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How Motivated Are You To Move and Kinect?



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

Read my column or
comment on this letter at
gameinformer.com/mag or
follow @GL_AndyMc

I have discussed before how I thought it odd that PlayStation Move and Microsoft's Kinect seem to be trying to recreate the magic that Nintendo has already captured on the Wii, but since returning from E3 and seeing the two systems in action, it brings up a slew of new questions, especially now that the peripherals finally have price points and pack-ins.

I do believe each device offers up its own evolution of the Nintendo Wii formula, whether it's the more precise control of the PlayStation Move or the controller-less adventures of the Kinect, but two classic clichés come to mind and equally apply: "too little, too late" and "if it's not broke don't fix it." Both are in reference to Nintendo's vice grip control on motion-based games, be it party, dance, sports, or otherwise.

These two systems are most definitely early in their life spans (Move hits this September and Kinect in November), but I think that's all the more reason that these respective platforms need to show consumers not only why they are different and better, but how they can offer new gameplay experiences – not just better bells and whistles.

Which is all the more reason I am still completely stumped by Sony's choice to pack in Sports Champions. I can't be the only person to realize Nintendo has been packing in Wii Sports since 2006, right? I get the sense Sony is more or less putting Move out there and offering as many software choices as possible, be it casual or hardcore, and hoping that gamers pick up the pieces and that the pack-in game isn't the motivator. But either way it feels unimaginative, and I think that's unfortunate.

In Microsoft's case, I was floored to discover that they chose Kinect Adventures as the pack-in when it has perhaps the best motion-based casual game around in MTV Games/Harmonix's Dance Central. It would have shown that Microsoft (I can't believe I'm saying this) is hip and different, and not predicably boring, but instead it opted to choose – you guessed it – the predictable and boring pack-in game that feels like a Wii-wannabe. Shocker, I know.

For both platforms there is plenty of software that looks exciting, including the games I knocked for being included with the peripherals, but I think for these systems to truly be successful they need to break new ground and not tread on the trail already blazed by the Nintendo Wii.

Cheers,

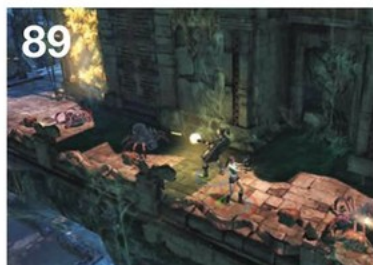
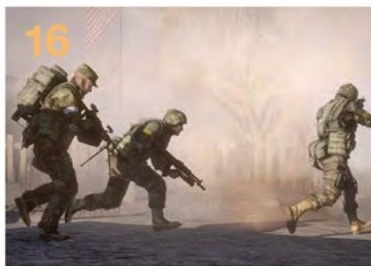
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Batman: Arkham City

Batman: Arkham Asylum rocked the gaming world two years ago. Giving Batman a whole district of the city teeming with criminals to explore is one of the few plans we'll accept for trying to top one of the best superhero games in years.

by Bryan Vore



regulars

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Readers contemplate the relative worth of playing games on easy mode, and one visionary tells us what horrible, biased, dishonest people we are here at GI

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Want to know about Kinect's pricing and what it means? What about the story behind how a former NHL player helped revolutionize EA Sports? Connect has you covered

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Arm your creatures for battle in Darkspore. Disarm your enemies in Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II. Defend your farm in Two Worlds II

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Lara Croft is back to being her old self again, even though we're seeing her from an unfamiliar angle
by Meagan VanBurklee

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What you didn't know about Mortal Kombat creator Ed Boon in this month's Game Over
by Dan Ryckert



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72



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T

his month in Feedback we discuss timed exclusives for DLC, examine the merits of playing on easy mode, mourn a lost title from Lionhead, and listen to a rant about how biased and unprofessional we are.

We ♥ Art

Regarding your list of video games that can be considered art in your July 2010 issue: While I enthusiastically agree with most of the games on your list, I feel you might have left out a game that has moved many gamers (well, or at least myself) to tears: Mother 3. The story, the characters, the whole world of the game was carefully created with much attention to detail, and it really shows. The story is touching and tells a very strong message; that is what I think art is supposed to do. It's the first video game to make me cry.

Vincent Chang
Simi Valley, CA

I wanted to write to express my appreciation for your recent article, "The Great Debate." Films and photography were once derided as less than fine art too, but you can now find critics and students alike studying and extolling the artistic virtues of those media. The same will almost certainly happen with video games, and the classic games of the current and past generations (like those mentioned in your article) will be in textbooks written and read by the next generation of artists and gamers.

Sarah Sinclair
Santa Barbara, CA

In my art school we had a very simple definition of what art is: If you have to ask if it is art, then it is art. There, everyone can relax. If Duchamp and his Fountain piece, or any other Dada artist for that matter, can be considered art, why on earth would a video game not be?

Doug Andrews
Manchester, CT

We don't need to say much here, because **A)** we'd just be preaching to the choir, and **B)** gamers are probably getting a little sick of this topic by now. Still, we love that so many of you took the time to write in and articulate your passion and enthusiasm for video games as a form of entertainment, a hobby, and an art form. Good job!

Perfect Timing

I fully understand the whole business side of the equation when it comes to console exclusive games like Metal Gear Solid or Halo – console manufacturers want good games you can only play on their system. But why do companies make deals for timed DLC exclusives? The other console's users gain access to the content later on – are they really going to sell that many more games because of a brief head start on DLC? It seems like game publishers are doing more harm than good by alienating a section of potential customers.

Greg L.
Eden Prairie, MN

The weeks immediately following a game's release are typically when it sells the most copies. Exclusive DLC near the launch window allows console manufacturers to capitalize on those early sales in an attempt to become the definitive platform for a high-profile game. For instance, Modern Warfare 2's Stimulus Package maps were available a month earlier on Xbox 360 than PS3 and PC. Eventually, everyone gets the same content, so no one is alienated. But if you have the option, why make yourself wait? With Modern Warfare 2, the timed exclusive

strategy definitely worked in Microsoft's favor; early sales numbers showed that the game sold twice as much on Xbox 360 than the other platforms.



Question of the Month:
What is the best
Zelda game ever?

Email your response to
feedback@gameinformer.com

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com



Call of Duty: Modern Warfare - Reflex Edition

Unbiased and Honest

Why are you guys so biased and dishonest? Give some credit to Nintendo for once! I'm a huge Nintendo fan, and you don't give their games fair reviews. You put them down because you assume Nintendo is for nerds. On the other hand, you guys worship the Xbox 360 and the PS3 because that's what the "cool people" play. That's a totally unfair bias. Another unfair trait is your attention to the titles of the games. If it sounds violent or evil, you assume it will be good. Thus, not surprisingly, every Call of Duty game has gotten a perfect 10 (except for the Wii version - how predictable!). My final complaint is your obsession with so-called "hot" female characters. You choose to like a game with a concept involving hot girls. That is not reason enough to like a game. You should be ashamed, and also should be well known for your obsession with being "cool," at least by your definition and standards. I subscribe to *Nintendo Power* as well, and I gotta admit: They are much more fair and honest about their games. And "being cool" does not monopolize their lives. That's why all gamers should choose them over you any day!

Anonymous
North Smithfield, RI

This is either a fanatical rant or a pitch-perfect parody of a fanatical rant. Honestly, we can barely tell the difference anymore. You are right about one thing, though: Being cool does monopolize our lives. To stay on top of all the hip trends, we have to spend our free time reading Twilight books, watching *Real Housewives*, and calling people "bro." It's tough being so awesome.

Destination Download

Today I bought the Onslaught mode for Battlefield: Bad Company 2. I then realized that downloadable content is rarely reviewed by the Game Informer staff. This perplexed me. Why not review DLC? I understand that DLC is used to enhance the game and keep that disc in the tray longer, but is it really worth it?

Julian Canto
Guilford, CT



We've been reviewing downloadable games for a while now, and they continue to rise in quality and prominence. In fact, with *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light*, this issue marks the third consecutive month that a downloadable game has won Game of the Month honors (*Joe Danger* and *Limbo* won in issues 207 and 208, respectively). While full downloadable games are getting more reviews, add-on content like maps and modes are difficult to score because they only enhance an existing game - they aren't complete experiences. That doesn't mean we're hanging you out to dry; we've been playing the add-ons and giving our recommendations online, including *Bad Company 2's* Onslaught mode. All you need to do is head to gameinformer.com/impulse for the latest news and impressions from the world of downloadable content.

Answer of the Month



Last Month's Question:

If you could pick one game to make the case for games as an art form, what would you pick?

Top 3

1. Portal
2. Shadow of the Colossus
3. Okami

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

Can you tell me when *Kingdom Hearts 3* comes out?
No.

Make up your mind! Do you like Claptrap, or is he a dork?
Yes.

Which is better: hoagies or hot dogs?
Hoagies.

Most Corrected Mistake



In issue 207, a response in Feedback stated that the "Top 10 Console Games That Get Content Creation Right" was on page 39. The feature was on page 22. We apologize for the error, and for any extra wear-and-tear your fingers sustained by turning a few extra pages.

gi spy



(Left) Activision's Drew Meyer, Lindsay Morio, and Phil Greenspan watch on as Miller and Andy shred it up on *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock*. (Right) Comic book legend Adam Hughes takes a nap on Meagan's shoulder.

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



GI SPY
continued on page 8

Long Live Easy Mode

I really appreciated Russ Frushtick's opinion article "Casual Encounters" in issue 207. I am a longtime hardcore gamer, but in my late twenties with a full time job, it is hard to find as many hours to play games as I used to. Recently I have started to play some games on the easy setting because I just want to experience the game mechanics and enjoy the visuals more than I want to be challenged. As a general rule, I don't like to die during the first half of the game. Some may think that this is lame, but playing at a lower difficulty level enables me to be able to experience more games in less time.

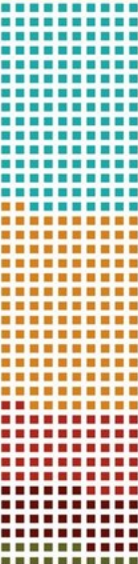
Matthew Cobb
Nashville, TN



Every so often an article comes along that demands contemplation and leads to a revelation that fosters experimentation resulting in jubilation. I am referring to Russ Frushtick's piece "Casual Encounters." I had been playing Bayonetta and got tired of having my ass handed to me on a regular basis, so I grudgingly switched to easy mode and had the time of my life. Perhaps in this age of trophies and achievements, we gamers have become too focused on earning awards in our first playthrough – forgetting how to just have a good time and appreciate games for what they are.

Karl Woods
Tukwila, WA

On Your Mind



- Halo: Reach: 37%
- iPhone games: 35%
- Blizzard vs. Anonymity: 14%
- Move vs. Kinect: 10%
- Crackdown 2: 4%



Extinct

Back in 2004, Xbox owners had the honor of playing great games like Fable, Riddick, Ninja Gaiden, and Halo 2 – but there was one game missing that year: B.C. It was probably my most-anticipated game of all time, but Lionhead decided to suspend its development, and I don't understand why they haven't revived it yet. Fable was a big success, and I understand why they went right to work on Fable 2, but we are near the completion of a third Fable, and I still don't know if B.C. will ever see the light of day. The timing would be perfect; with the success of open-world games like Red Dead Redemption, I think people would really enjoy the same type of gameplay featuring everyday survival against dinosaurs. Do you think B.C. will ever get the release it deserves?

Chris Raye
Landis, NC

The short and sad answer to your question is "no." Between Fable III and the Milo project (whatever that actually is), Lionhead seems to be moving forward instead of looking back. Don't get too disappointed; remember that B.C. was originally planned as a last-generation game. Making the technological leap from one generation to the next doesn't usually turn out well (see: Kameo, Too Human, Duke Nukem Forever), so you may ultimately be happier imagining the game B.C. could have been instead of facing the reality of how the concept has been ravaged by time.

GI SPY

continued from page 7

(Far Left) A pretty girl at Comic-Con? Yawn. A pretty girl wearing normal clothes? "faints dead away" (The girl in question is Caprica star Alessandra Torresani at the Marvel vs. Capcom 3 party) (Left) Ubisoft's Corey May and Jade Raymond celebrate the good life (Right) Seth Rogan puts his Weezer glasses on at the Marvel vs. Capcom 3 party at Comic-Con (Far Right) Big Boi from Outkast tears it up at the Marvel vs. Capcom party. His new album rules, go get it

continued on page 10



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WITH 3G AS WELL.**

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1

WINNER 1 Quinci Quartararo Kirby may be an easy target in a duel, but just try getting a lasso around him. **2 Berol Landskroner** No longer subdued by a Teen rating, Baraka goes after a man who recently did Mature right. **3 Bill Clawson** Don't be fooled by the appearance of Slinky Dog here. He's not real unless Jim Varney is voicing him. **4 John Lueras** Few are aware that American Gladiator Storm honed her Atlasphere skills during her youth in Rapture. **5 A. S. Nino** This is either Gears of War art or what Mel Gibson sees when he closes his eyes.



2



3



4



5



GI SPY

continued from page 8

(Left) Writer Evan Narcisse, EA's Amanda Taggart, and Fortyseven Communication's Brian Rubin are basically chillin' **(Right)** Marvel legend Stan Lee has legally adopted Ben Reeves



KINGDOM HEARTS *Birth by Sleep*



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games

A Triple-A Tag Team

Capcom and Namco team up for the biggest fighting crossover ever

By Dan Ryckert

When the first Tekken was near release on the PlayStation, print ads for the game featured the slogan "That burning in your chest is from your broken ribs...not some fireball." Over a decade later, that statement no longer holds true for the combatants in the King of the Iron Fist tournament. Officially announced at Comic-Con, the rosters from two fighting juggernauts are joining forces for two ambitious crossover titles – Street Fighter X Tekken and Tekken X Street Fighter.

Rumors initially swirled about the possibility of a Capcom vs. Namco title, with many believing we'd see the likes of Mega Man and the Soul Calibur crew making appearances. However, the final product is much more tightly focused, exclusively featuring characters from each company's flagship fighter.

With each game featuring a distinct gameplay style, it only makes sense for this mash-up to be two separate games. Street Fighter X Tekken will take place within the former's universe, with its trademark 2D plane and ink-based art style. Tekken X Street Fighter will instead utilize Namco's 3D plane, making us curious as to how Capcom's trademark button inputs will work. Tekken (and Soul Calibur) has always featured a style that was difficult to master, but could still be enjoyed by button mashers. With SF's more intricate special move system, it'll be interesting to see if the controls are modified to fit more smoothly in the Tekken universe.

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Who's in so far

As of this writing, only four characters have been revealed – Kazuya Mishima and Nina Williams representing Tekken, and Ryu and Chun-Li representing Street Fighter. Gameplay details are scarce, but a demo shown at Comic-Con clearly showed off a tag battle mode in Street Fighter X Tekken. In what appeared to be a team Ultra Combo, Nina subdued Ryu while her partner Kazuya came charging in with a devastating spinning uppercut.



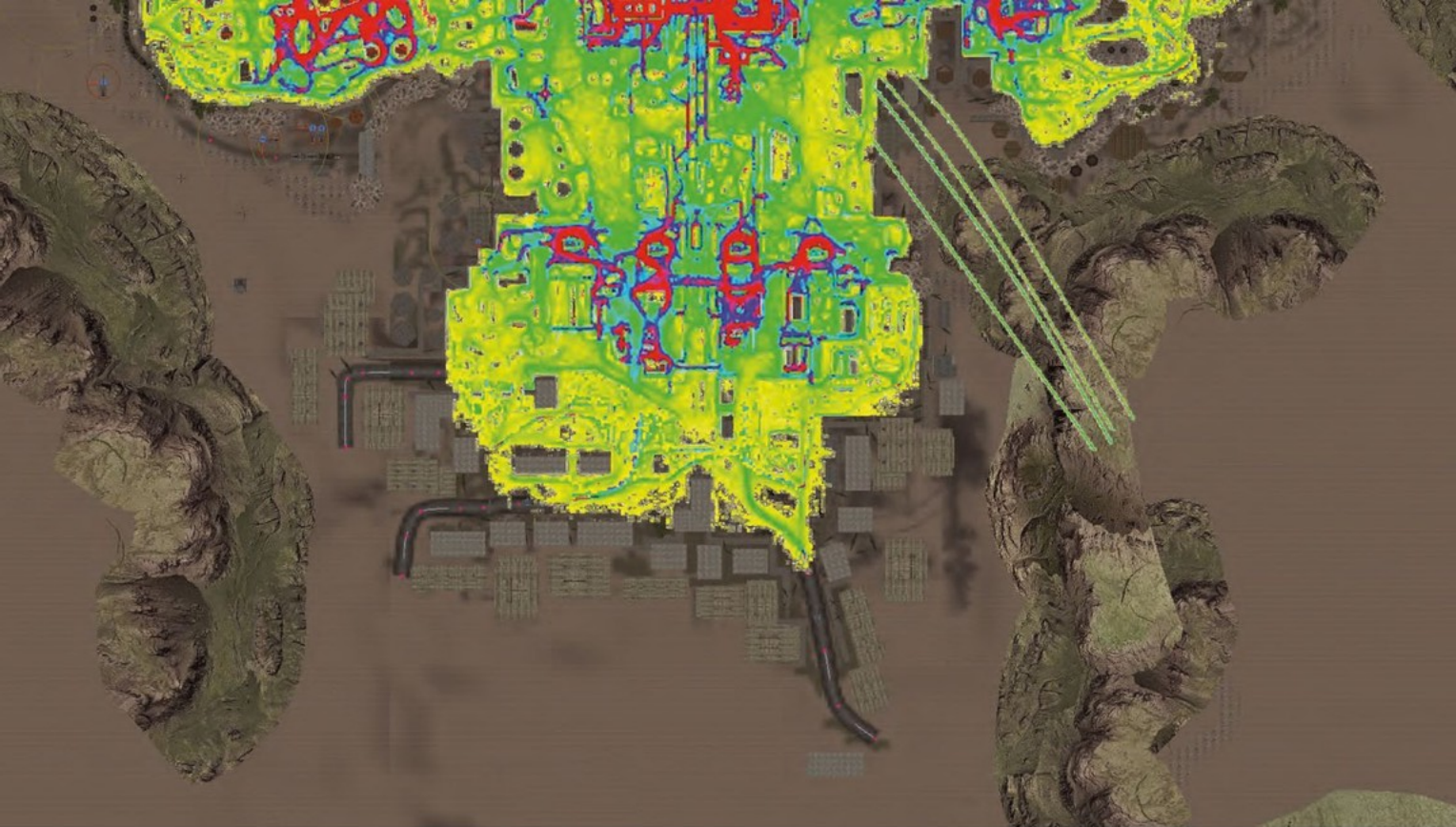
This Capcom/Namco tag team is just one of the several recent announcements that have fighting fans buzzing. A new *Mortal Kombat 3* impressed almost everyone that saw it at E3, and *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* is looking stellar from what we've seen so far. The recent resurgence of the fighting genre can perhaps be credited to Capcom's stellar *Street Fighter IV*, and it looks like the company plans to keep the ball rolling in the near future thanks to this partnership with Namco. *Street Fighter X Tekken* is expected to release sometime after *Mvc 3* hits next spring.

An exciting future for fighting fans

The Labo Rats

By participating in open betas, players have a bigger role in game development than they think
by Annette Gonzalez





Activision's multiplayer behemoth Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 was a smash hit right out of the gate, selling nearly five million copies at launch. This translates to five million users jumping into multiplayer lobbies on day one hoping to quickly find a match and start getting their money's worth. Unfortunately for these early adopters, multiplayer sessions in Modern Warfare 2 went from a good time to a glitch fest in a few short weeks. First there was the javelin glitch. Then came the overpowered akimbo shotgun, care package knife deaths, wall and elevator glitches, unintended infinite ammo, and several more problems that plagued the otherwise impressive game.

While it's tough to predict what will happen when a multiplayer title goes live, many of these bugs can be minimized, if not eliminated ahead of time, through proper testing procedures – a process Modern Warfare 2 surprisingly did without. With the increasing prevalence of open betas, gamers can play an active role in polishing the final product to avoid disappointment at launch.

Every step walked, shot fired, vehicle destroyed, power up chosen, and path taken during beta phases is tracked by developers to test for glitches and address balancing. Even if you refuse to participate in forums or lack the motivation to submit a 5,000-word essay expressing your concerns, your behaviors alone provide the data needed to make necessary tweaks. An open beta is not a feature-rich demo with a few blemishes; it's an invitation to help create a better game.

"I'll say it up front: If this is a demo of our game, this is the worst demo ever," says Blizzard design director Dustin Browder in regards to the StarCraft II beta. "It's not really meant to be a demo. It's really meant for us to test our servers, test software stability, and of course, test the balance and gameplay experience." This isn't just true for StarCraft II, but for multiplayer titles all across the board that go through the beta process.

» HEAT MAP

A heat map from MAG's Absheron Refinery during one 256-player Domination round. Heat map images show the movement of players and vehicles. Areas shown in yellow and green are the most lightly traveled, areas in red are the heaviest trafficked on maps

Beta by the Numbers

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16 million	Hours logged by beta testers
1.4 million	Number of screenshots and videos uploaded
1.3 terabytes	Amount of upload data for said screenshots and videos
1.1 billion	Number of kills during public beta
198 hours	The most time spent by a single player in the beta
12	Approximate hours a day said player spent playing the game
142,657,966	Number of kills with magnum
127,822,409	Number of kills with DMR
49,341,380	Number of kills with Needle Rifle
8,927,112	Number of kills with the Flag
360,245	Total forum posts created in the Halo: Reach beta forum on Bungie.net

MODNATION RACERS

122,000	Total number of players
78,000	Total number of creations
226,000	Total number of games played
128,000,000	Total number of transactions



» KILLMAP

MAG's killmap images show the locations of players when killed and location of the killer as noted by a connecting line. Red dots represent dead players, blue dots represent killers. These images identify spawn camping issues and deadlines of certain chokepoints, objective areas, bunkers, etc. This could also suggest sightline problems on maps

Preparing for the onslaught

According to MAG producer Alan Van Slyke, there are two essential elements in preparing for a beta release. On the development side, coders must make sure the game is stable enough for proper public testing. Then there is the technical process, which must ensure the beta is ready for download, the patching is functional, the servers are available, and escalation procedures are in place in case of a major crash.

To prepare for the onslaught of everyday gamers when the beta opens, multiplayer titles undergo internal testing during alpha phases where developers bring in teams from other departments to play the games and provide feedback. In the case of Halo: Reach, Microsoft and Bungie employees tested the game through internal alpha and beta phases to check for major balance issues and address server stability prior to releasing a build to the public.

"The preparations began months in advance," explains Bungie's community director Brian Jarrard. "As much as this is a work-in-progress snapshot of the game, we recognize we're putting this game out there and it's going to be critiqued. People, to some degree, can be forgiving in acknowledging it's a beta, but they also have expectations and they're going to voice opinions about the game based on their experience."

Even with the amount of testing prior to their release, public betas are far from perfect. If

you've been part of a beta test before, you've probably seen your fair share of glitches and server crashes.

"Releasing a beta is like another release of the game except our standards are a little bit lower," Blizzard's Browder says. "We will knowingly go into a beta with things that are a little bit broken, but not much. Still, we want to hold our standards pretty high because it's this trial run that helps us get the real release correct." However, these precautionary measures aren't always bulletproof.

The stress test

By simply jumping into a multiplayer beta, you've instantly become part of the stress testing that can contribute to a smooth, crash-free launch when the game releases at retail. If a game becomes a hit, the servers need to be able to handle millions of gamers jumping into the multiplayer lobbies at once. The only way to test if you're up to snuff is to subject your system to a real-world deluge of players.

"There is no other way of working out how your game is going to react when millions of users are making decisions you can't quite anticipate," observes Ged Talbot, lead designer for Blur. "The larger the group of people, the more chance, you'll find problems wherever they may lie."

When the Halo: Reach beta opened to the

public last May, Bungie expected several million users. The team worked to prepare server clusters for this volume using the infrastructure already established with Halo 3. Despite preparations, the servers were unable to handle the jump from zero to one million users in a short period of time, which caused the beta to crash.

"That was exactly the kind of test we could only accomplish in a real beta of this scale: Do as much as we can to emulate what would happen during a real retail release and get a huge number of data and simultaneous connections that really stress all the servers," Jarrard explains. Bungie figured out the snafu and got the Reach beta up and running again fairly quickly, eventually reaching 2.7 million unique beta players in just over two weeks.

For MAG, the first-person shooter centered on 256-player online battles, stress testing was invaluable to the beta process. During the alpha phase, the team at Zipper Interactive built a system that simulated real players to ensure server stability, and confirmed enough AI bots were able to log in to reach the desired size and scale at the beta's launch. However, Van Slyke says this is merely an engineering solution.

"We can't predict how players are going to play," he remarks. "That's where the open beta comes into play."

You're being watched

During online betas, servers collect tons of information for each unique user. This intel helps developers assess and address gameplay imbalances.

"It's not so much like Uncle Sam watching everything you do," says Kyle Zundel, producer on *ModNation Racers*. "It's more observing output from errors, and a lot of these errors can only be caused under real-world conditions with hundreds of people doing different things at the same time."

During the heavy traffic periods, developers watch a wide range of player behaviors to detect balance issues. In the case of shooters, the weapons chosen, number of shots fired, and kills per weapon are often tracked to check for imbalances in weapon power. If one weapon rises as the predominant choice for most users and is producing an overwhelming number of kills, this suggests that the weapon may be overpowered and might require tweaking.

In racing titles, dev teams track player locations and car pathing to produce collision maps that show where players crash most often. A clump of red data points in a given section on a map may be indicative of a flaw in track design.

In competitive multiplayer titles across the board, developers also track total matches played, win-loss percentages, and the performance of matchmaking systems. Internet connection types are examined to confirm the systems are pairing similar connections together for an optimal experience. Bungie even tracks how often players use in-game muting to help users find like-minded teammates.

All told, developers collect terabytes of data

to produce stats, graphs, and heat maps. With such a high volume of data flowing to the servers, each developer has its own unique way of funneling the data to the design teams. Some developers build servers that place all the gathered information into a database that designers can search for specific scenarios. If a designer needs a heat map for a specific location where players die the most, they're only a query away from receiving one. Data is constantly collected to provide up-to-date reports that can be used by teams to fuel the baseline discussion on which bugs need to be addressed. This data is further complemented by direct user feedback.

Your voice matters

During multiplayer betas, development teams also scan forums and message boards for user feedback on perceived bugs and other gameplay grievances. Community coordinators comb through and aggregate the information to ensure these suggestions go through the proper channels and reach the right people.

"[The beta process] is really the first time we can get a heartbeat on our potential consumer base," explains Ramone Russell, community manager for *ModNation Racers*. "Consumers play the game differently than we do. It's invaluable from a developer's standpoint because that's the only way we can get tons of raw data and make changes based on the things our beta testers find."

When working on *ModNation Racers*, Russell took each user's bug report and collaborated with the quality assurance team to check the game logs and see if the complaints were valid. Bungie does the same with *Halo*. If users are

causing a ruckus in the forum about headshots not registering, Bungie works with quality assurance to confirm that these user claims are more than just complaints filed about intentional design decisions.

"There's tons of little things like that that started out as anecdotal feedback, and we were like, 'let's just give them a few days to get used to it.' After there was more noise about it and it became more consistent, we would eventually discover there's actually a real issue," Jarrard explains.

"At the end of the day it's [the players'] game," Russell says. "This is a time where your voice can be heard and changes that we make can be based on the feedback that you give us."

Change you can believe in

Changes made to a game during a beta are primarily based on your feedback and behaviors, so next time you have access to a beta key, get chosen out of a pool of potential testers, or unlock a beta with another game you already own, you can do your part to help make a better gameplay experience.

"We want to know what you think about the game. We want to know the good, the bad, and the ugly. Most importantly we want to know what you didn't like, what bugs you found so we can make those changes, and make the product better," Russell says.

"Everybody wants a better game. When we run our betas properly and are able to gather the correct information and make those changes that improve the product, everybody wins." ♦



» (TOP) WALLRIDING

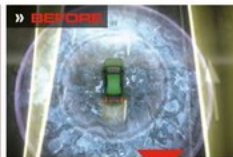
User data from *Blur* showed that players were deliberately wallriding to get around corners. The design team fixed this by significantly slowing down car speed upon wall impact

» (BOTTOM) KOENIGGSKEGG

This vehicle from *Blur* was way faster than other vehicles in the beta and thus won a considerable amount of races. It has been slowed for the final game

» COLLISION DATA

These collision images represent where player vehicles hit other objects in *Blur*. This is used by designers to find out if more turn markers or lights need to be added



BARGE BETA

These are before and after shots of the Barge power-up in *Blur*. Users noted the power-up was blowing other racers off the track. It has been reduced in size to balance with the game's other power-ups

TOP TEN DISGUSTINGLY CUTE CHARACTERS

by Tim Turi



Kirby

For something that devours and leeches power from its foes, Kirby is unbelievably adorable. His stumpy appendages and puffed-out cheeks kept him in our hearts for years. If you think that Pikachu deserves to be number one, remember that in Super Smash Bros. Kirby can don the Pokémon's trademark ears, brewing up a perfect storm of cuteness. The real nail in the coffin, though, is his recent arts-and-crafts makeover in Kirby's Epic Yarn.

Pikachu

Cartoons fleshed out the critter's cuddly-yet-courageous personality, but games like Pokémon Yellow and Pokémon Snap pushed the intoxicating electric rat into the spotlight. It's challenging enough to decide whether it's the rosy cheeks or his inability to say anything but his name that make him so irresistible, but it's even harder when you're busy dry heaving from an overdose of adorable.



Sackboy

Did Media Molecule contract with the devil when designing Sackboy? Because this guy is unholly cute. Fitting in with LittleBigPlanet's hand-sewn aesthetic, Sackboy looks like something your grandma knitted for you as a child. We have a feeling if you pulled the zipper on this little guy's stomach, you'd get an Ark of the Covenant-style sandblasting of cuddliness to the face.



Yoshi

Mario's famous mount is a green dino with a saddle on his back and booties on his feet. If that's not enough, Yoshi's handsome mug holds a coupe de grace of gratuitous charm — a tongue he uses to slurp up everything from tropical fruit to crying babies. His infectious "yum" sounds and butt-stomps are enough to make us overlook the fact that he hurts his unborn young at foes.



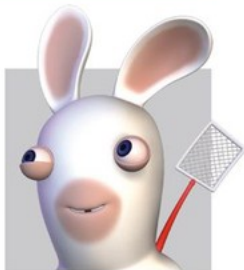
Moogles

Chocobos may look like cuddly, overgrown baby chicks, but Moogles and their wobby pom-poms steal the win. If you're really torn up about it, just ponder the Chocobo Knights from the Tactics series — Moogles dressed in chocobo-themed armor who ride the large, feathered beasts. It's tough to find an ugly Moogle, except that thing that Cait Sith rode. That thing was stupid, kupo.



Rabbids

Being pummeled by a plunger would usually upset us, but if it were a rascally Rabbid we'd probably be too busy swooning to care. For bug-eyed creatures with disproportionately huge mouths and screaming problems, these mischievous bunnies sure are squeezable. We would embrace them out of love, but we're fearful the hug might slip into an accidental chokehold of agitation.



Servbots

These mechanized, block-headed servants may be tasked with cooking, cleaning, and fighting Mega Man, but they're best at making us coo like idiots. The mere fact that their visage makes the grotesque zombies of Dead Rising look huggable is testament to the Servbots' lovability.



Nintendogs

Before Nintendogs, most hardcore gamers would have scoffed at the idea of becoming attached to a virtual dog. Then these cuddlesome canines came along and melted the cold, cynical hearts of naysayers. If you ever catch someone saying "good boy" to a DS in public, you know you've found a fellow gamer. Or a crazy person.



A Boy and His Blob

How many games have a hug button? While both the Boy and his Blob are undeniably adorable, the morphing, jelly bean-eating Blobonian stands apart with his ability to transform into a squeezable version of a ladder, trampoline, or spaceship. No intergalactic creature with a diet based solely on candy could possibly be disgusting.



Tails

Tails gave the already endearing Sonic a true run for his money. His ruffled hair and innocent, naive nature made him warm hearts, but it was his signature tails that made their arteries melt. Sure, a flying, two-tailed fox is handy in a platforming game, but Tails' true worth is found when he peters out and floats to the ground huffing and puffing like a tired pup.

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A glimpse into the not-so-distant future of the downloadable game scene *by Matt Miller*



Trine 2
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, PC

If you missed 2009's *Trine*, then you overlooked one of the best downloadable titles of last year. Make it up to yourself by checking out **Trine 2**, which is headed to XBLA, PSN, and PC next spring. Like its predecessor, *Trine 2* is set in a lush fantasy world filled with puzzles and monsters. The original developer, Frozenbyte, is prepping the sequel, which answers fan demand by delivering both local and online cooperative multiplayer. Solo players can jump back and forth between the three main characters to use their varied skill sets, or up to three players can join in to bring everybody onto the screen at once. Each of the three returning characters have some new tricks up their sleeves. The wizard gains some offensive capability through the ability to manipulate enemies in the same way he does objects, pushing and flinging them about like rag dolls. The melee-focused knight can now parry and counter attacks. The thief is able to slow down time, further

accentuating her stealth and agility. The game boasts some huge boss fights that help highlight the gorgeous background visuals and smooth animations that made the first title such a treat to play. Keep an eye on this one.

Slam Bolt Scrappers defies easy classification, combining block dropping, brawling, building, and a little bit of tower defense. The indie team at Fire Hose Games is crafting this PSN exclusive for launch in early 2011. The game tells the story of the scrappers of Slam Bolt City, who accidentally set off an explosion that damages nearby Volcano City and Sky City. Chaos ensues. I played the game for several frenzied sessions, and was surprised how well the different elements fit

together into a frantic but fun experience. I was constantly sending my scrapper zooming around the screen, destroying enemies to turn into blocks while trying to rattle my opponent with occasional rapid strikes. By combining same-colored blocks into larger structures, they transform into weapons that proceed to auto-attack enemy forces. The game supports one to four players in either of its primary modes – campaign and battle mode. Battle mode's constant action and breakneck pace is reminiscent of *Smash Bros*. The cooperative campaign mode has side-scrolling elements, giant bosses, and shifting environments. I'm intrigued by the possibilities.



Slam Bolt Scrappers
PlayStation Network



Dead Space Ignition
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



Fans of the franchise can get a head start on *Dead Space 2* by checking out **Dead Space Ignition**, the prequel set in the hours leading up to the beginning of the new game. This unusual variation on the series framework is set up as an interactive comic with branching story paths accompanied by several computer hacking minigames. While this gameplay concept doesn't blow me away, Ignition may still be worth a look. *Dead Space* comic book writer Antony Johnston is scripting the story, so players can expect a high-quality, integrated, choose-your-own-adventure storyline. Each of the game's four endings offers unlocks for Isaac Clarke in *Dead Space 2*, including an exclusive new suit. Producer Rich Briggs hinted that fans will be pleased with its price point. If that doesn't mean free, then it at least means damned cheap.

The *Castle Crashers* creators are hard at work on **BattleBlock Theater**, which is one of my most anticipated upcoming releases. The Behemoth's third game tells the story of an unusual island populated by sentient cat creatures. For their feline entertainment, players are forced to engage in deadly theater productions. The game features tremendous character customization, with hundreds of options to help make your cute avatar stand out.

Side-scrolling *Mario* games inspired the four-player cooperative campaign, but the mode is rooted in the brawling mechanics of *Castle Crashers* – albeit with some added options for screwing over your allies. The competitive mode is more of an arena-style fighter, encouraging the use of insane weapons like an exploding discus or a giant dodge ball that makes your opponent

dizzy. Am I wrong to think that this game sounds amazing?

The best Q-Games title to date is getting a sequel on PlayStation Network. **PixelJunk Shooter 2** picks up where the last game left off, with the intrepid subterranean rescue ship swallowed by a massive beast at the core of the strange planet. The new game takes place within the massive confines of the creature's body, where players must once again contend with the complex dynamics and interplay of different liquids. To deal with the new environment players can rely on a few new tricks, like traveling through darkened areas as well as what looks like some new liquid types. The responsive controls remain as strong as ever, and the core gameplay loop of taking out enemies and rescuing survivors is thankfully unchanged.



Mega Man Universe
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade

This sequel also introduces a competitive online multiplayer mode with its own designated stages and a new virtual co-op mode, where a computer-driven ship acts in concert with the player to solve levels. *PixelJunk Shooter 2* releases this fall.

Capcom's *Blue Bomber* is starring in an unusual new XBLA and PSN project named **Mega Man Universe**. Series creator Inafune says the project is rooted in 8-bit style, but allows players to become one of any number of classic Capcom characters. This includes different versions of Mega Man over the years and other Capcom heroes like Ryu from *Street Fighter* and Arthur from *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. Sadly, that's about all there is to know at this point. Check back for more details.

“The best Q-Games title to date is getting a sequel on PlayStation Network.”



BattleBlock Theater
Xbox Live Arcade



PixelJunk Shooter 2
PlayStation Network



For additional coverage of independent and downloadable games, visit gameinformer.com/impulse, which features daily updates on the best titles, timely reviews of the titles you care about, and weekly features profiling games and indie developers. Also, read our full reviews of *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light* on page 89, and *Castlevania: Harmony of Despair* on page 92, along with our score summaries of *Hydro Thunder Hurricane*, *Blacklight: Tango Down*, and *Monday Night Combat* on page 96.

Singularity

Though it launched under the radar, Game Informer's February 2009 cover story game Singularity delivered on its promise of riveting time-bending gameplay. Raven Software's senior producer Jeff Poffenberger and writer Bob Love talk about the development difficulties associated with time travel, the similarities to BioShock, and the support provided by Activision.

When most developers incorporate time manipulation into their games, we hear horror stories about the powers breaking the framework of the game. Were there any powers that didn't make it into the game for this reason?

Jeff Poffenberger: There were definitely some powers that didn't fit the theme of the game. For example, at one point the TMD had a glue gun attached to it that allowed you to fuse items together. That didn't make it very far. However, powers that did make it into the game were breaking the "framework" up until the very end. One power, the deadlock, caused all kinds of issues in QA [quality assurance]. There must have been over 100 bugs associated with that power. Another, the anti-gravity power, allowed you to stand on objects, pick them up, and surf out of the levels. Lots of headaches there as well. Our QA team at Activision was diligent in breaking the game with the powers we had. I cringe at the idea of having added more.

Even Steven Hawking admitted that time travel is a tricky concept to wrap your head around. Is it difficult crafting a flowing story with time travel as its key component?

Bob Love: The time travel story for Singularity was a lot of fun to create. It gave us a chance to think outside the box and tell a story in an unconventional way. But it was difficult because we had to be very careful to make sure the gamer knows exactly when they are. If they can't be certain it's the past, present, or future, they aren't going to be able to make heads or tails of what's going on in the story. We tried to be very clear about the date in variety of ways, such as the soldiers' uniforms, the condition of the locations, and making sure recurring characters were aged properly. In the end, it just took a lot of testing, but it was all worth it.

Singularity draws obvious inspiration from BioShock. Were there any fears during development that it would be a common critique/complaint that gamers would have?

JP: To be honest, no. I think the similarities are there and comparisons are fair, but no one here stopped and said, "Hey, this is a lot like BioShock." We're using the same engine, have a theme rooted in the 1950s, and have a feature attached to the left wrist. In making a game you definitely look at what other games have done well (or not).

Why can't you walk and listen to the audio recordings?



JP: This was simply an issue of time. It was something we wanted but towards the end there were so many other issues that took priority. It's not just a matter of throwing up a HUD element and playing the tapes as you walk around. We'd have to have the logic in place for turning off tapes when you find another, stopping tape audio during combat, etc. It seems trivial, but when you have 15,000 bugs in the database, little features like this fall by the wayside. I really wish I could say that it was some kind of creative decision, but it was not. It was a production decision. It's something that we'd resolve early in the next game.

Throughout the game we see various prototype weapons lying around Katorga-12. Were these concepts that didn't make the game?

JP: Mostly they were original concepts that changed with production. The TMD used to be a "swiss army" type of weapon that you carried. It's featured a lot in the movies you watch in the game.

At the end of the game, was the enhanced impulse attack your way of saying, "Thanks for

sticking around until the end. Go crazy?"

JP: Pretty much. We wanted the user to feel invincible during the last little bit of the game.

Many of the puzzle solutions are repeated throughout the game, such as "expand the box." Were there more puzzle concepts that didn't make it into the game?

JP: There were a lot of puzzle concepts iterated upon throughout development. We wanted the puzzles to have a set of rules that the user understood easily. Some of the stuff that didn't make it into the final product just didn't make sense to us.

Of the game's three possible outcomes, which one would you predict most gamers chose the first time around?

JP: I'd most imagine they shot one of the other characters. That's what I did.

Was the "tough decision" ending in place from the beginning of development? And did you originally plan for the player to have the option to bow out of it?

JP: I assume you are talking about the ending where you have to TMD

the Singularity and go back in time? It was definitely one of the endings we planned from the beginning. We wanted to have multiple endings from the start.

Given how your time powers work, would co-op gameplay be possible in a future installment?

JP: Co-op play would be a definite in sequels.

Activision didn't seem to support Singularity since its announcement. It wasn't at E3, and it hasn't received much marketing support despite mostly positive reviews. Is this frustrating for the team after working on it for so long?

JP: This is a tough question. There's always more that a team would like to do or see. So, sure. We got the support we needed in the form of an extended release date. We utilized that extra time to focus on solidifying the story and adding creature versus soldiers to multiplayer. The time was well spent and that was due to the support we got. We're really proud of what we accomplished here and are excited that gamers are having fun. ♦

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CATAclysmic REASONS

To Come Back To WoW

by Adam Biessener

Two new races and all the content that Blizzard can shove into its shattered world are the primary draws of World of Warcraft's upcoming third expansion, Cataclysm. These eight reasons for lapsed [recovered?] WoW players to come back to Azeroth dive beyond the obvious bullet points to the real meat of why you might consider renewing your subscription.



ALTAHOLICS:

Level without pain

As any old-school player (or anyone pursuing the brutal Loremaster title) can tell you, pre-Burning Crusade zone design made for some tough times. Even with the many improvements to the 1-60 zones over the last five years – remember when there was no Horde flightpath to Un'Goro? – making it to Outland at level 58 feels like throwing off the chains of oppression and tasting freedom for the first time. We don't know exactly how much of the 1-60 questing path will be brand new, but you can safely assume that it'll involve a lot less vaulting between continents four times in the same quest chain.



ALLIANCE:

Killing goblins

For too long, the Horde has held a massive advantage over the Alliance when it comes to factional warfare: Killing gnomes is great. Seeing that bouncy mage wail and keel over after watching him ride his stupid robot chicken (jumping the whole time, naturally) around in circles like a hyperactive five-year-old is what fuels the Horde war machine. Now the Alliance can know what it's like to have such a perfect outlet for the rage engendered by the opposite faction's most annoying players.



LOREMASTERS: Meeting mythical figures

Cataclysm's questlines have deep ties to the War of the Ancients, and helping everyone from Malfurion Stormrage to the demigod Cenarius with their problems is as cool of a lore tie-in as anything currently in the game. Do you know what godlike figure the harpies worship, or what role the ur-turtle played in the battle against Sargeras' hordes? In Cataclysm, you'll find out.



EXPLORERS: Undersea as it's meant to be

Whether it's a gang of Murlocs beating you down because height-based aggro radii are broken or having to alt-tab and flame morons on your realm forum to save your sanity because swimming anywhere takes forever, nobody has ever in the history of WoW enjoyed a water quest. Against all probability, the new Vashj'ir zone makes it awesome. You move at near-mounted speed all the time, there's no breath timer, and the three-dimensional aspect works perfectly. This is the heroic fantasy underwater adventure you've always wanted.

RAIDERS: Who are you kidding, you're already here

Don't pretend that you're not in a Vault of Archavon pick-up group right now after clearing Icecrown on your main and primary alt earlier this week. You're going to take a week off work, level to 85, gear up in crafted blues, and hit the forums complaining about class balance and broken raid bosses as soon as the Cataclysm hits. And you're going to like it.



QUESTERS: 3D jousting

This unique event is easier to explain with video (which you can see at gameinformer.com), but the 3D jousting quests are both an awesome callback to the arcade classic and a demonstration of how creative the new zones can be at their best. It's worth hoofing it to southern Mount Hyjal just to experience this brilliance.



HORDE: Ogrimmar

Despite being the de facto capital of the Horde, Ogrimmar has been an ugly, hard-to-navigate mess since day one. New Warchief Garrosh Hellscream isn't having it. Under his leadership, Azeroth's orcs have stopped hugging trees and saving bunnies, and started building awesome war machines and covering every surface in sight with intimidating steel and spikes.

EVERYONE: Getting while the getting is good

If you've never jumped into the initial rush of content exploration when a new MMO or expansion goes live, you should. It's hard to fault people for burning out on the badge grind or achievement chasing that the elder game can devolve into, but the first few months after launch are the best times MMOs offer. Nobody checks your gear score before letting you into their group. If you're lucky, you might figure out boss mechanics on your own rather than watching a guide video online. Blue items are exciting again. Mobs kill you with abilities you've never seen before, and it's fun - for a while, at least. There will be some jaded tools in trade chat claiming it's all been done before, but they're a tiny fraction of the population and easy to ignore.



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games

Superhero Clash

Thor & Green Lantern Face Off In 2011

San Diego Comic-Con was full of superheroes in tight spandex, but two in particular used the convention to announce their upcoming video game plans. Sega revealed a Thor game for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Nintendo DS, and PSP, while Warner Bros. announced Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters on the same systems minus the PSP. This isn't just two games going head to head; the two superhero's films will square off in theaters next summer as well.

Silent Hill Homecoming developer Double Helix is handling Green Lantern, but little else is known about the game at this point. On the other hand, Sega is touting the consulting help of Thor writer Matt Fraction as Thor battles to save Asgard from foes like Ulrik, Ymir, and Surtur. The PS3 and 360 versions of the game are third-person action titles filled with melee combos, elemental powers, and an upgrade system. The Wii and PSP editions feature a different story from their larger console counterparts, along with comic book-style graphics. Finally, the Nintendo DS Thor game is a 2D sidescroller.

Concept art for Sega's Thor



Mission: Impossible

Warner Bros. is also working on a "hardcore violent" adaptation of DC Comic's Suicide Squad, as described by DC Entertainment chief creative officer and writer Geoff Johns during a Comic-Con panel. Nothing else is known about the game project.

The Suicide Squad comic has been in and out of circulation since the late '80s. The group consists of varying supervillains – including Deadshot, Bronze Tiger, and Nightshade – working for the government (and later as a freelance organization) to perform extremely dangerous missions in exchange for their freedom, like The Dirty Dozen.

Warner Bros. also picked up the rights to a Suicide Squad movie. Sherlock Holmes producer Dan Lin is attached to the film, but there is no further word about casting or a screenplay at the moment.

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ModNation Racers

Game Informer scours the leaderboards in search of the best of the best to uncover the person behind the handle and learn his or her strategies. If you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network, please don't delete it. You could be our next featured gamer. *interview by Annette Gonzalez*



Myles Gordon

Age
27

Hometown
Waterloo, Ontario

Favorite Design
O Tour 4: Sky Fleet

Hardest Skill To Learn
Track design

Accomplishments

ModNation Racers' Creation Station is the creative hub where hundreds of designer hopefuls aspire to have their work of art featured in the game's ModSpot. Amid the high volume of track creators, Myles Gordon stands out from the pack with 16 innovative tracks under his belt. To help advertise his race courses, which range

from mountain vistas to urban cityscapes, Gordon posted screenshots of his work in the ModNation forums and invited other community members to test his creations in multiplayer matches.

Origin of Skills

"There was this old PC racing game called Stunts (1990) that had a track editor built into it – it was

really advanced for the time – which I spent lots of time playing around with," Gordon explains. In addition to track editing experience early on, his computer science degree and years of programming experience further aid his creativity when working with ModNation's content creation system.

Practice Time

Gordon says each of the 16 tracks took roughly 10 hours to build, with equal amounts of time spent testing and revising for playability. Even with the amount of practice he's had with the creation tools, it hasn't cut down on creation time. Gordon's latest track (unpublished at press time) has taken 30 hours to complete. "To make something really special, be prepared to invest some time and patience into it," he says.

Design Tips

Gordon suggests budding track creators plan the design ahead of time. He usually creates an outline of ideas for the baseline of the track, then sketches out the full map on paper before diving into the toolset. Once the track has been completed, Gordon suggests testing the custom tracks by watching friends play and making note of any issues.

Life Outside

ModNation Racers

Gordon's job as a software test specialist is where he spends most of his time. However, you can also find him keeping active by playing squash, swimming, and running. He especially enjoys spending time with friends and family, hitting pubs, and taking random road trips.

Other Favorite Games

Mario Galaxy 2, 3D Dot Game Heroes, Heroes of Newerth, and World of Warcraft – shout out to his guild, Trismegistus.

Improving ModNation Racers

Gordon has a number of suggestions on how United Front Games could improve its track creation formula. Part of his wishlist includes rotating props vertically, allowing for more props to be overlapped, making all terrain surfaces available on all themes, removing fences from bridges, giving players more road to work with, offering DLC for new themes and props, and adding lava as a surface type.

For more on ModNation community creator Myles Gordon and a screenshot gallery of his custom tracks, check out gameinformer.com/mag.



In Gordon's Sky Fleet course, you'll ride airships, dodge artillery fire, and hopefully declare yourself the Omega Champion. The airships were built manually using blocks, windmills, and copters

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN

the good

Developer Just Add Water is resurrecting the cult Oddworld franchise with the help of franchise mastermind Lorne Lanning. The UK studio, which created the PSN/PSP title Gravity Crash, has been working with Lanning and others for over a year on multiple Oddworld projects slated to hit multiple consoles. Although Gravity Crash only came out on Sony platforms, Just Add Water's website says the company is registered for the Xbox 360, Wii, and DS. According to the website, the games will star "all your favorite Oddworld characters."



(ABOVE) Epic is hosting a killer-with-a-heart-of-gold contest to determine the fate of a new Carmine brother in Gears of War 3. By buying either "Carmine Must Die" or "Save Carmine" Xbox 360 avatar or real T-shirts, you are determining the fate of the newest Delta-One member in the game. Don't worry, even if you want to see Carmine eat it, all proceeds are going to the Child's Play Charity, so deep down you can still think you're a good person.



(ABOVE) Infamous 2 developer Sucker Punch got enough backlash on the new Cole MacGrath character design that it announced it was going back to the drawing board to come up with a look for Cole that was closer to the one in the first game. We're all for anything that makes their lightning-spewing protagonist look more like a badass and less like a Euro techno-loving raver.

the bad



Microsoft is always trying new things with its Xbox Live service, but one of its more intriguing features – the MMO game show 1 vs. 100 – has been cancelled. The game followed the format of the TV show and offered prizes such as Microsoft points and XBLA game downloads.

the ugly



We all had high hopes for Alpha Protocol, but given the Obsidian-developed espionage RPG's disappointing sales Sega has nixed any idea of a sequel. "Let's speak very commercially – the game hasn't sold what we've expected, therefore we won't be doing a sequel," Sega West president Mike Hayes told CVG.

(BELOW) Blizzard's community went nuts when the company announced that anyone posting on the company's game forums (like Starcraft II: Wings of Liberty, shown) would have to use their real names going forward as part of Blizzard's new Real ID initiative that focused on bringing civility to the discussions. The outcry was so fierce that the company quickly reversed its decision.



“

Well, he doesn't have to be as much of a d--- about it, does he? I think there is a way he can do it without being a total p---.



Tim Schafer of Double Fine takes issue with what he perceives is Activision CEO Bobby Kotick's ruthless obligation to Activision's shareholders

”

The Technology of Rock Band 3

by Matt Miller

Rock Band 3 aims to close the gap between simulated video game music and actual instruments through the introduction of Pro mode. New instruments highlight this shift, allowing players to gradually learn the actual musical parts of Rock Band 3 songs. We asked Todd Baker, director of hardware at Harmonix, to fill us in on these new peripherals. We paid special attention to the Squier Stratocaster – an instrument that doubles as both a controller and a functioning electric guitar.

The Squier >>

TUNING **T**

"Due to technology in the neck the Squier does not need to be re-tuned to alternate tunings," Baker assures us. "No capos are needed to play the game." For guitar songs with alternate tunings or the required capos, players need to make those adjustments themselves to play the actual song outside of the game. As for the challenge of normally tuning the guitar, Baker says you don't need to be in tune to play within the game.

NECK **B**

"The Rock Band 3 Squier Stratocaster uses technology built into the neck and fingerboard of the guitar to track finger positions in real time," explains Baker. As a player holds down a particular fret and string, the onscreen display will show that note and string, giving players feedback on correct finger placement even before the note is picked.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE **C**

The Squier controller can detect hammer-ons and pull-offs, but the game won't include any functionality for playing harmonics or pick slides. The controller does recognize string bends, but the game won't do anything with that info for the initial release of Rock Band 3.

STRINGS

"The guitar transmits strum data for the six individual strings, allowing the game to give feedback to players as they make the leap from rhythm game rocking to real world skills," Baker says. These are actual guitar strings, and Pro mode demands that players play individual strings independently.

MUTE **M**

This soft pad can be raised and depressed to mute the strings – ideal when playing Rock Band 3 so you only hear the game audio.

GAME CONTROLS **F**

The Squier has some visual cues that give away its dual functionality as a game controller. The guitar includes a standard Squier volume control, but no tone knob. There's no whammy bar, and there's only one pickup – with no switch. The d-pad and face buttons are present for standard game navigation.

PRICE

Harmonix has yet to announce final pricing for the Squier controller. Standard Squier guitars range from \$150 to \$350, minus any fancy sensor tech, so take that for what you will. As for other included features, there's no word yet on whether the controller will include extra strings, a stand, case, picks, or other goodies.

PICKUP AND MIDI **P**

"It is a fully functional MIDI-enabled guitar," Baker tells us. "Players can unplug from the fun of Rock Band 3 and plug directly into an amp to rock for real." Alternately, while playing in the game, a cord will plug from the MIDI-Out (on the side of the guitar, not shown) to the MIDI converter box to communicate with Rock Band 3.

Want to see more close-up images of the Squier guitar from our hands-on time with the instrument? Check out gameinformer.com/mag for the full gallery





Keyboard

THE STANDARD

"The Wireless Keyboard Controller also functions as a MIDI keyboard, boasting a two-octave (C3 to C5) range and non-weighted, velocity-sensitive key bed," Baker describes. The 25-key instrument comes with a strap, and can be used to play the keyboard, guitar, or bass parts in Rock Band 3. It can also be used as a fully functional MIDI device outside of the game.

THE CUSTOM

Players who use the new Rock Band MIDI controller can play Rock Band 3 with any MIDI-enabled keyboard already in their home. "The game looks for MIDI notes C3 thru C5 (two octaves plus one note) in Pro Mode, Standard keyboard mode uses C4, D4, E4, F4, and G4 as inputs to the five lanes," Baker says.

TOUCH STRIP

"A touch strip is included – during sustained notes the player can move their finger along the touch strip and affect the sound of the performance," Baker explains.

The Mustang



BUTTONS

The Mustang has the same in-game functionality as the Squier, but with 102 buttons instead of actual strings and frets. "The spacings between the buttons (frets) are the same as on an actual guitar," Baker says. "The Mustang also uses six strings for right hand plucking and strumming." When asked about how the buttons hold up over the long term, Baker told us that the "underlying button technology is very reliable and has been extensively tested for long-term reliability."

ACCESSIBILITY

"Beginners with no previous guitar experience may find the Mustang more approachable, but both the Squier and the Mustang are very fun to play in the game," Baker suggests to players unsure of which guitar controller is right for them.



Drums

THE KIT

Gamers can purchase either the Wireless Pro-Cymbals Expansion Kit to supplement an existing wireless drum kit (note that excludes wired Rock Band 1 kits) or purchase a full Wireless Drum and Cymbal Kit. The new cymbals represent the hi-hat, crash, and ride.

PEDALS

"We added a modifier to allow the second pedal port to be used for either a hi-hat pedal in the drum trainer and drum fills, or a second kick drum pedal," Baker explains. "It's up to the player to decide what they prefer." A second pedal won't be included in the set.

IMPROVED

"The new Pro-Cymbals boast quieter sound with noise-dampening rubber covering the full surface area of the cymbal," Baker says. "The Pro-Cymbals also feature enhanced responsiveness – essential when playing in Pro mode. In addition, the redesigned cymbals now permanently rest at a pre-defined 10-degree angle, better positioned for accurate play."

Microphone

"In addition to three-part harmony detection, we have improved the way we detect and score non-pitched vocal parts, we have improved the overall gain stage, and we've added a pitch-correction option," Baker explains. The microphone design has not changed.





games

Back to Wonderland

American McGee's Alice
Franchise Returns

Electronic Arts has officially announced the long-awaited sequel to American McGee's Alice entitled *Alice: Madness Returns*. American McGee is back at the helm with his studio *Spicy Horse*, and the dark, mature atmosphere of the original is clearly evident. The game takes place 10 years after the first one, and Alice has been released from Rutledge Asylum into the care of a London psychiatrist. Of course, she still isn't safe, and neither is Wonderland. *Alice: Madness Returns* is scheduled to hit PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC in 2011.

Kinect

Priced at \$150

Software Selling for \$50

Microsoft unveiled the newly named Kinect at E3 in June, but at the time the company didn't reveal the price of the peripheral. Industry analysts and insiders soon speculated about a \$150 price point, which Microsoft has just made official.

The basic Kinect package gives you a Kinect Sensor, the Kinect Adventures game, and cables that allow you to hook up Kinect with either the new slim Xbox 360 or the older original and Elite models. A bundle that includes all of the above along with a new 4GB Xbox 360 can be yours on November 4 for \$300.

Microsoft says 15 games will be available at launch. The software – including third-party offerings like MTV Games/Harmonix's Dance Central – will be priced at \$50. In comparison, Sony is pricing first-party Move titles at \$40.



KINECT ADVENTURES

Packed-in game Kinect Adventures features 20 games such as a raft-riding co-op challenge and the dodge ball minigame. Microsoft says gamers who pre-order either Kinect bundle will get a token at launch for three exclusive adventures.



Price Comparisons

How does the Kinect pricing stand up to the competition?

- \$29⁹⁹** PlayStation Move navigation controller
- \$39⁹⁹** PlayStation Eye camera
- \$49⁹⁹** PlayStation Move motion controller
- \$99⁹⁹** PlayStation Move motion controller, PlayStation Eye camera, Sports Champions game, and demo disk bundle. (Adding a \$29.99 navigation controller brings you to \$130 for all the Move peripherals)
- \$149⁹⁹** Kinect Sensor and Kinect Adventures game
- \$199⁹⁹** Nintendo Wii system, Wii MotionPlus remote, Wii nunchuk controller, Wii Sports & Wii Sports Resort games
- \$299⁹⁹** Kinect Sensor, 4GB Xbox 360 slim system, and Kinect Adventures game
- \$399⁹⁹** PlayStation Move bundle (detailed above) and PlayStation 3 system



Paws Screens

by Jeff Cork

We live in interesting times. As the three major console manufacturers work to carve out their own slice of the marketplace, they're taking obvious cues from their competitors, too. While motion controls and 3D have been grabbing headlines, there's considerable overlap in another area: virtual pets.

Nintendogs may have brought the concept to a new generation of players, but the idea has been around for a long time – remember those Tamagotchi keychains, or the old PC game Dogz? The latest litter of games in the genre is more sophisticated than ever, but the concepts are the same: Let players raise and interact with cuddly creatures. Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony are all offering competing products in the near future. Let's take a quick look at all three.

EyePet (PlayStation 3)

EyePet was released in Europe last year, but clunky controls kept the game in the critical doghouse. Sony wisely decided to give it a Move makeover before releasing the game worldwide, and so far it seems that's exactly what the game needed. Players use the Move controller along with the PlayStation Eye camera to play with a furry critter of questionable provenance. With the camera focused on your floor, the EyePet pushes the illusion that the creature is right there with you. Wave your hand on the floor and he'll jump over it. Dangle keys in the air and he'll leap for them. The Move controller can be "transformed" into a variety of different toys and gadgets, such as a hair dryer, trampoline, or bubble blower.

EyePet is ideal for families who like playing together. Several people can compete for the attention of the EyePet, which is fun in its own right, and it's easy to pass the controller around for specific tasks. Some activities work better with several people, such as bathing the creature. As one person whips up a lather by rubbing their hands together, the other rinses the suds away with a showerhead.

The trickiest part about EyePet is that it may take some time to get accustomed to playing with a creature that doesn't exist. The creature scampers around the players' floor on the TV, but it's obviously just superimposing the character onto a backdrop that the camera captures. Younger players and people unfamiliar with games could have a tough time reconciling the idea of petting thin air. Compared to having to constantly clean up after an animal that sheds, however, it's a trade-off worth taking.

Kinectimals (Xbox 360)

Weren't we just talking about petting thin air? Microsoft's Kinectimals is a launch title for the company's upcoming Kinect peripheral. Unlike EyePet, which augments camera functionality with a controller, Kinectimals is experienced entirely through your body – no controller is necessary. This title puts an emphasis on jungle cats, giving players access to a menagerie that includes baby leopards, tigers, and panthers. Each has its own personality and disposition, and they can learn their name and a variety of tricks.

In addition to bonding with pets, players can also take direct control of the cats in a variety of minigames. We checked out an agility course recently, which had us balancing across narrow beams, leaning to avoid obstacles, and ducking to make our way through low pipes.

Kinectimals is presented through the first person, meaning that the screen shows the action as though your television was the glass in a zoo exhibit. You don't see your hands when you reach up and pet your cat, but instead are shown a pair of computerized hands that are superimposed over the creature. It's odd at first, but it's more intuitive than EyePet. Ultimately, it's a matter of personal preference.

Nintendogs + Cats (Nintendo 3DS)

Nintendo is expanding its blockbuster pet sim to include felines. The game retains much of what made the first one so popular while taking advantage of the new handheld's additional features. The 3D presentation is an obvious upgrade, but the subtle tweaks, such as using the system's camera to recognize masters' faces, are cool, too.

If you haven't played Nintendogs, the premise is simple. Players adopt canines based on popular real-world breeds, train them, and take them on walks. Items can be unlocked through the pet store, allowing players to personalize their dogs.

We're still waiting to see how the cat angle plays out. It'll be interesting to see if Nintendo lets trainers work their magic with their cats or have the animals maintain the independent streak that owners know and love. One thing's for sure: The bathing minigame is bound to be less dangerous than its real-world counterpart. ♦

APB is DOA

Realtime Worlds' first MMO fumbles its core concepts *by Philip Kollar*

The official forums in the month surrounding APB's release mirrored my own complaints with the game. The guns are imbalanced, especially for new players. The busted mission design often favors camping and cheap tactics. Missions have no real variety, and the world design is boring. All of these issues add up to one inescapable truth: APB is a frustrating mess of a game that's not likely to pull in many long-term players.

APB successfully executed its mission of focusing on being a great action game over a great MMO, but its one concession to the MMO genre — upgrading weaponry — is a huge negative when it comes to action games. As you grind through missions, your reputation with various contacts around the city of San Paro increases, allowing you to buy more powerful weapons. Unlike Call of Duty, you're not just unlocking a new weapon that may have a faster rate of fire but is balanced with other weaknesses. You're literally getting upgraded versions of the same guns that are better in virtually every way. Within days of launch, having a character with the starting gun puts players at a huge, noticeable, and not-very-fun disadvantage.

The dedicated hardcore community building around APB defends the game by saying the problems are more due to player skill than balance issues. They also argue that nobody should

be playing solo. That last bit, at least, is undeniable. APB is a multiplayer game through and through, and there's nothing to be gained from going it alone.

Even if you're in a group of relatively good players, though, you're bound to hit a dynamically generated PVP encounter where the other team knows the perfect rooftop to hide on in order to cheese the system and win without much effort. Some mission types are flat-out broken, such as defend-the-area objectives where you can lose after holding the location in question for five minutes because the opposition grabs it in the last 20 seconds before the timer runs down.

If you want evidence of APB's problems, you need look no further than the response from the developer. Two weeks after release, Realtime Worlds representative Neil Castle made a series of posts on the APB website about planned updates to the game. Included in the list of things being "overhauled" (Castle's word) is, well...almost everything. Changes to combat, driving, repetitive missions, and matchmaking are all in the works. Castle even admits

to the overabundance of camping in the game and says that Realtime Worlds is "addressing a number of the worst camping spots in the game."

It's always heartening to see a developer addressing the problems that people who paid for its game are having, but it's hard not to look at the huge list of things being changed and wonder why they weren't thought about more before the game was released. Maybe these planned updates will turn the game into something a lot more enjoyable, but as it stands, APB is far from the groundbreaking mix of GTA-style action and MMO that was promised. ♦



The "snap" emote is absolutely crucial



CHANGE IN ACTION: GLOBAL AGENDA GOES SUBSCRIPTION-FREE

As one of the other rare attempts at mixing action/shooter gameplay within an MMO structure, Global Agenda had some promise, but the community interest fizzled shortly after its February release. Months later, they've managed to kickstart buzz around the game with a post-E3 announcement that it is now subscription-free. A one-time purchase of the game lets you build your characters up to level 50 with no monthly or time-related fees.

Instead, players can purchase individual expansion sets as desired. The first expansion, Sandstorm, will be released free of charge this summer and adds more traditional open MMO questing zones to complement the instanced areas that make up most of the game. With action gameplay that feels comparable to Borderlands and a free trial that will let you reach level 15, now may be the best time to give Global Agenda a chance.

games

The King of the Ring Returns

EA Readies A New Fight Night for 2011

As good as the Fight Night series already is, EA Canada knows there is room for improvement. The newest game in the series – Fight Night Champion – is not only re-working the franchise's previously anemic career mode, it's also changing the sweat science of its renowned dual analog boxing system.

Scheduled for release on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 in 2011, Fight Night Champion explores the "seedier, darker" side of the sport, and we hope this re-imagining of the career mode pays off in terms of depth and drama. Looking at this image from the game, expect more blood to pour down the already detailed character models.

The right analog punch controls are also getting a makeover. Although details are scarce on what's different, EA is promising to make them even more realistic.



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Role-Players

*Putting the pieces in place for
the perfect sports game*

by Matthew Kato



EA's EASHL takes online team play to new levels



NFL 2K5's Crib feature included its own minigames

You always hear about how important teamwork is in sports, and nowhere is this cliché truer than when building the perfect sports game. It takes a lot of different parts to come together and work in harmony to achieve greatness, and in video game sports as in real life, all the action doesn't just happen on the field of play. Take a look at some of the games we think capture all the drama, intrigue, and even heartbreak of sports as we mash them up and piece together a team for the ages.



MLB 10: The Show highlights specific player positions



The ESPN-style shows in NFL 2K5 still stand out



Fans still clamor for another Mutant League Football



NBA 2K6 features a conversation system for player roles



Joe Montana II's commentary was the standard for many years



Sony's NBA The Life series attempted to capture the off-the-field drama of sports

The Online Arena

Online play in sports games has been around for a while, but only recently has a sports title delved deeply into the space and broken out of the standard head-to-head mold. NCAA Football 11 delivers Online Dynasty play and also adds social features like the ability to create and share newspaper-style stories about teams, and an extensive browser-based create-a-team/player application.

NHL 10's EA Sports Hockey League (EASHL) takes competitive online play to a new level by incorporating full team play, monthly playoffs, and a sense of teamwork and camaraderie among your virtual teammates that attempts to mirror the real-life sport.

Intangibles

Good players are often described as having intangibles, and it's the same with video games. Some of their features aren't huge, but they add that extra something special. NFL 2K5's Crib, where you could buy furniture and memorabilia for your sports mansion, was awesome. FIFA's Ultimate Team card concept is a great fantasy sports mode, and we're even partial to NFL 2K's first-person football. Old school sports gamers will certainly remember little touches like the Madden ambulance that would pick up injured players and NBA Jam's infamous use of Bill Clinton.

The Players Association

Players determine how far a team will go, and video games' handling of its sports stars in off-season franchise features represent an important part of the sports experience. NBA 2K6 has you talk to players about their roles on the team, imbuing the game with a player chemistry element. In terms of stats, MLB 2K9 draws on real-life baseball stats with Inside Edge and the Pro Evolution soccer series documents the peaks and valleys of your players' form via mid-season attribute adjustments. Finally, although it's not realistic, being able to upgrade your players via points in Baseball Stars is a cool RPG-like quality that more sports games should explore.

In terms of front office matters, the structure and HUD of EA's NFL Head Coach 09 do a great job of replicating the NFL offseason, even if the implementation is a little uneven. While the free agency bidding doesn't work, the scouting and draft day experiences would be welcome additions to Madden. When it comes to trades, NHL 10's trade matrix is a great tool, letting you set up a wants/needs board that guides what kind of players other teams send your way for consideration.

Recent games like NHL 10 and Sony's MLB The Show series have done a great job of putting you in the shoes of a single player and chronicling his career in their respective Be a Pro-type modes. Similar kinds of features like create-a-team and create-a-player tools have been in sports for years. NCAA 11's browser-based TeamBuilder tops our list, and we'd still like to see the create-a-play feature from the 2000-era Madden make its way back into the franchise.

Presenting Primetime

This category encompasses a wide range of game elements, each of which adds a special sheen to the experience. Madden NFL 10 and NFL 2K5 sport some of the best cutscenes around, and 2K5 in particular does a good job with weekly recap shows complete with highlights and a draft special featuring ESPN's Chris Berman.

People often don't think of the audio portion of a sports game, but thankfully Visual Concepts did when it let you import tracks for different situations in NFL 2K5. Similarly, College Hoops NCAA 2K7 has a custom chant creator and MLB 09 The Show lets you record your own crowd heckles.

In the commentary department, NHL 10's Gary Thorne and Bill Clement represent the best announcing crew in sports — with much respect to the originator, Joe Montana II Sports Talk Football. NBA 2K10's Kevin Harlan and Clark Kellogg also deserve mention. The duo's contextual commentary about events outside the individual game at hand detailing player streaks, slumps, trades, and team performance is a necessary step forward for sports games.

What Is the Best Spin-Off Game?

It's got to be Mutant League Football, a game built off the Madden '93 engine that takes some great liberties with the sport, including toxic waste, landmines, jet packs, ref bribes, trolls, player deaths, and more. The game is still missed after all these years, and fans demand its return every year.

What We'd Like to See

Sports video games have covered many of the real-life aspects of the sports they represent, but few have gotten the drama inherent in story-based narratives right. Games in Sony's NBA series have a three-year story arc called The Life that chronicle the rise of The Kid and his surrounding cast of players. The Life tells its story through extensive voice work, cutscenes, and gameplay scenarios. It is a little heavy-handed for some, but it is as close as we've gotten to expanding sports games' horizons from the yearly game schedule and front office moves. A sports role-playing game could be the next leap forward in the genre. ♦



Interview



Photo: Brent Beale

From Goalie To Game Designer

EA Sports' **David Littman** took a unique path into the world of game design. After a successful college hockey career, he played goalie professionally for a decade before joining the team at EA Sports. After helping revive the NHL series, he's now guiding EA's new hoops franchise, NBA Elite.

You have a background as a professional athlete. When you were getting towards the end of your career, how did you hit on trying the game industry?

That's the question every professional athlete has. [When you're playing] you don't think about much else, because sports is your whole life. My last year I was in Orlando, playing for the Orlando Solar Bears, which is a team in the International Hockey League. After I stopped playing, I took about a year off to think about what I wanted to do with my life. I thought of my biggest passion outside of hockey, and there was no doubt that it was video games.

Tiburou, where they make Madden, was five minutes from where I lived in Orlando. I called up John Shappert [now COO of EA] who was the general manager of Tiburou then. I told him who I was. He recognized my name from the hockey team. He said, "The only thing I have for you is game tester." So my first job in the game industry was a game tester on Madden 2002. It's the entry level, but I was just glad to get my foot in the door... It was funny, because after playing hockey for 10 years I was 33 at the time sitting next to 19-year-olds. They were like, "Who is this old guy?" But that's just something you have to live with.

You spent a long time working on the NHL series. When you came in, it was struggling. How did the team go about righting the ship?

When I [moved over to hockey], the first game I was put on was NHL 2003. I'll be the first to say that EA Sports games at that time were not trying to be authentic. We were not simulating real-life sports the way we do now. We were putting gimmicks in our games. They were fun games to play, but they really weren't capturing the true essence of the sport. I learned so much those first few years with some great guys and great teams. But when the generations changed and we moved to the 360 and the PS3, we sat down and asked, "What do we want NHL to be known for?"

Was the skill stick your idea or a collaborative idea? Were there disagreements about the direction for the series?

We brainstormed about it. The guy who was the head of NHL when this started was Dean Richards. We talked a lot about what we wanted to do. What really came out was the question "How do we give the tools to people?" We need to mimic real life. It's so fun to skate on the ice and shoot the puck. We wanted to bring that fun into the video game and not base it on buttons and gimmicks. As soon as we figured out the direction, it actually came pretty easy. We figured out that the right stick could be your hockey stick.

How does your background as a pro athlete influence you as a game producer? How does that make you different from other producers?

I believe that every team that's making a sports game needs at least one former professional athlete or, at the very least, one division one college athlete. You don't truly know the sport unless you've played it for a living. That's not to say that fans don't give incredible input into the making of our games, but every team needs an expert in that sport. But, to be honest, what I've learned more than anything is that, unless you put the right people in place building that game, you're not going to get anywhere.

Are there disadvantages to your background? Do you need an outside perspective to check your viewpoint?

If I didn't have my gaming background, I'd be in trouble. Just knowing hockey is not enough to make a great game. It helps – if you have the right team and you have gaming knowledge. A good example of that is our NBA basketball franchise. We've had NBA experts on that game for years. What I felt was missing from that franchise was the gaming experience. My role has switched this year to creative director of hockey and basketball. I'm not a basketball expert – not by a long shot. What I'm bringing is my gaming knowledge. I'm a hardcore sports gamer. I learn a lot just from playing against consumers.

How did you end up transitioning over to NBA? As you said, it's certainly not your background.

NBA, as everyone knows, was lagging behind a bit in Metacritic and in sales. The basketball category is down over the last five years in terms of overall sales. It's not just one franchise; it's the whole category. Internally, hockey and basketball were already working closely together on some features. I approached the executive producer, Brent Nielson, and said, "I have an idea that I really think can turn NBA around."

So I had this idea for a new control system that is based on NHL's control system. I shared it with Brent and the guys and they [thought it] could work really well. In hockey, the left stick is your skates and the right stick is your stick. In basketball, the left stick could be your feet and the right stick could be your hands. We had a guy do up a prototype – a brilliant software engineer here – and people were having a lot of fun playing it. It actually felt like real life. That's when my role switched a bit. But what's been amazing is how, since being involved with that team, I've seen what amazing engineers and leadership is there.

For a long time now, it seems like NBA Live has been rebooting every year. Are you committed to this new direction that Elite is taking over the long term?

One hundred percent committed. We have a three-year plan in place, just like we did with NHL back in '07. It is our goal to be the most authentic basketball simulation ever made. Peter Moore, who just mentioned this, said that we are so committed to this franchise becoming what FIFA is in soccer and what NHL is in hockey.

2K has been the market leader in basketball. What have you learned from how they approach things?

I play all sports games. It doesn't matter if it's EA Sports or the competition. In many cases, the competition's games have been better. I'll play the best games and learn from every one of them. I don't look at [2K] as who we're up against. We're up against all video games [competing] for a person's hard-earned dollar. In this economy, people are buying fewer games, and they might only buy one or two sports games a year. I'll take inspiration from anywhere. I take inspiration from my favorite designers of all time – Sid Meier and Will Wright. Those are my idols.

What can you bring into your work in sports from games you love in other genres?

The biggest thing I've taken from Sid Meier's games and Will Wright's games [has become] one of the biggest pillars for NBA and NHL – emergent gameplay. We want to get away from scripted gameplay where you only have a limited amount of control. We want people to do things we never thought possible. The Sims is a great example. When people had a Sim and boxed him in a room with glass walls and kept him prisoner – I don't think Will Wright ever thought that would happen. But it emerged in the gameplay. Those are the moments we want. I learned that from all those incredible games made by the masters.

Elite is going away from the traditional, TV-style horizontal viewing angle that's been traditional in basketball. Talk about that decision.

You're playing the game; you're not watching the game. You get to express yourself and do things on the basketball court. It's not about watching a basketball game play out. That's not only the camera angle, it's also the new controls. We don't want to see these frame animations play out just because you press a button. Sure, that looks good, but that's not gaming. The greatest thing about the medium we're in is that it's interactive.

In EA Sports Hockey League every player on the ice is a real person online. Do you want to bring that to other sports?

There's no doubt about it. A lot of people buy our games to play as Kobe or Sidney Crosby. But we want people to become a celebrity for being the best virtual hockey player or virtual basketball player in the world. Having your name on the back of your jersey and being the best team in the world with your friends, that could be a more powerful experience than winning a game with the Lakers. Most kids dream of being a professional athlete. But 99.9 percent of the population doesn't get to do that, and you can through our games. I hope over the next five to ten years we see in sports what you see in Korea, with people becoming stars by playing StarCraft. ♦

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1980 ATARI MANIA

Littman begins his love affair with video games with his Atari 2600

1985 DORM DAZE

Littman attends Boston College, joining the school's prestigious hockey program as a goalie

1987 DRAFTED

Littman is drafted by the Buffalo Sabres organization

1989 THE DOTTED LINE

After graduating from BC, Littman signs a contract with the Buffalo Sabres

1989 GOING PRO

Littman spends the '89-'90 season with the minor league team the Rochester Americans. He plays a couple of games with the Sabres over the next two years

1992 THE SHINING STATE

Littman is traded to the Tampa Bay Lightning. He also plays for Team USA at the World Championships

1999 LEAVING THE RINK

Littman plays his last year as a professional hockey player for the Orlando Solar Bears of the IHL in the '99-'00 season

2001 BACK IN THE GAME

Littman gets a job at EA Tiburou, as a game tester on Madden NFL 2002

2001 UP NORTH

Littman moves to Vancouver to work on NHL 2003 as an assistant producer

2006 NEW SKILLS

Littman becomes a game producer for NHL 07. The game gets some of the best reviews in the series' history

2007 MOVING UP

Littman is promoted to line producer of the NHL franchise. NHL 09 goes on to win 12 "sports game of the year" awards

2009 HOOP DREAMS

Littman becomes creative director for the hockey and basketball franchises at EA Canada

Samsung Series 8

3D TV

by Nick Ahrens

Samsung delivers a top-notch experience

With this past year's CES dominated by 3D TVs and active shutter glasses, the rebirth of 3D is the hottest topic in the tech industry.

Along with every other TV manufacturer,

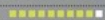
Samsung just released a bevy of new sets that support 3D. This Series 8 set is the flagship model, and for good reason.

At just 1.3 inches thick, this ultra-thin plasma television looks good from every angle. Unlike LCD, plasma televisions deliver true black colors because no light is being emitted from the screen when black images appear. With its 7,000,000:1 contrast ratio and vibrant color replication, this display is gorgeous. Forza 3 on Xbox 360 looked brilliant in 1080p, and so did the rest of the HD content we viewed.

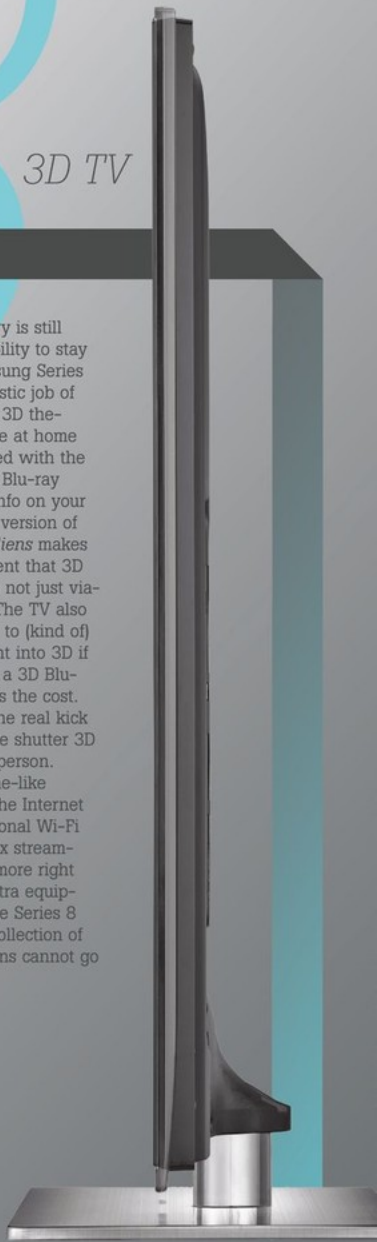
While the jury is still out on 3D's ability to stay relevant, Samsung Series 8 does a fantastic job of recreating the 3D theater experience at home when partnered with the company's 3D Blu-ray player (more info on your right). The 3D version of *Monsters vs Aliens* makes a good argument that 3D in the home is not just viable, but cool. The TV also has the ability to (kind of) turn 2D content into 3D if you're lacking a 3D Blu-ray

player. The only downside is the cost. The Series 8 is expensive, but the real kick in the pants is the price of active shutter 3D glasses – upwards of \$150 per person.

The TV also features the iPhone-like Samsung Apps that connect to the Internet via the Ethernet port (or an optional Wi-Fi adaptor). Users can access Netflix streaming, Twitter, Google, Hulu, and more right from your TV without buying extra equipment. With four HDMI inputs, the Series 8 is ready to accommodate your collection of game consoles. Home theater fans cannot go wrong with this set.

SUPERB 

\$2299 50"
samsung.com





1 | Samsung BD-C6900 Blu-ray Player

The C6900 has all the bells and whistles you could want on a 3D Blu-ray player. Along with the disc drive, this entertainment machine can tap into the Samsung Apps via an internal Wi-Fi antenna. Getting Netflix, YouTube, Twitter, and Pandora up and running is fast and easy. Blu-rays load quickly and look sharp. With support for DVD up-conversion and uncompressed audio from both Dolby and DTS, even hardcore home theater enthusiasts will walk away impressed. If you're looking for a better Blu-ray experience than the PS3, check out the C6900.

\$349
samsung.com

2 | Apple iPhone 4

Boot up the iPhone 4 and the visual upgrade over its predecessors is immediately noticeable. The new retina display presents photos, games, and everything else with clarity unmatched by other phones. The new front-facing camera is a nice addition, though it would be nice if the Face Time video calling wasn't Wi-Fi only. The new design aesthetic not only looks great, but also reduces the size of the phone, making it even thinner than last year's 3GS model. Shipping with the new iOS 4, the

iPhone 4 can finally multitask, one of a number of software improvements. While we haven't run into many of the dreaded antenna issues, it's clearly a problem for some users. Thankfully, Apple recently announced free cases for early adopters and future buyers that supposedly fix the problem. If you're not afraid of the bad press the company has received lately, the iPhone 4 is still the best iteration of the device yet.

\$199 16GB, \$299 32GB (with 2 year AT&T contract)
apple.com/iphone

3 | Olympus PEN E-PL1

While the PEN line of cameras is about as old as your dad, the concept of a micro four-thirds camera is much newer. The E-PL1 is the byproduct of a mad scientist cross-breeding a DSLR and a point-and-shoot. While Nikon and Canon are offering full DSLR's in the same price range, the PEN's size and design make it quite attractive. Performance-wise, the E-PL1 packs a 12.3-megapixel punch. The ultra-wide 14-42mm kit lens doesn't deliver too much zoom (thankfully you can buy additional lenses), but images within this range are sharp and colorful. While on-camera post-processing is usually something to avoid, the PEN's built-in effects aren't half bad. The PEN also delivers 720p video files, but

unlike most still cameras, captures decent footage. While definitely spendy, the PEN is a stylish, great quality kit that finds an interesting middle ground in the world of digital cameras.

VERY GOOD
\$599.99
olympusamerica.com

4 | Weta Arc Generator

The best part of having Peter Jackson's name attached to your film is gaining access to the legendary Weta studio. The PEN is a stylish, great quality kit that finds an interesting middle ground in the world of digital cameras. *District 9* die-hards will be excited to know that the sold-out Arc Generator replica of the one that main character Wikus Van De Merwe uses in the film is coming back in miniature form. This deadly alien laser was designed by Greg Broadmore of Dr. Gordobrot fame. Almost 10 inches long, each mini Arc Generator is hand painted.

\$99.99
wetanz.com

Head over to gameinformer.com/tech/nick to read expanded coverage and Nick's blog on gear and technology

MEDIA SHELF SUPER HUMAN



BEING HUMAN SEASON ONE

What happens when a ghost, werewolf, and another ghost live together? Drama and comedy, of course. Meet Mitchell, George, and Annie, three twenty-something adults trying to live a normal life without revealing who or what they are to the world around them.

\$39.98 (Blu-ray)
\$32.98 (DVD)
hbcamericashop.com



KICK-ASS

We've all asked it once or twice. Why aren't superheroes real? Dave Lizewski doesn't just ask, he acts. He also gets the crap kicked out of him a lot because he doesn't have any powers. Don't miss this hilarious take on superheroes that features some of the craziest action scenes in years courtesy of 11-year-old Hit-Girl.

\$29.98 (Blu-ray)
\$19.98 (DVD)
kickass-themovie.com



SCOTT PILGRIM'S FINEST HOUR

While it's sad to see it end, it feels like we've been waiting for book six for 100 years! Find out how it all ends as author Bryan Lee O'Malley sends off everyone's favorite evil ex-boyfriend slayer.

\$11.99
scottpilgrim.com

My Gamerscore is 1,650, and I've Never Felt Better

by Matt Helgeson
senior editor,
Game Informer

A few months ago, my original Xbox 360 bit the dust, finally succumbing to the dreaded red ring of death. I decided to upgrade to the supposedly better-engineered Elite model. While I was unboxing the new system, I did something that most 360 gamers would find unthinkable. Instead of importing my old Gamertag and Xbox Live account, I got a new 12-month subscription card, booted up the system, and started over from scratch. In a moment, all my gaming history from the last few years was gone, along with my Gamerscore and all of my achievements.

My motivation for starting fresh was a growing dissatisfaction with the endless race to collect achievement points. Achievements have never done much for me, other than occasionally spoil a crucial plot point of a game when I've looked into the list of unaccomplished challenges. I've never been a completist. Once I've finished the game's main storyline I rarely, if ever, tackle the remaining challenges to unlock alternate costumes or collectibles. A dizzying number of amazing games are released each year – more than anyone can play. I'd rather move on to the next adventure.

More importantly, I don't care to measure myself against other gamers. It's a meaningless metric. The leaderboards tout Live users with Gamerscores exceeding 650,000. Compared to that, what does it matter if you have 50,000 or even 200,000 points? More importantly, I expect that many gamers garner those megascors by cheating or farming terrible games that are overly generous with achievements. So, congratulations? I don't believe someone is a better gamer than someone else just because of some number. Anyone who plays games is a gamer – be that game *Oblivion* or *Farmville*.

Games are entertainment, and I don't need to have my free time graded against others. I had a great time playing *Red Dead Redemption*; I don't feel bad because I didn't shoot some arbitrary number of rabbits or unlock a fancy suit for John Marston. I got what I needed out of the experience – fun. Once that's over, I'm out. Nobody awards me points for watching the DVD extra features or the director's commentary track on a movie I rented, so why should my gaming choices be any different?

As life becomes busier by the day (by the time you read this, I will be the father of a newborn baby girl), chasing achievements seems like a poor investment of time – especially to prop up a numerical score that would never be

impressive anyway. The more life online becomes an endless competition – how many Facebook friends do you have? How many Twitter followers? What's your Gamerscore? – the more inclined I am to withdraw. I'd rather just play the games I want to play for as long as they hold my interest.

I'm not against achievements. Millions of gamers love them, and I'm all for anything that makes people's gaming experience more fun. But for me, the time spent trying to chase them doesn't usually add to my enjoyment of a game. Getting 100 points for completing a boss battle that I was going to finish regardless isn't really an "achievement" so much as a meaningless pat on the head. If the goal is interesting or enjoyable, chances are I'm going to want to tackle it. If not, no amount of padding to my Gamerscore is enough to make it worthwhile.

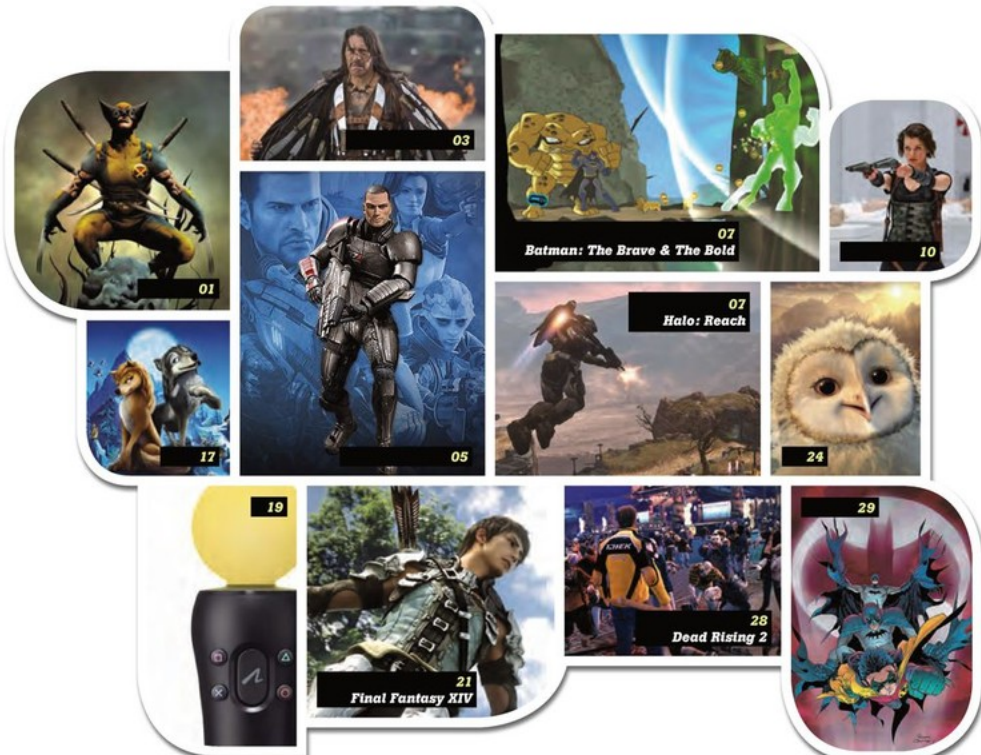
If developers want me to complete their extra challenges, make them an interesting, integral part of the experience. I was drawn to the hidden "The Truth" glyphs and the assassin's tomb challenges in *Assassin's Creed II*. Finding them was a joy, because every bit of enigmatic video footage I found drew me deeper into the complex web of intrigue Ubisoft Montreal created between the Templars and Assassins. Each tomb I found delivered fun, fast platforming to the already excellent mix of open-world exploration and combat. They were a welcome change of pace, and something I looked forward to finding. I didn't care how many points I got for completing them – or if I got any points at all.

To me, gaming is about becoming engrossed in a virtual world and an epic adventure. The little bubbles that pop up onscreen and inform me I've been awarded points only serve to break that illusion. A high Gamerscore doesn't make me a gamer. If I want competition, I can go online and test my skills against others, or better yet, play with friends in any number of amazing co-op games. So go ahead and make fun of my Gamerscore. I'm done with it.

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 Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com



September

01 Another Day, Another Superhero Goes to Hell

A new Wolverine series kicks off today! Wolverine's soul is trapped in hell, yet his body is still alive and well in the real world. Is someone else's soul inside of it? Marvel won't come out and say it outright, but this story has *Freaky Friday* spirit written all over it. When you read it, just pretend that Mel Gibson's soul is inside of Wolverine.

03 Steven Seagal Gets a Job

Remember those fake trailers in *Grindhouse*? Of course you do, because they were great. The best one, *Machete*, is a real movie now and you can go see it in theaters today. Directed by Robert Rodriguez, this movie has an implausibly star-studded cast, including Danny Trejo, Robert De Niro, and Jessica Alba. To offset all that good acting, it also features Lindsay Lohan and Steven Seagal.

05 New Friends For Your Plastic Master Chief

From comic books and novels to an upcoming feature film, *BioWare* is turning *Mass Effect* into an entertainment juggernaut. Is it the next *Star Wars*? Time will tell, but we can tell you George Lucas won't like seeing another science fiction brand on toy shelves. The first series of *Mass Effect 2*-based action figures hits store shelves today. This line consists of Commander Shepard (male), Grunt, Tali, and Thane.

07 New Releases

- *Arcania: Gothic 4* (PS3, 360, PC)
- *Batman: The Brave & The Bold* (Wii, DS)
- *H.A.W.X. 2* (PS3, 360)

- *Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep* (PSP)
- *NHL 11* (PS3, 360)
- *The Office: Season 6 (Blu-ray, DVD)*
- *R.U.S.E.* (PS3, 360, PC)
- *Smallville: Season 9 (Blu-ray, DVD)*
- *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions* (PS3, 360, Wii, DS)

10 It Just Won't Die

Gamers have begged for Paul W.S. Anderson to stop making *Resident Evil* movies ever since the first installment hit screens and rubbish piles. Proving once again that no one cares what you think, another by-the-numbers sequel hits theaters today with *Resident Evil: Afterlife*. Like its predecessor, it features zombies, a virus, model (and fake actress) Mila Jovovich, and none of the cool stuff from the games.

14 New Releases

- *Car Toon: Matt's Tall Tales* (Wii)
- *Fancy Nancy* (DS)
- *Fringe: Season 2 (Blu-ray, DVD)*
- *Front Mission Evolved* (PS3, 360, PC)
- *Gormiti: The Lords of Nature* (Wii, DS)
- *Grag Hastings: Paintball 2* (PS3, 360)
- *Halo: Reach* (360)
- *Legend of Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* (PS3, 360, Wii, DS)
- *The Lord of the Rings: Aragon's Quest* (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, DS)
- *Lost in Shadow* (Wii)
- *Phantasy Star Portable 2* (PSP)
- *Phineas and Ferb Ride Again* (DS)
- *Scobby Doo! And the Spooky Swamp* (Wii, DS)
- *Tron: U.S.* (PS3, 360, Wii)
- *UFC: Undisputed 2010* (PSP)
- *Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's Dual Transfer* (Wii)

17 Like a Visual Spanking

Are you babysitting your enemy's kids today? Drop them off at the mall so they can watch *Alpha and Omega*. No member of the Game Informer staff could even sit through the trailer without asking what they did to deserve such a punishment. Honestly, we watch a lot of bad trailers (since most movies suck so bad these days), and this is the worst we've seen since... last month.

19 PlayStation Move Brings Waggle to PS3

Sony's answer to Nintendo Wii hits store shelves today along with 13 titles designed to work with this new peripheral.

- *Brunswick Pro Bowling*
- *Echocalypse II*
- *EyeShot*
- *Kung Fu Rider*
- *The Lord of the Rings: Aragon's Quest*
- *Resident Evil 5*
- *R.U.S.E.*
- *Sports Champions*
- *Start the Party*
- *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2010*
- *Time Crisis: Razing Storm*
- *Toy Story 3*
- *Tumble*

21 New Releases

- *Civilization V* (PC)
- *Crash: The Wrath of Cortex* (DS)
- *Final Fantasy XIV* (PC)
- *Flo's Twisted World* (Wii)
- *Professor Layton and the Unwound Future* (DS)
- *Samurai Warriors 3* (Wii)
- *Test Drive Unlimited 2* (PS3, 360, PC)
- *True Crime* (PS3, 360, PC)

24 O RLTY!

Hollywood makes two kinds of movies: films nobody wants and CG movies about owls. Today, we have releases in each category. The owl-less *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* stars Shia LaBeouff, who will probably ruin it the same way he ruined *Transformers* and *Indiana Jones*. Thankfully, you can go see *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* instead. It's directed by Zach Snyder (of *300* and *Watchmen* fame) and stars the industry's top animated owl talent.

28 New Releases

- *Dead Rising 2* (PS3, 360)
- *Disney's Sing It Party Hits* (PS3, 360, Wii)
- *FIFA 11* (PS3, 360, PSP)
- *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock* (PS3, 360, Wii)
- *Junior Mystery Stories* (DS)
- *Morpho* (360)
- *MySims: SkyHeroes* (PS3, 360)
- *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2* (360)
- *Papato Pro Boss Fishing 2010* (PSP)
- *Scraper: Spelling Bee* (DS)
- *Shawn White Skateboarding* (PS3, 360)
- *Superman/Batman: Apocalypse* (Blu-ray, DVD)

29 Bruce Wayne Breaks Space/Time/Comic Writing

Comic book characters never stay dead. Bruce Wayne died, and he'll be resurrected today in Grant Morrison's *Batman and Robin*. How does Bruce come back? The story is complicated (and stupid), it involves a journey through time, and Batman becoming a caveman, pilgrim, pirate, and well... you'll have to read the rest to find out.

2010



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

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

» **Publisher**
Warner Bros.
Interactive
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Rocksteady Studios

» **Release**
2011

Since the events of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, warden Quincy Sharp has taken credit for Batman's successful quelling of Joker's uprising and used that momentum to win Gotham City's mayoral election. The first of his broad-sweeping plans is to proclaim Arkham Asylum and Blackgate Prison unfit to house criminals. Sharp buys up a large swath of Gotham's slums and walls it off, stocking the perimeter with highly trained armed mercenaries from an outfit named Tyger. All prisoners are transported to this new facility dubbed "Arkham City" approximately a year after the events at the asylum. They are given only one rule under threat of death: do not try to escape. No other policing takes place inside, leaving a mix of two-bit criminals and super villains to eke out an existence in this lawless, ruthless ecosystem.

Sharp brings in a mysterious psychiatrist named Hugo Strange to head the new Arkham. Hidden from the eyes of the public, Strange is rumored to be up to terrible things, but nothing can be proven. Anyone who investigates his past or Arkham itself seems to disappear, most likely within the walls of the prison city.

Batman believes this is a ticking time bomb and has kept a watchful eye on Arkham City for months, looking for any excuse to break into the well-guarded prison. Recently admitted inmate Two-Face needs to gain respect and followers fast or risk being eaten alive by the other super villains on the inside. Both sides of his psyche agree that the best way to accomplish this is with a high-profile show of power: a public execution of Catwoman. Given their past, Batman has no choice but to enter this hellish domain to save her and uncover what's really going on. With an all-new bag of tricks, he may just survive the night.

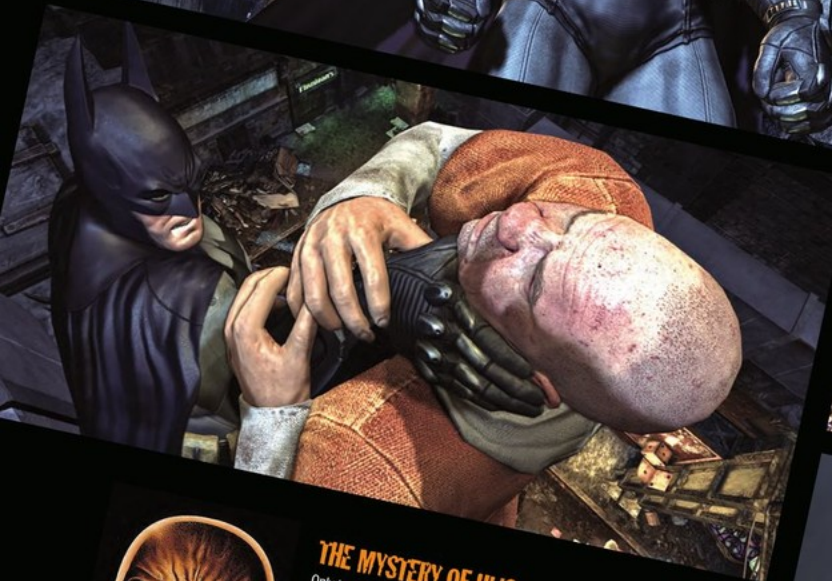


DIVING INTO DARKNESS

BATMAN

ARKHAM CITY

BY BRYAN VORE



THE MYSTERY OF HUGO STRANGE

Only hardcore comic book fans will recognize the name of Arkham City's new warden, Hugo Strange. This villain actually appeared in comics before the Joker, and has popped up intermittently throughout Batman history for the past 70 years. However, Rocksteady made it clear that this is the first time Batman has encountered Strange in the "Arkham-verse." It's impossible to know exactly what the developer has planned, but a character profile from the first game drops many enticing hints:

First gaining fame as a psychiatrist who declared that he'd fully analyzed the Dark Knight from afar, Professor Hugo Strange lent credence to his own claims by deducing Batman's true identity as Bruce Wayne. However, his interest in the Batman turned into a deranged obsession, and he's used his medical expertise to hatch a series of bizarre plots based around genetics and mind control in order to defeat the Batman and possibly take his place. Strange's fragile mental state has left him with intermittent knowledge of Batman's true identity, a fact that hangs over Bruce Wayne's head – for if Strange ever snaps completely, Batman's greatest secret might be revealed...

- » ATTRIBUTES**
- » Brilliant psychological analyst
 - » Trained to physical perfection
 - » Obsessed with Batman and his secret identity
 - » Plagued by schizophrenic episodes that leave him confused and dangerous





Grappling and gliding are Batman's preferred methods of transportation around Arkham City



ARKHAM

INSTITUTE FOR THE CRIMINALLY INCLINED

Following a Phenomenon

North London-based developer Rocksteady Studios is no stranger to staggering pressure. Despite the lofty expectations of millions of Batman devotees worldwide, this 70-plus person team proved that it's possible to transform a seemingly cursed licensed game property into a masterpiece – and they made it look easy. The way the team naturally integrated Batman's characters, combat, gadgets, and dark tone into a compelling gameplay formula made gamers wonder why no one had been able to do so before. This was all from a studio with only one game to its credit (2006's *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*).

"I think there's always pressure to make the best choice at any given moment," says studio director Jamie Walker. "Obviously, we're aware the fans want a great Batman game. I don't think that's any different from when we started the journey to where we are now."

This time around, Rocksteady is excited to have a successful gameplay foundation to build upon rather than starting from scratch. But that doesn't mean the studio is content to simply recycle the asylum environment and toss in a few new villains.

"We want to top everything that we did in the last game," says Arkham City director Sefton Hill. "We didn't want to do [an Arkham] 1.5. We want to make the same jump we made from nothing to Arkham. We want to make that same jump again for Arkham City – that same level of ambition."

A New Direction

Our live demo begins with Batman perched atop a building overlooking Gotham's prison city as a light sprinkling of snow falls in the night. Roving gangs of inmates wreak havoc below. His communicator crackles to life.

"Where is she, Alfred?" Batman asks.

"Miss Kyle was last seen in the vicinity of the Solomon Wayne Courthouse," replies his faithful butler.

"That's where Two-Face has been setting up camp."

"Let's hope she is still in one piece when you find her. Mr. Dent's fascination with the number two could prove fatal to Catwoman."

Batman takes a flying leap off the ledge, dive-bombing head first toward the streets below at an alarming speed. At the last moment, he spreads his cape and swoops back up into the sky. Soaring smoothly through the night air, Batman spots the courthouse in the far distance. He fires his grappling gun to the nearest skyscraper and uses the pull from the retracting rope to slingshot himself higher.

It's shocking to see the Batman we know from the mostly enclosed Arkham Asylum navigating open world city streets. After all, an overly broad, boring Gotham is exactly what the team wanted to avoid last time around. In the sequel, incorporating Gotham in an exciting way is the number one priority. "What we wanted to do was glide through the Gotham streets and fight crime, but we wanted to do it in a way that feels concentrated," Hill says. "What we wanted to do in building Arkham City was to create a place with the same attention to detail that we built with Arkham Island – to create something where there's a story around every corner. It's not a big, empty, expansive world. We wanted something with a real richness to it. We're trying to create the most detailed and rich city that has ever been realized in a video game."



Two-Face puts Catwoman on trial

Crooked Court

Batman drifts to the courthouse rooftop and sneaks through a window. It's immediately evident that Two-Face has made this place his own. Half of the interior is an immaculate, classic courtroom while the other side has been trashed and burned. Catwoman, bound in ropes, dangles upside down over a vat of acid while Two-Face paces back and forth flipping his famously marred silver dollar. A couple dozen inmates have come to see the show.

"The only way to get by in this place is to get ourselves some respect," says Two-Face's more sensible side, all that remains of former district attorney Harvey Dent. "Fear, that's how we get respect. Show them all how we do things," replies his twisted and disfigured side in a noticeably more sinister voice. "We should be fair, though. This is a place of justice after all. Screw justice. Kill her and they'll all fear us. Bring out the defendant."

"You certainly know how to keep a girl hanging, Harv." Catwoman says. "Hey, have you had some work done?"

Two-Face strikes her across the face. "That's for spying on us. No one spies on us," he threatens.

"I'm sorry. I've been a bad kitty," she teases. "Untie me and I'll make it up to you."

"Let's see if the coin thinks you're telling the truth," Two-Face snarls. "Your court is now in session."

As the cutscene comes to a close, Batman scans the area with his blue-tinged detective vision and notices a single armed guard above his position. He grapples to a platform behind the enemy and, instead of automatically dangling from the ledge like before, Batman now has the option to instantly flip up into a roll that maintains his forward momentum. He pops out of the roll right behind the armed guard and initiates a

chokehold. Like Gears of War's reload mechanic, players can now hit the attack button again at just the right time to bring down enemies faster.

A wire stretches above the scene, and Batman creeps along it to get a better vantage point. He scans the inmates and finds one with a knife in need of disarming. With a simple button press, Batman attaches his grapple hook to the wire, jumps off, and goes into a swing kick that knocks the guy across the room like a golf ball. Batman lands in the middle of the audience. Several goons run away in terror, but plenty stick around for a beating.

Batman vaults over the closest one, casually spraying some explosive gel on his back in the process (all gadgets now play a key role in combat). Two enemies swing at him in quick succession and Batman palms both fists, crushing their hands until they're left writhing on the floor. As he walls away on another foe, a new group fills in behind him. Batman summons a colony of bats to the scene to disorient and panic his attackers. Two-Face fires a pistol intermittently, forcing Batman to perform a series of gymnastic dodges. After the bats have moved on, Batman pulls out a detonator and hits the switch. The previously placed gel blasts several enemies. The last two inmates get desperate. One picks up a chair and chucks it at Batman. Just when it's about to crack him in the head, Batman reaches up and catches it, instantly throwing it back. One left. Batman simply tosses him in the air and finishes him with a swift kick to the back that sends him flying into a wall. Of course, this finisher is presented in glorious slow motion.

"Because we felt that the system for [Arkham

Asylum] was well-refined, we didn't want to deconstruct that and pull it apart and make a completely different combat system. We wanted to build on it," Hill says. New elements like multiple simultaneous counters, gadget incorporation, and projectile counters are all in service to the much larger crowds Batman will be fighting. "Basically, the idea was to balance it so I'm focusing on the guys who are nearest to me because they can hit me, but there might also be guys throwing things at me," Hill explains. "There can be guys with guns at the back. So I have to manage the whole crowd rather than everyone funneling in front of me just waiting for me to hit them."

Stay of Execution

With all of his goons out of commission, Two-Face makes one final play. "Objection," he says before shooting Batman. "Overruled."

With this nuisance out of the picture, Two-Face turns to his prey. "Heads or tails, kitty cat?"

"Which one ends with me getting out of here alive?" she asks.

Two-Face flips the coin and the scarred side lands facing up. "Not this one. Time to die."

"I vote for a stay of execution,"

continued on page 56



Wire walking allows for more tactical predator set ups

The armored thug in the center can take a lot more punishment

The new dive bomb in action

BATMAN AND CATWOMAN: A COMPLICATED PAST

Rocksteady emphasizes that Batman and Catwoman's relationship is still very early in the Arkham universe, but they have varying degrees of romance and rivalry. "He knows that she has crossed the line sometimes and broken the law. She's a thief. That's what she does," says director Sefton Hill. "But he thinks that she's someone who can be saved. Obviously there is a spark between them, which neither of them is willing to acknowledge. Batman's too in control of his emotions to express that, and doesn't have many friends in this place, so Catwoman's definitely someone he needs on his side."



Enemies will have much more variety in their appearance this time



GOTHAM CITY

ESCAPE IS IMPOSSIBLE

GANG TERRITORY

One major element that Rocksteady wants to explore is the order that forms out of complete lawlessness within the walls of Arkham City. High-profile villains like Joker and Two-Face have already recruited many prisoners to their divergent causes. "[Inmates] are now seeking protection by joining gangs, which inevitably means becoming part of the turf war and everything that is caught up with being a gang member in a broader power struggle," says Rocksteady marketing game manager Dax Ginn. How these various factions and territories work into gameplay is anyone's guess, but players can keep track of these gangs through Batman's criminal database. Maybe he can try to play different sides against each other or take them down one by one and start his own army.

Batman can now counter two attacks at once



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Catwoman says as she claws the ropes off her wrist and slashes him in the face.

Two-Face recoils in pain, clutching his eyes and cursing at her. Catwoman frees her legs and gets right side up. A grappling hook fires from out of nowhere at Two-Face and soon enough he's the one dangling above the acid.

"I thought it was only cats who had nine lives," Catwoman (a.k.a. Selina Kyle) teases as Batman walks into view. "Anyone ever tell you that you're full of surprises?"

"Figured you could use my help, Selina," he replies.

"You're right. I think I chipped a nail back there."

"Funny."

"So what do you need, Mr. Detective? I'm guessing it's something to do with our friend here and how he fits into what Professor Strange has got cooking."

"What do you know, Selina?"

"Not much. No one knows anything about the mystery man. It's like he never existed before Sharp hired him. But there is definitely something going on with him and Joker."

"That's not what I wanted to hear."

"It gets worse. The clown has a plan to destroy Gotham and take you out at the same time. You should get out of here. Leave Joker. He'll be dead soon."

"I can't. He's even more dangerous when backed in to a corner."

As if on cue, a glowing green laser dot traces its way up Catwoman's snug yet tactical suit. Next we see her in the crosshairs and hear a familiar voice. "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat. Watch me kill your favorite cat." Joker's disembodied voice tries to burst into his trademark maniacal laughter but he's cut short by a violent coughing fit, a symptom of some mysterious illness [see sidebar].

"The ex-district attorney here said something about..." Catwoman says before Batman pulls her out of the way of Joker's bullet. "What the hell?"

"You're not safe here. No one is," Batman warns as he presses her against a wall.

"Nine lives, remember?" Catwoman quips as she cracks her whip up into the rafters of the courthouse, pulls herself up, and sneaks off into the night.

Crime And Punishment

The next step is to trace the sniper shot back to its source. Batman activates detective vision and finds the bullet lodged in the floor. He looks up and spots where it entered the window and is able to trace the shot to a far off tower. "We have more complicated crime scenes than in the first game," Hill assures. "As you go through it gets more in depth and complicated, and we actually have puzzles based around the forensics as well."

He climbs out the window he came in and hears a ruckus down below as a group of thugs gathered around the front door entreats Batman to come out and fight them. Ignoring them, he pulls out the line launcher, a gadget he didn't have access to until late in the game last time, and uses it to zip toward the tower.

"When you're doing a sequel to a game like this, what we didn't want to do is have the same sort of upgrade path," Hill says. "We're going to start you with a number of the key gadgets that you earned when you played through the first game. And also we're going to upgrade all of those gadgets."

Along the way, Batman hears a group of inmates beating on someone and comes to a halt on the line. He swings up to perch on the wire and triggers a zoomed-in first-person view. Batman now has access to a criminal database that tracks all of the major villains and their followers in the city. Since this ties in with detective vision, one of the instigators glows bright green to indicate his allegiance with the Riddler.

Batman dive-bombs off the wire straight into the asphalt streets, and his impact pushes everyone back. Using the visual filter, Batman is able to beat up the inmates while trying to avoid hitting the Riddler's man. Once everyone is down he grabs the final prisoner by the neck for an interrogation.


"Riddler - what's he up to?" Batman demands.

"Oh crap, okay, okay! I just help him out," the inmate pleads. "There's a bunch of us. We give him info and he doesn't put us in those crazy machines of his."

"It's been a pleasure," Batman growls before knocking the informant out.

This new interrogation system replaces the Riddler maps from the first game that marked all of the trophy locations in a certain area. "We're definitely adding more depth to Riddler's experience," Hill says. "The

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One of Batman's many new silent takedowns



THE SICK CLOWN

Back when Arkham City was first teased in a trailer at the Spike Video Game Awards last December, it showed Joker in very ill health. There were many references to Joker's sickness in the demo we saw, but we never laid eyes on his condition. The most likely prognosis is that he's suffering from the effects of overdosing on Venom at the end of the last game, but Rocksteady would not confirm this. Perhaps his disease is something else entirely.

STALKING THE STREET'S WITH A FRIEND?

Gliding around Gotham and beating up criminals in co-op seems like it would be tremendous fun. Of course, Rocksteady wouldn't say anything about multiplayer at this time. However, Catwoman seems like a more than capable ally, and we did see a poster for a cancelled *Flying Graysons* show. Will Robin make his Arkham debut as a co-op partner?



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trophies around the world are not going to be as easy to get as they were last time. There are going to be little puzzles to get to them."

A glowing green question mark beckons Batman from a nearby rooftop, but as soon as he gets close to it a mechanical trap encases it. When he backs off, it opens again. Batman pulls out the Bat Claw and fires it at the trophy, which latches on and pulls it toward him. While this is a simple example from early in the game, Rocksteady promises trickier puzzles and other helpful functions of the Bat Claw's new fetching mechanic.

Continuing on, Batman hears a payphone ringing on the streets below with a group of prisoners huddled around it. They speak of the urban legend that has gone around Arkham City where anyone who answers a payphone supposedly ends up dead. Batman listens to them all daring each other into picking it up until he's had enough and jumps down nearby. Players can now use a new taunt button to scare off less courageous enemies.

"You're all going down," Batman threatens.

"It's Batman! Get out of here!" a prisoner shouts.

Everyone scrams without a fight and Batman strolls up to the still ringing phone. He picks up.

"Hello, Batman. Do you recognize my voice?"

"Zsasz," he replies.

This serial killer made only a brief appearance in the first game threatening to electrocute an asylum guard. This time around he'll have a long form side-mission that players can dig into. "We have a number of these stories, which are linked to key characters and their stories within Arkham City," Hill says. "You obviously have the main story that runs through, but you have these parallel side stories. If you want to jump in and find out about those, they're optional but they're all really worthwhile."

His Girl Harley

After his chat with Zsasz, Batman follows the sniper bullet trajectory to a church bell tower. A small group of new armored enemies block the entrance. These guys can block most normal attacks, so Batman has to use his cape swipe to stun them first. This opens them up to a new quick and brutal attack called a beat down. Basically Batman unleashes a rapid flurry of painful-looking punches that'll knock out most any enemy whether he's wearing protection or not. After dispatching the guards, Batman sneaks into the church and hears a familiar voice.

"Coming through, B-man!" shouts Harley Quinn as she charges towards him with a series of

handsprings and flips. Much like the last time Joker's girl tried this in Arkham Asylum, Batman sidesteps her attack and tosses her aside.

"Let the lady go, battfreak, or the doctors all get a bullet in the head," warns one of several machinegunning Joker members. The church has become a makeshift triage center that humanitarian aid workers have convinced Strange to allow within the prison.

"I think you should do what he says. It would be a shame to get blood all over my nice new outfit," she says. Instead of a nurse outfit, Harley now wears red and black pants and a matching midriff-baring top. Her face paint has been scaled back to a much more subtle degree and now she has a Joker tattoo on one of her hips peeking out over her waistband. She circles around Batman while explaining that she's keeping him away from Joker due to his illness. Harley apparently kidnapped a doctor to help him out, but she was unable to diagnose the problem. Rocksteady notes that this face-to-face encounter with Harley is part of a wider philosophy to bring Batman closer to the villains more often this time around without putting them behind some kind of protective Plexiglas or metal bars.

Harley slips out of the church, leaving the goons with guns to deal with Batman. At any time players could go after these enemies, but Rocksteady has put several lines of dialogue in for those who want to just stand there and listen to these knuckleheads try to figure out what to do next.

"Keep it together. He's ours. What's he gonna do?" one says.

"Good point. I mean, it's not like he's got a reputation

The line launcher will be available at the start of the game



A COLORFUL CAST

Rocksteady confirmed the return of three principal cast members in Arkham City: Kevin Conroy as Batman, Mark Hamill as Joker, and Arleen Sorkin as Harley Quinn. It's a mystery who will play Two-Face and Catwoman, though they could always mine more actors from *Batman: The Animated Series*. Other characters we've seen or heard referenced include butler Alfred Pennyworth, Jack Ryder, Aaron Cash, and Oracle/Barbara Gordon. Interestingly, a radio conversation between Batman and Alfred during the demo revealed that Oracle has not been answering her cell phone lately. Could she be in danger? Will she appear in the game this time instead of simply chatting over the radio? It'll be a while before we know for sure.

for breaking free of traps and smashing people's faces. Oh no, that's right. That's exactly what he does," retorts another.

After much debate they all decide to shoot on the count of three, but by that point Batman has already thrown down one of his new smoke pellets and grappled out of the situation. The enemies scatter throughout the church in panic. Batman maneuvers over to a ledge and notices an enemy standing directly under him with the help of his detective vision. With a single button press Batman dangles himself over the edge and chokes out the foe with his legs. Next he creeps along at ground level behind two thugs and smashes their heads together for a double takedown. The final target has taken a doctor hostage inside a confessional booth. Batman maneuvers behind the booth and takes advantage of the new weak wall system by bursting through like Kool-Aid Man and subduing the criminal. With the doctors now safe, Batman ascends the bell tower.

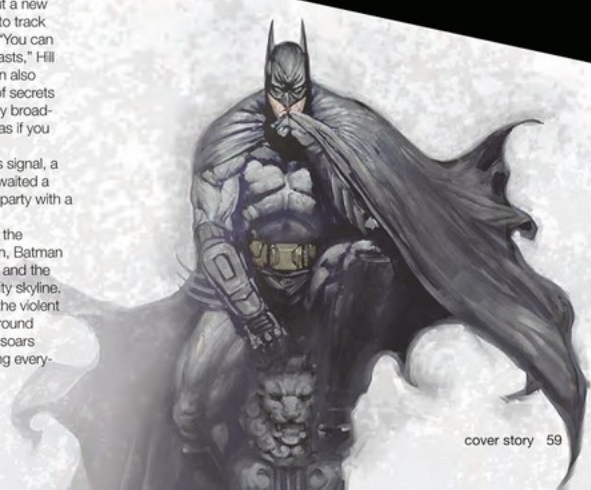
Bombs Over Gotham

Batman pulls himself up into the highest chamber, which contains a sniper rifle with a transmitter attached and a large stockpile of clown-themed

explosives. Instead of getting the hell out of there like a rational person, Batman pulls out a new gadget called the broadcast analyzer to track the location of Joker's transmissions. "You can use it to scan around different broadcasts," Hill says. "That's the GCPD dispatch. I can also tune into Gotham FM. There are lots of secrets here for players to find. Lots of mystery broadcasts that will lead you to different areas if you search around."

Once Batman gets a lock on Joker's signal, a static-laced message plays out. "I've waited a long time for this, Bats. Let's start the party with a bang. Hahahahaha! 5, 4, 3..."

There's no time to climb back down the tower. With the quick press of a button, Batman smashes through the nearest window and the camera cuts outside to the Arkham City skyline. His dark silhouette narrowly escapes the violent tower explosion. Plummeting to the ground below, Batman spreads his cape and soars upward towards the screen, enveloping everything in blackness. ♦





HALO

- » Platform
Xbox 360
- » Style
1-4 Player Shooter
(16-Player Online)
- » Publisher
Microsoft Game Studios
- » Developer
Bungie
- » Release
September 14th

REACH

FIGHTING THE INEVITABLE: REACH'S FINAL STAND AND BUNGIE'S FAREWELL TO HALO

With the Halo franchise out of Bungie's hands after Reach launches in September, the studio intends on going out with a bang. While you'll assuredly see more Spartans and Covenant gracing the Xbox for years to come, the developer that turned the series into a phenomenon will no longer be at the helm. Microsoft already has 343 Studios managing the intellectual property, and it's just a matter of time before they announce the developer behind the next game. For those faithful to its original developer, Reach is the last hurrah for Halo as we've known it. *by Dan Ryckert*





HANDS-ON

WITH THE LAST DAYS OF REACH

As a member of Noble Team, my objective is to determine the combat capabilities of a Covenant strike force on the planet of Reach. Alongside the sniper Jun, I navigate a treacherous cliffside in the rain and under the cover of night. I take out an unsuspecting Elite from behind, only to discover numerous dropships transporting more enemies into the area by the dozens. Jun attacks from afar with high-velocity rounds that can drop an Elite from 200 yards, while I dispatch various Grunts and Jackals with my DMR and any enemy weaponry I come across. After several more encounters (including one with a massive, tusked indigenous creature that attacks Spartans and Covenant indiscriminately), I make my way to a vantage point overlooking the enemy operation. Jun doesn't know how right he is when he states: "That's no strike force. That's an invading army."

Longtime fans of the Halo franchise are

likely familiar with the events that occurred on Reach, but this is the first time we've been able to experience them firsthand. As the deeper Halo fiction revealed, the first game began with Master Chief escaping the dying planet. This upcoming title is the first to place gamers on the ground and in the trenches as the alien Covenant force lays waste to the home of the Spartans.

Halo has always featured plenty of chaos and carnage onscreen, but nothing on the scale of Halo: Reach. Fans are accustomed to small skirmishes with clusters of foes; Reach features Spartans defending against a massive alien army. For example, the fourth mission in Reach's campaign, entitled "Tip of the Spear," begins with dozens of fully manned Warthogs driving in formation towards the enemy threat. Covenant Banshees swoop down en masse, dropping your fellow Spartans like the unfortunate soldiers storming the beaches of

Normandy. These situations aren't the pockets of activity seen in previous titles. They're crucial scenes from an all-out war.

My first mission required me to meet up with Noble Team in a massive battle to take out enemy anti-air installations, but the scale gets even bigger during the next mission, "Long Night Of Solace." I find myself fighting alongside fellow Spartans as we take out waves of Covenant on the path to the spaceship *Sabre's* launch station. Once I arrive and strap into the *Sabre*, I am treated to a fantastic scene of Noble 6 blasting off solo into space. When the thrusters detach, I assume full control of the ship in a space battle.

While these sections aren't huge parts of the overall campaign, the controls feel natural and the action provides a fun change of pace. Things start out simply enough; enemy Banshees are easily dispatched with some well-aimed blasts from the *Sabre's* machine



Space combat is only a small part of the campaign, but it stands up to the rest of the series' stellar vehicular sections



Tip of the Spear is one of the most action-packed Halo stages we've seen

guns. Strategy comes into play later once waves of Seraphs and Phantoms approach Noble 6's airspace. For these shielded foes, I must take down their protective shields with the machine guns before I can destroy their hull with a volley of missiles. The Sabre's defenses operate in a manner similar to the method used while onfoot – it has a regenerating shield, but damage to the ship itself sticks around.

With the new scale presented in Halo: Reach, it proves to be more than a mere collection of incremental updates to an established franchise. Massive battles, space combat, significant cosmetic upgrades, a new cast, and plenty of additions to the gameplay mechanics ensure that we're in store for a fantastic take on this often-discussed but rarely seen period of Halo history this fall. ♦



Extra Credit

As you play through the numerous modes of Halo: Reach, you earn credits and an overall rank. These credits allow you to alter your character in the armory with various cosmetic customizations, and even add some goofy effects to your Spartan.

Earn enough credits, and you can surround yourself with stink clouds or lightning bolts, or even have hearts and confetti emanate from your character. You'll earn credits for the campaign, Firefight, and competitive multiplayer, and Bungie will also be introducing daily challenges to the mix. These can feature a variety of objectives across the board, and aren't confined to one particular mode. One day you may be earning credits for beating a particular level by yourself on Legendary difficulty, while the next day you could be shooting for a target score in Firefight with a specific selection of skulls turned on. These challenges will net you around 500 to 1,000 credits daily, but some weekly challenges will rake in between 2,000 and 5,000 credits.

CUSTOMIZING YOUR BATTLE EXPERIENCE



Halo 3 introduced new equipment to the multiplayer fray, but it was never immediately clear what their functions were. Many gamers simply picked them up and deployed them without realizing their effect. Reach discards this system in favor of an always-present armor ability. Seven are available in total, and they can be switched out between deaths thanks to the new loadout selection option. Each suits a different playstyle, and players may find themselves switching between them based on what game mode they're playing. Take a look at these options and decide what's right for you.

Evade

Toss a grenade an Elite's way in Reach's campaign and you may see them perform a lunging evasive dive. This ability isn't restricted to the AI; you'll have access to it as an armor ability. Featuring different animations for Spartans and Elites, the evade is great for quickly escaping the blast radius of a grenade or rocket blast. This particular ability should be invaluable during rounds of the multiplayer Rocketfight mode.

Active Camo

With a press of the left bumper, you become practically transparent. Observant players will still be able to spot you, but not nearly as easily as they would without it. Give it a chance to cool down after using it, and you'll sink right back into the shadows.

Drop Shield

Halo 3 introduced the bubble shield. In Reach, players will have access to a similar-looking ability that serves a different function. Like the bubble shield, the drop shield forms a barrier around you. Any friendly character that enters its perimeter will be healed quickly, including the player that dropped it in the first place. However, while the bubble shield was invincible, the drop shield is not. Enemies can destroy it if they concentrate enough firepower on it.

Sprint

With this ability equipped, you'll be able to sprint across the battlefield in a manner similar to titles like Call of Duty or Battlefield. This is useful for modes like Capture the Flag or Headhunter that require the gamer to reach a goal quickly before being taken out.



Armor Lock

Gamers partial to this ability should be prepared to receive a generous helping of insults thrown their way by opponents. If you see an enemy rocket heading your way, just hold the LB button to activate temporary invulnerability. No matter how dead-on your enemy's aim is, you won't take the slightest hint of damage while it's active. Just in case someone attempts to melee you the second it becomes inactive, the ability sets off a close-proximity EMP that will severely damage your would-be attacker. Extremely useful as a sort of "instant cover," allowing your shields time to recharge without danger of being killed.



NEW BATTLEFIELDS

Each entry in the Halo series features a diverse set of maps, mixing brand-new areas with reworked versions of previous battlefields. Reach will be no different, and Bungie recently showed off three of the new maps where players can look forward to creating carnage.

Zealot

This purple-hued symmetrical area is reminiscent of Midship from Halo 2, and features five man cannons. Two of its stories are indoors, and its roof is a giant shield. While this shield keeps bullets and grenades from escaping the structure, players can man cannon or jetpack straight through it. Once they've broken the barrier, they'll find themselves in space, complete with low gravity.





Jetpack

Gamers who participated in the Halo: Reach beta are familiar with this ability. Helpful in maps with several stories, the jetpack allows you to take to the skies long enough to deliver an objective or get the drop on an unsuspecting enemy. For a ridiculous multiplayer experience, try turning on unlimited jetpacks in a mode that features infinite sniper ammo or rockets.

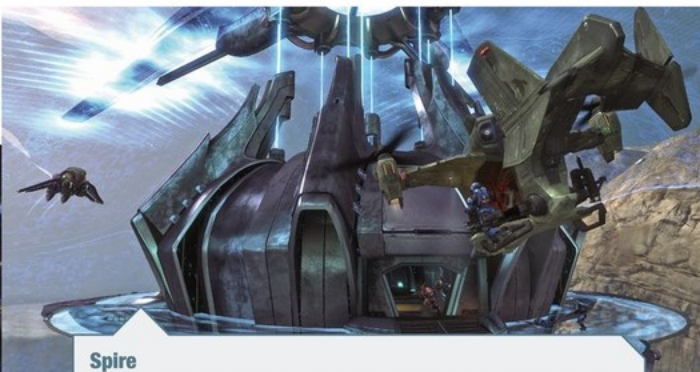
Hologram

When you activate the hologram, it sends a copy of you running straight in the direction you're currently looking. If your enemies watch closely, they'll become suspicious of the clone's beeline movement, but most gamers pull the trigger on sight. Fans of the series' multiplayer know the frustration of getting stuck with plasma grenades or killed by a melee blow to the back of the head, but wasting several sniper rounds on a Spartan that doesn't really exist may be the new king of aggravating moments.



A New Building Ground

The Forge was introduced in Halo 3, and allowed gamers to tinker with the built-in levels. While many experimented with this mode, it was cumbersome to work with and wasn't conducive to intricate stages. In Reach, Bungie is dramatically expanding the tools and objects available to players, but that's not the only improvement to the Forge. One built-in map is called Forge World — one massive level that contains numerous different terrain and level types. The Blood Gulch remake (named Hemorrhage) is found here, and it's adjacent to indoor areas, mountainous terrain, and a large island that Bungie refers to as "the rock." When you load this up in the Forge, you can keep the whole area accessible, or you can set your own boundaries to constrain the map to one particular section. If you're looking to build a level starting with a blank canvas, it's possible to simply glue your entire construction to the side of a cliff. If you'd rather keep everything within the Blood Gulch environment, it's just as simple. It's easily the largest map in any Halo game.



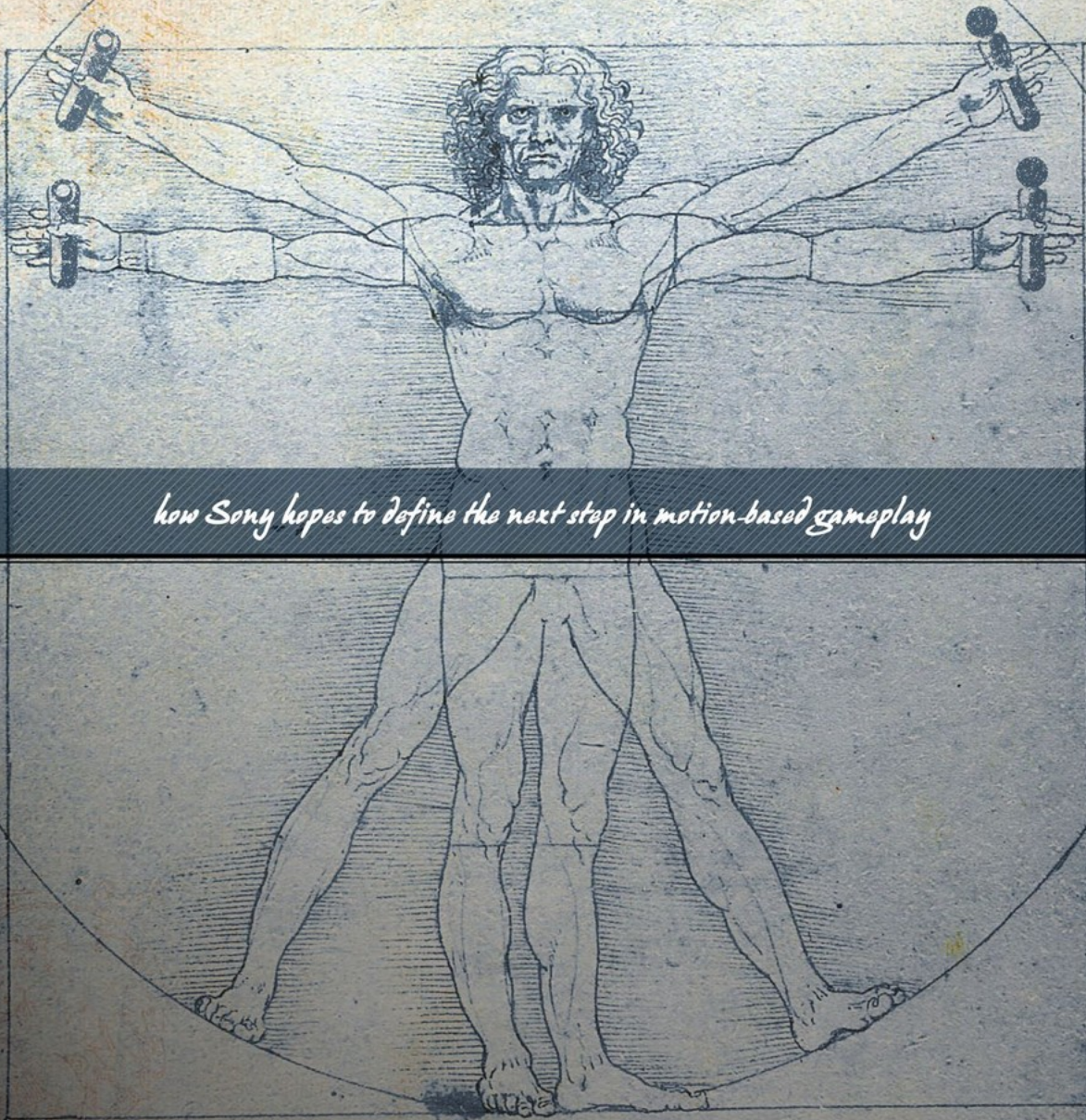
Spire

This map works as a perfect showcase for a new game type called Invasion. In this objective-based mode, Spartans storm a hill toward a massive Covenant-occupied tower. The first two sections of Invasion function like Territories, with the invading team attempting to gain ground. Once two areas are taken over, it's up to the Spartans to ascend the tower, steal the enemy power core, and rush it to the nearby helipad to make their escape. It's essentially a wild form of single-flag CTF, and the available Falcons and Banshees ensure intense action on the ground and in the air.

Reflection

Ivory Tower was a popular map in Halo 2, and it's being reborn with a new style for Reach. Reflection eschews the old aesthetic in favor of a Zen garden-like atmosphere, complete with peaceful fountains and koi ponds. Players will have access to three man cannons as they traverse this wooded environment.





how Sony hopes to define the next step in motion-based gameplay

SONY'S NEXT MOVE



When Nintendo first announced the Wii and declared a new age in motion-based gaming, it was met with healthy skepticism from journalists and the public alike. But once consumers got their hands on the new hardware and began buying the console in massive quantities, it proved (for better or worse) that motion controls and casual gamers have a significant role to play in our industry.

Today, Sony's Move is met with equal, if not greater, skepticism. With Nintendo Wii's dominating install base and Microsoft's ambitious Kinect peripheral launching on a similar timeline as Move, how does Sony plan to carve out a name for itself? The answer is simple: By combining the strengths of its competitors, while trying to avoid all of their flaws. After spending a full day with a final version of the new hardware and some of Move's launch titles, we walked away with a good understanding of what makes Sony's motion controller intriguing, and what potential pitfalls lie ahead.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC OF A CONTROLLER IS WHETHER IT'S COMFORTABLE TO USE OVER EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME.

While the design of Nintendo's Wii remote is appealing to the eye, its straight lines and square face don't conform to your hand the way a controller should. The Move might not be a sexy piece of hardware, but from the moment we picked the controller up, it felt natural to hold and point at the screen. The Move controller is also lighter than a Wii remote and feels more durable—although you'll still want to wear the wrist strap to avoid throwing it across the room.

Another problem often cited against the Wii remote is its button layout, and it appears Sony learned from the competition. Your thumb rests naturally on the controller's Move button (a.k.a. the big button in the middle). The other four face buttons are within easy reach and don't require looking at the controller to press. The pressure-sensitive trigger is a step up from the DualShock's stubby triggers, and performs well in games with shooting mechanics. Only the start and select buttons, which have been placed on the sides of the controller, require any sort of contortion to press (start is on the right, making it especially difficult to hit for southpaws). The upside, however, is that there's little risk of accidentally pressing them during gesture-based games. Playing Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11 feels much more natural with Move, even though it shares the same mechanics as the Wii version.

The most important feature of Move is the brightly lit ball on top of the controller. It might look like a

children's toy, but this ball gives Move its impressive accuracy. The PlayStation Eye camera tracks the ball in much the same way as the Wii's infrared sensor does, only it's omni-directional, meaning you don't have to point the controller at the screen in order for the software to recognize its position. For example, in Sports Champions' archery event, the player reaches over his or her shoulder to pull out an arrow from the character's quiver. The game accurately aligns the arrow based on your movements, because the glowing ball remains visible regardless of the position or angle of your hand. Such a feat would be impossible with the Wii's directional IR sensor—it would have to rely on data from the six-axis sensors to emulate the movement, and MotionPlus couldn't be sure about your exact position.

The ball's illumination makes it far more reliable than the Wii remote as well—the Eye camera can detect the background color of your room and assign a contrasting color, ensuring solid recognition. The initial feeling of foolishness we had while playing games with glowing controllers subsided when we realized that Sony chose function over form when designing Move—something any avid gamer should appreciate.

THE PLAY TEST

You may have guessed from Sony's track record with controllers that Move is a solid piece of hardware.

What you can't tell is how it performs. It was only when we got extensive hands-on time with several of Move's launch titles that we began to see the abilities of the new tech.

We were particularly impressed by Move's ability to recognize and accurately emulate our actions. Initial setup is important—make sure the edge of your table or television isn't obstructing the Eye camera's view. Many games also require an initial controller calibration. After following these simple onscreen directions, most games performed flawlessly. I spent a few minutes before Sports Champions' disc golf event just swinging the disc around, and my character's hand always held it at the correct orientation no matter how quickly I moved. In the ping pong event, the game never confused whether I was holding my paddle to the left or the right—you can even hold the paddle upside down like a pro. This is possible because the game isn't just tracking motion; it has a constant fix on your position and orientation as well.

Thanks to the pre-existing abilities of the Eye camera, titles can even incorporate basic head tracking into gameplay. The Fight: Lights Out uses this ability (which was turned off during our demo), allowing the game to not only emulate the position of your hands, but your entire upper body. Unlike Wii Sports' boxing event, The Fight determines the amount of damage your punches inflict based on the



The Fight Lights Out



Not a Wii Clone

When Sony debuted a prototype of Move at last year's E3, many gamers dismissed it as an attempt to cash in on Nintendo's success in motion-based gaming. However, the development of Move goes back much further than people realize. Sony began experimenting with tracking colored spheres as early as 2001, before the release of the original Eye Toy for the PS2. The earliest prototype was simply a ball on stick, but Sony couldn't solve color recognition problems created by inconsistent lighting. Around 2004/2005 the company began experimenting with glowing spheres, but were limited to one color – if a player's lights or walls used a similar shade, the camera still couldn't detect it. Three years ago, the LEDs used in Move became cheaper, allowing for a device that can change colors on the fly and accommodate all different lighting situations. Although Move features many similar abilities to the Wii remote, many of the parts – such as the six-axis sensors and rumble components – were taken directly from the DualShock.

actual speed of your punches – swing harder and your enemy will hit the ground quicker. My first apathetic attempts at fighting resulted in my onscreen character drunkenly swinging his arms as if he had already gone twelve rounds against a heavyweight. It was only after some playful goading by the PR rep that I put some effort into my swings and transformed my fighter into a semi-respectable opponent. Games like *The Fight* would be difficult to play if Move's response time was sluggish, but we saw little to no lag in the games we played, eliminating the painful delay between swiping a sword or throwing a punch with a controller and waiting for your virtual avatar to follow through.

Move's impressive recognition and quick response time result in a greater level of precision than we've previously seen from motion-based gaming. In *Tumble*, players manipulate stacks of blocks similar to Wii's *Boom Blox*. The key difference (besides the lack of cute animal characters), is that *Tumble* works in all three dimensions simultaneously: Stacking up blocks is simply a matter of reaching out and placing

them like you would in real life. It's an overly simple concept, but the novelty of having your movements recreated on screen makes it entertaining – for a while, at least.

Not all games use Move in such a fluid, non-choreographed way. Others use Move's six-axis sensors to translate simple gestures into gameplay. It's a technique we've all seen before, and launch titles like *TV Superstars* will do little to convince gamers to shell out more money on new peripherals. However, the Move-enabled version of *Heavy Rain* proves the value of such gaming experiences. It translates the controller movements of the original version into natural gestures that correspond to the onscreen action, such as raising your hand and reaching out to knock on a door, or shaking your hand to prime an inhaler. While these everyday tasks may sound mundane, a scene like the fight between Scott Shelby and a man harassing a prostitute is transformed into an intense, chaotic, and more immersive experience than before.

In addition to motion-based controls, many Wii





The World's First Chameleon Simulator

One of the more amusing demos Sony engineer Anton Mikhailov showed us was a first-person simulation of a day in the life of a chameleon. Using two Move controllers, the player takes control of the chameleon's front feet to grab and pull himself along the branches of a tree. The controls were amazingly responsive, and the pressure sensitive triggers gave Mikhailov full articulation of the chameleon's claws. Mikhailov admitted the demo didn't have a lot of practical use, but was inspired by his time working in a pet store. "Hopefully, someday a developer will have the courage to make a chameleon simulator," he joked. Whether or not the world is ready to step into the skin of a cold-blooded reptile, the demo was a good example of how Move can accurately translate your hands into a virtual space.

games use the console's remote as a pointer. Sony made sure this was possible with Move as well, but once again the addition of the Eye camera creates a more robust and reliable experience. Because the Move's ball is always brightly illuminated, lightgun games like Time Crisis: Razing Storm don't suffer from jittery cursors like many Wii games. Additionally, Move's aiming mechanic uses a combination of position (determined by the Eye camera tracking the ball) and angle (determined by the six-axis sensors inside the controller) to ascertain where the player is pointing, and can therefore accommodate a greater variety of movement. For example, The Shoot incorporates dodging incoming missiles by moving the entire controller to the left or the right of the screen. However, you can simultaneously aim at the opposite side of the screen by angling your controller in that direction. This type of functionality is not possible on the Wii.

Ultimately, Move's hardware performed better than we expected. The only potential stumbling block is the navigation controller. The tech is solid – the controller feels good and the buttons and analog stick function admirably – but we only saw two games that use the extra controller, and it's not included in any of the Move bundles, further dividing what may already be a small install base. The smaller the install base, the riskier it is for developers to require the navigation controller for their game. Although the DualShock can be used as an alternative to the navigation controller, the button layout doesn't translate perfectly between the two peripherals (especially for left-handed players).

Move's tech is above board, but a peripheral is only as strong as the software that utilizes it. You'll have to wait until next issue to read our reviews for Move's launch titles. After trying out several titles early, we can say that they dutifully provide a glimpse at the possibilities and variety offered by Move, but probably

won't offer the depth veteran gamers want to see.

BEATING THE WII AT ITS OWN GAME

In an attempt to one-up the standard Wii pricing, all first party Move games will retail for \$40. However, despite the bargain pricing, most of the games we played offered more entertainment than similar titles for the Wii. Sports Champions features six events (archery, disc golf, ping pong, bocce ball, volley ball, and gladiator fighting), each with its own courses and variations on gameplay. The Fight: Lights Out features a full career mode, a cinema mode to save and edit replays of your fights, and detailed stats for how many calories you've burned while playing. It also doesn't hurt that these games feature better graphics than the best Wii game thanks to the extra processing power of the PS3 and its HD capabilities – possibly the biggest reason Nintendo fans have to be jealous.

Another entertaining addition to Move's launch lineup are games that feature augmented reality. Start The Party contains over 20 minigames that display live video of you via the Eye camera and insert digital objects into the action. For example, a painting game requires you to fill in random shapes with different colored paints. When the game begins, your Move controller automatically morphs into a paintbrush on the screen; you can rotate it or hold it at any angle and the digital paintbrush will stay in alignment with your hand without any lag. Drips of paint will fall off periodically as you make broad brush strokes, coloring in the highlighted area. It's a cool effect that could hopefully lead to more immersive gaming mechanics in the future.

WHAT ABOUT THE HARDCORE?

Although we had fun with some of Move's launch titles, we couldn't help but notice the lack of more traditional games at the event. While Sony debuted a Move-enabled demo of SOCOM 4 at E3 that featured contextual, gesture-based stealth melee kills and three different aiming configurations, the demo was pulled from the Move event at the last minute as Zipper Interactive continues to tweak the game's formula. Ubisoft's RTS R.U.S.E. was also a no-show, and we didn't see any titles that suggested the depth of an RPG or the production values of a triple-A action title. The only games to point at the potential of Move were

the aforementioned Heavy Rain demo and an updated version of Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition.

RE 5 gave us our first chance to see how the navigation controller performed, and although it took awhile to get used to, the control scheme worked well. You use the analog stick to walk and to move the camera when stationary. The Move controller is then used for aiming, allowing you to quickly line up headshots with your reticle. I prefer this method to games that employ a dead zone for aiming and turning, but RE 5 is a special case because you don't walk and shoot at the same time. How other shooters will incorporate Move remains to be seen.

While traditional games remain a question mark, the most entertaining Move titles use the controller in new ways. One shining example (no pun intended) was Echochrome II, which uses the Move controller like a flashlight to distort shadows for an adventurous silhouette to traverse. The game didn't appear to have a lot of depth, but it was refreshing to wrap my head around a new game mechanic I had never seen before. Surprisingly, Sorcery – which many gamers considered the most impressive Move title debuted so far – was not shown, and Sony isn't listing it as one of the games being released this holiday season.

MOVING FORWARD

After playing and seeing Move titles for a full day, the most promising examples we saw of the Move's capabilities won't be available at launch. These were tech demos created specifically to show off what's possible with the new hardware. The majority were created by Anton Mikhailov, a software engineer in Sony's R&D department, who demoed them to us as he explained what differentiates Move from the competition.

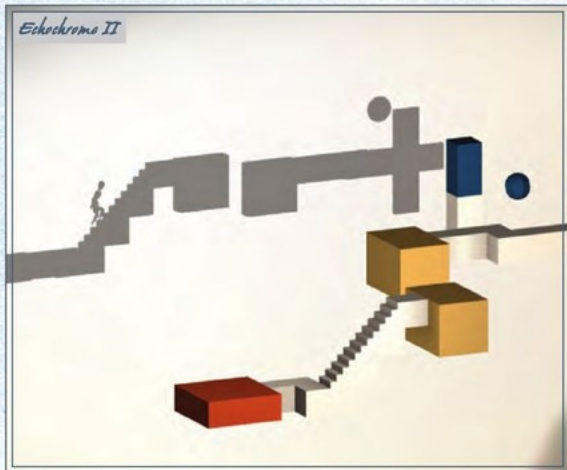
As he spoke, it became clear that Mikhailov's main interest in the Move is its ability to realistically recreate the player's hands in 3D space by using two Move controllers in tandem. Using the analog triggers to adjust the amount of grip he was applying, Mikhailov effortlessly built structures out of Lego blocks, manipulated swirling fire balls with his hands and launched them into space, and penned his own football plays like an NFL coach. Many of his demos suggested possible uses outside of gaming, such as pulling out the features of a sculpted head to create a custom character for an RPG (kiss those cumbersome sliders goodbye),

or crafting his own sword as he twirled it around and took a few practice swings to see how it looked. We walked away with a greater understanding of the variety of ways Move can be used, but the demos weren't made for us: they were all created for developers.

Sony has been criticized in the past for creating hardware that's difficult to program for, but for Move the company is creating new tech demos based on requests from interested developers. A studio may not want to spend a month doing R&D to see if incorporating Move is worth it for their title. Instead, Mikhailov creates a demo for them based on their requirements in a fraction of the time. Zipper Interactive reportedly had SOCOM 4 up and running with Move controls in just two weeks thanks to this partnership. As an added bonus, Mikhailov believes Move will lead to more developers utilizing the Eye camera in their games – with or without motion controls – thanks to the inevitable increase in the peripheral's install base.

How consumers will react to Move is something we'll have to wait to see, but Sony appears to have a leg up on the competition. Move outperforms the Wii remote (even with MotionPlus) thanks to the additional input received from the Eye camera and the controller's omni-directional glowing ball. Move also seems to stack up well against Kinect. Although Move can't do full skeletal tracking like Microsoft's camera, by using two Move controllers and head tracking, Move can faithfully recreate most upper body movements the player performs. More importantly, Move can offer a far greater amount of precision than Kinect thanks to the controller's sensors. It can also provide tactile feedback a camera-only system cannot. These facts point to an advantage for Move, but for non-casual gamers it's a little disconcerting that we haven't seen more robust gaming experiences. The real test will be what second-generation games developers can create when they become more acquainted with the hardware, and whether the casual market is willing to pay more money for better technology. In the meantime, check back next issue for reviews of Move's first round of titles. ♦

For more hands-on impressions of upcoming Move titles, head to gameinfarm.com/mag





Dirt 3

Codemasters' racer hits the big time

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Racing
(8-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Codemasters

» **Developer**
Codemasters

» **Release**
2011

Dirt 2's career mode was built around the premise that you were an up-and-coming racer breaking into off-road racing and all its different disciplines. Dirt 3 continues where the last game left off, and in that sense it mirrors where developer Codemasters' racing franchise stands in real life. Dirt 2 brought the series to the forefront, turning it from a niche racer into the kind of franchise that everyone could enjoy. Dirt 3 looks to build off that momentum and let you experience life as an action sports racing star.

"In Dirt 2, winning the X Games may have felt like you had reached the top of your career," explains Matt Horsman, chief game designer. "But in reality there is so much more to being an action sports athlete. We spoke a great deal with Ken Block about his aspirations in life and how he plans out his calendar, and we have tried to emulate this as closely as possible." In Dirt 3 you start out with a business manager and fanbase consultant. The pair helps steer your career through four years of competitive racing events

and sponsor-based challenges. These include the amazing gymkhana events that have helped make drivers like Ken Block a sensation (see sidebar for more), as well as other one-off fantastic feats like Travis Pastrana's record-setting 269-foot rally car jump. Horsman says these replayable events will "give the player a chance to let their hair down and do something other than just compete for first place."

Because you're already at the top of your game, Dirt 3's car progression isn't about buying and upgrading equipment to make you competitive, but rather about taking your pick of the rides made available through signing with specific racing teams. Although the game drops Dirt 2's conversion kits, you drive the same types of cars in varying disciplines via the use of different chassis. The game features the biggest roster of cars in the series to date, including selections from 50 years of rally racing.

Dirt 3 packs in more events, races, and tracks than Dirt 2, plus it brings back a full Rally World

Tour schedule complete with five stages of racing at each location. Places like Norway make use of the game's dynamic weather system, which produces different weather conditions as you race. The accumulating snow will change how your car handles as you drive. The game also features a day-to-night cycle, adding further variety to the experience.

The online features also continue to evolve. In Dirt 3, you can record and share race videos of your proudest moments and embarrassing crashes via a YouTube upload. Multiplayer expands courtesy of split-screen offline play over multiple racing disciplines (including gymkhana events) and pass-the-controller party play.

With all kinds of new tracks and racing disciplines, sponsor obligations, and the return of full-on rally racing, Dirt 3 looks to spare no expense in putting the world of off-road racing at your feet. » **Matthew Kato**



Dirt 3 features rally cars of the past 50 years



Dynamic weather means that conditions on the track will change while you're racing



What is Gymkhana?



These racing events use obstacles like cones or even dangerous real-world props arranged into time-based courses that demand agility, split-second timing, and a good amount of drift skill. DC Shoes co-founder and multi-discipline maverick Ken Block has earned YouTube notoriety for his series of gymkhana runs in a rally car. Perform a YouTube search for "Ken Block" and prepare to be floored. The sequence above was taken from his Gymkhana Two Project infomercial video.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

Starkiller has new tricks up his sleeve for the sequel

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

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

» **Publisher**
LucasArts

» **Developer**
LucasArts

» **Release**
October 26

The original Force Unleashed introduced us to Starkiller, Darth Vader's secret apprentice, who in the end sacrificed himself to preserve the Rebel Alliance and protect its leaders. In looking at ideas for the sequel, the team at LucasArts realized they were in a tough spot. Though he may have died at the hands of the Emperor, writer and executive producer Haden Blackman tells us, "Starkiller still has a lot of life left in him."

The Force Unleashed II kicks off with the Star Wars signature text crawl explaining the fledgling Rebel Alliance is (as always) on the run from Darth Vader. The game then transitions to a cloning facility hidden on the planet Kamino. Here Vader reveals the new Starkiller is a clone (or so he says) created with the DNA of the original. The Starkiller clone is plagued by memories of his predecessor's past, including images of his beloved Juno Eclipse. Aware of this, Vader declares this clone to be defective. The outraged Starkiller lashes out at Vader and leaves the scene, becoming a fugitive in the process.

As we jump into the game demo, a fleeing Starkiller makes his way across the dark, rainy

Kamino, taking down Imperials along the way in one of the game's many "run for your life moments" where the outcast Jedi's best hope is to retreat in the face of overwhelming odds. The fugitive is dual-wielding lightsabers, which allows him to attack more quickly and gives the combat a more stylized visual flair. Ripping Stormtroopers to shreds never looked so good. As in the first game, collectible lightsaber crystals, including the popular black crystal, can augment your lightsabers to make them more formidable.

In addition to his melee prowess, Starkiller has a number of impressive new Force abilities, including a Jedi mind trick that causes enemies to attempt suicide. Weak-minded Stormtroopers will jump off the nearest bridge, leap out of windows, stand in front of turrets, or walk into dangerous force fields. Another devastating power, Force Fury, is a timed ability that enhances all of Starkiller's Force abilities. How enhanced are these powers? Think about crushing an AT-ST with your mind. If you make quick work of your opponents, you can cut the fury short to preserve some of the Force energy for later use.

Though the Force Unleashed proved popu-

lar with gamers, it wasn't without its flaws. To address one chief concern amongst gamers, LucasArts is improving the AI to give each enemy type a distinct set of behaviors. Spamming Force powers isn't enough this time around; players must think strategically to make the best use of their resources and find enemy weak spots. Flying Jump troopers, for instance, are more susceptible to Force Lightning. Shoot a few bolts their way and watch as their jetpacks hilariously malfunction. We also saw a formidable walker equipped with a shield and Carbonite weapon that requires the use of Force powers to remove the shield before the mechanical monster will take damage. Environments also play a bigger role in fights, as you can use your Force powers to pick up enemies and throw them in to a line of cannon fire or use an object you have electrified with Force Lightning and drop it onto your foes.

Alongside the improved combat, Blackman says the sequel includes more story elements and puzzles to help break up the action. From what we've seen of the game thus far, Star Wars fans may have plenty to be excited about when the game releases this fall. » **Annette Gonzalez**



LucasArts has announced that the galaxy's most famous bounty hunter, Boba Fett, will join the sequel's cast



With the ability to dual-wield lightsabers, Starkiller can quickly mop the floor with these surrounding Stormtroopers





Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

Ultimate Spider-Man is back in black

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Action

» Publisher
Activision

» Developer
Beenox

» Release
September 7

Activision's newest web-crawling game features four versions of Spider-Man spread across four different comic universes, but you won't need a master's degree in comic history to keep the continuity straight. Developer Beenox is working with comic author Dan Slott to make sure *Shattered Dimensions'* narrative stays true to each storyline, and neither is worried about sliding the game neatly into any particular moment in the comics' timelines. Their goal is to allow fans of any level of dedication to pick up and enjoy *Shattered Dimensions*.

At this year's San Diego Comic-Con we played as the Amazing Spider-Man in the newest build. This game kicks off with Mysterio stealing an

artifact called the Tablet of Order and Chaos from a museum exhibition hall. Spider-Man interrupts the villain's heist, and during the pair's struggle they inadvertently shatter the tablet, creating a universe-fracturing crisis. Madame Web appears and explains to Spider-Man that the tablet pieces have been scattered across other dimensions, and that it's up to Spider-Man and his alternate personas to reassemble the tablet and prevent all of reality from collapsing.

We've known for a while that two of the other universes would be the Noir and 2099 settings, but Comic-Con was our first chance to check out the Ultimate universe. In a unique twist, Ultimate Spider-Man is wearing his symbiotic black suit. This is an interesting choice since the

hero only wore that suit for a few issues in the Ultimate Spider-Man series. The black suit's tendrils allow Ultimate Spider-Man to perform more flamboyant attacks. This wild action resembles games like *Devil May Cry* and *Bayonetta*.

Ultimate Spider-Man has a longer reach than any of the other Spider-Man characters in the game, allowing him to perform sweeping circular attacks that hit multiple enemies and juggle characters in the air. Ultimate Spider-Man also has a rage meter, which builds up as he strings combos together. Once this rage meter is full, he can go into a rage mode where his attacks become stronger and he has access to more elaborate combos that hit more targets at once.

In the Ultimate universe, Spider-Man faces off against villains like Deadpool and Carnage. We played through a level set on the Triskelion – S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters and home base to the superhero team The Ultimates. Captain America and Iron Man must have been away saving the world, however, because Carnage had taken over the facility, covering the complex in organic webbing and tendrils. In possession of a piece of the Tablet of Order and Chaos, Carnage's powers have been amplified, allowing him to





control S.H.I.E.L.D. agents throughout the base and turn them against Spider-Man. After making our way through a legion of mini-Carnage creatures, we took on the psychotic symbiote himself in a fight that had us throwing him through jet engines and pinning him down for some first-person ground and pound.

All four versions of Spider-Man feature unique gameplay and special combat techniques, but players can upgrade all their abilities via a system called the Web of Destiny. Unlike most games where you spend experience points to

unlock new abilities, the Web of Destiny offers players a variety of in-game meta challenges to complete. When players complete these challenges – such as stringing together a certain number of combo attacks – they will unlock new abilities and web attacks. Players can also earn a variety of alternate costumes for Spider-Man, such as the famous Spidey armor and the Mangaverse version of the character. Beenox isn't saying much about these costumes yet, but the team hinted that some of the extra suits may give Spider-Man unique abilities.

Packing multiple gameplay experiences into one package is often a recipe for disaster. We wonder if Beenox has bitten off more than it can chew with a game that features four different worlds, each with its own unique game types and art styles. However, from what we've played so far, each world in Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions features some entertaining sequences. We'll find out in September if all four worlds add up to one game that is worth playing.

» Ben Reeves



Shattered Rogues Gallery

Marvel gave Beenox a great amount of leverage to take Spider-Man's classic cast of villains and bring them into universes in which they haven't appeared before. At San Diego Comic-Con, Activision announced a host of new villains for the game. Ultimate Spider-Man will fight Carnage and Deadpool, while Juggernaut appears in the Amazing universe. The Vulture is flying through the Noir universe, and Scorpion appears in the 2099 universe for the first time. We also got a sneak peek at Sandman, who appears in the Amazing universe.



Darkspore

Spore's creature creator returns in top-down action/RPG

» **Platform**
PC • Mac

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Action
RPG (Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Maxis

» **Release**
February 2011

An ancient race called the Crogenitors made their name experimenting with DNA to spawn a new life form: a genetically developed group of soldiers that were used as weapons in battle. To increase their power, the Crogenitors produced a new – and highly unstable – exponential DNA that unfortunately ended up in the wrong hands. A rogue Crogenitor used the exponential DNA on himself to spawn evil creatures called the Darkspore, who had one goal – to hunt and destroy the Crogenitor race.

One thousand years later, the survivors of the Darkspore onslaught discover the exponential DNA has finally stabilized. To exact revenge against the Darkspore, you must reconstruct an army of heroes and upgrade their strengths with tens of thousands of collectibles in this isometric action RPG.

Darkspore is the latest project from the famed development team at Maxis, a studio originally founded by Will Wright. To create the game,

the company behind SimCity and The Sims enhanced Spore's creature creator with added customization options and accessibility. Players can battle the Darkspore alone or with three other friends to collect genomes and other parts needed for creature creation.

Unlike the original Spore, you can add visual elements to your creations without sacrificing stats. Armor pieces and accessories can be changed in size and orientation, and can be placed anywhere you wish. For instance, shoulder pads can now be used as knee pads if you so desire. If you don't want specific items to affect your stats but still want to add them to your character for visual flair, you can drop them into a specific item slot designed for fashion.

Players can choose from five character types, which are referred to as "genesis types" for added skill customization. This includes Bio (plants and animals), Plasma (fire and lightning), Necro (zombie), Quantum (time, space abilities), and Cyber (robotic). These types fall into three

classes including the tank-like Sentinels, fragile, ranged attack-based Tempests, and speedy, melee-focused Ravagers.

With scores of minions to combat, plenty of pick-ups and rewards will be around to aid in character tweaking. At the end of each level you'll be given medals and other rewards based on your performance. This opens up a risk vs. reward element to gameplay. Once a level is complete and rewards are presented, you can "cash out" and collect your earnings or risk the loot for a greater prize at a higher difficulty. Darkspore features an AI director similar to the one in Valve's Left 4 Dead, so a different set of enemies will appear in a given area during every run through.

Darkspore still has a ways before it releases on PC and Mac, but with the slew of customization options and great replay potential, there is already plenty here for Spore and dungeon crawler fans alike. » **Annette Gonzalez**





Super Scribblenauts

Maxwell expands his vocabulary

If you don't appreciate the power of adjectives, try to go a day without using them. In addition to being unable to complete Mad Libs, you'll find yourself unable to describe just about anything. We have those things for a reason, after all.

If Scribblenauts wowed players with its astounding variety of nouns, Super Scribblenauts is bound to delight with the addition of adjectives. Gameplay is largely the same, but letting players hone their summoned objects by describing them adds some hefty new gameplay layers. A bike is perfectly nice, but how about a hairy bike? What does an angry bike do?

It's fun to tweak objects in silly ways, but adjectives are useful in Super Scribblenauts, too. Scribblenauts veterans know that jetpacks are useful for grabbing out-of-reach Starites or escaping deep pits, but in Super Scribblenauts new additions like flying bikes work just as well.

Developer 5th Cell says that are 10,000 total adjectives in the game. There's definitely a solid library of modifiers in Super Scribblenauts, though it's not as vast as the object roster. In

the preview build we played, we could strum on happy guitars, but loud guitars were a no-go. It's always a bummer when a suggested word gets crossed out upon entry, but there's still plenty of room to experiment (see sidebar).

In addition to adjectives, Super Scribblenauts has 120 all-new puzzles. They're as clever as ever, and many of them play off the game's larger vocabulary. In one, several objects – including a vampire, leech, robin, and toy helicopter – are in boxes, and players have to come up with something that shares some level of commonality with the others. We typed in “vampire bat” and picked up the Starite for our trouble. Another puzzle works like a math problem, with players filling in the blanks with appropriate creations. A ghost minus a blanket is an invisible ghost, but what is a man without a watch? How about “late man”?

Add in some tweaks such as much needed d-pad controls and a puzzle creator, and you've got a game that's shaping up to deserve the “super” descriptor. — Jeff Cork

» **Platform**
Nintendo DS

» **Style**
1-Player Puzzle

» **Publisher**
Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

» **Developer**
5th Cell

» **Release**
October 12

Unpack Your Adjectives

Part of the fun of Super Scribblenauts is thinking up adjectives and seeing how they modify the objects within the game. Here's a taste of what I was able to do with an ape...



Naked ape

Our primate pal looks great in pink. Don't worry; no naughty bits are visible



Zombie ape

Not only is he pale green, but zombie ape also walks with a distinctive lope



Dead ape

True to his name, dead ape collapses onto the ground immediately after being called into the game



Stinky ape

Poor stinky ape. Noxious clouds emanate from his fur



Pretty ape

Apparently, all that separates us all from being pretty is a tiara



Ghost ape

Care for something spooky? Ghost ape is translucent and flies around



Strong ape

Bigger than your normal ape, strong ape also boasts a pair of huge forearms. He defeated bad ape with one mighty punch

Grape ape

Alas, copyright restrictions prevent our animated pal from appearing in the game





NBA Elite 11

Rebuilding the franchise mode by mode

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Sports
(10-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Canada

» **Release**
October 5

The inability for the NBA Live franchise to find its stroke this generation is perplexing given that the other sports titles developed by EA Canada – NHL, FIFA, and Fight Night – have all come into their own with the implementation of dual analog control schemes. With NHL creative director David Littman (see our interview on page 42) at the helm of NBA Elite, EA hopes to break the vicious cycle of non-competitive entries with NBA 11. That vision starts with the new dual-stick control scheme and extends to the revamped game modes.

The improvements start with the new Be a Pro mode, which EA has renamed Become Legendary. Your career begins with determining your draft position during the Jordan Brand draft showcase game (which is also the Elite demo). Once you're chosen by an NBA team, players shape their careers and earn new levels of sponsorship from Jordan via a loosened progression system that awards skill points based on your game grades, statistical performances, and how you bounce back after bad games. Since stars run the NBA (ask Wade, Bosh, and LeBron James), at the end of each season your agent will ask you if you would like to explore taking your talents elsewhere.

NBA Elite 11 also introduces the EASBA, a five-on-five online league that features a separate player progression, team progressions, and monthly champions. As

your team gets better your venue will improve from a local gymnasium to a huge stadium that offers a big home-court advantage.

For those of you more interested in turning your forlorn franchise around, EA is touting big changes to its Dynasty mode. Like NHL, the mode now features a GM tracker that awards you points based on good decisions. Manage your team smartly like Danny Ainge and you'll unlock new bonuses to help your squad. Go crazy like David Kahn and don't expect to get

your job back (unless the owner is Glen Taylor, that is). EA is also addressing other needed improvements to this formerly broken mode, including revamped rookie classes that are more in tune with reality (no more overflow of albino point guards), a rebuilt sim engine, and ESPN integration into the menu system.

With all the proposed changes to the gameplay and game modes, the NBA Elite team has a lot on their plates. But you don't win championships without putting in a lot of effort. » **Matt Bertz**



NBA 2K11

Air Jordan returns to display his dominance

Now that LeBron James has taken the role of Robin to Dwayne Wade's Batman in Miami (what does that make Bosh, Catwoman?), the chatter has focused on how Kobe Bryant is now the unquestioned best player in the league. When a trio of great players decide to join forces to attempt unseating him as league champion, that's a fair assessment. But does any modern player come close to the legacy of His Airness? The NBA 2K series, a hoops franchise with a stellar legacy of its own, plans to answer that question with The Jordan Challenge.

Younger hoops fans who never had the chance to watch Michael Jordan torch the league for ten scoring titles, six rings, and five league MVPs will get a crash course in Chicago Bulls history with the new mode, which allows players to relive the 10 defining moments in Air

Jordan's career. Visual Concepts has pulled out all the stops in recreating the Jordan era, securing the license rights for every player involved in the 10 games, creating signature style animations for every player (with special attention paid to Jordan himself), recreating '80s and '90s era broadcasts with special commentary for the games at hand, and even making sure the paint on the court is historically accurate for each arena. If you still need a Jordan fix after playing through the 10 moments, take a historical Bulls team (or one of the other classic teams) into Association mode and rip your way through the inferior modern competition.

On the court, developer Visual Concepts has many gameplay tweaks in store for enhancing offensive and defensive controls. With new player models and completely retooled player animations, the on-court movement already



- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1 to 4-Player Sports
(10-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
2K Sports
- » **Developer**
Visual Concepts
- » **Release**
October 5

looks much smoother than it did in NBA 2K10. Players are no longer locked into their animations and rendered helpless until the move runs its course. A retooled control scheme does away with the complicated dribbling controls of its predecessors, and Visual Concepts is also adding a jumper separation mechanic to give players more flexibility to get off shots, implementing jostling to bring more physicality to the post game, and tweaking passing to better differentiate great point guards from backups.

Major refinements are also in store for The Association (which is receiving an AI overhaul), My Player, and the online modes. Look for more info about these modes as we move closer to the October 5 release date. » **Matt Bertz**



The Jordan Challenge

Live through 10 of MJ's most legendary performances in NBA 2K11's new mode

The Arrival

Jordan bursts onto the scene with a 63-point playoff performance against the legendary Celtics squad featuring Bird, McHale, and Parrish.

Goals: Score 63 points while shooting 50% from the field

69 Points

Jordan reintroduces Cleveland to disappointment as he systematically destroys the Cavaliers, scoring 69 points.

Goals: Score 69 points while shooting 50% from the field in a Bulls win

Shootout

Jordan and fellow dunk champ Dominique Wilkins show off their talents in a high-scoring affair.

Goals: Outscore Dominique and hold him to under 25 points while winning the game

Bad Boys

After losing two straight in Detroit during the Eastern Conference Finals, Jordan breaks down the gritty Pistons defense in legendary fashion.

Goals: Score 47 points and win the game

1991 NBA Finals

Jordan earns his first ring by beating Magic Johnson's talented Lakers squad.

Goals: Average 31 points, shoot 55% from the field, and win the series

The Shrug

Jordan sets the tone for his second finals run by breaking the spirit of the Clyde Drexler-led Blazers in the first game of the first round.

Goals: Score 35 points in the first half, make six three-point shots in the first half, hold Drexler to under 20 points, and win the game

Double Nickel

Returning from his ill-fated baseball experiment, Jordan resolidifies his status as the best in the business by lighting up Madison Square Garden.

Goals: Score 55 points, shoot 55% from the field, and win the game

Father's Day Victory

His Airness wins his fourth title against the Seattle SuperSonics to cement a Cinderella comeback.

Goals: Score 22 points, grab nine rebounds, and win the game

The Flu Game

Not even a virus can stop this scoring machine; Jordan puts up big numbers and nails the game-winning shot against the Stockton-Malone era Utah Jazz.

Goals: Score 38 points, grab seven rebounds, and win the game

Michael's Last Dance

With under a minute left and the Bulls down by one to the Utah Jazz, Jordan nails a clutch shot to earn his sixth and final championship.

Goals: Score 45 points, get four steals, and win the game





Two Worlds II

A whole new Two Worlds

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

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

» **Publisher**
SouthPeak Games

» **Developer**
Reality Pump

» **Release**
September 14

Like my hazy memory of its disastrous predecessor, *Two Worlds II* begins in a dark place. Events pick up with your hero from the first game imprisoned and a big bad guy named Gandohar ruling the world. Orcs were one of the primary enemies in the first game, but *Two Worlds II* starts with a dramatic jailbreak aided by these one-time opponents. In addition to your struggles against the evil ruler, a large part of the plot involves figuring out what has changed over the five years that you were in jail to make the orcs into your allies.

The first thing that leaps out to me during the getaway is the impressive level of detail in the environment. The stones on the walls are rendered in three dimensions, so what likely would have been a flat, bland texture in the last release now looks great. Light streams into the dank hallway through a single window, and it's filtered through the prison bars realistically. As the character moves past some chains hanging on the ceiling, they wrap around his body, curving and quivering in the way I expect them to from being jostled by the character's bulky frame.

I skip ahead a few hours to explore a portion of the game's main quest. I'm in a small village where the mayor refuses to help me unless I help him recover their water supply. Ready to take part in the time-honored RPG tradition of solving

other people's problems, I explore the outskirts of the village and discover a large dirt structure. I talk to a man nearby who turns out to be doing some research; the structure is actually a huge termite mound. After more investigation, I find a huge collection of termite mounds to the north. The missing water is likely stored within.

I hop on a horse and head to my new objective. Horse riding was a clumsy and ill-conceived part of the first game. Some issues persist in *Two Worlds II*, like having to spend a moment lining my horse up correctly so I can open a gate, but I never feel frustrated or like I'm losing control of the creature's movement. One point of contention that carries over from the first game (at least in this preview build) is the occasional loading in the middle of riding through the huge open world. It never lasts longer than a few seconds, but it's still an annoyance.

Arriving at the termite mounds, I encounter a violent pack of Varns, jackal-esque creatures that stand on two legs. The combat has received substantial improvements. Every sword, axe, or staff automatically sets its own special abilities, which are mapped to open buttons on the controller. The sword I use has a special ability that performs a powerful downward swipe and another that lets me leap dramatically toward an enemy. These skills have short cooldowns, but

it's possible (if not necessary) to use them multiple times throughout a fight.

Two Worlds II also includes the ability to swap between different sets of armor and weapons using the directional pad. You can change what you're wearing on the fly, even in the middle of combat. You could start out in your caster gear, shoot off a few fireballs at the enemy from range, switch to a melee setup to knock a nearby enemy down, then switch to your ranged equipment as you back up to start filling him with arrows. The tactical possibilities this quick-switch ability opens up are interesting.

This preview only scratches the surface of the number of huge improvements in *Two Worlds II*. The magic system allows you to create brutal and insane spell combos. The voice acting wasn't finished, but also wasn't totally laughable. Even the standalone co-op campaign and adversarial multiplayer have potential, though we haven't seen them in action yet.

In March, we put up a feature on gameinformer.com with our reader's picks for guilty pleasure games, and *Two Worlds* made the list. If all of the great stuff we've seen from the sequel pans out, *Two Worlds II* may pull off being a pleasure without any of the guilt. » Phil Kollar





Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

Ninja Theory stabs westward

Enslaved: Odyssey to the West is loosely based off the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, though it's been given a post-apocalyptic makeover. We've already seen a lot of the game's earlier sections, which take place in a ruined New York City. That's only a small slice of the game, though, according to Tameem Antoniades, the chief creative ninja (his title, not us making a lame joke) at developer Ninja Theory.

Antoniades says the oppressive urban setting only makes up about 25 percent of the total game. Once players emerge, they must escort co-star Trip back to the mountain village her father founded as a safe haven. From there, the duo journeys further westward toward a slaver encampment, encountering many memorable environments. "You will pass through the Titan Graveyard, a kind of giant graveyard of giant mechs, after which you will then keep going further out towards...well...I should let you discover the rest, shouldn't I?" exclaims Antoniades. "The story gets darker and stranger the further out west you travel."

The Titan Graveyard is home to a new sidekick



named Piggy, also loosely adapted from *Journey to the West*. This old friend of Trip's father has a hero complex and tries to be a ladies' man, but his grappling hook hand doesn't do him any favors with the maidens. What he lacks in suave he makes up for on the battlefield as a sniping

and explosives expert. Voiced by Richard Ridings, who played Roach in *Heavenly Sword*, Antoniades says Piggy adds more to the group dynamics than a just a good shot. "He doesn't really trust Monkey and has a thing for Trip... Expect fireworks when he turns up."

The group dynamics may become more complicated with a third wheel, but Antoniades stresses the relationship between Monkey and Trip still serves as the heart and soul of the game. "She's your partner and in many ways your equal," Antoniades says. "You cannot overcome things without her help and vice-versa." Trip can scan enemies so that Monkey can locate and attack them, upgrade his equipment, draw gunfire so Monkey can flank enemies, solve mechanical puzzles, and scout areas with her dragonfly. "Monkey and Trip's ups and downs in gameplay and story is one of the things that makes this game special," Antoniades remarks. "If we do our job right on this game, you won't want to ever be without her." — Jeff Cook

- » **Platform**
PlayStation • Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
- » **Publisher**
Namco Bandai
- » **Developer**
Ninja Theory
- » **Release**
October 5



Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds

Capcom rolls out its new fighters

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Capcom

» **Release**
Spring 2011

The Marvel vs. Capcom series draws in players from both the comic and video game realms, but this 2D fighter's popularity isn't just built upon fanboy allegiances. These fighting games pack a serious punch, and the third entry in the series looks better than ever.

For Marvel vs. Capcom 3, Capcom has streamlined the controls, paring back to three attack buttons and adding a new exchange button. This revolutionary mechanic makes swapping between fighters easier than ever. This hot-swap ability brings a strategic element not found in other fighting games. Being successful in the battle arena is less about learning the intricacies of one individual fighter and more about finding a team of fighters that balance each other's weaknesses. Queuing up exchange attacks during mid-air combos is a big part of mastering this game's hyperactive battles, and can turn the tide of your brawls.

At San Diego Comic-Con we got a glimpse of two new environments. With a massive floating heli-carrier in the background, one Marvel-themed level seemed to take place on a S.H.I.E.L.D. base. The second new level Capcom revealed is a secret Umbrella laboratory tied to the Resident Evil universe. In the background, the mutant Tyrant can be seen floating in a giant glass breeding tube. Capcom also unveiled six new combatants who all make great additions to your fighting roster. » Ben Reeves

er's weaknesses. Queuing up exchange attacks during mid-air combos is a big part of mastering this game's hyperactive battles, and can turn the tide of your brawls.

» Ben Reeves



Meet The New Challengers

Doctor Doom

The Fantastic Four's arch-nemesis was in the first two Marvel vs. Capcom games, so his list of moves should be familiar to series fans. Doom is a fierce foe thanks to a number of long-range attacks, such as his plasma beam. He's a strong defender, too; his molecular shield move allows him to summon several large rocks to block incoming attacks. Doom's super moves all seem to involve him creating a fountain of yellow lightning from his fingertips.

Chun Li

It's no surprise that Street Fighter's most recognizable female fighter is bringing her lightning kicks to MvC 3. Quick feet are Chun Li's greatest assets, but she still has her usual set of super moves, like a massive stationary fireball and her ever-popular thousand rending kicks.

Trish

This demonic superhuman from the original Devil May Cry joins Dante as a playable fighter. Like Chun-Li, Trish's strength is her kicking attacks, but her basic blows are more devastating thanks to her supernatural background. Trish comes equipped with a giant blade and has the ability to hover in mid-air, making her a strong aerial combatant.

Super Skrull

Since Marvel's Secret Invasion event last year, Skrull's popularity has surged. He makes his fighting game debut in MvC 3. Possessing all of the Fantastic Four's powers makes this green alien a formidable opponent. We watched the Super Skrull combo people into the air, stretch out his arms like Mr. Fantastic to grab them, and slam them back to Earth. One of his super moves lets him explode into a fiery supernova, which is one of the Human Torch's iconic moves.

Thor

Marvel's mighty Thor comes equipped with his signature hammer, Mjolnir. Being a god, Thor can dish out a lot of punishment. His torpedo-like rushes allow him to cross the screen in a blitz. He also has the ability to control the weather for his super move, engulfing the entire screen in a giant electrical tornado.

Amaterasu

Amaterasu showcases many of her abilities from Okami, attacking with a long-range whip and zipping across the screen on vines. She is fast, nimble, and short, making it easy for her to dodge high attacks. Her special is an explosion of color and flowers, and we look forward to seeing her use more Celestial Brush techniques in the final game.





James Bond 007: Blood Stone

James Bond races into action

James Bond has a reputation for saving the world by any means necessary. Sneaking into restricted areas through vents, driving a boat through an office complex, calmly strolling through a secret bunker while dual-wielding semi-automatic weapons – nothing is above Britain's best spy. It only seems fair to let gamers have the same license to kill in video games. This November, the Bizarre Creations team that brought us *The Club* is hoping to deliver a game that lives up to the super spy's legendary status.

Blood Stone isn't based on any upcoming films, but that didn't stop Activision from tapping A-list Hollywood talent. Current Bond star Daniel Craig and Judi Dench, who plays Bond's superior in the films, are lending their voices and likenesses to the game. Ben Cook, Craig's stunt double for the films, is providing motion capture. English soul and R&B singer/songwriter Joss Stone stars as the newest Bond girl, and is also performing the song for *Blood Stone*'s opening montage.

The talent doesn't end there. Bruce Feirstein, the writer for many of the Pierce Brosnan-era Bond films, is writing a script that involves a secret U.K. biochemical weapons project. When these WMDs go missing, MI6 fears that they've fallen into the hands of a mysterious terrorist sect. The SIS sets Bond loose to hunt down an arms dealer by the name of Greco, who is rumored to be involved in the conspiracy. This journey eventually takes Bond to exotic locales like Athens, Istanbul, Monaco, Siberia, and Bangkok.

Bizarre Creations wants *Blood Stone* to feel like one of the recent, more action-heavy Bond films, which means the sily jetpacks and wrist-watch lasers that were popular in the '60s, '70s, and '80s probably won't be in the game. Craig's Bond is a physical brute, so the team is complementing the inevitable gunfights with hand-to-hand action. Cover is an important part of *Blood Stone*, as it allows Bond to sneak up on his enemies and perform dozens of close-quarters takedowns. Every time Bond knocks out an enemy with his hands he earns a Focus Aim token. These work like *Splinter Cell*: Conviction's mark and execute system, allowing Bond to walk

into a room and immediately take out up to three of his nearest targets with the touch of a button via slow-motion headshots. Unlike Conviction's system, however, players can use these tokens to take out one enemy at a time or string them together to clear out a room.

While Bizarre Creations has experience developing shooters, it is probably best known for its racing games *Blur* and *Project Gotham Racing*. This makes them an ideal developer to take Bond's high-octane gunplay and integrate it with his penchant for destroying expensive automobiles. After shooting up a villa in Greece in the demo we watched, Bond's targets take off in a truck. The suave super agent conveniently finds himself standing next to an Aston Martin. After a short cinematic transition, Bond is racing through the streets of Greece, plowing through street vendors, and ramming enemy vehicles off the road. All of the gameplay elements are seam-

lessly strung together.

In another race sequence Bond is in a frantic boat chase. While controlling the speedboat, players can use Focus Aim to shoot over the glass at Bond's rivals. Similar to Disney's recent *Split/Second* racer, *Blood Stone*'s racing environments morph as Bond speeds through them. When a lighthouse up ahead explodes, Bond uses the debris as a ramp to avoid the catastrophe and catch up to his targets.

With the new Bond film going through some troubled development, the only opportunity for fans to get their 007 fix in the near future is with Activision's upcoming games. In the past, Bond games have run the gamut from revolutionary to repulsive. Judging from what we've seen so far, however, Bizarre Creations is crafting an experience that could land a little higher on that spectrum. » **Ben Reeves**

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
(16-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Activision
- » **Developer**
Bizarre Creations
- » **Release**
November



Twisted Metal

New entry in legendary series looks to past for franchise's future

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Action
(Online TBA)

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Eat Sleep Play

» **Release**
2011

The second Sweet Tooth's ice cream truck rolled out on stage during Sony's E3 press conference this year, we knew we were in for a treat. The beloved car combat franchise Twisted Metal is making its next-gen comeback with an emphasis on online play next year.

Series creator David Jaffe spilled some details on the upcoming reboot to a crowd of rabid fans at this year's San Diego Comic-Con.

With Twisted Metal's current focus on online multiplayer, we caught a glimpse of a playable map that is still early in development. Jaffe presented a rooftop that takes inspiration from the

best features of those seen in Twisted Metal 1, 2, and Black. The industrial map has a center hub housing a large globe and figure eight circuit, and each surrounding rooftop is connected by a jump ramp for ultimate battle stunts. An atrium on the roof can be crashed through, dropping players into a swimming pool below. The team is still making tweaks to this layout that is only roughly 50 percent complete, but the Comic-Con crowd seemed pleased with its current state. Multiplayer will also see a host of new weapons. A non-playable gunner will be added to each vehicle, and snipers will introduce the

series' first one-hit kill.

As far as Twisted Metal's single-player mode, we're told Sweet Tooth, Dollface, and Mr. Grimm will be playable. Each character will have three different endings. These cinematics mark the return of live-action cutscenes that the original Twisted Metal was once criticized for. The team at Eat Sleep Play explored other options like "moving comic" sequences and CG popularized by other titles, but decided to return to the game's live-action roots instead.

At the panel Jaffe had some of the live-action props on hand including several versions of Sweet Tooth's rusted machete and variants of the masks worn by the homicidal clown and Dollface. However, don't expect any sort of gruesome scenes filled with blood, guts, and dismemberment; Unlike Twisted Metal: Black, which was rated M and was also the worst-selling title in the series' history, the new Twisted Metal will be rated T to ensure more players of all ages in multiplayer lobbies. Jaffe does admit, however, that he would love to see a low-budget slasher film starring Sweet Tooth make its way onto PlayStation Network. Jaffe also scuttled rumors that the game would feature 3D and Move compatibility, despite the fact that many of Sony's first-party games are pushing those technologies.

While the game is pretty early in development, we're eager to find out more on the latest Twisted Metal in the coming months.

» Annette Gonzalez



After dragging it along the asphalt, the flaming chainsaw is ready to be thrown





NHL 11

Skating through the game modes



If you've followed our NHL 11 coverage, you're already familiar with the gameplay changes EA Canada is implementing in its award-winning hockey franchise—a real-time, physics-based animation engine, broken sticks, and revamped face-off system standing out as the most notable new additions. Now it's time to dig into the game modes.

To create a more authentic start to your NHL career in the Be A Pro mode, EA added the 60 CHL teams, the amateur league that outputs the most NHL talent. Your draft position is determined at the Memorial Cup, and with seven rounds being integrated into the draft for the first time, if you sink it up you could find yourself being passed by several times over. EA has also tweaked how much it costs to buy skill points, added new equipment to the hockey shop, and refined the AI behavior to make your teammates skate better and take more shots.

The centerpiece innovation of last year's NHL game, Be A GM mode, improves with the addition of restricted and unrestricted free agency. Like the real NHL, you can sign younger players to slotted offer sheets or try to poach young superstars at the cost of losing draft picks. EA Canada has worked to improve the trade logic to limit the movement of star players and added five-player-per-team trades. The devs also implemented fixes to make sure good players don't unrealistically sit in free agency too long. Expect a lot more player movement at the minor league level, and, like the real NHL, don't expect cap-conscious teams to move a lot of first-liners unless they are pending unrestricted free agents.

NHL's popular six-on-six online league adds the oft-requested practice mode for the first time, and to create more intensity for the monthly seasons, this year's EASHL will feature playoffs the last four days of each month. If your team wins

the Cup, your game will feature a unique presentation package including raising your championship banner to the rafters before each game.

The new addition the dev team is most excited about is the new EA Ultimate Hockey League. This hybrid of online franchise and FIFA's Ultimate Team mode gives gamers a starter pack that includes 24 players, jerseys, a home arena, and training cards. Like the EASHL, each month is its own self-contained season that features playoffs and a championship game, and players can tweak their rosters by buying card packs or purchasing players in the auctions. Gamers will get their first taste of the league when the NHL 11 demo is released in mid-August. » **Matt Bertz**

Read more about Hockey Ultimate Team at gameinformer.com/mag

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 to 6-Player Sports
(PS3), 1 to 4-Player
(Xbox 360) (12-Player
Online)

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Canada

» **Release**
September 7

FIFA 11

Who's got the golden boots?

The recent World Cup just showcased the best soccer players from across the globe, and while some of them like Ingerland's darling Wayne Rooney or the entire French and Italian sides crapped the bed, it was indeed a spectacle of soccer skill. FIFA 11 is also trying to highlight what some of the best players in the world are capable of by making star players stand out on the pitch.

That's not just represented in their overall rating or number of skill move stars; a variety of different factors combine to make good players what they are. For instance, attributes like shot placement, passing, and dribbling proficiency will be more noticeable in the better players, not only in terms of the number assigned to that attribute but in their animations on the field. Gamers should be

able to visually identify good players from bad, whether it's trying to replicate a star player's gait from real life, or seeing how better players simply handle and address the ball.

Players' different proficiencies on the field match nicely with FIFA 11's attempts to vary the passing game to avoid gamers' ability in previous years to make it all the way down the field with just a few laser-guided passes. Now players with lower passing abilities might produce passes that require those receiving the ball to take more time to gather it up or have to chase down passes off the mark.

Although the game's real-life players are a focus this year, gamers also have a wealth of creation options to form their own clubs and fill them out with created players. This can be done with a

browser-based online application that includes designing the team's crest and kit and choosing a home stadium. These can be taken into online play, tournaments, and exhibition matches. You can also tweak players' attributes and make tactical changes via the web. Finally, the game's customization options also extend to the audio, where you can import the chants of your favorite team and even set up their entrance or goal-scoring music, for example.

EA has had the official FIFA license for years, and by trying to bring the players to the forefront, it's not only leveraging a particular asset, it's trying to represent the sport to its fullest.

» **Matthew Kato**

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Sports
(20-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Canada

» **Release**
September 28





gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

89 Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light

Crystal Dynamics turned the long-running Tomb Raider franchise on its head, creating an exciting new downloadable game for Xbox Live Arcade. Combat and puzzle solving mix in this isometric action title, which also boasts the ability to play cooperatively with a friend. To get the full details on this startling departure for one of gaming's longest-running series, check out our review on page 89.

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	Mel Gibson.

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

Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light

Crystal Dynamics takes a risk and reaps the reward



gameformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1 or 2-Player Action (2-Player Online) Publisher Square Enix Developer Crystal Dynamics
Release August 18 (Xbox 360), Fall (PS3, PC) ESRB T

Full disclosure: I love Lara Croft. It's no secret, but worth putting out there all the same. My allegiance to the industry icon, however, is just that – to the character herself. I've played all the Tomb Raider games over the past decade, and Lady Lara always helped me trudge through the franchise follies, even when convoluted narratives and questionable gameplay decisions disconnected the game from the roots I found endearing.

My waning enthusiasm for the property halted when Crystal Dynamics reinvented the series with Tomb Raider: Legend, which promised a new direction for the seasoned franchise. The studio's commitment to the IP and willingness to take risks is apparent in Guardian of Light, the first downloadable title in the franchise's stable.

With a new isometric viewpoint, amplified combat, and co-op play, Guardian of Light's many departures from traditional Tomb Raider gameplay are obvious. Despite the changes, the downloadable game feels more like a Tomb Raider experience than anything I've played of late. Bursting with exploration, puzzles, and platforming, the pace isn't encumbered with unnecessary narrative, dialogue, or even character development. We know who Lara Croft is. We know what she does best. The shrouded forests of Central America are her playground, and we're lucky enough to go along for the ride.

If you're worried about this being a downloadable game, don't fret. This isn't the case of a franchise being reduced to a skeleton in the name of brainless fun. Lara's library of moves

isn't truncated; the addition of artifacts and relics that augment Lara and her sidekick Totec's stats encourages careful exploration. Some are rewards for completing challenges, while others must be located in dangerous environments. This allows Lara to evolve in a measurable way, unlike past Tomb Raider games.

The level design is as epic as ever, with puzzles spanning entire vistas littered with tunnels, tombs, torturous traps, and more. Challenge rooms are a new addition that make the game much more accessible. The more taxing experiences in the game are reserved for these optional tombs, but Lara will be rewarded with a bigger payout for besting them. Some challenge rooms require logic to solve puzzles, while others test your reflexes and shooting skills with deathly obstacle courses and waves of powerful foes.

Nothing surprised me more than how much I enjoyed co-op play. The mode opens up new gameplay avenues with tools such as remote bombs and cooperative grapple moves. Many puzzles require cooperation, but the competitive element makes the adventure memorable. Though you and your partner share the same goals, a prominent score counter keeps both of you scrambling to get your hands on more gems and other objects of value than your partner. Speed runs, challenge tombs, and level-specific achievements each encourage replayability.

Despite the well-deserved accolades, a few problems remain. One would think the higher vantage point provided by the isometric camera would by default give you a better lay of the land,

but the legacy camera problems occasionally return. I met my demise several times by falling off a hidden cliff after getting ambitious in my exploration. Sometimes I had a hard time making a jump because of an object obscuring my view. These issues are few and far between, though, and the punishment for death is little more than a reduced score.

In taking a chance with Guardian of Light, Crystal Dynamics rediscovered Lara's latent potential. For those of you concerned with the direction this ancillary title has taken, rest easy. We now know that Lara Croft is as versatile as she is flexible. » Meagan Vanburkleo



9

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Dropping the Tomb Raider moniker, Crystal Dynamics changes the equation with a new camera and co-op play neatly wrapped in a downloadable package

» Graphics

Employing the Tomb Raider Underworld engine, the environments, lighting effects, and character renders are as polished as their big-budget counterparts

» Sound

Populated with both iconic and original music, the former grounds the game in familiarity while the latter plays up the new, action-centric direction. Some of the voice acting could use another once-over, though

» Playability

Despite the arcade influences, Lara's moveset isn't reduced in the slightest. Co-op play allows for more diversity in puzzle solving, and the analog shooting lends itself nicely to frenzied combat

» Entertainment

Balancing the franchise pillars – exploration, puzzles, and platforming – with the new combat-centric focus is both engaging and entertaining. Even when solving puzzles, downtime is rare

» Replay Value

Moderate

Madden NFL 11

Moving in new directions

8.75

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Madden NFL 11 takes some great strides forward at the expense of other areas

» Graphics

The players look sharp, with great lighting work, helmet reflections, and personal equipment touches

» Sound

New play-by-play announcer Gus Johnson brings emotion, but it's often behind the action and can be disjointed. The licensed stadium songs/chants are cool, however

» Playability

Running with the ball (without turbo) feels great and GameFlow improves offensive playcalling, but you'll spot plenty of legacy issues in the gameplay

» Entertainment

Controlling the ball carrier never felt this good. This year's Madden isn't perfect, but it has its improvements

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (6-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release August 10 ESRB B

Football fans often debate about the relative importance of the positions on a team. Can a great QB make the receivers around him better? Can marquee receivers make a mediocre QB look good? Does an ineffective pass rush doom even the most skilled corners? Madden NFL 11 spurs a similar kind of discussion based on the features it has chosen to address for this latest iteration versus those that have remained unchanged. Does the inclusion of online co-op play trump a bare-bones online franchise mode? Is making a stud running back like Chris Johnson feel like a world-beater more important than not cleaning up past AI issues?

The answers to these kinds of questions are up to you as a Madden player. I like a lot of the new additions to this year's game, but the lack of progress in some areas is unfortunate.

Madden NFL 11 features a new motion engine that makes running with the ball a dream. Subtle cuts, bursts of speed (without the turbo button), sheer physical power, and other characteristics are layered on and make NFL players come alive and showcase the abilities that make some of them stand out from the crowd. The game makes you feel like you've got unprecedented control over the runner, and every run feels a little different—particularly in the tackles or the lack thereof. Because of all the different factors that go into a player's running and tackling, you've got to watch that your defenders wrap up the ball carrier, otherwise it's common for a guy to get loose after a couple of sloppy tackles.

I love the varied outcomes in tackling and animations, but inconsistency elsewhere in the gameplay is maddening (no pun intended). Running with the ball is one of the highlights of the game, but the passing game shows some flaws. Players can be shockingly unaware of the ball as it sails by within their grasp. You also see players standing around without a clue of who to block or tackle. This is conspicuous when such great work has been done to highlight receivers' tracking of the ball for sideline catches and grabs in the back of the endzone. For every cool catch you see, you'll also see the ball suction into a receiver's hands or vice versa (where it looks like a player shoots forward suddenly to catch a ball otherwise out of their reach), as well as old staples like dropped gimme interceptions and auto-INTs.

Similar to last year, not every area of the game has been improved. What we gain in the new locomotion the game loses in yet another stalled year for Franchise mode. The worst part is that some of the mistakes remain, like the broken logic behind staff contracts. Online Team Play (OTP), the new three-vs.-three co-op feature that lets each of your team members control a specific unit like linebackers or wide receivers, is fun, but the fact that this new feature lacks any overall structure like persistent teams means that the games you play in this mode are more or less one-offs. OTP doesn't fill the void of the gimped Online Franchise mode, which still lacks free agency. Finally, I love the concept of the card-based Ultimate Team mode, even if your starting team is so bad—and no, I don't feel I should have to spend real money to get good card packs.

I enjoy a lot of the new features in Madden NFL 11. Things like game planning in conjunction with the automated GameFlow play-calling feature (which works a lot better for offense than defense) have changed the way that I play the game. I don't want to sound greedy or ungrateful, but I feel like adding new features isn't the only job of the development team when there are other areas that need to be addressed. Madden NFL 11 is a clear step forward for the franchise, but as fun as the additions are, the fact that some of its glaring mistakes remain is like getting a new stud quarterback even though the offensive line still needs an upgrade. You're going to score, but you're still a team with weaknesses. — **Matthew Kato**

Second Opinion 8.75

Like NCAA, Madden 11's biggest improvement over last year is the new locomotion engine and running controls. The new animations perfectly capture what announcers are talking about when they say Adrian Peterson "runs angry." The difference between average and great backs is now evident in the way they make cuts, burst through open holes, and attack defensive backs. The other highly touted change, the truncated GameFlow play-calling system, is a great tool for varying your offensive attack, but lacks the sophistication to deliver a sound defensive scheme. Putting a linebacker on Percy Harvin in the slot would get most coordinators fired, but I was caught in a base defense too many times when teams lined up in three receiver sets. On the presentation front, new commentator Gus Johnson talks circles around the robotic hack Tom Hammond, and Tiburon finally gives the Super Bowl the unique treatment it deserves. As a franchise guy, I lament that EA neglected to improve my favorite game mode; the Madden devs instead focused on strengthening the game's online offerings with the three-on-three Online Team Play mode. OTP adds teamwork and coordination to the equation, which makes playing with friends more enjoyable, but with no custom teams, career stat tracking, or scouting info about your opposition, EA missed an opportunity to flesh out the experience and make it a destination mode. — **Matt Bertz**



Clash of the Titans

Namco's newest clash is a wet and sloppy collision

Style 1 or 2-Player Action Publisher Namco Bandai
Developer Game Republic Release July 27 ESRB T

4

It's no secret that games based on licensed products are generally bad, but when a game gets delayed long past its corresponding movie release it gives you hope. After all, the publisher must think the game is good enough to stand on its own if it is willing to forgo piggybacking the movie's hype, right? GoldenEye 007 did this, and it is regarded as one of the most important console shooters of all time. If Namco Bandai was hoping for similar results with Clash of the Titans, it's in for a titanic disappointment.

Players take control of the demigod Perseus, who must fight against the will of the gods and save the world. You finish off foes using quick-time button presses, level up your weapons with souls extracted during combat, and face endless waves of enemies torn from a mythical Grecian bestiary. It's reminiscent of one of Sony's premiere franchises, but Clash of the Titans doesn't have the chops to stand alongside Kratos.

The game's non-player characters provide you with over a 100 kill-or-be-killed missions through very linear levels filled with underwhelming environments. Picking up missions is the only way the game breaks up its monotonous combat, but these are empty moments because you don't actually converse with these characters.

Perseus isn't fighting through legions of centaurs and harpies alone, but the game's lazy companion AI is one of the worst I've ever fought beside. Though I wasn't technically alone on the battlefield, it felt like it because my wallflower allies always shied away from the action. You're better off having a live companion watch your back (after you've unlocked co-op by playing through several single-player missions first), but good luck finding human recruits willing to put up with the game's stop-motion pace. Clash of the Titans' action has more hiccups than a maenad at a Dionysian party thanks to its jittery and repetitive animations. The combo system is virtually non-existent. Bosses are just bigger hit boxes with more health, and journeys in and out of the game's labyrinthine menu system feel like one of Homer's lost epics.

The game's coolest features fail due to poor design. By the end you amass an arsenal of over 80 weapons. However, many of these tools can't be leveled up until you've collected soul power from specific enemies, so sharpening your swords becomes an arduous process that ensures you'll stick to two or three of the first weapons you find.

The recent Clash of the Titans film was a mildly entertaining display of special effects. The game contains all of the film's camp but lacks the spectacle of million-dollar CG krakens to help save it. This titan of derivative gameplay doesn't deserve our reverence; it hardly deserves our attention at all. » **Ben Reeves**

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Make a God of War clone to coincide with the movie, miss the movie's marketing campaign by months, and weep for the lost opportunity to cash in

» **Graphics**
The game's textures are so messy it looks like some terrible Grecian sacrifice was performed in every level. The character models have the expressiveness of dead fish

» **Sound**
The dialogue is delivered with the tempered enthusiasm of a Paxil user, and the characters sound so similar that I suspect the same voice actor was used for everyone

» **Playability**
If Clash of the Titans could talk, it would have a stutter. The game's slow combos and choppy animations result in a frustrating action game with little depth

» **Entertainment**
Everything here has been done better in a dozen other games

» **Replay Value**
Low

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GAMER'S CORNER

PLAYER SPOTLIGHT: GokuVegeta

Virgin Gaming is proud to host console gamers from around the world. This month we spotlight the Netherlands' GokuVegeta, who has racked up FIFA™ winning streaks on both major consoles.



RED HOT SUMMER LEADERBOARD

Virgin Gaming's \$100,000 Red Hot Summer challenge is wrapping up, and here's the most recent list of gamers from the top of our leaderboards.

BAYERN4LIFE

BlindLuck21

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Alienware

JoeyB45

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Castlevania: Harmony of Despair

A new format doesn't hold back classic gameplay

8.5

360

» Concept

A fast-paced, six-player trek through Dracula's castle with elements from many Castlevania titles

» Graphics

Fantastic enemy design, environments, and death animations look as great as they ever have

» Sound

The soundtrack is unmistakably Castlevania, filled with its signature gothic guitar riffs

» Playability

If you've played a Castlevania title before, you know exactly how the controls feel

» Entertainment

The ability to bring several friends along is a great addition to the series' tried-and-true gameplay

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Style 1-Player Action [6-Player Online] Publisher Konami Developer Konami Release August 4 ESRB T

Second Opinion 8.25

The latest incarnation of Dracula's castle summons the previous heroes who fought within its haunted halls, and you'll need all of them to push back the darkness. If you're smart you'll recruit everyone you can get, because Harmony of Despair is designed from the ground up as a six-player multiplayer experience. This new cooperative approach is a blast, offering several beautiful stages filled with a greatest hits mix of locations, enemies, and characters from previous franchise entries. While the timed, self-contained stages fit the multiplayer paradigm perfectly, I'm not a fan of some of the other design choices. Why can't we pause the game? And why can you only equip new items at discrete locations around the board? Gathering equipment and exploring levels is fun, though the game lacks the intrigue and secrets that are franchise hallmarks. Harmony of Despair may not move the series forward, but seeing Alucard and Soma fight side by side is worth the price of admission. » Matt Miller

After the success of 1997's *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, Konami could have stuck with the formula that made that title an all-time classic. Instead, the exploration-heavy 2D gameplay didn't last long on home consoles, and migrated to Nintendo's handheld systems. After a decade of experimentation (and disappointment) with 3D titles on consoles, the familiar sprites of Alucard and company return to grace our television screens. Harmony of Despair looks familiar to series fans, and many of its classic elements are in place, but it's a Castlevania experience unlike anything you've played before.

When Konami announced that Harmony features six-player cooperative play, it was a godsend for longtime fans. However, further reveals led to some understandable skepticism. The new time limit raised the most eyebrows. Since *Symphony of the Night*, *Castlevania* games

have always centered on exploring massive environments at your own pace. Like *Metroid*, the fun is in exploring dozens of doors, paths, or ledges that you couldn't access until later points in the game. With a time limit in place, the gameplay changes.

Except it doesn't. Yes, each standalone stage has a 30 minute time limit. However, you're still navigating the castle, slaying countless demons, and acquiring new weapons and armor. Surprisingly, the time limit is almost never a hindrance.

Rather than hitting select or glancing at the top screen map to get your bearings, you can zoom out to see the entire stage on one screen. If you have a small (or non-HD) television, this probably won't help very much. But if your screen is large enough, you can see every single enemy, co-op partner, and boss in the level moving in real time. It's not just a cosmetic gimmick. I preferred the

two closer zooms for combat and exploration, but the impressive wide shot also serves a purpose. Many areas are inaccessible without teamwork, so it helps to track your buddies' locations as they stand on switches or pull levers to open the path ahead. Some bosses have huge attacks that pass through walls and stretch across the entire

map. Others freely float around the stage at will, so keeping tabs on their locations is key.

Unlike previous titles, *Harmony of Despair* ditches a standard leveling system. Rather, your character becomes more powerful by acquiring new weaponry and armor scattered throughout the levels. It eliminates the need for grinding, but as a longtime fan of the series I missed wandering the castle killing everything in a quest to level up. Relying on random treasure chest contents to improve your character makes it more of a luck of the draw system.

Equipping these items is also a hassle. Rather than determining your best assortment of accessories by pausing the game, you must travel to one of the rare book stations in the level. It's frustrating to pick up an impressive-sounding new sword, only to have it sit in an inaccessible menu for an extended period of time. The system for equipping healing items also adds to the frustration. Plenty of potions and food are scattered throughout the quest, but you can only equip one at a time. As you progress through the game, this makes the lesser items virtually useless because savvy gamers opt to bring along high potions or super potions.

While these frustrations keep *Harmony of Despair* from reaching the level of its predecessors, the co-op multiplayer is a fantastic new feature. Early levels are frustrating when going solo, but bringing a few friends along makes it a significantly more manageable and fun experience. It's the only way to go after Dracula if you want the full experience. » Dan Ryckert



Ninety-Nine Nights II

Hacking and slashing through the mindless hordes

Style 1-Player Action (2-Player Online) Publisher Konami
Developer Q Entertainment Release June 29 ESRB M



Ninety-Nine Nights was a strange beast. On a superficial level, the Dynasty Warriors clone swapped Three Kingdoms-era intrigue for a swords and sorcery motif. Adding magic and likable characters went a long way toward making the experience accessible to players who normally avoid the hack-n-slash genre, but the gameplay never expanded beyond taking your hero to the battlefield and obliterating thousands of goons. The sequel adds more enemies and more customization, but somehow manages to feel more shallow than its predecessor. It's a shame, too, since there's still a lot to like at its core.

Ninety-Nine Nights II features five new characters, each with his or her own motivation and fighting style. Galen, an imposing armored figure who wields huge swords, is the most traditional of the bunch. While the others, such as the goblin assassin Levv or dark-elf leader Zazi, look completely different, they ultimately play the same. Levv's twin blades and Zazi's crossbow are different weapons with different

effective ranges, but successful players will only rely on those attacks while they wait for magic to recharge. Therein lies the ultimate problem with N3 II.

As I slugged my way through various levels, painfully replaying some to earn XP to boost skills and item stats, I eventually settled on an effective loadout. Early battles required me to dive into battle and hammer on my melee attacks, but once I acquired the proper skills I could decimate armies without even trying. My lightning spell shot ricocheting bolts through a mass of enemies, felling dozens at the press of a button. Once powered up, I could plant a magic orb at the feet of mid-bosses and bosses alike, withering their health down in seconds. It's an undeniably great feeling – particularly when you can blow through previously difficult sections without pausing – but with a few overpowered options, the dozens of other skills and abilities seem unnecessary.

Each character is geared toward being good at specific types of magic or another talent. When

everyone can equip the same items, however, there's little reason or incentive to experiment. This is especially true when it's easy to level up the wrong items and find yourself stuck, losing an hour's worth of progress.

It's a shame that so much of the game feels like a grind, because there's a lot of real potential in this series. As with the first game, N3 II tells a nuanced, mature story about racism and the futility of revenge. Characters have their own versions of the campaign's central conflict, and playing through each individual's story reveals additional layers.

As good as that narrative framework may be, it's ultimately sandwiched between repetitive, mindless combat. Some people like grinding in games, myself included. At some point, though, even the most patient of us yearn for more. A million enemies might make for a great bullet point, but when they're as dumb and inconsequential as the foes in N3 II, it all rings too hollow to matter. » **Jeff Cook**

6

360

» **Concept**

Save a kingdom – and the universe as we know it – by shredding entire armies

» **Graphics**

Loads of similar-looking enemies are packed into the lackluster levels

» **Sound**

The generic fantasy soundtrack is largely forgettable

» **Playability**

While a handful of combos are available, you can just as easily tear through the game jamming on the X and Y buttons at random

» **Entertainment**

If you love the grind and are looking for something mindless to play as a background activity, this is a contender. Otherwise, it's tedious even for the genre

» **Replay Value**

Moderate

Darkstar One: Broken Alliance

There's not that much to do in space, apparently

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Kalypso Media
Developer Gaming Minds Release July 20 ESRB T



I'm a big space sim dork, and I wanted to love Darkstar One so badly. It's too bad that this attempt at simulating the lifestyle of a Han Solo type consists of little more than the same three missions repeated ad nauseum.

As the pilot of the titular spacecraft, players spend most of their time in the cockpit. The nuts and bolts of spaceflight, while as scientifically inaccurate as the iconic sound of Twin Ion

Engines howling through the vacuum, work well enough in the arcade dogfights that break out at the drop of a hat. The battles can't hold a candle to the glorious setpiece engagements found in Starlancer or TIE Fighter, but blowing enemy ships into particles is fun on a basic level.

Darkstar One gives players a lot of leeway along the path to avenging the protagonist's father. A steady drip of goals keeps you moving

forward. Finding artifacts allows you to increase your alien tech-equipped ship's capabilities, while collecting cash allows you to kit your craft out with the latest in military hardware. How you earn money is up to you: clear out pirate nests, run goods or contraband, hunt bounties, or escort merchants. The unfortunate

reality is that nearly all of the hundreds of side missions in the game fall into one of a bare handful of types. Ninety percent of the time, it's "fly here, shoot these guys." Nine of the remaining 10 percent consists of "fly here, listen to interminable dialogue." That final percentage is where many of the story missions fall, and contains genuinely interesting scenarios like picking off waves of drones trying to land on a research station or taking out bomber wings trying to finish off a disabled cruiser.

Side missions containing little variety wouldn't be a huge problem except that you are required to spend the vast majority of your time doing them in order to progress. You can skip hunting artifacts and making money to burn through the story to some extent – and get obliterated by the stronger foes in the next sector.

If the dozens of hours of boring fluff were stripped out, I could recommend this as a reasonably amusing budget-priced shoot-em-up in space. That's not the case, and Darkstar One is the worse for it. Avoid this unless your space dogfighting itch is keeping you up at night. » **Adam Bisessner**



Unusual setpieces like this make up a tiny fraction of gameplay

6

360

» **Concept**

Track down your father's killer through multiple space empires, making money and leveling up your ship along the way

» **Graphics**

It's an older engine, but it checks out. Ships and stations don't have enough variety, but space itself is a pretty place. The blazing framerate helps

» **Sound**

Sometimes I marvel at the fees that accomplished voice actors charge. Then I spend dozens of hours in a game like this where the voiceover budget was in the tens of dollars

» **Playability**

There are too many controls in the PC original to comfortably fit on a gamepad, which makes the work done to create this useable interface all the more impressive

» **Entertainment**

This could have been something special with more interesting content. As it is, the endless task repetition kills a lot of the fun

» **Replay Value**

Low

Guilty Party

The Dickens Family Detective Agency is open for business

8

Style 1 to 4-Player Party Publisher Disney Interactive Studios Developer Wideload Games Release August 31 ESRB E

Wii

» Concept

Spice up bland Wii minigame collection by mixing it with a Clue-style board game

» Graphics

Great character design and detailed settings make for a sharp-looking SD game

» Sound

Strong voice acting and clever writing make up for an annoying theme song and repetitive catchphrases

» Playability

Three difficulty settings ensure that anyone can play, though minigames vary wildly in challenge

» Entertainment

Not worth it for the five-hour story mode alone, but if you've got friends or family who dig the concept, it's a blast

» Replay Value

Moderate

The sign of a good mystery is that it keeps you guessing until the end. For all of its goofy characters, motion-based minigames, and occasional frustrations, Guilty Party does just that.

The easiest way to understand Guilty Party is to think of the old mystery board games Clue and Guess Who. Like Clue, you explore the different rooms surrounding the location of a crime scene, gathering evidence on the culprit. Like Guess Who, the clues help you whittle down the list of suspects by hinting at the physical attributes of the criminal – their gender, hair length, height, and weight. You only have two options for each trait, which seems like it could make things too simplistic, but in every case I played through, I was uncertain right up until I uncovered the final clue.

Guilty Party is split into two modes: Story and Party. Story Mode has six main cases, plus a prologue and a finale. These mysteries have set criminals and clues, and each is bookended with a silly outscene that moves the story along. The plot, about a family detective agency being tormented by the devious criminal mastermind Mr. Valentine, is inconsequential, but the dialogue and voice acting are funny enough to keep players of all ages entertained.

The family runs the gamut of mystery story stereotypes, from the superhero wannabe Kid Riddle to the Sam & Max-style comedic noir detective coincidentally named Max. A



kung-fu-wielding granny named Charlotte is thrown in for good measure. The other female family members play it straight to the point that they're boring, but everyone else provides a few chuckles during the team's absurd exploits. My personal favorite line: "Oh, Hugh the manateel!" screamed while a zeppelin explodes in the background.

Party mode exchanges the storyline for randomly generated mysteries and more ways to mess up your opponents. Though Party mode can be played cooperatively, the real fun is in playing competitively, where you get to draw cards to choose what traps Mr. Valentine sets for other players after your turn.

The only downside is that in the chaos of locking other detectives in rooms, stealing their move tokens, and knocking them out, it's pretty easy to miss out on clues and leave your crew unable to solve the mystery before time runs out and the bad guy escapes. Get ready to be annoyed by your character screaming the same two or three lines every time you play a card or win a minigame as well. "Kid Riddle strikes again!" And again. And again...

While the mystery metagame is enjoyable, Guilty Party's minigames are passable at best. Many are extremely easy, such as fanning away the dust in a crime scene to uncover clues or tickling a suspect to get them to reveal information (both accomplished with the same frantic waving of the Wii remote). If you solve these without trouble (as players of almost any skill level will), the game recommends moving to a higher difficulty setting. When this happens, you're inevitably going to bump into one of the rare overly difficult minigames, such as an awkwardly fast-paced rhythm game or a thumb-wrestling match that's far too hard.

Though they're hardly compelling, the minigames are at least numerous and easy to learn. I never repeated the same tasks often enough to get bored with them, but I also never found myself confused when new mechanics were introduced. They basically operate as a minor and inoffensive distraction for families and friends. If you're a fan of board games or enjoy gathering people around the TV to play together, Guilty Party will have you scouring for evidence and unmasking crooks for weeks. » Phil Kollar





Disciples III: Renaissance

Nothing original in this fantasy empire

Style 1 to 4-Player Strategy Publisher Kalypso Media
Developer Akella Release June 16 ESRB E 10+

5.5

PC

» Concept

Fuse RPG-style adventure with light empire-building in grand high fantasy tradition

» Graphics

The best parts of this strategy game are the graphics and art direction. I will never get to write that sentence again

» Sound

Turn it off as soon as possible. Some of the worst voiceovers in years

» Playability

Map scrolling is painfully slow for no good reason, and poor documentation means that you'll have to dig around online to find out how a lot of things work

» Entertainment

Reinstalling any well-received strategy title from the last decade would be more worthy of your time

» Replay Value

Low

Try as I might, I can't think of a reason to play Disciples III. This Russian-developed strategy title mashes up concepts from a handful of games that are dear to my heart, and yet fails to sculpt them into a worthwhile whole.

Like Heroes of Might & Magic, Master of Magic, Age of Wonders, or almost any fantasy strategy game, Disciples III has players commanding armies on a large overworld map and diving into tactical battles when those forces clash with enemy troops. Taking control of strategic points grants dominion over resource-generating nodes and other useful map features, while prevailing in battle awards experience points to heroes and troops along with equipment and consumables. Disciples has more RPG in its strategy than most of this niche subgenre, with heroes advancing along Final Fantasy-like upgrade boards and generic troops progressing through several tiers themselves.

None of this is compelling in the slightest. It's as if all the necessary components of a fantasy strategy title were mixed together with no vision for what the final product should be. Upgrading your Squire to a Knight, which requires a significant XP investment and a new building at your home castle, gives passive boosts more suited to equipping a new piece of armor. Hero skill points grant such exciting powers as +2 strength or +3 movement. Most units have no special powers, and the ones that do are so good that you want to use them every round. The tactical AI is terrible, so battles are turgid slogs through thousands of hit points with little variation. The strategy layer holds no interest either, with a bare few mobile armies on any given map and more awful AI offering little challenge to your garrisons.

Disciples III is pretty enough, but it doesn't take long to figure out that there's no soul behind the enticing façade. With how well classic turn-based strategy games hold up over the years, there's no reason to buy a new game just for the sake of having something made in 2010. » **Adam Biesseiner**



A tiny handful of single-player and hotseat maps is the only content outside the story campaign

Valkyria Chronicles II

Another strategic victory, despite the small battlefield



gameformer
SILVER

Style 1-Player Strategy (2-Player Local) Publisher Sega Developer Sega
Release August 31 ESRB T

8.5

PSP

» Concept

Civil war has broken out in Gallia! Can your ragtag class of military cadets keep the nation whole?

» Graphics

Even without the cool effects of the original, the sequel still has a distinct visual style

» Sound

A superb soundtrack sets the mood, and the sparse voice work is pretty good

» Playability

The difficulty is generally lower than the first game, but a handful of story missions will punish you ruthlessly for a wrong move

» Entertainment

Just as good as the first game, but fun in different ways

» Replay Value

Moderately High

As a fan of the first Valkyria Chronicles, I was initially disappointed to learn the series was moving from PS3 to PSP. Then I played this sequel, and all was forgiven. Sega makes some sacrifices to make the experience more portable, but it also made improvements and added depth, resulting in a follow-up that stands right alongside its predecessor.

The strategic combat system remains remarkably similar to the first game. After surveying the situation from the command map, you take control of individual units to move and attack in real time. Putting players in the middle of the action avoids the mechanical repetition associated with grid-based strategy titles while still delivering the thrill of a well-executed tactical maneuver. The maps and mission objectives lack variety, but new enemies and unit types ensure that you aren't constantly reaching into the same bag of tricks. If you still need a change of pace, you can check out the new versus and co-op challenges, though the multiplayer is local-only.

The PSP can't reproduce all of the things that made Valkyria Chronicles a cult hit on PS3. The cel-shaded sketchbook aesthetic of the original has been replaced with a more conventional anime vibe, and the scale of the conflicts has been drastically reduced. Where you could once bring a veritable army into battle, you are now limited to six soldiers on the field at once. This is especially restricting when you need to wage war on multiple fronts. This limitation is the most glaring flaw, since it also prevents battles from achieving the scope of the original.

Unit deployment could use a few tweaks, but Valkyria Chronicles II compensates by making your time off the battlefield better than ever. The story doesn't just focus on a few teammates; your entire squad is front and center. The characters each have unique cutscenes and missions that flesh out their personalities, and I became attached to many of them. They also feel more like individuals thanks to the new XP and advancement system, which rewards a unit's performance and allows them to take on specialized roles beyond the base classes. From the new weapon upgrades to the improved tank customization, almost everything outside of combat is a step above the last entry.

Valkyria Chronicles II is the best PSP game I've played in years. It could have been even better if not for the limitations of the hardware, but hopefully Sega wises up and puts Valkyria Chronicles III back on home consoles. In the meantime, this entry will delight fans of the original and inspire the uninitiated to pledge their allegiance to Gallia. » **Joe Juba**

To read the extended review, head to gameformer.com/mag

9 | NCAA Football 11

Platform PS3 • 360 Release July 13 ESRB E
Issue Aug '10



NCAA has its flaws, but with improved on-the-field action, recruiting, and presentation (including the option to generate custom stories on your Dynasty), for the first time in years I feel like I'm getting the college experience.
— Matthew Kato

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Rogue Warrior	1.5	Feb-10
Singularity	8.5	Aug-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jun-10
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75	Apr-10
Split Second	8.25	Jun-10
Star Ocean: The Last Hope - International	7	Mar-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
Vandal Hearts: Flames of Judgment	7.5	Apr-10
White Knight Chronicles	7.25	Mar-10
Yakuza 3	6.5	May-10

Battlefield: Bad Company 2	9.5	Mar-10
Bayonetta	9	Feb-10
Blasphemous 2	8.25	Mar-10
Blood Bowl	7.75	Mar-10
Blur	8.5	Jul-10
Crackdown 2	7.25	Aug-10
Dante's Inferno	7	Mar-10
Dark Void	7	Feb-10
Darksiders	8.5	Feb-10
Dead to Rights: Retribution	8	Jun-10
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Matt Hazard:		
Blood Bath and Beyond	7.75	Mar-10
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Nier	6.5	Jul-10
Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8	Jul-10
Pure Futbol	7	Jul-10

XBOX 360

Alan Wake	8.5	Jun-10
Aliens vs. Predator	5.75	Mar-10
Alpha Protocol	6.5	Jul-10
Attack of the Movies 3D	4	Jun-10
Backbreaker	5	Jul-10

8 | Hyrdro Thunder Hurricane

Platform 360 Release July 28 ESRB E

Hydro Thunder Hurricane is clearly a work of nostalgia; there aren't really any new ideas here, just a fervent desire to return video game racing to a time when speed and fun meant more than complex career modes and customizable liveries. It's all the more charming for the fact that, in these declining days of the racing genre, there aren't many pure arcade racers anymore. Perhaps services like Live Arcade can be a new start for a style of game that deserves a second chance. — Matt Helgeson

6 | Ivy the Kiwi?

Platform DS Release August 24 ESRB E

Cute graphics and a famous name aren't always enough. Sonic creator Yuji Naka returns to game development in a snooze-fest that lacks depth for far too long. What may have seemed like a good idea for a platformer on paper ended up being a nearly uncontrollable game with frustrating mechanics. While the game eventually wakes up a bit in the later levels, I never really did. — Nick Ahrens

7.5 | Ace Combat: Joint Assault

Platform PSP Release August 31 ESRB T

Joint Assault offers up two changes to the long-running dogfighting series — real-world locations and co-op play on a portable system. Outside of that, it's the same solid experience you've been playing since the PSone. It's understandable considering that there's only so much you can do with a semi-realistic jet fighter game, but that doesn't stop us from getting a sense of déjà vu. — Dan Ryckert

5.5 | Blacklight: Tango Down

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release July 7 ESRB T

Though the \$15 pricetag is attractive for a robust multiplayer shooter, Blacklight: Tango Down ultimately loses the war to poor level design and questionable game balance. There aren't enough bullets in this gun's chamber to make the kill count. — Matt Bertz

7.75 | Monday Night Combat

Platform 360 Release August 11 ESRB T

Monday Night Combat's mix of tower defense strategy and third-person shooter action is an addictive new approach to multiplayer gaming. However, with only two basic modes and a handful of similar-looking maps, it's only a matter of time until the player is left wanting more variety. — Jeff Marchiava

4.75 | Sniper: Ghost Warrior

Platform 360 Release June 29 ESRB M

Sniper: Ghost Warrior's biggest flaw is that it doesn't get sniping right. Whenever you look down the scope to line up an enemy soldier for a messy de-braining, you can activate a mutant-like power to slow time, during which the enemy moves slower than a sloth. This enables even the least skilled gamer to line up a shot that will bore a hole right between a soldier's eyes. This power steals away any chance of Sniper: Ghost Warrior being taken seriously. — Andrew Reiner

9 | Limbo

Platform 360 Release July 21 ESRB T Issue Aug '10

As I played, fellow editors would occasionally tap my shoulder and draw my attention away, and I would catch myself jumping – not because I was scared, but because I was so engrossed in the experience that it felt jarring to be pulled out so suddenly. – Matt Miller

Puzzle Quest 2	7.75	Aug-10
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jun-10
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Resonance of Fate	6.75	May-10
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Rocket Knight	8	Jul-10
Samura Shodown Sen	6	May-10
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Singularity	8.5	Aug-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jun-10
Snoopy Flying Ace	8.5	Aug-10
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75	Apr-10
Splitter Cell: Conviction	9	May-10
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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75	Jul-10
Toy Soldiers	8.25	May-10
Toy Story 3	8	Aug-10
Transformers: War for Cybertron	8.5	Aug-10
Tropico 3	8.75	Mar-10
UFC Undisputed 2010	8.25	Jul-10
Verdant Hearts: Flames of Judgment	7.5	Apr-10

Wii		
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Toy Story 3	6	Aug-10
Trauma Team	8	Jun-10

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Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight	7.75	May-10
Dark Void	7	Feb-10
Divinity II: Ego Draconis	7	Mar-10
Dragon Age: Origins – Awakening	7.75	Apr-10

Gyromancer	7.75	Feb-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10
Mass Effect 2	9.75	Mar-10
Metro 2033	9	May-10
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Napoleon: Total War	8.75	Apr-10
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Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom, The	8.5	May-10
Sims 3: Ambitions, The	7.75	Jul-10
Supreme Commander 2	8	Apr-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75	Jul-10
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II Chaos Rising	8.5	May-10

NINTENDO DS		
Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth	7.5	Mar-10
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Bookworm	7.75	Feb-10
Dementium II	6	Jul-10
Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies	8	Aug-10
Infinite Space	8	May-10
Picross 3D	9	May-10
Pokémon HeartGold/SoulSilver	8.5	May-10
Puzzle Chronicles	7	Mar-10
Puzzle Quest 2	7.75	Apr-10
Rooms: The Main Building	7	Apr-10
Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey	8.75	Mar-10
WarioWare D.I.Y.	8.5	May-10

PSP		
Dead or Alive: Paradise	4	Jun-10
Disgaea Infinite	6.5	Aug-10
Lunar: Silver Star Harmony	8	Mar-10
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker	8	Aug-10
Metall Slug XX	6.75	Apr-10
Puzzle Chronicles	7	Mar-10
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable	8.25	Aug-10
What Did I Do To Deserve This My Lord? 2	6	Jul-10

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Road Warriors

The ups and downs of David Jaffe's car combat innovator Twisted Metal

by Dan Ryckert





In the early '90s, each console had a clearly defined and family-friendly face attached to it. Nintendo's SNES had the always-reliable Mario, and Sega's Genesis and Saturn had the speedy Sonic in their corner. Sony didn't have anyone quite on their level of fame, but they launched a fairly successful marketing campaign with their own cuddly platform star Crash Bandicoot. Amongst all of these cartoon-eyed platformers, there was a very different title that separated itself from the pack back in 1995. It too came with its own distinctive face, and it was the flaming head of a murderous clown.

Within two months of the PlayStation's launch, SingleTrac established itself as a hot new developer by releasing *Twisted Metal* and *Warhawk*. While the latter is a fondly remembered air combat title, it was the chaos and carnage caused by Sweet Tooth and company that made gamers take notice. We're now 15 years removed from the debut of the longest-running PlayStation-exclusive series, but E3 2010 made it perfectly clear that we aren't anywhere near the end.

At its core, *Twisted Metal*'s concept shouldn't be a hard sell – a bunch of cars driven by psychopaths and decked out with a ludicrous amount of weaponry. Make everyone else explode, and you win. As easy as the concept is to understand, SingleTrac and David Jaffe provided gamers with the perfect dose of wicked humor and clever game design to make it special.

Games like *Destruction Derby* brought vehicular mayhem to the PlayStation, but they didn't let you run over mimes in a monster truck. *Twisted Metal* turned the action up to a cartoonish level, featuring cars ramping from skyscraper to skyscraper while shooting homing missiles and napalm bombs. You could detonate the Eiffel Tower, burn the Mona Lisa with napalm, murder fat kids in swimming trunks, and even (confusingly) turn the Statue of Liberty into an obese, bikini-clad woman via the use of a few fire missiles. The creative stages took the game's signature carnage from wide-open cornfields in Holland populated by two lone windmills to rapidly-sinking glaciers in Antarctica.

Spinning off track

The first two titles in the series offered these insane moments with reckless abandon, and in playing them you could sense SingleTrac had a blast making them. However, the next two entries in the series were oddly soulless thanks to a switch in developers. A contractual dispute led to SingleTrac being pulled from the series in favor of Sony's in-house 989 Studios. While not unplayable games, *Twisted Metal 3* and *4* felt like empty experiences by comparison. All of the elements were in place – wacky drivers, exploding landmarks, ridiculous weapons, etc. However, the games lacked the creativity and humor that was such a crucial part of the originals.

The series returned with a bang in 2001. Many former SingleTrac employees, including Jaffe himself, formed Incognito Entertainment. Their first title was a new take on the *Twisted Metal* franchise, titled *Twisted Metal: Black*. Many series favorites returned, but gone were the bright colors and cartoon-like ending vignettes featured in the past. *Black* became the first title in the series to earn an M rating from the ESRB thanks to its incredibly gory cutscenes and grim story. Most characters hailed from the game's Blackfield mental asylum, and none of them were in the light-hearted vein of previous contestants.

Black's change of tone didn't hurt the gameplay in the least. The series' PlayStation 2 debut featured massive, sprawling areas with countless destructibles and secrets. A ferris wheel could be taken off its hinges, causing it to run roughshod through the suburban town below. One stage initially appeared to be set entirely on a large ship until it docks, which opened up the carnage to giant island area. Another allowed players to shoot down a 747, granting entry to previously inaccessible areas.

New opportunities

Multplayer was always a huge part of *Twisted Metal*'s appeal, but it never had much of a chance to feature robust online play. Players could hunt enemies via co-op play or duke it out in areas populated with bots, but the PS2 just launched its network adaptor when *Black* launched, so Incognito never offered a true online experience. *Twisted Metal: Online* came out shortly thereafter, but many PS2 users still didn't have their consoles connected to the Internet.

With all the fun the series has provided without the help of online play, one can imagine the carnage this upcoming PS3 installment will bring. With Jaffe and many SingleTrac/Incognito staffers forming development studio Eat Sleep Play, *Twisted Metal* fans should take comfort in knowing that the series is in the hands of those who know it best.



Top *Twisted Metal 2* (PSone)
Middle *Twisted Metal: Head-On* (PSP)
Bottom *Twisted Metal: Black* (PS2)

THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT...



ED BOON

One of the biggest talking points coming out of E3 is the new (well, old) direction for the Mortal Kombat franchise. By taking it back to the 2D plane and gory fatalities that made the series notorious, Ed Boon is reminding gamers why we love it in the first place. Read on for some tidbits from the innovator behind Mortal Kombat's violence.

+ Earliest gaming memory:

Playing Defender in an arcade. I actually got in a motorcycle accident when I was a kid and I broke my left wrist and my left toe, so I had a cast on my foot and wrist. I cut away part of the cast so I could grab onto the joystick that moves your ship in Defender. I'd sit there kind of balancing on one leg and playing the game for a few weeks as I had the cast on.

+ Odd jobs before the gaming industry:

I worked in a grocery department and at a Cadillac dealership parking and washing cars when I was 15 and 16 years old. Right out of college I was hired to program pinball machines for Williams Electronics.

+ On the controversy surrounding Mortal Kombat's violence:

Well, we weren't worried by any stretch of the imagination in terms of "oh no, they're going to put a ratings system in!" like that's a bad thing. Part of us were kind of realizing that it was something that was becoming necessary because graphics were becoming a little bit more realistic. All of a sudden you could depict violence and blood and all that. I remember when people were playing the game in the arcades I was thinking, "Wow, this is really a violent game and young kids can just walk into the arcade and play it." There was something that seemed kind of wrong about that.

+ The last time he spoke to John Tobias:

About a week or two ago. We have instant message and stuff so I talk to him all the time.

+ Non-fighting games that he enjoys:

I've played Gears of War and God of War. I certainly tried playing Grand Theft Auto, but something about the size being so big made me realize that I would never be able to finish any individual one of them just because I don't have that time. So I can never really invest into it. I'd play it more so from a developer's standpoint, kind of admiring what they did and wondering how they did this and all that.

+ Experiencing the 3DS at E3:

I got to the Nintendo booth and they snuck me in to check out the 3DS. I couldn't believe that they actually got a 3D screen without glasses, so from a technology standpoint I was really impressed with it. I wondered a little bit if there would be any kind of fatigue in your eyes or any kind of focusing problems or something. Let's say you had Mario 64 or Zelda or something that requires 20-something hours of staring at the screen. I wondered how long of a game session people would have before their eyes would start getting strained.

+ His least favorite Mortal Kombat characters:

In Deadly Alliance we had a character Hsu Hao who was a strange guy. Him and Drahnin. Those are probably two characters whose chances of returning aren't very high.

+ On the Mortal Kombat movie theme never being used in the games:

During the PS2 era, we had these elaborate rendered movie sequences that would play for Deadly Alliance, Deception, Shaolin Monks, and Armageddon. At one point, one of the audio guys was saying, "What if we played the Mortal Kombat theme?" But by then, it was so overplayed. When I would hear it, I'd interpret it as so inappropriate for the game. There was a sort of cheesiness to it that I couldn't quite repeat.

+ Are there any fatality ideas deemed too gory for Mortal Kombat?

Oh yeah, without a doubt. We have fatality meetings and people come in with sketches or ideas and they'll stand up and kinda act it out. Somebody will say something dealing with parts of the body that you just don't want to mutilate, and we'll say "Come on, you guys! We can't do better than this!" We want to be creative with it instead of just blatantly shocking like "...and he stuffs it in his mouth!" You can figure out the rest.

+ On the fake Mortal Kombat movie trailer:

I was sitting in front of my screen like everyone else going "What the hell is this?" It just turned out to be this guy who wanted to direct a Mortal Kombat movie, and that's his sorta guerrilla tactic of doing it. I thought it was awesome.

+ On whether motion control can ever rival a controller for fighting games:

With a fighting game there's a precision factor when you don't have tactile feedback of a button. The timing of when you want the punch to be fired out and when you want contact to be made is more difficult to do when you are doing it with your body and there's nothing feeding back to you. I think that it would absolutely require a different game design. I don't think you could say "Oh, let's take Mortal Kombat and just quickly hook it up with Kinect controls! There you go, you're punching and kicking!" I don't think it's gonna be that simple of a process.

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