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LOST PLANET 2



PS3

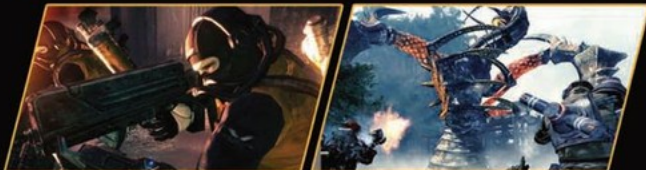


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Gears of War 3

The government has fallen and the lambent threaten to crack the planet open, but hope is not yet lost in this conclusion to the epic trilogy.

by Matt Miller



In Defense of the Game Manual



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

Read my column or
comment on this letter at
gameinformer.com/mag or
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Ubisoft recently announced its plans to remove manuals from the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 editions of its games in a move to go green. Not to sound like Andy Rooney or some consumer monster who isn't Earth-conscious, but I find it hard to believe that game manuals are killing mother Earth when there are about a million other far more grievous offenses taking place each and every second of every day.

I'm aware of the phrase that every little bit counts, but its not like the industry is ripping through the rain forest to make paper products. Most paper is treated like crop – a replenishable resource just like food. Once the trees are cut down, they plant more. It's definitely not strip-mining, and last I checked the world could use more trees, not fewer.

I'm often annoyed at the Internet's love of mocking paper products like our magazine or game manuals while people sit at a computer sucking down power on a giant plastic product. When I'm done with a magazine I can recycle it. Do you know where your computer goes when you are done with it?

Gamers can instead find digital versions of the manual on the game websites, which I'm all for. I like the idea of being able to check a manual in-game if I wish, but the total removal of manuals doesn't sit well with me. The manual is an important part of my game experience. As I walk out of the store with a new game, I rip open the annoying packaging, sit down in my car, and pull out the manual to check it out. I want to see the art and experience that new game smell as I crack open the box. I like to laugh at crappy black and white manuals and enjoy the wonder of an outstanding full color masterpiece.

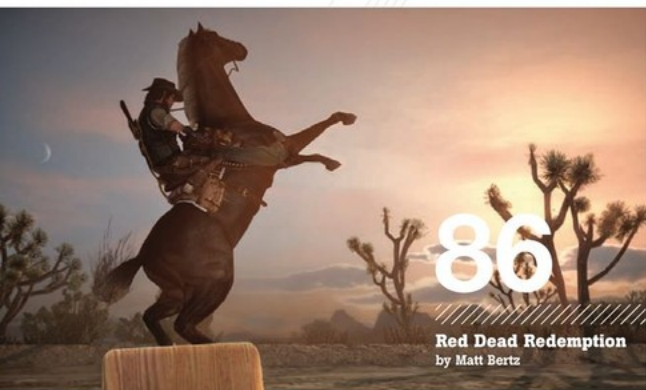
Yes, the "Game Notes" section in the back of manuals is a waste of space, but I find the rest quite useful. I don't need a manual to tell me how to play a game, but many times there are lots of useful hints, as well some of the back-story that oftentimes doesn't make it into the games themselves. Also, I usually read manuals when my game isn't on. After my game loads, I'm busy playing. It's when I take a break or find myself stuck that I take the manual with me to learn more about my game of choice.

With moves like this, the manual's future doesn't look bright, but I'll always be willing to pay a few extra dollars to get more from the games that I collect rather than less.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

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



86

Red Dead Redemption
by Matt Bertz



50



18



36



62

Fallout: New Vegas
by Jeff Cork

27



regulars

8 Feedback

Readers share their mixed feelings on Meagan's Gender Gap article, express their hilarious confusion over Darth Clark's position at GI, and are unwilling to pay a premium for a top-notch multiplayer FPS

14 Connect

We explore the reasons behind why sequels are such a major part of the video game business, show you how to get the Mass Effect 2 ending you want, and dig into the upcoming Scott Pilgrim game

68 Previews

Halo: Reach, Crisis 2, and this year's EA Sports lineup all give you something to look forward to

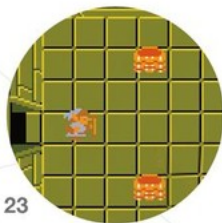
84 Reviews

Super Mario Galaxy 2: More than just star collecting?
by Matt Helgeson

100 Game Over

56

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds
by Tim Turi



23

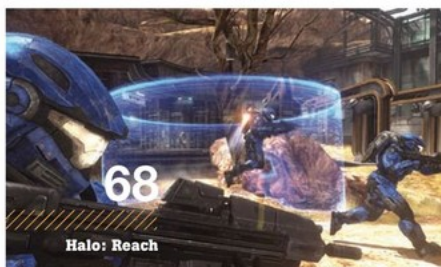


94



75

Ghost Recon:
Future Soldier



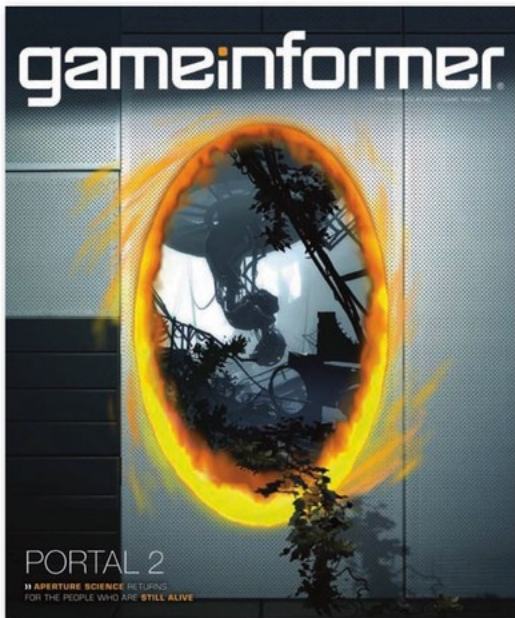
games index

Alan Wake	92
Conduit 2	79
Crysis 2	72
Enslaved: Odyssey to the West	71
Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	75
Green Day: Rock Band	78
Halo: Reach	68
Iron Man 2	91
Lost Planet 2	88
Madden NFL 11	82
ModNation Racers	93
Monster Hunter Tri	95
NCAA Football 11	80
Red Dead Redemption	86
Shaun White Skateboarding	70
Skate 3	90
Split Second	89
StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty	74
Super Mario Galaxy 2	94
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	81
Trauma Team	95
Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings, The	76



AXE TWI2T

THE FRAGRANCE THAT CHANGES



This month in Feedback we look at solutions to online multiplayer problems, talk about gaming and social issues, laugh at people who fell for Game Infarcer, and get a little sick of cake.

No Lie

The Portal 2 cover was awesome! I'm looking forward to a lot of things about the sequel, but there's one thing that I'm most excited about: new jokes. If I hear anyone say "the cake is a lie" one more time, I swear I'm shoving them into the nearest emergency intelligence incinerator.

Mike Irons
Chicago, IL

Yeah, the Portal references have gotten a little out of hand. Then again, all of the talk about cake and companion cubes is really a testament to the success and popularity of the original. You don't hear gamers reverently spouting inside jokes about games they hate...unless the game itself is the punchline. Try shouting "Superman 64!" in a room full of gamers – the laughter is deafening.

For the Love of the Game

Today I would like to write to you with a saddened heart. I have yet to find a gamer that is as deeply into gaming as I, and that disappoints me. I go beyond being a hardcore gamer by supporting my industry the best way that I can; I subscribe to gaming magazines, and always check out videos on the Internet, and strive to bring my friends together to have fun online. I always defend game companies, and support them – and I am not even in the industry! Today I write to you, Game Informer, to ask if anyone out there cares about the future of gaming as much as I do?

Collin McFerrin
Madison, WI

We could say a thing or two here, but we have a feeling that you, the readers, will have a few choice words of your own for Collin. We'll just hold our tongues until next month, when we print your responses.

Pay It Forward

In his opinion piece entitled A Changing Battlefield, Matt Bertz says "I for one would be more than willing to shell out a few dollars a month for an evolving standalone multiplayer experience." What a great idea about how to fix glitching in Modern Warfare 2, Bertz! Tell you what: If that happens, I will be more than willing to give you my gamertag so you can take care of my bill too, because I'm not paying a penny to fix their mistake. Imagine having to pay a monthly fee on each one of your favorite games; that won't be "a few dollars" anymore. We can't let publishers think it is okay to continually charge gamers to have an experience that should be available out of the box, free of charge. It is their responsibility to keep a game playable, not ours.

Giancarlo Scamarone
Middleburg, FL

Obviously, we'd prefer to not pay extra money for games we've already bought, but something needs to change about the current situation. Bertz wasn't proposing that you pay money for the same content you're getting now in Modern Warfare 2. An "evolving standalone multiplayer experience" would be more akin to the model used in

MMOs like World of Warcraft. Online shooters could continually add new content like maps, weapons, and objectives – in addition to keeping the glitches under control. This kind of attention to the community requires more staff and development time, which cost money. You can say that it is Activision and Infinity Ward's duty to give these things to you for free, but that's just not going to happen under the current model.

Did you miss Bertz's opinion piece on the problems with online multiplayer in issue 204? Go to gameinformer.com/mag to read it online!



Reader Nonsense

"A game should never, ever be given a score of 10/10. That means it is perfect, and no game can ever be perfect. Giving any game a 10, no matter how good, calls your credibility and integrity into question."

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com



The Undying Shepard

I just finished playing through Mass Effect 2 for the third time and I can't figure out how to get the ending where Shepard dies! Could you please tell me specifically how to accomplish this?

Clayton Burke
Glendora, CA

You're in luck, Clayton. Just turn to page 18 and you'll find a detailed guide with info straight from the team at BioWare. You'll learn what set of circumstances will lead to Shepard's death during the suicide mission, as well as how you can save or sacrifice specific party members to construct your ideal endgame save file to import into Mass Effect 3.

True or False?

In order to sell more PS3 Slim units, Sony deliberately sabotaged older PS3s with the clock bug that rendered the early systems useless for a day back in February.



Answer: False

Darth Infarcerus

I don't understand how someone as arrogant as Darth Clark is being supported in your magazine. His claim that his opinion is more important than the games or the people that create them is insulting to the gaming community. Creating games is hard work, and the gamers are the final opinion in gaming – not some jerk's opinion. If he counts as the superior opinion on the topics of games, then I will cancel my subscription to the magazine supporting this stupidity. It's about the games and will always be about the games. The creators should get the credit, not some critic that s---s on everything he sees.

David Owen
Via email

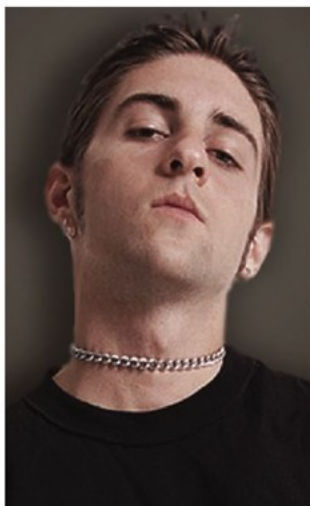
I am writing to comment about your Game Infarcer section, which I think is a great idea! However, the idea could only work in the hands of a talented and clever writer, which was instead left in the hands of someone called "Darth Clark." Clark's attempts at satire are pathetic, and actually diminish the value of GI as a whole. After reading Game Infarcer, I have realized this section is completely ruined in his hands. Not only is he entirely devoid of any humor or cleverness, he also comes across as an arrogant jerk – which

is pretty sad, considering he really has nothing to be arrogant about.

Andrew A.
Via email

After the yearly Game Infarcer section runs in the April issue, we prepare ourselves for an onslaught of letters. Usually, these come from readers who get suckered by one or more of the fake news stories, but this year we got a little surprise. Game Infarcer's editor-in-chief, Darth Clark, ruffled more feathers than anything else. In some cases (like Andrew's letter), even readers who understood that Game Infarcer is a satirical feature didn't realize that the alleged author of the section was also a parody. Here's the good news: Darth Clark is pretend, and not an employee at our publication. On the other hand, if you think Game Infarcer is "devoid of any humor or cleverness," you only have us to blame.

To see Sony's reaction to our Game Infarcer story about PlayStation Home's supposed shutdown, go to gameinformer.com/mag



Top 3 Game Infarcer Stories That Fooled Readers



1. WiDS
2. Remembering PlayStation Home
3. Mass Effect 3

gi spy



(Left) Capcom's Bryan Keitner, Disney's Mariam Sughayer, Sony's Jeff Rubenstein soak up the vibes at GDC (Right) Ninja Theory's Tam Antoniadis, Namco Bandai's Alicia Kim and Ryan Adza, and Miller enjoy some of the world's best roast beef at Maverick's in St. Paul

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



GI SPY
continued on page 10

On Your Mind



- Gears of War 3: **31%**
- The Infinity Ward Drama: **25%**
- Halo: Reach: **22%**
- Pokémon: **18%**
- Splinter Cell Frenzies: **4%**



Tackling The Issue

It was refreshing to read *The Gender Gap*, a well-written analysis of the challenges of female representation in gaming. But as a student currently researching archetypes in video games, I'd like to offer my two cents: Not only should we ask for more female characters, we should demand that future female NPCs not be constrained by traditional gender roles. Developers could do a lot for women in gaming with this simple, safe, and cost-effective measure.

Alison Rapp
Minneapolis, MN

I am a female gamer. I adore wasting my week-ends away playing *Modern Warfare*, *Halo*, *Left 4 Dead*, and *The Orange Box*. However, I hate females in games! Usually, they are the "strong" female archetype that drives me crazy with her "I'm just one of the guys, but better" antics and showing off how tough she is. More often than not, I won't buy a game with a female lead character. I couldn't care less if the game has gender diversity; as long as it's a good game, then I'm happy. Gaming can just be entertainment – it doesn't need to tackle social issues. I don't complain about lack of girls in games and I will never have a reason to!

Crystal Chavez
via email

Your insulting article about the gender gap in video games almost made me want to cancel my subscription. Where do you guys get off putting that in your magazine? Save it for the *New York Post* or *Time*. I thought I was reading *Game Informer*, not the "What's Wrong With America Today" magazine.

James Ivey
Bradenton, FL

All media is influenced by the surrounding culture. Sure, you can play video games without giving much thought to their social significance – but that doesn't mean it isn't there. As a video game magazine, we report on many facets of the gaming industry, and we wouldn't be properly serving our readers by ignoring the challenge that social issues (like the gender gap) pose for game developers. They may not be as entertaining as punchy Top 10 lists, but these issues are a part of today's video game industry. If you want a bland hobby disconnected from controversy, perhaps you should invest in a food-themed coloring book.

No Sims Allowed

I just read your article about *The Sims*' anniversary, and I thought of a better title for it: "10 Years of the Sims and the 9.75 Years No One Gave a S---." I mean, *Mortal Kombat* and *Duke Nukem* worked too hard to set the bar for these guys to come along and make a video game out of a home economics class. Don't encourage them, Gl.

Malcolm M.
New York, NY



Games with lots of blood and guns aren't automatically more legitimate than those about buying furniture and going to work. *Mortal Kombat* and *Doom* certainly carry more hardcore credibility, but as the best-selling PC series ever, *The Sims* franchise is a huge milestone in gaming history. If simulations aren't your thing, stick to BFGs and fatalities. Just remember that "I don't like this game" and "This game is bad" aren't always interchangeable statements.



GI SPY
continued from page 9

(Left) From now on, unruly guests on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* will be brought to justice with the lancer from *Gears of War 3* (Center) G4's Abbie Heppe and Adam Sessler are too hot for TV, but just the right temperature for *GI Spy* (Right) Dan gets what's coming to him at the hands of famed luchador El Elegido at a recent Konami press event. That beard was making Dan think he was so tough



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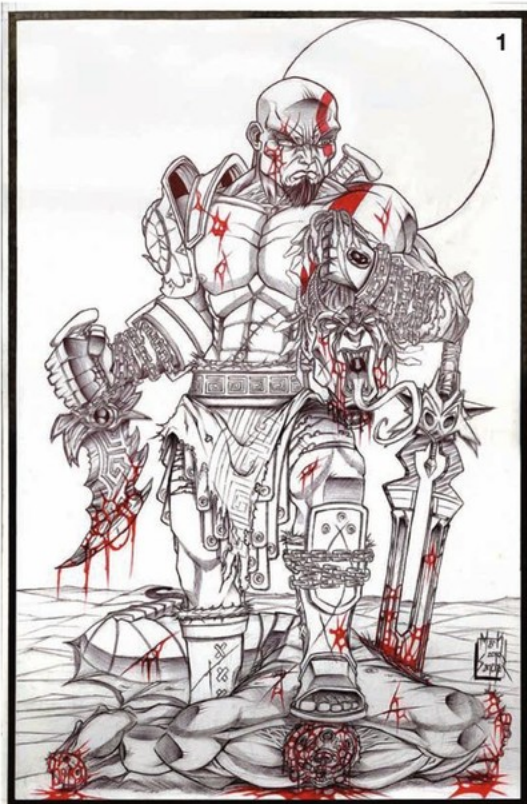
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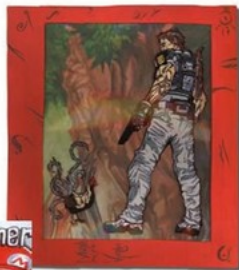
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WINNER 1 Mark Sanchez He already has Helios' head smuggled in his loincloth somewhere, why not one more? **2 Sahra Giertz** Chris seems somewhat underwhelmed by his new DLC co-op partner **3 Deonta Head** Sackboy attempts to sneak into the Nintendo-only E3 party unnoticed **4 Berol Landskroner** Hulk and Goro come to blows after arguing over who has the most pathetic film career **5 Sam Chapman** The sworn enemy of Joseph McCarthizard



2



3



4



5

(Left) High Road Communications's Alex Ryan, G4's Jeremy Hoffman, and GameSpy's Will Tuttle, pictured here having a serious bro-down (Right) Dan recovered from his injuries just in time to hang out with Valve's Doug Lombardi, Eric Johnson, and Gabe Newell



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news

The Evolution

Are sequels stronger than ever?

by Matthew Kato



NOTABLES

- 18 hold the line
- 20 x-com re-imagined
- 22 afterwords: splinter cell conviction
- 24 lone star gaming
- 27 all ages
- 28 the (pixel) art of scott pilgrim
- 31 opinion: game regulation across the pacific
- 33 west & zampella start respawn entertainment
- 34 interview: esa president michael gallagher



of Success

The word "sequel" might be a dirty word to some, but it also represents a large portion of the good games we play. The current gaming landscape is marked with established properties like *Mass Effect 2*, *Uncharted 2*, *BioShock 2*, and many more. And why shouldn't it be? When a publisher or developer sees that a series like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* increases its sales from 14.4 million units sold worldwide for the first game to over an estimated 18 million for the follow-up (so far), it's easy to envision a successful franchise as a goose laying golden eggs. In light of the recent success of so many sequels, it appears we're in the midst of a video game heyday. We took a look at the process of crafting a good series and investigate the overall strength of the model.

"We go in with the mentality of, 'Everything we build has the potential to turn into a major franchise,'" says Scott Rohde, vice president of Sony's worldwide studios in America. While everyone wants a blockbuster or three, getting there through a succession of carefully crafted games is not easy. It can be the kind of challenge that is almost too big to foresee.

"The funny thing about the *God of War* games," explains *God of War III* director Stig Asmussen, "is that we push so hard at the end of the game that we aren't planning very well for the next game. We don't plan for the next game until we're back from our vacation after we finish the game." When they do start working on the next installment, there's a wealth of info from focus groups, fans' forum posts, internal post-mortems, and other sources, but it's not always easy to cut through the static.

However, both Asmussen and Evan Wells, co-president of *Uncharted 2* developer Naughty Dog, believe that a good place to start is with what wouldn't, or even couldn't, work in the

previous games. Both developers believe in the importance of examining ideas that didn't make it into earlier titles. This isn't because of a lack of inspiration, however. If anything, it's a way to revisit gameplay mechanics and features that

were worthy enough the first time around but couldn't be implemented, perhaps due to technological constraints. Asmussen points to *God of War III*'s grunts with randomized animations and AI as an example of this, and Wells states that righting wrongs is the inherent purpose of sequels. "More so even than exceeding the sales or the critical reception of the first game, we're just hoping that we can find personal satisfaction in achieving the vision that we had actually originally set out to achieve."

For Wells, working on a sequel isn't just a return to the familiar, but an exciting process "because from day one you are really productive," he explains. "When you are creating a new IP it's a slog through at least the first year of development, and maybe even longer if you are developing a new engine or working with new hardware to where the amount of progress you're making every day is really little."

Building from a foundation can be a good approach, but franchises must always navigate the double-edged sword of attracting new fans without alienating the old ones. Does a tutorial for the uninitiated get in the way for veterans? Do franchise overhauls and/or flashy new features pull the rug out from under long-time fans? As Asmussen details, there are no easy decisions. For *God of War III*, he felt he had to rob Kratos of some of his powers because he thought that the series' debut on PS3 would attract a lot of newcomers. "It's kind of a cliché for the game right now," he acknowledges, "but we definitely recognized that there were going to be a lot of new people."

On the subject of tutorials, Wells believes they're a must for anyone who plays his games, simply because he doesn't think that even fans of *Uncharted*, for example, will remember all the controls from the first game back in 2007. One feature he did think was a win-win for everyone, however, was multiplayer.

No matter how finely you hone your craft, the danger of becoming stale is always present. Some gamers believe that sequels get cozy and don't create enough new momentum for the industry. While new IPs are certainly sexier than what's familiar, innovations in gaming can be made by any game at any time, and even new IPs rely on what's come before. Still, both Asmussen and Wells know the danger signs of a franchise that has run its course. "I think the best gauge," says Wells, "and ultimately what makes

a difference between what makes a good game and a bad game, is the enthusiasm of the team."

When a developer is burned out on a franchise, Asmussen believes that the best thing to do is give the property to another developer – assuming that the studio is right for the job – or put it on the shelf until the original team is inspired again. Rohde, a man who certainly is familiar with the status of Asmussen, Wells, and all of Sony's first-party developers, keeps a close watch on the situation. He is mindful of the climate Sony's franchises are in, the publisher's balance of new IP to sequels, how the audience for a given series may be changing its demographics, and how this might even affect what kind of mechanics might be added or which console is most suitable for certain points in the franchise's life. For those series that Sony has put on the shelf, Rohde is one of the people who is planning – sometimes as long as three or four years down the road – for the right time for a franchise to return.

Even though Asmussen has worked on all the *God of War* games, he's not oblivious to the danger of the industry becoming too dependent on sequels. However, he doesn't think that we're at that critical mass yet. He likens the current climate to that of movies in the '70s and '80s, citing still-relevant sequels of the time like *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Rocky II*. "I think we have to be very careful that the industry doesn't become so focused on money that nobody is willing to take risks anymore, and we're either just doing sequels or games based on franchises in other mediums. I might sound like a hypocrite because I just got done working on my third game in a row, but for me it's a passion, it's more like the *Star Wars* movies or *Rocky* movies. In my mind, *God of War* kind of commanded a sequel."

If ever the state of sequels is dire, Asmussen firmly believes gamers should not hesitate to take matters into their own hands. In that case, he says, "People have to stop buying the sequels. Something needs to happen to get people to stop buying the sequels, because the companies are going to keep offering nothing but sequels." For now, however, we seem to be reaping the benefits of gaming franchises constantly perfecting their craft and offering consistently enjoyable experiences.

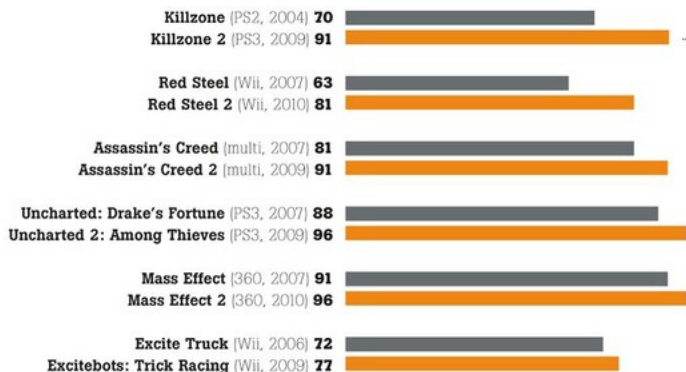
continued on page 16

Sequel Movers & Losers

The Metacritic scores of many of the series we looked at stayed the same or only strayed by a few points, perhaps pointing to the strength and reliable nature of sequels. However, here's a culled selection of modern video game franchises whose scores stand out.*

*The highest Metacritic score was used for multiplatform titles with different scores. Also, no sports games were used in this study.

Movers



Losers



Are Episodic Games the Answer?

When we asked Naughty Dog's Evan Wells what he thought might break the current model of sequels, he told us episodic gaming has the potential to do that, but that it would be difficult. Wells thinks that so far nobody has produced compelling content with the "current level of fidelity" of your average console game at the same rate it can be dished out. In other words, it's tough to drop episodic content every month, and then only have a month to create the next batch. "If someone was able to crack that nut, I think that's one of the only things that would change the way people are experiencing their sequels."



Final Fantasy XIII

Matters of Context

A new console can be an exciting new opportunity for series like Killzone. There's no doubt the PS3 provided hype and great-looking graphics for a sequel that was better received than the first one. Similarly, new features (like Resident Evil 5's co-op), new developers (BioShock 2), or new mechanics (Final Fantasy XIII) may factor in some sequels scoring lower than their predecessors — even though the games and series themselves may be high quality.



No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle

The Scarcity of Wii Sequels

A hidden statistic in the Metacritic sequel data is that Nintendo's Wii — apart from some first-party titles like Super Mario Galaxy or Metroid Prime — doesn't have as many sequels as the other systems. While lesser franchises like Cooking Mama or Shaun White Snowboarding pad out areas of the console's roster, the Wii's overall catalog misses out from the stable of consistently strong-scoring titles that sequels provide the other platforms. Given the problems that third parties have had achieving success on the Wii, it's not surprising. Thankfully there are a few exceptions, such as Boom Blox, Red Steel, Resident Evil, and No More Heroes.



Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Sequels Aren't Better

Interestingly, neither Evan Wells (co-founder of Uncharted 2: Among Thieves developer Naughty Dog) nor God of War III director Stig Asmussen thought that sequels necessarily do better than their predecessors. "I don't think it is a given," said Wells. "From the research I've done, on average, if you look across all games, not just the most successful triple-A titles, sequels tend to decline in sales." Asmussen observed a possible mirage effect produced by review scores. A sequel might score better because it's likely a more refined product than the game before it, but "they don't always do better in terms of sales." Despite Asmussen and Wells' insider observations, both God of War III and Uncharted 2 (shown) have surpassed their predecessors according to Sony's sales numbers.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN



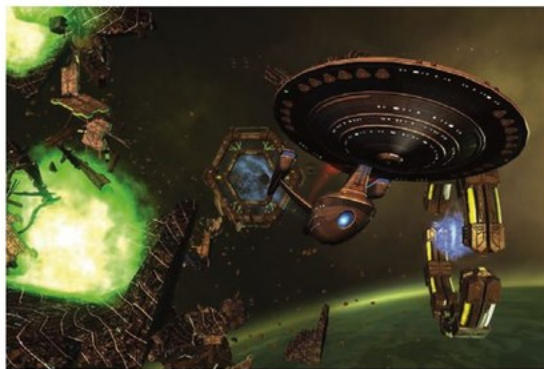
(ABOVE) People all over the industry love to blab about stuff they shouldn't. Otherwise, how would we know that there are voice actors portraying Mr. Freeze and Talia al Ghul in *Batman: Arkham Asylum 2*? Or how retailer HMV is listing the upcoming Bizarre Creations-developed James Bond racer as James Bond: *Bloodstone*? Tony Hawk even "accidentally" twittered that his next board peripheral-using game is called *Tony Hawk Shred*, but nobody paid attention, so it's like it never happened. Right?

(RIGHT) Bionic Commando: Rearmed was the only good thing about last year's return of the franchise, and gamers who loved the side-scrolling XBLA/PSN title are getting more. Capcom unveiled the sequel at a recent event, and although there are no details about when *Rearmed 2* is coming out, at least Nathan "Rad" Spencer can now jump.



(ABOVE) Canadian tea partiers just got a new reason to hate being taxed. Too Human developer Silicon Knights has been awarded a \$4 million grant from the Canadian government to hire new employees and work on a new game. Personally, we'd rather play the balance-the-budget game that our government recently contacted Microsoft about making.

(BELOW) It's good news, bad news for Cryptic/MMO fans. First, like the planned console version of *Champions Online* before it, the 360 edition of *Star Trek Online* is on the "back burner" according to the game's executive producer, Craig Zinkivich. He says it's a business and not a technology snag, so it would appear that Microsoft's strict online policy has claimed another casualty. The good news is that the company has filed a trademark for *City of Heroes 2*.



(ABOVE) An actor pulled a fake gun on a bunch of bar patrons in New Zealand as part of marketing stunt for *Splinter Cell: Conviction*. Needless to say, panic ensued and the cops were called. What a stupid way to advertise the game. Everyone knows Sam Fisher is a total badass who could take out every cop in New Zealand if he wanted, and would never get arrested like that fool.



(LEFT) There's been a staff bloodbath at Sega. Not only has *Iron Man 2* developer Secret Level (acquired by Sega in 2006) been closed, but 73 people have lost their jobs in both the San Francisco and London offices. The company says that while it is not abandoning traditional console titles at all, there will be a new focus on digital content. In fact, London will be the HQ for PC and console titles, while San Francisco handles the digital expansion.

“

We don't have the time to comment on the many lawsuits Activision files against its employees and creative partners.



Jeff Brown, Electronic Arts director of corporate communications, when asked if the company conspired to lure ex-Infinity Ward heads Jason West and Vince Zampella. See page 33 for more.

”

HOLD THE LINE

SAVING YOUR PARTY IN MASS EFFECT 2

by Joe Juba

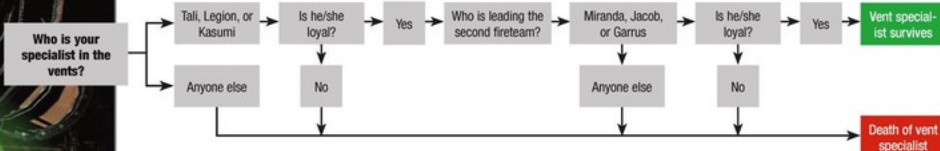
You've already completed Mass Effect 2 at least once – maybe you've even finished multiple play-throughs. Regardless of how many times you've saved the galaxy, what goes on behind the curtain of Shepard's final mission is shrouded in mystery. You know it's good to get the loyalty of your crew, but why? What happens if you choose the wrong specialists? Why is Mordin prone to getting gunned down, even when loyal? We talked to the team at BioWare to get all of the under-the-hood details on how the game determines who survives and who is sacrificed during the course of the game's climactic suicide mission. *Warning: spoilers follow!*



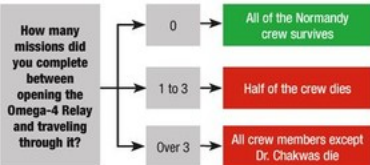
THE BASE



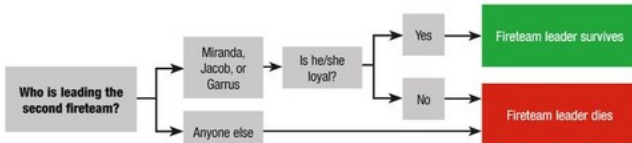
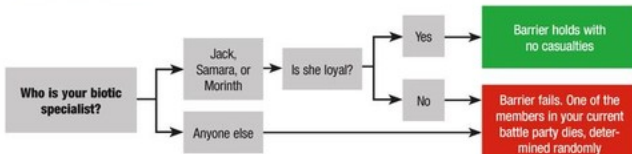
THE VENTS



THE CREW



THE LONG WALK



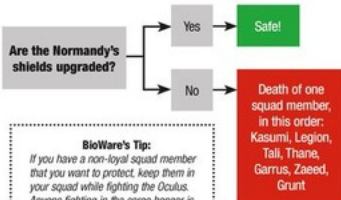
THE APPROACH



ARMOR CHECK



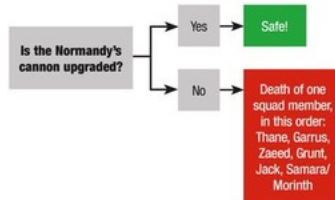
SHIELD CHECK



BioWare's Tip:
If you have a non-loyal squad member that you want to protect, keep them in your squad while fighting the Oculus. Anyone fighting in the cargo hangar is safe from dying due to shield failure.

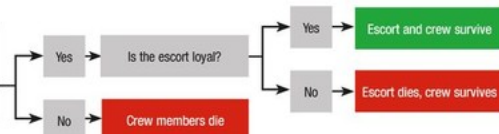


WEAPONS CHECK



THE ESCORT

Do you send a party member to escort the surviving crew?

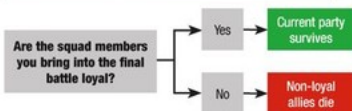


THE ENDGAME



THE FINAL FIGHT

BioWare's Tip:
A good strategy to keep the most people alive while holding the line is to bring the least combat-focused squad members with you for the final fight. It may make your own fight more difficult, but anyone who is loyal is guaranteed to survive at your side.

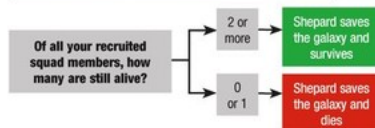


HOLD THE LINE

BioWare's Tip:
While Shepard's battle party is fighting the last boss, the rest of your squad will be holding the line. Less combat-oriented (or unstable) characters like Mordin and Jack are likely to die or put the other team members holding the line at risk – especially if they are not loyal. Battle hardened soldiers like Grunt and Zaeed can actually save the lives of others holding the line. These factors determine how many party members are killed during the the last stand. Non-loyal squad members will fall first, followed by loyal ones according to this order: Mordin, Tali, Kasumi, Jack, Miranda, Jacob, Garrus, Samara/Morinth, Legion, Thane, Zaeed, Grunt.



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games

X-Com Re-Imagined

Classic Becomes FPS, 360

Console Exclusive

Bringing back a well-known franchise is exciting because fans reminisce about all the things they like about the old games, envisioning how the passing of time might improve an already beloved series. X-Com definitely raises the heart rate of fans, but they might not recognize what 2K Games has planned. The publisher has announced that it is reviving the franchise as XCOM – a first-person shooter developed by BioShock 2 lead studio 2K Marin. The game does not have a release date yet, but it will only be on Xbox 360 and PC.

The game puts you in the shoes of an FBI agent who must handle a growing alien threat. Even though XCOM is a first-person title now, that doesn't mean that it has completely lost its strategic edge. Although 2K Marin isn't talking yet about the gameplay, its stated goal is to combine strategy elements with the personal perspective of an FPS.

"With BioShock 2, the team at 2K Marin proved themselves as masters of first-person, suspenseful storytelling," said Christoph

Hartmann, president of 2K, "and with XCOM they will re-imagine and expand the rich lore of this revered franchise. Players will explore the world of XCOM from an immersive new perspective and experience firsthand the fear and tension of this gripping narrative ride."

It's too early to pass judgment on this new XCOM, but the game's new style is certainly an opportunity for 2K Marin to put its own stamp on the franchise, and perhaps take it in new directions that everyone will love.

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Splinter Cell: Conviction

Splinter Cell has always been a game of precise calculations and small windows. If Sam Fisher didn't duck into the shadows at an exact moment, he'd compromise the mission. **Conviction** moves away from these traditions, applying an uncalculated urgency to the stealth formula. Ubisoft Montreal's creative director **Maxime Beland** and co-op game director **Patrick Redding** shed light on the series' dramatic shift, and also outline how an old man like Sam could suddenly be as light-footed as a spring chicken.



After announcing the game you went back to the drawing board and reinvented it. Why did you ultimately decide to change tracks mid-development? How many of those original ideas made it into the final game?

Beland: Our creative teams knew they needed to make an enormous impact with this fifth installment in one of Ubisoft's most important brands. Great games aren't made quickly, and Ubisoft supported the creativity of the development team by giving the necessary time to make a great game. Due to this, we kept all the great tools we already had, such as an amazing lighting engine and the dynamic environment, then we focused the gameplay more on the Splinter Cell values and strengths, such as light and shadows, athletic moves, and gadgets. The aerial level was changed pretty radically in the last months of the project. Other than that, we pretty much produced and shipped everything that we had planned on the mission side. For gameplay, the number one feature that we were not able to do on time was the ability to carry dead bodies. I wish we would've been able to do it. Not that you really need it in the game, but more because it's a feature that a lot of fans would like to have.

Early concept images of Sam showed him with a beard and shaggy hair. Why did you move away from the gruff look?

Beland: The change in Sam's look simply fits better with the new direction of the game. He is not a fugitive anymore, and he is a man on a mission. Sam is not in Third Echelon anymore, he is on his own investigation, and so he chooses to dress in an adequate manner to allow him to do acrobatic moves. The new

Sam now works for himself. He's tense and mean, and all his muscles are for predation, pointing toward his goal. Sam has always been a dangerous man. But now, he lets himself be dangerous.

Conviction moves at a much faster pace than most stealth games. Was speed one of your design goals?

Beland: We wanted to give the "ruthless elite agent" fantasy to the player. We focused on keeping what made SC special: intelligence in action. SC is not and will never be a skill-based shooter at its core. It has to incorporate tactical elements and be rewarding for those that are using it effectively. Meanwhile, we realized that gamers enjoy innovative gameplay and fast-paced action. Our ambition was to bridge the tactical elements with the needed action and pacing that would resonate with gamers' expectations. So we decided to focus on brand new gameplay elements for Conviction. The Mark and Execute is a really good example of this philosophy; being granted a mark and execute, and using it well will require some thinking, while the execute part will be driven by providing the sense of being this ruthless agent. Additionally, the ability to use Last Known Position allows players to strategically flank opponents. This gameplay encourages gamers to learn their surroundings and utilize strategic positioning, while still allowing the freedom to run head first into battle.

Enemies are very chatty in Conviction. Why is the AI constantly hurling insults at you?

Beland: Part of that decision was to give players the feeling that they have too much information about where enemies are and what they're doing rather than too little. Part of

that was bringing enemy chatter into the narrative. Usually, that sort of dialogue is very generic. You can transplant the "Arrgh! I've been shot!" lines that bad guys give off from one game to another, and in a lot of cases it would be hard to tell the difference. Here, we were trying to make those reactions a part of what was going on. Different enemies react in very different ways. Some of that's the insults you're talking about. Some of that's flat-out terror. And some of it is a determination to measure themselves against this terrifying, iconic figure of Sam Fisher by taking him down.

The last fight is more of an interactive cutscene. How do you respond to players who say that the ending was a missed gameplay opportunity?

Beland: Originally, the plan was for Tom Reed to suddenly mutate into a 40-foot tall tentacle beast with machine guns in his eyes, but that turned out to be a bad match for our core gameplay. More seriously, a standard boss fight didn't mesh well with all of the rules of gameplay that had been established across the game, and really across the franchise. A drawn-out, extended fight with a single enemy in a game that's about sudden, successful attacks and quick drops of enemies sort of fights against everything the player had done up to that point. Instead, it seemed more appropriate to have a "boss sequence," something that used gameplay and narrative to create something that matched the rest of the game while providing a satisfying resolution to all aspects.

Why did you decide not to include the beloved Spies vs. Mercenaries multiplayer in Conviction?

Redding: From the beginning we

decided to make the best co-op experience possible for Conviction. The gameplay developed in single-player supports co-op very well because it lets two players work together to dominate the enemy and reinforce that feeling of being predatory. If Sam is the panther, Archer and Kestrel are like two wolves in a pack, working together to take down their prey. Spies vs. Mercs does not fit this new approach to gameplay. We have one challenging adversarial mode called "Face Off" consisting of spy versus spy, with hostile AI thrown into the mix that fits perfectly with the concept of two rival agents.

Splinter Cell is known for having a rigid trial and error gameplay, but Conviction isn't like that at all. Did you try to make the game more forgiving?

Beland: What it means to be a stealth game has changed over time, as has Splinter Cell itself. We used to have things like three alarms and the mission would be failed, the light and noise meter, and detailed radars and maps. We looked at all of these elements and what they brought to the game, and worked to execute those concepts in a new, faster, more action-oriented experience. For example, we've always had a concept of a Last Known Position, a means of playing cat-and-mouse with the enemies; however, it was a difficult concept to play with since there was a lot of guesswork involved. Now we expose it to you, and it becomes a really powerful tool that you can exploit. In all, I think we've managed to create the same core Splinter Cell experience, but faster, clearer, more personal and with the option to play either in a stealthy or more dynamic way. ♦

TOP TEN ANNOYING ENEMIES

by Dan Ryckert



Like-Likes (Legend of Zelda series)

Most annoying enemies are content to simply send you to your death, but Like-Like has more sinister intentions. The real threat with him isn't that he'll drain your health bar, it's that he'll steal one of Link's iconic accessories – his shield. If you don't defeat him soon enough after he swallows you, you'll find yourself angrily trotting back to the nearest shop to throw down some hard-earned rupees on something you already owned.

Metroids

(Metroid Series)

On one hand, Metroids are among the most awesome, iconic enemies in gaming. On the other hand, they are huge pains in the butt. You've got to blast them with missiles (usually after freezing them), which is easier said than done when they come zooming in from off-screen as you're trying to jump on tiny platforms hovering over lava. If they do manage to latch on, prepare to do Samus' signature "bomb and jump and flail like crazy" maneuver to get free.



Will-o-the-Wisps

(Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion)

If you happen to be wandering Cyrodiil without a magic weapon in tow, you'd better prepare to sprint in terror if you see a Will-o-the-Wisp. These shimmering beacons of death are immune to conventional weapons, and will relentlessly chase after you as they fade in and out of existence. Be careful not to accidentally lead them into a town, which is essentially a death sentence for all nearby guards and citizens; the Wisp unceremoniously zaps everything in sight before turning its attention back to you.



Mimics (Many RPGs)

More than any other enemy on this list, Mimics love to add insult to injury. At least the other bad guys look like bad guys...these spike-toothed pests have the gall to disguise themselves as treasure chests. You think you'll be getting a nice new weapon or some gold, but in a giant middle finger to the player, you end up having to fight a monster. Perhaps the most insidious Mimic of all is found in *Zelda: Spirit Tracks*, in which some treasure chests turn out to be disguised Like-Likes (see #1).



Lakitus (Mario series)

The sight of these goggle-eyed jerks will trigger instant rage for any old-school Mario fan. If you think of Lakitus as friendly, cloud-bound buddies who carry video cameras and hold checkered flags, you need to spend more time in the Mushroom Kingdom's 2D incarnations. That's where this floating menace assaults players with an unending rain of Spiny's, occasionally taunting you with an extra life on a fishing line before beginning the barrage.



Big Eyes (Mega Man)

As if Mega Man blasting his way through a devious gauntlet of traps isn't harrowing enough, Dr. Wily decides to deploy the Big Eyes. Guarding the entrance to the lairs of the original robot masters, the Big Eyes are difficult to hit and can absorb a ton of shots from your mega buster. Even worse, their devastating jump attack does absurd damage, sending you back to a mid-stage checkpoint when you are only inches away from confronting the boss.



Birds

(Ninja Gaiden)
Swarms of ghost fish plagued Ryu in his Xbox comeback, but his original animal adversary came in the form of these infuriating hawks from his NES debut. In a game that required insane reflexes and precise platforming, there was nothing worse than a bird swooping down and knocking you out of the air to your death time and time again.



Hunters

(Resident Evil)
How could things get worse after barely killing a giant mutated plant? Try limping back to a mansion you just cleared of zombies only to be decapitated by huge bipedal reptiles with foot-long claws. Hunters infest the Raccoon City mansion later in *Resident Evil*, and their quick instant kill attacks make the undead look like puppies. Survival horror fans learned the hard way that half a clip of handgun rounds and an ink ribbon don't do much against these beasts.



Malboros

(Final Fantasy series)
These terrifying creatures have been inflicting a multitude of status effects on RPG gamers for years. One whiff of its Bad Breath attack could render your party useless with effects ranging from confuse to poison. If enough of these ailments struck your team, there was little else you could do other than run away.



Medusa Heads

(Castlevania series)
While they were present in many *Castlevania* titles, these airborne nuisances were at their peak of annoyance in *Symphony of the Night's* clock tower area. Not only did these swarms prevent you from making that precise jump, but the gold ones even turned Alucard to stone.



top ten

Since the early days of Richard Garriott's Origin Systems and Warren Spector's Ion Storm studio, the city of Austin, TX has become one of the most vibrant video game development scenes in the country. With a legendary local music scene, great local culture and weather, Austin is an attractive location for aspiring game designers.

LONE STAR GAMING

AUSTIN TEXAS, A MECCA OF GAME DEVELOPMENT

by Matt Helgeson

A steady stream of young talent from the University of Texas, which boasts world-class computer science and game development programs, fuels Austin developers. Currently, the Austin chapter of the Independent Game Developers Association boasts 83 member companies that employ 3,047 employees.

1 Arkane Studios

The American branch of the French developer. Arkane recently worked on BioShock 2 for 2K Marin

2 Armature Studio

A new company formed in 2008 by ex-Retro vets Mark Pacini, Jack Matthews, and Todd Keller. The company has a development deal with EA

3 Aspyr Media

This publisher/developer specializes in porting PC games to Mac, including franchises like Call of Duty and Civilization

4 BioWare Austin

A division of BioWare, this studio was created in 2006 to work on the highly anticipated Star Wars: The Old Republic MMO project

5 Edge of Reality

Formed in 1998, this veteran studio most recently developed The Incredible Hulk for Sega and did the console versions of BioWare's Dragon Age: Origins

6 Electronic Arts Pogo

Pogo.com, a free online games portal, specializes in browser-based casual titles. Electronic Arts purchased the company in 2001 for \$40 million

7 Junction Point

Formed by legendary developer Warren Spector, Junction Point is a division of Disney Interactive. Its first project is the much-anticipated Epic Mickey for Wii

8 LightBox Interactive

This studio was founded by core members of Twisted Metal: Black and Warhawk studio Incognito Entertainment. LightBox currently has a multi-year development deal with Sony Computer Entertainment

9 Midnight Studios

A new company formed by brothers Kevin and Charles Normann, who produced big titles at Electronic Arts including many products in the Sims series

10 Retro Studios

This well-known Austin developer is world renowned for its work on Nintendo's Metroid Prime series and is currently working on an untitled project for the Wii

11 Red Fly Studio

Red Fly Studio has worked on titles like the PS2, Wii, and PSP versions of Ghostbusters. It's also done Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars, and the recent Food Network: Cook or Be Cooked! for Wii

12 Renegade Kid

This small studio is co-owned by industry veterans Jools Watsham and Gregg Hargrove. The studio has won praise for its DS horror series Dementium

13 Sony Online Entertainment

This division of Sony's internal studios was responsible for Star Wars Galaxies and is now working on a new MMO project

14 Twisted Pixel

This upstart developer has won praise for its critically acclaimed downloadable titles The Maw and Splosion Man. The studio is working on a new game titled Comic Jumper

15 Vigil Games

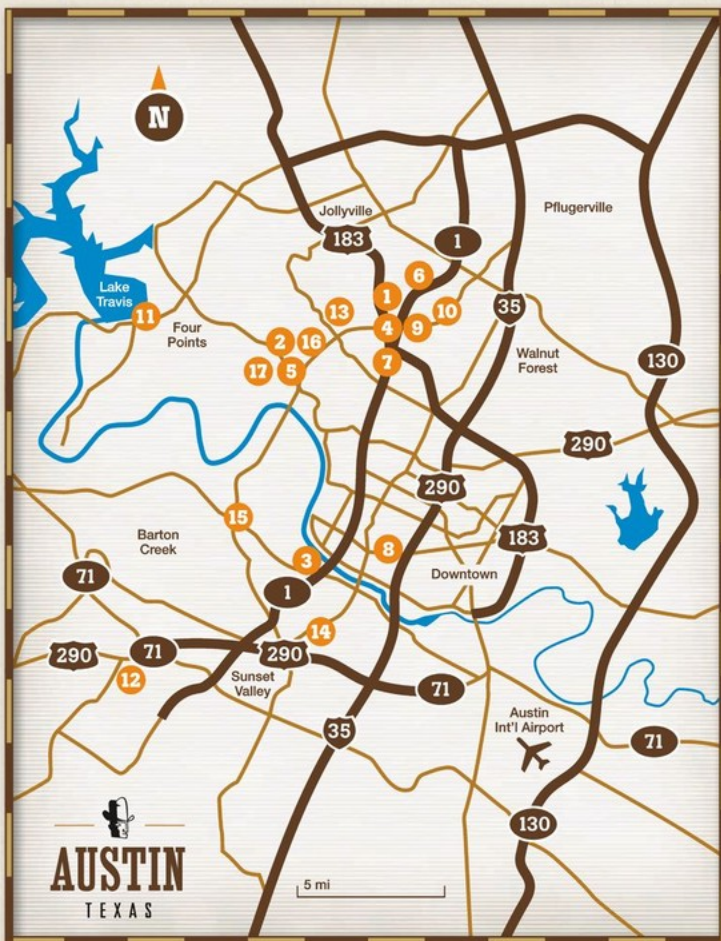
Vigil was formed out of a partnership between game producer David Adams and well-known comic artist Joe Madureira. The company has developed two titles, the Warhammer 40,000 MMO and the recent cult hit Darksiders. Vigil is owned by THQ


16 NCSoft West

This division of the giant Korean publisher is still active, but was hit with massive layoffs following the failure of the MMO projects Dungeon Runners and Richard Garriott's Tabula Rasa

17 Portalarium

After a messy divorce with NCSoft, Ultima creator Richard Garriott has formed a new Austin-based company, Portalarium, which will focus on casual and social networking games. Its first release is Sweet @S! Poker, currently available on Windows and Facebook





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Limbo
Xbox Live Arcade, PC

An independent game winner makes good, and another classic franchise returns *by Matt Miller*

It's always nice when a small team's creative vision gets enough attention that it's given a shot at the spotlight. That's exactly what seems to be happening with **Limbo**, a stunning new project from a Danish development house called PlayDead. Having won awards in Visual Arts and Technical Excellence at this year's Independent Games Festival, Limbo is now headed for a console release on Xbox Live Arcade. The minimalist art style of this platforming action/adventure is the first thing that catches the eye — everything is rendered in a soft, slightly blurry black and white. In action, the game's audio is equally stark — devoid of music, the audio experience is nonetheless central to the foreboding atmosphere. Creaking trees and softly whistling wind accompany the lonely journey through the game's danger-fraught forests. The gameplay that ensues in this disconcerting environment is puzzle-heavy — the shadowy boy with shining eyes has no special abilities beyond jumping and manipulating onscreen objects. His lack of superpowers leads to some grisly deaths that seem at odds with the game's platformer roots. He'll be decapitated, and his head will roll gently down a hill. Or a looming creature will stab its spear-like leg into his body, impaling the suddenly limp form. PlayDead has claimed inspirations for the game in everything from German expressionism

to American film noir and even the stark and haunting nature of nightmares. There's little in the way of plot beyond a vague tagline about a boy, uncertain of his sister's future, who is flung into Limbo. I'm fascinated by everything I've seen of Limbo so far — avant-garde gamers would be wise to watch for its summer release on XBLA.

Several months ago I got to see **Puzzle Quest 2** in action; this month I was afforded an extended hands-on period with the highly anticipated game. I poured dozens of hours into Challenge of the Warlords, so my enthusiasm for that game's first true sequel should come as little surprise. If you are like me, rest easy; Puzzle Quest 2 changes a lot of the surrounding window dressing, but the core combat/puzzle mechanic is rock solid. The new isometric viewing angle and westernized art style brings players closer to their hero and his journey — the whole game resembles a single, massive dungeon crawl, rather than a world-spanning journey across the map. Encounters against uniquely powered monsters remain the most common challenge. In these battles, weapons join the magic spells of the previous game, expanding the number of ways you can take down an enemy. The four classes (assassin, barbarian, sorcerer, and templar) each have interesting powers and are balanced for particular play styles. Beyond the battles, players will face a host of challenges and

minigames. These puzzles are usually a variation on the color-matching mechanic, with goals like knocking down a door or extinguishing a burning house. What remains to be seen is how the title will play out in its entirety — if the latter-game leveling and exploration process is as fun as the early introductory levels are, Puzzle Quest 2 will likely garner another 40 hours of my life.

Amid the flood of recent remake news, I was excited to hear that Konami is prepping a new take on the classic Rush'N Attack. Like the original 1985 arcade game, **Rush'N Attack: Ex-Patriot** is an action/platform title with roots in the conflicts of the Cold War. In the game's fiction, Sergeant Sid Morrow is an operative sent into the former Soviet Union to help deal with an escalating clandestine conflict between the U.S. and Russia. His mission: to recover an MIA soldier and grab some Russian nuclear secrets along the way. To do so, the game takes on a number of features of modern stealth games — most situations leave Sid with little more than his knife to take down enemy soldiers. Along 2D levels with 3D features (like doors in the background in which Sid can hide) players navigate through three sprawling facilities. Players have a choice between straightforward assault and careful, planned takedowns. The game bears a marked visual similarity to last year's Shadow Complex — unsurprising, since both games utilize the Unreal 3 engine in similar gameplay styles. Ex-Patriot will release this fall, and combine the visual action and exploration of Shadow Complex with a tense stealth vibe all its own.

For additional coverage of downloadable games, check in at gameinformer.com/mag for weekly updates.



Puzzle Quest 2
Xbox Live Arcade, Nintendo DS

Verloren - Chapel
Goblin Academy, Defeat the Goblin



Rush'N Attack: Ex-Patriot
PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade



Controller Freaks

by Jeff Cork

I was browsing around the Indie Games section on Xbox Live the other day, and one of the games stood out from the rest. The art was a photo of a smiling baby, which is something you don't usually see on game consoles. In the accompanying text, the creator says he wanted to make a game that his eight-month-old son could play, too. It's a cute idea, but the more I thought about it the more it creeped me out.

Why are we gamers so pushy about our hobby?

Visit any online gaming community and you're bound to find posts about the best games to get a controller into a reluctant spouse's hands. Obviously, everyone is a gamer – they just haven't played the right one yet. Another common thread is one where people post about how they plan to introduce their children – real or hypothetical – to the joys of video games.

I talked to Bethesda Softworks executive producer Todd Howard to see what his opinions were on the subject of kids starting out with gaming. He's the father of two boys, ages three and seven, and he seems to be taking the same approach that my wife and I have been. "I let him do it at his own pace," he says. "I didn't really force it, like 'I like video games, you should look at this,' because I felt that it would come." Howard says that his oldest son didn't have any interest in games until he was about five.

My older son, who just turned three, doesn't have much interest in games, either. We're fine with watching him play with trucks and stomp around with his toy dinosaurs. He has his whole life ahead of him, and it doesn't make much sense to plop him down in front of a TV when he's so happy being an active little boy.

We certainly don't have a corner on the market when it comes to projecting our own interests on other people – just look at hardcore sports fans. But I think there's something particularly needy and pathetic about the obsession that gamers have about converting the non-believers. I'm all about sharing my enthusiasm with other people, but I think I'm pretty good about setting boundaries. I know my wife isn't going to get excited about games the same way I do. I could frustrate both of us by trying to force the issue, but I've learned not to bother. She certainly doesn't try to get me to watch reruns of *The Gilmore Girls*.

Would I like to someday sit down with my sons and play co-op with my kids? Absolutely. Am I going to be disappointed if they'd rather play hockey or read or collect stamps? Probably not. Am I going to prod them into playing in the meantime? Absolutely not. I'm happy to play it cool. "I just knew that it would come, and once it came he'd be glued to them," Howard says.

Until then, I've got a pile of single-player games to keep me busy. ♦



all ages

The (Pixel) Art of Scott

Paul Robertson Jumps From YouTube Sensation To Game Art Director *by Bryan Vore*

On March 25, nerds lit up the Internet watching and posting about the debut trailer for *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*. Based on a series of comics from Bryan Lee O'Malley, the movie (hitting theaters August 13) is chock-full of indie rock humor, over-the-top kung fu battles, and rampant video game references. It's only fitting that a film so steeped in gaming culture have a legit video game itself.

Enter Ubisoft, which is producing a 2D sidescrolling brawler for downloadable platforms based on Scott Pilgrim in the vein of classics like *River City Ransom* and *Double Dragon*. The smartest move the publisher made, however, was hiring Paul Robertson to head up all of the pixel art and animation. Robertson's *Pirate Baby's Cabana Battle Street Fight 2006* is a short black and white film made to look like the ultimate brawler. With amazing animation, outrageous enemies, and inside nerd jokes, the short took off, garnering over a million views across various outlets.

If you read through user comments on the video, one message keeps appearing again and again, "Why can't this be a real game!?" Hopefully through the Scott Pilgrim game, fans of *Pirate Baby* can finally get their wish. We caught up with Robertson in Australia to get the scoop on projects past and present.

How did you first get into pixel art and animation?

I always liked drawing as a kid, and when I was about 12 my friend gave me an animation program for our 386 [computer] and I went from there. I did a media arts course at university, but I probably learned more theory than any practical skills there, so I would say I'm mostly self-taught. I don't know any programming, though.

Pirate Baby debuted at the 2006 Next Wave Festival and was sponsored by a grant from the city of Melbourne. How did that come together?

A friend I met at university organized it for me. She was working for a festival committee, organizing screenings and exhibits, and I was already making *Pirate Baby* so she asked if I was working on anything and if I wanted to apply for a young filmmakers grant that was on offer. So she organized all the paper work for me and set up an exhibition for it with a few other artists.

What was it like showing it for the first time?

It was exciting. Hearing the crowd's reaction to the more violent or crazy scenes was pretty funny.

Did you ever expect the enormous online reaction that *Pirate Baby's Cabana Battle Street Fight 2006* received?

I never really thought about it. I was just making it to entertain myself, so it was pretty cool that a lot of other people liked it too.

Were you ever tempted into turning *Pirate Baby* into a playable game?

I never wanted it to be a game; it's a parody of a game. [It's about] huge crazy bosses, endless fodder enemies, get to the top of the building and save the kidnapped girl plotline, arena battles...everything that's in a good game.

What was the first commercial game you were paid to work on?

It was cleaning up 3D rendered sprites on a Game Boy Advance backyard football game. It was the best fun ever.

You've worked on games with Scribblenauts developer 5th Cell. What was that like?

5th Cell always has nice clean sprites in their games, which are fun to animate. I enjoyed working on the Drawn to Life games the most. I got to work on an animated intro for the latest one, which was really fun. Plus, they are all around nice guys to work for.

How did Ubisoft approach you to work on the Scott Pilgrim game?

They emailed me and said they were making a Scott Pilgrim game, and asked if I'd like to be art director on it and handle the style and animation on the game. I thought it sounded like a cool project and I was just finishing up a job when they made the offer, so it was convenient for me.

How do your responsibilities with this game compare to past projects?

I designed the sprites and the general look of the game and am animating the playable characters, bosses, effects, and other miscellaneous stuff. We have an awesome background guy and two other animators also working on it. I directed them and worked with programmers directly and set a certain art style for the game, so that was



Pilgrim

all new for me. I'd definitely say it's the most creative control I've had on a game. But there were still a lot of restrictions. Keeping to the original source material for one, pleasing the publisher and producers, programming limitations, etc.

Does Scott Pilgrim creator Bryan Lee O'Malley have any input on the look of the game?

Yeah, he came to the studio a few times and we talked about how we were gonna handle the narrative and flow of the game. It was really good to have his input. He also drew a few sketches that we based the between-level cutscenes on.

What would be your dream game to work on?

A 2D Monster Hunter. I wouldn't want to design any new monsters. The ones they have are awesome already. I'd just like to animate them in pixels. Although animating all the Pokémon would be fun, too.

Robertson followed up *Pirate Bob* with the even crazier (and full color) *Kings of Power 4 Billion %*



*Pirate Bob's Cabana
Battle Street Fight 2009*



Stephen, Kim, and Scott rock out as Sex Bob-omb in Paul Robertson's in-game interpretation of the Scott Pilgrim franchise



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Stepping Into Final Fantasy XIV's Magical World

Can Square Enix finally craft a more approachable modern MMO? *by Philip Kollar*

Before I get into details about Final Fantasy XIV, I should be clear on my Square Enix MMO history: Though I'm a lifelong fan of the classic JRPG franchise, I couldn't force myself to play Final Fantasy XI for longer than a week. I can understand the appeal of EverQuest with a Final Fantasy skin, but I had already played EverQuest. FF XI was too slow, too awkward to control, and too unrefined. By the time it was out, I was ready for World of Warcraft to come along and set a new precedent for less intimidating MMOs.

Square Enix has been upfront about its intention to follow in Blizzard's footsteps and make Final Fantasy XIV more accessible. With the game still planned for a 2010 release and an alpha version now running, we were finally able to check out FF XIV this month, but the changes weren't always as obvious as I had expected.

I watched the tutorial segment for Limsa Lominsa, one of three possible locations to begin your journey. Choose this locale, and you'll find yourself aboard an instanced ship headed to this port city. After you learn some basic controls, the ship hits stormy weather and, in a beautiful, cinematic cutscene, is invaded by a small army of squid-like sea monsters. After watching a few powerful

characters do some stylish hacking and slashing, you regain control of your character for the combat portion of the tutorial.

Needless to say, the actual in-game combat is less exciting than the cutscenes, though it also recalls other Final Fantasy games better than XI did. Once you enter combat, the action gauge begins filling up (similar to the ATB gauge that solo FF fans are used to). After three to four seconds, you're allowed to select an attack. Your available actions depend on your class, which can be changed on the fly simply by switching weapons. For example, if you have an axe equipped, you'll become a Marauder and unlock the "Hack" ability, which does a single strike.

You'll need to wait another few seconds for your action gauge to refill between every attack, which makes the combat in FF XIV sluggish even by MMO standards. Other strategic elements, such as the effect gauge, which controls attack strength, and the TP meter, which builds and allows for stronger abilities throughout the course of combat, add layers of complexity. However, they may not be enough to engage players in an otherwise very slow-paced combat system.

Thankfully, virtually everything else about Final Fantasy XIV seems much easier to jump into. Each area contains numerous crystals, all of which restore HP and MP. Guildleves grant you quick quests, and you can even adjust the difficulty to make missions easy enough for solo play or hard enough to require a party. The only

"Square Enix has been incredibly upfront about its intention to follow in Blizzard's footsteps and make Final Fantasy XIV more accessible."

major issue I found with the questing structure is that most NPC dialogue appears in the regular chat box, a problem FF XI had as well. I hope it is changed before launch.

Though I saw the PC version of Final Fantasy XIV – there will not be a beta for PS3 – it was demoed quite comfortably with a controller. The combat's simplicity tailors it to a console audience that may not be familiar with the complexity of most button-filled MMOs, but I'm still skeptical whether the game can keep me interested at its current speed. Anything in this early alpha version is subject to change, though, so I'll have to wait it out before I can pass serious judgment. ♦



BUILDING A HERO

Though Final Fantasy XIV has the same five races as XI (now with slightly different names), the character creation process is overflowing with choices to make your avatar unique. Figuring out how your character looks and sounds will be more important than in other MMOs for one very big reason: Your creation will take part in fully-voiced cutscenes that reveal the story of the world of Eorzea.



Game Regulation Across the Pacific

Australia and the R18+ Rating

by Chris Stead
editor-in-chief,
Game Informer Australia

I cannot walk down to my local game shop and buy Left 4 Dead 2 in its original form. I can't buy *Risen*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Fallout 3*, *Mark Ecko's Getting Up*, and many more. I am not allowed to do this because in my country, Australia, our highest classification level for games is capped at MA15+. If the content is considered by our classification board to be suitable only for gamers aged 18 and above, it's not allowed in the country. Full stop! That's the law. Yet somehow, I have still managed to play all these games.

Australia's draconian classification system is only inflicted upon games. I can buy equally confronting material, such as the film *The Exorcist*, the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Snoop Dogg's latest jingle about capping "bitches" while on "the best weed" unhindered. However, I cannot use drugs to heal my injured adventurer in *Fallout 3* because its interactive nature is, according to Australia's current classification guidelines, more likely to turn children into drug addicts than seeing Snoop blow ganja rings over a sea of heaving breasts from the bonnet of his Hummer. The hypocrisy makes you want to scream, Edward Munch style, but it's merely a testament to the oldest of human idiosyncrasies: the generation gap.

According to the yearly studies of the Interactive Entertainment Group of Australia, 96 percent of Australians would like to see an R18+ rating for gaming. But that has not been enough. There are a four percent who don't, and some of them have positions of power. Australia is, in truth, no different from the USA. We, like you, have conservative older citizens who, in their generational naivety, strongly oppose the entertainment video gaming offers. They are simply unable to consume the media in context and understand that the generations below them grew up alongside gaming, and that – at the risk of generalizing – we are well aware of the line between it and reality.

Unfortunately for Australian gamers, one such individual, Michael Atkinson, became the Attorney-General of South Australia in 2002, right at the beginning of the maturation of our industry. Due to a loophole in a customs law that dates back to the federation of the country

in 1900, he – like the Attorneys-General of the other Australian States – has veto power over any changes made to the classification system. He was so personally convinced that gaming is a terrorist holding Australia's youth hostage that he pushed said veto button as soon as any talk of an adult classification for games arose during his eight-year tenure, which ended on March 22 this year.

Imagine if such a person rose to significant power in USA and violent video games were banned. Don't laugh – look at prohibition or the crusade against rock n' roll in the '60s. If a territory as significant as the States took a right wing stance on video gaming, it would cripple the gaming industry beyond repair, not to mention have economic repercussions across the rest of society and – dare I say it – the globe. And it is a real threat; there is genuine fear out there about what the interactivity of gaming violence is doing to our minds. And in fear, people shoot first and ask questions later.

The video game naysayers are not without their points. There should be studies into the effects of violent and addicting games on human psychology and whether the interactivity matters. We should arm ourselves with that information, because as individuals we're not all equally equipped to deal with having our emotions pushed to the limit, regardless of the stimulus.

Trying to ban or restrict media while we await such knowledge is not the answer. If history has taught us nothing else, it is that there is no controlling change. Video gaming is here, and it is here to stay. I urge my own government as it enters this new post-Atkinson era to be more welcoming of the diverse content gaming

can offer, and to facilitate an R18+ rating which will simply allow users to be accurately informed of the content before it is consumed. The new Attorney-General has certainly shown a willingness to educate himself on video gaming – a positive change. For the governments of the greater world I would warn about the dangers of trying to impose harsh controlling

measures as seen in Australia. Ultimately, in the geographically boundary-free existence in which the human hive exists, the content will be consumed regardless and you will have only missed out on an opportunity to inform your citizens on what to expect in advance.

That's what has happened in Oz: the lack of an adult rating has merely seen the majority of content being sent through classification under false pretenses and ultimately released with a MA15+ classification. So instead of being safely marked as R18+, games like *GTA* and *God of War* are shoehorned into a lower rating, thereby subjecting children as young as 15 to games they were never intended to experience. Not only is it morally reprehensible on the part of the government, but it must horrify the creators, too. A small percentage of games are sprung and asked to make nips and tucks (like turning off blood splatter in *GTA IV*) so that they can argue their way into a lower rating. This simply inspires many gamers to either send their money overseas with imports or, worse, head to their nearest torrent. In truth, the prohibition of video games has merely acted to increase its presence in the wrong hands.

Cultural evolution is not a by-product of chance. Humanity has deliberately gone where no one has gone before, willing to give curiosity the lead and to pass on what we have learned to the rest of the hive. Video gaming is forging fearlessly ahead on this frontier: Now what have we learned?

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

opinion



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



Battlefield: Bad Company 2

Game Informer scours the leaderboards in search of the best of the best to uncover the person behind the handle and learn his or her strategies. If you get a pesky message from GameInformerMag over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network, you could be our next featured gamer. *by Matt Bertz*

Accomplishments:

Like many shooters, Battlefield: Bad Company 2's leaderboards are corrupted by boosters — players who get together to create the ideal scenarios for cheating their way up the rankings. But amid the sea of disingenuous ranking junkies, a few legitimate performers stand out. Rikki Evans is the first true player to reach the rank of 50 on Xbox 360, the crowning achievement in Bad Company 2. Along the way he's amassed nearly 7 million points, 31,000 kills, and 700 dog tags.

Origin of Skills:

Evans is no stranger to first-person shooters, having cut his teeth on Call of Duty, Modern Warfare 2, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter, Rainbow Six Vegas, Gears of War, and the Halo series. But Battlefield Bad Company 2 is the first game in which he's taken his online reputation seriously. "Bad Company 2 is better than all other games put together," he says. "There's just so much stuff you can do in it, and I love how the game plays — you never know what can happen." Evans now splits his time between playing Xbox Live matches with his friends and competing with the Sons of Anarchy, the top-rated Bad Company 2 clan on Gamebattles.com.

Battling the Boosters:

Evans is the true top-rated player in Bad Company 2, but if you check the leaderboards, he's listed beneath a few other players whose extremely low kill counts and BHLL.com name-dropping tip their hands as boosters. Evans knows first-hand how badly these cheaters

plague the Bad Company 2 leaderboards, and admits he doesn't understand the allure. "There's no fun in it," he says. "It bugs me a lot, but I know I'm the legit number one so it's all good."

Battlefield Tips:

When it comes to offering advice to aspiring Bad Company 2 competitors, Evans recommends playing as a team, communicating before you act, and coordinating your movement. "Never play with randoms, only people you know," he says. "If you work as a team you will start to get a lot better. Make sure you look all around before moving anywhere, never run off from your squad, and spot every enemy so, in case they kill you, your team knows where to look for them. Also, make sure your squad has a mix of different classes in case you need one of their main specializations."

Improving Bad Company 2:

Evans believes the game is fantastic as is, but if he could change a few things he'd like to see DICE include more weapons like the ACR and AK-47, trim down the damage on the overpowered M60, and add a few new game modes. "I just want it to be more chaotic. Being able to hit people with the stock of your gun would be awesome."

Life Outside of Bad Company 2:

Evans recently graduated from school, and is taking time to enjoy himself before jumping into the workforce. When he's not racking up the kills in Bad Company 2, he likes to mess around with his mates and drink the occasional pint.



Rikki Evans

Handle

SS RikkiSniper

Age

18

Hometown

Bridgend, South Wales

Favorite Map

Arica Harbor

Favorite Kit

AN-94, M1911, 4x rifle scope, magnum ammo, and warheads



Although Jason West and Vince Zampella have left Infinity Ward, Modern Warfare 2's Stimulus Package DLC has sold over 2.5 million downloads so far.

news

West & Zampella Start Respawn Entertainment

The past, however, is still unsettled *by Matthew Kato*

It's been an eventful past few months for Activision, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 developer Infinity Ward, and the studio's two former heads, Jason West and Vince Zampella. But a new day is dawning, and with it comes a new studio for West and Zampella, the next round in their lawsuit with Activision, and big changes for Infinity Ward.

A New Start for West & Zampella

It didn't take long for West and Zampella to land on their feet. The pair have inked a deal with EA Partners (Electronic Arts') premier publishing/distribution arm for third parties) to start Respawn Entertainment. Although nobody is talking about the deal's details, EA Partners has given the new company start-up money to get the ball rolling on an undisclosed project.

We talked to West and Zampella, who told us that although they fielded a variety of offers, in the end it was EA Partners who won because of its promise to let the pair keep their independence. "It allowed us to form an independent studio, seed capital, and a publishing deal, so we're Respawn Entertainment," said Jason West. "We're totally independent, own the IP, and we control our own destiny, and then EA has the exclusive on publishing our premier game, but we feel like we're Respawn Entertainment."

West's use of the singular "game" would point to a short-lived partnership between the two, but when pressed, he wouldn't get into any specifics of the contract. As for the game itself, anything's possible — including a title that's not an FPS. "I won't speak for EA," Zampella said, "but on our side, the sky's the limit, which is a good place to be where

we're pretty much open to exploring new ideas."

Before this new project can get off the ground, however, Respawn has to hire staff apart from West and Zampella. The company has already been hiring many former comrades who have jumped ship at Infinity Ward.

No matter what the future will hold for the pair, the past is not totally behind them just yet. Respawn's choice of EA Partners would seem to lend credence to Activision's countersuit charges that the duo conspired with EA to leave Activision while still at Infinity Ward, but to Jason West, it's a pretty cut-and-dried situation. "We were on a contract, and if they [Activision] didn't fire us then there would be no Respawn."

The Infinity Ward Body Count

As if the studio losing its two generals in Jason West and Vince Zampella wasn't bad enough, there is now a column of employees marching out of the Infinity Ward building. As of the time of this writing, almost 20 people have left the developer — and we're not talking about some interns. Going down the list of the departed, the word "lead" comes up often in their job titles. Adding insult to injury, over half of them have joined West and Zampella at their new studio.

As for the rest of the Infinity Ward crew, they will continue making

games. Modern Warfare 3 — the title that West and Zampella didn't want to make — will likely be the studio's next project. Treyarch is handling a new Call of Duty game, while Activision's Sledgehammer Games is working on a CoD title slated for 2011. Activision has also created a whole Call of Duty division dedicated solely to the franchise and its spin-offs.

We don't know what the mood and morale of Infinity Ward is at this point, but perhaps it received a boost thanks to a bonus payout. Of course, West and Zampella's lawsuit against Activision seeks over \$36 million in unpaid royalties, including a recent bonus that the two believe the publisher fired them to avoid paying. Nevertheless, the company is distributing a bonus back to the remaining employees of Infinity Ward. The publisher's community supervisor, Dan Amrich, revealed: "Vince and Jason had very large bonuses; those bonuses are being redistributed to everybody else, to the people who did not allegedly attempt to steal company secrets. Activision is not pocketing that bonus money; it's still going to the people who work at IW. But you have to work at IW to get it."

It's too early to determine how Infinity Ward or Activision will fare without the services of West and Zampella, but so far the franchise is still in the business of printing money. Modern Warfare 2's Stimulus Package DLC sold 2.5 million downloads in its first week at \$15 a pop, raking in over \$37 million.



Activision CEO Bobby Kotick has been under fire for his handling of the situation, but the company's stock price has gone up since the departure of West and Zampella.

Activision Strikes Back

West and Zampella's lawsuit against Activision detailed charges that the publisher reneged on a promise to let the pair work on a new IP after Modern Warfare 2, withheld royalties, and that they were fired unlawfully. Activision's countersuit, however, describes the pair as "self-serving schemers" who were trying to steal the wholly owned studio.

It claims that they went "on a secret trip by private jet to Northern California arranged by their Hollywood agent, to meet with the most senior executives of Activision's closest competitor." The countersuit doesn't name Electronic Arts, but given that West and Zampella's new Respawn Entertainment outfit signed up with EA Partners, it's not hard to believe the idea that the wheels had been greased.

Furthermore, Activision's countersuit says that West and Zampella sought to prevent the publisher from paying Infinity Ward employees bonus money, speculating that they did this "to make these employees easier to poach when West and Zampella executed their plans to leave the company and set up their own company."

In a statement, the duo's attorney, Robert Schwartz, responded by saying charges in Activision's countersuit were "false and outrageous." Schwartz says that West and Zampella's hiring of Creative Artists Agency (before it was recently announced), and conversations with Infinity Ward employees and "others" were designed to investigate whether Activision's idea of spinning off Infinity Ward could work, and weren't "in disrespect of their obligations to Activision."



West and Zampella and Jason West have the independence they craved at Respawn

interview



Photo: Kris Connor

Defending the Industry

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1995 CAPITOL HILL

Gallagher heads to Washington as a chief of staff for Representative Rick White, his former boss at the prestigious Seattle law firm Perkins Coie

1998 BACK HOME

Gallagher returns to Seattle to enter the burgeoning wireless communication business at AirTouch

1999 MERGERS

AirTouch merges with the UK Vodafone Group. Later that year, Vodafone AirTouch merges with Bell Atlantic to form Verizon Wireless. Gallagher helps coordinate state public policy at the new firm

2001 BACK IN D.C.

Back in Washington, Gallagher works as a deputy assistant Secretary of Commerce and the deputy director of the National Telecommunications & Information Administration for the Bush administration

2003 BIG CHIEF

Gallagher becomes deputy Chief of Staff & counselor for Policy to Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans

2003 INTELLIGENCE MATTERS

Gallagher becomes a CIA Intelligence Fellow

2006 HIGH PRAISE

Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez awards Gallagher the Redfield Award for distinguished leadership in government service

2007 ESA BOUND

In May of 2007, Gallagher succeeds ESA founder Doug Lowenstein as the President of the Entertainment Software Association

As president of the Entertainment Software Association, Michael Gallagher leads efforts to battle censorship, decrease piracy, and put on the annual E3 convention. We spoke with him about some of the issues facing video games.

The ESA is very active in challenging laws that seek to restrict the sale of games in the court system. Right now, there's a very important case regarding games that could be heard by the Supreme Court.

You are mentioning the Schwarzenegger appeal. That case is actually pending before the Supreme Court right now. They have yet to decide to grant "cert" or not. It's not been decided whether they will hear the appeal or not. [Shortly after our interview, the news broke that the Supreme Court had granted cert and will hear the case - Ed.]

So a lower court overturned the law, which would criminalize the sale of some games in California, and the state is appealing the decision.

In 2005, the State of California passed the Yee bill - named after Leland Yee. The ESA was very clear with the legislature that that bill [was] unconstitutional. It was passed and signed by Governor Schwarzenegger. We got an injunction against the law going into effect. Twice, the State of California has appealed the injunction, and in both circumstances they've lost in very clear opinions that point to the ESA stance that video games are, in fact, speech and an artistic form of expression. The final 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision is what Schwarzenegger appealed to the Supreme Court.

If the Supreme Court upholds the lower court's decision, would that establish a precedent for the entire nation?

If the Supreme Court takes cert and hears the case, at that point the State of California and the ESA provide briefs and oral arguments before the Supreme Court on whatever the issues are that they grant cert on. They get to define the questions that they want answered. Then they would hear the case. Somewhere in the fall, they would issue a written decision. That would be the law of the land relative to how these kinds of statutes can be formulated, passed, and implemented. It's very, very important for the whole industry. There is a lot at stake. It's the freedom to create, to market, and to grow as an industry that's at stake before the Supreme Court.

The ESA also runs the Video Game Voter Network. How successful has that been in mobilizing gamers politically?

The VGVN has been immensely successful. It's a dimension of leadership and advocacy that only the ESA provides. With 200,000 members, it's an incredibly effective tool. Last year it was used 47 times in a number of cases. What it does is channel very relevant, very local feedback to elected officials, which is enormously valuable, especially on the state and local level.

Are there any other cases that you are working on right now?

The only litigation we are involved in is the Supreme Court case and another case against the Chicago Transit Authority, which has to do with advertising as opposed to retail sales.

Legislation is introduced around the country at the whim of any state legislator. We have seen a decline in the volume of that type of legislative activity for a few reasons. One, there's a growing realization amongst legislators that everyone is a gamer. Sixty-four percent of Americans play video games. As those numbers grow, the willingness of legislators to attack that type of entertainment is waning. The second is that we've done an excellent job working with legislators to help feature the ESRB. The third point is that the word has gotten around: ESA is 10 and 0 when it comes to litigating restraints on the sale of our products. Not only will you lose, you will end up paying for the ESA's attorney's fees as well. We've collected over two million dollars in attorney's fees to date.

Has the Obama administration been friendly to the video game industry?

They've been very open-minded to our arguments on protecting intellectual property. They've listened to us very carefully when it comes to trade and open market access. In November, we participated as one of four key groups with President Obama focused on fixing our country's issues relative to science, technology, engineering, and math education. We are sponsoring two competitions where video games will be designed to help motivate students in STEM education. The President has acknowledged that video games have a significant contribution to make to help us close our education gap in science and math. Similarly, the First Lady sent out a letter to the Game Developer's Conference to game creators asking them to help her with her "Let's Move" campaign to end childhood obesity. Again, the video game industry is seen as a solution, not as the problem.

Are you making an effort to begin ESRB ratings for mobile, iPhone, and social games?

Pat Vance and her team at the ESRB are doing a great job of staying connected with parents, staying relevant, and being a useful tool for parents. Wherever people go, the thing that they want to do on any device is play games. That's a market opportunity for our industry. It's also one where we need to demonstrate responsibility. We've been focused on doing that and that we have the right approach. It's a very dynamic sector and it's still very much in formation. It's a moving target, [but] I would say, "Stay tuned."

You also coordinate anti-piracy efforts for the industry. How serious is that problem today?

Piracy is theft, and piracy is a scourge on our industry. The good news for the industry is that the Vice President, in December, convened a discussion that included the Secretary of Congress, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the head of Customs, and a variety of leaders. We were invited and had a very open and frank discussion. The Vice President has said that digital piracy is theft and needs to be stopped. However, we're being very smart about how we approach it. We're putting every business model

in front of the consumer. Some models in place are totally ad-based, so there is no piracy. Other models are based around microtransactions, like Farmville. Others are subscription based. Obviously, the leader there is World of Warcraft. We're trying to find the answers. By the same token, we are clear: if you steal our companies' products and put them on the Internet, we will find you and seek the full force and weight of the government to put that to an end.

What is your stance on net neutrality?

We have a very enlightened stance that we filed with the FCC six months ago. We think it's very important for a principal matter that broadband is ubiquitous and high quality, especially when you look at latency issues. We recognize that that takes investment, and we want that investment to flow freely. The second part is that if there is illegal activity happening on the Internet - whether that's fraud, child pornography, or stealing - the ISP should be empowered to take necessary actions to curb that activity.

The ESA runs the E3 conference. It's been through a lot of changes over the past few years. How healthy is E3 right now?

I came aboard one month before the Santa Monica show, the first small show. For all of the thinking that went on prior to my arrival, I don't know. What I can tell you is that last year, everyone in the industry agreed that we nailed it. The show last year was met with universal praise, and was viewed as a high value and high quality experience for everyone. That was echoed by the industry, analysts, and the media.

Do you feel like you finally have the right formula?

Yes, the formula is right on. We took a show from 4,000 people to 41,000 people at a time when other shows were shrinking 20 and 30 percent. With that in mind, we have an eye towards improvement and keeping the show relevant. We survey our key attendees to make sure that we are delivering the experience that makes them want to come back. This year, I think you will see an uptick in attendance, closer to 45,000.

Activism dropped out of the ESA in 2008. Is that a concern?

We continue to have good relations with all video game companies, members and non-members. Our membership, which now stands at 31 members, is at an all-time high. We added 10 members over the last 12 months. The door is open. I believe that this industry is the most powerful when we stand together. Certainly, it would be a positive for the industry to have their presence here. Similarly, [Activism] would be much more aware of the trends and policies that impact them. So there's clearly a benefit for both of us. My view is that will happen in time. But, in the meantime, we have a mission here at ESA and we are focused on that.



Apple iPad

Apple sets a high bar in the latest gadget trend

The release of the iPad has once again reinforced the fact that Apple is good at making sexy, desirable products. Quite accurately dubbed “a giant iPhone” by some, the iPad is a sleek and intuitive personal media device equally suited to checking email at home and serving as a video player on the go.

The iPad’s star feature is its huge 1024 x 768 LED-backlit display. High resolution content like photos and videos shine thanks to Apple cramming 132 pixels per inch into the impressive screen. While the screen is supposedly treated to prevent fingerprints, expect to wipe them off frequently with a glass-friendly cleaning cloth.

We found that the iPad apps in the App Store take advantage of the unit’s increased real estate in a great way. Unfortunately, a lot of these apps are overpriced, and the App Store doesn’t have a return policy (unlike the Android Marketplace). Also, just as with the iPhone, the small pool of great products are overshadowed by a sea of cheaply produced knockoffs.

Apple’s proprietary new microchip, the 1GHz A4, powers the iPad and delivers smooth video playback, fast scrolling, and great overall performance. The multitasking update coming next fall should benefit from the custom chip as well.

Like a more visually advanced Kindle, the iPad is also ideal for reading. With a new reader-friendly version of Safari and the new iBooks app, Apple claims the iPad is the best mobile reading solution available, and we half agree. The iBooks service offers a great selection and the color screen makes the iPad a decent eReader. Add a fantastic battery life that lasts over 10 hours during use and days in standby mode and you’re set. However, the iPad does not have the array of options that come standard with most eReaders, like note-taking. It does have a simple book-marking feature, though.

The retooled Safari offers good web surfing, but navigating can be a problem. The thin, aluminum-backed iPad sits great in your lap for reading, but you’ll need to get accustomed to holding it with one hand in order to free up a finger for interfacing. You’ll also occasionally run across sites that don’t look like they’re supposed to.

Problems browsing tie in with the iPad’s Achilles heel: the lack of Flash support. Apple has no plans to support Flash, and while the company continues its catfight with Adobe, consumers are caught in the middle. Some major sites have adopted HTML5 in a play to support video playback on the iPad, but most still do not – something potential owners need to keep in mind.

VIEW OUR 

\$499 - \$849

apple.com

by Nick Ahrens

■■■■
 Hundreds of thousands of apps work on the iPad, but which ones are the best? Here's a quick guide to help you sort through the clutter and not break the bank

The iPad App Starter Guide



Adobe Ideas
Free

A sketchpad that allows for quick ideas and note-taking. You can also import photo layers and store color schemes.

iBooks
Free (purchases in-app)
 Grab this right away to turn your iPad into an eReader.

MLB At Bat 2010
\$14.99

While it's one of the most expensive apps, it's also one of the most impressive. Live streams, highlights, stats, and real-time data all integrate into the ultimate baseball experience.

TweetDeck

Free
 One of the best ways to experience Twitter, and it's totally free.

Flight Control HD
\$4.99

An upgraded version of the iPhone classic. This app is proof that you don't have to spend \$12 to buy a game that delivers hours of fun.



Marvel
Free (purchases in-app)

This is the best-looking comic book service on the planet. The vivid colors pop off the display, making this a priority for avid readers.

Wildpanion

Free
 This gem turns Wikipedia into a customizable eReader.

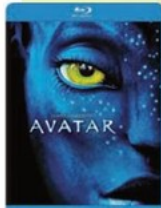


Netflix
Free (with existing Netflix subscription)
 The instant play movies and TV shows look fantastic, and you can also manage your queues.

ABC Player

Free
 Disney and ABC set the standard for what should become an interesting competition between the networks. This app features full-length episodes of popular shows and other perks.

■■■■
MEDIA SHELF



AVATAR

The biggest movie of all time now comes to your living room via Blu-ray. While it may not be the 3D version, at least you can still help fill James Cameron's pockets with more money.

\$26.99
 foxconnect.com



WOLVERINE: WEAPON X, VOL. 1: THE ADAMANTIUM MEN

Evil corporation Roxxon has acquired the blueprints for Adamantium super soldiers, and Wolverine must kick some ass to stop them.

\$19.99
 shop.marvel.com



EBOY NEW YORK POSTER

We've been digging eBoy's pixel art for years. Now you can plaster one of these highly complex pieces of art on your wall with this giant 46.8 x 33.1 inch poster.

\$27
 shopca.eboy.com



1 | Spawn Labs HD-720

Have you ever taken a family trip and spent the whole time daydreaming about a game just sitting in your Xbox 360 back home? Spawn Labs feels your pain. Much like the Slingbox does for TV viewing, the HD-720 connects to your Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 and allows you to play console games on a PC just about anywhere with a web connection. We tested the HD-720 in Texas with the consoles stationed in Minnesota, and as one would imagine, distance and latency play a big factor in the user experience. Games with critical real-time components, like racing and FPS, have noticeable lag. However, less twitch-reliant genres like RPGs and turn-based strategy are quite playable. Spawn Labs also offers cool community features, like live streaming gameplay to users and supporting remote co-op meant for a single screen. It may not be

up to par for hardcore shooter fans, but if you're dying to play your home console on the go, it's worth a look.

AVERAGE
\$199.99
 spawnlabs.com

2 | Optima GT-720 Projector

When we heard about projectors for gamers, we had the same gag reflex we all have when something is marketed for "gamers." Regardless of its intended audience, the Optima GT-720 is a great HD projector. The unit supports every major video connection, outputs images at 1080p resolution, and even supports 3D gaming when connected to a PC. Powered by Texas Instruments' DLP technology, the GT-720 delivers an impressive 120-inch image at just



six feet from a wall or screen. We spent hours playing games on the unit and enjoyed the larger-than-life image and impressive sharpness. Like most if not all standalone projectors, brightness can be an issue, and playing in the dark is a necessity. With an attractive \$799 price tag, any gamer looking for the biggest picture possible without breaking the bank should consider the GT-720.

VERY GOOD
\$799
 optimausa.com

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

New Releases

- Alpha Protocol (PS3, 360, PC)
- Bass Pro Shops: The Hunt (360, Wii)
- Club Penguin: Elite Penguin Force – Herbert's Revenge (DS)
- Diamond Trust of London (DS)
- Farmtopia (DS)
- Hot Shots Tennis (PSP)
- Mean Girls (DS)
- Mind Over Matter (DS)
- Morphr (360)
- My First Dollhouse (DS)
- Pure Futbol (PS3, 360)
- Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands (PC)
- The Sims: Ambitions (PC)



Gears Of War Collected And Bound

The first six issues of Wildstorm's Gears of War comic book are finally collected in graphic novel form. If you want to know more about Marcus Phoenix and Delta Squad, check out this 160-page monster.



Batman Beyond Returns

Bruce Wayne is supposedly coming back to DC Universe's main continuity. As DC's scribes attempt to bring him back in a way that won't make comic fans' eyes roll over dead, Bat-fans can revisit an icon of the past (or is it future?) with the first issue of Batman Beyond. This six-issue series kicks off today, and tells a new tale based on the TV show of old!



New Releases

- Act Combat: Joint Assault (PSP)
- Combat Wings: The Great Battles of WWII (Wii)
- Deathsmiles (360)
- Front Mission Evolved (PS3, 360, PC)
- The Last Airbender (Wii, DS)
- LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, DS, PC)
- Ninety-Nine Nights 2 (360)
- Sin & Punishment: Star Successor (Wii)
- Singularity (PS3, 360, PC)



Alpha Protocol

Even Super Heroes Need Diplomas

Back in the day, if you developed the ability to shoot fire out of your eyes you could make a nice living, either as an Avenger or as a fearsome bank robber. Gifted individuals with good intentions no longer get a free pass. In the first issue of *Avengers Academy* (releasing today) the heroes of tomorrow must first prove themselves...in class. This book introduces six new faces to the Marvel Universe and puts Hank Pym (Ant-Man) in the lead role of teacher.

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New Releases

- Diagea Infinito (DS)
- Green Day: Rock Band (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker (PSP)
- Naughty Bear (PS3, 360)
- R.U.S.E. (PS3, 360)
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11 (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Vacation Isle: Beach Party WFP (Wii)

New Releases

- 100 Classic Books (DS)
- Arc Rise Fantasia (Wii)
- Kid Adventures: Sky Captain (Wii)
- Legend of Kay (DS)
- Toy Story 3 (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, DS)



If Only Pixar Made Everything

Most movies are crap. Thankfully, we still have Pixar making movies like *Toy Story 3* in theaters today. The secret to the studio's success? Keeping actors off of the screen. Looking at the craggy faces of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen makes us want to hurt, but if we only have to listen to them, we can actually sit through a movie without giving up and heading to the bathroom to play with the blow dryer.

New Releases

- DarkSiders (PC)
- Dragon Ball: Origins 2 (DS)
- Field and Stream: Total Outdoorsman Challenge (360)
- Puzzle Quest 2 (DS)
- Transformers: War for Cybertron (PS3, 360, Wii, DS)



Ninety-Nine Nights 2



The Overdrive™ 3G/4G mobile hotspot. Think first-person shooter—actually in the forest.

Want to connect to the internet and everything Wi-Fi enabled? Now you can, with blazing-fast 4G speeds that go where you go. Up to 10x Faster than 3G, anyone? Then think about up to five people connecting at once. It's literally the future, now. Interested? sprint.com/4g

4G at E3

Try out Sprint 4G for yourself at E3. Go to gameinformer.com on June 11 to learn more and print out the Sprint E3 Guide.



WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH 4G?

Up to 10x Faster claim: Based on download speed comparison of 3G's 600 kbps vs. 4G's 6 Mbps. Industry published 3G avg. speeds (800 kbps-1.7 Mbps); 4G avg. speeds (3-6 Mbps). Actual speeds may vary. **Other Terms:** Coverage not available everywhere. The 3G Sprint Mobile Broadband Network reaches over 258 million people. Sprint 4G currently available in over 25 markets and counting, and on select devices. See sprint.com/4G for details. Not all services avail. on 4G and coverage may default to 3G/separate network where 4G unavailable. Offers not available in all markets/retail locations or for all phones/networks. Pricing, offer terms, fees & features may vary for existing customers not eligible for upgrade. Other restrictions apply.



BACK AGAINST THE WALL

Eighteen months have passed since the sinking of Jacinto. The last bastion of humanity tumbled into the sea, and the few survivors have been scattered across a dying world. The government has disbanded, the military has fallen to pieces, and a new threat is rising up that will literally tear the planet apart. Hope is hard to find, especially after years of war, loss, and heartbreak. As Marcus Fenix and his companions face extinction, they must deal with a harsh reality. They're all stranded now; fighting back isn't a job anymore - it's the only choice they have.



» **Platform**
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Game Studios

» **Developer**
Epic Games

» **Release**
April 2011

BY MATT MILLER

GEARS OF WAR 3



Gears of War virtually defined the potential of next-gen gaming, and Gears of War 3 will conclude what the original began in 2006. The tale of Marcus, Dom, and the rest of Delta Squad has one act remaining, and all the story threads of previous entries have been leading to this. The last hope of a dying species is a few ex-soldiers who've gone through hell and come out the other end as family. From a wider lens, Gears of War 3 is the culmination of Epic Games' most ambitious franchise. The final chapter will answer the fans' demands in every way possible: a deeper story, stunning technology, broadened cooperative play, and polished gameplay that already seems strides ahead of the last game, even a year before release.

The first level of Gears of War 3 is clear evidence of all of the above. "The Gears tribe has taken to the sea, in what is essentially their own village on an old aircraft carrier," executive producer Rod Fergusson explains. "They're eking out an existence there, and that's where you start the game - you wake up on this village they've created." Whether you play the game alone or work together in the new four-player cooperative

RAVEN'S NEST

2



mode, the first moments of the third installment find Marcus Fenix alone in a room, shaking out of a sleep full of disturbing nightmares and into a waking life of equal horror.¹ He's deep in the bowels of the Sovereign, a Raven's Nest-class aircraft carrier cobbled together with various other boats,² floating free along the oceans of Sera. The Coalition of Ordered Governments (COG) fell apart months ago. Marcus and a ragtag group of surviving Gear soldiers have since taken over the Raven's Nest as their home. "They've gone from being a squad to being more of a family unit," Fergusson says. "They rely on each other. It's based a lot more on trust now than some military organization."

As player one navigates Marcus out of his berthing, evidence of the sorry state of affairs surrounds him. The creaking ship appears worn down and heavily beaten. Fellow occupants aren't technically soldiers anymore - dressed down and exhausted, they're as distressed as the ship in which they dwell. In those early minutes, Marcus walks alone; in co-op, the second, third, and fourth players roll into the story naturally within minutes. "We now have four player co-op built around unique characters,

not clones," says Fergusson. "These are not nameless guns blazing around in a pack. We've always been about a character-driven story, and now we're about four players being a part of that character-driven story." It comes as little surprise which squad member shows up first; Marcus finds Dom alone in another cubby of the ship, tending to the one job as important as protecting the ship - growing food. Dom looks harried and older - a ragged beard hangs from his face, and a haunted expression darkens his eyes.³ "We've seen everything that Dom has gone through," design director Cliff Bleszinski says. "How he's just despondent and distracted. He'd rather deal with these plants that he can control than even shave his own face." As the story begins, the two old friends have been summoned to the upper decks for an unknown reason.

Two brand new teammates join up as the friends ascend through the ship. They're the first new playable campaign characters that have appeared in the series. Jace Stratton is a young man who will be familiar to those who have read the Gears of War comics, and a welcome sign that Gears of War 3 will integrate elements of that expanded universe.⁴ "He's our sensitive





one," Fergusson tells us. "He's a young soldier that cares more about the people than the war. And he's been taken under the wing of these hardened soldiers. At the same time, he's not some green, naive, Carmine-like character."

The bigger surprise comes a few minutes later, as player four drops into the role of Anya Stroud – the same woman who has been guiding Delta from base since the first game.³ Every able-bodied man and woman now needs to suit up to stand against the profound threats facing humanity, and Anya is the first of multiple playable female soldiers. "Anya has gone from being a desk jockey communications dispatcher to someone who is very much capable of handling herself," Bleszinski assures us. "Capable of using the lancer, cutting enemies in half, and getting her hands dirty." Fergusson adds: "Every time we go to a convention, it's always surprising how many female fans we have for this hardcore, M-rated game. And we found that when they play online, a lot of people represent themselves in their characters. We realized we really weren't reaching out to that female audience, allowing them to see a little of themselves in their character."

If most of the locust were drowned in the



flooding almost two years ago, how have things become so desperate for humanity? As these four make their way through the Raven's Nest carrier, the threat facing these heroes is soon clear. Scurrying, crab-like creatures come skittering towards the team as an attack rocks the Raven's Nest. The lambent are a more potent and dangerous threat than the humans and locust ever realized. Introduced in the second game, the lambent surge to prominence in the final installment as the third army in the mix – a parasitic organic root structure that is slowly devouring the planet.⁶ "It's ultimately the impulsion that is having an adverse effect, turning locust into these incredibly hostile, feral, impulse-driven creatures that have the ability to mutate dynamically right in front of the character," Bleszinski says. The lambent's most primitive forms are these polyps that assault the team, which explode as they swarm across the ship corridors.



Elsewhere on the decks, the situation is even worse, as lambent stalks erupt all around the ship.⁷ These plantlike tentacles are the infection washing over Sera, and from them come the teeming hordes of lambent attackers. As the four-person squad fans out across the battlefield, we see the first inklings of their interconnected and familial reliance on each other. Players can now trade weapons and ammo during battle, or take weapons from any other soldier in the area. Beyond delivering a broader arsenal, this simple mechanic also boosts the sense of interdependence and cooperation at the core of Gears of War 3.



The locale for the new trailer is a place that has come to be known as Char, and it's the starkest reminder of the tough choices made by the COG government during the war against the locust. As humanity retreated towards Jacinto, the government laid down massive orbital bombardments using the Hammer of Dawn in a harsh, scorched earth policy of deterrence. Uncounted numbers of civilians were lost, leaving nothing behind but their horrified ash silhouettes



Facing the team across the ship's deck is the infantry of the lambent army. Drudges inhabit the dead bodies of locust drones. More complex than the early lambent creatures encountered in the last game, lambent drudges are horribly mutated freaks that take a tremendous pounding to bring down.⁸ They initially appear in a familiar bipedal form that belies their true nature. After taking a few hits, they'll rapidly mutate, expanding out with a towering neck, two writhing arms, and a trunk-like body that spews more polyps. "They're a necessary mutation for us in terms of gameplay," Fergusson declares. "By mutating their legs they're able to invalidate cover by getting above you. By mutating their arms they're able to invalidate you jumping on them as a group, because they can attack three people at a time. We're using them to help deal with four-player co-op, and also to mix it up and force you out of cover and out of your safe zone." Even killing the body won't finish the job. Once the torso bursts into bloody pieces, the tentacle neck comes crawling across the ground to finish the job like a twisting snake. In fact,

any lambent sensing its own imminent death will make a suicide charge in an explosive final gambit. "They're filled with very hot, volatile, boiling, yellow goo. One could imagine that it's not a pleasant thing to be running around with that inside of you," Bleszinski suggests.

To compete against such potent enemies, Delta squad has a few new tricks and toys up its sleeves. The middle range, all-around weapon of choice remains the lancer, with its trademark chainsaw. A new variation called the Pendulum-era lancer is missing the chainsaw, but has a primitive bayonet and shoots out incredibly powerful rounds at close range.⁹ Meanwhile, long-range lovers will enjoy the redesigned hammerburst; its aim mode immediately drops into a deep zoom to nail distant headshots. These three weapons comprise your basic arsenal, and are available throughout most of the campaign.

Beyond these standard weapons, you'll have some less common (but no less exciting) options. A double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun joins the army, featuring a devastating single

close-range shot that can take out multiple enemies at once, and has a crosshair that fills half of the screen.¹⁰ Players looking for something more exotic will enjoy the digger launcher; this strange weapon fires explosive piranha creatures that dig through the ground at high speed before rising up to immolate enemy forces.¹¹ A new one-shot, recoilless rifle is a joy for the big jobs – it's a heavy-class destroyer that can take down nearly any enemy in the game with a single trigger-pull.¹² Grenades are also improved; smoke, ink, and frag grenades are joined by the new incendiary option.¹³

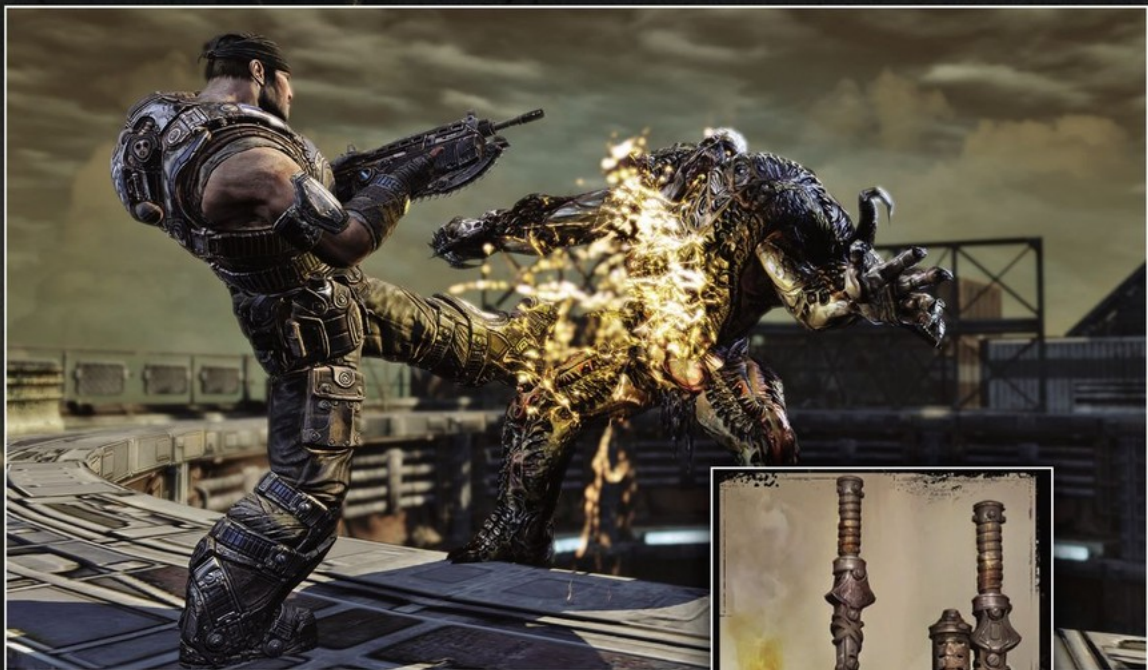
No matter the weapon, players will have access to a host of new execution moves. Nearly every weapon in the game has a brutal new finishing move to eliminate injured opponents, and every one of them will work in both single- and multiplayer. The flamethrower can be thrust into an enemy's torso, causing flames to ignite from within and shoot out from its mouth and eyes. The shotgun can unhinge, wrap around an enemy's neck, and snap it. The Pendulum-era lancer can slash open a



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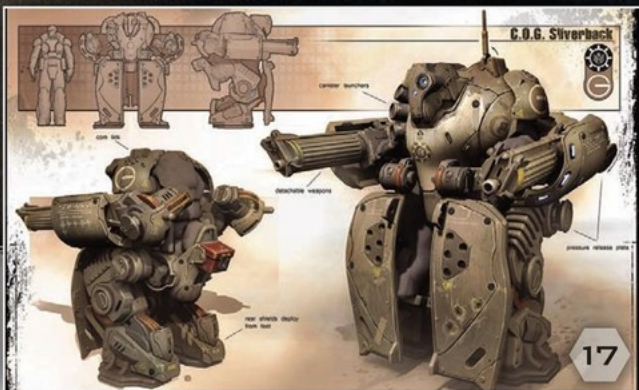
stumbling foe in one devastating swing. With these maneuvers, the team at Epic is striving to maintain the over-the-top finishers that were first established by the curb stomp four years ago. "Executions are not an automatic given," Fergusson cautions. "Just because you have the weapon doesn't mean you can do the execution. Executions are things you earn." Using a given execution will show off to your friends that you've completed the associated task and earned the right to your gory kill.

Back on deck, Marcus and friends waste little time in putting their significant armaments through their paces as the polyps and drudges push the attack. Battle is as frantic and fast-paced as the previous entries. Marcus

roadie-runs between cover as projectiles tear apart the surrounding stonework. Characters constantly shout back and forth in frenzied and terrified calls for help. The top deck of Sovereign devolves into a storm of gunfire and explosions.

When a break finally comes, a Raven helicopter sets down on the aircraft carrier. Onboard is a figure that the friends had thought they'd left behind months ago. Chairman Prescott, the former head of the COG government, steps out. The leader had abandoned the Jacinto survivors only weeks after its destruction. He bears news for the Raven's Nest commander, and rushes away to meet him, but not before pressing a data disc into Marcus' hand.





On the disc are the true seeds of the Gears 3 adventure, and the beginnings of an answer for gamers who listened closely at the end of the second game. The disc contains a message from Adam Fenix, Marcus' father.¹⁴ He claims that there is a way to save the planet, but he'll need Marcus' help. It appears that Marcus will have one last chance to save his father, and in so doing, potentially save the world of Sera.

"We want to answer the question of Adam Fenix," states Bleszinski, "What was that recording all about at the end of Gears 2? What is going on with Marcus' father, who was presumed dead? Is he being held against his will? And how can we find him, and then leverage his ideas to nullify this effect and save the planet?"

To complete the task, Marcus and friends will confront old enemies along with the lambent threat. Anyone who thought the Locust Horde was truly broken at the end of the last game clearly wasn't paying attention. Battered and diminished, the locust and their enigmatic queen remain, though the recent setbacks have caused many of them to revert to even more savage and primal tendencies. Some of the new locust, like the savagery grenadier,¹⁵ are barbaric beasts wielding primitive weapons as they charge into battle. In other cases, the locust have returned to pre-industrial heavy weaponry, like their use of the cruelly harnessed siege beasts.¹⁶

"It's a creature that the locust use as a sort of

catapult/trebuchet," Bleszinski says. "It's being used against its will, having its legs continually bent back to unload flaming balls of ammo at its enemies." Delta squad will have to face this enemy and all the rest of the Locust Horde to reach Adam Fenix.

With the enigmatic disc message in mind, Marcus fights the lambent's renewed assault on the Raven's Nest carrier. Drudges surge onto the ship's deck, smashing the desperately needed gardens and crops that line the sunlit surface. The enemy numbers and ferocity are overwhelming, and it's clear that some bigger ordinance is needed. Marcus calls for the biggest new toy in the bunch, and the silverbacks are lifted up from the ship's holds.¹⁷

"The silverback is a very tough exoskeleton/mech that players are able to acquire at certain points in the game," explains Bleszinski. "Originally based on a loader structure, it's been outfitted so it can have a modular weapons system attached to the side – the default is a rocket launcher on one hand and a very high caliber gatling gun on the right hand. Basically, it's a bucket of fun. It's a walking, talking f--- you."

These hulking machines carry a single soldier into battle, whose body movements control both mobility and weapons. The silverbacks have two primary forms. The first is as a deadly moving weapons platform, capable of firing on the run.

Like a well-trained Gear soldier, the silverback can charge across the battlefield at high speed, and it can even curb-stomp a downed enemy. "That's worth 60 dollars alone," Bleszinski jokes. The silverback's second mode adds a strategic layer; stop moving and it can be deployed in stationary mode. Its weapons remain functional, but its armor plating expands outward, creating a wall on either side of the emplaced driver. Allies can then use the silverback for cover, effectively adding to the exoskeleton's deadly firepower from a consolidated position. "With the ramping up of the enemies, we've had to ramp up your solutions," Fergusson says. With the silverbacks on duty, Marcus and company throw themselves back into a desperate counter-offensive to hold the ship.

As the story continues, more surprises are in store. The first two Gears games included several sections depicting the other two core characters of Delta squad – Cole and Baird.¹⁸ Frequently, the adventures of these fan-favorites occurred off-screen. That approach changes this time around, with dedicated levels of the campaign focused on them. "Having you experience a person's journey as that person is more interesting than to just witness it," Fergusson says. "We'd questioned early on if we really wanted to do it or not, and we just thought it was important to give some more depth to these characters."



As Marcus defends the Raven's Nest and sets out to find the whereabouts of his father, Cole and Baird are away on a mission of their own, encountering new playable characters that join the fight out in the ruined wastelands. "The missions start interweaving with each other, and you start hearing lines that Marcus said on the boat on the comlink as you play Cole and Baird," Bleszinski tells us. "The timelines start overlapping *Pulp Fiction*-style, eventually merging in this great, cool, finale moment. I think it's going to turn out to be a really great narrative mechanic."

Amid the talk of new campaign features, Epic also indicates profound shifts in its approach to the game's structure this time around. The biggest is the inclusion of an arcade mode to accompany the cinematic campaign. Where the cinematic mode maintains the clean and sparse presentation that has always made the Gears universe immersive, the arcade mode goes the opposite direction. It adds extensive scoring and stat-tracking features, encouraging a competitive and challenging replay of the campaign. Onscreen indicators clearly highlight fellow players with over-the-head carrots to help navigate. Objectives and other highlighted objects are clearly marked at all times, sacrificing the normally lean presentation for quick directions and a clear sense of purpose.

Mutators also become part of the game in arcade mode, allowing for dramatic and sometimes humorous changes to the core gameplay. "Mutators are just a way of mixing up the gameplay in arcade mode," Fergusson says. "One of our big goals is replayability of the content. Mixing up the gameplay simply by changing the rules through mutators are a way to do that, whether you change gravity, the sizes of heads, sound effects, or whatever else you want to change." In the Unreal franchise, mutators could end up hurting competitive online play, so in Gears of War 3, mutators remain isolated to campaign play. As you play through arcade mode, pop-ups appear on your screen, showing you accomplishments that your friends have managed and daring you to beat them—a feature lifted from Epic's Shadow Complex.

"The distinction between arcade and cinematic is really the intention of the player," Fergusson says. "Cinematic mode is really about people who are playing it for the story. Playing in arcade is about how me and my friends want to go shoot s---. It's not up to us to determine how the player comes at our game; we're offering two perspectives on the same content, and it's up to the players to determine how they want to experience it."





The team at Epic continues to address the accessibility issue by including difficulties for every play style. The high difficulty experience remains largely untouched – enemy forces will continue to brutally tear you down at every step. But the lowest casual setting is even more simplistic, encouraging players who have no desire for anything more than an interactive narrative. “We’ve made casual even more casual,” Fergusson says. “It’s a borderline tourist mode.” In this simplest of play modes, character death is rare, auto-aim snaps right to the enemy attackers, and the overall threat is almost non-existent. Particularly with the addition of four-player co-op, the new casual mode ensures that anyone can jump in with the group, hardcore gamer or not.

Any conversation about the Gears of War franchise is incomplete without bringing up the subject of multiplayer, and Epic provided some early glimpses of what we can expect. While cagey on the subject of specific modes, it’s clear that the team continues to raise its own bar. “We will meet or exceed feature parity with Gears 2, but it’s safe to say that there may be things that it

makes sense to consolidate in regards to certain features,” Bleszinski hints. To prove the point, Epic showed us some tantalizing glimpses of new maps we’ll be playing on launch day.

The decadent and crumbling thrashball arena will surely be a favorite for gamers who’ve wondered about the sport that Cole used to play.¹⁸ Along its roughly symmetrical ends, several visual cues (like a crashed helicopter) help players keep track of their location. The scoreboard over the pitch can be brought down to change the center of the battlefield into a sparking metallic mess. The arena layout also doubles as a fine opportunity to see some of the newest elements of Unreal tech in action; a new global illumination system creates dramatic visual light and shadow effects along the ground. As a tattered flag blows in the breeze, its shadow is perfectly mirrored upon a moving figure beneath. From within a smoky mass of rock and metal, particles of color and light glimmer. As Marcus runs about the fallen arena, he shatters pieces of cover – some of which are fully destructible, while others fracture without completely falling apart. As a demonstration of nav mesh technol-

ogy, Epic triggers a wave of lambent polys into the space. Utilizing this new technology, the enemies recognize changes to the environment and account for it in their pathfinding. “Now, destructible cover means that if you destroy a piece of cover, the AI will walk over it and recognize that it’s gone, whereas before it was still there in their minds, even though it wasn’t there in yours,” Fergusson explains.

Departing the thrashball match, we also explore Overpass – a sprawling map set on Jacinto during its final moments above water.²⁰ The map perfectly unveils an amazing technological advancement. Riffing off the dynamic map changes seen in Gears 2, the new game includes the option to completely alter a map over the course of a match. In Overpass, the old highway has multiple changing states that trigger while players are battling on its surface. First, the water begins to flood in a river down the concrete. Then the entire map begins to tumble towards a yawning cavern into the underground Hollow. Buildings that were once at street level are suddenly hundreds of feet above as the earth cracks and shifts. Even as





a battle plays out, this dynamic map adjustment delivers a sense of scale and drama previously reserved for single-player cinematic scenes. Alongside the dynamic map system, the Overpass map also affords a look at one last brilliantly fun feature – the multi-turret.²¹ High atop the broken freeway stands a primitive stationary turret with four lancers jammed into it. Pulling the trigger causes all four to scatter bullets onto the field below. Even more tantalizing is the fact that these multi-turrets can be equipped with virtually any weapon in the game.

Gears of War 3 walks the fine line between maintaining its franchise identity and simultaneously launching in startling new directions. Even from our early glimpse, it's clear that the

absence of the familiar military framework has irrevocably altered the tone of the Gears universe. These characters are now near extinction, and only the bonds of friendship established in earlier adventures keep them alive. Beside the tried-and-true gameplay mechanics that have made the franchise so fun, this formula is poised to provide a stunning completion to the trilogy. It will be one of the first franchises to complete a full series run on the 360. With Epic Games among the vanguard of top-tier developers, this flagship project will speak volumes about what defines a triple-A title for the remainder of this console generation. ☺

GEAR UP

Need more Gears of War 3? Throughout the month, we continue our coverage of the game and the wider Gears franchise at gameinformer.com/gears3. Explore the universe of Gears with extensive articles on the fiction behind the world of Sera. Watch exclusive interviews with Cliff Bleszinski and the rest of the team at Epic Games. Learn more about the game's storytelling in our conversation with bestselling author and Gears of War 3 writer Karen Traviss. Plus, you can check out profiles on the characters, weapons, and enemies at the heart of the new game. Check back in the coming weeks for all this, plus a few additional surprises.



"Delta used to have a purpose – take down that enemy, charge that hill, capture that base," executive producer Rod Pergusson says. "Now their purpose is just to stay alive. And that doesn't sit too well with these guys. The idea of surviving is not enough."



Little Big Planet

2

SACK

BEYOND
PLATFORM



LIFE

BOY

GOES

ARMING

by Dan Ryckert

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
- » Style
1-4 Player Platforming
(1-4 Player Online)
- » Publisher
Sony
- » Developer
Media Molecule
- » Release
2010

When the team at Media Molecule released LittleBigPlanet in 2008, they never intended to make a simple platforming game. Piece by piece, they were putting together a trailblazer in the world of user-created content. The experiment paid off: Over two million levels are currently available online, and that number keeps climbing. While most games reach their apex of popularity near release, Sackboy's charming adventures have only grown on gamers over time; LittleBigPlanet users create over 56,000 new levels every week. If you were to sit down and attempt to play through every currently available level, you'd be 63 years older by the time you were done – and that's if you limited yourself to three minutes on each level. With an involved player base, a wealth of user content, and nearly infinite replayability, the original LittleBigPlanet is still going strong – but Sony and Media Molecule aren't content to ride the first game's success. For LittleBigPlanet 2, gamers will see Sackboy branch out into new realms of user-created content.



A

As Media Molecule proclaims, LBP 2 is less of a platforming game and more of a platform for games. The new level creator is not just a tool to create traditional run-and-jump levels; it fully encourages you to make that shooter, racer, puzzle game, Space Invaders clone, or even RPG that you've always imagined.

Want to make a fighting game? Use the new holographic material to build your own customized HUD, complete with health bars. One Media Molecule developer created a fully functional Command & Conquer clone. As creative director Mark Healey says, "I'm sure someone's going to end up making a fully-functioning first-person shooter with this." Possibilities are endless for those that take the time to truly learn the ins and outs of its level creation mode.

Many user-created levels in the original LittleBigPlanet manipulated the creation tools to manufacture tributes to games such as

Galaga or Mario Kart. Considering that the original was a platformer at heart, various sacrifices and work-arounds were necessary to complete these nostalgic nods. Like a 21st century Wizard of Oz, Sackboy had to be hidden "behind the curtain" for these games to operate. You never saw the charming character as you piloted your spaceship or race car, but you knew he was there somewhere within the framework of the stage. These creations tucked away elements of the game that weren't conducive to their overall design. LittleBigPlanet 2, on the other hand, eliminates the need to create those work-arounds.

Extending Your Creation

Many popular user-created stages feature sequels of sorts, but they aren't always easy to find. Sure, you could go check out the creator's other levels, but this seems like an unnecessary hindrance. In LBP 2, level creators can link their stages together so they flow seamlessly from one to the next. This process can continue for multiple stages, meaning we could conceivably be treated to entire user-created games with dozens of stages.

LittleBigPlanet 2 accomplishes this via a new tool called direct control seats. LittleBigPlanet allowed you to create rudimentary vehicles with simple "hold R1 to accelerate" controls, but the sequel takes it to an entirely different level. I watched as Healey put together a car out of rubber wheels and a bottle, and then placed a direct control seat in the middle of it. With a couple of simple button presses, he pulled up an interface that resembled a PSS controller. Within seconds, he had assigned the forward/reverse functions to the Sixaxis tilt of the Dual Shock 3. He then placed a horn on the front and mapped it to the X button. You're not limited to the game's stock sound effects, as you can record your own voice and attach it to characters and objects, replacing the basic magic mouth feature from the original.

Changing a vehicle's control scheme is straightforward and instantly accessible – simply tether your desired button to the part of



The ability to dress up new AI Sackboys, a.k.a. "Sackbots", greatly increases the value of the costumes you've collected or downloaded





You're not the only one that can utilize the new direct control seats. Sackbots can be programmed to use them as well.



The new grapple hook gadget makes for some fantastic platforming segments.

the contraption you want it to control. With this new feature, LBP fans are free to create everything from race cars to serpents to shooter-ready spaceships.

Media Molecule recognizes that one of the most popular concepts for user-created levels is the recreation of stages from classic 8- and 16-bit games. While you'll find plenty of Mario tributes in the community right now, they're all forced to feature the signature gameplay mechanics of LittleBigPlanet. In LBP 2, fans

who want to create faithful representations of old-school platformers can now place a direct control seat on their own platforming protagonist, complete with a customized control scheme. If a hardcore Yoshi's Island fan creates the perfect recreation of that SNES-era jump, they can share it with anyone in the community that's looking to build a similar level.

Mapping inputs to various functions is only the tip of the iceberg. Many LBP fans are familiar with the calculator level, which became a



Familiar Ground

While LBP 2 features a major overhaul to its level creator, the story mode will be familiar to fans of the original. The same three-plane perspective is intact, and the levels feature a similar breed of run-jump-grab platforming — though Sackboy has a few new gadgets up his sleeve. One of these tools is the grapple hook, which will feel familiar to fans of old-school Bionic Commando. The hook allows Sackboy to swing over gaps and pull certain objects toward him, but it opens up options for mischievous players as well. Imagine a narrow hallway with an electrified ceiling and a launchpad that sends Sackboy flying upwards. Devious players could wait until a co-op partner jumps over the perilous launchpad, then use the grapple hook to reel their buddy back onto the pad. If you enjoyed snapping your friends and dragging them to their doom in the original, this should be right up your alley. The mischief doesn't stop there; Media Molecule promises several more new gadgets like the grapple hook will be included when the game ships later this year.

YouTube sensation. PSN user Upsilandre created a fully-functioning calculator using only the creation tools provided in the original game. If you've seen the video, you know that the logic gates needed for this feat occupied physical space within the level. Behind the scenes, hundreds of tethers and switches were working in tandem to provide the players with the answer to their math problems.

Rather than take up all that valuable space within the stage itself, Media Molecule has given users the options of placing all of these functions on a single in-game microchip.

A compact calculator is a nice novelty, but other new functions in LBP 2 have a more direct impact on gameplay. Enemies in the original could only be programmed with basic commands, and most resembled marionettes or cardboard cutouts. Now, users will be able to take a basic template called a Sackbot, tweak its AI, and dress it up however they please (all of the DLC from the original will transfer over). Players can choose a Sackbot's vulnerable point, determine if it's scared of heights, and even program acting routines.

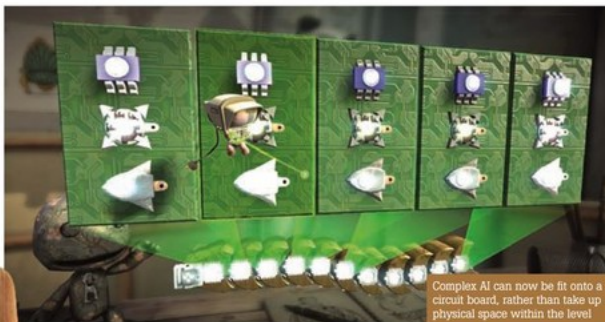
An example of the latter involves a disco scene set up by the Media Molecule team. They started recording on a single Sackbot, and proceeded to move its arms and bob its head in a humorous dancing routine. Once the recording was complete, they copied and pasted that AI to 20 Sackbots. Each was given





“Someone will create a really brilliant game with this. A new genre.”

*creative director
Mark Healey*



Complex AI can now be fit onto a circuit board, rather than take up physical space within the level



Sackboy Goes to Hollywood

Originally, level creators had to rely on the simplistic magic mouth feature to push the story of their stages along. This amounted to little more than speech bubbles, often combined with a stock sound effect. LBP 2 gives creators far more freedom, allowing for full cutscenes. Users can select the camera angles they want and add their own voice-overs for characters. These cutscenes can be triggered within stages themselves or exist as their own separate entities. If someone wants to create a five-minute short film, they can bypass any input from the player. These creations will be clearly marked on the stage select screen, so you'll know from the start whether you'll be watching or playing.



a random costume and programmed to dance on a nonstop loop. When the player-controlled Sackboy wandered onto the stage, he triggered the adorable dance party. In a demonstration of the new movie-editing options (see sidebar), cameras shifted and lights flashed as the bevy of Sackbots nodded their heads and shimmied left and right to the music.

All of this creation is fantastic on its own, but fans of the original know that it doesn't amount to much if you don't have the opportunity to share it. LittleBigPlanet 2 makes it easier for the player to browse and play quality content; taking a cue from social networking sites, each player will have their own profile on the official LBP.me website displaying an activity feed as well as previews of their stages.

Another novel bit of user-created integration comes in the form of QR codes. These computer-recognized symbols can be printed on things like advertisements and business cards, and will automatically load a level when placed in front of the PlayStation Eye. You won't even have to go to a special menu screen to do this; you can flash the code at any point in the game to go directly to the stage. If you're not near your PS3, you can take a quick photo with your smart phone to see an online preview of the

level, and even add it directly to your queue.

All of these aspects contribute to a true evolution of LittleBigPlanet in a way that DLC add-ons could never accomplish. As technical director Alex Evans puts it, "If we did this drip by drip by drip, you'd only see the drips...you'd never see the bath."

LittleBigPlanet 2 will not only give fans access to over two million created levels carried over from the first game, it will also give you the chance to play countless new experiences in various genres as the community experiments with the new creation options. "Someone will create a really brilliant game with this. A new genre," says Healey. Even if a very small percentage utilizes all of these new tools to the fullest, it will result in thousands of great new games for PS3 owners to play off of one disc. Not only is this far too large for DLC, it almost seems unfair to call it a sequel. It's a full-scale evolution in the world of user-created content. As Evans puts it, "We never would have dared make this game the first time around. This could only be LittleBigPlanet 2." ♦

For more screens and the game's debut trailer go to gameinformer.com/mag



You can make situations like this exist as standalone short films or events triggered within the stage



New Adventures

Rather than the country-themed areas of the original, the Media Molecule team wanted to base LBP 2's stages in the periods of time "where human imagination was at its peak," according to art director Kareem Ettouney. Here are the themes of the various story mode stages:

Techno Renaissance

Ettouney explains that this would not be like a "BBC [documentary] on the Renaissance," but rather a whimsical alternative take on the period. Sackboy will encounter a Leonardo DaVinci-like character to guide him through a technology-based twist on the crucial cultural movement.

Steam & Cake

The steampunk art style has gained popularity on the Internet over the past few years, but it's become somewhat predictable. Media Molecule wants to mix up the look a bit by combining it with environments reminiscent of a classy tea-and-cake party.

Neon Propaganda

Cold War-era propaganda posters line the halls of this factory environment, where Sackboy is tasked with helping its workers escape their oppressive working conditions. Keeping with LBP 2's mixture of themes, the grim nature of this factory is at odds with neon lights and signs.

Fluffy High-Tech

Various high-tech equipment, like video walls and circuit boards, are mixed with cute bunnies and sheep. This bizarre aesthetic results in stages that will have you exploring cold, futuristic environments populated with adorable critters and fluffy clouds.

Designer Organic

The world of eco-architecture is based around a designed, controlled version of nature. It comes together when artists manipulate organic objects into a particular look, often with an art nouveau aesthetic. These areas bring Sackboy closer to nature than any of the other themes, complete with elaborate designs comprised of plants.

Hand-Made Arcade

With LBP 2's new focus on creating games, it's a no-brainer that many of these will resemble arcade classics. These story mode stages embrace that without abandoning the hand-made art style the game is known for. Expect to explore areas familiar to long-time gamers — just don't be surprised when the pixels you're used to are replaced by cardboard and wood.





WHEN
WORLD

WHEN
WORLD

SLIDE

- » Platform
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360
- » Style
1 or 2-Player Fighting
(Online TBA)
- » Publisher
Capcom
- » Developer
Capcom
- » Release
Spring 2011

Ten years have passed since the warriors of ink and pixel last collided. In the intervening time, Wolverine has sharpened his claws, Ryu has trained endlessly, and new combatants have invaded the old rivalry between Marvel and Capcom. Now, the two universes reignite a classic conflict too huge to be forgotten, with their loyal allies foaming at the mouths to join in. Spectators at a marvelous New York City parade cheer for balloons in the shape of Spider-Man and Viewtiful Joe. On the rooftops above, Wolverine's adamantium clashes with Ryu's iron will in a shower of sparks and energy. The familiar feud is ready to begin again, and this time the battle threatens to consume everyone.



Wolverine dons his Astonishing X-Men costume for battle this time

Shattering Ten Years Of Peace

The fighting genre spent the last decade on the edge of its deathbed. Leading up to the downfall, 2D fighters in the '90s delved into absurd levels of complexity, while games in the 3D space struggled to stand. After a ten-year hiatus, Capcom resuscitated fighting games with the classic gameplay and stunning, ink-brushed visuals of *Street Fighter IV*. New winds are blowing in the sails of the genre, and now is the perfect time for *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*.

Marvel vs. Capcom 2's core recipe remains

intact for the sequel. First, dump a boatload of awesome characters into a 2D fighter with a deep combat system. Then, sprinkle it with stunning, screen-filling special moves, and serve it to thousands of hungry fans. While the concept and gameplay are familiar, Capcom is making refinements to the formula for *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*. The 2D character sprites are swapped with heavily shaded 3D models that look like living comic book characters. Complex controls are streamlined and accessible to avoid alienating the casual fans of the genre, yet the

combat retains strategic elements.

Preserving the original *Marvel vs. Capcom* flavor is important, but the comic publisher has flourished tremendously over the last decade. *Marvel* now churns out blockbuster movies and pulls in cash hand over fist, a far cry from the bankrupt company of the '90s. As *Marvel* has matured it has become more involved with its licensed products, resulting in greater participation in the game development process. "*Marvel* has grown up," says *MvC 3* special advisor Seth Killian. "They're much more hands-on with their properties, which is why they've been so successful over the last few years."

"We're definitely bigger now than ever," says Chris Baker, licensed games manager at *Marvel*. "Which means it's the perfect time to release the best fighting game featuring our characters that's ever been made."

Being a *Capcom* game, *MvC 3* is an easy sell to fans of the publisher. Enticing *Marvel* fans into a chaotic and intimidating fighting game is the tough part. *Marvel* is working closely with *Capcom* to ensure each character's likeness and personality is perfect. *Story* is also an integral part of the comic book experience, and *Marvel* is working hard to surpass what previous *Marvel vs. Capcom* games passed off as a narrative. Each character will have beginning and ending story bookends, along with in-game events to keep it fresh in players' minds. Producer Ryota Niiusuma insists that though this story is better than in other *MvC* games, it doesn't steal the spotlight from the action.

Assembling The Dream Team

A huge selling point for *Capcom's Versus* series is the characters. *Marvel vs. Capcom*



A MARVELOUS DEAL

Christian Svendsen, *Capcom's* vice president of strategic planning and business development, shares his thoughts about rekindling the business relationship between *Capcom* and *Marvel*.

On the downloadable re-release of *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*:

"*Marvel vs. Capcom 2* was our first stab at re-establishing a relationship with *Marvel*. Both *Capcom* and *Marvel* thought that would be a good starting project for us to get reacquainted. That first deal took a good while to be completed, almost over a year."

"The *MvC 2* deal was one hundred percent separate from the *MvC 3* deal."

On getting *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* started:

"The *MvC 2* deal [for XBLA and PSN] took so long that we started talking to them about *MvC 3* before the ink even started to dry."

"It was a very complex deal to work through in terms of making sure everyone was comfortable with approvals and creative freedom. That's a very hard thing to get through on all sides."

"*Marvel* and *Capcom* both wanted this to happen on a very high level. Once we got to that understanding, we both made compromises to get a deal done, and the game went into production."

On Disney's acquisition of *Marvel*:

"So far the acquisition of *Marvel* by *Disney* has not impacted the project positively or negatively in any way. We've been working with the same people we did the deal with,



Will the womanizing Tony Stark finally meet his match with a succubus?



2 included an unprecedented 56 characters, drawing from 15 years worth of other games' sprites. The Morrigan you saw in 1994's *Darkstalkers* was basically what you saw in 2000's *MvC 2*. *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* doesn't have the luxury of a character model backlog, and starting from scratch means a smaller cast somewhere in the 30s, composed of beautiful new renditions of old favorites like Captain America and Morrigan, along with some new surprises.

Marvel vs. Capcom 3 features 3D characters on a 2D plane, similar to *Street Fighter IV*. Heavy use of shaders unifies the diverse cast under a living comic book aesthetic. Bold shading is a natural fit for superheroes popping off comic pages, but it works well with Capcom characters, too. Chris Redfield and Dante look right at home with dramatic dark shadows stretching across their bodies. Lighting effects highlight shiny characters with stunning results. Reflections bounce across Iron Man's metal-

lic suit as he unleashes his giant laser cannon special, and Captain America's shield glints as he cartwheels around. Furthering the comic book vibe, vibrant slashes punctuate every move, and certain attacks cause a dramatic page-tearing effect.

Not only do the characters look great, but they also have mannerisms and moves that show off their personalities. Deadpool stands as testament to Capcom and Marvel's combined efforts to make the cast pop out of the comics and into the game. Taunting, moon-walking, dancing, and breaking the fourth wall are all front and center for the dual-wielding, smart-mouthed mutant. The "Merc with a Mouth" fits the *Marvel vs. Capcom* universe like a glove.

While Deadpool will get *Marvel* readers excited, Capcom has plenty of its own characters slated to make an appearance. Ex-S.T.A.R.S. member Chris Redfield passes up his former partner Jill Valentine's *MvC 2* technique of summoning t-virus monsters, instead relying on his beefy artillery from *Resident Evil 5*. Chris is no superhero, and when jumping, he flails through the air as if he's grasping for a cliff ledge in *RE 5*, showcasing Capcom's attention to detail.

Dante from *Devil May Cry* is also a natural fit for the *Versus* series. The powerful son of the demon Sparda stands toe to toe with many of the superheroes in terms of ability. He makes use of his aerial combat skills from *Devil May Cry*, launching foes into the air and slashing away with his gigantic sword. His cockiness and bravado shines through in every action, doing the white-haired badass justice.

If you were disappointed that you didn't see certain no-brainer Capcom characters in *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom* for the Wii, don't give up hope. Niitsuma confirmed that big characters like Dante were saved from *Tatsunoko* for *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*. Even with the small cast that's been confirmed thus far, *MvC 3* is shaping up to make up for quantity with quality.

CHARACTER WISH LIST

The *Game Informer* office is filled with diehard Capcom and *Marvel* fans alike. We banged our heads together to come up with our dream cast for *MvC 3*.

CAPCOM

- + Albert Wesker (*Resident Evil*)
- + Amaterasu (*Okami*)
- + Arthur (*Ghosts 'n Goblins*)
- + Barry Burton (*Resident Evil*)
- + Dinosaur (*Dino Crisis*)
- + Dr. Wily (*Mega Man*)
- + Haggar (*Final Fight*)
- + Mega Man X (*Mega Man X*)
- + Nemesis (*Resident Evil 3*)
- + Phoenix (*Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*)
- + Proto Man (*Mega Man 3*)
- + Vergil (*Devil May Cry 3*)

MARVEL

- + Apocalypse
- + Bullseye
- + Daredevil
- + Dr. Octopus
- + Elektra
- + Iron Patriot
- + Luke Cage
- + Nick Fury
- + Phoenix
- + Punisher
- + Sentry
- + Spider Woman
- + Thor
- + Ultimate Spider Man

Seasoned fighter Ryu returns to the fray. Check out the rest of the known cast on page 61.



Attacks in *MvC 3* are punctuated with a crisp, visual pop.



Chris managed to shoot rockets from a helicopter into a volcano, hitting a mutated Wesker in the face. He can handle The Hulk

A Fight For Control

When the game first released, *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* cabinets easily drew in crowds at the arcade. Glitzy graphics and iconic characters were impossible to resist, enticing gamers and comic fans to take a crack. Despite its tantalizing appearance, the complexities of the combat system immediately slammed a learning barrier down for the uninitiated. Not anymore. *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* aims to knock down the wall of complicated controls and open up the field of strategic fighting to all comers.

Capcom's mission statement for *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* is to maximize depth while minimizing complexity. This means fusing the accessible controls of *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom* with tried-and-true *MVC 2* gameplay.

The flow of combat is just as intense and hectic as *MVC 2*, and all the hardcore elements remain intact. Three-on-three tag-team combat returns, complete with the assists and team building structure of the previous title. Veterans can look forward to alpha, beta, and gamma assist types, snapbacks, and hyper move cancels. Even if you don't know what a snapback is, you're still going to be able to pull off show-stopping aerial raves, since the team at Capcom is streamlining the process for executing advanced maneuvers.

One area receiving some special tweaks is launchers. In *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, how each fighter launched opponents into the air varied by character. *Tatsunoko* simplified this by making the air launch move universal among all characters, resulting in less time spent memorizing button inputs and more time



EVOLVING BATTLEFIELD

Capcom is using their signature MT Framework engine to build the game, which is the backbone of *Lost Planet 2* and *Resident Evil 5*. It allows for even crazier stages that fall more in line with *Marvel* and *Capcom* lore rather than generic fantasy realms. In the New York City stage a *Daily Bugle* news helicopter flies above a parade as an enraged J. Jonah Jameson shouts and points at the superheroes battling on a construction lift. Another level is set in the world of *Mega Man Legends* spin-off character, *Iron Bonne*, complete with dozens of adorable Servbots scuttling around the action

spent hammering on your foe in the clouds. *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* takes it a step further by mapping the aerial launch to a single button, currently referred to as the exchange button. With the simple tap of the button, you can launch Ryu skywards and send Wolverine after him with a traditional combo of claw swipes.

But that's not all the exchange button can do; by pressing it along with certain directions, players can slam opponents into the ground, leaving them susceptible to combo continuation. Another input launches the battered enemy further into the air for a high-flying combo that can span three vertical tiers. Players can also hit the exchange button in midair to tag in other characters on the fly, making safe swaps easier than ever.

Further deepening the strategic element of the exchange button, fighters on the receiving end of an exchange-fueled barrage have an opportunity to counter. Perceptive pugilists can predict which exchange move their assailant is about to unleash, attempt to mirror the input, and hopefully break free of the onslaught. This also opens a brief window to counter into a retributive combo. This exciting rock-paper-scissors element complements the simplification of launching foes into the air, integrating a new fold of strategy for hardcore *MVC* fans to chew on.

Though some gameplay elements have been simplified to open the doors for new challengers, Capcom is being careful not to alienate the hardcore fans who demanded the sequel. *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* is a culmination of the work Capcom has done in the fighting genre for almost two decades. They are crafting the arcade fighter that fans will adore and newcomers will get hooked on. *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*'s artistic in-game flair and promising cast of beloved characters will get the blood pumping for any *Capcom* or *Marvel* fan with a pulse. If *Street Fighter IV* was the defibrillator that brought the fighting genre back from the brink of death, *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* has the potential to be its life support long into the future. ♡

Check out gameinform.com/mag for *MVC 3*'s stylish trailer and our best guesses at the mysterious silhouettes of unannounced characters



Pick your caption: "Don't taze me bro," or "Now The Hulk is seeing S.T.A.R.S."





CHRIS REDFIELD

The BSAA agent brings over every weapon he can carry from Resident Evil 5 into Marvel vs. Capcom 3. Chris devastates opponents with his pistol, shotgun, submachine gun, magnum, satellite laser, and grenade launcher (complete with fire, ice, and electric rounds). He also has a slide attack utilizing his electric baton.



THE HULK

Bruce Banner returns in his pissed-off form, and somehow he's even more monstrous than before. This green juggernaut is still sluggish, but his immense power and earth-quaking special make him a good bruiser for your team makeup.



DANTE

He may be based on the young Devil May Cry 3 protagonist, but this Dante comes equipped with his best moves from the entire series. He can juggle rival fighters with his dual pistols, close distances by sliding on his knees while playing Nevan (his guitar weapon), and even activate his deadly Devil Trigger mode to increase his speed and power. *



CAPTAIN AMERICA

This founding member of the Avengers returns with his indestructible shield to deliver combatants to justice. He preserves most of his handy move set, complete with deadly shield-a-rang tosses and evasive cartwheel maneuvers. *



FELICIA

Capcom's catgirl returns with her claws out to deliver quick and nimble combos to anyone distracted by her jiggle physics for too long. She is also able to summon a helpful little catgirl partner to double her threat. *



WOLVERINE

Logan's claws ravage everything unfortunate enough to stand before him in brilliant swipes of color. His trademark berserker barrage returns as both an assist move and a special, making him a perfect main for your team and also a menacing assist character.



MORRIGAN

Darkstalkers' seductive succubus continues the battle with all her familiar otherworldly moves. She catapults opponents skyward with a gigantic spear summoned from the ground and delivers flying reverse piledrivers.



DEADPOOL

Marvel's mutant mercenary joins the Marvel vs. Capcom 3 cast with all the swords, guns, and wise-cracking you could want. Deadpool has the ability to teleport around the battlefield, but do it too many times and his device will backfire to hilarious results. Ever breaking the fourth wall, Deadpool's special consists of beating down opponents with his own life bar. *



IRON MAN

Sleeker and slimmer than MVC 2's Tony Stark, this iteration of Iron Man better reflects his current style in the comics. The gold and maroon superhero's gigantic laser canon still makes for a great assist, and his jet boots make him ideal for aerial maneuvers.

CHARACTER BIOS

*Not official Marvel vs. Capcom 3 images



WELCOME

Fallout

NEW VEGAS

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

» **Style**
1-Player Action/RPG

» **Publisher**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**
Obsidian Entertainment

» **Release**
Fall

The latest installment in the **Fallout** series takes us back west of the Rockies, but there's more to the story than a shift in venue. We get our hands on the game to see how Obsidian Entertainment is working to provide an even more refined experience, with retooled combat and a host of tweaks that'll

make even the most cotton-mouthed super mutant drool. Fire up your Pip-Boy 3000, double-check your load-out, and boost your Luck stat – we're going to New Vegas, baby.

by *Jeff Cork*







Stepping off the monorail and onto the station's platform, I can't help but notice how nice the Strip is. It's certainly a refreshing change of pace from Fallout 3's bomb-scarred wasteland. In the Fallout universe, Nevada wasn't hit quite as hard as the D.C. area and other parts of the nation. Radiation and societal collapse destroyed civilization as we knew it, but buildings were largely left unharmed – until neglect and vandals had their way. Even though the New California Republic and Caesar's Legion each have their eye on the walled-in, independent enclave, walking through the streets it seems as though most of the Strip's residents are more outwardly concerned with trying to walk straight. War never changes, and neither does Vegas.

Walking down the street, I bump into a bit of local color. A nearby fountain has attracted some off-duty NCR officers who have decided to let off a little steam. The three partially undressed women gyrate suggestively and make teasing comments to passersby, but their girls-gone-wild moment is cut short by some military police. Heeding their advice to move along, the trio sprints off toward the Tops casino. Knowing a good party when I see one, I follow along.

Just before I hit the door, I'm interrupted by a man calling himself Mr. Holdout. This shady fellow offers to sell me a few concealable weapons, should I run into trouble inside. I'm not expecting to start anything, but I humor him and browse his selection of razors and brass knuckles before heading through the door.

The ladies are long gone at this point, so I'm not upset when the doorman wants to talk. As Holdout predicted, I'm asked to hand over my weapons before I can enter the casino floor. My character's high sneak skill allows me to keep a little insurance in my pocket in the form of a pistol, and the doorman is none the wiser. Like I said, I don't plan to use it, but in a world filled

with marauding bands of man-sized geckos, anything's possible.

Before I hit the tables, I decide to do a little exploring. It doesn't look like this place is shutting down anytime soon, so what's the harm? I enter the Aces nightclub, home to the Flad-Pack Revue. The manager (with more than a passing resemblance to Sammy Davis Jr.) offers me a sidequest that involves rounding up any musicians I might find while exploring the Mojave Wasteland. Sure thing, buddy.

I'm feeling pretty lucky even before New Vegas' producer Jason Bergman tells me that my character has the maximum luck skill of 10, so I decide to get some chips and do a little gambling. I stroll over to the cashier's cage and get some chips. I should have guessed that New Vegas' economy is a bit more developed than in the crater formally known as Washington D.C., but I'm still taken aback when the teller asked me what I'd like to convert. Come again?

"We actually do have multiple currencies in the game," says Bergman. "If you played Fallout 2, the NCR had their own currency; so we do have NCR physical dollars. We also have Caesar's Legion money, and Caesar's Legion uses coins. So we have caps, money, and coins. There is an actual exchange rate, and depending on who you're doing deals with throughout the world, they'll give you better deals."

I have more caps than anything else, so I just convert them into chips and call it good. After pulling the handle of a slot machine and hearing the foreign sound of money dropping down a chute, Bergman reminds me about my maxed-out luck. The slots are appropriately old-school – there's not a video-poker machine in sight – and after a few more pulls I decide to move on to one of the blackjack tables. There are a few tables with people playing, but I'd rather keep it between me and the dealer.

Each of the casinos in New Vegas has its own house rules, such as the frequency that dealers shuffle the deck or whether the dealer draws on 16 or 17. The blackjack tables at Tops support

surrendering, which allows gamblers to bow out with half their bet once they see what the dealer has. "It totally gives the world a different flavor," says Bergman about these different house rules, and I agree with him. It would be disappointing to see that each casino was merely a re-skinned exterior for the same few games. After a few more hands I go over to the roulette wheel and bet 200 chips on black. What do you know? I win. Who says the house always wins?

Everyone's having a nice time, but I could have theoretically pulled out that concealed gun and started going crazy. "I would not recommend doing that, because the Chairmen – the faction that runs this casino – they're pretty strong," says Bergman. "The bartender has a riot shotgun. You do not want to mess with them." Fair enough.

I played three games: slots, blackjack, and roulette. However, no good casino keeps your options that limited. "There is something else that we're not talking about," says Bergman. Looking at the casino layout, it doesn't seem like there's room for more table games. And even if it did have something like craps or keno, why would Obsidian be coy about something so mundane? My bet is that it's something that dovetails into the post-apocalyptic world, like betting on human cockfighting. We'll have to wait and see.

Aside from filling your pockets, success on the casino floor can have other positive effects. "As you win, the floor manager will come up to you and give you drinks and he'll comp you a room," says Bergman. "It's a casino." I didn't get that kind of high-roller treatment though, because it was time to move on.



The Lucky 38 is a New Vegas landmark, but the reclusive Mr. House hasn't let anyone inside for as far back as people can remember



With a little help from my friend

The next thing I know, I'm on the outskirts of the tiny desert town of Novac. There's not much to speak of: a run-down motel with a partially burned out "No Vacancies" sign, a few bungalows off in the distance, and an enormous dinosaur named Dinky.

"This area has actually seen a lot more business than some of the towns on the other side of the mountain," says Josh Sawyer, project lead for New Vegas. "All of the people in the town make their money by salvaging stuff out of a rocket base that's nearby." The area is vulnerable to gangs and raiders, and a pair of former NCR snipers use Dinky as a nest. Climbing up the hollowed-out beast (which is also a gift shop) reveals why; from this vantage point, I can see for miles.

My sightseeing is interrupted by Craig Boone, one of Novac's two snipers. He's not very friendly and more than a little jumpy, but after talking with him for a while I begin to understand why. Not too long ago, some slavers broke into the home he shared with his wife, Carla, and took her. Nobody else was captured in the raid, which leads him to believe that it was an inside job. Boone is upset, though he cryptically adds that he hopes to avenge Carla's death, not rescue her. I try to give him a bit of a pep talk and ask how he knows that she's dead, and all he says in return is that he knows.

I'm a sucker for vengeance, so I decide to help Boone out. His plan is simple: Talk to the residents of Novac, find the person responsible, and then lure them in front of Dinky. Boone hands me his red beret and tells me that our signal will be to wear it when I'm with the culprit. From there, well, Boone is a sniper.

I head down into the gift shop and talk to

Cliff, who runs it. I ask about Carla, and it's pretty clear that she and Cliff didn't get along. Apparently, she only went into the gift shop once, but left because it smelled funny. "If you want to be evil, you can send anyone out there," says Bergman. "As long as you're wearing that beret, he will shoot whoever walks in front of that dinosaur."

As enticing as that sounds, I decide to find the person actually responsible. After chatting up a few other people, I learn that no one liked Carla. Judging from what other people had to say, she was moody, irritable, and wanted to be by herself. In the hotel office I notice a safe tucked into the floor behind the manager, Jeannie May Crawford. Lo and behold, it's an invoice to the slavers for selling Carla and her unborn child for 1,000 caps. Armed with that info, I pop on my beret and ask Jeannie May if she'd like to go for a little stroll.

A few moments later I see proof that Boone is a one-shot, one-kill sort of fellow. He'd make a great companion on the wasteland, and I'm happy that he decides to tag along. If you're expecting a retreat of Fallout 3's disappointing companion system, prepare to be pleasantly surprised.

Fallout 3 is a vast game, but its AI partners left much to be desired. "They didn't have quests or storylines really," says Bergman. "They were really just dudes who followed you around. This is much more in line with past games that Obsidian has done, in giving them a full storyline and having them evolve, and they unlock special features. They become stronger, they become more interesting characters and you have dialogue with them, and they give you bonuses."



The Strip

The casinos in the Strip are an eclectic bunch, just like the actual Las Vegas. While there aren't any real-world casinos in the game, the small bunch I saw each had their own personalities.

Lucky 38

Mr. House, the mysterious man in control of the Strip, owns the Lucky 38. The casino can be seen from everywhere in the game world, but nobody has been inside the building for as long as anyone can remember. That doesn't stop House from keeping track of everything through his vast network of helpers and assistants.

Gomorrahh

If sex and vice are what you're after, be sure to check out Gomorrahh. The game is going for an M rating, but we'll have to wait to see exactly how far Bethesda is willing to push things. They don't call it Sin City for nothing, but you know how it goes.

Vault 21

"A lot of [the vaults] were social experiments, and they had a concept behind them," says Jason Bergman, the game's producer. "The Vault 21 experiment was that it was the gambling vault. All conflicts would be resolved through gambling. House decided he wanted to have Vault 21, so he bet them for it, and House always wins."

The Ultra-Luxe

The Ultra-Luxe is where folks go to eat, drink, and be merry. This luxurious casino features the best in dining and an appropriately swanky setting. If you're going to walk away broke, you may as well do it surrounded by nice things.

The Tops

The Frank Sinatra tunes blasting outside should clue you in — this is where you go if you want to experience Rat Pack-style Vegas. It's a pretty classy joint, and you might notice a few familiar faces if you look hard enough.

WELCOME

Who's Who In New Vegas

Fallout: New Vegas starts players out with a relatively simple task: Figure out exactly who shot and left you for dead and why. As they work their way through the story and explore the world, players will learn about a greater conflict, and the politics and factional differences behind the tension.

Raiders and gangsters roam the wasteland, but they aren't as organized or dangerous as some of the other groups out in the Mojave. Even in Fallout's shades-of-gray world, Caesar's Legion is a difficult bunch to relate to. They're a band of highly disciplined slavers who were defeated at Hoover Dam by the New California Republic. Since that battle, they retreated east, but they're starting to bleed back into Nevada. That's a terrifying prospect to people who live in the area, since Caesar's Legion kills who it can't capture, often by crucifying and displaying the victims.

"You start out sort of thinking, 'Oh, the NCR is opposing Caesar's Legion, and Caesar's Legion are slavers, they absorb tribes they find in the wasteland, turn them into slaves, conquer other groups and crucify other people, and do all this nasty stuff. Clearly, NCR must be the good guys.'" says Josh Sawyer, the game's project lead. "But then you start interacting with NCR and it's like, 'well, they're kind of strung really thin, they kind of abuse their power sometimes, they're really brutal in dealing with some of the locals. They do control the water supply kind of unfairly, and they don't allow the power to be distributed outside of the Strip or McCarran [airport].' So a lot of it is the practical realities of this very large bureaucratic military that's occupied the territory. And there are things you learn about Caesar's Legion, where Caesar's Legion are brutal and they are nasty and all that stuff, but they also conquered and civilized all of these tribes that were just sort of killing each other. So they turned them into a cohesive fighting force and stopped all of this murdering out in the wastes."

And then there's Mr. House. The elusive character essentially runs New Vegas in isolation. "He's very much inspired by Howard Hughes," says Sawyer. "Howard Hughes has a pretty big history with Las Vegas, so we thought it would be interesting to have this sort of a different, laissez faire dictator, where it's 'Everyone can do whatever they want as long as they follow my rules.' Which is in contrast to Caesar, which is like, 'Everyone follow my rules.' Mr. House has his families. They are tribes that he brought out of the wastes. He's actually a pre-war person who specialized in robotics and research into extending human life. So he was in stasis for several hundred years, and then woke up. He has minions who control the Strip, and they help control what goes on there."

More interestingly, he also had a hand in how things turned out in the Great War. "Mr. House is also the guy who engineered the fact that Vegas was not destroyed," says Sawyer. "The way he did that comes out through the course of the game, but because he is this sort of prodigy, he has a talent with machines and probability, he used that to his advantage to extend his own life and also to prevent New Vegas during the Great War from being destroyed. So there were hits in the area, but probability dictated that it wasn't going to get wiped out. He basically played the odds just right to make sure that it wouldn't happen. So he's a very interesting figure and very instrumental in New Vegas itself."

On your feet, soldiers!

With Boone in tow, I head across the desert toward Camp Forlorn Hope, where the battle-weary NCR has retreated. Their former camp, Nelson, was recently overrun by the notorious Caesar's Legion, who killed, burned, and crucified any NCR soldiers unfortunate enough to stick around.

A quick chat with a guy named Private Stone shows just how bad morale is. I get the sense that everyone is waiting around to die, even though they're supposedly regrouping for an attack on Nelson. I talk with the camp commander and ask if I can help. As luck would have it, I came just in time to help round up some missing supplies for the quartermaster. The people who were supposed to deliver the crate disappeared, and it's up to me and Boone to either find them or the missing goods.

On our way to our destination, we're attacked by a few wasteland critters. Before I can even get a bead on the first radscorpion, Boone snipes through its carapace and moves onto the next target. I'm glad I decided to help him out. He saved a few critters for me, giving me the chance to check out some of the game's real-time combat enhancements. Most notably, New Vegas adds iron-sight aiming. In Fallout 3, zooming in with

a weapon would merely pull the camera closer to an enemy. Now, players actually get to see down the sights of their weapons. It's closer to what you'd expect from an FPS, which is great. I found myself actually choosing to fight outside of VATS on purpose, as opposed to simply doing it while waiting to regenerate AP. Reloading animations are also new, reflecting exactly how many bullets the player is slipping into a weapon.

Eventually, Boone and I come upon some flame-spewing fire geckos and the remains of the NCR. Grabbing the crate, we start heading back to camp to deliver the bad news. We're then set upon by some Caesar's Legion soldiers, decked out in pseudo-Roman armor cobbled together out of football equipment. It's a tough fight, but I keep them busy with my bladed gauntlets while Boone picks them off from a distance.

Once the supplies are turned in, I head over to assist Dr. Richards in the medical tent. My high medical skill makes it a cinch to diagnose and treat a few patients, but there are other ways to successfully complete this part of the mission. This variety and choice is a key part of New Vegas. "Whenever



The dudes in Caesar's Legion don't like it when you crack wise about their skirts



Even though they're friendlier than most other factions, the NCR keeps a stranglehold on the area's power and water.



Weighing Their Words

Part of creating a compelling post-apocalyptic world is populating it with people who have interesting things to say. "Every studio is a little bit different, and the games that we've worked on are different from the ones that Bethesda's worked on," says Obsidian CEO Feargus Urquart. Obsidian was founded by members of Black Isle, the studio behind the first two *Fallout* games. "For Bethesda's games, dialogue is important. For our games it's been vital. We put more energy into it automatically, because it's kind of the thing that we do, whereas they put more energy into other things."

That philosophy can be seen throughout the game, including a slightly goofier dialogue tone that's more in line with what old-school *Fallout* players are accustomed to. *Fallout: New Vegas* adds something from *Fallout 2*, as well—special dialogue options for characters with low intelligence.

Obsidian decided that instead of having dumb characters speak caveman-like gibberish, however, that limited intelligence would manifest itself by having characters regularly miss the point of things. "When there's a line that shows a bit of higher intelligence, your character just botches it and says something really dumb and doesn't get it," says project lead Josh Sawyer. "That way we can tailor it a little more, so we're not simply rewriting every single line of dialogue with a dumb version. When it's called for the player says something extra dumb and the character responds to it. Sometimes it affects you negatively, sometimes it's funny. Sometimes it actually has a positive outcome."

I find an element of a quest that can only be accomplished with one skill, I'm like, "Skills can be shortcuts to completing a thing, but it would be nice if there was another way to do it," says Sawyer. "There are places in the game where, if you have an 80 science, you can flip a switch and be done with no problem. If you don't, though, you can go and do it and it's going to take you a little more effort or it's going to cost you something."

In this case, players can also lie about being a doctor (bad plan) or round up a selection of supplies such as surgical tubing and medical braces to help out. Barring that, players can simply say they don't have any experience and complete the mission.

With those tasks out of the way, it's time to roll into Caesar-occupied Nelson. I meet with a few soldiers, skip the briefing, and move toward the staging area close by. At that point, I'm faced with the decision of attacking from the north or the eastern ridge. "This is why you should read

mission briefings." I think as I choose the second option. It turned out to be a good plan, with the ridge providing a safe place for sniping before we launch the full attack. Midway through the assault, an onscreen indicator tells me that I've made a poor impression with Caesar's Legion. Go figure. I blast my way through the camp and into the barracks, where I meet with Nelson's new leader, Dead Sea. A few shots later, I'm watching his head sail through the air, freed from the rest of his body. Mission accomplished.

For fun, Bergman lets me check out the flipside of the mission. I roll into Nelson, demanding an audience with Dead Sea. His lackeys oblige, and soon I'm face-to-face with the vicious, imposing man. "Even when you're friendly with them, these are not guys who f--- around. These are guys who roll into a town, kill everyone, and enslave people. Even when you're super respected by them, they're not going to be nice to you. These are not nice people."

Dead Sea's orders are blunt: Kill the officers at

Camp Forlorn Hope by any means necessary.

"The easy way to do it is to roll into town and go postal," coaches Bergman. "If you want to have some fun, you do have those C4 charges." This new weapon, one of many in *New Vegas*, is what budding psychopaths have been waiting for. I'm friendly with the NCR right now, so nobody seems to mind when I drop ominous little parcels at their feet—and in the case of the quartermaster, plant them on his person through the art of pickpocketing. Once I've backed up a safe distance, I whip out the detonator and make things go "boom."

I flee the resultant chaos, feeling exhilarated and a little bit guilty as my demo ends. Sure, it's the wasteland, but being evil feels just so...evil. Of course, fans of *Fallout* wouldn't have it any other way. ☼

Visit gameinformer.com for even more *Fallout: New Vegas* coverage, including a look at some of the game's new perks.



Halo: Reach

Beta introduces new changes to multiplayer formula

We covered a lot of Halo: Reach information in our February cover story, but one aspect that Bungie remained tightlipped about was the competitive multiplayer. We recently took a trip to Bungie for a multiplayer beta preview to find out what players can expect once the official beta begins. It was a poignant day for Bungie: Not only was it the first time the developer was letting non-employees try out Reach's multiplayer, but it was also the last day Halo 2 would be available for play on Xbox Live—a reminder of just how popular the franchise's multiplayer is. Here are some of the new features you'll see in May.

A New And Improved Engine

Bungie has spent a lot of time improving their network code. Besides offering smoother gameplay in large matches, these upgrades also allow for more control over matchmaking criteria. Players will have the ability to rank the importance of certain criteria for matchmaking, including chattiness of players (Chatty/Quiet), inclination towards teamwork (Team Player/Lone Wolf), and tone (Rowdy/Polite). Similar to Xbox Live's Gamer Zones, you can also specify the level of competition you're looking for. This should make for an enjoyable experience whether you're looking to win at all costs or just want to have some fun.

The voting mechanic has also been altered. Instead of just giving the option to veto the chosen mode in favor of a random replacement, your lobby will be given a choice of four different modes. The mode that gets the most votes is the one you play.

File sharing has also been greatly improved: Whereas Halo 3 allowed players to save up to

100 pieces of custom content (including screenshots, videos, and custom game types), Reach will allow players to save thousands of items, which can be tagged for easy searching both locally and on Bungie.net.

Loadouts And Armor Abilities

The biggest change to Halo's multiplayer is the implementation of loadouts. Loadouts are chosen each time a player spawns, and affect what weapons and armor ability the player starts with. While weapons can be replaced with others found on the map or dropped from enemies, your armor ability will remain the same until you die. These abilities range from basic power-ups like the ability to sprint or dodge enemy fire, to more gameplay-changing options like the invisibility cloak or jetpack. While the armor abilities are all cool, certain ability/gun combinations definitely give you a distinct advantage. Loadouts

are mode-specific, meaning the killer combination you found in Slayer might not necessarily be available in Headhunter.

Addictive New Modes

Many gamers consider the Halo franchise to be a more traditional take on competitive multiplayer. But one way the series has always exhibited innovation is in the variety of modes it offers, as well as the ability to tweak the game parameters to your liking. In the upcoming multiplayer beta, players will have a variety of new modes to check out.

Generator Defense

This is Halo's answer to Bad Company's Rush mode. Two teams compete to either attack or defend three generators placed on the map. The teams switch roles between rounds, and random supply drops at the beginning of each round offer more powerful weapons to the players that get to

Expect bigger, more detailed multiplayer maps in Halo: Reach





Bungie has confirmed that the beta will support 4-player split-screen

them first. One unique twist to the Rush formula is that the defenders can lock down each generator when standing next to them, which will make them temporarily invulnerable to attack. There is a slight cooldown time before you can lock a generator down again, so even if a team is camping at a generator, the attacking team will still have a chance to cause damage. Defensive abilities such as Evade and Armor Lock are particularly useful in Generator Defense.

Headhunter

This mode takes Halo's Oddball to a whole new level of insanity. Each time you kill an opponent, a flaming skull flies out of their dead body. Walking over the skull will collect it, but unlike in Oddball, you can still use all of your weapons (and armor abilities), and you can carry more than one skull at a time. To score points, the player carrying skulls must walk into one of two scoring zones placed randomly on the map, which move as the round progresses. The number of skulls each person is carrying is displayed over their head, and is visible from anywhere on the map – the more skulls you're carrying, the more enticing a target you become. Depending on the map, the Sprint and Jetpack abilities are extremely useful, and can be the difference between pulling in a major haul and erupting in a fountain of flaming skulls.

Stockpile

According to Bungie, Stockpile is "CTF on crack." Instead of the traditional two colored flags on

opposite ends of a map, Stockpile features four randomly placed neutral flags and a special colored zone for each team. The goal is to retrieve the neutral flags and drop them in your zone, which will turn them to the color of your team. The twist is that flags are only counted at certain intervals – your team will have to defend your area until the timer ticks down, otherwise your opponents can come in and steal your stash (or just drop them outside of your zone to stop you from getting points). More than in other modes, teamwork plays an essential role in Stockpile.

Invasion

If you like objective-based multiplayer modes, Invasion is for you. This mode pits Elites against Spartans over the course of three phases of gameplay. In the map we played, the first two phases involved storming the Spartan's territory and holding one of multiple points for a given amount of time, while the Spartans set up defensive positions. The third phase required stealing a data core and carrying it back to our Covenant ship. The person carrying the data core was unable to use any weapons and moved at a snail's pace, requiring babysitting from the rest of the team. Completing each phase also opens up the new tier of more powerful loadouts and vehicles, resulting in an action-packed climax at the end of every round.

Invasion Slayer

This Slayer variation of Invasion forgoes the

unique objectives for straight-up killing, but keeps the unique loadout tiers, which are now unlocked by reaching a certain number of points (it can also be time-based). Random control areas also pop up on the map. Holding one of these areas for a short amount of time will initiate a supply drop – a few seconds later a vehicle or powerful weapon will spawn in the vicinity. Of course, there's nothing that says the team who initiated the drop has to be the one to pick up the reward...

Juggernaut

We found out late in the day that Juggernaut will be back for the beta, with a few gameplay tweaks. At the beginning of each round, one player is randomly transformed into the Juggernaut, and is endowed with incredible power (in the beta, 4x shields and faster running speed). The Juggernaut receives points for killing any of the other players, who can only score points by killing the Juggernaut, which in turn makes them the new Juggernaut. In the beta, the Juggernaut's only weapon is the gravity hammer, which is an instant kill for whoever it hits. Another important change is a short period of invincibility granted to the new Juggernaut, meaning you can no longer sneak in for a cheap kill immediately after the title changes hands.

As unique as these modes are, it's impossible to overemphasize how much additional variety Halo: Reach's loadouts introduce to the gameplay – not to mention the fundamental differences in the species. In much the same way that ODST's Firefight mode reinvented the Horde formula with an intricate rule set and power-ups, it seems that all of Halo: Reach's multiplayer modes will benefit from this new aspect of the gameplay.

Although the beta only consists of a handful of the content that the main game will offer, there's more than enough to keep Halo fans busy until fall. The Halo: Reach multiplayer beta is exclusively available through the extras menu in Halo 3: ODST. » **Jeff Marchiatava**

For details on the maps included in the beta, as well as screenshots, and gameplay footage, check out gameinformer.com/mag

» **Platform**
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
Microsoft Game Studios

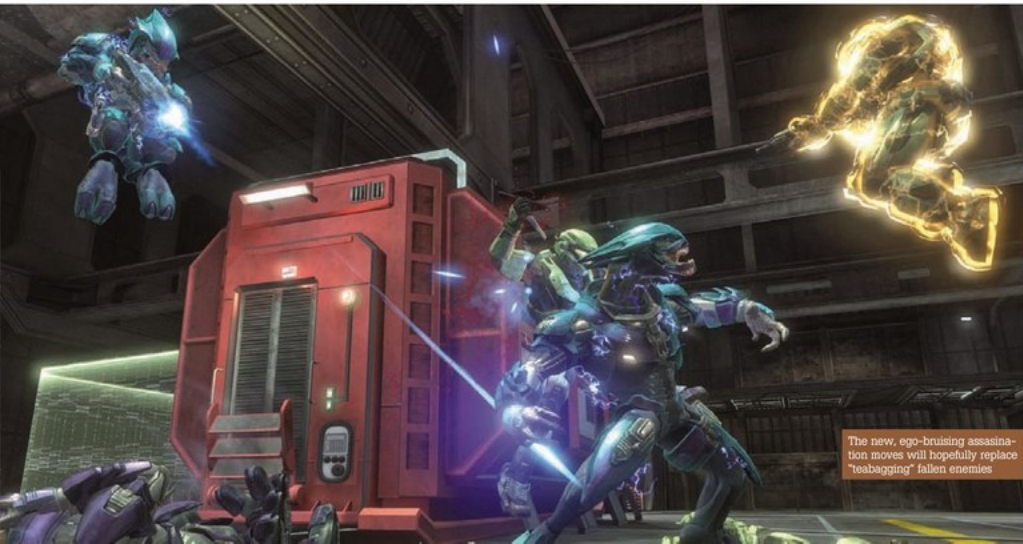
» **Developer**
Bungie

» **Release**
May 3 (Online Beta)



All Species Are Not Created Equally

One of the interesting aspects of Reach's multiplayer is that the two species you'll be playing as – the human Spartans and Covenant Elites – do not have the same characteristics. On the surface, the Elites seem to have the advantage. Although they are bigger (and thus an easier target), Elites are also faster than Spartans, have more health, and will regenerate both health and shields over time (Spartans will have to rely on health packs scattered throughout each map). Some armor abilities are also species-specific, including the Elite's Evade ability and the Spartan's Sprint ability. Perhaps the biggest difference lies in the weapons. While each weapon type has a rough equivalent on the other team, they are far from identical. Rate of fire, damage, and projectile characteristics can vary significantly. Whereas previous Halo titles tried to minimize the differences between players, Halo: Reach embraces these distinctions.



The new, ego-bruising assassination moves will hopefully replace "teabagging" fallen enemies



Shaun White Skateboarding

Ubisoft Montreal shapes a new experience

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

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

» **Publisher**
Ubisoft

» **Developer**
Ubisoft Montreal

» **Release**
Holiday

On the surface, Shaun White Skateboarding is an idea that some might not understand. Most of us know the man as a snowboarder, but he also made a name as a skateboarder. We also think of his tepidly received snowboarding series and wonder what he has to bring to the skating sub-genre.

But as an actual game, Shaun White Skateboarding presents a clear vision that stands out from the other titles. "Skateboarders see the world differently than non-skateboarders," says creative director Nick Harper. Using that philosophy and seeking to "capture the euphoria" of landing tricks, Harper and the team at Ubisoft Montreal have created a title where your actions as a skater transform the world around you.

Similar to *The Saboteur*, a level in Shaun White starts out dull and grey. This represents how the game's Ministry organization has turned the world into a worker hive concerned only with economic efficiency. As you pull off tricks, things start to spring to life, and the bigger combos you do the more you influence the environment. Pedestrians and other skaters become animated. Graffiti and other splashes of color

paint the landscape. Music fills your ears. You'll access new places to skate and even trigger new structures.

Aside from this rebirth of the environment, various places will shape the world and your involvement to an even larger degree. Go up to a special color-designated rail and not only can you trick on it, but you can mold its shape – up, down, left, right – and bend it to your will with the left stick while you are still on it. These shapable objects aren't limited to rails; you can create ramps out of patches of concrete or even bring them underground if you choose. In the early demo of the game we saw, there were many opportunities to influence the world with these special areas.

A level will have objectives built around this shaping ability, as well as standard objectives (like score a certain amount of points with a combo, etc.). In the demo I saw, the objective was to create a shaped rail so your skater could hit multiple points on a previously inaccessible high ledge. Then you had to drop down and trick on a fountain. This triggered a skate shop that popped out of the ground and offered more

skating opportunities. Harper told us of one area where you have to use shaped rails and ramps to make your way up successive tiers of a skyscraper, testing not only your tricking skills but your imagination as well. You'll return to levels at certain points in the game as your shaping ability increases and new opportunities are available.

Shaun White Skateboarding uses a right analog trick system, but it's simpler than EA's Skate franchise. To load your trick, you pull the stick in one of eight directions and then flick it in the opposite direction to initiate the trick. You can use a modifier button to increase the number of moves at your disposal. Which trick you perform (like street or vert varieties) changes depending on where you are, and the game will feature over 80 in all. There is also a simple face button control scheme, but it only uses the X/A button, and it's pretty bare bones. Unfortunately, I didn't get my hands on the trick system in the demo, so I don't know how it feels compared to Skate.

Take what you think about Shaun White and throw it out, because his game is all about creating your own experience. » **Matthew Kato**

This is an example of how you can spontaneously create a kicker out of the environment in real time



Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

Heavenly Sword developer monkeys around

Ninja Theory is tired of looking at the same gray desert found in most post-apocalyptic fiction. If humanity ever became an endangered species, it seems more likely that nature would slowly overtake our cities, resulting in a more colorful, lively world. This is the backdrop the Heavenly Sword developer has created for its new sci-fi action/platformer, *Enslaved*.

Enslaved starts after its hero, Monkey, is captured by a giant slave ship. Controlled by a mysterious force, these airships patrol the east coast capturing the world's few remaining humans and transporting them out west, where they are never seen again. Monkey's slave ship, however, doesn't even make it as far as America's heartland; the mechanical blimp crashes into New York after another captive—a woman by the name of Trip—orchestrates an escape. Monkey survives the wreck, but wakes to find that Trip has fitted him with a collar that will explode if she dies, forcing him to help her return home.

New York has become a mess of dilapidated skyscrapers and overgrown vines, and Monkey and Trip begin their journey by crossing through this urban jungle. Along the way they battle automated military robots and other forgotten machines from bygone wars. However, soulless robots probably won't be the only antagonists in *Enslaved*. We saw one sequence in which Monkey came across a floating mechanical mask. The mask was trying to communicate

with him, but the apparition vanished as soon as Monkey approached. The moment doesn't make much sense alone, but it teases the larger narrative, which will tie together Monkey's past and the mysteries of the massive slave ships.

Given Ninja Theory's pedigree with *Heavenly Sword*, we can expect *Enslaved*'s combat system to be rich with options. One addition to *Enslaved*'s breed of combo-driven fights is the ability to use ranged attacks. Monkey will collect both stun and plasma ammo from fallen enemies, which he can use against any foe that steps out of range of his staff. This ranged ammo is limited, however, so most of the action will involve stringing together combos at close range.

The other half of the gameplay involves exploration and puzzle solving. Trip will be at Monkey's side throughout much of the journey, and she will be dependant on Monkey to get past many obstacles, but that doesn't mean she won't also be an asset. Monkey can throw Trip up to areas he can't reach alone, and Trip will provide distractions that will give Monkey time to flank his enemies or hack open doors and other computer equipment Monkey doesn't understand. Trip also comes equipped with a robotic dragonfly, which she can send on scouting



Enslaved's camera shakes around during combat, creating an interesting effect that helps intensify combat

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Action

» Publisher
Namco Bandai

» Developer
Ninja Theory

» Release
Fall

Award-winning creative crew

Ninja Theory doesn't just care about making a good game. It has a tale it wants to tell, and it wants to tell it well. To assist with the narrative, the team has enlisted some of the most experienced entertainers in England. Andy Serkis, the actor who portrayed Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and King Bohan in *Heavenly Sword*, has provided both the voice and motion capture for *Enslaved*'s hero, Monkey. Meanwhile, Alex Garland (the scriptwriter for *28 Days Later* and *Sunshine*) has been tapped to help shape *Enslaved*'s story and cinematic sequences. Finally, Nitin Sawhney, one of England's most respected composers, is working on *Enslaved*'s score just as he did for *Heavenly Sword*.



missions. Players who take careful stock of their surroundings might notice shortcuts through areas or avoid battles altogether by sneaking around enemy encampments. Trip's dragonfly will also be a boon to Monkey during combat; since many of the enemies are long-dormant robots created for war, two machines from the same product line might have different vulnerabilities. Trip's dragonfly will scan enemies for these abnormalities and transmit their weaknesses to Monkey via his slave collar. For example, some enemies might be vulnerable to ranged attacks, while others will take extra damage if they are thrown into another enemy. Another foe has a self-destruct that Monkey can trigger, effectively taking out a larger group of enemies in a single blow.

Ninja Theory has said that *Enslaved* is already content-complete, and it's just putting on the polish before the title's fall launch. If the game comes together like we're hoping it will, *Enslaved* could be one of the most impressive new franchises of the year. » **Ben Reeves**

For extended impressions and more screens check out gameinformer.com/mag



Crysis 2

Crytek aims for the console shooter crown

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

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

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Crytek

» **Release**
Fall

Electronic Arts and Crytek aren't bashful about setting a high bar for Crysis 2. EA Partners general manager David DeMartini says he believes the game is "the greatest product that is going to come out this year." That's huge praise from a publishing group that boasts Battlefield: Bad Company 2, Mass Effect 2, and Medal of Honor in its 2010 lineup.

To achieve its immodest goal, Crytek is focusing on highly interactive destructible environments, enhancing the nanosuit functionality, and delivering a more engrossing story. Crytek founder Cevat Yerli admits the story in the

original Crysis was one of the game's weak links, and believes that enlisting acclaimed sci-fi writer Richard Morgan to pen Crysis 2 will bring the narrative quality on par with the rest of the experience. Morgan, best known for his book *Altered Carbon*, has won both the Philip K. Dick and Arthur C. Clarke awards. To add intrigue to the compelling sandbox gameplay, Morgan says he's focusing on the mystery at the heart of the nanosuit technology. "It's a very useful, sharp tool, but it can cut both ways," he says. "It can do things you don't expect it to." To pull this off, Morgan is giving the suit its own narrative arc

that players will have to come to grips with as they play through the game. "The technology is not what it seems – there's more to it than appears on the surface," he alludes.

As Yerli boots up the Crysis 2 demo on Xbox 360, we join the yet-to-be-named protagonist as he's perched high in a bombed-out skyscraper overlooking Wall Street. The ravaged financial district looks like a ghost town, with none of the bustling activity that was commonplace before the city went to hell. Buildings smolder in the distance, and the streets are abandoned save for the squads of Crynet Security guards roaming the streets. A military chopper passes overhead, and the private military contractors stationed on the ground chatter about being on the look out for Prophet, the badass Delta Force squad leader from the first game who has a knack for surviving impossible scenarios. Are they the bad guys?

"As in reality, it's a little more complicated than that," says Morgan. "You'll find that there's a lot to the Crynet Security story. Their relationship to you is volatile, but changeable. Certainly at this stage in the proceedings they are a problem for you – you are between them and something that they want."

While the grid-like layout of New York stands in



Nanosuit 2.0 will tailor itself to your play style



start contrast to the open world sandbox jungle environments of the original *Crysis*, Crytek is using verticality and the terraforming nature of the natural disasters to breathe sandbox sensibilities into the urban jungle. After scanning the area to get a bead on the enemy numbers, Prophet, or whoever it is the player is controlling, swan dives 20 stories to get closer to the action. The nanosuit automatically absorbs the impact upon landing.

The player activates the suit's cloaking device, creeps up behind an unsuspecting guard, and performs one of the new button-activated stealth kills. These takedown moves are the ideal way to stay hidden, because unlike when you open fire with a weapon, you don't lose your invisibility.

The player moves forward on the plaza and switches off the cloaking device. A soldier is patrolling on the other side of a metal panel. Rather than sneaking behind him for another stealth kill, the player decides to shoot through the cover to take out the unsuspecting victim. Bullets rip through the panel and the enemy's lifeless corpse hits the pavement. With his position compromised after firing bullets, the player turns on maximum armor to absorb the incoming gunfire as he leaps across the gap between two buildings. Upon landing, he uses his vertical advantage to take out a few enemies with a scoped weapon before activating the cloak ability once again to grab a nearby schmuck and throw him through the window to the street below.

With fire coming in from all sides, the player looks for an environmental advantage and finds one in a nearby gun emplacement. The immediate threat is behind him, so he rips the gun from the emplacement with the super strength the nanosuit provides and opens fire on the enemies, who duck for the safety of cover. These Crynet humps prove no match for the nanosuit enabled super soldier.

The second segment of the live demo starts with the player in the custody of Crynet Security, which is loading him onto a chopper for extraction to a nearby detention center. As the chopper ascends, the ground starts shaking below and



suddenly an alien spire bursts through what appears to be the New York Stock Exchange building and climbs into the air. The chopper is rattled by the blast and crashes near the corners of Nassau and Broad Streets. The player's nanosuit loses power in the crash, so he's rendered helpless on the ground as an alien dropship flies past launching pods into the streets.

Crynet Security takes cover to fight the oncoming threat – armored bipedal enemies much more deadly than the insect-like variety you fought in *Crysis*. These hulking creatures look more human, with two arms and two legs, sharing only the mechanical tentacles growing out the back of their heads with the beasts we've seen before. The grunts prove no match for the aliens, who rip through the guards within a matter of seconds. The nanosuit runs a recovery program and powers back on just as the last Crynet soldier bites the dust.

Once on his feet, the player grabs a powerful grenade launcher the last Crynet soldier standing dropped upon his death. He first goes into stealth mode to perform a sneak attack on a

nearby foe, which the enemy repels easily. The player, taking cover behind some abandoned taxis, starts lobbing grenades at the aliens.

These new enemies carefully coordinate their attacks, with one baddie flanking while the player is engaged with a target in front of him. It looks as if it's going to be tough to stay in one place when combating the extraterrestrial threat, so using the stealth mode to reposition your attack is crucial. While the player's hands are full dealing with the alien attackers, another pod crashes nearby. A much larger, menacing enemy emerges and triggers an EMP blast that once again disrupts the suit functionality, sending the player helplessly to the concrete.

If these brief encounters are any indication of the rest of the game, *Crysis 2* looks to be a kinetic action game that should find a willing audience in console gamers. Given how good the 360 version looked, we can't wait to see how Crytek pushes the boundaries of the PC platform. » Matt Bertz





Gabriel Tosh is a Specter – a new, more terrifying, and insane generation of Ghosts – and a necessary, if uncomfortable ally

StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty

Single-player bringing out a different set of big guns

» Platform

PC

» Style

1-Player Strategy
(8-Player Online)

» Publisher

Blizzard Entertainment

» Developer

Blizzard Entertainment

» Release

2010

Balance is Forked

In an unusual move, Blizzard forked the unit balance between single- and multi-player in mid-April. A Hydralisk in the campaign might not have the same stats as a Hydralisk online, as the multiplayer team is continually tweaking the numbers in pursuit of the legendary balance StarCraft is known for. With the ramping-up of beta testing and balance feedback, the single-player design squad began spending too much time having to rewrite scenarios because of online concerns. As odd as it sounds on paper, the team doesn't expect players to notice it all that much – we're talking about a five percent slower fire rate for Marines, or knocking 50 minerals off of the factory's build cost. Having played both multiplayer and a handful of campaign scenarios, I honestly wouldn't have noticed if Blizzard hadn't pointed it out.

Jim Raynor's got his hands full. His people are under the oppressive boot of Emperor Mengsk and his fascist Terran Dominion, which is choking the joy of life out of mankind with equal parts stormtroopers, taxes, and propaganda. Raynor's on the run, associating with criminals, murderers, and madmen in an effort to put enough muscle behind his nascent revolution to make it relevant. That's when the dark templar Zeratul shows up with a warning of a coming apocalypse so dire that the Queen of Blades is convinced that even she is powerless in the face of it.

Taking on the role of Raynor, players spend most of their between-mission time aboard the battleship Hyperion. The ship's four accessible rooms recall old-school point-and-click adventure titles, with rich art selling the setting as a physical space. Each area has a number of objects and people to interact with, many of which serve only to flesh out the evolving story. Players interested in the lore should check back through the entire Hyperion between every mission, as new dialogue and background information constantly becomes accessible. The original StarCraft didn't tell much of a story beyond "holy crap Zerg!" This time, Blizzard is putting significant resources into blowing out the sequel into a full-on space opera.

Aboard the battleship, you have plenty of options for spending the money earned by completing missions. The bridge offers the chance to

tackle new missions or replay old ones to pick up missed side objectives or pursue achievements. A fully functional top-down shooter arcade cabinet awaits in the cantina, as well as the opportunity to hire mercenary companies. On the battlefield, these powerful units build instantly, providing instant defense (or a money dump for players who build up large resource stockpiles).

Persistent upgrades are available at the Hyperion armory, and range from bonus hit points for bunkers to allowing Goliaths to simultaneously engage ground and air targets. If you're meticulous enough to collect sufficient research points (generally accomplished by completing secondary objectives), you can spend them on awesome abilities in the laboratory. You must make a permanent choice between two exclusive powers at each stage of research, but the choices all rule; your barracks can be upgraded to build units via orbital drop pods rather than having them walk out the door, but being able to double-build advanced units is just as enticing.

These metagame elements are compelling on their own, but more than anything else, StarCraft lives and dies by its gameplay and mission design. The three new missions recently made available to press at a Blizzard event answer that question quite satisfactorily. For example, one tasks you with harvesting a special gas from nodes that are spread across the map. Meanwhile, your Protoss foes are

hammering away at your base, racing to seal the nodes before you can get to them, and sending hit squads after your vulnerable SCVs. Scoring a basic victory isn't terribly difficult, but going after the scattered (and well-defended) research points at the same time or trying for the achievement of not losing any SCVs adds more layers of complexity and challenge. Four difficulty levels, ranging from Casual to Brutal, add replay value as well.

Real-time strategy campaigns succeed or fail based on three pillars: story, mission design, and a persistent metagame. Blizzard is doing exactly what longtime followers of the company would expect: mixing up mechanics pioneered by other studios with a few original ideas, making them work in perfect concert with StarCraft II's design, and refining it all to a smooth science. An afternoon neck-deep in the campaign didn't drown me in surprises, but I left with a greater appreciation for Blizzard's design and engineering talents than ever. I had some concerns going in that single-player was going to be a distant second fiddle to StarCraft's beloved multiplayer, but those are completely gone now. » **Adam Biessener**

Get extensive interviews with Blizzard's creative talent, walk-throughs of campaign missions, breaking news, and much more StarCraft coverage at gameinformet.com



Medics, like Firebats, have been cut from multiplayer but are available in the campaign



Goliaths serve as fantastic fire support to the Terrans' inevitable mass of infantry



Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

New gameplay promises a bright future for Ghost Recon fans



For nearly a decade, the Ghost Recon series has enticed gamers by imbuing its tactical shooter gameplay with futuristic technology bordering on science fiction. As the title suggests, Ghost Recon: Future Soldier will be no exception. Not only will you have an arsenal of high-tech weaponry and game-changing tools at your disposal, but numerous additions to the gameplay and a more powerful engine are set to keep the series on the cutting edge. Here's a rundown of all the intel we've uncovered so far, courtesy of our rendezvous with the game's creative director, Olivier Dauba.

A New Battlefield

While previous installments of the series usually focus on a single locale, Future Soldier will plunge players into a global conflict (Dauba told us most of the action will take place in Russia and Northern Europe), introducing more variety into the types of situations you'll face. While long to mid-range firefights will still be the dominant method of engagement, urban environments will feature more interior locations, which provide the opportunity for new close-quarter takedowns as well. In these situations, soldiers will utilize Krav Maga, the brutal self-defense system employed by Israeli Defense Forces. Players will also have an array of sensors and mines at their disposal, allowing them to creatively tackle enemy encounters.

A New Story

We felt a sense of déjà vu when the first trailer for Future Soldier revealed Russian ultranationalists as the target of the Ghosts' attention. Not only is Russia the main antagonist in recent shooters

like Modern Warfare 2 and Bad Company 2, but it mimics the plot of the first Ghost Recon. Your foe may be familiar, but Ubisoft is taking a new approach to storytelling. This includes delivering a wider view of the events by introducing segments played from the perspective of non-military characters, including the bodyguard of the Russian president and a worker at an oil refinery hit by a terrorist attack. Ghost members will also have more memorable personalities that befit the Tom Clancy moniker, similar to the author's go-to man, Jack Ryan. Most importantly, the way the plot unfolds will involve less listening to Cross-Corn chatter: "We have rethought the way the story is told within the game," Dauba said. "You are not told a story, but you get to play it. An event happens in the world that will have consequences somewhere else; you are there, and you play it. It's usually hard to understand the chain of events that leads to a major conflict. So, we are trying to make it easier by having you there at every single step."

New Tools

Future Soldier features toys so powerful that Master Chief would blush. The biggest addition is the augmented exoskeleton that all soldier classes will wear. This allows players to move faster on the battlefield, upping the intensity of the action. There are also plenty of class-specific skills. The commando class is equipped with a Predator-like shoulder-mounted rocket launcher, which can auto-lock onto enemies or be manually controlled by the player. The recon class sports optical camouflage, allowing them to blend in seamlessly with their environment provided they're not firing a weapon. The

engineer will be able to pilot the returning aerial droids, which now feature offensive capabilities. Finally, the sniper can designate targets from afar, which will feed information directly to other squad members. Players will also receive support from an unmanned mobile turret that would be more at home in a Command & Conquer title than Ghost Recon – but Dauba insists all of the game's fictional tech is based on real initiatives being researched by the U.S. military. "You should truly read DARPA's [the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency] calls for proposal," he told us. "They make Iron Man look like a high school science fair."

New Multiplayer

While rivals like Modern Warfare 2 and Bad Company 2 offer single-player only campaigns, Future Soldier's main story will feature four-player, drop-in/drop-out co-op. Teamwork will be an integral part of the gameplay, with features like the ability for squad members to share their skills when in close proximity and a unique link-up system. This allows players to fall into a tight formation with the leader controlling the movement of the entire squad, allowing the others to focus on covering the group. The series' Persistent Elite Creation system will return, and Dauba tells us all unlocks will be playable elements.

From what we've seen of the game, it looks like the future of the Ghost Recon series is in good hands. We'll bring you more on the title as we approach its tentative fall release. » **Jeff Marchiafava**

To view the trailer for Ghost Recon: Future Soldier, check out gameinformer.com/mag.

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC
- » Style
1 to 4-Player Shooter
(16-Player Online)
- » Publisher
Ubisoft
- » Developer
Ubisoft Paris
- » Release
Fall





The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings

Polish developer to deliver a different kind of RPG

- » Platform
PC
- » Style
1-Player Role-Playing
- » Publisher
Atari
- » Developer
CDProjekt RED
- » Release
Spring 2011

Aside from a touch of amnesia, Geralt of Rivia isn't your average RPG hero. Springing from the works of renowned Polish fantasy author Andrzej Sapkowski, his literary heritage is unlike the cookie-cutter, Tolkien-derived Western characters frequently appearing in games. He's sterile, but doesn't let that affect his voracious appetite for chasing skirt. He's a mutant, but his monster-hunting skills and supernatural abilities keep him in demand despite most humans' ingrained revulsion of non-humans. He'll save the world, but is typically more occupied keeping himself whole and his purse full. Geralt is the foremost Witcher in the land, and this next chapter in his dark saga holds great promise.

This sequel unabashedly iterates the adult-oriented original. The timing-focused combat is gone, replaced by a more standard third-person system with a focus on customization. Senior producer Tomek Gop tells us, "If you're used to 'hardcoreness' that we've provided before, you will find tons of options in our new combat system. I'm talking about things unavailable before, like combining different sword strikes with magic, or even creating your own combos." We expect analogues to the deep crafting and character progression systems to make appearances as well; Gop makes no bones about the

fact that his team is composed of hardcore gamers who are making the kind of game that they want to play.

The story follows Geralt's pursuit of a mysterious kingslayer with Witcher-like powers. Gop assures us that *The Witcher 2* doesn't lean as heavily on the amnesia crutch as its predecessor, which is a relief. Beyond that, there aren't any details on the plot. CDProjekt is hanging its hat on the game's storyline, and understandably wants to avoid spoilers at all costs. The original's excellence in this area buys the developer the benefit of the doubt.

Games like *Mass Effect 2* have raised the bar for RPG presentations, and while *The Witcher 2* is moving forward in its own way, Gop asserts that it is a different type of game than BioWare's masterpiece. "We are, probably, getting closer to the cinematic experience, but that's not the point for us," he says. "We put a lot of effort into the way we introduce characters to the player, or the way they unveil the new plots." In addition, the developer is using an engine developed in-house to support RPG-focused features like an unlimited number of participants in conversations and action sequences in the middle of interactive dialogue. The screenshots themselves speak to the quality of the proprietary rendering engine, as well.

What we've seen thus far of *The Witcher 2* is more than enough to bring us on board. The original is a solid RPG that holds up well to this day. With the same talented studio behind this sequel, the few wrinkles and oddities that marred the first title should be smoothed out. If the story and writing can deliver on the same level, this could be one RPG you won't want to miss. » **Adam Biessener**

Read the full interview with senior producer Tomek Gop at gameinformer.com/mag

PC-only...for now

The first game was always intended for a console release, but CDProjekt outsourced the port to another developer and killed the project when it didn't meet its quality standards. Senior producer Tomek Gop isn't closing any doors for a console version of the sequel: "Different approach and different outcome [than the original], I should say. I mean, we're not announcing nor confirming anything at this time, because we need time. But definitely we're thinking about *The Witcher 2* on consoles – our engine can support development on consoles – but this is all I can say for now."



It looks like Geralt will find himself often outnumbered, once again



A lady in a fantasy setting wearing practical armor? Madness!



**WHAT FATHER NATURE USES
WHEN MOTHER NATURE IS
OUT OF TOWN AT ANOTHER
ONE OF HER CONFERENCES.**

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WHERE FRESHNESS
SMELLS FROM

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Green Day: Rock Band

Harmonix moves forward with single band formula

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

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Rhythm/
Music (4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
MTV Games/
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Harmonix

» **Release**
June 8

Following the success of *The Beatles: Rock Band*, MTV Games is moving forward with a second title focused on the career of a single band. With the release of *Green Day: Rock Band* looming, we interviewed project lead Chris Foster to get the scoop on the new game.

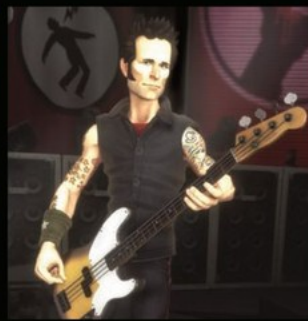
"First and foremost, we are integrating with the Rock Band platform fully," Foster explains. "It's something that we always like to do when we can. So, in this case, all 47 songs can be exported into your Rock Band music library [for \$10]." This is great news for fans who bemoaned the fact that they couldn't play their Beatles tracks in *Rock Band 2*. Also notable is the fact that this inter-game functionality goes both ways. "There are six Green Day songs in the Rock Band library already, and if you have bought them, those will import into the Green Day game. You can play those songs as Green Day, with custom animated performances and visuals."

Green Day fans will note that the full song list printed here draws heavily from three of the band's most well-known albums. All of *Dookie* and *American Idiot* will be playable in the new game, and so will *21st Century Breakdown*, assuming you've bought the six songs from the album currently available. A smattering of hit songs from the band's other albums are also in the title. Unfortunately, fans of the earliest pre-major label Green Day music are out of luck — all the game's music comes from *Dookie* and later releases.

From a gameplay perspective, *Green Day: Rock Band* is taking a slightly different route than Harmonix's last single-band game. "We want to fine tune each of these games to the artist," Foster says. "In this case, we're showcasing their live performances, and that drove us in a different direction, technically. We're doing linear mo-cap for the first time, and capturing a full band performance, which lets us do a lot of things that we couldn't even do in *Beatles*, in terms of the way the different band members interact with each other and play around with the stage." This approach has allowed Harmonix to flesh out the experience of a Green Day concert, from onscreen actions of the band members to fan interaction moments — like concertgoers who climb onto stage to leap out and crowd surf. "This is also not the linear path through the band's career that the Beatles did," Foster continues. "Instead, we're choosing key albums and key tours from the band, and showcasing each of those. It's a different structure, but it seems to suit the band really well." Three major venues are represented: the Fox Theater in Oakland, CA acts as the hometown venue for *21st Century Breakdown*, Milton Keynes' massive concert stage hosts the *American Idiot* songs plus several others, and a fictional Warehouse venue houses the early *Dookie* tracks.

So what sold Harmonix on Green Day? "We really don't think of this project as following up the Beatles," Foster tells us. "It's almost foolish to think that you can. At the end of the day, it's really the music. It's very squarely in Rock Band's area of expertise. It's really great, high-energy punk and rock music — with harmonies, which is one thing we're bringing over from the Beatles technology." Along with a huge amount of unlockable archival footage, deep participation from the band, and Harmonix's long-established leadership in the genre, we've got high hopes for Green Day's big upcoming release. — Matt Miller

For our interview with the band members of Green Day about their involvement in the game, make sure and check out gameinformer.com/mag



The Full On-Disc Set List

Played at The Warehouse

From *Dookie* (1994)
"Burnout"
"She"
"Having a Blast"
"Sassafras Roots"
"Chump"
"When I Come Around"
"Longview"
"Coming Clean"
"Welcome to Paradise"
"Emenius Sleepus"
"Pulling Teeth"
"In the End"
"Basket Case"
"F.O.D."

Played at Milton Keynes:

From *Insomniac* (1995)
"Brain Stew" / "Jaded"
"Geek Stink Breath"
From *Mimrod* (1997)
"Hitchin' a Ride"
"Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)"
"Nice Guys Finish Last"

From Warning (2000)

"Minority"
"Warning"

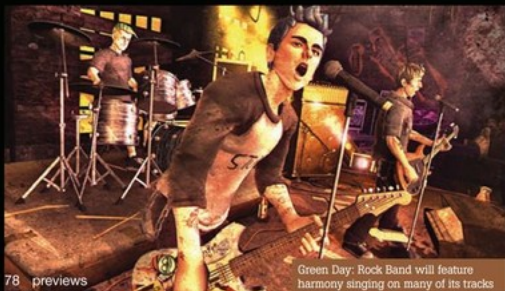
From American Idiot (2004)

"American Idiot"
"She's a Rebel"
"Jesus of Suburbia"
"Extraordinary Girl"
"Holiday"
"Letterbomb"
"Boulevard of Broken Dreams"
"Wake Me Up When September Ends"
"Are We the Waiting?"
"Homecoming"
"St. Jimmy"
"Whatserrname"
"Give Me Novacaine"

Played at The Fox Theater, Oakland, CA

From 21st Century Breakdown (2009)

"Song of the Century"
"Viva La Gloria! (Little Girl)"
"21st Century Breakdown"
"Restless Heart Syndrome"
"Before the Lobotomy"
"Horrshoes and Handgrenades"
"Last Night on Earth"
"The Static Age"
"Peacemaker"
"American Bology"
"Murder City"
"See the Light"



Green Day: Rock Band will feature harmony singing on many of its tracks



Conduit 2

High Voltage rewires the Wii's sci-fi FPS franchise

The Conduit was not the FPS savior High Voltage promised Wii owners. Despite tepid critical reception, The Conduit was impressive on a technical level... "for a Wii game." This very caveat stokes developer High Voltage's drive to shove an improved sequel in the faces of its critics.

According to High Voltage, the basic framework of the first Conduit – motion control – is among the Wii's best. "While Nintendo may cringe a bit, there's certainly something analogous to holding the pointer and firing a weapon," says Conduit 2 producer Josh Olson. "It feels good." With that in place, the team is focusing on overhauling almost everything else.

Enemies in The Conduit were dumb, and High Voltage has the fix. Enemies no longer seek shelter behind combustible barrels and promptly fire upon their flammable cover. Now the more realistic adversaries idly chat or work on computers until you make your violent entrance. Once engaged, heavily armored enemies with shotguns charge, while lightly protected snipers attack from afar. Combine this with their ability to wield any weapon, and you've got targets at least more dangerous than those in Duck Hunt.

Not only are enemies smarter, but they also look better thanks to High Voltage's focus on honing Conduit 2's art style. Randomly generated armor ensures that the fools populating your crosshairs never look too similar. Boss enemies like

a raging Leviathan showcase a level of detail unlike anything in the first game, and Siberian robot wolves and 30-foot tall Atlantis guardians help provide much needed enemy variety.

The Conduit concluded with protagonist Michael Ford chasing John Adams (the alien controlling the U.S., not the president) through a portal. In order to prevent Adams' global domination in the sequel, Ford must enlist the help of other aliens across the globe. Yep, it's still ridiculous. To do so, he must venture beyond Washington DC to face the foes of Russia, Atlantis, and beyond.

Where some Wii owners see The Conduit as a generic FPS, Sega and High Voltage see a young franchise with tons of potential. After less than a year, High Voltage is once again promising a Wii FPS that stands toe-to-toe with its beefier console brethren. Let's hope they get it right this time. — **Tim Turi**

» Platform

Wii

» Style

1-Player Shooter
(12-Player Online)

» Publisher

Sega

» Developer

High Voltage Software

» Release

Fall



Conduit 2 takes players beyond Washington D.C. to expansive outdoor locales

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Madden NFL 11

EA Sports puts the skill back in skill players



» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Tiburon

» **Release**
August 10

After years of struggling to field a next-gen football game that met the expectations of its rabid fan base, EA Sports finally got the vaunted Madden franchise back on the right track last year by adding gang tackling, introducing the oft-requested online franchise mode, and realigning the presentation to bring it more in-synch with television broadcasts. For the encore, developer EA Tiburon isn't just building on the success from last year—it's reinventing the most integral part of the gameplay experience.

Unhappy with how players accelerated, changed directions, and carried momentum in past Madden titles, the dev team scrapped its old locomotion engine in favor of a more responsive system. Speed is no longer the most important rating for skill players. The new approach places a much higher emphasis on agility and acceleration as distinguishing factors that separate the stud backs like the Vikings' Adrian Peterson from mediocre skill position players, like the Bears' Adrian Peterson.

Armed with a revamped right analog stick juke system that takes advantage of the new technology, players now have an entire assortment of moves resting under their thumb. If you wiggle the stick back and forth, the running back will stutter step. Pressing the controller far to the left or right prompts the familiar juke, but swinging the analog stick around like throwing an uppercut in *Fight Night* triggers a dangerous spin move in the direction you rotate the stick. Flicking the stick down activates a high step for avoiding diving tacklers, and holding it forward makes the runner assume the trucking position, which you can then steer by slightly guiding the right analog stick to the left or right. This is an important

technique to employ with fumble-prone players, as you can guide the runner strategically to keep the hand holding the ball from taking the brunt of the tackle.

Getting used to the new system takes time, since you must trigger moves much earlier than you did in last year's game to effectively use them. But after a few quarters I was stringing together killer juke combos that left defenders gasping for air. Tiburon is so confident in how this system improves the running game that it eliminated the sprint button altogether. It sounds like a dangerous move that could provoke the anger of hardcore fans, but EA Canada did the same thing with the NHL series, and it gave the game a more realistic feel.

Running the ball isn't the only aspect of the game the new locomotion engine improves. Receivers finally try to keep their feet inbound when making a catch on the sidelines. Backs and receivers immediately square their shoulders and turn upfield when catching comeback passes or screens, which finally eliminates their frustrating tendency to run backwards in past *Maddens*.

Defenses also benefit from the new locomotion system. Cornerbacks with amazing closing speed can bait quarterbacks into throwing their way by playing loose coverage, and star defensive linemen with impressive acceleration ratings explode toward the quarterback after shedding blocks.

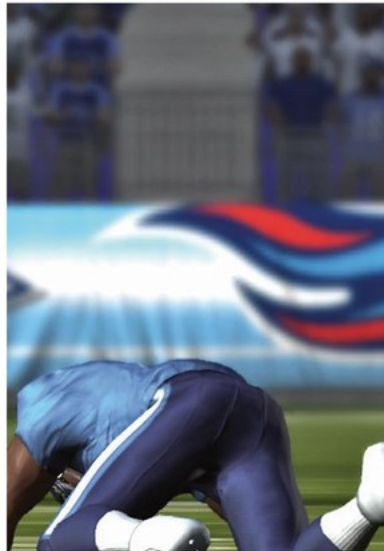
After playing a few games of *Madden NFL 11*, I can't stress how drastically the locomotion system revolutionizes the gameplay enough. It may look like a subtle change when watching footage of the game, but once you have the controller in your hands and hand the ball

off to a dangerous running back, you realize how empowering the new system is for skill players. If you're one of the disgruntled football fans who has forsaken Madden for its past transgressions, this could be the year to jump back on the bandwagon if everything comes together. » **Matt Bertz**

Get Your Kicks



When conducting focus group testing on *Madden NFL 10*, one of the constant sources of frustration for players came from an unexpected place—the kicking meter. Apparently some people couldn't figure out how to press the right analog stick forward and back (|). To help these Rhodes Scholars from blowing field goals, Tiburon has dropped the right analog-based system in favor of a three button press system that should be familiar to anyone who has played a sports game in the last two decades. Pressing 'A' once starts the kicking meter, the second determines power, and the third determines accuracy.





Tiburon wasn't willing to share details just yet, but promised a revamped Super Bowl experience that captures the magnitude of the sport's biggest event. To showcase its work, Tiburon is including the Super Bowl as a game option in the main menu.



Madden NFL 11 ships with the Ultimate Team and AFL Throwback downloadable content from last year's game.

Changing The Way You Play


In talking with NFL head coaches about Madden, one target of criticism kept coming up in the conversations – the unrealistic playcalling system. No coach shows up on Sunday with 300 plays in his gameplan, and after looking at telematics EA Tiburon discovered the average Madden player only calls 13 different plays a game. The devs went back to the drawing board and came up with GameFlow, a new approach to playcalling that more accurately reflects NFL practices and greatly cuts down the time spent navigating menus during a game.

Instead of cycling through hundreds of plays before the snap, GameFlow automatically feeds you a play from a predetermined list of options you can customize for particular downs and distances. The play art immediately appears on the field as the offense takes its position at the line of scrimmage, and the AI offensive coordinator who chooses the play then explains why he picked this particular play and gives advice on how you can best exploit the defense or challenge the offense.

GameFlow is a great learning tool for those unfamiliar with the intricacies of football, and greatly cuts down the amount of time it takes to play a game. Hardcore players don't have to worry about the new system crippling their offensive genius, either. You can fully customize gameplans by adding or eliminating plays for particular situations. Being able to rate each play on a five-star scale guides the AI logic in how frequently you want the play to be called – if you want to rarely run a bubble screen on third and short, give the play one or two stars. Want to ram the ball up the middle of the field every first down? Five star your favorite dive play. You can also access the full playbook at any time if you want to call a specific play. If you really hate the new feature, you can turn GameFlow off altogether. Superfans can even customize the gameplans for every CPU-controlled team in the game.

To complement the playcalling changes, Tiburon also simplified the system for making pre-snap adjustments. Now all hot routes, coverage adjustments, line shifts, and player motion is handled by the d-pad. Dubbed the Strategy Pad, this refined interface may irk players who memorized the old controls, but after using the Strategy Pad for a few games I appreciated how streamlined it is. Once you get used to the new system, it's actually easier to make last-second adjustments quickly.

To complete the playcalling overhaul, EA also reconfigured the audible system. Now when you press the audible button, your options are outlined right above the scoreboard on the bottom of the screen. As you cycle through the plays by pressing left or right, the play art for the highlighted play appears on the field, which is a very useful tool if you're using an unfamiliar playbook.



NCAA Football 11

With revamped gameplay, NCAA dives for the end zone

In EA's quest for authenticity, referees return to the field, players wear new equipment, and Alabama fans will be happy to hear that their helmets can finally sport player numbers

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Sports
(2-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Tiburon

» **Release**
July 13

Some football fans consider the NCAA Football franchise to be the red-headed stepchild of Madden. When it comes to the game technology, they may have a point. In an effort to differentiate between the two games, EA often introduces new technical upgrades in Madden, only to pass it down to NCAA Football a year later. This year may be the end of the hand-me-down relationship between the two games, as NCAA 11 features the same game-changing new locomotion engine as its NFL counterpart.

Just as in Madden, the new locomotion system improves how players move and react. Recruiting a star player is no longer just about looking at a player's speed rating; if your corner-back recruit has 90 speed and only 40 agility,

School Spirit

The development team realizes how much hard work fans put in to craft new schools in the impressive TeamBuilder feature – over 500,000 teams were made for NCAA Football 10. Rather than making everyone start from scratch, the devs assure us that you can import your old team into NCAA 11 just like you did last year.

he's going to get burned every time by great route-running receivers who can cut on a dime.

Skilled players can now showcase their electrifying moves by using the revamped right analog juke system – a new feature also found in Madden. Stringing together stutter steps, jukes, and spin moves on a run play has never been this gratifying or easy to execute. To give defenses a fighting chance, the game also adopts the Pro-Tak gang tackling system from last year's Madden.

One of the chief criticisms we frequently hear in regards to the NCAA franchise is the game's dry presentation. The commentary of Brad Nesselser, Kirk Herbstreit, and Lee Corso gets repetitive quickly, and many feel the game doesn't capture the school spirit on demonstration at campuses every Saturday. To ramp up the authenticity, NCAA 11 features full ESPN integration into its broadcast presentation and features more school-specific cutscenes during the game. After big plays, the camera will pan to celebrating fans in the school section, cheerleaders, flag teams, and mascots. The presentation also benefits

from an impressive new lighting system created to bring drama to the visual style and the integration of the depth-of-field effects made popular by last year's Madden.

One of the major differences between college and professional football is the amount of unique offensive schemes employed in college. Tiburon has placed an emphasis on faithfully recreating the playbooks to assure that if your school lines up in the pistol, option, or spread formations on Saturdays, you'll see it in the game as well. NCAA 11 also marks the return of the popular formation substitution feature, which allows you to customize who is on the field for each offensive and defensive formation. This is especially useful for players who rotate in pass rushing specialists for nickel and dime packages or offensive masterminds who like to move their star receiver around to find favorable coverage match-ups.

Fans of running the no-huddle offense will be happy to hear that you now have access to your full playbook when your team is running back up to the line of scrimmage. This is a major improvement over how the old games handcuffed you into choosing from your small selection audibles.

These aren't the only major alterations to the game; EA Sports says the game has several more big changes that they plan to reveal as we move closer to the release date. Is this the year that NCAA Football steps out of the NFL's shadow and becomes a must-play football game in its own right? We'll find out soon, as the game ships July 13. » **Matt Bertz**



To streamline the end of the season in Online Dynasty mode, EA has created a single bowl season where every team can play their game as if it was a week of the regular season



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11

Tiger Takes A New Approach To The Green



- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • Wii
- » **Style**
1 to 4-Player Sports
(24-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
EA Sports
- » **Developer**
EA Tiburon
- » **Release**
June 8

Tiger Woods' fall from grace has been a top talking point for tabloids, but EA Sports is all business when it comes to his video game license. This year's version skips extra-curricular pursuits in favor of adding the Ryder Cup, a competition in which America and Europe battle it out for bragging rights each year on the green.

The Ryder Cup appears in the single-player career and as a standalone mode. Acting as the captain, the player must build a team of golfers from a pool of PGA pros from America or Europe. Matches include different games like match play, four ball, and more. The Ryder Cup also features an online mode that pits 12 against 12 in an epic group match.

EA is also revamping the popular Tiger challenges by crowning daily winners and implementing leaderboards. For those of you who

complained about people working around the swing degradation to get a perfect hit on the ball, a new system has been put into place that randomizes the speed at which the degradation happens. This will hopefully make it next to impossible for would-be griefters to take advantage of the system online.

While Tiburon is being tight-lipped on many details, the team did share info on the new Focus swing mechanic. Best described as a fatigue meter, Focus will affect the way you play throughout the course of the round. Previously, players could spam things like Power Boost or ball spin and hone every shot beyond the characteristics of real golf. Now players must spend portions of the Focus meter when using these boosters to make their use more of a tactical decision. This adds a new layer of strategy to the game and asks players to take a step back and

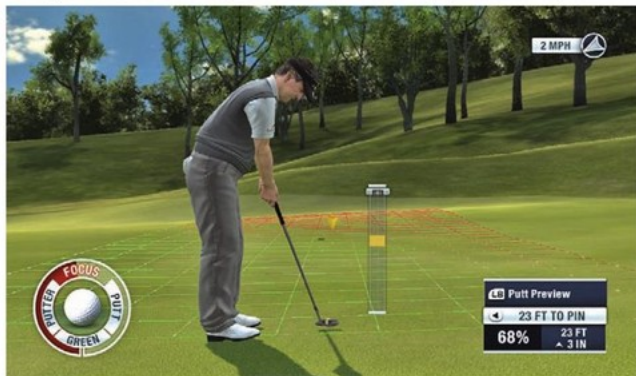
Tiger 11 features new dynamic lighting



analyze every shot, much like a real golfer. The Focus meter replenishes by playing well without using the boosters.

Other improvements in Tiger 11 include real-time time of day lighting with drastically improved shadows, the elevation grid is on display at all times so you can better plan those long par three putts, and a huge upgrade to the character models themselves, including cloth and hair physics. They even threw in animated skies and clouds for good measure.

As expected, EA confirmed that Sony's new motion controller, Move, will be fully compatible with the PlayStation 3 version of the game. However, when asked about Natal support for the Xbox 360, EA said they aren't currently "in position" to have it supported when the game comes out. » **Nick Ahrens**





gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

86 Red Dead Redemption

Rockstar has crafted the best video game Western ever made. Fusing the open world perfection of GTA IV, enchanting exploration of Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, and engaging morality system of Fable II, Red Dead Redemption hits all the high notes expected in a triple-A release and more. Save the dusty trail, you've got the entire Wild West to play in. Turn to page 86 to read the 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	Avatar in 2D. All that's left is the story! Just watch <i>Dances with Wolves</i> instead.

AWARDS

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

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Red Dead Redemption

Rockstar wrangles the best video game western of all time

9.75

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Transpose the Grand Theft Auto gameplay template onto a Wild West setting

» Graphics

Breathtaking scenery, unrivaled horse animations, and vastly improved cinematic cutscenes over GTA IV make this the best-looking Rockstar game to date

» Sound

From pitch-perfect gunshots to the daunting rumble of prairie thunderstorms, the remarkable attention to audio detail brings the world to life

» Playability

The airtight aiming and cover system will be familiar to anyone who's played GTA IV, and the horses control better than those I've ridden in any other game

» Entertainment

Rockstar ably recreates an expansive send-up to frontier life and gives players enough variety to keep cowboys engaged for several fortnights

» **Replay Value**
High



gameformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameformer
PLATINUM

Style 1-Player Action (16-Player Online) Publisher Rockstar Games
Developer Rockstar San Diego Release May 18 ESRB M

With high noon duels, lawless frontiers, and gruff leading men, the Western genre seemingly has all the essential pieces to make a smooth transition into video games. But as past six-shooters like *Dead Man's Hand*, *Call of Juarez*, *Gun*, and *Red Dead Revolver* found out, dressing your scruffy hero in a duster and giving him a revolver isn't enough to captivate audiences accustomed to firing rocket-propelled grenades and light machine guns. For Rockstar's first full-fledged effort in the genre (the company purchased *Red Dead Revolver* from Capcom), it decided to do what it does best—explore the topic at hand with an immersive open world.

Red Dead Redemption is set during the birth of the 20th century, where the expansion-minded federal government is moving swiftly to domesticate the untamed frontier. With railroads and telegram lines connecting previously isolated communities, the new cowboys are exploitative businessmen and aggressive legislators aiming

to expand their power bases. To keep this development moving along unabated, the feds have created the Agency, a new branch of law enforcement determined to rid the outer territories of the violent gangs running rampant.

John Marston used to be one of those outlaws; he's got the scars and practiced trigger finger to prove it. But after his gang left him for dead during a robbery gone awry, Marston embraced the quiet life, settling on a ranch, taking a wife, and having his first child. Like his spiritual predecessor, *Grand Theft Auto IV* protagonist Niko Bellic, Marston eventually discovers that running from his past doesn't mean he can escape it. Using evidence of his past transgressions against him, the Agency makes a persuasive proposition: Hunt down the last living members his former gang, or kiss family life goodbye. Marston begrudgingly grabs his six-shooter and heads out in search of his long-lost brothers in arms.

While *Red Dead Redemption*'s setup reads like a Clint Eastwood script, the gameplay construct

is pulled straight from *Grand Theft Auto*. In order to track down and confront his wayward outlaw friends, Marston has to consort with an unsavory cast of snake oil salesmen, drunks, grave robbers, washed up gunslingers, dissidents, and corrupt politicians. Assistance doesn't come easy, as Marston must complete fetch quests and rack up kill counts to earn their trust before they divulge any useful information. Those who tired of the errand boy mission structure of *Grand Theft Auto IV* won't find any solace in *Red Dead*—to get what he needs, Marston helps peddle cure-all tonics, aids in finding a lost treasure, puts in time herding cattle on the ranch, and rescues kidnapped citizens. The game is at its best when it embraces gunpowder-centric missions that only a Western era game can deliver; my favorites include assaulting a gang stronghold with a posse of regulators, protecting a supply train on horseback, and fighting up a treacherous mountainside to locate an enemy camp.

Given the limitations of the era's weaponry, Red



Think you're the fastest gun in the West? Compare your gunslinger skills with your friends in the Rockstar Social Club, which tracks everything you do in the game

Dead's gunplay is surprisingly exciting. Each weapon – from six-shooters and repeaters to sniper rifles and Gatling guns – has a distinct feel, and the hit detection system couples with Natural Motion's Euphoria animation technology to create visceral shootouts. Shotgun blasts blow enemies violently backward, sniper shots to the shoulder spin bandits around, and if you nail a fleeing enemy in the leg, he'll feebly crawl toward the nearest cover. When large groups of bandits descend on your position, you can activate the slow-motion Dead Eye ability to paint a large swath of enemies and watch in awe as Marston effortlessly puts them all in an early grave. Less practiced gunslingers can stick with the friendly snap-to auto-aim mechanic borrowed from GTA IV, but if you want to up the challenge, I suggest turning it off.

The story moves along at a fast clip when you're hot on the heels of your former gang, but the second section of the game finds Marston deeply involved in the birth stages of the Mexican civil war. To meet his obligations to the Agency, he must first get cozy with both the corrupt ruler of the border region and the upstart rebel bent on taking power for himself. This tangential plot drags on far too long without engaging the task at hand, and the game's momentum suffers for it.

But with such an expansive land to explore, Red Dead Redemption is even more alluring when you're roaming between missions. Given the large territory, the game has a more measured pace than GTA, which gives you time to admire the gorgeous vistas on display all around you. With desolate Mexican drylands, dust-swept plains, and the towering northern mountain ranges, Rockstar perfectly captures the untamed majesty of the North American landscape. If you get tired of galloping between far-reaching destinations, simply set up camp and use the fast travel feature to get back on task.

Though the world of Red Dead Redemption is immense, it's far from barren. Myriad systems of engagement breathe life into the world of Red Dead, compensating for the narrative lulls. The countryside is populated by packs of animals, traveling citizens, and bandit strongholds. Once you embrace the rural rhythm of the Wild West, the game opens itself up much like The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. While traveling on horseback to a mission, I often found myself side-tracked in pursuit of the many sub-quests. You can sharpen your survival skills by collecting flora, hunting dangerous animals like grizzly bears and cougars, scavenging for treasure, or perfecting your sharp-shooting skills by targeting the buzzards circling overhead. Each of these tasks has its own progression system, and your fame will increase along with your ranks. Colorful strangers also riddle the landscape, and these side missions offer a fresh change of pace from dealing with the miscreants Marston must aid in the narrative.

The shantytowns and bustling cities littering the land offer an equally deep level of engagement. While in town you can shop for provisions, watch a hilariously offensive silent film warning

of the dangers of women's suffrage, take a night watch shift to protect the sleeping village from burglars, play a game of horseshoes, or head to the saloon to play a game of chance like five finger fillet, blackjack, liar's dice, or Texas hold 'em. Try to cheat at poker and you may find yourself facing your accuser outside the cantina. Though the saloons have plenty of ladies of ill repute vying for your attention, don't expect any GTA-style sexual congress – John Marston is a faithfully married man.

Like Fable, how you conduct yourself affects how townspeople, lawmen, and bandits react to you. Help a stranded man retrieve his stolen horse, and your honor will increase. As your honorable reputation grows, people start to give you the benefit of the doubt and let small acts of disobedience slide. But if you spend your free time robbing banks or killing innocent passersby, citizens may start forming posses to hunt you down.

Once Marston finishes his tour of duty in Mexico and returns north of the border, he heads to Blackwater, the region's capital city, to work with the Agency directly to find the leader of his former gang. With cobblestone streets, a cinema, and automobiles, evidence of technology's reach is everywhere, and you get a sense that everything you just experienced in the open plains is about to disappear. Red Dead then culminates with a memorable, unexpected finale that strays from traditional storytelling techniques and instead relies on the sense of immersion you just experienced in the open plains is about to disappear. Red Dead then culminates with a memorable, unexpected finale that strays from traditional storytelling techniques and instead relies on the sense of immersion you just experienced in the open plains is about to disappear.

Red Dead allows you to round up a posse of friends to roam the game world, which also serves as the multiplayer lobby. In this free roam mode, your posse can terrorize towns or try to collect the bounty on another gang of reckless outlaws. At any time, you can jump into competitive multiplayer matches as well. These modes are Western-themed versions of individual and team-based deathmatch and capture the flag modes, plus another mode that tasks you with collecting more gold than your opponents. No matter the format, each match starts with a Mexican standoff, with the last man standing gaining a head start on the rest of the competition. Dead Eye carries over to multiplayer, but works in real time. While this may not be as powerful a tool as it is in single-player, it preserves the gameplay balance and comes in handy when you find yourself behind a group of enemies. With 50 levels and unlockable character skins, mounts, and titles, the multiplayer is a fully featured complement to the excellent single-player experience.

To succeed where other Western games have failed, Red Dead Redemption deftly recreates a sandbox playground of a tumultuous historical period swept away by technological progress. The game perfectly captures the expansiveness of frontier life and the gritty gunplay of spaghetti westerns, rightfully earning its place alongside the great Western films and the best Rockstar games. — Matt Bertz



Committing crimes puts a bounty on your head, which you can get rid of either by earning a pardon letter from a sheriff or by paying a large fine



8.5

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Monsters take center stage in a rewarding co-op experience

» Graphics

Nothing short of stunning. The monsters pop with life, and the visual effects are as frequent as fireworks on the Fourth of July

» Sound

Few things are more terrifying than a 10-story monster roaring from behind you. The weapon sounds pound with intensity, and the score fits the action at hand

» Playability

The controls offer gunplay finesse, and the co-op tactics allow players to approach combat situations in a multitude of ways

» Entertainment

A must-play for fans of both co-op and versus gaming

» Replay Value

High

Second Opinion 8.5

Lost Planet 2 could be the most changed sequel in all of video game history. No characters return, snow only makes a very limited appearance, and it's all about co-op this time around. The story doesn't matter a bit, but I'll take any plotline that takes me to outrageously realized locations like zero-G outer space bases, underwater caverns filled with massive sea snakes, and speeding mechanical sand ships battling each other like high tech pirates. Unfortunately, the clunky maneuvering and grappling controls haven't been improved, but you'll hardly notice as you battle some of the most enormous monsters in video games, working with your co-op pals in ways never before seen. A surprising variety of mechs helps even the odds against these beasts, and can give you a hilarious advantage in versus multiplayer. I love the career upgrades, too. I just wish they didn't rely on a random slot machine system that chokes out new weapons and abilities with charming, but useless, emotes and name tags. » Bryan Vore



Lost Planet 2

A monster of cooperative play



Style 1 or 2-Player Action (16-Player Online) Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Release May 11 ESRB T

Now this is what a monster hunting game should be like. Lost Planet 2 hides its human characters beneath helmets and lumbering armor – never once letting them develop identifiable personalities – and lets the monsters take center stage. With the thirst for human blood driving these foul beasts, they rampage through sun-soaked jungles, engulf mile-long trains in a single bite, and evoke as much awe as they do terror. They put on a stylish, ferociously outlandish spectacle, thrashing and gnashing everything in their path as explosions and visual effects dance chaotically in their wake. While offering a visual feast, the monster menagerie's greatest contribution is creating nerve-shattering fights for co-op teams of four players.

Although Lost Planet 2 can be played as a single-player game (with three unreliable, wandering AI bots standing in for players), most challenges call for a high level of coordination between the four teammates. In one such battle, one player is tasked with manning a cannon, the second fetches ammo, the third operates a crane, and the fourth calls out the boss's location while

keeping an eye on the vessel's coolant systems.

Standard combat calls upon players in different ways, such as asking your teammates to provide diversionary tactics so that you can repair your mech (known in-game as a Vital Suit). With player-based strategies tied to almost every combat scenario and gameplay mechanic, Capcom has created a co-op experience with a unique resonance that proves to be as engaging as Left 4 Dead's survival tactics.

The campaign follows a tight linear path, yet I found myself wanting to replay levels not just to relive an amazing boss battle, but to earn credits that I could deposit into a slot machine to unlock new weapons, abilities, emotes, and *norms de guerre* for my character. On top of this, performing well in a level raises your overall rank, a feat periodically rewarded with new armors. I found the character customization to be incredibly rewarding, almost addictively so. The hand cannon I unlocked became a point of jealousy for my party, and my title "Undercover Perv" always brought a laugh from new players. With hundreds of items to secure, Lost Planet 2 is a game that I foresee being a part of my daily

gaming rotation for a long time.

The hefty reward system crosses over into the game's competitive component. Player skill levels are gauged nicely through the ranking system, and the variety in maps and modes keeps this experience fresh. The game's jumbo-sized weapons and mechs dish out highlight reel-worthy kills, and the map designs factor in both weapon types and teammate strategies. The low-gravity map needs to be seen by every multiplayer fanatic out there.

With most of Lost Planet 2's weapons being bigger than the characters, the game offers a wallop with its gunplay and stands on its own as a respectable shooter. The gameplay mechanics are tuned nicely, allowing players to feel comfortable with the game's wide variety of weapons and vehicles from the moment they are first introduced. The grappling hook makes a return from the first game, and while it is called upon often, it is never used for frustrating do-or-die vertical navigation. When stacked up against the original title, the gameplay is tighter across the board.

While offering more monsters and bigger set piece moments, Capcom has also addressed the dullness of the human-against-human battles. Some of the firefights remain uninspired shooting galleries, and I would much rather battle a spastic monster than a motionless space soldier, but some of the human-based battles are among the game's overall best.

With faceless characters, a story that bounces confusingly from blizzards in the tundra to jet packing in outer space, and an ending that makes no sense whatsoever, the fiction mostly serves as a vehicle to show environment transitions. Playing Lost Planet 2 for the story is like going to a movie to watch the credits. If you go into this game, go into it with the intent of joining up with your friends to slay moon-sized monsters, and enjoy one of gaming's top co-op experiences. » Andrew Reiner

For videos of Lost Planet 2 in action, go to gameinformer.com/mag



Your friends can hitch a ride and help you topple rival mechs

Split Second

Danger lurks around every corner



Style 1 or 2-Player Racing (8-Player Online) Publisher Disney Interactive Studios Developer Black Rock Studio Release May 18 ESRB E

The fantastic moments in *Split Second* make you feel like you can move heaven and earth to your will. Sending an avalanche on top of the pack racing ahead of you or causing a train on a suspension bridge to derail and crash on the city below are powers worthy of mighty superheroes. The game puts these spectacular moments at your fingertips, but also produces enough spontaneous moments to blow your hair back and keep you guessing. This is a good thing, because when you've seen *Split Second's* big moments several times after revisiting the same tracks, you need reasons to keep you coming back.

The perfect lap in *Split Second* isn't necessarily the one that's the fastest. It's the one where you cause a nuclear reactor to explode at just the right time to take out as many competitors as you can. It's the one where you've drifted, jumped, and drafted enough times throughout the lap to constantly replenish your Power Play meter so you always have a way to trigger the various explosions and traps on the track to take out the other racers.

Whether you want to use your meter as soon as you can or save it for the big moments is up to you, but I was usually uneasy with triggering Power Plays and Route Changes in the game, which was unfortunate. When I spent my power to drop a bomb on someone from a helicopter overhead, I always wondered if there was a cool Route Change that I'd be missing out, because I couldn't refill my meter up fast enough. But there were also times when I saved it to no avail because that track's big Route Change had already been triggered. In general, I often found myself going out of my way to drift corners to fill

my power meter simply because I wasn't sure which strategy to employ. It might not sound like a big deal, but I often lost track position because of it, and that's not good racing.

There's no right or wrong way to use your power meter, and if you ever get the feeling that you've missed something at a track, don't worry, because you'll be racing there again soon. Developer Black Rock does out the thrills over repeated visits to a handful of locations. While I understand the work that goes into the game's large-scale moments, and the tracks do offer different experiences as you re-visit them, going back to these same tracks can get old. Repetition also spoils some of *Split Second's* grand moments.

Thankfully, the game still has the capacity to surprise because of the various regular Power Plays the competition triggers against you and others. Moreover, the physics in the game produces varied results. When a car ahead of you explodes in a heap because a truck on the side of the road was detonated, there's always that moment before you drive through a wall of smoke, debris, and fire where you're never sure what's on the other side. These kinds of moments kept me coming back to the

game more than the giant set pieces.

I also love the different racing modes sprinkled within the game. *Air Survival* is like a boss battle against a missile-shooting helicopter. *Survival* is an exercise in faith as you try and dodge explosive kegs spilling off trucks running rampant. I even liked *Elimination* (where whoever's in last place after a certain amount of time is booted), a mode I normally don't like in racing games. It forced me to use my Power Plays differently than in the normal races.

Split Second achieves a rarity in racing games, because it can make every lap feel different. This game has plenty of edge-of-your-seat racing and thrilling moments. Some of the repetition, however, slows it down. » **Matthew Kato**



Air Revenge requires that you not only dodge barrages of missiles from a helicopter, but you have to take it down by drifting to power up your Power Play meter so you can deflect the missiles back in its face

8.25

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Trigger explosive set pieces to throw fellow racers off course as you gun for the finish line

» **Graphics**
It feels very fast, and the color palette and lighting make the environments stand out. Some minor object pop up occurs onscreen, but it doesn't detract from the experience

» **Sound**
Setting the action to a choreographed orchestral score is smart, as it gives the game more drama than generic rock

» **Playability**
I was disappointed a few times with some cars' drift handling, but this wasn't a huge problem

» **Entertainment**
Split Second is filled with raucous moments. The fact that they're repeated, doesn't destroy the experience

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Skate 3

The next best thing to real skateboarding

8.75

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Continue building on the core skateboarding concept that reinvigorated the genre

» **Graphics**

Solid but not jaw dropping. If you've played Skate before, everything looks familiar

» **Sound**

One of the best licensed soundtracks yet, and the pop of an ollie still gives me goosebumps

» **Playability**

Top notch to say the least. The fantastic skateboarding gameplay once again shines brightly

» **Entertainment**

While the career is pretty much business as usual, the new park editor adds a fresh creative depth to the mix

» **Replay Value**

High



Coach Frank can freeze you in mid-air to learn new tricks

Coach Frank Says

Kickflip the grass gap



Style 1-Player Action Sports (6-Player Online) Publisher Electronic Arts Developer Black Box Release May 11 ESRB T

Second Opinion 8.75

It's always better to skate with friends, but which kind? Online or offline? The crew at developer Black Box has created a whole new city for you to terrorize, but the bulk of Skate 3's innovations occur in the online space. Exchanging user-created parks and tackling challenges with your teammates opens up the game to all sorts of possibilities that you have to explore. Unfortunately, the off-line career mode where you recruit team members and try to push your skate company to the top doesn't excite. I didn't get the sense that I was really building anything. When one of your recurring challenges is to do any three tricks anywhere, you're not shooting very high (and axing the Team Film challenges from Skate 2's Freeski isn't cool either). Despite this, the new addictive and objective-based Hall of Meat challenges are great. Skate 3 is still a deep and fulfilling experience, but like the search for any good skate spot, you have to know where to look. » **Matthew Kato**

have to hand it to EA and developer Black Box. They've once again delivered a game that serves up dish after dish of the thing that makes a good game so addicting: gameplay. Building off the momentum of two previous releases, Skate 3 incrementally adds to the formula with a new career style, park editor, and a few new tricks for good measure. And while this third entry makes no remarkable changes, consistency is a good thing in this case, rewarding dedicated players of the series.

Instead of following the tired idea of being a pro that's building up a career and sponsors, players assume the role of a new skateboard company owner. Not only do you start out by customizing your player, but your company, too. My company, PANTS Stealers, eventually grew to the point where I had sold over a million boards and recruited a few AI teammates. While a lot of it seems like just another version of previous

career modes, there are a few breakout features that make Skate 3 stand out – most notably in the online component. Not only can players join other companies online, there are full stats, player profiles, and even job-specific roles like street skater or filmer. You can also earn board royalties if other people download your custom content like videos, images, and parks.

Speaking of parks, my favorite new feature is the custom park creator. If Port Carverton, the new fictional setting for Skate 3, isn't enough, you can go into one of the many dedicated skate parks, tear everything down, and start from scratch. A huge set of tools, extremely deep options, and a large selection of objects mean that creative users will undoubtedly come up with some amazing designs. Of course, these can be shared with the world for download. I was impressed with the real-world physics objects like ramps and rails that once placed, can be moved around by other skaters in-game just like they would in a real city. Because the gameplay in Skate is so solid, this adds a level of replayability that rivals other content creation-focused games like LittleBigPlanet.

Online also returns with many of the previous games' features like freeski and proposing challenges. But with the addition of teams, online companies can battle it out in modes like Spot Battle and

Hall of Meat. The number of things to do online is staggering. Almost all of the challenges from single player are available online to be played in either group co-op or versus. While it's not structured like a proper career, players could effectively run through the whole game online together as a team.

I think Skate 3's biggest strength is its ability to deliver smooth, fun gameplay that fits like a glove. New tricks like the underflip and darkslide throw in a little flair. If you're a fan, Skate 3 is a sure thing; if you're just starting out, it's even better. New character Coach Frank, played by actor and pro skateboarder Jason Lee, will walk you through the basics. Black Box has also added in difficulty settings, which helps new players avoid frustration by saving more challenge for veteran boarders. The physics have been tweaked to be even more realistic, and better emulate the trials and tribulations of real-world skating.

Black Box has once again sucked me back into the world of kickflips and hip tricks. The Skate series' focus on what's important means gamers can pick up a copy with a sense of confidence that they will get what they pay for. While this latest title doesn't take any huge risks, I would argue that's a good thing. Skate has always been one of those rare games where you can just aimlessly play with no goals or objectives. With the addition of the park creator, this is only increased with the limitless possibility of player-created content. » **Nick Ahrens**

Head to gameinformer.com/mag for a tour of Nick's skatepark





Iron Man 2

Sega's Iron Man stumbles on the launch pad again

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Sega Studios San Francisco
Release May 4 **ESRB** T

In the comics, Tony Stark constantly tweaks his Iron Man armor, making new and improved suits as his technology evolves. It's too bad Sega can't keep tweaking this game after its release, because while the series might be headed in the right direction, there are still loose parts under the hood.

The story – a one-shot tale that sees Tony and Rhodey chasing down a stolen copy of the Jarvis AI – has a few cool moments, but most of them get diluted by low production values and terrible camera work. Likewise, much of the witty dialogue is trampled by bad Robert Downey Jr. and Scarlett Johansson impersonators.

If you look beyond the awkward cinematics, you'll find that the game is actually playable this time. The meat and potatoes is all about Iron Man and War Machine shooting mechs until they explode, and there is a certain mindless appeal to that. The flight controls have been simplified, so flying around is fun instead of making you curse the sky every time you lift off. It's too bad Sega wasn't able to include co-op, because the game dishes out a breed of mindless action that could be fun with a friend.

Unfortunately, things fall apart whenever the mechanical duo enters an enclosed area. This incarnation of Iron Man isn't built for hand-to-hand combat, and his limited attack set and frustrating targeting system make it show. The developers must have

also expected most players to have PhDs in engineering given the elaborate menu system you have to navigate to upgrade your weapons and armor. I can't even say anything exciting about the boss encounters, as most of them are pretty forgettable. Marvel fans might get a kick out of the appearance of Iron Man's famous foes, so I guess that's something.

Superhero games are supposed to be power fantasies. So far, the Iron Man games haven't done much to inspire my dreams, but at least they're not giving me nightmares anymore. If Sega keeps tweaking the formula, next time it might actually convince me that it's fun being Iron Man. » **Ben Reeves**



6

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Take a terrible superhero title and make it less terrible, but still not quite good

» **Graphics**
Dark and a little grainy, but the scariest part of the game is the first time Gwyneth Paltrow's digital rendering walks onscreen

» **Sound**
A decent metal soundtrack, and Sam Jackson and Don Cheadle do a good job with their roles. The rest of the cast is voiced by terrible soundlikes

» **Playability**
The game controls well this time, and the mechanics work, but none of the action is particularly exciting

» **Entertainment**
Hardcore Iron Man junkies might get a thrill from the story, but even they'll have trouble putting up with the bland missions

» **Replay Value**
Low

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Alan Wake

Redefining video game storytelling

8.5

360

» Concept

A dark presence has taken over the town of Bright Falls...or has it? Follow writer Alan Wake through an action-packed whirlwind of mystery as he tries to uncover the truth

» Graphics

A combination of beautiful landscape details and realistic lighting effects make Alan Wake one of Xbox 360's visual darlings

» Sound

High levels of suspense are brought to life through the exceptional sound design. A close connection is formed to Alan through his inner-thoughts. The soundtrack also fits perfectly

» Playability

Precise controls never slow down this fast-paced shooter's intense combat

» Entertainment

This game is hard to put down once it starts rolling. Once it concluded, I wanted to run out and discuss it with friends

» Replay Value

Moderate



gameformer
SILVER

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Microsoft Game Studios Developer Remedy Release May 18 ESRB T

“Stephen King once wrote that nightmares exist outside of logic, and there’s little fun to be had in explanations – they are antithetical to the poetry of fear. In a horror story, the victim keeps asking ‘Why?’, but there can be no explanation, and there shouldn’t be one. The unanswered mystery is what stays with us the longest, and it’s what we’ll remember in the end.” These are the first lines of dialogue spoken in Alan Wake. Through this message, Remedy reveals its hand of cards to the player, outlining exactly what to expect from this horror experience.

Alan Wake’s narrative is designed like a dream. Just when you think you’ve understood its message, it transforms without clarification, leaving you, and protagonist Alan Wake, in the dark.

Applying logic to the plot points only creates further confusion. This is what makes Alan Wake so

frustrating, and yet, at the same time, a work of art. If you can detach yourself from reality and let this tale pull you into its dark dreamscape, you’ll be treated to a brilliantly penned and disturbingly imaginative journey.

Most of the plot points are intentionally hazy, and scattered like puzzle pieces throughout the game. The way I connected them will likely differ from the way you would put them together. As a fan of the TV show *Lost*, I like that the story is open to interpretation. Even now, days after completing the game, I find myself deciphering sequences in different ways. Remedy’s scribes plant pieces throughout this story that can pull the narrative in one direction, should you latch onto one, or in another trajectory entirely if you believe a different one.

I walked away from Alan Wake dazzled and dazed by the story, but it also deserves respect

for being one hell of a game. Thickly populated woods, dilapidated factories, and village folk that could be deemed too creepy or weird for *Twin Peaks* unite to create the perfect setting for horror. Alan’s flashlight provides the only comfort. I was constantly thinking about what lies outside of its beam. Silhouetted trees sway in the wind. Shadows are sometimes mere tricks of the eye, while others are possessed villagers intent on killing Alan.

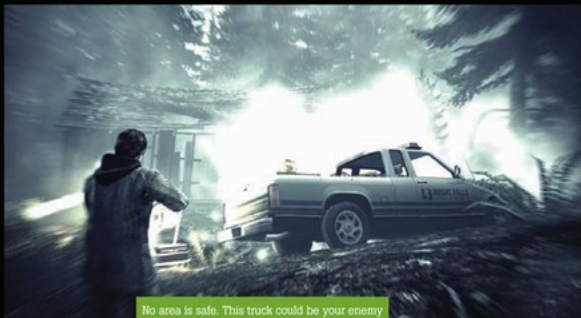
This is a heart-racer of a game. The visuals and sound unload suspense, and Remedy’s designers waste no time in rattling the player’s heart. Chainsaw-wielding lumberyard workers suddenly burst through doors. Without any notice, a truck could fall from the sky a foot in front of you. All this adds up to an enjoyably tense adventure through the world of the weird.

And weird best describes the game’s biggest misstep: forcing you to battle possessed farm equipment, like an angry combine. Alan Wake offers up powerful combat sequences and remarkably solid controls – not to mention a cleverly designed targeting reticle that piggybacks off of your flashlight’s beam. The battles against crazed villagers are fun, but most of the conflicts are telegraphed clearly through the environment design, removing some of the intended fear.

Oddly, Alan Wake is almost too much of a game in the traditional sense. Farm equipment boss fights are neatly divided throughout the quest, and I can’t seem to wrap my brain around the reasoning behind this, but one of Alan’s side goals is to collect 100 coffee thermoses. These classic gaming staples were jarring enough to pull me out of the fiction in which I was deeply immersed. Thankfully, the game is weighted heavily in the direction of the fiction.

If you don’t mind periodically revisiting game design from 1999, Alan Wake is an engaging horror mystery that brings the heart of Stephen King’s style of storytelling to the interactive medium. Like King’s books, you won’t find a better topic for water cooler discussions. » **Andrew Reiner**

For Alan Wake Tidbits visit gameformer.com/img



No area is safe. This truck could be your enemy

ModNation Racers

Sony's new kart racer performs a solid first lap



ModNation's career story is laughably bad, but if you play kart racers for the plot, you're missing the point

gameforme
SILVER

Style 1 or 2-Player Racing (12-Player Online) Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer United Front Games/Sony San Diego Studios Release May 25 ESRB E

Nintendo released Super Mario Kart in 1992, and it single-handedly defined what we expect from silly weapon-based kart racers. Since then similar games have come and gone; we've seen the genre transition to 3D and jump online, but kart racers have all been drafting behind a series that has barely changed in almost two decades. This is where United Front Games rolls onto the track. Like a rookie hotshot, it's fast, flashy, and has an unorthodox style. We've seen elements of player-created content and online community building in games before, but not yet in a kart racing game like this. Finally, it feels like the genre is evolving.

The aspect of this racing game that drew me in the most wasn't the racing -- it was the customization. I got a kick out of turning my racer into a top hat-wearing dinosaur, and then a bubble wrap monster with tufts of grass for hair. While my car might have started out looking like a muscle car beauty fresh from the paint shop, it slowly morphed into the most dangerous steam-powered cardboard box ever to finish a race. ModNation's customization tools allow you to control the color and texture of your skin, the style of your kart's seats and mirrors, and the stickers covering every inch of your character and car. I felt like I was only limited by my creativity and imagination. If you've ever thought about painting your own vinyl figure, you'll likely spend a lot of time tinkering in ModNation's Modcenter.

When I first brought my souped-up shoebox onto the circuit, I was impressed with the originality United Front Games brought to the racing formula. The pre-made tracks are fun obstacle

courses, but there are plenty of shortcuts to hunt out as you do your laps. It didn't take long before I was power sliding around, building up my boost meter, and ramming opponents off the road. You'll even encounter a bit of a strategy when deciding how to use the weapon pods. If you pick one up, you can use it right away and release a small lightning attack or EMP burst that will screw with the person in front of you. However, if you wait until you've picked up three weapon pods, you can unleash a more powerful attack that could disable every racer on the field, or warp you ahead of the pack. Of course, if you hold on to your weapon for too long you risk losing it when the racers behind you slap you with their's.

Anyone who enjoys the insanity of kart racers will have a ball here. Unfortunately, ModNation still manages to run over the same pothole that plagues most kart racing titles. The chaotic nature of the game's weaponized karting constantly makes you feel cheated. Even an experienced racer might run three perfect laps and then get knocked out of first place five seconds from the finish when a rainbow of lightning disables the engines. Your boost meter can be used to project a temporary shield, but a full meter will only give you a few seconds of safety. Since the last half-laps of the later courses tend to turn into an invasion scene from Mars Attacks with all the cannon fire flying through the air, it becomes impossible to avoid every attack. Playing against online opponents doesn't make the races feel any less ruthless, but at least you'll know that the people in front of you will be just as upset about the blue fire you shove up their tailpipe as you

were when they did it to you 20 seconds earlier.

Even with the craziness on the course, the pre-made tracks are only a taste of what you'll be able to build yourself with ModNation's track editor. I can't remember how many times I said, "I gotta try something like that," after seeing what the developers had made while racing through the career. Unfortunately, you will have to complete some particularly difficult challenges during the single-player races if you want to unlock the coolest track parts. If you don't have the patience for that (or don't feel like getting your hands dirty building the track yourself), the ModNation community will likely start producing a wealth of original content once it becomes familiar with the tools. With this much satisfying content, Mario will find some tough competition the next time he hits the track. » Ben Reeves



8.5

PS3

» Concept

Take the kart racing mayhem of Mario Kart and add a deep creation system to every facet of the game

» Graphics

The zany cartoon style suits the gameplay well, but the framerate drops even when you're offline

» Sound

ModNation's music is upbeat and charming, but it might take you a while to warm to the racing announcers

» Playability

The controls feel good, and the menus for the player-creation portions of the game are easy to navigate...which is good, because there are a lot of them

» Entertainment

Racing feels great, the courses are creative, and it's fun to unleash a storm of attacks on your opponent; too bad your opponents also have access to those weapons

» Replay Value High

Super Mario Galaxy 2

Mario returns for another trip through the galaxy

9.25

gameformer
GOLD

Style 1 or 2-Player Action/Platform Publisher Nintendo Developer Nintendo Release May 23 ESRB E

Wii

» Concept

The sequel to the groundbreaking platformer delivers clever and extremely challenging platforming

» Graphics

As bright and colorful as always; this looks good enough to make me wish the Wii could output true HD

» Sound

A mix of classic Mario music and a variety of other catchy tunes

» Playability

The platforming is rock solid and Yoshi adds some great new gameplay. However, a couple gimmicky uses of Wii motion controls (like flying) are extremely poor

» Entertainment

While it's the first Mario title in a long time that doesn't break the mold, you'll be glad to have more of Galaxy to play

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Super Mario Galaxy 2 is perhaps the truest "sequel" in the history of the storied franchise. By that I mean that it is, by and large, just more levels of what we experienced in 2007's Super Mario Galaxy. On the one hand, it is the first Mario title in years that doesn't feel like a dramatic reinvention of the platformer. On the other, I'm glad I didn't have to wait for a new generation of consoles just to get another Mario game.

The original Mario Galaxy is as good as it gets. The way it eschews large, open environments in favor of a series of smartly designed orbs and platforms floating in space is genius. It plays the fundamental elements of platformer designs like a classical composer plays with notes, subtly tweaking gravity, movement, and even lighting in ways that constantly challenge your expectations.

Mario Galaxy 2 builds on the strengths of its predecessor, adding new power-ups and abilities to the familiar mix. The most anticipated of these is the inclusion of Yoshi. Mario's trusted steed is back, and is perhaps my favorite new feature of the game. Yoshi's trademark ability – being able to swallow and spit out enemies (now aimed with the Wii remote) – works extremely well here, lending a shooter-like aspect to the gameplay.

You can also use Yoshi to swing between special flowers in the environment by pointing with the Wii remote. Both of these abilities are noteworthy for integrating the Wii remote into the mix of platforming in a real, user-friendly way – something that many games have struggled to do. Unfortunately, other sequences that use the motion controller – flight levels that control with "paper plane" controls and a Super Monkey Ball-style level that uses the Wii remote like a joystick – are imprecise and frustrating. Thankfully, the slight "co-op" functionality has been augmented somewhat, as your silent partner can now attack enemies onscreen with a spin move.

Mario also has a variety of suits, including returning forms like Bee and Boo Mario, as well as new ones like Rock Mario and Cloud Mario. While it's fun to roll over goombas as Rock Mario or make your own platforms as Cloud Mario, to me the meat of the experience still lies in the more traditional levels. These require fast and accurate platforming while throwing mind-bending gravity reversals, moving platforms, and even slow-motion sequences at you. For me, the Yoshi abilities and suits shine in the boss battles. Though most are based on classic boss battle

templates, each one manages to add at least one unique or compelling new aspect to the mix.

Longtime fans will also cheer the return of the classic-style level map, which you traverse in a spaceship shaped like a giant Mario head. The ship holds a few of its own secrets (I strongly suggest using the gambling minigame in the warp pipe located in one of the ship's "ears" to load up on 1up mushrooms) and the map does a better job of letting you know where the stars you've missed

are located. This is one of the many call-outs to Mario's past; Super Mario 64 fans will also be pleased with one surprise level that I won't spoil here.

Miyamoto promised that this game would be more "challenging", and he wasn't lying. It's definitely harder than the first. In the early stages, this is a plus; Galaxy 2 gets you into serious platforming much earlier in the game. It's nice to feel like you aren't waiting five or six hours to get to the good stuff. As the game wore on, however, I often felt more frustrated than challenged. I frequently hit choke points where I needed one more star to advance, but the only available stars were either annoying Prankster Comet challenges or time-consuming hidden stars. If I've completed all the main missions available to me, I just want to advance. At one point, I literally spent four hours of play without collecting one star. While I like a good challenge, this game has a lot of amazing content, and I suspect many won't be able to get through it all.

Even so, whatever frustration felt was worth it. Most games today are willing to hang their hat on a small handful of new gameplay or level-design ideas. Super Mario Galaxy 2 throws something new at you nearly every single level – and with over 240 stars to collect, that's no small feat. It's not the total reinvention of the genre we've come to expect from a new Mario title, but as a platformer fan I'm happy to get more Mario to tide me over. This game is a testament to the enduring appeal of the genre, as well as Nintendo's ability to create fresh new gameplay out of a decades-old formula. » **Matt Helgeson**





Monster Hunter Tri

A mechanically flawed experience that rewards patience

Style 1-Player Action/RPG (4-Player Online) Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Release April 20 ESRB T

Monster Hunter Tri should be a terrible game for a variety of reasons. Most of your time is spent in awkward combat plagued by spotty collision and no way to lock onto your enemies. Managing your massive inventory of weapons, potions, food, bugs, and more is crucial to success, yet the item management system is cumbersome and poorly explained. Load times abound throughout the confusingly laid-out hunting grounds. Despite all of these significant setbacks, Monster Hunter Tri offers numerous moments that lend insight into why it's such a sensation overseas.

You won't get very far into Monster Hunter Tri without patience, as the first several hours are tedious and uneventful. Once your unnamed protagonist learns the ropes of forging weapons and armor, farming, combining items, and other inventory-centric tasks, it's time to head out to

the hunting grounds.

Charging into battle with abandon may get you through the early missions, but you'll hit a brick wall once you encounter the more formidable foes. Repeated failure is almost required for many of these boss-like creatures, as learning their movements, attack patterns, and weaknesses is paramount to success. I often spent over 30 minutes attempting to take down a massive creature, only to fall at its feet for the second, third, or fourth time. Each time you fall, it's another chance to more adequately prepare for the battle ahead. It's smart to head back to the drawing board and put away all the items that didn't work, only to grab a handful of new toys that might fare better in taking the beast down.

Being bested by the same monster time and time again can be immensely frustrating,

especially after you've spent the better chunk of an hour taking him on. However, it's genuinely rewarding when you finally prepare for the bout perfectly, striking down the beast with a deadly combination of tactics, weapons, and gear.

The thrill of victory is even sweeter when you share it with friends. Thanks to the hassle-free online experience (no Friend Codes!), it's easy to assemble a team of four players and teach some monsters a lesson. With a new hub city and the same quest structure as the single-player game, this co-op option adds significant replay value. If you can look past the archaic game mechanics and have the patience to trudge through the early missions, Monster Hunter Tri offers a lengthy and rewarding experience like nothing else on the Wii. » Dan Ryckert

7

Wii

» Concept

Hunt a multitude of monsters in a game that's light on plot and heavy on preparation

» Graphics

Environments and human characters are bland, but the creatures are unique and feature great animations

» Sound

A variety of beastly squeals and roars lets you know exactly what's coming to eat you

» Playability

Combat controls are archaic. You'll definitely want a Classic Controller for this one

» Entertainment

Immensely frustrating at times, but genuinely rewarding after a particularly difficult hunt

» Replay Value

High

Trauma Team

A shot of new gameplay alternatives may alienate surgery fans

Style 1 or 2-Player Action/Adventure Publisher Atlus Developer Atlus Release May 18 ESRB T

8

Wii

» **Concept**
Lean toward realism and add in more doctor disciplines to spice up this surgery sim

» **Graphics**
New motion comics add much more excitement than the static talking heads of old

» **Sound**
Loads of good voice acting mixed with dramatic doctor music

» **Playability**
Surgery controls are just as tight as past Trauma entries and new activities operate inside of the Wii's limitations

» **Entertainment**
Six careers blend in plenty of interesting variety, though pacing gets unexpectedly slow in the adventure-style diagnostic and forensic modes

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Never in my gaming career did I ever think I'd actually play an onscreen colonoscopy, let alone have fun doing it. But that's one of the many surprisingly enjoyable medical skills you'll experience in Trauma Team. As anyone who's familiar with the series can attest, this crevice camera work is not par for the course. The traditional barrage of high-pressure surgeries has been tossed in with more relaxed options from multiple specialties this time around.

Instead of taking the role of a lone surgeon, you play as six different doctors. Traditionalists will feel right at home with the straight surgery career, but I found it a little easy and brief in comparison to previous Trauma games. However, just when it started to feel like I've been there and done that, the paramedic track kicks in. This doesn't let you dig into patients, but the doctor Diner Dash gameplay that keeps you jumping around among five injured people ups the tension in a fun and unique way. Orthopedics and endoscopy stay true to the Trauma vibe, yet add their own twists.

The final two careers, diagnosis and forensics, are sure to be the most polarizing elements of

Trauma Team. Anyone who's played Ace Attorney will recognize plenty here – analyzing witness and patient statements, surveying a crime scene, building strong evidence, and more. The cases and diagnosis mysteries were intriguing to unravel, but the brisk clip of other modes slows to a crawl as you take on these longform chapters. After I'd completed all of the diagnosis missions and was a ways into forensics, it felt so removed from the rest of the game that I had to actively remind myself that I was playing a Trauma Center title and that surgery would eventually return in the end. Perhaps the better option would have been to limit the adventuring

Second Opinion 7

The best kind of surgery – predictable and routine – is not the best kind of video game. To keep Trauma Center from getting repetitive and stale, Atlus uses Trauma Team as an opportunity to inject more variety and accessibility. That goal succeeds, but at the expense of the challenging gameplay that attracted me to the series in the first place. Adding more types of procedures isn't necessarily bad, but several of the new disciplines feel like half-baked minigames rather than complete modes. The straightforward surgery is still what Trauma Team does best, but you do it less than previous installments – and a lot more extraneous stuff gets in your way. » Joe Juba



to one character so that pacing doesn't take as much of a hit. Players can jump around between doctors at any time, so maybe that's the way to approach it rather than plowing through the careers one at a time like I did.

Two-player local co-op takes on many different forms depending on the career, ranging from simultaneous (surgery) to turn-based (orthopedics) to nonexistent (forensics). If you decide to skip co-op, you're not missing out on anything, but it's an amusing diversion if there's another Trauma fan in the house. » Bryan Vore

9 | Super Street Fighter IV

Platform PS3 • 360 Release April 27 ESRB T
Issue May '10



...the numerous new characters and greatly improved online options make the game worth a purchase regardless of whether or not you owned IV. Capcom has said all along that there was simply too much content here for it to be released as DLC, and my time with the game has convinced me of this. I put nearly 100 hours into IV, and I can easily see myself pumping dozens more into this update. If you haven't played IV at all, then \$40 is an absolute steal for the ultimate version of the best fighting game in recent memory.

PLAYSTATION 3

3D Dot Game Heroes	8.5	May-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
Avatar	6.5	Feb-10
Band Hero	7.75	Jan-10
Batman: Arkham Asylum	9.5	Sep-09
Battlefield 1943	8.5	Aug-09
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	9.5	Mar-10
Bayonetta	9	Feb-10
Beasties: Rock Band, The	8.75	Sep-09
Bigs 2, The	7	Aug-09
BlasBock 2	8.25	Mar-10
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	7.75	Jul-09
Borderlands	9.25	Dec-09
Brutal Legend	8.25	Nov-09
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	9.75	Dec-09
Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood	8	Aug-09
Damnation	3	Aug-09
Dante's Inferno	7	Mar-10
Dark Void	7	Feb-10
Darksiders	8.5	Feb-10
Diamond's Souls	9	Dec-09
Dirt 2	8.5	Oct-09
DJ Hero	9	Dec-09
Dragon Age: Origins	8	Dec-09
Dynasty Warriors 6 Empires	6.25	Sep-09
FIFA 10	8.5	Nov-09
FIFA World Cup		
2010 South Africa	8.5	May-10
Fight Night Round 4	9	Aug-09
Final Fantasy XIII	9.25	Mar-10
Fuel	7.75	Jul-09
G-Force	7.75	Sep-09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra	3.5	Sep-09
Ghostbusters	8	Jul-09
God of War Collection	9.5	Jan-10
God of War III	10	Apr-10
Guitar Hero 5	8.5	Oct-09
Guitar Hero Smash Hits	8	Aug-09
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	7.5	Jan-10
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	7	Sep-09
Heavy Rain	9.5	Mar-10
Heroes Over Europe	6.5	Oct-09

XBOX 360

Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	6.5	Sep-09
Infamous	9	Jun-09
Jurassic: The Hunted	6	Feb-10
Just Cause 2	9	Apr-10
Kataman Forever	7.25	Nov-09
King of Fighters XII, The	7	Sep-09
Last Religion	4.5	Apr-10
LEGO Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	6.5	Dec-09
LEGO Rock Band	8	Dec-09
Madden NFL 10	8.75	Sep-09
MAG	7	Apr-10
Major League Baseball 2K10	7.75	Apr-10
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	8	Nov-09
Matt Hazard: Blood Bath and Beyond	7.75	Mar-10
Mega Man 10	8.75	Apr-10
MLB 10: The Show	9.5	Apr-10
MX vs. ATV Reflex	7.5	Jan-10
NBA 2K10	8.25	Nov-09
NBA Live 10	7.5	Nov-09
NCAA Basketball 10	7.25	Jan-10
NCAA Football 10	8.5	Aug-09
Need for Speed: Shift	8	Oct-09
NHL 10	9.25	Oct-09
NHL 2K10	5.5	Oct-09
Ninjab Gaiden Sigma 2	8.5	Nov-09
Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising	7	Dec-09
Overlord II	6.5	Aug-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2010	8.5	Jan-10
Prototypes	7.25	Aug-09
Ratchet and Clank: A Crack in Time	9.25	Dec-09
Red Faction: Guerrilla	9	Jul-09
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	9.5	Apr-10
Resonance of Fate	6.75	May-10
Rogue Warrior	1.5	Feb-10
Saboteur, The	8	Jan-10
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	7.75	Jun-09
Saw	6	Nov-09
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	7.75	Apr-10
Star Ocean: The Last Hope - International	7	Mar-10
Super Street Fighter IV	9	May-10
Tekken 6	8.75	Dec-09

Terminator Salvation	5.5	Jul-09
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	8.5	Jul-09
Tony Hawk: Ride	5.75	Jan-10
Tornado Outbreak	6.75	Dec-09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	6.25	Sep-09
UF 2009 Undisputed	8	Jun-09
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves	10	Nov-09
Vandal Hearts: Flames of Judgment	7.5	Apr-10
Virtua Tennis 2009	7	Sep-09
Watchmen: The End is Nigh	5.5	Sep-09
Wet	7.5	Oct-09
White Knight Chronicles	7.25	Mar-10
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X-Men Origins: Wolverine	8	Jun-09
Yakuza 3	6.5	May-10

XBOX 360

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Darksiders	8.5	Feb-10
Dirt 2	8.5	Oct-09
Diversity II: Ego Dracoris	6.5	Mar-10

8 | Final Fight: Double Impact

Platform PS3 • 360 Release April 14 ESRB T

What sealed the deal was the ease of access to online and local co-op, the complete lack of SNES-era censoring, and the multitude of new challenges and achievements. — Bryan Vore

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

8 | Dead to Rights: Retribution

Platform PS3 • 360 Release April 27 ESRB M

The Dead to Rights reboot features tight gunplay and a decent melee system for when you're out of ammo. The real star of the game is Jack's dog, Shadow, who can fetch, distract, and maul with the best of 'em.

— Jeff Cork

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

4 | Attack of the Movies 3D

Platform 360 • Wii Release May 18 ESRB T

The dubious benefit of the game's 3D effects is offset by its one-dimensional gameplay. Rail shooters don't get much more tedious, lifeless, or ugly than Attack of the Movies 3D.

— Jeff Cork

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

4 | Dead Or Alive: Paradise

Platform PSP Release March 30 ESRB M

Other than a few minor distractions, there's little else to do other than watch your girl giggle and pose on the beach while you snap photos of her like a sweaty San Fernando Valley smut-peddler.

— Dan Ryckert

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

7.25 | Pirates Plundarr

Platform Wii Release May 25 ESRB E10+

This young-skewing, 4-player co-op, high-seas brawler is the best imitation of The Behemoth's Castle Crashers that you're going to find on the Wii — Bryan Vore

URL: gameinformer.com/mag

The Year That Was...

1998

September 4
Stanford University students Larry Page and Sergey Brin decide they'd like to be filthy rich, and found an upstart company called Google.

August 17
President Bill Clinton debates the metaphysical meaning of the word "is" during a taped grand jury testimony regarding the Monica Lewinski scandal.

August 21
Red Storm Entertainment releases *Rainbow Six*, the first in the long-running franchise of Tom Clancy titles including *Ghost Recon*, *Splinter Cell*, and *EndWar*. The writer is presumably aware of these games.

July 24
Saving Private Ryan opens in theaters; the movie not only spawns the hit HBO series *Band of Brothers*, but ultimately the WWII shooter. Steven Spielberg decides he wants to make a game based on the movie, eventually giving life to the Medal of Honor series.

June 29
Rare releases *Banjo-Kazooie*, a platformer many compare favorably to *Mario 64*. The developer then decides, "Enough of this quality software; let's start working on *Grabbed by the Ghoules*."



September 10
Resistance and Fatchet and Clark developer Insomniac Games sharpens its talents with the PSone classic *Spyro the Dragon*.



September 30
Black Isle Studios releases *Fallout 2* for PC, which, according to today's Internet, is "still infinitely superior in every way" to the sequel Bethesda releases a decade later. We don't always agree with the Internet.



September 30
Japan enacts the next stage of its master plan to hypnotize America's youth by releasing the Game Boy titles *Pokémon Red* and *Blue*.



October 21
Hideo Kojima commits to working on *Metal Gear* titles for the rest of his natural life after releasing the explosively successful *Metal Gear Solid* on PSone.

January 21

The year starts out strong with Capcom's sequel to Resident Evil. Even without the cheesy live-action FMV and terrible lines like "master of unlocking," Resident Evil 2 quickly comes to be regarded as one of the best survival horror games in history.



January 22

High five for justice: The Unabomber pleads guilty, accepting a life sentence without parole or appeal.

January 28

SquareSoft takes a break from the numbered entries in its Final Fantasy brand to release one of the series' most exciting spin-offs, Final Fantasy Tactics for PSone.



February 28

Namco crams the arcade hit Tekken 3 onto a PSone disc. The game features volleyball minigames, farting dinosaurs, and Eddie Gordo.



March 29

SquareSoft stretches the limits of science fiction storytelling with a plot involving sentient mitochondria in the PSone hit Parasite Eve.



March 31

Blizzard gives Korea a new pastime as it releases the addictive and well balanced RTS StarCraft.



May 22

Epic Games releases its first Unreal title. The technology under the game's hood becomes such a strong middleware engine that later versions of the Unreal Engine power titles like BioShock, Mass Effect, and Batman: Arkham Asylum.



May 14

Millions of Americans find their disappointment over the fact that Seinfeld was ending superseded by disappointment over the show's final episode.

April 30

Sega proves that the best time to release the only title worth playing on your system isn't after the console has died. Due to the Saturn's failing performance, only 6,000 copies of Panzer Dragoon Saga were released during the game's initial run.

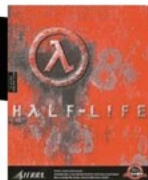


The 1990s were alive with cultural and political activity. The world briefly put aside its differences and started building an international space station, the average cost of gas in the U.S. hovered around the dollar mark, and England successfully pawned off the Spice Girls on other countries. The world of gaming was no less eventful. Consoles slowly transitioned out of their bulky cartridge-based formats in favor of CDs, Sony entered the industry and quickly became a major player, and the popular first-person shooter genre was born. In a decade already packed with significant developments, few years stand out like 1998. Let's take a look back at the shape of the gaming landscape more than a decade ago. *by Ben Reeves*



October 30

Tim Schafer releases Grim Fandango to critical applause and poor sales. The universe decides this joke is funny and plans to retell it multiple times in the coming years.

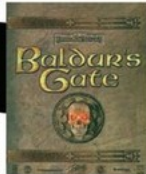


November 20

Valve gives PC nerds plenty of reasons to brag about their gaming platform when the developer releases Half Life.

November 21

Nintendo brings the much-loved Zelda series to 3D for the first time with the hugely successful The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.



November 30

Mass Effect and Dragon Age: Origins developer BioWare shows the world that good things can come out of Canada by releasing the first Baldur's Gate for PC.



December 10

Acclaim closes out the year with the N64 title Turok 2: Seeds of Evil, a historical retelling of how one Native American travels through time and caused the extinction of all dino life.

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THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT...

CEVAT YERLI

In 2004, Crytek burst onto the gaming scene with *Far Cry*, a gorgeous first-person shooter that ditched linearity in favor of sandbox gameplay. The studio continued its trailblazing ways with *Crysis*, which set a new high bar for graphics on PC. With *Crysis 2* on the horizon, we spoke with Crytek founder and game director Cevat Yerli to find out more about the man behind the nanosuit.

+ **I'm Turkish in roots, but I was born in Germany.** The game culture in Germany is more about strategy games and sports simulations, or it was about that. Economic simulations, sports simulations, sports games – that kind of vibe. First-person shooters were very rare game experiences.

+ **When I got my Commodore 64, my favorite game was *Alter Ego*.** It was like 12 discs or something like that. It was an awesome experience. I played a lot of Commodore 64 games and I started programming then.

+ **I created my first game at 12 years old.** Somewhere around 10 I was riding around on a bike and I knew that I had to make games. I had just played *Kick Off* – a football game – and I just realized how all of my friends wanted to play the game. We were playing it on a computer, on the Amiga, and I said, 'How the hell did they do that?'

+ **Work never stops, to be honest.** You can't just switch it off. My wife gets driven crazy about it, like 'You have to switch off for five minutes at least.' If I'm not actively working on something, I'm thinking about it. The thinking never stops.

+ **I'm always telling my family that if I'm pushing too much in certain areas to remind me about it. You forget your entire social life. I even sometimes forget to go to doctors.** Yeah, I'm sick, but I tell myself I'm fine and to continue and it will go away. But then I keep the flu with me two or three months.

+ **The only game I ever played completely free of mind was *Civilization*.** *Civilization* has been a classic game series for me. Sid Meier has always been a designer who when he made a game I skipped school, skipped work, whatever, just to play it.

+ **The engine biz has been going great.** It's one of those things that allows us to push the boundaries to create a better IP eventually. **Making games costs a lot of money and it's not something that just comes from a publisher.** We would not be able to experiment with a lot of creative ideas if we weren't also funding them a lot ourselves.

+ ***Crysis 2* is for me a dream project.** At Crytek right now we have like five projects running, and I was involved in all of them for a while. **I've been resuming directing *Crysis 2* myself because I love the *Crysis* franchise.**

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