



ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

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EXCLUSIVE SCREENS & INFO PG.68



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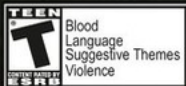
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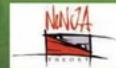
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ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD

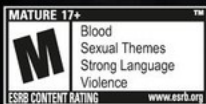
NOVEMBER 16



"One round in multiplayer has us sold"
— Game Informer

**"The single-player looks like
the best in the series"**
— Destructoid

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The Future Is Ringing, Will Someone Please Pick Up



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

Read my column or
comment on this letter at
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follow @GI_AndyMc

Everyone came out of E3 shot-out-of-a-rocket amazed at the Nintendo 3DS. The fact that you didn't have to wear 3D glasses overcame the biggest obstacle facing the born-again technology, and the list of partners supporting Nintendo's new platform is a who's who list of talent. Though the tech is impressive, I have to wonder how Nintendo will maintain its handheld market share without built-in mobile phone capabilities.

Apple and every other mobile phone company on the planet is targeting handheld gaming, and the argument that there is only so much pocket space for mobile devices calls into question the draw of gadgets that only handle one aspect of mobile computing, even if they do that one thing extremely well. Handheld sales have continued to decrease over the past year, but the Nintendo camp isn't panicking. With the power of mobile phones continuing to increase, however, you have to wonder where the tipping point is. When will convenience outweigh what gamers perceive as "true" gaming?

Since the debut of the poorly designed N-Gage, I have said that a single device is the future of handheld gaming. It's just a question of who will create the silver bullet that will change the handheld market forever. Some believe that device already exists with the iPhone. While it may be the closest device on the market to demonstrating the future of mobile gaming, I don't think it's there yet. I know some mobile phone lover is going to tell me mobile phone gaming is already on par with handheld devices, but that is simply not the case. Angry Birds, Solipskier, and Poodle Jump are all amazing games, but pale in comparison to the richer experiences games like Chrono Trigger or Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story offer. Mobile phones tend to lean towards quick in-and-out experiences, whereas the dedicated handheld devices offer longer, more involved sessions.

I travel with my DS, iPhone, and PSP, but if Nintendo or Sony teamed up with a mobile manufacturer to create a device that handled smart phone duties and delivered games at the level I expect from handheld gaming devices, I would ditch my collection of gadgets and jump on board in an instant. If they want to protect their place in mobile gaming, these companies need to embrace the future and start including smart phone capabilities in their handhelds as well.

I can't wait to play the 3DS, but I get the sinking feeling that it will only pacify us until this inevitable innovation happens. If Sony and Nintendo don't build the one device to rule the pocket of gamers everywhere, someone else will.

Cheers,

contents

52

Resistance 3

The Chimera have taken over the entire planet. The human population is a tenth of what it was. One man, previously serving under Nathan Hale, is doing everything he can to reach the remains of New York City to save his family and the human race from extermination.

by Tim Turi



regulars

» 8 Feedback

Matt's piece on his crappy Gamerscore garners a plethora of responses, and readers share their incorrect opinions on what the best Zelda game is. Hint: It's not Twilight Princess.

» 16 Connect

It's that time again: hatin' time! You think that you're not going to write in about how we're horrible people because of this edition of the Sacred Cow Barbeque, but you're wrong.

» 74 Previews

Contrary to popular belief on the Internet, they do still show games at Tokyo Game Show. The TGS crop this year is headlined by Metal Gear Solid Rising, and we've got the latest.

» 90 Reviews

Are you so totally over the music genre, or will Rock Band 3 bring you back in?
by Matt Miller

» 100 Game Over

We talk to infamous developer Sucker Punch about the evolution of protagonist Cole MacGrath.
by Matthew Kato



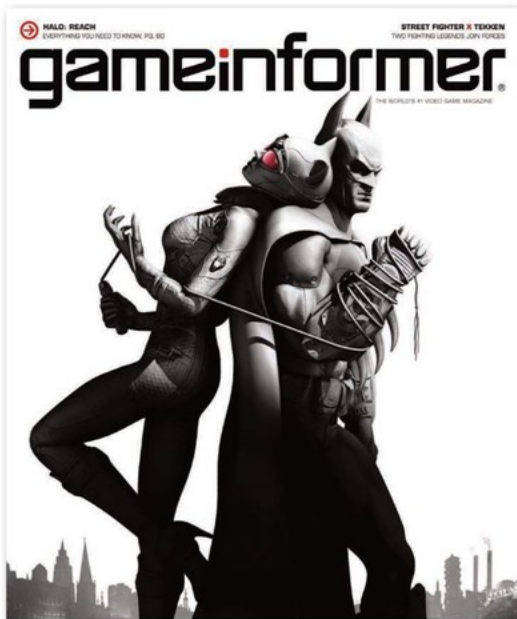
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See how the nutrients
in lowfat milk help Chris
refuel after a game at
bodybymilk.com/chrisbosh

Power up. got milk?



This month in Feedback we discuss the importance of Gamerscores, define what it means to be a fanatic, see the world through the eyes of a StarCraft II addict, and identify a new disease plaguing some of our readers.

The Bat and the Cat

I'm writing to say that September's cover was a great image, and a nice change of pace. Much of 2010 has been big dudes with guns/blades/electricity and carnage, and that Arkham City cover was clever, interesting, and most importantly, makes me want to play the game to see how the friend/enemy dynamics of Batman and Catwoman play out.

Kevin
Colorado Springs, CO

I have had a love/hate relationship with your magazine in the past, but have been a subscriber since issue #1. Issue 209 marks the first time I have ever felt compelled to provide feedback to your editorial staff. As an adult gamer with children in college who are gamers, I have to say this is one of the most intellectually stimulating issues I have ever seen you produce. The minimalistic yet seductive cover, "The Lab Rats," which provides a new fascinating view of the industry; the Opinion article regarding Gamerscores – you have outdone yourselves. This is one issue I am not just going to skim through and toss to the kids, saying "They have Halo: Reach in this one," but one I'll share and talk to them about.

Juan Lara
Pennsburg, PA

Empty Achievements

I am amazed by the Opinion article in issue 209. Matt's stance against Gamerscores shows some serious integrity, especially being a senior editor of a gaming magazine. The concept of Gamerscores or achievements is just one more

wedge separating gamers. Just like the division between hardcore and casual, your score puts you into a group in which you're judged. It seems at some point games stopped being about fun and started being a tasteless competition of one-upping each other. I'd rather keep the competition in the game and not let it be about what kind of gamer I am.

Nicholas
Carson City, NV

I just wanted to thank Matt Helgeson for his Gamerscore article. I spent a good portion of the summer chasing trophies. Matt's article brought me to a realization; I enjoyed gaming much more before Sony implemented the trophy system. I was saved from years of trophy-gyrating by this. These days, most people spend too much time focusing on achievements, and ignoring the finer points of most games.

Henry Hoffman
Kansas City, KS

I agree that gamers should never be judged based on their Gamerscore, but achievements give me a chance to get everything out of the game. I always play the game through once (usually on an easier difficulty to experience the story) without looking at the achievement list, so as to not spoil anything. After I look at the list and see all the weird stuff I could have done, I'll play it on hard mode and try to get whatever achievements I can. This adds more playtime and challenge if you ask me.

Brannigan Carter
Via Email

Our readers brought up some great points as to why achievements are a fun distraction for some gamers, and a waste of time for others. One thing we can all agree on: The best achievements are the ones that provide interesting and unique tasks to tackle, instead of mindless repetition.



Question Of The Month:

Did Halo: Reach live up to your expectations?

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com

A Rebuttal For Fanatics

Not that Game Informer needs anyone to stand up for them, but I'd like to point out to the ignorant subscriber that called your magazine "biased and dishonest" for giving negative reviews to Nintendo games when in issue 208, GI gave Nintendo the best rating from E3. Additionally, if a game sucks, I would like to know why it sucks and how bad it sucks. This is GI's advice to help us not blow our time and money. I have only bought and played games that have gotten a 7.5 rating and up from GI, and I have to say that I have yet to be disappointed. If the writer wants the same experience from Nintendo, he shouldn't expect it to come from terrible games.

Mike Ayers
Ohio

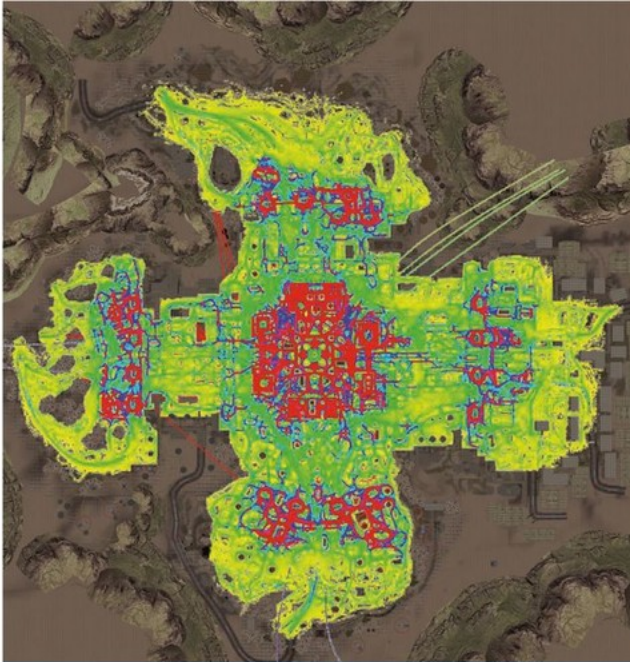
The defining characteristic of a fanatic is their unwillingness to acknowledge or accept any information that runs contrary to the object of their infatuation. However, letters like the one you're referring to do serve an important purpose: When we receive equal amounts of hate mail from Wii, Xbox 360, and PS3 zealots, we know we're doing our job!

Goldie Locks Syndrome

I really look forward to getting GI each month, mainly because of the comical Feedback section. It appears to me that the vast majority of the feedback you get is what I refer to as Goldie Locks Syndrome: "My porridge is too hot," "my porridge is too cold," but it's never "just right." I find your responses very satisfying, because you very nicely answer whatever is being cried about, without just telling them to stop complaining.

Stephen B.
Lexington, SC

We find your analogy intriguing, but we have a clinical diagnosis of our own for these fickle gamers: Big Whiny Baby Syndrome. The only cure for this terminal illness is a stone cold burn, and luckily for them we never tire of doling out prescriptions - it's just one of the invaluable services we provide to our readers every month!



Subliminal Message

So, I'm trying to read the Lab Rats segment in the September magazine, but I'm having trouble because the headlining image (the heat map of MAG's Absheron Refinery) looks exactly like a really big Battlecruiser from Starcraft II. Is that sad?

Alex
Via Email

We consulted with our resident StarCraft II experts to answer your question, and they confirmed that although the image vaguely resembles a Battlecruiser from Blizzard's new RTS, it's still pretty sad. Maybe it's time for you to take a break from the game before your neighbor's dog starts to look like a Zergling.

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

"Is it true that E.T. the video game was so bad they buried it in a desert?"

Yes.

"Who do you guys think would win, The Necromorphs, The Covenant, The Flood, or The Space Pirates?"

Space Pirates. Every time.

"I see you removed the penis from the Vitruvian Man."

Some things are better left unseen...

Worst News Tip Of The Month:

"wii party,coming out befor my sisters birthday!!!!!!"

gi spy



(Left) Ben before fighting EA's Jason Barnes....

(Right) Ben after fighting EA's Jason Barnes. Kids let this be a lesson to you!

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



GI SPY
continued on page 10

The Great Zelda Debate

In issue 209, we asked gamers what the best Zelda game of all time is. Out of the hundreds of responses we received, here are some of our favorites:

Although titles like Ocarina of Time and Twilight Princess added more gameplay elements and better graphics, they are just recreations of A Link to the Past. The characters, the enemies and the way they are defeated, the preliminary dungeons that must be beat to open the more expansive ones – A Link to the Past would have been Ocarina of Time if it were created five years later.

Anthony McDonald

There are three of us in our household answering this question, ages 8, 15, and 56. The 8- and 15-year olds said that Wind Waker was their favorite, and the answer came fast. I'd say Legend of Zelda is my favorite, can't go wrong with an oldie but a goodie.

Kathy Southworth

The best Zelda game ever? I suppose you will get a million and two emails about why one game is better than the others. Let me simplify the matter. The original Legend of Zelda would have to be the best: If it wasn't for the immense success of this game, we would not have been blessed with the countless unforgettable adventures that followed.

Matt VanBenthuyesen

Close Call

I just got issue 209 and in the Timeline it says that Naruto Ultimate Ninja Storm 2 is for the 360??? I am debasted [sic]! I spent \$350 to buy a PS3 just to get this game! My mother is a lawyer and she said that this is plausible for lawsuit! I really hope for your sake that it's a typo! Reply as soon as you can!

Markus Renberg
Via Email

No need to be "debasted" Markus: Naruto Ultimate Ninja Storm 2 is in fact coming out on both the Xbox 360 and the PS3. Please inform your mom that the only person she should sue is her son for spending that much money to play a Naruto game.



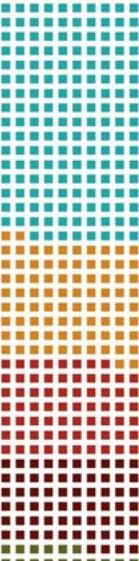
Mistaken Identity

In the article "Top Ten Disgustingly Cute Characters" of issue 209, the writer referred to "that thing Cait Sith rode" as a moogle. I'm sorry to say this is not accurate. Red XIII is not a moogle, he is a moomba. Please correct this in a future issue. Thank you.

Anthony Thayer
Massillon, OH

We're sorry to say that you're wrong, Anthony. Maybe you're thinking of the part in the movie *Advent Children* where Cait Sith rides Red XIII into battle. In *Final Fantasy VII*, the robotic cat rides a big, dumb moogle. We realize that FF games have so many cutscenes that they're easy to mistake as movies, but fans of the series should know the difference. P.S. We're not really sorry.

On Your Mind



- The Best Zelda Game Ever **42%**
- Disdain For Achievements **21%**
- Complaints From Nintendo Fans **17%**
- Complaints About Nintendo Fans **16%**
- Rage Quitters In Madden 11 (Pre-patch) **4%**

GI SPY

continued from page 9

(Left) Meagan and Annette hang with legendary game designers Shinji Mikami and the elusive Suda51 (Inset) Suda was wearing these special golden sneakers he bought a year ago just for TGS 2010 (Right) Dan is still in a post-Reach Microsoft's Mike Stout, Halo: Reach executive producer Joe Tung, and Edelman PR man Mark Van Lommel

continued on page 12



ON OCTOBER 26TH THE KING OF ALBION
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HIS BROTHER.



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1



3



2

WINNER 1 Reagan Nfel We're willing to bet Isaac from Dead Space looks a lot cooler than any engineering students you knew in college 2 Hector Lugo We're amazed the MyC 3 logo can hold up under the weight of Chun Li's always-massive thighs 3 Angel Torres Deadpool gets tired of waiting for Marvel vs. Capcom 3 and takes matters into his own hands 4 Sarah Rodriguez Amaterasu soaks in the fact that with her next game, she's gone from the gorgeous world of Okami to fighting Hulk on top of skyscrapers 5 Brooklyn Chase Alastor may have a sword that shoots purple lightning, but Dante had an electric guitar that shot purple lightning and bats. Point - Dante.



4



5

CORRECTIONS:

In the GI Spy section of issue 209, we misspelled the last name of EAs Amanda Taggart, even though her name tag was visible in the picture. Thanks to our sharp-sighted readers for catching the typos!

In last issue's Massive column, we incorrectly referred to Cryptic Studios as the team responsible for City of Heroes' newest content; in actuality, the title is now in the hands of NCSoft subsidiary Paragon Studios.

GI SPY

continued from page 10

(Left) Meagan sits atop a throne made of classic game cartridges at the Super Potato in Tokyo (Center) Continuing our theme of "editors getting beat up," Square-Enix's *Sonia Im* performs a devastating chokehold on Bryan Vore. He had it coming (Right) Meagan and Microsoft's Kudo Tsunoda point to random Xbox 360 games at TGS. Sounds like it would be a great Kinect game!





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Fallout

NEW VEGAS

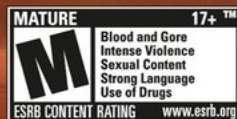
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Long Live The King

Gearbox announces 2011 release date for Duke Nukem Forever

by Matthew Kato

NOTABLES

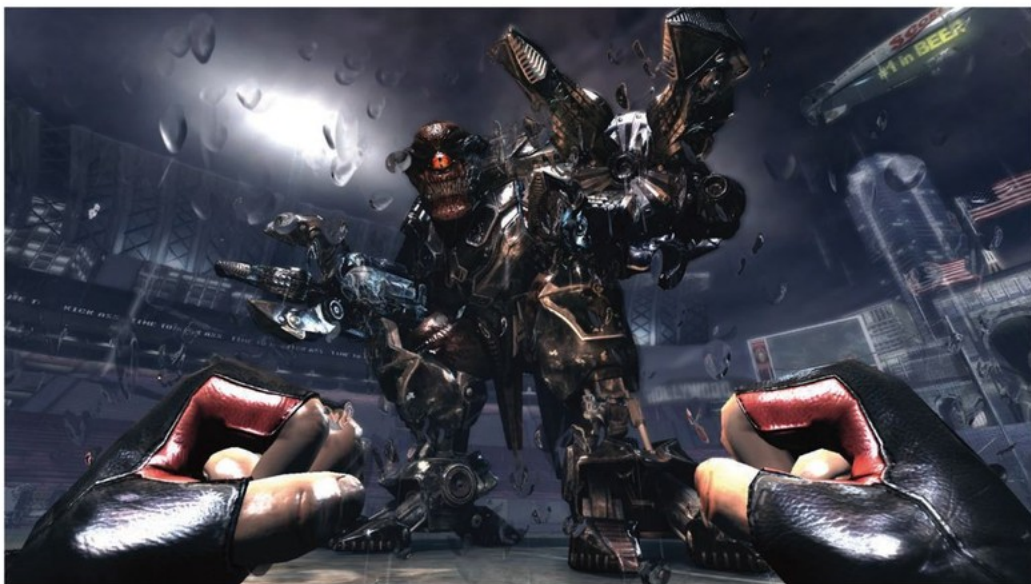
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Gaming's longest running joke is almost over, and Duke Nukem is getting the last laugh. Since its announcement in 1997, the troubled Duke Nukem Forever project has continually flirted with vaporware status and almost lived up to its initials DNF, which coincidentally stand for Did Not Finish. Borderlands developer Gearbox confirmed rumors by announcing at PAX that it purchased the project and the rights to the Duke Nukem license from former developer 3D Realms. Studio head Randy Pitchford says Duke Nukem Forever is on track to appear for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC in 2011, with 2K Games handling the publishing.

Gearbox's acquisition comes after years of investment by Duke's creators. Back in 1997 3D Realms announced a 1998 release date for the game, but as has often been the case in the title's history, this declaration proved to be premature. For the next decade and beyond, 3D Realms periodically teased fans with announcements, leaked screens, and even live demos. These spurred the public's excitement, but after enough time these showings felt hollow. No one believed that Duke Nukem Forever was any closer to completion, and all the announcements did was keep the longest running joke in the video game industry alive.

Duke was stuck in development purgatory largely due to 3D Realms' quest for perfection. Obsessed with keeping Duke on the vanguard of gaming technology, mercurial designer George Broussard constantly shifted the development goals for the project, often forcing his team to switch to different game engines mid-project and requesting brand new features based on whatever another game was doing at the time. As the number of full-time developers on the project dwindled and legal battles with publisher Take-Two ate away at 3D Realms' pocketbooks, Broussard finally waved the white flag, laying off what was left of the staff in May 2009. Many assumed Duke finally had bitten the dust for good.



continued from page 17

Duke Never Dies

For a game that has gone through as many changes as Duke Nukem Forever, many of the original ideas are still intact. We got our hands on the game at the recent Penny Arcade Expo, and it retains many elements from its 1996 predecessor Duke Nukem 3D, like the shrink ray gun, Cycloids, and, of course, Duke's bawdy attitude. When coming across a three-breasted alien invading Earth, Duke is undeterred. "I'd still hit it," he boasts.

The gameplay featured Duke punting the head of a huge Cycloid through the field goal posts of a rain-drenched football stadium, driving sequences through desert canyons, bloody battles with re-imagined versions of the series' pig aliens, and Duke taking a leak – complete with first-person controls.

Duke Nukem Forever looks surprisingly good and so far doesn't seem to have been adversely affected by its long development cycle and numerous iterations. Throughout its history, the game consistently garnered praise whenever it's been publicly shown, but it's been a tantalizing experience that has always disappointingly never fully materialized. Until now.



Many of Duke Nukem Forever's elements have remained intact during its 12-plus years of development



Timeline

Here are just a few looks at the game in various incarnations – sometimes with different engines – throughout its long history

1997



1999



2001



2007



2008



2009



Expose your computer to spyware

by opening a mysterious email attachment

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making you paranoid

to the point where you won't leave the house,

you stop trimming your nails

and begin wearing empty tissue boxes on your feet.

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TGS 2010

The magical shrinking show



For a geek, nerd, otaku, or any other identifying terminology, the first time you step foot in Tokyo is magic. The sights and sounds and general acceptance of all things enthusiast results in a high you really can't get anywhere else in the world. For most, the enchantment of Tokyo never really goes away, and for me personally, the first time I visited Japan that enthusiasm was further fueled at the thought of attending the largest video game event in the country, the Tokyo Game Show. At some point, however, the luster began to fade and the wonderland of Tokyo failed to mask the truth: TGS is becoming more and more underwhelming every year.

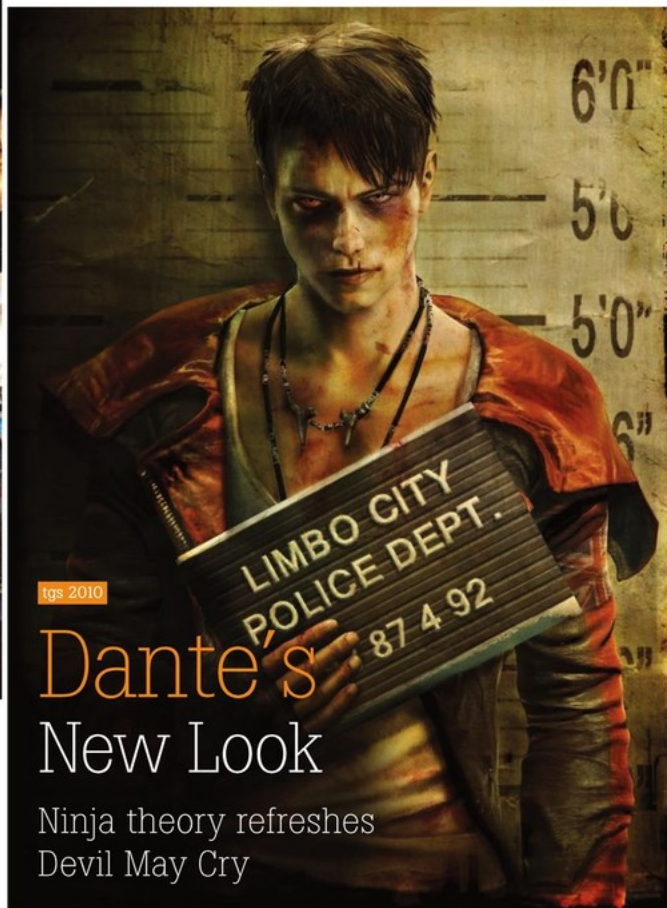
Returning for my third consecutive year, the cool air and quiet halls were immediately indicative of the state of the show. Instead of bustling with energy, everyone seemed to move at a leisurely pace. While recent years have seen the Electronic Entertainment Expo successfully return to its ostentatious roots, my qualm with TGS isn't one of showmanship. The level of grandeur, scale of booths, and extravagance of press events are all icing on a substantial foundation built of games. In this regard, TGS continues to disappoint.

Yes, a few gems stood out amongst the throngs of lackluster titles. With lack of support from major industry players, however, I found myself wondering what the future of the Tokyo Game Show holds. This year, the biggest news didn't even break at the show itself. At an event before the show commenced, EA debuted its collaborative effort with Grasshopper Manufacture, *Shadows of the Damned*. The

same night, Capcom also announced a reboot for the lauded *Devil May Cry* series developed by UK-based studio Ninja Theory. By the time TGS kicked off, the biggest news was already out of the bag. At the show, Microsoft attempted to reaffirm its commitment to Japanese development by announcing five partnerships with domestic developers for Xbox-exclusive content, and Sony stepped up to the plate with new *The Last Guardian* and *Gran Turismo 5* details. Then the floor fell quiet.

Last year, Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune spoke candidly on Japanese development, stating at a *Dead Rising 2* event: "When I look around at all the different games on the TGS event floor, I said 'Man, Japan is over. We're done; our game industry is finished.'" Following up with the *New York Times* a few weeks back, his sentiments seemed much the same: "I look around Tokyo Game Show, and everyone's making awful games; Japan is at least five years behind. Capcom is barely keeping up."

Is Inafune right? Is Japanese development dead? I'm inclined to say no. Instead, it's shifting more toward global development and global appeal. Japanese developers partnering with Western publishers is a snowballing trend. With innovators like Goichi Suda, Shinji Mikami, Fumito Ueda, and Inafune himself making headlines this year, no one can call the time of death on Japanese development quite yet. That being said, one point cannot be contested: The Tokyo Game Show is the largest domestic showcase for Japanese game development, and that presentation is sadly anemic at best. *— by Meagan VanBurklee*



tgs 2010

Dante's New Look

Ninja theory refreshes
Devil May Cry



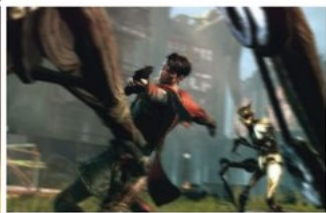
Capcom has talked a lot recently about how it wants to branch out to create more global appeal for its franchises.

For the classic Devil May Cry series, the company is executing this strategy by handing development duties to British studio Ninja Theory. The team that brought us *Enslaved* (see our review on page 100) and *Heavenly Sword* is rebooting the stylish action series with the tentatively titled *DmC: Devil May Cry*.

When an external developer (and a Western one, no less) takes over a popular Japanese franchise, it's often met with reservation from hardcore fans. Some of those fears were confirmed when Ninja Theory revealed the new-look Dante, who now sports a short, black hairstyle. The haircut looks to be a blatant attempt to cash in on the emo vibe made popular by recent teen flicks like *Twilight*. Taking a look at the initial trailer, at least Dante has something to mope about. Part of it shows our hero in an uncharacteristically vulnerable position; chained up in a blood-stained cell, presumably waiting for the next round of torture.

Dante isn't going down without a fight, as the trailer also shows him mowing through crowds of enemies that look like android versions of the first game's scythe-limbed marionettes with his trademark guns and blade. For the finale, he takes the carnage to another level by piercing a nearby car and hurling it at an oncoming wave of foes.

DmC: Devil May Cry is coming to the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, but a target release date hasn't been announced.



TGS DataFile

Valkyria Chronicles III
Only PSP-Bound



The U.S. version of *Valkyria Chronicles II* hit stores a little while ago, and if you like that you'll be happy to know that Sega has more for you with *VC III*. The game comes out in Japan sometime in 2011. We hope to hear about a U.S. release in the future.

Ninja Gaiden 3
Announced



Tomonobu Itagaki may have left Tecmo, but the publisher is forging ahead with *Ninja Gaiden 3*. Details are scarce, but a lone art poster for the title hints at a bloodier tone than last year's *Sigma 2*.

Tekken Tag Tournament 2
Joins the Fray



Namco Bandai announced a new *Tekken Tag Tournament* title for Japanese arcades in 2011. The game allows players to initiate combos from tags, but unfortunately the company did not mention a U.S. console release.

Frank West Returns in
Dead Rising Epilogue



Capcom recently announced *Dead Rising: Case West*, an Xbox 360 exclusive download-only title set after the events in *Dead Rising 2* featuring Frank West from the original title. In other *Dead Rising* news, Capcom has purchased DR 2 developer Blue Castle Software, which is being renamed Capcom Games Studio Vancouver.

Kinect

Comes to Japan

Microsoft debuts five new titles

Despite the company's perennial third-place status in Japan, Microsoft is still plugging away with the Xbox 360. To the strategists at Redmond, Kinect represents a new opportunity for a fresh start for the system, so at Tokyo Game Show the company announced five new Kinect games slated for worldwide release.



1 Rise of Nightmares

[Sega]

The idea of using Kinect to make your way through a horror title (or to flail in fear) is an interesting one. This game has everything from electric chairs and butcher knives to torture tables

2 Steel Battalion Heavy Armor

[Capcom/From Software]

Capcom is resurrecting its cult-classic mech title, and Kinect will replace the previous title's elaborate cockpit controller. The grainy trailer footage of soldiers storming a fortified beachhead along with mechs is striking, but it'll be interesting to see how intriguing the game is without the elaborate controller that was part of Steel Battalion's original allure.

3 Codename D

[Grasshopper Manufacture/Microsoft Game Studios]

The setting for this game is an evil amusement park filled with the kind of crazy characters only Suda51 could dream up. The short trailer for the game shows the protagonist holding a flaming baseball. Perhaps this is Suda51's take on knock 'em down carnival games using Kinect.

4 Project Draco

[Grounding/Microsoft Game Studios]

Panzer Dragoon fans will be pleased to know that the game's director is retuning with this dragon-flying title that comes complete with online play.

5 Haunt

[NanaOn-Sha/Microsoft Game Studios]

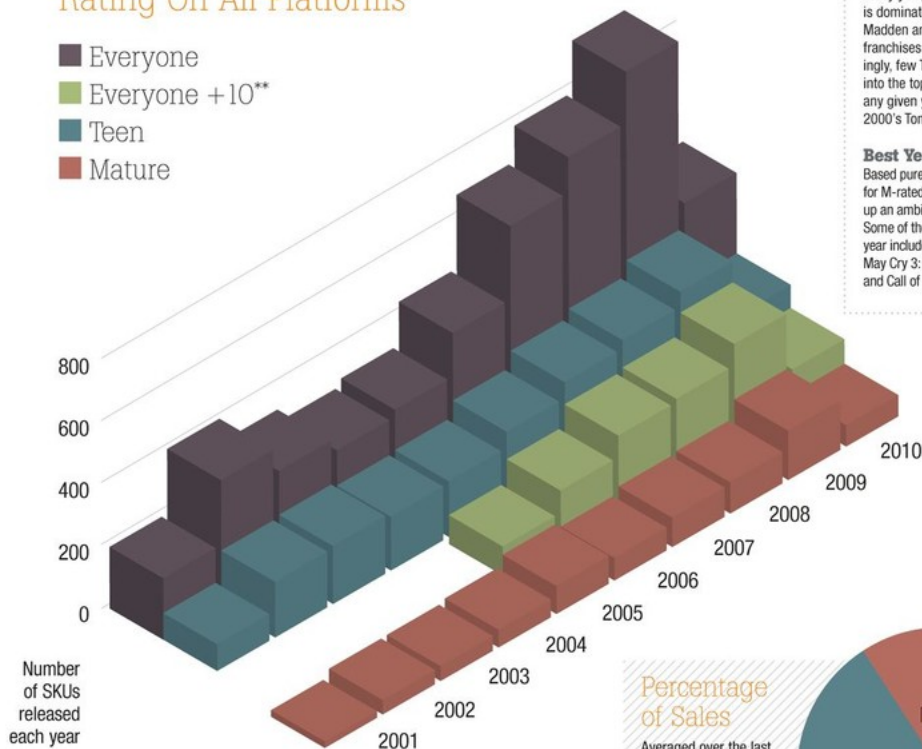
This title is appropriately set in a haunted house. While the game is said to be family friendly, it doesn't look kiddy or cartoony. We'll be interested to see how Haunt and Rise of Nightmares stack up against each other.

Rated For Sale

How games sell based on their ESRB ratings

By Ben Reeves

Games Released by ESRB Rating On All Platforms



Does It Pay To Be T?

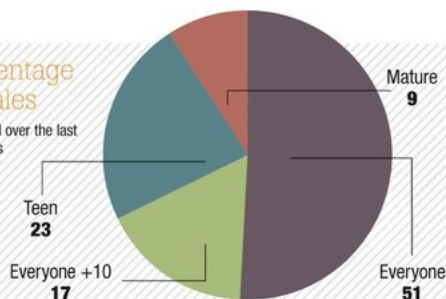
Every year, the list of top-selling games is dominated by E-rated series such as Madden and Pokémon, as well as M-rated franchises like Grand Theft Auto. Interestingly, few T-rated titles ever seem to break into the top three best-selling titles of any given year. One notable exception is 2000's Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2.

Best Year for M

Based purely on market share, the best year for M-rated titles was 2005, when they took up an ambitious 13 percent of the market. Some of the notable M-rated titles from that year included the original God of War, Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening, Battlefield 2, and Call of Duty 2.

Percentage of Sales

Averaged over the last five years



*2010 data is based on incomplete mid-year sales numbers • **E10+ Rating not introduced until 2005

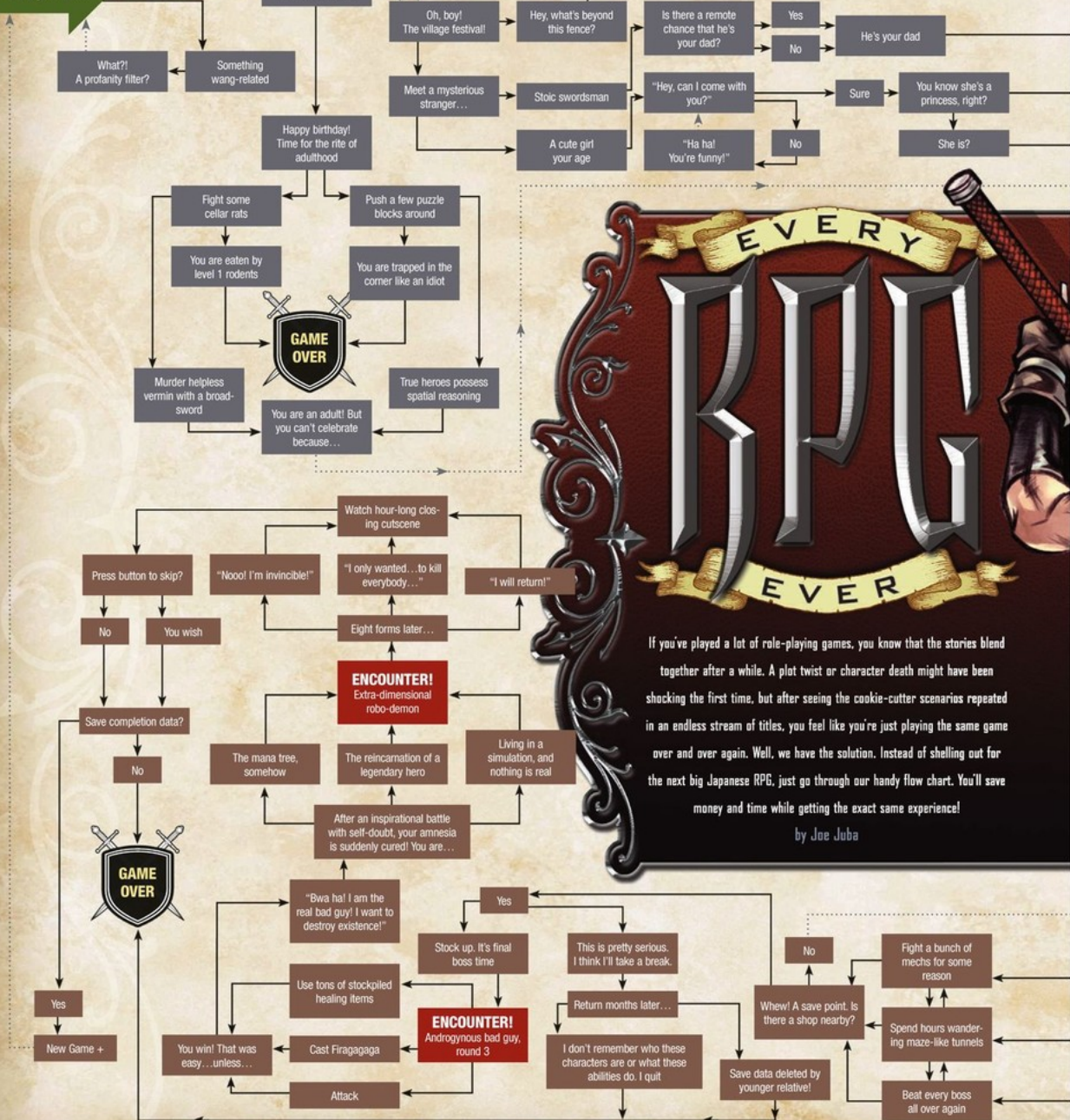
Shaun White

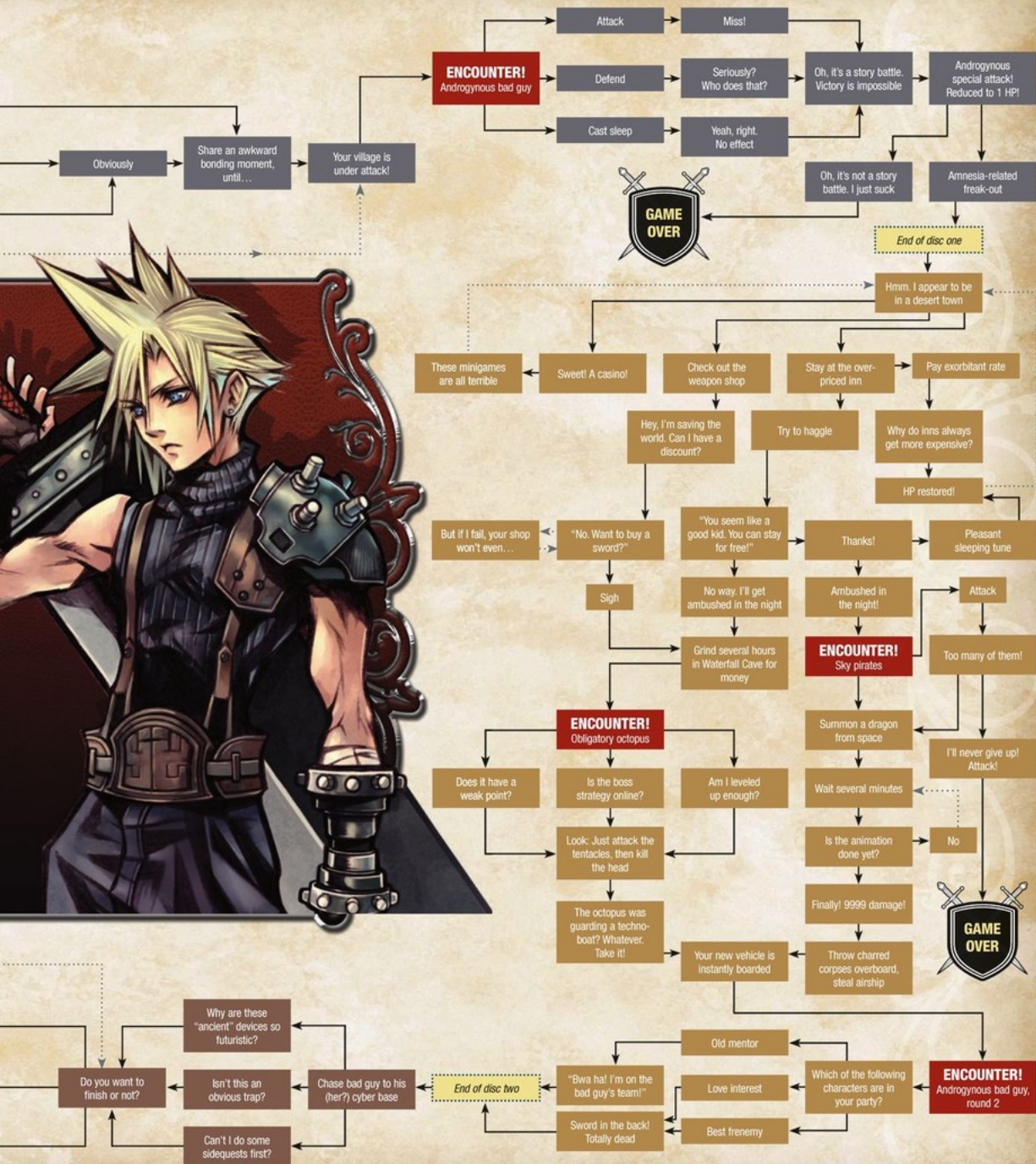
SKATEBOARDING

Transform your world.



START
Enter your name





CHARTING MASS EFFECT'S FICTION

01 Mass Effect Revelation

This novel takes place prior to the events of the first Mass Effect game. On the edge of colonized space, ship commander and Alliance war hero David Anderson investigates the remains of a top-secret military research station. The smoking ruins are littered with bodies and unanswered questions. Who attacked this post, and for what purpose? Where is Kahlee Sanders, the young scientist who mysteriously vanished from the base hours before her colleagues were slaughtered?

Sanders becomes the prime suspect, but finding her creates more problems for Anderson than it solves. Partnered with an alien agent he doesn't trust, Saren, and pursued by an assassin he can't escape, Anderson battles impossible odds on uncharted worlds to uncover a sinister conspiracy – one he won't live to tell about, or so the enemy thinks.

02 Mass Effect

The story of Commander Shepard begins aboard the SSV Normandy, an experimental Human Systems Alliance ship commanded by David Anderson. The Normandy's first mission is to investigate a Prothean beacon discovered on Eden Prime. To aid in the beacon's recovery, the Citadel Council sends Spectre Nihlus, an elite agent of the governing body. The beacon isn't the only discovery to be made on Eden Prime. A synthetic alien race known as the Geth have waged war against Eden Prime's colonies, and are also after the beacon. Nihlus is killed in battle...not by the Geth, but by their leader, Saren. Like Nihlus, Saren is also a Spectre.

What is Saren after? Why would he betray the council? The race for answers begins, and the fate of the galaxy hangs on every discovery.

03 Bring Down the Sky DLC

An asteroid in the Asgard system is on a collision course with Terra Nova, a world that millions of people call home. The asteroid's trajectory was not decided by the cosmos – it's a terrorist act orchestrated by a Batarian extremist group. The fate of Terra Nova rests in the hands of Shepard.

04 Mass Effect Ascension

This novel takes place between the two Mass Effect games. Scientist Kahlee Sanders has left the Systems Alliance for the Ascension Project, a program that helps gifted biotic children harness their extraordinary powers. The program's most promising student is 12-year-old Gillian Grayson, who is borderline autistic. What Kahlee doesn't know is that Gillian is an unwitting pawn of the outlawed black ops group Cerberus, which is sabotaging the program by conducting illegal experiments on the students.

When the Cerberus plot is exposed, Gillian's father takes her away from the Ascension Project and flees into the lawless Terminus Systems. Determined to protect Gillian, Kahlee goes with them...unaware that the elder Grayson is, in fact, a Cerberus operative. To rescue the young girl Kahlee must travel to the farthest ends of the galaxy, battling fierce enemies and impossible odds. But how will she be able to save a daughter from her own father?

05 Mass Effect Galaxy

This iPhone game takes place before Mass Effect 2 and tells the story of Jacob Taylor – a new party character in Mass Effect 2. This biotic-powered super-soldier stumbles across a plot to terrorize civilization's greatest beacon of hope, the Citadel.

06 Mass Effect Redemption

Dark Horse Comics worked alongside Mass Effect lead writer Mac Walters to create this comic, which takes place in Mass Effect 2 before Shepard wakes up on the Lazarus station. Following Saren's attack on the Citadel, Commander Shepard has gone missing and Liara T'Soni is intent on finding her former commander. But she isn't the only one. The Shadow Broker is working alongside the Collectors to find Shepard as well. Liara makes new allies, confronts dangerous foes, and even takes on the Shadow Broker himself in this four-part series.

If you wanted to digest every morsel of Star Wars fiction released between 1977 and now, you'd have to dedicate years of your life to the cause. LucasFilm has transformed Star Wars into an entertainment giant, spanning movies, television, video games, novels, and comic books. Figuring out the chronological order of the fiction offered in each of these categories could take years.

BioWare is grooming its science fiction soap opera Mass Effect to be the next Star Wars-like multimedia giant. Since the series' debut in 2007, Mass Effect has produced two games, three novels, a prequel mobile game, and nearly a dozen slices of downloadable content. If you want to expand your knowledge of this fascinating universe, or are eagerly awaiting its release on PlayStation 3 next year, here's a chronological timeline of Mass Effect's fiction thus far. *by Andrew Reiner and BioWare's Mass Effect team*

12 Mass Effect 2 Overlord DLC

When sent to investigate a Cerberus research base that's mysteriously gone silent, Shepard arrives to find Geth overrunning the base. The sole survivor, Chief Scientist Archer, paints a dire picture. An experiment to fuse a human volunteer with a virtual intelligence has created a dangerous hybrid called VI Overlord. The rampaging VI has already attacked three other Cerberus bases, controlling any technology it finds in an attempt to break free, and unleashing Geth across the planet. Unless Shepard can infiltrate the VI's fortress and shut it down, this homicidal intelligence will beam itself off the planet and wreak havoc on other systems.

11 Mass Effect 2 Firewalker Pack DLC

The Firewalker pack includes five new missions featuring the Hammerhead, a heavy assault vehicle that hovers over the battlefield, travels at speeds up to 120 kilometers per hour, and features a guided missile system ensuring accuracy even during aggressive maneuvering.

10 Normandy Crash Site DLC

Players revisit the crash site of the Normandy SR-1 in this emotionally stirring expansion mission.

09 Stolen Memory DLC

Cerberus has procured the services of Kasumi Goto, the galaxy's most enigmatic master thief. In return for her help, Kasumi has asked for Shepard's help on a dangerous heist to infiltrate the vault of a deadly master criminal named Donovan Hock. Shepard must gain Kasumi's loyalty on the planet Bekenstein, where Hock is throwing a party for some of the galaxy's richest and most deranged criminal minds. The duo must infiltrate the party to recover data of great importance to Kasumi and the galaxy at large.

13 Mass Effect 2 Lair of the Shadow Broker DLC

Liara T'Soni is tracking down the mysterious Shadow Broker, and no one is safe. She'll do anything to recover the man the Broker kidnapped, and the Shadow Broker's agents will do anything to stop her. Team up with Liara and chase clues from the luxurious heights of Illium to the Shadow Broker's own secret lair.

14 Mass Effect Retribution

This novel takes place roughly after the conclusion of Mass Effect 2. The mysterious Illusive Man, leader of the pro-human black-ops group Cerberus that cooperated with Shepard during Mass Effect 2, is hell bent on discovering the Reapers' secrets. To do so he's devised the perfect plan – implant a human subject with Reaper technology in order to study the enemy. He also has the perfect test subject in Paul Grayson, an ex-Cerberus operative. Grayson betrayed Cerberus in order to save his daughter. When Grayson is kidnapped and made the subject of Cerberus' evil experiments, the Illusive Man will finally have his revenge.

07 Mass Effect 2

Having thwarted Saren's plans, Shepard now faces a far greater threat – the return of the Collectors. Waging a merciless war against the galaxy, the Collectors are abducting entire colonies, and humans live in fear. After a two-year absence, Shepard returns. Without a crew or a ship, Shepard forges an alliance with Cerberus, a fringe organization that cannot be trusted. Together they wage war against the Collectors. But in saving the galaxy, are they only angering a sleeping giant?

08 The Price of Revenge DLC

The Price of Revenge includes a new squadmate, Zaeed Masani, and his mission on planet Zorya. Zaeed served in the Alliance military before building a reputation as one of the deadliest guns-for-hire in the Terminus Systems. For 20 years he waged war for profit, but now he wishes to retire from his life of bloodshed and mercenary work. Shepard recruits him for one last job.



Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

After years of open-world video games, Spider-Man's webs began to sag. Thankfully, developer Beenox came along with some fresh ideas and produced the most critically acclaimed Spider-Man title in years. Though the game was received well, Marvel's mascot still couldn't save players from a touchy camera, a hackneyed storyline, and a bunch of soft-minded AI thugs. We talked with Shattered Dimension's producer Stephane Gravel about these issues, and about the challenges of designing four different worlds for Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions.

Spider-Man's last few games were not well received. Were you worried it would be hard to turn the franchise around, or that it might be hard to get people excited about a Spider-Man game again?

When we were presented with the opportunity to work on the next Spider-Man game, our team was ecstatic. Saying that we were fans of Spider-Man is probably an understatement. We knew we had a challenge ahead of us. I mean, who doesn't love Spider-Man? This superhero is well beloved among millions and millions of fans, so we had to make this game true to the character and the license. We saw that as one of the best opportunities we'd ever had, and took it on with only one goal in mind: to make the best Spider-Man game ever.

Considering Spidey's history of open-world titles, did you consider making another open world Spider-Man game, or did you always know you had to do something different?

From the get-go, we wanted to go back to something more straightforward. Before doing another open-world game with Spidey, it was necessary to go back to his roots and make sure that we felt what we called the "Spider-Man DNA." It was crystal-clear in our minds that every level had to be tailored specifically for each villain, and that we needed as many different locations as possible, which wouldn't be possible in a traditional open-world game.

How involved did Amazing Spider-Man writer Dan Slott get in story development?

We had the basic concept (four different worlds), but were unsure about how to link all that together. That is when Dan Slott was brought on board. We flew him to Quebec City, showed him our prototypes, and basically gave him the mandate to tie all that together while respecting the Marvel Universe. There are a lot of lines of dialogue in the game, so we had to hire some help for Dan because his head probably would have exploded if he had to do all the work by himself.

Some of the levels near the end of the game aren't as polished as the first half. Were there any sections of the game that you had to cut due to time?

Well, it's always easy after finishing a project to look back and see all the things that went well, as well as all of the hiccups we had during the process. Believe me, we are more critical of ourselves and our game than anyone else. But it's actually surprising that almost nothing was cut from the game. Now that the game is done we've spent some time going back, and we definitely see a few areas of improvement that we're going to focus on in our future projects.

In the Ultimate comics, Spider-Man only wore the black suit for a few issues, so it was strange to see him wearing it in the game. Why did you guys decide to put him in the black suit again?

It was very important for us that not

only every level looked different, but that they also played and felt different. To better differentiate the look of the character and the combat style of Ultimate Spider-Man from Amazing, we decided to use the black suit for one of them. The only remaining question was: Amazing or Ultimate? We chose the Ultimate universe for the black suit because we really wanted players to experience the iconic vibe of the Amazing Spider-Man with his classic blue and red costume.

It sounds like it would be hard to design four unique approaches to combat. How did you go about making sure the action in each of the four worlds felt fresh?

It's all about dedication. We had a lot of people working on making sure every world was different, be it designers, animators, or programmers. To be honest, the concept was bigger in scope than we anticipated, so reallocating resources to important parts of the game was crucial in making sure the game would be enjoyable.

What inspired the first-person Punch-Out! sequences? Were you worried that the gimmick might grow stale near the end?

There's a reason why you only get a handful of these sequences in the game; even though it's a nice addition, we knew that having too many of them had the potential to end up feeling gimmicky. As for the inspiration, it was all about putting you behind the mask and making you feel like you actually were the

friendly neighborhood Spider-Man, thus making a first-person sequence like that was relevant to the goal. That's also why most of the in-game cutscenes are presented in first-person point of view.

Spider-Man Noir isn't very popular, and fans had nearly forgotten about 2099 before now. Why did you guys decide to include these specific versions of Spider-Man?

Again, it was all about variety. You get to play Spidey in the past and in the future – how cool is that? Anyway, we knew right at the beginning that these worlds were not well known, but we thought that would work to our advantage and that we had an opportunity to have people discover these nearly unknown worlds, especially for people that are not necessarily fans of comic books. Also, those worlds allowed us a lot of creative freedom, with the inclusion of Hammerhead and the mutation of Osborn for Noir, and the creation of Hobgoblin and Doctor Octopus for 2099.

Do you feel like you would have had more time to polish all of the game's different mechanics if you had just done one or two worlds instead of four?

That's a hard question to answer. Maybe. Maybe not. We strongly believe that having four different dimensions was – and is – what people get most excited about in this game. Once we had the idea to do multiple dimensions, we never thought about limiting ourselves to just two; in fact, if time permitted we would have done more than four. More time is always something every developer craves after a project is done, so hopefully this is something we can plan for in the future.

Were there any versions of Spider-Man you would have liked to have included but didn't have time to put into the game? At the same time, were there any villains you would have liked to include in the game but didn't?

There were a couple of villains that we thought of using but ended up not using for different reasons. But we're really satisfied with our choices; we don't have any regrets about what we put in the game. As for the worlds, right at the beginning of the project, during the concept phase, we made a list of all the universes we'd like to have in the game, and we ended up with four of them in the actual product; I think that's a pretty good ratio. I know that's a little vague, but if there happens to be future games in the Shattered Dimensions franchise, we don't want to have any potential ideas revealed too early.

We noticed a few references to Spider-Ham in the game. Would you guys make a Spider-Ham game if you had the chance?

Definitely! It wouldn't be the same kind of game, but we have a few interesting ideas for a game with Spider-Ham. Who knows, maybe we'll get to do one of them in the future? ♦

How does a one-man studio impress Valve and Ken Levine?

Minecraft: An infinite box of LEGO blocks...and zombies



“It seems, dear friends, that our development team has succumbed to Minecraft addiction.”

– the official Team Fortress 2 blog

Part game, part toy, all dangerously engrossing – Minecraft (€10 from www.minecraft.net) is a small indie game that has gotten big attention in the last few months. At first download, the draw is a mystery. You're given no objective, your inventory is empty, and the world is made up of giant blocks with hilariously low-res textures. All you can do is slowly dig through dirt, sand, and trees to pick up the blocks that they drop.

But wait...a log can be crafted into four planks. Planks turn into sticks. Combine a full 2x2 crafting interface worth of planks, and you get a workbench. In the resulting 3x3 grid, you can affix wooden blades to the resulting poles to create simple tools: axes, pickaxes, shovels, even a crude sword. Dirt and sand can be piled on top of each other to create rough structures. Pickaxes can quarry stone out of the ground, which can make a furnace. Feed the furnace with wood and put some sand on top, and you get glass blocks. Windows, at last!

And then night falls, you can't see anything, and a zombie creeps up and explodes all over your face. Respawn with an empty pack once again, you roll up your sleeves.

Six hours later, a mighty stone castle overlooks the shore. Furnaces blast away, smelting iron and gold into useable bars. A bubbling spring feeds a walled garden, where wheat grows by torchlight. You prowl the battlements, picking off zombies that

come wondering by with the fine bow you've crafted. The mountain in the distance begs to be explored, and as soon as day breaks you're off to go digging for precious ore...or perhaps diving into a dangerous spider-filled cavern.

Minecraft is all this and more. You can build mine cart tracks, complete with powered trains carrying passengers and/or goods. Redstone can be pulverized and the dust used to create logic circuits, the possibilities of which the game's sizeable community is just starting to explore. Pressure plates and trap doors can be combined to make monster-slaughtering traps. Want an underwater lair with a hidden entrance and a lava spring feeding furnaces deep below

the waves? It's not only possible, but there's probably a YouTube video showing you how to get started. If it isn't possible now, it might be soon. Minecraft is currently in an alpha state, and the developer has been adding new stuff nearly every week.

Is there a point to all this building? Not really. Is there a point to building an awesome tree fort, other than to have a vantage point to proudly gaze down at your (obviously lesser) neighbors? Minecraft provides nuclear fuel to that creative impulse within all of us. It's a three-dimensional construction sandbox that occasionally explodes. Stupid zombies. *– by Adam Riessner*



1 Multiplayer was recently added. Sharing your creations and watching others' grow is sublime

2 Search YouTube to see this fan-modeled Columbia that drew praise from Irrational

3 Levels can be generated as summer or winter-themed. Developer Mojang Specifications intends to add shifting seasons in a later update

“Oh, Minecraft, how long can I avoid your sweet siren call?”

– BioShock creator Ken Levine, via Twitter

FEAR FACTORS

How developers scare the hell out of
players one design decision at a time
by *Annette Gonzalez*

Some horror enthusiasts argue that the survival horror sub-genre has been on the decline in recent years. Though there are a few notable gems, recent titles in this category often stab at scares by mixing uneventful spooks with stale gameplay, losing what made playing game-changers like Resident Evil and Silent Hill so enjoyable (and terrifying). While fear is subjective, properly placed jump scares, moody environments, and frightening sound design can elicit sweaty palms and an irregular heartbeat in even the most hardened horror junkie. We take a peek at the chilling elements that make up successful horror games and pinpoint which titles get them right.



Surprise Spooks

The most elementary scare tactic in horror games is the jump scare. Nothing like a fallen enemy springing back to life or a creature jumping down from an overhead vent to cause you to pause the game and drop the controller to catch your breath. While a game should never solely rely on jump scares as a fear generator, sprinkling a few memorable instances – such as rabid zombie dogs bursting through windows in a narrow hallway in Resident Evil or unexpectedly finding a female corpse in a blood-filled bathtub in Eternal Darkness – keeps players on edge and makes them hesitant to turn a corner or examine an object thereafter.

Solitary Confinement

One of man's biggest fears is being alone. More often than not, horror titles leave an everyman with no real skill in weaponry or combat in unfamiliar territory to fend for himself. Psychological horror fan favorite Silent Hill follows a man on a search for his daughter around fog-filled territory occupied by hellish creatures. Isolation is proven to be an effective scare tactic. This is part of the reason why the addition of multiplayer in established single-player horror franchises causes panic among fans.

The Sound Of Fear

The usual protocol for playing a horror title is turning off all the lights and cranking up the volume, making a disembodied scream, grunt, or dragging sound on the other end of a dark hallway absolutely terrifying. Dead Space won several awards for its ability to build tension with sound. Unseen Necromorphs shuffling within vents, hazardous electrical cables whipping around, faulty doors slamming open and shut, and most importantly, not always knowing where some of these sounds are coming from effectively sends chills down the player's spine. On the other end of the spectrum, minimalist sound design, as in moody indie game Limbo, can also give you the creeps. Light footsteps and snapping bear traps are more than enough to cause the occasional jump.

Macabre Imagery

Most horror titles offer some degree of terrifying imagery, whether it's in enemy design, lighting effects that play tricks on your eyes in trickling down walls. Games like Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly mix haunting black-and-white cutscenes, disturbing apparitions, and a combination of light and shadow to create a frightening mood. The amount of detail in creating this atmosphere has never made us more afraid of dolls.

Fearsome Foes

Memorable enemies elicit an instinct to run upon first glance, and are a vital component to any horror title. Nemesis from Resident Evil 3 is one such character – a large, pulpy beast wielding a bazooka who has stalker-like tendencies and an unforgettable grumble is enough to make anyone wet their pants. Silent Hill 2's Pyramid Head, the mysterious lady killer and serial rapist masked beneath large headgear and a butcher's smock, is another prime example of great character design. Who can forget the first time you encountered a Big Daddy in BioShock and faced the wrath of its massive drill? With each encounter you wonder what's the deal with these characters, though you're probably better off not knowing.

Unpredictability

The biggest factor in a game's replayability is unpredictable AI paths. Having enemies respawn from different locations during each playthrough helps the game maintain an element of surprise. Valve's Left 4 Dead uses an AI Director system that places the undead in different positions based on the current situation, status, and overall performance of the players. A simpler version of the AI Director was used in Half-Life 2: Episode Two, and is something Valve wants to keep using going forward, and the team designing F.E.A.R. 3 is using a similar tactic. This sort of random respawn technology is something that future horror titles could benefit from as well.

Running For Your Life

What gets your blood pumping more than being chased by a horde of bloodthirsty demons? Take the elevator sequence in Dead Space, where an unarmed Clarke runs from a group of Necromorphs through the narrow corridors of the USG Ishimura, just barely escaping. Any situation pitting your character against an enemy you're hopeless against is a recipe for terror. Nothing will make you crap your pants quite like coming face to face with a grizzly bear in the middle of dimly lit, dilapidated warehouse in Condemned 2: Bloodshot. Stephen Colbert is right to fear those godless killing machines.

Starving The Player

One criticism of recent action horror titles is having an overpowered main character and ample access to ammo and weapons. Back in the Resident Evil days, players had limited inventory slots, making every weapon pickup and ammo discovery precious. Rationing inventory drives the fear of eventually running out and makes each enemy encounter a terrifying exercise in combat efficiency. Even though access to resources is a design decision slated toward accessibility, greatly limiting resources and inventory slots at higher difficulties is a plus for the hardcore player who is seeking a challenge. ♦

TOP TEN VIDEO GAME MOUSTACHES

by Tim Turi



1 Mike Haggar – Final Fight

There are men, and there are men. Mike Haggar is the latter. When this ex-pro wrestler turned mayor discovers his daughter is kidnapped, he removes his shirt and begins punching and pile-driving everyone in Metro City. All that dripping testosterone is nothing compared to his neat, trim lip-warmer of intimidation. A vote for Haggar is a vote for 'stache.

4 Old Snake – Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

In Metal Gear Solid, Snake was a clean-shaven, boy-faced government operative. After going rogue and philanthropic in Sons of Liberty, Snake grew a fuzzy trailer park beard and mullet. In Guns of the Patriots, Old Snake grew an old man moustache because, well, he's an old man. That's what old men do. Or maybe Fox Die has some very dapper side effects.



5 Wario – Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins
Mario and Luigi have been sporting lush Italian 'staches since the 8-bit era, long before Wario came along with his crooked pipe cleaners. But Mario's conniving doppelganger beat those guys on the list thanks to sheer grotesqueness. Seriously, it looks like two fuzzy caterpillars crawled from Wario's nose and were then electrocuted.



6 Dr. Robotnik – Sonic

A video game character based off President Theodore Roosevelt has to have a stately 'stache. Approximately 60 percent of Dr. Robotnik's facial real estate is taken up by his flamboyant feather dusters. You may be interested to know that the inclusion of Sonic's nemesis on this list was delayed due to a fraudulent moustache inspection; we had it on good authority that Dr. Robotnik's plumage was actually the result of an attempt to snort Tails.



7 Soda Popinski – Punch Out!!

Getting beat down by a soda-swilling Russian is bad enough, but it's even more demoralizing when staring into the face of such beastly bristles. We lost two dozen matches straight in Punch Out thanks to Soda Popinski's distracting lip locks. You thought that bones strengthened by drinking milk were important for boxers? Nope, the sticky, soda-infused moustache is the real key.



8 Mucho Macho Moustachio – Ninja Tourn

This moustache is a moustache with a moustache on it, which double-qualifies it for our list. Do we give credit to the flying 'stache that carries ninjas to safety or the moustache it wears? We may have stumbled upon a tear in the fabric of reality here. Looking upon this furry friend is like gazing into the gaping endlessness of an infinity mirror.



9 Captain John Price – Call of Duty

The mustachioed, gun-toting captain of the Call of Duty series has fallen down waterfalls, fled a sinking ocean liner, killed terrorist leaders, destroyed the International Space Station, and escaped prison. You'd think that Price would have died somewhere along the way, but thankfully he's got that bushy handlebar in the middle of his face he can use to hang on for dear life.



10 Lance Vance – Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Some say that Lance Vance grew his slim and debonair moustache to keep his upper lip warm, but we know it's actually to keep the ladies warm... at night. In Grand Theft Auto: Vice City we are led to believe Lance's paranoia causes him to betray Tommy Vercetti, but we think the follicles of his sleek pencil moustache spread into his mind, took root, and made him drunk with power. 'Stache power.

2 Dr. Wily – Mega Man

Apparently mad scientists only have enough time to shave their neck, chin, and cheeks. Dr. Wily has an outrageous set of whiskers. If the shifty eyebrows don't convince you of his evil, his hair and moustache look like matching pairs of batwings. Is the doctor's dastardly facial hair the reason he never dared to construct Razor Man?



3 Landon Ricketts – Red Dead Redemption

Landon Ricketts' signature soup-strainer is the bushiest and baddest in the Wild West. Did you know the bandana was invented to make showdowns with this cowboy fair? Ricketts' walrus-like nostril fuzz would stun opposing gunmen before they could even reach for their guns. That, and too many innocent ladies were accidentally shot upon bum-rushing the handsomely hairy fella.



The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN

the good

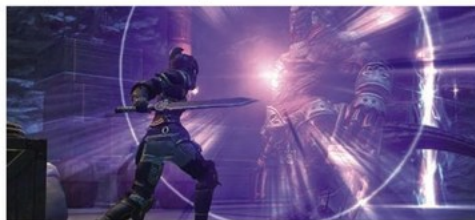
NASCAR is back with its own dedicated game, with Activision and U.K. racing developer Eutechnyx (Supercar Street Challenge) behind the wheel. NASCAR The Game 2011 comes out for PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii in February. Details are scarce at the moment, but the game features a full 43-car field, all 22 tracks, a host of real drivers with supposedly accurate AI behaviors, online racing, and multi-car wrecks. Stay tuned for more info as we get it.



The company's first handheld game: Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

(ABOVE) BioWare could be working on another handheld title. One of the company's QA leads' LinkedIn profile listed his current project as an "Unannounced handheld game" – a listing that has since been changed to simply read "Unannounced." If that's not an indication that the rumor is true, we don't know what would be.

(BELOW) Final Fantasy XIV's payment system uses a currency called Crysta, which is like Microsoft's Live points in that you can never use them all up paying for the stuff you need, so you're essentially always paying to have a little extra hanging around in your account tempting you to waste it on useless junk in the marketplace. Although you can use a credit card to pay for your subscription, the third-party provider Square has chosen has already been criticized by users for its convoluted processes and inflexibility.



the bad

You knew it was coming. Rockstar has delayed L.A. Noire to an unspecified time in 2011. We wouldn't be surprised if it was pushed as far back as holiday of next year. LittleBigPlanet 2 and Conduit 2 have also had their release dates pushed to 2011.



the ugly

The arrogance of Activision's Bobby Kotick knows no bounds. He recently told a conference that he wants to "capitalize on the relationship that we have with our audience" by selling hour-and-a-half movies of cutscenes (like from StarCraft II, shown) for \$20 or \$30 within the next five years. As crazy of an idea as it is, there will certainly be takers. What would be really evil is if a company – perhaps Kotick's – makes you spend extra for cutscenes as the only way to experience them in your games.



(ABOVE) Realtime Worlds' action MMO APB closed down only months after it launched. The game was delayed numerous times during development, and didn't come out of the gate strong either. The developer has been going through a rough patch because of the failure, layoffs, bankruptcy filing, and the loss of other projects.

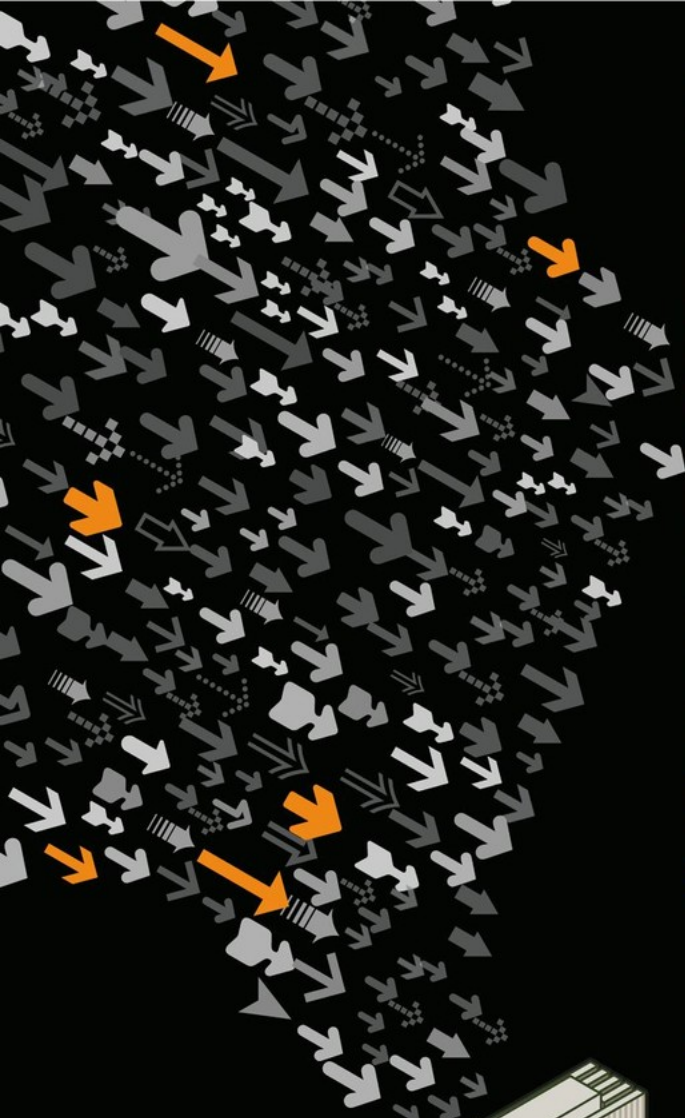


After [Shadows of the Damned] comes out and is a huge success, I would really love to do a sequel for No More Heroes and maybe collaborate with EA.



Grasshopper Manufacture's Suda51 contemplates the future, including No More Heroes 3





Dead Rising 2: Case 0
Experiencing the thrills of Dead Rising 2 in a condensed, bit-sized setting is still a blast



feature

DLC

Diagnosis

No aspect of the gaming marketplace is as unpredictable and inconsistent as downloadable content. DLC is the Wild West of gaming, and publishers are doing everything they can to strike it rich by honing the balance of timing, price, and worthwhile content. Game makers are searching for a consistent winning formula, and we've taken a close look at the DLC approaches that we'd like to see more and less.

by *Tim Turi*



What We Want:

Well Timed Single-Player Expansions When we love a game, we already want more of it when the credits roll. Several games have nailed the timing window with great single-player DLC. Remedy's first Alan Wake episode, *The Signal*, delivers fun, chaotic gameplay for free (or \$7 if you don't buy the game new) approximately two months after the game's release – more than enough time to complete the main quest. *Grand Theft Auto IV's* *The Lost and Damned* and *Ballad of Gay Tony* downloadable episodes delivered awesome new gameplay mechanics and more digestible storylines for Rockstar fans, and only made them wait months rather than years for follow-ups. *Fallout 3* (on Xbox 360, at least) got five sequential DLC expansions approximately every two months following the game's release, leaving the carrot dangling on a long enough stick to keep Wasteland warriors hooked.

More Than A Demo Previewing a game before it releases is nice, but retracing steps you've already made when the final game launches is a pain. Capcom schemed a winning formula with *Dead Rising 2: Case 0*. This prologue chapter to the zombie-butcherer title is not only dirt cheap (at \$5), it expands the story, offers a new setting, and packs hours worth of content. Even better, gamers can transfer their leveled up Chuck into the full game. We hope more developers copy Capcom, because getting a head start on highly anticipated games is great.

New Characters Tons of beloved characters exist in the world of gaming, and adding more via DLC is a great way to keep fans interested. Capcom treated *Mega Man 10* players with retro rival Bass via DLC, with all new shooting mechanics. *Transformers: War for Cybertron* fans who preordered the game received free characters like Jazz and Demolisher, and later Activision released more bots via DLC. We want to see more downloadable characters moving forward. We're looking at you, *Super Street Fighter IV*, *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, and *Street Fighter X Tekken*.

Game Alteration When rabid *Portal* fans discovered Valve altered bits of the PC version of its beloved game, excitement ensued. Valve's intriguing (and free) method of sneaking new content into its highly replayable masterpiece has us wondering what other games would benefit from postmortem Easter Eggs. These refreshing tweaks could be as subtle as *Portal's* sequel hints or as grandiose as mixing up enemy types, item locations, or endings.

Download Kiosks Potential DLC customers would benefit greatly from retailers touting new game content in stores. It would make even more sense to offer consumers the option to use kiosks to download new DLC onto a portable storage device which they can then take home. This would not only be convenient, but could help end the alienation of gamers deprived of Internet connections or online-enabled subscriptions. This would have helped disconnected gamers who held out for GTA Episodes from *Liberty City* and *Borderlands Double Game Add-On Pack* at retail.

Consistent Content Reliable release dates are something the gaming industry has struggled with for a long time, but with sparse DLC exposure, regular releases are imperative. Harmonix has vowed us with its weekly DLC *Rock Band* songs, and *LittleBigPlanet's* constant stream of new level packs is equally impressive. Shopping for new game content becomes more convenient when you can look forward to a day rather than rely on vague release windows.

What We Don't Want:

On-Disc DLC We often hear DLC doesn't make it on retail discs because there isn't enough storage space, which is acceptable. When 2K released the Sinclair Solutions "DLC" for *BioShock 2*, however, players discovered that the content was already on the disc. The publisher justified consumers paying for on-disc content because it didn't split the multiplayer player base. This was also the case with the free *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* VIP map packs, which enabled players to play existing modes on existing maps that were already on the disc. EA passed off the extra modes as bonus DLC, but we see this as both developers tricking content for which gamers already paid.

Download In Progress

Select game makers have proven that core games can be augmented with DLC, but there's a long way to go before the majority of developers and publishers understand what content to offer and when to deliver it. We as gamers are in an interesting position. The DLC that we purchase can shape how the extra content of future games is handled. Download responsibly.

False Promises Nothing upsets fans more than withdrawing previously promised content. Several developers have canceled or indefinitely delayed DLC plans due to underwhelming game sales or other reasons. *Quantic Dream* killed off the *Heavy Rain* DLC after one episode to work on the *Move* version of the game, which puts the developers at risk for being too late if they return to it. New characters *Quan Chi* and *Harley Quinn* were nearly finished for *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*, but when Warner Bros. purchased Midway the company put the kibosh on it.

Taking Us Out Of The Game *Mass Effect 2's* *Cerberus Network* is a good example of DLC advertising, but BioWare's other RPG, *Dragon Age: Origins*, dropped the ball with

intrusive in-game content peddling. We're not fans of being offered a brand new, exciting quest and then being prompted to exit the game and throw down money to play it. This jarring obstacle can interrupt the fluid pace of an otherwise masterful experience.

Tacked-On Modes How many developers have offered a variation of *Gears of War 2's* *Horde Mode* as DLC? This cutting and pasting is a lazy replacement for more interesting and fresh content. *Borderlands' Mad Moxi's Underdome Riot* is guilty, as are *Uncharted 2, Left 4 Dead, BioShock 2*, and *Aliens vs. Predator*. *Battlefield: Bad Company 2's* free DLC mentioned earlier was already suspect, but the paid DLC *Onslaught Mode* is an even greater offender as it's basically a *Rush* mode against AI bots on existing maps.

Expensive Map Packs Developers attempt to appease the feral hunger of gamers by releasing multiple map packs, specifically with shooters. Activision offered two *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* map packs for the steep price of \$15 each (the same price as any of XBLA's *Summer of Arcade* titles). Sales surpassed the five million mark as of June, so obviously gamers are willing to pay a healthy sum for five maps for *Infinity Ward's* sterling FPS. What worries us is less popular games asking for the same amount of money as *Call of Duty*. Hopping into matchmaking months after a game's release only to find the player base has been split between several map packs takes the itch out of our trigger fingers.

1 Alan Wake
Alan Wake's first DLC toyed with fans' perception of the game's ending, something we'd like to see in more DLC

2 Marvel vs. Capcom 3
DLC characters in fighting games could end the need for updated "super" versions

3 BioShock 2
BioShock 2 is a double offender, with on-disc DLC and a single-player horde mode copycat



Six new downloadable games to watch

by Matt Miller

Bastion
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade

One of the coolest things about covering the downloadable game scene is discovering the gems that come out of nowhere. I love watching new studios and established developers alike who take chances on new ideas. This exciting and dangerous approach to development is typified by **Bastion**, a stunning action/RPG from new studio Supergiant Games. Founded by several ex-members of EA's Command & Conquer team, the studio has worked on this beautiful game for the past year. I played an extended demo and was instantly charmed. After the Calamity shatters the world into a series of floating islands, a protagonist named the Kid must construct a new safe haven. The environments feature vibrant backgrounds and incredible detail. Along his journey to find survivors and collect supplies, the Kid battles strange beasts with melee combat, ranged weapons, and special skills. Bastion's real standout feature is the audio. The awesome score melds acoustic guitar with a more modern electronic touch, and a gravely voiced man narrates the entire

game, relaying the story of the Kid as he moves through the world, describing the items he finds, sharing recollections of the Kid's life before the Calamity, and adding excitement to fights with vivid descriptions of the monsters and battles. Bastion is targeting release on XBLA and PSN next summer, but Supergiant Games hasn't nailed down a publisher yet. Whichever company is smart enough to recognize the game's potential may have a hit on their hands.

Ubisoft is also delivering a new franchise next year with **Outland**, an intriguing new platformer from Super Stardust HD creators Housemarque. Outland unabashedly combines Prince of Persia-style platforming with Super Metroid-style exploration. The fantasy game stars a modern-day man of Mayan descent beset by dark visions that send him trekking in the Yucatan jungle for answers. Stark, shadowy landscapes recall elements of Shadow of the Colossus, and a new soundtrack from Ari Pulkkinen, the composer who scored Trine, complements the gorgeous visuals. As he moves through the fantastical setting, the main character must jump and climb past traps and other dangers. As players

navigate the world they can flip back and forth between a light and dark state just like in the classic Japanese shooter Ikaruga. Your choice of polarity determines which enemy attacks can hit you and factors into the platforming challenges. Outland also features an extensive combat component, with massive boss encounters peppered throughout the game. I can't wait to get my hands on this game, which releases early next year and looks to be a strong contender.

If you've been following the series, then you know you have reason to be excited about the newly announced **Bit.Trip Fate**. I played several hours of the incredibly challenging shooter, and the game is just as entrancing as its predecessors. The game puts a new twist on the old-school side-scrolling shooter formula, with your character moving along a designated curve from which he cannot diverge. To dodge enemy projectiles, you must find a place on the line that is safe from attack while simultaneously dishing out punishment on your foes. The series' trademark pixel art and 8-bit inspired music is in full effect, as is the steep difficulty and hallucinogenic visual effects. Every one of these games has been





new high-octane shooter this month and came away impressed by several new features that help move Konami's franchise forward. Uprising features a big shift in its art style, and the new anime sensibility serves the ridiculous action well. The coolest gameplay innovation is the new upgrade system. In Rising mode, your point totals become Corps Points (CP) that can be used to purchase new abilities, health upgrades, additional lives, and weapon power-ups. These purchases can be enabled and disabled to affect difficulty, and each character can be upgraded separately. The extremely challenging arcade mode returns for purists as well. The early levels I played were filled with constant enemy waves and set piece action moments. Add in online co-op on PSN and XBLA, and I'm sold. **Hard Corps: Uprising** should be out late this year.

A while back I shared some tidbits about Capcom's mysterious **Mega Man Universe** project. This month I had the chance to see the game in action. The game is a playground for Mega Man fans, delivering high-end character customization and level creation. Capcom is including a remade version of Mega Man 2 within the core game, but the real deal is that you get to share and download user-created levels. Players can choose from a wide array of playable Capcom characters, from the many Mega Man variations to other favorites like Street Fighter's Ryu. Players can tweak each character by changing out body parts, abilities, and colors to create a unique hero. I'm excited by the possibilities of limitless Mega Man levels to explore and conquer.

For more coverage of independent and downloadable games, visit gameinformer.com/impulse, which features daily updates on the best titles, timely reviews, and weekly spotlights on indie developers and their projects. And don't miss our reviews of *Sonic the Hedgehog 4: Episode 1* and *Plants vs. Zombies on page 102*.

Hard Corps: Uprising
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



Mega Man Universe
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



Outland
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
PlayStation 3, Network, Xbox Live Arcade



unique, and after Fate's fall release, I can't wait to see how Gaijin's unannounced, sixth installment of the WiiWare exclusive series comes together.

British studio Just Add Water made headlines recently by announcing its Oddworld revival. Its first project is a remake of **Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath**, the excellent but underappreciated final entry in the series that debuted on the Xbox in 2005. It sounds as if the game will be a faithful remake, albeit with a graphical overhaul that improves the visuals to meet contemporary expectations. If you never had the chance to try Stranger's Wrath, you missed out. The game stars an unusual bounty hunter in the Oddworld equivalent of the Old West. Players shoot "live ammunition" in the form of giant insects and small mammals, and the storyline includes an awesome twist near the end that reveals a lot about the hero's motivations. I'm excited to revisit the game, and even more intrigued by the possibility of having a new studio building more games within the fantastic Oddworld universe.

It may not have Contra in the name, but make no mistake: **Hard Corps: Uprising** is the next installment in the storied franchise. I dug into the

Game Informer's Third First Annual

sacred cow BARBECUE



July 2010

It's back! Just when video game icons thought it was safe, the Sacred Cow Barbeque returns with a heaping helping of hatin'. While the last two BBQs focused on some of the all-time classics in gaming history, this time around we've focused on some more recent hits. Why? Because games today suck just as bad as they did in the golden age. So read on to find out which of your favorite games are headed for the garbage dump of history. These six deserve all this and worse, believe us.

by GI Staff • artwork by Zander Cannon



ਧਰਤੀ ਦੇ ਧਰਤੀਕਾਫੀ

Oh, World of Warcraft, you have so much for which to answer. We're not referring to the soul-destroying number of lifetimes wasted in some Sam's Choice version of Middle-earth, the relationships ruined, or the underwear soiled. We're not even going to mention having to accept grown-ass men using the word "nerf" as a verb. No, the true travesty of WoW isn't how much time and money has been wasted on it; it's how damn bad this game is.

What's not to love? The simplistic, point-and-click combat that hasn't smelled fresh since we carted EverQuest's stinky carcass off to the glue factory? The fact that – for most people – more of the game is spent in what amounts to a fantasy themed chat room than experiencing actual gameplay? The endless leveling until you reach the top (which then arbitrarily becomes the bottom again)? The fact that not only do you have to suffer through playing this crap, you actually have to pay Blizzard \$15 a month? It's like paying for the privilege of getting kicked in the nuts. Expensive, monotonous, and endless, WoW is the video game equivalent of a hamster wheel. On the plus side, you get to hear creepy shut-ins talking about epic mounts, something you usually have to trawl Craigslist M4M personals ads to learn about.

Oh but the loot! The loot! Never before have so many people that aren't 10-year-old girls worried so much about dressing their virtual dollies...er...avatars. "Ooh! I got an extra rare purple cloak!" "Yippe! I just scored a Shadowmourne!" With this much emphasis on accessorizing, WoW is basically a Bratz game for 36-year-old dudes.

The defining phenomenon in WoW history came in the middle of the decade, when the press discovered the existence of video game sweatshops – poor souls in Eastern Europe and Asia that made substandard wages farming gold for Western Warcraft players. Finally, gaming had hit its ultimate low – a game so tedious you'd actually pay someone else to play it for you.

ਫ਼ੁਰੇ ਦੇ ਧਰ

The God of War series is considered a classic by many gamers, though we'll never understand why. For one, if its "innovative" combat were a book, it would be titled *Devil May Cry For Dummies* – everything that it didn't steal from that series it replaced with lumpen button mashing for the skill-free gaming set. However, God of War is much more than just a simplified rip-off of Devil May Cry! It also has annoying button-pressing minigames swiped from PaRappa the Rapper (but without the funny songs). Don't forget the epic, over-the-top puzzles, like...um...pushing that one box onto that one switch...or that part where you had to pull that lever then climb up and pull that other lever. We get goosebumps just thinking about it.

For reasons unknown, lead character Kratos has become a gaming icon. Could it be his appearance? With a face and body full of ill-advised tribal tats, Kratos resembles an Ed Hardy shirt come to life – if he only had gelled hair he'd fit in perfectly with the *Jersey Shore* boys. If you're capable of overlooking his ridiculous "UFC fighter in a kill" wardrobe, then you'll no doubt be charmed by his personality, which revolves around...um...yelling at stuff...and being...angry...about stuff. Basically, he's like a high school football coach from an '80s teen flick with swords.

Let's not forget the series' deep and affecting story. Starting as a complete rip-off of *Clash of the Titans*, it quickly devolves into an incomprehensible mess that falls somewhere between Michael Bay rewriting the *Odyssey* and a Lifetime movie. Basically Kratos kills his wife and daughter for some reason, then he tries to kill Zeus – who is really his father – but then he's feeling guilty for not reuniting with his daughter – who he already killed because he wants to kill Persephone – or something like that. Believe us, it doesn't make any more sense in the games.

The series attempts to salvage things with ever-more-ridiculous set pieces – "How about Kratos battling Poseidon on top of a Titan who's climbing Mount Olympus?" If there ever is a God of War 4, we expect to see Kratos fighting an eight-headed dragon on top of a Titan Vampire Giraffe who's jumping a Space Camaro over a giant flaming can of Mountain Dew crashing into the moon.



ਰਿਜ਼ੀਡੈਂਟ ਏਵੀ 4

This modern classic was a high-profile exclusive on the GameCube, which was sort of like having a luxury suite on the Titanic. Unfortunately, Resident Evil 4 was ported to systems that people actually owned, so we eventually had to play this piece of crap.

The game stars Leon Kennedy, who is most notable for his horrible eye haircut and weird fur-collared jacket. So, Leon, are you a bad enough dude to protect the president's daughter from a bunch of mentally incompetent villagers armed with sticks and pitchforks by mowing them down with a machine gun? The answer is just barely, as Resident Evil 4 broke with the series' long-standing horrible control scheme with a slightly less bad control scheme that *doesn't allow you to run and shoot at the same time!* Fortunately, they didn't change the whole "save at a typewriter" mechanic we all loved so much.

With so much to hate, Resident Evil 4 is a veritable turd buffet of stomach-churning gaming. Take Ashley, who erratically follows you around during the infuriating escort missions with all the grace of a drunken Tara Reid. Or perhaps you're partial to the annoying, fake-Tetris inventory system? Nothing can really prepare you for the incomprehensible plot. The main villain is a weird midget, and some villagers in later levels suddenly discover rocket launchers and begin dressing as if their life's goal was to combine the videos for "Beat It" and "Thriller."

The real tragedy is this game was successful enough to spawn yet another sequel – Resident Evil 5, which somehow managed to be even worse. The undead never rest.



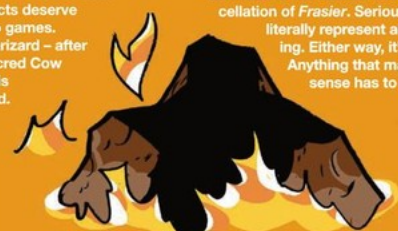


pokemon

We don't love our children. That's the only possible explanation for why we've now let nearly two generations of our young people suffer through the Pokémon series. Unlike the rest of this list, we couldn't narrow down this entry to just one game in the series, for the simple reason that Nintendo has been releasing the same damn game over and over again for well over a decade. Blue, Red, Yellow, Silver, Emerald – this franchise is like a giant bag of beet-flavored Skittles! Taste the rainbow! Catch 'em all! But by all means keep shoveling delicious green dollars into Nintendo's greedy maw.

It's no wonder that the traditional, turn-based RPG is dying a slow death, given how millions of children now grow up thinking that "RPG" means "an incredibly boring slog interspersed with painfully simple battles between mutant stuffed animals." Calling Pokémon's combat a battle system is insulting to the RPG genre – it's basically a dumbed-down version of Rock, Paper, Scissors, but with worse graphics.

This franchise would be bad enough if it stuck to conning nine-year-old handheld owners out of their allowance money, but Pokémon didn't stop there. No, it had to spawn a terrible TV show, a few terrible movies, plus a plethora of shoddy merchandise. We won't even get into the spin-off games like Pokémon Snap, Hey You Pikachu!, Pokémon Channel, and the Stadium series, as we're not even sure those products deserve to be called video games. Charmander, Charizard – after this edition of Sacred Cow BBQ, consider this series Charbroiled.



braid

The recipe for Braid: Take a heaping helping of Super Mario Bros., one cup of time-reversing mechanics stolen from Prince of Persia and Blinx: The Time Sweeper, three tablespoons annoying puzzle solving, and simmer down to remove any actual enjoyable gameplay. Finally, drizzle in several gallons of pretension and – voila! – you've got an art house game that's every bit as hard to sit through as art house films.

The game stars charisma-free hero Tim, who's only recognizable for wearing a schoolboy outfit he obviously stole from AC/DC's Angus Young. Tim is on a quest to rescue a princess. Shockingly, at the end of every level, we find that she's in another castle. In any other game, this would just be a Mario rip, but because Braid is so

"smart" and "adventurous" it's totally, like, postmodern...or something.

The story, told through writing that reads like fortune cookies written by a first-year philosophy major, eventually reveals that – spoiler alert – the princess you've been trying to rescue all along was actually running from you! That's right! You were the bad guy all along! This is a completely original twist, provided you've never seen *Fight Club*, *The Machinist*, *Shutter Island*, or any of the other 1,000 movies that have used the same twist ending. Oh, and did we mention the story is told out of sequence? Holy *Memento*, Batman!

This didn't stop game critics the world over from assigning this vacant plot with imagined symbolism. The princess represents memory...or lost love...or the invention of the nuclear bomb...or the cancellation of *Frasier*. Seriously, she could literally represent anything, or nothing. Either way, it's mind-blowing. Anything that makes this little sense has to be.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

You loved Star Wars growing up. So did we. But there comes a time when facts must be faced. Everything that's happened in this universe after the first two-thirds of *Return of the Jedi* has been a total disaster. It's high time we stopped deluding ourselves, so let's start by admitting that BioWare's much-beloved *Knights of the Old Republic* just plain sucks. Is it better than the prequel movies? Okay fine, sure it is, in the same way that drowning in water is better than drowning in pee.

Developer BioWare is known for its engaging writing and vivid characters, so they weren't content to recycle Star Wars standbys like Han Solo, R2-D2, Chewbacca, or Darth Vader. Instead they created the memorable likes of fake Han Solo, fake R2-D2, and fake Chewbacca. We know what you're thinking: "Okay, fine, those characters suck, but what about HK-47! He's a robot...and he's like really an a-hole to people and stuff. That's so awesome!" Really? We liked that character better when he was Bender on *Futurama* and actually funny.

This is a BioWare game, so that means you have to deal with mediocre gameplay to experience the choose-your-own-adventure plot. Why have one great story when several bad ones will do? As always the moral choices are about as subtle as A) save the space puppy from a burning building on Tatooine or B) pour gas on the fire, scream "screw you mom and dad!" and take a dump on a sand dune. Aside from these ridiculously simple options, the whole over-long mess ends up with a completely obvious reveal [see Braid entry]. Hell, by that point we wouldn't care if the main character turned out to be Keyser Söze – just end this game already. ☹

massive



by Adam Biessener

The Impending Dynamic Content Future

Nothing short of nuking Blizzard from orbit is going to stop World of Warcraft from chugging along and doing its

thing, but the next generation of MMORPGs is nearly here. Dynamic PvE content – zones, quests, and objectives that change over time based on player actions – is one of the watchwords of the coming MMO landscape. Rift: Planes of Telara and Guild Wars 2 have dramatically different ways of approaching the concept. Which one fits your gaming taste?



Guild Wars 2

The event system in Guild Wars 2 is basically Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning's public quests taken to the extreme. The game doesn't have what we think of as "standard" MMO quests – all of the outdoor PvE content is tied into these events, which are happening all around you all the time. Events range from rescuing a farmer from bandits to teaming up with dozens of players and NPCs to take down a marauding death dragon.

Rift

Rift has large swathes of traditional MMO design with its signature rifts layered on top. These tears in the dimensional fabric of the world allow the malevolent forces of the elemental planes to enter the physical realm, wreaking havoc on the landscape and the wildlife in the process. If they continue unopposed by players, rifts escalate into full-scale invasions that can and will wreck entire cities until players deal with them.

EMERGENT

Some events tie into others, like escorting a supply caravan to a larger ongoing battle

Invasions will fight NPCs, guards, and other ongoing invasions

Advantage:
Rift

VARIETY

Powerful technology allows designers to handcraft a wide variety of scenarios

Dozens if not hundreds of pieces are fitted together to make each rift or invasion unique

Advantage:
Guild Wars 2

AESTHETICS

Painterly art style ties entire world together with unique look

Solid graphics and art hew closely to fantasy tropes

Advantage:
Guild Wars 2

GAMEPLAY

Positional combat and multiple stances for each class provide endless combat possibilities

Innovative skill-tree unlocking and progression systems allow unprecedented customization

Draw

ACCESSIBILITY

Events scale according to the number of players engaged with them

Rifts, footholds, and even invasions all scale to player involvement

Draw

AMBITION

Building a world full of constantly churning, interlocking event system

Underlying tech that allows massive changes to game world during gameplay on live servers

Draw

TRACK RECORD

NCsoft's global MMO empire stands behind MMO developer

Investor-funded startup Trion is publisher and developer

Advantage:
Guild Wars 2

RELEASE

When it's done

Early 2011

Advantage:
Rift

Overall Edge: Guild Wars 2

It's tough to bet against Guild Wars 2. Developer ArenaNet has longstanding experience creating and maintaining innovative, successful MMOs, and everything it has shown of Guild Wars 2 to date has been nothing short of incredible.

On the other hand, upstart Trion is making a bold entry into online gaming with Rift, and I like what I've seen so far. I have to give the edge to Guild Wars 2 for now, but these are the top two non-Cataclysm MMOs on my radar for good reason.

interview



Photo: Ed Carreon

Treyarch Taking the Lead

Mark Lamia's long career at Activision led him to his current position as studio head of Treyarch, where he's helped make the studio into one of the world's best-selling FPS developers. Recently, we spoke to Lamia about his career and how Treyarch hopes its upcoming Call of Duty: Black Ops will help cement its reputation in the industry.

How has it been making the transition from creating games in a WWII setting to a Cold War setting in Black Ops?

It's inspired a burst of creativity. It's fertile ground where the creative people I have at the studio can stretch themselves into doing something new. It's a very interesting era. It's the dawn of real black ops; there was a lot of political intrigue with the CIA and Soviet Union. That whole era was wild. Also, it's much more documented. There was so much more communication then. It will make for very exciting storytelling. People will be surprised by the things we did in making it our own.

More modern games like Medal of Honor and Modern Warfare 2 have generated controversy in the press. What are your thoughts on that intersection between real life and games? Is anything off limits?

We don't approach it from that perspective, but I do have a feeling about it. My feeling is that there are all sorts of movies and books and entertainment that touch on these subjects and don't receive the kind of scrutiny that games receive. I think that it's insane that people don't think we're an art form. If you know game development, you know how many artists and animators and everything else work on these games. But people that have grown up with games understand that this is our art form. If this were a movie, no one would be even asking me that question. But because it's a game, I get asked that quite often. This game is not about the Vietnam War, but it does have that as a backdrop. That's part of what's appealing about our game, because people think they know what happened. Our game is about what occurred under the surface with the black ops.

How did the messy divorce between Activision and Infinity Ward affect Treyarch as a whole and you personally?

It didn't affect the studio because we were already over halfway through with Black Ops. It was difficult to not hear about it; it was all over the news. It was like any divorce, people were concerned and they thought it was unfortunate. For me personally, I know those guys and I worked with those guys. Even though I was focused on the studio here, you have relationships with people. The Infinity Ward was – and is – an incredible development organization. Some of those guys that left were incredibly talented, but the guys that stayed are incredibly talented, too. I don't think anyone would say that was a good thing for either side, but it happened. I know that Activision is focused on the people that are still at Infinity Ward.

Did the situation present an opportunity for Treyarch to really put your stamp on the Call of Duty franchise and take the reins, so to speak?

The only thing I can say about that is that we were hoping to do that anyway. [Laughs] We've been working hard for a long time with this

team, and I think that this game represents the best work we've ever done. We're putting attention to detail and refinement into everything. This is everything we got, so we were hoping that this – not to the exclusion of anyone else – [would be] creatively identified with this studio. We felt that this was our opportunity to establish us as a creative force.

World at War is regarded as your best work; it's still one of the most played Xbox Live games. Why did that game come together the way it did?

It's a culmination of a lot of years of making Call of Duty. While there are always new people, a lot of the mains and senior leads had made multiple Call of Duty games. We had more time than we'd gotten on any of the other games. With [Black Ops], it's the same thing. After 2008, after we shipped Spider-Man, World at War, and Quantum of Solace, we decided we needed to consolidate our focus. That's one thing that Infinity Ward always did very well. They focused on quality. Not that we weren't focused on quality, but when you're making multiple titles you have to split your attention, time, and resources. Now that we've just been focused on making Call of Duty, everyone's rowing in the same direction, and it's made all the difference.

Will you remain a one-game-at-a-time studio or will you go back to multiple games in the future?

For the foreseeable future, it's all Call of Duty. This sort of game – stories from a first-person perspective, multiplayer, cinematic first-person action – is the focus. Now how is that broken up? I need to talk to my Activision counterparts after I finish putting the bow on Black Ops.

So you'll be working exclusively within the Call of Duty franchise?

Well, that's my intention. Unfortunately, I don't get to make the decision myself, but my intention is to continue work in the Call of Duty franchise. It's a type of first-person shooter game, and I want to continue to advance our capabilities in that area. You learn a lot about your team after every game.

Does Activision dictate the next project or do you have a say?

We have a really strong say, but it is a partnership. We will go to them with our ideas for what we want to do next, and then we'll marry that with what the business realities are. That's one of my key responsibilities here at Treyarch, to make sure we're doing what we want to be doing. I can tell you that after this game ships, we're not done – we're going to keep supporting it with the help of our partners. While we're not announcing our next project, we do have a vested interest in Call of Duty's future.

Modern Warfare 2 had a lot of issues with cheating and balancing. How are you planning to deal with those issues?

We've actually engineered quite a bit of security measures into the game. Due to the popularity of World at War, we've had a lot of experience with these types of issues, and we released a lot of updates to that game to fix cheats and hacks. That gave us good insight into how we wanted to design our engine this time around. More importantly, there's a commitment. We'll fix something, and someone else will try to hack something else, and we'll just be on them constantly. So it's a technical thing, and it's also just a determination to deal with it more aggressively. It's a bummer when you're working really hard but there are a bunch of people on the leaderboards that have clearly hacked in front of you.

Bobby Kotick has made some comments that have suggested the future of Call of Duty might be – not necessarily an MMO – but perhaps a larger, persistent world of some sort. Is that something you are thinking about?

It's not something I spend a lot of time trying to figure out right now, but I think that online is clearly a huge part of Call of Duty. It wouldn't surprise me if you saw a new business model emerge that wasn't just box product. Whether that's transaction based or subscription based, we're starting to see some of them. EA's done some of that with their Battlefield game that was supported by transaction. I think every publisher is looking at those things. If you're not looking at that, that's probably a big mistake.

As an FPS developer, do you think that Move or Kinect will ever be able to offer you the kind of quick, responsive controls you need?

I think there's a place for gesture-based movement in the genre; we do it with the Wii version of Call of Duty. I can tell you that we did not consider Wii, Move, or Kinect for Call of Duty: Black Ops. [and we] have no plans for that. Black Ops wasn't designed that way; I wouldn't want to take your hand off the controller. But I could imagine a game with the pacing where that works. There are a lot of hand gestures in the military where you could pull that off. Whether that's fun or not, that's up to the creators.

Whether it's Call of Duty or Spider-Man or James Bond, you've always worked on games based on existing licenses or IPs. Do you have any ambition to create an IP and a universe from the ground up in the future?

In my career, I've helped build new IP, including Call of Duty, but as far as Treyarch is concerned, it wouldn't surprise me if some original property comes out of it in the future. It wouldn't surprise me the least bit. It wouldn't surprise me if the Call of Duty franchise spawns its own spinoffs. Do I know right now? I honestly do not, but I think in order to create triple-A IP and for a publisher to back you, you have to be able to produce the highest quality content in the industry. ♦

Interview by Matt Helgeson

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1980 BASIC TRAINING

After his father brings home a TRS-80 computer, Lamia spends his time making his own games by copying BASIC game programs out of books and magazines

1985 POWERFUL STUFF

Lamia falls in love with Balance of Power, a political strategy game created by legendary designer Chris Crawford

1989 A NEW DIMENSION

Lamia plays a 3D PC game for the first time – Activision's Mechwarrior

1990 HIGHER ED

While attending UC Santa Barbara as a political science student, Lamia convinces his professor to let him teach a city planning class as TA using Sim City as course material

1993 RISE OF THE SHOOTERS

Now in law school, Lamia, like millions of others, falls in love with Doom

1995 A BIG RISK

Now with a law degree, Lamia decides to follow his heart into gaming, taking an entry level position at Activision. His first job entails burning CDs for the studio's various development teams

1998 PRODUCING RESULTS

Lamia gets his big break, producing the game Civilization: Call of Power for PC

2000 BIG TIME

Lamia is promoted to VP of Activision's North American studios. He works with several internal and external studios, including ID Software

2002 LIGHTNING STRIKES

Activision signs Infinity Ward to create Call of Duty: Lamia works closely with the studio

2006 NEW GIG

Lamia transfers from Activision to Treyarch, coming on as VP and COO. He is promoted to studio head in 2007

2008 ON FIRE

Activision releases Treyarch's Call of Duty: World at War, its best work to date. The game is hugely popular on Xbox Live



Apple iPod Line

Apple revamps its wildly popular media players

by Nick Ahrens

Apple has once again tweaked its legendary

series of iPod products. This year features the most drastic changes to the players in several years, with a completely new Nano and upgraded Shuffle and Touch.

The aesthetic changes to the Nano line are immediately noticeable. Slimmed down to the same form factor as the tiny Shuffle, the Nano is now a touch-screen-only device perfect for anyone on the go. With a built-in FM radio, support for Nike+iPod, and Genius playlists, working out never sounded so good. Apple also claims it has a 24-hour battery life. While the new version doesn't have video support, the touch screen does display a clock app that crafty consumers have already turned into a high-tech wristwatch.

Apple brought back the face buttons to the Shuffle as well as a cool feature that speaks the name of the song or artist playing using a text-to-speech system. The iPod Touch has also undergone some handy upgrades, including a lot of the features that came to the iPhone 4 – a high-resolution Retina display, HD video, FaceTime video calling, and the new Apple Game Center.

- Shuffle \$49 (2GB)
 - Nano \$149 (8GB)
 - Touch \$229 (8GB)
- apple.com





1



2



3



4

1 | Logitech G930 Headset

Logitech takes another swing in the fight for the ultimate gaming headset with the G930. This 7.1 surround sound wireless system may be a little bulky, but the G930s are more comfortable than they look. The well-designed headset sports customizable G keys, a volume roller, and mute button. The pivoting microphone glows red when muted, but seeing it requires the arm to be in a very specific place in front of your face. The sound quality is good, though the extra two channels in the 7.1 aren't very noticeable. The real issue with the G930s is the battery life. While Logitech claims around 10 hours before a charge, we were lucky if it lasted for five.

AVERAGE

\$159
logitech.com

2 | Nikon D7000

If you're enthusiastic about taking photos, maybe it's time to step up your gear. Nikon's latest camera, the D7000, takes you from the boring world of point-and-shoot to the much more awesome "prosumer" level. Sporting a 16.2 megapixel CMOS sensor, full HD video capture with autofocus, and the ability to mount hundreds of lenses, the D7000 gives you the

flexibility of a professional camera with the comfort and ease of use of a point-and-shoot. The new camera also sports an upgraded 39-point autofocus system, dual SDXC card support, and a rugged magnesium alloy body. If you want to start shooting with the big dogs, the D7000 is a great tool for turning you into the next David LaChapelle.

\$1,199
nikonusa.com

3 | Uncommon Deflector

Protect your iPhone in style with an Uncommon Deflector. Unlike other case companies that use decals or stickers, Uncommon uses a proprietary printing system called 3DTATT that embeds the image into the plastic of the case. This prevents fading and wear problems associated with paper stickers. It also means that you can upload a high-resolution photo of your beloved pug wearing a sailor suit. Uncommon also has designs available by other artists and users on its website. The case itself is a thin, hard plastic that features a special anti-glare camera ring that prevents interference with photos.

\$34.95
getuncommon.com

4 | Xbox 360 Wireless Controller

When Microsoft surprised us with a refreshed controller with a new d-pad, everyone in the office let out a collective cheer. While the Xbox 360 controller remains our landslide favorite in overall design, the d-pad has always been the lone offender in an otherwise solid controller. This silver beast features a grayscale aesthetic and a twistable d-pad that reveals the raised "plus" shape that we all know and love. While the physical button feels different, the d-pad's responsiveness only delivers slightly better results than the old model. The analog sticks have also been slightly tweaked with a new concave ridge to help your thumbs stay in place. Even though the new d-pad doesn't perform as we hoped, the Xbox 360 Wireless Controller is still the best option for 360 players.

VERY GOOD

\$64.99 (with Play and Charge kit only)
xbox.com

MEDIA SHELF

COOL CARS



BACK TO THE FUTURE 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Marty McFly's story of time travel, Biff punching, and souped-up DeLoreans continues to stand the test of time. Take the journey once again in high-def with this Blu-ray.

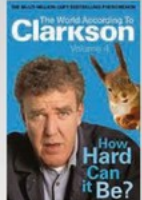
\$79.98
nbcuniversalstore.com



TOP GEAR 13

We can't get enough of the British threosome of Jeremy, Richard, and James. In this season, they race through Abu Dhabi in a Lamborghini, act like 17-year-olds in cheap cars, and race the post office from England to Scotland in a Porsche.

\$24.98
bbcamericashop.com



HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

Top Gear's Jeremy Clarkson adds another book in his The World According to Clarkson series. Expect more nonsensical hilarity like teaching kung fu in a flower arrangement class, discussing dictators and their combovers, and more.

\$20.00
penguin.co.uk

It's All Temporary



As you've probably guessed, I'm a gamer. If all goes according to plan, I intend to remain one well into old age. There's an inherent problem in this assumption, however. I'm what you call a TAB – temporarily able-bodied person. This isn't a condition unique to me – you are afflicted, too. Advocates for accessibility in gaming use the term TAB as a great equalizer. The truth is that our health, physical prowess, and mental faculties are all only temporary. This obvious, inescapable reality is why gaming accessibility should be a mounting concern for industry players and consumers alike. The ability to enjoy video games unhindered throughout the span of your life is in the hands of developers.

Despite the looming threat of games being yanked out of my aged hands, I only lead with the above concern to make the issue easier to digest for those unfamiliar with game accessibility. Lack of awareness or intentional marginalization on the part of developers often leaves gamers with disabilities – visual, auditory, speech, cognitive, physical, or otherwise – on the sidelines. There is no denying that the vast degrees of disabilities make it impossible to create a universally accessible game, but there are simple steps developers can take to make their games more inclusionary.

The harsh reality is that in the current video game climate, the majority of hardware, software, and peripherals are inaccessible to many gamers. Blockbuster titles still ship without subtitles, eliminating the deaf community from having the chance to enjoy creative works well deserving of their time and appreciation. In other instances, a developer's unwillingness to allow for reconfigurable controls makes it impossible for a gamer with a physical limitation to use a custom controller for play – a controller for which they were more than willing to pay hundreds of dollars.

The severity of disabilities can range from unnoticeable to inescapable. Chances are you

know someone with a disability, be it a slight case of colorblindness, a mild manifestation of autism, or full-blown muscular dystrophy. Whether or not you have a disability, accessible technology benefits all gamers. The same way closed captioning helps you keep tabs on your favorite sports team in a loud bar, or wheelchair ramps are a salvation when struggling with heavy luggage, accessibility features in gaming can be used by everyone. I want closed captioning implemented in my favorite games to ensure I don't have to shelve my playtime late at night when family is visiting. At this point, it seems inexcusable not to include closed captions. After being called out for skipping closed captioning in the original Assassin's Creed, Ubisoft promised to include the feature in all games moving forward, a commendable move on its part.

As for reconfigurable controls? Ask my fellow editor Annette Gonzalez what a godsend they were after having surgery on her shoulder. For a more potent and relevant example, consider all the war veterans returning home to their previous lives. Many are young and consider themselves gamers, but are now forced to contend with unexpected physical or mental impairments that prevent them from resuming

by Meagan VanBurklee
associate editor,
Game Informer

play as they once had.

Contending against the diversity of disabilities is difficult when it comes to game design, and I understand that accessibility features aren't always easy to implement. But at what point do we begin to hold developers to a higher standard and demand that steps are taken? Not all considerations are massive undertakings. Allowing for customizable text size and scroll rate in both dialogue and user interfaces can help alleviate symptoms of visual disabilities. Something as simple as including multiple difficulty settings can go a long way in allowing gamers with cognitive or physical impairments to engage in play. If balancing multiple difficulty settings requires too much commitment, then how about the inclusion of cheats for non-competitive play? God mode would not only help newer and inexperienced gamers fully enjoy a title, but also allow for a gamer with a disability to enjoy a game to which they might otherwise not have access.

Some accessibility considerations would require only a minimal amount of education on the developer's end. The tendency to rely on color as an important visual indicator is dangerous, for example. Considering the high rate of colorblindness in

males, it always surprises me that color is the main differentiator of teams in multiplayer first-person shooters.

These small-but-potent changes are the bulk of what gamers with disabilities desire. They aren't demanding game-breaking additions or that a majority of resources should be reallocated to suit their unique needs. Rather, they simply ask to be a part of the development process from the beginning.

Is there such a thing as a universally accessible game? No – and there never will be. Lack of awareness and limited resources are the most commonly echoed sentiments I hear in regards to the reason accessibility features are ignored by developers. This makes me wonder if we will ever reach a point that accessibility features are relegated as essential game design instead of a pleasant afterthought. How long will these excuses cut it? Will the issue of accessible design remain on the back burner until it becomes personal? Because it will. Remember, it's all temporary.

The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff.

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Heigson at matt@gameinformer.com



November

02 New Releases

- Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader: Back to School (W, DS)
- Atari's Greatest Hits Volume 1 (DS)
- Babysitting Mama (W)
- Bakugan II (PSS, 360, PSP, DS)
- Bakugan Battle Brawlers: Defenders of the Core (DS)
- BeyBlade: Metal Fusion Battle Fortress (W, DS)
- The Biggest Loser: Ultimate Workout (W)
- California Sports (W)
- Chevrolet Camaro (W)
- Dance Dance Revolution (PSS, W)
- DC Universe Online (PSS, PC)
- Dragon Ball: Raging Blast 2 (PSS, 360)
- Flamingo (W)
- Get Fit (PSS, 360, W)
- Ghost Trick Phantom Detective (DS)
- God of War: Ghost of Sparta (PSP)
- Gran Turismo 5 (PSS)
- James Bond: Blood Stone (PSS, 360, PC, DS)
- James Bond: GoldenEye 007 (W, DS)
- Jeopardy! (W, DS)
- Karaoke Revolution Glee (W)
- Mathews Bow Hunting (W)
- Megamind: The Blue Defender (PSP, DS)
- Megamind: Ultimate Showdown (PSS, 360)
- Minute to Win It (W)
- Patapon 3 (PSP)
- Penalties of Madagascar (DS)
- Pro Evolution Soccer 2011 (PSS, 360, W, PSP, PS2)
- Sully Bandz (DS)
- SingStar Dance (PSS)
- Split/Second (PSP)
- Iron Evolution (PSS, 360)

- True Crime (PSS, 360)
- Wheel of Fortune (W, DS)

03 Rebooting The Bat

DC Comics can't find a solid direction for Batman. Once again, the company is giving its beloved character a fresh start with two new series, *Batman, Inc* (launching today), and *The Dark Knight* (launching on the 23rd). *Batman, Inc* is penned by Grant Tinker (*Confusing Stories*). Morrison, and *The Dark Knight* is in the hands of the reliable David Finch. Both series are ongoing, but if history proves anything, they'll be replaced in a year or two by something else.

04 Microsoft Rolls Out Controller-Free Gaming

Kinect officially hits store shelves today. This state-of-the-art camera is being sold in three bundles, one with the game *Kinect Adventures* for \$149.99, one with a 4GB 360 slim model plus the game for \$269.99, and a third that ships with a 250GB 360 slim plus the game for \$299.99. Here's the launch line-up:

- The Biggest Loser: Ultimate Workout
- Dance Central
- Kinect Adventures
- Kinectimals
- Kinect Joy Ride
- Your Shape Fitness Evolved

05 Will Ferrell: Who Cares?

Why would you waste your time casting talented actors like Brad Pitt and Tina Fey, and then throw it all away adding Will Ferrell to the mix? *MegaMind*, a CG comedy not made by

Picart, offers this unfortunate actor combination and opens in theaters today. Though we don't have to look at Ferrell's face directly, we still have to suffer through his jokes. Has he said anything funny since *Jailhouse Nights*?

09 New Releases

- Call of Duty: Black Ops (PSS, 360, W, DS)
- Deadliest Catch: Sea of Change (PSS, 360, W)
- Hasbro Family Game Night 1 & 2 bundle (W)
- Hawk 2 (W)
- Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Miniland Mayhem (DS)
- Monster Jam 3 (W, PSP, DS)
- MySims Bundle (W)
- Raving Rabbits: Travel in Time (W)
- The Sims 3 (PSS, 360, W)

10 A New Wrinkle In The Assassin's Creed Mythos

Assassin's Creed II will likely debut a new protagonist. Will it be a 19th century Russian assassin named Nikolai Orelov? We'll have to wait to find out what Ubisoft has planned, but gamers and comic fans will get their first look at this could be hero today in *Widestorm's* three-part *Assassin's Creed: The Fall* comic series. Like Ego and Altair before him, Orelov is pulling a Templar artifact. But who in the future is putting his strings?

12 Budget War Of The Worlds

The alien abduction movie *Skyline* opens today, and looks to have a huge special effects budget. The reason for this? All of the cast are C-list TV actors. You might recognize *That Dude From Scrubs*, *That Boyfriend From Six Feet*

Under, and *That Cuban Detective From Dexter*. Would anyone in the theater care if they were abducted? Doubtful.

16 New Releases

- 999: 9 Hours, 9 People, 9 Doors (DS)
- Apache (PSS, 360)
- Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood (PSS, 360, PC)
- Battle Groom and Glam Pups (W, DS)
- Brunswick Pro Bowling (360)
- Create (PSS, 360, W, PC)
- Death Drive (PSS, 360)
- EA Sports Active 2 (PSS, 360, W)
- EA Sports Active: NFL Training Camp (W)
- Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (PSS, 360, DS, PC)
- Human Body (PSS, 360, W, DS)
- Carly 2 (W, DS)
- i-Sing (W)
- Jillian Michaels Fitness Ultimatum 2011 (W)
- Learn Math Advance (DS) Learn Music (DS)
- Learn Science (DS)
- Learn Words & Numbers (DS)
- LittleBigPlanet 2 (W)
- Man vs Wild (PSS, 360, W)
- Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet (PSS, 360, W, DS)
- Naruto Shippuden: Dragon Blade Chronicles (W)
- Naruto Shippuden: Naruto vs Sasuke (DS)
- Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit (PSS, 360, W)
- Pac-Man 30th Anniversary Party (W)
- Pictionary (W, DS)
- Sonic Colors (W, DS)
- uDraw Tablet (W)
- Wicked Monster Blast (W)
- Wizards of Waverly Place: Spellbound (DS)

19 Harry Potter VII: Part 1 Of 15

Since the *Harry Potter* books ended with an uneventful whimper, Hollywood will likely create a better send-off in the movies, starting with the release of today's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1*. Our sources tell us Harry and Malfoy finally hook up (the sexual tension was killing us), Ron dies, Hogwarts is turned into a Costco, and Gandalf kills all of the bad guys. Sounds like a step in the right direction!

23 New Releases

- Disney Tangled: The Video Game (W, DS)
- Donkey Kong Country Returns (W)
- Dood's Big Adventure (W)
- Diner: San Francisco (PSS, 360, W, PC)
- Hot Wheels: Track Attack (W, DS)
- Pac Room (DS)
- Splinterhouse (PSS, 360)

24 New-Age Disney Schlock

When a Disney movie hits theaters, kids go nuts. Unfortunately, the kids today don't get cool Disney flicks like we did. You know, *The Lion King*, *Mulan*, and *Abraham*. They get *The Princess and the Frog*, *Brother Bear*, and today's release, *Tangled*. A comedy about a girl with long hair. If your kids want to see a movie about a chick with weird hair, just show them *Ju-On*. They'll love it.

30 New Releases

- God Eater Burst (PSP)
- Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom (PSS, 360)

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(Online TBA)

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Insomniac Games

» **Release**
2011

RESISTANCE 3

When Freedom Falls, A Hero Must Stand

Nathan Hale is dead. The Chimera have won. America is dying.

The country is pocketed with smoking craters, like the one in the head of Joseph Capelli's former lieutenant. Mercy made him end Hale's life, an easy way to stop the Chimeran virus from consuming the war hero. Unlike Hale, Capelli couldn't purge the six-eyed evil from Earth with a single bullet, or a thousand. That futility is why he defected from the military, hung up his gatling gun, and tried to start a family in hiding. But the scant surviving humans on the planet are being frozen and scraped from Earth's surface like warts. With his family threatened by the encroaching parasites, **Joe Capelli embarks on the trip of his life.**



by Tim Turi



Capelli leaves behind the new life he fought so hard to begin in order to save mankind

Malikov Lives!

Fyodor Malikov is Resistance's genius scientist, and the man who's responsible for engineering the superhuman Sentinels, powerful soldiers using the Chimera virus to their advantage. He also unintentionally spawned Resistance 2's antagonist. An intel document in Resistance 2 suggests the doctor was contemplating suicide, but we now know he had a change of heart.

"Obviously, he feels responsible and a huge amount of guilt for all the pain and suffering he's caused," lead writer Jon Paquette explains.

"With Project Abraham he actually created Daedalus, and in a way he was responsible for Hale's death because Hale succumbed to the Chimera virus and Capelli was forced to kill him. Malikov came to his senses and said, 'You know what? I'm the world's expert on the Chimera virus. I know the Chimera better than anybody. I'm either going to die trying or eventually overcome.'"



Human limbs hanging on butcher hooks in a kitchen suggests cannibalism in this brutal world

Insomniac is known for its uncanny ability to continually churn out polished critical darlings.

From its PlayStation offerings like *Spyro the Dragon* to the consistently awesome PS2 and PS3 *Ratchet & Clank* games, the company has been among Sony's top guns for over a decade. As a testament to its pedigree, Insomniac is continuing to evolve. Its developmental prowess will soon spread to Xbox 360, and the PS3-exclusive *Resistance* brand has become one of Sony's treasured franchises.

The California and North Carolina-based developer crafted a premier launch title out of a brand-new IP with *Resistance: Fall of Man*, and *Resistance 2* was an ambitious game that crammed a ton of content onto its Blu-ray disc. These two titles were high-quality gaming experiences, but Insomniac is certain it can deliver an even more polished experience with *Resistance 3*'s extended development time.

"As a philosophy at Insomniac, we now believe the more time you can spend watching people play the game, making tweaks, and getting in there and turning the knobs, the better your game is going to be," says Insomniac president Ted Price. "It's that last 10 percent that you hear developers talk about all the time that is so important to get right. Usually that 10 percent is the difference between a game that's good, and a mega-hit." Sony gets it, and the publisher granted an entire extra year of development time for *Resistance 3*.

This exciting new title marks the studio's first departure from its standard two-year development cycle, and the benefits of extra time already show. The biggest change in the design process comes from behind the wheel, as series creator Ted Price is handing the reins to former *Resistance* project manager Marcus Smith. "We've always had a very collaborative approach to the design process, so it's not as if I'm giving up my baby," says Price. "A lot of people have been heavily invested in *Resistance*, and Marcus is one of them, so it was great to see someone else bring their enthusiasm to leading the team creatively."

"I have big shoes to fill," Smith admits. "Ted is a charismatic leader and is a great guy to work for. He really knows how to unify a team in a way that I've really not seen."

Marcus makes it clear that Insomniac's goal is to not only embrace and polish the inventive gameplay that made the series a critical hit, but also to create an engaging drama of a man traveling to save his family.

A World In Ruin

At the end of *Resistance 2*, Lieutenant Nathan Hale and Joseph Capelli eradicate Daedalus and an entire Chimeran air fleet. Following their triumph, the Chimeran virus, which gave former series protagonist Nathan Hale his regenerative powers, began overtaking him. Hale then looked to the skies as he spoke in a haunting alien voice about the beauty of Earth's inevitable downfall. Fellow virus-enhanced Sentinel Joseph Capelli drops his usual disrespectful attitude to deliver on a promise. "Forgive me, sir. It was an honor," Capelli says before putting a bullet through Hale's head, ending his life and the Chimera's influence on him.

Video game fans are known to cling onto their beloved characters. Look no further than the fan backlash regarding Cole's redesign in *Infamous 2*. It gets even more treacherous with wholesale replacement, with *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s Solid Snake's swap

with pretty boy Raiden serving as a strong example. Spotlighting a new main character is tough enough, and unapologetically murdering your protagonist is even rarer.

"I think internally we were really excited by the idea," Smith reveals about killing off Hale. "We were like 'Oh my god, yeah! Let's do that!' I guess moving into *Resistance 3* it became more of a marketing question. Are people going to accept us with moving in a new direction? Who cares, let's make a great game."

If you think that Capelli's turn in the spotlight comes out of nowhere, Insomniac begs to differ. "In *Project Abraham*, the alternate reality game that we did, Joe Capelli was a very big part of that experience," explains director of brand development Ryan Schneider. "We played up that tension between Capelli and Hale at the very beginning of telling the larger *Resistance* tale. It's not too big of a surprise that Capelli would take on such a center stage role, because we've been setting that up throughout *Resistance 2*."

During the four years since Corporal Capelli shot Hale, he defects from the crumbling SRPA (Special Research Projects Administration), gives up his

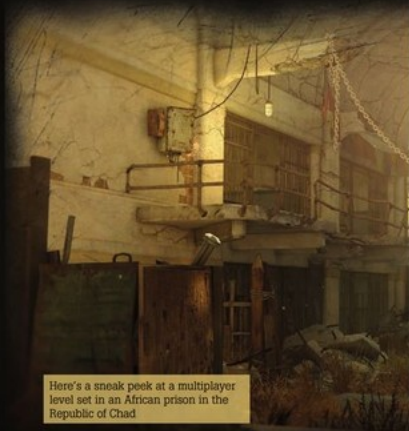


Years of malnourishment have resulted in a much leaner Capelli

killing ways, abandons his bad attitude, and starts a family. The Chimera now completely occupy North America and the rest of the world. Having converted enough humans for their army, they're now in the process of exterminating the remaining pests. One such genocidal attack reduces the Capelli home in Haven, Oklahoma, to splinters. Survivors in the town emerge through underground tunnels to defend their homes. Following a futile last stand by the town's inhabitants, Capelli reunites with his wife Susan and their boy Jack. Devout *Resistance* fans will recognize Capelli's wife as Nathan Hale's stepsister from William Dietz's novel *Resistance: The Gathering Storm*. Their son is very ill from the frigid temperatures caused by the Chimera. Susan says there's a way to save the boy - Dr. Malkov, the foremost expert on Chimera, told her so. But to find it Capelli must travel to New York.

"Malkov managed to extract some blood from Nathan Hale and discovered that he had some special antibodies inside of him," explains Jon Paquette, lead writer for *Resistance 3*. "From that they were able to develop a Hale vaccine, which is essentially a cure for the Chimera virus." Now

continued on page 56



Here's a sneak peek at a multiplayer level set in an African prison in the Republic of Chad

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Capelli must somehow use the Hale vaccine to inoculate the small number of surviving humans.

Insomniac remains cryptic regarding further plot specifics, but the trek from Oklahoma to New York City suggests that the Hale vaccine could save the remnants of humanity if brought to the Big Apple, which is likely rotten by now. Malikov decides to accompany Capelli throughout the quest, but it won't be easy.

"Malikov has become a little older, he's become a little more frail," Paquette explains. "He's not going to be a gun-toting, shooting guy in this game. But he is going to be with Joe Capelli on his journey." Joe's changed ways and Malikov's impatience result in a strained relationship early on, but Paquette suggests the duo will learn to cooperate during the journey.

Survival In An Unforgiving World

One leg in the journey to New York finds the pair boating across a flooded town on the way to St. Louis, Missouri. Floating along what was once a high school football field, they pass the disturbing image of a waterlogged school bus. A moment later they confront something even more unsettling – alien plant life. Capelli curiously fires a Magnum round into the glowing yellow plant's swollen yellow bulb, causing a volatile explosion that knocks over a nearby sign. This, along with huge icy shafts jutting into the earth, are signs that the Chimera are terraforming their new home.

Even grander evidence of Chimeran occupation lies further down in the murky waters. The enormous carcass of a Kraken is splayed across a section of a collapsed bridge like a nightmarish rotting island. Its exposed entrails are being consumed by a pack of Leapers. The Chimera's formerly domesticated beasts are now feral and populate the planet, killing on their own terms.

Novelty candy canes and other Christmas decorations float by in the water as Capelli and Malikov's boat nears the center of town. An eerie silence chills the men as they pass a motel. Malikov calls out for any potential survivors, and the only response is the dull pattering of the boat's engine. Suddenly something moves across a motel window, knocking something over with a crash. In the blink of an eye a massive torrent of Grims rush from the ravaged building, leaping and yowling as they claw their way onto the vessel.

"Everyone in the town gathered here after the Liberty Tower Defense System fell to decide what to do, to stick around for the military to evacuate them or to try to get out themselves," Smith explains. "Half of the town left to try to make it out by boat. The other half stayed here... and bad things happened."

The Grims swarm Capelli and Malikov unhindered, their tendency to overhear remedied by the artificially lowered temperature. Capelli quickly reaches for his Marksman rifle, using its alternate fire to drop an electrical turret at the ship's stern. He then produces his upgraded Magnum handgun, firing several remote detonated rounds into the dense mob, which fragment into smaller explosives. Once Capelli hits the trigger, each round combusts, sending a handful of the stinking bastards and a Santa decoration flying skyward. He cleans up the remaining Grims with his trusty Fossmore shotgun, thanking his maker he brought the whole arsenal this time.

In the last game, Hale was limited to carrying two weapons at once, a fact lamented by many reviewers

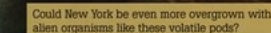
who loved the great weapon variety in the first game. Capelli has no such restrictions in Resistance 3. "The move away from the two-weapon system of Resistance 2 to Resistance 3 is less a reaction to anyone in particular and more about making the game that we want to make," Smith comments.

Inventive weaponry is one of Insomniac's calling cards, and granting players access to the robust armory opens up more strategic opportunities. Returning weaponry consists of the updated classics like the previously mentioned, along with the Bullseye and Auger. Players can now accumulate points by using specific guns and use that currency to upgrade their weaponry. Human weapons aren't the out-of-the-crate army issue guns of previous games, however. They're appropriately cobbled together out of the salvaged scrap of a post-apocalyptic world.

"We're trying to make everything look a little more improvised by the human resistance," Smith clarifies. "Even the fragmentation grenade is much more hand-made. Its model is a can of beans with nails strapped around it."

Back on the boat, Capelli and Malikov's aquatic voyage funnels onto a swollen river. Malikov checks the map and discovers they're on the Mississippi heading towards St. Louis. Before the two have time to talk specifics, a terrible noise rumbles from the distance. Turbulent waves are coupled with the sound of crashing water and grinding machinery. Cold yellow

continued on page 60



Could New York be even more overgrown with alien organisms like these volatile pods?



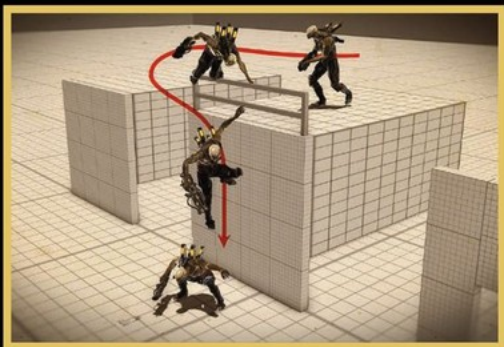


Insomniac hinted at bosses even larger than the towering Golath seen here



Building Better Bad Guys

For an alien species capable of conquering the world, the Chimera's AI wasn't very clever in the first two Resistance titles. In the first game enemies could fire at you from across the map with impossible precision. Resistance 2 attempted to remedy this by implementing a proximity-based awareness system, which resulted in enemies who ignored you until you crossed an invisible threshold. Insomniac is addressing these issues by finding a sweet spot between the two approaches. Foes no longer begin firing at you immediately on sight. Rather, players have a moment to conceal themselves before coming under fire. For example, if you attack an enemy through the window of a darkened house, they'll confusedly seek out your location instead of instantly zeroing in on you. In addition to shooting you after being spotted, the crafty creatures move to cut off and flank your position.



Cinematic Traversal

Not only are the Chimera getting smarter (see pg. 57), but they're also becoming more agile. Previous Resistance games featured enemy movement that was hand-scripted by developers. This meant Chimera could only enter a window or climb a wall if designed to do so. Insomniac's Cinematic Traversal technology bestows the Chimera with a suite of context-sensitive movement options. No longer will waist-high cover prevent a Hybrid from cracking your skull open with a melee attack.



Cooperative Concessions

Malikov isn't the only company players will have throughout the campaign. Rather than sticking with the standalone cooperative concept from Resistance 2, Insomniac is allowing two players to team up during Capelli's journey to New York. Capelli's partner is named John Harper, but nothing more is being revealed about this mysterious sidekick. "We are focusing more on creating a fun experience than integrating it into the story, so that people aren't constantly trying to find story loopholes," explains creative director Marcus Smith. "He's integrated into the story a little bit, but largely it's made for two people to have fun with."

So why did Insomniac ditch their eight-player standalone co-op mode from Resistance 2? "The biggest shift in our focus on co-op is really trying to focus and have a uniform experience for the player—playing single-player, playing with a friend, and having that same unified experience and really crafting that into an outstanding player experience," Smith remarks. "That is more important to us than trying to craft a whole different mission-based system. Getting players in and experiencing the same high level of quality in the single-player game is really our biggest goal."



Hulking Ravagers return to give Capelli hell



MUTATOR

RESISTANCE THREE



The Mutator

This piece of devastating new weaponry harnesses an infectious biological agent designed to give the Chimera a taste of their own medicine. The weapon's primary fire paints a target in sickly green mist, causing bulbous cysts to erupt all over its body and mutating the target into a combustible land mine that infects nearby Chimera. Alternate fire unleashes a diseased mist that disorients all enemies in the area, leaving them vulnerable to a volley of shotgun blasts. The Mutator can be upgraded to affect the Chimera on a cerebral level as well, causing them to go berserk and attack their teammates. Even the lumbering Ravagers can be soaked in the nasty stuff.



The Long Legs add a much needed vertical element to the Chimera's infantry tactics

continued from page 56

beacons cut through the mist hundreds of feet above their heads. A Goliath bigger than the town they just traversed passes directly over them, taking out a bridge overhead and nearly causing them to capsiz. The immense threat eventually passes, but it leaves a new menace in its wake – Long Legs.

The new enemy is similar in appearance to a Hybrid, but sports elongated, enhanced lower limbs for nimble leaps. These deadly foes deftly jump along flooded rooftops, raining gunfire from above. Capelli dodges the incoming volley as he rummages through his arsenal to find the best weapon for the vaulting Chimera.

"We actually made a big chart of all the weapons and all the enemies, sort of like what weapons are going to be more useful against different enemies," reveals lead designer Drew Murray. "Like the Long Legs which jump around a lot, the Auger – which shoots through walls – is probably not the best weapon. But the Bullseye, where you can tag that guy so that when he's jumping around, your shots are going to him."

Capelli holsters the Bullseye after the final homing round plants itself in the smoking corpse of the last Long Legs. At this point Insomniac flashes us forward to a moment from Capelli's eventual St. Louis visit.

The formal Corporal joins an insurmountable gang of young, cocky greasers in their fight to secure a Chimeran power cell. They need the energy source to fuel their rickety VTOL aircraft,

which has been jury-rigged to run on Chimeran power cells after the gasoline resources dried up. Unfortunately, securing one means seizing a Chimera drop ship. The only way to do that is by drawing a lot of attention. Capelli and company work in unison to chew through dozens of Chimera with Molotov cocktails and shotgun shells. Capelli only recently met the slick-haired young men fighting alongside him, but their battle-hardened eyes told him of the strife they've endured in this post-apocalyptic world.

"We're spending a lot of time cleaning up our NPC movement and behavior," Smith says. "It will feel much more like you're fighting with people, not just going solo." For example, when a freedom fighter lobbs an EMP grenade to take out a drone's shield, his numerous allies lining the rooftops will rain down suppressing fire.

The Chimeran dropship receives one volley of gunfire too many, causing blue, purple, and orange flames to plume forth as it crashes into the bombed-out St. Louis street. Capelli and the men cheer in victory as they secure the power core to make their bird fly again. This is where our time with Resistance 3 draws to an end. Does the gang assist Capelli by flying him further towards New York? Where else will the last Sentinel's journey lead him? Real life destinations such as the Appalachian Mountains, West Virginia's coal mines, expansive national forests, and Washington D.C. present interesting locales we hope Insomniac considers for Capelli's path.





Taking The Fight Online

Insomniac is remaining tight-lipped regarding Resistance 3's online competitive multiplayer, but don't expect the massive 60-player battles of Resistance 2 to return. As with the single-player campaign, the team is aiming for a more focused experience.

"The approach to multiplayer on Resistance 3 is to really streamline the things that were really popular with Resistance 1 and Resistance 2," says creative director Marcus Smith. "Obviously weapon usage is a big one, but we also have our progression through multiplayer which is a lot tighter. It's going to reward people as they go. We're also setting the location of all our multiplayer maps in various locations around the world. During the single-player campaign you'll be hearing updates [via a radio show] of those battles as you're progressing through the game."



Hold The Line

Like Capelli, Insomniac's path into the future is unclear. The company announced a partnership deal with EA Partners last May to become a multiplatform developer. This could lead some to believe that the Sony-owned Resistance franchise may be waning with Insomniac's loyalty split between the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

"Some of the hardcore PS3 fans express disappointment because they assume we would be diminishing our efforts on PS3 somehow, but that's not the case," Ted Price assures us. "With Resistance 3 and with the announcement of Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One, we're proving that our dedication to PlayStation 3 is just as strong. I hope that at this point that both multiplatform owners and PS3 fans are happy."

When asked whether Resistance 3 will be the closing of a trilogy, like Sony's popular God of War series, Marcus Smith takes a moment to ponder the question. "I don't think so," he replies. "I think Resistance 3 is a story within the Resistance universe that can be expanded upon. There is definitely going to be a beginning, middle, and end, but we're really trying to make it something people won't have to finish Resistance 1 and 2 to get a great experience from. We want fans of the franchise to get a lot out of it, but we don't want to be bogged down so much in the storyline that new players won't understand what's going on. I believe there will be doors closed, but they won't be slammed." ♦

10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU PLAY ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

BY MATT MILNER



» **Platform**

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**

1-Player Action
(8-Player Online)

» **Publisher**

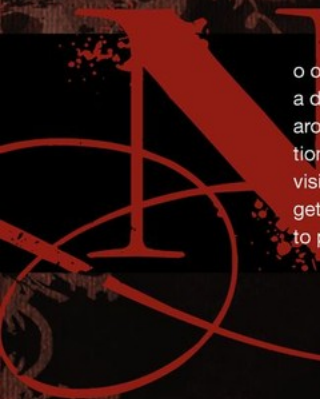
Ubisoft

» **Developer**

Ubisoft Montreal

» **Release**

November 16



o one knew what to make of Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood when it was first announced. Would it be a direct sequel to the last game or offer up a new protagonist? Was it an expansion? When E3 rolled around, it became clear that the new game has a lot of surprises in store for its players, from the addition of multiplayer to an entirely new system for building a personalized order of Assassins. When we visited Ubisoft Montreal this month to play the game for a full day, we found out the surprises were just getting started. In advance of the game's November release, we've gathered the 10 must-know features to prepare you for the biggest and most complex game yet in the franchise.



The core gameplay loop of tracking and eliminating assassin targets remains in place, but it is integrated more naturally into the flow of the story

2

BUILDING THE BROTHERHOOD

Ezio was once a lone assassin rising through the ranks of the guild. Now he is the master, and others flock to his banner. As Brotherhood progresses, players can train up to 12 unique individuals, each with his or her own equipment, costumes, and names.

The process begins with recruitment; potential assassins are scattered throughout the city vainly fighting back against the Borgia. Save them, and they'll join you. With their loyalty assured, Ezio can assign any number of his recruits a contract from any pigeon coop, hideout, or conquered tower. These unplayable missions take place in a faraway city where the recruit will gain experience and shape the course of history. Many of the most challenging contracts are based on real-life assassinations from historical records of the period, and by completing them Ezio earns special unlocks and item rewards. Be careful whom you choose for these missions; if your ally fails, he will die.

When they return from a successful mission, your assassins will level up. Each of the 10 levels offers a single skill point that can be assigned to weapons or armor. You can also choose their outfit colors, creating a standard uniform for everyone, or helping each one to stand out. At level 10 they join Ezio as a full-fledged member of the Assassins' order.

We started recruiting right away, and found leveling can get pretty quick with regular attention. Distant missions only take a few minutes. One cool assassination mission in Moscow – a historical turning point for the city – demands our best talent. We assign a level-six ally, but a 40-percent chance of success won't out it so we add two level-four assassins as well. We send all three off and hope for a favorable report.

1

A ROMAN RENAISSANCE

In *Assassin's Creed II*, players could rebuild Ezio's country villa into a place of beauty and commerce. The same feature returns on a grander scale in *Brotherhood*, as Ezio brings his wealth and influence to the city of Rome.

The new approach to city building is far more integrated into the action in *Brotherhood*. As the game begins, the tyrannical Borgia family dominate the political and cultural landscape. A dozen of their towers are scattered across the city, each held by a powerful captain. Before Rome can be renewed, Ezio must kill the captain to sow disorder, and then ignite the top of the tower with explosives to signal to the populace that a change has come.

With the Borgia displaced, areas throughout that district open up for purchase. Ezio can walk right up and buy them without entering a menu or pausing the game. Doctors begin to sell their valuable medicine. Blacksmiths un-shutter their windows. Purchasing empty faction buildings lets you create a new gathering place for your mercenaries, courtesans, or thieves. Ezio's three main allies in the game. You can even buy aqueducts and landmarks, like the Coliseum, which dramatically improves the quality of life in the area and assures a hefty monetary return. Ezio can pick up these payments at any of the numerous bank locations you've reopened in the city.

During one mission we played, Ezio must travel far across the city to meet up with Machiavelli. That's a long way to run, but a horse would shorten the trip. Unfortunately, the nearby stables are run down and closed. Climbing over a nearby wall, we spot the leader of the local Borgia tower, who is surrounded by guards. Slipping from one rooftop to another, we drop down from above to silence him with our blade and then scurry away from the surprised guards towards the tower itself. Clambering up amid crossbow bolts from pursuers, we reach the top and set the tower alight before leaping to safety far below. With the Borgia beaten, the stable becomes available for purchase. Several hundred florins later, and we were on our horse heading to the meet-up.



Ezio must set fire to his enemy's fortress towers to alert the populace that tyranny is coming to an end



3

USING THE BROTHERHOOD

This cadre of killers isn't there for show. Six members of the Brotherhood are available at your beck and call. Two assassins are signified by a single token located by your health bar. Tap LB or L1 and they'll burst into action, contextually responding to your wishes.

The Brotherhood can swoop in to take out dangerous foes that aren't worth your time or send storms of arrows cascading into an enemy force out of nowhere. At high enough levels, they can throw smoke bombs to mask your escape. In a tight squeeze, they can also leap into melee combat to help against overwhelming odds. But be careful – if they die in combat, they won't come back. At least the game allows you to say goodbye; you can visit fallen allies, and in a short scene, mourn them and send them on their way. To

replace your fallen assassin you must spend the time to find and train another recruit.

In one mission we played, Ezio needs to tail a Borgia guard as he delivers a heavy chest of gold to a target we need to "meet." Halfway through the rooftop pursuit, a crossbowman on a nearby rooftop spots us. Rather than divert our course, we tap LB and one of our assassins bursts from a curtained rooftop shed and pulls the alarmed guard in. Your assassins are everywhere around you, whether you realize it or not.



With each game, Desmond's role increases. During Brotherhood, the team sets up camp in the ruined sanctuary at the Villa Auditore, hundreds of years after we last saw it in Ezio's day.

4

THE FUTURE

You didn't think we were done with Desmond, did you? The near future setting starring Desmond, Lucy, and the others takes an even more central role in Brotherhood. After fleeing their compromised hideout at the end of Assassin's Creed II, the gang's next stop is the ruined Auditore villa, hundreds of years after we last saw it.

Desmond now has entire platforming levels to tackle on his own; his first mission is to breach the villa's interior from underground and enter the long disused sanctuary that once housed Altair's armor. Later, the entire surrounding village opens up for exploration.

After Lucy, Shaun, and Rebecca start setting up the Animus in the ancient sanctuary, we take Desmond on a mission to restore power. Running through the streets of Monteriggioni has a pleasant sense of mystery and nostalgia. The same streets remain, but are now decorated by electric lights and modern convenience. Climbing along walls and rooftops, we disable several electrical boxes, rerouting power to the villa to fuel the Animus. Along the way, we find a hidden historic relic—a journal written by Ezio's sister Claudia. This is one of several hidden collectibles that tie Desmond to his ancestors.

5

VIRTUAL REALITY TRAINING

An entirely separate virtual reality game is hidden inside the Animus, offering a break from the story any time you want to test your skills. Ostensibly a set of training tools for Desmond, the VR sequences give gamers a competitive experience complete with online leaderboards.

VR missions are split out into several distinct categories, like free run, stealth assassination, and combat. Each category has several challenging sub-missions. They can be tackled to develop your skills, and later to compete against friends. The levels have a distinct visual aesthetic, and a player could pour hours into mastering all the challenges.

We confront a combat challenge in which we are swarmed by a huge number of enemy attackers. It gives us a chance to try out the new, more offensive attack strategies present in Brotherhood. Chaining kills is now a big part of melee. We finish off one target, and quickly take aim at the next target about to hit us, taking him down before he can land a hit. Repeat this approach, and it's easy to build up an impressive chain. Sadly, our skills only manage a few linked kills before we get hit. That won't stand up on the leaderboards for too long.



6

THE TRUTH

The Truth has returned, as have the mysterious locations left behind by Subject 16. This time, the riddles have a concrete focus. Unveiling them all reveals the story of Abstergo Industries – how it arose as the modern day manifestation of the Templar order, and how the company came to control so much of the modern world.

Ubisoft also gave the puzzles a major overhaul. Most are now tied to actual modern events and people that gamers will recognize, from George W. Bush to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Seemingly innocuous or innocent quotes and pictures reveal them-

selves to be tied to the Templar conspiracy.

Back in Rome, we uncover a strange breach in the system left behind by Subject 16 hidden on an inner wall of the famed Pantheon. Diving in, we tackle a curious puzzle about the modern day Supreme Court and its ties to Abstergo. Later, a second puzzle challenges us to uncover the masking signal overlaid on a teleconference call between two conspiring Abstergo employees in the year 1970. When we completed the puzzle, we got to listen to the call and a new fragment of The Truth unlocked.



Leonardo DaVinci returns with some special side missions that send Ezio beyond the walls of Rome, including a trip to Naples to destroy a Borgia fleet with a prototype naval cannon. He also builds some new toys, including the prototype parachute

7

THE FOLLOWERS OF ROMULUS

If you liked the secret assassin tombs of the last game, you're in for a treat. In the heart of Rome, Ezio has a new set of challenges presented by a crazed cult called the Followers of Romulus. By delving into their hidden lairs around the city, you'll learn about their history and gain the keys to their fabled treasure.

At the tail end of one mission, a squad of dingy men in the garb of wolves attempts to attack us. After fending them off, we slip into their nearby lair called the Halls of Nero. A great platforming puzzle sequence ensues, sending us running and jumping through the underground palace of one of Rome's ancient leaders. At the mission's culmination we find a key – one of several we need to unlock the Followers' greatest treasure.

8

USING THE BROTHERHOOD

One of the most thrilling parts of exploring Rome is opening up the map and seeing the plethora of new icons teasing new mission types and challenges. Rome is far bigger than any of the cities in the last game, and there's a lot to do. Stores now offer special jobs. A blacksmith might want a certain number of different items that can only be obtained in hidden treasure chests or through your Brotherhood's assassination missions around Europe and Asia. Returning the items earns you a unique gift from the store owner, like a new weapon or a special map. Even story missions feature cool bonus objectives, like finishing in a time limit, or using a certain weapon for a designated assassination. Remember all those hard-to-find feathers and flags? Here's a hint – turn on Eagle vision and those items will now glow and get marked on your map, making it easier to locate them.

In one memory sequence, we stumble onto a fascinating sidequest signified by a broken heart icon on the map. Upon arriving at the location, Ezio's mind wanders back to a time before the beginning of *Assassin's Creed II*. As a very young man, we see his older brother giving him advice on talking to a beautiful woman on the street. After getting turned down, Ezio follows her home, only to be forced into a confrontation with one of the Pazzi family when they try to accost the girl. With mounting excitement, we realize this mission and those that follow reveal the preface to *Assassin's Creed II* – the events that led to the bridge brawl that helped open that game, and the mysterious woman at the heart of the conflict.



The game is visually stunning, continuing the trend of the franchise's presence on the bleeding edge of graphical technology



10

ABSTERGO'S PERSPECTIVE

The multiplayer component of Brotherhood is tightly wound into the fiction, taking place both in the present day and during the Italian Renaissance. Abstergo is using its Animus machines as training tools, dropping its recruits into the past to learn the techniques of the assassins.

As one of these recruits, players experience multiplayer through an exciting ladder of unlocks and upgrades. Characters can equip two unique abilities that offer triggered actions to aid in attacks and escapes, such as hidden guns and smoke bombs. Players also gain two passive perks, like the ability to blend into the environment with greater ease. Players also get to chose kill streak and loss streak abilities – these special conditions only trigger after multiple successful kills or a successive set of failures. A kill streak might offer increased experience points for a string of assassinations, while a loss streak might trigger a reset of your ability cooldowns. You can set up to three profiles, each with different abilities, perks, and streak bonuses. Each player also gets to pick his or her character's costume before each match; each one has a unique style and animation suite.

We spent two hours exploring the new Alliance game mode, the cooperative variation on the cat and mouse gameplay that entranced E3-goers earlier this year. We formed up into a two-person team and each adopted the priest costume before wading into the carnival-like setting of Siena. In one memorable exchange, our teammate was stalking our target when it became clear that she was being stalked herself. We ran past and dropped a smoke bomb, turning the hunter's attention away from our teammate and simultaneously triggering a sprint ability to put some distance between us. He pursued, leaving our teammate to continue her deadly approach and finish off our original target with a gruesome knife kill from behind. Her silent approach assured high point values for our team – the edge we needed to win the round.



STORYLINES AND MISSIONS

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood picks up exactly where its predecessor left off, in the deep catacombs beneath the Vatican. Ezio is reeling from the strange vision bestowed upon him by Minerva. After escaping, the retribution for his attack on the Pope is swift. Young and dangerous Cesare Borgia leads an army to devastate the Villa Auditore. Escaping to Rome, Ezio must rebuild his life, his family, and the assassins' guild that now looks to him for training and guidance.

Stretched across the years between 1499 and 1507, the game tells the second half of Ezio's adventures. If the last game was the story of Ezio's rise to prominence and power, this is the story of what he does with that cunning and capability. The narrative is focused on themes of leadership and sacrifice, with missions that flow naturally from one to the next. The story is short on repetition and high on character development and plot.

At one point, having taken out a Borgia guard tasked with delivering a large cache of money, we adopt his garb. Outside, the other guards follow our lead as we walk through town, heading to the as-yet unknown site of a grand party where our assassination target is to be found. Walking blindly along, the guards behind us comment about Ezio's unusual route, thereby giving audio clues as to the right path. By completing the walk without arousing their suspicions, we gain entrance into a grand bacchanalian party and strike down our lecherous foe.

Combat includes some big improvements, especially in Ezio's ability to act offensively to take down his foes



A PAIRING OF EPIC PROPORTIONS

by Annette Gonzalez

Platform

PlayStation 3

Style

1-Player Action/Adventure

Publisher

Sony Computer Entertainment

Developer

Team Ico

Release

Holiday 2011



It's been nearly a decade since gamers first felt the emotional bond between a young boy with horns and a mysterious girl as they traversed a world overrun by shadows. Though Ico wasn't a blockbuster, critics were awestruck by its minimalist design and unique visual style that blurred the line between video games and art. The cult hit led to the development of spiritual successor Shadow of the Colossus, which further carried on the theme of companionship and testing the morally questionable lengths to which one man would go to save a lost love. Shadow is considered by many to be one of the greatest PlayStation 2 games of all time. Team Ico's upcoming next-gen effort, The Last Guardian, follows the colossal footsteps of its predecessors. Players will witness a boy and a mystical creature develop an unbreakable bond as we discover which of the two is the true guardian.

In the early



teaser trailer of the game that debuted a year ago, the camera pans into an ancient structure housing a dormant beast within. A young boy curiously examines the unidentifiable creature from behind a pillar and carefully tiptoes in its direction. When the boy gently pets the beast's head, suddenly the feathered feline rolls over to expose its talons, props itself up, and playfully scratches behind its ear with its hind leg.

Team Ico has been tight-lipped about *The Last Guardian* over the past year since its reveal last E3, leaving many questions unanswered regarding the duo's relationship and the identity of this mysterious creature. Now that the team has completed its research and development and locked down the core gameplay elements, director Fumito Ueda and Team Ico are now ready to let us delve deeper into this mysterious new world.

Gameplay videos of *The Last Guardian* showcase the heart-warming interaction between the boy and the huge creature, which we now know as the Trico. Throughout the boy's journeys, the cat/bird hybrid assists the boy onto high platforms, rescues him when he slips off ledges, and destroys guards who threaten the boy with the force of its talons. The boy expresses his gratitude toward the Trico with a friendly, tender caress. Ueda says this type of harmonious relationship is something the player must work to achieve, as when they first meet the boy ruffles the Trico's feathers.

(continued on page 73)



At this year's Tokyo Game Show, Sony officially announced the previously rumored Ico and Shadow of the Colossus: The Collection for PS3. The collection includes both PS2 titles on one Blu-ray with full support for HD, 3D, and trophies.

Ueda says both titles were very 3D centric in design, so the move to 3D will fully bring these worlds to life. The jury is still out, however, on whether or not The Last Guardian will support 3D.

The Last Guardian In 3D?



Connections To The Past

When Team Ico originally designed *Shadow of the Colossus*, the project began as an independent concept from Ico. It was only toward the end of development that Ueda and the team decided to connect the two. Both titles feature horned characters as protagonists, and both encounter shadowy figures. Ueda hasn't confirmed whether or not there will be a connection between *The Last Guardian* and its predecessors, but you may have noticed protruding bumps between the Trico's ears. Many have speculated that like Ico and *Shadow of the Colossus*, *The Last Guardian* will feature a heartbreaking ending, but Ueda says that the conclusion will be open-ended.

The current model of the Trico is meant to resemble a cat, which the team agreed to after scrapping previous iterations that looked more like a dog, or, in one case, a camel. Ueda says the cat and bird combo turned out to be most effective from a design standpoint because it can jump higher, duck lower, fit into smaller openings, and is more agile overall. This emphasis on the Trico's ability to move and adapt to dynamic spaces was a direct result of level design. Instead of building environments around the size of the massive creature, the team instead decided to design levels around the size of the small boy to accentuate the Trico's large scale. Thus, the Trico had to be flexible enough to fit into smaller spaces.

Designing The Boy And His Trico

During early stages of development, the protagonist was actually a girl. But after discussing the design implications, Ueda says the team moved away from this concept because the girl would have smaller hands and a weaker grip, and a skirt-wearing protagonist would make for awkward camera angles since a large component of *The Last Guardian* is climbing. In the end, the team settled on an energetic boy who is much younger than Ico. To emphasize co-dependency when progressing through levels in *The Last Guardian*, Team Ico didn't design the boy to be completely self-sufficient, but strong enough to hold onto the Trico's feathers.




Lost In Translation

In Japan, The Last Guardian is called Hitokui no washi Toriko. This literally translates to "Man-Eating Giant Eagle Trico" or "Trico the Man-Eating Giant Eagle." Ueda says the reason they chose this name because it signals that the boy will not know if the Trico is a friend or foe when they first team up. Though to us "man-eating" makes the Trico sound like a terrible creature, the term is commonly used in Japanese children's books and fairy tales. The word "Toriko" is also worth noting. It can mean prisoner or baby bird, and may be a hybrid of the Japanese words for bird (tori) and cat (neko).

(continued from page 70)



Part of Team Ico's



inspiration for building The Last Guardian around the dynamic relationship between a boy and an animal character was the powerful emotional impact the relationship between Wander and his horse Agro had on players in Shadow of the Colossus. While Ueda has yet to explain how the boy finds the animal bound in chains, we're told the Trico is initially confused by the young boy and will not always respond to commands until the boy can gain its trust. Rather than adopt a fictional language as its predecessors Ico and Shadow of the Colossus did, in The Last Guardian the boy communicates with the Trico by calling its name or attracting its attention with a barrel or other object of interest. Getting the creature to follow instructions will present a challenge to the player in the game's stages, but the Trico will warm up to the boy as the story develops.

Team Ico didn't reveal any of the core story elements, such as why this unlikely duo is teaming up or what they are trying to accomplish, but the developers did open up about their level design and gameplay philosophy for the project. The Last Guardian's level designs are very vertical, so in order for the duo to progress, they must cooperatively

solve puzzles to make their way up a dilapidated, ancient structure. For instance, if the boy needs to access a room that is out of his reach, he must lure the Trico into a position that will allow him to climb its back. To do so, the boy must toss a barrel onto the level above, which piques the Trico's interest. As it walks toward the barrel to investigate, the boy has an opportunity to climb onto its back and successfully leap toward the platform above. The boy and the Trico are traversing an aged, crumbling structure, so environments dynamically change depending on your actions. This causes puzzles to increase in complexity as you progress.

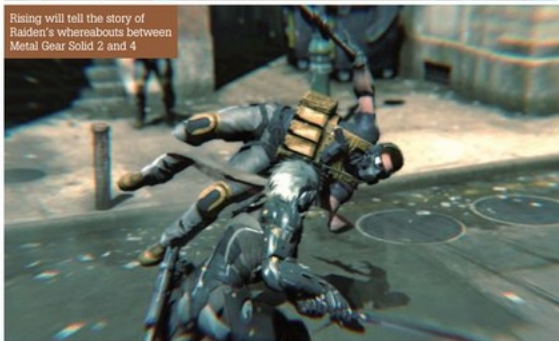
Ueda won't reveal many more specifics on The Last Guardian, which isn't surprising. Anyone familiar with Ico and Shadow of the Colossus knows that the developer offers very little information to the player, leaving the overall experience up to interpretation. In fact, Ueda says part of the reason the team chose the title The Last Guardian is because it can be construed in many ways. Is the last guardian going to be the boy or the Trico? We won't find out until it releases next year. ♦

previews





Rising aims to preserve the stealth aspects of the Metal Gear series while emphasizing blade combat



Rising will tell the story of Raiden's whereabouts between Metal Gear Solid 2 and 4



No parking zone



Players can slice through cyborg soldiers' power units to steal their batteries and consume them for energy

Metal Gear Solid Rising

A slice of what's to come

With a few stylish swings of a high-frequency katana, Metal Gear's Raiden made his triumphant return at this year's E3 as he made short work of a slew of bad guys and a defenseless watermelon. The latest installment in the legendary stealth franchise emphasizes blade combat, a fact highlighted in the E3 trailer as a sentry robot and a group of generic soldiers are dissected in a fit of lightning-quick swordplay.

During Microsoft's press briefing at Tokyo Game Show, the crowd was treated to a live demo showcasing the free-cutting mechanic at Rising's core. Players will have the ability to slice objects from just about any angle, as

demonstrated by a set of bowling pins set up on an outdoor table. Raiden slowly aims at the pins revealing a red line that represents where the blade will pass through the object, then unleashes the blade for a clean cut.

Next, an innocuous set of stacked watermelons suddenly reveal the franchise's signature exclamation point. Hiding behind the fruit is a Scarab, one of the orb-like robots with three arms that appeared in Metal Gear Solid 4. The Scarab picks up a watermelon, which it proceeds to spin on one of its fingers like a basketball. Then it juggles bowling pins and balances one of its own kind above its body to showcase Raiden's ability to slice and dice moving objects.

The Scarab applauds Raiden for his efforts at the end of the demo right before it splits in half.

From bowling pins to watermelons, Rising's free-cutting mechanic looks more and more enticing with each swing of Raiden's katana. We look forward to chopping up enemy cyborgs and random inanimate objects when we get to experience the "lightning bolt action" for ourselves once the game hits PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, though Konami still hasn't announced a release date. » **Annette Gonzalez**

For more details on Metal Gear Rising's gameplay, check out our interview with producer Shigenobu Matsuyama on gameinformer.com/mag

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Konami

» **Developer**
Kojima Productions

» **Release**

TBA

Dead Space 2

Dismember friends online as human or necromorph



» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action
(8-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Visceral Games

» **Release**
January 25

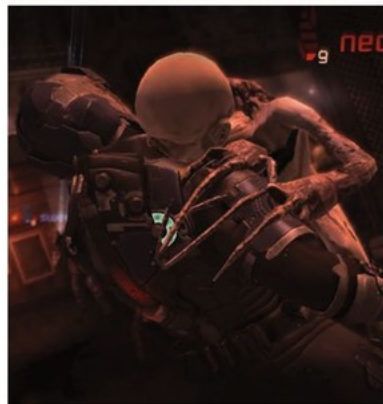
The first Dead Space was a smashing success that didn't invite much criticism from fans. Gamers loved the space horror vibe and slice and dice gameplay so much that many lamented the absence of a multiplayer mode. While strategically dismembering AI opponents is still a core component of the single-player experience in Dead Space 2, ripping live opponents apart online as a human or a necromorph sounds equally enticing.

As this is the first multiplayer outing for the Dead Space franchise, the team at Visceral studied games like Left 4 Dead for inspiration. Dead Space 2 multiplayer features four-on-four

matches across five objective-based maps unique to the multiplayer campaign. Each match is comprised of two rounds, one of which you play as Sprawl security guards and another in which you control necromorphs. Humans are equipped with special abilities such as stasis and memorable weapons like the plasma cutter, pulse rifle, and line gun. Necromorphs are more melee focused, with a few ranged attacks that mainly involve spewing toxic bile on opponents. As players work through the maps, weapons can be upgraded and necromorph attacks increase in damage when players level up.

For our first look at Dead Space 2 multiplayer, Visceral showed off one of the five objective-based multiplayer maps, Titan Mine. In this map humans scramble to collect three parts of a shock mine needed to open a passageway. All the while, necromorphs are on the prowl ready to rip humans to shreds and prevent them from reaching their goal. Playing as a human is second nature if you're familiar with the single-player campaign, as the control scheme remains the same. Necromorphs take some getting used to, but once you get the hang of their attacks, laying down the hurt on Sprawl security is a blast.

Playing as one of the demon child-like Pack creatures allows you to scurry toward a human, leap onto them, and tear away with your claws by executing quick button presses much like the Hunter character from Left 4 Dead. This leaves the human victim vulnerable to other attacks. As the name implies, Pack creatures are most effective in groups. The other necromorphs bring other abilities to the table. Lurkers can scale along walls and ceilings and deliver long-range fire, leaving an unsuspecting opponent below open for



Lurkers can scale walls and ceilings for surprise attacks on human opponents



attack. It's a great way to startle your enemies. The Spitter and Puker can switch between melee and projectile bile spewing from different ranges, leaving opponents with burning faces full of goo. Learning the strengths of each of these character types keeps things fresh and fun.

From what has been shown so far, fans yearning to experience the Dead Space universe in an online space with friends have plenty to look forward to when the game ships next year. » **Annette Gonzalez**

For more Dead Space 2 multiplayer details, check out our interview with producer Scott Probst at gameinformer.com/mag



Necromorphs find strength in numbers against humans



Quick button presses will get that Pack creature off the human's face



Dismemberment is your friend



Killzone 3

Multiplayer makes its debut

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Guerrilla Games

» **Release**
February 22

Thus far most of the talk about Killzone 3 has focused on the single-player campaign, 3D capabilities, and Move functionality. Guerrilla Games finally cracked the door open on multiplayer for fans who have waited patiently for details since Sony announced the game earlier this year.

For the third installment, Guerrilla Games is revamping the level progression to give it much more flexibility. Instead of just 15 ranks like in the last game, Killzone 3 features 45. Rather than simply tossing in a bunch of arbitrary ranks, Guerrilla changed things up so that players could be rewarded more frequently. This time players earn points that they can choose how to spend, and players will no longer be stuck with a gun or ability that they don't like.

Guerrilla also rewrote the matchmaking logic so that players are better paired with opponents of similar skill levels. The team also added a party lobby so that groups of friends can easily stay together from match to match. Each match gives your friends headset priority so they're always louder than random strangers. Clan support returns as well, with regional leaderboards and unranked matches so your crew can get practice in without damaging its reputation.

Before each match, players select from five different classes – engineer, infiltrator, marksman, medic, and tactician. Each class has six unique abilities players can earn over time, and the weapon unlocks for each tract are tailored to work best with that specific play style. For example, the medic must always watch his or her back when healing others, so when you level up that class gains the ability to equip a mini drone that follows you around and blasts enemies for a limited amount of time. The drone can also attempt to patch you up if you get shot down.

In an effort to up the scale of the battles, some maps now include vehicles. The exoskeleton



from Killzone 2's single-player campaign is available in multiplayer for the first time. This walking tank has the firepower to decimate the entire opposing force, but the thin glass windshields offer a glaring weakness for snipers to exploit. The jetpack seen in earlier demos of Killzone 3 is now confirmed for certain multiplayer maps as well. These environments are designed with more vertical action in mind to take advantage of the extra axis that players can traverse. These devices won't keep you in the air for more than a few seconds at a time, so don't get any ideas about dogfighting high above a blown up cityscape.

Guerrilla Warfare, the first mode we tried out, is essentially a team deathmatch featuring capture points that teams must secure to respawn. With Guerrilla's dynamic respawning system, players will respawn in locations close to the action but not so close that they'll get blown up instantly by a random grenade.

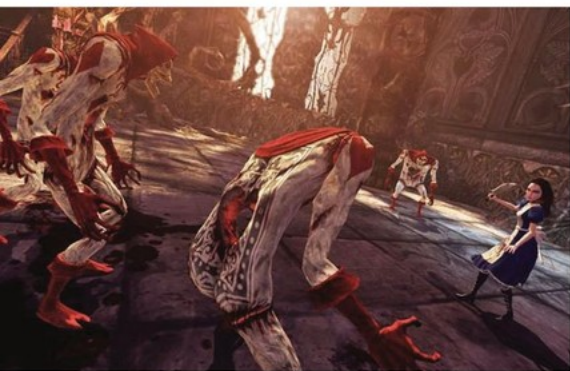
The Operations mode is an attack and defend

match with a series of objectives. In the map we saw, one side must defend an important dam while the other schemes to destroy it. The first section involves blowing up the outer doors. If the attackers succeed, they'll see a brief cutscene starring all of the players involved in the conquest, complete with custom outfits and gamer tags floating above their heads. The better you perform, the more prominent a role you'll have in the replay. A less integral player may be running around in the background, while the best player is the hero setting the charges. On the flip side, high-ranking defenders will appear as the ones issuing commands for further measures like releasing nerve gas or detonating an EMP. When the dam ultimately is blown, the victors fly away heroically on transports while we look like chumps getting swept away by the flood. Unfortunately, our revenge will have to wait until Killzone 3's February 2011 release. » **Bryan Vore**





Only a well-organized team can bring down an exoskeleton-equipped enemy



Alice: Madness Returns

We're all mad here

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

» **Style**
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Spicy Horse

» **Release**
2011

Alice returns to Wonderland thanks to a surprise reunion between EA and American McGee, who now sits at the helm of a new studio. In the original, McGee turned Alice into an older, wiser, and mentally unstable character to craft an intentionally disturbing tale of one woman's slipping sanity. The sequel continues her struggle to differentiate fantasy from reality.

The team at developer Spicy Horse claims *Madness Returns* has a much stronger narrative focus than the first title. The sequel begins a decade after the events of *Alice*, as our protagonist is released from Rutledge Asylum and into the care of a psychiatrist in London. Overwhelmed by the change in scenery and still bearing the mental and physical scars from the events that led to her parent's death, Alice retreats into the dark recesses of her mind once more. The familiarity and security of Wonderland lures her, offering something Alice can't find in the real world.

Our demo begins on a rooftop in London, where Alice is joined by an elderly woman tending a garden. Without notice, the woman con-

verts into a menacing creature before her eyes. Unfortunately, the woman then falls from the lofty height, and when Alice tries to flee the scene, a weak spot on the roof gives way, and she spirals down the rabbit hole once again.

Wonderland is in a state of disrepair, but as before, the fantasy world holds the key to Alice's recovery. Restoring peace throughout the realm will mend her fractured mind. However, the old woman's transformation indicates that reality and fantasy are starting to bleed together for Alice. Wonderland has escaped the confines of Alice's mind and begun to permeate her London home. The opposite is true, too. As Alice steps into a familiar domain – the Veil of Tears – childhood toys litter the level. Another familiar site greets her: a disembodied Cheshire grin.

In terms of gameplay, much of *Madness Returns* stays true to Alice's roots. Heavy emphasis is placed on platforming, and we watch Alice double jump her way from mushroom cap to mushroom cap throughout the Veil. When she happens upon an oddly colored waterfall, the enticing words "drink me" scroll nearby. A single sip gives Alice the ability to

minimize her size on a whim. She can also use Shrink Sonar, a hint system that surveys the level and determines when her diminutive form is needed. The skill can come in handy during combat, too.

Combat doesn't take center stage until we enter Mad Hatter territory. Enemies are puzzles in their own right, and Alice must evaluate the best method for dispatching each new foe she encounters. Mechanical teapots are the pest of choice in this level. A ranged shot to their mechanical eyes momentarily stuns them, allowing Alice to close the gap and attack with the Vorpal Blade.

Teeth erupt from bested enemies and serve as the currency in Alice's demented domain. These can be exchanged for upgrades to her arsenal and for unlocking combos. Collectables like memory fragment audio logs also populate Wonderland.

While we've only peered briefly into Alice's new nightmare, we can't help but be intrigued. » **Meagan VanBurklee**



Neverdead

Devil May Cry meets Katamari Damacy

In the world of video games, protagonists don't generally survive a close range grenade explosion. Ordinarily you'll see a game over screen after the grenade goes off. In *Neverdead*, however, death and dismemberment is only the beginning of a unique new game mechanic.

The hero, Bryce, is an immortal who can withstand any manner of punishment and put himself back together if need be. When he fought and lost against the demon king 500 years ago, he was rewarded/cursed with an invincible demon body. Over the centuries he's developed into kind of a jerk and has taken up the trade of demon hunting.

Konami is working closely with Aliens Vs. Predator developer Rebellion in an increasingly more common East-meets-West partnership. Shinta Nojiri, producer on the Konami side, came up with the original concept and oversees design while Rebellion develops the game with its proprietary engine.

"At the beginning I wanted to make a game with an immortal guy, but I needed to make it different from the others because immortality is a common theme in movies and novels and also in games," Nojiri says. "I conceived the idea to make the player dismembered. He's kind of like a zombie, but not a zombie."

In the brief footage we saw of the third-person action title, Bryce wields two pistols in battle against the demon horde. If he gets bashed especially hard, his torso will separate completely from his head and limbs. Players then control the head and must roll over to the other body parts to get back in the action. Any order works, so you could have an arm sticking out the side of a rolling head and still fire wildly at your enemies. If you get your torso next, you'll crawl around with no legs. Reattaching one leg allows you to hop around clumsily until you pick up the next.

Bryce doesn't have to wait for an enemy to dismember him. He can choose to rip off various parts of his body if it suits him. If there's a particularly high ledge he can't reach or small space he needs to get through, he can rip his



head off and toss it in the required direction. Bryce can also throw his arm and still shoot his gun remotely, which is especially strange when dog-like demons pick the limb up and run around while the pistol's firing. Somehow he can also detonate his thrown limbs like a remote controlled grenade. Using the surrounding environment to his advantage is another option. Bryce can destroy ceilings to bring down rubble on top of himself and all of the surrounding demons. They'll all be toast, while he simply rolls out of the wreckage.

Co-op and competitive multiplayer are confirmed, but Konami isn't talking specifics just yet. We wouldn't be surprised if the second player took control of the female government agent Arcadia, who partners with Bryce in the single-

player campaign. Since she's a normal human, we wonder how Rebellion is going to make her as fun to play as Bryce. We're also curious as to how the dismemberment mechanic is going to apply to competitive multiplayer. Punting an opponent's head to the other end of the map after you've taken him down sounds like a fun possibility to us. » **Bryan Vore**

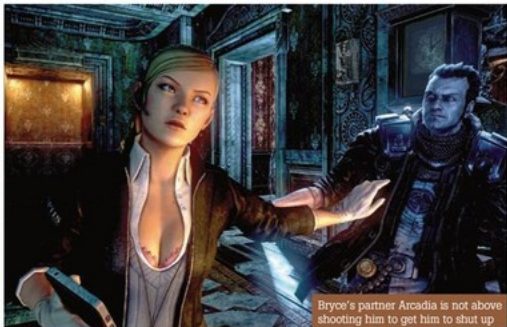
» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**
Konami

» **Developer**
Rebellion

» **Release**
2011



Bryce's partner Arcadia is not above shooting him to get him to shut up





Heinrich and Gretchen will need to combine their powers if they want to succeed

Knights Contract

A hack and slash in the purest sense of the term

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
- » **Publisher**
Namco Bandai
- » **Developer**
Game Republic
- » **Release**
2011

The meat shield and glass cannon are two of gaming's most dependable archetypes. Together, they're a great combination – one distracts enemies up close while the other picks them off from a distance. With *Knights Contract*, Game Republic has taken that classic gameplay relationship and spun an entire game around it.

Players control Heinrich, an immortal executioner armed with a massive spring-loaded scythe. His companion is Gretchen, a resurrected witch. Both have a vendetta against Dr. Faust, who has poisoned medieval Europe with supernatural creatures of his own design. Heinrich's connection to Faust is particularly

tense; Faust killed him at one point.

Heinrich is invincible, which frees players from having to be overly concerned about health. As a hack-and-slash game in the vein of a *Ninja Gaiden* or *Bullet Witch*, Heinrich can unleash flurries of scythe-based combos and other physical attacks. Gretchen isn't impervious from harm, however, so players must make sure that she's safe at all times. Sometimes that means running over to her side and killing whatever monstrosity happens to be chewing on her face. Other times Heinrich must pick her up and physically move her to a safer position.

Just because she isn't indestructible doesn't mean that Gretchen is a liability on the battlefield.

She's capable of whipping up a variety of spells, such as summoning thorn-covered vines from underground, which launch enemies into the air. At that point, Heinrich can slash at them while they're temporarily off balance. She also has access to elemental attacks like ice.

Knights Contract's bosses are grotesque. One creature is a beefy salamander-looking freak with two muscular arms and a single leg. After a chase through a burning village, players have to pin that lone limb down to the ground and then hack at its numerous eyes.

Moments like that make us glad to be invincible. It certainly beats the alternative. » **Jeff Cork**



Heinrich is invincible, but Gretchen isn't. He'll have to carry her around to keep her safe



Dr. Faust's creations look as though they were cobbled together from scraps



While a lot of other games can boast about the size of its bosses, few are as large and ugly as *Knights Contract's*



Weapons and vehicles have been retro-dated to fit the new setting



Battlefield Bad Company 2: Vietnam

DICE has another 'Nam flashback

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 won over multiplayer gamers with its unique squad-based gameplay formula, wide-open maps, vehicular combat, and destructible environments. But interest in the title waned and the community shrank over the past six months as EA failed to deliver new map packs, opting instead to repurpose existing maps for other game modes. The wait for new content is almost over, as DICE returns to a familiar battlefield – Vietnam – this winter.

The four new multiplayer maps are playable in both Conquest and Rush mode. From an aesthetic standpoint, the jungles of Vietnam offer drastically different scenery ripe with new opportunities for creative warfare. In the Phu Bai Valley map we saw, rice paddies populate the landscape and contrast with lush foliage in the foreground that serves as great cover for

encroaching soldiers. Foxholes and trenches litter the battlefield, adding another layer of strategy to the maps. DICE is also taking measures to ensure the action feels authentic, recording new wartime chatter genuine to the period. We haven't been told if any of the unannounced maps draw from the original Battlefield: Vietnam, but we'd be surprised if DICE didn't take the opportunity to pay tribute to one of its early works.

Fifteen new Vietnam-era weapons join the fray, including the Navy SEAL XM22 machine gun, the standard issue M16, and the M79 grenade launcher. Each new weapon features proficiency stars players can collect. The maps also feature six new vehicles like the Huey chopper, Russian T54 tank, and PBR patrol boat. As in the original Battlefield: Vietnam, vehicles have radios featuring tunes from the era. This time

players can choose from eight radio stations and 49 tracks, like Creedence Clearwater Revival's protest song "Fortunate Son."

The rest of the Battlefield gameplay has been retrofitted for the new era as well. Instead of planting C4 explosives, players use dynamite and a plunger to blow crates. The medic uses syringes to save fallen soldiers instead of a defibrillator, and tank turrets leave you uncomfortably exposed instead of placing you safely within the confines of a modern vehicle. Longtime players will be happy to know that your progression from Bad Company 2 ties into the Vietnam expansion, and any experience points you earn will go toward advancing your rank.

EA still hasn't handed over two important pieces of intel on Vietnam – the release date and price – but that doesn't make us any less excited for this long overdue expansion. » **Meagan VanBurklee**

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC
- » **Style**
1-Player Shooter
(24-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Electronic Arts
- » **Developer**
DICE
- » **Release**
Winter



Battlefields include lush green foliage – until it burns to the ground, that is



Inversion

Looking at the world from a different angle

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action/
Shooter (Online TBA)

» **Publisher**
Namco Bandai

» **Developer**
Saber Interactive

» **Release**
2011

Gravity is considered one of the weaker forces in the universe. We counteract it every day when we get out of bed or pick a controller up off the couch. The new sci-fi shooter from Saber Interactive, on the other hand, bends the rules of gravity so much that they are about to snap in half. When an army of human-looking aliens invades the planet, they start screwing with the natural order of physics, literally turning the world on its side. Fortunately players can fight back with some gravity-altering abilities of their own. Let's take a look at some of the ways Inversion lets you abuse Isaac Newton's universal law of gravitation.

Gravitational Control

Inversion's main weapon is a device that allows players to manipulate gravity. It lets players pick up objects within the environment and either use them as a shield or throw them at enemies. We've seen this mechanic before, but Inversion puts a twist on the technique by allowing players to pick up liquids as well as solid objects. This means players can pick up globules of a flammable liquid, douse their enemies, and then set them on fire. Players aren't limited to manipulating objects directly in front of them, either. Inversion allows you to fire an antigravity pulse that nullifies the gravitational effects of cer-

tain objects. For example, if a few enemies are holed up behind cover, you can turn off the gravity on those objects and watch your enemies' faces turn red as their protection floats skyward. Enemies are susceptible to this energy pulse as well, and watching them float through the air should provide some entertaining shooting gallery moments.

Bringing Down The House

Saber Interactive knew it would need an impressive physics system to deliver the kind of experience for which the team was aiming. To that end, the developer partnered with middleware developer Havok to create a new physics system called Havok Destruction. Thanks to this system, little pieces of debris start to rise off the ground whenever a player sends out an antigravity blast. Little ambient touches like this are nice, but Havok Destruction really shows off its merits when players start using the environment as a weapon. We witnessed one sequence where Inversion's main character manned a heavy turret and started blasting away at the first floor of a nearby building. After decimating the building's main support

pillars, the structure collapsed, taking out a troop of enemies stationed inside along with it. Inversion's new physics system is sturdy enough that buildings will collapse differently every time depending on how the player attacks the structure and how gravity pulls on the weight of the building.



Navigating Though Altered Gravity

In the world of Inversion, gravity is malfunctioning. Sometimes this means players must navigate fields of zero G, and other times this means gravity pulls objects in unusual directions. The invading alien force is manipulating the environments, setting off antigravity charges that could literally shift the area on its side at any moment. You might start a level on the city street, but after a gravity event sweeps across the district you could find yourself standing on the side of a building. Alleys along ordinary city streets become endless chasms that players must traverse as they fight along the sides of skyscrapers. » **Ben Reeves**



Onscreen indicators let you know the path a grenade will follow if gravity is altered



Certain sections of the game will be played on the sides of buildings



Dungeon Siege III

More co-op, less AI

Forget everything you know about Dungeon Siege. This console sequel being developed by veteran RPG studio Obsidian Entertainment has more in common with Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance than it does with the Dungeon Siege that spawned from franchise creator Gas Powered Games. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

What we've seen of Dungeon Siege III so far suggests it's the kind of story-driven cooperative fantasy dungeon crawler that we haven't seen on console in a couple of years. The distant third-person camera allows for easy tracking of the high-flying, explosive abilities players unleash against multiple enemies at once. Characters can flip between stances at will, whipping out a two-handed weapon to clear out swarming foes with sweeping arcs and switching to a sword-and-board setup to handle their leader after the minions are culled.

Building your character is a matter of personal taste, as each of the several playable classes can level up along different paths. Obsidian isn't ready to share details on the progression yet, but the developers assure us that the choices will be significant.

A Mass Effect-like conversation wheel and cinematic camera work deliver storytelling interactions far beyond what action/RPGs traditionally offer. Obsidian has proven that it can do amazing things in this realm (see Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II), and Dungeon Siege III has a solid technical foundation on which to build.

The developers happily showed off the game's two-player drop-in/drop-out local co-op play, but remained curiously silent when asked about online co-op or the fact that Dungeon Siege has always featured four-character parties. Does anyone seriously think that a triple-A quality game like this will have couch co-op but forgo online support? We certainly don't. — **Adam Biessener**

Each class has several ability sets, all tailored for a particular combat style or encounter type



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

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Square Enix

» **Developer**
Obsidian Entertainment

» **Release**
2011

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Shadows Of The Damned

A punk rock road trip to hell

Suda says that we'll see much of the pop/punk styling that he excels at. "But this time, it isn't going to be low-class like Travis. It's going to be a little more sophisticated," laughs Suda

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Grasshopper
Manufacture

» **Release**
2011

Shedding light on a highly anticipated collaboration, EA and Grasshopper Manufacture finally unveiled *Shadows of the Damned* at this year's Tokyo Game Show. Driven by the combined talents of iconic Japanese developers Goichi "Suda 51" Suda (No More Heroes) and Shinji Mikami (Resident Evil), it's obvious from the debut trailer that both are infusing their signature styles into this third-person shooter.

Conceptualized by Suda six years ago following the completion of *Killer 7*, *Shadows of the Damned* was born after the Creative Artists Agency brought the project to EA. Soon thereafter Mikami joined in an official capacity. Branded a psychological action thriller, *Shadows* follows professional demon hunter Garcia Hotspur through Suda and Mikami's unique interpretation of hell.

"What I want to do is introduce the audience to a brand new experience," Suda explains. "I want this to be a very exciting experience that isn't like a normal action game. Not normal at all. That is where we came up with the idea of a 'psychological action thriller.'"

After learning that his love has been captured and is being tortured in the underworld by vengeful demons – when you take out the damned for a living, they develop a chip on their shoulder – Hotspur dedicates his life to rescuing Paula. Despite legions of dark foes standing in his way, he won't stop until he brings hell to his knees.

Suda says the dark atmosphere of movies like *Se7en* were highly inspirational, but that he intends to balance the mood with the pulpy action of Robert Rodriguez films. The short teaser trailer begins with Hotspur riding his motorcycle on an empty road at night to a

heavy metal soundtrack, with just enough light from the flickering lampposts to illuminate his significantly scarred face and tattooed torso. Hotspur approaches a giant gate, kicks it in, takes out his gun, and says, "Let the bloodbath begin!" After massacring a few enemies, he stops to shout, "My name is Garcia Hotspur! My wrath is your hell!"

Hotspur's character design looks very familiar. Dark, dangerous, and clad in a leather jacket (a signature Grasshopper style), Hotspur feels distinctly spawned from Suda's mind. Hotspur's over-the-top arsenal feels like vintage Suda as well; his skull-adorned shotgun makes a statement without even firing a shot. Hotspur is joined on his quest by a flaming skull, a reformed demon who can transform into said weapons.

Mikami's influence is evident everywhere in *Shadows of the Damned*. While descending further into hell, players must confront a twisted array of creatures and solve a series of demented puzzles, all infused with Mikami's unique style. The game features an over-the-shoulder camera and shooting mechanics that look very much like *Resident Evil 4*. Boss battles are also being created under his watchful eye.

Despite the macabre setting, obvious punk rock overtones permeate the game. "I think survival horror is very serious in both visuals and gameplay," Mikami says. "However, for this game, it really has a punk rock flavor. It isn't always serious. It is very easy to get into and is a very stylish game. I want players to always be excited when they play. It is very different than a normal survival horror game, despite the subject." — **Meagan VanBurklee**



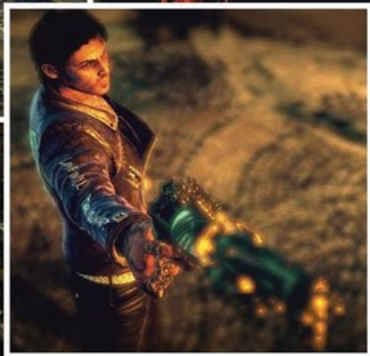
Environments are promised to span demon-infested towns, dark and twisted forests, and hell's sewage-filled underbelly



Antacid commercials sure are getting creative



Not the recommended way to enjoy Red Bull



Lauded composer Akira Yamaoka has also joined the team, best known for his sound design in the Silent Hill franchise



PS3 • 360

Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon

In this follow-up to Earth Defense Force 2017, D3 and developer Vicious Cycle are building on the campy B-movie vibe that made the original a cult hit. EDF fans can expect more weapons, plenty of ridiculous enemies, and the addition of online co-op. Get ready to send those giant bugs back home to space in spring 2011.



Wii

Michael Jackson: The Experience

Ubisoft Montpellier is handling dev duties for the only home console version of this dancing game that is not getting delayed. Due to Kinect and Move difficulties, the PS3 and 360 versions won't release until early 2011, but Wii users will be moonwalking to "Billie Jean" and dance pointing to "Beat It" on November 23.





PC //

Torchlight II

If there's anything Torchlight needs to complement its solid hack n' slash dungeon-crawling gameplay, it's new classes with more than a handful of unique skills apiece. Good thing that's the biggest thing this sequel is adding when it comes out next year. Oh, and co-op. Did people want that? That's in, too.

PC //

Section 8: Prejudice

This sci-fi shooter is bringing its tactical multiplayer combat to a new level with shinier graphics and more than 50 customizable weapons. A proper single-player campaign is promised as well. Prejudice isn't confirmed for consoles yet, but we're guessing it will show up on 360 as well as PC when it ships next year.



PS3 • 360 //

Asura's Wrath

Developed in conjunction between Capcom and CyberConnect2 (hack, Naruto) with Mega Man's Keiji Inafune at the helm as executive producer, Asura's Wrath is an upcoming brawler coated with Japanese influence and a unique art style. No word on a release date, but we're hoping to hear more details soon.



gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH



104

Civilization V

gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

96 Dead Rising 2

Chuck Greene's resourcefulness with duct tape and prowess with improvised weapons have earned him one of the top slots this month. Chuck's adventure is too good not to share - which is why the game's co-op is such a great addition. You'll want to bring a friend as you battle your way through the undead apocalypse. Read our full review on page 96.

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	Like APB, this won't make it to 80 days before the plug is pulled.

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

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7.75

PS3 • 360

» Concept

A direct sequel that shatters continuity by reuniting players with a dead man

» Graphics

Most of the level designs don't offer much eye candy, but every little effect and texture detail in them are works of art. This is easily one of this generation's best looking games

» Sound

The voice work for Starkiller is hit or miss, but John Williams' familiar melodies bring each scene to life

» Playability

Lightsaber combat offers more depth, and the Force powers are as explosive as ever. The enemy lock-on still brings frustration

» Entertainment

Short, yet far from sweet. The story holds an otherwise fun game back

» Replay Value

Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

The original *Force Unleashed* let players harness the power of the Force like never before, and that concept is still at the core of this sequel. In fact, so much of the first game is intact in *Force Unleashed II* that it hardly feels like you're playing a new game. Combat feels tighter, but most of the so-called improvements don't change anything, from the dual lightsabers (which are just cosmetic) to the Mind Trick power (the only new addition to your Force repertoire). Even though the gameplay hasn't evolved much, I won't complain about having an excuse to obliterate hundreds of Imperials; I had a blast impaling, electrocuting, and throwing my opposition. The Force powers alone are reason enough for Star Wars fans to give this game a chance – just be warned that the plot holding the action together is awful. If you thought the narrative in the last game was threadbare and inconsistent, you haven't seen anything yet. The *Force Unleashed II* has some moments of pure Force-fueled bliss, but the disappointments and missed opportunities outnumber them by far. » **Joe Juba**



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

Uneventful storytelling drains this entry of its magic

Style 1-Player Action Developer LucasArts Publisher LucasArts Release October 26 ESRB T

In *The Force Unleashed*, Darth Vader's crusade to rid the galaxy of the Jedi was interrupted by a young boy named Galen Marek. After slaying Galen's father, Vader secretly brought on the child as his apprentice. Despite being trained in the dark arts from a young age and carrying Vader's torch against the Jedi, Galen, under the guise of Starkiller, still clung to the good inside of him. His softer side eventually caused him to fall in love with Juno Eclipse, free himself of his oppressive master, and form a rebellion against the Empire. In the end, Starkiller sacrificed his life to save his friends and give the galaxy a fighting chance against the Empire.

The Force Unleashed II picks up where this tale left off, but it doesn't focus on the rise of the Rebel Alliance or Vader's unrelenting quest to hunt them down. In a twist that comes dangerously close to breaking *Star Wars*' lore, Starkiller returns as a clone, or so Vader tells him. Haunted by visions of Starkiller's past and the love he has for Juno, this supposed doppelganger's mission is to find answers as to why he exists, all while battling or embracing ghosts from a soul that may not be his.

The story starts out with a shaky concept and never finds solid ground. Cameo appearances by Yoda and Boba Fett end up going nowhere. Yoda's role is relegated to that of an anatomical Disney character in front of a ride, and Boba Fett talks a big game, but never once confronts Starkiller. Boba Fett? Boba Fett? Where? If you can put yourself in the mindset of the prequel movies, where you're willing to tolerate a groan-inducing narrative for the tradeoff of Jedi doing badass things you never thought were possible, *The Force Unleashed II* delivers in a big way.

He may be a clone, but Starkiller's handle over the Force has grown significantly. When a situation calls for improvisation, Starkiller shows a flair for the dramatic. Whether this means beheading a squadron of stormtroopers or guiding a large space cruiser inside of a cloning facility, his actions almost always inspire awe and are usually tied to fun gameplay sequences. He can also turn enemies on their own ranks through mind control – an act that always rewards the player with a hilariously visualized betrayal or suicide.

When a battle calls for a little extra firepower, Starkiller turns his Force powers up to 11. With rage fueling his actions, he can bring down a mining droid, an adversary that can normally withstand a dozen lightning blasts and a handful of saber slashes, in one powerful strike.

Combat still has that distinct *Force Unleashed* feel, but refinements to the mechanics, such as the ability to easily pick up and throw items, make it a more fluid experience. Whether you are Force throwing a stormtrooper or crushing a TIE Fighter, the physics convey a true sense of weight and appropriate visualization. I didn't have any issues with the lightsaber combat in the first game, but many fans felt it was too shallow. LucasArts addresses this minor irritation with Starkiller's acrobatic dual-wielding abilities. If you don't want to rely solely on the Force, you can let the lightsabers do most of the talking. The enemy lock-on is the only tool that still doesn't quite work, as it is solely based on Starkiller's position.

The texture work and animation, for both Starkiller and his opposition, rank among this generation's best. LucasArts also went well out of its way to avoid camera clipping. Every shot is framed beautifully, delivering a cinematic view that mimics the motion pictures. The camera work also brings you closer to the action than any *Star Wars* experience before it.

Many of the environments are set on Kamino



or the space around it, which didn't entrance me like the varied levels in the first game. The only iconic locations are a game-free pit stop at a familiar setting from the original trilogy and a trip to an intergalactic casino that was surprisingly disinteresting. My favorite stage-based moments were the free fall sequences where Starkiller plummets dangerously toward the ground.

Most levels conclude with a repetitive by-the-numbers boss fight. The last boss fight is particularly nauseating; it lasts far too long, is too easy, and concludes with one of the most uneventful send-offs I've seen. LucasArts hardly offers a compelling conclusion to this story. Most of the key plot points are open to interpretation, and the logic applied to many of the narrative twists make Vader look like a schizophrenic madman who sabotages his own plans moments after making them.

In a similar vein to the Starkiller clone's role, *The Force Unleashed II* is a shadow of its former self. The graceful gameplay offers a higher level of excitement, but the plot and characterization – two large components from which I expect great things from any *Star Wars* journey – makes this experience one of 2010's biggest disappointments. » **Andrew Reiner**

For videos of *The Force Unleashed II* in action, go to www.gameinforma.com

Rock Band 3

A whole new challenge



9.25

PS3 • 360

- » **Concept**
Reinvigorates the music genre with new ways to play
- » **Graphics**
Excellent visuals match the band scene, and well-animated transitions carry you from the menus into the game
- » **Sound**
An eclectic and excellent set list takes full advantage of the many instruments
- » **Playability**
The new pro instruments are challenging, but extensive training helps you along
- » **Entertainment**
A massive title that's more like several games in one; Rock Band 3 could keep you entertained for months
- » **Replay Value**
High

Harmonix was founded on the principle that everyone should have access to the joy of creating music, even if they never had the benefit of learning a real instrument. The premier music game developer fulfilled its goal in developing Guitar Hero and Rock Band, but Rock Band 3 is a whole new ball game. While continuing to polish the experiences that established the Rock Band brand, this new installment also offers players the opportunity to take the next step and learn to play the instruments we've been pretending to rock out with for the last five years.

The core of any music game is the song list. Rock Band 3 features the most unusual and varied in the franchise, but it also has fewer widely recognizable tunes. While Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" and Huey Lewis and the News' "The Power of Love" vie with several other historical chart toppers, the meat of the setlist lies in artists like The Smiths, Metric, and the Flaming Lips. The more I dug into this eclectic selection of tunes, the more it reaffirmed my confidence in Harmonix's song selection team. With each part I played, I fell more in love with the interplay of instruments. As a result, the only people I envision being disappointed could be folks who choose to play only one instrument. With guitar, bass, keyboard, drums, vocals, and harmony vocals all vying for attention, not every song will shine for everybody in the band.

With the new songs come new instruments. The keyboard in particular has several songs that highlight its flexibility and fun. I really like this newest peripheral; it's small and light, and can be played from a number of positions (lap, table, or strapped up like a keytar). I also admire

the onscreen notation system that shows off the many keys that need to be played in pro mode. By the time you're rocking the highest difficulty on pro mode, you're playing the full right-hand parts to the songs in question. It's a thrilling sensation, whether you've ever played piano or not.

The new pro-guitar system is remarkable, even if the high cost of entry and steep challenge make it prohibitive for some players. A phenomenal tutorial system introduces the basics of fretting, barre chords, and finger placement, along with all the other skills you'll need to play the world's most familiar rock instrument. Nothing replaces a real teacher, but Rock Band 3 does a good job of approximating the real thing.

The notation system for this new guitar is based on traditional guitar tablature, with some notable differences in the visual representation of chords. It takes a while to pick up, as the game demands you learn the unique shapes that correspond with each chord on the guitar's neck. The only way to dive into this new experience at launch is with the Mustang guitar—a reasonable approximation of a real guitar with buttons instead of frets on the neck. I liked the Mustang, but it's a far cry from the challenge of real strings, and it's not a true guitar that can be plugged into an amp. The Squier peripheral, which releases in a few months, solves these problems. It will likely cost the equivalent of a true guitar, but this is fair since it is one.

Even with a focus on these new toys, Rock Band 3 is still excellent with existing instruments. I loved soaring through the guitar and bass parts with the old instruments; several of the songs have great solo lines, and there's a nice mix of rhythm and lead play throughout

the setlist. Normal drums continue to be a blast, and the transition to pro mode with three additional cymbals is the easiest "pro shift" to make, thanks to clear visual cues that distinguish cymbals and pads. Singers have a bunch of fun melodies to explore, and harmony vocals return from the Beatles game for all those wanna-be backup vocalists.

It may be far less glamorous than new setlists and instruments, but the revamped user interface that underlies the whole experience is the game's most unqualified success. Fixing nearly every problem from previous installments, and layering in a whole new career structure, the new format is brilliant. Each player has their own pop up menu to drop in and out of play and adjust their options. Setlists are sortable, saveable, and shareable. Players can rate songs to determine their likelihood to show up during random selections. New road challenges offer bite-sized tours that can be conquered in a night of play. Hundreds of goals span across all modes of play, delivering progression no matter the way you spend your in-game time. Innumerable tiny changes also make the game more fun and easy to play, from the ability to disable drum pad navigation to the option of continuing to play a song after failing out.

In many ways, Rock Band 3 is a culmination of Harmonix's efforts to bring music to the masses. But it's also a new chapter in the franchise that starts the gradual merging of real and game-based music. Plenty of naysayers have already declared music games dead. Harmonix certainly hasn't gotten the message; this band is primed for a new tour. —Matt Miller

9.5

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Survive a zombie attack using improvised weapons while uncovering a massive conspiracy

» **Graphics**

Tons of zombies appear on the screen – particularly near the end – and the game handles it without a hitch

» **Sound**

Intentionally bland mall music juxtaposed against snarling monsters helps sell the creepy ambience

» **Playability**

Blue Castle's efforts to alleviate frustrations from the first game succeed

» **Entertainment**

A lot is going on in Dead Rising 2, and it all works together wonderfully

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High

Second Opinion 9

Dead Rising 2's ultimate selling point is the size and scope of the title – you'll never run out of activities to occupy your time. The new weapon-manufacturing mechanic ate up hours of my playthrough; it's so engaging that I let critical missions pass without care. The open-ended nature and ability to start the narrative over while maintaining character progression encouraged me to explore every facet of the game, resulting in an extremely personal and fulfilling experience. I spent my days rescuing survivors, taking on increasingly memorable psychopaths, playing strip poker for money, trying on horrific new ensembles, and simply exploring the grandeur of Fortune City before addressing Chuck's pressing problems. While indisputably impressed with the experience, I wish there was a storage system that would allow players to stash away valuable weapon parts for a later time. Similarly, the magazine system still seems archaic, especially with weapon fabrication making inventory space a precious commodity. Fortune City never sleeps, and neither did I while playing through Dead Rising 2. With a seemingly unending supply of engaging content, I'll sleep when I'm undead. — **Meagan VanBurkleo**



gameformer
GAME MONTH

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1 or 2-Player Action (4-Player Online) **Publisher** Capcom **Developer** Blue Castle Games
Release September 28 **ESRB** M

Dead Rising was an early example of what the then-new Xbox 360 hardware could do. Running through vast crowds of zombies in a mall was wish fulfillment for a generation of people raised on George Romero movies, and slaughtering them wholesale with improvised weaponry was blood-red icing on the cake. A finicky save-game system and terrible AI created two outspoken camps – those who couldn't stand the game, and an equally vocal group of apologists. For the sequel, Blue Castle Games and Capcom took a long, hard look at the first game and addressed nearly all of its major annoyances. The end result is one of the most enjoyable games I've played this year.

Former motocross champ Chuck Greene is a likable guy, which makes his plight all the more engaging. His wife was killed in a zombie attack in Las Vegas – the same attack that left his daughter Katey infected with the deadly virus. To get doses of the expensive Zombrex drug, which keeps her infection in check, Chuck has had to do some unsavory things. That path has led him to Fortune City, Nevada, where he hopes to cash in on the gruesome show *Terror is Reality*.

The most dramatic improvement Blue Castle Games made is in the way that players interact with other survivors. Let's face it – escort missions are rarely fun. When the people you're

escorting have no regard for their safety and a complete indifference for avoiding obstacles, it can make you want to throw a controller. Guiding survivors to the safe house in Fortune City is a big part of the game, though it's much less annoying than it was in the first one. Maybe there was a carbon monoxide leak in the Willamette Mall.

NPCs follow Chuck at the press of a button, and they can be guided to a specific place by adding a trigger pull. This second option, which was critical in the first game, isn't nearly as important this time around. I never had a problem with survivor AI, even during points when I had a train of six followers. They kept pace with me wherever I went, navigating stairs and other potential obstructions with ease. I never felt comfortable having the AI shadowing me in the first game, but there were points in Dead Rising 2 when I was bummed to say goodbye to them.

Chuck can combine specific objects at special stations to create super weapons. If you think a fire axe and sledgehammer are effective against zombie skulls, you'll be impressed with what they can do when they're duct-taped together. Chuck's not a photojournalist like Frank West was, so using these items replaces snapping pictures as his way of earning experience. Items that can be combined are marked with a wrench icon, and building new weapons is addicting.

Players can use trial and error to discover new combinations, but more obscure ones – such as combining a wheelchair with a car battery to make the "electric chair" – are more likely to be discovered through combo cards. Players receive these for helping certain survivors or completing battles against Fortune City's psychopaths.

Even though Blue Castle Games is based in Vancouver, the team nailed the first

game's goofy interpretation of American culture. This is probably most noticeable in the psychopaths. As in the first Dead Rising, the zombie attacks completely derail some folks who were probably a bit unhinged to begin with. They're not undead, but they're no less deadly. Some are gross and silly, like a memorable run-in with a cannibal chef, though other encounters have a poignancy one might not expect from a game about killing zombies. I felt guilty fighting more than a couple of these sad sacks.

Certain aspects of Dead Rising 2 are bound to be deal-breakers to some, but they shouldn't be as polarizing as the problems in the first game. The sequel features save-game slots, so it's not as easy to paint yourself into a zombie-infested corner. Even though I usually had half a dozen or so missions going on around me at once, I rarely felt overwhelmed. Time is still the ultimate enemy in Dead Rising 2, though it seems to have relaxed its hold a bit.

It's still possible to claw your way into an exceptionally difficult position, though. The game is designed with replayability in mind, as character progression carries over between playthroughs. If you try to beat the game straight from beginning to end, it's going to be tough, even with a co-op buddy. Instead, I found the optimal way is to join a friend's game and help them progress a while before starting your own game. That way, you'll begin with a more experienced Chuck who can carry more items, has more health, and knows a few fighting moves. Earning cash by playing the excellent *Terror is Reality* online multiplayer mode – which features an entire game's worth of silly zombie-themed minigames – is easy and enjoyable, too.

Even after playing for dozens of hours, you'll still find new things in Dead Rising 2. I won't spoil anything, but there's a lot of variety to be found in the game beyond obvious things like the number of objects that can be used as bludgeons. This game is designed for multiple playthroughs, and I'm looking forward to each and every one of them. — **Jeff Cork**



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Castlevania does 3D right by sucking Sony's blood



Where would video games be without J.R.R. Tolkien?



Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Konami **Developer** MercurySteam/Kojima Productions **Release** October 5 **ESRB** M

Vampires surround Gabriel Belmont with hisses and bared fangs, lusting after his blood as he waits for the gate to slowly open. Sticky, pale skin clings to their gangly bones and huge tattered bat wings beat as they encroach. Gabriel swings his barbed chain whip widely, rending their flesh and repelling them towards enormous boarded windows. The beasts are merely stunned, but Gabriel capitalizes by snaring his whip on the planks barring the windows. Sunlight drenches the room as he shatters the ancient wood. Vampire flesh flutters from the bone like macabre rose petals. With hope renewed he turns to the gate. It is only halfway open when dusk lays its dark, suffocating blanket. Ghostly bellows herald the second wave of abominations. The warrior's holy blood runs hot in anticipation.

My excitement for Castlevania: Lords of Shadow was tempered with apprehension. Ever since Castlevania 64, 3D has been a dirty word for the franchise. To my sublime enjoyment, MercurySteam's collaboration with Kojima Productions slays the series' three-dimensional demons. This feat is accomplished by merging the best elements of some of Sony's biggest hits. This Frankenstein's monster is a formidable combination of God of War's combat, Shadow of the Colossus' boss fights, and Uncharted 2's platforming.

Players have access to a familiar suite of showstopping light and heavy whip attacks, as well as high flying enemy juggling ripped off wholesale from Kratos. Light and shadow magic add dimension to the fluid combat; Gabriel's

health is restored with each successful attack when light magic is activated, and shadow magic makes the whip stronger. Alternating between magic types mid-combo is a rush, and the engaging boss fights later on force players to swap tactically.

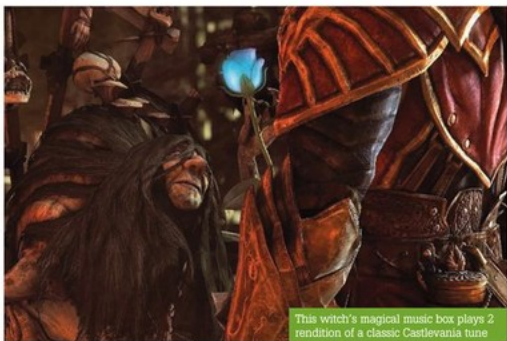
Just like in Castlevania's 2D offerings, Lords of Shadow delivers a plethora of innovative, expertly balanced boss fights. Gabriel scales colossal titans, searching for and surgically pounding their weak spots to dust. He scrambles to destroy a deadly vampire general before it dines on the bloody contents of an iron maiden. Castlevania also has the widest variety of enemies I've ever seen in a game of its ilk. Chupacabras abduct your powers, forcing you into a game of hide and seek, and burrowing zombies attack from underground as their decapitated heads float after you.

If at any point your interest in combat begins to wane, a puzzle comes to the rescue. These range from mundane crank-turning capers to engaging quizzes, like coaxing a murder of crows towards a scarecrow by shaking their perches. Platforming also breaks up the action. Players shimmy and leap across rock faces Uncharted 2 style, using the chain whip to rappel and scale ledges in style. Geometrical snags occasionally rob these climbs of their fluidity, which is frustrating when a hand grip is crumbling away. In later levels, Lords of Shadow foos itself into thinking it has the 3D platforming finesse of Mario Galaxy. Expect repeated deaths.

Gabriel's cliché quest to resurrect his wife is fraught with both obvious and confusing twists. Each of the 50 levels begins with a monologue

by Patrick Stewart's character, many of which would have been better as cutscenes. However, much is redeemed by the game's post-credit ending, which is among the coolest video game finales this millennium.

Castlevania takes a few hours to get rolling, but once it sinks its fangs in you'll be absorbed. After putting nearly 20 hours into Lords of Shadow I emerged satisfied and ready to play again. This polished, action-packed adventure has me ecstatic to see not only what's in store for the next 3D Castlevania, but also what talented developer MercurySteam does next. Don't let the deluge of fall releases or the 3D Castlevania stigma keep you from this amazing quest. » **Tim Turi**



This witch's magical music box plays 2 rendition of a classic Castlevania tune

9

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Konami finally produces an awesome 3D Castlevania by ripping off awesome games and infusing its signature style

» Graphics

Not even mediocre human character models can spoil the breathtaking environments, vibrant colors, and cool looking enemies

» Sound

Lacks classic Castlevania tunes, but the epic orchestra is a solid replacement. Some sound effects seem absent

» Playability

A natural control scheme provides satisfying Devil May Cry and God of War-style combat

» Entertainment

It starts slow, but builds up with incredible boss battles, rewarding exploration, and an unforgettable conclusion

» Replay Value

High

Medal of Honor

EA's reboot fails to polish a tarnished series

7

Style 1-Player Action (24-Player Online) Publisher Electronic Arts Developer EA/EA GAMES Release October 12 ESRB M

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Transplant the Medal of Honor series away from its usual World War II setting to modern-day Afghanistan

» Graphics

The desert environments are convincing enough, but the character models are bland. EA/EA GAMES did a great job keeping a visual parity between the campaign and multiplayer modes

» Sound

With a proper sound system, you'll feel the gun battles in your gut

» Playability

The single-player mode's default aim assist does everything but pull the trigger for you

» Entertainment

It doesn't do anything new or risky, but Medal of Honor is an adequate shooter that may not be enough at this point

» Replay Value

Moderately High

EA took a chance with the latest installment of Medal of Honor, moving the series from its World War II origins to a contemporary setting. It's no secret that the franchise has lost its way over the years, and it has the declining review scores to show for it. Those who pinned their hopes on the change in venue fixing the problems are likely to be disappointed by the results.

The single-player campaign isn't bad, but it hardly feels inspired. If you've played any of the modern-day military shooters, you've experienced most of Medal of Honor's set pieces—a helicopter-based rail shooter segment, a section where you paint targets for air support, and other levels where you and your bearded buddy sneak through camps as snipers. Medal of Honor's campaign lacks the excitement that would help it stand tall against the considerable competition. Character animations are gimpy, weapons feel slightly underpowered, and the AI is downright suicidal. This works to your advantage when enemies show a complete disregard for cover, rolling out of safety to stake out firing positions in the open.

The story is standard fare, with players taking on a variety of raids and infiltration missions throughout Afghanistan. The narrative switches perspective several times, but since none of the characters are particularly memorable, it's tough to care too much about what's going on. The pacing bounces around a bit, too, with one nighttime ATV section in particular dragging on too long. (And don't ask me why they chose two of the loudest vehicles imaginable for the nighttime raid, either.)

Admittedly, a lot of people won't bother with the campaign. After all, the biggest draw for most military shooters is the multiplayer. Battlefield alums DICE took on the task for Medal of Honor, and while the experience is technically competent, it ultimately doesn't have the same spark as the developer's flagship franchise.



There are three classes in multiplayer—riflemen, Special Ops, and snipers. Each class levels up independently, with experience unlocking new gear. There aren't any Modern Warfare-style perks, so you know that every player you face on the battlefield can take as many bullets as the next.

Combat Mission is the most ambitious of Medal of Honor's multiplayer modes. Coalition forces must work through a series of five connected missions while the insurgents try to prevent them from succeeding. For instance, in the Mazar-I-Sharif Airfield level, the Coalition starts on the outskirts of a dilapidated airfield. Their ultimate goal is to download data from a laptop on the far end. To get there, the team must destroy a roadblock (allowing tanks to pass farther into the battlefield), blast through some hangar doors, secure an area with the help of a mounted rocket launcher, kill enemies around a downed helicopter, and then work toward the building containing the computer. This fast-paced mode is complemented well by the game's generously short respawn times.

Sector Control is essentially Battlefield's Conquest mode, with two sides fighting to control three objectives. In Objective Raid, Coalition forces have to defend a pair of objectives from enemy sabotage.

As players rack up score chains—points earned racking up kills, meeting objectives, and supporting your team—they're rewarded with offensive and defensive bonuses. You can, for example, choose to rain fire on the opposing team by calling in a mortar strike, or put a UAV online to temporarily display the enemy locations on your radar. Better still, you don't lose this bonus ability when you die—though your score chain will be reset.

The game's eight maps are diverse, drawing inspiration from pivotal moments in the single-player campaign. Mazar-I-Sharif provides plenty of hiding spots, as players sprint from hollowed airplane shell to hangar and back. Snipers will

undoubtedly fall in love with some of the game's more urban settings, including Diwagal Camp, which features insurgent emplacements in caves perched above the village's mud huts.

The Shahikhot Mountains map unfortunately highlights a larger problem with the game's balance. Defenders are holed up in a small camp tucked into a snowy mountaintop. With only a few paths into that camp—most of which are easily monitored by snipers—attacking quickly becomes futile. After a few waves of spawns are neatly killed, defenders rack up the killstreaks and can then use the bonuses to ensure that the momentum doesn't shift. Once a team has gained the upper hand, it's quite difficult to stage a comeback when the enemy team can blast chokepoints with rocket barrages. Teams could work the score chain system to their advantage on offense as well, unleashing a coordinated hoard of rockets and mortars.

The obvious solution for comebacks is to stop dying, but the spawn system doesn't do players any favors. If you're on the insurgent team, you'll spawn in predetermined points. Coalition players who spawn on teammates don't get to specify which member they want. The AI is supposed to invisibly link players into predetermined squads and use that to choose optimal positioning, but it often plopped me down right into an enemy's sights. This works both ways. I'd be in the middle of blasting someone apart when one of his teammates would pop up beside him out of thin air. It's easy to take advantage of their temporary confusion and make it a two-fer, but those kills feel hollow.

All the parts for a great multiplayer experience are here—class unlocks, a variety of familiar modes, lots of guns—but they don't come together in a way that makes Medal of Honor a must-play shooter. Military buffs may enjoy the game on some level, but in such a densely packed genre, EA must try harder to stand out. » **Jeff Cork**



Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock

Guitar Hero goes gonzo

Style 1 to 4-Player Music (8-Player Online) **Publisher** Activision **Developer** Neversoft **Release** September 28 **ESRB** T



If you thought Guitar Hero had already jumped the shark, *Warriors of Rock* is akin to hopping in a hot rod, revving the engine, and jumping through a flaming hoop over a school of mega-sharks. *Warriors of Rock* welds the series' familiar gameplay to action game elements like elaborate cutscenes and character transformations. Now, instead of just selecting your character and plowing through setlists, you must go through custom sets created for GH characters old and new, earning a ludicrous number of stars to unlock their new "warrior" forms. Pretty soon, good old Lars Ulrich is a giant death metal pig with pierced nipples, Casey Lynch is a half-snake woman, and Johnny Napalm is... a punk rock version of Nightcrawler from *X-Men*? Sure! This is about as over-the-top as it gets, and it's topped off with a paper-thin plotline about defeating some giant beast with your axe of rock (Brütal Legend anyone?) with narration by Gene Simmons of KISS.

Neversoft injected the familiar gameplay with steroids; a host of character-specific power-ups allow you to get previously impossible numbers of stars. Casey's Shield Guardian gives you two

recharging shields that protect your note streaks. Judy Nails can overflow her rock meter, garnering two extra stars. Others include a five-percent Star Power boost for every 10-note streak and an Ankh talisman that saves you from failing out of a song.

This basically amounts to grade inflation. I'm certainly not as good at *Guitar Hero* as I once was, but I remember what nailing a song feels like. What would have been a three or four-star run-through of a song now nets you six or seven stars. If that makes you feel better, fine, but I'm not going to delude myself.

The powers become more interesting later in the game, when you must assign the characters into two bands to face the final boss. Here it's important to wisely combine your powers in order to maximize your advantage. For example, I constructed one band to focus on Star Power and the other for multiplier and note streaks. After you've finished the game, you can tackle it again in Dominate Quest, where you have all eight powers enabled but must get 40 stars on each song. If you're playing well, you can play an entire song with Star Power on (and a 36x multiplier

running). This arcade-style experience carries over to the new Quickplay+ mode as well, which adds cool Star Challenges that let you gain points to level up and unlock new rewards and items.

The soundtrack is a mixed bag. The earlier stages are well balanced and focused, giving you genre-oriented sets like Johnny Napalm's punk gig at CBGBs or new character Austin Tejas's classic rock block. The game's centerpiece is a marathon playthrough of Rush's sidelong 2112 suite. As a big Rush fan, I loved it, though I'm not on board with having the band members do an awkward recitation of the album's silly story. The end of the game amps up the challenge with a final boss battle that features some ridiculously hard new Megadeth songs and a bonus tier of metal shredders. Frankly I think most of these songs are terrible and felt like a chore. I had much more fun coming back to earlier tracks on the Dominate Quest.

Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock is often stupid and frequently silly, but I got caught up in shredding my way through the ridiculous experience. It doesn't matter if I was laughing with the game or laughing at it; I was entertained. » **Matt Heigesson**

8

PS3 • 360 • Wii

» **Concept**
Takes the familiar *Guitar Hero* gameplay on a ridiculous fantasy adventure

» **Graphics**
This is definitely the most ambitious eye candy ever seen in a music game

» **Sound**
At first the soundtrack is diverse, but later levels overemphasize shredding metal

» **Playability**
The new special powers add some interest, but mostly it's the same old runway and notes

» **Entertainment**
Audacious or stupid (or both)? This game will sharply divide fans

» **Replay Value**
High

Vanquish

A one-note burst of adrenaline

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Platinum Games **Release** October 19 **ESRB** M

If *Vanquish* were a movie instead of a video game, the most appropriate comparison would be *Crank*. Like that Jason Statham vehicle, *Vanquish* moves along at a breakneck pace, briefly stopping on occasion to offer blink-and-you'll-miss-them scenes that push along the barest possible skeleton of a plot. While some of the action is exhilarating, the game's generic characters and one-note gameplay keep it from reaching the high standards set by Shiji Mikami's other works.

After a brief tutorial, you're immediately thrust into a futuristic U.S. vs. Soviet Union conflict.

Long story short:

You have crazy battle armor, the Russians have an army of robots that want to kill you, and a crazy dude wants to blow up New York City. Cutscenes are brief and don't do a fantastic job of pushing the narrative forward, but something tells me that the story wasn't the first order of business for Platinum.

You play as Sam Gideon, a tough-as-nails chain-smoker whose voice resembles a Muppet impersonating Solid Snake. Outside of that, you don't learn much about your protagonist. What he lacks in personality he makes up for with his Augmented Reaction Suit, which is a fancy way of saying "awesome body armor that lets you rocket-slide into robots."

Most of the fun *Vanquish* offers is related to this suit's abilities, whether you're rocketing from cover to cover or performing a missile dropkick on a robotic

commie. If a dozen enemies are coming down a staircase towards you, it's hard to not feel like a badass when you rocket-slide away from them in slow motion while throwing a grenade over your shoulder. The game is at its best when you're using these abilities during one of the many giant set piece moments.

However impressive the action is, the game is a one-trick pony. Boss fights start recycling early on, the weapons aren't particularly impressive, and you won't care about the story for a second. Outside of a "snipe the spotlights" section and a ridiculously brief zero-gravity area, most battles are of the "stand here and survive until the elevator is ready" variety. The game is also very short. Don't be surprised if you finish your first playthrough in four hours or less.

If *Vanquish* had been fleshed out with better characters, more variety, and a more substantial campaign, it could have been great. As is, the awesome suit amounts to little more than a fun toy in a forgettable world. » **Dan Ryckert**



7.75

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
SHOOT BOOST SHOOT BOOST SHOOT BOOST. Smoke

» **Graphics**
Everything moves along at an impressive framerate considering how much crazy crap is constantly happening onscreen

» **Sound**
Spastic techno soundtrack and cartoonish voices. Prepare to hear Sam scream "Out of the way!" anytime you're aiming within 20 miles of an ally

» **Playability**
The shooting mechanics and the suit abilities both work without a hitch

» **Entertainment**
It's a blast at the beginning, starts to grow old not long after that, and then it's over

» **Replay Value**
Moderately Low



Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

A strong story sideswiped by uneven gameplay

7

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
What's harder to endure, the apocalypse or uninteresting gameplay?

» **Graphics**
Often grand in scope, but the fine details are lacking. Monkey's animations are amazing, but pixelated texturing often steals your eye

» **Sound**
If I hear Trip say "let me scan the area" one more time...

» **Playability**
Teamwork between Trip and Monkey is stunted early on. Combat is an exercise in redundancy and platforming is skill-free

» **Entertainment**
A better story than it is a game

» **Replay Value**
Low



My thoughts exactly

Style 1-Player Action Developer Ninja Theory Publisher Namco Bandai Release October 5 ESRB T

Second Opinion 8

Not every action game needs to be composed of larger than life action sequences or feature some world ending threat. In a game where the world has already ended, Ninja Theory has told a story that focuses on character. I was immediately drawn into the small but animated cast and grew to actually care about their well-being. I only wish the rest of the game had so wholly captured my imagination. The game's combos don't evolve throughout the course of the game and neither do its enemies, but its fast-paced action is engaging, and Ninja Theory's camera work helps escalate the tension. The animation work during the platforming sections is fantastic, and Monkey pulls off of some remarkable feats, but you never have to worry about getting lost or falling off your perch while clambering through the environment. This diminishes the climber's high you might have received from pulling off these otherwise impressive ascents. Enslaved may not innovate, but it's an engaging tale through the apocalypse, bookended by some of the most exciting action sequences I've seen in a game. » **Ben Reeves**

Enslaved lives up to its namesake both with its conceptual hook of robots enchainning mankind and through the unnecessary shackles tied to gameplay. Developer Ninja Theory spends far too much time holding the player's hand, and in the process removes any sense of escapism to this intriguing tale of humanity's last gasp for life.

The game starts off with a bang reminiscent of Uncharted 2's introductory train sequence. A robot-infested slave ship is sabotaged by a resourceful female prisoner and starts plummeting toward the skyscraping remnants of a lost metropolis. Your first goal is to survive the crash. This feat takes you through exploding corridors and out onto the ship's hull, where breath-stealing leaps must be made as debris passes overhead and every second wasted brings you closer to impact.

This exciting sequence concludes with an unlikely partnership being forged between the female, Trip, and a protagonist who never reveals his true name, yet insists on being called Monkey. To no surprise, Monkey is ape-like in appearance and possesses the uncanny ability to swing across poles just like a simian. Monkey is brought to life aptly by Andy Serkis, Hollywood's resident primate expert (he played King Kong, the ape-ish Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*, and will play Caesar in the forthcoming *Planet of the Apes* film).

The relationship that develops between Trip and Monkey is fun to watch. It doesn't follow the path you think it would. Their

personalities clash, yet neither could survive in this harsh climate without the other. Thanks to sharp writing by Ninja Theory's scribes, I cared about the fate of both characters. The banter between them is emotional at the right times, filled with smart jabs and amusing sarcasm, and their chemistry shows noticeable progression as their journey family takes them farther west. The resonance of the tale, however, is undermined by the gameplay.

Most of the platforming sequences showcase action-packed moments, such as a bridge falling apart as Monkey shimmies along. But rarely do these tense set pieces offer a real threat, as Monkey can never fall or miscalculate a jump's trajectory. If he isn't lined up correctly and you press jump, he won't jump. He just stands there until you move him into the correct position. Toward the end of the game, he has to avoid flames and spinning gears but up until this point, most of Enslaved's platforming is simply an exercise in basic movement.

Combat, while offering a great sense of brutal physicality with each of Monkey's staff strikes, lacks depth. I used the same combo sequences



Hang in there

from start to finish. Ninja Theory also fails to offer interesting adversaries. The largest foe, a robot dog, looks cool, but is easy to snuff out with repeated EMP blasts. Watching this beast rise from the ground only to knock it down again with another EMP shot feels like cheating, but as far as I could tell, it was the only way to destroy it.

Enslaved also lacks a sense of exploration. Whenever Trip enters a new area, she must first scan her surroundings. This extensive fly-by of the level details all of the enemies and points of interest along the way. Trip's findings are digitally broadcast to Monkey through his slave headband. He can see the distance at which he'll alert an enemy, as well as all the objects with which he can interact. One platforming stretch toward the end of the game even has Monkey following a dragonfly that is discharging a sparkling trail for fear that the player may not know where to go next.

Given the amount of hand holding, I'm surprised this game doesn't play itself. The lack of immersion and knowledge that every jump – no matter how perilous it is – will land without fail saps Enslaved of its entertainment value. You know a game is troubled when you find solace in its extensive orb collecting.

This experience is also marred by a lack of polish. Ugly textures frequent most environments, the jump command is touchy, the framerate skips like a lopsided record in certain areas, combat controls lack responsiveness, and the camera often clips into the environment, hiding cool takedowns or cinematic sequences. With the gameplay being such an unwanted distraction, the story is the only attraction. The plot delivers a cool science fiction twist in its final moments, but ultimately serves as a slave to mediocre gameplay for eight to nine hours. » **Andrew Reiner**

NBA 2K11

The education of an athlete

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (10-Player Online) Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: Visual Concepts Release: October 5 ESRB: E

Developers of sports games do an admirable job of capturing the essence and excitement of the modern leagues, but few tap the deep well of history in service of the sport. This is often chalked up to logistics – since the players from bygone eras no longer are serviced by player unions, the developers must sign each individual athlete to craft a historical recreation. Visual Concepts toyed with this concept with All Pro Football 2K8, but with no league license the experience rang hollow. In doing the groundwork to retell the storied past of basketball's most decorated legend, Michael Jordan, 2K Sport has proven the results are worth the effort.

The Jordan Challenge is my favorite new sports game mode of the year. Visual Concepts painstakingly recreated 10 memorable events from the career of His Airness, signing all the players from the era, animating them with signature shots, and even providing historical commentary to give gamers the context of Jordan's achievements. The attention to detail paid to Jordan himself is remarkable – 2K nailed the jump shot, crossover, ball fake, signature dunks, tongue wagging, and even the competitive stare of its cover athlete. This is a mode every hardcore basketball fan should experience, and other developers should follow suit in recreating classic moments of other sports with this level of dedication.

This attention to craft is also apparent in the Association mode, which for years has stood as the best franchise experience in the sporting realm. With many of the finer details already in place, this year the mode received a subtle makeover in several areas. The new trade finder is helpful in finding willing suitors to unload a troubled player or unwanted contract. The draft

day features more trade activity than ever before. The AI-controlled teams are more aware of when they should be starting a fire sale, collecting young players for rebuilding, or grabbing a veteran player to make a title run. The only nagging absence in the mode is the inability to sign players to contract extensions during the season.

Last year 2K unveiled its My Player mode, a stunted attempt at putting you in the shoes of a young player trying to make an NBA roster. The mode is more enjoyable this year thanks to an experience system that results in better rewards for good performances. The reward logic is still touchy – you get knocked an absurd amount of points for letting your man score and you hardly receive any bump for draining shots yourself. The skewed system also over-rewards you for playing out of position – for instance, point guards get an uncharacteristically high bump for grabbing rebounds under the hoop. But once you get the hang of the grading system you should start stringing together strong performances. One carryover complaint from last year: The mode still starts you out with too low a rating. A 40-rated player would never get drafted in the first round, so if you're going to let me get selected this high, shouldn't I have a commensurate rating?

The only area the inferior NBA Elite game beats 2K11 is online. You can create a Crew and import your My Player to play in five-on-five matches, but with no online league infrastructure it's not the destination mode it could be. The on-court play runs smoothly for the most part, but I did notice brief moments of lag.

On the court, 2K delivers many subtle changes that should please hardcore hoops fans. The off-the-ball defense is drastically improved –



"Myahh"

players more actively police passing lanes and rotate properly. The game has a better sense of differentiation between untalented ball handlers and gifted dime-dishing point guards – no more outlet passes from your backcourt after a basket to beat the defenses to the paint. The refined collision system looks great, and the tweaks to the dribbling mechanics make the complicated system more accessible. My favorite new feature is the informative new playcalling system that draws the plays right on the court so you know where you should be at all times.

The only complaints I have are the return of a few legacy issues like poor sideline negotiation, players shooting balls off the side of the backboard when shooting from the baseline, the strange magnetism that redirects your player while playing defense, and the fundamental problems with help defense. Players often don't face the right way or attempt a proper steal when double-teaming.

While its competitor struggles to find its shot, NBA 2K11 keeps refining its game and opens a new door to the sports genre with the must-play Jordan Challenge mode. With solid presentation, a great franchise mode, and strong gameplay, NBA 2K11 is an impressive package. **— Matt Bertz**

8.75

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Recreate the biggest moments from the best player in basketball history's career

» **Graphics**
A fantastic array of generic and signature player animations gives this game the look of a real-life broadcast

» **Sound**
Solid commentary and the best sports game soundtrack of the year

» **Playability**
You can break out of animations more frequently, and the rest of the solid controls return from last year

» **Entertainment**
A total package marred only by small gameplay glitches

» **Replay Value**
High



The new jostling on the block accentuates the physical nature of posting up in the paint



Sonic the Hedgehog 4: Episode 1

Almost as good as you remember



8

Style 1-Player Platforming Publisher Sega Developer Sonic Team/Dimps Release October 12 (PS3), October 13 (360) ESRB E

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Scrub away a decade of bad Sonic games with bleach and HD

» **Graphics**
When Sonic first hit the Genesis the vivid colors popped off the screen. They still do

» **Sound**
The same iconic sound effects from the '90s coupled with ho-hum music that's too kiddo

» **Playability**
Genesis-like gameplay feels off, but the homing attack smooths it over

» **Entertainment**
A must-play for Sonic nuts and a solid download for side-scrolling fans

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

My relationship with Sonic dates back nearly 20 years. Things were great in the early days; we ran through the fields and thwarted a mustachioed mad man's evil plans together. But after a few years of bliss we hit rocky times; Sonic experimented with 3D and hit rock bottom. This trust-shattering downward spiral continued for almost 15 years, but now Sonic has promised change. Is the blue blur's return to fidelity and 2D enough to reignite the blissful old flame? Yes, but some of the magic has faded.

Sonic 4 sets the tone with a fitting tribute to Green Hill Zone. The hedgehog tears across the lush green environment, trailing vivid blue streaks that evoke fond 16-bit memories. Treks through casino, water, and factory-themed levels not only show off the game's gorgeous visuals, but also serve as breezy remixes of the best Sonic levels.

Each level is packed with familiar enemies, power-ups, and speed devil set pieces like loop de loops. The goal is still to blaze through these stages while raking in enough rings to play special stages and score seven chaos emeralds – a challenging but rewarding task. If you've played a classic Sonic game in the last year you may struggle with the way he controls now. While he accelerates fine without constant spin dashes, Sonic's signature momentum wanes without a constant press of the analog stick. However, an efficient and fun new homing attack overshadows most frustration caused by the not-quite-apt controls.

This new title looks, feels, and sounds like an upgraded Sonic game. Easily digestible torch lighting puzzles and mine cart segments do well to break up the game's pacing, but more variety would have been welcomed. Playing four stages within one level's theme gets repetitive. Additional incentive for enduring frustratingly difficult special stages to collect arbitrary gems would have been nice, too – Super Sonic and a teaser ending just doesn't cut it anymore.

Sonic does his best to make things like they used to be, but all the candlelit dinners and chaos emeralds in the world can't hide the fact that we've both changed. It may not be the be all end all Sonic game that professed enthusiasts like myself have been waiting 15 years for, but Sonic 4 is a fun, frenetic download for fans and newcomers alike. » **Tim Turi**



Plants vs. Zombies

Xbox 360 version provides lawn defense for two

9

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1 or 2-Player Puzzle Publisher PopCap Games Developer PopCap Games Release September 8 ESRB E10+

360

» **Concept**
Fend off starving zombies using a wide variety of plant life in original and new modes on XBLA

» **Graphics**
Cartoony visuals look great in HD

» **Sound**
The music never gets old, with haunting-yet-lighthearted arrangements complemented by the sounds of zombies yearning for brains

» **Playability**
Controls are just as easy to pick up on the 360 controller as they are on other platforms

» **Entertainment**
If you've somehow missed the previous versions, the inclusion of co-op and multiplayer makes the XBLA versions of Plants vs. Zombies a worthy selection

» **Replay Value**
High

In just over a year, Plants vs. Zombies has sprouted across multiple platforms, further establishing PopCap as a household name post-Bejeweled. Whether on PC, handheld, or mobile platforms, each installment oozes with PopCap's signature charm and polish, and the most recent Xbox Live Arcade version is no different. To further enhance an already solid and addictive offering, PopCap has included engaging cooperative and multiplayer modes to keep things fresh.

In case you've been living under a Wall-Nut, Plants vs. Zombies requires you to defend your home (and your brain) from a zombie invasion using a variety of plant life to keep the hordes at bay. This time around, however, a second player can join in for the main adventure's 50 levels. Each player selects and places plants independently, but having an extra set of eyes becomes helpful during later levels when zombie hordes are seemingly endless. You'll also find separate co-op levels outside of adventure mode that gives each player four slots to choose plants. Sunlight needed to set up your defense isn't shared, however, so what begins as a harmonious team effort can quickly turn into a shouting match for hogging all the energy or misplacing a plant – and that's all part of the fun.

Versus mode puts one player in control of the plants, with the other commanding the advancing zombie horde. The plants are no different than in adventure mode, but as zombies you're tasked with protecting your army from opposing plant projectiles with properly placed tombstones while driving zombies toward the plants' home. The inclusion of multiplayer and cooperative modes to the franchise is a welcome addition, and the seamless execution of familiar gameplay mechanics when exploring new soil with a second player makes these modes feel like they have been part of the beloved game from the start.

If the new control layout on the 360 is of concern, don't sweat it. PopCap has continually done a fantastic job translating the control scheme across platforms (from computers to touch screens) and the 360 controller is no exception. While navigating the grid with the left stick is probably the least tight among platforms, it takes no

time at all to adjust to the new scheme making it just as easy for veterans and newbies alike to get the gameplay down.

If you have yet to pick up Plants vs. Zombies or want to once again engage in zombie stomping (or brain munching) action with a friend, the XBLA version is a worthy addition to your library. » **Annette Gonzalez**



NBA Jam

A drive down memory lane

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Canada Release October 5 ESRB E

In the height of the arcade era I probably spent the GDP of Burundi raining threes and shattering backboards in NBA Jam. But after years of success, the franchise found itself in a scoring slump and inevitably retired to the bench. After Midway liquidated its assets, the

franchise license fell into the lap of EA, which just happened to hire original NBA Jam designer Mark Tumell shortly thereafter. Queue the Rocky comeback training montage and overdub it with a Boomshalaka. NBA Jam is back, and it's as good as you remember.

This over-the-top take on the NBA trims away the fat from team rosters to deliver glorious two-on-two gameplay with the most recognizable faces in the sport, as well as a few guest appearances from celebrities and politicians. Most teams have unlockable legendary players from the original games as well, with a few glaring exceptions like Charles Barkley, Reggie Miller, and Shawn Kemp. The art style takes a page from *South Park*, as pictures of player faces are Photoshopped onto animated bodies with hilarious expressions that change as they perform different actions on the court.

The tried and true gameplay remains largely unchanged. Each game is filled with thundering dunks, bombs from three-point range, and an excessive amount of blocks, steals, and flying elbows. Hitting three shots in a row without letting the other team score sets your player on fire, but this doesn't increase your shooting accuracy as much as in years past. EA did an admirable



Second Opinion 8.25

Rather than trying to revolutionize the core elements of the game, this reboot plays just like classic NBA Jam with updated rosters, hilarious visuals, and some entertaining game modes. EA nails the presentation, from the high-flying tomahawk slams to the commentary from Tim Kitzrow. While it may look and feel like the same game you pumped countless quarters into back in 1993, the Wii controls can be a hindrance at times. It's frustrating to watch your character go for jump shots when you want a dunk, or when the remote misreads a slight hand motion as an intent to block a shot. It's also disappointing to see that being "on fire" doesn't give you quite the dominating edge it did back in the day. Despite these minor issues, NBA Jam absolutely delivers if you're looking for a concentrated shot of nostalgia. » **Dan Ryckert**

8.25

Wii

» **Concept**
Revive a classic arcade franchise with a contemporary touch

» **Graphics**
The charming Photoshopped-meets-pixelation art style works well

» **Sound**
Classic commentator Tim Kitzrow returns to call every Boomshalaka and block with fervor

» **Playability**
Controls are more competent than most Wii games, though you'll still suffer from some unpredictability. The game also supports the classic controller

» **Entertainment**
This nostalgic trip down memory lane is the perfect multiplayer game. So why no online support?!

» **Replay Value**
High

job translating the controls to the Wii remote and nunchuk, but it's not without problems. When you jump to block or take a shot, sometimes your character jumps again immediately after you complete the motion, which can easily cost you a basket in tight games.

The classic campaign structure returns, but EA wisely complements it with a few new game modes as well. The Remix Tour offers a host of different game types, challenging you to destroy a team's backboard or control hot spots on the half-court to rack up more points than your opponents. My favorite is the Remix 2v2 game, which intermittently strews power-ups across the court that your player can use to get the upper hand on the competition. Those who crave a hardcore challenge will adore the Boss Battles, which pit your skills one-on-one against NBA legends like Larry Bird and Dr. J.

NBA Jam's only major flaw is the lack of online multiplayer. This game was made for competition, and not everyone has three other people to play with in their house. I'd love to see the full game ported to the other consoles so we could challenge our friends online. » **Matt Bertz**

Wii Party

For the love of God, don't RSVP

4.5

Wii

» **Concept**
Remove Mario Party's charm by taking out classic characters and replacing them with boring Miis

» **Graphics**
"Spin-Off" successfully emulates the gaudy look of a game show, but everything else is bland and lacks style

» **Sound**
Plan to turn down the volume before you're overwhelmed by elevator music and an annoying gibberish-speaking host

» **Playability**
Learning to control each new minigame is a slight challenge, but there's little strategy to the metagames

» **Entertainment**
If you dug Mario Party, maybe you'll enjoy this, but there are far better party game options on the Wii

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Last month, I reviewed Guilty Party, one of the best examples of a party game this generation. It has a light-hearted atmosphere, but it also requires strategy and forward thinking if you want to win. By comparison, Wii Party is unmitigated, uninteresting chaos. Believe it or not, Wii Party is worse than the Mario Party series.

Wii Party's 80-plus minigames share the same uneven quality I've come to expect from Mario Party, which makes sense given that many of them are iterations of games from that series. The metagames are even worse. Whereas Mario Party gave players multiple boards to play through, Wii Party features multiple game types, each less exciting than the last.

Board Game Island and Globe Trot adhere

most closely to the Mario Party tradition. If you're going to play any portion of the game, Globe Trot is the best. You choose how many spaces you move by playing cards in your hand, so you have more control over what's going on.

Game types such as Spin-Off are full of random crap that keeps determining the winner out of your control. In my first few rounds of this Wheel of Fortune rip-off, the bank filled up with 50,000 coins that I subsequently won in a minigame, making it nearly impossible for me to lose. This wasn't due to any sort of skill on my part; it was dumb luck. My reward? Having to sit through 10 futile rounds of other players spinning the wheel, unlikely to ever catch up.

If that isn't enough to put you to sleep, why not try one of the several games based around

the thrilling activity of matching Miis who are wearing the same color? There's even Mii Bingo. Yes, Mii Bingo. That should give you a good sense of the brain-dead crowd this game is targeting.

I can already hear complaints rolling in about how I'm not part of Wii Party's intended audience, but I don't think that's true. I love getting friends together to play goofy games like this, but plenty of other Wii releases have done what Wii Party is attempting in better and more interesting ways—even Nintendo's own WarioWare: Smooth Moves. The only impressive thing about Wii Party is how Nintendo dumbed down and removed the soul from a franchise that was already as stupid and soulless as Mario Party. » **Phil Kollar**



9.75

PC

» **Concept**
Build a mighty civilization from a humble wandering tribe

» **Graphics**
Performance isn't what you'd hope for from a strategy game, but the art deco aesthetic works well

» **Sound**
Real accents in their actual languages for rival leaders is a great touch. The soundtrack doesn't live up to Civ IV, though

» **Playability**
One horrible mistake in diplomacy is the only blemish on the interface. Everything else is perfect

» **Entertainment**
This is the best strategy game in years. Don't miss it

» **Replay Value**
High

Civilization V

Reformed into a masterpiece



gamerformers
GAME OF THE MONTH

gamerformers
PLATINUM

Style 1-Player Strategy (8-Player Online) Publisher 2K Games Developer Firaxis Games Release September 21 ESRB E10+

Comparing Civilization V to contemporary strategy games is entirely pointless. Imagine if Modern Warfare had come out alongside Quake II. There is simply nothing comparable out there, not least because the strategy genre has become the province of indie developers and niche publishers. Civ V is a towering, triple-A release with millions of dollars worth of polish in an era where questionably localized Russian titles are all that strategy gamers have to tide them over for months at a time. It's also a delightfully fresh take on a formula that has been slowly iterated on for more than two decades.

The heart of the Civilization fantasy is unchanged. You still manage cities, developing them from crude collections of mud huts into gleaming modern metropolises. Vast armies and armadas are again at your command, waging global war for conquest, defense, or resources with everything from spears to nukes. The land must still be worked, the primordial wilderness tamed through your people's sweat and blood. Your ultimate goal is yours to choose: Diplomatically unite the people of the world under your benign leadership, launch a viable colony ship into outer space, conquer the globe

through force of arms, or create a glorious utopia through enlightened civility.

Civ V's genius lies in the way that Firaxis has aggressively chopped the number of decisions that a player has to make during the course of a game while taking away almost none of the meaningful ones. As a hardcore Civ player, I appreciate some of these ancillary aspects of the design, but the removal of all the fat is unquestionably Civ V's greatest accomplishment.

A perfect example of this elegance of design is the new concept of "embarking" units and removal of transport ships. In previous games, you'd build separate transport units, load your armies onto them, and send them across the ocean to land on foreign shores. As your military got larger, managing this became extremely cumbersome. The concept of land units being vulnerable and slow while embarked – the entire point of transport units – is perfectly replicated by Civ V's system of allowing armies to move across water on their own, albeit slowly and defenselessly.

Firaxis applied this sort of critical examination to legacy systems across the board. Some remained nearly unchanged, such as constructing improvements like farms and windmills on your land. Others were scrapped entirely, like Civ IV's religion system. Many others survived in altered forms, and I embrace the changes without exception. This is by far the most approachable game in the series, even edging out the stripped-down console entry Civilization Revolution, but Civ V's remarkable gains in accessibility have not come at the cost of strategic depth.

The major changes to the Civ formula may be hard for veterans to accept at first, but most will quickly realize that they haven't lost any control over their empire's development. The change to research and revenue looks drastic on the surface, but your input has merely been moved from the commerce allocation slider to managing citizens and specialists within individual cities. Religion's old role in spreading culture and affecting diplomacy is ably filled by the newly expanded role of gold, and creating a trading/

financial powerhouse civilization is finally a viable path to victory. And as for combat...swallow your pride and your love for the old stack of doom, ladies and gentlemen, because the one-unit-per-tile new model is infinitely superior in tactical and strategic options while decimating the amount of time it takes to focus on an active war.

The design focus on gold and resources is a fantastic approach that lends a lot of texture to diplomacy and opens up new possibilities for non-violent conflict – but it's a pain in the rear to fully take advantage of because the interface lacks a good way to track your incoming and outgoing resources and gold. Every time I want to sell off some cotton to Montezuma, for instance, I have to manually count how many I'm collecting myself, how much I'm getting in trade from other nations, and how many I'm already trading away. Stupid. Also, one specific early-game strategem nearly guarantees a win on its own: using the Great Library's free research advance to net the expensive Civil Service technology can double your growth rate, putting every other empire at a massive disadvantage.

Multiplayer is functional, but the only way I suggest spending any time with it is with friends playing cooperatively against the AI. For a number of reasons, including the Civil Service slingshot above, Civ V's design does not lend itself well to cutthroat human-versus-human play. That said, I didn't come across any technical issues that prevent playing with friends from being enjoyable.

I encourage everyone, from strategy newbs who spend most of their time in online FPS matches to gronards who could teach me a thing or two about the optimal distribution of forces in hex-based combat, to give Civilization V a shot. As a hardcore strategy gamer who is no stranger to planning out my empire's production dozens of turns in advance, I've already turned to Civ V for my world-conquering needs – but at the same time, if anything is going to rear a new generation of strategy gamers like the very first Civilization did for me, it's this. » **Adam Biessener**

Tactics finally matter. It's a shame nobody told the AI.



Amnesia: The Dark Descent

Horror done right



Searching the castle brings equal parts terror and enlightenment



Style 1-Player Adventure Publisher: Frictional Games Developer: Frictional Games Release: September 8 ESRB: RP

If there is any justice in the world, the sizable contingent of gamers who incessantly bleat about the lack of new experiences in modern video games will purchase Amnesia: The Dark Descent right now. This indie project is an expertly crafted tale of horror and discovery that uses its interactive nature to enthrall players as deeply as any tale in any medium. Amnesia is barely a game in the traditional sense, leaving the nearly two decades of horror gaming tradition since *Alone in the Dark* by the wayside and forging its own twisted path.

Daniel's story is a tragedy from the beginning. Waking up in a decrepit Prussian castle with no memory of his past, he soon learns that his amnesia is self-inflicted. "I can't tell you why, but know this: I choose to forget," reads the note his former self left for him, dated August 1839, before intentionally blanking his own memory. His reasons for this drastic act remain vague, but the horrible reality of the castle gives reason enough to squeeze your eyes shut. A literal living nightmare relentlessly pursues Daniel through the castle as he struggles to piece together enough of his past to make sense of his former self's final directive: Find and kill Alexander of Brennenburg.

Going into further detail would spoil the mystery; Amnesia's setting is too intricate, and the pacing of reveals is too well-crafted to disrespect. The backstory parallels Daniel's current quest. Amnesia follows the tradition of Lovecraft, Poe, and Shelley, weaving a tale deeply tied to the 19th century's spirit of discovery, power, and glory. The journal notes you unearth tell a story of hubris and curiosity inexorably pulling a fascinating cast of characters through their own

descent into madness, which leads to the current predicament. The story drew me reluctantly onward, even when I wanted to walk away – not out of frustration or boredom, but because I was outright scared of what awaited me down the next dark hallway.

I'm not ashamed to admit my fear. Amnesia is terrifying. Slow footsteps and ragged breathing might be part of the ambient audio track – or they might mean that a nightmarish creature is behind the next door. A door flying open could be a clue to where you need to go next. It could also be a precursor to a horrible monster charging at you. I literally jumped out of my seat several times per hour. Developer Frictional Games has discovered a strange alchemy that mixes pacing, interactivity, and presentation into pure suspense.

The first-person gameplay itself is simple. The castle slowly opens up to you as you explore its many chambers, revealing the secrets that have kept it and its occupants shrouded in a cloak of occult mystery for centuries. Gathering your nerves to venture into the next darkened room is the hardest thing about Amnesia; action sequences are used sparingly to capitalize on built-up tension. The primary mechanic is your sanity level, which slowly drains as you spend time in the darkness. Standing in the light makes you an obvious target for any enemies, though, which makes the light-dark tension a constant. Cool fullscreen effects make everything more menacing as your sanity spirals downward, and Daniel's breath echoes in his ears as he loses his grip on reality. Advancing through the game is the only method to regain your wits, which creates a feedback loop that pulls you ever

forward rather than encouraging the meticulous scavenging behavior that is a hallmark of so many games.

Inventory management is limited, as players only need concern themselves with a bare handful of resources as well as the occasional puzzle piece. Unlike *Alan Wake* (or nearly all horror titles, for that matter), the gameplay never takes away from the suspense or sense of immersion. This comes at the price of action, as you generally have no viable combat option in Amnesia. Then again, the ass-kicking protagonist is a concept foreign to the horror genre in every medium but games.

If Resident Evil is *Aliens*, Amnesia is *Alien*. Frictional Games has created something wholly unlike the traditional horror game. Amnesia shows us by example that gaming has entirely new realms to explore. The price of admission is only \$20 through your digital retailer of choice. Do the right thing. » [Adam Bliessen](#)



The chamber will burst with less than 100% sanity

9.25

PC

» Concept

Blend audio, video, and interactivity in a convincing argument for the power of video games as emotional experiences

» Graphics

I've never had a visceral reaction to light and darkness like I do in Amnesia

» Sound

Play it loud. From ambient noises to environmental interactions and scripted events, the audio design is perfect

» Playability

Rather than combining two arbitrary items to form an improvised lockpick to open a window, you can throw a chair through it. You don't have to have Myst-style patience for these puzzles

» Entertainment

"Entertaining" is perhaps not the right word, but this is a journey well worth taking

» Replay Value

Moderately Low

8.75

DS

» **Concept**
Expand Maxwell's already impressive vocabulary with the addition of adjectives

» **Graphics**
The simple, endearing graphics and animations haven't evolved much from its predecessor

» **Sound**
The upbeat music suits the tone of the game perfectly

» **Playability**
The inclusion of d-pad controls helps eliminate some of the frustration from the first title

» **Entertainment**
Vague goals can get in the way of pure puzzle bliss, but the euphoria from solving riddles keeps the enjoyment high

» **Replay Value**
Moderately High



Super Scribblenauts

Adjectives add intrigue and innovation

If you enjoyed Scribblenauts, slipping into the sequel feels like meeting up with an old friend. The building blocks of the game remain unchanged, retaining the cleverness and replayability that made the original so charming. Instead of overhauling the basics, 5th Cell opted to augment the tried-and-true formula by adding adjectives and building upon the impressive vocabulary that brings your creativity to life.

Adjectives allow for increasingly humorous and complex methods of solving puzzles. When asked to make a cross between a building and an animal, successful solutions included a "furry condo," and a "hairy house." Sadly, a "drooling apartment" didn't fulfill the criteria (fur was apparently a requirement), but summoning a salivating



Style 1-Player Puzzle Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive Developer 5th Cell Release October 12 ESRB E10+

residence into existence was gratifying in its own right.

Maxwell's available vocabulary isn't the only thing that has expanded; the puzzles feel more varied, too. New challenges have you dueling a witch by summoning monsters with specific traits to counter her concoctions, matching ingredients in a grid according to a recipe, and even more complex chains of interactions like colonizing a planet. Even if I was slightly frustrated by a puzzle, curiosity always got the best of me and pushed me forward. "Just one more puzzle" is an easy habit to fall into.

Super Scribblenauts' biggest downfall is the same as its predecessor's. Because of the freedom of choice and the overall ambition of

the project, it's that much more disappointing when an elaborate scheme on your end doesn't come to fruition. Some exclusions are mystifying in the library of 10,000-plus modifiers; I could summon a "mopey car," but a "loud car" was out of the question. Additionally, a handful of objectives were cryptically worded, so much so that it took a lot of trial and error to even understand the goal.

Super Scribblenauts still stands head and shoulders above its puzzle brethren in terms of innovation and originality. The ability to tackle puzzles again to find new solutions, the addition of a puzzle creator, and special levels that focus on action-oriented play give Maxwell's adventure surprising longevity. » **Meagan VanBurklee**

Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light

Too old fashioned for its own good

6

DS

» **Concept**
Make an RPG that ignores all advances in game design from the last 20 years

» **Graphics**
Some cool visuals in towns, but the charm of this style is wearing off

» **Sound**
The music is my favorite part of this whole game, bringing back fond memories of old-school Final Fantasy soundtracks

» **Playability**
Why won't you let me select which enemy my characters attack? Why?

» **Entertainment**
If you want a classic-style RPG, play a real one instead of this imitator

» **Replay**
Low

Style 1-Player Role-Playing (4-Player Local) Publisher Square Enix Developer Matrix Software/Square Enix Release October 5 ESRB E10+

Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light employs old-school basics to recapture the charm of a bygone RPG era. From the predictable plot to the four heroes, this spin-off takes inspiration from the minimalist approach of the 8-bit Final Fantasy titles. Nostalgia may be a powerful force, but it isn't enough to make 4 Heroes of Light worth remembering, fondly or otherwise.

Developed by the same team that handled the DS remakes of Final Fantasy III and IV, this game could be said to have a classic vibe, but that's being charitable. Everything about the adventure is pulled straight from the big book of RPG tropes – Desert town? Spoiled princess? No way! Nothing about the characters or plot is surprising.

Without a strong narrative to draw you in, all you're left with is a wreck of a battle system thrown into this by-the-numbers adventure. On one hand, the turn-based combat tries to be simple and accessible; the job system is easy to understand, and the elimination of MP means you aren't constantly managing resources. At the same time, the limited inventory space and rough boss encounters will leave you longing for basic features found in just about every real RPG made since the late '80s.

The worst offender is the targeting – or the lack thereof. You can't specify which enemies you attack or which allies you heal. Instead, you select the action you want to perform, then place your trust in whatever hidden, under-the-hood calculations the system uses to determine your target. It does okay most of the time, but fails frequently enough that you can never formulate reliable strategies.

Four-player co-op could have patched some of these wounds, but it doesn't. The local-only multiplayer is only good for grinding, since only the host can make story progress (and you can't save until you exit the whole model). Your core party isn't even static, so you may only be able to do two- or three-player co-op, adding an extra barrier to enjoying even if you and three friends are sitting on the same couch.

What this experience lacks in novelty, it makes up for in frustration. Your objectives are often left unclear, and when you figure it out, you're rewarded with clunky battles and a story you don't care about. Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light isn't glitchy or broken, but that's the highest compliment I can muster. » **Joe Juba**



Professor Layton and the Unwound Future

The best Layton story so far finally brings in some new mechanics



Style 1-Player Puzzle Publisher Nintendo Developer Level-5 Release September 12 ESRB E10+

8.25

When Professor Layton and the Curious Village came out in the U.S. a couple of years ago, it was a fresh concept. The French cafe soundtrack, the distinct animation and art style, and Layton and Luke's insatiable desire to solve mysteries made it stand out from your ordinary puzzler. The second game was on a similar bar puzzle-wise, but it had a strange vampire plot and ending with a series of wacky explanations.

This time around, the duo travels to what may or may not be a future version of London, so it's not like things are suddenly grounded in reality. However, the cast really sells it. I won't spoil any new or returning characters, but it's easy to see why the charming professor gathers a crowd of amateur puzzle enthusiasts on his trek, making the player feel like a team member as well. The biggest departure from previous Layton tales is that it actually ties into the professor's past – we learn that he's not just a stoic, manners-obsessed robot. It's also worth mentioning that this is the last entry in a distinct trilogy, so fans have to check out the surprisingly epic finale (the next Layton trilogy is actually a prequel).

From a puzzle-solving standpoint, don't expect too many changes from previous titles. You'll still have plenty of block shuffling, route figuring, and "how old is this sister?" phrasing tricks. However, Level-5 finally revamped the memo system, and it makes a huge difference. Now you can change ink color, line thickness, and most importantly, erase specific notes instead of being forced to clear out everything at once. There's also a new Super Hint that unlocks after you've spent three coins on all of the previous puzzle hints. This one costs two coins and pretty much spells the answer out. Of course, they should only be used if you're extremely stuck, but it essentially eliminates the need to look up answers online.

Bottom line, if Layton didn't float your boat the first time around, nothing is going to change your mind here. But it's definitely worth it for fans to jump back into a world where you can't walk five steps without finding a puzzle to solve. » **Bryan Vore**

DS

» Concept

Tie puzzle gameplay into an outrageous mystery just like always

» Graphics

The brain-teasers look as simple as ever, but this has easily the most deftly animated sequences of the series

» Sound

Doesn't stray far from the traditional accordion music backing Layton's proper British accent

» Playability

Slight tweaks to the puzzle solving tools help bring the series forward

» Entertainment

Nothing rocks the boat here, but the total package is the best of the trilogy

» Replay Value

Moderate



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9.5 | Halo: Reach

Platform 360 Release September 14 ESRB M Issue Oct '10



Any disappointment series fans felt after ODST should be completely washed away thanks to Reach. Make no mistake about it – this is the true follow-up to Halo 3. It's also a perfect way for Bungie to part with the series it turned into a phenomenon. This is the best Halo game yet. – Dan Ryckert

PLAYSTATION 3

3D Dot Game Heroes	8.5	May-10
Alpha Protocol	6.5	Jul-10
Backbreaker	5	Jul-10
Blacklight: Tango Down	5.5	Sep-10
Blur	8.5	Jul-10
Clash of the Titans	4	Sep-10
Comic Jumper: The Adventures of Captain Smiley	8	Oct-10
Dead to Rights: Retribution	8	Jun-10
FIFA World Cup 2010 South Africa	8.5	May-10
Final Fight: Double Impact	8	Jun-10
Front Mission Evolved	7.75	Oct-10
Green Day: Rock Band	7.5	Jul-10
HAWX 2	7.5	Oct-10
High Velocity Bowling	7.5	Oct-10
Iron Man 2	6	Jun-10
Joe Danger	9	Jul-10
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	6	Oct-10
Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light	9	Sep-10
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.25	Aug-10
Lost Planet 2	8.5	Jun-10
Madden NFL 11	8.75	Sep-10
Mafia II	9	Oct-10
ModNation Racers	8.5	Jun-10
Naughty Bear	6	Aug-10
NCAA Football 11	9	Aug-10
NHL 11	9	Oct-10
Nier	6.5	Jul-10
Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8	Jul-10
Pure Futbol	7	Jul-10
R.U.S.E.	7.75	Oct-10
Racquet Sports	5.5	Oct-10
Racquet Sports	5.5	Oct-10
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jun-10
Rocket Knight	8	Jul-10
Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World	9	Oct-10
Shrek	8	Oct-10
Singularity	8.5	Aug-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jun-10
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	8.5	Oct-10
Split Second	8.25	Jun-10

Sports Champion	7.75	Oct-10
Start The Party	6	Oct-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9	May-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75	Jul-10
Toy Story 3	8	Aug-10
Transformers: War for Cybertron	8.5	Aug-10
Turnbile	8	Oct-10
UFC Undisputed 2010	8.25	Jul-10

XBOX 360

Alan Wake	8.5	Jun-10
Alpha Protocol	6.5	Jul-10
Attack of the Movies 3D	4	Jun-10
Backbreaker	5	Jul-10
Blacklight: Tango Down	5.5	Sep-10
Blur	8.5	Jul-10
Castlevania: Harmony of Despair	8.5	Sep-10
Clash of the Titans	4	Sep-10
Comic Jumper: The Adventures of Captain Smiley	8	Oct-10
Crackdown 2	7.25	Aug-10
Darkest One: Broken Alliance	6	Sep-10
Dead Rising: Case Zero	8.75	Oct-10
Dead to Rights: Retribution	8	Jun-10
Final Fight: Double Impact	8	Jun-10
Front Mission Evolved	7.75	Oct-10
Green Day: Rock Band	7.5	Jul-10
Halo: Reach	9.5	Oct-10
HAWX 2	7.5	Oct-10
Hydro Thunder Hurricane	8	Sep-10
Iron Man 2	6	Jun-10
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	6	Oct-10
Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light	9	Sep-10
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.25	Aug-10
Limbo	9	Aug-10
Lost Planet 2	8.5	Jun-10
Madden NFL 11	8.75	Sep-10
Mafia II	9	Oct-10
Metro 2033	9	May-10
Monday Night Combat	7.75	Sep-10
Naughty Bear	6	Aug-10
NCAA Football 11	9	Aug-10
NHL 11	9	Oct-10

Nier	6.5	Jul-10
Ninety-Nine Nights II	6	Sep-10
Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8	Jul-10
Pure Futbol	7	Jul-10
Puzzle Quest 2	7.75	Aug-10
R.U.S.E.	7.75	Oct-10
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jun-10
Rocket Knight	8	Jul-10
Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World	9	Oct-10
Shark	8	Oct-10
Sherlock Holmes vs Jack the Ripper	7.75	Jul-10
Singularity	8.5	Aug-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jun-10
Sriper: Ghost Warrior	4.75	Sep-10
Snoopy Flying Ace	8.5	Aug-10
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	8.5	Oct-10
Splinter Cell: Conviction	9	May-10
Split Second	8.25	Jun-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9	May-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75	Jul-10
Toy Story 3	8	Aug-10
Transformers: War for Cybertron	8.5	Aug-10
UFC Undisputed 2010	8.25	Jul-10

WII

Attack of the Movies 3D	4	Jun-10
Batman: The Brave and The Bold	8.5	Oct-10
Green Day: Rock Band	7.5	Jul-10
Gully Party	8	Sep-10
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.25	Aug-10
Metro: Other M	6.25	Oct-10
Monster Hunter Tri	7	Jun-10
NHL 2K11	6	Oct-10
NHL Slapshot	7	Oct-10
Pirates Plunder	7.25	Jun-10
Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8	Jul-10
Sin & Punishment: Star Successor	8.75	Jul-10
Super Mario Galaxy 2	9.25	Jun-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.5	Jul-10

8.5 | F1 2010

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 21 ESRB E

Combining ease of use both on and off the track is the key to why this game stands out. I can't say that either aspect of the game is the most involved you are going to see, but simply having interviews and team objectives in and of itself is great for a season-based racing game. Couple that with accessible racing with an eye towards realism, and Codemasters finally delivers an F1 game everyone can enjoy. – Matthew Kato

6.5 | Blade Kitten

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 21 ESRB T

Blade Kitten attempts to marry the essence of old-school 2D platformers with the bright visuals and gonzo storyline of a Japanese anime. While Krome Studios has certainly attained the latter, sketchy mechanics keep Blade Kitten from being as fun as its forerunners. – Jeff Marchiafava

3.5 | Kung Fu Rider

Platform PS3 Release September 7 ESRB E10+

To say Kung Fu Rider fails to take advantage of Sony's new Move hardware would be exceedingly generous. This is a game about riding office chairs, and through some reverse miracle, the developers actually managed to make the game stupider than it sounds. – Jeff Marchiafava

6.5 | Elemental: War of Magic

Platform PC Release August 23 ESRB T

My intense 4X fandom has been conquered by Elemental's nonstop irritations. I'm putting it down for now, but I'm not writing the game off forever... For now I'm not recommending this to Civilization nerds, much less strategy curious gamers. – Adam Biessener

Toy Story 3	6	Aug-10
Trauma Team	8	Jun-10

PC

Blacklight: Tango Down	5.5	Sep-10
Blur	8.5	Jul-10
Disciples III: Renaissance	5.5	Sep-10
Front Mission Evolved	7.75	Oct-10
Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light	9	Sep-10
Mafia II	9	Oct-10
Metri 2033	9	May-10
R.U.S.E.	7.75	Oct-10
Rocket Knight	8	Jul-10
Sims 3: Ambitions, The Sims Craft II: Wings of Liberty	10	Oct-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75	Jul-10

NINTENDO DS

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Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies	8	Aug-10
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PSP

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STAFF

Publisher
Cathy Preston cathy@gameinformer.com
Editor-in-Chief
Andy McLamara andy@gameinformer.com
Executive Editor
Andrew Reiner reiner@gameinformer.com
Senior Editor
Matt Helgeson matt@gameinformer.com
Senior Associate Editors
Adam Blesesara adam@gameinformer.com
Joe Juba joe@gameinformer.com
Matt Miller miller@gameinformer.com
Content Manager
Matt Bertz mattbertz@gameinformer.com
Editor
Jeff Cork jeffc@gameinformer.com
Media Editor
Nick Ahrens nick@gameinformer.com
Associate Editors
Ben Reeves ben@gameinformer.com
Bryan Vore bryan@gameinformer.com
Meagan VanBurke meagan@gameinformer.com
Jeff Marchalacia jeffm@gameinformer.com
Tim Turi tim@gameinformer.com
Annette Gonzalez annette@gameinformer.com
Phillip Kollar phil@gameinformer.com
Dan Ryckert dan@gameinformer.com

Art Director
Thomas Blustin tom@gameinformer.com
Production Director
Curtis Fung curtis@gameinformer.com
Graphic Designer
Jeff Akervik jeffakervik@gameinformer.com
Contributor
Zander Cannon illustration
Software Engineer
Sean Lowery sean@gameinformer.com
Circulation Services
Ted Katzung ted@gameinformer.com
Information Systems Manager
Paul Hedgpeth paulhedgpeth@gameinformer.com

In memory of Paul Andersen

ADVERTISING SALES

Associate Publisher
Rob Born rob@gameinformer.com
West Coast Advertising Sales Director
Damon Watson damon@gameinformer.com
East Coast Advertising Sales Director
Suzanne Lang suzanne@gameinformer.com
Advertising Coordinator and Online Sales
Amy Arnold amy@gameinformer.com
West Coast Advertising Associate
Janey Stringer janey@gameinformer.com
Marketing Coordinator
Rachel Nimerfroh rachel@gameinformer.com
Mark Burger mark@gameinformer.com

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For subscription inquiry ONLY:
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7.25 | Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole

Platform PS3 • 360 • Wii Release September 14 ESRB E10+

Kid-targeted games have a bad reputation, but it's not always deserved. Legend of the Guardians is one of those rare exceptions that stands on its own as a fun and visually arresting game for any age group, even if its simple premise and gameplay make it most appealing to less experienced gamers. — Matt Miller

5.75 | The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest

Platform Wii Release September 14 ESRB T

Condemning Aragorn's Quest for its attempts to accommodate a less experienced audience isn't fair, but shallow and repetitive combat combined with stilted storytelling just results in a bad game, no matter how you slice it. — Joe Juba

8.75 | FIFA 11

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 28 ESRB E

Soccer is a free-flowing game of creativity and skill, and I can experience that on the pitch in FIFA 11. Unfortunately, weak spots like the game's bare career mode hold it back and keep the entire package from being Total Football. — Matthew Kato

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classic



The Twisted Tale of Tengen

How challenging Nintendo's authority ruined a company

by Ben Reeves

In the 1980s, Tetris was one of the most sought-after video game properties in the world. Dozens of companies raced to acquire the rights to it, and in 1989, Tengen bought the license from a European company called Mirrorsoft. After being on store shelves for only a month, the publisher was forced to recall hundreds of thousands of unsold Tetris cartridges. A tiny problem had emerged – Mirrorsoft didn't own the license to sell the game, and Nintendo had already purchased the rights to distribute Tetris from the game's original owners, the Soviet Foreign Trade Association. Nintendo sued Tengen, and Tengen's version was pulled off the market. The custody battle over Tetris is just part of a bigger story of Tengen that involves patent theft, corporate backstabbing, and underhanded business dealings.

Born Out Of Atari's Ashes

Atari rose to dominance in the '70s, as the world's leading video game company, but after the industry crash in 1983, Atari was sinking fast. In order to recoup costs, the company sold off its home video game division. This new company started producing PC hardware under the name Atari Corp, but it ran into a problem when it decided to break into the video game business a few years later. The original Atari was still producing games under that label, so this new Atari needed a name that would set itself apart from the competition.

Atari was named after a term from the popular Japanese board game Go. The Atari offshoot followed suit, rebranding itself Tengen, a term that refers to the center point of a Go board. It may have been arrogant to assume that this new publisher would become a focal point for the video game industry, but its name turned out to be somewhat prophetic. Within a few years, Tengen became one of the most talked about companies in the industry, not because of the games it was publishing, but due to its shady business practices.

The Keys to Nintendo's Kingdom

To maintain quality control of the titles released on the NES, Nintendo installed a lockout chip called the 10NES into every unit. Only games that made it through Nintendo's licensing and approval process were given the microchips to bypass this system. At the time, Nintendo restricted its licensees to five games a year, and every title had to remain exclusive to the NES for at least two years.

Tengen wasn't happy with this arrangement. It could make a lot more money by producing more games, so Tengen executives met with Nintendo to see about renegotiating the licensing agreement. The execs felt that Nintendo's licensing fees were too expensive and they didn't like being restricted to releasing only five titles a year. When Nintendo shot down Tengen's proposition, the young western company began looking for a less diplomatic solution. They decided to hack Nintendo's lockout chip.

Numerous manufacturers had already discovered a way to override the 10NES lockout chip, but this required zapping the chip with a voltage spike. Tengen engineers worried that this might cause irreversible damage to a customer's NES consoles, unnecessarily exposing the company to liability. Additionally, Nintendo was aware of this workaround and constantly made modifications to the 10NES chipset to prevent hackers from spiking the system.

Tengen's hive of engineers worked in secret to reverse engineer the 10NES chipset, but the console proved to be a lock they couldn't pick. The company refused to give up, and eventually switched tactics. Tengen's lawyers contacted the government copyright office requesting a copy of Nintendo's lock-out system, claiming it needed the materials for a fictional lawsuit Nintendo had filed against them. Blueprints in hand, Tengen had no problem creating its own version of the 10NES chipset. Tengen had its own master key to the most popular video game console on the planet. Announcing that it had developed a chip that allowed non-licensed companies to bypass Nintendo's lockout chip, Tengen started releasing its own games on a gray market. For a short time, the future looked very profitable.

The Fall of Tengen

The reason most NES cartridges look exactly the same is because Nintendo manufactured them all. No matter who developed a game for the NES, Nintendo handled the production of the actual cartridges. When Tengen started publishing unlicensed products, however, it had to manufacture its own cartridges. The company put its games into rounded black cases that resembled early Atari carts, something that immediately set its games apart from the competition.

Many of Tengen's titles were popular, but most of the company's library consisted of arcade hits like Pac-Mania, Ms. Pac-Man, Rolling Thunder, and Klax. Tengen also licensed popular Sega titles like Shinobi and After Burner and ported them to the NES. Business was booming, and Tengen was riding high on its success.

In December of 1988, Tengen kicked off what would turn into a long series of legal battles. It accused Nintendo of a monopoly and sued the Japanese publisher for \$100 million. By November of 1989, Nintendo had seen enough. Tired of Tengen's bullish behavior, Nintendo pushed back hard, countering the company for breach of contract and copyright infringement.

ment over the copied 10NES security chip. At the same time, Nintendo started secretly meeting with various retailers, threatening to reduce or hold up shipments of Nintendo products if their stores didn't stop carrying Tengen games. At the time, Nintendo was the biggest name in the toy industry, and the NES was one of the

hottest commodities on the market. It wasn't a hard decision for retailers.

"Tengen had its own master key to the most popular video game console on the planet."

ongoing legal battles – compounded by the Tetris fiasco from earlier in the year – depleted Tengen's financial reserves. Tengen fought Nintendo in the courts for as long as it could, but eventually settled with Nintendo before a decision was reached. The end finally came in 1994 when media conglomerate Time Warner bought a majority share of Tengen's parent company, then folded Tengen into its Time Warner Interactive label. The name Tengen disappeared from video games forever. But somewhere out there, hundreds of thousands of black NES cartridges serve as a reminder of its existence.

Tengen's NES Gameography

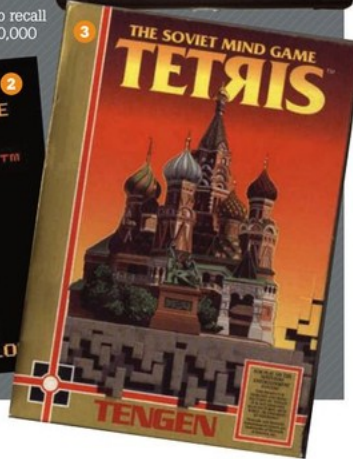
In 1988, Tengen published three licensed NES games based on the arcade hits Pac-Man, R.B.I. Baseball, and Gauntlet. These were the only three games the company released through official channels, although the company eventually re-released the titles in black carts after it broke its contract with Nintendo. Below is the full list of Tengen titles.

- » After Burner
- » Alien Syndrome
- » Fantasy Zone
- » Gauntlet
- » Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom
- » Klax
- » Ms. Pac-Man
- » Pac-Man
- » Pac-Mania
- » R.B.I. Baseball
- » R.B.I. Baseball 2
- » R.B.I. Baseball 3
- » Road Runner
- » Rolling Thunder
- » Shinobi
- » Skull & Crossbones
- » Super Sprint
- » Tetris
- » Toobin
- » Victors

1 Tengen manufactured its own cartridges molded out of black plastic, which helped set its games apart at garage sales and used game retailers for decades

2 Tengen's version of Tetris was programmed by Ed Logg, who also famously created the arcade hit Asteroids. Many consider it to be superior to the Nintendo version of the game, which released that same year

3 In June of 1989, Tengen was forced to recall its stock of Tetris copies. Only around 50,000 copies were sold



Resources:

Steven L. Kent. *The First Quarter: A 25-Year History of Video Games*. Bothell: BWD Press, 2000.

Leonard Herman. *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Video Games*. New Jersey: Rolenta Press, 1997.

The Evolution of Cole MacGrath

Infamous 2 producer Brian Fleming says that the team at Sucker Punch loves changing

and improving its work, but fans got hostile when Cole MacGrath was redesigned and unveiled in our cover story earlier this year (issue #207). However, that's not the only time Cole and his conceptual predecessors have gotten a makeover. Here's a look at what's happened throughout the character's conception and some of the reasons why.

by Matthew Kato



2006

+ Talon

Infamous started out with the codename True Hero, and the team wanted an athletic urban character (but not necessarily ethnic, per se). Talon and all the other names you see here before Cole MacGrath were simply internal names. Fleming says this early iteration of the character reveals a more stylized look reminiscent of the studio's Sly Cooper days.



+ Gear Wolf

"At the Talon phase he wasn't a bike messenger, and at Gear Wolf, bike messenger was the defining thing," says Fleming, who explains that pinpointing this facet of the character was a major breakthrough.



2007

+ Chance

One change in the character's look relates directly to Infamous' gameplay. Cole — unlike Chance — doesn't have a gun. Although the team felt that giving a superhero a gun was cheating, they saw it as a challenge to make his superpowers cool enough to render the pistol impotent. The choice of a face-obscuring mask was an odd one, and Sucker Punch ditched it because it made conveying emotion from the character difficult. What is clear, however, is Chance's lack of hair. The reason? "Baldness is actually easy to render."



+ Cole MacGrath

Cole MacGrath was originally named Dylan in our original Infamous cover story (#183), but this was changed because Sucker Punch learned that Marvel Comic's Electro — who also had electricity superpowers — was named Max Dillon.



2009

+ New Cole

Fleming says that the first iteration of Cole for Infamous 2 was an attempt to get back to how they saw Cole originally in the first title before he got grumpy. "There's a string of decisions that you make, and I think we got a little ahead of ourselves and changed him away from this essence of who Cole was at the end of the last game. I know it sounds crazy, but it's really easy to do. It's a stupid mistake on some level, but on another level it's really reflective of who we are. We like to work on things and change them and try our best to improve them every day."



2011

+ Classic Cole

After fans protested the slick new Cole, Sucker Punch went back and rediscovered Cole's less stylized essence. Some elements of Classic Cole are still incomplete, however. Fleming told us things like the hand tape may return, but the main work is finished. "I would never say it's not going to change, but in terms of who the guy is — no, we're at the end of that. We had a fun summer, let's just put it that way."

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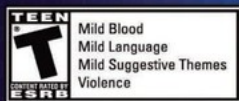
*"...it's looking like one hell of an MMO."
(Best of E3 2010, MMO Game of Show)
— Gamespy*

*"...the game not only looks Jim Lee-style great
but also functions Kratos-style smooth."
— Gamepro*



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