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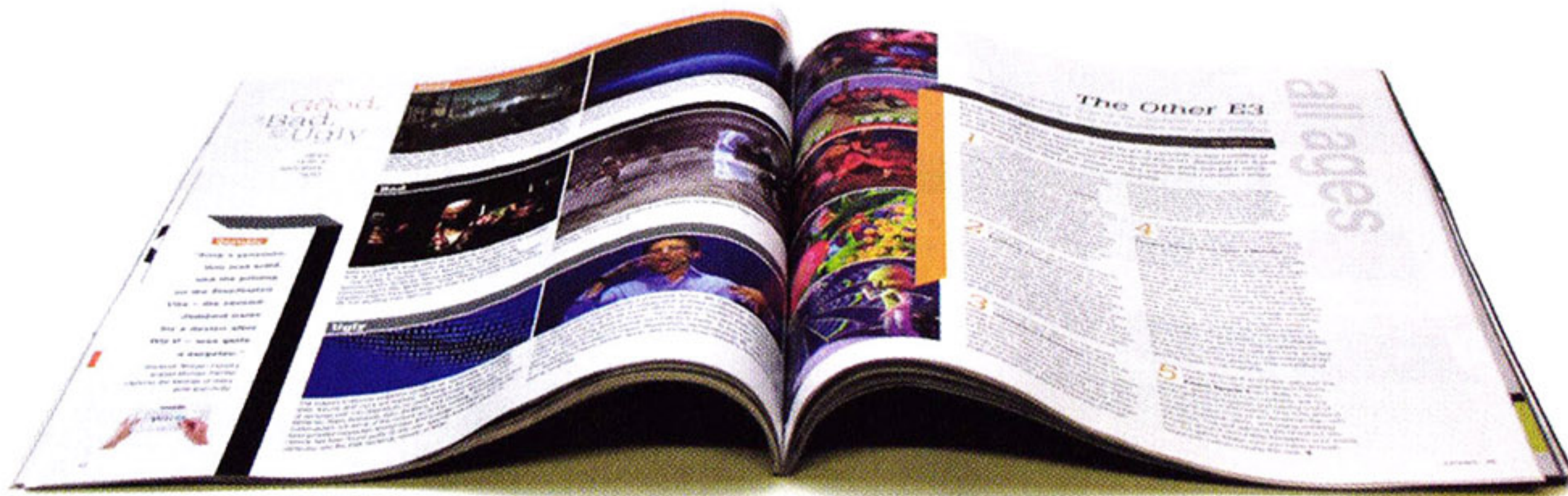
THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

MORRGWIND

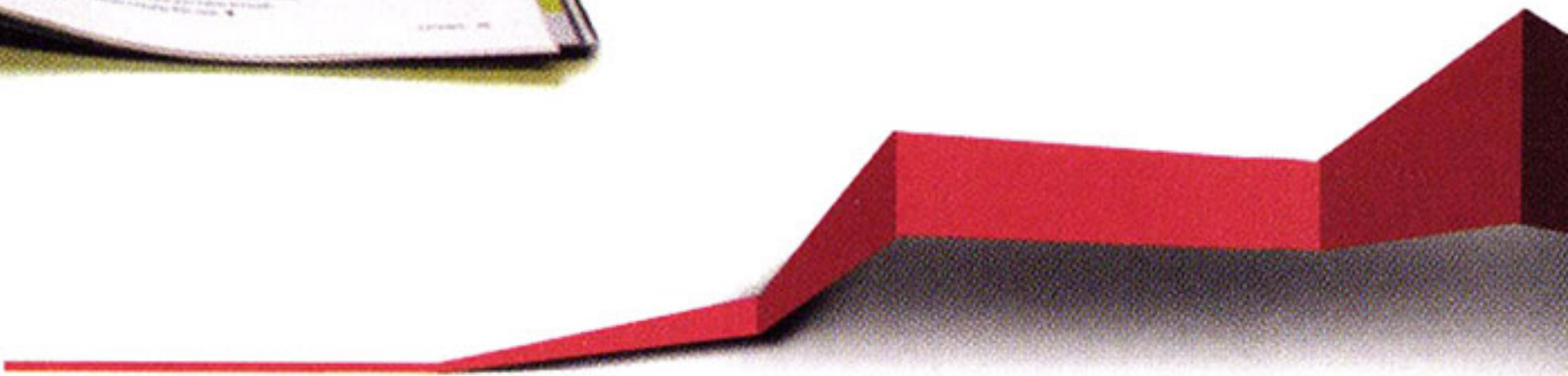


BLACK MARSH





Don't Just Read It...







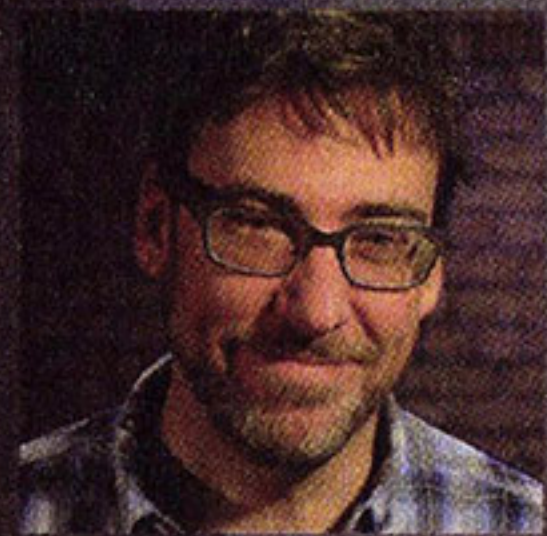
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ANDY McNAMARA  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
andy@gameinformer.com

Read my column or  
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## A Fair Exchange?

As discussed in our feature on game monetization (p. 20), with the advent of freemium games 99-cent apps, and downloadable content expansions, premium console games face one of their toughest challenges yet. How do publishers convey value for a \$60 game in a world where a larger percentage of titles are free or available at a fraction of the cost?

I don't just speak for myself when I say there is a market of gamers who are willing to pay more for an experience that goes above and beyond the call. The popularity of games like the multi-billion dollar Call of Duty franchise proves that. Those same gamers also prefer experiences that are devoid of invasive ads or built solely for the purpose of taking dollars out of their pocket-book rather than delivering unadulterated entertainment to fill their valuable free time. The real question is, will the traditional \$40 to \$60 price tag for console games still be acceptable as we enter the next generation of hardware?

In my mind there is no simple answer, because every entertainment medium – be it movies, TV, or video games – is an exchange. I give them money, they keep me joyfully occupied for a period of time, and when it is over I deem whether the exchange has value or is a rip-off. This is not qualitative judgment of product in the classic game review sense; this is a consumer interaction graded in the rawest of forms: Was the fun worth it?

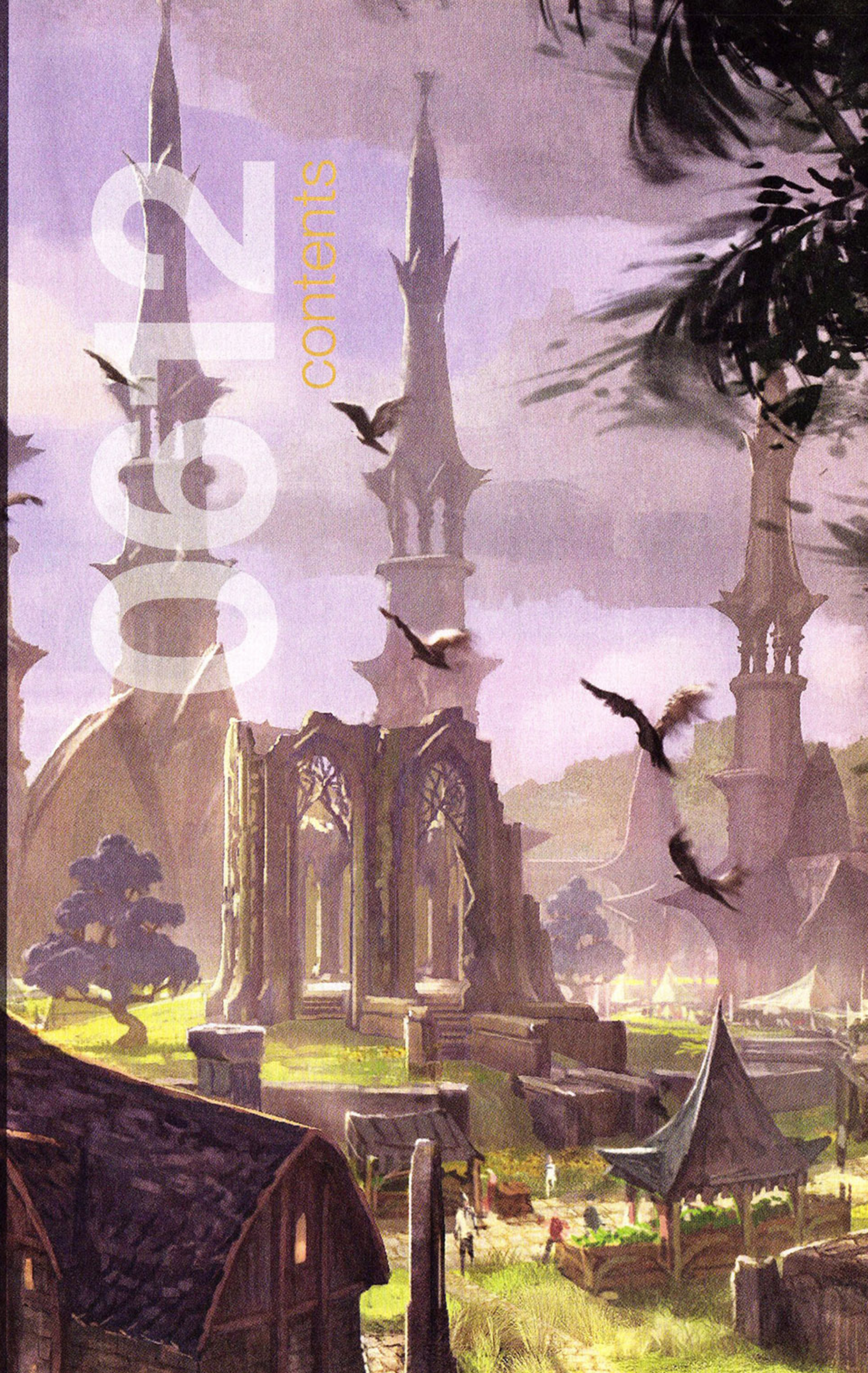
With free games, it is easy to get to the tipping point of making it a positive value for the customer, but I've still had free experiences where I felt ripped off because my time is valuable. Bad games are bad no matter what the cost. Great games make a player feel like every penny spent was worth it, no matter the cost.

The solution sounds simple: Game publishers should offer games at a value-appropriate price. Small, simple games (hell, even giant MMOs) can be free. Small, simple games (hell, even giant MMOs) can be expensive. Determining the value and formulating a strategy for selling and marketing your game is a right every game publisher should have. Unfortunately, on consoles they don't have that power.

The platform holders – in this case Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony – charge publishers and developers a set fee for each game and enforce pricing standards. In effect, they take the decision of whether or not the game is a good value proposition away from the creators. Want to make your game free-to-play on Xbox Live? Too bad. Thinking about porting that App Store game you sell for 99 cents over to Vita at the same price? Sorry, that needs to be \$12.99.

Publishers and developers are not free to make these decisions in the current console game environment, and if it doesn't correct itself other game platforms where the creators are empowered to define price freely will win the battle – not of price, but of value. Premium games aren't in danger of extinction, but archaic control over game pricing should be.

*Andy*



» 46

### Elder Scrolls Online

This new MMORPG direction for the Elder Scrolls series lets you revisit classic areas from the worlds of Morrowind, Oblivion, Skyrim, and Daggerfall. You can also engage in streamlined, tactical combat with other players for control of the imperial city.

by Adam Biessener

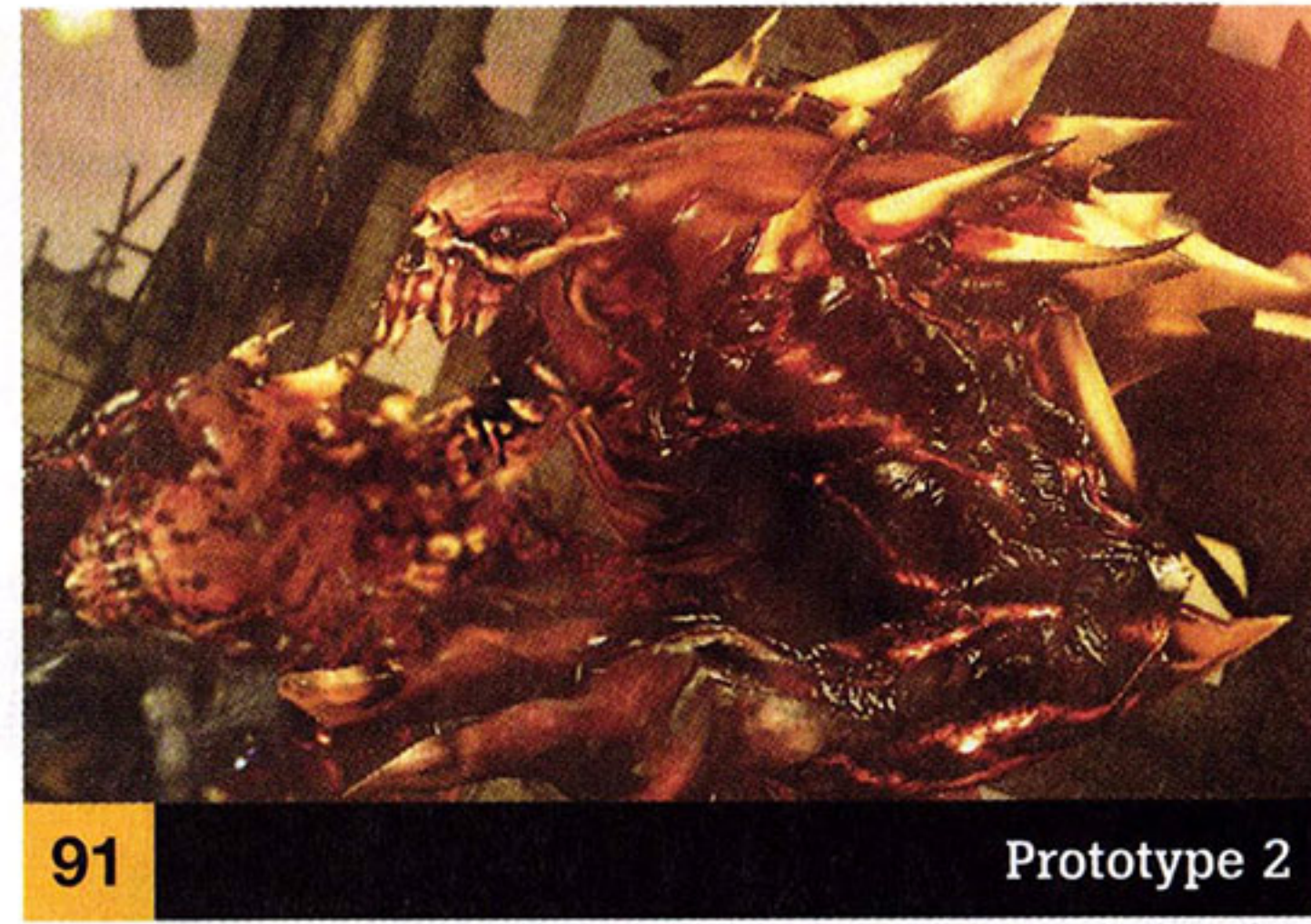




70



78



91

Prototype 2



14

The Genre That Refuses to die



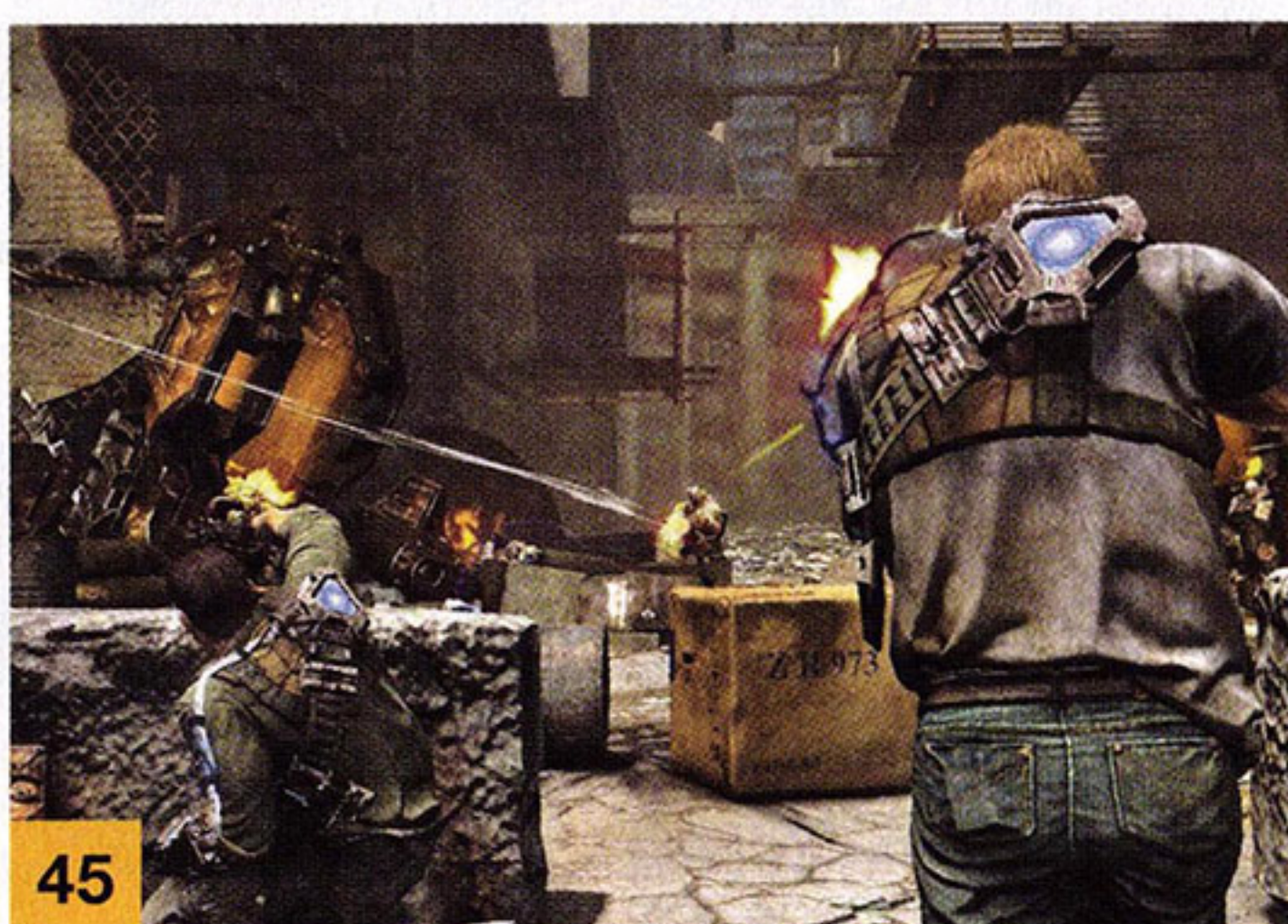
58

The Amazing Spider-Man

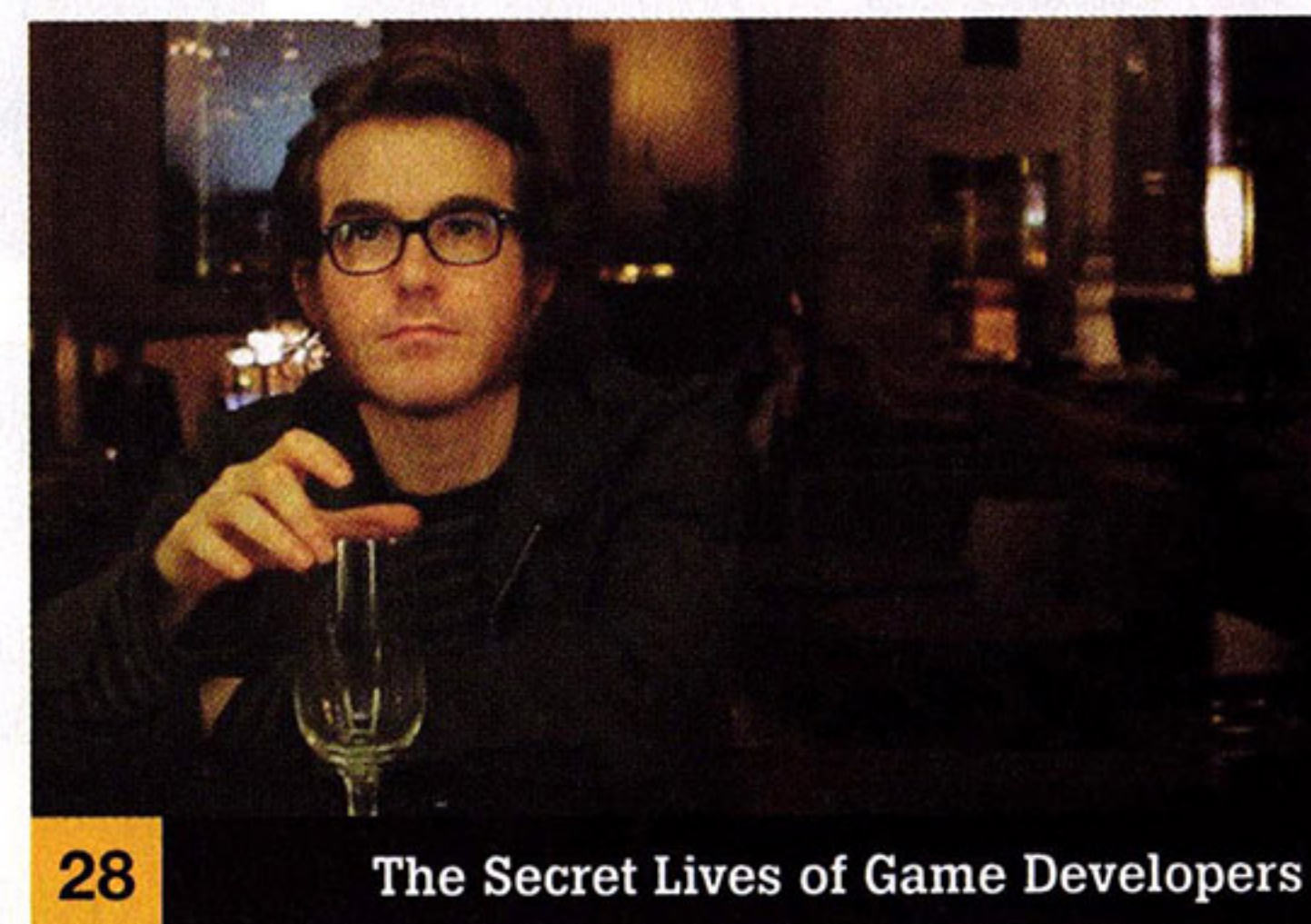


18

The Art of Play



45



28

The Secret Lives of Game Developers

## regulars

### » 6 Feedback

The April issue has passed, and a slew of letters has arrived from fans and fools regarding our annual Game Infarcer. Two Mass Effect fans with very different opinions on the third entry's ending sound off on the controversy.

### » 10 Connect

This month we speak with the curator of the Smithsonian's video game art exhibit, take a look at a persistent game genre, and explore the different ways video game developers and publishers go after your cash.

### » 64 Previews

We take a trip back to Pandora in Borderlands 2, catch up with everyone's favorite thieving cartoon raccoon, and spill new info on Capcom titles Lost Planet 3, Resident Evil 6, and Devil May Cry.

### » 90 Reviews

There are several good games for you to choose from this month, whether you want to terrorize a city in Prototype 2, explore the puzzling world of Fez, or battle mythological beasts in Dragon's Dogma.

### » 100 Game Over

How well do you think you know Irrational Games' Ken Levine?





32 Shoot to Thrill: Warface



33 The Good, the Bad & the Ugly



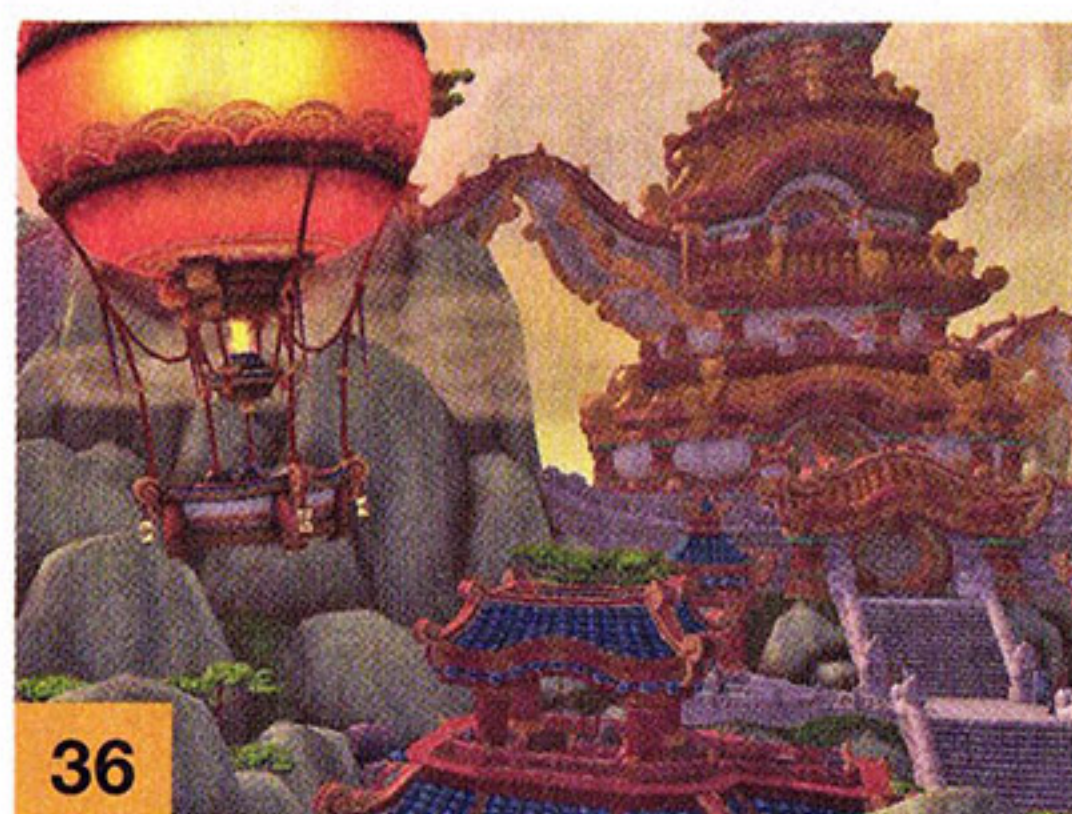
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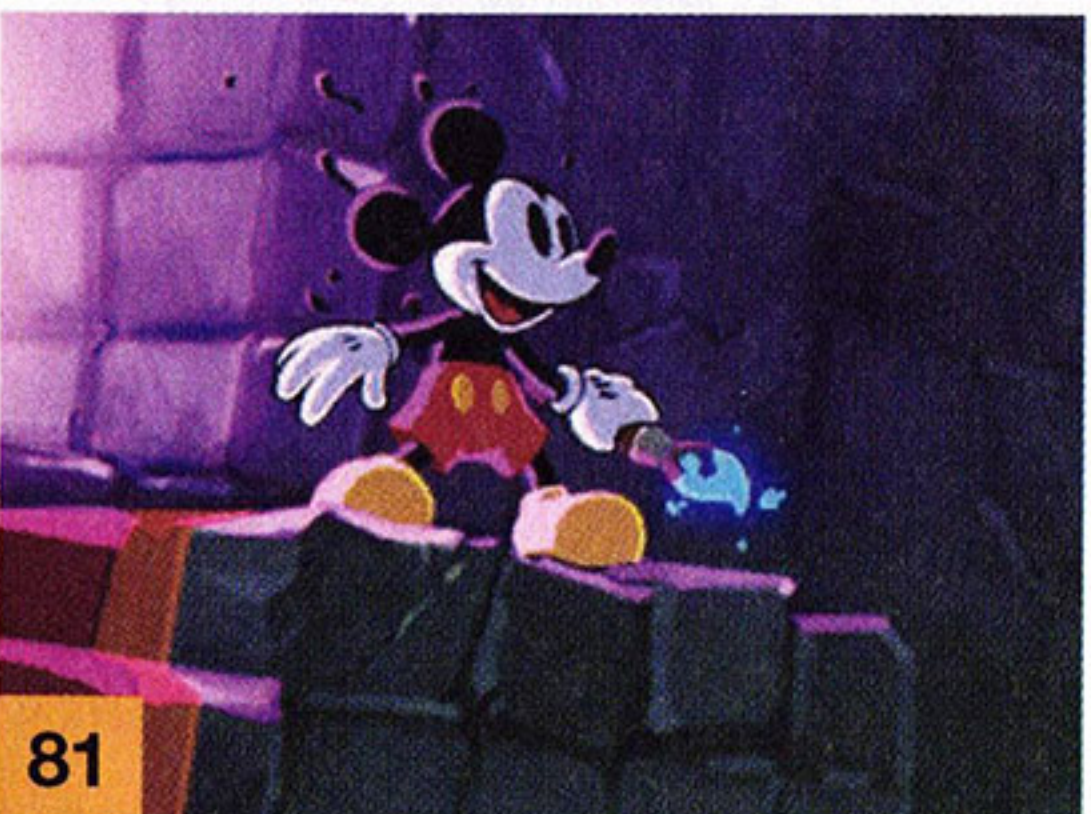
93



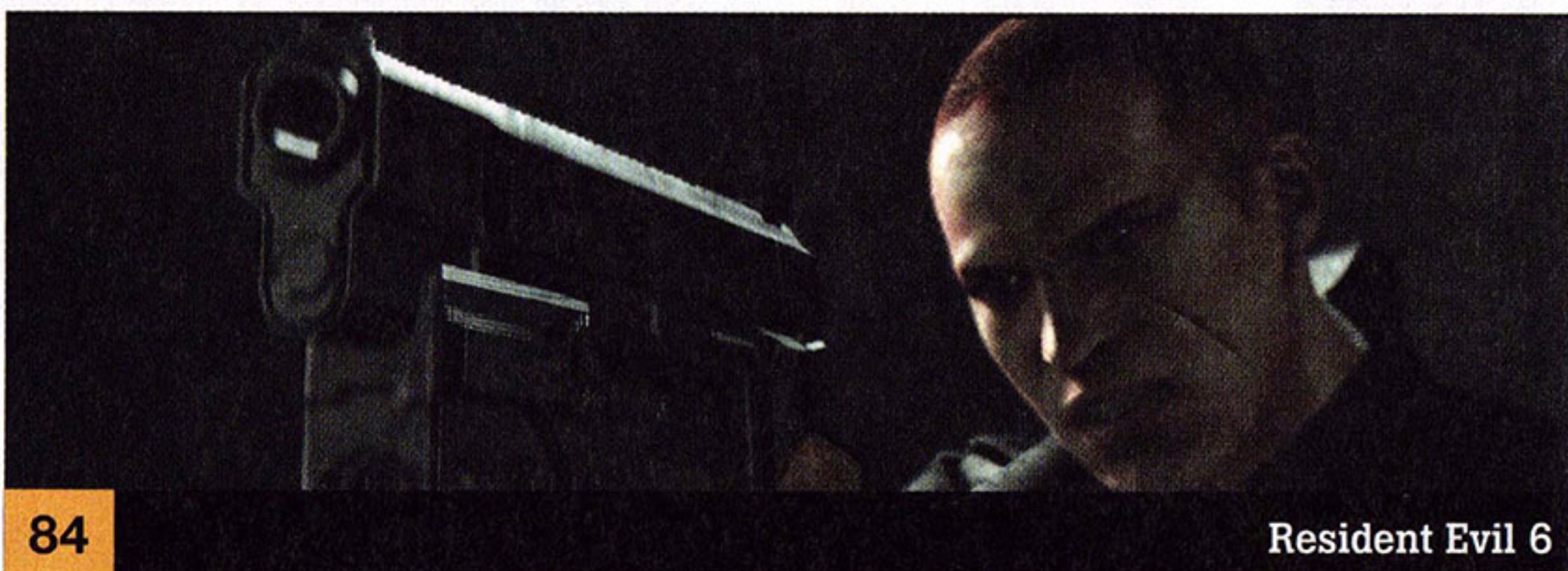
68 Devil May Cry



36



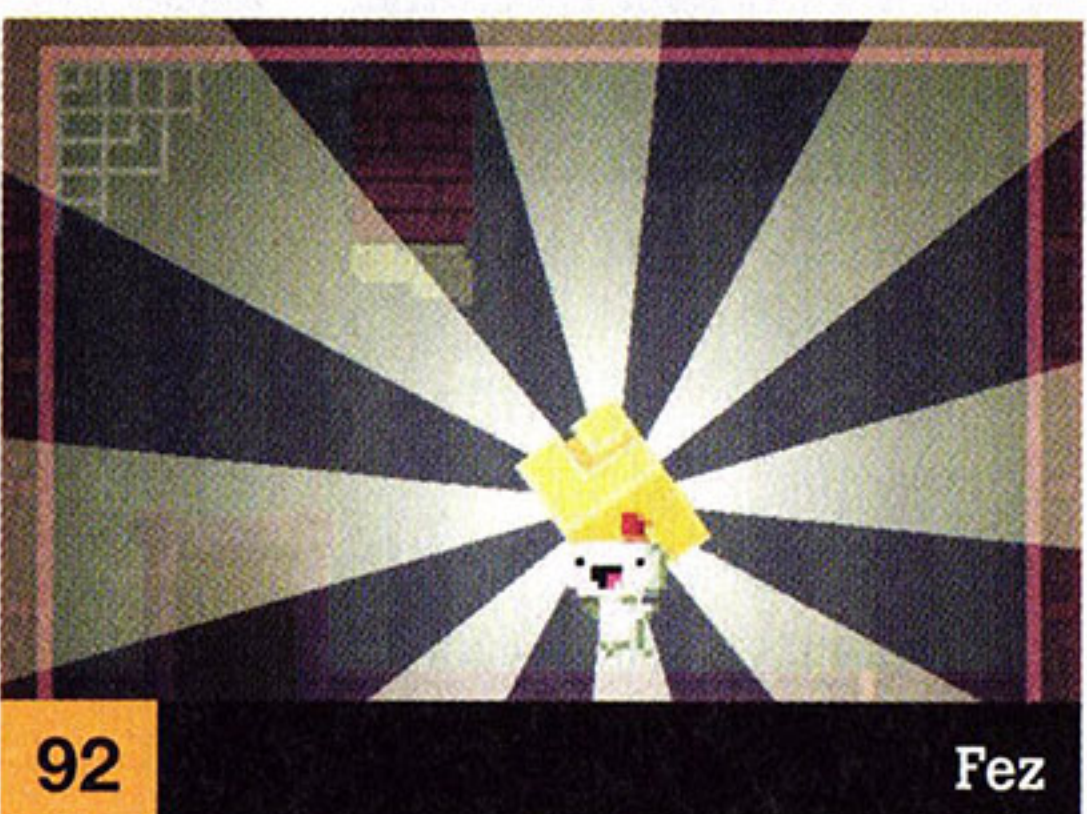
81



84 Resident Evil 6



94



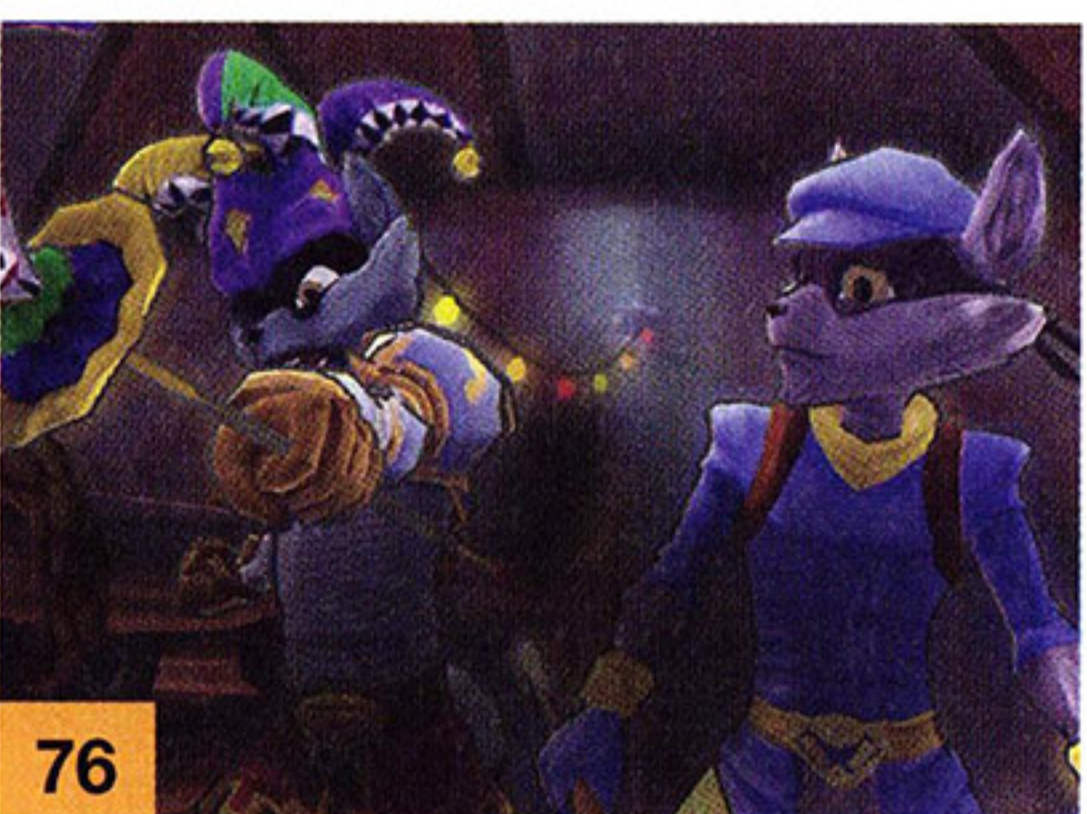
92 Fez



66



90 Dragon's Dogma



76

## games index


//////

BioShock Infinite	70
Birds of Steel	96
Borderlands 2	66
Crysis 3	83
Dark Souls: Prepare to Die Edition	87
Devil May Cry	68
Dirt Showdown	77
Double Dragon: Neon	86
Dragon's Dogma	90
Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion	81
Far Cry 3	73
Fez	92
Fibble: Flick 'n' Roll	96
Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	71
Guacamelee	87
Kinect Star Wars	93
Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance	80
Legend of Grimrock	95
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	64
LittleBigPlanet Karting	74
Lost Planet 3	72
Madden 13	78
Mortal Kombat	95
NCAA Football 13	79
Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	82
Prototype 2	91
Resident Evil 6	84
Sine Mora	96
Skull Girls	96
Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time	76
Sorcery	86
Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir	96
Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor	87
Test Drive: Ferrari Racing Legends	86
Trials Evolution	94
UFFA Euro 2012	96
World Gone Sour	96



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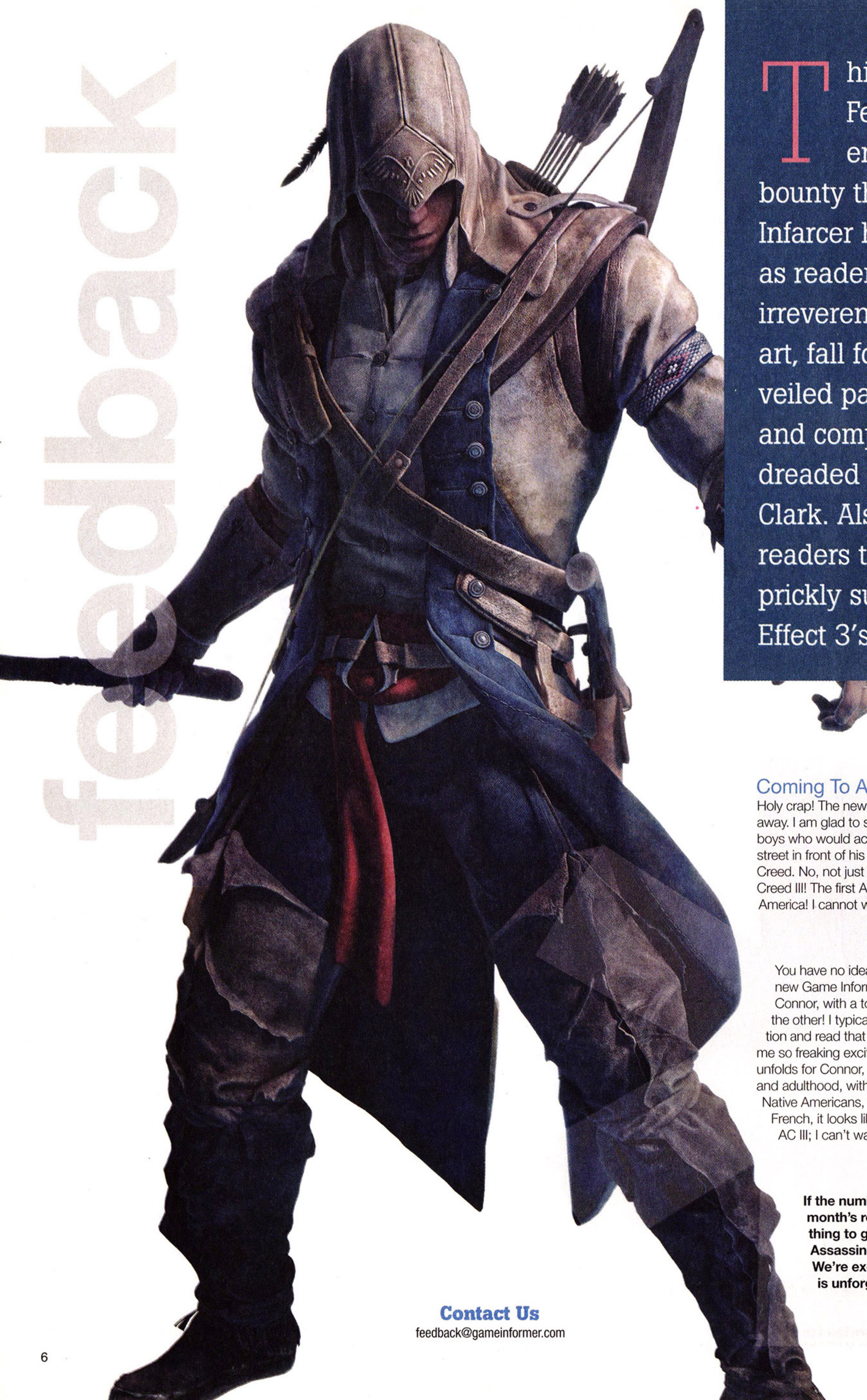
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This month in Feedback, we enjoy the fruitful bounty this year's Game Infarcer has provided us, as readers admire our irreverent Infarcer cover art, fall for some thinly veiled parody articles, and complain about the dreaded return of Darth Clark. Also in this issue, readers take on the prickly subject of Mass Effect 3's ending.

### Coming To America

Holy crap! The new Assassin's Creed III cover blew me away. I am glad to say I'm one of the only 15-year-old boys who would actually scream in the middle of the street in front of his mailbox because of Assassin's Creed. No, not just Assassin's Creed, but Assassin's Creed III! The first Assassin's Creed to take place in America! I cannot wait until October.

**Zach  
Marion, VA**

You have no idea how excited I was when I got the new Game Informer, and on the front cover was Connor, with a tomahawk in one hand and a pistol in the other! I typically go straight to the Feedback section and read that first, but not today! This game has me so freaking excited. I can't wait to see how the story unfolds for Connor, as you go between his childhood and adulthood, with conflicts on every side: From the Native Americans, the Colonial Americans, British, and French, it looks like it is going to be a blast. Bring it on, AC III; I can't wait for this war!

**Michael Benningfield  
Dallas, TX**

If the number of exclamation points in this month's responses to our cover story is anything to go by, gamers are mighty excited for Assassin's Creed III's American adventure. We're excited too – but skipping Feedback is unforgivable!

### Contact Us

[feedback@gameinformer.com](mailto:feedback@gameinformer.com)



## What A Farce

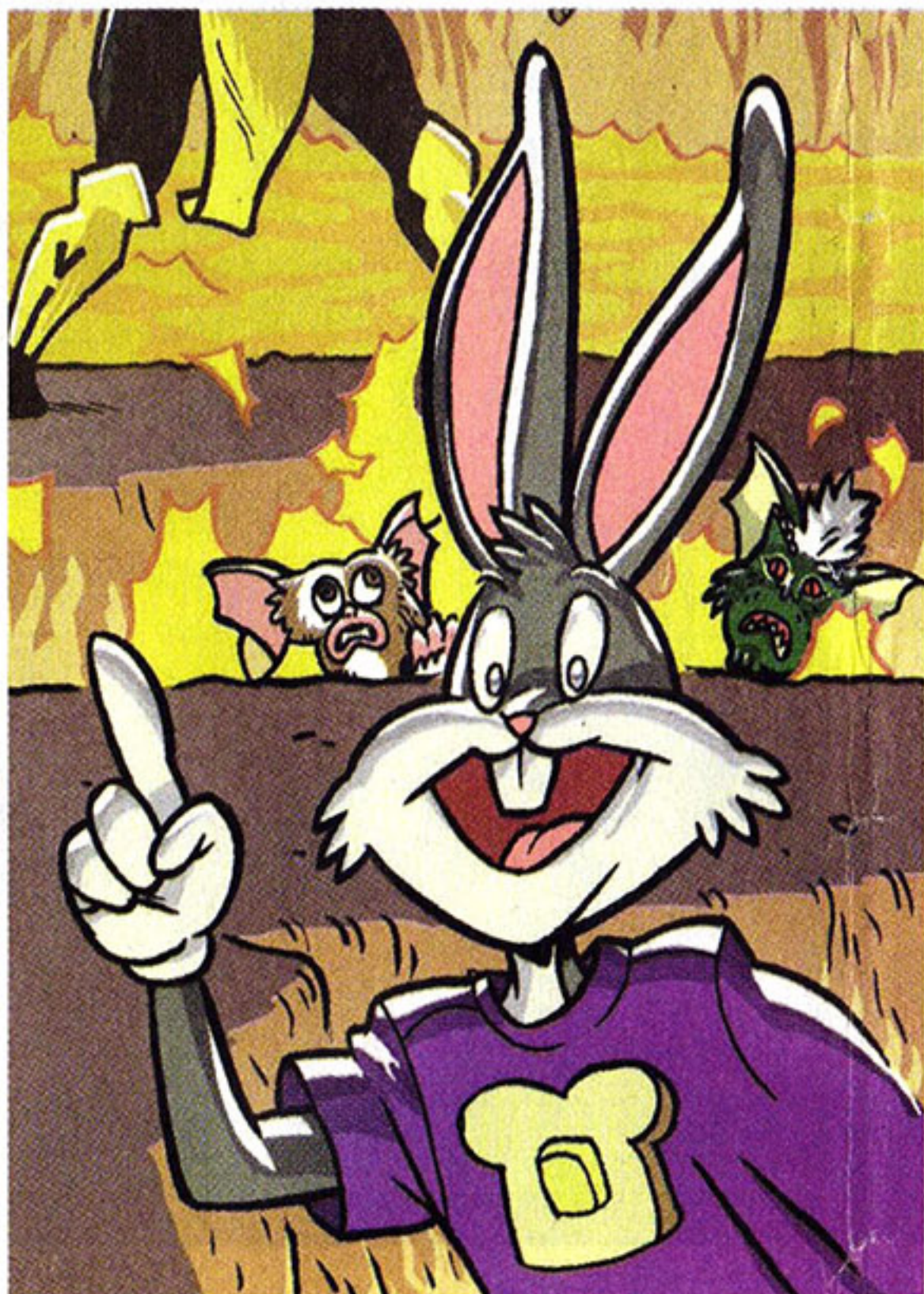
Bravo to the artist behind the Mortal Kombat vs. Warner Bros. Game Infarcer cover (issue 228). I found myself going through and seeing how many familiar faces I could recognize amid the fire and destruction. Sadly, by the end I wished that this was an actual game coming to consoles. I can only imagine how unstoppable Pee Wee would be with his boomerang bowtie.

**Jon Martin Gaffney, SC**

I wanted to tell you how much I enjoy Game Infarcer. I always find it very humorous, because you do a great job of poking fun at the core elements of video games. But I think the best part about that section is reading the responses people send to you because they don't see the word "parody" written at the bottom of each page.

**Cullen Casey via email**

**In what's become a tradition, this year's Game Infarcer cover art is the work of the talented artist, Zander Cannon. You can read more about the creation of the cover at [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag). As for letters from confused readers... Yeah, we got a couple of those.**



## Fool Me Once

I started flipping through this month's Game Informer, completely unaware it was the April issue. I saw the part about the Indie Cred Kit, which I believed. I got my laptop and was about to search for it, but remembered I had seen a picture of Darth Clark earlier. That's when I opened the magazine back up and saw it was a joke. Thank you, Game Informer, for making me feel like a complete idiot.

**Joshua Murphy via email**

I hate this year's Game Infarcer because it tricked me twice. First, I read the fake review of the HD Collections collection. I was reading the review when I saw that it got a 10.25, and I thought it must be an awesome set of games. That's when common sense kicked in and I said, "You're an idiot." The second time was the Vita triple-analog stick add-on five minutes later. I had to laugh at myself. I love parodies.

**Jacob Tacoma, WA**

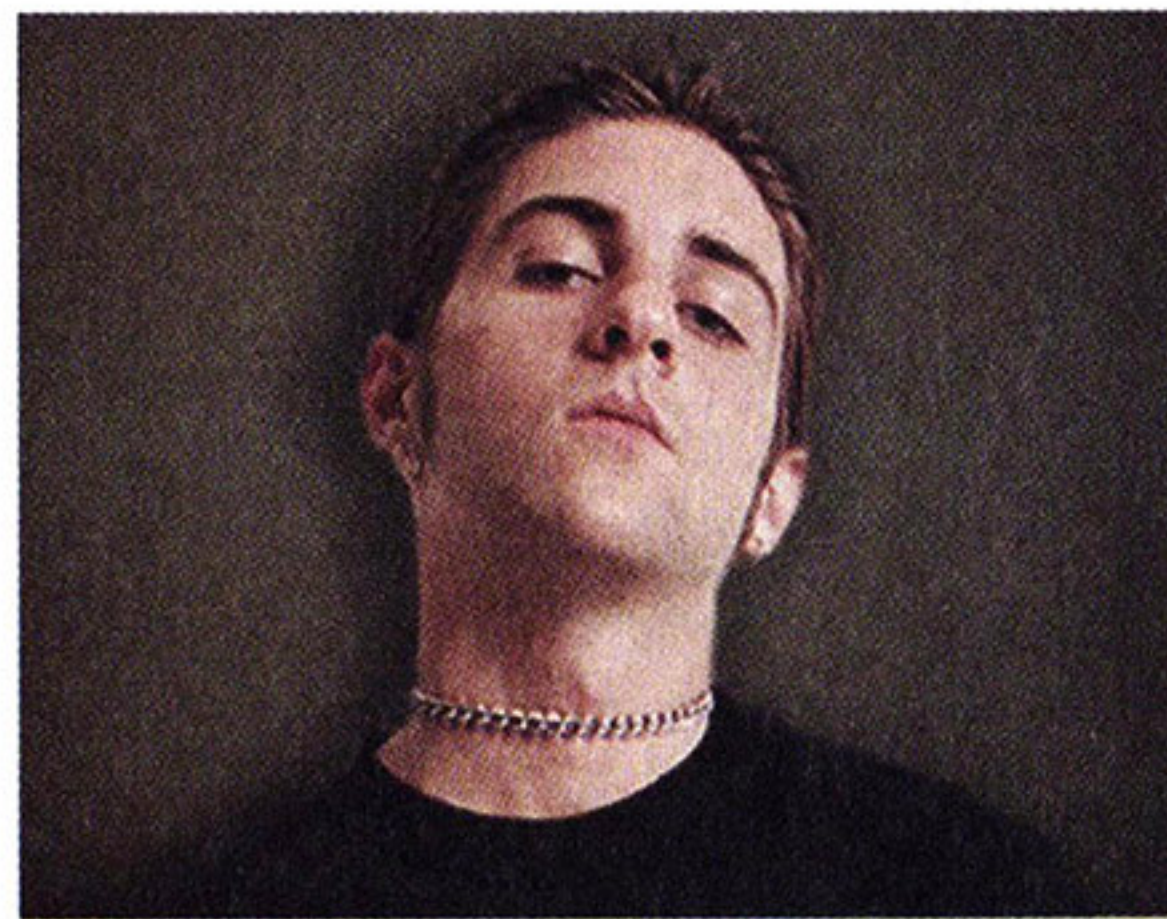
I was reading this month's Game Informer and I found my old friend, Game Infarcer. I got to the third page and almost cried when I saw Half-Life 3 – that is until I remembered what section I was reading. My 10-year-old brother ran over after he saw me freak out. Now he is begging to go to the store to buy Cave Johnson Story.

**Grace Wilkinson via email**

I recently bought the new Game Informer, which I was pretty sure was the March edition. As I was stopped at a light while driving home, I casually flipped through a few pages, when I stumbled across the article on Cave Johnson Story. I was so excited by the potential mash-up of these two great series I had to pull over and read it. After reading just that article, I continued driving home ready to tell my fiancée about it. I opened the magazine to the page and finally glanced at the articles surrounding it. Then I saw that dreaded word at the bottom: "PARODY." Good job guys: You brought my hopes up, and dashed them expertly.

**Perry Swisz via email**

**Look on the bright side: At least you all realized your mistakes. Unlike these Darth Clark haters...**



## Haters Gonna Hate

Please fire Darth Clark! He is the most ignorant and stupidest douche ever! He acts like he is God because he is writing in your magazine. First, his definition of a gamer from a long time ago was f---ed up, and now he is saying whatever comes from Japan is automatically better? Are you f---ing stupid?! You want to know why Japanese games aren't getting the attention they had before? Because their golden days are over and now they suck, you stupid son of a b---. Honestly, if you were next to me, I would pummel the s--- out of you. I hate you, and so does every other reader. I'm f---ing glad my membership is over, so I won't see your sh--writing and your crack head picture. Stupid f---!

**Carlos Laureano via email**

I am writing to GI because you actually let that cocky Darth Clark write a column. Oh my God, this guy is an idiot. Did anyone read his column before printing it? Just because we don't want to play the sh---y games that keep coming out of Japan doesn't mean we are falling behind. The fact that Darth Balls says they deserve to be successful based off of their heritage is total BS. You know what, I don't even care about the developers; I simply don't like the guy who wrote this column. It is not the first time this D-bag has written a senseless column. Your mag would be much better without him. He's far from a professional video game journalist, and is just another opinion that no one cares about. Your team should use him for chum. The only problem is the sharks wouldn't eat him because he is so full of sh--. Tell him to keep his sorry-ass opinions locked up in his big-ass head.

**Brian Baltimore, MD**

## Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions

"If this gets in the magazine, will I look like an idiot?"

Yeah.

"Can I have your emale address?"

**We don't give out our emale to just anyone...**

"Do you know the muffin man?"

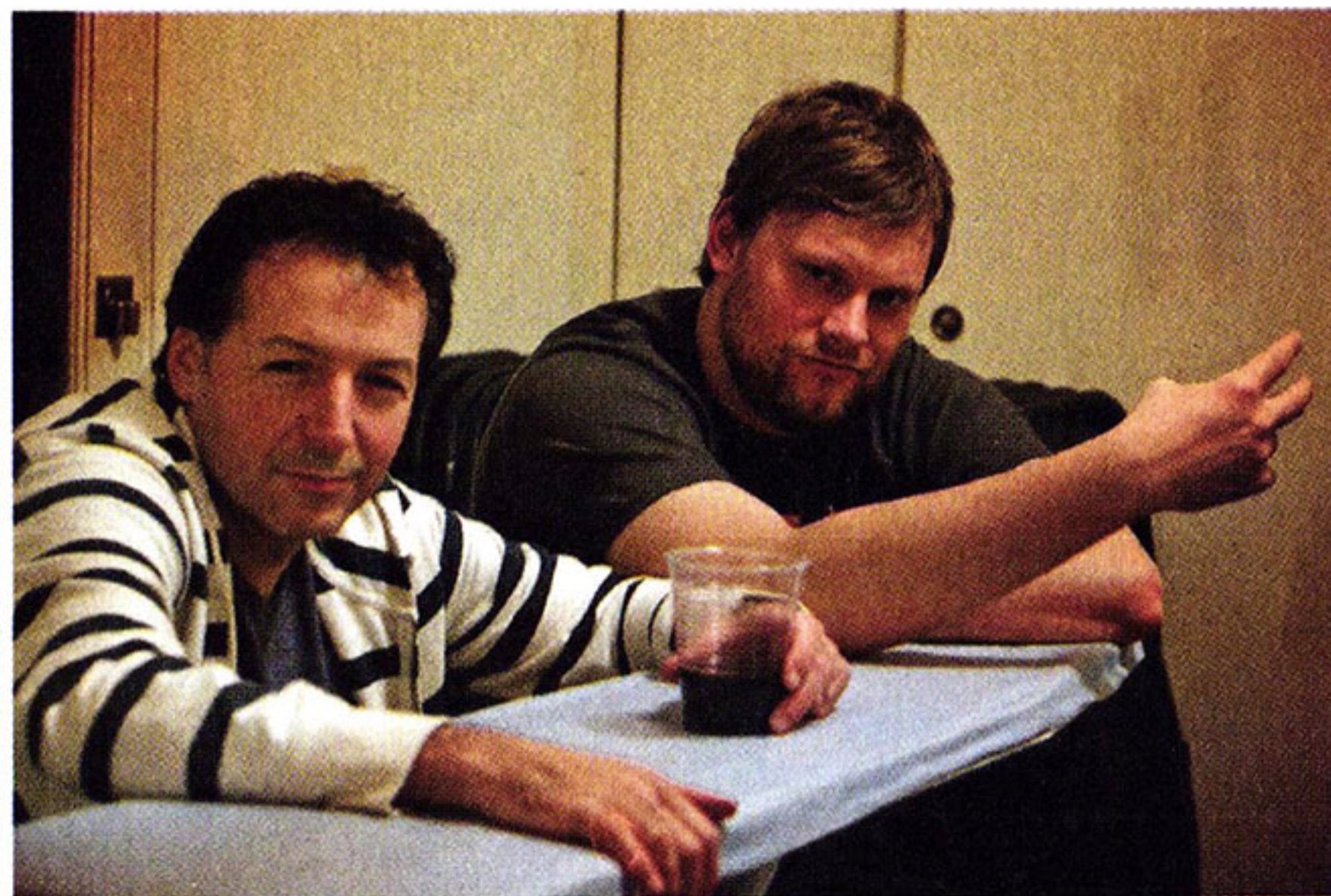
**We're pretty tight.**

## Worst News Tip of the Month:

"i would like to know about more f---ing dinosaurs!!!"

## Question of the Month:

Are you ready for a new round of consoles? Why or why not?



**(Left)** Andy and Bertz joined a variety of industry folks for a post-GDC wine tasting at Freemark Abbey Winery in Napa Valley. **(Right)** Despite the fact that they were hanging out in a mansion, Foundation 9's Tom Russo and Double Fine's Greg Rice drew everyone into the laundry room for the "Dirty Laundry" nightclub experience. True visionaries.

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

GI SPY  
continued on page 8



## On Your Mind

# Courting Controversy

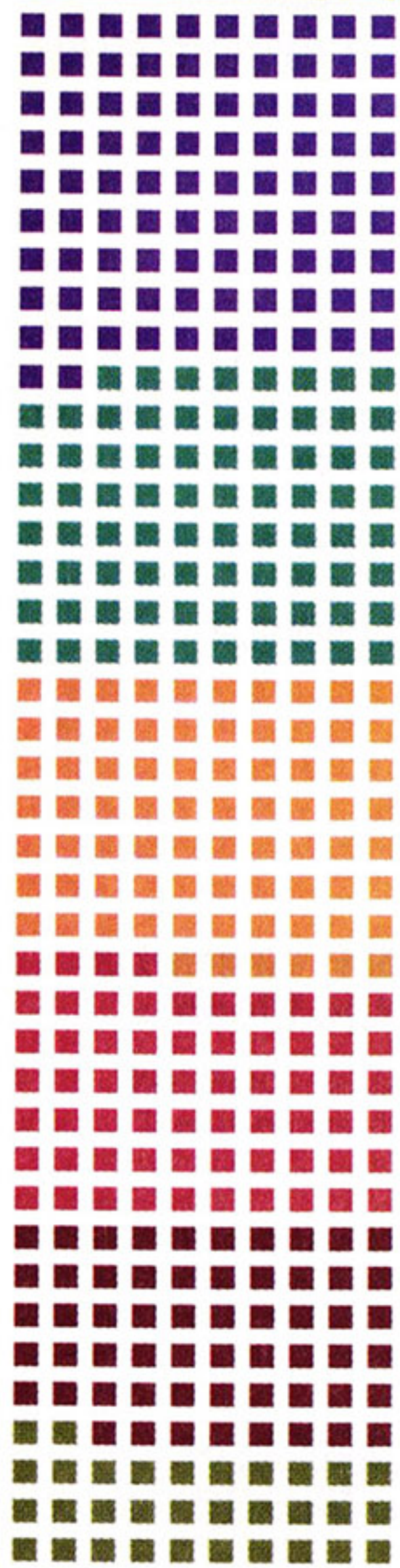
I hate how so many reviewers have attacked the Retake Mass Effect movement. They depict us as whining brats who want to destroy artistic integrity. This is not the case. Contrary to popular belief, we do not want a happy ending, although that would be nice. We want an ending where the choices you make matter and affect the outcome. I'm still in shock that five minutes of a game can destroy 100 hours of gameplay.

**Alex Fortino**  
via email

On the subject of Mass Effect 3's ending, I think it's sad that companies now may be discouraged from making bold decisions with the endings of franchises and instead go with the clichés that everyone wants. If all the complaints were simply about continuity questions at the end, I would understand. But from seeing posts about what most people want, it's clear they desire an ending where the hero saves the day and lives happily ever after. In other words, the ending to 90 percent of all other games, instead of the artistic route BioWare went to make an allusion about the nature of civilization and technology. As someone who believes games can transcend entertainment and be art, I'm ashamed to be a gamer now.

**Tim Malone**  
Meadville, PA

**One thing's for sure regarding Mass Effect 3's ending: People see very different things in the final sequences, and interpret them in very different ways. We'll have to wait to find out if the end-altering DLC BioWare has planned for summer will appease discontent gamers without angering fans already pleased with the end of their adventure.**



- Assassin's Creed III Excitement **23%**
- Game Infarcer Infatuation **20%**
- Darth Clark Rage **19%**
- Mass Effect 3 Ending Backlash **16%**
- Day One DLC Hate **14%**
- Mass Effect 3 Ending Backlash Backlash **8%**

## GI SPY

continued from page 7

**(Left)** This month Andrew W.K. stopped by the office to play Mario Party with us. Seriously. Watch the video at [gameinformer.com](http://gameinformer.com).

**(Right)** There were a few parties at PAX East as well. From left to right: freelance journalist Alex Rubens, Dan "I only own band shirts" Ryckert, Giant Bomb's Patrick Klepek, Kotaku's Tina Amini, Destructoid's Hamza Aziz, Ubisoft's Alex Monney, and OXM Online's Dave Rudden.





## Fantasy Pet

In issue 228, we asked readers what video game animal they would want as a pet. After weeding out the responses that were female characters (shame on all of you), Pokémon were the most common pick. Cheap transportation was an important factor as well, for some reason. Here are some responses.

The Blob from A Boy And His Blob. All you have to do is feed it jellybeans and it turns into anything. A rocket, umbrella, trampoline – anything!  
**Matt Baggin**

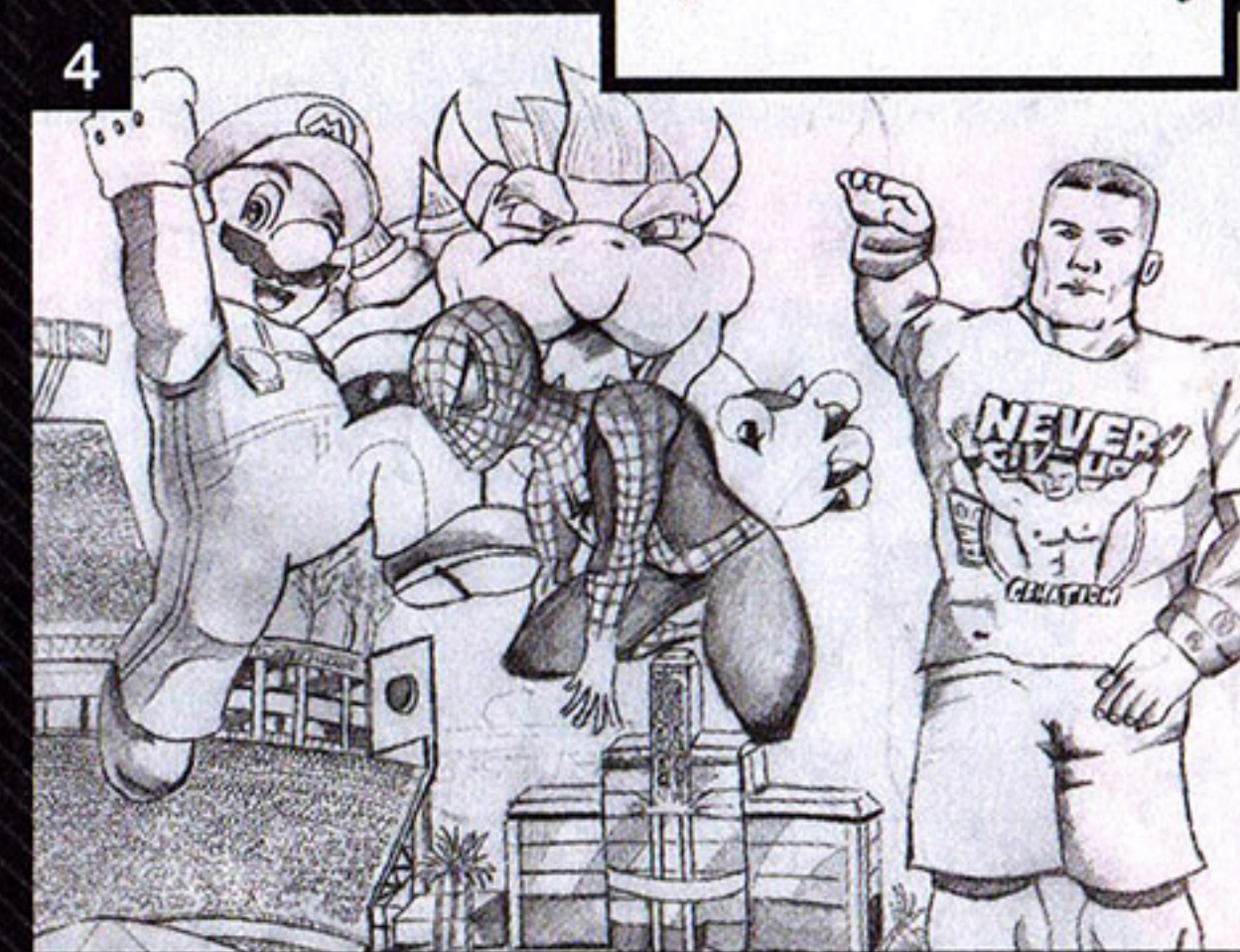
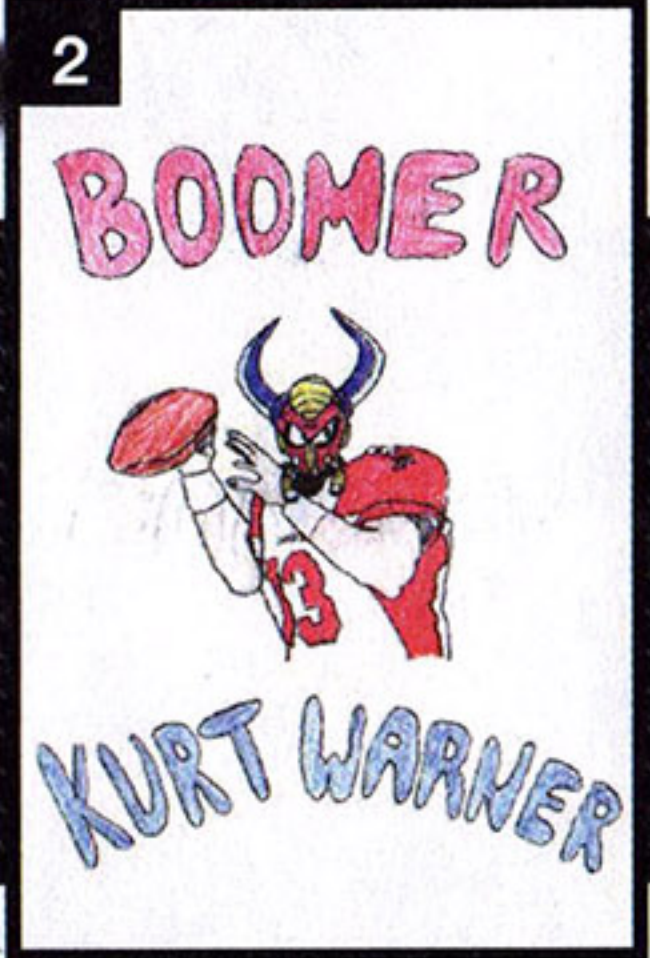
I think a Vaporeon (Pokémon) would make an excellent pet. Diving, swimming, and fighting would all be awesome. The question is how to domesticate it...  
**Luke Norman**

If I could have any video game pet, it would be Clank from Ratchet & Clank. I mean, he acts as a jet pack, he can talk, and he's a robot for God's sake. Why wouldn't you want to have him as a pet?  
**Troy Fisher**

I would have to go with a Mabari war hound. They are extremely powerful, fiercely loyal, and insanely intelligent.  
**Glenn**



**WINNER 1 Penny McKeever** Isaac once again demonstrates his lack of good judgement when it comes to romantic pursuits **2 Ben Huelsman** And you thought Capcom had run out of ideas by the time they got to Duff McWhalen. **3 Justin Beyer** 95 percent of mankind's usage of the Super Nintendo mouse was tied to this game **4 Marco Casafranca** Count us in if the next Smash Bros. adds John Cena, Spider-Man, and a Wrestlemania XXIV stage.

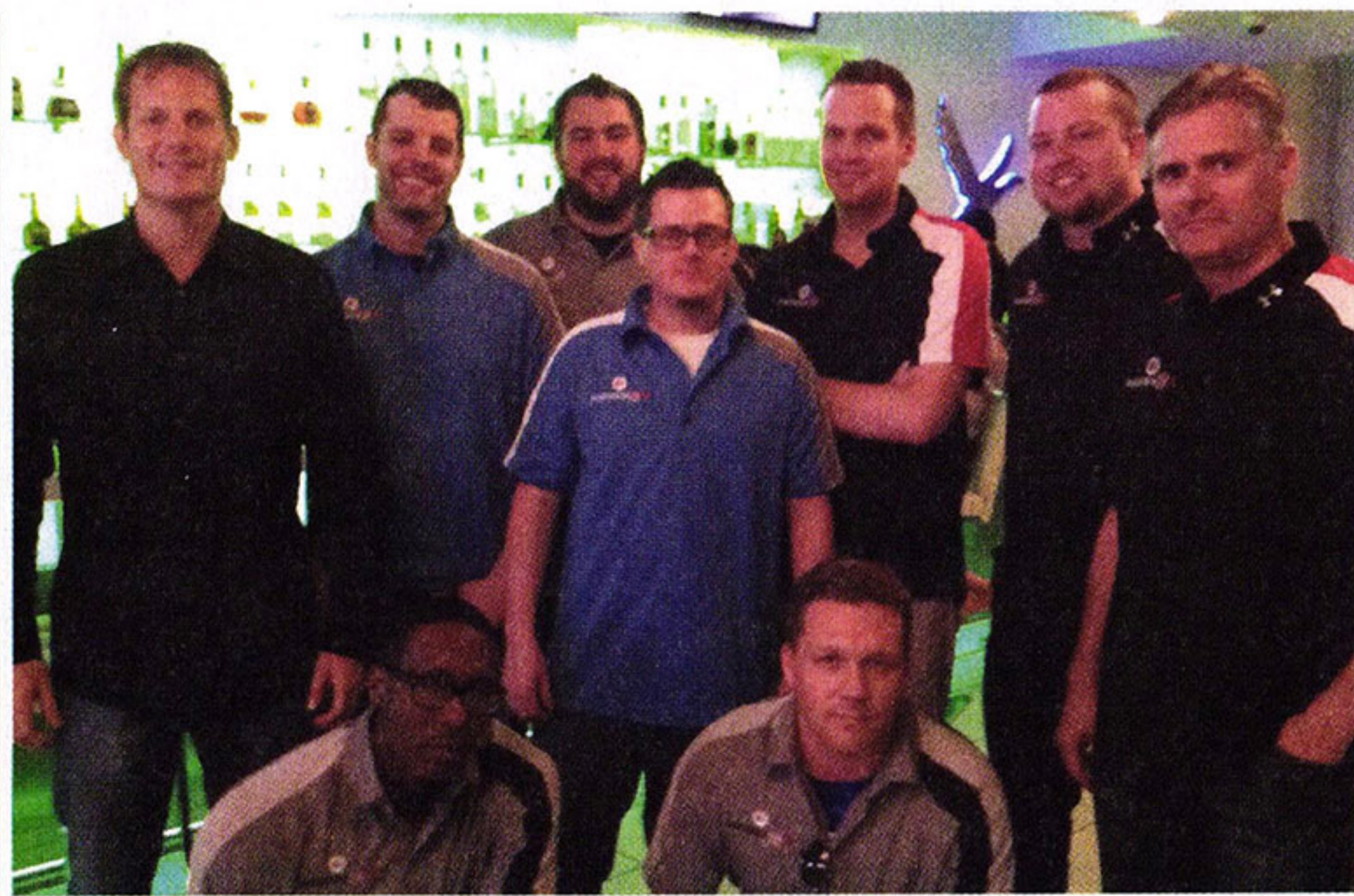


**Corrections:**  
 In last month's Gamer, we incorrectly stated that Chester Bolingbroke lives in Salem, Mississippi (MS). In actuality, he lives in Salem, Massachusetts (MA). Postal Code abbreviations are hard.

gallery

Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.

**Send to:**  
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 Mpls, MN 55401



**(Left)** How can Harmonix's John Drake compete with the magnificent moustache of Naughty Dog's Arne Meyer? He can't – but we still like him anyway. **(Right)** These Madden 13 developers are so buff they could start their own football team. Kneeling: Victor Lugo and A.J. Dembroski. Standing: Cam Weber, Patrick Bellanca, Ryan Ferwerda, Matt Christman, Mike Young, Josh Looman, and Matt Bialosuknia.



# The Ongoing Evolution of the ESA

by Matthew Kato

## Last year the ESA won

a landmark Supreme Court decision that struck down a California law and cemented video games' protection under the First Amendment. As crucial as this was, fighting anti-video game legislation is just one facet of what the ESA is about. Renamed the Entertainment Software Association in 2003 from the Interactive Digital Software Association (which was originally formed in 1994), the trade organization is made up of 36 publishers, including the three console manufacturers, Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Epic Games, and more. The ESA also established the ESRB ratings board, runs the E3 convention, and fights for its constituents' intellectual property rights.

The ESA's involvement in these areas affects both its members and the entire industry, and as the world of video games changes so must this organization. We took a quick look at some of the different issues the ESA is facing and talked to those involved to gauge how the organization is serving its constituents and the industry at large.

### NOTABLES

- 14 the genre that refuses to die: keeping adventure games alive
- 18 the art of play: touring the smithsonian's video game exhibit
- 20 treasure hunting: how game makers are getting your money
- 28 the secret lives of game developers
- 30 mobile gaming state of the union
- 34 all ages: get your family off the couch





iOS titles like Chair Entertainment's *Infinity Blade II* – and other games in Apple's App store and Google's Play marketplace – are not currently covered under the ESRB rating system



## Video Game Legislation

The Supreme Court decision that struck down a California law banning the sale of violent video games to minors was the most important court battle ever spearheaded by the ESA. The organization's effort – which included defeating similar bills in other states, filing lawsuits against the California law, and arguing before the Supreme Court against it – is perhaps its most valued contribution to the industry. Whether a company is a member of the ESA or not – the dues-based membership is open to publishers only – the Supreme Court victory benefits all video games, says Gordon Bellamy, the executive director of the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), a separate, non-profit organization that has worked with the ESA in the past. "[The ESA] ensured that developers can create the types of games that they want to make, and do so without government interference," he said.

Despite this influential decision, the ESA says its work on the legal front isn't over. "Just because the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of ESA and our position does not mean legislative and legal battles are over," says ESA president Michael Gallagher. "To the contrary, we continue to see misguided legislation introduced in states and in Congress – as evidenced recently by a bill introduced in Congress by Representatives Baca and Wolf." If passed, the bill would require all video games to carry a warning label that states: "Warning: Exposure to violent video games has been linked to aggressive behavior," no matter what the game was rated.

The fact that a causal link between video games and aggressive behavior hasn't been proven only underscores the fact that the ESA's legislative work should continue. Bills that are spurious or even unconstitutional are introduced all the time, and the First Amendment protection of the last Supreme Court ruling doesn't mean the issue can't be tested in another way in the future.

## ESRB Ratings Board

Warning labels are exactly why the ESA set up the self-regulatory ESRB ratings system in 1994. Although adhering to the system is voluntary for publishers, you can't go into a retail store or download a title through a home console that doesn't feature the familiar "E for Everyone" through "M for Mature" designations (you won't see the "AO for Adults Only" at retail stores). The pervasiveness of the ESRB ratings not only helps the public understand a game's content, but the mere fact that the ESA created it has precluded the need for government oversight of games, similar to the movie industry's MPAA ratings.

The ESRB covers games at retail outlets and those distributed via home consoles, but what about mobile, browser-based, or PC downloadable titles? The ESRB has partnered with the CTIA wireless trade association to institute a voluntary ratings system for six wireless carriers (AT&T, Microsoft, Sprint, T-Mobile USA, U.S. Cellular, and Verizon) using the ESRB's familiar ratings. Apple's popular App Store and the Google Play marketplace are conspicuously absent, however.

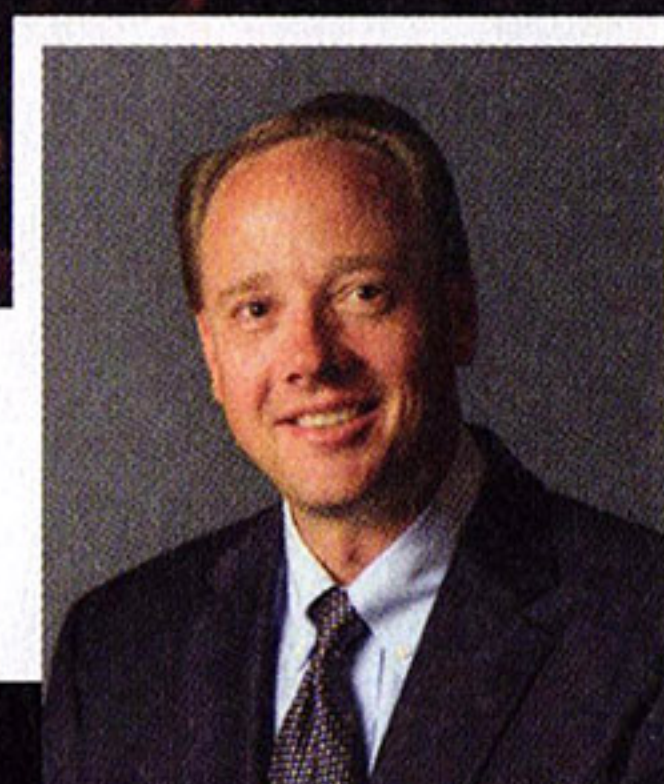
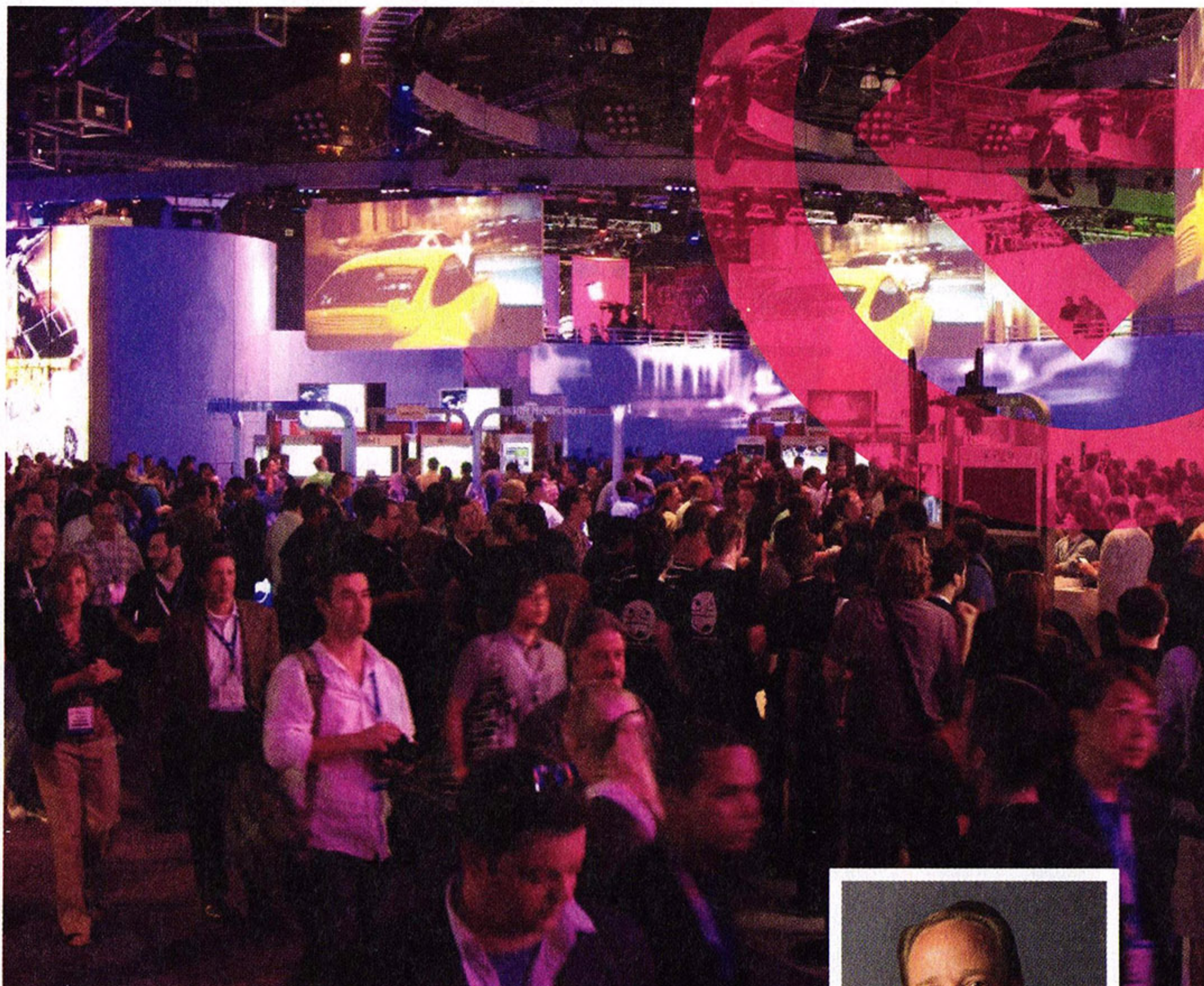
Having worked with Apple for the *Infinity Blade* iOS series, Epic Games president Mike Capps says Apple (which could not be reached for comment for this article) has its own particular ratings issues since its App Store features both games and non-gaming apps. The company also sells these games internationally where the ESRB is not involved. Currently, Apple and Google have their own content rating systems and do their own policing.

Jeremy Mustard, co-founder of *Infinity Blade* developer Chair Entertainment, says Apple's ratings process is "very straightforward," which sounds similar to the ESRB's voluntary system where game info is submitted by the publishers themselves. He says developers submit information about the game, which Apple checks, that then determines its rating. The community can flag inappropriate content after it's released if necessary. "In our experience, we've found this ratings format to be efficient and like the fact that it places more responsibility on the content creator, allowing us to be more accountable to the people who play our games," Mustard says.

Apart from these separate ratings systems, the ESRB also has to reconcile international systems. The ESRB is currently trying to create a more universal system that covers different global ratings systems such as Japan's CERO and Europe's PEGI classifications. This is something that Capps thinks is very complicated given each region has its own standards and cultural differences. It could be solved by having a single rating that when inputted would generate ratings elsewhere instead of a one-size-fits-all approach.

As for PC downloadable titles, in an interview with *Gamasutra*, ESRB president Patricia Vance stressed the organization's voluntary structure, saying that submissions for ratings are "not something we can force; it's got to evolve organically." Currently, the vast majority of download-only PC games do not carry an ESRB rating.





**Michael Gallagher**  
president, ESA

## Fighting Piracy

The controversy surrounding the over-reaching SOPA and PIPA anti-piracy bills in the House and Senate, respectively, put the ESA in a difficult position. While the ESA and its constituents obviously supported the crackdown on piracy, the potential collateral damage to Internet freedom drew the ire of many gamers. The ESA lobbied for the bills before ultimately dropping its support after consumer backlash intensified. When we asked ESA president Michael Gallagher what the organization could do to modify future bills similar to SOPA/PIPA in order to prevent possible censorship, he wasn't specific, but did cite the importance of a "solution that effectively balances both creative and technology interests."

Before the ESA dropped its support of the bills, ESA members like Epic Games and Trion Worlds and industry groups such as the IGDA and the Entertainment Consumers Association (ECA) took stands against the bills, creating a less-than-united front.

"I don't think we agreed exactly with everything

the ESA was doing," says Epic president Mike Capps, who sits on the ESA's board of directors. "We were more aligned than you might think, but we recognized that the group is a democratic one. We all get together and talk about what we think is best to do for the industry, and we get a vote. I've lost some votes on the board of directors, I've swayed some votes, and won some, and I think that's just part of being in a bigger industry with folks who have very different needs."

Capps says that apart from achieving that balance between fighting piracy without curtailing free speech or Internet freedom, the organization could do a better job next time around of presenting the ESA's efforts to gamers. "I think everyone at the ESA regrets that we didn't take a more customer-forward position about explaining SOPA," he says. "The no-subpoena shutdowns – that's really scary to me. We need due process, and I think that was going to be solved. But everyone was already too upset. It was too late to try and re-inform the public by the time it blew up. Lesson learned."

## The Big Show

The ESA also puts on the E3 industry trade show, which garners the attention of mainstream media outlets for its reveals of big games, industry announcements, and upcoming consoles. Given the hype and hoopla, however, the scale of the convention might not be beneficial to everyone. Meggan Scavio, general manager of the Game Developer's Conference, thinks that despite the fact that the E3 is a tent-pole event for the industry, it still has its holes. "...From what I can tell, E3 is not really staying up with the trends and emerging technology," she says. "It's still focused on big-budget boxed games."

The ESA hopes to address this issue. Social gaming giant Zynga plans to attend E3 for the first time this year, and the ESA says that E3 attendance is strong and, in general, membership is higher than ever. In 2008, notable members like Activision, LucasArts, and id Software left the ESA, and many speculated that it was because they preferred former ESA president and founder Doug Lowenstein over then-new president Michael Gallagher. Since then, many of those companies have still shown their games at E3 even though they aren't official ESA members.

Michael Pachter, managing director of equity research at Wedbush Securities, thinks that regardless of who attends E3 or is a member of the ESA, smaller companies and sectors like mobile and downloadable games don't have to worry about not being represented by the ESA. He posits that if an ESA member like Electronic Arts is active in the social gaming space, for example, then by default they represent the interests in that genre of other companies.

Still, Pachter thinks the more the merrier. "The only reason I think it would be great if Zynga, Activision, and indies all participated is I think you get a better result if you have more input from more people," he says. "More people will come up with a wider variety of outcomes and make things smarter. I know Mike Gallagher – he'd love everybody to be in there. I think the biggest impediment to them representing the entire industry is a lot of guys have different ideas about what the cost of that should be. My understanding is that ESA dues are a function of revenues, so a big company like Activision is saving millions by not participating."

Robot Entertainment co-founder Patrick Hudson, who has had experience in both releasing traditional boxed products when he was at Ensemble Studios (Age of Empires, Halo Wars) and downloadable games at Robot (Orcs Must Die!), agrees with Pachter that his company's interests are adequately represented despite their size and the fact that they can't join the ESA as a developer. When Ensemble was a part of Microsoft, Microsoft was the middleman between the ESA and Ensemble, leaving them free to concentrate on making games.

At Robot, Hudson is more content to carve out his own path. "We went to E3 last year for Orcs Must Die!" he says. "We didn't find that to be a beneficial conference for us to attend. We're much better off attending places like PAX and PAX East. For us, that is hitting the absolute core of people we're appealing to." ♦



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# The Genre That Refuses

## Keeping Adventure



Most discussions about the adventure genre begin with an acknowledgement of its glory days in the '90s before bending toward its subsequent death. The decline of the point-and-click adventure is often presented as a phase of gaming history – an indisputable event. That isn't necessarily true. Though adventure games aren't mainstream hits anymore, they haven't died. Their time in the spotlight earned them a devoted following of fans who have kept the genre on life support over the years. These sustaining efforts might pay off soon; with the popularity of mobile gaming and a handful of high-profile titles in development, the adventure genre is on the brink of resurgence. It may never reclaim its former status, but these are the projects responsible for keeping the genre alive long enough to give it another chance. **by Joe Juba**

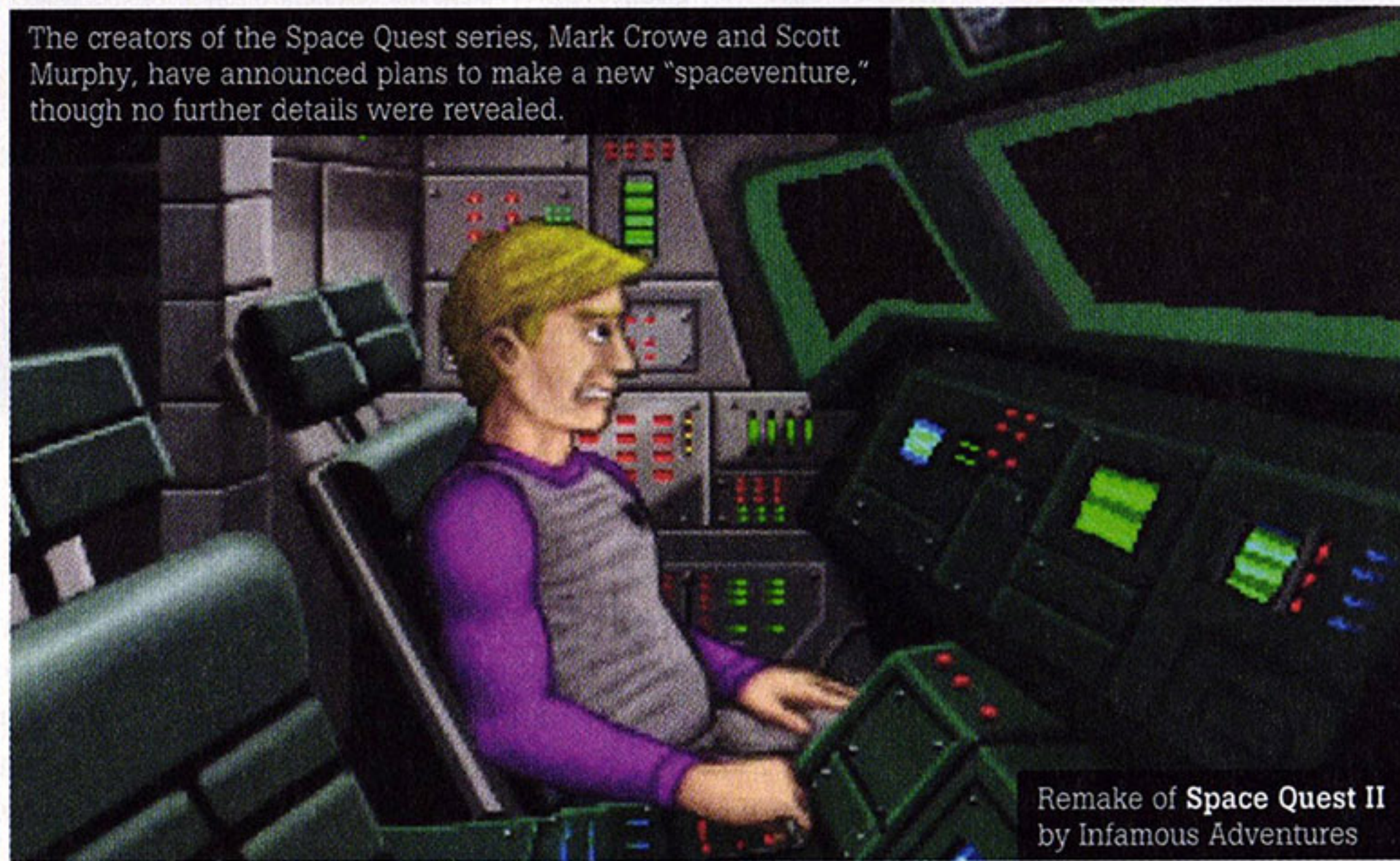


# To Die: Games Alive



King's Quest III Redux  
by AGD Interactive

The creators of the Space Quest series, Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy, have announced plans to make a new "spaceventure," though no further details were revealed.



Remake of Space Quest II  
by Infamous Adventures



The Silver Lining  
by Phoenix Online Studios

The Dream Machine  
by Dream Team

## By Fans, For Fans

As adventure games became a shrinking part of major publishers' release lists, fan communities from around the world realized the only way to keep playing their favorite series was to continue development themselves. Thanks to accessible and free software (most notably Adventure Game Studio), this goal is within reach for anyone willing to invest the time and effort. Several enthusiasts have even banded together, forming development groups dedicated to revitalizing the classic properties that defined the genre's heyday.

One such studio, AGD Interactive, has released VGA remakes of King's Quest I, II, and III, plus one for Quest for Glory II. Another group, Infamous Adventures, remade Space Quest II (as well as its own version of King's Quest III). After some legal wrangling, Phoenix Online Studios has released four of five episodes in a

full King's Quest sequel entitled The Silver Lining. All of these games are currently available as free downloads.

These projects are labors of love. They involve coordinating the efforts of talented artists, writers, programmers, and voice actors from around the world to create complex and massive quests. Since these developers don't charge money, all of that effort isn't in the interest of making a profit. Their affection for the genre, its conventions, and its history is evident to any adventure game fan on every screen and in every puzzle.

## Indie Cred

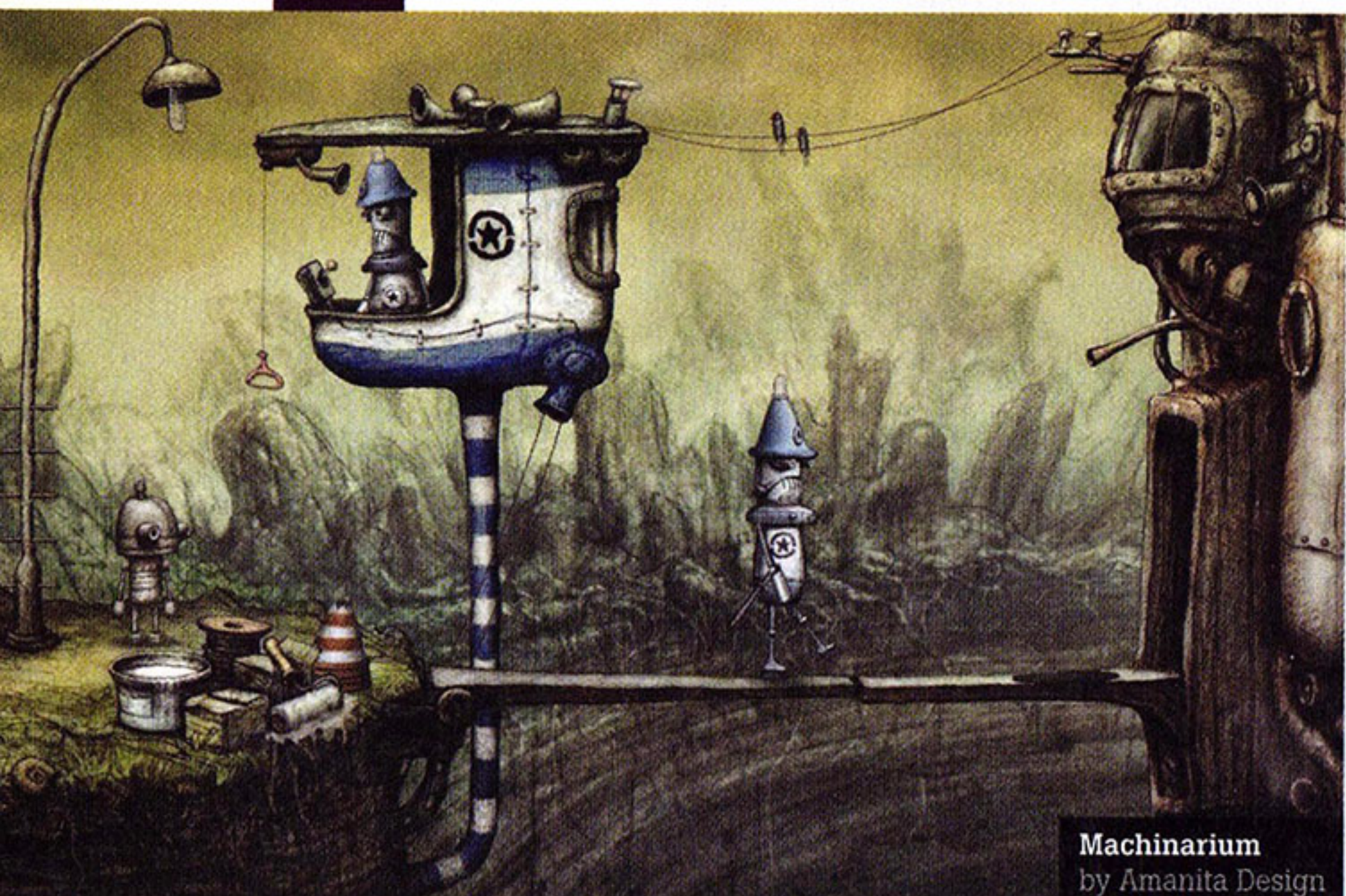
Reviving and reinventing classic games is great for nostalgia, but creators haven't just been retreading familiar ground. Plenty of new adventure projects have arisen from the indie development scene. Some of these are made by one-person

teams and are only intended to be shared with the loyal adventure game community, while others are geared toward a broader audience.

Amanita Design's *Machinarium* earned acclaim from media outlets when it released in 2009, and the developer has a stable of other stylish titles. The most recent is *Botanicula*, which released on April 19. The hallmark feature of Amanita's titles is their distinct and often surreal visuals that portray odd and unconventional worlds. While the puzzles are challenging, they rarely veer into the obtuse inventory combination pitfalls for which the genre eventually became infamous, making the games easier to enjoy.

Moving even further from tradition, Jason Rohrer's 2010 release entitled *Sleep is Death* is more of a communal storytelling exercise than a traditional adventure, but it takes clear cues from the genre. *Sleep is Death* requires two people interacting online in real time. One takes the role of the player, who manipulates the world





**Machinarium**  
by Amanita Design



**Strong Bad's Cool Game For Attractive People**  
by Telltale Games



**Back to the Future**  
by Telltale Games



**Sleep is Death**  
by Jason Rohrer

and initiates contact with NPCs. The other is the author, who changes the world in response to the player's choices – writing dialogue, moving objects, and setting up scenarios through an intuitive interface. In effect, *Sleep is Death* is more like software that allows you to create an adventure on the fly. The result is a narrative-focused experience that is infinitely adaptable to your choices, freeing players from the boundaries of single-solution puzzles.

The adventure genre is also frequently represented at the Independent Games Festival at the annual Game Developers Conference, as well as the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' Indie Game Challenge. One standout from this year's IGC was *The Dream Machine*, a point-and-click adventure where the clay-and-cardboard environments, props, and characters are hand-animated by developer Dream Team. The first three (of five) chapters are already complete and available to play online for free.

Titles like these are well-known and respected among hardcore fans, but only gamers who are actively seeking new titles in the genre are likely to find them. Fortunately, not all new adventure titles are reserved for those who know where to look.

## Telltale Signs

Discussing the state of the modern adventure game is impossible without mentioning the tireless efforts of Telltale Games. Though the studio had developed prior games, Telltale's decision to revive *Sam & Max* for a 2006 release earned the most credibility among fans. After that point, the company continued to create new *Sam & Max* episodes in addition to expanding its catalog into other areas.

Telltale's release list appears tailor-made to draw in adventure game enthusiasts new and old. The studio developed new chapters in the classic *Monkey Island* series, along with

licensed titles based on popular films like *Back to the Future* and *Jurassic Park*. The studio has also produced adventure games based on web series (*Strong Bad*) and comic books (*The Walking Dead*), bringing those properties' built-in audiences into the fold. Telltale has even acquired the rights to develop official new entries in the venerable *King's Quest* series, an announcement that excited many longtime fans.

Telltale deserves credit for its work in keeping adventure gaming in the spotlight, but the studio has been more of a steward than savior of the genre. Awareness of Telltale's games is one thing, but reception is another; review scores for Telltale adventures are all over the place, but most are middling. The studio lacks a knock-it-out-of-the-park hit, and not all fans agree with its relatively simple approach to puzzles and exploration. That isn't to say that Telltale hasn't produced good games, but being prolific in the adventure genre isn't the same as reviving it.

## Portable Adventure

Remakes are a great way to revisit a classic, but you should turn to your phone or tablet if you want straight conversions of the games you know and love. Mobile devices are almost perfectly suited to point-and-click mechanics, and have received no-new-frills ports of many old favorites. For instance, *Broken Sword* (top), *Gobliiins*, and *Riven* are all currently available on iOS. Though great new adventures like *Sword & Sworcery* (bottom) are also available on these devices, the structure of the marketplaces make it difficult to separate the good from the bad.

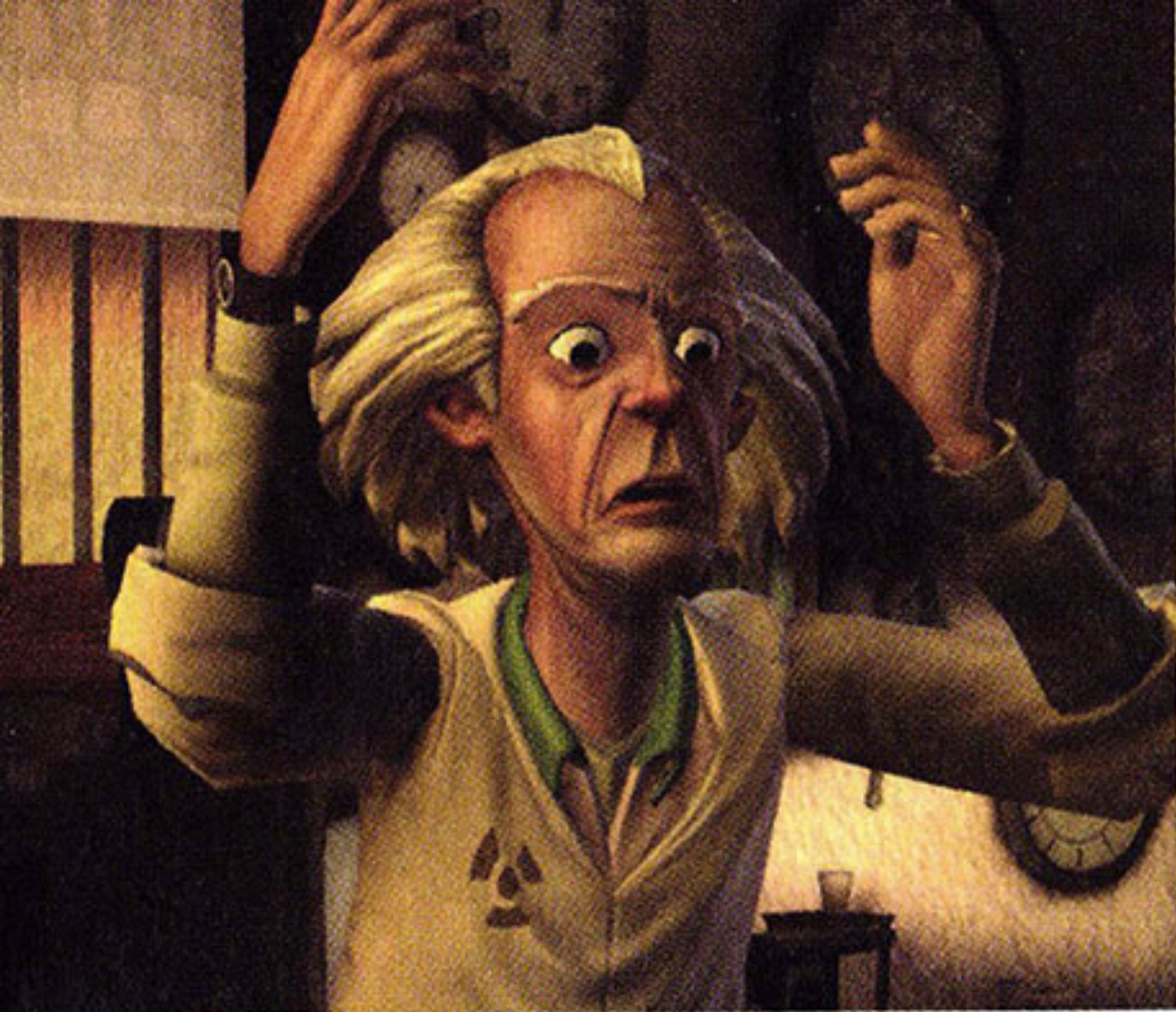


## Five Must-Play Classics

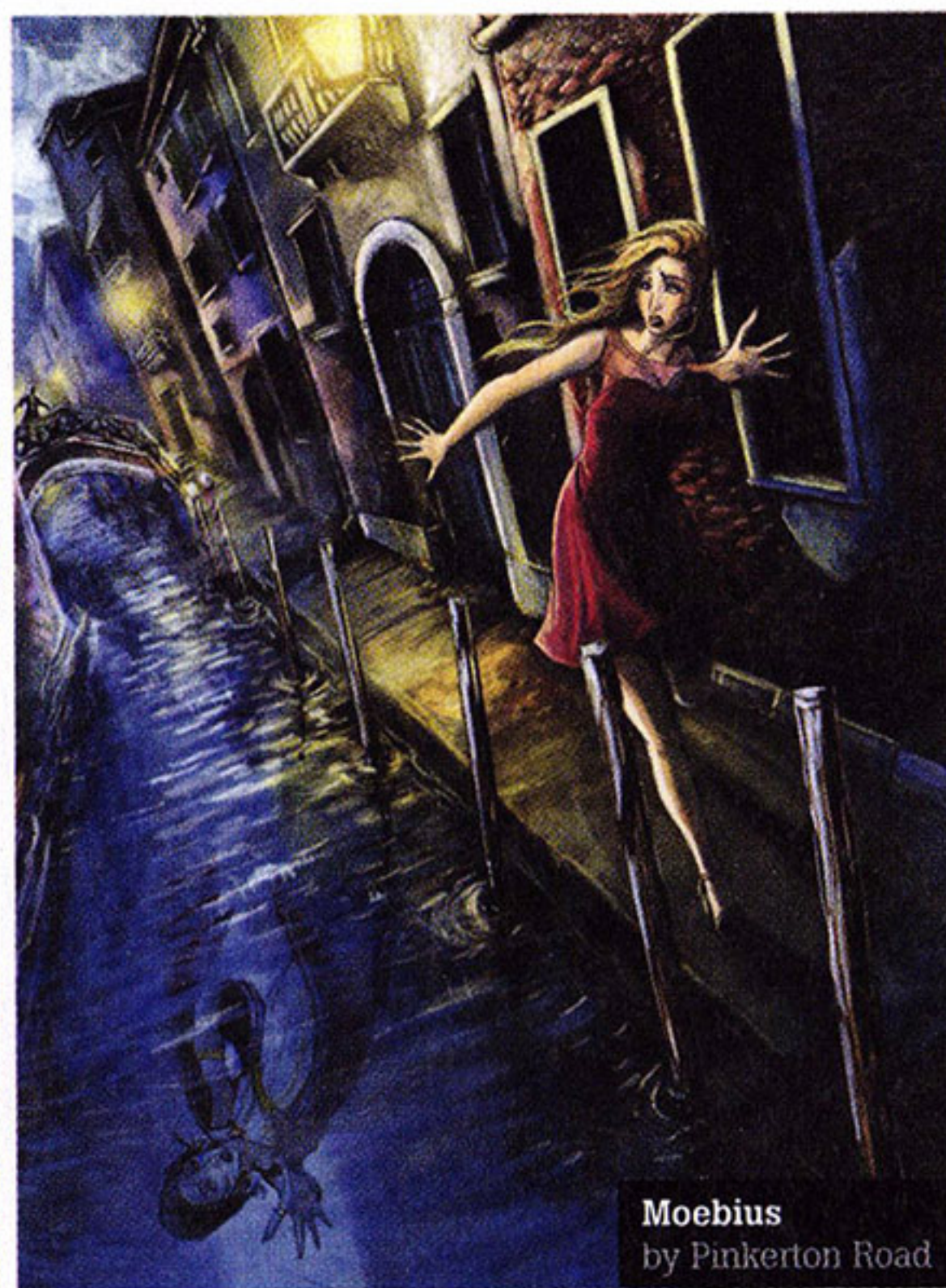
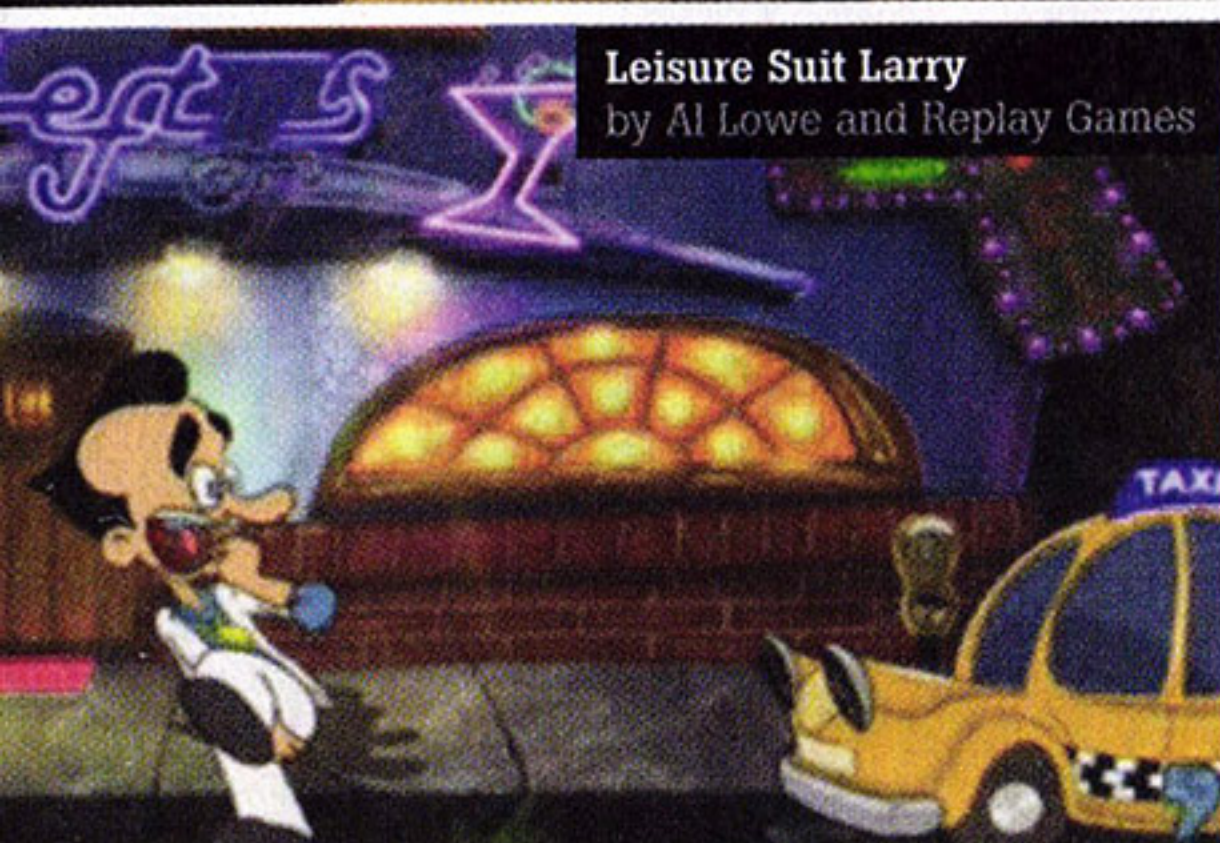
As adventure gaming rises up from the underground, new fans may want to get more familiar with the genre's history. If you don't know where to start, this list of five old-school adventures will give you a solid foundation.

\*Available on gog.com \*\*Available on gog.com and iOS  
\*\*\*Check online retailers for availability





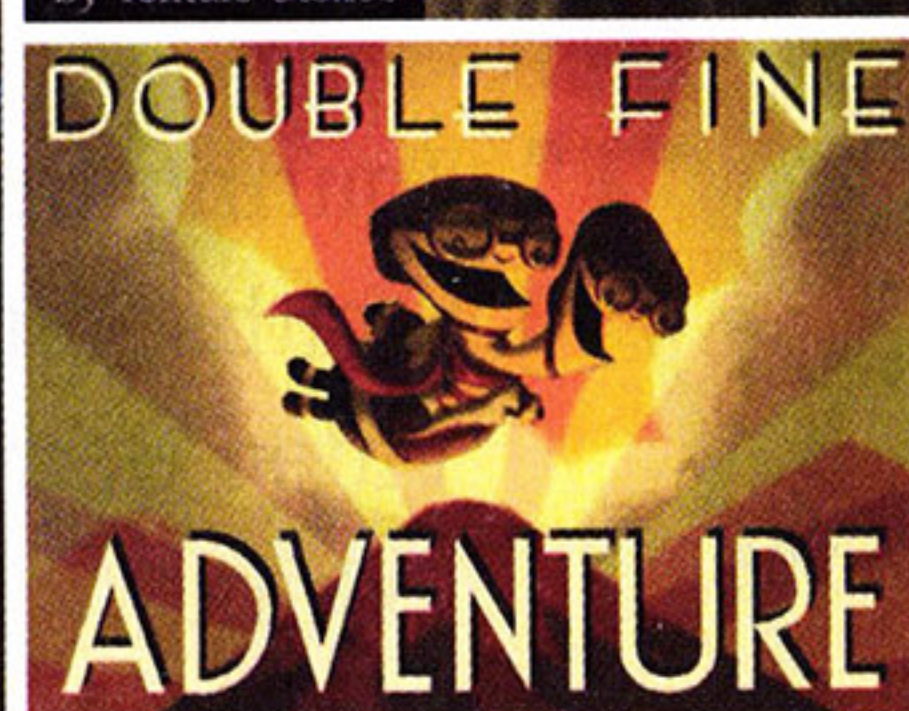
**Leisure Suit Larry**  
by Al Lowe and Replay Games



**Moebius**  
by Pinkerton Road



**Sam & Max**  
by Telltale Games



## The Kickstarter Future

If Telltale's relentless releases aren't enough to propel adventure games back into the mainstream spotlight, what chance do they have? Some promising prospects have recently arisen from an unexpected source: crowd funding website Kickstarter.

The phenomenon started when Double Fine Productions and its founder Tim Schafer began a Kickstarter campaign to raise \$400,000 for a new point-and-click adventure. Schafer's resume certainly helped inspire confidence in the project; he worked on such memorable titles as Full Throttle, Monkey Island, and Grim Fandango. The project crushed its funding goal, raising over \$3.3 million during the course of the campaign – the largest amount raised on Kickstarter at the time.

Double Fine demonstrated that Kickstarter could be a successful method to raise funds for

projects that traditional channels wouldn't support, and as a result, other developers jumped in with their long-shot titles. Among these, adventure game fans will notice a few familiar faces.

Jane Jensen, the creator of the Gabriel Knight series, began a new studio called Pinkerton Road. Jensen hopes to fund a year's worth of adventure games through Kickstarter. The first is called Moebius, which the developer describes as a "metaphysical sci-fi thriller" starring an antiquities dealer named Malachi Rector. Pinkerton Road is aiming for a March 2013 release.

Another renowned genre veteran, Al Lowe, has also turned to Kickstarter for support. Lowe is the mind behind the hilariously juvenile Leisure Suit Larry series, and together with Replay Games, an HD remake of the original Leisure Suit Larry is currently in production. This project was actually announced before Double Fine's Kickstarter coup, but later made the transition to crowd funding.

The pedigree of these upcoming games is promising, but to say that we are experiencing an adventure game renaissance may be premature. The potential is exciting, but the current crop of titles has yet to be proven. In fact, as of this printing, Moebius and Leisure Suit Larry HD have yet to reach their Kickstarter funding goals, making their eventual release far from certain.

Even so, adventure fans can still find many victories in the current gaming landscape. Adventure games are certainly more talked about today than they have been over the last decade, and studios like Telltale Games and Amanita Design have been keeping the genre alive when major publishers had left it for dead. A full-fledged rebirth isn't likely, but adventure game fans don't expect it. With quality titles available now and even more promising projects on the horizon, the pointing and clicking isn't stopping soon. ♦



### King's Quest VI \*

King's Quest is one of the most respected names in adventure gaming, and this entry is a great example of its fantastic locations, puzzles, and storytelling.



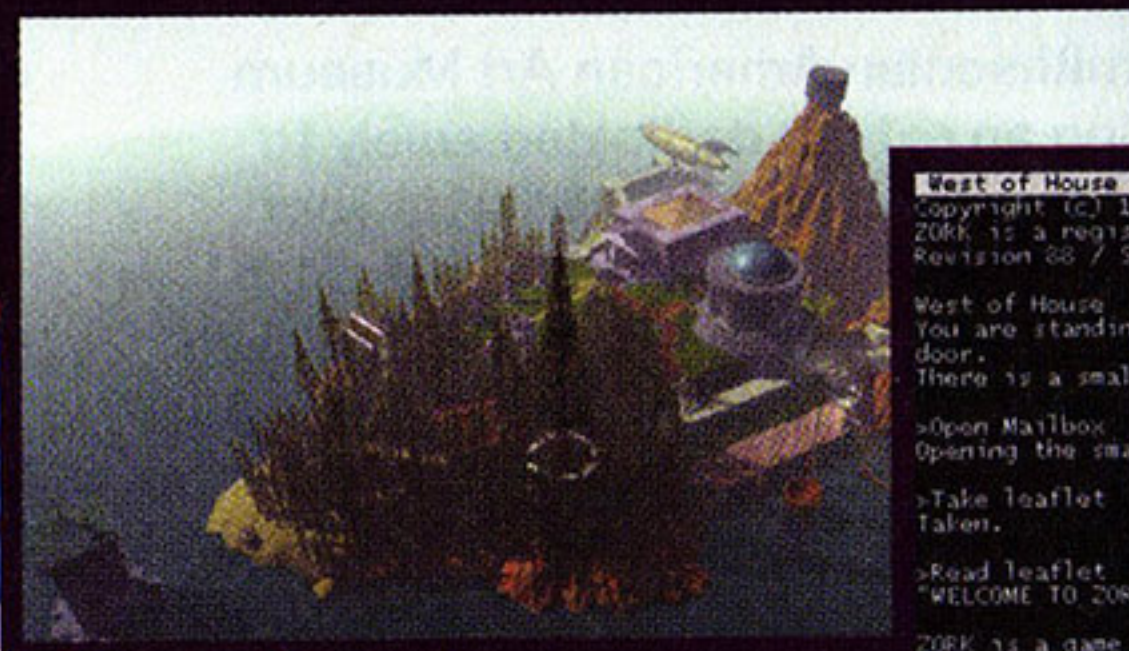
### Day of the Tentacle \*\*\*

A prime example of the glory days of LucasArts adventures. A cartoony visual style complements the offbeat sense of humor and great characters.



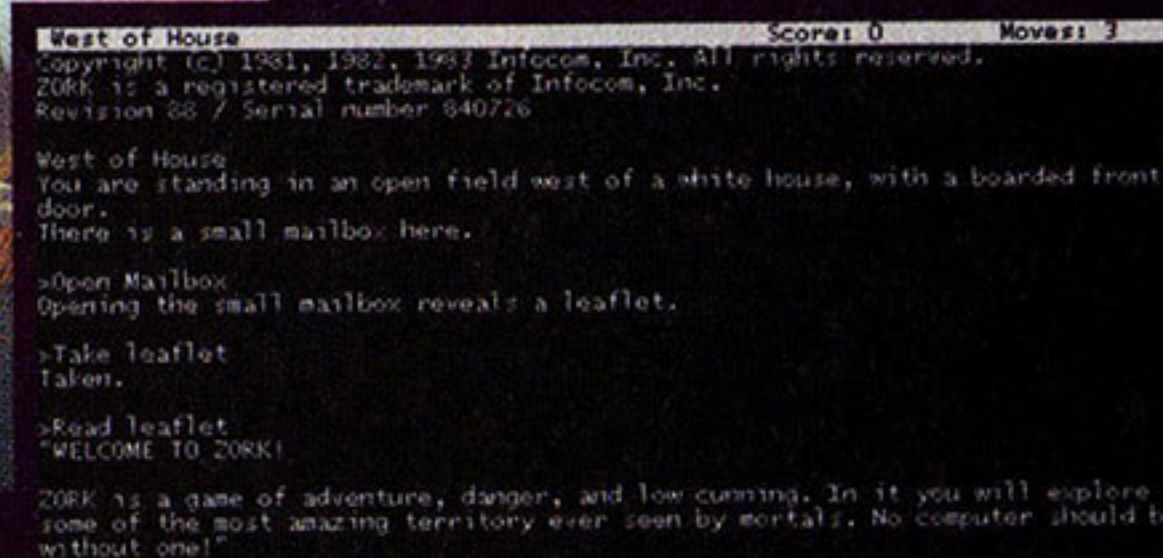
### Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist \*\*\*

You control an Old West pharmacist who used to be a top gunfighter. The premise is awesomely ridiculous, but the colorful cast and clever puzzles put this one over the top.



### Myst \*\*

Myst focuses on solitary observation, experimentation, and deduction. You won't talk to many other characters, but the world still feels remarkably rich.



### Zork \*

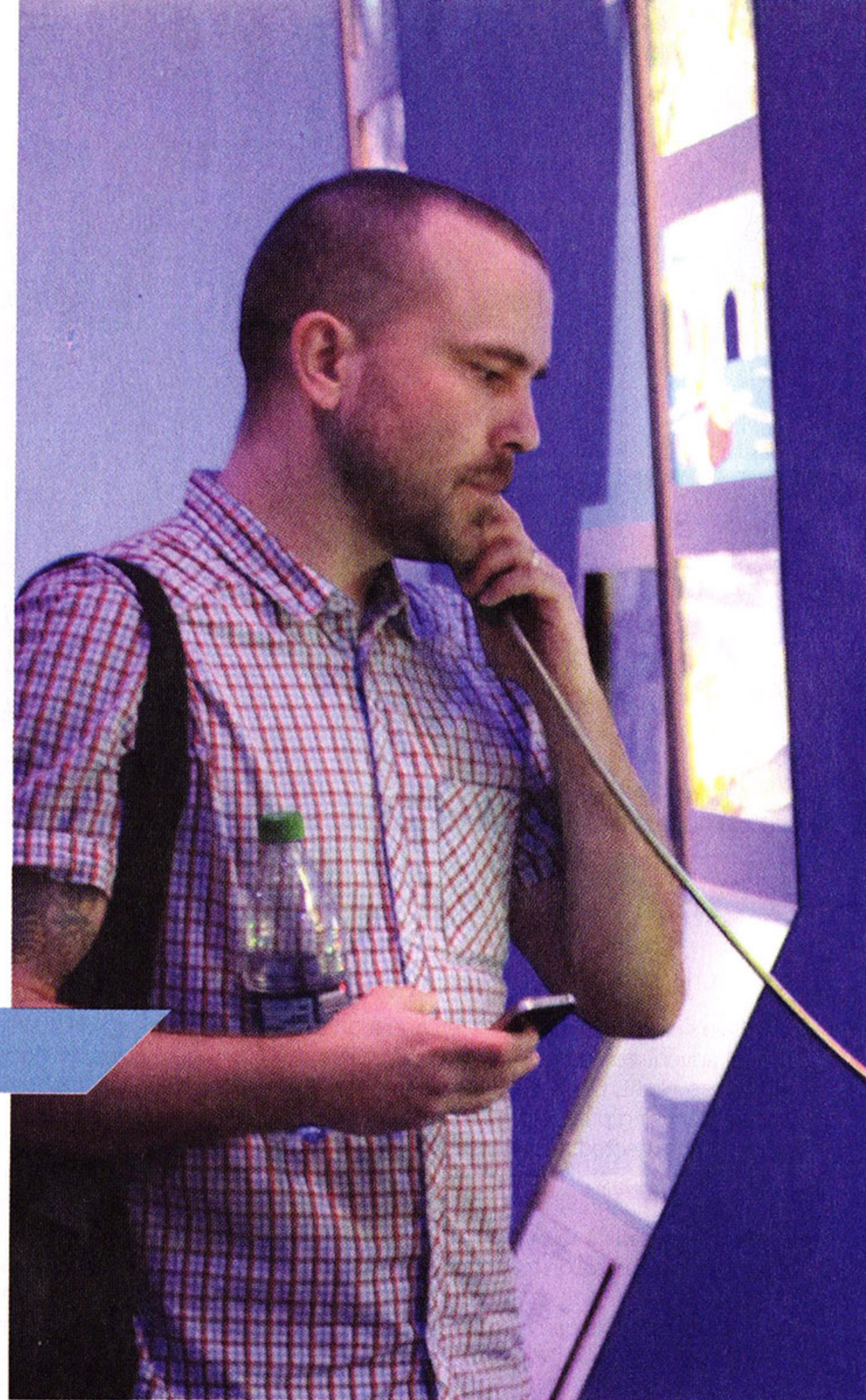
A precursor to point-and-click adventures, this text-based game makes you read about your surroundings and type out your commands. Though it's not much to look at, Zork is a milestone in gaming history.



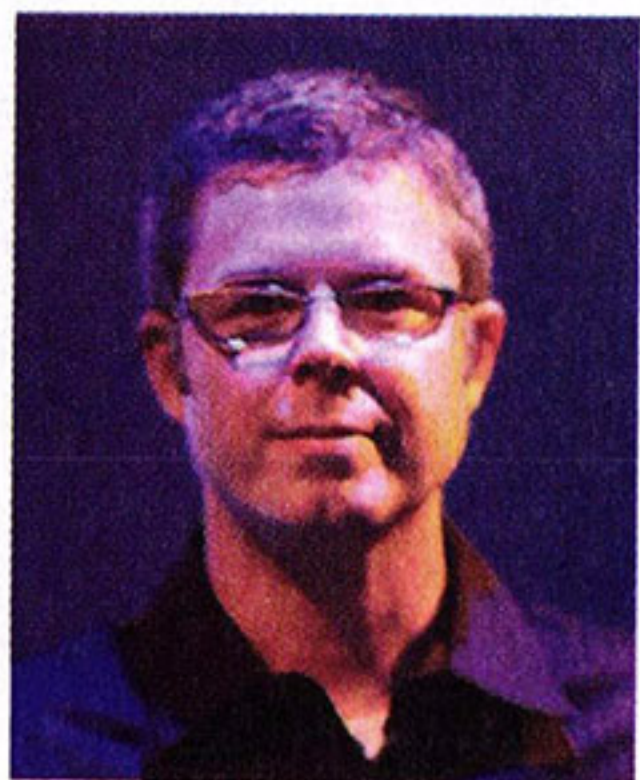
# The Art of Play

Touring the Smithsonian's Video Game Exhibit

interview by Ben Reeves



In an attempt to capture the aspirations and imagination of modern culture, the Smithsonian American Art Museum displays works of art from renowned artists such as John Singleton Copley, David Hockney, and Georgia O'Keeffe – and most recently, Tim Schafer, Sid Meier, and Ken Levine. The museum's newest exhibit, "The Art of Video Games," is a 6,000 square-foot show dedicated to showing off the artistic merits of over 80 games from the last 40 years. The show's March 16 opening drew nearly 23,000 visitors and was one of the museum's busiest days on record. We talk with guest curator Chris Melissinos about the exhibit and the rising influence video games have on our culture.



**Chris Melissinos**  
guest curator,  
Smithsonian American  
Art Museum

**The Smithsonian American Art Museum featuring an exhibit dedicated solely to video games is a big deal. What is your goal for this show?**

We wanted to build an exhibit that shows the artistic progression of video games over time. We wanted to look at video games as an art in itself, not just look at the art that makes up games. I think that's an important distinction. We're not just looking at the artifacts within games, the music and the art and the story. We're looking at the video game medium as an art medium.

**People debated that topic for a long time, but this exhibit lends legitimacy to games being an art form. Do you think this exhibit might finally silence some opponents?**

Art is a highly subjective term, but I can tell you that after spending so much time in museums in the lead up to this exhibition, I've never had a painting or a sculpture drive me to become

emotional. However, I have had games do that. Games have this way of reaching us on a level that most art cannot, because it is an amalgam of art. It is the best of what we can do with art all wrapped up into something that becomes greater than its parts. Within games we have illustration, sculpture, musical scoring, narrative, and poetry. Not only are they an amalgam of all these things, but also they are the only form of art that invites us – even requires us – to participate in order to fully express itself. I think that's incredibly powerful.

**When putting together the show did you receive any backlash from the old guard who maybe doesn't understand how games could be perceived as art?**

By and large, the museum was on board. However, there are always questions that arise from people who are not used to the experience. I think the reason there is such a kickback to viewing video games as art is because it's such

a recent medium. It's hard to approach it with the same reverence that we all have for these older art styles. Video games are on the same trajectory that every other form of art has ever taken. When movies were introduced people said, "Why would you go to a movie when you could go to the theater?" But video games have had this kind of hyper-evolution in just 40 years. It has expanded faster and more impressively, and it's touched more corners of the planet than any other form before it in that same amount of time. Society is used to having more time to adapt to new art forms. I think we're finally at the point where we can have this discussion about games as art. We couldn't have had this discussion 20 years ago. We can have it now.

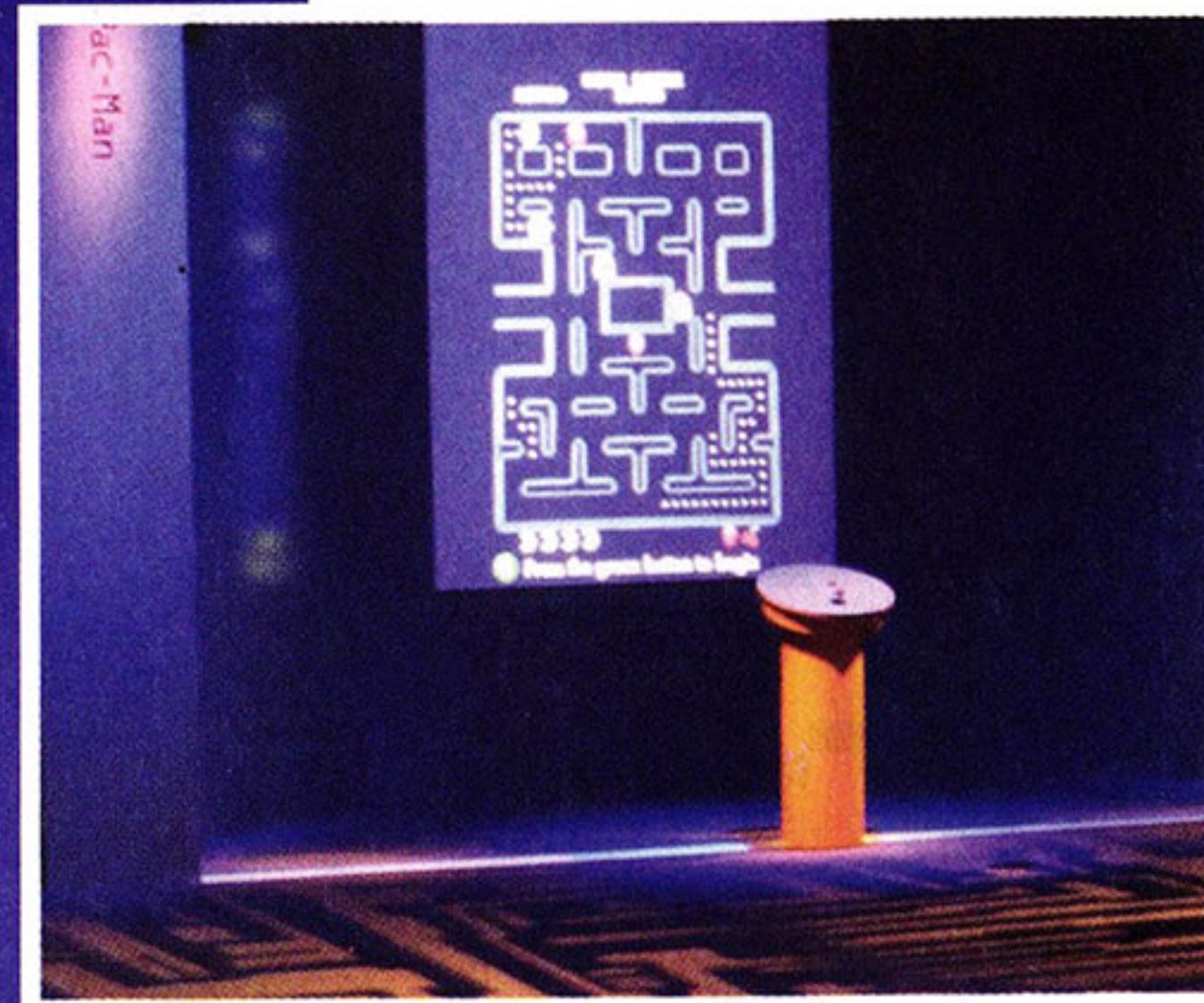
**How did you approach looking at video games as an art form?**

We looked at creating a narrative that would demonstrate the evolution of the form over time while wanting to be able to hear the echoes of game mechanics that remain the same. For example, when you look at a game like Pitfall on the Atari and here is Pitfall Harry running and jumping on vines, and then you look at Uncharted 2 and you see Nathan Drake running through the jungle and jumping on vines, you realize that those core mechanics are very similar. What changes is the size of the canvas in which designers can paint the story. It's not like games from the past were any less ambitious





Kiosks at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Art of Video Games exhibit give guests a look back at some of the most artistic games from the last 40 years



## Art On Tour

If you can't make it to Washington, D.C. before the "The Art of Video Games" exhibit closes on September 30, you might still have an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the show. The exhibit will travel to 10 other cities in the United States through 2016:

- **Boca Raton Museum of Art**  
Boca Raton, FL  
(October 24, 2012 – January 20, 2013)
- **EMP Museum**  
Seattle, WA  
(February 16, 2013 – May 13, 2013)
- **Phoenix Art Museum**  
Phoenix, AZ  
(June 16, 2013 – September 29, 2013)
- **Hudson River Museum**  
Yonkers, NY  
(February 15, 2014 – May 18, 2014)
- **Toledo Museum of Art**  
Toledo, OH  
(June 19, 2014 – September 28, 2014)
- **Flint Institute of Arts**  
Flint, MI  
(October 25, 2014 – January 18, 2015)
- **Memphis Brooks Museum of Art**  
Memphis, TN  
(June 6, 2015 – September 13, 2015)
- **The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum**  
at Florida International University in Miami, FL  
(October 9, 2015 – January 25, 2016)

or any less involved; it's just that the technology of the day was anemic. It could not accurately or fully describe the entire intent of the author, which is why early games came with elaborate box art, and comic books, and cloth maps.

### You could have included a number of games in the exhibit. How did you trim down your list and settle on just 80 titles?

For the exhibit, we picked four very general genre buckets that we could lump a bunch of things into that would show the progression of video games over time. It would have been easy to just pick 80 games that I felt fit the narrative best, but I didn't think that would stay true to the voices of video games. I believe we have three voices in video games. One is the designer and the story they're trying to tell. One is the game itself and the mechanics that present the game to the player. And finally we have the voice of the player who, in playing the game, makes it art. I wanted that three voice premise to echo through the exhibit. So rather than just pick 80 games, I picked 240 games that would fit into the narrative arc, and I let the public cast a vote to provide some semblance of input – a representation of interactivity – that would be represented in the show.

### What are some of your personal highlights?

We have games like Uncharted 2, Rez, Utopia, Minecraft, and Heavy Rain. We have a wide variety that demonstrates the art's progression.

One of my favorites is when you look at Panzer Dragoon Zwei and Saga. They were interesting because they came out during a transition era. In that era, we asked game designers and artists to move from a two-dimensional medium to a three-dimensional medium. Imagine if you were a painter and you were handed a chisel and hammer and told to go make your next creation out of marble. How well do those skills really translate? Not very easily. There's no one-to-one. In games like Panzer Dragoon Zwei you can see the struggles the artists had in trying to convey their design under the limitations of the hardware. The world sits broken because the hardware couldn't match the scope of the idea. I think that's beautiful to observe. You flash forward to today and we don't have that problem. We can fully render 3D worlds and convey the breadth of a story pretty well, so now we're starting to see artists limiting themselves.

### What exactly do you mean when you say, "artists are limiting themselves?"

Look at 3D Dot Game Heroes, Limbo, or Fez. They're not pushing some kind of realism, they're saying, "What if rather than create something photorealistic, what if we flipped it and used the technology to create a perspective that's different and engages the audience in a way that can't happen with photorealism?" Now video games are beginning to create more abstract notions of art. Look at Journey, which could have

implemented full voice chat with your online partner, but it didn't in order to influence your emotions in a different way. We have the technology to let players chat with each other while they play, but Journey doesn't do that, and you still have this really cool immersive, connected experience. It's a journey in the true sense of the word. It limited itself on purpose for the sake of the art.

### Art usually has a deeper meaning than what we see on the surface. Do you think that holds true with games as well?

Absolutely. The problem with dismissing video games as just games is that you're not really listening to the story that the artists intended behind the game. An example I use all the time is Missile Command. Everyone said, "Well it's a benign but really cool target shooting game." However, Missile Command was a statement about the Cold War. [Missile Command creator] Dave Theurer was approached by Atari to work on a missile game, but he said he would not build a game where he launched nukes at the USSR. He wanted to build a game about defending one's country, because he felt it was a moral good. What was happening in the world, at the time, informed his game. The problem is that people dismiss the meaning behind the game because they dismiss games as games. The goal of our show was to peel back the gameplay veneer a bit and listen to what the designers were trying to say. 💎





# Treasure Hunting

## How Game Makers Are Getting Your Money

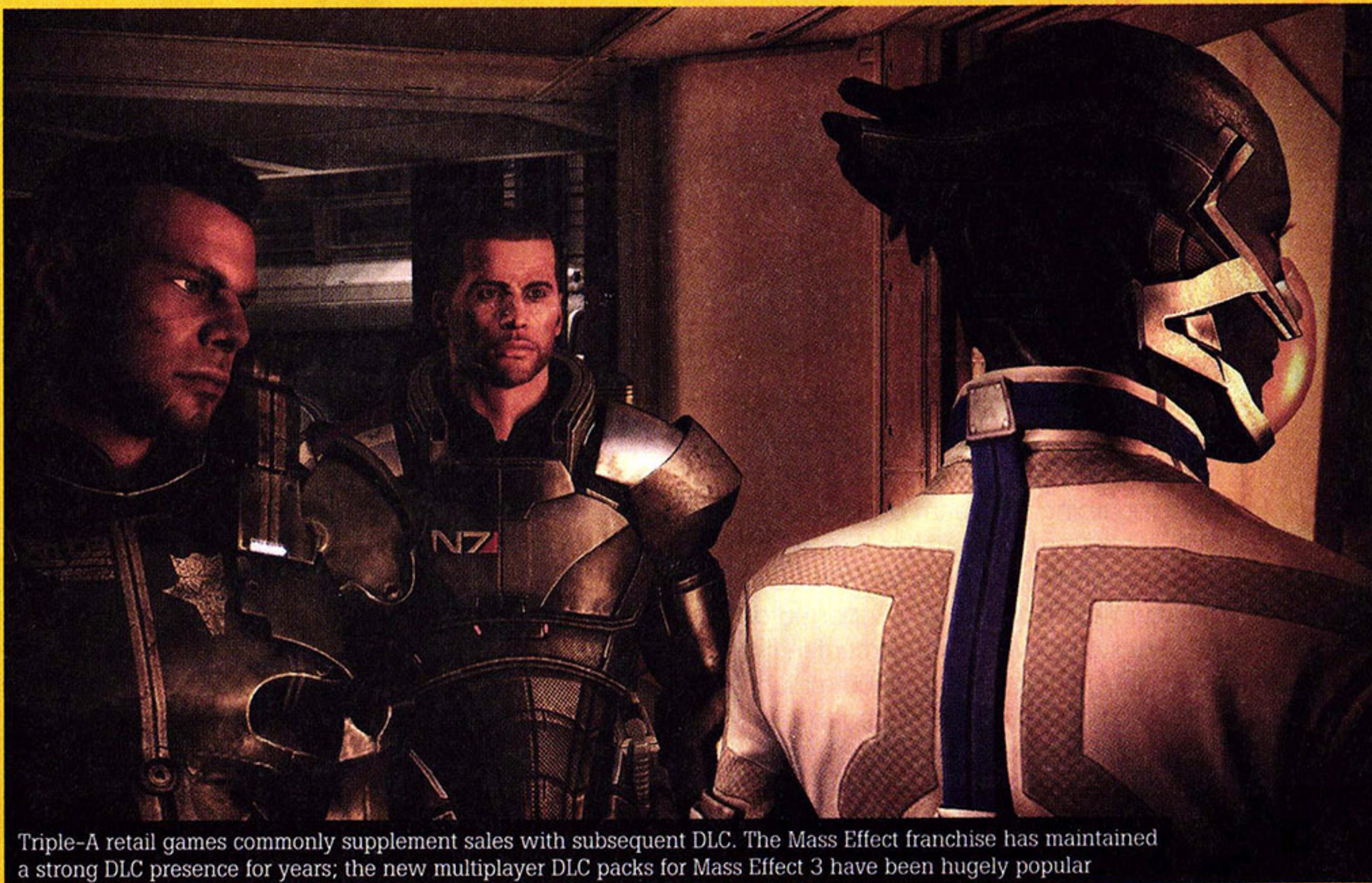
by Matt Miller

While the artistic merits of video games remain a matter of discussion in some quarters, one aspect of video games isn't changing any time soon: Publishers are looking to separate gamers from their hard-earned cash. Like film, television, and music, at the end of the day the video game industry is a profit-driven sector. The billion-dollar question is how best to capitalize on the entertainment it creates.

A drive for profitability and monetization isn't necessarily a bad thing. Competition between game makers to create strong products fuels innovation, and gamers today have more options than ever when it comes to what games to play and how to pay for them. However, it's never wise to go blindly into a marketplace where everyone is looking to take advantage of your naivety. We take a look at some of the top models being implemented by industry professionals to relieve you of your hard-earned dough, and investigate how the industry is trending as we continue through the second decade of the 21st century.



# The Old Standard



Triple-A retail games commonly supplement sales with subsequent DLC. The Mass Effect franchise has maintained a strong DLC presence for years; the new multiplayer DLC packs for Mass Effect 3 have been hugely popular

For many gamers, the familiar structure of buying a game at a store and bringing home a box with a disc remains the go-to path for delivery. The proven and profitable model remains the primary monetization avenue for the most high-end games. According to a recent Nielsen report on gaming, 56 percent of U.S. households now own an Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, or Wii. Those console owners aren't just sitting and staring at empty disc trays, either. While the NPD Group reported that physical software sales dipped six percent in 2011 in the U.S., that number still amounted to \$8.83 billion in sales for the year.

According to Jesse Divnich, who tracks industry trends as vice president of analysis with EEDAR, retail games remain a powerful revenue stream, and are likely to remain that way for many years to come. "The retail model will always exist for the foreseeable future," Divnich says. "Physical software sales account for \$25 billion annually in the western markets, which is nearly four times more than several emerging markets such as social and mobile. We do believe, however, that the physical sales market is slowly declining. We see the retail model, which can support much higher price points, to continue to be a medium for triple-A video games." The likely migration away from retail could become increasingly apparent with the lower-tier products. "Middle-of-the-road titles, like movie-based games, 5- to 7-rated games, etc. are likely to switch to other markets, if not disappear entirely," Divnich says.

Other issues surround the viability of physical product as a means of revenue, most importantly the prevalence of used game sales. Some game publishers decry the practice because it allegedly bites into new product sales, and because no revenue from the used game sale goes to the developers. Defenders of the practice claim that used markets exist for any type of physical media, used sales help spur engagement in ongoing franchises, and that trade-ins fuel new game purchases. Regardless of where consumers fall on the spectrum, they're being forced to deal with the fallout of the conflict; publishers are exploring ways to shore up the value of a new game purchase. The most popular tactic is the use of online pass codes, which blocks off content for gamers who don't have the one-use code that comes with the initial purchase.

In the case of high-profile franchises like Call of Duty, Halo, or Assassin's Creed, high-priced retail releases will continue to exist, but consumers can cross their fingers that the prohibitive \$60 norm may slowly drop over time in response to lower-cost gaming alternatives. Publishers may begin to more actively explore price fluctuation over the life of a game's sales, helping to extend the shelf life and remain competitive against the used market.

Anecdotally, Nielsen's SoundScan report found that the music industry still sold over 220 million compact discs in 2011, even with the seemingly ubiquitous presence of downloadable tracks, mp3 players, music pirating, and streaming music. In other words, retail product undoubtedly retains its draw, no matter the medium. However, with each passing year, other game delivery avenues are emerging.



# The Future is Downloadable

The downloadable future is not happening as soon as some have predicted, but it's hard to deny the trend – paid game downloads are on the rise. Whether you look at the success of platforms like Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network, the broad reach of PC sales through Steam or Impulse, or premium mobile games, consumers are increasingly foregoing physical product and acquiring games digitally.

The growth trend is rapid and unprecedented. As a private company, Valve is notoriously reticent to share revenue data regarding its Steam digital distribution platform, but analyst firm FADE estimated \$970 million in sales in 2010. Meanwhile, Electronic Arts reported digital revenue growth of 46 percent in fiscal year 2011, amounting to \$800 million. CEO John Riccitiello predicted to investors that the company's digital revenue would continue to grow, exceeding \$1 billion in 2012.

For game makers, the paid download model offers some significant advantages. Independent developers can circumvent the retail-distribution channel, which makes them less reliant on publishers and gives them a direct line to gamers. Publishers can cut costs by pressing, packaging, and shipping fewer retail products (a savings that is not always passed to consumers). The digital platform also offers increased protection from piracy and used sales.

As rapid as digital distribution is growing, it still has many hurdles to clear before becoming a dominant industry revenue model. For one, some people like holding a physical copy of their purchase, which can potentially be resold. "Most of entertainment is intangible, yet because of technology limitations consumers have become used to enjoying entertainment through tangible formats," Divnich says. "As consumers get more comfortable with the idea of purchasing intangible entertainment, the paid download model will increasingly grow."

Other issues facing digital distribution include consumer aversion to aggressive digital rights management (DRM) intended to curtail piracy, slow download speeds for large games, hard drive space constraints, and the broadband penetration rate. As a generation of kids raised on digital purchases gains buying power and technology gets better, however, Divnich still sees the gaming industry migrating to a digital format over time. The aforementioned challenges may make that reality more than a decade away.

# It's Virtually Free!

The microtransaction model thrives because small numbers of users spend large amounts of money. During his presentation at GDC this past March, PapayaMobile's Oscar Clark laid out the case for catering to "true fans," and their propensity to spend large amounts of money on a single game. Also commonly called "whales" within the industry, these players might spend \$100 a month on a single game. Deeper moral dilemmas arise when one examines who some of these purchasers might be, including children or other buyers who can't afford or don't understand how much money they're spending.

Whether or not they spend large or small amounts of money, 86.9 percent of gamers purchase game elements that help to accelerate play, according to Clark. It speaks to a danger that is present in many freemium games. By necessity, many of these games are forced to find ways to make the experience less enjoyable or tedious the longer you play, the better to push users toward purchasing goods or other items to speed up progression. It's a dangerous trend that could have profound effects on the future shape of game design, especially as the free-to-play model gains momentum.

"Free-to-play is here to stay, and is by far one of the fastest-growing models in video games today," Divnich says. "There are still some kinks to work out as some developers have deployed deceptive tactics to exploit this model among younger audiences. My biggest fear is that if the industry fails to rein back these deceptive practices, it could lead to government regulations."

Barring such intervention, no force currently exists to curtail some of the practices currently in use by freemium game makers. "If people want something, they buy it," says BioShock creator and Irrational Games president Ken Levine. "Is it a world that I'd necessarily choose? Not necessarily, because as a gamer I'm certainly in a position now where I have enough personal resources, so I'd rather just buy things rather than go through that process. But that wasn't always the case, so I understand why the freemium market is very attractive to gamers. As a game developer, I think you have to be very open to the fact that the only constant is going to be change. These people go out and say, 'This is bad for games! Gamers should stop playing these!' Why are you wasting your time? It's like yelling at a cloud."

Amid this emerging marketplace of downloadable games, more publishers are embracing a deceptively named model: free-to-play. Ostensibly, this moniker claims users are getting something for nothing.

The reality is more nuanced. While a small number of independent games are available to the public for free, most games in the free-to-play space are built to support monetization.

By a wide margin, microtransactions remain the most popular way to bring in money for these "freemium" games. The recent Mobile Gaming Report for 2012, produced by the Casual Games Association, estimated that 55 percent of mobile revenue models in 2012 will be built around microtransactions. This figure is projected to rise to over 60 percent by 2014.

The report also found that between 3.5 and 10 percent of gamers transition from free-to-play to paying users. Though the number may seem small at first, that's balanced against a much vaster pool of potential players than \$60 retail games. Consider Zynga's CityVille. The Facebook follow-up to FarmVille garnered 100 million players in less than 40 days; if even three percent of those players drop a single dollar a month on CityVille, that adds up to \$3 million. Evidence suggests that most will pay far more.

Zynga and other freemium game makers have come under fire for ways in which their games elicit money from players, sometimes to the detriment of the aesthetic enjoyment of a game. But according to Frank Lantz, creative director of Zynga New York, the developers are keenly aware of this issue. "You are always looking to strike a balance between making a game that is financially successful and making a game that is valuable and a rewarding experience for the player," he says. "Sometimes these things are in conflict, and we try to be honest about that and sensitive to those issues and find the right balance. But sometimes they aren't in conflict. Often the commercial aspects of a game can contribute in a positive way to the player experience."



turn 16 you are guessing Victoria T.'s drawing

correct!

ELVIS

While microtransactions remain the dominant approach for free-to-play games, a small percentage of titles explore a different tack and are supported by in-game advertisement. In addition to microtransactions, the smash mobile hit Draw Something has a free-to-play version powered by ads



# Sign Me Up!



Whether you initially pay for the game or get it for free, numerous publishers support their content over time through subscription services. Historically, the subscription model is most commonly tied to the massively multiplayer field, where games like World of Warcraft or EverQuest provide ongoing support and content for games in exchange for a regular monthly fee.

In recent years, only the most ambitious and highly marketed MMO titles have found the paid subscription model viable, such as BioWare's Star Wars: The Old Republic. Others, including games like Age of Conan, Star Trek Online, or Lord of the Rings Online all began with paid subscriptions, and switched over into free-to-play after some period. There's no sign that the trend will abate any time soon.

More recently, publishers have introduced subscription services for other game

genres. In November of 2011, Activision launched Call of Duty Elite, a service built to expand on the franchise experience through additional downloadable content, daily competitions, strategy guides, and performance analysis. Judging by response, fans are willing to pay for the content. At the end of January, Activision reported the service had 1.5 million paying subscribers.

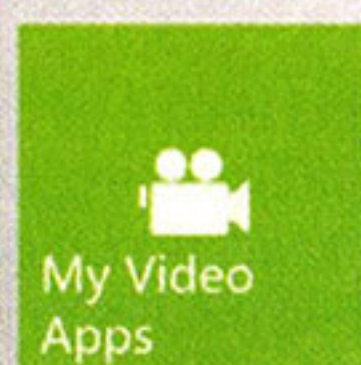
Other publishers have taken notice. In an interview with VentureBeat in March, EA Games executive vice president Patrick Soderlund suggested the company is studying the viability of the model for games like Battlefield and Medal of Honor. "Like all other companies, we're looking at how we can maximize our investment in this and get the most out of our investment and get more people playing this product," Soderlund said.

Wedbush Securities managing director Michael Pachter sees a future in which subscription-based systems may face significant challenges when put up against other emerging models. "There is no question that free-to-play will attract a larger audience, but the open question is whether the 'whales' will pay enough to offset the predictable revenues from subscription," Pachter says. "I suppose the trade-off is that quality for subscription games has historically been higher than for free-to-play, but that is probably going to change...I think that traditional publishers are skeptical of free-to-play, but the success of games like League of Legends has caused people to rethink traditional business models."

If you follow the trend to its apparent conclusion, we're likely to see a reduction in subscriptions as a prerequisite for play, but a possible increase in subscriptions that offer added value, whether in MMOs, shooters, or other genres. Like in the freemium space, a certain percentage of fans appear to be willing to pay extra for an enhanced experience, and publishers are unlikely to overlook that potential revenue stream.

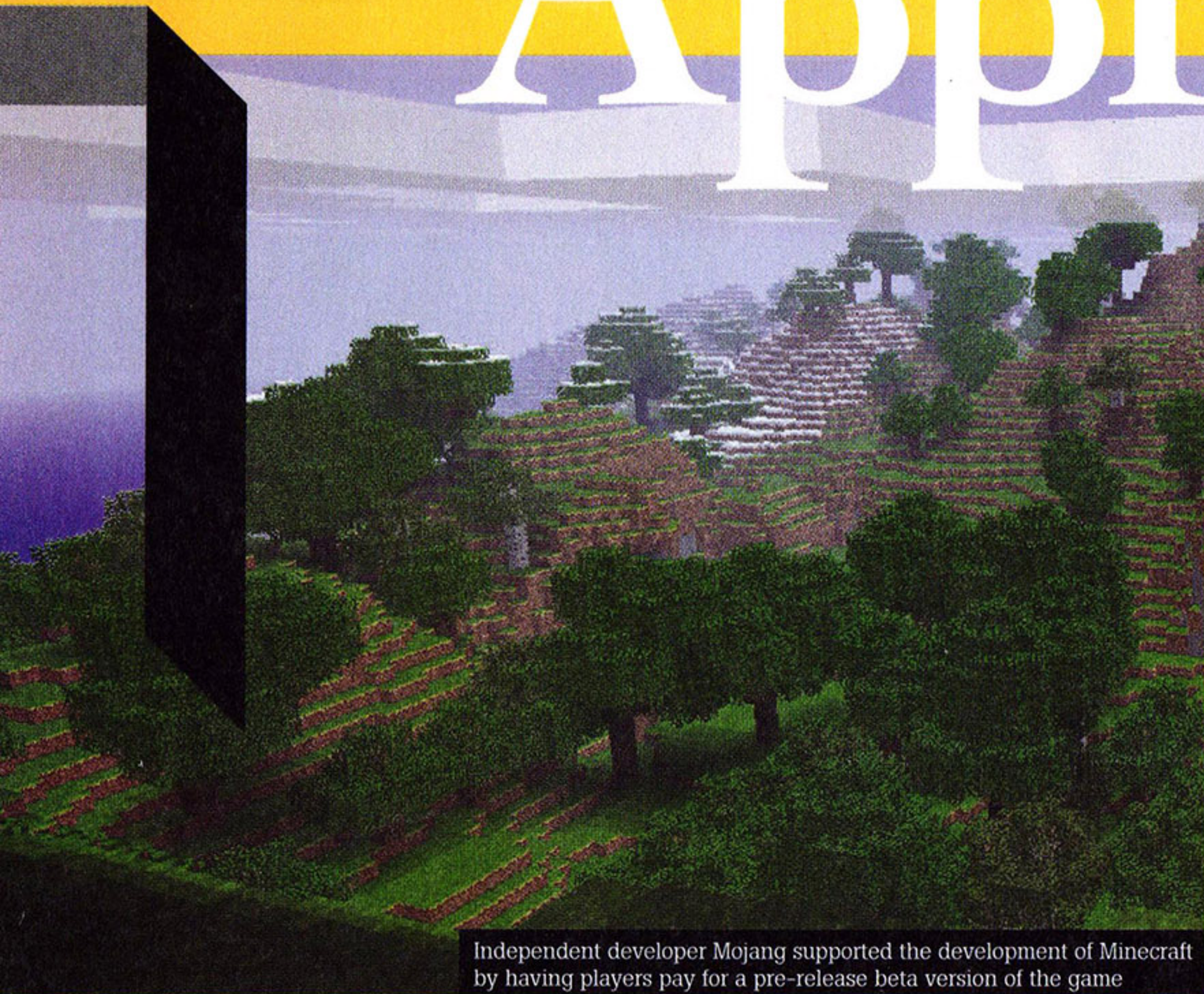
Microsoft hits players twice with Xbox Live. The premium "gold" plan has a yearly subscription fee, but those same subscribers are inundated by ads on the front dashboard.

me social tv video games music apps settings

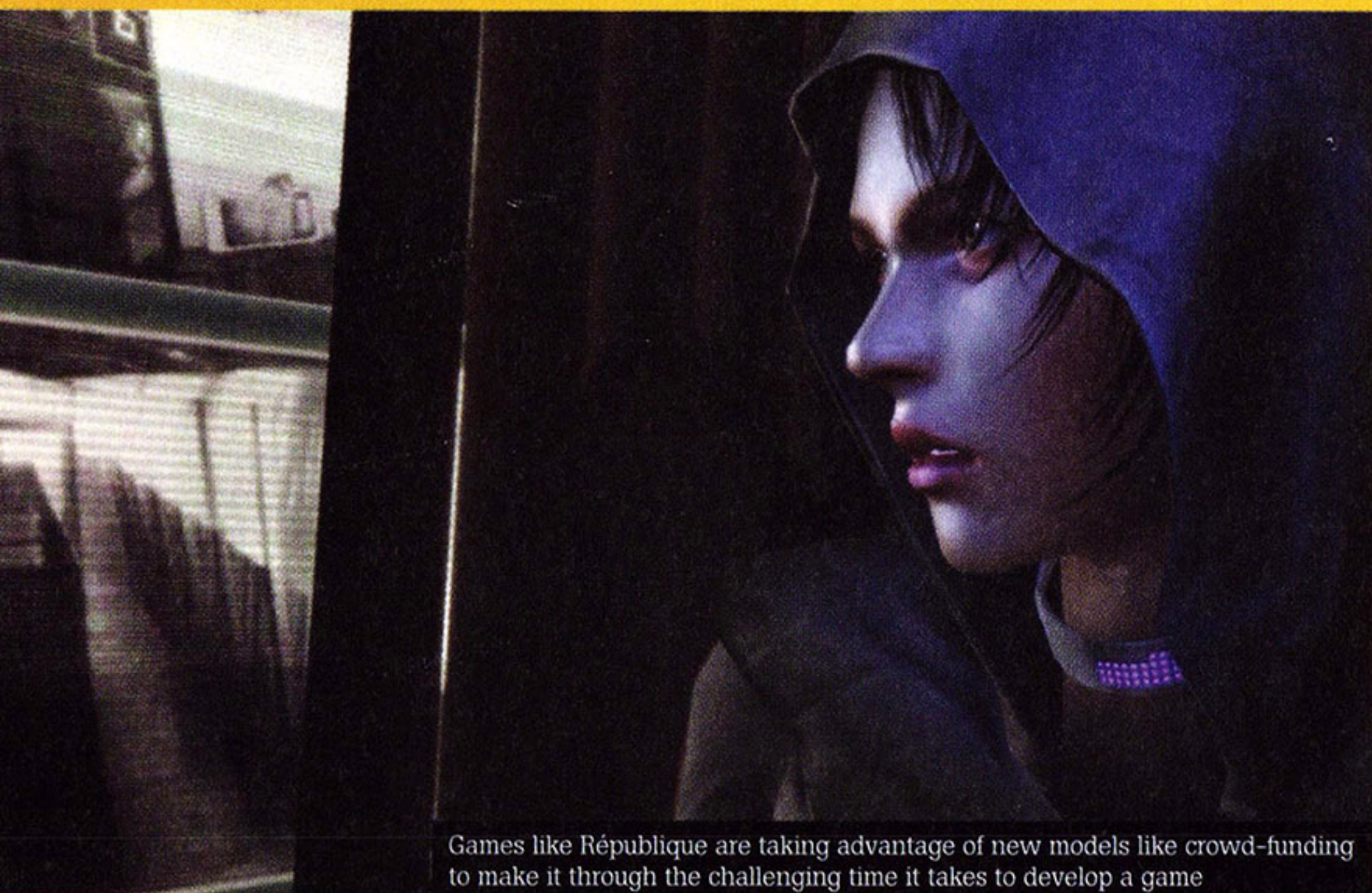




# Alternative Approaches



Independent developer Mojang supported the development of Minecraft by having players pay for a pre-release beta version of the game



Games like République are taking advantage of new models like crowd-funding to make it through the challenging time it takes to develop a game



Diablo III includes an auction house that allows users to legally sell in-game items for real cash, but Blizzard takes a cut

In a world where huge publishers have already taken such a large percentage of the pie, independent developers are looking for new ways to get their games played. The most successful new strategies engage directly with fans early in development, a path most traditional publishers and developers have avoided.

Perhaps the biggest success story to emerge has been Mojang and its breakout hit, *Minecraft*. Early in development, Mojang gave gamers the opportunity to buy an early beta version of the game. The developer clearly communicated that the cost to buy in early would be less than later on, but that early buyers would gain later versions of the game for no additional cost. In effect, Mojang asked its fans to speculate on the game's potential, and thereby fund future development as it went. The tactic doubled as a way to get free testers who would offer feedback about how the game could improve. The unspoken danger lies in a game that doesn't meet with positive response in its early form. Luckily for Mojang, *Minecraft* rapidly developed a rabid following.

A similar mindset lies behind the latest successful approach pulling in cash: crowd funding. Popularized by the website Kickstarter, the public can peruse early plans for projects and then pledge money to help fund their creation. The project creator sets a minimum goal needed to make the project happen. If the goal isn't reached, no funds are gathered from donors. In recent months, game developers have benefitted greatly from this funding model. Double Fine Productions received what was at the time the largest Kickstart in history, with over \$3 million pledged for the Tim Schafer-led team to create a new adventure game. Brian Fargo's InXile Entertainment hit its \$900,000 funding goal in only 42 hours to create a sequel to the cult hit, *Wasteland*, and went on to raise just shy of \$3 million before the funding drive ended. With numbers like that, it's no wonder that other developers are looking to follow suit. "I think we're still in the early age of this crowd-funding revolution, which I believe is going to give an increasing amount of power to consumers about the things they really want," says Ryan Payton, director of independent game studio Camouflaj. His team is in the midst of a Kickstarter drive to fund the team's brainchild, *République*. "I love how Kickstarter has become a platform for game developers to pitch their ideas to the actual people buying the game rather than a group of old dudes in a corporate boardroom."

"The idea of a Kickstarter program is great on paper and one that EEDAR truly supports," Divnich says. "However, we believe Kickstarter programs like Double Fine's should only be used by small developers and it is unlikely a concept that will ever be adopted by medium to large developers."

It's not just developers taking advantage of new technologies and broadened access to gaming communities. New streaming game services like OnLive and Gaikai look to deliver games without the delay of download or the hefty cost of dedicated gaming PCs. Games are hosted and rendered on remote servers, and the video streamed back to the client. It's an intriguing proposition for the future, but one that is still mired in questions of lag time, broadband speeds, and ownership of a product outside of the streaming service.

These recent innovations prove that game makers are being almost as creative about funding and making money off their games as they are when developing them. With a new generation of consoles on the horizon for which it will undoubtedly cost even more to produce games, the field is open for new revenue models to arise. ♦



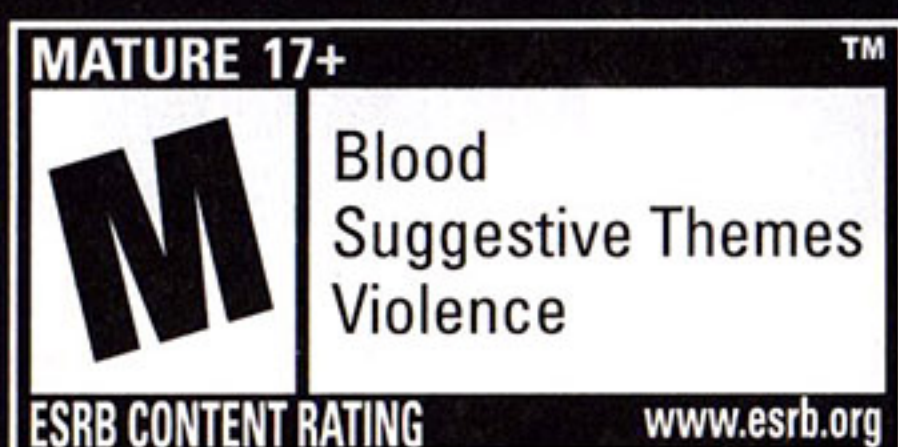
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# Checking *the* Trends

We crunch the numbers to see if specific genres have taken a step forward or a step back this generation.

With new hardware technology, evolving game engines, and advancements in game development theory, reason dictates that genres should continually improve each console generation as the studios harness that newfound horsepower and refine their approaches. Sometimes, however, the reality of game budgets, creative stagnation, and aggressive development timelines derail reason.

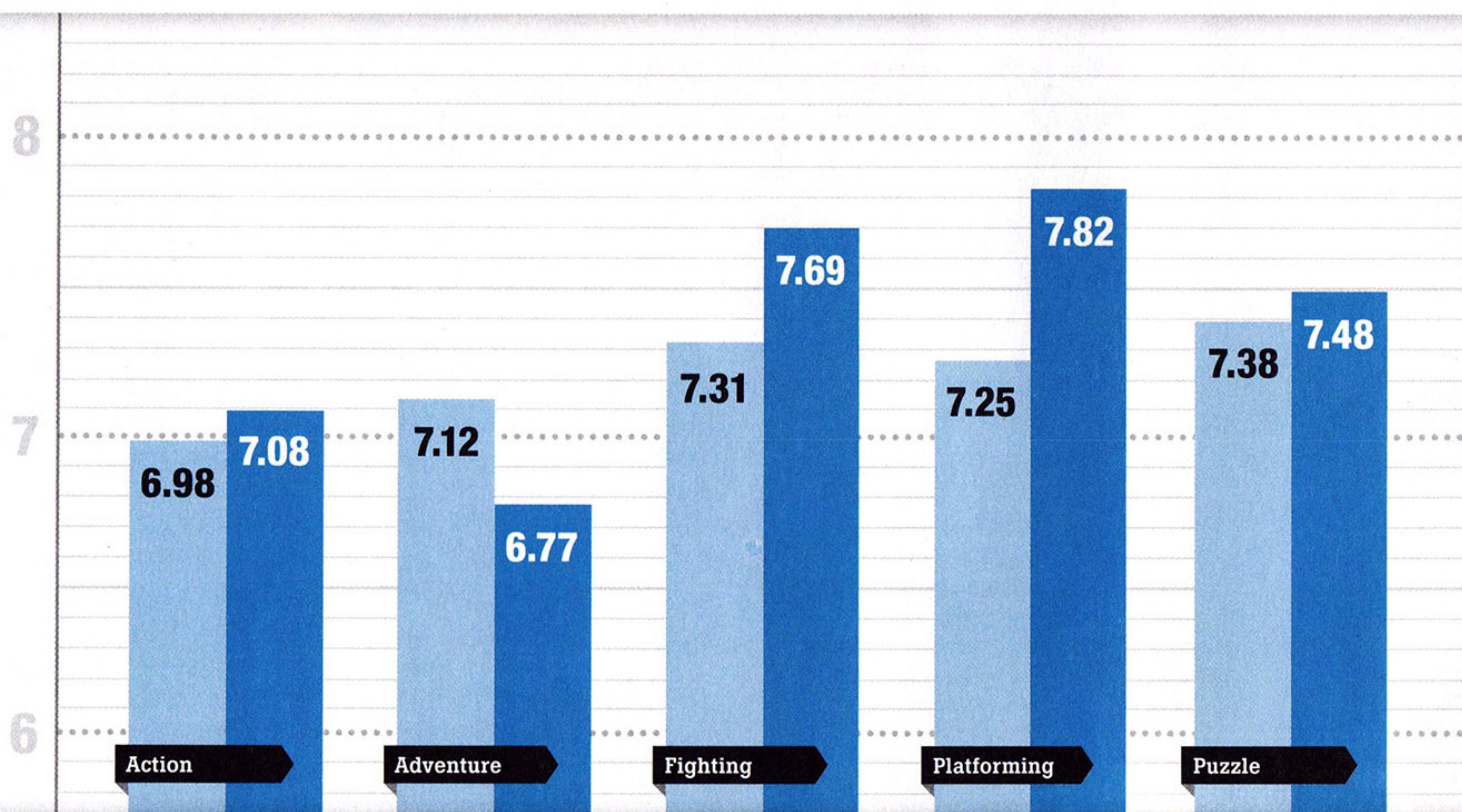
To see how the big game genres are faring, we delved into the Game Informer review archive to compare how this generation of games stacks up against their immediate predecessors. As we expected, most genres moved forward, but there were a few exceptions and surprises.



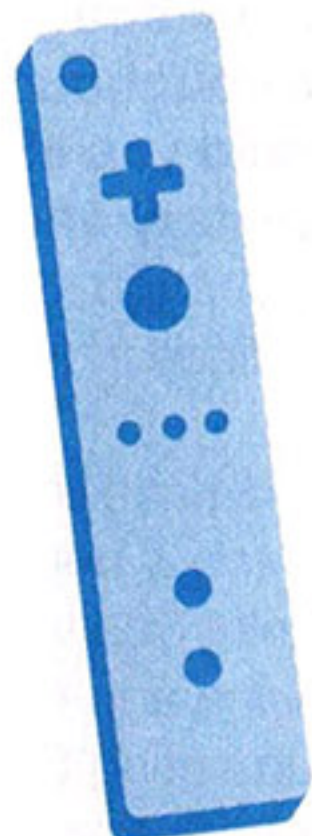
The biggest average review score boost came in the platforming genre, which improved from 7.25 to 7.82 thanks to a bevy of stellar titles like Super Mario Galaxy, LittleBigPlanet, and Rayman Origins.

## Genre Trends

To determine the genre averages for the last console generation, we included Game Informer review scores for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, and Game Boy Advance, plus PC games that released before November 2005. For the current generation scores, we included every review score for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, DS, and PSP, plus PC games that were released after November 2005. In each case we combined the game review scores and calculated the genre average.







**How bad does the Wii library suck?**

When we removed them from the equation entirely and just used PS3, Xbox 360, PSP, and DS scores as the basis for the current generation genre averages, they raised in every instance.

**Though it's dominant in terms of game sales this generation, the shooter genre dropped slightly**

in our average review comparison mostly due to the deluge of budget titles. When we removed the Wii shooters from the equation, however, it received a modest .04-point boost.

**The average role-playing game rating also dropped from last generation.**

This shouldn't come as a surprise given that for each series that trended upwards like The Elder Scrolls, there were several franchises like Final Fantasy that didn't perform as well this generation. Add current-gen no-shows like console-based Kingdom Hearts, Xenosaga, and Knights of the Old Republic games, and the downward trend becomes even more believable.

**The biggest jump when you remove the Wii scores? Surprisingly, the rhythm/music genre,**



**The worst trending genres were adventure and simulation** – two former PC juggernauts – which both dropped .35.



**The biggest decline in number of games for a particular genre was racing.**

We reviewed 301 racers last generation, compared to only 140 thus far this generation.



**In a head-to-head comparison, the PlayStation 3**

**received a superior average rating** to the Xbox 360 in 9 of the 12 genres. The genres that fared better on the 360 were shooter, puzzle, and racing.

**The genre with the most games rated 9.0 or higher? Action, with 88 entries**

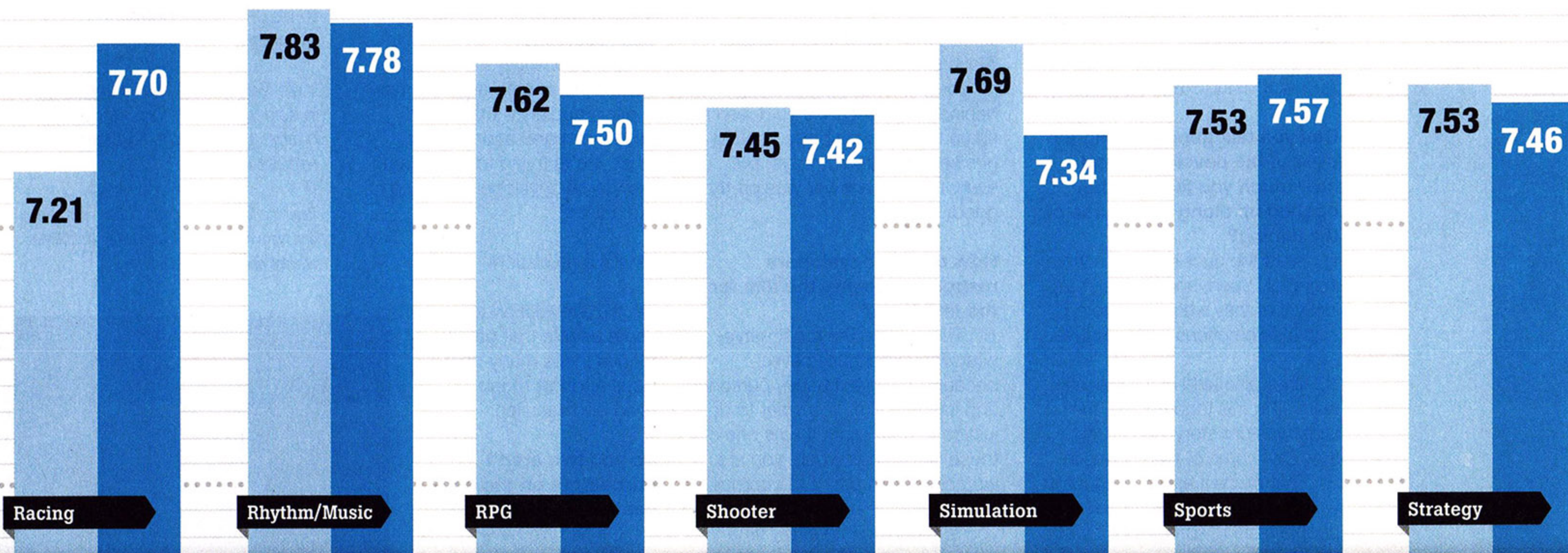
(this includes multiplatform duplicates). The shooter genre followed with 71.

**The biggest increase came in the shooter genre.**

We've already reviewed 325 shooters this generation, compared to 289 last generation.



■ Last Generation    ■ Current Generation

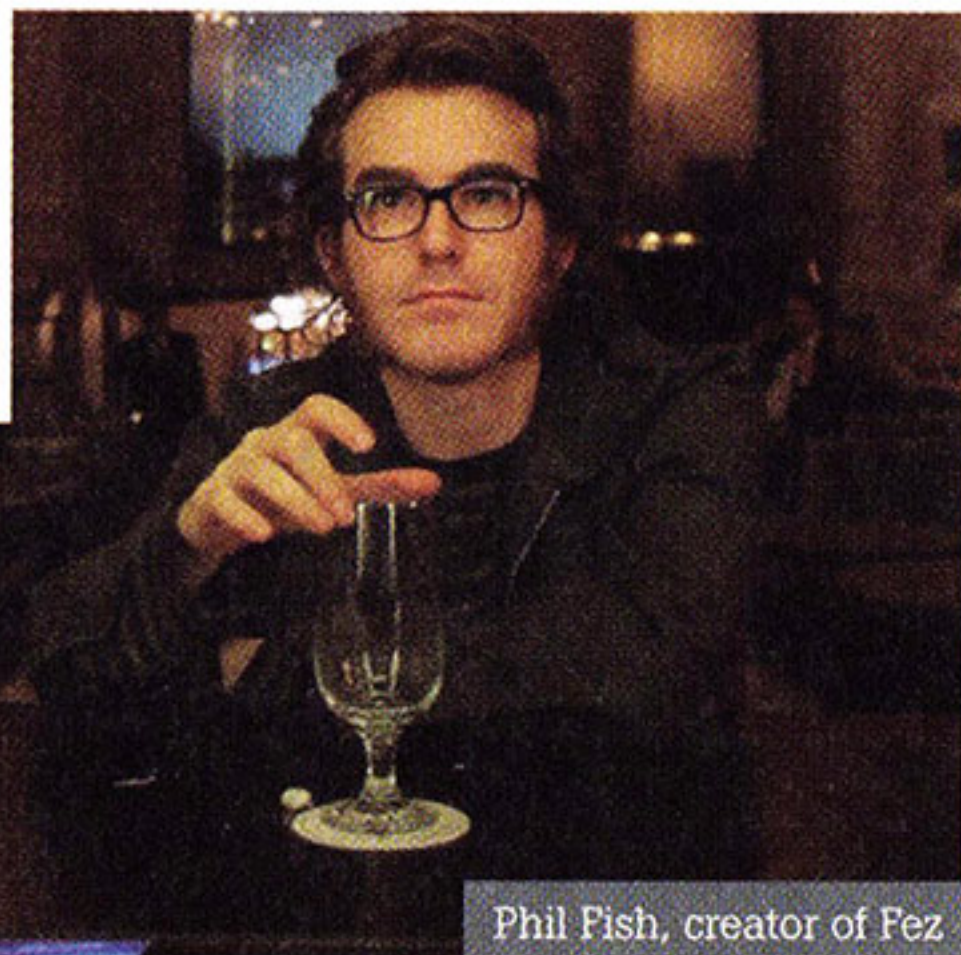
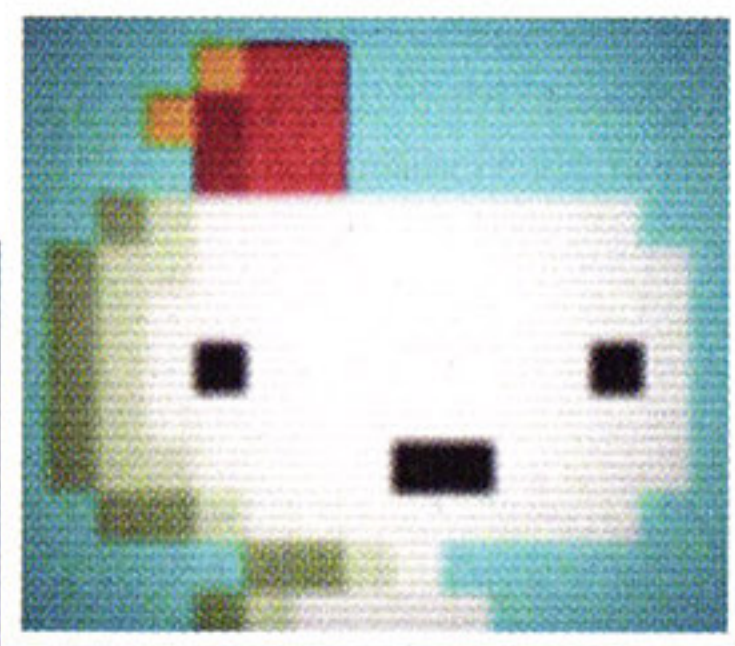




# The *Secret Lives* of Game Developers

by Ben Hanson

In the heartfelt, revealing documentary *Indie Game: The Movie*, filmmakers Lisanne Pajot and James Swirsky show the world a glimpse into the creative lives of the developers behind Super Meat Boy, Fez, and Braid. The duo recently took home the the World Cinema Documentary Editing Award from the Sundance Film Festival, and the film is now being adapted into a fictional series on HBO by Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony award-winning producer Scott Rudin. I chatted with the developers about their road to success.



Phil Fish, creator of Fez

**So I should probably start out by saying I love the movie. I'm sure you guys get this comment a lot, but I want to show this movie to my parents to help them understand the video game world.**

**Lisanne Pajot:** That's so great – we have gotten that before! It's almost as if we need to give a parent edition or something – with appendices.

**James Swirsky:** Yeah, a glossary.

**Can you talk about gaining the trust of the developers and how much you feel like they opened up along the course of the filming?**

**LP:** All of the guys in this film were incredibly open, and we feel really lucky that they were so generous with their emotions and their lives.

**JS:** They also kind of felt like we were all in this together, like their story was our story, and I think they saw some of themselves in us. That made it easier because it wasn't just two people filming two people making something; it was four people making things.

**Do you want to talk about working with Braid creator Jonathan Blow? He kind of plays the role of the wise old man, the Obi-Wan.**

**LP:** Yeah, we were just super pleased that Jon would be part of our interview because Jon doesn't do really much of anything for television or films.

**JS:** He doesn't want to be edited.

**LP:** We hope that the film sheds a little bit of light to his vulnerability and [helps] crack that shell a little bit. I think people have certain visions of who they think Jonathan Blow is, and our hope is that through our film people have a slightly different light of him.

**JS:** The same could be said for Phil [Fish, creator of Fez] and Tommy [Refenes, co-creator of Super Meat Boy].

**LP:** By the end of it, [Jonathan Blow] shares a lot, and of course he doesn't share the meaning behind Braid because he doesn't share that with anybody. I asked him several different ways, but every time his answer was pretty good... [laughs]

**How did the developers respond to seeing the film for the first time?**

**JS:** Those were the most nerve-racking experiences ever, because it's an extremely personal and intimate film. You want to do justice to their story. It was one of those screenings where you are watching them out of the corner of your eye the entire time and you are reading into every time they shift. Then the lights came up and Edmund [McMillen, co-

creator of Super Meat Boy] and Tommy had tears in their eyes and they said it was really, really good and then we talked about it for hours after... And then with Phil, we were particularly worried about Phil, and the lights came up and he started crying. To just have him say that he was proud of it was huge for us, and that he saw the value in sharing his story. Obviously he is uncomfortable watching himself go through that stuff because it must be the most surreal home video ever, right? Take the most stressful moment of your life, and then film it, with not just one but two cameras, and then edit it together and augment it with graphics and give it a Jim Guthrie soundtrack. It was just, yeah, one of the most rewarding things ever. It was more rewarding than Sundance.

**What has been some of the most impactful feedback you received?**

**LP:** [At Sundance] there was always this middle-aged woman in every audience that would raise their hand and say, "So, what you're trying to say is that, like, game developers are kind of like artists?"

**JS:** It's a revelation!

**LP:** It's a revelation to some people that games require these many decisions and this much heart and sacrifice.

**So you two aren't burned out on the concept of video games?**

**JS:** Oh no. We have ideas that go outside of games, for sure. But I

think there are so many stories left to tell. We are just scraping the surface of indie games, nevermind all of the other subsections of video games out there.

**If you could be a fly on the wall holding a video camera, which game throughout all of history would you like to make a documentary about?**

**LP:** Oh, through all of history? Maybe Prince of Persia?

**JS:** Well, Prince of Persia would be cool, too... but if you had that opportunity, you would have to do mankind and history a favor by documenting Super Mario Bros. You'd have to. That sets the basis for so much of the industry and has a really compelling story behind it as well.

**Hopefully Shigeru Miyamoto has some archival footage out there and would let you take a crack at it.**

**LP:** Our next movie!

**JS:** There needs to be a Miyamoto documentary.

**Do you have any simple advice for aspiring filmmakers out there?**

**JS:** The most practical information is don't wait for things to be perfect, just get out there and do something. Even if it's crap and you know it's crap, at least you know it's crap and you are getting better.

**It's like if Phil Fish had stopped after [his first game] Cyber Vision.**

**JS:** Yeah! If he meant to make Zelda and he ended up making Cyber Vision and didn't keep on going. That's kind of my main advice, just to say that you're bad now and you are supposed to be. You'll get better, just keep on going.

*Indie Game: The Movie is playing in select theaters throughout the nation. Look for the DVD and digital release in June.*

*Read the full interview with Lisanne and James and learn more about Indie Game: The Movie at [www.gameinformer.com/mag](http://www.gameinformer.com/mag)*

Edmund McMillen, co-creator of Super Meat Boy







01

### Doom Guy (Doom)

When the invading armies of Hell tried to consume our universe, the Doom guy was the only one standing in their way. But this soldier didn't just send the legions of Hell packing; he followed them home and trashed their bathroom. The Doom Guy doesn't have a personality (or even a name), but he doesn't need one; all he needs is a chainsaw and a Cyberdemon to vent on.



02

### Master Chief (Halo)

Master Chief is the modern face for space marines, which is poetic considering this Spartan is faceless. He may seem like he's allergic to comedy and more robotic than his AI companion, but the Chief's sense of justice is so strong it could bench press a Warthog.



03

### Terran Marine (StarCraft)

StarCraft's marines fit the stereotype to a T. They're layered with enough armor to weigh down a tank and willing to charge headfirst into an army of Ultralisks. When the Brood tried to consume the universe, these marines pistol-whipped them back across the galaxy.



04

### Ultramarines (Warhammer 40,000)

The Ultramarines are the Costco-branded toilet paper of space marines — the bulkiest and most generic. These marines have grown up in a world of war. It's all they know, so they don't understand that violence isn't an answer to injustice. For them, violence is more of a question, and the answer is always yes.



05

### Stormtroopers (Star Wars)

Sure, a Stormtrooper's aim is so terrible that if they threw rocks they'd probably miss the ground, but Star Wars pre-dates everything on this list, so in a way, these super inaccurate baddies are the genesis of all space marines. Destroying Ewok villages may be the last thing on their to-do list, but only because they save the best for last.



06

### Major Dutch Schaefer (Alien vs. Predator)

Dutch wrestled an acid-blooded Xenomorph to the ground and is named after Arnold Schwarzenegger's character from *Predator*. The guy is so cool that unicorns probably dream that someday they'll catch a glimpse of Dutch drinking from a rainbow stream.



07

### EDF Soldier (Earth Defense Force)

When skyscraper-sized ants come to ruin our planet's picnic, the Earth Defense Force acts as humanity's insect repellent. The EDF soldiers aren't too concerned with small details like the lives of millions of people or the structural integrity of buildings. They just want to turn an endless barrage of giant bugs into geysers of green goo.



08

### COG Gears (Gears of War)

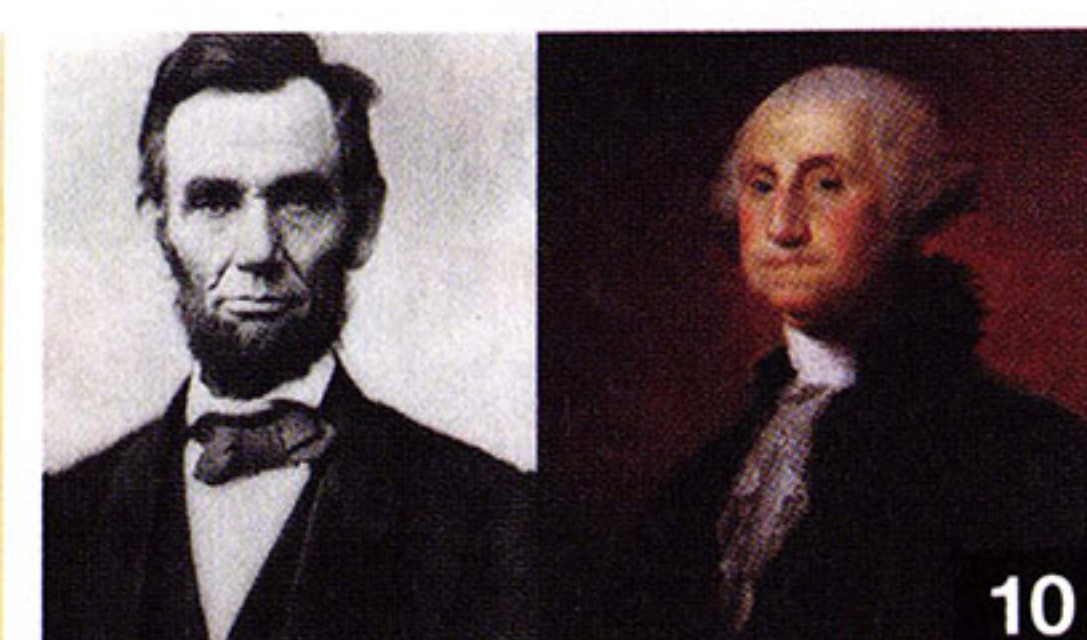
After a horde of ripped reptiles erupts from the ground, the only force that can hold them back is an army of soldiers built like prehistoric gorillas. Sure, the Gears' personalities have about as much texture as greased Jell-O, but when it comes to taking down subterranean threats, Marcus Fenix and company are ready to grunt through the job.



09

### X-Com Crew (X-Com)

While many space marines are nameless meatheads who silently follow orders, your X-Com crew are grizzled meatheads who silently follow orders...who you can name! Sure, they die faster than a housefly with a smoking habit, but they safeguard our planet from alien invasions.



10

### Presidents Washington and Lincoln (Conduit 2)

Before the credits roll at the end of Conduit 2, former American presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln jump out of a time portal wearing combat armor powered by freedom and justice and tell us that they need help fighting an alien menace. Hollywood, we hope you're taking notes.



# Mobile Gaming

## State of the Union

The mobile gaming landscape has changed drastically over the past few years. As Apple and Google strive to get smartphones into the hands of as many consumers as possible, developers have taken advantage of the digital platforms to usher in a new way to play games. If you're a gamer looking to make a switch to a new phone, here is what you need to know about the competing platforms.

by Jeff Marchiafava



### State: Strong

The popularity of Apple's iPhone knows no bounds. The release of the iPhone 4S delivered the anticipated surge of new owners, and in early March the company proudly announced that over 25 billion apps have been downloaded since the App Store went live in 2008. The App Store also contains a higher percentage of paid apps compared to Google Play (previously known as the Android Market), which makes it easier for developers to turn a profit than with ad-supported apps. Because of these reasons, iOS continues to be the primary platform developers debut their games on.

### Strengths:

Apple's iOS platform provides a standardized experience. Everyone who buys an iPhone knows exactly what they're getting, and developers only have to focus on one OS version and few hardware configurations.

### Weaknesses:

Apple places more restrictions on developers than Google, and the App Store is the only source for distribution. The App Store has also been prone to manipulation, with some developers using underhanded tactics to get their apps to the top of the rankings.



### State: Growing

While Apple provides hardware and software as one cohesive unit, Google focuses on creating a mobile OS that can run on a variety of third-party handsets. So far Google's plan has been working. According to Nielsen's Q4 2011 smartphone study, 46 percent of smartphone owners use a handset running Android, compared to 30 percent running iOS. Despite this market share advantage, Android still lags behind iOS in getting timely game releases. Google has made great strides in the past year securing titles from popular developers like PopCap, EA, and Halfbrick, but the games were available on iOS for months (if not years) in advance, and Android still has very few exclusives.

### Strengths:

Android offers more free and ad-supported games than iOS. The Amazon App Store offers a free app of the day, while Google Play attempts to stay competitive with regular sales.

### Weaknesses:

The strategy that has gotten Android phones into the hands of so many consumers is also its greatest drawback for developers. Not only do game makers have to worry about supporting and testing a variety of different hardware, but because Google doesn't require handset manufacturers to adopt the latest OS release, Android users are fragmented between a number of different OS versions. The Android market's preference for ad-based apps makes it harder for developers to turn a profit, leading many to roll out their games on iOS first. Users also have to contend with multiple store fronts to see the full game catalog.



### State: Weak

It's easy to forget that there's a third platform in the mobile race: Windows Phone 7. For gamers, Microsoft has made Xbox Live integration its primary selling point, which allows 360 owners to link their profile and Gamerscore to their phone. WP7 phones enjoy a handful of exclusive XBLA crossover titles, such as Ilomilo, Fable: Coin Golf, and the Avatar-infused Full House Poker, as well as universal games like Plants vs. Zombies, Angry Birds, and The Sims. However, WP7's app library is less than a quarter the size of Android's library, and falls even further behind iOS. Microsoft still hasn't taken full advantage of WP7's Xbox Live integration (real-time multiplayer still isn't available), but we can't really blame the company. Microsoft is competing with two behemoths; Apple has an overwhelming grip on consumer mindshare, while Android has carved out its place in the market as an open platform supporting a variety of cheaper handsets. What Microsoft's role will be in the coming years remains to be seen.

### Strengths:

Xbox Live integration should appeal to Achievement nuts, and Microsoft theoretically has the weight to attract more XBLA exclusives to the platform.

### Weaknesses:

No one is buying them. According to the previously mentioned Nielsen study, Windows Phone 7 is running on just 1.3 percent of all smartphones in the U.S. That consumer disinterest undoubtedly makes WP7 a distant third for mobile game developers seeking viable platforms.





Writer/director **James Gunn** is best known for creating movies like *Super* and *Slither*, and penning the screenplay for the 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* remake. Grasshopper Manufacture's Suda 51 and Warner Bros. Interactive liked his style and brought him on board to work on the upcoming zombie action game **Lollipop Chainsaw**. We recently spoke with Gunn to learn more about this unique collaboration. *by Bryan Vore*

JAMES GUNN

talks

# Lollipop Chainsaw



## How did you first get involved with Lollipop Chainsaw?

Suda and Warner Bros. came to me about two years ago now and they said, "We're working on this project and we think it's something you might be interested in." They showed me just a little test footage of the character who became Juliet Starling killing these zombies with her chainsaw and these big colorful bursting hearts going everywhere, and I was blown away by the aesthetic of it. I was like, "Yeah, I want to be involved in this. I'll do whatever you guys want me to do."

## Were you familiar with Suda's work beforehand?

Yeah – No More Heroes. I like his stuff, and I think he's really an incredible creative mind.

## What kind of things did you bring to the game after you signed on?

Well, when I came on board there was a basic story outline in place. Some of the characters were created in terms of their looks, and some of the locations were built at least in part. So my job was then to take all that stuff and put it together in such a way that it created more of a compelling story and to flesh out the characters. That's really the biggest thing. Every single bit of dialogue in the game is written by me. So it really was about bringing life to these characters who existed, but who weren't fully formed yet.

## How would you describe Juliet's relationship with her talking severed head boyfriend?

I think that Juliet and Nick have a very sort of Abbott and Costello relationship. Juliet is an optimist and Nick is a pessimist, but you understand that he's a pessimist because he doesn't have a body. So he's kind of bummed out throughout the whole game because of this new predicament. And she's such a ludicrous optimist that she believes there are many good things about not having a body. So their relationship is almost like any other buddy comedy team as they go back and forth throughout the whole game sort of bickering and arguing, and at the end of it all they find their love for each other.

## What was it like working with the team in Japan?

It's a great learning experience for me both in terms of making a video game, which is a completely new experience, but also working with a completely different culture who approaches a lot of stuff very differently than we do. It was no secret that Japanese storytelling has a very poetic edge to it. It's not as linear. Part of why I came on board, I think why both Suda and Warner wanted me on board, was to create a little bit more of a Western storytelling through-line in the game.

## You were heavily involved in the casting and voice sessions.

### Was it fun casting a lot of people you've worked with before?

Yeah, I told [Warner Bros.' Peter Wyse and Scott Warr] early on, "Listen, I can probably get my friends to do this. I think they'd be into it." I don't think they believed me. Then I asked a few of my friends to play different roles. Some of them had actually done it a fair amount before. I know Michael Rosenbaum and Linda Cardellini had done a lot of cartoon work and some video game work, and so to them it wasn't that unusual. Then people like Gregg Henry, who I think is one of the best people in the game – an actor a lot of people don't know but who everyone recognizes – did Gideon Starling, Juliet's father. He's amazing in the game. He's got a great voice for voiceover stuff. He's just never done it before in his life. I think we kind of turned people on to talent that they didn't know they had.

## How would you compare working with Suda to one of your earliest collaborators, Troma's Lloyd Kaufman?

[Laughs] Suda's way more controlled than Lloyd. These are two completely different things. But there are some similarities. My first movie with Lloyd was *Tromeo and*



*Juliet*, and when you're making a Troma movie you have to work within certain parameters. There are certain things that have to be there and then you have freedom outside of those parameters. Same thing with working on this video game, so the thing to do is to be as creative and make things as exciting as you possibly can within those pre-existing parameters. I think that's true when you come and work with anybody.

That sometimes can be very discouraging to creative people, but other times it can be sort of freeing. I've found a lot of freedom in creating Lollipop because it is such a huge world. The script by itself is like a foot high. Being able to go so deep into something with so many different outcomes and little things for people who are really playing the game again and again to notice, there are 20 different jokes in one little tiny scene. To be able to go deep like that made it really fun.

## Are you hoping to work in games more in the future?

Absolutely, yeah. I can't wait. I've already talked to people about doing stuff. I'm very excited about working on more games. It was a heck of a lot of fun. It's still new to me, and I can't wait to dive into another game. ♦



# Shoot to Thrill

Several new free-to-play PC shooters are gunning for the space dominated by Team Fortress 2 and Battlefield Heroes. Which ones are worth checking out?

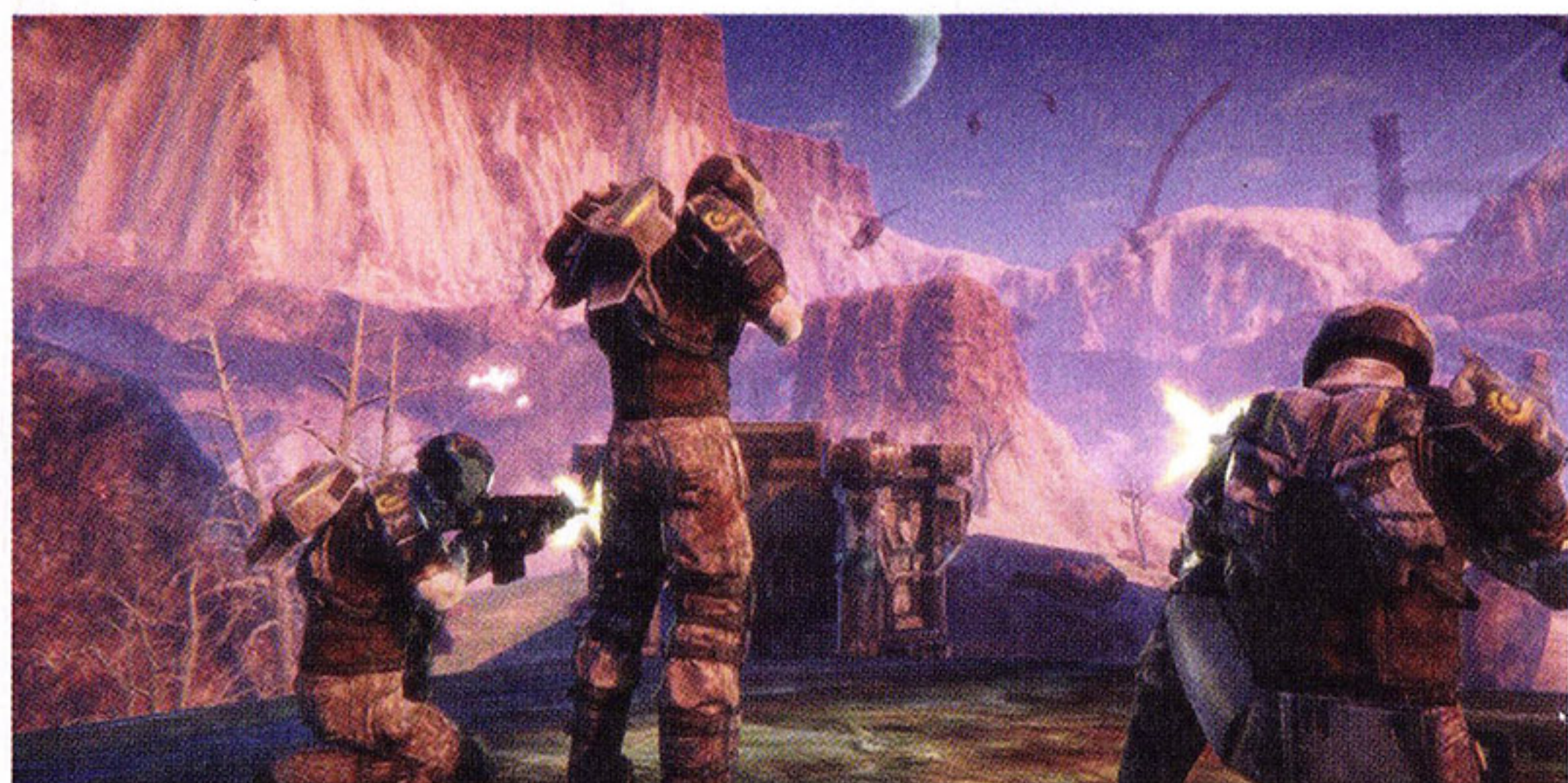
by Matt Bertz



## TACTICAL INTERVENTION



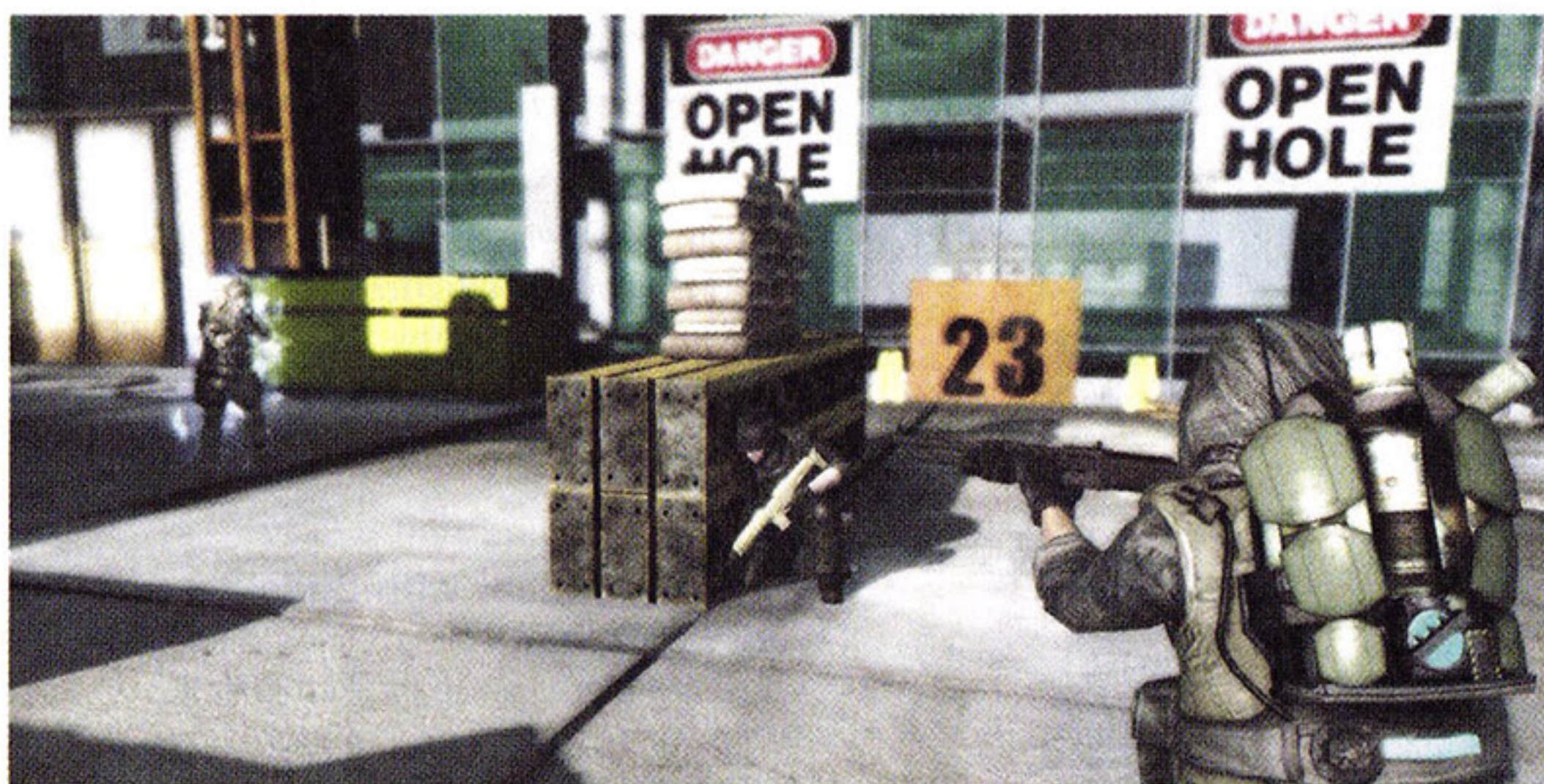
**Who's Making It?** Original Counter-Strike co-creator Minh Le's new studio, FIX Korea  
**What's The Gist?** Using a modified version of the Source Engine, Le's new game pits terrorists against counter-terrorists in 10v10 battles that take place in a mall, a high rise, and during a frantic car chase. Team tactics take center stage, but you can also use environmental hazards like fire extinguishers to create diversions and obfuscate your movement. Playing the game and receiving new weapons via leveling up is free, but you can also buy new guns, augmentations, perks, and skins to customize your player.  
**Release Date:** A closed beta test just started, and FIX Korea hopes to have the game out this summer.



## PLANETSIDE 2



**Who's Making It?** Sony Online Entertainment  
**What's The Gist?** The original MMOFPS is making a comeback with a new coat of paint. A re-imagining of the original concept, Planetside 2 doesn't stray far from its predecessor. The same three factions still duke it out for persistent control of a futuristic planet using guns, land vehicles, and air support. Like Battlefield, players choose from several different classes when fighting the large-scale battles. Lag crippled the game last go around, so we hope SOE can master the bandwidth, considering it plans to support battles with thousands of players at once.  
**Release Date:** 2012



## GHOST RECON ONLINE



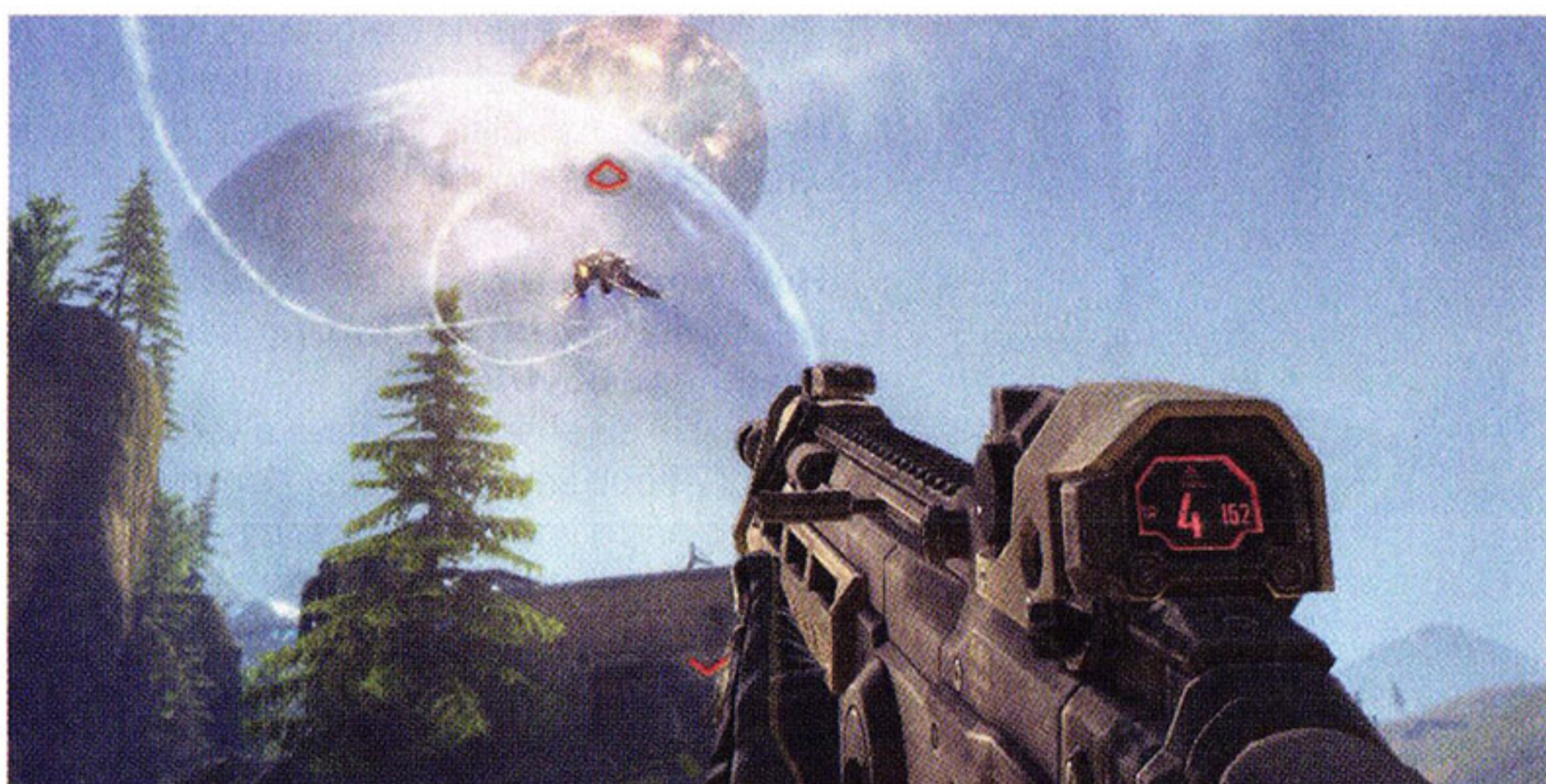
**Who's Making It?** Ubisoft Singapore  
**What's The Gist?** Ubisoft's third-person shooter dips its foot into the free-to-play pond with this class-based game that stresses teamwork and tactics over running and gunning. Ubisoft has injected all the multiplayer bells and whistles into this project, including rankings, progression, character customization, and unlocks. If you want to accelerate your progression, you can pay for unlocks as well. Like Battlefield Play 4 Free, GRO is running on a legacy engine, so don't expect state-of-the-art graphics.  
**Release Date:** The closed beta is ongoing, and Ubisoft hopes to have the full game up and running later this year.



## WARFACE



**Who's Making It?** Crytek Seoul  
**What's The Gist?** Warface offers the most unique collection of modes in this roundup. It has cooperative player-versus-environment missions as well as standard competitive multiplayer. Daily PvE missions have dedicated leaderboards, and deep customization gives players control of every facet of their weaponry. This near-future, class-based shooter is being created using the same CryEngine 3 technology that powered Crysis 2. It looks great on higher settings, but Crytek says it scales down to mid-level machines as well.  
**Release Date:** 2012



## TRIBES: ASCEND



**Who's Making It?** Hi-Rez Studios  
**What's The Gist?** The class-based competitive multiplayer shooter returns with a new game powered by Unreal Engine 3. All the sci-fi shooter staples that put this series on the map are back, including jet packs, futuristic weapons, and large open areas. You earn weapons, new classes, and upgrades via the progression system, but impatient players can purchase loadouts, additional soldier classes, and boosters that help you earn XP faster. Flying across the maps is a lot of fun, but the gunplay is hardly visceral.  
**Release Date:** Ascend officially kicked off on April 12.



## The Good

### KRATOS

returns in *God of War: Ascension*, a prequel to the first *God of War* that likely takes place before Kratos' family is killed. The PlayStation 3 title is currently slated to come out in 2013. *Ascension* is being directed by Todd Papy, the design director on *God of War 3*.



g-p-r  
THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

## The Bad



### JACK TRAMIEL,

founder of Commodore, died at the age of 83. Apart from creating the popular Commodore 64 home computer, which shipped 20 million units, Tramiel also bought the consumer division of Atari from Warner Bros. to go against Commodore after he resigned from the company he founded.

## Quotable

"To put it another way, the food was no good and the portions were small. THQ won't be around in six months."

## HERE'S A GRAB BAG OF BAD NEWS:

*Darksiders II* (shown) is delayed until August, *Prey 2* is delayed out of 2012, and *Gears of War: Exile* is canceled (whatever that was). Sony closed SOCOM series developer Zipper Interactive, and Sega announced layoffs, general company restructuring, and the cancellation of some unannounced titles.

## The Ugly

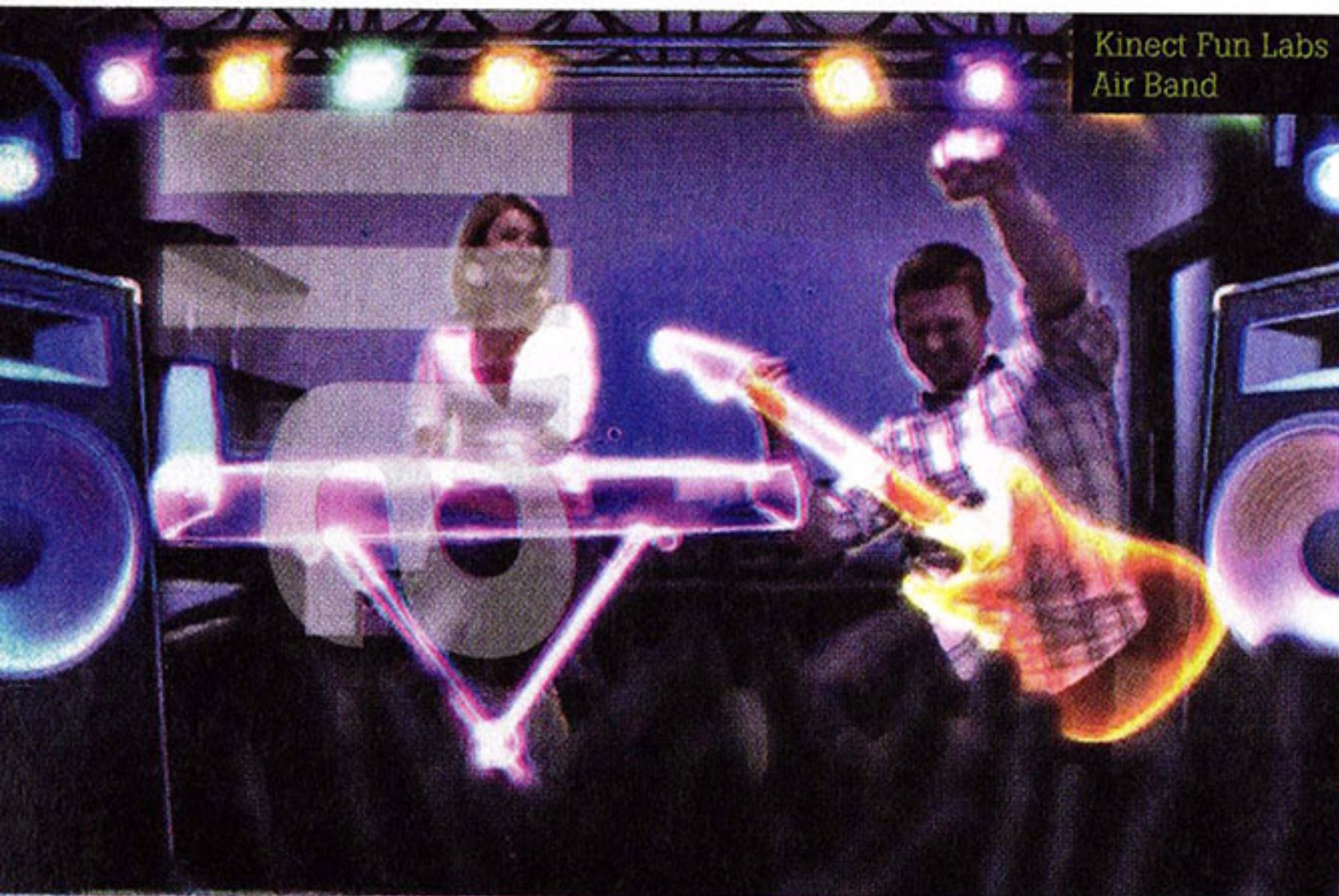


— **Strauss Zelnick**, CEO of Take-Two, offers his assessment of THQ. He would later say he regretted his comments, calling them "inappropriate."

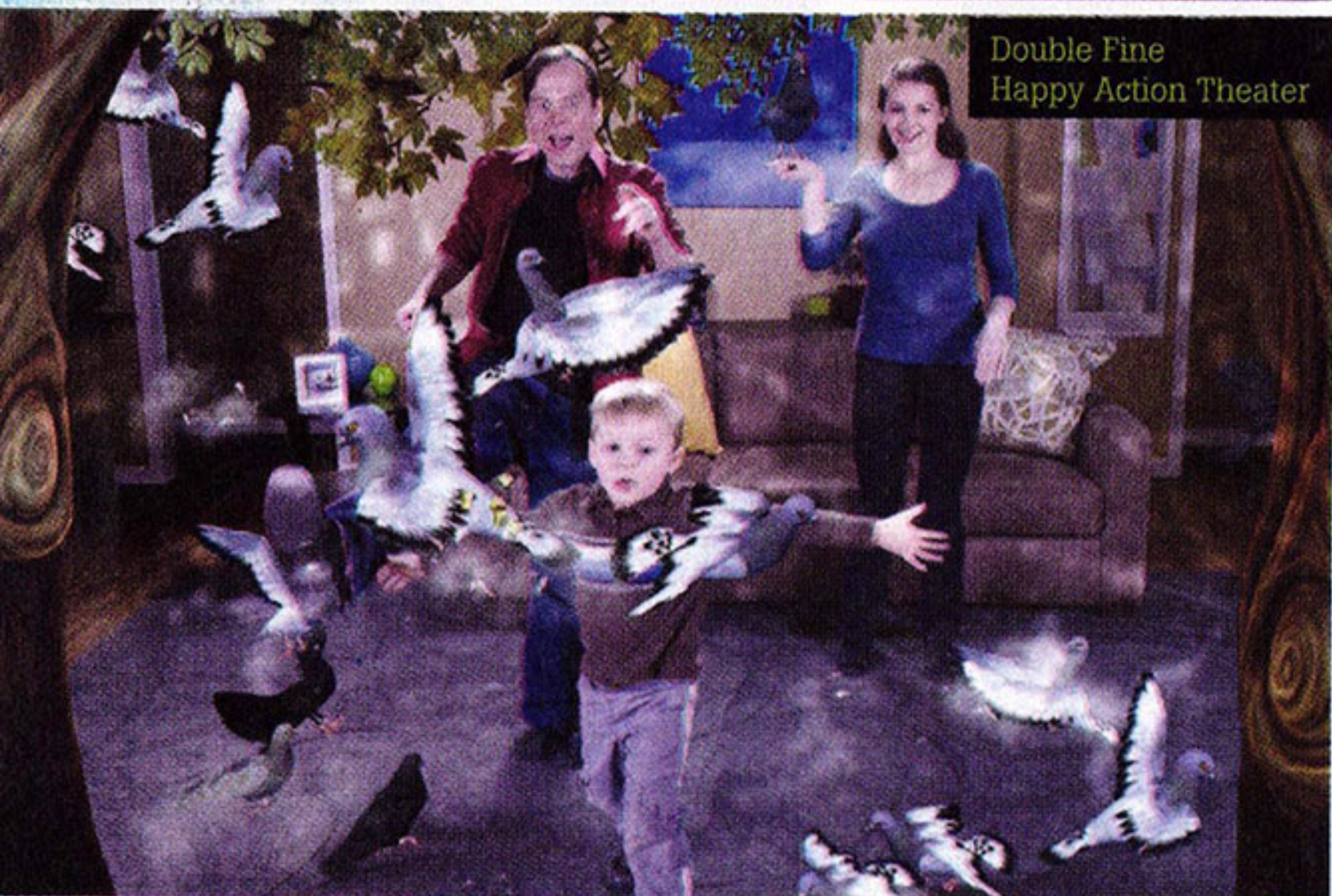


# Get Your Family Off

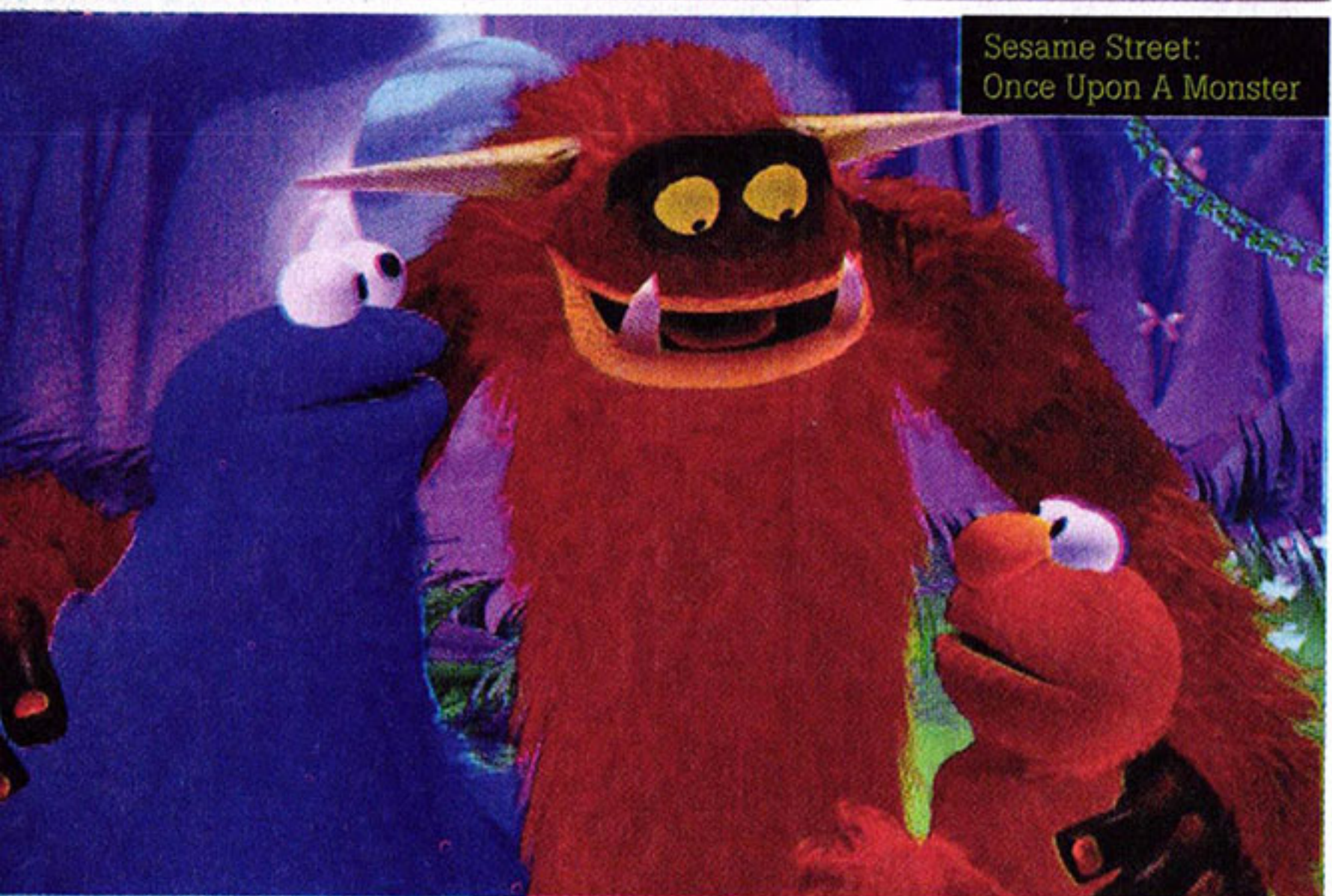
Kinect is fast becoming a destination for family-friendly games.



Kinect Fun Labs  
Air Band



Double Fine  
Happy Action Theater



Sesame Street:  
Once Upon A Monster

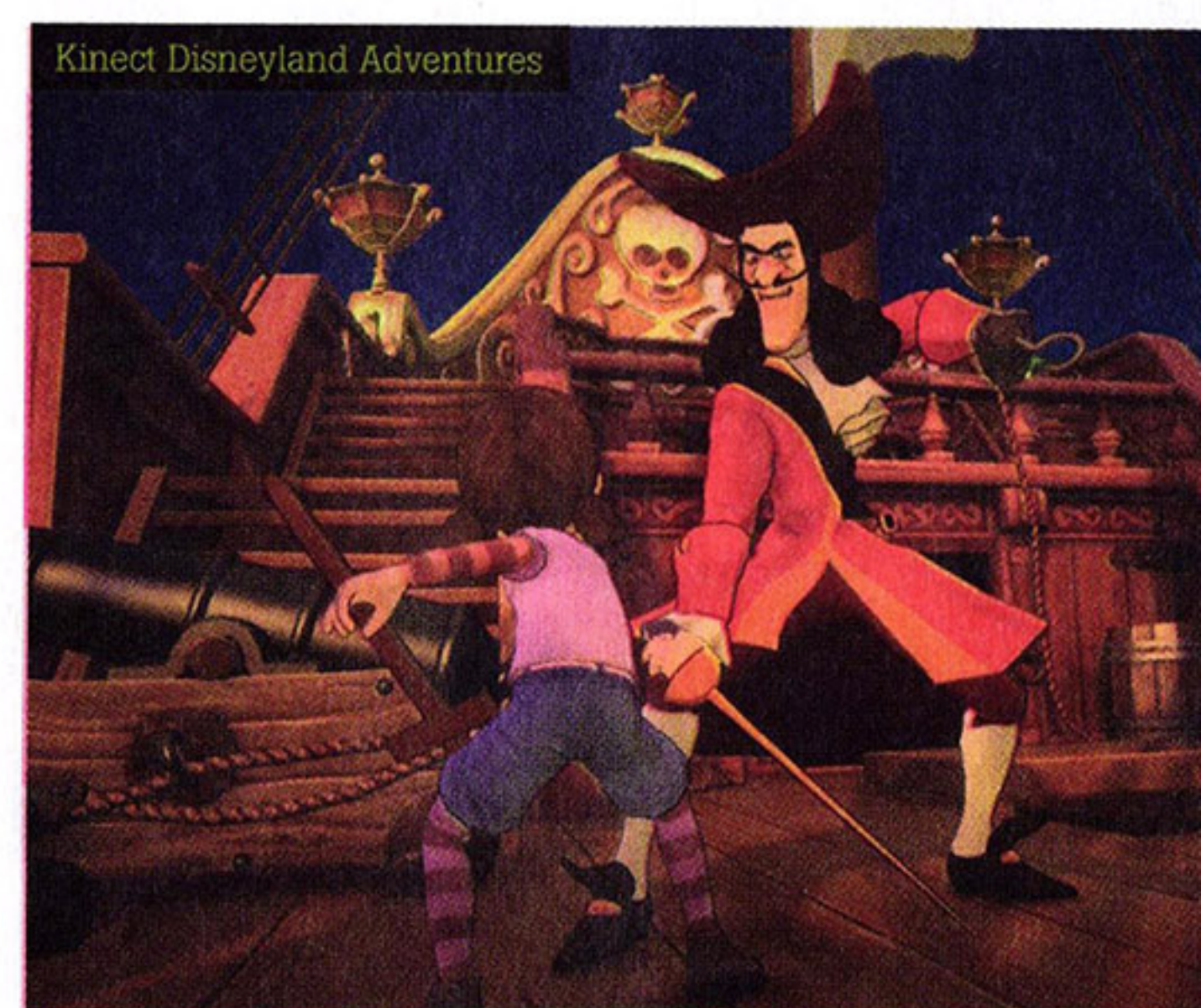
## For The Little Guys

Even though I work at a gaming magazine, I've avoided pushing my children toward the hobby. I'd much rather nudge them outside, where they can run around with their friends, ride their bikes, skin their knees, and all that other kid stuff. Of course, everything I do is endlessly fascinating to them (a phase I'm sure they'll be outgrowing soon), including the time I spend playing video games. When the weather doesn't cooperate with my preachiness, however, there's a distinct possibility that you'll find us playing something on Kinect. Here are a few games that come with my three-year-old's seal of approval.

If you've just picked up your Kinect, then **Kinect Fun Labs** is the first thing you should download. These bite-sized experiments aren't quite games; they're more like silly examples of what the Kinect technology can do. Better yet, they're all available at no charge. We're big fans of **Air Band**, which allows kids to summon instruments using familiar gestures, and **Musical Feet**, which superimposes a playable keyboard onto your floor.

**Double Fine Happy Action Theater** offers a similar experience, though the mayhem has more direction. Each of these playable vignettes lets kids see themselves in a variety of silly situations. Even if your little ones are too small for most games, they'll get a kick out of seeing animated birds touch down on surfaces in their home and fly away when approached. And who doesn't want to smash their way across a miniature town? Best of all, there's no post-rampage cleanup required.

For more directed play, **Sesame Street: Once Upon A Monster** is a great option for parents of young children. It's designed with co-op in mind, and teams can't fail out of the game's levels. Kids can learn about socialization and other key lessons while playing with a young friend or a parent.



Kinect Disneyland Adventures

## Character Builders

If your kids are past preschool age but still too young for more complicated gaming, you're in luck. These picks feature great characters that they may already be familiar with. Better yet, they're ripe for co-op play, which helps ease the frustration of getting stuck.

Microsoft Studios has published a pair of Disney-based Kinect games, and both are excellent selections for young players. **Kinect Disneyland Adventures** lets kids explore the park and play through tons of attraction-based minigames. Fans of Pixar movies (and who isn't, really?) will get a kick out of **Kinect Rush: A Disney Pixar Adventure**. Kids can hop into their favorite worlds and go on adventures with Lightning McQueen, Buzz, Woody, and others.

**Kinectimals** is a fun pet simulator (with or without Bears), but it's not the only option. If your kid's tastes are a bit more fanciful, **Fantastic Pets** offers much of the same gameplay, only with dragons and other imaginative beasts. Both games let kids feed, train, and play with virtual pets.

**Kinect Star Wars** is polarizing among older gamers, but families who don't take the Star Wars universe too seriously could find a lot to like here. Players can battle with lightsabers (or in dance contests, if they're not too self-conscious), and even step into the giant feet of a Stormtrooper-squashing Rancor. It is rated T, so parents may want to play the game or watch some video clips of it in action before handing it off to the kids.



Fantastic Pets



# the Couch

Here are some of the best.

by Jeff Cork



## Tough Competition

Co-op is well and good, but sometimes you may want to have a friendly competition. These Xbox 360 games are great for determining the king or queen of the living room. Remember: A little friendly trash talking never hurt anyone.



### Fruit Ninja Kinect

This game was a big hit on iOS and Android, and the fruit-slashing action works surprisingly well on Kinect. See who can slice through the most fruit before time runs out. Just be sure to avoid those bombs – their explosions hurt more than a pineapple to the head.



### Kinect Sports & Kinect Sports Season 2

These two sports-compilation games are both safe bets for family game nights. Between the original game and its sequel, you can battle for dominance on the gridiron, see who comes out ahead in a pitching battle, and even have a wall-friendly game of darts. The games' natural motions make them easy to play – even if you've never been much of a gamer. Heck, you may even be able to squeeze out a win or two!



### Dance Central 1 & 2

If movies and television have taught us anything, it's that dance battles are one of the most effective ways of settling scores. Dance Central can help facilitate friendly matchups with some of today's most popular music. It's a great way to show off your sillier side and even burn a few calories.



# Invasion of the Pandas

*A tour through the World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria beta*

To find out whether playing the new class is worth the price of admission, I brought a newly

created monk up to the decision point between joining the Horde or Alliance. Find out why I think the monk combat mechanics are the best in the game – with the possible exception of my death knight Cataclysm main.

by Adam Biessener

**T**he pandaren adventure begins on the Wandering Isle, a large starting area located on the back of a great sea turtle named Shen-zin Su. This massive beast has been drifting through the oceans of Azeroth for 10,000 years, but when the giant sea turtle is in danger of being swallowed by the Maelstrom, the previously aloof pandaren are drawn into the epic events engulfing the world.

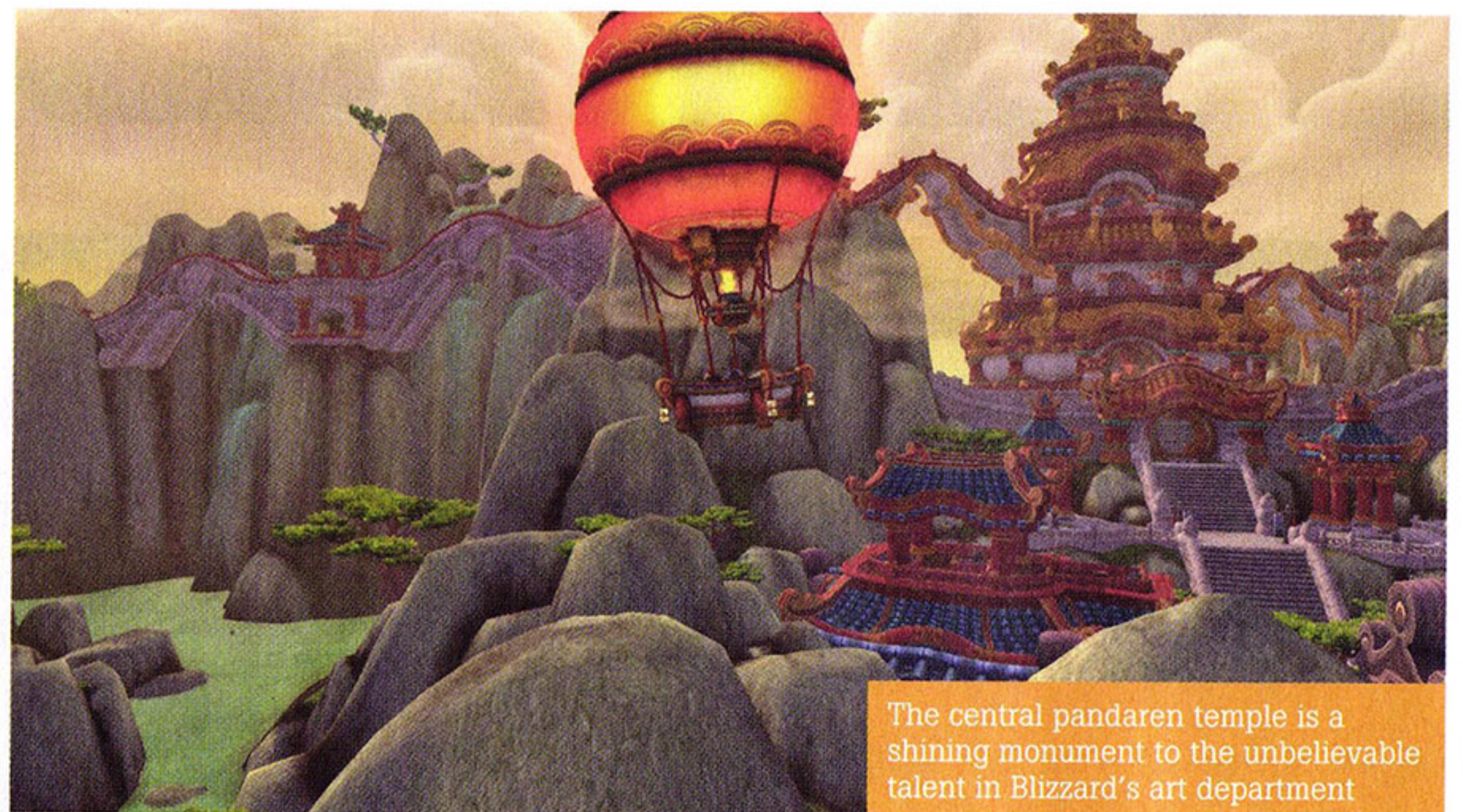
To introduce players to this starting area and the pandaren culture, the early missions task them with rescuing mischievous spirits, driving off predators from critical farmland, and ultimately removing a crashed Alliance airship and healing the wound it poked in Shen-zin Su's side. These missions also offer an intriguing preview of this expansion's new quest mechanics.

Blizzard is finally dabbling in public quests in Mists of Pandaria. A few quests in the pandaren starter zone feature a progress bar that all players in the area work toward filling by defending NPC healers trying to close Shen-zin Su's gaping wound, for example. Like most overworld questing in World of Warcraft, you almost have to try to fail these objectives thanks to their trivial difficulty, but I appreciate having another type of quest to keep things fresh along the leveling path.

The far more interesting addition is the combat mechanics for the new monk class. The energy and chi resources are similar to a rogue's energy and combo points, except that chi is built up on yourself instead of tied to a particular target. In practice, however, playing a monk feels more like piloting a death knight as you juggle the two resources to maximize your output. With the capability to store only four chi points at a time and skills that generate multiple chi, optimal play requires constant flipping back and forth between building and using chi. Two core skills

monks learn early on have additional effects based on the target's health percentage as well, so you'll want to vary your tactics as each fight progresses.

I approve of Blizzard giving monks the option to pick a tanking, healing, or damage role with their choice of specialization. As much as I love the death knight I used in Cataclysm, I missed being able to flip between all three roles at whim like I could with my druid main in Wrath of the Lich King. Having more players run with tanks and healers will be a



The central pandaren temple is a shining monument to the unbelievable talent in Blizzard's art department

great thing for population balance.

The only specialization I tried is the tanking brewmaster spec, which has an interesting passive and a cool "misfire" mechanic threaded through many of its abilities. Brewmasters have a chance to "stagger" any incoming damage, which moves half of the hit into a short-duration damage-over-time effect. Automatic smoothing of damage spikes is a fantastic tool for a tank to have, and will no doubt save many a wipe. On the active side, several abilities add a misfire chance to an enemy's attacks, which makes them damage themselves instead of you when they swing. They're both interesting mechanics that hit the sweet spot of making you cheer every time they go off, though I don't love that the two major features of the specialization that show up by level 12 are both based on random chance.

I didn't try the healing spec myself, but it's another first for Blizzard in that it exchanges the energy/chi system for a classic mana bar. No big surprise there, since a big part of Blizzard's designs rely on healers having a limited resource that the entire group has to work together to manage.

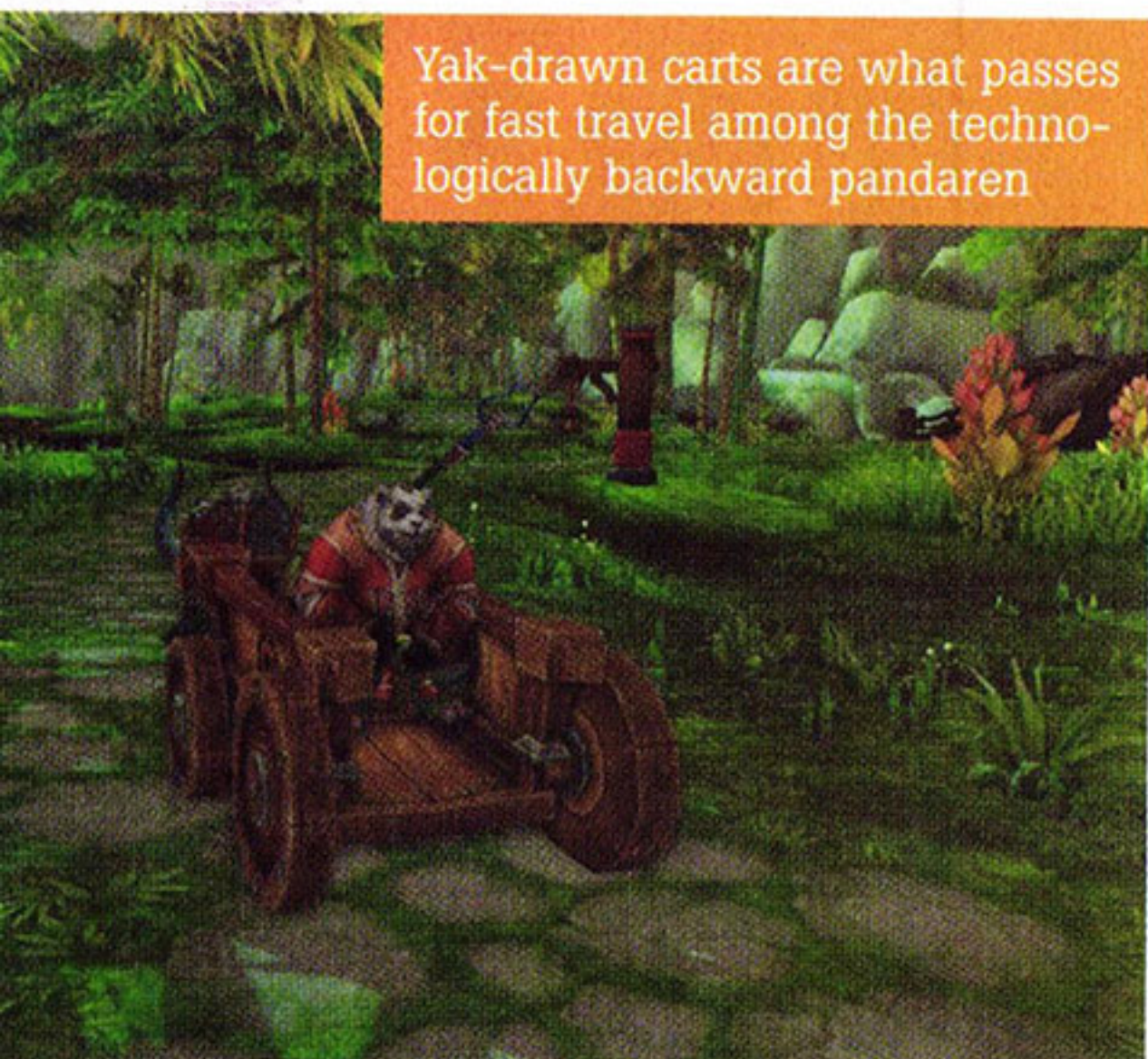
As for the controversial talent revamp, which removes the talent trees in favor of a handful of discrete choices between three mutually exclusive abilities, I'm torn. On the one hand, I appreciate Blizzard still chasing its goal of letting players play the way they want instead of being forced into an optimal spec. The choices all feel genuinely meaningful, since you're mostly picking between cool, powerful abilities instead of boring percentile increases. On the other hand, I love how my death knight plays in Cataclysm and the developers are dramatically changing the class



yet again. A quick glance through the talent trees confirmed my suspicions that there are abilities that will be practically required for whichever part of the game you're playing. You think you'll be able to pass on the fear/mez break for PvP, or the area-effect snare for either PvP or PvE? Think again.

I can't comment on the level 86-90 content, as it wasn't part of the beta as of press time, but based on the improved use of phasing in the pandaren starting zone, I'm hopeful that some of the missteps Blizzard made in Cataclysm (Uldum, I'm looking at you!) will be avoided this time around. I think Mists of Pandaria will be a solid expansion that should please a lot of players – particularly if the pet battle system turns out well. I have less faith that it will overcome the six-plus years of WoW burnout for players like me, particularly with the next generation of MMOs coming out between now and this fall. ♦

Yak-drawn carts are what passes for fast travel among the technologically backward pandaren





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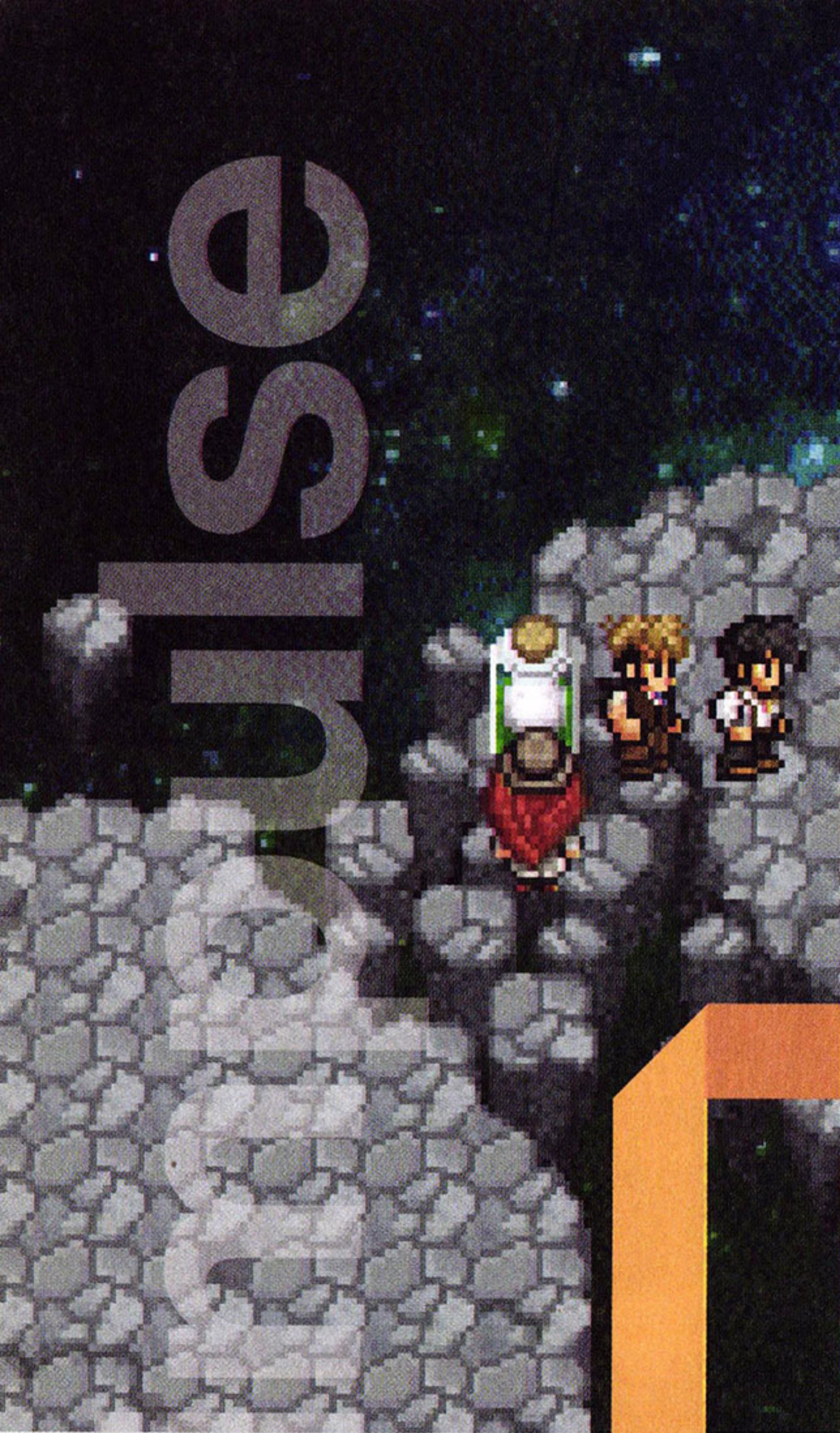
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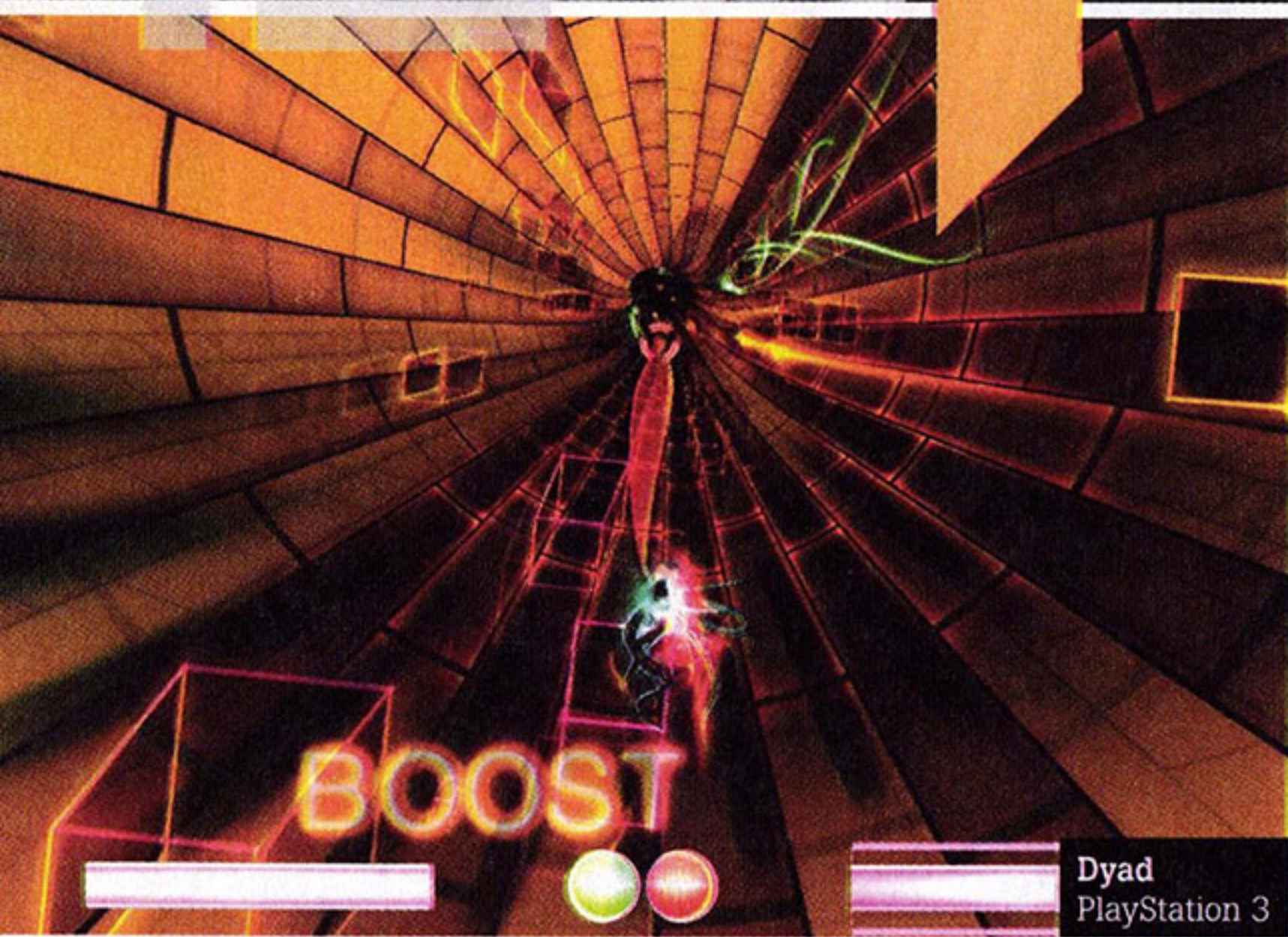
by Matt Miller

# 3 indie darlings draw big buzz

I've had my eye on **Skulls of the Shogun** for over a year now. The intriguing strategy game has humor and visual style in spades, but its smart approach to strategy solidifies its appeal. I recently played a new build, and the level of polish is remarkable for a game still several months from release late this summer. Players adopt the role of a samurai general who is betrayed and struck down in the moment of his greatest triumph. In death, he gathers an army about him to claim his rightful place in the afterlife and assure vengeance against those who killed him. Battles play out on varied battlefields filled with plenty of barriers, protective cover, and multiple paths. Rather than a traditional square grid, characters move within a circle based on their speed, and can freely maneuver about that area to find the most advantageous position before acting. Numerous troop types have unique strengths and abilities, from ranged archers to healing monks. The ability to create new units mid-battle allows for deep experimentation with your squad. My favorite thing about the game is the tight balance on display in each battle; even early fights can end in disaster if you don't protect your leader, keep your troops healed, and remain in defensive formations as you advance on the enemy. Strategic battles and innovative but accessible mechanics put *Skulls of the Shogun* near the top of my list of anticipated downloadable projects.



On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness 3  
Xbox 360 • PC • Mac • iOS • Android



Dyad  
PlayStation 3



Skulls of the Shogun  
Xbox 360 • PC • Windows Phone 7

I had no idea what to make of **Dyad** after the first few minutes of play. The game's magic unfolds over time, and I soon found myself entranced by the psychedelic visuals and frantic pace. This strange variation on a racing game has you zipping down an endless tube of swirling colors and lights. As you travel, glowing enemies appear farther down the tube, which you can activate in pairs to boost your speed. By passing near the tagged enemies, you gain some of their energy, which fuels other power-ups so long as you don't collide with them. The game layers in additional mechanics over time, while upping the pace and visual craziness of the levels. On top of the colorful visuals, the game features a hypnotic electronic music score that alters speed and sounds in reaction to your onscreen actions. The ultimate effect is sensory overload, but it also deeply involves you in the fast-paced race. *Dyad* is targeting a summer release on PSN.

Most fans, myself included, feared that the Penny Arcade games were done for good. Zeboyd Games is coming to the rescue, altering the visual style of the series to match 16-bit console RPGs and continuing the conspiratorial tale of Tycho and Gabe. **On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness 3** picks up the tale of the Startling Developments Detective Agency when the pair receives a mysterious phone call with 10 minutes of eerie silence – the prompt for a grand new adventure that probably involves mimes. More of a standalone story than previous installments, the new game emulates classic RPGs like *Final Fantasy IV*. The turn-based combat plays out from a side view. Individual characters can build up MP over the course of a battle to unleash modest abilities early on, or more potent spells as the turns pass. Players can also strategically use interrupt attacks to push enemies further back in the turn order. Between fights, players wander a map of New Arcadia and enter locations around the city to solve the unfolding mystery. Zeboyd has a reputation for bringing the funny in games like *Cthulhu Saves the World*, so this new developer should be a great match for the familiar Penny Arcade wit. Watch for Tycho and Gabe's adventure to continue this summer.

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ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS

# MAX PAYNE 3



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# interview



photo: Steve Skoll



# PlayStation's New Digital Boss

After running the ambitious social game platform PlayStation Home exclusively for the past four years, **Jack Buser** was recently promoted to senior director of PlayStation digital platforms. His new duties include overseeing PlayStation Network and PlayStation Suite. We talked to Jack about the transition to his new job and what his plans are for the future.

*interview by Jim Reilly*

**Describe what the transition has been like for you going from overseeing PlayStation Home to now running PlayStation's entire digital business.**

PlayStation Home was a really great experience for me and the rest of the team because we were able to really experiment and use it as a laboratory for what the future of digital media, and specifically games, are going to look like.

There's a number of firsts that we did in PlayStation Home. We did the very first free-to-play games on a game console [Midway, Novus Prime, Sodium 2: Project Velocity - Ed.] - so using all those great game development business models from web games but then applying them to core game types, like racers and first-person shooters. One example of this is Dust 514, a free-to-play shooter, and a lot of the learnings we had from PlayStation Home are now being applied to successfully deploy this game on PlayStation Network.

**Are you looking to do anything differently with PlayStation Network now that you're running the show?**

Obviously we have a lot of projects and content already in the pipeline. So now it's just taking inventory of those things and figuring out when to deploy them. There's always innovation going on with PlayStation Network, which is one of the reasons why this new role is so exciting for me. But another reason why this is so exciting for me is that there's no crystal ball. I don't think anybody can predict with 100-percent accuracy what the world of digital games will look like 10 years down the road. One of the great things about sitting at this seat at PlayStation is that to a large extent we get to define that.

We can actually use the PlayStation brand, the millions of gamers in our community, and our studios and partners to define the future of what the digital games space is going to look like. It's a landscape that's always evolving and changing. Sometimes it's evolving very rapidly, and we have to respond to those rapid changes in the market. That's absolutely what we plan to do with PlayStation Network. You can actually see us blazing trails in new directions miles ahead of the competition.

Going back to free-to-play, if you take a look at some of the online offerings from our competition, there's nothing free-to-play about it. You

can't even get on the network for free. So for us, not only is PlayStation Network available at no cost to the community, but now we're offering full game experiences at no cost as well. I think it's that kind of innovation that really points towards PlayStation Network taking a true leadership position in the digital games space.

**What's the challenge like working on a platform that's not only evolving but also is expected to work on the current hardware and the hardware coming in the future?**

This is another area where you'll see us take a leadership position. It's the ability for PlayStation Network to actually span devices and connect your game experience in the cloud such that it's not tied to any one piece of plastic. A great example of that is PlayStation 3 owners who pick up a Vita will see their entire PSN identity come to life on the device and create a unified experience. This is something that PlayStation Network is doing that other online offerings are not doing. That's where this industry is going.

Console manufacturers have always asked the gamers to come to them. And for the first time you're seeing a shift in that philosophy here at PlayStation where instead of always asking the gamer to come to us, we're now taking the experience to where the gamer wants to be. This is a radical change in how gamers are going to interact, not only with their games, but the overall digital platform that ties it all together.

**Mass Effect 2 and 3 both launched at retail and on PSN the same day. But Sony's overall catalog of full game downloads is not nearly the same size as Microsoft's. What's your strategy going forward with this?**

We are going to get very aggressive about full game downloads on PlayStation Network. The recent day-and-date launch with Mass Effect 3 really points towards the direction of where we're going. We're going to be putting a huge effort behind not just getting those titles on PlayStation Network, but also building customer awareness that those titles exist.

If you look at how in the past gamers have viewed online delivery of games there's been this idea that online delivery is only able to give you smaller format games, and if you wanted larger format games you'd have to go to physical media. We're about to prove that very wrong on PlayStation Network. You'll see a tremendous number of full games being delivered over our network.

**With PlayStation Plus, it seems the initial audience was the hardcore PlayStation user. Are you looking to broaden the appeal of the service at all in the future?**

We're really getting the word out about PlayStation Plus. You're going to see those efforts ramp up significantly and see some exciting new announcements for the service. PlayStation Plus is a huge focus for us. No question. We've been much more vocal about the value of the service. It's really kicked into high gear and you're seeing the number of subscribers absolutely skyrocket.

Getting a content-based service like PlayStation Plus up and running such that we can always provide our PlayStation audience with something to play is tremendously important to us, and the audience is responding in kind.

**Last year you finally launched PlayStation 2 games on PSN, but right now they're mostly rare, niche titles.**

**How have those efforts been and can we expect that library to expand at all?**

We dipped our toe in the water with respect to the PlayStation 2 classics. We've been releasing PlayStation One classics for some time. One of the strategic advantages of being PlayStation is that we have this very rich, 15-plus year history of creating hit titles from us and our publishing partners. So you can expect us to leverage that catalog in a number of ways going forward.

**Are you looking at re-evaluating what you're doing with PlayStation minis? I think the initial sell for this is that it was going to be small, cheap games, but the prices still seem too high and the overall quality of games isn't there yet.**

PlayStation Minis was originally developed in order to be a program to allow these bite-sized game experiences at lower price points to become available on our platforms. I think we were able to successfully deploy that brand and those titles into the market and really get a sense how those types of titles would perform on PlayStation Network. I think as we look toward the future, we've realized the games industry is going to continue to evolve and change such that we'll need to be able to provide room for a variety of different price points and games. Nothing in this industry, especially in the digital space, stays static for very long. I think the message I can really assure you of is we will not stay still. We will continue to innovate. ♦

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1997

### IN THE GAME

Developed early prototype game products for a portable communication device for Motorola

1998

### HIGHER EDUCATION

Graduated with honors in electrical and computer engineering from the University of Illinois

2000

### HIGH FIDELITY

Launched Dolby audio technology games, creating the standard for sound on all game consoles to this day

2006

### TAKING THE REINS

Became director of worldwide technology evangelism at Dolby Laboratories, guiding next generation product development across Blu-ray, home theater, cinemas, game consoles, and PCs

2008

### WELCOME HOME

Joined Sony Computer Entertainment as the director of PlayStation Home, launching in December that year to millions of PlayStation fans

2011

### RENOVATION

Redesigned PlayStation Home, creating the first free-to-play games on consoles and driving Home's user base beyond 25 million users worldwide

2012

### LEVELED UP

Promoted to senior director of PlayStation digital platforms, including PlayStation Network, PlayStation Home, and PlayStation Suite



gear

# Sphero

**G**one are the days when we could simply entertain our pets with cardboard boxes and squeaky toys. Our furry friends are not going back to traditional toys after spending a night chasing the curious Sphero. This little remote-controlled ball might make your cat or dog question its entire world.

Sphero is more than an expensive pet toy. You can control this four-inch in diameter spherical robot using a free app downloaded to your iOS or Android device. Rolling the little ball around the living room became second nature, and we enjoyed controlling the Sphero by tilting our iPhone as if it were a marble in a labyrinth game.

A handful of apps allow you to use your smart device to play games with Sphero. A golf game lets you line up shots and swing your device like a putter as you aim for an improvised

hole. This makes for an interesting tech demo but a boring game. Another app turns the Sphero into the controller, which the user must rotate in order to line up with a series of colors as detailed on their

phone. Unfortunately, tilting the Sphero – and therefore its internal gyroscope – to select colors on a radial menu in the matching game feels loose and inaccurate.

You can change Sphero's color at any time, so give it a blood-red glow and see what happens when you roll the quiet little devil into your sleeping roommate's bedroom. A handful of extra free apps are available for download, but none succeed in making Sphero more than what it is – a fancy, fun RC toy that boasts an impressive Bluetooth range of around 60 feet.

The creator, Orbotix, is more of a tech lab than a game studio, but we're confident other app developers will take advantage of the open technology to give owners more to play around with. If you want to inject a little levity and general mischief into your home or office, you can do a lot worse than Sphero.

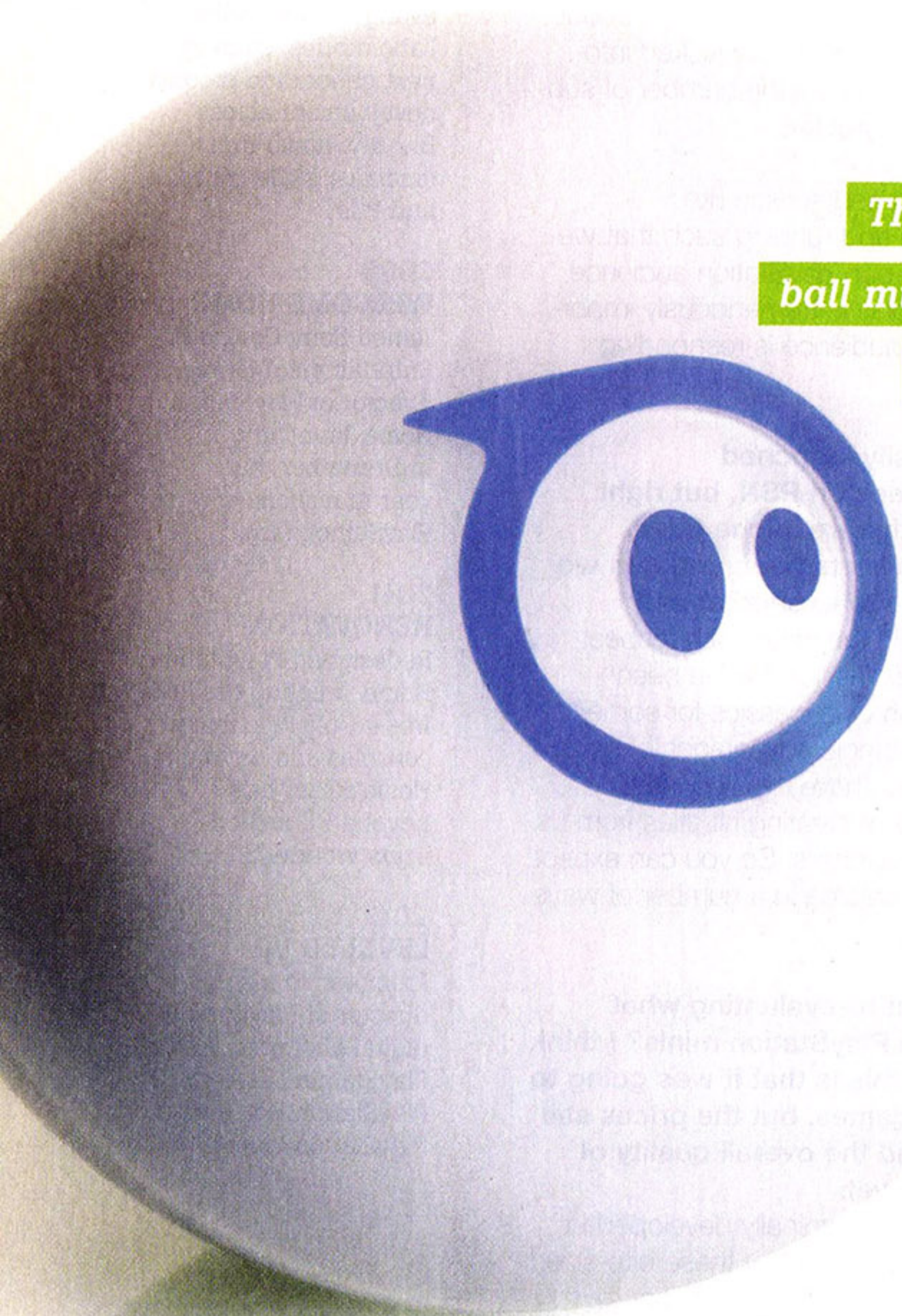
AVERAGE

\$129 | [store.gosphero.com](http://store.gosphero.com)

*This little remote-controlled*

*ball might make your cat or dog*

*question its entire world.*



by Game Informer Staff





1

### 1 HTC One S

With the release of the HTC One S handset, T-Mobile users finally get a taste of Android's new Ice Cream Sandwich OS. The One S boasts a slick aluminum exterior and a 4.3-inch AMOLED screen, but hardcore users will be more interested in the 1.5 GHz dual-core Snapdragon S4 processor under the hood. This chip handles power-intensive games like Shadowgun without a hitch. HTC designed the One S with Android 4.0 in mind, which means you can say goodbye to the dedicated menu button. Instead, it's been replaced with an on-screen counterpart, which unfortunately adds clutter to an otherwise clean interface. The eight-megapixel camera is one of the most responsive we've seen, and the pictures look great even in low light thanks to the powerful LED flash and burst mode. With music-library software and Beats by Dr. Dre audio enhancements included (essentially a bass-boosting equalizer), the device is aimed squarely at music fans, but this makes the lack of any kind of MicroSD support puzzling. HTC generously throws in 25GB of Dropbox space, but considering how well it handles media, its 16GB of built-in storage is going to fill up fast.

VERY GOOD

\$249 (with two-year contract) | [htc.com](http://htc.com)

### 2 Portal Gun Replica

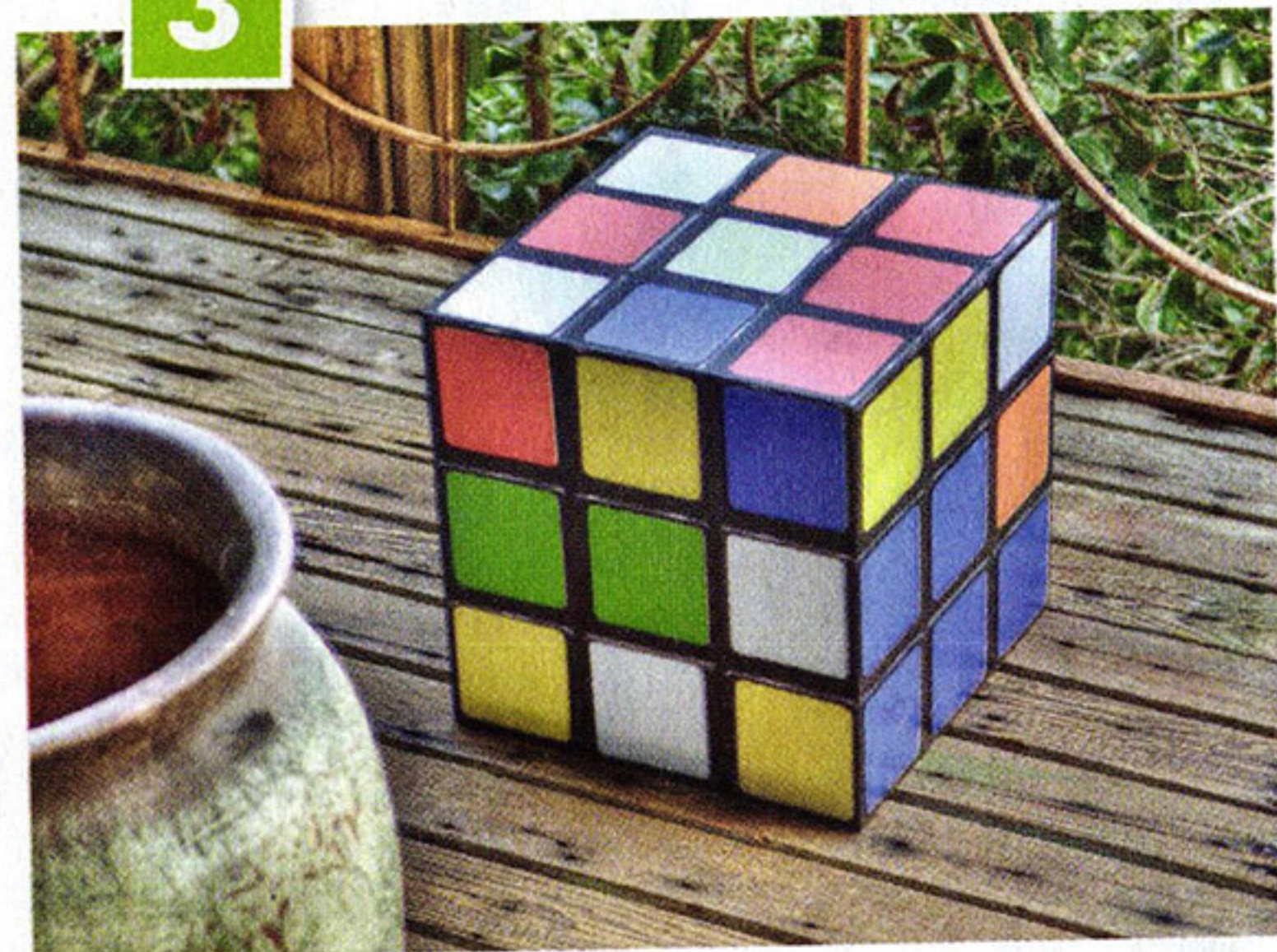
Valve's Portal device is finally ready for field testing. Collectable manufacture NECA Toys has reproduced the Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device. This one-to-one scale replica of the portal gun features internal blue and orange LEDs and makes authentic firing sounds. The device's one small flaw is that the portals it throws never actually open. Maybe NECA can release a firmware update or something.

\$139 | [necaonline.com](http://necaonline.com)

### 3 Rubik's Cube Table

The home décor of gamers is often puzzling, but any nerd would be proud of this end table. Artist Parvez Taj crafted this 14-inch square table that lights up and nuzzles perfectly into any corner of your house. You won't be able to solve this Rubik's cube, but resting your feet on it is a lot easier.

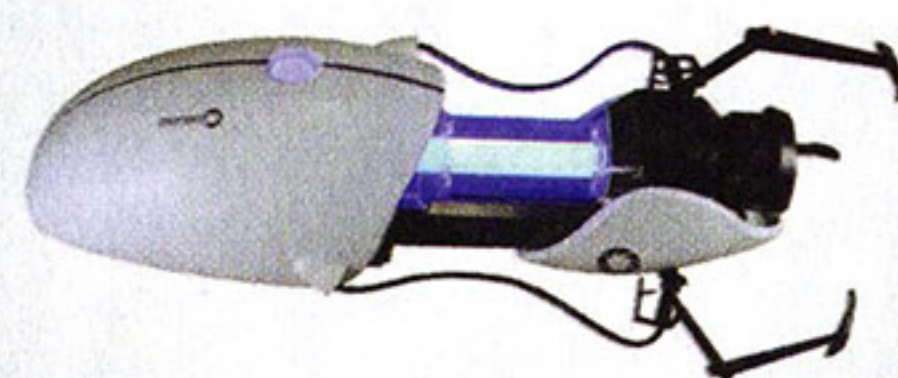
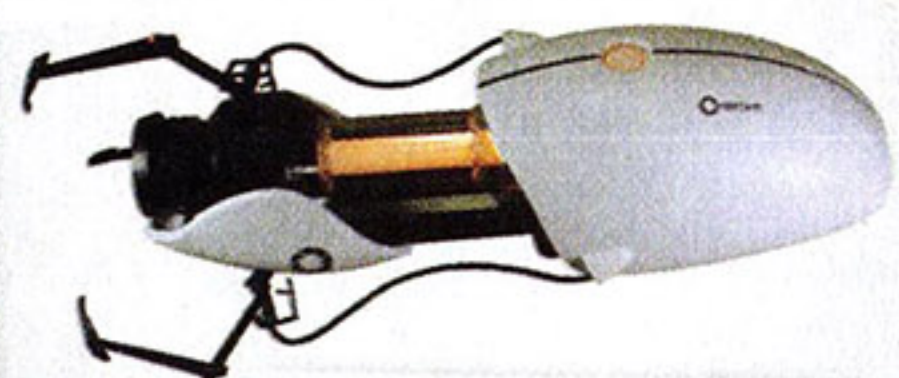
\$500 | [shopgreyarea.com](http://shopgreyarea.com)



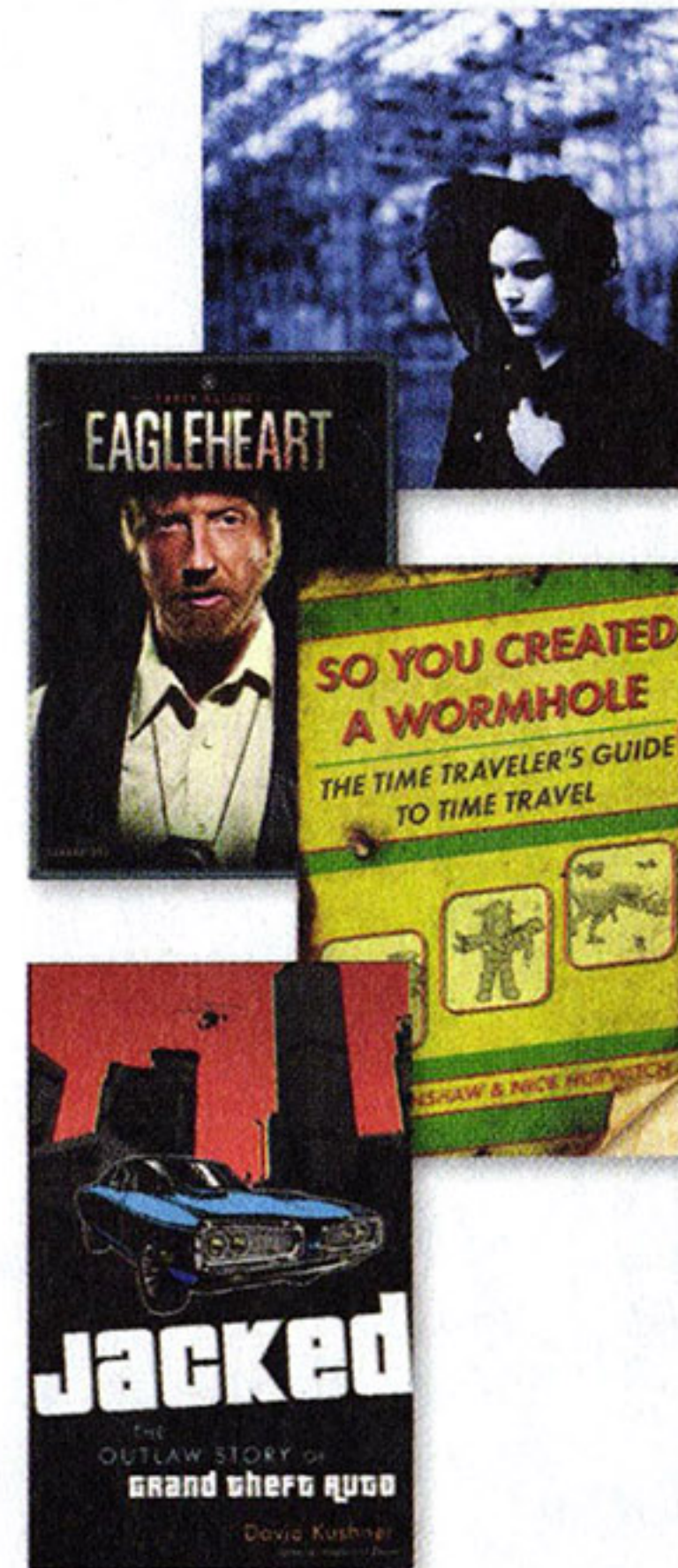
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2



Media Shelf



### BLUNDERBUSS BY JACK WHITE

The White Stripes frontman and founding member of The Raconteurs taps his fiery guitar work and punk-blues style for his first solo album.

\$10.99  
[thirdmanrecords.com](http://thirdmanrecords.com)

### EAGLEHEART: SEASON ONE

Produced by Conan O'Brien's production company, Conaco, this violent comedy follows a group of U.S. Marshalls as they track down drug smugglers and con artists in an endless series of cartoon-like violence.

\$19.97  
[adultswim.com](http://adultswim.com)

### SO YOU CREATED A WORMHOLE: THE TIME TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO TIME TRAVEL BY PHIL HORNSHAW AND NICK HURWITZ

Welcome, interloper, to the dangerous, convoluted, and sometimes deadly world of time travel. Part time-travel survival guide and part *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, this humorous gem shouldn't be missed.

\$15.00  
[us.penguin.com](http://us.penguin.com)

### JACKED: THE OUTLAW STORY OF GRAND THEFT AUTO BY DAVID KUSHNER

The author of *Masters of Doom* digs into the Grand Theft Auto series, detailing its humble history while analyzing its cultural impact and political controversies.

\$25.95  
[davidkushner.com](http://davidkushner.com)



# A Budgetary Concern

by Jeff Marchiafava, associate editor, Game Informer



# W

e all love triple-A games. Big budget titles feature unparalleled production values and the most bombastic and memorable set-piece moments gaming has to offer. Players flock to midnight releases to buy these year-defining titles, often setting launch records in the process. Despite this shared enthusiasm, triple-A games are becoming harder for developers to make, and nowadays even mediocre sales numbers can sometimes usher in the death of a series or an entire studio. This trend has caused no shortage of handwringing in the industry. Developers have offered a number of excuses for why they're losing money, leading to the shared conclusion that triple-A game development is heading in an unsustainable direction. This may be true. But the problem isn't the market. It's the mindset.

I don't doubt that developers are facing a narrowing profit margin, but in many cases I believe it's only a symptom of the real problem: overspending. Developers can complain about the rising costs of development all they want, but the bottom line is if you're spending so much money to make your game that you can't sell enough copies to turn a profit, you're not doing your job. Don't pass that blame on to your consumers.

This simple budgetary principle applies whether you sell 50,000 copies of your game, or 50 million. It ultimately doesn't matter how popular your game is, because success isn't measured by the number of games you sell. Success is measured by profit – game sales revenue minus the cost of making the game. Developers and publishers have to weigh the amount of money they spend on a game against the number of copies they think it will sell. In other words, demand dictates budget.

Some will argue that you have to spend money to make money; spending more on a sequel will likely deliver a better gaming experience, and in turn sell more copies. But developers cannot rely solely on ballooning budgets to grow their video game series. Even if they muscle more money out of consumers with online pass codes and DLC, developers will eventually max out their fan base and start losing money on their investment. If developers aren't happy with their profit margins, they have to either spend less or diversify.

Epic Games is a good (if for some, surprising) example of this practice. The Gears of War games are unabashedly big affairs that no doubt require mind-boggling budgets. But Epic also owns Chair, a studio that specializes in smart downloadable and mobile ventures – not to mention the income it makes from leasing its heralded Unreal engine to other companies.

Not every developer has the disposable income, assets, or talent of Epic Games. Simply put, if you can't afford to make a Gears of War, make something else. Plenty of games don't require hundred million dollar budgets. Minecraft is the most obvious example; programmed primarily by Markus Persson, the indie sandbox title has since raked in \$80 million in revenue. Very few developers enjoy that level of success from a single project, but since when is putting all your eggs in one basket a smart idea anyway? A game doesn't need to be a smash hit in order to be successful. Atlus has a long history of

developing and publishing games for niche audiences, and it has outlived many similar companies by making smart, modest business decisions.

With previous console generations, developers were primarily limited by technical constraints; you could only fit so much content on a cartridge, and devote so much processing power to graphics. Some developers need to grow up and realize that while some technical hurdles may no longer stand in the way of making their dream game, budgetary concerns might. We can still have our Skyrim's, Gears of Wars, and GTAs. But not every game can deliver that epic scale, nor should they try. I'd honestly rather play the next Minecraft than the next Call of Duty, anyway.

Sales data may tell us that year-over-year consumer spending is on the decline, but one only has to look at the advent of Kickstarter as a sign of how strong our consumer base still is. Not only are players willing to put down money on a game before it's even created, they're willing to fund games that wouldn't get made otherwise. Double Fine's new adventure game, inXile's RPG Wasteland 2, and Christian Allen's hardcore tactical shooter Takedown all met and substantially surpassed their funding goals. Even better, these games are starting on a solid foundation by setting clear budgets and justifying them to their financial backers. The industry as a whole might learn a thing or two from this grassroots phenomenon. ♦

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

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



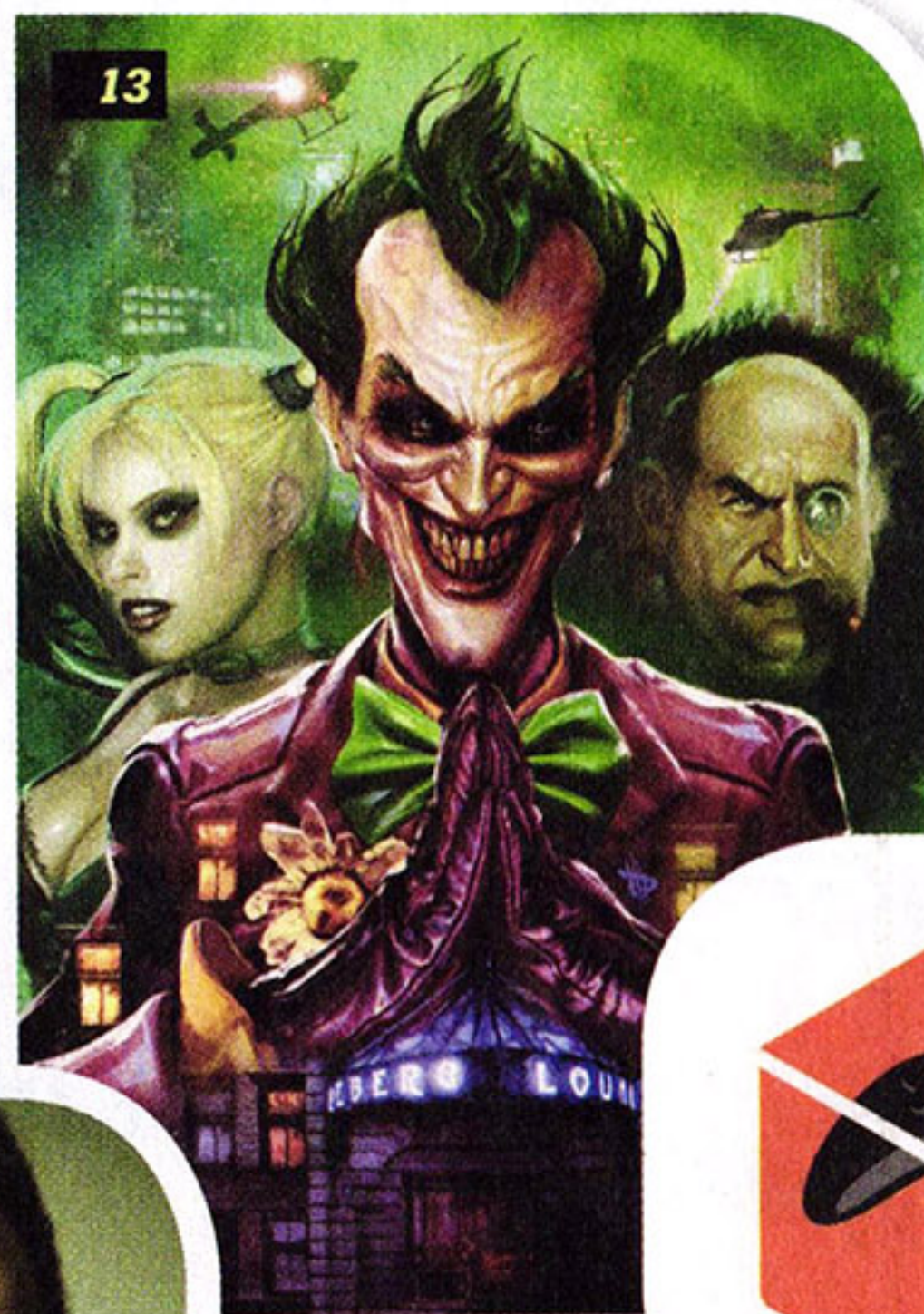
05



05  
Inversion



13



19



12  
Lollipop Chainsaw



15



16



22

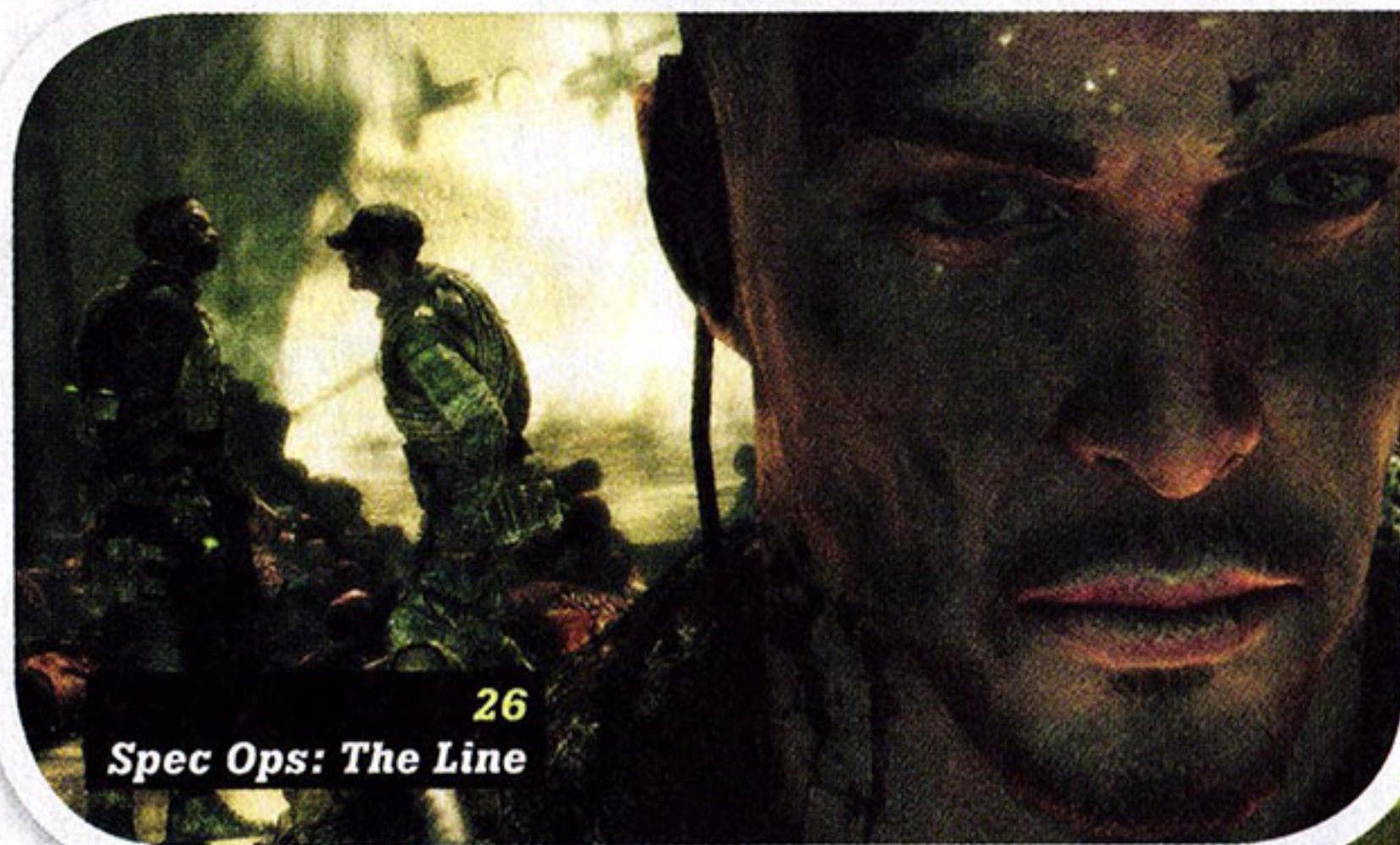


19

The Last Story



26  
Spec Ops: The Line



## June

### 01 Snow White Loves Vampires

If you always imagined that Snow White looks like a burnout who hangs out at the mall food court, then this movie is your dream come true. Kristen Stewart (of *Adventureland* fame) stars as the ruby-lipped heroine in *Snow White and the Huntsman*. If this casting works, maybe we'll see Lindsay Lohan in *Beauty and the Beast* — then they'd just need to find someone to play the Beauty.

### 05 New Releases

- › Inversion (PS3, 360)
- › The Sims 3: Katy Perry's Sweet Treats Pack (PC)

### 05 E3 2012

This year's Electronic Entertainment Expo is shaping up to be one of the most exciting ever. Both Microsoft and Sony could tease their plans for next-generation hardware, and the first batch of games for Nintendo's Wii U should be playable. We'll have all of the breaking news as soon as it happens on [www.gameinformer.com](http://www.gameinformer.com).

### 06 Beware the Angry Comic Book Fan

If you see someone wearing a Superman or Batman shirt today, avoid making eye contact with them. Odds are, they are upset over DC Comics' decision to release *Before Watchmen* today, a prequel story to Alan Moore's famed *Watchmen* series from the '80s. The reason for their angst? Moore didn't want to be involved in this story, and didn't want DC to make it. In an interview with the *New York Times* he said this venture was "completely shameful."

### 08 The Alien Spin-Off

Ridley Scott's highly anticipated *Prometheus* opens in theaters today. Although the Alien brand has been sullied (thanks, *Alien Resurrection*), moviegoers are still interested in this compelling science fiction universe. The extent that *Prometheus* is connected to the previous films is unknown, but if you look closely at the trailer you'll see a xenomorph-like image. As long as Newt is still dead, we're happy.

### 12 New Releases

- › Gravity Rush (Vita)
- › Gungnir (PSP)
- › Lollipop Chainsaw (PS3, 360)

### 13 The Arkham City Prequel You Didn't Expect

DC Comics' newest Batman series *Arkham Unhinged* is an ongoing prequel story to Rocksteady's *Arkham City* video game. This series details how all of the heroes and villains ended up where they are as the game begins. Why no sequel story? Maybe the powers that be have more significant game-related plans for the follow-up story. We'll have to wait and see.

### 15 Too Many Games Con

Starting today and running through June 17, the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center houses *Too Many Games*, a video game convention offering a marketplace, game room, tournaments, panels, exhibitions, a workshop, and a guest appearance by James "The Angry Video Game Nerd" Rolfe.

### 16 Seattle Retro Gaming Expo 2012

If you happen to be in Bellevue, Wash. this weekend, make sure you check out this year's *Retro Gaming Expo* at the Red Lion hotel. You can buy classic games here and also compete in tournaments. One of this convention's rooms is dedicated completely to *Steel Battalion* multiplayer. A two-day pass will only set you back \$20.

### 19 New Releases

- › Brave (PS3, 360, DS, PC)
- › The Last Story (Wii)
- › LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes (PS3, 360, Wii, DS, Vita)
- › Pokémon Conquest (DS)
- › The Secret World (PC)
- › Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor (360)

### 19 Enter the Test Chamber

Last month *Game Informer Online* introduced *Test Chamber*, a new video show that looks at each week's biggest releases. Join us as we provide commentary, reviews, and insight into the games. *Test Chamber* airs every Tuesday.

### 22 Meet Pixar's New Heroine

Computer animated films are a dime a dozen, but Pixar has always led the pack in terms of quality (except *Cars 2*). The studio's newest film, *Brave*, opens in theaters today. Even though it looks to have a more serious tone than Pixar's previous work, you can count on it appealing to kids and adults alike. We have a feeling young girls will walk out of this theater wanting a bow and arrow — protagonist Merida's weapon of choice.

### 26 New Releases

- › The Amazing Spider-Man (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS, DS)
- › Heroes of Ruin (3DS)
- › LittleBigPlanet (Vita)
- › Record of Agarest War 2 (PS3)
- › Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 (PS3, 360)
- › Spec Ops: The Line (PS3, 360)

### 29 No, Joe!

For whatever reason, Hollywood decided to create another movie based on *GI Joe*. If you're heading to the theater today to see it, you better be going for the laughs. This movie looks terrible! We can't wait to see how *Cobra* takes over the White House. Also, does Bruce Willis really play a character named "GI Joe"? If you really need to see a movie today, go see *Brave* again.

2012



» **Platform**

PC

» **Style**

Massively Multiplayer Online  
Role-Playing Game

» **Publisher**

Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**

Zenimax Online Studios

» **Release**

2013

*From Skyrim to Morrowind,*

*The*

*Elder Scrolls*

*Online*

*and everything in between*





# War

War has raged across the continent of Tamriel since time immemorial. We've experienced epochal conflicts from several perspectives: the Nerevarine's fierce battle against Dagoth Ur in *Morrowind*, fractious lords desperately fighting against an otherworldly invasion from *Oblivion*, and a bloody civil war in *Skyrim*. The *Elder Scrolls Online* unifies Tamriel's many provinces and sets players loose to experience the story of their own faction's struggle for dominance. This time, saving the world from the awakening of ancient evil is only the beginning. What happens when hundreds or thousands of prophesied heroes all think that they should be Emperor?

*by Adam Bliessener*





The Elder Scrolls franchise's adaptability to the massively multiplayer space has been clear to everyone since *Morrowind* broke into the mainstream in 2002 to the tune of over four million lifetime sales.

Fans have been waiting for an announcement on that front since Zenimax Online Studios formed in 2007. Five years later, the franchise has exploded in popularity, with *Skyrim* experiencing even greater critical and commercial success.

Now Zenimax Online is taking the popular role-playing series in a bold new direction. Many qualities responsible for forging the series' success – weighty combat, richly interactive environments, a world reactive to players' actions – are not easily translated to the MMO genre. Others, like expansive, exploration-friendly landscapes and historic struggles against ancient evil, fit just as

naturally in a multiplayer online game as they do in a single-player RPG.

The trick for Zenimax Online is finding a balance between Elder Scrolls fans' expectations and the constraints of MMO development in some areas, and deploying innovative solutions that push the genre's boundaries in others. "We've really got to create a compelling game first," says creative director Paul Sage. "It needs to be comfortable for people who are coming in from a typical massively multiplayer game that has the same control mechanisms, but it also has to appeal to *Skyrim* players. You want to hit those touchstones, but more important than that, you've got to create an

experience that's unique and fun."

Despite cleaving to genre standards with classes, experience points, and progression, much of the leveling experience is based around the core fantasy presented by traditional Elder Scrolls games. Players travel the land as an itinerant adventurer righting wrongs, seeking riches, or simply seeing the sights. The structure is instantly familiar to any Elder Scrolls player, with a compass pointing toward points of interest and hundreds of things to stumble across along the way. You may be doing it from a third-person perspective and using a hotbar to activate skills, but the basic idea is the same.

Remember that time you were hoofing it





The art is stylized rather than chasing photorealism like *Skyrim* or *Oblivion* – which is practically impossible to pull off with 200 characters on screen – but designs like this archway should be familiar



The mountains in the distance bound the playable area, but the studio is doing its best to avoid the “content bowl” zone design seen in most MMOs, in favor of more natural terrain

to Whiterun to talk to the Jarl and you came across a group of bandits accosting an elderly couple? Perhaps you waited until the bandits were occupied with their victims, then took advantage of the chaos to kill them all and help yourself to everyone’s former possessions. This kind of minor event is critical to the *Elder Scrolls* experience, and it exists in the MMO alongside more involved quests, unmarked caves to explore, and larger conflicts between armies.

Unfortunately, the constraints inherent to online gaming preclude some designs that put *Elder Scrolls* on the map. Players can’t master every discipline or own every mansion, though you absolutely can join every guild and build a pool of skills far broader than ever before. Almost anything you see off in the distance can be explored, but you may have to level up a bit before you can survive the dangers that live there. The sheer size of the game world, though, dwarfs the single province of *Skyrim* that we know and love.

The *Elder Scrolls Online* is set approximately 1,000 years before the events of *Skyrim*, well before the ascendancy of the Septim dynasty in the Third Era. During this era, the land of Tamriel has no clear ruler. The Imperials are weakened from previous wars, and the

central province of Cyrodiil is marked by constant warfare. Three distinct alliances, each consisting of three of the playable races, maintain huge standing armies to defend their holdings and expand their territory. Each fights continual battles against the hated Imperials and their other neighbors. However, the noble Tharn family (whose descendant Jagar you may remember from *Arena*) is hatching a plot to bring Tamriel back under the Imperial heel. They’ve forged a dark pact with the King of Worms, Mannimarco, an altmer necromancer who promises to fuel the flagging Imperial war machine by reanimating the bodies of fallen soldiers. Unknown to the Imperials he supposedly serves, however, Mannimarco is scheming with the Daedric prince of domination, Molag Bal, to bring the mortal realm under that dark lord’s dominion. The heroic fantasy story explores these world-threatening events from the point of view of an adventurer whose soul has already been stolen by Molag Bal. This provides a convenient in-fiction rationale for being able to come back from death over and over again. To get your soul back, you must save Tamriel as well.

The game world features most of the continent of Tamriel, from *Skyrim* to *Morrowind* in the north to the Altmer home on the Summerset Isle and the mysterious Khajit ancestral homeland of Elsweyr. Not all provinces are included in their entirety; Zenimax Online is keeping large areas inaccessible to save them for use as expansion content. Nonetheless, every major area is represented to some extent. For instance, the nord stronghold at Windhelm is fully implemented, but Winterhold and the mages’ college won’t be in at launch.

The three player factions each hail from distinct regions. To the north and east of Cyrodiil, the nords, dunmer (dark elves), and argonians have forged the Ebonheart Pact out of necessity. Their ancestral hatreds still burn – particularly in the



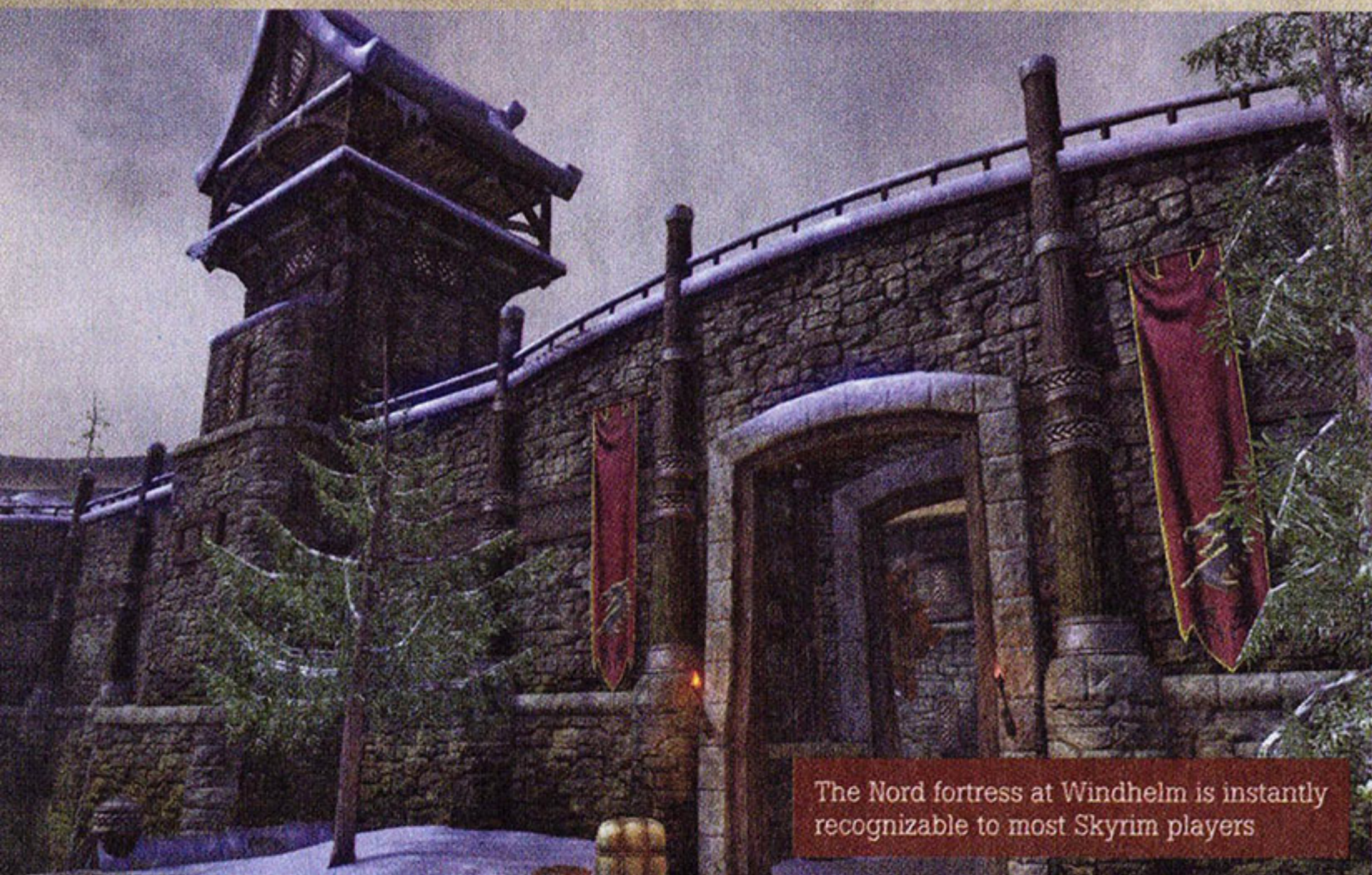
oppressed argonians – but each warlike race recognizes the threats posed by their unified enemies. The altmer (high elves), bosmer (wood elves), and khajit form the Aldmeri Dominion in the south and southwest, a nascent empire that rules its holdings with an iron fist. The Daggerfall Covenant, an egalitarian democratic association between bretons, redguard, and orcs, uses its military might to secure lucrative trade routes to and from its northwestern dominions.

Recreating the freedom *Elder Scrolls* players expect within the World of Warcraft-style mechanics Zenimax Online is using for this MMO would be impossible without changing the way that players interact with the

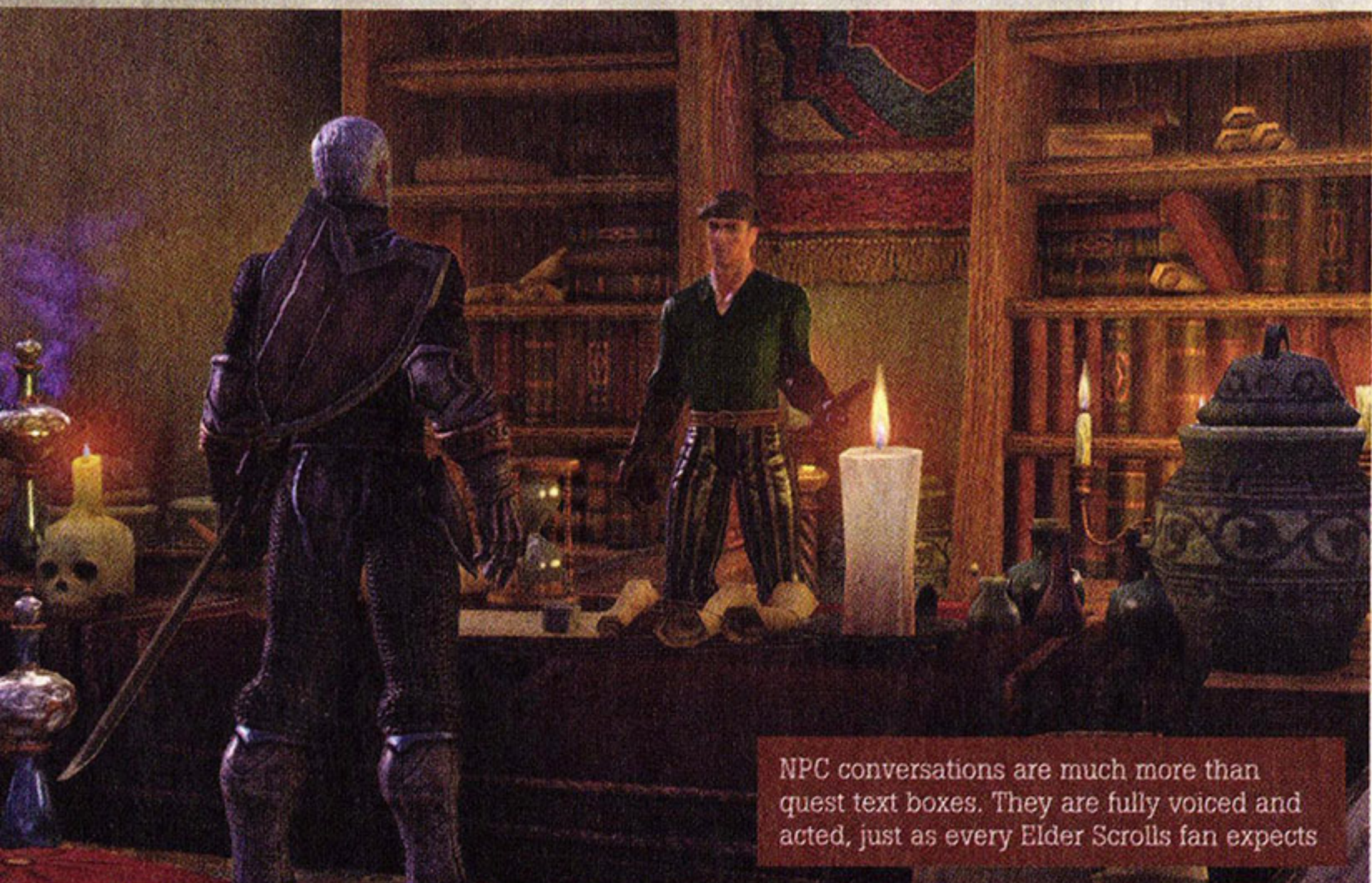
### *Where is Bethesda in all this?*

Zenimax Online is its own studio under the larger corporate umbrella of Zenimax Media, which owns the publisher Bethesda Softworks as well as the development house Todd Howard calls home, Bethesda Game Studios. The two development studios have a tight working relationship when it comes to keeping the *Elder Scrolls* franchise recognizable in a different genre, meaning they collaborate extensively on lore and geography. “[Howard] checks in every once in a while to make sure that we’re keeping the war real, but the creative team has a very strong link to the loremasters over there,” says game director Matt Firor. Bethesda Game Studios is working on its own projects, though, with everything from high-level design decisions to the content creation on the MMO being done at Zenimax Online.





The Nord fortress at Windhelm is instantly recognizable to most Skyrim players



NPC conversations are much more than quest text boxes. They are fully voiced and acted, just as every Elder Scrolls fan expects

world. The studio came up with something it calls “hubless” design to combat this problem. Instead of the typical questing design that MMO players intuitively recognize – go to town, pick up quests, complete quests, return to town for reward – The Elder Scrolls Online aims to allow players to enjoy whatever piques their interest as they wander the world, so long as you are appropriately leveled.

The examples Zenimax Online showed us focus on making each point of interest a self-contained module, not unlike a Dungeons & Dragons adventure designed for a single evening’s tabletop role-playing. A simple example is that you may not have a quest to clear out the

## Public Dungeons

The Elder Scrolls Online is bringing back a much-beloved feature that has largely disappeared from modern MMOs: public dungeons. These caves, ruins, and such are designed in much the same way as the private instanced dungeons in recent MMOs like World of Warcraft and Star Wars: The Old Republic. The difference is that they’re not segregated from the regular world like those areas; the entire point is to create spaces that encourage players to organically group up and work together.

“What [public dungeons] really did by allowing players to explore the same space together without knowing each other is let people meet each other organically,” Firor says. “That’s what’s been lost. Meeting people while you’re actually doing similar things.”

Talk to just about any EverQuest or Dark Age of Camelot veteran and you’ll get a similar answer. More recent games like Rift have tried to accomplish similar goals through dynamic outdoor content that players can group up and engage in without going to an instance, and whether this older design will resonate with modern MMO players’ expectations remains to be seen. Even the worst-case scenario, though, is mitigated by The Elder Scrolls Online’s inclusion of standard instanced dungeons as well.



undead-infested barrow you stumble across in your travels, but perhaps the shade you free by killing the necromancer at the bottom rewards you for your trouble.

Townfolk naturally point players toward some adventures, like a wounded soldier seeking help for his ambushed patrol who conveniently puts a marker on your map noting their location, but not all content will be flagged thusly. Some fraction of the caves, ruins, dungeons, et cetera have nothing marking their existence until you personally come across them. Strategy and spoiler sites will inevitably have guides listing everything within weeks of release, but the studio hopes players who value that sort of free-form experience will find it in The Elder Scrolls Online.

The studio expects reaching the level cap to take 120 or so hours (varying wildly on individual playstyle, of course) and each of the three factions has its own set of leveling content, so dozens if not hundreds of different solutions to this problem should be present in the final game. Some scenarios are significantly more complex, with interlocking pieces coming together to tell a larger story without forcing players to fully clear out entire zones to get the whole plotline. For instance, the saga of Camlorn that Zenimax demonstrated in great detail plays out across multiple adventures and involves ancient battles, time travel, werewolves, ghosts, and undead werewolves.

### STOPPING A WEREWOLF PLAGUE

Zenimax Online showed one extended example that illustrates how The Elder Scrolls Online handles multiple world-saving heroes, player choice, epic

storylines, and iconic franchise touchstones. The story of Camlorn is tragic, but a hero’s intervention can undo much of the evil plaguing the once-bustling city.

NPC refugees in neighboring cities tell the player an unusual werewolf epidemic has taken over Camlorn and the surrounding area. Most werewolf problems are self-contained in The Elder Scrolls, beast-men causing trouble around their isolated lairs or occasionally banding together to form guilds and manage their curse for the greater good. In Camlorn, however, these werewolves are working toward conquest in large groups under a leader named Faolchu.

On the way to Camlorn, the player’s compass alerts him to the presence of a military encampment some distance from the road. A detachment of mages and soldiers is under attack by ghosts, but nobody has any idea why. After recovering artifacts from the battlefield and ghostly ectoplasm from the hostile spirits for the embattled mages in standard MMO kill and collection quest fashion, the player learns that the ghosts are eternally reliving an ancient battle that has something to do with Faolchu. Sent into the nearby ruins to summon the shade of an army commander who can explain the mystery, the player’s quest takes a left turn.

The ghost of a lieutenant of the long-deceased army tells the player that donning her husband’s armor and experiencing the battle through his eyes is the only way to truly understand the battle. Clad in a dead man’s equipment, the player is transported hundreds of years into the past. Now present in a battle long since decided, the player has a chance to make a real difference in the world.

Officers bark out commands, and the player leads his forces to small victories across the battlefield as the larger conflict rages on. Soon, we learn that the entire assault is a trap: the





The dunmer architecture in Mournhold brings Morrowind memories flooding back – minus the horrific (by modern standards) textures and models

The fated confrontation is now upon the player. He charges into Faolchu's cave and engages him in bloody battle, luring the enemy through bonfires to counter his wolf transformation and render him vulnerable to cold steel. The mission complete, the player returns to his own time to a peaceful, ghost-free battlefield and a grateful group of mages.

This use of "phasing," where players see different worlds dependent on their quest progress and can't interact with others in different phases, is technically very similar to how Blizzard implements it in World of Warcraft. "Every time I come back to Camlorn after [defeating Faolchu], it's the hero of Kvatch moment from Oblivion," says game director Matt Firor. "They recognize you as the hero that killed the guy who was oppressing them." The difference in this game, according to Zenimax Online, is in the quest design. The studio believes that the self-contained nature of The Elder Scrolls Online's quests – plus the fact that a player who has already completed a stage can join a party member in an earlier stage's phase – will help to avoid the worst pitfalls of segregating players away from each other that have cropped up in similar systems.

If the player decides not to save the lieutenant, one quest NPC whose lineage will have never existed is not present during the resolution. This kind of choice is unlikely to affect the larger storyline any more than individual quest decisions altered Skyrim's overall plotline, though their consequences do sometimes extend beyond single adventures. Firor chuckles as he tells us of one example where a noble's servant is constantly put in harm's way throughout one faction's storyline. Though he can die at any one of those inflection points, the story chugs along. It's hard to believe that the game won't acknowledge keeping his ill-fated soul in his body through a unique achievement or other recognition.

The dialogues, enemies, and lore contained

in this quest could have been ripped in their entirety from a single-player Elder Scrolls game. The real differences are in the intermediate quest stages, the combat mechanics, and the players around you. The single-player RPGs don't have a lot of "kill six of these" or "bring me ten of those" objectives, though what we've seen here is not excessive by MMO standards. The overall experience and flow of the content, though, is very much in line with what Elder Scrolls fans are used to.

This entire quest is incidental to the larger werewolf problem in Camlorn. Learning that the boss is vulnerable to fire is useful, but completing this is not required to progress in the overarching story. Anyone who has ever been stuck in an MMO questline because they failed to stumble across one lone quest-giver in the middle of the woods can appreciate what Zenimax Online is attempting to accomplish here.

Werewolves and guilds are only a few of the Elder Scrolls touchstones that are present in the game in one form or another (see the Elder Scrolls Touchstones sidebar on page 56). As much as the developers are trying to include everything they possibly can to make sure that the world feels like the Tamriel we've been exploring for over a decade, they have little choice but to diverge dramatically from the combat system we loved in Skyrim.

## Joining the Fighters Guild

This wouldn't be an Elder Scrolls game without guilds to join. The primary method of increasing your reputation with the Fighters Guild is by destroying Dark Anchors. These devilish devices are enormous hooks sent by Molag Bal from his Daedric plane of Coldharbour to drag Tamriel into his realm and subjugate it once and for all. Dark Anchors pseudo-randomly spawn and plummet from the sky, attaching enormous chains to the earth itself. Defeating their Daedric guardians and casting the cruel hooks back to Coldharbour is intended to be possible but difficult for appropriately leveled solo characters, so meeting up with nearby strangers to take them on helps. Each anchor destroyed grants everyone who contributed a reputation boost with the Fighters Guild, which leads to all kinds of rewards down the line – including new skills and abilities.

enemy commander, Faolchu, is merely trying to get his foes gathered together so he can transform and shred them all in one decisive blow. At this point, a choice presents itself: save the wife of the man whose body the player is possessing, or pursue Faolchu. The Zenimax Online designer running the demo cuts through more enemies and saves the lady lieutenant, who tells us that Faolchu's only weakness is fire.



In addition to the different silhouettes presented by each class and role, groups of abilities share color schemes in their effects. Heals, for example, are typically green





### AN ELDER SCROLLS TWIST ON MMO COMBAT

The reality of network latency and massively multiplayer games prevents The Elder Scrolls Online from following the real-time combat model that has driven the series since its inception, but the developers are trying to bring over a few of the concepts that define the franchise's combat. The stamina bar is the fulcrum around which the entire combat design revolves.

The opportunity to sprint, block, interrupt, and break incapacitating effects by using the stamina resource lends a new dimension to the decisions you make in combat. Blocking is by far the most central of these abilities. The exact mechanic varies slightly by class and weapon – parrying with a two-hander, raising a shield, or projecting a magical force field – but the gameplay effect is similar. Blocking a special attack might not stop all the damage, but mitigating the pain and perhaps stopping a secondary effect like the movement impairment of an ice bolt can make a huge

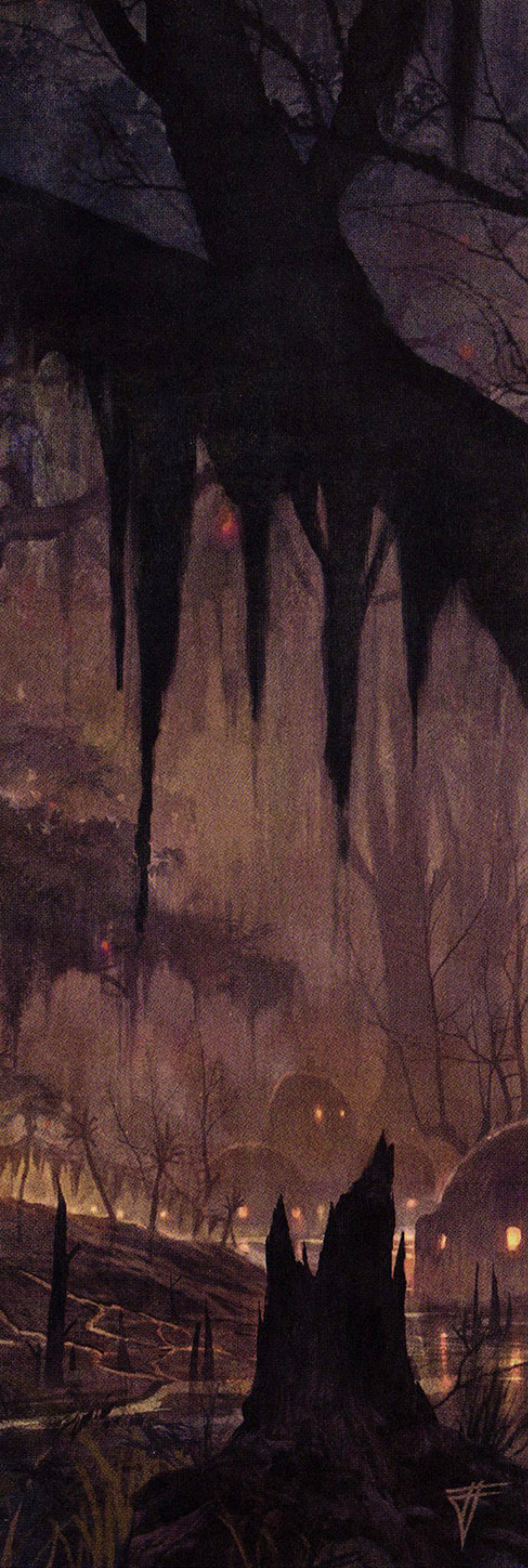
difference. Blocking a charged-up heavy swing could stagger the attacker off balance, opening them up to retaliation.

Imagine a PvP battle where a line of fighters charges a group of foes with shields raised. In a traditional MMO, they'd be slowed, frozen, stunned, and torn apart by enemy mages en route. Here, they may be out of stamina from blocking when they finally close the distance, but a full-health melee specialist in the middle of archers and wizards is going to cause trouble no matter what – even if that's distracting ranged enemies while allied casters take advantage of the confusion.

On the flip side, consider a duel between skilled players. Firing off every crowd control effect in the book may not do much to lock down someone with a full stamina bar, but it could be advantageous to deplete an enemy's stamina so they can't interrupt a big follow-up attack. Stamina management will be a key component of player skill when the fighting gets intense.

Another facet of giving players universal





access to these powerful defensive capabilities is a moderate break from the traditional tank/healer/damage "holy trinity" of MMOs. Zenimax Online intends for any five reasonably skilled players to be able to form a group capable of clearing most content. In the absence of traditional "aggro" mechanics, where players directly manipulate a target-priority system for the AI, every player has an increased responsibility for their own well-being. Healing is still a big part of the game, and defensively focused characters like shield-wielding fighters have more options to protect their allies than others, but the studio's goal is to have everything work in a more naturalistic fashion instead of relying on explicit game mechanics like aggro.

Players have a small standard MMO hotbar on which they slot a handful of skills freely outside of combat. The limitation on the number of skills available at one time mostly does away with the concept of skill "rotations" that much of the class design of an MMO like World of Warcraft is built on. "Now every ability can be awesome," says lead gameplay designer



Taking advantage of the game's unusual (for an MMO) system of blocking and interrupting is advised against tough monsters like this flesh atronach



The nine playable races are distinct from each other in gameplay as well as art, but the studio isn't talking about racial traits yet

Nick Konkle. "If you have 20 abilities, at some point I can't let every one be a stun. We can just make every ability really cool, and how you build your 'hand' in advance is what defines you."

Zenimax Online declined to share details on individual classes, though the studio confirmed that the game is class-based instead of using the free-form character progression of Skyrim. The currently equipped weapon determines the light and heavy attacks that take up the first two slots, players choose another few class abilities they've unlocked, and the final slot is taken up by an ultimate ability that can be activated only after building up "finesse." This is earned by performing well in battle.

## *Joining the Mages Guild*

Getting in with Tamriel's mages in the Second Era is a matter of scouring the world for lore books hidden everywhere from bustling cities to the dark depths of forgotten caverns. Whether that means dynamic, pseudo-random spawn or hand-placed locations for each collectible is unknown at this time. Discovering these lost bits of knowledge is a reward in and of itself for explorer types and lore hounds, but building your Mages Guild reputation is yet another way to earn new perks, skills, and abilities.

Finesse is intended to be an obvious carrot that encourages players to develop skillful tactics. The idea is that taking advantage of your special abilities and playing smart, for instance by interrupting an enemy spellcast or blocking a dangerous blow, is rewarded. Maxing your finesse rating while soloing currently gives a





bonus loot chest in addition to charging your ultimate attack, so hopefully using intermediate tactics such as those will become second nature after a bit of questing.

A more dramatic way to build finesse is to combo your skills with yourself or friendly players. One example Zenimax Online shared is a rogue-type character dropping an oil slick on the ground to slow enemies, which can then be set ablaze with fire magic for serious damage potential. Another combo the studio showed off has a fighter running into a firestorm dropped by a friendly mage and activating his spinning whirlwind attack, which turns into an inferno cyclone shooting deadly fireballs in all directions. Mutual enemies can't combo off of each others' skills, though, so you can't drag your foes into an oil slick left by their rogue and then light the lot of them on fire.

All of these decisions have obvious ramifications for PvP tactics. Elder Scrolls fans who have no intention of partaking in the larger battle for the Imperial City (more on that later) will be happy to learn, however, that NPC enemies are more than happy to use them against players in everything from solo questing to heroic-level dungeon runs.

#### **SMARTER ENEMIES, BETTER TACTICS**

Illustrating an example of PvP combat in *The Elder Scrolls Online* is simple. Charging a group of enemy players might go something like this: The fighter stuns you with a shield bash while

the rogue circles around behind and the mage drops a slowing ice patch on the ground and sprints out to create some distance. Burning some stamina and unleashing a few long-cooldown attacks to quickly dispatch the rogue helps even the odds, particularly if you can time a block to stagger the fighter and keep moving to avoid being splattered across the landscape by the mage.

That's exactly the kind of encounter you can expect when fighting NPCs. "The first and foremost important thing about creatures is that they are not speedbumps," says gameplay designer Maria Aliprando. "You will encounter the same mechanics from monsters that you will from players." Enemies work together with general behaviors, like fighters trying to tie foes up in melee while mages shoot from a



Players are never punished for working together. If you help someone kill a monster, even if you're not grouped together, everyone gets full experience, loot, and quest credit







Returning enemies like this spider daedra use their iconic abilities against you as well as a few new tricks in most cases

distance. They also combo their abilities when the opportunity presents itself; the fire mage is only too happy to turn an oil patch his rogue buddy dropped into a deadly blaze.

The same concept holds true in dungeons and other group content. The developers intend for NPCs to react to players in ways that make sense, rather than standing around waiting to be pulled. "The room is an encounter," Aliprando says. "You must manage all of these guys, and they are managing you at the same time." The idea is for enemies to react in a way that makes intuitive sense – archers taking defensive positions, healers and other support classes trying to cover groups of allies, and heavy melee types charging up front to protect their friends.

This sounds like a tall order, and it is. Every MMO developer out there would love to have their monsters do something other than stand around and watch players slaughter their friends 20 yards away. Though we haven't seen it in action yet, the idea sounds fantastic.

As much work as it is to make AI behave in a more naturalistic fashion in an MMO, developers can largely assume that players will act in rational ways when fighting one another. This means they can instead spend their time and effort creating more, cooler toys for players to kill each other with.

### CROWNING AN EMPEROR

You're level-capped. Molag Bal's nefarious plot to conquer Tamriel is thwarted, or at least stalled for the time being. What now?

As is expected of a modern MMORPG, The Elder Scrolls Online has heroic modes of its small-group instanced dungeons, as well as larger raids that have multiple groups of players working together to conquer terrible foes. High-end public dungeons pose unique challenges. You can always explore, tracking down more Dark Anchors and lore books to fluff your guild reputations. Instanced, balanced PvP arenas await players who prefer the e-sport side of MMOs. The most significant point of differentiation between this game and other modern MMOs, however, is the open world, free-form, faction-versus-faction PvP.

The majority of the central province of Cyrodiil is the battleground for endgame PvP, with the eventual goal being conquering the Imperial City and crowning the most accomplished player in your faction emperor. Imagining a more fitting PvP endgame for an Elder Scrolls game is difficult.

Those hundreds of hours you spent playing Oblivion will serve you well, since Zenimax Online is using the same topography to build the Imperial City and the province it rules in

the MMO. "Most of Cyrodiil is in The Elder Scrolls Online, but we had to make the playable area smaller to fit the requirements of the PvP system," Firor says. Dotted with forts, farms, mines, castles, and other valuable points to conquer, Cyrodiil burns with eternal conflict.

The bulk of Cyrodiil's gameplay depends on your fellow players. "It has this interesting dynamic where one side can go into ascendancy, but they're always going to be pushed back by the other ones," Firor says. "When there are three sides, there's always something happening. I always know there's a battle somewhere. I can always jump in and fight, because I know that somewhere, someone is weak." Allying with another faction – temporarily and locally, of course – to bring down the currently ascendant alliance is

### Joining the Thieves Guild

Zenimax Online confirmed the existence of the Thieves Guild (and the Dark Brotherhood) in The Elder Scrolls Online, but stopped short of detailing how players interact with these iconic organizations. Both of these factions have traditionally relied primarily on heavily scripted, meticulously crafted set pieces – one of the most difficult types of content to produce in an MMO. The studio is well aware that Elder Scrolls fans expect these beloved guilds and their associated gameplay to make an appearance in this game, but we'll have to wait and see what ultimate form they take.





a simple thing, but it leads to political intrigue and a fascinating endgame more often than not. What happens when a prominent guild in your faction promises to show up in support of a Daggerfall assault, only to leave an allied keep undefended from Aldmeri retaliation? Is the mutual irritation from months of small-scale raids between the Covenant and the Dominion too much to overcome a proposed joint attack on a ripe target?

Zenimax Online intends for battles over control of the largest keeps to scale all the way up to the 100-versus-100 top-end that the game's engine is written to support. Players intimidated by the idea of charging into a furious melee can

hang out in the back and fire siege weapons, which can smash the walls of a fortress into rubble. The defenders' trebuchets are aiming for your allies and have the advantage of being mounted on those high walls, so taking a keep requires a lot more than plinking away with long-range siege weapons.

Smaller targets, like farms and mines, give smaller groups something to do beyond being part of a massive keep-assaulting horde. These more intimate points of interest have perhaps a single flag to conquer and a bare few NPC guards assisting any defenders. Nonetheless, any objective held by your team boosts your alliance's overall score, which gives faction-wide bonuses and determines who if anyone gets to take control of the Imperial City.

Seizing the capital city once your faction takes a commanding lead in points gives your team the chance to ride into the Imperial City and sweep Molag Bal's daedra from the streets. "[The Imperial City] is in the game at launch, but not reachable by players," Firor says. "When it is, it won't be playable in the sense that all the other cities are – it'll be a dangerous play space (think Kvatch from Oblivion), not a friendly city."

The crowning of an emperor isn't through a vote or other social mechanism. Once your faction has taken the Imperial City, the player with the highest contributions to the war will receive the title according to a calculation that is still being finalized. Ultimately, the point of being emperor is for bragging rights rather than special powers. "You're top of the leaderboard, think of it that way," Firor says.

Predicting the entertainment value or lack thereof in player-driven politics is difficult at best, but a significant portion of Zenimax Online's development talent comes from encouraging backgrounds: Mythic (Dark Age of Camelot) and Origin Systems (Ultima



The open-world PvP endgame in Cyrodiil is accessible from an early level through a bolstering system that increases your base stats to level-cap values

## *Elder Scrolls touchstones: What's in, what's out*

### **DAEDRIC PRINCES**

Molag Bal, the lord of domination and enslavement, is the primary antagonist of the game. Vaermina, whose sphere of influence extends to the dream world and the nightmares of mortals, features prominently in the overarching storyline of one zone. Other daedric princes are sure to appear in some form or another, but don't expect to become a demigod by collecting a set of daedric artifacts that break the rules of the game.

### **CRAFTING, ALCHEMY, SOUL STONES**

Zenimax Online isn't sharing details on any of these yet, beyond confirming that they all will exist in some form or another.

### **VAMPIRES/WEREWOLVES**

Vampires play their usual role as antagonists, and werewolves are central to the Camlorn storyline detailed earlier, but players are unfortunately barred from contracting porphyric hemophilia and lycanthropy themselves. The powerful abilities conferred by those iconic diseases are practically impossible to balance for a multiplayer game without breaking lore, which Zenimax Online is unwilling to do.

### **CONSTELLATIONS & BIRTHSIGNS**

Mundus stones function just like Skyrim's guardian stones, allowing players who seek them out to choose a powerful, permanent buff tied to a constellation like the Lady or the Serpent. The

iconic constellations appear in several more forms throughout Tamriel. For example, some appear as clues to a puzzle room at the bottom of an ancient ruin that denote the sequence of a set of magical tiles must be activated in to free an imprisoned spirit.

### **TOWNS**

The Imperial City in Cyrodiil, Windhelm, Daggerfall, Sentinel, Mournhold, Ebonheart, Elden Root, Shornhelm, Evermore, Riften, and many more recognizable locations are all in the game. The studio is still building content and the complete play area of the game is still being determined, so this list is far from complete.

### **RADIANT AI**

The nature of an MMO poses significant problems with the concept of NPCs following schedules and reacting to their environment like they do in Oblivion and Skyrim, so The Elder Scrolls Online uses its own AI system. Nobody wants to be stuck adventuring through deserted nighttime streets because their playtime tends to fall later in the day.

### **MOUNTS**

This is another question that the developers declined to give any detail on aside from confirming that they will be in the game and will make sense within the lore. This means no flying mounts.

### **FAST TRAVEL**

Wayshrines enable the

fast travel system and also serve as resurrection points. You can teleport from a wayshrine to any other wayshrine you've discovered, but you can't just open the map from anywhere and instantly travel to another point of interest.

### **DRAGONS**

Though Zenimax Online stopped short of flat-out saying dragons aren't in the game, the team stressed that the time period this takes place in is one in which dragons aren't much involved in Tamriel's history.

### **STEALTH**

Sneaking is definitely part of the game, but the studio is still working on the exact form that it will take.

### **PETS**

"We're not talking about this right now," says game director Matt Firor.

### **PLAYER HOUSING**

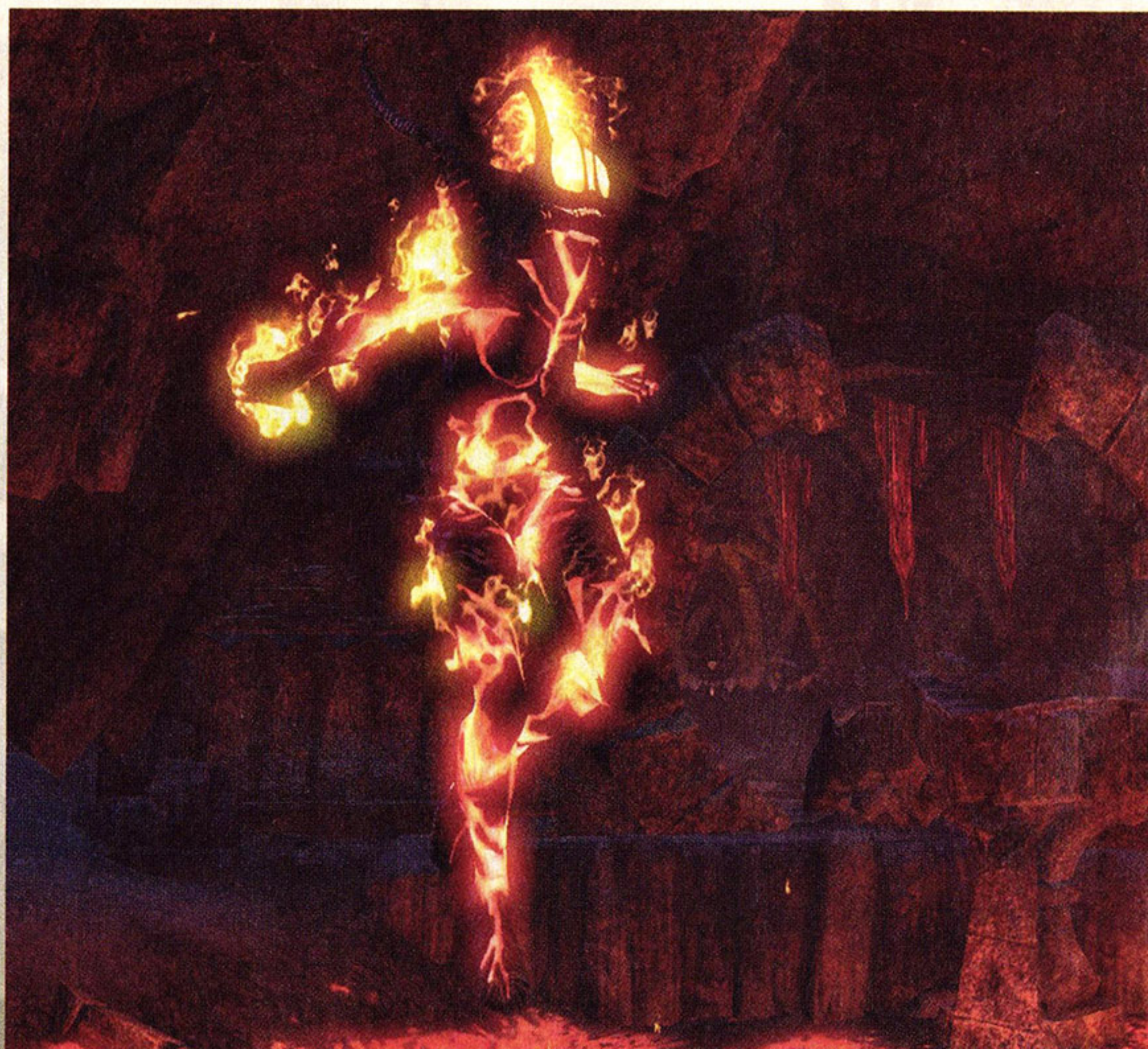
Making player housing work the way fans expect is too hard to implement in an MMO, so Zenimax has no plans to let you accrue real estate.

### **NPC ROMANCES**

The idea of an MMO is to form relationships with other players, so Zenimax is not adding NPC romances or marriage to the game.

### **FULL VOICE ACTING**

Like Skyrim, the inhabitants of Tamriel are completely voiced.







describe it as it isn't a definite addition to the game yet.

The Elder Scrolls Online is going to face a lot of criticism from fans of the franchise who don't care for MMOs, and from MMO fans who see a hotbar and quests and dismiss it as World of Warcraft with nords. Speaking with the development team, though, it's obvious that the 250-person team is composed of equal parts MMO veterans and Elder Scrolls fans who have given deep consideration to everything from the nuts

and bolts of the combat system to the players' expectations of an open world that reacts to their decisions. Some aspects are still in flux. The adaptation of the Elder Scrolls standby of being able to loot almost all objects you see in the world, how crafting will be implemented, the Thieves Guild, and much more are still undetermined. Nonetheless, the veteran talent at the studio seems well positioned to skillfully manage the MMO basics players expect, the ambitious PvP implementation looks ready to make a splash in a currently underserved niche, and the solo and small-group content we saw is ready for prime time.

The Elder Scrolls Online is pushing MMO boundaries as much as any project on the horizon, and doing so while maintaining a strong tie to the beloved world of The Elder Scrolls and projecting a strong identity of its own. MMOs are expensive bets for companies and consumers alike, but the odds are in Zenimax's favor at this point. ♦

Our website is your personal source for buckets of exclusive content on The Elder Scrolls Online for the next calendar month. Stop by [www.gameinformer.com/elderscrollsonline](http://www.gameinformer.com/elderscrollsonline) for video interviews, in-depth exploration of various game mechanics, and more over the coming weeks.

This flame atronach is one of the many foes found in the volcanic public dungeon under Morrowind



Not all enemies are monsters like this kagouti. Many of the adventures you have reinforce the burning conflict between the three player factions and the necromancy-corrupted Imperials







the amazing  
**SPIDER-MAN**

**WEB-SLINGING THROUGH**

Throughout Spider-Man's 50-year history, the creative caretakers have always strived to take the wall-crawler in new, often offbeat, directions. Spidey has been buried alive, cloned, shot into space, and consumed by his own costume. But good storytelling is often cyclical. Abandoned storylines resurface unexpectedly, and some of the best "new" ideas are actually revived concepts from yesteryear. This summer, as Sony Pictures reboots its film franchise with *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Activision developer Beenox is releasing a brand-new Spider-Man game using some refreshingly old concepts.





# THE FIRST THREE HOURS

by Ben Reeves

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360

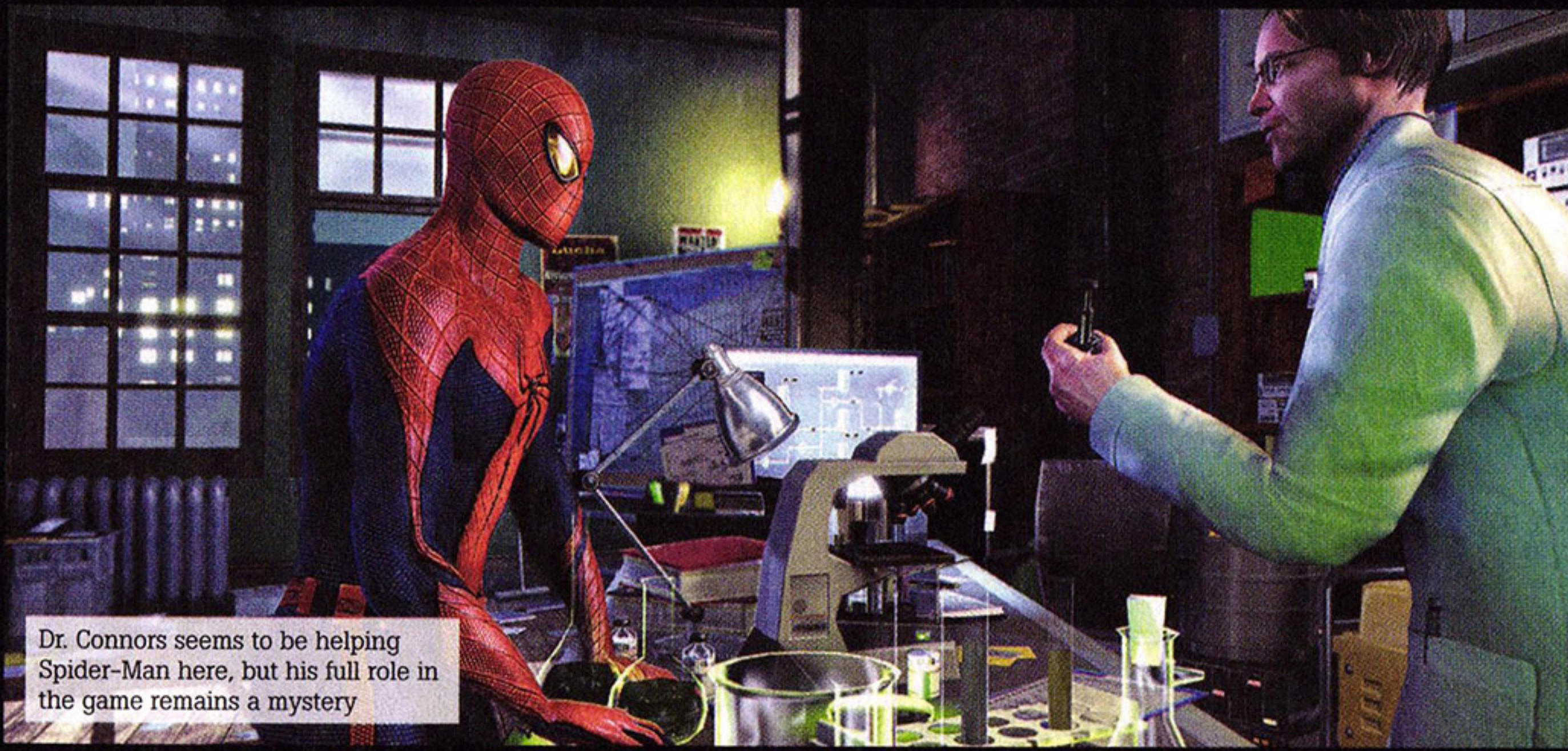
» **Style**  
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Activision

» **Developer**  
Beenox

» **Release**  
June 26





Dr. Connors seems to be helping Spider-Man here, but his full role in the game remains a mystery

## EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW

In 2004, Activision released *Spider-Man 2*, which helped reinvent the character for the PlayStation 2 era. For the first time, fans could freely swing around New York City as Spider-Man, swooping down into its alleys to thwart petty criminals or crawling to the top of the skyline to battle supervillains. To this day, *Spider-Man 2* remains not only one of the best-selling Spider-Man titles in history, but also one of the most beloved.

However, yearly sequels and an overreliance on this formula began to tarnish the character's gaming reputation. When Beenox inherited the Spider-Man franchise after 2007's *Friend or Foe*, the studio knew it had to take the character in novel directions if it wanted to break him free of this rut.

Both of Beenox's previous Spider-Man titles featured some of the character's most unusual incarnations – introducing gamers to a Depression-era Spider-Man from Marvel's Noir universe as well as a biologically mutated wall crawler from a nightmarish version of the year 2099. But Beenox also shook up the gameplay formula, axing the open-world structure altogether to focus on a more traditional linear experience.

Now, as Beenox puts the finishing touches on its third Spider-Man game, the studio hopes to begin a sea change similar to the one *Spider-Man 2* ushered forth back in 2004. Activision has tasked the studio with developing a game tied to Sony's summer blockbuster. But where Sony Pictures sees *The Amazing Spider-Man* as a chance to reinvent the hero's origin for the silver screen, Beenox sees *The Amazing Spider-Man* as an opportunity for a different sort of reinvention. In video games, Spider-Man has spent four long years away from the crime-riddled network of Manhattan streets. Beenox feels like it has significantly distanced the hero from the open-world formula; it's time to bring Spider-Man home.



Spider-Man will be able to stop car chases and other random crimes throughout the city



### Will This Game Ruin The Movie?

Activision's game releases almost a week prior to the film, but since the story takes place after the film, it contains some major movie spoilers. During the first few hours of the game, we were clued into the fate of Dr. Connors, the status of Gwen and Peter's relationship, and a few other major film spoilers. Plot-sensitive gamers may want to avoid playing the game until after they've seen the film – though longtime fans of the comics likely won't be too surprised.



Beenox has included a reader on the game disc, so players will be able to collect and read full comics such as Spider-Man's first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy* #15





In the film, Peter is inspired by lucha libre wrestlers and apes their fighting style

## SETTING THE SPIDER'S STAGE

This summer's film doesn't just reimagine Spider-Man; it details the origin of one of Spider-Man's classic villains, the Lizard. In the film, Peter Parker befriends a scientist named Curt Connors, one of his father's old colleagues. Connors' research on reptilian limb regeneration has led to several major scientific breakthroughs that could benefit millions of amputees around the world. But Connors' work has stalled due to lack of human trials. In his eagerness to advance science, Connors makes a rash decision and accidentally transforms himself into a cold-blooded monstrosity that almost destroys New York City.

Beenox's *The Amazing Spider-Man* takes place after this immediate conflict is resolved. But even though the game's story launches off key plot points established during the movie (see sidebar), Beenox says players can enjoy the game outside of the context of the film.

At the beginning of the game, Peter Parker's high-school crush, Gwen Stacy, asks Peter to come visit her at work. Gwen has scored the prestigious position of chief intern at OsCorp, which grants her access to some of the company's secure laboratories. Unfortunately, Gwen doesn't like what she sees.

In the wake of Dr. Connors' meltdown, OsCorp inherited terabytes of data on cross-species genetics. The company hires roboticist Alistair Smythe to help sort through the mess of notes Connors left behind, but the task hasn't been easy. Gwen believes that OsCorp has the genius and the resources to turn Connors' work into a blessing for society, but she suspects his research is being used for sinister practices. She asks Peter to help uncover the truth.

As the two kids walk through the halls of OsCorp, they spy a number of full-grown cross-species test subjects. Spider-Man fans might recognize many of these test subjects as Spider-Man villains like Vermin, Rhino, and Scorpia. While there is no guarantee that Spider-Man faces off against these villains in the game, we also noticed additional references to characters like Felicia Hardy, Iguana, and Morbius during the opening hours.

As Peter skulks deeper into the complex, many of the cross-species become physically agitated – hooting, hollering, and beating their fists against glass cages. They seem to be reacting to the presence of another cross-species. They're reacting to the presence of Spider-Man.



## THE PROPORTIONAL STRENGTH OF A SPIDER

Though *Edge of Time* just shipped last October, Beenox isn't hastily creating *The Amazing Spider-Man* in an eight-month time frame. Work on the project began in earnest while *Edge of Time* was still being produced. "We've been in full production for almost two years now," explains Dee Brown, Beenox founder and CEO. "We started pre-production and conceptualizing the core mechanics before we'd even finished *Shattered Dimensions*." Having a more traditional development schedule allowed Beenox to rework many of its game systems, most notably the combat.

This revamped version of Spider-Man has taken a few cues from Batman's fighting style in the Arkham games. While Spidey's combat feels slightly faster and he bounces around the screen with more acrobatic flair than the Dark Knight, the nuts and bolts of the combat function similarly. Spider-Man has one major attack button and one counter-attack button that must be hit in time with a Spider Sense icon that appears over the hero's head. As players build up larger combos, they can activate special attack options that allow them to take out multiple enemies with the press of a single button.

As Gwen and Peter work their way through the OsCorp facility, they notice a few scientists preparing a test subject for transport. OsCorp is shipping many of its cross-species experiments to an off-site biolab for disposal. As Peter approaches one test-subject chamber, however, the beast becomes highly agitated and beats vigorously against its glass enclosure. As if on cue, dozens of test subjects begin to howl and tear free of their bonds. The facility descends into chaos. Peter ducks into a dark room and throws on his mask. The hero has a lot of work cut out for him.

Early foes don't pose much of a challenge, but dodging enemy projectiles requires attentive counterattacking. Spider-Man must jump over shielded enemies to attack them from behind or disarm them with a simple web attack. The combat could use more diversity, but we hope battle strategies continue to evolve as the game progresses.

One feature that helps distinguish combat is Spider-Man's web zip maneuver. Any time the action becomes overwhelming, a single button allows Spider-Man to quickly web zip out of battle and find a hiding spot along the ceiling. The web zip helped us regain our bearings more than a few times during some of the larger battle sequences.

After quelling this cross-species riot, Spider-Man takes stock of the situation and checks his equipment. Players have two sets of upgrade trees to explore. Experience earned in combat can be poured into new combos, more powerful special attacks, or stealth moves that allow Spider-Man to silently web down from ceilings and pick off enemies one by one. Spider-Man also discovers tech pieces scattered throughout the levels that can be used to upgrade his equipment. Web-tech upgrades unlock moves like the "web blast," a large ball of impact webbing that pins enemies against a wall.

Spider-Man needs to take advantage of every tool at his disposal, because the cross-species breakout at OsCorp has quickly spiraled out of control. Test subjects have already infected dozens of OsCorp employees with a strain of the virus that mutated Dr. Connors into the Lizard. Other subjects have snuck out of the building entirely and are freely roaming through the sewers and alleys of New York City. If left unchecked, this outbreak will quickly spread across Manhattan and could eventually infect millions of people.



## SWINGING HIGH AS A SPIDER

A day after Peter unwittingly sets off this chain reaction inside OsCorp, hundreds of the city's residents have become sick as the cross-species subjects crawl through the waterways. But even the world's most virulent disease can't slow down the city's bustling criminal activity.

After the opening sequence inside OsCorp, Spider-Man is free to explore the open-world environment of New York City. "We're bringing you the best-looking Manhattan that has ever been in a Spider-Man game," Brown says. In true open-world form, Beenox is working hard to provide players with plenty of optional content to explore while swinging around the city.

At any time during the game, Spider-Man might stumble across a number of criminal activities like bank heists, car chases, or muggings. A few offbeat side missions even require Spider-Man to hunt down and take pictures of certain locations, collect comic books, or perform stunts for a crazed videographer.

Beenox is trying to make the city vibrant with activity. After stopping a mugging, the would-be victim thanks Spider-Man then starts taking pictures of the hero with a camera phone. As Spider-Man swings low over a busy street, people yell out phrases like, "Spider-Man!" or "That is so cool."

"The crowd reacts to your presence," Brown says. "Some will take pictures of you. Some will ask for your autograph. Others will yell at you for things that happen later in the story."

While Manhattan offers plenty of distractions from the main quest, a good portion of the game also takes place in segregated levels like the opening OsCorp sequence. This might help prevent the repetitive mission-design problems that dog other open-world games.

"We use the interior levels to tell our story, because we feel like it's a better narrative setting, and because it allows us to bring some stealth options to the gameplay," Brown says. "But every time you come back from a story mission, there are more and more things to do in Manhattan."

Swinging between skyscrapers is a nice diversion, but you can't ignore the main story forever. While passing by a city park, a massive earthquake tears through Manhattan. While Spider-Man has been stopping petty crimes, Alistair Smythe has been busy working on a solution to the cross-species problem. Unfortunately, Smythe's cure might be worse than the disease.

### Villain Profile: Alistair Smythe

In *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Alistair Smythe serves as a major foil for the web-slinging hero. The character has been a staple of the comics since the mid-'80s, but some gamers might not be familiar with this eccentric character. In the comics, Alistair is the son of a genius inventor named Spencer Smythe. After his father dies of radiation poisoning, Alistair inherits his father's legacy of building spider-like mechs to hunt down and kill Spider-Man. In the game, Alistair is hired by OsCorp to clean up the mess left by Dr. Connors. Alistair is a cold, calculating individual who dislikes biological mutations, preferring to interact with sterile subjects he can control, such as robots. Alistair builds a series of Spider Slayers to help rid the city of cross-species, but these inventions eventually prove too complex to control.



## WEB-RUSHING INTO BATTLE

Spider-Man spies a lizard-like creature (possibly the Iguana) scurrying through one of the city's public parks. But as the hero touches down to confront the beast, a robotic Spider Slayer drills up from under the ground.

Designated S-01, this massive Spider Slayer overshadows the park with a 10-story frame. Alistair Smythe designed Spider Slayers like this one to hunt down and capture the various cross-species that escaped OsCorp. Unfortunately, these machines aren't programmed to minimize collateral damage. When the lizard-like creature scurries off, the S-01 mistakes Spider-Man for an escaped test subject and racks up several million dollars' worth of property damage in its attempt to capture the vigilante.

The battle with the S-01 highlights one of Spider-Man's new abilities: the web rush. At any point in the game, players can hold down the web-rush button and slow down time. The action slowly crawls back to a standard pace, but while the game speed is reduced, players can see an assortment of Spider-Man silhouettes scattered across the environment. These silhouettes represent places Spider-Man can quickly zip to. After players highlight their desired destination, Spider-Man automatically chains together a series of stylish acrobatics as he bounds over small obstacles, runs along the tops of buses and cars, or swings around poles in order to reach his goal.

"The web rush is our interpretation of Spider-Man's Spider Sense," Brown says. "Spider-Man can perceive reality on an accelerated level — like

in the first movie when the world slows down and you see Spider-Man dodge that punch at school. We wanted to give players the feeling like they were able to react to events faster than the world around them."

The web rush comes in handy while exploring Manhattan, as it allows Spider-Man to quickly zip from one place to another. But the mechanic is also useful in combat, enabling Spider-Man to quickly move towards interactive objects he can throw at groups of enemies. While battling the S-01, I use the web rush to avoid the Slayer's laser fire and homing missiles. The slayer blows up a car and cuts a dark scar along the side of a building as Spider-Man navigates toward a series of sensors lining the machine's outer casing.

After I smash a few of the S-01's sensors, I touch down on the ground and rifle off a stream of impact web pellets that gum up a few vents attached to the Slayer's legs, immobilizing the unit. The S-01 fights back with a final barrage of homing missiles. In a last-ditch effort to take down the epic mech, Spider-Man dives for the giant's mouth and I furiously tap the attack button in order to pry open its jaws. With one well-timed counterattack, Spider-Man jumps out of the way and a stream of homing missiles fly into the S-01's open maw.

Metal debris showers down as Spider-Man lands on the grass on the other end of the park. Spider-Man has successfully disabled Smythe's destructive Slayer, but as the unit's designation implies, it was only the first in a long line of Spider Slayers.

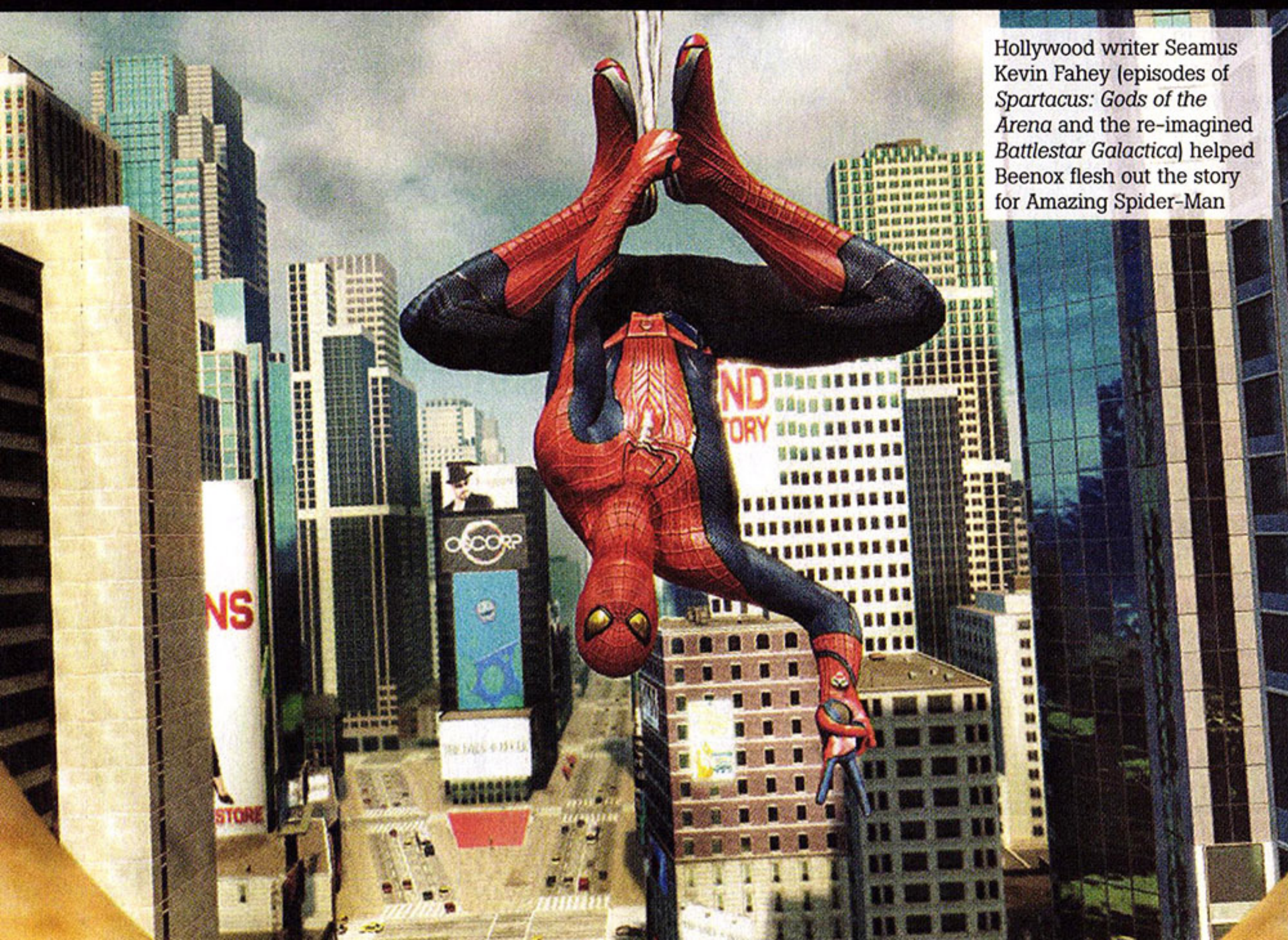


While Manhattan is an open world, many story missions take place in their own linear levels





Audio files spread throughout the levels add some context to the story



Hollywood writer Seamus Kevin Fahey (episodes of *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena* and the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica*) helped Beenox flesh out the story for *Amazing Spider-Man*

## DOES WHATEVER A SPIDER CAN

Spider-Man was one of the first characters to successfully transition from the comic page into the video game arena, but several comic characters have released remarkable video games since. Recent titles, like *Batman: Arkham City*, have made a significant impact on the video game climate. Can Beenox reach similar heights with *The Amazing Spider-Man*?

Activision seems focused on pushing out annual Spider-Man titles, and last fall's *Edge of Time* wasn't nearly as well received as Beenox's first Spider-Man game, *Shattered Dimensions*. That being the case, there is a fair amount of pressure to make this year's Spider-Man release as amazing as its title proclaims.

For now, the studio is focused on hitting all the key elements it believes make for a great experience: It's refining the story, filling a massive world with plenty of content to explore, and dreaming up unique new gameplay mechanics such as the web rush. We'll have to wait and see if Beenox can prevent Spider-Man from falling back into another rut, but right now it looks like the hero is swinging in the right direction. ♦





# LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes

Exclusive first look at the Justice League

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360  
Wii • Vita • 3DS • DS • PC

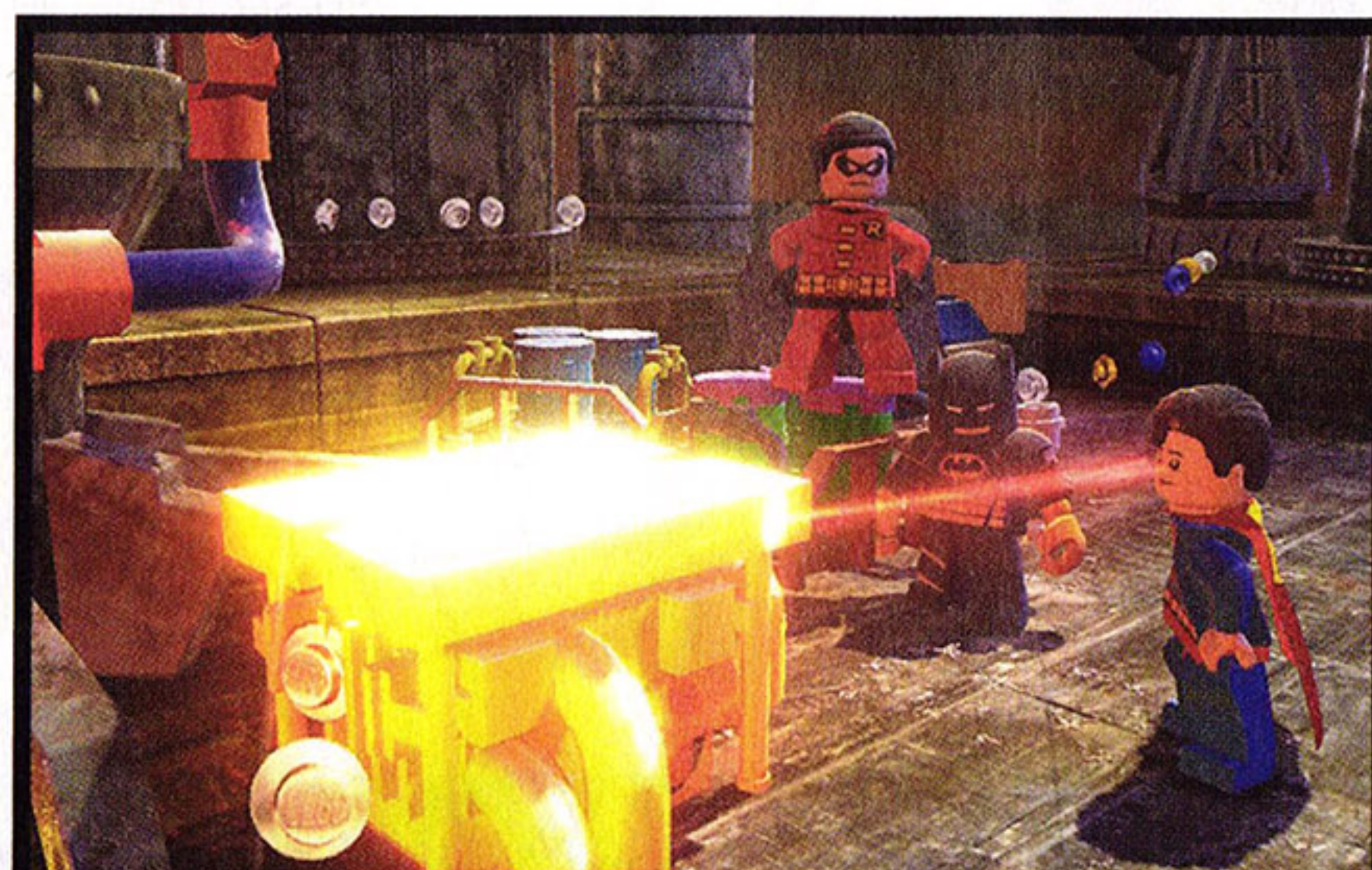
» **Style**  
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Warner Bros. Interactive

» **Developer**  
Traveller's Tales

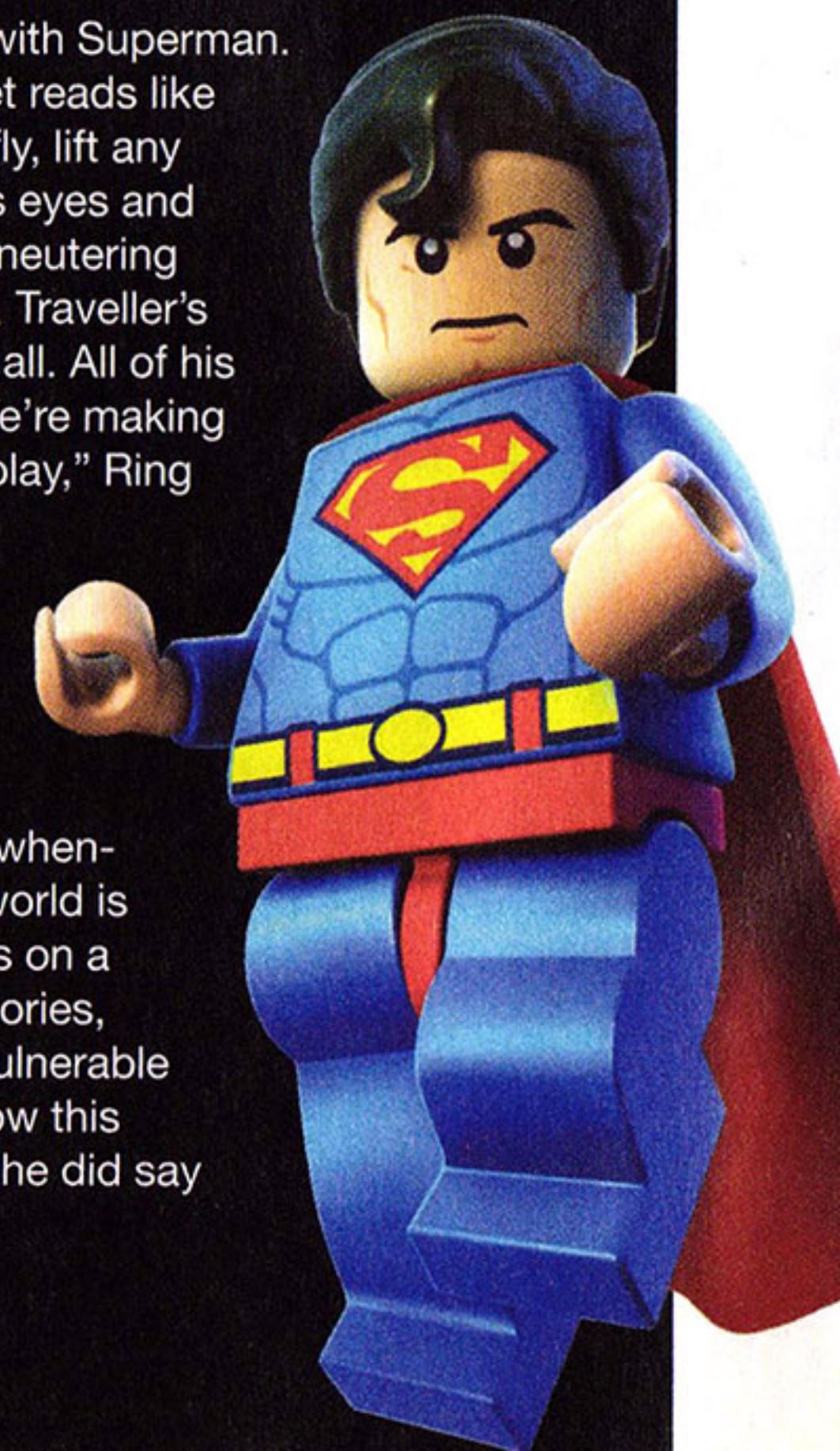
» **Release**  
June 19

Batman is getting top billing, but his batarangs won't be enough to stop the Joker and Lex Luthor from destroying Gotham City in this latest LEGO adventure. He's calling in the big guns, the Justice League, to dismantle this threat brick by brick. Traveller's Tales' take on this legendary superhero team shares the same roster as New 52's current Justice League, including Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, Cyborg, and just in case a fish gets unruly, Aquaman. All of these powerful characters are playable in LEGO Batman 2, and you even get to explore their Watchtower base. I talked to Traveller's Tales' producer Phil Ring about the Justice League's role in this game, and how each of these different heroes fits into the stud-smashing mix. » **Andrew Reiner**



## Superman

Game developers often struggle with Superman. He's indestructible, and his skillset reads like a superpower dictionary. He can fly, lift any object, and shoot lasers out of his eyes and ice out of his mouth. Rather than neutering his ability set like most games do, Traveller's Tales isn't changing Superman at all. All of his abilities and traits are present. "We're making him that hero everyone wants to play," Ring says. "They want to be able to fly. They want to be able to smash things. They want to be able to pick things up and throw them around. When goons come up and punch him, they aren't doing anything." Players can take flight whenever they want. Flight in the overworld is free form, whereas in level, he flies on a lateral plane. Like all Superman stories, Lego Batman 2 shows he has a vulnerable side. Ring didn't want to reveal how this plays out in the story just yet, but he did say that kryptonite is involved.



## Cyborg

Cyborg appears later in the game, and gives players new abilities to play with. He can interact with mechanical objects in the world and also shoot powerful lasers out of his eyes.







### Batman

As all comic fans know, Batman and Superman don't trust each other. "We explore that stuff, but in ways people haven't seen before," Ring says. When he isn't making snide gestures to Superman, the Caped Crusader once again relies on his array of toys to topple foes and progress through levels. The suit-swapping mechanic featured in the first LEGO Batman game returns, but isn't limited to just one function per suit. Each suit benefits Batman in different ways for puzzle solving and combat. "Batman's power suit gives him the ability to have super strength instead of just being able to put a bomb on the floor," Ring says. "He can also shoot rockets out of his back. When he runs around he kind of stomps in a hulking-like way. He can smash down on the ground to send people flying." Batman can also change into a stealth suit, complete with stealth take-downs and X-ray vision. When approaching combat situations, you can begin with the stealth suit to silently take down a few enemies, and then switch to the power suit to handle the rest.



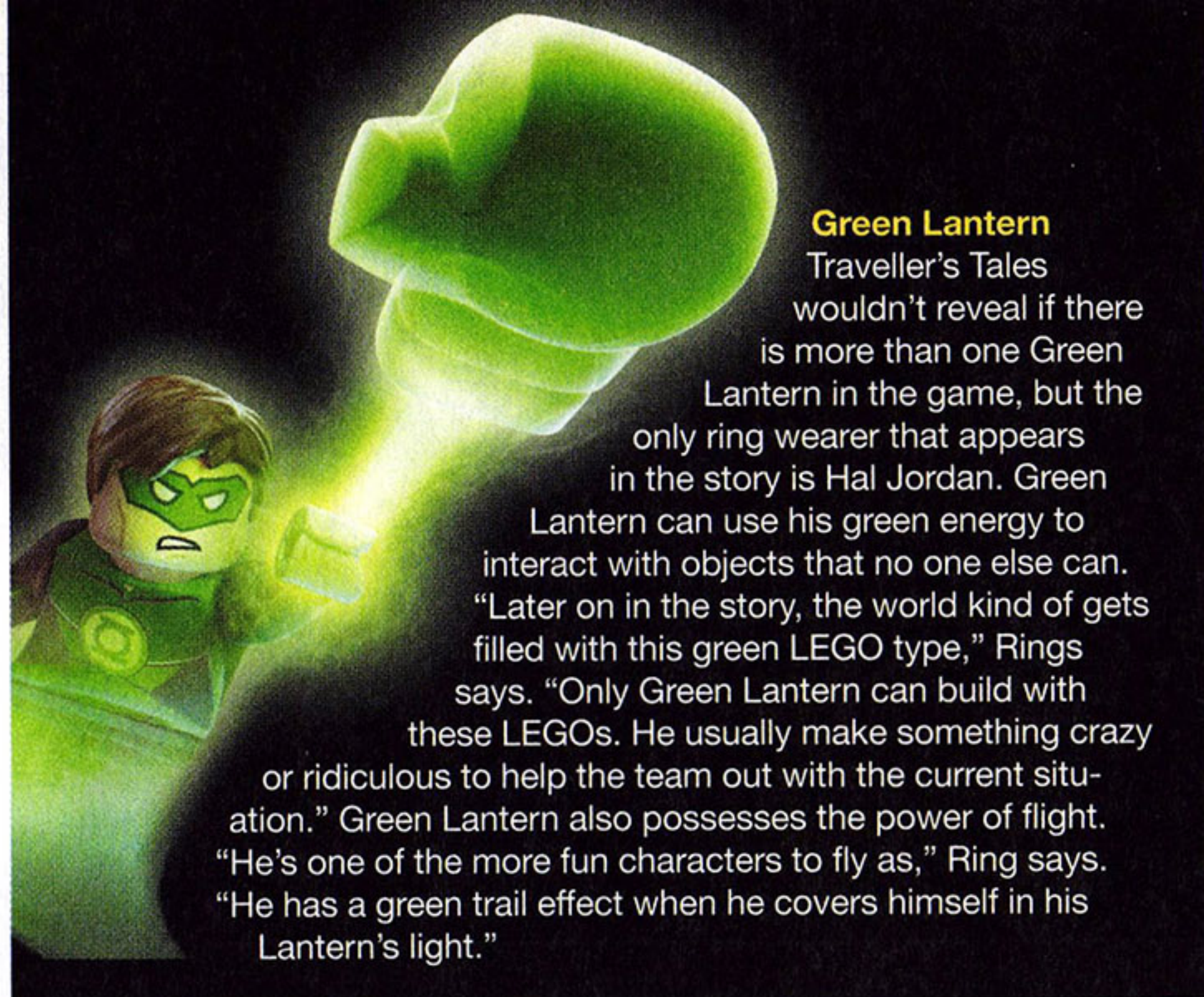
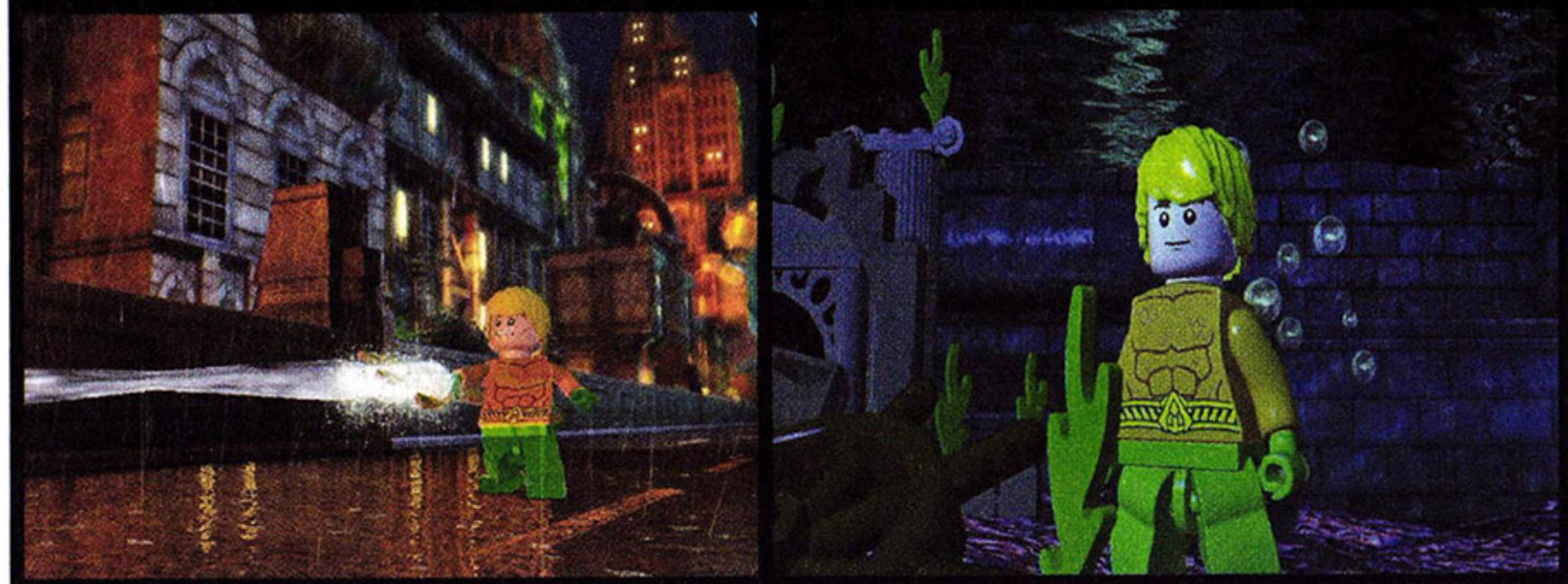
### Flash

The Flash is the fastest character ever incorporated into a LEGO game, so he provides a much different gameplay experience than players have seen before. "He kind of dashes around the city and breaks things apart," Ring says with a laugh. "He can plow through lamp posts and LEGO objects all around him." He's the ultimate stud collector. His speed pays dividends in combat, as well. When he runs into a large group of enemies, he can take all of them down in a matter of seconds with his lightning-quick punches and kicks. "He's great fun in combat," Ring says. "You'll see lots of LEGO limbs and body parts flying in the air at once." Although there's only one Flash in the game, players can have two Flashes at once during cooperative play thanks to the game's new Super Free Play access. Traveller's Tales is still exploring the idea for alternate costumes for characters like The Flash, but has no plans to include two versions of the same hero on the character selection screen.



### Aquaman

"Aquaman can do things in the water that no other character can," Ring says. Outside of this unique ability, he's a fairly standard character. Will we see him talking to fish? We'll have to wait until LEGO Batman 2 hits store shelves on June 19 to find out.

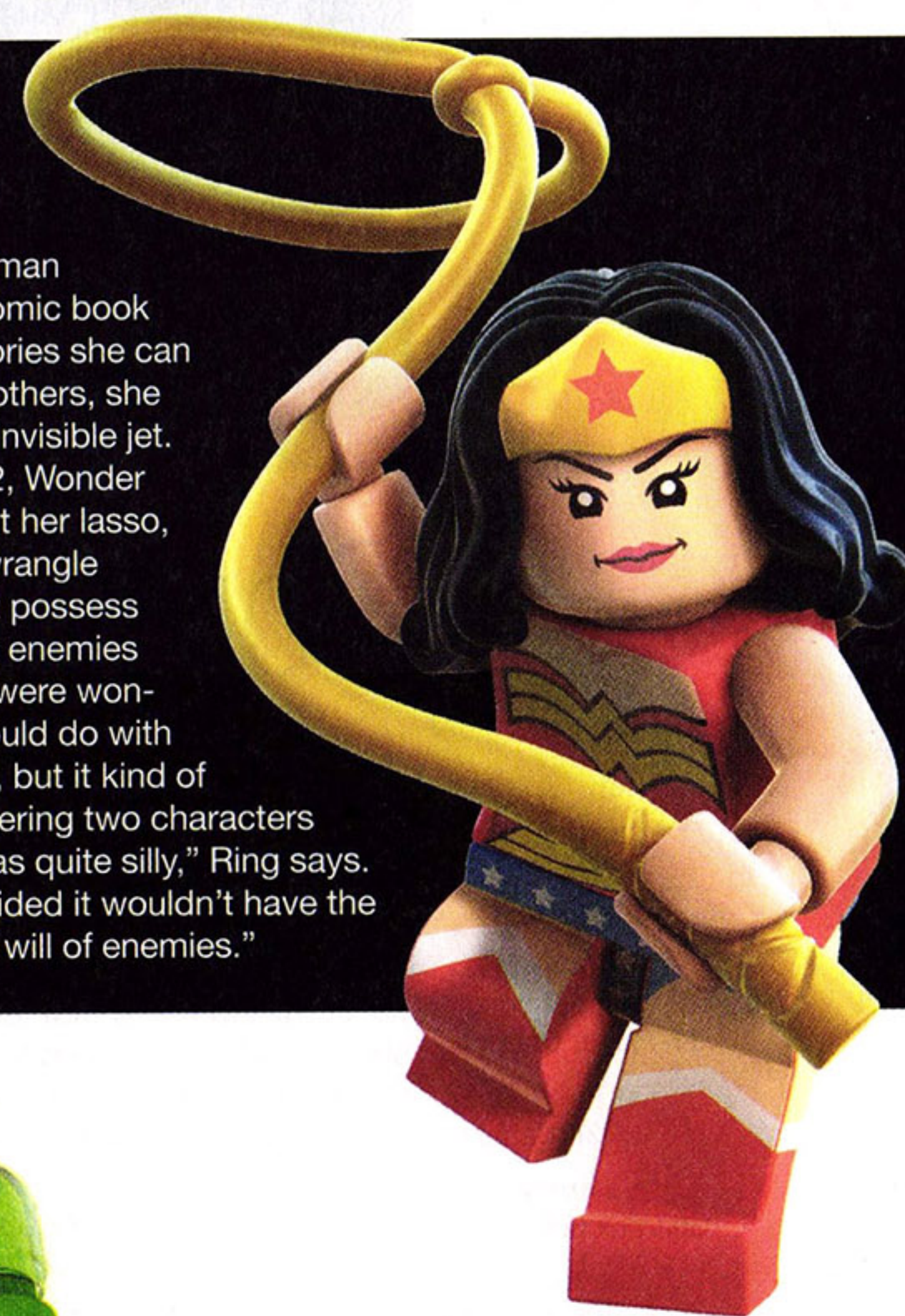


### Green Lantern

Traveller's Tales wouldn't reveal if there is more than one Green Lantern in the game, but the only ring wearer that appears in the story is Hal Jordan. Green Lantern can use his green energy to interact with objects that no one else can. "Later on in the story, the world kind of gets filled with this green LEGO type," Rings says. "Only Green Lantern can build with these LEGOs. He usually make something crazy or ridiculous to help the team out with the current situation." Green Lantern also possesses the power of flight. "He's one of the more fun characters to fly as," Ring says. "He has a green trail effect when he covers himself in his Lantern's light."

### Wonder Woman

DC Comics has introduced a number of different Wonder Woman variations in the comic book series. In some stories she can fly on her own. In others, she needs to take her invisible jet. In LEGO Batman 2, Wonder Woman can fly, but her lasso, which is used to wrangle enemies, does not possess the ability to make enemies tell the truth. "We were wondering what we could do with the Lasso of Truth, but it kind of ended up just tethering two characters together, which was quite silly," Ring says. "After that we decided it wouldn't have the ability to bend the will of enemies."







Mordecai prepares the player for an explosives-heavy mission

# Borderlands 2

Our first hands-on with Gearbox's return to Pandora

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

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

» **Publisher**  
2K Games

» **Developer**  
Gearbox Software

» **Release**  
September 18

When I visited Gearbox for our Borderlands 2 cover story, the developer clearly had ambitious plans for the game. The surprise success of the original spawned millions of fans, and it was no shocker when the developer announced the sequel. Our time at the studio was hands-off, but Gearbox brought a playable build to PAX East. There, I joined a co-op session with creative director Paul Hellquist.

The build featured two classes: the siren Maya and the dual-wielding Gunzerker, Salvadore, who graced our cover. Since I spent most of my time guns blazing in the original, I opted for the latter. It didn't take long for me to realize how well these two worked in tandem.

Maya can trap enemies using her Phaselock ability, which suspends them helplessly above the ground. While they float, I position Salvadore underneath them and let loose with a barrage of shotgun blasts. Used in combination with his dual-wielding Gunzerker ability, we take down daunting foes with ease.

In the same lootfest fashion as the first game, battles typically end with a shower of ammo, health, cash, and new weapons. After picking up a promising new shotgun, I enter the significantly improved menu system. The images float in front of your character, giving the illusion that he or she is looking at it within the game world. Many players of the first game complained about the unwieldy map system. In Borderlands 2, you can easily pan and zoom.

For the demo, Gearbox gives me 15 skill points to spend however I want. Each character has three distinct paths they can take through their skill tree, and deciding which route to take isn't easy. Maya's three paths are influenced by your play style. Offensive-minded players should take the Cataclysm route, those that prefer to heal and support their team should choose Harmony, and those who hope to increase their movement and reload speed should opt for the Motion path.

It's impossible to reach the end of all paths in one playthrough, so players must commit to one if they hope to attain the most significant

upgrades (although it's possible to respect). These final upgrades are meant to be game changers, which rings true for both classes in the demo. Salvadore's "Come At Me Bro" skill lets him taunt enemies with double middle fingers while dual wielding weapons. This enrages his enemies, but it shouldn't matter much considering it gives you a full health recharge and near-invincibility for the duration of the ability. Maya has access to one late-game upgrade that changes her basic ability entirely. Phaselock turns into Thoughtlock, which hypnotizes enemies into fighting for you rather than simply trapping them.

I didn't see the assassin Zer0 or the soldier Axton in action, but Hellquist filled me in on their abilities. Zer0 can use his Deception ability to create a holographic version of himself, which draws fire from enemies. While the fake assassin commands the enemies' attention, the real deal activates optic camouflage, allowing him to line up a perfect sniper shot or come in close for a katana kill. The soldier Axton has a similar turret ability as Roland in the first game, but with far more customization options. Upgrades allow him to toss his turret across long distances, add more guns to the weapon, or even deploy two turrets at once.

After selecting our initial upgrades, Hellquist and I head to the Wildlife Exploitation Reserve area in search of the first game's hunter, Mordecai. Salvadore and Maya are looking for an upgrade for Claptrap, and it can only be researched once we obtain a chip that's attached to the collar of Mordecai's hawk, Bloodwing. As we battle toward our objective, we face a large assortment of enemy types and functions. Robotic loader enemies go

## Adding to the Ultimate Lootfest

Borderlands is known for its vast arsenal of weaponry and upgrades, but Gearbox isn't content to simply offer more of the same. At their PAX East panel, the developer announced that character customization is coming to the series. They mentioned that Borderlands is all about doing awesome things and looking cool while doing it, so they're focusing more on unique skins than offering a hundred different ways to alter your eyebrows. Players receive new costume pieces and even collectible heads as they complete missions and challenges. In addition, any players who have save data from the original Borderlands on their system will be gifted an exclusive head and skin.





Salvatore wreaks havoc on Crimson Lance soldiers



Concept art for "Deathtrap"



### The Mechromancer

Like the first game, *Borderlands 2* features four playable classes. However, Gearbox announced that it plans to release a fifth class at an unspecified post-release date. The female Mechromancer character appears to be a human/robot hybrid, and controls a large robot known as D374-TP (or "Deathtrap"). Those who pre-order the game will receive the Mechromancer for free, and those who pick it up later will have to pay a price that's "comparable to most DLC," according to Gearbox CEO Randy Pitchford.

into what Hellquist calls "Terminator mode" once their legs are shot off, causing them to crawl menacingly at the player. When they become injured, flying Surveyors swoop in to repair them, healing damage and re-attaching severed limbs. Constructors serve as a spawn point of sorts, quickly creating new robotic enemies until they're destroyed. Burrowing creatures called Threshers, which remind me of the movie *Tremors*, send your character flying if they emerge under your feet.

Another area, Caustic Caverns, features numerous organic pods on the ground. Though harmless on their own, these larva-like creatures can crawl inside the pods and

emerge as Adult or Badass versions of themselves. Each of these enemies requires different strategies to defeat, from strafing around robots to backpedalling to avoid charging skags. Prioritizing enemies is an important tactic as well, considering you can cripple or limit enemy forces by taking out Surveyors and Constructors first.

Constant firefights keep us engaged as we battle from point to point in search of Bloodwing. Once we finally reach the bird's supposed resting area, we discover that antagonist Handsome Jack has taken the bird elsewhere. We head off toward a new objective, only to be stopped by a level 21 Badass

Constructor. I fire off a few rounds at the giant robot before the *Borderlands 2* logo appears to signal the end of the demo.

My time with *Borderlands 2* left me wanting it more than ever, which is impressive considering it was already one of my most anticipated games of 2012. The new characters feature some fantastic abilities, enemy variety is significantly improved, user interface issues are remedied, and the game somehow includes even more weapons than the massive arsenal of the original game. Shooter fans should plan on clearing their schedules and inviting some friends for the September release. » **Dan Ryckert**

Zer0 can move in close for katana attacks







# Devil May Cry

Ninja Theory takes the demon hunter in a new direction

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360

» **Style**  
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Capcom

» **Developer**  
Ninja Theory

» **Release**  
2012

To longtime fans of Devil May Cry, Ninja Theory's upcoming reboot appears different in many ways. Despite hitting reset on the story and redesigning the protagonist, the team is passionate about retaining the key elements that comprise a true DMC experience. From the fluid combat to the roguish hero, we talked to game director Tameem Antoniades about carrying on the Devil May Cry legacy. » **Joe Juba**

**If Capcom wanted another Devil May Cry like the previous entries, it obviously wouldn't have reached out to Ninja Theory. How do you approach picking up the reins on an established series?**

I was at a GDC session years ago where a panel of Japanese developers were asked, "How do we make games that appeal to the Japanese?" The answer was to not try and copy the Japanese style if you are not Japanese. That stuck. Be true to your roots. We are not Japanese. We grew up with western movies, comics, TV, and influences. We tried to imagine what Devil May Cry might look like if it came out now as a western game. But in another sense DMC combat has been head and shoulders above any western effort at melee combat. Perhaps working together we can provide the best of both worlds? That was the beginning of [Ninja Theory's] DMC.

**Part of the appeal of DMC is the depth of combat – which can also scare away newcomers. How do you balance the expectations of the hardcore and the needs of the novices?**

Devil May Cry was a game that allowed players to be cool quite effortlessly. But beneath the cool was a layer of depth and freedom that has endured to this day. We want any action gamer to get into this game. Then we want to encourage and promote them to become hardcore players. If you're new to Devil May Cry, or even just new to combat games in general, you'll have no problem picking up the combat and having a lot of fun with it. If you're a veteran Devil May Cry player who wants to chain moves together by switching between weapons and forms on the fly and wants to cancel out of moves into others to nail a SSS rank, then you can. This won't be a dumbed-down combat game.

**In terms of structure, does the game move automatically from mission to mission, or can players go back and replay completed areas?**

Once you've completed a mission you can go back and replay it as many times as you like. If you want to get a SSS rank for a mission you'll be replaying it. You can expect additional modes of play as per previous games in the series.

Yep, Dante looks different now. The redesign was the source of fan concern early on, but the gameplay speaks for itself

**Are players still able to spend currency to purchase new moves and upgrade existing ones?**

Yes. Dante starts the game with limited combat options that you can build up over time by purchasing upgrades. You start with Rebellion, Ebony, and Ivory. Soon after you gain Osiris and the Arbiter, two new weapons each with their combo sets and upgrades. Further weapons and guns will follow. The best part is that you can switch between them all on the fly mid-combo.

**How is your approach to combat during boss fights different from regular encounters?**

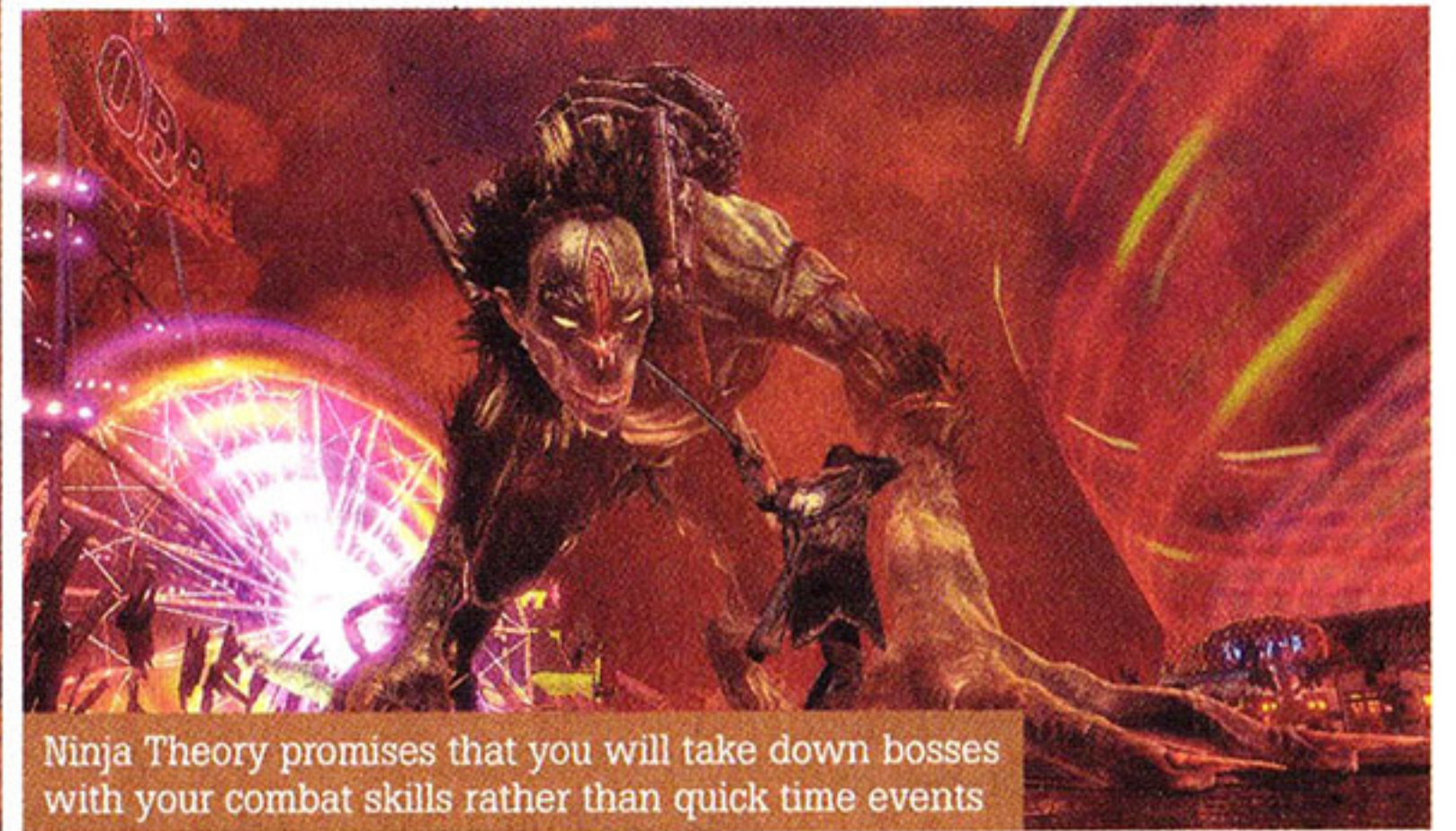
Combat doesn't change whether you're in an encounter with several demons or one boss demon. You have to think strategically about every battle and build an understanding of your opponent's weaknesses and how your weapons and abilities can exploit them. In a sense, the boss battles in DMC are the ultimate test of the skills you've learned and the abilities you've gained on your path to that particular encounter. One thing we can promise: no quick-time events.

**Are there threads from previous games that you're picking up and integrating into the new story? Dante's brother Vergil, for instance?**





Dante has his trusty sword Rebellion, though other weapons join the arsenal as you progress



Ninja Theory promises that you will take down bosses with your combat skills rather than quick time events



Players can still purchase and upgrade abilities to enhance Dante's demon-killing skills



[Our] DMC narrative stands up entirely on its own, so if you're new to Devil May Cry you'll play the game without feeling like you're missing story from the other games in the series. If you're an existing Devil May Cry fan you'll find familiarity in some of the characters and themes. Exactly which themes and which characters is something that we're keeping under wraps for now.

**Do you think fans have moved past focusing on Dante's redesign and begun paying more attention to other aspects of the game?**

I think it is true to say that as we've released more information on the game, shown more of it in action, and let people play it, we've convinced people that we're not just some force of evil sent to destroy the Devil May Cry series. If we can attract new players to the series, then the series as a whole will become stronger. To those who are against the direction we are taking this game, please be patient and try the game for yourselves before passing final judgment.



Swordplay and gunplay still take center stage, no matter how different Dante looks



# BioShock Infinite

Irrational Games rolls out the heavy hitters

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

» **Style**  
1-Player Shooter

» **Publisher**  
2K Games

» **Developer**  
Irrational Games

» **Release**  
October 16

If you've been looking forward to BioShock Infinite since its announcement (like most of the gaming world), then you already know about its stars. Players control Booker DeWitt, a former Pinkerton agent who tries to rescue a young woman named Elizabeth from a metropolis floating in the sky. The major foe that stands in his way is the massive beast called Songbird, but the city of Columbia is full of other threats. Apart from the rank-and-file thugs, Irrational Games has revealed four enemies that it dubs "heavy hitters," and each one can change the shape of an encounter. » **Joe Juba**



## Motorized Patriot

Irrational Games art director Nate Wells describes this foe as a "clockwork Terminator." The motorized patriot is a ruthless automaton crafted in the likeness of George Washington, but this founding father is more interested in death than liberty. With a massive chain gun and no sense of self-preservation, the motorized patriot wades into battle and doesn't stop until it lies in pieces. On the plus side, players can salvage the chain gun from the rubble to use as a temporary weapon.



## Handyman

Human heads and beating hearts are the only parts of these golems that indicate they were once men. "There's a certain sadness to who they are," says creative director Ken Levine, "but I'd rather gamers find that out in the course of the game." The surprisingly agile Handyman has mechanical bodies and large porcelain hands. They might charge Booker shoulder-first, or use their massive hands to pick up objects – including enemy soldiers – to hurl at Booker. This makes Handyman a danger to friend and foe alike.

## Boys of Silence

These frightening creatures can't see, but they can still pinpoint Booker's location using enhanced hearing. They are reminiscent of BioShock's Big Daddies, since they patrol certain areas and players need to choose whether to evade or engage them. The Boys of Silence call in reinforcements if they detect Booker, so a tough fight is bound to ensue if you don't tread carefully around them.



## Siren

Tapping into the era's fascination with the spiritual world, Sirens are the ghostly remains of dead singers. They are connected to both the physical and supernatural realm, and can summon groups of deceased warriors with a blood-curdling wail. These additional enemies vanish once the Siren is defeated, but their persistent harrying makes it difficult for Booker to focus his efforts on the real threat.





# Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

A lackluster showing for the new Guerrilla mode



The newest Ghost Recon title is quickly approaching, and Ubisoft gave PAX East attendees an early look at Future Soldier's Horde-like Guerrilla mode. With 50 waves of enemies to blast through, the publisher claims that a full playthrough of the mode takes over five hours. I engaged with four waves on the showfloor, and the mode seems to offer little that we haven't seen before.

The demo starts us on wave five, with the four playable Ghosts already outfitted with a pre-selected arsenal of weapons and support items. At the outset of each round, airdrops of weapons and items are indicated with red and blue smoke, respectively. Considering there aren't any set classes in this mode, players are free to choose their play style on the fly. Each of the four Ghosts has about 30 seconds to grab weapons, set up claymores, and get in position. Once the timer hits zero, a new wave of enemies enters the battle.

Teamwork is necessary to make it through these waves, and tagging enemies is critical to success. Whenever I point out an enemy location, it only takes a matter of seconds before someone on my team takes them down. Considering how quickly you can be taken down yourself, it's also to everyone's benefit if you call out for medical attention as soon as you're injured.

The four waves I play task us with protecting a glowing blue HQ, which we defend from behind cover. On the rare occasion a member of my team does a roadie run through open space, it doesn't take long before he is bleeding out on the ground. Players must defend this static primary objective for 10 waves at a time before the location moves.

Wave streaks become available as you progress, and are rewarded upon surviving several consecutive waves. These bonuses certainly aren't a new concept; the Ubisoft representative hesitantly admitted that they operate similarly to Call of Duty's killstreak rewards. I only see two during my game round – a UAV and personal optic camouflage. The game has three slots for additional streak rewards, but they weren't on display at this event.

While nothing about Ghost Recon: Future Soldier's Guerrilla mode is broken, it feels uninspired. I only played four waves out of fifty, but nothing felt particularly original or entertaining. It's just one mode in a bigger game, but it leaves me hoping for more innovation in the overall package. » **Dan Ryckert**

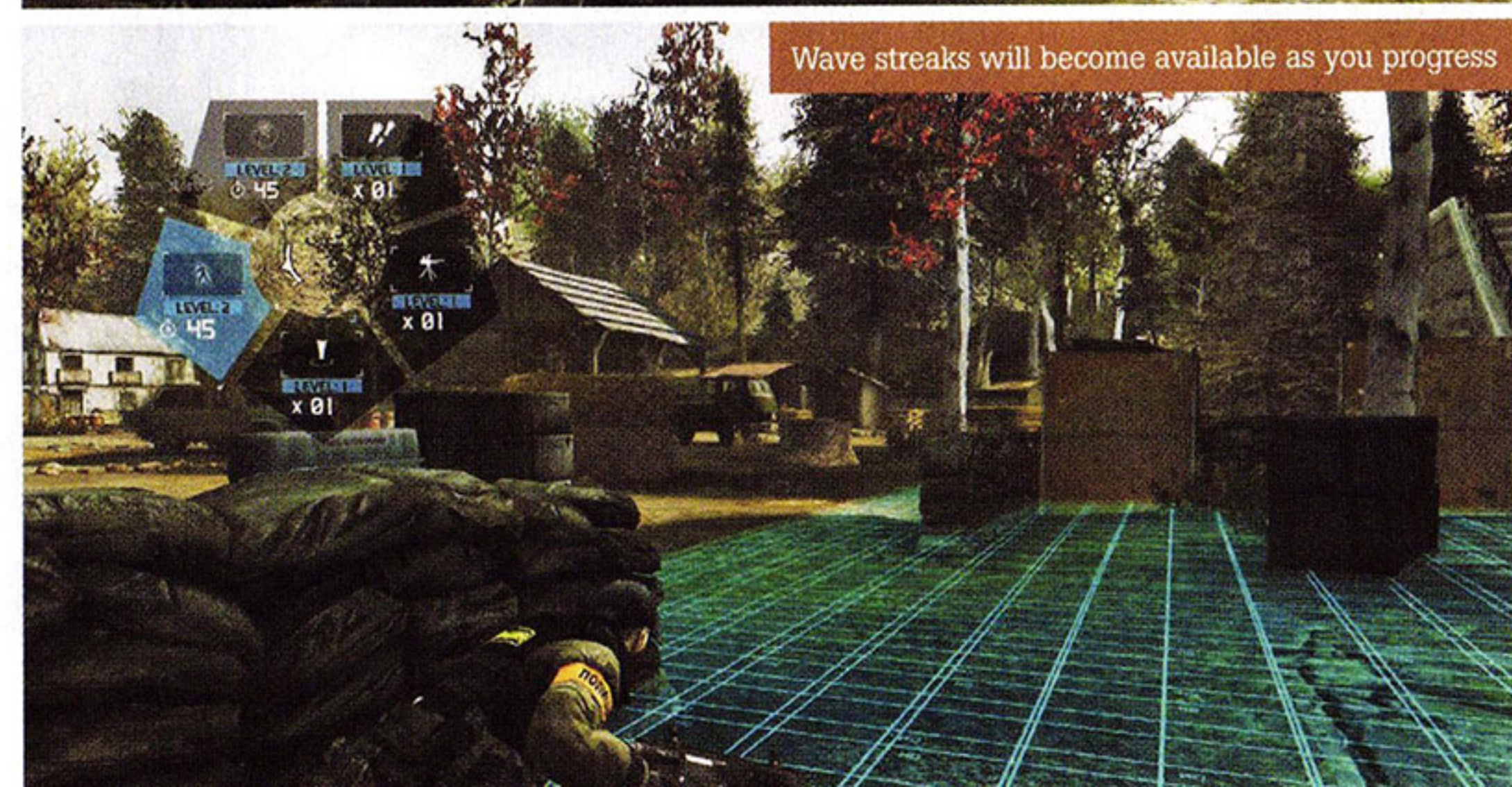
» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360 • PC

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

» **Publisher**  
Ubisoft

» **Developer**  
Ubisoft Paris

» **Release**  
May 22





# Lost Planet 3

Capcom's shooter heads back into the cold



Capcom says the game will have multiplayer

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

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

» **Publisher**  
Capcom

» **Developer**  
Spark Unlimited

» **Release**  
2013

Unlike your parents after that fender bender with the SUV, Capcom continues to willingly hand the keys to first-party franchises over to western developers despite their spotty driving records. Entries in the Resident Evil and Bionic Commando series, as well as the promising Devil May Cry reboot, have all been handled outside Capcom. Now Call of Duty: Finest Hour and Legendary developer Spark Unlimited is taking a crack at a prequel to the Lost Planet series. The Unreal Engine 3-powered game features huge mechs, third-person shootouts with angry aliens, and extreme conditions that make Hoth look like a snow flurry.

The game stars Jim, a rugged, blue-collar operator of a gigantic construction rig on a mission to discover thermal energy deposits on the icy planet E.D.N. III. Jim endures howling blizzards and insectoid Akrid while he explores the uncharted planet and collects a big payoff that will hopefully get him back home to his family on Earth. Though it's called Lost Planet 3, the game

is set before the slow global-warming event of Lost Planet: Extreme Condition. During this era, E.D.N. III is at its most inhospitable. In the debut trailer Jim fights one of the biggest Akrids we've seen and hunkers down as a massive snow storm rolls in on the horizon.

Facing off against giant alien creatures and terrifying blizzards would decimate Jim while on foot, but thankfully he has the biggest mech the series has ever seen at his disposal. Lost Planet 3 takes place before the more compact vital suits from previous games have been manufactured. Jim pilots the titanic rig to shrug off storms and also grab, tear, or shred enemies in first-person. The rig acts as Jim's shelter, heavy artillery, and base of operations while on his mission.

Close-quarters areas require Jim to disembark from the rig for some of the series' trademark third-person action. In Capcom's stunning trailer, the hero flees a group of smaller, glowing orange Akrids on foot through the tight corridors of an unknown facility. While outside his rig Jim

can also accept quests from NPCs. Players can sidestep the linear main quest at any time to complete these extra adventures. Trudging around large, snowy outdoor environments in a huge mech and exploring buildings on foot presents the potential for some exciting and varied gameplay.

While we enjoyed Lost Planet 2, the series has received mixed reviews since its inception in 2006. The series' encounters with huge aliens, unique winter planet setting, and mech/third person-based combat still have a lot of potential. Developer Spark Unlimited may have an inconsistent track record, but a new team of "Spark veterans, along with a large portion of industry heavyweights" are working on the new entry, according to producer and project lead Andrew Szymanski. We'll have to see how the game looks in action, but the new details and impressive cinematic trailer have us hopeful the Lost Planet series can break the icy walls of mediocrity. » **Tim Turi**



We're willing to bet Jim will be shooting Akrids in the glowy orange bits



Expect a good mix of indoor third-person sequences and outdoor mech action







# Far Cry 3

## Putting a focus on teamwork

One of the primary complaints many gamers have with competitive first-person shooters is the self-serving mentality of teammates. Many titles reinforce this behavior by rewarding players for kills more than supporting your team, but other games like *Team Fortress 2* and *Battlefield* push things in the other direction. With *Far Cry 3*, Ubisoft Montreal is putting a major focus on team play, and my hands-on time at PAX East left me thinking the team's methods may work.

I played a few rounds of Domination, and the similarities to *Call of Duty's* multiplayer don't end with the name of the mode. Three control points (an ammo dump, fish market, and scrap yard) are spread throughout the map, and teams are tasked with defending or capturing these locations. A bar at the top of the screen tracks the flow of battle, and the round ends if either color (blue or red, depending on whether you're playing as pirates or rebels) reaches the end of the meter.

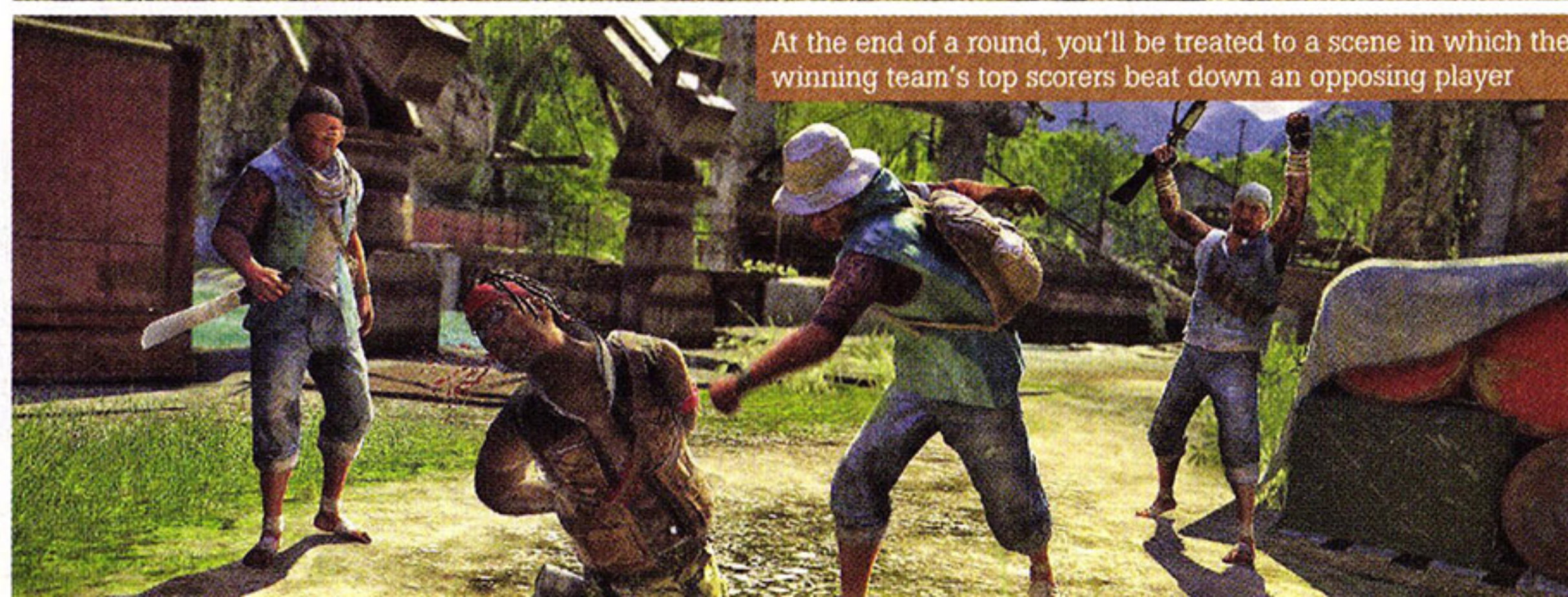
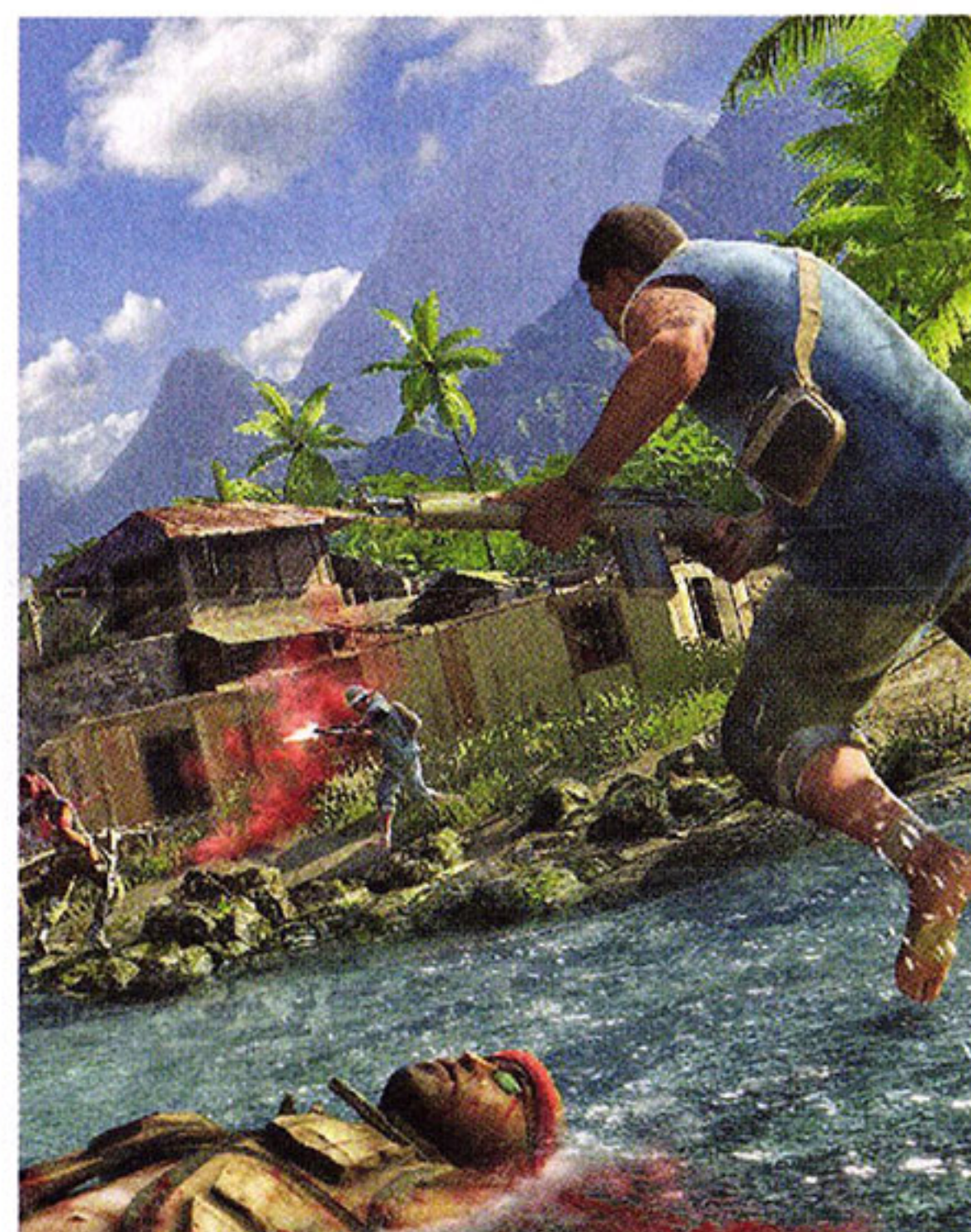
Where *Far Cry 3* sets itself apart from the *Call of Duty* formula is its clear focus on being a team player. In addition to the standard XP rewards for kills and captures, you also receive Team Support (TS) points any time you're doing something that helps the team effort as a whole, including revives, command point captures, and the new Battle Cry ability. With a press of both thumbsticks, your character lets out a yell that gives a boost to any nearby teammates. A number in the corner of your HUD lets you know how many allies are affected, so you'll want to be in a cluster for maximum effect. Depending on which Battle Cry you select, the bonus could range from speed and damage boosts to maximum health increases. Done correctly, the Battle Cry can be a huge help for a group of allies gathered around a control point.

As you collect TS points, a meter fills up that rewards you with a variety of offensive and defensive bonuses. The PAX East demo was limited to three static rewards, but players can customize them in a fashion similar to *Call of Duty's* killstreak system. The first reward is a radar, and the meter depletes if you use it. If you'd rather save your TS points for a bigger bonus, you're rewarded with the awesome psych gas item. This cloud of gas affects every enemy in its radius, and greatly impacts their experience.

When affected, players have to put up with cloudy vision and ominous whispers as they try their best to survive. Even worse, the gas makes every character (friend or foe) appear as a demonic figure with glowing eyes. Team killing is enabled when the gas is in effect, so you're at great risk of committing friendly fire while under its spell. The final reward in the build is a huge barrel bomb, which drops onto a designated target from a helicopter.

While much of *Far Cry 3's* multiplayer is clearly inspired by *Call of Duty*, the TS system could make a significant impact on the gameplay experience. Supporting your allies benefits everyone in a tangible way, and it may succeed in making teams work together as a cohesive unit. We'll see its effect on player behavior when the game launches this September. » **Dan Ryckert**

Curious about *Far Cry 3's* single-player mode? Check out [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag) to see footage of the campaign in action.



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

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

» **Publisher**  
Ubisoft

» **Developer**  
Ubisoft Montreal

» **Release**  
September 4

### A Unique History

Most series feature several layers of consistency between installments, whether they be narrative, characters, a common enemy, or a running storyline. *Far Cry* has bucked that trend by presenting each entry as a stand-alone experience with numerous differences (including their development teams). The original title took place on an island and tasked the player with taking on genetic mutations, while its sequel put players in control of a new character in Africa as he battles drug runners and warlords. *Far Cry 3* continues this trend, taking place on a new island and introducing protagonist Jason Brody.



# LittleBigPlanet Karting

Sackboy gets a license to drive

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3

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

» **Publisher**  
Sony Computer  
Entertainment

» **Developer**  
United Front Games/  
Media Molecule

» **Release**  
2012

LittleBigPlanet began in the platforming genre, but after the extensive creation tools included in LittleBigPlanet 2, putting a single label on the series is difficult. The latest installment continues to broaden Sackboy's horizons, this time moving away from 2D platforming completely and embracing the chaotic 3D world of kart racing.

LittleBigPlanet Karting is being collaboratively developed by United Front Games (the studio behind ModNation Racers) and Media Molecule. "From our initial kickoff meetings onwards, Media Molecule has always had great feedback for us," says United Front senior producer James Grieve. "In particular, our art director Greg [Juby] and Media Molecule's art director Kareem [Ettourney] both soon established a great rapport, and that relationship was critical in reinterpreting LBP's look and feel in a 3D world."

Even though the move to 3D requires different technology from previous entries in the series, don't expect drastic differences in the look of the game. "LittleBigPlanet Karting is set in Craftworld, and will carry through all of the signature visual style, charms, and humor of the LBP series," Grieve says. This includes karts made out of cardboard, toys, and flowerpots, along with plenty of bizarre animatronic props lining the tracks. You also customize your Sackboy racers and vehicles in the classic LBP pod before testing them on the track.

Any fan of kart racing should be comfortable with the gameplay, since it contains a mixture of wacky tracks and challenges that are accessible to all sorts of gamers. Some activities veer away from basic racing; you may have to throw eggs at a target or outrun a snake chasing you through an arena.

Considering that creation is a key element of LittleBigPlanet, users also have tools to make crazy minigames of their own.

United Front is leveraging its experience with ModNation Racers to deliver the degree of creation and customization fans expect from the LittleBigPlanet name. "We have brought the streamlined construction tools for creating track geometry and populating a 3D world [from ModNation]," Grieve says. "From LBP, we've introduced the power of their gameplay creation tools into our 3D world. Creators will have access to tons of familiar gadgets from LBP and also a unique set of new gadgets specifically designed for creating and tuning amazing karting experiences."

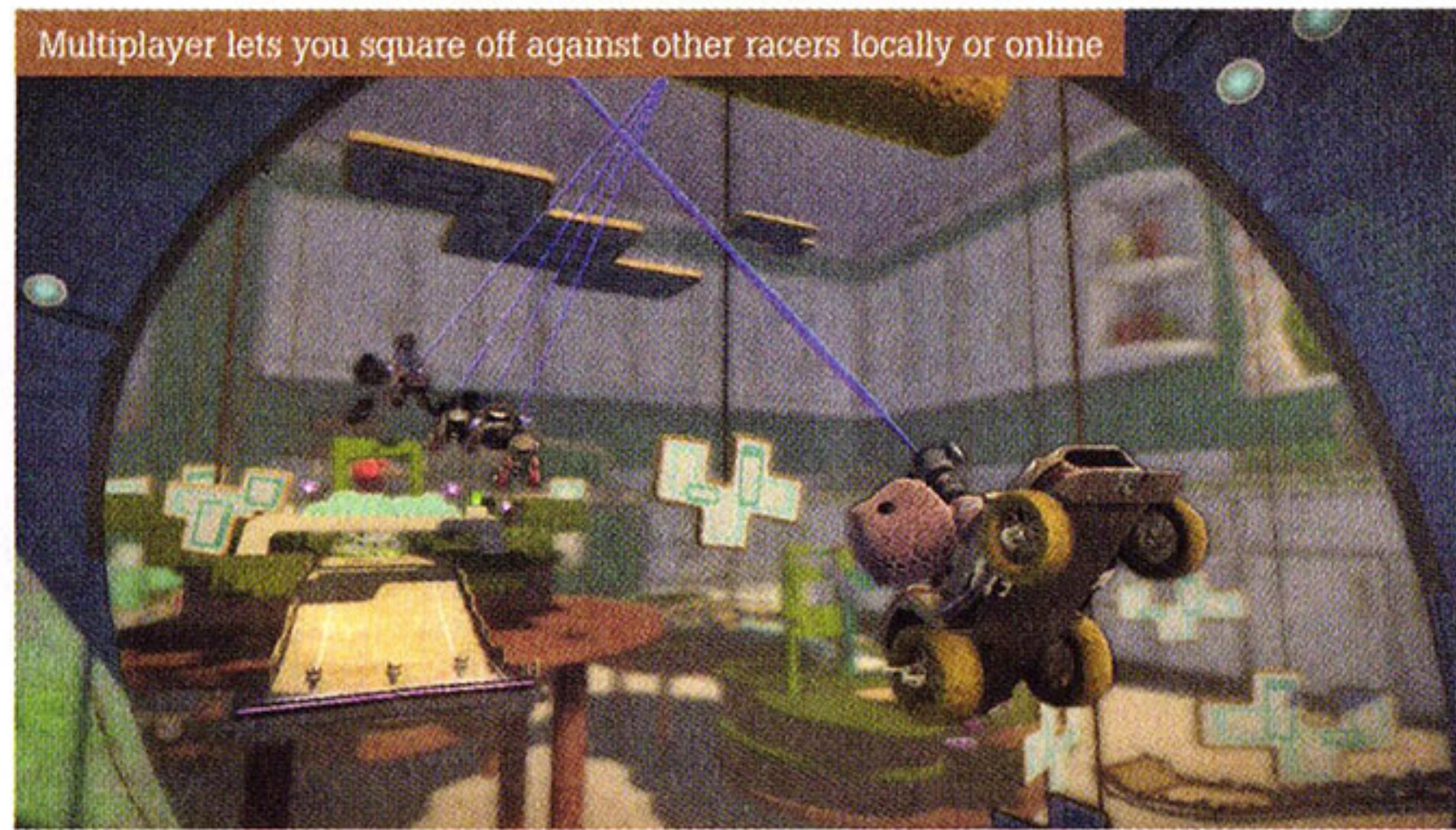
After you've made your custom track, you can race against your friends online. Local multiplayer supports up to four players in split-screen, while online play supports eight. You can even mix the two, using local split-screen in a larger online match.

LittleBigPlanet titles typically garner substantial community support, and the ability to create tracks and race online is a natural way to keep fans involved. Sackboy's transition to four wheels seems like a natural move for the series, hitting the core "Play, Create, Share" tenets in new and amusing ways. » **Joe Juba**

United Front Games is "looking into what's possible" when it comes to connectivity with previous LBP titles, like carrying over costumes



Multiplayer lets you square off against other racers locally or online



The game may now offer three-dimensional freedom, but it still looks exactly like a LittleBigPlanet title should



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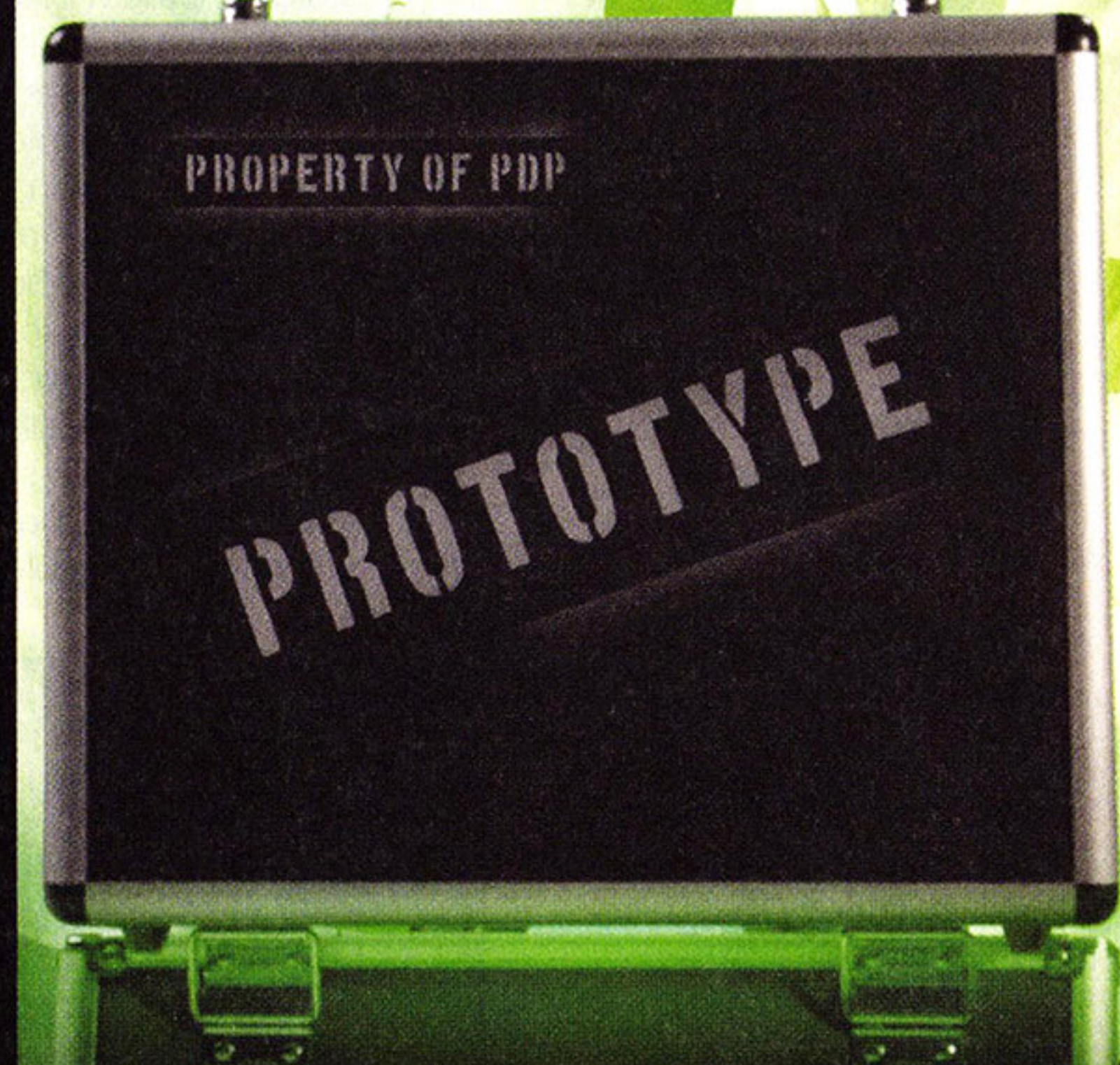
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# Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

Sanzaru sneaks through history

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3

» **Style**  
1-Player Platforming

» **Publisher**  
Sony Computer  
Entertainment

» **Developer**  
Sanzaru Games

» **Release**  
Fall

The Thievius Raccoonus is a cherished possession among the Cooper family of master thieves. The book chronicles the history and techniques of every branch of Sly's family tree. But at the beginning of *Thieves in Time*, this cherished tome begins to change – words and pictures within the book vanish from its pages. After reuniting the Sly gang and informing them about this disastrous turn, Bentley uses his newly developed time machine to send the entire Sly crew careening back into the past. If Sly Cooper is unable to root out the devil behind this deed, his family's secrets may be lost forever.

When Sly and the gang run into the legendary figures featured in their history books, they discover that a calamity has befallen their idol and that Sly's ancestor no longer retains his impressive thieving reputation.

"When they arrive in medieval England, Sir Galleth is not the mighty knight they have read about," says Sanzaru Games president Glen Egan. "Rather, he is cloistered in a bizarre circus as a jester, abused for the entertainment of the local militia." Only Sly and the gang can help restore Sir Galleth's legendary status as they work to uncover the entity behind the destruction of the Thievius Raccoonus.

Each ancestor is playable and features a unique set of abilities. Sanzaru Games has previously talked about Sly's ancestor from feudal Japan, Rioichi Cooper, whose Leaping Dragon technique allows him to scale great distances in a single bound. Unfortunately, Egan wasn't ready to talk about Sir Galleth's special talents other than to say, "These skills expand beyond what has been listed in the Thievius Raccoonus in previous games." Hopefully, we'll learn more

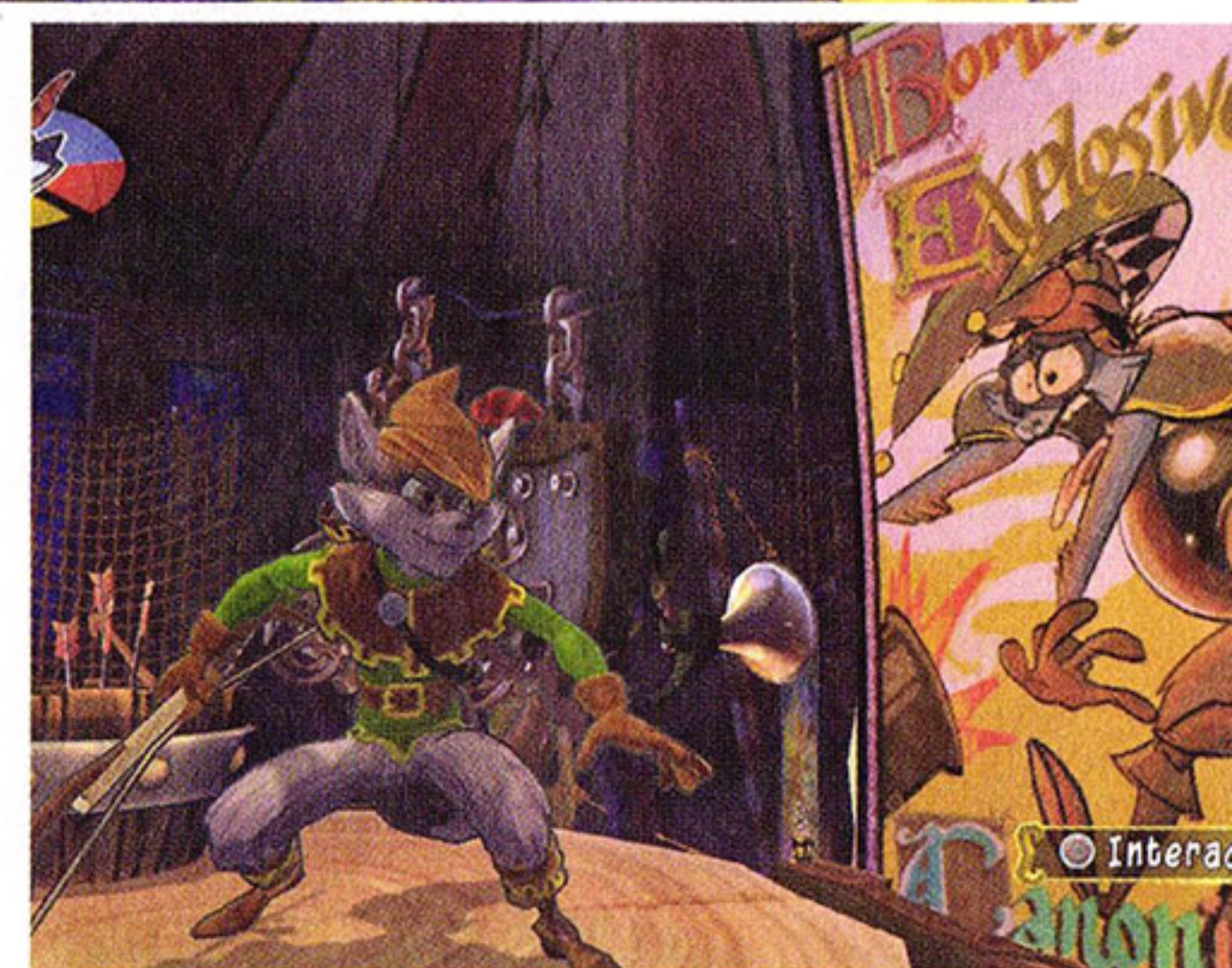
about Sir Galleth and his story soon.

During each episode, Sly gains a special costume that imbues him with new abilities. Sanzaru previously revealed the samurai armor, which deflects fire attacks, and the thief costume, which gives Sly the ability to slow down time. In medieval England, Sly discovers the archery costume. Buckets of arrows are scattered around the environment, but these are only useful after he dons the archery costume. This Robin Hood-like outfit allows Sly to fire a rope line arrow that creates tightrope walkways to otherwise inaccessible areas. With an ample supply of arrow buckets, Sly could essentially create his own rope pathways anywhere.

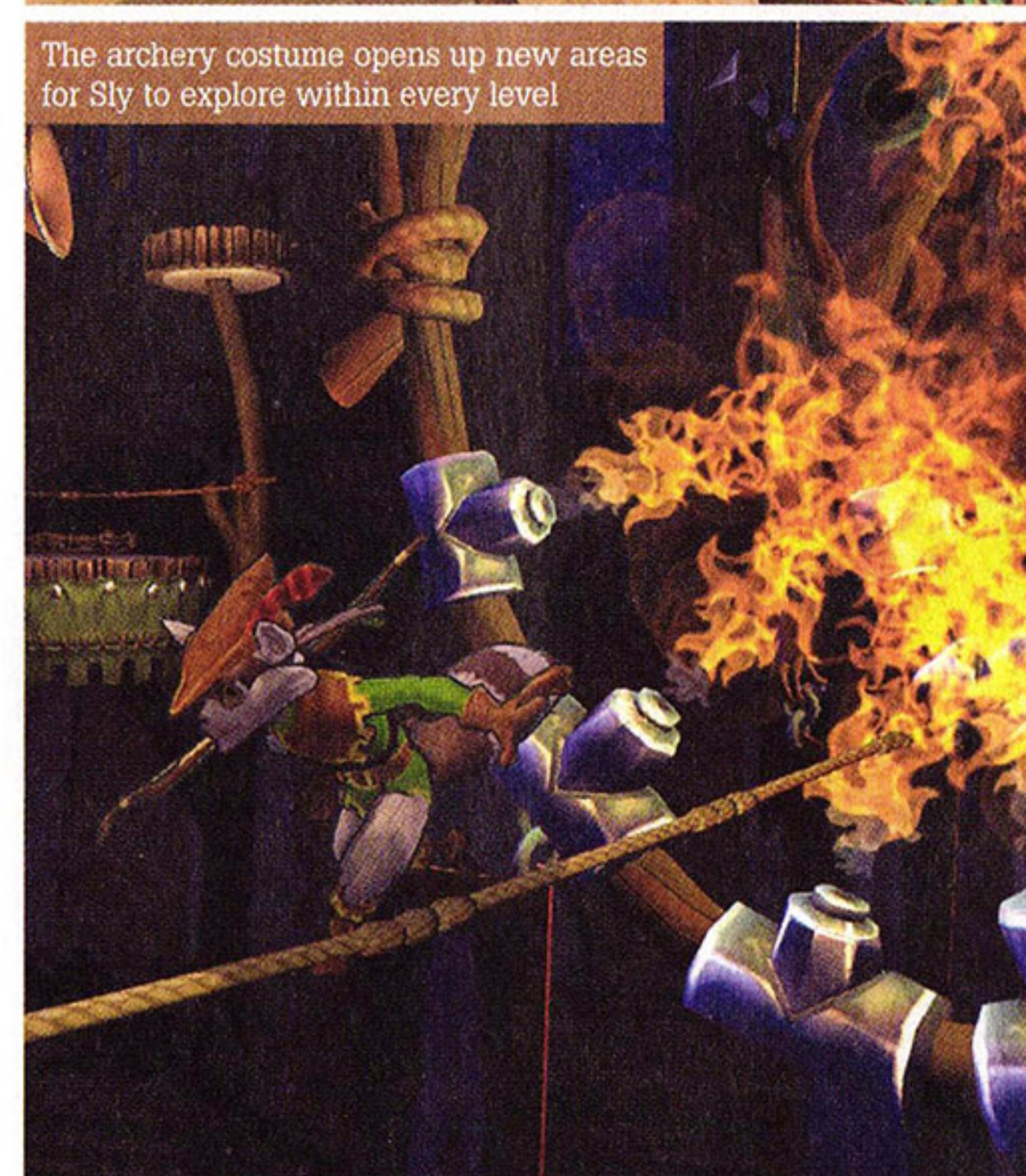
"There is no set structure for how Sly acquires a costume in an episode," Egan says. "It will always come as a function of playing through the game and uncovering the story. We didn't want to just create a formula and have players repeat it; we wanted to create a more organic experience." Egan also hints that the archery costume might have a few additional uses that the developer will reveal at a later date.

Once Sly acquires a costume, it is available to him at any point throughout the game, and players can quickly switch between costumes as they move between the episodes. Experimenting with Sly's wardrobe of skills will invariably reveal hidden treasures or open up new areas within older environments.

*Thieves in Time* looks like it's hitting all of the Sly Cooper cornerstones: striking cartoon visuals, a variety of creative environments, a wild cast of characters, and a creative set of new moves. We can't wait to steal another glimpse before the title releases later this fall. » **Ben Reeves**



The archery costume opens up new areas for Sly to explore within every level

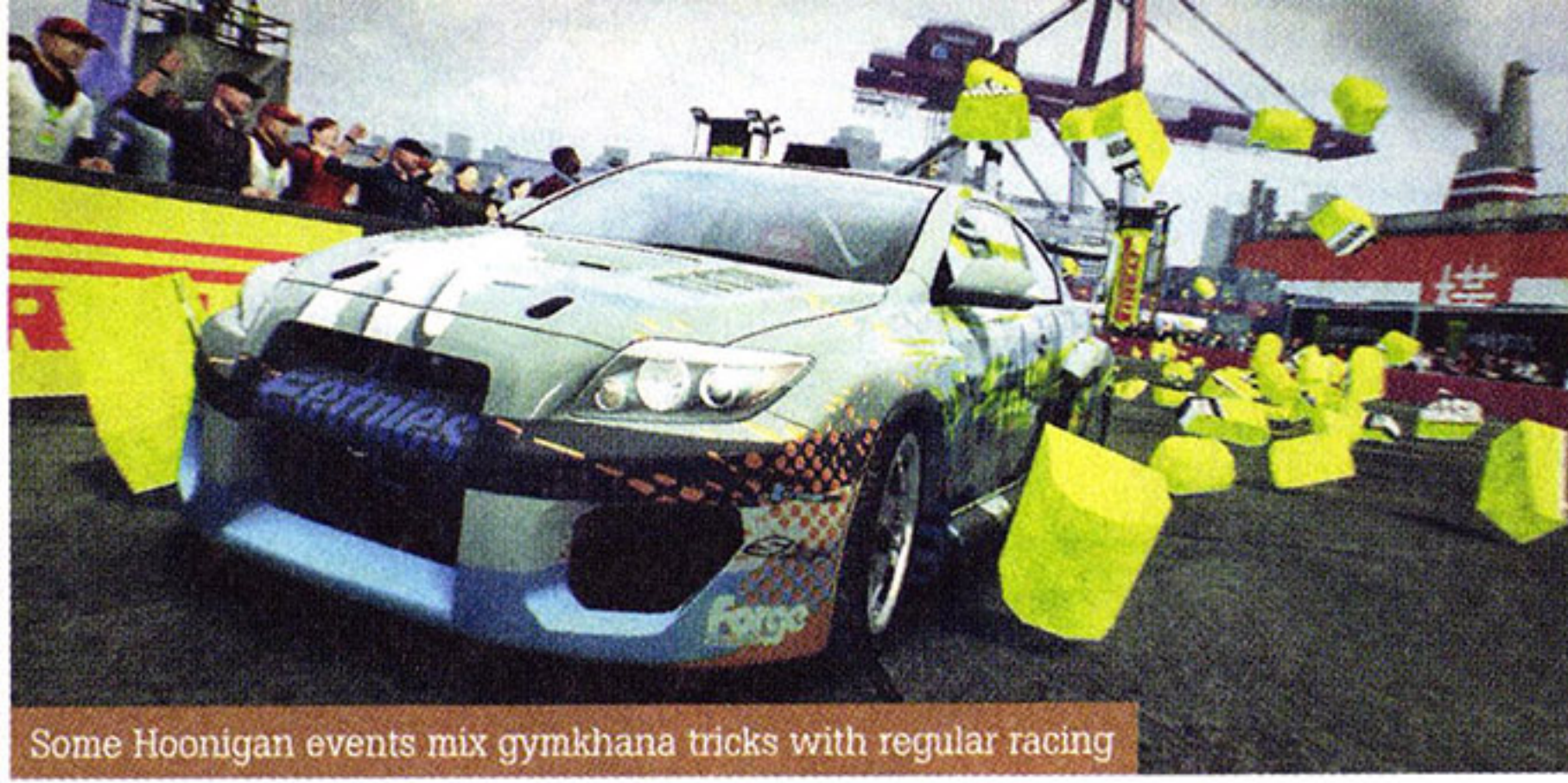


## Previously in Sly Cooper...

At the end of *Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves*, the Sly gang parts ways. Sly Cooper presumably gives up the thieving life in order to be with his lady love. Murray pursues his passion for vans and begins racing them professionally. Bentley settles down with the ambitious goal of building a time machine. In *Thieves in Time* they reunite to time travel and save Sly's past.







Some Hoonigan events mix gymkhana tricks with regular racing

# Dirt Showdown

In search of four-wheeled thrills

It might seem like Codemasters has taken a severe left turn with *Dirt Showdown*. The studio is known for its pursuit of sim-based racing excellence, not aggressive driving with the intent to maim. But as a developer with racing at its heart, this game is not as much a detour as it is an extension of the studio's love of anything on four wheels. An early taste of the game shows that there's more than one way to mash the gas.

For instance, although the traditional demolition derby Rampage event in San Francisco didn't excite me at all initially, once the double-point bonanza timer hit, I became a crazed maniac hellbent on pounding anything in sight. A similar twist livens up the Knockout event, which takes place in a large, raised sumo ring with onboard ramps on all sides. Ramming into a car at full speed is one thing, but getting big points for knocking cars over the edge of the arena's platform is another.

Race Off events are more or less traditional races with a few curveballs thrown in to keep things moderately interesting. One is a corridor of jumps. These don't save any time or provide any spectacular reward, but serve more as obstacles to be avoided in the interest of making good time. The event expects you to use lots of boost, which is replenished both through time and how much damage you inflict on others. Oddly enough, the barrels around the track neither slow you down nor take off your car's health.

My favorite event in the hands-on preview was Head 2 Head, which mixes gymkhana elements with a simultaneous rallycross duel against another racer. In the confines of the walled track in Yokohama, one turn might ask you to drift for so many seconds, while an opening around the corner tasks you with doing a donut around a center obstacle. Although *Showdown* does have the freeform, challenge-filled locations like

*Dirt 3*'s Battersea compound, this event is a fun way to infuse racing with some hooniganism.

If you like that obstacle course-style of racing, you can participate in gymkhana events in the Hoonigan multiplayer mode. *Dirt Showdown* also offers a team-based capture the flag mode called Smash and Grab, and features the debut of Codemasters' RaceNet. This is a cross-title Codemasters profile that keeps track of your stats and progress through any of the company's future racing games. It also includes tournaments, community features, and the chance to win undisclosed awards.

I didn't see a lot that was starkly new about the different race events I played in the early, truncated build of the game, but each one had its own interesting hook. I hope that as the game goes on, it keeps throwing out more of these kinds of surprises and expands our idea of what constitutes a racing game. » **Matthew Kato**

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

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

» **Publisher**  
Codemasters Racing

» **Developer**  
Codemasters Racing Studio

» **Release**  
May 29

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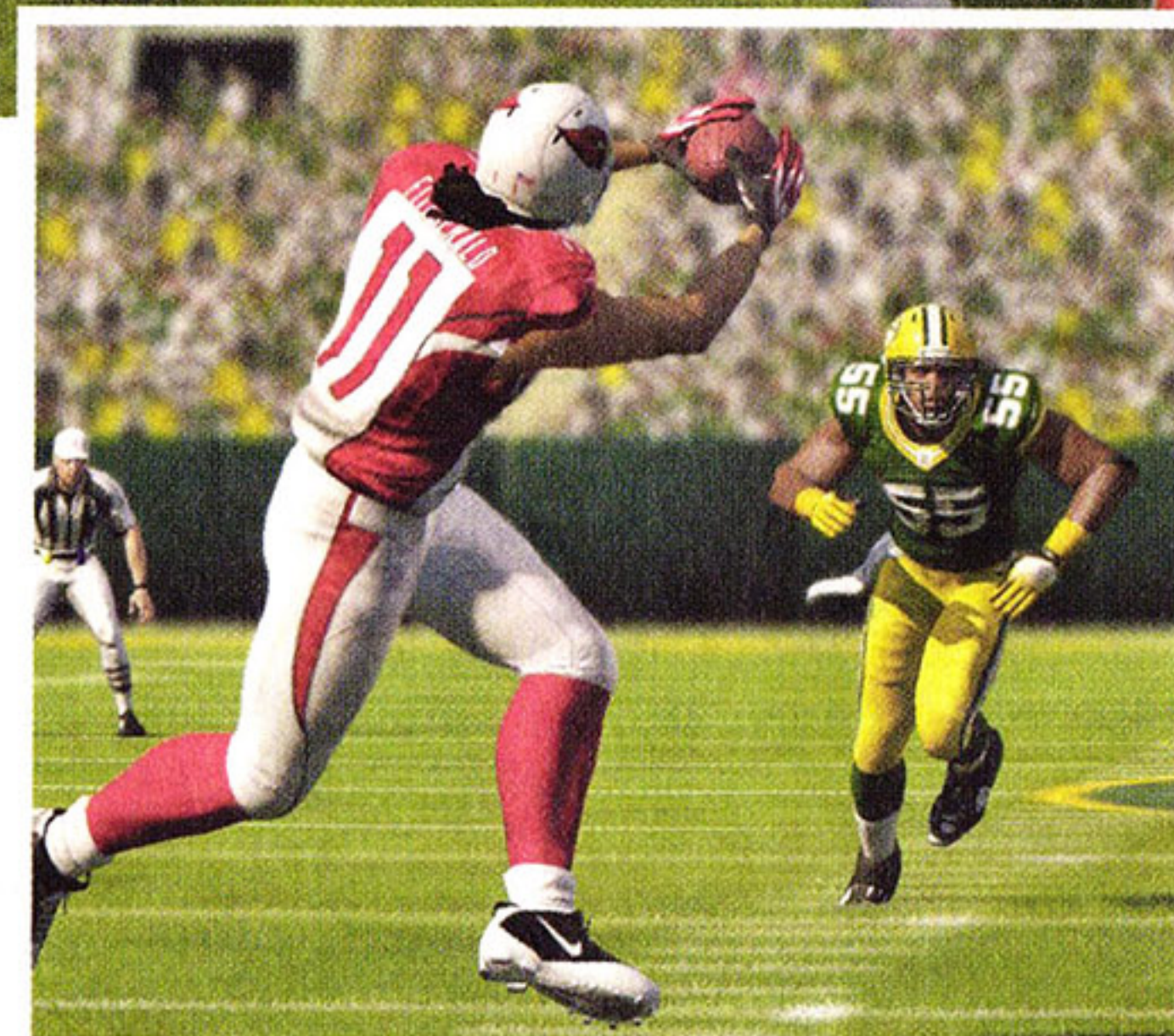
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The play action animation can be cancelled if you feel the heat coming around the corner, and QBs' execution of play-action and their normal dropback animation have all been sped up



# Madden NFL 13

Madden goes for a total team overhaul

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**  
EA Sports

» **Developer**  
EA Tiburon

» **Release**  
August 28

After the release of Madden NFL 11, I asked former series creative director Ian Cummings if there would ever be an installment of the franchise that was not built around a new feature with a splashy marketing name, but instead focused on fixing many of the problems that have persisted from year to year. His answer was that fans wouldn't be satisfied with just solutions to legacy issues and that they should get more for their money. On that point he was right, but unfortunately Madden NFL 12 didn't come close to fitting that bill – it exacerbated the situation. Madden NFL 13 attempts to both change the series' checkered past and make a statement about its future. "This isn't about gimmicks," says new creative director Mike Young. "There's no feature that's going to be debated on, 'Why didn't we focus on what the fans really care about?' It's really about

the core this year."

The passing game is one of the main areas that longtime Madden fans want to see change, and the developments in this department mirror the changes coming to NCAA Football 13 (see the following page for more). The new pass trajectories combined with hundreds of new catch animations and improved player-controlled ball placement guided by the left analog stick give users more areas on the field where they can throw the ball. In Madden 12, I only felt comfortable throwing a few routes because even if a receiver looked open they often weren't. A super-jumping linebacker would get in the way, defensive backs would sprint to the ball even if they didn't see it, or a quarterback's overall lack of accuracy and finesse precluded some throws.

In my hands-on time with an early build of Madden 13 I had more options. Leading receivers enabled better runs after the catch, and a few times I placed the ball where only my receiver could get it. Although an instance arose where a linebacker jumped up and blocked a low-trajectory pass, I could put the ball into that 15-20 yard mid-range with confidence. In general, I liked the control and feel of the passing game. My passes went where they were supposed to instead of a handful of seemingly pre-determined spots on the field. I missed my receivers a few times, but this was because I threw the ball before they were looking for it – a new, realistic touch augmented by the fact that your receiver's passing icons

are grayed out before they're looking at you or expecting the ball.

The quarterback's life inside the pocket is a little easier thanks to new mechanics like the option to cancel play action if you see an oncoming rusher, quick moves to avoid sacks, and even automatic dropbacks if you want (done by not touching the right analog after the snap). I tried this out on one particularly pesky play for past Madden games – the screen pass. The QB correctly drifted backward, giving me enough time to float a pass out to the flat without awkwardly running out of the back of the pocket.

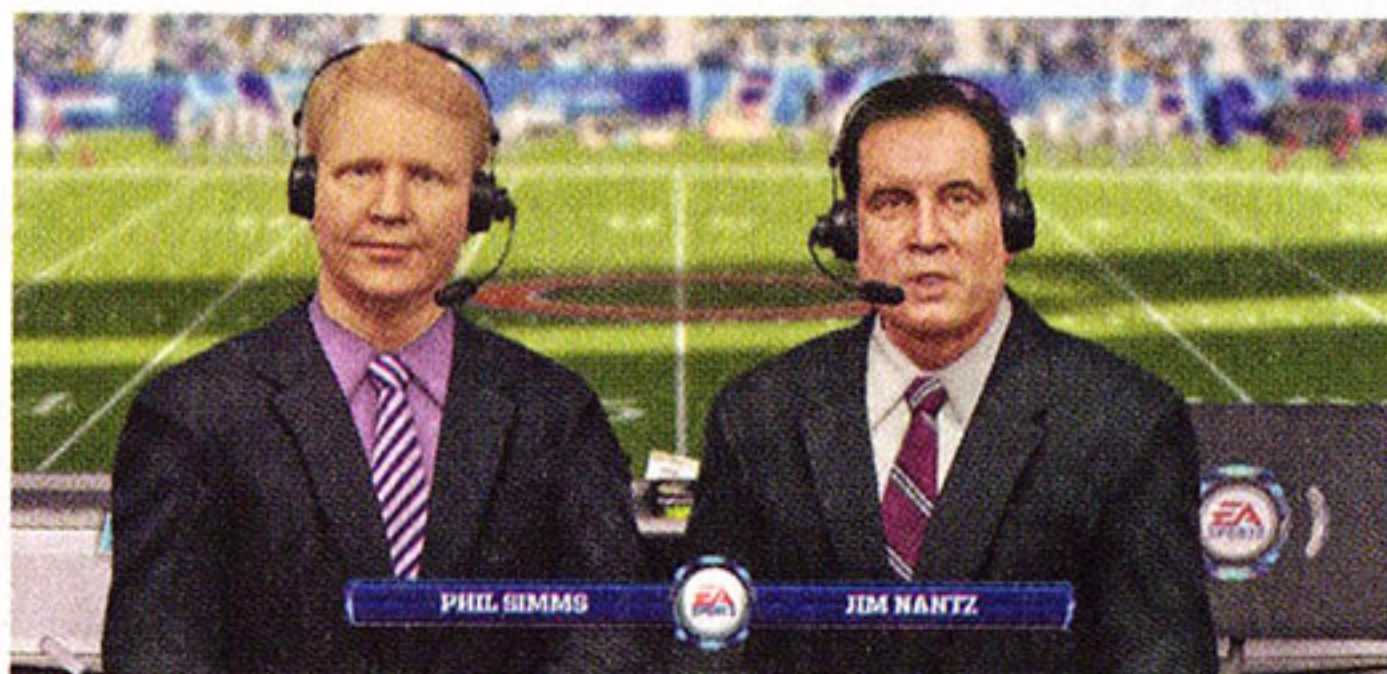
Defenses have their own tools to combat the increase in offensive control, such as better pre-snap alignments that match up the best defenders on the best receivers and different coverage techniques. I didn't concentrate on this in my hands-on time with the game, but it'll be interesting to see if defenders execute off- or underneath coverage effectively and to determine what kind of a difference this makes in the tug-of-war between offense and defense.

Although the above gameplay changes mirror those coming to NCAA 13, this is neither a bad thing nor the end of the list of improvements for Madden NFL 13. As Young said, every feature in the game has been updated in some way, and these gameplay changes in the passing game alone are a good place to start. » **Matthew Kato**

For more details on the game's presentation and gameplay, check out [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)

## See You Later, Gus

Madden 12 took a big step back with its presentation, particularly because the commentary of Gus Johnson and Chris Collinsworth was old and out of synch. To fix the broadcasting, EA hired CBS prime-timers Jim Nantz and Phil Simms to deliver quantity as well as quality. These two chat from the pre-game all the way through kick-off, and fill in plenty of dead space between snaps. That may sound obnoxious, but it makes things feel quite real.







When you're recruiting your next big star, promises will be unlocked from the beginning, there are no more random phone call topics, you can pitch by your school's playing style, and more

# NCAA Football 13

The program searches for a passing rhythm

Last month we promised you new gameplay details for NCAA 13. Here they are, along with information on how the development team at EA Tiburon is improving Dynasty mode. » **Matthew Kato**

## The Air Attack

Just about every facet of the passing game in NCAA 13 has changed, from the way quarterbacks drop back (faster, more variations, and with better control) to the way they sling the ball. More trajectories and different ball speeds, as well as actual ball placement control via the left analog stick, means that you can make all kinds of throws all over the field instead of just moon balls and hard bullets. Screens, outs, leading passes, and more are now better executed. Marry these changes with a new catching system that boasts more than 430 new catch

animations, and users can see and do more – with fewer balls going right into the facemask.

EA Tiburon has also tweaked what the quarterback does before he ever throws the ball. Apart from better drop backs, which ultimately mean less jittery movements in the pocket, play-action plays are set into motion faster and now include an abort mechanic on the right trigger that allows the quarterback to break away from the run fake and gets the running back to engage in pass protection immediately. Users also have quicker pump fakes, an eight-direction pocket avoidance system that recalls NFL 2K5, improved pitches, and an automatic shovel pass animation so you don't have to go through a time-wasting animation when you just want to flip the ball out quickly.

## Seeing is Believing

Player ball awareness has been poor in past NAAs, but now offensive and defensive players live by a simple rule: If they don't see the ball, they can't react to it. For receivers this means that their passing icons are grayed out until the moment in the route that they turn their heads in anticipation of the ball. This doesn't mean you can't pass to them before then or that you can't lead receivers (or that they're open when their icon lights up), it just means they're not expecting the ball and it will likely not be caught. Thankfully, receivers are smart enough to look back to the quarterback if the corner covering them blitzes or they beat press coverage.

More importantly, this also gets rid of the eyes in the back of defenders' heads. Perhaps to compensate for the tools given to the offense, however, defenders now play different coverage techniques (trail, off, etc.) and line up better to prevent mismatches like a linebacker lining up over a star receiver in the slot before the snap.

## The DNA Behind Your Dynasty

EA Tiburon has improved the heart of Dynasty mode – recruiting – by giving more timely and pertinent updates to the AI that governs the pitch system. Last year, your school's pitch grades were based on the previous season's BCS ranking. Now many of your grades can change from week to week depending on how you're doing. For example, your pitch grade for Championship Contender or TV Exposure rises and falls with your week-to-week performance. The Pro Potential grade is determined by an internal mock draft that projects where players will go to the NFL, the past four years' draft results, your promises to players, transfers who've come and gone, and more.

EA is also adding a new component to Dynasty mode, scouting, which can be controlled in-game or via a web browser. Scouting is controlled with a separate bucket of hours than recruiting, and it naturally involves finding out more about potential recruits' attribute ratings and where the sleepers and busts are hidden.

Read more details on NCAA's Dynasty mode at [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)

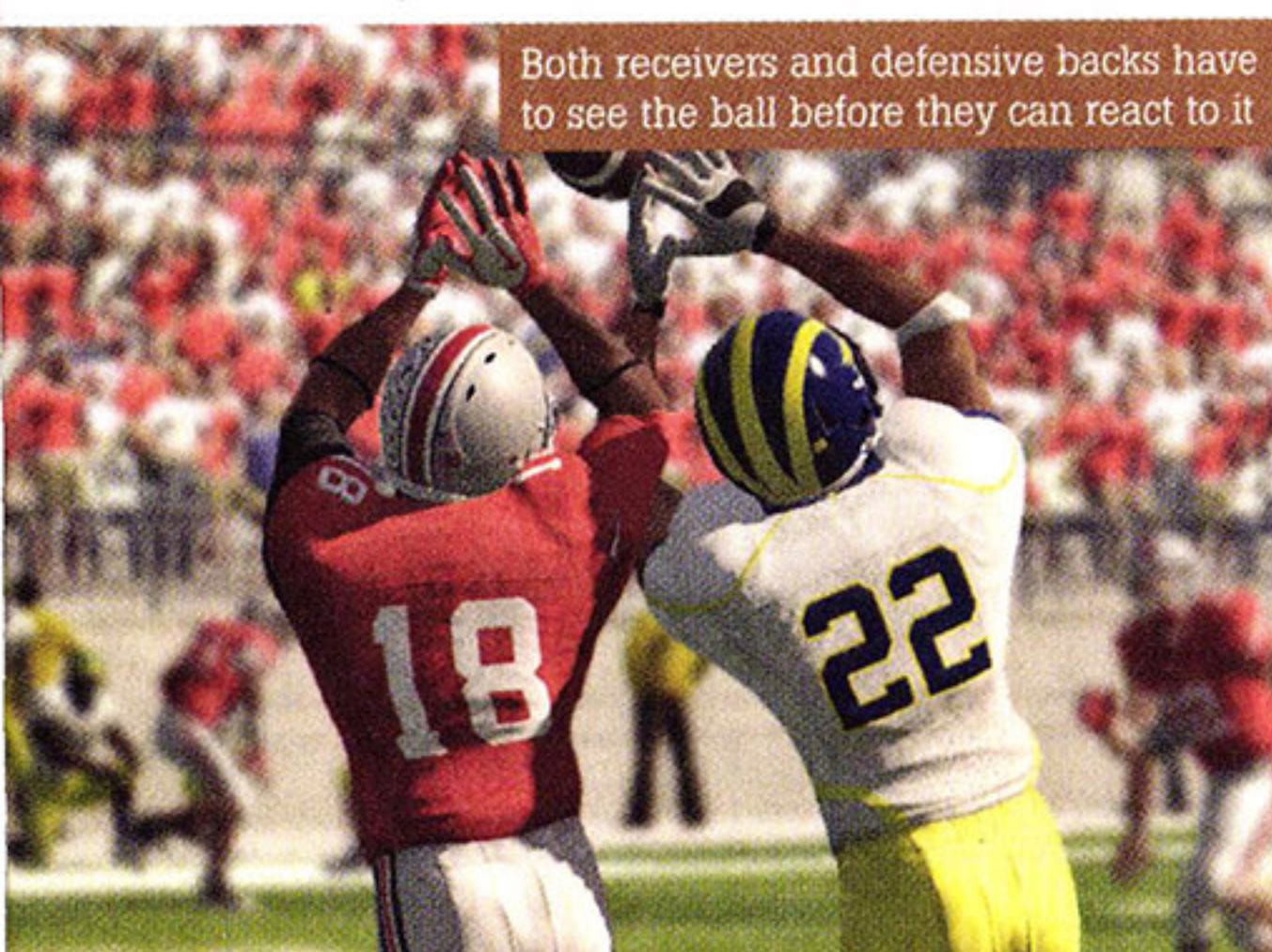
» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360

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

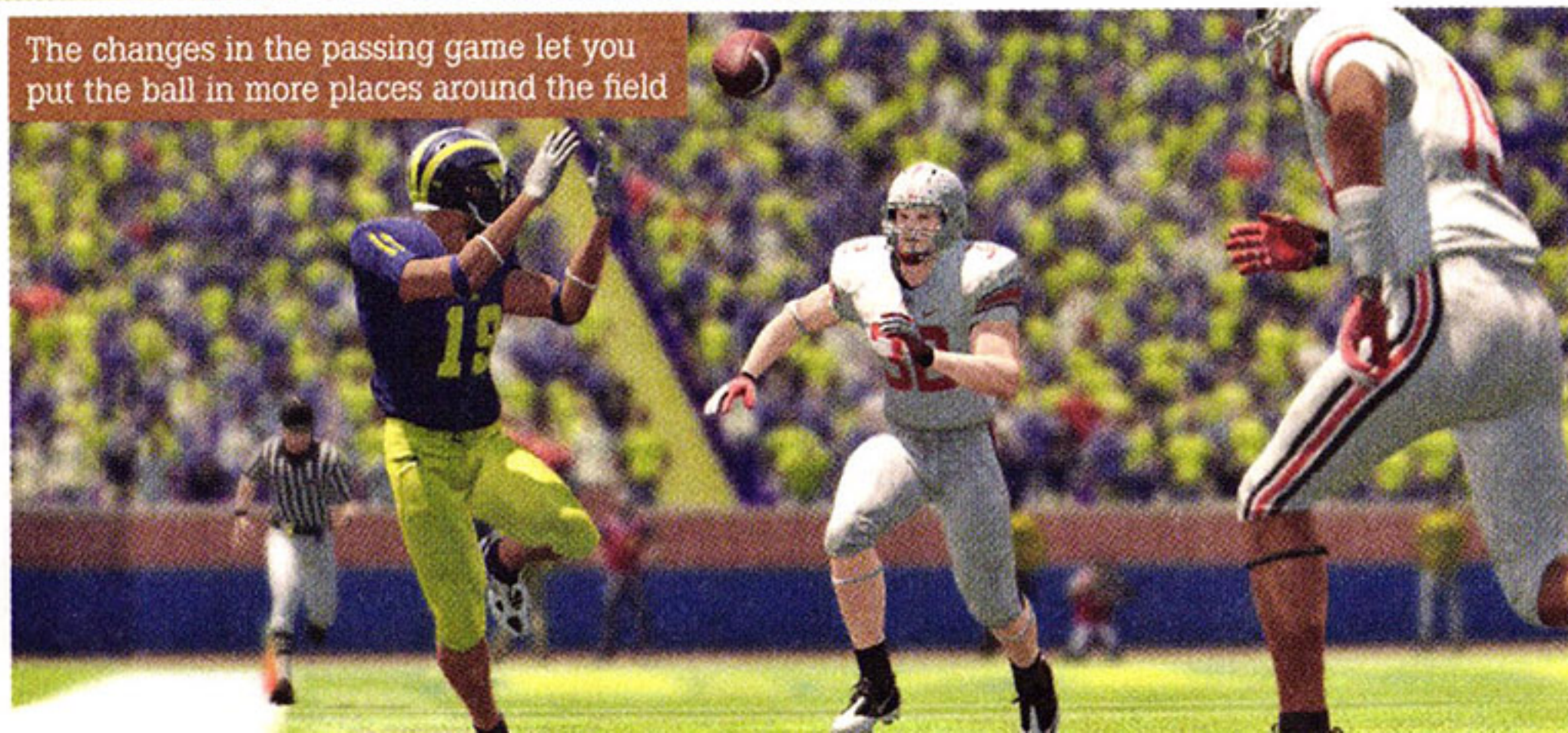
» **Publisher**  
EA Sports

» **Developer**  
EA Tiburon

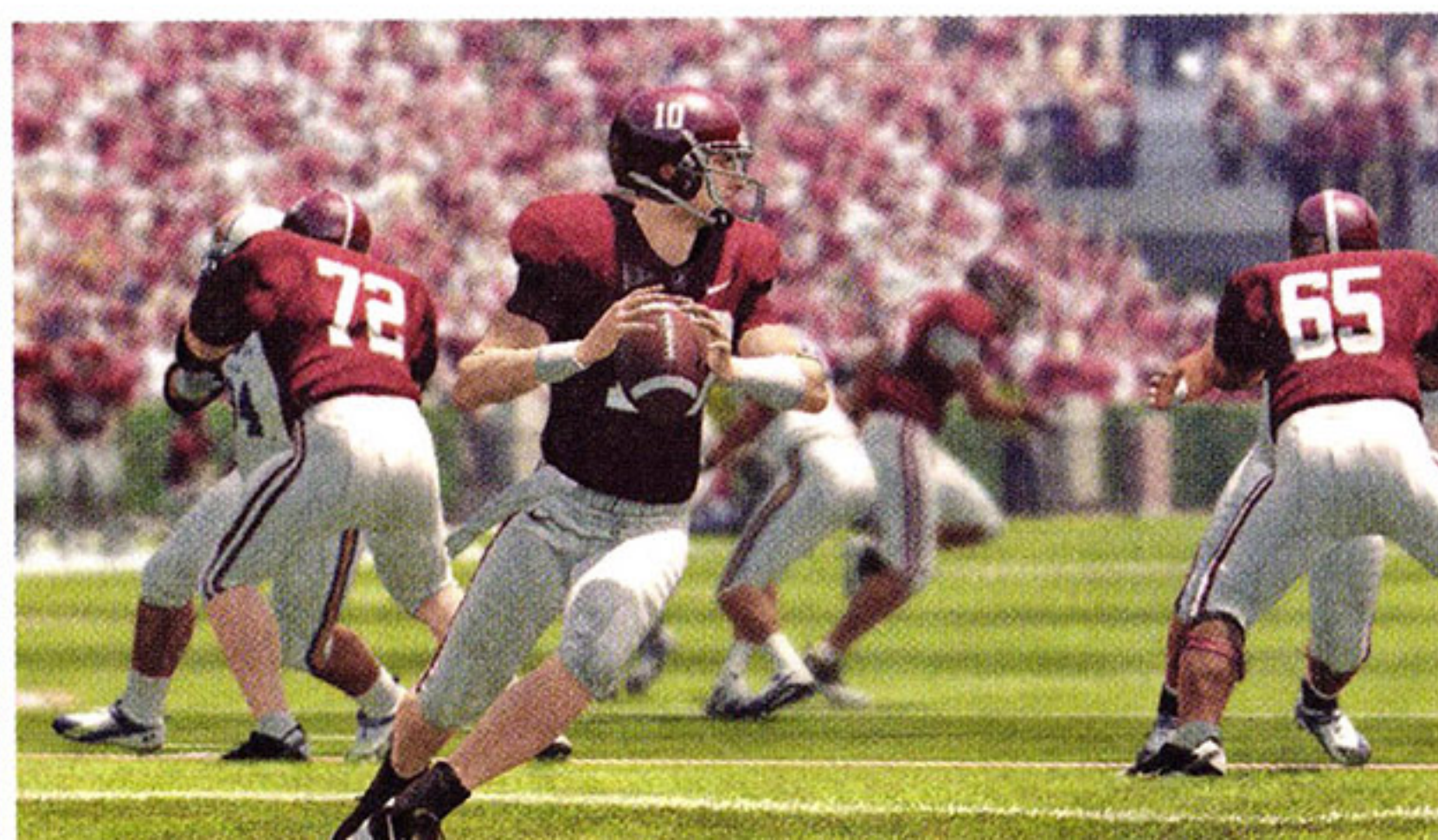
» **Release**  
July 10



Both receivers and defensive backs have to see the ball before they can react to it



The changes in the passing game let you put the ball in more places around the field







# Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance

Tetsuya Nomura speaks on his latest creation and beyond

» **Platform**  
3DS

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

» **Publisher**  
Square Enix

» **Developer**  
Square Enix

» **Release**  
July 31

**K**ingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance recently released in Japan and will come to North America in late July. We talked with series creator Tetsuya Nomura about the new game, Kingdom Hearts' 10th anniversary, and the mysterious Final Fantasy Versus XIII. » **Bryan Vore.**

**What is the first element you create when starting a new Kingdom Hearts game?**

It differs every time, but I usually start with the gameplay mechanics. At the same time, I work on the structure of the story and then flesh it out from there with the gameplay linked to the story.

**What was the visual inspiration for the colorful and cute Spirit allies and Nightmare enemies compared to the darker Heartless and Nobodies in past games?**

I've always wanted to incorporate a system in which you can turn your enemies into allies. When I decided on having the story take place in a world of dreams, I needed a new category of enemies. That's how I thought about creating new characters that can be added as allies. I had the team apply many different color patterns, keeping in mind that these characters are able to join the party and that they are fantastical creatures that live in a dream world. Then, I picked the pattern that was the most colorful and stood out the most.

**Would you ever want to see a high-definition collection of Kingdom Hearts and Kingdom Hearts II similar to the upcoming Final Fantasy X HD remaster?**

I do have an interest in HD versions, and I'm currently researching them. If it is

possible, I would like to do something about the series being spread over many different consoles, too. I am thinking a lot about the future.

**You released Birth by Sleep on PSP. What are your thoughts on the PlayStation Vita?**

We have been invited to make games on different new platforms, and every time we have created titles making sure that they are highly compatible with the platform. The PS Vita is definitely a powerful device that is very interesting, but because of its high power, there isn't much of a difference with a console. So even if we were to make a game, we would have to be very careful about how to create it for that device. I also feel that it's about time that Kingdom Hearts should go back to being on a console.

**What do you say to the segment of Kingdom Hearts fans that believes the increasingly complex storyline of Kingdom Hearts stands at odds with the child-focused Disney element of the franchise?**

First of all, this series is not intended to be child-focused, and so the complexity of the story is purposefully made prominent. That being said, with a series being around for so long, there are a few items I have in mind so that a wider audience range can enjoy the experience. For the time being in Dream Drop Distance, there is a new function called Mementos, and in the section called Chronicles, the player can read a summary on each of the titles from the Kingdom Hearts series. Whether you are just starting out or you have played the games before and need a refresher, it has all of the key information summarized.

**In recent interviews you hinted that Dream Drop Distance is the last game before Kingdom Hearts III. Do you see it this way?**

I'm not able to disclose any information on what's coming next or any other future plans, but

you may be able to find a hint if you play through Dream Drop Distance to the very end.

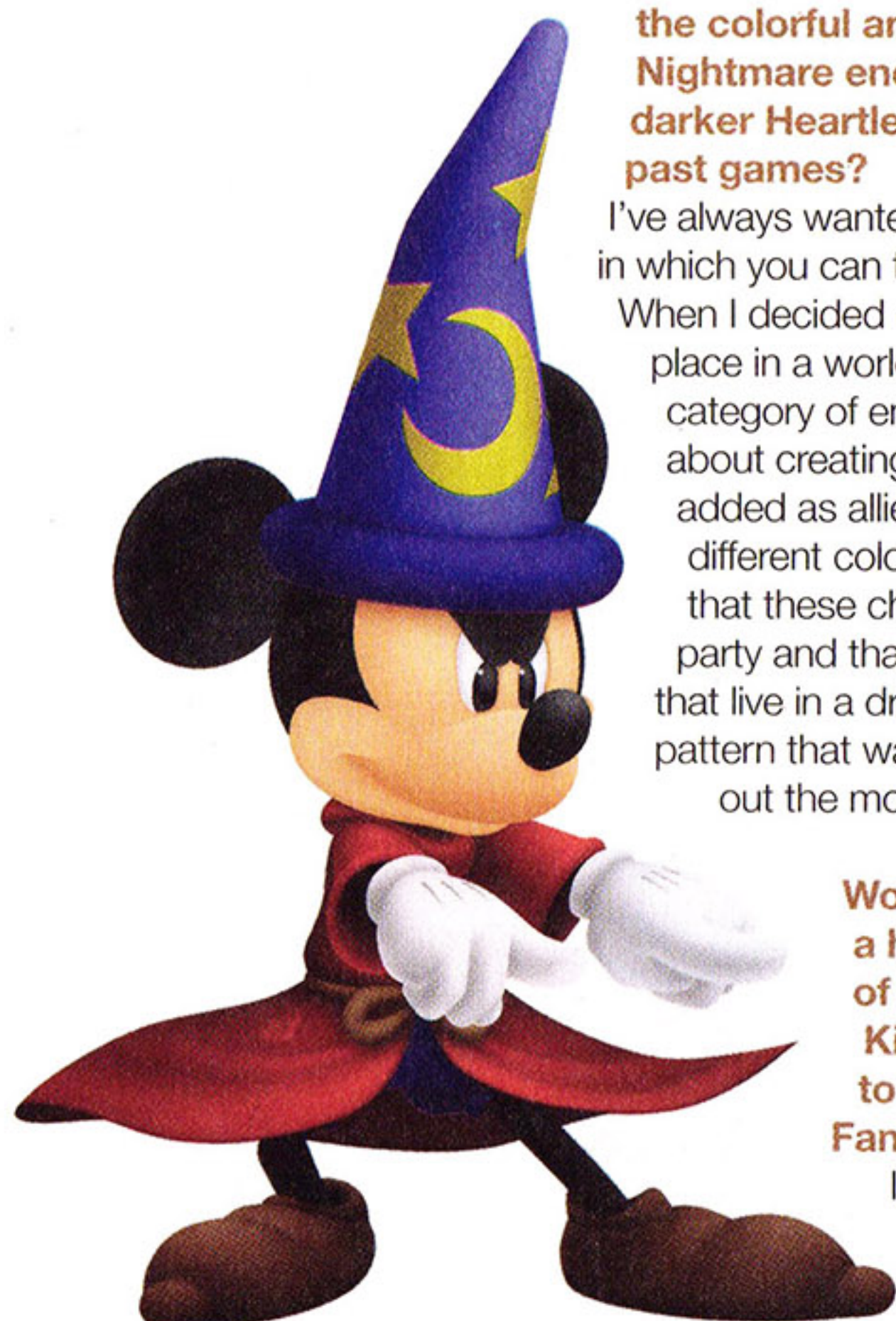
**Square Enix has released several iPhone and iPad games both for new franchises and classics. Are you interested in creating Kingdom Hearts games or other titles for iOS?**

There is something I am working on, but I'm afraid I can't reveal the specifics. I feel that there needs to be progress made on tablet devices, and there should be more games for that platform. I'm not sure with which title this would come to pass, but I am researching about the iOS as one of the platform options.



**How is Final Fantasy Versus XIII coming along? It's been nearly six years since it was announced. Why is this project taking so long to develop?**

We would like to ask for your patience on an official announcement for this title. It always takes time when tackling the challenge of doing something completely new, but we are doing our best to bring information to the fans as quickly as we can. Your patience is greatly appreciated.







Rescued characters will take refuge in sections of the Castle, where Mickey can visit with them



We almost didn't recognize Scrooge McDuck without his ocean of money

# Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion

An epic tribute to Mickey's 16-bit glory days

Mickey Mouse has the uncanny ability to capture the hearts of folks of all ages with his whimsical antics and timeless charm. Platformers from the 16-bit era share a similar everlasting appeal to gamers. DreamRift, developer of DS titles *Henry Hatsworth* and *Monster Tale*, is combining these infectious elements with *Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion*, a gorgeous 2D platforming throwback for the 3DS.

The game is a spiritual follow-up to both *Epic Mickey* on the Wii and the Sega Genesis title *Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*. The *Castle of Illusion* has materialized in the Wasteland – a place for forgotten Disney relics. Along with the mystical fortress comes an old witch named Mizrabel, who kidnaps Minnie Mouse with the intent to steal her beauty to become less hag-like. Armed with his paint and thinner, Mickey heads to the *Castle of Illusion* to rescue his girlfriend.

*Power of Illusion* features classic platforming gameplay with a new artistic flair. Mickey can jump on foes to defeat them, but he can also erase enemy objects with thinner and paint new items into existence. For example, while exploring Captain Hook's *Jolly Roger*, Mickey can paint a cannon into existence. Players trace the outline of the cannon using the 3DS touchscreen. Depending on the paintjob's quality the cannon will either fire *Jolly Roger*-branded cannon balls

that harm only Mickey, neutral cannonballs that harm everyone, or mouse ear-branded cannonballs that just hurt foes.

Painting objects into the game isn't purely contextual – Mickey can earn sketches for new items by completing sidequests for rescued characters. After saving Scrooge McDuck he asks Mickey to find his lost lucky dime. When Mickey returns it, the filthy-rich waterfowl rewards Mickey with a new sketch, which he can use to paint objects into levels that allows him to access previously inaccessible areas. *Power of Illusion* may be divided into distinct stages, but these sidequests and the Metroid-style exploration and discovery gives players incentive to revisit past locations.

Mickey's new portable adventure has us brimming with excitement like a Mouseketeer squirming at the Disneyland gates before opening time. We're happy to see

that the game has an identity of its own, rather than being a soulless tie-in with *Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two*. DreamRift is home to many huge fans of Disney's 16-bit platforming days, and they want to do them justice with this spiritual successor. We can't wait to get our hands on the game and learn more about the boss fights, gameplay, and classic character cameos. » **Tim Turi**

» **Platform**  
3DS

» **Style**  
1-Player Platforming

» **Publisher**  
Disney Interactive Studios

» **Developer**  
DreamRift

» **Release**  
September



DreamRift promises boss encounters with popular Disney villains





# Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch

A drop-dead gorgeous collaboration between two Japanese titans

» Platform  
PlayStation 3

» Style  
1-Player Role-Playing

» Publisher  
Namco Bandai

» Developer  
Level-5

» Release  
2013

## Level-5 and Studio Ghibli

Studio Ghibli is a Tokyo-based animation studio known for films including *Castle in the Sky*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *The Secret World of Arrietty*. It's known for its highly detailed, hand-drawn animation.

Level-5 CEO and president Akihiro Hino says the collaboration between the companies was a great learning opportunity for both.

"Studio Ghibli didn't have much knowledge of games and game culture to begin with, so when we started the project we explained the standards of game development and what comes with it," Hino said. "It was kind of teaching them about how the game-production process goes. What we learned from them was really the storytelling in terms of animated storytelling. Even with the 3D real-time events, they supervised all the storyboards and gave us directions on very minute details. Even to the smallest movements, they were there to direct those and give us art input. In terms of the entire game, it's something that exerts the feel of a Studio Ghibli animation, and we think you'll be able to see that in the finished product."

When *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* begins, a young boy named Oliver is wrestling with the overwhelming loss of his mother. Alone in his room, he cries into a toy she made for him before dying, and it springs to life. As luck would have it, this cloth-and-stuffing construction also happened to be a fairy named Drippy, and he's here to help. According to Drippy, Oliver can save his mother, but he'll have to travel to another world first.

In the world of *Wrath of the White Witch*, well, there are actually two worlds. Our young hero, Oliver, lives in Motorville, a modern city that most of us would find familiar. *Ni No Kuni*, on the other hand, is a parallel world filled with fantastical elements such as talking animals. All living things share a soul between each of those worlds, which means that there's still a chance that he can rescue his mother. But first, he'll have to find her counterpart in *Ni No Kuni*.

Level-5's latest role-playing game was developed in close collaboration with acclaimed animation company Studio Ghibli (see sidebar), and it's obvious at first glance. The game is absolutely gorgeous, with whimsical characters and richly detailed environments. The game is loaded with fully animated cutscenes, and the fact that they maintain the tone and

style of in-game assets is a testament to the relationship between the two companies.

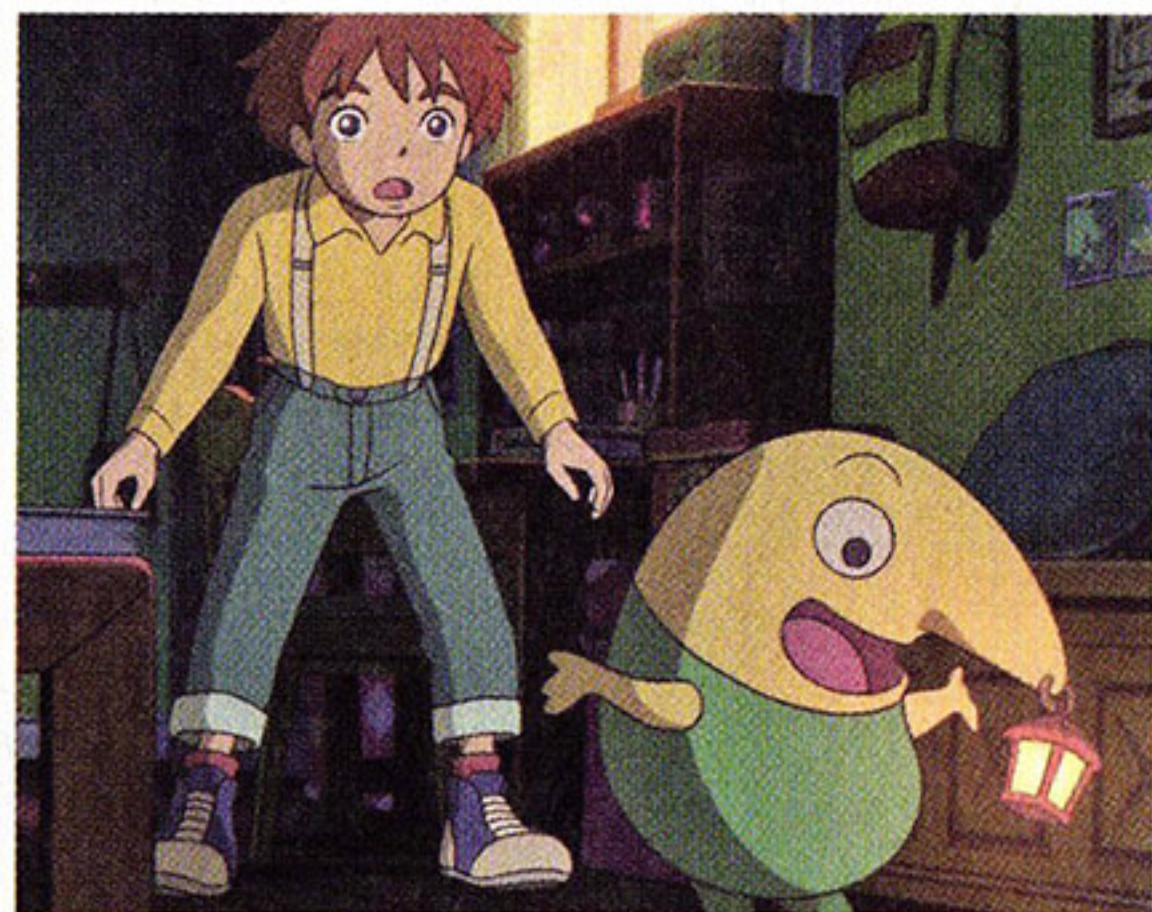
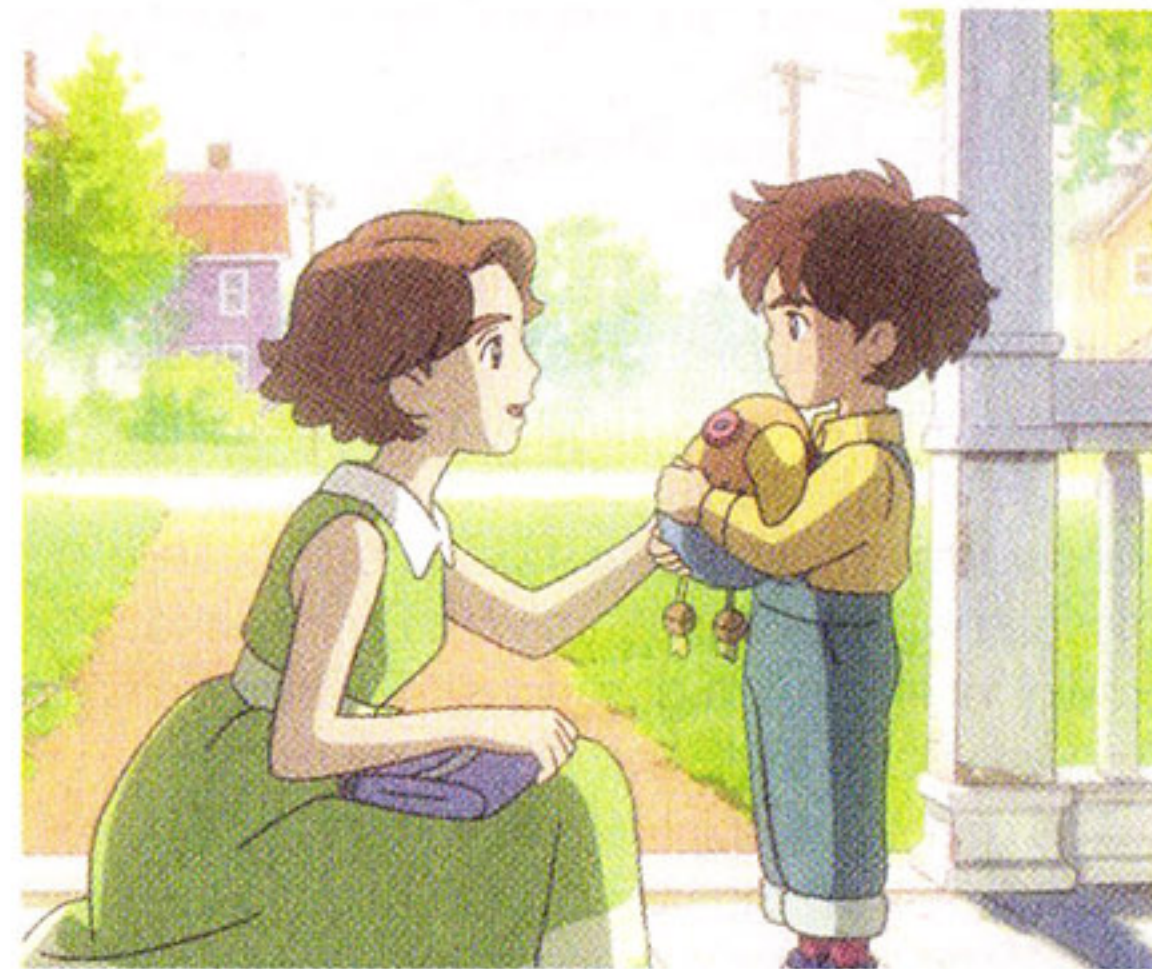
Oliver and Drippy navigate the lands of *Ni No Kuni*, attracting an ever-growing party of followers. In combat, players can move Oliver around on the battlefield to avoid enemy attacks and pick up power-enhancing glyphs. When it's time to attack, players select their options from various menus. In a battle against a pig-shaped tank named Porco Grosso (a winking reference to Studio Ghibli's ace pilot Porco Rosso), Oliver must dodge cannon fire while making the most out of his party and roster of summoned familiars to survive.

The game released in Japan last November, but the localization team is still hard at work to bring it to North America. It's apparent in everything from the clever wordplay (a storekeeper in the feline-themed *Ding Dong Dell* is called a Purrprietor) to Drippy's characterization. In Japan, he speaks with an unusual Osaka accent; in the English version, he has a lilting Welsh voice.

*Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* is clearly a visual treat. If its story and action can keep pace with its good looks, PlayStation 3 owners will have yet another exclusive bragging point when 2013 rolls around. » **Jeff Cork**

To see the latest trailer for the game, visit [gameinformer.com](http://gameinformer.com)

Level-5 and Studio Ghibli worked together closely to create unified designs between gameplay and animated cutscenes







The upgraded nanosuit allows Prophet to use alien weaponry and hack enemy turrets

# Crysis 3

Crytek's new New York state of mind

When Crytek brought the critically acclaimed Crysis franchise to consoles last year, its success proved that mainstream gamers have a healthy appetite for sandbox shooters. Like the original, the sequel garnered praise and moved millions of copies thanks to its gorgeous environments and strong gameplay mechanics. But not everyone was happy. Some fans of the original felt somewhat limited by the New York City setting, which was more constrained than the wide-open jungle from the first game. For Crysis 3, Crytek hopes

to find a happy medium between those expansive landscapes and the more orchestrated micro sandboxes of the sequel.

The story picks up several years after Crysis 2. After being incarcerated and forgotten about for 20 years, a series of events allows a revenge-driven, nanosuit-wearing Prophet to return to New York City in the year 2047. Instead of being hunted by Ceph and CryNet agents, this time he's the hunter. His quest for vindication is aided by a new high-tech compound bow that allows him to stay cloaked while taking

down enemies and nanosuit modifications that grant the ability to hack turrets and use alien weaponry.

New York looks very different than the one Prophet left at the end of Crysis 2. In the ensuing years after he squelched the Ceph uprising, the Cell Corporation built a large nanodome over the island of Manhattan. The private military contractor told the world it built the "Liberty Dome" to quarantine the Ceph remnants, but its motivations are more insidious. The corporation is harvesting alien technology with the goal of using it to achieve world domination.

The landscape within the Liberty Dome has changed drastically. Thanks to an alien accelerated forestation process, Manhattan now features seven environmental districts known as the Seven Wonders. Each region has a distinct geographical flavoring, with grasslands, swamps, jungles, and rivers all grow-

ing over the abandoned streets and tenements. The reconfigured terrain is more open, but it also retains the verticality of the sequel provided by derelict skyscrapers.

If the slightly altered approach appeals to both mainstream fans and the Crysis traditionalists, Crysis 3 could become a major hit. With another couple years under the studio's belt working with its proprietary CryEngine 3 platform, we wouldn't be surprised if it looks more stunning than its gorgeous predecessors as well. » **Matt Bertz**

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

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

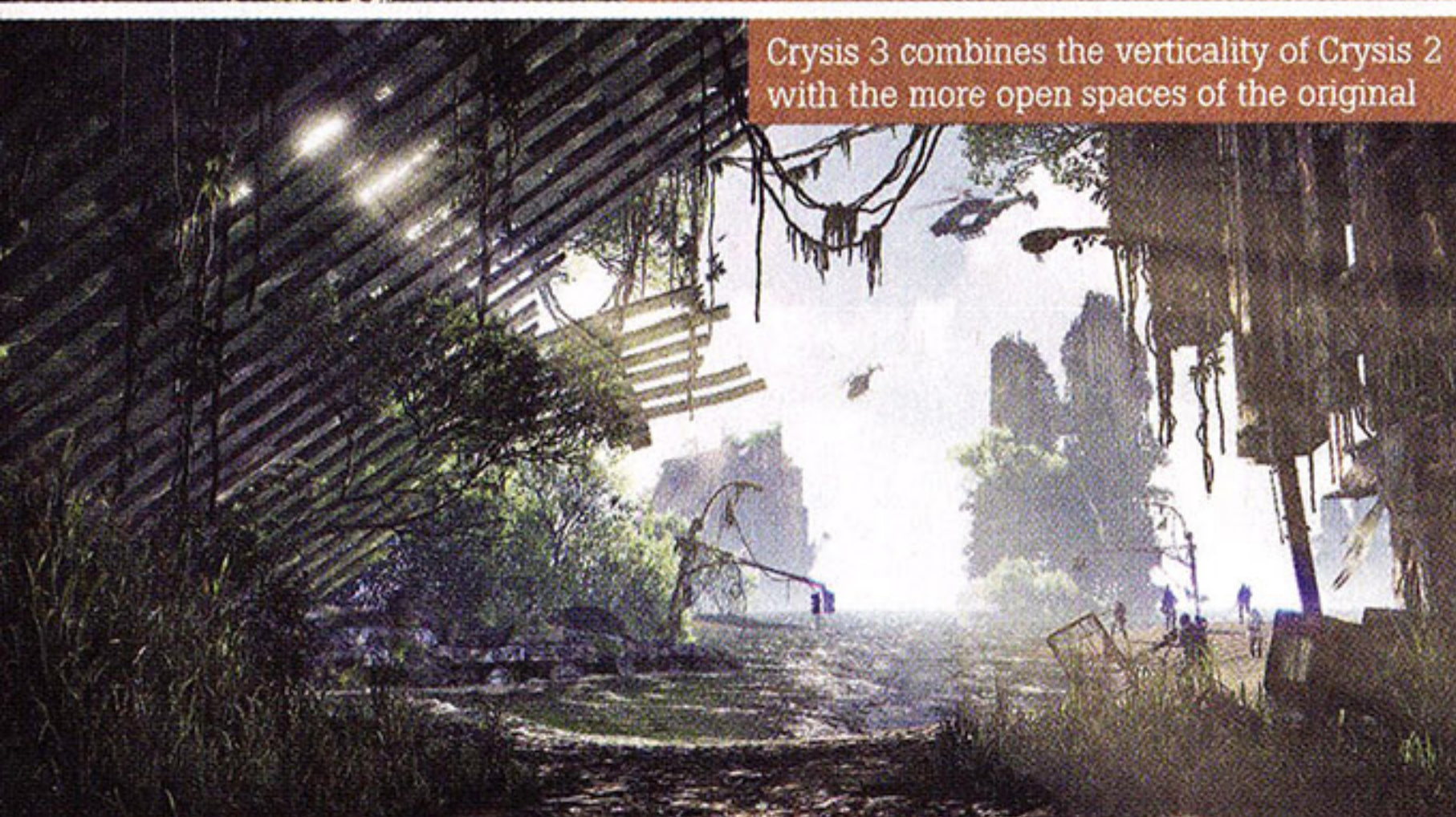
» **Publisher**  
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**  
Crytek

» **Release**  
Spring 2013



The Cell Corporation has created a nanodome over the entire island to quarantine the Ceph remnants



Crysis 3 combines the verticality of Crysis 2 with the more open spaces of the original

## State of Confusion

Though its sandbox environments and nanosuit technology help Crysis stand out from the never-ending march of lookalike military shooters, the series' story is nothing to write home about. The first game starred Nomad, a Delta Force operative who fought the alien Ceph uprising on a remote Korean island. The Warhead expansion built on the alien emergence story with another operative, Psycho. Then things got weird when Crytek enlisted the help of Philip K. Dick Award-winning science fiction writer Richard Morgan to craft the plot for Crysis 2. The alien outbreak reached New York City, and in a confusing turn of events toward the end of the game, the nanosuit made the third protagonist, a Marine named Alcatraz, somehow absorb the memories of Prophet, the deceased squad leader who commanded Nomad in the first game. Got all that? With new writer Steven Hall in charge of Crysis 3, this Alcatraz/Prophet hybrid takes center stage. Hopefully some narrative chops will come along with him.





Chris and his trusted sniper buddy, Piers

# Resident Evil 6

Wesker and Birkin's bloodlines thicken the plot

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

» **Style**  
1 or 2-Player Shooter

» **Publisher**  
Capcom

» **Developer**  
Capcom

» **Release**  
October 2 (PC TBA)

Umbrella masterminds Albert Wesker and William Birkin have played pivotal roles in the Resident Evil series as virus-spreading bad guys. Longtime nemesis Chris Redfield killed the superhuman jerk Wesker in Resident Evil 5, and the genius scientist-turned-mutant killer Dr. Birkin disintegrated in an exploding lab at the end of the second game. While these key foes in the series have both met dramatic ends, their crucial bloodlines live on in Resident Evil 6. A recent flood of details revealed that the previously unnamed male protagonist is Wesker's son, and the blonde woman is an all-grown-up version of RE 2's Sherry Birkin.

The name of Wesker's offspring is Jake Muller, a mercenary fighting in Europe to earn cash for him and his mother. It turns out Wesker isn't exactly a model father, apparently abandoning both Jake and his mom. Jake's bullet-fueled fight for money is interrupted by Sherry Birkin, the little girl Leon and Claire save at the end of Resident Evil 2. Sherry convinces Jake, who is immune to viral infection, that his special blood type could help save the world from the recent C-virus outbreak.

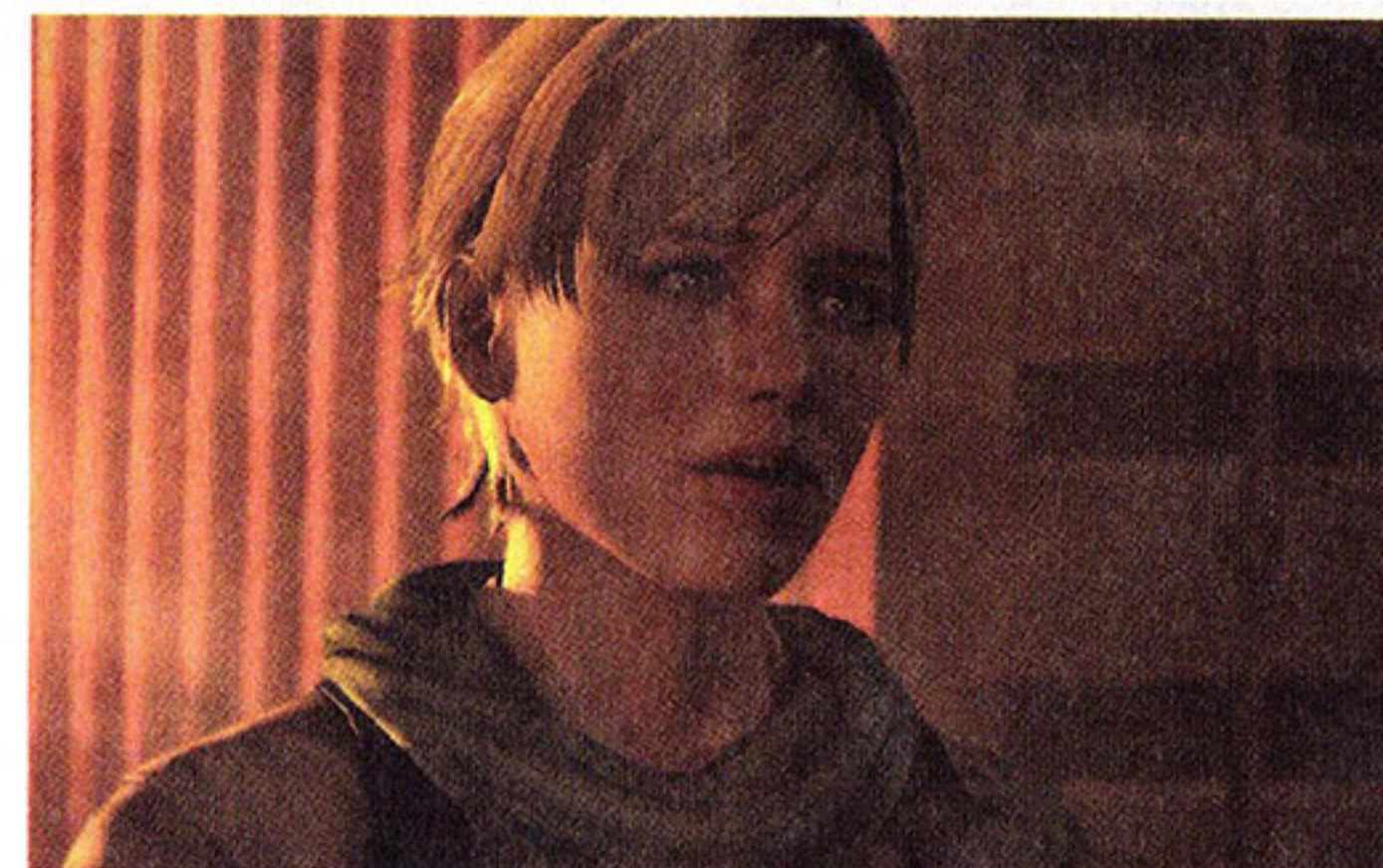
Sherry and Jake's fight to escape the eastern European Republic of Edonia. Edonia makes up just one leg of Resident Evil 6's three interwoven co-op campaigns. Chris Redfield also teams up with fellow Bioterrorism Security Assessment Association agent Piers Nivans to fight through an outbreak in Lianshang, China. While exact details are still vague, something dramatic happens to Chris that changes his entire outlook on life and makes him much more jaded. If the trailer is any indication, it has something to do with a shorthaired lady in red that could only be Ada Wong. Ada appears to have turned heel, and Chris is hell bent on bringing her down. The trailer gets interesting when Leon S. Kennedy, who has a complicated relationship with Ada, halts Chris' attack on the treacherous spy and the two heroes stand with their guns drawn on each other.

Before the Resident Evil icons' heated standoff in China, Leon must fight through a zombie outbreak in the small American town of Tall Oaks. Resident Evil 6 begins with Leon and partner Helena Harper assassinating the President, who turned into a zombie following a bioterrorism attack. Shortly after, the two encounter a panicked father who needs help finding his daughter.

With this entry, Capcom aims to reintroduce the tension and terror that drew fans to the early Resident Evil games. Leon and Helena must creep through a dimly lit university building as thunder rumbles outside and lightning flashes across the windows. Huge chandeliers sway ominously overhead and gurgling coughs can be heard echoing in the old building. Windows shatter and chandeliers unexpectedly crash around the duo as they hunt for the girl.

Capcom may be injecting old-school fright into Resident Evil 6, but the controls are decidedly modern. Players can move and shoot, run into cover, and even dive onto the ground and fire from on their back. While aiming up at zombies' chins from the ground, some zombies crawl towards the players, forcing them to scoot away from their prying hands. Sometimes zombies wielding axes or lead pipes rush the player, which can be disarmed and used against them for grisly finishers. I'm excited for Leon and the gang's enhanced combat capabilities, and I have faith that the new moves won't diminish the series' trademark skin-of-your-teeth encounters.

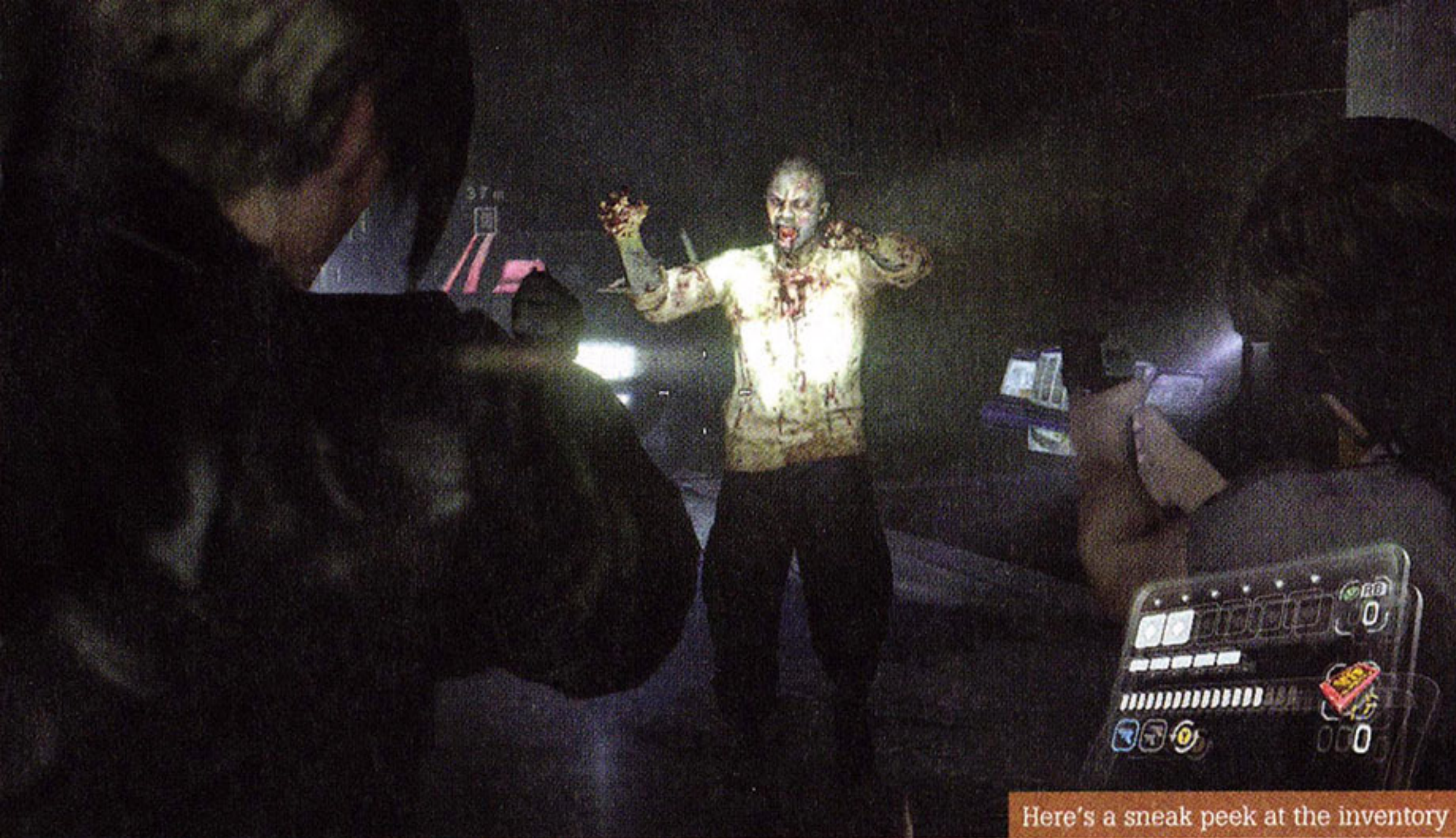
The newly revealed characters, intense globe-trotting story, and upgraded controls could set up Resident Evil 6 to be one of the finest entries in the series to date. Tack on the fact that the popular Mercenaries Mode is available out of the box, and Capcom is crafting a package that could be hard to beat. Sweetening the deal just a bit more is the bumped-up release date of October 2 – over a month earlier than previously stated. » **Tim Turi**



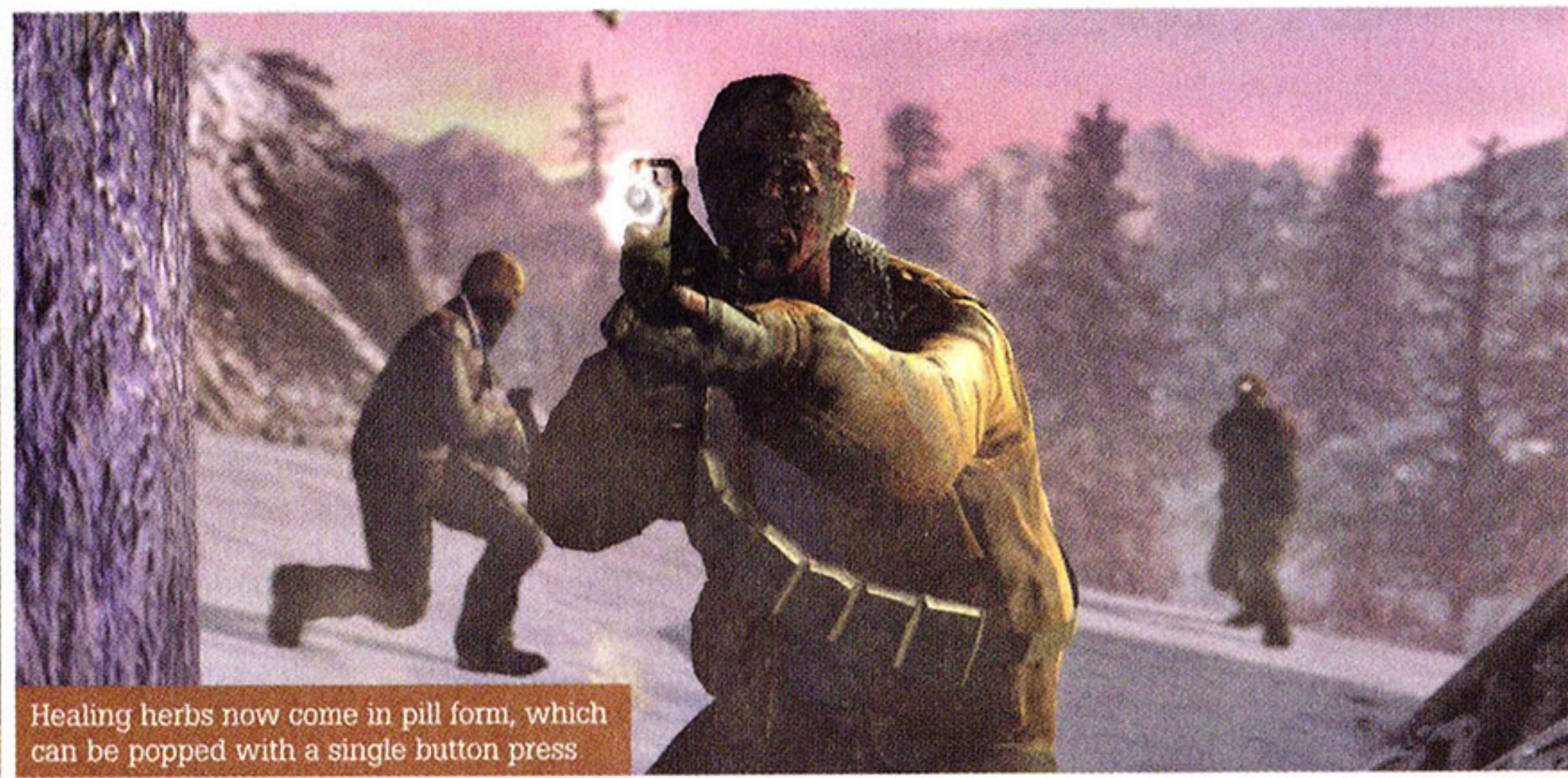
We're curious to see how Ashley and Jake get along



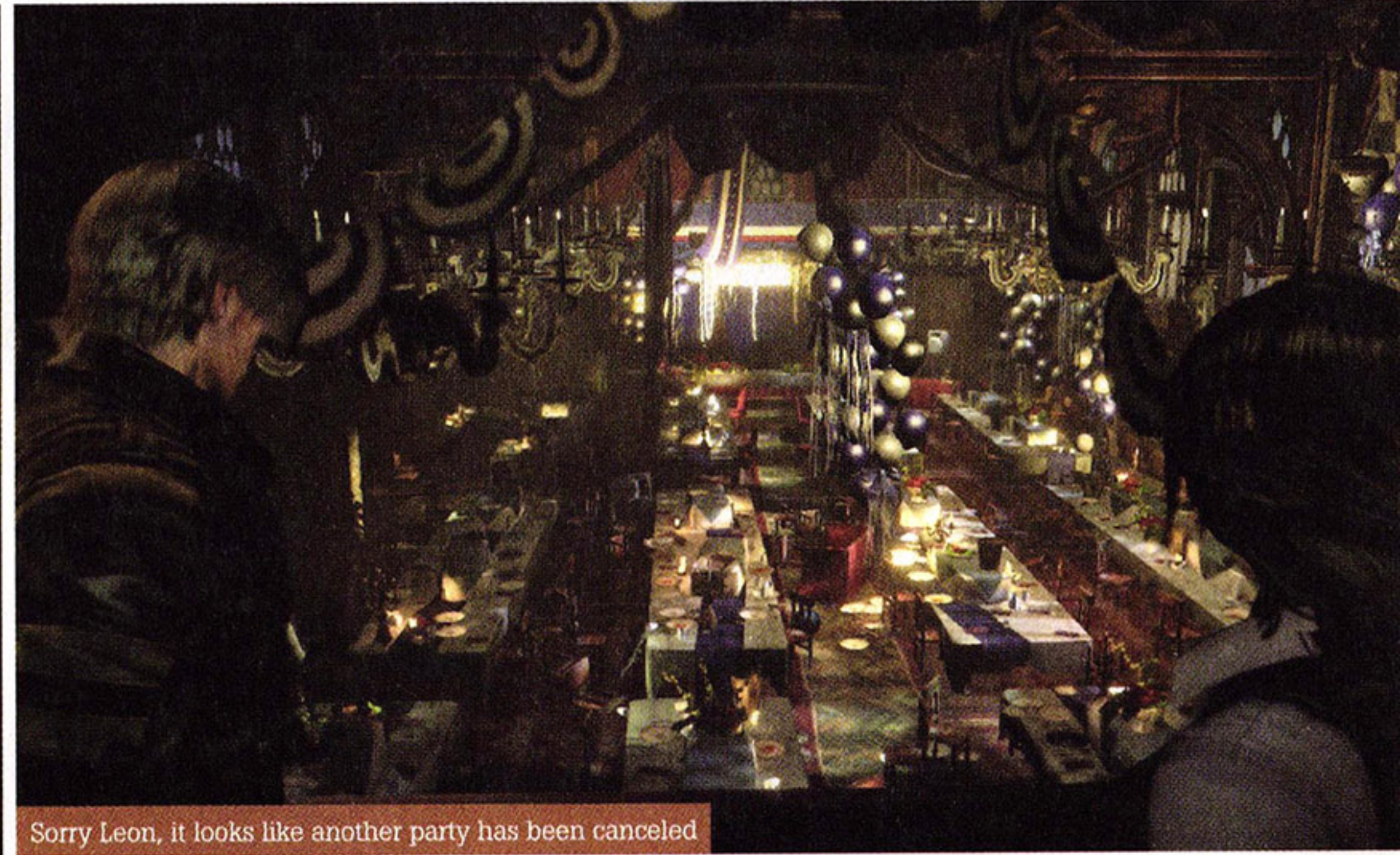




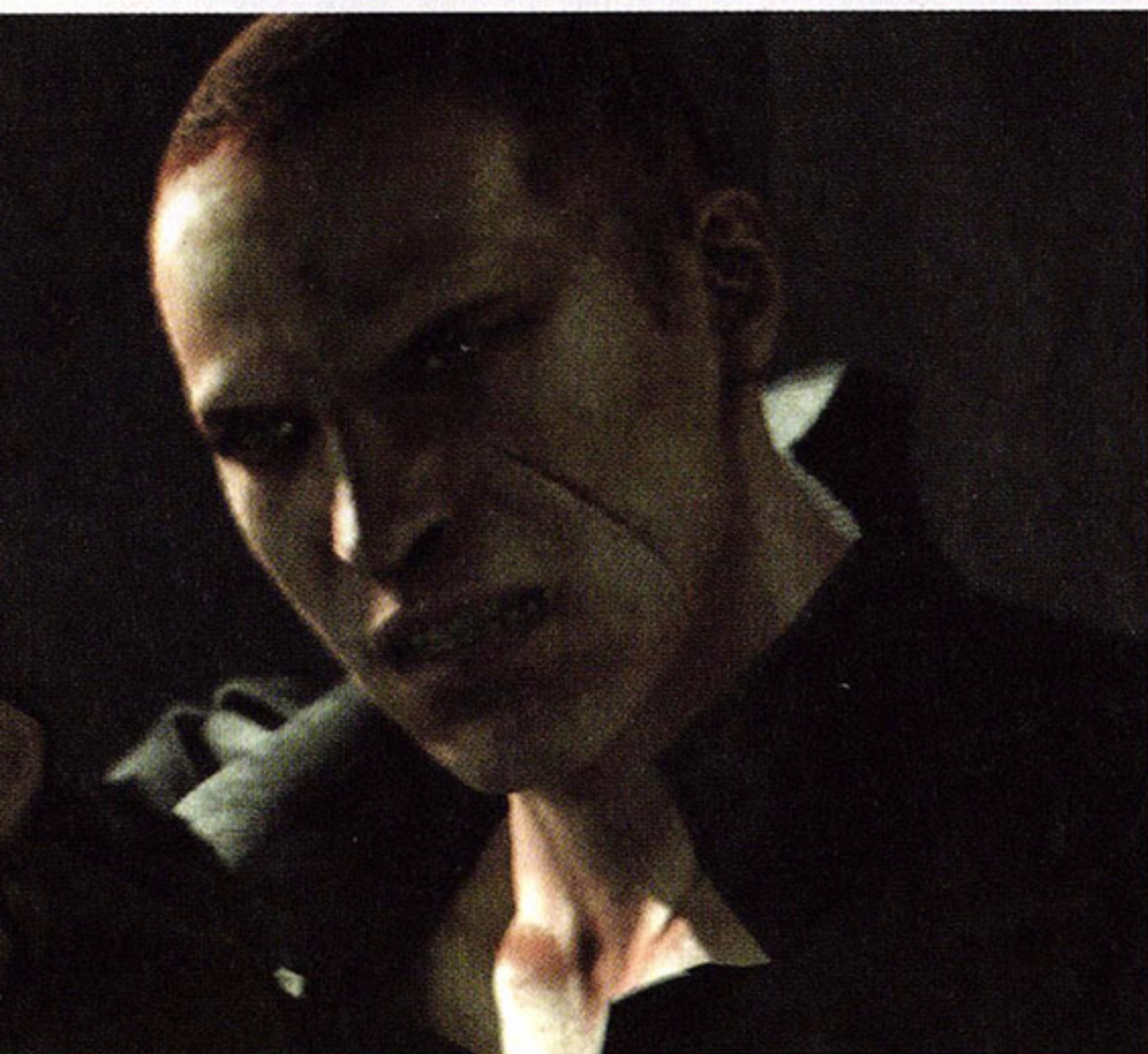
Here's a sneak peek at the inventory



Healing herbs now come in pill form, which can be popped with a single button press



Sorry Leon, it looks like another party has been canceled



### Return of the Living Dead



The C-virus brings zombies back into the Resident Evil universe. Unlike early games, these flesh-hungry ghouls will dash, jump, climb, and use weapons to take down their struggling dinners.







PS3 //

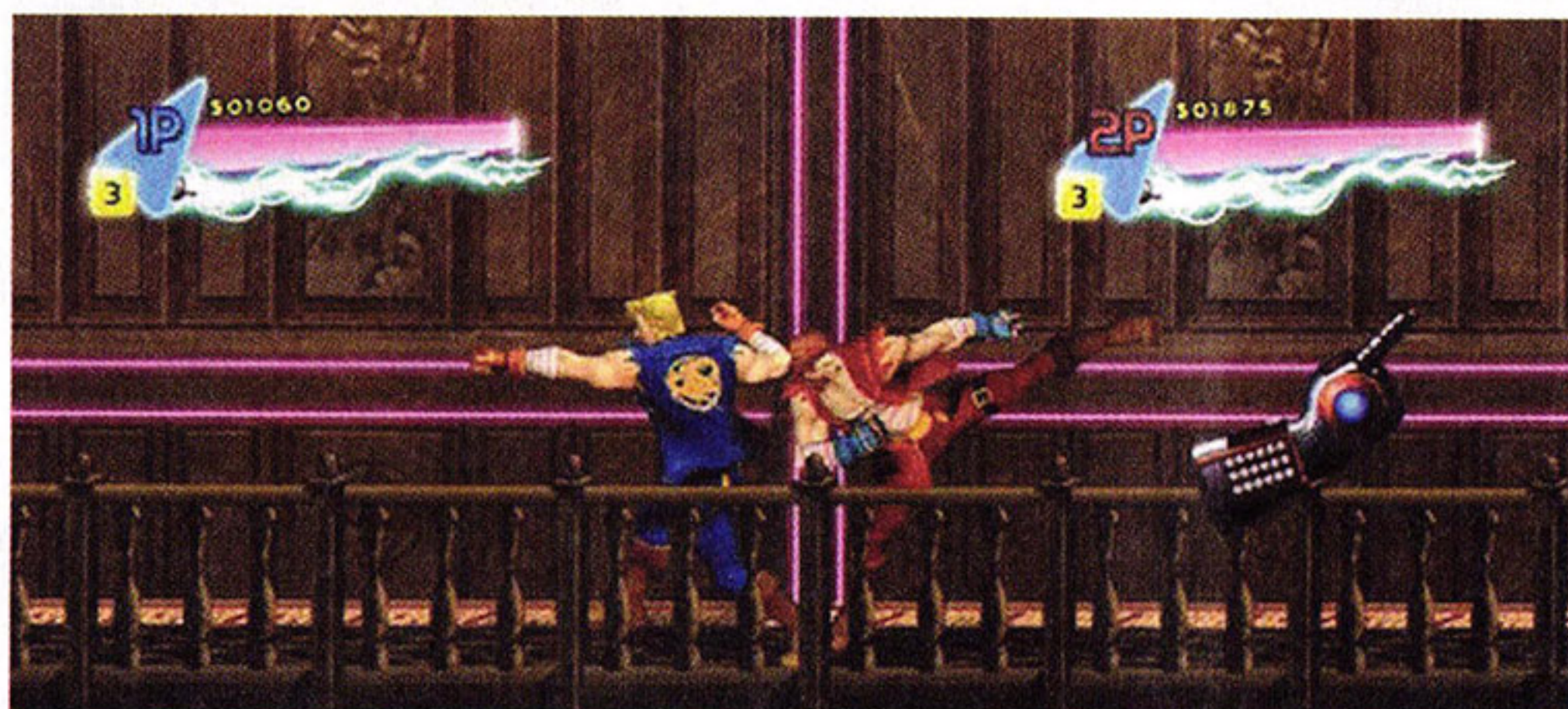
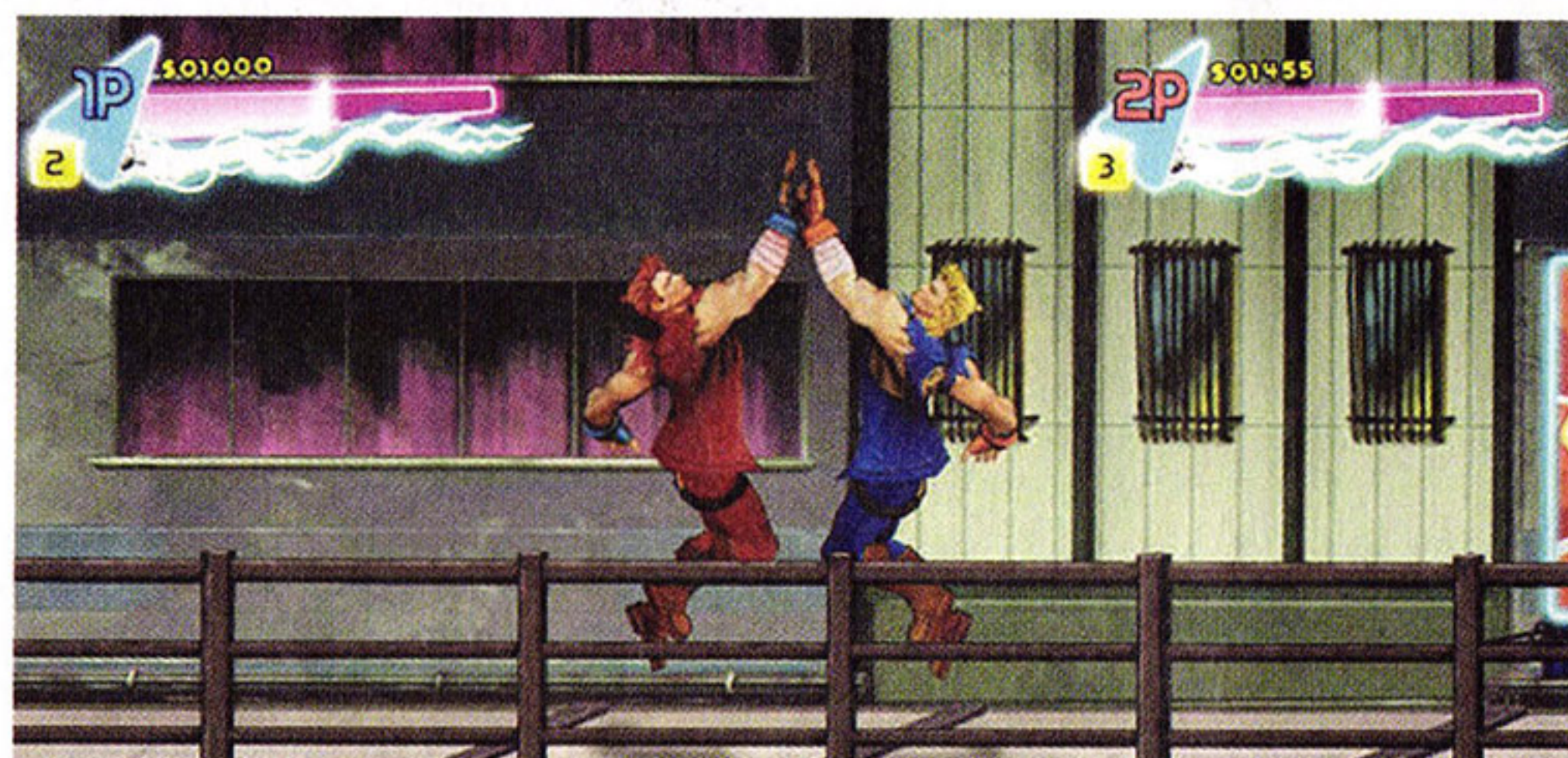
## Sorcery

Sorcery debuted at E3 back in 2010, and we haven't seen much of it since, making us wonder if the magic-based Move title would ever evolve past being a promising tech demo. Nearly two years later, Sorcery has reemerged with some snazzy new screens and a May 22 release date. It's about time: Sony's floundering peripheral could use a hit or two. » **Jeff Marchiafava**

PS3 • 360 //

## Double Dragon: Neon

Developer WayForward (A Boy and His Blob, Contra 4) has a history of creating solid new installments for established IP. It hopes to bring that experience to the upcoming Double Dragon: Neon due out this summer. Players once again assume control of Billy and Jimmy as they attempt to rescue damsel in distress Marian from new antagonist Skullmageddon's goons. From what I played at PAX East, WayForward is hitting all the right notes with this retro revival. » **Dan Ryckert**



PS3 • 360 • PC //

## Test Drive: Ferrari Racing Legends

The next installment in the Test Drive series departs from the open world stylings of last year's Test Drive Unlimited 2. Need for Speed: Shift developer Slightly Mad Studios is taking over this title that chronicles the history of Ferrari. Featuring over 50 Ferraris (complete with visual damage), 36 tracks, and over 200 missions, Ferrari Racing Legends tracks the famed carmaker's history through various racing types such as rally, GT, and Formula 1. Test Drive: Ferrari Racing Legends drives off the show floor in May. » **Matthew Kato**





PC //

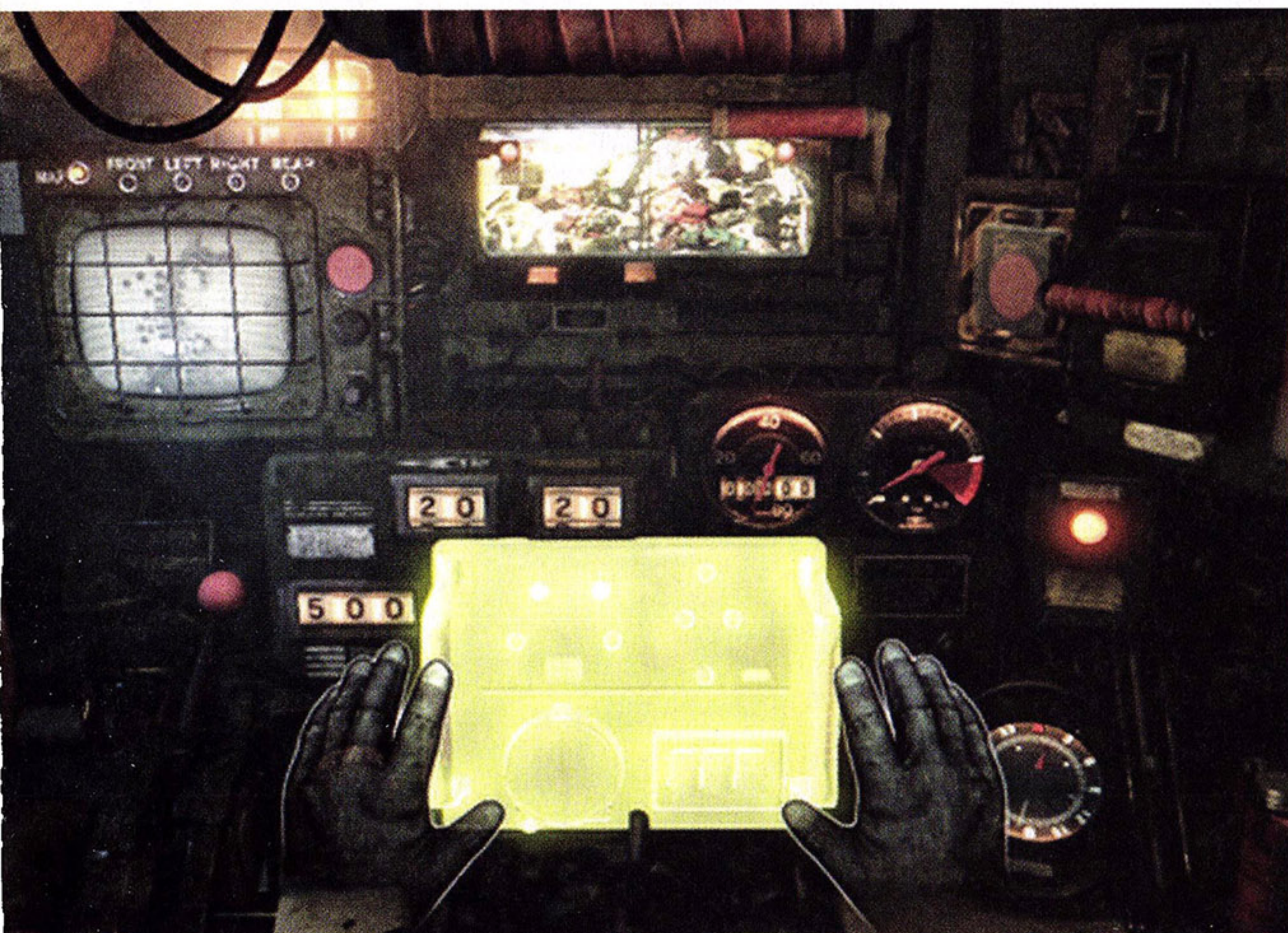
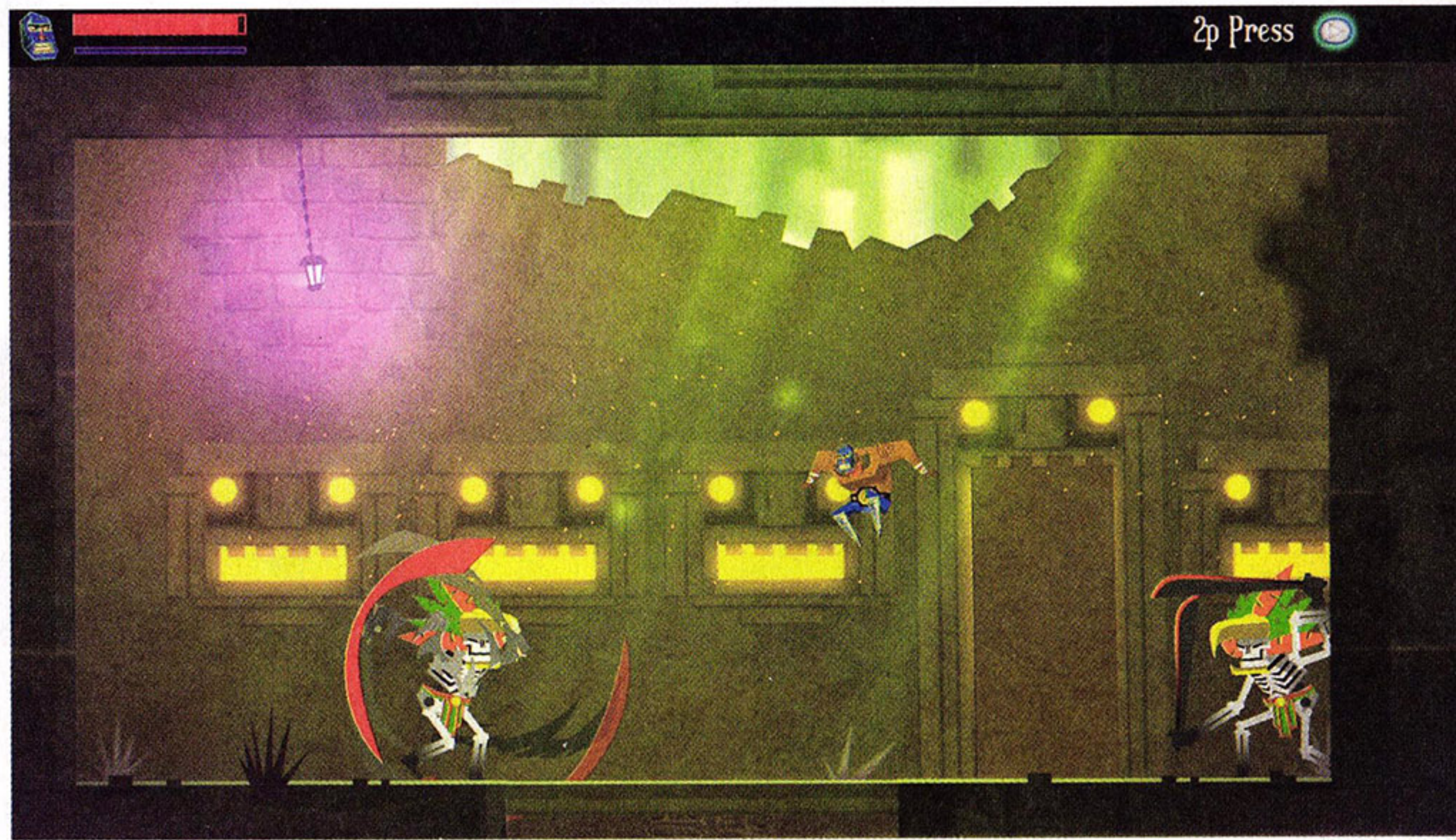
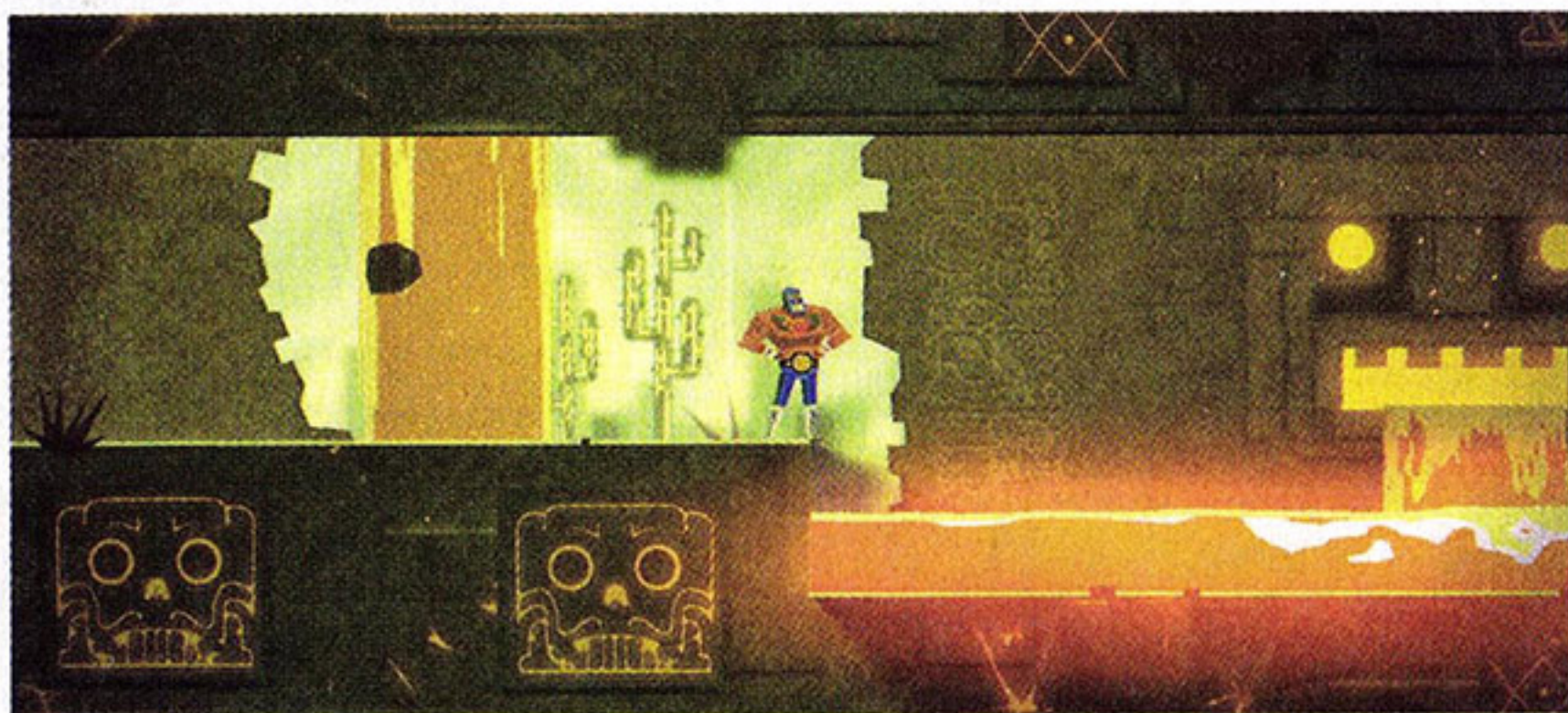
## Dark Souls: Prepare To Die Edition

Online petitions usually never amount to anything. But in the case of Dark Souls, publisher Namco Bandai's decision to port the game from consoles to PC weighed heavily on an Internet campaign that received nearly 100,000 signatures. The new Prepare to Die Edition includes more of the game's signature boss fights and a battle with a one-eyed dragon, plus new locations, enemies, weapons, and armor. Namco also promises a new online matchmaking system, allowing you to quickly jump into player-versus-player fights or co-op. Look for the game on August 24. » **Jim Reilly**

TBA //

## Guacamelee

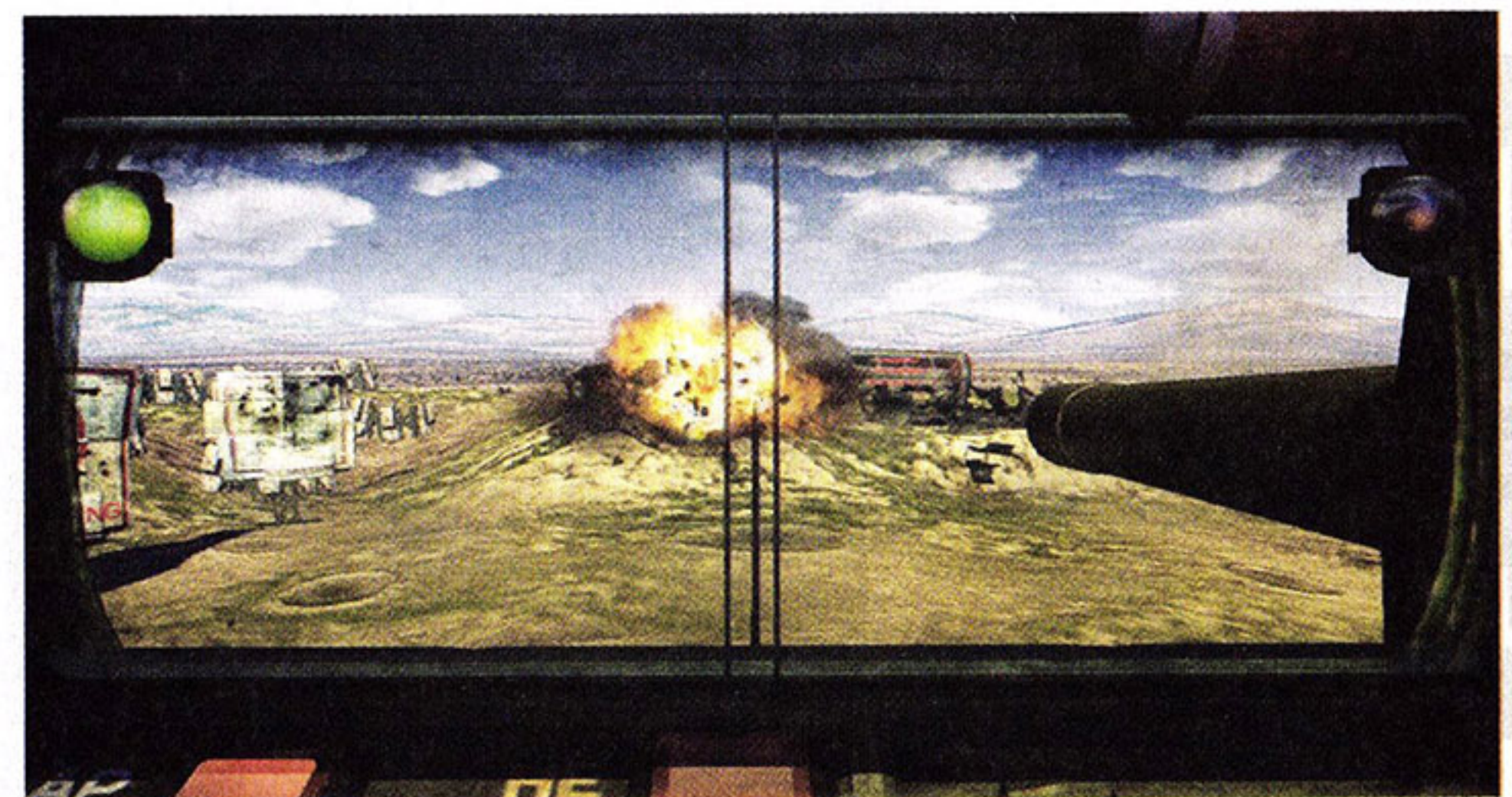
Guacamelee plays like Metroid would if it were melee-based and featured luchadores instead of intergalactic bounty hunters. You play as Juan Aguacate, a down-and-out field worker that turns to the world of lucha libre. He falls in love with the president's daughter, and sets out for revenge when she's kidnapped by a reanimated skeleton. With its ridiculous sense of humor and tried-and-true gameplay, Drinkbox's downloadable title should be one to look out for when it releases next year. » **Dan Ryckert**



360 //

## Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor

The original title in this mech series featured one of the most elaborate controllers in the history of home consoles. With Heavy Armor's hybrid Kinect/controller gameplay, now the series is going in the opposite direction. Situation-specific gestures are required fairly frequently, and these usually involve your crew. Keep them happy by giving them silly fist bumps and high fives, or more serious actions like sharing your canteen in the middle of the desert. Treat them poorly, and you risk some snide remarks or even a death on the battlefield. Heavy Armor heads to battle on June 19. » **Dan Ryckert**





# Reviews

gameinformer  
**GAME OF THE MONTH**

**92** Fez

It's a 3D world, but you can only see it from a 2D perspective. That's the fundamental idea fueling Polytron's remarkable new XBLA debut, but things only get more exciting and mind-warping from there. Ever-more unusual puzzles challenge the player to think in new ways and constantly change one's own perspective. Fez can take over your mind like few games can.

## THE SCORING SYSTEM

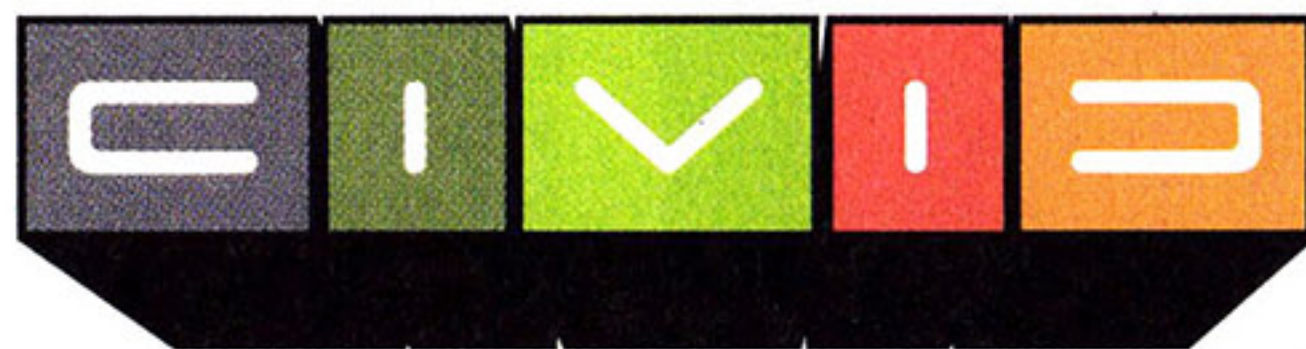
<b>10</b>	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	<b>5</b>	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
<b>9</b>	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	<b>4</b>	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.
<b>8</b>	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.	<b>3</b>	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.
<b>7</b>	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.	<b>2</b>	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
<b>6</b>	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	<b>1</b>	Max Payne's life.

## AWARDS

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



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# Dragon's Dogma

Capcom delivers an open world worth exploring

8.5

gameinformer  
SILVER

Style 1-Player Role-Playing Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Release May 22 ESRB M

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Give players an open world, fill it with monsters, and provide their heroes with the tools to dominate

» **Graphics**

Gransys is a well-realized world, filled with beautiful scenery and imposing monsters

» **Sound**

If there's a shy pawn out there, I never met him. AI companions fill the silence with their every observation, however mundane

» **Playability**

Combat is intensely satisfying, with an impressive amount of class-based attacks and skills

» **Entertainment**

Dragon's Dogma blends the best from open-world RPGs and action games without feeling like a diluted wannabe

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High

Dragon's Dogma is one of those rare "have your cake and eat it, too" games, where the inspired designers take elements from several different genres and mash them together. In this case, open-world RPGs and hack-and-slash action games are the source materials. It's not perfect, but its arsenal of unusual party mechanics and combat flourishes make it worthy of any virtual sword-swinger's time.

Dragon's Dogma is strictly a single-player experience, though AI companions called pawns help sell the concept that your hero isn't alone in the sprawling fantasy world of Gransys. You create your own pawn in the beginning of the game, selecting its gender, tweaking its appearance, and choosing its class. As you travel the world, your pawn soaks up and shares information about the environments, quests, and enemies it's exposed to. In a battle against a cyclops, for instance, your companion might recommend stunning the creature with a blast of lightning. Walk near a beach, and your pawn may drop hints that valuable items may have washed ashore.

If you're connected online, you can hire pawns that other players have created, and they'll join your game with whatever knowledge, gear, and skills they've already acquired. It works the other way around, as well. When you visit an inn, you may get word that your pawn has returned back from adventuring in someone else's game (even if they've been beside you the entire time. Suspend your disbelief.). Those adventures add to your pawn's knowledge base, meaning that they can help you out in situations that are new to you. It's quite clever, and I always got excited each time my pawn came back with valuable information – especially when those tips led to more loot.

Pawns may not be the greatest conversationalists – expect to hear plenty of repeated

dialogue – but they're indispensable in battle. Dragon's Dogma provides a rich and satisfying combat system, and the pawns hold their own against Gransys' varied bestiary of classic mythological creatures. Some of the team members from the Devil May Cry series worked on this game, and that pedigree shines through the action-heavy encounters. Players have access to a wide array of combos, juggles, and other deadly tools. Your character's actions are quick and responsive, and combat feels more like something that you'd experience in a full-fledged action game than the sluggish offerings that action RPGs typically provide. You can create a balanced party with tanks, healers, and damage dealers, but it's not mandatory. I had the most fun when my magic archer teamed up with a pair of mages and a sorcerer. My heat-seeking arrows combined with their magic attacks to create a deadly spectacle.

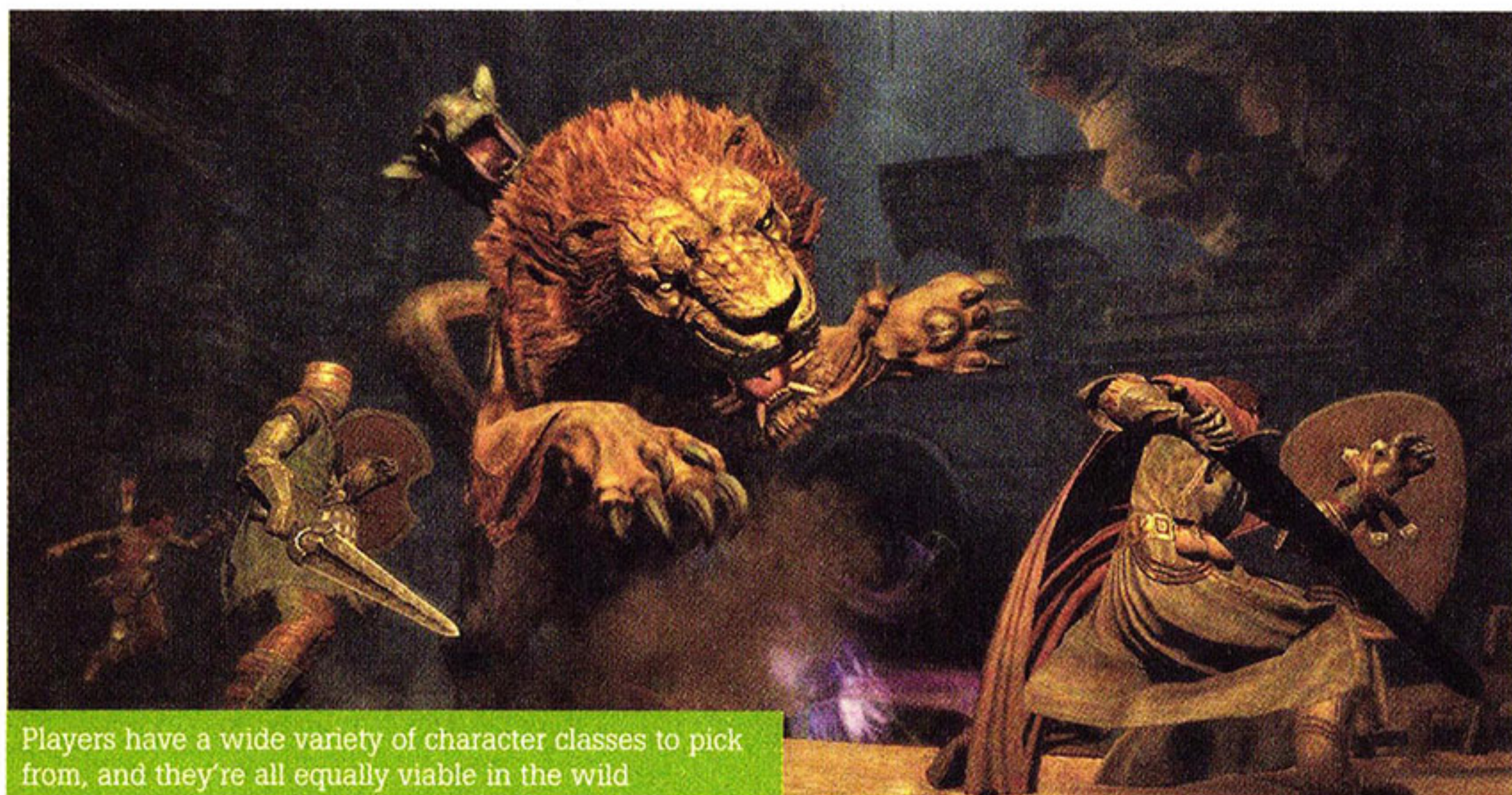
One of my favorite parts of the game is how Capcom expertly layers skill progression, loot upgrades, and the pawns to sell the feeling that you're a powerful force in a brutal world. I was pleased to see how regularly my skills progressed throughout my journey, and they went far beyond the simple "+2 damage" type improvements I've grown accustomed to. I felt pretty slick the first time I fired ricocheting magic bolts of energy into an unexplored tunnel and heard unseen monsters squeal in pain. A few hours later, I was able to shoot three of those same blasts simultaneously. Character respects are easy, which came in handy when I jealously watched a melee-based pawn in action. A short while later, I was exploring the world as a newly minted warrior.

If you need a strong story to pull you along in your adventures, you may be disappointed with Dragon's Dogma. In the beginning of the game, your character meets a dragon and has his or her heart yanked out. From there, it's up to you to find the dragon and slay it. That's basically all there is, for better or worse. Personally, I'd rather make my own fun than sit through hours of cutscenes, so this spartan approach didn't bother me. Quests provide a nice incentive to explore the world and give the experience some much-needed direction. Capcom delivers a solid balance between mundane collection quests and more ambitious tasks. In one early mission, I had to escort a rickety cart carrying a hydra's head to a duke for a tribute. The bloody trophy was a magnet to the region's goblins and harpies, and I was barely able to guide the cart through a winding canyon with just a sliver of health remaining.

I play a lot of action/RPGs, and I was continuously surprised at how Capcom managed to freshen up many of the stale aspects of the genre. Mages and sorcerers deal with elements we've all seen before, but not quite like this. Freakish spires of ice pummel unsuspecting foes, while lightning attacks are delivered not in mini lightning storms, but in crackling bolts that are wielded like whips.

Dragon's Dogma is an unconventional game for Capcom, and action/RPGs in general. Combat feels like a necessary part of the game's design, rather than something that was begrudgingly added to provide interaction between cutscenes. I left the game feeling that I made my mark on Gransys the way I chose to, instead of being escorted from plot point to plot point. When you're talking about an open-world game, I can't think of higher praise. » **Jeff Cork**

Visit [gameinformer.com](http://gameinformer.com) for developer tips on how to stay alive in Gransys and more



Players have a wide variety of character classes to pick from, and they're all equally viable in the wild



# Prototype 2

Radical's latest comes out of the prototyping phase



gameinformer  
SILVER

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Activision Developer Radical Entertainment Release April 24 ESRB M

When the first Prototype released in 2009, it did a lot of things right: traversing the towering skyscrapers of New York City, stealing the identity of anyone you see, and forming weapons out of your character's grotesquely morphed appendages. It fell short in many ways as well, but Prototype 2 feels like a well-heard response to fan feedback, addressing nearly every issue from the original.

Over a year after the events of Prototype, New York is overrun yet again by the Blacklight virus. New hero James Heller is out for revenge against former protagonist Alex Mercer for causing the outbreak that killed his family. Before long, Mercer grants his viral powers to Heller, seeing potential in the experienced soldier and hoping to win him as an ally.

Mercer slides easily into the antagonist role, since he was always more of an antihero. Heller reminds me of God of War's Kratos, focused entirely on revenge with his emotions set constantly on angry. With him, Radical essentially

traded in one story cliché (amnesia) for another (dead wife and kid).

Bouncing through the city and pounding the hell out of everything is Prototype 2's main focus. The city traversal is some of the best I've seen. Like Mercer before him, Heller can sprint up a skyscraper in seconds, dash and glide through the air, and commandeer tanks and helicopters—but now the controls feel more natural. I love how I can zip across the whole city to a mission in no time and still land on a dime.

The mobility improvements are nice, but combat has evolved even more. Instead of constantly fiddling with a weapon wheel, two powers are mapped to separate face buttons, allowing you to mix up ground-pounding Hammerfist area attacks with speedy melee claws, for example. A new power extends tendrils from your arm and strings up a target, leaving it vulnerable to limb-slicing or other special attacks.

New defensive options make Heller feel like a complete combat package. His shield is easily

accessible at all times, and it doesn't ever break. Time it right and you can even reflect rockets or counter melee attacks with a shield bash covered in long spikes. You can also easily flip over enemies when they attack and start slashing from behind.

The difficulty remains relatively mild, with a challenging flare-up here and there, but it never gets cheap. Players track targets to consume, put down infected monstrosities, bust/sneak into bases, and pose as a soldier. Some stretches feel repetitive, but things always pick back up soon enough, especially at the end. The final boss puts all of your powers to the test, and is much more narratively significant than the previous one. Unfortunately, the by-the-numbers, post-battle wrap-up doesn't leave much of an impact.

You could just stick to the core objectives, but it's wise to keep up with the extra Blacknet missions as well. They provide unique tasks, more evolution points, and unique mutation upgrades. These mutations work outside the standard leveling system, offering boosts to damage, hijack speed, and more. They can also be obtained by grabbing collectibles. Don't worry, there are far fewer than the hundreds of floating orbs in the original, and the brilliant in-game hint system ensures that you can find everything yourself.

Prototype 2 has officially redeemed this franchise. The mechanics feel the way you wished they would have in the first installment, and it's a rush to abuse your incredible powers any way you see fit. If you've stayed away from the first game because of the lackluster word of mouth, don't hesitate to jump right into the sequel. A slick video catches you up on everything right out of the gate so there's no excuse to miss this taste of ultimate viral power. » **Bryan Vore**

# 8.5

PS3 • 360

## » Concept

Fix most of the problems of the first game and make original antihero Alex Mercer a true villain

## » Graphics

Prototype 2 looks better than the original in every way, including pulsing tentacles coming out of skyscrapers, more expressive faces in cutscenes, and impressive dynamic lighting effects

## » Sound

Rocking explosions, meat slicing and tearing, gloopy transformation noises, and radio battles between scientists and soldiers bring the world to life

## » Playability

Navigation and combat have undergone significant overhauls to make everything feel just right

## » Entertainment

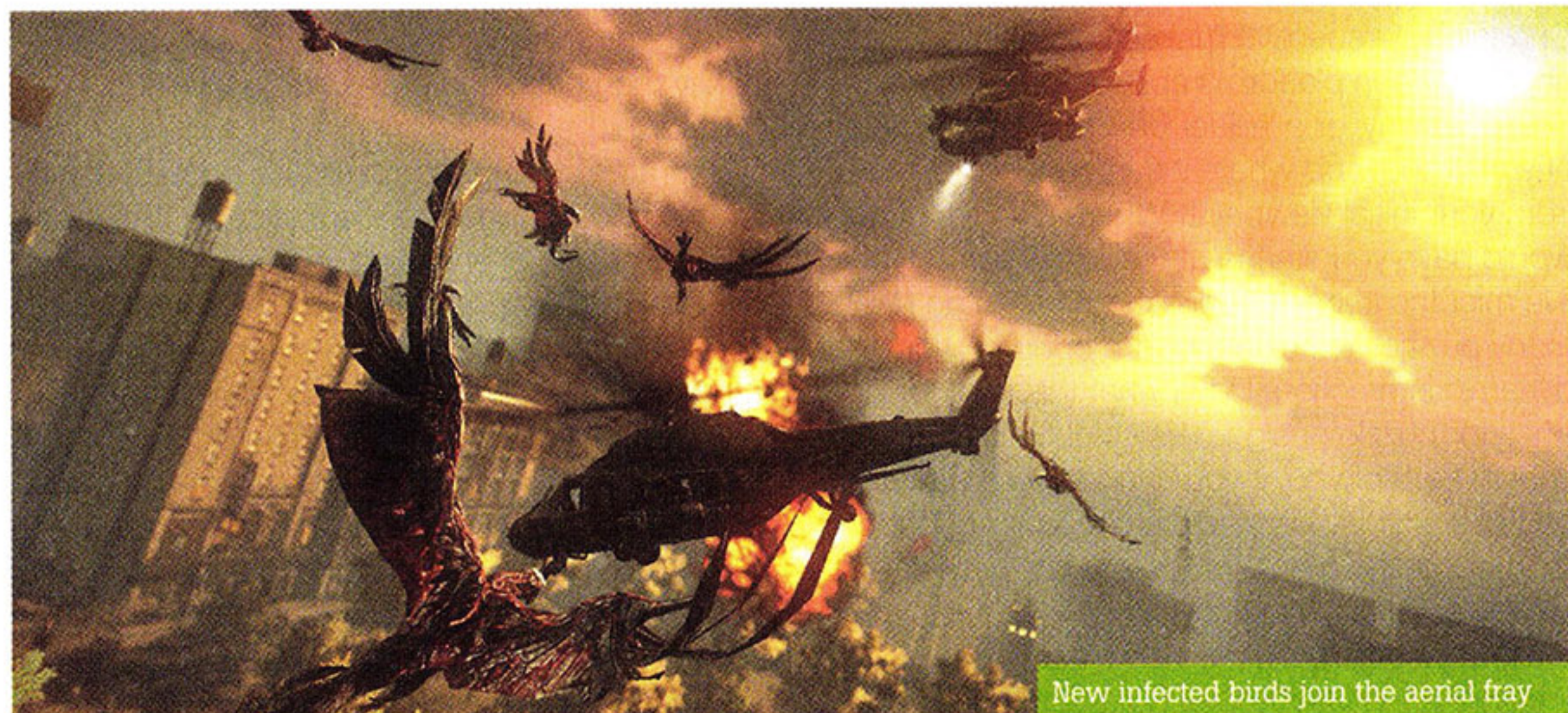
This is the Prototype game everyone wanted

## » Replay Value

Moderately High

## What is Radnet?

Radnet is the online component of Prototype 2 that comes as a code with every new copy of the game. For seven weeks, the game updates with a new set of minigames, challenges, avatar items, and DLC content. Minigame "events" will show up in your normal game, tasking you to kill as many enemies as you can in a certain time limit, for example. If you complete a weekly set of tasks, you get a variety of in-game rewards. Leaderboards keep track of all your scores and will promptly notify your friends if you best their scores. While I appreciate the attempt to introduce Pinball FX-style score battles, I don't care if someone does better than me at roof running. I just want to get at least a bronze rating on the event and move on to the next task to get my reward.



New infected birds join the aerial fray



# Fez

Change your perspective

9.25

360

» **Concept**

Explore a 3D world from a 2D perspective in this perception-altering puzzler

» **Graphics**

A charming 8-bit aesthetic feels both nostalgic and fresh

» **Sound**

Intermittent chip-music tracks are used to great effect

» **Playability**

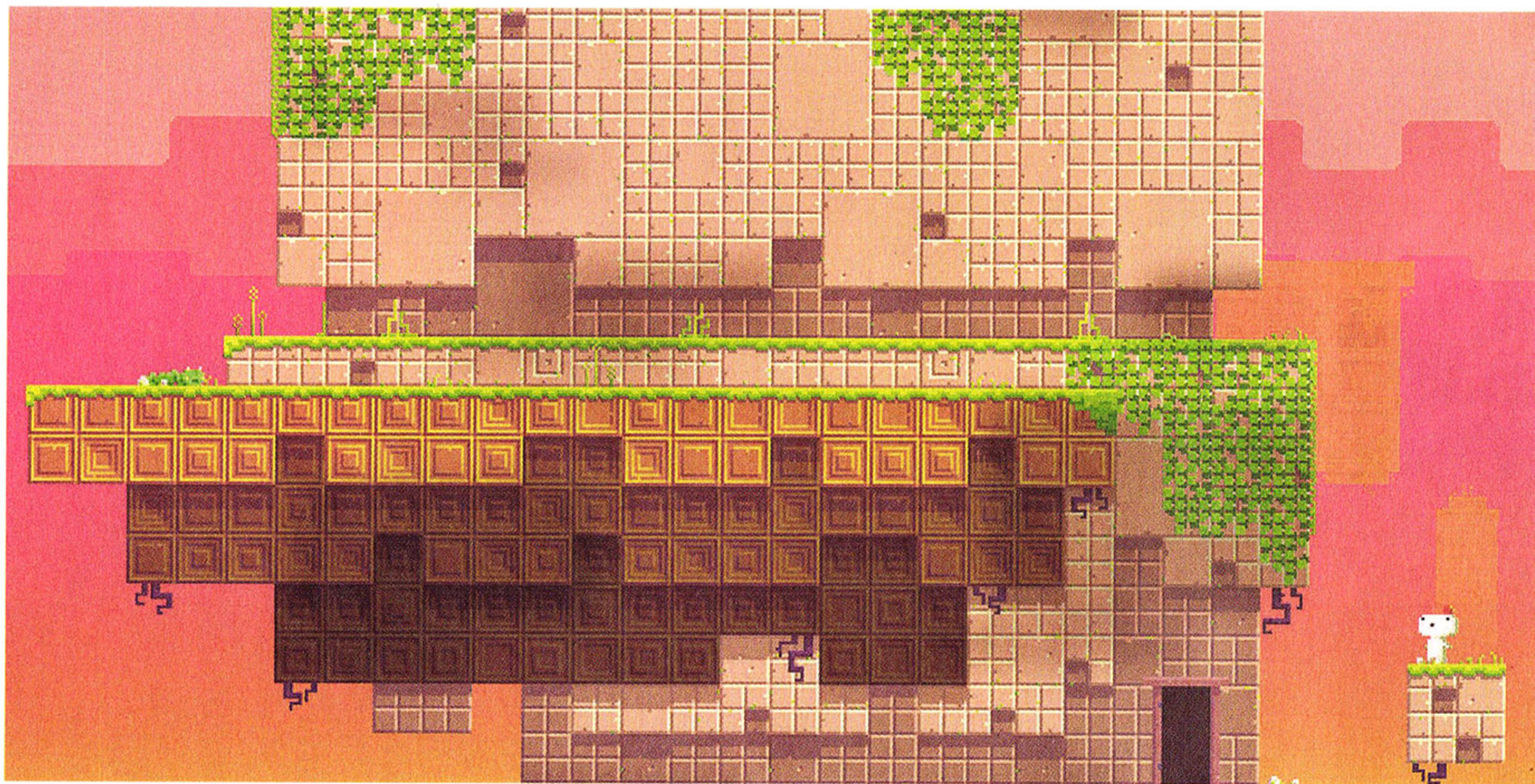
Controls are mapped well, but the lack of any in-game guidance can make navigation challenging

» **Entertainment**

A masterful puzzle game that challenges you to think in new ways

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High



gameinformer  
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameinformer  
GOLD

Style 1-Player Puzzle/Platform Publisher Microsoft Developer Polytron Release April 13 ESRB E

Take two small objects and hold them out in either hand directly in front of your left and right eyes. Now move them both to the center point between your two eyes, like both objects are rotating a quarter turn around an invisible center axis. In your perception, those two objects now look like one; they've merged on the horizontal plane in front of your eyes. This simple optical illusion is the foundation of Fez, the brilliant new puzzle/platformer from Polytron. While others have teased the potential of this trick – most notably Echochrome and Super Paper Mario – no other game captures the potential and magic of the concept like Fez. The result is one of the most accessible, clever, and mind-altering experiences on the gaming market.

You are Gomez, and your small 2D world has just been flipped on its head by the arrival of a magical fez. Your new hat lets you shift your

perspective and perceive the 3D world that's always been outside your perception. Echoing storytelling and themes presented decades ago in the novella *Flatland* by Edwin A. Abbot, you set out and discover that the world is far bigger and more complex than you first imagined.

The guiding principle behind the joy of Fez is the sensation of discovery. Every new level is a process of pulling back the curtain a little further. Secrets and mysteries abound: Hidden warp doors send you careening across the map to different locations, bright red treasure chests hide keys and artifacts, and looming obelisks tease concepts you might not grasp until hours later. The rabbit hole goes incredibly deep; some of the most involved puzzles are so complicated that you can easily pass them by without even realizing a puzzle was present.

As you reveal these mysteries, you collect glowing cubes – the keys to saving the universe, naturally. Reaching these tantalizing cubes is the real trick, requiring you to rotate the entire world around to get a new view of the action. Changing perspective makes impossibly distant gaps between platforms appear to be only a few feet away, or a ladder on the opposite side of a wall show up where it seemed invisible from your initial viewpoint. Where another game would have you staring at the same screen for five minutes trying to figure out what to do next, many puzzles in Fez are built around motion and dynamic interaction. I love what this mechanic does for puzzle design. The solution is usually right in front of you, if you change your view on the situation. Puzzles are challenging, but for most of the game you're solving them at a steady and rewarding pace.

Several magnificent and original brainteasers wait in the later hours, but the pace of

progression dramatically slows. Confusing navigation and the likelihood of frequent backtracking are the game's only real flaws; far-flung clues and the inability to move quickly between unsolved levels takes its toll, and the conclusion sits frustratingly out of reach for several hours. Fez alleviates some of this slowdown by offering two different types of cubes that can be used to reach the end. One set is generally easier to reach, but they both combine to create the total you need to witness the end-game. Completionists may return afterwards to put together the wildly challenging full picture. Those dedicated players are in for a treat, since Fez offers a New Game+ feature with an intriguing twist that will change the way you see Gomez's world.

Fez's 8-bit art style is simple but charming, and plays well into the fiction of this strange universe of flat shapes and hard corners. Occasional frame rate stalls during autosaves and location loads aren't enough to hurt the otherwise smooth visual presentation. The sparse musical soundtrack heightens the atmosphere at key moments, and drives home the '80s nostalgia vibe.

The most striking moments and puzzles of Fez are the ones I'm most reticent to spoil. The initial core mechanic of changing your perspective on the level is actually a preface for deeper layers of gameplay. Whether it's the subtle shifts in lighting during the day and night cycle of a level, translating seemingly meaningless symbols into meaningful clues, or even paying attention to the specific vibrations of your controller, Fez challenges players to think and see in new ways. It's a puzzle game with genuine moments of revelation and subtlety, and deserves all the acclaim it will undoubtedly receive. » **Matt Miller**





# Kinect Star Wars

The Force is broken

Style 1 or 2-Player Action Publisher LucasArts Developer Terminal Reality Release April 3 ESRB T

# 5.5

360

## » Concept

An ambitious Kinect game that doesn't work as well as it needs to

## » Graphics

Sticks closer to the simple and cartoon-like art style of the *Clone Wars* series than it does to the motion pictures

## » Sound

One of the worst voice-acted protocol droids outside of *Doctor Who* blabs through a large portion of the story. As always, familiar tunes accompany the action

## » Playability

Due to motion recognition problems, the Force is an unreliable and frustrating weapon

## » Entertainment

Roughly eight hours of "point and laugh" fun, but the actual game is terrible

## » Replay Value

Moderate

I ignore the abysmal rating for one second. I had a good time playing *Kinect Star Wars*. More accurately, I laughed all the way through it, and most of the people who jumped in to play cooperatively with me left with smiles on their faces.

Some of the comedy is intentional, mostly delivered through minigame diversions separate from the core campaign. Dancing alongside Han Solo to a familiar pop song rewritten with groan-inducing *Star Wars*-themed lyrics is a strange idea, even for a company that decided Greedo shot first. Watching Han perform moves like the "trash compactor" and "falcon in flight" hurt my inner nerd, but more so made me laugh and shake my head in disbelief. Galactic Dance Off mode is designed to be fun and weird, and it succeeds in being both.

The dance mechanics are similar in design to Harmonix's *Dance Central*, but lack accurate motion recognition. I received a three-star ranking doing nothing but crotch chops – some were applauded by the game as "Great." This mode offers a handful of unlockable parody songs that have no business being a part of *Star Wars*. Christina Aguilera's "Genie in the Bottle" is transformed into "Princess in a Battle," and the Village People's "YMCA" (which I thought would be "YODA") is "Empire Today."

Another minigame, the Rancor Rampage mode, gives you control of the giant creature that Luke Skywalker killed with a steel door in *Return of the Jedi*. I reveled in dealing massive amounts of environmental damage with its powerful attacks. This hyperactive rampage is mostly free of challenge, but it's one of the game's few highlights. The act of picking up a lowly human and inserting him into the rancor's mouth is hands-down my favorite use of Kinect yet; you can even pick up a human in each hand and devour both of them at once. Humans not deemed worthy enough for lunch can be hurled hilariously far into the distance.

The remainder of the game takes itself much more seriously, and like most *Star Wars* video games, is a story-driven experience similar to those offered on the silver screen. In a mode called Jedi Destiny: Dark Force Rising, I assumed the role of one of eight silent Jedi padawans – all appearing to be far too old to start their Jedi training. After being wowed by the simple action of extending my right hand to use the Force to grab my lightsaber, the gameplay went downhill shortly after the blade was ignited. Kinect struggles to pick up arm movement most of the time. After a few dozen failed attempts to recognize my intended wrist flicks and raised arm strikes, I switched to short robotic swings and found a higher level of success. Since most



foes ran blindly into my attack zone, this strategy worked well. With most of my focus applied to simply making the game work, I derived little fun from it.

Actions like jumping or lunging run into similar detection problems. Given how much I tried to emphasize my intent, most battles were obscured by Kinect's "move back into the field of play" warning. The game often lost track of me, resulting in five-second delays to reestablish participation.

Excitement and tension also dissolve if you delay a split second when you're expected to perform an action. At that point, a holographic version of Obi-Wan appears onscreen to show you exactly what to do. In a few instances, he even appears directly in the center of the screen over the action. I never once felt like a Jedi playing this game. Instead, I felt like I was thrown into an elaborate dance line, forced to watch the person standing next to me to figure out what move I should do next.

The worst part of it all is that the cinematics show Jedi doing miraculous things. They spin through the air, bounce off of the heads of foes, and become the unstoppable forces I was hoping to be. As soon as I took control, simple dodges and arm waving replaced those spectacular feats.

Though *Kinect Star Wars* lacks the spirit of Jedi combat, I still found it to be amusing. A few laughs even came from the story, which spends most of its time recreating moments from the *Star Wars* films rather than paving its own path. It's a Frankenstein's monster-like mash-up that includes a sarlacc pit battle (complete with skiffs), speeder bikes zooming through a dense forest, and a space battle that concludes with an "escape the exploding reactor" sequence. Even the Sith warriors, who initially look like new characters, are just re-skinned versions of Darth Maul. They wield double-bladed sabers, and perish before we learn anything interesting about them.

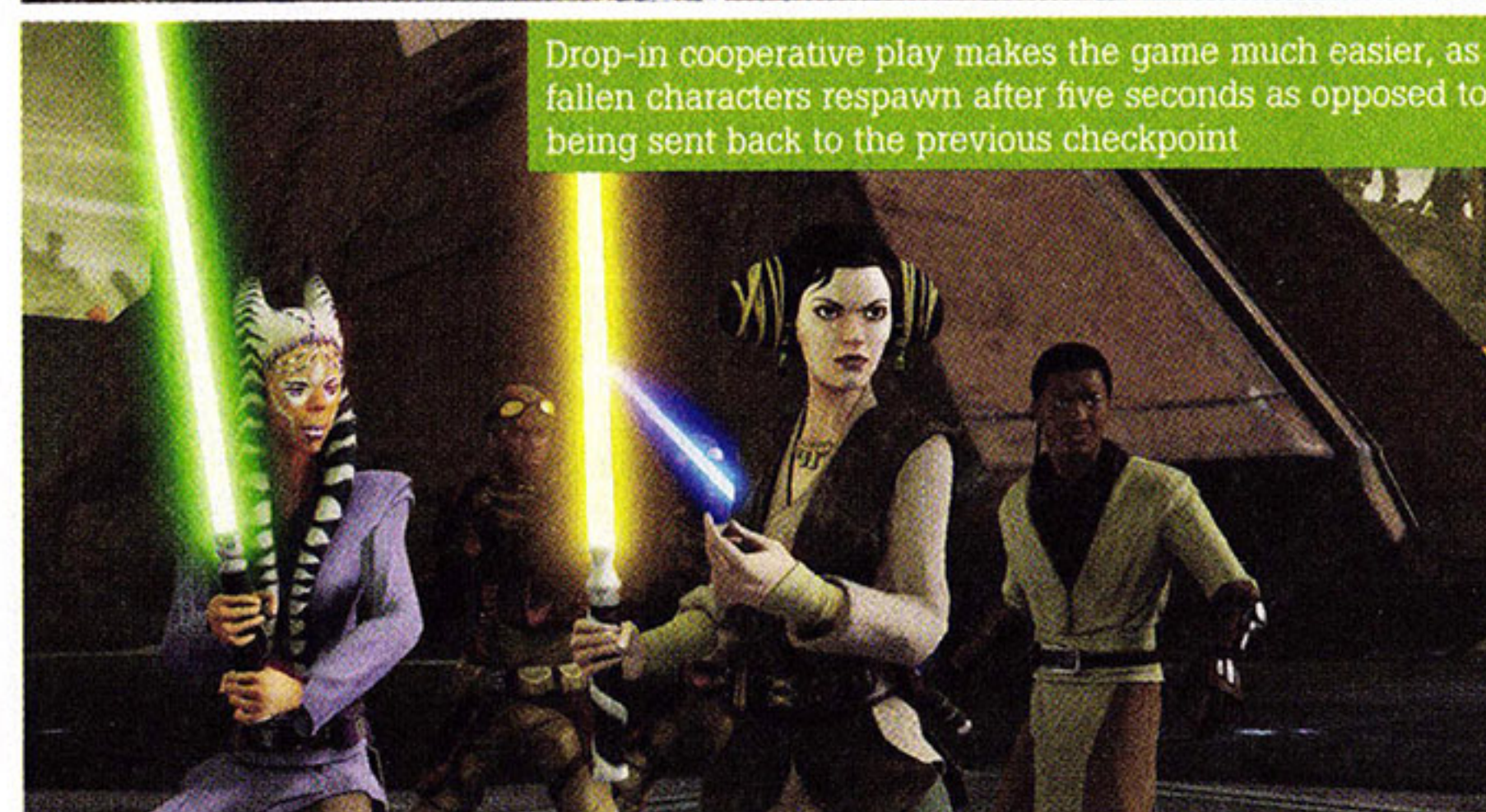
Space battles round out the *Star Wars*

experience. These gameplay sequences move slower than molasses and are more about picking ships out of a busy background than testing your gunning skills. If you see a ship, you usually have a good five to seven seconds to down it.

*Kinect Star Wars* is a bad game. If you go into it knowing that you are getting full-on camp like *The Star Wars Holiday Special* rather than a legitimate *Star Wars* experience, it can be fun, but you have to tolerate faulty Kinect recognition the whole time. Ever since Nintendo introduced the Wii, I've been hoping LucasArts would deliver a great motion-based lightsaber experience, but *Kinect Star Wars* left me wanting a controller again. » **Andrew Reiner**



Yoda and Mace Windu give the new padawans advice, but play no role in the outcome of the story



Drop-in cooperative play makes the game much easier, as fallen characters respawn after five seconds as opposed to being sent back to the previous checkpoint



# Trials Evolution

More addictive than ever

9

gameinformer  
GOLD

Style 1 to 4-Player Racing (4-Players Online) Publisher Microsoft Studios Developer RedLynx Release April 18 ESRB E 10+

360

## » Concept

Expand upon the widely loved experience of Trials HD

## » Graphics

You won't see much difference in the character models, but the backgrounds are vastly improved

## » Sound

The annoying metal riffs are one of the game's only weak points

## » Playability

It's incredibly challenging, but you'll know it's your fault when you fail

## » Entertainment

Evolution is a blast even if you're playing offline, but some of its best qualities come out when competing against the performances of your friends

## » Replay Value

High

When it launched as part of Microsoft's 2009 Summer of Arcade promotion, Trials HD quickly earned fans with its challenging physics-based gameplay. Almost three years later, RedLynx has released Trials Evolution, and it's a more than worthy follow-up. It maintains the fantastic gameplay that made its predecessor a hit, but dramatically improves upon the stages and adds an entertaining multiplayer component.

Virtually the entire Trials HD experience took place in the same bland warehouse environment. You may see glimpses of a similar area from time to time in Evolution, but they're rarities amongst the sea of beautifully designed outdoor environments. One stage has you careening down a floating roller coaster, another has you navigating the perilous rocks and ramps of midair islands, and others are clear homages to other properties, including Limbo and the rotating cities of Christopher Nolan's *Inception*.

These areas appear wildly different than those in Trials HD, but the challenging gameplay is fully intact. Some complained about the steep learning curve of the previous game, and many missed out on the later stages because of it. You won't breeze through Evolution by any means, but the game is more generous with checkpoints and features a new method of progressing through your career. Medals are required to move on to the next license test or set of levels. Simply beating every stage in order isn't enough to move forward; that only rewards you with a bronze medal worth one point. If you hope to make it to the end, you need to aim for silver (two points) and gold (three points) in most of the early courses. Herein lies the difficulty of Trials Evolution, not in long spaces between checkpoints on particularly hard levels. I finished the game with 137 medals, which was enough to unlock the extreme courses. As was the case in the first game, I couldn't complete any of these unbelievably difficult areas. Beating everything Trials Evolution has to offer (or even crazier,

getting all the medals) requires superhuman reflexes and patience.

As you progress, you also unlock skill games that are almost always hilarious to experiment with. One has you skiing down a dusty hill, another tasks you with flying via the use of cardboard wings, and a couple are even nods to 'Splosion Man and Marble Madness. Standard courses outnumber these skill games by far, but their quality makes up for the lack of quantity.

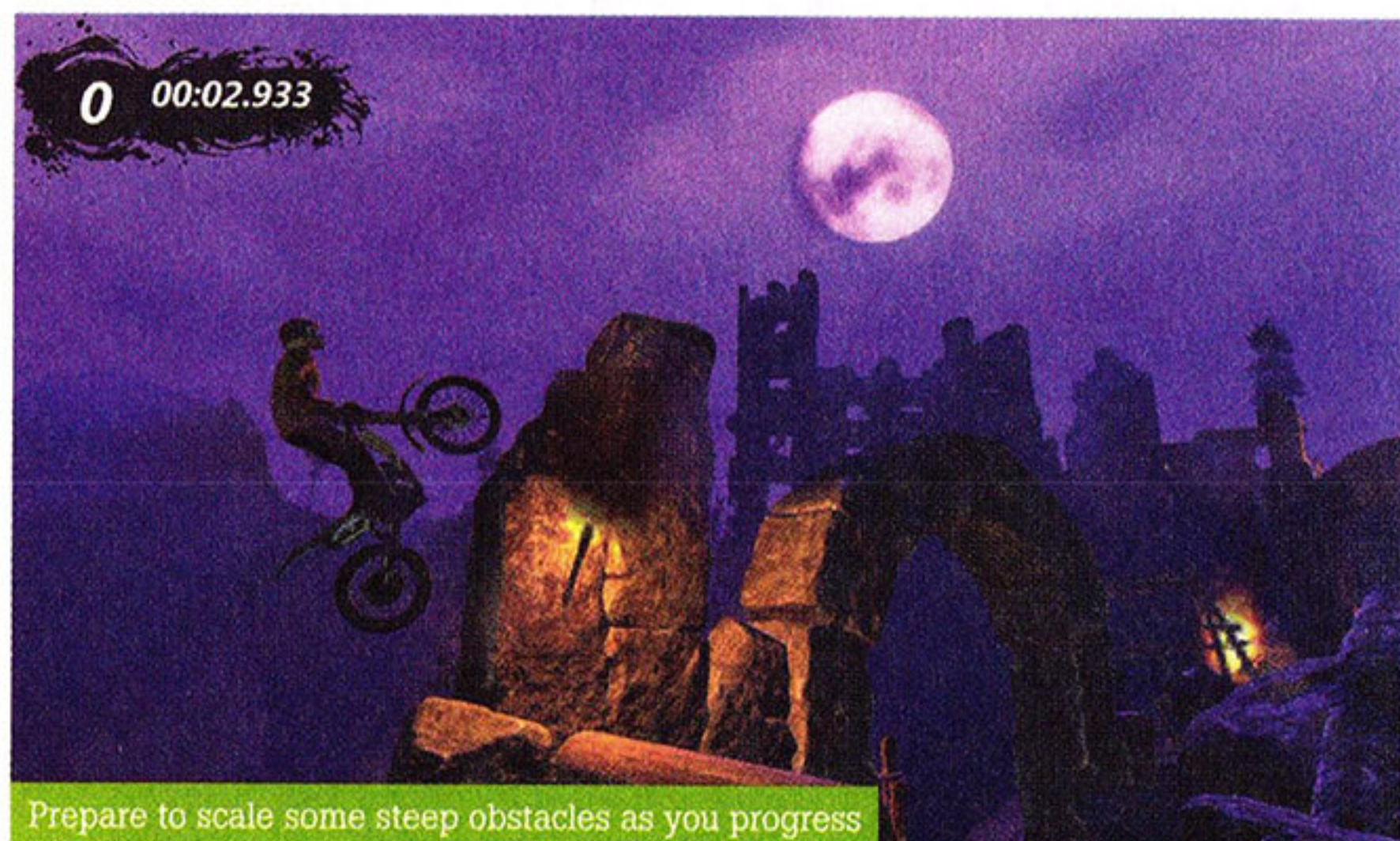
Your completed courses and medals come with cash bonuses, which can be used to purchase new costume elements and vehicle customization. These won't grant you any additional abilities or stats, as they're purely cosmetic. It doesn't fundamentally change the game, but tweaking your look and buying new parts is still a nice distraction between courses.

Tracking your progress against your friends was a blast in the first game, and the social element returns in improved form in Evolution. Instead of an indicator at the top of the screen letting you know how your friends fared, you'll see their position on the track itself. It gives you more of an idea of where they are and where they wiped out, and it puts you in less danger than glancing at the top of the screen mid-run.

A new addition to Trials Evolution is the multiplayer component, which supports four-player competition either locally or online. Local play doesn't split the screen, so a checkpoint system ensures there isn't much space between first and last. Multiplayer over Live offers more freedom and features two modes: Supercross and Trials. The former features you and three opponents occupying four lanes of the same map, and several heats and races determine the victor. While you can see your opponents' actual character models in this mode, they're limited to ghost images in Trials mode. This mode is comparable to the single-player career experience, only with the live images of three opponents occupying the course as well. I preferred this mode to the short courses and relatively uninspired tracks of Supercross.

Playing against friends or Xbox Live strangers can be entertaining, but the real fun and challenge of Trials Evolution lies in the single-player experience. Even though you may not be facing off against live opponents, the social element of the game does a remarkable job conveying a sense of competition. You're constantly aware of how you stack up to your friends, whether it's via an indicator during a course or a leaderboard afterwards.

I started playing this game before it was released, so I didn't get to see much of these elements at first. Even then, I constantly felt like I wanted to improve my times and get a higher medal rating. Once the game went live and I saw the leaderboards light up, it made the addictive qualities of Trials Evolution exponentially stronger. My achievement list may tell me that I've completed the game, but the quality of the experience and social elements ensures that my time with it is nowhere near over. » Dan Ryckert



Prepare to scale some steep obstacles as you progress



Evolution features an in-depth level creator





# Legend of Grimrock

Old and new RPG conventions meet with mixed results

**Style** 1-Player Role-Playing **Publisher** Almost Human **Developer** Almost Human **Release** April 11 **ESRB** N/A

This indie PC project is a love letter to the titles from the '80s that made me the gamer I am today, like Wizardry, Might & Magic, and Dungeon Master. The developers hit their target of marrying old-school gameplay and puzzle solving with modern production values and UI conventions, but a few missteps in combat and puzzle design keep Legend of Grimrock from attaining the heights of the classics that inspired it.

Creating your party takes five minutes of stat assignment, and then you're off into the oppressive darkness of Mount Grimrock. After 15 to 20 hours, you'll have solved dozens of puzzles, slaughtered scores of monsters, and reloaded a lot of saves en route to solving the mystery

permeating the 10 levels of ancient tunnels that imprisoned your motley crew.

The best sections of the game are a beautiful marriage of classic western RPG tropes and modern presentation. Figuring out how to progress past the pressure plates, teleporters, and even poetry-based puzzles that cover nearly every inch of Grimrock's square-grid dungeon is a pure joy much of the time. The developer lives on the edge between holding the player's hand and making the clues too obscure. The only problematic aspect is the occasional overreliance on "Where's Waldo?" hidden switch hunts.

The combat design is less successful. Battles are tense and interesting in the first few levels of the dungeon, but by the midgame,

run-of-the-mill monsters can tear through the most defensively specialized fighter in seconds. Survival from that point on becomes a matter of learning how best to kite monsters around pillars and otherwise abuse their AI, which is neither heroic nor particularly interesting.

Legend of Grimrock resonates with powerful nostalgic vibes for gamers of my generation, and I don't regret my time with it one bit. I love it for respecting my brain as a puzzle-solver even as I rage at its failure to recreate the kind of tactical combat that made me fall in love with PC RPGs in the first place. Which side of that scale you lean toward should tell you whether this is going to be a good investment of your \$15. » **Adam Biessener**

# 7.25

PC

» **Concept**

Recreate the first-person dungeon crawl experience that ruled the early days of western PC RPGs with the benefit of modern technology

» **Graphics**

A lot of art is re-used, as you'd expect from a four-person team, but the use of light and shadow to create a grim dungeon environment is inspired

» **Sound**

Straining your ears for the sounds of monsters creeping around is a great tension booster

» **Playability**

Going for an old-school mouse-driven vibe is commendable, but I could have done with more keyboard shortcuts. At least there's an automap

» **Entertainment**

A strong stomach for tedium is necessary to make it through combat, but the clever brain-twisting puzzles make up for much of that

» **Replay**

Low

# Mortal Kombat

The fighter hits the road with more content than ever



**Style** 1-Player Fighter (4-Player online) **Publisher** Warner Bros. **Developer** NetherRealm Studios **Release** May 1 **ESRB** M



When NetherRealm returned Mortal Kombat to its ultraviolet roots last year, they did so in a manner that satisfied longtime fans and newcomers alike. It combined a classic roster, fantastic gameplay, creative Fatalities, and a massive amount of content to make it the most complete entry in the notorious franchise. In an impressive feat, the team crammed all of that game's content, its DLC, and even more onto the Vita. Most

importantly, it plays as smoothly as ever.

On consoles, Mortal Kombat featured a lengthy, CG-filled story mode, a massive challenge tower, hundreds of unlockables, numerous minigames, tag team play, and online multiplayer. This new Vita version features all of this, but adds a 150-stage bonus challenge tower, new minigames, and a surprisingly effective touch-screen-based method of performing Fatalities (players can swipe the directional inputs on the screen, eliminating accidental jumps or strikes).

In terms of content, the bonus tower is the most substantial addition. Its stages aren't simple rehashes of the ones you've already seen; they're tailored to take advantage of the four DLC characters (Skarlet, Kenshi, Rain, and Freddy Krueger) as well as the Vita's hardware. Early trailers featured a player wiping blood off of the screen during a match,

which looked like a silly gimmick. You don't have to worry about these admittedly gimmicky new features encroaching on the established modes, as they're restricted to the occasional bonus tower appearance.

Many of these bonus stages feel gimmicky, but most are surprisingly fun. Whether you're flinging severed heads at your opponent or slashing at organs in a deranged Fruit Ninja knockoff, they stay entertaining throughout the tower. For every annoying new mission (such as the ones that require you to tap missiles to keep a character juggled in mid-air), there are 10 fun ones waiting to be played.

Even if you never touch the bonus tower, Mortal Kombat's core gameplay and modes (including online play) are recreated perfectly on Vita. A little bit of detail has been lost when it comes to character models, and online play is limited to two-player (ad hoc supports four), but it remains a fantastic port. Returning fans will love the new content and touchscreen Fatalities, and first-timers will be greeted with an almost overwhelming amount of great content. This is the most complete version of Mortal Kombat available. » **Dan Ryckert**



# 9

Vita

» **Concept**

Cram the massive amount of content from the most recent Mortal Kombat onto the Vita

» **Graphics**

Kombatants are less detailed, but it still looks gorgeous and runs smoothly

» **Sound**

The sounds of uppercuts, blood splatter, and Scorpion's yells still sound great

» **Playability**

Special moves are easy to pull off with the Vita's d-pad, and touchscreen Fatalities are a welcome addition

» **Entertainment**

You're getting an awful lot of great content on a single Vita card

» **Replay Value**

High



# reviews archive

## PLAYSTATION 3

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	8.25	Dec-11	Dark Souls	8.75	Nov-11	God of War: Origins Collection	9.5	Oct-11	Magic: The Gathering – Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012	8	Aug-11	Renegade Ops	8.25	Nov-11
Adventures of Tintin, The	7.75	Feb-12	Darkness II	7.5	Mar-12	GoldenEye 007: Reloaded	7	Jan-12	Major League Baseball 2K12	6.75	May-12	Resident Evil 4	9.5	Nov-11
Alice: Madness Returns	6.75	Jul-11	Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	9.5	Nov-11	Gotham City Impostors	8	Apr-12	Mass Effect 3	10	May-12	Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	8.5	Nov-11
All Zombies Must Die	7.5	Mar-12	Deus Ex: Human Revolution	8.5	Oct-11	Grand Slam Tennis 2	8	Apr-12	Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	9	Jan-12	Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	6	May-12
Amy	3	Mar-12	Devil May Cry HD Collection	8	May-12	Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	6.5	Aug-11	MLB 12: The Show	8.75	May-12	Resistance 3	7	Oct-11
Armored Core V	6.5	May-12	Dirt 3	8.75	Jul-11	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2	6.5	Sep-11	MX vs. ATV Alive	7	Jul-11	Rochard	8.25	Feb-12
Assassin's Creed Revelations	8.75	Jan-12	Disgaea 4: A Promise Unforgotten	8.25	Oct-11	House of the Dead: Overkill Extended Cut	8	Dec-11	NASCAR Unleashed	7	Dec-11	Rock of Ages	7	Nov-11
Asura's Wrath	8.5	Apr-12	Disney Universe	6.5	Dec-11	Ico & Shadow of the Colossus Collection, The	9.75	Oct-11	NBA 2K12	9.5	Nov-11	Rocksmith	8.25	Dec-11
Bangai-O HD: Missile Fury	7.75	Jul-11	Driver: San Francisco	8	Nov-11	Infamous 2	8.75	Jul-11	NCAA Football 12	9	Aug-11	Saints Row: The Third	9	Dec-11
Batman: Arkham City	10	Nov-11	Duke Nukem Forever	6.75	Aug-11	Jak and Daxter Collection	9.25	Mar-12	Need for Speed: The Run	7.75	Dec-11	Shadows of the Damned	9.25	Aug-11
Battlefield 3	9.25	Dec-11	Dungeon Defenders	7.75	Jul-11	Journey	9	Apr-12	NeverDead	4	Mar-12	Shank 2	7	Apr-12
Binary Domain	7.5	May-12	Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11	Jurassic Park: The Game	5.5	Jan-12	Nexuiz	6	May-12	Silent Hill HD Collection	8	Apr-12
Blades of Time	4.5	May-12	Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	6	Jul-11	King of Fighters XIII	7.75	Feb-12	NFL Blitz	8	Mar-12	Silent Hill: Downpour	7	Apr-12
BloodRayne: Betrayal	7	Sep-11	Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	8	Aug-11	Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	8	Mar-12	NHL 12	8.75	Oct-11	Sims 3: Pets, The	7.5	Dec-11
Bodycount	5	Oct-11	El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	9	Sep-11	Kung-Fu High Impact	6	Feb-12	Ninja Gaiden 3	6	May-12	Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	8	Dec-11
Brink	6.75	Jul-11	Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, The	9.5	Jan-12	L.A. Noire	8.75	Jul-11	No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	7.75	Sep-11	Sonic Generations	6.75	Dec-11
Burnout Crash	7.5	Nov-11	F.E.A.R. 3	7.75	Aug-11	LEGO Harry Potter Years 5-7	7.5	Jan-12	Okabu	8	Dec-11	Soulcalibur V	8.5	Mar-12
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	4.5	Sep-11	Fancy Pants Adventure, The	7.5	Jul-11	LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	7	Jul-11	Payday: The Heist	6.5	Dec-11	Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.5	Dec-11
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	9	Jan-12	FIFA 12	9	Nov-11	Lord of the Rings: War in the North	5.5	Dec-11	Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	9	Nov-11	SSX	7.75	Apr-12
Captain America: Super Soldier	7.5	Sep-11	FIFA Street	7.25	May-12	Madden NFL 12	7.5	Oct-11	Rage	9	Nov-11	Street Fighter X Tekken	8.75	May-12
Cars 2	7.75	Aug-11	Final Fantasy XIII-2	8	Feb-12				Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	8.75	Dec-11	Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition	7.75	Aug-11
Catherine	7	Aug-11							Rayman Origins	8.5	Dec-11	Syndicate	8	Apr-12
Crysis	8.25	Dec-11							Red Faction: Armageddon	7.25	Jul-11	Tales of Graces f	7.75	Apr-12

the score

## 6.75 | UEFA Euro 2012

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release April 24 ESRB E

*With no gameplay enhancements and only surface changes to presentation, this FIFA 12 expansion is a cosmetic add-on with no redeeming new features. The UEFA tournament mode is a lazy attempt to capture the glory of the competition, and the new Expedition mode is only good for familiarizing yourself with second- and third-tier players. – Matt Bertz*

## 8 | Sine Mora

Platform 360 Release March 2 ESRB M

*If you're not an arcade shooter fan, Sine Mora probably won't change your mind. If you've stood on the sidelines because of intimidating difficulty levels, however, it's worth giving it a shot. You won't coast through the experience, but it remains fair and (most importantly) fun throughout. – Dan Ryckert*

## 8 | Fibble – Flick 'n' Roll

Platform iOS Release March 29 Rating 4+

*Crytek's first iOS game is a decent 30-level romp for folks looking for something new and pretty to play on the go. The Marble Madness-esque gameplay is straightforward and mostly reliable, and the presentation is a colorful treat to behold on iOS devices. – Tim Turi*

## 6.75 | World Gone Sour

Platform PS3 • 360 Release April 10 (PS3), April 11 (360) ESRB T

*I have to hand it to Kraft for letting its brand be portrayed in such a weird and dirty light. While World Gone Sour won't win any awards, it at least earns some street cred as a genuine video game. Perhaps that's all the corporate giant wanted anyway. – Bryan Vore*

## 7 | Birds of Steel

Platform PS3 • 360 Release March 13 ESRB T

*Gaijin Entertainment attempts to make Birds of Steel universally appealing with simpler control options. Unfortunately, the gamer who will get the most from Birds of Steel is still the one who has at least one meticulously painted World War II model airplane. – Kyle Hilliard*

## 5 | Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir

Platform 3DS Release April 13 ESRB T

*In its best snap shots, Spirit Camera has interesting boss fights, an amusing riddle sequence that has you flipping through a diary for specific images, and unique puzzles. Unfortunately, those scattered bright spots are washed out in the face of severe technical issues. – Bryan Vore*

## 8 | Skullgirls

Platform PS3 • 360 Release April 10 ESRB T

*As a downloadable title featuring the bells and whistles that many retail fighters are lacking, Skullgirls is an impressive feat. Hardcore fans of the genre should find a lot to love, but more casual fighting fans may not have the same appreciation for the game's intricate mechanics. – Dan Ryckert*



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# 10 | Mass Effect 3

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release March 6 ESRB M Issue May '12

*BioWare has delivered one of the most intricately crafted stories in the history of the medium. After getting to know these characters so well, it'll be hard to leave this universe behind, but it's been one hell of a ride. – Andrew Reiner*



Thor: God of Thunder	4.5	Jul-11
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	8	May-12
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	7.5	Aug-11
Trine 2	8.75	Feb-12
Twisted Metal	8.5	Apr-12
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	8	Jan-12
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception	9.5	Dec-11
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine	8	Nov-11
WWE '12	5.5	Jan-12
X-Men Destiny	7	Nov-11
Yakuza: Dead Souls	7.75	May-12

XBOX 360

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	8.25	Dec-11
Adventures of Shuggy, The	8.25	Aug-11
Adventures of Tintin, The	7.75	Feb-12
Alan Wake's American Nightmare	7.75	Apr-12
Alice: Madness Returns	6.75	Jul-11
All Zombies Must Die	7.5	Mar-12
Amy	3	Mar-12
Armored Core V	6.5	May-12
Assassin's Creed Revelations	8.75	Jan-12
Asura's Wrath	8.5	Apr-12
Bangai-O HD: Missile Fury	7.75	Jul-11
Bastion	9.25	Sep-11
Batman: Arkham City	10	Nov-11
Battlefield 3	9.25	Dec-11
Binary Domain	7.5	May-12
Blades of Time	4.5	May-12
BloodRayne: Betrayal	7	Sep-11
Bodycount	5	Oct-11
Brink	6.75	Jul-11
Burnout Crash	7.5	Nov-11
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	4.5	Sep-11
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	9	Jan-12
Captain America: Super Soldier	7.5	Sep-11
Cars 2	7.75	Aug-11
Catherine	7	Aug-11
Child of Eden	8	Jul-11
Crimson Alliance	8.75	Oct-11
Dance Central 2	8.25	Nov-11
Dark Souls	8.75	Nov-11
Darkness II	7.5	Mar-12
Dead Island	8.5	Oct-11
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	9.5	Nov-11
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	8.5	Oct-11
Devil May Cry HD Collection	8	May-12
Dirt 3	8.75	Jul-11
Disney Universe	6.5	Dec-11
Driver: San Francisco	8	Nov-11
Duke Nukem Forever	6.75	Aug-11
Dungeon Defenders	7.75	Jul-11
Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	6	Jul-11
Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	8	Aug-11
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	9	Sep-11
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, The	9.5	Jan-12
F.E.A.R. 3	7.75	Aug-11
Fancy Pants Adventure, The	7.5	Jul-11
FIFA 12	9	Nov-11
FIFA Street	7.25	May-12
Final Fantasy XIII-2	8	Feb-12
Forza Motorsport 4	9.25	Dec-11
From Dust	8.75	Sep-11
Fruit Ninja Kinect	8	Oct-11
Gatling Gears	8	Jul-11
Gears of War 3	9.5	Nov-11
GoldenEye 007: Reloaded	7	Jan-12
Gotham City Impostors	8	Apr-12
Grand Slam Tennis 2	8	Apr-12
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	6.5	Aug-11
Guardian Heroes	8.25	Dec-11
Gunstringer, The	8	Oct-11
Half-Minute Hero: Super Mega Neo Climax	8.25	Sep-11
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary	8.5	Jan-12
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 3	6.5	Sep-11

Hulk Hogan's Main Event	1	Dec-11
Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet	8	Sep-11
Joe Danger: Special Edition	8.5	Feb-12
Jurassic Park: The Game	5.5	Jan-12
Just Dance 3	6	Dec-11
Kinect Disneyland Adventures	7.5	Jan-12
King of Fighters XIII	7.75	Feb-12
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	8	Mar-12
Kung Fu Panda 2	5	Jul-11
Kung-Fu High Impact	6	Feb-12
L.A. Noire	8.75	Jul-11
LEGO Harry Potter Years 5-7	7.5	Jan-12
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	7	Jul-11
Lord of the Rings: War in the North	5.5	Dec-11
Madden NFL 12	7.5	Oct-11
Magic: The Gathering – Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012	8	Aug-11
Major League Baseball 2K12	6.75	May-12
Mass Effect 3	10	May-12
Ms. Splosion Man	8.75	Aug-11
MX vs. ATV Alive	7	Jul-11
NASCAR Unleashed	7	Dec-11
NBA 2K12	9.5	Nov-11
NCAA Football 12	9	Aug-11
Need for Speed: The Run	7.75	Dec-11
NeverDead	4	Mar-12
Nexuiz	6	May-12
NFL Blitz	8	Mar-12
NHL 12	8.75	Oct-11
Ninja Gaiden 3	6	May-12
Otomedius Excellent	3.75	Jan-12
Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	9	Nov-11
Quarrel	8.5	Apr-12
Rage	9	Nov-11
Raving Rabbids Alive & Kicking	5	Jan-12
Rayman Origins	8.5	Dec-11
Red Faction: Armageddon	7.25	Jul-11
Renegade Ops	8.25	Nov-11
Resident Evil 4	9.5	Nov-11
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	8.5	Nov-11
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	6	May-12
Rise of Nightmares	5	Nov-11
Rock of Ages	7	Nov-11
Rocksmith	8.25	Dec-11
Saints Row: The Third	9	Dec-11
Sesame Street: Once Upon A Monster	8.5	Nov-11
Shadows of the Damned	9.25	Aug-11
Shank 2	7	Apr-12
Silent Hill HD Collection	8	Apr-12
Silent Hill: Downpour	7	Apr-12
Sims 3: Pets, The	7.5	Dec-11
Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	8	Dec-11
Sonic Generations	6.75	Dec-11
Soulcalibur V	8.5	Mar-12
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.5	Dec-11
SSX	7.75	Apr-12
Street Fighter X Tekken	8.75	May-12
Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition	7.75	Aug-11
Syndicate	8	Apr-12
Thor: God of Thunder	4.5	Jul-11
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	8	May-12
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	7.5	Aug-11
Trenched	7.5	Aug-11
Trine 2	8.75	Feb-12
Tropico 4	7.75	Nov-11

UFC Personal Trainer: The Ultimate Fitness System	5	Sep-11
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	8	Jan-12
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine	8	Nov-11
Warp	6.75	Apr-12
Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings – Enhanced Edition, The	9.5	May-12
WWE '12	5.5	Jan-12
X-Men Destiny	7	Nov-11

Wii

Bit.Trip Complete	8	Oct-11
Disney Universe	6.5	Dec-11
Fortune Street	8.5	Jan-12
Kirby's Return To Dream Land	8.5	Dec-11
Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword, The	10	Dec-11
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	7	Jul-11
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	5.75	Feb-12
Mario Party 9	5.75	May-12
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.5	Dec-11
Xenoblade Chronicles	9.5	May-12

PC

A Game of Thrones: Genesis	6.75	Dec-11
Alice: Madness Returns	6.75	Jul-11
Batman: Arkham City	10	Nov-11
Battlefield 3	9.5	Dec-11
Brink	6.75	Jul-11
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	4.5	Sep-11
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	9	Jan-12
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	9.5	Nov-11
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	8.5	Oct-11
Duke Nukem Forever	6.75	Aug-11
Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11
Dungeons of Dredmor	8	Sep-11
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, The	9.5	Jan-12
F.E.A.R. 3	7.75	Aug-11
Gotham City Impostors	8	Apr-12
Jurassic Park: The Game	5.5	Jan-12
King Arthur II: The Role-Playing Wargame	7	Apr-12
Magic: The Gathering – Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012	8	Aug-11
Mass Effect 3	10	May-12
Might & Magic Heroes VI	8.25	Dec-11
Minecraft	9.25	Jan-12
Nexuiz	6	May-12
Payday: The Heist	8	Dec-11
Postal III	1	Mar-12
Rage	9	Nov-11
Renegade Ops	8.25	Nov-11
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	6	May-12
Rochard	8.25	Feb-12
Rock of Ages	7	Nov-11
Saints Row: The Third	9	Dec-11
Serious Sam 3: BFE	7.75	Feb-12
Shank 2	7	Apr-12
Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	8	Dec-11
Sol: Exodus	6	Apr-12
Stronghold 3	4	Jan-12
Swords of the Stars II: Lords of Winter	3	Jan-12
Syndicate	8	Apr-12
Total War: Shogun 2 – Fall of the Samurai	9.25	May-12

Trine 2	8.75	Feb-12
Tropico 4: Modern Times	8.5	May-12
Vessel	7.75	May-12
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine	8	Nov-11
Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings, The	9.25	Jul-11
Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings – Enhanced Edition, The	9.5	May-12

NINTENDO DS

Aliens: Infestation	8.25	Nov-11
Cars 2	7.75	Aug-11
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2	7.5	Oct-11
Kirby Mass Attack	8.5	Oct-11
Professor Layton and the Last Specter	8.5	Dec-11
Solatorobo: Red the Hunter	7.5	Dec-11

PSP

Corpse Party	8	Feb-12
Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection	8.5	May-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	6.5	May-11
Patapon 3	6.75	Jun-11

3DS

Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion	4.75	Jul-11
Dillon's Rolling Western	8	May-12
Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection	8.5	May-11
Kid Icarus: Uprising	7	May-12
Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D, The	9.25	Jul-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	6.5	May-11
Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D	7.5	Apr-12
Patapon 3	6.75	Jun-11
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	8	Aug-11
Resident Evil: Revelations	9	Feb-11
Shinobi	6.5	Feb-11
Star Fox 64 3D	8.25	Oct-11
Tetris Axis	8	Nov-11

VITA

Dungeon Hunter: Alliance	5	Apr-12
Escape Plan	7.75	Apr-12
FIFA Soccer	7.75	Apr-12
Hot Shots Golf: World Invitational	7.5	Apr-12
Little Deviants	6	Apr-12
Lumines: Electric Symphony	8	Apr-12
MLB 12: The Show	8	May-12
ModNation Racers: Road Trip	7	Apr-12
Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus	7	Apr-12
Rayman Origins	8	Apr-12
Ridge Racer	5	May-12
Shinobido 2: Revenge of Zen	6.25	Apr-12
Super Stardust Delta	8	Apr-12
Touch My Katamari	7.5	Apr-12
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	7.75	Apr-12
Uncharted: Golden Abyss	8	Apr-12
Unit 13	6.5	May-12



# Same Names, Different Games

In recent console generations, multiplatform games rarely have glaring differences. We sometimes encounter performance issues on one console (Bayonetta on PS3), exclusive peripheral-based features (Mass Effect 3's Kinect-powered voice commands on Xbox 360), and console-specific DLC, but most multiplatform games are the same at their core (excluding Wii games). This wasn't always the case. During the 16-bit era, several games were wildly different (or different games entirely) depending on whether you played the Super Nintendo or Sega Genesis version. Read on to take a look at some of the biggest examples of this, as well as our take on which version was superior.

## Mortal Kombat

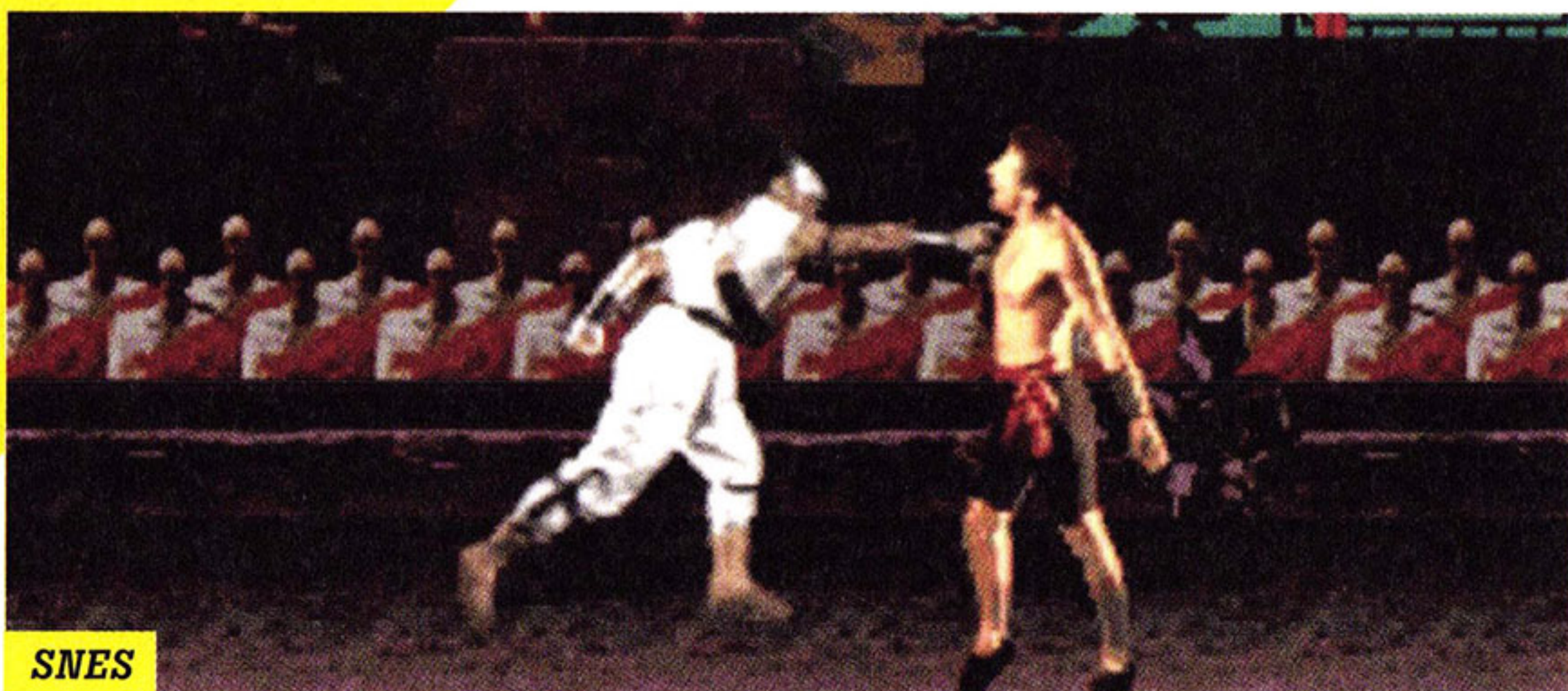


GEN

**Sega Genesis:** Blood and uncensored fatalities weren't available for this version by default, but players could unlock them in all their gory glory with a quick input of the ABACABB code. Once it was activated, players were treated to the unedited violence that made Mortal Kombat a sensation, as well as the tightest controls available outside of the arcade.

**Super Nintendo:** Nintendo has always maintained a family-friendly image, but it was much stricter about violence in the early-to-mid '90s than it is today. As a result, the gallons of blood featured in the Genesis version were replaced with odd spurts of gray sweat. Fatalities were either completely changed (Johnny Cage kicks his opponent in the chest instead of punching their head off) or made less violent (Raiden's electricity makes his opponent turn into dust instead of making their head explode). This version also featured less-responsive controls than its Genesis alternative.

**The Edge:** The Genesis version wins by a mile. With its castrated combat and sloppy controls, the Super Nintendo version is clearly the inferior option.



SNES

## NBA Jam

**Sega Genesis:** NBA Jam's most fondly remembered trademark is the collection of colorful phrases said by announcer Tim Kitzrow. From "Boomshakalaka!" to "He's on fire!" quotes from the game can still be heard today if you hang with the right crowd. This version featured a wider variety of phrases, as well as music during gameplay.

**Super Nintendo:** The relative lack of commentary is noticeable from the very beginning, as this version doesn't even feature the "Welcome to NBA Jam!" clip in the opening menu. With no music during gameplay and fewer quips from the announcer, the SNES version feels like it's missing something. On the plus side, the visuals are slightly sharper and the controller's shoulder buttons make it easier to access other controls while holding turbo.

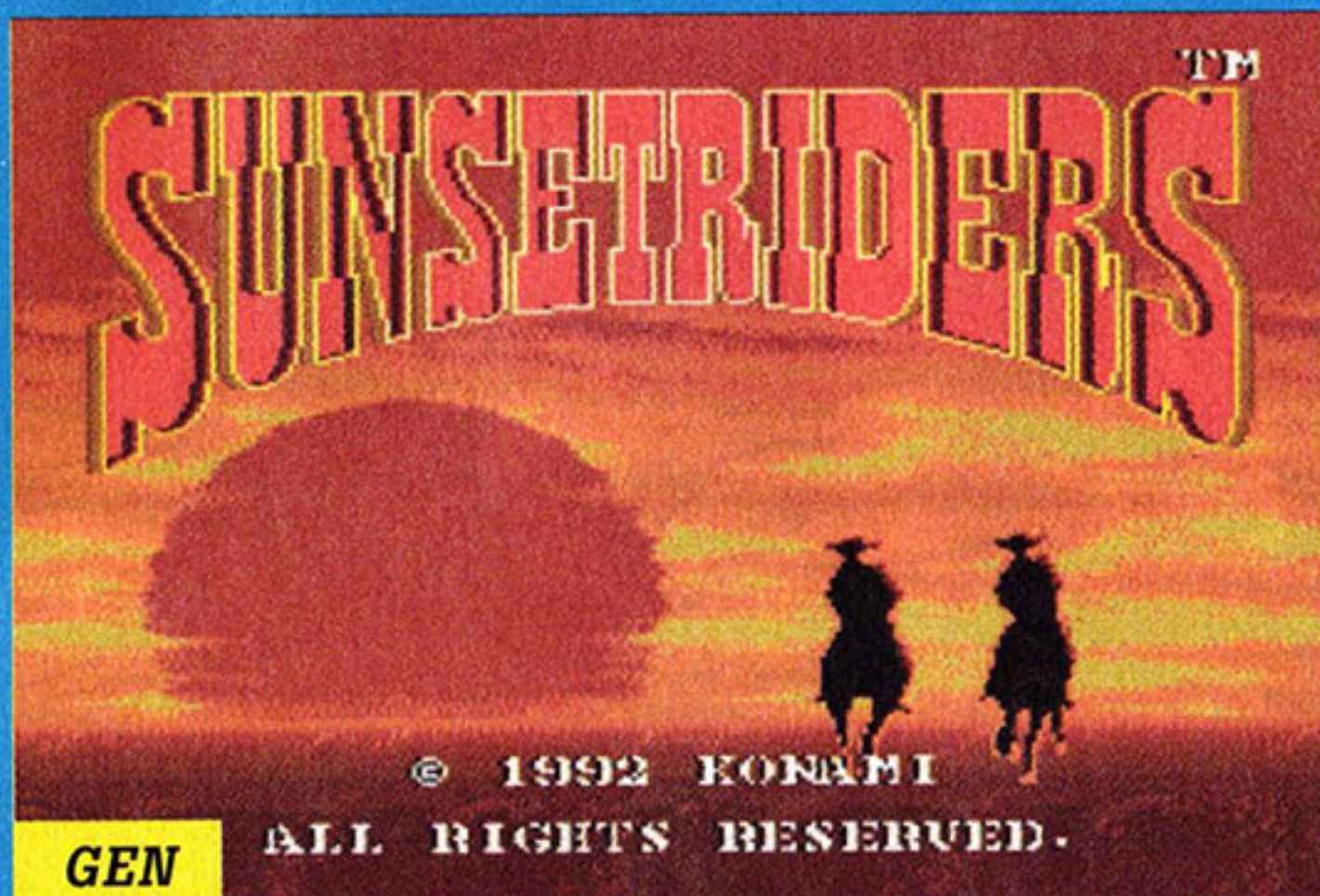
**The Edge:** Both games play great, but the more-accessible turbo button on SNES doesn't make up for its audio shortcomings. Genesis wins.



GEN



## Sunset Riders



**Sega Genesis:** Both console ports of this run-and-gun shoot-'em-up were based on the arcade original, but Sega's version was a loose interpretation. Instead of eight stages ending in boss battles, the Genesis version featured four. The four selectable characters from the arcade were whittled down to two (Billy and Cormano). It also featured fewer voice samples, and the great boss sayings from the arcade are missing entirely. Sega was more lax than Nintendo when it came to depictions of women, so leaving a tavern would be met with an animation of your character with a scantily clad barfly.

**Super Nintendo:** This version was a more faithful adaptation of the arcade classic. It featured all four characters, the intro movie, and all eight stages (plus the shooting gallery bonus stage). Konami made a couple of cosmetic changes, however. It replaced the Native American enemies with generic cowboys/outlaws, except for the boss fight against Chief Wigwam. Women were more conservatively dressed, and your character wouldn't exit taverns with them (they simply struck a pose instead).

**The Edge:** Some slight censorship can't keep the Super Nintendo version from being the better (and more faithful) game.

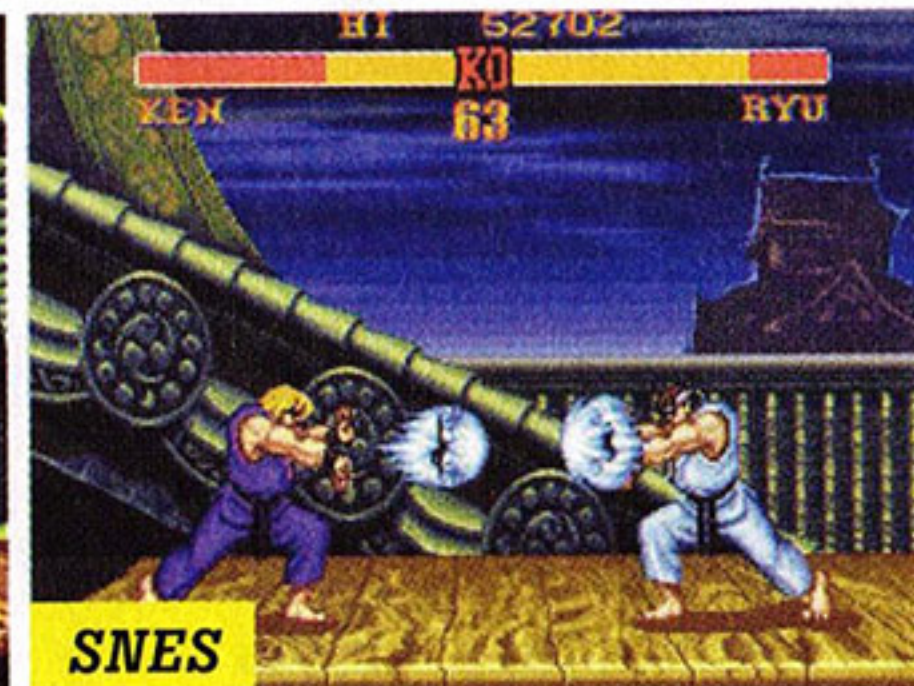


## Jurassic Park

**Sega Genesis:** At the beginning of this version, players could choose whether to control Alan Grant or a velociraptor. As you'd expect, this made the experience of playing the game very different. The raptor could jump high, eat compys for health, and swipe his tail at enemies. The less-mobile Grant could use tranquilizer darts and grenades to take out the hostile dinosaurs. Both options had their fair share of control issues, but it was a novel approach to this licensed game.

**Super Nintendo:** This version also contained two different types of gameplay, but neither was enjoyable. Most of the time, players controlled Grant from a top-down perspective as he avoided electric traps and dinosaurs while destroying eggs, powering up generators, and opening gates. Once he entered a building, however, the game switched to a clunky first-person mode that could be controlled via the controller or the SNES mouse. The gameplay is weak in both areas, and it's even worse thanks to the fact that there is no save or password system. It grants you with unlimited continues, but you're required to finish the game in one sitting.

**The Edge:** It's no masterpiece, but the Genesis version is the better option.



## Street Fighter II Turbo

**Sega Genesis:** This legendary fighter eventually made its way to the Genesis with the subtitle "Special Champion Edition," and is essentially a port of Street Fighter II Turbo (including playable versions of Sagat, Balrog, Vega, and M. Bison). While the game controlled admirably, it required the six-button controller variant if you didn't want to switch between punches and kicks with the Start button. This port played well enough, but in comparison to the SNES version it had inferior visuals and sound effects.

**Super Nintendo:** Nintendo's trademark d-pad design did a great job of making Street Fighter's special move inputs a breeze (no matter which version you purchased). Backgrounds and characters were sharp, vivid, and well animated. Plus, the iconic stage music sounded fantastic.

**The Edge:** If you didn't own the competition, the Genesis version is a decent choice. However, the technical edge helps the Super Nintendo version win this contest.

## Shadowrun

**Sega Genesis:** Presented from a top-down perspective, this role-playing game placed a significant focus on action. With weapon modification, a lock-on system, and an open world, it featured more gameplay options than its SNES counterpart. Fans of this version especially enjoyed its hacking/cyberspace sections.

**Super Nintendo:** Released a year before the Genesis version, this was more of a linear, traditional RPG. It was presented from an isometric viewpoint and emphasized story rather than combat. Thanks to its narrative and slower-paced combat, this wound up being a longer experience than Sega's version.

**The Edge:** Many gamers are divided on whether the SNES or Genesis is superior. When it comes down to it, both of these games have a fair share of fans and the experiences are too different to name a clear winner. Action RPG fans tend to prefer the Genesis version, while more traditional RPG fans side with SNES.



## Aladdin

**Sega Genesis:** This side-scrolling platformer was developed by Virgin Games, which had a track record of creating quality licensed games such as Cool Spot and Robocop vs. Terminator. The titular hero wielded a scimitar that could be used to cut the pants off guards, revealing their heart-adorned boxers. In addition to the scimitar, apples could be used to kill enemies. Some bonus levels allowed the player to play as the monkey Abu. In general, this version had a faster pace and a cel animation style that more closely resembled the film.

**Super Nintendo:** Rather than taking enemies down with a scimitar, this Capcom-developed version of the platformer tasked players with hopping on their heads. Apples stunned enemies rather than killing them. This version contained a "Break Time!" bonus game that featured a spinning wheel that could grant players with extra lives.

**The Edge:** With better animations and combat variety, the Genesis version has the slight edge.



# Things You Didn't Know About...



**KEN LEVINE**

Ken Levine has worked on such critically acclaimed games as BioShock and System Shock II. With work on BioShock Infinite in its final months, Levine took the time to attend PAX East in Irrational Games' hometown of Boston. We had a chance to sit down with him at the event, and he shared some of his personal history.

**+ I was born in Queens, and I grew up in northern New Jersey.** I moved there when I was like one. When I graduated from college, I went to San Francisco for a year, then I went to L.A. for like five years and Europe for a couple years. I was sort of all around.

**+ I remember going to my 10th high-school reunion.** The story of a high-school reunion is supposed to be the nerd goes to it and he's successful and happy and the football hero is kind of a loser. I went to it and I remember being with a girl that I didn't really love, and **I was working as a computer consultant on Wall Street. I really was not very happy.** I ran into the football captain, and he had this really successful business and this beautiful wife, and he looked super happy. I thought, "Wait a minute, this is not how this story goes." Shortly after that is when I decided I have to figure out what I'm gonna be.

**+ Even until some time in 1995, it never even occurred to me that people made games.** I assumed they just sort of showed up. I was reading Next Gen magazine, and there was an ad in the back for jobs with game companies. I saw an ad for Looking Glass, and I was a big fan of them...I thought "I could do that," and I applied for the job. For some reason, they flew me out there and hired me.

**+ I have a fairly simple life, actually. I play a lot of games, nonstop.** I do a lot of running. I like movies, I do a ton of reading. But mostly, I play a lot of games. I'm not a very social guy, I tend to go home, hang out with my wife, play games, and relax.

**+ I'm a Coen brothers whore.** If you play our games, you'll see tons and tons of Coen Brothers influence. In BioShock, it was *Miller's Crossing* that was the influence. Another Coen Brothers film, and I won't say which one, had a huge influence on Infinite.

**+ To me, there's every other superhero, and then there's Spider-Man.** I remember encountering him, and thought it was a great origin story and character. I quote it all the time, that line of "With great power comes great responsibility," and I apply it to my business life all the time.

**+ I go back and forth [about my favorite game of all time].** Sometimes it's X-COM; sometimes it's Civilization. Then there are some old-school games like the original Castle Wolfenstein and Diablo II. If anything inspired Thief, it was that. Some old Looking Glass games, before I got there... Ultima Underworld and System Shock. Beyond Good & Evil is a game I've always loved. I loved Wind Waker, Paper Mario...**I'm really quite eclectic when it comes to games.**

**+ So many developers are now in their prime just knocking it out of the park every time, whether it's Naughty Dog or BioWare or guys like that.** One of my co-founders at Irrational is at a company called Robot Entertainment. They did a game called Orcs Must Die. I thought that was a very smart, fun little game. There's something about it that feels like an old Atari 800/Apple II kind of vibe. I really liked how simple it was and how it's a combination of strategy and action. It reminded me of that old Battlezone game in 1998. **I like weird hybrids, I like experiments that are very hardcore gamer experiences.** I'm not big on games where it's like "Hey, play this game where you're a piece of dust." That's not as much me, but I like games that take hardcore tropes and mix and match them.

For the full transcription of our interview, visit [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag).

by Dan Ryckert



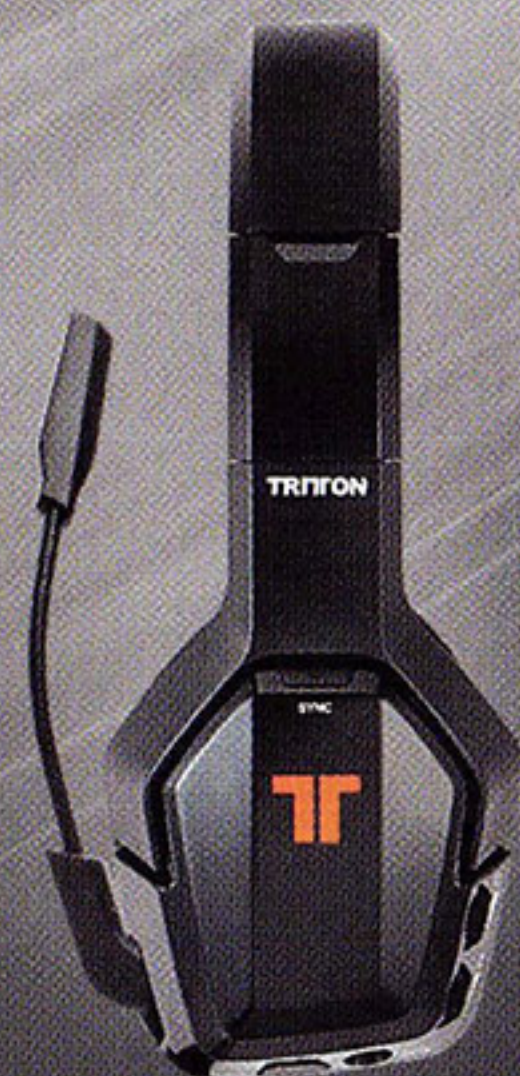
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