVELOPER *The Creative Assembly* RELEASE *October 7*



Alien: Isolation

Ridley Scott's *Alien* was appealing because it explored ordinary people facing an unknown threat they were unequipped to handle. One by one, the crew of a spaceship was hunted and killed by a threat that was almost too horrible and foreign to comprehend. Ellen Ripley survived not because she was the best shot or was the strongest, but because she was intelligent and methodical (as *Aliens* would show us later, the creatures aren't to be taken lightly, even if you are armed to the teeth).

The team members at The Creative Assembly are big fans of the influential film, and they wanted to capture the vulnerability and sense of terror that those crewmembers aboard the *Nostromo* must have felt. The result is *Alien: Isolation*, a game that also challenges players to be methodical and intelligent, rewarding stealth and adaptability over twitch reflexes.



I've seen a lot of *Alien*: Isolation over the past year, and I've been impressed with its atmosphere, tension, and overall quality. I have been missing one critical part, however: context. Is it a slow burn? Are there moments of crazy action out of the gate? What's it like to be trapped in Sevastopol Station with the creature for more than an hour at a time? I played the game from its opening sequence to when Sega wrenched the controller away from my sweaty hands almost eight hours later. Now that I have more understanding of what to do, I'm even more excited to play it at home.

The Mission

When we begin, Ripley's daughter Amanda is approached by a Weyland-Yutani executive named Samuels with a proposition she can't say no to: find answers about her missing mother. As viewers, we know that Ripley jettisoned from the *Nostramo* in a shuttle before destroying it, but her fate has been a mystery to everyone else in the fiction. Fifteen years after that incident, Amanda has become an engineer, finding work in the area of space her mother disappeared in — perhaps hoping for answers. Weyland-Yutani has caught word that a ship, the *Anesidora*, retrieved the *Nostramo*'s flight recorder and brought it to a nearby port, Sevastopol Station. It's a relatively simple handoff that could provide closure to both the company and Amanda

Ripley. A three-person team is scheduled to visit the station, meet up with head of security Marshal Waits, secure the flight recorder, and be on their way. Convinced, Amanda signs on for what sounds like a simple mission.

She emerges from the hypersleep station, with the pod's clear door rising open from a first-person perspective. The slapping sound of her bare feet on the tile accompanies her steps until she retrieves her uniform from a nearby locker (sleeping in skivvies is just part of the *Alien* deal). She walks around the station (and I soak up the retro '70s-era visual design) meeting up with a Weyland-Yutani legal representative named Taylor, who seems to be having a hard time adjusting to space travel, and Samuels. His comment about not needing sleep immediately fires off a "This guy could be an android" flare, but that could be my prejudices from watching the films. Either way, he was nothing but a nice guy in my time with the game.

Approaching the station, it's clear that something's amiss. Waits attempts to warn the *Torrens* about something, but communications — notoriously unreliable in *Alien* — cut out. The pilot attempts to land, but the dry dock is damaged. An EVA spacewalk is required, so the



It doesn't have to end this way. Players can avoid most conflicts altogether by creating distractions and moving intelligently through the environment

three characters head out in their suits. It's too late to leave empty-handed at this point, after all. An explosion rocks the area, and the trio is split up. Amanda launches herself toward an airlock and enters the station.

I immediately save the game at a wall-mounted registration station, and am confronted with signs of the damage. A floor grate has been cast aside, as flames lick upward from a now-exposed pipe. The lighting is incredible, with shadows wavering behind the traffic cones surrounding the incident. Safety first. This area is clearly off limits, so Amanda has to use the utility shafts instead. These shafts are instrumental to survival, providing access to areas that would otherwise be off limits, like around the flames in this case, or a temporary hiding spot. Of course, you aren't the only one using these handy passages to your advantage, as I learn over the next few hours.

Amanda continues to work her way through the station, encountering signs that the explosive event was just one in a long line of unfortunate events to have befallen Sevastopol Station and its parent company, Seegson, in recent times.

"Seegson was a company we created, because we didn't want to say, 'You're on another Weyland-Yutani-operated station and you get there and they're another finger in the pie,'" says design lead Gary Napper. "It just felt like something that needed to be our own creation, and it allowed us to do much more with the fiction behind the station and the pitch that they were this company that weren't quite as advanced as Weyland-Yutani."

"At some point, they were sort of neck and neck with Weyland-Yutani, and they really were on the edge," adds creative lead Al Hope. "As the years have gone by, Weyland-Yutani has really forged ahead, and they haven't been able to keep up the pace. Where we meet them, the space station is a really good snapshot of



This shot offers a rare glimpse at the human skull-like structure under the alien's translucent head dome. Pretty neat, eh?



KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

The night before my demo, I rewatched *Alien* to make sure it was as fresh in my mind as possible. After playing the game, I'd recommend following a similar course. There are loads of nods to the movie - some overt, and some far more subtle. Here are just a few of the highlights:

- The opening sequence mimics the way the film's title dropped into place, one letter segment at a time. We're zoomed much closer in *Isolation's* tribute, however, letting every pixel in the pseudo-CRT display shine thrown in an unsettling glow.
- The *Torrens* ship is quite similar to the *Nostromo*, making it an explorable reference. Keep an eye out for the distinctive helmets on the bridge; they're a focal point in one scene in the film, where a computer display is reflected on a similar helmet's visor.
- I could have sworn I heard a cat in the distance during an early jump scare. Obviously, Jonesy wouldn't have made the trip to Sevastapol station, but it seems like cats and space travel are just part of the deal in the *Aliens* universe.
- One detail that popped out during my viewing was how much people smoked during the movie. That habit carries over to the game, too. Cigarette packs are strewn throughout the world, and I even took cover behind a case of them during a big encounter near the end. Keep an eye out for the brand, too. They're a nod from *The Creative Assembly* to the man who wore the alien suit in the film, *Bolaji Badejo*.

where they are. They're struggling to find their feet and they're way behind."

The station was envisioned as an outpost that would eventually become the center of commerce in that region of space. It was built near a gas giant, KG-348, with the hope of mining it for resources. There ultimately wasn't enough business in the area to sustain Sevastapol Station. Before Amanda and the *Torrens* arrive, the station is in the midst of being decommissioned, and it's currently operating under a skeleton crew. Or, more accurately, it was before hell was unleashed.

Amanda enters a darkened room, but she's able to turn on a generator and use a newly active terminal to restore power to the area. As it whirs back to life, a few people run past, the first sign of life she's seen since first arriving.

Chaos abounds, like the arrivals terminal that's filled with abandoned luggage. In one particularly unsettling moment, Amanda enters the baggage area and

discovers that it's been turned into a makeshift morgue. Bagged bodies are lined around the hall, even on the baggage carousel. Who killed these people? The easy answer is the alien did it, but it all seems too methodical for that as the sole explanation. An overturned table with "Waits lied to us" spray-painted on the surface raises a few questions; the blood splashed over the text reads more like an exclamation point.

Not A Killer

Amanda meets Waits later during the demo, and I have a hard time figuring him out. Hope provides a little help. "He's trying the best he can, he's trying to stick to rules, and the situation is getting beyond him," he says. "He's trying to cling to an order that no longer exists, and I think he feels maybe not guilty, but responsible for everyone. He's a character who's trying to solve a problem, and he feels it's his responsibility to solve the problem."

Regardless of his motivations, Waits has used his authority to lock down areas of the station with brace devices - like a parking boot on a car, but for doors. After exploring the accessible areas, Ripley eventually finds a wrench on a body, along with an audio recorder nearby that talks about Waits' lockdown plan. Now Amanda is able to open those doors, using the wrench like a hammer to smash the padlock and then unfastening a bolt. It's going well until she meets a paranoid survivor who introduces himself by pressing a pistol to the back of her head.

Amanda is able to convince the man, Axel, that he'll have a seat on the *Torrens* if he can help her find the ship's communications area. He agrees to lead her there, first stopping by his hideout in a vent (like Newt in *Aliens*, these kinds of places have secret areas for enterprising souls). He gives her a flashlight, which is an improvement over the flares she's previously had to use to light her way.



We work our way past some looters, distracting them by turning off the generator and then using a floor vent to run under them undetected. Eventually he's attacked, and Amanda comes to Axel's aid, smashing her aggressor in the back with the wrench. Axel fires on the attacker, killing him. Amanda is revolted by his actions, and she lets him know in no uncertain terms.

A lot of games give lip service to heroes that aren't trained killers, but when it comes time to actually play the game it sure doesn't feel that way. Amanda might be an engineer like Dead Space's Isaac Clarke, but she's not the stone-cold killer that he is. When she holds a

revolver, you get the sense that it's heavy and alien in her hands, that it's not something that she's ever comfortable holding. "I think that's us trying to work on your subconscious and say, 'This isn't the answer to your problem, there is a massive consequence to using this, and this isn't your everyday tool,'" Hope says. Playing stealthily and avoiding confrontation isn't just an option, it's almost always the best option. That philosophy was one of the reasons that The Creative Assembly was able to reunite the original voice cast, too (see sidebar).

As I play, I track down a variety of junk and crafting components that Amanda can use to build various

tools and items, provided she first finds their blueprints. Some components can be used in multiple creations, so you have to determine if you'll have more immediate use for a stun grenade or a medical kit, for instance, and use the limited resources accordingly. I scrounged around for as many components as I could, and they're scarce. Each time I chucked a noisemaker at a group or healed myself, I felt like I was making a tough choice – adding to the already escalating tension.

The game isn't called Looter: Isolation, however, and it's about this time that we finally meet the real star of the game. Once it enters Amanda's world, she – and the player – isn't going to be the same.

Threats Detected

In a lot of stealth games success is dependent on learning A.I. paths and working past them. The alien is a different beast altogether, with a sophisticated set of behaviors pulsing under a terrifying exoskeleton. It's unpredictable, fast, deadly, and – paradoxically – is exhilarating to be around.

"The way we built the alien was to start thinking of the way it would search for the player, or just the target – because it's not always looking for the player," Hope says. "The way it searches is that it looks in a wide sweep sort of behavior. If you imagine you're in a new building that you've never been in before and you were told to look for someone, you'd do fairly casual searches on each floor. But if you heard something in an area, you'd think, 'Right, there's something there,' and then you'd do a bit more of a detailed search and spend more time there and you'd maybe look underneath things and inside things – that's the way the search behavior works. On top of that, we've got this very detailed sense system, where he can see, he can hear, he detects things like light and movement, and then we have very complex sets of behavior that are driving those senses. If he's seen you a couple of times before, he might be on high footing and a little more heightened and it would take less time to see you, and other times you might be able to dash across the corridor and see him react to the movement and go and investigate where he saw that movement as opposed to chasing after you."

If you can see this, you're probably too close



REUNITED

The Creative Assembly is telling its own story with *Alien: Isolation*, even though it's firmly rooted in the universe that Ridley Scott established in his film. That doesn't mean that players who want to experience moments from *Alien* won't be able to do so. A while back, Sega announced that the voice cast had been reunited for special preorder bonus missions (the publisher later elaborated by saying they would be available to everyone later). I asked about the DLC during my conversation with the developers.

"From a creative perspective and a fan perspective, it's absolutely amazing that we managed to reunite the cast for

the first time in 35 years," says creative lead Al Hope. "For many of those actors, it was the first time they had reprised their roles since they left the sets at Shepperton [Studios] in 1979. For Sigourney Weaver to reprise her role for the first time in a video game as Ripley was just unbelievable.

"You have all of these light-bulb moments when you're first starting out on a project like this. You start thinking, 'Wow, wouldn't it be cool if we built the *Nostromo*, and wouldn't it be cool to walk around and maybe confront our alien?' And then of course you make the natural leap of, 'Wow, what if we could get the original cast

to come back and try to survive?' I guess we're just really lucky with this, and we were able to put the game in front of these guys and talk about what we were doing and tell them that this game was focused on survival and not about killing, and they could see the attention to detail that we'd poured into the world that they originally created. So really happily they agreed to come on board and be a part of this project.

"At the same time, it is a side bonus piece of content, and it has nothing to do with the main game. It exists independently...I have to pinch myself that we were able to do this and work

with these guys and hear them reprise their roles in the dialogue sessions and hear them talk to each other again.

We've spent so long working on this game, and everyone is completely passionate about that first film, and I can still remember the cheer when I announced that Sigourney Weaver had agreed to reprise her role and come on board the project. That was a really significant day for us, because it felt like a testament of all the work the guys had done to show the guys who had created it originally that it was in good hands, and that we were going to put that world in front of a whole new audience."

Amanda gets a motion tracker early on, which allows her to get vague updates on what's going on around her. If a looter is walking nearby, she'll hear a thumping sound and see a blip on its screen. The game doesn't feature a HUD or any on-screen UI, so players have to pull up the tracker by pressing a button if they want to use it. When it's out, they can't have a weapon or tool out, making it a risky trade-off. People generally follow the rules on motion trackers. You see a glowing dot, and even though walls and other environmental elements aren't represented on the screen, you get a sense of where they'll be walking. The alien doesn't care for rules. His blip is unpredictable and kind of scary when you first start playing. He can travel in the vents, and he's really, really fast. You might see him run straight at you, stop, and then move in a completely different direction. Or, even worse, your screen can make it look like he's in front of you at a full charge, passing through you, as you realize he was above you the whole time. That's when you learn to trust your ears.

"You notice, we don't use any hologram markers in the world or any indicators that the alien has seen you, aside from his sounds and his animation," Hope says. "When you're hiding, you start to learn what those sounds are and how he moves. You can recognize when he's given up or when he's going to attack and things like that. And then all of a sudden when there's a bunch of sirens blaring and a massive amount of noise, that encounter becomes so much more difficult because you can't actually hear the state of the alien."

Looters and the alien aren't the only threats that Amanda faces during her stay at Sevastopol Station. The station is filled with Working Joes, Seegson's alternative to Weyland-Yutani's lifelike androids. While their competitors went for lifelike simulacrum, like Ash and Bishop, Seegson realized they lacked the resources to create machines that passed as human. Instead, they

decided to capitalize on their creations' phoniness, or at least attempt to spin it as a positive. While the androids walk around and are able to communicate with people, their rubbery, ill-fitting skin amplifies their otherness.

"They see themselves as a competitor to Weyland-Yutani, but they're actually way behind the tech race," Hope says. "If Weyland-Yutani is capable of producing an android such as Ash, then this is Seegson's best attempt at a synthetic, biomechanical character. So they've taken an alternative path, whereas Weyland-Yutani are obviously making very realistic androids that you can't tell between real and not real, they've decided to go down the path of making their synthetics overtly synthetic, hence the Working Joe name. You always know a Working Joe, because they're not trying to look like people, they're supposed to be

service maintenance and support the crew in these types of situations. When we meet them in the game, they're highly unpredictable."

That's an understatement. Working Joes are governed by a central A.I., and they're now running counter to their original programming. The androids, once subservient and helpful, are now aggressive to Amanda and other humans. Regardless of whether it was a sensible way of keeping the station secure or a sign of something more sinister remains to be seen. In the meantime, Amanda has to avoid being seen by the Joes, lest they respond with detached and effective brutality. Unlike the comparatively fragile looters, Working Joes take a beating. Perhaps as distressingly, the alien doesn't seem to show much interest in the androids, so you can't use them as bait to stay alive.



In addition to pointing out enemy locations, you can use the motion tracker to see where your next objective is



Smart players will use the alien's obsession with killing humans as a way to get past hostile survivors on the ship



Some of the most terrifying moments in the game are when you catch glimpses of the creature from the corner of your eye

Danger Lurks Everywhere

The encounters between the alien are memorable, whether it is a one-on-one interaction, or if other humans are involved.

Even though *Alien: Isolation* is a single-player game, it's been designed in such a way that players can experience their own unique moments as various scenarios play out.

"The longevity in the game is seeing how [the alien] reacts to the different abilities that the player can develop by finding items in the world, crafting things, getting ahold of different weapons, and each one of those has something that the alien can react to," Hope says. "The real beauty of it is that he doesn't react the same every time, and he adapts his behavior according to what you do as a player."

What I appreciate most about the alien is that, while it is terrifying, it's not infallible. If you manage to break line of sight with the creature or cause a distraction, it's not going to be able to hunt you down with 100-percent accuracy. I got to see that first-hand while in the medical wing looking for supplies. I hadn't seen the creature in a while, and I turned in time to see it walk past the open doorway. I froze. It paused and looked right toward me. If I'd moved, it would have noticed, and gone for the motion. For whatever reason, it decided to keep going down the hallway.

In another section, I was at the base of a T-junction. A few humans were patrolling the area, and I wanted them to move to one side so I could sneak past. I pulled out the motion tracker, and we were all alone – no alien in sight. I tossed a noisemaker down the hallway and hid behind a medical cart. Just for fun, I pulled out the motion tracker again, and got to see a bloodbath reduced to a series of green dots. A large blip charged down the hallway toward the source of the sound from seemingly out of nowhere, before noticing the people. The smaller dots raced in the opposite direction, but they were outpaced. In a matter of seconds – accompanied by screams and gunfire – three dots became two became one.

Hope says that humans aren't automatically going to shoot you, even if they're hostile. If you back away after

they warn you, odds are you're going to be all right. That's why it came as such a surprise when I encountered a looter on patrol and he immediately shot at me. It missed, and I ducked and moved behind cover. A split second later, I realized I wasn't the target after all. The alien was behind us, and that shot was probably a lifesaver. It charged after the most immediate threat, nearly bowling me over in its haste, and slaughtered the man. Once he was gone, the creature leapt up into an exposed vent.

Finally, this wasn't my finest moment, but it's worth mentioning. After luring the alien over to some people who were blocking our way, I hid in a vent. I couldn't help but peek out to watch what would happen next. After the alien was done killing its prey, it crouched in place until it noticed the vent opening. I don't know

Fire looks gorgeous, but it also attracts attention. Move along





what I was expecting to happen, especially since I knew just how much time the creature spends in those vents. I will say that seeing the animation of it pulling me out and killing me was worth the reload.

I'd be remiss in not mentioning those reloads. Make no mistake: *Alien: Isolation* is a difficult game, particularly before you get a good sense of how the alien reacts and behaves in various situations. You'll want to save at registration terminals (manual save points) whenever possible – in large part because the game doesn't auto-save after mission objectives are complete. It can be frustrating at times, but it's by design.

"We put [the manual save system] in to give the player a bit more tension, so you feel a sense of relief when you saw one," Napper says. "What we found was, when we put them off the beaten path, off the main game route, it encouraged exploration. The people who played for five, ten minutes and then died, they're thinking, 'Oh, I've missed something,' and they spend longer exploring the environment, and then they're finding more things to build and then giving themselves more options."

"I think with horror you have the idea of small victories, as if you're building tiny moments where you think, 'If I keep doing this, I might ultimately survive,' and having manual save points kind of taps into the horror, but it's something that you're self-conscious of, and you strive to find and to use," Hope adds. "I think you get a sigh of relief when you actually reach them. It was a really conscious decision on our part to shy away from the automatic checkpoint system and make it part of the actual

mechanics of the game." You can pull up a map to get your bearings, and fill in unexplored areas by tapping into special terminals. Keep an eye out for save points on your map, and plan to visit them whenever you can.

I won't delve into much more of the mission content, because discovering what happened at this station is one of the most interesting parts that I played. The Creative Assembly has built a fantastic world and filled it with mystery. Some of it's filled in by text logs and emails that you read on computer screens. Other bits are simply part of the environment, and you learn by observing. I can't wait to learn more about the doomed station.

I was concerned that the environments would take on a sameness after a while, but that didn't appear to be the case. Sevastopol is filled with a variety of different environments that made me wonder what life was like before the disaster. I could imagine crowds waiting for their flights, stopping for a bite in a now-abandoned restaurant. The swirling marks on the floor of the medical quarters made me wonder if the person who waxed the floor now filled a bag in the terminal. The factory floor filled with nonoperational Working Joes made me anxious as I scanned their dead eyes. It's a gorgeous, unsettling, and powerful place to explore – and as I paused at a particularly stunning view of the fiery KG-348 one moment, I wished it was safe to just soak it all in. ♦

For more on *Alien: Isolation*, head to gameinformer.com/horrorissue

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

After seeing and playing the game several times over the past year or so, it's difficult to imagine that the *Alien: Isolation* players will be getting this October could have been considerably different. How different? Imagine being hunted by the creature from a third-person perspective. When the team visited our offices with an extremely early version of the game – before any preview coverage – that's what we saw. What happened there?

"When we first envisioned the game it was in first person, and it seemed at the time it felt like a really natural thing, and then we experimented with third person," recalls design lead Gary Napper. "I think we kept going back to what we originally created, which was first-person, and thinking about how this experience would be at its most powerful if it was completely direct, if the alien was actually hunting you, if you were actually hiding behind this crate, not your avatar."

Putting the action directly from the player's perspective served two purposes. First, Napper says it eliminated the ability for players to move the camera around for a better view of the action. The peek function does allow players to see what's just beyond cover or a corner while retaining a sense of danger. According to Napper, the perspective taps into something primal. "It's a really immersive cat and mouse experience. You can dive under a gurney really rapidly and really simply. There's a really nice shortcut between your brain having an idea of how to survive and how you can actually execute that action in first person."

Keep an eye out for the posters and other background details as you explore. They're more pleasant to look at than a bunch of corpses



Into The Mouth Of Madness

by Andrew Reiner



PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC* STYLE *1-Player Action*
PUBLISHER *Bethesda Softworks* DEVELOPER *Tango Gameworks* RELEASE *October 14*



The Evil Within

Game director Shinji Mikami is often referenced as the "father of survival horror," a moniker he earned for his work on the Resident Evil series. His latest endeavor, *The Evil Within*, harks back to this genre's roots and fully embraces the "survival" and "horror" elements that made Resident Evil a runaway hit.

We were given the opportunity to chronicle the first five chapters of *The Evil Within*, and found it to be a much different experience than we expected — one that is as much a psychological thriller as it is survival horror.



Setting The Stage

The *Evil Within* wastes little time getting to the blood and gore. During the opening cinematic, we're introduced to Sebastian Castellanos, a protagonist with a dark demeanor, gritty voice, and unkempt attire that hits all the tropes of a 30-something noir detective. He's riding shotgun in a police car that has been dispatched to investigate the report of chaos unfolding within Krimson City's Beacon Mental Hospital.

As the squad car roars down a darkened highway with its sirens and lights ablaze, the chatter of its passengers is filled with unease and wild conjecture. Castellanos asks if they could be racing toward a riot.

The driver, officer Connelly, confirms that it's much

worse than that. "A call went out just before I picked you up, and said it was multiple homicides," he says, his eyes briefly looking over at Castellanos. "A half dozen units are already on scene. Maybe it's the ghost of that doctor who went schizo and chopped up all of those patients."

Castellanos' young partner, Joseph Oda, who appears to be the brains of this operation with his thick, black glasses, perfectly knotted tie, and relationship-killing haircut, quickly fires back, "That's not what happened. Some patients disappeared. Some kind of scandal?"

"Still... Gives you the creeps doesn't it?" Connelly counters in what appears to be a desperate plea to keep his gore-filled hunch alive.

Castellanos turns his attention to his partner in the

backseat. "Some kind of connection?" he asks. This comment is in reference to a previous case that the two worked together, but its details are intentionally left a mystery at this point.

The conversation is cut off abruptly by a sudden blast of static through the radio. The volume of the noise increases to the point that it's so unbearable Castellanos grabs his head in pain and Connelly cannot keep his hand on the wheel, making the car swerve into oncoming traffic for a brief second.

The static doesn't last long, tapering off as quickly as it began, giving an already jittery squad a scare they didn't need.

The gates of the hospital draw near, a foreboding sight of confinement and an establishment in desperate need of upkeep. The metal is rusted. The concrete discolored. An art piece sits at the heart of the hospital's courtyard. It's a tall physical representation of the facility's icon — a circle containing a cross with arms that stretch out and thicken like the blades of an axe. The sinister-looking logo fits nicely with the hospital's worn exterior. No matter what lighting you put it under, this building looks like something out of a horror movie — the kind of place kids wouldn't enter even if dared to. Under the overcast lighting presented at this particular moment, the hospital looks terrifying.

The only welcoming visual comes from the vibrant lights of eight police cars parked haphazardly in the courtyard. Oda looks into one of the



MIKAMI ON DIFFICULTY BALANCING...

"Balancing horror and fun certainly is a huge challenge. It wasn't something that could be determined by fiddling with numbers or logic. It meant a lot of trial and error and, yes, it is a painstaking process. I'm glad I don't remember the number of times we reiterated."



Most of the enemies in The Evil Within have not been named by Tango. This particular demon is lovingly called "Laura" by Bethesda Softworks



vehicles, and mumbles to himself, wondering why some of his fellow officers left their weapons behind. Even odder, none of them are around.

The group approaches the hospital's front doors, and cracks one of them open. A familiar stench hits the officers. "Smells like blood," Connelly says grimly.

The source of the odor is revealed as soon as the doors fully open. Bodies of doctors, nurses, and facility personnel are scattered across the hospital's spacious lobby. Some of the corpses are hunched over awkwardly in pools of their own blood. A few are jumbled together in a pile. Seeing that some of the bodies are still seated indicates that the attack happened quickly. Gigantic gashes can be seen on many of their torsos.

Silence and disbelief fall upon the team. Guns are quickly drawn. Castellanos wields a single-action six shooter, an odd choice of a weapon for a world that seems to be modern.

After working his way through the grisly tableau, Castellanos' investigation brings him to a security room. His eyes are immediately drawn to a camera feed showing a handful of officers rattling off gunfire at someone or something that isn't in frame.

The feed flickers. Castellanos' expression turns to that of disbelief as a hooded man phases into reality directly in front of an officer. With a subtle touch, the officer collapses to the ground. The hooded man phases out of existence again, but just for a heartbeat, reappearing again and darting like a sinister version of DC Comics' Flash from one officer to the next, their bodies falling in his blurred wake. The assailant phases out of view one last time, this time reappearing with his face directly in front of the rooftop-based camera.

His eyes boil with a devilish rage. One of his cheeks appears to be horribly scarred from burning, perhaps a clue to his identity. Most disturbing of all, he's clearly

looking back at Castellanos through the lens.

The next moment is The Evil Within's not-so-subtle way of telling the player that all bets are off, and that the rules of reality don't necessarily apply to this world. For the sake of spoilers, we won't detail what happens, but the event that transpires plants the seed for a far greater mystery than the mass murder that Castellanos came to investigate.

We also learn that The Evil Within's breed of horror isn't easily defined. Traits of Japanese horror blend with the conventions of Western horror. As the game unfolds, at times it feels like *Ju-on*, seconds later it's reminiscent of *Saw*, or *Shutter Island*, or *The Shining*. The gameplay

rhythm is equally as Frankensteined, harking back to the Resident Evil classics, but often delivering sequences that would fit comfortably into other games like *Silent Hill*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Eternal Darkness*, *Fatal Frame*, or even a stealth game like *Manhunt*. All of these different sides of horror are wrapped nicely into The Evil Within's universe and rules, and flow seamlessly with Castellanos' narrative arc.

With so many different types of horror at play at once, you can't anticipate when something might happen or what it might be. That thought of "I hope a dog doesn't jump through that window," is amplified to a level of not being able to trust anything in the world.



The Butcher

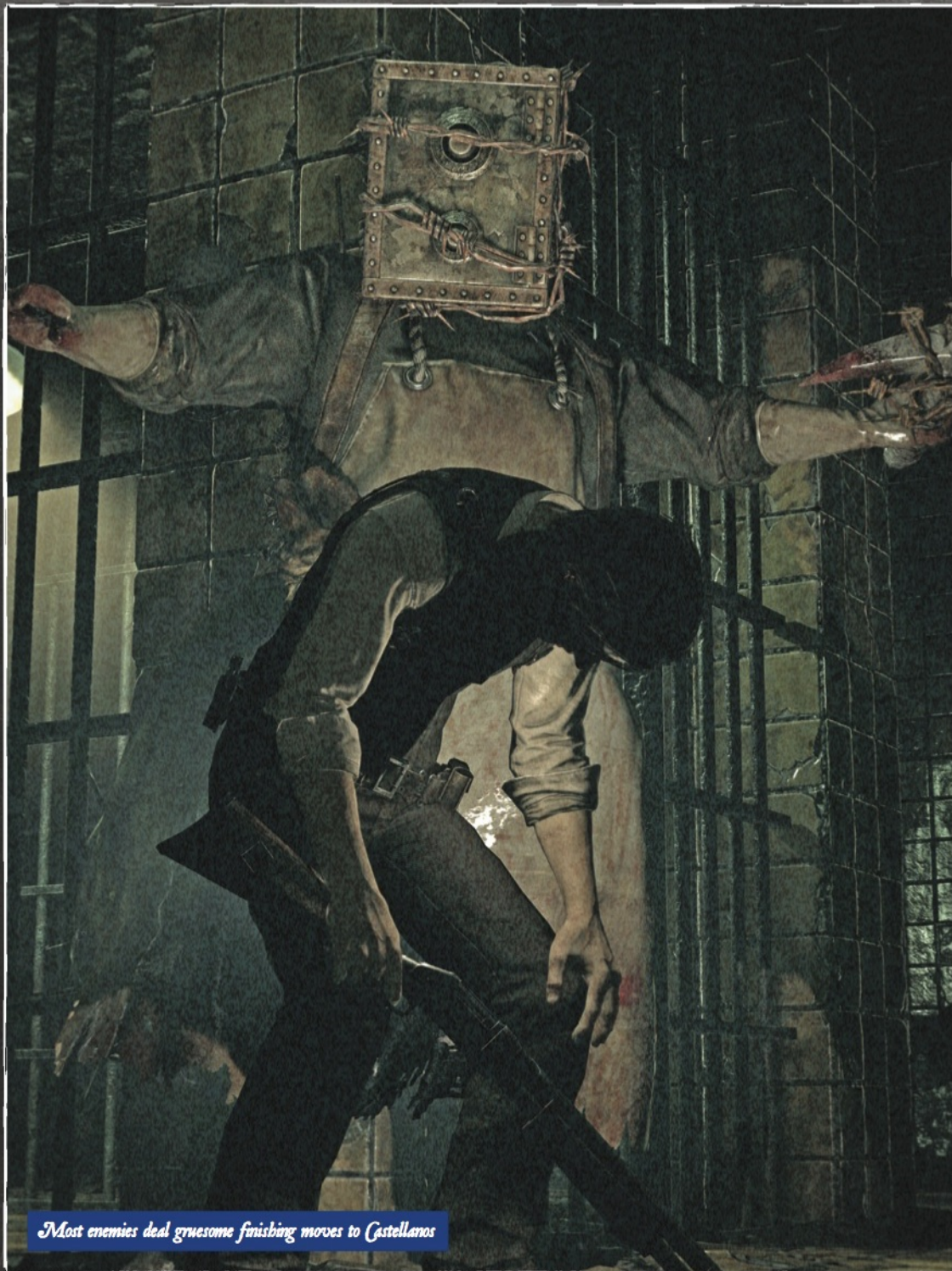
When control returns to Castellanos, we find him in a dire situation. He's hanging upside down on a hook in a meat locker, and is surrounded by the corpses of other humans. A bulky butcher in a mask is hacking up a body to Castellanos' left. At this point, Castellanos channels his best Lara Croft impersonation, swinging back and forth (an action handled by timed analog-stick movements) to reach a knife that is jammed into the side of a corpse in front of him.

This is an interesting moment, as it puts the protagonist in the victim's role – something we haven't seen much of in Mikami's games. His protagonists have always had the odds stacked well against them, but they've usually had a means of dealing with the threat, or escaping it in spectacular fashion.

When Castellanos cuts himself down he's weak and injured, barely capable of walking. He must hide in the shadows to avoid alerting the butcher. This sequence of slow-moving stealth consists of studying the patterns of the butcher, and diverting his attention – an action that is handled by throwing empty bottles to generate sounds for his pursuer to investigate.

The stealth aspects are handled well, making use of simple sneaking controls and the ability to hide in lockers or under beds. A layer of difficulty is added when the butcher becomes enraged and pulls out a chainsaw. At this point, Castellanos' line of sight isn't enough to determine whether the path ahead is safe or not. Sound plays a large role in *The Evil Within*. In this instance, Castellanos must measure the distance between him and the roaring chainsaw, or listen intently to determine if the butcher opened a door.

The slowness of movement is juxtaposed with brief action sequences, which send a limping Castellanos down a long hallway or through a room littered with medical gear as the butcher gives chase.



Most enemies deal gruesome finishing moves to Castellanos

Thorough exploration of the environment produces rewards for the player. I come across a document that talks about a project called "STEM." This journal details research made to brainwave synchronization. The doctor terminated the project after his subjects fell into a coma, and his staff developed symptoms of nausea and falling unconscious.

This document smacks of Resident Evil's storytelling conventions for Umbrella Corporation. It successfully plants another intriguing wrinkle into the mystery that is afoot.

I won't spoil where the narrative goes from here or how the tussle with the butcher concludes, but the intimacy of this level quickly shifts when Castellanos frees himself

of the hospital and steps back out into the courtyard. Skyscrapers are collapsing, the tectonic plates of the world are shifting, the roads are crumbling into blackness below, and it looks like hell on earth for as far as the eye can see.

Castellanos would likely be consumed in the chaos, but his partners show up just in nick of time with an ambulance. They also rescued a doctor and a patient named Leslie, who is unnaturally pale, young, yet gray-haired. His hands are bloodied, and he repeats words said by other people three times.

The static heard in the police-car radio makes its return, this time signaling the beginning of a horrific string of events.



MIKAMI ON THE RESIDENT EVIL MOMENT...

"Initially, I didn't think about putting that scene in the game but I was hearing voices from the team that it would make horror fans happy — hence it's in the game. There are other scenes in the game that pay homage, and horror fans may recognize them as well."

Warping Reality

The ambulance ride brings the first chapter to an end, but no refuge comes from escaping the hospital. From here, Castellanos' journey for answers falls further into a murky haze with the introduction of multiple realities. It's not clear how these different moments in his life lay out. Some of these scenes could be dreams, as he sometimes snaps out of a moment to find himself back in a familiar place or moment in time.

One of the alternate realities can be accessed whenever Castellanos stumbles upon a glowing mirror. The player will know a mirror is nearby when he or she hears an old 20th century melody playing quietly. The vibrant glow projected in the mirror represents a lighthouse. Bethesda's early marketing images for *The Evil Within* pictured a brain wrapped in barbed wire. What many people didn't notice is that the brain's stem is the lighthouse of note.

At the beginning of chapter two, Castellanos finds himself in a wooded area near a massive lake. The lake has dried up, yet the sound of rolling waves can still be heard. A lighthouse rests on the far end of the lake, its light gleaming brightly.

A document Castellanos finds reads: "When did they put the lighthouse on the lake? Has it always been there? That circling light passes over me, passes through me... I feel like it takes something away each time. I can't remember what it was, though."

Lighthouses. Alternate realities. Turn of the century music. This isn't a story penned by Ken Levine for the *BioShock* universe. The lighthouse in this game represents safe passage, and always leads to the same location — a room (or cell) in an asylum.

Castellanos isn't alone here. A dozen-plus cockroaches scurry up the walls, which are cracked and dirty. When he visits this reality, he always awakens on the bed. The visuals are almost entirely black and white, but vibrant lights produce a degree of color.

He can leave the room at any point he sees fit, but can only travel to two places: A room with an arcane, wooden chair in the

center of it, and if he happens to find a key hidden in a level, the nurse at the front desk will grant him access to the morgue.

The chair plays a vital role in the game. This is where Castellanos can upgrade his abilities (life, sprint, melee damage, syringe recovery), weapons (damage, fire rate, clip capacity), and item stock (the amount of grenades, ammo, syringes, and matches that can be carried).

The chair is powered by green gel, a substance that Castellanos finds hidden in the levels, sometimes in boxes that must be smashed. Some enemies drop molten gel that can be harvested. The gel is an essentially a currency. Each upgrade comes with a cost. When Castellanos selects an upgrade, an electrical current is sent through the chair and is pumped into a device that is strapped to his head.

The other room, the morgue, consists of two gigantic mortuary refrigerators. All of the doors on them are locked. Any key that is brought to the nurse can be used to open one of these doors. What's inside is a surprise, but it's always a big benefit to Castellanos, such as a huge supply of gel or 15 bullets. The keys are

well hidden (I saw one strapped to a rat), but give plenty of reason for players to fully explore the environments.

Castellanos must use the mirror again to return to his previous location.

Classic Survival Horror

The majority of the second chapter moves away from the linear, narrative-driven pacing of the first, and places Castellanos in a lakefront clearing that pushes the player to approach it however they see fit.

The only light source comes from campfires. The darkened areas can be illuminated by Castellanos' lantern, which can be freely used by clicking the left analog stick.

The first sign of life that is found in this dreary place should bring a smile to the faces of Resident Evil fans. A man is sitting on the ground with his back to Castellanos. He's munching on something. When Castellanos inches closer, the man's head turns slowly to the left to reveal his zombified face and the human remains he's devouring.



This particular room is tied to a mind-bending sequence that peppers in puzzle elements along with a wealth of gore



This is the first combat encounter. The zombie moves slowly, allowing for a headshot to be lined up perfectly. Only in *The Evil Within*, a headshot doesn't signal a one-hit kill. My shot blows off half of the zombie's skull, but it continues toward me. My second shot removes what is left of the head, and the beast falls to the ground. This one won't be getting back up again.

Other downed enemies are likely to reanimate. The surest way of dealing with them is to incinerate their bodies by throwing matches onto them – a mechanic

similar to the one used in *Resident Evil Remake*. Matches can also be used to burn objects in the environment, such as hay, to create a blaze that zombies may inadvertently walk through, causing them to go up in ash.

Since this is a survival horror game, resources are scarce, and determining when to use your items is as much of the gameplay experience as combat. Gameplay also favors the slower "Take the time to line up your shot" approach over running and gunning, although it should be pointed out that Castellanos can sprint to safety for a brief second should trouble arise.

Another critical decision that the player is always faced with is figuring out if a situation would best be handled through combat or stealth.

One such scenario unfolds in an area where a half dozen zombies are feasting on what must be most of this area's population. Castellanos mentions he hopes these guys keep their attention on their meal. The best course of action in this instant is to sneak around them, using the shadows and provided rock and foliage-based cover to reach the gates on the other side of a rickety old bridge and the conclusion of the chapter.

Beware, The World

The next chapter leads Castellanos to a small farm town, complete with a barn that appears to be the home of a zombie that is enraged to the point of constantly yelling. Every building can be entered and thoroughly explored. Most hold zombies and valuable items. The variety in enemies is impressive. Some of the zombies wield pick axes or scythes. Another, perched up on a balcony, is armed with a rifle, and will open fire if he hears or sees Castellanos. These zombies are smarter than your

average variety, much like the villagers at the beginning of *Resident Evil 4*. One zombie, wielding a sawed-off shotgun, wears a mask that is bulletproof – a revelation I find out the hard way. One blast with the shotgun cuts me in half.

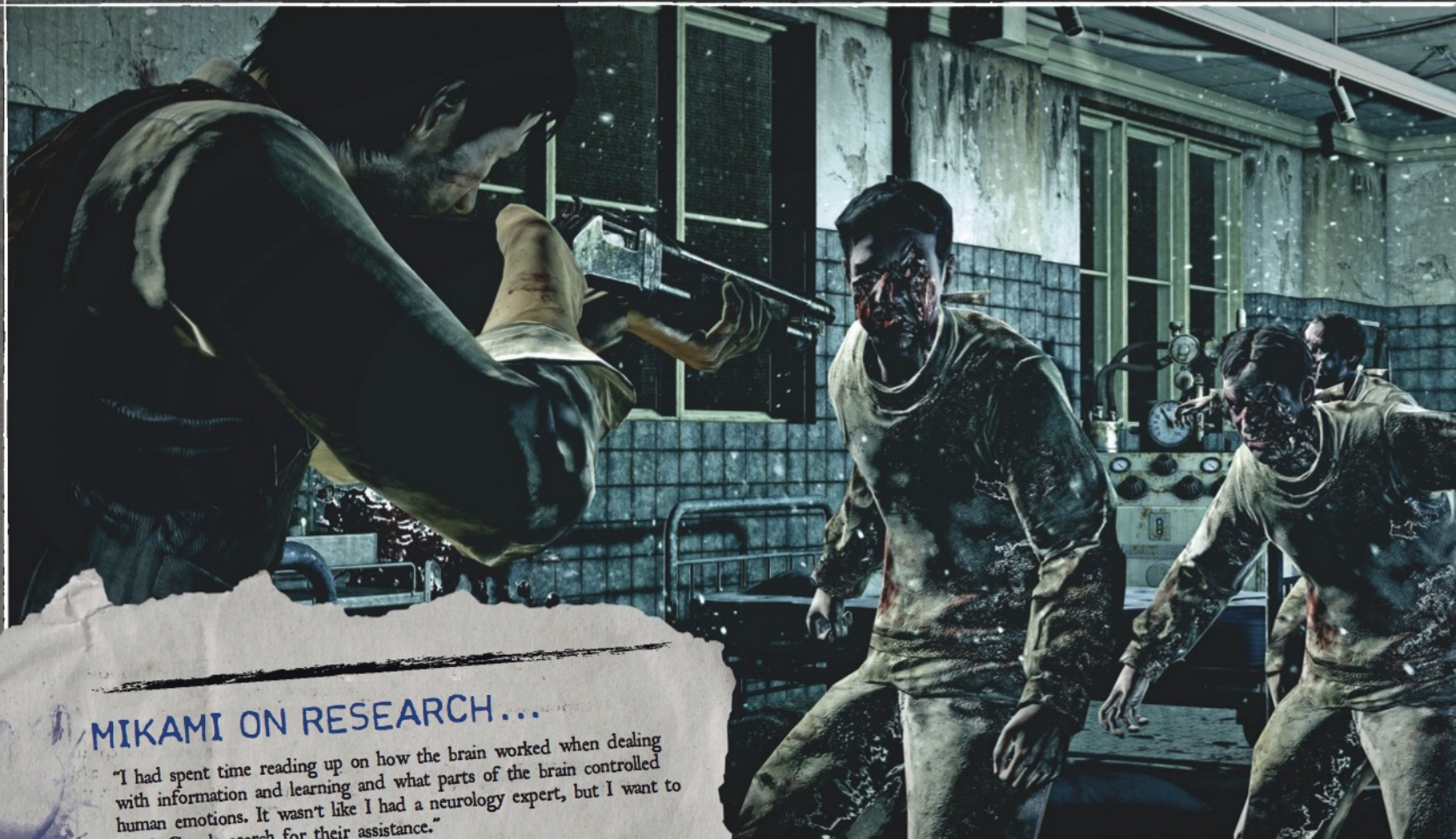
The game is incredibly challenging. I die numerous times in this area, but timely checkpoints keep track of the houses I clear out. My scavenging uncovers a shotgun and crossbow. The latter features a wide variety of ammo types – flash bolts to blind enemies, which can open up a brief stealth-kill window, harpoon bolts for impaling, and explosive arrows with timed detonations.

The environment itself can be hostile. Bear traps, trip wires, and proximity bombs are scattered throughout this city. All of them can be disarmed if approached slowly. Hidden chests, which hold item riches, can also be deadly. Opening a box, which is done manually with the analog stick, could reveal a bomb strapped to the roof. If you open the box too much, you are a goner.

Some enemies are also aware of traps and can throw switches that may hurtle a hail of rusty knives your way. Most of these traps can be used as weapons, should you lure foes into them.

Castellanos eventually runs into the doctor from the ambulance, who needs help tracking down Leslie. They work together briefly, but all of the combat encounters are left up to you.

The final section of this village reveals the first pseudo-boss – a terrifying monstrosity with a chainsaw who isn't phased by five shotgun blasts point blank. He moves quickly and gives chase no matter what house Castellanos enters. He chops through me numerous times before I smart up and realize that I should use the environment to help me take him down. The chapter concludes with another appearance of the mysterious cloaked being. Why is he watching Castellanos?



MIKAMI ON RESEARCH...

"I had spent time reading up on how the brain worked when dealing with information and learning and what parts of the brain controlled human emotions. It wasn't like I had a neurology expert, but I want to thank Google search for their assistance."

The Realm Of The Weird

Chapter four begins with Castellanos and the doctor visiting a hospice where a man named Valerio Jimenez, Leslie's original doctor, resides. They enter to find him working on a corpse. He's digging his hands through it. The sounds of the corpse's innards being probed are disturbing. Castellanos eventually finds himself doing the same thing through a minigame that will likely be one of the most talked-about parts of the early portion of *The Evil Within*.

The hospice is lined with posters, each one detailing the anatomy of the human body. What kind of work was done here? Was Leslie involved?

The remainder of chapter four and the entirety of chapter five are heavy on story content, jump scares, and psychological horrors. One of the more puzzling areas is a room completely made out of white tile. After entering this tiny area, I quickly realize that there's nothing to interact with or look at here. When I turn around, the door is gone — replaced with more tile. I circle around the room, looking intently at the tile for a clue for a good 30 seconds. Nothing. Just when it seems all hope is lost, I realize one of the tiles has disappeared. I approach the black hole slowly, dreading what may be lurking in this newly revealed space. This little change kicks off a lengthy puzzle sequence and mind-bending experience.

At this point in the game, combat continues to intensify and find ways to surprise. One of the enemy types is a fast-moving humanoid creature with what appears to be a squid for a face. It has the ability to

turn completely invisible, and no tricks like the Predator-like blur are used to identify it. You'll need to listen to where the footsteps are coming from, or if you are in a room with water, you can look for ripples. This foe sometimes bumps into objects, which reveal its location.

Another foe is a spider-like woman born from a geyser of blood. Any contact with her results in Castellanos being torn to shreds. My strategy against her was to run for my life.

Chapter five sees the reunion of Castellanos and Joseph. They're searching a mental institution for their other partner, Julie Kidman. When they reach her, she's confined in a metal box in the center of a spacious two-story room. Zombies enter from all sides, some of them carrying dynamite. Castellanos needs to keep an eye on Joseph's health. If he runs into trouble, he can be healed. Don't fret, however Joseph's A.I. is impressive. He's capable of downing enemies should you get into a bind or run out of ammo.

The zombie horde is relentless, but it isn't the only conflict that the duo is facing. Water is pouring into the tank holding Julie. Time is of the essence. The zombies must be dispatched quickly, but that still leaves the problem of figuring out either how to stop the water or get Julie out of the tank.

The demo concludes here. In the four to five hours I spent with *The Evil Within*, I found it to be an exceptionally polished and well thought out horror experience. It feels like a game that has received heavy iteration in development to plot timely scares and ensure that the player never really feels safe or comfortable with their weapon stock. It brought back a flood of memories of playing *Resident Evil* and *Resident Evil 4* again, only with a heightened level of terror coming from scares that warp reality and are designed to mess with your mind. ♦

Head to gameinformer.com/horrorissue for exclusive videos and content for *The Evil Within*



If the odds are stacked against protagonist Sebastian Castellanos, he can use a dash move to find a better vantage point. Most enemies are relatively quick and some even open doors



Sometimes the best option for Castellanos is to run, and perhaps use the environment as a weapon to down troublesome foes

A New Dawn For Horror

by Jeff Marchiafava



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The horror genre has suffered its share of declines and droughts over the years, but like a shambling, reanimated corpse, it never stays dead for long. Everyone from the smallest indie studios to major triple-A developers are lining up to terrify gamers. Over the next five pages, we outline a litany of upcoming games designed to shock, scare, and deprive you of a peaceful night's sleep.



Silent Hills

PLATFORM *PlayStation 4* • (Other Platforms *TBD*) PUBLISHER *Konami* DEVELOPER *Kojima Productions* RELEASE *TBA*

One of the most surprising and exciting announcements from this year's Gamescom, the reveal for the newest installment of the acclaimed Silent Hill series was anything but ordinary. During its press conference, Sony showed a short and enigmatic teaser trailer for a project codenamed "P.T.," complete with over-the-top reaction footage of frightened players. P.T. turned out to be short for Playable Teaser, which went live on PSN at the same time as the announcement. The free demo tasks players with exploring an eerie and

constantly changing house, which serves up a number of scares, including a crying baby trapped inside of a suspended refrigerator, an eye glimmering back at you from a hole in a bathroom wall, and a ghostly image of a woman, presumably one of the victims of a murdered family hinted at in clues left around the apartment.

The biggest surprise, however, comes at the end of the demo; triggering the final scene reveals that P.T. is actually a new Silent Hill game, created by legendary game designer Hideo Kojima and director/screenwriter

Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Pacific Rim*). The game stars *The Walking Dead* and *Boondock Saints* actor Norman Reedus, and runs on Kojima Productions' Fox Engine. Kojima stated that they toned down the visual quality of the demo to fool players into thinking it was created by an independent studio. Whether the final game is even more visually striking or not, we can't wait to see what Kojima has planned for the series, and the early playable taste holds a lot of promise (and scares) for horror fans.



The Forest

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *Endnight Games*
DEVELOPER *Endnight Games*
RELEASE *TBA* (Early Access *Now*)

Inspired by horror movies like *The Descent* and *Cannibal Holocaust*, *The Forest* drops players into a lush open world teeming with mutant cannibals. Surviving the opening plane crash is only the beginning, as staying alive in *The Forest*'s unforgiving wilderness requires hunting for food, gathering resources to create shelters and defensive traps, and using stealth and crafted weapons to fend off hostile inhabitants. *The Forest*'s playable alpha is already gorgeous, and Endnight has been continually expanding the game with more features from an ambitious development roadmap that includes eventual co-op multiplayer and Oculus Rift support.

For another wilderness excursion gone wrong, check out: *The Long Dark*

Neverending Nightmares

PLATFORM PC PUBLISHER Infitap Games
DEVELOPER Infitap Games RELEASE September

Gamers who prefer psychological horror to jump scares and gory combat will want to keep an eye on *Neverending Nightmares*, a Kickstarter-backed indie game rooted in creator Matt Gilgenbach's struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. The player navigates through a series of increasingly disturbing nightmares while trying to decipher which elements are real and which are manifestations of the protagonist's subconscious. Gilgenbach says that the violent and disturbing imagery in the game, such as the main character cutting the skin off his arm, is derived from recurring thoughts caused by his OCD. *Neverending Nightmares* also features a branching narrative structure that leads to many different endings to encourage replayability.

For more psychological indie horror shows, check out: *Fran Bow*, *Darkest Dungeon*



Soma

PLATFORM PlayStation 4 • PC PUBLISHER Frictional Games
DEVELOPER Frictional Games RELEASE 2015

Frictional Games' *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* kicked off a wave of indie horror games in 2011, thanks to its focus on a defenseless protagonist trapped in a haunting atmosphere. Now the developer is trading the macabre fantasy setting for a sci-fi horror tone, complete with an underwater research facility, sentient (and deadly) computer system, and mysterious alien environments. The focus is still on narrative and avoiding dangers instead of confronting them head on, and there are no waypoints or mini-maps to interfere with the chilling atmosphere.

For more underwater terror, check out: *Narcosis*



Overkill's The Walking Dead

PLATFORM TBA PUBLISHER Starbreeze Studios
DEVELOPER Overkill Software RELEASE 2016

Telltale's adventure game adaptation of Robert Kirkman's long-running comic book series has riveted players with its memorable characters and tough decisions, but the action sequences have always been clumsy and disappointing. Terminal Reality's abysmal *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct* didn't fare much better, but a recent announcement from Kirkman and Starbreeze Studios should give zombie fans new hope. Payday developer Overkill is working on a co-op focused first-person shooter that emphasizes action role-playing, survivor horror, and stealth. Little else is known about the game, other than that it will take place in Washington and – based on the grim announcement trailer – adhere to Kirkman's dark vision of what survivors would face in post-apocalyptic world.

For more multiplayer-focused frights, check out: *The Flock*



Dead Island 2

PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC*

PUBLISHER *Deep Silver* DEVELOPER *Tager Development*

RELEASE *Spring*

Techland may have left behind *Dead Island* to start up a new zombie-slaying survival horror series, but that doesn't mean Deep Silver is ready to bury the brand. Spec Ops: The Line developer Yager is crafting a new sequel set in California, which takes place after the events of the original *Dead Island*. Despite the change in location and developer, *Dead Island 2* stays true to the series' focus on cooperative multiplayer, weapon crafting, and gory combat. The brutal finishers in early gameplay trailers are enough to make even veteran horror fans wince, but hey – no one ever said the zombie apocalypse would be pretty.



Until Dawn

PLATFORM *PlayStation 4* PUBLISHER *Sony Computer Entertainment* DEVELOPER *Supermassive Games* RELEASE *2015*

Originally announced in 2012 as a PlayStation 3 Move title, *Until Dawn* has been completely retooled based on player feedback and is now coming exclusively to Sony's new-gen console. The third-person survival horror title centers on eight friends being stalked by a psychotic killer in a remote cabin. You control each of the teenagers throughout the course of the night, and Supermassive says that all characters

are capable of living or dying based on your decisions and performance during the dynamically unfolding narrative. Supermassive is using a modified version of Umbra 3 (the engine behind Guerrilla Games' striking *Killzone: Shadow Fall*) and is capturing performances from Hollywood talent including Hayden Panettiere, Rami Malek, and Brett Dalton to sell *Until Dawn*'s horror-movie vibe.





Project Zomboid

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *The Indie Stone*
DEVELOPER *The Indie Stone* RELEASE *TBA (Alpha Now)*

Project Zomboid might not be the scariest-looking game on this list, but it features the most in-depth simulation of the zombie apocalypse we've ever seen. When not fending off massive hordes of the undead, players must grapple with hunger, thirst, illness, depression, and rolling power outages. Scavenging for supplies in the massive and continually expanding open world feeds into the extensive crafting system, which lets you build everything from deadly weapons to plywood fortresses. The zombies aren't brain dead either, thanks to sound and visibility mechanics that affect when the undead are alerted to your presence. Project Zomboid already has a thriving modding community, and Indie Stone has been implementing standout additions into the base game, ensuring there will be no shortage of new content for players to experience in the foreseeable future.

For another crafting-friendly apocalypse, check out: 7 Days To Die

Hellraid

PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC* PUBLISHER *Techland*
DEVELOPER *Techland* RELEASE *2015*

Techland's horror-themed action game sports a medieval twist and an emphasis on slicing, stabbing, and smashing enemies with a variety of melee weapons. Each weapon type features its own fighting style, while spells provide both elemental attacks and defensive buffs. Players can also customize their character with over 100 different skills, and change their appearance with armor and clothing acquired by looting enemies and visiting blacksmiths. Like *Dying Light*, *Hellraid* features four-player co-op, so you won't have to fend off the demonic invasion alone.

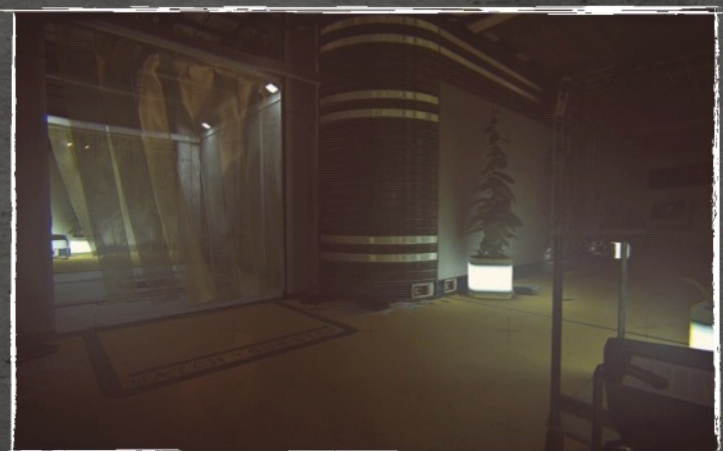


Routine

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *Lunar Software*
DEVELOPER *Lunar Software* RELEASE *TBA*

Lunar Software's *Routine* takes the sense of dread and isolation to the extreme by placing players in a deserted moon base. A low-fi, '80s aesthetic recalls classic sci-fi movies like *Alien* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, with gritty CRT monitors, floppy disks, and malfunctioning robots. Thanks to the implementation of permadeath, one wrong move could end your adventure at any time. A Cosmonaut Assistance Tool allows players to access mainframes, enable night vision, and even temporarily fend off the killer automatons, but you'll probably want to play it safe and stick to the shadows as you explore *Routine*'s open, randomized environments.

For more isolated horrors, check out: Asylum



Resident Evil HD Remaster

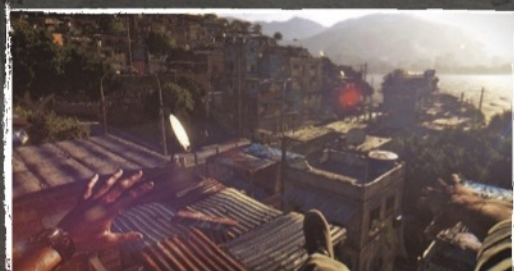
PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC*

PUBLISHER *Capcom* DEVELOPER *Capcom* RELEASE *Early 2015*



Capcom's original Resident Evil remains the definitive survival-horror experience in gaming, and the developer hasn't been shy about tweaking its masterpiece over the years. The 2002 GameCube remake serves as the foundation for Capcom's latest iteration: a downloadable, remastered return to the series' iconic mansion. Improvements include completely redone visuals, 5.1 surround sound, and a new scrolling camera to support the 16:9 ratio aspect of

modern televisions. Players can also choose between the original tank controls and a friendlier alternate control scheme that moves your character in the direction the analog stick is pointing. Resident Evil HD Remaster runs at 1080p on new-gen consoles, and 720p on Xbox 360 and PS3. Gamers won't have to wait long to relive Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine's nightmarish struggle against Umbrella Corp.'s experimental abominations, as Capcom is aiming for an early 2015 release.



Dying Light

PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 •*

Xbox 360 • PC PUBLISHER *Warner Bros. Interactive*

DEVELOPER *Techland* RELEASE *February*

The Dead Island series provides players with horrific open-world environments to explore, but the sluggish and clunky controls make surviving the zombie apocalypse harder than it should be. Techland's new survival-horror series aims to fix that with an emphasis on fast and responsive free-running mechanics. Players are still slaying the undead in melee-focused combat with hundreds of weapons and up to three friends, but improved visuals and a real-time day/night cycle (which results in faster and deadlier zombies after dusk) should provide Dead Island with some healthy, albeit decaying, competition. ♦

The Top 25 Horror Games Of All Time

by GI Staff



The drive to win and the tension of impending failure is enduring across all genres, but horror games push that formula further, punishing foolish mistakes with gruesome death sequences and fraying players' nerves with unforgiving scares.

Iron-willed gamers have survived decades of horror games, from dread-inducing adventure games to gory shooters where you confront your fears while aiming down a shotgun barrel. The full

catalog of horror games is staggering, but we've taken on the gut-wrenching task of refining this massive history to the top 25 in their class.

Similar to how certain things scare some people and don't faze others, deciding what constitutes a horror game is subjective. These are the top 25 games that we consider either brutally frightening, a blast to play, innovators in horror storytelling, or some mixture therein.

25. Blood

PLATFORM PC PUBLISHER GT Interactive DEVELOPER Monolith Productions RELEASE 1997

Monolith Productions' long lineage of superb horror titles (F.E.A.R., Condemned) begins with what might have been dismissively labeled a "Doom clone" in the '90s. Unlike id's demon-blasting FPS phenomenon, *Blood* doubles down on carefully crafted settings and tongue-in-cheek nods to classic horror films. Caleb is a resurrected gunslinger who uses a pitchfork, hairspray/lighter flamethrower, and even a voodoo doll to take down enemies like zombies and Tommy Gun-wielding cultists. His adventure takes him to a twisted carnival where dismembered hands lunge at his neck while (somehow) screaming "I'll swallow your soul!" (*Evil Dead 2*), and another level takes place in a massive hotel's snowy hedge maze, complete with a frozen Jack Nicholson lookalike (*The Shining*).



24. Splatterhouse

PLATFORM Arcade PUBLISHER Namco
DEVELOPER Namco RELEASE 1989

With its geysers of blood and over-the-top-of-the-top violence, *Splatterhouse* is pretty goofy by today's standards. At the time of its release, however, Namco's homage to slasher films was fairly controversial. The TurboGrafx-16 port tamed things down a bit for American audiences (overt references to religious iconography and mild profanity got the axe), but Rick's rampage through West Mansion was still gory enough to make it unwelcome in many households. Sequels would add further carnage (and put the hockey-masked hero in a pair of jorts) but it's tough to beat the original – even with a 2x4.



23. Shadows of the Damned

PLATFORM PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER Grasshopper Manufacture RELEASE 2011

Heavily inspired by campy horror like *Evil Dead*, *Shadows of the Damned* is as funny as it is full of horror tropes. A collaboration between Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami and Suda 51, the game plays like Resident Evil 4, which is always a favorable comparison. This bizarre adventure is full of gore and sexual innuendo. With a well-established demon world, charismatic characters, and an unsettling "What's real and what isn't?" tone, *Shadows of the Damned* sticks with you well after completion.

22. I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *Cyberdreams*
DEVELOPER *The Dreamers Guild* RELEASE *1995*

Harlan Ellison's classic 1967 short story inspired this point-and-click adventure, which remains one of the most disturbing games created. You control the fates of five people, the only scraps of humanity left on Earth after a sadistic A.I. named AM has taken over. Each survivor has to endure their own hellish nightmare based on the whims of the machine. The game deals with heady subjects including suicide, rape, and genocide, pushing the limits of what's often considered an escapist art form. As it stands, *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* was an early beacon of mature storytelling for players who could stomach the content.



20. Slender

PLATFORM *PC • Mac* PUBLISHER *Parsec Productions*
DEVELOPER *Parsec Productions* RELEASE *2012*

This free-to-download game came out of nowhere to scare the crap out of gamers in 2012. *Slender* forgoes ornamentation and deep narrative in favor of a slimmed-down frightfest that challenges gamers to collect eight pages of paper strewn around a forest in the middle of the night while evading the omnipresent horror of the Slender Man. Armed with only a flashlight with horrible battery life, this task isn't easy. When the static appears across your screen, that's a good indicator your life expectancy just took a nosedive.



21. DayZ

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *Bohemia Interactive*
DEVELOPER *Dean Hall* RELEASE *2013*

From its modest beginnings as an *Arma 2* mod to its rise to becoming a monolithic multiplayer experience, one thing has never changed – *DayZ* carves a unique niche in the survival horror landscape. This unrelenting game throws dark nights, dangerous weather conditions, and surprise zombie assaults at players, but nothing is scarier than unknown encounters with your fellow men and women who are also trying to make do on scraps of food, limited ammunition, and shelter. Sony recently announced a PlayStation 4 port is coming in the near future, so console owners can finally see what the craze is about.

19. Dead Rising

PLATFORM *Xbox 360* PUBLISHER *Capcom*
DEVELOPER *Capcom* RELEASE *2006*

You like zombies? Have a whole mall full of 'em! That's what Capcom shouted at horror fans with *Dead Rising*, its campy take on the undead. Unlike the company's own too-cool-for-school *Resident Evil* series, which maintains a deadly serious façade even during battles with plants and silly giant robots, Keiji Inafune's take on zombies is gleefully self-aware. Photojournalist Frank West seems to be having as great a time as the player, cracking wise while snapping photos (and necks). In addition to being a blast, *Dead Rising* was a technical marvel for its day, showing off the power of the Xbox 360 by rendering hundreds of undead in detailed mall environments.





18. Sanitarium

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *ASC Games*
DEVELOPER *DreamForge Intertainment* RELEASE *1998*

Don't you hate it when you wake up in a strange place with no idea what happened? This scenario is doubly bad for Max, who finds himself confined in a mental institution with no idea of who he is or why he's there. In this isometric adventure game you explore his unsettling dreamscapes populated with disfigured children, carnival horrors, and tormented ghosts to piece together the sequence of events that led to his commitment.

17. Alan Wake

PLATFORM *Xbox 360 • PC*
PUBLISHER *Microsoft Game Studios*
DEVELOPER *Remedy Entertainment* RELEASE *2010*

Following in the storytelling tradition of Stephen King, Alan Wake offers a mix of frightening visuals, psychological tricks, and unusual personalities, all of which add up to one of the most eerie and captivating games on Xbox 360. The story follows the titular novelist as he investigates a small town in search of his missing wife. Like a thoughtfully paced thriller TV series, the game is split up into distinct episodes that each end with cliffhangers. Beyond taut storytelling, Alan Wake's exploration of light and shadow is both visually arresting and terrifying, since light is often a limited resource. Even without constant jump scares, Alan Wake's pervading sense of an unknowable evil is deeply memorable.



THE HOUSE THAT HORROR GAMES BUILT

Not every historically important horror game made our Top 25 list. Here are five games that built the foundation for modern genre successes.

- **The 7th Guest**
PC (1993)
Trilobyte's horror adventure game pushed the boundaries of game technology by introducing CD-ROMs. Using full-motion video to tell the dastardly tale of psychotic doll maker was equally ingenious.
- **Alone in the Dark**
PC (1992)
Developer Frédérick Raynal is credited for making the first 3D survival horror game, adopting cinematic framing techniques to accentuate Alone in the Dark's scares.
- **Haunted House**
Atari 2600 (1982)
Despite its crude sound and animations, Haunted House amped up the tension by giving the player no way to combat the evil spirits, other than fleeing.
- **The House of the Dead**
Arcade (1997)
Sega's light gun rail shooter drew crowds at arcades thanks to its unapologetic gore and blood-soaked screens.
- **Uninvited**
Mac (1986)
Mindscape's point-and-click adventure set in a haunted house nailed mood and atmosphere well before developers had the tools to make gamers jump out of their seats in terror.



16. F.E.A.R.

PLATFORM *PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC* PUBLISHER *Vivendi Universal*
DEVELOPER *Monolith Productions* RELEASE *2005*

Given the awe-inspiring arsenals players wield in first-person shooters, the genre doesn't seem ripe for a horror experience. Monolith Productions proved that presupposition wrong with this creepy 2005 release. Heavily inspired by Japanese horror films like *The Ring*, F.E.A.R. features the most terrifying child to haunt video games, Alma. This apparition, born out of dastardly military experiments, can bend soldiers to her will and cause the protagonist Point Man to experience hallucinations, making her a formidable foe even for a Delta Force squad armed to the teeth with advanced weaponry and superhuman reflexes.



15. The Suffering

PLATFORM *PlayStation 2 • Xbox • PC* PUBLISHER *Midway*
DEVELOPER *Surreal Software* RELEASE *2004*

The Suffering is the rare horror game that combines psychological twists with gore-packed action. The night that a man named Torque is scheduled to be executed for the death of his family, an earthquake hits the isolated prison and unleashes a horde of gruesome demons, each of which personifies a different form of execution. Torque battles his way off the island while staring face to face with the horrors of institutionalization, channeling his own inner demons to transform into an equally horrifying monster.

14. Clock Tower

PLATFORM *PlayStation* PUBLISHER *ASCII Entertainment*
DEVELOPER *Human Entertainment* RELEASE *1997*

The SNES version of Clock Tower never reached American shores, but ASCII introduced U.S. gamers to the terrifying Scissorman on PlayStation. The point-and-click survival horror game places you in terrifying situations with him in pursuit. The sound of his scissors viciously slicing the air alerted you that he is closing in, adding to the intensity. However, the real terror comes from having only your wits to survive. Running away and finding hiding places are your only defenses against him. Clock Tower has multiple endings and perspectives to experience, but it truly stands out for how helpless it makes you feel.



13. The Walking Dead

PLATFORM *PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC • Vita • iOS* PUBLISHER *Telltale Games*
DEVELOPER *Telltale Games* RELEASE *2012*

Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* has always been unapologetically brutal and violent. Telltale Games took things to a new level when it made an adventure game set in the universe, showing gamers firsthand the true nightmares of a zombie apocalypse. Not knowing when a zombie attack would happen is one thing, but having the life of a charismatic child named Clementine in your hands is absolutely terrifying. You never know when someone in your fragile alliance will crack, who you can trust, or what dangers are ahead. Most importantly, the game lets you make choices, forcing you to face the consequences. With plenty of distressing situations, Telltale proves that horror can come in many different forms.



12. System Shock 2

PLATFORM *PC • Mac* PUBLISHER *Electronic Arts*
DEVELOPER *Irrational Games/Looking Glass Studios* RELEASE *1999*

The cold interior of a spaceship has become a tomb for many a player in *System Shock 2*, the precursor to Irrational Games' *BioShock*. The immersive first-person shooter is hailed for combining elements of action and role-playing games, but it's equally notable for its rich, atmospheric environment that ramps up tension and terror thanks to a rogue A.I. *System Shock 2* paved the way for shooters being associated with much more than just blasting away with both barrels.



11. Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

PLATFORM *GameCube* PUBLISHER *Nintendo*
DEVELOPER *Silicon Knights* RELEASE *2002*

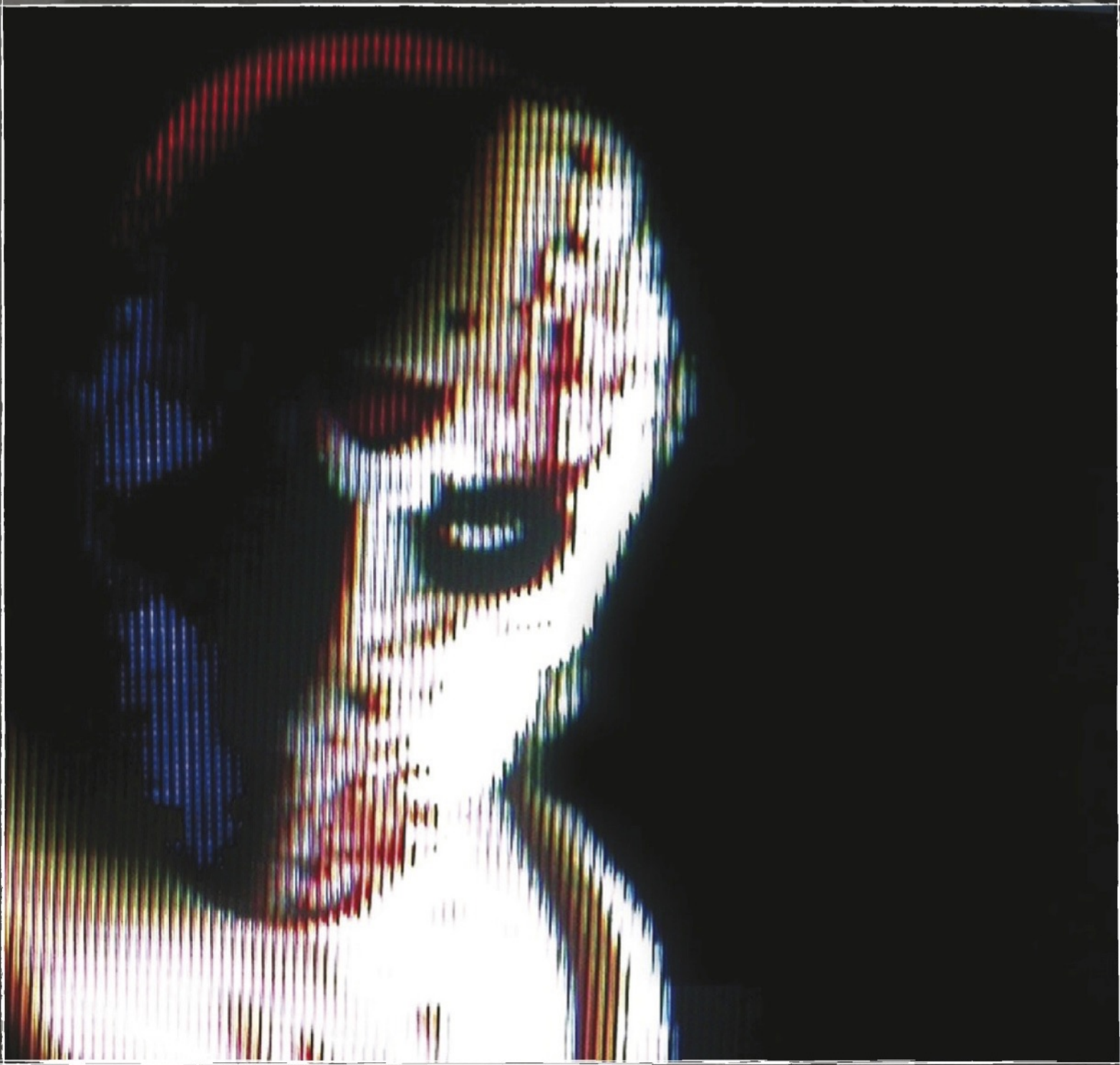
The most mature-themed game Nintendo has ever published, *Eternal Darkness* takes players on a haunting journey through history to confront an ancient supernatural power. The Lovecraftian plot is filled with mystery, but was ultimately overshadowed by its infamous sanity meter. This devious design toyed with players' minds in bold new ways. We recommend experiencing these fourth-wall breaking scares firsthand to truly appreciate this game's legacy.

10. Condemned: Criminal Origins

PLATFORM *Xbox 360 • PC* PUBLISHER *Sega*
DEVELOPER *Monolith Productions* RELEASE *2005*

Upon its release in 2005, few games that had come before offered the immersive sense of disquiet and anxiety as the investigations of agent Ethan Thomas. Whether moving through dilapidated apartments and confronting its enraged and insane inhabitants, or entering an abandoned shopping complex to be stalked by mannequins, *Condemned* keeps players on their toes. Brutal first-person combat feels raw and dangerous, and players never know what to expect, right up to the surprising and abrupt conclusion.





9. Manhunt

PLATFORM *PlayStation 2 • Xbox • PC* PUBLISHER *Rockstar Games*
DEVELOPER *Rockstar North* RELEASE *2003*

Horror games often revolve around the supernatural – the apparitions and grotesque monsters of legend. Rockstar North's *Manhunt* is perhaps the most disturbing game on this list because the monster isn't a zombie or some other fictional creature – it's you. As convicted death-row killer James Earl Cash, the player must commit dozens of grisly murders in a real-life snuff film, spurred on by the voice of a mysterious man known as "The Director." Though most of your victims are themselves sociopathic killers, *Manhunt's* violence turns the mirror back on the player and video games' fascination with violence. Perhaps true horror lurks in the hearts of men.

8. Left 4 Dead

PLATFORM *Xbox 360 • PC* PUBLISHER *Valve*
DEVELOPER *Turtle Rock Studios / Certain Affinity / Valve* RELEASE *2007*

Everybody loves a great zombie survival story, and Turtle Rock figured out how to distill the experience into a cooperative, episodic structure with enormous potential for emergent gameplay moments and replay. You and three friends are survivors of a plague of mutation and aggression, drawn together in the name of living just a few days longer. With guns in hand, each episode finds the survivors fighting back to back as they seek safety. An innovative A.I. system ensures that each playthrough results in new scares, as zombies attack from different locations. Whether it's the tension of trying to pass by a witch without startling her into a terrifying rage, or screaming for help as a smoker drags you away from the group, *Left 4 Dead* keeps the whole group on the edge of their seats.



7. The Last of Us

PLATFORM *PlayStation 4 • PlayStation 3*
PUBLISHER *Sony Computer Entertainment*
DEVELOPER *Naughty Dog* RELEASE *2013*

The *Last of Us* is primarily remembered for its emotional, complex storytelling – and rightly so. The relationship between protagonists Joel and Ellie is one of the best in the history of the art form. However, at its core, *The Last of Us* is a survival horror game – although one set in a more grimly realistic world than most. Enhanced by immersive sound design, we'll never forget the chilling sensation of hiding in a dark, dank basement, our pulse racing as we hear the skin-crawling sounds of the mutated "clickers" shuffling toward us. *The Last of Us* isn't only one of the past generation's most affecting games; it is also one of the most horrifying.

6. Resident Evil 4

PLATFORM *PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • Wii • PlayStation 2 • GameCube • PC • iOS*
PUBLISHER *Capcom* DEVELOPER *Capcom* RELEASE *2005*

The stiff tank controls of the original Resident Evil are still criticized to this day, but by contrast the over-the-shoulder gunplay of Resident Evil 4 redefined what a third-person shooter could be when it debuted on the GameCube. Series creator Shinji Mikami finally allowed players to dial in headshots on shambling ghouls with a huge, fully upgradeable arsenal. Leon S. Kennedy's solo mission into an infected Spanish cult village changes up the formula, trading out jump scares for trigger-squeezing action. Backtracking and puzzle solving takes a backseat to harrowing battles against towering giants and chainsaw-wielding maniacs. Resident Evil 4's influence infects game design to this day, but at its core it still gets pulses pounding.



5. Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly

PLATFORM *PlayStation 2 • Xbox* PUBLISHER *Tecmo*
DEVELOPER *Tecmo* RELEASE *2003*

The Fatal Frame games are not for the faint of heart. In fact, after creating the first game, the developers feared that they had scared people so much they never played it to completion. For the second iteration, Tecmo focused more on the narrative, so people would be so engrossed they'd want to finish. They succeeded. In Crimson Butterfly, twin sisters are drawn to a village, soon becoming trapped inside with tortured souls. How the twins play into the larger plot is frightening, but Crimson Butterfly's biggest achievement is how it forces you to look fear in the face. With a camera as your weapon, you must stare at the spirits to ensure you hit the shutter at the right moment, constantly throwing yourself into danger.



4. Amnesia: The Dark Descent

PLATFORM *PC* PUBLISHER *Frictional Games*
DEVELOPER *Frictional Games* RELEASE *2010*

The indie scene became a bastion for horror during the lull of scary triple-A titles last generation. Amnesia: The Dark Descent is one of the main games to thank (or blame) for the resurgence in creepy, atmospheric games. Players awake in a castle in the 1800s, their memory wiped due to the titular malady. Amnesia begins a slow, steady burn toward the first frightening monster reveal – a tortured beast that cannot be killed directly. The focus on flight over fight only amplifies the omnipresent sense of dread. Not being able to battle the abominations stalking you might be infuriating in other games, but Frictional handles it with unsettling elegance.

3. Dead Space

PLATFORM *PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC* PUBLISHER *Electronic Arts*
DEVELOPER *EA Redwood Shores* RELEASE *2008*

Movies like *Alien* and *Event Horizon* established just how scary outer space can be, and *Dead Space* followed suit with an interactive variation on the theme. Isaac Clarke is no space marine or superhero. Instead, he has to make do with his skills as a ship engineer with a simple cutting laser when the starship he boards turns out to be infested with reanimated horrors called necromorphs. Immaculate pacing and a sense that you're never truly safe help *Dead Space* establish an atmosphere of dread. Make a mistake, and Isaac's often gruesome death scenes are enough to fuel nightmares. Lonely, dark corridors and scary sound design carry players the rest of the way through this trip into terror, and make *Dead Space* the definitive outer space-horror experience.



2. Silent Hill 2

PLATFORM *PlayStation 2* PUBLISHER *Konami*
DEVELOPER *Konami* RELEASE *2001*

Silent Hill set a new bar for horror when the first entry released in 1999, but the game that remains the most memorable and terrifying for the Game Informer staff is the second iteration. James Sunderland is lured to Silent Hill when he receives a letter from his deceased wife. The tension is suffocating as you explore the eerily silent, fog-filled town, which is so whisper quiet you can hear your own footsteps. Never knowing what's around each corner is part of the suspense. Pyramid Head, the series' iconic adversary, makes his series debut in *Silent Hill 2*, and he's only a slice of how twisted things turn. However, the most compelling element of the game is how it explores Sunderland's psyche, leading to one hell of a memorable finale.



1. Resident Evil

PLATFORM *PlayStation* PUBLISHER *Capcom* DEVELOPER *Capcom* RELEASE *1996*

Other horror games came before it, but the traumatic events of the original Resident Evil put the genre on the map for years to come. The brave S.T.A.R.S. team survivors are forced to scrounge for resources like ammo and health while battling or evading lethal monstrosities like zombies and weaponized, reptilian assassins. The 2004 GameCube edition refines the PlayStation original's terrifying premise while enhancing the visuals and adding terrifying surprises like resurrected zombies that come back as fast and hard as something out of *28 Days Later*. Unforgettable scares like bloodthirsty canines smashing through windows spawned a legion of masochistic fans and dozens of copycat developers. The franchise's quality has fluctuated over the years, but its legacy lingers like a deep scar. ♦



ORI

AND THE

BLIND
FOREST

A MULTINATIONAL TEAM BANDS TOGETHER
TO CREATE THEIR DREAM PROJECT



» PLATFORM Xbox One • Xbox 360 • PC » STYLE 1-Player Action » PUBLISHER Microsoft Studios
» DEVELOPER Moon Studios » RELEASE Holiday (Xbox One, PC), 2015 (Xbox 360)



S

uper Metroid and Castlevania: Symphony of the Night are widely regarded as two of the best games of all time, but official 2D sequels have been few and far between recently – and usually relegated to the handheld space. That absence has spurred indie developers to co-opt the classic formula and make it their own.

With its new title, Ori and the Blind Forest, Moon Studios seeks to deliver a Metroid-like experience with a mix of pixel-perfect platforming à la Super Meat Boy and the crisp visuals of Studio Ghibli's animated films. It sounds like a powerful cocktail that may appeal to millions of gamers, and Microsoft has already bet big on this new IP. But can a ragtag team of developers from around the world – many of whom have never met – overcome its unique development challenges and create an instant classic?

BY BEN REEVES

A MEETING OF LIKE MINDS

Thomas Mahler didn't take the traditional route into game design. The Austrian native studied sculpture in Vienna. Traditional sculpture work proved a challenging career path, so Mahler started freelancing, making digital 3D models to help pay the bills. After working up a sizeable portfolio, Mahler began getting job offers from the likes of Disney and Blizzard, and eventually took a job working on StarCraft II.

Mahler wasn't content working on other people's ideas, so after putting in a full day of work at Blizzard, he would go home and tinker with his own game concepts. One idea featured a little forest spirit named Ori who traveled through 2D painted backgrounds. Mahler didn't think he could turn his ideas into bankable products on his own. He wouldn't have to.

Gennadiy Korol cut his teeth scripting tools for feature films in Israel. He loved everything about the technical aspect of computer graphics and animation, and since many designers struggled with the complicated interfaces behind 3D modeling and rendering software, Korol had built up a side business making tools to assist designers with their work.

While scrolling through forums about Autodesk's Maya 3D animation software, Korol met Mahler.

"I was always going on about how badly these things were designed, how you need way too many hotkeys, and how this is totally not like sculpture where you put forms on it and shape it," Mahler says. "So when I first meet Gennadiy, I was probably screaming at him because his tools weren't working the way I wanted them to."

"They always worked perfectly," Korol quips.

"Yeah, he's probably right," Mahler says.

The two bonded over programming tools, and started to dream about designing their own games together. Mahler and Korol formed Moon Studios and over the course of six months they prototyped a demo for a first-person shooter with real-time strategy elements they jokingly called War Soup. Both developers felt they had a solid concept that they could pitch to a publisher, but selling a game takes time, and the two young designers quickly grew restless.

"We said, 'While we're waiting to sign this game let's do a smaller game; let's do something we can sign in half a year,'" Korol says.

That half-a-year project became Ori, and evolved into a four-year development timeline that has consumed their lives and turned their two-man studio into a 20-plus person team spread across the globe.

A BASHFUL SPRITE

Ori is a forest spirit born into exile and raised by a loving bear-like creature named Nuru. However, when Ori's mother dies, the young creature must go on a journey of discovery and ultimately fulfill his destiny by saving a dying forest. Ori is joined by a light spirit named Sein, who teaches Ori about the world and assists him while fighting monsters by unleashing a series of energy-based attacks.

Around the time that Mahler and Korol started plotting out Ori and the Blind Forest, the indie platformer Super Meat Boy released for Xbox 360 and PC. "We were very inspired by Super Meat Boy," Korol says. "We needed something to wrap the game concepts around, and so we decided to make it a platformer."

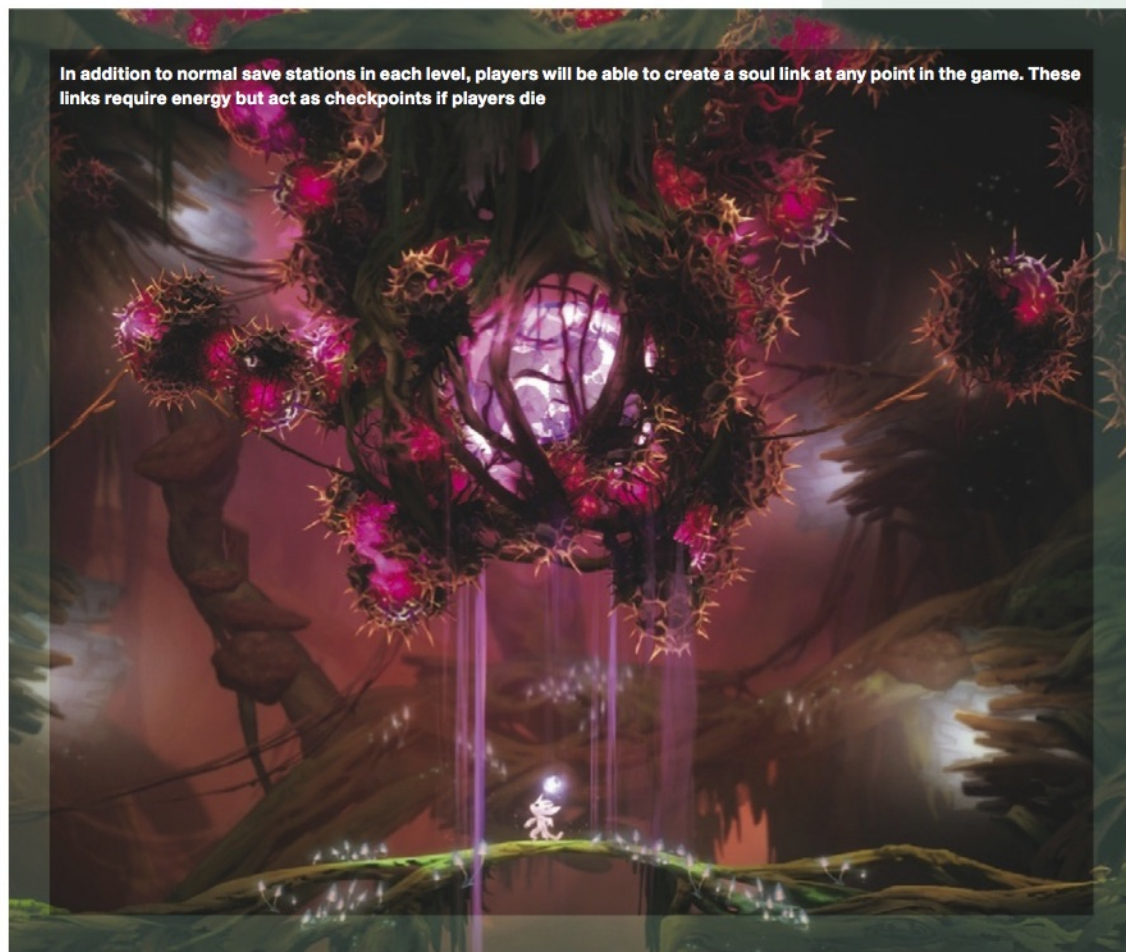
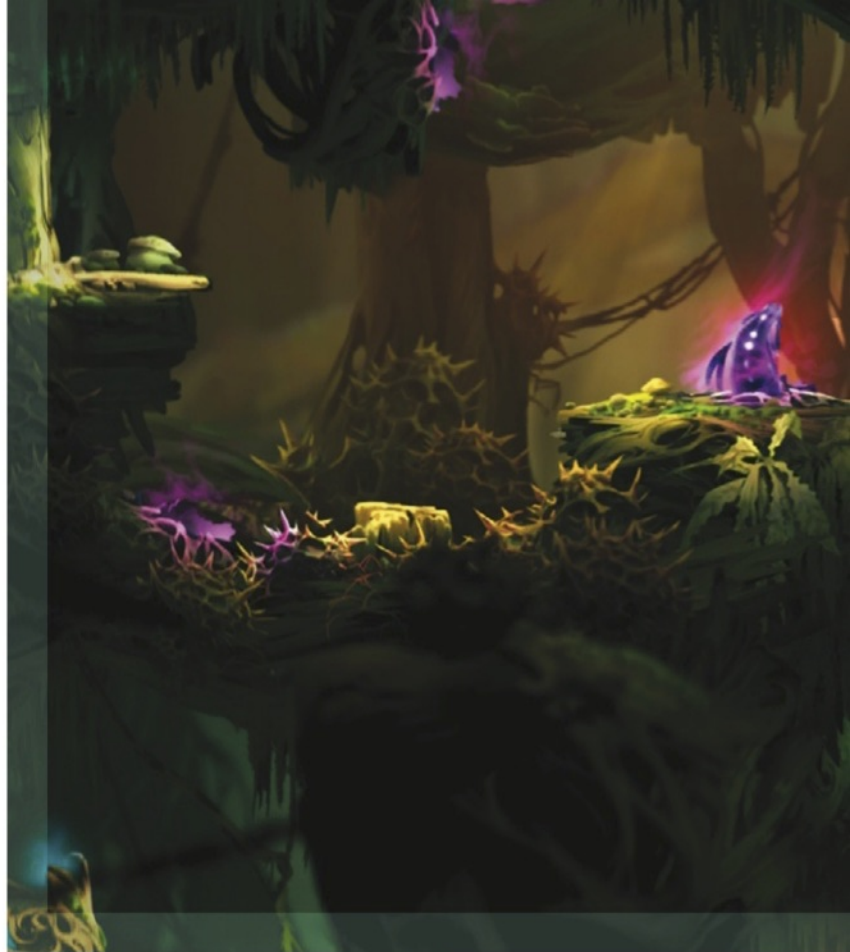
While, Moon Studios has always sought to emulate Metroid's classic 2D exploration, at its heart, Ori is also a platformer. Many of the skills and power-ups that Ori acquires through his journey reflect this. In true Metroid fashion, Ori gains new abilities – such as double jump and wall run – that allow him to access new areas

and find hidden secrets and upgrades scattered around the world.

A great example of this is the bash attack. Early on in the game, Ori is tasked with bringing water back to a dying forest. As he searches for a way to do this, he travels to an area called the Ginso Tree and learns this new ability. Bash allows Ori to grab onto objects, enemies, and projectiles before bouncing off them and shooting off to higher platforms. Interestingly, the object that Ori bashes gets thrown in the opposite direction. This mechanic has given Moon plenty of opportunities to craft platforming puzzles where Ori has to throw enemies into deadly traps or bash off enemy projectiles to reach high ledges.

We play through one sequence where we must toss an enemy projectile through a series of redirecting portals in order to send it to the top of the screen and smash apart a barricade. Ori's controls are instantly intuitive, and it's a lot of fun just to bound around Ori's lush environments. This is likely because Moon spent a full year iterating on the controls before working on the art.

"People always talk about how gorgeous Ori is but we've actually spent more time working on the gameplay," Korol says. "We always start with the solids; if enemies aren't fun to fight when they're jumping boxes then they're not going to be fun to fight when they're fully produced 3D models."



In addition to normal save stations in each level, players will be able to create a soul link at any point in the game. These links require energy but act as checkpoints if players die

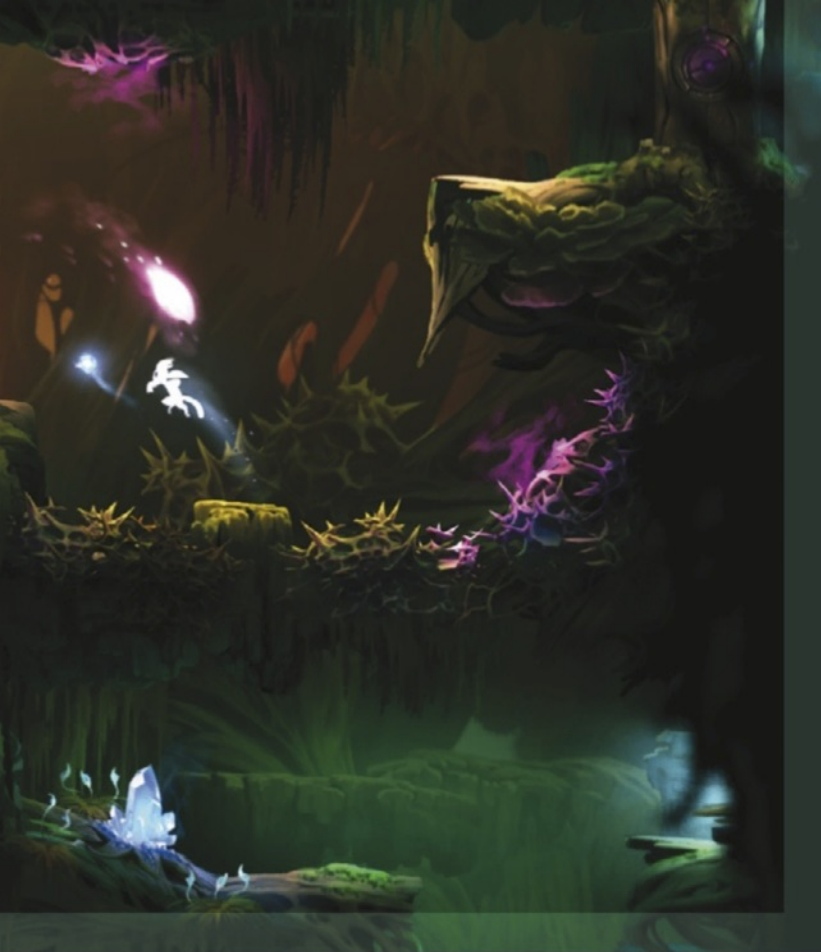
GLOBAL ENTERPRISE

With the traditional development model, a core group of designers decides on their project and then starts gathering a larger team into a single space where they share ideas and build on each other's work. Modern technology, however, has freed developers to start working from home; Moon Studios has chosen to allow all of its developers to work remotely.

"At traditional studios you have this problem of, 'Hey we found this person with a portfolio who has exactly what we need, but they're not able to relocate because of this or that,'" Mahler says. "With Moon I really wanted to try this concept of having a studio that was spread across the world. I want Moon Studios to be like The Beatles or Oasis or something – a place where a group of really talented people work on something that they really feel passionate about and then accomplish something that none of them could do on their own."

Two years into the project, Moon Studios brought a demo of the game to Microsoft in order to find out if the publisher would continue funding their game. Not only did Microsoft agree to see the project through to finish, it gave the game a big spotlight during both its E3 and Gamescom press conferences this year.

To celebrate this milestone, several of Moon's developers met up in Disneyland Paris. Even though Mahler and Korol had been working together for over five years at that point, it was the first time that the two had met in person. Some



PUSHING AGAINST GRAVITY

Working so hard on the game for over four years has allowed Moon Studios to create an adventure with a diverse amount of gameplay.

"I always loved this thing about Nintendo," Mahler says. "In the older Nintendo games in the '80s and early '90s, you always had this feeling that there were so many different ideas in a single game, and you'd think, 'Another developer would have made five games out of this.' We wanted to do something with Ori that felt complex and new while staying simple and intuitive."

In an effort to crack Nintendo's classic magic formula, Moon wants every area of Ori to center on a different gameplay hook. The Ginso Tree area, where Ori learns the bash attack, is inspired by Kid Icarus, and is full of vertical levels and portals that send Ori warping to the opposite side of the screen whenever he walks past the edge. But these mechanics are limited to the Ginso Tree; other areas of the game explore completely different concepts.

For example, the Forlorn Ruins are a distressed icy environment littered with what was once the glorious architecture of a secret tribe of creatures within the forests of Nibel. Even though Ori doesn't understand it, he interacts with this technology to manipulate the world around him. Certain orbs that Ori picks up warp gravity within a localized area, allowing him to walk on walls and ceilings.

Some of the gameplay sequences we saw Ori tackle in the Forlorn Ruins had the sprite jumping across a series of platforms while running up the side of a wall, tilting gravity so he could fall sideways across large gaps, and walking across a ceiling before dropping the orb to return gravity to normal and fall into otherwise unreachable areas. Moon Studios has had a lot of fun playing with gravity, and it hopes players will too.

If the Forlorn Ruins and the Ginso Tree are a slice of what's to come, then Ori and the Blind Forest looks to be full of diverse gameplay sequences. The team has spent four years creating a lot of content for one game, but Moon says that they've cut more content from the game than they've put into it.

"We've actually tried to make the game as short as we possibly can," Korol says. "Because we feel like it's better to make a digestible experience that's extremely polished rather than a longer game that isn't as polished. We wanted to make the smallest tightest package that we could."

Talking about the amount of content you've cut from your game is an unconventional promotional tactic, but Moon Studios is an unconventional studio. After blending together elements from some of the industry's most beloved works, Moon has created a game that is distinctly its own. If Ori and the Blind Forest proves as promising as it looks, then Moon Studios will have plenty of concepts on the cutting room floor to revisit for a sequel. ♦

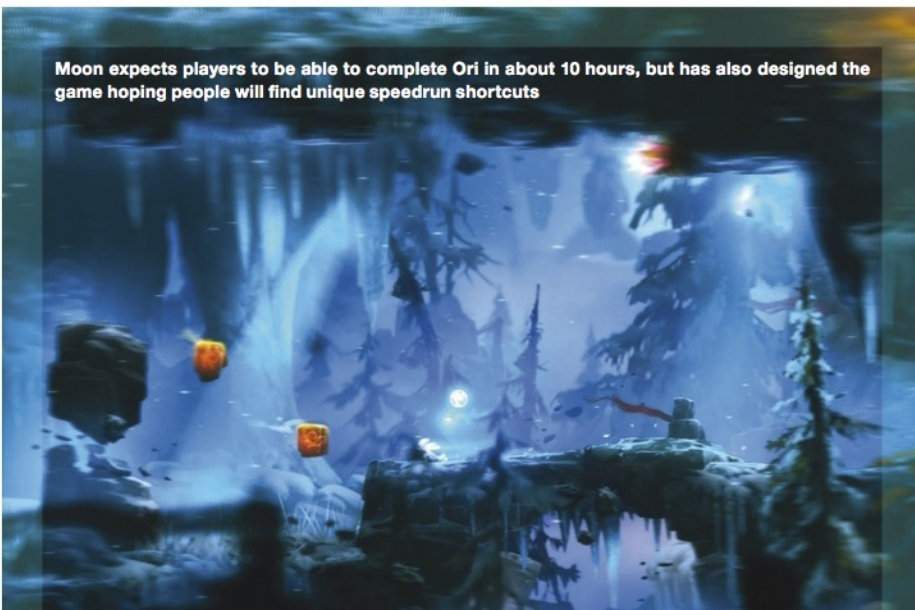
of the other team members didn't shake hands until earlier this year at E3, which is no wonder since the entire team is spread across countries as far ranging as Austria, Germany, Israel, the United States, the Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, and Australia.

"It would be nice to have a few more water-cooler moments, because you don't really have much of that aside from people making fun of each other on Skype," Mahler says. "But my experience of workflow at places like Blizzard was that if you had a problem then you needed to run over to the tech department and hope the person

you need to talk to was there, and then bring them back to your desk before showing them the problem. There are inefficiencies even in having everyone in the same building."

Moon Studios has had to deal with the communication lag that happens when talking to people on the other side of the world, but the benefit is that there is always someone working on the game. Mahler can send out an email to the team before heading to bed and then wake up and review the edits over his morning coffee. For close to four years, people have been working on Ori and the Blind Forest nearly 24/7.

Moon expects players to be able to complete Ori in about 10 hours, but has also designed the game hoping people will find unique speedrun shortcuts



The Forlorn Ruins are littered with ancient, abandoned technology that will allow Ori to manipulate gravitational fields





INTO THE FIRE

BY JOE JUBA

SAINTS ROW: GAT OUT OF HELL

► PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC ► STYLE: 1-Player Action (2-Player Online)
► PUBLISHER: Deep Silver ► DEVELOPER: Volition/High Voltage Software ► RELEASE: February 3



The 3rd Street Saints have emerged victorious in the face of the most dangerous and improbable threats imaginable, from crazed Luchadores to space-faring alien conquerors. Under the leadership of a single individual, they became the most powerful people in the world – and when the world blew up, they took over the universe. Where do the Saints go from here? Well, that’s the problem: Their boss has been kidnapped by Satan, dragged to hell, and betrothed to the devil’s daughter. Before the Saints can move on to their next big thing, they need to get their boss back. If you’re wondering who among the Saints is confident and crazy enough to fight the Prince of Darkness, then you don’t know Johnny Gat.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Saints Row may not be the grittiest or most realistic open-world series, but that doesn’t mean players can’t get attached to the characters. If you need proof, just search online for Johnny Gat tribute videos. When the fan-favorite Saints lieutenant was apparently killed in Saints Row: The Third, the community responded with a flood of memorials to the trigger-happy psychopath. However, that reaction paled in comparison to the enthusiasm when developer Volition revealed that Johnny wasn’t actually dead – and he would return for Saints Row IV. Even though the Saints’ boss is the player character, Johnny is the most recognizable face of the series. The Saints Row IV

expansion, Gat Out of Hell, finally lets him step into the spotlight. Don’t let the title fool you, though; he shares the starring role with fellow Saint Kinzie Kensington.

“We knew we wanted to do an expansion pack,” says senior producer Jim Boone. “We wanted to do something fun and new, and so then it was just a matter of trying to figure out what makes sense.” Thankfully, practically anything goes in the Saints Row universe, so what “makes sense” can easily include a guns-blazing trip to the underworld and a confrontation against Satan himself. That’s the basic premise of Gat Out of Hell; it may not be the next full-scale title from developer Volition, but it serves as an epilogue to the Saints as we have known them. It concludes their trajectory from a motley street gang to intergalactic rulers, and adds “slayers of infernal evils” to their accomplishments.

Building on the mechanics and superpower-focused gameplay of the original, Gat Out of Hell lets players freely swap control between Johnny and Kinzie (or team up in online co-op) to rescue their leader from a marriage arranged by the devil. “We wanted to make sure that – since the story is about Gat – the other player could have the opportunity to play as one of the female characters,” says associate producer Kate Nelson. “And I think the answer to ‘Why Kinzie?’ is that she is also one of the fan favorites. You have Gat and Kinzie, and those two can play off each other really well. She’s all about intellect and wants to come up with a master plan, and Gat’s plan is ‘I want to shoot the devil in the face.’”

During a visit to Volition, I played about 90 minutes of an in-progress version of Gat Out of Hell (which is being co-developed with High Voltage Software). From what I saw, it strikes the silly and satirical tone that we want and expect from Saints Row. Few settings have the potential to be as bleak and grim as hell, but that isn’t the case here. Desiccated husks cruise around on motorcycles. William Shakespeare is working as a DJ at a nightclub called The Tempest. Johnny gives the thumbs-up when he dies by falling in lava, *Terminator 2*-style. Despite the lakes of fire and tortured souls, the team isn’t taking hell too seriously. “If it was more Dante’s Inferno, then that wouldn’t fit,” Boone says.

WELCOME TO HELL

Don't expect a long prologue or tutorial segment to ease you into Johnny and Kinzie's adventures in the inferno. When you start a new game, the intro is framed in a new storybook aesthetic in which the narrator (Jane Austen from *Saints Row IV*) sets the stage. Then a brief cinematic shows the Saints gang celebrating Kinzie's birthday on the spaceship, but when they break out the Ouija board, a portal opens up and sucks in the boss. Johnny decides to attempt a rescue, and reluctantly brings Kinzie along after she pulls the "It's my birthday" card.

Once they get sucked into the portal, Johnny and Kinzie find themselves in hell. However, it isn't just an endless expanse of craters, volcanoes, and lava. Hell is about half the size of Steelport, and is split up into five districts. One is the Forge, an industrial area. The Badlands is another, and more traditionally hellish – fire and brimstone – with Blackbeard's pirate ship resting on the rocks. You also see slums, a downtown area, and an entertainment district. "We continue that idea of a city," Nelson says. "We have our hell city." The different parts of the underworld add some visual variety to keep the environment interesting, and ensure that you aren't just causing mayhem in a blasted wasteland.

Johnny and Kinzie find an unlikely ally once they arrive in hell: Dane Vogel, the primary villain from *Saints Row 2*, who rules the industrial district from the Ultor building. Vogel explains that the Saints' boss is responsible for more chaos and destruction than anyone in human history, which Satan thinks is the perfect qualification for an in-law. Therefore, Satan kidnapped the boss to marry his daughter, Jezebel.

Vogel isn't the only familiar face residing in hell. Considering that the *Saints Row* universe is filled with some awful people, you shouldn't be surprised to see lots of them wandering around hell – especially since practically everyone was killed when Earth blew up in *Saints Row IV*. Who made the cut? "We had a lot of people here waving their flags for certain characters," Nelson says. "We can't do them all – but we'd love to."

I won't spoil all of the cameos, but there is one in particular that longtime *Saints Row* fans will appreciate. Dex, a former *Saints* lieutenant who betrays the protagonist in *Saints Row 2*, never got his comeuppance. That changes with *Gat Out of Hell*; Dex is one of the tormented souls walking around the world, and players can finally kill him – seven times, actually, and he becomes harder to beat each time you fight him. As satisfying as they are, these encounters with Dex aren't scripted; you see him in the world and decide if you want to try taking him down. In fact, that's how just about everything works in hell.



Johnny and Kinzie find new weapons to fight the legions of hell. This demon is called a Dark Inciter, and has a shield that needs to come down before you can do damage

THE PLAYGROUND

The closest thing to a formal structure or direction you find in *Gat Out of Hell* is when Vogel points you toward the leaders of the other four districts (William Shakespeare, Vlad the Impaler, Blackbeard, and sisters Kiki and Viola DeWynter from *Saints Row: The Third*) and suggests you recruit them. These missions are brief, serving more to acquaint players with the geography of the world than present any challenging gameplay. After you complete them, the map shows you the location of almost every activity, and it's up to you to forge your own path.

There are no traditional story missions. Instead, everything you do contributes to your level. Getting a medal in an activity, completing a cumulative challenge, and otherwise disrupting Satan's affairs raises your level and attracts his attention. Reaching certain levels advances you to the next beat in the story. For example, the cutscene/musical number that introduces Satan and Jezebel (see sidebar on next page) happens at level 5. Your final confrontation is unlocked at level 15, though

you can advance as high as 20. That isn't as high as you can level in the main games, but it provides plenty of content for an expansion. "With it being such a sandbox, depending on skill level, we've been seeing it come in around seven or eight hours for critical path," says Boone. "That's just leveling up to get to Satan."

I did a wide variety of things during my time in the sandbox. I played Torment Fraud – a variation on the popular insurance fraud activity in which you inflict suffering on a tortured soul. I stole an emergency vehicle – the Rambulance – and started a rampage with the goal of running over as many people as possible before the timer ran out. I entered the Marshaling Grounds, an arena-like challenge where I tried (and failed) to take out a bunch of angry demons. Many of these diversions are similar to things fans have seen in previous entries, but with a hell-themed twist. One brand new activity is called Salvation, where players use their new set of wings to catch falling bodies mid-flight to build up a multiplier without touching the ground.

You aren't just limited to flying in the minigames; it's your primary mode of transportation. "We tried to figure

RE-ELECTED

Gat Out of Hell is releasing on January 27, alongside *Saints Row IV: Re-Elected*. This remastered edition is the full base game, plus all of the DLC. It also features community challenges and some voice-activated powers and commands. The graphics may not be a drastic step forward, but this version still gives fans a way to experience the complete *Saints Row IV* package.



Hell is about half the size of Steelport, and it is split up into different districts to give the landscape some variety



INFERNAL ARSENAL

Vehicles used to be one of the primary ways players were rewarded in *Saints Row*, but *Gat Out of Hell* finds other ways to make your exploits worthwhile. Upgrades to familiar powers like *Stomp* and *Blast* enhance your combat abilities, and you have the new *Summon* power that conjures demonic imps to attack your foes. Like the base game, you jump and fly through the world collecting clusters ("soul clusters" instead of "data clusters" this time) to upgrade your superpowers.

Beyond powers, a collection of new and crazy weapons entices you to see what hell has to offer. You get a warhammer with a charged area-of-effect smash, a rocket launcher that fires exploding frogs, and a locust gun. That's just a small handful of the options; each of the categories (pistol, melee, SMG, etc.) has three weapons to unlock. "Three per each class felt generous for an expansion pack," Boone says. "But with it being an open-world game, we felt like, 'Let's be generous.'" All upgrades and weapons carry over between characters, so you don't need to worry about Kinzie being underpowered if you start playing as Gat, or vice versa.

You can find weapons, buy them, or get them as quest rewards. A handful of weapons are particularly special, since there are seven modeled after each of the seven deadly sins – all in different categories. For instance, the greed-based weapon is the *Diamond Sting*, an SMG that causes enemies to die in a shower of money. The sloth weapon, *Armchair-mageddon*, is a rocket-equipped recliner with chain guns in the armrests. These special weapons are also obtained in ways that reflect the associated sin; *Diamond Sting* costs a lot of money, while *Armchair-mageddon* is just sitting on a rooftop, waiting to be found.

These weapons, alongside all of the new abilities, give players plenty of ways to make hell even more chaotic. The lack of explicit direction provides the freedom to engage with the world the way you want to, and you see the consequences of your actions manifest in the multiple endings – which the team acknowledges but doesn't want to spoil.

For those who have completed *Saints Row IV*, certain revelations at the end of that game open up tantalizing possibilities for upcoming installments in the series. While Jane Austen returns as the distinguished narrator for *Gat Out of Hell*, *Vollition* isn't revealing whether the time-traveling technology that introduced her into the *Saints Row* universe plays a significant role in the events of this expansion. A concept that big might be better suited to a full-scale release, but the future (or past?) of the *Saints* is a mystery. For the present, *Vollition* and *High Voltage* are focusing on putting a fresh spin on what fans loved about *Saints Row IV* while delivering one hell of a good time. ♦



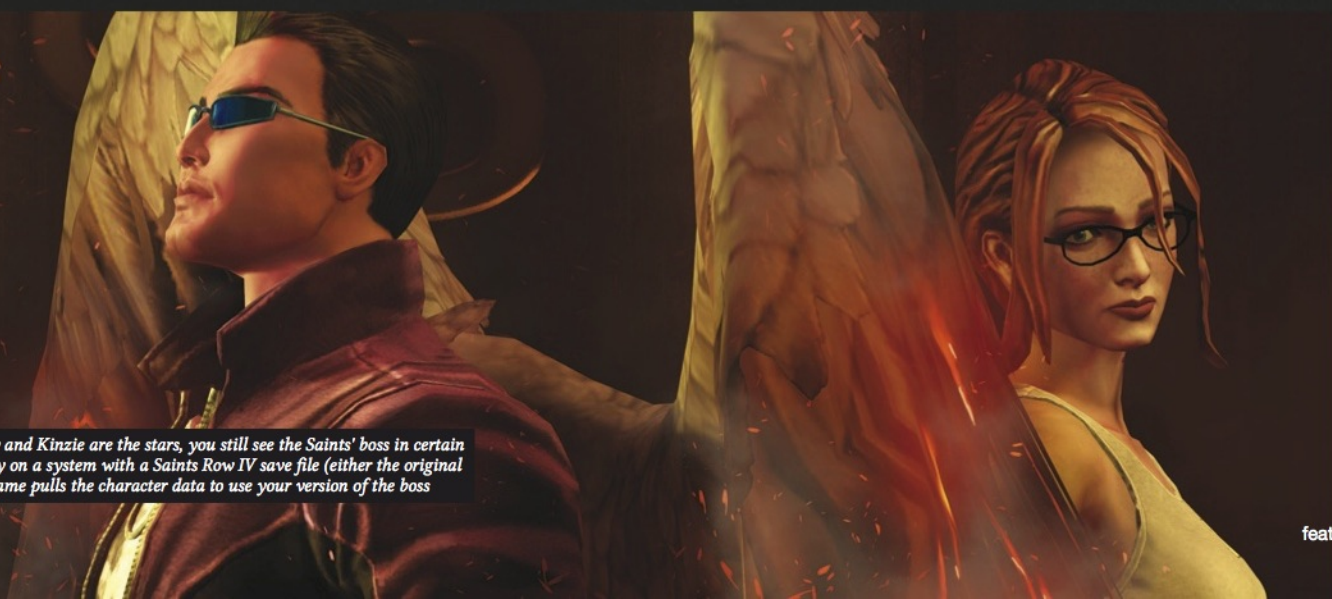
THE SOUND OF MUSIC

The *Saints Row* series has had plenty of crazy moments, but it still manages to delight fans with its ability to pull off surprising twists on gameplay and story. *Gat Out of Hell* continues the tradition with a full-blown, Disney-inspired musical number. This five-minute sequence introduces the key characters Satan and Jezebel as they sing about their thoughts and intentions. "It's one thing to do it in the credit sequence," says creative director Steve Jaros. "This is the critical path...it is true story conveyance in what the actual plot is and the dynamic – it's just happening in song." From the melody to the choreography, the whole number feels like a faithful tribute to the Disney movies from which it draws inspiration. Of course, with lyrics like, "You have to stay the course, and kill without remorse," it still stays true to the tone of *Saints Row*. "Were the world mine, I would have loved the entire game to be a musical," Jaros says. "Maybe one sweet day, I can have a *Saints Row* musical."

out what we could do that's still different, but that pays off some of the things that people liked," Boone says. "I think navigation was one of the biggest ones; people liked that, but we'd get the question, 'Why don't you get flight? You're a superhero.'" Thanks to Johnny and Kinzie obtaining Lucifer's cracked halo, flight is now an option. Don't expect to cruise around like Superman, though. Figuring out your wings takes timing and finesse, since you need to be aware of your momentum. After a little practice (and a few upgrades), you'll be getting from one end of hell to the other in no time. It's an exhilarating and fun way to get around, so why would you need to get into a car instead? That was a question even with *Saints Row IV*, since the jump and glide options rendered vehicles irrelevant.

"We continued that route [with the expansion]," says Boone. "Now you really don't need cars, but it felt like the right thing to do. It felt like a sacrifice that was okay to continue to make. In fact, we've minimized them a bit more than we did in *Saints Row IV*, while still adding some new mechanics with diversions for those people who really love to drive cars around."

Even though Johnny and Kinzie are the stars, you still see the Saints' boss in certain cutscenes. If you play on a system with a *Saints Row IV* save file (either the original or *Re-Elected*), the game pulls the character data to use your version of the boss





Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare

A faster, more powerful Call of Duty multiplayer experience

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter
(18-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Sledgehammer Games
(PS4, Xbox One, PC)
High Moon Studios
(PS3, 360)

» **Release**
November 4

Each August, like clockwork, Activision gathers press and fans for a sneak peek at multiplayer for the next Call of Duty title. This year, speculation has run rampant given the futuristic setting and exoskeleton augmentations we first revealed in our June issue. Fans have been wondering how new lead studio Sledgehammer Games would put its own mark on the best-selling annual franchise.

The changes to the formula for Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare combines pillars of years gone by with many new elements that impact gameplay and progression. The biggest changes to this year's installment center on the "exo." This combination of jump pack, tactical augmentation, and weapons platform changes core elements of Call of Duty's familiar multiplayer. Each player is equipped with one, enabling double jumping by default. Boost jumping is crucial for survival, and staying on one horizontal plane for too long is a recipe for an early respawn.

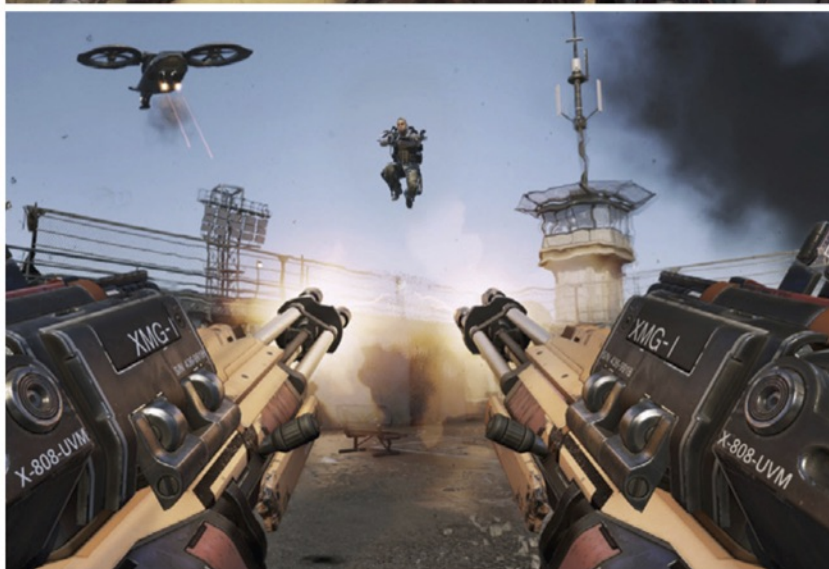
"The exo movement was one of the very first things we started with," says lead multiplayer designer Greg Reisdorf, looking back at the game's development over the past

three years. "Most of those three years was spent taking the boost jump and the dodge and figuring out how to mold them together into a seamless experience on the controller." The maps are all designed around the exo, giving players the opportunity to rocket above opponents, dash to the side, slam into them from above, and even hover in the air with the right ability customization.

Everything feels faster and more fluid, without sacrificing tactical decision making. Exo abilities take the place of tactical weaponry on the gamepad and offer a variety of functions, including advanced healing, cloak, speed boosting, and a tactical energy shield.

Exo abilities are balanced by tying their use to single-charge battery. You can toggle your ability off to conserve energy, but once your





power cell is empty, it won't recharge until you respawn. None of these feel overpowered in our limited hands-on time (you can still see a shimmer of a cloaked player, and a tactical shield won't stay around forever), but they force players to adapt to another set of variables.

Another major change comes in the form of supply drops. While similar to Battlefield's battlepacks, supply drops are earned via an under-the-hood formula instead of leveling. Each contains a combination of weapon loot, character gear, and reinforcements. These come in three rarities: Enlisted, Pro, and Elite.

Weapon loot is one way to unlock the 10 variations of standard weapons (another is by completing challenges). "It's not a randomly generated system," Reisdorf says. "We're balancing each one independently. The other part about that is all the weapons have a signature." For example, the Bal-27 assault rifle fires faster the longer you depress the trigger no matter which of the 10 variations you are wielding.

Reinforcements are one-time use, rare supply drop items. For instance, one automatically drops in at four minutes into the match and gives you another perk or score streak when you collect it. They are relatively small boosts in the scope of an entire match, and they are a way for less-experienced players to try out scorestreaks they might not otherwise unlock.

Character gear is a class of aesthetic add-ons for your custom operator. Helmets,

eyewear, vests, shirts, pants, exos, and more can help you customize your look. None of it impacts gameplay, but it's a great way to show off your loot in the new virtual lobby, which gives you a chance to see other players as more than just a gamercard.

Mechanically, this is the fastest Call of Duty experience we've played, forcing a greater awareness of vertical positioning. You won't find players wall-running or mechs running rampant like Titanfall, but boosting opens up cat and mouse play.

The four maps we played are well-tuned, combining tight corridors with open spaces.

There is still some room to improve the subtle cues that tell players that they can't mantle in certain places or that the seemingly accessible ledge is actually out of bounds. We expect those are elements that could be tightened up before launch.

Sledgehammer seems to have balanced Call of Duty's familiar multiplayer with new elements that give a solid nudge to the formula. The result at this early stage is the same spectacular action with enough new elements to be the freshest take on the well-worn series we've seen in years.

» **Michael Futter**



Pick 13

This year's create-a-class format is called Pick 13, a variation on Black Ops II's Pick 10 system. Each weapon, attachment, ability, perk, lethal, and wildcard has a point cost. This year, the number of scorestreaks (returning from Black Ops II) can be customized.

Players can opt to take as many as four and as few as zero into the fight. For players who tend to find themselves respawning frequently, dumping extra scorestreaks for more attachments, an extra lethal, or wildcards that enable a second primary weapon or trading in an exo ability or lethal for an extra of the other might be worthwhile.

Scorestreaks can also be tweaked with behavior modules, giving them slightly different properties. Many streaks offer a "support module" that allows users to carry points across respawns (similar to the support-class killstreaks in some previous installments).

Advanced Warfare also introduces co-op scorestreaks. Approximately 25 percent of them will have an option to allow a second player to assist in a non-lethal capacity (unless a module upgrades that role). The downside is that both players are vulnerable when controlling a co-op scorestreak, but the possible enemy casualties make it worthwhile in some situations.

Dragon Age: Inquisition

Build power alone, but wield it with friends



» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing
(4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
BioWare

» **Release**
November 18

Gamers are just a few short months away from starting their own Inquisition and jumping back into the Dragon Age universe. You might think that you know all of Inquisition's major features this close to the release, but BioWare is still rolling out the surprises. From new mechanics and areas to entire modes, the scope of the adventure just gets bigger and bigger.

The most surprising revelation is the addition of multiplayer. Like Mass Effect 3's online component, it involves friends partnering up for co-op action. I visited BioWare's Edmonton studio to get my hands on this new mode, but I also spoke with the team about a major hub of the single-player campaign: Skyhold, the Inquisition headquarters.

Given the amount of depth in both of these areas, it's hard to believe that they only represent a fraction of the entire experience. They are interesting individually, but how they mesh with Inquisition as a whole could add a dimension of customization and replayability that we haven't yet seen in the series.

Your Base Of Operations

As the Inquisitor, you must travel across Ferelden and Orlais to address various problems and threats. However, you don't spend all of your time on the road. You need a place

to consolidate your strength. That's where Skyhold comes in. "It's a place from which to project your power," says creative director Mike Laidlaw.

Skyhold is the fortress that serves as the Inquisition's base, and as you gain power and influence, that is reflected back at the castle. Though it starts out in bad shape, your efforts transform Skyhold. "Over time, as you progress through the story, you get to see it rebuilt and more areas open up," Laidlaw says. "It goes from 'kind of wrecked castle' to 'your castle.' The walls are fixed. Your soldiers are patrolling. You see your support staff growing in number. Merchants come to set up a station. You get that feeling of it becoming a grand, central hub."

The base is more than just a place for the Inquisition to gather. On the gameplay front, players are able to chart the Inquisition's course at the War Table, spending power to unlock new areas and operations. It is also where you can purchase various global upgrades, like increased potion capacity or improved harvesting. You can even sit on your throne and pass judgment on agitators and other individuals who come to the Inquisition's attention.

"All of that Inquisition decision-making is there," says producer Cameron Lee. "It's

also where the majority of your crafting and modification happens...As you explore the world and play different quests and side content, you gain access to, say, different thrones you can put in place. Different decorations, different heraldry. So you can customize and make it grow based on your choices and actions."

Whether you surround yourself with Dalish carvings or arcane relics, your decisions are all about personal choice. By design, Skyhold's appearance won't carry any big gameplay effects. "The problem with going too heavy with game mechanics on that is, suddenly, you're min-maxing your base," Laidlaw says. "If we did a system where 'This outfit does this, and it's the best outfit,' well, now I have to wear that outfit or sacrifice my gameplay. So, something like what banner or carpentry I use, to me, doesn't have to have a gameplay effect. If you're into it, I don't want you to feel like you're being penalized."

A core part of the Inquisition experience is feeling like a leader. While it's easy to imagine how that manifests while directing your followers in combat, Skyhold provides a different way to witness the effects of your choices. It is the embodiment of your authority, and gradually becomes a place that players can call home.

Adventures In Co-Op

One of the limitations of single-player RPGs is that they aren't the most replayable games. Even with a variety of choices and consequences, the prospect of going through a 40-plus hour game a second time is only appealing to a small segment of hardcore fans. Like Mass Effect 3 before it, Inquisition is expanding beyond its single-player story and giving fans a way to keep the adventure going long after the main campaign is complete.

Those familiar with Mass Effect's foray into co-op already have a general idea what to expect from Inquisition's, but it doesn't just trade out assault rifles for swords. Instead of fighting off waves of enemies in the same area, you form a team of up to four Inquisition agents and dive into a "campaign" – a modular and randomized map. As you move through

the rooms and fight groups of enemies, you rely on specialized roles and teamwork to win the encounters.

For instance, legionnaires should be on the front lines soaking up damage, while archers should stay away from the fray and focus on dealing damage from a distance. These tactics change depending on the specific enemies you face, so you aren't just repeating actions in the same order for every battle. I played an archer during my matches, and though we didn't successfully complete a campaign (which BioWare says should take about 20 to 30 minutes), I had a lot of fun coordinating with my teammates to handle the encounters.

Whether you win or lose your match, you are rewarded with experience and gold. The experience helps you level, which in turn grants you skill points to spend on new

abilities. The gold is used to buy chests – random packs of cards that contain loot like weapons, classes, and potions. These chests can also be purchased with real money, but it merely speeds up the acquisition process. You won't get anything that you couldn't get by saving up in-game money. If you get any items you don't like, you can break them down into components and use the new crafting system to turn them into useful gear.

The persistent character progression is an impressive hook, tapping into the same addictive loop as that Mass Effect 3 did. After finishing one match, I was eager to jump into another. Even better, BioWare plans to support the multiplayer mode with free DLC and weekend challenges long after release, so players can easily find reasons to keep playing. » **Joe Juba**



Special encounters and fights against bosses help punctuate the multiplayer experience



Skyhold is your base of operations, and as you rebuild it, you can customize its appearance



Templar's Regalia (Devotion)

47 Armor Rating
COMMON HEAVY ARMOR

ITEM LEVEL 2

■ +2% MELEE DEFENSE

○ Empty Heavy Arms

○ Empty Heavy Legs

RESTRICTION: TEMPLAR ONLY
NOT SALVAGEABLE



Templar's Regalia (Devotion)

New Armor Appearance: Templar

Gold earned from multiplayer matches can be exchanged for chests that include random classes, weapons, and items



Bloodborne

Souls bathed in blood

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4

» **Style**
1-Player Action/
Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
From Software
SCE Japan Studio

» **Release**
Spring

Sony's PS4 exclusive Bloodborne was unveiled at E3 this year, but the reveal left us with more questions than answers. After Gamescom, we have a much clearer sense of what to expect next year. Bloodborne could almost safely wear the Souls series tag, but it has enough differences to make it a powerhouse all on its own. Perhaps the biggest and most significant diversion from the Souls games is the combat, which is slightly faster with a decidedly offensive slant. The days of hiding behind a shield, studying the enemy, and becoming comfortable with an encounter are gone. One could assume that this turns the game away from the precise combat that the Souls series is known for, perhaps devolving things into a hack and slash bout of little consequence. This is far from the truth thanks to the regain system, which forces the player into continual risk-reward battles that up the ante on already tense encounters.

The regain system gives you a small window in which you can land a successful attack


on an opponent to regain some of your lost health. This is tied to weapon speed, so you get more life back for landing a slow ponderous blow with an axe than you would with a speedy sword. This creates a combat loop that prevents the player from ever becoming comfortable and requires continual, fast decision-making. Should you attack an enemy after you've been hit to try and recover some lost resources at the risk of taking more damage? Should you just accept your losses and watch your blood ebb away because the situation is too dangerous to counterattack? This system emulates the best parts of the Souls games by providing constant friction; there is never a time where you feel safe by throwing up a shield block. Rolling and evasion remain important staples and complement the frenetic pacing of combat. Instead of "changing stances" like you would in a traditional Souls title, weapons themselves transform to deliver different movesets and functionality.

The item system moves a bit off course

from the Souls titles as well. Healing items have been moved out of inventory slots and are simply accessible at all times, with the number of currently available heals displayed at the top left of the screen. In the Souls games players were always placing Estus Flasks and healing items into the active item slot, so other items kept being ignored. The new system is designed to encourage playing around with other tools while still having access to precious heals. We played with a few of them, combining oil and Molotov cocktails for an explosive recipe, and flinging pebbles to draw the attention of stray enemies to separate them from packs of foes. In addition to having an active tool slot at all times, players can also keep tabs on their current readied ammunition in the ammo slot, for using various ranged weapons like the blunderbuss.

As with many Souls games, Bloodborne sends the player into atmospheric areas with unknown and often disturbing-to-behold enemies. The journey into gothic horror/Victorian era as a backdrop seems well-suited for the living world of nightmares, moreso than the medieval dark fantasy realms of Dark Souls. During a hands-off demo session we saw a new area known as Grave Town, where the player was besieged by a swarm of frenzied old women wielding flaming weapons and scythes. The player would have easily been defeated, but he rolled into them in order to create enough breathing room to win the fight. These old women are frail, hence rolling into them is one tactic to defeat them. From Software says Bloodborne features many moments like this, where experimentation and discovery can be used to overcome a seemingly overwhelming encounter.

While Bloodborne doesn't have the Souls franchise label attached to it, it's rooted in all the aspects that make the series great. The diverging paths that the game is taking look to be creating an even more engaging and intense player experience, and we're still looking forward to details about the multiplayer components. » **Daniel Tack**



These ghastly crows are just one horrific twist on the normal that players will discover

Pillars Of Eternity

More than nostalgia



Drawing from the era of great PC RPGs, Pillars of Eternity takes the aspects that made those dungeon dives grand and brings them to the modern age with a slew of enhancements. Create your party and get ready to explore as the tabletop comes to life with this contemporary take on Baldur's Gate, Icewind Dale, and the rest of the Infinity Engine suite. Pillars of Eternity has lots of room to shine in the realm of graphics, sound, and usability in comparison to its now-ancient inspirations.

Before you begin, you need to select your difficulty. Even on easy mode, Pillars of Eternity serves up a challenge, but you're free to move the slider all the way over to Path of the Damned if you're looking for something special. You can also opt to complete the game solo without a party or in Trial of Iron mode, where you only get one save file and if you are defeated the game

deletes it. Whatever experience you're looking for, there's an option for you, and the craziest of players may try to tackle Path of the Damned Trial of Iron Expert Mode for an epic thrill.

Character customization is in-depth, but players uninterested in poring over Dungeons & Dragons style stat perfection can easily create a playable hero out of the box. If you're looking to create a perfect or zany team like all wizards or all paladins, simply head over to a local inn, where you can use the character creator to assemble any assortment of elves or dwarves.

Combat is driven by all the expected die rolls behind the scenes, but the classic "real time with pause" battles let the action play out quickly after you lock in commands. Whatever your composition, there's likely all kinds of advanced combat positioning and ability use that you learn as you go. For

instance, an ogre may be able to drop anyone in your team in a single blow, so you may need to play an elaborate game of keep-away during that encounter. Other enemies may have dangerous abilities like poison or petrify that demand the presence of a cleric or paladin. The primary method to recover after tough encounters is to rest, but since resting/campfires are often abused mechanics in older iterations of PC RPGs, Pillars of Eternity has a limit on maximum rests you can carry, based on difficulty level.

Along the journey players make many different story decisions that can change the course of the game, as well as participate in optional adventures that reward experience and loot. The day/night cycle can change what's available in each location. If you're looking for a blast from the past with all the glory of modern games, Pillars of Eternity is shaping up to be a winner. » **Daniel Tack**

» **Platform**
PC • Mac

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Paradox Interactive

» **Developer**
Obsidian Entertainment

» **Release**
Winter 2014



One blow from this ogre club will send even the hardest adventurer packing



Villages provide players with hubs to recruit new characters and restock



Forza Horizon 2

The series explores new roads

» **Platform**
Xbox One
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Racing
(12-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
Playground Games
(Xbox One)
Sumo Digital
(Xbox 360)

» **Release**
September 30

Forza Horizon 2's Festival is moving to a new location – not only to the Xbox One, but also in the game itself. The racing now takes place throughout southern Europe, and the new locations bring with them an experience that's expanded from the first title. It capitalizes on being a more honest open world than its predecessor, and in true Forza fashion, makes progression through the game enticing thanks to new perks. Using tech from Forza 5, including the graphics engine and Drivatars, Horizon 2 continues to forge its own path forward while benefiting from a strong foundation.

Hitting The Open Road

Forza Horizon 2 ditches the fence barriers that restricted the first title from being a true open-world game. Accordingly, point-to-point checkpoint races are more interesting, allowing you to bomb through the countryside in pursuit of the next gate. Thankfully, you won't get stuck on many objects apart from obvious trees or large objects like hay bales, so the racing remains fast no matter what surface you're on.

New hill climb and cross country race events take advantage of the more open environments, and the use of Drivatars means that when racing against the virtual representations of your friends they may lead you to secrets and unlockables they've found previously.

The Bucket List & Perks

While traveling the game you may come across hot cars parked on the side of the road. Pull over and accept the car's Bucket List challenge and you get to use that vehicle to tackle a range of challenges. Developer Playground Games also promises to update

the game after launch with new Bucket Lists.

As with everything you do, you earn XP for skillful racing or simply exploring the world. Horizon 2 introduces 25 perks arranged in a skill tree-like formation. These are ways to augment your normal activities by generating more XP while you play or enabling fast-travel to other locations.

Wheel Spins are also new to Horizon. These let you try your luck at random jackpots of XP and cash when you level up.

Online Car Meets

Online racing is streamlined so that you toggle between offline single-player and online via a button press with no loading in between (this and Drivatars won't be in the

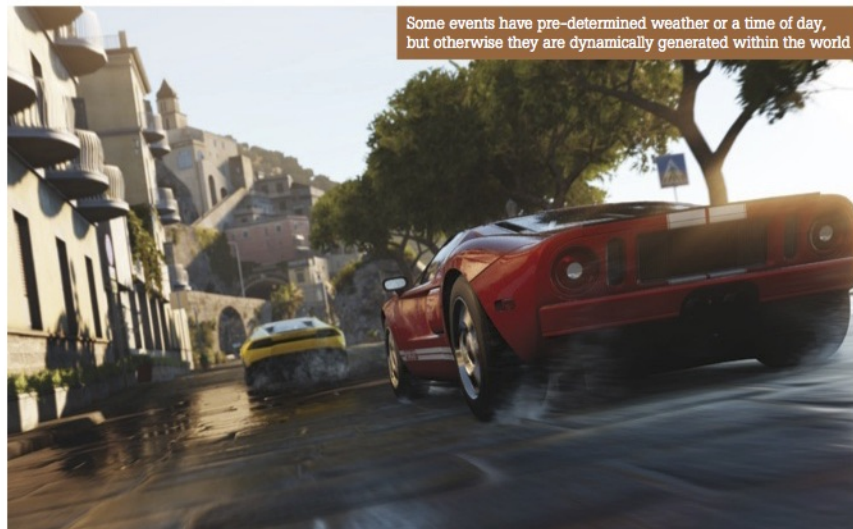
360 version). You can still race in single-player and challenge any Drivatars you come across (still only in point-to-point races, unfortunately), but now you can switch to online and go around in Free Roam (like single-player) with your friends or start a Road Trip. This is like a playlist of events that takes everyone from city to city and event to event seamlessly.

Car Meets are an online extension of the series' Festival spirit. These specific locations within the world are where you can meet up with others to trade liveries (if you have the same car) and tunings, buy people's cars, and chat in real time. You can also do mini-races in the area while you hang out.

» **Matthew Kato**

By The Numbers

- 200-plus cars at launch
- 7 radio stations with double the music as Horizon
- 1,000-member car clubs
- Forward Plus rendering lighting system with thousands of different light sources
- 25 skill perks
- 189 different championships
- 700-plus events
- 3 times the driving space as Forza Horizon



Some events have pre-determined weather or a time of day, but otherwise they are dynamically generated within the world



Quantum Break

Remedy's time-warping gameplay debuts

Alan Wake and Max Payne developer Remedy teased this unusual game/television show hybrid back at E3 2013, but we haven't had a significant update until this year's Gamescom. Here, the team showed live Quantum Break gameplay for the first time both on the Microsoft press conference stage and behind closed doors.

The game begins with a time-travel experiment gone wrong at Riverpoint University that threatens to break time itself. It results in anomalies in which time freezes, skips forward, and rewinds in volatile ways. Characters Jack Joyce, Beth Wilder, and Paul Serene gain different time powers, and players control each of them at one point or another in the game.

Paul, head of the Monarch Corporation, becomes the primary antagonist and is the focus of the TV show. "You play through an act of the game that culminates in what we are calling a junction in time where you actually play the main villain, who has the most powerful time power of all, which is that he can see glimpses of different potential futures," says Remedy creative director Sam Lake. "[The show is like] an action-movie scene where you see the bad guy planning and making his moves. You explore and investigate these

visions and then you make a choice. You decide which future comes to be in your Quantum Break experience. Then immediately from that we go into the episode of the show and you start seeing the consequences of your choice. Some of the things that you see in the show will feed back into the next act of the game and will give you an advantage."

Jack and Beth are the heroes of the story, trying to correct the flow of time back to normal. At the start of the live demo, Jack walks along, and everything freezes except for him. These so-called stutters signal the degradation of time and can't be seen by the general populace. Jack can't control stutters, but he can manipulate elements within them.

The world returns to normal and Jack darts behind a large cement pipe. A citizen unintentionally gives away Jack's position to nearby Monarch troops, which initiates combat. At its core, Quantum Break is a cover-based third-person shooter. But trying to play it like Gears of War gets you killed quickly. Jack's time powers are essential for survival against the well-equipped enemy forces.

He uses a time-enhanced speed dash to zip over to an SUV and the enemies close in on his previous location. Jack performs a fast-dashing punch to knock out one guy with

a single strike and then opens a time-halting bubble in front of another. He unloads pistol fire into the bubble and then disables it. The whole cluster of bullets hits the enemy at once, taking him out instantly.

He climbs the stairs and out of nowhere a semi truck crashes through a guardrail on the bridge above, careening toward him. Another stutter kicks in, pausing the truck in mid-air like a twisted metal sculpture before it can crush him. Jack makes it up to the bridge and scenes of chaos remain serenely still, like a 3D photograph you can walk through.

Two men approach in armor built to resist the effects of the time stutter, unleashing volleys of rockets as Jack dodges from cover to cover. His pistol doesn't seem to do any damage, so Jack shoots a car near one of them to take him down in the explosion. He neutralizes the next enemy by unleashing a car from the stutter and crashing it into the guy.

To get past some rubble Jack climbs a ladder up to a higher section of the bridge. While he's moving along a catwalk, time unfreezes and a massive cargo ship lumbers toward the bridge. The bridge gets ripped to shreds as the ship crashes through.

Jack awakens hanging upside down from a metal bar frozen in space. He gets right-side up and platforms along a string of floating wreckage. He gets back to the bridge, and a car is crashing over and over again in a time loop. Jack has to wait for the right moment and uses his dash to zip through when there's an opening.

He jumps along some floating truck parts and freezes a car as it passes in front of him. This creates a platform for him to cross over. He jumps down through an open metal shipping crate that creates a makeshift slide and guides him safely to the ground below.

As the demo ends Remedy teases the next big step in development – shooting the live-action television footage in the coming months. It'll be interesting to see the other side of the coin and how it fits with gameplay the next time we get a look at Quantum Break. » **Bryan Vore**

» **Platform**
Xbox One

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
Remedy Entertainment

» **Release**
Spring





Shadow Realms

Dungeon crawling on demand

- » **Platform**
PC
- » **Style**
5-Player Online
Role-Playing
- » **Publisher**
Electronic Arts
- » **Developer**
BioWare
- » **Release**
2015

BioWare is best known for its deep story-driven RPGs, but for its follow-up to *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, its Austin branch is exploring a new vein of pen-and-paper role-playing games. This game may have narrative elements, but the studio's primary focus is creating fast-paced modern fantasy action that pits four players against another who assumes the role of the shadow lord.

Essentially acting as a dungeon master, the shadow lord's goal is to thwart the other players' progress through a series of procedurally generated dungeons. It's an unusual and daring design, but with the online market continuing to show support for single synchronous session titles from the MOBA landslide to war titles, *Shadow Realms* may snag a foothold in previously unexplored RPG space.

Content is episodic in nature, with new realms opening up each week to lay out a developing story over the course of a season, which is expected to be around a year. Players can participate in new adventures as well as have the option to replay old missions in new dungeon layouts for rewards.

Players queue up for dungeon adventures using a matchmaking system. With one player acting as the shadow lord, the others play as modern fantasy takes on classic RPG archetypes – wizards in office garb, gun-toting clerics, and tech-touting warlocks. The shadow lord can select minion types and play with some other aspects of the realm before the game begins, while players select their class-based loadouts, similar to readying before a match in a shooter.

My wizard came with a pre-selection of skills suited for the demo: a shocking orb that sticks to the target and makes them more

vulnerable to attack and eventually explodes, a wall of flame that punishes enemies that stand or walk through it, and a point-blank area of effect burst that shoves opponents away. Each class can take an ultimate ability into a match, which are more powerful skills that require adrenaline buildup (being active in combat) to unleash. These skills are customizable as a player earns currency from playing matches, so it's possible that one wizard could have a completely different set of skills than another. These cooldown-based skills combine with basic attacks bound to the left mouse button and an evasive skill (Blink, for the wizard) on the right mouse button.

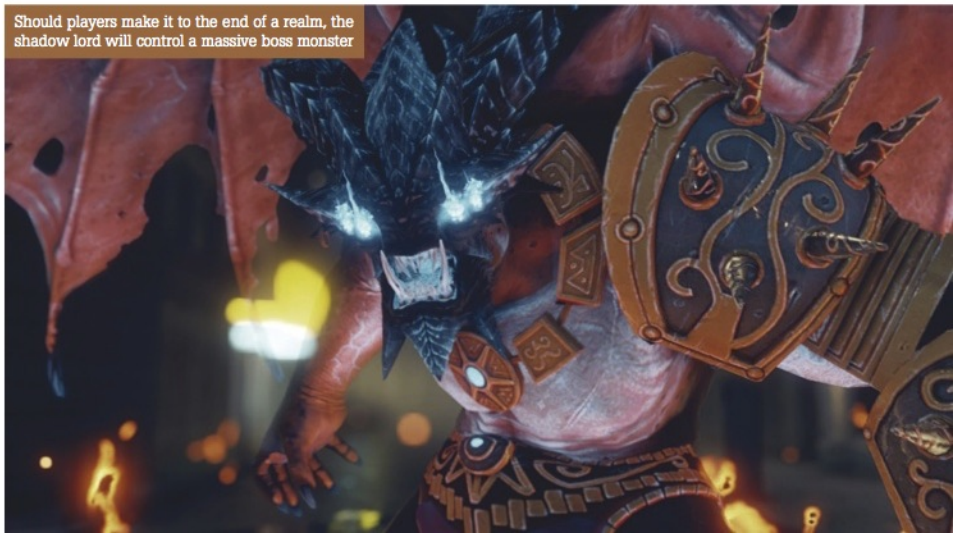
The shadow lord has a completely different set of skills to work with, and abilities that open up as the party proceeds through the dungeon. Early on, the shadow lord can only drop a few traps and will have difficulty killing off the party, but as they proceed,

abilities like possession and doppelganger are unlocked. The shadow lord can take over the strongest (or most beneficial) enemy in a room and use its abilities manually. This can be especially dangerous on something like the banewolf, a powerful foe that can down players in one or two blows. The shadow lord can also create duplicates of players or doppelgangers and eventually take over the final realm boss if players make it that far. Matches essentially play out as a war of attrition, with the shadow lord attempting to deplete the team's potions and resurrection kits. Both players and shadow lord are rewarded at the end of a match regardless of outcome, with additional goodies for the winner.

Shadow Realms is markedly different from typical BioWare offerings. The narrative elements take a backseat to fast-paced competitive matches, but the concept is intriguing.

» **Daniel Tack**

Should players make it to the end of a realm, the shadow lord will control a massive boss monster





NBA Live 15

EA grabs its own rebound

After a three-year hiatus, the NBA Live franchise returned last year, but its first shot at regaining its status as a contending basketball sim clanged unceremoniously off the rim. The ringing sound of that miss is still resonating in the ears of executive producer Sean O'Brien and the rest of his EA Tiburon team. After going through the gauntlet of bad reviews and brutal public response, the team redoubled its efforts for NBA Live 15.

EA is taking a three-pronged approach for its next release – improve the look of the game, hone the gameplay, and create a tutorial system to bring new players on board. Game modes like Dynasty and Rising Star won't get serious attention until next year, when EA also hopes to bring its popular five-on-five EASBL back online.

To improve the graphical fidelity of the game, EA invested in a new scanning technology that applies to everything from faces, skin, and hair to uniforms, footwear, and

accessories. The new models are a significant upgrade to last year when standing still, and O'Brien says the team is working hard to integrate blending animations to make sure that hard work isn't ruined when the players move around the court as well.

On the hardwood, EA is tweaking its approach to passing, dribbling, and defense. When guarding the ball, the developers want players to be able to maintain good positioning by just using the left analog stick. The poor A.I. that brought down offenses last year is being addressed with new quick-action strategies, which send makeshift offenses into motion at the click of a button based on the context of what's happening.

Every team believes it has a chance in preseason, but we never know if the improvements are meaningful until the regular season tips off. NBA Live 15 has its work cut out for it catching up to the superior NBA 2K series, but O'Brien says EA isn't giving up the fight.

» **Matt Bertz**

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Sports
(2-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

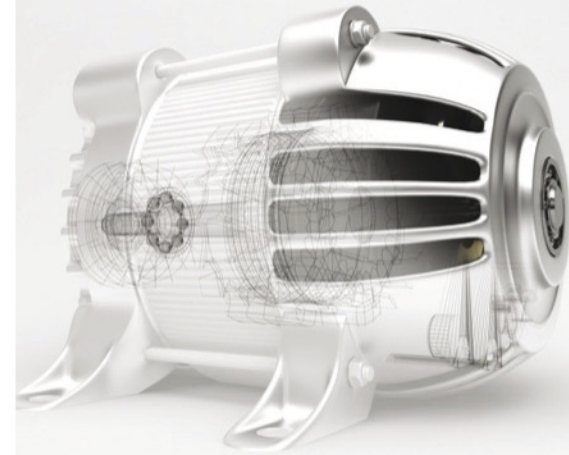
» **Developer**
EA Tiburon

» **Release**
October 7



TECH
RESPECT

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Fuuka

Mm-hm. If I remember right, the card soldiers were painting the white roses red.



Persona Q: Shadow Of The Labyrinth

Bringing the best parts of Persona to Etrian Odyssey's gameplay

» **Platform**
Nintendo 3DS

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Atlus

» **Developer**
Atlus

» **Release**
November 25

Persona Q is the epitome of fan service. It brings together the casts of Persona 3 and 4 and has them comically interacting with plenty of throwbacks to their original games. Tie in the punishing, old-school dungeon-crawling gameplay of the Etrian Odyssey series and you have a combination that holds a lot of fun potential.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if characters from Persona 3 met with Persona 4's gang? This is one of the most exciting parts of Persona Q. The game begins with the groups separate and you select your starting cast, but they eventually both come together to fight shadows. Two new characters are also along for the journey: Zen and Rei. Part of the fun is figuring out how they tie in to the monster outbreak.

I started with the Persona 3 cast and began in an Alice in Wonderland-themed dungeon. It has the trademark black and red checkerboard tiles alongside gardens and clocks. Just like in Etrian Odyssey games, your goal is to map out the dungeons and find a way through various shortcuts. Alice in Wonderland isn't just the backdrop; it also plays into your dungeon tasks. At one point I have to chase down a rabbit, but he's not the easiest rascal to trap. I study his movement

patterns and use the various shortcuts around me to catch him. It's not long before I enter my first lighthearted scene, which features Akihiko and Shinjiro getting too bold and drinking from a particular bottle, another throwback to Alice in Wonderland. You can only guess what happens next.

Mapping is one big part of the gameplay, but the other is managing your party members in battle. Persona fans should feel right at home with the traditional battle system, focused on exploiting enemy weaknesses. Special attacks for each character are determined by which type of Persona you equip. Just like in past games, when you defeat enemies you may gain access to a new Persona, which you can fuse to make stronger allies.

Having the best Personas equipped is essential, and you want your party as balanced as possible, like having a healer and making sure you have a variety of affinities on hand. If you hit a weak point, you get a boost. This means your next turn won't cost you any SP, and that's when you want to use your high-cost special attacks. If you knock out all the enemies' weak points before your turn ends, you can perform Persona's trademark all-out attack to deal extra damage. Fuuka, a support ally, can also help once you execute enough

attacks to fill her gauge. She has a healing spell that restores a little HP to the party during each turn. For those using Persona 4's Rise, she gives characters speed boosts for an edge.

Soon enough I run into my first F.O.E. Etrian Odyssey fans know these ravaging mini-bosses all too well. I wash off the paint of a rose, which distracts the F.O.E. and lets me avoid him for now. The dungeon ends with a boss battle with none other than the Queen of Hearts, but I have to take out waves of card soldiers before I can even touch her. This battle is about wearing her down. Aigis can power up for two turns, but she loses the two following turns as well. This is useful for knocking off a good chunk of HP fast. My victory triggers a slew of cutscenes, as the groups from Persona 3 and 4 interact for the first time.

The next dungeon is love themed at the Group Date Cafe from Persona 4. The dungeon pairs up characters romantically and asks various dating questions like if age matters and chooses a destined partner for your main character at the end. I only got to experience a slice of the dungeon, and I can't wait to play more. Persona Q looks to be on the right track, expanding the Persona world we know and love. » **Kimberley Wallace**



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WWE 2K15

Gameplay finally makes an entrance

» **Platform**

PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**

1-Player Fighting
(Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**

2K Sports

» **Developer**

Yuke's/Visual Concepts

» **Release**

October 28

For a game coming out at the end of October, it's surprising it took this long for anyone to see WWE 2K15. However, its absence has helped build anticipation and prevented oversaturation that can sometimes sink in by the time a game launches.

For the series' new-gen debut, Visual Concepts is joining longtime developer Yuke's to help create the best-looking entry yet. The team has brought over its scanning tech made famous in the NBA 2K games to capture as many wrestler faces and bodies as possible. Since this rig is mobile, the team has traveled everywhere from Shawn Michaels' remote home in Texas to Los Angeles to capture Steve Austin and Sting.

As you can see in the screenshots, the character models are impressively accurate. Everything from the shine on Goldust's suit to Randy Orton's smirk are spot on. You can even hear Cena yammering at the camera before he runs down the ramp in his entrance. Crowds look better with much more face and outfit variety, new child character models, and dynamic chants that respond to the situation at hand.

The new 2K Showcase mode is based on the rivalries between CM Punk and John Cena from 2011 to 2013 and Triple H and former DX partner Shawn Michaels from 2002 to 2004. The two rivalry threads are presented as mini-documentaries, using real-life footage of the feuds combined with commentary from the wrestlers involved to set up the matches. We got to see the opening video package for Punk/Cena and it got me super hyped all over again for their historic Money in the Bank 2011 championship match in which Punk threatened to leave the company with the title. Spoiler alert: He only left in the "storyline" at that time. Punk has since parted ways with WWE in real life, so unfortunately



2K hasn't gotten him in front of its scanners. I'm sure in a previous WWE game CM Punk's character model would blend in with the rest, but when everything else looks this good his face is noticeably off.

Players battle through a total of 33 matches in this mode, unlocking content along the way by completing historical objectives that match up with what really happened in the ring. For those dreaming of other epic rivalries, 2K may just grant your wish further down the line. The publisher has already promised story-based rivalry DLC packs post-launch.

In-ring action feels crisp and looks far more natural thanks to over five times the animation data of last year's entry. Strikes feel like they connect more, and moves performed

near the edges of the ring cause wrestlers' body parts to interact realistically with the ropes. A new chain wrestling minigame kicks in toward the start of matches, mimicking real-life wrestling ring psychology. This initiates a rock, paper, scissors mechanic between the two grapplers in which both select either a side headlock, a wrist lock, or a waist lock. Each hold beats or loses to another. The winner ends up in a dominant position, but victory isn't in the bag yet. Both players must find a sweet spot with the right stick before their opponent does. If the dominant wrestler wins, they perform a move, and if the defender wins they shift into the dominant position. It sets up a chain flow you couldn't really do in the game before, and offers a close look at the wrestlers' more expressive facial animations as they wince in pain while someone's wrenching on their arm, for example.

Commentary makes a leap as well, with Michael Cole and Jerry Lawler recording together at the same time rather than doing it solo and having the studio mash the tracks together later. The developers are trying to focus on telling a story in the ring with the calls rather than just describing the moves in the ring. When I played as John Cena, Lawler discussed the effectiveness of his signature STF, noting that he used it to beat Mark Henry at Money in the Bank 2013 and Chris Jericho at Armageddon in 2008.

Outside of enhanced presentation, Visual Concepts also brings in its MyCareer mode from the NBA 2K games. The exact specifics are still under wraps, but we do know that your created rookie starts out training in WWE's Performance Center and moves through the developmental NXT program, the WWE main roster, headlining pay-per-views, conquering Wrestlemania, and eventually earning a spot in the Hall of Fame. Since this is the first year of MyCareer, I expect some rough edges, but am excited to see NXT truly included for the first time. » **Bryan Vore**

The details on Goldust's suit and facepaint impress





Life Is Strange

Be kind, rewind

Last year, Dontnod released *Remember Me*, a sci-fi action tale about an amnesiac's *Total Recall*-like quest to recover her stolen thoughts. The game earned average marks, but featured a few notable sequences where the main character had to rewind through characters' thoughts and alter their memories. Building off this rewind mechanic, Dontnod's next title is an episodic adventure game about a high-school senior who suddenly discovers she has the ability to rewind time.

Players control a photography student named Max who has just returned to her hometown in Oregon after a five-year

absence. A lot changed while Max was away, and her one-time bestie, a girl named Chloe, has grown into a rebellious teenager constantly at odds with her verbally abusive stepfather. The recent disappearance of a fellow student brings the two girls back together and forces them to work out their differences while they uncover the mystery behind their friend's departure.

Dontnod says much of the story is told throughout objects scattered within the environments player explore. Throughout the story, Max has plenty of opportunities to put her newfound rewind powers to use. During a Gamescom demo Max reverses time in order

to solve puzzles and puts broken items back together. Players can even rewind through dialogue sequences in order to force conversations toward different outcomes.

Much like Telltale's recent adventure games, Dontnod's *Life is Strange* promises a branching narrative where events early in the game have repercussions down the road. The studio also says it's working to refine the release schedule, so players won't have to wait more than a few weeks between episodes. We hope Dontnod can stick to that rigorous timetable, because it won't be able to rewind time if an episode slips past a deadline. » **Ben Reeves**

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Adventure

» **Publisher**
Square Enix

» **Developer**
Dontnod

» **Release**
TBA

Citizens Of Earth

Atlus picks up *EarthBound*-inspired RPG

Developer Eden Industries is not afraid to wear its inspiration on its sleeve when it comes to *Citizens of Earth*. It only takes a few minutes of gameplay to be reminded of the 1995 Super Nintendo game *EarthBound*. From the familiar yet strangely off typical American town and bizarre sense of humor to the combat and visuals, *Citizens of Earth* looks and feels a lot like that classic RPG.

As the Vice President, it's your job to develop a party of constituents to help you battle enemies and explore the strange happenings of your surroundings. Our demo

begins with a group of three party members: your character's mother, brother, and a local baker. As you progress and tackle assorted sidequests, up to 40 additional characters can be recruited. We tracked down a special coffee allowing us to convince a local barista to join our crew, as well as a conspiracy theorist. You can only have three in your party fighting, but you can switch around your roster at any time.

In combat, every character has a specific set of personalized moves. Your mother's moves, for example, involve a collection

of nagging attacks (like "scold" and "stern lecture") to lower an enemy's defense, while the baker takes advantage of heat-powered attacks related to baking. These work great against the sentient coffee beans and half-robot cappucinerds we battle.

Role-playing fans looking for something outside of the realm of science fiction and fantasy, where the genre comfortably resides, should keep an eye on *Citizens of Earth*. With its strange sense of humor and nostalgic gameplay, it should offer an experience unlike the typical RPG. » **Kyle Hilliard**

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4 • Wii U
Vita • 3DS • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Atlus

» **Developer**
Eden Industries

» **Release**
November



Citizens of Earth should clock in at around 20 hours of gameplay, but completionists looking to curate a full roster of characters can look forward to 30-40 hours



gameinformer **GAME OF THE MONTH**

92 The Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 5: No Going Back

Who will Clementine become? In the season two finale, Telltale places that decision in your hands and forces her to face the harsh realities of growing up. Tensions come to a head as Clementine's alliances crack under the pressure, demanding you make some tough choices in the process. The finale's biggest achievement is in its multiple endings that you leave you aghast – and change the course of Clementine's future.

NOTE: Remasters and rereleases are not eligible for Game of the Month honors, which is why The Walking Dead wins the award over higher scoring titles in this issue like The Last of Us Remastered and Diablo III: Reaper of Souls – Ultimate Evil Edition.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Hatred-filled trolls masquerading as gamers.

AWARDS

gameinformer PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10
gameinformer GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5
gameinformer SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 8.5 and 8.75
gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH	The award for the most outstanding game in the issue

Madden NFL 15

A rebuild or the start of a dynasty?



Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (2-Player Online) **Publisher** EA Sports **Developer** EA Tiburon **Release** August 26 **Rating** E

Madden has hit the ground running this console generation and is in a better position to push forward than it has been in a while. This year's game is like the lone bright spot of the last generation: Madden NFL 13. That year we got Connected Careers and an improved passing game. Madden 15 improves these two facets, but it feels like other areas of the title have not progressed enough. Despite this uneven performance, Madden 15 demands you raise your game to the next level, and hopefully is in the process of raising its own.

I'm disappointed in the areas that haven't been addressed – not just for this year, but for multiple iterations running. The contract negotiations in Connected Franchise mode are limited, whether that's a lack of contract options during free agency or the fact that this portion of the offseason is still missing elements such as restricted free agents. An updated interface actually surfaces free agents' wishes more, but I still feel free agency and the offseason lacks drama and is too simplified (no practice squads). This sacrifices a level of involvement and complexity that I want as a GM. I'm here to build a dynasty, not just sim to when I'm playing the game, so please give me the full experience. Even a change to make info more available would make drafting a scouted pick and planning my offseason more efficient.

Connected Franchise's big additions are player confidence (a new attribute) and game prep, where your coaching staff applies man-hours to increase your players' XP and confidence through drills and non-interactive classroom work. These systems kept me engaged in a mode that has its lulls, even if managing game-prep hours and keeping

confidence bolstered can be like keeping spinning plates aloft.

In future iterations, coaches (and not just owners) should be able to hire their own coaching staff to maximize players' confidence and the game-prep system, and having offseason training and mini camps would be a natural reset point for players to stop potentially plummeting confidence and get new players up to speed. Regardless, game prep's integration of skills-trainer drills is more interesting than the old practice format.

The game's focus on skills-trainer drills and teaching strategic offensive and defensive schemes (also done in the new playcalling menus) is valuable. Due to the defensive improvements this year, knowing where defenders are and where your routes are going is crucial. Good defenders are aggressive breaking on the ball in zone coverage, and are often on receivers' hips in man-to-man coverage, which makes old standbys like slants harder. Defenders' head tracking is decent, so there aren't a lot of surprises when a bad decision leads to a pick.

Quarterbacks have better passing controls at their disposal, allowing you to throw away from defenders, and even though Madden 15 has varied its incomplete passes, the passing game is a fun challenge. Sidelines pull like magnets, receivers slide into catches, and they still don't fight for the ball enough, but the concentration needed to be a successful passer had me laser focused from down to down, and I liked it. Off the field I wanted to go through skills-trainer drills to rehearse attacking specific defenses, and during games I had to apply that knowledge and even notice tells in defenders' animations.

Unfortunately, the running game isn't as strong. Run blocking is still suspect, and navigating your own offensive line can be tricky. Letting the CPU guide your runner into the hole sacrifices control, but doing it yourself can get you stuck on your own blockers.

Elsewhere, Ultimate Team has simplified its structure by doing away with its reserve deck, and Owner's mode is harder to make money in, even if a good stadium situation remains the main factor behind profits. The former should be implemented in other EA Sports titles, while the latter isn't as essential.

Sports games like Madden are often chided for being too iterative, but in this case I hope we're witnessing the first steps in a larger progression. Future Maddens need to support Madden 15's additions so we don't wonder why once-prominent features haven't evolved. The series can't withstand another rebuilding year or worse – an entire console generation thrown away. » **Matthew Kato**



The icons for jumping the snap and defensive rush moves are optional, but I really liked them

8

PS4 • Xbox One

» Concept

The series may have come into this generation with its features intact, but there's still plenty of work to be done to bring all its elements up to snuff

» Graphics

The game looks sharp and a step up from the first new-gen foray. Playing with the zoomed-in player-lock camera highlights this

» Sound

The commentary is still largely ignorant of the larger context of the game

» Playability

I suggest using optional visual indicators for tackles, jumping the snap count on the defensive line, and rushing the passer

» Entertainment

There are definitely things to enjoy in every phase of the game, even though as a whole it isn't extraordinary

» Replay Value

Moderately High

The Last-Gen Difference » 7.5

PS3 • 360

Madden NFL 15 is best played on new-gen consoles. The PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions are inferior due to a drop in graphics and presentation, the lack of strategic play-calling options, the absence of the player-lock camera, the inability to jump the snap on defense, and lesser defensive A.I.



The Walking Dead Season Two — Episode 5: No Going Back

Taking a stand

8.5

gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameinformer
SILVER

Style 1-Player Adventure Publisher Telltale Games Developer Telltale Games
Release August 26 (PS3, PC, Vita), August 27 (360), August 28 (iOS) Rating M

PS3 • 360 • PC
Vita • iOS

» Concept

Food and supplies are running low, forcing you to decide what's best for Clementine

» Graphics

The brutal imagery looks crisp, and the colors remain bleak to highlight the situation

» Sound

Conversations feel natural and the scenes evoke emotions. Telltale also inserts tense music at the right moments

» Playability

Everything plays out smoothly. The controls are still simple, and the few action scenes are very forgiving

» Entertainment

This finale gets you reflecting about who Clementine really is and how you've shaped her. The narrative is intense and heartbreaking

» Replay Value

Moderate

Growing up, certain rites of passage help define who we are – moments we won't forget because they change us. For the entirety of season two, Telltale has been building up Clementine's coming-of-age in a zombie apocalypse. The battles and decisions she faces aren't your typical adolescent trials, which is part of what makes Clementine's journey so interesting. Telltale brings it all to a head in the season two finale, letting you decide how Clementine has grown. The decisions aren't easy, and they affect where she ends up; in a way, these choices say just as much about you as they do about Clementine.

The previous episode set up many of the choices Clementine would encounter in these last hours. Her group is falling apart due to infighting and deteriorating mental states. Throw in the life of a newborn baby, and this is the worst time for everyone to be at odds. Episode 5 begins with another group threatening their lives and trying to rob them. It erupts into gunfire on both sides, leading to new problems for Clementine and company as they try to find safety in this dangerous world.

The first part of this season was adrenaline-filled, but the previous episode slowed things down. Episode 5 returns to this pace, giving you more bonding moments with characters, such as changing bandages and celebrating birthdays. In these little chats, characters reveal more about their pasts and their deepest fears. I wish I cared about these cast members more. Deaths haven't hit me that hard, and maybe it's because these allies aren't really all that interesting. Even finding out more on their backstories didn't leave me feeling any more connected.



Throughout the episode, the danger continues to escalate. Zombies come at the worst times, forcing Clem to decide when to use her gun. She has to walk across a dangerous, icy pond to get to the next safehouse. The action sequences are short in this episode, never overstaying their welcome. Telltale is also constantly pitting you against certain characters and the smaller alliances that have formed. You need to decide who Clementine aligns with – old friends or new. This means hurting people and acknowledging that good people do bad things. The choices are at their most captivating in these moments; Clementine is growing up and learning that the world has shades of gray.

I won't spoil much, but Telltale's biggest achievement in this episode is how it handles the ending. It finally includes multiple endings depending on your choices. This is something I've desired for a long time – to actually see the ripple effect of my decisions, and Telltale doesn't disappoint. I watched five endings, and I was amazed at how distinct they all

were, putting Clementine in different places with different people. They also raise questions and make statements about Clementine. For instance, is she better off with or without certain people? Does she have to sacrifice happiness for safety?

I think about that little girl I found at the treehouse back in season one. She wanted to believe people were inherently good and that her parents were still alive. She didn't even know how to hold a gun. Now I look at Clementine as someone who can fend for herself. She knows the horrors of the world, but she also knows the beauty. I hope the latter keeps her fighting, and that my decisions set her in the best place possible for season three. Telltale has once again left me thinking and longing, and I hope they make these endings mean even more in the future.

» Kimberley Wallace

This review is based on the PC version. The Walking Dead is also available on PS3, 360, Vita, and iOS

Metro Redux

A post-apocalyptic remodel

Style 1-Player Shooter **Publisher** Deep Silver
Developer 4A Games
Release August 29 **Rating** M

Born out of the ashes of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. developer GSC, 4A Games came out of nowhere in 2010 with its moody and atmospheric debut, Metro 2033. The game proved to be a critical darling, and despite switching publishers the studio managed to produce a sequel, Last Light, that met equal acclaim. To give these impressive titles a victory lap, Deep Silver encouraged 4A to create this remastered collection.

Leveraging the power of new-gen consoles, 4A games uses the latest version of its impressive proprietary engine to give Metro 2033 a facelift complete with revamped A.I., improved weapon handling, and non-lethal takedowns. Both games now run at a brisk 60 frames per second with HD resolutions (1080p on PS4 and 900p on Xbox One). PC players with powerful enough systems can push that resolution up to 4K. The new textures, global illumination, and improved character models combine to make two already beautiful games even more attractive.

For the uninitiated, the Metro series follows the exploits of Artyom, a survivor of a nuclear holocaust that has wiped out nearly all the life on earth, leaving behind an irradiated landscape of ruins and forcing the survivors to rebuild civilization in the subway tunnels of Moscow. Post-war life isn't easy, as rival factions, bandits, and mutated beasts make travelling between settlements a dangerous proposition.

Redux essentially offers players two ways to enjoy both games. Shooter fans who prefer running and gunning will feel at home in the Spartan mode, which increases the ammunition found in the world and amps up the action much like Last Light. Series traditionalists who preferred the strategic and harrowing play style offered in Metro 2033 should choose Survival mode, which cuts down the amount of resources at your disposal and makes the enemies more dangerous. Hardcore fans can opt for Ranger mode, which builds off Survival mode by removing all the HUD elements and making weapons more deadly. Each of the play styles is well tuned and offers different challenges.

The main attraction of these games is their bleak setting. Like the Ukrainian novels the games are based on, both 2033 and Last Light create a moody atmosphere and pervading sense of hopelessness that makes this otherwise unremarkable setting stand among the most memorable locations in video games. Whether you're eavesdropping on conversations in crowded subway stations, sneaking through neglected underground passageways, or exploring the rubble above ground, these games have an undeniable sense of place.

Metro Redux may not offer much to entice players who have already played and enjoyed these games, but this remastered bundle is the best way for newcomers to experience the thrills and scares of this underappreciated series. » **Matt Bertz**



8.5

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Concept**
Spruce up Metro 2033 and Last Light for a new-gen port

» **Graphics**
The 4A engine features phenomenal light and shadow effects

» **Sound**
Haunting sound effects echo through the treacherous Metro tunnels

» **Playability**
Whether you want to scrounge for resources or unload heavy doses of lead, Redux has you covered

» **Entertainment**
A haunting, atmospheric shooter definitely worth a play

» **Replay Value**
Moderately high



Hohokum

Pretty empty

Style 1-Player Action/Puzzle **Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer** Honeyslug/Sony Santa Monica **Release** August 12 **Rating** E

6

PS4 • PS3 • Vita

» **Concept**
Complete various puzzles and menial tasks as a sentient line in a gorgeous, absurdist world

» **Graphics**
I love this game's look; the art style is cute, colorful, and engaging

» **Sound**
Honeyslug's partnership with label Ghostly International pays off with some great electronic tracks by artists like Tycho and Matthew Dear

» **Playability**
The basic controls are fine; however, the game often doesn't do a good job of conveying information

» **Entertainment**
Hohokum aims to be a non-linear, exploratory experience. While it has its charms, too often it's just dull

» **Replay Value**
Moderately Low

Many adherents of the indie gaming scene accuse modern triple-A games of being all flash and no substance – big budget boondoggles that rely on huge action-flick set pieces and expensive graphics to cover up their lack innovative gameplay.

Hohokum is proof that the same can be said for games that wear their indie aesthetics on their sleeve. It has it all: oddball, cartoonish graphics that are colorful and charming, tasteful electronic music by a host of artists on the hip Ghostly International label, and a “nonlinear” structure that encourages players to experiment with the environment at their leisure.

I love games that stretch the definition of what a video game can be. Whether it's Journey or Gone Home, the last few years have seen titles that eschewed traditional notions of gameplay and challenge while delivering profoundly emotional interactive experiences. Hohokum, for all its whimsy and often-humorous weirdness, doesn't really seem to have much to say. In fact, it's much more of a conventional game than advertised. Your wormlike creature must solve puzzles (usually as simple as delivering a little cartoon creature to the right platform or hitting a sequence of switches) and complete objectives – there's even a boss battle with a giant elephant.

The gameplay itself is extremely simple – you guide your line-creature around the environment and run into objects or give other creatures a lift when they jump on. There are a number of levels you can complete, but they are all unlocked from the outset and there is no set order of progression. In general, it's up to you to enter a new area, and start running into things until you suss out what you're supposed to do. The developers clearly see this as a way to create a game that encourages ingenuity while not placing limits like death or a timer on the experience.

That's a great idea. However, I found myself wishing that Hohokum had either been more structured (by giving me better cues and a more solid gameplay structure) or more experimental. As it stands, this art game doesn't have much of a point, aside from its own (admittedly nice) aesthetics. Its vagueness and leisurely pace might be pleasant to some; I was frequently restless and found myself wishing the game would just get on with it already. Once you figure out what you're supposed to do, the actual actions or puzzles are usually fairly simple and uncreative.

Again, I can't stress how much I enjoyed the game's art, music, and quirky vibe. Hohokum is one hell of a screensaver. As a game, it lacks depth. » **Matt Helgeson**

Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls — Ultimate Evil Edition

Little tweaks make for big fun

9.25

gamesformer
GOLD

Style 1 to 4-Player Action Publisher Blizzard Entertainment Developer Blizzard Entertainment Release August 19 Rating M

PS4 • Xbox One
PS3 • 360

» Concept

Return to a world of demons and angels in the most feature-rich version of Blizzard's sprawling lootfest

» Graphics

The next-gen version exhibits a sharpness and sparkle that approaches PC quality

» Sound

The sumptuous soundtrack communicates both the dark tone and epic grandeur of the proceedings, while melodramatic voiceover adds narrative framework to the hacking and slashing

» Playability

In-game action is great, but the inventory and shopping screens take some getting used to

» Entertainment

A stellar port with a few strong new additions makes this the ideal choice for new-gen cooperative play

» Replay Value

Moderate

Two years is a long time in video games, and it's rare so far out from its original incarnation can generate excitement. However, Blizzard's constant improvements and adjustments have led to a stellar port to new-gen consoles, including the complete experience available on PC, plus several smart bonus features. It's an ideal way to play the game for the first time or the tenth, especially if you have any mix of friends to play with, either on your couch or across the country.

The richly imagined world of Diablo III is a visual treat, and hits all the requisite buttons for epic fantasy world building, but the clichéd and predictable story isn't what keeps you hooked. That honor goes to the finely tuned character progression and loot system. Months of tweaking have resulted in the fastest-paced leveling and equipment gathering yet.

A new apprentice mode is the most meaningful addition, pulling the stats of low-level players up to a competitive tier with their buddies, and then making the monster fights appropriately challenging for the newly powered group. Apprentice mode eliminates the frustration of players out-leveling each other, and lets the apprentice fly through those lower tiers of play.

Drop rates (especially for coveted legendary items) are notably elevated, and most pickups are targeted to the needs of your class. In addition, a clever gifting system adds a satisfying new social wrinkle; upon acquiring a piece of legendary gear, you sometimes also acquire a gift item targeted to someone on your friends list. You can send it through the in-game mail



as a pleasant surprise that benefits the whole group the next time you play.

As you wander, the controller may shake as a nemesis approaches. This towering evil has already killed one of your fellows, and has powered up before hopping across friends lists to arrive in your game. If he kills you, the beast heads off to torment another of your buddies. Kill him, and everyone involved in the fight gets commensurate rewards. The nemesis system is another indication of Blizzard's commitment to social engagement, and adds a small but meaningful twist to gameplay.

The Ultimate Evil Edition includes both the base game and the expansion, which makes it an exceptional value for fledgling players. While the addition of a single new act and character class in Reaper of Souls is relatively modest in scope, the real value in the expansion comes from adventure mode. This endless

experience throws high-density monster groups at you in surprising new configurations, and demands you take out bounty targets to receive big XP and material rewards. After completing the story, it's my preferred way to develop my main characters' post level-cap paragon levels, as well as build up new alts into the fight. That's why I'm bummed that Blizzard opted to keep adventure mode locked until a character completes the storyline. Players coming over from PC would have liked to jump right into the best version of the action, but must instead push through the slower-paced story again.

The new-gen versions of the Ultimate Evil Edition look phenomenal, with a level of polish in the flashing magical effects and grim backgrounds that approaches high-end PC quality. Control-wise, direct control over your hero with the left stick simply feels more engaging than endlessly pointing and clicking. Moreover, the console-exclusive right stick dodge is a solid way to get out of danger fast, and a welcome use of the available inputs.

However, the other major playability adjustment on console doesn't fare as well. Inventory management and vendor interactions are handled on a radial menu. It's functional, but more than a little clunky when trying to compare multiple items or switch between categories quickly. Given that loot management is so central to the experience, it's too bad this system feels subpar. In this regard, the PC version and its mouse-click options remain superior.

The complete Diablo III experience is enjoyable played solo, but by allowing a combination of online and local cooperative play for up to four players and adding some fun new social tools, Blizzard has made this the cooperative game to beat on new-gen consoles. No matter your experience level with the game, this is an excellent time to dive in to the action. » **Matt Miller**

We reviewed the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions of the Ultimate Evil Edition. The game is also available on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360





The Last Of Us Remastered

Naughty Dog's best gets better

gameinformer
PLATINUM

Style 1-Player Action (8-Player Online) Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment Developer Naughty Dog Release July 29 Rating M

The last console generation was a tremendous success for Naughty Dog. The gorgeous visuals and natural dialogue of the Uncharted series proved the team was capable of much more than cartoonish character platformers. The developer then escalated its storytelling to a dramatic new chapter with the unprecedented, visceral journey of a broken man seeking redemption. The Last of Us is the defining PlayStation 3 game, and Naughty Dog has refined its visuals and packed in meaningful DLC content for the new generation.

The Last of Us treads familiar ground for video games, with a post-apocalyptic world filled with infected humans hungry for flesh. Naughty Dog uses this grim backdrop to tell a dramatic tale about a man and the girl he must protect. Similar to the stories told in *The Walking Dead* and *The Road*, the narrative impact is found less in the moment-to-moment action and more about what Joel and Ellie say or don't say as they scrape by with one another. It's a powerful story of moral

grays and unlikely bonds that I won't risk spoiling for those who will be experiencing it for the first time on PS4.

Also included in the Remastered package is the single-player DLC, *Left Behind*, which fills in a gap in the main story while offering insight into Ellie's life before meeting Joel. Ellie and a close friend explore their complicated friendship while searching a mall that packs an unexpected development. Naughty Dog does a terrific job of shifting between the grim tone of Ellie's adventure with Joel and a more lighthearted encounter with her friend. If you haven't played the brief-but-powerful *Left Behind* yet, the Remastered edition is the perfect opportunity.

Speaking of perfect opportunities, Remastered is the definitive way to play *The Last of Us*. Plenty of HD remakes have hit consoles in recent years, but Naughty Dog's PS4 update is among the most striking I've seen. The PS3 version of *The Last of Us* was no graphical slouch, but Remastered's

improvements to the detailed character models, lighting system, and framerate dramatically elevate it above the original. Looking at the two versions side by side, it's remarkable how much smoother and crisper this new version is. Scanning the environment for clues or lining up crucial headshots feels silky smooth compared to the original (though you can still lock in Remastered's framerate at 30 frames-per-second if you're a crazy person).

For all the visual enhancements, the solid, visceral gameplay remains the same. Sneaking past or stealthily taking out violent Clickers and marauders is still the order of the day. Ammo is scarce, so eliminating enemies with spiked 2x4s and shivs is key. Ellie's A.I. pathfinding still suffers from occasional immersion-breaking hiccups, but thankfully she's invisible to foes. Merely surviving in *The Last of Us* can be a punishing task, but with that challenge comes the satisfaction of living to see the next turn in the unforgettable story.

The Last of Us made a profound impact on how I view storytelling in games when I originally played it on the PlayStation 3. I didn't review the game then, but my thoughts on its myriad strengths line up well with what Matt Helgeson conveys in his original review. My personal feelings on Naughty Dog's masterpiece place it a hair higher on our review scale compared to Matt's original glowing review, PS4 bonuses aside.

All the graphical improvements are wonderful, but you may be wondering if *The Last of Us Remastered* is for you. Like the best visual updates, Remastered plays like you remember it. If you played 2013's Game of the Year near release and have been dying to return to the dark tale, then this is a great opportunity. If you never played *The Last of Us* at all, this is absolutely the way to do it. But be careful – you'll never want to go back to the PS3 original again after reveling in all the improvements.

» Tim Turi

10

PS4

» Concept

Bring one of the best games of last generation to the PlayStation 4, with vastly improved visuals and previously released DLC content

» Graphics

The Last of Us is one of the best-looking PS3 games, and it's even more breathtaking on a new-gen console with 1080p native resolution running in 60 frames-per-second

» Sound

The subtle, nuanced voice acting expertly brings these complicated characters to life, and Gustavo Santaolalla's moody score sets the dismal tone

» Playability

Gunplay can be wobbly by design, but the brutal enemy encounters only add to the overarching sense of dread

» Entertainment

The punishing world dares you to press on, and the story is an emotional punch to the gut. In short, this is one of the best video games ever made

» Replay Value

High



Lichdom: Battlemage

First-person shooter magic



8

Style 1-Player Action/Role-Playing **Publisher** Xaviant
Developer Xaviant **Release** August 26 **Rating** NR

PC

» Concept

Seek revenge on the powerful forces that destroyed your family and left you to die

» Graphics

Things look great with impressive spell effects and engaging environments

» Sound

Sparse but decent voicework from Troy Baker, Clancy Brown, and Jennifer Hale

» Playability

Smooth spell-swapping and basic controls allow anyone to pick up and play, though the base game is quite challenging.

As players become more comfortable with the crafting and customization system, the game's depth is revealed

» Entertainment

A fun romp with an interesting crafting system that encourages all kinds of spell-combining action, marred only by some repetitive encounters and minor inherent gameplay flaws

» Replay Value

High

After your life is destroyed and you are left for dead by the malicious Count Shax, a sorcerer named Roth teaches you the ways of powerful magic and gives you the tools to seek your revenge. The setup is as cliché as it gets, but luckily there's plenty of interesting gameplay in Lichdom: Battlemage. Think of a first-person combat game with customizable spells and the loot/boss structure of Diablo, and you have a good idea of what to expect.

The base level of difficulty is quite challenging, and players may struggle until they begin combining magic, leveling up base sigils, and crafting new spells. Thankfully you continue to grow in power and collecting loot even as you die over and over at the hands of the enemy swarms and bosses. There's a bonus for staying alive as well; the more checkpoints you can get to without dying adds to the rarity of the loot you collect along the way. You'll eventually come away with sacks of loot, all of which can be broken down for materials or applied directly to existing sigils to craft new and powerful magic.

Crafting is at the core of everything that happens in Lichdom, and you can either stick with the tried and true basic spells like targeted blasts and area-of-effect spells or move into far more interesting fare like the potent lob. The system is incredibly deep and should keep players concocting new things all the way into new game plus. If you're looking to make some crazy spell mixes, optional challenge rooms are dotted around the world that provide a glut of quality materials.

In addition to your ever-growing arsenal of magic, players must use dodges and shields to get by. The basic form of protection is a timed maneuver; if you can time your block with an opponent's attack you unleash a powerful retaliation with your active magic. More advanced shields and modifiers allow players to do all kinds of interesting things, like teleport and unleash strikes at the point of materialization.

Combat is smooth and responsive, but I found myself falling prey to "backpedal blasting" at several points, simply retreating backward while chaining control and damage spells. It's something everyone has done from time to time in first-person games while seeking cover, but it feels awkward and out of place here in light of the mostly energetic combat.

Lichdom: Battlemage is an interesting and enjoyable take on first-person fantasy with lots of customization to dive into. I'm hoping this initial effort leads to an even more polished sequel for Xaviant down the line.

» **Daniel Tack**

Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair

Looks can be deceiving

8

Style 1-Player Adventure **Publisher** NIS America
Developer Spike Chunsoft **Release** September 2 **Rating** M

Vita

» Concept

A new group of students is trapped on an island with only one way out: murder

» Graphics

The comic book-style animations look sharp and the island has interesting locales.

The bright colors serve as contrast to the dark storyline

» Sound

The music captures the atmosphere wonderfully, although some overused tracks wear out their welcome. The voice acting fits the varied cast well

» Playability

The point-and-click controls are easy to grasp, but the minigames require precision and can be frustrating

» Entertainment

Goodbye Despair continues the intriguing narrative of its predecessor, taking it in new, exciting directions, but the experience is brought down by weaker characters and poorly designed minigames

» Replay Value

Moderate

Under what circumstances could you get someone to contemplate murder? Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc hinged on this terrifying question, locking students in a school and progressively giving them more reasons to kill. The sequel, Goodbye Despair, continues exploring this worst-nightmare scenario, but it makes the journey exciting and unexpected thanks to a new locale and cast.

As a visual novel, most of the gameplay involves reading dialogue between characters. You also investigate crime scenes and find clues to present during trials. These elements are still intact from the original, but Goodbye Despair ditches Hope's Peak Academy and takes a group of talented students to a tropical island for a fun field trip. However, soon the blood-thirsty bear Monokuma shows up and brings back his torturous game, imprisoning the students on the island.

The change in scenery offers rich areas for exploration. You visit five different islands, including a theme park and an abandoned city. The locales are more memorable than the first game, but the characters aren't. The students are more archetypal, like the meek nurse who doesn't want to upset anyone. The writing still does a great job at exploring people's mental states and casting doubt on their claims, and that's the real lure. Are you potentially befriending a murderer or the next victim?

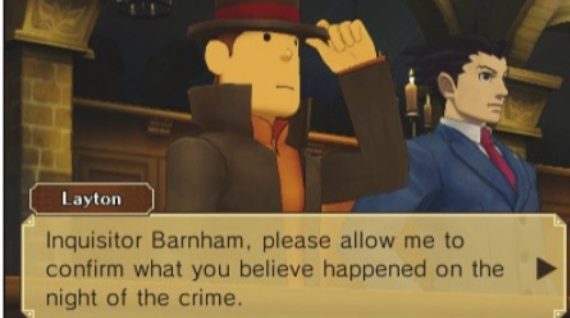
The plot is far from perfect, though, and pacing is the biggest issue. The story doesn't pick up until the end of the third case – halfway through the adventure. The first few cases aren't awful, but they're just not particularly surprising or emotional. Once the plot takes off, however, it left me glued to my Vita, losing sleep to see the next reveal. Endings aren't easy to pull off, but Goodbye Despair nails its finale, making it just as fascinating as it is satisfying. Still, I wouldn't play Goodbye Despair without playing Trigger Happy Havoc first, as the ending won't be nearly as rewarding or comprehensible.

The gameplay tweaks the original formula slightly. Instead of merely pointing out contradictions as classmates spew their theories, you can now reinforce points when you agree. The solutions to some of the puzzles are more obtuse though, forcing me to rely on trial-and-error – something I rarely did in Trigger Happy Havoc.

One new addition is absolutely horrible: Logic Dive – a snowboarding video game where you dodge obstacles while answering questions. Nothing is more frustrating than knowing the answer to a question, but having to complete a jump sequence to advance.

If you enjoyed the first entry, you owe it to yourself to play Goodbye Despair. If you who weren't enamored with it, you won't find anything here to change their mind. Nonetheless, few series mess with your head like Danganronpa. It sticks with you long after you watch the credits roll. » **Kimberley Wallace**





Layton

Inquisitor Barnham, please allow me to confirm what you believe happened on the night of the crime.



Grand Grimoire Court Record



Menu



Barnham

Now then, Milord! I believe it is time. I ask that you render your unwavering verdict!

Grand Grimoire Present Court Record



Hint

Grand Grimoire Court Record



Menu

Professor Layton Vs. Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

No objections here

Style 1-Player Adventure/Puzzle Publisher Nintendo Developer Level-5/Capcom Release August 29 Rating T

8

When I first heard about Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, I was beyond excited. As a fan of both series, which combine for a total of around a dozen games, I couldn't wait to see how these similar-yet-different worlds would mix. Most gaming crossovers uproot the characters from their respective genres and place them in fighting games or (shudder) Olympic sports competitions. After playing Layton vs. Wright, I can't recall another case in which the core gameplay and tone of both franchises stays so true to both originals.

Level-5 and Capcom go with their most quintessential lineups. Professor Layton and Luke appear as they did in the first DS trilogy, and Phoenix Wright dons his classic blue suit with Maya Fey returning to his side. Both teams start in their respective specialties, Layton solving puzzles around town and Phoenix working the courtroom in London. Both are teleported to a strange town via a magic book owned by mysterious young girl, Espella Cantabella.

Nintendo invested no resources in bringing the game over to North America. Luke is voiced by his British counterpart, which may delight some hardcore fans, but it's a little jarring at first when you're used to the American voice. One thing that never goes away is the alternate spellings of words like "Your Honour," "defence," and the particularly odd "manoeuvre." On the plus side, most of the voices don't have an accent and we get to hear Phoenix and Maya pipe up regularly. I know these games don't rake in Mario money, so I'm just thankful that Nintendo even bothered to bring it over at all.

The peculiar medieval fantasy town of Labyrinthia leans more toward a Layton backdrop than a modern and relatively realistic Phoenix city. It's not long before all four are trudging around town together. These sequences play almost exactly like a Layton game. You explore, gather information, and run a magnifying-glass cursor over every square foot, hoping for hint coins and hidden puzzles. The puzzles collected here feel familiar, but not detrimentally so. You do some classic liquid pouring between glasses, figure out which rope to break, and other brain teasers. I like how more puzzles are tied to obstacles in the world, with chibi versions of our heroes running around inside them.

Fans of Phoenix Wright might be disappointed to learn that there are few crime-scene investigations, and the ones included are brief. Unlike the most recent Ace Attorney entry, there are no 3D rotatable rooms, just the Layton-style dioramas.

The courtroom returns things to Phoenix's domain. Finger pointing, extreme expressions, and a bearded judge all capture the feel. The new multi-witness system shakes things up; several characters offer testimony one after another, and you have to call out contradictions in their statements. This allows a nice mix of personality on the stand instead of pecking away at a single character. Just because someone makes a noise to signal a contradiction doesn't always mean that pressing will move the case forward. Plenty of these lead to dead ends, so you have to use discernment to determine the useful leads. It works as a new wrinkle, and if you find yourself getting stuck, Layton's hint coins

can be used in court to point the way. It can be a smooth way to avoid losing Phoenix's "credibility" by turning in the wrong pieces of evidence so you can receive the full picarat payout at the end of the case.

Primary inquisitor Zacharias Barnham looks more like a Fire Emblem knight than a traditional Ace Attorney prosecutor – and isn't as antagonistic as Wright's other opponents. Most of the conflict stems from our heroes' fish-out-of-water experience in a medieval world rather than unbridled venom. Instead of relying on fingerprints and forensics, Phoenix must leverage the logic of the world he's in, which frequently includes the laws of magic spells.

The story is about as good as you're going to get when it comes to a crossover. All four leads receive relatively equal face time and they're all mixed and matched in different ways to pay fan service and play out how they all would get along. The ratio of courtroom scenes to puzzles is relatively even for most of the game until the court takes over at the end. Prepare yourself for several hours of over-explanation of the fantastically implausible plot. Both series have closed out on some doozies, but this one feels extra outrageous.

I can't say what fans of only one franchise or the other think of the unfamiliar sections, but I think they will be a breath of fresh air for two series that have become bolted down to the same mechanics for years. As a fan of both, I didn't get all the bells and whistles I expect from both sides, but I'm pleased with how the strongest elements from the Professor Layton and Phoenix Wright games came through in the end. » **Bryan Vore**

3DS

» Concept

The kings of Nintendo portable adventure unite for an unlikely crossover

» Graphics

Detailed 3D characters, imaginative environments, and impressive animated cutscenes provide a visual treat for fans

» Sound

Classic theme songs blend with catchy new tracks and solid voice acting

» Playability

Adventuring uses tried-and-true Layton mechanics while the court scenes naturally fall under the Ace Attorney system

» Entertainment

It's not the ultimate Layton or Phoenix Wright game, but it's just plain fun to see these two and their respective assistants working together and playing off their differences

» Replay Value

Moderate

PLAYSTATION 4

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
Bound By Flame	8	Jul-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14
Daylight	6	Jun-14
Deception IV: Blood Ties	6.75	May-14
EA Sports UFC	8	Aug-14
Entwined	5.5	Aug-14
Infamous Second Son	8.5	May-14
Lego The Hobbit	8	Jun-14
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	7	May-14
Murdered: Soul Suspect	6.5	Aug-14
Sniper Elite III	6.5	Sep-14
Titanfall	9	May-14
Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark	5	Sep-14
Transistor	9	Jul-14
Trials Fusion	8	Jun-14
Valiant Hearts: The Great War	7	Aug-14
Watch Dogs	8.5	Jul-14
Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14

XBOX ONE

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
Another World: 20th Anniversary Edition	8	Sep-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14
EA Sports UFC	8	Aug-14
Kinect Sports Rivals	6.5	Jun-14
Lego The Hobbit	8	Jun-14
Magic 2015 – Duels Of The Planeswalkers	8.75	Sep-14
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	7	May-14
Murdered: Soul Suspect	6.5	Aug-14
Plants Vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare	6.5	May-14
Super Time Force	8.5	Jul-14
Super Ultra Dead Rising 3 Arcade Remix Hyper Edition EX + α	7.5	Aug-14
Titanfall	9.25	May-14
Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark	5	Sep-14
Trials Fusion	8	Jun-14
Valiant Hearts: The Great War	7	Aug-14

Watch Dogs	8.5	Jul-14
Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14

PLAYSTATION 3

2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil	8	Jun-14
Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
BioShock Infinite: Burial At Sea – Episode 2	8.5	May-14
Bound By Flame	8	Jul-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14
Dark Souls II: The Crown Of The Sunken King	9.75	May-14
Drakengard 3	6	Jul-14
Grid Autosport	7.75	Aug-14
Lego The Hobbit	8	Jun-14
Luftrausers	8.5	May-14
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	7	May-14
MLB 14: The Show	8.5	Jun-14
Murdered: Soul Suspect	6.5	Aug-14
R.B.I. Baseball 14	2	Jun-14
South Park: The Stick of Truth	8.5	May-14
Tales of Xillia 2	7.75	Sep-14

Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark	5	Sep-14
Valiant Hearts: The Great War	7	Aug-14

PLAYSTATION 3

Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 1: All That Remains, The	8.5	Feb-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 2: A House Divided, The	8.75	May-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 3: In Harm's Way, The	8.5	Jul-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 4: Amid the Ruins, The	8	Jul-14
Watch Dogs	7.5	Jul-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 1 – Faith, The	9	Dec-13
Wolf Among Us: Episode 2 – Smoke & Mirrors, The	7.5	Apr-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 3 – A Crooked Mile, The	8.5	Jun-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 4 – In Sheep's Clothing	6.5	May-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 5 – Cry Wolf, The	7.5	Sep-14
Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z	6.5	May-14

XBOX 360

2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil	8	Jun-14
Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
BioShock Infinite: Burial At Sea – Episode 2	8.5	May-14
Bound By Flame	8	Jul-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14
Dark Souls II	9.75	May-14
Dark Souls II: The Crown Of The Sunken King	9	Sep-14
Grid Autosport	7.75	Aug-14
Lego The Hobbit	8	Jun-14
Magic 2015 – Duels Of The Planeswalkers	8.75	Sep-14
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	7	May-14
Murdered: Soul Suspect	6.5	Aug-14
R.B.I. Baseball 14	2	Jun-14
South Park: The Stick of Truth	8.5	May-14
Super Time Force	8.5	Jul-14
Titanfall	9	Jun-14
Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark	5	Sep-14

7 | Crimsonland

Platform PlayStation 4
Release July 15 Rating T

Crimsonland has all the gameplay mechanics in place, but it looks and sounds like it was released before the real art and sound were put in place. The twin-stick shooting at the core is fun, but the experience can't help but be diminished by nearly every other aspect of the game. — Kyle Hilliard

8 | Theatrhythm Final Fantasy: Curtain Call

Platform 3DS Release September 16 Rating T

If you already tapped through the 70-plus immortal tunes of the original, this expanded 200-plus song selection and the extra modes may not be enough to justify a return visit. However, Curtain Call is a good choice for those diehard Final Fantasy fans that couldn't get enough of the original. — Tim Turi

5 | Only If

Platform PC Release July 25 Rating NA

The dialogue and voice acting fall flat, so your hero is totally unlikable. The twist at the end is beyond stupid. The whole game is just a cocktail of disastrous or dull moments, with the environment occasionally playing an amusing trick on you. — Joe Juba

7.5 | Sacred 3

Platform PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
Release August 5 Rating M

Substantial elements from the previous games haven't made the cut. Whether you enjoy the remaining slices ultimately depends on whether you value arcade-style hack-and-slash action over open-world exploration. — Jeff Cork

8 | The Golf Club

Platform PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC
Release August 19 (Xbox One, PC), August 26 (PS4) Rating E

The Golf Club delivers as a course creator, and it's no slouch swinging the clubs, either. What's missing is the personality; the larger career structure and personal investment in your avatar to spur players on and elevate the experience from a nice set of features to the complete package. — Matthew Kato

7 | Risen 3: Titan Lords

Platform PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC Release August 12 Rating M

While the adventure has lots of content to explore (and multiple ways to experience it), Risen 3's imprecise combat and ponderous dialogue keep the title from realizing its swashbuckling potential. — Daniel Tack



8 | Infamous First Light

Platform PlayStation 4 Release August 26 Rating T

Infamous First Light lacks some of the punch of Second Son in its campaign battles and familiar narrative marks, but is still a welcome addition to the series. Fetch is a fantastically written character, and the conclusion to her origin story is worth seeing in its entirety – even if you already know what happens. — Andrew Reiner

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Trials Fusion	8	Jun-14
Valiant Hearts: The Great War	7	Aug-14
Walking Dead: Season Two – Episode 1: All That Remains, The	8.5	Feb-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 2: A House Divided, The	8.75	May-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 3: In Harm's Way, The	8.5	Jul-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 4: Amid the Ruins, The	8	Jul-14
Watch Dogs	7.5	Jul-14
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Wolf Among Us: Episode 2 – Smoke & Mirrors, The	7.5	Apr-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 3 – A Crooked Mile, The	8.5	Jun-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 4 – In Sheep's Clothing	6.5	May-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 5 – Cry Wolf, The	7.5	Sep-14
Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z	6.5	May-14

WII U

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark	5	Sep-14
Pushmo World	7.75	Aug-14
Shovel Knight	8.75	Aug-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14

PC

A Story About My Uncle	7.75	Aug-14
Age Of Wonders III	7.5	Jun-14
Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
Among The Sleep	7.75	Aug-14
BioShock Infinite: Burial At Sea – Episode 2	8.5	May-14
Bound By Flame	8	Jul-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14
Dark Souls II	9.75	May-14
Dark Souls II: The Crown Of The Sunken King	9	Sep-14
Daylight	6	Jun-14
Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls	9.25	May-14

Divinity: Original Sin	9	Sep-14
Goat Simulator	5	Jun-14
Hearthstone: Heroes Of Warcraft	9	May-14
Lifeless Planet	7.25	Sep-14
Luftrausers	8.5	May-14
Magic 2015 – Duels Of The Planeswalkers	8.75	Sep-14
Moebius: Empire Rising	6	Jun-14
Murdered: Soul Suspect	6.5	Aug-14
Rambo: The Video Game	4	May-14
Shadowrun: Dragonfall	8.75	May-14
Shovel Knight	8.75	Aug-14
Smite	9	May-14
Sniper Elite III	6.5	Sep-14
South Park: The Stick of Truth	8.5	May-14
Titanfall	9.25	May-14
Towerfall Ascension	9	May-14
Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark	5	Sep-14
Transistor	9	Jul-14
Trials Fusion	8	Jun-14
Tropico 5	8.5	Jul-14
Valiant Hearts: The Great War	7	Aug-14

Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 1: All That Remains, The	8.5	Feb-14
Walking Dead Season Two – Episode 2: A House Divided, The	8.75	May-14
Walking Dead: Season Two – Episode 3: In Harm's Way, The	8.5	July-14
Walking Dead: Season Two – Episode 1: All That Remains, The	8.5	Feb-14
War Of The Vikings	6.5	Jul-14
Watch Dogs	8.5	Jul-14
Wayward Manor	5	Sep-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 1 – Faith, The	9	Dec-13
Wolf Among Us: Episode 2 – Smoke & Mirrors, The	7.5	Apr-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 3 – A Crooked Mile, The	8.5	Jun-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 4 – In Sheep's Clothing	6.5	May-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 5 – Cry Wolf, The	7.5	Sep-14
Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z	6.5	May-14

3DS

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Prepare for a Life of Tech Respect

gameinformer

Volume XXIV • Number 10 • Issue 258

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Whether you're trapped on a lost spaceship or in a haunted mansion, you're going to need items to survive in a horror game. Match the appropriate item with the game. *by Daniel Tack*

1. ___ The 7th Guest
2. ___ Alan Wake
3. ___ Amnesia: The Dark Descent
4. ___ Alone In The Dark (1992)
5. ___ BioShock
6. ___ DayZ
7. ___ Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly
8. ___ I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream
9. ___ Left 4 Dead 2
10. ___ Resident Evil
11. ___ Silent Hill 2
12. ___ Splatterhouse

 A GREEN HERB	 B TYPE-14 FILM	 C JAR OF OIL
 D POT OF SOUP	 E DOLL	 F JAR OF EYES
 G RADIO	 H FLASHLIGHT	 I AUTOMATIC HACK TOOL
 J CANNED BAKED BEANS	 K GNOME CHOMPSKI	 L TERROR MASK

1-E, 2-H, 3-C, 4-D, 5-I, 6-J, 7-B, 8-F, 9-K, 10-A, 11-G, 12-L

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