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## Video Gaming Is On The Move



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

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I like to think that I'm right all the time, but I remember the times I was wrong a lot more. I could bore you with my poor predictions over the years, but you have better things to do with your time (like read about all the great games in this issue). I do want to mention, however, the name that is most commonly associated with my mistakes – Nintendo.

I literally laughed out loud at the Wii when I first heard what Nintendo had planned for its next console. The name, the design, the lack of HD – everything about the idea screamed that Nintendo had lost its marbles. I couldn't have been more wrong. The Nintendo Wii ended up changing video games forever, and, to some degree, dominating the market this generation. It's made such an impact that Sony and Microsoft are releasing their own answers to the motion control-based innovator this year, almost four years after the Wii's release.

I've played many games on the Wii, and while it does a fantastic job of making games more immersive through movement, I don't believe it's the future. Wii MotionPlus or not, the current technology fails to deliver the precision I'm looking for in my games. I can interact quickly by pointing or using other gestures, but the motion controller still lacks intuitiveness when navigating 3D game space. You move like a Frankenstein monster, not the master ninja gamers want to become.

This is why it feels to me more like a stopgap between the traditional analog controller and the controller of tomorrow. It makes me wonder why Microsoft and Sony are focusing so much energy trying to capture the magic and market that Nintendo is already dominating.

In fact, I would wager that Nintendo's next interface will be less Wii-like in design. I don't believe a wand and nunchuk are our future, nor is the controller-less Natal platform Microsoft is developing. I have a sneaking suspicion that Nintendo doesn't believe that either, and is working on a new controller innovation for its next system. (This is when you need to refer back to the opening paragraphs about how I'm wrong about Nintendo...a lot.)

One thing is certain: the industry is convinced the connection between the gamer and the game is paramount, and will travel down any road to push games to the next level of interaction. I believe we are in the learning phases of bridging this gap in a more sophisticated way, and will look back on touchscreen interfaces, 3D glasses, and Wii remotes in the future and laugh at how silly we were. Until then, I'll take a good standard issue controller any day of the week.

Enjoy the issue. Cheers.

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### Bulletstorm

If you can impress the Gears of Wars creators at Epic so much that they buy your company outright, you're on the right track. See the awesome fruits of the collaboration between People Can Fly and Epic Games inside.

by Bryan Vore



Editor interests and dislikes  
are now available at  
gameinformer.com/mag



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**F.E.A.R. 3**  
by Matt Bertz



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### 6 Feedback

We reassure readers that L.A. Noire is not leading the charge on a new generation of FMV games and that God of War did not, in fact, invent Athens

### 12 Connect

Breaking down the PlayStation Move and investigating the insidiousness of FarmVille are just a sampling of this month's 30-page Connect section

### 70 Previews

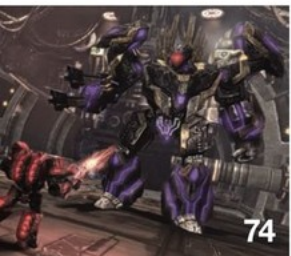
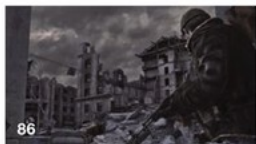
Miyamoto spills on Super Mario Galaxy 2 and we dig into Fallout: New Vegas and Metroid: Other M

### 84 Reviews

We've gotten a ton of awesome games already this year. Where does Splinter Cell: Conviction place in an already-crowded first half of 2010?

by Andrew Reiner

### 100 Game Over



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**T**his month in Feedback we prep for the summer gaming drought, shake our heads at sarcasm that went undetected, complain about Big Daddies, and cringe at old FMV games.

### FMV is a Four-Letter Word

I was reading your article about L.A. Noire when I realized something disturbing: Team Bondi's facial capture tech is just like full motion video (FMV). Instead of artists painstakingly making characters, you just have actors in predetermined places – like you're watching a video. FMV was the big thing in games in the '90s until it was done to death, and then looked upon with disdain by gamers. Although L.A. Noire's tech looks powerful, I can see the same thing happening that happened with FMV; you'll have lots of quickly produced and gimmicky titles.

**Mike Lelinski**  
Milwaukee, WI

Both techniques help translate a real person's movements into a game, but that's where the similarities end. The concept and intent behind the techniques used in L.A. Noire are completely different from the maligned FMV games of the '90s. In the case of FMV, games were contorted around the technology, existing for no other reason than to show off grainy video. With L.A. Noire, you'll still be playing a real game, complete with 3D models and interactive environments – the only difference is that the process of creating and animating the characters has been streamlined, producing realistic performance in less time. The technology isn't the reason for L.A. Noire's

existence; it is just one of many tools Team Bondi is using in the development process. It's also incredibly expensive, so don't expect a rush of copycats.

### Superfan

I have to say, issue 203 is probably the best one you have made so far! At first I thought you were going to just review Mass Effect 2 but then BAM! Final Fantasy XIII, BioShock 2, Battlefield: Bad Company 2, Heavy Rain, and No More Heroes 2! Props on the amazing media shelf (I love Doctor Who and Boneshaker), plus the cover on L.A. Noire. Issues like this help me through the summer video game drought to come, so thanks!

**Alex Centeno**  
Chicago, IL

Last year, when publishers announced that many holiday 2009 titles were getting pushed into early 2010, we were a little disappointed. Now, we couldn't be happier; this year's onslaught of awesome games has kept us glued to our controllers week after week. As you mentioned, things always slow down a bit in the summer, but that's a small price to pay if it means that publishers aren't just cramming all of their best games into a tiny three-month window.



### Quantified!

This month, we got more emails about our review of Heavy Rain than we did about our review of Final Fantasy XIII.

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Art by Cody Hudson - codyhudson.net



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## Issue 203's Most Popular Features



- L.A. Noire
- Missing In Action: Has Your Favorite Franchise Gone Dormant?
- Zombie Flow Chart
- Opinion: Marketing to Remember
- Afterwords: Bayonetta

## Big Daddy Explained

You gave BioShock 2 an 8.25, but I strongly disagree with your major complaint. You said the game didn't make you feel as strong or awesome as a Big Daddy should be. If you'd played through the game and paid attention to the story, you'd know why that is so. The largest reason is this: Delta is an early series Big Daddy, which were less heavily armored than others. They are simply weaker. That is exacerbated by the fact that you have been away from Eleanor for too long, and your body and mind are breaking down. Delta is basically a walking time bomb. In fact, within the fiction, his ability to survive 10 years away from his Little Sister is more of a stretch than the fact that he dies quickly.

**Jason Osman**  
Bridgeport, CT

We understand that the story offers context for Delta's frailty, but regardless of the reason, BioShock 2's failure to fully convey the awesomeness of a Big Daddy shouldn't be so easily excused. Just because a design decision is supported by the plot doesn't mean it's a good decision to begin with. Imagine you're playing a Superman game, except Superman can't fly, isn't strong, and is vulnerable to conventional weapons. No matter how the narrative explains why Superman is in that situation, players would be rightfully disappointed that the game doesn't remotely provide the experience they associate with being Superman. Similarly, the original BioShock built up the players' concept of what it means to be a Big Daddy, and the sequel doesn't deliver on it until the closing hours. Those complaints aside, BioShock 2 does plenty of other things right, and is still an entertaining and memorable adventure that any fan of the original should check out.



## Reader Gibberish

- Game Informer I have a very juicy bit of nerd rafe mail for you. But what is the cause of my ate you ask? simple:
- could u put more halo halo reach in the magzngres
- I hear that TOOL is making their latest album. im super stoked.

### We're Still Getting These

Mistakes happen, and no one is perfect, but your ignorance regarding *Clash of the Titans* in the Timeline section of issue 203 is downright appalling! Your job is to be nerds, and with that comes the obligation of actually researching material you plan on putting into your magazine. If you had done your research (which you obviously did not) you would have found that *Clash of the Titans* is actually a remake of the classic 1981 movie, not a *God of War* rip-off. It truly baffles me that you can hold your writers to such a low standard of journalistic responsibility, and have the audacity to print a blatant lie. The fact that you can allow this is – as you so elegantly phrased it – shameless. Just shameless.

**Dan Mitchell**  
Via email

You mentioned how the *Clash of the Titans* is a rip-off of *God of War*. As a fan of the original *Clash of the Titans* movie, I had to say something: Yes, the new movie is a remake, but its predecessor came out in 1981, way before Kratos ever ripped the head off a Gorgon. I would think *God of War* fans would look at *Clash of the Titans*, both then and now, as a nod to Kratos' beginnings – and not a blatant rip-off.

**Christina Stitt**  
Wilmington, DE

A little free advice: If you use sarcasm, make sure it isn't too subtle. In your Timeline section, you mentioned that *Clash of the Titans* movie is a rip-off of *God of War*. Now as we all know, *Clash of the Titans* is a remake of the 1981 film of the same name. I know this, and you know this, but not everyone will get the joke. Someone

may know that it's a remake, but not detect the sarcasm – resulting in confusion and the assumption that you don't check your facts.

**Bryan DeJaynes**  
Pekin, IL

Never has a single blurb about a movie caused such an outpouring of comments. We received hundreds of emails from readers informing us – with varying degrees of tact – that *Clash of the Titans* predates *God of War*. The saddest part of the whole situation? A staggering number of the responses thought that we actually believed a video game from 2005 invented the ancient city of Athens. Seriously? *God of War* was a great game and everything, but even we know there are limits to what Kratos can accomplish.

gi spy



(Left) Tim Turi represents true kvtt with members of the video game metal powerhouse Powerglove at Station 4 on the Rockin' East Side of St. Paul (Right) Dan, Adam, and Bryan (look close!) hang with some of the people behind this month's cover story, Bulletstorm

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



**GI SPY**  
continued on page 10

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THERE ARE HUNTERS AND THEN THERE ARE MONSTER HUNTERS

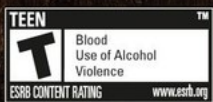


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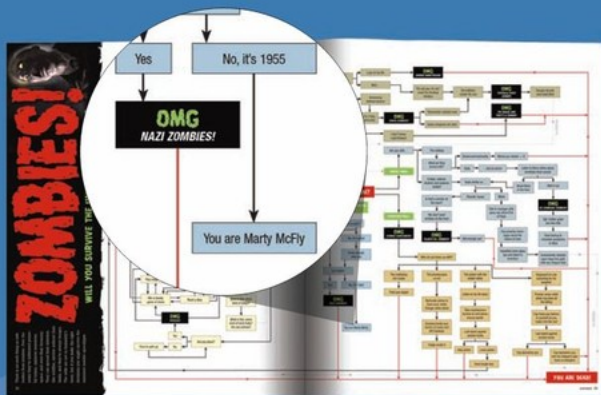
Wii Classic Controller Pro: A New Way to Hunt Only On Wii



## On Your Mind



- Call of Duty/Infinity Ward Concerns **31%**
- Activision: "Totally evil" or just "really evil"? **30%**
- Ubisoft's shady DRM: **24%**
- Paying for on-disc DLC **13%**
- Getting game-related tattoos **2%**



## Where's the Flood?

Wait, so the only way to survive a zombie apocalypse is to be Marty McFly?

**Martin H.**  
Orland Park, IL

According to our zombie apocalypse flow chart in issue 203, being Marty McFly is the only path that doesn't lead to a grisly death. However, before you don your orange vest in hopes of survival, remember that Marty has a host of other problems to deal with: the advances of his hot mom, bullying from Biff Tannen, and erasure from the space-time continuum. Either way, you still kind of lose. By the way, if you're totally confused by this letter because you missed the flowchart in the magazine, check it out at [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag).

## Making Copies

I think that Game Informer has gone a bit too far with how you compare games to others. Darksiders was a good game with an original story. Sure, it was not without flaws, but for the most part, this was a good game. I hated how Reiner and Joe just labeled it a God of War/Zelda knockoff. If you look at any game nowadays, they are all copycats somewhere down the line.

**Kyle H.**  
Geneva, OH

You're correct to point out that most of the titles we're enjoying today are built on the

innovations of their forebears. We admit that there's nothing is wrong with drawing inspiration from the greats; Darksiders does an excellent job synthesizing familiar elements into an entertaining adventure. On the other hand, it's also fair to draw attention to those similarities, especially when the parallels are as pervasive as they are in Darksiders. A good game can stand on the shoulders of the ones that came before, but a great game should contribute something new and move forward.

## Kids Today

I'm a player of all current systems, but have endured all that it has taken for them to get them where they are – starting with the Atari. My daughter, on the other hand, is starting with the Wii. We recently bought Barbie as the Island Princess, and I just want to know how Activision can make such a disaster and sell it to unsuspecting kids. I know the leadership of the company understands completely that the children who buy these games have no voice in the gaming industry; once the crappy game is bought, their money is in the bank. The next time my daughter wants to buy a game with her painfully earned tooth fairy money, I am going to encourage her to reconsider. I am going to be her voice in the gaming community and I hope other parents follow suit; kids aren't stupid, and companies like Activision should stop treating them like idiots.

**Michael and Emilee MacPeck**  
Auburn, ME

We completely agree, Michael. Years ago, parents would just blindly buy whatever games their kids begged for. Now, as more gamers are becoming parents themselves, titles geared toward children are coming under



more scrutiny by adults who are able to distinguish a good one from a bad one. Though kids may not always be the most reliable judges of quality themselves, they don't deserve to play terrible games any more than seasoned gamers do. It isn't impossible for a studio to make a legitimately good game for a younger audience, but the process needs to involve more than exploiting a popular franchise for a blatant cash-grab. You can see how one developer, Avalanche Software, hopes to address this problem by reading our Toy Story 3 feature on page 52.



**GI SPY**  
continued from page 8

**(Left)** Meagan and IGN's Jessica Chobot compare fake tattoos at the FF XIII launch event. We think that's the logo for some type of energy drink **(Center)** Iron Man 2 creative director Kyle Brink and Sega PR manager Tali Fischer dig into some Jucy Lucys at Matt's Bar in Minneapolis **(Right)** Gaming legend Shinji Mikami greets the press in Tokyo at an event to introduce his newest creation, Vanquish





1

**WINNER 1 Melissa Santiago** The arrival of this spot-on Sackboy should tide us over while we wait for the Heavy Rain level pack for LittleBigPlanet! **2 Shea-Ron Phillips** Guile already has the hair gel and abs thing down, now he just needs some Ed Hardy shirts to fit in with the Jersey Shore crowd! **3 Sarah Wesinger** You have to give Zelda credit for ruling Hyrule despite the deformity of having six ears! **4 Matt Moss** Gorillas may look tough, but we'll see how this one fares when an EDF base falls on his head! **5 Jose Flores** Batman finally snaps after yet another long-winded Snake monologue

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

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2



3



4



5



(Left) Andy, Miller, and Reiner pose in a police lineup with Bethesda's Erin Losi, Tracey Thompson, and Pete Hines. (Hint: Reiner did it) (Right) Meagan, Matt Bertz, LucasArts' (and former GI editor) Chris Cook, Nick, Sony's Jeff Rubenstein, and Ayissa Casella: actin' all classy and whatnot

## NOTABLES

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- 20 face off: the many faces of nolan north
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- 26 impulse
- 30 loose talk
- 31 interview: jake gyllenhaal
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- 36 interview: jessie schell
- 40 opinion: get off my lawn (but read my game reviews)



# Sony Showcases The **PlayStation Move** At GDC

Sony execs make the case that Move is more than just Wii HD

*by Nick Ahrens and Matt Bertz*

When Sony first announced its motion controller at E3 last year, no one was sure what to make of it. Was the company trying to dip into Nintendo's honey jar or was it legitimately serious about motion controls? After months of going dark, Sony took the veil off its new technology at the Game Developers Conference and gave its motion controller a name: PlayStation Move.

During the GDC press conference, Sony treaded familiar territory, filling the stage screen with action shots and videos showcasing families gaming together in the living room. Though much of the games on display looked like HD versions of Wii games, Sony also appealed to the more traditional gamer demographic with demos of SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs and LittleBigPlanet using the Move.

Move's fall launch won't be short on games, with Sony claiming that 20 launch window titles are in development by SCE Worldwide Studios alone. In an effort to distance its game library from the shovelware-plagued Wii lineup, Sony told Game Informer that creating a standard of quality for the platform is of the utmost importance. "We're going to have some quality control. We don't want a bunch of older games ported at launch," assured Scott Rohde, vice president of Sony Worldwide Studios. "But we don't worry about it because there's been so much great engagement from the third parties when we bring this technology to them."

Sony proudly touted the support of over 30 companies including Activision, Capcom, Ubisoft, Electronic Arts, Disney, Square Enix, Sega, Konami, Crave, Tecmo Koei, Namco Bandai, THQ, and Warner Bros. Interactive.

Many other games are presumably in development, but as of press time the only games third-party publishers have announced with Move support are EA Sports' Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11, Warner Bros. Interactive's Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest, and Disney's Toy Story 3.

Sony has yet to announce the exact pricing or launch date for the Move, but it did confirm that three different packages will be available for consumers: a standalone motion controller, a package deal that includes the Move, PlayStation Eye, and a game for under \$100; and a full bundle that includes a PlayStation Move, PlayStation Eye, and a PlayStation 3.

Staying under the three-digit mark is an aggressive move by Sony, but the dollars will add up when larger families want to purchase multiple controllers, games, and accessories. With the Wii's strong grip on the family market, it will be interesting to see if people will jump ship for the promise of HD gaming or just stick with Nintendo.

"I think that Move is what Wii HD should have been," said Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter. "Nintendo can either respond with Wii HD, or watch Sony capture share when people upgrade to PS3 plus Move. I think that they should take this more seriously than they appear to be taking it."

Whether or not Nintendo will respond with an upgrade of its own remains to be seen, but one thing is for sure – Sony appears to be in the motion control arms race for the long haul.

### Tracking Light

The glowing bulb on the top of the controller is the key differentiator between the Wii remote and the Move. It tracks player's position and registers depth, telling the console whether the controller is moving closer or further away from the camera. This allows games to account for forward movements like stabbing a sword or dodging backward. The RGB LED that glows inside the bulb also assures the controller works whether you're in a fully lit or pitch-black room. Developers can turn the bulb any color they wish to accommodate their gameplay. For instance, to give players a visual cue to their health status while playing a game, the bulb could move from green to yellow to red as their hit points are depleted. Fantasy games could turn the bulb blue for casting ice spells and red for casting fire spells.

### Action Button

This all-purpose button serves as the primary input for many games. From menu confirmations to pulling off special moves in-game, expect to push it a lot.

### Bluetooth

Unlike the Wii's nunchuk, the Move and the sub-controller connect wirelessly to the PlayStation 3 via Bluetooth, just like the Sixaxis and DualShock controllers.

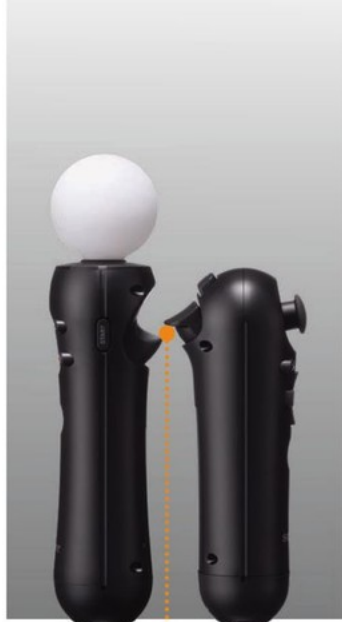


## Move Controller



# The **Technology** Behind Move

Sure, the Move looks nice, but how does it work? In our hands-on time with the new motion controller, we were impressed by the sturdy build quality. The Move weighs slightly more than the Wii remote, but it's still lightweight enough to feel great in your hands. This chart breaks down the science behind Sony's new technology.



## Triggers

The Move's pressure-sensitive trigger is ideal for shooters, as it can differentiate between short-controlled bursts and full automatic fire based on how hard you press it.



## Face Buttons

## Analog Stick

## PlayStation Button

## D-pad

## Sensors

Both the Move and the sub-controller use accelerometers, gyroscopes, and terrestrial magnetic sensors. What does that mean in plain English? These devices accurately measure the speed of your movements and the angle at which you're holding the controller.

## High Quality

Like other Sony electronics, the Move and sub-controller are built with solid plastic and have a good weight while in hand.

## Rumble

Like the DualShock, the Move and sub-controller feature force feedback vibration.

## Rechargeable Battery

Both controllers feature rechargeable lithium-ion batteries. Third-party companies will surely be in a frenzy to offer a charging solution for a full set of four Moves and four sub-controllers.

## Sub-Controller

For more complex games like SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs, players can use the sub-controller to add analog-stick based movement and a second trigger for aiming with a reticle. Like the Move controller, the sub-controller features Bluetooth connectivity and a rechargeable lithium ion battery.



# PlayStation Move: **The Games**

After the GDC press conference, Sony gave the press access to several Move game demos. Most of the game kiosks featured very short snippets of play, but the variety helped shed some light on the different directions Sony is encouraging developers to pursue. They also showed off how Move can integrate into existing titles with a LittleBigPlanet demo.



## **SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs**

Zipper Interactive's long-running shooter series is taking the helm as the first core title announced for the Move. Much like a Wii shooter, players use the Move controller to aim and fire, handling basic movement, cover, and squad commands with the sub-controller. While the build shown at the event was more of a tech demo, we did get a feel for how Move shooters feel differently than Wii games. The aiming felt smoother than expected, and easily out-performed every Wii shooter we've tried. Zipper also confirmed that the motion sensitivity will be adjustable in the final game. The most interesting information to come out of the demo was a Zipper representative's confirmation that players using the Move can jump into online multi-player against players armed with DualShock. It will be interesting to see who comes out on top in the head-to-head matches.

## **Sports Champions**

You can't talk about Sports Champions without mentioning Wii Sports Resort. The marketing visuals aren't the only thing Sony is "borrowing" from Nintendo, as this competition-based compilation of minigames proves. Geared towards active players, Sports Champions features archery, Frisbee, table tennis, and melee fighting. Each game uses the Move in a unique way, but as with Wii Sports, none of the modes appear to offer much depth. The standout mode in the demo was Gladiator, a one-on-one melee fighter that turns your controllers into a sword and shield. It won't be surprising if Sony offers this as a pack-in or possibly a cheap download for consumers who purchase Move.





## Move Party

Where motion controllers go, party games follow. While you can expect a lot of silly, frantic, waggle action, there are a few clever gems, in this mix, including some games that use augmented reality to put you into the game. One minigame tasks you with shaving and dying the hair of a football-headed dork, and in another you must prevent baby chicks from falling out of a tree by using a small fan to blow them back into nests. With a presentation that calls Scene It to mind, Move Party looks to be an appealing solution for a few giggles at an otherwise falling party.



LittleBigPlanet



Slider



## Motion Fighter

This gritty brawler uses two Move controllers, one in each hand, to simulate fist fighting. By holding your hands up in front of your face, your on-screen character assumes a protective stance.

Motioning your body back and forth with your hands in this position, your character will bob and weave to dodge attacks. Once you spot an opening, you can go in for the kill with jabs, hooks, uppercuts, and even a few dirty moves like head butts and headlocks. Though the Move controllers handled basic punching with no problem, it had a hard time keeping up when we strung together combos. Future fighters can look forward to a career mode, split-screen bouts, and online head to head.



TV SuperStars



EyePet



## The Shoot

(working title)

This goofy light gun shooter has a b-movie vibe, with robots, cowboys, and other baddies trying to take you out. While the game feels slightly generic, it does have a few interesting elements. The evil robots you're facing off against have destructible armor, and players can dodge incoming attacks by moving to the side. The Shoot also features some gesture-based special moves, one of which creates a large shock wave that travels outward when you spin around in place.



Brunswick Pro Bowling

Watch [gameinformer.com](http://gameinformer.com) for the latest PlayStation Move news and announcements

# infinity ward

news

## Modern Warfare: Activision & Infinity Ward In Legal Battle

Will the firings of the president and CEO of Infinity Ward by Activision spell irrevocable doom for the infamous Call of Duty and Modern Warfare developer?

How did it all go so wrong? *by Matthew Kato*

**T**he dramatic firing of president Jason West and CEO Vince Zampella from Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 developer Infinity Ward happened fast, but trouble had been brewing between the studio and parent company Activision for some time. Still, on March 1, from when G4TV first reported that a “bunch of bouncer types” showed up from Activision unannounced at the Infinity Ward offices to when West and Zampella’s Facebook and LinkedIn profiles were updated to state that they were unemployed, things had clearly gotten serious fast. West and Zampella quickly filed a lawsuit against Activision, and the document paints a picture of an uneasy alliance between the two parties behind one of the most successful franchises in video game history.

### Acts of Insubordination?

West and Zampella’s lawsuit seeks over \$36 million in unpaid royalties, claims that the duo were unfairly dismissed, and charges that Activision breached the “implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing.” The lawsuit alleges that the pair was unfairly painted as insubordinate employees so that Activision could lawfully fire them before a royalty payment was due on March 31. Part of this setup was a six-hour, Kafkaesque interviewing of West and Zampella over the President’s Day weekend in a windowless conference room. Activision officials wouldn’t tell West and Zampella what specific acts they were guilty of; instead they were told they “already have a clear understanding of what they have or have not done.” Despite this vague threat, they were told that anything less than full cooperation would be an act of insubordination, which in and of itself

### An Infinity Ward/Activision Timeline

**2001**

After meeting in the late 1990s, Jason West and Vince Zampella start working together on Medal of Honor: Allied Assault at developer 2015 for Electronic Arts.



**2002**

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault on PC releases to rave reviews. After a dispute with Electronic Arts, the pair forms Infinity Ward with over 22 other developers who worked on Allied Assault.

**2003**

Infinity Ward releases Call of Duty to great success, and Activision exercises its contractual option to purchase the remaining shares in the developer at a low price, making it a wholly owned subsidiary. West and Zampella personally sign three-year contracts with Activision, separate from Infinity Ward.



**2005**

Call of Duty 2 launches with the Xbox 360. Activision exercises the option in West and Zampella’s initial contracts in two successive terms to keep them under contract through October 2008.



was cause for termination.

When they were actually fired, West and Zampella say it was for acts (which were not specified in the legal filing) that were already disproved or weren't discussed in the February investigation interviews. Furthermore, they represented a double standard against conduct that Activision executives had exhibited in the past without punishment. Also, despite Activision's current concern for their actions, at the time they occurred – during the development of Modern Warfare 2 – there was no investigation or discipline.

Activision was quick to respond to the lawsuit with a statement. While calling the claims "meritless," it said, "...Activision legitimately expected them to honor their obligations to Activision, just like any other executives who hold positions of trust in the company." According to a memo obtained by G4TV from a source at Activision, the company is currently compiling documents for the upcoming legal fight, including "documents regarding West and Zampella's communications with Activision's competitors, including but not limited to Electronic Arts." The company is also gathering documents regarding all of Infinity Ward's projects and the possibility of the duo forming a new studio. If Activision thought West and Zampella were going to split from Infinity Ward before their contracts were up in 2011, perhaps the company was trying to beat them to the punch and catch them in the act.

## "Complete Control Over the Infinity Ward Studio"

We don't know what exactly happened, and Activision hasn't fully told its side of the story at this time. However, reading the lawsuit, it

appears that one central point of contention is Infinity Ward's desire to move away from the Call of Duty/Modern Warfare universes and create a brand-new game. According to the lawsuit and attached court documents, on March 31, 2008 Activision and West/Zampella renewed their contract and drew up a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which tasked them with completing Modern Warfare 2 by November 15, 2009 in exchange for:

- Creative authority over the Modern Warfare brand or "any Call of Duty game set in the post-Vietnam era, the near future, or the distant future."
- "Complete control over the Infinity Ward studio" and the right to operate it independently
- The chance to develop a new intellectual property (IP) after MW 2
- Royalties and other compensation to West, Zampella, and IW employees

The lawsuit alleges that Activision fired West and Zampella to regain control of the developer despite the promises of creative control and independence agreed to in the MOU. Before the release of Modern Warfare 2 and the signing of the MOU in 2008, Activision was pressuring Infinity Ward to keep creating Call of Duty instead of starting work on their new IP. Despite being "not eager" to jump into Modern Warfare 2, West and Zampella signed the MOU and made the game. However, the developers don't feel that Activision held up its end of the bargain.

The lawsuit makes it appear that after the release of MW 2, Activision continued to

want Infinity Ward to make more Call of Duty or Modern Warfare titles instead of a new franchise. In this case, it's not hard to guess Activision's motivations for firing West and Zampella. In doing so, the company can keep the successful brands rolling by eliminating the two men to whom it gave final authority over those brands, and thus who could throw up potential roadblocks.

## Call of Duty in Danger?

Activision still owns Infinity Ward despite the departure of the studio heads, and the publisher says that it intends to continue making Call of Duty titles regardless of the power these two important figures may hold. Activision says a new Treyarch-developed Call of Duty game is due this fall, and Sledgehammer Games – the new studio headed up by Dead Space creator Glen Schofield – is handling another CoD title in 2011. However, given that the lawsuit asserts that "the defendant [Activision] may not commercially release another Modern Warfare game (or Call of Duty game set in the post-Vietnam era, near future, or distant future) without the written consent of West and Zampella," it will be interesting to see if Activision's plans are halted until matters are resolved. Will Activision's titles take place in Vietnam or earlier, as rumored, and therefore not fall under West and Zampella's jurisdiction? Or will Activision present documents that show that the pair was out of line? The first shots have been fired.

*For more details on this developing story and expert opinion from an intellectual property attorney, check out [gameinforma.com/mag](http://gameinforma.com/mag)*



## What's Next For West and Zampella?

It's safe to say that the future is already bright for two talents like West and Zampella, and the pair has just signed on with Hollywood's Creative Artists Agency to make sure that happens. CAA is a powerhouse agency with clients across the movie, music, and sports spectrums (including Will Wright and Ken Levine), and it could be used as a connection between West and Zampella into movies, apart from any traditional representation it might provide. The *LA Times* reports that CAA won out over at least one other top Hollywood agency. After unsatisfactory stints under Electronic Arts and now Activision, CAA should be helpful in finding the right fit for West and Zampella.

### 2007

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare launches, unseating Halo as the most played game on Xbox Live. The pair is approached to extend their contract.



### 2008

West and Zampella's contract is extended through October 2011 with a new Memorandum of Understanding between the pair and Activision dated March 31, 2008. Under it, West and Zampella agree to deliver Modern Warfare 2 by November 15, 2009.

### November 10, 2009

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is released and quickly sets sales records.



### February 2010

Activision interviews West and Zampella regarding acts of insubordination.

### March 1, 2010

Activision fires West and Zampella from Infinity Ward. The duo counters with a lawsuit suing for unpaid royalties and control over the Modern Warfare franchise.

**Jason Fleming** (Shadow Complex)

You might remember Shadow Complex as the game starring that guy who looks and sounds like a poor man's Nathan Drake, but Chair Entertainment's Metroid-inspired 2D platformer was so entertaining we didn't care what he sounded like. North could act like a despondent 6-year-old for all we care, we just want a sequel.



**Male Hero** (Fable II)

He may not have had many lines, but North produced the grunts and growls for your farting, peasant-killing, finger-flipping hero in Fable II.



**War Machine** (Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2 & Marvel Super Hero Squad)

North voiced Ghost Rider and Hawkeye in the first Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, but he must have done a better job with War Machine in MUA 2, because THQ had North voice Rhodey again in last year's Marvel Super Hero Squad.



**Will Grey** (Dark Void)

North assumed the role of yet another everyman in Airtight Games' airborne shooter. Video game casting directors must have a cheat sheet that reads, "if your hero has a square jaw and acts a bit like Han Solo, Nolan North is your man."



**Sergeant John Forge** (Halo Wars)

No stranger to the Haloverse, North recorded several lines of dialogue for miscellaneous marines in Halo 3, and then voiced the sniper Romeo in last year's Halo 3: ODST. However, North's biggest Halo role came in Halo Wars, where he sucker punched a Covenant Elite as Sergeant John Forge.



**Nathan Drake** (Uncharted: Drake's Fortune & Uncharted 2: Among Thieves)

This is easily North's most recognizable role. North might get a lot of crap for playing the same role over and over again, but he's part of the reason the ladies have a crush on Nathan Drake.



# Face Off

The many faces of Nolan North



**Elliot Salem** (Army of Two: The 40th Day)

Earlier this year North lent his voice to EA to take over the role of the short knucklehead with a stupid mask. Or was he the tall knucklehead with a stupid mask? We can't even tell those two idiots apart.



**Raphael** (TMNT)

North has also done a fair share of voice work for animation. He's played both Cyclops and Deadpool in Marvel's animated videos, but in 2007 North starred as the angry turtle in the TMNT feature film and its associated video game.



**Few video game voice actors are as prolific as Nolan North. Over the course of the last decade, North has voiced protein-fueled war grunts, ancient Greek gods, and clean-cut everyman heroes alike. It's getting to the point that you could almost play Seven Degrees of Nolan North (if you were familiar with any other video game actor, that is). Chances are that you don't even realize how pervasive Mr. North has become. Take a moment to look at the many faces of Nolan North.** *by Ben Reeves*



**Desmond Miles** (Assassin's Creed 1 & 2)

Altair and Ezio steal much of the spotlight, but present-day Desmond ties the series together. We expect the North-voiced Desmond to have an even bigger role in the trilogy's closing arc.



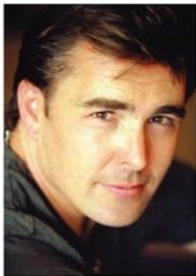
**The Prince** (Prince of Persia)

Having voiced minor characters on Final Fantasy XII and God of War, North was already familiar with fantasy settings, but in 2008 Ubisoft upgraded him to royalty when North became the Prince of Impossible Parkour and Terrible Fashion.

**We're Not Done**

Think you've heard Nolan North's silky vocals in another game? That's probably true, since the actor performs in more than a dozen games a year. He's not always the main hero, however. Sometimes he's just a shopkeeper or a random soldier. Here's a select list of other games in which North has appeared.

- 50 Cent: Bulletproof
- Ape Escape 3
- Area 51
- Armored Core 4
- Banjo-Toole
- Call of Duty 2
- Call of Duty: World at War Cars
- The Cat in the Hat
- The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
- Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed
- Destroy All Humans!
- Path of the Furon
- Dragon Age: Origins
- Endwar
- EverQuest II
- Final Fantasy XII
- Gears of War 2
- God of War
- Gun
- Infamous
- Lost Odyssey
- Lost Planet: Extreme Condition
- MadWorld
- Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
- Prototype
- Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time
- Red Faction Guerrilla
- Saints Row
- The Saboteur
- Spec. Ops: The Line
- Spongebob's Atlantis Squarepants
- SpongeBob SquarePants: Lights, Camera, Pants!
- Supreme Commander 2
- Watchmen: The End Is Nigh
- White Knight Chronicles
- X-Men Origins: Wolverine



# North Star:

An Interview with Nolan North

It's a strange world we live in when a steamy soap star goes on to become one of the most popular video game action heroes of all time, but such is the story of Nolan North. This Connecticut native did voice work for games as obscure as *The Cat and the Hat* and *Power Rangers: Super Legends* before becoming *Uncharted's* Nathan Drake. North took a few minutes out of his busy recording schedule to talk with us about his rise to prominence in video games.

“...that’s  
the great  
thing about  
voiceover, I  
get to play  
hundreds of  
characters.”

## How did you get into this business in the first place?

Acting in general was kind of a process of elimination. I've done so many things, and I really found my passion in acting. I've done television and so many other things, but I've always messed around with voices and impersonations of celebrities. I've always had an ear for different dialects and languages, and some of my friends were like, “Hey, you should do voiceover.” One of the first games I did through my agency was *Maximo vs. The Army of Zin*. I remember going in there and having a ball.

## Were you trying to pursue a different career before voice acting?

No, acting is acting to me. I was in New York doing theater and stand-up comedy, believe it or not, and I decided to come out to California. My first job was in the soap opera *Port Charles*, which was a spin-off of *General Hospital*. It was one of those things, you know, you're painting houses during the day and bartending at night, and “bang,” I got lucky early.

## How many video games do you think you've been in so far?

I don't even know. I know that on IMDb.com some of them are missing. Honestly, I can't even estimate. Probably over a hundred games. But that's the great thing about voiceover, I get to play hundreds of characters. Hundreds! Sometimes it's zombies, sometimes it's monsters, sometimes it's an animal, and sometimes it's the good guy, I'm the kind of guy who doesn't want to play the same character my whole career. I don't think any actor would really like to. I'm basically a professional schizophrenic.

## What has been your favorite role?

I would have to say Nathan Drake, because it's so involved. I'm in production with Naughty Dog for more than a year. Most of the time you go in and record something for five or six sessions, but that's just in the studio doing voice. *Uncharted* is a whole performance capture. We become like a family, and Drake is the most me of any character I've played. They told me, “You're not playing Nathan Drake. You're playing Nolan, in his personality, as though his name were Nathan Drake.” It's the closest thing to me. He even walks and runs like me.

## Do you ever play the games you're in?

I have, but not because I'm in it. *Uncharted* is a little tough for me, because Nathan Drake doesn't always make it through to the end, and it's a little disconcerting to throw yourself off a cliff. Also I'm usually looking at the scenery. When we record we're working off a script and in a mo-cap studio, so when I play the game I'm looking to see how they put it all together. I do play games though. I wasn't in *Modern Warfare*, but I loved that game. I am a fan of gaming, but with two young kids and a career I don't get to play as much.

## Since you've played so many roles recently that have been so similar, do you ever fear that the industry might get Nolan North burnout?

You know it's interesting, because before *Uncharted 2* came out, no one noticed that I was already doing dozens of games, but then they were like, “Nolan North is everywhere.” I've heard some people say, “there's going to be a backlash, because he keeps doing the same thing.” But I can't help how I'm directed. There have been a few roles where I talked to them and have said, “this really shouldn't sound like this. Can we do something a little different? Give him an accent or something?” But they said, “No, don't worry about the voice.” I'm not going to lie to you, it concerned me for a while, but those things were all recorded before *Uncharted 2* came out and became such a huge hit. It was just a timing thing, because *Uncharted 2*, *Assassin's Creed II*, *Dark Void*, and *Shadow Complex* all came out relatively around the same time. I don't think that will happen again.

## In the past, a lot of actors used fake names while recording video game dialogue. Was video game voice acting ever seen as inferior to other types of voice acting, cartoon or commercials, for example?

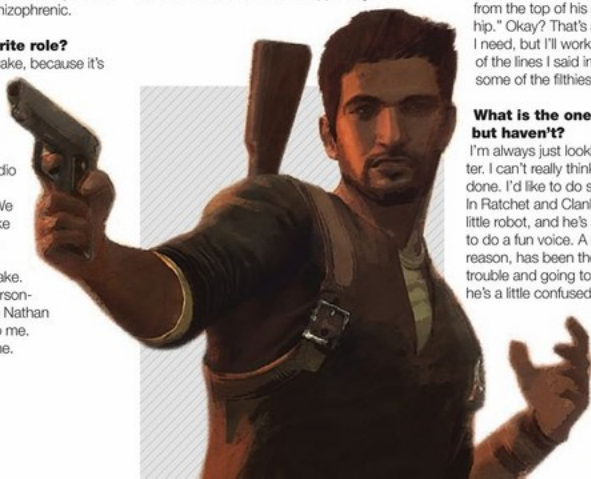
Well honestly, I don't think anyone ever used a pseudonym because video game acting wasn't cool. Video game acting was always non-union, and if an actor who was part of SAG or AFTRA did a non-union job they could get fined or kicked out of the union. I never worked under the non-union stuff, so I don't really know that world, but for the longest time developers didn't want to pay all the fees associated with union workers. But, you know, I worked on soap operas, and a lot of people feel that there is a stigma associated with those, and I always thought that was silly, because if you are working in this industry then God bless you, because it can be hard. I don't think there is a stigma with video game acting, especially now, because there are more big name people doing this than ever before. Some of them aren't even getting that big of a salary; they're just doing it because it's a cool thing to do.

## What is the weirdest thing you've been asked to do or say while recording?

The first time I was asked to sound like I was drowning I thought I'd get a little method with it, and I got some water and tried to gurgle, but I hit the gag reflex and almost threw up in the booth. It doesn't really get too weird, but weird is relative. I might get asked to “make a sound like an undead zombie who's been chain-sawed from the top of his neck diagonally down to his hip.” Okay? That's a little more information than I need, but I'll work with it. I can't repeat some of the lines I said in *Saints Row*, because it was some of the filthiest stuff I've ever read.

## What is the one role you'd like to do, but haven't?

I'm always just looking for a compelling character. I can't really think of any one thing I haven't done. I'd like to do some more cartoony stuff. In *Ratchet and Clank*, I got to do Sigmund the little robot, and he's a great character and I got to do a fun voice. A lot of my stuff, for whatever reason, has been the hero everyman who's in trouble and going to work his way through it, but he's a little confused. People don't know that I do really cartoony things. I've made the majority of my money just doing my own voice, but I'd like to do more of that Mel Blanc kind of outrageous cartoony work.





## TOP 10 DEVELOPER BLOGS

by Annette Gonzalez



### Jonathan Blow

The mastermind behind Braid began a blog that was originally intended to be a space for the game's development notes, but those eventually took a backseat to posts related to other inspirational (and at times downright unusual) games worth playing, plus issues related to games as an expressive medium. Also keep an eye on Blow's latest blog for his upcoming game, The Witness.

» <http://braid-game.com/news/> » <http://the-witness.net/news/>



### David Perry

Perry has held various titles over his 25-year tenure in the industry since his big break with Earthworm Jim. His blog is home to informative news and tips on how to break into the industry. Be sure to check out his comprehensive "Game Industry Map," a world map that pinpoints where the industry jobs are.

» <http://www.dperry.com/>



### Steve Gaynor

The designer from 2K Marin hosts a comprehensive blog that discusses issues in game design and provides useful tips for industry hopefuls ("Make cool s---, and show it off to anyone and everyone"). Gaynor also provides interesting behind-the-scenes tidbits on games he's worked on. Be sure to check out his post on BioShock 2 secrets.

» <http://fullbright.blogspot.com/>



### David Jaffe

Jaffe's regularly updated blog is much more than God of War and Twisted Metal updates. His first crush was Ms. Marvel. He loves Dr. Seuss pencils. He says f--- a lot. Alongside these fun facts he posts opinion pieces regarding the current state of the industry in both print and video form. If you really want to know what's on Jaffe's mind in pure, unadulterated fashion, fans of his work should look no further.

» <http://www.davidjaffe.biz/>



### Matthew Burns

The writer and indie developer (previously a producer at Bungie) hosts a blog titled "Magical Wasteland" where he serves as your "mysterious host" through the world of video games and the industry they live in. Burns comments on development challenges through hard-hitting opinion pieces and thoughtful narratives that do an excellent job of exposing darker sides of the industry you may not have seen.

» <http://www.magicalwasteland.com/>



### Warren Spector

If you didn't get enough of Spector during our Epic Mickey coverage, check out his blog that oozes with his love for all things Disney. You'll also discover which games inspire him and why, plus gain more insight on Junction Point's mission.

» <http://junctionpoint.wordpress.com/>



### 2D Boy

The team at 2D Boy took a break from America's Next Top Model to create a blog that serves as a "making-of" for hit downloadable title World of Goo. The blog documents sources of inspiration (ants) and details other fun side projects.

» <http://2dboy.com/2007/06/>



### Jason Rohrer

The man responsible behind the five-minute game about the inevitability of death, Passage, hosts a minimalistic website that features links of all his games to date, complete with development notes. You'll also gain access to his personal Arthouse Games website that urges developers to take more risks in games.

» <http://hcssoftware.sourceforge.net/jason-rohrer/>



### Hironobu Sakaguchi

The creator of Final Fantasy left Square Enix in 2004 to create his own studio, Mistwalker. The company website hosts his personal blog, where Sakaguchi's musings reveal a love for LEGO robots, instant soup, and beautiful photos of the sky. He also has an adorable dog named Skip. Be sure to check out the wild photos from Skip's birthday party.

» <http://www.mistwalkercorp.com/en/column/>



### Robert Bowling

Best known for his work as creative strategist at Infinity Ward for Modern Warfare 2, the FourZeroTwo blog is a great source for all things Call of Duty. Bowling injects a bit of his "gamer geek" fanboyism as well with posts about upcoming games (Fallout: New Vegas) and comics (Batman) that he's looking forward to.

» <http://fourzerotwo.com/>

# The DS Does

New handheld to be unveiled at E3

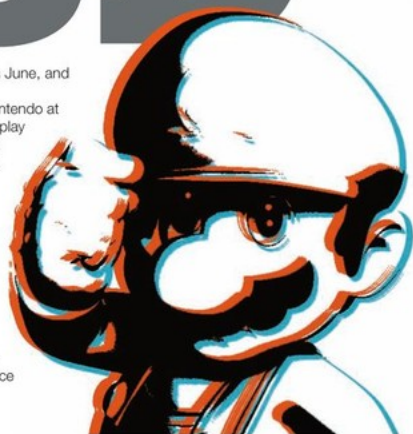
**B**efore the DSi XL even had a chance to make it out the door, Nintendo announced a new 3D Nintendo DS handheld that doesn't need glasses – the 3DS. The company says that the system (along with more details) will be presented at E3 this June, and the handheld is scheduled to come out sometime before March 31, 2011.

"We wanted to give the gaming industry a heads up about what to expect from Nintendo at E3," said Nintendo of Japan chief spokesperson Ken Toyoda. "We'll invite people to play with the new device then." Despite the company's slow unveiling, one detail that has been confirmed is that the 3D handheld is compatible with older DS and DSi games.

With HD in many households, console manufacturers like Nintendo and Sony – as well as TV makers – have made 3D the centerpiece for showcasing cutting edge technology. Earlier this year at CES, Sony had 3D demos for PSS titles like MLB 10: The Show and Gran Turismo 5, and the company says that it will have a 3D-ready Blu-ray player (with firmware updates for existing players) ready this summer. Microsoft is waiting to see how the public takes to bringing 3D into their homes before it moves on any 3D plans.

Rumors of a new DS handheld have been running around for a while, but none of the speculation indicated 3D functionality. Previous talk centered on the system getting an accelerometer and two larger screens placed very close together so they could function as a single screen. No word has surfaced as to whether these features could also be incorporated into the Nintendo 3DS. Other rumored features for the device include rumble capabilities and a single analog stick. » by Matthew Kato

# 3D



## How Will It Handle 3D?

Nintendo hasn't explained how its new handheld will produce 3D without glasses, but some companies have already found ways to do this. Talking to Tom Zerega, co-founder and CEO of Magnetic 3D, a 3D display company, he outlined two of the main ways companies can produce glasses-free 3D (known as auto-stereoscopic) effects: filters and lenses.

A barrier filter is "like putting a screen door in front of a display," Zerega explained. It blocks certain pixels from the player, which creates the illusion of 3D when used in conjunction with the software. Lenses – which Magnetic 3D uses – curve the light to your left and right eyes to produce the effect. Both methods could be seamlessly integrated into the 3DS screen as a thin film behind a protective screen. This would produce a 3D illusion that simulates both depth and projection out of the screen.

Zerega is partial to lenses because he believes they have a better viewing zone, brightness, and image qual-

ity. "I think barrier is really simple, but it does have its downsides when it comes to image reproduction," he said. "Nintendo is all about putting out really high quality products, so I'd expect to see them look at lenses."

Hidden Picture, a DSi puzzle game out currently in Japan, already uses a 3D effect and touch screen interaction in its puzzles. The title uses the DSi's cameras to orient its images with the player, but unlike filters or lenses, it only produces 3D via depth, not projection. Earlier this year, Satoru Iwata mentioned to Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* that the next DS would require a sensor to read player movements. At the time, Iwata claimed he was misinterpreted, but the newspaper stood by its quote. If what Iwata said was true, perhaps this is an indication that the 3DS will use cameras similar to how Hidden Picture uses the DSi's cameras to track movement and adjust the onscreen picture to give the illusion of 3D.



In the Japanese game Hidden Picture for the DSi, tilting the handheld back and forth or side to side produces a 3D effect.



This is an example of how Hidden Picture for the DSi uses 3D to solve puzzles. You can't find the letter A unless you rotate the DSi to the side to connect the letter's different fields of depth.

## A DS For Every Occasion

**Nintendo DS**  
(Nov. 21, 2004)



**Nintendo DS Lite**  
(June 11, 2006)



The DS Lite's smaller form factor is an attractive upgrade, and becomes the default style for the DS going forward

**Nintendo DSi**  
(April 5, 2009)

Although the DSi loses GBA backwards compatibility, it gains two cameras, more RAM, and other features



**Nintendo DSi XL**  
(March 28, 2010)



Nintendo's latest handheld features bigger screens and a larger stylus

**Nintendo 3DS**  
(TBA)



## The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN

**(RIGHT)** Konami's music games haven't fared as well as the competition, but that may change with Def Jam Rapstar. The game – which features 40 hip hop songs from Dr. Dre to Kanye West, accurate voice recognition technology, freestyle rapping, online battles, video uploads, and across-the-board microphone compatibility – comes out this fall.



**(BELOW)** The cuts continue at EA. The publisher has announced that it cancelled one of the two games in development with The Darkness creators Starbreeze Studios. The Swedish developer was working on Project RedLime, which is a code-name for a remake of a classic EA IP, and a Jason Bourne title. It sounds like the latter game got the axe, as EA has said that although the company is still committed to the Bourne franchise it picked up last year, no projects related to it are currently in the works. The other game, which EA and Starbreeze say they are currently focused on, has long been rumored to be Syndicate.



## the ugly

**(RIGHT)** An internal clock error bricked every pre-Slim PlayStation 3 system for a few days shortly after the release of Heavy Rain. It was so bad that Sony had to tell everyone not to play their PS3. At least they had some Kevin Butler commercials to keep them happy in the meantime.



**(RIGHT)** The doomsday scenario for naysayers of Ubisoft's new PC DRM (which requires an online connection to the company's servers even if you're not playing multiplayer) came true when the company's authentication server crashed. While it was down, people couldn't play their copies of Assassin's Creed II because they couldn't log in to their accounts. Looks like Ubisoft's anti-piracy DRM has only encouraged people to look for cracked versions of the game. The good news is that Ubisoft has offered a free game to those affected.



**(ABOVE)** Former Tecmo/Dead or Alive mastermind Tomonobu Itagaki has surfaced with a name for his new development studio: Valhalla Game Studios. No word on what the 50-person team is working on, but Itagaki says he doesn't want it to be a fighting game, as he already considers Dead or Alive "the best fighting game in the world." Hopefully he thinks the same about DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball, because we don't know if we can take another bikini simulator.

In other Itagaki news, he and Tecmo reached an undisclosed out-of-court settlement regarding a lawsuit Itagaki filed over unpaid bonuses.



**(ABOVE)** Red Dead Redemption can't seem to get out of Dodge. The game was originally supposed to hit store shelves on April 27, but has now been delayed until May 18. Not a significant delay, but we're getting mighty anxious to put our spurs into this one. Another open world title taking its time is Mafia II. The crime title set in the '50s has been moved to August 24.



“  
Getting mad at Activision for this kind of thing is like getting mad at an ape for throwing feces. It's just how the beast communicates.”

Double Fine's Tim Schafer tweets about Activision firing Infinity Ward's Jason West and Vince Zampella. See page 18 for the full story.

”



**Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light**  
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, PC



## Strong contenders emerge in this summer's downloadable game scene *by Matt Miller*

**T**he last couple of months have seen a wealth of new downloadable titles revealed. 2010 is shaping up to be a phenomenal year for the short form, indie, and other small-scale downloadable releases, no matter your platform of choice.

One of the most intriguing upcoming arrivals is **Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light**. Ditching the Tomb Raider moniker, Crystal Dynamics is prepping the long-time gaming icon for a download-only release sometime this summer. Abandoning the familiar behind-the-back, solo platforming that gamers have come to expect from Ms. Croft, *Guardian of Light* has a decidedly more arcade sensibility. The camera is panned to an overhead isometric view, and the combat is a central part of gameplay, along with the expected dose of puzzle solving. To help

her figure some of these brainteasers out, Lara is joined by Totec, an ancient hero reanimated to fight against their mutual enemy. With this new companion along for the ride, the game includes a full online or offline cooperative option, letting players team up to explore crumbling ruins and forgotten traps. Each of the two main characters has unique abilities and equipment; Lara can use her grapple to create a tightrope to distant objects, or Totec can hold his shield above his head to create a temporary platform for our heroine. It's a surprising new direction for a franchise in need of some fresh ideas — early impressions are of an intriguing side-adventure for fans while they wait for the inevitable announcement of a major retail installment.

An excellent DS title is migrating over to XBLA and PSN in the coming months; **Might & Magic Clash of Heroes** changes up the



**Comic Jumper**  
Xbox Live Arcade



**Might & Magic Clash of Heroes**  
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade

longtime franchise formula with a unique tactical puzzle mechanic. Players create a network of defensive and offensive units under a variation of the familiar match-three model. A vibrant cast of anime-style characters underpins the experience with a light RPG framework, a detailed story, and plenty of artifacts, spells, and leveling. The HD port to console has the game looking sharp and appealing. If you haven't yet had a chance to check out the original portable version, this is one title that should definitely be on your radar.

**Bit.Trip Runner** is the fourth installment of the excellent franchise that's been rolling out on WiiWare over the last many months. Runner is a marginally less abstract concept than its earlier brethren, as it plays out in a familiar side-scrolling platform style. Our hero, Commander Video, is on a mission – and though we don't know what it is, he can't stop running to get there. With the main character in constant motion, players are tasked with precise button presses to vault, kick, slide, and otherwise progress through a patterned sequence of obstacles. Like previous games in the series, the action is keyed to audio cues in the music, making it easy to drop into a rhythmic trance as the challenge escalates. And boy, does it escalate. A single mistaken jump will send the Commander reeling back to the beginning of the stage; perfect timing and lightning fast reflexes are the key to success. It's a simple but brilliant little game with a strangely mesmerizing visual style that makes it hard to look away.

After the success of the first installment, it was a no-brainer that we'd be seeing **Monkey**

#### **Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's**

**Revenge.** For pirates new to the humorous world of Monkey Island, Guybrush Threepwood is an unlikely hero embroiled in a zany adventure through pirate-plagued seas and unusual hidden treasures. Like its predecessor, *Monkey Island 2* has dramatically reinvented visuals that can be hot swapped with the original PC version for a nostalgic comparison. New to this second entry is the optional ability to control Guybrush directly, rather than a purely point-and-click affair. Given the standout quality of the original game, and the stellar job LucasArts did on the first title's remake, I've no reason to believe this will be anything but an excellent addition to any adventure gamer's catalog.

I know I'm not the only one who was a big fan of last year's "Splotson Man. If you're with me in that sentiment, you'll be excited to hear about **Comic Jumper**, the next title from development house Twisted Pixel. The game stars Captain Smiley, a muscle-bound do-gooder bashing and shooting his way through a side-scrolling beat 'em up. Or at least that's what I've seen so far. Though Smiley begins the game in familiar superhero environs, the game takes its name from the idea that its hero will jump to new comic book styles as the game progresses. Twisted Pixel recently revealed its second area – a comic world in the style of Frank Frazetta's iconic Conan paintings, starring a hero named Nanoc. No matter the comic backdrop, Twisted Pixel's trademark humor appears to be in place. Look no further than the talking, fully animated

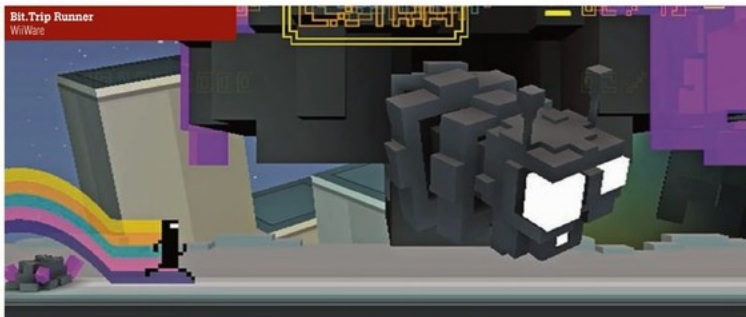
star on the Captain's chest for evidence. I can't wait to check out more of the game.

Konami is reviving an old and nearly forgotten character from their stable of retired mascots: **Rocket Knight** is coming to PSN and XBLA. Anybody remember this guy? If you don't, you're in good company. Sparkster hasn't appeared in a starring role in about 15 years. I had some severe doubts about the viability of the little opossum's return, but a couple hours with the new title silenced my doubts. Gorgeous, cartoon-style visuals highlight the return of Rocket Knight, who is once again to be found in a straightforward side-scrolling platform adventure – a relative rarity these days. The adventures of Sparkster might feel lackluster were it not for his titular gimmick. The ability to rocket across screen in sudden bursts of speed adds a frantic nature to the action. The highly vertical platforming stages give way to open *Gradius*-style shooting levels for a nice change of pace. Multiple difficulties, challenging collectibles, and strong level design help the game shake off initial impressions of a "kids only" title, and emerge as a distraction that might be worth a look.

*For additional coverage of downloadable games, check in at [gameinformer.com](http://gameinformer.com) for weekly impulse updates. In addition, you can read our review of WiiWare's remarkable new platformer, *Cave Story*, on page 91.*



**Rocket Knight**  
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



**Bit.Trip Runner**  
WiiWare



**Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge**  
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, PC





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## February Top 20

Rank	Game Title (System)	Rank Last Month	Months in Top 20
1	BioShock 2 (360)	-	-
2	New Super Mario Bros. Wii (Wii)	1	3
3	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (360)	4	3
4	Just Dance (Wii)	9	2
5	Wii Sports Resort (Wii)	6	6
6	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (PS3)	7	3
7	Mass Effect 2 (360)	2	1
8	Dante's Inferno: Divine Edition (PS3) This special edition is the only PS3 version of the title. It includes the original soundtrack, developer commentaries, a digital art book, and more for the same price as the 360 edition. Are console-exclusive special editions the way of the future?	-	-
9	Dante's Inferno (360)	-	-
10	Heavy Rain (PS3) Quantic Dream's ambitious adventure title sold over 219,000 units in just under a week on shelves. Next month's chart position may give a better picture of whether its appeal has spread beyond the hardcore gamer and into the mass market.	-	-
11	Aliens vs. Predator (360)	-	-
12	BioShock 2 (PS3)	-	-
13	New Super Mario Bros. (DS)	18	46
14	Mario Kart (Wii)	5	23
15	MAG (PS3)	13	1
16	Wii Fit Plus (Wii)	3	4
17	Mario and Sonic At the Olympic Winter Games (Wii)	-	-
18	God of War Collection (PS3)	20	1
19	Mario Kart DS (DS)	16	53
20	NBA 2K10 (360)	-	1

Listings based upon NPD data of units sold for February 2010

### loose talk

# Devil May Cry's New Developer

A lot is always going on behind the scenes in the video game industry, and we try and share the rumors and scuttlebutt we hear about your favorite games, developers, and publishers. Loose Talk lets you in on what goes on behind closed doors and what might be in store for the future.

## Ninja Theory's New Project

The PlayStation 3 exclusive Heavenly Sword catapulted developer Ninja Theory into the spotlight. Unfortunately, the game's popularity never matched the critical praise, and the studio moved on to making Enslaved for Namco Bandai (see issue #198, page 52 for more). Loose Talk has learned that Enslaved isn't the only game Ninja Theory is working on – we've heard that the Cambridge, England developer is being tapped for the next Devil May Cry. That's right. Although we've been more than happy with the direction the series has been going in, new development blood is an interesting choice for such a storied franchise. It's not totally unexpected, however; Capcom has said that although it is shying away from Western developers for new IP, it would continue to utilize them for known franchises, which DMC certainly is.

## Barlog's New Project Means End of Mad Max?

God of War II's game director Cory Barlog took a brief, albeit glorious, turn at the helm of that successful franchise before moving on. Since 2008 he's been working with Mad Max director George Miller on a game based on Australia's premier near-future, gang-ridden dystopia. Loose Talk is hearing, however, that development on the project has stopped, and that Barlog has moved on to new pursuits. That's only the half of it. We've also heard that Barlog is currently working on a new Tomb Raider game. We don't have all the details at the moment, but we assume that means the full-fledged (i.e. not Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light. See page 26 for more on that) Tomb Raider title that developer Crystal Dynamics has cooking. While it's sad that Mad Max's adventures appear to be over before they ever began, we're excited to see what Barlog can add to Lara's next outing.

## Gears of War 3

Everyone's got their ears to the ground for word about the next Gears of War, and the Internet is buzzing about a possible release date for the third installment of Epic's gritty shooter. Word is that the world will first hear about the game in April, and that it's expected to come out the following April in 2011. Mark Rein, Epic vice president, replied, "You're kidding, right?" when asked about the April release date. However, from what we're hearing, this timeline of Gears 3 events isn't far-fetched.





# A Conversation With the Prince

Game Informer talks with **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time** star **Jake Gyllenhaal**

Jake Gyllenhaal is considered one of the most talented young actors in Hollywood for his roles in such acclaimed films as *Brokeback Mountain*, *Donnie Darko*, and *Zodiac*. This May, he stars in *The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, producer Jerry Bruckheimer and director Mike Newell's would-be blockbuster based on the legendary video game series. We recently had a chance to speak with Gyllenhaal about working with Prince of Persia creator Jordan Mechner, the physical challenges of big-budget action filmmaking, and the correct way to adapt video games to the big screen.

## Were you familiar with the Prince of Persia games before you signed on to do the film?

I actually played the original Jordan Mechner game when I was a kid. After that, I took a long hiatus from the game – I think the game took a long hiatus, too. When I read the script, I knew the original game, but I had not played its current incarnation. So I picked it up and started playing it.

I think the thing that separates this movie from the video game and other video game adaptations is that in the video game, although the Prince does really extraordinary feats of defying gravity that seem almost inhuman, the basis with which he does them is comparable to parkour. We based everything in reality. When he does the moves in the film, everything has a reason in the story. Some of the video game adaptations that have previously been done are just carbon copies or taking an idea and doing the cool thing that's already been done in the game. With this one, because we all love filmmaking and we wanted to take it to another level, we said, out of respect to the video game, "How do we do what he does in the game but give it a basis in the character?"

## Series creator Jordan Mechner worked on the movie's script. Did you meet him?

Yes, definitely. Jordan came to the set a few times, and we spent time together. He drew me over and over again. [Laughs] I've since seen him many times. It's great, because I've played real people who exist in reality and characters that have been created in books, and you have to respect the existing source material. At the same time, you have to interpret it yourself. With this, it was fun, because I don't think that this type of source material – games – had ever been translated correctly into movies. With Jordan keeping an eye on it and us elaborating on the idea that he began, it was a great collaboration. It was cool, because the best day was when Jordan came on set and said, "This is awesome."

Every time he would see stuff, he'd say, "This is my dream." The irony of Prince of Persia is

that, for Jordan, it was based on movies he'd seen. Now, the movies inspired a video game that has now inspired a movie. It has a circular effect – much like the Sands of Time. [Laughs]

## It sounds like you grew up with games then grew out of the hobby. Has this inspired you to get back into gaming?

Definitely. Playing the Sands of Time was a part of my work. I'm sure you understand that with the job you do. I got really into it – too into it, actually. They would call me to set and I'd say, "Just give me one second, I need to finish this!" I don't want to get too sucked into it, because who knows what will happen. But, yeah, I'm definitely into it.

## This is the first time you've worked on a high budget, special effects-intensive action film. How was that experience for you?

It was so much fun. I really enjoy the challenge, because I knew people would be critical of whoever was going to play a part that was dear to the fans of the game. I was up for the challenge. I had to get in shape physically and learn all these different skills. I had to learn parkour. It was overwhelmingly amazing to be in something so big. It was great fun, man. It's an honor.

## What kind of physical regimen do you go through to get in shape for a movie like this?

They just put us in a machine and we come out all chiseled up. [Laughs] For me it was all about functional fitness so I could be prepared like an athlete. You don't do a movie like this, in my opinion, unless you are going to try your hand at those stunts. Even if you don't pull them off and the stunt man makes you look bad, at least you tried. I trained to do the stunts, along with the normal things like cardio to get your heart and lungs in shape. I was studying parkour and learning from acrobats. In the gym, we'd be running on padded walls and jumping on things. Most of the things we do in this movie were done without wires. We wanted to add a certain reality to it. I think the sense of suspense is suspended when you know people are on

wires, when you know they are safe. A lot of the times, even though [the stunt coordinators] are very professional and we were generally safe, we were pushing the edge... Mostly, I just did a lot of sword fighting and, over time, you chip away at it. All of a sudden, you're in shape.

## When you were planning the stunts, did you take cues from the video games for certain moves?

Yes, all over the place. Even on set, I would have it in my trailer. If I saw a move I liked in the game, I would bring the stunt guys in and say, "Guys, we have to try this out!" So we did things like that all along the process.

There's a fine line because there's wall running, massive sword fights, and battles very much like the game. It's very faithful to Sands of Time. But in terms of how it looks and how it's done, it's very different. For example, in one scene my character is running over these short pillars and there are horses attached to them. Unless you knew the game, I don't know if you would know that that's something the Prince can do. But it looks like something that would naturally be done in the situation he is in. Then, all of a sudden, he does this big back flip over a running horse.

I remember Jerry Bruckheimer saying, "Stop. I want to know why he just did that back flip. Why did he need to do that?" I was like, "Because it looks cool." [Laughs] But Jerry said, "No. I want to know why. It needs to have a reason in this movie and in this storyline. I don't want to make a movie where we are just copying a video game. I want to make a great story." So, each one of the moves that is inherent to the Prince is connected to the story and has a reason. We spent a really long time doing that. Finally, we devised a way that the only way for him to get out of that situation in a certain period of time was to flip. Originally, there wasn't a horse there, so we added that and all the reactions to what I did. It's that kind of thing that makes this movie so good. I think the gamers will see it and say, "Those are the moves the Prince does," and people that haven't played the game will say, "Man, that's so cool," and won't even realize that it's something the Prince does in the game. » Interview by Matt Helgeson



# Battlefield: Bad Company 2

**Selling over 2.3 million copies in two weeks**, DICE's *Bad Company 2* was an instant success. But even with a public multiplayer beta to smooth out the rough edges, the community is always chirping about perceived imbalances and requesting refinements. DICE producer Kristoffer Bergqvist discusses the questions posed by the Battlefield community.



**I see a player "skill" ranking in the leaderboards, but I have no idea what that means. Could you explain the formula you use to come up with that number?**

Player Skill is a relative skill level calculated depending on how well you perform on the battlefield. The unique thing about it compared to the regular rank is that the Player Skill can drop if you start to perform poorly for a while. The Player Skill will also increase more if you shoot and kill players with a high Player Skill, and less if you run around pwning newbs. Players familiar with the Elo rating system will find a lot of similarities.

**Every weapon or vehicle in the game seems to have a natural counter and requires some human skill to use – except the mortar strikes. Why did you give the recon class such an unbalanced and overpowering weapon? Teams with a lot of snipers just spam the M-Com crates.**

The drawback to the mortar strike is its reload time, and to some extent the time between when it's triggered and its impact on target. If there are many snipers in the area that create a constant barrage of mortar strikes, I suggest you head there and get yourself some knife rewards. That being said, of course, we constantly watch the game for exploits or overpowered weapons, and if a certain item proves to be too powerful we will address it. We won't jump to conclusions, though; it's important that we see how the gameplay evolves as people discover new tactics and are getting more familiar with the tools at hand.

**Why did you create such a small amount of unlocks, gadgets, and specializations? I already maxed out the vehicle and medic classes in less than 10 hours. Are you going to introduce new rankings and unlocks in the future?**

Get back to me when you're at max level and got all awards.... Seriously though, we would like to be able to build *everything* for future DLC, but will focus on the areas where our players find it most necessary. On the content side, right now it looks like players want more levels rather than more weapons. Head over to our forums and let us know what you think!

**Why can't you go prone in the game? Is there a game design reason why you don't let players drop on their bellies?**

Yes. After playing around with it we all realized that prone didn't add anything to the *Bad Company 2* gameplay. It slowed down the pacing and made counter-sniping even harder. We don't see a reason to keep game features out of legacy; we want everything in the game to make for a better gaming experience for everyone on the Battlefield.

**It seems to take several RPGs to take out a tank, but only one C4 or UAV guided missile. What is the reasoning behind that balancing?**

Using C4 puts you in a lot of risk since you, in most cases, need to be very close to the vehicle you're attacking. In the UAV's case it is indeed possible to one-shot tanks if you get a clear hit where the armor is weakest, the balancing factor there is the reload time. The different vehicles actually have different armor depending on angle.

**Hardcore mode is a great concept, but everyone is sniping and it makes it annoying to play. Have you considered creating a custom game mode where players could turn off the recon class so not everyone hides in the hills, or employ a kit limit for certain game types like Rush mode? I really don't see a kit limit being the solution here. Battlefield players**

should be allowed to play the game their way – it's still a sandbox after all – and not be limited by some abstract rule set. We are, however, aware of the problem with snipers being over-represented in Hardcore mode, and are currently looking into different solutions.

**Did you guys change the frequency of the ticket bleed in the Conquest mode? Maybe it's just me, but it seems a lot slower.**

Yes, it's slower and the outcome of the game is more dependent on kills compared to the previous Battlefield titles. We are looking at the telemetry from the Conquest matches right now, and this is something that may be addressed in a near future.

**Why won't the game let me switch teams after a match? Sometimes I get stuck on the opposite team as my friends, and it's a hassle to back out, accept a new join game request, and cross my fingers to see if I get onto their side.**

**My friends and I typically roll deep (10-12 players) every night when playing Modern Warfare 2 and BFBC 2. In Modern Warfare 2 it's easy, just form a pre-game party and we're set. With Battlefield we struggle all night to end up on the same team. Why did you decide against creating a lobby where a larger group of friends could split into smaller squads and join matches together? Could you please add this in the future?**

I'll merge these two questions into one, honestly maybe not entirely satisfactory, answer. We have seen that there are a few odd occasions where our friend-join systems fail to meet the players' demands, and will look into fixing these. Once again it's a question about priorities in the post-launch plan. Team switching is already on the wanted-list, but I

guess we didn't see a lot of 10-12 player groups wanting to fill one team (if you're fewer I'd suggest joining as squads, if you're more use the Private Match system and get an entire server of your own).

**I miss maps like El Alamein that let you have epic tank battles. Any plans to add one of these with DLC?**

I'd love to see some more maps where our tanks will come to use, but it's all up to the community and the requests we get in the coming months.

**Your game is super realistic with all the vehicles, weapons, and destruction, but it kills the realism when I am shooting a guy and then I see three other dudes pop up on him and start shooting me. Have you ever looked at squad respawn alternatives that put the new guys near their squadmate in a safe place away from the line of sight but not directly on them?**

Checking for a coordinate on the level that is currently out of sight for all 32 players, plus in close vicinity to the squadmate acting spawn point, is a technical impossibility. From a game design perspective it's always important to spawn the soldier as close to the squad as possible, in case someone is already watching or engaging that squad and don't want any surprise enemies emerging from the sides.

**The spotting mechanic doesn't seem to work sometimes even though my crosshairs are right on an enemy or vehicle. What's the deal?**

That's not the expected behavior of that feature. It's something that'll be addressed in an upcoming patch. Sorry about the inconvenience. ☹

# God of War III

Every game in the God of War series has set the new high bar for stylish action. In each entry, Kratos must live up to his own epic legacy, and he has succeeded once again in God of War III. We talked about the game's technical challenges, sources of inspiration, and design philosophy with game director [Stig Asmussen](#).



**Several elements of previous games (like Pandora's Box and the Blade of Olympus) play important roles in God of War III. How much of their significance to the third game was known when they were originally created?**  
None. The story for the third game went through two different directors and several major changes were made. I wanted to make sure that we created a story that tied everything together, so we looked for ways to incorporate those elements.

**The game breaks new ground in its cinematic presentation. How did the team arrive at the decision to make this a priority versus major overhauls to the combat system, for instance?**  
Because we knew this is something that we could do without ripping the gameplay apart. We knew it would make the overall presentation better without disrupting the experience. When you are working on the final chapter of a trilogy it is not a good idea to overhaul the player mechanics. People were expecting the game to feel a certain way and remain familiar.

**What was the most difficult sequence in the game to execute, either from a design or technical standpoint?**  
Without a doubt, the Titans. The opening sequence was just a bear. We had to worry about selling this massive war on top of a Titan who is climbing a mountain fighting against gods during a boss battle. Wow, what a mouthful! All this needed to happen within framerate and memory and most importantly it needed to be fun. Cronos was a major task as well. Since the sequence was slightly more free form, we had a harder time nailing down the design. And in general, working on the scale of those two scenes was simply ridiculous.

**Did you have any reservations about bringing Athena back after her death in the second game? Killing a god doesn't have much impact if they just come back to life immediately.**  
I see your point, but we had no reservations. She was just too important to telling the story the right way. She is a guide of sorts and I thought it would be cool to surround her with this mysterious sense of resurrection. Why did she come back? Who brought her back?

**Kratos and Pandora aren't together very long, but some key story moments hinge on a bond between the two characters. Why didn't they have more time together to form a more believable connection?**  
Simply put, we ran out of time. We had several more chambers in the Labyrinth and a couple of extra key scenes with her that we had to remove to fit everything else in. These were not easy decisions, but these things happen. I think considering how much we packed into the game we did a pretty good job.

**During the course of the game, Kratos takes down all the major players, but not the entire pantheon. Were there any gods that you wanted to include but didn't make the cut for the final game?**  
No. This is the cast that I wanted to see. We needed time to build up a small amount of backstory between Kratos and the gods he would eventually take out, and these were the ones that made the most sense. These are also the guys that we saw at the end of God of War II.

**An ancient musical mechanism emblazoned with the icons of the PlayStation controller seems out of place in Kratos' world.**

**Was this ever brought up as a concern during development of that puzzle?**

Absolutely. People complained about it all of the time. We tried other symbols and they were too hard to read. We tried removing the symbols all together and using the buttons on the edges of the screen but it didn't work with the pacing of the challenge; you need to see what button is coming next. At the end of the day we ended up using Greek symbols that matched the triangle, X, etc. and colored them like they were on the controller. This was the way it was designed and the way it was meant to be played. If people think that it ruined the immersive nature of the game, I will take responsibility for that, but in general, I am very proud of how we integrated our puzzles into the game in a very natural way.

**Weapons that aren't the chain blades traditionally haven't been as useful, but God of War III changes that (particularly with the Cestus). What was the team's philosophy when designing Kratos' additional weapons?**

The philosophy was very plain and simple: We wanted people to use them. We achieved this by making them easy to get to on the controller, and giving them unique personalities that were integrated into the gameplay. Each weapon speaks differently to the enemies and environment that you come across.

**Kratos still has the Golden Fleece, but reflecting projectiles isn't as central to the combat this time. Why did you choose to de-emphasize that mechanic?**  
There are a couple of reasons why, but I wouldn't use the word "de-emphasize." The main one is because we have a lot of new mechanics, and we wanted them

to take center stage. Also, the fleece is generally more of a hardcore mechanic, and we took strides to make the game more approachable for a wider range of players. However, it is still there and it is still very useful.

**The final punch against Zeus was awesome. What was your approach to creating and portraying the fatal blow?**

We had several discussions about how to make this final sequence work. I really wanted to do something that had the impact of the Poseidon kill. We had several different ideas centered around the screen covering with blood. We really wanted to sell the sense that Kratos is blinded by his rage. Our lead combat designer, Adam Puhl, came up with the idea of having the sequence continue until you stopped pressing circle. I loved this because it really helped sell the moment that Kratos needed to get out his anger before laying down his weapons. You have to choose to stop. It was brilliant!

**Is the "another Skywalker" moment near the end tied to the story of Kratos' lost brother from the original God of War's special features?**

Beyond what we show there were plans of an extra two minutes of footage. These did not include the lost brother. I only know where that two minutes would take us, but not where the story would go after that.

**God of War III presents a satisfying conclusion to the story of Kratos. If the series were to continue, do you think it could do so without Kratos at the center?**  
I am not sure of where the series could or will go, but I would love to imagine that Kratos would be some part of it. He is just too strong of a character... ♡



games

# Life On The Farm

A hardcore gamer's look at FarmVille

by Joe Juba

If you use Facebook, you're familiar with FarmVille. Even if you don't play it yourself, your news feed has probably kept you updated on your friends' inane in-game accomplishments. Between all of the mystery eggs, lost cows, and ugly ducklings, I blocked all FarmVille-related content on my Facebook page shortly after the game's release last summer.

While avoiding FarmVille on Facebook is as easy as clicking the hide button from your news feed, the application is difficult to ignore as a force within the gaming industry. With more than 82 million users, FarmVille is the undisputed king of the social gaming market. That kind of success isn't a fluke. I wanted to understand what so many people found appealing about a simple Flash-based farm simulation, so I started playing it for myself. If you had dismissed FarmVille as a mere nuisance, you may be surprised at how cleverly Zynga's flagship title is designed to suck you in, attract your friends, and accept your money.

## Farm Fact:

Of the 82 million FarmVille users, 32 million play the game every day

## Getting Started

Most importantly, FarmVille is free. It doesn't cost anything to create your cartoon farmer avatar and get your hands dirty. Many Internet games are free, but not all of them can leverage the advantages of Facebook; the game is accessible to all of the networking site's users, which gives it a potential audience of over 400 million. These two factors combine to form a ridiculously low barrier to entry – probably the most important factor in FarmVille's success. Millions of people can get in the door with no investment (apart from a few minutes every day or two), and can continue playing indefinitely without shelling out any real cash.



## Farm Living

At the basic level, FarmVille is just pointing and clicking. You click on a plot of land and you plow it. Click on it again, and you can choose what seed you plant there. After waiting for several real-time hours, you return to your farm to harvest the crop, which yields currency that you re-invest in more crops and other upgrades. It's like you're playing solitaire, but you can only move a couple cards every few hours and you get some fake money when you do. There is no skill and no urgency involved – a fact that may cause hardcore gamers to scoff, but it is just another part of keeping the game accessible.

By contrast, Natsume's Harvest Moon series (which I enjoy) also lets players tend to a virtual farm, but several mechanics are needlessly complicated and poorly communicated, which has kept the franchise relegated to niche status for years. With FarmVille, it's always simple, and there's always a new ribbon or reward just within your grasp.





## Coins Versus Cash

Despite the rural country backdrop, the whole farming concept is just cosmetic. It's a skin stretched over FarmVille's economy, which is where the game starts getting insidious. You'll collect two separate kinds of currency, coins and farm cash. Coins are plentiful, and you get them for practically every task you complete. Harvest crops, you get coins. Help a friend, you get coins. Earn a ribbon (FarmVille's achievement equivalent), you get coins. After a few days of playing, your coffers are overflowing with coins. Farm cash, on the other hand, is a much rarer commodity; you get only one dollar per level you gain.

The two kinds of money aren't interchangeable – something that costs farm cash may not be available for purchase with coins, no matter how many you have. If you don't have enough cash for the things you want (which is inevitable), you're forced to consider how much FarmVille means to you. Is it worth paying for? FarmVille accepts credit cards, and is more than happy to trade you virtual money for real money. Some of the ways the game tries to get you to pay up are exceptionally devious; you can use coins to buy a tractor, but purchasing fuel for the tractor costs farm cash. Since 25 farm cash only costs \$5, it's a small step to go from playing FarmVille to paying for it.

### Farm Fact:

Without any promotion, FarmVille garnered 18,000 users on its first day

## Friends and Family

Like a chain letter or pyramid scheme, FarmVille hopes you will convert the people you know into fellow customers. The game gives you a variety of incentives to rope your other Facebook friends into playing, and some of FarmVille's finer points depend on having plenty of neighbors to rely on. Adding your friends as neighbors unlocks upgrades for purchase in the store, but it also opens up new avenues to milk your buddies for experience and free stuff. The more neighbors you have, the more people can send you items (which they can gift for free, but would otherwise cost you money in the store).

You can also visit their farms while they're away to fertilize their crops and feed their chickens. This isn't altruistic – you get experience (and find fuel for your stupid tractor) for these chores, so it's just as much about helping yourself as helping them. Everybody wins, including FarmVille, since it gets more users to view ads and potentially spend real money for virtual money. This isn't all part of some evil scheme on Zynga's part; as a player, you get some payoff in the way that you are interacting with your actual friends instead of random internet creeps. That's precisely the appeal, and FarmVille isn't above exploiting it.

### Farm Fact:

FarmVille was designed and developed in just five weeks

## Making Progress

Like a successful MMO, FarmVille knows how to dangle rewards in front of you to keep you swinging from one carrot-on-a-stick to the next. Using a handful of psychological tricks, the game becomes surprisingly addictive. First of all, you earn experience and gain levels; anyone who has played a role-playing game understands the inherent temptation there. Once you cross a certain threshold, you not only level up your character, but also individual crops. The more strawberries you plant, the better your strawberries become. Completing various tasks, like adopting animals, planting trees, and helping friends, nets you ribbons that each come with an experience and monetary bonus.

If you choose to publish these accomplishments on your Facebook page, your friends can also get in-game bonuses in celebration of your deeds. Apart from all that, there's the appeal of accumulating imaginary wealth, which you can spend on new buildings and decorations – most of which do nothing and can't be interacted with in any way. Want to sit at that picnic table you bought? Too bad – it's only there for effect. In short, FarmVille borrows some of the most addictive elements of traditional video games, without any of the associated depth or complexity. It's like a cardboard prop game – easy to enjoy and understand on a superficial level, but ultimately lacking substance.

## The Future of Gaming?

The more I played FarmVille, the more it scared me. The game itself isn't frightening, but as a hardcore gamer, I'm uncomfortable with the position of prominence it currently holds. Publishers and developers are already tripping over themselves to attract the attention of the casual audience, and with such a massive user base, I imagine everyone is looking at FarmVille to see what it's doing right and how to copy its formula. The problem – and the key difference between FarmVille and more sophisticated games – is that it isn't focused on delivering any kind of experience. FarmVille is just a tool, a framework that keeps you coming back for as long as possible, because the longer you play the more revenue you help the game generate. In return, you get a quaint little cartoon farm that stands as a monument to the time you've spent playing.

As a gaming experience, your farm pales before the excitement of titles like Mass Effect 2 or God of War III. On that basis, it may be tempting for the hardcore crowd to dismiss FarmVille, but with its astounding success (and profitability), you can bet that major game publishers are already implementing similar strategies to chase the social gaming market. ☼

### The Original

FarmVille is the most popular farm simulator on Facebook, but it wasn't the first. Though it added some new features, FarmVille is a blatant rip-off of Farm Town (an incredibly successful application in its own right), which came out in early 2009. The look and feel of the games are almost identical, though they handle social options differently. I have to give FarmVille some credit since it resonated with people in a way that Farm Town didn't, but it is hardly a pioneer in the field



Farm Town (top) and FarmVille (bottom)

# interview



# Contemplating the Gamepocalypse

Jessie Schell, founder and CEO of Schell Games, is a game design professor at Carnegie Mellon's Entertainment Technology Center. He's also one of gaming's most inspiring thinkers. His recent speech at the annual DICE convention, "Design Outside the Box," turned heads with a vision of the future where everything is a game.

## Talk about your book, *The Art of Game Design*.

The book grew out of a course I used to teach at school. I'd always been interested in putting some kind of book together, and publishers had approached me about it. So I decided to try to codify some of my thinking. The whole idea is that good game design comes from looking at your game from many perspectives. It's more about the questions you should ask yourself. Its subtitle is "A Book of Lenses" because I tried to separate out all of these perspectives as a different lens. A sample lens might be the lens of the toy. Does my game have toy-like properties? Do people see it and immediately want to touch it and play with it, even without knowing what the game goal is? There are about 100 of those, and we made a deck of cards that goes with it. This book has been popular. It won the 2008 Frontline Award from *Game Developer* magazine for book of the year. It's been adopted in a number of colleges as a principle game design textbook.

## Is video game design just a part of game design as a whole?

It's certainly not separate from game design as a whole. The fanciest video game in the world has a set of rules and challenges. The good video games are good in the same way that good board games are good. Any distinction is an artificial one. I'll take that further by saying that the principles of good design go outside of just games. I just got out of a lecture about level design. Everybody wants to know the nitty-gritty details about good level design. I told them, "Don't waste your time with details about where's the best place to put an item drop. Look at what architects have learned over the last 5,000 years. They are the ones that understand about the human relationship to space. If you follow those principles, you make excellent levels."

## Your speech at DICE was very well received. You've obviously been very struck by the power of Facebook and social games like FarmVille. What lessons can the industry learn from those games?

It's something I've had to look at a lot. A lot of people thought that Facebook games were going to be a silly novelty. I go to Facebook to meet up with other people. Why on Earth would I want to game to distract me when I'm here for an obvious purpose? But that's not how it works. I think the real power of the games on Facebook is that this is the first time that the casual game player sees a game that's all about their real friends – the friends that you have already established as a part of your social network.

**These games are intersecting with our real lives and real people that we know. That's almost the antithesis of what games have traditionally been – a way to shed your real identity and escape into a fantasy world.** There's a weird paradox that everyone is going to have to face up to is this collision between fantasy and reality. In a lot of ways, the idea of the single-player video game is a weird anomaly.

If you look at the history of games going back thousands of years, those games are multiplayer 99 percent of the time. You might have solitaire, but most of the time games are about connecting with other people. Computer technology of 20 or 30 years ago didn't really permit that, so there was no choice but to have single-player games. I think the single-player thing is a bit of a blip on the history of games. Moving forward, most games in the future are going to have a connected, multiplayer component to them.

## You talked about a future where there are CPUs in everything we use and life becomes a huge macro video game. For example, people getting "experience points" for walking or buying certain products.

Anything we can measure that people want to influence the behavior of, people are going to try to work into a game. Games are meaningful and powerful. It sounds weird, but if we can track you while you are reading a book, watching television, what you are eating, and when you are walking, why won't people try to try to turn it into a game? That might sound silly, but look at the idea of imagery and logos. There was a time when the whole world wasn't covered in logos. But, as print media made it possible, people realized, "Oh look at all the places we can put logos to influence you. Anywhere you can put an ad, why wouldn't you? So anywhere you can put a game, why wouldn't you? It's going to influence behaviors."

I have a name for this, for the time when game playing infiltrates every second of your life. I call it the "Gamepocalypse." After my talk, people started emailing me, saying, "This is already happening! Do you know about this; do you know about that?" They sent me all these things, so I started a blog [http://gamepocalypsenow.blogspot.com – Ed.] about all these things that take us closer to the Gamepocalypse. A recent one I just put up was called uBoost, which is a system for teachers. Do you want to give out bonus points to your students for good grades or behavior? They can use the points to decorate their avatar or feed their virtual pets. They can trade them in for iTunes gift cards. There are so many things like that, so it's nice to have this collection at the blog. These things are infiltrating everywhere.

## When everything you do is tracked and implemented into this macro game structure, what prevents it all from turning into an Orwellian nightmare?

Right. Everyone says, "God, it's just like George Orwell." Well, it's kind of like George Orwell, but it's really more like Aldous Huxley and *Brave New World*. Orwell thought a cruel government would enslave its populace. But this isn't about the government. Huxley's premise was that we'd be enslaved by entertainment. Entertainment would be so interesting and so compelling that we wouldn't think about anything important, and it would be corporations taking advantage of us. That's the more real

danger. I spoke about example like "Buy 20 cartons of Camels and unlock the Bentley in Grand Theft Auto" or "Sign up for the U.S. Army Reserves and we'll give you a battle fortress in World of WarCraft." People are going to start to realize the power of these things to influence us. You see it now. People are figuring out better and better game structures to manipulate us.

Some people have told me, "People won't stand for that; they'll rebel." But if you look at the examples, in 1950, 13 percent of television was commercials. Now, it's 36 percent. It's gradually risen, and did anyone rebel? Did anyone do anything? Think about Google and Gmail. My god – a corporation is going to scan every email you send and form a picture of your buying patterns. But we think that's okay.

## You almost see game designers as being on the front lines for the battle over the way we go to live.

Yes. If you're a game designer, you've got to pick what side you're on. I carve it up into four different areas. There are the persuaders, who are in it to just make money. We've always seen those folks in the game industry. There's a group I call the fulfillers; this is most of the game industry. These are people that are really into fulfilling people's wishes, fulfilling people's dreams and fantasies. Then there are the artists, who want to make things that are beautiful and revolutionary. They don't really care how many units it sells. And, finally, there are the humanitarians. Their goal is to use the incredible power that games have to make us better people – improve our minds; improve our bodies; improve our souls. You might think you're on one side, but someone else is going to be trying to manipulate you. I put out a call [to game designers] to say, "You better pick what side you're on, because if you don't, someone else is going to pick for you."

## That's a bit scary.

We are battling for everyone's attention. But where an individual devotes their attention determines their character. What you give your attention to determines who you are; it determines who we are as humanity, it's a very meaningful question. It may turn out that it's a nightmare and there's no winning this war. The government might come up with games to get you to go outside, and stop smoking, and be smarter; but who can win against Coca-Cola and Philip Morris? But the flip side of that is that, when everything is measured all the time, people become more self-conscious. People become more aware. Maybe that will change people. Maybe they will say, "This isn't how I want to be remembered." Because it will be remembered – for 1,000 years or as long as your descendants choose to keep your data alive. It will be a permanent record of everything you've done. Maybe that will cause people to be better people and that will be the balancing force. But it's hard to say.

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### 1982 A NEW GAME

Schell begins programming his own games on a home computer

### 1984 OBJECTS IN MOTION

Schell takes up juggling, which would be his on-and-off job through high school and college. He eventually juggles in Freithofer's Mime Circus and the Juggler's Guild

### 1989 HIGHER ED

Schell becomes a student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, an engineering school in Troy, NY

### 1993 NEW SCHOOL

As part of a program through his new employer, Bell Corp., Schell attends Carnegie Mellon as a graduate student in information networking

### 1995 IMAGINEERING

Schell moves to California to take a job at Disney Imagineering, where he works on such projects as interactive theme park rides and the still-active children's MMO Toontown Online

### 2002 HEAD EAST

After the launch of Toontown Online, Schell moves to Pittsburgh to teach a class at Carnegie Mellon at the behest of his mentor, the late Randy Pausch [who became famous for his speech and book, *The Last Lecture*]

### 2002 A NEW VENTURE

In addition to his teaching, Schell forms Schell Games, a consulting company. The company's projects include the Disney Fables MMO and the Sum of All Thrills ride at Epcot Center

### 2008 LITERARY PRAISE

Schell publishes *The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses*. The book wins a year-end award in *Game Developer* magazine

### 2010 BIG SPEECH

Schell's presentation at the annual DICE convention becomes an Internet sensation



gear

# Astro A30 Headset

## Astro Brings It All Together

A while back, we featured the A40 from Astro Gaming. Branded as the official headphones for Major League Gaming, the A40 represented a great beginning for the company – even if it was expensive. Astro's follow-up is the A30, a step down model that we prefer to its predecessor. The sound quality is on par with the A40, but packaged in a much smaller headset. As far as gaming headsets go, Astro delivers some of the best sound. While they still have yet to achieve the studio sound that a lot of music and DJ headphones have, the A30s deliver a good range with little to no distortion. Unlike its clunky older brother, the A30s fit well over your ears, and the slimmed-down design allows for portability. The build quality is improved, though they still require more love than you'd give your iPod earbuds. Astro pairs the headset with a detachable microphone for online gaming and all of the cables you need to get started on the PC or home theater systems. The optional MixAmp brings 5.1 output into the mix from your Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and just about every other audio source out there. While the price is higher than most other headsets, the performance is unmistakably good.

VERY GOOD

\$149.99 (headphones),  
\$229.99 (with 5.1 Mix Amp)  
astrogaming.com

by Nick Ahrens



## MEDIA SHELF



### LIFE

*Planet Earth* made the Game Informer staff drool like children. Now the masterminds behind the gorgeous nature imagery are back with an all-new 11-part series that takes the same jaw-dropping cinematography and puts the focus on the planet's most interesting lifeforms.

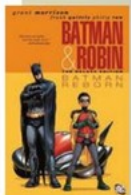
**\$59.95 DVD,**  
**\$69.95 Blu-ray**  
[shop.discovery.com](http://shop.discovery.com)



### ATHF V7

We're not sure how Carl has managed to live next to the insanity of the Aqua Team Hunger Force all these years. Whether it's Master Shake finding something new to steal or Frylock masterminding a new way to bend space-time, we're just happy there's a show on TV with a rolling meatball that sings and dances.

**\$29.98**  
[adultswimshop.com](http://adultswimshop.com)



### BATMAN & ROBIN: BATMAN REBORN

Bruce Wayne may be dead (or is he?), but that doesn't mean that DC has stopped cashing in on Batman. This new trade follows Dick Grayson taking over for the legend while Wayne's son, Damian Wayne, picks up the Robin mask.

**\$24.99**  
[dccomics.com](http://dccomics.com)



### 1 | Peregrine Glove

On paper, the Peregrine Glove may seem like a good idea. The thought of removing the keyboard for repetitive tasks such as selecting the marquee tool in Photoshop or an attack command in an RTS game has appeal, but the Peregrine isn't the answer. The USB-powered glove has 30 programmable buttons, which work with virtually any application. Unfortunately, the steep learning curve will turn off most the first time they slip on the glove. It has a decent build quality, but the top connector for the USB cord falls off at the slightest tug. Unless you're desperate to ditch the keyboard for a sci-fi chic input solution, however problematic, the classic QWERTY layout is still your best bet.

**\$149.95**

[theperagrine.com](http://theperagrine.com)

### 2 | Logitech DiNovo Mini

As home theater PCs become more popular, the need for an interface solution becomes paramount. While many applications are remote friendly, most need a keyboard and mouse at some point. Bulky, battery hungry, and uncomfortable usability on a coffee table makes the classic QWERTY setup a poor solution. The problem solvers at Logitech have you covered with the DiNovo Mini. This little hybrid blends a keyboard and mouse in one small

package that connects to your PC via Bluetooth and features a rechargeable lithium-ion battery. The keyboard has a built-in ambient light sensor to automatically judge the need for backlighting, and the arrow pad doubles as a touch mouse. The keyboard even has a flip-down cover to help protect the Mini from living room hazards. If you're serious about home theater PCs, give the DiNovo Mini a serious look.

**\$149.99**  
[logitech.com](http://logitech.com)

### 3 | Fisheye No 2

Shooting awesome photos doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. Part of a movement to resurrect the photography technology of the past, the Lomographic Society has you covered with the Fisheye No 2. This affordable dedicated fisheye camera will have users shooting the widest of wide shots at concerts, sports events, and more. The classic film camera comes with everything you need to get started, including a built-in hotshoe flash. The camera sports a 180-degree lens that can capture just about anything you point it at and warp it to that of a river trout's vision. For a mere \$70, you can crush off those super expensive DSLR rigs and just shoot away.

**\$70.00**  
[usa.shop.lomography.com](http://usa.shop.lomography.com)

### 4 | Eclipse Touch Mouse

The Touch Mouse from Mad Catz offshoot Eclipse is more modern art than mouse. This Bluetooth-powered oddity may not replace your desktop mouse, but it's a decent partner for a laptop. Because of the small size and lack of ergonomics, gaming may not be the best application for the Touch Mouse, though web surfing is smooth sailing. The weird feel is made up for with the center button, which is also a smooth plastic touch pad. Scrolling around the web is effortless, and the main buttons have a satisfying click to them. What we liked best about the Touch Mouse was the built-in gestures that require no additional software. Holding the center button in and moving the mouse in different directions results in paging back and forth, refreshing a page, and even opening the default browser. If you're willing to forgo comfort for a refined web experience, the competitively-priced mouse may be a good fit.

**\$59.99**

[eclipsetouch.com](http://eclipsetouch.com)

Head over to [gameinformertechnick.com](http://gameinformertechnick.com) to read expanded coverage and Nick's blog on gear and technology

## Get Off My Lawn (But Read My Game Reviews)

When it comes to game writing, respect your elders

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

Five years ago, there were two things you'd never see at E3: a line for the ladies room, and anyone with gray hair. But the video game realm is changing. Women, thankfully, have infiltrated our male-dominated ranks. And the E3 convention floor? It's now dotted with more than a few salt and pepper coiffures, receding hairlines, and at least one bona fide toupee.

In a perfect world, all game writers would enjoy long, satisfying, Roger Ebert-like careers. We'd clunk from booth to booth at E3 with our walkers and refer to our medications as our "power ups." Microsoft would have a special jazzy entrance at its press conference.

Problem is, many of us likely won't make it that far. The video game industry has turned into a kind of *Survivor* island for writers and reviewers. The economy stinks. Magazines and newspapers are suffering. Many websites don't pay a living wage. When it comes to cutbacks, the game reviewer at any publication is always the first person to be shown the door.

I'm 41. I've had a lot of good years in this business, and I hope to have a few more before I'm through. As a general rule, I never discuss my age at industry events. I feel compelled to hide it. The lame running joke among the gaming press is that we're all 29 until further notice.

I should be proud of my age. I'm not. My age makes me feel something verging on shame. I don't want to be known as "that old guy" or "Grandpa Gamer" at E3. I don't want to be a punchline at press events. I know of one industry veteran who refuses to give his age altogether. On the rare occasion when I do encounter a fellow older writer, the two of us usually enjoy a private "You too?" moment, as if we've discovered that we are both lactose intolerant or enjoy lite jazz.

So what are we older writers afraid of? I'll tell you a story. I worked as a senior writer at a website called Crispy Gamer in New York City for the past two years. The site was designed as a gathering place for older, mature gamers. Gamers are growing older. Games are maturing as a medium. The site strived to reflect those more sophisticated tastes.

The idea wasn't original. It's been attempted before. See: *Incite*. See also: *PC Accelerator*. Those publications failed, but the gaming landscape is always changing and evolving. Maybe this time, we told ourselves, the gaming world would be ready for this.

We put together a roster of some of the best writers in the industry. A few weeks

after we launched, an editor at a competing website wrote to me privately and said, "Congratulations. You hired my dream team." Those writers, to put it gently, were not young. They'd spent years in the business learning their craft. They knew what they were doing, and their work reflected that. In the two-year lifespan of the site, we had plenty of highs and lows, but overall, I think we published some of the most sophisticated writing the industry has ever seen.

And suddenly, it was over. The staff, most of whom were freelancers, were told that there was no more work for them. A few days after the site died, the full timers gathered in New York to mourn its demise with large amounts of gin.

Then, a week later, something strange happened. New stories began appearing on the site. Like a zombie without its head, the site was somehow, some way still alive. The byline on the new stories belonged to one of the office interns. This glasses-wearing student from NYU whose most remarkable feature was a perpetual need for a haircut, a kid who was as green as can be, had been hired to replace us. All of us.

I was beside myself with rage. Here was this website where a lot of talented, hard-working people had spent two years busting their asses trying to create something with meaning and gravity, and it was now being steered by someone who wasn't even shaving regularly. I said to a colleague, "It's as if we built this big, beautiful opera house, and now [Name withheld] gets to get up on stage with his comb and a piece of wax paper."

What happened at Crispy Gamer, I realize now, is why I'm reluctant to talk about my age in mixed company. This is why we are all "29 until further notice." This is why my colleague refuses to divulge his age. We are afraid of being marginalized. We are afraid, now more than ever,

that the industry we have loved for so many years will one day forsake us. We are afraid that it will boot us out of the moving car, then peel away.

That's already happened to far too many of my peers. A former colleague is now logging hours as a fact-checker at a women's fashion magazine, trying to figure out a way to get back into the business. Another colleague is sitting alone, drinking (I can't decipher his late-night texts), collecting unemployment checks, and wondering what his fate will be. Others have taken shoot-me-now jobs in public relations and marketing departments. Our ranks are thinning. Many of the people best equipped to write about this medium — people who can remember a time when playing a game cost 25 cents, people who have been crafting sentences for decades — can no longer find work doing what they do best. The industry is a lesser place without them.

What killed *Incite*, *PC Accelerator*, and Crispy Gamer wasn't 20-year-old interns. Gamers are always talking about how dissatisfied they are with the lack of maturity in video game journalism. Yet, it seems that whenever a publication or website comes along that purports to offer something more erudite and sophisticated, something more substantial than racy screen-shots of the Dead Or Alive girls, that publication flies around like a duck with a broken wing for a few painful months before finally dying.

What really killed these publications is that we threw a party that gamers promised to show up to, and they didn't. [Which leaves me to wonder this: Do gamers truly want more sophisticated content? Or is it simply something that they like to think they want?]

The good news is this: Sooner or later, someone will inevitably try the whole "jaded gamer" experiment again. It might be in a few months; it might be in a few years. But someone will try again. Someone — besides the fine publication you are holding in your hands — will hire the finest, most talented, and — ahem — most mature writers the industry has to offer.

When they do, you people had better be there next time. With bells on.

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.

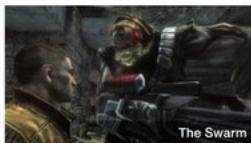
If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformermag.com



Iron Man 2

**Man Boobs & Armor**

The original Iron Man wowed theatergoers with visual effects and a shirtless Robert Downey Jr. Iron Man 2 adds a new blockbuster element: shirtless Don Cheadle. Mickey Rourke is also shirtless, but... well... we already went blind looking at those nipples in 9 1/2 Weeks. If you want to see a bunch of old dudes' chests, flock to your theater today.



The Swarm

**Finally...A Robin Hood Movie**

Gladiator II – also called Robin Hood – hits theaters today. Russell Crowe plays the role of Zombie Maximus (who goes by the nickname Robin Hood). Judging by the trailers we've seen, he apparently gets turned into a fox at some point... and then takes another step down the evolutionary ladder by turning into Kevin Costner. Mel Brooks wrote the script.



Alan Wake

**New Releases**

- Alan Wake (360)
- All-Star Karate (Wii)
- Attack of the Movies 3D (360)
- Blue Dragon: Awakened Shadow (DS)
- Legend of Kay (DS)
- Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands (PS3, 360, Wii, DS)
- Red Dead Redemption (PS3, 360)
- Sails: Second (PS3, 360, PC)
- Shrek Forever After (PS3, 360, DS)
- Tournament of Legends (Wii)
- TrackMania (Wii, DS)
- Trauma Team (Wii)

**The Return of Aquaman!**

The King of the Seven Seas is alive... again! In the second issue of DC Comics' yearlong Brightest Day story, Arthur Curry is restored to his original form. This means he won't have a hook for a hand, a hobo beard, or seashell headband created by an elderly woman who works at Jo-Ann Fabrics. This is the Aquaman we love. You know... the guy who talks to fish, talks to whales, uh... talks to dolphins, and... hmmm... well... we're pretty certain he can swim fast. That's Justice League material, people!



**Old Chicks, Zombies, Princes – Your Pop Culture, Ladies And Gentlemen**

There's something for everyone at the movies today. If you like video games, go see Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time. If you like zombies, go see George Romero's Survival of the Dead. If you liked Grumpy Old Men, but wished the main characters were more annoying, go see Sex and the City 2.



Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker

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**New Releases**

- Duke Nukem: Critical Mass (PSP, DS)
- Iron Man 2 (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP)
- Picross 3D (DS)

**The Heroic Age Begins**

For seven years, the heroes of the Marvel universe have been locked in war. With the delectable Norman Osborn, peace is at long last restored to the world, giving way to the age of heroes. The Marvel universe changes today. Readers get their first glimpse of this exciting new era in today's release, Avengers #1, a new series starring Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Spider-Man, and Wolverine.



**New Releases**

- 3D Dot Game Heroes (PS3)
- Lost Planet 2 (PS3, 360)
- Skate 3 (PS3, 360)
- The Swarm (360)



**Michael Myers Slays Theatergoers Again**

The eighth Shrek movie, Shrek Forever, hits and leaves theaters today. By the time you read this, it will be on DVD. By the time you go to the store to buy it on DVD, it will only be airing on USA Network at 3 a.m. When you try to watch it, you'll see Burn Notice instead. All roads lead to Bruce Campbell and the Chin of Destiny.

**Prince of Persia  
Immortalized in Plastic**

Todd McFarlane has made a name for himself with his comic book and action figures. But can he capture Jake Gyllenhaal's steez? You can be the judge today.

**New Releases**

- Backbreaker (PS3, 360)
- Blur (PS3, 360)
- Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker (PSP)
- Modification Racers (PS3, PSP)
- Sniper: Ghost Warrior (360)
- Super Mario Galaxy 2 (Wii)
- Tides of War (360)
- UFC Undisputed 2010 (PS3, 360, PSP)



# BULLETSTORM

The image is a promotional cover for the video game Bulletstorm. At the top, the title "BULLETSTORM" is written in a large, stylized, yellow-outlined font with a jagged, splattered white border. Above the letters are several sharp, white, needle-like shapes radiating outwards. The background is a dark red gradient. Below the title, a large, gnarled tree trunk arches over a scene. In the foreground, two characters are shown in a combat stance. On the left, a character in a futuristic, silver and black tactical suit with a helmet and goggles aims a rifle. On the right, a character in a more rugged, brown and black outfit with a backpack aims a different rifle. In the background, there are classical stone arches and columns, suggesting an ancient or ruined city. To the right, a large, grotesque, multi-limbed creature with a red and black patterned body is shown in a dynamic, falling or attacking pose. The overall scene is set against a bright, hazy sky with palm trees and a distant cityscape.

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

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

» **Publisher**  
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**  
People Can Fly/  
Epic Games

» **Release**  
2011

CONDUCTING A **BLOOD** SYMPHONY



**I**t's not often that a first-time developer working with a small publisher releases a great game. This is especially rare in the technically and visually demanding first-person shooter genre. Polish developer People Can Fly did just that in 2004 with its demon-slaying shooter Painkiller. Game Informer scored it at 8.5 and awarded it PC game of the month. Plenty of other outlets agreed, and the game developed a deserved cult following. Since then, People Can Fly has worked on an expansion and a few ports, but the team hadn't followed up with a new original property...until now.

Epic Games, the mega developer responsible for the popular Gears of War and Unreal franchises, was blown away when it received a brief demo a few years back from People Can Fly utilizing the Unreal Engine. It wasn't long before Epic bought a majority stake in the developer and opened the door for the team to craft a brand new franchise.

People Can Fly fused its wild and imaginative design with Epic's veteran experience and high standard of polish to craft Bulletstorm. This pulpy sci-fi first-person shooter offers never-before-seen ways for players to brutalize enemies with point-earning combinations and creative new weapons. How confident is People Can Fly in its new destructive symphony? The ambitious creators promised to eclipse the jaw-dropping set piece moments from Uncharted 2 without batting an eye.

BY **BRYAN VORE**

## FROM HERO TO DRUNK

In the 26th century, the Confederation of Planets is one of the most powerful forces in the galaxy. General Serrano puts a charismatic public face to the Confederation, but also runs a secret black ops team called Dead Echo that undertakes covert missions crucial to maintaining peace in the galaxy. Protagonist Grayson Hunt is the best of the best, and begins the game leading the team on a mission to assassinate a man allegedly responsible for the deaths of thousands. Dead Echo infiltrates through the roof of a skyscraper and makes its way to the target. What happens next, People Can Fly won't exactly say, but Serrano somehow reveals a manipulative and psychotic side to his personality.

"It's very hard for me to talk about the story because it's full of twists," says Adrian Chmielarz, creative director/co-founder of People Can Fly and lead designer of *Bulletstorm*. "I'm struggling here how not to spoil the fun for you when you play the final game, but something goes wrong and basically it turns out that the guy whom we were supposed to kill is not really a bad guy. He's actually a really good guy. Gray refuses to execute a very cruel order and commits treason." Shaken by this traumatic experience, Gray escapes into space and becomes the most wanted man in the galaxy.

Ten years later, Gray has gone from a cool-headed leader to a drunken and debauched pirate, robbing Confederate freighters on the fringe of occupied space to make a living. His only friend is a cyborg named Ishi Sato who serves as his brother in arms and sole voice of reason. Gray is such a wreck though, that Ishi can't contain all of his crazy impulses.

In a remote corner of the universe, they stumble across Serrano's massive warship, *Ulysses*. In a boozy haze, Gray's first impulse is to destroy it and get revenge on his old commander. The pathetic spattering of gunfire from their tiny vessel has absolutely no effect on the *Ulysses*, which replies with a "s--storm" offensive. Gray's ship gets torn up, and the only sensible option left in his mind is to ram the *Ulysses* and go out with a bang. Somehow they manage to crash into the engines, which causes both ships to spiral toward the planet below.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46 ▶

The *Ulysses* versus Gray's puny ship



Grayson Hunt



## NO FAQs REQUIRED

People Can Fly's Adrian Chmielarz is sick of achievement descriptions with absolutely no hints as to how to unlock them. "Why can't it just be in the game?" he laments. "Once skill shots are introduced in *Bulletstorm* you can see the description for most of them. If you don't have a certain weapon yet, you don't see the skill shots purposely. You can read it: Cause a heart attack in an enemy by doing this. [Then say], 'Okay, let's give it a try.'"



It's easy to see that Stygia used to be a lot of fun at one point

## PARADISE DEFILED

Up until the touchdown on the planet Stygia, the story has been all prologue. But that doesn't mean you're stuck watching a Metal Gear-style cinematic for 20 minutes right off the bat.

"It's all first-person gameplay. It's not a cutscene," Chmielarz says. "We only do the cutscenes when it's really crucial—and maybe when there's a lot of talking [to convey] more drama."

As Gray and Ishi explore their new surroundings in search of the *Ulysses* crash site, they notice something strange about Stygia. The opulent architecture and temperate climate hint that the place used to be some kind of adult playground similar to Dubai or Las Vegas. Now it's mostly abandoned and overrun with man-eating plants. The human remnants on the planet have formed tribal gangs, seemingly trading sanity for blind savagery. If you look at this issue's cover closely, you see some hints of cannibalism as well.

Our demo begins roughly four hours into the game. Gray and Ishi have made their way from a desert crash site into the city of Elysium, the primary setting for *Bulletstorm*. Along the way to the city, the duo picked up a non-feral woman who is good with a gun and seems to know what's going on with this place. Despite her handiness, Gray's trust issues and bald-faced misogynistic tendencies create a constant tension between the two (maybe he was betrayed by a woman 10 years ago?).

As the trio maneuvers through the streets, a massive killer plant busts out of nowhere, eats Ishi, and disappears underground.

"Ish!" Gray shouts.

"The plant life on this world is mutated," the woman says. "A lot of it's sentient. Your pal, he's dinner."

"Bulls---. We're not leaving till I see a body."

"You're going to see two bodies if you stick around here, buddy."

"You want to high-tail it? Head out there on your own? Feel free, sister. But I... [beeping noise]. Wait a minute. I'm picking up something on the leash. That crafty metal bastard's sending a signal. Goddamn, he's underground. Moving at a good clip, too. Already five hundred meters off."

"C'mon. It must be taking him to its nest."

"Suddenly, the b---- is a botanist."

Obviously, Gray isn't the most politically correct hero in video games. But *People Can Fly* assures us that he becomes less of a jerk over time, which is important when he's speaking for you the entire game. In a world where very few FPS protagonists say anything, it's nice to see a game going in this direction.

"It's weird for the first two minutes, and then you get used to it, and it's actually something really new and fresh," Chmielarz says. "I had this idea for a moment to make it all in first person, but then we thought it's pulpy, it's crazy, and we want to show you what Grayson looks like, so from time to time we go and do this badass cutscene."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48 ►

Ishi Sato



### NO CO-OP?

As is the case with most early looks at games, *People Can Fly* and Epic Games are pleading the fifth on competitive multiplayer. But they are flat out shooting down co-op, which seemed like a given since Ishi or the mystery woman is always at your side.

"You already know we are going to have an online component of the game, which I think is going to kick ass, but we're just not ready to reveal that yet," says Adrian Chmielarz, creative director/co-founder of *People Can Fly* and lead designer of *Bulletstorm*.

"But in single-player you don't want anybody stealing your skill shots and getting in the way. Also, we wouldn't be able to do any co-op action without sacrificing some of the story elements. For example, if this were a co-op game, then you'd be sitting in the stomach of a monster for half an hour. 'Faster, faster, please! I have to press B all the time in order not to be digested!'"

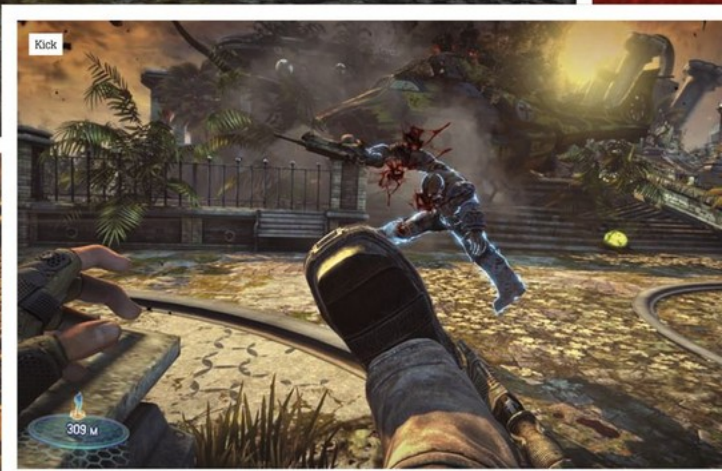




Leash



Slide



Kick

Bulletstorm's combat system relies on three key elements: the leash, kick and slide.

## LEASH 'EM IN

The leash that was sending Ishi's tracking signal? It's only one function of what People Can Fly calls a "futuristic Swiss army knife." This energy whip's most important abilities augment combat on the field of battle. In its most basic iteration, the leash can pull enemies towards Gray. On the opposite end of the spectrum, he can also kick enemies away or pop them into the air with a ground slide. All of these moves cause a brief moment of localized bullet time, leaving the single enemy helplessly floating in front of your gun. This triple threat of actions isn't an endgame attack, but merely a setup for further enemy harassment.

People Can Fly dubs the combat in Bulletstorm "creative mayhem." A straight kill will result in a plain "+10" over your enemy's fallen body. If you accomplish the more challenging shot of nailing someone in the face, you'll see "Headshot +50" in a different color. This is just the tip of the iceberg on Bulletstorm's in-depth skill point system. Essentially, the more creative the kill, the more skill points you receive to spend on offensive and defensive upgrades. The developer is shooting for around 100 skill shots, but after seeing the game in action, quantifying the many ways players can take out enemies is an extremely difficult job.

As gameplay begins, Gray kicks a cart down some stairs that runs over some guys. Points. He blasts the next foe in the throat and blood gushes out. "Gag reflex +50." In the next area Gray kicks an enemy and shoots him while he's airborne. "Bullet kick +50." He opens fire on an explosive incinerator bin (read: red barrel) next to an enemy. "Enviro

mental +50." Looking up, he notices a conveniently placed billboard and proceeds to yank it down on top of a squad of goons with the leash. Points. Then he kicks a guy into a giant cactus. "Bad touch +50." To round everything off with a laugh, Gray shoots a man in the nuts and blows off his head while he's on his knees. "Mercy +100."

After racking up loads of points, Gray invests them into his base gun, the Peace Maker Carbine (PMC). Now he can overcharge his weapon and shoot 100 bullets all at once. It turns the average foe into a steaming red skeleton. It's also useful on boss weak points, especially if you only have a limited window to do damage.

The "thumper" upgrade for the leash is even more impressive. With this ability you can slam the energy whip on the ground in front of you, sending enemies dozens of feet in the air. This recreates the shooting gallery feeling from the old NES pack-in Duck Hunt — if the ducks were stuck floating pathetically in place rather than flapping all over. To earn a ton of skill points, boost an explosive in the air alongside a group of guys and blow them all to hell in midair.

Another impressive weapon in Gray's arsenal is the flail gun, which shoots two grenades attached by a length of chain. These projectiles can wrap around people's legs like bolas to trip them up, cinch around their chests to pin down their arms, or to simply cling to an object in the environment. You can either wait for the explosion timer to go off or trigger it yourself. It's versatile enough to work like remote-detonated C4, or you can simply fire it at enemies and detonate it at the point of contact

to simulate a grenade launcher. If you shoot it at someone in cover at the right angle, one grenade will stick to the wall while the chain violently whips around the corner, decapitating or dismembering anyone in the way.

Every time a new weapon like this is added, it unlocks all new skill shots like wrapping a guy in the flail, kicking him into a group of dudes, and detonating them all. Remember the explosive bins? You can also wrap those with the flail and detonate them to make one big super bomb.

How many other weapons will be in the game? "Just between enough and many," Chmielarz teases. "There will be some like the PMC that you pick up and understand, but there will be a fair share of weapons that you have never seen before. If you take all the weapons and mix them all up, then you mix in the different environments, and then you have the leash, including the upgraded versions, it's such an insane amount of interactions that sometimes we feel like we're losing control."

While the developers haven't decided if they will implement a skill tree or straight leveling, they are sure of one thing. "Internally we ask, 'Is it awesome or is it f---ing awesome?'" Chmielarz says. "When you upgrade something you have to feel it. If you don't see your health bar on the screen and then you give the player plus-ten percent, can you really feel it in the game? But if you get something like the charge shot for your gun, then you understand that you really do have an upgrade."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51 ▶

## AN ORAL HISTORY OF BULLETSTORM

*People Can Fly, Epic, and EA reminisce on how it all came together*



Capps

**Dr. Michael Capps, president of Epic:** The People Can Fly guys actually were using our engine, and within a month they had a really cool gameplay demo. They sent it to us and Mark [Rein, VP of Epic] was like, "Mike, you gotta see this!" He pounds on the wall. Bam, bam, bam! I'm like, "What is it, Mark?" He's like, "You gotta see this demo. It's incredible!"

**Adrian Chmielarz, creative director/co-founder of People Can Fly:** We decided to license Unreal for our new project, and the guys at Epic said, "Finally, you're not going with the Painkiller engine. That was a good choice." We did a little demo and sent it to Epic and asked them "What do you think? We want to shop this around to publishers." They saw it and we got a response like, "Hey, hold on with that publisher thing. Let's start talking."

**Capps:** We first talked to them about doing some add-on levels for Gears of War. Those three levels were so gorgeous that they became some of the best-looking levels in Gears



Chmielarz

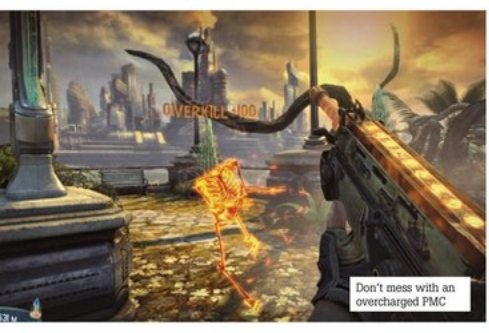
of War. After they did that work, Mark's like, "We should buy them. How much could they cost? They're in Poland." Well, it turns out a lot, but we were really impressed with their work. So that's when we talked about doing a Gears of War PC port.

**Chmielarz:** We were ecstatic [about porting Gears of War] because we knew companies that would pay to do this job. So half a year later we had proven ourselves to Epic that our coding team is great. Our artists are great. Our designers are pretty OK [laughs]. And then they said, "Look, you're a great team and you've done Painkiller, so what do you want to do next?"

**Capps:** When Adrian came up with Bulletstorm he kept saying "It's like a blood symphony, f---ing blood everywhere!" And we're like, "So Vlad the Impaler wants to make a video game. Cool!" We basically set them free.

**Chmielarz:** They just gave us the freedom to propose what we really wanted to do, so we proposed Bulletstorm and the rest is history. Epic said "We want you to be part of the family. What do you think?" And we said "F---, yeah!" In two months we had a demo ready and went to the Leipzig games convention to show this to the publishers. That's how we got the EA contract.

M



Don't mess with an overcharged PMC

The flail gun: for all your incapacitating and exploding needs

**Mark Morris, EA executive producer:** Bulletstorm was pitched at Leipzig during the games conference there. We're obviously big fans of what Epic has been doing and huge fans of the People Can Fly guys – they've been on our radar for a while now. So when we saw that they were working together we were obviously intrigued. Then we saw the demo and that really got us excited. We signed them up and have been very pleased with the results.

**Chmielarz:** It's unbelievable that you have this amazing developer with so many awards and great franchises that is just helping you make a better game. I can tell you honestly – this can be frustrating. You think you've got something really amazing, and then you get a list of changes that says, "Eh, that was boring. This is crap." And then you bang your head against the wall. After five minutes when you cool down you realize, "Yeah, that makes sense." In the end, we're going to have a better game.

**Capps:** Having a Polish studio that's like a crazy oompa jazz band doing whatever they think is "f---ing cool" is great. It's good for us. We need that injection at Epic because we're a bunch of guys who make games we want to make, but also we're a business. They're mostly just a bunch of guys making cool games they want to make. That's healthy for us.



Morris

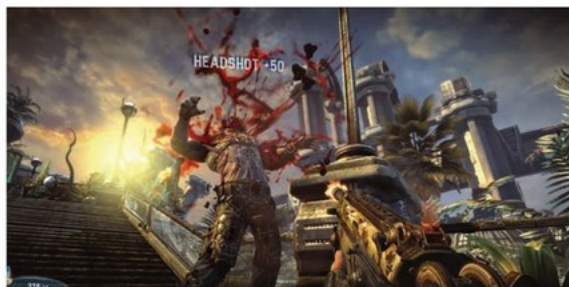


## TAKING IT EASY

During the development of Painkiller, People Can Fly decided to craft a difficulty mode that almost anyone could beat. Little did they know what kind of reaction it would garner. "It was really shocking to me the amount of thankful emails that we got from people saying, 'This is the first first-person shooter that I can really play,'" recalls People Can Fly's Adrian Chmielarz. "If you play Bad Company 2, when you choose easy, they call it 'content tourist' mode, and this is exactly the kind of thing that we want to have in Bulletstorm."



Spend your skill points on the leash's thumper upgrade as soon as humanly possible



Better him than you

## A CHAT WITH WRITER RICK REMENDER

### How did you first get involved with Bulletstorm?

I was contacted by Epic this time last year. They had a sci-fi shoot 'em up in need of a writer. There were some *Fear Agent* fans on the team so they came to me. Their mistake. They flew me out to Warsaw for a week, and we all locked down the story together as you would in any writers' room. We tore it up, everyone had great ideas, by the end we'd written our dream sci-fi movie, it just so happens that it's also a groundbreaking video game.

### How is writing *Bulletstorm* different than when you were a writer on *Dead Space*?

On *Dead Space* I came in after Warren Ellis and the EA team had the building blocks in place. I fleshed it out, wrote out scenes that were bullet pointed, added new scenes, and did a good few rewrites before it went to Antony Johnston. It was a collaborative effort with other writers passing a thing down a line like a baton. *Bulletstorm* is just the game team and me. They had the basic pitch, a great starting point with some terrific ideas, and I took it and smashed it, reworked the focus and setup, did character bios, created the universe stage, and wrote a three-act story that we all spent weeks working on to fine tune. I've had a tremendous amount of input, which helps me stay excited and keep mentally invested in the story more than if I was just hired to add chatter or write a few cinematics.

Grayson Hunt seems to have several things in common with *Fear Agent* protagonist Heath Huston. What traits do you think they share and how do they differ?

Heath is a bleeding wound, once a normal family man thrown face first into chaos.

Anyone who's read writer Rick Remender's comic series *Fear Agent* knows that he's the perfect fit for *Bulletstorm*. We caught up with him during a brief break from current projects *Punisher* and *Last Days of American Crime*.



Grayson is a soldier, a motherf---er of doom. His life is turned upside down as well, but in a very different way. Gray is also a hardened killer when it all goes sideways on him, so his reaction to the turn of events is very different. Where as Heath is a bleeding wound drinking away the pain, Gray becomes a calloused hard-as-nails space pirate who sinks deep in to debauchery and acts of revenge. There's not a reflective side to Gray as much as with Heath. He's a tough son of a bitch who gets tougher, and then we get to see the consequences of such a mind set. The consequences of his downward spiral, that's the meat of the game, that's where things turn for the crazy and we go on an unexpected ride.

### What can you tell us about Grayson's cyborg sidekick Ishi?

Samurai Spock is the joke we've been throwing around. His arc has a lot of meat on the bone story wise. I don't want to give it away, but we lean into some very interesting ideas about the unnatural duality in Ishi's character, and even let them drive the story in a very unexpected way. The goal is to ensure the player never knows where things are going, never knows what to expect. Ishi and his arc exemplify that strategy.

### Just how evil is General Sarrano?

On the "mustache-twirling-evil" scale, he's a solid 9.5. He's a classic psychopath, winning is the goal, highly intelligent, mercenary, manipulative and always, somehow, in control of everything. You really want -- nay need -- to see this guy die, as he piles his malicious acts on top of each other like a well-crafted Machiavellian layer cake. It's a lot of fun to make players hate someone this much.



The first form of the giant plant boss loves working the tongue

◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 48

## SHOP OF HORRORS

As we make it closer to Ishi's leash signal, the number of seven-foot-tall Venus fly traps increases significantly. Fortunately, these things don't just ignore all the bad guys and go after you. You can always unload bullets into one until it turns into a goopy mess, but where's the fun in that? Kick a guy towards a plant and it'll snag him with his tongue and start chomping, leaving you safe to casually stride past. But that still leaves one organism alive. Wrapping a guy in a flail, kicking him into the plant, and detonating them both kills two birds with one stone.

Suddenly a helicopter zips by in the background. As you near its location, a circular gauge appears onscreen indicating an "adrenaline rush moment," as *People Can Fly* is calling it currently.

"We want you to be immersed in this world, so we don't interrupt with a cutscene every five minutes to show something important," Chmielarz says. "We give you an incentive. If you want to ignore that stuff, ignore that stuff. But if you actually press the zoom button whenever you see that circle on the screen you will look at what's happening there. The faster you press this button, the more skill points you get."

This particular moment showcases several fly-traps latching onto the chopper with their tongues and smashing it down. This allows you to easily kill the turret operator and pass through the downed vehicle to reach a previously inaccessible area.

Inside, Gray meets the massive plant monster that nabbed Ishi earlier. Now that it's staying put, it's easier to notice the terrifying details. The creature has more sets of razor-sharp teeth than would ever

be necessary, and it looks like a blend of red animal meat and green plant material.

"*What exactly is that?*" Gray asks.

"*Whatever it is, we don't have to fight it,*" the woman responds.

"*No, his signal's coming from below.*"

"*Probably already s--- him out.*"

"*Quit cheering me up and shoot it!*"

Anchored to the center of the plaza, the creature wastes no time in flicking its big, gross tongue at you. A quick kick repels the attack. The ground in this area is completely rain drenched, which makes your slide move last longer than normal. This comes in handy as you quickly glide past tentacles crashing up out of the concrete. A series of sacs around the base of the monster's stalk look like a good place to shoot. Using a PMC charge shot makes the first sac explode. Hooking the leash to a sac and yanking causes it to explode like a giant boil ripped open by a fishhook.

After all of the sacs are destroyed, the monster detaches from the ground and uses its tentacles to climb up to the ceiling and hang upside down, raining down deadly explosive spore pods in the process. Good thing there's a way to sling them back up. Gray thumps the leash on the ground and all of the pods fly into the air. Shooting them at this height brings the explosions right to the monster's face for way more damage than shooting alone would deliver.

The demo ends right before the boss is defeated

so as not to spoil what happens next. But the creators promise many more boss fights and "blockbuster moments."

"[At Game Developers Conference] the Uncharted 2 guys mentioned that the train sequence almost killed them because it turned out to be way more difficult than they thought it would be. We have way more of these," Chmielarz says. "This is what I love about games – when you have this element and you cannot believe they spent time on it because you just played it for fifteen seconds and it looks like half a year of work. But that's what gamers love."

After seeing *Bulletstorm* and speaking with the team, we're pumped about the compelling new ideas and can't wait to see more of these blockbuster moments. But will the leashing and kicking put off gamers looking for a more straightforward FPS experience?

"If you want to play this as a regular shooter, you absolutely can," concedes Chmielarz. "We have tons of s--- in store for you. So I think if you want to play this way you can, you'll have the ride of your life. If you want to have more fun, go ahead and execute skill shots. This completely changes the game. How many times in your life when you were playing a game were you actually disappointed that you just killed the enemy? That's what's happening when you see only 10 points. Oh, but, hey, there's another one. Weeeel!" ♦

Go to [gameinformer.com/bulletstorm](http://gameinformer.com/bulletstorm) for expanded *Bulletstorm* content all month long



» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • Wii  
• PC • PSP • Nintendo DS

» **Style**  
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Disney Interactive Studios

» **Developer**  
Avalanche Software

» **Release**  
June 18

**Avalanche Software isn't just making another licensed game. With the blessing of Pixar, it hopes to change the way we look at family games forever.**

At Pixar, Toy Story is serious business. "It's kind of the foundation upon which this studio has been built," says Pixar director Lee Unkrich, who's been at the company since 1994. When it came time to begin work on the inevitable game based on Toy Story 3, the company showed a rare interest in the project. With so many things that can — and often do — go wrong in the world of licensed games, this is the story of one that might very well succeed in entertaining kids and parents alike.

In August 2007, Pixar invited a diverse group of potential merchandisers to its Emeryville, California offices to learn more about Toy Story 3. Unkrich took the stage and reintroduced the audience to Buzz, Woody, and the rest of the gang over the course of half an hour. As paintings and storyboards from the then work in progress flashed behind him, Unkrich told the story of a boy growing up and outgrowing childhood toys. After that initial pitch, game developer John Blackburn had two things on his mind: How his team could wrangle its way into making a game based on the movie and, more pressing, how best to wipe his eyes without anyone noticing.

# TOY STORY

## Out of the Box



by Jeff Cork



The team at Avalanche poses in their Salt Lake City offices. They are (from left to right) Marcus Fisher, Bill VanOverbeck, Jonathan Warner, Jeff Bunker, John Blackburn, Jeff Goostyla, and Rob Nelson

### COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIPS

As co-founder and CEO of Avalanche Software, Blackburn knows a thing or two about licensed games. He got his start programming Super Nintendo games in the 16-bit heyday, toiling away at Sculptured Software before leaving to start Avalanche with some of his co-workers. Since it was founded in 1995, Avalanche worked on everything from Mortal Kombat to Rugrats, even creating the Tak series of games that later became a TV show on Nickelodeon.

Avalanche was in a perfect position to land the Toy Story 3: The Video Game project. The company was acquired by Disney Interactive Studios in 2005 and had since worked on several licensed games for Disney's Feature Animation department, including Chicken Little, Meet the Robinsons, and Bolt. With Pixar's status as a wholly owned subsidiary of Disney, it seemed logical that Pixar and Disney Interactive would jump at the idea of an internally produced game. As it turns out, the story was a bit more complicated.

A few years earlier, the board at Disney Interactive Studios decided that the smart money was on boosting its video-gaming presence. It was decided to move away from focusing on licensing Disney's properties to others in favor of reestablishing itself as a full games publisher. At the time of that first pitch, THQ and Pixar already had a fruitful relationship, with THQ publishing games based on the company's films since Cars. With Toy Story 3, Disney wanted to try something different, but as both a licensor and publisher, it was critical that Disney not burn bridges with licensees such as THQ.

As Blackburn tells it, Disney's solution was to put development for Toy Story 3 up for a competitive bid. Should THQ's proposal get approved, Disney Interactive would earn licensing royalties. If, however, Avalanche's proposal was approved, Disney would essentially make all of the money from the games. After getting the rundown of Toy Story

3's plot, Avalanche went to work. From the outset, the team knew they had to come up with something bold. Pitching against THQ was one catalyst. "These guys have been doing games for Pixar for years, and Pixar's pretty happy," Blackburn remembers thinking. Secondly, Avalanche's creative team quickly realized that the movie was the movie and the game was going to be the game. "There's no way we [could] tell the story of the movie as well as the makers of the movie did," Blackburn admits. That understanding was one informed by years of experience.

### THE PRESSURE'S ON WITH LICENSED GAMES

The relationship between movies and their licensed gaming counterparts is one filled with friction, tension, disappointment, and the occasional surprise. What works in a movie rarely translates well to the gaming space, a roadblock that developers often crash into at full speed. The problem doesn't just lay with developers, however. Movie studios often approach game adaptations with the mandate that the games follow the story of the movie. Blackburn says that games can suffer as a result, but that developers are ultimately paid to make their clients happy. "That's the rule," he says. "The thing is, sometimes it's really hard."

Take Disney's Chicken Little, for example. The film is about a young chicken with daddy issues, which might work for a movie, but poses a significant challenge for those tasked with structuring a game around that story. As Blackburn says, developers typically find themselves pulling elements from the story that lend themselves to minigames — baseball and aliens, in Chicken Little's case — and putting them together into a loose framework that follows the gist of the film. Further compounding those problems are the brutally short development cycles that often constrict licensed games.

"A lot of sales happen concurrently with

the release of an event," Blackburn says. "If you're a TV show, there's no real event necessarily, but Christmas is a big event. So there's a pressure to deliver when people will actually purchase it... For a movie, there's a solid ship date."

Avalanche certainly wasn't immune to those problems, but the company learned some ways to maneuver around them. After working on Chicken Little, the team developed the Meet the Robinsons game for Disney Interactive. This was the first time that a developer had worked on back-to-back games for Disney Feature Animation, which Blackburn felt resulted in a deeper level of trust between the two parties.

"When we got into that one we pitched them an idea that the video game would be much better if it was about Wilbur Robinson than it would be about Lewis," Blackburn remembers. The character of Lewis was certainly interesting in the context of the film, but Avalanche's team didn't think that playing as a mopey inventor would have been nearly as interesting as taking on the role of a time-traveling, high-





tech whiz. Moving the action from the movie's story also gave the team a buffer for when a film's focus inevitably shifts during production. By the time Bolt came around, Blackburn says Avalanche was given the latitude to focus on the story of the dog as a superhero from the beginning, rather than the film's "dog who thinks he is a superhero" conceit.

Blackburn is quick to point out that his team at Avalanche isn't making kids games, but has instead chosen to spend its efforts on making family-appropriate entertainment. The distinction is subtle, but important to the team. Some of the touchstones Blackburn cites are Traveller's Tales' LEGO games and the Guitar Hero series. Both include co-op elements, which is a strength for Avalanche. The LEGO games are particularly good points of comparison to what Avalanche hopes to achieve with the Toy Story 3 game. Kids interested in LEGO toys have an obvious entry point to the games, and adults who grew up with the plastic blocks might find themselves playing the games to relive feelings of nostalgia. If those adults have children of their own, playing cooperatively is a great way for parent and child to spend time together.

In the same way that Pixar's films appeal to adults and kids, Avalanche hopes that its games will appeal to young players while presenting a challenge to older ones. It would be naive to think that hardcore gamers are going to pick up Toy Story 3 if they're not interested in the movie franchise, but Avalanche is working to create an interesting experience for those who do. Convincing those gamers that this is a licensed game worth playing is a challenge of which Blackburn and his team are well aware.

### A BOLD IDEA AND A BOLD PITCH

Without Disney Interactive playing a key role in the development, Avalanche found itself starting from scratch with the Toy Story 3 project. If anything, Pixar's strong working relationship with THQ put Avalanche even further behind. To compensate, the team was ready to try something bold. Avalanche was going to pitch a licensed game that didn't bother with specifically referencing the source movie.

"The concept behind it was, 'Let's let you play

In story missions, players can see the world through the toys' eyes



Throwing things is a big part of the Toy Box mode, whether you're chucking balls or townspeople

### Avalanche's Tech Toy Box

Deadlines are a cold reality in the world of game development. Fortunately for the team working on Toy Story 3, Avalanche has developed a couple of tools to help speed the process.

Meridian is a live-authoring tool that allows artists and other noncoders to instantly place and manipulate objects in the game's world. For a platformer, that kind of flexibility allows users to test out concepts to see how they play and make tweaks when necessary. Before, the system would need to be reset after every change to the game, a process that takes a few minutes. "It's only three minutes, but it's so different from instantaneous," Blackburn says.

PITS is short for Playing Information Testing System, and it allows the team to monitor kids' playtesting and mine those sessions for usable data. Player movement can be charted onto a wireframe of the level, giving Avalanche a bird's eye view of their interactions within the world. By observing patterns in the colored ant trails, the design team can spot places where players stand immobile for long periods of time, possibly alerting them to puzzle roadblocks, or otherwise troubleshoot levels and help-icon placement.

with toys like when you were a kid," Blackburn says. Looking at how his children played and thinking back to his own childhood, Blackburn realized kids are masters at bringing in disparate toy elements and merging them together in play. A Fisher Price castle might provide refuge from Barbie-car driving Transformers. "We came into this initial pitch with the idea that everyone understands Toy Story already. Let's go in and play with Andy's toys."

The team cobbled together a presentation that included a pair of gameplay sketches that outlined key game concepts and a tech demo featuring Buzz in Andy's room as it transformed into a fantastical extraterrestrial backdrop. The concept behind Avalanche's pitch was a game where kids could essentially create their own sandboxes. After selecting one of several themed playsets, objects such as volcanoes, spaceports, and other structures could be dropped into the world. Each addition came with its own rules, and kids would be rewarded for experimentation. The idea has since evolved and changed from the original concept, but that core notion of creativity remains.

Before showing its work to Pixar, Avalanche pitched the idea to Disney Interactive. "You've seen that Seinfeld where they pitch the TV show about nothing?" jokes art director Jeff Bunker. "It went over about like that. 'We don't want to tell the story of the film, we want to do this.' 'What?'" Disney pointed out that kids might want to interact with some of the new characters from the film, so Blackburn and his team came up with a more conventional idea for a Toy Story 3 title as well. Fortunately, the movie lent itself to a game a little easier than something featuring a chicken's fragile emotional state.

Until the release of Toy Story 3, we've only seen the toys as the world sees them. They move around when nobody is watching, and

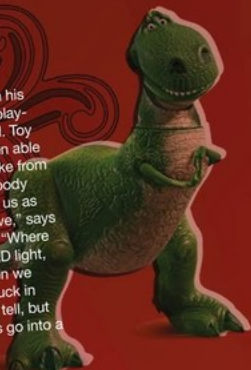


**"You've seen that Seinfeld where they pitch the TV show about nothing? It went over about like that."**

- Jeff Bunker, art director



when Andy maneuvers them around in his bedroom, viewers only see the static playthings being jerked around in his hand. Toy Story 3 marks the first time we've been able to see what those play sessions are like from the perspective of the toys, where Woody actually is a sheriff, for example. "For us as gamemakers, that's a nice place to live," says Jeff Bunker, Avalanche's art director. "Where Buzz's little LED light is not a little LED light, it's a laser, and he actually flies. When we came out of the pitch, it definitely stuck in our heads. There's the story we can tell, but there's this whole other thing — let's go into a child's imagination."



This concept played a key role in Avalanche's more conventional Toy Story 3 pitch, which had players experiencing the adventures from the toys' perspective. Fantasy sequences saw characters chasing runaway trains, rescuing orphans, and taking all within a traditional level-based structure. Other segments were more rooted in reality, focusing on how a toy interacts in a human-sized world with an emphasis on cooperation and problem solving. Players might have to figure out how to work together to open a door or reach objects on high shelves — no mean feat when your avatar is only eight inches tall.

On their return visit to Pixar's offices in October, Blackburn pitched both ideas, saying that it was up to Pixar to choose. Pixar's chief creative officer John Lasseter was intrigued by what he saw, asking if there was any reason why Avalanche couldn't do both. Blackburn explained that it was a budgetary issue more than anything else. After a brief discussion, Lasseter posed a hypothetical: Say this is the biggest budget you've ever had for a licensed movie game. Could they do it? After checking with Disney Interactive's Graham Hopper, Blackburn said yes. A little over a month later, they received the green light to effectively make two games simultaneously.

"We actually had a few different video game companies come in and pitch ideas for what could potentially be the game." Unkrich recalls. "We were all really blown away by Avalanche's take on this. A lot of video games done as tie-ins to movies are oftentimes not the best games. They're kind of hamstringing by hewing close to the plot. I think we all had a sense with Avalanche's pitch that they were really trying to do something exceptional and not just trying to do yet another tressed off movie tie-in but to try to truly create a really great game."



**"We came into this initial pitch with the idea that everyone understands Toy Story already. Let's go in and play with Andy's toys."**

**— John Blackburn, Avalanche Software**

Old favorites are back, along with new buddies from Toy Story 3



Woody's pull-string laso lets him reach high areas

"Back in the day there was kind of a churn and burn mentality for [licensed games], but that's not where we came in with the thought process on this," Blackburn says.

#### COLLABORATORS FROM THE START

From the beginning, Avalanche's status as a fellow Disney company opened doors for them at Pixar. The team was able to use character models and other assets from the films that would have otherwise been off limits. Avalanche and Pixar overcame the distance between Utah and California with frequent teleconferencing, which gave both teams the opportunity to see what the other is doing. "It was great because we could steer them in ways if maybe they were slightly off, or be able to applaud and say that's absolutely right, go down that direction a little bit more," says Jason Katz, Toy Story 3's head of story.

One of the first hurdles Avalanche faced came about nine months into the game's development. In the exploration-themed Toy Box mode, the game's world is populated with tiny, customizable townspeople who bear a passing resemblance to Little People. After showing the work in progress to Pixar, the animation studio was concerned at how prevalent Avalanche's creations were becoming in the Toy Story universe. As Avalanche explained to Pixar, they had solid gameplay reasons behind the decision. "We needed something that we could use en masse, that didn't have a personality," Bunker says. "For Toy Story characters, that is Rex. That is Ham." The team needed something that was cannon fodder, essentially.

After hearing the issue, Pixar worked with Avalanche to come up with a decent solution. "The solution was bringing the aliens in," Blackburn says. "Andy owns three aliens, but there are lots of aliens at Pizza Planet. [Another] problem, and this is actually a finer problem but it's one that they were very interested in conquering, is when

you're playing the game are you playing it from the perspective of a child playing with that toy and this is what you're imagining, or are you the toy and this is what you experience? This is extremely important to these guys, because it's what's going to make the world hold together. The devil is in the details in a lot of cases."

Ultimately, Avalanche sees its adaptation of Toy Story 3 as a stepping stone toward better-quality family games overall. Blackburn says there's a misconception that games for kids are easier and smaller to develop and that they don't have to be complex. His hope is that someday kids will look back at family games the way that he does with watching *The Wonderful World of Disney* or playing card games with his parents — as a way to connect with family, be entertained, and be surprised. In a good way. ♦

Check out [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag) for more about Avalanche — including some *Mortal Kombat* goodies — and interviews with Pixar's creative team.



# Toy Story 3: The Video Game

*Avalanche's risky take on licensed games could pay off in a big way*

You now know the story behind Toy Story 3's development, but there's a significant chunk missing: Is the game any good? It's one thing to try something different, and quite another to deliver results that are worth playing. After spending the better part of an afternoon playing through both of the game's modes, I can say that Avalanche is definitely on to something.

The meat of the game is in the Toy Box mode. It's changed a bit from the initial pitch, where players plopped down items and essentially managed a toy ecosystem, but it's still a freemove sandbox that embraces the way that kids play. After running through a couple of quick tutorial missions, players are free to do whatever they like in the Western Town hub.

Missions are scattered throughout the world, giving players a chance to talk to Slinky, Stinky Pete, and other familiar faces. In one moment you might find yourself rounding up stray cattle and tossing them back into their pen. Next you might grab a few townspeople and chuck them into barbershops to customize their haircuts. From there, it's understandable if you just want to wander around, explore, and collect the items scattered throughout the world.

"In our last playtest we had a nine-year-old tester who finished his first mission an hour and a half into the game," Blackburn recalls. "He rated the game a nine and a half. We asked what he did, and he said he wanted to destroy everything in the town. He was cruising around, scoping out the entire world and knew where he was at, and he boinged every cactus and destroyed every crate about three times before he was like 'Okay, now it's time to do what the game says.' We asked if he enjoyed that, and the question never entered into his mind. He was like, 'Yeah, it's what I wanted to do.'"

When players start, their town is fairly sparse. Once missions are complete and players have earned enough gold, they can visit Al's Toy Barn and buy new playsets. Adding Sid's Haunted House introduces ghosts to the world, for example. Buying Bullseye provides a faster way to get around town. A stunt set adds a racetrack and stunt areas for cars. Playsets also add new abilities, such as goo that shrinks or expands objects and characters, or wands that let players suck up ghosts and fire them back out.

What happens when you shoot shrinking goo at a car? It turns into a tiny vehicle that characters straddle, changing the physics and handling along with the visuals. Fire a ghost at a winged creature and their fairy wings transform into bat wings. Little touches like these reward experimentation and exploration in ways rarely seen in family games. Frankly, it's about time.

The game's story mode starts off in a majestic canyon, with players chasing down Ham. Somehow he's managed to squeeze his porcine figure into a UFO, which gives him a bit of a

speed advantage. Fortunately, Woody's trusty (and floppy) steed Bullseye is rarin' to go. Players can choose from Buzz, Woody, or Jessie as they hop over obstacles and race to catch up to a speeding train. Once aboard, the action piles on shooter elements as players work their way to the front of the train. Aliens pop out from cover to fire ray guns, but they can be blasted by tossing orbs their way.

During this area I see the dynamic difficulty settings in action. One of the cars players have to pass combines rickety planking with hot coals. The narrow boards are tricky to walk across, and it's easy to lose footing and fall. If a player repeatedly fails that part, the game makes a subtle change to the width of the planks. It's a nice concession for players who might still be learning gaming skills, and it doesn't take anything away from veterans who might breeze past the section.

In another level, I experience the "little toy in a big world" gameplay. In these areas, players cycle between the three playable characters, each of whom has special skills. For example, Buzz can throw other characters to reach higher levels, and Jessie is able to nimbly leap across tiny footholds. After sneaking out of Andy's room, the trio of toys had to find a way to grab an out-of-reach telephone. Fortunately, the Army men had already scouted out the area. Players then have to navigate their way through the puzzle-like environment to meet up with each soldier and then parachute them down to the phone on its perch.

After playing through the levels, it's obvious why the folks at Pixar kept mentioning that Avalanche seemed to fundamentally understand the property. Everything from the music to the animation to the characters themselves felt right, which is critical with such a beloved series. Most importantly, the controls were responsive and nicely tuned. Jumping in a 3D platformer can oftentimes set teeth on edge, but my deaths were almost always my fault. Story mode also offers something that should get Toy Story fans excited: a level based on the Buzz Lightyear video game seen in Toy Story 2's intro.





# DEAD R

*Welcome to  
Fortune City*



# DEAD RISING 2

CO-OP 'TIL YOU DROP

BY JEFF CORK

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**  
Capcom

» **Developer**  
Blue Castle Games

» **Release**  
August 31

**A**s any big winner at a state fair midway will tell you, walking through a crowd while carrying an enormous stuffed bear isn't easy. It's even tougher when the teeming mass craves the taste of human flesh over corn dogs. In the first *Dead Rising*, players had to dodge, weave, and juke their way through the undead horde, keeping their eyes peeled for the right opening and taking advantage of the slightest opportunity. That kind of strategy and quick thinking still pays off in *Dead Rising 2*, though players have one huge advantage over its predecessor: co-op. Some things are just better with friends, like seesaws, slumber parties, and zombie slaying.

Looking back on *Dead Rising*, it's surprising to realize just how alone Frank West was on his mission, particularly since so much of the experience centered on his interactions with others. Fellow survivors were vulnerable outside the safety of the maintenance room, and dragging them along any farther than necessary was a fool's errand. The more resourceful individuals at the Willamette Mall were often volatile psychopaths. Even Otis, Frank's constant companion, only accompanied him through a walkie-talkie. For the majority of his 72 hours at the mall, Frank had to go it alone – alone with 53,594 of his closest undead pals.

Adding co-op to the game expands the sandbox concept in ludicrous ways. Developer Blue Castle Games decided against creating special team-based weapons and attacks in favor of staying true to the single-player game. Fortunately, the sequel adds new features and massages some older concepts in ways that lend themselves especially well to co-op. Zombies aren't exactly the smartest creatures around, and new hero Chuck can take advantage of their cognitive impairment through lures. Zombies are attracted to things like meat and loud noises,



and players can use items to force zombies to cluster together. When activated, a toy helicopter will hover in place while attracting the attention of any undead within range. Once they're grouped, Chuck can either take advantage of his distracted foes for an easy kill or slide past them unnoticed.

That's what we did with the big stuffed bear when I got some hands-on time with *Dead Rising 2*. I stuck close to my partner – playing as another Chuck – as he herded the swarm of zombies, tossing out chunks of meat to lure them into clusters and then scorching them with an improvised flamethrower. After a

few tense moments, we made it to the utility room, where the real fun started. *Dead Rising 2* expands on the first game's "everything is a weapon" concept by letting players combine objects to make superweapons. Chuck isn't exactly a mechanical whiz, but he's handy with duct tape. As art director Dave Taylor is fond of saying, you wouldn't want this guy to fix your car. You might want him on your side during a zombie invasion, however.

A simple teddy bear, when combined with an automatic weapon, becomes Freedom Bear, complete with Rambo-style headband. After admiring our handiwork, we hopped back into the Royal Flush Plaza mall and dropped our new pal next to a coffee shop. Freedom Bear then sprang to life, panning left and right with his weapon and shredding any zombies unfortunate enough to enter his sights. Hopping onto the counter, we helped our fuzzy friend mop up by tossing sticks of dynamite at the stragglers.

Chuck can get inspiration for his creations in a variety of ways. He can poach ideas from action-movie posters by examining them, or he can collect cards during story mode that provide required components for new items. Even if you haven't collected the appropriate card or gawked at the right poster, you're free to combine items if you have the parts. Players will probably find some on their own, such as the baseball bat spiked with nails. Others, such as the electric rake – a deadly combination of a rake and a car battery – are probably a bit trickier to discover unaided. It does pay to find combinations legitimately, though, because players who do collect the cards can build stronger versions of those creations (see the sidebar for a look at more than 20 combo weapons on page 62).

## ABOUT THAT SAVE SYSTEM

*Dead Rising*'s save system was one of the more polarizing aspects of the game. Players had one save slot, and upon dying they could either load their last game or start a new game while keeping their current level. Players who didn't save often complained about losing hours of progress.

Capcom says the sequel addresses those concerns, though the company is being coy about specifics. "It's going to be improved," says Keiji Inafune, the game's executive producer. "As for the details, I want to save the answer until maybe last, as long as I can extend it." In the early build we played, *Dead Rising 2* seems to be tackling the problem by including multiple save slots. We saw three, though a Capcom representative was quick to point out that the number isn't final at this point.

Co-op adds another twist to the save system. Capcom isn't saying whether players who join a friend's game will keep their progress after leaving. Let's hope they take a cue from games like *Borderlands*. Drop-in, drop-out gameplay is nice, but if helping friends isn't rewarded, we imagine at least some players won't bother dropping back.





Even though Chuck is the only playable character in co-op, players can dress him up and make their own uniquely odd version



Unlike Frank, Chuck's not much of a shuttlerbug. Fortunately, he's able to earn Prestige Points in ways that don't involve snapping pictures. Combo weapons help him score PPs, which are used to level up. Interactive elements are also scattered throughout the game's world, giving players a chance to gain experience while riding a mechanical bull, playing on a virtual golf course, or getting a fortune told, among other ways. We even saw an oversized, fully playable video poker machine. Solo players might want to enlist

help before checking that one out; it's difficult to gamble without a buddy watching your back and fending off advancing zombies.

When the game was first revealed, the demo ended with thousands of zombies simultaneously on-screen. Compared with the 800 or so that the first game could handle, it was an impressive show of Blue Castle's technical prowess. The team is quick to point out, however, that those kinds of numbers don't necessarily make for a great game.

"It was even a little bit surreal for me when



I first put it in," says James Hall, the game's technical director. "I had this wide open street level, and I just kept dropping in more and more and more and more, and basically it was just this sea of them. But you could run through this sea. It took a long time to get there, but it reached a point where it was very clear that it was no longer the technical bottleneck for the game. It actually made it so clear trying to run through it that if we actually put it into the game like this, it would be the most annoying and aggravating game in the world." Senior producer Jason Leigh says that one of the team's mandates is that players have to be within 10 steps of something interactive. With that in mind, balancing the crowds in the indoor environments is a tricky endeavor. They can't be so sparse that Chuck isn't ever in jeopardy of being grabbed or attacked, but if they're too consistently thick, then it becomes annoying to navigate, as Hall pointed out. The few areas I checked out in *Dead Rising 2* seem to have struck that balance nicely. If you see something interesting – and you will – it's possible to get to that item or weapon, clear out the crowd, and put your plan into action.

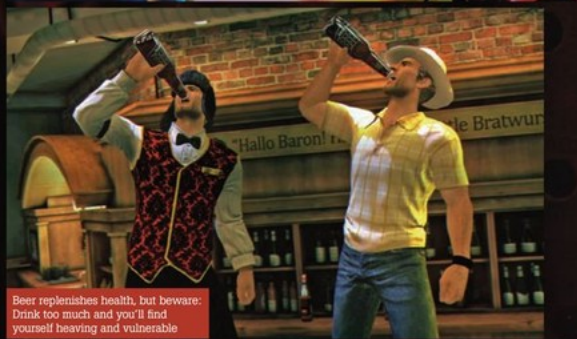
Chuck's adventures take place in Fortune City, a fictional casino town in Nevada. Players who were worried that this setting isn't as ripe as a mall for an improvised weapon extravaganza can calm down. The Royal Flush Plaza area is a mall in itself, with loads of stores including Stylin' Toddlers and In the Closet. Chuck is as much a fashion plate as Frank, wearing increasingly ridiculous outfits that he scavenges along the way. If you're worried that having two of the same characters in the world will be boring, don't worry; when one of you is dressed like Elvis and the other in a too-small superhero costume, it's clear that there's room for personal taste.

Environments seem to be just as diverse, drawing inspiration from the tackiest that Sin City has to offer. One casino, the Yucatan, features walls with stone facades, tiki torches, and piped-in jungle music. Tucked away in the corner, however, is a Bavarian bratwurst restaurant, complete with upbeat polka tunes. Here, we tackled one of the game's story missions. We were told to make our way to the casino's nightclub, the Shoal, where some kind of deal was going down. Once there, we were ambushed by a pair of twins, who we recognized as the eye candy from the *Dead Rising 2*'s multiplayer reality show, *Terror is Reality*. After making the mistake of explaining that they were going to blame Chuck for a recent outbreak, the pair attacked us with massive swords. My partner and I split up and each

took on one of the girls. As the battle wore on, the dance floor was marred with streaked pools of blood and crimson footprints. I died at one point, but my partner was able to revive me by handing over a recovery item. Before too long, we won out and were rewarded with a dramatic cutscene. Well, it might have been more dramatic had Chuck not been wearing a tube top.

Capcom's decision to have a Western company take on development may have been puzzling at first, but it's a strategy that appears to have paid off. From our time with the game, *Dead Rising 2* looks, plays, and feels like the sequel fans had been hoping for. "That's the best compliment for us, and a few people have said it now," says Blue Castle's president, Rob Barrett. The combo weapon system is a logical extension of what the first game offered, and co-op is the icing on the cake. We haven't spent a lot of time with Chuck, but he's certainly shaping up to be a worthy successor to Frank. About the only big question still remaining is what compelled Blue Castle to combine a stuffed bear with a firearm in the first place. We may never know. ♦

Check out [gameinformer.com/deadrising](http://gameinformer.com/deadrising) later in the month for our *Dead Rising 2* hub, filled with tons of exclusive video and the latest *Dead Rising* news.



Beer replenishes health, but beware: Drink too much and you'll find yourself heaving and vulnerable



## COMBINATION PLATTER

Here are the recipes for the combo weapons that we know about:

CANOE PADDLE + CHAINSAW = PADDLESAW

NAILS + PROPANE TANK = IED

DRILL + BUCKET = DRILL BUCKET

WINE + NEWSPAPER = MOLD TOV

RAKE + BATTERY = ELECTRIC RAKE

AIR BLOWER + GEMS = GEM BLOWER

MALL + FIRE AX = THE DEFLER

TRAFFIC CONE + SPRAY PAINT = AIR HORN

FOOTBALL + GRENADE = HAIL MARY

FIRE EXTINGUISHER + SQUIRT GUN = SNOWBALL CANNON

M/M/A GLOVES + NAILS = TENDERIZER

LIZARD MASK + FOUNTAIN SPARKLER = FOUNTAIN LIZARD

MEAT + DYNA/MITE = DYNA/MEAT

TIKI TORCH + TOY SPITBALL = FIRE SPITTER

STUFFED BEAR + MACHINE GUN = FREEDOM BEAR

SQUIRT GUN + GAS CAN = FLAMETHROWER

ROCKET FIREWORK + LEAD PIPE = ROCKET LAUNCHER

PITCHFORK + SHOTGUN = BODMSTICK

VACUUM + SAWBLADES = EXSANGUINEATOR

BOW + DYNA/MITE = BLA/MBOW

CONSTRUCTION HAT + BEER = BEER HAT

HELICOPTER + BOWIE KNIFE = HELIBLADE

BASEBALL BAT + NAILS = SPIKED BAT



MEET THE

# CHARACTERS

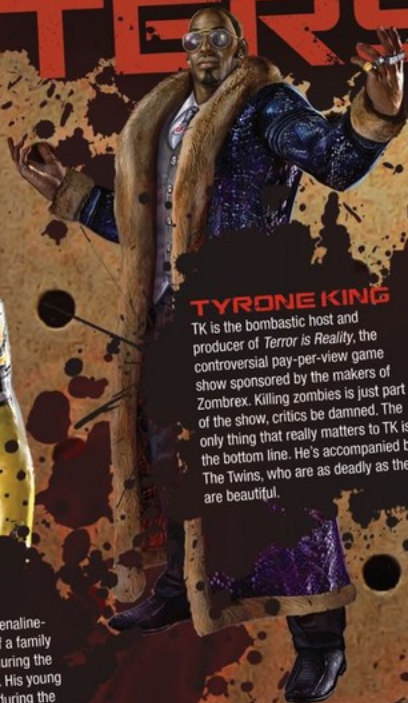
## THE TWINS

TK's twin co-hostesses for the game show. They provide nice eye candy as well as some taunting for the contestants.



## TYRONE KING

TK is the bombastic host and producer of *Terror is Reality*, the controversial pay-per-view game show sponsored by the makers of Zombrex. Killing zombies is just part of the show, critics be damned. The only thing that really matters to TK is the bottom line. He's accompanied by The Twins, who are as deadly as they are beautiful.



## CHUCK GREENE

Chuck Greene seemed to have it all. He'd traded his adrenaline-fueled past as a motocross champ for the tranquil life of a family man. That wouldn't last long. His world was shattered during the Las Vegas outbreak, when he lost his wife in an instant. His young daughter, Katy, was spared, though she was infected during the attack. Since then, Chuck has had to risk his life in order to raise money for his daughter's medication. Without daily doses of Zombrex, she will become yet another zombie in a world that's slowly being overtaken by the undead. His latest stunt takes him to Fortune City to compete in the reality show *Terror is Reality*. With any luck, he'll be able to put his skills to good use and save what remains of his family in the process.



## STACEY

As head of the zombie-rights organization CURE (Citizens for Undead Rights and Equality), Stacey is vehemently opposed to *Terror is Reality* and what it stands for. Rather than slaughter the undead for the entertainment of the living, 20-year-old Stacey imagines a world where the government makes Zombrex affordable and readily available. Stacey's passion and aggressive activism have been a thorn in the side to those who would exploit zombies.



## KATEY GREENE

Chuck's daughter has taken the current situation in stride, all things considered. Even after watching her mother die, she's remained playful and brave. She loves her father dearly and worries about his safety. She feels guilty for having been bitten during the attack and doesn't want to be a burden to Chuck.





Fratricide. Patricide. Inbreeding. Not exactly core family values. But if Alma and Paxton Fettel have their way, none of these transgressions will prevent the Wade family from reuniting just in time to watch the birth of a new family member. Will the Point Man assume his destined role alongside his mother and brother, or forsake his family bonds and prevent Alma from giving birth to a new form of terror?

# F.E.A.R. 3

A nuclear family reunion by Matt Bertz

Don't expect to receive Christmas cards from the Wade household – this dysfunctional bunch puts the “nuclear” in the term nuclear family. It started with cold-hearted scientist Harlan Wade, who locked up his psychically gifted daughter Alma at a research facility to experiment on her in the name of a U.S. Department of Defense contract for creating an army of E.S.P. powered super soldiers. While under lock and key, the research team impregnated Alma twice with wretched hybrid semen that even included some of her father's DNA. When her psychic outbursts started getting out of hand, they sealed the vault as a precaution.

Like Alma, her children didn't have normal upbringings. The youngest offspring, Paxton Fettel, formed a psychic bond with his imprisoned mother while being trained at the Armacham facilities to telepathically control soldiers. The elder sibling, known only as Point Man, eventually worked his way into First Encounter Assault Recon, a top-secret Special Forces team trained in dealing with paranormal threats.

The bond with Alma convinced Fettel he should employ his mind-controlled infantry to jailbreak his mother in the first F.E.A.R. game. Point Man's unit was sent in stop him. When the brothers inevitably confronted each other, Point Man won the argument by lodging a bullet in Fettel's skull. After Harlan Wade heard of Armacham's plans to destroy all the evidence of the project, including the facility, he went to the vault with hopes of saving his daughter. It was too late to play the good daddy card. Now a demonically twisted woman fueled by psychic energy and hate, Alma took out her frustrations by immediately killing her father, who offered

no resistance. In a recorded video message, Wade seemed resigned to his fate, saying, “It is the way of men to make monsters, and it is the nature of monsters to destroy their makers.”

With Alma free, Point Man's only course of action was to detonate the facility reactor. The blast decimated the entire city and most of his F.E.A.R. unit, but Alma's paranormal power proved strong enough to survive the explosion.

Down a father and son, in the sequel Alma set out to rebuild her bloodline, targeting an unsuspecting Delta Force operative named Michael Becket as the perfect sperm donor. The protagonist of F.E.A.R. 2, Becket was deemed Alma's ideal candidate due to his psychic abilities, which he obtained by unwillingly going through a psychic procedure while knocked unconscious. During Becket's attempts to trap Alma, she turned the tables and sexually assaulted him in the game's climax. What Alma wants, Alma gets.

F.E.A.R. 3 picks up roughly nine months later. With Alma closing in on her due date, she'll do anything to bring her demon seed into the world. If she succeeds, it will have horrible consequences on the world as we know it. Becket's whereabouts are unknown, returning Point Man to the role of protagonist. After receiving a distress signal from a former squad member, he journeys back into the blast zone to investigate. He's not alone; Armacham is moving frantically to erase anything that could link the disaster to the company. F.E.A.R. units are still hunting Alma in hopes of putting a stop to this before it gets even further out of hand, and Point Man has an unwelcome passenger along for the ride that he can't shake due to the strength of their psychic link.

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

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

» **Publisher**  
Warner Bros. Interactive

» **Developer**  
Day 1 Studios

» **Release**  
Fall

## Blood brothers

Point Man's discomfort with his new companion is on display front and center as Warner Bros. boots up a demo of F.E.A.R. 3. We join Alma's last living offspring as he travels in an escape pod somewhere above the outer blast zone of the leveled city. The cramped quarters of the vehicle are made all the more uncomfortable by his dead brother's apparition hovering above him in the cockpit.

"Just like old times, brother," Paxton Fettel murmurs in a haunting, slightly mocking voice. "Crammed together with no privacy, wanting to rip each other's head off. Rats in a cage."

The pod is speeding over a large body of water toward a ruined double-deck bridge that looks more like an urban graveyard than a main thoroughfare. Smoldering cars litter what's left of the bridge, and broken segments of pavement hang precariously over the sea below.

"Mother's called us to her side to witness the moment, to share in the power, and you want to stop her?!" Fettel yells. "We have to think about things as a family."

An unidentified voice comes in over the comm system to break up the brotherly quarrel, informing Point Man that energy pulses are messing with the navigation systems and his best bet is to crash down on the bridge.

"This is our moment, brother," Fettel continues. "This is where we must stand together. If you stand against me, well...it's ugly business killing a sibling, but you know all about that, don't you? Can you do it again?"

After the pod crashes on the lower level of the bridge, the fundamental gameplay shift in F.E.A.R. 3 becomes clear. One player in our demo takes control of Point Man on one screen, and the other assumes the role of Fettel. F.E.A.R. 3's co-op is a family affair.

To keep the signature persistent tension and oppressive atmosphere of the franchise, Warner Bros. realized that creating a co-op campaign wouldn't be as simple as stitching in another F.E.A.R. operative. The first question the developers had to ask themselves was whether co-op would get in the way of the horror theme. Smartly made horror films and single-player games deliberately funnel the participants into carefully constructed situations to build tension for thrilling payoffs. Co-op changes everything: You're never guaranteed the players are looking in the same direction at the same time, and weaving in a story that can withstand the action narrative between the players as they communicate and work together to fend off waves of enemies is a daunting challenge.

Warner Bros. didn't have a lot of success stories to turn to for inspiration. The most prominent contemporary co-op title with a horror focus, *Left 4 Dead*, didn't even bother trying to solve this problem, instead giving the players control of vaguely defined characters with only one motivation – survive another day in the face of an ever-growing sea of zombies. *Resident Evil 5* implemented co-op alongside its story, but one of the core criticisms from fans was that in doing so it lost the oppressive tension of its single-player predecessors. Unwilling to sacrifice F.E.A.R.'s narrative in the name of co-op, Warner Bros. stumbled upon an unconventional solution. What if it brought back deceased brother Paxton Fettel in apparition form?

"He's not to be trusted," says Dan Hay, senior producer at Day 1 Studios. "There's this uneasy alliance between the brothers as they work their way through the campaign, and you're in this situation where your cooperative player may not have the same goals that you have and may not be giving you all the information that you need."

"It's like being downstairs in the dark with Hannibal Lecter," says Warner Bros. director of design Frank Rooke. "He's not a friend."

Dubbed "diverging co-op" by the dev team, this asymmetrical construct forces the player in control of Point Man to make tough decisions about where his loyalty belongs. Will you accept your fate as a member of this tragic and wicked family by aiding Fettel and Alma in birthing her evil offspring, or should you remain faithful to your squad members by sabotaging the process before it's too late? The morally correct choice seems evident, but the players in control of Point Man and Fettel could end up in a power struggle against one another throughout the entire game if you choose to deny your place in the family tree. Day 1 Studios didn't go into details about how this dynamic plays out, but the developer considers it a core part of F.E.A.R. 3.

"One of the things we really feel strengthens the experience is your actual actions, reinforcing that during gameplay," says lead systems designer Parker Hamilton. "You have to be concerned about the other person because you are tied together, you are moving through the story together. You really have to be concerned about what's happening to the other person. There's a sort of empathy that gets developed in this sort of a circumstance, and we think it's a strong asset."

The differences between Point Man and Fettel go beyond motivation as well. Point Man operates as he always has – an adept special-forces soldier with the ability to slow down time during firefights to gain the upper hand. As a psychically powered ghost, Fettel's paranormal traits give him a much different skill set. His primary attack is a ranged stun blast, and he can see and access areas that Point Man cannot. These shrouded locations may contain new weapons, sensitive information, or even alternate routes through the level. It's up to the person playing Fettel to share this information or keep it to him or herself.

**"It's like  
being  
downstairs  
in the  
dark with  
Hannibal  
Lecter"  
Warner Bros.  
director of design  
Frank Rooke**



## The uneasy alliance

The crack of gunfire above hints that Armacham and F.E.A.R. are exchanging pleasantries on the top level of the bridge, while a low, guttural growl and desperate pleas of tortured men emanate from unlit corners of the decaying subway wreck in front of the duo on the lower level. They're not alone.

Bloodstains streak the subway car walls, dead bodies are everywhere, and darkness engulfs everything outside the dimly lit corridor. The sounds of sudden movement, creaking metal, and howling wind further lend an air of oppression to the environment. It feels like something is watching, but it's hard to tell from where.

Point Man and Fettel move carefully through the cramped wreckage, and suddenly glimpse a wolf-like creature whisk a half-eaten corpse into the darkness. A few cars up, a feral beast with eyes aglow in demonic rage pounces on the duo. Point Man concentrates his fire on the animal, while Fettel throws stun blasts its way. The first of many threats is vanquished.

As the duo approaches a squad of armed Armacham enemies on cleanup detail, Point Man and Fettel split up to attack from two angles. Point Man opens fire to draw the soldiers' attention, which allows Fettel to sneak up on an unsuspecting soldier and show off one of

his more powerful special abilities – possession.

"By possessing enemies he takes on their abilities," Hay says. "His abilities really start to expand out and grow."

"Fettel is a little bit more vulnerable than Point Man, a little more defensive," art director Heinz Schuller adds. "The payoff is when he possesses he becomes more berserker-like and his hit points go way, way up – even much more than Point Man. So he can run into the middle of it and take incredible amounts of damage while Point Man is working the periphery of the fight. It's that swing back and forth that I think is cool."

Fettel isn't the only one with new tricks up his sleeves. After opening fire, Point Man finds safety with the new first-person cover system created by Day 1 Studios.

"We're very excited about this because it's a relatively new thing in first-person shooters," Rooke says. "That's offered us an opportunity to define what first-person cover means and perhaps even introduce things that other games have not done before."

The system appears to be very flexible. While in cover, Point Man can negotiate the gun muzzle around the edge of the object he's behind and peer out for a shot by using the iron sights. If a new threat emerges from

behind him, he can quickly vault over the cover and take position on the other side with the press of a button.

Fettel opens fire on the enemies from behind, and they immediately recognize the development of a new threat, adjusting their tactics accordingly. Looks like the impressive enemy AI that the F.E.A.R. games are known for has survived the move to co-op. Their foes' efforts prove to be insufficient, however, as the brothers make quick work of them. With the threat eliminated, Fettel leaves the body of the possessed soldier, and the empty corpse slumps to the ground.

The amount of time Fettel can possess an enemy depends on the individual's strength of mind. Weaker enemies like standard infantry can't withstand the mental barrage for long, but stronger enemies will give Fettel prolonged possession capabilities. This begs the question: can you take control of any enemy in the game?

"We have a possession solution for every character that you come across in the game, but unfortunately we're not going into detail about that," Rooke says with a reassuring gleam in his eye that indicates he can't wait to share more.

## Breaking down the modes

Though Warner Bros. has designed F.E.A.R. 3 from top to bottom with co-op in mind, the game also gives players the ability to play the campaign in a single-player mode that follows the same narrative from Point Man's perspective. Rather than have co-op character Paxton Fettel appear in the game as a buddy AI, the developers decided to limit Fettel's interactions to the cutscenes. He is present in the narrative sense, but will not directly affect the action. F.E.A.R. 3 also features a competitive multiplayer mode, which Warner Bros. plans to reveal at a later date.

## A horrific pedigree

Rather than have its team of internal writers handle the script duties, Warner Bros. hired *30 Days of Night* writer Steve Niles to pen the F.E.A.R. 3 story about Alma's pregnancy, the return of Paxton Fettel, and the moral dilemma facing Point Man. This decision came with added benefits. A good friend of John Carpenter, Niles convinced the horror film pioneer to consult on the project. "He really helped us visualize how horror can come through our storytelling through cutscenes," Frank Rooke, director of design relays. The rest of the story is under wraps. When asked if giving players control over Point Man's fate in F.E.A.R. 3 would include multiple endings, the development team refused to give away any clues. In fact, don't expect to find out what kind of endings the team has in store until you play the game yourself. "The way we're handling the end is something that's really satisfying that will treat the franchise in a good way."



Warner Bros. says F.E.A.R. 3 has even more mech scenarios than the last game





The new phase caster enemy can summon waves of troops to impede your progress.



## The contractions of horror

### Keeping score

With a *Left 4 Dead*-like generative system changing the way each playthrough is experienced, the F.E.A.R. 3 dev team wants to create incentive for return visits to the campaign. Their solution? A scoring system that keeps track of your every move, including your interactions with the other player. "We have a base scoring system that we'll reveal much more information about later on," says Warner Bros. director of design Frank Rooke. "We want to have replayability and longevity for the game. Co-op in general just begs for the game to be replayed multiple times. We want the player to have these motivations to go back and try and be better."

When Point Man and Fettel emerge from the lower level of the bridge, the sky turns red and a low, persistent rumbling sound engulfs the area. That can only mean one thing – Alma's presence.

"As Alma gets closer to the birth of whatever it is she's birthing, she's having contractions," Schuller says. "These contractions manifest themselves in the environment in what we call a rift event. When these rift events happen they are a premonition or a harbinger toward the unleashing of paranormal forces into the world."

Suddenly a pack of the wolf-like creatures crashes through the windows of nearby subway cars and dashes toward the duo. To cut down the threat, Fettel targets one of the scavengers and uses his third unique ability – suspension – to temporarily immobilize it. While it's suspended in the air, Point Man applies his slow motion ability and starts filling the creature with lead. Fettel joins the fight with his stun blast, and once the foe is vanquished they turn their attention to the other scavengers. Staying on your toes, coordinating attacks, and stacking abilities is key to

surviving these frantic encounters. But Hamilton also points out that this fight won't necessarily play out this way on a second playthrough thanks to the generative system at the heart of F.E.A.R. 3.

One of the most remarkable innovations in recent horror games was the Director system employed by Valve and Turtle Rock Studios in the co-op sensation *Left 4 Dead*. Instead of using fixed spawn points for enemies and a constant stream of zombies for players to fend off, this artificial intelligence program orchestrates attacks by varying the frequency and locations from where enemies attack based on the players' health status, skill level, and supply levels. To amp up the tension, the Director also creates lulls in the action for players to catch their breath and to build the suspense for the next encounter. The result is a cooperative experience that encourages multiple playthroughs, something the F.E.A.R. 3 team finds massively appealing.


"Our generative system allows us to randomize encounters, so those creatures crashing through the windows may or may not happen, or they

may choose other windows to jump out of – it just creates a fresh environment each time the player runs through," Rooke says.

The architect of the generative system, Hamilton says the sequencing alters atmospheric elements, enemy locations, the number of enemies, and even where secret routes and stashes appear. "It encompasses everything from smaller, ambient details that really contribute to the mood – lights flickering, sound, shadows – up into larger, sort of more dramatic elements, scripted jump out-of-the corner things to shock you," he says. "As you play through it, you can't rely on some of the assumptions you made previously. It helps with the desensitizing that normally happens when you play through the same space over and over again."

The hope is that this generative system will result in a high replay factor, encouraging players to run through the game as both characters to experience the breadth of the tactical variety, and perhaps even alternate endings.





"We have tapped into the audio department at Monolith to really help guide the audio folks at Day 1 on how to properly create that atmospheric environment that lays the groundwork for tension and anticipation," says director of design Frank Rooke. The blood probably helps, too.

## An enemy emboldened

As Point Man and Fettel move toward the center of the bridge, they come across an Armacham encampment housing one of the more troublesome new enemies – the phase caster. These commanders summon multiple enemies to their cause by projecting a psychic light beam that eventually splinters, sending shards of light into random corners of the battlefield where enemies then spawn.

While Point Man sets off to hunt down these new threats, Fettel turns his attention to a sniper stationed in a nearby tower. Just as the last grunts are eliminated, the phase caster is beginning another summon. Before he has a chance to unleash his new army, Fettel suspends him and Point Man opens fire with his assault rifle. With the caster out of the way, Point Man turns his attention to a nearby mech. Moving into the massive machine, his arsenal increases tenfold.

Day 1 Studios is no stranger to mechanized combat. Before the team ported the original F.E.A.R. title to consoles, the devs cut their teeth crafting the critically acclaimed titles *MechAssault* and *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf*. To take advantage of their skills, Warner Bros. plans to expand the bombastic mech-based combat much further than they did in F.E.A.R. 2. Some criticized these battle-heavy sections as dampeners on the supernatural tension for which the series is known. You don't exactly fear much when you're a lumbering down the street in steel armor eviscerating enemies with missiles, so why bring them back?

"We actually feel like they complement each other," Rooke says. "It really defines what that core F.E.A.R. experience has been in the past – it's those creepy, horrific, intimate experiences that suddenly open out into a larger, more epic type of combat situation."

"F.E.A.R. has always done well with the horror aspects and those high intensity combat aspects, and I think the common element in both of those is adrenaline," Hamilton adds. "They have a nice progression from one to the other. As you're building up into the higher adrenaline of combat you have the sort of tight spaces and uncertainty of these horrible things coming out and grabbing you. And after you have this cathartic combat experience you drop back down, but you don't drop all the way back down because you go into these scary moments. That basically keeps your adrenaline going up and down like a rollercoaster ride."

Moving through the maze of smoldering cars and buses, Point Man makes quick work of the remaining enemies. He leaves one alive, however, for Fettel. Taking possession of the weak-minded grunt, Fettel makes a mad dash for a second mech just up the road.

"Co-op is a very big part of this game, and it just wouldn't be right if both players couldn't get into a dual mechanized situation," Hay says.

The wave of destruction that follows is much more explosive than any of the battles in previous F.E.A.R. games. While the duo unleashes a barrage of missiles and gunfire against a legion of smaller enemy mechs, an attack chopper suddenly emerges overhead. Point Man and Fettel must carefully coordinate their attack plans, keeping an eye on both the sky and the battlefield in front of them.

The skirmish ends with an explosion that sends Point Man plunging into the sea below, the ghostly apparition of his brother following closely behind.

One of the major pitfalls of horror in film, novels, and video games is the specter of

familiarity. The same scares don't work twice, and if you're not striving for new ways to deliver thrills, your franchise may go the way of *Leprechaun*. The teams at Warner Bros. Interactive and Day 1 Studios seem to understand this, and show no trepidation in taking F.E.A.R. in a new direction. It's too early to tell whether the asymmetrical co-op, generative scare system, and increased focus on mechanized combat will help or hinder the fright factor, but the developer's fearless approach to blazing new trails into Alma's nightmare is a necessity if they want to keep gamers on the edge of their seats. ♦



## Super Mario Galaxy 2

Miyamoto gives us the scoop on his sequel's biggest new features

- » **Platform**  
Wii
- » **Style**  
1 or 2-Player Platforming
- » **Publisher**  
Nintendo
- » **Developer**  
Nintendo
- » **Release**  
May 23

As soon as [Super Mario Galaxy] was over, we started making something that we might call version 1.5." This revelation from Nintendo's mastermind designer Shigeru Miyamoto – that Super Mario Galaxy 2 began as a middle step, almost more of a level pack – is not a huge surprise, but it begs the question of what made them decide to turn it into a full-fledged sequel.

"It's actually quite unusual for us to make two different games in the same series on one platform," Miyamoto admits. "Usually we wait until the advent of new hardware, but for this time around, because there were so many ideas we were not able to include in the first volume, we thought we should make a sequel to that." In our most recent hands-on with Super Mario Galaxy 2, we got to experience those new ideas firsthand.

### The Drill Power-Up

Though it's been shown previously, we were finally able to see Mario's new drill power in action. This powerful ability allows Mario to drill straight through planets. Sometimes he'll pop out on the other side of the world, while other times he'll discover a hidden area in the hollowed-out core of a planet. Strategic drilling will also allow you to damage enemies and bosses. In one intense boss battle that we witnessed, Mario is constrained to a very small planet that turns his movement to 2D while a giant robot attempts to track him down. By carefully timing use of the drill, Mario can burrow through the planet and hit the boss's weak spot on his underbelly, an area otherwise protected by his massive legs.

Though little else has been shown in the way of power-ups, Miyamoto promises more sur-

prises in the full game, saying, "We obviously have more abilities that Mario will have with his different suits."

### Yoshi

The most anticipated change to Super Mario Galaxy 2 is the addition of Yoshi. Fan service though it may be, the inclusion of the lovable green dinosaur also heralds some major gameplay changes. Yoshi's ability to float through the air for an extended period of time has allowed Nintendo to create even crazier jumps and more precarious platforming. Yoshi also gets his own specific power-ups in the form of food. Spicy foods, for example, make him run extremely fast for a short period of time. Another special fruit makes Yoshi gassy, essentially turning him into a balloon floating upward until he runs out of gas or can eat another fruit.





Super Mario Galaxy 2's more challenging platforming includes many instances of wall jumping along moving objects



Yoshi's sweetest move is his ability to swallow enemy projectiles such as Bullet Bills or hammers and spit them back out. This power will be utilized to find hidden secrets, open paths, and defeat bosses, and it's all made possible by the third big addition.

#### More Pointer Functionality

Super Mario Galaxy featured a few segments where a free-floating Mario could grab onto objects in space by pointing at them with the Wii remote. Expect to be pointing while platforming a lot more often in the sequel. "Aiming the pointer at specific enemies makes Yoshi swallow that enemy," Miyamoto explains. "Pointing at certain locations will also help Yoshi progress through a level: 'You can actually identify and point at things that Yoshi can grab with his tongue and then grab that point in order to reach additional points.'"

Sometimes the result is as simple as pulling yourself up to a ledge that you couldn't normally reach, while other times Yoshi will need to use his athletic tongue to swing through whole sections of levels. The ability to quickly point at and grab things in the world while riding Yoshi adds an enjoyable layer onto Galaxy's tight gameplay. We could also see that technique being used with other power-ups – how about the ability to target enemies by pointing before tossing a fireball?

#### Increased Difficulty

Nintendo may be moving more and more toward greater accessibility lately, but Miyamoto says they're not afraid to shy away from a challenge: "[Super Mario Galaxy 2] has been developed and designed so that those who have conquered the prequel...can feel as if it's a continuation from the ending of that first game.... It's more difficult for the beginner, and especially more difficult for the beginner who has never played the first game."

Miyamoto is quick to point out that Nintendo is still pouring lots of effort into making sure the controls are easy to pick up for gamers new to Mario Galaxy, but he adds, "It would be ideal if those players have already conquered Super Mario Galaxy 1 before playing Super Mario Galaxy 2." As in the original Galaxy, players should be able to see the credits easily enough by collecting a mere 70 stars. However, finding special Comet Coins will unlock super-hard bonus levels on top of the numerous extra challenges already available in each world. All told, there will be over 240 stars to tackle for players hoping to see everything Super Mario Galaxy 2 has to offer. » **Phil Kollar**

For our full interview with Shigeru Miyamoto on Super Mario Galaxy 2, social gaming, 3D TVs, and more, visit [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)



Feed Yoshi the right fruit, and he'll be able to dash up steep paths

# Fallout: New Vegas

Leaving the irradiated lands for the City of Sin

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

» **Style**  
1-Player Action/RPG

» **Publisher**  
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**  
Obsidian Entertainment

» **Release**  
Fall

You've been shot and left for dead on the outskirts of New Vegas, Nevada. Drifting between blurred reality and a soothing blackness, your mind wanders from thoughts of the afterlife to questioning why you've been shot. You've wronged nobody. You kept yourself out of trouble and found a way to survive in this harsh world as a courier. You were carrying a parcel at the time of the shooting. Was the assailant intercepting the package?

This is how *Fallout: New Vegas* begins. After being dug out of a shallow grave by a robot, you awaken in the house of a friendly doctor named Mitchell. He tended to your wounds. He nursed you back to health. And he won't let you leave until he conducts a psych profile on you.

Your character's stance in the world is largely shaped by the answers you provide – much like the school tests in *Fallout 3*. I chose an evil path for my courier, saying mothers make great human shields and commenting that the inkblot looks like a mushroom cloud (I actually saw a bearded man). Mitchell hands over a device called the Vit-o-Matic to determine your skills, and in turn, influences. The choices include cult leader, peevish librarian, and old hermit. And yes, you can now alter your age to reflect that of an elderly hermit.

The choices you make in this introductory section also dictate the weapons, armor, and items with which you begin the game. On your way out of the door, Mitchell also gives you a Vault 21 outfit. At this time you are asked if you would like to play the game on Hardcore mode.

Contrary to what you may think, Hardcore mode isn't a new difficulty level. It works in unison with your difficulty level of choice – meaning you could play the game on Very Easy Hardcore or Very Hard Hardcore.

The two big alterations Hardcore mode employs are a realistic approach to healing and the addition of a hydration meter. The effects tied to stimpaks and RadAway are gradual. This subtle change has a huge effect on how combat plays out. The strategy of retreating to the Pip-Boy to replenish your health will no longer work. Stimpaks won't heal limb injuries, either. You'll now have to visit a doctor or carry a doctor's bag to mend these wounds.

If you don't take the time to drink water or eat specific foods during your quest, your character will become dehydrated. Much like *Fallout 3*'s radiation poisoning, the affects of dehydration are tolerable at first, but increase in severity the longer you suffer.

Even before stepping foot outside of the game's first area, I found myself thinking that *New Vegas* will be a much different game than its predecessor. One look at the world outside of Mitchell's house strengthens this thought. *New Vegas* is not a war-torn, post-apocalyptic wasteland. This world suffers more from deterioration. The color palette



is warmer. Most of the scenic views offer an inviting golden glow. It's almost peaceful. Almost.

Admire a sunset for too long, and you'll end up in the gut of a man-sized gecko. Should you choose to fight back, you can now put style into your kill, thanks to the addition of firearm modification. You can add scopes, alter the clip sizes, and apply effects like bonus limb damage to any gun. All alterations are represented cosmetically.

Melee weapons, like the 9 Iron, are now incorporated into V.A.T.S. Whether you choose to bludgeon a foe over the head or snipe them from far away, all weapons have special attacks in V.A.T.S. The 9 Iron's is called "Fore" – a tee-off shot that could potentially knock your opponent down if landed.

Like all *Fallout* games, player choice is factored into every aspect of the game. However, this time around, murderous rampages and good deeds are judged more closely. In addition to your overall karma, you'll now develop a reputation with factions in *New Vegas*. If you have a negative reputation with a faction, they may not give you a quest. Conversely, if you've gained a group's favor, they may be more inclined to give you additional quests.

One such faction is the super mutants. On the outskirts of Black Mountain, I stumbled upon a cross-dressing super mutant named Tabitha, who commands a loyal legion and enjoys the company of a ghoulish slave named Raul. Tabitha even employs the services of Nightkin, a different breed of super mutant with cloaking capabilities. I ended up going to war with Tabitha and his army while passing through the area, but who knows what would have happened if I gave in to his demands.

Our attack freed Raul from captivity. Being the clingy type, Raul asked if he could join us on our adventure. The decision falls squarely on player choice. I decided to keep Raul around, mostly because I liked the cut of his jib (think Kif from *Futurama*). Companions like Raul play a more vital role than they did in *Fallout 3*. A new companion wheel interface allows you to give them weapons and items, or tell them to be aggressive or passive in combat situations.

Bethesda Softworks, the team behind *Fallout 3*, isn't handling the development of *New Vegas*. While this deserves a moment of pause for some, it never passed my mind during the demo. The new developer, Obsidian Entertainment, is using the same tech, and would appear to have a stranglehold on it. From my brief glance, *New Vegas* looks like *Fallout 3* with considerable refinement. Whether the writing is as clever remains to be seen, but having Chris Avellone (of *Planescape: Torment* fame) as a senior designer on the project is a good sign. Tabitha did give me a laugh, and I love the plot's direction of tracking down the assailant who shot you. » **Andrew Reiner**

To view the teaser trailer and read an interview with Obsidian Entertainment head to [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag).



The grenade machine gun in action

## Introducing the Grenade Machine Gun

That isn't a typo in the headline. In *New Vegas*, you have the chance to wield a firearm that spits out grenades just as fast as any machine gun does bullets. You can also attach a high-speed mod kit to it. Of course, this is a high level weapon. You start the game with varmint rifles, dynamite, and maybe even a century old pistol. The grenade machine gun may sound like an overly powered tool of death, but its explosive assaults end up looking like mosquito bites compared to another of the game's weapons, the Helios One orbital strike. Seeing a laser beam the size of a house torch everything in sight is a treat only James Bond villains have been able to enjoy.



The Helios One orbital strike in its powering up phase



Fore!



The companion wheel ups the interaction you have with your companions...



...like Raul here. The only command for him: Keep being awesome



# Transformers: War for Cybertron

High Moon hopes to turn the tide

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

» **Style**  
1 to 3-Player Action  
(10-Player Online)

» **Publisher**  
Activision

» **Developer**  
High Moon Studios

» **Release**  
June 22

Dedicated followers of the Transformers franchise have reason to be concerned about IP exploitation. While giant robots and kinetic action should add up to success, the recent Hollywood adaptations and vanilla video game tributes may not have been what fans were looking for. High Moon Studios' goal for its pet project is to appeal to various degrees of Transformers fandom – layering lore on top of solid and accessible third-person action. If successful, the resulting fan service with gameplay worth our hard-earned money, War for Cybertron could be the remedy needed to cure what ails the property.

War for Cybertron unfolds on the Transformers' home world, which has been ravaged by war for millions of years. While the Decepticon faction pursues order at any cost, the Autobots believe in freedom and personal expression. A story of power versus hope, War for Cybertron allows High Moon Studios to explore the franchise's history before the mass exodus to Earth that laid the groundwork for subsequent Transformers series. Creating new canon – like the first time Bumblebee and Optimus meet – is an intimidating prospect.

The story unfolds through two unique campaigns, one dedicated to each of the warring factions. The Decepticon tale acts as a prequel to its Autobots counterpart. Both campaigns include three-player drop-in/drop-out co-op, with a standard three-character pool to choose from. If you prefer to go stag, the remaining bots

will accompany you as AI allies. In our demo the character pool consisted of Optimus (not-yet Prime), Bumblebee, and Ratchet.

Unless a particular Transformer holds the key to your heart, deciding which character to use isn't a frivolous choice. Each has distinctive abilities – two for their robot mode and another unique to their vehicle form. One of the two robot abilities is consumable, requiring Energon shards looted from fallen enemies to replenish a meter. The other works on a cooldown timer. The vehicle-specific ability recharges differently for each robot. Using Optimus as an example, his robot form includes an area of effect move called Warcry, which increases offense and defense capabilities for himself and nearby allies. His cooldown ability is Dash, a move used primarily for extra maneuverability. Lastly, when in truck form, Optimus can access Ram – a burst of speed that inflicts heavy damage on contact with an enemy. The unique skill sets make for diverse play styles when layered on top of familiar shooter elements.

Our most recent look at War for Cybertron culminated in a limited hands-on session in Iacon, the home base for the Autobots resistance. The scenery is an eye-fel, as Iacon represents the height of Transformers' civilization. The environment has ultra-modern influences, but also includes a hint of ancient architecture to make the city feel established and time-tested.

The scene unfolds as Optimus learns of Zeta Prime's defeat and makes the executive deci-

sion to take up temporary command. Working our way through the city, we must get defensive weaponry back online in order to hold off advancing Decepticon foes. Slipping into the controls is easy – the contextual cover system, weapon swapping, and health regeneration give the action a distinct Gears of War feel.

Easily identifiable thanks to their purple accents, Decepticon troops on the ground and in the air have us dashing and ducking for cover. Dash gives us the speed we need to get out of a tight situation, and Ram does decent damage when in truck mode. All the while, Bumblebee and Ratchet fight alongside, duking it out with foes as we progress through a corridor. When the area is clear, we stop to collect ammo, scavenge weapons, and refill our Energon meter before pushing forward. Next, we get trapped in a circular arena that houses the Decepticon War Machine. Optimus must stay nimble to avoid a constantly advancing laser beam, targeting weak points in the machine's architecture when given a moment of respite.

The freedom Hasbro gave High Moon with the license has allowed the studio to approach Transformers: War for Cybertron like a brand new IP. Hopefully this factor changes the tide for the beloved robots in disguise, providing enough creative freedom to reinvigorate an often-abused franchise. » Meagan VanBurklee



As bots take damage their screen fills with static, an appropriate and stylistic twist on the "red screen" standard in most shooters



Soundwave will transform into a truck instead of an '80s tape deck



High Moon won't place any restrictions on the player in regards to transforming, but some areas will be intentionally designed to capitalize on either the robot or vehicle form



## Transforming Online Multiplayer

After our demo, High Moon gave us the first scoop on War for Cybertron multiplayer details. High Moon says online play features five-on-five battles or a 10-player free-for-all. However, the aspect the team is most excited about is the ability for players to customize their own Transformer. Your first major decision will be to choose a class: scout, leader, scientist, or soldier. Each class is tied to a vehicle type - cars, trucks, jets, and tanks, respectively. From an aesthetic standpoint, you can pick your chassis (with several to choose from for each class), custom colors, and the robot's name. Once you've designed your bot, you can pick a custom weapon loadout, two special abilities based on your class type, and upgrades.

The player has three upgrade slots, each of which can house one of six offensive, defensive, and "general" aids. Offensive and defensive upgrades are unique to each class, and the general upgrades are open to all classes. For example, a scout class upgrade may increase ground speed, with a complementary general upgrade cutting down on recoil. As players level up their robots, a Call of Duty-like perk system unlocks upgrades and new abilities.

High Moon also revealed several game modes, all of which allow only custom characters. Multiplayer features standard modes such as Team Deathmatch, Deathmatch, and Power Struggle (a fancy term for capture the flag), but the standout mode may be Code of Power, a mode comprised of two-and-a-half minute rounds where teams vie for a giant melee weapon. High Moon made clear that transforming and teamwork is imperative to successfully completing missions, and promises to announce more multiplayer modes soon.



Use ranged units to soften up soldiers in elevated positions

### It's A Mod World

Rather than pushing the mod community away from the game and leaving them in segregated camps across the Internet, former modder and current Civilization V lead designer John Schafer came up with a novel idea. Why not host the community from within the game? Civilization V does just that. Shipping with powerful customization tools that match those in Civ IV, the game also features a new standalone world builder that fans have been demanding for years. When they're done creating their strategic masterpiece, players can upload, download, install, and comment on the work of fellow modders within the game.

# Civilization V

Fitter. Happier. More productive

- » **Platform**  
PC
- » **Style**  
1-Player Strategy
- » **Publisher**  
2K Games
- » **Developer**  
Firaxis Games
- » **Release**  
Fall

**S**id Meier knows how to cater to a platform. With Civilization IV his team at Firaxis delivered the most comprehensive version of the turn-based strategy title to date, earning several PC game of the year awards in the process. Then the devs took their act to consoles with Civilization Revolution, delivering an easy-to-digest version with a streamlined user interface that increased the game's accessibility without damaging the addictive strategy at its core. For the follow-up, Firaxis is stretching the franchise in two drastically different directions, creating a new version for Facebook while prepping Civilization V, the first proper sequel in five years.

Though Meier's willingness to tinker with the Civ formula in the name of accessibility may have some hardcore PC fans worried, our first look at Civilization V hardly painted the picture of a dumbed-down strategy title. Rather, it simpli-

fies the front end to keep players organized. With so much information flooding users in the late game, Firaxis decided that streamlining the interface and implementing an icon-based notification system like the one in the Total War series was the best way to inform players of dormant units or new research opportunities so they can better manage each turn.

While Firaxis disencumbered the front end, it's taking the opposite approach to combat by embracing hexagon tiles and ditching stackable units. The result is a much more open experience where units have more flanks to manage. With combat pulled out of the cities, the landscape becomes an integral part of the strategy; terrain like mountain passes and river crossings hardly mattered before, but they now create natural choke points for defense. The addition of ranged units also adds tactical variety to the battle. Archers are very weak in tile-to-tile

combat, but they are handy for softening units that are encamped on bonus-granting high ground before your disadvantaged spear men move in to attack.

With stacks removed from the game, Firaxis was forced to reconfigure how city sieges work. The solution? Giving each town a hit point rating based on its size and whether or not a unit is garrisoned within. To better defend cities, players can research masonry to build protective walls, which also allows the city to bombard outward for counter-attacks. The ideal defense, however, is to keep an army nearby to thwart enemy advances.

The military, technological, and economic struggle between the nations has always been the crux of the Civ experience. By introducing city-states to the mix, Firaxis hopes to throw a wrench in long-standing strategies players have carried over from one version of the game to the next. These new pawn nations do not expand borders or grow into dangerous military powers, but how you engage them is paramount to your success. Crushing them could have unforeseen consequences should they be friendly with another civilization, so the better route may be to engage them diplomatically to sway them to your cause. Take them under your wing as a protectorate, however, and you may be held responsible for their actions if they irk another nation.

We haven't even touched on how Firaxis plans to tweak the culture, technology, or multiplayer in Civilization V, but these first details are enough to catapult the game up our list of most anticipated PC titles in 2010. **» Matt Bertz**

Log into [www.gameinformer.com/mag](http://www.gameinformer.com/mag) to watch an exclusive video interview with Civ V producer John Shirk.



Leaders like George Washington are full in-environment characters who speak their natural language. Firaxis went to great lengths to make sure the leaders speak correctly, even hiring experts in dead languages



# Crysis 2

The sequel to Crytek's critically acclaimed open-world shooter heads to consoles

If you rely on your Xbox 360 or PS3 for your first-person shooter thrills, *Crysis* may be the best game from the last five years you never played. The unrelated follow-up to Crytek's visually and technologically impressive *Far Cry*, the 2007 title took the sandbox shooter genre to the next level with even better graphics and futuristic weaponry that turned Special Forces soldiers into alien-fighting badasses.

The German developer unleashed player creativity by arming gamers with a devastating nanosuit that allowed them to leap two-story buildings, send enemies flying across bases with one punch, and terrorize foes by picking them off one by one only to disappear into the jungles with a cloaking device. This super suit proved particularly useful when a scientific research team off the coast of North Korea accidentally reactivated a long-dormant alien entity and your super-soldiers were the only ones capable of neutralizing the threat.

When analyzing the telemetrics from *Crysis* and the *Crysis Warhead* expansion, Crytek discovered that most players used the nanosuit to play one of three different ways – as a stealth-like Predator, a guns-blazing commando, or a cautious, long-distance sniper. To accommodate these play styles, *Crysis 2* introduces a new and improved nanosuit that will adapt to your preferred method of attack and reward you with new functionalities to augment your skills. For instance, defensive players who like to snipe from a distance could unlock the ability to fire a flare above an area to make it easier to identify and shoot enemies.

In the few years that have passed since the events of *Crysis*, the planet has suffered a series of catastrophic natural disasters with a frequency normally reserved for Roland Emmerich movies. Earthquakes, tidal waves, and floods have ravaged much of the world, including the bustling metropolis, New York City. To make matters

worse, a plague is ravaging the city populace, and the aliens have returned to finish what they started. It's up to you and your super-charged nanosuit to repel the latest invasion.

To keep the alien invasion story from devolving to the snicker-worthy pulp of many sci-fi tales, Crytek has hired acclaimed writer Richard Morgan to pen the *Crysis 2* script. Morgan, best known for his book *Altered Carbon*, has won both the Philip K. Dick and Arthur C. Clarke awards for his novels.

To ensure the franchise's migration to consoles with the new Crytek graphics engine is a smooth one, Crytek has assembled a large development team, among them the Crytek UK team (formerly known as Free Radical). Given the series' trouble in creating a destination multiplayer presence, we'd love to see the former Timesplitters developer bring its ingenuity into the fold. Check back for a more extensive review of *Crysis 2* next month. » **Matt Bertz**

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

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

» **Publisher**  
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**  
Crytek

» **Release**  
Fall



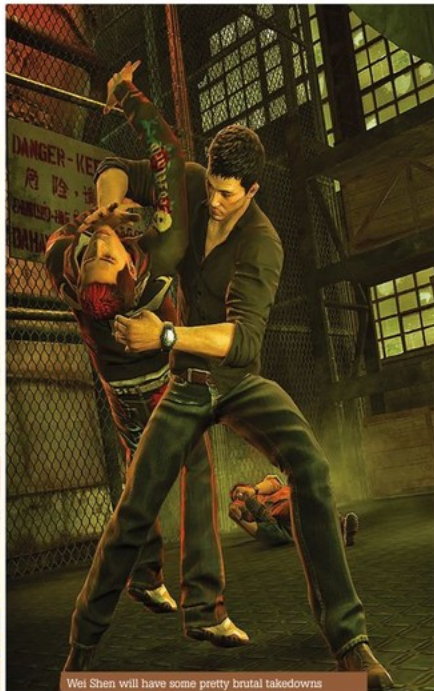
Even after the explosion you still can't afford to live in the condo across the street



The aliens aren't the only things your super soldier needs to worry about. The NYC environment is volatile, and a natural disaster could happen at any moment

# True Crime

Activision gives an old franchise new life



Wei Shen will have some pretty brutal takedowns

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

» **Style**  
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Activision

» **Developer**  
United Front Games

» **Release**  
Fall

The previous games in the True Crime series garnered mixed reviews but decent enough sales for the publisher to hang onto the name for a new day. Now, with the help of ModNation Racers developer United Front Games, Activision has pulled the trigger on a franchise reboot.

This clean slate has given United Front the opportunity to keep what it liked and ditch what it disliked about the first two games. The first True Crime titles were like Grand Theft Auto from a cop's perspective, filling the open world settings with disconnected missions that involved punching ghosts and driving through yards. This new entry takes a step back and refocuses on elements like story and gameplay.

Instead of a fractured, choice-based storyline, United Front has created a gritty, linear narrative with a single ending. Inspired by legendary films such as *Infernal Affairs*, the insider epic that Martin Scorsese eventually remade into *The Departed*, True Crime throws you in the shoes of Wei Shen, a cop deep undercover inside one of Hong Kong's feared Triad gangs. Unlike past leading characters in the series, Wei Shen must blend in at all costs, which means going above the law and committing crimes to preserve his cover.

To get an idea of how Wei Shen's story will unfold, Activision walked us through a mission from the game. Starting in the office of a nightclub, we meet Winston, a mid-level Triad lieutenant. A rival named Dog Eyes has messed with someone in his family, and Winston is hell bent on revenge. Wei Shen, undercover as part of Winston's crew, points out that they shouldn't do anything too extreme or it might gain the attention of – and ultimately piss off – the enigmatic

Uncle Po, a high-ranking Triad officer that the rest of the crew clearly fears.

After the outscene breaks, the crew hops into a decked-out Triad SUV and we get our first taste of True Crime's version of Hong Kong. Unlike the real city, the streets have been widened to allow for a better view and more breathing room while driving. United Front is home to many racing developer alumni, including staff from the Need for Speed series. They stress that the driving is more arcadey as opposed to the heavy feel of Grand Theft Auto.

Upon arrival at one of Dog Eye's lairs, the crew charges in to mess the place up. Meanwhile, Shen needs to slip in and get a man named Siu Wah out and unharmed to avoid Uncle Po's wrath. Of course, there are a few waves of bad guys to mow through, which is a perfect opportunity to demo the combat. Like the driving, True Crime's combat is less about being

authentic and more about just plain fun. Wei Shen is a master martial artist, and unlike American gangs, the Triads favor hand-to-hand and melee weapons over guns. True Crime has a full arsenal of firearms, but the real satisfaction comes from delivering stylish round houses, swinging baseball bats, and using the brutal environmental kills. In one instance, we see an unlucky thug get his head smashed in a freezer door more times than he would have liked. Shen can also vault over and

slide across just about any object to get where he's going fast.

After Shen finds the target and drags him outside, Wah slips through his fingers and takes off in a car. In hot pursuit after stealing a random car, Shen speeds towards Wah's car, leaps over to it, and takes control.

This over-the-top mission finale puts United Front's goals into perspective. True Crime is an action-focused game with a classic Hong Kong cinema story. It's good to see Activision rebooting the series rather than just churning out another clone of the previous games. We're looking forward to seeing more of it in the coming months. » **Nick Ahrens**

For more info and screens on True Crime, head over to [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)



Combat is fast-paced with a focus on melee





Since *Shattered Dimensions* doesn't put Spider-Man in an open world, the game's levels are fairly expansive to maintain the freedom of web swinging anywhere

## Back In Black

Even some Spider-Man fans might not be familiar with Marvel's Noir line that inspired *Shattered Dimensions*. Introduced in 2009, *Noir* is an alternate continuity line that re-imagines many of Marvel's popular characters as though they had existed during the early half of the 20th century. *Spider-Man Noir* explores Peter Parker's life as a depression-era kid who gains his spider-like powers after being bitten by a spider found in an ancient spider statue. While he has many of the same powers of the mainstream Spider-Man, *Spider-Man Noir* also carries a gun, and it will be interesting to see if Activision utilizes that particular prop. Fans interested in learning more can pick up the comic trade *Spider-Man Noir* by David Hine, Fabrice Sapolsky, and Carmine Di Giandomenico.

# Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

Activision refills its web fluid and takes another swing

Since 2004's *Spider-Man 2*, most of Spidey's titles have followed an open world formula. No longer. *Shattered Dimensions* from internal Activision studio Beenox is a linear, level-based action title that reboots the franchise and shows Spider-Man in a light many gamers haven't seen him in before.

The game opens with Spider-Man trying to retrieve a mysterious, ancient artifact—the Tablet of Order and Chaos—before it falls into the wrong hands. Legends say that whoever claims the tablet will gain incredible, untold power. Unfortunately, the tablet has been split and scattered into multiple realities. As happens with all reality-displaced ancient tablets, this threatens to tear apart the space-time continuum, so in order to protect all of reality from collapsing on itself, Spider-Man will need the help of Spider-Men from other dimensions. This may sound like a storyline dredged from the wacky, anything-goes '60s era of comic storytelling, but for this tale Beenox has enlisted the talents of modern Spider-Man scribe Dan Slott—who is pretty good at spinning this kind of hackneyed plot into a comedic and entertaining tale.

To date, Activision has only revealed two of the universes *Shattered Dimensions* explores. Aside from the Amazing universe, featuring the Spider-Man everyone already knows and loves, fans can expect to step into the webs of Spider-Man Noir. Marvel Comic's *Noir* line is fairly new, but it re-imagines what Peter Parker's life would have been like during the 1930s.

As the name implies, *Spider-Man Noir* is gloomier. "The *Noir* universe needed to have a darker and less saturated color palette," says *Shattered Dimensions*' creative director, Thomas Wilson. "We looked at movies like *Sin City* and *The Spirit* and wanted our *Noir* universe to look similar to their style." The Amazing universe is much more vibrant and alive, drawing from the aesthetic of vintage Amazing Spider-Man comics of the 1960s.

In addition to the refreshed palette, Spidey will see a few changes of scenery. Instead of swinging through New York's trash-strewn streets the whole game, as he's done in every Spider-Man title since the Atari 2600, Spider-Man gets out of the city every so often. We've already seen Spider tracking Kraven the Hunter through an

Amazonian jungle, and Beenox says Spider-Man tours other famous locations he's visited in the comics.

Every universe in *Shattered Dimensions* will play differently. While the Amazing universe has a more straightforward action focus, *Noir* will reward players for sticking to the shadows and dropping down on their foes from above.

"*Noir* is much more realistic compared to the other universes. If you get shot, you'll end up badly wounded," explains Wilson. "Blending in the dark and sneaking behind your opponents are pretty much your best ways to make sure you'll finish the level alive." While we still haven't seen the other two universes, Beenox has promised that they will vary from Amazing and *Noir*.

While the action in *Shattered Dimensions* focuses on Spider-Man's agility and utilizes his web to pull enemies in or pin them down, one of the most intriguing aspects of the gameplay is the new first-person sequencing. During scripted sequences in boss fights, the action will switch to first-person, letting Spider-Man take down his enemies *Little Mac*-style. With mechanics similar to Nintendo's *Punch-Out!!*, players must use the analog sticks to dodge and attack. "These characters have so much detail and expression in their models, we wanted to bring the action close to the camera and put the player in Spider-Man's tights for a brief moment," explains Wilson. Not only do these first-person sequences change up the game's pacing, but they could be a rewarding catharsis after a long boss encounter.

It's easy to forget, but Spider-Man was once the star of some of the best comic-based video games. *Batman*: Arkham Asylum and infamous have raised the bar for what players expect in superhero games, and while it's still too early to tell if Beenox's reengineering of the Spider-Man license is enough to put Spidey back on top, it's good to see some fresh ideas injected back into the franchise. » **Ben Reeves**

See a 3D screenshot from the game at [gameinform.com/mag](http://gameinform.com/mag)



Spider-Man's enhanced agility and spider sense allows him to dodge most attacks, as long as players are holding down one of the triggers

- » Platform  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360
- » Style  
1-Player Action
- » Publisher  
Activision
- » Developer  
Beenox
- » Release  
Fall



# Guilty Party

Evidence suggests that solving crime can be fun

» Platform

Wii

» Style

1 to 4-Player Party

» Publisher

Disney Interactive Studios

» Developer

Wideload Games

» Release

July 27

A new contender has stepped up in the ongoing search for great third-party games on the Wii. This time Disney is taking a shot at the popular console's notoriously difficult market with Disney Guilty Party, a minigame collection that adds in mystery and intrigue. Think Mario Party meets classic board game Guess Who, and you're on the right track.

Whether you're playing through one of the game's seven main cases in story mode or a fully randomized mystery in party mode, every game of Guilty Party begins the same way: A crime has been committed, and you and your fellow sleuths from the Dickens Detective Agency must discover the culprit. Each clue gets you closer to an answer, but the evidence must be won through successful minigames. Some use the Wii remote to emulate tools you might expect to find on a crime scene – a flashlight, a magnifying glass, and more – but some of the tasks get a bit more interesting.

In one area, you might confront a potential suspect who knows more than she is letting on but needs to be broken before she'll spill her guts. How do you manage it? A stare down! In this minigame, the location your Wii remote is pointed at represents where your eyes are. As the suspect moves her head back and forth, you'll follow her eyes with the Wii remote,

building the pressure until she cracks. While the easiest difficulty only involves following the suspect's eyes left and right, detective (medium) difficulty forces you to tilt the Wii remote to match the angle of her face as well. In the highest difficulty setting, super-sleuth, the suspect occasionally blocks her eyes with her hands. You'll have to use buttons on the Wii remote to pinch her nose and keep the process moving along.

According to Wideload Games vice president Patrick Curry, this is the structure for all of the minigames. On the easiest setting, anyone should be able to handle it, but the hardest adds new gameplay elements that force you to adapt and relearn the minigame. One of the simplest minigames is bribing a witness. At its core, this minigame consists of taking money from your character's hands and placing it in the witness' eagerly open palm. But in its hardest version, game villain Mr. Valentine attempts to steal the money from you as you place it in the witness's hand. Winning the minigame requires speed and strength as you slap away the dastardly criminal's greedy fingers.

All told, Guilty Party is packed with over 50 minigames, and you won't need to tackle all of them on your own. At certain points, Mr. Valentine unleashes a trap meant to foil your crime solving, prompting a co-op minigame where all the detectives work together to make

it out alive. Curry points to the train mystery as an example of this. In one of the train cars in this level, Valentine lets loose a basket full of snakes. One of the characters can search through luggage to scare snakes out as well. As mentioned, you can go into party mode to have a mystery created from scratch at any of the story mode's locations; it generates a crime, a new culprit, and new clues for you to track down. Once you complete a minigame in story or party mode, that game will unlock in the game room, which allows you to practice it as many times as you want or challenge friends and family to a minigame duel.

With the variety of minigames and difficulties, Wideload hopes that Guilty Party will appeal to every member of the family. The fun extends beyond the story mode as well. As mentioned, you can go into party mode to have a mystery created from scratch at any of the story mode's locations; it generates a crime, a new culprit, and new clues for you to track down. Once you complete a minigame in story or party mode, that game will unlock in the game room, which allows you to practice it as many times as you want or challenge friends and family to a minigame duel.

It's easy to be skeptical of third-party Wii games, especially minigame collections, but Wideload has a unique spin on the genre that has me excited to start digging into Guilty Party's mysteries. » Phil Kollar



# Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom

An otherworldly take on a classic tale of teamwork

Tons of classic stories begin with a young boy stumbling across and befriend an unlikely pet. Not all of them are huge, mystical bear-hippopotamus creatures called Majin, however. Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom is one such tale, and the charming action-adventure title is bounding to North America this summer.

Majin has been imprisoned within a castle for a hundred years while dark forces engulfed the world around him. He may have remained there even longer if a young thief named Tepeu hadn't come along and removed the huge spike pinning him down. The two team up to escape the castle – which is naturally teeming with malevolent creatures – and recover the beast's lost powers.

With the AI-controlled Majin on his side, Tepeu has a much better chance against the evil forces that have overtaken the land. Tepeu wields the spike which impaled Majin as a weapon. Over 100 long years, the spike absorbed a fraction



of the creature's mythical powers. While he's hacking away at enemies with the improvised armament, Majin can use his might to breathe fire and summon devastating electrical storms. In one instance we see an outnumbered Tepeu defend against a mob of monsters while Majin topples an overhead wall, squashing the bad guys below.

When brute force won't do the trick, the duo must use stealth and solve puzzles to progress. Certain situations will require either Tepeu or Majin to ward off enemy assaults while the other solves environmental puzzles. However, Tepeu

must be mindful of how far he strays from his ally, as only Majin's magic can restore his health.

Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom features a beautiful and bizarre art style. The development team (which contains several Team Ico veterans), draws inspiration from Tim Burton's work to create the "magical yet mysterious" air.

While at first glance it appears to share several elements in common with *The Last Guardian*, Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom looks like it could be an engaging adventure. » **Tim Turi**

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

# Iron Man 2

Sega corrects Iron Man's flight plan

It's hard to clone a movie's story in a video game. You either spoil the plot for fans or risk contradicting parts of the film's fiction. Sega's solution to this problem with *Iron Man 2* is to just avoid the movie's plot altogether. The game is coming out around the same time as the Robert Downey Jr. flick, and it shares some characters and themes from the movies, but the story itself is temporally divorced from the world of the movie – meaning fans will be able to play the game without risk of spoilers.

Comic writer Matt Fraction (*The Invincible Iron Man* and *Uncanny X-Men*) helped formulate the game's plot, which moves at a brisk pace and is filled with clever dialogue. When a portion of Tony Stark's personal AI system, Jarvis, is stolen, Tony tracks the thieves to Russia. Marvel fans will be glad to hear that many elements of the comic mythology have been tapped for the game; the



terrorist organization AIM gets involved, and Iron Man has a particularly destructive fight with the Crimson Dynamo.

After only a few minutes with the game, we could tell that a lot of time has been spent fixing the faults from Sega's 2008 Iron Man title. The game is still a third-person shooter with flight elements, but the controls – both on the ground and in the air – feel sturdier. Players now have more ways to upgrade Iron Man's tech, and the levels do a better job at pacing the game's action.

However, the game's biggest change is the addition of Iron Man's new ally, War Machine, as a playable character. Picking one character over the other can change how the levels play out. War Machine is the heavy hitter who's not big on subtlety. He's equipped with more artillery than an aircraft carrier, and designed for players who just want to point and shoot. Iron Man, on the other hand, requires a greater degree of strategy. Designed with a balance between defense and offense, what Iron Man lacks in firepower he makes up for with other special skills, such as his ability to hack certain enemies and have them fight on his side.

Sega has fiddled with a lot of the tech under Iron Man's hood these last two years, and Shellhead is looking better prepared for battle than last time. At the very least, the game looks like it should scratch our itch for mechanized super heroics as we build to the movie's release in the first week of May. » **Ben Reeves**

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360  
» **Style**  
1-Player Action  
» **Publisher**  
Sega  
» **Developer**  
Sega Studios San Francisco  
» **Release**  
May 4



Check [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag) for extra screens and a trailer for the upcoming game



# Metroid: Other M

Samus' latest adventure mixes things up but still pays tribute to the past

» Platform  
Wii

» Style  
1-Player Action/  
Adventure

» Publisher  
Nintendo

» Developer  
Team Ninja

» Release  
June 27

This month, I played through the first hour of Nintendo's upcoming sci-fi adventure for the Wii. I was surprised how different Other M feels compared to previous Metroid games – it actually borrows most of its genetic make-up from the franchise's past. Here's the breakdown of where Other M's important pieces originate. » Phil Kollar



## Metroid: Exploration

If one element has tied the entire Metroid series together, it's the sense of exploration and discovery in an alien atmosphere. Though the portion of Other M that I played takes place on a derelict space station rather than a dangerous planet, players still need to use every trick Samus has to fully explore the map and find all of the hidden power-ups. In the early segment of the game, I ran past numerous hidden passages and side paths, many of which required new weapons or advanced techniques to access. Unlocking bombs near the end of the demo allowed access to one missile power-up, but I could see several other hidden areas that I couldn't yet figure out how to reach.



## Super Metroid: Plot

Other M takes place immediately following the events of Super Metroid (and before Metroid Fusion), a connection Nintendo is playing up a lot. The new game opens with Samus reminiscing about the events that ended the SNES classic: She was nearly defeated by the evil Mother Brain, only to be saved at the last second by an unlikely ally – the baby Metroid she rescued in her previous adventures. This final Metroid was destroyed, effectively wiping out the species, but not before it powers up Samus, allowing the bounty hunter heroine to take down Mother Brain and escape the planet Zebes.



Samus' narration during Other M's intro sequence is more heavy-hearted than we expected from Nintendo's coolest heroine, lamenting the loss of the baby Metroid that she will "never see again," and pondering what lasting effects the creature's sacrifice will have on her. Whatever the Metroid did has left her more powerful than ever, but that power is offset by a surprising level of ennui. Though it's unclear how things will pan out, the first cutscenes indicate that the events of Super Metroid will keep popping up throughout Other M.

## Metroid Fusion: Storytelling

Other M embraces a more narrative-heavy approach than previous games in the series. In this respect, it's most similar to Metroid Fusion, the GBA release that introduced a more introspective Samus who developed an inner monologue and had more frequent interactions with other human and non-human characters. What sets Other M apart – possibly for the worse – is that all of this monologue and dialogue is fully voiced. Some of the melodramatic writing that may not have sounded silly in Fusion as text is harder to stomach when spoken aloud.

Other M also introduces a crew of Galactic Federation soldiers that Samus interacts with, including her old commanding officer Adam Malkovich (who featured into the plot of Fusion). Like the GBA game, Samus takes orders from and works with the Federation instead of operating on her own, a change that may annoy fans who loved the solitude of classic Metroid games.





## Ninja Gaiden: Fast-paced action

Ninja Gaiden is a necessary part of Other M's lineage because of the game's developer, Team Ninja. Some fans were worried that Samus' latest adventure would be too focused on action under this new team's direction, and those fears are at least partially founded.

Controlling Samus in Other M involves using a single Wii remote – no nunchuk or classic controller options are supported. While the game contains classic Metroid-style exploration, the tight corridors often open up into larger rooms that serve as 3D arenas for combat against waves of enemies. In Ninja Gaiden fashion, Samus moves through these areas at an inhuman speed, with the ability to dodge enemy attacks with a well-timed tap of the d-pad. Since buttons on the Wii remote are limited, Samus auto-aims at the closest enemy in front of her. Because of the speed of combat, however, it's difficult to target a specific bad guy and easy to accidentally face away from the enemy.

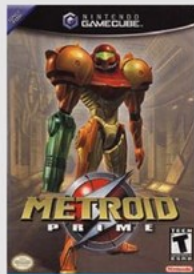


## Metroid Prime: First-person mode

Perhaps the biggest surprise of my short time with Other M was discovering that it contains a Metroid Prime-esque first-person view that's required to scan items in the environment and shoot missiles. By lifting up the Wii remote and pointing it at the screen, the camera will zoom into Samus' visor, offering a new perspective on your surroundings and the ability to aim freely.

While the sudden switch to first-person was exciting at first, it creates some major problems. Several enemies in the first hour – including the first boss (a purple tentacle creature) – require well-timed missile shots to be defeated. Since there's no nunchuk attached to the Wii remote during play, there's also no way to move while in first-person mode. I found it nearly impossible to stop and aim at an enemy in first-person without getting hit, leading to numerous silly situations where I had to run away from an enemy in circles until I had put enough distance between them to stand still and shoot.

First-person mode also allows Samus to take a more detailed look at her surroundings and scan some items, though scanning appears to be much more limited than in the Metroid Prime series.



## Handheld Game of the Month



Picross 3D

## PC Game of the Month



The Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom



## 89 Splinter Cell: Conviction

Working off the grid isn't easy, but Sam Fisher pulls it off with aplomb. It's been quite a wait for Splinter Cell fans, but Ubisoft's super spy returns with a few new tricks and a thirst for vengeance. Conviction not only strikes a delicate balance between stealth gameplay and fast-paced action, but it pulls off that same trick even when two players are on the field. Turn to page 89 to find out why you'll want to play the new Splinter Cell alone and again with a friend.

## THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

## AWARDS

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

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# Metro 2033

A dreary subway ride well worth taking

9

360 • PC

#### » Concept

Explore the crumbling tunnels of a post-apocalyptic Moscow as first described in a best-selling Russian novel

#### » Graphics

Beautiful environments with a surprising amount of detail are aided by fantastic animation

#### » Sound

The guns don't sound particularly powerful, but the monster noises will leave you quivering in fear

#### » Playability

The aiming is looser than most shooters, but once you adjust the settings, you'll be blasting away like normal

#### » Entertainment

If you give yourself over to the world of Metro 2033, chances are you'll enjoy getting sucked in for its entirety

#### » Replay Value

Low

## Second Opinion 8

If I had to summarize the story in Metro 2033, I would write "giant mutated rats... post-apocalyptic Moscow... subway ghosts..." followed by a stream of question marks. I have no idea what happened, but I still enjoyed the adventure. Most of the allure comes from the suffocating atmosphere of despair. Almost every environment made me tense up and grip my controller tightly. Most sequences offer at least one towering tent-pole moment along with drop-dead gorgeous visuals. As arresting as this journey is, you should also prepare for agitation. None of the gameplay mechanics operate consistently: headshots and stealth kills don't always register, and most of the fights devolve into shooting creatures standing a foot away from you. Depending on what form of entertainment you seek from your games, Metro 2033 can be viewed as an atmospheric adventure or a lackluster shooter. » Andrew Reiner



Style 1-Player Shooter Publisher THQ Developer 4A Games Release March 16 ESRB M

Having followed very little pre-release coverage for Metro 2033, my expectations going in were almost wholly based off one piece of info I'd heard about Ukrainian developer 4A Games: The team was formed by devs who had previously worked on S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl. Knowing that, I steered myself for an open-ended shooter full of ambition and technical issues. The ambition is there in spades, but Metro 2033 is an impressively polished and extremely linear experience that makes for an excellent debut.

Metro 2033 takes place in a post-apocalyptic Moscow, but you won't spend too much time on the city's bombed out, radioactive surface. The citizens of the fallen city have taken to the abandoned subway tunnels, and aside from a few excursions topside, most of your time is spent in these grimy passageways.

If that sounds a bit cramped, the level design matches the premise perfectly. From the second you start the campaign, you follow a straight line to the finale with only a handful of opportunities to explore alternate paths or side missions. What a glorious straight line it is.

In true Half-Life fashion, the linear level design is balanced by incredible set pieces that break up the regular pacing. Throughout your journey to save your home village of Exhibition, you'll take control of turrets in tense defense scenarios, sneak aboard a Communist train, experience strange hallucinations, and more. In one particularly memorable sequence, you must carry a little boy on your shoulders through a section of the tunnel, an act of bravery that causes your movement and aiming to be compromised for a brief but enjoyably challenging stretch.

Half-Life 2 may be the perfect point of comparison to Metro 2033. Like Gordon Freeman, mostly silent protagonist Artyom is often joined

by invincible AI partners. And like Valve's classic FPS, the gunplay isn't the star so much as the fascinating world built around it. You can look down ironights like in a Call of Duty game, but the aim snaps to enemies quickly and most of the battles devolve into taking down enemies as quickly as possible instead of taking strategic positions. A handful of levels allow for stealth solutions, but it's so easy to run and gun through bandits and soldiers that only the most obsessive Achievement hunters will want to move through without getting caught.

The game's eight to ten hours are spotted with stops at some of the communities struggling to survive underground after a vaguely described nuclear apocalypse. These small villages may be near extinction, but their few inhabitants are unique and often partake in fascinating dialogue that fleshes out the world. Friendly humans are matched by an impressive array of opponents, both natural (remnants of Communists and Nazis warring for territory) and supernatural (including the werewolf-esque nosalises and slimy amoebas). One of those supernatural forces, the Dark Ones, has threatened your village, which forces you to head out and search for protection.

If you can survive all the obstacles and find what you need to save your home, the game delivers a fantastic climax, lifting you out of the subways and above the city for a surprising final mission. Very little incentive is offered to replay the game, but the core experience is awesome

enough to warrant checking out.

One downside to the game is a much-touted unique feature that isn't fully developed: the ability to use bullets as currency. The weapon selection is a very standard set of pistols, shotguns, assault rifles, and sniper rifles. Though you can buy gun upgrades (scopes, silencers, etc.) and items (med packs, body armor), I rarely found myself willing to spend ammo instead of hanging onto it for later; vendors simply didn't carry interesting enough stuff to make me conflicted.

Despite those nitpicks and a couple frustrating late-game sections, Metro 2033's greatest success is the consistency of its pacing. You're constantly encountering new factions, discovering interesting new locations, or being tasked to do something you haven't done before. With this stellar first effort, 4A Games has handily risen above its team's past efforts in terms of approachability and fun, if not innovation. Metro 2033 is almost certainly destined to be a cult hit. If you enjoy single-player shooters, you owe it to yourself to get in on the (below-) ground floor. » Phil Kollar





# Super Street Fighter IV

A more than worthy update at a more than reasonable price



Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Release April 27 ESRB T

When Capcom announced Super Street Fighter IV, many gamers were instantly reminded of buying multiple versions of Street Fighter II back in the early '90s. These fans complained that this new release was only an excuse to "trick" gamers into buying the same game twice. No matter how much skepticism its release has generated, Super Street Fighter IV includes far more content than any previous Street Fighter iteration.

Whereas the SNES updates added only a handful of new characters each time around, SSF IV comes out swinging with 10 additions to the original SF IV roster. Of the new challengers, Juri is my personal favorite. She features multi-level projectiles, a punishing cartwheel kick, a sneaky air combo, and a brutal Ultra Combo. In terms of sheer weirdness, newcomer Hakan is the standout of the bunch. He's a hulking, bright-red beast who refers to himself as the "Oil King of Turkey." Almost all of his moves revolve around oil, including one "attack" in which he pours two bottles of olive oil all over himself. It's not just for giggles, however – the oil increases his damage

## New Tricks

All of the returning characters from the original Street Fighter IV have been updated with a brand new Ultra Combo. These don't replace the flashy and devastating attacks you're familiar with – they just add another option that you can choose from the character select screen. These Ultra II moves aren't necessarily better than the originals, but they do feature all of the ludicrous spectacle you'd expect. One of my personal favorites involves Crimson Viper surfing her opponent's flaming body across the floor and up the wall, finishing with a massive electronic uppercut.

and defense, and extends the reach of certain attacks like his oil slide.

Not all of the extra fighters are brand new – several are veterans from Street Fighter III and the Alpha series. Fans of Adon, Makoto, and Ibuki will feel right at home thanks to how these characters are handled in SSF IV, with updated moves that feel faithful to their original incarnations. All of the playable characters, new and old, fit perfectly within Capcom's classic fighting universe and are welcome additions to the series' rebirth.

For all the praise Street Fighter IV received, one universal complaint revolved around how online play was structured. Modes were scarce, and the ranking system left

much to be desired. A free DLC update didn't do much to remedy the situation, so a total overhaul has been introduced in SSF IV. Endless Battle is a new mode that allows several gamers to join a lobby and watch the action, and it operates on a "winner stays" system. If you're on a tear, you won't stop playing until one member of the lobby finally topples you (leaving you to sit back and watch the action until your turn comes around again). Team Battle allows you to pit two teams of up to four players against each other, and you can even set up lopsided 1 vs. 4 bouts if you're feeling particularly cocky. Standard ranked matches are always an option, and an enhanced Replay mode gives you the opportunity to study other world warriors' tactics. Online play on the whole is far more robust in Super Street Fighter IV than it was in the original, and significantly increases the replayability.

When it comes down to core gameplay mechanics, there's no denying that Super Street Fighter IV resembles the original in almost every way. However, the numerous new characters and greatly improved online options make the game worth a purchase regardless of whether or not you owned IV. Capcom has said all along that there was simply too much content here for it to be released as DLC, and my time with the game has convinced me of this. I put nearly 100 hours into IV, and I can easily see myself pumping dozens more into this update. If you haven't played IV at all, then \$40 is an absolute steal for the ultimate version of the best fighting game in recent memory. » **Dan Ryckert**

To watch video of the opening cutscene and returning bonus rounds, go to [gameinformer.com/imag](http://gameinformer.com/imag)



The car-smashing bonus stage returns

# 9

PS3 • 360

## » Concept

A too-big-for-DLC improvement to an already stellar fighter

## » Graphics

New ultra attacks ensure you'll be seeing many flashy, gorgeous finishes

## » Sound

Omits SF IV's cheesy-yet-catchy "Indestructible" theme in favor of more traditional hyperactive tracks

## » Playability

Precise controls and countless specials keep the action brisk and exciting

## » Entertainment

At \$40, this is the best value for a fighter you'll see this generation

## » Replay Value

High

## Second Opinion 9

Improving on success can be tricky, but Capcom's best games are crafted through careful iteration. Super Street Fighter IV continues the company's legacy of fine-tuning their premier fighting game to pugilistic nirvana. Each of the 10 new characters alters the flow of a fight dramatically, forcing gamers to stray from their accepted battle routines. I was so charmed by Juri's flashy kicks and Hakan's oily antics that my stubborn allegiances to the classic fighters were forgotten. The return of the car-smashing and barrel-busting minigames delivers refreshing gameplay variety and a jolt of nostalgia that will leave you drooling all over your arcade stick (and if you don't have one of those, get one). The oodles of new content combined with the streamlined online experience are enough to satisfy even the most fanatical fighters. » **Tim Turi**

# Resonance Of Fate

An innovative battle system can't make up for other deficiencies

## 6.75

PS3 • 360

### » Concept

Blend a traditional JRPG with John Woo bullet ballet

### » Graphics

The Basel tower's unique look is undercut by boring, repeated battlefield design

### » Sound

These poor voice actors do their best with the stunningly strange dialogue. The score impresses at times, but endlessly repeating tracks in some areas will grate on you

### » Playability

The steep learning curve will slam many casual players

### » Entertainment

A push and pull of being hooked and frustrated

### » Replay Value

Moderate

In the spectrum of RPG battle systems, Resonance of Fate's leans more in the action direction, allowing characters to move freely before firing the guns-only arsenal. Machine guns take off temporary scratch damage, while handguns do permanent direct damage; softening foes up with scratch damage before dealing direct damage is the only way to succeed. While it's easy to spam more powerful John Woo-style "hero actions" on standard enemies, dungeons are full of powerful foes that require a strategic approach. If played smartly, hero action points will replenish themselves, but you'll run out and face almost certain death if you're too haphazard.

At first I was confused by the battle system. When I grasped the flow, I felt like a badass gunslinger. Then I'd hit a nasty new enemy type that made me feel like I hadn't learned anything at all. After some trial and error and plenty of grinding, I'd figure it out and feel like the smartest tactician alive. The latter two steps kept going back and forth again and again.

After the thousandth time you've seen the characters twist through the air, it loses all sense



Style 1-Player Role-Playing Publisher Sega Developer Tri-Ace Release March 16 ESRB T

of excitement. Eventually, battles are either extremely frustrating or so easy that you're just going through the same old motions. You'll fight through a lengthy dungeon with no problems at all only to meet a boss that's twice your level - forcing you to bang your head against the wall or leave to recoup and slog through the boring parts again.

The overworld consists of many flat platforms scattered up and down a futuristic tower. Every platform's surface is covered in hexagons, and you must place pieces across the land like Tetris blocks before you can transverse it. It's tempting to blow through many of your hexes on a new area, but keep in mind that you'll be stuck grinding for these later. It's especially disheartening when you've been moving through a critical path dungeon in which the enemies don't drop hexes

at all. I spent too much time in the late game gathering pieces to gain access to that next elevator or crucial towns.

Beware: this game is extremely wacky, only moving in a more serious direction later on. The worst offender is horn-dog team leader Vashyron. Fortunately, if the story's not your thing, you can bypass it easily. Resonance of Fate may appeal to the JRPG connoisseur who is looking for an interesting and challenging new take on combat. Others most likely will be thrown off by the silliness, steep learning curve, required grinding, and other pains - especially when there are so many recent well-rounded RPGs out there. » **Bryan Vore**

Visit [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag) for an extended review of Resonance of Fate

# Yakuza 3

Outdated gameplay plagues a Japanese mob story

## 6.5

PS3

### » Concept

A Japanese crime drama that sloppily combines elements from RPGs, action games, and open-world titles

### » Graphics

Beautiful cutscenes, but glitches and generic character models are constants

### » Sound

Japanese voice acting works for cutscenes, but the lack of speech during gameplay is immediately noticeable

### » Playability

The dated combat engine wears out its welcome early on, and the RPG elements are bare-bones

### » Entertainment

A specific crowd will appreciate Yakuza 3's Japan-centric sensibilities, but those who don't fall in that niche should ignore it

### » Replay Value

Moderate

If I'm to believe Yakuza 3's depiction of Japan, a visit to the country would consist of being constantly accosted by punks while walking through markets, being asked out on dates by random beautiful women in burger joints, and performing menial tasks like going from shop to shop looking for dog toys. You'd get the occasional flash of excitement in the form of shirtless fistfights on the rooftops, but these would be few and far between.

For a game rooted so heavily in a tale of organized crime, Yakuza 3 is filled to the brim with unexciting errands. In those moments where it does shift into all-out action, the gameplay feels incredibly dated. The brawling is distinctly last-gen, complete with horrendous collision detection. You'll unlock some vicious finishing moves and techniques that provide more wiggle room in terms of improvisation, but the combat feels

downright mechanical when put up against other action games on the market.

Leveling up your abilities is a basic ordeal, requiring you to funnel experience into one of four categories. However, these upgrades never do much to significantly change the way you approach combat. It's a minimal nod to RPG conventions, but no matter how much you've upgraded, you'll still groan every time some gangsters want to fight because they think you looked at them crooked.

Outside of the repetitive fights, gameplay is mostly confined to walking around and talking to people in an effort to advance the story. When Yakuza 3 comes down to these open-world elements, it's trounced by a title as old as Grand Theft Auto III. Downtown Ryukyu may be heavily populated, but the lack of any real interaction makes it feel like a ghost town. Numerous

activities are available, from surprisingly complete recreations of golf, pool, and darts to afterthoughts like the dreadful karaoke minigame. Some of these serve as decent distractions when you want to take a break from the main quest, but the scant XP and cash bonuses



you receive from them won't do anything to make the core gameplay more tolerable.

Yakuza 3 offers an involved, lengthy story for those with the patience to wade through the repetition and annoyances. Fans who have followed Kazuma through the previous installments should enjoy watching him return to mob life to protect his orphanage. Yakuza 3 carves its own identity and characters, making it more than just "Grand Theft Auto in Japan." If you don't feel a strong connection with the story, however, the dated gameplay mechanics and lack of polish sap most of the enjoyment you could potentially receive. » **Dan Ryckert**

For our extended review of Yakuza 3, check out [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)





9

360

» **Concept**

An action/stealth hybrid with pitch-perfect pacing and one hell of a story

» **Graphics**

The environments are beautifully rendered, and Sam's animations are killer. Black and white effects are used too freely, resulting in a detachment from the world

» **Sound**

Sam's gravelly tones are fueled by emotion, and backed by a surprisingly powerful score

» **Playability**

I never once had to fuss with the controls. The stealth mechanics are easy to embrace, and the gameplay offers razor-sharp precision

» **Entertainment**

A satisfying conclusion to Sam Fisher's tale coupled with one of gaming's most rewarding co-op experiences

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High

# Splinter Cell: Conviction

Revenge is a dish best served by Sam Fisher

gameformer  
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameformer  
GOLD

Style 1-Player Action (2-Player Online) Publisher Ubisoft Developer Ubisoft Montreal Release April 13 ESRB M

In *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, Sam Fisher's humanity is demolished, leaving nothing but an emotionally frail and agitated shell of a man. He lost his daughter. Everyone he trusted betrayed him. He's teetering on the edge of madness, and his thirst for revenge is the only thing driving him.

*Conviction* follows Sam as he wrenches answers from those who have wronged him. His methods are brutal, often making Jack Bauer's interrogations look like relaxing massages. Heads are smashed through urinals, hands are impaled by knives, and most people who exchange words with Fisher likely won't talk again.

Artfully constructed flashback sequences bring Sam's darkest days into full frame, giving the hunt ahead a twisted sense of justification. The plot races forward with the urgency of a Jason Bourne film and skirts most of the clichés associated with revenge stories. Who Sam ends up hunting is a twist I didn't see coming. This development is an eye-roller, but it gives a concrete and satisfying conclusion to Sam's story. The last act, and the means with which Sam handles a high-ranking official, are worthy of a fist pump.

With the story transitioning seamlessly from a tale of revenge to one of hope, the gameplay also takes on a new identity. *Conviction* is not a

slow-moving stealth game, nor is it a fast-paced shooter. Ubisoft finds the happy medium. With solid gunplay and intuitive movement at your fingertips, *Conviction* offers the best of both worlds. I didn't feel like I was railroaded into using one or the other—I approached combat the way I wanted to.

The game's sense of urgency spills over into the stealth mechanics. I rarely found myself sitting in one spot waiting for a guard to turn his back to me. The level designs embrace player choice in how you traverse environments as well. Walls can be ascended with the grace of Ezio from *Assassin's Creed*, and a sprinting slice maneuver can quickly lower you from an enemy's line of sight should you need to cover a large distance in a single effort.

Gunplay is highlighted by Sam's new "mark and execute" ability, which uses cinematic slow motion to frame the brain-bursting shots. When this move is used, Sam quickly chains together a series of silent headshots. I used this ability religiously to make short work of small pockets of enemies, and also to save my ass in shootouts that were heading toward game over screens.

*Conviction's* only glaring oddity is the logic that enemies exhibit. They empty clips and toss grenades with the best

of gaming's foes, yet are overly vocal in their pursuit of you. These chatty Cathys yell taunts so frequently that you're always sure of their location. I don't know about you, but if I spotted one of the world's greatest killers I wouldn't antagonize him. They feel more like

Dr. Evil henchmen than believable adversaries.

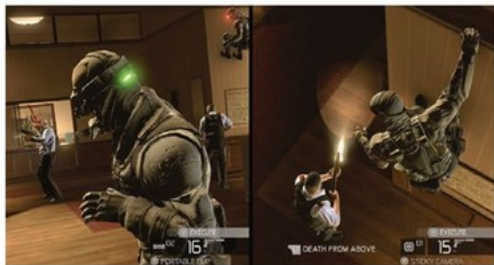
I also have mixed feelings on *Conviction's* stylistic visuals. I love how mission objectives and memory sequences are projected on the game world, but the transitions to black and white—an effect used to tell the player they are hidden from enemy sight—are jarring. I know Ubisoft's intent was to reduce the reliance on the HUD, but I'd much rather look at a stealth meter than have the game's gorgeous visuals fade to shades of gray.

*Conviction's* single-player campaign is a finely crafted thrill ride that puts Sam front and center. The game's second campaign (yes, there are two completely different stories) focuses on two characters named Archer and Kestrel. This co-op only experience is heavy on action, pumping out adrenaline-filled "they're everywhere, man!" sequences almost every step of the way. Coordinating mark and execute maneuvers with a friend to combat the onslaught is a gaming moment I'll cherish forever. While light on narrative, this campaign is every bit as good as Sam's. It's my favorite *Splinter Cell* co-op endeavor yet.

It may surprise longtime series fans, but *Conviction's* multiplayer disappoints outside of the co-op. Ubisoft has included a one-on-one, spy-versus-spy competitive component, but it lacks the flair and depth of previous installments' spies-versus-mercenaries mode.

*Splinter Cell: Conviction* isn't the series' high point, but it does get the franchise back on track. Fans who have been at Sam's side since day one should walk away with a sense of closure and optimism for future installments. At the same time, this is a great jumping-on point for newcomers. The fiction includes all the relevant plot points of the series' past without the Tom Clancy techno-babble that bogged down previous entries. » **Andrew Reiner**

For Tutorials and videos of *Conviction* visit [www.gameinformer.com/mag](http://www.gameinformer.com/mag)



**Second Opinion 9**

Right off the bat, *Splinter Cell: Conviction* hits a level of intrigue often reserved for the climax of a spy thriller. An arresting sense of urgency surrounds every stealth kill Sam Fisher performs, and each level tests your reaction speed and split-second tactical skills. Figuring out how to best move through the levels to take out the many enemies was a thrill, and the gameplay is elastic enough to allow for multiple solutions to almost any problem. Using the game's mark and execute system or torturing guards for information make you feel like a badass. It's too bad that the AI is so willing to broadcast its position with annoying taunts. The story also isn't particularly gripping, and as soon as things finally get interesting, it's over. Co-op does a great job of iterating on the game's single player mechanics. Working with my partner to take out four and five guards at the same time in a coordinated breach and clear maneuver might be one of the most exciting gaming moments of the year. » **Ben Reeves**

# Red Steel 2

Stellar swordplay makes it easy to overlook a few dull edges

8

Wii

» **Concept**

Play as a gun/swordslinger in a world where the wild West meets the far East by way of *The Road Warrior*

» **Graphics**

The Japanese-inspired areas are gorgeous, but some of the other settings are bogged down in a dreary sameness

» **Sound**

Music is catchy and powerful, with the Ennio Morricone influences you'd expect to hear

» **Playability**

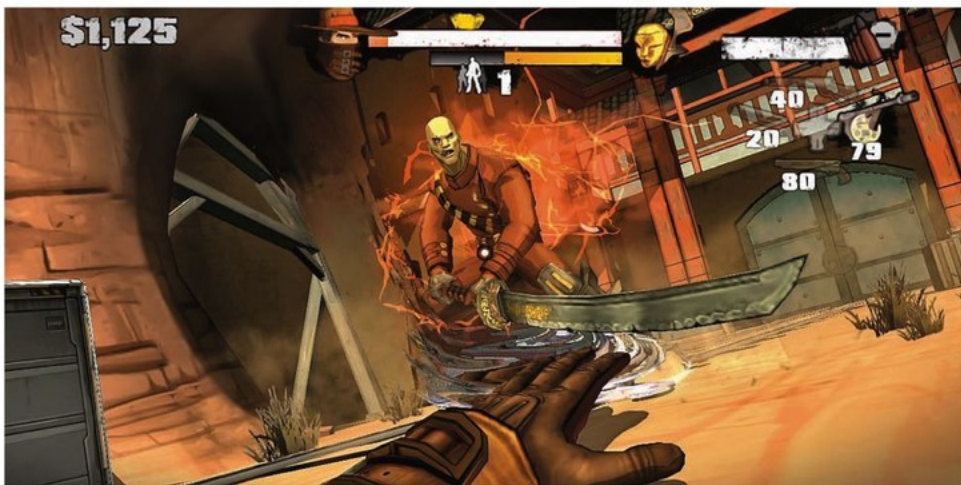
There's a lot of depth to the swordplay if you're looking for it, and the game does a great job of easing players into combat

» **Entertainment**

Anyone who has ever swung an imaginary sword around their living room should give *Red Steel 2* a shot

» **Replay Value**

Moderately low



**Style** 1-Player Action **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Paris **Release** March 23 **ESRB** T

By the time you reach the end of *Red Steel 2*, you feel unstoppable. Is a huge dude coming at you with an equally super-sized maul? No problem. Use your Matador ability and gracefully sidestep his charge, slashing his now-vulnerable back to ribbons. What, three ninjas think they can swarm and overwhelm you? Using the Cobra, you quickly paint your targets and methodically blast each one apart with your revolver. Even a minigun-wielding opponent is no match for the mysterious hero, Hero. Channeling the power of the Bear, you slam your fist into the ground and charge at your stunned prey. *Red Steel 2*'s combat is challenging and interesting for those who take the time to learn its nuances. Wagglers need not apply.

When Ubisoft Paris approached a *Red Steel* sequel, they wisely shifted away from the bland Asian gangland setting in favor of something a bit more fantastical. *Red Steel 2* is set in a bizarre Nevada, where the old West has fused with the far East. Hero, the sole remaining member of the Kusagari clan, has returned from exile to find his home in ruins. At first, he starts his quest for revenge by focusing on the Jackals, a low-life band of scavengers, but he soon learns that the rival Katakara clan is after him and his legendary sword.

Ultimately, the story is just an excuse to put a gun and a sword—legendary or otherwise—in players' hands and set them loose. As one of the first games developed exclusively for WiiMotion Plus, *Red Steel 2* has a heavy load to bear. Does the peripheral live up to the hype and deliver 1:1 controls, or at least a close approximation of sword-swinging action? While I've never handled an actual blade or fought against a pack of thugs, I've been known to swing a stick or two in

my day. Even if they're not completely true to life, *Red Steel 2*'s controls are responsive and deliver a deeply satisfying experience. It clicked for me the first time I saw a Jackal slicing down at me. Instinctively, I blocked horizontally and his blade glanced away harmlessly. Pointing my Wii remote at the screen, I then ventilated him with a few well-placed shots. Some of the more technical maneuvers require button presses and odd combinations, but the fundamentals of using a sword offensively and defensively are intuitive enough to be picked up by just about anyone.

As Hero advances through the story, he learns new moves from his mentor, Jian. They include a variety of finishing moves and attacks designed to take enemies by surprise in various situations. If an opponent is armored, you might block his first few attacks and then counter with a metal-smashing Crush attack. If Hero is surrounded, a quick use of the Storm will unleash a cyclone of death. By the end of the game you will have accrued enough of these versatile attacks to handle just about anything the game can throw at you. Weapons and armor can also be leveled up, giving the sword more damage or adding special properties to guns such as ricochet shots.

The combat is so good that it deserves a better game. Missions are doled out in a boring bulletin-board system, and the majority of the sidequests are the same throughout the game. Tearing down wanted posters and hacking into transmission

towers by pressing huge yellow buttons isn't that interesting the first time, and it's decidedly less so the third or fourth. Some of the environments are gorgeous, particularly in the beginning of Hero's quest. As the game drags on and players start spending more time in featureless caverns and canyons, it gets to be a bit dull. The same goes for the enemies. There just isn't enough variety in their ranks to keep things fresh.

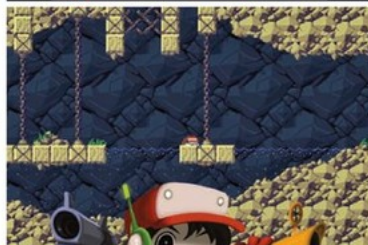
Fortunately, the good parts in *Red Steel 2* are quite good. The combo system is flexible and offers room for experimentation. You can take on a crowd of ninjas and Jackals and decide precisely how you want to take out each one. Sure, you'll be battling the same types of enemies in a few ugly venues, but the day that telekinetically pushing bad guys into explosive barrels gets old is the day I hang up my hat and sheathe my sword. — **Jeff Cork**

Visit [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag) to read more about *Red Steel 2*, including a glimpse at how the game was focus-tested back in its conceptual stage

T for teen?

*Red Steel 2* doesn't include dismemberment or blood, but that doesn't mean that it's not brutal. Some of Hero's finishing attacks are downright disturbing, particularly the ones that involve firearms. Cradling a Jackal's head and blasting it apart at close range is nasty, even without seeing gray matter splattering out the back end. If that's what you're after, Ubisoft definitely delivers. Parents may want to watch the game in action before making a decision, however.





[ GEEKED AT BIRTH ]

# Cave Story

A retro gamer's dream come true



**Style** 1-Player Action/Platform **Publisher** Nicalis  
**Developer** Nicalis **Release** March 22 **ESRB** E10+

# 8.75

Imagine a game that was created but never released during the classic era of early console gaming. It has the side-scrolling platforming and upgrades of *Metroid*, patterned bosses that rival the early *Ninja Gaiden* titles, and music that stands toe to toe with any 8-bit *Mega Man*. Give it a compelling mythology like *Link* to the Past, and multiple endings in the style of many *Castlevania* titles. Now you have a pretty good idea what to expect out of *Cave Story*.

The game tells the sometimes predictable story of an amnesiac robot who awakens in a strange land of monsters, talking rabbit creatures, and fiendish magic. As he explores his surroundings, he becomes embroiled in a struggle between the island's peaceful natives and a tyrannical scientist with planet-conquering ambitions.

The game does a fine job of communicating a sense of magic and discovery as you move through sandblasted ruins, underwater rivers, and stark, cliff-side climbs. The strange creatures that oppose you along the way are unique and varied in their attack strategies. That's all the more true with the bosses, who feel organically placed in the story, rather than formulaic stops at the end of every stage.

Like many games in this classic style, the items required for progression sometimes seem arbitrary and hard to find; this devotion to form is the worst that can be said about the otherwise steady pacing. Players frequently unlock new equipment, and a unique weapon upgrade system keeps combat relevant and exciting throughout.

*Cave Story* has a retro look that could be a turn-off for some, but there's a surprising sharpness and detailed beauty to the game world. Visually striking backdrops abound, and hand-drawn character art brings the colorful personalities to life. Equally important is the musical score, which calls to mind the catchiest game tunes of the 1980s.

From beginning to end, *Cave Story* is an engrossing and challenging downloadable title. Don't be dissuaded by the simple throwback style — this game is deserving of a trip down memory lane, even if you've never walked this way before. **— Matt Miller**

For our expanded review of *Cave Story*, including more details on the history of this intriguing indie title, head over to [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)

Wii

- » **Concept**  
Return to video game roots for a surprising new adventure
- » **Graphics**  
Decidedly old-school visuals create a masterpiece of pixel art presentation
- » **Sound**  
Just try to not have these tunes bouncing around your head for three days
- » **Playability**  
Floaty jump mechanics take a while to get used to, but you'll be thankful for them once you hit the end
- » **Entertainment**  
Simple but solid mechanics and excellent game design can take a game a long way — here's the proof
- » **Replay Value**  
Moderately High



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## Second Opinion 9

It's hard to find fault in *Cave Story*. The graphics are simple but endearing. The music is masterfully composed, and when combined with an engaging story, carries true emotional weight. Combat is fluid and diverse, and the dynamic weapon XP system facilitates an ebb and flow that has you constantly reevaluating your skirmish strategy. Respawned enemies keep action high and epic boss battles harken back to dozens of classic franchises, unfolding in a shower of projectiles. Although fairly linear, secrets, bonus weapons, and several alternate endings give the players reason to come back for more. The only blemish is the unreliable save point frequency; at times, death will leave you replaying large portions of a level. Still, offering a near-perfect balance of exploration, combat, platforming, puzzles, and charm, *Cave Story* is the epitome of what I want from a downloadable title. **— Meagan VanBurklee**

# 3D Dot Game Heroes

Atlus brings Zelda back to its roots

## 8.5

gameformer  
SILVER

Style 1-Player Action/Adventure Publisher Atlus Developer From Software Release May 11 ESRB E10+

PS3

### » Concept

Make a Zelda game for ex-Nintendo fans with PS3s

### » Graphics

A beautifully simple 3D take on third generation video game sprites

### » Sound

Part Zelda, part Final Fantasy, part Mega Man; this soundtrack rocks

### » Playability

You'll know what to do the second you pick up the controller

### » Entertainment

Cuckoo noodle soup for the retro gamer's soul

### » Replay Value

Moderately High

imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it can also lead to kick-ass rip-offs. 3D Dot Game Heroes is an unapologetic tribute to The Legend of Zelda, tempered with tons of NES-era nostalgia and refreshing, simple presentation. Without the distraction of forced innovation, From Software has successfully refined the classic formula to pure retro gaming bliss.

3D Dot Game Heroes simultaneously looks like everything and nothing you've ever seen. Its unique graphical style expands classic 2D sprites into the third dimension. Every single object in the Kingdom of Dotnia is composed of tiny 3D cubes. The stunning shading and particle effects make the game resemble the masterworks of a video game-obsessed LEGO architect brought to life. Motivated adventurers can flex their own creativity in the accessible hero editor, or choose from dozens of preassembled characters like a shark, ninja, or funky Santa Claus. Putting the time into making a great-looking hero heightens ownership of the brilliant adventure to come.

Whichever character you choose, 3D Dot Game Heroes plays like a version of Zelda that aged as well as your fond memories of the series. I'll spare you the details on the story and gameplay, because you've done the dungeon-crawling, puzzle-solving, boomerang-slinging song and dance before. All you need to know is that it's still fun.

Where 3D Dot Game Heroes departs from the core Zelda formula is in its challenge. Simply navigating the overworld from dungeon to dungeon can be perilous and confusing, but that difficulty makes finding your destination that much sweeter. Clearing dungeons requires tremendous concentration and patience, but if you're a true Zelda fan you've been training your whole life for this. If you're worried about wracking your mind on a single puzzle for an hour, fret not: They've been expertly crafted. Boss difficulty, however, is inconsistent. A huge dragon chewed on me for about an hour, while a towering knight didn't so much as scratch me. Gamers expecting a wistful romp through a bizarre Hyrule are in for a surprising amount of game overs, but each will only strengthen your resolve.

The game controls similarly to the top-down Zeldas. Staunch traditionalists are free to



navigate the fields and dungeons of Dotnia with the d-pad, but I'd recommend the analog stick. Before you recoil at my retro gaming-blasphemy, you should know that improvements have been made to the primitive Zelda swordplay. Many of the game's numerous weapons allow 360 degrees of attacks, which the analog stick slickly supports.

Speaking of swordplay, do you remember how in the early Zelda games your sword shot lasers when you had full health? That mechanic returns here, but some blades nearly fill the screen. For example, the fully-upgraded katana lacks width but can cut down baddies from clear across the screen. Combine this with the spin attack and you've got power that makes the master sword look like a pocket knife. Your weapon's ability at maximum vitality creates an engaging struggle to always remain at full health. When you're reduced to your regular armament, the game becomes a tough, desperate romp which coaxes from you the dormant Zelda skills necessary to survive.

This shrine to Miyamoto doesn't come without its faults. Sometimes the dungeons' fixed camera perspective obscures a vital path, which can halt progress for hours. Additionally, your character's collision box doesn't correspond to its onscreen model, which can lead to unintuitive snags on geometry and misjudgments regarding whether you're the right size to squeeze through a narrow passage.

Ultimately, 3D Dot Game Heroes combines the original Legend of Zelda's world with A Link to the Past-style gameplay, which proves to be an absolute blast. What the game lacks in originality it makes up for in nostalgic humor, polished gameplay, and length, clocking in at around 20 hours for non-completionists. No self-respecting Zelda fan or retro gamer should pass this one up. » **Tim Turi**

For an awesome video of our custom Link hero adventuring in the kingdom of Dotnia, go to [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)



Minigames like Block Defense offer fun distractions from the main quest



If this game doesn't make you laugh, you're either too young or too dead

# Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight

Play this with a friend or not at all



Style 1-Player Strategy (10-Player Online) Publisher Electronic Arts Developer EALA Release March 16 ESRB T

**D**on't play Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight alone. Play it online and hope that you get reasonable teammates. Play it with buddies and enjoy the intense 2v2, 3v3, and 5v5 objective-based matches. Play through the lame story campaign with a friend if you must. Whatever you do, though, don't go it alone. The entire point of this game is to bring cooperative real-time strategy to the next level. It accomplishes that goal quite well, but does so at the expense of everything else.

The rock-paper-scissors unit matchups and combat model will be instantly familiar to anyone with a lick of RTS experience. Rockets blow up aircraft, lasers dominate heavy armor, and gunfire owns infantry. A few special abilities like sprinting infantry and burrowing scorpion tanks can give proficient micromanagers an edge. The C&C staples fans expect are present, with engineers reanimating avatar and mammoth tank husks and commandos blowing up everything in sight. Here, though, is where the familiar comes to an end.

Macro strategy is completely different. You don't collect resources or build bases; you simply order new units from your mobile construction vehicle. Normal play consists of competing with the other team to control point-generating nodes. Like a game of Battlefield, the first team to accumulate a set number of points (which can also be gained by blowing up enemies, though node control is the primary means) wins. Losing your MCV isn't the end of the line, as a limited number of redeploys allows defeated players to get back in the fight.

This unique take on RTS is a blast when you're in a solid match. You're constantly scouting and checking the minimap to stay on top of what

your opponents are up to while micromanaging the current battle(s) as best you can. Juggling unit builds and tech upgrades, coordinating macro strategy with your teammates, and simply watching the gorgeous carnage unfold all add up to an intense, fulfilling strategy experience.

Teamwork wins more skirmishes than anything else. Since each player chooses one of three classes – offense, defense, or support – a combined force is far more than the sum of its parts. Offense provides the beefiest units and unmatched mobility. Defense can set up turrets and bunkers, as well as pump out powerful infantry to take advantage of garrisonable structures. Support has a big bag of tricks, from the best air units (which are powerful but cannot capture points of interest) to powers like instant area-effect repair and scouting bonuses. The briefest consideration of the classes' diverse abilities conjures a plethora of tactical and strategic possibilities, and conceiving them is nearly as much fun as executing them with a competent teammate or four.

This huge investment in cooperative play is both C&C 4's biggest strength and weakness. Each player is playing basically a third of a standard RTS faction, though you wouldn't guess it from the large stable of units and powers available to each. Offense is short on air support. Defense lacks strong tanks. Support has a heck of a time alone in any stand-up fight. If your teammates are lone-wolf idiots or just bad, the entire game breaks down. Accomplishing anything of note by oneself is a frustrating, Sisyphean labor. No amount of micro skill or clever unit balance will make up for fighting an entrenched defense class with competent repair and scouting assistance from

a support teammate when your ally is off doing something useless.

In that same vein, having no teammate is even worse than having a bad player on your squad. I cannot stress enough the failure of the story campaign in single-player mode. From baffling, objective-scuttling AI on escort missions to boring slogs through weak linear defenders, this scripted garbage goes nowhere. With a co-op buddy, the campaign improves from merely horrible to bad. Even the story makes inexcusable missteps, despite my unabashed enjoyment of the live-action camp that the series is known for. C&C 4 reaches a level previously reserved for Uwe Boll, where the quality of everything from writing to set design and acting is so poor that you can't even laugh at it.

Some of the reliance on cooperative play could be mitigated by a strong online backend, but C&C 4's is middling at best. There is a friends list and rudimentary matchmaking, but the stat tracking and achievements leave me cold compared to better solutions like Modern Warfare. Forcing players to be online in order to play single player is lame as well.

C&C 4 is not without redeeming qualities, and in the right situation it offers something truly unique to the RTS genre. I have no doubt that there will be gamers who fall head-over-heels for its tightly engineered co-op design. The binding dependence on teammates can be a pain, though, and legacy issues like bad keyboard shortcuts and unit AI persist. I can recommend the game, but only to a certain style of gamer and only with a handful of caveats. » **Adam Biessener**

## 7.75

PC

### » Concept

Don't let the classical RTS combat layer fool you. This is a visionary redesign of macro strategy like you've never seen

### » Graphics

The bright, super-saturated palette and clean robotic designs make battles a treat to watch. The game also gets bonus points for making units easy to differentiate at a glance

### » Sound

Audio cues like "we've lost point two" take the old "we're under attack!" model to the next level

### » Playability

Basic control of your army is as easy as can be, but micromanagement is unusually difficult for a modern RTS

### » Entertainment

The design is 100 percent focused around cooperative play. Playing with bots or getting an unlucky draw for teammates online kills the experience

### » Replay Value

Moderate

# The Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom

Economic sim incorporates a tasty board game flavor

8.5

PC

» **Concept**

Build an economy that can power your way to victory with any combination of traders, clerics, and soldiers

» **Graphics**

The bright, cartoony art combines with a great use of depth-of-field effects to make an attractive game

» **Sound**

The limited music tracks wear thin long before you're finished with one of Settlers' hour-plus play sessions

» **Playability**

Giving your people orders works well enough. Finding all the information you need to give effective orders is a different matter

» **Entertainment**

Larger empires are unwieldy and the lack of feedback can be frustrating, but this is an excellent strategy title regardless

» **Replay Value**

High



Style 1-Player Strategy [4-Player Online] Publisher Ubisoft Developer Blue Byte  
Release March 23 ESRB E 10+

As SimCity's success demonstrated years ago, tuning a system to create efficient outcomes is its own reward. The Settlers 7 taps into this basic well of entertainment with its economy simulation, but that's nothing we haven't seen before. This game goes the extra mile with an impressive diversity of map types and victory conditions, board game-like competition with other rulers, and multiple vectors for expanding your power and influence.

The simplest production chain sees woodcutters chopping trees into logs, which are refined into planks at a sawmill and finally used by constructors to put up buildings. Dozens of parallel and criss-crossing tracks exist—gold turns into coins and jewelry, while grain is milled into flour and baked into bread. As you construct each production building, you have to make several continual decisions, like where your wood goes when you need it for paper, planks, and char-

coal. Optimal efficiency requires tailoring your building placement to the contours of the map, ensuring that your blacksmith doesn't have to waste time walking to hell and back to get the iron bars he needs. Managing this simple yet interesting economy is the bulk of the game, as it has to support your overall strategy and survive shifting conditions like forests being depleted or mines running dry.

All those materials need to be put to good use in order to secure victory. Conquest (or defense) demands blacksmiths, mints, and wheelwrights to equip your military. Clerics can research technology and proselytize neutral sectors into joining your empire, and require beer, books, and jewelry. Traders can open new off-map trade routes that can turn surplus goods into needed supplies or money, and demand fine jackets and jewelry to work for you. Planning and executing your grand strategy using some combination of these three elements is great fun, and victory generally goes to the player who best tailors his or her plan to the situation. Agility is important as well—being able to switch your focus and cover a stone deficit through traders when your neighbor rudely conquers your quarries, for instance, is key.

Each map has its own flavor. One may have dense forest cover, but little in the way of mines. Farmable land might be in short supply on another, while fish and game are plentiful. The lay of the land determines how effective various sectors of your economy are likely to be, but quests

and victory conditions are more explicitly unique to each map. Winning is based on victory points rather than wiping out your enemies. These are awarded for excellence in each aspect of the game, where a point belongs to the player with the most money, the most workers, the most soldiers, etc. Special conditions like completing a quest for an NPC or researching a specific expensive technology can grant points as well. The first player to a set limit wins. It's a great system that smartly emphasizes the wide spread of gameplay in Settlers 7, and generally rewards the most well-rounded player.

Settlers' few problems are irritating, but hardly deal-breakers. A lack of feedback in the interface makes it hard to manage large, multi-province production chains. It's easy to not notice that there's a problem with your iron smelters until you suddenly run out of swords and have to frantically search your empire for the broken link. Getting that industry back on track can take a lot of time, and missing a small detail can easily derail your entire strategy. Also, the story in the single-player campaign is execrable, but a healthy skirmish mode and good online support make up for it.

Ubisoft has built in community tools to keep the game healthy in the long term if enough people get on the Settlers 7 wagon, with a map editor and seamless online matchmaking. I'm hoping that people get into it, because I plan on keeping this one in my regular rotation for some time. —Adam Biessener





# Pokémon HeartGold/SoulSilver

New training methods add value to gold and silver remakes



## 8.5

DS

» **Concept**

It's a Pokémon RPG. Do I really have to explain?

» **Graphics**

Johto and character sprites get a fresh paint job modeled after Diamond, Pearl, and Platinum

» **Sound**

You'll find yourself humming along to familiar tunes

» **Playability**

Pokéfans and newcomers to the series can easily jump right in

» **Entertainment**

A trip down memory lane with a few added perks to enhance the training experience

» **Replay Value**

Moderate

generations  
**SILVER**

Style 1-Player Role-Playing (5-player Via Local) Publisher Nintendo  
Developer Game Freak Release March 14 ESRE E

Game Freak has a large portfolio of Pokémon titles that have met tremendous success despite the fact they don't take major leaps in innovation from one entry to the next. If you've played one Pokémon game in the series, you've essentially played them all. Battle across vast expanses of tall grass to beef up your Pokédex. Challenge gym trainers region-wide and pummel their Pokémon to collect precious badges. In HeartGold and

SoulSilver, it's no different.

As remakes of the Game Boy Color's Pokémon Gold and Silver, you'll tread the same map locations and experience the same storyline. However, even though you're replaying games that first debuted nearly 10 years ago, watching a Poké Ball rock back and forth on a possible capture will still make you hold your breath until you hear the satisfying click.

Nostalgia may not be enough for some players to give HeartGold or SoulSilver a go, thus the addition of the bundled Pokéwalker is certainly welcome. The Pokéwalker is a fun, hands-on alternative to the in-game Pokémon Day Care that will allow you to level Pokémon who may not be ready to battle in their current state. Similar to the Pikachu pedometer that interacted with the Game Boy Color back when Gold and Silver were released, the Pokéwalker allows you to easily transfer collected Pokémon via infrared to and from the device. Once a Pokémon is stored, the player can earn Watts based on how many footsteps are taken, which is the currency needed to participate in Pokéwalker minigames that allow you to collect rare items and capture

hard-to-find Pokémon. In general, the Pokéwalker allows for more interaction with the game than the old Pikachu pedometer ever did.

Once your stored Pokémon is returned to the game cartridge, a cute animated story will be told on the DS screen noting dates and times you went for walks, times you were idle, instances of Pokémon encounters, and battle results. Did I mention it's really cute? Upon return, your Pokémon will earn a level increase as well. With the ability to gain new items and Pokémon, and opportunities to level-up your existing Pokémon without the usual grind, the Pokéwalker is a solid addition to any trainer's toolset. It's also a pretty decent pedometer to simply keep track of your activity levels.

The standard wi-fi connectivity options that have appeared in some of the more recent Pokémon games are available to interact with trainers around the world and trade Pokémon to boost your collection. The only other notable addition is the inclusion of Pokéathlon games, a series of single-player minigames that make complete use of the touch screen. Though a minor inclusion, the Pokéathlon is just one more change that separates HeartGold and SoulSilver from their original source material.

Gold and Silver's timeless gameplay combined with the Pokéwalker and extra minigames makes the decision to catch them all over again a no-brainer. Even though the classic Pokémon formula still works as evidenced by these remakes, I can't help but hope for a Pokémon title that breaks some new ground. » **Annette Gonzalez**



### Second Opinion 9

The source material for SoulSilver and HeartGold is nearly a decade old now, but that doesn't mean it's gone stale. Updated visuals and little touches like Pokémon who follow your avatar in the world are welcome additions from the GBA originals. Trapping a coveted new creature is still a thrill after all of these years, which makes for a perfect "just one more minute" experience. One of the surprising additions comes in the form of a new peripheral. The Pokéwalker is a nifty device that adds even more to the over-stuffed game. The fact that it doesn't rattle like a box of Tic-Tacs like some low-end pedometers is a plus, too. Whether you're new to the series or have been following it with religious fervor, the latest entries are a reminder that there's a highly polished game amid all the kid-centric hype. » **Jeff Cork**



# Picross 3D

Adding a new dimension to an old classic

9

gameformer **WEEKS**  
**GAME** MONTH

gameformer  
**GOLD**

Style 1-Player Puzzle **Publisher** Nintendo  
**Developer** HAL Laboratories **Release** May 3 **ESRB** E

DS

» **Concept**  
The classic 2D puzzler gets reimagined in three dimensions

» **Graphics**  
It's cubes and numbers, but the interface and graphics are clean as can be

» **Sound**  
Soothing in a "Please hold until the next available representative can take your call" kind of way

» **Playability**  
I was really impressed by the polished and problem-free interface

» **Entertainment**  
It's a great twist on one of the best puzzle series ever

» **Replay Value**  
High

Nintendo introduced gamers to the joys of onogram or, as they were more famously known, "paint by numbers" puzzles in 1995 with Mario's Picross for the original Game Boy (the made-up name being a foreshortening of "picture crossword"). While a few more Picross titles have released in Japan and the U.S. over the years, nothing of note has changed in the original formula—until now. Picross 3D, as the title suggests, brings the traditional gameplay into three dimensions. Now, instead of creating simple dot-matrix art on a 2D grid, you're essentially a sculptor, knocking out cubes from a block until you whittle it down to a primitive shape of some familiar object.

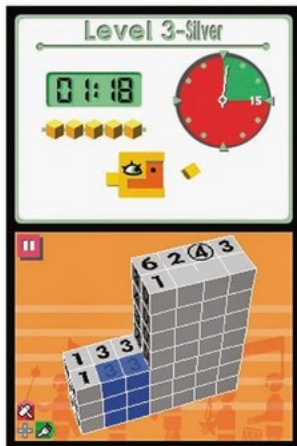
The rules are simple: Rows and columns are marked with a numeral that describes the number of cubes it contains. These can be displayed on any of the sides of cube. Sometimes, if the number is zero, you can knock out an entire row or column. Some numbers are circled, which means that the blocks listed are divided into two groups, separated by at least one blank cube. Trust me, it's much easier to understand in practice. If you're one of the millions that's become addicted to Sudoku puzzles, Picross is very much in line with those puzzles' process of

elimination strategy.

From a critical standpoint, it's tough to evaluate Picross, as the game has that near-perfect quality that makes Sudoku, crossword, and Tetris so appealing. That said, developer HAL took a risk by bringing it into 3D, and that gamble pays off big. Essentially, it's everything I already loved about Picross, but there are more factors to consider. Each move must be looked at from every angle, and as a result it's an even more challenging task.

As might be expected by a Nintendo-published title, the interface and tutorial are excellent. You can easily rotate your view using the stylus, while quickly marking or destroying cubes with d-pad shift keys. You can also use "slicers" to cut back the cube in order to view interior squares. After a few minutes, it will all feel as easy and intuitive as the old 2D puzzles. I usually have little time for tutorials, but this one is necessary, informative, and not tedious or overlong.

Picross 3D also has a puzzle creator, which features a very nicely designed interface for teaching me that I'm dumb and not very good at designing games. However, the ability to download new user- and HAL-created puzzles gives even longer legs to a game that will not leave my DS travel case for the next couple years. » **Matt Helgeson**



8.5

DS

» **Concept**  
Step into the shoes of an elementary game designer to create your own frozzed microgames in hallmark WarioWare fashion

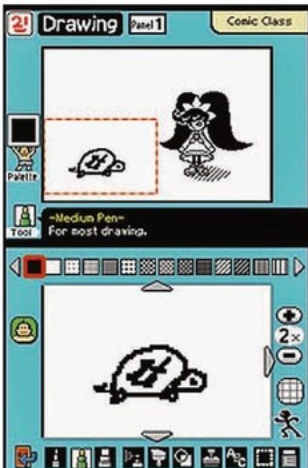
» **Graphics**  
On par with previous WarioWare titles. However, the aesthetics of custom games depends entirely on your own artistic prowess

» **Sound**  
Unique melodies and beats. If your own audio talents are lacking, better leave it to the maestro

» **Playability**  
The learning curve can be steep as you take the role of artist, programmer, and sound designer, but you have all the tools you need to succeed

» **Entertainment**  
The preloaded microgames are quick and quirky, but the degree to which you enjoy D.I.Y. is inextricably tied to your commitment to learn

» **Replay Value**  
High



# WarioWare D.I.Y.

An education in fun

gameformer  
**SILVER**

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Nintendo **Developer** Intelligent Systems  
**Release** March 28 **ESRB** E

If you've played a WarioWare title before, you're familiar with the series' manic gameplay style. Unlike previous installments, however, you won't necessarily be putting down WarioWare D.I.Y. after a bite-sized session. Wario's latest venture is an educational tool and platform for delivering user-generated content as much as a game, so D.I.Y. is essentially as fun as you make it.

You've got to be willing to put in the time and energy to succeed. Knowing the fundamentals is just the beginning; the interactive tutorials teach you how to use various art tools, compose music, create multi-cell animations, set win conditions, and more. From there you must take into consideration some of the more abstract game requirements, such as difficulty balancing and entertainment value. The ultimate goal is to create a quirky game that's easily digestible in moments. Not an easy task, trust me.

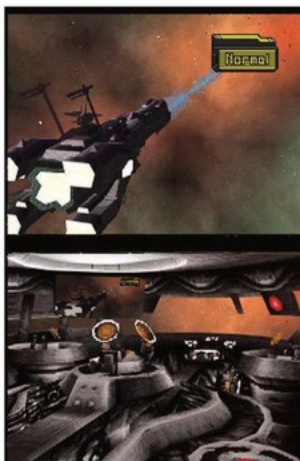
Thankfully, the game provides the support you need. D.I.Y. is filled to the brim with helpful tools and educational aids. In addition to the aforementioned tutorials, the 90-plus preloaded games included can be opened in edit mode to dissect how the professionals approached the design. If a player is still struggling, they can

forfeit various degrees of ownership by using preloaded art and music assets.

After a few hours of tutorials, I felt comfortable enough to embark on my first game, which organically evolved into a bizarre mess requiring the player to poke cats to make them angry. Still, I found the process fairly intuitive. To my surprise, I struggled more with the art creation tools than any other aspect, finding them slightly restrictive and unforgiving of mistakes. Moving forward I became overambitious, and my second game was a complete failure. It wasn't fun or even functional. Still, each attempt augmented my knowledge and comfort level with the increasingly complex AI interactions.

WarioWare D.I.Y. is a commitment, but one that Nintendo made as intuitive and digestible as possible. Between your own efforts, the official updates, and downloadable user-generated games, you'll be spending more time with Wario than ever before. D.I.Y. is an ambitious game, and in the hands of an equally ambitious player, can yield inspiring results. » **Meagan VanBurklee**

To see Meagan's first microgame in action, head over to [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag)



## Infinite Space

Saluting the fleet commanders

**Style** 1-Player Role-Playing (2-Player Local) **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Nude Maker/Platinum Games **Release** March 16 **ESRB** T

Infinite Space is a game about adventuring through the galaxy, but its best parts have nothing to do with the things you associate with a space opera. The story of a young boy assembling a rag-tag crew to fight evil and uncover his destiny is ordinary, and the combat system does what it can to capture strategic starship battles. However, the game's depth and true spirit lie elsewhere.

The heart of the game is in ship creation and management. To build a ship you have to buy blueprints, but mixing and matching the modules is what ultimately gives the ship its characteristics and what delivers the fun. Unlike many upgrade systems, it's not just a case of buying the best laser turret or shield generator at the shop. Every ship mod you add takes up space on your ship. Moreover, mods

come in different shapes and sizes, which means everything has to fit in the ship's grid of boxes.

Far from being frustrating, I loved the challenge of arranging mods and the strategy in balancing the tradeoffs among them. I was also impressed with the sheer amount of mods: mess halls, navigation bridges, radar rooms, crew cabins, security rooms, and much more can all be added along with your standard complement of weapons, shields, and engines. Given that you can cruise the galaxy with up to five ships at once, you can build a whole fleet to your own specifications.

If the mods define your ships, your crew optimizes them. There are 33 crew positions, and while you don't have to have someone in every spot, a crew member gives you combat bonuses, and much of the game's story exploration is tied to recruiting new people. Unfortunately, scouring every tavern in the galaxy for hired hands is part of what bogs down Infinite Space. On multiple occasions, I missed the chance to hire a crew member or skipped a plot point because I simply didn't go to a specific tavern enough times, which is frustrating.

Despite all the preparations that you put into your fleet, the real-time combat is the weak link because of the basic rock-paper-scissors gameplay (for both ship-to-ship and melee combat) that doesn't hold up through all the grinding and random encounters. It's not bad, but it doesn't deliver the payoff (and neither do the isolated multiplayer battles) after the time you spend on the more exciting ship building. I guess it's true what they say: It's better to create than to destroy. » **Matthew Kato**

8

DS

### » Concept

Travel the galaxy with a cast of Japanese RPG clichés. Customize your ships, build up your fleet, and manage your crew along the way

### » Graphics

The battle montages look decent for the DS. A lot of time is spent with the standard Japanese dialogue using static character art. There are a few video cutscenes as well

### » Sound

A well-done aspect of the game. Combat uses piercing sound effects to punctuate the action

### » Playability

Even though Infinite Space contains an extensive help menu, you'll have to figure out some aspects of the gameplay yourself

### » Entertainment

Delivers on the shipbuilding front, though other aspects of the game like the combat and story aren't as impressive (though they aren't shallow either)

### » Replay Value

Moderately High



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## 10 | God of War III

Platform PS3 Release March 16 ESRB M  
Issue Apr '10



When I first took up Kratos' blades back in 2005, I thought I was embarking on a simple quest for vengeance. After leaving a trail of bodies spanning four games and three systems, that quest has finally reached its end. Not even in my wildest dreams could I have imagined such a powerful, cinematic, and breathtaking conclusion to the saga of the Ghost of Sparta.

### PLAYSTATION 3

Avens vs. Predator	5.75	Mar-10
Army of Two: The 40th Day	6.5	Feb-10
Assassin's Creed II	9.5	Jan-10
Avatar	6.5	Feb-10
Band Hero	7.75	Jan-10
Batman: Arkham Asylum	9.5	Sep-09
Battlefield 1943	8.5	Aug-09
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	9.5	Mar-10
Bayonetta	9	Feb-10
Beats: Rock Band, The	8.75	Sep-09
Bigs 2, The	7	Aug-09
Blasphemous 2	8.25	Mar-10
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	7.75	Jul-09
Borderlands	9.25	Dec-09
Brital Legend	8.25	Nov-09
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	9.75	Dec-09
Call of Duty: Bound in Blood	8	Aug-09
Damnation	3	Aug-09
Dante's Inferno	7	Mar-10
Dark Void	7	Feb-10
Darksiders	8.5	Feb-10
Demon's Souls	9	Dec-09
DJ 2	8.5	Oct-09
DJ Hero	9	Dec-09
Dragon Age: Origins	8	Dec-09
Dynasty Warriors 6 Empires	6.25	Sep-09
FIFA 10	8.5	Nov-09
Fight Night Round 4	9	Aug-09
Final Fantasy XIII	9.25	Mar-10
Fuel	7.75	Jul-09
G-Force	7.75	Sep-09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra	3.5	Sep-09
Ghostbusters	8	Jul-09
God of War Collection	9.5	Jan-10
God of War III	10	Apr-10
Guitar Hero 5	8.5	Oct-09

Guitar Hero Smash Hits	8	Aug-09
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	7.5	Jan-10
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	7	Sep-09
Heavy Rain	9.5	Mar-10
Heroes Over Europe	6.5	Oct-09
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	6.5	Sep-09
Infamous	9	Jun-09
Jurassic: The Hunted	6	Feb-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10
Katamari Forever	7.25	Nov-09
King of Fighters XII, The	7	Sep-09
Last Rebellion	4.5	Apr-10
LEGO Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	6.5	Dec-09
LEGO Rock Band	8	Dec-09
Madden NFL 10	8.75	Sep-09
MAG	7	Apr-10
Major League Baseball 2K10	7.75	Apr-10
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	8	Nov-09
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
MX vs. ATV Reflex	7.5	Jan-10
NBA 2K10	8.25	Nov-09
NBA Live 10	7.5	Nov-09
NCAA Basketball 10	7.25	Jan-10
NCAA Football 10	8.5	Aug-09
Need for Speed: Shift	8	Oct-09
NHL 10	9.25	Oct-09
NHL 2K10	5.5	Oct-09
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2	8.5	Nov-09
Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising	7	Dec-09
Overlord II	6.5	Aug-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2010	8.5	Jan-10

Prototype	7.25	Aug-09
Ratchet and Clank: A Crack in Time	9.25	Dec-09
Red Faction: Guerrilla	9	Jul-09
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Rogue Warrior	1.5	Feb-10
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Wet	7.5	Oct-09
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Wolfenstein	7.25	Oct-09
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2010	8.25	Nov-09
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	8	Jun-09

### XBOX 360

Avens vs. Predator	5.75	Mar-10
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Assassin's Creed II	9.5	Jan-10
Avatar	6.5	Feb-10
Batman: Arkham Asylum	9.5	Sep-09

## 8.5 | FIFA World Cup 2010 South Africa

Platform PS3 • 360 Release April 27 ESRB E

There's no doubt that World Cup 2010 delivers a great performance on the pitch, but this game fails to give you the full qualifying experience elsewhere. Thus, it doesn't really tell the full tale of the World Cup. The different online options and new penalty taking system are welcome, but aren't enough to let this title stand on its own two feet. — Matthew Kato

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

## 8.5 | Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II Chaos Rising

Platform PC Release March 11 ESRB M

Chaos Rising does everything necessary to recreate and enhance the excellent small-squad role-playing/real-time strategy hybrid gameplay of Dawn of War II. It's more of the same, but it's the kind of add-on that fans of any title hope for. — Adam Blessener

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

## 6 | Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon

Platform Wii Release March 16 ESRB T

Fragile Dream's story may have been better suited to a more experimental format, like an interactive novel. Shoehorning the narrative concepts alongside generic combat and aimless wandering just doesn't work. — Joe Juba

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

## 8.25 | Toy Soldiers

Platform 360 Release March 3 ESRB T

By giving control of individual units to the player, Toy Soldiers adds a layer of action to the tried-and-true tower defense formula. The result is a game that is constantly engaging and challenging, whether playing alone or against a friend. — Matt Miller

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

## 6 | Samurai Shodown Sen

Platform 360 Release March 30 ESRB M

While the core combat is a frenzy of entertainment, the underwhelming graphics, perplexingly bad story mode, and countless poor design decisions will disappoint even the most nostalgic fans of the series. — Jeff Marchiafava

URL: gameinformer.com/mag



# A BIT OF THE OLD ULTRA-VIOLENCE

Gamers will get a hefty dose of blood and guts when *Bulletstorm* releases next year, but it's not the first title to spill gallons of the red stuff. Take our test below to see how much you know about some of the most violent games ever made.

**1. Which Mortal Kombat title introduced "Animality," which allowed players to disembowel their opponents as their "power animal"?**

- a. Mortal Kombat II
- b. Mortal Kombat III
- c. Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
- d. Mortal Kombat: Deception

**2. What prolific Hollywood actor voiced antagonistic director Lionel Starkweather in *Manhunt*?**

- a. Brian Cox
- b. Hugo Weaving
- c. Steve Buscemi
- d. Peter Stormare

**3. Who does Kratos kill in *God of War II* by slamming his head repeatedly in a door?**

- a. Typhon
- b. Cronos
- c. Perseus
- d. Theseus

**4. Which of these was the name of one of the protagonists in the original *NARC*?**

- a. Fist Rockbone
- b. Lance Uppercut
- c. Dirt McGirt
- d. Max Force

**5. Which developer's head appears as an in-game object in *Doom II*?**

- a. Ed Boon
- b. John Carmack
- c. John Romero
- d. Gabe Newell

**6. Which game featured a cameo from Gary Coleman?**

- a. Postal 2
- b. Wolfenstein 3D
- c. Medal of Honor: Underground
- d. Soldier of Fortune

**7. What is the name of the game show in *MadWorld*?**

- a. Total Carnage
- b. DeathWatch
- c. Smash TV
- d. The Running Man

**8. Which fighting game character was "killed," then brought back as a zombie in a future installment?**

- a. Liu Kang
- b. Nina Williams
- c. Guile
- d. Shaquille O'Neal

**9. Which of these was not a weapon in *Dead Rising*?**

- a. Gumball machine
- b. Stuffed bear
- c. Viking helmet
- d. Cactus

**10. *Thrill Kill* was canceled on account of how violent it was, but its engine lived on through which game?**

- a. Cardinal Syn
- b. Kung Fu Chaos
- c. Wu-Fang: Shaolin Style
- d. Madden 2001



ANSWERS:

- 1-b, 2-a, 3-d, 4-d, 5-c, 6-a,  
7-b, 8-a, 9-c, 10-c



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