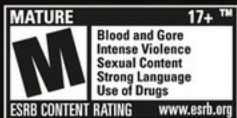


GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE

OCTOBER

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Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol

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Alcohol Reference
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Language
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Violence



PS3
PlayStation 3



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JOIN FORCES | 09.30.2010

FINAL FANTASY XIV
ONLINE



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

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

Some Games Should Never Die

As a connoisseur of games, one of the greatest things that happened in 2009 was the release of the God of War Collection. Not for the obvious reason that it is a great bundle of amazing products slapped together as one cheaper piece of software; its genius lies in the fact that it updated a beloved game with today's technology so God of War could continue to be relevant in the video game world.

Sony Computer Entertainment followed up the God of War Collection with the announcement of The Sly Collection, which releases later this year. Same modus operandi – keep the classic gameplay but update the graphics and throw in some new bells and whistles for good measure. Kudos to Sony for its historically savvy vision of the future.

While playing StarCraft 2, the desire to relive the glory days of the original hit me like a ton of bricks. However, to my disappointment, the game is trapped in old resolutions and even has some minor issues working with modern day operating systems. Obviously, this isn't the game's fault (and yes, it is "playable"), but it's a crime that so many great games are headed down a path of extinction. If it barely works now, what will it play like in 12 more years when StarCraft 3 comes out?

Updating past glories, or in this case releasing a special edition or collection with improvements, not only gives the old guard the opportunity to replay a classic, it gives new gamers a chance to experience some of interactive entertainment's greatest triumphs.

My mind reels with possibilities: Warcraft III, Deus Ex, System Shock, Grand Theft Auto III, Ico, Mortal Kombat, and even the original Halo. I could go on and on. I want these games to get a loving makeover by their creators and be reintroduced to the gaming public. These classics – and hundreds of others – deserve to live on forever outside of emulators, dusty old consoles, and low-resolution 4x3 aspect ratios.

It's been done before, and it will be done again, but I would love to see these collections become the standard operating procedure for the hits and cult classics that have defined video gaming for all these years.

Cheers,

1010

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COLLECTOR'S EDITION COVERS

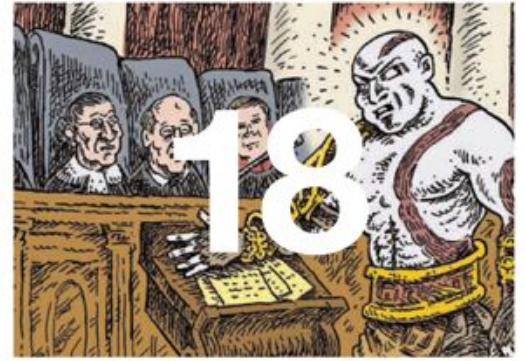
Game Informer teamed up with Irrational Games this issue to bring you three special edition covers featuring characters from BioShock Infinite. Capturing the spirit of *The Saturday Evening Post* from the early 1900s, these covers recreate what gaming magazines may have looked like on Columbia.

48

BioShock Infinite

BioShock developer Irrational Games makes a breathtaking return to the series it originated. With a daring new setting and a fresh cast of characters, BioShock Infinite will change everything you think you know about the franchise.

by Joe Juba



regulars

» 12 Feedback

Readers attempt to convince us that it's okay to cry over announcement trailers, and that AO titles aren't just for lonely perverts. We shoot down their sad delusions.

» 18 Connect

We provide Gamescom coverage imported straight from Germany, build the ultimate game controller, review the PlayStation Move, and much more.

» 70 Previews

Explore the opening sequence of *Fallout: New Vegas*. Go zero gravity in *Dead Space 2*. Learn about *Diablo III*'s new crafting system.

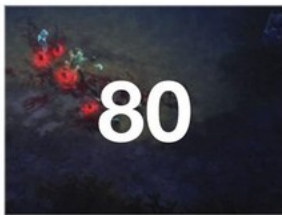
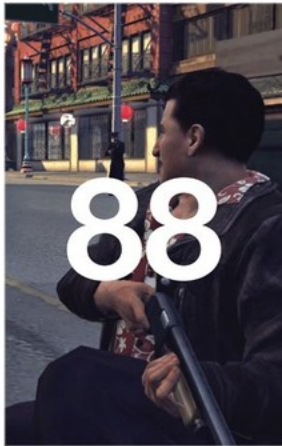
» 84 Reviews

Halo: Reach wows with a massive new campaign and the biggest multiplayer experience yet, *NHL 11* skates to victory, and *Mafia II* whacks the competition.

» 100 Game Over

Kevin Butler loves bacon. This and more fun facts about Sony's hilarious pitchman and VP of awesome await in this month's Game Over.

by Ben Reeves



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This month in Feedback we discuss the future of 3D televisions and motion controls, try not to laugh at some hardcore Star Wars nerd logic, give advice to an irritated girl gamer, and reaffirm that there's no crying in video game journalism.



Question of the Month:
Of the games still to be released in 2010, which are you most excited for?

Email your response to
feedback@gameinformer.com

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Return of the Nerds

In your Force Unleashed II preview, Andrew Reiner's weak mind asked why clones of Jengo Fett are used instead of cloned Jedi. Timothy Zahn's bestselling trilogy, set five years after Return Of The Jedi, deals with this situation. Cloned Jedi go mad, are uncontrollable, and are therefore extremely dangerous. A plan, foiled by the rebels, would have allowed the safe cloning of Jedi. Perhaps Starkiller escaped that ordeal. For not coming up with this possibility you all should have your Force powers reduced to Schwartz powers! But no liquid Schwartz. It is too concentrated and you will hurt yourselves.

Scott Shiveley
Columbus, OH

Congratulations, Scott. We had several nerds take issue with Reiner's question, but your explanation was by far the nerdiest. You may rest well knowing that order has been restored to the galaxy. If we ever mess up a bit of Star Wars trivia in the future, feel free to use your Vulcan nerve pinch on us. PS: You misspelled "Jango Fett."

No More Motion Controls

While reading your articles on E3, I noticed how the biggest news from both Sony and Microsoft involved motion controls. This kinda bums me out, as I like my games as they are now. I'm afraid (and I'm sure I'm not the only one) that soon the controller-based console will die out and video games will be controlled solely with motion (or a hybrid, like Wii/Move).

Brandon Siegel
Orlando, Florida

Based on the number of concerned responses we've received regarding motion controls, it's clear that a lot of gamers still prefer playing games the old-fashioned way - and developers know that. While a lot of companies may continue to exert more effort courting casual gamers, it won't be at the expense of the thriving franchises that are bringing in millions of dollars from hardcore gamers. And who knows? We may enjoy some great gaming experiences thanks to the new technology.

To 3D or not 3D?

Based on Sony's current trend toward 3D gaming, would it be safe to say that their next console will be 100-percent 3D? Would it be a wise decision for me to go out and buy a 3D television so I'm prepared for the upcoming 3D game invasion? Or is 3D gaming simply a fad?

Tony Hurla
Via email

It's still far too early to tell what role 3D games will play in the future of the industry, but we highly doubt Sony would ever risk alienating customers by releasing a 3D-only console. Furthermore, you should never feel pressured into purchasing something you don't want - not by video game companies, or reviewers for that matter. It's your money; spend it on the products you know you'll enjoy. Like pogs!

Modern Woe-fare

If you couldn't tell by my name, let me clarify: I am a girl, I love video games, and yes, I'm actually pretty good at them. One of my favorite games is Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, and I love to play online. What I don't love is talking to other gamers through the microphone. As soon as the guys figure out I'm a girl it starts. Insults, name calling, and general loud mouthing, and it gets worse when I have more kills than anyone in the game. Obviously video games and gamers have become more mainstream, but how long until it becomes ok to be a girl gamer?

Jessica
Lyndhurst, NJ

It doesn't matter which sex you are – if you're finishing at the top of the leaderboard in MW 2 matches, you're going to be insulted. In that sense the online gaming crowd is surprisingly equal opportunity; regardless of sex, race, or creed, you can always expect to have a boatload of bigotry and vulgarities hurled at you. Until developers figure out a way to filter out the riff-raff, we suggest doing what we do: Play with your friends, and mute everyone else... especially people who bookend their screen names with a bunch of Xs.

Dry Your Tears

A comment in your newest issue caught me severely off guard. In the Top 10 Embarrassing E3 moments, the very last thing you list, "Grown Men Cry for Zelda," really struck a nerve with me and left me in awe. I wasn't at the show, but I also cried when I watched this for the first time. I mean, have you guys never had something that you are that passionate about? Really? I feel like you just called anyone who cries over video games losers, nerds, geeks, dorks...the list goes on. Do I need to be slapped because I feel an emotional connection to a video game? Do I?

Rick
Via email

In a word, Rick, yes. If a player feels a strong emotional connection to the storyline of a game and the ending leaves them teary-eyed, that's great. We've had moments like that. But you're not talking about the culmination of countless hours of gameplay or a deep and engrossing story. You're talking about blubbering over a



90-second announcement trailer. That's not emotional investment; it's the blind fanaticism of an undiscerning Twilight fan, and that's pathetic – especially when it's coming from journalists.

It's Still Gross

A couple issues back someone questioned why AO games weren't available to purchase. GI said a sexually explicit game would be "gross." I find it highly offensive to think that you would take such a very immature stance on this. Sex is beautiful and pleasurable and banned from shelves, but kicking a man into the air and shot-gunning him in the testicles is on pre-order! I feel you ought to be ashamed for taking such a stance. Often men have no ability to have adult relationships with women. If a developer can create a villain who murders people with a surgical scalpel, I should be able to create a tense sexual situation with a beautiful woman (or man), and have it be considered just as "mature."

Anonymous
Via email

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

"Are there any good Naruto games that adults would enjoy?"

Nope.

"Do you prefer Dr. Pepper or Root Beer?"

Dr. Pepper.

"Why did you neglect to cover [insert game title here] in the E3 issue?"

We are biased against the things that you love the most.

Reader Gibberish:

ey wats reniers opinion on waffles?

Hai yalk so sup wit shemnu 3!

gi spy



(Left) The guys from Treyarch and Activision (Dan Bunting, David Vonderhaar, John Rafacz, Josh Selinger, and Josh Olin) had to pull some Black Ops of their own in an effort to get Dan to step into a fancy restaurant **(Right)** Ben and Dead Space 2's Steve Papoutsis meet up at Gamescom. Ben's best efforts to look tough were thwarted thanks to that purse he's carrying

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



GI SPY
continued on page 14

Story Time

I'm about to be a high school student and I am very into games with deep storylines. Although, I have some younger friends I've been talking to and they seem to not care at all about storylines. In fact, they ridicule me for liking them so much, and I'm starting to feel a bit alone out here. I know I'm not the only person who cares about storylines so much, but I'd just like a response from someone like me.

Josh Moncrief
Via email

On Your Mind



- Are Video Games Art (Still?) **45%**
- Batman: Arkham City **32%**
- Link Now Being Right-Handed **15%**
- Our Insightful Movie Critiques **6%**
- Possibility Of A Highlander Video Game **2%**

Josh, your friends are idiots. Luckily for you, in a few years you'll have a bunch more story-driven games to play, which might still be inappropriate for your age now. We suggest using the time until then to find a less dim-witted crowd to hang out with.

You Can't Please Them All

I was just reading Ted P's letter in issue 208, and would just like to say that I for one prefer more previews than reviews. Honestly, I don't subscribe to GI to see what you guys think about games that I most likely already know whether or not I'm going to buy (possibly thanks to your preview coverage). I subscribe for insider information, such as the hands-on previews. So if Ted P. cancels his subscription, let me know - I'll buy two. Just keep the previews coming.

Matt B.
Pittsburgh, PA

We received quite a few responses to Ted's insistence that we focus more on reviews than previews, both supporting and arguing against his stance. Since no one can seem to agree on the issue, we're just going to keep doing whatever the hell we want. Thanks for the feedback, guys!



Goodbye, CGI

I completely agree with Andy's editorial in issue 208 regarding CG movies. Opening movies look great and are often accompanied by great musical scores to draw the gamer in. However, when they are implemented in-game, it interrupts the flow. He was also right when he said that the CG movie and the actual game itself look completely different. It's like being shell-shocked. What's the point in having an awesome CG movie if it looks nothing like the game? With the horsepower current consoles have, cutscenes in games should only be done with in-game graphics.

Danny Ruiz
Via email

I understand Andy's point in his editorial about cutscenes, but what about, say, StarCraft II? The nature of the game practically demands for pre-rendered cutscenes to advance the campaign's storyline. Who wants to watch an in-game marine-sized Jim Raynor with a dialogue box during cutscenes? Some games require cutscenes to advance the plot, and if they are going to be a part of the game, I'd rather they were pretty.

Tyler Fetter
Conroe, TX

GI SPY

continued from page 13

(Left) The WWE's Million Dollar Man and his son Ted DiBiase have always claimed that "everyone has a price," and they proved it by purchasing Dan and Ben **(Middle)** Disney's Mariam Sughayer and Double Fine's Greg Rice hang out at a Scott Pilgrim party **(Right)** Annette ran into Metal Gear creator Hideo Kojima at Comic-Con's Tron party. Kojima was not amused when she kept dropping to one knee and taking pretend Codec calls

continued on page 16



ON OCTOBER 26TH THE KING OF ALBION
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WINNER 1 *Ronnie Price* If it may not look like Pyramid Head is doing much here, but underneath his helmet he's on his Bluetooth negotiating to be in the new *Silent Hill*. **2** *Brittany Bolden* If what she's holding is any indication, Peach has been messing around with a faithful companion while Mano works on his dance moves. **3** *Berol Landskroner* Not even spidey sense could make Spider-Man understand why Scorpion turned into a penguin in *Mortal Kombat 3*. **4** *Sarah Rodriguez* Before it was sanctioned by Nintendo, *Smash Bros.* competitions fell under the watchful eye of Michael Vick. **5** *Luke Valentine* Here we see the famous plumber going up against the star of the *Alien* movies: Sigourney Weaver.



2



3



4



5



GI SPY

continued from page 14

(Left) Ben and Bender Helper's Shannon McPhee run into Brent Spiner of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Despite Spiner's long run on *The Next Generation*, all Ben wanted to talk about was *Independence Day*. **(Right)** Joe, Bertz, and Nick have dinner with the *BioShock Infinite* team.



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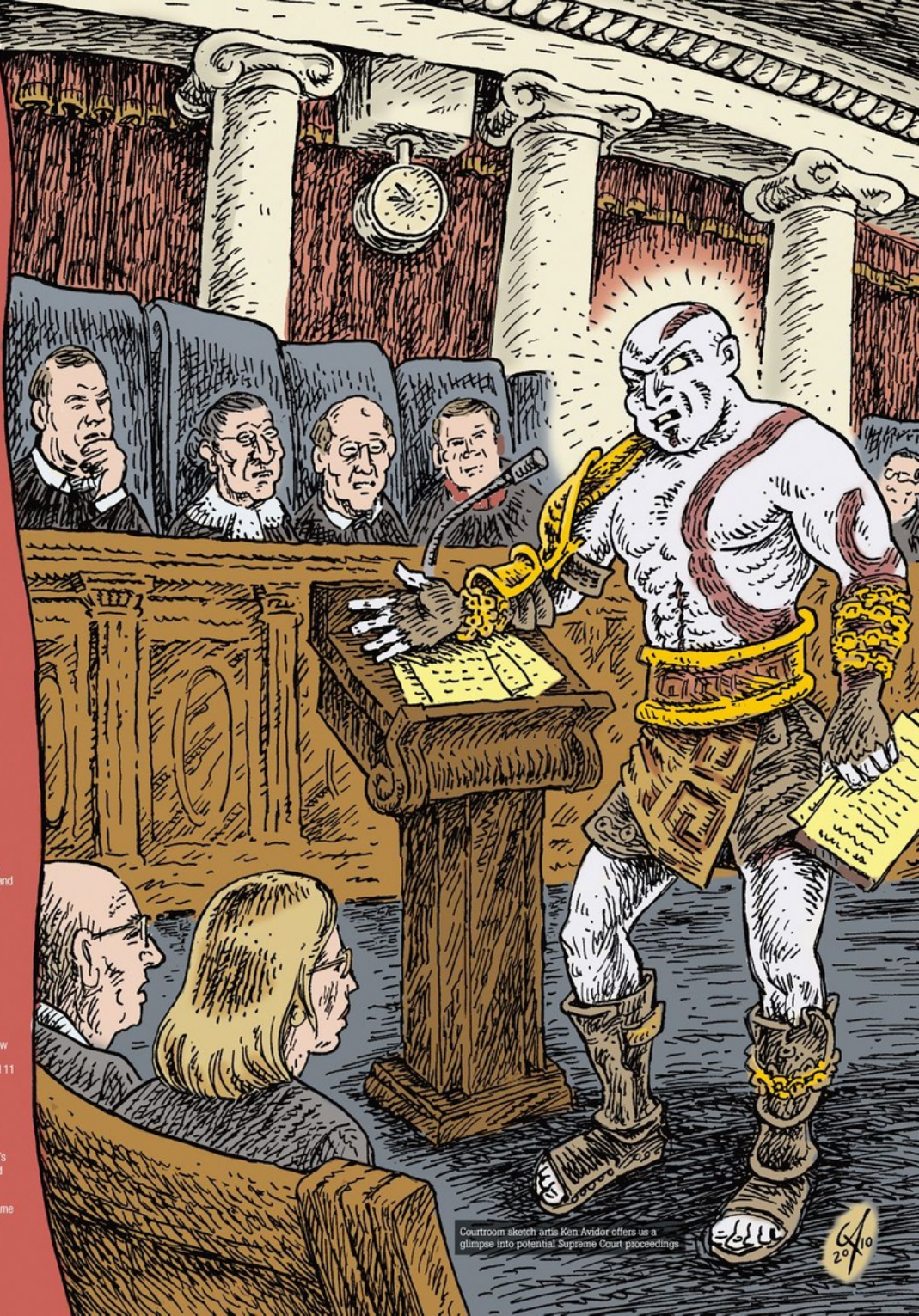
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Courtroom sketch artist Ken Avidor offers us a glimpse into potential Supreme Court proceedings

2010

games

Enemy of the State

The Supreme Court is hearing a case legislating the sale of video games to minors. **Why should you care?**

by Matt Miller

This fall is an important season for the video game industry. Blockbuster titles like Halo: Reach, Call of Duty: Black Ops, and Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood will arrive. Sony and Microsoft will introduce new motion-controlled peripherals. But another major event is also on the docket: the industry's day at the biggest court in the land. For the first time, video game legislation restricting the sale of video games to minors is going before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Entertainment Software Association has successfully contested the California law as unconstitutional on first amendment free speech grounds twice already. We've seen these types of laws proposed and defeated for years, so why is this one any different? We went to both sides of the argument to find the answer.

What's the law say?

The California bill demands that violent video games be marked with a two-inch square label on the front of the box. Retailers that sell those games to minors would be liable for up to \$1,000 per violation. Take a big game on its release date and a bad sales clerk, and that could add up to a hefty chunk of change.

The law eschews the ESRB rating system, and demands a separate set of descriptors be applied. It describes a violent game as one in which "the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being." The bill also details what it means by each of those words and extends its description to include characters with "substantially human characteristics."

According to the bill, a game falls under the law if "a reasonable person, considering the game as a whole, would find it appeals to a deviant or morbid interest of minors...it is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the community as to what is suitable for minors...

or it causes the game, as a whole, to lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors."

If some red flags are popping up as you read those descriptions, you're not the only one. The ESA has some problems as well.

What's at stake?

Game Informer asked ESA spokesman Rich Taylor about the challenges the bill presents to the gaming industry. "Do you want the government even beginning to get into the area of deciding what can and can't be sold and marketed, and ultimately, what can and can't be created?" Taylor asked. "As someone who enjoys video games, do you believe that form of creative entertainment deserves the same constitutional protections afforded to books, films, and music, and other forms of popular entertainment? Why should this incredibly dynamic industry be treated differently?"

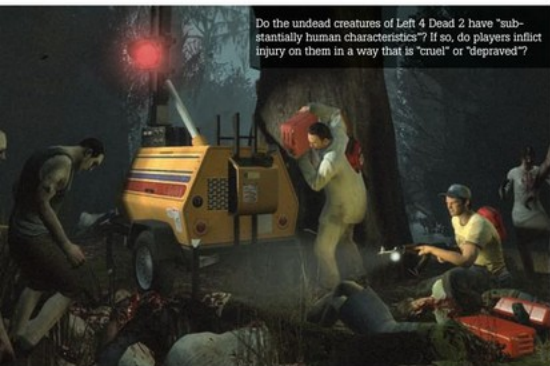
To many gamers, the law sounds redundant. After all, the ESRB already labels M-rated games, and retailers regularly enforce them. This

law would complicate the relationship between publishers, retailers, and gamers. "If you're a retailer, you want to be able to sell the products that come to your store without fear of potentially being on the wrong side of the law," Taylor surmises. "The easier course might be to not carry that game at all. And when retailers make that decision, it means there are fewer places to sell that game for those that create them." Connecting the dots gets easy from there on out. Game publishers and developers need to make money to produce new games and turn a profit. If retailers won't sell a game for fear of legal penalties, the likelihood of those games being made decreases.

Moreover, the ESA has concerns about the precedent set by the law, both in terms of future video game legislation, as well as limitations set on other forms of media. "It's a law that would treat creative works in a way that's inhospitable to the first amendment," Taylor continues. "That's a very dangerous place for our country to be considering heading."

The Other Side

But are all those arguments legitimate? The California law isn't concerned with other mediums – only video games. And from the perspective of the state, if the retailers can't successfully enforce their own sales limitations, how will it ever learn without a penalty? That's the point of view espoused by the office of California State Senator Leland Yee, the bill's original author. We spoke with Yee's chief of staff, Adam Keigwin, for some clarification. "What's at stake is whether states have the right to pass laws that may restrict what is harmful to kids," Keigwin says. "In the past, the courts have ruled in favor of protecting children on so many issues. There's certainly a heck of a lot less evidence that pornography has any harm to kids, and yet they have ruled that we can limit their access to pornography. They've ruled time and again that we can limit children's access to several things: driver's licenses, firearms, the death penalty, life without parole sentences in certain cases, tobacco, alcohol." Citing studies that draw connections between real life violence and the playing of violent video games, California hopes the Supreme Court will lean on the side of child protection.



But why is a law necessary? The ESA claims to have one of the strongest entertainment ratings organizations in any medium. "We take great pride in the Entertainment Software Ratings Board," Taylor says. "The Federal Trade Commission looks at movie ratings, music labeling, and video game ratings every two years or so. Consistently, and increasingly so, it says that the ones that are doing the best job in educating and being clear at the retail level is the video game industry."

Citing the same organization, Keigwin highlights some very different findings. "At the time that they passed this law, a federal trade commission study showed that well over half the kids 14-16 years old were able to purchase ultra-violent video games," he claims. "That number has improved, and I'll give the industry credit for that. With that said, it's still nearly 30 percent of young kids that are able to purchase ultra-violent video games."

Keigwin also isn't satisfied with the way games are classified in the first place. "The ratings system itself is flawed. They have an AO rating – they don't use it even though the AO description says that it's for extreme violence. They've never rated a game AO based upon

violence. So why have it? It sends the wrong message to parents who look at an M game and say: 'Oh, well if it was so bad it would have gotten an AO rating.' A parent doesn't know that a game has never been rated AO. That's the problem. 'Mature' is a very ambiguous term."

The ESA takes issue with this line of reasoning, citing the detailed descriptions that accompany each rating, and proposes another solution that avoids treading into legislation. "We think government efforts should be focused on joining with us to ensure greater understanding and use of our system, because it's the parents – not the government, and not the gaming industry – that should make decisions about what games are suitable for their children," Taylor declares.

Unanswered Questions

Regardless of how the Court rules, a plethora of unresolved issues remain cloudy. Specifically, how will California enforce this new law?

"The law itself presents many unanswered questions and many dangerous precedents in its construction," Taylor tells us. "I think that's the reason that the courts that have looked at it until now have said with no equivocation that this is an unconstitutional law. I would say to direct that back to Mr. Yee and those in support of the law, including the governor of California, who appealed this up to the court."

We took his advice, and Yee's chief of staff offered a simple answer. "If they rule in our favor, the law just gets to go into effect," Keigwin says. "I don't see the video game industry struggling over this, although you would think they may, because they are fighting this so hard. So you think they must be making a lot of money off of sales to kids."

The seemingly straightforward implementation of the law is where things get dicey. California is fundamentally opposed to the ESRB's approach, so that system won't be used to determine which games are deemed violent or not. Instead, each individual publisher would need to make those decisions based on the wording of the law and hope that they're not in violation. Would a T-rated military shooter be considered inappropriate because it includes depictions of killing another human? How about the killing of aliens – are the Covenant sufficiently humanlike to be protected under the law? Does killing zombies count considering they're already dead? It's tempting to be flippant, but that's exactly the point. These off-hand examples illustrate the dilemma that would face game makers if the law were upheld.

There's also the issue of downloadable gaming. California's law specifically addresses retail releases. However, services like Xbox Live allow purchasers to buy M-rated games, leaving it up to parents to set parental controls if they want to limit the games their children can purchase. Is it fair to hold downloadable games to a different standard, when sometimes the games available online are identical to those sold in stores?

Then there's the potential avalanche of similar laws in other states and the undue stress that would place on game creators. Eleven states formally support California's case – Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia. If the law passes, other similar laws could be passed in those and other states. Would each state have its own definition of game violence? Would each require a different

sticker on the box? Would publishers be responsible for keeping track of each set of statutes in order to legally sell their games?

Regardless of the court's ruling, one overriding question behind the disagreement remains – are



violent video games a negative influence on children? California has numerous studies they've submitted that claim they do, and the game industry has evidence to the contrary. "The violent crime rate among youth has descended almost as fast as our industry has grown," Taylor says. "New media is often greeted skeptically and hostilely by some, and we're no different."

Make Your Voice Heard

No matter how you feel about the law in question, gamers owe it to themselves to get involved. If the presence of this law before the Supreme Court isn't a wake-up call, it's hard to know what will be.

If you're displeased with the way the ESRB rates and retailers sell video games, contact the organizations and let them know how they should improve. Alternately, if you sympathize with the ESA and believe video games deserve to be protected speech like any other form of art or entertainment, then you may want to look into the video game voters network (videogamevoters.org).

"There are over 200,000 registered voters who are game enthusiasts, who are keeping track of policy as it relates to computer and video games," Taylor says. "If someone comes up with a misguided, unconstitutional, hostile proposal, the network contacts them. That speaks louder to a policy maker or a politician: to hear from constituents that say 'I disagree on your stance on that.' If that 200,000 number were to become a million or more, it would be the kind of number and voice that would make clear to legislators at the local, state, and federal level that gamers are engaged. Gamers are paying attention, and they're going to register their satisfaction or dissatisfaction at the ballot box."

One million gamers is about one quarter of the people who read this magazine every month. It's about an eighth of the players who bought the last Call of Duty game in the first week of its release. It's less than a tenth of people who currently hold World of Warcraft accounts. It's not an unattainable number, so if gamers want to prove they're more than disconnected stereotypes that never come out of their mothers' basements, then it's time to step up and be counted.

THE FIESTA HAS ENOUGH NEW-WORLD TECHNOLOGY TO PUT A 50-GRAND CAR TO SHAME.



There's a lot you can get in a Fiesta. A class-exclusive 4" multifunctional LCD display,* standard. A PowerShift six-speed automatic transmission.** That's the kind of engineering that makes it more responsive and still keeps it fuel-efficient! The Fiesta also has available keyless entry, push-button start, voice-activated SYNC**† and even ambient lighting. All told, that's as much high-end technology as many premium cars. How's that for high tech?

IT'S A PRETTY BIG DEAL.

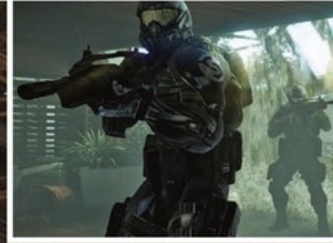


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Drive one.

*Class is Compact Cars vs. 2010 competitors. **Optional. †Fiesta SES shown. EPA-estimated 29 city/38 hwy/33 combined mpg, automatic. ††Driving while distracted can result in loss of vehicle control. Only use mobile phones and other devices, even with voice commands, when it is safe to do so.





event

Gamescom 2010

A weeklong celebration of gaming in Germany

By Adam Biessener

Europe puts on a gaming conference every year that dwarfs E3 – in size and attendance, if not in groundbreaking news and announcements. Over a quarter million gamers descended upon the city of Cologne in western Germany in late August to celebrate their shared passion for gaming, demonstrating an enthusiasm that rivals any region in the world. Join us for a tour through Gamescom 2010's highlights.

The halcyon days of E3 never approached this scale, as Gamescom is as much of a festival and celebration for the fans as it is an industry event for publishers, their business partners, and the press. The Kölnmesse, an enormous multi-building meeting complex that sprawls across the eastern bank of the Rhine river, is saturated with millions of dollars worth of electronics, scantily clad booth babes, suited businessfolk, and swag-toting, wide-eyed gamers. In contrast to E3's 18-and-over admittance policy, Gamescom allows anyone over 12 into the show – though anyone without a press or exhibitor badge has to wear a wristband that gates their access to content that Germany's USK ratings board puts into the 16+ or 18+ categories. Much of Gamescom's fan population falls into the sub-18 age bracket, and their boundless fervor lends the show a particular energy. All of the developers we spoke to about

the issue enthusiastically welcomed the chance to connect with their younger fans, even at the price of having to send all of their show floor demo material through the notoriously strict USK rating process.

While E3 is swallowed whole by the hustle and bustle of downtown Los Angeles even in years when the Lakers aren't finishing out a dramatic NBA Finals against the Celtics, Gamescom seemingly takes over half of Europe. From the customs official in Amsterdam who guessed our destination as soon as he laid eyes on us to nearly every clerk, waiter, driver, and concierge in Cologne, the bulk of the native Europeans we met were at least aware of the show. Cologne itself sported more signage for Gamescom than for its football club, which was opening its Bundesliga (the top-level German soccer league) schedule. The massive train station that sits in the shadow of the Gothic cathedral in the city's heart was full to bursting with Gamescom

attendees, its dozen-plus platforms overcrowded for the hours surrounding the show's opening and closing every day.

Outside the Kölnmesse's north entrance, bungee jumping and something called BossaBall – think volleyball played on an enormous air mattress – contributed to the carnival atmosphere. Skaters and BMX riders drew crowds with aerial antics. Inside the convention center itself, everything from hair salons to rock-climbing walls entertained attendees whose eardrums needed a break from the overpowering cacophony of the show floor or whose noses could no longer handle the miasma of a few hundred thousand sweaty bodies packed together. Gamescom 2010 is a neon counterpoint to the outmoded notion that video games are the sole province of pizza-faced basement dwellers.

A look at the future

Gamescom's close proximity to the all-important holiday season means that many companies choose to announce new products at E3 instead, but there was significant news at the show on many fronts nonetheless.

Sony used its leadership position in Europe – the PlayStation 3 is surpassing or at least on equal footing with the 360 and Wii there, depending on which set of numbers you look at – to throw a hell of a press conference. The company announced ambitious plans for its Europe-specific video streaming service, PlayTV, plus a new movie-streaming app called Mubi. It garnered awards for Gran Turismo 5, expanded its catalog with Mass Effect 2 coming to PS3, debuted Insomniac's new Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One, teased the developer's upcoming Resistance 3, and blew out the Move launch even more with a playable demo of Heroes on the Move (see page 32 for our reviews of the Move's launch lineup).

Anecdotal, the Sony booth always seemed packed (even by Gamescom standards) and the level of fan enthusiasm for the PS3 seemed a step beyond typical American reactions. For Americans used to seeing Sony forced into damage control ever since Kaz Hirai's disastrous "Five hundred and ninety-nine U.S. dollars!" proclamation, the company's confident Gamescom presence could be jarring.

Microsoft showed bits of new content for Fable III and Halo: Reach, but the company's clear priority was Kinect (see page 64 for an extensive hands-on report on the device). Kinect's Gamescom showing was head and shoulders above its uneven E3 presence, and the fans seemed to be into it – we saw a large crowd gathered around a live Dance Central demo in the middle of Cologne's shopping district. Similarly to Sony, though, it was strange to see Microsoft in such a different role than its swaggering E3 demeanor.

Nintendo won awards for Kirby's Epic Yarn and plenty more praise for new Epic Mickey content shown at its booth, but that was the extent of the company's impact on Gamescom. The highly anticipated 3DS wasn't playable on the show floor, only in private meeting rooms. The Wii and DS are both hugely successful in Europe, just as they are in the U.S. and Japan, but Nintendo didn't come out swinging with anything terribly new and exciting in Cologne.

BioShock Infinite's coming-out party (see this month's cover story on page 48 for much, much more) floored everyone lucky enough to see it, but beyond that there wasn't much in terms of announcements. Third-party publishers and developers more than made up for the lack of new product in the form of meaty updates to previous show titles, though. Bulletstorm, Civilization V, Dead Space 2, Street Fighter X Tekken, Dragon Age 2, Guild Wars 2, Crysis 2, Knight's Contract, and much more all debuted significant new chunks of content to the delight of the European attendees.

Cultural differences power innovation

Seeing what companies focus on at Gamescom, and how the fans react to various titles, is a fascinating commentary on the differences between European and American interests. EA capping its press conference with an in-depth look at FIFA 11 or Konami focusing on its Pro Evolution Soccer franchise is hardly unexpected. Likewise, the prevalence of PC gaming – an entire exhibit hall was dedicated to MMOs, and broadcast TV airs advertisements for free-to-play online games – is no surprise. A bizarre tractor simulation commanding as much floor space as Super Scribblenauts, on the other hand, is baffling to U.S. sensibilities.

The European gaming community's love of PC games and strategy titles is well-documented, but seeing it in action drives the point home. The Witcher 2 was received well enough by critics at E3, but the Gamescom response was at the level we Americans reserve for a Resistance or a Dragon Age. Guild Wars 2 may not have eclipsed Star Wars: The Old Republic, but it was a lot closer than you would've thought. The Blizzard booth was jammed with multi-hour wait times from the doors opening on day one to the security guards showing everyone out at the very end of the show. Civilization V may as well have been God of War, judging by the fan response.

The differences between European and American tastes aren't as drastic (and occasionally hilarious) as the gulf between us and the Japanese, but the divergence is no less important. The fact that Europeans go nuts for a weird PC-only Russian-developed King's Bounty remake means that we got King's Bounty: Armored Princess, one of Game Informer's top 50 games of 2009. ArenaNet has a hugely long leash and massive budget for making Guild Wars 2 the best MMO they can because of the first game's strong European support – Guild Wars sold roughly as much in Europe as in the U.S. Gamers around the world benefit from a breadth of interest that allows a wide variety of games to be profitable, and the cultural differences between the U.S., Europe, and Japan are a huge part of that.

The story of Gamescom 2010 from an American perspective is one of cultural differences and surprising priorities as much as a blast of gaming news. If there's one thing to be learned from spending a week surrounded by developers, publishers, and fans in Cologne, it's that gaming is developing into a universal language that binds people around the globe around a shared passion. And that's a beautiful thing. ♦



The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN



(ABOVE) Fable creator Peter Molyneux is rightly lauded as a genius in the video game world, and now you can put your creations right next to his. Developer Lionhead has put up a free web application that lets you create a villager in Fable III, complete with a backstory. If you pre-order the title you can actually interact with your villager, who will give you a quest and 1,000 gold. Check it out at the Fable III website.



Killzone 3 developer Guerilla Games announced it is working on a new Sony-exclusive IP unrelated to the Killzone franchise. No further information was revealed, unfortunately.

the good

“
...We're considering a longer development cycle — 15, 18, 21 months between releases rather than annually.



(ABOVE) Sony's SOCOM 4 (shown), Activision's True Crime: Hong Kong, Warner's F.E.A.R. 3, and Atari's Test Drive Unlimited 2 have all been delayed into 2011. Each publisher claims they want to use the extra time to make the games better. In the case of SOCOM 4, you wonder how Sony's Move controller fits into that equation. The game used the motion peripheral at E3, but since then developer Zipper Interactive has altered the Move controls within the game.

the bad



Will the next PSP be DOA like the PSP Go?

(ABOVE) Rumors are circulating that Sony is showing off a new PSP to its publishing partners. The unit reportedly has a touch-sensitive control panel on its backside and doubles as an Android-based smart phone thanks to a partnership with Ericsson. While this sounds like it could be a perfect gadget hybrid, it could also be the PSP Go part two — a handheld nobody asked for that went absolutely nowhere.



(ABOVE) APB developer Realtime Worlds and NBA 2K franchise creators Visual Concepts have both been hit by layoffs. Realtime Worlds, a Scottish studio, has also declared bankruptcy. Despite these difficulties, Realtime Worlds says it will still support its action MMO APB. It is also moving forward with its next game, Project: MyWorld. As for Visual Concepts, after the stagnation of its third-party exclusive baseball game and the poor NHL 2K11, basketball seems to be the only thing going in its favor.

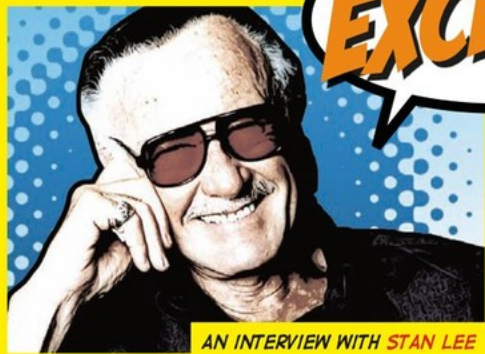


the ugly

Fable III might have some new features (see above), but it's also losing them as well. The game's online auction house for character-created weapons won't be in the game, although players will still be able to make and trade them with friends. Creator Peter Molyneux has been criticized for talking about features and then pulling them from the final product, like in the first Fable. Hopefully this is the only feature in the game that is being yanked, otherwise things could get ugly.

THQ CEO Brian Farrell charts out the future of the UFC franchise after less-than-expected sales for UFC Undisputed 2010.

EXCELSIOR!



AN INTERVIEW WITH STAN LEE

Stan Lee is one of the most influential geeks of our time. As the father of Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, and numerous others, Lee's work has helped shape popular culture as we know it today.

As the hardest working 87-year-old in the entertainment industry, he's not done shaping pop culture yet. Lee has his hands in comic books, television, and movie production, plus he often aids the development of Marvel Comics' video games. Activision recently tapped Lee for *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* and *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions* (see our review on page 87). What does

Stan Lee think of how his characters have been portrayed in games? Does he ever play them? We sat down with Lee to find out.

When someone starts making a game based on one of your Marvel properties, how involved do you usually get?

I try to get involved in some way. I either narrate it or do voiceovers somewhere in the game, or I just talk to the developers about the characters and give them story suggestions when they're just getting started. I'm a real busybody. I like to poke my nose into everything; they can't get rid of me. Obviously, I'm here for Activision because they have this great new game with four Spider-Mans, and I'd forgotten I'd even done it, but they told me that I narrated the game. [Laughs]

You created a lot of these characters nearly 50 years ago, and now they are featured in movies, TV shows, and video games. How does it feel watching your characters explode across popular culture?

I'll show you why I'm a lousy interviewee; I'll answer that question. I feel great. [Stops and waits for next question.] Actually, it's amazing. Years ago we never would have thought that some day I'd be interviewed by journalists because I was involved in Spider-Man, because in the early days it was embarrassing to even tell people you wrote comics. They were considered the bottom rung of the literary world. Now everything has changed. Now I walk into a room and somebody sees me and they say, "excuse me President Obama, I think I have to talk to Stan Lee." I think the movies and the video games have helped so much in making these characters world famous. So everybody does the work and I take the credit.

Your likeness has been put into comics, films, and now video games. How did you like being put into a game?

You know, I was just annoyed that I didn't have the starring role. But honestly it was great. I guess I'm a ham. I love being in the games, I love doing my cameos in the movies and television. I guess I'm a frustrated ham. Although these days I'm not so frustrated, because I'm getting the cameos. [Laughs.]

Do you ever play any of the games featuring your characters?

You know something? I was hoping you wouldn't ask that. I have to tell you, I have never played a video game. Although actually, years ago when they made the Hulk video game, I went to visit the studio, and I was sitting with the guy who made the Hulk game, and he said, "Come on, Stan, I'll show you how to play." And I thought, "Well there's no way I can't do better than this kid." So I said, "fine," and he took the control, and suddenly Hulk was on the screen fighting people, and the developer was moving his arms around making the Hulk run up buildings and doing all these crazy things, but when I tried it the Hulk just sort of stumbled around and swatted at a few people. It was embarrassing. I've never had the time for games. I wish I could, because I enjoy looking at them, and I marvel at the fact that the characters look as if they copied them right from the movies. They look as expensive as a movie, but the guys that do video games are geniuses, because they've got different things happening all at once and it seems far more complex than putting together a film. I don't know how they do it.

A lot has changed since you created these characters. Now it feels like there are a dozen different versions of Spider-Man. What do you think of the fact that your Spider-Man is sharing the spotlight with characters like Spider-Man Noir and 2099?

I think they're all good. The great thing about these four characters [from Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions] is that they give the players a chance to have variety. I've seen the game in action and it looks like a lot of fun. All four Spider-Men are different in their own way, but they're all great. I just wish I'd thought of them all. But you know I haven't the time to read comic books anymore. I had to ask someone about the Ultimate books, because I don't know what's going on in them. I usually look through them, but I don't have time to read them. But I still write the Spider-Man newspaper strip. I've been doing that for about 30 years, I guess. I think everybody forgot about it, so they let me keep doing it.

Out of all the characters you created, do you think any of them would be particularly well suited for video games?

I can't wait to see Doctor Strange or the Black Panther in a game or film. Oh, they're all good. I love them all. I'm prejudiced. I think they'll all be games eventually. Anything that becomes a successful movie will eventually be a video game. That seems to be how the industry works. I think any of Marvel's characters would be good. I was

even talking to the director who's in line to do the Ant-Man movie, Edgar Wright [*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* and *Shaun of the Dead*]. Who ever would have thought Ant-Man would be a movie? But it could be a good movie. Of course, you'd have to have the wonderful Wasp in the movie. It really depends how it's written. The funny thing is, you can take a character that people think is a weak character and you can write them well and everyone will say, "Man, that's cool." I'll give you an example: Iron Man. Iron Man was never one of our more popular characters. He was never one of our best-selling comics. He did well, but it wasn't Spider-Man or X-Men well. Then they did the movie, and they wrote it well, and it was well directed, and they got Downey in it – suddenly it's one of Marvel's best properties. Everything depends on how you do it. You can make almost anything successful as long as you do it right.

What do you think of Marvel's recent deal with Disney?

Oh, great! Everything Disney does I love. In fact, I'd always felt that Marvel should be like Disney. Unfortunately, when I was working for Marvel, the people who owned the company weren't interested in branching out into movies or anything, which was always frustrating to me. However, now that Disney bought Marvel, just you wait, you ain't seen nothing yet.

What's your favorite character that you actually didn't help create?

You won't believe this, but DC had a character named Lobo. I liked him because he was so different. But otherwise I don't really have favorite characters. Even of my own – I love them all.

It seems like the line between comics and video games is blending as comics go digital. What do you think of the digital comic book trend?

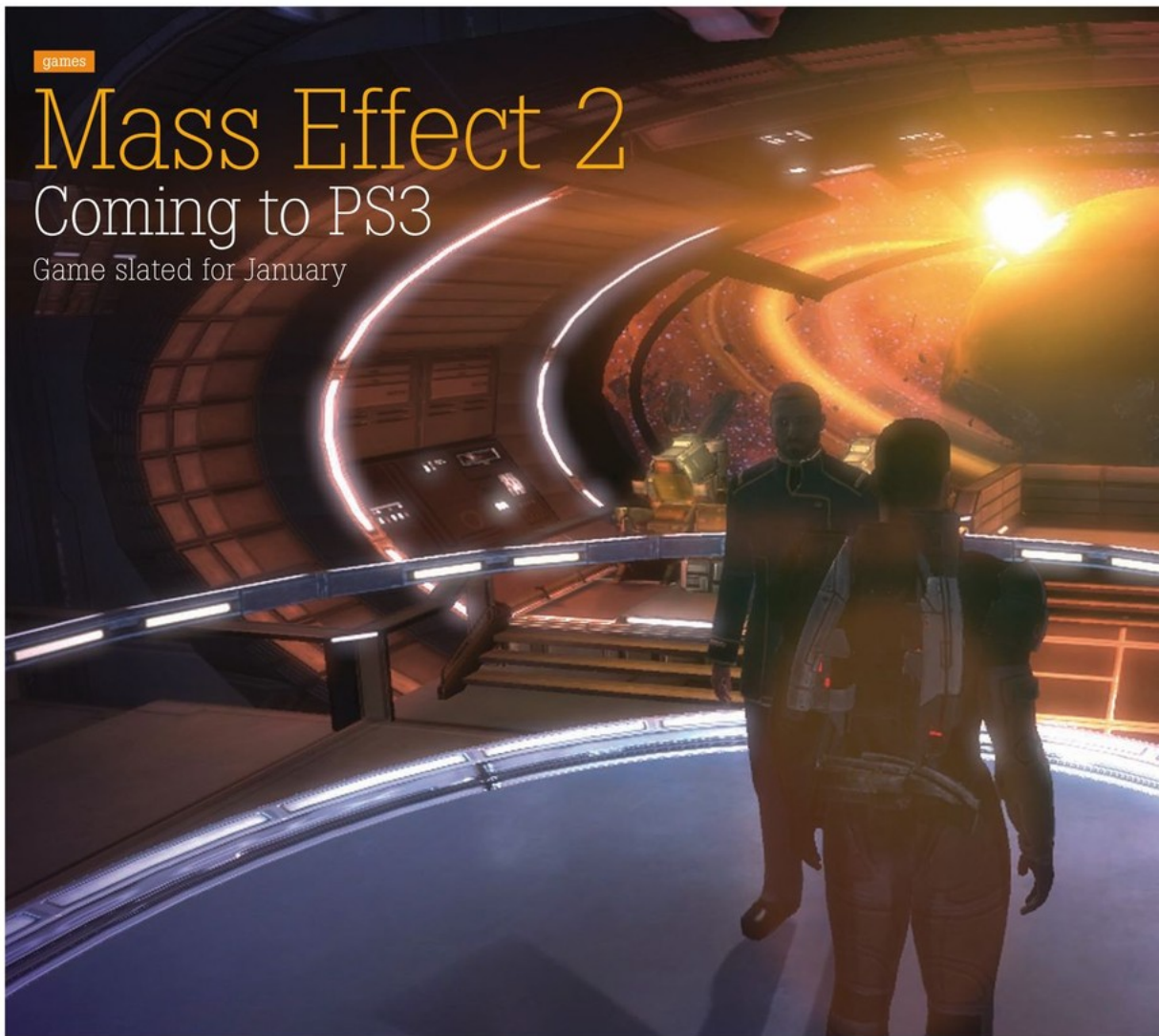
I think they're great, and I think they'll get more and more popular. You're going to find comics wherever you look. You're going to see them on your phone, you're going to see them on your TV, you're going to see them on your computer. Maybe someday they'll even have them so you can just see them floating in the air, I don't know. It just shows how wonderful a medium comics are. What better way of telling a story can there be than with words and pictures? Steven Spielberg once said to me – I'm one of the world's biggest name droppers – he said to me, "You know Stan, you and I do essentially the same thing, except my pictures move." But when you think about it, a movie or a comic book, or a video game, they're words and they're pictures, and there is something special about telling a story on two fronts. *Interview by Ben Reeves*

games

Mass Effect 2

Coming to PS3

Game slated for January



BioWare's Mass Effect RPG franchise is no longer exclusive to the Xbox 360, as the developer is bringing Mass Effect 2 to the PlayStation 3 in January.

When Electronic Arts bought the company in 2007, we assumed it wouldn't be long before it made the series multiplatform. BioWare stood by the first game as an Xbox 360 exclusive, even after it released that November and a PC port appeared in 2008. The console exclusivity held when Mass Effect 2 was announced for PC and the Xbox 360 in the spring of 2009.

This latest departure of exclusivity not only highlights the fact that fewer titles are staking their fortunes on just one console these days, but also Microsoft's dwindling first-party stable. Bungie and Project Gotham developer Bizarre Creations have gone to Activision, and properties like *Too Human*, *Alan Wake*, *Crackdown*, and *Shadowrun* have not done well.

One of the key features of Mass Effect 2 was that you could transfer over your Commander Shepard save file from the first title. BioWare and PS3 owners are faced with the question of what will happen to their Mass Effect 2 saves. It seems foolish that BioWare would let PS3 owners play Mass Effect 2 and then not let them experience the rest of the trilogy with their save file, but BioWare hasn't announced the next title for the PS3. This also brings up the question of whether or not the original Mass Effect will come out for the PS3 or be included with Mass Effect 2.

BioWare says the PS3 version of Mass Effect 2 comes with "hours of bonus content," but whether this refers to the 360 DLC that has already been released or announced, such as the various weapon packs, the Kasumi's Stolen Memory DLC, and the upcoming Lair of the Shadow Broker story featuring Liara T'Soni, is unknown at this time.



news

The Tech Test

A look into the present & future

Games are beyond being popular – they are everywhere and have taken a place alongside movies and other media and entertainment in the larger culture pool. But who are we and where are we going? We surveyed 1,159 readers to get a snapshot of gamers' attitudes towards gaming technology, other consumer products, and their usage.

Other Avenues

You need a display to play a home console, and 72 percent of those surveyed like to do it in style with an HDTV. This is compared to a Consumer Electronics Association study this year showing that 65 percent of American homes have an HDTV. However, it doesn't necessarily follow that just because you love games, you are a geek for all tech. Niche amenities like 3D TVs, iPads/tablets, and even gaming peripherals other than extra controllers (such as arcade or flight sticks) show low numbers. The majority of respondents in our survey – 68 percent – don't even own smart phones.

Similarly, just because you like games doesn't mean you want to do it everywhere. Although half of those who own smart phones said they download apps on their phones and occasionally play games on them, 44 percent said they have no interest in gaming on their phone. Is it the controls? Perhaps not, 74 percent said they wouldn't buy a game controller peripheral for their phone even if there was one.



In some cases numbers have been rounded up or down
Margin of error: 6-7 percent

Move Vs. Kinect Vs. Wii

Peripherals usually only capture 10 percent of that console's audience, and there are surveys predicting that both Move and Kinect will hit a similarly low install base. Our respondents, however, are more enthusiastic about purchasing the two motion peripherals, with both Move and Kinect hitting over 25 percent.

Other numbers appear to further demonstrate excitement for these new gaming experiences. Over 30 percent of those who say they intend to buy either Move or Kinect say they plan to get the other product. Perhaps this points to the legacy of the Wii and the motion-based phenomenon that it started. In fact, almost 30 percent of Wii owners say they also plan to get a Move, Kinect, or both.

If there is an example of brand loyalty, however, it's that almost double the amount of PS3-only owners intend on getting Move (21 percent) versus the Xbox 360-only owners planning on picking up Kinect (12.9 percent).



The Online Experience

Those who took the survey show a high online aptitude. Only 13 percent aren't online at all, and 85 percent say they play online either "a lot" or "occasionally." Even 44 percent of those who only own a Wii play online occasionally. This presence is felt in the fact that a very high percentage of people buy games on XBLA or purchase DLC for their titles (83 and 84 percent, respectively). Over half of our respondents play some kind of online free-to-play game.

Despite this love of the online experience, almost 80 percent of those surveyed said they prefer owning a traditional, retail copy of a game versus having a digital download. Does this represent past habits or an actual resistance to the supposed future of cloud computing?

Surprise, surprise: Not only do almost 40 percent of respondents tab shooters as their favorite genre, but playing online is popular as well

The Console

Wars Are Over

One thing was certainly clear in our results: Many gamers don't own just one system. For instance, people who only own some form of Xbox 360 console (whether it's an Elite, Arcade, or Slim) accounted for just 186 gamers – and the number was even less for the PS3 and Wii. In total, multi-console users accounted for over 65 percent of respondents.

Xbox 360 has a narrow lead over the other home consoles, with 36.6 percent of those surveyed playing on some form of Xbox. PS3 and PS3 Slim owners accounted for 30 percent, with the Wii at 33 percent. All of these home systems are within the margin of error, so there is statistically the same amount of ownership of the three platforms.

High Profile

You can make generalizations about those who took our survey, just like there are stereotypical profiles for gamers at large. For example, over 80 percent of respondents were male. Xbox 360 owners are slightly more likely to say they play online a lot. The majority of those who only play a Wii are under 18.

But one thing we found out is that savvy marketing alone isn't going to convince gamers to be the kinds of consumers they are not. The majority of those surveyed don't think it's important at all to be the first to get a new system, for example, and money is always a variable when it comes to getting new technology. 3D gaming? There doesn't seem to be a huge demand for it just yet if you go by the number of people who want to buy a 3D TV. The fact that most gamers own more than one system in and of itself largely invalidates the old stereotypes and ways of thinking about what each console's audience is.



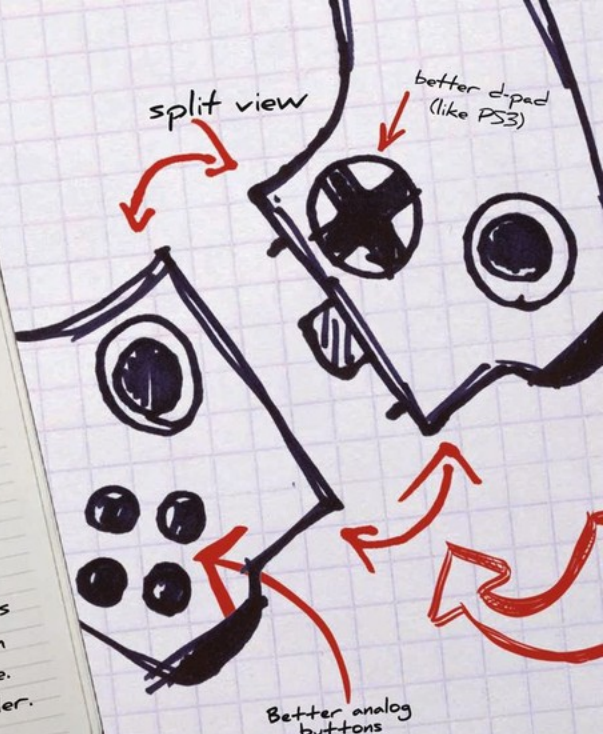
The Wish List

The number one thing gamers of all stripes (almost 40 percent) are planning to buy is the Nintendo 3DS. Various other products, like Kinect, Move, a smart phone, and an HDTV, all hover below 20 percent. The real Rock Band 3 guitars garnered the least interest, with only 103 people saying they wanted to buy one.

The horseshoe between the Xbox 360 S and PS3 Slim models seems to go slightly in Sony's favor. Almost three times the amount of people own a PS3 Slim as opposed to the new 360 design at the time of this survey (although overall 360 S sales have been very good), but 27 percent of respondents plan to get a 360 S versus 19 percent for a PS3 Slim.

feature
Building The Perfect Controller
by Ben Reeves

What is a video game controller but the portal that lets us step into a digital world? The more versatile our controllers become, the more immersive our gaming experiences will be. Modern technology has improved our cell phones, computers, and appliances in countless ways, and it's time we take some of Silicon Valley's newest achievements and use them to optimize our gaming experience. It's time we built a better controller.



Triggers - For years we've been pushing on our controllers, now they can push back. Force feedback buttons allow developers to amplify the game experience by allowing the trigger buttons to rumble individually. First-person shooters could use this to offer trigger resistance similar to real-world guns, and when a player's car whips out of control in Burnout the brakes could actually lock up on them.

left shoulder buttons

concave analog sticks (like the 360)

front view

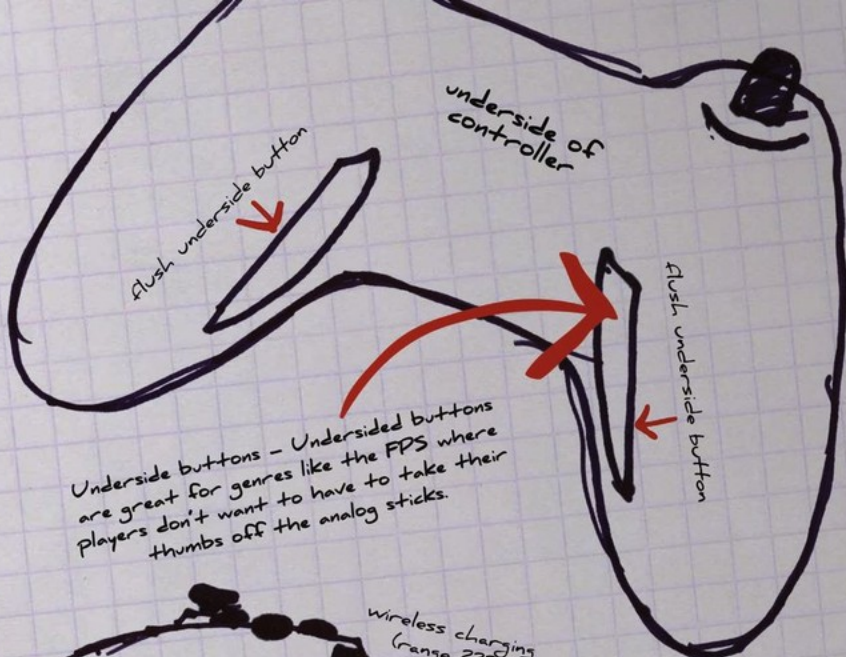
Memory chip - Players will be able to hook this controller up to a PC, allowing them to program macros or set certain buttons to turbo. And since the controller will know which game is being played, we shouldn't have to worry about switching through dozens of presets every time we turn on our system.

Self-cooling skin

Sony, in case you're wondering, this is called a trigger guard. It prevents players from hitting the trigger buttons when they don't want to.

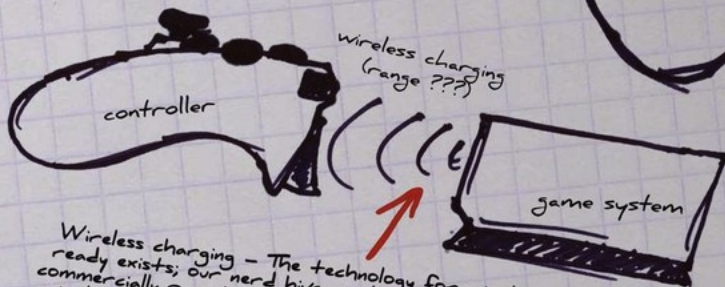
Split - Nintendo's Wii remotes opened up gaming to a variety of new controller mechanics, but it also sacrificed a lot of what worked so well about standard pads.

We think there is room for both styles. We envision a controller that breaks in half for motion based games, but comes together during more traditional gameplay. As an added bonus, the left side of the stick can be used independently for single-handed gameplay, perfect for RPGs. You may notice that there are no straps on this controller; only one thing can prevent you from throwing this expensive piece of technology through your TV's, windows, or pets' heads. It's called self-control.

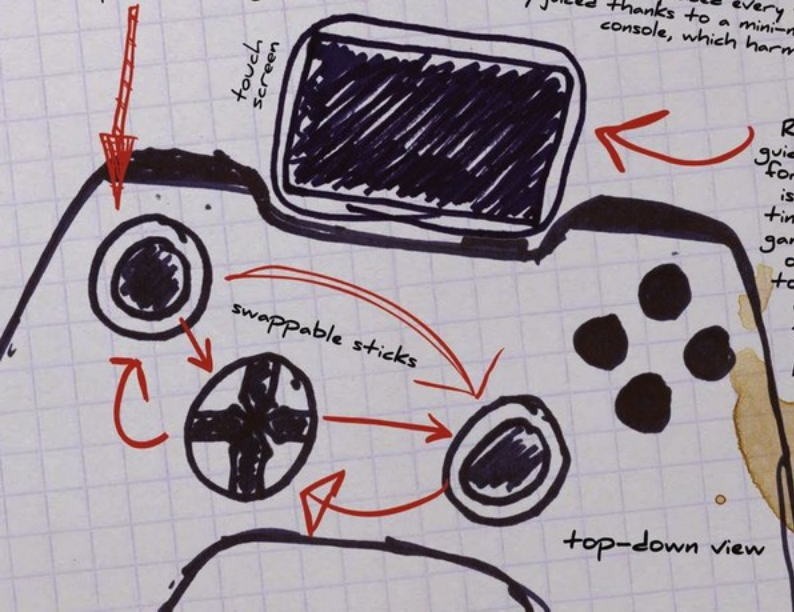


Underside buttons - Undersided buttons are great for genres like the FPS where players don't want to have to take their thumbs off the analog sticks.

Modular sticks - Microsoft's d-pad feels like a quarter balanced on top of a pea, but we prefer its analog sticks over Sony's rounded nubs. Our perfect controller would take the best parts of both worlds, but what sets this controller apart is that players get to choose the layout. With this unit's modular design, players will be able to arrange the placement of the controller's d-pad and analog sticks, creating a personalized ergonomic design.



Wireless charging - The technology for wireless power transmission already exists; our nerd hive mind just has to figure out how to make it commercially practical. We can't think of anything more practical than a wireless controller that doesn't need to be tethered to a wall or have its batteries replaced every 4-8 hours. Our controllers will constantly stay juiced thanks to a mini-microwave transmitter nestled in a future console, which harmlessly feeds it electrical energy.



Removeable touch screen - The guide button is cute, but it's time for an upgrade. The touch screen is infinitely more versatile. This tiny screen can display helpful in-game information such as health or inventory, and since it's a touch screen it also allows for easy achievement browsing, friends list sorting, game soundtrack controlling, and speedy pizza ordering.

The Verdict On

MOVE

Reviews For PlayStation Move Hardware and Five Launch Titles

By Jeff Marchiafava

The Hardware:

The Move motion controller is a strange-looking peripheral. Even in an era of gaming inundated with plastic musical instruments and exercise accessories, Move's glowing sphere will probably make you feel like an idiot when you first start playing with it. Luckily, it also happens to be a responsive and accurate motion controller.

The controller's internal sensors are as powerful as a Wii remote with Wii MotionPlus, while the mold is more comfortable in your hand. The face buttons are small, but raised enough that we never missed them while playing. Players who are accustomed to the DualShock may find Move's button placement confusing at first, but it didn't take us long to acclimate to the new orientation.

The battery life for the motion controller is on par with the DualShock, and withstood a full day of gaming before low battery warnings began popping up. Syncing and recharging the controllers via USB is as simple as expected, but the PlayStation Slim presents a bit of a problem. The redesigned console only has two USB ports, so if you have two motion controllers and a navigation controller, you're already out of slots. You can't recharge controllers while the PS3 is off, and if you want to play Move titles while charging your other controllers, keep in mind that the PlayStation Eye needs a USB port as well.

The other half of Move is the PlayStation Eye, which is slightly less impressive. It's great that Sony was able to utilize an existing peripheral (especially if you've already bought the underused camera), but that also means you're purchasing older hardware. The PlayStation Eye is almost three years old, and it shows. The 640x480 resolution looks especially grainy on HDTVs. This really only affects games that feature augmented reality though, and luckily the camera's motion-tracking capabilities are top notch – under the right conditions.

While setting up the PlayStation Eye, we realized how much the environment can affect Move's performance. Putting the camera on top of our television gave us fewer recognition problems than our initial placement underneath the television at about knee level. Although the PlayStation Eye can automatically adjust its exposure setting and assign a color to your controller that contrasts with the lighting of your room, the camera is still fairly sensitive. Our overhead lights were too bright

for PlayStation Eye's liking, and opening the blinds behind our television created minor problems as well. Once we struck the right balance, we didn't have any further problems.

The last piece of Move is the navigation controller, but how it performs is still up in the air. None of the launch titles we played utilized it, making it impossible to say how it will hold up during extended gameplay sessions. The controller's analog stick and trigger feel fine, but the two face buttons and d-pad – which are all placed under the analog stick – feel slightly awkward. The navigation controller is only \$30, but there's no reason for gamers to pick one up until we see what kind of support it gets.

Despite these minor problems, the more we played with Move the more it impressed us. The PlayStation Eye and motion controller are a killer combination for accurate and highly responsive motion-based gameplay, and we applaud Sony for getting the hardware right the first time. The quality will cost you, however: The Move bundle plus an extra motion controller (you'll want an extra controller) will cost you \$150.

VERY GOOD ■■■■■■■■■■



Over the past few months we've tried out PlayStation Move, playing through limited demos of the hardware's launch titles. These opportunities gave us a good idea of what to expect from Sony's new motion controller, but they weren't comparable to a real-world test. This month we received our own Move hardware, along with copies of several retail Move titles. As we spent countless hours flailing around our living rooms, the strengths and weaknesses of Sony's new motion controller became apparent.

The Software:

Playing with the peripheral over a range of titles revealed that the effectiveness of Move's capabilities depends considerably on the software utilizing it. While we have hope for Move's future, the titles we've played so far have been a mixed bag. Here's what to expect from five of Move's launch titles.



Tumble

1-2 Players

Score: 8

Tumble is a PSN title based on the simple concept of building towers out of differently shaped blocks. However, the game's ability to accurately translate your movement into 3D space makes it surprisingly engaging, and the sheer variety of levels and building challenges kept us entertained long after other Move launch titles grew old. Local multiplayer is well implemented, allowing you to work cooperatively with a friend to build the highest tower, or attempt to screw them over with a teetering mess.

Sports Champions

1-4 Players

Score: 7.75

Sports Champions is one of the best examples of what PlayStation Move can do. The table tennis, disc golf, and bocce ball events offer an unprecedented level of accuracy in motion-based gameplay, and feel as natural as their real-life counterparts. The archery and gladiator events are entertaining as well, especially when using two controllers. Only volleyball failed to hit the mark, feeling more like a gesture-based gimmick than a game. Sports Champions features head-to-

head play, tournaments, and challenge modes, as well as unlockable characters, outfits, and equipment. It might not be the killer app Sony is hoping for, but it's entertaining nevertheless.

Start The Party

1-4 Players

Score: 6

The novelty of augmented reality makes Start The Party an entertaining but shallow experience. While the overly cartoony presentation and obnoxious announcer will make you want to gouge your eyes and ears out, the controls are impressively accurate, and some of the minigames are intuitive and enjoyable. This game is aimed squarely at children and (patient) parents. More discerning gamers should look elsewhere.

Racquet Sports

1-4 Players

Score: 5.5

Racquet Sports is a port of a Wii title, and it shows. The game's graphics received a considerable boost in the transition to the PS3, but the gameplay is still plagued by questionable detection and slow response times. Unlike Sports Champions, Racquet Sports relies on gestures and timing to translate your movement

into gameplay. While badminton and beach tennis controlled reasonably well, tennis, ping-pong, and squash only managed to serve up frustration. Racquet Sports has plenty of tournaments to participate in and extras to unlock, but with such questionable gameplay, you probably won't care.

High Velocity Bowling

1-4 Players

Score: 5

High Velocity Bowling was a PSN title from 2007 that received generally positive reviews. It's now being updated with Move controls, which managed to make it worse than before. While the basic swing mechanics are above board, the curve mechanic (which was originally handled by pressing buttons) is inexcusably glitchy; you curve the ball with a gesture more akin to unlocking a door than turning your hand over, and when we played the curve was often inexplicably applied in the wrong direction. High Velocity Bowling has plenty of items, characters, and additional challenges to unlock, but if you want to actually enjoy the game, it's best to stick with your Sixaxis controller.



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games

Portal 2

Release Date Announced

New Voice Actor Revealed

Portal 2 was our E3 game of the show, but Valve's triumph was balanced out by the disappointing news that its release was delayed to an undisclosed date in 2011. Thankfully, we won't have to wait that long. The developer recently announced that Portal 2 is coming out on February 9.

In other Portal 2 news, British comedian, actor, writer, and Ricky Gervais buddy Stephen Merchant (*Extras*) voices Wheatley, one of the personality cores in the game who serves as a companion to protagonist Chell at various points. Merchant's natural comedic skills should be a good fit for a game already imbued with a great sense of humor and well-crafted dialogue.



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Madden NFL 11

The Madden community is always a vocal one – and it should be when you consider that millions of people buy the game annually. This year is no different, as developer EA Tiburon gave fans both positive and negative things to talk about. We posed some of the burning questions about the game to creative director Ian Cummings, who ran us through the rationale behind the decision making for Madden NFL 11's feature set.

How come when I'm playing someone online and they quit, I can't at least finish out the game and earn a win against the computer?

Resounding feedback over the years has been that people didn't really enjoy playing against the computer in an online game, so that's why the option was removed.

The first patch for the game gives fans the choice whether or not to use the strategy pad. Does that mean we'll see both kinds of pre-play options for the next Madden? In the future is there any danger of the strategy pad going away like the QB Vision Cone?

We all still believe that the Strategy Pad is a more streamlined way to control the audibles, so that will likely continue to be the default version (unless the telemetry data we collect proves us otherwise). If this has proven anything though it's that by having a nice close relationship with our community through channels like Twitter, Facebook, and forums, we are able to hear feedback basically immediately and react in a quick and nimble manner, which honestly wasn't the case at all just two years ago.

The NCAA football game has gotten a lot better the last few years. Are there any features you'd like to use in Madden?
The NCAA Football team has provided great features this year with

Dynasty Mode and Online Dynasty Mode. We always want to make sure we have a healthy competition that drives the development of each title, while also differentiating each to provide fans truly unique football experiences. We always find the best gains when we are able to combine resources to build core technologies together, and then create ways within the data set (animation, tuning, etc) to differentiate the games. Locomotion is a perfect example of this.

Why is the default game speed "slow" in offline games and "normal" in online games?

We wanted the default pick-up-and-play experience to be more accessible, and the "slow" game speed helps with that goal. Online, on the other hand, is naturally a more hardcore audience, and we got enough pressure from the community that the "normal" speed won out.

New features like GameFlow are cool, but some of us just want to see old problems fixed first. Would you guys ever put out a game whose focus is just cleaning up legacy issues?

It's always a balance. Though it sounds like it could be feasible, our fans would not be satisfied if we released a title that only consists of bug fixes. We want to make sure we continue to innovate, while still working on key fundamental gameplay fixes and re-writes – as evidenced by

our huge focus on locomotion and run blocking with Madden NFL 11.

What do you think of the idea of EA selling a full-fledged Madden game every other year, and in the off years selling a roster update plus for less money? This way the development team would get more time to really fix and evolve the franchise.

Our entire team is made up of passionate football fans, and we appreciate the challenge of providing an innovative and fun NFL experience each and every year. My job as a designer is to focus on that goal and I'll leave the business decisions to the experts in that space.

This year's Madden favors offenses because defenses seem to have a hard time keeping up with and tackling ball carriers. The default difficulty level is also easier than previous Maddens. Was there a conscious choice to make the game more high scoring?

Yes, that was the hope for the default skill level, but we don't want good defenses to be ineffective on All-Pro or higher. This is something we'll continue to monitor via telemetry and feedback from the community. We don't want to make any rash decisions...if there is data that suggests there is an issue, we can adjust accordingly.

The Wii Madden games don't seem to be hugely successful on a console targeted at a casual audience, so why did you feel like the 360 and PS3 versions of Madden needed to go after that audience with GameFlow, etc. if those consoles are considered more hardcore?

Though a very hardcore Madden fan may think that we're catering only to the casual Madden audience with a feature like GameFlow, that's not truly the case. Every feature we build we want to be mostly universally accepted. We know that not everyone will try it, but our data is still that over 80 percent of every single play called is a GameFlow-selected play. This proved our theory that there are a lot of Madden and NFL fans out there that just aren't that into playcalling. We are still focused on delivering

an accurate NFL simulation, especially to the hardcore Madden NFL fan. In Madden NFL 11 we spent a ton of time on many things that the hardcore fans have been clamoring for like a new commentator, improved run blocking AI, sideline catches, and our new locomotion system. Gameplay is still king, and that's where we want to continue to focus our time moving forward.

Why were there no changes to Franchise mode, Online Franchise, or Superstar mode? Can we expect that to happen in Madden 12?

The tough decision to not make any major upgrades to those modes was made after looking at the data. In the case of Online Franchise, we saw that very few people were playing the mode, and due to the cost of adding features we felt we had to re-evaluate what we spent our time on (which is why we decided to go ahead and make the rather large investment in the Online Team Play infrastructure). As to offline Franchise and Superstar modes, there is very telling telemetry data in that a lot of people try them out, but extremely small numbers of people actually continue playing them into the offseason or multiple years. What this tells us with all three of these modes honestly is that we weren't providing compelling enough features to keep our fans engaged for long stretches of time. So as we planned out our feature set for Madden NFL 11, we had to choose one of two paths: A) Put in a few small features to demonstrate that we were still working on it, or B) Aggressively plan for the future and start mapping ourselves out a multi-year plan to revamping these career modes. We went with option B – not only because we feel it's right for the long term growth of the franchise, but it's what we've heard fans say they want as well. Though many may be upset this year, we hope that over time they will realize that the investment in a long-term strategy is the right one. As to what will be in Madden NFL 12, I really can't promise anything other than our commitment to delivering a kick-ass NFL simulation. ♦

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Revisiting City of Heroes

The summer of 2004 was the best of my life. I was preparing to attend college in the fall, so I didn't have or need a job, and I moved in with a girlfriend who loved cooking and didn't mind that I spent all of my free time playing video games. A couple months earlier in the year, NCSOFT released *City of Heroes*, a superhero MMO that ended up consuming virtually every waking hour of the next five months of my life. I had an endless supply of tacos in the real world (thanks, Ashia!) and an endless supply of villains to take down in the virtual world of Paragon City.

After playing so intensely for months, I burnt out quickly and ended my subscription by the time the *City of Villains* expansion pack was released in 2005. Now it's six years later, and *CoH* is finally getting its second expansion, *Going Rogue*. I spent the last week diving into both the new expansion and the classic game to see how the MMO I remember so fondly has changed.

Since its release, *City of Heroes* has received an impressive 18 content updates (called "issues"), adding new power sets, zones, and story arcs, as well as some major game features. The biggest addition was the "Mission Architect" feature, which Cryptic introduced in 2009 to allow users to write and design their own missions and story arcs. This has created a flood of user-generated content for the game, ensuring an endless stream of new missions even while players are awaiting the next content update.

Though many of the Architect missions that I tried aren't up to par with the level design and storytelling of developer-created arcs, I was surprised at how enjoyable and varied they were. At the time of this writing, there are over 50,000 Architect missions to choose from, including guest arcs created by *PvP* writer/artist Scott Kurtz, the *Red vs. Blue* masterminds at Rooster

Teeth, and comic writer Bill Willingham. It's more than enough content to keep even the most active superheroes busy.

Then there's *Going Rogue*, the first retail expansion for *City of Heroes* in five years. I went into the beta with little info, knowing only that it adds an alternate universe called Praetoria and the ability to switch between hero and villain. The additions of *Going Rogue* are actually much more substantial.

Rather than just being able to change from hero to villain and back again at will, *Going Rogue* features a fully-formed morality system. Depending on choices you make during missions, you'll move along a scale of good and evil, marking yourself as hero, villain, rogue, or vigilante. Your morality rating affects what zones and story arcs are open to you at any one time. It reminds me a lot of the decision-making *BioWare*

is bringing into the MMO genre with *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, and it's already done very well in *Going Rogue*. If Cryptic upped the production value, particularly in the voice acting, the storylines and choices you're making could really come alive.

Amongst the additions and tweaks, though, the core gameplay of *City of Heroes* remains the same. I've always thought of it as a beat-em-up MMORPG; you clear out caves and warehouses full of nameless enemies, take on a boss at the end, and level up to gain new powers to take out more enemies. The game still moves at a measured pace, and the regen powerset scrapper that I made at launch is still basically unstoppable.

At this point, *City of Heroes* has become the gaming equivalent of comfort food for me, a reminder of that awesome, worry-free summer. It may not be the best MMO out there, but it's a fun experience I can always return to, and NCSOFT has continued to improve it over the years. ♦

Several years after his last mission, a superhero returns to Paragon City



TOP TEN GAMES WITHIN GAMES

by Adam Biessener

Geometry Wars (Project Gotham Racing 2)

So beloved that it got its own standalone release, Geometry Wars reminded us why we dropped all those quarters into Robotron in years gone by. Its pounding techno soundtrack and screaming neon visuals have the subtlety of a cinderblock to the face, but the gameplay's pitch-perfect intensity needs no help.



Blitzball (Final Fantasy X)

This simple sport simulation holds the greatest power in all Spira, turning Tidus from a whiny loser into a one-man wrecking crew that all the ladies want. Add in the draw of tracking down the best players in the world for your squad (and the promise of Wakka's ultimate weapon), and Blitzball ate a ton of hours on its own.



Hunting (Oregon Trail)

Dysentery. Broken axes. Snakebites. Fevers. The educational dangers of the Oregon Trail can't stop legions of kids from loading up on bullets and stabbing westward – at least as far as necessary to get to the awesome hunting sections. Stalking your prey and filling it full of buckshot is better realized in this ancient classic than any beer-sticky lightgun cabinet.



Arcomage

(Might & Magic VII)
The early 3D graphics hold up only marginally better than early PSone games, but the Magic-like Arcomage card game is still excellent. Managing your income of the three resources is as important as having a strong defense in this unique strategy game. Arcomage got a standalone release of its own, but unlike Geometry Wars, nobody played it.



Tekken Ball (Tekken 3)

Why are the legendary warriors from the King of Iron Fist tournament playing an odd beach volleyball-like lawn game? The answer is beyond mortal understanding, but this bizarre mode is more fun than all the Dead or Alive volleyball games combined. Even if (or maybe because) it's not half as jubbly.



Guy Savage

(Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater)
In Snake's dreams, he is a dual-wielding monster hunter who sometimes turns into a monster himself, and also there are zombies. What? Don't ask us; we're as confused as you are. That doesn't stop this strange unlockable from being an amusing distraction from picking the perfect foundation to go along with Snake's eyeshadow.



Lost Viking (StarCraft II)

It seems like half the minigames and secret modes are Galaga-style scrolling shoot-em-ups, but Lost Viking stands out regardless. Made in StarCraft II's powerful Galaxy Editor, this challenging space shooter looks as good as it plays. We're all in favor of Blizzard making new gameplay out of the in-jokes it loads up all its games with.



Liars' Dice/Texas Hold'em (Red Dead)

If popular media is to be believed, the only people who didn't gamble their way across the old west were the occasional priest and the deceased. Rockstar's implementation of two of the best-known games of the period (and today) are miles better than the free crap you can find online – not least because you can shoot the bastards who can't stop flopping trip queens.



Triple Triad (FF VIII)

Square's record of making amusing sub-games hovers around the Mendoza line, but when the company hits, it hits big. Triple Triad had rules that make sense to humans (unlike FF IX's awful Tera Master), gave solid in-game rewards, and engaged our over-developed collector's mindset something fierce. Plus, you didn't have to deal with the stupid Draw system to play it.



Zom-Botany (Plants vs. Zombies)

What's worse than zombies on your lawn? Zombies with plant heads that shoot things at you. Plants vs. Zombies' outstanding gameplay is turned on its head (that, not in this difficult mode). Your mind will reel from more than just the punny title when the peashooter-headed zombies tear through your defenses.

top ten

impulse

Tim Schafer and Double Fine go downloadable

by Matt Miller



Costume Quest
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade

LEVEL 1
XP



0
CANDY

The studio that brought us Psychonauts and Brütal Legend is setting its sights on a different stage. Double Fine head Tim Schafer recently revealed his development house is creating four downloadable games, the first of which is a charming RPG called **Costume Quest**.

I talked to project lead Tasha Harris, who explained the inspiration for the game: "Costume Quest is influenced by a lot of the different games I loved growing up – the Zelda series, Dragon Quest, Earthbound. I wanted to capture what was fun about those games and put them together into something that feels classic and updated at the same time." To nail that aesthetic, Double Fine combines classic RPG leveling and turn-based battles with early adventure game mechanics like hidden items and characters who block paths until you complete their task. "And candy," Schafer added. "Tasha covered everything except the candy, which is an essential part of any RPG."

The game tells the story of a young brother and sister who are out for one of the most important nights of the year: Halloween. "First the player has to decide whether to play as the boy or girl twin," Harris explained. "Whichever character you don't pick ends up getting kidnapped by monsters who mistake their candy costume for an actual giant piece of candy." Schafer added: "That's the educational portion of the game. It's a lesson for kids: Don't dress up like something monsters like to eat."

From there, you're off trick-or-treating. Some houses hold well-meaning grown-ups who shell out the sweets. Others contain the sugar-hunting monsters that are menacing the neighborhood. When you meet them, your costume imaginatively morphs you into a giant version of yourself to do battle. The examples we saw included a towering anime robot, a knight in shining armor, and a patriotic Statue of Liberty with torching capabilities. When you're not in combat, you can explore the game's various locales, complete missions for neighbors, and be entertained by the cleverly written dialogue that spouts from the colorful personalities around town.

After quizzing the Double Fine folks, they let me run around the candy-filled town. The battle system is a blast, and the bombastic attack moves provided by the different costumes had me chucking. Timing-based button presses

occur on both offensive and defensive turns, encouraging constant involvement. The adventure game moments between battles take more patience, since a big part of the game is built around item collection. However, the charming and simplistic concept holds up throughout the game. Costume Quest is an ideal family title, as the funny situations and young characters should keep kids entranced, while parents will appreciate the witty conversations for which Double Fine has always been known.

On that note, I asked Double Fine how Costume Quest fits into the collection of games the company has produced so far. "I don't think it's too different from Double Fine's previous games, humor-wise," Harris told me. "The only thing that's really changing is that people can expect to play something from us more often," Schafer concluded. Costume Quest should release on Xbox Live and PlayStation Network before Halloween.

Costume Quest wasn't the only new title that excited me this month. I'm fascinated by an unusual new parody game that's far more ambitious than its 8-bit visuals might let on. **Retro City Rampage** is

both a send-up of the open world crime genre made popular by Grand Theft Auto, and a nostalgia-laden trip into the tropes of '80s game culture. You play an amoral protagonist who runs down pedestrians and takes on the cops in wild shootouts. At its core, the game is a retro top-down action title, but the humor and throwback scenarios make the game worth a look for anyone with fond memories of the 8-bit glory days.

In my first crime-spreed-filled hour, I stole cars for a super-criminal, got chased by the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, hijacked Bill & Ted's phone booth to travel through time, met Doc Brown and his DeLorean, and took a stealth mission for Solid Snake. Of course, none of these personages were so named, but the resemblances are spot-on. As the game progresses, even more

clever nods show up, from Bionic Commando's grappling arm to Contra's spread gun. Retro City Rampage will release on XBLA and WiiWare before the end of the year.

I also saw an intriguing upcoming downloadable project from Atlas this month. **Rock of Ages** looks like a Katamari Damacy title, except everything your boulder collides into gets smashed to bits instead of getting picked up. As you roll your boulder down narrow strips of land, you have to destroy your enemy's fortresses and troops, or alternately defend your kingdom from boulder destruction by setting defenses with 30 unique units. The game includes online multiplayer contests where players must defend their own terrain from the opposing player's devastating rock. However, the coolest feature of the game is its approach to level design – each stage is modeled after a period in art history, from romanticism and renaissance to rococo and gothic. Atlas expects the game to appear on PSN, XBLA, and PC sometime next spring.

It's exciting to watch publishers explore the downloadable space as an avenue to hype larger retail projects, even if not every ven-

ture pans out. I've got high hopes for **Red Faction Battlegrounds**, the newly announced PSN and XBLA title that ties in to the upcoming Red Faction Armageddon retail release.

Battlegrounds is a vehicular combat game at its core, featuring four-player local and online multiplayer support for several competitive modes and coop-

erative play. In keeping with the futuristic Mars setting, players can hop into tanks, mechs, and car-like rovers to blast each other to bits. As has become the accepted approach with these sorts of projects, playing Battlegrounds will unlock exclusive content in Armageddon. Both games are out early next year, with Battlegrounds likely hitting earlier to build the buzz.



Retro City Rampage • Xbox Live Arcade, WiiWare



Rock of Ages
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, PC



Red Faction Battlegrounds
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade

Looking for more on indie and downloadable games? Head to gameinformer.com/impulse for weekly downloadable release schedules, featured indie developers, and daily updates on what's going on in the world of DLC. This month, read the complete transcript from our interview with Double Fine's Tasha Harris, along with additional snarky answers from Tim Schafer. Also check out our review of Twisted Pixel's Comic Jumper on page 93.

interview



Photo: Edward Carrion

Christophe Balestra (left) and Evan Wells (right) lead the team responsible for the *Jak* and *Uncharted* series

Genius Through Collaboration

Naughty Dog co-presidents **Christophe Balestra** and **Evan Wells** steer the ship for one of the industry's most consistently successful studios.

What's the key to running a successful major studio these days?

Christophe Balestra: Make sure you stay true to yourself, and you don't change too much by growing. For us, that's key. Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin built something great, and we didn't want to lose that. We didn't want to lose that dynamic. You have to grow, but gradually.

Evan Wells: Yeah, I think what Christophe is describing is trying to maintain that culture that got you to where you are. Even though the technology moves very quickly, and the requirements of game development change on a yearly basis, if you've got a culture that has been successful, do everything you can to maintain it even while you're adapting to the new demands of the industry. We really just want to empower everybody on the team to bring their passion, enthusiasm, talent, and creativity into the game.

Is there a balance to be found between the long, grueling work hours and the production of quality games? Does one necessitate the other?

EW: Triple-A games require a lot of work. They are hugely complex, and the more time you put into them, the better they're going to be. So it comes down to how much you're willing to invest of your time to make it better. Something that we have at Naughty Dog is a bunch of people who are extraordinarily passionate, and they want their work to shine. They gauge themselves by how much time they want to put into the game. We don't ever demand overtime or weekend work, but people do of their own accord because they are that enthusiastic. They want to leave their mark on the industry. We have to start coming up with ways to limit the number of hours they put in instead of asking them to put more in. You get into the biggest problem of burnout and frustration with the team members if they are just constantly in that mode of pushing and crunching. But we have that cycle. When a game is done, we all take a lot of time off. Several weeks, or even a couple months. No work whatsoever. And when we come back, we just encourage people to explore and work creatively without the pressure of a deadline. That period can last six months or more.

What do you look for in a new team member for the studio?

CB: We need people to be very proactive and responsible. Nobody has a job title of producer here. Everybody is sort of their own producer, and manages their own time. If a programmer needs something from an animator, he's going to talk to that animator directly. No one is going to do that for him.

EW: Communication is important. Collaboration is important. We're looking for programmers who have really creative and design-oriented

minds. We're looking for designers who are very technical. People really have to have a diverse set of skills, in addition to being extremely talented in their specialty.

What's been the learning curve on programming for the PS3?

CB: It's been a long process. It's not the PS3 itself. It's going from a single-core to a multi-core. That changes everything. It's a different mindset that you have to get used to. It's happening, and all the next hardwares are going to be like this. I think, for me, that was the biggest transition. Besides that, I love the PS3. When I see the things we're able to do with it, like in *Uncharted 2*, it definitely means it's a great machine.

Are there special challenges or advantages to being owned by Sony?

EW: One big advantage is that we can really focus on one piece of hardware and get the most out of it. Another big advantage is that Sony has an incredible team of developers working exclusively for them that we can share ideas with and techniques and production philosophies. There's a lot of real openness and collaboration between studios that has helped us all. The one big challenge is how to get our games experienced by as many fans as possible. Our audience is limited by making our games for one platform. Fortunately, the Sony fans are extraordinarily enthusiastic and support us really well.

You've had a couple of popular characters that have moved on to other developers. Is it hard to lose control of a property like that?

EW: It's a double-edged sword. We like to continue to reinvent ourselves, and we like to explore new territory. With each generation of hardware we've developed a new franchise. It's a shiny new toy, and we get excited to play in that new universe. We just don't have the resources to go back and support all the other franchises that we've worked on. So far, it just hasn't been in the cards. Our development resources are limited. It's not something I'd rule out. Maybe one day we'll grow the team, and something like that would be possible. But for the time being, we're just going to have to make one game at a time. As far as seeing other people work on the franchises, yeah, it's great. It's fun to see their take on it. It's sometimes hard to let go, and you think, gosh, I may have done that a little differently. But we don't get too hung up on it.

What's your take on Sony Move? Is that technology you are interested in exploring in your games?

CB: Maybe in the future. Right now, it's kind of difficult because we're so focused on the next thing. It would be too late for us to start thinking about that. Move certainly has potential.

EW: I was probably the biggest naysayer when I heard about the Wii, thinking, this is just going to be a flash in the pan. What is Nintendo thinking? But I've eaten my hat. And I think that there's some really great and exciting new experiences that you can create. So, I definitely think the Move has a lot of potential. But I think if we were going to tackle a game that supported Move, we would want to do it from the ground up. We're too far into what we're working on next to really do it justice.

The first two *Uncharted* games were highly cinematic – a goal you had early on with those projects. Are there goals like that you'd like to hit in the coming years with *Naughty Dog's* upcoming games?

EW: Along those lines, we want to continue to push the cinematic nature of games. We're trying to elevate games to a point where you aren't talking about them the same way that you used to talk about them. You're not doing interviews where you're saying: How many new vehicles do you have in this? What are the new weapons? It's the experience we're interested in. What are the emotions you're trying to convey? Who are the characters you're trying to introduce? In addition, we'd like to continue to expand our exploration of the online space.

CB: I think the online experience for console players is going to change. We're going to be doing more refining of the game after we ship it, in order to make it a better experience and to add new things to it. That's what we had in mind for *Uncharted 2*. I think it was a little surprising for people, the fact that we were doing this, because I think that not a lot of people do that – but it's going to become more and more common.

You've done a lot of action and platforming games. Are there other genres you'd like to explore, or are you staying in that place?

EW: I think we'll probably stay in that sort of place.

CB: It's hard to say. When you look back when we were working on *Jak 3*, did we know what *Uncharted* would be? We had no idea. It's a good thing that we don't know what we're going to do next.

EW: I think everybody here is excited about technology and storytelling. There are so many different things that you can do with those things, no matter what kind of game you're making. Trying to figure out new ways to get an emotion out of a player, to push the tech and the PS3 further than it's been pushed, the artists getting to create new worlds – all those things are opportunities to try new things and keep the enthusiasm going regardless of what direction we go. ♦

interview by Matt Miller

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1986 THE FIRST DOGS

Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin found Jam Software while still in high school – the company that would later become Naughty Dog.

1991 OVERSEAS ROOTS

Balestra starts programming, and joins the European demo scene. Over the coming years, he helps establish *Rayland Interactive* in Paris, France to produce games.

1993 FIRST SHOT

Evan Wells gets his foot in the door doing level design on *Toejam & Earl: Panic on Funkotron*.

1994 TRANSITIONS

Evan Wells moves to Crystal Dynamics, joining a team of future industry superstars to make the *Gex* games.

1996 HITTING IT BIG

Naughty Dog releases *Crash Bandicoot*, which becomes one of the unofficial icons of the original PlayStation.

1998 NEW DOG IN TOWN

Wells joins Naughty Dog to help work on *Crash Bandicoot: Warped*.

2001 A LARGER WHOLE

Sony purchases Naughty Dog. Its first game published under the new relationship is *Jak & Daxter: The Precursor Legacy*.

2002 FINDING A HOME

Balestra joins Naughty Dog during *Jak 2* development as a programmer.

2004 NEW MANAGEMENT

When founders Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin depart, Evan Wells takes over as company president.

2006 COOPERATIVE VENTURE

Balestra joins Wells as co-president, mirroring the technology/design collaboration modeled by the company's founders.

2007 TERRA INCOGNITA

The first *Uncharted* helps establish the PlayStation 3.

2009 THE BIG TIME

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves releases to critical and commercial success, winning coveted Game of the Year awards from numerous publications, including *Game Informer*.

gear



by Nick Ahrens

HP Envy 14 Laptop

Get Envious *Many notebook manufacturers have tried to match the sexy factor Apple brings to its proprietary computer line, but few have succeeded. The HP Envy 14 is the rare gem in the boring world of portable computing that proves the exception. The Envy line of laptops breaks away from the pack with clean lines, modern styling, and performance to back it up.*

The Envy 14 boasts a clean metallic body in a uniform shape. Considering the powerful specs, the body is surprisingly thin, measuring at just over an inch. Weighing just under 5.5 lbs, it's not the lightest thin notebook, but isn't heavy enough to warrant complaint either. The Envy 14 isn't lacking in features, with a slot-loading, dual-layer DVD-RW drive, front speakers, plus HDMI and a mini DisplayPort for use with an external monitor or HDTV.

The Envy 14's vibrant 1600 x 900 widescreen display is perfect for watching HD films, playing games, and more. Even the webcam operates in HD. Under the hood, HP employs the latest trick in mobile computing, switchable graphics. When in normal mode, the Envy 14 runs off of an integrated Intel GMA HD graphics chip, but users have the option to kick it up a few notches by switching over to the ATI Mobility Radeon HD 5650 video card. This drains your battery quicker, but allows for graphics-intensive gaming,

smoother HD video, and overall performance improvements.

The Envy's audio also makes a big splash thanks to Dr. Dre's Beats Audio technology. The external speakers only sound slightly better than average, but when you plug in headphones the

Envy 14's sound quality skyrockets. Users can even tune their headphone settings independently thanks to the useful Beats Audio software.

Other notable specs include an i5 processor, around 4.5 hours of battery life (using integrated graphics), 4GB of RAM (expandable to 8), and a great island-style backlit keyboard. The touchpad is much improved over previous HP notebooks, allowing for multi-touch gestures and easy disabling when typing or using an external mouse.

The Envy 14 is the best all-around laptop we've tested in years. It's the perfect solution for someone looking for a fashionable mobile PC that admirably handles daily tasks, multimedia, and the occasional gaming session without requiring a forklift to transport.

ESPEER 

\$999.99

www.hp.com



1



2



3

4



1 | Logitech G700 Mouse

Much like its predecessors, the G700 delivers a level of quality not found in other mice. Considering how much the average person sits at a computer these days, a good mouse is critical, and gaming is where this beast really shines. With 13 macros, gamer profiles, and a high-quality laser, the G700 ensures even the most hardcore players will be satisfied. The ergonomic mouse hugs the hand well, and Logitech also brought back the ball bearing scroll wheel, which allows for either a normal clicking scroll or an open free spin that greatly aids navigating long web pages. The bundle also includes the necessary components for the mouse to be wireless or wired, eliminating the need to choose. The only complaint we have is the default side button layout, which makes navigating forward and back a little tough to reach.

STRENGTH:

\$99.99
logitech.com

2 | Logitech G510 Keyboard

Logitech is also releasing a new gaming keyboard along with the G700 mouse. The G510 is a slightly slimmed down version of the popular G15. While it boasts the same basic feature set, some subtle differences make it a more attractive option. The keyboard is bit wider, which gives Logitech the real estate to place the media keys in a more

logical spot. Logitech tripled the amount of macro compatible "G" keys along the left-hand side to 18, with three modes each, resulting in 54 possible macro settings per game. The GamePanel LCD also returns, which can display character stats or auction bid updates in games like World of Warcraft. The G510 also has built-in USB audio, so the keyboard becomes an easy access plug-and-play option for sound and voice with built-in mutes for each. The long-throw keys have a nice feel to them, and are backlit with RGB lights for any color scheme a person could want. Current G15 owners probably won't need to upgrade to the G510, but newcomers should take a look.

VERY GOOD:

\$119.99
logitech.com

3 | NOX Specialist

In the overcrowded headset market, NOX audio is making noise. The Specialist headphones are proof that good things come in small packages. NOX's ingenious engineering has created a high quality over-the-ear headset that looks and feels like regular headphones. The Specialist pulls off a tech ninja move with the built-in microphone's ability to retract into one of the earpieces. The headset supports for 3.5mm jacks for use with the iPhone, Android phones, and PCs. The optional Negotiator Universal Optical gaming kit adds Xbox 360 and

PlayStation 3 support. As for the sound? It's good. Despite the headset's small drivers, games, music, and phone calls all sounded great, with crisp highs and impressive lows that help fill the midrange with a full spectrum of sound. The Specialist is also a fantastic value.

STRENGTH:
\$79.99 (\$99.99 with gaming kit)
nox-audio.com

4 | Nyko Wand+

We've been critical of Nyko's controllers in the past, but the Wand+ is a great entry into the Wii remote race. Although not essential to most titles, Wii MotionPlus is starting to appear in games more frequently. Using Nyko's proprietary Full Motion Technology, the Wand+ provides the same 1:1 tracking as Nintendo's version, but the remote itself remains the standard size. The controller features rubberized plastic and feels more solid than previous Nyko units. The new buttons may look silly design-wise, but are comfortable and responsive. While there's no reason to run out and replace your working Wii remotes, if you're looking to replace a broken controller or add Wii MotionPlus to your repertoire, the Wand+ is worth a look.

VERY GOOD:

\$39.99
nyko.com

MEDIA SHELF

HAHAHA



PSYCH: THE COMPLETE 4TH SEASON

When there's a murder, Psych PI. is on the case. Shawn Spencer (a pretend psychic) and Burton "Gus" Guster (also in pharmaceuticals) are back and better than ever in 16 episodes across four discs.

\$31.99
psych.usanetwork.com



LEWIS BLACK: STARK RAVING BLACK

The angriest guy in comedy is back with another disc of finger-pointing comedy. Everything from country music to aging politicians is on the agenda as Black takes no prisoners.

\$12.98
lewisblack.com



GET HIM TO THE GREEK

Jonah Hill, Russell Brand, and P. Diddy star in a hilarious comedy about a budding music professional who has to drag the biggest weirdo in music to the Greek Theatre for his big comeback show.

\$39.99
nbcuniversalstore.com

Can a Video Game Over-deliver?

Developers, beware "The Second Refrigerator"

by: Scott Jones
co-host of *Reviews on the Run*
and Editor-in-Chief of
Reviewsontherun.com

I have a confession to make – I have not finished *Red Dead Redemption*. I know, I know. Hey, it's at the top of my to-finish pile. Every night I come home from work and look at the sight of John Marston on the box menacing me with the twin barrels of his shotgun. And every night, without fail, I re-shelve *Red Dead Redemption* and wind up playing something else.

Blame it on the The Second Refrigerators.

Red Dead Redemption is great. It's big. It's bold. It's beautiful. It deserves most – if perhaps not quite all – of the holy-crap caliber praise it's gotten from consumers and critics. Yet, if a game could ever be found guilty of being too big for its own good, it's *Red Dead*. Think about it: All those long, endless vistas stretching in the distance. All those trite trips into town. All those virtual people forever trying to have virtual conversations with you. All those nights spent fast-sleeping in your little shed. All the pesky critters that need shooting. And Mexico. Man, don't even get me started on Mexico.

The mere thought of going back to this richly imagined, living, breathing, virtual rendition of the Old West for some inexplicable reason makes me crave a black cup of coffee followed by a handful of those pills that truckers keep in their glove compartments. On paper, *Red Dead* is what I've always wanted. It's what I'd dreamed about since I read Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt." I've fantasized about having a room in my house – and no, not one of those cheese ball amBX "immersion" rooms that are always demoted at trade shows – that can transport me to a boundless reality.

Red Dead features many exciting moments (at least from what I've seen of *Red Dead* so far); moments that made my knuckles go white; landmark moments that I will probably never forget. Yet for each one of those knock-you-on-your-chaps missions, there seem to be at least a half-dozen tepid, pointless, nap-inducing missions that need to be endured.

Red Dead Redemption is stuffed with moments of banality. This may sound like heresy, but it's true. One spoiler-free example: Early in the game Marston pulls nightwatchman duty on the MacFarlane Ranch. He trails behind an old, fat dog – quite possibly the slowest-moving canine to ever qualify for watchdog duty. Man and dog make the rounds in the dark. Crickets chirp. Skunks scamper in the distance. Seconds turn into minutes. Minutes turn into, well, more minutes. Then there's a brief skirmish – you fire your shotgun into the sky to scare off some thieves or varmints – and mission complete.

You could argue that after my watchdog-following excursion, I now had a clearer understanding of the geographical layout of the MacFarlane ranch or that I'd earned Bonnie MacFarlane's trust by casing her property at night. Yet, mostly what I learned from this mission is that the developers have no quandaries whatsoever when it comes to wasting my time with busywork.

I spoke with a fellow reviewer who thoroughly enjoyed *Red Dead* about this particular mission. He agreed that it was not the game's best mission. I posited that *Red Dead*, overall, would be a far stronger, more consistent experience if only Rockstar had been willing to edit out about a third of the game's more prosaic missions. He didn't disagree with me on this point.

I've failed to finish *San Andreas*, *GTA IV*, and now *Red Dead Redemption*, as well as other open-world games like *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, *Mercenaries 2*, *The Saboteur*, and *Assassin's Creed II* – all arguably terrific experiences. I fought my way to the endings of *Infamous* and *Prototype*, both of which had awful third acts and were beyond tedious in their final hours. All of which is to say that I'm starting to think I no longer want, or need, a Veldt-like room in my home.

Back in 1999, Shenmue proved that just because you possess the CPU power to articulate every drawer in a house – open, close; open, close – does not mean you should. In *Grand Theft Auto IV*, just because you can drive Roman to a pub and play a half-baked darts minigame and then drive him home again does

not mean that you should. These are extraneous details, digressions that fail to enrich the overall experience in any substantial way. The Russian writer Anton Chekhov defined talent as "the ability to select the important moments from the trivial ones." Adhering to Chekhov's definition, games should be a series of selected, considered moments. Yet lately, like sows in slop, games revel in the trivial and the unimportant. That's a problem.

I recently had lunch with a developer friend of mine during which we discussed this trend towards superfluous digressions in games. "Imagine that you buy a house," he said, "and the house you buy for some reason has two refrigerators in it. It might seem strange to you at first, having these two refrigerators. But would you throw out one of the refrigerators?"

I told him that I would probably not throw out one of the refrigerators. Having two refrigerators sounds great. I could put salami in one and beer in the other.

"Of course you'd keep both refrigerators. Who wouldn't? That's exactly what happens in game development all the time," he said. "We build something, and then because it's already built, and because money was spent building it, and because time was spent building it, the 'second refrigerator,' without thought, automatically goes into the final product."

I wonder sometimes why game development studios don't have dedicated editors. Books, magazines, TV, and films all benefit from having editors. If you've ever delved into the "outtakes" or "edited scenes" section of Blu-rays or DVDs, you can easily see why these scenes didn't make the final cut. Usually they stink, are far too trivial, or aren't essential to furthering the overall experience of the movie. In other words, they were second refrigerators.

Developers: From this moment forward please make an effort to discern between the essential and the non-essential, the important and the trivial, when building your wonderful games – particularly in the sandbox/open-world genre where second refrigerators abound.

If you do find yourself with two refrigerators, send the second fridge over to my place. I'll have the salami and the beer standing by.

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

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



October

01 Facebook: The Movie

The Social Network somehow finds its way into theaters today. Don't let the name fool you; it isn't a boring television documentary about MySpace. It's about Facebook! And it's not on television — it's a movie! Odds are you both all of your friends with Farmville updates. Now you can find out more about the service that helps you alienate old classmates and family.

05 New Releases

- Ben 10: Ultimate Alien (PSS, 360, Wii, PSP, DS)
- Def Jam Rapstar (PSS, 360, Wii)
- Emergency 2012 (PC)
- Enslaved (PSS, 360)
- FIFA 11 (PSS)
- Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light (DS)
- Littlest Pet Shop 3: Biggest Stars Blue/Pink (DS)
- MotionSports (360)
- National Geographic Quiz Wildlife (Wii)
- NBA 2K11 (PSS, 360, Wii, PSP, PC)
- NBA Elite 11 (PSS, 360)
- NBA Jam (Wii)
- Opps! Frank Party (Wii)
- Power Gig: Rise of the Six String (PSS, 360)
- Repala Pro Bass Fishing 2010 (PSS, 360)
- Two Worlds II (PSS, 360, PC)

06 Kick-Ass returns!

Mark Millar and John Romita Jr. are back for the Kick-Ass 2: Balls to the Wall comic series. If the name of this book implies anything, we have a feeling that several wannabe super heroes are going to die in painful ways. In this story Dave Llewellyn (Kick-Ass) realizes that a world of superheroes may be a bad thing. Don't worry, this wouldn't be a kick-ass comic without Hit-Girl in it!

08 More Zelda For Your Shrine

Daruina is the proud naked leader of the Goron race. In case you forgot, Daruina calls upon Link to defeat the dodgones that have overrun the Goron's pantry. This statue of Daruina stands in at an impressive 15 inches, and is in scale with First 4 Figures' other Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask sculptures. The bad news: adding him to your collection will set you back \$154.99.

12 New Releases

- Arcania: Gothic 4 (360, PC)
- Blazing Souls: Azazel (PSP)
- Combat Wings: Great Battles of WWII (Wii)
- Indomials (PSP)
- Just Dance 2 (Wii)
- Lucha Libre AAA Héroes of the Ring (PSS, 360, Wii, PSP)
- Medal of Honor (PSS, 360)
- My Baby 3 (DS)
- Naird (PSS, 360)
- Naruto Shippuden: Naruto Vs Sasuke (DS)
- Quantum Theory (PSS, 360)
- The Shoop (PSS)
- NBA Super Scribblenauts (DS)
- Zhu Zhu Pets: Wild Bunch (Wii, DS)

13 Introducing Daredevil, the Cold-Hearted Killer

How many times do superheroes send the same villains back to jail? By now, Batman must have sent the Joker to Arkham Asylum at least 500 times. At some point, every comic reader thinks "maybe he should just kill him." In the new Marvel series Shadowland, Daredevil is doing just this: In the first issue he guts Bulseye. Who will he drop in the final battle? Find out in issue four today!

15 Retired and Extremely Dumb

With the deaths of Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, Hollywood has been struggling to fill its old actor quota. Today's theatrical release of *Rod* is the coming out party for the new wave of fogies: Bruce Willis, John Malkovich, and Karl Urban (?) star in this film alongside already old farts Morgan Freeman and Helen Mirren. This movie is based on a comic book, so you know it has to be good.

16 Kingdom Hearts Figures For Your Phone

We've never covered charm toys before, but after seeing senior associate editor Joe Jube rock an Aerith charm on his phone as a reminder of the one true love in his life, we laughed and thought you would look just as cool with them on your phone or backpack: Chibi versions of Sora, Cloud, Aerith, Tifa, Mickey, Axel, Roxas, Donald, and Sephiroth are available now.

19 New Releases

- Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 11 (PSS, 360, Wii, DS)
- DJ Hero 2 (PSS, 360, Wii)
- Dragon Ball Z: Tenkaichi Tag Team (PSP)
- Fallout: New Vegas (PSS, 360, PC)
- Naruto Shippuden: Dragon Sword (Wii)
- Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2 (PSS, 360)
- Saw 2 (PSS, 360)
- Sled Shred Featuring the Jamaican Bobsled Team (Wii)
- Time Crisis: Racing Storm (PSS)
- Vanquish (PSS, 360)
- Warriors: Legends of Troy (PSS, 360)
- Zhu Zhu Pets: Kung Zhu (DS)

22 Why Do We Keep Going To These Movies?

Today *Paranormal Activity 2* opens. As everyone knows, horror movie sequels are always great. Think about it. *Saw 2*, *The Ring 2*, *Hostel 2*, and *The Hills Have Eyes 2* are all instant class... wait. Oh god. This movie is going to suck.

26 New Releases

- Crafting Manna (DS)
- Deca Sports 3 (Wii)
- Disney Channel All-Star Party (Wii)
- Fable II (360)
- The Fight: Lights Out (PSS)
- Hasbro Family Game Night 3 (PSS, 360, Wii)
- Kevin VanDam Fishing (PSS)
- LEGO Universe (PC)
- Nerf N-Strike: Double Blast (Wii)
- Rock Band 3 (PSS, 360, Wii, DS)
- Shawn Johnson Gymnastics (Wii, DS)
- The Sims 3: Late Night (PC)
- Spialthouse (PSS, 360)
- Star Wars: The Clone Wars Season 2 (Blu-Ray, DVD)
- Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II (PSS, 360, PC, DS)
- WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2011 (PSS, 360, Wii, PSP, PS2)
- Yu-Gi-Oh! SD's Tag Force 5 (PSP)
- TV Superstars (PSS, 360)

27 Death, Meet Lex Luthor

Characters in the DC universe die (and are resurrected a few years later) all the time. Lex Luthor is the most recent person to find himself knocking on death's door. In this case, however, he is the first character from this universe to meet Death from Sandman. Check out how this story unfolds in Action Comics today.



Fair -of- Columbia!

A Patriotic Air

A young girl named Elizabeth was whisked away to a faraway city and locked up in a tower. Confined to a single room, a hulking beast guarded her for 15 years until a brave man came to her rescue.

This premise sounds like a fairy tale populated by idyllic characters and unambiguous intentions, but it serves as the narrative core for the next BioShock – and the situation is more complex than it seems. The minds responsible for Rapture’s flooded corridors, Andrew Ryan’s twisted ideals, and the Big Daddies’ fatherly instincts wouldn’t be content to tell a simple fairy tale. With BioShock Infinite, Irrational Games returns to the series it created, leaving the ocean behind and turning its gaze toward the sky.

Elizabeth isn’t a typical damsel in distress; she has latent, dangerous special abilities that are slowly awakening. The faraway city where she is kept is called Columbia, a world-famous floating metropolis and one-time testament to America’s power and industry. While the hulking beast is Elizabeth’s jailor, it is also the only friend she has known during her long years of captivity. And the brave man who saves her – that’s where you come in.

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY

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

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter

» **Publisher**
2K Games

» **Developer**
Irrational Games

» **Release**
2012

BIO SHOCK

INFINITE

Out Of The Sea, Into The Clouds

by Joe Juba

Starting Over

The city of Rapture defined the identity of the BioShock series when Irrational Games released the original title in 2007. The ruined underwater utopia was more than just a collection of tunnels and rooms for players to shoot splicers – it became another character in the story with its own dark secrets. Given the popularity of the setting, gamers weren't surprised to learn that the sequel (developed by 2K Marin) returned to Rapture. The art deco paradise and its iconic denizens – Big Daddies and Little Sisters – seemed to be inextricable aspects of the BioShock brand.

You won't see any of them in BioShock Infinite.

"When we started working on this game, we decided that even though it's a BioShock game, there are no sacred cows," says Irrational's president and creative director Ken Levine. In other words, everything gamers associate with BioShock was up for assessment. This process began shortly after the first game's release, and resulted in a comprehensive look at its strengths and weaknesses.

"If you're not the most critical person of your own stuff, you can't progress as a game developer," Levine says. "For us, we have this game that gets great reviews, and this great Metacritic average. But, it's not about continuing what we did. It's about saying, 'Where are the opportunities?'"

For Irrational Games, finding opportunities isn't simply about adding a few new weapons and characters. Three years after the project's inception, the Boston-based studio has a brand new game engine, a visually stunning setting, a multifaceted story, and deeper gameplay – all while retaining the core of the BioShock experience.

"For us, BioShock has never been about a city," Levine says. "It's been about an idea. It's about going to a place that's mysterious and strange and learning about that place and the powers you can use. It's about how you interact with that environment, how you interact with those characters."

Even without the trappings of Rapture, fans will still see thematic and gameplay connections to the previous two games; this is still BioShock, but any lingering homesickness you may have for Andrew Ryan's failed experiment will fall away the second you lay eyes on Columbia.

City In The Clouds

In the year 1912, the floating city of Columbia has disappeared from public view. A collection of islands held aloft in the air, the city is a technological marvel. Buildings bob on clouds, bridges and freight lines connect suspended landmasses, and the sky stretches off in all directions as far as the eye can see. Columbia is a seemingly impossible feat constructed as a monument to the United States' growing superiority. "Imagine an Apollo project, but in 1900," Levine explains. "As a demonstration of the glory and the power of the American democratic system – of what its technology, its industry, and its endeavor could accomplish."

Prior to its disappearance, everyone knew about Columbia. Unlike Rapture, it isn't one man's work hidden at the bottom the ocean; the airborne city was conceived and built by the U.S. government to be paraded around the world as a shining beacon of prosperity. "It moved around, almost like a mobile World's Fair, from country to country," Levine says.

Traveling to ports around the world, Columbia was a symbol of peace and diplomacy. However, the city's existence also implied a subtle, sinister threat. Imagine living overseas and watching an entire American metropolis float overhead in the early 1900s – an era where radio, automobiles, and airplanes are in their infancy. Imagine the shock when you compare the vastness of the United States' technological prowess to the other nations of the world. Even when dispatched in the name of strengthening international relations, Columbia sent a clear, unmistakable message on behalf of America: We are beyond you.

Columbia's population believed in the message their city conveyed, embodying the same ideals they preached. Revering the founding fathers as gods, valuing devotion to religion, and fearing anyone who didn't fit in, the city's leadership instilled a sense of extreme American nationalism among the citizens – in some cases, to a fault. "In the same way that Andrew Ryan represented a certain spirit in America, Columbia represents a certain spirit in America – good and bad," Levine says.

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Because Columbia's buildings are suspended in the air by mysterious technology, they can crash or drop away with little warning

Building On Thin Air

BioShock Infinite does not share any art assets or code with BioShock 1 or 2. Irrational Games has developed a new engine and new technology in order to create the city of Columbia, and even better, it doesn't rely on visual trickery. The buildings that are bobbing in the distance like ships off a dock? They are floating in real-time, and can sway, move, rotate, or crumble at any moment.

"We could not do any of this stuff – this floating city in the sky, the kind of scale – in the original engine," says creative director Ken Levine. "BioShock 1 was at the bottom of the ocean, but of course, it was really not. It was art, primarily, that made you feel that. The entire city, everything in this game is actually floating. Everything can move."

This kind of technology isn't just for show – it has gameplay applications, too. The floating islands can be affected by weather (like strong winds), and it gives players more opportunities to change or react to the environment around them. It also opens the door for cool setpiece moments; during our demo, we witnessed a bell tower tilt and collapse, with the bell breaking off and sliding to a stop right at the player's feet.



Two factions are fighting for control in the floating city, and both of them are after the woman named Elizabeth



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That was the state of Columbia prior to the beginning of *BioShock Infinite*. As the game opens, the city has been lost for years, vanishing after a violent and high-profile international incident. Irrational isn't revealing the exact nature of the event, except to say that Columbia was hiding more secrets than anyone had suspected. "This Apollo project became a Death Star," Levine says. "It turns out Columbia wasn't just a World's Fair. It was a battleship, and it was armed. Heavily armed."

The event in question created a schism between the leadership of Columbia and the United States, and Columbia disappeared into the clouds. Despite rampant speculation, its activity and location during the last several years are unknown – until a client approaches a man named Booker DeWitt with a proposition.

The Go-To Guy

The protagonists in the first two *BioShock* titles can hardly be called characters. Jack and Subject Delta served mainly as silent sets of eyes through which players could experience the action. They had little initiative of their own, instead receiving their objectives from voices over the radio. In *BioShock Infinite*, players do not control a blank slate who does what he is told. Booker DeWitt is a man with his own dialogue and backstory, as well as a history of getting out of tough situations.

"[Booker is] known as a man who gets things done," Levine says. "If you need something accomplished, maybe legal, maybe not-so-legal, Booker DeWitt is the guy people turn to." A capable, experienced protagonist also allows Irrational to throw out one of the conventions it relied on in the past: radio conversations.

Instead of taking orders from an unseen ally, Booker discerns his own goals, which he makes apparent to the player through dialogue. "He's a smart guy," Levine explains. "He's been in scrapes before. He can figure what he needs to do to advance his objectives."

With a reputation built through his work as a Pinkerton agent and strikebreaker, Booker is approached by a mysterious man with an unusual mission. He tells Booker a tale about a woman named Elizabeth, kidnapped and held hostage for 15 years. The man wants Elizabeth freed and brought back to him. Booker assumes that the job will be a basic rescue and escape mission until the man tells him where Elizabeth's prison is located: Columbia. Even more intriguing, the man knows the location of the lost city.

Once Booker arrives, players notice that all is not well in Columbia. Explosions and gunfire can be heard in the distance, propaganda posters taking extreme nationalistic positions adorn the walls, and some buildings are dropping out of the sky. The city in the clouds is being torn apart by war; the violent international incident from years ago caused a splintering among Columbia's population. Two factions – Columbia's ruling party and an underground resistance group called the Vox Populi – are vying for control of the city.

The ruling party wants to maintain the status quo – a fervent devotion to God and country. The Vox Populi want to wipe out the nationalism and xenophobia that permeate the city, and they will go so far as to blow Columbia out of the sky to do so.

At one point during our demo, we saw a member of the ruling party named Saltonstall holding court in a gazebo to a crowd of empty chairs, denouncing the ideals of the Vox Populi: "The needs of our great city of Columbia must come before the desires of any foreigner, whether they be enemy or friend. For I have looked into the future, and one path is filled with amity and gold, and the other is fraught with the perils of a hostile and alien world!"





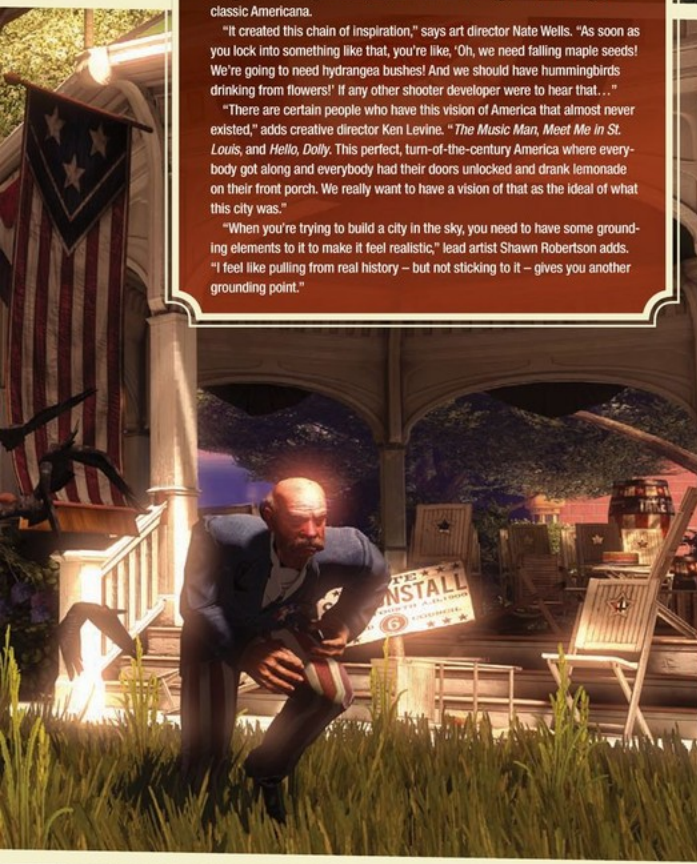
Celebrating Independence

The original *BioShock* became closely associated with the art deco style of its setting. Similarly, *BioShock Infinite* has a signature style running through most of its locations. If the first game's visual tone could be summarized as "New Year's Eve, 1959," *Infinite*'s is best described as "Fourth of July, 1912." The design features bright colors, the summer sun beating down, and images of classic Americana.

"It created this chain of inspiration," says art director Nate Wells. "As soon as you lock into something like that, you're like, 'Oh, we need falling maple seeds! We're going to need hydrangea bushes! And we should have hummingbirds drinking from flowers!' If any other shooter developer were to hear that..."

"There are certain people who have this vision of America that almost never existed," adds creative director Ken Levine. "*The Music Man*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and *Hello, Dolly*. This perfect, turn-of-the-century America where everybody got along and everybody had their doors unlocked and drank lemonade on their front porch. We really want to have a vision of that as the ideal of what this city was."

"When you're trying to build a city in the sky, you need to have some grounding elements to it to make it feel realistic," lead artist Shawn Robertson adds. "I feel like pulling from real history – but not sticking to it – gives you another grounding point."



Shouting from gazebos isn't what leads to Columbia's strife. Armed conflict between the ruling party and Vox Populi broke out, and the battles between the two factions are tearing the city apart. As if rescuing Elizabeth in the midst of a revolution in unfriendly territory weren't dangerous enough, Booker soon learns that she is at the center of it all.

Rescue Mission

Running contrary to the standard damsel-in-distress trope, finding Elizabeth is not the ultimate goal in *BioShock Infinite*. In fact, she is a companion character who accompanies you through much of the adventure. Booker will locate Elizabeth near the beginning of the game. Getting her out of Columbia is the tricky part. "The princess is not in another castle," laughs art director Nate Wells. "She's in the first castle."

The reason Booker and Elizabeth are united so early is that their developing bond plays a major role in the action, from a gameplay perspective as well as a narrative one. Kept in a one-room prison in a tower for 15 years, Elizabeth doesn't know anything about the world around her. Though naïve in some respects, her greatest asset is a dormant set of powerful abilities that she learns to control throughout the course of the game. Once the two meet up, Booker and Elizabeth both use their unique skills to aid each other in their escape; Booker has ingenuity and proficiency with firearms, and Elizabeth has an arsenal of psionic abilities that are getting stronger by the minute.

Wherever Booker goes with Elizabeth, conflict seems to follow. As you spend more time with Elizabeth, you'll gain insight into her significance and, more importantly, her personality. "You develop this relationship and learn about her, and you're both learning about the city together," Levine says. "There's a notion of prophecy in this world, and that Elizabeth is very important to fate of the city."

The prophecy, along with her powers, is what puts Elizabeth at the center of the war in Columbia. The ruling party and the Vox Populi both want her for their own agendas. "The powers-that-be certainly

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The Lies That Bind

The bond between Booker and Elizabeth is a crucial component of the story and gameplay in BioShock Infinite. However, forging a connection with a non-player character is a difficult task, and having a game hinge on that relationship is a considerable risk. The team at Irrational has thought deeply about the problem, and come up with an approach it believes will work.

"In terms of the narrative perspective, how do you make somebody care about a puppet? Because that's what it is – let's not kid ourselves – it's a puppet," observes creative director Ken Levine. "How do relationships build in real life? They build on somebody helping you, and almost more importantly, they need your help. When she uses her power, that's not cost-free for her. This drains her; this physically hurts her. The cost to Elizabeth, when she does these things to help you, you'll see on her body. You'll see on her face. She's not some superhero. But you're developing a relationship. You're trying to save her, and eventually, she's trying to save you."



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Elizabeth is learning to control her powers, so they start relatively weak and amp up as the story progresses

have the upper hand, but Elizabeth is the wild card," Levine explains. "She could be a complete wild card and trump card for both sides." Thankfully, she has Booker to help keep her safe.

As Alyx Vance in *Half-Life 2* and Yorda in *ICO* both demonstrated, integrating a companion provides an opportunity for the player to form an emotional attachment to a character that simply isn't possible through conventional cutscenes and dialogue. However, adding another person to the equation also presents challenges to keeping the game balanced and fun to play. If Elizabeth is too powerful, she could just kill all of the enemies with her abilities. If she's too weak, Booker would have to worry about monitoring her health bar. The team at Irrational is aware of the issues posed by companion characters in other games, but your time with Elizabeth won't be plagued by them.

"We wanted her to impact your gameplay, but we never wanted her to drive your gameplay," Levine says. "We don't want you protecting her, keeping her from dying, because we don't think that's interesting. We don't want her driving the action where she kills a bunch of enemies. She just sets up opportunities for you to do super-awesome cool s---."

In our demo, gun-toting supporters of Columbia's ruling party are swarming Booker. He fires a few electro-bolts from one hand while shooting his rifle with the other (yes, dual wielding powers and weapons is confirmed), but the horde of enemies is too large to hold off. Just when it seems hopeless, Elizabeth unleashes her powers. The sky darkens, thunder cracks, the winds pick up, and rain starts to fall on the advancing pack of goons. She shouts: "Hit it now," and Booker fires a bolt of lightning into the crowd of soaking wet enemies, electrocuting the entire group.

Elizabeth asks for a moment to rest. Using her powers takes a physical toll on her, depending on the level of exertion, and she needs some time to recover after using them. Unfortunately, the two don't have long enough to enjoy the triumph of their teamwork.

Shortly after the electric storm, they encounter a hulking robotic humanoid on a metal bridge. Our first thought is that this is BioShock Infinite's answer to the Big Daddy, but we're wrong. Irrational is currently calling these enemies Alphas; they can buff and resurrect lesser units, as well as summon artillery strikes, making them challenging (and high-value) targets in any encounter. Booker uses telekinesis to grab a mortar shell and throw it at the creature, but to no avail. Elizabeth uses her power to weaken the structural support on top of the bridge — an example of Irrational setting up an opportunity players can choose to exploit or ignore. Booker uses his telekinesis again, this time throwing a mortar shell at the support, which comes crashing down on the Alpha and destroys the bridge in a cacophony of explosions and falling metal.

With the threat dispatched, it seems like the two partners have a chance to catch their breath. "That was the one who was chasing you, right?" Booker asks. Elizabeth responds quietly and grimly: "No. That wasn't Him. That wasn't Him." A thundering crash echoes from atop a building behind them. "That's Him!"



The beast called "Him" by the people of Columbia may look monstrous, but he is the only friend Elizabeth has had for 15 years

The God of the Sky

Both the ruling party and the Vox Populi want Elizabeth in their hands, but the biggest obstacle to her escape (and Booker successfully completing his job) is a vigilant, winged sentinel that the people of Columbia refer to as "Him."

"This thing is going to appear as a god of vengeance coming down upon you, and he's huge," Levine says. The massive guardian stands 30 feet tall, and like a Big Daddy, wears a suit strapped with mechanical implements and a helmet with glowing portals for eyes. Unlike Big Daddies, however, this beast is not mass-produced. There is only one guardian, and it has only one job: Keep Elizabeth locked in her prison. He was built expressly for that purpose, but by whom is a mystery that will only be revealed when you play the game.

"In this city, he serves a similar role [to the Big Daddy]," Levine says. "But we didn't want to repeat that dynamic. We loved that dynamic, but we think that traditional Big Daddy/Little Sister dynamic has been explored. But there are echoes."

The huge winged guardian isn't some malevolent creature that wishes Elizabeth harm. It has guarded her faithfully for all 15 years of her captivity, and during that time, the silent creature was the only living thing with which Elizabeth had any contact. While he was technically her captor, he was also a friend, caretaker, and protector. When he drops from the sky and attacks Booker like an unstoppable juggernaut, it isn't out of malice. He just wants to bring Elizabeth home.

"Elizabeth and [Him] have a complicated relationship, because she loves him," Levine says. "He would take care of her, but he also imprisoned her. It's a kind of growing up story; she needs to get away from him...He is hell-bent on keeping the two of you apart and getting her back to her cage."



Notice the woman in the background calmly sweeping the step as her store burns. Something is not right in Columbia

How does Elizabeth's relationship with Him affect the inevitable fights players will have against the beast? If it is so powerful and relentless, why isn't BioShock Infinite one long chase scene? "Think of the dynamic with Him as a series of encounters that always end in some kind of resolution: you get away, he takes Elizabeth, he separates you from Elizabeth, et cetera," explains Levine. "He will appear at several points during the game, and these will be large, impactful events... His role in the game will continue to evolve in surprising ways."

Elizabeth wants the best of both worlds: to escape Columbia with Booker without harming her friend and former jailor. Even if Booker could just electro-bolt and shotgun Him to death (which he can't), it would irreparably damage his relationship with Elizabeth. "Booker is being challenged and having his life threatened by it, but this woman he's growing attached to also has a deep connection to this thing," Levine says. "From a feelings standpoint, it's like the girl you love and her father." You won't find any easy answers when faced with these encounters; reconciling the bond between Him and Elizabeth with the bond between Elizabeth and Booker forms the emotional core of BioShock Infinite.

War in Columbia

Indiscriminate assault may not be an option when you're staring Him down, but Booker has versatility when it comes to taking on the other denizens of Columbia. When compared to the first two BioShock titles, Infinite has more options for customization and combat, as well as more variety in the kinds of fights players encounter.

"People liked BioShock as a story experience, but some people felt it wasn't the tightest or most diverse combat experience in

terms of great gunplay," Levine acknowledges. In the original, players tended to stick with a single loadout of plasmids, weapons, and tonics. For Infinite, you're going to need to be more adaptable. Not only are the radial menus gone (no longer limiting your selection of guns and powers), but you also have more abilities with varying levels of power.

Columbia's version of plasmids are called vigors, and they aren't fueled by a single resource. Instead, each vigor has a set number of charges when you obtain it, which eliminates the need for a blue mana bar. Weaker vigors like telekinesis have more uses per pick-up than stronger ones, but they will still be a resource you need to manage — no more buying stacks of Eve hypnos and firing off powers left and right. If that sounds disappointing, don't worry; the way vigors are consumed has an upside.

"The limitation on the charges is more about being able to scale them to different powers, making some of them hugely, awesomely powerful," Levine explains. "Whereas in BioShock they all had to be roughly the same power because they all had roughly the same cost." Just like ammo for the best weapons is scarce in many games, limited-use vigors are much stronger than the normal tier, and allow Booker to demonstrate a more impressive array of abilities.

One new power, dubbed Murder of Crows, unleashes a wave of the black birds on a target from a distance. In our demo, Booker obtained the ability after rifle-butting the bodyguard of the loud-mouthed politician Saltontall over a railing near the gazebo. The bodyguard dropped a black bottle in the shape of a crow, which bestowed the ability after Booker drank it. Given their temporary nature, it's clear that vigors don't rewrite the subject's DNA like plasmids, but Irrational isn't ready to reveal exactly how they grant exceptional powers to users.



Even with new info about the story and gameplay of BioShock Infinite, fans of the BioShock series are undoubtedly wondering how this title fits in with the franchise, as well as how it addresses the complaints gamers had about previous entries. We talked with Irrational president and creative director Ken Levine and asked four of the burning questions that are likely to pop up in the minds of BioShock fans.

A common criticism of the original BioShock was the lack of multiplayer. What is Irrational's approach to multiplayer in BioShock Infinite?

Our approach hasn't changed... Every game we did prior to BioShock had a multiplayer component, and I don't think it mattered. It always came out of the request of a marketing department.

If you look at multiplayer, either you are going to do something that's profound, or you're wasting your time. Absolutely wasting your time. Because what are people going to do? You're going to have a couple thousand people play it for a few weeks, then they're going to go back to the great multiplayer games — Call of Duty, Gears of War, Halo, Left 4 Dead.

My feeling always has been if there is an idea that is organic to the product and is profound and is going to move people and excite people and really add a dimension to the product that is not just good for the product but stands on its own as a game, then you do it. If you don't have that, you don't do it.

At this point, we haven't made a determination about whether or not we have something that's profound enough or what exactly our thinking is there.

In BioShock, vita-chambers essentially made death inconsequential. Is that mechanic changing in BioShock Infinite?

My feeling about the vita-chambers was this: I think they set a certain tone for the game in terms of how it felt and the progression. It was not a game about dying and restarting. It was a game about experiencing the feeling of being in Rapture. Certainly, there are arguments to be made about whether there was enough disincentive to get killed.

I think that's a reasonably legitimate concern. I would say that it's unlikely we'll have the exact same approach we use in BioShock 1 as it shipped — without any option to turn it off or any penalty. I think there is probably some wisdom in the criticism of that, but we haven't made any final determinations. It's definitely something we think a lot about and examine.

Why is the game called BioShock Infinite?

It's not BioShock 3 because it's not a direct follow-up to BioShock 1 or 2. In terms of what the title means, that's something that will become clear over time. But it means something.

Does BioShock Infinite take place in the same timeline as BioShock 1 and 2?

We're leaving it up to people for now to draw their own conclusions on this...



Alphas are challenging foes alone, but they become even more dangerous when surrounded by allies they can assist

Another major addition to the combat is a part of Columbia's infrastructure: the skylines. These rails were originally built between the floating islands of the city to transport freight, but they aren't just a bathysphere-like mode of transportation. The skylines are heavily integrated into the outdoor combat experience, adding a dimension of speed and verticality to battles. Since they're essentially rails, you can focus on combat instead of navigation as you ride them.

"The goal of the skylines is to feel fast, agile, and dynamic," Levine says. In the demo, after Booker kills Saltonstall's bodyguard, the politician grabs onto a skyline and zips away. The skyline moves people incredibly quickly – think of it like a rollercoaster going downhill. As Booker pursues, an enemy comes zooming toward him in the opposite direction with a weapon raised, preparing for a mid-air joust. Booker sends him flying with a well-timed melee attack, accompanied by a slow-motion camera effect that sells the weight of the impact.

While this sequence seemed fairly scripted, skylines are built into many of the outdoor environments, letting Booker access different areas and elevations freely. "It's kind of like a designer's dream to just make a jungle gym," says lead designer Bill Gardner. "To make a crazy playground and really find out what works."

By leaping between skylines, shooting enemies as you zip by them, and getting a new vantage point on the battle, the shape of Infinite's encounters can change quickly. The goal is to empower the player, not frustrate them with first-person platforming. "I want to make it clear: this is not a game where you stumble off a ledge and fall to your death," Levine assures.

With a new system for handling vigors and the promise of taking to the skies, BioShock's brand of combat is looking better than ever. However, even with new tools at your disposal, you may want to use some restraint. Sometimes the best way to win a fight is to not start one in the first place.

New Choices

The theme of choice was prominent in the original BioShock. Should you harvest or save the Little Sisters? Is this the right time to fight that Big Daddy? Would you kindly? While the notion of free will isn't one of the main thematic hooks in BioShock Infinite, player choice remains a key component.

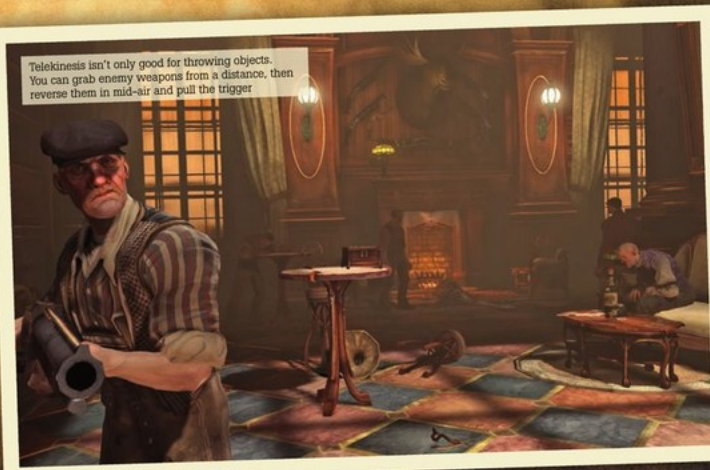
In BioShock, Big Daddies were opt-in boss fights. They wouldn't attack you unless you provoked them, but every splicer in Rapture would instantly charge you on sight. With Infinite, more residents of Columbia are like the Big Daddies, going about their business with no particular reason to attack. For example, we saw Booker stumble into a bar while evading mortar fire from Saltonstall. Some of the patrons turned in his direction, and others just continued their conversations – then someone pulled out a shotgun and all hell broke loose.

"Imagine that Wild West scene: You go into a room, and everybody's got their hands on their guns, but nobody's drawing," Levine says. "That's a dynamic you don't really see explored, and we wanted to expand it out... We didn't want to repeat the Big Daddy/Little Sister dynamic, but we did want to explore interesting relationships between the player and the AIs."

This tactic also gives Irrational a chance to deliver narrative in a different way. Booker can observe characters having discussions and other interactions, relying less on audio recordings picked up off the ground. The situation still has tension, because you won't know who will be the first to attack, but it also conveys story without taking control away from the player. Alternately, you can just kick down the door with guns blazing; the choice is yours. "Once the shooting starts, the narrative's over in every game," Wells says. "That's why [other developers] take your gun away and letterbox the screen. We don't like to do that. In some ways, those tactical realities provide a solution that's completely organic for narrative."

Your choices also have a greater impact on how Booker's abilities progress. One of the problems the team identified with the original BioShock is how players didn't have to live with many of their choices. For instance, if you didn't like your plasmid and tonic loadout, you could just swap in new ones at a gene bank. That is no longer the case with Infinite.

"We definitely heard some concerns from the audience," Levine says. "I think there was a sense that BioShock was simpler than System Shock 2, and part of the reason for that is that you didn't





Skylines add an element of speed and agility to combat

have to make permanent choices. It was so malleable."

Instead of letting players switch out their vigors and passive abilities (called nostrums), the team is implementing a system where you make more choices regarding Booker's progression. For example, you may come across an unstable nostrum, and when you pick it up, you have the opportunity to select which of three possible abilities the nostrum bestows. Once you choose, that ability is there to stay.

How you build your character – the weapons you favor, combat tactics you use, and which nostrums you select to support that playstyle – also impacts the vigors you find. "We're making a lot more smaller scale but meaningful permanent decisions throughout the course of this game," Levine says. "When you pick up a vigor, for instance, based on the decisions you've made, that's going to be a different vigor."

The choices you make with regards to how you engage enemies and build your powers affect your moment-to-moment gameplay, but those aren't the decisions that turned *BioShock* into a phenomenon. The most infamous choices from the previous titles revolved around the Little Sisters. Selecting how to handle these innocent and ghastly girls was effective because it forced the player to weigh personal gain against committing a reprehensible act, more Adam at the cost of a life. "That exact concept

is not returning," Levine reveals. "Once a moral choice gets explored that way, it just becomes a game system."

Just because you won't be choosing to harvest or save young girls in *Infinite* doesn't mean you won't have compelling decisions to make. The nature of those decisions, however, will remain mysterious for a while longer. "It's safe to say that the game is set in a context of interesting moral and political questions," Levine teases. "Beyond that, I'm not really ready to talk about it."

Icarus

BioShock Infinite was codenamed "Project Icarus" during its early development. Considering Columbia's high altitude and the game's high ambitions, the name is appropriate. Irrational Games set an industry standard with the original *BioShock*, but rather than revisit a familiar setting with familiar technology, the team started over from scratch and blazed a trail in a new direction. "Our guess was the fans would give us permission to do something quite different," Levine says. "That they didn't want to pick up where we left off."

Even with a new setting established and the main characters revealed, *BioShock Infinite* still has plenty of secrets to reveal. For instance, during our demo, we saw

several objects shimmer briefly with a wave of a bluish light. The shimmer seemed to alter them, changing pictures within frames and the words on banners. What these occurrences mean is open to speculation, but they are undoubtedly clues pointing to a larger mystery. One thing is certain: There is more to Columbia than meets the eye.

"We'll protect a lot of the story stuff until the game comes out," Levine says. "There are things within things within things that I'm not even going to go near. After playing *BioShock 1*, I'm sure you understand there are things I can never discuss. Just like there are things very particular to that game, there are things very particular to this game that I'm not going anywhere near."

Given Irrational's reputation for masterful storytelling, we're satisfied with not knowing all of the details. The joy of discovery is part of the *BioShock* series' identity, and we can't wait to explore the mysteries of Columbia. We came away from our time with *BioShock Infinite* feeling similar to the first time we saw the original *BioShock* – with a sense that we had just seen a title that is likely to define the video game landscape in the years to come. ♦

To see a trailer for *BioShock Infinite*, get expanded info, and hear more from the team at Irrational Games, head to gameinformer.com/bioshockinfinite

CALL OF DUTY: FINANCIAL

BY DAN RYCKERT

1-Player Shooter (24-Player Online)
Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC
Style
Action
Publisher
Activision
Developer
Treyarch
Release
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BLACK OPS 2

When a series is as beloved and successful as Call of Duty, the first thing developers have to keep in mind is franchise fatigue. While an approach of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" may ring true for a couple of installments, eventually gamers will grow tired of the tried and true. Activision knows a thing or two about this thanks to the decline of the once-untouchable Tony Hawk franchise. With the cash cow known as Call of Duty now functioning as an annual franchise, Treyarch realizes it's important to keep things fresh — especially in its wildly popular multiplayer component. Infinity Ward proved that moving away from the oversaturated World War II market was a wise decision, but Treyarch wants to change more than just the game's era.



Subjects are environments will be present within multiplayer, but the game does not in fact have an open-world multiplayer in the mainline and other objective-based modes.

Setting the game during the paranoia and espionage of the Cold War is an intriguing move, but it's the new currency system that will make the biggest impact on the gameplay of Black Ops. Each title since Modern Warfare has based its multiplayer unlocks solely on gaining XP and leveling up. In this system, certain types of gamers were "rewarded" with guns or perks that they never intended on using. If your play style was suited to assault rifles or LMGs, that shiny new sniper rifle wasn't of much use to you. This new method predetermined by the developer.

Players have far more say in their personal upgrade paths. Currency is accrued through various means in Black Ops, which players can spend on new weapons, perks, and graphics for their customizable emblem (see sidebar). As you level up, you'll unlock the ability to buy that sniper rifle, but you have the option to ignore it in an effort to save money for that assault rifle you've been eyeing a few levels up.

One method of earning cash is through the new Contracts menu. Three slots exist for active contracts, and they resemble the challenges from previous titles. If you purchase a contract that requires you to get a predetermined amount of kills with a certain weapon, you have a finite amount of in-game time to complete

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

Players are betting on their own abilities with the contract slots, but you'll be putting money on how well you stack up against other players in the new wager matches. These function like poker tournaments, with every player being in at a predetermined price (which can be doubled down) and the top three players being "in the money" at the end of the round.

Four wager matches are available, and they're all free-for-all. Sticks and Stones is a ridiculous mode that arms every player with explosive crossbows, ballistic knives (an actual prototype of the handle), and tomahawks. The player with the top score is called out on the radar with a gold icon rather than the standard red. This special treatment is very bad news for the leader considering what the other players can do. If a player successfully kills another with a thrown

COMBAT THEATER

Black Ops launches with a full-scale Theater mode similar to what we've seen in Halo 3 and Reach. You may remember seeing crazy knife-kill YouTube videos from Modern Warfare 2, but that game didn't feature any one-in-a-million moments. With this new mode, gamers can stitch together multiple segments from a single match, or just capture that one crazy moment from many different angles. Vevo and screenshots are both supported, and Treyarch says everything can be easily uploaded to the web so you can share your craziest matches and moments with your friends list.

FORGING YOUR IDENTITY

Modern Warfare 2 constantly bombarded players with unlockable titles, emblems, and call signs, almost to the point of becoming overwhelming. Rather than having players unlock these pre-made designs, Treyarch has implemented an easy-to-use emblem editor in Black Ops. By the time it ships, it'll come with hundreds of icons and designs that can be mixed and matched in any way you see fit. Putting together a custom icon has been done plenty of times before in such games, but rarely with such ease of use. You can even use your guns with your personal insignia, and opponents will see it if they equip your gun after killing you.



hatchet, the victim is immediately bankrupted. That badass in first place can immediately plunge to the very bottom of the scoreboard with one well-aimed tomahawk, and that gold icon on the radar guarantees he'll have to dodge his share of that proves to be more tactical and pressure-filled than the others. Each player starts with a knife and a pistol with one bullet in the chamber. Earning a kill gives you another bullet, and each





Chain tags can be ejected into the metal of your gun, and will be seen by any enemy who picks it up



PC motor. If you're the one at the controls, however, it's one of the most satisfying kills you can get in Black Ops.

The remote control car is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to offensive options. Attachments like the under-barrel flamethrower can be added to standard guns, or you can call down an mortar team to target three specific locations simultaneously. The ARC Angel kill-streak reward lets you shoot a giant missile into the sky, and then remote-pilot it directly into an enemy's hiding spot.

It wouldn't be a COD sequel without these new weapons, killstreaks, and game modes, but Black Ops is bringing much more to the table than expected. All of the new weapons are a blast, and the new currency system and wager matches will change the multiplayer landscape. Any game with Call of Duty on the box is guaranteed to sell millions of copies in 2010, but it's impressive to see Treyarch take some risks in such an established series. With the fate of Infinity Ward and the Call of Duty franchise uncertain, it's comforting to see this fan favorite in the hands of a developer interested in pushing the series forward.

To see the multiplayer trailer for Black Ops, head on over to gameinformer.com/mag

UP YOUR ARSENAL

Ballistic knives and tomahawks are great fun, and there are plenty more new weapons where they came from. Working within an era filled with prototype weaponry, Treyarch has the freedom to get wackier with the weapons than in its WWII titles. Explosive-tipped crossbows are a nice and insulting way to off your enemies, but the semtex-equipped RCXD car showcased in the multiplayer trailer is even better. Rewarded after racking up three unanswered kills, this killstreak puts you in control of a deadly remote control car. Because of its tiny frame and speedy maneuvering, it's difficult for opponents to stop in time. If you're not piloting it, you'll never be more scared of the sound of a nearby

player has three lives to work with. The strategy comes into play when you're deciding how to go about killing your opponents. Do you go for one shot, one kill for each, or do you run around stabbing everyone in an effort to stockpile bullets? When you approach an enemy in this mode, it almost feels like a Wild West duel. You find yourself counting the number of shots they've fired so you can predict whether or not they have another bullet.

Sharpshooter is the most bare-boned of the four wager matches. Basically, it randomizes the weapon each player is holding every 45 seconds, only to switch to the least noteworthy of the four, but it's still a nice change of pace if you're tired of the standard TDM/Domination playlists.

Each of these wager matches is a welcome break from the norm, but Gun Game was the standout mode during my time with the multiplayer. Each player starts with a pistol and is tasked with climbing through 20 tiers of weapons before they win the match. A couple weapons before they're rewarded with a double with the pistol and you're rewarded with a pistol. Get another kill and you'll move onto the shotguns, then the assault rifles. A couple rifles, rocket launchers, and so on. A couple of interesting touches make all the difference in Gun Game. If you stab an enemy, you don't move up a tier, but you do demote them to their previous rank. It's incredibly frustrating if you've made it past the difficult sniper rifle tier only to be stabbed back down the ranks. Guaranteeing that the round always ends with a dramatic kill can, the final weapon is the ballistic knife. After going through all of the previous tiers, you'll have to score one well-aimed knife shot to earn top rank. The matches elicited more shouting

FAMILIAR GROUND

Player appearance in previous titles was based solely on what weapon they were currently using. Treyarch feels that method didn't properly indicate what type of player you were going up against, so your appearance in Black Ops is based on your first Perk selection. If you pick Scavenger, your character will have visible ammo and equipment all over his uniform. Those who prefer Lightweight will appear as a slimmer, quicker soldier. If you want to minimize explosive damage with the Flak Jacket perk, your character will wear heavy protective equipment similar to the suits seen in *The Hurt Locker*. It's a subtle change, but it should give you more of an indication of your opponent's playstyle.




put the
controller
down



Will Microsoft's motion-sensing gamble pay off?

by Jeff Cork





Nintendo took a chance by offering motion controls to the mainstream, giving people who might otherwise be intimidated by loads of buttons an intuitive alternative. Instead of fumbling with a controller, gamers could play tennis by swinging the remote or roll their ball down the alley by making the motion with the controller.

Nintendo's gamble paid off in a big way, and it was only a matter of time before rivals Sony and Microsoft made their play at the same newly invigorated market. Sony took a fairly traditional strategy with Move (see page 32 for a full review), marrying motion controls with an LED that gives the system a better sense of positional space. Microsoft's Kinect went in the opposite direction, boiling Nintendo's philosophy down to its essence. Why use a controller at all? Why not just use your body to play games?

That approach invited plenty of skepticism. Would it work as promised? How accurate could it really be? Would the games be any good? We've spent a considerable amount of time with the Kinect hardware and a wide array of launch titles, and we can say that while it's far from perfect, Microsoft's device opens up some interesting opportunities.

Getting Kinected

"I think four million is underselling it a bit," says Kudo Tsunoda, smiling slightly. He's talking about an analyst's recent proclamation that Microsoft's Kinect will sell four million units over the fourth quarter of 2010 alone. As general manager of Microsoft Game Studios, Tsunoda definitely has a dog in that fight. Tsunoda has also taken on the role of Kinect's public ambassador, showing it off at its E3 debut back when it was called Project Natal, and popping up on Jimmy Fallon's show to play Kinect Adventures with Miranda Cosgrove.

So yeah, Tsunoda is a little hyped on Kinect. "It's not only the first batch that's going to sell," he continues. "As more and more people get it, it kind of has an avalanche effect. I think four million is a nice number to put out there, but I really believe we're going to be able to do a lot more than that."

It's easy to get excited about Kinect when you're on its payroll, but what about the rest of us?

Kinect's technology and business plans invite

a healthy dose of skepticism. First up, there's the price. If you want to get into Kinect gaming, you have one of two options. The device and a pack-in game, Kinect Adventures, retails for \$149. The console bundle sells for \$299, which includes Kinect, Kinect Adventures, and an Xbox 360 S with 4GB of storage space. Tsunoda is quick to defend the cost, saying that after players spring for that initial price, they're done. Unlike other devices, such as Move or the Wii, players don't have to pay for additional controllers if they want to play multiplayer games with their friends.

Price is also connected to the next major Kinect question: Are the games any good? Specifically, are the games good enough to warrant that \$150 investment? Before we get too far, let's step back and get a refresher course on Kinect.

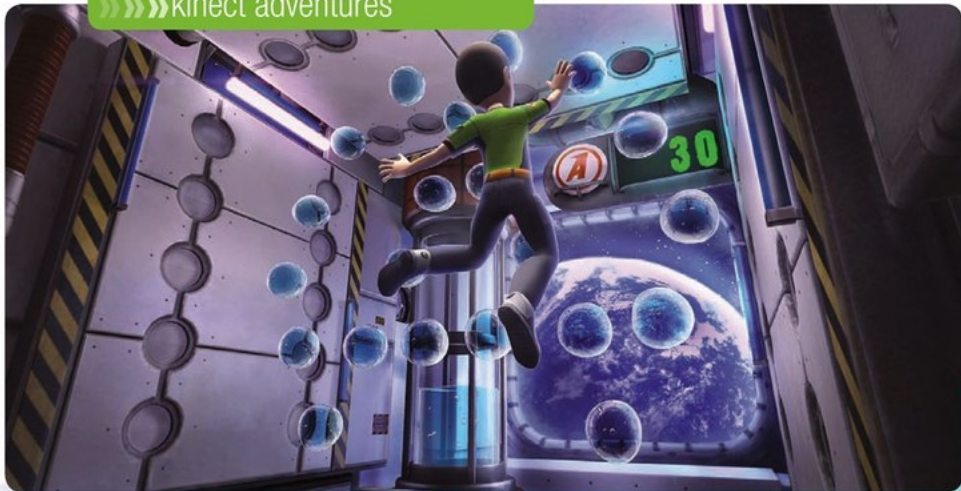
Kinect combines a variety of separate technologies into a single package. The device bathes the immediate area in invisible infrared light, which is then detected by a special camera. That camera works in conjunction with its partner –

essentially a webcam – to differentiate a person from the background. Several microphones are housed in Kinect as well, enabling it to detect voice commands.

It's already possible to play games that use cameras on the three major consoles; that's nothing special. The real innovation comes in the software. Players can register themselves with the system through a quick succession of scans, after which the system will always recognize them. That opens up a range of possibilities, including the ability to log on a user on sight, pick their avatar when they join in a game, and more.

The microphones are arranged in such a way that they can detect a user's position in a room. They also do a terrific job of ignoring background noises. I've been able to flawlessly direct a movie to stop, pause, and fast forward by using my regular speaking voice – without any kind of previous calibration – on an extremely busy show floor.

kinect adventures



adrenalin misfits



dance central

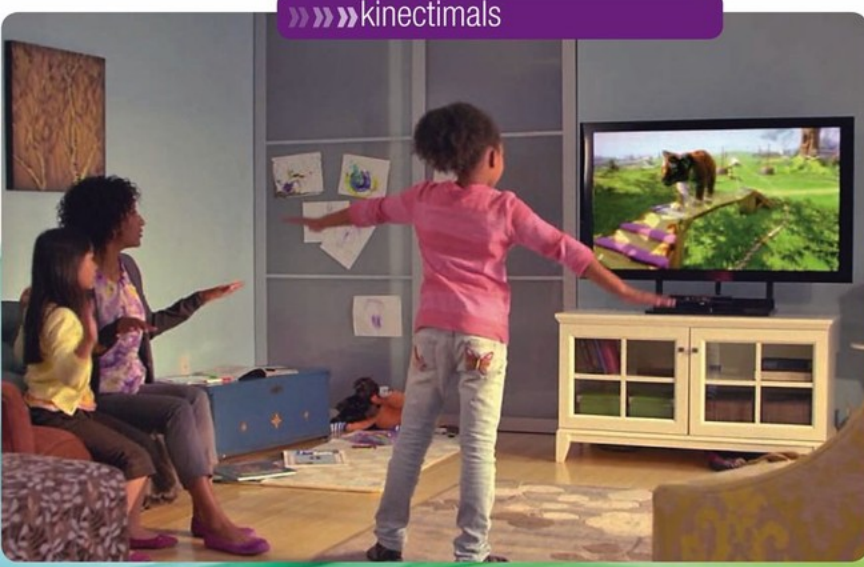


dance masters



»»»» fighters uncaged

»»»» kinectimals



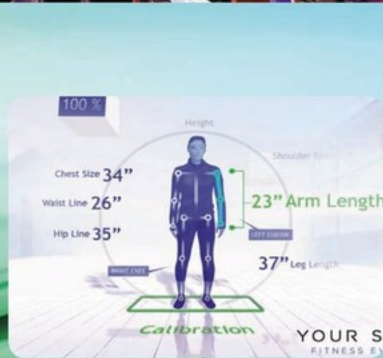
Outside Interference

Back to the games. One of the most interesting things about Kinect is how it determines which person in a room is the player and ignores everyone else. As I was playing Kinectimals, for instance, I was petting an imaginary tiger cub and a photographer walked over, crouched, and took a photo of my hands from about a foot away. While I thought that was odd, the game didn't seem to mind at all. The action didn't hiccup or stutter from the interloper's actions.

As I've noticed throughout the various games I've played, that amount of "focus" is entirely up to developers. With Dance Central for example, ignoring everyone else in the room would be detrimental to the experience. Tsunoda says those kinds of calls are made by developers on a game by game basis. "We try not to limit how developers use the technology, because games will use them in different ways," he says. "You'll see a game like Dance Central that uses a lot of the people in the background as part of the dance routine, and you don't want to limit things like that."

That's a healthy philosophy to have, but some developers are still struggling with the technology. In several cases, people standing off to the side of a game accidentally interfered with the action just by being present, causing characters to suddenly veer off in the wrong direction or preventing access to menus and other critical areas. In all of these cases I've seen, having the offending player move out of view seemed to do the trick. Seeing it done extraordinarily well, as with Kinectimals, made it more noticeable when other games didn't manage background interference as well. These games were all works in progress, but demonstrated that developers had better make sure their quality assurance teams know what they're doing with Kinect games.

kinect sports

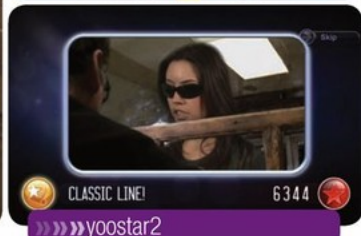




kinect joyride



sonic free riders



yoostar2

Two Kinds Of Motion

Kinect's launch titles fall into two main camps. In one, games faithfully represent player actions from Kinect. Your Shape Fitness' yoga class is an excellent example of this style of gaming. "In yoga, it makes total sense because you're doing the exact yoga motions and you want those poses to be correct," says Tsunoda. "A big part of that experience is actually training to learn how to do yoga properly, so you want an exact matching 1 to 1. But something in Adventures, where you're jumping over stuff, do you really want it to where it's only how high you can jump? That really limits the fun experiences you can have with the game."

That's probably the source of some of the criticisms that Kinect games feel odd or floaty. Unlike traditional games, where you press a button and things happen instantaneously, Kinect is interpreting your actions visually and then translating them into a game. As of now lag is inherent to that action, but much of that delay is probably your own body's fault. Many of us are accustomed to pressing buttons, because we do it so often. When it comes time to jump, though, we're not always so spry.

Jumping is a common interaction among the games in Kinect's launch lineup, and I couldn't help but notice that they all share a

common setup: before players have to jump, there's some kind of colored line, shaded zone, or other similar detail before the required leap to get players ready. After failing a few times in Kinect Adventures, I got the timing down. That translated immediately to the jumps in Sonic Free Riders and the leaping sections in Kinectimals' obstacle courses, where I did much better.

"People don't really know how high they jump," says Tsunoda. "If I jump in the air, is it four inches? Is it 16? What people know is when they take off and when they land. It's really important to feel in control of the character. If they break it too much, then it starts feeling disjointed from what they're doing."

Some early reports said Kinect would only work if players stood up. That's simply not true, Tsunoda says. He cites Kinectimals, which lets players teach their adopted cubs to play dead by laying on the ground. "Whether it's standing, whether it's sitting, whether it's laying down, whether it's jumping, it's all things Kinect can do, and then it's just allowing developers to do what makes the most sense," Tsunoda says. "Obviously, you're not going to be doing something like Kinect Sports, where you're playing football, you're not going to be doing it sitting on the sofa - that doesn't make much sense. But

certainly you don't want to be playing movies and have to stand up to fast forward."

Tsunoda works at one of the most connected companies on the planet, so you probably won't mistake him for a luddite. Still, as I get ready to leave, he says that a lot of technology has been bothering him recently. "It's somewhat disappointing to me to see all of the technological innovations that have been made recently, whether it's social media or mobile stuff. So much of the technology now is about dividing people up rather than bringing them together. You go to a party and everybody is standing around tapping at their phones. Or with social media, instead of just sharing experiences I've had with you, I post them up to the web somewhere and you download them from there and then put your experiences up. One of the reasons it's called Kinect is that we're really focused on developing genuine human to human interactions and being able to bring people together for shared memories and shared experiences."

It's clear Tsunoda's ambitions extend far beyond merely selling four, six, or ten million units. While we'll have to wait and see how it ultimately pans out, Kinect is full of wonderful possibilities. ♦



your shape





Is that Ron Perlman? We thought he was just narrating the intro



This guy certainly looks like he just walked out of the Atomic Wangler

Fallout: New Vegas

Heading off the beaten path

The camera drifts through a dilapidated VIP lounge as "Blue Moon" leaks through the speakers. Tables are unoccupied, covered in sheets of dust and a scattering of faded plastic chips. Pulling back, we're on the main floor of a casino, and it, too, has suffered from what appears to be decades of neglect. Blowing through the doors, we see that we were in the Lucky 38 casino, home of the reclusive Mr. House, de facto ruler of the New Vegas strip. Our tour continues, and we see the flames surrounding the Gomorrah sign, as well as the Tops and Vault 21 casinos. The inhabitants of the Strip mill around, robot and human alike, as a sniper perched on the iconic "Welcome to New Vegas" sign picks off an intruder unfortunate enough to be on the wrong side of the barbed-wire blockade.

The camera pulls us farther from New Vegas and into its arid surroundings. Some mobsters finish digging a grave in the desert as a familiar voice intones a statement equally familiar to survivors of the apocalypse: "War. War never changes."

After watching the opening sequence for *Fallout: New Vegas*, I was ready to dig into the game. After blowing through the intro, where

my hero was rescued from a desert grave and nursed back to health by the kindly Doc Mitchell, I hit the Mojave Wasteland. My newly minted gunslinger, Hank, was pretty strong, smart, and charismatic. He wasn't best in class at anything in particular, but I designed him to be handy enough for a demo.

In addition to his regular stats, I added a pair of optional traits. Kamikaze gave me more action points at the expense of damage mitigation, and I couldn't resist the allure of the Wild Wasteland trait. The description says it unleashes the most bizarre and silly elements from the wastelands, adding that it wasn't meant for serious types. *Fallout*'s known for those elements (whales in the desert, anyone?), so I was all about opening up the possibility of seeing more. With that all sorted out, I hit the door.

I hung around the town of Good Springs long enough to know that I wanted to leave. After helping Sunny Smiles with her gecko problem, I set off for new adventures. I found what I was looking for in the nearby town of Primm. I recognized the roller coaster from previous demos, but I didn't have the firepower to snipe anyone from above. As I made my way through the town's fence, a helpful New California Republic soldier



asked what I was up to. When I said I was going to Primm, he warned me that it was off limits. I didn't beef up my guns skills for nothing, so I disregarded his advice and moved ahead.

The town was dead, and I soon learned why. Primm's deputy had been kidnapped, and a roving gang of former convicts now ruled in his absence. That wouldn't do. I headed over to the Bison Steve Hotel to investigate.

The guy manning the front desk was more interested in ventilating my skull than offering hospitality, so I shot his head clean off. New Vegas' iron-sight aiming made combat a cinch, and after a few encounters I almost forgot that VATS existed. Once I'd mopped up a few more ex-cons and looted their remains, I repaired my 9mm pistol and rifle to near-original condition. I was worried for a while there, since battling geckos on the way to Primm had taken its toll on my weapons.

Eventually, I ended up in a ballroom dodging blasts of fire. Just for old times' sake I entered VATS and queued up four headshots with my newly acquired magnum handgun. It didn't take four shots.

After rescuing the deputy, I learned that he didn't want the job anymore. I suppose being kidnapped by an incinerator-equipped maniac would do that to a person. He offered a couple of suggestions, though, including a former sheriff or the NCR itself. Both sounded like decent options, so I headed toward the newly added waypoints on my compass.

Hank's time in the wasteland ended before he was able to patch up Primm's convict problem, but I suspect he'll be back in October. That's when I plan on resuming his adventures in the Mojave Wastelands. War hasn't changed, and neither has my enthusiasm for New Vegas.

» Jeff Cork

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» Style
1-Player Role-Playing

» Publisher
Bethesda Softworks

» Developer
Obsidian Entertainment

» Release
October 19



The bugs you kill in Vegas stay in Vegas



Dead Space 2

Screaming in a vacuum

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Action
(Online TBA)

» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
Visceral Games

» Release
January 25

Action scenes in films and video games often rely on pounding soundtracks and ear-shattering explosions in order to maintain intensity. *Dead Space 2* demonstrates that a less aggressive approach to sound design can be just as effective in establishing a riveting atmosphere. EA's survival horror sequel uses a muffled, ambient soundtrack for all the action that takes place inside a vacuum, ratcheting up the intensity without an orchestra pit. EA showed us the newest build of the game at Gamescom 2010, and we walked away from the demo trembling.

Dead Space 2 continues the adventures of Isaac Clarke as he hunts for the truth behind a mysterious marker at the root of a plague of alien necromorphs. This journey has led him to the Sprawl, a giant space station orbiting Saturn that faces a new necromorph outbreak. To signal for help against this new flood of foes in the Gamescom demo, Isaac has stepped into the cold of space to align a solar array. This puzzle takes place in zero gravity, so we were able to see Isaac's new suit thrusters, which allowed him to maneuver freely in space as he used telekinesis to align a few solar arrays. We also got to witness Isaac's new dodge mechanic in action; using a couple of focused thrusters, Isaac can now quickly dodge incoming ranged attacks.

As soon as all the solar arrays are aligned, the action kicks into overdrive with one of Visceral's big action moments – sequences intended to



When in a vacuum, Isaac's uneasy breathing is the most prominent sound you'll hear

release some of the tension associated with the horror experience. Isaac must reunite with the rest of his team, who are unfortunately on the other side of the Sprawl. Isaac's solution is to hook himself into some kind of ejector seat, effectively turning him into a human rocket. Once launched, this rocket seat shoots out into space just as the world behind Isaac implodes (for reasons that aren't totally clear).

Traveling through open space at hundreds of miles per hour, Isaac sees a minefield of floating debris between him and the Sprawl. He dodges all of the oncoming detritus, but at the last second, a chunk of metal the size of a city block floats across his path and he is forced to thread his body through a small opening in the center. Isaac immediately spins around and ignites his suit's thrusters as he crashes through the top of a nearby building before making a safe – albeit heavy – landing. Adrenaline fueling him, Isaac is now ready to face the perils hiding in the vent shafts and floorboards of the Sprawl.

We've seen how *Dead Space 2* captures the terror and gruesome deaths of its predecessor,

and we've seen how well it juxtaposes horror with big action moments. Now we just want to see how the series handles the multiplayer mode EA has been teasing since the game was announced. Regardless of how the online action turns out, we've already seen enough of the game to pray that it will land safely on its January 25 release date. » Ben Reeves



You may think this is just Isaac floating around, but it's actually the end of the game. Space is the final boss



Isaac has full maneuverability in zero gravity, so you won't just be hopping from surface to surface

Hard to Stomach

The original *Dead Space* was filled with dozens of gruesome ways for Isaac to die, and *Dead Space 2* promises to kick it up a notch. At Gamescom we got a look at one of Isaac's new foes, the puker, who killed Isaac in a particularly unpleasant fashion. As its name would suggest, the puker spits up powerful bile that dissolves anything it touches. This volatile substance even hurts other enemies who come in contact with it, so if Isaac can position smaller foes between him and the puker, he might be able to conserve some ammo. The puker has a long range snare attack, so Isaac will want to keep a safe distance from the monster. We saw one puker grab a hold of Isaac and vomit all over his face. As the bile boiled Isaac's face, our hero started convulsing, eventually ending up on all fours and puking his own guts onto the floor. If all of Isaac's deaths are this gruesome, getting a game over will be more disturbing than ever.





Singers can look forward to harmony vocals on a number of songs

Rock Band 3

An overwhelming breadth of content

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 to 7-Player Rhythm/
Music (7-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
MTV Games/
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Harmonix

» **Release**
October 26

As we inch closer to the release of Rock Band 3 it's becoming increasingly clear that this game features hundreds of hours of content. This month, we used some extended hands-on time with Harmonix's latest creation to dive into several new features that fundamentally change the genre.

First, the basics: Rock Band 3 is compatible with all those expensive music peripherals you already have sitting around the house, and your old song library. The small improvements to menu navigation make a huge difference to the experience, especially in party settings. Drum pad menu navigation can be disabled. Players can join and drop during songs and change difficulty mid-music. Band score and individual scores are now listed separately. Filters let you select which type of music you want to appear in your selectable song list, and you can rate songs to determine how often certain music shows up in random setlists. Taken together, these improvements help players customize the game the way they want to play it.

The more substantive changes surface in the career progression. Everything you do in the game now contributes to your progression, no matter the mode. Over 800 goals exist – you can shoot for them purposefully by looking at a list, or you can wait for them to trigger automatically

when you complete them in a song. The game still has a storyline following your band during its rise to stardom, but that plot is now modular and occurs after certain criteria are met. For instance, creating and naming your band triggers a cutscene about the band getting together and agonizing over its name.

The more involved (and expensive) new proposition delivers the most dramatic changes to gameplay. The Pro Mode requires one of the new instruments – the drum cymbal expansion, the new keyboard peripheral, or one of the two pro guitars. You'll need to shell out some extra money, but the rewards are substantial. Rock Band 3 features an incredibly advanced instrument tutorial system for every pro instrument that teaches you the basics of play in ways that transfer to the actual instrument. In other words, you could learn how to play the guitar, drums, and keyboard by completing the training sections. All of the songs in Rock Band 3, and many of the downloadable tracks moving forward, will include pro instrument charts, which represent a new challenge for music game aficionados.

We've had over five years to perfect our Guitar Hero and Rock Band skills, and after several hours with the game, we can attest to the higher difficulty the pro instruments present. The pro guitar and bass parts, in particular, are challenging even on the lower difficulty settings. For many players, moving up to Expert could involve months of practice and improvement.

Rock Band 3 aims to answer fans' calls for innovation in the increasingly reiterative cycle of music products. What remains to be seen is whether gamers are willing to shell out the cash required to take that next step. » **Matt Miller**

The Latest Songs

2000s

- HIM, "Killing Loneliness"
- Ida Maria, "Oh My God"
- Juanes, "Me Enamora"
- Mana, "Oye Me Amor"
- Metric, "Combat Baby"
- Phoenix, "Lasso"
- Poni Hoax, "Antibodies"
- Rilo Kiley, "Portions for Foxes"
- Slipknot, "Before I Forget"
- Them Crooked Vultures, "Dead End Friends"
- The Vines, "Get Free"
- The White Stripes, "The Hardest Button to Button"
- Tokio Hotel, "Humanoid"

1990s

- Filter, "Hey Man, Nice Shot"
- Jane's Addiction, "Been Caught Stealing"
- Marilyn Manson, "The Beautiful People"
- Smash Mouth, "Walkin' on the Sun"
- Spacoch, "In the Meantime"
- Stone Temple Pilots, "Push"
- Ramstein, "Du Hast" (in German)

1980s

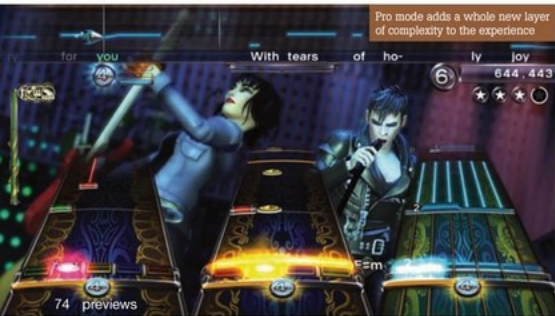
- The Cure, "Just Like Heaven"
- Def Leppard, "Foolin'"
- Dio, "Rainbow in the Dark"
- Huey Lewis and the News, "The Power of Love"
- INXS, "Need You Tonight"
- Joan Jett, "I Love Rock and Roll"
- Night Ranger, "Sister Christian"
- Ozzy Osbourne, "Crazy Train"
- Roxette, "The Look"
- Tears For Fears, "Everybody Wants To Rule The World"
- Whitesnake, "Here I Go Again"

1970s

- The B-52s, "Rock Lobster"
- Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Get Up, Stand Up"
- Foreigner, "Cold As Ice"
- Queen, "Bohemian Rhapsody"
- War, "Low Rider"

1960s

- Jimi Hendrix, "Crosstown Traffic"
- The Doors, "Break On Through"



Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One

Insomniac brings four-player arcade-style co-op to the Ratchet universe

Ratchet, Clank, Qwark, and Dr. Nefarious are forming an unholy alliance for the benefit of PlayStation fans everywhere. Plot details are scarce as to why these guys would team up, but the latest entry in the Ratchet & Clank franchise is turning in a very different direction. Up to four players can join up throughout the entire game. Players can drop in and out at any time, and any combination of online and offline players can team up.

All 4 One plays like a hybrid of Gauntlet, LEGO Star Wars, and, of course, Ratchet & Clank. Unlike past Ratchet games, all the characters have the same basic skill sets. Each has a grappling hook, standard blaster, and a brand new weapon sure to be a hit with fans.

Ratchet is known for its amazing arsenals, and the first new weapon on display at the game's debut is a souped up vacuum that can suck up objects and shoot them off in an arc. You can launch objects like explosive mines at enemies with the vacuum, or suck up a foe and launch him back at one of his friends. You can also use this on your so-called friends to launch them off

the edge of the nearest cliff. If you feel like working together, you can also shoot friends up to normally inaccessible high ledges.

Insomniac encourages this mix of working together and stabbing each other in the back. Players will have to fight for rare items, but also work together to get past certain enemies and obstacles. As long as at least one character is alive, everyone can be resurrected. Otherwise, it's back to the checkpoint, so take it easy on the team kills.

In an early demo, we saw all four characters in action. After shooting a few enemies, they all attach their electrified grappling lines to a flying robot and form a long four-man string. Everyone swings back and forth to create enough momentum to detach and jump to the next ledge. When they get to a locked door, one player shoots a creature called a Voltergeist into a slot on the wall and another player electrifies a switch panel. Before long, the door creaks wide open.

Up ahead, several sentry turrets scan the area with blue lights and a force field protects them from frontal shots. The only solution is to launch

a friend behind the turret to shoot at its weak spot. Next, a large robot commander sends them into a massive incinerator. They all must balance on a moving platform or they'll fall to a flaming death. After hopping to safety, they take a ride on a mild-mannered elevator that suddenly breaks apart and sends the team plummeting down the shaft. Several fans power on intermittently, and the team must work together to follow where the wind blows or everyone dies.

The final section of the demo puts the team against a large robotic miniboss. He sweeps a red laser across the area, forcing everyone to hop over it like a jump rope. Ratchet vacuums Clank and shoots him up to a switch. With the correct timing, Clank slams down on the switch and disables the boss's shield. The team destroys him with a wave of blaster fire and explosive mines, and a huge payload of bolts shoots out to all the players. What things you can buy with this currency is still a mystery, but we can't wait to find out more over the next year.

» Bryan Vore

» Platform
PlayStation 3

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

» Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» Developer
Insomniac Games

» Release
Fall 2011



Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine

Walk a kilometer in this powered armor



Most people don't know that Space Marines were one of J.R.R. Tolkien's original races in Middle-earth

Where Did the RPG Go?

When it was first shown in trailer form at E3 in 2009, Space Marine had a greater focus on Diablo-like loot acquisition and character progression. Over the next year of development, Relic experimented with many different prototypes and came to the conclusion that a straight action game fit the team's vision for Space Marine better. The RPG stuff just put another layer of abstraction between players and the core fantasy of stepping into a Space Marine's armor and laying waste to the enemies of the Imperium. The last vestige of that old design is the slow upgrading of weapons as you use them, but that's a minor diversion – almost more of a nod to Space Marine's origins than a real addition to the game.

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

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

» **Publisher**
THQ

» **Developer**
Relic Entertainment

» **Release**
TBA

The Warhammer universe has never been as big a deal here as it is in Europe, but Relic Entertainment has built a solid U.S. following with its excellent real-time strategy offerings in the Dawn of War series. Now, the Vancouver-based studio is taking the IP in a more violent and hands-on direction with this third-person shooter. The build Relic recently demoed for us looked promising, but it's not clear yet just how Space Marine is going to get past its horribly generic name and carve its own niche in a densely packed genre.

Space Marines in Warhammer 40,000 are the perfect expression of mankind's warlike ways. Melding generations of genetic modification and eugenics with influences from the greatest warrior traditions in human history, Space Marines are hulking juggernauts who gladly charge into 1,000:1 odds with rightful expectations of emerging victorious. Relic wants this game to capture that sense of power and violence in a way that tabletop miniatures or real-time strategy never could.

We watched the as-yet-unnamed protagonist

lead his squad of blue-armored Ultramarines in battle on a besieged Forge World. In this case, "lead" meant "blow up everything in his path, and occasionally watch a buddy chainsword an Ork in half." Space Marine isn't about taking cover and devising a brilliant tactical approach to an impossible situation. It's about the ground shaking beneath your armored boots as you crash through a crumbling, once-ornate pillar. It's about turning enemies into fountains of blood as your bolter shreds the chunks of concrete they're hiding behind, tears through their pitiful armor, and liquifies the tender flesh beneath. It's about evaporating a squad of Orks with a plasma grenade before pulping their leader with a crushing blow from your thunder hammer. If nothing else, the slice of gameplay we saw imparted the unstoppable badassery of the Ultramarines.

Relic intends the seamless transition between ranged and melee combat to be Space Marine's hallmark. A single face button strikes out with your melee weapon. Simple contextual combos and finishing moves drive the presentation. Similarly streamlined, one-button timing-based

evasions and counterattacks add depth to close-quarters engagements. Your initial chainsword is a mighty implement of futuristic destruction, and never having to explicitly switch to the weapon means it's as simple as pressing a single button to decapitate an Ork who gets too close.

The single-player campaign is your typical sci-fi adventure. Boss fights, pensive atmospheric sequences, and as much variety as Relic can come up with in general encounters comprise the linear path players take to their ultimate destination. The studio estimates players will take eight to twelve hours to complete the campaign, and promises to supplement that with significant cooperative and multiplayer offerings – which it declined to comment on just yet.

With Relic's pedigree, Space Marine should be nothing less than competent and fun. Whether it has the chops to break out of being just another sci-fi action shooter and become something special is another question entirely. However, Relic has done enough in the last decade (Homeworld, Dawn of War, Company of Heroes) to earn a little leeway. » **Adam Bissener**





Crysis 2

Online suits this shooter well

I've always thought that a bunch of dudes running around beating each other up with nano-suit-augmented powers could be awesome. Who didn't? I don't care that it took Crytek buying up the remains of a defunct studio (Free Radical, now Crytek UK) to do it. I'm ecstatic that Crysis 2 multiplayer is shaping up to be what I always wanted.

Crysis 2's approach to using the nanosuit in competitive play is brilliant. Much of the suit's power lies in mobility. Super speed, soaring jumps, and acrobatic takeout slides are just a few of the ways that Crysis 2's combatants set themselves apart. This was just as true in the original Crysis, but you had to press a button to pull up the power menu, select a power, then leave the menu and do whatever it was you were trying to do while a bunch of dudes used you for target practice. Now, all of those moves are controlled within the context of movement itself.

On an Xbox 360 controller, tapping the A button does a regular jump, while holding it for a few seconds charges up a super-leap. Holding A as you come up to a ledge activates a brief burst of super-strength to lift your body up onto the platform above. The bumpers activate what used to be suit modes, with LB making you briefly slower and more resistant to damage, and RB cloaking you for a few seconds and allowing for stealthy one-hit melee kills.

It plays as intuitively as it sounds. Within a few deaths of picking up the controller, I was flinging myself pell-mell across NYC's ruined landscape in search of a better tactical position. Crytek UK has crafted tight, intimate levels that take full advantage of the nanosuit's mobility. Both maps available at Gamescom – one an odd juxtaposition of a modern office building crashed into a decrepit apartment tenement, the other an interconnected set of rooftop gardens – are vertically diverse. It's hard to get a great read on them from a bare few rounds of play, but new strategies were springing to mind in just 10 minutes of hectic action.

Sure, it's more of the standard online shooting that the industry has been iterating on since

Quake rather than some crazy departure from multiplayer norms like Resistance 2 or M.A.G. This type of gameplay is the well-loved baseline for a reason, though, and the nanosuit powers and verticality of the levels set Crysis 2 far enough apart to offer players new experiences within that framework.

Persistent online character progression is a genre standard now, and Crysis 2 doesn't disappoint there either. Crytek UK freely admits that its system is mechanically similar to its competition's. The devs feel that the difference comes in how the perks tie back into the nanosuit and the game's sci-fi setting. More than 20

suit upgrades, with three levels apiece, form the backbone of the progression. The experience you accumulate during play is broken down into subcategories like stealth and explosives, which they hope will channel players into the types of upgrades that enhance the play styles they enjoy most.

Solid guns-and-grenades core gameplay and a progression system that looks as deep as any Call of Duty form a great spine for Crytek UK to build on, and so far the former Free Radicals seem to be taking full advantage of that. Crysis 2 was the best multiplayer shooter at Gamescom, without question. » Adam Biessener

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

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

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Crytek

» **Release**
March 22





Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom

An unlikely duo battle the darkness together

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Namco Bandai Games

» **Developer**
Game Republic

» **Release**
November 30

After freeing the Majin from its castle prison, the thief Tupeu is disappointed. This towering creature was supposed to be his homeland's savior, helping to eradicate an encroaching darkness. Instead, it is childlike and clumsy. The beast certainly looks imposing, with a massive frame and powerful arms, so Tupeu hopes for the best and heads back to his threatened forest.

While *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom* may kick off with feelings of disappointment, producer Daisuke Uchiyama says their bond will grow. "This Majin will become an important part of the experience – not only to the main character, but to the user himself."

After playing the game for a while, it was easy to see how this works. Tupeu is quick and weak, and his melee attacks do little damage compared with his gigantic friend. Using the right trigger in conjunction with face buttons allows you to direct the Majin in battle or solve puzzles – or sometimes both simultaneously. The Majin can stun opponents with his powerful physical



or elemental-based attacks, letting Tupeu finish them off with his blade or team attacks.

In one encounter with a mid-level boss, I entered a large room from an elevated path. I directed the Majin to attack, and I dove in after-

ward. We were quickly overtaken and both died within a few seconds. On my second attempt, I looked around a bit more before initiating the battle. There, I noticed a weakened wall above the larger room. I commanded the Majin to lean against it and wait for my order. Dropping down, I lured the group of dark warriors toward the trap. Once they were in position, I gave the Majin the signal, and he leaned into the wall, knocking it down and crushing our foes. From there, we made short work of the few who survived.

Afterward, Tupeu was glazed in the same mucky goo that covered his enemies. The Majin used the break in the action to inhale and absorb the darkness, restoring Tupeu's health. Even after spending a few minutes with my new earthen friend, it was easy to see that Uchiyama is well on his way to achieving his goal of creating a character that players care about. I couldn't have imagined a better companion against the darkness. » **Jeff Cork**

The third time's the charm

The Majin you see in the game now wasn't the character's first design. Producer Daisuke Uchiyama says the first attempt was more cuddly, covered in fluffy fur. His team took the design to students in San Francisco, who made their opinions clear. "Basically, they ripped the crap out of it," he says. The second iteration was more menacing, but Uchiyama and his team found that players had a difficult time relating to such a scary figure. After eight months of work, they finally came upon the Majin's current design. As he grows more powerful, the foliage on the Majin's back will become more robust, sprouting trees and filling in like a lion's mane.



"Together we shall slay the darkness and – hey look, a bird!"

Gran Turismo 5

Sony's B-side and other rarities

The popular Autostrada Nazionale di Monza circuit is appearing in GT 5

In 2003, Polyphony Digital released Gran Turismo A-Spec, which quickly sold millions and was heralded as one of the best racing simulators of all time. Polyphony had planned on releasing a second title called B-Spec shortly thereafter, but like all great plans, this one changed along the way. Over seven years later, the car crazy studio finally feels like it is ready to release B-Spec as part of Gran Turismo 5.

Fans are already familiar with the popular A-Spec mode; players race through a series of events, buying new cars and tuning old ones until their garage looks like a mini car dealership. In Gran Turismo 5, A-Spec races cover everything from NASCAR to go-karts, and Polyphony has made several tweaks to its physics and geometry systems to deal with this wild range of race types. If you think some of the game's super cars don't handle like this in real life, it's because you've never driven them.



Polyphony planned to save go-karts for Gran Turismo 6, but the info leaked out early so the team decided to include the feature in GT 5

B-Spec, on the other hand, functions more like an RPG for racing team managers. While a similar mode was included in GT 4, Polyphony didn't feel that it stood on equal footing with A-Spec. It's taken until Gran Turismo 5 for the team to realize its vision for this unique racing mode. In B-Spec, players still buy and tweak cars, but AI drivers handle all the racing. The manager's job

is to nurture a winning environment. During races the manager tracks his or her driver's mood as well as their car's statistics. Keeping these statistics in mind, a manager issues commands to the driver, telling him or her to speed up, overtake a driver, or come in for a pit stop. Each AI driver has a unique personality and responds to these commands differently based on their mood and personality. If a manager rides a driver too hard or has a novice behind the wheel, their commands could go unheeded.

It may have taken nearly 10 years, but Polyphony finally feels that B-Spec's racing management sim is on par with the company's much-lauded racing simulator. It will be interesting to see how fans of the series embrace this less traditional approach to a racing game. » Ben Reeves

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
- » **Style**
1-Player Racing (16-player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Sony Computer Entertainment
- » **Developer**
Polyphony Digital
- » **Release**
November 2

Unnatural selection in GT's course maker

Polyphony calls its course creation feature a course maker and not a course editor for a reason; it doesn't function like a normal course editor. Players start the process by picking a theme, like "Germany at night" or "Toscana in the early morning." Several sliding scales allow players to adjust course parameters such as track length, weather, time of day, number of race sections, sharpness of the corners, degree of topography, bank of angles, and frequency of curves. Once you set all these parameters, the game generates the course. Players can race these courses online or share them with their friends. It will be interesting to see if players latch onto this kind of map making like they would a more hands-on course editor where you lay the tracks yourself.

Course Maker



Car Crazy

Not to be outdone, the team at Polyphony Digital keeps adding more cars to Gran Turismo's ridiculous roster of nearly 1,000. Here are a few new entries the company announced at this year's Gamescom.

2010 Subaru Impreza WRX STI

2009 Pagani Zonda R

2008 Lexus IS-F Racing Concept

1967 Ferrari 330 P4

1967 Ford Mark IV

1967 Jaguar XJ13

1967 Lamborghini Miura P400 Bertone Prototype

Diablo III

Blizzard's new crafting system is a loot lover's dream

- » **Platform**
PC
- » **Style**
1-Player Action/RPG
(Multiplayer TBA)
- » **Publisher**
Blizzard
Entertainment
- » **Developer**
Blizzard
Entertainment
- » **Release**
TBA

Blizzard pulled back the curtain on Diablo III's crafting at Gamescom 2010 in Germany. By offloading crafting onto followers, the artisan system allows players to create powerful magical items without making them hang around in town wasting time better spent killing monsters.

Three artisans will join you after you complete certain quests within the greater storyline. They each have names and backstories of their own, but for now we know them only by their trades. All three have basic vendor functionality, allowing you to buy and sell items at your camp rather than shopkeepers in town. Beyond that, their capabilities vary greatly.

The blacksmith unsurprisingly focuses on equipment supporting close combat. Heavy armor, swords, axes, and the like can all be found with him. He can also repair damaged equipment and add sockets to items, allowing you to place an additional stat-boosting gem into an existing item.

The jeweller focuses on gems. He can combine lower-grade gems into more powerful versions, and pop a previously socketed gem out of an item (preserving both the gem and the item in the process).

The mystic can identify items (though he'll never replace Deckard Cain in our hearts), add a chosen affix to an already magical item (allowing you to focus on, say, critical hit chance if that's your thing), and craft magical totems like wands.

Though different character types will likely focus on one or the other of the artisans, game director Jay Wilson notes that "every artisan should do something for every class." Cloth-wearing casters can still make use of an extra socket on their chestpiece, even if the blacksmith's axecrafting doesn't do much for them.

All three artisans can specialize along various paths, like shield smithing and wand creation. Unlike most RPGs, however, these specializations aren't exclusive. Just because you've had your blacksmith specialize in armorcrafting doesn't mean he can't also start down the swordsmith's path. The only limiting factor is the amount of materials you spend on an artisan's development. If you want to max out a character's artisans with every specialty in the game, you can – if you grind long enough.

Recipes are obtained as crafters level, but they can also be found as drops from monsters and chests in the world. No doubt the rarest recipes will be nearly as hard to acquire as the best equipment itself, if not more so. If Blizzard is smart about it, rare recipes will be an integral part of the Diablo III online economy.

To fund these powerful abilities, you'll have to collect materials by breaking down existing items. The good news is that you can do it in the

field, clearing space in your inventory by reducing bulky swag to easily stackable components. The bad news is that this has allowed Blizzard to remove town portals from the game entirely.

Wilson contends that allowing players to create portals to the safety of a town at will leads to bad design and bad gameplay. Players end up using them as buffers; fight near an open portal and you're always just a click from perfect safety. The point is certainly valid, but I'm going to miss the convenience. Wilson says that waypoints (which work similarly to those in Diablo II) will be much more frequent in an attempt to alleviate that somewhat, but it won't be the same.

Even if I'll miss that old town portal "bwong-ong" I've heard thousands of times, I'm on board the Diablo III train. Judging by the cheers, excited murmurs, and palpable enthusiasm from the European crowd at Gamescom, I'm not the only one. Like everyone else, I just wish they'd let me play it already.

Blizzard still won't commit to shipping it any sooner than "when it's done," but previous indications have put it in fiscal year 2011 (March 2011 through March 2012), and nothing I've seen contradicts that. And no, there's no news about a console release yet. » **Adam Bessiener**



The new ability to distill useless loot into crafting materials on the field will reduce trips to town



Assault Horizon puts players behind the controls of helicopters for the first time

Ace Combat Assault Horizon

Namco Bandai touts Assault Horizon as a "rebirth" for the series

After a three-year hiatus in which the series took to the skies on portable platforms, Namco Bandai recently announced Ace Combat's return to consoles. Ace Combat Assault Horizon is in development for both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, returning to Sony's console after the 360-exclusive Fires of Liberation.

Project Aces is being intentionally tight-lipped about Assault Horizon, but the first official trailer clued us in on a new direction for the franchise. The footage indicates that the title is a complete reboot for the series, referring to it as a "game changer" and "rebirth."

We'd be hard pressed to disagree, even with the meager glimpse of the game that is currently

available. The trailer most notably highlighted an evolution of combat from something calculated and mechanical to a decidedly more organic and personal approach. Dogfights unfold in the midst of urban areas, with pilots narrowly avoiding skyscrapers as bullets spray the lofty structures. Miami is the battleground in this particular trailer, meaning we'll be seeing more real-world locations. PSP's Joint Assault broke the series' tradition of fictional settings, and Assault Horizon looks to follow suit. Signs also indicate that the player will take to the skies as a member of the United States Air Force.

The dogfight draws to an end in an explosion of fuel and debris, momentarily lighting the sky on fire as tendrils of oil spider through the air.

This brief exchange highlights the more intimate direction Project Aces is taking the series, with combat so close that fuel rains down on your aircraft upon impact. After several more fiery takedowns, our pilot's luck runs out and we are jarringly ejected from the cockpit. A safe landing appears to be too much to ask for, as an enemy craft approaches from the periphery.

Other scenarios highlighted include air-to-ground combat from a helicopter, and a pilot taking on a fleet of ships out at sea.

Perhaps intimate action and a return to reality is exactly what Assault Horizon needs to reinvigorate the Ace Combat franchise.

» **Meagan VanBurklee**

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)
- » **Publisher**
Namco Bandai
- » **Developer**
Project Aces
- » **Release**
2011

The Sims Medieval

EA goes medieval on the Sims

When The Sims first launched in 2000 it appealed to hardcore and casual gamers alike, quickly launching the series onto PC bestseller lists worldwide. Since its initial release, numerous expansion packs and sequels took these characters from the cookie cutter homes of suburbia to the big city. Now The Sims are going back in time in a brand-new entry that focuses on quest-based gameplay and the characters that inhabit the kingdom.

In The Sims Medieval, players craft unique stories for their characters in the iconic Middle Ages setting. A physician, for instance, is responsible for curing the ill by dropping a few leeches on the afflicted sim, draining blood, and administering medicine. Should the physician neglect his or her responsibilities, they will be forced to pay a fine,

In a medieval setting, your sadistic treatment of Sims is almost justified



get sent to the stocks for a face full of tomatoes, or be escorted to the "Pit of Judgement" for execution. To avoid a painful ending, it's imperative for each sim to complete his or her individual quests. The game offers options for tackling each one.

In one quest during a hands-off demo, the king became ill after being poisoned in a sword fight. The physician can choose to either end his life or rescue him. Having taken the virtuous route, the physician heads over to the palace, checks the king's condition, and returns to her clinic to research a cure. She discovers a serum called Angel Balm is needed to cure poison. Once she collects all the necessary items from her healing garden, she returns to her clinic to mash the ingredients together at her crafting table. The medical practitioner also has the option to call on the kingdom's merchant for healing items, or summon the town priest to bless the king back to health for additional aid. She heads over to her messenger post (equivalent

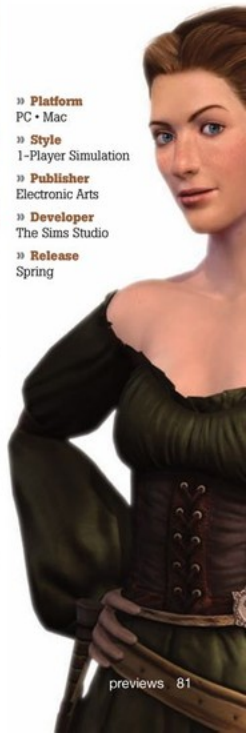


to the phone system in modern-day Sim titles) and calls upon the priest via carrier pigeon. With all tasks in place, it's time to cure the king.

Once quests are successfully completed, the sim gains experience and the player earns kingdom points to unlock more Sims from a wide range of professions that will open up even more quest opportunities. Play as a knight, monarch, scribe, priest, aristocrat, physician, and more with each role affecting quest types. While the physician spends her time healing, the priest provides sermons at his church and with more experience will reach the ultimate goal of increasing the church's popularity. The opportunities are endless.

For an early build, The Sims Medieval looks impressive. Building interiors and exteriors all have a unique, handcrafted feel, and the finely detailed character models sport the requisite old school garb. We look forward to getting more details as The Sims Medieval moves further along in development. » **Annette Gonzalez**

- » **Platform**
PC • Mac
- » **Style**
1-Player Simulation
- » **Publisher**
Electronic Arts
- » **Developer**
The Sims Studio
- » **Release**
Spring



The Last Story

The RPG master reunites with Nintendo



Apparently, the hairstylists in *The Last Story* only know the "business in front, party in back" look. That one's always a winner!



- » Platform
Wii
- » Style
1-Player Role-Playing
Game
- » Publisher
Nintendo
- » Developer
Mistwalker
- » Release
TBA

Fans of the role-playing genre are familiar with the name Final Fantasy, but they may not know the man who started the phenomenon. Hironobu Sakaguchi created the famous series, and was involved in every entry through Final Fantasy IX. After leaving Square Enix, Sakaguchi founded a new development studio called Mistwalker, which designed the excellent 360 RPGs *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey*. When Sakaguchi is involved in a new project, gamers should pay attention.

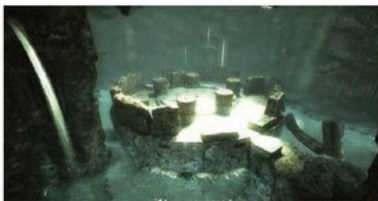
The latest title from Sakaguchi and Mistwalker is a Wii exclusive entitled *The Last Story*. The game marks the first time Sakaguchi is directing (as opposed to producing) a game since Final

Fantasy V. Set in a traditional fantasy world, the plot of *The Last Story* follows two main heroes living on Furi Island. One is a mercenary named Elza, and he eventually meets an aristocratic woman named Kanan, along with a crew of additional party members. Their journey explores themes ranging from political upheaval to human emotion, but Mistwalker and Nintendo are keeping the specifics of the adventure under wraps for the moment.

On the combat front, *The Last Story* is different from the traditional turn-based structure that made Sakaguchi's early titles successful. The battle system is real-time, but appears to pause to accommodate target selection for spells

and abilities. In the game's trailer, the fights run smoothly as multiple enemies circle the heroes, and cool effects and environmental destruction are abundant. A cover system allows players to hide from enemies mid-battle, waiting for the right opportunity to jump out and catch the foe unaware.

Nintendo plans to have *The Last Story* hit before the end of the year in Japan, but the game hasn't been confirmed for a North American release yet. However, with a renowned developer like Sakaguchi at the helm, it's a safe bet that *The Last Story* will hit our shores sometime in 2011. » Joe Juba



A rag-tag group of adventurers meeting in a tavern? Okay, not everything about this game is innovative



Combat integrates real-time and menu-based elements

Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light

Square Enix goes back to the good old days

Final Fantasy titles get more complex with each new installment, with sweeping storylines and involved mechanics. Most fans of the franchise prefer this kind of evolution, but some yearn for the days when things were simpler. With *The 4 Heroes of Light*, Final Fantasy goes back to its roots with an adventure inspired by the series' early entries.

Developed by Matrix Software (the same studio who made the DS remakes of *FF III* and *IV*), *The 4 Heroes of Light* is a new RPG with an old-school vibe. The tale begins like many others; a boy wakes up on his 14th birthday

and must visit his king in order to be considered an adult. The premise sounds clichéd, but the game isn't as narrative-driven as other entries. I played the first few hours, and the story serves mainly as an excuse to send players into various towns, caves, and castles. The entertainment isn't delivered through cutscenes; instead, the thrills come from exploring, killing monsters, and leveling up.

The story isn't the only simplification — the combat system is also straightforward. Instead of having to manage magic points, all of your skills and spells draw from a single reservoir of action

points. You can build up a reserve for future turns by boosting, and other events in battle can cause you to randomly regenerate AP as well. The system requires players to be conscious of the flow of battle, selecting the best moments to build power to launch a full-on assault.

What you can do with the action points you accrue each round depends on the crowns your characters are wearing. The equivalent of a job system, different crowns bestow bonuses, penalties, and special abilities. For instance, the classic black mage is one of the early options, but other options, like merchant and dancer, open up as the game progresses. I counted space for 28 total crowns (each with several upgrades), so you'll have plenty of different classes with which to experiment and form your ideal party.

If you get tired of grinding through the classes solo, you can team up with up to three other players in local co-op. The additional players won't be able to make any story progress in this mode, but you all earn points for rewards that carry over like powerful weapons and helpful items.

With an accessible structure and a simple story, *The 4 Heroes of Light* is built to simultaneously evoke nostalgia and entice newcomers. We'll have a full review next month, so stay tuned to see if this is the right handheld Final Fantasy for you. » **Joe Juba**

- » Platform
Nintendo DS
- » Style
1-Player Role-Playing
(4-Player Local)
- » Publisher
Square Enix
- » Developer
Square Enix/
Matrix Software
- » Release
October 5



Def Jam Rapstar

Think you can flow with the finest?

Konami's upcoming rap karaoke title *Def Jam Rapstar* lets hip-hop up-and-comers put their rhyme skills to the test. You can rap along to the game's 45 licensed tracks from the likes of Lil Wayne, Kanye West, Nas, A Tribe Called Quest, LL Cool J, and more, or freestyle over beats from producers such as Danja or Nitti Beats.

Def Jam Rapstar offers three ways to play. Party mode lets you battle with friends or collaborate in a duet in tracks such as Kanye West's "Goldigger," where one player follows Kanye's flow while the other assumes the role of Jaime Foxx and sings along to the chorus. In Career mode you can perform licensed tracks to work your way toward superstardom. Top perfor-

mances will earn microphones, in-game currency that unlocks new tracks, backgrounds, and effects that can be used in the rest of the game.

To earn maximum mics and street cred, *Def Jam Rapstar* judges your performance based on lyrics, timing, and pitch. The game determines points by syllable and vocal nuances, making auto tune an even bigger pain than it already is. After spending some time with the game, I found it is almost essential to have at least some familiarity with the song chosen, otherwise you might trip over a few lyrics. Nothing a few run-throughs with a given track can't fix. This game was designed for fans of hip-hop, so anyone with an interest in the genre and a love for rhythm games can take a few flubs and pick up the rest of the

track no problem. The show must go on, right?

Freestyle mode introduces the game's online community component, where players with proper lyrical savvy can record their performances using a system-specific camera. Videos can then be edited with visual effects, color palettes, and filters. Once you're done crafting your video, upload it to *Def Jam's* community site for review by your fellow peers. With *Def Jam's* involvement, who knows, maybe you'll get discovered.

You won't have to wait long before picking up the mic, as *Def Jam Rapstar* hits retail in early October. » **Annette Gonzalez**

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » Style
1 or 2-Player Rhythm/
Music
- » Publisher
Konami
- » Developer
4mm Games
- » Release
October 5



reviews

gameinformer **GAME OF THE MONTH**



96

StarCraft II

gameinformer **GAME OF THE MONTH**

92 Halo: Reach

Bungie's last hurrah with the Halo franchise goes out with a bang, taking us back to the start of the story and introducing a new team of heroes who find themselves in the midst of a hopeless conflict. Upping the ante with massive ground battles and space combat, Reach's campaign delivers thrill after thrill. The customizable competitive multiplayer is equally bombastic. Bungie proves that beginning the fight can be just as satisfying as finishing it.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

AWARDS

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



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Old Spice

"GREATEST SMELL IN THE NFL"



NHL 11

A star player starts to show some flaws

9

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Integrate a real-time physics engine into NHL's time-tested gameplay

» **Graphics**

The increased variety of animations for on-ice collisions is a welcome change

» **Sound**

Bill Clement and Gary Thorne are still great announcers, but the dialogue is starting to show its age, and EA needs to integrate more contextual commentary

» **Playability**

The checking options and quick dekes add more tools to an already versatile control scheme

» **Entertainment**

The on-ice action is still solid, but Be A GM mode suffers from poor CPU logic and Be A Pro mode doesn't offer much in the way of innovation

» **Replay Value**
High

Second Opinion 8.75

NHL 11 pits brains versus brawn, and it's brawn that wins. But it's not just about getting cross-checked in the face — the game's physicality offers hits of all sizes, whether you're forechecking, clogging the neutral zone, or playing defense. The new physics engine also allows the puck to move more realistically when not on players' sticks. However, the game could be smarter. AI players don't play with enough personality, they get stuck in routines, and there aren't enough garbage goals. Be A GM mode should give you GM tasks that are tailored for your club, trades and trade feedback from AI GMs that make sense, and not let some of the good players sit in free agency. Some of these were problems last year too (like how Be A Pro mode feels the same game in and game out), but at least I can happily spend time in the addictive Ultimate Team mode. NHL 11 is fun from one end of the ice to the other, but with more work it could be the complete package. — **Matthew Kato**



Scoring is still tight, so blocking the goaltender's vision is important if you want to put the puck in the net



Style 1 to 6-Player Sports (PS3), 1 to 4-Player (Xbox 360) (12-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Canada Release September 7 ESRB E10+

In the NHL's current salary cap era, building a Cup contender requires more diligence than simply poaching big-ticket free agents in the offseason and drafting a blue chip blue liner. Money is tight, so savvy general managers must make shrewd draft day selections, toy with restricted free agency, buy out overpaid players on the tail end of their careers, and know the right time to call up a young prospect. Past NHL games only captured the basics of the team building, but with the addition of the CHL license and a new free agency system that accounts for unrestricted and restricted players, NHL 11's Be A GM mode comes closer to mimicking the real league than ever before.

With most of the amateur league players now in the game, Be A GM gives you control over the fate of all the prospects in your farm system. Though the game lacks NCAA and KHL players, most every other prospect is right where he's supposed to be. NHL teams draft players at a young age, so only the top draft picks land on NHL rosters out of the gate. But through several years of simming seasons I saw both first round picks and late round gems blossom into pro stars.

Managing the farm system makes for a fun offseason, but your peers could use some advice. Though the GMs don't swap star players with abandon anymore, they sometimes let highly touted first rounders like Alexander Burmistrov escape into free agency, bury vets like Chris Drury in the minors, and send mixed signals during trades. One team proposed a trade but then rejected it when I agreed to the terms. Another rejected a fair trade for the obtuse reason of having an "athletic surplus." The new 10-player swaps further demonstrate the broken trade logic guiding CPU GMs; one team asked for both of my NHL goalies for a trio of fourth-line

caliber defenders and a throwaway pick. Sure buddy, where do I sign?

No sports game has innovated more on the gameplay front this generation than NHL, and this steady progress continues with the new physics-based animation system. Checks now look different depending on whether your defender is in position for a crushing hit or only able to chip a puck carrier as he skates by. The introduction of broken sticks and a new face-off system also helps NHL 11 improve its game, and EA Canada has tweaked the AI to cut off the back door goal exploit and vary the angles goalies take. Scoring is loosened a bit, particularly in the slot, but most games are still low scoring affairs on higher difficulties.

The game is also starting to show signs of aging. As with the past few NHL games, it's easy to dictate the pace of the game, keep control of the puck, and limit the number of scoring chances for your AI opponent. That said, the games are still tight because opponents shoot an uncharacteristically high percentage. Your AI-controlled teammates don't demonstrate the same nose for the net during odd man rushes, as they frequently stop driving to the net. The goalies don't track the puck well once it's been deflected, either swinging wildly to knock the puck away or not noticing that it's sitting right on their shoulder. In some circumstances the line change function still fails, leaving five tired players on the ice. The most notable criticism is the lack of player personality on the ice. Notorious hitters like Cal Clutterbuck rarely finish their checks, and star players like Alexander Ovechkin don't play markedly different from any other forward. Outside of a short stint on a CHL team during the Memorial Cup at the beginning of your career, there isn't much new to the Be A Pro mode either.

If you're an EASHL player, the biggest

improvement over past years is the option to practice with your club. Rather than risk your spot in the standings to try out a new player or implement a new strategy, you can now do it within the safety of your own rink. EA also cleaned up the interface to make it easier to interact with your club and find games.

In what's quickly become a rite of passage for EA Sports games, NHL 11 includes the Ultimate Team card-based game mode made popular by Madden and FIFA. Rather than simply recycle the idea, the NHL devs are building another competitive level onto the game with the Ultimate Hockey League. While it still uses the familiar card pack system that allows you to purchase new player cards by playing with your team or paying for them, EA Canada has created a monthly league governed by a salary cap to keep big spenders from ruining the league balance. As you play games and earn pucks (the game's currency) you can purchase new packs to find new players for your roster, train your top prospects, or extend the contracts of your nucleus. Though it's technically possible to compete in the UHL without spending money, putting your team on solid footing will be difficult, as the cheaper packs rarely award you with any solid NHL players or training cards, and contract cards don't come frequently enough to help you keep your best players on the ice.

Like a star player at the apex of his career, NHL 11 still shines on the ice. New innovations like the real-time physics engine and UHL show EA Canada still has some room to grow, but as age creeps up on the stalwart franchise and its prior innovations feel commonplace, some of its weaknesses are starting to appear more evident. — **Matt Bertz**

Read an extended review of NHL 11 at gameinformer.com/mag

Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

Beenox helps Spider-Man crawl back to the top



Any superhero can beat up thugs, but no one does it with as much style as The Sassy Spider-Man™



Style 1-Player Action Publisher Activision Developer Beenox Release September 7 ESRB T

Many different versions of Spider-Man exist these days. Marvel's wall-crawler has been re-envisioned as everything from a 17th century Scottish rogue to a radioactive pig. In the past, I've had little reason to pay attention to these Spider-Man variants. However, developer Beenox makes a strong argument for some of Spidey's time-displaced alternates in *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions*. This leads me to wonder why games have focused on only one version of Spider-Man for so long.

Creating a game with four different main characters, four different worlds, four different art styles, and four different game types sounds overly ambitious, but any smart developer knows that it needs to change things up to keep the action fresh. *Shattered Dimensions* works that need for variety into its fiction. One level had me running through a jungle using Spider-Man's spider sense to dodge sniper fire. In the next I was falling past mile-high skyscrapers, dodging hover cars in a future version of New York. Next I was web-zipping between crates as they twirled through the eye of a giant sand tornado. Then a series of spotlights hunted me across the skyline as I quietly knocked out a mob of thugs. The action in *Shattered Dimensions* is almost schizophrenic, but it's never boring. Usually in a game like this, half the action ends up feeling unpolished, but Beenox avoids that pitfall while making all of *Shattered Dimensions'* disparate game types flow seamlessly together.

With this much going on it's almost hard to pick a favorite world. Amazing's gorgeous environments reminded me of *Borderlands'* comic

book vistas, and its web-based combat felt different than any of the other worlds. I also loved 2009's neon-tipped environments and free-falling combat, which had me slamming super villains into any object that got in the way of gravity. The *Ultimate* universe puts Spidey in the black suit and gives him a rage meter, which makes the action against hordes of smaller minions all the more fierce. But I may have had the most fun in the *Noir* universe, where its stealth-based levels allowed me to sneak through cracks in the shadows and whittle away the enemy numbers with a series of punishing takedowns. The variety in this game extends to the unique boss battles, which usually involve using the environment to creatively take down your opponent instead of just chipping away at a large health bar.

One of my favorite aspects of the game is the Web of Destiny challenge. A cross between traditional orb collection and achievement rewards, the *Web of Destiny* allows you to level up each version of Spider-Man with new moves, abilities, and costumes. I constantly found myself diving into the menu to see what kind of meta challenges I had left to complete. These various activities include collecting hidden icons, completing time challenges, and defeating enemies in special ways. Many of them can be completed during the game's natural progression, but only the dedicated will complete all 180 tasks.

Every superhero has his Achilles' heel, and this Spider-Man is no different. While the combat is fast and fun, the auto-targeting occasionally snaps to the wrong place, and the camera can have a mind of its own when you're climbing walls. My biggest disappointment is reserved

for the story. Comics are a strong storytelling medium, but few – if any – comic-based games have done their source material justice. Activision got current *Amazing Spider-Man* scribe Dan Slott to help with the plot, but all Slott has done is draft up a bunch of puns so terrible you'll want to curse. The story details what happens when a mystical tablet shatters across several different dimensions, amplifying the powers of any supervillain who holds it. It's the kind of hackneyed plot that was fashionable in the '60s, and I thought the comic world already transcended this kind of storytelling.

Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions lands just shy of being the full package, but it delivers a non-stop action ride with something new around every corner. Though its story leaves something to be desired, it's one of the best Spider-Man titles in recent memory, if not the best Spider-Man title to date. **Ben Reeves**



8.5

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Take four different versions of Spider-Man, set them in four different worlds with four different styles of play, and produce one of the best Spider-Man titles in years

» Graphics

Each world has its own unique look and style, and they are all great. Amazing's sketchy comic vibe is particularly stunning

» Sound

An incredible voice cast featuring actors from past Spider-Man television shows is backed by a solid soundtrack

» Playability

All four versions of Spider-Man have unique combos to explore. It was nice not just jamming on the same attack button over and over again

» Entertainment

Don't worry if you've never heard of *Noir* or 2009, each world offers something to fans of every level

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Mafia II

Jump into this thing of ours

9



Style 1-Player Action Publisher 2K Games Developer 2K Czech Release August 24 ESRB M

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

A compelling, cinematic game about La Cosa Nostra filled with nods to classic mobster movies

» Graphics

Only the occasional environmental pop-up and recycled character models take away from an otherwise admirable recreation of '40s and '50s America

» Sound

Fantastic voice work (particularly for sidekick Joe Barbaro) complements an amazing soundtrack filled with classic songs from the period

» Playability

The gunplay and driving control well, but the cover system can give you problems in tight quarters

» Entertainment

A focused, if derivative, mobster tale that should appeal to any fan of *Goodfellas*

» Replay Value

Moderately Low

America's fascination with the Mafia is long documented. For decades, films like *The Godfather* and television series like *The Sopranos* have basked in the world of the Italian organized crime syndicate. Its current and former members tout it as a closed community that operates on trust, respect, and glory. Never mind that in reality they backstab, double-cross, and rat each other out at a higher frequency than any of the *Real Housewives* reality shows. No video game franchise adheres more closely to this fractured dream of a romanticized criminal subculture than *Mafia*.

Set in the '40s and '50s, *Mafia II* is jam packed with familiar plot devices pulled from classic movies like *Goodfellas* and *A Bronx Tale*. In the fictional city of Empire Bay, three Italian crime families hold control over most of the criminal underground. While the old-fashioned Dons stick to the time-tested rackets of gambling, running numbers, and boosting goods, more adventurous young upstarts start dabbling in get-rich-quick schemes involving narcotics. This creates a friction that could break the alliance and pit the families against one another. This is the backdrop for Vito Scaletta's rise from street thug to wise guy.

Like a made guy dressed to the nines in a tailored suit, fedora, and a pair of Stacy Adams, *Mafia II* dresses the part. The new setting, Empire Bay, is a stunning recreation of a '40s and '50s American metropolis. From the wartime propaganda posters to the era-specific automobiles and radio tunes, *Mafia II* transports you to a time where American pride was at an all-time high, dames were called broads, and overt racism ran rampant through the segregated communities. The impressive attention to detail is most noticeable in the expertly crafted building interiors, which look like destructible sets pulled straight out of *Mad Men*.

Unlike Grand Theft Auto's Liberty City, Empire Bay isn't an open world playground overflowing with side quests and distractions. The world still feels like a living city, but *Mafia II* is a much more focused experience. You can buy new



clothes, get your plates changed at the auto shop, and boost cars for cash, but that's about the extent of your interaction with the city. The game is divided into story chapters, which allows the developers at 2K Czech to alter the weather, time, and city conditions in service of the missions. While explorative gamers may miss the free-wheeling structure of games like *GTA* and *Red Dead Redemption*, those who never finish lengthy games will appreciate *Mafia II*'s direct storytelling.

The original *Mafia* stood out for its engaging missions, and the sequel follows suit. You still drive through the city for long stretches (this time without a clutch or constant harassment from traffic cops), but once you reach your destination the action unfolds in smartly scripted missions that feel different every time. These quests feature your standard blend of third-person shooting and driving sequences, with the occasional fistfight thrown in for good measure. The controls don't depart drastically from genre conventions, though the finicky cover mechanic gave me troubles in tight quarters.

For Vito to become a made man, he must earn

his stripes selling stolen cigarettes on the streets, robbing jewelry stores, burying dead bodies, and taking on dangerous infiltration and assassination missions. His best friend Joe is along for the ride most of the time, and their dialogue serves as a narrative lynchpin. Though *Mafia II* relies heavily on mobster clichés, the ending takes an interesting turn that gives the game its own identity.

If you're a veteran of open world games, you should note that *Mafia II* is extremely easy on the normal difficulty. Turn it up a notch if you want more challenging gunfights. No matter what difficulty you choose, don't expect a lot of interference from the clueless cops. When you break the law, the men in blue aren't overly concerned with apprehending you – some give lazy chase, but shaking them is as easy as stepping on the gas in a fast car, making a u-turn in a busy intersection, or stopping until the cops get out of their cars and then flooring it. They're even more ineffective when the guns come out. I "hid" behind a dumpster of a closed-off alley in front of a pile of several dead officers and lost my wanted rating despite several cops patrolling the area.

Mafia II suffers from some other minor annoyances as well. The game relies heavily on cutscenes, and sometimes doesn't know when to draw the line between interacting with the world and triggering a cutscene. I shouldn't take control of Vito as he wakes up only to jump immediately into another cutscene when I pick up the ringing phone. The NPC intelligence during missions is also troublesome. In one mission I had to tail a car to find out where it was headed, but the driver got into an accident and the mission failed.

In an era when video games are moving away from relying on cinematics for storytelling, *Mafia II* draws on the rich mobster film history to weave a gripping drama about family, friendship, loyalty, betrayal, and pragmatism. If you're fond of quoting Don Corleone and Tony Soprano, don't miss this game. — Matt Bertz



The Empire City police force: shooting up parked cars since 1915



Four-player co-op is a blast, but it would be even better if you could play online.



The cutscenes are short and sweet. Most of the time, you're just boating the crap out of Canadians.

Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World

The best modern brawler since Castle Crashers



Style 1 to 4-Player Action **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal/Ubisoft Chengdu **Release** August 10 (PS3), August 25 (360) **ESRB** T

I'm a huge Scott Pilgrim fan and brawlers are my absolute favorite classic genre, so Ubisoft had the chance to exponentially disappoint or thrill me. Fortunately, Scott Pilgrim vs. The World is everything I would have wanted for a game based on the franchise, and it stands on its own as a great beat 'em up.

Up to four players can team up as Scott Pilgrim, Stephen Stills, Ramona Flowers, or Kim Pine to take on Ramona's seven evil exes and legions of hipsters, ninjas, and Halloween party revelers. Enemy personality is important in this genre, and Pilgrim's foes have it in spades. Emo dudes regain health if you let them fix their hair, Todd Ingram abuses his telekinetic vegan powers to great effect, and loads more excellent

moments (that I will not spoil here) permeate the entire experience.

Combat is tight and easy to grasp, and useful new moves unlock as characters gain experience like ground attacks and air recoveries. In a nod to River City Ransom, you gain permanent stat boosts by purchasing things like a Clash at Demonhead record or a burrito at Sneaky Dee's. In fact, gamers will find a treasure trove of classic game references throughout the entire story mode.

Scott Pilgrim also contains loads of Easter eggs and secrets to keep you coming back. Players can unlock playable characters, find hidden shops, discover secret powerful moves, and more. There are also several secret codes

you can type in at the title screen to unlock new game modes and fun modifiers like changing all of the coins enemies drop into cute forest animals.

While the game is great fun as a single-player experience, it truly shines when you team up with friends. Whether you're working together to figure out a boss pattern or hogging all the Canadian coins, multiplayer is a blast. The only problem? There is absolutely no online play. How was that feature left out in this day and age? I would have gladly paid an extra \$5 over the \$10 asking price for this feature. Picturing my friends list full of people playing this awesome game and not being able to team up just hurts. » **Bryan Vore**

9

PS3 • 360

- » **Concept**
The perfect union for fans of brawlers and the Scott Pilgrim franchise
- » **Graphics**
Pixel hero Paul Robertson has crafted his finest visuals yet
- » **Sound**
The catchy chiptune soundtrack will stick in your head just as long as the music from classics like Mega Man and Castlevania
- » **Playability**
Unlockable moves add more depth to the traditional punch-jump-dash controls
- » **Entertainment**
A rarely seen licensed game done right
- » **Replay Value**
Moderate

Shank

Vengeance served hot

8

Style 1 or 2-Player Action **Publisher** Electronic Arts **Developer** Klei Entertainment **Release** August 24 **ESRB** M

PS3 • 360

- » **Concept**
A gruesome revenge story told through stylized cartoon action
- » **Graphics**
Stunning art and animation make this one of the most visually arresting games in recent memory
- » **Sound**
Full voice acting and a fitting score accompany the visuals perfectly
- » **Playability**
Some poorly mapped controls mar the otherwise solid action
- » **Entertainment**
A satisfying romp into unadulterated fury
- » **Replay Value**
Moderate

Take the bloody action of a Tarantino flick, meld it with the best in action cartoons, overlay it with a fast-paced 2D brawler game mechanic, and you know what to expect out of Shank. With both a single-player and multiplayer campaign and plenty of unlocks, Shank cuts a bloody swath to establish an identity on Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network.

Shank is a wronged man. As the south-of-the-border single-player story starts, there's not much else to go on. But wherever that anger comes from, it has him mowing down gang members with chainsaws and using shotguns to make his point. Something awful has happened to him and someone he loves, and the world will pay one way or another.

The 2D action heats up from the very beginning, with gory battles against a teeming cartel of armed thugs. Combat is fast and fierce, and the amusing variety of devastating attacks and kill animations steal the show. Tight controls and a great combo system hit a bump due to some questionable button mapping, like the item pickup button doubling as the main melee button. There are also a number of frustrating sequences involving poor enemy placement and bosses that take too many of the same patterned attacks to

finish off. On the other hand, the challenge is high, which is ideal for gamers looking for a real fight.

An entire second campaign is available to play cooperatively with a friend. Though many of the environments are reused, the enemy encounters and bosses are unique to each campaign, and the multiplayer plot provides the backstory to the larger single-player adventure you just finished.



The art direction and animation are like nothing you've seen in a game.

Shank suffers from too much repetition, even for a brawling fighter, but it gets high points for style and its gritty, dark subject matter. This is a game you can sink your teeth into and bask in its wild aggression. » **Matt Miller**

Second Opinion 7.5

Shank is unquestionably a stylish game, but aside from its strikingly crisp characters and excessively violent story there's not much else to it. If you liked the first level, you're sure to love the last one; aside from getting a few superficially different weapons, it's the same repetitive grind from beginning to end. It's a drag, because there's a lot to like in the game. Combat is satisfying and flexible, allowing you to do things like tackle a goon, sit on his chest and pound his face in for a few seconds, chuck a grenade at another guy, and then resume your smacking. The boss fights rely on some clever gimmicks, though they absorb so much damage—particularly in multiplayer—that they last well past their expiration date. Overall, Shank is a flashy homage to exploitation flicks that wears out its welcome just a bit too early. » **Jeff Cork**

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days

Worse than the first

6

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

A direct sequel with improved gunplay, but no soul

» **Graphics**

Character and environment details are masked beneath grainy filters and shaky camerawork. These effects add to the documentary presentation

» **Sound**

A non-stop barrage of gunfire and expletives

» **Playability**

Gunplay is significantly improved, but it's used in a formulaic manner that doesn't do it justice

» **Entertainment**

Multiplayer has stronger legs, and online co-op is a nice addition, but it does nothing to help the lackluster campaign

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High



Most people don't know this, but dogs can fly higher and faster than airplanes. Expect to see them replace traditional airliners in 2011

Style 1 or 2-Player Action (12-Player Online) Publisher Square Enix Developer IO Interactive Release August 17 ESRB M

When Kane steps into frame for the first time, he displays the body language of a sullen, defeated man. His clothes are disheveled, he's poorly groomed, and he is clearly lost to the world. Lynch, on the other hand, while still in dire need of a shampooing, is uncharacteristically calm, almost beaming with life. We're led to believe that he's found his lot in life in Shanghai, the setting for Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days.

The reunion of these two trigger-happy maniacs is sharp of tongue, as expected, yet has a sense of sincerity. Kane and Lynch have changed in their time apart, yet it's clear that neither is comfortable in their new skin.

Before Kane can check in to his hotel, Lynch

asks if he can run an errand first. This errand begins with Lynch kicking in a door and ends with the game's credits rolling. Any notion that the characters have evolved is stripped away once the bullets start flying.

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days is a relentless yet faceless shooter. The protagonists' personalities – which were prominently on display in the first game – are muffled under the constant rattle of machine guns. The entire game is one long firefight, giving little time for the player or plot to breathe. The interesting personality flaws of Kane and Lynch rarely bleed into the action, but we know that in their time apart, they've both learned how to shoot a gun properly.

Most of the firefights are intense tests of skill that nicely mix up the weapons and ranges. Your foes, which are either poorly dressed gangsters or Shanghai police, are intelligent enough to flank in the larger environments, and recognize the fastest and safest route to cover. However, they have problems reading player movements in cooperative play (either split-screen or online). On occasion, when my teammate and I would shift position, enemies would run into the middle of the fray or would try to position themselves in the same cover location as another enemy. Rather than moving to a different spot, their body joins with their teammate, creating a glitch-tastic visual. This problem also occurs with your teammate in single-player.

Kane and Lynch: Dog Days earns the right to be called a respectable shooter. It doesn't earn the right to be called a respectable game. The lack of face time with the characters isn't the only bewildering omission. None of the levels have a pulse. Outside of one exciting helicopter-based

moment, every fight can be classified as a by-the-numbers shootout. The result is a game that feels more like a carnival shooting gallery than a gritty adventure.

I hate to say it, but the true star of this game is the camerawork. Designed to mimic a poorly recorded YouTube video, the camera is intentionally imperfect. Shots are framed poorly, off-screen light sources bleach the image quality, and artifacting and distortion occur when the camera is jostled. As odd as this is going to sound, the grungy effect is beautifully realized.

If your interest lies outside of single-player or co-op, Dog Days offers a much deeper multiplayer experience than the first game. Fragile Alliance, the mode that starts with players working a heist together then possibly turning against each other, is heightened by a better selection of maps, not to mention gunplay that actually works. A variation on Fragile Alliance called Undercover Cop also delivers a thrilling experience, as players know one of their own will surely turn on them. Enjoyable deathmatching is also offered in the new Cops & Robbers mode, although it doesn't have much in terms of progression outside of achievements and trophies.

If your preference is single-player or co-op, Dog Days' lack of personality (both in the characters and on the battlefield) results in one of the blandest shooters out there. Given how little the story matters, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck could have been swapped in as the protagonists and I probably wouldn't have noticed. Corners are even cut on the ending, leaving the story wide open with no hint of resolution. » **Andrew Reiner**

Second Opinion 5

While gravely flawed, Kane & Lynch: Dead Men had soul. Dog Days does not. Lobotomized characters and a throwaway narrative do nothing to bolster mediocre gameplay. Easily one of the most formulaic games I've ever played, Dog Days repeatedly relegates you to one room-clearing mission after another – the only real variable being the state of your character's clothing (or lack thereof). The gunplay has been tightened and cover system reworked (it's now notably less magnetic), but the tweaks can't counteract the glaring omissions. Interactions with your partner are curtailed, removing all instances of ammo sharing and squad commands that I enjoyed in the first game. AI is hit or miss and notably more troubled when playing co-op. Multiplayer continues to be a point of intrigue, but with other perfectly tuned online offerings available, it's hard to justify a purchase for this single redeeming feature. The minor technical improvements can't offset the fact that there is nothing in Dog Day's gameplay or design that hasn't been done by dozens of other shooters to significantly more success. Dead Men had interesting ideas in a poorly executed package. Dog Days disregards any and all brand capital established by its predecessor, and as a result is stunningly ordinary. » **Meagan VanBurklee**



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Front Mission Evolved

Blast walking tanks to bits in this entertaining mech shooter

Style 1-Player Shooter (8-Player Online)
Publisher Square Enix **Developer** Double Helix
Release September 28 **ESRB** T

7.75

PS3 • 360 • PC

» **Concept**
Turn your mech into the ultimate machine of destruction with accessible customization tools to suit your play style

» **Graphics**
Mechs are varied and detailed, but the environments could use the same level of attention. Environmental objects don't feel like the right scale for the machine's massive size

» **Sound**
Like something straight out of a Transformers flick

» **Playability**
If you can play a third-person shooter, you can play this

» **Entertainment**
Varied mission structures keep the action moving at a solid pace, at least until you ditch the mech for the on-foot shooting sequences

» **Replay Value**
Moderately Low

The Front Mission franchise has a limited cult following, but has struggled to find mainstream appeal. Reaching out to a bigger crowd, Front Mission Evolved ditches the previous entries' RTS-style gameplay in favor of third-person action. While a few signature series staples remain, such as a convoluted political storyline and tons of customization options, the fast-paced mech combat makes blowing the crap out of stuff far more accessible and fun.

You take control of a walking tank (or Wanzer) that can be customized to suit your play style based on speed, power, or durability. Part of the fun is tweaking these machines between missions, ensuring you aren't packing too much heat (overweight machines are about as good as scrap metal). I preferred strapping on a missile launcher and sniper rifle for ranged combat; slamming foes with exploding missiles while picking off limbs is effective and satisfying. If you lean more toward melee, you can equip oversized shields and blunt weapons for extra force and defense, handy when having to quickly power through tons of enemies to reach the next checkpoint. I found ranged assaults to be the most effective, but it is easy to adjust to other types as needed to survive specific scenarios. If you want to just jump into the action, you can select from a number of pre-built machines, but manually tinkering with the breadth of customization options ensures the highest probability of success.

The mission objectives are standard, but tight controls and performance-based difficulty scaling keep things enjoyable. You may need to speed boost across an entire level to survive a collapsing environment, man missiles aboard an aircraft, topple an enormous boss, or simply blast the hell out of everything in your path. Some scenarios require you to ditch the Wanzer and take out human opponents on foot – missions I could have lived without. These sections' slow pacing and combat mechanics aren't as tight as the mech battles. Once reunited with your Wanzer, however, you'll look forward to transforming your opponents into heaping piles of burning metal.

Front Mission Evolved offers four multiplayer modes that are average at best: deathmatch, team deathmatch, domination (take control of turrets), and supremacy (claim capture points). While chasing and destroying live opponents might be fun on launch day, the modes are not compelling enough to compete with other multiplayer offerings out there.

Front Mission Evolved isn't for everyone, and fans of the series may be disappointed by the deviation from tactical gameplay, but the action-focused formula works well enough to earn the series some new fans. » **Annette Gonzalez**

Halo: Reach

Bungie leaves with the Spartans' finest hour

9.5

360

» Concept

Let Halo fans finally experience the event that they've been hearing about for a decade

» Graphics

Character models and weapon effects are significantly improved over Halo 3, and battles feature ludicrous amounts of onscreen action

» Sound

Series composer Marty O'Donnell outdoes himself with one of the best gaming scores this generation

» Playability

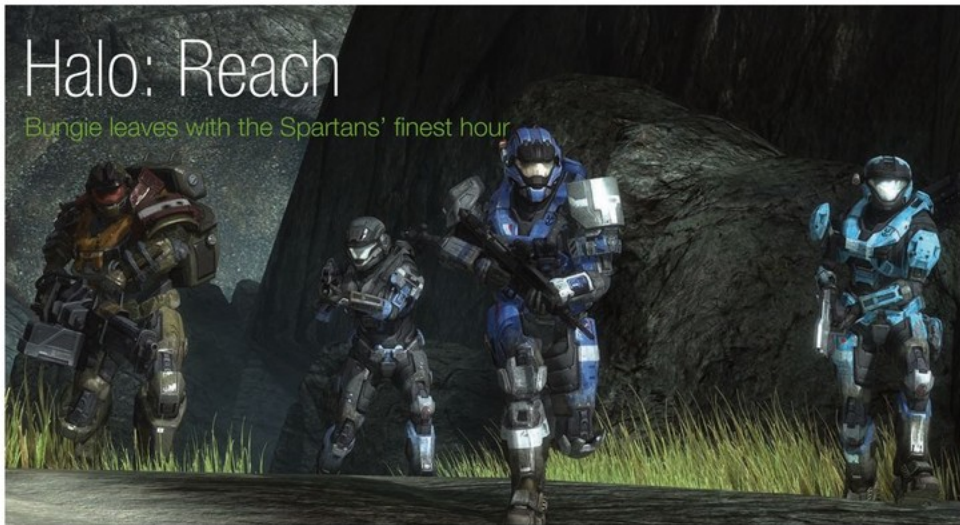
As always, controls are tight as a drum. The new Armor Abilities are a huge improvement over Halo 3's equipment

» Entertainment

Reach knocks it out of the park in virtually every category, with a varied campaign and a vast amount of multiplayer options

» Replay Value

High



gamer's **GAME OF THE MONTH** platinum

Style 1 to 4-Player Shooter (16-Player Online) **Publisher** Microsoft
Developer Bungie **Release** September 14 **ESRB** M

Halfway through the campaign of Halo: Reach, you are in the sky behind the controls of a Falcon turret as protagonist Noble 6. As the UNSC ship scurries you around the battlefield, you try your hardest to take out the numerous waves of enemies in an attempt to save friendly forces. No matter how fast your thumbs are or how dead-on your aim is, it's impossible to take out the entire invading Covenant. You get frustrated watching fellow soldiers die, despite performing to the best of your gaming abilities. This feeling of helplessness is a common occurrence throughout the title. Series fans know going in that this game will not have a happy ending, and that gloomy sense of inevitability sticks with you from beginning to end.

Reach doesn't waste any time; the opening cinematic features a Spartan helmet with a bullet hole through its visor resting on the ground of a smoldering, war-torn planet. Once you assume control of Noble 6, you plunge right into the first days of the planet's violent downfall. Along with the other five members of Noble Team, you discover slain soldiers on the fields and in the houses of a countryside settlement. It isn't yet apparent that the planet is facing a full-scale invasion, but something is clearly amiss.

Once the action picks up, there's no turning back. Mission by mission, Reach delivers battles on a scale never before seen in the immensely popular franchise. Small skirmishes are the exception rather than the rule, as many firefights feature Banshees and Falcons blasting away at each other in the sky, ground vehicles spraying plasma and concussive shells all over the place, and hordes of angry Covenant soldiers. Bungie succeeded in making these invaders scary again, as their numbers are overwhelming and their native grunts and yells are far more frightening than the comical English they spoke in previous titles.

The Covenant are also smarter than ever. Toss a plasma grenade at an Elite and he'll protect

himself with the same Armor Lock ability you'd use if the roles were reversed. If you go into Armor Lock to shield yourself against a charging, hammer-wielding Brute, he'll be smart enough to back off before the short-range EMP detonates.

These subtle details are everywhere if you're looking hard enough, but most of the time your attention is focused on the sheer chaos around you. Previous Halo titles suffered from repetitive, similar-looking environments, but Reach mixes up the gameplay better than any of its predecessors. One minute you're sniping enemies under the cover of night, the next you're flying from skyscraper to skyscraper in a Falcon or infiltrating a Covenant ship in low-gravity.

This refreshing mixture of gameplay is most evident in a mid-game mission called Exodus. You begin in a bright, vivid city that would be beautiful if it weren't for all the dead bodies everywhere. Within minutes of exploring, waves of Grunt suicide squads bombard you. If you want to survive the overwhelming odds, you must tiptoe around every corner just in case there's a pack of plasma grenade-wielding foes on the other side. Once you've dispatched these squads, Noble 6 grabs a jetpack to cruise across a few chasms and joins a human team named the Bullfrogs. Then you're on to an all-out war with an angry gang of Brutes. Earlier Halo titles went several missions without significantly mixing up the gameplay, but Reach does it three times within the same level.

The Halo: Reach campaign is the best in the series, but it's still shy of perfect. Master Chief may be a gaming icon, but he is an emotionless, almost generic protagonist. Bungie tries to give the individual Noble Team members personalities, but it's equally hard to care about them or their fates. It's not enough to simply show us some Spartan faces and give them a few lines; they need to be likable characters which we can identify with. They may have more personality than the Chief, but they still have a long way to go.

Reach also occasionally screws you over with checkpoints. Some are too far between, and others leave you at a major disadvantage depending on the circumstances when you activated them. At one point late in the game, I activated a checkpoint with almost no health, no ammo, and missing the Scorpion tank that was crucial to finishing the mission. Situations like these are few and far between, but that doesn't make them any less frustrating.

As good as it is, the campaign isn't what will keep gamers glued to their televisions late into the night for the next several years. Halo's legacy is built on multiplayer, and Reach gives gamers more reason to come back than ever before. Whether you're raking in credits en route to that perfect suit, blasting through Firefight with three friends, experimenting with the great Armor Abilities, creating new maps with the infinitely improved Forge mode, or just playing some good old-fashioned Team Slayer, it's one of the most robust multiplayer offerings available.

Multiplayer maps have always been one of Bungie's strongest suits, and Reach features a fantastic collection. A few favorites return with a new coat of paint, and the new maps are among the best in the genre. Some are especially suited to a particular mode. The new Invasion game plays like a mix of territories and capture the flag, and it really shines on the Spire map. As the Spartans, it's your job to storm the Elite's tower, grab their power core, and make a mad dash to the heliport. Modes such as this one probably won't be played nearly as much as the standard Slayer/Team Slayer/CTF matches, but they're a great change of pace.

Any disappointment series fans felt after ODST should be completely washed away thanks to Reach. Make no mistake about it – this is the true follow-up to Halo 3. It's also a perfect way for Bungie to part with the series it turned into a phenomenon. **» Dan Ryckert**



Comic Jumper: The Adventures of Captain Smiley

Down comes the wall

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Twisted Pixel
Developer Twisted Pixel **Release** October 6 **ESRB** T

Comic Jumper is a game I have a love/hate relationship with, depending on when you catch me playing. Harkening back to old school shooters, Comic Jumper pits you against swarms of enemies, flurries of projectiles, and multi-stage bosses that will have you respawning aplenty. Fits of frustration are usually followed by a self-congratulatory euphoria, only to wash, rinse, and repeat on the next level.

Captain Smiley, an out-of-work comic hero, is forced to earn extra dough (and regain his readership) by guest starring in popular comic properties. Each comic — be it the Conan-inspired Nanoc the Oblivator or the Silver Age Improbable Paper Pals — has a unique art style, sound direction, and roster of enemies.

Gameplay breaks down into shooter and brawler segments, with inimitable boss battles peppered in to keep you on your toes. The combat is shallow — melee attacks are very limited and the nature of analog shooters is logically restrictive — but the papercraft geishas armed with bladed fans and fire-breathing marionettes don't give you

time for respite. Boss battles offer the most varied combat, and much like old school shooters you learn by trial and error, deciphering their patterns before you can reduce their massive health bars to zero. Other than a hit to your score (and missed monetary bonus potential), the penalty for death is nonexistent. Unfortunately, the checkpoints are unreliable, sometimes restarting you back significantly further than you would expect.

My favorite aspect of Comic Jumper is that the devs at Twisted Pixel didn't break the fourth wall; they completely decimated it. Captain Smiley converses with real life Twisted Pixel employees during the game, and you can even call for live-action aids if you want some of the staffers to help you in battle. The studio's personality is infused into every aspect of Comic Jumper, and I couldn't help but be endeared to them.

Comic Jumper is one of the most original games of the year. If you're up for the challenge and don't mind the shallow combat, it's worth the price of admission. » **Meagan VanBurklee**

8

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

An out-of-work superhero guest stars in other comic properties for cash

» **Graphics**

The diverse art styles give each level a fresh spin and added incentive to push forward. Captain Smiley's bulbous head makes him the most unnerve hero ever, though

» **Sound**

The music is as varied as the art direction, used both to set the tone and as an outlet for humor

» **Playability**

Comic Jumper follows in 'Splosion Man's footsteps with punishing gameplay, but since there's no penalty for dying, frustration doesn't dip into deal-breaker territory. A few cheap deaths had me gritting my teeth, however

» **Entertainment**

Sometimes the humor seems forced, but overall Captain Smiley kept me chucking. Bonuses for exploring, purchasable character progression, and unlockable content all provide incentive to revisit

» **Replay Value**

Moderate



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Metroid: Other M

Nintendo's Team Ninja team-up robs Metroid of its atmosphere and character

6.25

Wii

» Concept

Metroid's exploration and upgrades meet Team Ninja's fast-paced action gameplay – oh, and drama

» Graphics

Some interesting environments and unique creatures balanced by rough character models and animation. Still, one of the best-looking Wii games

» Sound

Classic Metroid sounds and music will bring you much closer to the franchise's greatness than the gameplay

» Playability

It can be fun once you're all powered up, but switching to first-person to shoot missiles is always clumsy and annoying

» Entertainment

Most gamers will find more enjoyment in mocking the overacted, overwritten cutscenes than playing the game

» Replay Value

Moderate



As with other Metroid games, you can uncover power-ups by backtracking through old areas with new abilities

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Nintendo Developer Team Ninja Release August 31 ESRB T

When I saw the debut trailer for Metroid: Other M at E3 2009, I had the same reaction as many fans. I was nervous about another big change to the series I love so much, but mixing the exploration and atmosphere of Metroid with the tight acrobatic action of Team Ninja's Ninja Gaiden series seemed like a very possible win – you know the old cliché about two great tastes that go great together. Unfortunately, this combination proves sour.

To begin with, Metroid's signature sense of isolation on a harsh, alien planet is largely absent since Samus is no longer running solo. Shortly after boarding a derelict space station, she meets a crew of Galactic Federation soldiers, and – surprise! – she has a secret history with several of them. These new allies could have presented a forgivable way to mix up the Metroid formula, but they end up having a negative impact on almost every aspect of the game.

Samus ends up working together with the crew, which makes sense. However, in a totally absurd decision that doesn't work well for her character, she decides to follow the orders of commanding officer Adam Malkovich. Although you supposedly begin Other M fully-powered, Samus will not use her variety of missiles, advanced guns, or armor upgrades until

Malkovich authorizes it. I refuse to believe that a badass bounty hunter would refuse to activate her armor's heat-resistant Varia suit as she marches through the heart of a volcano with her health constantly draining – an actual scenario from the game.

You'll run into situations like this again and again, where a super missile or grappling hook would allow you to progress, but instead you're given orders to turn around, knowing you'll have to backtrack later. It's like Team Ninja wanted to prove that they could come up with a more contrived way to lock down your powers than the average Metroid game where you just lose them in the beginning sequence.

On the other hand, maybe Samus is happy not using her full range of weaponry, because it's kind of a pain to do so. Since control is limited to a single Wii remote, many of the game's encounters boil down to running in a circle, charging up your gun, and shooting over and over until the enemy dies, praying that the game's dodgy auto-targeting works. Aiming at the screen with the Wii remote takes you into first-person view, which is the only way you can shoot missiles. Unfortunately, this also takes away your ability to move. If the developer thought that frequent, jarring switches to first-person to shoot off a few desperate missiles before you get attacked is a fun gameplay mechanic, they were wrong.

The combat isn't the most painful part of Other M, though; that award goes to the stilted dialogue in its many overlong cutscenes. Instead of the subtle, effective storytelling of Super Metroid (which Other M follows in the Metroid timeline), you'll get cinematics that look beautiful but often run as long as 15 minutes, exhausting players with repetition of obvious plot points and over-wrought dialogue as mature and interesting as a teenager's diary.

The biggest culprit in the bad storytelling is Samus herself. She has a constant running narration, which makes the whole experience feel unnecessarily expository. I assume it's meant to lend her emotional gravity, but the soulless voice acting and ham-fisted writing make that impossible. Even worse, Samus often comes off as an idiot. After one supporting character has clearly established that the space station has been doing biological weapons tests, Samus asks, "Do you think they were doing biological weapons tests?" Later, in her internal monologue, she again reiterates this confirmed fact we learned just 20 minutes ago.

If that's not enough to make her unlikable, her attitude toward the Galactic Federation soldiers is. When she's not blindly following orders for no discernible reason, she becomes a spoiled brat. One major flashback revolves around how Samus became known as the soldier who would give thumbs down during mission briefings. Who does that?!

Late in the game, once Samus unlocks all of her abilities and begins meeting more familiar faces from the series, I experienced fleeting moments where it all clicked, and I saw glimpses of how great Other M could have been. But an hour or two of less painful gameplay can't make up for the bad design choices at this game's core. It especially can't make up for what Other M has done to Samus as a character. She'll forever be trapped in my mind as a whiny, talkative child who is too willing to give up her freedom and too petulant to be likable. Metroid: Other M is the most disappointing Nintendo release in quite some time and a blemish that isn't likely to be forgotten on an otherwise superb franchise. » Phil Kollar





8.5

Wii

» **Concept**

Translate the Friday night fanfest into a co-op brawler ripe with iconic team-ups, taking care to maintain the cheeky humor

» **Graphics**

The stylized 2D illustrations look fantastic and perfectly mirror the show. That being said, I could do without the occasional 3D landscape

» **Sound**

With the bulk of the show's voice cast lending their talents, the constant banter is pitch-perfect

» **Playability**

Gameplay is accessible since there is little penalty for death. Plenty of perks exist for taking your time to learn the intricacies of combat, however

» **Entertainment Value**

The comedic overtones, diverse episodes, and evolving combat keep *The Brave and the Bold* engaging until the credits roll

» **Replay Value**

Moderate

Batman: The Brave And The Bold

Justice prevails as Batman glides onto the Wii



Style 1 or 2-Player Action Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment Developer: WayForward Release: September 7 ESRB: E10+

If you're unfamiliar with the Cartoon Network series, *The Brave and the Bold*'s comedic overtones will hit you over the head like a hammer. This is especially true if your only frame of reference is Paul Dini's grim masterpiece *Batman: The Animated Series*. Both the cartoon and game take a lighthearted approach to crime fighting more in tune with Adam West's live-action show from the '60s. Cheesy one-liners are thrown as often as punches, but they elicited genuine laughs on my end. Listening to Batman and Robin's thinly veiled jabs is a treat, as is the absurd opportunity to see Commissioner Gordon in cat form.

The Brave and the Bold breaks down into four episodes. Every segment starts with Batman and his respective partner in a bind – a new character for each episode – only to escape moments before the opening credits roll. All four episodes follow an arc of mystery, discovery, confrontation, and ultimately the defeat of an iconic DC villain. Diverse and lengthy, the episodes balance a cast of lesser-known characters with DC's more recognizable faces. For every Catwoman there is a Catwoman, for every Gentleman Ghost a Hawkman.

The Brave and the Bold is a side-scrolling classic brawler with tight controls and an expansive

library of moves. Light and heavy attacks are augmented with grapples and throws, a variety of aerial moves, special attacks, and the ability to call in support characters for powerful room-clearing combos. Wii motion controls are used sparingly, which I appreciate. Heavy attacks are initiated by shaking the Wii remote, and special attacks with a Wii remote/nunchuck shake combo. A ground pound attack also uses a quick flick of the controller, but that's it. No incessant flailing.

The best way to play *Brave and the Bold* is with a friend. While single-player offers the same basic experience, the support character isn't particularly helpful. Expect to do the heavy lifting. The AI isn't fantastic outside of combat, either. At one point Hawkman attempted to follow me through a treacherous path of platforms above molten lava, only to fall to a fiery demise over and over again. I sat there and watched until the amusement wore off.

Each character has unique melee attacks, special abilities, and upgradeable tools. This multifaceted approach allows players to tailor combat to their liking. You could focus primarily on hand-to-hand combat, or opt to upgrade your gadgets instead. I often used my triple Batarang to push back groups of foes before initiating a

flurry of attacks. Explosives are also effective, particularly if you herd groups of enemies into one area before detonating the blast. Most items also have practical applications that can help solve the simple environmental puzzles.

Your fighting performance earns you money to purchase new abilities and upgrades. You receive more cash for maintaining hit combos and destroying environmental objects. Conversely, you can also empty your purse by dying repeatedly. The game keeps track of individual scores during co-op, but the pot is curiously shared at the end of each chapter. Player one gets to decide where all the joint money is allocated, which is a strange way to handle the finances. Making Batman your primary focus for upgrades is a smart move since he's involved in every mission, but making sure your co-op pal stays engaged is important, too. You won't unlock Batman's complete library of tools until the end of the game, encouraging players to return to finished chapters and explore previously unreachable areas.

Tight controls and cheeky humor make *Brave and the Bold* an easy recommendation for bat and brawler fans alike. Accessible and entertaining, it's also a perfect fit for family play. **—Meagan VanBurklee**

Second Opinion 8

Batman: Brave and the Bold won't appeal to everyone. If you can't stomach a version of Batman who smiles at Robin's lame jokes, chases ghosts through London sewers, and briefly gets turned into a cat by mystical jelves, then walk away now. *Brave and the Bold* has all the humor and youthful charm of the cartoon show, and I loved every minute of it. WayForward has crafted a side-scrolling action title in the classic vein. It may not be very challenging, but I never grew tired of the combat, which offers a variety of combos and super attacks despite the simple one-button attack system. However, it would have been nice if WayForward included the option to play with a classic controller. The game's four episode-like missions were over in a flash, but the game's hidden secrets and different playable characters give me reason to replay this game with a friend. **—Ben Reeves**



WHO! What is that thing, it's huge! Looks like an official licensed Batman trash can.



StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty

Worth every second of a twelve-year wait

10

gameformer
GAME MONTH

gameformer
PLATINUM

Style 1-Player Strategy (Up to 8-player online) Publisher Blizzard Entertainment
Developer Blizzard Entertainment Release July 27 ESRE T

PC

» Concept

Remake the classic RTS for modern machines – but with immense creativity applied to its content and connectivity

» Graphics

The exaggerated art style and highly saturated palette pop even on old machines using low settings, while higher-end PCs enjoy the last ten-years worth of work on lighting, shadow, and particle effects

» Sound

The extensive voice work throughout the campaign is excellent, and the in-game audio conveys information as well as you'd hope

» Playability

Small touches like the removal of unit limits within selections, multiple building select, and excellent idle unit AI and pathfinding give this the best control of any traditional RTS

» Entertainment

Try as I might, I can't name a single gamer in my life who I wouldn't strongly recommend this to

» Replay Value

High

just finished StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty's story campaign, and all I want to do is crank up the difficulty and start over right now despite my clock telling me it's 1:00 AM. The battles are so varied – with new units fitting seamlessly beside returning favorites and campaign-only toys that would break multiplayer balance – allowing for interesting force compositions. The objectives are unique, challenging players to move their bases through hostile territory ahead of an advancing wall of fire or to rescue orbital-dropping allied units from behind enemy lines. All I'm interested in right now is diving right back in. The lure of attacking my problems from different directions and padding my Battle.net account with additional achievements has me hooked. It doesn't hurt that new difficulty settings change the scripting of missions, rather than just throw a few more units at you. The story is more competently executed than brilliantly conceived, but a few amazing, epic moments on top of the continuation of Raynor, Kerrigan, and Zeratul's adventures make it all worthwhile.

It's 3:00 AM and I just lost my fifth game in a row, and all I want to do is hit that Find Match button one more time. I think I've got my opening down – pushing up that first barracks earlier in my build order was key – but I'm getting wrecked when I try to transition to a mech-based strategy when hard counters to my infantry start showing up. The classic RTS tension of trying to keep my economy growing, constantly scouting, and managing the battles themselves is perfectly captured here. The few little changes to control, like multiple building selection and unlimited unit selection, are a big difference in making the interface work for you instead of getting in your way. I've never spent so much time with an RTS without popping a vein in frustration over unit AI or pathfinding, but none of those issues have appeared here at all. The gameplay is all StarCraft all the time, but with the benefit of a



decade of iteration to improve it without sacrificing the pacing and impeccable balance that are its soul.

My fingers are twitching on their own and my mind is buzzing with hotkeys, control groups, and rally points as the sun comes up. I have to take a break from this lightning-fast competitive environment, but I don't have to leave StarCraft II to do it. Motivated creators have already used the powerful editing tools to create wildly different experiences within the game, and I can't wait to check them out. I can't seem to tap into this awesome potential, though, because it's hidden behind an awful backend that requires me to download a map and publish it myself before I can host a match on it. A few other terrible decisions about custom game hosting and matchmaking on Blizzard's part have me tearing

my hair out in frustration, but the incoming invite from my friend to play co-op distracts me for the moment.

My god, there's a whole other set of achievements, unlockable portraits, and vanity items in co-op against the AI, plus a wide variety of maps and difficulty settings. Am I ever going to tear myself away from this game? I don't know if I even want to.

Some games contain a brilliance that is difficult to capture in words. Braid's greatness, for instance, lies in suggesting emotion to our minds and challenging us to interpret it how we will. StarCraft II is anything but that sort of enigmatic, subjective experience. This is a sublimely engineered game with a simple, elegant core design and all of the rough edges ground away. » Adam Bliesener



Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep

Great mechanics get undercut by character and story reboots



Style 1-Player Action/RPG Publisher Square Enix Developer Square Enix Release September 7 ESRB E10+

Anyone depressed that Square Enix is dragging its feet on a high production value PS3 release of Kingdom Hearts 3 would be insane to pass up Birth by Sleep simply because it's on PSP or that it doesn't place series hero Sora in a lead role. This entry stands alongside Kingdom Hearts II visually with impressively detailed characters, animation, and on-screen effects. Instead of rereading the same old words, it brings in brand-new locations like Snow White's forest and Stitch's spaceship prison (if I never have to run through Agrabah ever again, it will be too soon). And it finally explains what the heck is going on in that crazy secret movie with the bunny armor people in a keyblade graveyard from the end of Kingdom Hearts II.

New characters Terra, Ventus, and Aqua play precursor roles to Riku, Sora, and Kairi respectively. They all hope to become keyblade masters and have trained hard for the privilege. You can't help but draw comparisons to Star Wars in Birth

by Sleep, especially when one of the three must battle against the dark side, I mean, the darkness. Despite the heavy borrowing, replacing Jedi with keyblade masters and the Force with magic fits well.

Combat blends melee combos with easily accessible magic and keyblade specials. Like any RPG, your character levels up as you gain more experience, but Birth by Sleep lets you gain experience in each ability. I became addicted to swapping abilities once they maxed out and combining them to make more powerful new ones. When combining abilities, you can also keep any perks tied to a maxed ability like fire resistance, bonus health, or longer combos. This move evolution system doesn't always tell you what you're going to create, however, so I wasted a lot of materials along the way in order to tailor my characters how I wanted. Scoring a powerful acrobatic move or a rare powerful spell makes it all worth it in the end. Once you know what you're doing you can get stronger quickly.

Players choose one of three protagonists at the start and follow each story from one Disney world to the next until the final confrontation. In 10 to 12 hours, you've beaten the game and must start over with the next character. You'll travel to all the same worlds in essentially the same order, but you'll explore different areas of the map, meet different

characters, and battle different bosses. In Cinderella's world, for example, Ventus is shrunk down to mouse size to help collect items for her dress, Terra escorts her to the ball, and Aqua makes sure she gets to try on the glass slipper. While it's an interesting concept, by the time I got around to playing Aqua on my third playthrough, I had already been everywhere twice and had powered up two characters. It's no fun starting over at square one again after you've tasted ultimate power. It doesn't help that Aqua's story is the weakest of the three, either.

To play the final wrap-up chapter after all three careers, you have to collect all of Xehanort's reports. If not, you have to go back and grab them and re-beat the game with those specific characters. It's kind of a pain that you can't just go right to the end, but if you've explored along the way you'll probably have most of them anyway.

Multitasking is local ad-hoc only, so good luck finding a friend with a PSP and copy of the game. If you do, you can team up or face off in a variety of minigames like a kart racer, a Monopoly-esque board game, and several arena matches. I didn't care for the first two options, but it's always enjoyable to be able to beat up a friend in battle or team up with them to take on waves of enemies.

Overall, I loved the combat, leveling, and look of Birth by Sleep, and I applaud the bold storytelling approach of having three storylines. I'm just glad I won't have to start up another character from scratch in this game ever again. **» Bryan Vore**

8.5

PSP

- » **Concept**
Tell the origins of the Kingdom Hearts world, borrowing from Star Wars
- » **Graphics**
The graphical limitations of other portable Kingdom Hearts titles are not a problem here. Birth by Sleep is gorgeous
- » **Sound**
Leonard Nimoy shines as lead villain Xehanort, while Mark Hamill surprises as mentor Eraqus
- » **Playability**
Quite possibly the series' smoothest and most dynamic combat system yet
- » **Entertainment**
Any story becomes tired when you have to repeat it so much
- » **Replay Value**
Moderate



Getting more out of Birth by Sleep

If you're interested in playing Birth by Sleep, you should consider investing in a hefty memory stick. To reduce load times as much as possible, you have to install 624 MB of data onto your system. Also be sure to boost color depth up to 32-bit and push the CPU speed up to 333Hz. The game will look great and run as smooth as silk no matter how many effects are flying around on screen.

8.75 | Madden NFL 11

Platform PS3 • 360 Release August 10 ESRB E
Issue Sep '10



Madden NFL 11 is a clear step forward for the franchise, but as fun as the additions are, the fact that some of its glaring mistakes remain is like getting a new stud quarterback even though the offensive line still needs an upgrade. — Matthew Kato

PLAYSTATION 3

3D Dot Game Heroes	8.5	May-10
Aliens vs. Predator	5.75	Mar-10
Alpha Protocol	6.5	Jul-10
Backbreaker	5	Jul-10
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	9.5	Mar-10
BackShock 2	8.25	Mar-10
Blacklight: Tango Down	5.5	Sep-10
Blur	8.5	Jul-10
Clash of the Titans	4	Sep-10
Dante's Inferno	7	Mar-10
Dead to Rights: Retribution	8	Jun-10
FIFA World Cup		
2010 South Africa	8.5	May-10
Final Fantasy XIII	9.25	Mar-10
Final Fight: Double Impact	8	Jun-10
God of War III	10	Apr-10
Green Day: Rock Band	7.5	Jul-10
Heavy Rain	9.5	Mar-10
Iron Man 2	6	Jun-10
Joe Danger	9	Jul-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10
Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light	9	Sep-10
Last Rebellion	4.5	Apr-10
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.25	Aug-10
Lost Planet 2	8.5	Jun-10
Madden NFL 11	8.75	Sep-10
MAG	7	Apr-10
Major League Baseball 2K10	7.75	Apr-10
Matt Hazard:		
Blood Bath and Beyond	7.75	Mar-10
Mega Man 10	8.75	Apr-10
MLB 10: The Show	9.5	Apr-10
ModNation Racers	8.5	Jun-10
Naughty Bear	6	Aug-10
NCAA Football 11	9	Aug-10
Nier	6.5	Jul-10

PC

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8	Jul-10
Pure Futbol	7	Jul-10
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jun-10
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Resonance of Fate	6.75	May-10
Rocket Knight	8	Jul-10
Singularity	8.5	Aug-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jun-10
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75	Apr-10
Split Second	8.25	Jun-10
Star Ocean: The Last Hope - International	7	Mar-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9	May-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75	Jul-10
Toy Story 3	8	Aug-10
Transformers: War for Cybertron	8.5	Aug-10
UFC Undisputed 2010	8.25	Jul-10
Vandal Hearts:		
Flames of Judgment	7.5	Apr-10
White Knight Chronicles	7.25	Mar-10
Yakuza 3	6.5	May-10

XBOX 360

Alan Wake	8.5	Jun-10
Aliens vs. Predator	5.75	Mar-10
Alpha Protocol	6.5	Jul-10
Attack of the Movies 3D	4	Jun-10
Backbreaker	5	Jul-10
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	9.5	Mar-10
BackShock 2	8.25	Mar-10
Blacklight: Tango Down	5.5	Sep-10
Blood Bowl	7.75	Mar-10
Blur	8.5	Jul-10
Castlevania: Harmony of Despair	8.5	Sep-10
Clash of the Titans	4	Sep-10
Crackdown 2	7.25	Aug-10

Dante's Inferno	7	Mar-10
Darkest One: Broken Alliance	6	Sep-10
Dead to Rights: Retribution	8	Jun-10
Dwivity II: Ego Draconis	6.5	Mar-10
FIFA World Cup		
2010 South Africa	8.5	May-10
Final Fight: Double Impact	8	Jun-10
Green Day: Rock Band	7.5	Jul-10
Hydro Thunder Hurricane	8	Sep-10
Iron Man 2	6	Jun-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10
Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light	9	Sep-10
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.25	Aug-10
Limbo	9	Aug-10
Lost Planet 2	8.5	Jun-10
Madden NFL 11	8.75	Sep-10
Major League Baseball 2K10	7.75	Apr-10
Mass Effect 2	9.75	Mar-10
Matt Hazard:		
Blood Bath and Beyond	7.75	Mar-10
Mega Man 10	8.75	Apr-10
Metro 2033	9	May-10

Meadowlands of P.B. Winterbottom, The	8.5	Apr-10
Monday Night Combat	7.75	Sep-10
Naughty Bear	6	Aug-10
NCAA Football 11	9	Aug-10
Ner	6.5	Jul-10
Ninety-Nine Nights II	6	Sep-10
Prince of Persia:		
The Forgotten Sands	8	Jul-10
Pure Futbol	7	Jul-10
Puzzle Quest 2	7.75	Aug-10
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jun-10
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Resonance of Fate	6.75	May-10
Risen	7	Apr-10

7.75 | R.U.S.E.

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release September 7
ESRB T

A number of hiccups in the control scheme and unit AI keep the gameplay from being as smooth as I'd like, and the console versions suffer from constant texture draw-in and object pop-up when you're quickly flitting about the map — which is most of the time. I hope online play finds an audience, though, because it's a unique flavor that is sure to resonate with a fair number of gamers. — Adam Biessener

8.75 | Dead Rising: Case Zero

Platform 360 Release August 31 ESRB M

The downloadable Dead Rising: Case Zero is a great introduction to the sequel's new systems while managing to stand on its own. It's relatively short, but there's enough zombie-slaying action — with room for experimentation — to inspire multiple playthroughs. The fact that some of that experience carries over to Dead Rising 2 is just brain-flavored gravy. — Jeff Cork

7 | Pokémon Ranger: Guardian Signs

Platform DS Release October 4 ESRB RP

Guardian Signs simplifies the traditional, color-coded Pokémon RPG formula for a game that is enjoyable overall and accessible for trainers of all ages. Though it may be too simple for hardcore monster catchers, this Pokémon lite spinoff makes a great entry-level title for the younger generation. — Annette Gonzalez

7.5 | HAWX 2

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 7
ESRB T

HAWX 2 explores a number of clever variations on the air combat theme, and is better for the effort. It's just not enough to wholly make up for a haphazard story, sub-par production value, and unsurprising mission structure. — Matt Miller

6 | NHL 2K11

Platform Wii Release August 24 ESRB E10+

There used to be a time when I liked the 2K hockey series over EA's franchise, and that was because I liked the way the skating felt. It was tight and responsive, even if the games themselves were more arcade-like. How I long for those days after playing NHL 2K11. — Matthew Kato

7 | NHL Slapshot

Platform Wii Release September 7 ESRB E

If you can put up with the lack of precision in the hockey stick peripheral and the shallow nature of the other game modes, the fun Peewee to Pro mode captures the spirit of hockey from the backyard ponds to the packed arenas in a way that should appeal to adults and children alike. — Matt Bertz

8.5 | Castlevania: Harmony of Despair

Platform 360 Release August 4 ESRB T Issue Sep '10

While some frustrations keep Harmony of Despair from reaching the level of its predecessors, the co-op multiplayer is a fantastic new feature. Early levels are frustrating when going solo, but bringing a few friends along makes it a significantly more manageable and fun experience. — Dan Ryckert

Rocket Knight	8 Jul-10	Gully Party	8 Sep-10
Samura Shadowrun	6 May-10	LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.25 Aug-10
Sherlock Holmes vs Jack the Ripper	7.75 Jul-10	Mega Man 10	8.75 Apr-10
Singularity	8.5 Aug-10	Monster Hunter Tri	7 Jun-10
Skate 3	8.75 Jun-10	No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle	8.5 Mar-10
Sniper: Ghost Warrior	4.75 Sep-10	Prates Plundarr	7.25 Jun-10
Snoopy Flying Ace	8.5 Aug-10	Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8 Jul-10
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75 Apr-10	Red Steel 2	8 May-10
Splinter Cell: Conviction	9 May-10	Rooms: The Main Building	7 Apr-10
Split Second	8.25 Jun-10	Sin & Punishment: Star Successor	8.75 Jul-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9 May-10	Super Mario Galaxy 2	9.25 Jun-10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75 Jul-10	Super Monkey Ball: Step & Roll	8 Apr-10
Trojan Soldiers	8.25 May-10	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.5 Jul-10
Toy Story 3	8 Aug-10	Toy Story 3	6 Aug-10
Transformers: War for Cybertron	8.5 Aug-10	Trauma Team	8 Jun-10
Tropico 3	8.75 Mar-10		
UFC Undisputed 2010	8.25 Jul-10		
Vandal Hearts: Flames of Judgment	7.5 Apr-10		
		PC	
		Backlight: Tango Down	5.5 Sep-10
		Blur	8.5 Jul-10
		Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight	7.75 May-10
		Disciples III: Renaissance	5.5 Sep-10
		Divinity II: Ego Draconis	7 Mar-10
		Dragon Age: Origins - Awakening	7.75 Apr-10
		Just Cause 2	9 Apr-10
		Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light	9 Sep-10
		WII	
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Cave Story	8.75 May-10		
Data East Arcade Classics	5 Mar-10		
Endless Ocean 2: Blue World	7.5 Apr-10		
Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon	6 May-10		
Green Day: Rock Band	7.5 Jul-10		

Miss Effect 2	9.75 Mar-10
Metro 2033	9 May-10
Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom, The	8.5 Apr-10
Napoleon: Total War	8.75 Apr-10
Rocket Knight	8 Jul-10
Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom, The	8.5 May-10
Sims 3: Ambitions, The	7.75 Jul-10
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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	8.75 Jul-10
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II Chaos Rising	8.5 May-10

NINTENDO DS

Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth	7.5 Mar-10
Blue Dragon	7.75 Jul-10
Awakened Shadow	7.75 Jul-10
Dementium II	8 Jul-10
Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies	8 Aug-10
Infinite Space	8 May-10
Ivy the Kwi?!	6 Sep-10
Pixelated 3D	9 May-10
Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver	8.5 May-10
Puzzle Chronicles	7 Mar-10
Puzzle Quest 2	7.75 Aug-10
Rooms: The Main Building	7 Apr-10
Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey	8.75 Mar-10
WarioWare D.I.Y.	8.5 May-10

PSP

Ace Combat: Joint Assault	7.5 Sep-10
Dead or Alive: Paradise	4 Jun-10
Disgaea Infinite	6.5 Aug-10
Lunar: Silver Star Harmony	8 Mar-10
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker	8 Aug-10
Metal Slug XX	6.75 Apr-10
Puzzle Chronicles	7 Mar-10
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable	8.25 Aug-10
Valkyria Chronicles II	8.5 Sep-10
What Did I Do To Deserve This My Lord? 2	6 Jul-10



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Things You Didn't Know About...



KEVIN BUTLER

Thanks to Kevin Butler, it's hard not to smile every time one of Sony's commercials comes on the air. Sony's well-dressed vice president of nearly everything knows how to tickle the geeky part of our brains. However, we don't know much about Sony's newest pitchman. It's time that changed.

+ Considering your career path, you must have gone to an impressive college; what did you major in?

College?!!? Listen, you don't rise up to be a highly successful corporate vice president by wasting time with book learning. I've got a double major from the School of Hard Knocks and a minor from Awesome University.

+ Surely you've had a long and illustrious career. Where did you work before Sony?

I don't normally like to talk about the past; let's just say there's a certain foreign intelligence agency who'd pay a pretty penny to get their hands on this VP. But in my early days I used to be an actor. Did my fair share of commercials and the occasional off-Broadway play. You may remember me from such lines as "When will they make a pancake that tastes like a hot dog?" and the classic "Did somebody take my crescent wrench?"

+ Sony is a proud and powerful company. How did you end up working there, and what has that experience been like?

I really am living the dream. I mean, who wouldn't want to work for a gaming company – and the best one at that? The only thing that could make it any better would be if we were making video games out of chocolate. And trust me, I'm working on that.

+ Seems like you wear a lot of different hats at Sony. How many job titles do you actually have? How big is your business card?

Honestly, I've lost count. I'm what they in the business world call "upwardly mobile." And occasionally sidewardly mobile. I've always been this way. As a kid I was both VP of Lemon Distribution and District Manager of Sugar Procurement at my brother's lemonade stand. And we always hit our numbers. As for the business card, it's big. Most people would go with one big card, but mine is made of many small cards sewn together. Like Betsy Ross when she made the flag. Except hers stood for Freedom and mine stands for Awesome.

+ It would seem that a busy guy like yourself would need to start the day out right with a power breakfast. How do you start your mornings?

I follow a strict regimen of the four food groups. And every food group is bacon.

+ You've unlocked the secrets of space and time and traveled to the future. What's that like? Got any tips for prospective time travelers?

Time travel tips? Only one: bring toilet paper. I don't want to get into too much detail, but let's just say that the future alternative to toilet paper is one party you don't want an invitation to.

+ Do you have any heroes? Who does Kevin Butler admire most?

Only one: President Millard Fillmore. For obvious reasons.

+ When you inevitably get around to writing your autobiography, what will you call it?

Well, I can't imagine one book could tell the whole story so it would definitely have to be a trilogy. But I imagine the first book would be called *Kevinomics: How I Only Did Everything*.

+ Last but not least, what is your favorite sandwich?

Have you ever had a Monte Cristo? It's an entire ham, turkey, and swiss sandwich dipped in French Toast batter and deep fried. It's actually semi-extinct in most parts of the world, because few could handle its epicness. Well, my favorite sandwich is a double bacon cheeseburger with two Monte Cristo Sandwiches as the bun. And a Diet Coke, obviously.

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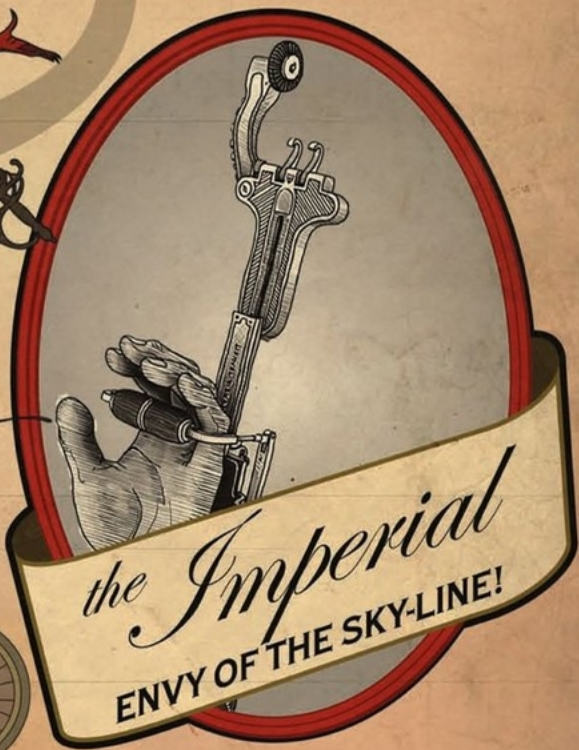
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