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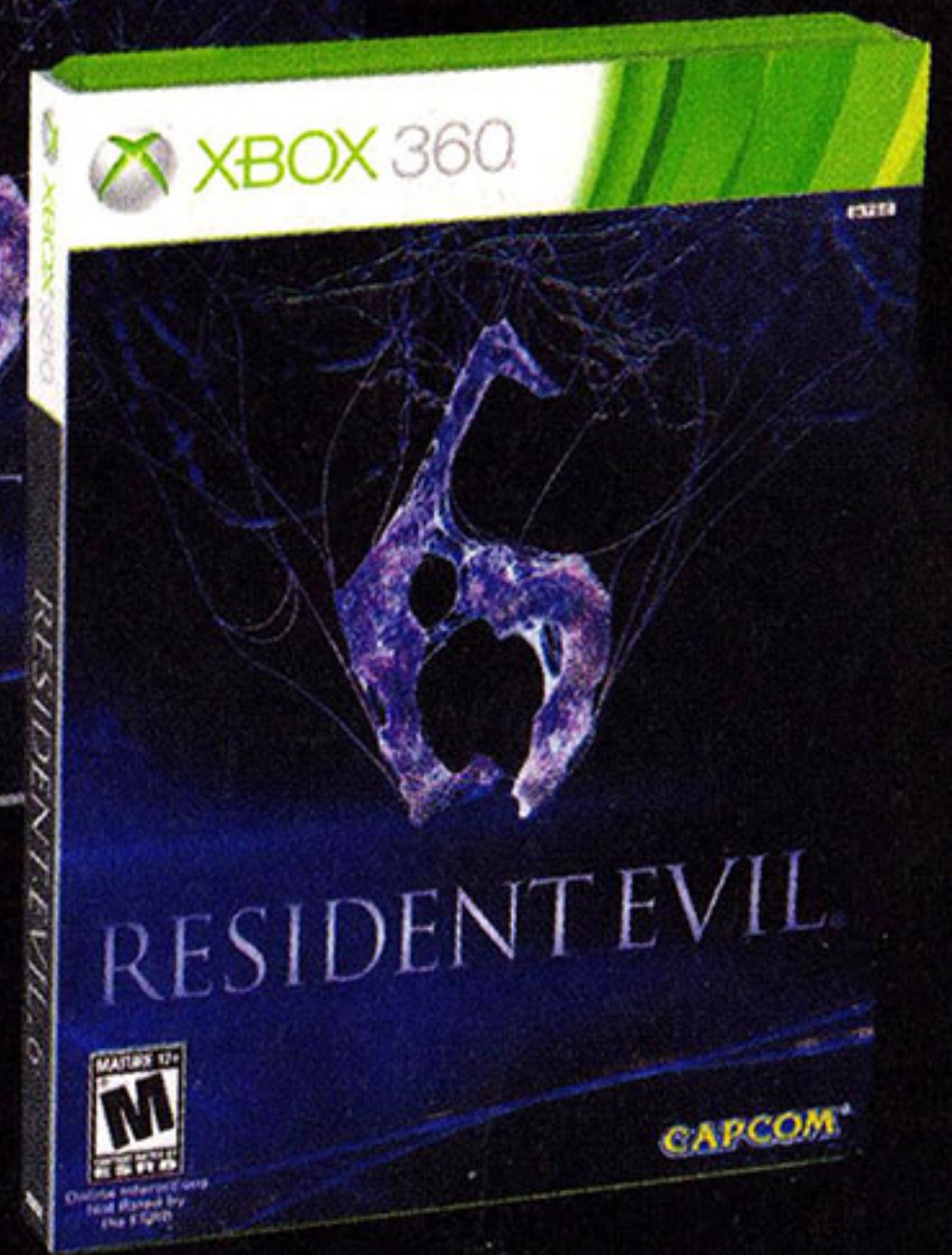
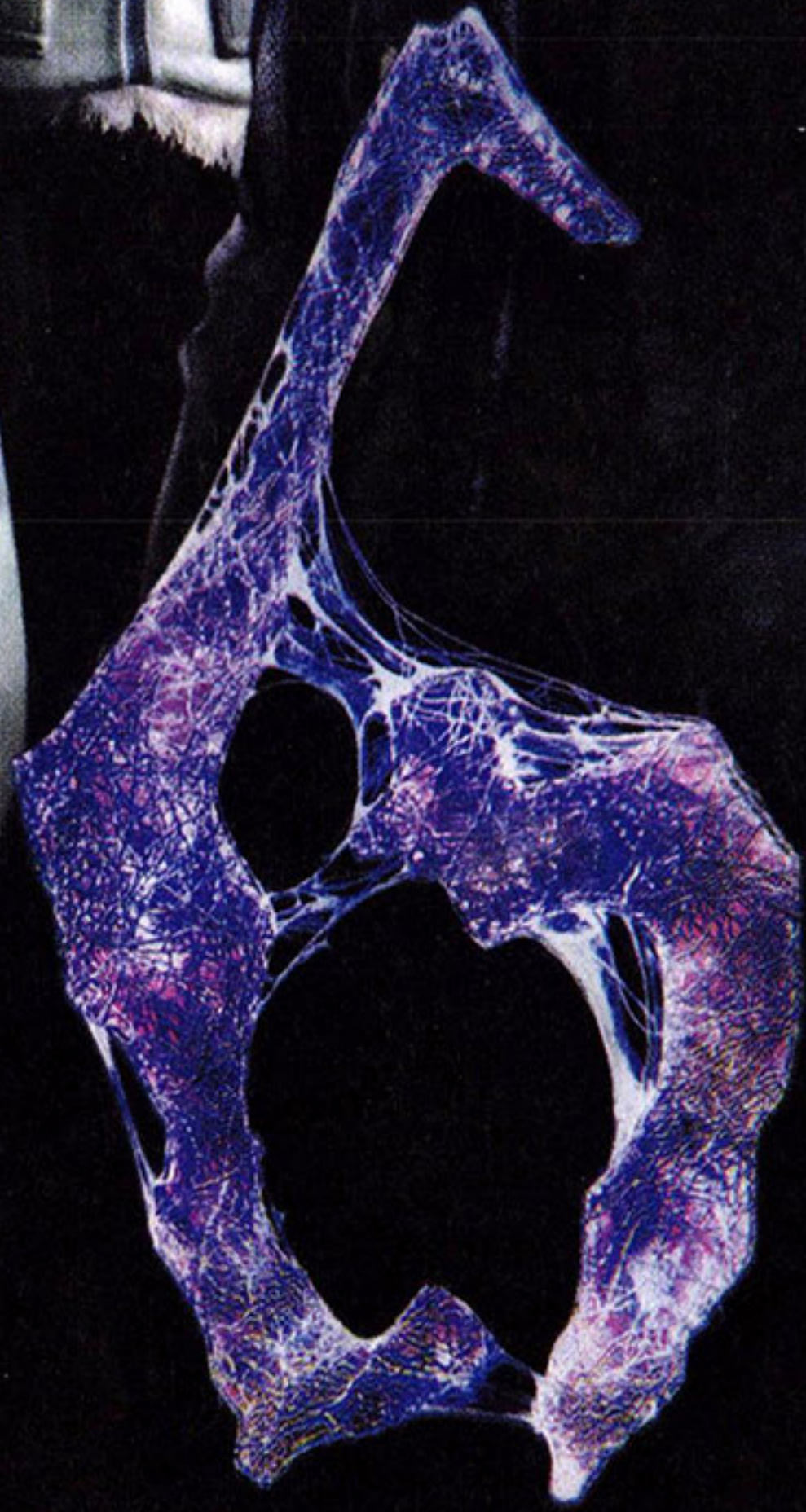
XBOX LIVE

CAPCOM

...BUT SHE HAS FLED..."

NO HOPE LEFT

10.02.2012



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ASSASSIN'S —CREED— III

OCTOBER 30

IGNITE THE REVOLUTION



UBISOFT

Mario is Here to Lead the Charge



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

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

Are you ready for a fact that is hard to believe? Mario hasn't been on the cover of Game Informer for a new Mario game since August 1996, when we featured the groundbreaking Super Mario 64. That was issue #40. You are currently reading issue #234, just to put it in perspective if "August 1996" didn't already make it sound like forever ago.

Yes, he has appeared a handful of times as part of larger console pieces, all-star casts, or in cases like our Top 200 cover that we dedicated to the world's most famous plumber, but it has indeed been that long since he captured the top spot for his marquee series.

I don't think it's a coincidence that he once again appears on our cover at a time that is crucial to the future of Nintendo. Back in 1996, Nintendo was facing a new competitor: Sony, a consumer electronics giant that brought all its power to bear to release the original PlayStation. It was a time of change for the video game industry as we went from cartridge media to compact discs. It was also a giant battle for the hearts and minds of gamers everywhere and Nintendo led the charge with its hero, Mario.

The Wii U is set to launch and the industry is once again at a sea change. Technology is evolving as digital downloads, online networks, and new ways to interact with games create new experiences.

As we worked on this issue all about the Wii U, we also saw many unanswered questions about the network and the overall power of Nintendo's newest addition to the console world, but there is one thing that is never in doubt: the power of Nintendo's iconic mascots and the amazing games that Nintendo delivers time and time again.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

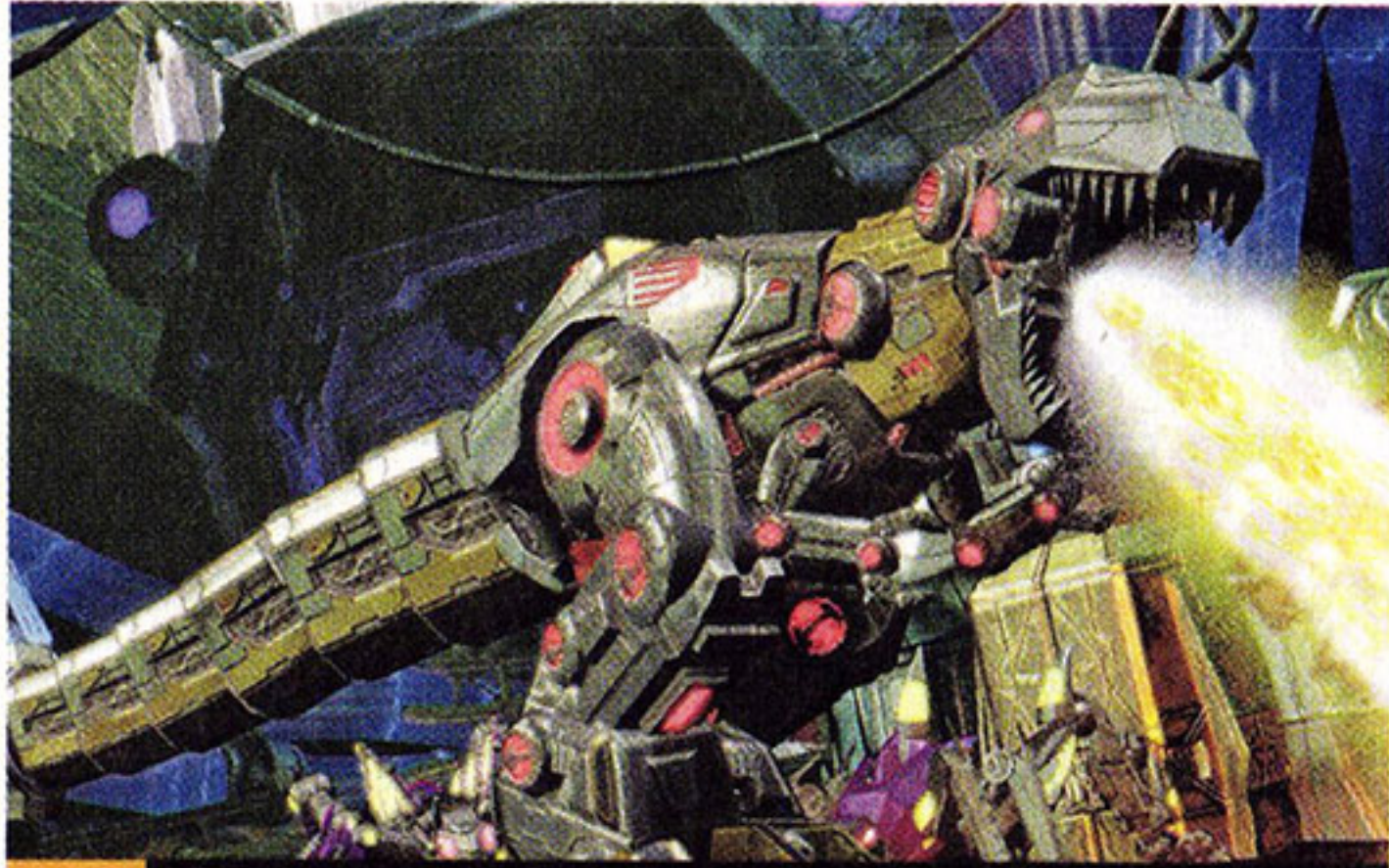


» 42

New Super Mario Bros. U

Nintendo is launching its new console with its biggest star, and we checked out Mario's latest game. Read about the iconic plumber's new 2D adventure in this month's cover story.

by Dan Ryckert



87

Transformers: Fall of Cybertron



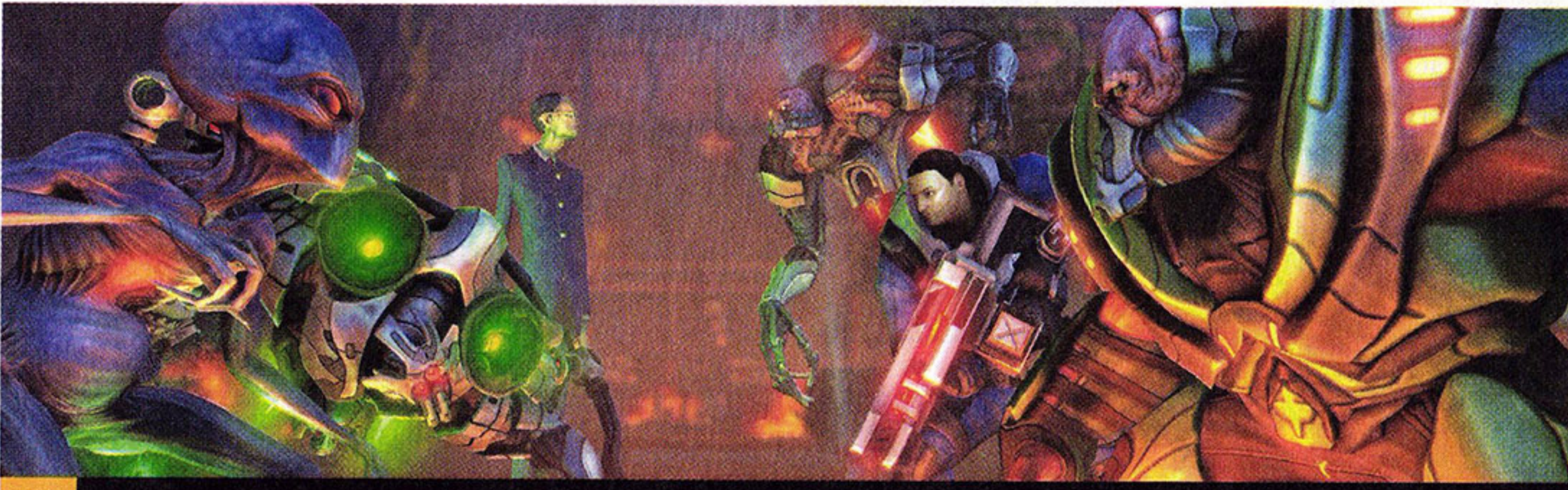
38

Gear: Samsung Series 7 Gamer Notebook



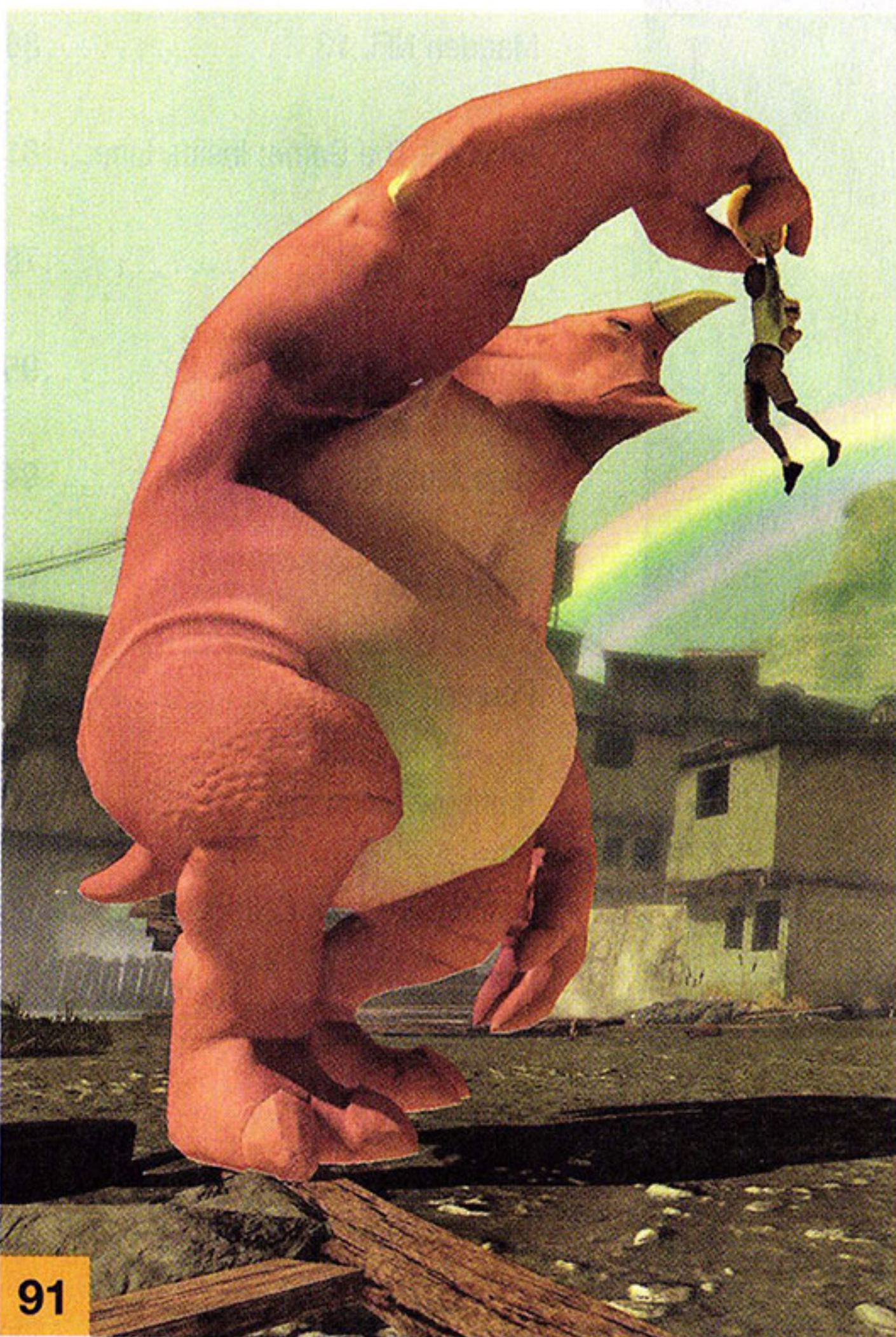
14

Gamescom 2012



64

XCOM: Enemy Unknown



91



52

Preparing You for the Wii U

regulars

» 8 Feedback

Readers tell us their favorite cover from our E3 Top 50 collection, ask us to add a new bullet-point to our reviews, and debate if true gamers use strategy guides.

» 14 Connect

We examine what happened at this year's Gamescom in Germany, interview the founders of Telltale Games, and recommend some scary games that might have been lurking behind you in the shadows the whole time.

» 70 Previews

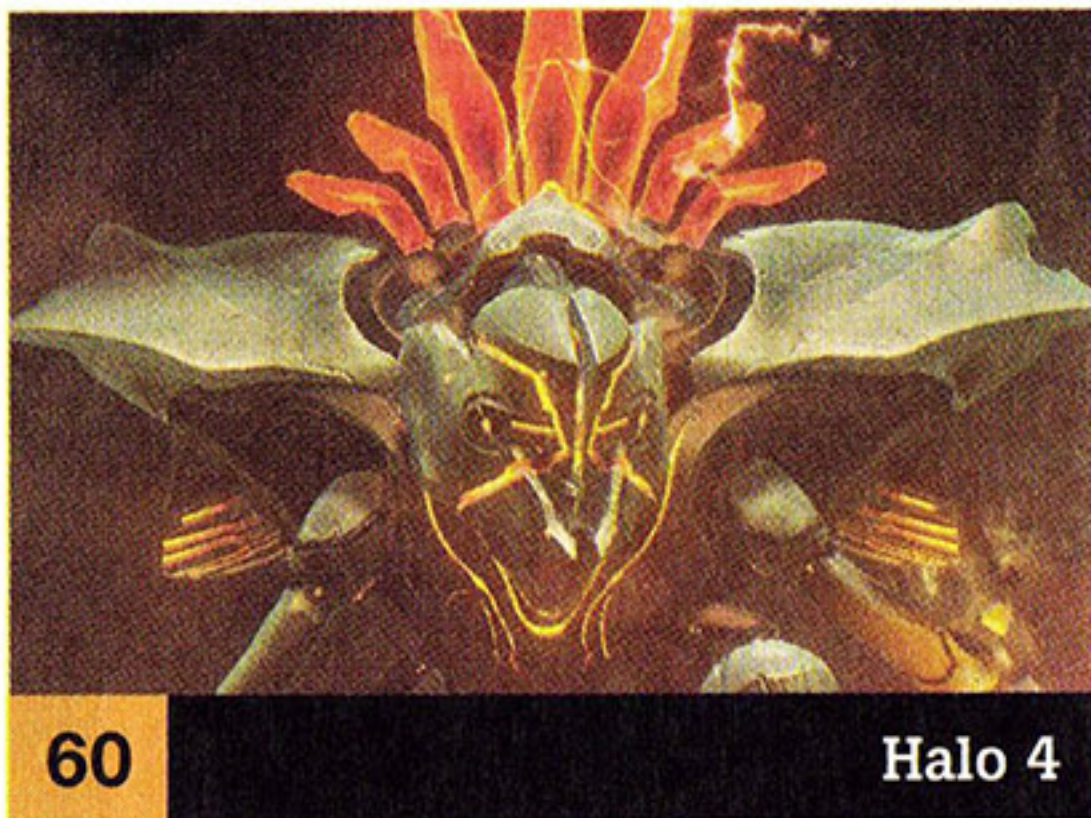
This month we explore the strategic outer limits of XCOM: Enemy Unknown, reunite with legendary alien-killer Master Chief in Halo 4, and get our hands bloody playing Resident Evil 6.

» 84 Reviews

Darksiders II leads the charge in a good month for games. Transformers: Fall of Cybertron, Borderlands 2, Orcs Must Die 2, and Sound Shapes all get high marks.

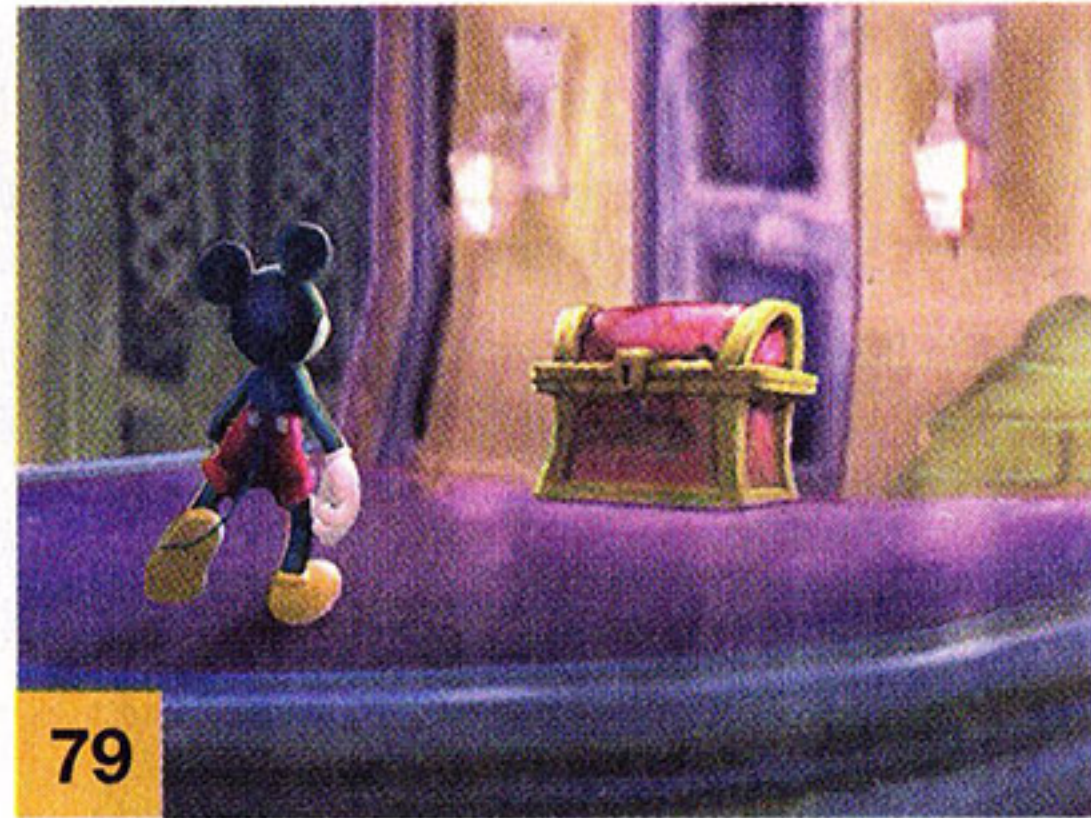
» 100 Game Over

We ask Mario's creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, all the questions you have always had about the infamous plumber and his friends, but were too afraid to ask.



60

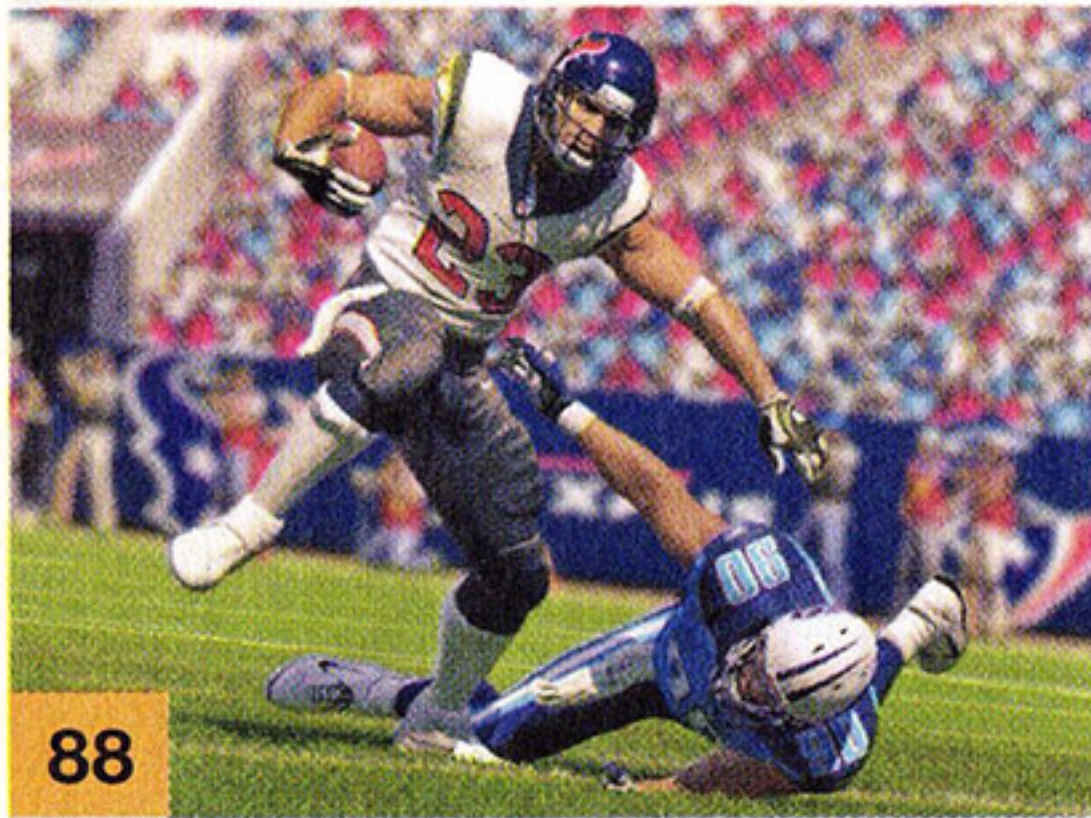
Halo 4



79



73

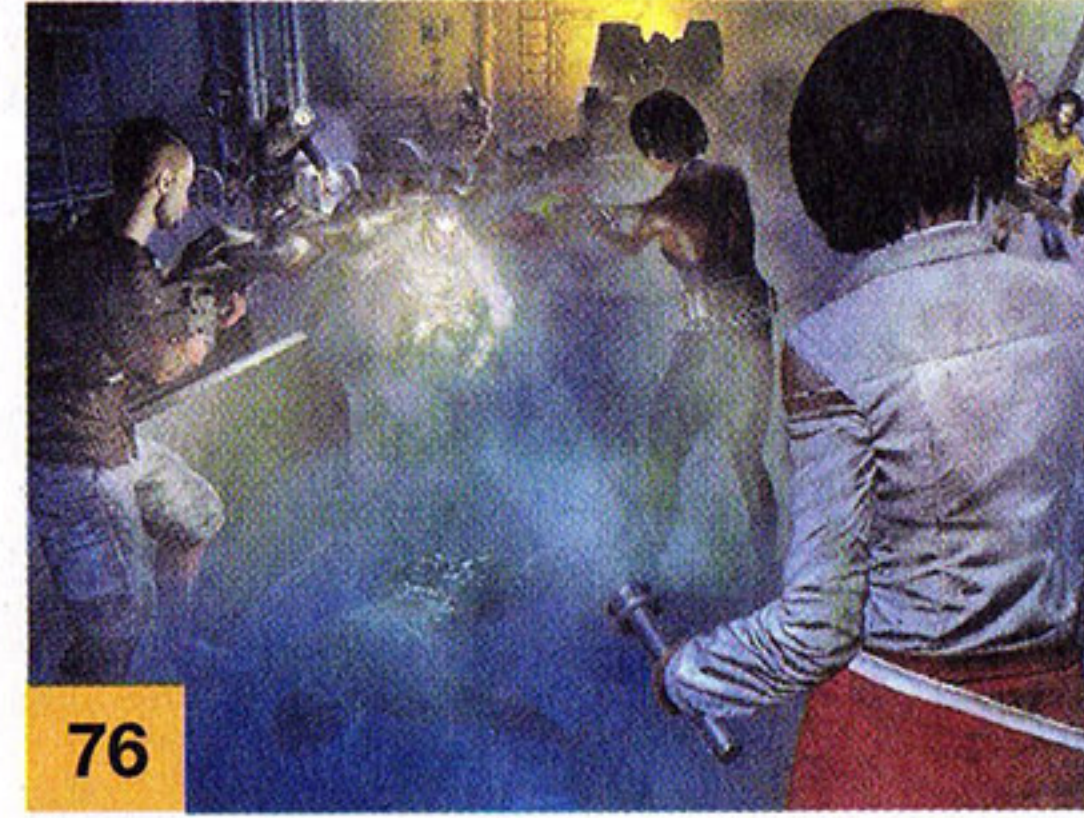


88



74

Smite



76

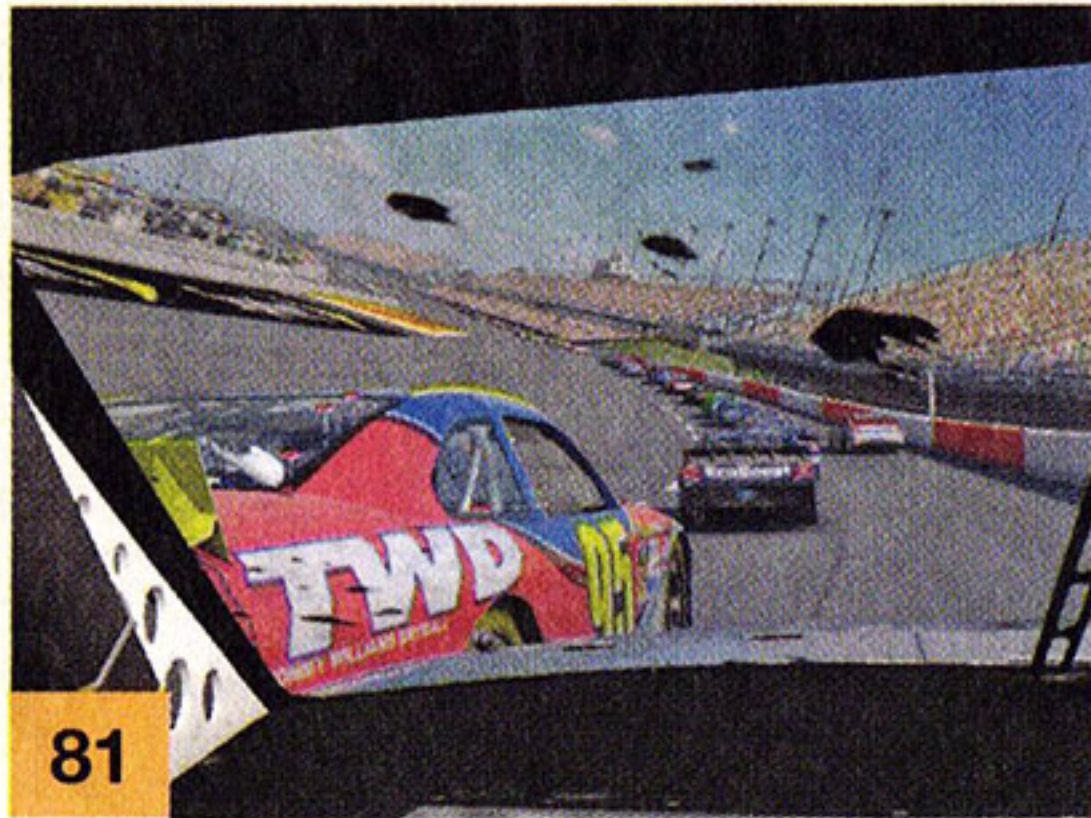


95

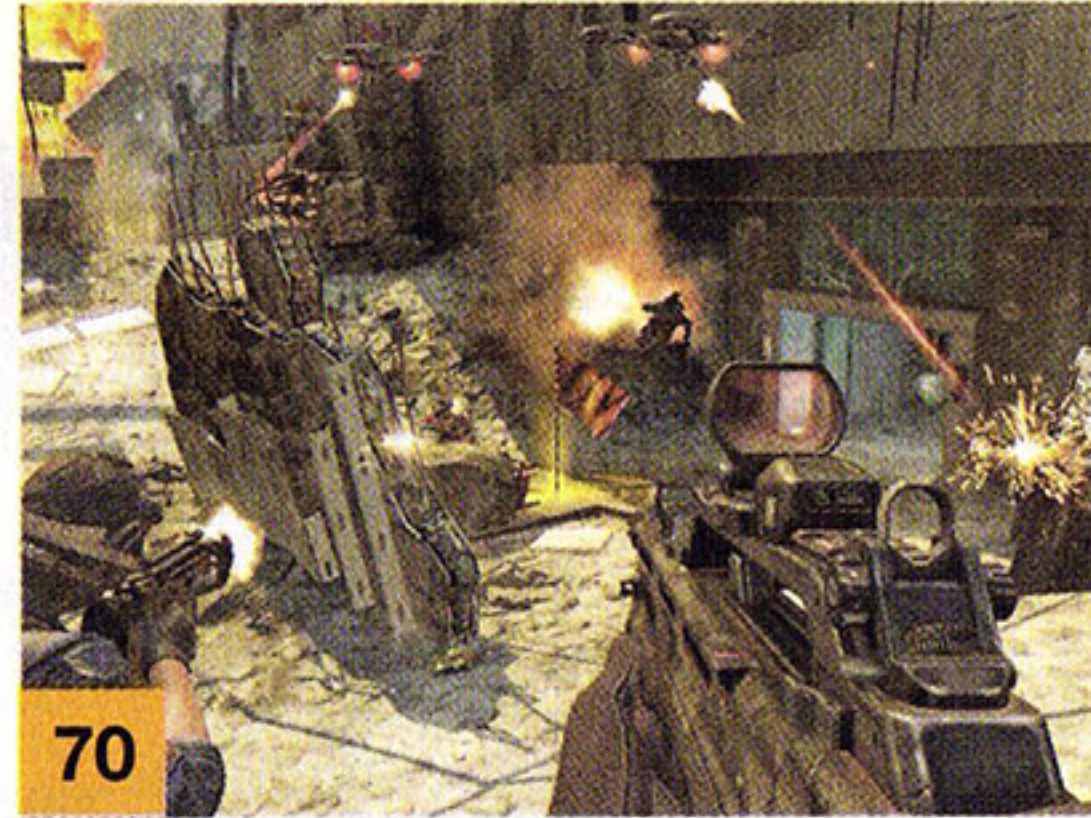
New Super Mario Bros. 2



92



81



70



77



78



82

Resident Evil 6



36

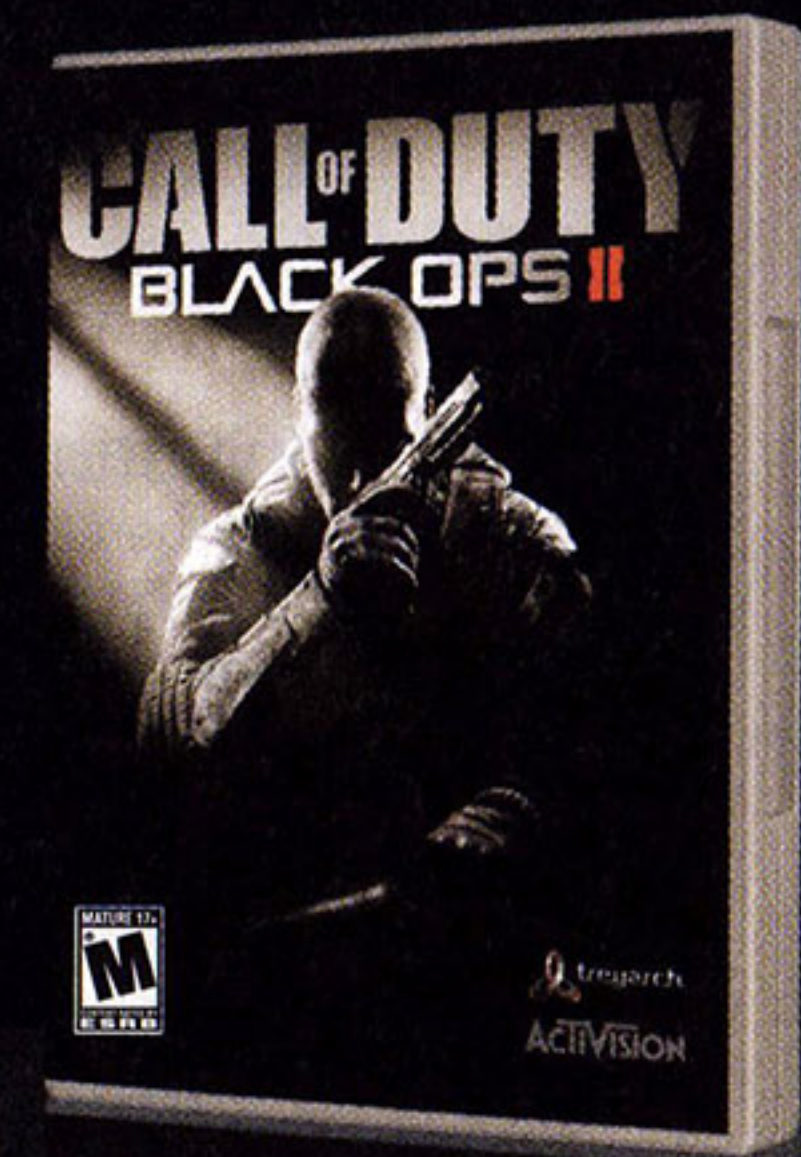
Interview: Telltale Takes Adventure Mainstream

games index

Angry Birds Trilogy	80
Borderlands 2	90
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	70
Contrast	33
Dance Central 3	73
Darksiders II	86
Dead Island: Riptide	76
Deadlight	91
Dust: An Elysian Tail	92
Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	79
Hybrid	92
Madden NFL 13	88
NASCAR The Game: Inside Line	81
NBA 2K13	78
New Super Mario Bros. 2	95
Orcs Must Die 2	94
Papo & Yo	91
Persona 4 Arena	89
Rainbow Moon	96
Ratchet & Clank Collection	96
Remember Me	72
Resident Evil 6	82
Risen 2: Dark Waters	96
Rock Band Blitz	93
Smite	74
Sound Shapes	89
Transformers: Fall of Cybertron	87
Warface	77
Way of the Samurai 4	96
Wreckateer, The	96

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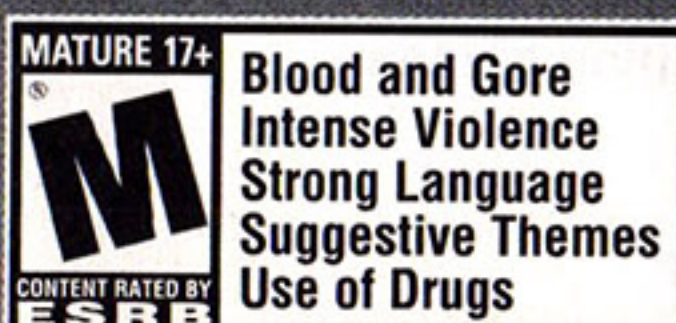
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ACTIVISION

 **treyarch**

**XBOX
LIVE**

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This month in Feedback, readers request an unlikely video game mash-up, question the continued relevance of a beloved mascot, demand more superhero cleavage, and complain about having to press the start button. Is this what the world has come to?

Injustice For All

In issue 232, your article on Injustice: Gods Among Us got me really excited. I love hardcore fighters like Mortal Kombat, but my parents always flip out when they see a crazy decapitation or a ridiculous splatter of blood. I'm glad that they're making one that doesn't have all that crap in it. I'm also excited for a real superhero fighter that lets you harness super-powers without making them really lame.

Josh Fuhr
via email

I loved the Injustice: Gods Among Us cover of your E3 Hot 50 issue. Batman looks awesome! Superman looks as metro as ever. Then I saw the back. Whose idea was it to make Wonder Woman look like a dude? The artist has her arms crossed, covering her cleavage. If they were trying to suck every ounce of sexy out of that Amazon, he succeeded admirably. I hope Linda Carter gives the artist what-for!

Brian Sheppard
Santa Cruz, CA

Despite Brian's call for more boobs, most readers had nothing but praise for the reveal of NetherRealm's upcoming DC fighter. Here's hoping the studio

can give comic book fans a game that lives up to the reputations of their favorite superheroes.

Leaving Cult Sonic

Is Sonic the Hedgehog dead? I used to be a huge fan of Sonic, but now it's just getting boring. I've played the games over and over, and it's always the same: Eggman wants to take over the world, Sonic gets the Chaos Emeralds, it looks like all hope is lost, and then Sonic saves the day by turning super. Plus, the games are quite easy; I beat Sonic Generations the day I got it. Do you think that there is any chance of Sonic making a comeback by Sega taking it up a notch? Or should I just give up on my hopes of there being a worthy sequel with a new storyline?

Alexis
Rochester, NH

Will Sega release a new Sonic game that both lives up to his glory days and delivers something exciting and new? Anything is possible – except for that. On the bright side, Alexis, now that you're a disillusioned Sonic fan, you can bask in all the insults and denials of the diehard Sonic fans who will now dismiss you as just another hater.

The Olympic (Video) Games

I think there should be an Olympics for video games, where gamers can watch their countries compete in shooters, RPGs, etc. It would give video games greater exposure and increase national pride, while bringing the global gaming community together. Let's face it: We are not getting the respect a lot of us serious gamers think we deserve. This could earn gaming more global attention, and a bigger audience. The hope being that one day we would enter the real Olympics. I mean, they have curling; I think there's a much bigger audience for games.

Steve Glidden
via email

We doubt adding video games to the actual Olympics would earn our hobby the respect you're looking for, but that's why eSports exist. Gamers can already cheer their countries on in a number of international tournaments, including the World Cyber Games, DreamHack, and the MLG Championships. If that's not enough, there are always those dumb Mario & Sonic at the Olympics games.

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com



Privileges Revoked

I love Minecraft, but my desktop computer was made in 2003, so I bought a new motherboard for it. One thing led to another, and I ended up building a whole new computer. Since I built it and paid for the parts, I made myself admin. My dad saw that I was running a Minecraft server, which is strictly off limits, so he grounded me from said computer, and took away my admin rights. I get that I did something wrong, but I did use almost my entire savings for parts, and I put it together. Any suggestions?

Chris Holben
via email

It sounds like you have two options: You can use your newly honed computer-crafting skills to build yourself a time machine, then travel back in time and listen to your parents. Or you can apologize to your dad and beg for a second chance. We suggest making time travel plan B.

XCOM Excitement

I am super stoked that a revamp of X-Com is finally coming out. I fondly remember passing crappy winter days in the '90s gassing aliens to take back to the lab, repurposing alien tech, and blowing stuff up with the programmable blaster bomb launcher. You can be sure I will be pre-ordering this ASAP.

Jay Chan
Seattle, WA

Your excitement is well deserved. Not only are fans of the classic X-Com getting a long-awaited installment of the series, but one from legendary strategy game developer Firaxis Games no less. Unlike most strategy titles, console gamers aren't being left in the lurch. For our impressions of the first few hours of XCOM: Enemy Unknown, check out our preview on page 64.



Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions

"Why is it that when you run multiple covers I always get the least cool of them?"

Karma, probably.

"Can you imagine if BioWare did a series similar to Mass Effect but set during the Trojan War?"

No, we can't.

"Why do you guys always treat Dan so badly? He is my favorite editor, so tell the truth."

You can't handle the truth!

Worst News Tip of the Month

"There is a rumor that AC3 will be canceled because of budget cuts."

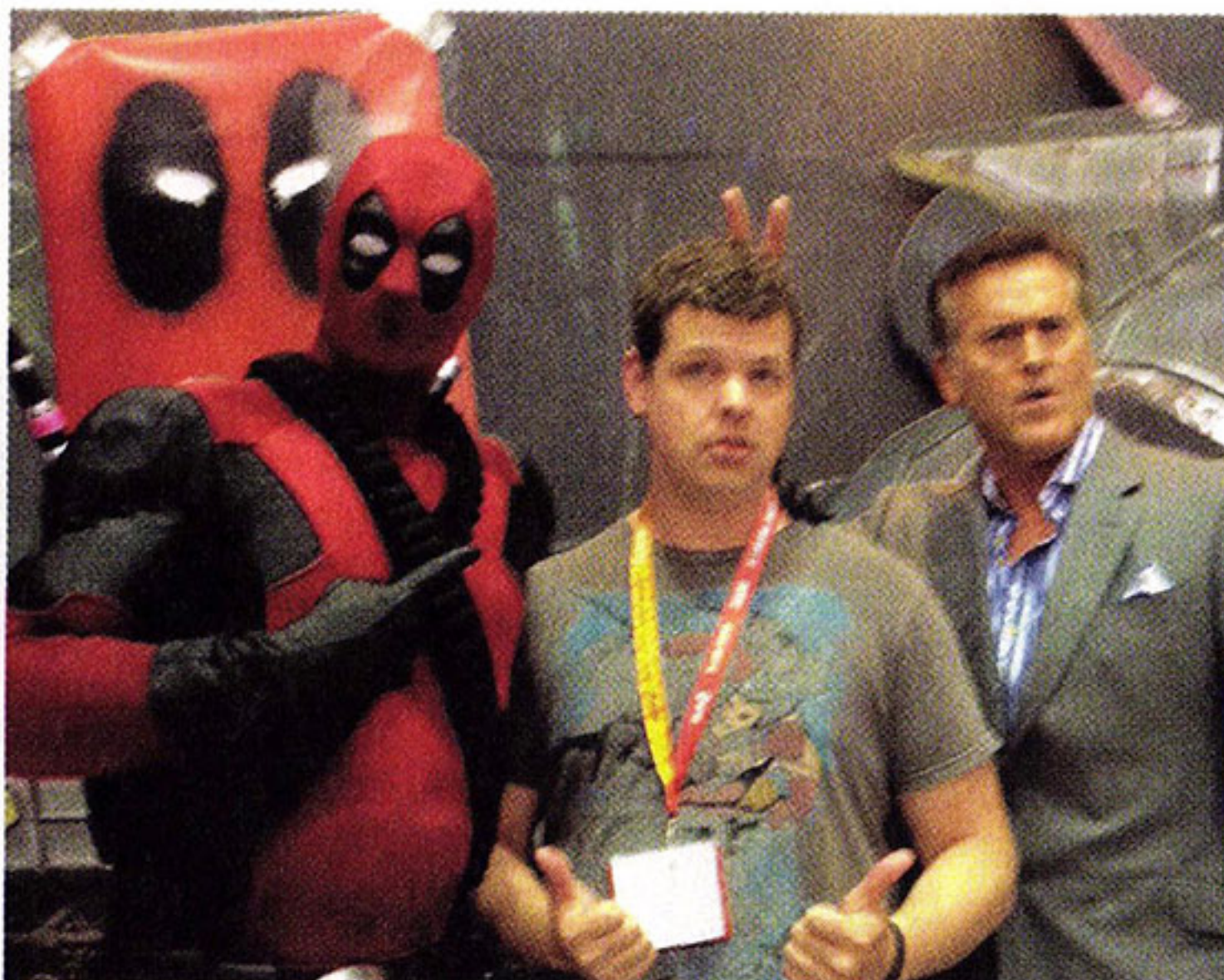
Holier than Thou?

"Except for my Bible, this magazine is my favorite thing to read."

— Rob Blair
devoted reader

Question of the Month

If you could play as any video game villain, who would you choose, and why?



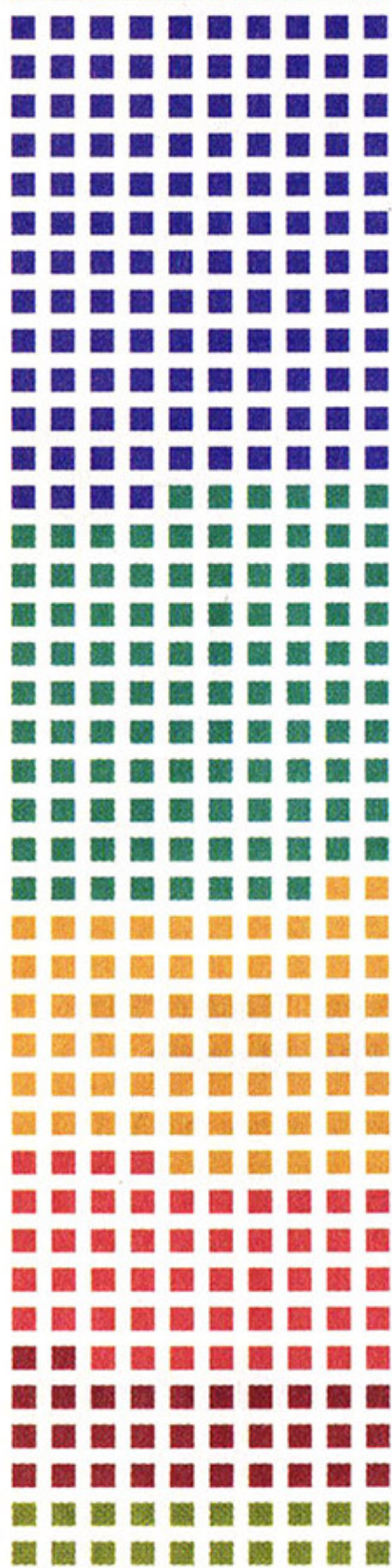
(Left) Ben was just cool enough to hang out with Deadpool and Bruce Campbell, but not cool enough to avoid being mocked with bunny ears. **(Right)** What better cover for Junction Point Studios' Warren Spector and Raul Ramirez to pose in front of than Epic Mickey? Watch the two play Deus Ex in a recent episode of Replay on Gameinformer.com.

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

GI SPY
continued on page 10

feedback 9

On Your Mind



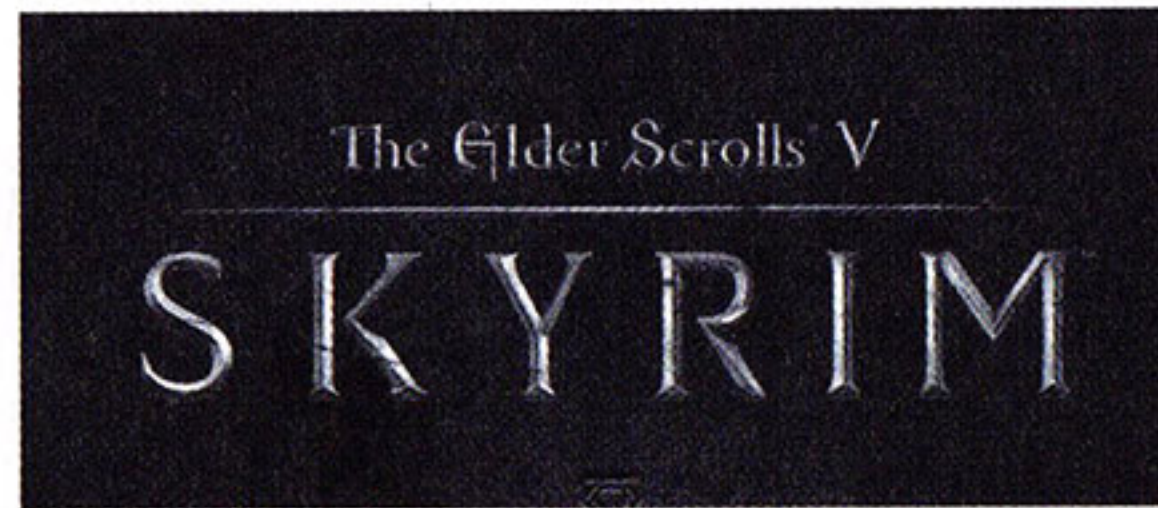
- "I Can't Wait For [Insert E3 Hot 50 Game]!" **31%**
- "Why Isn't [Insert Game] On Your E3 Hot 50 List?!" **26%**
- Favorite Video Game Sounds **17%**
- John/Jim Belushi Screw-Up **13%**
- Next-Gen Skepticism **8%**
- Jeremy Renner/Hawkeye Defenders **5%**

End of Story

I think you are missing a very important bullet point when you review your games. You cover graphics, sound, replay value, etc., but you overlook one key element: story. What would a video game be without a story? There would be no dialogue and no motivation. For example, a great game like *Half-Life 2* would suck if you just went around shooting things with no purpose. You would feel no emotion because there would be no plot, and no sense of accomplishment upon beating the game. I believe that if you told us whether the story evokes an emotional response, it would improve your reviews and help us decide whether the game is worth our time or not.

Alex J Malmstrom
via email

We don't deny that story plays an integral part in some games – but not every game. The sports, puzzle, and platforming genres are chock full of excellent titles that don't even bother trying to weave an interesting tale. That's why story doesn't have its own bullet point. If story is a factor in a review, we always describe it in the main text.



A Sound Strategy

Me and a buddy had an argument about strategy guides. I am in favor of them, but he believes they are basically cheating and a "true" gamer shouldn't use them, and instead figure out everything on their own. I'm older now and married with two young kids, and frankly I don't have enough time to figure out all the stuff like I used to. Does this make me less of a gamer because I choose to not spend hours upon hours to figure out one of the many secrets of the current game I'm playing?

Greg Long
via email

We're not sure who died and put your friend in charge of defining what a true gamer is, but if you want to use a strategy guide to save yourself some time, go right ahead. The Skyrim strategy guide contains over 650 pages of detailed information; you'd have to be a robot to amass that amount of knowledge by yourself. Besides, for better or worse, you proved your gamer cred by having an argument over strategy guides in the first place.

Seriously, Press Start

I have a stupid question. Why do most games nowadays require me to press start to start the game? I mean, if I turn on my console and put the disc in the machine, obviously I want to start it. *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* asks me to press start, then a loading screen pops up, and then it asks me to press start again. Why? I just don't get it!

Vincent Minjares
via email

You're absolutely right, Vincent – that is a stupid question. We suppose you could spend hours of your life pondering such a basic and innocuous design decision. Or you could press a button and play your awesome games! The choice is yours.

Sounding Off

In issue 231, we asked readers what their favorite video game sound effect is. Nostalgia ruled the roost, with many respondents calling out sounds from 8-bit classics as their all-time favorites. Here are some responses.

My favorite sound effect has got to be the "puzzle solved" jingle from the *Legend of Zelda* series, because it's the most iconic sound effect in any video game. Plus, when you hear it, you know you've just gotten that much closer to shoving the Master Sword through Ganondorf's face.

Samuel Harden

My favorite sound effect is definitely the hissing sound Creepers make in *Minecraft*. No matter how often I play, I am always scared when I hear it. That sound signals mass destruction and death.

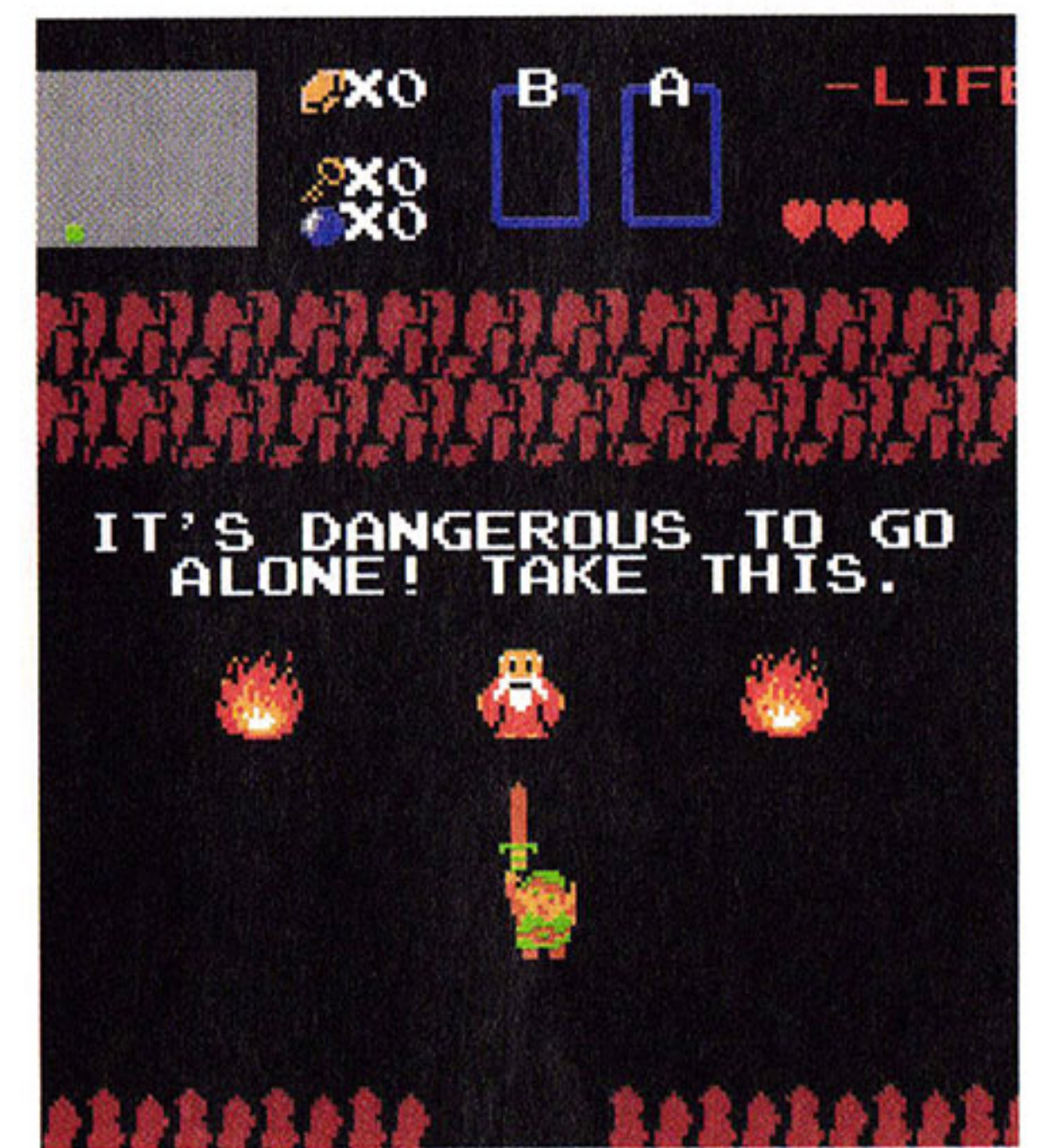
Cole Guttormsson

The sound of a running horse in the *Assassin Creed* games. They sound just like the Magical Coconuts from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

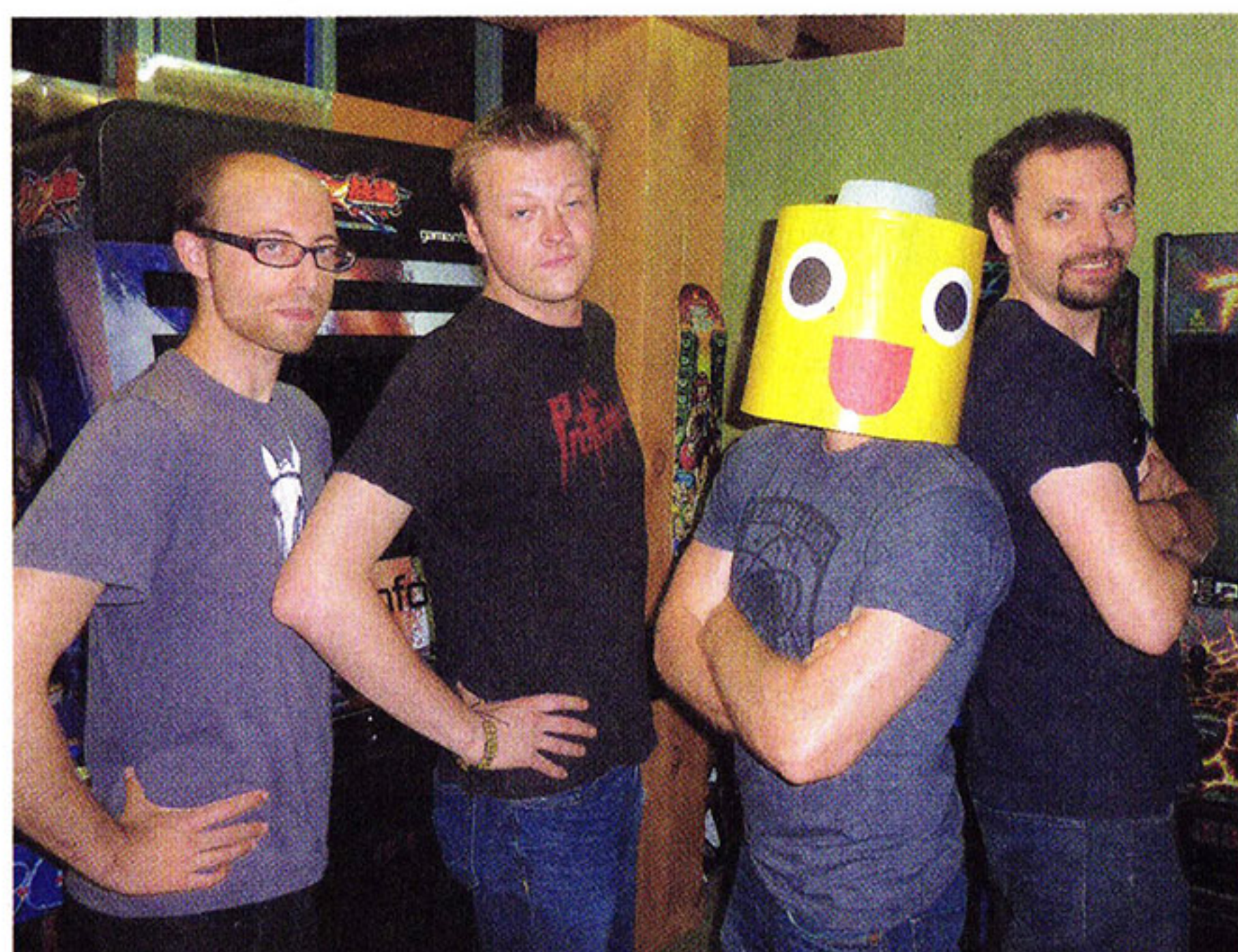
Chad Lee

My favorite is the warp pipe sound in *Super Mario Bros*. My wife even agreed to play it at my funeral as I enter the ground.

James Gaspar

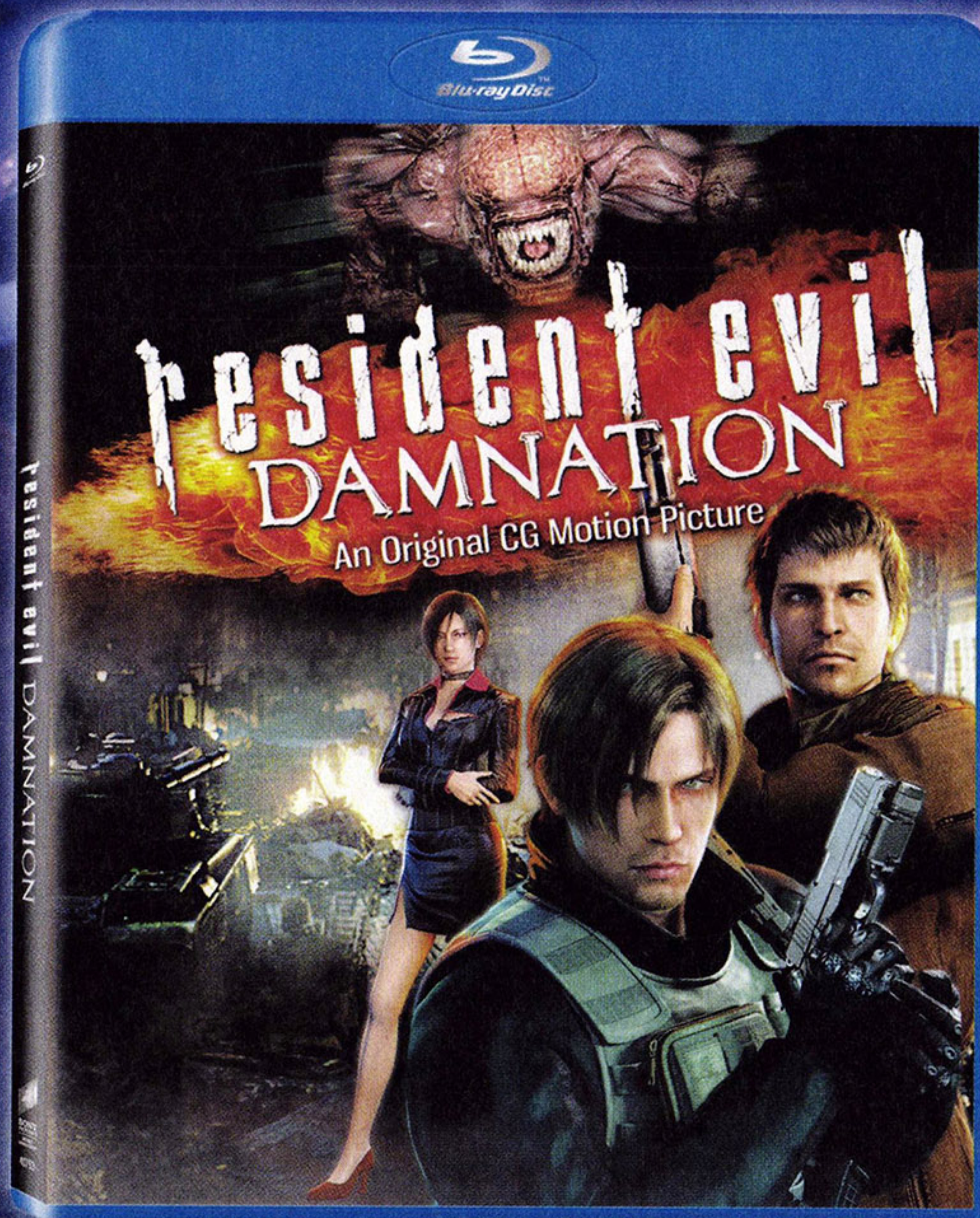


(Left) Recently Capcom's Greg Moore joined Jason, Tim, and Reiner for GI's "The Hunks of Replay" calendar shoot. Tim's a little self-conscious. **(Right)** Valve's Dan Ballance instantly regretted agreeing to give Tim and Dan a tour of the new studio.



GI SPY
continued on page 12

resident evil DAMNATION

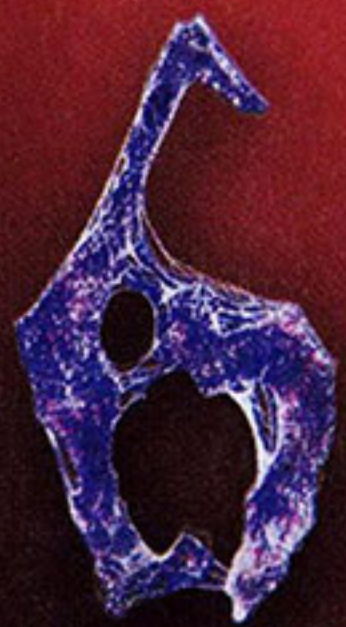


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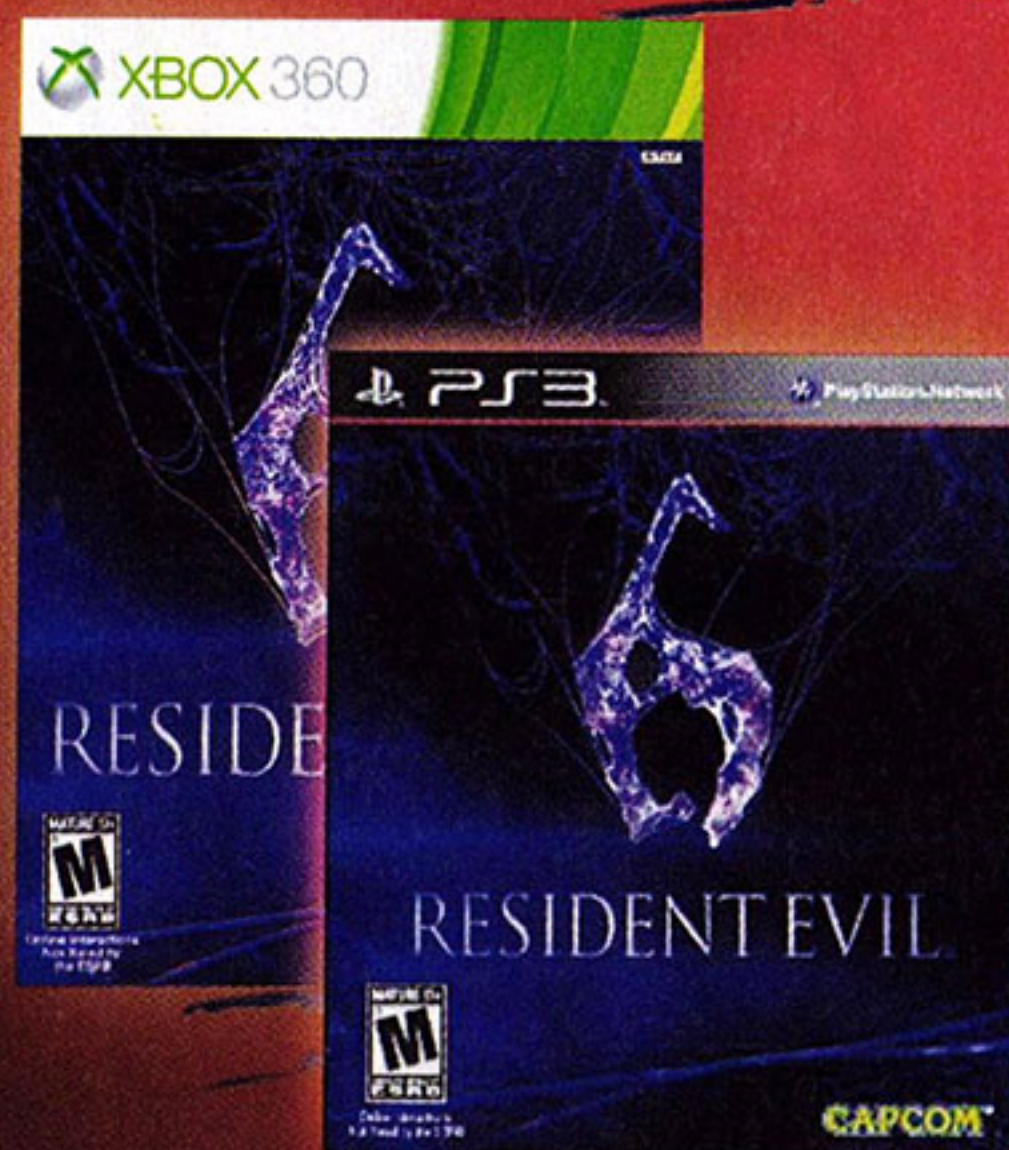
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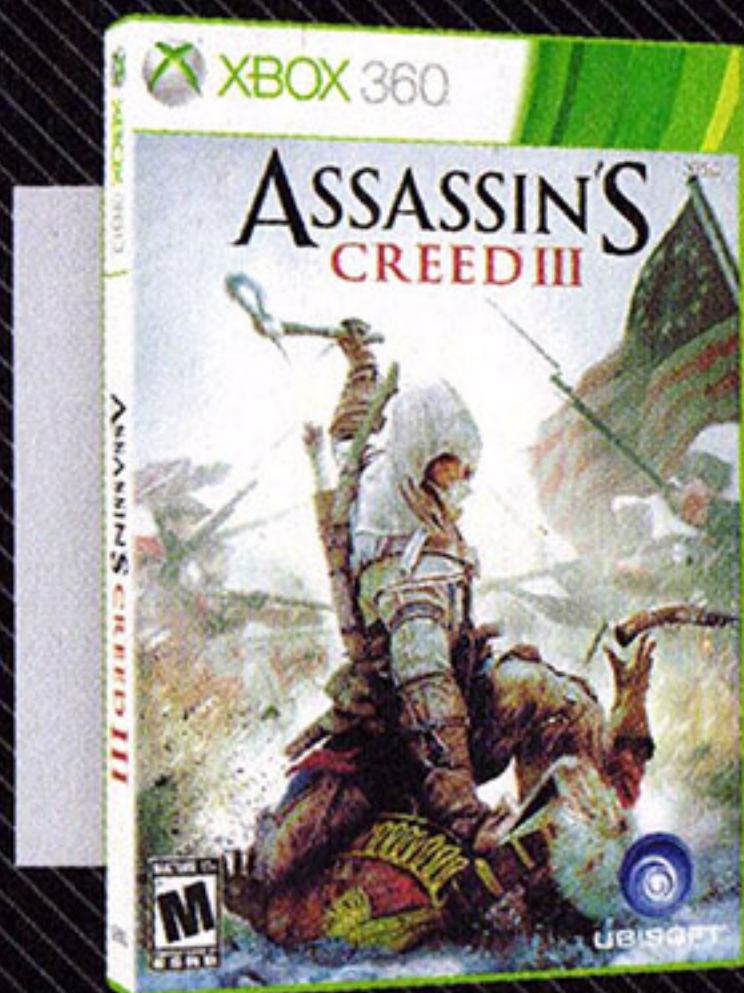
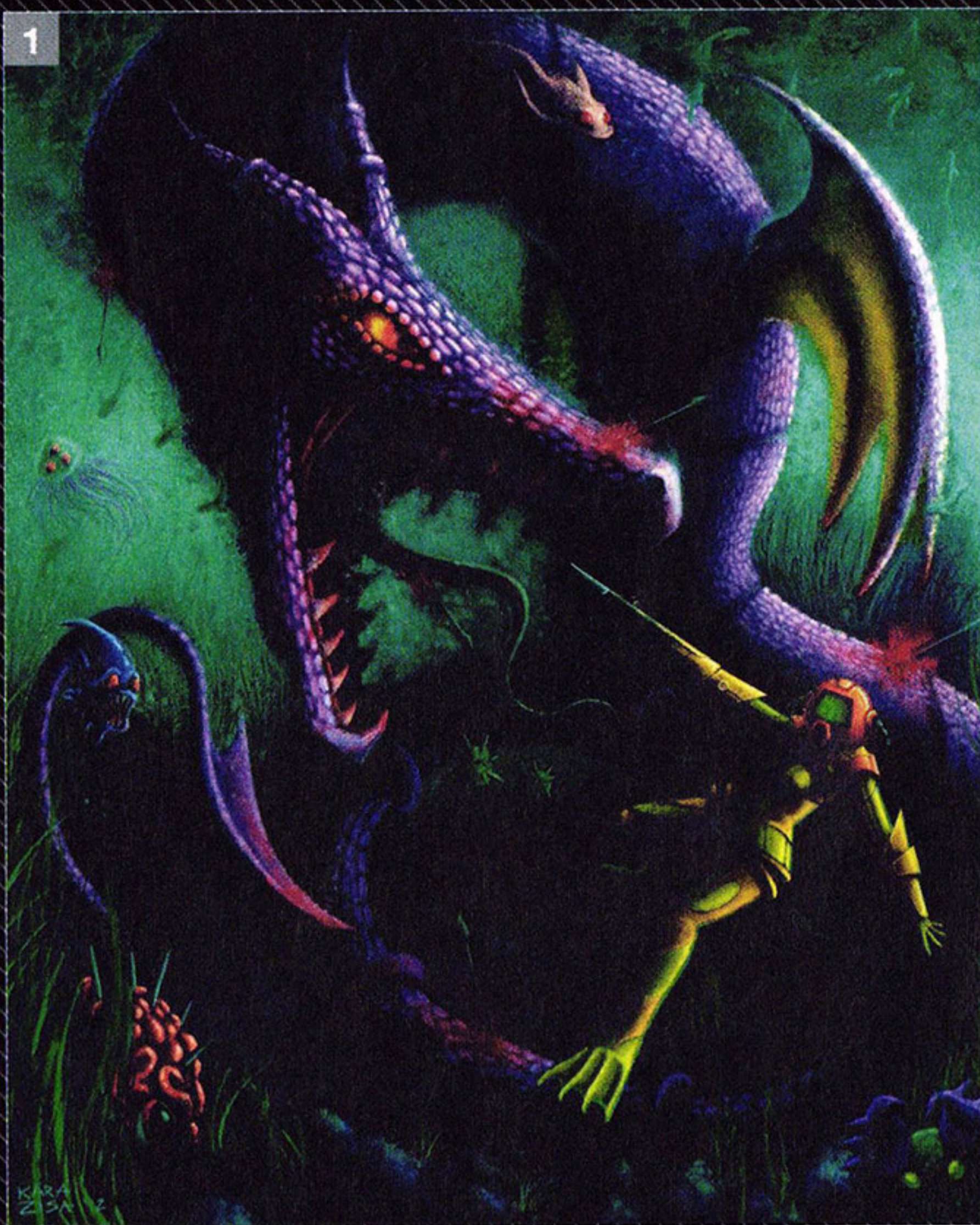
WINNER

1 Kara Zisa We can't think of many worse fates than being attacked by Metroids during an underwater level.

2 Aaron Bohache If Simon knew what was good for him, he'd give Gabriel a holy water bath right now and get it over with.

3 Gabrielle Bailey Apparently, you can make any creature cute with some white fur and red face paint.

4 Bryan Henry You can't see Waluigi because he already won the race two laps ago.



WINNER

This month's winner will receive a copy of Assassin's Creed III for Xbox 360.



Corrections:

In issue 232's Gear section, we desecrated John Belushi's legacy by stating his brother Jim was in *Animal House*. We are currently still flogging the guilty editor.

GI SPY

continued from page 10

(Left) This month Adam met up with Rising Star Games' Phil Robinson and Bohemia Interactive's Jan Kunt, who swung by the office to show off Carrier Command. **(Middle)** Everything is better with Atlus' Aram Jabbari, including our Persona 4 Arena episode of Test Chamber. Watch the video at Gameinformer.com. **(Right)** Dan and Jeff Cork became an army of five when they buddied up with Visceral Montreal's Zach Mumbach, Julien Lamoureux, and Julian Beak.



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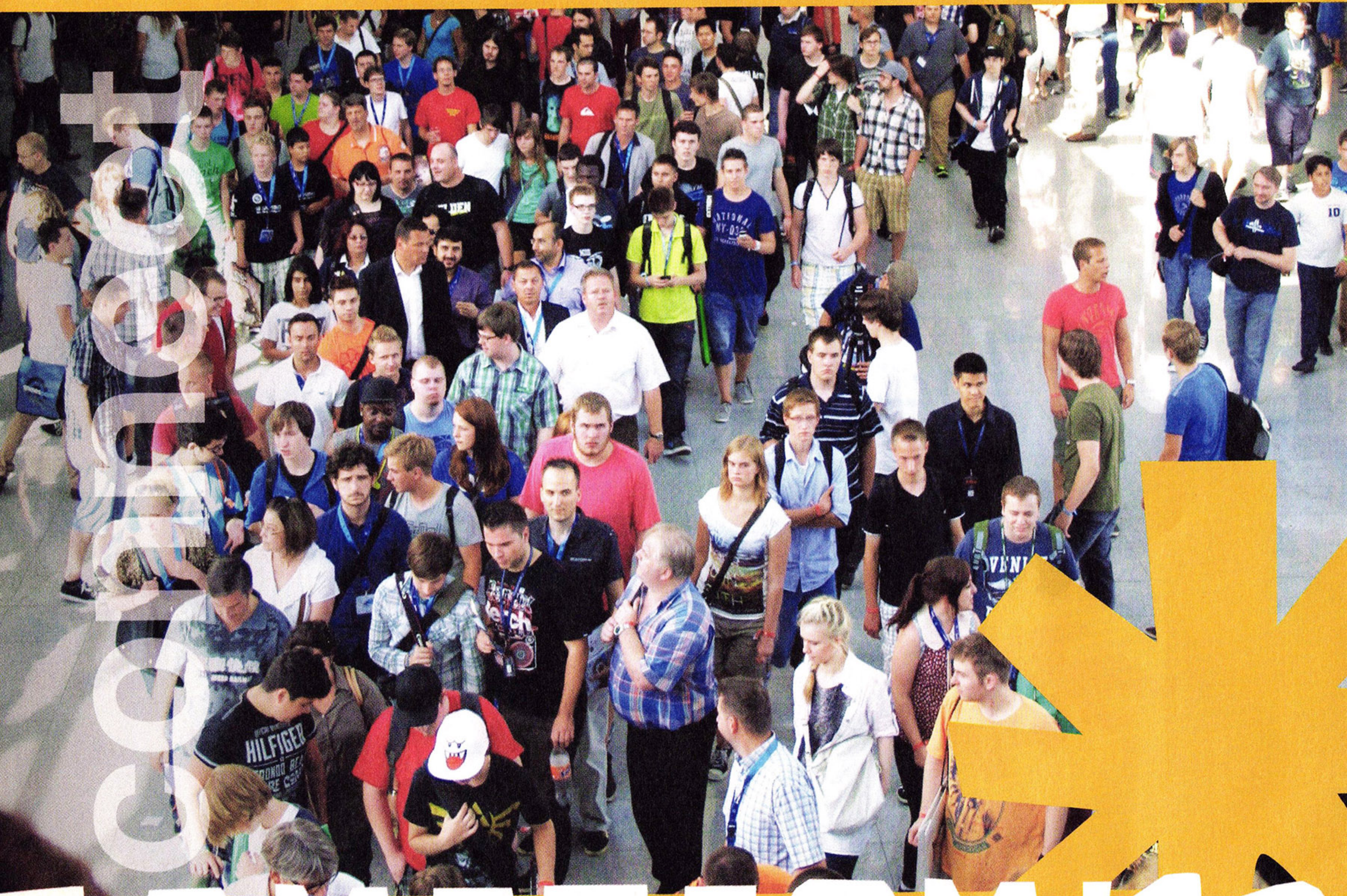
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GAMESCOM '12

NOTABLES

- 18 meet your new hero: a closer look at assassin's creed iii's connor
- 22 rare scares: under-the-radar horror games
- 26 afterwords: sleeping dogs
- 30 top of the table: fantasy flight and the surprising rise of hobby gaming
- 32 massive: wildstar
- 34 composing double dragon
- 36 interview: telltale's dan connor and kevin bruner



Sony's strong presence more than makes up for no-shows Microsoft and Nintendo

Germany's Gamescom has a lot in common with game conventions such as E3, with one critical difference: It's open to the public. Organizers say more than 275,000 people crowded into Cologne's convention center to see the latest games, meet up with other gamers, and soak in the festival atmosphere. That mass of humanity translated to long queues – up to five hours for Call of Duty: Black Ops II, in particular – but a positive communal spirit for the hobby prevailed over the annoyance at the lines.

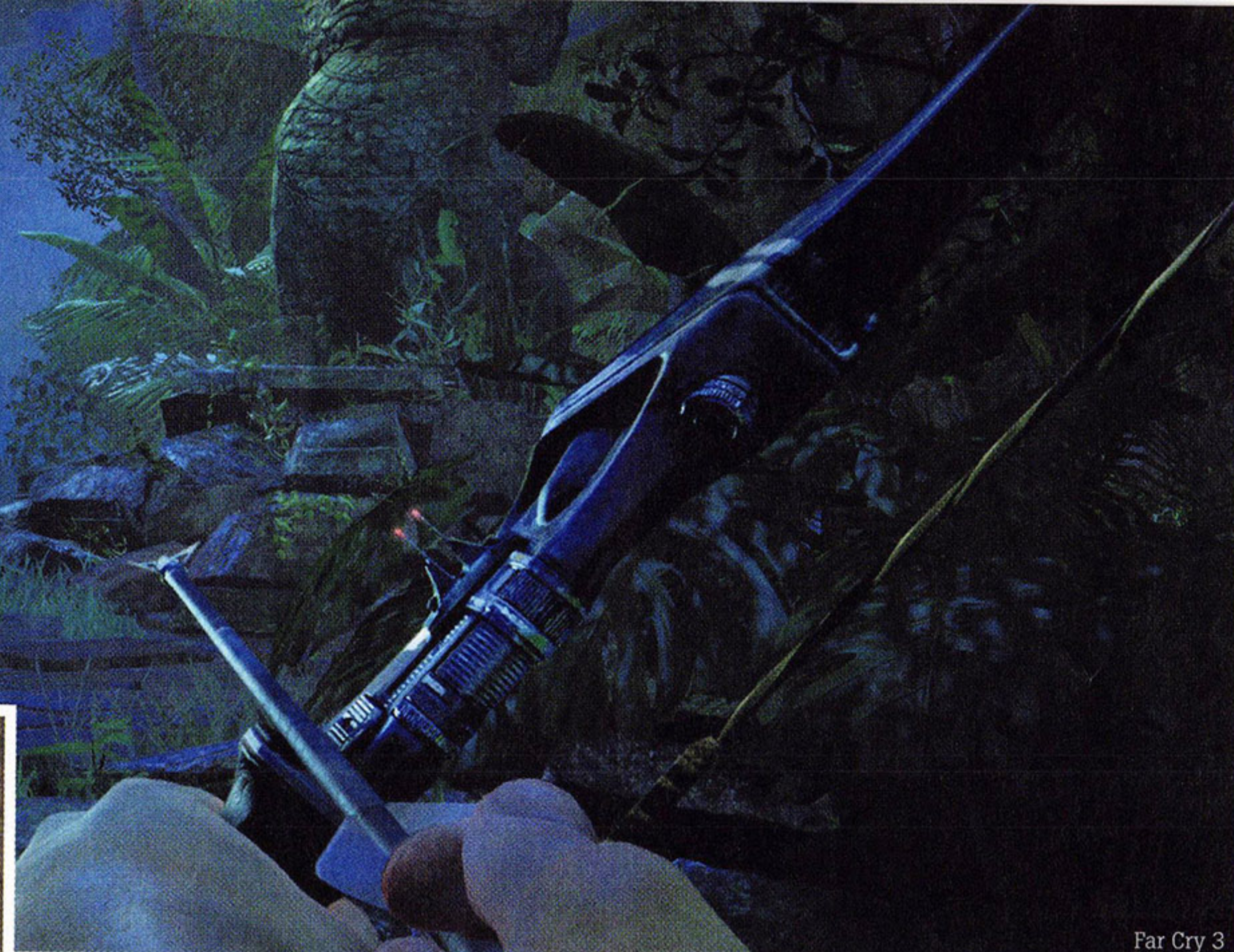
"You've got a lot of gamers here who just want to show up and play the games, and the enthusiasm is great," says Shuhei Yoshida, head of Sony Worldwide Studios. Sony fed that passion with five game announcements – a nice contrast from its two E3 reveals (Beyond: Two Souls and Wonderbook).

The newly announced games included Media Molecule's Tearaway (see page 16); a striking PS3

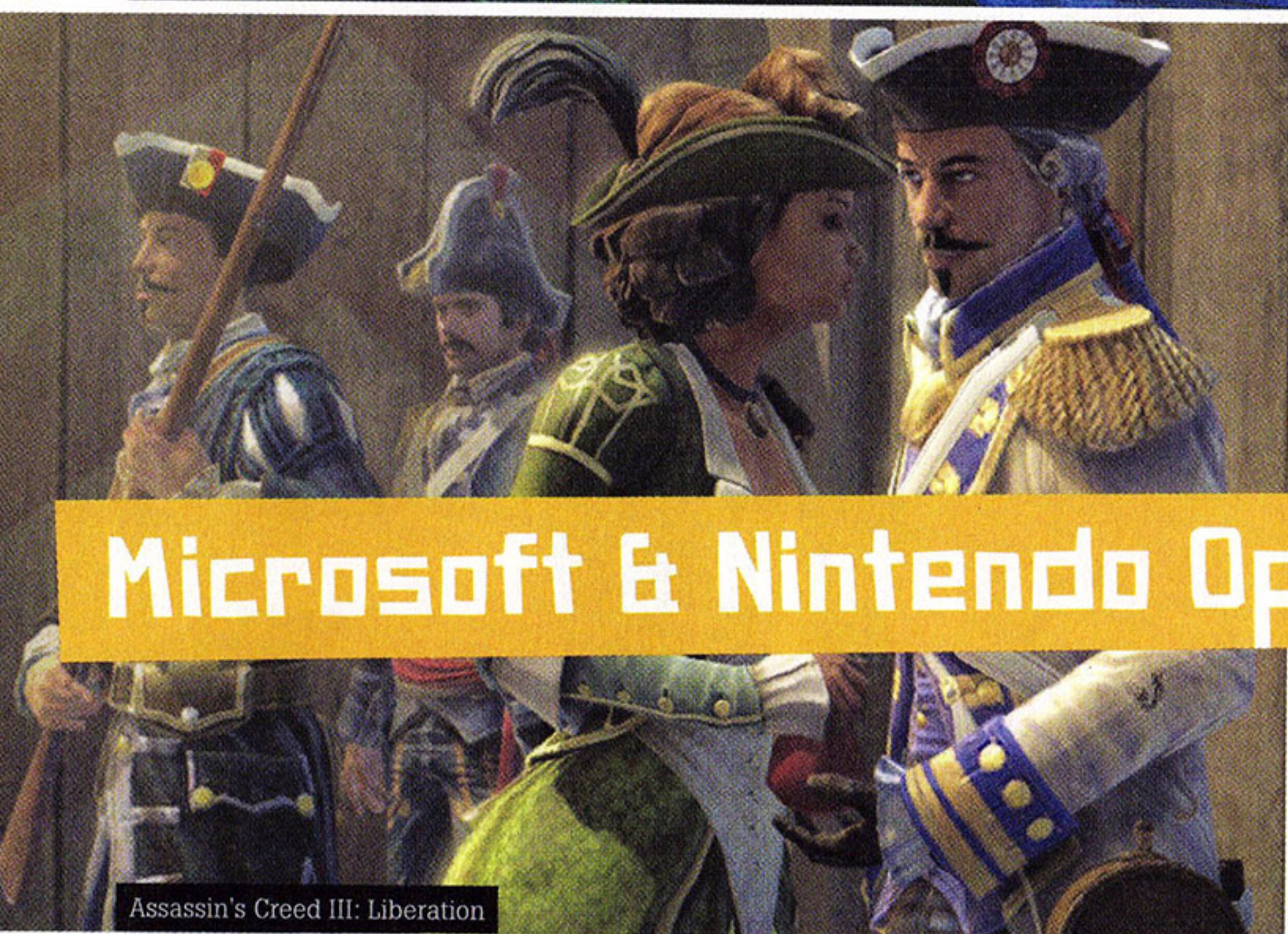
game about a puppet boy called Puppeteer; Sony Japan Studios' Rain, a PS3 tale of a boy who turns invisible until he gets wet; the Move-enabled teen slasher Until Dawn; and a new installment in the Killzone series, the Vita game Killzone: Mercenary.

In contrast to its nearly Vita-free E3 press conference, Sony devoted a sizeable portion of its Gamescom presentation to the struggling handheld. Aside from the two new game announcements and details on its Cross Buy and Cross Play (see page 17), the company showed off new trailers for Assassin's Creed III: Liberation and Call of Duty: Black Ops Declassified. If its trailer is any indication, COD fanatics may want to stick to their consoles.

"As far as we are concerned, the European market is as big or bigger than the U.S. market, and Gamescom is getting bigger and bigger," Yoshida says. "It's a really important venue for us to be here."



Far Cry 3

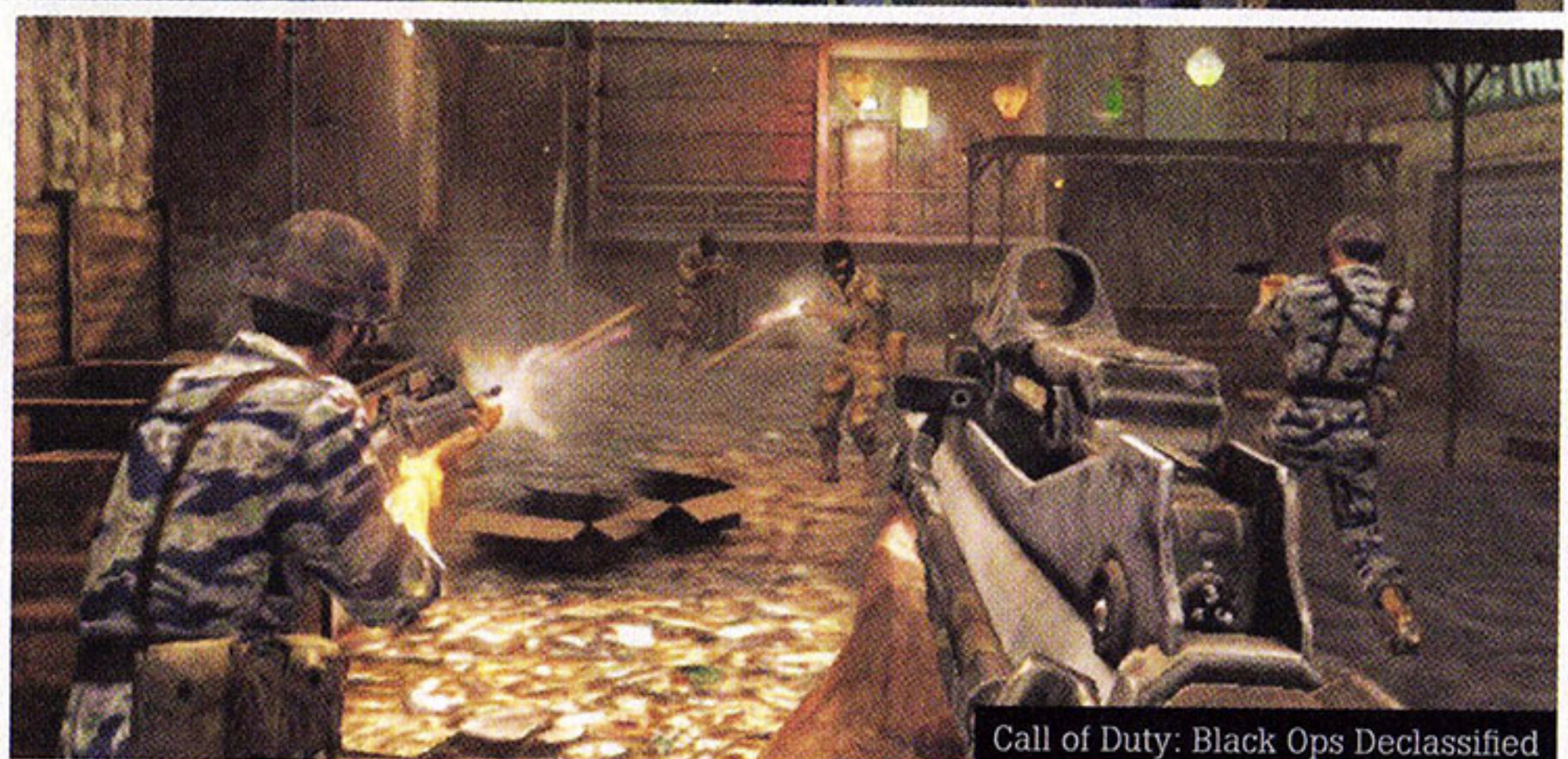


Assassin's Creed III: Liberation

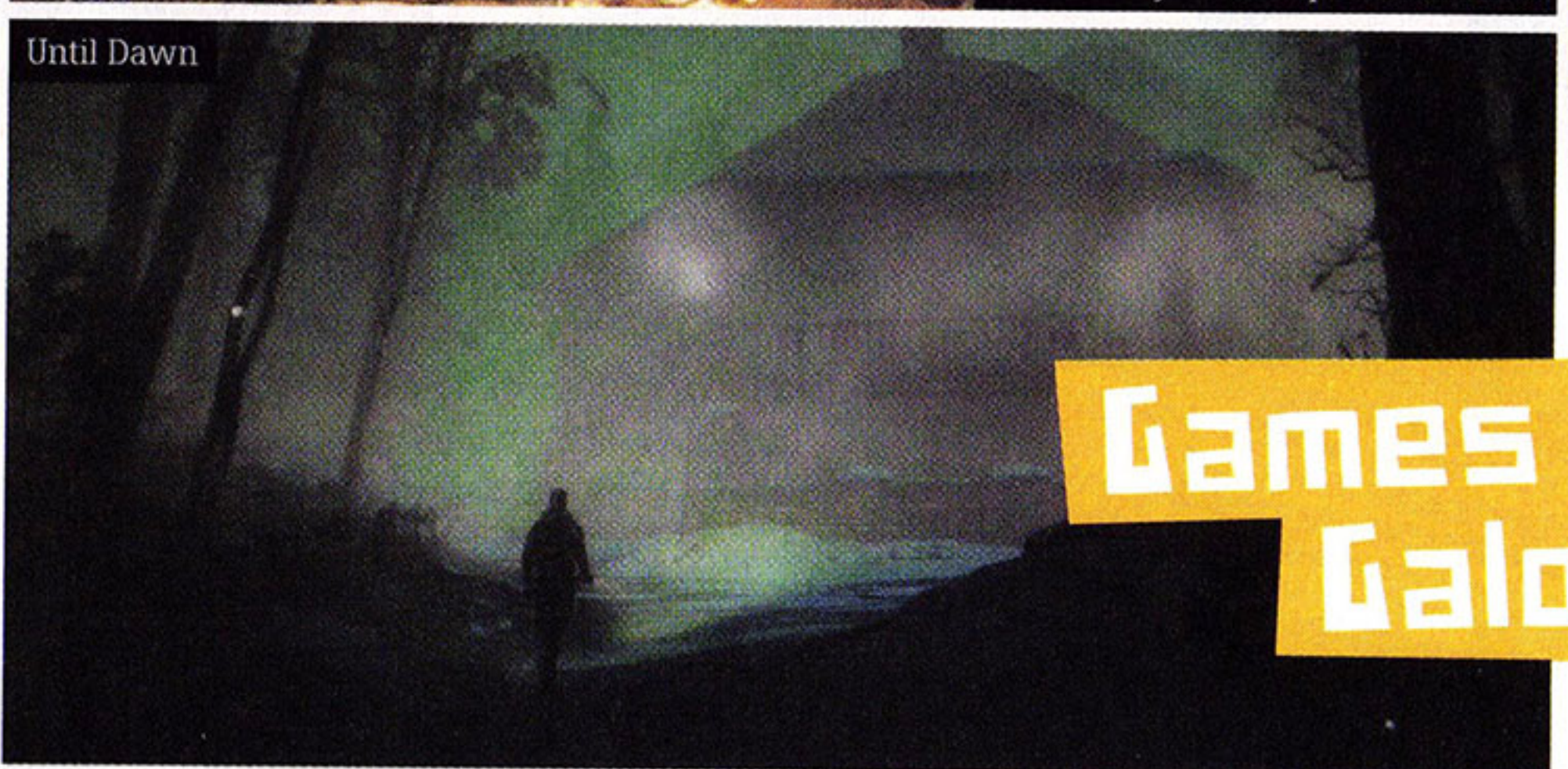
Microsoft & Nintendo Opt Out

Microsoft and Nintendo shared an opposing perspective on the show's importance, with both companies choosing to stay home. Microsoft has traditionally held an off-site event before the show, providing a near-comprehensive look at its roster of upcoming titles. Microsoft seems content to let its third-party partners do the heavy lifting. Still, it was hard not to notice the gaping hole that Halo 4, Gears of War: Judgment, and Forza Horizon left on the show floor.

Nintendo's absence was especially conspicuous as the company prepares the launch of the Wii U. Nintendo failed to generate any Gamescom buzz for the console, which is an obvious missed opportunity. We're inching closer to the console's supposed holiday release, and the company needs to get it in front of as many players as it can. However, as with Microsoft, the console maintained a small presence at Gamescom thanks to the platform's third-party developers.



Call of Duty: Black Ops Declassified

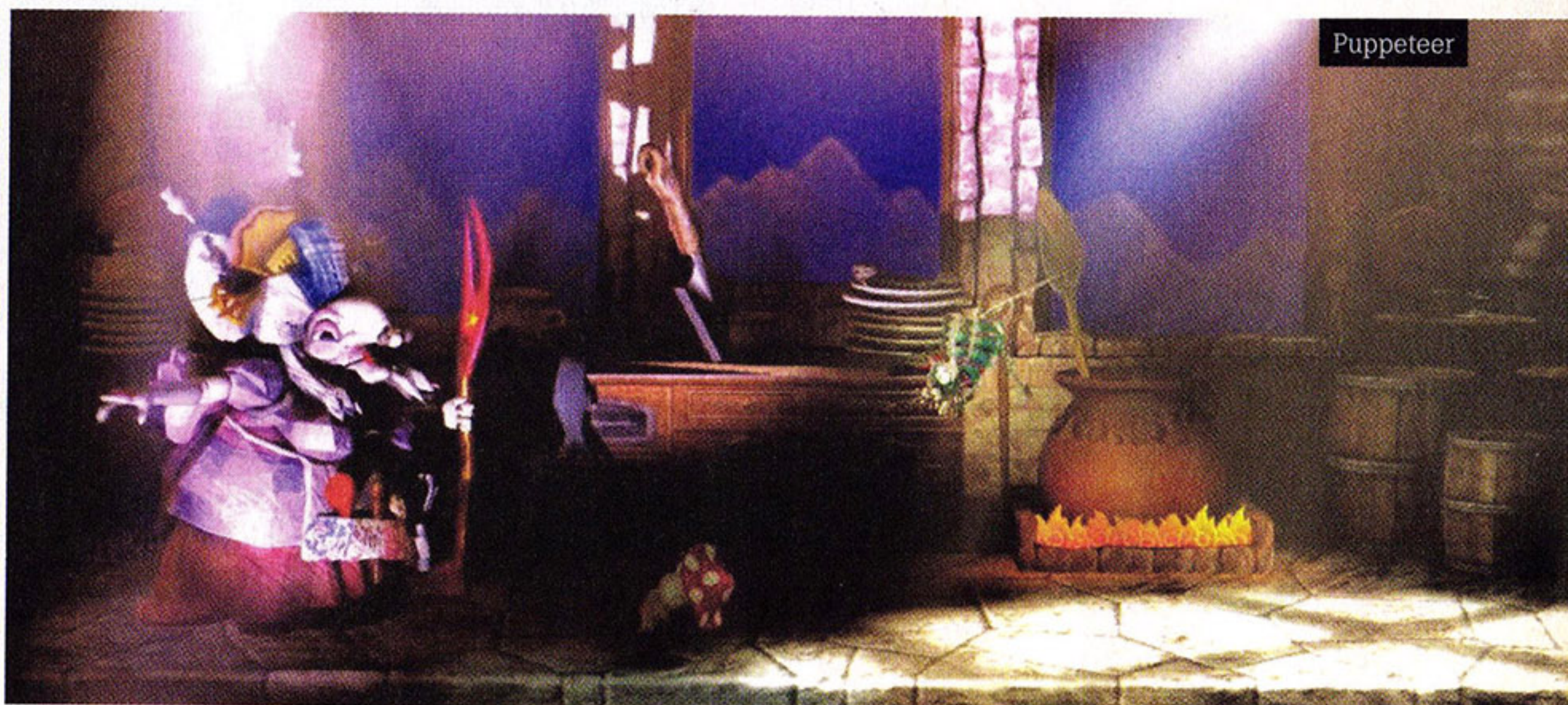


Until Dawn

Games Galore



Killzone Mercenary



Puppeteer

Ubisoft was the most prominent Wii U backer at Gamescom, showing off ZombiU, Rabbids Land, Just Dance 4, Game Party Champions, Rayman Legends, and Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2013. The publisher reaped the benefits of supporting the Wii and Kinect at launch, and early adopters can expect to see plenty of Ubisoft logos on shelves in the Wii U section. ZombiU didn't have the strongest showing; aside from an environmental-scanning mode, where you move the GamePad around in 360-degree space, it didn't do anything particularly interesting. On the other hand, Rayman Legends is still great fun, and Rabbids Land looks like a well-constructed alternative to Mario Party. In addition to the company's Wii U lineup, Ubisoft showed Far Cry 3's open world for the first time (in a playable demo, no less) and it was one of the show's highlights. It's a shame Ubisoft didn't reveal it earlier.

EA's floor presence dwarfed its competition – the massive Medal of Honor booth outsized many other exhibitors' entire floor footprints. FIFA was a clear hit during the company's Gamescom press conference, along with new trailers for Criterion's upcoming Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit, Medal of Honor Warfighter, and Crysis 3. EA brought more than trailers, though. "The timing of Gamescom is always good for us," says EA COO, Peter Moore. "The software is so much further along than it is at E3. Pretty much everything is playable, and you can sit down and play it." Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel was probably the biggest surprise for the audience. The audience snickered when the trailer began, but its ridiculously over-the-top action seemed to win the crowd over, replacing the snarky whispers with plenty of "Holy s---s."

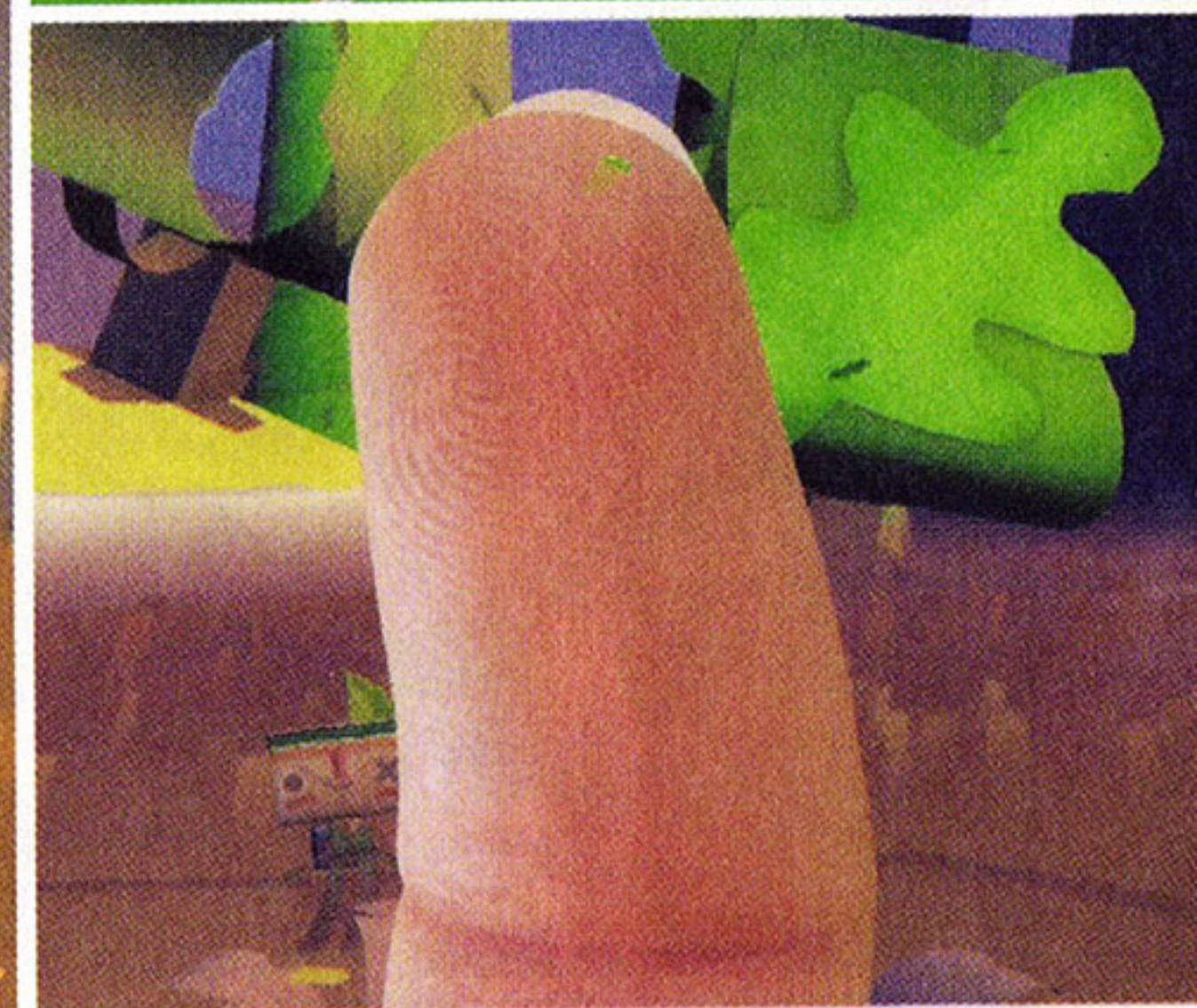


Capcom debuted a new IP, Dontnod Entertainment's memory-bending action game *Remember Me*. We saw a presentation on the game last year, when it was called *Adrift*, and it seems to have come a long way. It combines *Uncharted*-style traversal with acrobatic combat and adventure-game elements. Heroine Nilin can enter peoples' memories and remix them, convincing them that they committed murder, for instance. *Devil May Cry*, *Lost Planet 3*, and *Resident Evil 6* also scored valuable stage time. Of those games, *Devil May Cry's* demo was the strongest. It was a savage parody on contemporary television news, featuring as much dead-on commentary as it did flashy combos. As good as its games were, they were upstaged by *Street Fighter* producer Yoshinori Ono. He took the stage dressed as Blanka, birthday cake in tow, in honor of the series' 25th anniversary. He pretended to announce *Street Fighter V*, to the horror of the company's PR team.

Some of the other Gamescom 2012 highlights included *SimCity*, *Hitman: Absolution* (and its newly revealed assassination-creation *Contracts* mode), and *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* (see the preview on page 70). PC gaming is huge in Europe, and games like *Omerta: City of Gangsters* (from *Tropico* developer Haemimont Games), *Sacred 3*, and the MMO shooter *Firefall* go a long way in explaining its popularity.

Gamescom 2012 was Sony's show to lose, but the company had an exceptional showing. Sony's combination of interesting new franchises and meaty announcements would have been impressive in any year, but Nintendo and Microsoft's absence made it all even better.

"I don't know why they're not here," says Yoshida, summing it all up nicely.



TEARAWAY

Media Molecule's latest game is anything but flat

Media Molecule's post *LittleBigPlanet* game *Tearaway* starts in your living room. Or on the bus. Or wherever you happen to be using your Vita. As you scan your immediate surroundings with the Vita's camera, you notice something unusual. A little tear in reality rips open, and an envelope slides out through the space. Before you can grab the letter, which bears your name on it, it gets sucked back in and transported into another world. And so are you. Kind of.

Your Vita now acts as a portal between the real world (where you presumably live)

and a fanciful place made of paper. The message that brought you into this place lies securely inside a charming little fellow named Iota. He wants to deliver the personalized letter to you, but he can't very well pull open his face and hand it over. Instead, you and Iota must team up to see if you can find a solution together.

You're a god of sorts in *Tearaway's* world, which is demonstrated by a particularly clever illusion. If the papery ground is thin enough – think tissue or crepe paper – you can poke the Vita's back touchscreen and your finger

will rip through the ground from below. This convincing effect is more than just a one-note gimmick. Players can tap enemies from below, sending them sky high and out of Iota's way. Other Vita functions are incorporated as well, including bouncy drums that propel Iota into the air by tapping the back touchpad, and storms summoned with your breath.

Creativity plays a big role in the game, with incentives that extend beyond the game world. As you explore with Iota, you unlock paper models that can be customized and printed out. Once assembled, they can serve as physical reminders of your virtual travels or can be shared with friends in the real world.

Media Molecule earned a reputation for creating whimsical games, and *Tearaway* continues that tradition. We're excited to see more from this pop-up book come to life, and also learn more about Iota and his fascinating world.



GAMESCOM

By the Numbers

Gamescom continues to grow year over year, drawing thousands of gamers and exhibitors from across the world. Here are a few quick stats on the 2012 show, according to the event's organizers.

270,000+
people crowded into Cologne's Koelnmesse convention center

1.5 million
square feet covered by the exhibition hall

330
global, European, and German premieres revealed

APPROX. 25,000
trade visitors in attendance



Cross Buy...

Sony revealed a new pricing promotion at the show that's bound to attract the attention of thrifty gamers who dual-wield PS3s and Vitas.

Players who purchase selected titles on Vita or PS3 gain access to the other version at no additional cost. The feature is called Cross Buy in Europe, though it may get a new name when it makes its way to North America.

The promotion is launching with three first-party games in Europe – PlayStation All-Stars, Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time, and Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault – but it's likely to expand in the future. "We want to make sure the system works first, but we'll offer this new feature to third parties," says Shuhei Yoshida, head of Sony Worldwide Studios. "Either they can offer a discount to people who purchase the PS3 version or they can combine two SKUs for one price."

Pricing promotions aren't the only way the PS3 and Vita will interact. Sony highlighted more of its Cross Play functionality in an onstage LittleBigPlanet Vita demo.

The game goes beyond letting players control the action on the big screen by using a Vita, which the company demonstrated at E3 via PlayStation All-Stars. At Gamescom, we saw Sackboy navigating the world and solving puzzles that swapped between both screens. For instance, players must look at their Vitas in one section to determine what platforms are safe to walk on – or risk getting scorched. Unlike the Wii U, which comes with a second screen built into the Gamepad, the Vita/PS3 crossover could be an expensive gamble. Players who already have both systems can simply enjoy the additional content for their brand loyalty.



...and Cross Play



Q & A with Sony's Shuhei Yoshida

Shuhei Yoshida, head of Sony Worldwide Studios, had a lot to say during our Gamescom interview. Here are some of the highlights from our wide-ranging conversation:

On mobile gaming and the Vita:

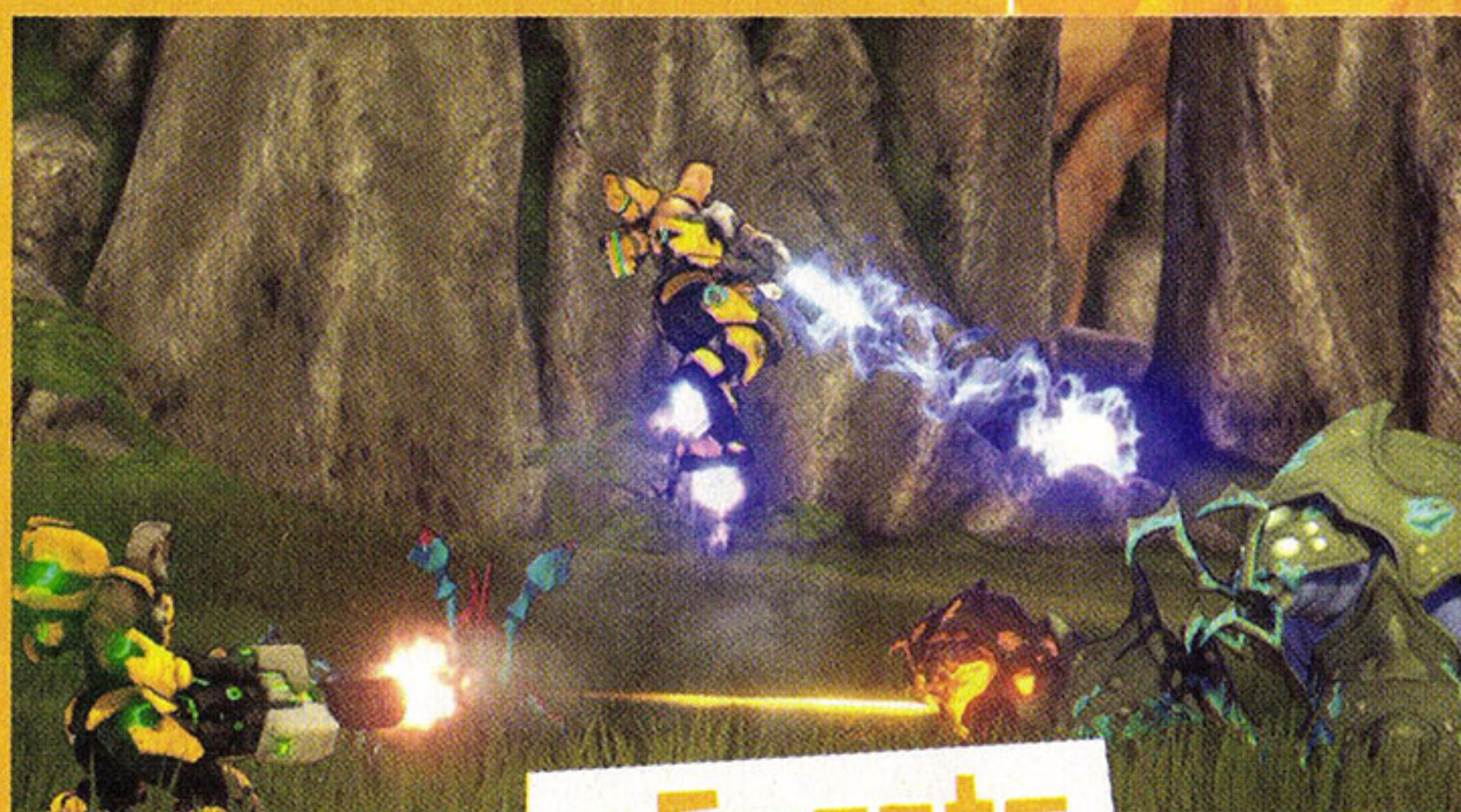
"We've continued to work with third-party publishers and our own studios to provide native content on PS Vita, but at the same time people enjoy using smartphones or tablets to play simple casual games. These games work very well on PS Vita as well."

On Wonderbook

"The announcement at E3 had some technical difficulties, and we were criticized for spending too much time on Wonderbook during the press conference.... The reaction from [the mainstream] media in general was very strong, especially the publishers and content holders who see the opportunity to bring their IP onto this new form of interactive story. We were able to announce partnerships with the BBC and Disney, and it's just a start.

On PlayStation Move

"It's been a very tough sell for us to talk to the core audience. With any new tech, it takes time for developers to try out different usages, and it could be that the development teams are finding ways to use the device to its strengths other than [creating] confusing ways of playing games."



eSports Rising

Competition has been a part of video games ever since Tennis for Two lit up oscilloscopes back in 1958. Gamescom's open-to-the-public format makes it a great spot for organized tournaments and events – and even some announcements. The show played host to competitive events, including League of Legends and StarCraft II tournaments. The Electronic Sports League held Europe's first Firefall beta tournament at the show, too. Activision hosted an event before Gamescom officially started, showing off new shoutcast tools designed to make Call of Duty: Black Ops II friendlier for eSports participants. Players can broadcast and provide their own color commentary in the shooter without having to buy any special equipment. ♦

Meet Your New Hero

A Closer Look At Assassin's
Creed III's **Connor**



❶ Also called a hatchet, the tomahawk is the weapon that most distinguishes Connor from his predecessors in the Assassin lineage. The Assassin symbol cut into the blade seems to indicate some wider importance to the item, but Ubisoft Montreal claims that this tomahawk's origins are related to a major spoiler from the game.

❷ Over the course of the Assassin's Creed games, the iconic white hooded style has been tailored to the hero's time and place. Note the buttons on Connor's coat, which speak to colonial heritage and functionality. The overall outfit is tighter-fitting and sleek.

❸ Connor's bow has been in use since his childhood, except now he uses it to hunt more than just animals. Deadly and silent, it's an ideal ranged weapon to match Connor's deadly missions.

❹ Connor carries this decorative arm band as a memory of his village. The band is formed of wampum, a sacred shell bead common among Native Americans on the East Coast of America. Wampum were used to commemorate special events, and occasionally as a means of trade with outsiders.

❺ The flintlock pistol is useful in a pinch, but its loud nature and slow reload assures that it won't take over as the centerpiece of Connor's fighting style.

❻ While they're not always on display, Connor maintains the centuries-long tradition of dual hidden blades. For up-close assassinations, the weapon can't be beat.

❼ Like many elements of his ensemble, Connor's boots speak to an element of his history. These moccasins are styled after the footwear worn in the village where he grew up, which is part of the Iroquian-speaking nation of Kanien'kehá:ka, which translates to the People of the Place of Flint.

❽ Ubisoft Montreal worked extensively with Native American consultants to ensure visual authenticity whenever possible in representations of culture. The pattern work on this quiver is based on actual historical art of the period.

WE ARE THE BRAVE.

WE ARE THE FREE.

WE ARE UNITED.

OUR TIME IS NOW



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Silent Screams

Universal Studios Creates the Ultimate Silent Hill Haunted House

by Ben Reeves



Universal uses game concept art from Konami while designing the costumes for its show

For over 20 years, Universal Studios has been creating some of the world's most elaborate haunted houses inside its Orlando and Hollywood theme parks. In the past, Halloween Horror Nights have centered on iconic films like *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Saw*, and *The Thing*. This year marks the first time Universal has designed its Halloween experience around a video game property: Konami's Silent Hill.

Universal's Halloween Horror Nights aren't your average strip mall scare-fest. The entertainment giant sinks a movie-sized budget into transforming its parks into living incarnations of existing horror franchises. Universal's Halloween Horror Nights take over a year to plan, are staffed by over a thousand actors, and draw in hundreds of thousands of visitors. Recently, we got a sneak peek at how Universal is transforming its parks into Silent Hill this fall.

Step One: An Idea Is Born

The idea to frame this year's events around Silent Hill came after a chance meeting between Universal and Konami executives during a marketing conference in Los Angeles.

"Halloween Horror Nights is a special event and it's treated like a horror movie," says John Murdy, creative director for Universal Studios Hollywood. "As a brand, Silent Hill matched what we do perfectly. We really wanted to bring

Silent Hill's set design, its imaginative creatures, and its overall horror ambiance alive in our parks. If ever there was a video game we were going to pick, it was Silent Hill."

Step Two: Conceptualizing Hell

Konami provided Universal with hundreds of gigabytes of concept art, audio files, and game footage from the Silent Hill games. Universal's show directors spent hours poring through these files and visiting message boards as they brainstormed the set pieces, environments, and characters they wanted to bring to life. The nurses and Pyramid Head were obvious choices, but the Bogeyman from Silent Hill: Downpour floated to the top of the list as well.

Universal took this stew of information and drew up a paper description of what people will experience as they walk through the maze. Konami executives then approved the concept and offered suggestions for creatures and moments that they would also like to see in the maze. After the concept was approved, Universal's architects began drafting digital schematics of what the maze would look like.

Step Three: Ideas Take Form

Silent Hill's maze is broken down into a dozen rooms or "scenes," which take attendees around 8 to 12 minutes to walk through. Construction on the maze began in early summer and took around 10 weeks to complete. All of the props and costumes for Horror Nights are custom made, so as the production schedule ramped up, an army of prop makers, set designers, and decor artists began plying their trade.

"Our production is similar to how you would create a movie, because you use a lot of the same disciplines," Murdy says. "There are scenic crews, lighting crews, you create the audio like you're creating the audio for a video game or movie. It really is like a movie, except we're doing it live. If you're doing a special effect scene for a movie, it only has to work once, but our effects have to work every ten seconds for over a month."

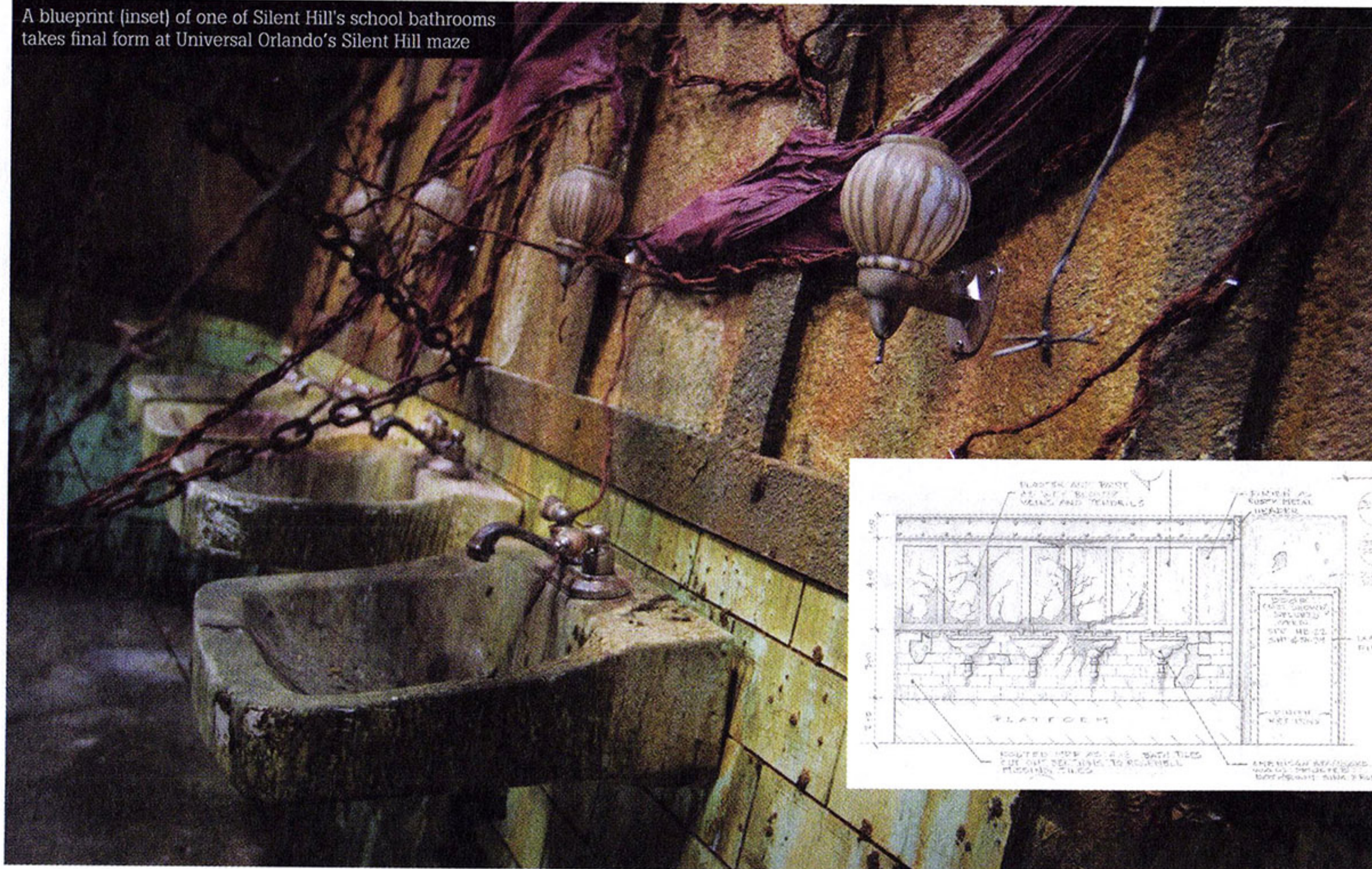
Step Four: Attack The Five Senses

"We play the angles," says Patrick Braillard, show director for Universal Orlando Resort. "Video games can have fixed camera angles, but we have to prepare the maze for 360 degree immersion. We're not above placing someone at ground level and someone else above them. We're not above changing light scope or dropping that on a dime, because if you strobe someone, blinding them for a second, and then someone suddenly appears in that space, that's terrifying."

Universal gives its actors the ability to trigger their own point source audio and lighting effects. These effects are designed to blind guests and distract them, giving the actors a variety of ways to approach and scare showgoers. However, sight and sound are only two of the terrifying tools at Universal's disposal. When players walk into the sewers of Silent Hill, Universal wants to attack its audience with a full sensory assault.

"We actually fabricate our own scents," says Murdy. "It's like those small little scent dispensers you have in your home; we have the industrial versions of those. People come across them all the time and don't even realize it. You can be walking through the mall and smell the aroma of baking cookies, but you're not really smelling cookies. It's an artificial smell. We learned about this a long time ago and started tapping in to the darker side of it."

A blueprint (inset) of one of Silent Hill's school bathrooms takes final form at Universal Orlando's Silent Hill maze



Step Five: Dress Rehearsal

Months before the event, Universal continued to staff up. Halloween Horror Nights generally requires a cast of over 1,000 actors who work in shifts of 500, roaming the park and terrorizing guests who remain after the sun goes down.

"We tell all our actors to play the angles," says Murdy. "If something appears in your peripheral vision it's a heck of a lot more scary than when someone is standing right in front of you. Psychologically people are preparing themselves when they walk into these things. They know they are going to be scared, but they don't know where it's coming from. Our job is to ensure that every time you go through, we're scaring the hell out of you."

Step Six: Open The Gates Of Silent Hill

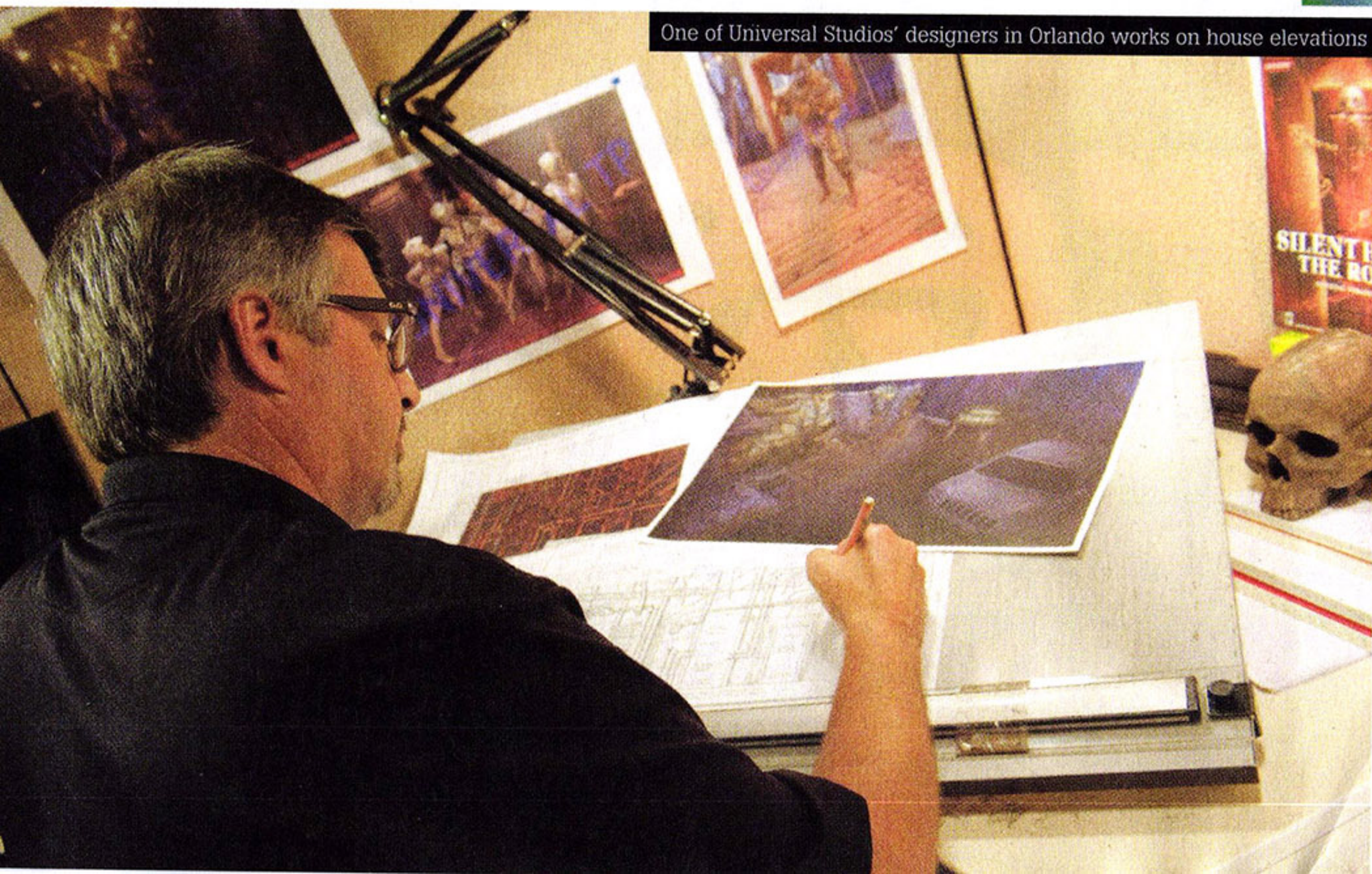
Universal's Silent Hill-themed Halloween Horror Nights begins September 21 and runs through Halloween. Both the Orlando and Hollywood parks feature variations of the Silent Hill theme, including different characters, locations, and

house layouts at each studio, so dedicated Silent Hill fans might have to plan two vacations around Halloween this year.

"We change out every light in the park," Murdy says. "We'll be in the park leading up to this thing, and I see these guys running around changing every single light bulb. It's a pretty extensive change out of the entire park. The minute you flip the switch, the day park is over; you can see the horror night's fans lining up. They're not going to know what hit them this year." ❖



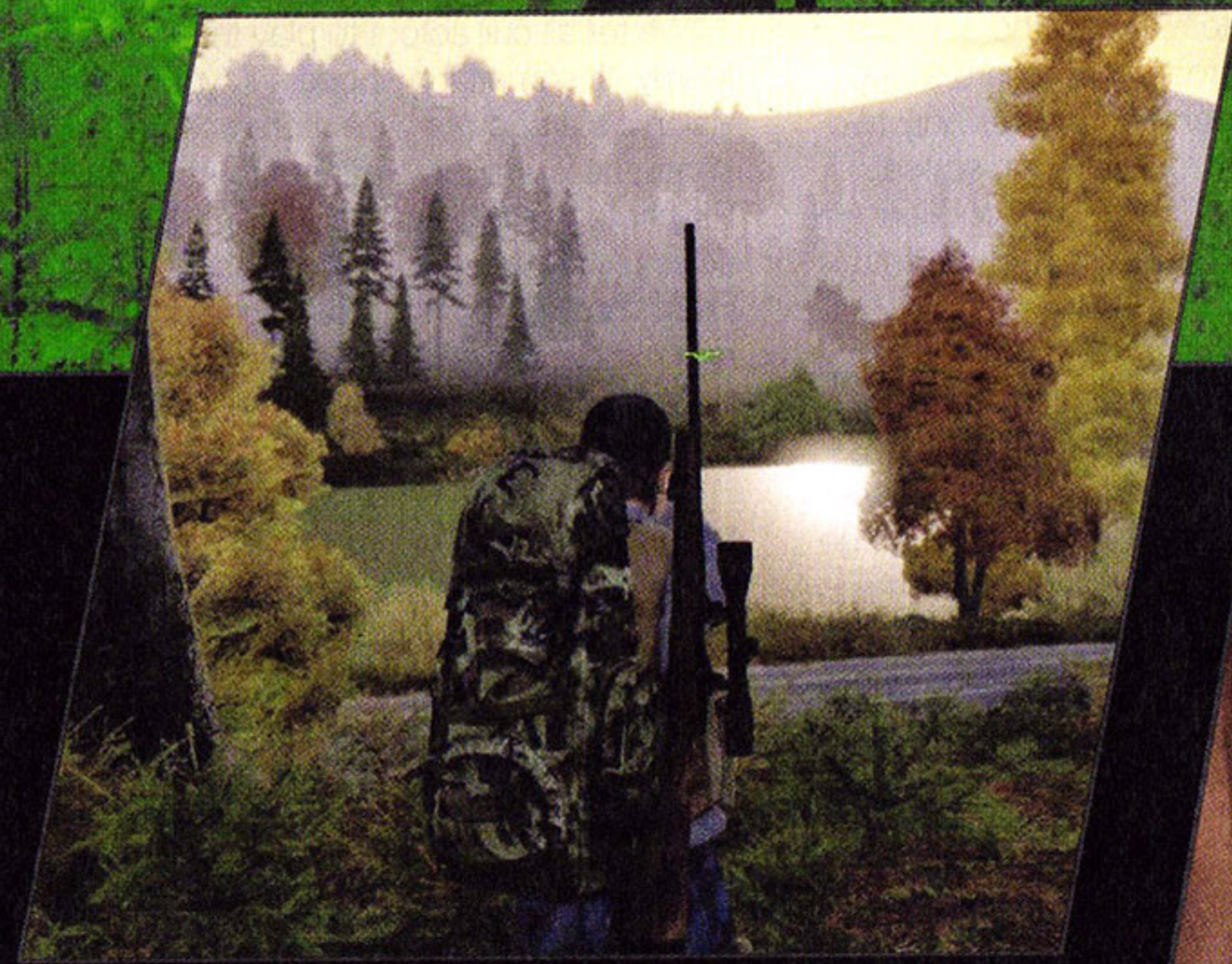
One of Universal Studios' designers in Orlando works on house elevations



Crowds line up to get terrorized at last year's Halloween Horror Nights

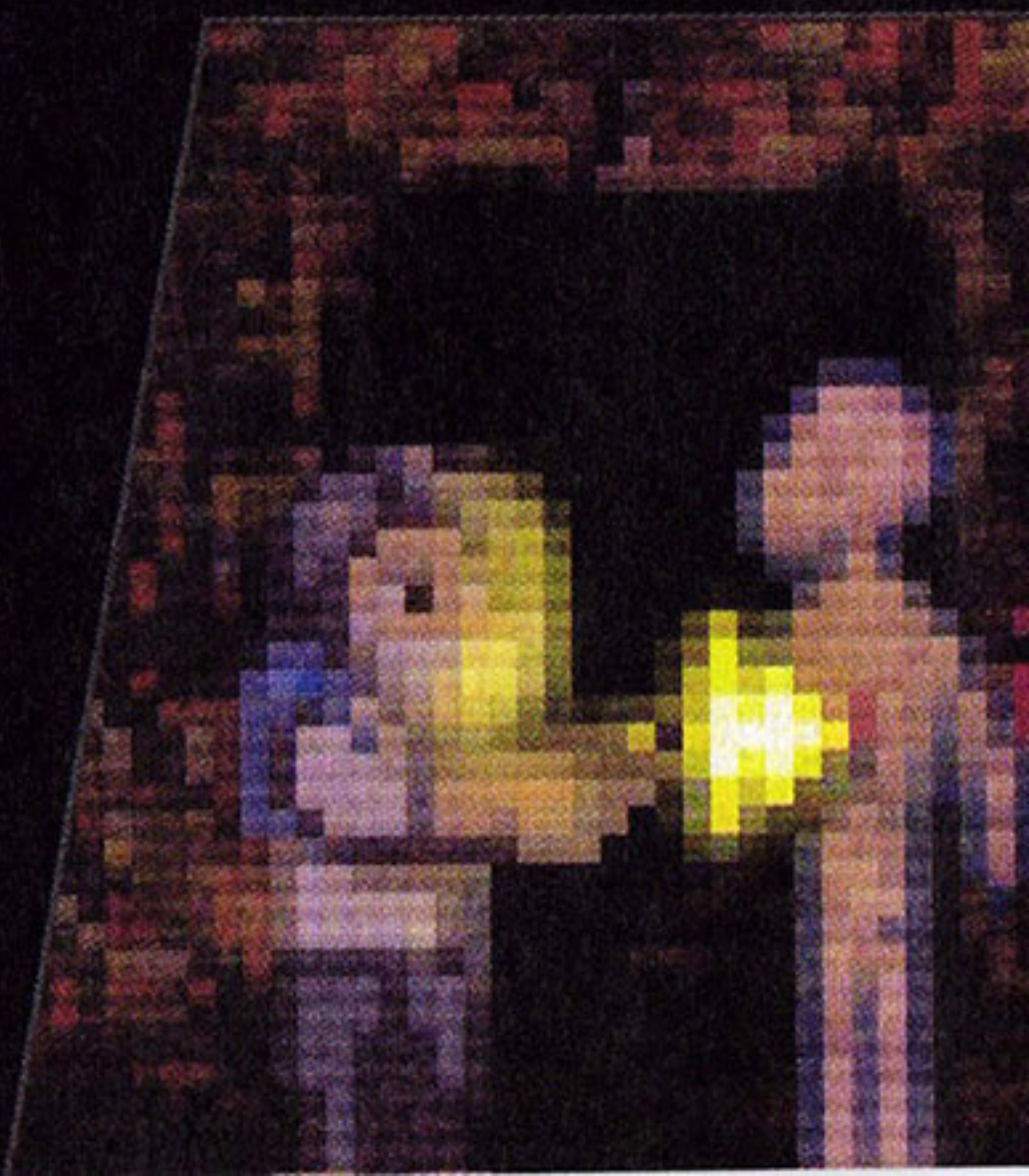


Surv. Ev Hunter disconnected



Rare Scares

We all know about Resident Evil, Silent Hill, and Dead Space, but several other lesser-known titles can conjure up a sense of dread with the best of them. Here are a few under-the-radar horror games on PC and Mac worth checking out.



DayZ (PC)

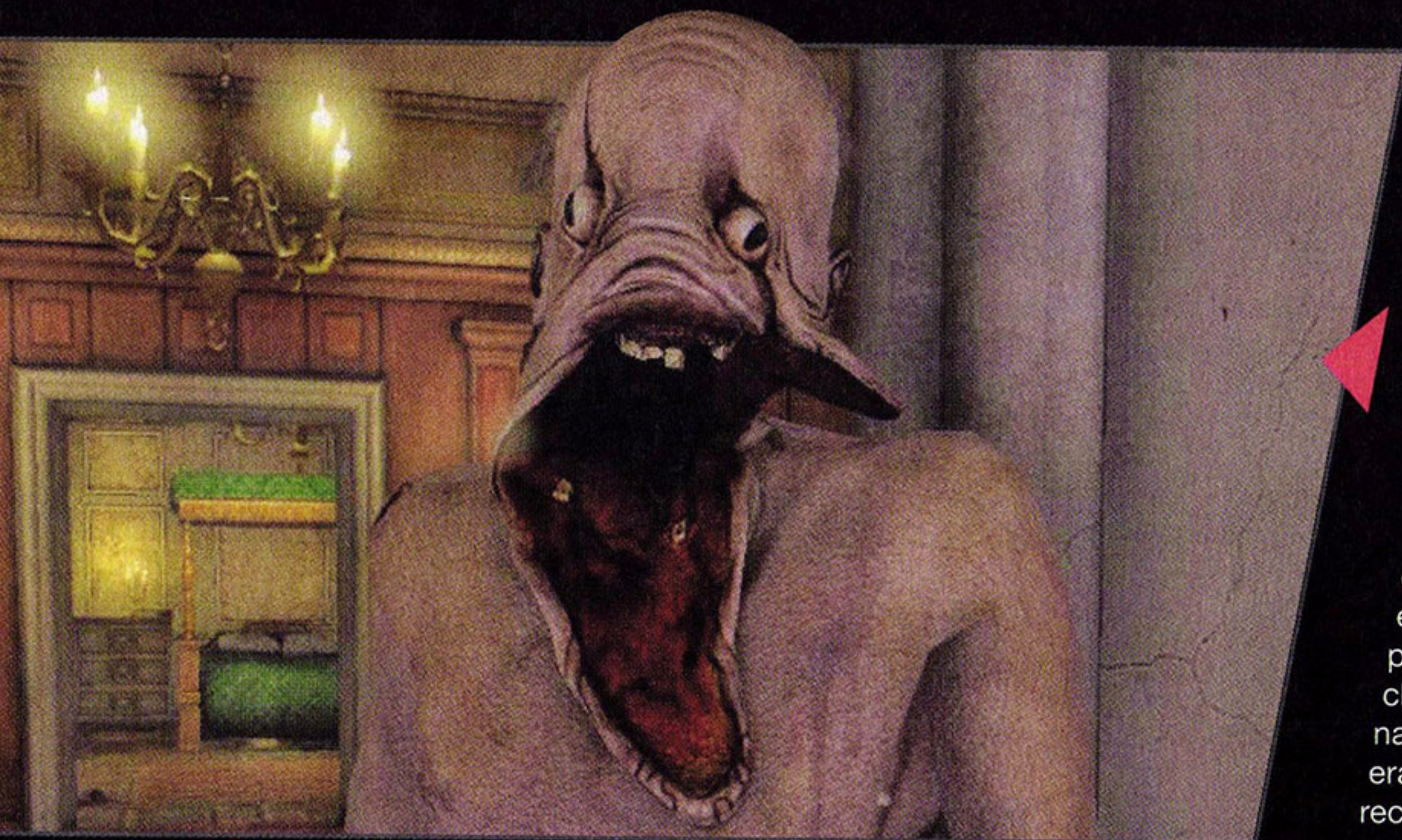
Even if the protagonist is an everyman, most zombie games turn you into a death-dealing maestro within a matter of minutes. Not DayZ. Surviving this post-apocalyptic setting is nearly impossible. Created by Dean Hall, this Arma II mod takes the tactical realism of the base game and injects it with a healthy dose of infected. You must scavenge the 225 square kilometer open world to find water and food and, if you come across a group of undead (who have heightened senses of smell and hearing, but not sight), your best bet is to stick to the shadows because firing weapons attracts more zombies. To survive longer you should find a group of people you can trust, but beware players you don't know. They may end up being bandits more interested in killing you and harvesting your scant supplies than adding another mouth to feed.

Play If You Like: 28 Weeks Later

Slender (Mac, PC)

Born from a fake paranormal image shared in the Something Awful forums, the Slender Man meme has exploded in popularity. Since 2009, it has spread through the 4chan boards, served as the subject of several DeviantArt fan illustrations, and even inspired the creation of the Endermen in Minecraft. This video game tribute to the faceless man by Parsec Productions throws you into the woods with only a handheld camera and a flashlight. Your goal? Collect eight pieces of paper before suffering the wrath of the Slender Man. As you collect pages, the danger grows, which is reflected in the tense music, heavy breathing, and the distorted camera image that signals the Slender Man's presence nearby. If you catch a glimpse of him, turn away and try to escape. Hopefully, the fresh load in your pants won't slow you down too much.

Play If You Like: The Blair Witch Project



by Matt Bertz

Cry of Fear (PC)

The Half-Life engine may be over a decade old, but this mod proves it can still deliver effective thrills. In Cry of Fear, a hoodie-wearing teenager named Simon awakens in a dark alley with a hazy memory of how he got there. As he desperately tries to find his way home through the city, a series of nightmarish sequences make him question his sanity. Though it's a first-person shooter, the constant inventory management and world exploration call to mind the early Silent Hill and Resident Evil games. The '90s-era graphics may turn off many, but the cinematic pacing, tension-heightening sound effects, and grotesque monsters make this a worthy download for horror fans. It only takes a few minutes to realize that creators Team Psykskallar know how to make the hair on the back of your neck stand on end.

Play If You Like: Silent Hill

Amnesia: The Dark Descent (PC, Mac)

Though it's been out for two years and received countless awards, we still come across people who haven't heard of Amnesia. All horror fans should put down whatever game they are playing and pick this up immediately. This exploration-based, first-person experience from Frictional Games tests your sanity by throwing you into the dimly lit corridors of a 19th-century Prussian castle where guttural growls echo down the halls and every sound makes you feel unwelcome. With no weapons at your disposal, your only safe move is to flee into the light provided by candles and chandeliers. Wander too far into the darkness or witness a macabre supernatural act, and your Lovecraftian sanity meter starts to drain. No game this era has packed so many scares into such a suffocating environment. We can't recommend it enough.

Play If You Like: The House on Haunted Hill

Lone Survivor (PC)

This indie title from Superflat Games shoehorns the survival horror aesthetic into the body of a 2D side-scrolling game, losing none of the mood or tension in the transition. When a virus turns most of the world's populace into disfigured monsters, the protagonist locks himself in his apartment. After he runs out of supplies, he must don a surgical mask to stave off infection and venture forth into the deadly world. The gameplay largely consists of combining items to solve puzzles and bringing supplies back to the apartment, where you can sleep to avoid descending into madness. Along the way you're subjected to several haunting hallucinations that make you start to question what's real.

Play If You Like: I Am Legend ♦

DayZ: From Mod to Mainstream

In a mod, I can't control the source. I can only really control the data. You're pretty limited in your options.

What's your prime directive for the upcoming standalone version of the game in terms of not messing up what makes DayZ special?

The first thing to do is to just stabilize the core. That's our focus with the initial outcome. There's only two things we're doing: We're stabilizing the core, and we're providing enough new stuff so that people are happy about paying an extra whatever for the standalone. After we do those few things we're okay. We're not really touching the core of the design with that.

Is there anything else high on the list to add to the standalone?

The big thing is completely redoing the inventory. Inventory is everything to DayZ.

I want something very visceral where you see all the gear and experience it. That's really key. Redoing the UI completely as well, with as minimal HUD elements as possible to maximize immersion. Simplified ragdoll is big on the list. And in the longer term is player construction, maybe subterranean construction and development.

Why subterranean construction?

The way I see it is that subterranean construction is to DayZ as capital ships are to Eve [Online]. They're going to be something that you need a large number of people to do. They require a lot of resources and a lot of time commitment. They're a sign of power in DayZ, which is what a capital ship is in Eve, even if you don't necessarily do a lot with it. I think it gives an opportunity for collaboration and it gives you something else to do other than just killing people. I think that's what we need to explore. Rather than changing the core aspect of the design, we need to give players more options and more creative control of the world.

Do you want to take DayZ in a proper MMO direction?

That's the dream. That's the holy grail. Look at Eve, what a great model there. Basically, take Minecraft and Eve and mix the two together and we're right there. But again it comes back to small steps and big dreams.

What got you thinking in this hardcore, emergent-gameplay direction in the first place?

I started making some prototypes and stuff in Unity 3D before I took the contract up here [at Bohemia Interactive]. I was going to save enough money in the army and start my own studio. And then I found I couldn't play normal games. I sat down to play Red Dead Redemption – it looked awesome – and it just felt like I was getting story shoved down my throat. It really broke the immersion. I asked myself, "What am I doing? Why am I sitting here playing this?" I know there are some great story-driven games like L.A. Noire and stuff like that are really cool, but for me I wanted to explore. I wanted to explore with some friends as well, even if it's just a four-player co-op or something.

I guess it started with doing cooperative survival mission in the original AvP [Aliens vs. Predator – Ed.] back when I was in university. It was open-ended; the aliens would just keep coming at you. I had these amazing experiences meeting up with random people, standing there for ages just defending each other and covering each other and talking to each other. I just found that transcended standard game design. You can't really design that. All you can do is pick out the elements and hope that happens. For me, that's the kind of games I want to play. ♦

THE HARDCORE ZOMBIE SURVIVAL MOD DAYZ has catapulted the three-year-old military shooter it's based on, Arma II, back onto top-ten sales charts and spawned a community as invested in their brutal world as any successful commercial MMORPG. Players wash up on shore with a bare few essentials, and must try to survive the persistent lawless wasteland of Chernarus where fellow player survivors are often more of a threat than the zombies who destroyed civilization. Die, and your character is gone forever – starting a fresh survivor on the beach is your only option.

Created by a New Zealand military veteran while working at Arma studio Bohemia Interactive, DayZ has outgrown its existence as a mod with over a million players and more than 60,000 concurrent users at peak times. Dean "Rocket" Hall took a minute away from heading up a team working on a standalone release of DayZ to talk about his game design philosophy, what makes DayZ special, and why he can't play normal games anymore. *interview by Adam Biessener*

How did you get started in games?

I had been into modding for a long time. Mainly, I got into flight simulation modding with Microsoft Flight Sim, and I did a little bit of contract work for a couple of add-on companies making planes. I also got heavily into modding Arma II. So I used that after a career in the air force and a career as project manager to pitch to a local game company that I'd come and work with them as a producer. I ended up not liking it, so I quit and ended up re-enlisting in the army. I did that for a few years and then got an offer from BIS to come work as a contractor on Arma III.

What was the inspiration for DayZ?

I've been working on persistent rule set modifications for Arma III for quite a while. I wanted to do something that was more mainstream. When I was based in Singapore on an exchange program, I did survival training in Brunei. So I got really interested in survival and the psychological effects and things like that.

What do you think gives DayZ a broad appeal despite its extremely hardcore ruleset?

I realized what I wanted to do was more focused around emotion. I didn't really think about design or mechanics. I thought about what I want as a player experience. Then I worked back and said, "Well, what mechanic do I need to do that?"

I looked at the things I wanted to do, and I looked at what was available, and I tried to marry them up. I think the reason that it worked is because sometimes a good game is more about what we don't do than what we do. I think that's the case with DayZ.

What's your favorite story to come out of the community?

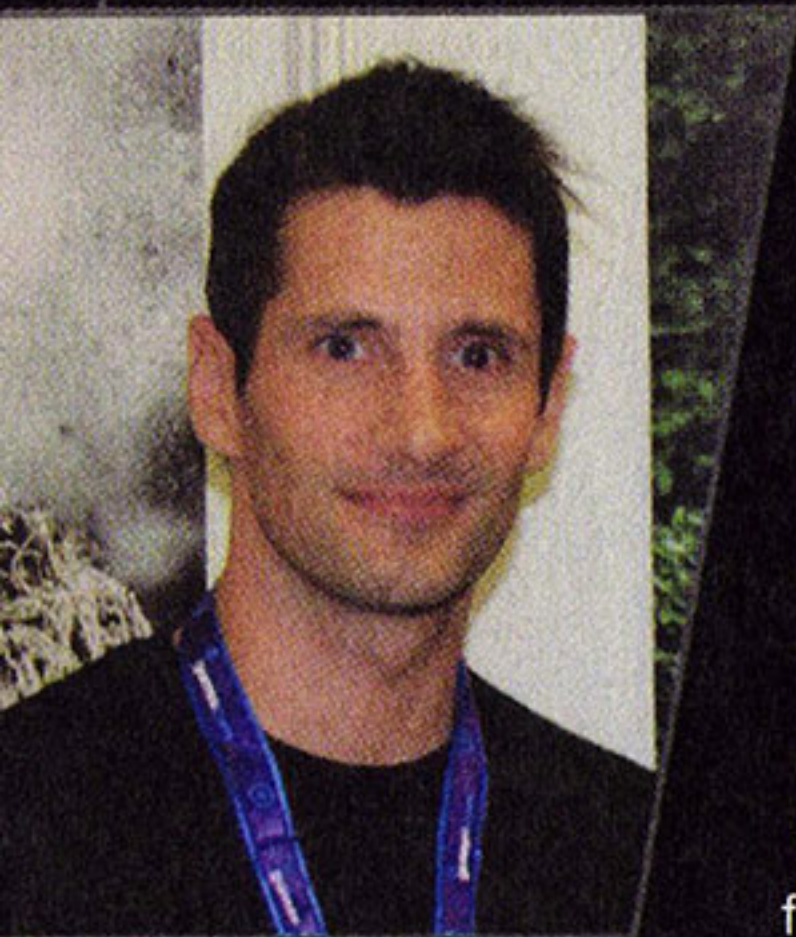
I really like hearing about the player legions [DayZ's term for clans – Ed.]. That's probably the coolest thing for me. I don't know that there's another license – in movies, games, or anything – that's actually driven by the players. What we have are these player heroes and legions coming up, villains like the Black Widow. She's this girl who lives in a church in Chernarus, and she'd go on [voice] chat and say, "Help me, help me, I'm in trouble." Guys would come in, and she'd kill them and take their stuff. It's like a whole supervillain that everybody talks about when they hear about it. Then you get heroes like Dr. Wasteland. I just think that's very exciting and something we want to emphasize. How we can support that through transmedia strategies – comics and stuff like that – where the players are actually driving the story and the lore and the world?

What's the most common request you get?

Fix the bugs. Fix the hacks. I can't even go on my Facebook now; it's not possible. And that's the prime focus.

How much of that is a function of DayZ being a one-man project?

Yeah, and also that it's way outside the envelope of what Arma was ever designed or conceived to do. The fact that Arma is able to do it is a testament to the engine. I know that people rip on it, but if you try and do crazy things with another engine, that's way outside the envelope. So that's why we're going into a standalone. We can actually address those things.



Dean "Rocket" Hall
Creator, DayZ





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Sleeping Dogs

Originally introduced as a new entry of the True Crime series set in Hong Kong, *Sleeping Dogs*' future was uncertain after Activision canceled the project in 2011. Seeing potential in the United Front Games title, Square Enix resurrected and renamed it. We had a

chance to speak to executive producer Stephen van Der Mescht about his thoughts on the situation now that the dust has settled and the game is on store shelves.

Since the development team originally intended for *Sleeping Dogs* to be a new IP, was it a relief when the project was separated from the True Crime name?

It was a huge relief. We never viewed the game as a True Crime game (although it shared similar features), but the tone we were trying to achieve was quite different. All in all, we are really happy that we ended up back where we started with a new IP.

How long was the project in limbo before Square Enix decided to resurrect it?

It took six months from the point of cancellation to resurrection. Square approached us very soon after the cancellation, but it was a tricky deal to negotiate with a developer and two publishers.

What are some of the difficulties that a development team faces when a project switches publishers during the development cycle?

Any relationship between a developer and publisher is a complex beast. They tend to mirror personal relationships quite closely. There's an attraction of sorts, so you start flirting, spend a bit of time together, and then decide to take the plunge. There is always a honeymoon phase in the beginning where neither side can do wrong, but then

inevitably the pressure starts to build and the fundamentals of the relationship get tested. Switching publishers mid-development is like starting that process all over again, but on a much more compressed timeline. You don't have the luxury of those first few months of feeling each other out; it's just straight down to business and delivering. The tricky things are aligning quality expectations, understanding on both sides what the teams are capable of and where they need support. Square Enix London Studios were great though. We worked very hard in the beginning to set those standards and ensure that expectations were aligned.

After the project was saved and renamed, how much of the core story changed?

Very little of the core story changed. The characters and plot were similar as to when it was True Crime, and before it was True Crime. Even though the name changed and the development cycle was turbulent, there was a core vision that we stuck to from the get-go. A lot changed around the story though, in terms of characters in the living world getting fleshed out, and establishing links between them, the story, and the game world.

With so many elements to an open-world game, which was the most difficult to develop?

Each element has its own challenges. People playing games don't always think about the development process, but making an open-world game that has so many unique gameplay mechanics is extremely challenging. You get held to the same standards as games that only have a single mechanic as their core gameplay, so you have to pick and choose your battles very carefully. In an open world, where you put your emphasis has to feed into something bigger than just the fighting or shooting or driving. It has to serve the overall experience. Throughout development, that experience can be very difficult to validate as it requires all the pieces to be in play to see if it really works. So while making the game, you talk a lot, you fight a lot, and you work extremely long hours to make it happen. Of course, you surround yourself with talented people who are driven and passionate to make the process fun and not a grind. In isolation you can see the mechanics come together, but getting them to work together in a way where as a gamer you actually feel something while playing the game is by far the hardest part of the equation.

The soundtrack is full of Asian language tracks that most American gamers are probably unfamiliar with. What was the process of putting the soundtrack together like?

It was a lot of fun. The soundtrack is really important in an open world game. It gives the game a feel, it's a huge part of the game's identity. We went through a lot of researching and listening to tracks. Often what we'd do is just put stuff we thought would work into the game and then listen to it while driving around in the city. If it felt right, we'd fight like crazy to get that track. Finding the right balance between Asian and western tracks took a while. Even just something as simple as the order of the playlists was something that had a lot of back and forth between the music director and people on the team. Obviously, for the story missions, we wanted a score. The story and cinematic part of the game was important to us, and we felt being able to score the missions would improve the dramatic impact overall.

Was there ever any talk of including multiplayer?

Yes, there was early on. But we really wanted to spend as much of our energy as possible on creating a great single-player experience. I'm sure it would have added something to the game – but as things turned out, the in-game Social Hub adds an element of multiplayer by playing against friends, beating scores and making challenges. I believe it was the right decision.

Do you see *Sleeping Dogs* becoming a series, or is it planned as a stand-alone title?

We would love to make another *Sleeping Dogs*! ♦

01



Fallout

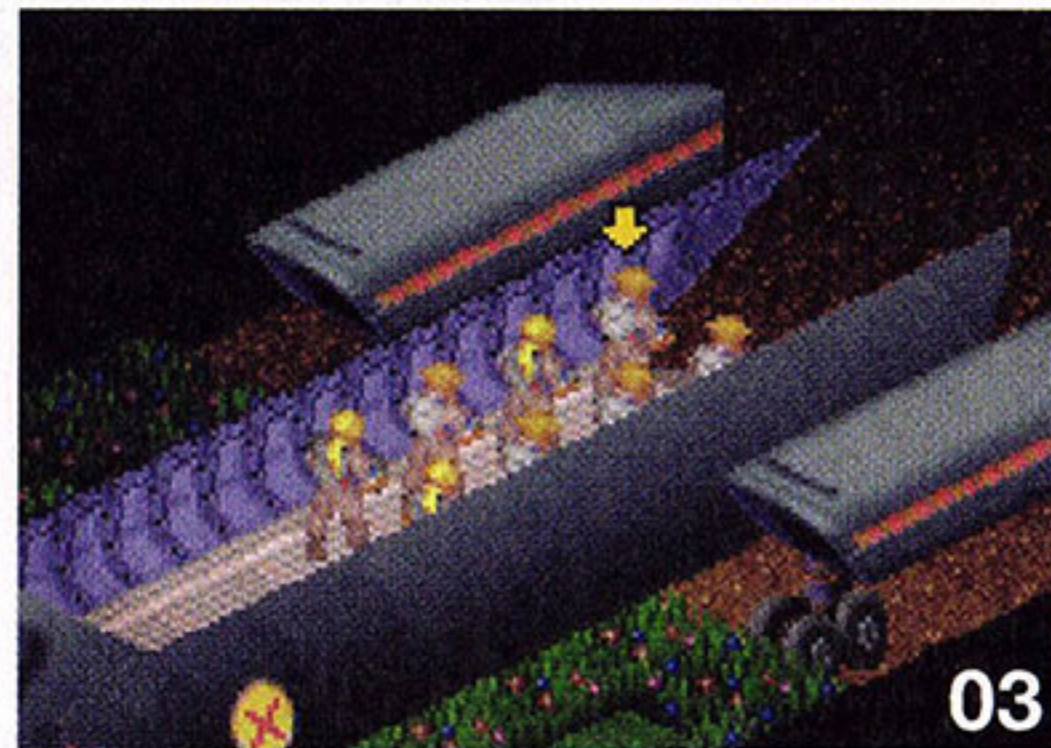
War never changes, but platforms do. Interplay's legendary post-apocalyptic role-playing game is a perfect fit for a touchscreen interface. With a graphical facelift, this landmark game could show a new generation of gamers why the original is so revered.



02

Day of the Tentacle

We want LucasArts to keep the adventure game renaissance moving forward with a new port of this 1993 classic. This sequel to Maniac Mansion is the game that put Tim Schafer (Psychonauts) and Dave Grossman (The Secret of Monkey Island) on the map.



03

X-Com

Squelching an alien invasion isn't strictly an at-home operation. While 2K reinvents the beloved strategy series for consoles (see page 64 for an in-depth preview) it should also resurrect the original for tablets and phones.



04

Grim Fandango

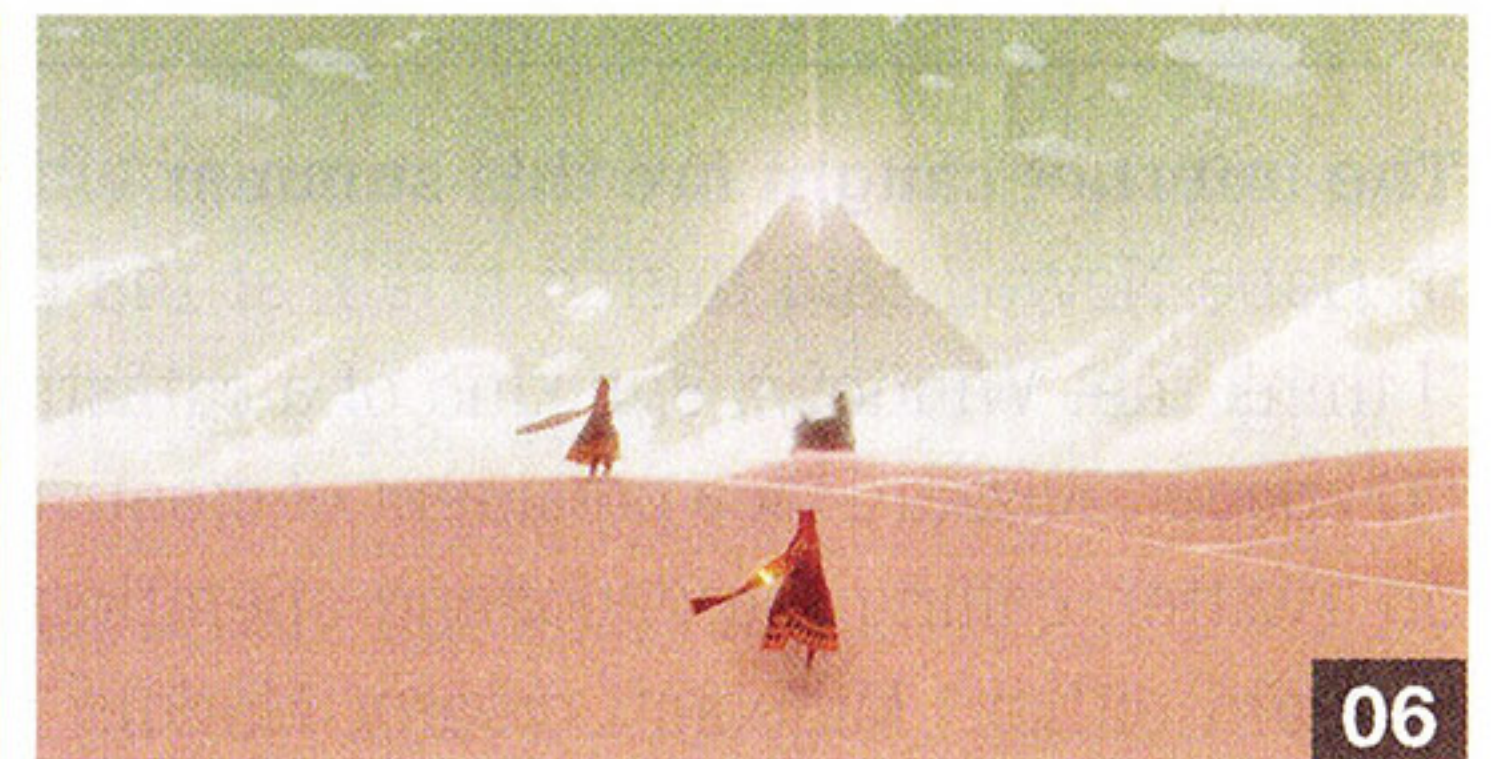
Getting this LucasArts classic to work on a modern machine is an exercise in futility. Tim Schafer's noir tale of Department of Death travel agent Manny Calavera's journey into the underworld is still as witty and entertaining as it was in 1998, so why hasn't a port happened already?



05

Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together

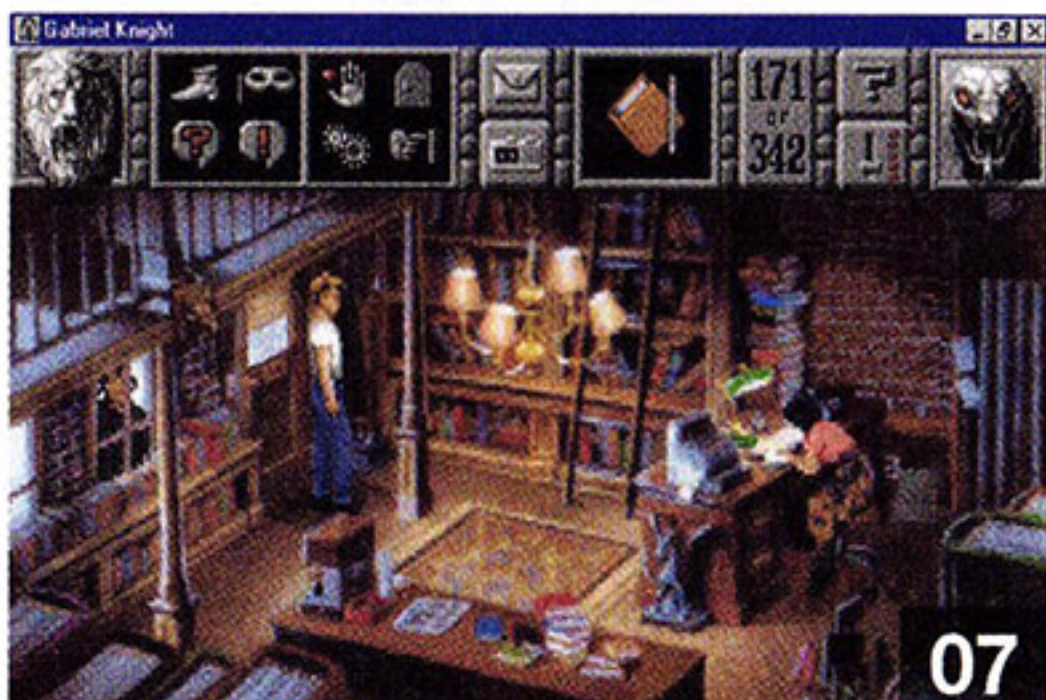
Square Enix has already brought many of its memorable titles to iOS, but thus far it has overlooked this classic tactical role-playing game. Given the popularity of strategy games on tablets and phones, chances are it would receive a warm welcome.



06

Journey

Thatgamecompany's short, yet poignant video game poem celebrating the spiritual journey through life is one of 2012's best games. Its easy-to-learn exploratory gameplay is also a great fit for tablets.



07

Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers

The only place you can play Jane Jensen's classic adventure game right now is on Good Old Games. Someone should cast a voodoo spell on rights holder Activision so it commissions a port to bring this supernatural detective story to the masses.



08

Valkyria Chronicles

Sega's turn-based role-playing game never found the audience it deserved on PlayStation 3, so its sequel was relegated to the PSP and the third game was never localized for North America. A tactics game this good deserves a second chance.



09

Civ V

Civilization Revelation is already on iOS, but sometimes you don't want to buy the diet version of a product. With the horsepower of the next iPad rumored to rival that of the Xbox 360, there is no excuse for Firaxis to forego offering us the most robust version of its empire-building simulation.



10

Tetris Attack

This classic SNES puzzle game has been left on the shelf so long that many people probably think Bejeweled was the innovator of the "match three" game style. It's time for Nintendo to hook a new generation of gamers with the true originator.



Developers Set Sights On **Windows 8** *by Adam Biessener*

The Internet caught fire this summer when Valve managing director Gabe Newell said during a talk at the CasualConnect conference, "I think that Windows 8 is kind of a catastrophe for everybody in the PC space." Blizzard vice president of creative design Rob Pardo agreed on Twitter, calling the upcoming operating system "not awesome for Blizzard either." Minecraft creator Markus "Notch" Persson threw his two cents in on Reddit, saying, "If Microsoft decides to lock down Windows 8, it would be very very bad for indie games and competition in general." Why are all these PC gaming luminaries so down on Windows 8? The answer is simple: control.

Microsoft is trying to unify the experience of using Windows 8 on tablets, smartphones, and desktops. Much of that effort is happening under the banner of Metro, the company's name for its next-generation user interface. Metro's look and feel is a drastic, visible departure from Windows 7 and previous generations. However, the elements of Windows 8 that concern game publishers and developers are on a much deeper level. Valve, Blizzard, and others are worried about the steps that Microsoft is taking toward closing down the Windows platform in a manner similar to Xbox Live or Apple's iOS. Unlike PC today, there is no way for developers to release games or apps for XBLA or iOS without going through Microsoft or Apple.

Two elements of Windows 8 are at the root of the issue. First is how the tablet-only Windows RT version of the OS allows only Microsoft-approved apps, sold through the company's official digital storefront, to run — just like Apple

is the gatekeeper for all apps and content on iOS devices. In contrast, Google's Android OS places few restrictions on apps that run on it, and even allows third parties like Amazon to run their own stores on the system — as Ouya presumably will when the Kickstarter-backed \$99 Android console comes out next year.

The second element developers take issue with is Microsoft restricting certain capabilities of Metro in all versions of Windows 8 to apps

that use the official digital storefront (and are therefore approved through a Microsoft certification process). The restricted functionality appears trivial as of now, but the step is unprecedented in Windows history.

Windows 8 on desktop PCs, laptops, and Intel x86-based tablets still allows any app compiled for the platform to run, with no interference or input from Microsoft. Nonetheless, developers and publishers are concerned about any steps down the path to a closed platform. "If we would have to go through something like Xbox [certification] to get our game on Windows, it would be really bad for us," said John Gibson, president of Red Orchestra developer Tripwire Interactive. "If it is a closed system, that's a nightmare scenario." Tripwire has updated its game *Killing Floor* more than two dozen times with free content to reward players' loyalty, and Gibson says that such a model would be "off the table" in a closed system.

Other developers like Arma and DayZ developer/publisher Bohemia Interactive are less concerned about Windows 8. "I don't think it will affect us that much, because I don't expect our users are going to migrate much," said CEO Marek Španěl. Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli agrees, as Windows 8 does nothing to restrict or harm the performance of his company's CryEngine 3 or their games. "At the moment it's irrelevant to me. That may change," he told Game Informer.

Microsoft itself declined to comment for this story, instead passing along a statement through a representative reiterating its hopes for giving players a better, more connected experience with Windows 8 through its Xbox Games for Windows 8 initiative's avatars, achievements, and social connections to Xbox Live. The company has a tough road ahead to tempt consumers away from competing services like Valve's Steam, though, as Games for Windows Live has faced a litany of consumer complaints and dwindling third-party participation since its inception in 2007.

Newell, Pardo, and the rest may be jumping the gun in proclaiming doom and gloom for Windows gaming in the face of Windows 8's upcoming October launch, but the arguments against closing the platform are compelling. If Microsoft were to set a system up in the future where it got a cut of every game sold on Windows, the outcome would be dire. Independent game development would suffer greatly, and the wide variety of storefronts from Steam to Battle.net would face a threat to their existence. For the hobby's sake, let's hope that Microsoft sees Windows' open nature as the strength that everyone else does. ♦

The Good

EA HASN'T TALKED a lot about Battlefield 4 other than to acknowledge its existence, but recently the publisher revealed a few details about the next major installment in the mega-franchise. The beta program starts in the fall of next year (you can currently get in if you pre-order Medal of Honor: Warfighter), and developer DICE confirmed that it stays in the modern setting. Battlefield fans may also be heartened to hear that the studio hasn't ruled out a return of the Bad Company offshoot series.



Battlefield 3

The Bad

THQ CANCELLED

InSane, director Guillermo del Toro's horror video game project, which was being developed by Volition. Announced in 2010, the series was expected to debut in 2013, but nothing substantive was seen from the title up to its cancellation. Del Toro retains the rights to the project. This may be bad news for those looking forward to the game, but given THQ's dire financial situation, cutting this project loose might be best for both sides.

The Ugly



Photo: AP

ZYNGA'S DECLINE

continues. Not only has its stock fallen 71 percent since the initial public offering in December according to Businessweek, but executives (including founder Mark Pincus) are being investigated for insider trading after dumping \$516 million in stock the same quarter as it posted bad financials. One of the executives under investigation is former Zynga COO, EA Tiburon founder, and one-time Microsoft vice president John Schappert (above). Schappert was stripped of his position overseeing game development at Zynga before resigning from the company in August.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY

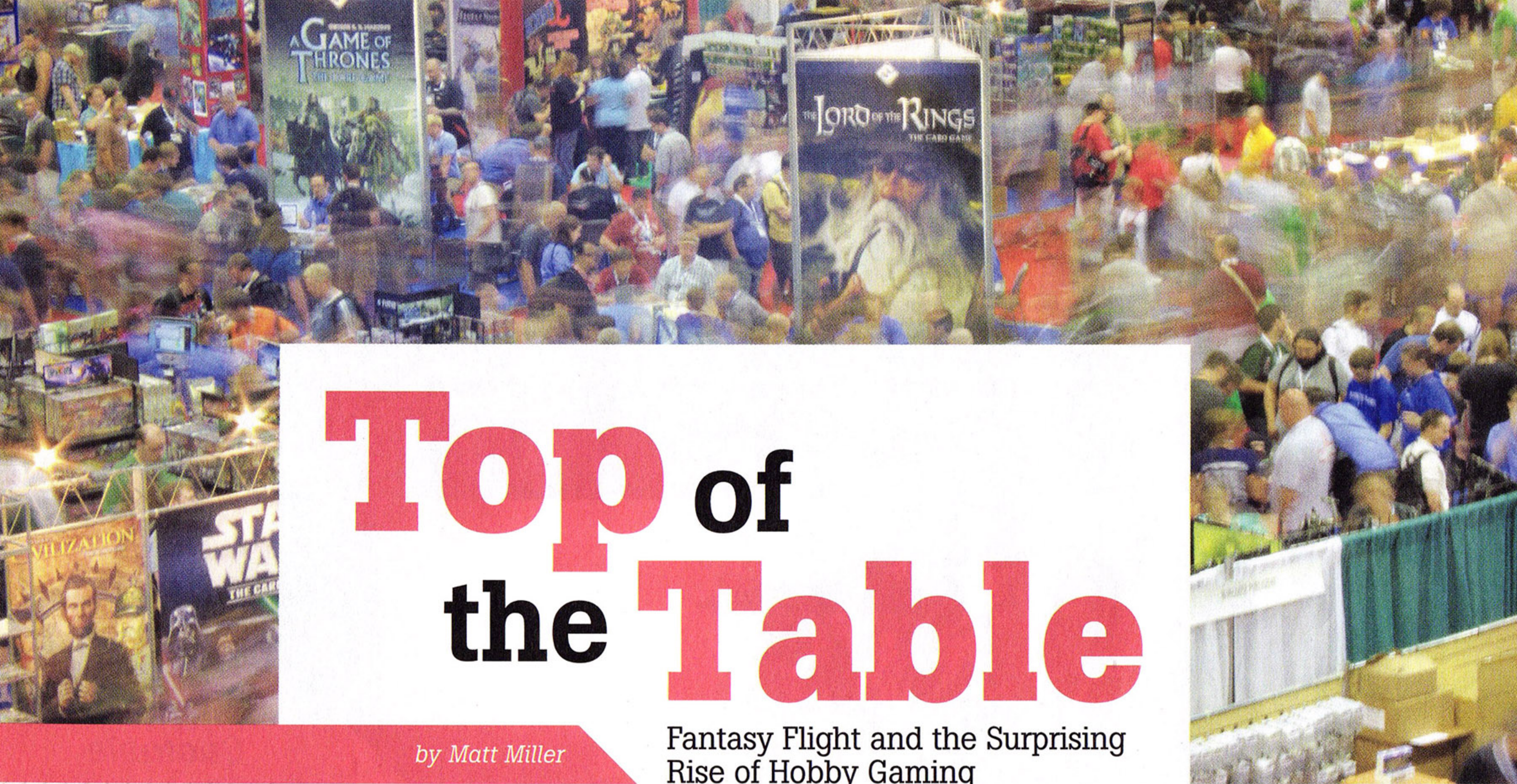
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Quotable

"I met Shigeru Miyamoto and he put his hand on my shoulder, and it made me a better game designer."



— Epic Mickey's **Warren Spector** talks about Miyamoto's magic touch



Top of the Table

by Matt Miller

Fantasy Flight and the Surprising Rise of Hobby Gaming

Conventional wisdom suggests that tabletop gaming is all but dead. With video games, the Internet, and an ever-broadening array of digital entertainment options, who could possibly be playing board games in their free time? And yet, conventional wisdom is wrong. The hobby gaming industry is on the rise, and companies like Fantasy Flight Games are riding the wave.

This year, over 41,000 people attended Gen Con in Indianapolis, making it the biggest hobby games show in North America. "I can remember when that show was half as large. Every year it grows incrementally bigger," says Steve Horvath, senior vice president of communications and digital business at Fantasy Flight. "Our sales have grown along with that as more and more people discover the hobby." Additionally, many veteran players are returning to card, board, and role-playing games after years of absence, bringing their kids along for the ride.

"During tough times, I think families and friend groups rally together for ways to entertain themselves that are going to last a long time, and hobby games are a good fit for that," Horvath suggests. "Even as the economy has been tough in the past several years, I think that's brought out the value proposition that the hobby games market has to offer. For example, you may go out with some friends for dinner, see a movie, and spend \$50 or \$60 for five hours of entertainment. For that same expenditure, we give you a board game that you can play for hundreds of hours for years to come."

Tabletop gaming has carried a stigma for decades now, embodied by the lonely, anti-social basement dweller. In contrast, kids growing up within the scene know hobby gaming as a highly social experience that fosters deep and long-lasting friendships, and that has never been more true than today. Like with video games, tabletop gaming has continued to grow and mature with the passing years. The games being played by adult tabletop gamers today are a far cry from Monopoly and Chutes and Ladders.

These more sophisticated games are the bread and butter of Fantasy Flight Games. Leaders in the hobby gaming scene, Fantasy Flight has built a reputation on board games that feature rich narratives and complex game mechanics. Game designer Christian Petersen founded the company in the mid-1990s, single-handedly putting together the first edition of a game called Twilight Imperium. Now in its third edition, the sci-fi game was indicative of a new wave of detailed and strategic board games that would expand

with each passing year. "We've grown from there to over 90 employees and we have over 70 active product lines," Horvath says.

The tabletop scene today encompasses a vast array of board, card, dice, miniature, and role-playing games that touch on any setting and game concept imaginable. "For pretty much any genre in the video game industry, there is a corresponding genre in tabletop games," Horvath says. Fantasy Flight's catalog includes fantasy, sci-fi, horror, war, western, and other genres. Those settings are communicated through games ranging from cooperative storytelling adventure games to competitive empire building epics.

For Fantasy Flight, success comes from a diverse approach that includes both original franchises and well-known licensed properties. "We have licenses for Star Wars and Lord of the Rings. We've worked with the folks at Epic Games on Gears of War, as well as Firaxis' Civilization," Horvath tells us. "We began years ago working together with Blizzard to create games for World of Warcraft and Starcraft. Lots of people more recently have heard of another of our licenses, Game of Thrones – we're the longest-running licensee for that property." For many, these licensed games are a gateway into the larger world of tabletop games. Horvath explains that many players found one of Fantasy Flight's video game licensed products first, and then crossed over into Fantasy Flight's original properties like Android or Rune Wars.

Millions of people are in on the secret that the world of tabletop gaming is a vast and varied place. Many of those same tabletop fans also love video games like Skyrim, Assassin's Creed, and Call of Duty, but they've found that tabletop gaming can scratch a different itch. "Even though the world has become a more digital place, there's always a desire for people to have face-to-face interaction with their friends," says Horvath. "It's great to sit around a table and tell stories, brag, and laugh." ♦

The yearly Gen Con is a venue for hobby gamers to congregate and publishers to exhibit and announce new projects





Descent: Journey in the Dark - 2nd Edition

We visited Fantasy Flight's headquarters to get a sneak peek at the company's biggest new game. The original Descent released over six years ago to widespread acclaim and popularity, and the new version aims to expand the series' storytelling and gameplay potential.

Descent reimagines the classic fantasy dungeon-crawling adventure vibe by casting up to four players in the role of adventurers and one player as the overlord of a vast dungeon. While the adventurers cooperate to gain treasure,

improve their characters, and defeat baddies, the overlord tries to crush them.

The new edition expands the potential for long-term campaign play, creating branching scenarios that change depending on the winner from the previous session. Meanwhile, gameplay has been streamlined and balanced based on years of player feedback. Simpler and more accessible than most traditional role-playing games, the new edition of the Descent board game nonetheless delivers deep narrative and tense combat.

Fantasy Flight maintains an event center in Roseville, MN where gamers can come to try games before they buy

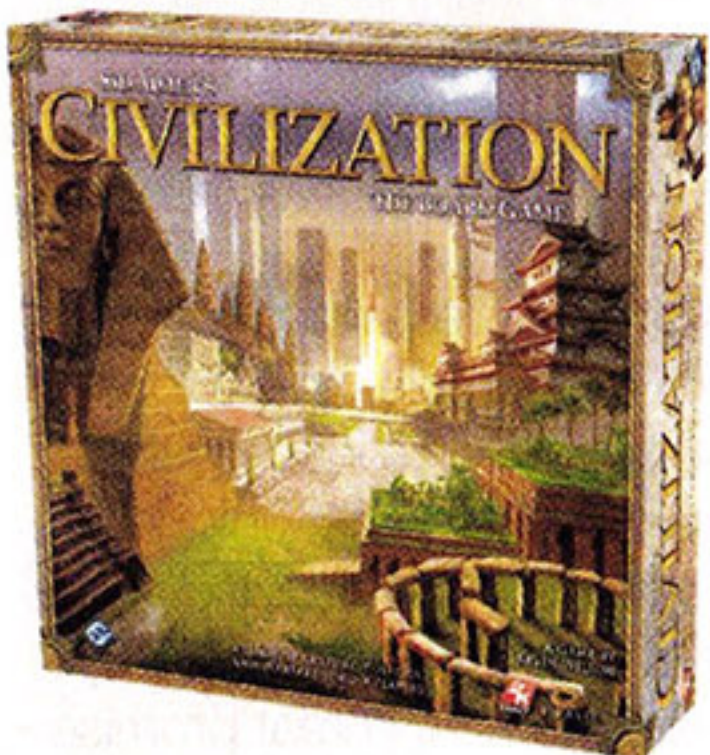


Other Suggestions to Get Started



Arkham Horror

Set in the roaring 1920s, this cooperative adventure game casts each player as an investigator trying to halt an attempt to stir the ancient gods of Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos before they emerge and devour the world. Arkham Horror provides large groups of players with atmospheric horror storytelling, and can be played dozens of times with a different adventure every outing.



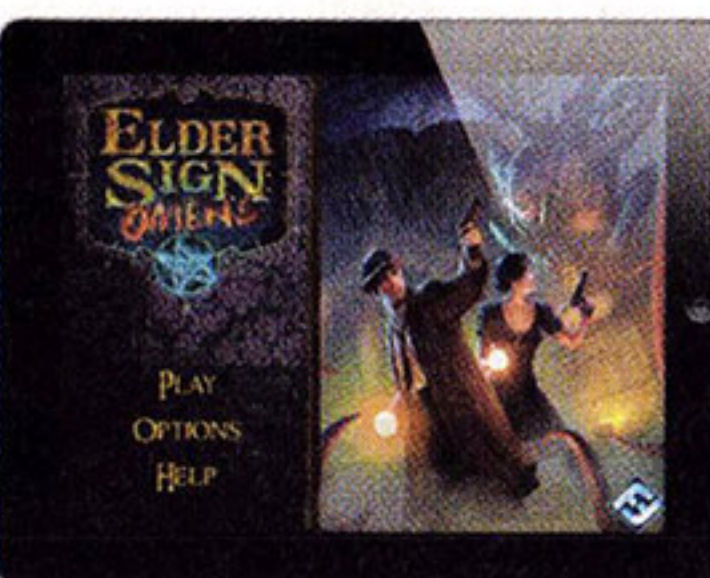
Sid Meier's Civilization

If you love the PC version, you'll enjoy the intricately balanced fun of the Civilization board game. The modular game board is different every time, and Fantasy Flight's version maintains the flavor of the video game while establishing mechanics all its own.



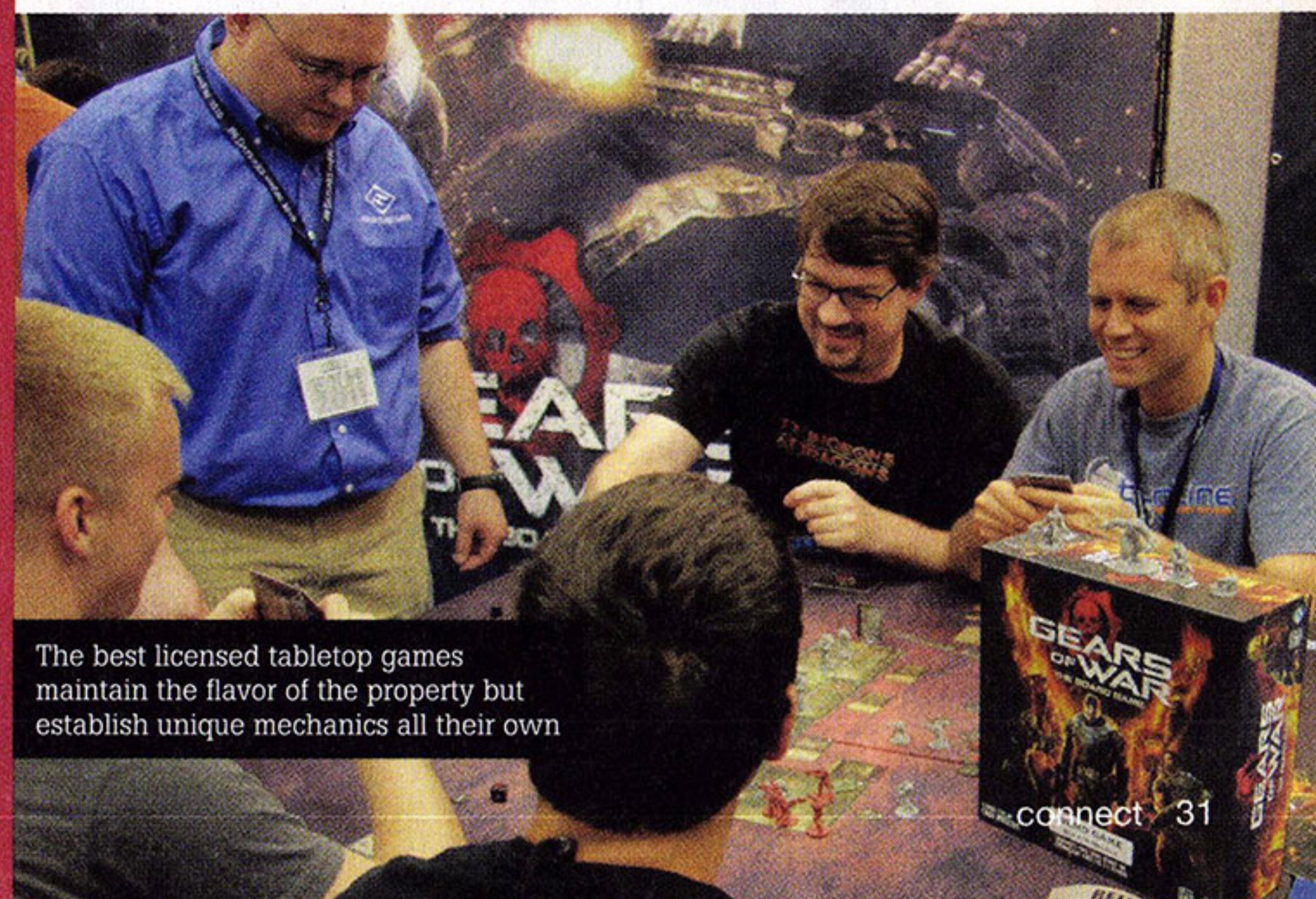
The Adventurers: The Pyramid of Horus

Are your kids ready to graduate to something more exciting than Uno and Battleship? The Adventurers takes up to six players into a crumbling Egyptian pyramid in search of treasure. Simple rules and fast turns keep the action going, while the looming threat of the pyramid falling down on top of you demands that players decide how far to push their luck before fleeing for their lives.



Elder Sign: Omens

If you don't want to make the jump from your screen to your table, Fantasy Flight has got you covered with this digital edition of its popular Elder Sign dice game. Available for iOS and Android and set in the same Cthulhu-themed horror setting as Arkham Horror, Omens serves as an engaging introduction to tabletop games. If you like it, try out the original.



The best licensed tabletop games maintain the flavor of the property but establish unique mechanics all their own



Wildstar

A cartoony MMO NCsoft hopes is for everyone

by Adam Biessener

Carbonite Games is taking a broad approach with its first title, Wildstar. The game's initial showing of its genre-standard combat mechanics at 2011's Gamescom left me cold, but I'm glad I gave the Austin, TX studio a second chance at this year's show in Germany. Carbonite's approach to world building, particularly in the way it invites players to take part in shaping their environment, sets this sci-fi MMORPG apart.

of the advanced alien race whose ruins dot the landscape. Explorers discover points of interest hidden to untrained eyes and scale mountains impassable to other callings. Soldiers tackle enemy hordes head-on, planting flags that draw out challenges from

POUNDING THE GROUND

Wildstar's combat features hotbars familiar to anyone who has played an MMO in the last decade, but its strict focus on attack patterns and shapes breaks it out of the autotarget-and-hit-spells mold. Nearly every player and enemy skill marks an impact zone on the ground. Abilities can hit in any shape the designers think of, from 320-degree arcs to narrow lines or randomly sprayed areas. Carbonite hopes to keep combat fresh throughout the leveling curve and endgame by constantly throwing different looks at players. What I've seen so far has potential, but the combat itself is still the least innovative and exciting part of Wildstar.

Some of the ways Carbonite brings Wildstar's world alive are reminiscent of Raph Koster's innovative designs from Ultima Online and Star Wars Galaxies. One zone features giant space bees roaming around, searching for nectar to bring back to their hives. If they're left to their own devices, they turn that nectar into honey and use it to fuel special attacks when players engage them. Though this sounds like a small thing on paper, the idea of a world chugging along and NPCs pursuing their own goals independently of player interaction is exciting.

Environmental interaction is a big part of Wildstar as well. Minefields that damage players and enemies alike are the simplest example, and even those offer gameplay opportunities for players to lure monsters into dangerous paths. Another area Carbonite showed at Gamescom has an enormous robot (featured much later in the game as a raid boss) trying to pull itself free of an underground prison and randomly blasting eye lasers at anything in the vicinity. A third zone has a constant battle raging between two factions, with aircraft dropping bombs that blow up ally and enemy alike.

Wildstar's four paths offer experiences tailored to different types of MMO players, separately from the classes that define a hero's combat skills. Scientists gain gameplay advantages by digging deeper into the lore of the world, gaining new insights into the fantastic energy source that draws adventurers from across the galaxy to the planet Nexus and the disappearance

unusual beasts and powerful enemies. Settlers are the most interesting path of all, with their ability to create new outposts and grow crude camps into bustling trading hubs that everyone can interact with.

The different callings work best when teamed up with one another. For example, an explorer can guide a scientist to otherwise inaccessible areas, where the scientist can gather unique data that fuels new research. I love anything that encourages MMO players to actually play with one another, and this system has great promise—especially if Carbonite ties it into the deep crafting system the studio is teasing.

Wildstar tries to offer something to everybody, with high-end raids, crafting, small-group dungeons, social activities like settlement building, and the four paths that provide secondary gameplay across a character's entire career. The wide focus is worthy of some concern, but Carbonite feels that it can create the large amount of content needed to support it thanks to the studio's vision of building simple systems and setting designers free to mix them together and make them interact. Landmines are a perfect example: all they do is blow up when something steps on them, but gameplay challenges and opportunities arise from different monster AI behaviors and player mobility skills. Its inviting aesthetic and varied gameplay styles give it a wide pool of potential players; now it's up to Carbonite to nail the execution and turn possibilities into a successful game. ♦



An **Exclusive** Look at **Contrast**

by Matt Miller

The world of indie and downloadable games is exciting for a number of reasons, but one of the most intriguing things about the scene is the potential for innovative new ideas to come out of left field. That's exactly what's happening with fledgling studio Compulsion Games' first project, *Contrast*.

Contrast sets itself apart at first glance through its surprising setting. Developed in the style of classic noir, *Contrast*'s tale dives into the world of 1930's Vaudeville. Players adopt the role of Dawn, a young woman who is somehow detached from the real world, unable to interact directly with most of its inhabitants. Instead, she is a guardian angel to a girl named Didi, a child born into a family of stage performers. Some horrific trauma that I won't spoil unfolds in the lives of Didi's family, and it's up to Dawn to help steer events to some sort of conclusion for her young ward.

At first, gameplay in *Contrast* appears to play out in third-person puzzle style. The lithe figure of Dawn runs through a world of dimly lit urban streets and shadowy hotels. Occasionally, Dawn can see the childlike form of Didi as she moves through the world, but the child is the only figure in a world otherwise devoid of people. Only when Dawn finds a way to turn on the lights does the

world comes to life.

As soon as a light is trained on particular locations, the shadows of the figures standing there are cast on the wall behind, and Dawn can hear what is happening. In a sequence I witnessed, Dawn enters a seemingly lifeless theater. As she shines a spotlight on the left side of the stage, a lone saxophone player's shadow is cast against the back wall and his mournful tune begins to play. Dawn trains another spotlight on the right side of the stage, and a drummer's shadow appears as he joins the song. A third spotlight is only accessible from the theater balcony, and there appears to be no way to reach it.

Contrast then introduces its most unusual feature; Dawn can depart the 3D world and leap into the 2D plane of shadows on the wall. Dawn runs in three-dimensional space up to the stage and jumps toward the wall. With a button press, Dawn fades from the color-filled 3D world and appears in a stylized 2D world of shadows on the wall. She uses the blackened outline of the slowly swaying saxophone player as a set of platforms with which she can reach the balcony. When she shifts back into a 3D shape and moves the final spotlight, a sexy shadow of a woman singer appears on the wall – Didi's mother. As her verse ends, her shadow steps off stage to

confront a threatening male shadow who has shown up off right. A classic noir conversation ensues – an estranged old flame, veiled threats, hints of mysterious events from these two characters' pasts – and suddenly Dawn has the first inkling about the strange events hanging over Didi's family.

Compulsion says this theater sequence is only the simplest expression of the way shadows and storytelling intertwine in the game. I saw another scene that had Dawn leaping between platforms formed of two figures conversing on a balcony as their outlines were thrown against the building across the street. In another sequence, Dawn scales the interior of a hotel lobby by raising and lowering a series of chandeliers so their shadows are within jumping distance of one another. A third fascinating section I witnessed involves Dawn assuming the role of a missing princess figurine in a shadow puppet performance.

Compulsion has yet to announce all the platforms *Contrast* is coming to, but it's committed to PC and one or more unannounced consoles. It's also unclear how far out the game is from release. Nonetheless, I'm impressed by what I've seen so far. So much of *Contrast*, from its pulpy noir conversations to its mixing of 2D and 3D gameplay, is decidedly distinct. ♦

*Looking for more information about downloadable and independent games? Check out gameinformer.com/impulse for daily updates, previews, and reviews. For more on downloadable games in this issue, you can read our interview with the composer for *Double Dragon Neon* on p. 34, our preview of *Angry Birds Trilogy* (p. 80), our reviews of *Dust: An Elysian Tail* (p. 92), *Hybrid* (p. 92), *Orcs Must Die 2* (p. 94), *Papo & Yo* (p. 91), *Rock Band Blitz* (p. 93), and *Sound Shapes* (p. 89), and our scores for *Rainbow Moon* and *Wreckateer* on p. 96.*

Contrast
PC • Unannounced Consoles



Composing Double Dragon

by Bryan Vore

Jake Kaufman rose to prominence on the chiptune scene under the name “virt,” remixing classic game themes and composing original music. He scored his first freelance composing gig in 2000, working on the Game Boy Color port of Q*Bert. Regular client Wayforward Technologies recognized his outstanding work on projects like Shantae and Contra 4, and eventually hired him as the sole in-house composer. Kaufman has since worked on such titles as the Mighty series, Shantae: Risky’s Revenge, and BloodRayne: Betrayal. As we approach the release of his latest project, Double Dragon Neon, Kaufman talks about the tricky balance between reinterpreting a classic game soundtrack and creating original material.

How would you compare reinterpreting classic tracks for Contra versus what you are doing now for Double Dragon?

Contra was more of a natural fit for me because I grew up listening to Konami music almost exclusively; that was my jam. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 1, 2, and 3, Zen the Intergalactic Ninja...the Konami guys had a way of making everything sound completely incredible on the Nintendo. They had some really high-tech music playback code.

I was most inspired by the Konami style, but I was also inspired by the Double Dragon stuff. Contra was more of a straight-ahead, unironic, bare-chested, sort of ultra-manly



[theme]. It wasn’t tongue-in-cheek. Whereas, Double Dragon is a little bit cheekier. It’s more of a fun look at the original series while still being a kickass beat ‘em up. It was almost like writing a commentary on the original stuff. Contra was more stylistically homogenous, kickass Contra music. With Double Dragon, I wanted to cover all of the bases and do send-ups of all of the bands that were popular at that time, like Van Halen, DEVO, N.W.A., and Prince. I had to be way more versatile for Double Dragon.

Based on the classic soundtrack, I figured there might be some distorted guitar stuff, a seedy club vibe with some griminess to it. You really took it everywhere. The most surprising for me is “Tube Ride” (from the original’s palace stage) combining surf guitar and Latin trumpet.

I’ve heard it that way in my head since the ‘80s. I heard the Minibosses cover it a number of years ago and was wishing they’d turn on the spring reverb and [go] totally Dick Dale with it.

Do you feel like that is the case with a lot of the reinterpretations?

With the exception of Zelda tracks, which I usually “metal-ify” way more

than I think the original intent was, I try to do arrangements of songs that I believe were somewhat similar to the author’s original intent. Being that we’re working with blips and bleeps, you have to use your imagination. It’s like looking at sprite graphics, right? A mess of pixels on the screen and you interpret them into whatever – backgrounds, characters. You have to fill in a lot of information when you are looking at 8-bit graphics, but also when you are listening to 8-bit music.

The game features mixtapes to power up Billy and Jimmy, which opens the door to many unique song clips. How did that come about?

That was me volunteering to do more work than I was slated to do. Sean Velasco, the director, said, “We need a song for the mixtape editor, while you’re putting them together.” And I said, “Why don’t the mixtapes actually have songs?” He said, “Because there’s, like, 100 of them!” And I [responded], “And...?”

So he whittled it down to 20 different types of mixtapes and five iterations of each. There are not actually 100 unique songs. Then he [said],

“You’re not going to do full songs for this, are you?” I said, “We just need five to six second loops we can play to give you the impression there are actual songs behind each one of these.” He’s like, “Dude, you’re crazy!” And I’m like, “Dude, you’re crazy!” – and we high fived. And our health bars equalized. It was a mess, man.

Is this one of your more open projects, where you can just go anywhere with it?

Anything I ever work on with Sean is always like that because he trusts me completely. At the end of the day, he just says, “Dude, this kicks ass. Ship it.” It takes a lot of trust to work up that kind of a relationship with a director. When he tells me something doesn’t fit or something is over-the-top, I tend to trust that he is not just being nitpicky. ♦

Find out about Jake Kaufman’s work on the Shantae games, re-recording the entire BloodRayne: Betrayal soundtrack in 8-bit style, and the unique vocals on the new Double Dragon Neon soundtrack at gameinformer.com/mag

"UNLIKE ANYTHING WE'VE EVER SEEN ON THE XBOX 360..."

-TEAM XBOX

"...A LOT MORE THAN JUST SAVVY TRADING."

-IGN

"THE WORLD - OR AT LEAST THE CARIBBEAN - IS YOURS!"

-INSIDE GAMING

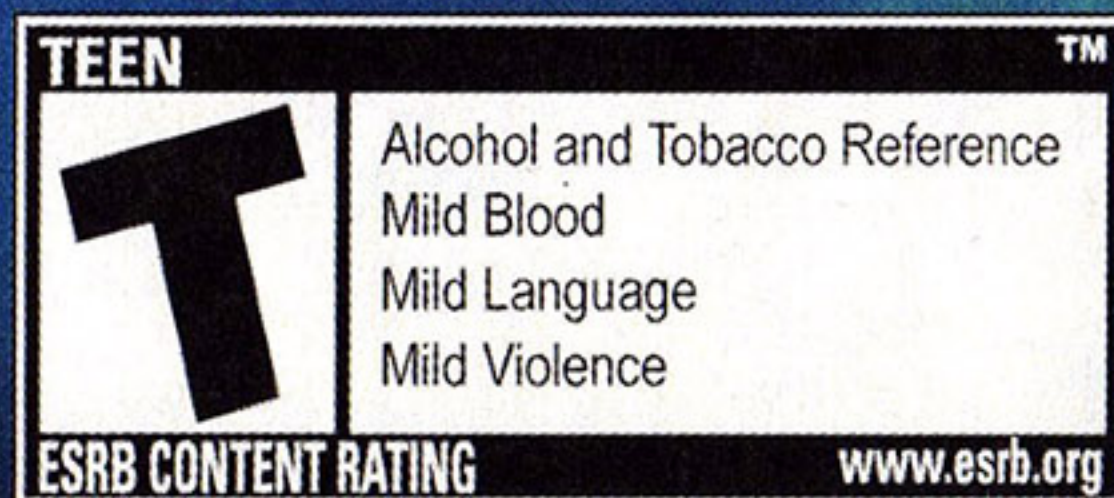
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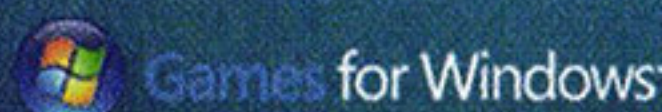
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Photo credit: Jason Henry

Telltale Takes Adventure Mainstream

Led by CEO **Dan Connor** and CTO **Kevin Bruner**, who founded the company together, Telltale Games has carved out a unique niche in the industry with episodic adventure games based on major entertainment properties. The company's recent *Walking Dead* series is its fastest-selling yet.

interview by *Matt Helgeson*

Where did the idea for episodic games come from, and why did you feel that that would resonate so powerfully?

Dan Connor: A lot of the best storytelling going on in the past 10 years or so has been episodic storytelling, from *The Sopranos* to *Game of Thrones*. We saw the strength in that model as the way to tell a story and it was tied into our digital distribution strategy, which was to break the content up in a way that would engage people over time and have them return to you, instead of just building a one-time experience. [We wanted] to give them smaller, finishable chunks – to change the dynamics of the way people play games.

Most publishers' data suggests that a vast majority of gamers don't finish traditional, 10- to 20-hour disc-based games. Do you find that the episodic model means that more people finish your games?

Kevin Bruner: Certainly, people seem to finish episodes in their entirety. One of the things when we started the company that was a big deal for us [was that] we were buying and playing and enjoying a lot of games, but never finishing them because there were just too many and [they were] too big. We were done with the game before the game was over. I used to always say that the worst job in games was the second-to-last level designer, because anybody on the second-to-last level was going to finish the game. They're just plowing through the second-to-last level as fast as they can to get to the end, so that's the most unloved level in any game. I think episodic cures this [because] each episode is a contained experience. We design a beginning, middle, and end so it has its own arc that can be satisfying in and of itself. We [usually] offer individual episodes or season passes – and pretty much, when it's available, most people tend to buy the season pass, so they're signing up for the whole season upfront.

DC: Over time, we've kind of honed the craft of creating a piece of content that people could finish and feel good about, but still have a feeling of wanting more. That's been a big focus for us.

Over the past few years, a lot of game companies have pulled away from licensed games, but you've had a lot of success with them.

DC: When we built Telltale, [we] wanted to take advantage of digital distribution and evolve the business model to make it possible for things like licensed games to succeed in a way that the traditional business model couldn't support anymore... There was a lot of new thinking around the business model that made licensed products able to work for us. We come from a licensing background, so that's a big thing we wanted to do. When we hear people saying that you can't succeed with a license that has 25 million viewers it just seems like that's a problem that should be solvable. If there's that much interest in a franchise, you should be able to come up with an interactive game of the [franchise] and be successful. If the current business model doesn't support it, then a new business model should be in place to support it.

KB: I'll just add that there are a whole bunch of really, really bad licensed games out there. One of the things that we really pride ourselves on is being able to do licensed games right. What I mean by that is, if you look at *Walking Dead*, it's a zombie franchise. Your knee-jerk reaction is: We're going to go have a shotgun in our hand and go around blowing hundreds of zombies away. But that's not what the books are about, and that's not what [creator] Robert Kirkman's trying to do. We approach every license from [the perspective of] what is great about the license, and how do we turn that into a game? Not what is gamey about the license. We didn't make a *Back to the Future* game where you just drive around in a Delorian, or a *Walking Dead* game where you just run around and shoot everything. Digging into a license and figuring out what's really good and how to make it interactive is something we take really seriously.

For years people were saying that PC games were dying. Now everything is switched and prognosticators are saying the future is PC and consoles are dying.

DC: I don't buy into that. I think there is still a place for entertainment in the living room with a big screen and big speakers. I think games are always going to be a part of that. It would be hard to say what the box in that room is going to look like, but I don't think it's going to go away, and I don't think that large form gaming content

is going to go away in any way and that is really what you are talking about. What it looks like in the next generation, I think, is going to be a major evolution away from where we are at, but it should be because the consuming patterns of people have changed.

Free-to-play is the new trend in the PC space, is that something you'd look at in the future?

KB: It seems like there are these extremes, and actually I think that Steam is demonstrating that the sweet spot is in the middle. For years, I could spend \$60 on some giant game that requires hundreds of hours of my time. [But] I was never actually spending hundreds of hours on it, so I would pay \$60 and play a game for a little while and then move on. Or, I could [play] a free-to-play game and get barked at every five minutes about [buying] coins or upgrades. What I wanted was like a movie. You know, I'll pay \$10 to see a movie and it's an evening. I buy a lot of games on Steam that I'll play for four or five days, see what it's about, and get my fill of it. It's cheap and it is the right price point. Our episodes are \$5, and I think that's a damn good trade. We're going to entertain you for two to five hours for five bucks and if you want it again, you can come back and get another one. I look at it like going to see a movie or a concert around town. It just seems like people respect that. They are like, "Cool, a good price for a good amount of content." We don't need to trick people into spending more than they might want. It is a lot simpler. Here is a *Walking Dead* episode for five bucks. Is it worth it to you?

Five years or ten years from now, how do you see Telltale evolving as a company?

KB: I see Telltale cementing itself as a major, first-class digital publisher. Right there with Valve, having the scope of a current EA or something like that.

DC: I also see us with a closer relationship to Hollywood in a way where there is more of a – I need to say transmedia because it sounds so trendy – an approach where games and television and movies are all coming from the same source and there is a strategy to execute it across all of the different outlets. The game component is considered along with the movie component along with the show component, and they grow together. ♦

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2004

ROOTS OF ADVENTURE
Dan Connors, Kevin Bruner, and Troy Molander, all veterans of LucasArts, form Telltale Games after Sam & Max: Freelance Police is canceled

2005

BETTING BIG
Telltale releases two games, *Texas Hold 'Em Poker* and *Bone: Out of Boneville*, the latter based on a comic series

2006

RESURRECTION
Unable to secure the rights to the canceled Sam & Max project from LucasArts, Telltale gets the rights to make a new, original episodic game, *Sam & Max Save the World*, from franchise creator Steve Purcell

2008

GEEK CRED
Telltale warms the hearts of nerds the world over with *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People*, based on the popular Homestar Runner web cartoon

2010

GET BACK
Telltale brings back a treasured franchise with *Back to the Future: The Game*, another episodic adventure hit

2012

DEAD ON
Telltale releases the first two episodes of *The Walking Dead*. Many critics consider it the company's best work to date, and it quickly becomes Telltale's fastest-selling game

by Ben Reeves and Bryan Vore

Samsung Series 7 Gamer Notebook

Samsung isn't known for its gaming machines.

In fact, the Series 7 Gamer is the company's first game-branded laptop. Thankfully,

Samsung hasn't forgotten how to build a quality product while working on this portable powerhouse.

The Series 7 Gamer features a four-way switch that allows you to quickly jump between a variety of power settings, such as a power-saving mode and a library mode that reduces fan noise and unnecessary lighting/sound effects. Most gamers will make the gaming mode their home, where the system's turbo-cooled fans go into overdrive and the laptop's 2.3GHz Core i7 processor and Nvidia GTX 675M graphics processor get a workout.

We ran the Series 7 Gamer through its paces with Diablo III, The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, and The Witcher 2, and this beast never slowed down to catch its breath. Both games and movies look stunning on the system's 17.3-inch SuperBright screen, which is two-times brighter than most laptop displays. We also appreciate the full-sized keyboard and highlighted WASD keys.

All this power comes at a cost, however. The Series 7 Gamer weighs over eight pounds and devours electricity. The battery only provides a couple hours of game time.

Like that nerdy kid from high school, Samsung's Series 7 Gamer is chunky and unattractive, but it performs better than almost any other system. If you're willing to break the bank, the Series 7 Gamer is one of the most powerful laptops on the market.

SUPERB ■■■■■■■■■■

\$1,899 | samsung.com

1 Nintendo 3DS XL

While many thought that the first addition to the 3DS family would add a second circle pad, Nintendo opted for increased screen size instead. The upper screen is 90 percent larger, but features no increased resolution, which means most high-end smartphones look sharper than the 3DS XL. The smooth and curvy faux-metal finish resists fingerprints and feels comfortable, but the best addition to the hardware is the huge, non-telescoping stylus, which is now stored in the right side for easy access. If you don't have a 3DS yet, this is the one to get. However, it might not be worth trading in your current system.

VERY GOOD

\$199 | nintendo.com/3ds



2



2 Lego Star Wars Jabba's Palace

Lego's newest Star Wars set recreates Jabba's skeyev sex cave from Episode VI in cutesy block form. The set includes nine minifigures, including Jabba, Salacious Crumb, Chewbacca, and Han Solo in carbonite. Put it together and then slide back Jabba's throne to reveal a trap door and hidden treasure room, or move the guns at the entrance gate and flick a missile off the detachable roof and watchtower.

\$199 | shop.lego.com

3 Zik Touch-Activated Bluetooth Headphones

Parrot – maker of the AR.Drone RC quadcopter – brings its tech expertise to the portable headset market. These wireless headphones come with a hefty price tag; thankfully, they're also packed with a nice feature set. Bluetooth pairing, active noise cancellation, five noise-canceling microphones, and a jawbone sensor for speech recognition are only the tip of the iceberg. The Zik is an attractive unit, but this headset's sexiest feature might be touch controls that allow you to swipe the side of the device to adjust volume, skip tracks, and answer incoming calls. A motion sensor recognizes when you slide the headphones off your ears and automatically pauses your tunes. Your smart phone is starting to look dumb.

\$399 | parrot.com/zik



ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS FIRST EDITION PREMIUM PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

In 1974, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson gave our dinner tables an alternative use: tabletop gaming. Since then Dungeons & Dragons has built an impressive legacy. Now the original AD&D rules are being reprinted with their original art and content.

\$34.99
wizards.com/dnd

BORED TO DEATH: THE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON

When New York writer Jonathan Ames starts moonlighting as an unlicensed private eye, he gets involved in a variety of crazy shenanigans. During the third season of HBO's charming comedy, Jonathan comes face-to-face with furies and goes on the ultimate oedipal investigation.

\$49.99
store.hbo.com

LEGENDS OF ZITA THE SPACEGIRL BY BEN HATKE

After a robot doppelganger assumes Zita's identity and ruins her reputation, the intrepid space heroine must find a way to reunite with her friends and save an alien race from extinction. Ben Hatke's child-friendly adventures prove equally entertaining for adults.

\$12.99
macmillan.com

THE UNDERWATER WELDER BY JEFF LEMIRE

Jack Joseph is conditioned to withstand the immense pressures of deep-sea work, but after a mind-bending encounter at the bottom of the sea, Jack's life will never be the same. This classic sci-fi tale of fathers and sons, birth and death, and memory and truth should not be missed.

\$19.95
topshelfcomix.com

Game Accessibility: What It Is And Why It Matters

by Josh Straub, intern, Game Informer

Whether it's God of War: Ascension or Gears of War: Judgment, I'm sure everyone reading this has a game they are looking forward to next year. But imagine what it would be like if you had to play that game with your fingers taped together. How long would you try to fight the Locust or the Cyclops if – no matter how hard you tried – you couldn't get your hands to move fast enough to avoid dying dozens of times in one level? How long would you try before you would put the controller aside and log on to Netflix or start to read a book? No gamer would willingly put up with these limitations, yet thousands of gamers must every day. I am one of them.

I am a disabled gamer and I am determined to keep playing. Sometimes, my disability prevents me from moving my hands fast enough to execute certain sequences in games. For example, one of my favorite games of all time is Uncharted 2: Among Thieves. Near the end of the game Drake is in a Tibetan temple, in which there are levers he must crank to open doors. The player makes Drake open these doors by tapping the triangle button repeatedly. Because of the delay in my muscles, there is no way for me to tap fast enough to get him to open the door. When I realized this, I was forced to confront the idea that I had just spent \$60 on a game, progressed most of the way through it without help, and then had to rely on somebody else to get me past that point. Beyond that complication, however, the game was easy for my hands to handle. It was literally two small sequences, opening two small doors, that made the game inaccessible. For me, game accessibility is not an empty phrase or a buzzword – it's a part of my life.

Unfortunately, trying to define game accessibility is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. Since each disabled gamer has different limitations, we all have slightly different definitions of what makes a game accessible. The four categories of disability, sensory (sight and hearing), fine motor (hands and fingers), ambulatory (walking), and cognitive (mental), all have different issues that have to be addressed.

It's also important to understand what game accessibility isn't. Game accessibility does not mean taking all of the challenge out of a game. No serious gamer, no matter what their limitations, would advocate nerfing a boss fight to the point that there is no challenge, especially given the fact that disabled gamers make up only a fraction of the entire gamer population. If the industry were to simply make games easier to help accommodate the disabled, they would end up alienating a majority of gamers.

It is also important to realize that game accessibility is different from hardware accessibility. People who approach game accessibility tend to do so

with the attitude of: "If the physical interface of a game is inaccessible, then the best way to make a game accessible is to change the physical components of controllers and systems." This is the wrong way to approach game accessibility. While it should ultimately be the goal to create video games that anyone can play, and that means that eventually hardware accessibility will have to be addressed, a very large part of the problem can be solved by addressing game software rather than hardware. It is easier to change a line of code and make a controller layout accessible than to redesign a physical system. If total accessibility is going to be achieved it must be focused, mainly on software developers, since they are the ones that determine if a game is accessible. Oddly, the Wii, Kinect, and the push towards motion control in games, which has been an effort to involve people that previously didn't play games, has had the unintended consequence of alienating a very large portion of the disabled gaming community.

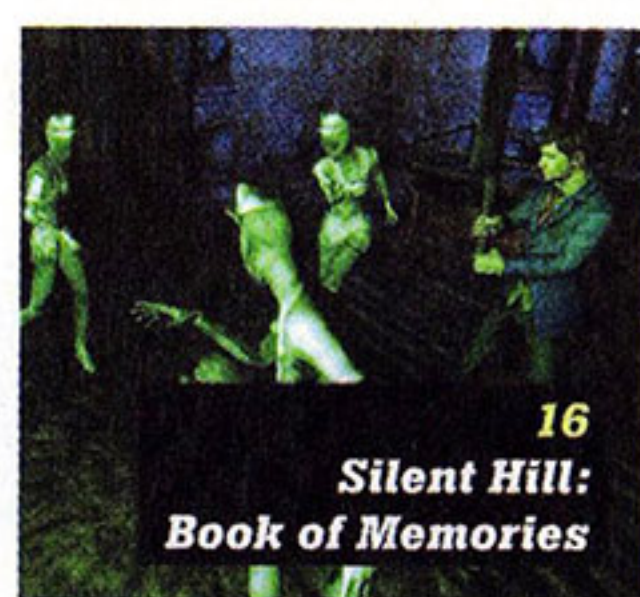
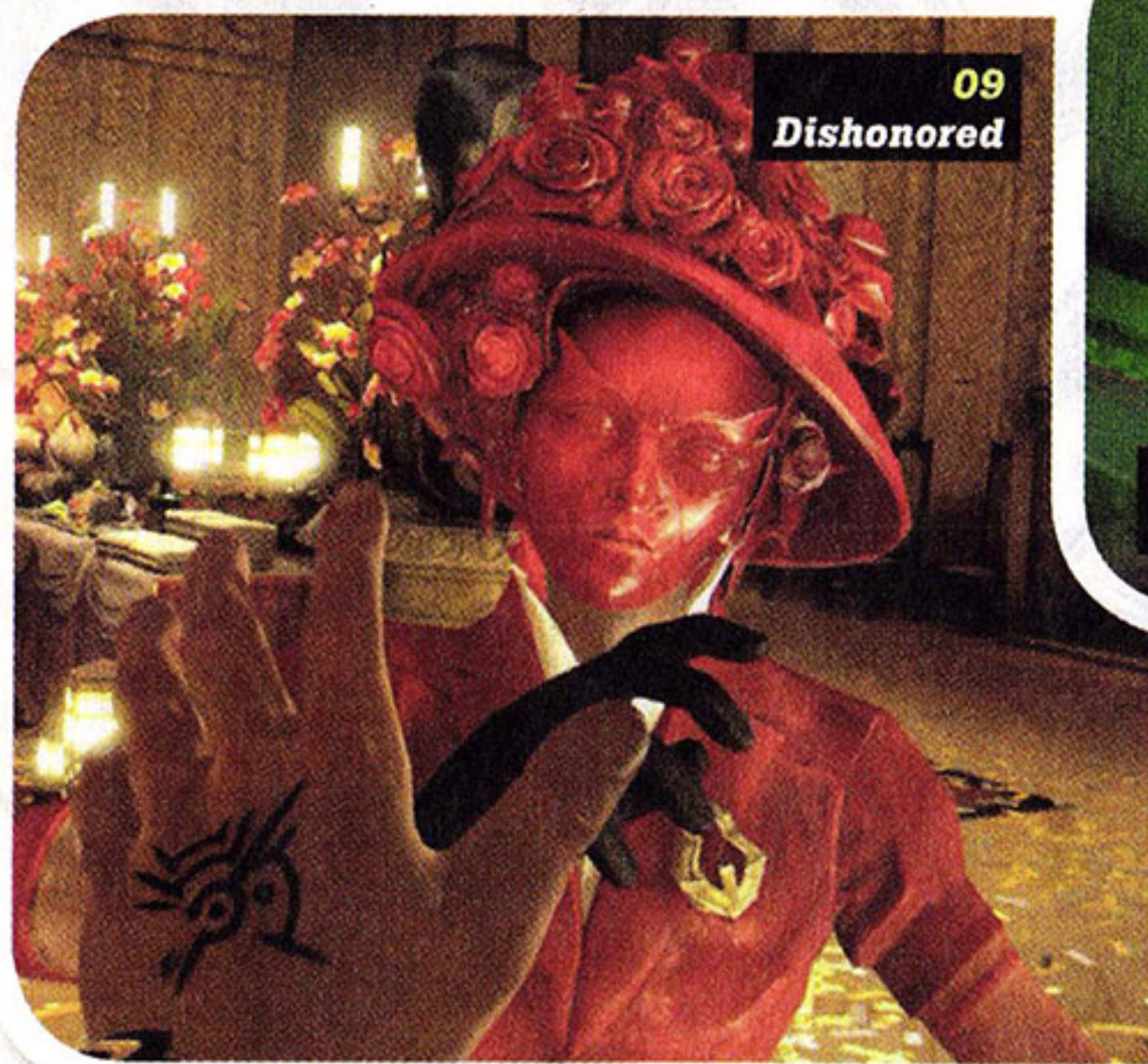
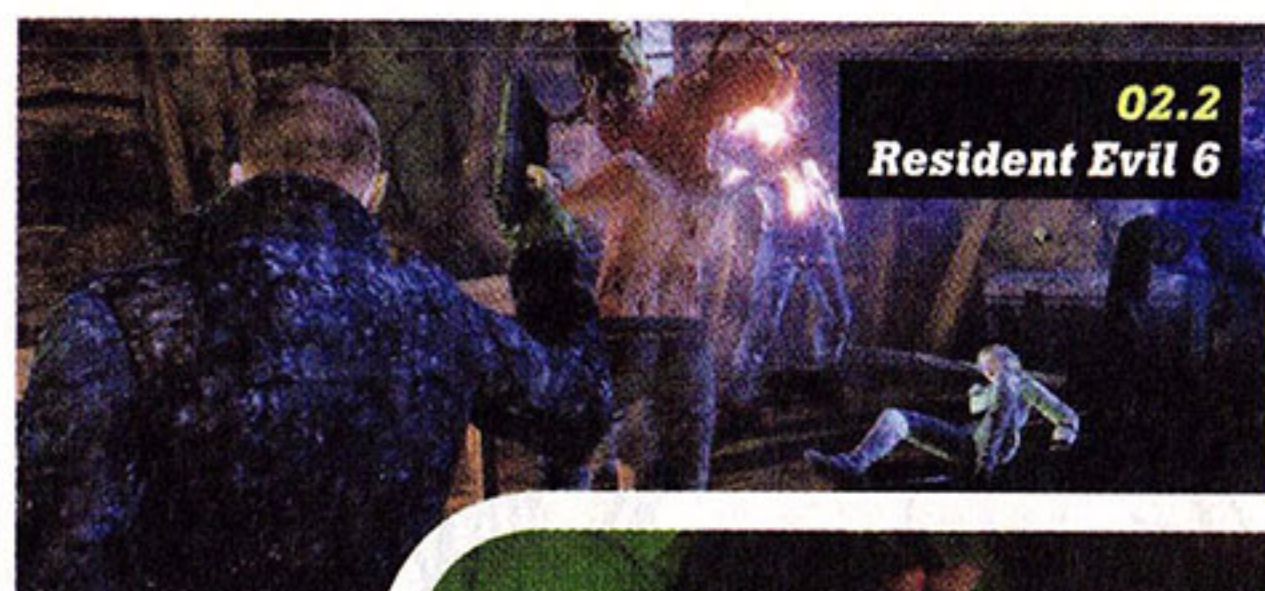
The best definition of game accessibility that I have come up with is this: giving as many players as possible the best opportunity to experience a game. A lot of times when a disabled player is unable to fully experience a game it is not because they cannot figure out what to do. It is simply because the way a game is set up does not flex to fit their abilities. Would that door-opening sequence of Uncharted be diminished if, instead of tapping the triangle button, you simply had to hold it down? If that particular command sequence were deemed too crucial to the pacing of the mission to change it from a rapid tap to a hold, would it have been hard to give the player the option whether they would like to tap or hold the button? Many of the issues of game accessibility could be solved with a few extra customizable features.

But the question remains: Why do we need to bother programmers to include extra features in their games to satisfy only a fraction of their audience? The fact is, gaming is more than entertainment for a lot of disabled people. Personally, games have helped me both physically and psychologically. As a small child, I used my Game Boy during therapy sessions to strengthen my dexterity and take my mind off of the pain of some of the activities. A hamstring stretch is so much easier when you're focused on capturing Zapdos instead of the burning sensation in your legs. I've also found a much-needed escape from my disability in online gaming. As a gamer, hidden behind an avatar, I can be sure that people are not filtering their words through the fact that I am disabled. They're not going to pull any punches when I mess up because they worry about my feelings. They also won't avoid me because they see me as different.

This is why accessibility matters. If games fail to become more accessible, many disabled gamers won't be able to turn to games for the escape that games have provided them for years. ♦

To follow Josh Straub's writing on game accessibility, go to www.dagersystem.com.

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



October

02.1 Marvel Now

Starting in October, a major new initiative at Marvel Comics called Marvel Now brings titanic changes to some of this universe's biggest heroes, including Captain America, Nick Fury, Cyclops, Jean Grey, and Rocket Raccoon. Yes, we said Rocket Raccoon. Spread across multiple comics, creative teams are shuffling to new books. This should be an ideal time for newcomers to jump onboard.

02.2 New Releases

- › Carrier Command: Gaea Mission (360)
- › Harry Potter for Kinect (360)
- › NBA 2K13 (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, PC)
- › Phantom Breaker (360)
- › Resident Evil 6 (PS3, 360)

03 Return of the Joker

In the first issue of DC's new Detective Comics series, The Joker appeared to meet a grim fate at the hands of another super villain. Batman's iconic nemesis has been absent ever since. The thirteenth issue of Batman heralds the return of the Clown Prince in a follow-up to the classic Death in the Family storyline. The Joker hopes to have the last laugh against Bruce Wayne.

07 New Releases

- › Pokémon Black/White Version 2 (DS)

09 New Releases

- › Code of Princess (3DS)
- › Dishonored (PS3, 360, PC)
- › Fable: The Journey (360)
- › Just Dance 4 (PS3, 360, Wii)
- › Naughty Bear Gold: Panic in Paradise (PS3)
- › Spy Hunter (Vita, 3DS)
- › XCOM: Enemy Unknown (PS3, 360, PC)

11 Comic Books

Take Over the Big Apple

New York Comic Con kicks off today and runs through the weekend at the Javits Center. Activision is attending (undoubtedly with Deadpool in tow), and Robert Kirkman, the creator of *The Walking Dead*, discusses his remarkable career as a comic book writer. This is a great location to snap shots of superheroes getting out of cabs and eating hot dogs.

13 Manchester Goes Retro

The newly organized Play Expo starts today in Manchester, England's EventCity. Over 10,000 people are expected to attend. This two-day convention focuses heavily on classic games, but with Nintendo, EA, Namco Bandai, and Konami on hand, several upcoming games are playable, as well.

16 New Releases

- › Dance Central 3 (360)
- › Doom: BFG Edition (PS3, 360, PC)
- › Dragon Ball Z for Kinect (360)
- › James Bond: 007 Legends (PS3, 360)
- › Ragnarok Odyssey (Vita)
- › Rocksmith: Guitar & Bass (PS3, 360, PC)
- › Silent Hill: Book of Memories (Vita)
- › Zumba Fitness Core (360, Wii)

20 Game Informer Unites with Extra Life

Today Game Informer editors and the GI community team up for a 24-hour long gaming marathon. The livestream runs for a full day on gameinformer.com starting at 8:00am central time. Tune in to win prizes, contribute to a good cause, and watch us play games until our eyes stop working.

21 New Releases

- › Skylanders: Giants (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS)

23 New Releases

- › Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2013 (PS3, 360, Wii)
- › Cabela's Hunting Expeditions (PS3, 360, Wii)
- › Forza Horizon (360)
- › Harvest Moon: A New Beginning (3DS)
- › Just Dance: Disney Party (360, Wii)
- › Medal of Honor: Warfighter (PS3, 360, PC)
- › Smart As... (Vita)
- › Star Wars: The Clone Wars – Season 4 (Blu-Ray)
- › Street Fighter x Tekken (Vita)
- › Super Monkey Ball: Banana Splitz (Vita)
- › Zero's Escape: Virtue's Last Reward (3DS, Vita)

26 More Fog for the Silver Screen

Theatergoers didn't enjoy their first visit to the Silent Hill, so why not make a sequel? *Silent Hill: Revelation* opens on the big screen today, and hopes your memory of the film is just as foggy as this city's streets. Sean Bean (*Game of Thrones*) stars as Harry Mason and somehow also Christopher Da Silva, his character from the first movie.

28 New Releases

- › Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask (3DS)

30 New Releases

- › Assassin's Creed III (PS3, 360, PC)
- › Bratz: Fashion Boutique (3DS, DS)
- › Lalaloopsy: Carnival of Friends (3DS, DS)
- › Lego Lord of the Rings (PS3, 360, Wii, Vita, 3DS)
- › Moshi Monsters Moshlings Theme Park (3DS, DS)
- › Need for Speed: Most Wanted (PS3, 360, Vita, PC)
- › Nike: Kinect Training (360)
- › Toy Story Mania (PS3, 360)
- › Transformers Prime: The Game (Wii, 3DS, DS)
- › The Trash Packs (3DS, DS)
- › Wreck-it Ralph (Wii, 3DS, DS)
- › WWE 13 (PS3, 360, Wii)
- › Zone of the Enders HD Collection (PS3, 360)



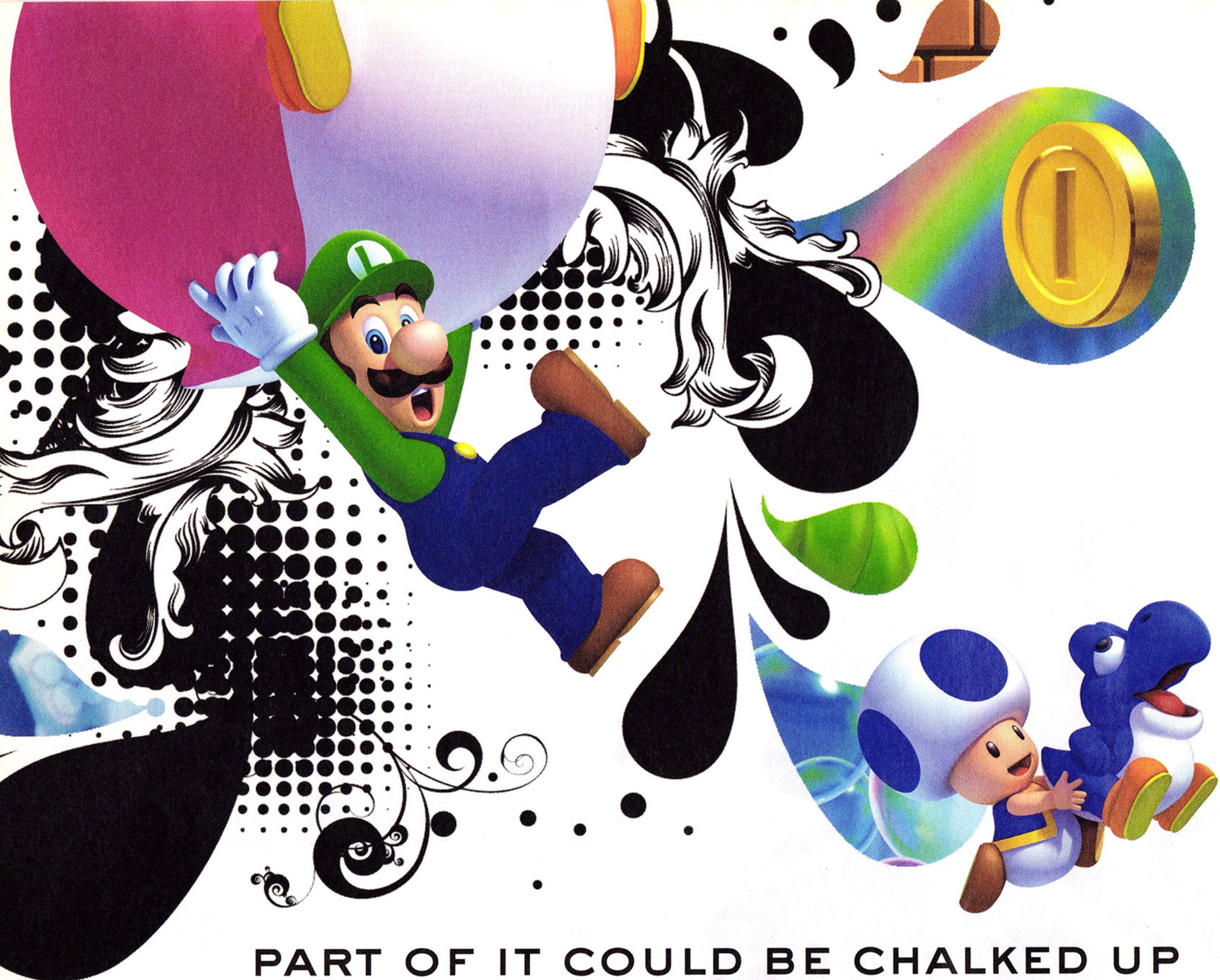
- » **Platform**
Wii U
- » **Style**
1 to 5-Player Platforming
- » **Publisher**
Nintendo
- » **Developer**
Nintendo
- » **Release**
Holiday



GAMING'S MOST FAMOUS FACE ENTERS THE HD AGE

Few series in gaming have aged as gracefully as the core Mario platformers. From the original Super Mario Bros. to Super Mario Galaxy 2, the franchise's tight controls, inescapable likability, and rogues gallery of memorable villains bring smiles to the faces of the most jaded gamers. Fans of the industry are quick to gripe about marginally different annual Call of Duty installments, but few complain about Mario's continued Goomba-stomping adventures.

BY DAN RYCKERT



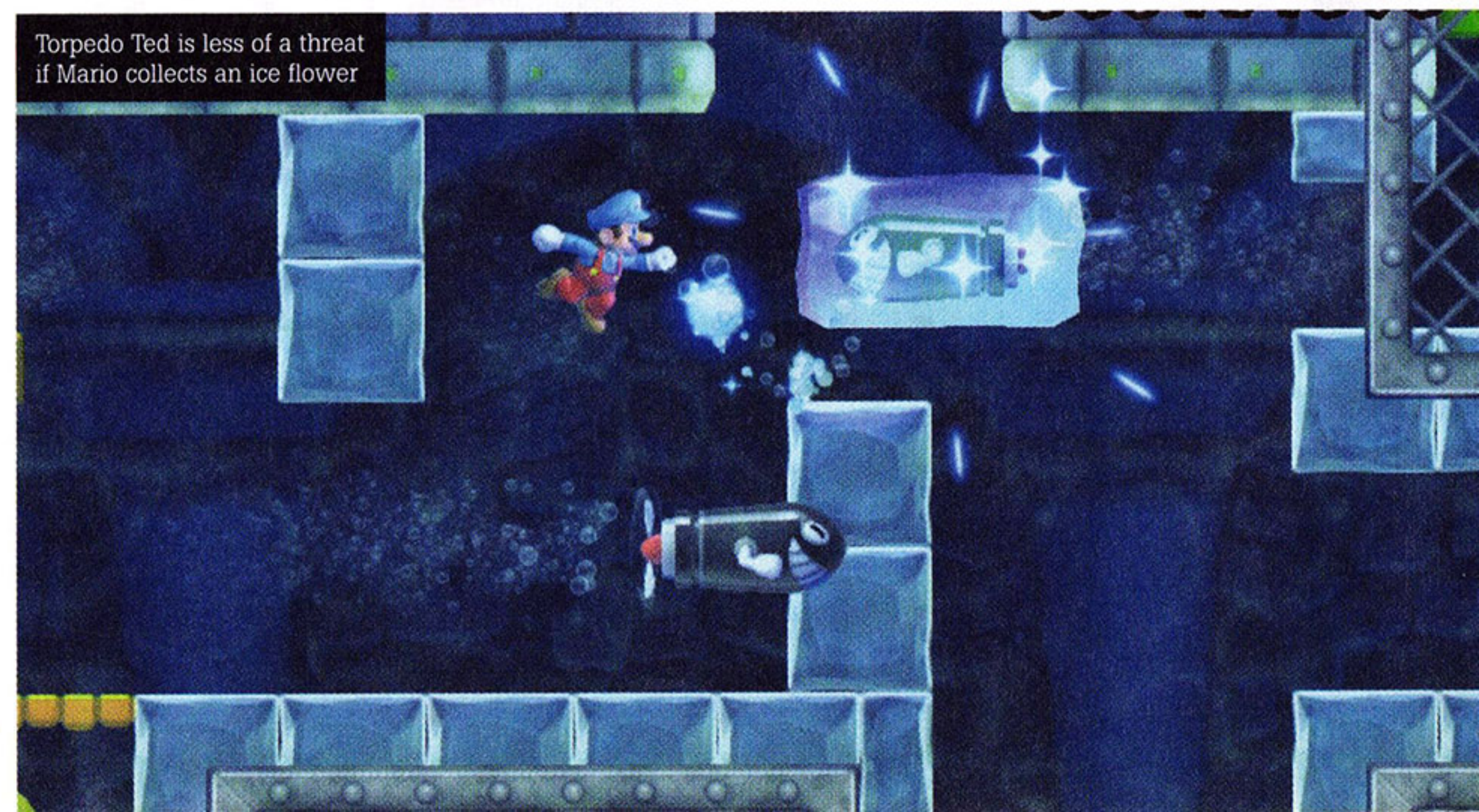
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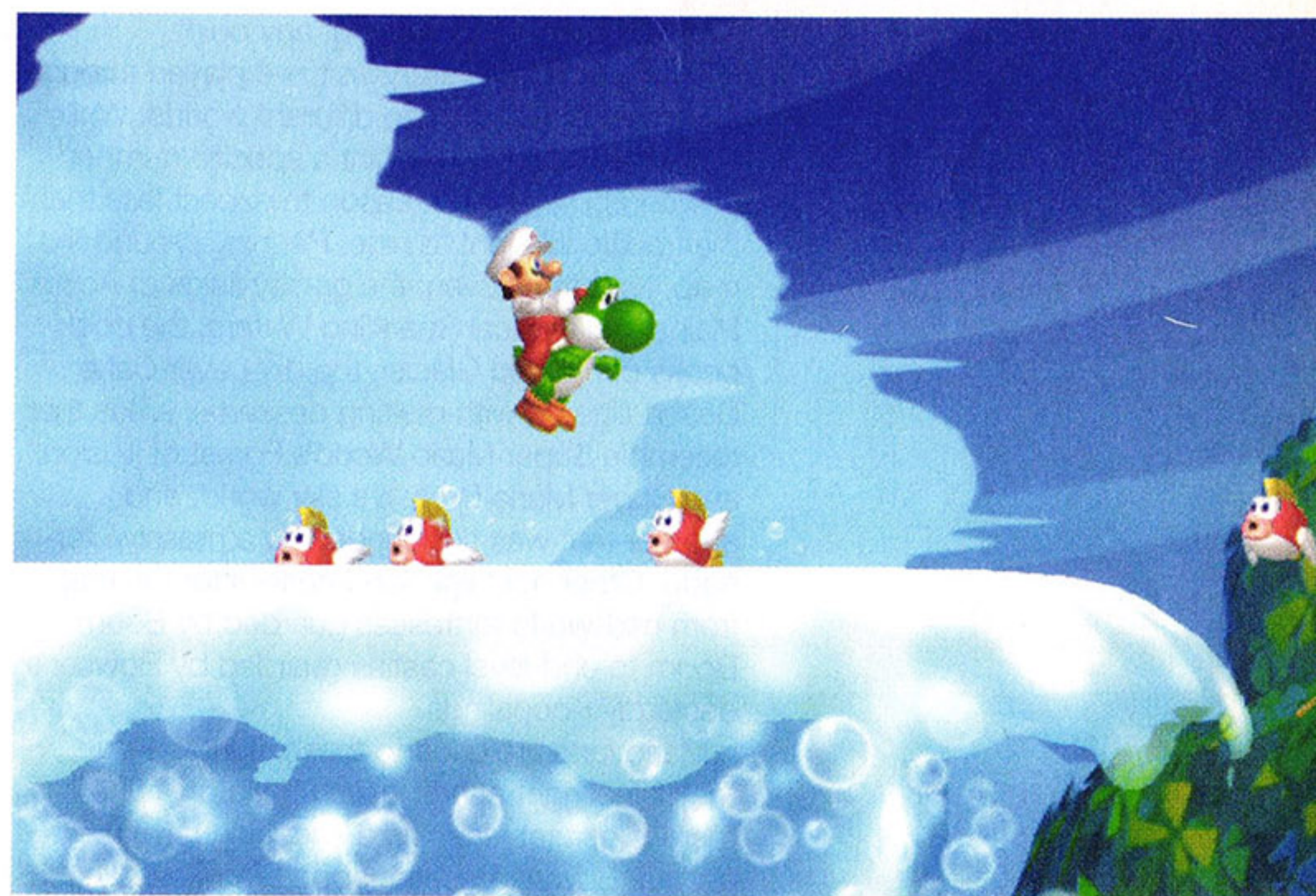
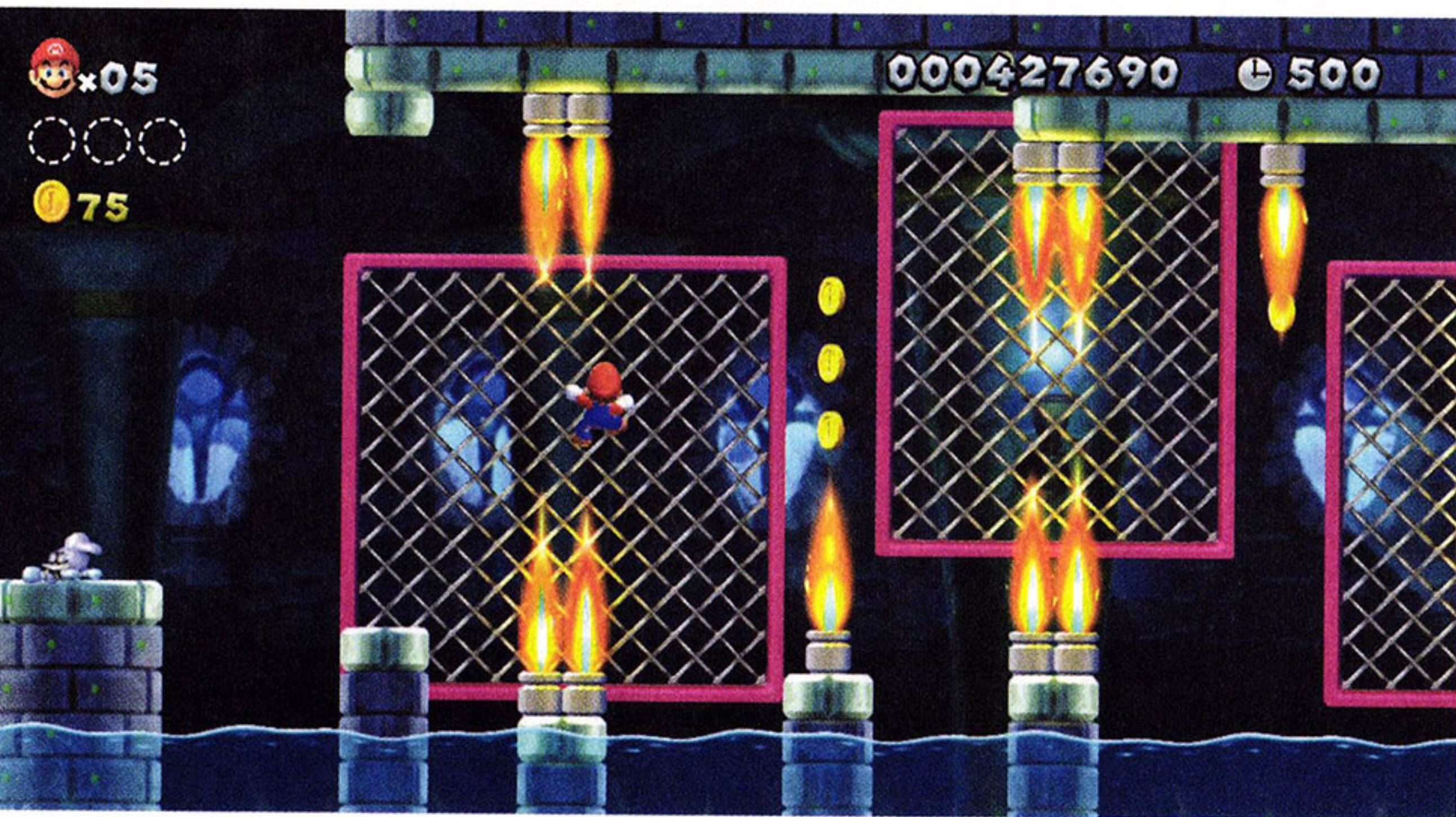
as many generations have Mario-related childhood memories. Adult gamers spent their early years exploring Mario's roots on the NES, but today's teenagers have similarly fond memories of Super Mario 64. That title transitioned the series into 3D flawlessly, laying the groundwork for the future of the genre. While everyone's favorite portly plumber continued to star in stellar 3D titles, his creators introduced a separate series in 2006 that tugged at the nostalgia strings of longtime gamers while simultaneously introducing its classic gameplay elements to a younger generation. When New Super Mario Bros. launched on the Nintendo DS, it became an instant smash hit. To kick off its new Wii U console, Nintendo chose to introduce the fourth New series installment in six years.

It comes at a crucial time for Nintendo, as the Wii U's impending launch isn't generating as much mainstream buzz as the original Wii did in 2006. That console's introduction of motion control was enough to grab headlines, but a controller with a touchscreen is a tougher sell. Adding to Nintendo's woes is the looming

announcement and release of next-generation consoles from Sony and Microsoft that will almost assuredly outperform the Wii U's hardware. For its launch to succeed, Nintendo is leaning on a familiar face. Mario is the most recognizable name in gaming, and Nintendo hopes

to lure in both casual and longtime gamers by releasing his new 2D adventure alongside the console. After all, three of the company's most successful systems (the NES, SNES, and Nintendo 64) were assisted at release by the mustachioed icon.





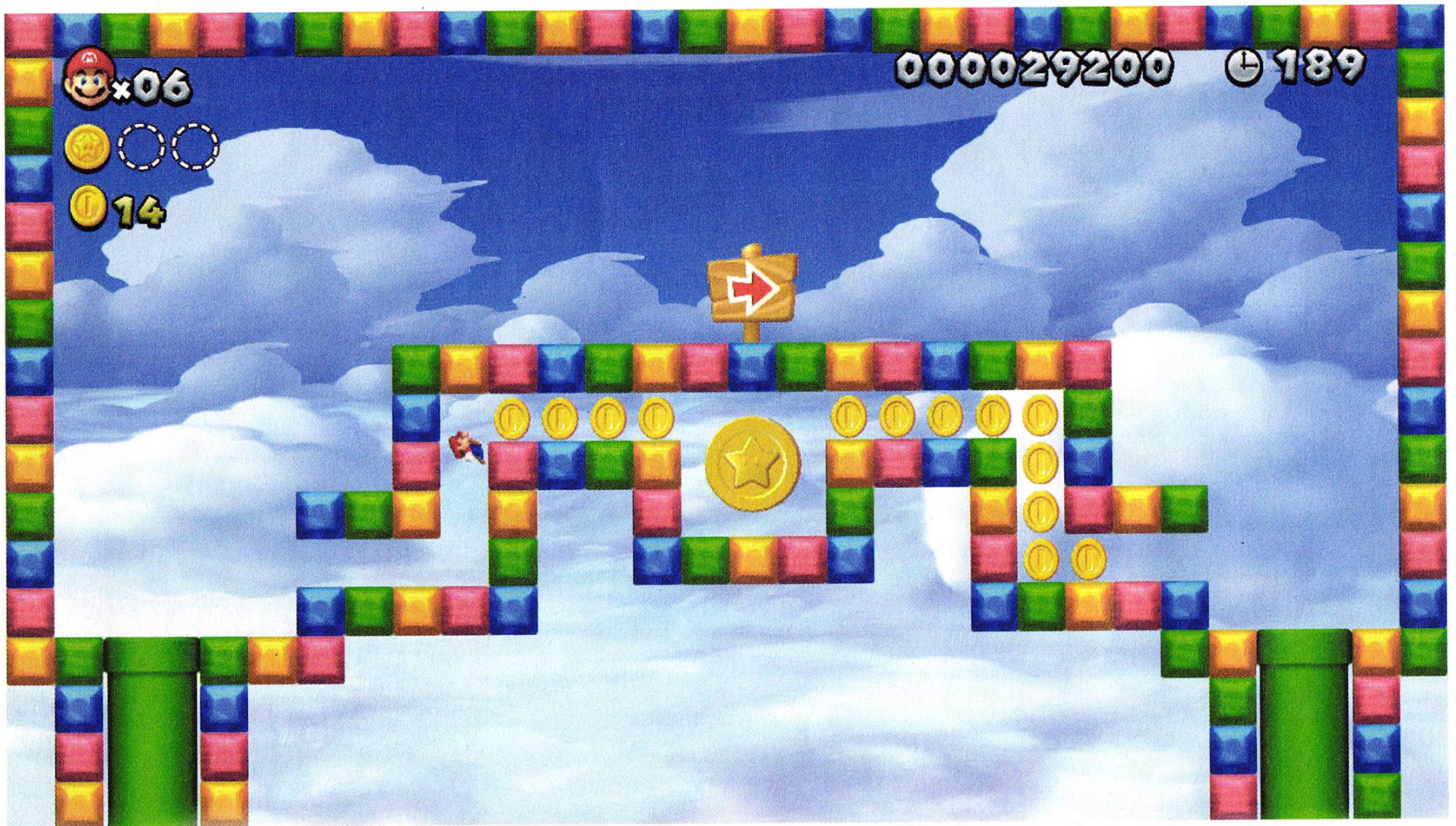
Each of the New titles focuses on traditional gameplay, but they all have unique hooks. The first title rejuvenated 2D Mario platforming, the Wii installment introduced four-player co-op, and the recent 3DS release featured an insane focus on coin collection. For New Super Mario Bros. U, Nintendo is bringing its gaming icon into the 21st century by embracing high definition. Mario looks better than ever, and his new adventure mixes classic elements and unique tweaks with the same tried-and-true gameplay that has entertained multiple generations of gamers.

Nostalgia drips out of every nook and cranny of the New series, and the map screen in New Super Mario Bros. U brings back memories of a very specific entry in the series. Like the beloved Super Mario World, dozens of levels are scattered across one giant map. The SNES

classic occasionally breaks from the large map to zoom in on areas like Cookie Dome or Forest of Illusion, but this new map can be panned around in its entirety and seamlessly explored at any time. It's a great departure from recent games in the series, which typically featured segmented worlds with the occasional branching path.

Going beyond branching paths, New Super Mario Bros. U presents fans with a choice they've never had in a 2D Mario title. Deciding which path you go down is now much more than choosing between World 2-3 and World 2-4. At certain points, you're presented with several choices on which world you want to explore next. If you don't feel like tackling a water-based world, feel free to knock out a few forest levels before you swim with the Bloopers. It's not a one-way street, as you're free to





explore other world paths at any point.

During our cover story visit, we played through seven stages from three different worlds. While Nintendo wouldn't pinpoint a specific number of worlds, we see no reason to expect less than the traditional eight to nine. Panning around the map, I spotted seven: the grassy fields of Acorn Plains, the tropical Sparkling Waters, the cold peaks of Frosted Glacier, the dry Layer Cake Desert (littered with melting desserts), areas that resemble Super Mario World's Forest of Illusion and Super Mario Bros. 3's sky world, and another that was surrounded by a massive tornado. Other nostalgic landmarks litter the map, from mid-world fortresses guarded by Boom Boom to end-level castles guarded by Bowser's dastardly Koopalings.

Mario fans are used to these sights, and they'll feel right at home with the story (what there is of it, at least). In a shocking turn of events, Bowser has kidnapped Princess Peach.

Nintendo wouldn't discuss details, but its insistence that the story doesn't take any real departures indicates that fans should expect the status quo. The one new element Nintendo chose to highlight is the Super Acorn. We don't know how prominent it features in the story, but the prevalence of acorn trees and acorn power-ups reminds us of the narrative focus on the Super Leaf in Super Mario 3D Land. Mario regained the classic Tanooki suit in that 3DS title, but he dons a brand new outfit once laying his hands on the Super Acorn.

As seen at this past E3, Mario and his buddies can glide through the air when equipped with the flying squirrel suit. It's a tremendous help when navigating lava-filled castles or threading the needle between flying enemies, and it's an invaluable resource when attempting to reach high-up secret areas. A quick shake of the remote or GamePad causes an updraft, which sends Mario significantly higher than

he can reach naturally. Much like Super Mario World 3's Super Leaf or Super Mario World's cape, it is the go-to power-up in New Super Mario Bros. U. Outside of this new addition, Mario relies mostly on classics like the mushroom, fire flower, invincibility star, and recently introduced power-ups like the ice flower and mini mushroom.

What the game lacks in new power-ups, it makes up for in new baby Yoshi abilities. Not seen in the core series since Super Mario World, these infant dinos behave differently than in the past. We saw three varieties. Pink baby Yoshis can be inflated with a shake of the remote/GamePad to take Mario even higher than the flying squirrel suit. They don't aid in horizontal movement, but their large surface area is helpful for collecting large clusters of airborne coins. During a trip to the dark Fire Snake Caverns, I had trouble seeing more than a few feet in front of me before grabbing a gold



MARIO: A TIMELINE

Few series feature the pedigree of Mario's core platformers, but younger gamers that began with the New series may not be familiar with the classic franchise's lineage. Here's a look at Mario's console history outside of the New titles.



baby Yoshi. Once I had him, a quick shake of the controller illuminated the area around me and stunned nearby enemies. We didn't get our hands on the blue baby Yoshi, but Nintendo says his bubble-shooting ability opens up a variety of new ways to deal with enemies.

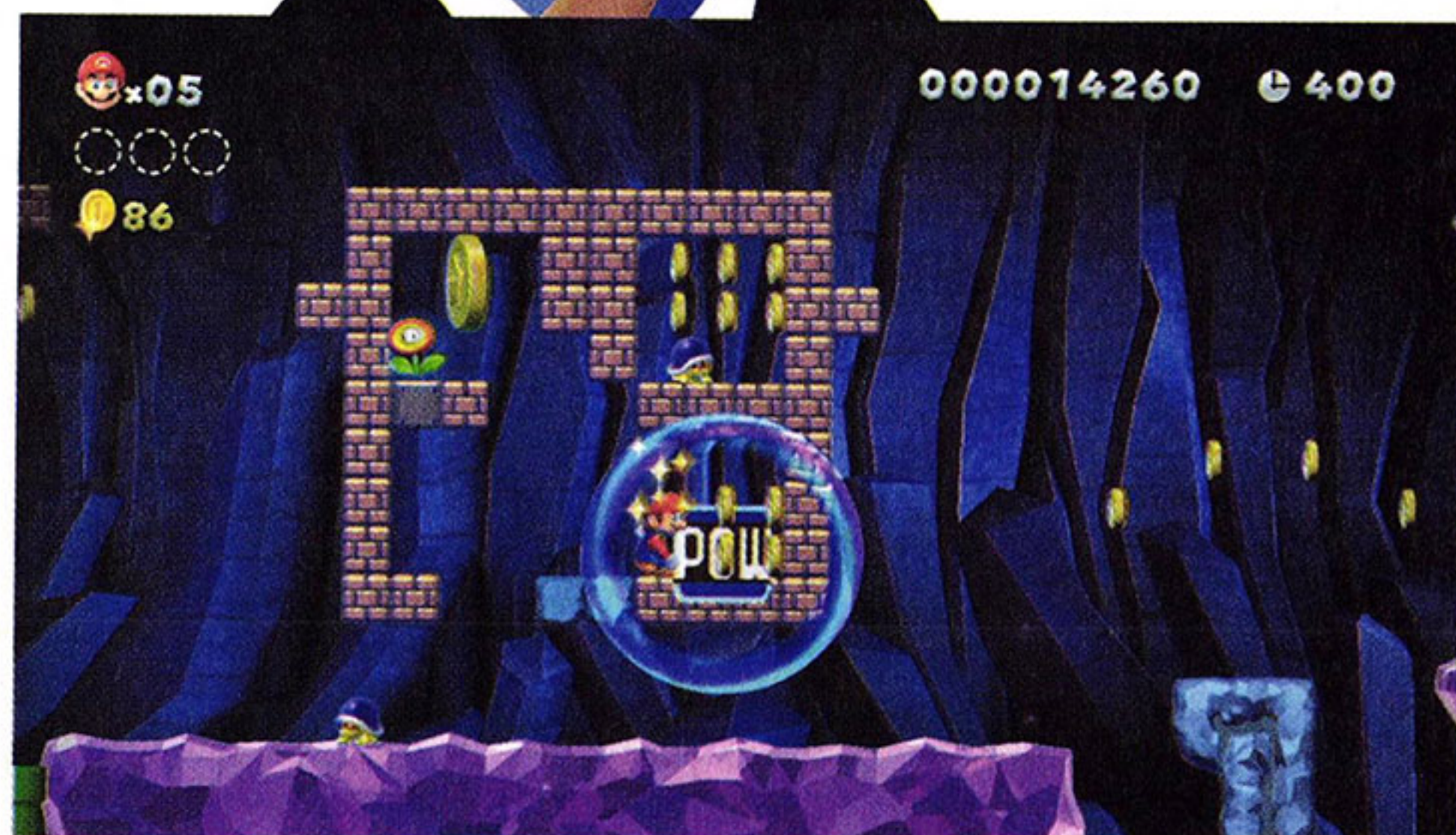
Yoshi isn't only present in baby form; Mario can also ride his adult version in numerous levels, flutter-jump and all. Like in his Super Mario World debut, Mario's pet dinosaur can eat various fruits that he finds throughout the Mushroom Kingdom. Collecting five fills a meter that rewards Yoshi's rider with a power-up. Eating fruit while riding Yoshi is just one of many little touches in New Super Mario Bros. U that

brings back memories of Mario's stunning 16-bit adventure.

Mario may be travelling like it's 1991 all over again, but New Super Mario Bros. U also embraces the present by including cooperative gameplay. Once again, players can team up with up to three friends to assume the roles of Mario, Luigi, blue and yellow Toads, or your Mii characters. Sharing the screen with three buddies comes with a mix of positive and negative consequences. On the plus side, the camera pans out a bit, allowing you to see hidden star coins and pipes that you wouldn't see while playing solo. Collecting these coins is easier with friends to jump off of, and dying isn't an



Eating fruits as Yoshi is one of many throwbacks to Super Mario World



Completionists can once again look forward to three Star Coins per level



1985: SUPER MARIO BROS. (NES)

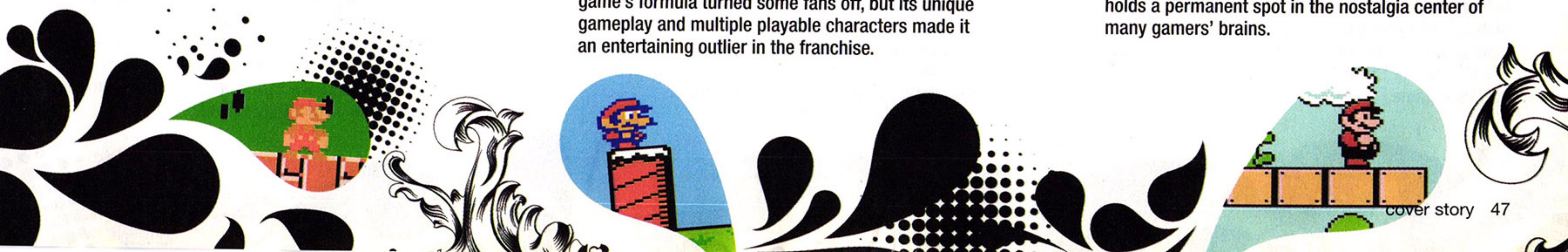
This title introduced an entire generation to video games. Mario's first adventure took him to eight secret-filled worlds and served as the debut for numerous classic power-ups, sound effects, and characters that we still see regularly today.

1988: SUPER MARIO BROS. 2 (NES)

After the Japanese version of Super Mario Bros. 2 (re-released here as *The Lost Levels*) was deemed too difficult for U.S. audiences, we received this re-skinned version of a platformer named *Doki Doki Panic* instead. Its drastic departure from the first game's formula turned some fans off, but its unique gameplay and multiple playable characters made it an entertaining outlier in the franchise.

1989: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3 (NES)

Thanks to a marketing blitz from Nintendo (including a featured role in 1989's *The Wizard*), the hype for Mario's return to form was off the charts. With classic gameplay, a new world map, and fantastic power-ups like the Super Leaf, this landmark title holds a permanent spot in the nostalgia center of many gamers' brains.



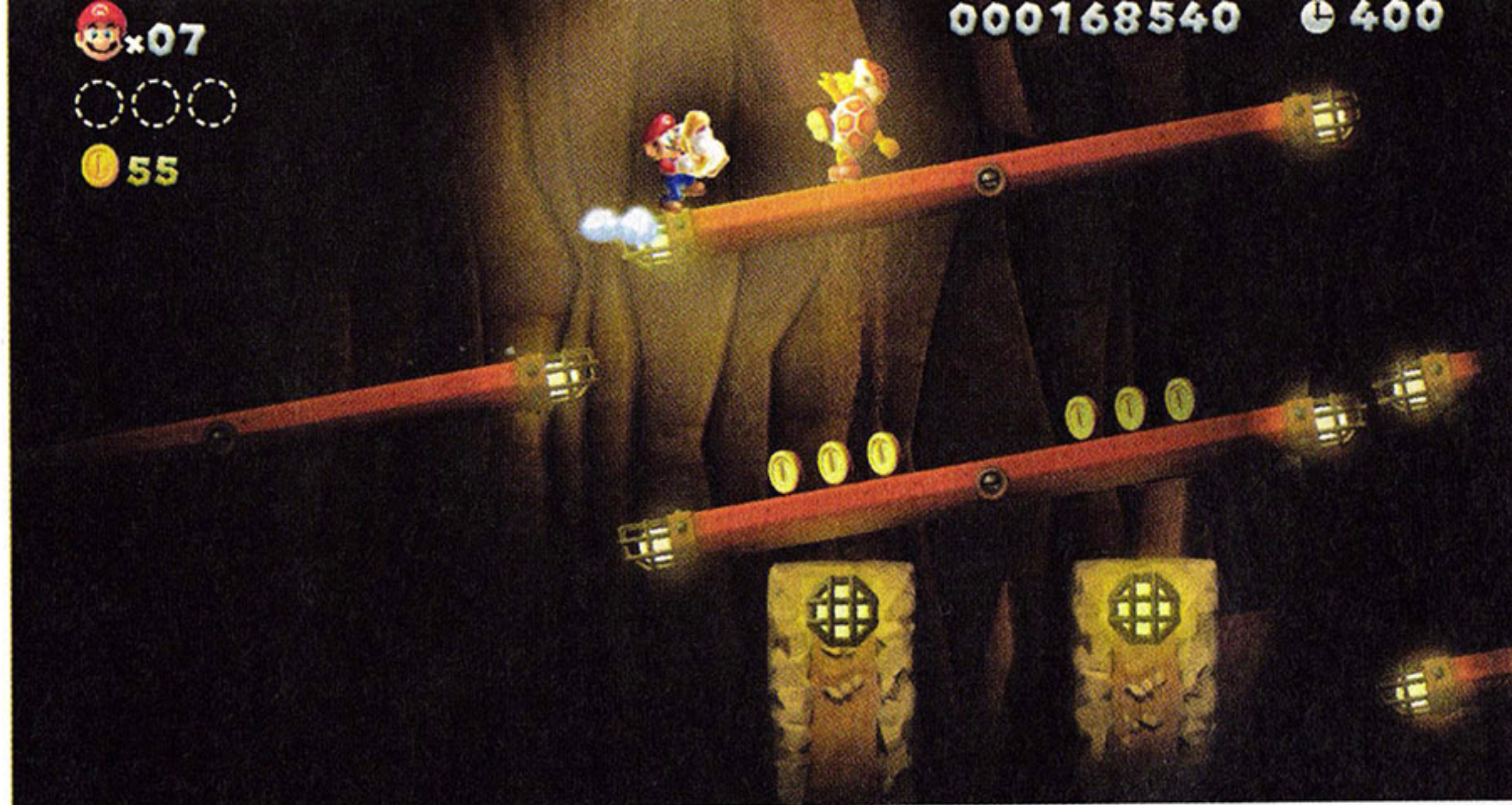
immediate return-to-checkpoint penalty if others are still alive. On the negative (although often hilarious) side of things, your friends add unpredictability to the already treacherous levels. Avoiding fireballs and pitfalls is hard enough, but it is much harder when a friend bouncing off your hat thwarts your well-timed jump.

If you're looking for help navigating these worlds, a friend can grab the GamePad to activate Boost Mode. This allows them to place up to four floating platforms at a time using the GamePad touchscreen, making those out-of-reach star coins far more attainable. Touching the screen has many other applications as well, including popping friends out of bubbles, stunning enemies, making it easier to reach the top of end-level flagpoles, manipulating environmental objects, and swatting Paratroopas out of the sky. To turn on Boost Mode, all the person has to do is power up the GamePad.

Gamers looking for a new kind of challenge should explore Boost Rush Mode, which tasks players with sprinting through pre-selected packs of levels as fast as possible. Collecting coins makes every level auto-scroll faster, even if the level doesn't auto-scroll in the main game. It's a double-edged sword, as faster-scrolling levels lead to shortened completion times, but it also makes them far more difficult. Players are granted a limited amount of lives at the beginning of each pack, and dying doesn't reset the clock. If you have a friend assisting you in Boost Mode, we found that it can often be as much of a hindrance as a blessing. When a level is scrolling at max speed, one misplaced boost block can immediately halt Mario's forward progress.

Boost Rush Mode seems like a fun distraction after the main campaign is completed, but we're most excited to explore the Mushroom Kingdom, take down mini-bosses, and rescue Peach from Bowser, even if Nintendo has been recycling this formula for a quarter of a century. Mario is an industry icon for a reason. His parties and forays into the sporting world may be hit and miss, but his platforming adventures are always exceptional. New Super Mario Bros. U looks to keep that track record intact. Shocking twists and genre-changing gameplay may not be in the cards for his HD debut, but Mario's history ensures that we'll probably love the ride just the same. Nintendo hopes the continuation of his successful track record can give its new console a much-needed taste of early success. ♦

Be sure to check out gameinformer.com/wiiu, as we'll be posting exclusive New Super Mario Bros. U videos and plenty of Wii U content all month long.



Gold baby Yoshis help Mario illuminate dark areas



>> 1991: SUPER MARIO WORLD (SNES)

When Nintendo launched the Super Nintendo in 1991, it included this marquee title in the package. Super Mario World took the series to the massive Dinosaur Land, a sprawling map with 96 stages (many of which were only accessible through hidden paths). It introduced the lovable Yoshi, tricky ghost houses, the ability to store items, and the cape power-up. Fans of the series frequently debate whether this or Super Mario Bros. 3 is the premier 2D Mario game.

1995: SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND (SNES)

In the mid-'90s, most of the gaming world was focused on the industry's shift to 3D. Perhaps because of this, Yoshi's Island is often overlooked when fans discuss the Mario series. Despite its unfortunate timing, this Yoshi-centric platformer put the dinosaur in charge of protecting Baby Mario to great results. Some gamers felt the infant's cries were like nails on a chalkboard, while others were too distracted by the gorgeous art style, massive boss fights, and creative levels to notice.

1996: SUPER MARIO 64 (N64)

Many series went through growing pains when making the shift from 2D to 3D. Some like Bubsy and Earthworm Jim failed right out of the gate, while others like Castlevania stumbled for years before eventually getting it right. Nintendo's iconic plumber ushered in the 3D era with a remarkable level of polish; Super Mario 64 is virtually unopposed as the father of 3D platforming. Its large hub world inspired the design of the genre for years to come, allowing gamers to explore the varied areas of the Mushroom Kingdom in any order they saw fit.



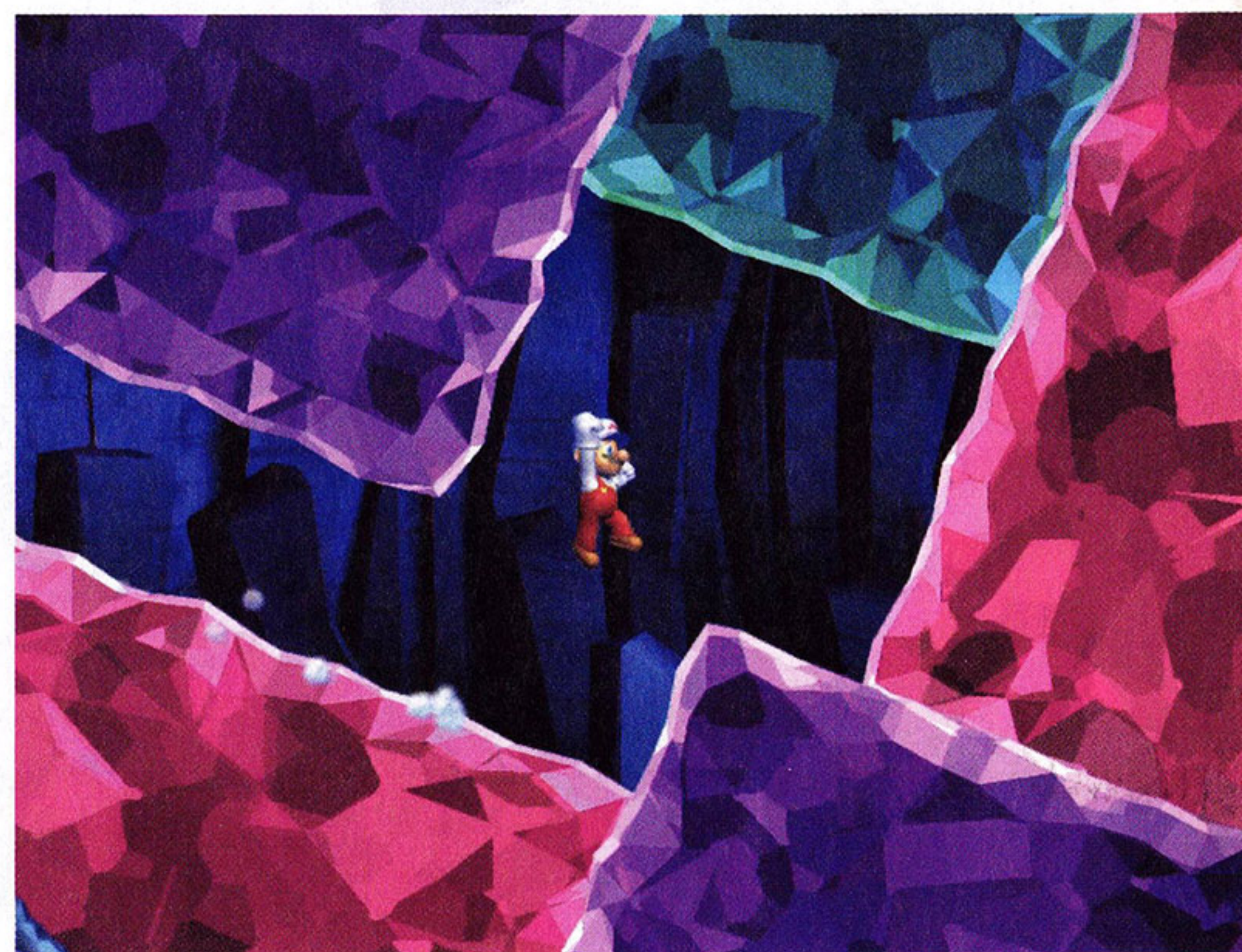


**NOT NEW,
BUT IMPROVED**

New Super Mario Bros. U may not feature a wealth of new power-ups, but one returning item has a never-before-seen feature. In the past, Mario could run across water and jump much higher when shrunk down to size by a mini mushroom. Grabbing these tiny items now has a new effect, and it seems to be another of the game's callbacks to Super Mario World. In that game, Mario could run vertically up walls if he sprinted towards an angled block. Mini mushrooms now grant him that ability, allowing him to run up numerous vertical surfaces. In one level, we even accessed a secret area by having mini Mario sprint up a giant waterspout.



If you're looking for a challenge, the auto-scrolling Boost Rush levels should do the trick



2002: SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE
(GAMECUBE)

Six years after introducing the series to 3D, Mario landed on the GameCube with this tropical adventure. This was a noticeable departure from series tradition, mostly thanks to Mario's F.L.U.D.D. jetpack and the new island setting. While cleaning graffiti off walls and jetpacking around Delfino Island felt unfamiliar, the game also included some classic platforming areas that stripped Mario of F.L.U.D.D. It's one of the more divisive entries in the series, but it still has its share of fans.

2007: SUPER MARIO GALAXY
(WII)

When the Wii launched, Nintendo focused much of its efforts on getting gamers off the couch. Super Mario Galaxy was the exception, with only a few segments dedicated to motion controls. It proved to be a good choice, as Mario's interstellar adventure was one of his best yet. Collecting stars by exploring a hub world was a familiar (yet welcome) feeling, but the new setting allowed for exceptional gravity-bending platforming.

2010: SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2
(WII)

In a first for the series, a 3D Mario game received a numbered sequel. Gamers were initially confused about whether this was a true sequel or more of a "director's cut" of ideas that didn't make the original game, but the end product surpassed its fantastic predecessor. With the addition of Yoshi and a whopping 242 stars to collect, there was no lack of content for fans of the genre.





THE MEN BEHIND MARIO

The consistent quality of the Super Mario Bros. series is a testament to Nintendo's amazing in-house development team, which is composed of both long-time designers and young talent that grew up playing the series. To gain insight on how they maintain the series benchmark for excellence, we spoke to legendary game designer Shigeru Miyamoto and EAD's Takashi Tezuka, whose resume is a virtual "best of" list of Nintendo classics.

Each entry in the New series has a unique hook, whether it's introducing co-op or focusing on coin collection. What would you say is the primary hook of New Super Mario Bros. U?

Tezuka: If you look back at the Wii version, the multiplayer was something that was very well received. When we decided to bring the series to the Wii U, that's something we wanted to further expand upon. The way that we decided to do that was to feature something that's unique

to the system, which is the Wii U GamePad. If you come home and you want to play New Super Mario Bros. U and someone else is already using the television, go ahead and use the other screen to allow for single-player right on the GamePad. It's a simple implementation, but I do think it's a unique one, and one that we've focused on right from the beginning.

Why did you choose to go with two Toads again? Did you ever consider including Peach or a villain like Wario?

Tezuka: We did consider that when we looked at which characters we would use. We really came down on the side of using Mii characters rather than some of the characters you had mentioned. Through the technology of HD, you're going to see more expression and emotion on the Mii character faces. Of course, we're going to continue making Mario games, so you can maybe look forward to some of the things you were asking about in the future.

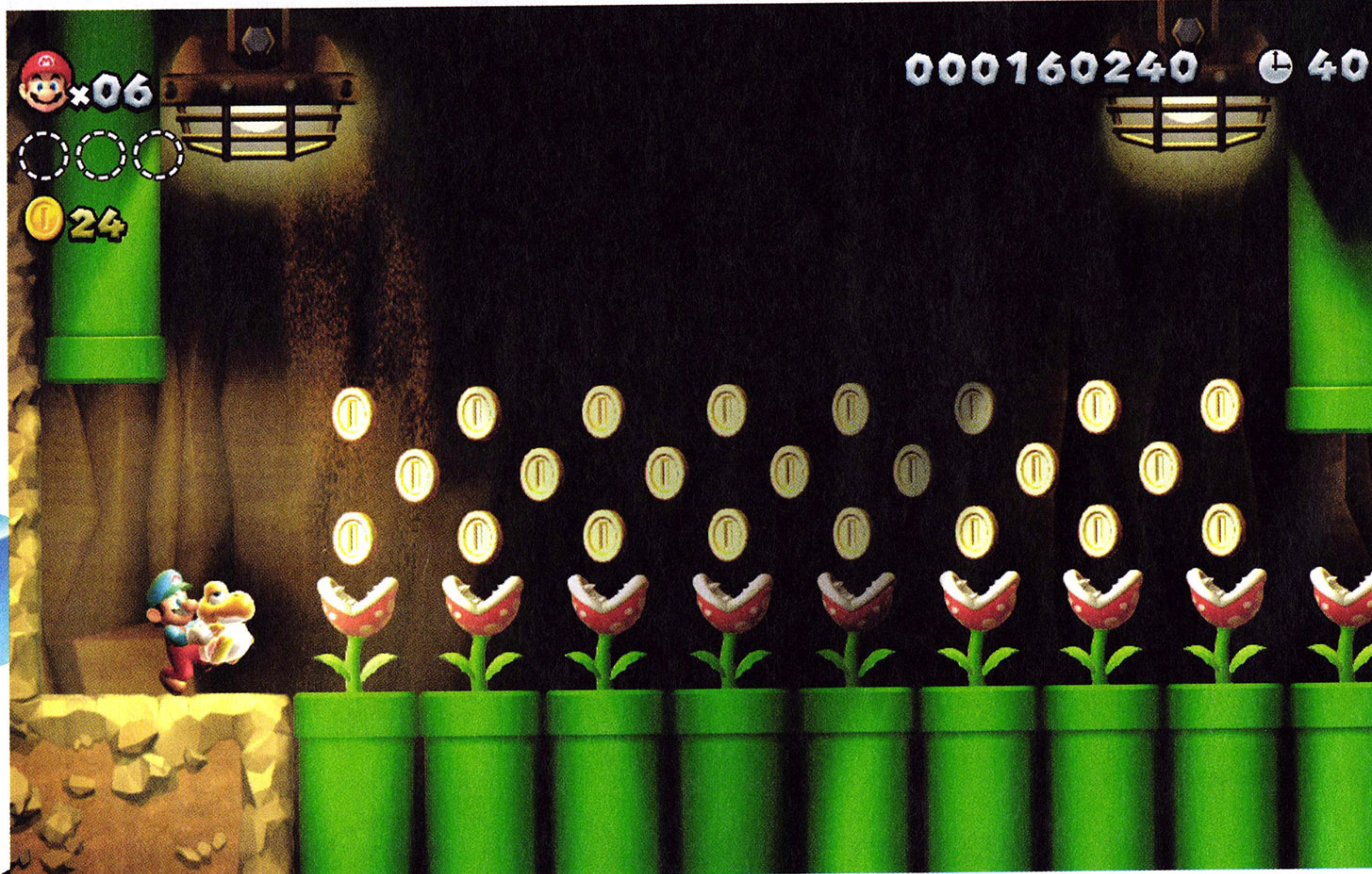
Recent Mario games brought back some classic power-ups like the raccoon tail. How do you choose which to bring back, and which (like Mario World's cape) to leave in the past?

Tezuka: That's a difficult task for us. Every time we work on a new Mario title, that's one of the things that we're always wondering about and talking about with the team.

What we do is, we look at the courses. As we're playing through the courses, we think, "What would be a good power-up or a good ability for Mario to have on this course?" Then we build some of them and try them out and see if it worked or didn't work. With a Mario game, what you really need to ensure is that those abilities or power-ups work on many different courses. Because of the number of courses, you want to make sure that it's not, "It works well here, but maybe not on these other 20." That's sort of the process by which we go about looking at which power-ups to revisit or whether we want to bring in new ones. For this iteration of New Super Mario Bros., we have the flying squirrel. If you notice, if you shake the Wii remote while he's gliding you'll actually boost and get a little bit of elevation. That wasn't the original idea; that's something we added as we were going through development and realized it would be a good addition to the fundamental feature of the flying squirrel Mario.

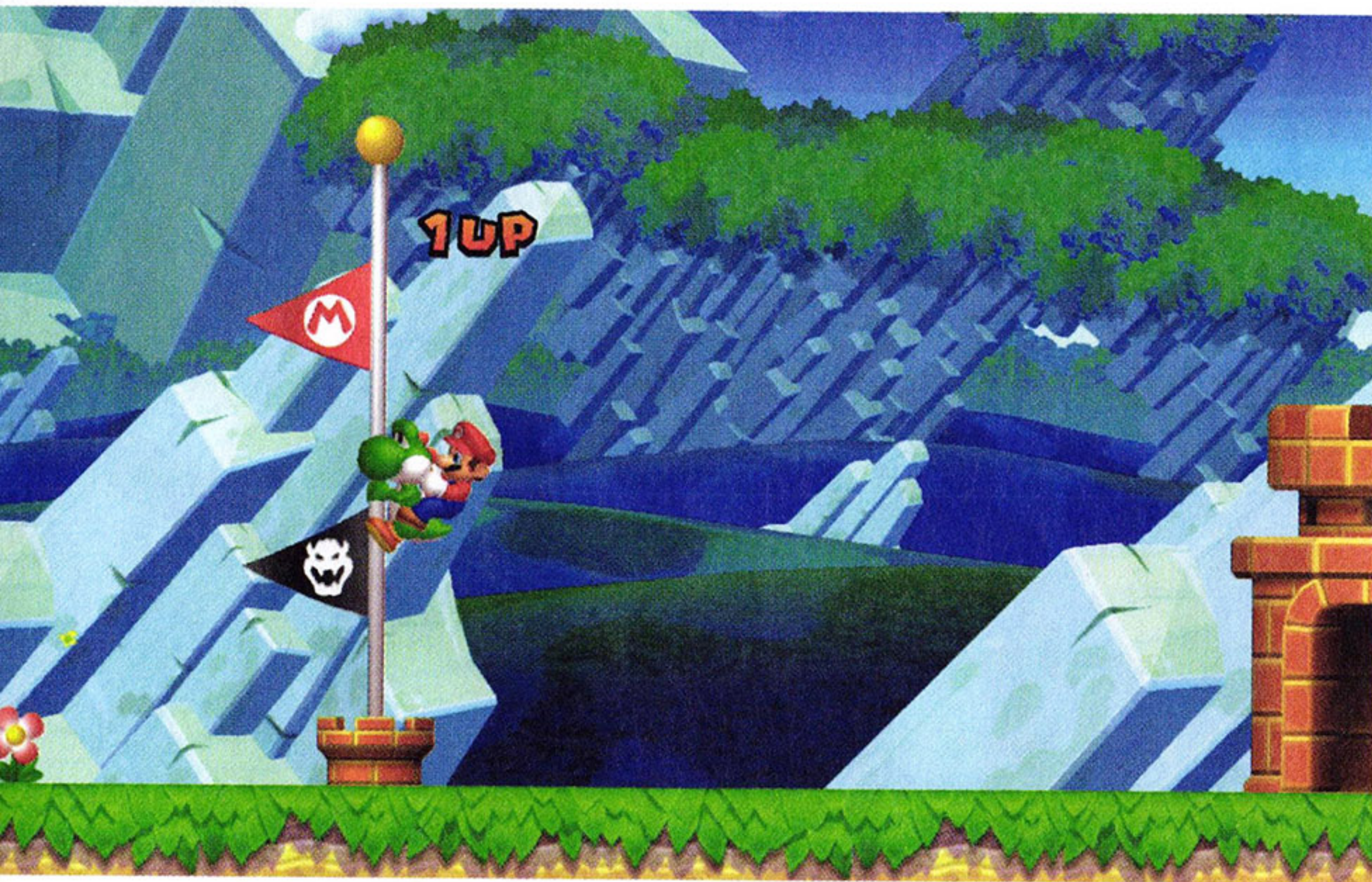
Shaking the controller makes flying squirrel Mario boost higher, but we also noticed that this could be accomplished with the GamePad's ZR button. The same button replaced other motion controls like picking up items and inflating the pink baby Yoshi. Will it be possible to complete the entire game without any motion controls if you're playing on the GamePad?

Tezuka: Of course, it's possible for us to put motion control on the Wii U GamePad. That being said, we want to make sure that people keep a good hold of the GamePad, so we're trying to reduce some of the motion requirements and allow for button mapping for that as well. Can you actually clear the game without any motion control whatsoever? No. There will be some motion required even when you're playing on the GamePad.



MIYAMOTO

TEZUKA



In the original Mario games, 1-ups were critical to succeeding. Now, I'm playing New Super Mario Bros. 2 and I have 300 lives. Do you feel that the 1-up has become devalued as a prize?

Tezuka: That's a difficult balancing question for us. I think that those who are experienced Mario players might feel that there are a lot of 1-ups or power-ups or items that help them out. Others, who are maybe not as experienced, would really need that number to be able to progress through the game. The question becomes, "Who do we balance the game for? Who do we make this for?" One of our goals is to increase the number of people who play a Mario title through to the end. With that being one of our goals, we have an increased number of these items. That being said, for players who need more of a challenge or who are looking for some variation, we have included other modes that will allow for them to get that sort of gaming fix. I think we have created something that has a wide range of features that a very wide range of players will be able to enjoy.

Since you're focused on making these games more accessible, does that mean we'll be seeing the return of the Super Guide or "cheat items" that have been in many recent Nintendo games?

Tezuka: We're bringing back the system that we used for New Super Mario Bros. Wii. An autoplay feature will take you through a certain area and then you'll take control again.

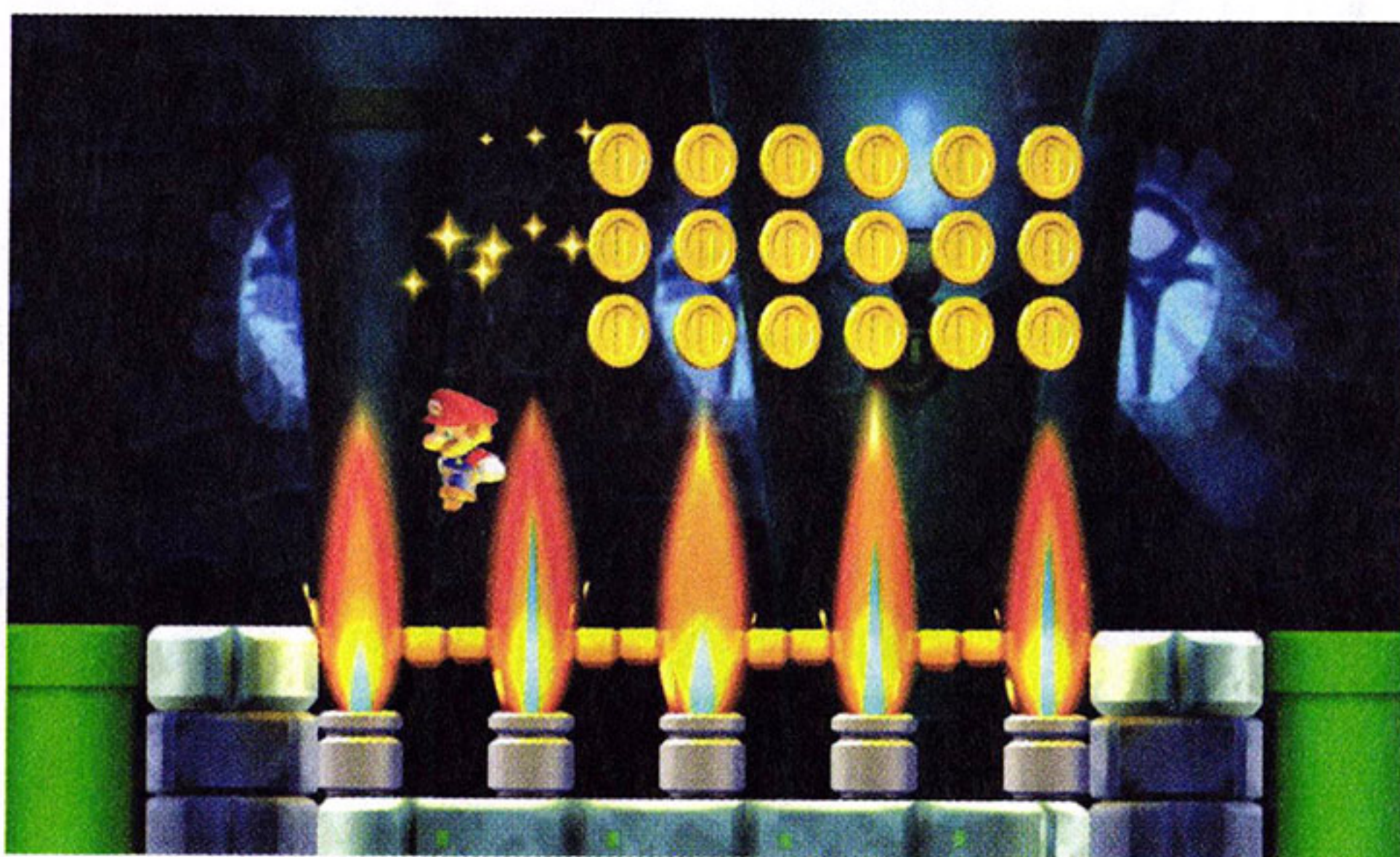
Miyamoto: I'm actually really happy that you asked these last two questions, particularly the question about the 1-up mushrooms. As Mr. Tezuka explained, we are designing the New Super Mario Bros. series to be one that players of a wide variety of skill levels can enjoy. This is getting a little bit away from the Wii U version, but New Super Mario Bros. 2 has come out for 3DS, and we've talked about the additional courses we're planning for that game. With these new types of features that allow us to add additional courses later, that gives us the opportunity to look at the game and say, "What would happen if we designed a course where you have very few lives, or perhaps it had very few 1-up mushrooms?" We're able to look at these types of new systems as a way to continue to add additional content that will challenge players to a greater degree than perhaps what they're experiencing in the main game.

When you're playing Mario with four players, it's easy to accidentally kill your friends. Do you feel that it becomes too chaotic at any point, or do you think that the craziness is something to be embraced?

Tezuka: The possibility exists that people will get a little out of hand, but that depends on who is playing. You may have a group of really good friends playing and they decide, "Hey, that one guy...yeah, let's just focus on him." You might have people teaming up on him and doing things like that, but how people play is really going to depend on who's playing and the mood they're in and what course they're on. We embrace that and we think it's great.

The first four core Mario titles (Super Mario Bros. 1-3 and Super Mario World) were distinctly different games. You could look at any screenshot and instantly identify which game it was. With the New series, they all feature a similar art style and similar music. Why did you choose to make them so similar as opposed to the approach of the earlier games?

Tezuka: I think once we decided what the entire world was going to feel like, we wanted a more well-defined, more vibrant version each time. Just doing that graphical change is really not something that is going to bring a freshness to the feel of each title. One thing that we've done with New Super Mario Bros. U was look at the world map, and for the first time challenge ourselves to make it seamless. With Mario World, we had an overview map that was similar, and with successive iterations of the series, we focused on more accessible, simpler gameplay, so we didn't really do too much with the map system. With New Super Mario Bros. U, we wanted to bring to the player the feeling that they were really



exploring a complete and whole Mario world. That's why we have challenged ourselves to bring about this seamless map so it does feel like everything is connected and not just these separate areas.


Miyamoto: Mr. Tezuka is overseeing all of the development of the New Super Mario Bros. series, and I am handling the development of the 3D Mario games. Perhaps as you have seen with Super Mario 3D Land, even with the 3D Mario games we're starting to see some games that are a bit of a blend between the 2D and the 3D style. But really, the New Super Mario Bros. series exists as the extension of the original 2D Mario series. So it's really staying true to the roots of the side-scrolling Mario series.



Preparing You
for the

Wii U





A good deal of mystery still surrounds the Wii U. At press time, we don't know how much the system costs (most analysts speculate it will be around \$250). We don't have a launch date aside from a vague "holiday season." We also haven't seen the system's menus or the Nintendo Network, the company's online service, in action. However, we have spent a healthy chunk of time with the games that will make or break the system. Nintendo is stacking the Wii U's launch with first-party titles like *New Super Mario Bros. U* (see page 42) and *Nintendo Land*, established franchises like *Assassin's Creed* and *Mass Effect*, and promising new titles like *Lego City: Undercover* and *Project p-100*.

by Tim Turi & Jeff Cork

Nintendo Land

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo



3DS game, you use the GamePad's stylus to draw gusts of wind to direct your Mii. The goal is simply to make it as far as you can, something Nintendo hopes will breed competition in the Miiverse. Players are challenged with dividing their attention between the TV, which shows a complete view of the playing field, and the GamePad, which offers a zoomed-in view for precise dodging. I found moderate success watching the TV while blindly swiping the stylus across the GamePad. Brutal windstorms and tasks like delivering packages complicate the already challenging gameplay to addictive results.

We also played two attractions that eluded us during E3 2012, minigames themed on Luigi's Mansion and Animal Crossing. In Luigi's Ghost Mansion, one player controls a ghost using the GamePad while four flashlight-toting Miis hold their Wii remotes sideways. The spectre is invisible to the under-equipped Ghostbusters unless they shine their lights on it. The Miis' goal is to light up the ghost until its health depletes, and the ghost's goal is to incapacitate all the Miis by sneaking up behind them. Controller vibrations clue the Mii players in on the ghost's location. Sneaking up on unsuspecting Miis as the ghost and searching rooms as a Mii are both tense experiences. I love the suspense of resuscitating a fallen ally with the flashlight, not knowing how close the ghost is to grabbing me.

Similar to Luigi's Ghost Mansion, Animal Crossing: Sweet Day pits the player holding the GamePad against the players holding the Wii remotes. Each of the GamePad's analog sticks controls one of two guards tasked with stopping pesky Miis from stealing candy scattered across town. Moving the guards in opposite directions zooms out the view on the GamePad's screen, allowing the player to see more action and orchestrate nasty pincer attacks. Having a private view of the action on the GamePad provides a nice sense of power. Like in Luigi's Ghost Mansion, the Mii players hold their Wii remotes sideways and make a mad dash to shake sweets loose from trees. This time the action on the TV unfolds in split-screen. The Miis cram sweets into their animal-shaped hats, causing them to swell to bulbous proportions. The large loads of candy slow down the Miis, which makes the guards' jobs easier. You can vomit up the precious candy to regain speed, but the Miis have a limited amount of time to collect enough. Animal Crossing: Sweet Day is a fun, fast-paced thrill whether you're giving chase or being chased.

Despite my previous skepticism, I was charmed by Nintendo Land's colorful visuals and simple but engaging gameplay. The innovative use of the GamePad's independent screen delivers some of the best offline multiplayer I've experienced on a Nintendo console, with the added benefit of a fifth player in most cases. The single-player offerings are addictive and offer another way to earn extra coins without friends. Nintendo still isn't saying whether Nintendo Land is a pack-in or standalone Wii U game, but I will be playing it come launch regardless.

Nintendo has a track record of confusing E3 moments, like 2008's bumbling Wii Music demonstration. Many gamers added Nintendo's E3 2012 showing of Nintendo Land to that list. The company showcased the Wii U's next-gen capabilities with what appeared to be a handful of Mii-focused, Wii Sports-style minigames hiding behind beloved Nintendo veneers like Zelda and Animal Crossing. Polarized hands-on impressions from the convention didn't help change the negative buzz around Nintendo Land. I was among the naysayers doubting Nintendo's choice to trumpet the game. Now that I've played the game outside the noisy, time-restricted demos of E3, I can see why Nintendo has such faith in Nintendo Land.

The 12 games are nestled within a small theme park hub reminiscent of Disneyland. An infectious tune pipes in through faux loudspeakers, emulating the feeling of standing in the video game-themed Magical Kingdom. You use your Mii to explore the bustling park grounds, hopping on a small train for speedy travel between attractions. A helpful robot – a sentient TV with arms and a big

smile plastered across its screen – is your tour guide across Nintendo Land, dishing out hints and tutorials.

In this hub area, you can spend coins earned by playing attractions on a fun, simple pachinko game. Winning pachinko games populates the park with Nintendo memorabilia, like Miis parading around in Zelda-themed mascot suits. This framework is more substantial than Wii Sports' barebones menus, but the real fun lies in the games.

Metroid Blast, shown during E3 2011 as Battle Mii, is a multiplayer shooter in which everyone suits up in Samus' armor. One player pilots the bounty hunter's ship using the GamePad and its independent screen. The GamePad's dual analog sticks and gyroscopic motion controls make aiming and flying a snap. In one mode, up to four grounded players use a Wii MotionPlus-enabled remote and nunchuk to blast the spaceship out of the sky. The lack of radar makes hunting down enemies in the sizable arenas a challenge. The lava-filled Norfair map is my favorite, complete with a massive, mechanical Kraid that players can ascend using their grapple beams. Other modes include a chaotic scramble to collect tokens and a cooperative battle against waves of robotic Metroid foes. The gunplay is smoother and more accurate than any Wii shooter I've played, and the GamePad-controlled spaceship provides a unique twist.

Nintendo is reaching deep into the NES catalog with an attraction based on Balloon Fight. In Balloon Trip Breeze, players guide floating Miis through side-scrolling levels filled with electrified spikes, crazy birds, and hungry fish. Much like a

Wii MotionPlus A Must?

Motion-focused games in Nintendo Land, such as Metroid Blaster, require the player to use Wii MotionPlus. Nintendo says not every Wii U game will use the enhanced Wii remote motion technology, and that it's up to developers whether to use it. It will be interesting to see how many third-party publisher and developers take advantage of the Wii MotionPlus' advanced control.

Game & Wario

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems

This spiritual successor to the hilarious Warioware games exchanges countless microgames for more involved single- and multiplayer games. We checked out one game from each end of the spectrum, both of which involve spotting sneaky crooks.

One single-player game has players using their GamePad as a camera to take snapshots of suspects scattered across a city. The cardboard cutout citizens go about their lives, mindlessly walking by open windows in their apartments or cruising down the street. The scene resembles a shooting gallery. The trick is to use the zoomed-out perspective of the TV to locate suspects, and then zoom in with the GamePad to get them in frame and take the shot. It's nothing fancy, but it shows off the versatility of the controller.

Warioware games like Smooth Moves have always been great at engaging a roomful of gamers, even if they're not holding controllers. One such game in Game & Wario has a single player controlling a crook via the GamePad



and attempting to blend into the bustling city streets. The other participants look on as they try to pinpoint the criminal nonchalantly stealing apples. The thief must time these thefts with passing busses, smoke from chimneys, or crowds to obscure the crime. After three apples have been stolen, the onlookers pass around the GamePad, view a criminal lineup,

and select their suspect.

Snapping photos is fun, but the "whodunit" multiplayer is downright delightful. Both these games, along with the previously shown tilt-controlled skiing and motion/touchscreen-enabled archery games have me excited to see what other quirkiness Game & Wario has in store.

Pikmin 3

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

The beloved follow-the-leader simulator continues on the Wii U. You use the nunchuk's analog stick to steer your tiny captain while aiming and tossing scores of ant-like Pikmin with the Wii remote. The GamePad screen acts as a zoomed-out map of the playing field.

The standard Pikmin are just as industrious as ever, quickly dispatching foes and carrying their corpses back to base. The new rock

Pikmin are perfect for shattering glass barriers and dazing foes. They were especially useful during a frenzied boss battle against a gigantic, glass-coated caterpillar creature.

The latest Pikmin installment packs enough new features to entice longtime fans, but doesn't complicate the formula to the point of alienating newcomers. Four-player multiplayer adds a new wrinkle, but Nintendo is staying silent on specifics.

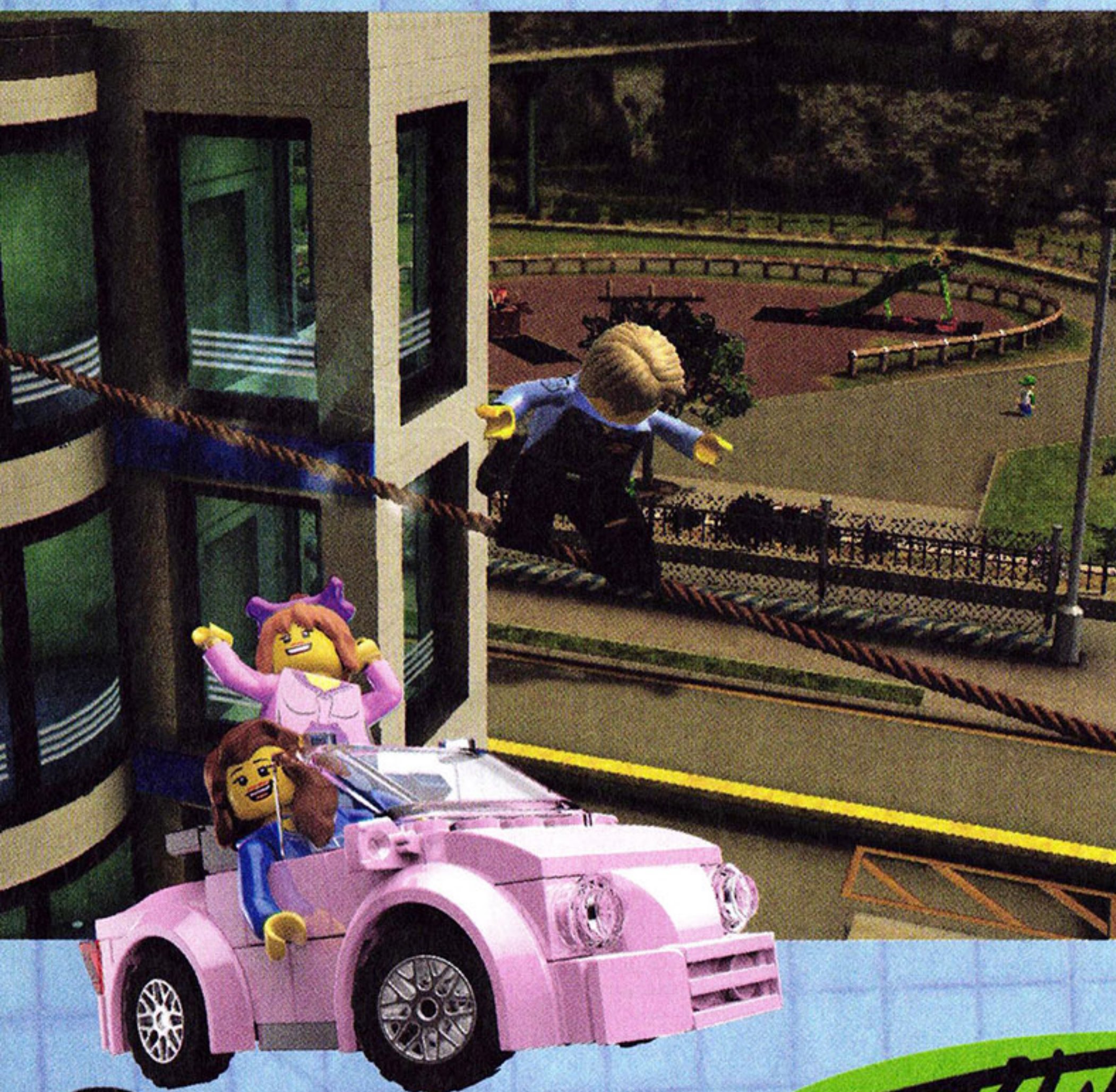


Backward Compatibility

Nintendo confirms that Wii discs are playable on the Wii U. Additionally, you can transfer all the Virtual Console and Wiiware games from your Wii to your Wii U. GameCube games are not supported.

Lego City: Undercover

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Traveller's Tales



The latest from Traveller's Tales stacks an expansive open world on top of the fun, linear levels from classic Lego games. As crime-busting officer Chase McCain, you can commandeer any vehicle you please. Gamers are free to snag a sports car and immediately start whipping donuts in busy intersections. The vehicles smoke as bricks crumble away, indicating the car's waning vitality. I love watching streetlights and mailboxes explode into a shower of Lego bits due to my haphazard motoring. Driving feels tight and responsive on the Wii U GamePad, which is useful when Chase is tasked with running down a gang of bank-robbing clowns.

Players receive mission data and perform other interesting tasks on the GamePad's screen. Chase's partner feeds him information via the GamePad's speakers, allowing players to focus on the task at hand on the TV. The map is also located on the GamePad's screen, clearing clutter from the TV. One scenario had me hold the GamePad in front of my face and use the motion control to perform an X-ray scan of the area. I like what Traveller's Tales

has done with the GamePad so far, and have full faith the developer will find more interesting uses for the device.

Joyriding around town and tinkering with the GamePad is fun, but the nuts and bolts of the traditional Lego games are still intact. Chase descends into a mine in pursuit of criminals. The first task is finding a miner's clothes; swapping outfits is a key element of the game. After some light platforming, Chase encounters a locked gate. He puts on his robber outfit to force open the locked door with a crowbar, earning him the miner outfit. The miner's outfit lets Chase use dynamite to clear paths and move minecarts around the stage. The level concludes with a dramatic skydiving stunt through an impossibly long mineshaft. Dodging spinning fan blades and supports beams at high speeds plays out a lot like a Star Wars Death Star run.

Lego City: Undercover provides a whimsical, family friendly take on the open-world genre, while offering the variety and depth that more sophisticated gamers demand. So far, it's one of the most promising original games for the Wii U.

The Versatile GamePad

Nintendo is packaging every Wii U with the console's signature GamePad. Here's what you can look forward to:

Primary Control: Nintendo wants the Wii U controller to be the first point of access for the console. Though the menus haven't been shown off yet, you can browse everything on your console via the GamePad, then decide if you need to turn on your TV.

Comfort: After hours of hands-on time with the device, we can confirm that it's as light and comfortable as a 360 or PS3 controller. The device is easy to hold both vertically and horizontally. The analog sticks offer much more precise control than the previous circle pads.

Alternate Screen: The GamePad's screen can be used to view Netflix movies, browse the Internet, control your TV, or play specific Wii U titles. Nintendo says that all Virtual Console and Wiiware games purchased on the Wii can be transferred to the Wii U and will likely be playable via the GamePad.

Swiss Army Knife: The GamePad sports a crisp-looking (though non-HD) 6.2 inch touchscreen, stereo speakers, stylus, motion control, microphone, front-facing camera, and all the buttons you'd expect from a modern controller. It feels sturdy and durable, just like most of Nintendo's hardware.

Two GamePad Support?

Initially, Nintendo said that the system would not support more than one GamePad, which drew criticism from fans and the press. In response, the company reversed course and said that the Wii U would support two GamePads at once. However, at press time, there are no known titles that take advantage of the two-GamePad support. We expect that no Wii U launch games will support two GamePads.

Wii U Pro Controller

Not excited about holding a tablet/controller hybrid while playing your favorite games? Nintendo has you covered with a controller similar to the Xbox 360's. We haven't played around with it yet, but it looks like a traditional way to play Wii U versions of modern games like Mass Effect 3 and Darksiders II.



Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge

Publisher: Tecmo Koei
Developer: Team Ninja

The third entry in the notoriously challenging action series disappointed us with its toothless difficulty and nonexistent weapon customization. Team Ninja hopes to make good with this enhanced Wii U version. Ninja Gaiden shows its teeth with more aggressive enemy AI and the return of bloody dismemberment. Ryu meets the challenge with

a worthwhile upgrade system. You can purchase new moves, sword upgrades, and magic spells with currency earned by performing flashy combos. Ryu's more involved combos can be viewed on the Wii U GamePad so you don't rush into battle half-cocked. Ayane is also in for the ride, starring in narrative-expanding missions with an all-new move set.



The Enigmatic Nintendo Network

Many questions still revolve around Nintendo's online strategy. What we do know is that there is no subscription fee and Nintendo is connecting gamers via the Miiverse. This social networking software allows players to swap notes and become friends with one another via the Wii U and mobile devices. Unfortunately, Nintendo says some messages may take up to 30 minutes to appear due to strict content filtering by Nintendo moderators.

Nintendo is mum on the specifics of its online service. The GamePad includes all the necessary technology for video chat (front-facing camera, microphone, and screen), but Nintendo hasn't confirmed this feature. Nintendo is leaving much of the responsibility for connecting gamers via voice chat and game matchmaking in the hands of third-party developers. Rumors suggest that Nintendo is working closely with EA to support its Origin online portal and storefront on the Wii U. Unlike Microsoft and Sony's closed networks, this open approach could take much of the burden off Nintendo's shoulders while allowing third-party publishers like EA to control how people play their games. Whether that proves beneficial to gamers is still unclear.

Project P-100

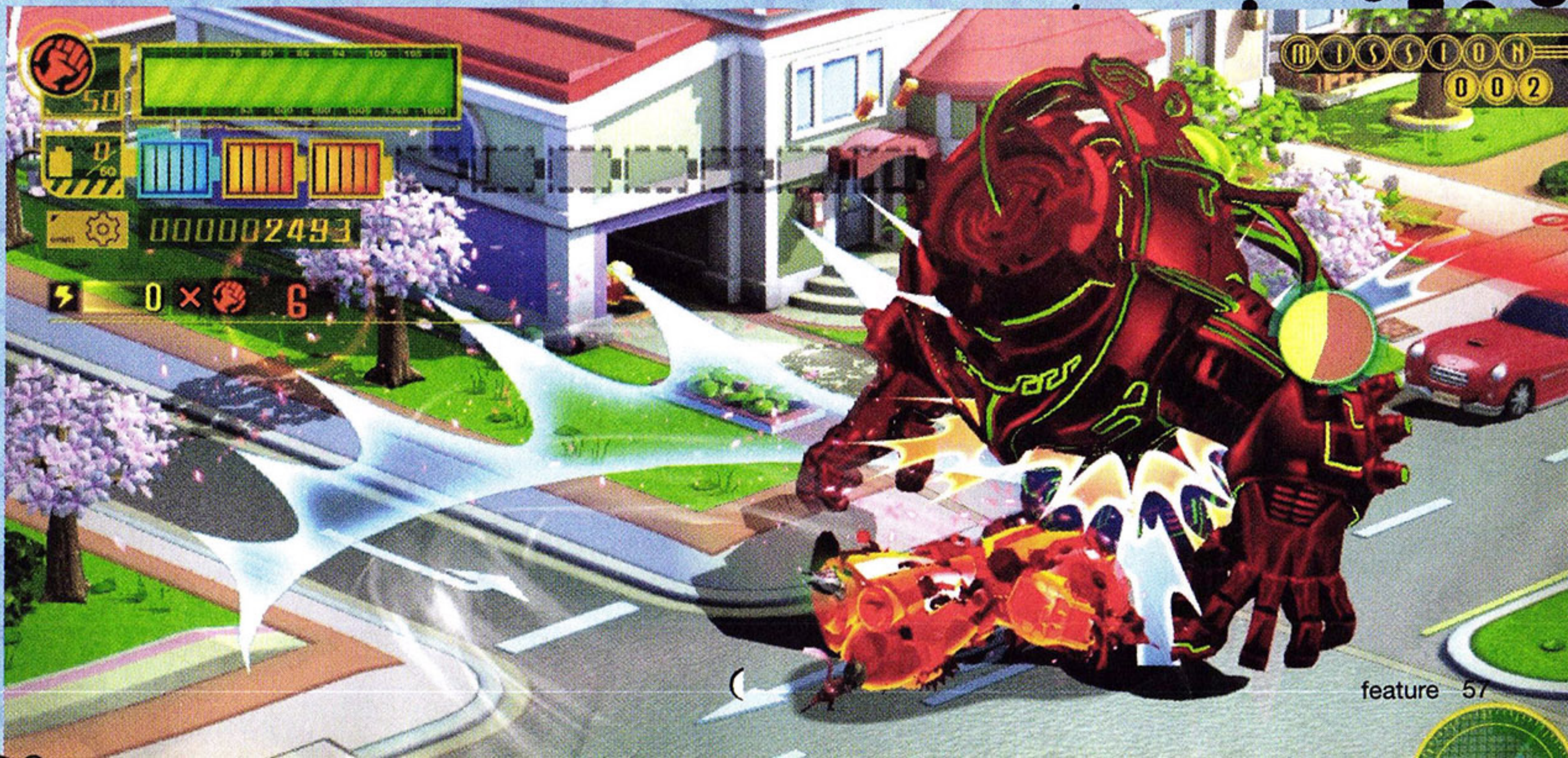
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Platinum Games

Part superhero game, part Pikmin, Project P-100 lets you control a horde of superheroes. A gang of generic, masked crime fighters follows your onscreen avatar around in a town under attack by a robotic menace. Players swipe varying patterns across the GamePad's touchscreen (or rotate an analog stick) to rally the troops into formations shaped like a massive sword, gun, or fist, then mash the attack button to lay waste to the metallic foes. You may liberate some civilians in the process, which can be converted into superheroes to add to your ranks.

The Wii U GamePad is usually reserved for sketching group attacks, but the gameplay occasionally shifts to the smaller screen. At one point, entering a building causes the action to switch to the GamePad display, showing my tiny avatar in a third-person perspective. At this point, I have to solve a simple switch puzzle before continuing on.

The demo concludes with an arduous battle against a robot the size of a skyscraper. The heroes attack vulnerable spots on the robot's arm, while evading attacks from its other hand and laser eyes. The group can take the form

of a gelatinous dessert to deflect the fist or execute a Slinky-like dodge to leap over laser attacks. This boss battle was surprisingly challenging, but the tight GamePad controls were up to the task.



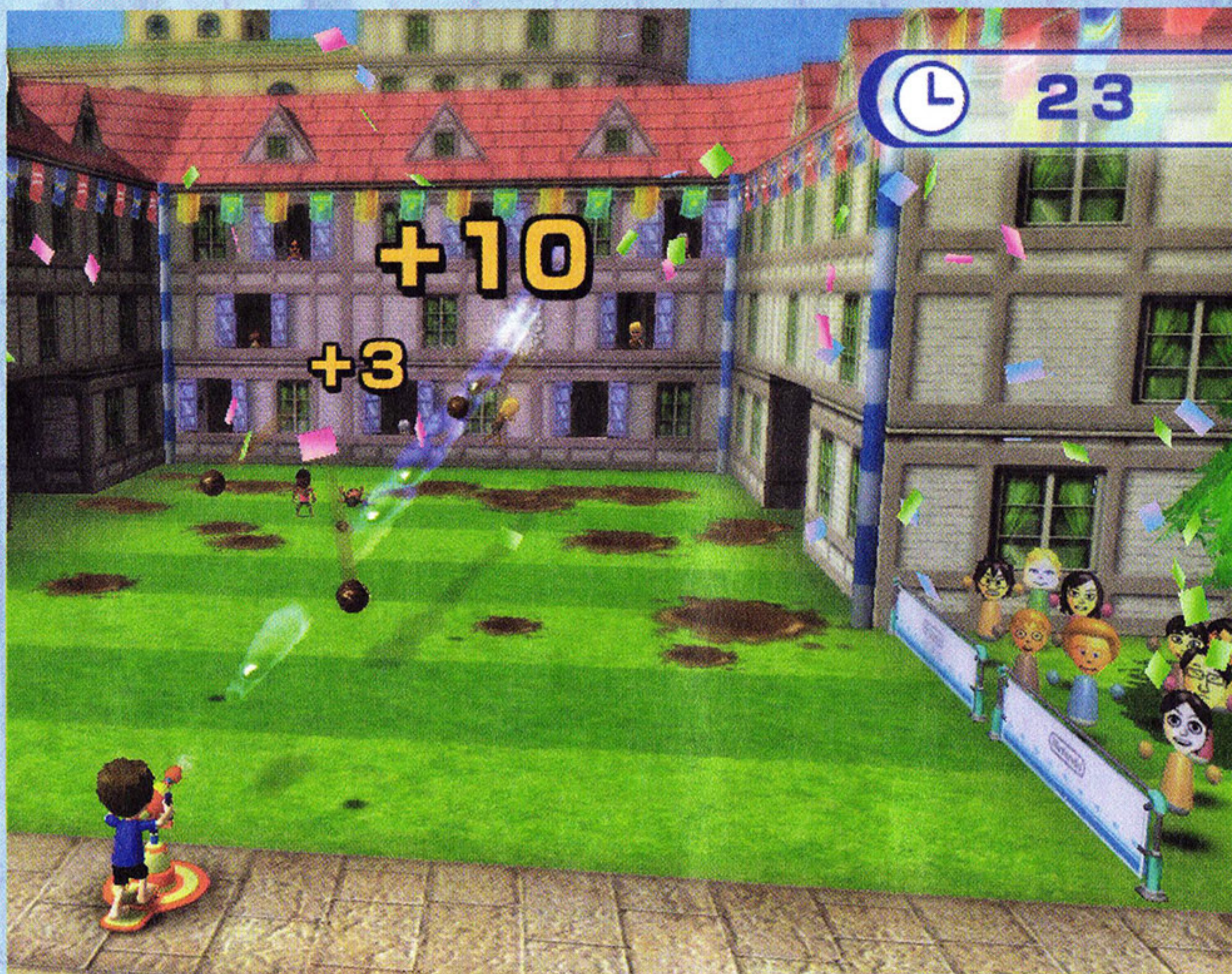
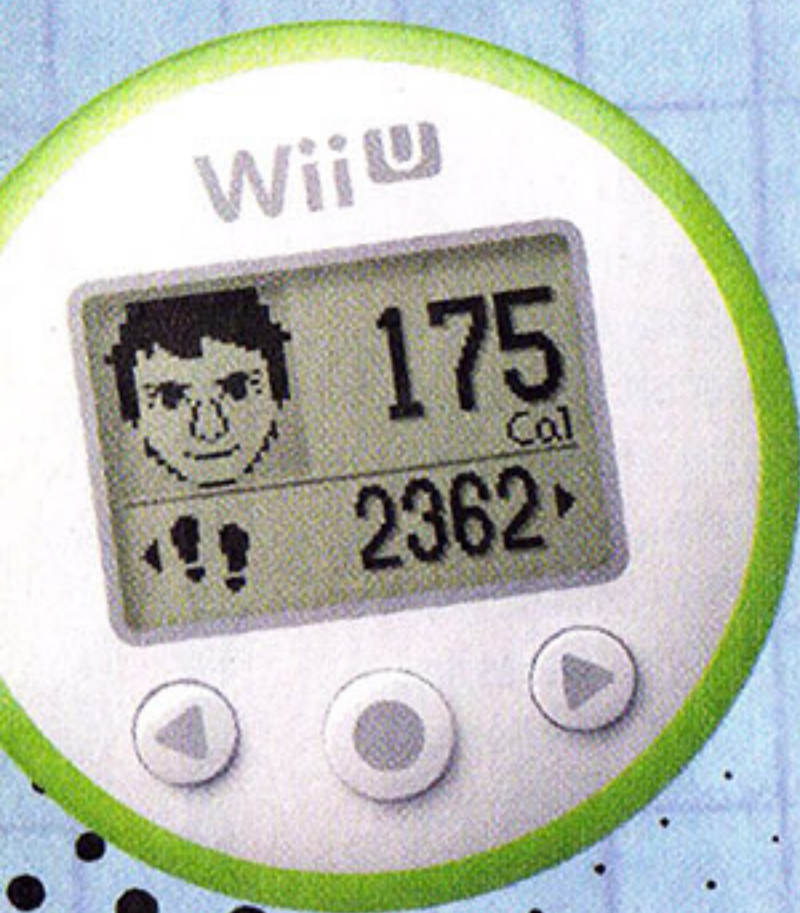
Wii Fit U

Hopefully you didn't throw out your Wii Fit Balance Board, because Nintendo's next fitness game makes use of it. Wii Fit U cleverly disguises plenty of squats, ab routines, and balance exercises as addictive minigames.

One game warms up your quads by requiring you to squat and stand in time with trampoline bounces. Gunning for the highest jump is guaranteed to light your legs on fire. A balance game requires you to walk in place on the balance board while holding the Wii U GamePad as if it were a dessert tray. The trick is to quickly deliver each sweet to its hungry customer without it toppling over. The most intense challenge so far is a luge minigame in which you sit on the balance board with your legs raised out front and lean back, engaging your abs as you steer down the icy track.

The goal in each game is deceptively simple, but never so mundane that you start thinking about the challenges as exercise. You may not even realize which muscles you're engaging until the minigame is over. A new, Pokémon-like pedometer device will also be incorporated to encourage staying active outside the game. Nintendo isn't revealing the overall structure to Wii Fit U, but the company clearly knows how to disguise exercise as fun.

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo



Rabbids Land



Ubisoft is bringing the rabbids over to Wii U in an all-new bundle of chaos. Up to four players take turns rolling the virtual dice and competing to earn trophies. In true party game fashion, victory can depend just as much on screwing over the other players as it does playing well. About 20 theme park-inspired minigames are

available, though the variety of gameplay is double that. Each of the challenges features asymmetrical gameplay, meaning that players using the GamePad's screen get a different experience from those who view it on the TV. In one section, a player pounds out a drumbeat using the Wii remote and nunchuk, with each successfully timed strike creating

a fireball. The player on the smaller screen has to hop around on a roller coaster, dodging the flames to avoid getting a scorched tail. Another cooperative game features a Ghostbusters-like mechanic, with the player using the Wii U's controller to splash ghosts with water, and the other player sucks them up with the remote.

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Paris



ZombiU

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier

Zombie-slaying fans can get their fix in Ubisoft's upcoming FPS. The game – a Wii U exclusive – lets players explore an infested London, featuring iconic sights like Buckingham Palace. The Queen's Guard is famous for keeping their composure, but their zombified versions lunge and bite just like anyone else. Fortunately, your character can use a backpack-filling arsenal of firearms and improvised weapons to keep them at

bay. Ubisoft is using the Wii U controller's screen in some clever ways, including as a lock-opening interface and a UV scanner for detecting hidden items and secret passageways. If you don't survive the horde, your character stays dead – or undead. You'll have to track down your zombified self and kill it to retain your loot. Your zombies can also infect your friends' games, stealing loot and creating mayhem along the way.



The Complete Wii U Games List

The Wii U currently has no official release date. With that in mind, Nintendo has labeled games releasing close to the system's launch as "holiday." Here are the games you can expect around the system's launch and beyond.

Holiday Releases:

- Assassin's Creed III
- Batman: Arkham City Armored Edition
- Ben 10: Omniverse
- Darksiders II
- Family Party: 30 Great Games
- FIFA 2013
- Game Party Champions
- Jett Tailfin
- Just Dance 4
- Lego City: Undercover
- Madden NFL 13
- Marvel Avengers: Battle for Earth
- Mass Effect 3
- NBA 2K13
- New Super Mario Bros. U
- Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge
- Nintendo Land
- Rabbids Land
- Rise of the Guardians: The Video Game
- Scribblenauts Unlimited
- Sing
- Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed
- Sports Connection
- Tank! Tank! Tank!
- Tekken Tag Tournament 2
- Trine 2: Director's Cut
- Transformers: Prime – The Game
- Wii U Panorama View
- Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2013
- ZombiU

Launch Window & Beyond:

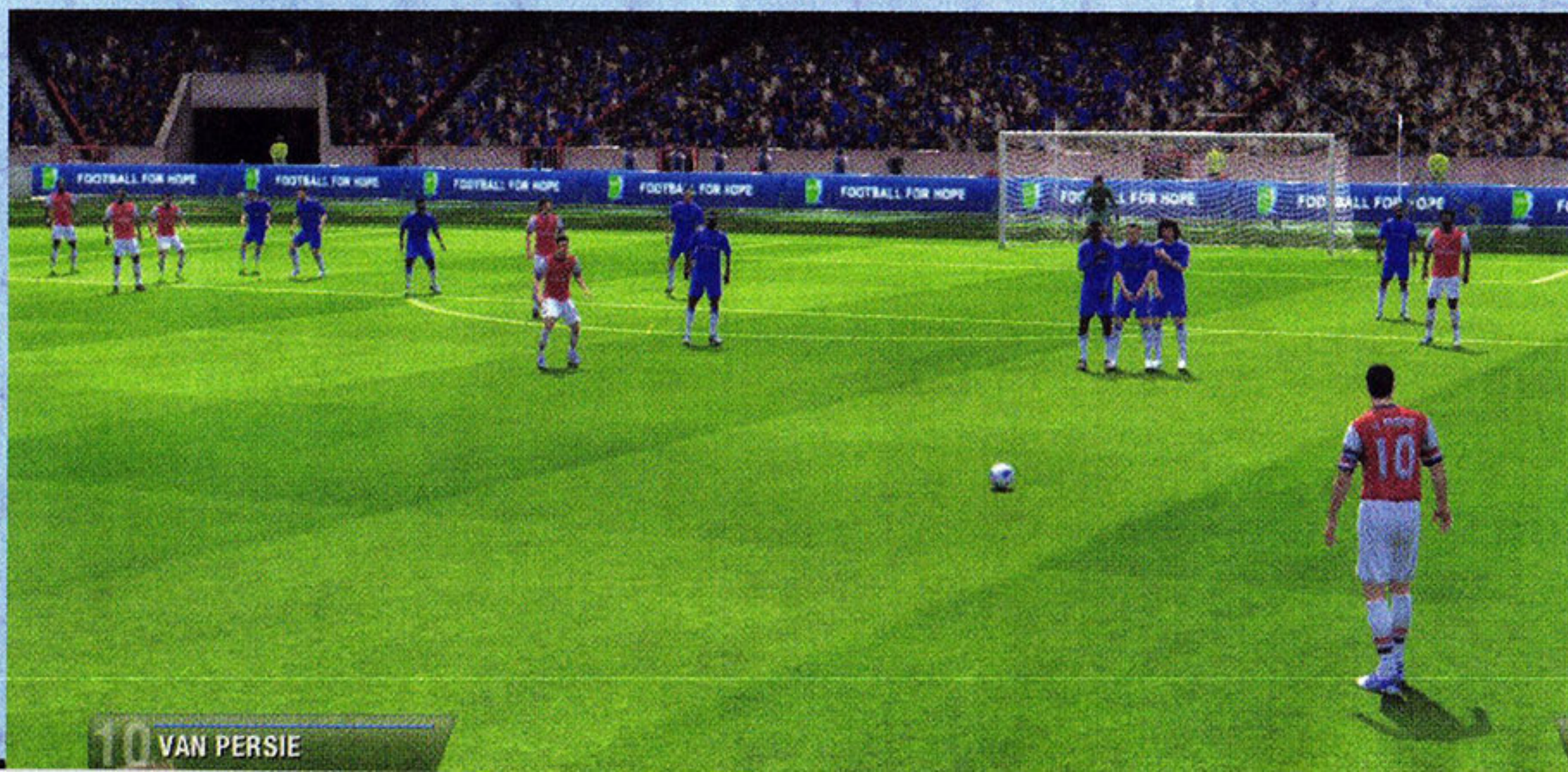
- Aliens: Colonial Marines
- Game & Wario
- Pikmin 3
- Project P-100
- Rayman Legends
- Wii Fit U

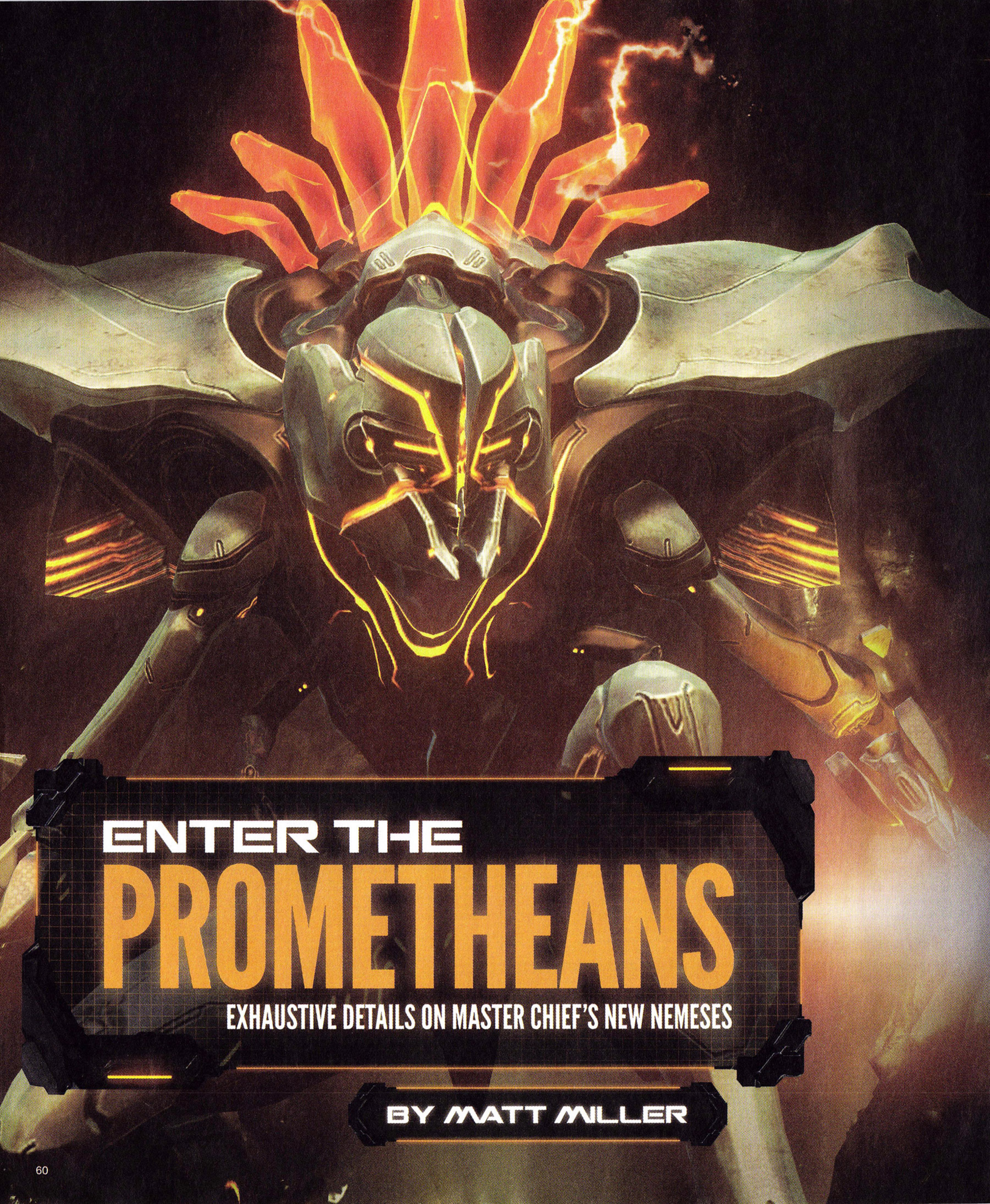
FIFA 13

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada

Soccer fanatics may be dismayed that the Wii U version of FIFA is built on the foundation of FIFA 12, but the unique GamePad controls go a long way toward servicing both hardcore players and casual fans. EA Sports is leveraging the touchscreen to create a complimentary experience that is less dependent on twitch skills; with the slide of a finger you can send players on runs, designate shot placement, and aim free kicks.

Advanced players benefit from the GamePad menu that allows you to substitute players on the fly, tweak team strategy in real time, create man-marking assignments, and check out interactive game statistics. This ambitious package could point the way forward for Wii U sports games bridging the considerable gap between the hardcore and casual fan bases that existed on the Wii. ♦





ENTER THE
PROMETHEANS

EXHAUSTIVE DETAILS ON MASTER CHIEF'S NEW NEMESSES

BY MATT MILLER

HALO 4

For over a decade, the Covenant and the Flood have harassed John-117 at every turn, nearly bringing ruin down on the galaxy.

343 Industries is charting a new course with Halo 4, a brand-new saga starring Master Chief that delves deep into the history of the Halo universe. To fulfill that vision, the development team needed a new enemy to change the battlefield and the story. Enter the Prometheans.

"It's been more than 10 years since we've added a class of bad guys," says Frank O'Connor, franchise development director at 343 Industries. "We've added individual bad guys, like the Buggers in Halo 2, and the Brutes, but never a full class. Previously, the Brutes were probably the biggest addition to the sandbox, but it was a layering rather than a complete rethinking. We realized early on that we definitely had to change things up." More than a re-skinning of a previous enemy type, or a single foe to flesh out the experience, the Prometheans are a whole family of enemies, and they bring with them the need to rethink everything you know about Halo, in terms of both story and gameplay.

The Prometheans are part of the Forerunner civilization, the ancient race that dominated the galaxy in the Halo fiction 10,000 years ago. Their ruined buildings and facilities, including the Halo rings themselves, have been at the center of the story since the beginning. Even so, mysteries remain about who they are and what happened to them. "The Prometheans are undoubtedly Forerunner citizens. They are in thrall and work for the Forerunner civilization, or whatever is left of it," O'Connor says. "Even so, they don't represent the entirety of the Forerunner culture." Instead, the Prometheans are warrior-servants, remnants of a caste of soldiers driven by duty and renowned for their prowess. "When you first encounter them on Requiem, they are defending the planet from intrusion," O'Connor tells us.

One of the central mysteries of Halo 4 is what has happened in the vast stretch of time between the apparent end of Forerunner civilization and the events of the Halo games. Moreover, why do these once proud fighters now appear as robotic entities? Were they always this way? "It's a mistake to think of them as simple robots," says O'Connor. "But they are directed – they have a general, of sorts."

When talking about the sentient Promethean warriors, you're actually talking about the Knights, one of three subdivisions within the alien enemies. Through some as-yet-unknown process, these Knights have been revived to defend Requiem, and they guide the actions of the other two groups. Crawlers are the most plentiful, and act to clear out enemies without putting the Knights directly in harm's way. "The Crawlers behave like pack animals," O'Connor says. Finally, the Watchers are flying robots that support the other units and bring reinforcements

into play when necessary.

The Prometheans present a devious challenge within the familiar Halo gameplay. "I was being sniped at by a couple of Promethean Knights, and I did what I normally do in a Halo game," O'Connor recounts. "My shields are low, and I go hide behind a pillar to try and recoup some shield before I go back out to the encounter. Typically, the bad guys would have to rethink their strategy at that point. Instead of flanking, because [I] took cover, is it in [their] best interest to continue, or do something else? As I was going through that thought process, the Crawlers completely ignored all that, clambered up over the top of the thing I was hiding behind, and came vertically down towards me."

In addition to overriding many familiar strategies, the Prometheans present a more fundamental problem because of their ability to interact with one another. Crawlers charge your location, and demand immediate attention. Meanwhile, the Knights can open their carapaces to unleash a Watcher. In turn, the Watcher can deploy a Hardlight Shield for the Knight, spawn additional Crawlers, or even resurrect a fallen Knight. Meanwhile, the highly intelligent Knight continues its assault, sniping from a distance or closing in for the kill. Who do you take down first? "There's no safe order for how to bring them down. It's going to depend on the encounter," O'Connor says. "The sheer complexity of the encounters means that the strategy that you think you need to repeat to plow through on Legendary [difficulty] just might not be possible."

Like the Covenant, the Prometheans represent more than an enemy to fight. They bring with them a wealth of new weapons and equipment to fill out the player's toolset. "The Prometheans, as we find them, exist in the wake of the Forerunner/Flood conflict that was ended by the firing of the Halos," explains O'Connor. "All the Prometheans you encounter, and the weapons they [use] on you, were originally designed to combat

the Flood." These weapons populate the campaign, as well as the competitive War Games multiplayer mode and cooperative Spartan Ops missions.

Frank O'Connor is reticent to spoil the events of Halo 4, so questions remain about how the Prometheans fit into the wider story. Who commands them? Why are they incensed by the arrival of Master Chief? However, O'Connor did offer one hint about the story. "When you start the game, the Covenant will be the first problem you have to deal with," he says. "Subsequently, you're going to discover the Prometheans. But it's when those two forces combine, and how they combine, that's going to provide some of the biggest surprises in the game."

To learn more about the Prometheans, flip the page and uncover some of the variants you'll face, and read about the new weapons, grenades, and armor abilities you'll be wielding when Halo 4 releases. ♦

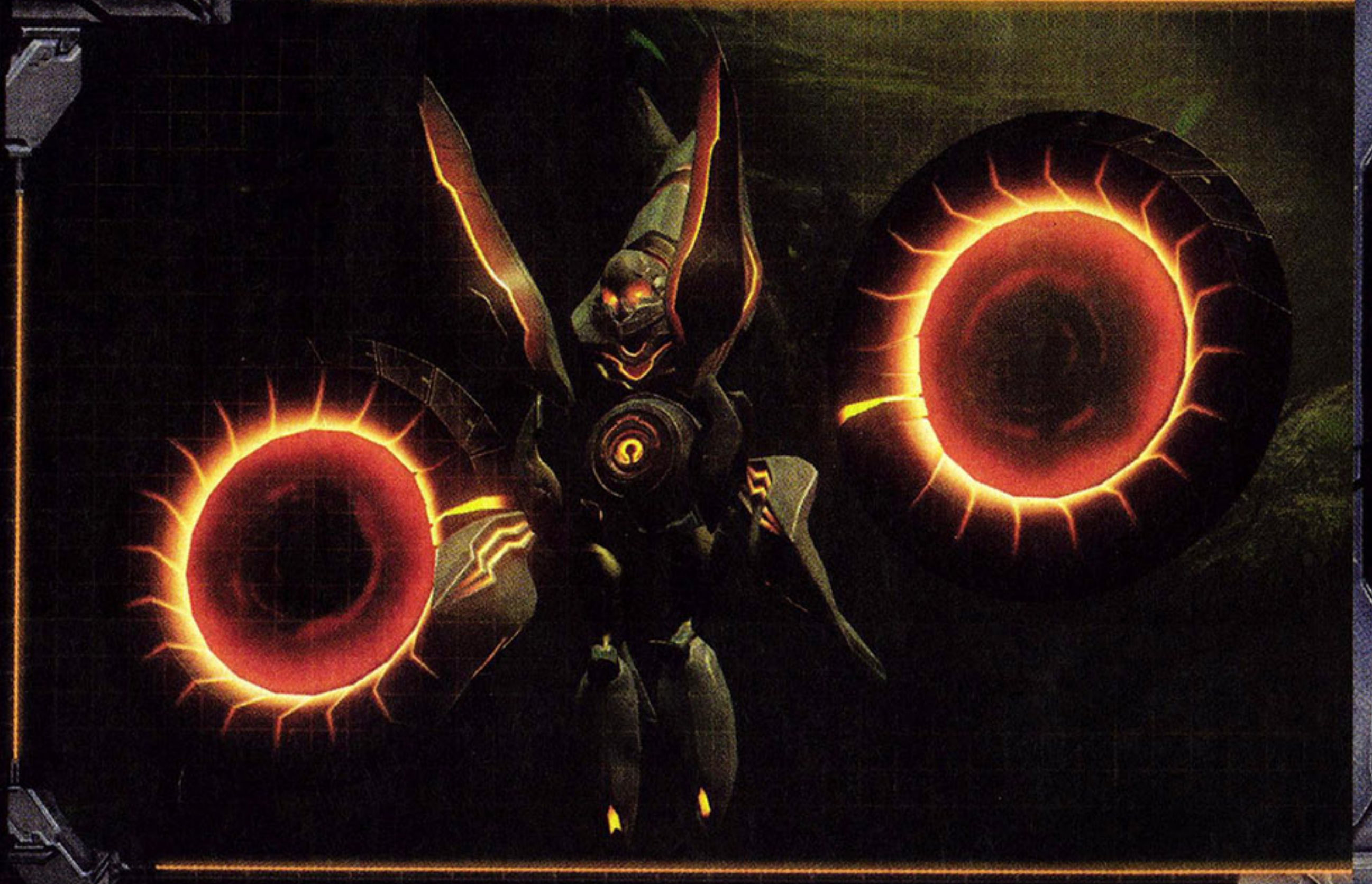
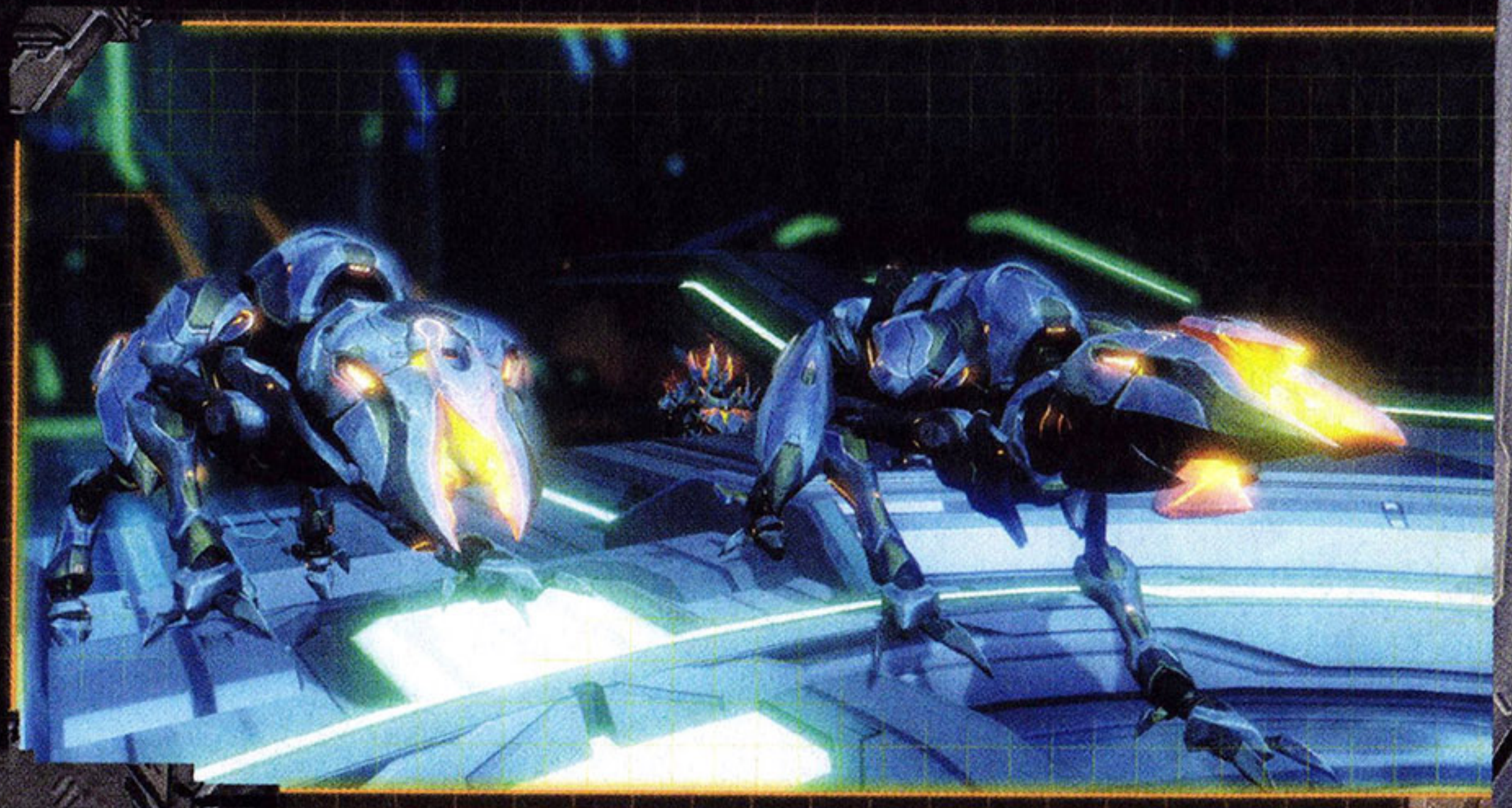
» **Platform**
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 or 4-Player Shooter
(16-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
343 Industries

» **Release**
November 6



THE PROMETHEAN FORCE



KNIGHT

The captains of the Promethean force, the autonomous and intelligent Knights are ancient warriors tasked with defending the artificial world called Requiem. An encounter with a single Knight can turn deadly, as they systematically bring more enemies into the fight. Knights wield weapons like the Suppressor and LightRifle.

WATCHER

These flying robotic creatures emerge from the armored shell of Knights. Once active, they can resurrect Knights, summon Crawlers from the bowels of Requiem, create shields to protect other Prometheans, or attack using their most common armament, a Boltshot.



KNIGHT LANCER

Utilized primarily as scouts and marksmen, Lancers are extremely accurate even at a great distance. Among their many skills, Lancers utilize Promethean Vision to track targets even when they're behind solid objects.

CRAWLER

The most common Prometheans on Requiem are the Crawlers. Crawlers are extremely agile and move in packs. They can swarm an enemy and tear them to pieces, or utilize a Boltshot from a distance.



KNIGHT COMMANDER

As the name suggests, Knight Commanders lead groups of Knights. Commanders have the formidable combat skills of a normal Knight, and can also wield Incineration Cannons, don stronger armor, and deploy floating Autosentry turrets.

CRAWLER SNIPE

This variation on the basic Crawler is larger, wears heavier armor, and carries a Promethean Binary Rifle. They typically ascend to the highest point on the battlefield, where they bring down enemies with deadly single shots.



KNIGHT BATTLEWAGON

Rare but incredibly dangerous, Knight Battlewagons are deployed when other Promethean forces have failed. Their huge metal frames are draped in heavy armor and hard light shielding, and these deadly combatants are capable of deploying their own Autosentries. Even getting close to a Battlewagon is a challenge. That's especially true as the robotic Promethean uses its Scattershot against approaching threats.

ALPHA CRAWLER

More dangerous than the standard variety, the Alpha leads packs of Crawlers into battle. Luckily, Alphas can be identified by the series of Hardlight spikes along their head and back. This unit uses Suppressors as a ranged weapon.



THE PROMETHEAN ARMORY

1. BOLTSHOT

The Z-110 Directed Energy Pistol is designed as a close-range precision weapon that devastates organic matter. Historically, the Boltshot came into use at the end of the first century of conflict between the Forerunners and the Flood, and remained in use until the war ended two centuries later.

2. BINARY RIFLE

The Z-750 Special Application Sniper Rifle includes two core-mounted particle accelerators with unparalleled stopping power to bring down distant foes with one shot.

3. INCINERATION CANNON

The Anti-Materiel Z-390 High-Explosive Munitions Rifle fires several streams of explosive particles along multiple paths that detonate and spread on impact. Mixing traits of a rocket launcher, shotgun, and flamethrower, it's a highly destructive weapon.

4. LIGHTRIFLE

The Z-250 is comparable to both the human DMR and Battle Rifle, allowing for burst fire when shot from the hip and precision targeting when scoped.

5. SUPPRESSOR

The automatic fire of the Z-130 Suppressor made the weapon a favorite for Forerunner troops fighting against the Flood. The weapon fires bolts of charged Hardlight that pierce and destroy organic material of any type.

6. SCATTERSHOT

A shotgun with ricocheting shot has terrifying killing potential, and that's why the Z-180 Close Combat Rifle gained popularity in the latter part of the Forerunner war against the Flood.

7. PULSE GRENADE

It's hard to overstate the strategic potential of the Z-040 Attenuation Field Generator. The grenade creates an area effect that slows vehicles and damages both shields and health. The pulse grenade is ideal for clearing enemies from cover and can reshape the layout of a battle.



PROMETHEAN ARMOR ABILITIES

HARDLIGHT SHIELD

The photon emitter on the Z-90 Hardlight Shield fuses particles of light into a powerful barrier. Spartans can deploy the shield for highly effective coverage directly in front of them, but in doing so sacrifice speed and the ability to fight back.

PROMETHEAN VISION

The Z-5080 Short-Range Spectrum Augmenter allows a Spartan to see through solid objects, keeping them apprised of approaching enemies from any direction.

AUTOSENTRY

The Z-2500 Automated Protection Drone outstrips any similar tools already in use by the UNSC military thanks to its ease of mobility, power, and ability to distract and damage enemy combatants.



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XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

*THE ALIENS GO WHEREVER THEY
WANT, WHENEVER THEY WANT.*

They kill and abduct innocent humans with impunity, engulfing the nations of the world in tidal waves of panic. In the middle of this whirlwind of death

and terror, a small squad of human soldiers has caught up to an extraterrestrial landing party before they could complete their grim work. Merely catching the aliens in the act is an unprecedented victory. Emerging victorious from this unfair fight seems like a miraculous outcome, given the aliens' advantages of advanced weapons and psychic capabilities. Killing one alien is a remarkable achievement, but XCOM's commander must somehow build on that tiny victory until the monsters from beyond the stars tremble at our approach instead of the other way around.

Put in charge of the small organization at the heart of humanity's defiance of an overwhelming alien invasion, I gave those aliens what-for until 2K pulled the plug on my hands-on session. Australia may be more or less on fire, and the memorial in XCOM's barracks may be well-lit by remembrance candles, but that's a small price to pay for having laser shotguns rolling off of my assembly lines.

BY ADAM BIESSNER

THE XCOM THE FIRST THREE HOURS



The tutorial quickly accommodates players with everything XCOM's first hour has to offer. A nearly combat-free mission ends with three rookies dead (and the last one promoted to squaddie) while showing off the slick interface for commanding the turn-based tactical battles. Back at XCOM's secret headquarters (I choose a European base, which makes labs and workshops half as expensive to build and maintain), a quick tour familiarizes new commanders with the critical areas: the research lab, engineering bay, situation room, council room, hangar, and barracks. The outstanding presentation zooms and swoops the camera around the "ant farm" base, turning fundamentally menu-driven strategic tasks like setting research priorities for your scientists and submitting fabrication orders to the engineering corps into pleasant (but thankfully quick and skippable) interactive vignettes with full voice acting.

Here, I'm given my first priority objective. Dr. Vahlen, the head scientist, wants to autopsy one of the sectoid corpses the ground team brought back. The choice is left to the player whether to pursue that or a different line of research, but I see no harm in going for it. The research will consume one of my sectoid corpses and take a few days, so I head back to mission control to

scan for alien activity (effectively fast-forwarding time until something interesting happens). Soon enough, another extraterrestrial contact demands XCOM's attention.

Two concurrent abduction missions force a choice between helping the U.S. or China. The effects of going one way or another are minimal for tutorial purposes, but later choices shape the course of the conflict with the alien invaders. For now, another tutorial-limited mission highlights the power of recently promoted Ben Reeves' rocket launcher (naturally, all my soldiers are named for Game Informer editors – see sidebar on p. 69) as XCOM's brave soldiers slowly creep through a midnight-blackened dock. The sky-ranger VTOL transport soon returns our wounded squad to base, where another round of upgrade decisions require the commander's attention before one of our national allies tips us off to an escaped alien abductee who needs rescuing.

This two-phase mission starts out like the others, with a small group of aliens waiting in the darkness for XCOM soldiers to discover them. The thin men we fight display a dangerous poison spit ability as soon as a squaddie moves into range, wounding her badly enough to force a retreat. Once the squad fights its way to the hostage at the other end of the map,

I take control of the escapee. The XCOM squad escorts her back to the skyranger, one piece of cover at a time to avoid messy deaths at the hands of the incoming aliens wielding energy weapons.

Upon returning to headquarters, XCOM's satellite coverage network picks up an airborne UFO ripe for interception. Sending an interceptor to engage the UFO in the sky above Germany is an easy choice, as I have two birds ready for launch, though later on XCOM's interception capabilities will be strained along with every other facet of the organization. Our jet fighter knocks the bogey down to relieved cheers at XCOM command, and the crash-landed UFO offers another mission for our ground troops. Strapping back into the skyranger, my soldiers once again fly off into the unknown.

Thankfully, only a fraction of the UFO's crew survived the crash. The dispatched soldiers gingerly pick their way past burning trees and flickering energy fields only to have a new alien type – the energy-based outsider – nearly one-shot Corporal Reeves with a previously unknown plasma weapon.

Back at base, the preset missions of the tutorial are behind us. From here on in, the gloves are off.

With the sectoid autopsy complete (which comes with a squishy little narrated cutscene), I'm presented with another priority objective. Dr. Vahlen thinks she can make an electric stun gun capable of immobilizing aliens if she were supplied with sufficient time and weapon fragments. The engineers can build a containment facility to house any captives for an expenditure of cash. Unfortunately for her master plan, I decide that we need advanced scopes to help our inexperienced squaddies actually hit the aliens they're shooting at.

Now that I have full control of the XCOM organization, it's time to spend the credits burning a hole in my bank account. Reeves

has reached the rank of sergeant, which unlocks the ability to spend a big chunk of money for a fifth slot during squad deployment. I set the engineers to start excavating additional caverns below ground, to be filled later with labs, workshops, and satellite uplinks to expand my research, fabrication, and interception capabilities. The few remaining credits go to purchasing a few medical kits for in-mission hit point restoration. The passage of time is paused while I make these decisions, and once all the money is gone I return to scanning for activity.

An uneventful (meaning every soldier gets wounded but nobody dies) mission passes while the research continues, getting my squaddies some more experience and enough cash to fabricate a couple of scopes to replace the frag grenades in two of my soldiers' accessory slots. The grenades – the basic accessory that XCOM has an unlimited supply of – are powerful, but Dr. Vahlen complained during the last outing about excessive use of explosives, which prevent the collection of the corpses and weapon fragments she needs to fuel her research. I keep one grenade equipped, though, because sometimes the choice is between getting squaddies killed and wrecking the salvage. In those cases, the doctor will just have to wait.

The handy scopes finished, I let Dr. Vahlen proceed with her stun gun research. This lets me capture aliens, but the guns need to be manufactured at non-trivial expense, equipped in a squaddie's accessory slot, and most importantly applied to a lethally dangerous live alien at close range. Sectoids are the weakest alien in the galaxy, but capturing even one of those grunt troops is tricky.

SETTING YOUR PRIORITIES

The priority objective system is the main narrative thread that weaves its way through XCOM: Enemy Unknown. Though you can't win the game without completing the entire chain, how you go about it is up to you. Few technologies are linked to any given objective; nearly the entire tree is available with sufficient time, weapon fragments, and alien corpses. Crucially, the alien invasion does not take your progress through the priority objective chain into account. The types of aliens that land, the frequency with which the aliens attack, and everything else happens on its own schedule and has nothing to do with your actions. It's up to you to keep up with the invasion's ever-increasing pace; the bad guys don't pull their punches.



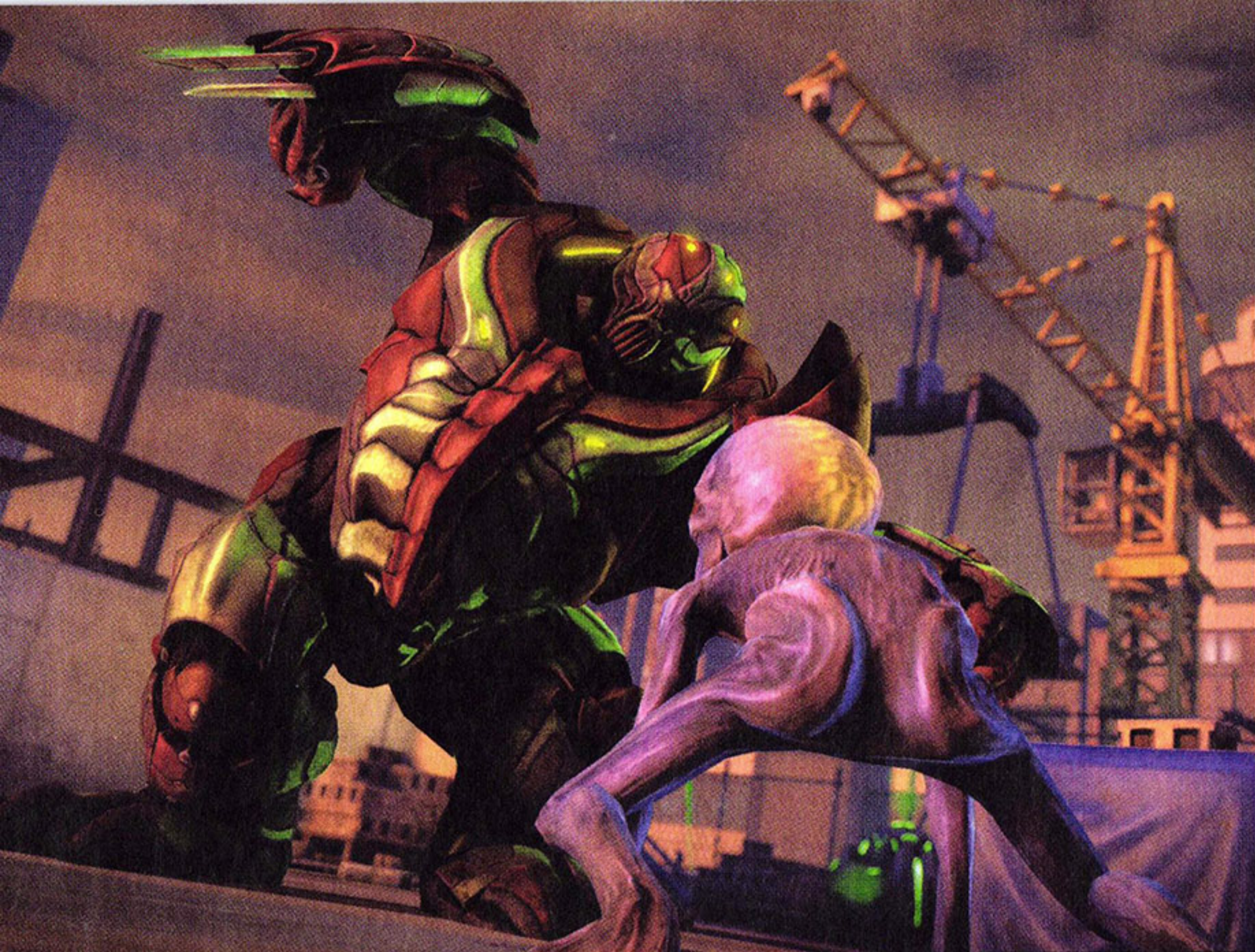
HEAVY ABILITIES

SQUADDIE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CORPORAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SERGEANT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LIEUTENANT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CAPTAIN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MAJOR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COLONEL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Fire Rocket
Fire a rocket using an equipped launcher. This ability cannot be used after moving, nor more than once per mission.

SKIPPING THE TUTORIAL

Those who would rather poke around on their own than have the game hold their hand can skip the tutorial entirely. Instead of the pre-set missions and dilemmas described above, you face randomized situations from the start. I played through a second time without the tutorial and was pleased to find that the game takes off running immediately, presenting maps and enemy force compositions I hadn't seen in my first game.



HARDER IS BETTER

You don't need to be a glutton for punishment to appreciate that XCOM's best qualities shine through most when it's more difficult.

Cranking up the difficulty (thankfully adjustable in either direction on the fly) ratcheted the tension up by an order of magnitude, and the fun factor skyrocketed along with it. Permanent death for soldiers lies at the heart of XCOM.

The knowledge that every action could lead to disaster turns this from an amusing sci-fi tactical RPG into something much greater. As much fun as flawlessly completing moderately tough missions is, pulling through impossible odds with two KIAs and two soldiers wounded so badly they won't be out of sickbay for three weeks makes the accomplishment all the sweeter.

A month of game time has passed, and the international Funding Council summons me to an ominous teleconference where they grade XCOM's performance. I haven't lost a mission yet, and the Council "couldn't be more pleased" with the results. That said, Australia has reached panic level three (at five the country pulls out of the XCOM project, permanently taking its funding, engineers, and scientists with it). XCOM is broke, and our best soldiers are laid up in sickbay with nasty wounds. The influx of cash the Council sends our way is immediately dumped into building out the efficiency-boosting workshops I had previously excavated space for – all the best equipment needs extraterrestrial alloys to create, and the workshops will stretch our dwindling supplies further.

The timed bomb defusal scenario in the next randomly generated mission presents a new look. I only have three rounds to get across an alien-infested Russian train platform and power down the bomb, but switching off alien power cells scattered across the map buys extra turns. Prioritizing those side objectives gives me plenty of time to get to the bomb, but spreading out to do so gets second-string squadmember Reiner killed. My second-best soldier gets herself killed in an ill-fated attempt to capture the last sectoid on the map, but another squaddie takes it alive and we are victorious once again.

Capturing aliens is relatively easy for now, with the stun gun's success rate based on hit points. Sectoids only have three HP to start with, which gives a 70 percent chance. Any more health drastically reduces the odds. As painful as losing Sgt. Wallace was, her sacrifice didn't just complete a priority objective – interrogating the sectoid gives our scientists new insights that permanently double the speed of all beam weapon research. Each alien species holds the secrets of a branch of the tech tree, so capturing one of each should be a top priority for any XCOM commander.

The interrogation complete (abstracted as a short research project), my priority becomes the capture of an outsider – the dangerous enemy type I have so far only encountered aboard the UFO I shot down. My scientists are now free to start the long process of developing laser weapons, though, which should prove to be huge upgrades over our conventional firearms. I choose to pursue precision

lasers, which can be adapted to sniper rifles and shotguns.

Clearing the next UFO I shoot down does not go according to plan. Head engineer Dr. Chen's advice lets me avoid getting anyone blown up by a stray shot hitting the alien power core, but Capt. Reeves' critical success on a reaction shot taken while on overwatch frags the outsider I was hoping to capture. That priority will just have to wait.

Another alien species makes its debut in the next mission, a week or so of game time later: the floater. XCOM's sniper extraordinaire, Capt. Miller, connects with a headshot despite its unnatural agility. Capturing one of these flying foes is not happening any time soon; our primitive stun guns are no use when they're floating 20 meters

above ground level.

Eventually, another UFO makes an appearance – except that this one has already landed, presumably with its entire crew intact. The resistance is predictably stiffer, but a good plan on my part (and the first laser weapons to hit the battlefield for the good guys) makes all the difference. Splitting my squad into two fireteams of three soldiers apiece proves effective, as bravo team counter-ambushes a troop of sectoids as they try to flank the point squad. The ranking XCOM support specialist,

Sgt. Reilly, carries the day with his ability to get three uses out of his medkit instead of the standard one. Even a perfectly executed textbook UFO infiltration entails a fair amount of plasma burns for frontline personnel.

The 2K Games representative cuts my playtime off as Dr. Vahlen is explaining the odd crystalline structure of the shard at the outsider's core, which apparently resembles some kind of antenna. Delving deeper into the aliens' secrets will have to wait.



COMMANDING THE ALIEN MENACE

2K recently revealed XCOM: Enemy Unknown's multiplayer offerings, and I've experienced both sides of the swift beatdowns that players can inflict on each other in the game's only mode: one-on-one deathmatches between fully customized squads of XCOM soldiers, aliens, or both. Multiplayer works just like a regular mission, with teams alternating turns and highly lethal attacks quickly cutting down any exposed unit.

Before the match starts, each player builds their squad from any mix of units that they can fit into the point budget set for the round. A high budget makes for a long game with multiple elite units on each side, while a lower value constrains players to a few moderate-to-weak units.

The fog of war is as integral to multiplayer as it is to single-player. You have no idea how your opponent has configured her squad, and flanking and lines of sight are more important when facing a human mind. Scouting and making sure your squad is covering each other are paramount, even more so than when playing against the AI in the campaign.

Multiplayer is noteworthy solely for being able to control the aliens for once. With no real persistence or structure beyond standalone deathmatches, and the propensity for a single wrong move or bad roll of the dice to determine the outcome, XCOM's multiplayer looks like a neat diversion, not a destination mode.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

XCOM has many facets. We already knew that some of them worked well from previous showings of the game – the tactical combat, the interface for XCOM's secret base, and the presentation were all on display at E3 in June. A few open questions remain, like how terror missions and narrative-driven "tentpole" scenarios are handled, but this session answered several of my concerns.



Above all, the one thing that stands out from my playtime is the constant drumbeat of hard choices facing the player both in and out of combat. The huge rewards for capturing aliens pushes you to take risks you otherwise wouldn't, as evidenced by Sgt. Wallace's brave sacrifice. Many of the alien incursions force a choice between helping one country or another, and those decisions have ripple effects hours down the road as you fight to keep nations from dropping out of the XCOM project. Deploying satellites and filling hangars around the world with interceptors is extremely expensive and does nothing to help out your soldiers on the ground, but can be the best investment of all as fewer and fewer aliens slip by to terrorize the world's population. The research tree is amazingly broad, offering several techs with drastically different effects at any time.

I didn't get far into the game, but I was already being pulled in several directions and had a fraction of the resources necessary to undertake every project that caught my eye. Choosing what to invest in has a huge effect on how a playthrough shapes up, and if Firaxis can make it so there are few if any "right" answers to any given situation, I can easily see losing hundreds (yes, hundreds) of hours in XCOM: Enemy Unknown when it comes out on October 9. ♦



R.I.P. GAME INFORMER EDITORS

Though XCOM soldiers don't have any personalities of their own, renaming them as friends, family, and co-workers makes for great stories – even if the player's imagination has to supply some of the flavor for their adventures. Here are the notable battlefield performances of Game Informer editors in the Great Invasion:

ANDREW REINER

Survived first two engagements with minimal combat distinction. Directly after being promoted to heavy specialization after being wounded in the second, Reiner badly flubbed an open shot on a flanked sectoid. Turning around, said sectoid scattered bits of Reiner across multiple square meters of a Russian train platform.

BEN "BIG GUY" REEVES

Carried XCOM squad through initial contact with alien forces through commendable bravery and exceptional marksmanship. Promoted to heavy specialization, Reeves attained the rank of major while leading every major XCOM ground operation. Notable actions include scoring a quad-kill with his personal rocket launcher, sustaining fire through multiple plasma burns to buy Capt. Miller time to pick off enemies from cover, and generally inserting his boot into the nearest alien orifice no matter the consequences.

JOHN "STACHS" REILLY

Promoted to support role following early engagement with sectoid hostiles in which Reilly saved Maj. Reeves and Sgt. Wallace by braving enemy fire to throw a grenade between three sectoids. Reilly's expertise with the standard-issue XCOM medikit saved several squaddies from lethal injury, notably Pvt. Kato and Sgt. Hilliard each on multiple occasions, throughout XCOM operations.

KITTYBEELEY LULLFACE

Held down the front line from day one of XCOM's existence with unquestioned bravery in the face of certain death. Said death eventually came in Sgt. Wallace's fifth mission, when she stoically followed orders to hold fire on a nearby enemy pursuant to an XCOM directive to capture the hostile alive. She is missed by her commander and squadmates alike.

MATTHEW "LONGSHOT" MILLER

Along with Maj. Reeves, Capt. Miller is responsible for the most confirmed fatalities out of all XCOM operatives. When Dr. Vahlen offered the opportunity to pursue multiple options for applying laser technology to handheld human weaponry, Capt. Miller's growing expertise with sniper rifles made the decision simple.

JEFF CORK

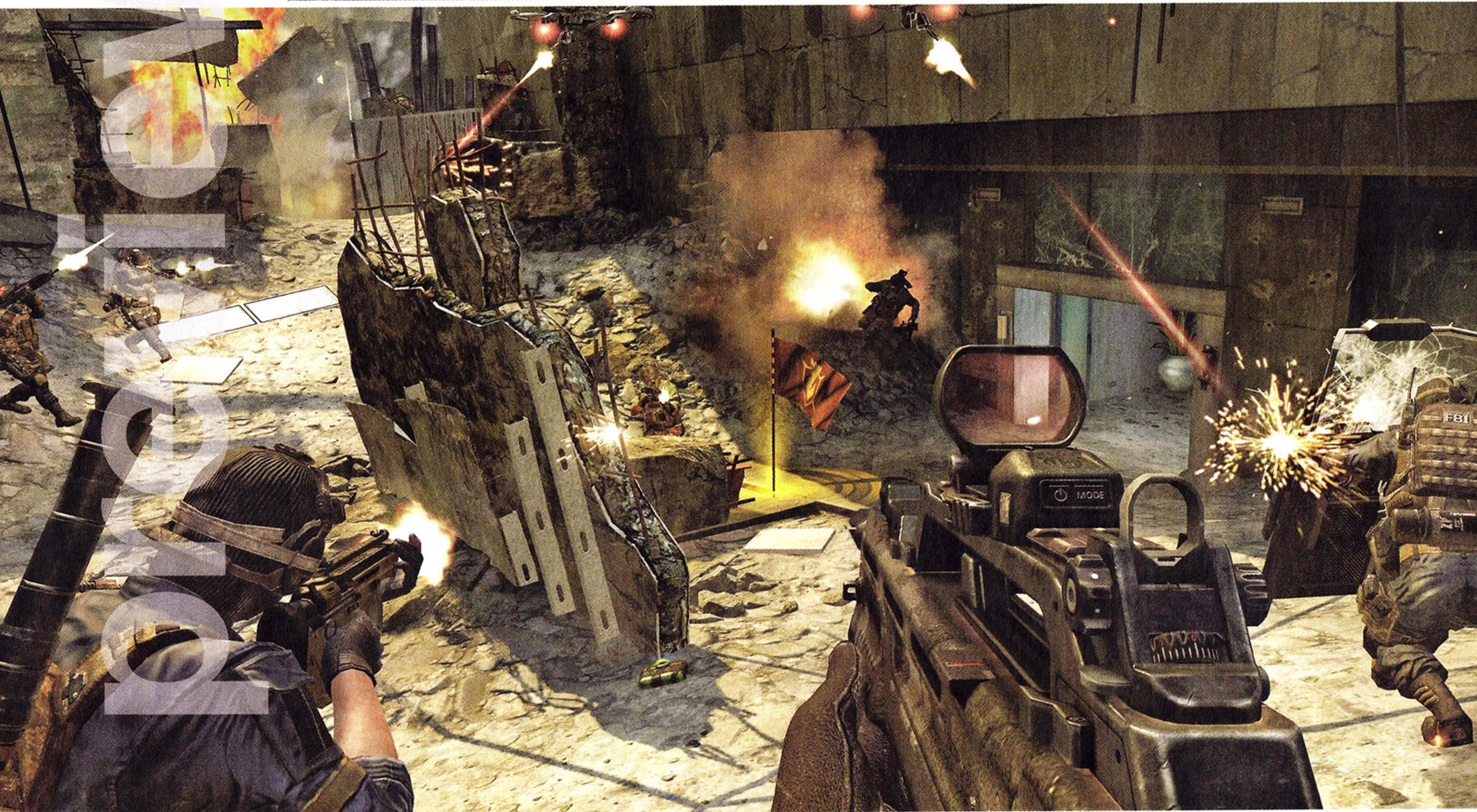
Cpl. Cork's contributions to the XCOM effort upon being recruited to fill the deceased Sgt. Wallace's spot on the front line are not to be minimized, but his efforts remain a pale shadow of Sgt. Wallace's heroism. Cpl. Cork's unquestioning application of stunning electrical discharges to alien bodies at close range will be viewed favorably in his annual review.

MATTHEW KATO

Suspected of embellishing complications from wounds sustained in action, Pvt. Kato is still considered a rookie despite taking part in several XCOM operations. While Maj. Reeves shrugged off multiple plasma burns while maintaining position, Pvt. Kato fled to heavy cover after being winged by a single shot on three separate occasions. His complaining about Reeves' heavy carapace armor and nanoweave vest were deemed "unsatisfactory" by command. Pvt. Kato has spent nearly four full weeks in sickbay as of this writing.

RYLE HILLIARD

Recently promoted to the rank of sergeant, Hilliard made the most of his many opportunities on the battlefield while Pvt. Kato lay in sickbay. Despite seemingly suffering the majority of the wounds dealt to XCOM soldiers in every operation he has taken part in, Sgt. Hilliard has never complained about the undeniably painful application of XCOM medikit field remedies he so often requires. Hilliard has more than once eliminated an enemy that had just badly wounded him.



Call of Duty: Black Ops II

Waging war in multiplayer

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

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

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Treyarch

» **Release**
November 13

Treyarch's games have always dealt with wars of the past, but now the studio is using Black Ops II's jump to the near future as an opportunity to make some changes to multiplayer. The team has made some significant tweaks to fundamental elements of the series, including character customization and killstreaks. We played four new maps to see how these changes affect the bottom line.

Yemen is arguably the most traditional Call of Duty map that we played. It's a relatively tight map set in an urban Middle Eastern environment. Here, I'm able to play the new Hardpoint mode. If you've ever played a king of the hill mode in an FPS before, you have a good sense of what you're up against here. Players race to take control of an outlined area, slowly filling up a meter as they defend it. Once it's taken, the zone moves to another location, and the

cycle continues.

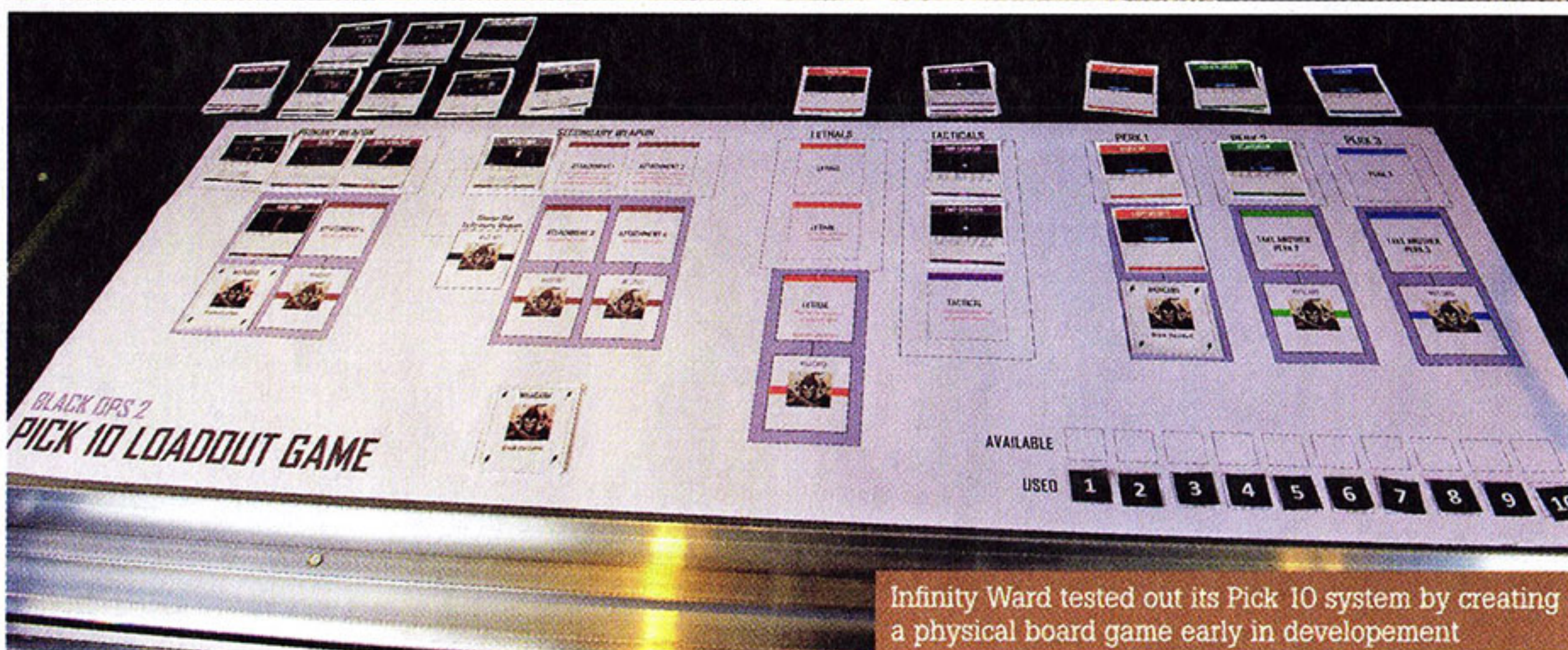
This map is a great showcase for Hardpoint, and the mode highlights the map's variety – something that seems a little counterintuitive considering its focus on alleyways and buildings. For instance, the Hardpoint occasionally pops up in an open market area. The shop stalls provide a decent amount of cover during battles, but I'm generally left feeling exposed. Another point I see a few times is inside a building overlooking that same market area. This spot is much easier to defend, though attackers aren't completely powerless. A doorway and open window are ripe for grenade trick shots, which are typically quite effective unless defenders take cover behind a prominent column in the room.

Yemen provides one of the most memorable moments from my session. I walk into an alley right as an opponent tosses a smoke grenade. In previous games, I know this situation wouldn't

have ended well. Fortunately, my Millimeter Wave Scanner provides an outline of the offender as he blindly fires in my direction. I'm able to pinpoint him quickly and score an easy 100 points.

The Turbine map is also set in Yemen, but it's completely different in both geography and features. Turbine is set in a wind farm, with the remains of crashed aircraft scattered nearby. The rocky terrain features numerous hiding spots, ledges, and tunnels. Treyarch stated that this was the most open of the maps on display at Gamescom, but it doesn't necessarily feel that way.

This map serves as the venue for a multi-team death match. In multi-team matches, players can choose between six different factions in any combination. In this session, teams are split into four groups of three. The death-matches are functionally identical to previous



Infinity Ward tested out its Pick 10 system by creating a physical board game early in development



deathmatches, with one main difference: There are more bad guys to shoot at. It's interesting to see each team's tactics (or lack thereof) in action. Some trios split up and lone-wolf it. Others stick together in roving bands. Teams who coordinate their actions are definitely more effective. This match is also where I see my first uber-weapon, the Death Machine. The portable Gatling gun chews me up more times than I'd like to admit.

Of the four maps I played throughout the evening, Cargo was my favorite. The setting isn't especially interesting – a seaside dock in Singapore, filled with cranes and cargo containers – but I love the way it's incorporated into gameplay. Throughout matches, cranes lift individual crates or set them down. That camping spot you've learned to love? It might not still be around if you make a quick lap around the map. There are also a few crane-control stations, which make great sniper perches. I'm able to hold one position for a while after dropping a shock charge on the staircase behind me for insurance. When an enemy inevitably charges me, he's temporarily incapacitated by the non-lethal electric shock. Well, it's nonlethal by itself.

You're immobilized by the charge, and you can imagine how that scenario is likely to play out.

Aftermath is the last of the four maps in the rotation, set in the aftermath (get it?!) of a drone attack in Los Angeles. The area is appropriately ruined, with buildings missing entire faces, and emergency vehicles dotting the landscape. As with Turbine, the level features a fair amount of verticality. I enjoy a memorable domination match in this map.

As I bound toward each of the three zones, doing my best to either capture positions or defend the ones we have, I'm struck by how well the map is designed. I didn't run into any dead ends or frustrating choke points. Instead, areas flow into the next, featuring alternate paths that seem to anticipate my intentions. My appreciation for the level design didn't guarantee any kind of victory (we lost in a heartbreaking 196-200 squeaker), but it made the loss much more palatable.

Overall, the evening was a lot of fun, filled with victories and losses. That's ultimately what Call of Duty has been about, and even with the significant tweaks Treyarch is making, that doesn't seem to be changing any time soon. » **Jeff Cork**

More Flexible Loadouts and Leveling

Call of Duty's create-a-class system has allowed players to tweak loadouts in a variety of ways, but the new Pick 10 system takes things even further. Everyone gets 10 points to distribute however they'd like. This includes enough to choose the standard primary and secondary weapons, attachments, perks, and grenades. Now you have the option to cut out any and all of these to free up points to devote elsewhere.

New wildcards take up a point as well, but they enable powerful new options like adding additional attachments to guns, allowing more perks, equipping two primary weapons, and carrying more grenade types. It's even possible to clear out all your weapons and load up on six different perks, counting on guns lying around the environment to get you through. It's not the most viable strategy, but it shows how absolutely flexible the new system can be. We're looking forward to seeing what other wild combinations people come up with once the game's out in the wild.

As always, players need to level up in multiplayer to unlock more of these loadout items. Instead of relying solely on killstreaks, however, Black Ops II now focuses on score streaks. This still includes kill streaks under its umbrella, but it also adds weight to performing well in objective-based modes. Now you get points for nabbing the flag and earn double points for any kills made while holding it. Basically, as long as you're helping your team win at the designated mode, you earn more experience. Developer Treyarch dubs the core of the score streak system as "rewarding desirable gameplay." Players can level up to 55 and prestige 10 times. Treyarch is promising over 100 different unlocks, so it'll take quite a while to get everything. » **Bryan Vore**

A New eSports Focus

Powerful tools for shoutcasters and prospective live streamers are part of a big push to make Call of Duty: Black Ops II a top-tier eSports title. Professional and amateur shoutcasters (or "CODcasters" as Activision refers to them) can take control of their broadcast to a much greater degree than simply choosing which player's eyes to look through. While commenting on a match, or patching through a team's voice communications to viewers, casters can bring up a larger tactical map and a detail-rich picture-in-picture display. The map shows where every player is on a 2D overhead view and notes whether they're minimap-visible to opponents. The picture-in-picture view presents a snapshot of current scores, killstreaks, and objective statuses like who is carrying the flag. At all times, a scoreboard keeps track in the top-middle of the screen, while a prominent nameplate occupies the lower-left corner any time the broadcast is following a specific player.

Built-in livestreaming works hand in hand with improved shoutcasting tools. Any player with the requisite upstream bandwidth can livestream a multiplayer match of Black Ops II, optionally including a USB camera view of (presumably) his or her own face. The stream is viewable on any device that can view a standard video stream, including iPad (which we saw in action).

These improvements are great news for eSports fans, but they come with some limitations. The CODcasting feature only works for custom games and local play live; league play (the new matchmaking system) and public match games can only be casted with the new tools by doing so over a theater replay. Live streaming will be limited by Activision's own network capacity and meeting an unspecified minimum number of viewers. In fact, live streaming is unlikely to make it for launch though it looks like the casting tools are in for sure. Additionally, live streaming only works for league play. Neither feature will be compatible with the co-op Strikeforce mode or single-player campaign. » **Adam Biessener**



Remember Me

Three things to remember about Dontnod's memory-mixing debut

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

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Dontnod
Entertainment

» **Release**
May 2013

Remember Me is a third-person action game set in a futuristic Paris, where people can record and share their memories. The game's heroine, Nilin, has the unique ability to remix peoples' memories, altering the way they recall events in ways that benefit her. At Gamescom, Capcom revealed that it is publishing this debut title from Dontnod Entertainment.

We see an impressive sequence that illustrates how Nilin's ability works. She enters the memories of a character named Forlan in an adventure game-like scenario, changing how he recalls a fight with his wife. After a few failed attempts (after the player selects a variety of objects in the room), Nilin persuades Forlan that he killed his wife in an argument. Forlan, now convinced he committed a crime, kills himself after he thinks the police are on to him. The scene ends with the police and his wife discovering his body, seconds after he dies.

We sat down with Remember Me's creative lead, Jean-Maxime Moris, and got answers to a few nagging questions. Here are three things about the game that you should try not to forget.

Nilin isn't necessarily a killer

In the demo, we see Nilin battling enemies with flurries of acrobatic kicks and punches, culminating in what appear to be finishing moves. Is she a stone-cold killer in addition to being a gifted memory hacker? Nope. "Basically what she does is she overloads their memories," Moris says. She uses a spammer, a device that tunes into ambient data, to jumble up and erase her opponents' memories. "They're left on the ground, but they don't die. They'll get up eventually – they might have forgotten their fifth birthday or who they're married to, but they'll get

up eventually. It was a conscious choice to not have death as a recurring event in the game." Moris says he's not against violence in games, but believes that when it's not meaningful there's no use in relying on it.

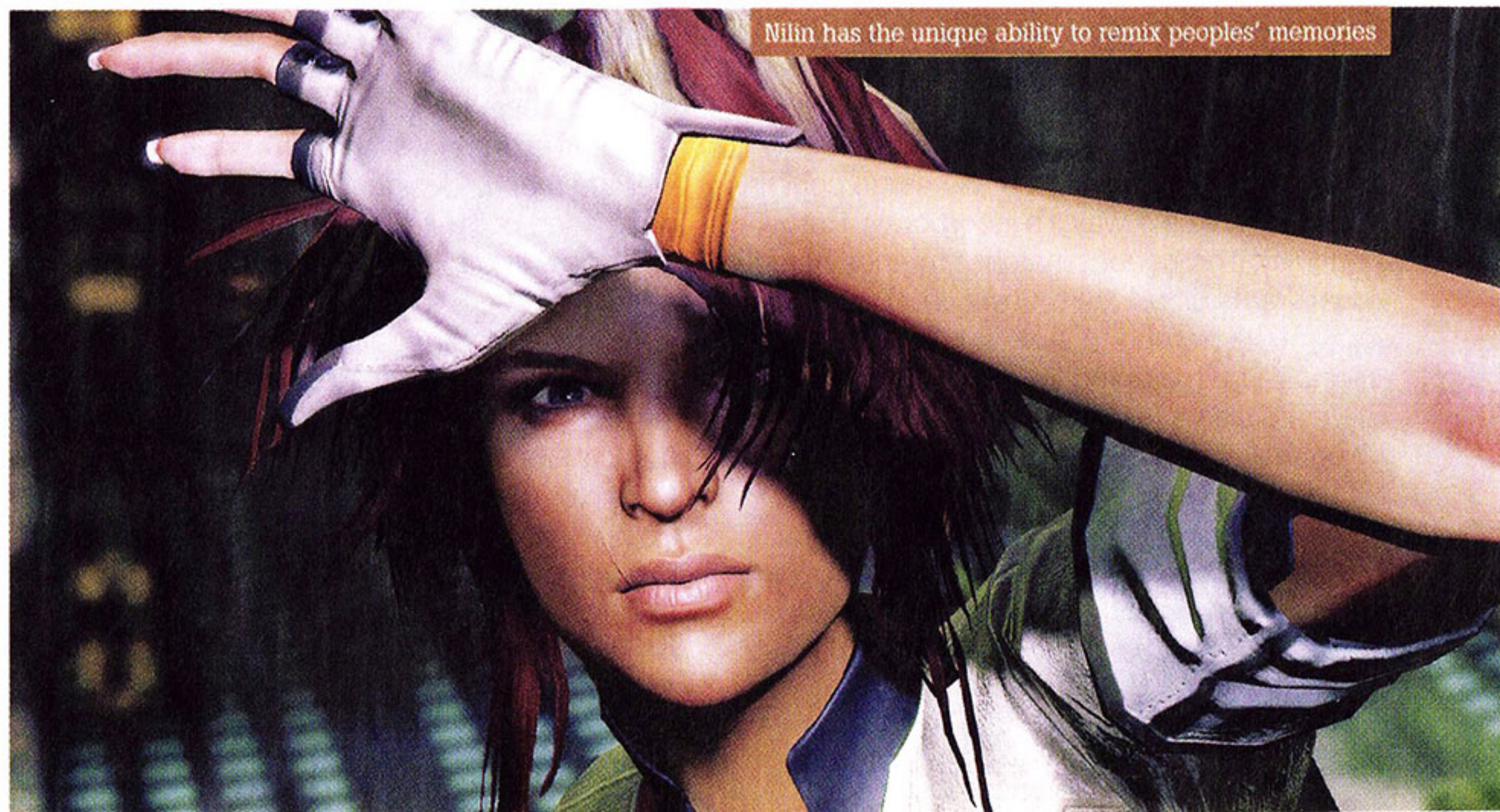
Memoreyes isn't a cartoonish villain

The company that built the technology to record and share memories, Memoreyes, has the potential to be portrayed as overtly sinister. That's not the route the team is going. Moris likens the memory-recording tech to the advent of TV and smartphones – advances that people have accepted and adopted on their own. "[Memoreyes is] not viewed as the bad guys in the game," Moris says. "The way people will be depicted in the game will be happy people sharing their memories and having access to knowledge and sensorial experiences." That perpetual bliss wouldn't necessarily translate to an interesting story. Judging from the demo, the possibility of the tech being used for less-than-altruistic

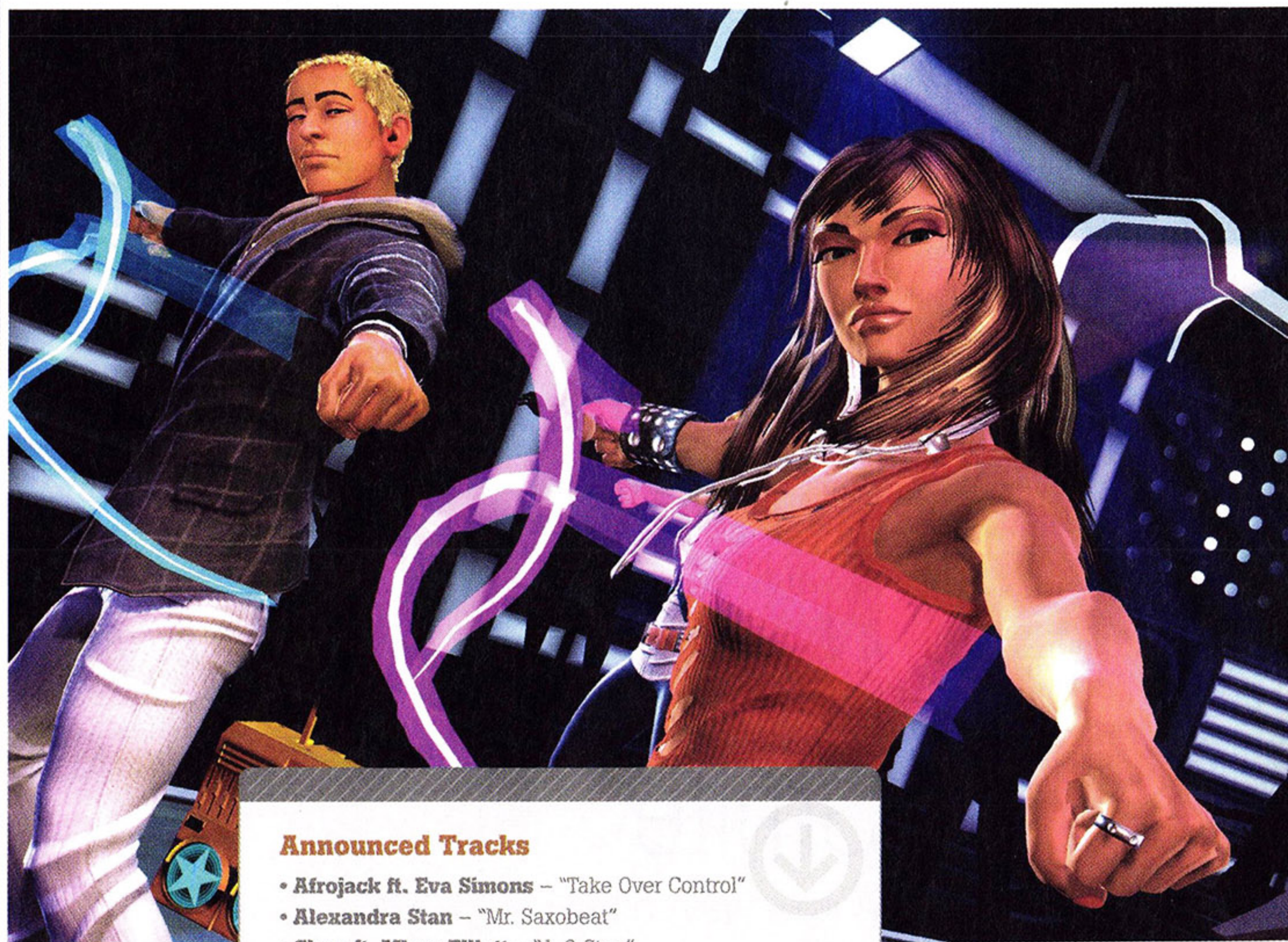
purposes appears to be quite real. Just don't expect any Snidely Whiplash-style mustache twirling from the suits at Memoreyes.

Memory segments aren't going to be tedious

During the video presentation, we saw Nilin figure out how to implant memories through trial and error. Each time she failed to get the intended outcome – not turning off the safety on a pistol, for instance – the scene rewound and Nilin tried again. Players have control of the rewind and fast-forward abilities in the memory world, which solves a key issue with adventure games. Where's the fun in experimentation when you have to repeatedly perform the same steps in a puzzle? If you figure out the beginning setup of a puzzle and fail, you can simply rewind to the point just before your mistake. Moris says his team was inspired by the way the PS3 video player can fast-forward and rewind footage using the Sixaxis controller. » **Jeff Cork**



Nilin has the unique ability to remix peoples' memories



Dance Central 3

Traveling through time to fight dance crimes

Dance Central has always been about dancing, and stealthily taking pictures of your friends while they make awkward poses. This time around Dance Central is adding another focus: story.

The series has never been short on characters, containing a roster comparable to fighting games of assorted dancers each with their own distinct personalities. In Dance Central 3, these characters are getting some context for their dancing, and it involves joining Dance Central Intelligence (DCI) to fight an evil dancing genius who is building an army of dancers with mind-control helmets. In order to defeat him, you and the dance crews established in Dance Central 2 have to travel through time to collect the dance crazes of past eras to end dance crime throughout the world. You'll be traveling to the past to learn the YMCA, The Hustle, The Macarena, The Electric Slide, and many others.

A huge collection of modern dance tunes complements the classic tracks. Players can import all the music from Dance Central 1 and 2 into Dance Central 3, and all the DLC purchased from either game is automatically available. By the time the game releases, just under 200 songs will be available, with more coming all the time through DLC.

The storyline adds context to the single-player game, but having fun and dancing is still Dance Central's main objective. Party Time Mode is being added to Dance Central 3 with the dance party atmosphere in mind. With this new mode you can let the game run on auto-pilot, allowing people to easily jump in and out of the game as they please, even if they aren't too familiar with Dance Central. You can pre-program a playlist or control the songs via SmartGlass, which

allows you to connect most tablet devices wirelessly to your Xbox 360. With Party Time all set up, all people have to do is step to the Kinect, high-five one another, and the dancing begins.

There is also a new mode that may appeal to people who don't necessarily want to dance to music, but do enjoy striking awkward poses. With Strike A Pose, characters are shown a series of stationary poses that must be emulated. If you've played Dance Central or its sequel, you will recognize these as the poses that must be struck at the finale of a song. If you are hitting all the poses, you get point bonuses and a chance to rest every few poses. If you're doing poorly, it continuously throws poses at you until everyone in the room is laughing with you, not at you.

Make Your Move, another new mode, is like the game of Horse, except you must repeat your partner's dance move instead of their basketball shot. A suggestion pops up saying something like "do a funky move," which you can totally ignore. You have to perform your move four times in order for the dance move to count, and then your opponent attempts to repeat it. At the end of the game, all the moves created between you and your partner must be performed together in a montage as one last bid for points.

Crew Throwdown offers multiplayer for the committed Dance Central players. Up to eight

Announced Tracks

- Afrojack ft. Eva Simons – "Take Over Control"
- Alexandra Stan – "Mr. Saxobeat"
- Ciara ft. Missy Elliott – "1, 2 Step"
- Daft Punk – "Around The World"
- Dev ft. The Cataracts – "Bass Down Low"
- Enur ft. Natasja – "Calabria 2008"
- Martin Solveig ft. Dragonette – "Hello"
- The Trammps – "Disco Inferno"
- 50 Cent – "In Da Club"
- Cali Swag District – "Teach Me How to Dougie"
- Cobra Starship ft. Sabi – "You Make Me Feel ..."
- E.U. – "Da' Butt"
- Edward Maya & Vika Jigulina – "Stereo Love"
- Gloria Gaynor – "I Will Survive"
- Marcia Griffiths – "Electric Boogie"
- Usher ft. Will.I.Am – "OMG"
- Usher – "Scream"
- Van McCoy – "The Hustle"
- 2NE1 – "I Am The Best (Original Version)"
- Alice Deejay – "Better Off Alone"
- Backstreet Boys – "Everybody (Backstreet's Back)"
- J.J. Fad – "Supersonic"
- Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz ft. Ying Yang Twins – "Get Low"
- LMFAO – "Sexy And I Know It"
- Los Del Rio – "Macarena (Bayside Boys Mix)"
- Maroon 5 ft. Christina Aguilera – "Moves Like Jagger"
- Vanilla Ice – "Ice Ice Baby"
- Vicki Sue Robinson – "Turn The Beat Around"
- Village People – "Y.M.C.A."

» **Platform**
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player
Rhythm/Music

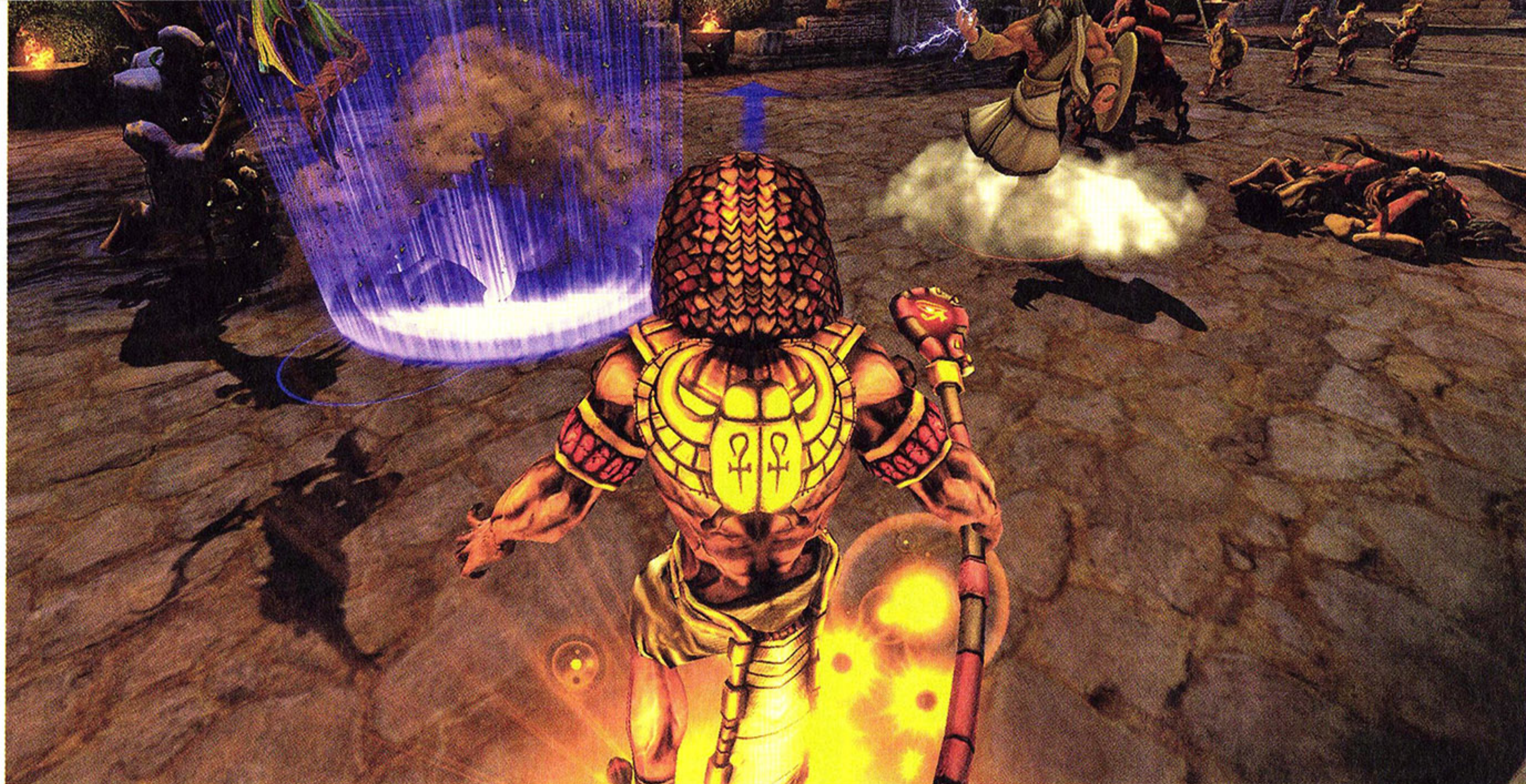
» **Publisher**
Microsoft Studios

» **Developer**
Harmonix

» **Release**
October 16

players can form up to four two-person dance crews. The Kinect snaps everyone's picture, and then pits everyone against one another. It's a longer game with lots of interesting opportunities to get points outside of simply dancing well. Harmonix describes it as the Mario Party of Dance Central.

The story behind Dance Central 3 is weird and absurd, but it's perfect for a game that's all about dancing. The additional modes open up the game to every level of dancer or non-dancer making the game more accessible to everyone who just wants to gesticulate wildly in front of a television. » **Kyle Hilliard**



Smite

A new way to look at MOBAs

- » **Platform**
PC
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
(10-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Hi-Rez Studios
- » **Developer**
Hi-Rez Studios
- » **Release**
2013



Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBAs) are incredibly popular with budget-minded gamers and professionals alike. Titles like League of Legends and Heroes of Newerth offer free-to-play, real-time action strategy to anyone with a half-decent PC. MOBAs involve leveling powerful hero units, working with teammates, and deploying minions to destroy the competition's shrine. The traditional overhead view of the map allows for a god-like perspective, but distances players from the immediate action. Smite maintains the MOBA metagame while shifting the view to a third-person perspective to pump up the intensity.

The Smite beta map I played consists of three lanes connecting two bases. Each is riddled with area-defending towers, marching minions, and intertwining paths. Lush jungle lines either side, filled with creeps players can kill to gain experience and buffs. This is the same basic premise MOBA fans have experienced since Defense of the Ancients, the Warcraft III mod that started it all. It's all about managing lanes and adjusting to the ebb and flow of battle. A detailed minimap and tons of preset team commands are available for communication, but Smite unfortunately lacks built-in voice chat.

Instead of pointing and clicking to control your hero as in most MOBAs, in Smite players use the mouse and keyboard like a PC action game. Controlling your hero and selecting abilities reminds me of playing an MMO. Specifically, dodging area of effect spells and orienting your characters in front of enemies for melee attacks should be familiar to World of Warcraft players. Skill-based attacks mix things up, requiring players to aim and time a powder keg toss, for example.

A MOBA is only as good as its heroes, and Smite delivers all-stars from five pantheons of mythology: Greek, Norse, Chinese, Indian, and Egyptian. You can control everyone from Odin and Zeus to Anubis and the multi-limbed Kali.

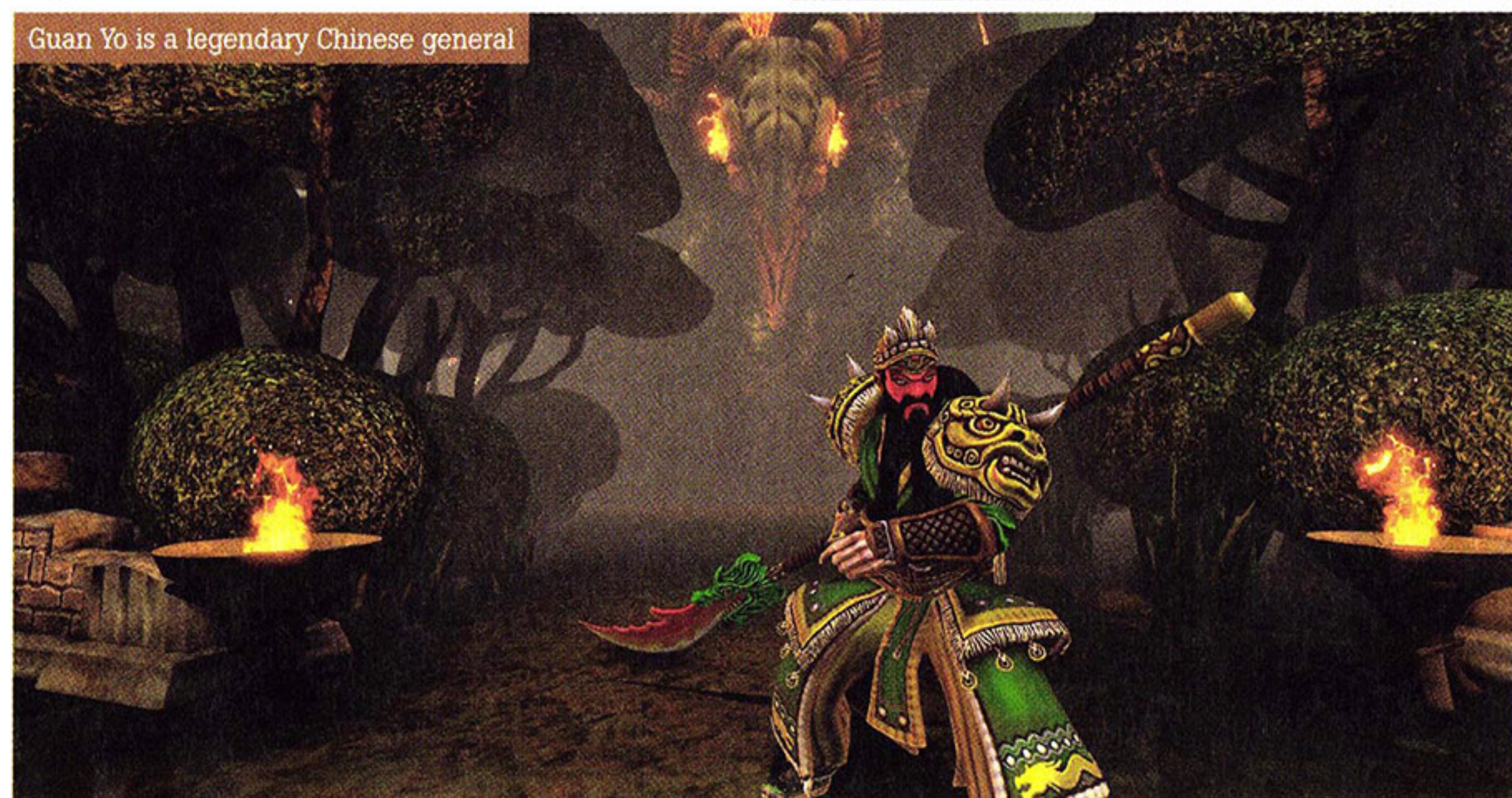
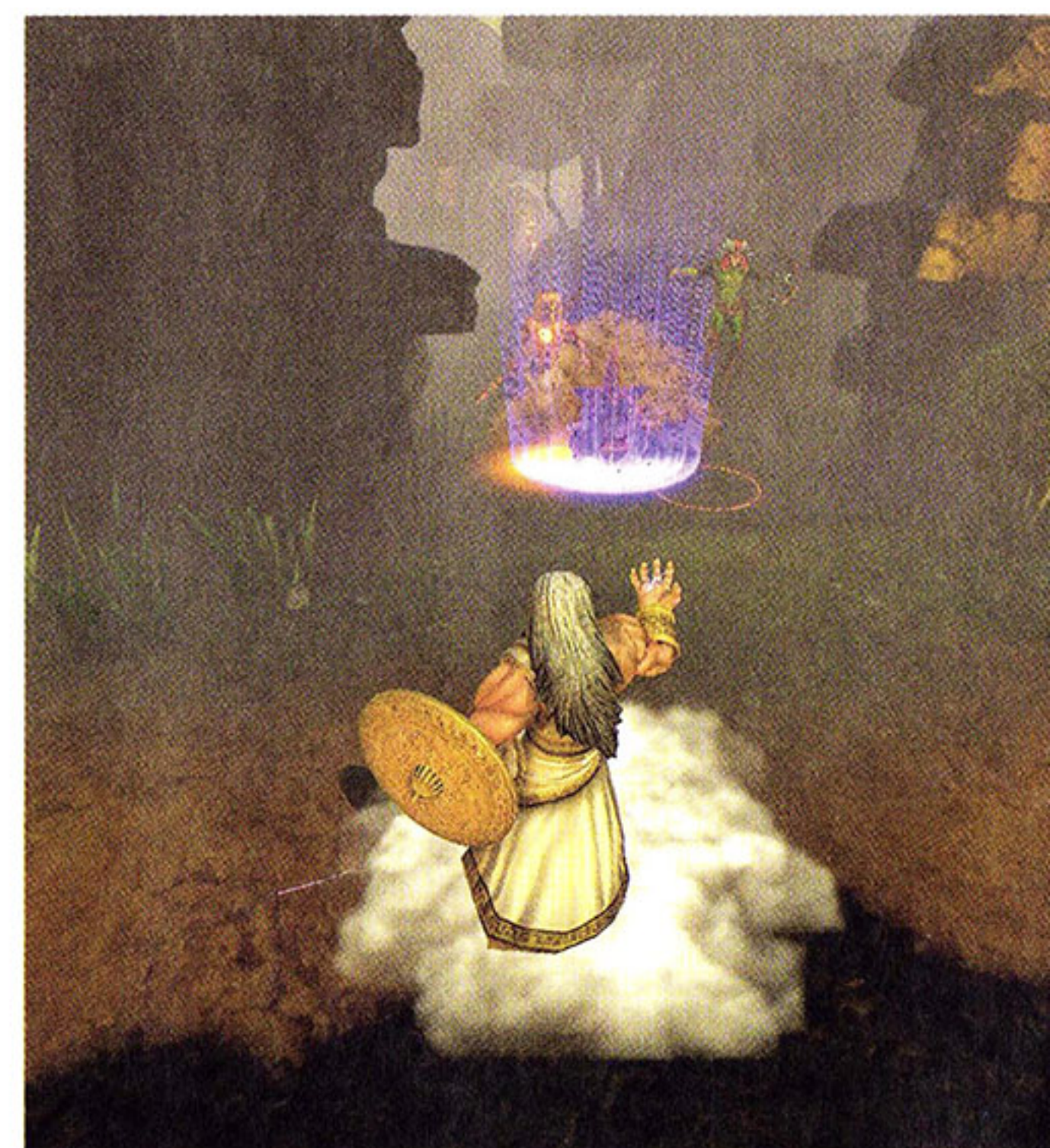
I chose Ra, the falcon-headed Egyptian sun god. Ra harnesses solar power to devastate foes from a distance. His celestial beam attack deals damage in a straight line, perfect for dispatching marching lines of minions. The divine light ability causes light to emanate from him, slowing nearby enemies for a quick escape. Due to Ra's squishiness as a ranged unit, fleeing is often necessary. Thankfully, his passive ability grants him increased movement speed for each ability used.

Controlling Ra helped me get used to the overall flow of combat. Sticking close to groups of fresh minions helps keep attention off you, and Ra's healing ability grants the protective NPCs extended life. Ra is great at taking out swaths of enemy minions, a duty I adhered to for the sake of the team. Despite my less glamorous task, I still assassinated a few player-controlled enemy gods with Ra's ultimate attack, an amplified version of the celestial beam ability. I could spend dozens of matches discovering and mastering the nuances of Ra, and he's only one in a cast of 30 playable gods.

Smite has a lot to offer both MOBA fanatics and gamers unfamiliar with the genre. For MOBA vets, the zoomed-in perspective resurrects the thrill of being jumped by a pack of enemy heroes emerging from the jungle. For newcomers, the familiar third-person view reduces the overwhelming feeling of watching a big map bustling

with units. Given the game's free-to-play nature, you're at zero risk for giving the game a shot. If you do get hooked, Hi-Rez Studios will be rolling out plenty of skins and gods to buy both individually or in packs. » **Tim Turi**

Head to gameinformer.com/mag for a chance to win access to Smite's closed beta



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Dead Island: Riptide

A new adventure on a new island

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

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

» **Publisher**
Deep Silver

» **Developer**
Techland

» **Release**
TBA



Deep Silver's *Dead Island* was the surprise hit of last year, so we were excited to get a look at its followup, *Dead Island: Riptide*. Developer Techland explained a handful of new mechanics and abilities for this follow-up in a demonstration of a frantic defense mission at Gamescom in Cologne, Germany. Whether you start a new survivor or import your existing character into this extension of the *Dead Island* universe, you're able to play with your friends and see everything that *Dead Island: Riptide* has to offer.

Taken from an indeterminate point in the early part of the game, the mission on display has four players cooperating to enter a series of catacombs under a ruined church. The tunnels are flooded, so the players have to scrounge up a huge pump to gain entry – and stockpile a cache of heavy weapons to defend against the zombie onslaught the cacophony of pumping is sure to trigger.

Riptide takes place directly after the original game, and the dreaded monsoon has hit and left this island much wetter than in the first. The boat trip through the jungle on the way to the catacombs shows off the dramatically improved water effects Techland has created. The developer at the controls steers the craft while a second player takes her position at

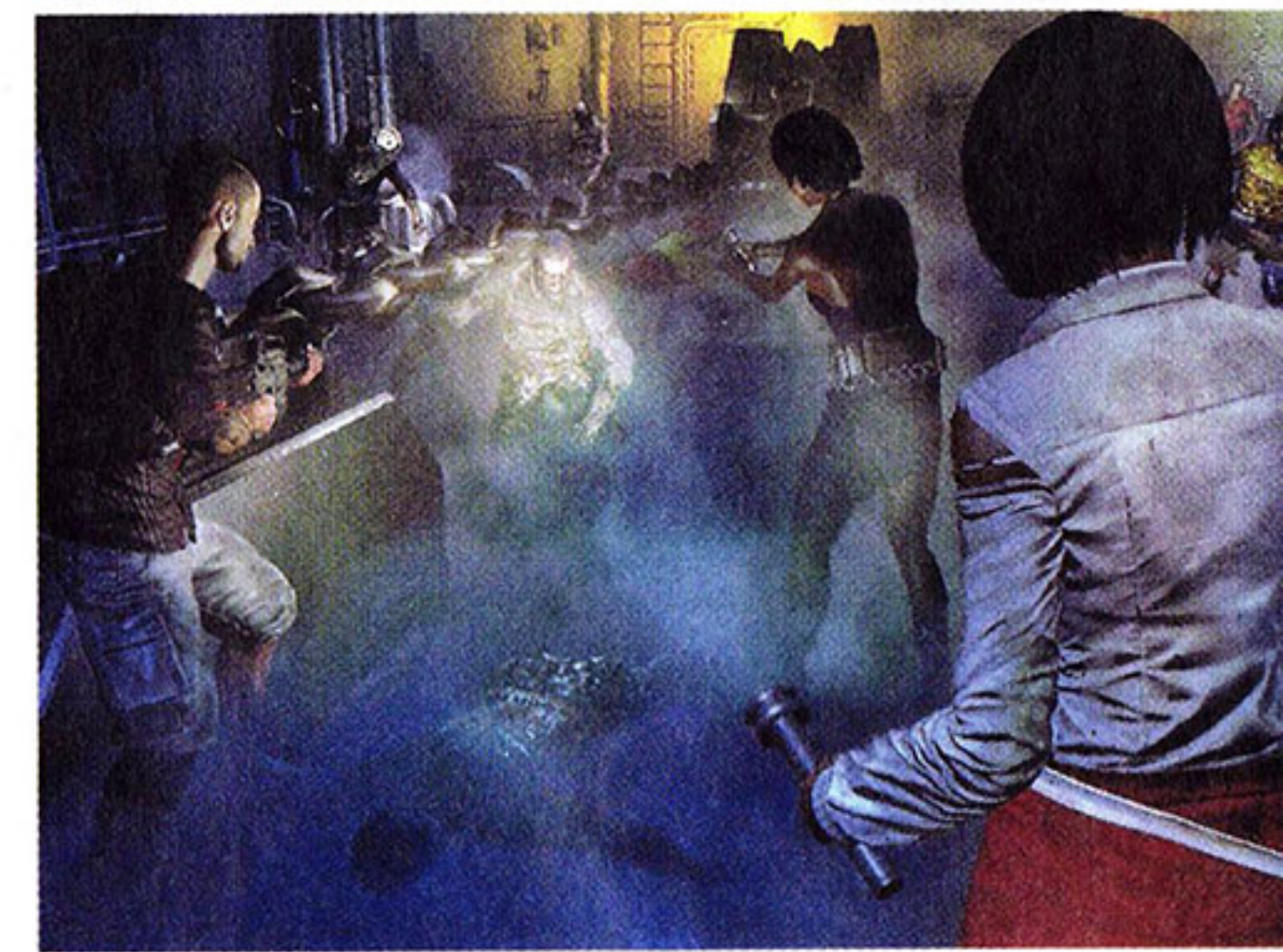
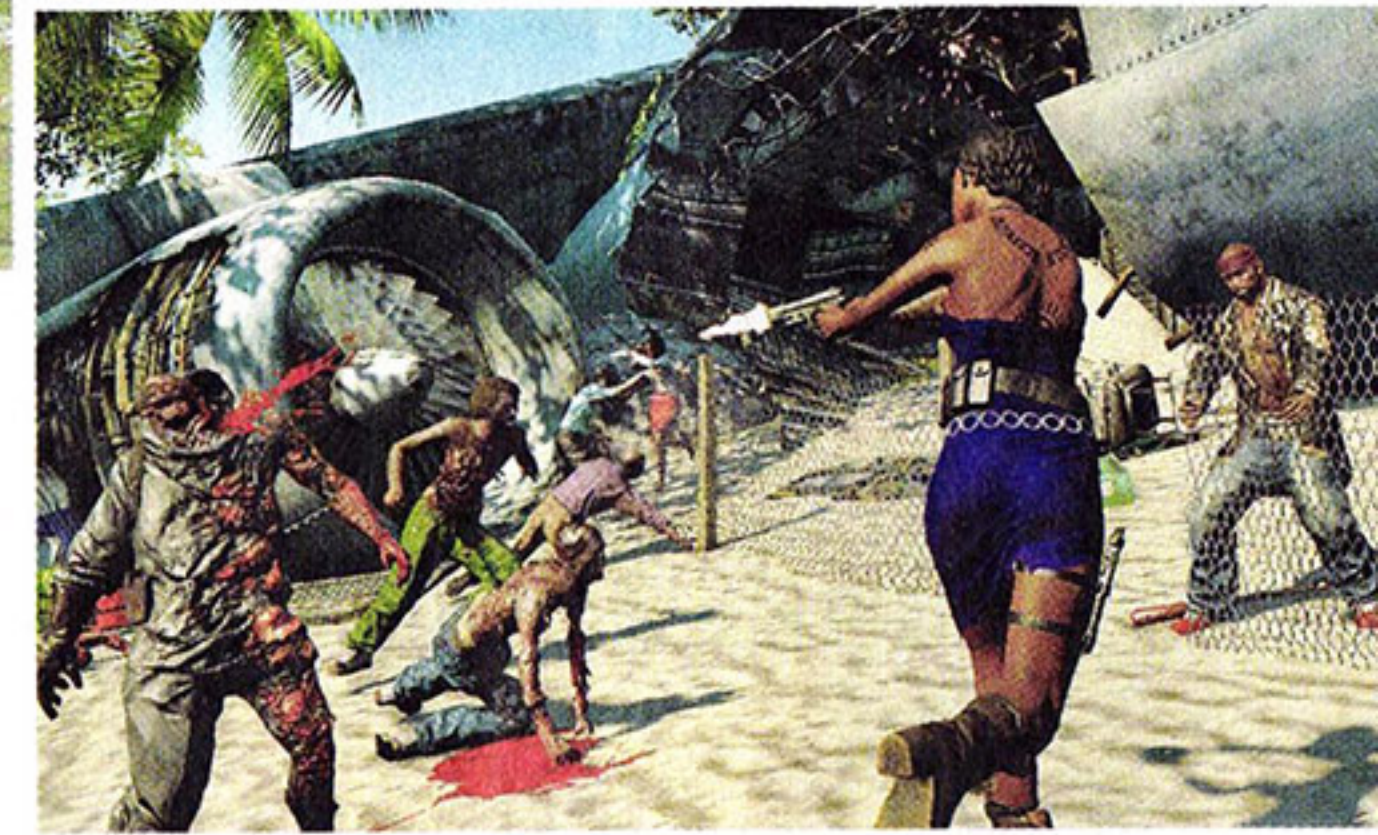
the side of the boat, ready to smack down any zombies who try to climb on.

The journey passes peacefully, and our heroes lug the heavy machine guns to mounting points in the church where they can be used. Canisters of fuel are placed at strategic points for later detonation. Chain-link fences are stretched across entrances to serve as temporary barriers. Other rolls of fencing are strewn across the ground along likely attack routes, where they trip up zombies for easy head-stomping thanks to the improved physics system. Improvised landmines are placed in a ring around the ruins, where they are sure to blow up large groups of zombies courtesy of the extended range *Riptide* adds to explosives.

The survivors finally run out of traps to set after a few minutes, and the time to activate the pump arrives. Dozens of zombies rise up out of the swamp and turn toward the sound. Shrieking their rage, a wave of the undead gathers and bears down on the fortified church ruins. The deep bass booms of mines kicking off punctuates the steady staccato of two constantly firing Gatling guns. A loud pop sounds from the other side of the building as a survivor detonates a fuel canister, sending flaming zombies tumbling into the stagnant water. A furious melee ensues as two heroes desperately slash at a group of undead that

Leveling the Playing Field

Riptide adopts the co-op leveling system added to the original game in a patch. Level one characters can play with maxed out buddies, and each player sees and interacts with enemies of an appropriate level. The implementation might lay bare the treadmill of *Dead Island*'s progression system, but that seems a small price to pay for the ability to play with whomever you want, whenever you want, and have a good time doing it.



had torn down a fence, trying to push back the zombie horde long enough to replace the barrier. Personal firearms add a sparkling descant to the violent symphony, cooking through a previously unthinkable amount of ammunition – Techland intentionally hands out more ammo in *Riptide* to avoid hamstringing imported characters that specialize in firearms.

Eventually, the pump finishes its job. Our demo ends as the developer on the controller intentionally dies to a gargantuan grenade-tossing foe; the catacombs will have to wait for a later reveal. Despite Techland's tease that new enemy types exist, it can't talk about them yet. The demo paints a picture of a second *Dead Island* game that is extremely unlikely to disappoint fans. *Riptide* takes advantage of all the patches that smoothed out the first game's technical issues and design missteps and adds a slew of new content and ways to violently interact with it – as well as an increased level cap. What more do you expect? » **Adam Biessener**



Warface

Crytek's argument for free-to-play

Cevat Yerli, CEO of Crysis developer Crytek, has publicly expressed his view that free-to-play is the future of gaming. Warface puts his money where his mouth is; this free-to-play first-person shooter brings high-end visuals to a market that was considered a low-rent little brother to "real" video games for years. Seeing the game is enough to confirm its graphical chops, and my playtime with Warface has put to rest any concerns I had about its quality.

Warface breaks little new ground in FPS mechanics. The slide move is a wonderful mobility tool, the instant weapon customization brought over from Crysis is great, and the buddy lift that lets two allies boost each other up to an otherwise unreachable platform is a cool way to encourage teamwork. But even taken together these features don't move the needle much. Warface's innovation comes from its mission structure.

A new co-op mission is available every day. Completing its significant challenge that day gives double rewards to buy and repair weapons and other gear. On its second day, the mission is available in an easier form. Missions drop out entirely on the third day, meaning players have two available missions on any

given day. Maps will obviously cycle back in – as talented as Crytek is, it's hardly going to pump out a full

mission every day – but the variety sounds great, especially if the missions are as long and involved as what I played at Gamescom.

The first leg of the demo is a standard "get to the chopper!" linear trip through a goon-infested Brazilian favela. On paper it doesn't sound exciting, with guys spawning in and being cut down as my five-person squad makes its way through the level. In practice, Crytek is good at making top-tier FPS gameplay. The pacing is varied, with an easy segment giving way to a brutal counterattack, followed by a moment to apply medkits before a grinding assault on a fortified heavy machine gun. The tight, powerful gunplay makes the simple act of shooting a joy. The huge rewards for pumping up your combo meter (which lead to more currency acquired upon victory) add constant arcade-style tension. The support abilities of each class, from the medic's healing to the rifleman's ammo refill, are required to proceed and serve to bind players together.

Every co-op mission has a one-off bit after an interstitial break. Instead of the miniboss from the E3 demo, we get a frantic defense scenario. We cut down incoming riflemen, snipers, and flame-throwing armored goons by the dozen, and still burn through several coins (which would have been purchased with real money in the live game) instantly reviving after being smacked down. Finally, we get the order to fall back – only to defend a secondary location in similar fashion until a tank shows up and forces us back to a third arena. I buddy-boost a sniper teammate up to a good vantage point, which proves helpful as the final wave is the hardest yet. I go through two full ammo refills courtesy of our rifleman and rack up tons of kills after switching my scope to the 3X zoom tactical on the fly. After about 20 minutes total, we emerge victorious.

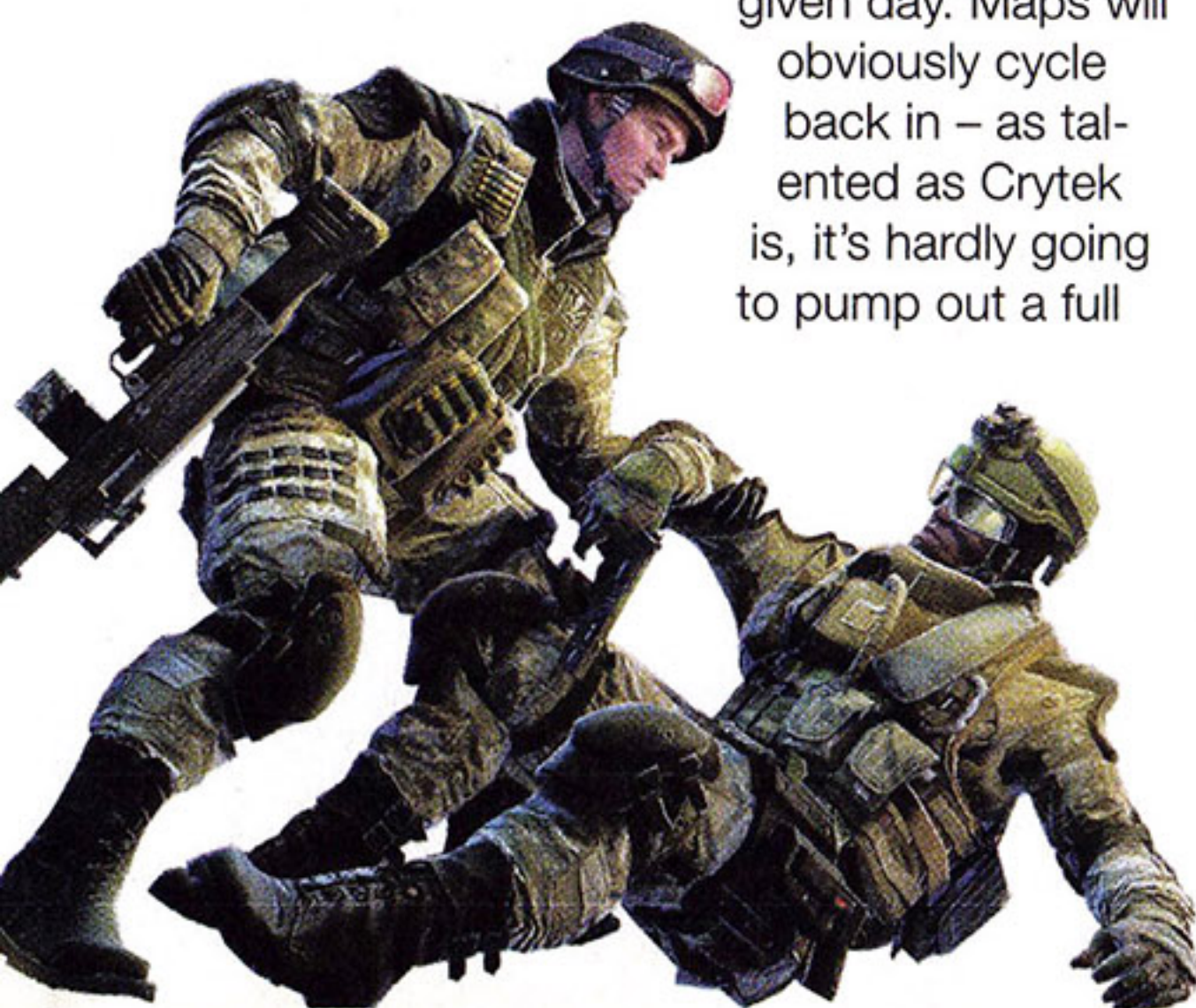
Warface's PvP benefits from the excellent

gunplay and presentation. The design of the one map I played was good, but I didn't take anything away from it that I couldn't have from any of a dozen other games. Warface lacks the progression hooks of Call of Duty and the team focus and outstanding vehicles of Battlefield, keeping the game from topping any competitive lists in my mind.

The business model in the already-live Russian version doesn't seem exploitative. A real-money infusion from time to time can skip a lot of in-game currency hoarding for a piece of gear you have your eye on, but all the gameplay is free to be enjoyed by everyone without paying any tolls. Warface isn't my first choice for competitive FPS action, but its exceptional co-op is all I need to be ready to spend zero dollars on it when it comes out this winter. » **Adam Biessener**

- » **Platform**
PC
- » **Style**
1-Player Shooter
(16-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Trion Worlds
- » **Developer**
Crytek
- » **Release**
Winter

Warface features both player-versus-player and player-versus-environment game modes





NBA 2K13

Making headlines on and off the court

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
2K Sports

» **Developer**
Visual Concepts

» **Release**
October 2

NBA 2K11's stroll down memory lane with the Jordan Challenge was a huge hit with fans, and NBA 2K13 continues developer Visual Concepts' love affair with basketball history. Although the game includes the Dream Team (see sidebar for more), the majority of NBA 2K13's new features are forward looking.

The development team spent considerable time reworking the control scheme, doubling down on the right analog stick, which it now dubs the Control Stick. Like NBA Live, the right analog stick controls basic dribbling moves that allow you to set up a defender like you would on a real court. Hold down the left trigger, and it transforms to the Shot Stick from previous games. The right analog stick can also be used for passing and post play, making it the most unified control scheme in the series history.

The unification theme also carries over to the destination mode of NBA 2K13, My Player. The "My Player" designation now refers specifically

to player customization. Users earn virtual currency ("VC") while playing in any game mode, which can be spent on skills, ability boosts, practice gear, street clothes you wear during press conferences, and even pre-game rituals. You can take your My Player online via the Blacktop mode, or create a hall of fame legacy in the My Career mode.

Visual Concepts' goal with My Career is to make users feel immersed in the virtual world. As you gain popularity and influence in the league, more fans will follow and communicate with you on Twitter. When you get famous enough, other players may talk trash to you and NBA legends may offer advice. All of the comments you make and feats you accomplish are chronicled by the in-game commentary. If you act contentious in a press conference, the broadcasters will make note of it. No doubt taking inspiration from the strange offseason of Dwight Howard, the team also worked general manager sit-downs into the experience. Periodically throughout your career, you will be

invited into the GM's office to discuss your role on the team, who you like playing with, and perhaps why your name is being mentioned in trade rumors. Attain enough organizational influence and you may even be able to dictate whom they go after in free agency and whether or not your coach comes back for another season.

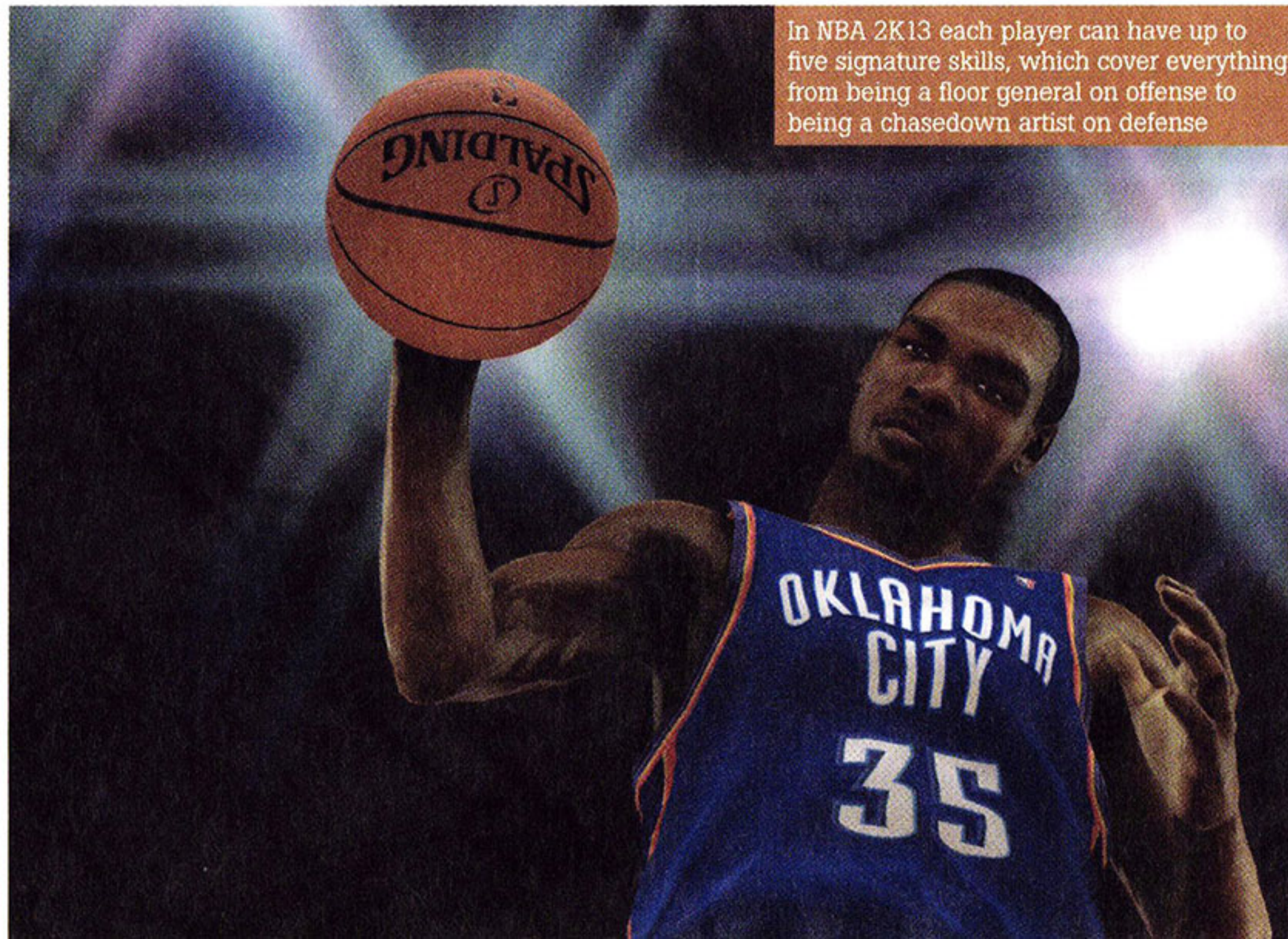
The popular Association mode is also undergoing a revamp. NBA 2K13 fully integrates the rules of the new collective bargaining agreement, reconfigures the team building and trade logic, gives users more control over how their team performs during sims, and allows players to jump into an Association with all the current player stats, ratings, and injuries no matter the calendar day.

With all of these changes in place, plus a new Ultimate Team-style mode dubbed Road To The Playoffs, NBA 2K13 is poised for a big season. If Visual Concepts can keep its online multiplayer network stabilized and deliver on the gameplay, it could land gold just like the Dream Team and Team USA. » **Matt Bertz**

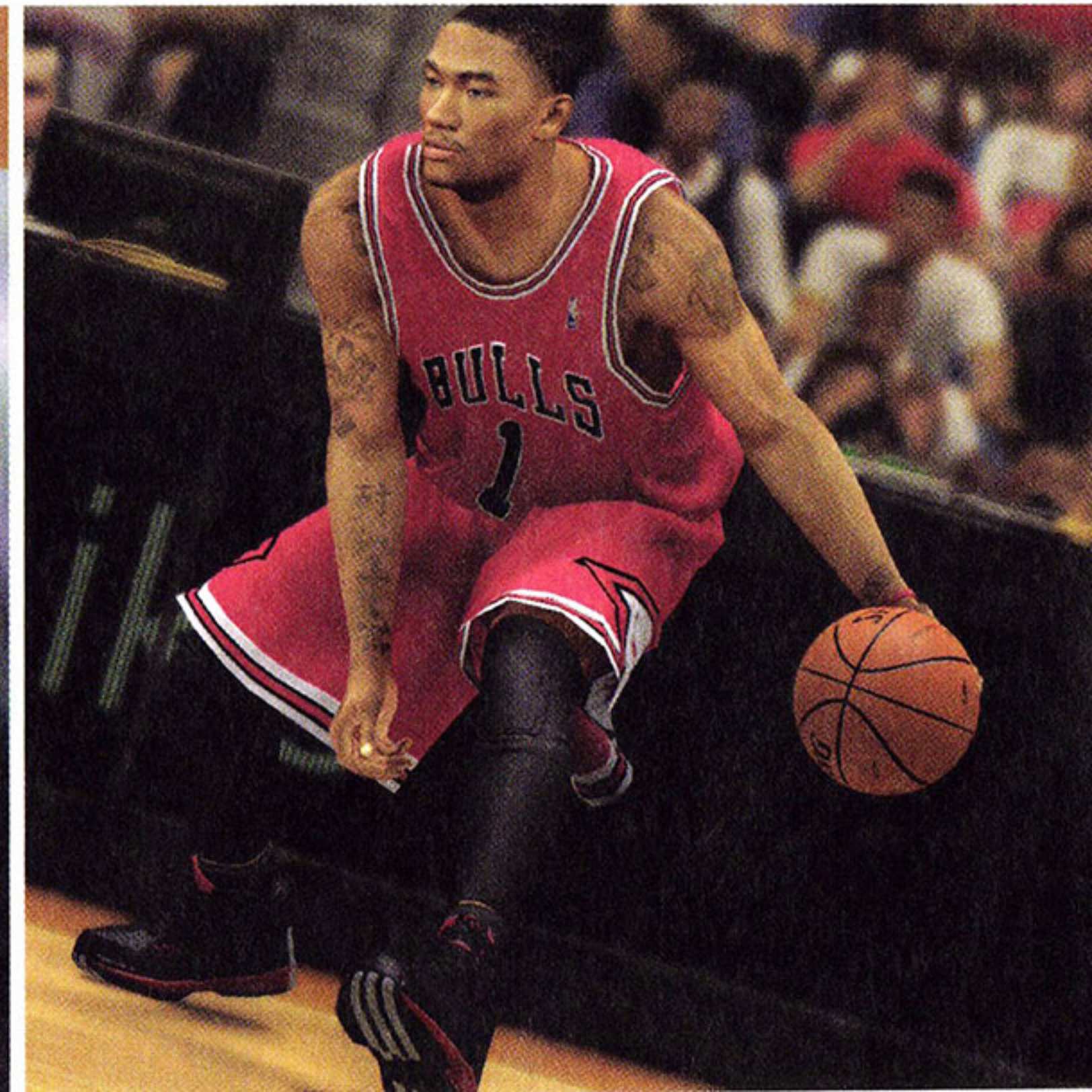
The Courting of Sir Charles

When Visual Concepts announced that Jay-Z would serve as NBA 2K13's executive producer, some questioned the move as a publicity stunt. However, he has already proven very valuable to the franchise. Jay-Z got a hold of Charles Barkley and persuaded the once-reluctant holdout to appear in the game so Visual Concepts could recreate The Dream Team – the 1992 gold-winning U.S. Men's Olympic basketball team.

78 previews



In NBA 2K13 each player can have up to five signature skills, which cover everything from being a floor general on offense to being a chasedown artist on defense





Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two

Mickey returns to The Wasteland

Epic Mickey is heading back to The Wasteland, and this time Oswald is here to help. Junction Point Studios' vice president and creative director Warren Spector brought his game by the Game Informer offices to show off Blot Alley and all of the things that have changed since Mickey's first adventure.

Spector says people always ask him when he's going to make a new game like Deus Ex. "I never stopped!" he says. In his mind, Epic Mickey offers the same level of choice and consequence that he has always placed in his games. Spector says the choices in Epic Mickey are adult choices with mature consequences, but people write off Mickey because it takes place in a cartoon world.

The Wasteland did not forget about Mickey

once he left in the original Epic Mickey. Blot Alley has become a home and rehabilitation center to the enemy blots from the first game, and they're not happy to see Mickey return. A friendly ghost named Ian, a character who appeared in the 1932 cartoon *Lonesome Ghost*, has taken over, and he tells Mickey if he can meet him at the end of the alley without fighting the blots, he has a reward for him.

The game offers many choices for how to proceed. You can ignore Ian like I did, attacking every blot in sight, or you can play the way Warren Spector showed me, sneaking around, avoiding conflict and taking the high road by platforming along the assorted terraces above the alley street.

Along with player choice dictating routes,

inkwells scattered across the levels change depending on how you interact with the environment. If you use the paint thinner to destroy the terrain, Mickey and Oswald can jump into the well to become temporarily invincible by coating themselves in a gold shield. If you use the paint, the inkwell allows Mickey and Oswald to become invisible.

The way you play changes more than just the environment. Each time I played through the level and returned to speak to Ian, he offered a unique conversation. Using my approach, Ian was upset with me and gave me nothing. Using Spector's tactics, Ian gave Mickey a handful of currency and was quite happy with him.

The cutscenes and dialogue in the game change depending on player actions. With the preface statement "spoiler alert," Spector said that every player will save The Wasteland. However, how players get there depends entirely on their play style. The end game, and all cutscenes are dynamically generated based on what the player is doing. In just one level, I saw multiple conversation changes based on my actions compared to Spector's.

After meeting up with Ian, I had a chance to take on one of the new enemies in the game. The Blotworks are loosely based on the animatronics of Disneyworld. I took on a group of robotic cars under the control of the blots. First I had to jump on their hoods to expose their weak spot – a button in this case. After jumping on the button, the blot exposed himself. From there, I could either coat him with paint to make him a friend, or throw thinner at him to destroy him. Pete, dressed in Tron garb, thanked me for defeating the blotworks, and his dialogue changed depending on how you fought. I asked Spector why Pete was dressed in a Tron uniform, and he said there is an army of Petes all dressed differently. When I pushed him further he said, "We'll expand the League of Petes in later games," offering no further hints.

Epic Mickey releases on November 18, which just so happens to be the day that *Steamboat Willy* premiered in 1928. » **Kyle Hilliard**

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

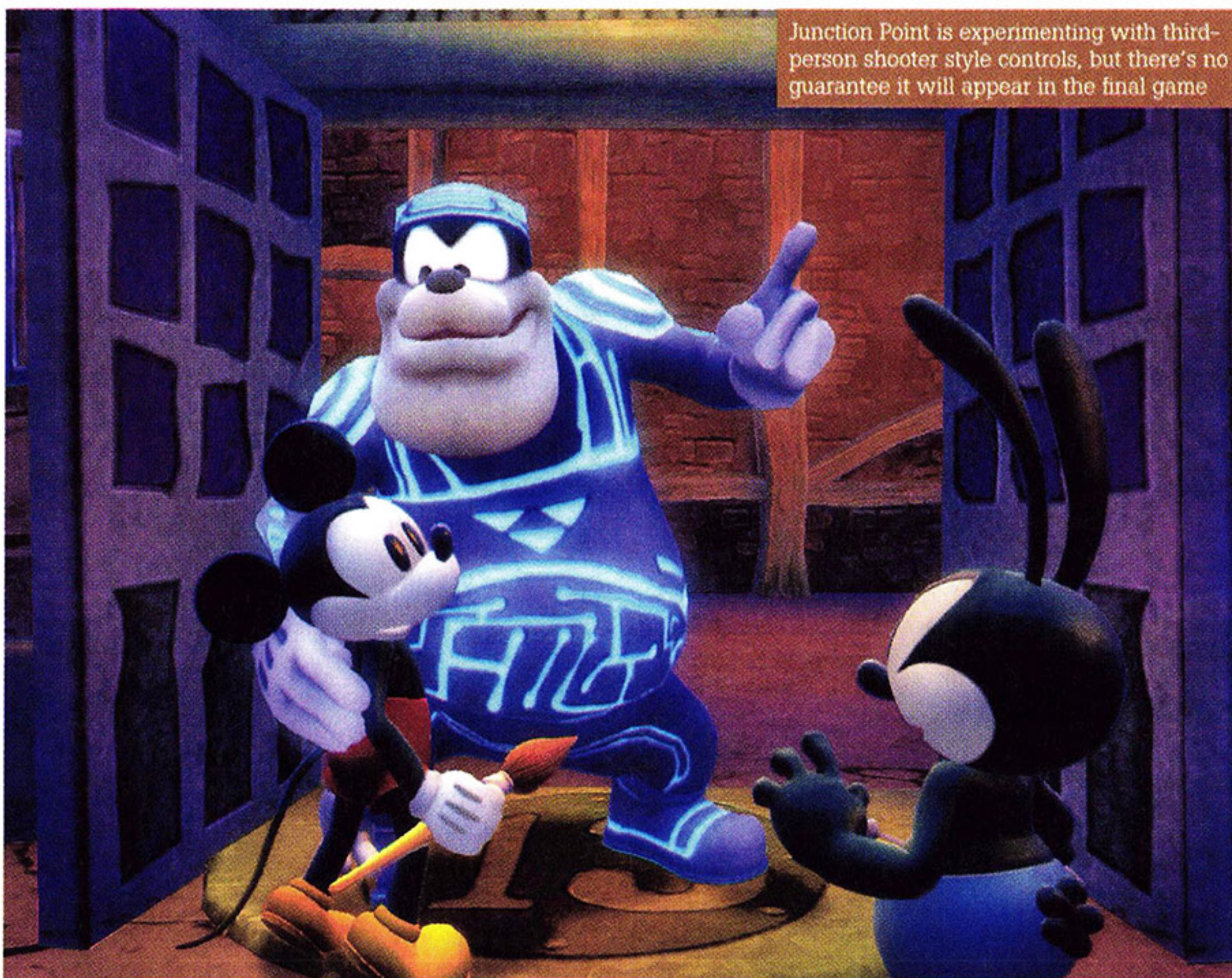
» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Disney Interactive
Studios

» **Developer**
Junction Point Studios

» **Release**
November 18

Junction Point is experimenting with third-person shooter style controls, but there's no guarantee it will appear in the final game



The Player Choice Pioneer

Warren Spector is best known for his work on Deus Ex, a game that pioneered dynamic player-driven choice in video games. Spector says Epic Mickey 2 has more in common with that first-person shooter from 2000 than most people realize. We sat down with Warren Spector to replay the beginning of Deus Ex, and we caught it all on video. Be sure to check it out on www.gameinformer.com.

Angry Birds Trilogy

Activision reloads the slingshot



The core Angry Birds experience is intact in Angry Birds Trilogy. There's a reason why it's so popular

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

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Rovio/Housemarque

» **Release**
September 25

Angry Birds may not have been the first game to capitalize on the destructive joy of smashing towers of blocks, but it's the most successful. The series has cumulatively been downloaded more than a billion times since its 2009 release, making it one of the most popular games ever. Now the birds are flocking to HD consoles and the 3DS with Angry Birds Trilogy. We got our hands on the game, and it's exactly what you expect. That's not a bad thing.

To the uninitiated, the objective in Angry Birds is to slingshot your avian buddies into blocky structures, knocking them down and smashing pigs and other enemies in the process. Early levels are straightforward, but it quickly becomes a test of both accuracy and problem solving. That's in large part because of the physics behind the mayhem and the variety of birds. Different birds have different abilities, which can be activated after launching. Blue birds explode into three glass-shattering separate birds, for instance, while the bomb-shaped black birds explode in a more literal sense.

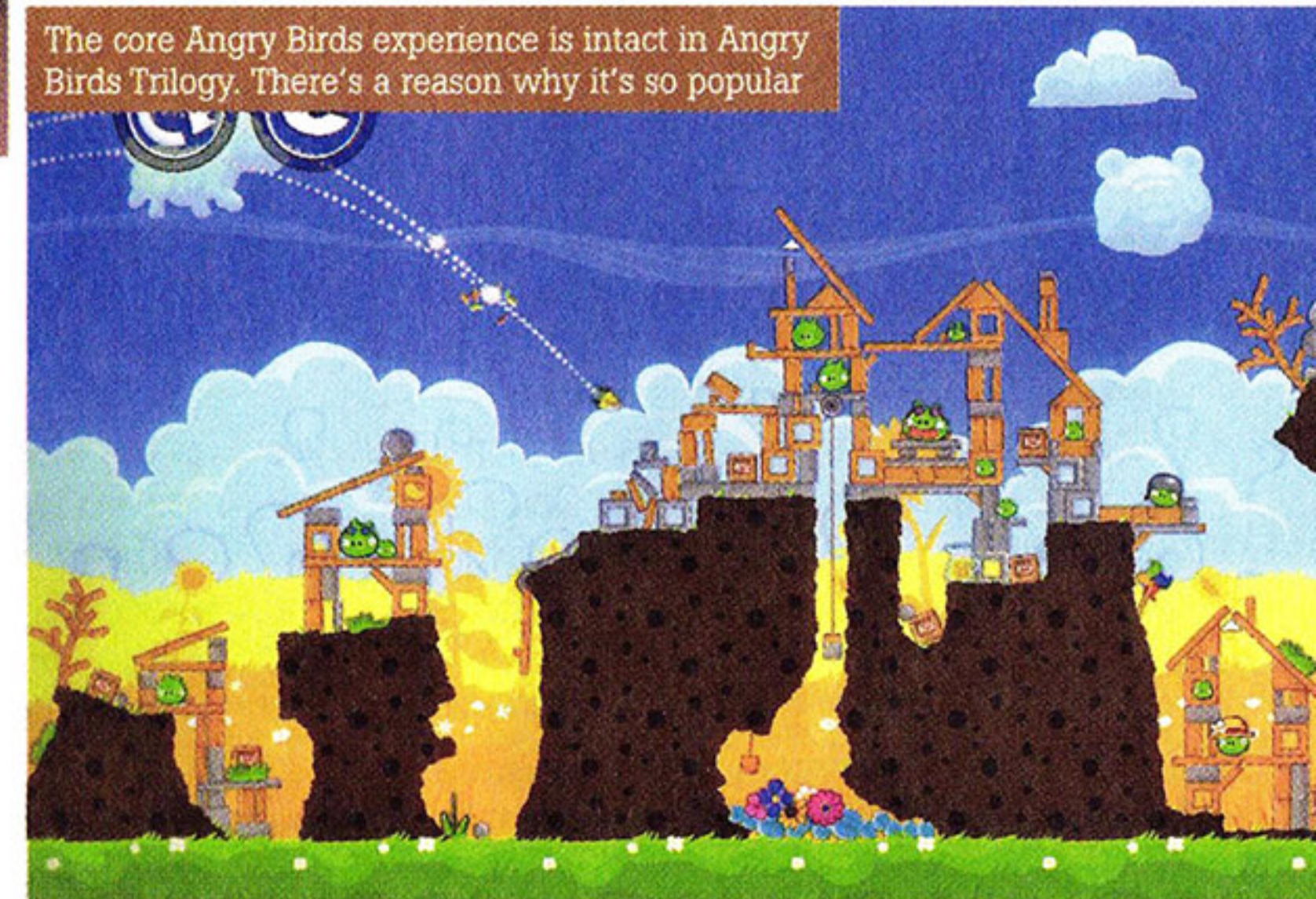
Angry Birds Trilogy bundles three of the series' first games – Angry Birds, Angry Birds Seasons, and Angry Birds Rio – and adds a few new levels and bonus goodies. In addition, the PS3 version supports Move and its Xbox 360 counterpart has an optional Kinect interface. All three versions also feature fully animated cutscenes in contrast to the originals' static sequences.

The games look great, with crisp characters and additional background details thrown in for good measure. Some effects, such as dandelion fuzz that floats in the breeze, are affected by passing birds although they don't get in the way of gameplay. They're a smart way to keep things visually interesting without causing any distractions. The series started out with tiny screens in mind, after all, and levels would look sparse without adding any extra flourishes.

The game plays just like previous installments, with few surprises. I've poured a lot of time into

the series, and I feel right at home. I'm a perfectionist, so I appreciate how easy it is to restart levels by holding down a button. Another button calls in the mighty eagle, a character that was previously only available via microtransaction. This insanely powerful bird crashes through entire levels in a single swoop, which is a cathartic way to blast through areas when you've hit a rut. Players can earn special golden feathers by using him to destroy everything.

Angry Birds Trilogy also includes a few bonus levels (stacked onto the 100-plus stock ones) featuring some of



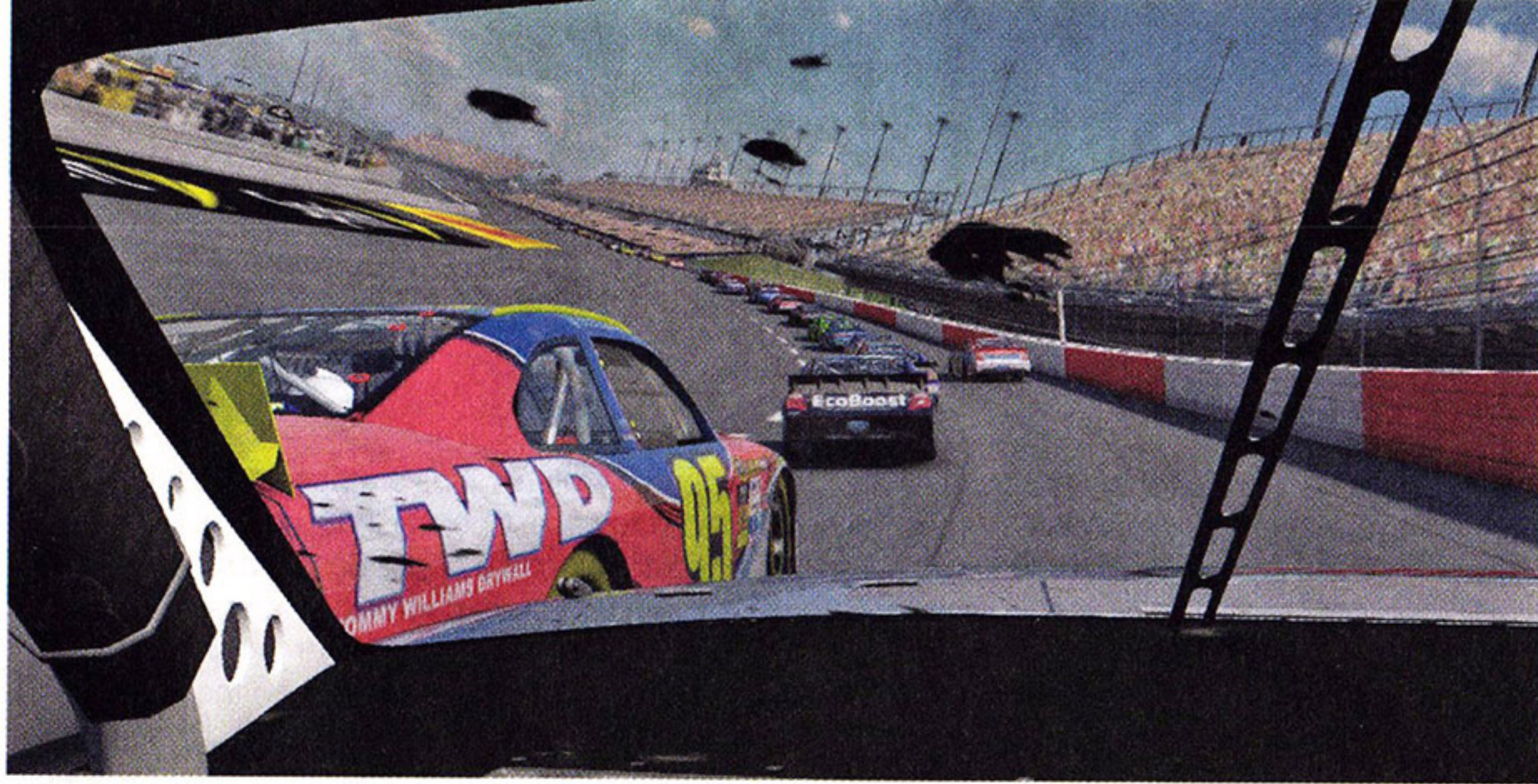
Players can zoom all the way out in the HD versions of the game, which is a helpful way to strategize



the biggest areas seen in the series. The ones I played required deft aim and the foresight to create effective chain reactions. I didn't see the PlayStation Move functionality in action, but the twitchy and imprecise Kinect support seems like it exists for the sake of adding another bullet point to the box. The compilation also provides a glimpse at the game's evolution via early concept art. Those extras probably won't be enough to woo casual fans, but they're an extra enticement for people who can't get enough Angry Birds.

Both the HD and 3DS versions of the game make the most of their displays. Players can zoom all the way out on the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions for a full view of the playfield. The 3DS version pushes the tower view onto the top screen, with the touchscreen handling the slingshot. If you're not into dragging your stylus on the screen, it's also playable with the 3DS d-pad.

Some players may cry foul at the \$39.99 price point (\$29.99 on 3DS), and they have a decent case. After all, you can pick up the first three versions of the iOS original – in HD – for less than \$10. If you don't have a smartphone or tablet (or if you prefer gaming on a TV) this is a solid alternative. Angry Birds Trilogy packs a lot of content, and if you enjoy its central concept it offers dozens of hours of gameplay. Otherwise, this package isn't likely to convert you. » **Jeff Cork**



NASCAR The Game: Inside Line

Eutechnyx looks for a better finish

Sprint Cup drivers have practice sessions in advance of a race for a reason. With feedback from the driver and its complex analytical systems, the crew tweaks the car based on how it performed on the track. It's not an easy process, and if you make too many changes you could end up worse than when you started. Similarly, developer Eutechnyx is fine-tuning many aspects of its NASCAR series after an inauspicious debut last year.

Inside Line fleshes out the franchise in all areas. The career mode is based on earning, retaining, and improving your car's multiple sponsors (from a real-world roster of 60 companies) by meeting different

performance-related criteria. This in turn pays for multi-stage car upgrades in areas like your drive train, chassis, and engine. Money fuels success in NASCAR, and the new career structure creates an ascending path that should keep you engaged.

Being fast in the shop and fast on the track, however, are different matters. It pays to go through the revamped practice sessions, where you can analyze fuel usage, get feedback from your crew chief (voiced by Ray Evernham), check tire temps, test out new setups, and more. Practices are also helpful for getting to know the tracks, and since Inside Line has reworked all its tracks using telemetry data from the real-life races (see sidebar for more), they

Are you good enough?

Inside Line uses real-life race telemetry to create over a dozen scenario challenges based on actual situations from this season and last, such as reliving David Regan's first victory at Darlington in 2011 or redoing Mark Martin's second-place finish at this season's first Pocono race. The game also uses telemetry for head-to-head races where you try to beat driver's lap times.



have accurate brake points and multiple lines that develop through the race. The online play now has a full practice weekend, and this mode also features savable records and results, quick cautions, and myriad other improvements over 2011's pale out-of-the-box offering.

NASCAR is an incredibly complex sport, and Eutechnyx has its work cut out for it as it tries to play catch-up with the other racing games on the market. However, a fleshed-out career mode and adjustments to almost every area of the game (including a better race HUD, more realistic damage, better pit strategy, and much more) show that "the guys back at the shop" will continue to tinker with this machine until they get it right. » **Matthew Kato**

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Eutechnyx

» **Release**
November 6

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Resident Evil 6

An exploding rollercoaster of zombie bloodshed

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

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action
(4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Capcom

» **Release**
October 2

Resident Evil 6 begins with a prologue that picks up somewhere in the middle of Leon and Helena's campaign. The two are outrunning helicopters and explosions right off the bat, taking only a few moments to rest and show off the new health system. Instead of pausing the game and diving into the menus to grab an herb, you now convert herbs into tablets that can be consumed on the fly like Tic-Tacs.

Things pick up quickly once Helena is healed, and within moments the two are shooting and punching zombies. They make it onto a helicopter, but the pilot has been bitten and Leon has to take over the controls and shoot at the new pilot-zombie while simultaneously playing a game of chicken with a monorail train. This crazy sequence never lets you catch your breath. It's an exciting way to begin Resident Evil 6, and it looks to be indicative of the pacing of the rest of the game.

Leon and Helena

After the explosive prologue, you can begin with any of the three campaigns you like. We already know how Leon and Helena's story begins: The President of the United States gets infected with the zombie virus, and Leon has the unenviable

task of taking him out. Helena claims everything is her fault, and she plans to reveal why once they check out a mysterious temple.

The action moves quickly, and in many cases charging ahead without wasting precious ammo on enemies is preferred. Reminiscent of Raccoon City, Tall Oaks has gone to hell in the wake of the zombie apocalypse. The two make their way to an ammo store where a group of people is holding off the horde. With the help of the gun shop occupants, the group makes its way to a bus to head to the temple, but not without losing quite a few people along the way.

Despite the effort it takes to get on the bus, it crashes and flips right outside of the temple's cemetery, as buses are prone to do during zombie apocalypses. Once inside the temple, I take part in my one and only puzzle sequence throughout the entire six-chapter playthrough. I use the laser sight on my gun to activate switches, shoot at targets to open doors, and deactivate statues with crossbows to open the door of a gigantic secret facility below the temple. Helena promises Leon once again that he only has to do one more thing before she will tell him everything – a promise she makes at least three more times as you progress further and further underground where Ada Wong makes her first appearance. For possibly the first time in her life, she is dressed appropriately for combat, a mistake she doesn't make in subsequent campaigns.

Jake and Sherry

Jake's campaign opens with proof that he is somehow immune to Umbrella's assorted viruses. When he and a few other fellow mercenaries apply shots to themselves for some unexplained reason, Jake is the only one who doesn't turn into a snarling monster.

In the chaos of combating his former teammates, Jake finds Sherry, who informs him that his blood holds the key to curing the bioterrorism virus plaguing humanity. Jake ponders his worth for a moment, and agrees to lend his blood for \$50 million. The two make their way to Sherry's recon point, only to be interrupted by the Ustanak – the giant menacing, seemingly indestructible half-monster, half-robot super soldier. All Jake and Sherry can do is outrun him and blow up the destructible barrels he happens to stand beside.

Before heading to home base, Jake and Sherry meet up with Chris and his fellow BSAA

soldiers. Anti-air guns are preventing takeoff and it's up to Jake, Sherry, Chris, and his partner Piers to take care of business. This is one of the sequences where campaigns intersect and the game opens up to four-player cooperative play.

Jake and Sherry finally get into the air, but only long enough for Sherry to make a phone call to confirm that Jake's asking price can be met. The Ustanak rears his ugly masked face again, taking down the plane and forcing Jake and Sherry to share the only remaining parachute on board.

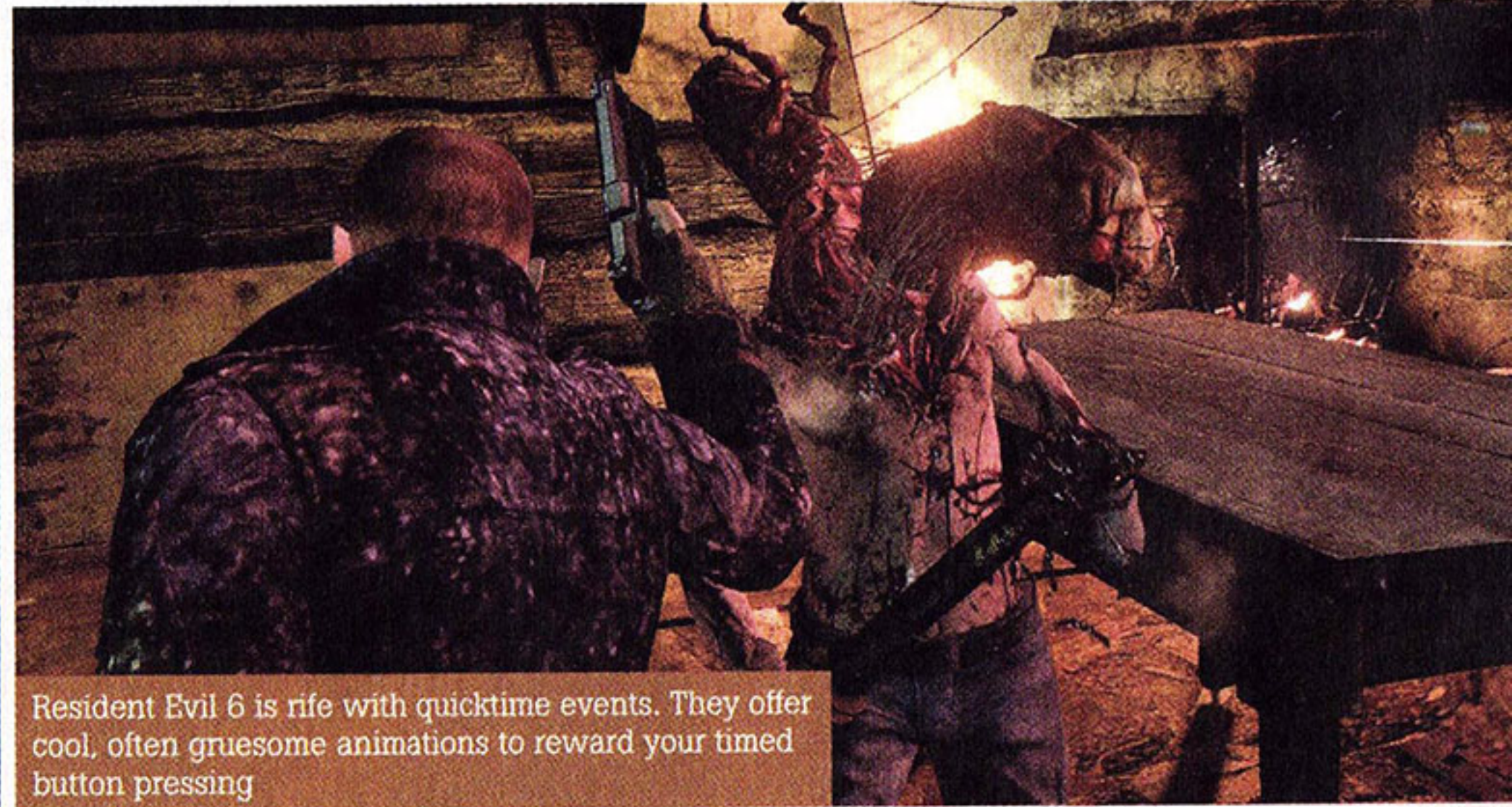
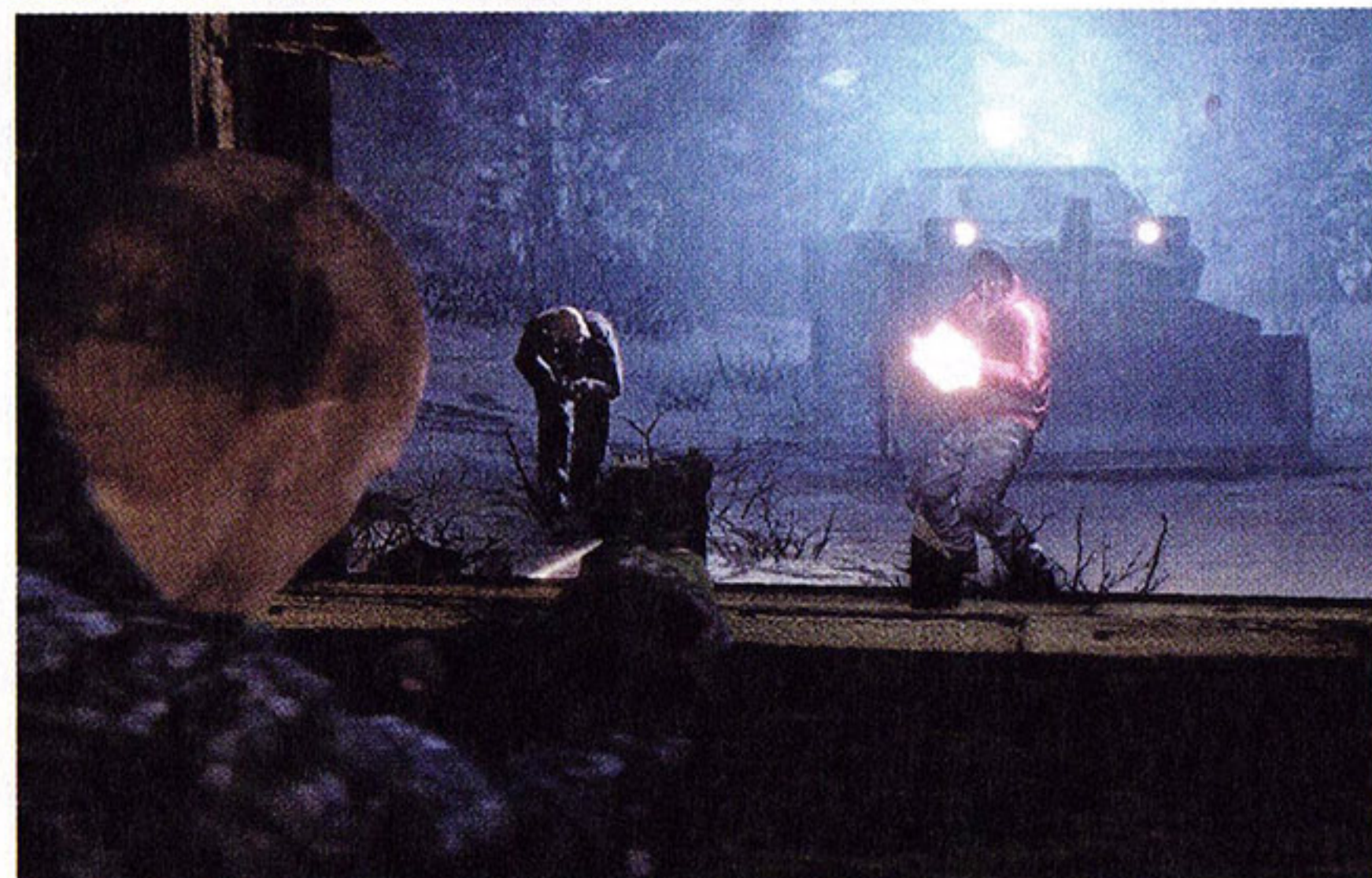
Once on the ground Sherry realizes she dropped important data that needs to be recovered. The data is contained on three USB drives, and I'm free to explore the wide-open environment to track them down. While I come across many enemies, this is the slowest pacing during my time with the game. Meandering around the snow is quiet, and the lack of visibility creates a creepy, harsh atmosphere.

Jake and Sherry regroup in a cabin to get out of the oncoming snow storm. Here Jake breaks away from his callousness to show his human side. Up to this point every dialogue sequence with Jake has been a series of bland quips and action-movie one-liners, but in the cabin he shows concern for Sherry in a non-romantic way. Their rest is short lived as soldiers blow up the cabin's walls and Jake and Sherry are forced to flee both soldiers and an avalanche via snowmobiles.

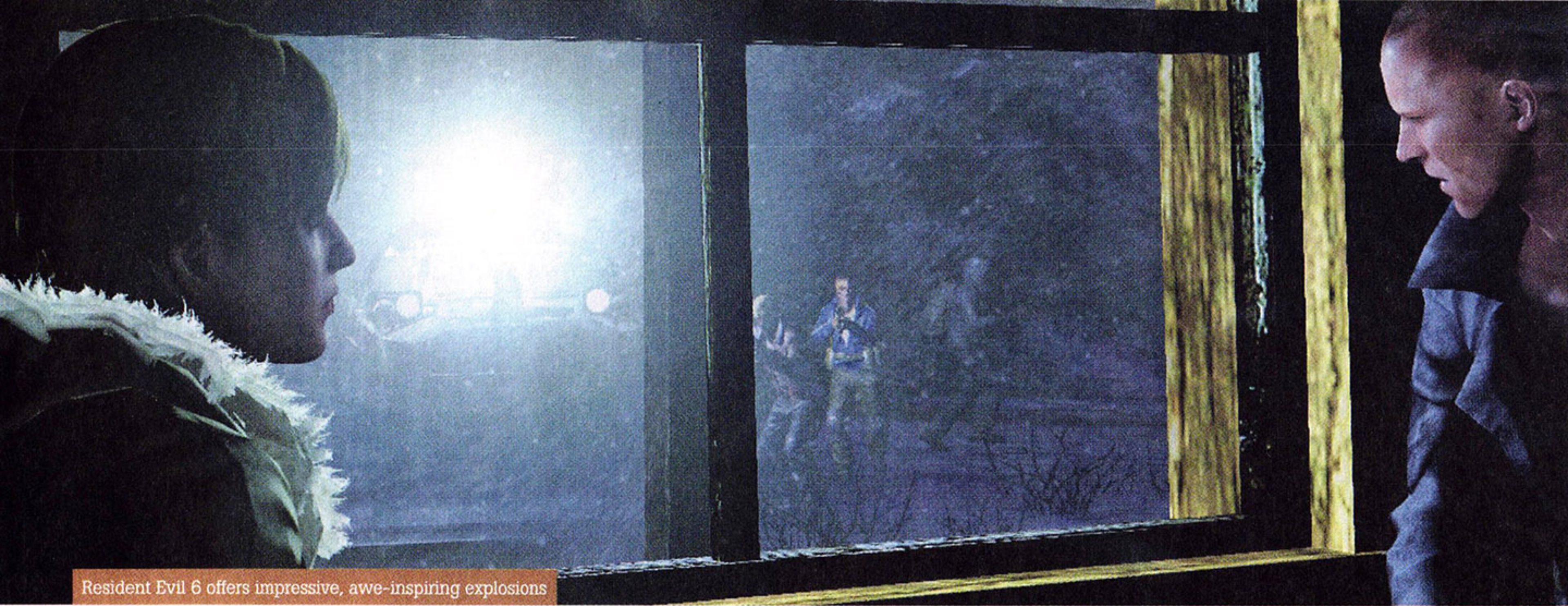
The two press on, only to run into the Ustanak again in a cave. I dodge the Ustanak and quietly sneak around him toward a giant drill that becomes the ultimate weapon to destroy him. It takes a multitude of quicktime events, but I aim the drill squarely at the chest of the Ustanak, pushing him through multiple walls until he appears to be dead.

Jake and Sherry emerge from the cave to see their destination city off in the distance, and suddenly Ada Wong appears inappropriately dressed with a very revealing dress in the middle of the snow. She has a scarf, but her back and most of her chest are entirely exposed. She must be freezing.

She reveals that Jake is the son of antagonist Albert Wesker. Jake claims to have no idea who she is talking about, and the Ustanak once again emerges from the cave with a giant drill-shaped hole in his chest. He knocks out both Jake and Sherry at Ada's command, and the chapter comes to a close.



Resident Evil 6 is rife with quicktime events. They offer cool, often gruesome animations to reward your timed button pressing



Resident Evil 6 offers impressive, awe-inspiring explosions

Chris and Piers

Chris' campaign leans the hardest on third-person shooting. Through the entire first two chapters, I never have to solve a puzzle or explore the environment. Chris and Piers simply make their way through a series of pathways filled with enemies and cover points. As far as I can tell, Chris' mission is always to enter an area, clear out its enemies, and then blow up the aforementioned area. If he gets out before the bombs come through, then he is having a good day. In the BSAA, executing the mission is the main priority, even if it means incidentally killing your best soldier.

This campaign begins in a bar, with Piers trying to talk a drunken Chris into coming back to the BSAA. After a quick run through a C-Virus infected Lanshiang, China, where Chris gets back into the swing of fighting deadly monsters, he has a flashback to a previous mission.

The scene opens with Chris promising his fellow soldiers that none of them are expendable, and none will be left behind. During the course of their mission, the BSAA runs into Jake and Sherry. Here players experience the gunship sequence from a new perspective. I play as a

different character, but the scenario is exactly the same.

After taking care of Jake and Sherry, Chris, Piers, and his fellow BSAA agents move to a new area, an abandoned science research facility. The group runs into Ada Wong, who claims to be an employee of the facility. Chris doesn't know Ada so he accepts her claim, but decides to keep an eye on her. The group makes their way into the heart of the facility with Ada as a tour guide.

It doesn't take long for Chris' suspicions to be vindicated, because Ada separates Chris and Piers from the rest of their group. It would be a spoiler to reveal why Ada split up the BSAA agents, but it has a lot to do with why Chris became the drunken emotional wreck seen in the beginning of his campaign.

Resident Evil 6 doesn't evoke tension or horror like past entries. While that may be disappointing to many, that doesn't mean that the new direction doesn't stand on its own. Shooting zombies and monsters is still an intense experience, and there are surprises everywhere, even if they aren't monster dogs jumping through windows. » **Kyle Hilliard**



ES



gameinformer
★ GAME OF THE MONTH

90 Borderlands 2

We didn't think it would be easy to top the addictive co-op of the original, but Gearbox has gone above and beyond it in this stellar sequel.

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	Dash Rendar. Remember that guy?

AWARDS

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

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 **TOYOTA**
moving forward

Darksiders II

Death's loving embrace

9

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action Publisher THQ Developer Vigil Games Release August 14 ESRB M

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Running concurrently with the original *Darksiders*, this sequel focuses on Death's quest to find absolution for his brother War

» **Graphics**

Beautifully animated characters are almost overshadowed by the world's soaring architecture and extravagant detail

» **Sound**

Jesper Kyd's score is eerie and catchy enough to stick with you. Combat effects are nice and violent. Most of the voice acting is good, but ends up falling flat due to the muddy storytelling

» **Playability**

The controls and user interface couldn't be better. Combos are easy to time, the spell system is seamlessly integrated into the hack 'n slash action, and small touches like instant-equip weapons and armor make looting effortless

» **Entertainment**

Darksiders II is a remarkable series of dungeons that offers a 20-plus hour critical path with plenty of side content and secrets to find

» **Replay Value**
High

Darksiders concludes with a hell of a tease. War, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, stands ready for action. "You will be hunted," angel Uriel warns. "The White City for certain... The Council... and there will be others! You would wage this war alone?!" The rider calmly turns to her, raises a fist, and says, "No. Not alone." The camera pans up and centers on three flaming objects rocketing toward Earth. War's fellow Horsemen are coming to fight at his side. The screen fades to black, and the wait for the sequel begins.

Bury your excitement for War uniting with his fellow Apocalyptans. Developer Vigil Games instead takes us back in time to the beginning of *Darksiders*, when War is accused of inciting a conflict between Heaven and Hell. Rather than revisiting this scenario from his perspective, we see how these events affect his brother Death, the most feared Horsemen of them all.

Death's story runs in parallel with War's arc, set in the 100-year span when War is imprisoned in the Charred Council. He is questing to free his brother and save mankind from the apocalypse. His goal is clearly defined, but Death's journey quickly devolves into multi-part fetch quests with little in terms of gripping narrative progression. Because of the throwaway fiction, Death is a faceless lead who spends most of his time excavating rare artifacts from dungeons. His only significant story contribution comes when the final boss is defeated after 20-plus hours of play.

That doesn't make him a bad character. He may come across as an antique collector that specializes in rare, oversized, magical keys in the story, but when he enters a dungeon, his wide set of skills turn him into one of gaming's most extraordinary protagonists.

Outfitted with a move set geared for speed, necromancy, and raw power, Death is an efficient killing machine that lets players select their means of evisceration. I gravitated toward his necromancy skill tree, allowing him to summon ghouls to distract and attack enemies. As they tear away flesh, Death can retreat to the battle's perimeter to call forth a murder of crows that

further confounds the enemy. Powers like these are fun to use, and get even more potent as players improve them through the skill tree.

Death's close quarters approach is equally as exhilarating. His speed – and the fact he carries two scythes – make him a more acrobatic combatant than his brother. He darts between enemies with ease to unleash combos that are so violent and lightning quick that



the action is often obscured by vast amounts of blood, magical effects, and blurred movement. In some combat scenarios, this becomes so severe (and awesome) that I lost track of Death completely. This is a good problem to run into.

Switching between weapons mid-combo is seamless, and the art of chaining together lengthy attacks relies on careful timing for both weapon strikes and evasive rolls. Finishing moves are still a part of the fray, but appear less frequently, and are now nice surprises as opposed to being the easiest way to drop a foe.

Standard enemy encounters are balanced well, putting players' skills to the test in most instances. Since Death is geared to handling multiple threats at once, fights consisting of a singular boss are usually cakewalks. Towering, Shadow of the Colossus-like titans fall after a few undemanding scripted attacks. Even the last boss, who is hardly mentioned in the story, falls like a mid-dungeon chump.

The addition of loot – a dizzying array of weapons and armor with different damage, arcane, elemental, and bonus attributes – adds even more variety to an already deep and satisfying combat system. The loot system is beautifully implemented into both combat and questing. I explored every nook and cranny in dungeons, and downed every foe I saw just to make sure I wasn't missing out on the chance of a rare possessed weapon dropping. These weapons get stronger when you sacrifice other weapons to power them up. Feeding weapons to weapons – how cool is that?

Having an expanding arsenal at your fingertips makes New Game Plus, the Apocalyptic and Nightmare difficulty settings, and Crucible's arena challenges more appealing and approachable.

Although the dungeons are built on the familiar framework of water, fire, time, and the series' portal themes, most are architectural wonders filled with inventive puzzles, and sights so beautiful it's worth taking a second to stop to admire them. Vigil does a tremendous job of using Death's move set for dungeon navigation and puzzle solving. Toward the end of the game, some of the dungeons feature elaborate puzzle machinations that call upon the use of multiple abilities. Out-of-the-box thinking is required for a few solutions.

Some of these dungeons are overly long, but with so many different elements tied to the gameplay, they rarely feel like they are repeating the same steps just to lengthen the overall game time. The three-dungeon "Court of Bones" quest is particularly impressive in its array of puzzles and combat scenarios. The only dungeon that I didn't enjoy revolves around a firearm called Salvation. This dungeon plays out like a shooter level, and a bad one at that.

One of the most polished aspects of the game is environment traversal. Death can run along walls and leap between pillars much like the Prince of Persia. These sequences add an element of verticality to exploration, and are used extensively to unearth hidden areas. The overworld is filled with them (including numerous bonus areas and bosses). A handy fast travel ability makes backtracking a painless affair.

After finishing *Darksiders*, I hoped the sequel would continue with the Four Horsemen riding together in aid of War. That thought faded once Death let his scythes do the talking. Like Kratos and Dante, playing as this reaper gives you that amazing feeling of being an all-powerful ass-kicker. » **Andrew Reiner**



Transformers: Fall of Cybertron

Variety in all things



Style 1-Player Action (12-Player Online) Publisher Activision Developer High Moon Studios Release August 21 ESRB T

9

If you've ever wondered why that friend of yours so fervently loves these transforming robots, High Moon Studios has crafted an answer for you. Larger-than-life characters flung into dire straits, giant explosions combined with potent sci-fi storytelling, sacrificial heroism pitted against megalomaniacal villainy, and robots that transform into cool cars and planes – this is wish fulfillment at its finest. Even if it's not the deepest interactive experience, *Fall of Cybertron* is certainly one of the most enthusiastic and boisterous digital adventures you'll have this year.

Fall of Cybertron opens after the bad guys have won. Countless battles have ravaged the planet, and the heroic Autobots are abandoning their home. Unwilling to let them leave, the marauding Decepticons are doing their best to wipe their enemies out before they can escape. The simple premise keeps the focus squarely on the characters and their adventures, and the storytelling is surprisingly well paced and cogent. Nearly every level switches up the point of view character, but maintains a consistent narrative thread that is at turns humorous, exciting, and full of nods to the history of the fiction.

High Moon has taken a big chance on multiple playable characters. Each one offers a distinct gameplay style, from melee powerhouses to flight combat. It's a credit to the studio that every one of those characters is fun to play, and that the pacing from one to the next is so smooth. Optimus Prime's military sci-fi shooting flows naturally into Cliffjumper's stealth, making Jazz's subsequent sniping exciting. The variety in gameplay is *Fall of Cybertron*'s strongest feature, but also its biggest limitation. While most levels feel challenging, the characters' mechanics rarely reach the depth that another action game hero might get to experience over the course of a whole game.

The theme of increased variety carries over into settings and enemies. Taking to heart criticism

of the limited visual novelty of its previous Transformers game, High Moon has invested serious time in making sure each level stands apart, and takes us to corners of Cybertron that fans have never seen before. Individual battlefields are memorable and graphically stunning, thanks especially to multiple distinct metal types. Whether it's gears grinding, walls shifting, or rust storms blowing, the game world is always in motion.

The wide array of different enemies follow their own behaviors in combat, and learning how to tackle each one when they first appear is fun. The coolest enemy types base their actions on what form they've transformed into, so attentive players have clear visual cues about how to react.

Eschewing the two separate campaigns seen in the earlier *War for Cybertron*, this new game's structure flows better, and by controversially abandoning cooperative play, every level is built to a particular character's strengths. The adventure is filled with titanic set piece moments, and the developer isn't afraid to take short breaks from the action to nail home the atmosphere or an important plot point. In the name of pulling players forward through the adventure, the whole affair is linear and lacking in real choices, but the reward is some of the best scripted moments in this generation of games.

If the ongoing story lacks some player agency, the sting is lessened through the addition of an engaging choice-driven upgrade system. All the weapons are worth exploring, and many fall outside the cookie cutter norms, from bouncing metal saw blades to guns that fire jolts of electricity. More importantly, energon shards earned over the course of the story can be spent to refine weapons and equipment in meaningful ways, or gain universal perks that improve everything from health to movement speed (go for these first). Improvements carry over into subsequent games on your profile, offering ample

reason to try out the next difficulty setting.

The big kicker for multiplayer is the opportunity to create your own Transformers to take into battle. Limited options for the four classes in the beginning blossom into increased weapon and cosmetic choices the longer you play, and the visual variety you see from other players far outstrips anything from comparable online shooters. The familiar modes of play aren't going to blow anyone's mind, but a healthy selection of 10 strong competitive maps is welcome. As of launch, frame rate isn't ideal, but I have no complaints about the balanced action or highly mobile battlefields.

In addition, the wave-based cooperative Escalation mode returns, and implements all the improvements of the single-player game, including better enemies, weapons, map design, and shooting. These levels offer the chance to play several legacy characters not available in the campaign, and your choices include a balanced mix of a healer, a powerhouse, or other specialties that promote staying together and cooperating. I'd love to see expansions or sequels offer some other experiences beyond shooting, like cooperative stealth, or even a dedicated Dinobot squad level.

Fall of Cybertron is the Transformers toy battle you imagined as a child, transposed onto the TV in front of you. It's the most faithful treatment of the Transformers brand for fans across any medium in recent years, and it manages the feat while remaining welcoming to new potential players. It's also a clear message to the world that High Moon Studios has joined that most rarified breed of game developer that can create an honest-to-goodness great licensed game. » **Matt Miller**

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

A tightly crafted and narrative-driven adventure that values variety over depth

» **Graphics**

Beautiful environments and character designs come to life through imaginative animation

» **Sound**

Fantastic and frequent voice work moves the story along. A few driving musical themes dominate the soundtrack

» **Playability**

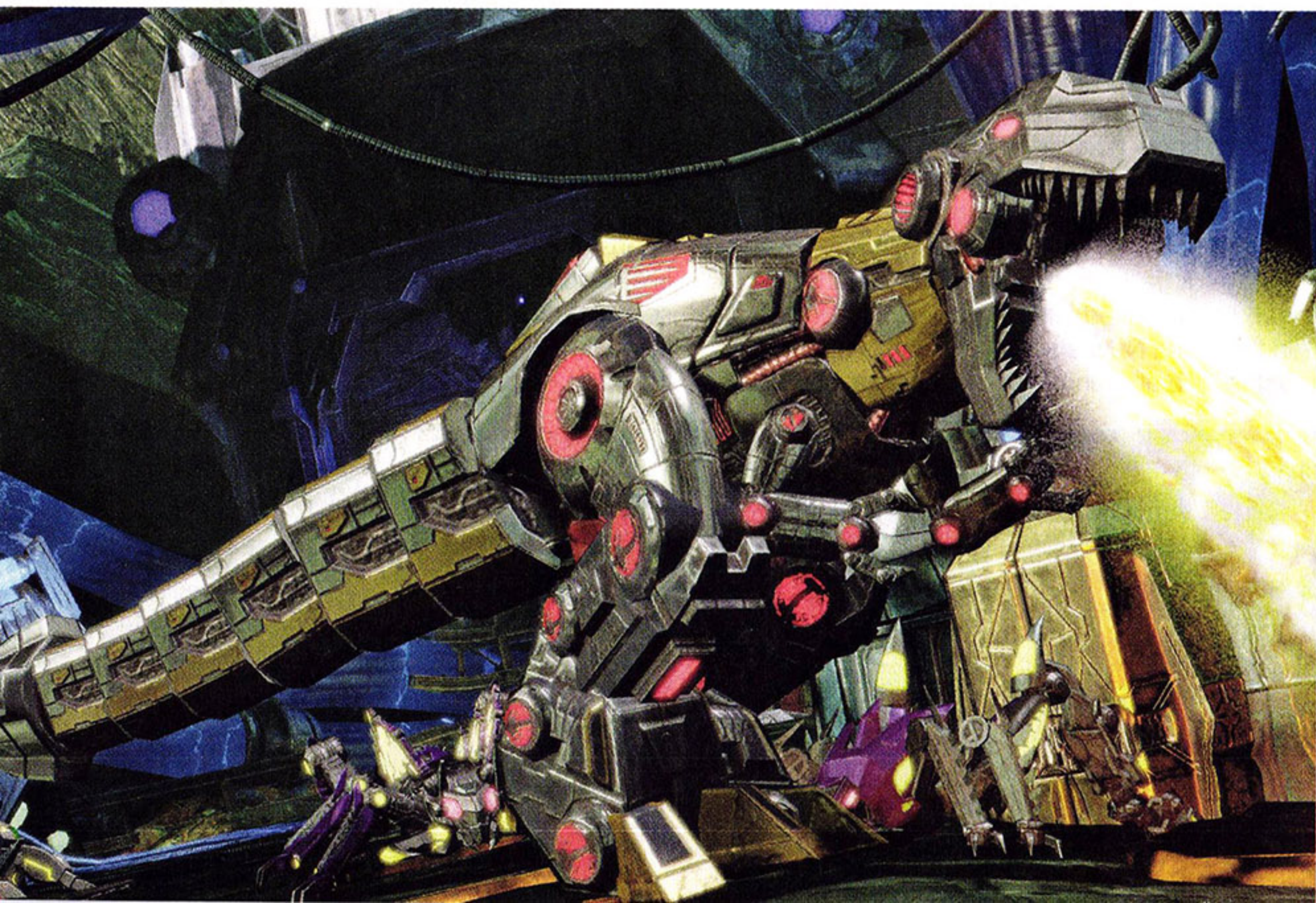
Controls are thoughtfully mapped and customizable, but almost every level shifts control elements to cater to new playable characters

» **Entertainment**

Explosive fun, whether you love the franchise or not

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High



Madden NFL 13

Madden turns the corner

8.25

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Madden eschews going for the first down and throws deep for the end zone with a slew of additions

» Graphics

The motion blur effect can be really cool. However, it looks odd from time to time

» Sound

Jim Nantz and Phil Simms are a refreshing addition even if their commentary lacks relevance at times. Trey Wingo steals the show with his draft-day player anecdotes

» Playability

Niggling issues arise throughout the game, from inconsistent physics to hard-to-reach info in Connected Careers. Legacy gameplay issues are also present. I love the changes to the passing game, however

» Entertainment

At times I had more fun off the field than on it, but this edition puts the franchise in the best position it's been all generation

» **Replay Value**
Moderately High



Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (6-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release August 28 ESRB E

They say football is a game of inches, and this is true for Madden NFL 13. Fans judge the series by so many details that it's hard to point to any one in particular that makes or breaks the game. This year's title attempts to cover a lot of ground for the franchise, and the outcome is akin to a QB throwing for 400 yards and still not winning the game. A lot went right even if it wasn't a resounding victory. In the case of Madden 13, there is such a thing as a moral victory.

Connected Careers is a brilliant mode that in one fell swoop makes the online franchise feature set the same as the normal offline one, introduces XP to upgrade players and coaches, bolsters the stagnant Superstar mode (including being able to call your own plays), and injects year-round drama into your franchise.

The XP system is great because it lets you progress your players in the areas of your choosing (the CPU also does a decent job if you auto-upgrade), while also incorporating natural player progress/regression and rewarding great performances and hard work at practices. It's a well-done system that invests you in your team in a way that makes sense. My criticism of the XP upgrades is that they could do a better job of letting coaches influence their team. Assistant

coaches, coordinators, and training/scouting staffs would add an extra dimension to coaching.

EA Tiburon also overhauled scouting and free agency, with the former vastly improved from last year. I like being able to choose which attributes and traits to scout, and with the scouting upgrade (a must-buy) the draft actually functions. The entire draft process is fun because of the little surprises that pop up during scouting and Trey Wingo's draft-day audio profiles on draftees. Maybe a potential draft pick goes back to college or drops due to character concerns. Stories like these and many more (in one playthrough, Kurt Warner came out of retirement) surface in a news hub that's augmented by media tweets, and they add a texture to each season which has been missing in past franchise modes.

As much as I like Connected Careers, some things are missing or unnecessarily frustrating. The lack of an overarching calendar makes it hard to know how many scouting periods are left before the draft and how many times you can bid on players in free agency. Furthermore, you can't see all of a player's info when you try to sign or trade them, and other useful info is needlessly buried (although there is a SNAFU in the Team Needs screen that lets you see the actual overall ratings for some potential draft

picks). Restricted free agents, variable contract structures, practice squads, and other franchise features are still absent. For some reason EA even removed the Combine and pro days.

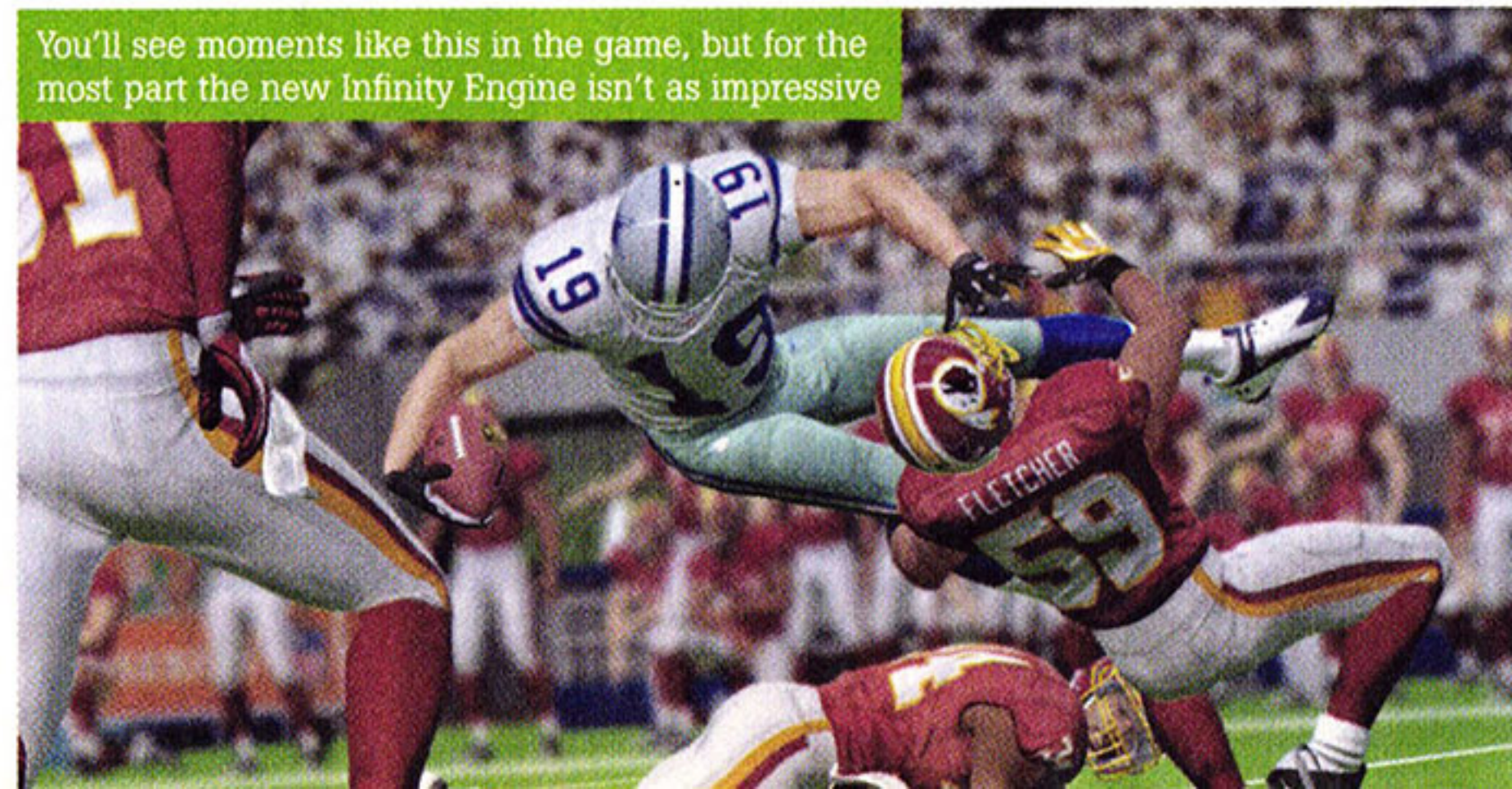
If there's one glaring mistake that brings Madden 13 down, it's the new Infinity physics engine. It sometimes makes good on its intent to bring more realistic physics, varied hits, and multiple contact points on the body, but the effects of player collision are inconsistent. You never know if you're going to unexpectedly trip during inside runs, and the new physics system can make players look sloppy, with arms flailing, legs buckling, and players flopping on the ground. The tackles sometimes feel predetermined, and suction blocking and tackling still occurs.

Both Madden 12 and Madden 13 are incomplete experiences, but in different ways. The former wasn't a good game, whereas this year's title introduces several aspects that need to be improved instead of scrapped. New passing gameplay similar to NCAA 13 opens up the field for QBs, and the XP system is a benchmark for the franchise. We haven't seen the best Madden has to offer, but it's a lot easier to rebuild when you have the right pieces in place. » **Matthew Kato**

The Kinect QB Cadence

You can bark out pre-play commands with the Kinect, but given how little time you have between plays and how the peripheral doesn't always pick up what you say, I would advise against it. That is unless you want to feel like a QB in a noisy stadium whose players can't hear what he's saying.

88 reviews



You'll see moments like this in the game, but for the most part the new Infinity Engine isn't as impressive

Pay attention to the main news feed, and you'll learn important info about potential draft picks



Sound Shapes

Headphones highly recommended

9

gameinformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Platforming Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment Developer Queasy Games Release August 7 ESRB E

Vita

» **Concept**

Platform your way through a series of levels, collecting notes to expand the music

» **Graphics**

Clean, often-abstract visuals make Sound Shapes a memorable and pleasing game to look at

» **Sound**

It's not a rhythm game, but the excellent sound design plays an integral role in the progression of each stage

» **Playability**

Your character controls perfectly. Outside of the editor mode, the game thankfully makes no extraneous use of the Vita's touchscreen or gyroscope features

» **Entertainment**

The music creates a surprisingly emotional experience to guide you through each of the five stages

» **Replay Value**

Moderately high

Sound Shapes is a simple platformer that incorporates music in such a significant way that it feels like a rhythm game, but without the need for all that pesky rhythm. You play as a little ball with a dot on it, sticking to walls and jumping between platforms on a journey to collect notes. As you collect notes, the music grows more complex, building and building until you feel as though you have been instrumental in the creation of a full song that narrates your adventure.

The way the music manifests itself around you creates a surprisingly emotional experience. You won't find a discernable plot of any kind, but as the music builds, you can't help but feel as though you are climbing to an emotional crescendo. You forget that you are moving a little ball from the left side of the screen to the right, and find yourself feeling something extraordinary as every note you collect adds to the stirring orchestration. It's a simple concept – making sure that collectibles are actually worth something – but many games neglect it.

The music is crucial, but Sound Shapes is also an incredibly well-designed platformer. By simplifying the player character to a geometric shape, there is never any misunderstanding about where your character will land. You can stick to like-colored walls and hold square to

deactivate stickiness and move faster. Everything that can kill you, be it enemy or dangerous pit, is colored red. You will always know what to avoid, what you can stick to, and where you need to go without any second guessing.

None of the levels take very long, making

Sound Shapes' campaign disappointingly short. Making up for the minimal developer-made content, Sound Shapes puts a lot of weight behind its level creation system, offering new creation pieces for progression in the campaign à la LittleBigPlanet. I usually like to leave the level creating to the professionals and the talented amateurs, but I was quickly enthralled by the level creation without having to work too hard.

I'm surprised

by how personally involved I became in the journey of a tiny ball with a dot on it. Sound Shapes is an excellent platformer, but the music that progressively fills each stage as you move forward is really what makes the game something special. » **Kyle Hilliard**



Persona 4 Arena

No casuals in the Velvet Room

8.5

gameinformer
SILVER

Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) Publisher Atlus Developer Arc System Works Release August 7 ESRB T

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

The cast of Atlus' Persona duke it out in the arena that Arc System Works built

» **Graphics**

Arc System Works continues its trend of amazing 2D sprite work

» **Sound**

Catchy remixes of familiar Persona tunes, plus dual language tracks

» **Playability**

Despite a simplified control scheme, newcomers will be left behind. Hardcore fighting fans will find a deep combat engine and satisfying difficulty curve

» **Entertainment**

Fans wanting more Persona lore will not be let down, and fighting game fans have a lot of mechanics to chew on

» **Replay Value**

High

Atlus and Arc System Works are specialists in their respective genres. Persona 4 Arena is a collaboration, but each side sticks to what they do best: lengthy storytelling (Atlus) and deep fighting mechanics (Arc System Works). Little is done to blur the lines between the two, leaving a distilled representation of each.

The visual novel approach to P4A's story mode is atypical of most fighting games. Text, spoken dialogue, and animated cutscenes place a heavy emphasis on narrative. The action in story mode is relegated to occasional dialogue selections and a handful of one-round fights at a low difficulty level so players interested in the story can focus on it without much distraction. Characters have their own individual perspectives, providing an incentive to play through multiple times

to experience the entire story. The crossover between Persona 3 and 4 (and introduction of a new character, Labrys) serves as a treat for fans of the RPGs.

Casual fighting game players will undoubtedly struggle with mastering some of the high-level mechanics, but those fans can still have fun here. Mashing the A button results in an auto-combo ending in a special move, so it at least looks like you know what you're doing. These low-effort, high-satisfaction combos make it easy to burn through story mode, but it doesn't level the playing field when it comes to competition, since moves executed via auto-combo have reduced damage.

Will a new player have a better chance to win against a veteran? Not really. Having an inner tube doesn't suddenly make you a world-class swimmer, and novice players will drown when faced with the complex combat. Breaking away from the auto-combo system and manually performing combos requires the strict timing and execution that Arc System Works' fighters are known for.

The mechanics are deep with a lot of room for experimentation. Hardcore fans won't be left wanting.

Having seen a release in Japan in the arcade and on home consoles, a number of balance changes and tweaks are already in place, signifying support from Atlus. That support, along with growing popularity among the fighting game community in North America, could greatly increase the longevity of the title and ensure you've always got someone to fight against.

The audio and visual representation is a fresh take on the already slick Persona style. Arc System Works' treatment brings the 3D models of the Persona characters into the 2D space with hand-drawn sprite work and sprawling, highly detailed backgrounds. In terms of background music, a majority of what you'll hear consists of remixed versions of existing Persona tunes.

Persona 4 Arena's gameplay, while having a few hooks for casual players, is largely inaccessible to them. There's not a lot of middle ground. Mastering the mechanics of this engine involves a lot of time and effort in the training room. This game hits a lot of the notes that catch the attention of casual and hardcore fighting game fans, even if it won't necessarily bring them together. » **Jason Oestreicher**



Borderlands 2

A genre-blending triumph

9.75

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Take an already-stellar foundation and improve everything

» **Graphics**

Pandora is looking far better thanks to locales with more variation than the original's

» **Sound**

Hilarious dialogue is delivered perfectly, and the music fits the mood throughout

» **Playability**

Borderlands 2 controls as smoothly as anything in the FPS genre, and inventory management is a breeze

» **Entertainment**

One of the best action experiences in gaming

» **Replay Value**

High



gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameinformer
PLATINUM

Style 1 or 2-Player Shooter (4-Player Online) Publisher 2K Games
Developer Gearbox Software Release September 18 ESRB M

Three years ago, gamers were treated to an ambitious title that appealed to fans of first-person shooters, lootfests, and RPGs alike. Its sequel would have been a step up (and a multi-million seller, assuredly) even if Gearbox only expanded upon the narrative. Instead of taking the easy route, the studio has taken everything that impressed in the original and greatly enhanced it. From major bullet points like the story to smaller details like the UI and inventory system, Borderlands 2 surpassed my expectations and stands as a prime example of how to knock a sequel out of the park.

Unlike the first game, players have a very specific enemy in mind as they shoot their way across Pandora. Handsome Jack has taken credit for the original vault hunters' actions, and has tapped into a vast supply of the valuable element Eridium in his rise to power as leader of the Hyperion corporation and dictator of Pandora. When a new set of vault hunters catches wind of his ultimate plans for the planet, they set out to reunite with familiar faces and put an end to Jack's reign. With an entertaining antagonist, some surprising twists, and cutscenes you actually want to watch, the story is one of the many significant steps up from its predecessor.

The new classes are vaguely similar to classes from the original game, but their abilities and skill trees make them uniformly superior. My playthrough was a blast as Zer0, the robotic ninja with the ability to cloak himself and deal massive damage with sniper rifles and his sword. His deception ability is more flexible than I anticipated, and it saved me in numerous scenarios. In most circumstances, I'd use it to sneak around enemies as they were distracted by my holographic decoy, and

surprise them with a super-powerful melee attack. In other instances, I'd use the ability to aid my escape from deadly situations, distract enemies as I revived my partners, or use it as an opportunity to retreat to an ideal sniping position.

Utilizing the same user-friendly co-op framework as the first game, experimenting with the classes' unique abilities in tandem is rewarding. While an enemy is suspended in the air by Maya's Phaselock, Axton can lay down a turret and unleash a torrent of firepower. After Salvador draws the attention of enemies by flipping them the bird, Zer0 has a great opportunity to sprint behind the pack for silent assassinations. Gunfights are rarely generic affairs, as the interplay between characters assures unique scenarios.

Having four distinct classes allows for a variety of gameplay experiences, but the replayability doesn't stop there. Each class has three distinct skill trees to explore, and your playstyle can vary wildly depending on how you choose to distribute skill points. My Zer0 was a melee machine. I opted to take down Pandora's bad-dies with my sword just as often as with my bullets. If I had chosen to follow the sniping skill tree, Zer0 would instead be a long-range threat with quick reload times and high critical hit percentages. It's almost like Borderlands 2 has twelve different classes instead of four.

We didn't get much of a chance to learn about the vault hunters during the first game, but by taking Roland, Brick, Lilith, and Mordecai out of the players' hands, Gearbox has freed itself to do more with the characters. They return to help the new crew, and they're just a few of the many colorful characters that assign quests. Fetch quest missions and generic objectives are rare in Borderlands 2,

as even seemingly inconsequential sidequests have plenty of entertainment value. Outside of the main story, you find yourself participating in activities as diverse as solving a murder, inspiring Scooter as he writes a romantic poem, robbing a train, getting a skag to defecate on a bomb, having a pistol duel in an Old West-style town, and helping Claptrap organize his birthday party. Throughout the game, the dialogue and clever missions display a sense of humor on par with the best in the industry.

While the new classes and focused narrative are the marquee bullet points when it comes to this sequel's improvements, that's barely scratching the surface of the multitude of smaller upgrades. Inventory management and the user interface are much better, allowing for simple buying, selling, and comparing of items. Character customization allows players to alter their classes with different heads and skins. A new token system rewards players for completing challenges by granting stat bonuses that carry over to any character on the same profile. Enemy characters are more varied, including both appearance and behavior. It's now possible to crawl to safety while waiting for a partner to revive you. These may not all be blockbuster features on their own, but they all add up to a noticeably superior experience.

All of the improvements would make for a standout title even if it were constricted to single-player. Considering Gearbox has continued to put this franchise in a league of its own when it comes to co-op, it elevates the game to something more. With its unmatched co-op gameplay, intense shootouts, addictive loot collecting, expansive skill customization, hilarious dialogue, and insane level of replayability, Borderlands 2 is one of the most rewarding gaming experiences of this console generation. » **Dan Ryckert**



Deadlight

Fun platforming action meets intense zombie outbreak

Style 1-Action **Publisher** Microsoft Studios
Developer Deadlight **Release** August 1 **ESRB** M

8

This side-scrolling action game lets players dispatch and evade zombies in new, interesting ways for the genre. It struggles with storytelling issues along the way, but emerges as a fresh take on the staling zombie concept.

Deadlight's storytelling is its biggest flaw. Cheap-looking graphic novel cutscenes attempt to stitch Randall's narrative together with flimsy characters and voice acting, but fail.

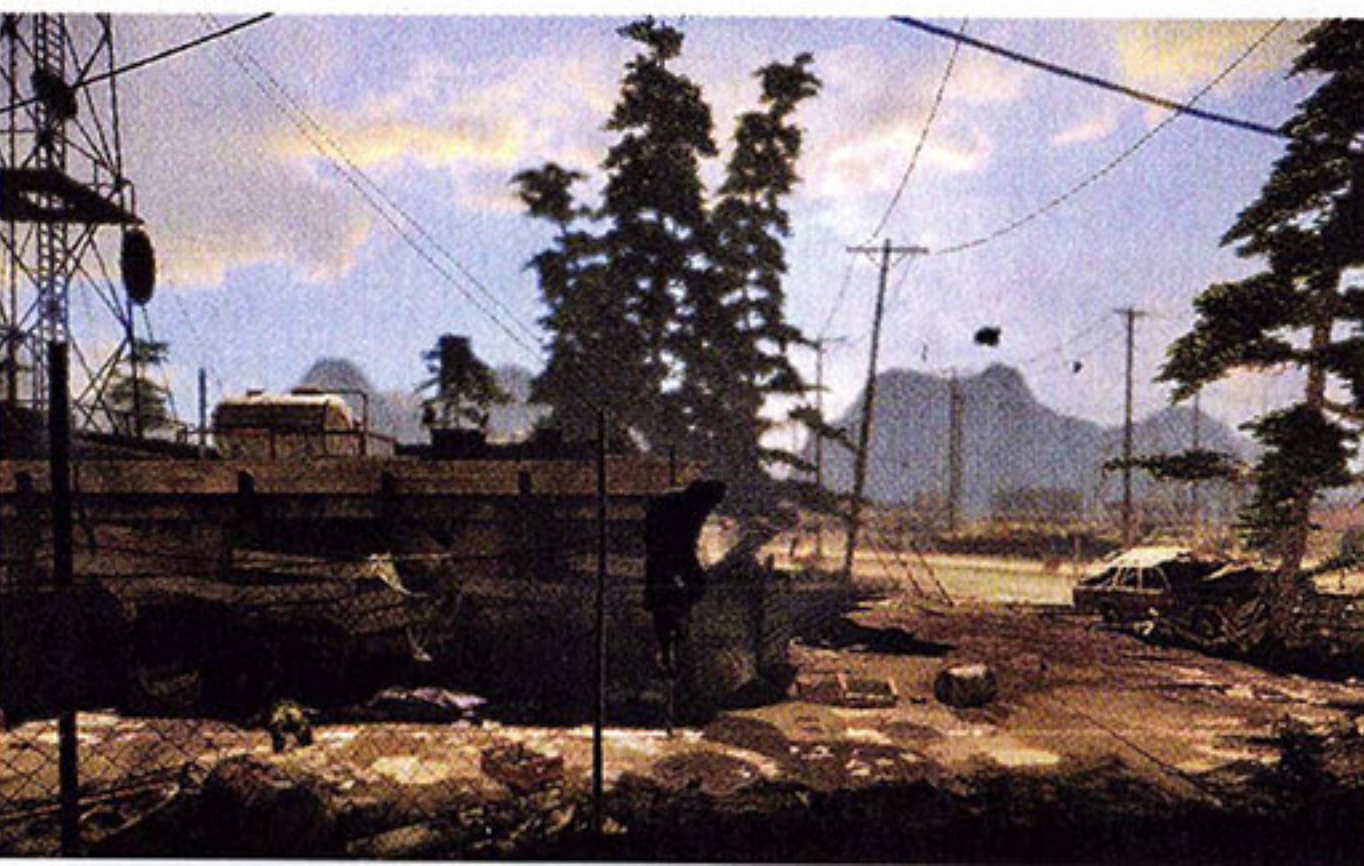
Despite Randall's tenuous motivations, working through a ravaged Seattle and its suburbs in 2.5D is fascinating. A bleak art style and detailed visuals increase suspense. The foreground is heavily shadowed at times, giving Randall and his surroundings a dreary, Limbo-like silhouetted look.

Randall can do the platforming basics like sprint, leap from ledges, and push boxes to progress between areas on his linear quest. He can also whistle to attract zombies. Standing on the opposite side of a pit from a pack of zombies, taunting them, then watching them fall to their doom is a sadistic joy.

Zombies aren't always the main obstacles. Sometimes they only harass you while you deduce a route through the simple puzzles. These puzzles rarely require you to do more than flip a switch or push a box to reach a ledge, but occasionally you have more interesting tasks, like knocking down a water reserve to put out a raging fire.

Most of the game is spent leaping across ledges and studying the surroundings to progress, but sometimes you just get cornered. Zombies are physical barriers, and you can't simply run through them. No matter how proficient I became wielding Randall's ax, two or three zombies could routinely take me down if I tried brute force. Randall's limited stamina meter holds players back from relentlessly wailing on the undead. A select number of firearms allow you to easily take out small packs by aiming with the right analog stick, but ammo is scarce. The lack of a death penalty takes the sting out of failure.

Creating a compelling zombie game in a generation with too many of them is a hard task. Tequila Works manages to do this while successfully merging it with the unlikely action-platforming genre. The lame narrative and lack of consistent challenge can't overshadow the fun I had with Deadlight. » **Tim Turi**



360

» **Concept**

Combine the survival and intensity of a good zombie game with side-scrolling platforming akin to Limbo

» **Graphics**

Smooth animations and detailed 2.5D environments create a visually impressive game rivaling Epic Games' Shadow Complex

» **Sound**

Zombie groans and other basic sound effects do the job. The music is forgettable and the voice acting is unconvincing

» **Playability**

Precise platforming, well-designed puzzles, and clever analog stick aiming make this easy to master

» **Entertainment**

The comic book-style cutscenes, lack of a death penalty, and disappointing climax leave a bit to be desired, but this is still well worth it

» **Replay Value**

Moderate



Papo & Yo

Triumph of the imagination

Style 1-Player Puzzle/Platform **Publisher** Minority Media
Developer Minority Media **Release** August 14 **ESRB** E10+

8

Amid a cavalcade of military shooters and fantasy hack n' slashers, a game with something more personal to say is refreshing. Few topics are more intimate than the one expressed in Papo & Yo. Created as a parable about creative director Vander Caballero's childhood experience with an alcoholic father, this narrative puzzle game slowly tells a challenging and thought-provoking message. Papo & Yo is a moving allegory about family, abuse, and the power of imagination to rise above.

The game opens on Quico, a young boy hiding in a closet as something monstrous stalks outside the door. A magic passage in the back of the wardrobe offers escape into the South American favela that Quico calls home, and with the help of chalk lines on the cement, Quico's imagination transforms the shanty buildings into a grand adventure through which he can leap and climb. As he journeys, a towering monster joins him. The monster can aid in growth and progression, but as soon as the monster devours a poison frog, it flies into a rage and Quico must flee.

Quico's world is well realized, but the visuals are sometimes lackluster. The repeated tilesets of the run-down slum buildings is limiting, even if beautiful sights, from breathtaking graffiti wall art to distant glimmering rainbows, pop up here and there. The visual limitations carry over into some subpar technical implementation; I encountered numerous clipping issues, and even fell through the game world several times during my multiple playthroughs.

Papo & Yo involves moving and pushing boxes, timed platforming, lever pulling, and other familiar activities. These exercises are only moderately challenging and usually linear in structure. While the puzzles themselves rarely astound, the magic of the experience comes from the way those puzzles affect the world, changing what might be an overly simplistic challenge into a surprising and memorable moment. Moving a small cardboard box might simultaneously transpose the location of an entire building. Tracing a chalk line might be the key to opening a portal into another world. Nearly everything in the game is an analogue to something greater and more significant.

That concept carries over into the story, in which players slowly piece together a sequence of characters and events that shaped and shattered Quico's life. The final conclusion of the drama may be a contentious one, drawing some harsh conclusions about the way a child must come to terms with their parents' failings. Those interested in games that stretch the boundaries of interactive narrative will appreciate this startling and emotionally nuanced examination of a complex topic. » **Matt Miller**

PS3

» **Concept**

A highly linear puzzle game doubles as a personal tale about substance abuse and its effect on children

» **Graphics**

The muddy textures and overused tilesets don't look great, but flashes of beautiful wall art and imaginative backdrops enliven the atmosphere

» **Sound**

A delicate and evocative score draws on the traditions of South American instrumentation and folk styles

» **Playability**

Simple platforming controls are easy for any player to learn

» **Entertainment**

Familiar puzzle solving within unconventional storytelling is a compelling hook

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High

Hybrid

Jetpacks can only get you so far

6

360

» **Concept**

A multiplayer third-person shooter with high-flying combat and a persistent world map

» **Graphics**

Graphics are crisp and clear, but most of the environments look the same

» **Sound**

Music is more prominent in the between-match lobby than the matches themselves, which leaves the audio landscape sparse

» **Playability**

Pick-up-and-play controls are easy to learn, but beware of long matchmaking times

» **Entertainment**

While fun, multiplayer modes lack innovation and staying power

» **Replay Value**

Moderately Low

In the crowded shooter market, a new series has a lot of competition. Being low on the totem pole, a new game not only needs to be competent, it also needs a unique hook to pull players away from their favorite shooters. On the surface it seems Hybrid does just that by using jetpacks alongside a strategic cover system, but the lack of freeform flying limits the experience.

Hybrid's plot synopsis is cryptic: An alien race competes with humans over a scarce resource called dark matter. You can join up with either the Variants or Paladins, factions in a power struggle to control pockets of dark matter scattered across an expansive, Earth-shaped map. Matchmaking preferences let you hone in on the playstyle you prefer, but some lobby wait times are excruciatingly long – five minutes or more in some cases. The familiar game modes are varied, but it wouldn't have hurt 5th Cell to include more unique match types suited to Hybrid's particular style.

The lack of map variety is by far the most disappointing aspect of Hybrid. During my playtime, I thought the game featured only two or three locations, simply because every map looks and plays almost identically.

Gunning down enemies is fun enough, but

Hybrid adds a new twist with rocket-propelled movement. You select a piece of cover and fly towards it, but after that, you're on autopilot. You can break the flight by choosing another piece of cover to maneuver to, using a speed boost, or strafing away from enemies. The lack of complete control means you're sometimes missing your landing zone.

Hybrid proves that you can't depend on a few flashy additions to rev up the shooting genre; innovation needs to go into every area possible for a game to stand out.

The jetpacks and cover system are twists on standard third-person firefights, but lose their allure quickly due to uninteresting maps and the reliance on modes



from other popular games. That's not to say the game isn't entertaining, but it lacks staying power. » **Kimberley Wallace**

Dust: An Elysian Tail

The best pieces falling into place

8.75

360

» **Concept**

Great ideas from across genres converge in a classically styled side-scrolling action/RPG

» **Graphics**

Animations and environments are great, but the character portraits during dialogue and cutscenes look like they're in the wrong game

» **Sound**

The soundtrack has a few excellent tracks, and the voice acting is good – though I couldn't stand Dust's sidekick

» **Playability**

Combat starts simple, but evolves to give players all the variety they need while remaining easy to control

» **Entertainment**

I was sold after the first real combat encounter, when I realized that the whole game would be that fluid and fun

» **Replay Value**

Moderate

The easiest way to describe Dust: An Elysian Tail is by positioning it as an intersection between other popular titles, like Metroid meets Odin Sphere, or Devil May Cry meets Castlevania. This downloadable title combines 2D exploration, fluid melee battles, and role-playing elements into a hybrid that encompasses some of my favorite things about gaming.

The titular hero, Dust, is a master of sword-play. By chaining together button presses, players initiate flashy combos that cut through hordes of bad guys with flair. Add in the ability to channel magic through Dust's sword, and even regular encounters become effect-laden spectacles. The aftermath of a fight – items and money littering the ground – is extremely satisfying, especially since Dust can equip new weapons and armor he finds (or buys) to improve his abilities.

Players have just enough options to encourage diversity and discourage button mashing, but a little more depth might have helped with Dust's biggest shortcoming: boss battles. These clashes do not put players skills to the test, since every boss is comically simple. I beat them in about 30 seconds each (except the final boss, who has multiple 30-second forms). You could

just choose a harder setting, but be advised that once you start the game, you can't switch the difficulty.

Dust's distinctive art style ensures that the action is just as fun to watch as it is to control. The main character's animation is particularly stunning, and though the enemies don't move as smoothly, their designs are still cool. In the face of all that visual splendor, I was surprised by how much I hated the design of incidental characters. The issue isn't whether or not you're into cutesy human/animal things; the amateurish style is sharply at odds with the impressive visuals you're treated to while exploring and fighting.

As Dust gains new abilities, like sliding or double-jumping, he can go back to explore

previously inaccessible areas. I never felt like I was doing too much backtracking, because the rewards usually justify the effort. An awesome weapon blueprint (which you can then assemble with the simple-but-fun crafting system) or permanent health bonus are well worth the slight detours they require.

Every gamer has spent time daydreaming about their perfect game, mentally mixing and matching different concepts and mechanics into a hypothetical supergame. Instead of just daydreaming, Dean Dodrill decided to make it happen. Dodrill is the one-man team behind developer Humble Hearts, and Dust: An Elysian Tail is the triumph that resulted from his efforts. » **Joe Juba**



Rock Band Blitz

Familiar fun, minus the peripherals

8

Style 1-Player Music Publisher Harmonix Music Systems Developer Harmonix Release August 28 (PS3), August 29 (Xbox 360) ESRB T

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Play through 25 new Rock Band songs minus multiplayer or plastic instruments

» **Graphics**

Colorful onscreen visuals keep the game inviting and attractive

» **Sound**

Strong new songs lean towards the pop end of the spectrum, but your own Rock Band library fills the gaps

» **Playability**

Simple controls, but lacking the complexity of play inherent to the core series

» **Entertainment**

A fun way to scratch that music genre itch, but the lack of true multiplayer is a drag

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High

Music game fans have reason to be excited, as Harmonix is offering a new way to dig back into the Rock Band experience. Blitz feels like a cross-breed between Rock Band and Harmonix's lesser known earlier music games, Frequency and Amplitude, with some new ideas thrown into the mix. The player hops back and forth among individual tracks that represent different instruments in the song, and gameplay focuses on accuracy as well as strategically switching between all the available threads. It's fun, but some strange design choices and the unfortunate absence of multiplayer pull down an otherwise great idea.

Like any music game worth its salt, Rock Band Blitz lives or dies by its song library. The more accessible and simple gameplay is matched by a pop soundtrack filled with hits like Rick Springfield's "Jessie's Girl," Foster the People's "Pumped Up Kicks," and Pink's "Raise Your Glass." For fans with different tastes, Blitz's strongest feature is its ability to play any and all songs already in your Rock Band song library. You may have stopped keeping count a few years back, but that tally now amounts to over 3,500 songs. In addition, all of Rock Band Blitz's 25 native songs are available for play in your core Rock Band experience.

No matter what songs you play, you drive down a familiar highway of rhythmic button presses. Each track only has two note options – left or right – so keeping up with a single track is easy. The challenge lies in knowing when to switch between your different instruments to build up that track's multiplier. Get each instrument to a high enough multiplier before a checkpoint, and you increase your multiplier cap, creating an addictive loop as you chase absurdly high scores. The experience lacks the intense accuracy focus of the core Rock Band games, but adds a fun new strategic layer.

As you play and improve, you unlock power-ups to help boost your score, from abilities that auto-play an instrument to zany bonuses like sending a pinball bouncing across the tracks. I enjoyed playing around with different power-up combos, but progression is hamstrung by the strange choice to make you pay in-game coinage for every use of a power-up. On many occasions, you won't have enough money to use any power-ups on a song until you grind for more money.

Blitz does everything it can to encourage competition against your online friends, offering opportunities to chase each other's scores. Sadly, Blitz offers no multiplayer, either online or



locally. This is especially unfortunate considering how well the formula worked in Amplitude. The Rock Band franchise has always had a party game mindset at its core, and stripping the option to play and cooperate with friends feels antithetical to its roots.

Examined on its own merits, Rock Band Blitz offers highly tuned rhythm matching fun, and the new approach to multipliers makes score chasing a blast. Harmonix has leveraged its obscenely large music library to boost the appeal of Blitz, and the game's draw may be directly proportional to how much previous money you've already invested in the series. » **Matt Miller**

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Orcs Must Die 2

A sequel to die for

9.25

PC

» **Concept**

The green hordes are coming, and you have to supplement smart trap placement with up-close and personal face-smashing to stop them

» **Graphics**

The same charming cartoony style – heck, a lot of the same cartoony models – return from the original, but excellent animation takes the average visuals to the next level

» **Sound**

The score, effects, and voiceovers fit the gameplay so perfectly that their limited scope is easy to forgive

» **Playability**

The only issue is some occasional collision weirdness, particularly with melee weapons, but it's a trivial concern even for a melee-centric playstyle

» **Entertainment**

The same formula worked well in the first game, but the dramatically expanded variety and the addition of co-op make this sequel a huge leap forward

» **Replay Value**

High

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action/Strategy (2-Player Online) Publisher Robot Entertainment Developer Robot Entertainment Release July 30 ESRB N/A

This is what last fall's *Orcs Must Die* would have been in a perfect world. *Orcs Must Die 2* is the same game, but the vastly greater breadth of the experience makes the original look like a demo. You're still combining direct combat with deadly traps to slaughter wave after wave of barbarous monsters before they reach their goal, but the additions of another playable character, cooperative play, several traps and weapons, and a handful of enemies unleash players' murderous creativity.

The straightforward application of spike traps, acid sprayers, shotguns, and bladestaffs to squishy orc bodies is more than sufficient at first. Once its basic tower defense-style concepts are established, *Orcs Must Die 2* wastes no time in presenting new looks to the player. Multiple paths, spawn points, and goals force you to dash between areas, often fighting a desperate battle to wipe out one band of enemies so you can beat feet to the next trouble spot. New enemies shrug off old strategies, as fliers float over your carefully constructed defenses and hulking ogres casually stroll through horrific gauntlets before bashing your face in with a giant club. Constant re-evaluation of your tactics and load-outs is necessary to progress, much less achieve top rankings for each level – not only giving you leaderboard bragging rights, but also skulls to buy upgrades for your arsenal.

Orcs Must Die 2's hooks sank in for good as soon as I realized the extent to which the game encourages and even expects players to radically alter their approaches. The free, unlimited ability to refund all spent skulls lets players try out any crazy combination they can think of. Players have an immense amount of creative space to mess around with thanks to the expanded options in this sequel, my favorite of which are the passive boosts (like health regeneration and extra coin drops) provided by the new trinket

items. The first huge combo score I pulled off had me laughing out loud, with floor scorchers setting orcs on fire as they walked through acid spray only to be thrown around by a system of ceiling-mounted haymakers like a horrible washing machine. Replaying the same level with the other character and funneling all the enemies into a narrow hallway to be whirlwinded into oblivion by my massive hammer as dwarf guardians fling grenades into their midst is a completely different, yet similarly amazing experience.

While the new sorceress character shares the bulk of her trap/weapon options with the returning male war mage, the exclusive items each hero gets are so powerful that they enable totally different playstyles. Among other character-specific abilities, her cheap charm spell and mana-free area-effect blasts tear apart big groups with ease while his huge hammer smashes the strongest foes to bits in seconds. I constantly flip between the two (they have their own progression through levels and modes, which I heartily approve of for increasing replayability) because I love experimenting with both ability sets so much.

Robot Entertainment's crowning achievement is making players feel smart for smashing up the orcish hordes. Key to that sense of achievement is the excellent balance *Orcs Must Die 2* strikes between maintaining tension without being unduly difficult. Once you're familiar enough with a level to not worry about letting a single monster through, you can aspire to new goals. Killing enemies with combinations of traps and weapons yields a multiple of the basic currency reward for placing more traps, which lets you rig better combos, garnering geometrically larger scores. I'm not one to chase high scores, but I feel the need to up my game when I see a friend with 10 times my score on the leaderboard. Replaying levels gets you more skulls, which let you buy more upgrades, which lead to



higher scores, and so on.

This replayability takes *Orcs Must Die 2* from great to incredible. You could blast through normal difficulty in a single dedicated day, but hard mode (which is well worth playing, rather than being a tacked-on nod to hardcore fans) is another story. Furthermore, classic mode brings several levels from the original into the sequel so you can see just how many more options you have now. Endless mode is the final challenge, and ramps up into obscene difficulty (and commensurate score and skull rewards) around wave 20, at which point you've still got a long way to go.

Co-op play is integrated without fuss. Rather than a separate set of co-op levels, any level can be played with a friend. The trade-off for having two players more than makes up for receiving less money individually. I had zero problems connecting or playing with buddies outside of a tiny bit of network latency that makes dancing in and out of ogres' melee range riskier. While many levels are obviously built to support co-op, with monsters taking simultaneous paths that have to be dealt with separately, I'm disappointed that horde compositions don't take the presence of a second player further into account. The normal and hard modes are both so much easier with a buddy that the otherwise enjoyable sense of tension is gutted. On the other hand, endless mode is still there for a challenge.

Orcs Must Die 2 is a strategy game at heart – you'll have a hard time even completing normal mode without at least some thought put into trap placement – but the constant action and adrenaline-surgings thrills of tearing orc hordes apart with your personal weapons and spells captures much of the appeal of third-person brawlers as well. The near-flawless execution on every level makes the brilliant concepts at the game's core shine through with perfect clarity. Even if you've never played or heard of the original game, *Orcs Must Die 2* is worthy of a place of honor in your collection. » **Adam Biessener**



New Super Mario Bros. 2

An all-too-familiar walk through the mushroom kingdom



Style 1-Player Platforming (2-Player Local) **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** Nintendo **Release** August 19 **ESRB** E

8.25

3DS

» **Concept**

Make coin collecting a major focus while leaning on aging New Super Mario Bros. mechanics

» **Graphics**

Many of the assets from previous NSMB games return

» **Sound**

Hope you're prepared to hear that song with the "wahs" in it over and over

» **Playability**

Controls are just as tight as a Mario game should be. Flying around with the raccoon tail again is great after all these years

» **Entertainment**

Innovation is in short supply here, but if you just want more NSMB, this will do the trick

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High

I can't believe six years have passed since Nintendo released New Super Mario Bros. on DS. It showed the company's willingness to revisit classic Mario 2D platforming, which hadn't seen an original entry since the early '90s, and offered many new tweaks. The latest game, New Super Mario Bros. 2, is actually the third game in the series, but it doesn't have an engaging new hook to entice players.

NSMB 2 is all about collecting those same gold coins you've been picking up for decades. A universal counter keeps track of every one you nab, but it in no way figures into the standard-issue kidnapped princess plot. The back of the box says to collect a million coins, but that's the only instruction you're given on the matter. I scored over 30,000 in my first playthrough, and all I got was a growing pile of coins on the title screen. To get the whole million is an enormous undertaking, and you aren't even given any unlocks or teasers about your reward along the way – just a few notification messages. Even worse, if you do manage to reach your goal, the million-coin reward is supremely disappointing (though I'm not going to spoil it here).

The new focus on amassing coins comes through in several of Mario and Luigi's new abilities.

The golden flower power-up is like a dream come true; Mario turns into a moving golden statue that shoots gold balls that turn blocks and enemies into coins. These projectiles also have a sweet explosion effect on contact that takes out a large area of enemies. Sure, it's overpowered, but it gets taken away when you're hit or



reach the end of a stage to keep things fair.

New gold rings temporarily turn all the enemies to gold and change all of their projectiles into coins. You can also jam Mario's head into a gold brick block that he wears as a helmet. It grants additional coins the more you move and adds in an extra layer of defense (though only for a limited amount of time).

As much fun as these new golden moves are, they're mostly brief thrill rides rather than vital tools. I love that the raccoon tail returns from Super Mario Bros. 3, but it doesn't help the game's case in bringing fresh concepts to the table. Most of the assets and songs seem reused from the previous two entries, and many levels are easy to forget. NSMB 2 feels like more of an expansion pack than a unique entry.

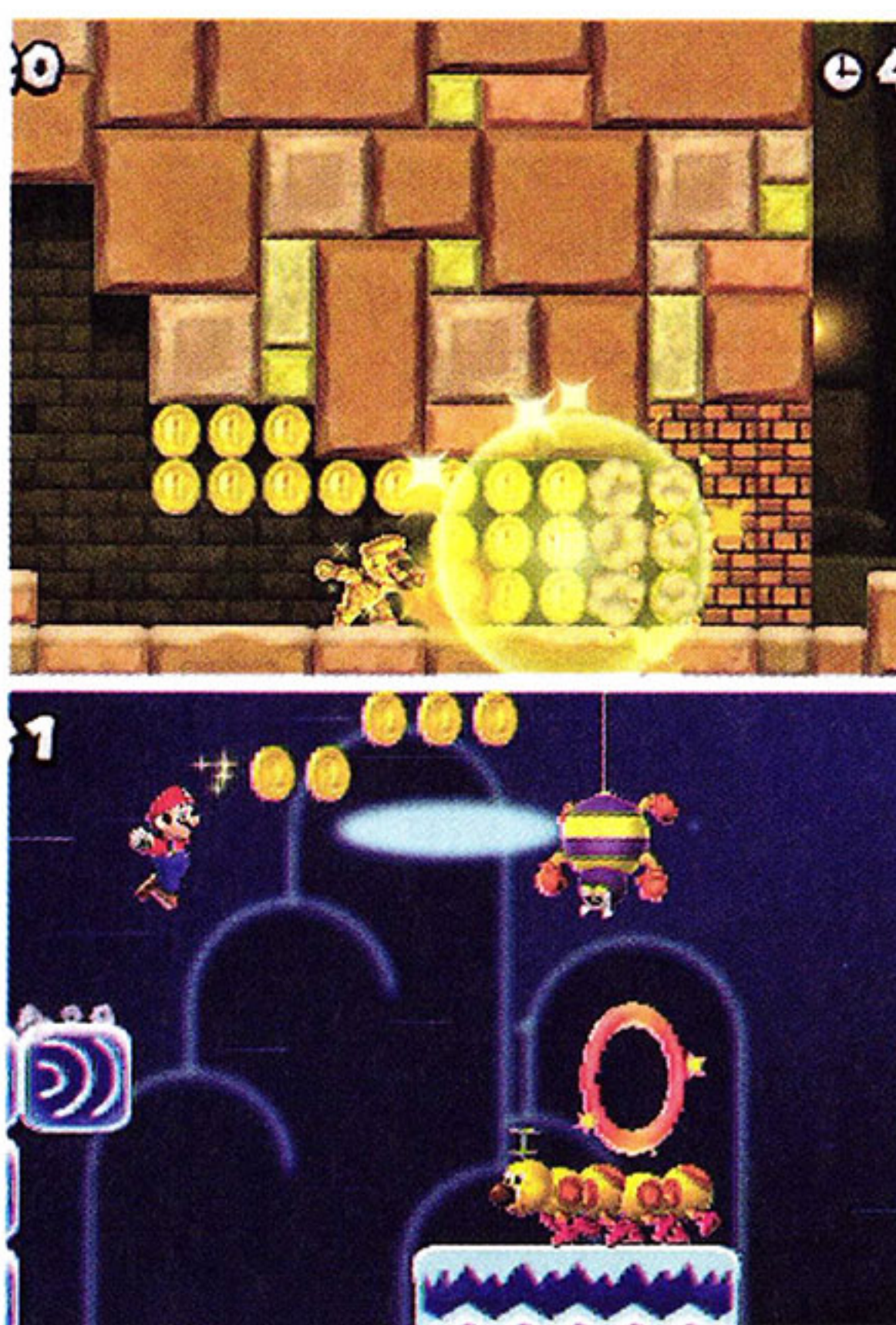
One promising new direction is coin rush mode, in which players have to survive three random stages in a row on limited time without dying while collecting as many coins as possible. You then send your record to other players via StreetPass. When receiving a challenge, you don't know what coin tally to shoot for, so you get a dramatic drumroll at the end to reveal who's the best. This would have been so much more effective if you could send challenges online or see a leaderboard of the best rush-

ers in the world. As anyone who's dealt with StreetPass knows, you can't count on your friends to have their system and game on them all the time. Good luck trying to track down strangers for challenge swapping.

The two-player co-op mode could also benefit from online capabilities, but at least it runs without hiccups in local wireless mode. Players control Mario and Luigi

(not those lame Toads) and earn twice the coins while teamed up. Only one player's save file can be used, so it will rack up all the level progress, hidden star coins, and the outrageous bounty of extra lives (I got up to well over 400). At least the second player gets to keep whatever coins they earn. Depending on who your partner is, they can be as much hindrance as help, just like in the Wii game. Things are much less chaotic with two plumbers than the full four.

A Mario expansion still beats out most other platformers out there in the control and polish department. I can't deny that I still enjoyed kicking koopa shells, climbing fences in castles, and hopping on the flag at the end of a stage. On the other hand, players have grown to expect innovation out of Mario, and this game makes a strong case that perhaps it's time for Nintendo to move on from the "new" formula. » **Bryan Vore**



PLAYSTATION 3

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	8.25	Dec-11	Nexuiz	6	May-12
All Zombies Must Die	7.5	Mar-12	NFL Blitz	8	Mar-12
Amazing Spider-Man, The	6.75	Sep-12	Ninja Gaiden 3	6	May-12
Amy	3	Mar-12	Okabu	8	Dec-11
Armored Core V	6.5	May-12	Payday: The Heist	6.5	Dec-11
Asura's Wrath	8.5	Apr-12	Prototype 2	8.5	Jun-12
Awesomenauts	8.5	Jul-12	Quantum Conundrum	8.5	Aug-12
Battlefield 3	9.25	Dec-11	Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	8.75	Dec-11
Binary Domain	7.5	May-12	Rayman Origins	8.5	Dec-11
Birds of Steel	7	Jun-12	Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	6	May-12
Blades of Time	4.5	May-12	Ridge Racer Unbounded	6.75	Jul-12
Crysis	8.25	Dec-11	Rocksmith	8.25	Dec-11
Darkness II	7.5	Mar-12	Saints Row: The Third	9	Dec-11
Devil May Cry HD Collection	8	May-12	Shank 2	7	Apr-12
Dirt Showdown	7.5	Jul-12	Silent Hill HD Collection	8	Apr-12
Disney Universe	6.5	Dec-11	Silent Hill: Downpour	7	Apr-12
Dragon's Dogma	8.5	Jun-12	Sims 3: Pets, The	7.5	Dec-11
Dyad	8.25	Sep-12	Skullgirls	8	Jun-12
FIFA Street	7.25	May-12	Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	8	Dec-11
Game of Thrones	6	Jul-12	Sleeping Dogs	7.75	Sep-12
Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	7.5	Jul-12	Sniper Elite V2	8.25	Jul-12
Gotham City Impostors	8	Apr-12	Sonic Generations	6.75	Dec-11
Grand Slam Tennis 2	8	Apr-12	Sorcery	6.75	Jul-12
House of the Dead: Overkill Extended Cut	8	Dec-11	Soulcalibur V	8.5	Mar-12
Inversion	6	Aug-12	Spec Ops: The Line	7.75	Aug-12
Jak and Daxter Collection	9.25	Mar-12	Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.5	Dec-11
Journey	9	Apr-12	SSX	7.75	Apr-12
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	8	Mar-12	Starhawk	7.5	Jul-12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	8.25	Aug-12	Street Fighter X Tekken	8.75	May-12
Lollipop Chainsaw	7.5	Aug-12	Syndicate	8	Apr-12
Lord of the Rings: War in the North	5.5	Dec-11	Tales of Graces f	7.75	Apr-12
Major League Baseball 2K12	6.75	May-12	Test Drive: Ferrari Racing Legends	6.5	Aug-12
Mass Effect 3	10	May-12	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	8	May-12
Max Payne 3	9.25	Jul-12	Twisted Metal	8.5	Apr-12
MLB 12: The Show	8.75	May-12	UEFA Euro 2012	6.75	Jun-12
NASCAR Unleashed	7	Dec-11	Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception	9.5	Dec-11
NCAA Football 13	8.75	Aug-12	Walking Dead Episode One: A New Day, The	8.25	Jul-12
Need for Speed: The Run	7.75	Dec-11	World Gone Sour	6.75	Jun-12
NeverDead	4	Mar-12	Yakuza: Dead Souls	7.75	May-12

8 | The Elder Scrolls V: Dawnguard

Platform 360 Release June 26 ESRB M Issue Sep '12

I had a blast returning to Skyrim after a few months away. Even so, Bethesda did such a fine job of entertaining me the first time out that Dawnguard feels more like an added bonus than an essential ingredient of the whole. – Matt Miller



XBOX 360

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	8.25	Dec-11	Gotham City Impostors	8	Apr-12	Prototype 2	8.5	Jun-12
Alan Wake's American Nightmare	7.75	Apr-12	Grand Slam Tennis 2	8	Apr-12	Quantum Conundrum	8.5	Aug-12
All Zombies Must Die	7.5	Mar-12	Guardian Heroes	8.25	Dec-11	Quarrel	8.5	Apr-12
Amazing Spider-Man, The	6.75	Sep-12	Hulk Hogan's Main Event	1	Dec-11	Rayman Origins	8.5	Dec-11
Amy	3	Mar-12	Inversion	6	Aug-12	Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	6	May-12
Armored Core V	6.5	May-12	Just Dance 3	6	Dec-11	Ridge Racer Unbounded	6.75	Jul-12
Asura's Wrath	8.5	Apr-12	Kinect Star Wars	5.5	Jun-12	Rocksmith	8.25	Dec-11
Awesomenauts	8.5	Jul-12	Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	8	Mar-12	Saints Row: The Third	9	Dec-11
Battlefield 3	9.25	Dec-11	LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	8.25	Aug-12	Shank 2	7	Apr-12
Binary Domain	7.5	May-12	Lollipop Chainsaw	7.5	Aug-12	Silent Hill HD Collection	8	Apr-12
Blades of Time	4.5	May-12	Lord of the Rings: War in the North	5.5	Dec-11	Silent Hill: Downpour	7	Apr-12
Darkness II	7.5	Mar-12	Major League Baseball 2K12	6.75	May-12	Sims 3: Pets, The	7.5	Dec-11
Devil May Cry HD Collection	8	May-12	Mass Effect 3	10	May-12	Sine Mora	8	Jun-12
Dirt Showdown	7.5	Jul-12	Max Payne 3	9.25	Jul-12	Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	8	Dec-11
Disney Universe	6.5	Dec-11	Minecraft Xbox 360 Edition	8.75	Jul-12	Sleeping Dogs	7.75	Sep-12
Dragon's Dogma	8.5	Jun-12	NASCAR Unleashed	7	Dec-11	Sniper Elite V2	8.25	Jul-12
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim – Dawnguard, The	8	Sep-12	NCAA Football 13	8.75	Aug-12	Sonic Generations	6.75	Dec-11
Fable Heroes	4	Jul-12	Need for Speed: The Run	7.75	Dec-11	Soulcalibur V	8.5	Mar-12
Fez	9.25	Jun-12	NeverDead	4	Mar-12	Spec Ops: The Line	7.75	Aug-12
FIFA Street	7.25	May-12	Nexuiz	6	May-12	Spelunky	8	Sep-12
Forza Motorsport 4	9.25	Dec-11	NFL Blitz	8	Mar-12	Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.5	Dec-11
Game of Thrones	6	Jul-12	Ninja Gaiden 3	6	May-12	Splatters, The	8	Jul-12
Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	7.5	Jul-12	Penny Arcade's On The Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness 3	8	Sep-12	SSX	7.75	Apr-12
						Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor	3	Aug-12
						Street Fighter X Tekken	8.75	May-12

the score

7.75 | Rainbow Moon

Platform PS3 Release July 10 ESRB E10+

Rainbow Moon doesn't have the triple-A production values of most modern RPGs, and it suffers from its share of flaws. But it also has deep and enjoyable combat, which drives a campaign that will keep you busy long after most retail games are collecting dust on your shelf. – Jeff Marchiafava

5.5 | Risen 2: Dark Waters

Platform PS3 • 360 Release July 31 Rating M

This pirate action/RPG is noticeably worse on console than on PC for a host of reasons, the foremost being that the sorely needed dodge feature that was patched into the original after release is missing in action. – Adam Biessener

7.5 | The Wreckateer

Platform 360 Release July 26 Rating E

While I can forgive The Wreckateer for lacking innovation, I can't forgive these lapses in execution – especially in a game that demands so much of the player. I enjoyed the game despite its flaws, but it's a missed opportunity for developer Iron Galaxy and Microsoft. – Matt Helgeson

9.25 | Ratchet & Clank Collection

Platform PS3 Release August 28 ESRB E10+,T

It rarely occurred to me while playing that these are gussied-up versions of last-gen games. Few modern games boast these levels of writing, pacing, and gameplay. Whether you're a Ratchet enthusiast or a series newcomer, this collection is a ton of fun. – Tim Turi

6 | Way of the Samurai 4

Platform PS3 Release August 21 ESRB M

Genuinely bizarre and often-comedic situations generated charm, but Way of the Samurai 4's dated visuals, control difficulties, and stiff combat makes it needlessly frustrating. – Kyle Hilliard

Dusty Pixels

The Classic Gaming Expo Returns To Las Vegas

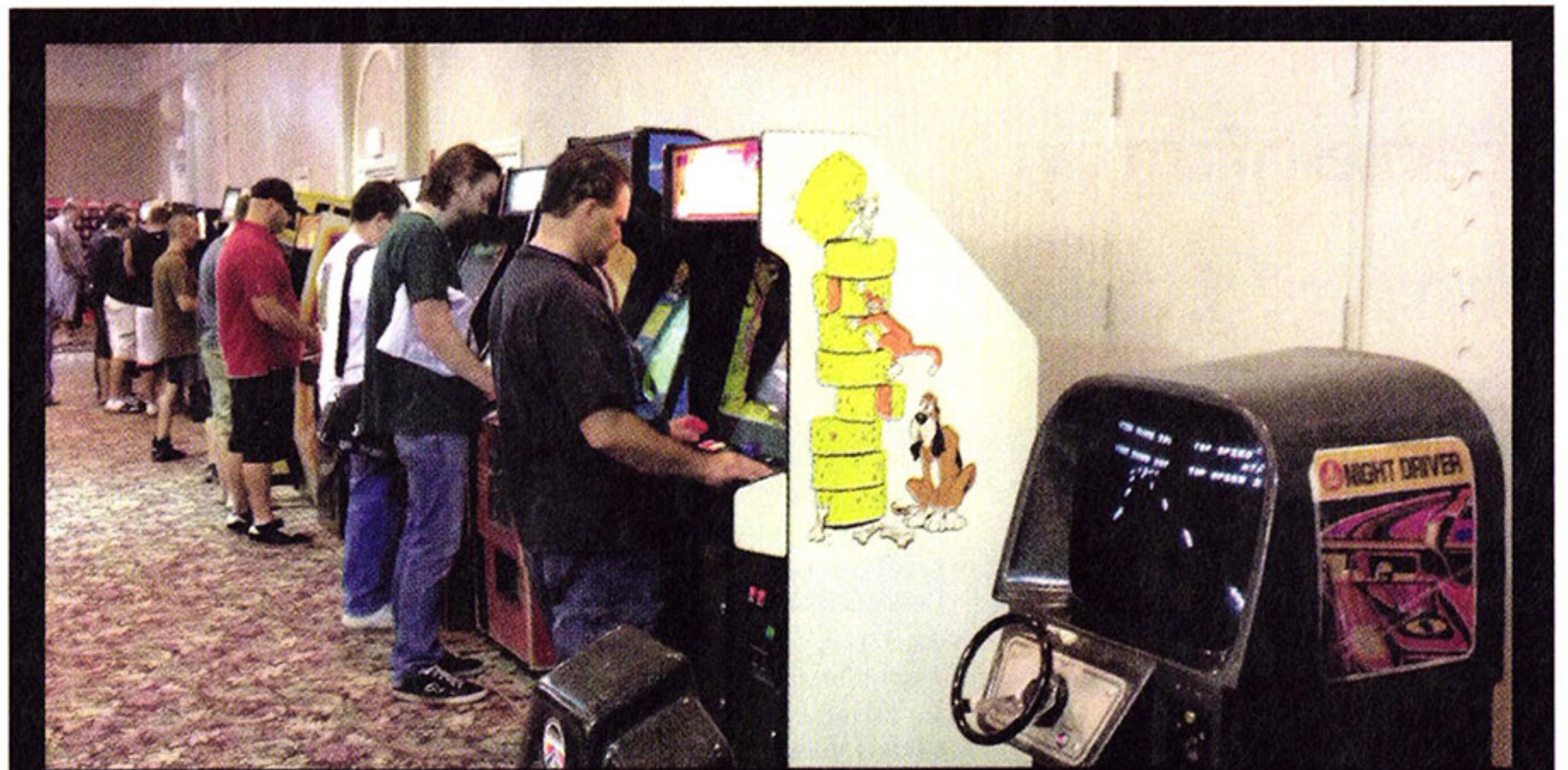
by Ben Reeves



Modern video games get a chance to shine at shows like E3, Gamescom, the Penny Arcade Expo, and a dozen other small conventions around the world, but where do fans of Ms. Pac-Man, Galaga, and Frogger go to share in their communal enthusiasm for the games of yesteryear? Las Vegas. For over 13 years, The Classic Gaming Expo has been the world's largest classic gaming convention. In 2010, the expo switched over to a bi-yearly schedule, so this August was the first time in two years that fans of classic games have had a show to call their own. The delay seems to have paid off, as this year's expo was bigger and better than ever before.

"The show started in 1999 as a way of bringing the pioneers of game collecting together with the pioneers of the gaming industry," says Sean Kelly, organizer for the Classic Gaming Expo and director of the Videogame History Museum. "We've located hundreds of alumni over the years and brought their contributions to our industry into the limelight. We've also preserved hundreds of their artifacts and, in the case of people who didn't want to add their items to our archives, we have made people aware that their relics hold some historical value."

In addition to the dozens of vendors selling classic games and paraphernalia, showgoers were able to enjoy live music from 8-Bit Weapon, play a variety of free-to-play coin-op machines scattered across the show floor, and attempt to achieve a high-score on a Fix-It Felix machine in promotion for Disney's upcoming film *Wreck-It Ralph*. Here's a look at some of the other highlights from this year's show.



The Speedboard was designed to allow players to rest NES controllers on their lap. Its designer must not have understood how thumbs work

Videogame History Museum

In 2010, the CGE formed the non-profit Videogame History Museum. In September of 2011, the museum used Kickstarter to successfully raise over \$50,000 towards the goal of finding a permanent home for the museum. Selections from the museum's collection are often on display at shows like E3, PAX, and GDC, but the layout at the Classic Gaming Expo was the most impressive to date. Many of the images on these pages are taken from that collection.

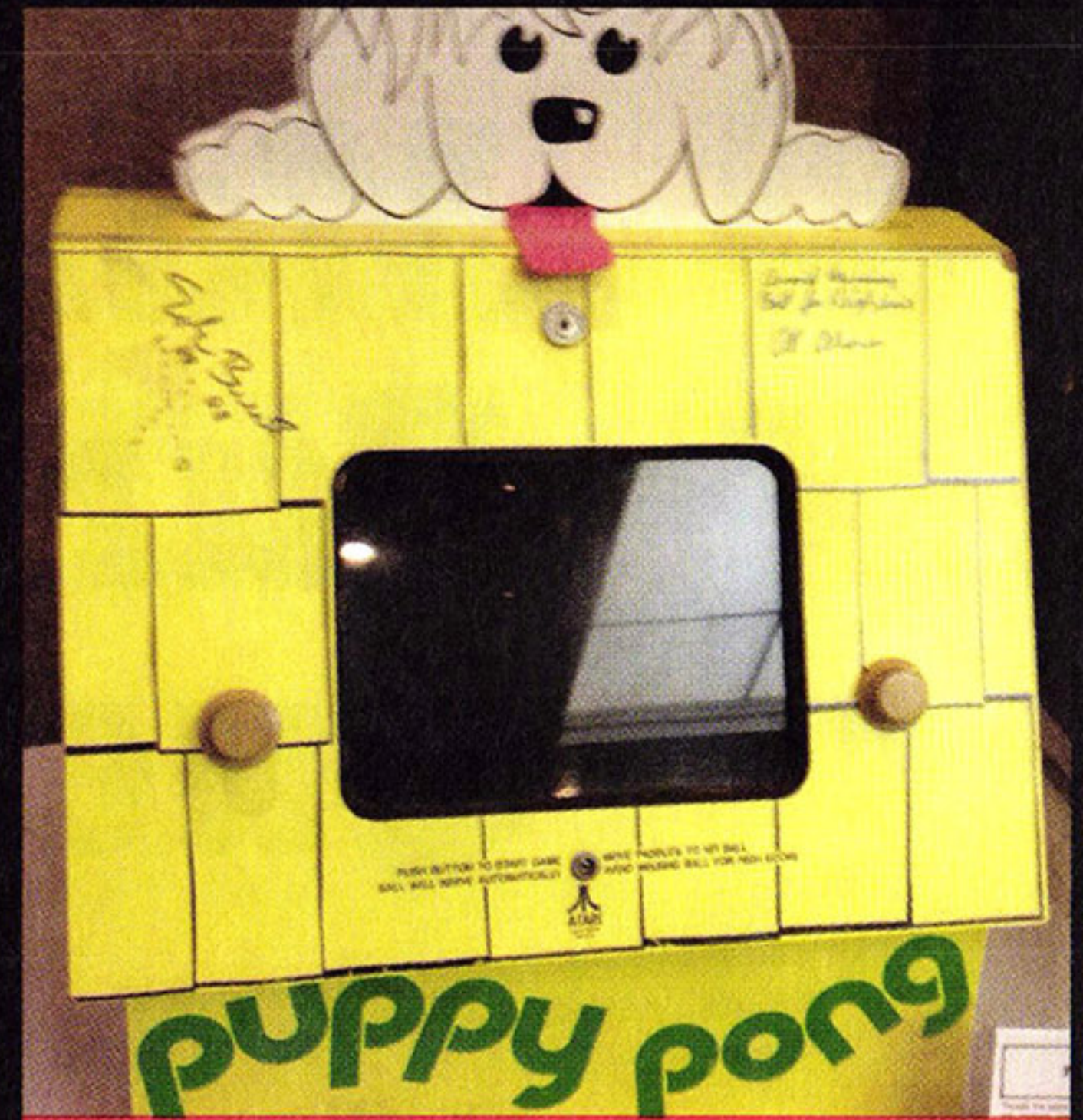
Panels

Video game luminaries were on hand to meet attendees and sign autographs. Many of them also gave talks or led panel discussions during the show. Highlights include a panel where Pitfall creator David Crane announced a Kickstarter funded project called JungleVenture, Howard Phillips recounted his crazy adventures while working in Nintendo's warehouse in the '80s, and game designer Warren Davis reminisced about his failed acting career and the creation of Q*bert.

Auction

On Saturday night, the CGE held an auction, in which some proceeds helped fund the Videogame History Museum. Rare items like a N64 development kit, Lucasfilm autographed manuals, and an Atari Jaguar system complete in box all found new homes. A mystery box full of GameTime Watches was auctioned off for over \$2,000.

Disney's promotional game for Wreck-It Ralph entertains show goers



Also released under the title Doctor Pong, Puppy Pong was an adaption of Pong intended for pediatrician waiting rooms. The cabinet was originally designed to resemble Snoopy's dog house



Released in November 1971, Computer Space is widely considered the world's first commercial coin-operated video game machine



An example of some of the Videogame History Museum's strange video game-related advertising materials

Mario's Burning Questions



Fans of the Mario franchise are acquainted with its oddities. It's a Japanese series about an Italian plumber who travels to a mystical land to eat mushrooms, throw fire, and stomp on turtles. We've all come to accept that. Despite our love of its wackiness, we still had some burning questions about the Mushroom Kingdom and its most famous inhabitant. When we sat down with series creator Shigeru Miyamoto and developer Takashi Tezuka, we wanted answers.



+ Some people claim that Mario and Luigi's last name is "Mario." Are their names officially Mario Mario and Luigi Mario?

Shigeru Miyamoto: This is an old story, but Hollywood did a film version of the Mario Bros. many years back. There was a scene in the script where they needed a last name for the characters. Somebody suggested that, because they were the Mario Bros., their last name should be Mario. So they made him "Mario Mario." I heard this and

laughed rather loudly. Of course, this was ultimately included in the film. Based on the film, that's [how] their names ended up. But, just like Mickey Mouse doesn't really have a last name, Mario is really just Mario and Luigi is really just Luigi.

+ Time and again, Bowser kidnaps Peach. Why do Mario and Peach still race go-karts and play tennis with him?

SM: If you're familiar with things like Popeye and some of the old comic characters, you would often-times see this cast of characters that takes on different roles depending on the comic or cartoon. They might be a businessman in one [cartoon] or a pirate in another. Depending on the story that was being told, they would change roles. So, to a certain degree, I look at our characters in a similar way and feel that they can take on different roles in different games. It's more like they're one big family, or maybe a troupe of actors.

+ In Super Mario Bros. 3, the Koopalings were supposed to be Bowser's children. But there's also Bowser Jr. Are they all his kids, and are they all from different mothers? s Bowser Jr. a Koopaling?

SM: Our current story is that the seven Koopalings are not Bowser's children. Bowser's only child is Bowser Jr., and we do not know who the mother is.

+ Here in the States, Yoshi's Island was referred to as Super Mario World 2. Despite the title, many gamers don't consider it part of the core series. Do you consider it part of the classic canon of Mario platformers or is it a spin-off in your mind since the player controls Yoshi?

SM: When we first made Yoshi's Island, we considered it part of the Mario series. After that, the Yoshi series continued on its own. As developers, do we consider it to be part of the core Mario series? The answer is yes.

+ In Super Mario World, the enemy Chargin' Chuck dresses like a football player but often throws baseballs. Why does he do that?

SM: He didn't throw a football!

+ There were some that kicked footballs, but most of them threw baseballs.

Takashi Tezuka: Well, at the time, one of the things we were trying to do with the resources we had was to introduce some variation. So we made the decision that this might be kind of weird, but let's go ahead and have some of these guys throw baseballs.

SM: I think that maybe the ones that threw baseballs were a little bit more fun, so we used a lot of them.

+ Mario's mustache and eyebrows are black, but his hair is brown. Does he dye his hair, is that natural, or is that a toupee?

TT: He's naturally brown-haired.

SM: This goes into [a] technical explanation of the number of colors that you could use in the early days. Mario was originally red, blue, white, and black. Maybe it was around the time of Super Mario Bros. 3 that we changed his hair to a different color. What really happened was that, when drawing the character, it became much easier to draw the mustache as an extension of the outline of his nose. Using that same color of black, we drew the mustache. But then we felt bad for Mario that he didn't have a distinct hair color, so we gave him brown hair.

+ Mario has been a boxing referee, a doctor, an Olympian, and a carpenter. Are all these official careers in Mario lore? If he has a medical degree, why does he continue his plumbing business?

SM: There's really only one rule in terms of the things that Mario does. Generally, it's that he's more on the blue-collar side. He's hard-working, and certainly much more physical in nature. So I think that a doctor is sort of an unexpected and perhaps unbelievable role for Mario. Perhaps the Dr. Mario you're thinking of was maybe, in some way, not necessarily legitimate. ♦

interview by Dan Ryckert

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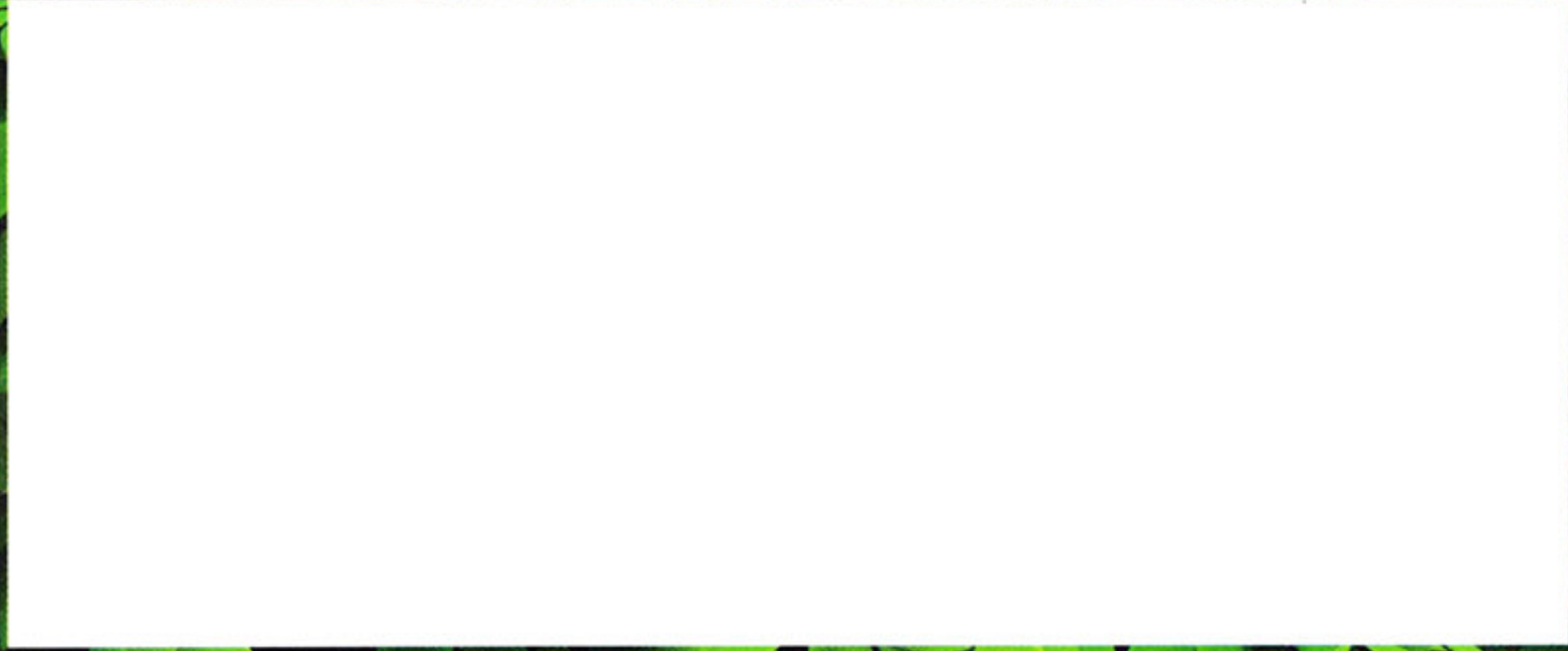
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