

game:informer

THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



INFAMOUS 2

» RIDE THE LIGHTNING IN SUCKER PUNCH'S ELECTRIFYING SEQUEL



... at 11:23 PM
... deserve it.
... best redesigns.

by **TheEdge**
Wednesday, April 14, 2010 at 04:45 PM
The GI community is one of the best, and I'm proud to be part of it.

by **born4this**
Wednesday, April 14, 2010 at ...
GamelInformer.com is awesome! I visit this site nearly every day of the week

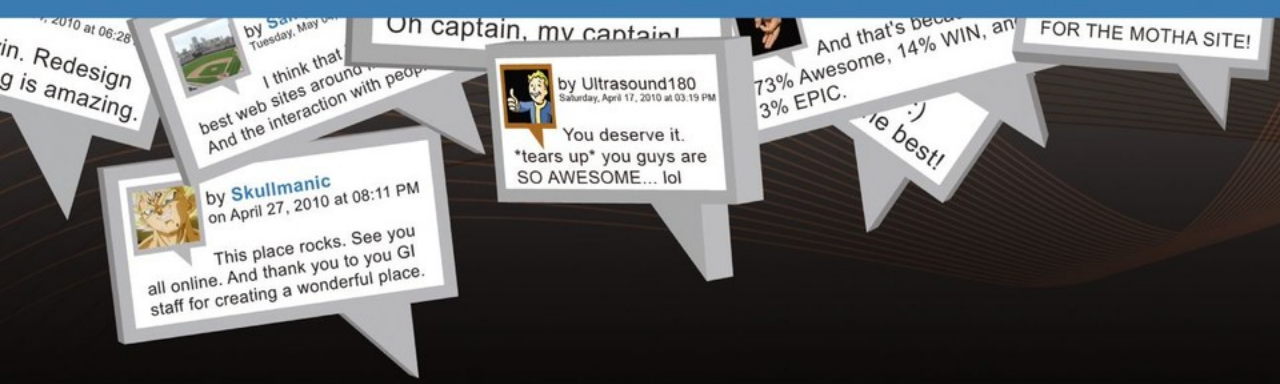
by **Ghostpig**
Tuesday, April 13, 2010 at 11:28 PM
Can I get one of those, O Captain, my Captain's?

...ously. This is the most fun site ever!

by **Chris**
Thursday, April 29, 2010 at 12:51 PM
Your site is amazing and it's a bonus to your already amazing magazine. I love this site!

by **WS-N**
Friday, April 23, 2010 at 03:29 PM
This is a bold statement but... this website is probably the best game website in the world!!!

Come see what all the fuss is about...



... 2010 at 06:28
...in. Redesigning is amazing.

by **Sal...**
Tuesday, May ...
I think that ...
best web sites around ...
And the interaction with peop...

Oh captain, my captain!

by **Ultrasound180**
Saturday, April 17, 2010 at 03:15 PM
You deserve it. *tears up* you guys are SO AWESOME... lol

And that's because
73% Awesome, 14% WIN, and
3% EPIC.

FOR THE MOTHA SITE!

by **Skullmanic**
on April 27, 2010 at 08:11 PM
This place rocks. See you all online. And thank you to you GI staff for creating a wonderful place.

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3D Glasses Go Out of Focus in the Home



ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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comment on this letter at
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Editor interests and dislikes
are now available at
gameinformer.com/mag

James Cameron's *Avatar*, love it or hate it, is a movie whose success will reverberate for years to come. Its impact is greater than I expected, as now every technology manufacturer under the sun is doing anything and everything it can to bring 3D from the big screen to your living room.

The consumer electronics industry wants you to buy a 3D television, silly glasses and all. Nintendo wants you to carry 3D in your pocket, and game developers want to create the software hit that redefines video games like *Avatar* did for the movie theater. I think the road is much longer, and I dare to say it may even be impossible as the technology stands today. I concede that in time, 3D entertainment could be a standard part of our lives. But as long as that technology requires special glasses or other peripherals, it will have a hard time finding mass appeal.

My reasons are simple. The first is cost. I'm the first person in line to buy new gadgets, monitors, and televisions, but a large number of Americans have recently upgraded to an expensive HDTV. Now 3D manufacturers expect them to pony up another \$1,500 for a 3D TV, \$500 for a 3D-ready Blu-ray player, and \$80 a pop for four pairs of 3D glasses? That's a hefty investment that many families may not be willing or able to make amidst a recession, especially given the lack of software that takes advantage of the technology.

I'll also add that no software will ever be so great that I will want to wear glasses on top of my vision-corrective glasses. The industry can state over and over how they made it possible for 3D glasses to fit over the frames of the world's near- and far-sighted, but that doesn't change the fact that it's uncomfortable over long periods of time. A two-and-a-half hour movie is one thing; marathon sessions that reach into the 10-plus hours of playing a game make this solution unacceptable (Virtual Boy anyone?). Unless health care companies around the world are going to start paying for prescription 3D glasses, I know myself and many other vision-impaired people will not exchange headaches and double glasses for the sake of "Wow, look at that thing pop out of the screen!" moments.

Finally, there is the hurdle of convenience. While playing a 3D game, your phone rings, and you pick it up and the screen is a blurry mess because, oh yeah, I have these stupid glasses on my head. Or perhaps it's something as simple as any screen in the room that isn't 3D warping and distorting at the expense of another. I often play games and watch sports on another monitor at the same time, so multitasking, the skill that defines today's media-hungry consumer, becomes encumbered.

There is a lot at stake with 3D. Companies like Sony stand to make money off software and hardware. While I feel the 3D glasses experience will define short experiences in the movie theater for the foreseeable future, its outlook at home for gamers is bleak until someone pushes the technology off my head and into an experience that anyone in the living room can enjoy free of nuisance.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

0710
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Infamous 2

Take a guided tour through *Infamous 2*'s distinct New Orleans-inspired setting – and main character Cole's redesign – in this exclusive first look at Sucker Punch's upcoming sandbox epic.

by Joe Juba





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The Great Debate

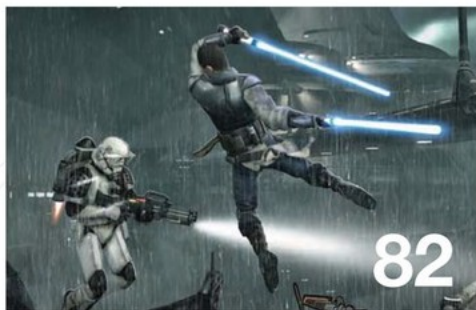


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Gaming's Strangest Glitches
by Ben Reeves



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This issue's letters include reactions to our Bulletstorm cover story (and the main character's hair), hope for the ESRB's AO rating, and a broad spectrum of responses to last month's invitation for readers to weigh in on finding "true gamers"

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An eight-page exploration of video games' place in the art world is the capstone of a mammoth Connect section that also includes a letter to gamers from BioShock creator Ken Levine and the origin story of Borderlands' beloved mascot ClapTrap

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2K revisits an old franchise with XCOM. Starkiller returns in The Force Unleashed II. Killzone 3 puts the PS3 through its paces. We've got the scoop on all this and more

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Obsidian challenged itself to create an original IP with spy thriller RPG Alpha Protocol. How did it turn out after all those delays? by Joe Juba

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This month in Feedback readers show their devotion to gaming, gripe about Farmville, rip on Activision, and we look at whether the AO rating is holding the industry back.

Preemptive Strike

I know it's a tad early, but I'd like to nominate Grayson Hunt as a candidate for your "Top 10 Dorks of 2010" year-end list. His face should easily put him in the top eight, and when you throw in the golden cow-skull crotch-doorknob, he rates top three at least. If Wolverine and Jet Brody mated, we would have Grayson Hunt.

Thomas Fischer Jr.
via email

I typically do not play first-person shooters, but after reading your article on Bulletstorm, all I can say is "Ahh! I can't wait!" Excellent job going through the inner workings of a sure-fire classic (five years from now, maybe). Bulletstorm blew my mind, and I just keep re-reading the article because it seems so rad. If only I didn't have to wait until 2011 for this darn game!

Nate Nease
Las Vegas, NV

Okay, so Grayson Hunt looks like he jumped straight out the box art for an early Super Nintendo game. However, the protagonist's '90s-cool flair contributes to the overall gonzo vibe of Bulletstorm; the gameplay is about ridiculous combos and blockbuster action, not a profound narrative. In that context, Grayson Hunt fits right in. After all, you can't pull off the "believable and relatable hero" schtick when you're getting points for electro-whipping dudes in the crotch.



Question of the Month

(Submitted by Caleb Peterson of Decatur, AL)

Who would win in a fight and why: **Samus** or **Master Chief** (without all the kissing and crap)?

Email your response to feedback@gameinformer.com

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Nerdist Corrections



Many comic fans wrote us to correct a couple of errors in our feature on Marvel vs. Capcom 3. So, in an attempt to regain some of our shamefully forfeited nerd credibility, we apologize for calling Deadpool a mutant, and for referring to Captain America as a founding member of the Avengers

More Than Mature



The AO rating is basically a death sentence in the industry. The fact that most places won't sell AO games means that they are being unfairly restricted, leading to them being edited and watered down. Games aren't just for kids anymore, people! There is a whole generation of grown-up gamers now, and we can handle an array of mature themes and situations. I can guarantee that a game with an AO rating would have a real audience. I want to see this happen, and I'm positive I'm not the only one. Are there any big developers out there with the guts to face the controversy and make a game like this?

Jess Wasson
via email

You seem to be under the impression that developers' artistic ambitions are being stifled as they are forced to pander to a phillistine audience, and the reality doesn't match up to that perception. The ESRB's AO label has only been applied to games featuring extreme sadistic violence or graphic depictions of sex. An M rating still allows developers to incorporate sophisticated elements that accommodate an entire spectrum of storytelling possibilities. Furthermore, most "mature themes and situations" can be conveyed under the M rating without fear of censorship; ask any gamer if they feel like *Heavy Rain* or *BioShock* were artistically hampered by being "limited" to an M. Mature gaming doesn't need to be defined by excess adults-only material – unless you're specifically advocating games with pervasive, sexually explicit content...in which case, gross.

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions

- Who has the highest Gamerscore at GI?
Reiner
- Where was GI Droid last seen?
Classified
- Which GI staffer wants to go one-on-one with me and get owned?
Dan
- Will they make BipShock 3?
(BipShock?)

Do It Yourself

Why do more developers not put in a map editing tool? Halo's Forge tool is where I spend most of my time on Halo, playing awesome racing maps and infection variants. Far Cry 2's map builder is the only reason I still own the game, and most of LittleBigPlanet's content is building your own levels and downloading others', and it is very well received. Map building tools hugely extend the replay value and it doesn't seem like it would be too hard to put in, so why don't more developers do it?

Hank Morrison
Chattanooga, TN

You're right. Creation tools are a lot of fun when they're handled well. That's easier said than done, though; developers not only need to give players all of the pieces to make content, they also need to make sure that the interface is intuitive and easy-to-use. Check out page 39 to see our top 10 console games that do user-created content right.

A Community Responds

Last month, we printed a letter from Collin McFerrin, a reader asking if he was the only gamer who cared about the future of the industry. Unsurprisingly, many of you had an answer to this question. These are just a few of the responses, ranging from outraged to welcoming.

Collin, whether it be your area or your attitude, you haven't truly met this gaming community. The enthusiasm and dedication of its fans has kept the business alive and constantly growing since the arcade days. These gamers – myself included – are infatuated with gaming. It's not just you. There are millions of gamers out there, and allow me to welcome you as you take your first steps out of your isolation and into our large community.

Giovanni Calderon
Bridgeport, CT

In response to Collin McFerrin, I'm absolutely sure that there are many people who love games just as much, or even more so than you do. I myself love video games, but we all have our ways of showing it. I, too, subscribe to magazines and watch online videos. More importantly, I buy games with my hard-earned money. I may not defend big game publishers or try to make gamers out of my non-gaming friends, but that doesn't mean I don't care about the future of the industry. In fact, I love it and look forward to it.

Sonya Chambers
via email

Bah, this kid is an idiot. Does Collin honestly think that people don't care about the future of gaming? "I subscribe to gaming magazines." Yes, but do you actually read them? Then you would see tons of people are just as into gaming – if not more – than you are.

Maggie Kaminski
Evanston, Illinois

gi spy



(Left) Ubisoft's Amy Salek and Shaun White Skateboarding creative director Nick Harper cozy up to the Prince in the GI lobby (Right) Miller and Ben hang with Kane & Lynch 2 multiplayer director Kim Krogh and Sandbox Strat's Rob Fleischer, who has been hitting the moustache wax in a major way (Inset) Meagan parties down with Destructoid's Chad Concelmo

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



GI SPY
continued on page 10



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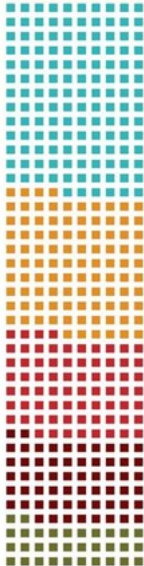
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On Your Mind



- Red Dead Redemption: **34%**
- DRM rage: **25%**
- Complaints regarding our Monster Hunter Tri review: **18%**
- Unwillingness to pay for better multiplayer: **15%**
- Trying to figure out what happened in Alan Wake: **8%**



Growing Concern

I was appalled to see a feature on Farmville in issue 205. Not only is it insulting to call Farmville a game in the same spirit as Fable, Halo, and Uncharted, but I also feel as though my foremost source for gaming information should avoid lending it credibility by covering it. I would rather turn to other gaming news sources than be bombarded by useless information. What could possibly be next? Other Facebook game reviews? iPad app reviews? Probably. Anyway, please avoid making a quality magazine into a joke by adding such drivel in future issues. If you choose to continue, feel free to refund my subscription money and cancel any future issues.

Sam Eggleston
via email

Ignoring the rising prominence of casual gaming doesn't do anyone any good. Whether or not you're personally interested in Facebook games is unimportant; video game publishers are interested in them, and that means that those games are having an impact on what you play, however indirectly. We're a little disturbed by the popularity of non-games like Farmville as well, but we're going to keep doing our job by reporting on the issues that are shaping the face of gaming – no matter how much they clog up your activity feed with junk about golden eggs and fertilizer.

Don't Worry

One company has me scared crapless about the future of the gaming industry: Activision. Every little thing they do just seems more evil than the last. Sure this is hyperbole, but after hearing about the termination of the heads of Infinity Ward and seeing dozens of Something Hero games, it just feels like the company is bleeding the industry dry.

Evan Painter
Savannah, GA

Activision is a popular target for ire these days, for all the reasons Evan cited and more. Before you get too scared, however, remember this: Times change. Five years ago, people were saying the same things about Electronic Arts. Long before that, Atari was the name to beat in home video games. The company leading the market today won't hold that position forever...and you can take comfort in that the next time a Something Hero gets you down.

Brave New World

I was rather disturbed by the comments made by Jessie Schell in the interview "Contemplating the Gamepocalypse." His view of a future in which an individual's every activity is monitored and awarded bonus points is Orwellian. However, Orwell and Huxley's writings were warnings, not goals. Maybe Mr. Schell should get off his computer for a while and "integrate" with people the old-fashioned way. In any event, I can guarantee I won't be enriching him further by buying and reading his trash or buying his games.

Jeff Howell
Pelham, NH

The idea of your every action being monitored and quantified with points may be unsettling, but you don't need to shoot the messenger. In the interview, Schell theorized that current trends are going in this direction, but he wasn't discussing it as an ideal to be attained. The phrase "gamepocalypse" hardly conjures up positive images; it's important to see the distinction between recognizing the potential for an Orwellian future and actively working to bring it to pass.



GI SPY
continued from page 8

(Left) Sucker Punch's Matt Longest (far left) and Chris Zimmerman (second from right) smile with Ben and Joe as Infamous 2 game director Nate Fox tries to eat Dan's head (Right) If you wear 3D glasses in real life, which is already in 3D, do you see in 4D??? Only Meagan and Ray-chul Moore know the answer

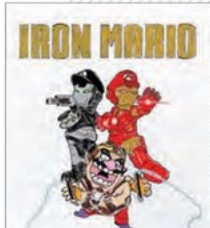




WINNER 1 Jungwook Sang Big Daddy's drill tends to be a bit more intimidating than his egg-beater attachment **2 Charles Atkins** The reason they look so terrified is because they just caught a glimpse of DK's post-16-bit career **3 Andy Ballesteves** He may not look like him, but we're willing to bet Wario at least smells like Mickey Rourke **4 Raul Lopez** Wolverine preps for MVC 3 by jumping into another pop culture crossover **5 Julian Elwood** And they did it all without the help of any creepy floating seahorses

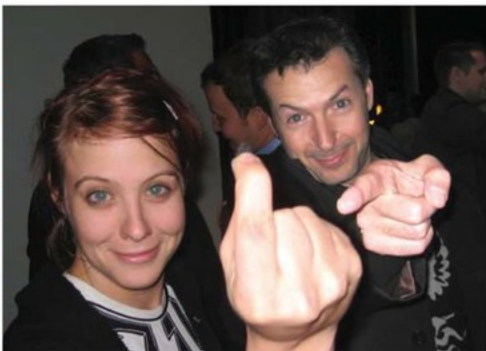
CORRECTIONS:

In Issue 206, we mentioned that Cryptic had filed a trademark for City of Heroes 2. In actuality, NCSoft filed the trademark. We apologize for the mistake.



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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(Left) GI's Dan Ryckert shows off one of his 1,000 classic rock T-shirts in this picture with the LittleBigPlanet crew at Media Molecule (Right) Life is a snap for G4's Abbie Heppe and Tom Russo

connect

A futuristic space scene featuring a glowing blue ring or structure in the foreground, set against a dark starry background. A planet's horizon is visible on the right side, and a bright light source is on the left.

NOTABLES

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news

Bungie Teams With Activision

Halo creators sign a 10-year
contract for new property

by *Matthew Kato*

It's hard to imagine Bungie's future without Halo, but the studio has been slowly moving away from the successful first-person shooter franchise ever since it split from Microsoft three years ago. Now, the Kirkland, Washington-based studio is embarking on a different path with new partner Activision.

Bungie and Activision have signed a 10-year deal that allows the studio to retain the rights to the IP it creates in return for giving Activision the exclusive rights to publish and distribute those titles worldwide. Harold Ryan, president of Bungie, said that the deal has been in the works for nine months, and that, to him, Activision was the best choice. "We chose to partner with Activision on our next IP because of their global reach, multi-platform experience, and marketing expertise," he said. "It is clear that Activision supports our commitment to giving our fans the best possible gaming experiences."

Bungie hasn't announced its next project, but the studio is trying to replicate its success with Halo by creating a compelling universe for its new IP that Bungie envisions will host multiple titles. The developer's aspirations are sure to receive a boost by reaching more gamers; this is the first time the studio is creating a multi-platform console game. Wedbush Morgan industry analyst Michael Pachter believes that putting its games out on other platforms could pay off big. "If future Bungie games are as popular as Halo, they could sell as many as 15 million units on Xbox 360 and PS3 combined."

Many were surprised Bungie chose Activision as the partner with which it wants to grow this ambitious property, given the publisher's current legal entanglement with Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 developer Infinity Ward and its two former creative leaders. Although Bungie community director Brian Jarrard regrets the poor timing of the announcement, he doesn't believe Activision will interfere with Bungie and the games it intends to make. "Honestly, the reality is it doesn't change anything for us. We have a pretty amazing deal with all the important points for us that really set us up for success and hopefully kick some ass in the next decade."

Bungie doesn't seem like a company that wants to forfeit the independence it gained after separating from Microsoft in 2007. The two had enjoyed considerable success with the Halo franchise since Microsoft acquired the company in 2000. When the pair split, it was a seemingly peaceful breakup, with Microsoft keeping the Halo brand and a minority share in Bungie. The developer became a privately held company, and set itself up to work on non-Halo games. It's long been rumored that there was friction between Microsoft and Bungie due to the latter's unwillingness to blend into Microsoft's corporate structure and culture, as well as an increasing desire to work on another franchise.

It remains to be seen if Bungie can make lightning strike twice with back-to-back blockbuster franchises, but it seems that the developer trusts Activision to give them every chance to succeed.

continued on page 14

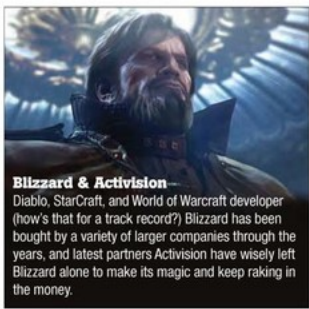


The Future of Halo

Microsoft owns the Halo series and created the 343 Industries label to handle all things Halo, but Bungie is still working on Halo: Reach for release this fall, and is promising to take care of the game after its launch. "We definitely have a plan in place to have a portion of our team that will still be focused on supporting Reach and our community and keeping the Xbox Live experience going," said Bungie community director Brian Jarrard. "Eventually there will be some discussions about what the end of that period looks like and when and how does that all fit together, but that's not something that we're prepared to talk about yet."

Unlikely Allies?

There are plenty of ways to skin a cat, and this recent partnership between Activision and Bungie isn't the first time seemingly unlikely partners have teamed up. Here's a quick look at some recent and sometimes surprising bedfellows.



Blizzard & Activision

Diablo, StarCraft, and World of Warcraft developer (how's that for a track record?) Blizzard has been bought by a variety of larger companies through the years, and latest partners Activision have wisely left Blizzard alone to make its magic and keep raking in the money.

Disney & Square

At a Sony PlayStation event in 2000, Square and Disney announced a vague deal to bring Disney characters into a Square-developed PS2 title. The result was the very successful Kingdom Hearts franchise. The partnership is ongoing, and Kingdom Hearts fans are still clamoring for more games from the pair.



BioWare & Electronic Arts

Although EA bought BioWare Pandemic in 2007, their relationship is seemingly more of a partnership, leaving Mass Effect developer BioWare with a fair amount of freedom. The move has paid off. This is a marked change from the days when EA would buy and subsume developers such as Westwood Studios, stripping them of their name, identity, and talent.

Epic & Midway

When Midway nabbed the publishing rights for three new Unreal titles, the company was relatively stable and trying to make inroads into the PC market. Unfortunately, only two titles – Unreal Championship 2: Liandri Conflict and Unreal Tournament 3 (along with a compilation, Unreal Anthology) – were put out by Midway before the company went under.



Bethesda & id Software

Doom's id Software was a long-time partner of Activision, but in 2008, John Carmack and company shocked the industry by announcing a publishing deal for Rage with Activision rival Electronic Arts. Since then, however, Bethesda Softworks acquired id and the Rage rights transferred to the Elder Scrolls publisher.





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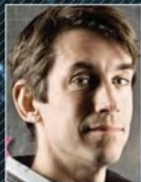

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UBISOFT

Insomniac Goes Multiplatform

New Franchise Coming Courtesy of EA Partners *by Matthew Kato*



"We will continue to be making games with Sony. Sony does own the intellectual property rights for Ratchet and Resistance. But, as I said, the relationship remains great."

— Ted Price,
founder & CEO,
Insomniac Games

Insomniac Games – creators of stalwart Sony franchises such as *Resistance* and *Ratchet & Clank* – has signed a deal with EA Partners for an as-yet-unannounced game for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Insomniac says it is launching a new universe with this series, and it'll be the first time that developer has gone multi-platform in its 16-year existence.

Game Informer talked to Insomniac's Ted Price, the company's founder and CEO, who couldn't divulge a lot about the forthcoming title, but said the time was right to branch out to other systems. "Well, we've been talking about multi-platform for a while. We have taken a very measured approach to everything we do, and we are at the point in our lifecycle as a company where we can expand to the Xbox 360." Talking to Price, he was careful to stress how early in the process the project was, and he was reticent to characterize the nascent game. Insomniac currently operates two studios, one in Burbank (which will handle this new game) and one in North Carolina. We've heard that there are currently three games being made at the moment between the two locations.

Although the deal is for only one game, EA Partners general manager David DeMartini says that the relationship between it and Insomniac isn't entirely ephemeral. "If you look at everything that Insomniac has ever done, they are creating new universes and new franchises. The deal's scope that we are talking about today is this first game. This isn't about contracts; this is about relationships. We try and earn the business every time we work with a partner, and we're confident when Insomniac delivers the high-quality content that we know they will create in this universe, we will be their partner." The developer is known for creating its own technology, and despite this cozy partnership, Price says that any tech it comes up with will not be shared with other EA studios.

Insomniac has a long and storied history with Sony, but the developer is not a wholly owned subsidiary of the console maker. Regardless of what transpires between Insomniac and EAP, Price says that the developer's relationship with Sony will continue. "We will continue to be making games with Sony. Sony does own the intellectual property rights for *Ratchet and Resistance*. But, as I said, the relationship remains great." Price told us that even though Sony owns the *Ratchet and Resistance* franchises, Insomniac would continue to make titles for them, and that he didn't expect them to be handed off to a different studio because of this new EAP deal.

In a statement regarding the agreement, Sony was just as optimistic for the future between it and Insomniac. "Sony Computer Entertainment and Insomniac Games will continue to build upon a strong, successful 16-year partnership that has led to more than 35 million games sold and enjoyed by fans around the world. We look forward to unveiling Insomniac's next PS3 exclusive properties in the near future."

This is a heady time for EA Partners Electronic Arts' third-party publishing and distribution wing. Fresh off the heels of its deal

with Respawn Entertainment (see last issue, page 33), it is now spearheading Insomniac Games' move to multiplatform. One thing is emphatically consistent between Insomniac and Respawn's language pertaining to these deals with EA Partners (and even Bungie's recent deal with Activision), the developers retain the rights to its intellectual properties. Keeping this level of control allows these studios to not only make more money off of the games and other media the franchise generates, but lets them shape the brand in the way that they – and not larger partners such as Sony or Microsoft – envision. It's the kind of freedom that successful studios like Insomniac have earned, and which seems like a win-win for everyone, particularly gamers. If there's a loser in this whole equation, it's perhaps that the days of rigid console-exclusive relationships are a thing of the past.



games

Jurassic Park Comes Alive

Alive

Telltale Delivers Season of Episodic Games



Telltale has already mastered episodic downloadable gaming with series such as Sam & Max

Sam & Max developers Telltale games have struck an agreement with NBC Universal for a full season of downloadable episodic games based on the Jurassic Park films. The first installment of this multi-platform endeavor is expected later this year.

Telltale has already sold three million episodes based on classic adventure series like Sam & Max, and hopes to continue its success with Jurassic Park. "We are all huge fans of the Jurassic Park franchise," says Dan Connors, CEO of Telltale Games. "For Jurassic Park, we will leverage Telltale's expertise in storytelling and game design to deliver on the tension and drama of the series creating the ultimate cinematic adventure."

It'll be interesting to see what tone and genre Telltale uses for these Jurassic Park games, given its more whimsical, adventure-oriented past via properties like Tales of Monkey Island.

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games

Pirates of the Caribbean Hits the High Seas

Action/RPG Charts Own Course

Though next year's *Pirates of the Caribbean* game uses the same title as the popular movie series, *Armada of the Damned*'s story isn't based on scripts from any of the recent films, but instead allows players to create their own adventure.

Armada of the Damned introduces RPG elements, giving players greater choice in the type of pirate they wish to become. Depending on your actions you can become a fearless Legendary pirate or a fearsome Dreaded pirate, either of which will affect the story, environment, character interactions, appearance, and combat abilities. Players can also play the role of Captain, which allows them to customize ship and crew. Once preparations are made they can then raise anchor to explore the game's world.

During a recent demo, the crew arrived at an island inhabited by cursed villagers who have mutated into savage crabs. You are presented with the choice to rescue them, and ultimately their fate is up to you. We'll find out the outcome of these islanders and more when Disney Interactive and developer Propaganda Games release *Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned* on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC next spring.



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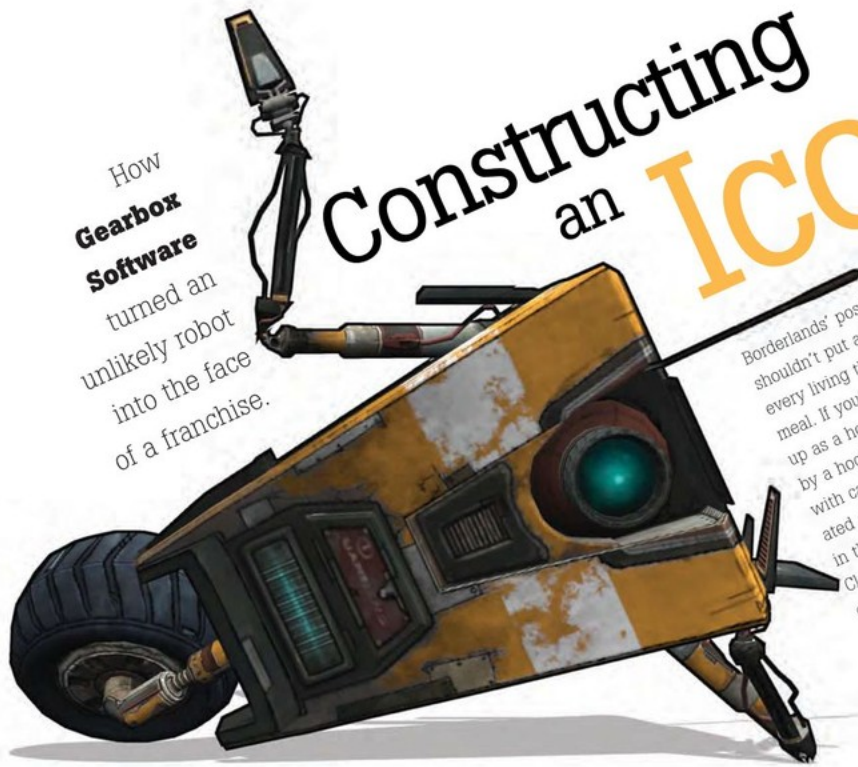
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FREE YOUR SKIN[®]

How
Gearbox
Software
 turned an
 unlikely robot
 into the face
 of a franchise.

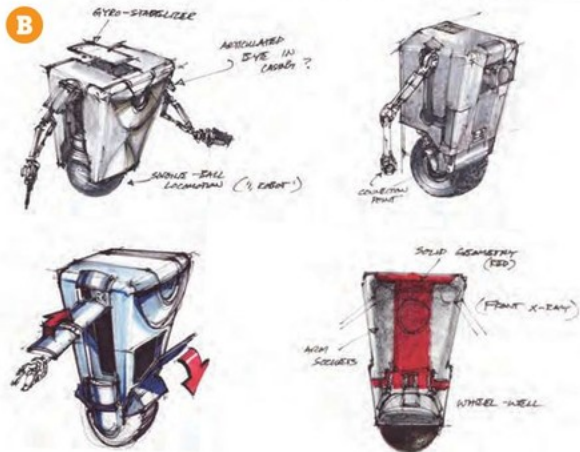
Constructing an **Icon**



Borderlands' post-apocalyptic wasteland shouldn't put a smile on your face. Virtually every living thing eyes you as a potential meal. If you're lucky, your skull won't end up as a hood ornament on a vehicle driven by a hockey-mask wearing psycho. Even with cannibalism being as common as irradiated sand, Borderlands' players find solace in the wisecracks and cheery demeanor of ClapTrap, a robotic tour guide who seems oblivious to the horrors around him. This bucket of bolts dances in the face of death and brings a splash of normalcy to this man-eat-man world.

Wood's Words

- A** My initial sketch. He was supposed to be a trashcan, I believe?
- B** This was exploratory ideation. The scale and proportions were established and locked down. Minor details are being worked out here.
- C** More refined features. We were deciding how expressive the character should be. The eyebrows were eventually removed.
- D** This was the final orthographic that Brent Hollon, our modeler, used.
- E** The high-poly model.





ClapTrap is based on a sketch of yours. Have you had this character in your head for a while, or was he a spur of the moment creation?

Well, I had to fulfill a personal need to draw the most generic robot I could think of. As I was working on Borderlands, Brian Martel recalled the sketch (it was posted as a gag in an assignment for a completely different project) and had me drag it back to the surface. The design direction the game was taking, we agreed he'd make a nice addition to the game, for both technical and artistic reasons.

What was the inspiration for this character?

Well, there are several obvious sources that I drew from – everything from R2-D2 to WALL-E. He's ultimately an homage to these characters with our own spin.

Was ClapTrap created as a counter to the gloomy post-apocalyptic setting?

He was. The tone of the game is pretty bleak when you get past the eye-candy. The main characters, not to mention the bandits and all the other creatures that populate the world, are not necessarily prone to cuddling. I think we pretty much nailed the aggressive nature we were pursuing; this environment is hostile. Okay, now how do we balance this equation? Humor is always the best way to deflate an uncomfortable situation. ClapTrap was created as a form of tension relief and as a result took on many of the humanizing characteristics that the other characters were lacking...intentionally. In a way he became the voice of reason for the player (which explains why your first reaction is to try and shoot him).

How did ClapTrap evolve from sketch to in-game model? Were there any significant tweaks?

Incidentally, there were very few changes made to the character design. There were more additions than anything else.

The sketch was resurrected, and from there I went through a process of ideation with Brian where I played around with various forms of locomotion, facial details, some minor proportional alterations, and appendages, but in the end we returned to the original sketch and proportions. The elements that he's composed of are very non-threatening proportionally.

We needed specific elements that would convey a great deal of personality within a limited bracket of geometry. It's a good exercise that helps hone your design skills. I sketched out some more refined designs before taking that to Brent Hollon, the modeler. Brent suggested some superficial details which firmly solidified ClapTrap into this world. He's very capable at his job, and his contributions brought some much needed reality that I didn't consider.

I kept the design fairly simple for both aesthetic and modeling purposes, but a 2D drawing doesn't always translate into three dimensions in any way that's satisfactory. More detail will help sell dimensionality when it moves in space. It was necessary to make him more believable.

Did you ever toy around with the idea of a robot voice? Or did you always see him having a goofy, human-like tone?

There were some initial conversations about the voice (and sounds in general). Part of me vaguely envisioned him with a limited vocabulary and lots of techno-grunts, but when David took the reins he went off in a completely different direction than I would have imagined. In my mind's eye I saw a muse of sorts, more akin to WALL-E with a few off-color limericks tossed in there. I think David saw that too as he forcibly shoved me out of the recording room and slammed the door with maniacal laughter.

Does David speak in his normal voice any more? Or has he transformed into ClapTrap?

He does walk around the office dancing like ClapTrap trying to get his groove on...it's actually pretty sad.

Did you apply an effect to his voice?

Nope. That's all David Eddings [Gearbox's vice president of business development and licensing]. It really is difficult to keep a straight face when you're around him.

Yes. His voice was altered considerably. It's difficult to even recognize it as his. David is basically gone. His performance is the only way to identify him.

ClapTrap is obviously popular with Borderlands fans. Will we ever learn of his origin story? Why do all claptraps have the same voice and attitude?

Ah, good question. Well, on that subject I'm a man of few words....

Throughout Borderlands' DLC, we see several variations of ClapTrap, many in outfits. In the original Borderlands content, you stuck with color swaps. Was this something that came up after the initial release?

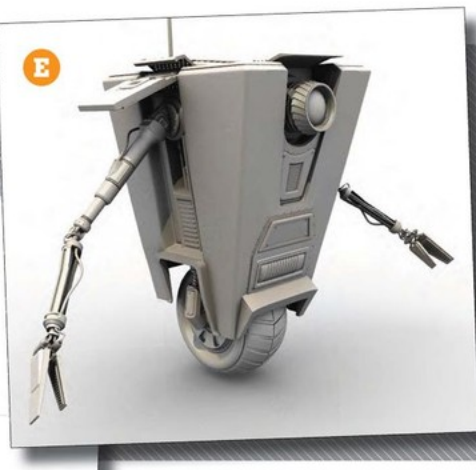
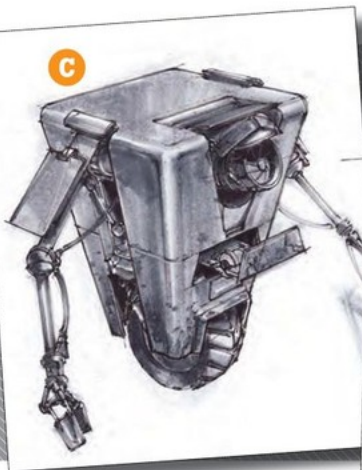
No, that was all premeditated. The environment and theme of the individual DLCs dictated the color schemes of the ClapTraps. We were accustomed to the standard yellow hero ClapTrap, we figured why limit ourselves with that? Let's have some fun with him. The only thing that needed to be consistent was the post effect and texture work. We established that design language on the original game, so if we could get away with something, it had to adhere to those rules.

Any chance we'll see other robots like ClapTrap in future Borderlands iterations...perhaps an antagonist?

Well, again, I'm a man of few words....

[Grins] = interview by Andrew Reiner

How does such an anomaly exist in this harsh environment? We asked ClapTrap's creator, Lorin Wood, about the character's origin and his role in the wasteland.



TOP TEN CONSOLE GAMES THAT GET CONTENT CREATION RIGHT

by Jeff Marchiatava



LittleBigPlanet (PS3)

LittleBigPlanet's deep toolset gives armchair developers freedom to create their own levels, costumes, and programmable objects, while remaining simple enough for non-designers to use. With over two million user-created levels available online, LBP has one of the most prolific communities of any game to date.



Banjo Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts (Xbox 360)

Nuts and Bolts offers a unique approach to user-created content, by requiring players to make their own cars, boats, and airplanes to complete vehicle-based missions. Vehicle blueprints are also included for the creatively challenged, but the most entertaining aspect of the game is creating your own mechanical monstrosity to terrorize the game's cutesy inhabitants.

WarioWare D.I.Y. (Nintendo DS)

One of the most complete systems for creating user-made content belongs to Nintendo's handheld. WarioWare D.I.Y. allows players to create every aspect of their own micro game: they can draw custom art in the image editor, compose a unique musical score, and program all of the game's objectives and interactions, then share them with friends via Wi-Fi.



ModNation Racers (PS3)

The second game released under Sony's Play. Create. Share brand, ModNation Racers applies LBP's style of content creation to the tired kart racing genre. User-friendliness is again the key, with ModNation's toolset allowing players to effortlessly make their own racers, cars, and tracks.



WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2010 (PS3, Xbox 360, PS2, Wii)

The 2010 installment of the franchise takes character customization to a whole new level, not only allowing you to create your own wrestler, but also craft custom finishers, choreograph unique entrance animations, and even write your own storylines.



Halo 3 (Xbox 360)

While Halo 3's Forge editor only allows you to move objects in a map and not change the terrain itself, later map packs released by Bungie included a variety of building blocks designed to let players create their own structures. Not only is Forge easy to use, but it also allows players to play together on the map while they edit it in real time.



TimeSplitters: Future Perfect (PS2, Xbox, GameCube)

An early attempt at an FPS editor on consoles, Future Perfect allows you to lay out pre-fab rooms on a set grid to create unique levels. You can also set custom lighting, program enemies and set their spawn behavior, and create custom objectives for your levels. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to share your maps with other players.



Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy (Wii)

Blast Works is a dream come true for fans of side-scrolling shoot-em-ups. The game's editor allows players to create their own ships, enemies, levels, and even custom bullet patterns. Aside from the initial hassle of entering your Friend Code, transferring any of the 9,000+ user-made files from the game's website is a breeze.



Skate 3 (PS3, Xbox 360)

The Tony Hawk franchise laid the foundation for creating your own custom skate parks, but recently the Skate series has been doing all the innovating. Not only do Skate 3's tools allow you to effortlessly create your own custom parks within the city of Port Carverton, but the game rewards you for sharing your creations with other players and skating them together.



Forza Motorsport 3 (Xbox 360)

Forza may not be the first game to feature a layer-based livery editor, but thanks to the ability to rate and sell custom paintjobs for in-game credit via the auction house, it has become one of the most popular choices for artistic gamers. Forza's website allows you to browse pictures of over two million custom cars created by the game's dedicated community.

Portal Power

As I wrote in my last column, my wife and I are reluctant to push video games onto our kids. That's not to say they're not fascinated when they see me playing something. When we do let my oldest son play games, however, it's usually on our computer. He has an easier time with the keyboard/mouse interface than on a gamepad, and there are also plenty of bite-sized activities for him to explore. The fact that the games are free doesn't hurt, either.

Here are a couple of indispensable websites that feature browser games appropriate for little ones. I'll be back in a few months with a look at some great places for older kids, so this intentionally skews very young.

by Jeff Cork



SesameStreet.org

One of the best sites I've found for younger kids is also perhaps one of the most well known. Sesame Street's online presence is a fantastic resource for kids and parents alike, expertly merging educational content with entertainment.

The games on the site are generally quite simple, but they're perfectly appropriate for their audience. One of the games starts with Elmo talking about using the potty. From there, players see an animated sequence with Zoe as she realizes she has to use the bathroom. A voice tells the player to press any key on the keyboard to keep the story going. It's barely a game, but it's a great way to get children acclimated to the idea of pressing buttons on the keyboard — a concept we adults may take for granted.

Many of the games on the site are accompanied by tips for parents that tie into the ideas that the games are trying to get across. After learning about patterns with Cookie Monster at the checkout line, for example, parents are urged to give their kids some pennies to help pay for items next time they're at the grocery store.

For parents of young kids, I can't recommend SesameStreet.org enough. A PlaySafe mode lets parents lock their browser so that children can't accidentally navigate away from the site, which is invaluable when you need to step away from the computer. Everything on the site is free, but parents can register to create customized pages with easy access to favorite games and videos. If your kids are into Sesame Street, they're bound to find a lot of them.



PBSKids.org

PBSKids.org is another site that households with little ones should know about. The interface isn't quite as easy for kids to navigate, but the content is rock solid. PBS Kids is home to a lot of familiar faces, such as Clifford the Big Red Dog and Curious George. The games are simple but interesting, and they do a great job of mirroring each character's visual style.

As with most of these sites, the games are hit or miss — though when they hit they're quite good. One of the more interesting ones has players choose who will receive a gift from Curious George.

From there, George draws a picture of a gift and players have to deduce what he was trying to scribble. Then they enter an arcade-style minigame and go to the appropriate store aisle while avoiding fellow shoppers. Kids who are learning their letters and numbers have plenty of ways to test their skills, too. In a Super Why!-themed bingo game, kids click on letters as they're called out, revealing hidden pictures.

The best thing that parents can do is to visit the sites ahead of time and check them out for themselves. As I said, some of the games can be pretty weak and it's great to know what stinkers to avoid beforehand. They're absolutely not a replacement for storytime, drawing, or other forms of play, but my wife and I have found these sites to be a fun supplement to our son's regular activities.

Now, if only he'd try to emulate me when I clean up the yard... ♦

all ages

Alan Wake

Very rarely does a game leave you longing for answers. Alan Wake is designed to mess with your mind and make you question reality. We talked to Alan Wake writer and longtime Remedy employee **Sam Lake** about bringing such an ambitious project to life.



When you wrote this story did you originally pen a definitive conclusion, or did you always intend to leave it open to interpretation?

The idea of how the game would end was in place for a long time while we worked on Alan Wake, but how that ending would be told shifted around a few times. The most important thing was to create an emotionally satisfying and fitting conclusion to the story. Something that would stay with you and make you think, while still giving a feeling of having succeeded in your goals. This is a psychological thriller, and as such we wanted an ending that would be somewhat subjective and have a dreamlike feel to it. I'm very happy to hear that the ending has sparked great conversation. You will find out our interpretation when the story of Alan Wake continues.

Since Alan Wake is a story about writing, how difficult was it to tell this tale?

It's true that on one level you can look at the story of the game as a metaphor of a long and difficult writing project. As a writer, the way that works is very familiar to me. Whenever the going got tough along the way for one reason or the other, the main character's profession and writing as a theme were the touchstones we'd return to.

How will the planned DLC fit into Alan's story?

I don't want to spoil anything here, but the DLC will take place after the events of Alan Wake. Alan Wake is a story-driven experience, and as such, all the DLC content will be story-driven, too. We see the DLC as a special feature of a TV series, something that builds a bridge between one season and the next, or in this case the first game and the potential sequel. If the gamers like Alan Wake and want more, we have

more planned and would very much like to do more. The name of the first DLC pack is "The Signal," and is free to all that purchased the game. [Only new copies. - Ed.]

How big of a challenge was it to telegraph major plot points on the manuscript pages without spoiling the suspense of the actual moment?

The exact way to do it took some work to find. The key is never to reveal too much of a future situation, just enough to give a glimpse and to create an expectation, a future cliffhanger as it were. That way you don't really spoil anything but only add to the suspense and tension.

The game begins with a Stephen King quote that ends up being the perfect thesis for the entire game. Was this quote a happy coincidence, or was it used as a fundamental philosophy for the story?

I found the quote quite late in the project. It fit so perfectly that I knew we just had to use it.

How much time went into designing the lighting engine and honing it for the experience?

It took a lot of work, years of work. But we had a vision and we knew that this was the area we really wanted to focus on. First to get the engine and the tools done, and then extensive prototyping to find the looks – and most importantly, the gameplay mechanics and flow – to make it fun to play.

The Dark Presence is manifested in the form of a tornado. How did you decide on the final form?

We wanted it to be a force of nature, something large, something that everyone would recognize and know to be powerful, something scary in that way.

Alan Wake has a more sophisticated soundtrack than most games. Was each song hand-selected to complement the plot?

Very much so. Audio and especially music are very powerful storytelling tools, especially in a game like Alan Wake, where the mood and the atmosphere play a big part. With a right song you can add a lot of depth to the story.

The "Lady of the Light" song was created to move the plot forward. What was it like crafting a song for use in narrative?

We had already worked with Poets of the Fall guys – the men hiding behind Old Gods of Asgard in Alan Wake – when working on Max Payne 2 and the end credit song there, "Late Goodbye." I outlined the history of OGoA to them, and the story content we wanted to communicate to the players with the song. They created "The Poet and the Muse" based on that and we went through a couple of rounds of iteration to get all the details right. They are very talented musicians. It was a pleasure working with them, and I'm very happy with the result. I wouldn't be surprised if there would be more OGoA songs in the future Alan Wake games. I hear there's already a fan site dedicated to the band.

Is Alex Casey supposed to be Max Payne?

Now that you mention it, Alan Wake's past success as a writer of hardboiled crime fiction could well be interpreted to mirror Remedy's past success and the games we have worked on. Funny thing, that.

Collecting manuscript pages fit into Alan Wake's world and story, but the coffee thermoses seem out of place. Can you explain why this collectable was included in the game?

The coffee thermoses are a tip of the hat to Twin Peaks where they drank endless amounts of coffee and talked about it a lot. We drink a lot of coffee as well, especially when we go out in the woods at night.

Alan Wake offers difficulty settings for normal, hard, and nightmare. Is there a reason why easy was not included for casual players more interested in the story than the challenge?

When playing the game using the normal difficulty setting, the game actually has an auto-adjusting difficulty setting, which means that for a casual gamer, the game is easy. We really want everyone who's interested in the story to be able to play the game through and experience the story from the beginning to the end. The game monitors how you are doing and tweaks the settings to help you out if you are having trouble.

What remnants from the originally proposed open world design carried over into the linear, story-driven final game?

The game engine supports large areas and vistas. Some of the locations in the game are still quite large, and the sights are spectacular. It's hard to say if there would be any vehicle gameplay in the game without the early sandbox prototypes.

Is there any chance Alan Wake will show up in different media other than the Bright Falls videos?

We are actively looking into opportunities of doing something like that. We feel that Alan Wake could well be transported into other mediums. We have planned Alan Wake from the beginning as something bigger than just one game. Let's see how it goes. Time will tell. ♦



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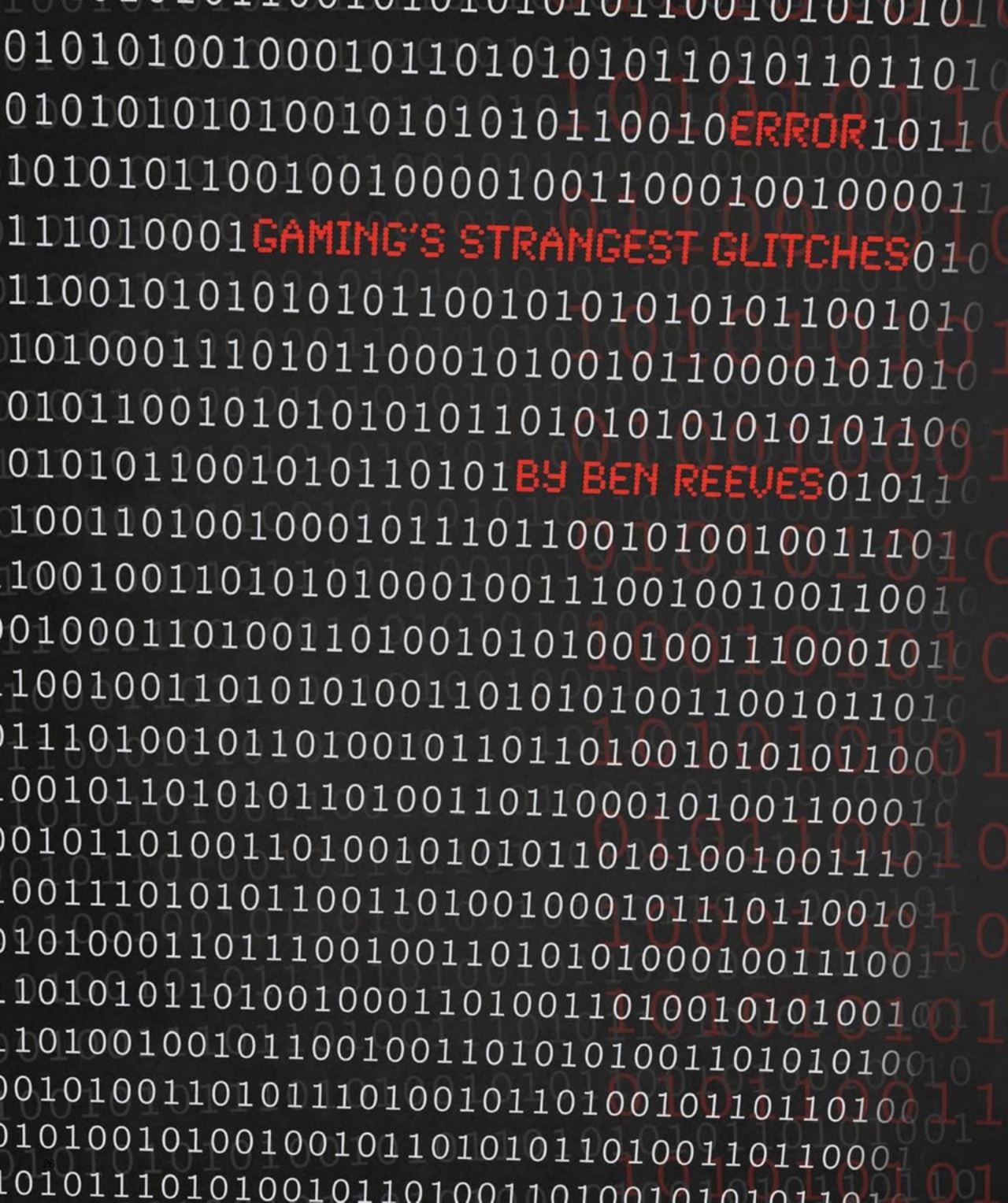
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GAMING'S STRANGEST GLITCHES

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BY BEN REEVES

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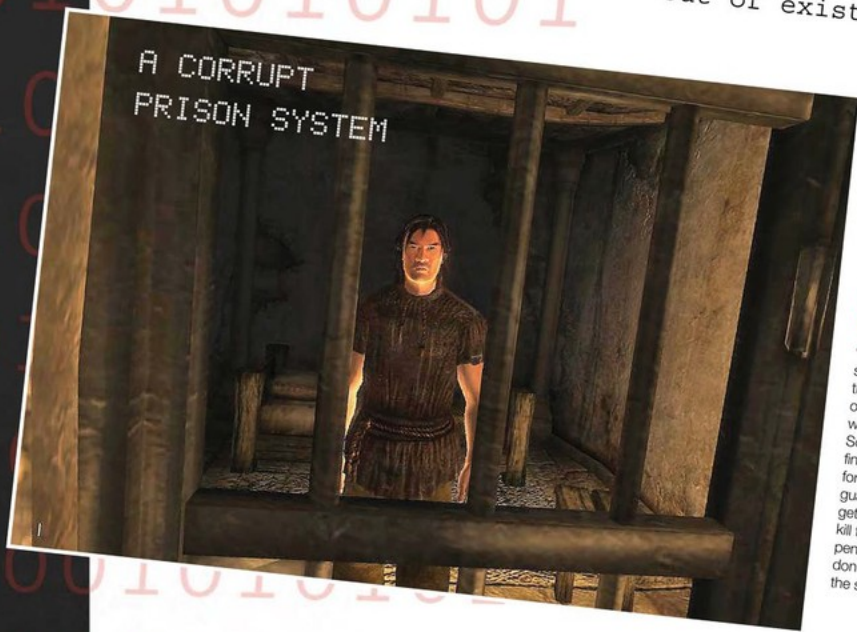
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Sometimes games don't function as designed. Most console games today see tens of thousands of bugs fixed before ever entering a living room. This process keeps some of the strangest glitches from ever seeing the light of day. While you've probably seen dead enemies twitch about or fall through an invisible crack in the floor, that was just the tip of the iceberg. Here are some stories about the best bugs in history, before they got squashed out of existence.



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

"During Oblivion, our new Radiant AI system – which let all the NPCs in the world think and act on their own – led to some of the best bugs. My favorite was a quest where you had to talk to a prisoner in jail. Sometimes, when playtesting, we would find him locked in his cell, dead. It took us forever to figure out why. Turns out, the guards in the jail could run out of food and get hungry. They would then go down and kill the prisoner to take his food. This all happened when the player wasn't there. I still don't remember how we figured it out. But the solution was easy: more guard food."

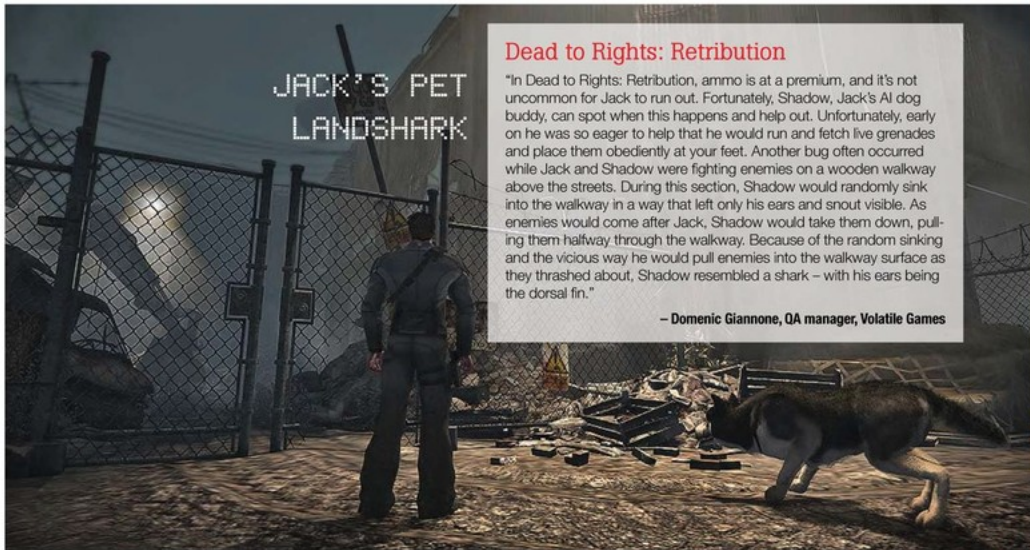
— Todd Howard,
game director
Bethesda Softworks

EPIC
DISASTER
NARROWLY
AVOIDED

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

"Leading up to the E3 press conference we had a texture streaming bug in Uncharted 2 that would strike without warning, turning every texture on screen into a purplish mess. It was one of those insidious kind of bugs that happened rarely enough that it was very difficult to track down, but happened frequently enough that the idea of giving a live demo on stage in front of thousands of people had me scared s---less. We did everything we could to fix the bug before the big day, but simply could not guarantee that it had been eliminated. Since the demonstration had to be live, we needed some sort of backup plan. While I was playing the game live on stage, we had our producer from Sony playing along back stage keeping perfect pace with my progress. If the bug struck, we were going to switch the screen on stage to his feed so that the demo could continue without the corrupted textures. Thankfully the demo went off without a hitch and we didn't need to pull the trigger on the backup plan."

— Evan Wells, co-president, Naughty Dog



JACK'S PET
LANDSHARK

Dead to Rights: Retribution

"In Dead to Rights: Retribution, ammo is at a premium, and it's not uncommon for Jack to run out. Fortunately, Shadow, Jack's AI dog buddy, can spot when this happens and help out. Unfortunately, early on he was so eager to help that he would run and fetch live grenades and place them obediently at your feet. Another bug often occurred while Jack and Shadow were fighting enemies on a wooden walkway above the streets. During this section, Shadow would randomly sink into the walkway in a way that left only his ears and snout visible. As enemies would come after Jack, Shadow would take them down, pulling them halfway through the walkway. Because of the random sinking and the vicious way he would pull enemies into the walkway surface as they thrashed about, Shadow resembled a shark – with his ears being the dorsal fin."

— Domenic Giannone, QA manager, Volatile Games

SCOTTY,
BEAM
DOWN THE
ENTIRE
SHIP

Star Trek Online

"It was a little frustrating, because in our game your character can be both a ship and a captain, but there were times when, under great stress, the code would get confused and it wasn't sure when you were supposed to be your ship and when you were supposed to be your captain. People would beam out into space thinking that they were going to their starship and they'd end up as a [ship-sized] person floating around in space. Sometimes the opposite would happen, too – they'd be a ship and beam down to a space station only to find that they were still a person-sized ship flying around the station."

— Daniel Stahl, producer,
Cryptic Studios



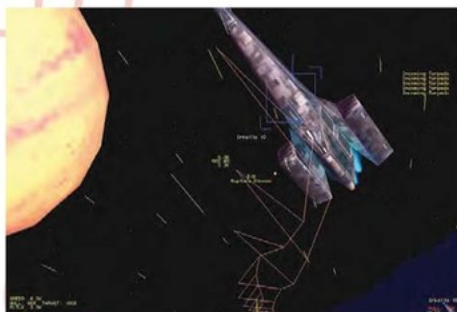
GIRLS
MATURE
FASTER
THAN
BOYS



Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2

"During MUA 2, we saw all sorts of bugs, though we found visual bugs were often the funniest. Late in the game, we discovered that the Thing's facial structure and voice were getting mapped to other characters during conversations. The most memorable instance of this happening was when Ms. Marvel began channeling the Thing, and her brow, nose and mouth stretched out to the shape of the Thing's. Coupled with the Thing's voice, it made for an unnerving experience!"

— Dan Tanguay, game director, Vicarious Visions

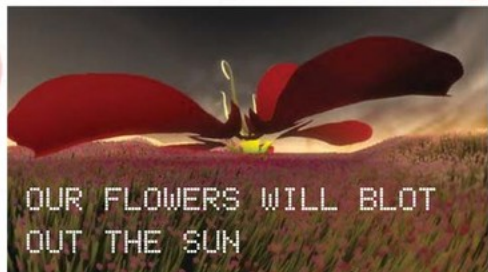


Terminus

"Way back in the day when Vicarious Visions was developing the PC game Terminus, we ran into some very strange bugs. In one case, every time you tried to fire a missile, your spaceship would spontaneously blow up. We had worked to model the game with incredible accuracy, and we just could not figure out why the ships were exploding. It took a long time to figure out the root cause – it turned out that the diameter of the missile was slightly larger than the weapons bay port it was getting shot out from, so every time it hit the port, it exploded and took the player's ship with it. Also in Terminus, we had a particular ship that would fly out of the space dock and immediately all the controls would go dead. The joystick wouldn't work, no keyboard input, etc. It turned out that we had modeled inefficient radiation shielding on the ship. So the moment the ship took off, the radiation from the engine's core would kill the pilot."

— David Nathanielsz, executive producer, Vicarious Visions

HOW DID
WE WIN
THE
SPACE
RACE?



Flower

"At one point, the flower that grows at the end of each level was affected by the number of petals that you collected during the level. Of course, before the game was balanced, when we were just testing out mechanics, we'd create such large swarms of petals that the final flower grew to epic proportions. We ended up calling it the Flower Mothership. It looked like it would inhale the entire valley, and it cracked me up every time."

— Kellee Santiago, co-founder and president, Thatgamecompany



The Maw

"One of our achievements hinged on the player feeding the Maw every single creature in the game. As we got close to the end of development, it seemed like we were running into all these cases where we couldn't find the last creature or two in a level even though we visited all their locations. It soon became apparent that the Yums were disappearing somehow. We were at a loss. Finally, by chance, one of us happened to be passing by one of the territorial Gastros as it defended its zone against a Yum. It grabbed the Yum in its mouth, shook it vigorously, and tossed it at a mountain. The Yum hit it and then suddenly went rocketing into the air like a Smash Bros. character. It turned out that if a creature was small enough and got shoved too far into an indentation in the terrain, our physics library helpfully resolved the situation by firing the creature into the air at near-infinite velocity. I thought it'd be fine to just tell players to wait a couple days for the Yums to fall back to the ground, but the designers made us fix the bug instead."

— Mike Henry, lead programmer, Twisted Pixel Games

SEND
YOUR
ENEMIES
INTO
ORBIT

To read more crazy stories
about gaming glitches go to
gameinformer.com/mag



Hands-on with **Scott Pilgrim**, plus Shank and Spank! *by Matt Miller*

Scott Pilgrim vs. the World
PlayStation Network

Scott Pilgrim may not be a name familiar to every gamer out there, but that will all change when the cult hit graphic novel series hits the big screen in this summer's *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*. To accompany the movie, Ubisoft has delivered an awesome variation on the traditional movie tie-in game. This old school, pixelated brawler tells the story of Scott, Ramona, and her seven evil exes that must be fought to win her hand. The game's premiering on PlayStation Network, but we wouldn't be surprised to see some other platform announcements in the coming months. I got to play a big chunk of the game this month, and was blown away by the hilarious art style, frantic fights, and faithfulness to the source material.

Scott Pilgrim vs. the World is a straight up brawler in the classic style, including the option to have four players each control a character in local co-op multiplayer. Scott is joined by his Sex Bob-omb bandmates Kim Pine and Stephen Stills, along with his girlfriend, Amazon.ca subspace ninja delivery girl Ramona Flowers. Ubisoft promises several additional

unlockable characters to be revealed over the coming months.

Our first look at the game began with a level set in Toronto's "Lee's Palace" nightclub, as Scott and his friends aim to take down the band The Clash At Demonhead and defeat vegan-powered ex-boyfriend Todd Ingram. The visuals are a constant treat, with detailed movements and actions crafted by internet phenom Paul

Robertson, who we profiled in last month's issue.

The Double Dragon-style level has named enemies running out to greet us; their life bars gradually decrease as we beat them down, just like in the old arcade titles. As they fall, coins scatter at their feet, mirroring some of the defeated enemies in the comic. Money can be gathered and used at shops to purchase food and accessories, as well as to upgrade one of four primary attributes – defense, speed, willpower, and strength. In addition, defeating enemies rewards a character with XP, which goes towards level-ups that provide new combat moves.

The brawling mechanic is easy to grasp but

deep in its implementation. There are a bunch of cleverly designed special moves, many of which appear to be unique to individual characters. Scott has his trademark uppercut, while Kim has a fantastic repeated slap attack that puts bad guys in their place. Useable items are everywhere, from red keg cups to ninja swords. You can even pick up enemies and use them to whack their buddies. The boss battle at the end of the level was everything I hoped it would be. Todd's booming bass is a devastating weapon, but even psychic vegan powers weren't enough to hold us back.

We also got a glimpse of the following level, when Scott takes on Roxie, Ramona's one evil ex-girlfriend. First in a bouncing tramway railcar, and eventually through a martial arts-infused dojo, the gang chases the half-ninja towards a final showdown.

It only took those two levels to convince me on this one. I'm sold on the concept, and I love the retro vibe that Ubisoft has brought to the proceedings, from blocky menus to a blaring chip-tune soundtrack. If *Scott Pilgrim* wasn't already on your radar, you should get it on there pronto. And if you can't wait for the August release of both the game and the movie, get a start by checking out the trade paperbacks of the original story – you won't be disappointed.



Shank
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, PC



Two other great games came my way this month. Both are from EA, and represent the company's more daring ventures into the downloadable space. **Shank** is a brilliant action/platform title with highly stylized art and animation that looks like something straight out of a late-night cartoon. The main character is a serious tough guy, bristling with weapons and more than willing to get up close to gut an enemy. I played a level where I went careening through a facility filled with enemy soldiers, hacking and shooting all the way with brutal realism as filtered through the game's unique visuals. Straightforward navigation sequences had me running along walls and leaping over flesh-grinders to reach a final encounter with a deranged butcher and his meat hook. Shank controls like a dream, and its fast-paced fights never cease to entertain.

Despite the rhyme, **DeathSpank** has nothing to do with the previous game except a shared publisher. Hothead Games, with the help of Monkey Island creator Ron Gilbert, has made

an action/RPG that blends humor with Diablo-style questing through a sarcastically generic fantasy world. **DeathSpank** is a hero on a quest to uncover "the artifact known only as...The Artifact," according to the game's intro. Through fetch quests and monster hunts, I spent my first hour with the game gathering equipment and grinding levels. Despite the amusing presentation, the game is huge, with a sprawling map and a highly customizable character with multiple equipment body slots and abilities. I got a kick out of the "justice meter" that fills up to allow for an unholy burst of attack speed and power. I can't wait to play more.

Whichever side of the rhyme you're into, they're both coming this summer to XBLA and PSN, with Shank also available on PC.

For more on downloadable games, make sure and check out gameinformer.com/mag for weekly updates on what's coming next. And flip over to page 94 of this issue for our full review of PSN's Joe Danger, one of the most addictive and outright fun downloadable games in months.

DeathSpank
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



HIGH SCHOOL. BITES.

ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE A VAMPIRE.



VladTod.com

The Chronicles of Vladimir Tod



Wade McGilberry

Handle
Quick Draw 42

Age
23

Hometown
Semmes, Alabama

Major League Baseball 2K10

On the eve of Major League Baseball 2K10's release, 2K Sports announced that it would reward \$1 million in cold hard cash to the first player to pitch a perfect game. While the company didn't announce a winner for months after MLB 2K10's release, Alabama resident Wade McGilberry pitched a perfect game on the first day it was out. *interview by Andrew Reiner*

Have you played the MLB 2K series before?
No.

When did you pick up the game?
I picked it up at the midnight launch.

Did you just jump right into the one million dollar challenge, or did you play other modes first?
Since the million dollar challenge didn't go live until midnight pacific time, and I live in the central time zone, I first decided to go to sleep. [Laughs] After that, I jumped into the million dollar challenge as soon as I got off of work. It took me six or seven games to pitch the perfect game. My wife told me to go for it and not to stop until I got it.

How'd those first five or six games go? Did you have a feeling that you could eventually pitch a perfect game, or were you thinking you'd never do it?
They weren't going too well. I was only making it to the fifth or sixth inning at best. The last time it just worked out. I was happy it worked out early.

What team did you end up using for the challenge?
There was only one game available to choose from that day. You can only choose from actual games that are played that day. It was the Braves versus Mets. I chose the Atlanta Braves.

Why the Braves over the Mets? I would have picked the Mets just to pitch as Johan Santana.
I'm from Alabama. The Braves are kind of our team.

Who did you end up sending to the mound? It was Kenshin Kawakami. [Editor's note: At the time of this writing, Kawakami's 2010 win-loss record is 0-5 with a 5.47 ERA. His career record is 7-17 with a respectable 4.09 ERA. Long story short, he isn't an ideal perfect game candidate.]

What pitches worked? Did you get mostly strikeouts, or did it just work out through sheer luck that all balls were hit to your fielders?
I only got four or five strikeouts in the entire game. It wasn't a lot of strikeouts. My strategy was throwing the ball low in the zone, and working the batters' hot and cold zones, and working the outside corners. I didn't try to overpower any of the pitches – you know, blowing it by the batters. My strategy was actually throwing it weaker, so that they might actually swing at the pitch. And because I was throwing it out of the zone, that didn't make for good contact. That led to a lot of ground ball outs.

Were there any close calls? Did you think your perfect game was blown at any point?
There were a ton of close calls in the game. It started out with the first batter I faced. He hit it right up the middle and hit my pitcher. My shortstop barely got to it in time to throw out the runner. There were some other close calls, like in the eighth inning there was a ball hit to the warning track that really gave me a scare.

What did you do when the final out was recorded?
I jumped up and gave a shout of joy. It was probably a little low key for most people, but it was pretty high for me. [Laughs]

At what point did it sink in that you just won a million dollars?
I think it's still sinking in. It's just unreal right now.

What are you going to end up doing with the money?
The first thing we are going to do is end up paying off the mortgage on our house. And then we were going to start a family whenever our finances got in order. So now they are, and we're going to try.

Are you still playing the game?
I'm still playing it. I'm actually playing My Player mode, and following the career of just one person.

What position is your My Player character?
Center field.

You said this is your first time playing the MLB 2K series. Did you play any other baseball games prior to this one?
I've played several throughout the years. The last one I played was All-Star Baseball on the Nintendo 64. Prior to that everything else was just completely different. This game is so much better than any other [baseball] game I've played in the past.

What kind of gamer are you, per se?
Lately it's just been first-person shooters or puzzle games. I haven't played sports games in a while; I've just gotten away from them.

Casual Encounters, or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love Easy Mode

by Russ Frushtick
Senior Writer for MTV
News and Editor-in-Chief
of MTV Multiplayer

My name is Russ, and I play games on Easy.

It started out innocently enough. I was reviewing Red Faction: Guerrilla and realized that I was having much more fun blowing up buildings than dying. So, I asked myself, why not take dying out of the equation or, at the very least, mitigate the chances of dying? And so I restarted my game on the easiest setting. Suddenly, a brand new world opened up to me.

It was a world in which I could wade into crowds of a dozen or more enemies and bash them with a hammer without the threat of having to reload a save. It was a world that allowed me to take down Martian military complexes and mining operations in grand, carefully-placed explosions without the thought of getting into cover ever crossing my mind. It was a world in which I felt like a badass. Why would I want to feel like anything else if I'm playing a video game about overthrowing an evil corporation on Mars?

Red Faction started me on the path and, since then, I've played through a handful of games that became markedly more entertaining on Easy. I began to wonder where the common thread was between them. It seems that, for a game to become better on Easy, it has to be inherently flawed.

Usually this means the combat is not up to snuff, or traversing the world is tedious, or the punishment for death is too high. Despite these issues, there are moments of greatness that you want to experience again and again. Bringing down Nazi installations in *The Saboteur* or pulling off insane grappling hook stunts in *Just Cause 2* helps us to forget the repetitive missions and half-baked storyline. Once you remove the threat of death, players can better ignore what's not working and jump straight to what does.

I recently spoke to David Abzug, the project design director on the next *Red Faction* game. He worked on *Red Faction: Guerrilla* and admitted that the difficulty settings were not balanced exactly as he would've wanted. "It's something that we are starting to change on our current title," he explained. "Difficulty is generally one of

the hardest things to balance in a game."

Abzug went on to say that the only people developers have to rely on for testing difficulty are the testers and the team members. But, since those two groups are going to be way more familiar with the game than someone who goes to the store and buys it, developers have to skew the difficulty settings to account for that experience. According to Abzug, difficulty settings should be tested thusly:

- *Easy* – Testers should be able to play it blindfolded while standing on their heads and juggling.
- *Normal* – Testers should be complaining that the game is too easy.
- *Hard* – Testers should still be complaining that the game is too easy...just less so.
- *Insane* – Testers should consider this a challenge.

As a game reviewer, the variety of difficulty settings makes the job tricky. What game am I reviewing: the one the majority of people will play, or the one the majority of people should be playing? Difficulty settings are often ignored in reviews, as it's generally accepted that "Normal" is the way to go. If I believe, however,

that there's a better path on an easier setting, isn't it my duty to set players straight?

I did just that in a review of *Bayonetta*, suggesting that almost everyone should play through the game on Easy their first time through so as to experience the incredible visuals and not be scared away by the punishing difficulty. One commenter on the review proclaimed that, because I listed the "Easy Mode" as a good thing, I should not be reviewing games. But how could it be bad if it makes the game finishable to more than just *Devil May Cry* addicts? Shouldn't every video

game be at least approachable to the once-in-a-while gamer?

Rockstar Games admitted as much when they included difficulty settings for the first time in one of their open world games. None of the *Grand Theft Auto* games allowed players to tweak the difficulty, but *Red Dead Redemption* offered the option to players looking for less of a challenge. Since they were making a cinematic Western, the developers figured there would be plenty of people playing the game just to experience the story, and would just as soon skip out on all those fatal cougar attacks.

Playing on Easy is a shortcut. It's a survival mechanism to make imperfect games tolerable or for those that prefer their journey less pock-marked with death. It's not for everyone, or for every game, but having that safety net can save you from wasting 60 bucks on a title that's been balanced for someone who knows every line of code by heart. And, as an added bonus, it's a great way to boost that achievement score.

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

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

interview



Photo: Edward Carrion

Redefining Video Games

Jenova Chen, the co-founder and creative director of That Game Company, is one of the most interesting artists currently making games. The Shanghai native has won critical acclaim for his offbeat, original games like *Cloud*, *Flow*, and *Flower*. Here, Chen tells us about his journey into games and his philosophy of game development.

You grew up in China. What was the video game scene in China like in the '80s and '90s?

China's gamers are mainly PC gamers, primarily because computer games are easy to pirate. If Chinese people in the '90s wanted to play a game at American prices, there was no way they could buy it. The only games that could afford were pirated games. I remember bringing a whole set of 12 three-inch discs to copy the early *Ultima* games. When I was a teenager, my classmates had Sega Saturn or PlayStation. It was like a dream when they invited me to their home to play the consoles.

At the time, I couldn't afford a console, so I would go buy these magazines. They had complete walkthroughs of these role-playing games. The people that wrote them wrote them in a very creative way. They would write as if they were experiencing the game in first person. It felt like reading a novel. That's how I knew *Silent Hill*, *Resident Evil*, and *Final Fantasy*. My first experience was reading these playthroughs. The first console we purchased, which was actually a copycat version of the NES that played NES games, was years later.

Were you interested in computer programming as a kid?

[Laughs] This is actually not true, because my dad works in the software industry. So, at a very young age, he wanted me to study computers. I had to learn computers against my will. He sent me to after-school classes. I hated it because they forced me to go. Initially, I didn't want to go, but then—before class—I would see all the kids playing games on Apple II computers. I got hooked. I liked going to class so I could play games.

You went through the USC Interactive Media program. How did that experience shape you as an artist?

It completely changed my course of life. When I graduated from college I was not sure about where I wanted to go. I was dreaming about one day working at Pixar or on visual effects movies. The most important thing the USC program exposed me to was the Game Developers Conference. That is when I saw the Independent Games Festival and all the finalists in the student showcase.

I had two big impressions. The first was, "There are so many people here from all around the world that are working in the video game industry." Whatever talk I attended, I felt like the room was filled with enthusiasm and a lot of love for what they were doing. The second impression was I went to the student showcase. Before I came to the U.S., I heard these legendary stories about John Carmack,

Richard Garriott, and Will Wright—these people who were already great when they were teenagers. So I assumed that American kids must be geniuses. When I went to the student showcase, I was disappointed because none of the games looked nearly as good as the games I made in college in China. So that built my confidence, it made me think I at least had the skills to compete at IGF with other students.

You did the game *Cloud* as a student project there. How did that idea come about?

One day, I was walking from my apartment to school, and I was looking at the clouds in the sky. They were beautiful clouds; I never saw clouds like that in Shanghai because it's always quite polluted and gray. So I wondered if I could make a game about clouds. What would that game be?

My first reaction was some sort of game like *Destroy All Humans*, where you have an alien who has the technology to manipulate clouds and cause natural disasters. The idea was pretty conventional. But as we started working, we started thinking about doing something different. What if the main character is not an alien, but just a little boy flying in the sky? From that point on, it became much more personal. I was trying to combine the boy's story with my own childhood memories. I had to go to the hospital a lot and had asthma every year around October because it was so polluted. I put my personal experience into the character, and made this game about using the clouds and rain to clean the air and clean the land.

Were you confident in the quality of the game?

Honestly, after working on the game for a year, we didn't know how good it was. We just had to finish it. After we put it online, G4's *Attack of the Show* featured the game. That was the magical moment. A lot of people tried to download it. Our server crashed about four times. We actually got about a \$2,000 fine because of the traffic that went over our bandwidth. We moved the game to the school's server. The school's server crashed and the whole school's website was down. Eventually, we asked for EA's help and put it on EA's commercial server to accommodate the traffic.

The most important thing about *Cloud* was not really how it was made but the reaction it got. We got many emails from people that were gamers and non-gamers who played the game. We had 50-year-old men and women writing in about how wonderful the game was. One man from Japan said he almost cried because of the game. That is a very strong reinforcement for what we did. We decided

that we should try to push to make games like this in the commercial realm.

Is violence something you avoid as a designer?

It's more that when we made *Cloud* we wanted to make something that was the opposite of what was out there. That was the year that *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* got many media attacks—talk of how games made children violent and connecting Columbine to video games. At that time, I wanted to change people's impressions. So, violence was something I wanted to avoid intentionally. There's no violence in *Cloud*.

Is there a message you are trying to convey in your games? Or are you just trying to convey feelings? Or is it a mixture of both?

It's a mixture of both. In art, people use a specific arrangement of elements to convey a sense or a feeling or a message. A message is more rational. I feel that I am too young to be able to make any judgments about violence or whether environmentalism is good. I'm more interested in communicating a feeling. Of course, the feeling in *Cloud* is a child looking at the sky and daydreaming about being able to fly. I mixed that with these feelings I had as a kid, hoping that my disease could be cured and the pollution would go away. That's different than saying, "Industrialization and pollution is bad." Of course, a game is very powerful, you can sway people's opinion, but I wasn't trying to make a game directly about a cause.

For example, a lot of people, when they played an early version of *Flower* said, "Oh I get it, the game is about creating electricity because you blow these windmills." I then realized I didn't want the game to be focused on whether we should have green energy. I intentionally changed the design to make it more vague.

Do you play more mainstream, action games in your private life?

Oh yes, my private life is all about violent video games. I like fighting games. I've wasted so many hours on *Street Fighter IV*. I was a very good *Counter-Strike* player. I play *StarCraft*. I always play competitively. That doesn't mean that this industry needs more competitive games. Everybody is making good competitive games. Most of them are about competition, empowerment, and violence. It's a very small portion of the emotional spectrum. If you look at books or movies, there are many more genres, and they are based on feelings. Look at romantic comedy movies. There are no romantic games. There are dating simulations but they don't feel romantic. We need to expand and cover the entire spectrum of emotion. ♦

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1990 COMPUTER ED

Chen's father forces Chen to take after-school computer classes. There, he gets exposed to gaming.

1995 8-BIT KNOCKOFF

Chen gets his first console, a Chinese knockoff of the Nintendo Entertainment system that played NES cartridges.

2003 STATESIDE

After graduating college in China, Chen moves to L.A. to pursue a career in the digital arts. He is accepted to the prestigious USC Interactive Media Program.

2004 A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE

USC takes its Interactive Media students to the Game Developers Conference. Here, Chen is exposed to the game industry.

2005 FIRST ACCLAIM

Chen and a student team produce the game *lyadin*. The game is picked to be a part of the Independent Games Festival.

2005 ABOVE THE CLOUD

Chen begins his next project, the dreamlike title *Cloud*. After exposure on G4TV, *Cloud* becomes an Internet sensation.

2006 FLOWING

Chen releases another title, *Flow*.

2006 THE BUSINESS

Now graduated from USC and waiting for a publishing deal, Chen takes a job at EA working on *Sporo* for DS.

2006 ABSENCE

That Game Company begins work on developing *Flow* for PSN without Chen.

2007 INDIE AGAIN

Chen leaves EA and rejoins That Game Company to begin *Flower*.

2007 FIRST HIT

Flow is released for PSN.

2009 A MASTERPIECE

Flower is completed and released for PSN. The game receives rave reviews.

Casio Exilim FH100

Casio mixes high-speed and HD video with solid photo features

a solid mix of quality and affordability. When digital cameras first burst onto the electronic scene, that's all they were: cameras. Today, we're seeing convergence in the devices with video and more. Casio has released a new line of Exilim cameras that step things up even further: high-speed video. Now consumers can record their cats jumping in 1,000 glorious frames per second.

We recently spent time with one of Casio's latest in the line: the FH100. Priced at \$349.99, the FH100 took great photos, crisp HD video, and provided endless entertainment with the high-speed video. While the speed can range all the way up to 1,000 frames per second, image quality and light requirements take significant hits at that blazing recording rate. However, the much lower 120 FPS is more than enough to slow down the real world and see how things really move. Switching back to the HD movie mode, users can shoot 720p videos

that, with enough light, play back with surprisingly good quality. The only thing we didn't like was the lack of zooming while recording video.

The FH100 can also shoot uncompressed RAW photos that allow for much greater post-processing control in programs like Photoshop. This makes it a great stepping-stone for people not quite ready to jump up to a DSLR. The 10-megapixel image sensor performed a bit better than its big and little brothers in the camera series, especially when we took it into manual exposure mode – another nice ability packed into its compact body. While some of the processing was a bit slow, it was nothing we aren't used to with other cameras in this price range.

Overall, the Exilim FH100 is a feature-packed little machine with a great price. If you're looking for something to fit in your pocket that can capture all aspects of your life, take a look at Casio's latest.

\$349.99

casio.com

For the best images and video, head on over to gameinformer.com/mag





1 | Sony Dash

Is your alarm clock a boring mess? Why not go for the gold with the Sony Dash? This bedside/kitchen connection to the information world is another step to transforming your house into a futuristic playground. There are already over 1,000 apps for the device, all built on the open Chumby platform. Checking the traffic on your route to work and streaming a radio news broadcast while eating your breakfast has never been easier. Or maybe you just want to fall asleep with a Netflix movie or Pandora radio. While this may be overkill for some, the Dash is a perfect accessory for tech nerds chasing the house of the future.

\$199
sonystyle.com

2 | T-Boy 7-Inch

Paper toys have been inspired by existing properties like movies or video games until now, but the tables have turned. Famed paper artist Shin Tanaka has jumped on the oh-so-collectible vinyl toy train with this 7-inch version of his T-Boy. Thanks to modern toy company Play Imaginative (Tokidoki, Gloomy

Bear), vinyl collectors can now get this more tangible desk accessory.

\$50
kidrobot.com

3 | Hori PlayStation 3 Wireless Fighting Stick

Japanese peripheral company Hori has been making controllers for a long time, so it was a little disappointing when we got our hands on their latest fighting stick and it fell short. A good arcade stick should feel heavy and sturdy, but the Fighting Stick is just the opposite and feels almost breakable. The mudiness results in noticeable drop in gameplay precision. Consider that and the lack of rechargeable batteries and you come out with something that's just plain average. If you're hardcore enough to drop a chunk of change on a stick in the first place, you may want to consider other options.

PERISSABLE 

\$79.99
shophoriausa.com

4 | Lego Minifigs

We love capsule toys, and we love Lego. When the two were combined, we naturally got quite excited. Lego has started a new limited edition Lego Minifig series that will be sold in the classic mystery box style used for many current collectibles like Bearbricks and Munny Figurines. The first series contains 16 different unique figures ranging from a classic ninja with a golden sword to a '50s era sci-fi robot and a lucha libre wrestler. Lego has proved over and over that regardless of age, its designs are an ageless attraction.

\$3.99
minifigures.lego.com

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

MEDIA SHELF



RED VS. BLUE: THE BLOOD GULCH CHRONICLES

Listen up, Halo fans. Red Vs. Blue is taking all 100 episodes from the first five seasons and packing them into one convenient box set. The six-disc set is also packed with tons of extra bonus content. If you haven't seen the series, shame on you. Now pick this up.

\$59.95 DVD,
newvideo.com



EXTRA LIVES: WHY VIDEO GAMES MATTER

After writing several acclaimed novels, author Tom Bissell becomes engrossed in the world of digital entertainment and lives to tell about it in his new book.

\$22.95
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INVISIBLE CREATURE

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“

We are trying to make Zelda, which has become very complicated, easier to play.



– Shigeru Miyamoto on Zelda for the Wii

”

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN



(ABOVE) Ubisoft has officially announced the continuing adventures of Ezio Auditore in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* this holiday season. The game, set in Rome, features about 15 hours of missions you can complete with the help of associates, multiplayer, and the chance to invest money in various districts of the city – à la *AC II*'s villa in Monteriggioni.



(ABOVE) Developer Turbine is turning *Lord of the Rings Online* into a free-to-play MMORPG, just like the company has already successfully done for *Dungeons & Dragons Online*. The beta will start shortly, and the re-launch is targeted for the fall. Players currently paying to play will get premium content, character bonuses, Turbine points for the game's store, and more. Free players, meanwhile, will have access to the full story up to level 50.



(ABOVE) In what is no longer a trend, but almost a routine, Ubisoft has delayed another game. This time it's *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. The title was originally supposed to come out this holiday season, but it's now slated for the "March quarter" of 2011. March is a month and not a quarter, so we bet dollars to donuts that in its confusion, Ubisoft doesn't put out *Future Soldier* until the summer.



(LEFT) Nintendo is looking into the possibility of charging users for the online component of systems like the Nintendo DS and Wii. Whether this would manifest itself in a monthly fee or a one-time upfront usage fee – if it happens at all – remains to be seen. With Sony and now Nintendo contemplating making players pay for some portion of their online services, a year from now will there be any free online lunch?



(LEFT) EA Sports' Online Pass program is making sports gamers enter in a one-time code specific for each sports game in order to play that title online. If you buy the game used and the code's already been entered, then you have to pay \$10 to get online with that title. We can understand that Electronic Arts thinks used games sales take away from new game sales (full disclosure: *Game Informer* is owned by GameStop), but in the end, EA Sports' code program victimizes those kids who simply wanted to save a few bucks by buying a game used. We'll see how long it takes for other divisions of Electronic Arts to adopt this program.

If you think this is just a problem for EA's sports games, not so fast. Ubisoft says it is considering its own online pass program, and THQ's *UFC Undisputed 2010* also uses one.

Ken Levine,
creative director at
Irrational Games



Irrational Thought

KEN LEVINE SOUNDS OFF

To: The Video Game Industry,
Journalists, and Fans

Subject: Growing a Pair

Since Roger Ebert wrote a post a few weeks ago entitled "Video Games Can Never be Art," the game-osphere has been abuzz with a broad range of rebuttals, assents, teeth-gnashing, and spleen venting. Ebert spends several thousand words making it very clear that video games aren't worth his time. Even the developer Ebert name checks in his article (Kellee Santiago from thatgamecompany) gets in on the act. The very first line of her response proclaims "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_ebert... a new watermark in my career as a game maker – Roger Ebert wrote an article about me."

Now excuse me for asking, Kellee, but you are an accomplished game developer. You are a USC alum. You are feted by your peers and your fans. You are coming off Flower, an impressive release that garnered the attention of the entire industry. You're giving speeches at TED. You're a star. And now you're telling me that a watermark in your career is that Roger frigging Ebert deigned to slow down his chariot long enough to notice you? And not simply notice, but vigorously endeavor to establish that your career, your work, and your passion are essentially beneath his notice.

I read another thoughtful open letter to Mr. Ebert on a prominent gaming blog that, before getting around to effectively saying, "You sir, are a film critic, not a game critic, so piss off!" spends several paragraphs name-dropping great filmmakers, as if to say, "See, Ebert? I know film, so I'm worthy of your respect. Take me seriously!"

Jesus, Mary, and Miyamoto! How insecure are we as an industry that we rush to seek validation not from our own peers, not even from creatives in other fields, but from critics in other fields, to tell us if what we're doing is worthy of notice? Look, I was in high school once. I spent the entire four years trying to match up with what I thought other people thought was cool and worthwhile. And I was miserable because the things I loved were not deemed valuable.

Dungeons and Dragons? Lame!

Video games? Nerdy!

Comic books? Pathetic!

And so I hid my passions. I tried to fit in. I played sports and was terrible at them. I tried to make friends with a collection of people whose only interests in the world amounted to Molly Hatchet records and Marlboro Lights. I tried to make myself a part of things I didn't care about and sought the approval of people who looked down on me.

And I was miserable. The sad truth is that

once a new form of media shoots out of the womb, one of the first impulses it seeks to fulfill is validation. Like me! Approve of me! Respect me!

Hey, I get it. I went to Vassar. I like a vigorous round of Socratic wankery as much as the next liberal arts undergrad. But what I can't stand is the insecurity. Are games art? Will they become art? What stage of development are we in as an art form? Are they more akin to George Melles' *A Voyage to the Moon* or Welles' *Citizen Kane*? What methodologies should we investigate to make a proper determination between the state of video games, Aristotelian aesthetics, and Robert McKee's definition of good writing?

Here's my answer in three simple steps:

Remove the beret from the top of your head.

Throw said beret out the window.

Light a fire. Into that fire toss your copy of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Crack open a two liter of Mountain Dew. Snap into a Sim Jim. Proceed to Xbox Live and shoot your best friend in the head with an M-16.

You're a gaming geek. Be proud of that. You don't need the "by your leave" of Roger Ebert, your loving parents, or the Library of Congress to validate your passion.

The world is changing. I've spent some time around Hollywood people lately, and I've even thought of trying my hand at screenwriting again. (I was a film scribe back in, oh, 1871 or so.) But many studio exec types have told me that their dream is to have some big film director work with me to make a video game.

My response was, "Why on Earth would I want to do that?" The notion is as ridiculous as me calling up an established film director and saying, "Hey pal, I've never directed a film before, but how about I show up on set tomorrow and take you to school?" Do you really want two egos like me and some hotshot film director butting heads over health station recharge rates or jump heights? Honestly, I'd expect that 10 minutes into the first meeting they'd start to look like somebody who realizes they just mistakenly got on the wrong – and very lengthy – inter-continental flight.

Consider last E3, when James Cameron spoke at the Ubisoft event. Now, I love James Cameron. He's the man along with George Lucas who really created 90 percent of the methodologies for telling nerdy stories in big budget movies. I constantly name check him and reference his work in story meetings at Irrational. You put him and the Coen brothers in a room, and I'd have trouble deciding which one I'd want to make out with first.

But why was he pitching the Avatar game and

not the guy who actually built the damn thing? Look, if a BioShock movie gets made, I'm sure there might be some people who would be interested in what I have to say about it. But the focus would rightly be on the folks who made the frigging movie.

Why does the rest of the media world put the gaming baby in a corner? Because the game industry has an inferiority complex. We know that the movie, television, book, and even comic guys look at us like we're some kind of junior varsity version of themselves. "Hey, video games! Aren't they cute? We should make us one of them!"

And why do they think of us this way? Because we encourage them to. *The New York Times* ran a page 37 story on GDC. Somebody call my parents! "Roger Ebert said we're not art. Get me my smelling salts!"

Do games owe a debt to popular culture? Absolutely. I can say that I am the biggest media whore who ever walked this green Earth. But popular culture today is gaming culture. The social networks and forms of interaction of the Internet didn't gestate at some university or film studio. The language of today's youth wasn't created by the Beatles or Public Enemy. The ways people connect to each other through extended networks weren't conceived by some genius at General Electric.

No. All of these things sprang from the nerd-o-scape. They grew up on Usenet and tech blogs. They sprung to life alongside headshots and tea-bagging. They evolved naturally through a group of lonely dorks looking for people who shared their nerdy interests.

We don't owe anything to anybody. The future of entertainment is being envisioned not just by the games industry, but by a confluence of developers and gamers who've interacted on BESes and the Net since our hobby began. And we're just getting started. Wait until we have had the time to develop that film and television had. We'll either be ruling the world, or we'll be the Eberts, writing dismissive essays about the newest kind of media, which of course will be irrelevant and shallow. That is something we must not do, because that kind of thinking is the first step on the path to irrelevance.

But today is not that day. Today is our time to realize the power of the medium we all love so much.

To paraphrase the elder Lebowski: The revolution is over, Mr. Ebert. The nerds won.

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

**"The
revolution
is over,
Mr. Ebert.
The nerds
won."**



THE GREAT DEBATE

A

re games art? This question has been asked hundreds of times, and no one agrees on an answer. Legendary film critic Roger Ebert recently reignited the debate with a blog post he wrote in response to a speech on the subject given at USC by game developer Kellee Santiago. Entitled "Video games can never be art," the blog post refutes several of Santiago's points while stating his arguments for why games have failed to achieve the status of art.

"The three games she chooses as examples [Flower, Braid, and Waco Resurrection] do not raise my hopes for a video game that will deserve my attention long enough to play it," Ebert wrote. "They are, I regret to say, pathetic. I repeat: 'No one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great poets, filmmakers, novelists, and poets.'"

Predictably, the Internet went crazy, with Ebert's post garnering scores of angry responses from gamers. While debate is certainly healthy, the incendiary talk hasn't gotten us any closer to the answers.

Not everyone agrees on the definition of art – or even the definition of a game. Still, thinking about the ideas behind the games we play and what they mean is important. For this feature, Game Informer chose eight games that we feel represent games as an art form. Our writers picked these games personally, and their arguments are very personal as well. While we don't presume to settle a debate about the meaning of art – that's something that's been discussed for centuries – we hope to do our part to move the debate forward.



SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

When the "are games art?" question springs up, few legitimacy-championing examples come up more than Fumito Ueda's body of work. Both *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus* offer strong artistic points, but I personally lean in the latter direction.

While this PlayStation 2 title has aged a few years at this point, *Shadow of the Colossus* features such beautiful design and composition that it could easily compete with any other medium that's already been inducted into the artistic fold. The forbidden land that protagonist Wander and his horse Agro explore simultaneously instills a sense of wonder and desolation in the player, sliding the effect slightly one way or the other with bleached out color in high sunlight or darkness in the black and cloudy sky.

The colossi are the true showcase. These organic creatures are clearly born out of the earth with stone bone structure and a prairie grass look to the fur. While they are amazing to look at, the most important element of these creatures is the relationship the player forms with them. Most game enemies are irredeemable demons, aliens, or mercenaries, but these behemoths force players to question the decisions the supposed "hero" is making. To resurrect the woman Wander loves, players must guide him to kill all 16 colossi in what is essentially a deal with the devil. After the first few slayings, you experience the thrill of a small human outsmarting and bringing down creatures 100 times his size. But somewhere along the way you start to feel like a poacher wiping out the last of an endangered species - especially when several of the colossi don't even come after you until you start stabbing them. Wander's appearance degrades with every kill as the dark essence born out of his actions flows into his body. You just want to call off the whole deal, but you must carry out Wander's ultimately self-serving plan despite the clear and dire consequences.

The killing blow on the final colossus carries with it a swirl of emotions - satisfaction at overcoming this enormous quest, hope that your loved one will be resurrected, guilt at wiping out these majestic beings, and dread that you may have unleashed a terrible evil on the world. This complex mix of reactions is what good art is supposed to instill in people, whether a controller is plugged into it or not.

- BRYAN VORE

MASS EFFECT 2

Shooting a bad guy gunning for you doesn't present much of a moral quandary. Shouldering the responsibility for the well-being of a crew of people who trust you implicitly – who you consider your friends – is another matter. *Mass Effect 2* puts a personal face on the tragedy of violence by forging a bond between players and their party members with solid writing and presentation, same as any film or novel. The difference is how it uses its interactivity as a tool to strengthen that bond and elicit a more intense emotional reaction from players. If Mordin dies in the final confrontation, it isn't due to the inevitability of the narrative. You put him in that grave with your decisions, same as if you'd pulled the trigger yourself.

Some players didn't think twice about sending their squad to their demise, and others simply approached it from a game theory perspective and coldly optimized their plans according to a guide or trial and error to get the ideal result. Plenty of people see a Bosch triptych and dismiss the painter as a pervert without gaining any insight into medieval European Christianity and its impact on the people living under its auspices, too. That doesn't mean it isn't art.

The NPCs in *Mass Effect 2* are collections of pixels, code, and audio recordings, just as *Saving Private Ryan* is made of celluloid and *Anna Karenina* is born of ink and paper. Artists pour themselves into their creations through video games just as in any other medium. I didn't feel anything as I sacrificed some knight to block a chokepoint in Fire Emblem, but I agonized over deploying my friends in the defense of the galaxy as Commander Shepard. Though you rarely have all the necessary information to make an informed decision, during the course of the game the player must wrestle with big issues like the moral ambiguity of a calculated genocide against a warlike race and a galactic conflict between the Quarians and Geth as deep rooted and volatile as the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Given the sensitivity of these issues, your decisions could fracture your party, compromise your mission, and even have long-term effects on the galaxy. Taking a hardline position doesn't come easy under these circumstances.

Making the audience feel something and think about the world in a new way, from a different perspective, or with a broader view is what artistic endeavors have been about since the dawn of history. *Mass Effect 2* does this by putting players into situations that very few of us will encounter in real life, and uses its interactive nature to connect with its audience in a way impossible in any other kind of media. I don't need any other argument to classify games as art.

- ADAM BIESSNER

HEAVY RAIN

The concept of freedom in games is illusory. By their very nature, games are governed by rules that steer players toward a shaped experience. Dragon's Lair may have allowed arcade-goers in the '80s a paltry amount of interaction compared to modern games like the Sims 3, but in each example the creators laid down the laws, so to speak, before releasing their work.

This simple fact invalidates the argument that games lack authorial intent and are therefore not art but something else entirely. While games allow more freedom than passive media such as film, game designers take player action into account. Look at Heavy Rain, for example. An early sequence allows players to take control of a father, Ethan Mars, as he navigates his son Shaun's early evening routine. A player might notice a checklist of responsibilities and their accompanying times – dinner, homework, then bedtime – and follow those guidelines responsibly. Others might choose to ignore Shaun and shoot hoops outside. Shaun reacts differently depending on how the parent player chooses to steer the evening's activities, but the sequence inevitably ends with Shaun and Ethan going to sleep.

Heavy Rain borrows heavily from cinematic conventions in both storytelling and content, but those elements are often manipulated and subverted to take advantage of interactivity. Early in the game, Ethan and his family are shopping at a mall. It's crowded, and Ethan momentarily loses track of his oldest boy. The boy has a balloon, which serves as a beacon in the swirling mass of people. It's a scene that's been done in movies and television before, but giving control of the sequence to players helps convey the terror and frustration of the situation. Simply watching a parent frantically try to locate a child in a crowd is gripping, but moving Ethan against the rushing mass yourself shows how games can expand on experiences with which viewers are already familiar.

Heavy Rain's designer David Cage said the game would challenge players to see how far they would be willing to go to save someone they loved. Whether the game succeeds in doing so is irrelevant. Cage and the rest of his team at Quantic Dream created parameters and tested players to see how they'd react in a variety of situations, from mundane demonstrations of parenting to terrifying acts of violence. It's a game – and work of art – that anyone interested in the potential of the form shouldn't miss.

—JEFF COAK

BRAID



At first, Braid seems familiar. The gameplay shares traits with a multitude of other titles; players control a young man who rewinds time, stomps on enemy heads, and gathers collectibles. These activities, cleverly combined, form a remarkable and entertaining puzzle game – but that isn't why Braid stands out as a prime example of video game art.

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel didn't become art by virtue of the paints used in its creation, and Braid should similarly be judged as more than an assembly of its components. The mechanics in Braid are in service to conveying a message – merely the paints used to define the thematic shape of the work. Whenever you rewind time, you're reminded of the main character's desperation to change the past. When you drop the ring, you can't help but wonder about the finger it belongs to. Through gameplay, Braid keeps the weight of love, loss, and regret at the forefront of your mind...even if your overt goal is as simple as unlocking a door.

By slowly unraveling these emotional knots, Braid develops along parallel paths. Below the surface of the progression from one level to the next, a richly ambiguous narrative gradually comes into view. The prominent themes are accentuated by the game's illustration (by artist David Hellman), music, and prose – all held together by the unified vision of developer Jonathan Blow.

While Braid is largely the work of one man, no single explanation encompasses the experience. Like countless great works, Braid is open to interpretation. Is it about a boy rescuing a princess? Escaping the demons of the past? The atomic bomb? Braid provides the gamer with multiple lenses through which to view the events, but you don't need to choose just one – works of art can hold a different meaning for each person who experiences them.

– JOE JUBA

 NES

Video games are more than the sum of their parts, and their value as artistic objects emerges from that whole. To put it another way, there are musical themes, visual images, and writing within video games that qualify as art on their own. However, their synthesis creates a unique experience that is something new, exemplified in an early classic like Super Mario Bros.

Though childlike in presentation, Super Mario Bros. has an elegance and depth to its gameplay that challenges human perceptions and senses. The music and visuals act in concert to support that gameplay.

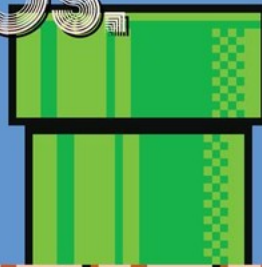
The game uses its first level to establish a vocabulary with the player – a first step into a wider understanding. Certain sounds equate with good or bad events. Run right, but don't run left. Jump up into blocks to break them. Jump down onto enemies to defeat them. With this vocabulary established, the game moves forward into ever more complicated combinations of these events. Tension and danger are vicariously experienced as lives dwindle and the threat of a Game Over screen becomes imminent. Power-ups scattered throughout the levels communicate a sense of mastery and excitement to the user. Fantastic level design means that carefully placed platforms become better understood with each playthrough – how and where to land after a jump, how fast one can move through an obstacle, or hidden passages in places the gamer didn't previously expect. Increased time with the game increases understanding of its intricacies, very like spending time contemplating a fine painting or a complex musical composition.

Ultimately, Super Mario Bros. is an artistic experience because, like all good art, it affects the one experiencing it emotionally and empirically. That experience varies from person to person, but there is always thought stimulated and understanding expanded. Even in its simple presentation, the game succeeds in drawing in the user and engaging them on multiple levels. Super Mario Bros. stands as a testament to the value of gameplay itself as an artistic experience – an experience that has been emulated by countless designers in the intervening years.

- MATT MILLER



SUPER MARIO BROS.



connect

LITTLE BIG PLANET

Like the first movies, *LittleBigPlanet* entrances players with the spectacle of seeing the familiar in a new light. Rather than trying to recreate our world with photorealistic graphics, the game employs bright, warm visuals that place an emphasis on texture not normally seen in digital mediums. Each object in the game is comprised of a basic material applied in creative ways: Grass is made from lush green felt, while clouds are fluffy white cotton. This simplistic representation of everyday objects feels new and familiar at the same time.

The game's main character, Sackboy, is equally fundamental. Similar to the actors of silent film, Sackboy is the embodiment of performance art, using exaggerated body language and facial gestures to convey basic emotions. Like Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin, Sackboy uses slapstick humor to drive the story's message of the importance of companionship. Without speaking a word, Sackboy has become one of the most unique and endearing characters of recent years.

LittleBigPlanet's symbolic representation of life and world is not simply an aesthetic choice, but a function of the game's core principle. *LittleBigPlanet* presents the player with a fantasy world born from imagination. This is not hyperbole, or the opening line of a fairy tale; the lands you explore are sculpted from primitive objects by their creators. The world's inhabitants are pieced together and rigged like marionette puppets, and the music, lighting, and color palette are customized to coincide with the ambiance of the level. While this is true of all video games, the levels in *LittleBigPlanet* are not created by programmers, but rather storytellers, artists, and most importantly, you.

All of the levels in *LBP* can be recreated with an easy-to-use toolset included in the game. When I first played the game, it took me an hour or two before I realized this – I knew *LBP* let you create your own content, but I didn't think levels made by players would be comparable to those created by the developers. When I saw that the user levels being shared online were just as intricate, professional, and creative, I understood that this game is more than a simple entertainment product; it's a new creative medium.

Wherever human beings are given the creative freedom to express themselves, there is art. Most players will only ever use *LBP* to make simple platforming levels, just like most Hollywood directors will only make romantic comedies or action movies. But already players are using *LBP* in more imaginative ways, uploading their own virtual galleries to showcase their inventions. Combining graphic design, sculpture, and engineering, the artistic craftsmanship taking place in *LittleBigPlanet* obliterates the standard definition of what a video game is. How something that fosters so much creativity and promotes the exchange of user-made creations and ideas could not be considered art, is beyond me.

— JEFF MARCHIAFAVA





BIO SHOCK

One line of thinking of why games cannot be art theorizes that interactivity inhibits the artist's ability to convey an emotional message. In essence, the artist's vision is lost if the audience has control over the experience. But the emotional punch of BioShock's story would wilt if players did not drive the action. Two-thirds of the way through the game players are treated to a story twist that forces them to pause and reflect on everything that had led up to that point. Good art does that: It knocks us off our heels, and makes us look at some part of the world from a different angle.

On the surface BioShock tells a story about a failed utopian society, but it is about so much more. Its narrative examines the weight of choice, the importance of free will, the exploitation of power, and the corruptibility of government – a hefty chunk of philosophy for any medium to chew on. BioShock tackles all these themes with masterful skill. The game's two iconic characters – the Big Daddies and Little Sisters – are tragic figures, and the game manages to make us care about them.

Then again, maybe what's most impressive about BioShock is how it tells its story. Video game characters have a disability in that they cannot deliver facial expressions or gestures with the same level of detail as a live actor. BioShock's characters faced the additional challenge of having to emote while the audience stared at a thumbnail-sized headshot. Despite being crippled in this way, the voice acting of BioShock's characters evokes a high level of pathos that many professional films fail to achieve.

But art isn't always about the story it tells; often it's about emotion, form, and atmosphere. Visual artists of nearly every era have filled canvases with shapes that continue to deliver new experiences after multiple viewings. Rapture must have been built with this directive in mind. Every area in the game begs to be fully explored. From the water-damaged ceilings to the footprints left by the ghosts that walk its halls, every room in Rapture feels as though it has untold stories to share. Rapture's glory can't just be viewed; it must be walked through.

BioShock isn't art because it's constructed from a variety of artistic components. What sets BioShock apart is that all of its various pieces work in concert to deliver an experience that couldn't be told in a film, couldn't be written in a book, and couldn't be shown in a painting. BioShock is a thought-provoking, exciting, and sometimes terrifying experience.

– BEN AEEVES

Directing **Scott Pilgrim**

Edgar Wright talks *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* and gaming influences



Edgar Wright (left) chats with Michael Cera

Director Edgar Wright rose to international acclaim with gore/action/comedy hits *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz* alongside longtime collaborator Simon Pegg. Between these two projects he scored the film rights to Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim*, an indie comic book series chock full of video game and rock culture. Releasing August 13, Michael Cera heads a large cast of established stars and up-and-coming young actors. We caught up with Wright in Toronto to get a taste of what's to come in both the movie and Ubisoft's tie-in game (which you can read about in this month's Impulse section on page 28) *interview by Bryan Vore*

How's the movie coming along?

It's good. We're getting close to the finishing touches. We've got another two months to go so there's still a lot of work being done. There's a lot of tinkering. It's easily the most detailed and ambitious thing I've ever done. It's like a huge coloring book and, by the time it actually comes out in theaters, it's going to be pretty much a year since we finished filming. I think when you see the film you'll see a lot of blood, sweat, and tears on the screen.

What got you interested in making a *Scott Pilgrim* movie?

It was first given to me pretty much as soon as the first volume was published back in 2004. I was doing press for *Shaun of the Dead* and these two producers were already looking into the rights for the first book and pressed it into my hands and said, "You need to read this. This is perfect for you." When I did read it [after the tour] I was like, "Oh yeah, I totally get it."

Did you work closely with creator Bryan Lee O'Malley?

Yeah, he's been an amazing resource for us. To be honest, if this were a project where I had no contact with him for whatever reason I probably wouldn't have done it at all. We relied on him a lot, especially in production, because a lot of the locations in the film are based on real places in Toronto which Bryan took pictures of as reference – some of them famous but some of them just a particular house in the suburbs. We tracked down the exact houses to shoot in, so, in the film, Stills' house is exactly the one that's in the books and Wallace's apartment is exactly the door that's in the books.

When we did the first draft of the script, me and Michael Bacall, the first thing we did was go to Canada and pick Bryan's brains about what he had in mind for the rest of the series. So by that time there was volume one and volume two was written and being finished. Then he had notes for volume three, four, five, and six. In some cases, he had to sit down and think about the notes because we were asking.

Obviously, the books are like canon as soon as they're published, but what's interesting is there are some elements in the film which refer to old ideas or just kind of like doodles and sketches. There were some points in the film where I said, "That was your idea originally, Bryan." He goes, "Oh yeah, I guess it was. It seems so long ago." It's quite nice in that sense that the film as an adaptation is sometimes incredibly close to the books and sometimes it diverges wildly, but is always in the same spirit.

Scott Pilgrim is full of video game references. Were you pretty familiar with a lot of those elements going in or did you have to brush up a little?

I do try and keep up, but what was kind of good with this is a lot of the references are actually very retro. There aren't really a lot of game references in *Scott Pilgrim* that are that recent. You know, older Mario, Final Fantasy, Zelda, Street Fighter, Tekken. And what's interesting is because those classic designs have never gone away it doesn't even necessarily feel retro – especially the way Nintendo particularly is so great at keeping the older games alive.

I had to maybe brush up on some of my Nintendo stuff because I'm from the U.K. and my first computer was the ZX81 [released as the TS1000 in the U.S. – *Ed.*]. When I was growing up the ZX81 and the ZX Spectrum – that was my adolescence basically, games like Knight Lore if anybody knows that. I was in college when the Sega Mega Drive hit and Sonic was huge for me. I have a complicated relationship with games because it's almost like I'm a recovering addict. In the TV series we did, *Spaced*, there were a lot of PlayStation references. Me and Simon Pegg made it in the heyday of Tomb Raider and Resident Evil and I lost whole months to those games. So people like Bryan who are really committed gamers, I don't know how they do it and get work done. It's like having heroin in the house.

Have you tried out any recent zombie or horror games?

Zombie games are probably the last thing I'd want to play. People always say, "Have you played Left 4 Dead or Dead Rising?" The thing is, I love zombie films and stuff, but after making *Shaun of the Dead* it was like being a fan of chocolate cake, then making a big chocolate cake, and then never wanting to have chocolate again. Probably some non-zombie games would be cool – even though I am aware there are *Shaun of the Dead* references in Left 4 Dead 2.

Ubisoft's working on a *Scott Pilgrim* game to go along with the movie. What do you think of what you've seen of it so far?

I think it's perfect. It's such a trip to see it because basically they started working on the game as we were shooting the film. It's essentially based on the books, but also our storyboards since we didn't have anything to give them when they were doing the artwork. I mean, it's great. We're even trying to figure out a way to put some of the graphics in the film. I want to have a little sort of tie back to the game.

The art is spot on.

Bryan said Paul Robertson doing the game is like Nigel Godrich doing the music for the film [the producer is scoring the movie and has secured tracks from Beck, Metric, and Broken Social Scene – *Ed.*]. You couldn't have a better person doing the work. Bryan was over the moon to be doing stuff with Paul. He even did a little pixel director, a little pixel me, which I'm very flattered about. It was nice because I think for people who question the very live action nature of the film – which I hope they won't when they see it because I think they'll see how true we've been to the artwork – but it's nice that the game is there as well because the game is kind of like watching an animated version of the books.

Check out gameinformer.com/mag for the full interview with Edgar Wright, including casting, creating a fake trailer for *Grindhouse*, and more.

A Star Wars Prequel Worthy Of Your Time

The new generation of Star Wars fans is well versed in petty trade disputes, and has learned that the pick up line "your skin is soft, not like sand" only works on George Lucas. This generation needs a classic Star Wars story. The Old Republic could be it. The Old Republic game isn't due out until 2011, but all interested parties can get a sneak peek at this universe through Dark Horse's Old Republic comic series, releasing today. This story is scripted by Rob Chestney, one of the game's writers, and is said to be the perfect primer for the lengthy game ahead.



Crackdown 2

New Releases

- Crackdown 2 (360)
- Despicable Me (Wii, PS2, PSP, DS)
- Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable (PSP)
- Tournament of Legends (Wii)

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World of Warcraft Toys Enter the Void

The second series of DC Unlimited's World of Warcraft premium figures highlights one of our favorite characters, the Voidbraker Void. This must-have figure comes packaged with the gnome warlock Valdeemar.



New Releases

- The Bachelor Video Game (Wii)
- NCAA Football 11 (PS3, 360, PS2)

Nic Cage Works His Magic

Sorcerer's Apprentice will lure fans of tech Harry Potter movies to theaters today. The film stars Nic Cage and Special Effects. You might remember seeing this duo in other movies, such as Ghost Rider, Knowing, and G-Force. Nic Cage isn't much of an actor, but that just gives Special Effects (whose career has gone downhill since Jurassic Park) more room to shine.



That Dude Who Directed The Dark Knight...

... should be working on the third Batman movie, but some idiot in Hollywood let him shoot another movie instead. It's called Inception, and it opens in theaters today. Unlike every other movie featured in the Timeline section, this one is worth seeing. From what we understand, the entire film crew thought they were working on the next Batman. The poster is framed exactly the same, the soundtrack hasn't changed a beat, and actor Leonardo DiCaprio appears to be portraying Bruce Wayne. Don't believe us? Watch the trailer for yourself.



NCAA Football 11



Chris O'Donnell's Bad Hair Day

Remember those fake "turn off your cell phone" movie trailers? No one ever fell for them because the movies just looked too terrible to be real. Today, Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore releases, and it makes those pretend movies look like Oscar-winning masterpieces. If the line "looks like someone's having a bad hair day" is in your movie trailer, you should out your losses and stop production immediately. Also, if Chris O'Donnell is your star, good for you! Way to give a has-been a second chance!

Future Cred

If you looked at the car to the left and said, "Hey, it's that car from Back to the Future!" put this magazine down and go watch a movie for a change. You clearly are not enough of a nerd to realize that the car pictured is from Back to the Future II. It's clearly coated in desert sand; not farm house sand. This beautiful replica features working lights and sounds, and should be on toy store shelves by the time you read this. Next time, get it right, Brit.

New Releases

- BlazBlue: Continuum Shift (PS3, 360)
- Quantum Theory (PS3, 360)
- TrackMania (Wii, DS)

New Releases

- Clash of the Titans (PS3, 360)
- Galaxy Racers (DS)
- Guilty Party (Wii)
- Harvest Moon: Grand Bazaar (DS)
- StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty (PC)




LAUNCHED IN 3D JULY 20, 2010



BlazBlue: Continuum Shift



StarCraft II



In an industry dominated by long-running series, gamers know what to expect from sequels. For years, most developers approached follow-ups with a predictable philosophy: Take the original framework and throw in more weapons and bigger levels. While this tactic gives fans more of what they love, it also leaves little room for each entry to establish its own identity.

Perhaps that's why some studios are rethinking the traditional approach to sequels. Last year, *Uncharted 2* and *Assassin's Creed II* weren't just bigger and better versions of their predecessors —

INFAMOUS

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3

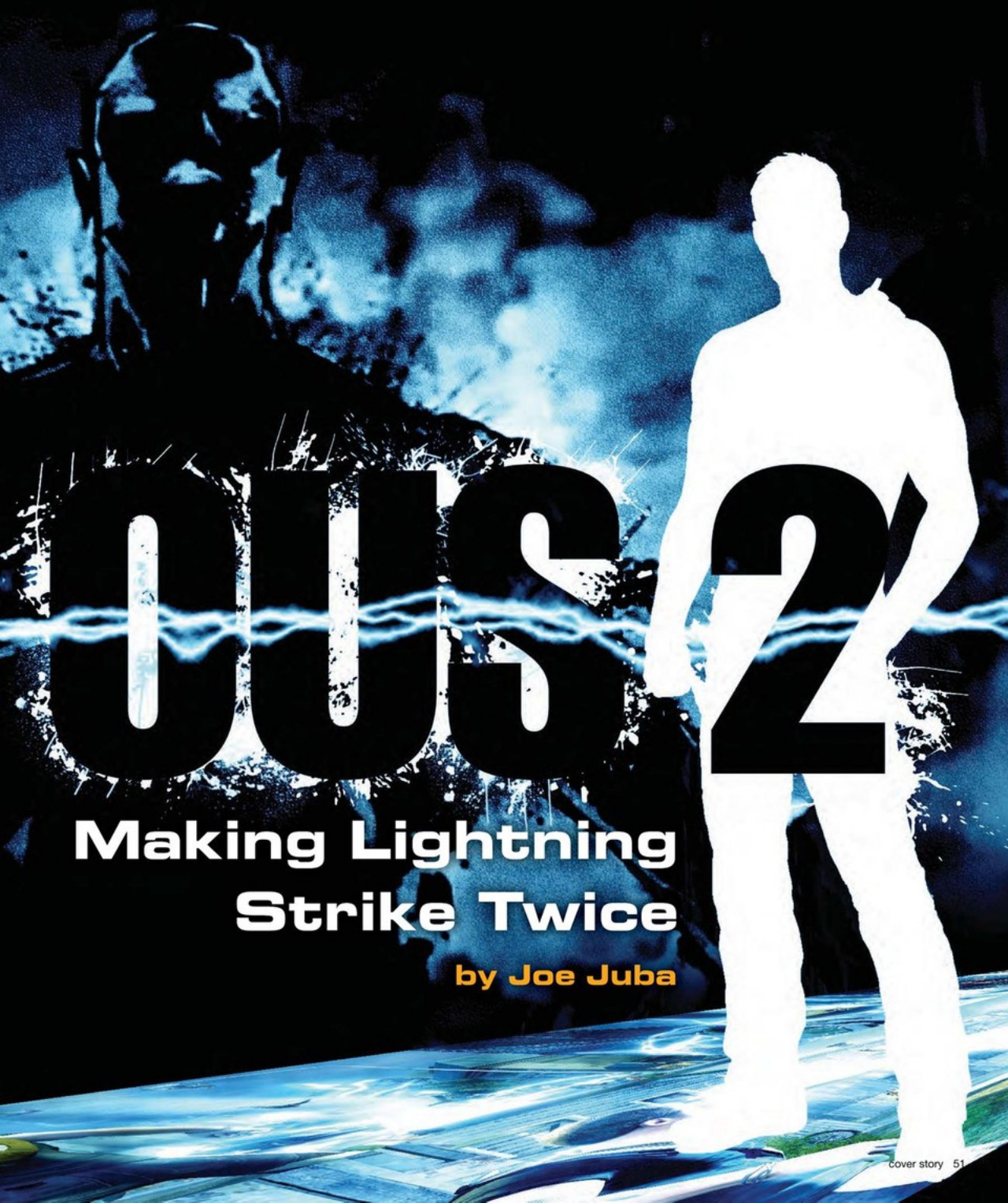
» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Sucker Punch
Productions

» **Release**
2011

they leveraged superior technology and cinematic flair to immerse gamers, achieving even greater acclaim than the originals. This level of refinement is the goal for the team at Sucker Punch Productions as it crafts the successor to its 2009 hit *Infamous*. As an open-world superhero sandbox, *Infamous 2* is certainly bigger and better...but Sucker Punch isn't stopping there. This sequel isn't just about amping up the powers and the stakes for hero Cole MacGrath; it's about transforming a great superhero experience into a mind-blowing one.



OUS 2

**Making Lightning
Strike Twice**

by Joe Juba

ny developer would be proud to produce a game as successful as the original *Infamous*. Telling the story of a regular person coping with extraordinary powers, the PS3-exclusive title has sold nearly 2 million copies. A suite of electric superpowers allows players to live the hero fantasy by traversing a wide-open city and reclaiming it from thugs and super-powered menaces. The team at Sucker Punch worked for months to hone and balance these elements, ultimately forming the core of what makes *Infamous* so satisfying.

"On a sequel, you have new challenges," says producer Brian Fleming. "A lot of the structural problems are fixed. You're already building on a strong structure, so the problem becomes – or the opportunity, really – is capitalizing on what that structure presents."

With *Infamous*' powers-and-parkour formula a proven success, the team's focus has shifted. Gamers already know what Cole MacGrath can do, and *Infamous 2* brings you closer to his god-like abilities than ever. "[*Infamous*] is a very solid game about acting out the role of a normal guy who gets superpowers," says game director Nate Fox. "But one thing that we really want to nail and hit out of the park is have it be more emotional, more personal, more physical, more visceral. Just more immediate to you as you're playing...we just want to yank you through the screen and into the world, on all axes."

Creating a more engrossing superhero experience isn't an easily quantifiable goal. It is something that forms in the player's mind when multiple facets of gameplay and design intersect: a new vision for Cole, increased emphasis on characters, streets packed with civilians, and cinematic camera angles that put players in the middle of the action.

Enhancements like these may seem peripheral, but they are instrumental in creating a game that could break into the highest tier of acclaimed titles. *Uncharted 2*, for example, retains most of the basic mechanics from the first game. However, developer Naughty Dog's attention to detail (and familiarity with the PS3's technology) transformed a good third-person action framework into Game of the Year material.

"Environments, animations, lighting – all of those things matter for drawing people in," Fleming explains. "The slogan I've been talking about since we began is 'no stone unturned.' We have to make everything better, and that's in service to the larger goal, which is to draw people closer and closer to the experience of being Cole MacGrath."

While no single feature is responsible for ratcheting up the intensity of *Infamous 2*, you can trace the cascading improvements to one starting point: an overwhelming new adversary.





NEW BEGINNINGS

Infamous 2 opens with utter defeat. Whether you had saved or subjugated the citizens by the end of Infamous, Cole was the most powerful being in Empire City. That changes with the arrival of the Beast, a mysterious character with immense power.

"At the end of the first game, you had a vision of the Beast – this Armageddon-style end-of-days foe that's going to come after you," says Fox. "We're going to, of course, deliver that."

The first game's antagonist, Kessler, traveled back in time to prepare Cole for his inevitable battle with the Beast. As a result, all of the major events Cole endured – obtaining electrical powers, the quarantine of Empire City, and the death of his girlfriend Trish – were orchestrated to harden him for the devastation the Beast would bring. It wasn't enough. Cole and the Beast fight in Empire City, but despite Kessler's scheming, Cole can't contend with such a foe; Kessler had counted on Cole having a few more years to hone his abilities.

"Kessler did a pretty shoddy job, I guess," Fox jokes. "Kessler tried to prepare Cole, and he pulled out all the stops to do it, but timelines have schismed. Reality has changed as a result of Kessler tampering with it." Forced to confront the Beast earlier than anticipated, Cole barely escapes with his life, but he formulates a plan to ensure that his next encounter with the Beast goes his way.

"You're forced to leave the city and look for ways to make Cole, who is already a superhero, into a *super* superhero," Fox says. This search takes players south to the fictional city of New Marais, a dangerous and diverse area similar to New Orleans. This is where the organization called the First Sons developed the Ray Sphere, the object that gave Cole his power in Infamous. After fleeing Empire City, Cole searches New Marais and the surrounding areas for other pieces of First Sons technology to augment his electrical abilities, uncovering bits of his own backstory along the way. Putting together the pieces and learning more about the First Sons is important, but Cole won't ignore what brought him to New Marais in the first place.

"The Beast is coming," Fleming says. "That's the heart-beat of the game: his travels, wreaking havoc on the cities on his way south, and you preparing. He knows where you are and why you're there."

SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

The change in location to New Marais provides a golden opportunity for Sucker Punch to showcase its commitment to providing an even more entertaining superhero sandbox. It isn't just about giving you someplace new to explore; New Marais is practically a character itself, with its own strange corners and dark alleys that you will uncover over time. Empire City was large, but it didn't convey the cultural diversity and architectural variety one would find in a major metropolitan area. Inspired by New Orleans (and other cities in that region of North America), New Marais is a richer backdrop for Cole's exploits.

"My father is from New Orleans," Fox tells us. "I grew up hearing these stories about this city that kind of has everything. It's got these swamps

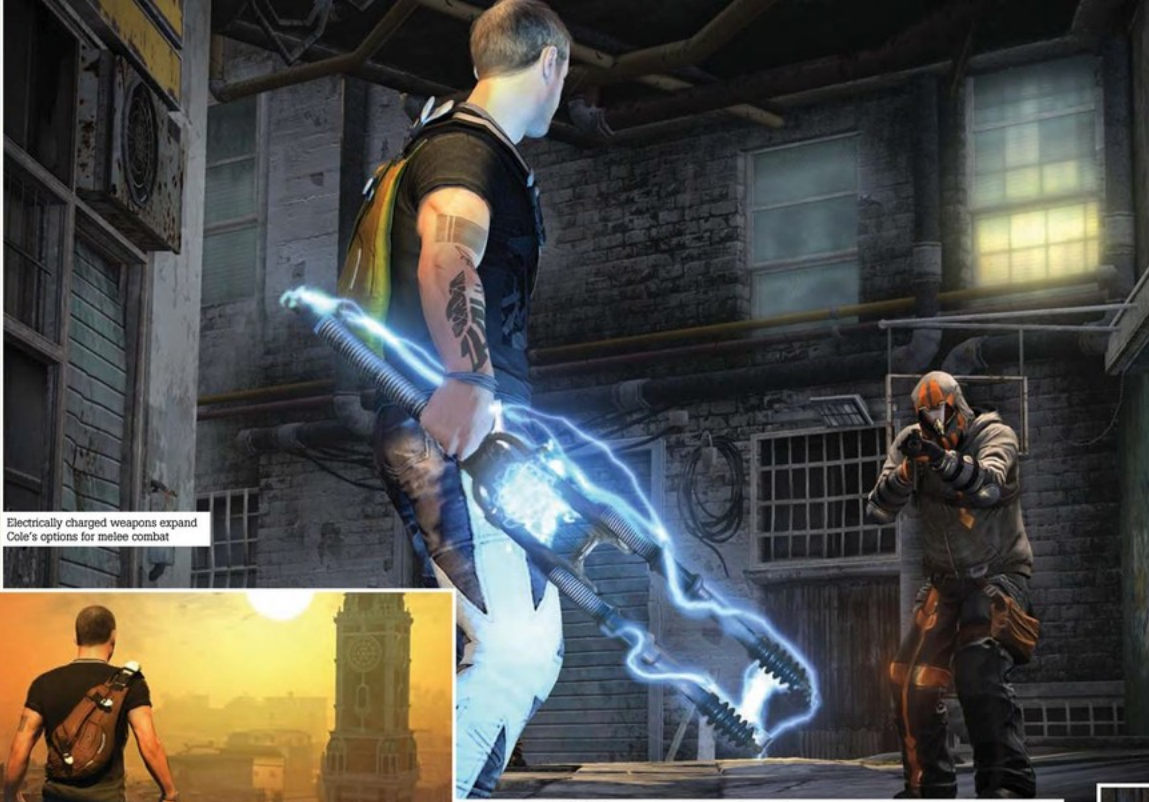
Meet Cole... Again

Infamous 2 is receiving improvements across the board, and that includes main character Cole MacGrath. While players loved using Cole's abilities in the original Infamous, they were less attached to Cole as a character. To address the issue, Sucker Punch has redesigned Cole and positioned him to become a more sympathetic hero. "The goal I have is to make a more appealing, more compelling main character," says art director Mathias Lorenz. "We're trying to get more out of him."


Cole's new persona goes beyond the obvious visual overhaul. "It's changing the look, but it's also diving a lot deeper into who the character is," animation lead Billy Harper tells us. "One of the things we looked at is what would an extreme sports star – like Travis Pastrana, Tony Hawk, or Chris Sharma – what would they be like if they had super powers?"

The team is able to convey its new vision for Cole through several avenues: a new voice actor, little details on his character model, and more lifelike animations as he scales buildings and bounds through the city. "We want to focus more on the physicality of the character," Lorenz says. "We want him to be a little gritty, a little street, without the grumpiness."





Electrically charged weapons expand Cole's options for melee combat



New Marais has more visually distinct districts than Empire City


filled with man-eating lizards, plantations, above-ground cemeteries, and cool architecture. This is exactly the kind of place where you want a superhero game to take place. New Marais is the kind of city where you feel like you could get stabbed at any time of day."

As soon as Cole arrives in New Marais, he's already in trouble. The city has been taken over by the Militia, a violent and well-equipped group devoted to the cause of human purity. Since the events of the first game, strange things have been happening across the country, and more people seem to be developing powers – or abnormalities, at least. The explosion in Empire City was not an isolated occurrence; the Militia, under the leadership of the well-bred and charismatic Bertrand, is determined to keep New Marais safe from anyone who exhibits any real or imagined non-human characteristics. Unsurprisingly, they don't take well to an out-of-towner who can shoot lightning.

During the game demo, we see Cole break in on a Militia rally, but a group of mutant bayou creatures crashes the party, too. The streets are swarming with Militia soldiers, panicked civilians, and freaks – everyone trying to survive the chaos. Cole fights his way through the mayhem in an attempt to reach Bertrand, running across numerous battles already in progress. "The city is very alive," Fox says. "One of the things we learned from the first game is that it's very interesting to come upon conflict. We like to have problems: pedestrians getting attacked by the Militia, freaks coming in from the swamp. Coming upon existing battles makes the place feel really alive."

Increasing the ambient action is another way that *Infamous 2* is poised to raise the bar from its predecessor. In our demo, we notice a drastic increase in the number of people and cars on the street at once, which gives players more chances to affect the world around them.

"There are two parts to it," explains development director Chris Zimmerman. "Adding more detail and interactivity in the environment, and having more activity in the city. More cars, more people, more bad guys, more everything. It just feels more like a city. It's more energetic if you have 100 guys on screen all the time, and it makes the game more fun because we can just throw waves of bad guys at you and it makes you feel more heroic." The bottom line is that gamers can expect to interact with a teeming, vibrant city – whether they're down on the streets or grinding the power lines between rooftops.



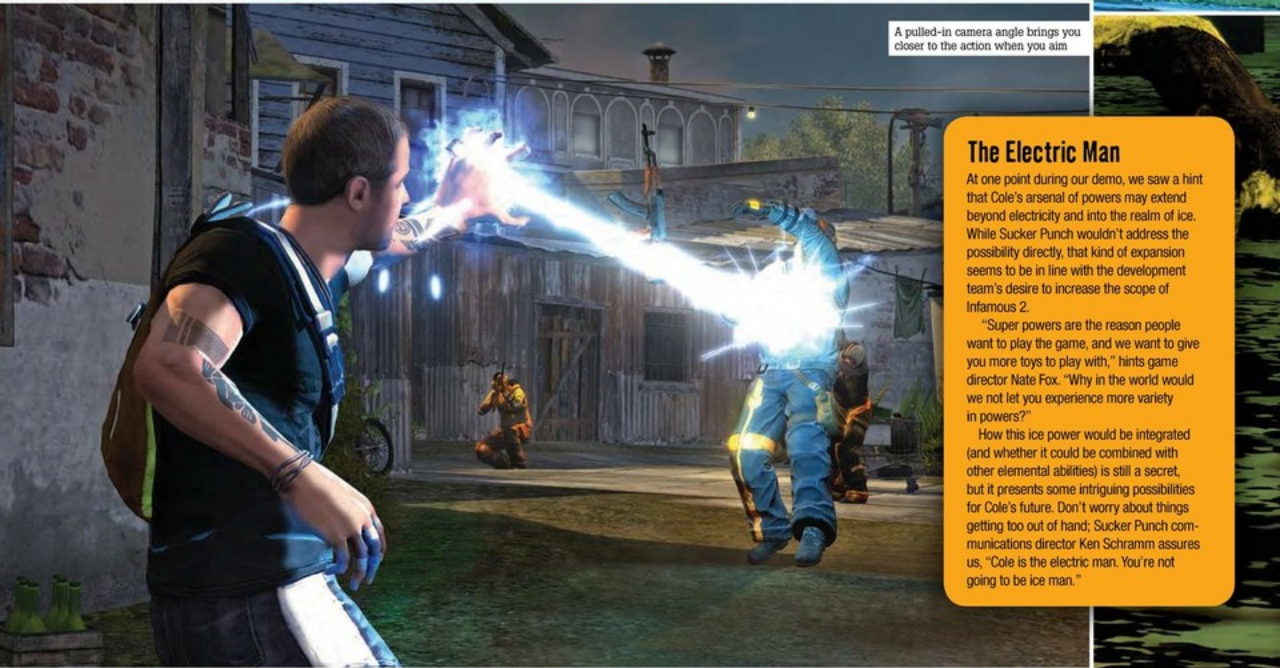
Water is still fatal, so you'll need to tread carefully in the swamps

continued on page 56



Cole won't just be beating up footsoldiers. Sucker Punch promises that the bosses in *Infamous 2* will be bigger and meaner

A pulled-in camera angle brings you closer to the action when you aim



The Electric Man

At one point during our demo, we saw a hint that Cole's arsenal of powers may extend beyond electricity and into the realm of ice. While Sucker Punch wouldn't address the possibility directly, that kind of expansion seems to be in line with the development team's desire to increase the scope of *Infamous 2*.

"Super powers are the reason people want to play the game, and we want to give you more toys to play with," hints game director Nate Fox. "Why in the world would we not let you experience more variety in powers?"

How this ice power would be integrated (and whether it could be combined with other elemental abilities) is still a secret, but it presents some intriguing possibilities for Cole's future. Don't worry about things getting too out of hand; Sucker Punch communications director Ken Schramm assures us, "Cole is the electric man. You're not going to be ice man."

continued from page 54

THE SUPER SUPERHERO

The city is just one half of Infamous 2's open-world superhero equation; the second half is making you feel like Cole's extraordinary powers are right at your fingertips. Unlike the original, this entry begins with Cole as a certified superhero, so you won't be forced to gradually reacquire familiar abilities.

"We want you to start out feeling like a full-on superhero and ramp up from there," Fox says. "We looked at all the powers from that vantage point." Cole may not have all of his abilities from the last game in their exact same form, but the goal is to avoid making players feel like they've moved backwards. For instance, Cole's ability to grind on power cables isn't a skill you need to learn again – you can do that right from the start.

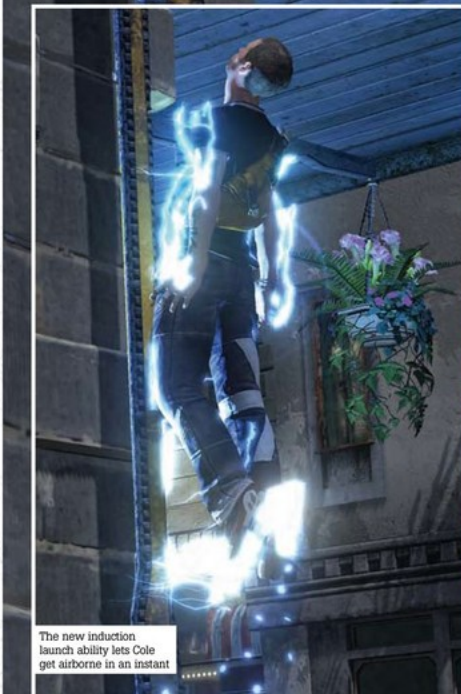
"You're certainly more powerful at the beginning of this game than you were at the beginning of the last game," Fleming tells us. That doesn't mean things will be easy; because of the threat posed by the Beast, simply being powerful isn't enough. Cole needs to become unbelievably powerful, which means obtaining new abilities that complement the ones he already has.

One of the highlights of Infamous was cruising around at high speed on power lines and train tracks, and Cole's electrified mobility is significantly expanded in Infamous 2. We saw two new powers in action, both related in concept to the first game's induction grind. Using specially designated areas on the sides of buildings, the induction launch allows Cole to launch himself upward, immediately taking to the skies for easy access to the rooftops. If you don't want to go up, you can use another new ability to jet horizontally across the faces of buildings.

A more agile, maneuverable Cole sounds like fun, but you can't beat the Beast by out-running him. That's where some new heavy firepower will be useful; one of Cole's most devastating powers (currently called the ionic vortex) creates an electrified tornado that lifts enemies, tears through the environment, and generally leaves ruins in its wake. It's not just a strong gust of wind – we saw Cole use it to take down a helicopter in one shot.

Another way the team is expanding Cole's arsenal is by making his melee combat more satisfying by tying it to his powers. "We had melee [in Infamous], but we didn't have it," Fox admits. "It didn't feel like you were really just cold-cocking people into next week." The solution to the problem is surprisingly simple: Give Cole a huge metal pipe. Because Cole is constantly flowing with electricity, it makes sense to have him harness it during close combat. By carrying around something like an oversized tuning fork, Cole always has an electrically charged weapon handy to dole out some punishment. During the Militia rally in New Marais, we saw Cole wreck at least a dozen enemies with this weapon, and each combo strike was accompanied by a camera effect to sell the impact.

Cole's supernatural powers may be lightning-based, but he also has a unique set of natural skills unrelated to his encounter with the Ray Sphere. He is an excellent climber, having engaged in urban exploration as a hobby for years. When combined with his superpowers, this degree of mobility and destruction is what gives Infamous its identity – an identity that gets stronger in Infamous 2. You will see fewer situations where it feels like Cole is jumping up the sides of buildings, and more where he is scrambling to the top using a variety of objects in the environment, creating a more satisfying sense of improvisation.



The new induction launch ability lets Cole get airborne in an instant



New Marais is filled with destructible objects – like cars and balconies – just waiting to be blasted apart



Ionic vortex is Cole's new knockout punch, clearing a huge swath in seconds

"Cole getting around – the marriage of parkour and superpowers – creates this incredible jungle gym of mobility," Fox says. "It becomes this landscape of opportunities when you can zip up a building, then find a wire that goes across empty space. You're making it up as you go, and you're stringing together these cool moves that allow you to dominate the space in a way that only Cole can do."

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

You can list a hero's powers and weaknesses, but many modern superpowered characters aren't defined by their abilities; they're defined by how they use them. Morality is a significant aspect of hero myths – whether heroes choose to fight for the greater good or personal gain is a defining characteristic. In the first *Infamous*, players were faced with making choices that would establish Cole as either the scourge of Empire City or its guardian angel, but many of these karma moments were presented as black-and-white scenarios. Don't expect *Infamous 2* to lay out your path so clearly.

"There are bigger consequences to your choices, and it's not really obvious what's good and bad," Fox says. This shift in the approach to decision-making isn't intended to trick players into making choices they don't want – it just introduces some nuances to the process. Ideally, players will approach moral dilemmas in *Infamous 2* on a case-by-case basis, rather than just blindly adhering to good or evil.

The team at Sucker Punch is tight-lipped when it comes to clarifying how the game will react to your choices. "Morality is certainly a big part of the product," Fox assures us. "And we are committed to making it impactful and meaningful, and have it be something you feel is responsive to how you're playing the game."

Your choices will lead you toward one of two drastically different endings – and they won't be like the original *Infamous*' endings, where you just experienced a different shade of the same events. On a related note, whether or not your karma or decisions carry over from the previous game is uncertain, though Fox tells us: "It is, philosophically, something that we don't ignore."

Beyond that, all of the specifics of karma – powers associated with good and bad, how the city dynamic changes, and how the story branches – remain mysteries for the time being.



Your New Partner

Zeke is a familiar face from the first game, but he'll be playing a slightly different role in *Infamous 2*. Last time, he just sat on his rooftop and caused trouble for Cole; now, he's more of a contributing partner in Cole's endeavors.

"He's really trying to move things forward and be a more productive member of the team," says game director Nate Fox. "He helps you out in the field and can build items for you that help pump you up."

Zeke's newfound desire to be useful may be related to the fact that he betrayed Cole in the last game, only to switch sides again in the final scenes. "They still have issues to work out, as all friends do," Fox admits.

Like Cole, Zeke has been redesigned for the sequel, but his personality remains the same: boisterous, crass, and hilarious. Unlike Cole, however, the team is planning to have the same voice actor reprise this role for *Infamous 2*.

STEPPING UP

As players explore the sights of New Marais, scurrying across buildings and zapping the Militia, they may not immediately notice the final major improvement to *Infamous 2*. Sucker Punch's ability to effectively use the technology of the PlayStation 3 isn't as flashy as firing off an electric tornado, but it has just as great an impact on your ability to step into the shoes of a superhero.

With a clear idea of what defines *Infamous* as a franchise, the team has dug into the PS3 hardware and addressed several complaints from the first game that were rooted in the technology. For example, instead of relying on comic book panels to tell the story, *Infamous 2* features cutscenes that highlight the characters' personalities and relationships. The comic-style interludes are still a part of the game, but they will be used for larger sections of exposition rather than detailing critical interactions between characters.

"We're able to have a much more empathetic narrative this time," Zimmerman says. "The characters are much more believable, much more likeable if only because the technology is there to let you do a camera close-up on somebody. We couldn't do that in the last game, so we needed to keep the camera away for technical reasons. This time we don't."

Better cutscenes, cinematic camera angles, more destructible objects, and swarms of characters on-screen are just a handful of ways the team is leveraging its partnership with Sony to tap into the power of the hardware and deliver a superhero experience that aims to impress on all fronts. Hitting the right beats in terms of fusing technology and gameplay doesn't just make this sequel better – it establishes the strength of the *Infamous* name. After all, the *Infamous 2* project isn't just a sequel; it's the next step in what could potentially be one of Sony's cornerstone franchises. "We're trying to build the IP," Fleming says. "We're trying to make it stronger, more diverse, more interesting. Also, more refined, higher quality, because we're trying to invest in the property itself."

"The space we're playing in – the third-person action genre – is the Game of the Year space," Zimmerman observes. "You look around and it's *Uncharted 2*, it's *Assassin's Creed*, it's *God of War*. It's all these great games, and you have to be able to compete on all axes with them. On the axes of character and story and stuff, we're much better set up this time so we can take a big, hard swing at it."

Sucker Punch is proud of its work on the original *Infamous*, but there is always room for improvement. With *Infamous 2*, the studio is seizing an opportunity to show gamers what Cole MacGrath can truly accomplish. "[*Infamous*] functioned well and felt good," Fox says. "It was a superhero game that you could get into and have a good time. The second game, if we do our jobs right, will hopefully give you a heart attack." ♦

Building A Future

The original *Infamous* didn't have any special online functions, but the premise could definitely support some cool multiplayer. When we asked about the potential for taking *Infamous 2* online, game director Nate Fox hinted: "I can tell you that this is a super-exciting time for the PlayStation 3, and there's a lot of cool stuff afoot. We're not really divulging any details, but we're excited by all of the traction other products have made to provide a foundation for us."

We don't know exactly what the team has in store, but we can speculate. It may be considering co-op and competitive options, which games like *Crackdown* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* have proven work great in an open world. However, in terms of online experiences unique to the PS3, games like *LittleBigPlanet* and *ModNation Racers* come to mind – a tantalizing possibility that could open up new horizons for aspiring heroes.

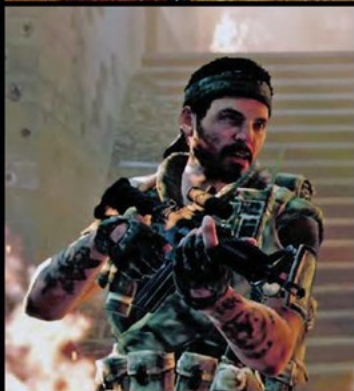




Comic panel cutscenes return, but the real jaw-dropping moments will be conveyed through more traditional cinematics



previews





Call of Duty: Black Ops

The darker side of the Cold War

It's not like the Cold War had a light side, but Treyarch is basing this next Call of Duty on the most secret parts of an already under-the-table conflict. At least one of the roles players take on in Call of Duty: Black Ops is that of an elite Special Operations Group soldier in Southeast Asia in the '60s. No mission is too tough, no tactic is forbidden, and no equipment requisitions are denied for these badass commandos. You've experienced some of the biggest armed clashes in the history of mankind through the Call of Duty lens. This time, the battles are more intimate – but no less explosive.

Activision hasn't revealed a ton of information on Black Ops yet, but it isn't a total mystery anymore. We know that vehicles play a larger role in gameplay than in past CoD titles. Treyarch has shown off sequences that include the expected turret firing aboard moving vehicles, plus moments that allow players to drive the helicopters themselves. Expecting a full-on Operation Flashpoint-style open battlefield is probably foolish, but you will definitely be in the driver's seat for part of Black Ops. The developer has also shown players performing a series of timed inputs to take off in a SR-71 spy plane. Let's hope that Treyarch hasn't fallen back in love with the lame quick-time events that plagued Call of Duty 3.

One-off set pieces, such as swimming through a river and silently taking guards out with your

combat knife, are the highlights of what Treyarch has revealed so far. After taking off in the SR-71, players must use their aerial vantage point to direct friendly squads through enemy-infested hot zones. Used well, these breaks from the usual run-and-gun are great pacing mechanics that keep the game from feeling stale. Treyarch seems to have the right idea, as one such sequence has players ripping an enemy force to shreds with the full force of an attack chopper's miniguns and rockets (while also piloting the helicopter) after struggling against them in an intense ground battle. Vengeance like that is as good as it gets.

You won't find any more elite squads in the Cold War than the SOG units such as the one the player spends time with. As such, you'll have access to military hardware we don't commonly associate with the military era. Treyarch has enthusiastically shown off the crossbow to everyone within viewing distance, not that we can blame the developers. Not only is it a silent weapon for stealthy takedowns, but skewering an enemy with an explosive quarrel and watching them stagger toward their friends and explode in a massive fireball is awesome. Firing specialized incendiary Dragon's Breath ammo from a shotgun is a good way to immolate anything nearby. Treyarch has declined to pull back the curtain on other unusual toys that may make appearances in Black Ops, but insists that it has

more surprises in store.

Multiplayer is of course the question on everyone's minds, but Treyarch is letting very little info out about online play. In what has become an expected and annoying tactic on Activision's part, it is refusing to do anything but tease vague details about Black Ops' multiplayer modes until the first batch of single-player info has thoroughly percolated through the gaming community. On the plus side, we know that co-op is extensively supported, with a four-player online mode (playable split-screen with two) separate from the single-player campaign. Competitive multi will almost certainly have a pre-release beta based on Treyarch's comments, which could help Black Ops avoid the host of glitches and bugs that have infuriated Modern Warfare 2 players since its launch.

The Black Ops trailer is full of Call of Duty's signature scripted dramatic moments, from kicking in a window while swinging from a fast rope on a crashing helicopter to diving off of a frigid cliff. Treyarch stepped up its Call of Duty game with its last effort in the franchise, World at War. It has a chance to take the next step with Black Ops, which would be an uncontested victory for gamers. » Adam Biesener

To see the newest Call of Duty: Black Ops trailer head on over to gameinformer.com

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC
- » Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher
Activision
- » Developer
Treyarch
- » Release
November 9

Destructible environments will play more of a role in Killzone 3





The jetpack from *Killzone: Liberation* lets you rain death from above

Killzone 3

Guerrilla Games wants you to destroy Helghan all over again

Last year, gamers became very familiar with the hostile environments and inhabitants of Helghan. Massive shootouts mixed with destructible environments created fantastic set piece moments and memorable battles in Guerrilla Games' second *Killzone* entry. While it was a solid FPS that served as visual evidence of the PS3's impressive hardware, the studio wants to push it to its absolute limits with *Killzone 3*.

"The average footprint of a *Killzone 3* level is about 10 times the size of your typical *Killzone 2* level," says Hermen Hulst, managing director at Guerrilla Games. "We have more destructibility in the first three minutes than we had in an entire level of *Killzone 2*."

As can be expected, gamers will be given a new arsenal to amplify the destruction. The first publicly shown level features two new massive weapons, both stolen from the Helghast. One is a gigantic minigun on a gyromount that rips apart enemies and environments with ease. The other is the WASP rocket launcher, which comes with two distinct firing modes. Primary fire launches a spread of rockets, while the secondary feature acts as an artillery strike. Hulst describes the latter as "more of a portable weapon of mass destruction than anything else."

Many stages in the last game featured flying

machines shuttling your squad about. This time around, you'll be able to fire upon enemies while soaring through the sky. Airborne combat won't be constrained to the transport sections, as certain sections will feature you piloting the jetpack from PSP spinoff *Killzone: Liberation*.

This third entry promises bigger scale, more onscreen enemies, more destructible environments, more vehicles, and more weapons, but these types of updates are typical of FPS sequels. Guerrilla hopes to make more than just incremental updates, with one example being the omission of loading screens. Hulst says "literally everything is streamed now," making the game more seamless.

Previous entries in the series have spotlighted Sony's hardware, and *Killzone 3* should be no different. The original title was the first high-profile online FPS for the PS2, and its sequel drew plenty of attention thanks to the notorious E3 2005 trailer. This pre-rendered look at *Killzone 2* was criticized by many who said the PS3 wouldn't be able to handle such detailed visuals. Now that they've proven those critics wrong, Guerrilla is treading into new visual territory thanks to *Killzone 3*'s 3D capability.

The obvious advantages of 3D are that you are able to read the environments a lot better and have a real increased sense of immersion," says

Hurst. He says that the basic player experience is 100 percent the same, but with 3D technology bringing you closer to the action than seen before. Whether 3D will be a crucial new element of gaming or just a novelty has been a source of much discussion within the industry, and *Killzone 3* will offer an early demonstration of what the technology can do.

Presenting the planet of Helghan in 3D is a confirmed feature of the game, but Guerrilla has yet to confirm whether it will be compatible with Move. If it does feature Move as a control option, it should be a great test of whether motion controls can click with FPS gamers on an HD system.

Despite receiving almost universally positive reviews, Guerrilla admits that *Killzone 2*'s story left gamers wanting a bit more. "At the end of *Killzone 2* you kind of got what you came for, and as the emperor Visari lies dead at your feet, it doesn't feel like a true victory," says Hulst. "Now that the emperor is gone...you'll feel like a small pawn in an epic war that is about to kick off." If Guerrilla can craft a story that matches the intensity and impact of the series' best battle scenes, this new *Killzone* could stand up against the most elite FPS competition. » Dan Ryckert

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
- » Style
1-Player Shooter (Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher
Sony Computer Entertainment
- » Developer
Guerrilla Games
- » Release
TBA



XCOM

BioShock 2 developer looks to reinvigorate the classic PC franchise

- » **Platform**
Xbox 360 • PC
- » **Style**
1-Player
(Multiplayer TBD)
- » **Publisher**
2K Games
- » **Developer**
2K Marin
- » **Release**
TBD

Talk to any X-COM fan and they'll probably tell you that the franchise should have ended in 1997. After a trilogy of stellar turn-based strategy games, the only two follow-ups to the series were an underwhelming space combat sim and a mindless first-person shooter. Now after nearly a decade-long hiatus, a new XCOM is under development, unhyphenated and re-imagined by the talented developers at 2K Marin. And although the newly announced title is returning to the FPS formula, the team looks to bring back some of the game's strategic elements while capitalizing on their ability to create a rich ambiance and suspenseful narrative.

The new XCOM trades the futuristic setting of the franchise for the idyllic America of the 1950s. A retro art style and slightly exaggerated characters are reminiscent of 2K Marin's recent adventure in Rapture, albeit with a less gloomy tone. Instead, the game juxtaposes a *Leave It To Beaver* atmosphere with the horrific nature of human-devouring amorphous blobs and ultra-destructive death rays.

You play the role of William Carter, an agent working in the FBI's XCOM unit, located in a

secret bunker beneath an undisclosed U.S. Air Force base. Like the original trilogy, XCOM's mission is to identify and defend the planet from alien threats. But don't expect to be facing any Sectoids or Floaters; the developers have stated they're ditching the franchise's established species in order to surprise players with new creations. Two enemy types have been revealed: a tar-like blob creature that latches onto and engulfs its victims, and a levitating ring structure capable of raining down widespread destruction from above. So far it seems 2K Marin has made the right call. The novelty of encountering and investigating new, terrifying life forms far outweighs the nostalgia of rehashing old ideas.

While most games forget what the "I" in FBI

stands for, investigation is your primary task in XCOM. Reports of strange phenomena from across the country are funneled into your base, and it's up to you to decide which case to embark on. These events can happen simultaneously, so while you're tracking down a lead in Kansas, an important piece of evidence in Maine may disappear.

The missions themselves are equally open-ended. Upon entering one of the large maps, you and two agents will comb the area for clues that are relevant to your investigation. XCOM employs a photo mechanic similar to *BioShock's*, and every picture you snap of a menacing alien or disintegrating co-worker edges you towards a solution for dealing with your alien invaders.



The slightly exaggerated art style gives your NPCs some personality





It's going to take more than a shotgun to bring down whatever that thing is



Other evidence, as well as a valuable alien element called Elerium, are also ripe for the taking should you find them. But limited resources and the urgency of the alien threat means the longer you stay in a location, the less likely your chance of survival. You'll have to decide whether it's worth it to stick around and see what else you can find, or if it's time to flee the scene and return to your base with your collected evidence – and hopefully your fellow agents.

Like the early X-COM games, that evidence you collect is important. Not only will it move the

story along and provide valuable information on the threat you're up against, it's also vital for your research team to create alien-based weapons powerful enough to overcome your extraterrestrial adversaries. So far 2K has revealed two of these inventions, based on the oily blob species. The "Blobotov" is designed to torch the pesky enemies, in light of the fact that a shotgun blast will only temporarily separate them into smaller pieces, allowing them to eventually reform. The second invention takes advantage of this rejoining property. By trapping a small slice of one of the blobs in a jar and connecting it to an electronic compass, the device will lead you to other creatures in the vicinity. Having weapon and gadget designs based on your research bolsters the game's science fiction appeal, and given the creativity behind BioShock 2's arsenal, we can't wait to see what else Carter will eventually have at his disposal.

We're also hoping your NPC cohorts can tap into the franchise's strategic depth, and 2K Marin has expressed an interest in making these secondary characters matter. Whether that means you'll be managing their resources and actions like the space grunts of the original series is something we'll have to wait to find out, but so far the game's direction is promising. 2K also isn't commenting on whether XCOM will feature multiplayer yet, but the prospect of teaming up with a few fellow humans to fend off an alien invasion is a tantalizing possibility.

Between the unusual mechanics, the 1950s setting, and the new cast of alien species, this XCOM reboot may be unrecognizable to long-time fans of the series at first glance. So far all the markings of a tense first-person shooter are coming together – let's hope a deeper look will reveal a layer of strategy befitting the franchise's name. » **Jeff Marchiafava**



Investigating aliens will allow your research team to create effective weapons, like the "blobotov"



Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Eidos Montreal gives gamers options
in its franchise revival

» **Platform**
PlayStation3
Xbox 360 • PC

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter/RPG

» **Publisher**
Square Enix

» **Developer**
Eidos Montreal

» **Release**
2011



The Deus Ex franchise isn't one to be used lightly. It comes with the kind of baggage that accompanies any game that has received critical acclaim without the recognition that comes with consistent releases. It's been 10 years since the original Deus Ex arrived on PC and redefined the first-person shooter for many gamers. It's been seven years since the less-beloved sequel, Deus Ex: Invisible War. Eidos Montreal, the brand new team behind Deus Ex: Human Revolution, has a tough job ahead of them if they hope to live up to this legacy, and they know it.

"We started out scared," admits creative director Jean-Francois Dugas. "Then we got to work." Work, in this case, began three years ago by bringing together a group of industry veterans — albeit veterans who were not involved in either of the previous Deus Ex games — to carefully pick apart the first two releases and try to pinpoint what made them so beloved. "And then," Dugas says, "we had to figure out how to bring those elements into a modern game."

As Eidos Montreal sees it, the key to the Deus Ex series is options. Every level in the game has multiple solutions for completion, all of which can be broken down into four basic choices: combat, hacking, social, and stealth. Need to break into a heavily guarded warehouse? You could sneak in through some ventilation shafts, snap a security guard's neck, and steal the key card. Or, if you'd prefer, you could blast your way through an army of goons.

It's unclear how you can talk your way out of certain situations, but Dugas promises

that it is possible. He demonstrates the game's dialogue system by showing a confrontation between protagonist Adam Jensen and a gruff bartender. Options for dialogue are presented as emotions or moods rather than a full sentence. For example, Jensen could try to be persuasive or friendly, or he could match the bartender's surly attitude with an aggressive response.

Choose what you say wisely, and you can proceed without violence. Mess up, and you'll close off the social option and be forced to find another way to finish your mission. If you're especially clever with how you mix social, hacking, and stealth abilities, it should even be possible to finish the game without killing anyone (save, perhaps, for some boss encounters).

Another important part of Deus Ex's legacy is the way it mixed RPG elements with the first-person shooter structure. Dugas says the primary RPG mechanics in Human Revolution come in the form of weapon customization and cybernetic augmentations. You can purchase new augmentations throughout the game, but you can also gather XP and spend it upgrading the augmentations you've already bought.

When I suggest that the RPG elements might be a bit downplayed from the previous games, Dugas is quick to step in with an "I don't think so." He explains that the team started out with a skill system very reminiscent of the first Deus Ex, but as the game's plot became more focused on augmentations, they decided it made more sense to place all the power within them. They didn't remove any skills from the game entirely; they just tied them to augmentations.

Aug-powered abilities include smart vision to

see through walls, an aiming stabilizer to lessen gun recoil, an Icarus system that allows you to jump to or fall from great heights, and even a claymore-style explosion that you can create with your hands. Each level-up provides new abilities related to the augmentation. "Strength level one might give more inventory space," Dugas says. "Then Strength level two may allow you to punch through walls."

One aspect that may leave fans slightly disappointed is the plot. The team specifically chose to do a prequel — set 20 to 25 years before the original game — so that they could approach it like a new IP. "You will not need any knowledge of the previous games to enjoy Human Revolution," Dugas promises, a strategy necessary to pull in new gamers but with potential to alienate fans. Then again, he also notes that the writer of the first two games is working as a consultant for the team to ensure that the story fits within the Deus Ex universe.

If there's one thing I can safely say about Deus Ex: Human Revolution already, it's that the team clearly has ambition on a scale that matches the previous Deus Ex games. With it not due until sometime next year, it'll be a while before we know whether that vision pays off in another revolutionary effort from the ground-breaking franchise or a fizzled-out wannabe of a revival. » Phil Kollar

To see the first trailer for Deus Ex: Human Revolution, visit www.gameinformer.com/imag





Human Revolution's global conspiracy plot will introduce Adam Jensen to a large cast of shady characters situated all around the world



Though most of the game will be played in first-person, third-person cover and stealth will allow for a more tactical approach to taking down bad guys



True Crime

A taste of the open world

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

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
United Front Games

» **Release**
Fall

This third entry in the True Crime series has nothing to do with the previous games outside of playing an undercover cop taking down a crime syndicate. You are Wei Shen this time, and you're trying to take down Triad faction Sun On Yee in Hong Kong. You'll recognize new developer United Front Games from *ModNation Racers*, and many of the team is composed of ex-staffers from Radical Entertainment, Black Box, and Rockstar.

Last time we talked about a linear warehouse rescue mission, but now Activision has shown us a taste of what lies beyond. We begin in a mission to track down and beat up a lowly drug dealer named Ming in a crowded market. Once we spot him, Ming takes off and it becomes an on-foot chase. Shen vaults over fences and slides over boxes in hot pursuit, and suddenly runs into Ming's gang.

These chumps are no match for Shen as he breaks a guy's arm, throws another, and forces one poor sap's face into an industrial fan. Environmental kills like these are much easier to



True Crime will include a full complement of radio stations complete with celebrity DJs and, of course, authentic Chinese tunes



pull off thanks to the ability to grab a foe and run him over to a tempting area like a sparking circuit board or a fly-infested dumpster.

After handling Ming, Shen is in the open world, and before you know it he's cruising the streets looking for trouble. He picks up a random task that involves wiping out a meddlesome motorcycle gang. An NPC takes the steering wheel allowing Shen to fire out the passenger side. He can shoot the guns out of the bikers' hands, blow their tires, or just straight up kill them.

Before officially finishing the mission, Shen hops out of the car and steals one of the fallen bikers' rides. The crotch rocket has a lot of zip – enough to catch some massive air after ramping off the front of an oncoming car. Once he's had his fill of the bike, Shen performs a slo-mo jump off it and shoots the gas tank in mid-air to blow up a row of parked cars just for fun.

Next he runs over to a civilian and jump kicks him right in the back. Shen then stuffs him in the trunk of a nearby car and drives off. He crashes into some cop cars, pops open the trunk, and beats up the unlucky gentleman right in front of the police. Once the cops get involved, Shen steals one of their nightsticks and beats them down.

These random acts of violence and mayhem certainly look fun, but they're not going to help your Face rating. This social status indicator increases as you pull off fancy fighting moves, wear cool clothes, drive sweet cars, and rise in

the Triad ranks. There is only one ending to the game, so you're free to be as good or bad as you feel at any given time, but it seems like following the rules is the only way to really boost your Face. With a higher rating you'll unlock new missions and moves, and be able to date classier ladies (this may include rival gang members' girlfriends). These hot dates range from karaoke singing to manhood-proving street races.

While True Crime is still a ways off, we're relieved to see that the open world elements have the potential to offer plenty of opportunities to terrorize the populace of a fictional Hong Kong. Mix that with some painful-looking combat and tight gunplay, and United Front may have what it takes to turn around the series' shady reputation. » Bryan Vore





Each of the six maps is based around real crime stories pulled from worldwide newspapers



Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days

Taking IO's new multiplayer modes for a spin

Online deathmatch games are a dime a dozen, so it's always refreshing to see developers try something new with multiplayer. Those who played the original Kane & Lynch online didn't just shoot at other players; they played mind games with a group of fellow thieves. In the series' Fragile Alliance mode, players teamed up to pull off a heist, and then either worked as a unit to shoot through an army of cops or backstabbed one another in a greedy play for extra cash. Of course, if your partners turned on you in the process, you got to hunt down your former allies as a cop. The original Fragile Alliance was our favorite part of the first Kane & Lynch, so we were eager to get our hands on version 2.0 in Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days, but there is more than one way to play Fragile Alliance this time around. Below we break down all of the divergent modes.

Fragile Alliance

The basics for Fragile Alliance in Dog Days haven't changed much. The whole team still shares its profits, but a traitor keeps everything for himself. This means turning traitor can earn you extra cash, but it also means you'll be running lone wolf, making it harder to get out alive. Anyone who betrays the group will have to be crafty, since they'll be marked with a traitor icon as soon as they turn on a colleague. However, traitors who make it to the extraction point before

anyone else can offer to split their cash with the driver and make an early exit.

If you accidentally graze a friend during a shootout, but didn't mean to turn traitor, the game's Yellow Card system comes into play. Anyone who accidentally shoots a fellow thief (meaning you shoot at another player but don't kill them) will receive a Yellow Card. This status only lasts for a few seconds, but during this time other players can seek revenge on you without penalty. However, if another player continues to shoot at you after your Yellow Card expires, that player will get marked as a traitor. This should help keep the alliance between players as tenuous as a wet paper towel.

Undercover Cop

Undercover Cop might be our favorite variation on the Fragile Alliance concept. The mode starts like a normal FA match, but with one exception. At the beginning of each match, the computer secretly chooses one player to be the undercover cop. It is this player's job to make sure that the thieves don't make it to their extraction point. Unlike Fragile Alliance, the undercover cop won't get marked as a traitor for killing other thieves, so a wise cop will wait until the loot has been collected, and then take out stragglers while no one is looking. Undercover Cop looks like it will foster a tense *Donnie Brasco*-like sense of paranoia.

Cops and Robbers

Cops and Robbers bumps the player limit up to 12, dividing everyone into two teams: cops and robbers. Unlike Fragile Alliance, robbers respawn on the same team when they're killed. Similar to single-flag CTF games, the robbers try to take their money to the extraction point within a time limit; if they do this, they win. All the cops have to do is prevent the thieves from reaching their vans in time.

Arcade Mode

IO felt that Fragile Alliance was generally well received, but many players missed out on the experience because they weren't connected to the Internet. Arcade mode is the answer to this problem. The premise of this mode is the same as it is online: grab four million dollars and escape in four minutes. However, now everyone else on your team is an AI bot. Each round gets a little harder, and the goal is to see how long you can last with a limited number of lives. The computer even starts to turn on you if it doesn't think you are pulling your weight. While this mode was designed for offline play, those who are connected to the Internet will be able to access online leaderboards and challenge friends to beat their score. » **Ben Reeves**

For more screens and details of our time with Arcade Mode check out gameinformer.com/imag

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » Style
1-Player Action
(16-Player Online)
- » Publisher
Eidos Interactive
- » Developer
IO Interactive
- » Release
August 24



Madden NFL 11

Simpler and smarter

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Tiburon

» **Release**
August 10

It was the lukewarm reception of the century," recalls Madden creative director Ian Cummings when one of the developers on his team came to him with an idea to radically change the way gamers have been calling plays for decades. "I laughed him out of my office. 'That's just stupid.'" Despite this rocky start, the team at EA Tiburon didn't abandon what turned into one of this year's most important new features. Madden's new GameFlow playcalling is designed to make you a better football player.

In September of last year, Cummings and the team had already created prototypes trying to improve the way that players interface with the game. Gameplanning—setting aside specific plays for situational down and distance—was up and running, but the pre-snap HUD was as unwieldy as ever. That's when technical artist and designer, John Taylor, built a playcalling prototype to show Cummings how effective a new method of playcalling could be. This early version of GameFlow chose an old Ask Madden play for you without any prompting or button pressing, and early playtesters—many hardcore Madden fans—found this new method of play calling so seamless that they didn't even realize that they weren't calling the plays themselves. This gave Cummings and Taylor the resolve to move forward.

New features were layered in as GameFlow started to take shape, like gameplanning, automatically showing the play art on the field, and audio chatter from coordinators. GameFlow isn't just for Madden newbies who want the CPU to pick plays for them; it's a tool to give you more time to play the actual game. Besides, imagine if you never got another delay of game penalty, or had enough time to actually dive into Madden's extensive pre-snap strategy options to become an audible master like Peyton Manning.

GameFlow is useless if the CPU picks a bad play for you (like we've all seen in Superstar mode), so EA Tiburon is relying on team tendency info from NFL head coaches and its access to a comprehensive footage of every play run by every NFL team—the same system the teams themselves use—to get things right. EA Tiburon is serious enough about its playbooks that it's even dipped into the mysterious black

market where old NFL playbooks are sold. GameFlow also lets you set up unique gameplans for your team, so you're only fed the plays you like to use. These gameplans can also be moved over to the aforementioned Superstar mode, so you don't have to put up with that mode's traditionally bad playcalling.

After choosing to use GameFlow (you can also call a play the old fashioned way), a coordinator will explain the play before you snap the ball. Cummings estimates that their writers came up with 300 to 400 lines for offensive sets and 400 lines for defense. These aren't just generic pep talks. For one GameFlow play, the offensive coordinator reminded us to give one particular wide receiver enough time for his deep route to develop. Following his advice

easily added 10-plus yards to the reception. Some of the coordinator audio is specific to what's already happened in the game, adding some useful context.

Honestly, it would be a miracle if GameFlow always gave you the perfect play (and if that happens, computers are about to take over the world), but our time with it let us easily imagine using it on basic situations such as first and ten or short yardage scenarios. Gameplanning or the old manual playcalling might be required for tricky third-and-longs or when we want to throw the other team off balance. The fact that we're already thinking of useful strategies shows how GameFlow isn't just about simplifying the game, but it should be a change that downright improves the experience for everyone. » **Matthew Kato**



Coordination

Between plays, you'll get a prompt asking you if you want to choose between using GameFlow or the full playbook (which also includes your gameplan plays). If you pick GameFlow, the CPU will select your play and you'll hear the coordinator audio and text describing it during the pre-snap. Madden NFL 11 also uses prompts on fourth downs and special teams plays to make common actions like PATs and punts easy to call without having to dive into the playbook.



NHL 11

NHL celebrates its 20th anniversary with a huge innovation



With a new face-off system, winning possession is no longer about perfectly predicting the puck drop



The Backbreaker-like physics engine gives every check a different outcome

Skating Onto The Wii

For the first time in the series, EA's NHL franchise is coming to the Wii. Rather than lazily porting over the game from the other consoles, EA Canada has rebuilt the gameplay around a hockey stick peripheral that houses the Wii remote and nunchuk, and simulates real hockey motions like slap shots and cross checks. In analyzing the failures of other team-based sports to translate onto the Nintendo platform, the creative director David Littman decided to build the game around a single-player experience. The result is Pee Wee to Pro, a Be a Pro-like mode that takes you from the neighborhood ponds of Pee Wee Hockey through Ban-tams, Juniors, and eventually the NHL.

Since introducing the analog stick-based control scheme in 2006, the NHL series has blossomed from a struggling franchise into the most impressive performer in the EA Sports stable; over the last four years sales have surged an astounding 120 percent. For NHL 11, developer EA Canada hopes to push the bar even further with an entirely new physics engine.

Hockey is a violent sport filled with bone-rattling hits along the boards and wine-inducing open-ice checks, but over the past few years the checking in NHL has become too predictable. With the new real-time physics engine, however, every hit will look and feel different. Developed internally with the help of the Fight Night team, the new engine gives realistic physical properties to the sticks, pucks, and players, bringing the game closer to what we see every night on the ice. Like Natural Motion's Euphoria technology, this procedural system generates animations on the fly, getting rid of the repetitive canned animations that plague so many sports games. Whether you're on open ice or along the boards, every collision looks unique – players

can catch the buckles along the benches, get their skates tied up, or even keep their balance if the checker only gets a small piece of him. Players rebound viciously from the glass after getting checked into the boards, and if you hit your victim hard enough he may drop his stick or suffer a gruesome injury.

The new deke system serves as the equalizer to the new checking system. In NHL 11, puck handlers have more inventive ways of beating defenders than ever before. The right analog stick is packed with new moves like the toe kick Pavel Bure made famous, bouncing the puck off your skate, and the Pavel Datsyuk technique of keeping square to the goal during a deke to preserve a shooting angle. If a defender's sliding on the ice in front of you, simply lift the puck over his outstretched body and jump over him in tandem. The new physics system also allows puck handlers to get off last minute shots in the midst of being checked, and superstars like Alexander Ovechkin can even shoot or pass while lying on the ice.

NHL 10 was frequently criticized for its lack

of goal scoring – even real-life sieves like Vesa Toskala played like Vezina trophy winners. To loosen up the netting and make goals more varied and realistic, EA Canada has tweaked the goalie angles. This makes it more evident where you

should be shooting; keeping your eyes on the goalie and picking the right spots increases your chances of putting the puck in the net.

To help the CPU keep up with all the blazing dekes, brutal checks, and the loosened goaltending, EA Canada has reworked the AI to boost its skill set. Players have more awareness to avoid vicious checks, and employ dekes more frequently to keep your defender off balance. Both the goalie and offside defenders do a better job of patrolling the crease and stopping those improbable cross-ice passes that gamers over-relied upon to score back door goals the past few years.

Other on-ice improvements include user-controlled celebrations, broken sticks, and a brand new face-off system that lets you shoot from the circle, kick the puck back to defensemen after tying up your opponent's stick, and flip your bottom hand to improve your chances of winning a face-off to your backhand side. With real puck physics in place, winning the face-off is no longer about jamming the analog stick before the opposing center – your stick must come in contact with the bouncing puck to gain possession. Swing too early and you could whiff on the puck. The various tactics at play gives each drop of the puck a paper, rock, scissors feel, breathing new life into a formerly stale system most players mastered long ago.

With the NHL 2K franchise on hiatus, EA's NHL series has no more on-ice competition. But if the new physics engine and the complementary game tweaks are successful, the ambitious development team will likely keep its place at the vanguard of sports gaming. » **Matt Bertz**

Read more about NHL Wii at gameinformer.com/mag

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

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

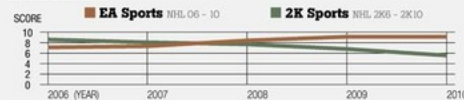
» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Canada

» **Release**
September 7

Trading Places

Over the past five years, the EA Sports and 2K Sports hockey franchises have skated in drastically different directions. Charting the Game Informer review scores, it's no wonder 2K Sports is taking the year off to reevaluate the future of its NHL franchise.





Lost in Shadow

A platformer that wants to change how you look at the genre

- » Platform
Wii
- » Style
1-Player Platform
- » Publisher
Hudson Soft
- » Developer
Hudson Soft
- » Release
September

At first glance, Hudson's *Lost In Shadow* resembles too if you took all the characters, turned them into shadows, and made it a 2D platformer. Despite the aesthetic similarities, you'll immediately notice gameplay mechanics you've never seen. *Lost In Shadow* challenges platforming veterans by forcing them to focus on the shadows behind objects rather than the 3D models themselves. The result is a novel title that challenges your sense of perception in a way never before seen in the genre.

When I first picked up the controller, it became

apparent that I'd have to totally change the way I looked at the game. Anyone that grew up during the 8- or 16-bit era is used to a straightforward approach to platforming, with clearly defined platforms and objectives. *Lost In Shadow* instead requires you to shift your gaze to the background, as your character exists only in shadows. Living in the shade changes the properties of many objects you see in the foreground. That unassuming fence you see in its physical form is a deadly series of spikes when its shadow is projected a certain way.

Objects in the real world can be interacted with by flipping shadow switches, but the majority of this interaction will be through the fairy-like "spangle" creature. When you point the Wii remote at the screen, this flying figure acts as your cursor. It can rotate bridges, flip switches, and even shift the location of light sources in an effort to move the shadows behind them. If you see a shadow platform that's well out of your jumping range, it may be a step away after sliding a lightbulb across the screen.

It's not just you and the shadows, though. Early in the game, you'll come across a sword that can be used to dispatch the red-eyed creatures that also inhabit the world. Killing them releases red and purple orbs that increase your shadow's "weight" (essentially your health meter) and provide you with experience points. Other enemies have blue eyes and can't be defeated with your weapon. Instead, you'll have to find ways to navigate around them or utilize the environment in an effort to do away with them.

Another enemy brings with him an entirely new level type. While most of *Lost In Shadow's* 50 stages let you platform and defeat monsters at your leisure, one stage in particular I saw — featuring a terrifying multi-limbed beast — had a more frenzied pace. Without any discernible face, this mass of limbs lumbers toward your character until you manipulate the environment to slow him down. There's no resting once he shows up, only a sprint for survival across gaps and around

death-dealing jigsaws and other hazards.

Outside of these tense areas of the game, the rest of the standard stages follow the same formula: collect three "key items" (rotating red icons that resemble an eye) to release the shadow barrier at the end of the level. You'll continue following this pattern as you ascend the many floors of the tower, with bonus stages known as "shadow corridors" interspersed throughout. These areas call on you to rotate your perspective with the d-pad when you approach special landmarks that resemble a double helix. Producer Shinichi Kasahara demonstrated this concept with a structure made of Lego blocks. When held in one direction, the shadow it cast on the wall resembled a jump that would be impossible to make. He then rotated it 90 degrees to reveal what appeared to be a staircase that could be easily climbed.

If the game consisted of only the shadow world, it would be a fairly standard affair. However, the interactions with the real world and change of perspective create a compelling new dynamic. With this intriguing gameplay mechanic and an art style that makes fantastic use of the Wii's limited hardware, *Lost In Shadow* could end up being a great sleeper hit for the system when it releases this fall. » Dan Ryckert





Lightcycles are thankfully off the grid

Tron: Evolution

Not an adaptation of, but a companion piece to, the film

By bridging the gap between 1982's *Tron* and the upcoming *Tron Legacy*, Disney-owned Propaganda Games is making a different kind of licensed tie-in to a big-budget movie release. *Tron: Evolution* forsakes the human stories of the digital world's programmers and their families for an adventure starring the programs themselves and their struggle against a rampaging virus called Abraxas.

Disney is holding back much of the game's story, but the basic premise is out there. *Tron: Evolution* takes place in 1989 – coincidentally the same year that Jeff Bridges' character, programmer Kevin Flynn, goes missing in the fiction leading up to *Tron Legacy's* millennial setting. Actress Olivia Wilde is lending her full likeness to the game in her role as helpful program Quorra,

implying that the character plays as pivotal a role as any human in the ongoing story. The mysterious Abraxas virus is slowly corrupting the entire digital realm, and the player is pulled into this war of extinction. The protagonist's identity is not known, but given the bare handful of humans that make their way into the programs' reality, we wouldn't be surprised to learn that players take on the role of an artificial construct themselves.

Gameplay is a blend of free running and melee and mid-range combat using the iconic disc against corrupted, malicious programs. Several games have attempted to fuse these disparate elements into a cohesive whole with varying degrees of success, so it'll be interesting to see how this one approaches the problem. Propaganda promises lightcycle

arenas as well, which also form the basis of the online multiplayer (though the developer is staying otherwise silent on online play). How much freedom players will have to explore the setting, and whether there is any degree of choice in how they combat the Abraxas threat, is unknown.

If nothing else, *Tron: Evolution* nails the universe's unique aesthetic perfectly. Questions remain about Propaganda's ability to deliver solid gameplay to back it up, but there's time yet before its November release to get things right. In any case, Disney's willingness to use a licensed game to enhance and explore the *Tron* fiction rather than retell the films' stories is a great sign for the future of film tie-ins.

» Adam Biessener

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

» Publisher
Disney Interactive
Studios

» Developer
Propaganda Games

» Release
November 1

The Lord of the Rings: War in the North

The quest for greater gear than Gandalf

Warner Bros. has been struggling to figure out ways to extend the value of its custodianship of its *Lord of the Rings* license since the film trilogy wrapped up back in 2003. Since then, EA's *Battle for Middle-earth* games and Turbine's *The Lord of the Rings Online* both did respectably well, but didn't live up to the success of the blockbuster films. Last year's *The Lord of the Rings: Conquest* (also from EA) continued the downward trend for LOTR-licensed products, disappointing critically and financially.

With the video game license now solely resting with Warner and the build-up to *The Hobbit's* release in full swing, the company is taking this

new adaptation in a hopefully more interesting direction. The secret weapon for making *War in the North* great? Developer Snowblind Studios, the team behind such addictive PS2-era action-RPGs as *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* and *Champions of Norrath*.

Like those classics, *War in the North* will focus heavily on the cycle of killing monsters, collecting piles of loot, and upgrading your gear. Up to three players will be able to team up in their insatiable quest for better equipment, with AI bots taking over for any open spots on the team.

As the title implies, *War in the North* will move away from the Fellowship-focused story of the *Lord of the Rings* books and films, allowing

Warner to flesh out other corners of Tolkien's rich universe. The overall art style of the game is inspired by the films, but Snowblind founder Ryan Geithman notes that the team "had a little more freedom to create something new" in areas that haven't been featured on screen before.

I'm not yet convinced that the straight-faced fantasy of the *Lord of the Rings* lends itself to the over-the-top variety of loot lust games that Snowblind is known for, but it's a unique change of pace for the franchise that should draw some interest. We'll be seeing more of *War in the North* at E3, so look for more information then. » Phil Kollar

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» Style
1 to 3-Player Action/RPG

» Publisher
Warner Bros. Interactive
Entertainment

» Developer
Snowblind Studios

» Release
2011





Some areas are platforming-intensive



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Is this the 3D Castlevania you've always wanted?

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1-Player Action/
Adventure
- » **Publisher**
Konami
- » **Developer**
MercurySteam/Kojima
Productions
- » **Release**
Winter 2010

It's no secret that Castlevania's reputation rests on the popularity of its 2D incarnations, as the series has stumbled when taking the step into the third dimension. Castlevania: Lords of Shadow producer David Cox wants to change this perception of the series by rebooting Castlevania in 3D and reminding gamers why it's such a legendary name in the industry.

"The first plan was actually to remake the original NES game," Cox reveals. The team at MercurySteam decided against that approach when they realized Super Castlevania IV tried that back on the SNES. Instead of taking a similar route, the team set its sights on putting together an all-new quest harkening back to the feel of the 8- and 16-bit classics. "We want to go back to that feeling of being a lone warrior facing off against tons of supernatural enemies with nothing but your whip," Cox remarks. "This is an action game through and through."

The gameplay flips back and forth between the three pillars of the action/adventure genre. "I want the gamer to have five minutes of combat, followed by five minutes of puzzle-solving, followed by five minutes of platforming," Cox explains. Some areas lean more heavily in one particular direction, like the Clock Tower (a homage to the recurring area in previous entries). In this lengthy platforming stage, Belmont perilously hops from spinning gear to spinning gear, avoiding electrified hazards in a sequence that requires a precise touch.

As is the standard with modern 3D action-adventure games, players collect experience orbs as they defeat enemies with their whip and secondary weapons. The orbs can then be spent on specific upgrades, resulting in a leveling system like those seen in God of War and Devil May Cry. The new magic system, based on light and shadow, is one way you can invest your accrued experience. When enemies are killed, they drop neutral orbs that can be sucked into either your Light or Shadow pool, then distributed toward the powers you desire. Your Light and Shadow orbs aren't based on any moral decisions, so you can pick and choose what ability you want to work

toward every time you collect orbs.

When it comes to storytelling, Lords of Shadow diverts from the Castlevania formula in a major way. Early in the game, Gabriel learns that a shady group of three men known as the Lords of Shadow are behind his wife's murder. These three each carry a piece of the God Mask, which supposedly holds the power to bring the dead to life. As you can expect, Gabriel will face off against all three in boss battles to obtain the mask and revive his lost love. Previous Castlevania plots boiled down to "Hey, let's go kill this Dracula dude." With a more in-depth story this time around, the series is getting the Hollywood voice-over treatment. Robert Carlyle voices your vampire-hunting protagonist, Patrick Stewart plays the swordsman Zobek, and *Californication's* Natasha McElhone provides the voice for Gabriel's wife, Marie.

It may borrow elements from series like God of War and Zelda, but the look and atmosphere of Lords of Shadow make it stand out from the pack. The human characters are made in the Castlevania mold, but the enemies look more vicious and aggressive than we've ever seen them. Ghouls are no longer shuffling whip fodder — they're quick and pose a real threat to the player. One especially disturbing foe is the Evil Butcher: a lumbering, deformed beast with slabs of meat hanging off hooks on his belt and a men-

acing cleaver. "We wanted to get away from the art style of the originals and make it a bit darker," Cox says. "The old games had this boyish depiction of vampires and monsters, and we wanted them to have a darker edge this time around."

Time will tell if Lords of Shadow's gameplay separates itself sufficiently from the rest of the 3D action pack, but the aesthetic is distinctly Castlevania. The music, character designs, and beautiful environments are looking fantastic. It doesn't hurt that Hideo Kojima is on board as a producer. We may finally get to see a 3D Castlevania game that does the series justice. » Dan Ryckert

Again and Again

Since Lords of Shadow doesn't follow the structure of 2D Castlevania titles, you won't find yourself in a massive non-linear area gated by various doors and obstacles. However, your quest won't always be a simple point A to point B affair. This franchise has always placed an emphasis on replayability, and Lords of Shadow boasts tons of hidden items and secret paths scattered throughout its 50 stages. Even better, any level in the game can be revisited — with no backtracking required.



The visuals are unmistakably Castlevania





Bodycount

Codemasters crafts a high impact successor to Black

Every bullet has a consequence. Whether a projectile inflicts a glorious headshot or aerates a wall, it always leaves a mark on the world. In too many video games, .50 cal machine guns feel like BB guns, rounds ricochet off glass, and bullet holes magically disappear. *Bodycount* is the gritty FPS aiming to put the power back in firepower.

Codemasters is working hard to create the ultimate shooter, one which delivers a typhoon of gunfire and devastation. "We don't do vehicles, massive terrains, jet packs, walking on walls, or controlling time," says creative director Stuart Black, who also helped develop 2006's *Black* for Criterion Games and EA. "We do you, with a gun, on the ground, kicking ass."

Ass-kicking receives variety by the different ways each weapon ravages the environment. If that hulking enemy wielding an anti-armor machine gun is blocking your exit, you can unload the clip of an SMG into a flimsy interior wall to create your escape. Manage to exit the derelict concrete building and you can punch through the dense exterior structure with your high-powered sniper rifle, taking out huge chunks from both the wall and the ogre's health. Every weapon in *Bodycount* has its own personality, and Black thinks of them each as much as a character as the leading man.

Speaking of, the lead protagonist of *Bodycount* is Jackson Delgado, a young everyman who has been coerced into killing for the enigmatic Network. Referred to as a John Doe, Delgado must hunt down specific marks belonging to a variety of factions. Citing espionage inspiration from *Mission Impossible* and *Alias*, Black calls *Bodycount* "a glossy, techno thriller for the 21st century."

One mechanic of the game that is decidedly 21st century is the cover system. *Bodycount* eschews the tired "whack-a-mole" cover system in favor of a deeper mechanic. *Bodycount* utilizes both analog sticks when in cover, one handles aiming while the other allows for precise movement behind your improvised sanctuary. I hope the cover system uses *Bodycount*'s rich destruction by allowing players to shove gun barrels through perforated barriers and fire from safety.

All these rich advancements in the FPS genre are only the tip of the iceberg. Co-op action, intense online deathmatches, upgradable skills, and a vast array of enemy types are all in the works. If you miss the days when guns took center stage in FPS games, be sure to keep a bead on *Bodycount*. » **Tim Turi**

If it's in the game, it will react to a bullet



» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter
2-Player Co-Op Online,
Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**
Codemasters
Codemasters

» **Release**
2011

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APB

Hands-on time with action-oriented MMO reveals much

Online Advantages

The heavily instanced nature of APB's world isn't solely a negative. Realtime Worlds has the ability to create alternate rulesets for different instances. The company plans to launch the "chaos" ruleset shortly after launch, where all players of the opposite faction are fair game all the time, with more to follow. Unlike WoW's PVE/PVP server divide, APB allows players to choose the ruleset they prefer at any time simply by switching instances. The developer can even add things like a pro ruleset with headshots (the base game has no location-based damage) later on.

- » Platform
PC
- » Style
Massively Multiplayer
Online Action
- » Publisher
Electronic Arts/
Realtime Worlds
- » Developer
Realtime Worlds
- » Release
July 29

Is it GTA Online? Is it World of Warcraft? Scottish developer Realtime Worlds has kept many of the details regarding APB's structure and gameplay under wraps since revealing its existence years ago. A recent hands-on session with the closed beta contains solid answers at last, which is a good thing – APB's much-delayed July 29 launch is nearly upon us. APB makes no bones about being an action game. Outside of its much talked-about unrivaled cosmetic customization, you'll find more RPG mechanics in Call of Duty than in this MMO. True,

you unlock new weapons and equipment as you gain reputation with various contacts and groups, but your functional options are limited to your choice of primary and secondary firearm, grenade type, and a few general equipment slots that offer abilities like ammo replenishment. There are no RPG-like rolls going on under the hood; you have no skill rating that modifies the amount of damage you do or your accuracy with a weapon.

APB's basic gameplay loop is simple. You spend most of your time in an instance of a large district of the city of San Pero, each of which supports 100 active players at a time. You can see other players going about their business, and in a full instance there is a lot of explosive action constantly happening all over the map. The catch is that you can't hurt other players unless you're opposing them in a mission. However, joining missions is the simplest, most intuitive match-making mechanic I've seen to date. Dispatches, bounties, calls for backup, and mission requests from NPCs continually scroll across the top of your screen, and a single keypress puts you into one. Markers on your HUD pointing to your objectives pop up, your allies' and enemies' names change color so they can be easily distinguished from uninvolved players, and off you go.

Most of the missions I saw are variations on traditional competitive shooter gametypes. Territory assault and defense, attackers trying to interact with a sequence of environmental objects, and good old-fashioned deathmatches are all present. The best mission I joined, however, was much more creative. A group of criminals in a vehicle were trying to escape from point A to point B, while the enforcer crew I joined up with tried to arrest (or, more likely, kill) them. To make things fair on the enforcers, the criminals are penalized every time they collide with anything at all on San Pero's crowded streets. This creates fantastic pressure on the criminals to drive as cleanly as possible while shooting back at the enforcers, and gives the enforcers a fighting chance to drop them before they reach their destination – it takes a lot of bullets to blow up a car, and it's nearly impossible to kill a driver with-

out taking out his ride.

Mechanically, the action works quite well. Large player health pools can be frustrating to chew through, especially with weak starter weapons, but the straightforward third-person shooting is tight and responsive. The built-in voice chat works well and makes coordinating with teammates simple. Blasting away at fools while hanging out the window of a moving car is a pure joy, particularly in gametypes built around it.

When the mission ends, you get cash and reputation rewards – significantly more for the winning team, though the losers get a non-trivial amount as well. Each is a path to advancing your collections of cosmetic additions as well as weapons, equipment, and cars. Higher-tier weapons are noticeably more powerful than the stuff you start with, which can lead to some frustration. Realtime Worlds expects it to be a minor issue, though, for two reasons. For one, the matchmaking system is quite happy to set up asymmetrical matches like three newbies against one advanced player, which can be a surprisingly even bout. Also, with a more diverse playerbase in the live game, the developers expect the instances to naturally stratify as hardcore types gravitate toward the instances where the competition is fiercest.

If APB can offer a sufficiently diverse set of missions and a reason for players to invest themselves in the game at launch, it's got a shot at being something special. I'm not completely sold on it just yet, as the action can get repetitive at times and there is no real endgame or PVE content, but I'm intrigued enough to keep tabs on it through the summer. Its flexible, lower price point (50 hours and unlimited free access to the social side of the game out of the box, then approximately \$10/month or \$7/20 hours of action gameplay) doesn't hurt, either.

» Adam Biessener



There's little functional difference between how you interact with mission objectives, but they run the gamut from breaking and entering to torching cars



APB's cosmetic customization goes beyond character creation to a Forza-like detail system that can create unique tattoos, clothing, and cars



God of War: Ghost of Sparta

Kratos and Ready at Dawn return to PSP

You may have thought that your time with the God of War series concluded after reducing the world to chaos in the third installment. Fans will be happy to know that although Kratos' vengeance is complete, his story is far from over. Ready at Dawn Studios, the developer behind Chains of Olympus, is taking up the blades again and bringing Kratos back to the PSP in an adventure set between God of War 1 and 2. We caught up with Ready at Dawn co-founder and creative director Ru Weerasuriya to chat about the studio's vision for God of War: Ghost of Sparta and how the title will contribute to the mythology of the franchise as a whole. » Joe Juba

Recently, Ready at Dawn has seemed eager to move away from PSP development to create home console titles. What drew you back?

Our mentality has always been to make great games regardless of the platform we are working on. When we shifted our focus, it was to familiarize ourselves with the different hardware out there so that we could gain some knowledge and maybe develop for them. When Ghost of Sparta was discussed, it wasn't so much the hardware that drew us back but the IP. We knew the world, we knew the character, and we knew we could improve on what we had already built. In all honesty, if we didn't think we could do a better job on a second title, we wouldn't have taken it on.

The beginning of God of War II seems to imply that little time passes between the first two games. How do you view that span...did years pass? Days? Decades? It's hard to pinpoint an amount of time, but it's definitely more than days. At the end of GoW 1, we leave Kratos on the throne as the new God of War. By the time GoW 2 comes out, Kratos has angered the Gods, adorned his god armor, and is ready to lead the Spartan army to war. Let's just say that events have taken place to enrage him to the point of taking on the Olympians, events that you'll be able to see and play in Ghost of Sparta.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for Ghost of Sparta to expand on Kratos as a character?

That's just it. Ghost of Sparta is all about Kratos' character. Although the other games touch on that very subject, both Chains of Olympus and Ghost of Sparta center around the man behind the god. There is a lot more to Kratos' past than we have seen thus far. The person he becomes by the end of GoW 3 is a culmination of the things he has endured throughout his life, and the different aspects that define him. We saw one important side of it in the first PSP game. The player will discover a lot more in the second.

What aspects of Chains of Olympus stand out as the areas you'd most like to improve in Ghost of Sparta?

There are so many things we wanted to improve on. From the graphics, to the depth of combat, to the navigation, we had our pick when it came to choosing the areas to modify. Fortunately, we've been able to somewhat rework every aspect of the game, sometimes by doing things we didn't have time to do in the first game and also by adding new things never seen before in the franchise.

God of War 3 made some modifications to the series' formula, like separating items from magic and changing the presentation on the context-sensitive events. Are you considering implementing any of those changes in Ghost of Sparta?

We didn't decide to follow any particular path when it came to Ghost of Sparta. It was more important that the way items and magic were handled worked well with the story. That said, there are definitely cool things that GoW 3 did with [context-sensitive] events, and it inspired us to explore ways to improve on the traditional GoW gameplay.

Chains of Olympus' scene with Kratos and Calliope in the Elysium Woods is a standout for the entire series. How do you approach includ-

ing more emotional scenes in a game generally about killing monsters, and can we expect more moments like that in Ghost of Sparta?

We see both games we've done here at RAD as more personal takes on Kratos' tormented life. Adding that moment with Calliope was always something that was going to stir debate, with some people being affected by it and others not caring one bit. But that was the challenge of trying to make people play their emotions rather than just see events being played in front of them. That's the same approach we took with Ghost of Sparta. The game harkens to the same goal of instilling emotion by gameplay. We'll just have to wait and see if those moments work.

For more info on Ghost of Sparta, read the full interview at gameinform.com/mag

- » Platform
PSP
- » Style
1-Player Action
- » Publisher
Sony Computer Entertainment
- » Developer
Ready At Dawn Studios
- » Release
Fall



Two Worlds II

Already better than the original



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

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

» **Publisher**
TopWare Interactive

» **Developer**
Reality Pump

» **Release**
September 14

The original *Two Worlds* won fans with its enormous open fantasy world and impressive customization. It lost as many if not more potential players with a brutally rough interface, questionable presentation, and serious bug and performance issues. TopWare recently showed off the Xbox 360 version of the sequel, and we came away impressed with its noticeably higher production values and intriguing designs.

Two Worlds II is in many ways an upgraded version of the original. The fiction has progressed, but most of its game systems are identical in concept. It's still a third-person open-world fantasy RPG, but the world is a much more interesting and engrossing place to explore. Casting spells is bound to a similarly open-ended, customizable framework, but there are more interesting effects to experiment with. It's releasing on multiple platforms again, but the console versions are being done in-house and will be more than bug-riddled afterthoughts this time.

You've heard all of this before, though. You've explored fantastic worlds, committed orc geno-

cide, and saved the realms from certain doom more times than you can count. The difference here is in scale. With the exception of *The Elder Scrolls*, nobody has attempted to deliver this kind of RPG sandbox. The comparison to Bethesda's beloved franchise is obvious, but the two series have very different focuses. The *Elder Scrolls* has traditionally gone for a deep dive on a single area and filled it with unmatched detail and history, and has never troubled itself much about balancing its progression systems or shaking up its combat paradigm. Reality Pump is spending its time honing and expanding its character development and combat systems, and delivering varied experiences via unique settings ranging from lush jungles to underground caves. It's a different vibe that appeals to a different gaming mindset, and this sequel looks like it should avoid the mountain of technical issues and lack of polish that plagued the original.

Progressing in *Two Worlds II* takes place along a few parallel paths. You've got your traditional points to assign to skills and attributes. Upgrading equipment is a game unto itself, and enough effort can make any given item end-

Building Your Village

Online is a big part of *Two Worlds II*. Duels and team-based arena PvP combat are a natural fit, and you can expect those. Additionally, there is a separate co-op campaign that takes place in discrete dungeon levels that range from two to approximately six-player affairs, and tells a prequel story to the single-player game. However, the final online facet (internally dubbed "village mode") is far more interesting.

Each player has his or her own town that serves as the setting for when they're hosting a village mode session. Here, you can help out your citizens by solving their problems and getting them access to better materials. For instance, doing quests and spending resources to kit out your blacksmith results in him offering better weapons for sale. Some events take you out of the village into the surrounding areas, like an incoming bandit raid that will have disastrous consequences if heroic types like yourself don't lead the counterattack.

The trick is that you're going to need help to accomplish much of anything in village mode—a single player isn't going to be able to complete the missions necessary to keep his own town prosperous. There is an incentive to visit others and help them out, though, as each town specializes in specific areas. You might have the best potions for sale, while your buddy has spent all of his time and energy on his armorsmith. Don't worry if your friends list is all playing *Alan Wake*, though. You can open up your town to the public, and the backend matchmaking system will find players of appropriate level and interest to assist you.

game-capable. Magic is tied to collecting cards and amulets, and the flexible system allows you to combine effects to the point of absurdity. A simple spell might summon an undead warrior to guard you or fire a bolt of ice at an enemy. Mixing the two lets you launch that ice bolt and spawn a skeleton at its impact point. It goes much further: we saw an incantation that fired six ricocheting projectiles that each exploded for area damage and animated a minion when they reached an enemy. Archery can be similarly customized, with arrows that stun their targets or split into multiple projectiles.

Squeamish gamers need not waste their time on *Two Worlds II*, as the fiction is dark even for a European-developed fantasy world. The world has been suffering under the boot of a brutal dictator for years, and Reality Pump is pulling no punches in depicting his atrocities. We saw one catacomb-like area under a bustling metropolis, except that instead of mere dead bodies in the walls, these natural caverns have chunks of mutilated corpses being carried along by a rushing river that in happier times supplied the city with fresh water. The developers are making no pretense that this is going to get anything less than a Mature rating from the ESRB.

The only thing holding *Two Worlds II* back is our lingering doubt about its technical competence, which was a huge issue with the original. Still, what we've seen so far has done everything in its power to dispel those fears. If the ambitious multiplayer modes (see sidebar) come together, Reality Pump could make a real name for itself on this one. — Adam Biessener

Check back at gameinformer.com for firsthand impressions in late June



Put enough upgrades in your favorite items and they'll be useful forever



Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part I

Upcoming action title tests wizardry and survival skills

In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the matured wizard must find and destroy magical Horcruxes that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named hides fragments of his soul in to preserve his immortality. The seventh and final book of the series tells the tale of Harry's most dangerous adventure yet, as he leaves the comfort of Hogwarts for the long-awaited confrontation with Lord Voldemort. Gamers will soon get a chance to experience part of this thrilling finale when EA brings out its interactive take on the story.

In EA's previous *Harry Potter* titles, players spent time in Hogwarts creating potions, playing Quidditch, and engaging in wizard duels. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part I* (the game will be broken up into two parts to coincide with

Warner Bros. Pictures' two-part film adaptation), players will experience an explosive single-player action title that will ultimately test your survival and wizardry skills.

Players will battle across a mixture of familiar open world and linear environments inhabited by Snatchers trying to earn bounty for Harry's capture, Dementors released from Azkaban prison, and dark magic-singing Death Eaters. While the last two *Harry Potter* games had a total of six Death Eaters to defeat, Part I will have hundreds. Mystical creatures such as dragons and giant spiders will also pose a threat, with more enemy types to be revealed closer to launch. In order to take down these terrifying foes, you'll be equipped with more spells than you can shake a wand at.

Deathly Hallows Part I will emphasize the use of magic with spells fans will recognize. *Confundo* has the ability to turn foes against each other, while *Protego* is a protective spell that casts a shield over the player during intense skirmishes. As far as the ability to use special items such as the famous invisibility cloak, EA tells us we'll have to wait and see.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part I aims to be a much darker, action-centric experience than any other game in the franchise. Potter fans will get a chance to experience Part I of the epic conclusion for themselves when it releases this fall. » **Annette Gonzalez**

For an interview with Jonathan Bunney, VP and head of production at EA Bright Light, check out gameinformer.com/mag

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC • Wii
Nintendo DS
- » Style
1-Player Action
- » Publisher
Electronic Arts
- » Developer
EA Bright Light
- » Release
Fall

The Sims 3

This has happened before, and it will happen again

The Sims is a successful franchise for a number of reasons, but EA's willingness to bring each entry to every imaginable platform ranks high on the list. After a year of letting PC and Mac users have *The Sims 3* to themselves, EA has decided it's time for console owners to join the party.

Like previous console iterations in the series, *The Sims 3* is not a direct port of its PC counterpart. Instead, it will give players more objective-oriented gameplay while allowing them to see

most of the key innovations from the original. Creating characters, fulfilling their wishes, and guiding them through a wide-open neighborhood are still key components of the experience.

On top of the familiar features, new karma powers will add another way for you to ruin or enhance your sim's life. These activated abilities add buffs (like instant beauty) and debuffs (like epic failure) to influence your interactions with your virtual surroundings. Apparently, you won't be able to use these powers without risk; EA

claims they may have unexpected results, and karma has a way of coming back to you.

Changes to the structure may be necessary to accommodate console gamers, but this iteration of *The Sims 3* still has the potential to translate the core elements of what makes *The Sims* so much fun. It may not deliver the exact same content as the original, but it's as close as you're going to get without a PC. » **Joe Juba**

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • Wii • DS
- » Style
1-Player Simulation
(Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher
Electronic Arts
- » Developer
The Sims Studio
- » Release
Fall



Exclusive to...

While each version is called *The Sims 3*, the different platforms will offer exclusive features designed to take advantage of the hardware. The PS3 and 360 entries will allow in-game sharing and downloading of custom content. On Wii, players can explore a beach town and engage in head-to-head multiplayer challenges. Finally, the DS will let you use your stylus to build structures and shape your sim's features.



NBA Elite 11

Another year, another direction for EA's forlorn hoops franchise

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » Style
1 to 4-Player Sports
(10-Player Online)
- » Publisher
EA Sports
- » Developer
EA Canada
- » Release
October 5

By taking a new approach to the basket each year and stumbling into the lane each time, NBA Live is dangerously close to fouling out as a franchise. Whether it was producing realistic sweat on player models, the Made Fresh Daily player tendencies that were supposed to make superstars act like their real-life counterparts, or the largely useless NBA Academy, the core gameplay has always taken a back seat to an easily marketable secondary feature. Basketball fans could see through the advertising smoke, and walked away from the franchise in droves hungry for a better hoops game. Determined to (yet again) give its NBA game a fresh perspective, EA Sports has rebranded the game Elite and turned the reins over to David Littman, the man responsible for turning the NHL franchise into a category lead-

ing innovator.

Littman, a former professional goaltender with no basketball background, admits his knowledge of the sport is only cursory. But as his success with NHL proves, he knows gameplay. When he started examining past iterations, he concluded that basketball gameplay has been stuck in a rut for decades. Too often player control is sacrificed for the sake of a pretty lay-up animation or a dice roll that determines whether a shot hits nothing but net or careens off the rim. His solution? Ditch the dedication to authentic television broadcast, return to a north-south camera perspective, and rebuild the game controls around the analog stick scheme that revitalized the NHL franchise.

Littman hopes the new control scheme increases NBA Elite's accessibility while at the same time offering the depth hardcore fans

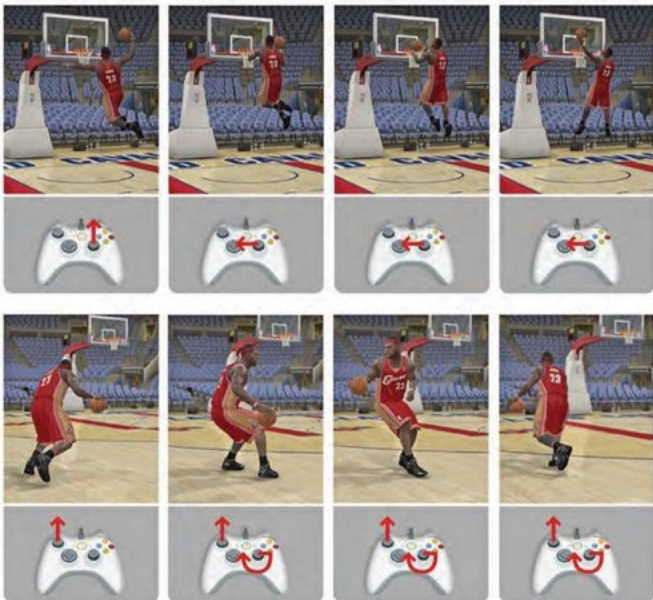
demand from sports games. Like NHL, the left stick controls your player movement, and the right stick controls your hands. When the ball is in your possession, flicking the right stick left or right results in a crossover, rolling the stick from left to right dribbles the ball behind your back, and pushing the stick forward hoists the ball toward the hoop.

Gone are the days where a behind-the-scenes math equation determines whether your shot finds the netting – player skill now determines whether or not your shot clangs off the iron or lights up the scoreboard. Depending on the timing of your release and how straight you push the right stick forward, your shot can miss to the right, left, short, or long. Release the shot a little late and you can even manually bank the ball off the backboard. When in the paint, pressing the analog stick up triggers a dunk, while rolling the stick upwards to the left or right activates a lay-up in the direction you press. The left trigger is used for jump steps and euro steps. To turn your back to the net for a post-up, simply tap the A button. The new animation system also lets you break out of your shot at any time to manually adjust your shot by changing hands during lay-ups.

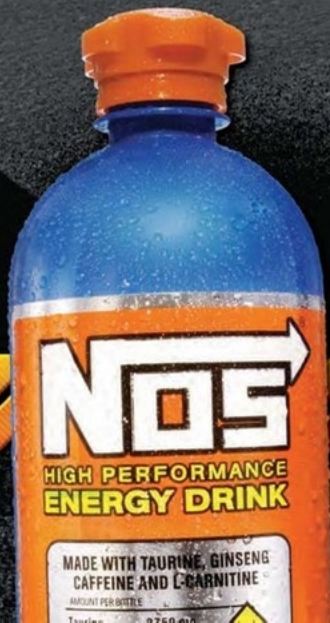
Defense is also radically changed by the new controls. Like NHL, the sprint button is gone, so you no longer need to time your bursts with that of the player you're guarding to keep him from driving the lane. Staying in front of your defender is much easier with the north-south perspective, and it also enables you to better spot opportune times to strip the ball. Pressing the right analog stick down activates a steal, and pressing up sends your player in the air for a block or rebound. To keep your hands in passing lanes, you can roll the stick left and right.

To complement the new controls and camera perspective, NBA Elite is taking a few more pages from the NHL playbook by integrating the Be A Pro mode and the EASBA, a five-versus-five online league.

Adopting another drastically different approach to its basketball franchise may seem like a bad move given NBA Live's slow but steady increase in quality, but in light of the series' abysmal sales EA has little to lose. If Littman and the development team can give the on-court action the fluidity of its NHL counterpart, however, it could breathe new life into a sports genre desperate for gameplay innovation. » Matt Bertz



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Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

The apprentice strikes back



» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
LucasArts

» **Developer**
LucasArts

» **Release**
October 26

On some level, we all knew that the original Force Unleashed wouldn't have a happy ending. Starkiller (also known as the secret apprentice) never had a chance at killing Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine. Even though he didn't save the galaxy, Starkiller did manage to start the Rebellion before getting a fatal dose of Force lightning. Sacrificing himself for the good of the Alliance, he died in the Emperor's chamber on the first Death Star.

You may think that Starkiller's demise would make it difficult for him to play a significant role in *The Force Unleashed II*. "That left us with kind of a big challenge," admits executive producer Haden Blackman. "We explored a lot of possible directions, but ultimately felt really strongly about bringing back Starkiller as a character." The team's solution to resurrecting a dead character is revealed in the opening moments

of the sequel.

After the signature text crawl, Darth Vader's TIE fighter descends on the planet Kamino, where the clones for the imperial army are manufactured. Approximately six months have passed since the events of the first game, and Vader has a new pet project in the works in a secret cell of the cloning facility: another Starkiller. According to Vader, the Jedi is just a clone of the original, but the story casts doubt on that assertion early on. After turning on Vader and breaking out of the facility, Starkiller attempts to figure out who he is while tracking down Juno Eclipse and running from the Empire's agents.

Whether Starkiller is a clone or not, his abilities certainly aren't the same as the last time around. In addition to dual-wielding lightsabers, he has access to an improved array of Force powers. This means you'll see new powers, like Mind

Trick – an ability that turns enemies against each other and may even trigger suicidal tendencies. However, you'll also see improvements to classic abilities, with a greater focus on differentiating the effects each time you invest in a new tier of the power. "What you buy matters," says project lead Julio Torres. "It significantly matters."

You'll have plenty of opportunities to put Starkiller's new powers to the test as you hunt for Juno in a variety of new environments. From derelict vessels to the Las Vegas-like trappings of planet Cato Neimoidia, you'll see even more of the Star Wars universe, but the changes in scenery won't fundamentally change the way you play *The Force Unleashed II*. It's still all about wrecking everything with the Force, and that's fun no matter what galaxy you're in. » Joe Juba





Bridge: You're doing it wrong



AT-STs return, but you'll use new tactics to take them down



Notice the pieces of Stormtrooper armor flying off

Then and Now

The Force Unleashed was a huge success, selling over 7 million copies worldwide. However, the members of the development team at LucasArts realize that they can't just coast on previous triumphs for *The Force Unleashed II*. We talked to executive producer Haden Blackman about the areas from the original *Force Unleashed* undergoing tweaks and improvements for the sequel.

On Light vs. Dark

"The notion of split endings is something that we're really fans of. We can't reveal anything about the ending or endings of *TFU II* yet, but we feel that the struggle between light and dark is important, and that's one of the ways we've conveyed it in the past."

On Pacing

"One of things we learned from *TFU I* was just better pacing. *TFU I* was just combat, combat, combat. Here, we've certainly got a ton of combat, but we also have some areas of exploration, more puzzles, and I think the pacing feels much better and more even."

On Surprises

"We can't talk too much about anything, really, except to say that we have a couple not-so-little surprises I think fans are going to be totally psyched about."

On Enemies

"A lot of work is going into enemy design, too. In *TFU I*, because we went to so many locations, we had about 100 different enemy types, so they weren't differentiated as well as they could have been. With this game, we're focusing on much more defined enemy types."

On Star Destroyers

"Honestly, the issue with the Star Destroyer fight [in *TFU I*] was actually a bug. The sticks were telling you the wrong direction. That's another thing we're focused on with *TFU 2*, working on a defined polish for the game."

On Technology

"We have some new Euphoria behaviors and Digital Molecular Matter material types that we didn't have in *TFU I*, so that's been really fun. The best thing about it, though, is that we could have made no changes to it and it still would have gotten better, because the team knows how to use it."

On Leveling

"There's one currency now, and you use that to rank up whatever you want, rather than splitting them into talents, powers, and combos. One of the other big changes is that we completely ripped out our UI solution and replaced it, so we could get rid of the loading screen and have it be a more accessible experience."

Tetsuya Nomura has his hands in almost every big project at Square Enix, including the mysterious Final Fantasy Versus XIII, but the Kingdom Hearts series will always be his baby. We spoke with Nomura to get the run down on Birth by Sleep and try to figure out what he's bringing to E3 in June. *interview by Bryan Vore*

Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep

» Platform
PSP

» Style
1-Player Action/RPG
(6-Player Local)

» Publisher
Square Enix

» Developer
Square Enix

» Release
September 7



The North American versions of Kingdom Hearts games have traditionally included several extras. What kind of bonuses can we expect?

There are a variety of new elements, including Critical mode, which takes the difficulty level beyond Proud mode; keyblades, abilities, mini-game maps, and songs. We're also unleashing a mystery enemy for North American fans, so hopefully everyone will enjoy the challenge.

How did you decide which Disney worlds would be in Birth by Sleep?

The process of choosing worlds has been the same with every entry. First, we select the worlds that are essential based on the scenario; in this title's case, the three princess' worlds. Then, to add some variety to the locations we decided to include Deep Space (Lilo & Stitch) and Neverland (Peter Pan). Since Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep takes place before the rest of the games in the series, we decided to include Olympus Coliseum (Hercules) to show the contrast between past and present. We were able to incorporate more locations because of the hardware's capacity, and also because this title carries the same weight as a numbered Kingdom Hearts title.

How did you decide to set Birth by Sleep before all of the other Kingdom Hearts games?

We set it before the other games to resolve the mysteries that have been scattered thus far, and to clarify what mysteries lie ahead in the series. I hope everyone gets to see the secret ending!

What can you tell us about the new enemy, the Unversed?

Heartless are realizations of darkness in the heart, while Unversed are an existence borne of negative emotion. They're similar in essence, but more information on their true identity will be revealed in due time by a certain individual.

How did you decide on featuring three playable heroes in Birth by Sleep with different quests rather than a single protagonist like Sora or Roxas?

Everything is part of one big story, and there is only one final destination. Fans of the series who already know what happens beyond Birth by Sleep may be able to predict where the three are headed. I thought that by separating the story into three perspectives, and having the player choose the order of progression would deepen the mystery, making the journey all the more interesting. Even if you complete one character's story, you'll become even more curious as to what happens to the other two, and eager to see how everything comes to a close for the three.

Can you explain some of the new combat elements?

The main concept for this battle system was to incorporate speed and tension in combat. There are three new systems that comprise the core of the game's battle system, and the Command Deck is definitely a key component. Each command has a level assigned to it, and there are several ways to develop them. There is also a charge time for each command, and timing is a crucial factor to using them successfully. You can freely adjust the command column, creating a setup that reflects your personal strategy and battle style.

The Shotlock command is an evolution of the target lock-on, which was one of the few con-

starts throughout the series. You can use it to wipe out multiple enemies at once, or as a special one-shot attack against powerful enemies.

Dimension Link (D-Link) was a concept we took from the scenario and built into the system. It's an extension of the summoning system, and allows you to access other characters' deck commands and special attacks by connecting with them.

What was the inspiration behind the new Command Board?

I personally love board games, and this was a concept I had been working on for years as something I wanted to construct as a system one day. It's not a concept I thought of just for this game, but I think we were able to link it very well with the current command leveling system. It's not just a minigame, but an alternate game whose results affect the main game as well.

What did you want to accomplish with the multiplayer gameplay in Birth by Sleep compared to 358/2 Days?

In Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days, you could venture to different worlds to accomplish missions, but this time around players can gather in a world called the Mirage Arena to defeat target enemies. Up to three players can play co-op or against each other three-on-three. There are also minigame battles that are new to the series: Command Board and Rumble Racing. We utilized the hardware's wireless capabilities and capacity to the fullest to offer minigames that people can jump right in and out of. This way, players can enjoy the variety of battles and worlds that the game has to offer.

Translations of your interview in Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep Ultimania seem to confirm that Kingdom Hearts III is coming along with two other games.

Kingdom Hearts III is not a confirmed title. I actually phrased my answer for the Ultimania "two titles other than III" to avoid speculation that we were working on Kingdom Hearts III.

Are there any hints you can provide about these new games?

Hints would give away too much, and for Kingdom Hearts we're contractually obligated to keep any information that has not been officially released under wraps. However, I can say one of the two projects mentioned above came into existence because we wanted to do something for the North American fans, so we'll be announcing it at E3.

Any chance these new games will spread to consoles that Kingdom Hearts hasn't been on yet like Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, or iPhone?

We have no plans at the moment, but have been discussing opportunities with various parties, so once we've completed the two new projects we'll begin thinking about the next steps.

Final Fantasy Versus XIII is your current primary project. How is it coming along?

Development is progressing smoothly, but starting with E3 and through winter, there are a number of titles I am involved in that will be announced. And of course, the company as a whole has many upcoming projects, so we'll take it one step at a time. We do have plans to officially showcase the title at a certain point.



"Starting with E3...there are a number of titles I am involved in that will be announced."

- Tetsuya Nomura



2ND

4TH

1ST

5TH

6TH

2,100

WHEELIE

gameinformer
★ GAME OF THE MONTH

94 Joe Danger

Joe is a grizzled stuntman who is ready to go out with a bang, and not a whimper. He's got nothing to lose in his race back to the top, and his ridiculous bike flips and tricks are the proof. Mix races, obstacle courses, platforming, and score combos in one tightly wound package, and you'll know what to expect out of this arcadey new downloadable title from Hello Games. Turn to page 94 to check out our full review.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	The dark side of E3: 7:00 AM press conferences, utilikit, and teleprompted banter.

AWARDS

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



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Alpha Protocol

A spy tale where everything is less than it seems

6.5

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Here's a riddle. What do you call the guy who graduated last in his class at spy school? Michael Thorton!

» Graphics

When all of the textures are present on the characters and terrain, the game looks decent. This doesn't happen often

» Sound

Some decent voice acting, but the worst performance is the most important, since it's your main character

» Playability

Technical issues abound, which often makes the controls feel stilted and awkward

» Entertainment

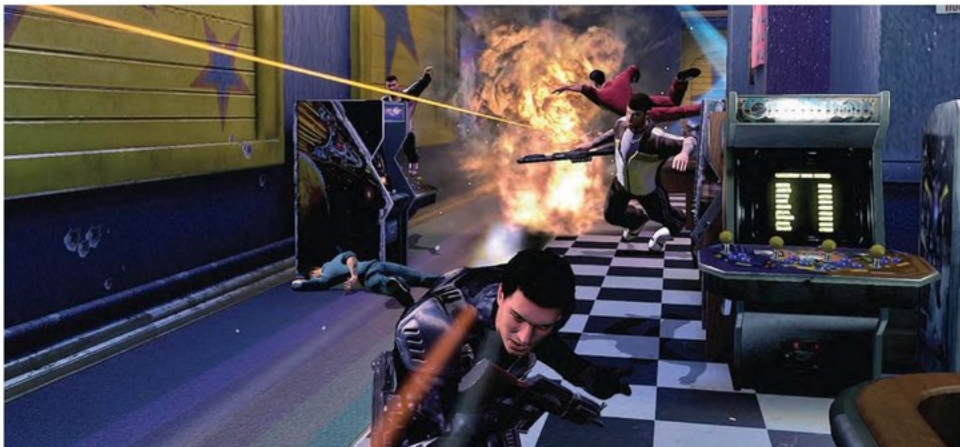
Cool weapon customization, leveling, and skill selection mean that you'll have most of your fun in the menus

» Replay Value

Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

Lacking the suave demeanor of James Bond or the terrifying persona of Jack Bauer, agent Michael Thorton is a painfully ordinary man caught in an extraordinary situation. Thorton's vanilla personality is an allegory for how underdeveloped the rest of the game is. The abominable AI is Obsidian's most glaring oversight, but missing textures, a half-baked cover mechanic, and a maddeningly restrictive character movement also are noteworthy failures. The game provides occasional moments that make you feel like a true secret agent, but they come few and far between. I did enjoy allocating experience to personalize Thorton's evolution, as well as the various tech-centric minigames. Sneaking dirty cash so not to leave a paper trail back to the agency, purchasing dossiers or ancillary intel to unlock bonus objectives, and customizing my arsenal were also highlights. Ultimately, however, Alpha Protocol is a game riddled with missed potential. Just like Agent Thorton, Alpha Protocol performs much better on paper than out in the field. » **Meagan VanBurkleo**



Style 1-Player Shooter/RPG Publisher Sega Developer Obsidian Entertainment Release June 1 ESRB M

During the course of a single mission, Michael Thorton is betrayed by his country, framed by his superiors, and cut off from his support. This pivotal moment in the story is clearly where things go wrong for the super-spy hero, but I wish it were as easy to pinpoint exactly where Alpha Protocol falls apart as a gaming experience. The espionage-themed hybrid of third-person action and RPG leveling is a baffling cocktail of outdated design and technical problems, with only a handful of bright spots illuminating how good the game could have been.

The best spy stories have magnetic, capable protagonists you love to cheer for—just look at genre icons like James Bond and Jason Bourne. Michael Thorton is an unlikable idiot by contrast. Maybe it's the fact that his personality is a collection of rote secret agent clichés, or the way these situations elicit no reaction from him beyond dull resignation. Whatever the reason, I never warmed up to Thorton or thought he was cool, and I got more entertainment watching his failure than I did his success. Super spies should inspire

excitement in an audience, not schadenfreude.

You could argue that Thorton's lack of charisma was partly my fault, since Alpha Protocol's dialogue system lets you steer conversations based on how you view the character. However, I refuse to accept any blame for his wooden performance. You aren't given nearly enough opportunities to interact in a non-combat situation, and when you are, your replies are usually simply labeled "suave," "aggressive," and "professional," so you never encounter responses that tempt you to deviate from a certain attitude. The conversations may seem similar to Mass Effect's on first glance, but where that title keeps players engaged with constant choices, Alpha Protocol doesn't put the system (and, by association, the characters) at the forefront.

The wedge between the player and the events makes it impossible to care about the generic "shady defense contractor out for profit" plot, and the gameplay does nothing to salvage your interest. Whether you choose to be a stealthy spy or a guns-blazing soldier, the mechanics are archaic and unaccommodating. You can't vault

over cover, you can't block melee strikes (bad guys can, though!), and the enemy AI makes the dumbest James Bond minions look like rocket scientists. The bosses, on the other hand, are on the opposite end of the chump spectrum. Don't misunderstand me—they aren't smart. They're aggravating and poorly designed. One left me speechless, since I couldn't think of profanity foul enough to express my frustration. Throw in a lot of loading (sometimes mid-firefight), pervasive texture-popping, and a preponderance of dumb minigames, and you have a lack of polish that puts a nearly impenetrable wall up in front of your enjoyment.

Alpha Protocol's jumbled mess of mechanics is tragic, because some aspects are genuinely well done. Thorton's progression is handled excellently, allowing plenty of flexibility to tailor his skills to your style. The abilities you unlock as you level—like invisibility and auto-targeting—are satisfying rewards for your investment. I was also immensely impressed by how the narrative naturally conforms around your choices. Events flow seamlessly regardless of when you complete a mission, your chosen allies, and who lives and dies. Characters often reference your previous actions and allegiances, which is pretty remarkable considering all of the factors on the table. This adaptability would add to the replay value—if the other facets of the experience were good enough to warrant completing the game once.

With a history including games like Knights of the Old Republic II and Neverwinter Nights 2, the team at Obsidian Entertainment knows role-playing. Alpha Protocol isn't necessarily a counter-point to that expertise; the RPG systems under the hood are solid. I just wish that I could experience them in the context of a compelling espionage adventure, not a last-gen third-person shooter. » **Joe Juba**





8

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Guide the Prince through perilous traps, daring jumps, and dozens of enemies to save his brother's kingdom

» **Graphics**
Manages to match the art style of the original Sands of Time trilogy while updating it to a new generation of hardware

» **Sound**
The expected mix of Middle Eastern-flavored music is good without being a standout element

» **Playability**
A steady challenge curve introduces more difficult combat and platforming over time

» **Entertainment**
Repeats a strong (and old) design formula, but adds flavor with new powers

» **Replay Value**
Moderately Low

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

The old Prince returns in a new variation

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Ubisoft Developer Ubisoft Montreal Release May 18 ESRB T

The Forgotten Sands is not a movie game, but it does come out right before a movie from the same property, stars a variation of the same character, and shares a number of visual traits. So if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck.... No matter how you bill it, this will be the game to represent the franchise to a wealth of fans that will be encountering the character for the first time in video games after they see the big Hollywood treatment. So how does it hold up?

The Forgotten Sands does a fantastic job of emulating the formula first established in the original Sands of Time. Set in the months after the Prince's first encounters with Farah, the Vizier, and the Dagger of Time, the Prince finds himself leaping and fighting his way through a new sand-based disaster in his brother Malak's kingdom. From spinning blade traps to running along walls, all the familiar elements are in place that established the franchise as the last console generation's king of platforming. The thrill of nailing a complex path is still there, diminished only marginally by the passage of time.

Several new features join the experience to mixed results. The new powers are a blast, adding layers to the gameplay by allowing

the Prince to solidify water, dash into enemies from afar, and recall ruined structures to their former glory. Together, these mechanics add depth that keeps the older design concept feeling fresh. Combining powers in a single platforming challenge is great fun. My favorite moment in the game had me jumping through a waterfall only to turn around and use that same waterfall as a solid wall to climb. The Prince's path is linear almost without exception, but that path is so entertaining that I didn't mind the lack of freedom.

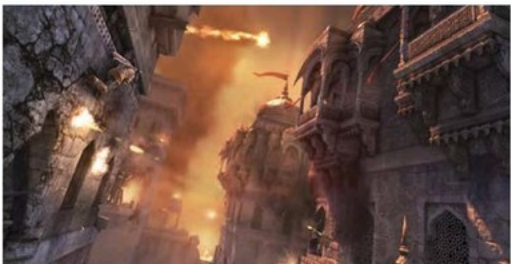
The same can't be said for the combat system, which has several cool ideas that never coalesce into something as challenging or dangerous as it could be. There are dozens of enemies

onscreen, but they all are helplessly slow automatons with no intelligence. The Prince has an impressive suite of moves, but all of his motions seem too slow for such an agile character. The result is a combat system that feels plodding at its worst, and visually exciting but simplistic at its best. An enjoyable progression system, including some fun elemental powers, goes a long way to enrich the combat; seeing the fruits of your XP collection pay off in a powerful sword swing or a surging blast of ice is thrilling. It's still not enough to keep the combat fresh throughout the lengthy story.

The storyline, falling as it does in the middle of an established trilogy's plot, feels like exactly what it is: a retrofit to a previously tight narrative.

The story is also a little too similar to the one told in the original Sands of Time. That said, the tale of corruption and the dangers of seeking power works just fine to move along the gameplay. If Malak's kingdom looks and feels an awful lot like settings from previous games in the franchise, I'm willing to overlook the fact to enjoy some of the great exploration that made me fall in love with the series years ago.

The Forgotten Sands is a conceptual step back for the franchise, but for once that's not a terrible thing. The Sands of Time trilogy was hugely entertaining, and this return to that formula puts a great face on the franchise to new series converts while pleasing old fans with a return to form. Like the exciting finale sequence that ends the game, it's clear that the Prince formula still has some surprises in store. Now all that remains to be seen is what direction Ubisoft will take the franchise from here on out. » **Matt Miller**



New powers innovate on the familiar traversal mechanics



Second Opinion 7.5

The Forgotten Sands is a slick, edge-of-your-seat adventure. It's not as mesmerizing as the Prince's previous engagements, but it brims with the same excellent acrobatic action. As the Prince scurries along walls and leaps from pillar to pillar, Ubisoft throws the player a curveball in the form of water-based platforming segments that warp the mind in the same way as the "pat your head while rubbing your stomach" challenge. These sequences steal the show and make the Prince's other miraculous feats seem as insignificant as someone jumping over a fire hydrant. For the second game running, the Prince is a sloppy combatant. The massive battle structure is more entertaining than the last game's disastrous one-on-one fights, but they don't deliver a satisfying wallop, or the assurance that the Prince will react accordingly with your actions. Saying this game offers a narrative is a bit of a stretch, as the entire story arc is "evil awakens... evil is defeated." And that works fine for this game. The focus rightfully stays on Prince and his expertise in navigating large, oddly designed palaces. » **Andrew Reiner**

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11

Tiger's small changes can make a big difference

8.75

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Many of this year's changes seem to be designed around slowing down some of the ultra-powerful golfers players have created in the past

» Graphics

The graphics have a noticeable crispness over last year, and golfers' clothes now wave in the real-time wind

» Sound

It's kind of cool that you'll get real-time updates to what other golfers are doing on the course during a tourney, complete with text and audio callouts

» Playability

The new True-Aim view makes the game harder by giving you fewer tools to access

» Entertainment

Apart from 24-player online matches, there aren't a lot of sexy new features. However, the additions are necessary and should provide a good foundation

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (24-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release June 8 ESRB E

Some gamers have gotten so used to the way that the Tiger Woods franchise plays that they've been gaming the system and taking advantage of exploits. This year developer EA Tiburon is trying to address some of that – which doesn't sound like an exciting focus for the new title, but the beauty of the changes taking place is that they benefit players of all stripes.

I've always been a fan of Tiger's old single-player career progression: Completing challenges, drills, and tourneys gave you stat boosts in specific areas depending on how well you did. I liked it because it felt like there was a lot of content, and I knew where to go if I needed to

get more distance on my tee shots, for instance. Now, the handcuffs are off. Everything you do in Tiger 11 gives you XP points that you can spend however you want – including on the normal selection of stat-boosting clothes. Using this open-ended points system, you could conceivably concentrate every XP point you have and channel it into your Power attribute right away, and you wouldn't have to grind to quite the same degree as before to do it. Although last year's drills are gone, with the inclusion of the Ryder Cup and the return of the standard pro-based skill challenges, it's not like there isn't enough to do. If anything, you can get on to playing PGA events a little sooner, which is nice.

The game also introduces some slight unpredictability in your shots via real-time wind that can rise up or die during your shot, and more variance regarding where your ball lands and how you come out of the rough. I know no golfer or gamer likes to hear about unpredictability, but if you knew of a way to get your ball to land in the exact same place every time – which is what some Tiger experts have been able to do in the past – it wouldn't be golf. I

certainly don't put myself in the expert category, but I didn't notice a huge drop-off in my game from last year, so I'm not complaining about the new changes. If anything, it's another element that makes the game slightly more realistic while still being fun.

Similarly, the True-Aim camera system – which only lets you see what your golfer would see (i.e. no circles showing you where the ball may land, etc.) – makes things more difficult, but I didn't get into it that much simply because unlike the Wii version (see our review on page 95) where the camera actually tracks your head looking down at the ball before you hit it, True-Aim isn't that fun to look at. I was also wishy-washy on the Focus meter. It gives you a pool of points to spend on spinning your ball, accuracy and power boost, and Putt Previews. You recharge your meter as you play, so you won't run out of it unless you rely on it all the time, but as a concept it seems a little strange. I can understand how it makes you pick and choose when to use it, but as a golfer, aren't I always trying to focus and hit the ball perfectly?

I think a lot of players won't notice too many of this year's more subtle new additions, but will instead help themselves to the 24-player online (where you can construct your own Ryder Cup-like competitions), GamerNet challenges, online tournaments, and five new courses. That's fine, but the smaller improvements made to this year's game offer players more freedom and customizability. Hopefully they'll stick around and be a part of the franchise's future. » **Matthew Kato**



In online multiplayer, you can see the real-time ball trajectories of your buddies' shots



Nier

Square Enix embarks on an adventure to nowhere

Style 1-Player Action/RPG Publisher Square Enix Developer Cavia Release April 27 ESRB M

The primary thrill in action/RPGs is gaining enough power to do things you couldn't do before. Whether you're accruing items that open up sealed locations or gaining new combat abilities, you should feel progressively more awesome the more time you spend playing. This is where Nier stumbles the most; it conveys no sense of growth. You hit the same buttons at both the beginning and end of the game, and magic attacks become more useless with each iteration. Technically, numbers on a menu screen prove that your stats are increasing, and that one weapon is better than another, but I couldn't feel any difference.

Nier's combat mechanics may be dry, but they still function within the game's limited ambitions. Attacking, dodging projectiles, and spell casting are easy to accomplish, enabling you to mindlessly mow through most encounters. Given the low level of challenge, it's surprising

that you eventually gain two party members to assist you in combat. Don't worry about them stealing your kills, though; they're idiots, only able to follow three basic commands buried in the menu system.

While the gameplay landscape is sparse, Nier's post-apocalyptic world has plenty to offer. A thousand years after the human population is effectively wiped out, the remaining people are living a simple medieval existence, with former technological and architectural marvels standing as inert and overgrown monuments in the wild. Developer Cavia has wrapped a good story around this setting, using your main character's quest to keep his disease-stricken daughter alive as a vehicle to deliver a few surprising twists that leave you with a sense of the ruined world's bleakness and desolation. While it goes off the rails a little towards the end, the tale is ultimately a satisfying one.

Unfortunately, you can't just move through the plot quickly to get to the good stuff. Dozens of sidequests and upgradeable weapons are your most likely distractions, but they involve lots of backtracking and hours of grinding for rare materials. Even if you skip these diversions, you'll still spend a ridiculous amount of time fighting familiar foes, running through the same handful of vast and boring areas, and revisiting dungeons you've already beaten. This level of repetition effectively kills the narrative momentum, bringing down the one thing Nier does well. With so many genuinely good action/RPGs that aren't riddled with archaic missions and gameplay, I have trouble recommending Nier solely on the basis of a decent (but unevenly executed) story. » Joe Juba

Visit gameinformer.com/mag for our full review

6.5

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
An open world action/RPG set in a cool universe, but without the gameplay chops to back it up

» **Graphics**
Terrible textures, generic enemies, and ugly characters don't leave me with much good to say on this front

» **Sound**
A surprising high point of the experience. The music is exceptionally cool, and sets the post-apocalyptic mood well

» **Playability**
The lack of quick-swap buttons makes it a chore to switch weapons and magic, but otherwise the controls work as intended

» **Entertainment**
Lots of repetition and a lack of mission variety put a damper on the storytelling

» **Replay Value**
Moderately Low

UFC Undisputed 2010

8.25

This fighter stays in shape, but is it pushing itself hard enough?

PS3 • 360

Style 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) Publisher THQ Developer Yuke's Release May 25 ESRB T

» **Concept**
Tweak the superb fighting system found in UFC Undisputed 2009 and call it good

» **Graphics**
Yuke's character models are still some of the best, and the animation system makes each fight look almost like the real thing

» **Sound**
Commentators Joe Rogan and Mike Goldberg have a more varied script this year

» **Playability**
A new freeform system will keep you exploring the nuance of each combatants' fighting style for a long while; it's a good thing you'll be having fun while you do it

» **Entertainment**
UFC fans will eat this up, but is an entertaining fighting system enough to win over new followers? Probably not

» **Replay Value**
High

How does a fighter who is on top stay in shape when he knows no one can beat him? Without competition, it becomes a mental battle just to stay in fighting form. I feel like the UFC Undisputed series must be wrestling with this mentality. Sure, EA has its own MMA title coming down the pipe, but it's still an unknown quantity at this point. In the meantime, THQ's fighter remains king of the mixed martial arts jungle, but it feels a bit like a lazy lion.

Like THQ's other wrestling title, it's hard to know where to start with Undisputed. There are so many modes to explore that Undisputed 2010 will easily keep UFC fans occupied all year. Ultimate Fights mode is probably my favorite, as it lets players reenact famous fights from UFC history, complete with Pay-Per-View interviews and achievement-style challenges that will drive you to keep playing matches over and over until you unlock every reward. You can even set up your own cards, so you can finally fulfill those dream match-ups you've

fantasized about for years.

Of course, the career mode is still here for those who want to mold a fighter from scratch. Starting from the bottom is still a long, hard grind, and you'll have to plow through several dozen fights before your fighter has enough experience to feel like he's worth his weight in protein powder. I like that I'm no longer locked into any particular fighting discipline and can freely choose moves from multiple schools, but the career story still isn't very compelling, so you have to love this kind of menu-driven stat boosting if you're going to sink your teeth into the career.

Still, the in-ring action is what matters the

most, and Undisputed 2010 tightens what was already a solid brawler. The new combo system — or lack thereof, since there are no pre-determined combo strings — means you have to experiment to find out what punches and kicks work best together and how far you can push your fighter before he becomes fatigued. This makes the action feel more natural, bringing each bout that much closer to the real thing. It's probably the closest a game has ever come to making you feel like you are actually practicing a martial art, just without the sweating.

While it may sound like Undisputed has a lot going for it this year, none of the additions add up to much. This doesn't feel vastly different from last year's model, which is my biggest complaint. If you're a UFC fan and you didn't pick up Undisputed 2009, this is definitely a superior product. But if you still have your copy of '09 you probably won't find enough fresh meat on these bones to satisfy you » Ben Reeves

For more screens and to check out our live blog of our time with career mode, check out gameinformer.com/mag



Blur

Another victory lap for developer Bizarre Creations

8.5

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Blur takes Mario Kart's power-up template and blows past it with ease

» Graphics

The game runs fast and smooth, and the effects that accompany the power-ups can dazzle

» Sound

Opponents' Shunt blasts make a warning sound before they race up your tail pipe

» Playability

Toggleing through your three power-up slots and deploying or dropping them is easy even at fast speeds

» Entertainment

Even an avowed pacifist would enjoy sending power-up after power-up at their opponents

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Style 1 to 4-Player Racing (20-Player Online) Publisher Activision Developer Bizarre Creations Release May 25 ESRB E10+

Blur developer Bizarre Creations has a history of thinking outside the racing box. The Project Gotham creators made a name for themselves with that series' Kudos system. It asked players to think about the race within the race – driving stylishly and on the edge was just as important as crossing the finish line in first. That same spirit is found in Blur, although this time winning the internal battles by abusing other racers at every turn is synonymous with coming in first place.

Blur is a game built on versatility. Power-ups aren't simply offensive or defensive; they are tools you can use in different ways depending on the situation. A Barge blast is always handy to disrupt any cars in your immediate vicinity, but it can also be deployed as a momentary shield. Likewise, most power-ups come with an

alternate fire option. For instance, your garden-variety Nitro boost can alternately be used to slow you down – useful for those really tight corners.

There are many ways to play Blur apart from how you use your power-ups. Earning fans (which is how you level up and unlock cars) is easy, and even when you're not getting them for doing stuff you'd normally do – like ramming someone with a Nitro boost while you're in mid-air – the game gives you plenty of opportunities. There are always mid-race challenges that garner fans for doing things like hitting someone with a Bolt missile while you're drifting or passing through a dozen checkpoint gates.

Unlike Mario Kart, Blur doesn't embrace randomness or engineer worst-to-first finishes. Power-ups are in the same position each lap and are never randomized, so you can plan ahead for when you can grab that Shield or lightning blast. You can also see what everyone's carrying, so you know when to make your move against a weak opponent or respect their strength. Finally, Blur lets you manage three power-up slots and drop power-ups at any time. You can stock up on three speed boosts for that long straightaway, for example, or concoct a triple threat that'll earn you lots of fans when they destroy the field. The



best thing is that the game doesn't favor one particular kind of strategy.

Blur features boss battles, and while I like the idea, I'm torn on the fact that to unlock them you have to go through set criteria first. Most of these you meet simply by doing what you do best, but a few are so specific (like reverse Shunting five cars), that occasionally I felt like I was having to grind races just to meet one of the goals. The cars you win from the bosses feature mods (which give you in-race bonuses), but I'm surprised these aren't as prevalent as in the multiplayer where you have cars with multiple mod slots and the ability to manage different mod loadouts. Blur's online multiplayer feeds your hunger for earning fans and leveling up, and it's one of racing's best online multiplayer modes.

Blur is the thinking person's death race – if there is such a thing – where your mind is racing just as fast as your motor. » **Matthew Kato**



Backbreaker

Impressive tackling animations don't earn this player a roster spot

Style 1 or 2-Player Sports (2-Player Online) Publisher 505 Games
Developer Natural Motion **Release** June 1 **ESRB** E

Like a rookie struggling to adjust to the speed of the pro game, *Backbreaker* could use a few years on the practice squad before seeing the field. Though the real-time physics engine produces varied tackling animations and a fantastic array of hits, the rest of the gameplay isn't ready for prime time.

The robotic-looking players move with no sense of agility, poor camera angles on sweep plays fail to focus on the defensive pursuit, and blocking breaks down too often at the line of scrimmage. The result is a feast or famine rushing attack littered with an absurd amount of negative carries and the occasional breakthrough run.

The passing game isn't much better. *Backbreaker* employs an up-tight camera perspective to bring you closer to the action, which makes it tough to scan the field for open receivers. With a convoluted progression system, intense pass rushes, and sporadic results from each pass, it's tough to pull off a Peyton Manning impersonation.

You would think the inability to consistently move the ball would make it tough to eke out a

win. Thanks to the lackluster opponent AI on every difficulty level, the opposite is true. My first team won the championship despite a 40-percent completion percentage and a 3.4 yards-per-carry rushing average on the season. The AI-controlled teams suffered from a paltry two yards per carry rushing averages, and completion percentages hovering around 40 percent. In real life, those numbers would get you banned from professional football or a contract with the Oakland Raiders (not sure which is worse).

On the other side of the ball, the focus on tackling and behind-the-back perspective brings some much-needed intensity to the game. Defense avoids the camera issues that plague offense with a handy left trigger function that centers the camera on the ball carrier. Hunting down running backs, roving passing lanes, and delivering vicious tackles is fun, though switching defenders is disorienting and I wish the game



gave users control over jumping to knock down or intercept passes. Given the poor offensive AI, however, the defense easily racks up negative plays, sacks, and interceptions, which robs the experience of realism.

Two of *Backbreaker*'s off-field strengths are its deep team customization tools and the British soccer inspired Road to *Backbreaker* mode, which tasks you with working your way up a multi-tiered league. The season mode, however, suffers from a lack of trades, free agency, and contracts.

Natural Motion's Euphoria technology is a great building block for a football game, but *Backbreaker* suffers from too many rookie mistakes. Only the most hardcore gridiron fans dying for an alternative to the EA Sports offerings should bother bringing this one in for a look. **» Matt Bertz**

5

PS3 • 360

- » **Concept** Offer a pigskin alternative with an impressive real-time physics system
- » **Graphics** Robotic players have no personality, robbing the game of a sense of drama
- » **Sound** Like the first next-gen Madden, *Backbreaker* foolishly excludes broadcast commentary in favor of basic stadium sounds
- » **Playability** The running game lacks agility and the passing game lacks finesse, but roving on defense is fun as long as you don't switch players mid-play
- » **Entertainment** This rookie is very rough around the edges; only football fans desperate for a non-EA Sports title should spend a late-round draft pick on it
- » **Replay Value** Low

Green Day: Rock Band

From punk to pop operas

Style 1 to 4-Player Rhythm/Music (4-Player Online) Publisher MTV Games/
Electronic Arts **Developer** Harmonix/Demiurge Studios **Release** June 8 **ESRB** T

Harmonix's follow-up to *The Beatles: Rock Band* is another single-band title, this time featuring the long-running Bay Area pop punks Green Day. The choice makes sense. Green Day has a cross-generational appeal and has maintained a high level of popularity for going on 20 years now. It's great from a marketing perspective—a younger skewing, yet still classic-rock friendly band that has enough well-known material to fill a disc. Harmonix worked hard to deliver a full Green Day experience—the sheer amount of unlockable video footage, old photos, and Green Day memorabilia is amazing; it's a new standard for single-artist music games.

That said, I'm not sure I'm on board. For me, this is the least compelling *Rock Band* game to date. While I enjoy Green Day, there's a difference between a good song and a good *Rock Band* song. A great many amazing tunes just aren't that fun to play. Green Day's stock in trade is power chords, delivered in clipped, repetitive eighth and sixteenth notes. Billie Joe might be a great frontman, but he's no master guitarist. The bass and drum tracks are more interesting than guitar, but playing this many Green Day



songs in a row gets boring. To be honest, I felt some of the same things about *The Beatles: Rock Band*, but the breadth, depth, and quality of the Beatles' songwriting gave me fascinating musical touches to notice and focus on. Here, the repetitiveness of the material is a slog. This is especially true of the first tier of songs, which are pulled entirely from the classic *Dookie*, a fondly remembered but musically one-dimensional album. You'll notice the band members using the same strumming phrasing or rhythmic tricks over and over again—or stealing them outright, like when "Warning" lifts the riff from "Picture Book" by the Kinks.

The game hits its peak in the second tier of songs, performed at the Milton Keynes arena.



Here you'll play some well-chosen tracks off the band's middle period albums as well as the entirety of the blockbuster *American Idiot*. The tunes are more diverse, especially some of the epic song-suites off of *American Idiot* like "Jesus of Suburbia," which is the best song in the game, throwing new parts and melodies at you on a minute-to-minute basis. The final tier consists of the less satisfying *20th Century Breakdown* album, which adds a new layer of pomp and (thankfully) more complex studio-musician lead playing. As a quick aside, I'm still bogged by the decision to include the a capella "Song of the Century" on the tracklist—couldn't this spot have gone to a more worthy full-band song?

If, like me, you've cooled on the music genre in recent months, I don't think Green Day is the band to reignite your love affair with *Rock Band*. In the future, maybe Harmonix could attempt a single band title based around a more complex—and more fun to play—band like Muse or Rush. This title has all the craft that Harmonix usually puts into its games. I just wish there were more songs I wanted to play more than once. **» Matt Helgeson**

7.5

PS3 • 360 • Wii

- » **Concept** Give the *Rock Band* treatment to the world's most popular pop punk band
- » **Graphics** It's not as striking as *The Beatles: Rock Band*, but there are some great full-performance animations, heavy pyrotechnics, and cool crowd participation segments
- » **Sound** The soundtrack relies too heavily on the three most popular Green Day albums. You can also import six previous Green Day DLC songs into the game
- » **Playability** It's largely by-the-book rock; Green Day isn't exactly known for their adventurous musicianship. Features the vocal harmony support from *The Beatles: Rock Band*
- » **Entertainment** While they've had a fine (and surprisingly enduring) career, I'm not sure Green Day is the right fit for this franchise
- » **Replay Value** Moderate

Joe Danger

Mixed genres are greater than the sum of their parts

9

gameformer
GAME OF THE MONTH GOLD

Style 1 or 2-Player Platform/Racing Publisher Hello Games Developer Hello Games Release June 8 ESRB E

PS3

» **Concept**

Race, jump, balance, trick, and combo with an over-the-hill stuntman on the ride of his life

» **Graphics**

Bright, inviting props and characters look great, but the backgrounds could use more variety

» **Sound**

The music is a zany collection that seems yanked out of a bad '70s county fair – fun for awhile, but it can wear thin

» **Playability**

Fantastically tight controls are easy to pick up, but only reveal their true complexity after hours and hours

» **Entertainment**

Hundreds of challenges across dozens of courses will keep you busy for a long, happy time

» **Replay Value**

High

It's a rare feat. Building a game that entertains after the first minute is hard enough, but creating one that is equally entertaining after the first hour, day, and week – now that's hard. The team at fledgling Hello Games did exactly that with PSN downloadable title *Joe Danger*, a rollicking good time that never ceases to entertain, combining genres and game styles into an addictive synthesis that can appeal to the youngest and most casual gamers just as much as the devoted, hardcore crowd.

Joe Danger defies easy classification, and a glance at the screenshots only helps a little bit. There's certainly a touch of racing in the vein of the classic *Excitebike*, and obstacle navigation that echoes the popular *Trials* series. What that first look couldn't tell you is how the game draws equal inspiration from the combo systems of *Tony Hawk*, the speed-fueled platforming of *2D Sonic*, or the creative drive of *LittleBigPlanet*.

Joe is a run-down, grizzled stuntman, whose old injuries have kept him off the circuit for years. When he returns, he needs to really wow the crowd to get back to the top. To do so, you'll navigate him through a huge number of obstacle-laden courses, each of which has a number of goals. Collect all the stars. String a combo through the entire level. Land on precarious targets around the course. Beat the time limit. Or, for the big scores, start combining objectives into a single run. Every achievement nets you



purchasing power to unlock later levels.

Things seem so simple at first. The tight and responsive controls only reveal their magic over time, and Joe's bike starts pulling off acrobatics that shouldn't be possible. The bike can switch its momentum in midair and go backwards. Bouncing springs send the stuntman hurtling through the air. The exaggerated physics are expertly balanced to be amusing but predictable. The high level of precision gives players the same control they'd have over an old school platform character, but here there is the added ability to throw in flips, boosts, and wheelies. Almost every action throws points up on the board.

Nearly every course is designed to reveal its secrets over the course of multiple playthroughs. Ten hours in, I was still learning the flexibility of the controls, and trying to maximize my runs. At the same time, at any point along the way I would have happily passed the controller to a beginner, confident that the early levels would

draw them in just as they did me. It's everything I would want a game like this to offer – fun, scalable challenges that are accessible to all players, with nearly infinite replayability.

While *Joe Danger* delivers an astounding wealth of levels and content for a downloadable game, it tacks on two other big extras for fun. Split-screen multiplayer has only a few levels, but does offer a great way to introduce friends to the title. The second big addition helps to alleviate that dearth of content; players can create and share online single-player and split-screen levels with friends. The level creator is straightforward and easy to use, and assures all sorts of additional playtime if you ever manage to squeeze through the extremely challenging levels at the end of the core game.

Hello Games' flagship downloadable game does suffer from a lack of variety in its environments and audio, and I'd love to see more challenges that have the old biker interacting with other riders. But those issues only arise for me because of how long I was drawn into the genre-bending gameplay. It's an ambitious and exciting new franchise, but more importantly it shows off a small developer that deserves some big attention. » **Matt Miller**



Split-screen offers the chance to race against a friend



BACK TO EDITOR

The creation tools are easy to use and flexible

CLOSE EDITOR



8.75

Wii

Sin & Punishment: Star Successor

Blows away the competition...while it lasts

Style 1 or 2-Player Shooter Publisher Nintendo Developer Treasure Release June 27 ESRB T

I don't know if I've ever played a game where the action is quite as non-stop as Sin & Punishment: Star Successor. From riding a strange dinosaur creature along a dangerous stretch of desert highway to blowing up legions of giant fish and submarines under the sea to an epic space battle finale, there's barely a moment to catch your breath as you fly from one absurdly oversized boss battle to the next. Anyone looking for an intense shot of adrenaline on the Wii need look no further.

The core gameplay of Sin & Punishment is similar to an on-rails shooter, which accounts for some of the speed – the game keeps moving along even if you're still gawking at the pretty scenery. A ludicrous story lightly strings together

the events, but the plot isn't really the point. During each set piece, you'll have to shoot down a bevy of enemies and environmental objects by aiming with the Wii remote or dragging the reticle around with the classic controller analog sticks. You've also got a melee attack that can be used to devastate any enemy who gets too close or to knock back projectiles toward opponents.

You'll need to master melee and ranged attacks as well as swift dodging in order to stay alive. Gigantic, multi-form bosses require reflecting missiles and varying attacks to be taken down. In fact, these encounters are the spots where you're most likely to die, requiring a bit of trial and error before you memorize how to best some of the more complicated bosses. Luckily,

checkpoints are very forgiving, often placing you just a minute or two back in the level.

The easy respawns also add to the game's biggest issue: It's incredibly short. Minus deaths and replaying levels for higher scores/difficulties, there's a grand total of around four to five hours of content in Star Successor. Add in a co-op buddy (not shown onscreen but providing double the firepower), and the experience will be over even faster. Then again, I'm not sure Treasure could have crammed much more insanity into this game without needing to put in a break from the exhilaration that makes it so awesome. Maybe sometimes it's better to be left wanting. » **Phil Kollar**

» Concept

A lightning-fast trip through some of the most bombastic action the Wii has ever seen

» Graphics

Tons of detail in the environments and enemies, though you'll probably blast through them too fast to notice

» Sound

A fun soundtrack – just don't let the English voice acting bring you down

» Playability

Easy for anyone to enjoy at lower difficulties and with a co-op partner

» Entertainment

What it lacks in length, it more than makes up for in memorable set pieces

» Replay Value

Low

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11

Tiger for Wii carries a full bag of clubs

8.5

generations
SILVER

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (4-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release June 8 ESRB E

Wii

» Concept
The WiiMotion Plus allows for a new advanced swing mechanic that makes things more realistic than last year

» Graphics
Nothing remarkable, but it's a golf game, so I'm not sure that it matters a whole lot

» Sound
Audio comes through the Wii Remote speaker and reinforces how well/poorly you've hit the ball

» Playability
Playing this game without the WiiMotion Plus peripheral is a waste of time

» Entertainment
This year's Tiger adds some solid depth to the experience in all areas

» Replay Value
Moderately High

Tiger developer EA Tiburon thought they had the full-motion golf swing down last year with the addition of the Wii MotionPlus peripheral, but now they swear they have it dialed in. Sarcasm aside, the franchise's second turn with the MotionPlus adds a new dimension to your swing that yields better results. In an odd way, I like that it adds the possibility of even more inconsistency to my swing without ruining the entire experience. The series continues to tinker around the edges, making modest improvements that are mostly welcome.

In Tiger 10, the MotionPlus peripheral was mainly concerned with whether your wrists were twisted or not as you struck the ball. Your wrists are still important, but now the game also reads your follow-through. It can be a subtle change that doesn't factor in all your swings, but I like it because it further codifies what constitutes a good method and what that feels like. If you



don't want to use the new motion you can revert to the old one through the game's detailed system of assists and difficulty levels that you can mix and match, including whether you want to use the waggle-style spin. One I recommend turning on is the TrueView camera, which is a first-person look at the ball as you size it up and watch it (hopefully) sail through the air.

Once again the career mode (consisting of

skills challenges versus pros, a PGA tour schedule, and the Ryder Cup) has been tweaked, this time with a more measured approach towards attribute points and modifiers. Clubs – and not shafts or clothes – are the only item that confers stat bonuses, and you are only allowed to give one of your four attributes a temporary stat bump before most challenges or tourney rounds. This approach slows down the stat-jacked characters of the past, but it's also not as fun. I like the inclusion of the Ryder Cup, but even though the tourney's format is largely the same, it's a little weird that the CPU doesn't abide by the nationality rules (Americans vs. Europeans) that make the Cup what it is. The Ryder Cup is also online, as is last year's disc golf.

Combining the progress made with the WiiMotion Plus peripheral with an expanded online footprint, five new courses, four courses of actual mini-golf, and more, Tiger 11 is a full-fledged game with a motion-based swing and not just a slight curiosity. » **Matthew Kato**

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Pro Evolution Soccer 2010	8.5	Jan-10

Ratchet and Clark:

A Crack in Time	9.25	Dec-09
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jun-10
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Resonance of Fate	6.75	May-10
Rogue Warrior	1.5	Feb-10
Saboteur, The	8	Jan-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jun-10
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75	Apr-10
Spit Second	8.25	Jun-10
Star Ocean: The Last Hope - International	7	Mar-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9	May-10
Tekken 6	8.75	Dec-09
Tony Hawk: Ride	5.75	Jan-10
Vandal Hearts: Flames of Judgment	7.5	Apr-10
White Knight Chronicles	7.25	Mar-10
Yakuza 3	6.5	May-10

XBOX 360

Alan Wake	8.5	Jun-10
Aliens vs. Predator	5.75	Mar-10
Army of Two: The 40th Day	6.5	Feb-10
Assassin's Creed II	9.5	Jan-10
Attack of the Movies 3D	4	Jun-10
Avatar	6.5	Feb-10
Band Hero	7.75	Jan-10
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	9.5	Mar-10
Bayonetta	9	Feb-10
BioShock 2	8.25	Mar-10
Blood Bowl	7.75	Mar-10
Borderlands	9.25	Dec-09
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	9.75	Dec-09
Dante's Inferno	7	Mar-10
Dark Void	7	Feb-10
Darksiders	8.5	Feb-10
Dead to Rights: Retribution	8	Jun-10
Divinity II: Ego Draconis	6.5	Mar-10
DJ Hero	9	Dec-09
Dragon Age: Origins	8	Dec-09
FIFA World Cup 2010 South Africa	8.5	May-10

the score

8 | Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

Platform Wii Release May 18 ESRB T

While it's by no means perfect, the game includes a wealth of ideas that capitalize on the Wii's capabilities. The result is a flawed but entertaining ride that elicits more creativity and critical thinking than any game in the Prince franchise to date.—Matt Miller

6 | What Did I Do To Deserve This My Lord!? 2

Platform PSP Release May 4 ESRB T

I enjoyed What Did I Do 2's quirky, lighthearted nature, and found its retro art style to be cute. But its freeform strategy design leaves too much of the gameplay out of your control.—Ben Reeves

7 | Pure Futbol

Platform PS3 • 360 Release June 6 ESRB E

Pure Futbol tries at times to be a soccer sim, with team customization and a clever, timed shot mechanic. More often, it seeks an arcade sensibility, with fast matches, flashy pop-up graphics, and dramatic music. Sadly, neither approach succeeds particularly well.—Matt Miller

7.75 | The Sims 3: Ambitions

Platform PC Release June 1 ESRB T

This does what an expansion pack is supposed to do by adding new household items for your sims to play with, but are a handful of new toys, and a few jobs people will get tired of after a day, really worth \$40?—Ben Reeves

7.75 | Blue Dragon: Awakened Shadow

Platform DS Release May 18 ESRB E10+

While this true sequel to the original Blue Dragon gets off to a sluggish start, and certain gameplay and storytelling elements are not exactly perfect, your patience will be rewarded with a boatload of varied and entertaining quests.—Annette Gonzalez

7.25 | Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper

Platform 360 Release April 24 ESRB T

The outdated visuals and unpolished gameplay won't attract any new fans to the adventure genre, but beneath the title's bargain-bin production values and hit-or-miss puzzles lies a solid mystery befitting the moniker of Sherlock Holmes.—Jeff Marchiafava

Final Fight: Double Impact	8	Jan-10
Grand Theft Auto IV	9.25	Dec-09
The Ballad of Gay Tony	7.5	Jan-10
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	7.75	Feb-10
Gyromancer	6	Jan-10
Iron Man 2	6	Jan-10
Jurassic: The Hunted	6	Feb-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10
Last Legend	8.5	Jan-10
Major League Baseball 2K10	7.75	Apr-10
Mass Effect 2	9.75	Mar-10
Matt Hazard:		
Blood Bath and Beyond	7.75	Mar-10
Mega Man 10	8.75	Apr-10
Metro 2033	9	May-10
Misadventures of		
P.B. Winterbottom, The	8.5	Apr-10
MX vs. ATV Reflex	7.5	Jan-10
NCAA Basketball 10	7.25	Jan-10
Pro Evolution Soccer 2010	8.5	Jan-10
Red Dead Redemption	9.75	Jan-10
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Resonance of Fate	6.75	May-10
Risen	7	Apr-10
Rogue Warrior	1.5	Feb-10
Saboteur, The	8	Jan-10
Samurai Shodown Sen	6	May-10
Skate 3	8.75	Jan-10
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75	Apr-10
Splinter Cell: Conviction	9	May-10
Split Second	8.25	Jan-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9	May-10
Tekken 6	8.75	Dec-09
Tony Hawk: Ride	5.75	Jan-10
Tony Solikars	8.25	May-10
TopSpin 3	8.75	Mar-10
Vandal Hearts:		
Flames of Judgment	7.5	Apr-10
WII		
Attack of the Movies 3D	4	Jan-10
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare: Reflex Edition	6.5	Jan-10
Calling	4.5	Apr-10
Cave Story	8.75	May-10
Data East Arcade Classics	5	Mar-10
Endless Ocean 2:		
Blue World	7.5	Apr-10
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Beavers	5.5	Jan-10
Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon	6	May-10
Jurassic: The Hunted	6	Feb-10
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games	5.5	Jan-10
Mega Man 10	8.75	Apr-10
Monster Hunter Tri	7	Jan-10
Need for Speed: Nitro	6.5	Jan-10
New Super Mario Bros. Wii	9.25	Jan-10
No More Heroes 2:		
Desperate Struggle	8.5	Mar-10
Prates Plundarr	7.25	Jan-10
Red Steel 2	8	May-10
Resident Evil: The Darkness Chronicles	8	Jan-10
Rooms: The Main Building	7	Apr-10
Shoun White		
Snowboarding: World Stage	6	Jan-10
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories	6.25	Jan-10
Super Mario Galaxy 2	9.25	Jan-10
Super Monkey Ball: Step & Roll	6	Apr-10
Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All-Stars	8	Feb-10
Tony Hawk: Ride	5.75	Jan-10
Trauma Team	8	Jan-10
Your Shape Featuring Jenny McCarthy	7	Jan-10
PC		
Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight	7.75	May-10
Dark Void	7	Feb-10
Dink! III: Ego Dracons	7	Mar-10
Dragon Age: Origins -- Awakening	7.75	Apr-10
Gyromancer	7.75	Feb-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10

King's Bounty: Armored Princess	8.75	Jan-10
League of Legends	7.75	Jan-10
Left 4 Dead 2	9.5	Dec-09
Mass Effect 2	9.75	Mar-10
Metro 2033	9	May-10
Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom, The	8.5	Apr-10
Napoleon: Total War	8.75	Apr-10
Risen	8.5	Dec-09
Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom, The	8.5	May-10
Supreme Commander 2	8	Apr-10
Torchlight	8.75	Jan-10
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II Chaos Rising	8.5	May-10

NINTENDO DS

Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth	7.5	Mar-10
Assassin's Creed: Alchemist of Sora Island	5	Jan-10
Bookworm	7.75	Feb-10
C.O.P.: The Recruit	4.25	Jan-10
Infinite Space	6	May-10
Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks, The	8	Jan-10
Picross 3D	9	May-10
Pokemon HeartGold/SoulSilver	8.5	May-10
Puzzle Chronicles	7	Mar-10
Rooms: The Main Building	7	Apr-10
Srin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey	8.75	Mar-10
WarriorWare D.I.Y.	8.5	May-10

PSP

Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines	6.5	Jan-10
Dead of Alive: Paradise	4	Jan-10
Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier	7.75	Jan-10
LittleBigPlanet PSP	8.5	Jan-10
Lunar: Silver Star Harmony	8	Mar-10
Metal Slug XX	6.75	Apr-10
Puzzle Chronicles	7	Mar-10

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8 | Rocket Knight

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release May 12 ESRB E10+

The game's four worlds offer a healthy mix of platforming and combat, with some boss fights requiring quite a bit of both. Nostalgia for the series isn't a requirement if you want to enjoy Rocket Knight, but nostalgia for the era it comes from certainly doesn't hurt.—Dan Ryckert

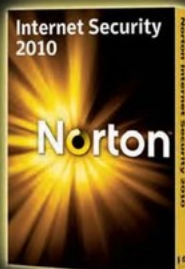
6 | Dementium II

Platform DS Release May 5 ESRB M

It's hard to throw your weight behind a game that feels like little more than a retreat. Abandoned hospitals, long corridors populated with monstrous foes, locked doors, and obscure puzzles don't feel fresh, and without any real scares, Dementium II simply falls flat.
—Meagan VanBurkleo

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Remembering The **VMU**



Diehard Dreamcast fans have a long list of reasons they love Sega's dead console. High on the list is the Virtual Memory Unit (VMU). This handy little device made every other memory card at the turn of the century look like a chump. More than Shenmue save files were stored in this trinket, though. The VMU contained some great ideas above and beyond storing data. *by Tim Turi*

Technology Breakdown

Dimensions:
1.85" x 3.5" x 0.63"

Mass:
46 grams

Video:
1.46" x 1.02" LCD display

Audio:
Single-channel speaker

Processor:
Tiny 8-bit CPU nicknamed "Potato" inside

Interface:
Four-way d-pad and buttons

Release:
September 9, 1999



Memory Card Plus

How many times have you reached for your cache of PS2 memory cards and struggled to remember which one holds your Metal Gear Solid 3 saves? The VMU let you manage its whopping 100kB of storage data without the console.



Separated at Birth

Not only did they resemble one another, the Sony's PocketStation could do everything the VMU did while one-upping it with infrared data transfer. Its biggest downfall was that it never released outside of Japan. This little device was the only way to play Final Fantasy VIII's virtual pet minigame, Chocobo World.



Ripples of Influence

Several recent developments in the video game industry harken back to the VMU's extension of gaming.

» Pokémon HeartGold and SoulSilver allow devoted Poketrainers to wirelessly transport Pokémon onto the Pokéwalker pedometer peripheral, with which they can level up, trade critters, and play minigames with points earned by walking.

» Live Anywhere is Microsoft's mobile extension of Xbox Live for Windows Mobile which will allow Live users to earn achievements, access their friends list, and engage in cross-platform multiplayer.



Mobile Chaos

Many Dreamcast titles came with minigames that could be downloaded to the VMU one at a time. In the case of Sonic Adventure, you could find eggs from cute little Chao critters, bring them to a VMU download station, and take the guys on the go as a virtual pet.



New Lease On Life

The VMU's role as a second screen came in handy with some games, and just displayed the logo in others. In Resident Evil 2, 3, and Code Veronica, the zombie slayers' vitality was displayed on the VMU instead of forcing gamers to interpret limps.

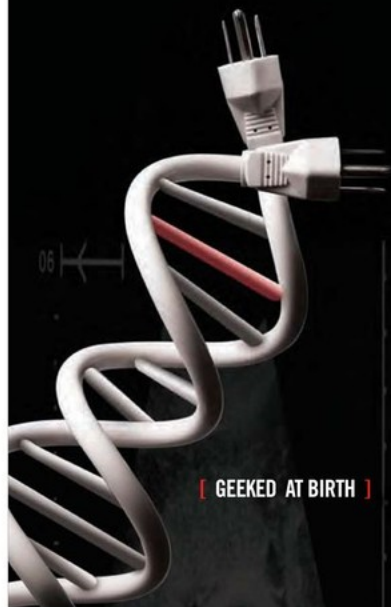


Pugilistic Nomad

So you unlocked Iron Man in Marvel vs. Capcom 2 at home on your Dreamcast. Nice work. With the VMU you could plug into an arcade cabinet and destroy your rivals with your recently earned fighters, or trade characters by directly linking VMUs.

For Your Eyes Only

In competitive multiplayer sports titles like NFL 2k, the VMU kept players honest with private playcalling screens. This feature removed the "I'm just lucky" factor from local multiplayer buddies' with a penchant for screen-looking.



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GAMING'S SHOCKING PAST

It's hard not to love electrocuting everything in sight in Empire City, but Infamous certainly isn't the first title to incorporate Edison's discovery. Take the test below to see if you're a modern-day Tesla or just a lowly Zeke.

1. What is Elec Man's weakness in the first Mega Man?

- a. Ice Slasher
- b. Fire Storm
- c. Magnet Beam
- d. Rolling Cutter

2. What does the electricity shield do for you in Sonic the Hedgehog 3?

- a. Automatically collects nearby rings
- b. Immunity to robotic enemies
- c. Grants Sonic super speed
- d. Prevents Sonic from drowning

3. Which Metal Gear Solid 2 badgie fired an electric rail gun?

- a. Fortune
- b. Fatman
- c. Olga Gurlukovich
- d. Emma Emmerich

4. Which god granted Kratos an electricity-based attack in the first God of War?

- a. Ares
- b. Hera
- c. Poseidon
- d. Hades

5. Which of these Pokémon is not an electric type?

- a. Raichu
- b. Voltorb
- c. Jolteon
- d. Articuno

6. Which Command & Conquer: Red Alert base defense zapped anyone unfortunate enough to wander near it?

- a. Pillbox
- b. Shock Tower
- c. Tesla Coil
- d. Lightning Spire

7. Which Castle Crasher knight featured electricity-based attacks?

- a. Red
- b. Orange
- c. Blue
- d. Green

8. Which PSone game allowed you to tase enemies until they caught on fire?

- a. MediEvil
- b. Syphon Filter
- c. Nightmare Creatures
- d. Krazy Ivan

9. Which Mortal Kombat character's fatality involves a stun gun?

- a. Jax
- b. Raiden
- c. Quan Chi
- d. Stryker

10. In Devil May Cry 3, Dante acquires a weapon that shoots bats and lightning. What was it?

- a. Baseball bat
- b. Guitar
- c. Hammer
- d. Bow staff



ANSWERS:

1-d, 2-a, 3-a, 4-c, 5-d, 6-c,
7-a, 8-b, 9-d, 10-b

CRACKDOWN 2

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