

GOD OF WAR III, HALO 3: ODST, SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 & LEFT 4 DEAD 2 INSIDE

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

ISSUE 199

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RAGE

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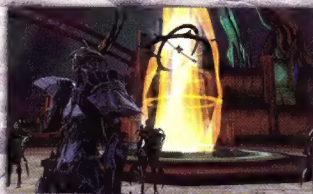
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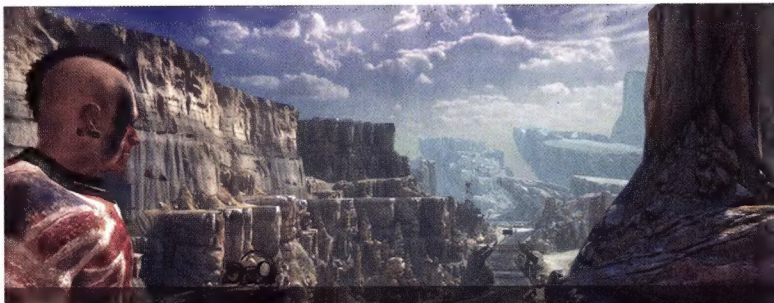




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Id Software is exploring new horizons of game development with its next opus, *Rage*. Concepts entirely new to the veteran studio, from driving to stealth, are incorporated into a massive open world and rendered by the powerful graphics engine id Tech 5. Teaser trailers for the game have been floating around for some time, but Game Informer presents the world-exclusive first look at the inner workings of this multiplatform action title.

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THE TOP 10 GAMES OF E3

We pick the hottest of this year's impressive catalog from the show floor. These aren't the only 10 games from E3 worth watching—not by a long shot—but they are the best-looking titles out of a bumper gaming crop. That's a heck of an endorsement.



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We talked to the bigshots within EA as well as high-profile partner companies like Valve Software, Epic Games, and Double Fine Productions to find out how the EA Partners program delivers its startling level of quality.

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FRAGRANCE WITH THE POWER OF LEATHER

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



ANDY'S AMERICAN ACADEMY OF AWESOME AWARDS

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Or the coveted AAs, as I like to call them. Or as my blitzed friends at a DICE award show once suggested, the "Andy's." So without further adieu, I give you my completely random awards from this year's E3 that have no real meaning other than I wanted to talk about some of my personal highlights.

Game of the Show: Modern Warfare 2
I know many gave it to Uncharted 2 (deservedly, because it is awesome), but I feel this will be the best game this year.

Game of the Show That Was Only A Video: The Last Guardian
It was previously known as Project Trico, but it is still awesome.

Game That Impressed But Didn't Get Much Hype: Darksiders
Still need to see more, but this dark horse definitely took me by surprise.

Most Impressive Tech: ModNation Racers
The track creation tool is out of this world crazy cool. Let's hope they get the racing right.

Game I Had The Most Fun Playing At The Show: Assassin's Creed 2
This game deserved more accolades than it got. The demo is amazing.

Game That Didn't Give A Crap About E3 Awards So I'm Giving It One: BioShock 2
The team doesn't want to spoil the experience, so they didn't show anything. Cheers to you. Even though you showed little, I'm still dying to play it.

Music Game I Can't Stop Thinking About Award: DJ Hero
The Beatles: Rock Band and DJ Hero's new challenge really has me hyped.

Best RPG: Mass Effect 2

Games I Can't Wait To Play That Deserved An Award But It Was Too Much Work To Create One For: (Tie): God of War III, Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, Borderlands, Splinter Cell: Conviction, Left 4 Dead 2, Super Mario Galaxy 2, New Super Mario Bros. Wii, Star Wars: The Old Republic, Final Fantasy XIII

Game That Nintendo and Tecmo Better Not Screw Up Award: Metroid: Other M
I think this game was tailor-made for this award.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Homebre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Silvernail Pickups, Phoenix, The Name Of The Wind by Patrick Rothfuss **Dislikes:** That You Aren't Following Me On Twitter. @CJ_Army. Bored State Troopers Who Give Me Tickets Just Because Old Lady Drive Mus **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Fallout 3, Chrono Trigger, Infamous, DJ Hero



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Game **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Adventure **Interests:** Project Natal, Working On A HUGE New Project At Game Informer, District 9, Recording An Album With My Band (Tipping Points), My Twitter (Andrew_Reiner) **Dislikes:** Peter McEvoyous Creating The First Cykon (His Virtual Boy, Mko, Will Bring The End Of Markland), The Cancellation Of Resper, Thinking Of What Could Come Next After Nintendo's Vitality Sensor (A Device That Makes Your Pets Talk) **Current Favorite Games:** Final Fantasy XIII, Assassin's Creed II, Ghostbusters, Red Faction: Guerrilla, Modern Warfare 2



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Puzzle, Action/Sports **Interests:** DJ Quik & Kurupt - Blackout, Wondering Who The Vikings Quarterback Will Be, CrossFit, The Spy Who Came In From The Cold By John LeCarre, Wild Five Brats **Dislikes:** Attack! Attack! (Come Back, Brokeneye, All Is Forgotten), Hipster Bacon Culture **Current Favorite Games:** The Beatles: Rock Band, Mass Effect 2, Heavy Rain, Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, Guitar Hero: Smash Hits, Worldling, Fight Night Round 4, Def Jam Rapstar



Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katano **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/RPG, Action/Adventure **Interests:** The Quality Of This Year's E3 Lineup, Union Continuing To Show That He's Not A Top-Flight Talent, Bill Wymann's Signature Series Metal Detector, The New Era Of Wild Hockey, The Return Of Non-Exclusive NASCAR Titles **Dislikes:** Vampires, The Rapidly Declining Field Of Sports Journalism, EA Letting You Buy Your Way Through NCAA **Current Favorite Games:** The Beatles: Rock Band, Mass Effect 2, Heavy Rain, Madden NFL 10, Scribblenauts, Just Cause 2, Alpha Protocol, Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, SpM2 Second, NHL 10



Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** iPhone OS 3.0, Wor For The Oaks By Emma Bull, Best E3 Lineup In Years, The Most Versatile Better Save System And Franchise Of Mass Effect On My Bumppin' PC, Good Games Coming Out Of Europe **Dislikes:** Mass Effect's Unbelievably Horrible Equipment System, No Improvement To The Size Of My Gaming Backlog In Years, Medice Baseball From The Twins, Blowtube **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect, World Of Warcraft, Dragon Age: Origins, Chrono Trigger, Plants Vs. Zombies



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Game **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Final Fantasy XIII's Long-Awaited Release Date, The Name Of The Wind By Patrick Rothfuss (A Must-Read For Fantasy Fans), My Immunity To The Music Game Race, Finally Watching The Wife (It Lives Up To The Hype) **Dislikes:** Bands Who Write Crap Lyrics, WoW-themed Beverages, Being Disappointed By Games I Was Looking Forward To (Overlord II and Prototype), People Who Live In Their Phones **Current Favorite Games:** Mass Effect 2, Heavy Rain, Bayonetta, God Of War III, Assassin's Creed II, BioShock 2, Splinter Cell: Conviction, Final Fantasy XIII



Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** Resper (Who Barely Know You), The Surprisingly Cool Recent Additions To The Rock Band Music Store (James Brown And Neko Case?), The Revenant In 4th Edition, E3 Getting Done Right, Gunmening Court **Dislikes:** Leaky Sinks, The Absurd Minnesota Road Construction This Year (Why Not Just Shut Down All Roads Entirely?) **Current Favorite Games:** Excitebots: Trick Racing, Heavy Rain, Newveinter Nights 2, Final Fantasy IV, Infamous, Rock Band 2, Assassin's Creed II, The Beatles: Rock Band



Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gimnastion III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Minnesota Wild's New Regime, Chris Kluwe Getting More Famous For His Band No One's Heard Yet Than He Is For Being A Vikings Quarter, Chan Park Woo's *Thirst*, Artur Lange Destroying Joe Buck On Live TV, Post-Rapture Pet Care (Great Business Plan!), Dinosaur Jr - *Farm Dislikes:* Mafia II and Red Dead Redemption Delays (Use Your Time Well, Good Sins), Fused Eleotrons, Missing The Leonard Cohen Concert **Current Favorite Games:** NCAA Football 10, Infamous, Red Faction: Guerrilla, Battlefield 1943, Assassin's Creed 2, Mass Effect 2, Heavy Rain



Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer-Man **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Racing, Stealth **Interests:** Smash Burger (Another Reason Colorado), *Bigger, Faster*, *Resper* (I Think I'm Developing An Adrenal Complex), *17 Miles*, *The Race To The Moon* (Like Reading A History Book That Tricks You Into Being Interested) **Dislikes:** Tokyo Zombie (I Know, It Sucks, Awesome: It's Not), Tax Audits, Helping People Move Three Days In A Row **Current Favorite Games:** The Sims 3, Plants Vs. Zombies, Punch-Out!, Final Fantasy IV, Prototype



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music, Indies **Interests:** ABC's *Wipeout* (It Blows Away The Classic Obsolete Courses Of *Double Dare* And *Trashes The Boring Quiz Section*), *Crizzly Bear*, *Vedekarms* **Dislikes:** Early Cell Phone Contract Cancellation Fees That Don't Scale Down Over Time (Yes Only Got Three Months Left And I'm Still Looking At \$175 Down The Grapper), Over So Doesn't Take **Current Favorite Games:** Rage, Mass Effect 2, The Beatles: Rock Band, Heavy Rain, Final Fantasy IV DS, Guitar Hero: Smash Hits

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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



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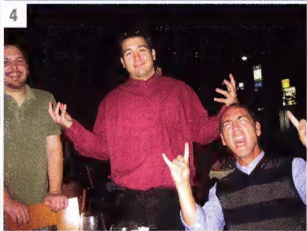


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1 Ben and Bryan hang with Bender Helper's Shannon McPhee, Elizabeth Stewart, and Cate Lombardo
 2 Reiner turns his swag on with Soulja Boy Tell 'Em, Cliff Bleszinski, and Chair Entertainment's Donald Mustard
 3 Media Molecule's Siobhan Reddy and Disney Interactive's Mariam Sughayer soak up the E3 vibes in Los Angeles
 4 Adam and Sony's Steve Grohl may be partying too hard. Even our awesome waiter at Roy's in downtown L.A. got caught in the crossfire
 5 Nick gets his groove back with Bethesda's Erin Losi and Rohan Rivas
 6 Journalist Russ Fischer chills with Capcom's Melody Ann Pfeiffer, OnLive's Tiffany Spencer, and g-Net Media's Shelby Hill
 7 Bertz and Matt enjoy some ice cold glasses of lemonade with Plugged In PR's Heather Sorenson
 8 One of the world's biggest Tekken fans, RC, visited the Namco Bandai offices to met Tekken project director Katsuhiro Harada, courtesy of the Make-A-Wish Foundation



4



1



2



3

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Dead Wrong

After the release of Left 4 Dead, Valve promised a steady release of new downloadable content for the game, much like they did for Team Fortress 2. However, it hasn't even been a year since the release of Left 4 Dead and they're already announcing a sequel? We've hardly seen any of this promised DLC, so what's with the new full-priced game? Left 4 Dead 2 could easily be released as an expansion pack to the original. It's just a few changes to the director and some new weapons and zombies, so there's really no other rea-

son that the new Left 4 Dead should even be a separate game. I'm not the only one who thinks this – there is an entire community that has instigated a boycott of Left 4 Dead 2. I hope Valve does the right thing and downgrades its plans for a full retail release.

Cody Heisman
via email

The "controversy" surrounding the announcement of Left 4 Dead 2 is pathetic. Have you played the full game yet? Do you know exactly how the team is

improving the mechanics? Do you know all about the weapons and enemies being added? No, you don't. Furthermore, without that information, you are wholly unqualified to make any judgments relating to the game's scope, quality, and appropriate pricing. Here's a little tip: Complaining about these things with no firsthand experience doesn't make you a gaming activist. It makes you a whiny, entitled brat.

For Example

I always thought your magazine showed some bias in favor of the Xbox 360. Now, after reading Andy's Letter from the Editor in issue 195, I have realized that your editor is also a weasel. What a terrible misrepresentation of the facts. When he mentioned "amazing games" for the 360, he must have been referring solely to the first Gears of War. "Impressive technology" must have also been a reference to the same game. I would like another example of an amazing or impressive technological achievement on this outdated console. As for Sony's Home being a joke, it seems to me that the users and developers love it. Also, it's free! You can't even give one example of how the PS3's software is a mess, and the assertion that you have to update the system too often is wrong. You would think something more than a vague reference would be in order, but then again, everything Andy conveyed in his little diatribe was unfounded garbage. I can handle a little bias, but Andy McNamara simply lied.

Anonymous
via email

Thank you for illustrating exactly what Andy meant when he said his letter – which pointed out equal failings in all

three systems – would "send the fingers of conspiracy theorists and bias-watchers into a frenzy of keyboard hate." Before you cry foul, think about this: Recognizing and acknowledging the problems of a console does not constitute bias. On the other hand, willfully ignoring those problems while exaggerating the flaws in another console... well, that sounds like a textbook definition to us.

Late to the Party

Isn't Castle Crashers awesome?

Harold Soward
via email

Yep.

Missing Pieces

As a life-long fan of the genre, I enjoyed your article on building the perfect RPG. However, you forgot to address one key issue: the archaic save point system. A perfect RPG would need a system that allows you to save whenever you wish. No experience is more frustrating than spending an hour of your time only to have to start again at the beginning of a dungeon, or trying to find a save point when you just want to stop playing.

Michael Muzyka
via email

You completely overlooked two categories in your article about building the perfect RPG: replay value and minigames. Every RPG should have a new game plus feature, allowing you to restart with all of the weapons and stats from the end of your last playthrough. Also, minigames like Final Fantasy X's Blitzball and Rogue Galaxy's Insectron should be included to give gamers something to do when they want to take a break from the normal game.

Sven 5
via email

In issue 195 you built the perfect RPG, and I agree with you on almost everything. The one thing I disagree wasn't something you included, but rather something you omitted. You left out one very important part of any RPG (or games in general): the music. Yes, that thing in the background that does so much, from setting the mood to evoking an emotional response. I can't tell you how many times the soundtrack has made a great game for me.

Anonymous
via email

Video games are complex, and developers weave many elements together in order to craft a memorable experience. When we imagined our perfect role-play-

ing game, it wasn't possible to highlight every aspect, so we focused on the major points. These are all excellent suggestions; unfortunately, it would take more space than a single magazine has available to outline all of the potential categories and the games that exemplify them. Plus, if you were going to go to all that trouble, you might as well try to make the perfect RPG instead of just dreaming about it.



Hardcore Negligence

In the reader art section of issue 195, there was a picture of Jack from the under-appreciated MadWorld. I'm one of the few who bought that game – it makes me wonder about gamers who cry on Internet forums about Nintendo failing its hardcore audience on the Wii. I'm starting to think the opposite is true: The hardcore audience has failed Nintendo. Why didn't you buy MadWorld,

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today

THE QUESTION:

What news from *ES 2009* excited you the most?



Halo Reach, simply for the fact that Bungie says they're done with Halo, but keep coming back. Either that or Project Natal, since it could move us within a few steps of the elusive Holodisk.

Forsberg | 785

Final Fantasy XIV was looking pretty awesome... until they revealed that it would be an MMO.

neobluebat

The Wii Vitality Sensor. Because, through juxtaposition, it made the announcement of Metroid: Other M seem that much better.

TrueNerd

The Last Guardian was probably the best announcement to come out of E3 this year. Just watching the trailer, with a boy and his monstrous cat-dragon, is enough to fill your body with all sorts of excitement.

DanieBunny

Metroid: Other M. As the Nintendo press conference went along, I thought it was going to be another bull-les like last year. As soon as Samus appeared, gracefully killing people on the screen, my eyes welled up and tears of joy came upon me. Yes, Nintendo still cares about us!

Animan_Di_WoW

Just Cause 2 was a real shocker. The first game was a terrible and ugly GTA done – the only saving grace was your character's grappling hook and parachute. Now it looks like they put forth a real effort into a refined game that just screams fun to me.

not_a_bumblebee

After waiting forever, the total revamp of Splinter Cell: Conviction stole the show for me. The (clever) writing on the wall, gameplay, and the overall feel of the game just oozes style.

SmackeyTheFrog



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House of the Dead, Okami, or No More Heroes? All of those titles should have sold more copies. If you call yourself hardcore, why aren't you buying the games made for you?

Patrick Borrelli
via email

Hardcore Wii owners, Patrick is calling you out. What do you have to say in your defense? Have hardcore gamers let Nintendo down? Drop us a line and share your thoughts.



Bad Comparisons

Back when I just had a PlayStation 2, I bought a game called Jet Li: Rise to Honor. It was one of the greatest games ever! Not only could you kung fu fight, you could shoot guns and pick up melee weapons from a large variety around you! I loved this game! Instead of comparing games to stupid art-house projects like Beyond Good and Evil and Ico, you should compare them to Jet Li: Rise to Honor.

Will Durrum

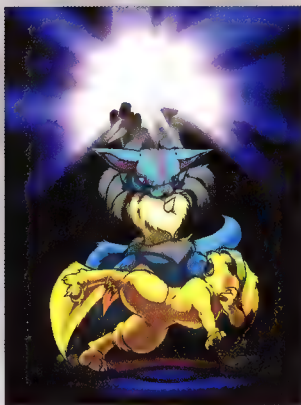
If we followed your suggestion, you'd probably see a lot more sentences like this: "This game isn't very good, but it's still better than Jet Li: Rise to Honor," or "These terrible stealth sections are reminiscent of Jet Li: Rise to Honor." Needless to say, we didn't enjoy the game as much as you did.

Somewhere in Between

I was reading your review for Infamous, which tackles the game's morality mechanism, and it got me reminiscing about the portrayal of morality in games in general. I wonder whether games will ever manage to implement a system that doesn't define the character as simply holy or diabolical. Do you think games will ever succeed in implementing a more realistic mechanism?

Damian Lopez

Games like Mass Effect and Fallout 3 make respectable attempts to add nuance to the traditional good and evil choices, but they are still ultimately split between two extremes. Part of the problem may be including a morality framework at all; if a game gives you a choice to be a goody-goody or a despot, players will naturally gravitate toward one of the two options (when has anyone ever tried to follow the neutral path?). By defining the choices in those terms, players think "I'm good, so I'm going to do good things," which preemptively defeats the choice. However, providing options and consequences unrestrained by simplified notions of good and evil would encourage players to evaluate the situation carefully and make a more meaningful choice. Several titles have attempted this, but Sony's upcoming Heavy Rain (see our preview on page 70) looks like it might be the first game to pull it off.



ALEX COCKBURN
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MICHAEL SURBER

If Peach gets any skankier, she could get her own reality show



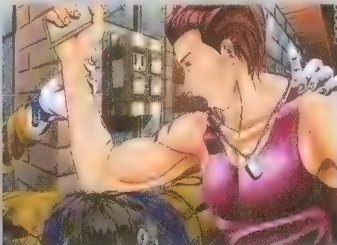
RYAN GRIEST

What's the joke here? Is this Master Culinarian? Master Cuisinier? Master Cook? We don't get it



K. REARICK

Nariko wants a sequel. Don't make her cut you



RUDY GONZALES

The perfect zombie-killing strategy: Dress up as a character from NES boxart and elbow-drop their necks

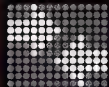


Half the flavor is before
you pull the rip cord.
The other half is after.



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Ever tried New  Gum?
Stimulate Your Senses.



CONNECT

Breaking News, Views, And Technology From
The Cutting Edge Of Gaming

Microsoft Impresses At E3

Despite continuing issues with the "red rings of death," the last few years have been tremendously successful for Microsoft's Xbox 360. While it has clearly become a top-flight console, the company has also learned how to make an impression at the annual E3 convention. Eschewing its past attempts at canned "cool," this year's press conference delivered exactly what fans wanted: great new features, a tremendous lineup of games, and some genuinely exciting surprises.

It kicked off with the biggest celebrity appearances in E3 history: The Beatles. Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, and widows Olivia Harrison and Yoko Ono came on stage to hail Harmonix's upcoming *The Beatles: Rock Band*. While the appearance was brief, the crowd was clearly thrilled to see rock 'n' roll's most important living legends in the flesh — and the game's opening video looked excellent as well.

From there, things only got better. From strong demos of upcoming games like *Modern Warfare 2*, *Forza 3*, and *Alan Wake* to surprises like *Spinter Cell: Conviction* and *Crackdown 2*, there was something to be excited about for almost any gamer.



Hideo Kojima appeared to announce that *Metal Gear Solid Rising* is coming to 360.



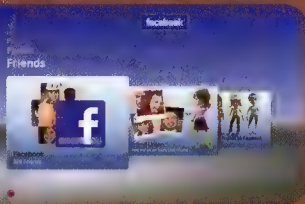
report card

Microsoft had a strong year at E3, showcasing a variety of games, the Xbox 360 is the leading console.

Devvy of impressive titles hitting the show floor. On the Xbox Live front, the company continued to improve its already strong position with a host of great new announcements. Finally, Project Natal blew away the expectations of those expecting a simple Wi-style motion controller peripheral.

A
final grade

Xbox Live Builds Steam



There's no question that Xbox Live is the best online gaming platform in history. For gamers of all stripes, the service continually adds exciting new features (give or take avatars) and content. Following last year's blockbuster announcement of Netflix on-demand compatibility, this year Microsoft came back with a handful of intriguing partnerships with some of the world's most successful content and social networking companies.

The most talked about partnership? Xbox Live compatibility with Facebook and Twitter, which allows gamers to send and receive the most banal details of life on Earth without leaving the couch. In addition, online music fans will enjoy the new Last.fm support.

On the gaming side, Microsoft announced the Xbox 360 will soon be home to a Zune-branded video service capable of streaming movies in 1080p HD and 5.1 surround sound instantly, complete with fast-forward and skip capabilities. The Netflix service is adding the ability to browse through its entire catalog directly from Xbox Live.

Perhaps the most exciting announcement of all was exclusivity for *Forza* on-parity with the cable-satellite television giant Sky. Later this year, Sky subscribers will be able watch live and on-demand television right from their Xbox, even gathering their avatars in Xbox Live parties to watch and chat about live events like soccer matches. While nothing has been announced for the U.S., Microsoft said it is working on a simultaneous solution for digital TV viewing. It's worth remembering that European viewers support recorded programs to the 360 hard drive.

During a post-conference luncheon, Microsoft's chief marketing officer revealed a few more surprises. For one, the company is finally pushing for more in-game items for avatars. We saw an avatar decked out with Halo ODS armor and holding items like a toy NYC warhog and pom-poms. More importantly, the company is ramping up its digital distribution model by releasing titles like *Assassin's Creed* and *BioShock* as full retail equivalents.



A Mysterious New Halo

In addition to a live demonstration of Halo 3: ODST, which returns to New Mombasa with a new multiple thread storytelling style, Microsoft also showed a teaser trailer for an intriguing new addition to the franchise called Halo: Reach. No gameplay footage was shown, but the video depicts a series of explosions, clattering the words of Reach to the soundtrack of panicked radio chatter and fire... silence. The last voice heard says, "We've got Spartans on the ground, sir—we're not going anywhere." The apocalyptic atmosphere was heightened by the tagline displayed at the outset of the trailer: "From the beginning, you know the end." Speculation has run wild on the Internet, with gamers asking the questions: Will the game star Master Chief? Does it represent the last game in the franchise? Will it be a first-person shooter or another genre altogether? All these questions will be answered after Halo: ODST ships with a Halo: Reach multiplayer beta and we move closer to the ship date in late 2009.

Microsoft Ditches The Controller

The biggest news out of Microsoft's press conference was the unveiling of Project Natal, a new camera-based, full body motion control add-on for the Xbox 360. The result of a long-term R&D project, the unit allows for hands-free control on a much more sophisticated level than what is offered by the Nintendo Wii remote.

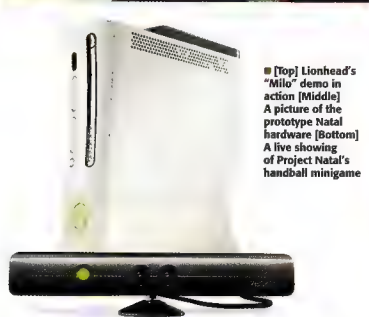
General manager of Microsoft Game Studios Kudo Tsunoda came on stage to guide the audience through a series of quick demonstrations. He introduced a quick handball style game, where an on-screen avatar mimed motions instantly, knocking out boxes in a 3D environment. The Natal teaser video further showed players using their arms to destroy buildings in a Rampage-style game, diving a racecar and performing wheel changes during pit stops, and skateboarding through a city via mimicking a skater's movements. The motion sensing also applies to menu navigation, allowing viewers to quickly flip through movies and games with their hand. The unit even includes facial and voice recognition, automatically booting up your profile when you step in front of the television.

In addition to the expected minigames, the unit can perform much more intricate actions, like "scanning" in objects like skateboards for use as virtual gameplay objects. Midway through the demo, an excited Steven Spielberg came onstage to hail Project Natal as a "historic moment" for gaming, one that could make games as mass market as books, movies, and television.

Then we met the intriguing Milo, a virtual character demo created by Peter Molyneux's Lionhead Studios. Milo, a young boy, interacted and conversed with a Lionhead producer, who even scanned in a drawing that the boy was able to receive, look at, and comment on his virtual world. E3 Judges met Milo later on at special event, though our own Andy McNamara felt there was a degree of scripting going on with the E3 demo. It will be interesting to see if Lionhead can bring Milo to life without that bit of trickery.

Other live demos of Natal were quite impressive. The unit tracked motion accurately, even allowing us to play the already released Burnout Paradise without a controller. The incredibly fast racer requires pinpoint control, and we were pleased to see that Natal steering worked nearly as well as a controller.

For now, the biggest question seems to be: When does this thing come out and how much will it cost? Microsoft said it will not be released in 2009, but didn't rule out a holiday 2010 date. It also promised a moderate price point and a marketing plan on par with the launch of a console. Speaking of which, following E3, 1up.com reported a rumor that Natal will actually anchor a new version of the Xbox 360 hardware to drop next year but that it's available as an add-on too.



■ [Top] Lionhead's "Milo" demo in action [Middle] A picture of the prototype Natal hardware [Bottom] A live showing of Project Natal's handball minigame



INTERVIEW

John Schappert

Corporate Vice President
Microsoft Interactive Entertainment

Editor Note: Should alter this interview. Schappert left Microsoft for a position at EA.

“Spielberg came out during the Natal presentation and said that controllers are keeping games from being mass market. It's very similar to what Nintendo has been saying for the last few years.”

I want to mention the Spielberg comment. I've spent some time with him, and Don has known him for 10 years. The interesting consistent feedback is that everyone can go to the movies and enjoy a movie, not everyone can enjoy games. Not everyone has the dexterity or coordination to pick up that controller and actually handle their character onscreen and have fun doing so. So he's been a big proponent of breaking down those barriers and having the messes come and enjoy experiences. That's why when we showed it to him a few months ago he was excited, he can't wait to work on it and he wanted to be part of our unveiling because he feels it is revolutionary. That's very heartfelt. [We also realize that there are a lot of folks out there that are very comfortable with controllers, that's why we're going to continue to certainly make controller-based games. That's not going away.]

“How do you get publishers to sign on to making Natal games? The history of add-on peripherals demonstrates that it's hard to drive a large installed base.”

Our response from publishers has been overwhelmingly positive. Someone said to me, “With Natal, it seems like that's the next Xbox platform or console.” That's exactly how we see it. It is our goal that it be synonymous with Xbox, that there be a very, very large install base so that it doesn't get relegated, like you said, as a small attached accessory.

“So you envision it as being marketed like a new console launch instead of a new peripheral launch?”

That's how we see it. As the next evolution of our platform.

The Milo demo was interesting. Is that something that developers could incorporate into, for example, an interactive cutscene in a traditional controller game? Yes. When we went on the road we said to publishers, “Let's show you Natal, it's going to bring all new experiences, here's a few experiences that we're working on to give you inspiration. These are games and experiences that you couldn't play any other way—that's how we look at it, that's why you saw some of those demos that we showed. But [we also said] that the Xbox 360 controller is the best controller ever made, and we're going to continue to make controller-based games. And then there's going to be some of the hybrids, so I can envision—and I don't know if we'll ever bring this out—that you could play Halo and you could turn your head while Natal is tracking your face and your head, and you're panning the camera. I could throw a grenade like this [mimes throwing motion] while I'm holding the controller.”

Sony Surprises

Sony's press conference was the last of the big three, and many wondered aloud if the company could bring fire-power to keep up with its competition. Fortunately, Sony did not disappoint. The company's big announcement – the PSP Go – leaked before E3 even started, and Jack Tretton, CEO and president of Sony Computer Entertainment America, even joked about it in his opening remarks. "Thank God you guys showed up," he quipped. "We consider ourselves to be industry leaders at PlayStation, and press leaks are no exception. We are not going to be outdone by anybody. [laughs]"

Thankfully, the premature reveal of PSP Go didn't leave Sony without surprises. Exceptional gameplay demos for God of War III, Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, and Assassin's Creed II were shown alongside reveals for exclusives The Last Guardian, Final Fantasy XIV, Agent, two Gran Turismo, Resident Evil Portable, and ModNation Racers. Finally, the unveiling of Sony's rumored motion controller was impressive despite being the last company to do so. In the end, Sony delivered on a number of fronts, and proved to be anything but a letdown.

■ Jack Tretton, CEO and president of Sony Computer Entertainment America

report card

Sony is in dead last place in terms of console sales, but this E3 ironically found the company in a comfortable place. The software outlook for the PS3 is good, and third-party console exclusives such as Final Fantasy XIV and Rockstar North's Agent are exciting surprises for a fanbase that might have thought the days of big-name Sony exclusives were over. The increased publisher support is particularly important for the PSP, which looks like it may be undergoing a renaissance of sorts being fueled less by the niche PSP Go and more by promising software like LittleBigPlanet and Resident Evil Portable. The lack of a PS3 price drop hurts, but for those of you who already own the system, the console will have plenty of great titles well into next year.

B⁺
final grade



Nintendo Plays It Safe

To nobody's surprise, Nintendo used its media briefing to tout the success of its all-inclusive strategy and the commercial dominance of the Wii and DS platforms. Among the boring corporate talk, however, a slew of exciting first-party titles (and a baffling hardware device) were announced.

The Wii received the lion's share of the software love. Super Mario Galaxy 2 is the first direct sequel to a major Mario game for years. New Super Mario Bros. Wii brings 2D platforming action back to home consoles and introduces LittleBigPlanet's four-player co-op to the Mushroom Kingdom. Nintendo also handed the reins to the strangely titled Metroid: Other M to Ninja Gaiden creators Team Ninja, a bold move for a beloved franchise.

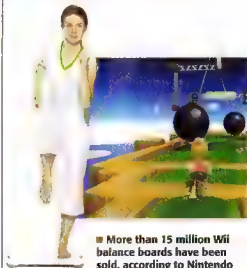
Nintendo highlighted several DS games as well. Notably, the announcements of role-playing games Golden Sun DS and Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story made a splash. Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Minis March Again debuted as well. Lower profile titles at the conference included minigame creation studio WarioWare: DIY and Flipnote Studio, a program that lets you emulate the corner of a notebook on your DS by drawing a series of pictures.



■ Nintendo's Bill Trinen onstage at Club Nokia

Getting Filter With Wii

Wii Fit has been nearly as much of a sensation as the Wii console, so it was no surprise that Nintendo announced the follow-up, Wii Fit Plus. Nintendo VP Cammie Dunaway described the title as being "more attractive for every member of the household," debuting six exercises and three minigames, which include skateboarding, juggling, and doing a Mario impression through an interactive obstacle course. The game also allows greater customization of your workouts. Given the success of the first title, we can't fault Nintendo for bringing out a safe sequel. Wii Fit Plus is due out this fall.



■ More than 15 million Wii balance boards have been sold, according to Nintendo

What's A Vitality Sensor?

Nintendo graced us with the most bizarre new hardware announcement yet: the Wii Vitality Sensor. The sensor clips onto your finger and reads your heartbeat. Gamers will no longer have to put a dollar in the machine at the grocery store to find out what their pulse rate is with this handy gizmo. How it will be used in relation to games is unknown, though Nintendo president Satoru Iwata's comments implied that the company sees it as more of a lifestyle device like the balance board than an accessory aimed at enhancing traditional games. No dates or other details are available at this time.

■ The Wii Vitality Sensor plugs into the bottom of the remote in place of a nunchuk



Miyamoto's New Zelda

It was strange not to see legendary creator Shigeru Miyamoto at the Nintendo press conference, but he did make an appearance at a small scale gathering behind closed doors. There, this image was revealed, along with confirmation that Miyamoto is working on a new Legend of Zelda game. No other details came forth, but there is plenty to speculate on just from the painting. Who is the mysterious girl? What significance does her necklace hold? How annoying will the fairy be this time around? You'll know as soon as we do.

■ This image is the only public information on the upcoming Legend of Zelda title from Shigeru Miyamoto

top

10

games
of E3

No other show gives out more senseless accolades than E3, where half-completed games are showered with trophies publishers can place on their retail boxes for marketing purposes whether the titles turn out well or not. Rather than give out meaningless awards for half-baked games, we run down our most anticipated titles showcased at the annual event.



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04



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05



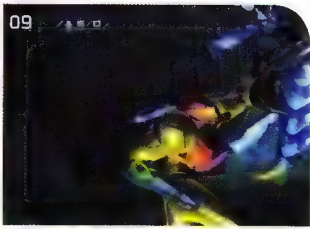
06



07



08



09



10

01 Modern Warfare 2

A daring climb up the side of an icy mountain during a blizzard; a nail-biting infiltration of a secret enemy base atop the mountain; an ally compromised, a diversionary bomb exploded, and a thrilling escape down the side of the mountain on a snowmobile. No one is better at delivering jaw-dropping action moments than Infinity Ward. This demo is proof positive that its run of blockbuster titles won't be ending anytime soon, and for this we give *Modern Warfare 2* our nod as game of the show.

02 Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Sony's press conference came to life when Naughty Dog's Evan Wells walked on stage to demo *Uncharted 2*. Nathan Drake and his treasure-hunting partner Chloe Frazier are traversing the rooftops of a Nepalese city, and as Drake shrimmies across a high beam, an attack chopper appears and starts shooting. The resulting chase across the city rooftops culminates with a crumbling building and a life-or-death jump to safety. The crowd showered the demo with applause, and we can't blame them.

03 Mass Effect 2

Rumors of Commander Shepard's demise were greatly exaggerated — he (or she) is back with a new team and a refined combat engine. After showcasing new heavy weapons and teammate commands, the demo culminated with the Normandy coming under heavy fire from an unknown alien vessel, and Shepard's escape uncertain. With harrowing moments like these, *Mass Effect 2* may be the darkest sequel this side of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

04 Assassin's Creed II

In the highly anticipated first trailer of *Assassin's Creed II*, new protagonist Ezio Auditore di Firenze pays off ladies of ill repute to distract a noble's henchman during a Carnival celebration. As he happily dances with busty ladies while fireworks go off above, Ezio cuts in and introduces his blade to the man's throat. The noble takes flight and the chase begins through the streets of Venice at dawn. Sensing an ambush as he approaches his prey, Ezio opts to use a new finishing weapon — a gun attached to his arm.

05 Splinter Cell: Conviction

Jason Bourne may be the second most dangerous government operative on the run. After two years under the radar, Sam Fischer emerged "reBourne" at E3. Gone is the hobo Sam on the run in favor of a bitter old man who abandons Third Echelon to avenge his daughter's murder. Sam exacts his paycheck the hard way, interrogating people with techniques that would make Dick Cheney blush, killing with abandon, and vaulting through environments with the speed and grace of a born predator rather than the patient stalking for which the series is known.

06 God of War III

While Sony announced we must wait until March 2010 to unleash another Kratos-driven rampage, the gameplay footage did nothing to diminish the high expectations for our favorite demigod's return. The press conference footage demonstrated that despite the absence of David Jaffe and Cory Barlog, *God of War* is still in good hands. The hands-on gameplay gave us a chance to grapple harpies, ride a Cyclops, and come face to face with a Chimera.

07 The Last Guardian

Team Ico's highly anticipated follow-up project to *Shadow of the Colossus* leaked weeks before the convention, but this did nothing to diminish the E3 reveal of this PS3 exclusive. Formerly known as Project Trico, *The Last Guardian* centers on the relationship between a young boy and a startlingly real giant rat/bird hybrid creature. Who may as well be named Steve. Ueda is going to kill this lovely creature after we form a lasting bond. Could this be the video game version of *Where the Red Fern Grows*?

08 Star Wars: The Old Republic

In the coolest *Star Wars* video since the first trilogy, a badass Sith who looks part Darth Vader and part Darth Malak confronts a plain looking Jedi who may as well be named Steve. Hmm, wonder who's going to win that fight? Guided remotely by a nearby bounty hunter, a Sith vessel barrels into the Consucant building, revealing a cadre of lightsaber carrying Sith. Perhaps George Lucas should just retire and leave the *Star Wars* franchise in the capable hands of BioWare; they are clearly better caretakers.

09 Metroid: Other M

When Reggie Fils-Aime started touting a "new, edgier game" in the "mature space," we thought he was about to unveil *Super Mario Hostel*. Instead, he introduced a badass trailer of a new and improved Samus Aran courtesy of *Ninja Gaiden* creators Team Ninja (minus former studio head Itagaki). The comprehensive revamp retains most every lauded aspect of the series, and it appears to add a deep back-story, narrative cutscenes, and killer finishing moves.

10 Heavy Rain

Quantic Dream's choose-your-own adventure tale about a serial killer debuted its second of four playable protagonists, a sexy reporter who gets into a sticky situation at a night club with the sleazy owner who may have valuable information in the Origami Killer case. The game's stunningly realistic animations, interesting conversation mechanics, and gritty theme made this the game of the show for some editors. Could this be the start of an adventure game renaissance?

impulse

BY MATT MILLER



Many showgoers declared E3 2009 one of the finest years for game software in memory, and it wasn't only planned retail releases that garnered attention. All three platform download services put cool new games on display, and I've gathered several of my favorites.



PixelJunk Shooter

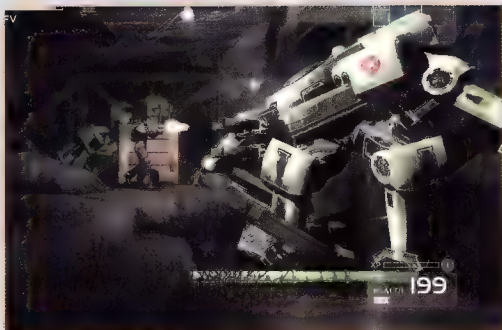
PlayStation Network



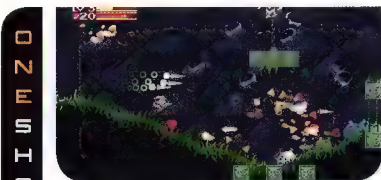
My favorite PSN title at the show was the next installment in the successful PixelJunk franchise. Like its predecessors, it is a completely new gameplay concept, tied to the previous entries only through the expectation for innovation that the series fosters. In this two-player co-op title, players must navigate ships through sprawling caverns to rescue survivors, much like the old-school game *Chopfisher*. The cool twist comes through full fluid dynamics on all the water and lava that fill the caves. Water is generally good, keeping your ship cool, and lava is decidedly bad. Certain walls can be destroyed to allow the flow of either liquid into a new location, which often clears the path to progression. Water also interacts with lava, combining to become more destructible rock for you to blast through. Toss in enemies with missiles, giant bosses, and the opportunity to do it all with a friend, and I'm already convinced I'll lose as much time to Shooter as I did to PixelJunk Eden.

Shadow Complex

Xbox Live Arcade

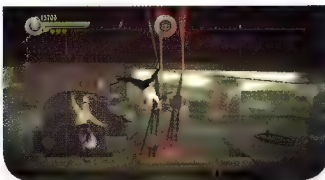


Chair Entertainment (*Undertow*) joined forces with Epic Games (*Gears of War*) to bring us a downloadable title that got more attention at E3 than dozens of bigger disc-based games. Citing inspirations like *Super Metroid* and *Contra*, the game is a classic 2D exploration game, but set in the near future of Orson Scott Card's *Empire* fiction. With dozens of hidden items and treasures littered through the game world, players must explore using new power-ups to find all the content. My time with the game revealed tight controls and a good mix of action and world traversal. In particular, I was excited to see one of the game's massive bosses, a mechanical walker with an absurd amount of firepower. Sources are saying an August release: *Shadow Complex* is my surest bet for the summer season.



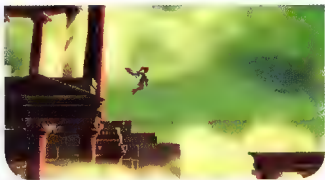
> Cave Story

This fantastic PC freeware game is getting a WiiWare release, and I couldn't be happier that it's finally reaching a wider audience. The seemingly simplistic 2D graphics hide a brilliantly designed adventure with a great cast of characters and a deep game world — more on this one in future months.



> Invincible Tiger: The Legend of Han Tao

This awesome kung fu beat 'em up is looking better with each passing month, offering fast action and co-op brawling for anyone who loves classic martial arts flicks. The PSN and Live Arcade game even runs in 3D, if you've got the TV and glasses to handle it.



> Nyxquest: Kindred Spirits

Releasing as a WiiWare exclusive, *Nyxquest* has players controlling the winged girl Nyx as she searches the ruins of Ancient Greece for her friend Karas. You control both Nyx and the godly powers of the Wii remote, which lets you alter wind flows, move platforms, and otherwise clear the way for her.

Shatter

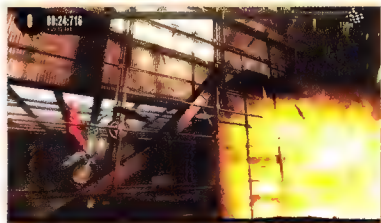
PlayStation Network



It didn't get any love at the big press conferences, but Shatter shouldn't be overlooked in favor of more high-profile titles. Sidhe, the developer of Gripshift, delivers this variation on the classic brick-breaking model. The bat, or paddle, still sends the ball careening up to destroy mostly stationary blocks, but several tweaks to the formula inject more fun. The bat can suck and blow like a vacuum, affecting the ball mid-flight and preventing frustrating "last brick" randomness that can make these games frustrating. You can also bet on your skill by sending out extra balls onto the field at any time — as many as you have in reserve. This increases your multiplier, but if you lose them all it's still game over. For added variety, the game also changes your perspective, sometimes setting you at the base of the screen as you'd expect, but other times on the side, or even along the edge of a circle. It's a far more involved and complex experience than other entries in this style, and is backed up by a cool musical score.

Trials HD

Xbox Live Arcade



Don't be fooled by the screen. This is as much a puzzle game as it is a racer. Detailed physics modeling forms the core of the gameplay challenge, as Trials sends your motorbike hurtling through one obstacle-filled course after another. Leaning forward and back and controlling the gas, you must navigate your bike to the finish line in the least time possible. It's very focused on precision, so the easily frustrated need not apply. Fifty tracks ship with the game, but a level editor allows for downloaded user-created levels post-release. Check out the demo when it releases this summer; I think you'll be hooked in no time.

Trine

PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, PC



This game strangely has different publishers on its different platforms, but it looks great no matter the system. Trine is a clever action/puzzle game deeply enmeshed in its fantasy backdrop. You and up to two friends can play together, each opting in as the knight, thief, or wizard. Each class has a small number of unique abilities that must be used in conjunction to move forward through the 2D, platform-heavy levels. The wizard can create boxes and levitate objects. The thief can grapple with her rope and climb. The knight is mostly good for hitting and lifting things. Throw all three into a gorgeous physics-enabled environment, and Trine emerges as one of the coolest looking downloadable titles in quite some time.

Secret of Monkey Island Special Edition

Xbox Live Arcade

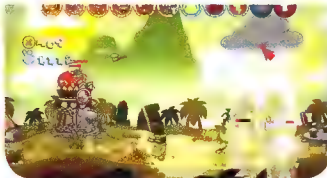


Your hunt for this PC adventure classic can finally end; LucasArts is bringing the original Secret of Monkey Island to Live Arcade. The team working on the game has recognized the potential hate mail they'd receive if they didn't deliver a faithful remake, but they're also eager to give the game a major visual and audio overhaul. Their solution is ingenious. The gameplay, characters, puzzles, and story are untouched. However, the team rerecorded and remastered all the original music, and completed a full graphical update to give Guybrush Threepwood and his world a new art style and a 1080i presentation. Better yet, they included a hot swap visual feature, which switches everything back to the original graphics with the press of a button. While true puzzle aficionados can still tackle every brainteaser without help, the game also includes a hint system for those who need help moving through the pirate-laden, swashbuckling story. This project sounds like a great idea from top to bottom.



> Fret Nice

Fret Nice is a music/platformer headed to PSN and Live Arcade, thanks to publisher Tecmo. The 2008 IGF finalist originally used a guitar controller to manipulate the onscreen character, but Tecmo is keeping mum on the control method for this new version. Unfortunately, Fret Nice may be as far away as 2010.



> Swords & Soldiers

Swords & Soldiers is a fantastic 2D RTS that is only available on WiiWare. Players are tasked with summoning units to defend their base on the left side of a long horizontal plane from the constant aggressive advances of the faction on the far right. Simple, addictive, and immediately fun, this one is already out, so go grab it!



> Project Cube

This omni-directional shooter for Xbox Live Arcade is a rarity, if only because it comes from Square Enix. The game differs from games like Geometry Wars and Robotron because of a dash move that lets you escape from danger and stun those evil cubes. Word is the game also includes multiplayer.

MMOreport

BY ADAM BIESSNER

Diversity was the rule at this year's E3. With different countries of origin, business models, gameplay styles, and settings, the breadth of experiences available from MMOs has never been greater. So, which titles look the most promising? Check out our report to find out.

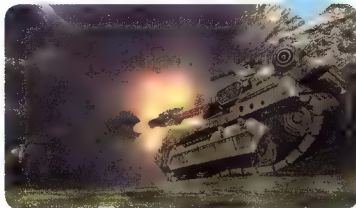
HOT



DUNGEON FIGHTER ONLINE

Maple Story creator Nexon is bringing another free-to-play Asian hit to our shores. Dungeon Fighter Online may sport visuals that wouldn't be out of place on a Neo-Geo, but its gameplay chops are impeccable thanks to several years of iterative development since its 2006 Korean launch. The Final Fight-style brawling action is shockingly deep, with five classic fantasy classes like Fighter and Mage slinging dozens of unique attacks each. The game rewards players for proficient play in the form of XP bonuses for executing back attacks, juggles, and the like. DFO is supported by microtransactions, though Nexon hasn't yet nailed down what exactly will be sold. The game is fun, but why isn't it coming to Xbox Live or PlayStation Network? It's a perfect fit. One recommendation: Make sure to plug in a gamepad if you dig into this one.

COOL



HUXLEY: THE DYSTOPIA

Huxley is an old friend of mine. From my first E3, it's always been there, touting its Unreal Engine 3 graphics (boy, did those look great in 2004) and unusual action-oriented play. It's 2009 now, several shooter-style MMOs have been released, and there I am, playing the Huxley beta from the show floor again. It's good to know that some things never change. Huxley is still fun; it plays much like Unreal Tournament 2004, and the sci-fi setting is one I never tire of — even if nothing about it stands out. However, it's no longer unique. I have no idea how it's going to entice players away from the dozens of other sci-fi FPS titles out there. Maybe it'll stay in beta for a while, which is for the best. I don't know what I'll do at E3 2010 if Huxley's not there. It'd be quite the brave new world.

WARM



PERFECT WORLD INTERNATIONAL

Publisher/developer Perfect World comes from China bearing free-to-play gifts. Perfect World International hangs its hat on two features: Rich customization and hardcore PvP combat. Dozens of sliders allow players to set their avatars' appearance just how they like, and you can wear strictly cosmetic clothing that supersedes the look of your actual stat-boosting equipment. On the other side, the unique PvP system allows guilds to bid for the right to attack one another's territory in scheduled weekly battles. These fights can get up to 80-vs-80, and grant victory to the side that more effectively turns the tide of battle between two warring NPC factions. Like many Eastern titles, PWI sports an alluring, slightly alien aesthetic brought to life by colorful fantasy art. The game is indisputably Chinese in many ways, but the PvP structure should appeal to many American gamers as well — if you can deal with production values a noticeable step below the Warcrafts and LOTROs of the world.

COOL



JADE DYNASTY

Also free-to-play and from Perfect World, Jade Dynasty is unlike any MMO I've seen. The setting shares Perfect World International's Chinese vibe: I saw a fairy-tale forest environment pleasantly different from what you'd see out of a studio like Blizzard. The game actively supports botting, requiring very little interaction from players as their avatars roam the world grinding levels and loot. Offline XP gain is a key feature as well, where you constantly accrue experience while you either have the client open or spend real money-purchased dreaming tokens. The design is weirdly cynical; if you can't keep bots and cheating out of your games, why not build one around those very concepts? I doubt I'll play Jade Dynasty extensively myself, but I'm fascinated with seeing how it performs in the U.S.

COOL



THE AGENCY/DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

The only console MMOs on this list, these titles from Sony Online Entertainment are cross-compatible between the PC and PS3. Action-oriented gameplay and instanced mission structures make these natural fits for the console. However, with the caveat that MMOs demo notoriously poorly on the hectic E3 show floor, these didn't look great. The single mission of *The Agency* I saw was a simplistic, linear scenario. Infiltrating a chateau in eveningwear, followed by busting out guns blazing in tactical gear, came off as a sequence of elementary obstacles that requires little thought or creativity from the player. DCU looks better, but I haven't seen anything about it to date that sets it apart from the pack other than the DC license. The colorful comic book look is there, and it's neat to see your created hero or villain alongside DC stalwarts like Bizarro and the Green Lantern, but the gameplay in particular has done nothing to impress me. SOE still has time to address lingering issues, and there is undoubtedly more to the games than what has been shown so far, but they've both been in development for a long time already. I have several reservations that need to be addressed before I buy into either of these titles.

COOL



WARM



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: EBERON UNLIMITED

Turbine's licensed D&D MMO has struggled with several issues since its 2006 launch. In its defense, the experience is remarkably true to both the high-fantasy spirit and the dice-rolling form of the D&D experience. In an attempt to inject new life into an underperforming title, the company is re-releasing it as a free-to-play, microtransaction-supported game. With the exception of endgame equipment, most everything you could think of is sold through the in-game store, including new dungeons, potions, XP boosts, and more. DDO was a brave, innovative game that suffered from a lack of content and an unusual gameplay structure. If this relaunch can attract a significant player base, this could be a pleasant surprise.

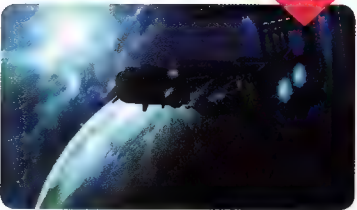
WARM



APB

Announced long ago but finally shown, APB is still a nebulous batch of ideas wrapped around a neat concept. Think of it as an MMO version of *Grand Theft Auto*. Players take on the role of criminal or enforcer in a fictional city where traditional police have succumbed to widespread lawlessness. The customization software shown at E3 is a very impressive, going well beyond anything I've seen to date with its ability to create realistic-looking characters and incredibly detailed tattoos, outfits, and logos. Developer Real Time Worlds claims the game has no grind or progression as the terms are commonly used in MMOs, pointing to *Counter-Strike* as the kind of lasting appeal the company hopes to achieve. APB still has a lot to prove when it comes to gameplay, and I'm reserving further judgment until I get my hands on it.

HOT



JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

NetDevil's spacefaring MMO, *Jumpgate*, has been around for years. This reworking has been in the works for almost as long. *Jumpgate: Evolution* had its PvP combat front and center at E3, showcasing massive space battles featuring up to 150 players on a side. NetDevil hopes that better ship vs. ship combat will set it apart from the current top sci-fi dog, *Eve Online*. What has been shown of the setting likely won't, as it's standard science fiction. The beta has lasted forever, but its latest showing was solid. If the structure of *Jumpgate's* universe – crafting, economy, social constructs – matches the quality of the PvP, I'm on board.

THE REST OF THE FIELD

The MMO space is far larger than any brief list could hope to encompass. **Star Wars: The Old Republic** from BioWare claimed a spot on our best of E3 list (page 19). I've told you about urban third-person shooter **CrimeCraft** before, and having played it at the show I'm much more hopeful for its future. The subject of last month's *Mod World* column, **Dragonica Online**, is another action-oriented free-to-play Korean import with potential. New studio Trion demoed an intriguing fantasy world with serious dynamic content possibilities called **Heroes of Telara**, which could be worth keeping tabs on. *GamesFirst/K2 Network* has several European-developed products also in the free-to-play market, though none wowed me at the show.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

**HARRISON OUT AT ATARI**

Former Sony head of worldwide studios Phil Harrison took over as president of Atari over a year ago, but the executive stepped down after the company posted a net loss of over \$300 million for the year. Harrison remains in a non-executive advisory role.

**MOLYNEUX PROMOTED IN EUROPE**

Lionhead boss and gaming visionary Peter Molyneux accepted the promotion to creative director of Microsoft Game Studios in Europe. He now oversees the output of Microsoft's internal studios in the region and works with third parties. Molyneux is also retaining his position at Lionhead.

**LEGO TRAVELS TO HOGWARTS**

Traveller's Tales continues to build its empire with LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4. There will be LEGO pieces, Harry Potter characters, and lots of money changing hands when the game comes out next year.

REAL TIME WORLDS KEEPS BUSY

APB developer Real Time Worlds says it is planning a second MMO project, and expects to announce the title next year. For more on APB, turn to page 82.

**GODFATHER'S REIGN OF TERROR OVER**

EA's Godfather franchise goes from a made man to sleeping with the fishes. EA Games president Frank Gibeau said of any future titles in the series: "We're not going to do another one."



METAL GEAR SOLID LIGHTNING BOLT ACTION

RIISING

games

METAL GEAR RETURNS!

TWO GAMES COMING

Before E3, Kojima productions teased a big announcement, and speculation centered on Metal Gear Solid 5 or even a resurrection of the Snatcher franchise. The truth turned out to be different, but no less exciting.

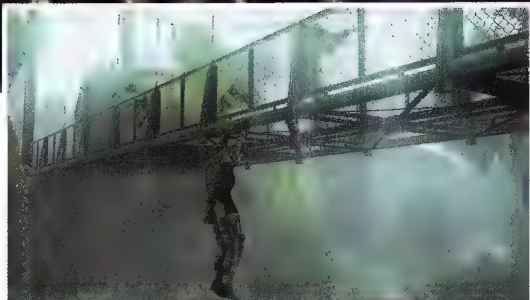
For the first time, a Metal Gear game will release day and date on Xbox 360 with Metal Gear Solid: Rising — a PS3 and 360 title featuring the badass version of zero-turned-hero Raiden. No release date has been announced yet.

The game is expected to keep the series' hallmark tactical stealth elements, but with a high action quotient. Early art for the game shows a cybernetic Raiden atop what looks like Crying Wolf from MGS 4's Beauty and the Beast Corps, effectively confirming that Rising takes place before Guns of the Patriots.

PEACE IN OUR TIME

Kojima describes Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker for the PSP as "the MGS 5 inside me." As such, he'll be directing, producing, and writing this handheld title set for release in 2010.

Peace Walker takes place in the 1970s, 10 years after Metal Gear Solid 3 while Big Boss is setting up Outer Heaven. The game is expected to be similar to PSP's Metal Gear Portable Ops series in that it explores Big Boss' charismatic ability to recruit soldiers to his cause, as well as containing a multiplayer component.





news

BIOWARE TAKES OVER MYTHIC

EA RESTRUCTURES RPG/MMO GROUP

Electronic Arts recently restructured its RPG and MMO development group, with Warhammer Online's Mythic now under the auspices of BioWare. Ray Muzyka, co-founder and general manager of BioWare is the new general manager of this RPG/MMO studio group, while BioWare's other co-founder, Greg Zeschuk, is the group's creative officer. Mythic's current general manager, Mark Jacobs, is leaving the company, and Mythic co-founder Rob Denton is taking his place and reporting to Muzyka.

Mythic made its name with Dark Age of Camelot and later Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning (shown). In 2006, Electronic Arts bought Mythic.



news

ZENIMAX BUYS ID SOFTWARE

CARMACK, PROJECTS STAYING PUT

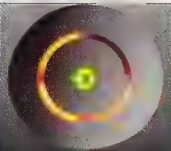
Zenimax – parent company of Fallout 3 developer/publisher Bethesda – has acquired legendary Doom studio id Software. This partners Bethesda with gaming luminary John Carmack, but he and the rest of the employees at id will keep their positions, and the company's structure and its projects will remain as they are. Previously, id Software has partnered with publishers like Activision, and to a lesser degree Electronic Arts – which announced a deal with id to publish Rage last E3 (see pages 28 and 38 for more). In accordance with this agreement, EA will still publish Rage.

"This puts id Software in a wonderful position going forward," said Carmack. "We will now be able to grow and extend all of our franchises under one roof, leveraging our capabilities across multiple teams while enabling forward looking research to be done in the service of all of them. We will be bigger and stronger, as we recruit the best talent to help us build the landmark games of the future."

This move represents another step forward for Bethesda's publishing arm, which includes a spate of upcoming titles such as Brink, Wet, and Rogue Warrior. The company will also presumably benefit from id's engine technology licensing program.

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



RED RINGS IN THE FINANCIAL RED

Microsoft's problems with the Red Ring of Death are well documented. The company went public with its woes in 2008, saying that it was setting aside \$1 billion to deal with the situation. While the company's efforts are sincere, and \$1 billion is a heavy hit to take, we're hearing that so far the problem has exceeded the \$1 billion mark and is showing no signs of slowing.

Thanks for your interest in EA Games!

We'd like to invite you to tell us your thoughts about your playing habits and gaming experiences with Command & Conquer and EA.

Our survey should only take a couple minutes to complete and will help influence the future design of our games. All of your answers and feedback for this survey will remain confidential.

Please click the button below.

[Take the Survey](#)

Thanks!

The C&C Team

COMMAND & CONQUER 4?

A survey sent out by UK market research firm 2CV has revealed Command & Conquer 4, which would include "the epic conclusion to the 15-year Tiberium saga with innovative RPG-like player progression, persistent in both single-player and multiplayer modes, coop play, and now stylized, live-action cinematics." The research company also asks about features for future C&C titles, including a mobile base known as The Crawler, character classes, and "MMORPG-like player progression in which you are rewarded every time you play." Whether these are for a title other than C&C 4 or are being vetted for inclusion into that game remains to be seen. Electronic Arts is not commenting on this supposed C&C 4.



BALLMER CORRECT ON NATAL RELEASE DATE

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer recently created waves when he said that Project Natal would come out in 2010. The company quickly corrected Ballmer, saying that it didn't have a release date yet. However, Loose Talk heard – even before Ballmer's gaffe – that Microsoft is targeting a holiday 2010 release date for the technology. The company is planning a big rollout, and has already lined up a roster of select publishers who will support Natal at launch.

Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamerformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Microsoft-exclusive titles didn't always adhere to the level of quality we are accustomed to today. This early Xbox-only title came out in the second wave of games after the system's launch in 2001. Developed by now-defunct Stormfront Studios, this title put in the seat of a boat bristling with weapons looking to avenge your brother's betrayal. You graduate to other boats as the game progresses, but its vehicular combat gameplay remains staid throughout.

(Answer on page 27)



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



QUOTE

Hey, if Activision liked it, then they should have put a ring on it. Oh great, now Beyoncé is going to sue me too.

— Brütal Legend's Tim Schafer reacts to Activision's lawsuit against developer Double Fine to prevent the title's release. This is after Activision passed on releasing the game in the first place.



GOOD

Gamers can return to Monkey Island this summer, as Telltale Games is creating new episodes in the adventure series called Tales of Monkey Island. Five monthly chapters are planned for download on your PC and WiiWare, starting this July with Launch of the Screaming Narwhal.



■ Burnout Paradise developer Criterion working on a NFS game?

GOOD

Outgoing EA chief operating officer John Plessants dropped news that developer DICE has begun work on Battlefield 3 and that Burnout creator Criterion are working on a new Need for Speed title. The company isn't officially talking about either game yet.



UGLY

Electronic Arts admits it staged a religious protest of its Dante's Inferno title at the Los Angeles Convention Center during E3. Unfortunately, many people were too busy comparing Dante's Inferno to the God of War series to notice.



GOOD

EA is moving into the MMA space in 2010 with the imaginatively titled EA Sports MMA for Xbox 360 and PS3. The game will be developed by Madden-makers EA Tibarco, but due to rival THQ's owning of the UFC rights through 2011, EA's MMA title will have to cobble together a fighter roster of non-UFC dudes.



GOOD

GTA: Chinatown Wars hasn't sold well on Nintendo DS, but now Rockstar is trying to find more traction on the PSP. The game comes out on UMGD and via download this fall. Accommodating its new platform, Chinatown Wars will feature upscaled widescreen graphics, improved lighting and animation, and new story missions.

QUOTE

"We might want to consider if we support the console — and the PSP too."

— Activision CEO Bobby Kotick demands a PS3 price cut or else



games

GRAN TURISMO RACES FORWARD

NASCAR AND WRC ON BOARD

Sony showed off new Gran Turismo titles for the PS3 and PSP at its E3 press conference. Despite being an old franchise known for its stubbornness to change, it revealed some new tricks. Sony licensed the NASCAR and World Rally Championship brands for Gran Turismo 5, and the game will feature car damage for the first time in the series. Sony isn't saying yet whether it's merely cosmetic damage or if it affects the handling on your ride.



■ Looks like damage is finally coming to Gran Turismo!



PORTABLE GRAN TURISMO

The wait for GT on PSP is over. Featuring over 800 vehicle models, 30 tracks, 4-player ad-hoc online play, 100 events, and the ability to share and trade unlocked rides, this title has the robust feature set of a console-based Gran Turismo. The game debuts in UMD and download form on October 1, the same day as the new PSP Go.



THE FUTURE OF NASCAR

A few months ago it looked like video game stock car racing had run out of gas when EA Sports announced it ceased production on its yearly sim-based NASCAR title. The license now lives on in Gran Turismo 5, and Blake Davidson, NASCAR's managing director of licensed products, tells us GT 5 is just the beginning.

Sony and the racing association started talks around fall of last year, and Davidson says the footage we saw at E3 "is just a taste" of what's going to be in the game. Although he doesn't know exactly what's going on between Sony and NASCAR's various drivers, Sony is looking into including drivers in GT 5.

NASCAR's deal with Sony is not exclusive, which is the way NASCAR wants it to stay. Davidson says that the association is looking into a broader strategy of multiple stock car titles across different platforms and genres, and it is currently looking at which partners are the best fits for each category.

Sim-racer fans will be happy to hear that this spring NASCAR joined forces with iRacing for an online racing series starting in 2010. Members of venerable racing developer Papyrus are behind the game.

Davidson also says that a PC sim-racing deal is in the works, and that NASCAR hopes to have a console sim-racing game – not including GT 5 – out in holiday 2010 or early 2011. Could this be the return of EA or even NASCAR Heat developer Monster Games? Davidson says that as far as EA Sports goes, NASCAR is "not having active conversations with them about any sort of sim product."

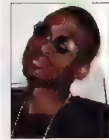
TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
PETER JOHANSSON
Lead Game Designer, Eidos

- 1 Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time – Nintendo 64
- 2 Shadow of the Colossus – PlayStation 2
- 3 Halo – Xbox
- 4 Resident Evil – GameCube
- 5 Super Mario World – SNES



READER
ELTON JONES
South Ozone Park, NY

- 1 Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening – PS2
- 2 Marvel vs. Capcom 2 – DC
- 3 Resident Evil series – Multi
- 4 WWF No Mercy – N64
- 5 Gunstar Heroes – Genesis

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists... Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Responses We Expect To Hear From Milo

- 1 I don't understand. Can you rephrase?
- 9 Ouch! Stop it!
- 8 Are you sure there's a treasure at the bottom of the lake?
- 7 Now that I have your username, can I get your password?
- 6 Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain
- 5 No, I haven't seen Old Yeller. Why do you ask? And where's Kate?
- 4 Seaman sucks
- 3 Please stop handing me pictures of genitals
- 2 I'm afraid I can't do that, Dave
- 1 No, I'm not Fable III

Name That Game Answer: Blood Wake

altered beast





Photo: Ed Carreras

alive, id, Epic, Harmonix, Crytek, Starbreeze, Double Fine, Grasshopper. The list of top-tier developers working with Electronic Arts' publishing branch EA Partners is impressive, and gamers reap the benefits of this partnership with a steady stream of great titles. But how did EA overcome its reputation as an IP-devouring corporate beast to become the champion of independence?

Whether it's acquiring shares of Ubisoft, buying up exclusive sports licenses, or attempting a hostile takeover of Take-Two Interactive, Electronic Arts certainly knows how to craft an image as a corporate monolith. But for over a decade the company has been working behind the scenes to cultivate talent in the little guys they're supposed to be crushing.

Top to Bottom, Left to Right:

Tim Schafer, president and founder, Double Fine Productions
 David Byrne, vice president of business development Europe, EA Partners
 Steve Nix, director of business development, id Software
 Scott Lynch, chief operating officer, Valve
 Doug Lombard, vice president of marketing, Valve
 Dave Jones, creative director, Realtime Worlds
 Sinjin Bain, vice president of business development worldwide, EA Partners
 Frank Gibeau, president, EA Games Label
 David DeMartini, senior vice president and general manager, EA Partners
 John Riccitiello, chief executive officer, Electronic Arts

It's easy to assume that EA Partners has only been around for a few years. The third-party publishing wing of Electronic Arts didn't really push the name all that much until promoting a string of top-tier games like Rock Band, The Orange Box, and Crysis in 2007. Now EAP takes its own slice of EA press conferences for big partner announcements and holds its own press events separate from the internal catalog. The

division has actually been around in the background for quite some time under the former moniker of EA Distribution. To initially head the division, EA found someone with plenty of experience in the business of signing top talent.

By 1997, Tom Frisina had co-founded and left two game companies, Accolade and Three-Sixty. His list of big hits included Hardball, Mean 18, Test Drive, and Harpoon. But he bowed out of Accolade due to disagreements with the other owners and Three-Sixty "wound down" in 1994. Frisina worked as a consultant for three years following until he got a call from a business that had invested in Three-Sixty in the past: Electronic Arts.

"Why don't you stop your consulting business and do for Electronic Arts what you were doing on the outside when you were running Accolade and Three-Sixty?" Frisina recalls them asking. "Essentially forming relationships with successful developers around the world, and building and publishing games."

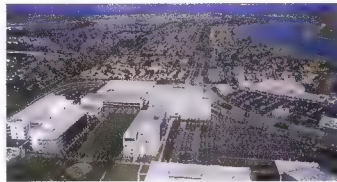
It didn't take long for Frisina to settle into his position

at the subdivision called EA Distribution (EAD). "After being there for two or three weeks, I said, 'I think what you guys really want me to do is to focus on product categories that EA Studios is not that successful at building,'" Frisina says. "Goldeneye had just come out shortly before that on the N64 and was a runaway global hit on that platform, but EA didn't know how to build a first-person shooter at that point – or role-playing games. I said, 'That's where I think EAD ought to focus.'"

He signed his first deal with Looking Glass studios for two projects: Flight Unlimited III and Irrational Games' System Shock 2. Not long after, he locked down the James Bond rights and teamed EA with MGM Interactive. After a few months of working with the studio, Frisina became familiar with the rest of MGM's lineup and offered his professional opinion. "I encouraged David Bishop, the leader of MGM Interactive, to kill those four titles – because I and my cohorts at EA didn't see any return on the investment of all the money they were putting in – and to focus all of their energy on building Tomorrow Never Dies." MGM followed suit and appreciated the frank business advice. Frisina used the momentum to pursue more deals.

EA had a previous deal running with Dreamworks Interactive, publishing The Lost World: Jurassic Park 1997 to modest success, but the two companies had a rough time agreeing on the next project. "EA wasn't really very interested in carrying on a relationship with DreamWorks because they weren't doing the kind of things the studio wanted to do," Frisina recalls. "So they said, 'Why don't you take over the relationship with DreamWorks and see if you can create something bigger?'" Frisina kicked around some ideas with

the developer until they hit a clear winner. "Steven Spielberg wants to make a video game version of Saving Private Ryan. What do you guys think about that?" Frisina remembers. "Well I thought that was just a s--- hot idea." Medal of Honor opened to tremendous success, and EA later bought DreamWorks Interactive.



EA Redwood Shores, the home of EA Partners

Frisina's next big project came out of a meeting with Swedish developer DICE. "I saw what Battlefield 1942 was looking like in prototype form and I flipped out and thought that this was going to be the next great thing for the industry," Frisina says. EAD signed a deal with DICE in 2000, releasing Battlefield 1942 and Battlefield Vietnam to huge sales before acquiring the developer outright in 2004.

Several years and game deals later, then-President and COO of EA John Riccitello pushed for a new name for EA Distribution. "It became apparent to John when I started reporting to him in 2003 that we needed to make this EAD thing a much more global entity, more than just an offshoot of the distribution business," Frisina says. "We needed to call it something more appropriate. I talked

1997
EAD kicks off new chapter under Tom Frisina and Nancy Smith – EAD changed from being a pure distributor partner to full publishing [development, marketing, etc.]

1997
EAD and Dreamworks Interactive sign deal for publishing of licensed games

1997
EAD and Dreamworks Interactive ship The Lost World Jurassic Park

1997
EAD and Looking Glass Studios sign deal

1997
EAD and Looking Glass ship Flight Unlimited III

1997
EAD, Irrational Games, and Looking Glass Studios ship System Shock 2

1999
EAD and Dreamworks Interactive ship Medal of Honor

2000
EAD, MGM, and Black Ops ship 007 Tomorrow Never Dies

2000
EA buys Dreamworks Interactive, merges them with Westwood to form EALA. MGM goes internal to EALA

2000
EAD, MGM, and Black Ops ship 007 The World Is Not Enough. Afterwards EA takes development of Bond license internal to EA Redwood Shores



to my cohorts in Europe, Australia, and Japan, and we came up with the name EA Partners." The change was subtle, yet fitting as it more accurately reflected the business philosophy of creating partnerships with talented developers based on mutual interests. "We didn't change anything in terms of the personnel, business model, or mission," Frisina says. "We just changed the name."

In 2003, John Riccitiello started making grand claims about EA Partners, stating he anticipated raising the revenue up to a billion dollars by leveraging relationships with huge independent developers normally wary of working with publishing juggernauts. But before he delivered on his promise, Riccitiello left the company in 2004 to create Elevation Partners, a private equity firm that invested in new intellectual properties in the entertainment space.

CHANGING COURSE

With the main advocate of EA Partners gone, the company focus swung back to internal development, leaving many of the partners frustrated. "With EA, personally we found the situation unworkable," said Oddworld Inhabitants co-founder and president Lorne Lanning in issue 194 of Game Informer. "We found that if the publishers don't own your IP, they don't have any incentive to push your game...That's not a business relationship. That's a master-slave relationship - one that we had no interest in continuing."

In the same year Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath was released (2005), EAP landed a major coup, working out a distribution deal with Valve after the developer had a falling out with Vivendi Universal. The partnership continues to this day, with nearly a dozen games

released. "EAP's ability to work uniquely with third-party developers is perhaps its greatest strength," says Valve marketing VP Doug Lombardi. "For every developer, the range of valuable services a publisher can offer from its global operation will vary. However, EAP is one of very few organizations inside of any leading publisher that is specifically designed to be extremely flexible in this regard and still able to leverage a worldwide and world-class organization."

In early 2007, Senior VP and general manager of EA Partners David DeMartini and EAP's VP of worldwide business development Sinjin Bain took their business model in a more complicated direction by signing a deal with MTV Games and Harmonix to produce Rock Band. The team also benefited from the return of John Riccitiello as CEO and new EA Games label president Frank Gibeau, both of whom DeMartini cites as "two of the biggest advocates of independently developed games in our organizational structure." The world-wide EAP staff runs lean at just over 50 people.

Why the shift from despised publishing partner to an attractive distribution broker? DeMartini describes some previous EA relationships as two people with their hands on the wheel trying to drive the car. "At the very least you're probably going to get into some kind of disagreement with regards to who's oversteering, you or the other person," DeMartini says. "You're probably both right, and you're probably both wrong." But now, DeMartini claims EAP rides in the back and only give directions when asked. "If they don't need the help, then we're happy to sit in the back seat and enjoy the ride," he says. "Based on the partners that we have it's usually a very successful journey."

New Talent



Michael Capps, president of Epic Games, about the surprising partnership.

How did talks with EA Partners first start in regards to your upcoming project with People Can Fly?

We've been friends with the guys at EAP for years, but haven't had a title to discuss. We first started pitching a very early version of this IP to publishers at the Leipzig Games Convention in 2007, and it was clear that EAP was a perfect fit for the project.

For this new IP there are three players involved: People Can Fly, Epic, and EA. How do you break down the responsibilities of creating and releasing the game?

People Can Fly is the primary developer of the game. Those guys have been making kick-ass shooters for a decade now, and we're super excited to have them be part of the Epic family. EA handles all the traditional publisher duties, like marketing, distribution, testing, PR, and generally making sure that everyone has a copy spinning on day one. Our job at Epic is to help wherever we can to make this a great game, and to be thinking about the long-term franchise.

Do you plan to continue to work with EA Partners on other future products?

We always say there's no free ride - the only way a publisher, contractor, or service provider keeps our business is by continuing to earn it every day. But I can certainly say, if they keep performing like they have been, we'll be working with EA for a long time.

JAN 2003
EAD and DICE announce partnership for Battlefield 1942

FEBRUARY 2000
EAD and New Line announce deal for the Lord of the Rings license. Development started externally at Stamford, but then went to EA Redwood Shores

NOVEMBER 2004
EAD, Fox, and Radical ship The Simpsons Road Rage

APRIL 2005
EAP and Free Radical announce TimeSplitters deal

APRIL 2005
EAD and DICE ship Battlefield 1942

APRIL 2005
John Riccitiello, then COO and President of EA, remains the group EA Partners

APRIL 2005
EAP and Oddworld Inhabitants sign deal for Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

MAY 2005
EAP and DICE ship Battlefield Vietnam

JUNE 2005
EAP and Crytek announce partnership

SEPTEMBER 2005
John Riccitiello leaves EA to form Elevation Partners

SEPTEMBER 2005
EA buys Battlefield developer DICE





The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, Starbreeze's most recent project, was bounced from Vivendi Universal to Atari. The Darkness moved from Majesco to 2K Games during production. So it's easy to understand why the company would look in its next game, with the stability of EA, Starbreeze CEO Johan Kristianson explained the advantages of the relationship.

When did talks first start with EAP?

We started talking right after we released the first Riddick game in 2004. We talked about an original IP that we had created at Starbreeze. Our studio was sort of in a panic state at that time. We didn't have any revenues and our cash was quickly running out. Then we got a really good offer ready to sign from Majesco, because we were also pitching The Darkness project in parallel, and we decided to go with Majesco. But we kept talking to EAP ever since 2004 to find the right opportunity. Then we found this Project RedLime and all the stars were aligned. That project worked out really well, so we then signed the Bourne project with EAP as well. Now everyone at Starbreeze is working on these two projects with EA. We're about a 100 people in the studio now, split about 50/50 between these two projects.

Has anyone online guessed the real "classic EA franchise" of Project RedLime?

There's been a lot of speculations around what Project RedLime really is. I've even seen websites where they have voted for different likely alternatives. Last year after that announcement there were some guys with binoculars that were spotted outside our office, looking into our windows.

Which EAP services are you using for RedLime and Bourne?

I think we're getting the full service package on both deals. Some EAP partners have just the distribution deal, but we get the whole enchilada.

So they do distribution and marketing?

Yes, and QA and localization. Pretty much the whole package.

To companies like Oddworld Inhabitants that feel scorned by past dealings, DeMartini promises things have changed. "I think the only way you can improve as an organization is to sometimes accept the harsh criticism of your past partners," he says. "I think our success in the last two-and-a-half years speaks volumes to how EA is as an overall organization, having that ability to look at what we're doing right, and what we're not doing right, and then be nimble enough to change the behavior."

GAINING MOMENTUM

The proof of the partnerships' success is astounding, with 22-percent of titles rated 90 or higher by Metacritic since 2005 being EAP projects — 13 games total. "That's a lot of home runs within the portfolio," DeMartini proudly proclaims.

One EAP title not in that percentile is Hellgate: London, whose servers were shut down just over a year after it was released, serving as proof that the system isn't bulletproof. "We are sad that it didn't work out, because that game had tremendous creative energy behind it," DeMartini says, admitting that the game needed several more months of development. "We just need to make sure that we don't do that again because it killed the franchise and it killed the studio. We're in the business to help people grow and not to help them be put out of business."

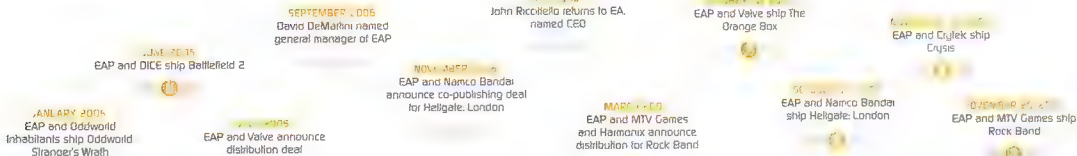
EAP's deals vary from each partnership, ranging from straight retail distribution to full co-publishing where EA is funding, assisting with design, and handling ports (see the PS3 version of The Orange Box). It all depends on what the developer wants, and rarely are two deals the same. "We laugh and say there's no such thing as a deal

that's not complicated when EAP is involved, because we're signing star free agents," DeMartini says. "Of course that complexity is always worth it because these are the cream of the crop, absolute best of the industry. They've got their ways of doing things and it's incumbent upon the publisher to zig to their zag."

One such developer is recent signing Double Fine. "EAP seems to really believe that it's best to let creative people be creative, and that means a lot to me," says president and founder Tim Schafer. "They have never tried to get between me and the game — but when I need feedback about what's working and what's not, they have resources to get that data for me."



Does all of this focus on knockout third-party games take away the luster of internal properties? Signal Hill Analyst Todd Greenwald thinks so. In an evaluation of EAP he claimed that these high-profile projects "speak to EA's marketing and publishing strengths, but [don't] say much for their development talent." He also says that the



HARMONIX



distribution deals have thin margins and that "it's indicative of the fact that they are not able to develop enough of their own titles to meet their revenue and earnings goals, that they need to fill in the gaps with these distribution deals."

EA Games label president Frank Gibeau disagrees. "I think what these analysts aren't taking into account is that [EAP] has a very different risk profile; we're not carrying those bodies on our payroll," he says. "So once the product ships, we're not paying the salaries of the employees of third-party development in terms of headcount or burn rate on R&D. And if we don't sign the deals, we're going to compete with them anyway, so why not participate?"

WE COME IN PEACE

Despite its impressive standing, EAP still has to prove every day that the company reputation of a bottom line-driven, emotionless corporation machine isn't entirely accurate. "Our executives can walk in and talk to them about what's great in their product, what they liked about the last one, and understand what the feature set is, and [try to prove] that we're not as bad as the reputation that we unfortunately built up in the late '90s and the early 2000s," says Gibeau. "It's a new team. It's a new way of approaching the business that cares about the product, and we're not here to screw you or assimilate you."

"We don't have to own everything," DeMartini adds. "It's like asking the same question, 'If a developer is really good, [should we] go buy them and bring them in-house?' No, we don't. I don't want to own anyone's IP anymore, I want to continue to provide a level of service

that makes them proud to say they're working with EA Partners."



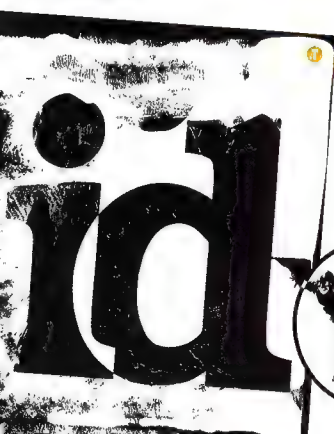
This philosophy seems to be paying off with the latest string of top developer partnerships. Grasshopper Manufacture is counting on EA's expertise in the western game market to help make a larger impact than Suda 51's past quirky titles with its new horror game (recruiting Resident Evil mastermind Shinji Mikami doesn't hurt either). Prior to id Software's recent acquisition by ZeniMax, EAP was able to win the prestigious developer away from its longtime publisher Activision with Rage. After selling millions of copies of its Gears of War franchise with Microsoft Game Studios, Epic Games is bringing its new People Can Fly developed shooter to EAP. Even though Crysis was a slow burn to 1 million in worldwide sales, Crytek is continuing the relationship with EAP for Crysis 2, hoping to capitalize on a new multiplatform release philosophy.

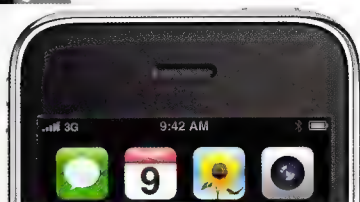
But there are only so many well-funded indies in the world like these. What happens when all of the big boys are spoken for? "There are new ids and Epics and Valves and Harmonixes evolving every day, and you need to be out there in front of those trains," DeMartini says. "Three years ago people might not have highlighted Crytek. Now Crytek's in the conversation with the top five developers in the world. Look at it like a baseball analogy - you need to sign superstar players that are already established, but you also need to have a great farm system."

Areas EAP is looking at strongly right now include Asia and Eastern Europe. "You need to be looking for potential partners worldwide," DeMartini says. We've established an accepted philosophy where we will look at any game, and we will give you honest feedback on any title. Even if it's unlikely that we're going to publish it, we'll have you in for a visit, we'll take a look at the software, we'll give you our honest feedback." If they can find the next Valve, it'll definitely be worth it. "You've got to kiss a lot of frogs to find a few princes," DeMartini says.

In the end, EA certainly has a great program in place to help top independent developers make the best games they can. But how long can this ideal program last? In the past all it took was a change from pro-indie management for the dust to start gathering on EAP. And as long as EA is a publicly held company, it's got to satisfy the shareholders whether that means eventually buying up some of these developers or once again turning the focus to internal projects. We can only hope that the continued success of the current EA Partners program earns enough profit to keep the corporate beast at bay.

- APR 2008**: EAP and id Software announce partnership for Rage
- AUG 2008**: EAP and Grasshopper Manufacture announce partnership
- SEP 2008**: EAP and Valve ship Left 4 Dead
- NOV 2008**: EAP and Starbreeze announce partnership for Jason Bourne game
- DEC 2008**: EAP and Realtime Worlds announce distribution deal for All Points Bulletin
- FEB 2009**: EAP and Epic/People Can Fly announce partnership
- FEB 2009**: EAP and MTV Games ship Rock Band 2
- MAR 2009**: EAP and Double Fine announce partnership for Brutal Legend
- MAR 2009**: EAP and Spicy House announce partnership for Alice 2
- MAR 2009**: EAP and Crytek ship Crysis Warhead
- MAR 2009**: EAP and MTV Games ship Rock Band Unplugged
- APR 2009**: EAP and Starbreeze announce development of Project RedLine

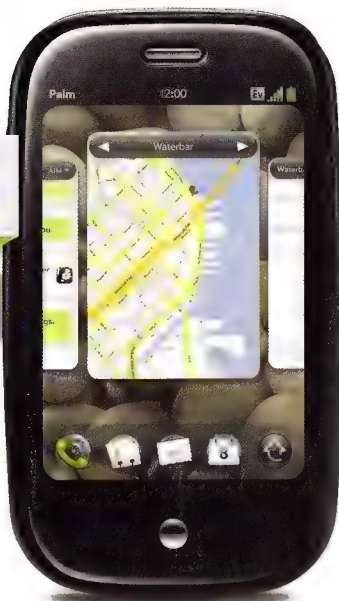




BATTLE OF WITS



VS.



We quiz time: Apple iPhone 3GS or Palm Pre? To see which smart phone passes the test.

IPHONE 3GS (AT&T)

SUPRE ★★★★★★★

Apple's latest iPhone revision sets the bar higher than ever. The new model has a faster processor, improved 3G speeds, video, voice control, longer battery life, and more. Coupled with the launch of the 3.0 software update, the iPhone once again solidifies its position as the current innovator in mobile tech. In our tests, the handset lived up to the hype in terms of performance improvements across the board. We loaded the highly addicting Peggle almost 60 percent faster than the previous hardware. Web pages also loaded quickly, thanks to faster data speeds and significant improvements to Safari. The previous selling points of the iPhone are still in full force, including the huge selection of apps and built-in iPod functionality.

\$199.99 (16GB), \$299.99 (32GB) • www.apple.com

PALM PRE (SPRINT)

★★★☆☆☆☆

Palm has been one of the biggest players in the smart phone space, but the rise of companies like Apple and Google have forced the company to play catch up. The result? The Palm Pre, which boasts WebOS, offers one of the slickest operating systems ever to fit into your pocket. Merging thoughtful design with great functionality, the OS comes armed with push notifications and robust messaging support out of the box. The Pre's physical design doesn't fare as well. The tiny keyboard makes it a challenge for people with medium to large thumbs to type, and the current version of WebOS doesn't feature a soft-keyboard alternative. The capacitive multi-touch display is bright, sharp, and responsive, however. With its own App Catalog already chalking up nearly a million downloads and fantastic support for consumer-level email like Gmail, the Pre is worth a look for people who want an Apple alternative.

\$199.99 (8GB) • www.palm.com



toys

MEZCO HELLBOY BPRD BUDDIES

These cutesy versions of Hellboy and his crew show the harbinger of the apocalypse's cuddly side. Each figure stands approximately two inches tall. The full package of eight includes: three versions of Hellboy, Abe Sapien, Johan, a Golden Army Soldier, Prince Nuada, and his troll sidekick Wink.

\$40.00 • www.mezcotoyz.com

pc

HP FIREBIRD

MINI PC *****

A trimmed down version of last year's Blackbird, HP's new Firebird is a well-dressed PC with one of the quietest liquid cooled systems we've ever heard. Add dual Nvidia GeForce 9800GS video cards in SLI configuration and you have a sexy black box that's still powerful enough to play *Crysis* on mainstream settings. Built using small form cards and a slot-loading DVD burner, the Blackbird retains a more ergonomic frame, but it also makes the machine more difficult to upgrade. For those worried about their carbon footprint, the Firebird is an efficient device, and HP claims it might cut your power bill down by as much as \$30 relative to another high-end PC. A few USB slots up front would have been nice, but the Firebird's balance of size, power, and performance make it an ideal machine for those who just want a plug-and-play PC.

\$1,649.99 • www.shopping.hp.com/voodoo



toys

TRANSFORMERS COMBINER CLASS DEVASTATOR

We'd love a life-sized animatronic Shia LaBeouf, but we'll settle for Hasbro's awesome line of Transformers toys. The most exciting of which is this Constructor Class Devastator, which doesn't hit stores until late August. Composed of six different vehicle figures, this monster measures well over a foot tall, mysteriously has no wrecking balls, and will make all your other toys feel inferior.

\$99.99 • www.transformers.com

peripheral

LOGITECH WIRELESS MICROPHONE

Sure you'll lose the ability to swing the mic like a lasso at the end of every song, but you also won't trip up your guitar as he's crossing stage right. Logitech's new cordless microphone has an estimated battery life of more than 20 hours. Since it's a USB device, it works with most popular music games, including *Guitar Hero*, *Rock Band*, and *SingStar*. Don't try using it with *Karaoke Revolution*; sure it'll work, but it's embarrassing.

\$74.99 • www.logitech.com



media shelf



1. 100 Bullets Vol. 13: Will

The world is secretly run by an underground society of thirteen families who are at war. This Eisner Award winning series by Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso finally reaches its epic conclusion.

\$19.99 • www.dccomics.com/vertigo

2. D&D Eberron Player's Guide

The intrigue-laden Eberron campaign setting finally gets the 4th edition D&D treatment, which includes a new artificer class, three new races (including the war-forged), and new rules for alchemy and dragonmarks.

\$29.95 • www.wizards.com

3. Dollhouse: Season 1 Blu-ray

Nerd Buddha Joss Whedon (*Firefly*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) has a new show about people who can be programmed with any skill. Start watching it before it's canceled.

\$69.99 • www.foxstore.com

4. Robot Chicken: Star Wars - Episode II

No one lampooned Star Wars nearly as well as Robot Chicken. Masterminds Seth Green and Matthew Senreich return for another round of cheap shots in this hilarious Adult Swim special.

\$19.98 • www.williamsstreet.com

5. Transformers: The Complete First Season 25th Anniversary Edition

This touching historical drama details the account of an epic, poetic war between sentient robots who possess the ability to disguise themselves as everyday vehicles.

\$24.98 • www.shoutfactorystore.com

ANDREW REIMER
EXECUTIVE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER



Having a game play itself is an odd idea, but it could have a huge impact on player progress in almost every type of game.



GAMES THAT PLAY THEMSELVES

Take a look at your video game library. How many of those games have you completed? How many of those games did you intend to complete, but abandoned because their challenges became too difficult or repetitive? How many role-playing stories have you dedicated dozens of hours to without seeing their endings?

I've always prided myself on completing most of the games I play. Sometimes it is a labor of love; other times it's labor for labor's sake. The sense of accomplishment that comes from topping a difficult boss is a large part of what makes video games alluring. But, even as someone who welcomes a challenge, I often find myself thinking a particular fight is ridiculous, that the design is working against the player, or that I wish there was a way to skip a particular section of a game. While I'm a poster boy for shelving my social life for a night with a boss battle, the reality is that most players do not finish the games they play.

The ultimate goal for game developers is to create an experience that blends challenge with accessibility. How this is achieved is still a work in progress for the majority of the industry. Most developers still rely on a difficulty level system that allows players to select their skill level at the outset of play. Others implement adaptive AI that adjusts on the fly to your struggles or towing achievements. The most controversial yet highly praised innovations in this field are BioShock's vita-chambers and Prince of Persia's saving hand of grace. Both of these games basically wave a white flag in terms of finding a balance between accessibility and challenge. I loved both of these games, but couldn't shake the feeling that I

was cheating in both of them, as neither penalizes the player for failure.

Sucking challenge out of a game is disheartening for a player like me, but for newcomers or the skill-free, being able to complete games that would normally be outside the range of their ability must be a rewarding experience. Developers also get the gratification of knowing that the majority of players are seeing the entire game to which they dedicated years of their lives.

At this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Shigeru Miyamoto detailed another option, one at which I immediately scoffed. In Miyamoto's upcoming Wii title, New Super Mario Bros., players can activate a function currently dubbed "demo play." When activated, this mode plays the game for you. It is intended to help stuck players get to the next section of the game. After giving this idea some thought, I realized this might be the white whale developers have been trying to spear since the inception of games.

Yes, you will have to swallow your pride when using this mode, but look at the alternatives. You'll either lose hours of your life attempting the same challenges over and over again, or say "the hell with it" and shelve the game permanently. Swallowing your pride to see more of a game doesn't seem like such a bad thing.

All demo play is doing is lending a helping hand when players need it most. This functionality shouldn't destroy your gaming experience; it's another option that developers can use to assist players. Games could still feature adaptive AI and as many difficulty levels as they want. BioShock's fiction wouldn't be strained by the idea of only one person

being able to respawn in Rapture. Persia's acrobatic Prince could finally feel the pain of falling on a spike.

As on board as I am with this concept, whenever I say "demo play" I hear it in Emperor Palpatine's deep, yet strangely alluring voice. The temptation of knowing that this functionality is just a few button presses away would likely drive me batty. But in a day and age where all of our gaming is tracked through Trophies and Achievements, demo play doesn't need to be a digital heart beating beneath the floorboards. For a lot of games, if using demo play led to the disabling of Trophies and Achievements, they wouldn't use it unless a challenge had gotten the best of their skills and sanity.

Having a game play itself is an odd idea, but it could have a huge impact on player progress in almost every type of game. Plus, it's already here in different forms. Guitar Hero ships with all of its songs unlocked, Rock Band gives players the option of turning on "no fail" mode, and Alone in the Dark's format allows players to skip to the next gameplay chapter. Is the concept of demo play any different?

New Super Mario Bros. is the latest test bed for this idea. It may die with this lone release, or it may spread throughout the industry. As long as developers put in the proper checks that ensure players won't abuse it — or moreover, feel the temptation of it — more gamers will probably finish games. Perhaps then these disgruntled gamers won't feel put off by sequels to games they never completed. If this is the case, the upside of demo play greatly outweighs the downside. ■ ■ ■

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.

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GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra - 06/14

NEW RELEASES
 • Brave: A Warrior's Tale - 360, Wii
 • Brave: Shaman's Challenge - DS
 • The Graveyard Book - PS2, PSP, DS
 • G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
 • Hannah Montana: Rock Out the Show - PSP
 • Phantom Brave: We Meet Again - Wii
 • Wolfenstein - PS3, 360, PC



04
Risk: Halo Wars
 Halo fans, your dreams of controlling a Flood carrier form have been answered. In Risk: Halo Wars, you can conquer territories as the Flood, or compete against them as the UNSC or Covenant. This reasonably priced set consists of 290 game pieces (including Proto Graveminds and Scorpion Tanks), and offers three different ways to play.

06
 If you want to go see *Gladiator: The Rise of Cobra* it's probably because you have fond memories of *Star Wars* and *Star Wars: Shadow*. Maybe you forgot what the cartoon was really like. Remember when Sephiroth killed Duke by throwing a snake at him? How about Cobra? Or Sgt. Slaughter? Don't let your blind love of ninjas (or Dennis Quaid) get you into trouble, folks. If this movie is anything like the TV show, it will be terrible. Go see *Transformers* again!



GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra



Madden NFL 10 - 08/11

11
NEW RELEASES
 • Fatal Fighters - DS
 • Mana Khemia 2: Fall of Alchemy - PS2
 • Madden NFL 10 - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
 • Raze Squad: Hidden Dagger - 360, PC
 • SBI Life 2 - PC

12
 The return of Captain America produced a collective yawn from the comic book nation, but Marvel's latest re-launch, Ultimate Comics Avengers, is gaining a passionate buzz. Ren Reeves has sold his jeans over many other things (including seeing a plastic spider on his desk), but we back him on his latest spidey. Scribe Mark Miller is penning this tale, which brings Nick Fury back into the fold. Trust us, you won't want to miss this one!



14
 Hayao Miyazaki's latest film, *Ponyo*, opens in select theaters today. We don't know what it's about, but here's our guess: It's a whimsical, coming-of-age story in which a young boy/girl (not distinct) does heart-warming things, and learns a valuable lesson. There will also be talking animals. *Disturb* 9 also opens today. It has aliens, and a "Peter Jackson Presents" credit. Remember Peter Jackson?



Ponyo



Fallout 3 Broken Steel/Point Lookout - 08/18

18
NEW RELEASES
 • Cruise Ship: Vacation Games - Wii
 • Daisy Fuentes' Plates - Wii
 • Fallout 3: Game Add-On Pack: Broken Steel/Point Lookout - 360, PC
 • Paw and Claws Pet Vet - Wii
 • Paw and Claws Pet Vet: Australian Adventure - DS

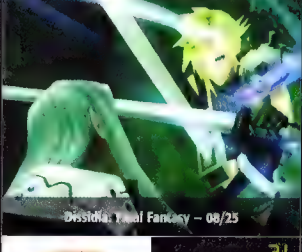
19
 At one point in the DC universe there was only one "Bat" character. Now, there seem to be hundreds, including a Bat-Mite. To pollute the pool further, DC is introducing a new Batgirl. What happened to the other Batgirl? This issue should tell all. All we know is that she is new to Gotham, yet seems to have a tie to the Bat family.



21
 Quentin Tarantino may not be able to spell (as demonstrated by his new film, *Inglorious Basterds*, opening today), but he knows talent. We are referring, of course, to B.J. Novak. He was on *The Office*. We're not sure which character he was, but that show is damn funny. This movie has some other no names in it, like Something Something Pitt, and Samuel L. Windu. You should go see it. You'll find new ways to use the F-bomb.



Inglorious Basterds



Dissidia Final Fantasy - 08/25

NEW RELEASES
 • Batman: Arkham Asylum - PS3, 360, PC
 • Cabala's Big Game Hunter: 2009 - PS3, 360, Wii
 • Dissidia: Final Fantasy - PSP
 • Hardy Boys: The Hidden Theft - Wii
 • Metro: Prime Trilogy - Wii
 • Professor Layton & the Diabolical Box - DS
 • Rapala: We Fish - Wii
 • Red Faction: Guerrilla - PC

26
 • Section 8 - 360, PC
 • Sony PSP Disturb Bundle
 • Ultimate Game Party - Wii
 • Vicarous of Waverly Place - DS



Want more Halo? Marvel's second Halo series, *Helljumper*, launches today!

28
 If you like watching stupid teenagers die in grisly Rube Goldberg-style accidents, go see *The Final Destination* today. If you like watching stupid teenagers die at the hands of a love-wielding mite, go see *H2: Halloween 2*. Instead, if you don't like watching teenagers die at all, good for you. Loser.



H2: Halloween 2



31
 Do you collect stupid things you find at truck stops? Do you have too much money in your checking account? Why not buy a life-size plush lion from Steiff Studio? This hideous spare waster (retailing for \$3,999.99 on Entertainment Earth) either looks like a truck too many transponder darts to the face, or is based on a sketch from a five-year-old. If you buy this item, please send pictures our way for GI Spy consideration.

august

For more information on these games and others go to www.gamesinformer.com



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC | MAC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)

> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS

> **DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE

> **RELEASE** TBA

RAVAGE

WELCOME TO THE WASTELAND

“Where’s the Emmy?”

Tim Willits asks several pockets of employees as we tour the hallowed halls of id Software’s Mesquite, Texas office. The co-owner and

creative director of the company shows us everything from the original toy shotgun used in *Doom* to the darkened floor where *Doom 4* is currently in development. As we settle in to a spacious conference room, several scouts pop in and out with leads on the last known location of the prestigious award. Miss Donna, the longtime office manager and “id mom,” appears triumphantly at the door holding a beat up black box. Inside is the familiar gold statuette bestowed on the company for “the development of 30 software engines.”

If the wayward Emmy had more room for text it could mention id’s legacy of pioneering the first-person shooter and online multiplayer deathmatches. Since its inception in 1991, id has found incredible success with only a handful of franchises – most notably *Wolfenstein*, *Doom*, and *Quake*. The company hasn’t released a major in-house-developed project since 2004’s *Doom 3*, and hasn’t launched a major new game franchise in 13 years. *Rage* represents a new chapter for the company – serving as the first showpiece for the groundbreaking id Tech 5 engine and the company’s first attempt at open world gameplay, driving, and, well, an honest-to-goodness story.

Enter the wasteland as we take you through a full hour and a half of straight gameplay and address the burning questions that have remained unanswered since *Rage*’s initial announcement two years ago. Just don’t ask when it’s coming out.

“We want to do something different,” says creative director Tim Willits. “We’ve done Doom, Quake, and Wolfenstein and they all have a very solid formula. We want to take that solid formula, that first-person action we do so well, and expand it. We want to have a richer story. We want to have more character interaction. We want to have a much larger world.”

This larger world is set approximately 80 years after a devastating asteroid collides with Earth and kills most of civilization. That isn’t to say that humanity wasn’t prepared. Governments around the globe banded together to enact the Eden Project, burying hundreds of pods, or “arks,” beneath the ground containing a dozen people each. Like the crew of a ship, each member has a specific complementary skill that would help rebuild society once they emerge from cryo-sleep. That’s how it was supposed to work, anyway.

An earthquake cracks open your character’s ark before the scheduled time. The rest of the crew is dead, and all of the onboard data is ruined, leaving him no clue as to what he’s supposed to do once he reaches the surface.

“In the very beginning of the game when you wake in your ark you step out [we want players to be] like, ‘Yeah, this is an id game. This looks like a space station. I’ve played Doom. This is cool,’” says Willits. “And as soon as that door opens it’s like, ‘OK, this is different.’”

Our demo starts a couple of hours into the game, but the bright skies and wide open canyons still have the intended startling effect to anyone who’s shotgunned his or her way through id’s traditional pitch-black corridors. Our character is standing



Multiplayer

Rage’s open world driving and shooting seems like the perfect setup for versus and cooperative multiplayer.

“We do have some plans for multiplayer, but it isn’t something that we want to get into now,” says creative director Tim Willits. “We need to make sure everything’s rock solid before we talk about it because we’d hate to say something and have to remove it or change it and it comes back to haunt us. But we are focused on doing something cool that fits in the Rage universe.”

by an old shack, and a radioactive green swamp looks to be the only water source for miles around. Inside the structure we meet Crazy Joe.

“You seen a mutant yet?” asks the weird old prospector. “Them are just like you and me. When the space rock hits, the unlucky few on the surface started changing. They were crazy days. Didn’t have no time to get deeper, I suppose.”

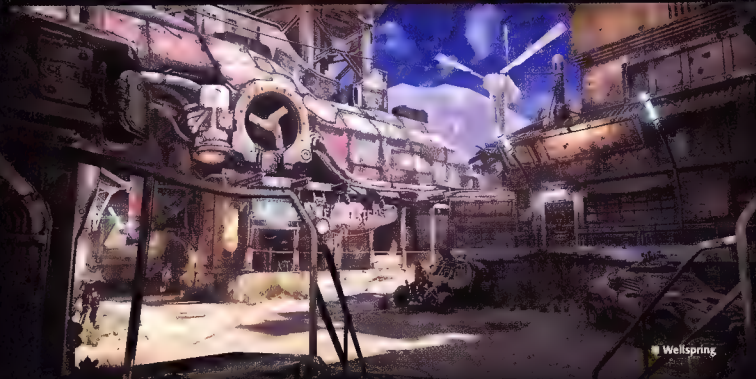
Joe warns us to run if we see one so we head outside and, of course, a mutant is atop a distant rock structure scanning the horizon. Willits, who’s manning the controls, equips a tri-tipped boomerang called the wingstick. He gives it a toss

and it takes a wide arc through the canyon before cutting down the distant enemy and flying back to our hands. With the danger out of the way, we hop in a nearby dune buggy and blaze over the dry, desert landscape.

“Unlike in other games, where vehicles are disposable, in Rage we want your vehicle to be really an extension of your first-person avatar,” Willits says. “The neat thing about the buggy is that you had to earn it. It wasn’t given to you.”

“It’s like when you turn 16,” lead designer Matt Hooper adds. “It’s somewhat beat up and stuff, but it’s your vehicle.” Players start with an ATV, which provides very little defense, and must fight bandits for parts and perform jobs to earn money to get the buggy up and running. Now that the buggy is functional, our latest task is to deliver a message to the mayor of Wellspring.

After a quick scuffle with some bandit buggies, we arrive at our destination. Wellspring is a well-fortified Western/Asian fusion themed town that serves as your home base for the first half of the game. As we maneuver through the streets, we’re met with suspicion for both our stranger status and the fact that we’re wearing an ark suit. Turning in an ark survivor is a rare opportunity to earn a hefty reward from a mysterious group called The Authority. “You hear whispers of them when you arrive and people are concerned about them, but you don’t know much about



Wellspring

Continued on page 42

Sizing Up The Wasteland

Open world games in particular beg the question: How big is it? Id remains vague on the size and length of the game. "It's as big as it needs to be [in order to be] cool," says lead creative director Tim Willits. "Doom 3 was too long. You always want to give people a focused, fun experience."



■ Rage's hero is a nameless, silent protagonist



Continued from page 40

them," Willits says. "You're out to learn what their true purpose is."

On the way to the mayor's office, we pass a no parking sign that has been altered to read "no peeing." The local bar, adorned with stuffed mutant heads, shows broadcasts of current races and episodes of hit show Mutant Bash TV. Mayor Clayton is a jovial sort, welcoming you to his town. The message you deliver for your previous employer requests help with bandits.

"He must really respect you to give you this important job, so for now I'll trust you, too," Clayton says. "You can stay here at Wellspring. I'll give you supplies, but not dressed like that. You'll bring The Authority sniffing around and I sure don't need that."

We head over to the Outpost to cover our conspicuous attire and, even though we didn't see it ourselves, the outfit you choose has some kind of effect throughout the rest of the game. But that doesn't mean Rage has a range of moral choices. "We don't have a good versus evil choice," Willits says. "That's not the game we wanted to play because we always end up playing the good guy, which is odd for [id]."

"We wanted to focus on 'I like racing,' 'I like stealthing,' 'I like adventuring and finding things,'" Willits adds. "Those are the choices that we wanted to give people."

Moving forward another couple hours, we're tasked by the Wellspring sheriff to destroy a bomb factory run by a bandit clan called The Shrouded. This group specializes in crafting small remote controlled cars with explosives attached to them. They're a real pain in the ass to

everyone crossing through the northern lands so you've got to put an end to their production. We head over to mechanic Mick's garage to grab our custom buggy and hit the road.

Currently, the minimap in the upper right corner looks like a top-down satellite photo of the desert terrain with a red dot highlighting our objective. The developers are still tweaking the guidance system following one prime directive. "We don't want the player to be lost," Hooper says. "Tim and I call it 'open but directed.' You know that you have to go [to an objective], but if you see something that's interesting you're free to go and explore."

Nonetheless, we take a direct route to the factory and encounter some hostiles along the way. At this point in the game, our offensive options are a pair of chain guns attached to our buggy and a trusty front rammer. We blow up a couple of vehicles in a hail of bullets and play chicken with the next, swerving out of the way at the last second. An arrow indicator on the back of our buggy informs us of danger from the rear, so we pull the handbrake for a quick 180-degree turn. A hit of nitrous rockets us forward and we ram the bandit at full speed, turning his car into a massive fireball. We make it to the factory in rough shape, but at least we didn't need a tow back to the garage — currently the only way to repair vehicle damage.

Once inside, a heavy door is blocking the way. A small vent looks to be the only way forward, so we pull out the blueprints on how to build our own RC car bomb. This engineering system allows players to build everything from wingtips to lock grids provided they have the plans and the

parts. Steering the small RC car through the tight corridor works exactly like driving full sized vehicles, except now we can self-destruct at the touch of a button. Blowing up the first bomb cache makes a hole large enough for us to fit through and proceed.

A Shrouded bandit is walking away from us down a hallway and we pull out a crossbow to take him down quickly and quietly, showing that Rage has a stealthy side in addition to id's trademark balls to the wall action. Eventually, players can earn alternate ammo types and weapon upgrades like scopes and aiming stabilizers. The crossbow in particular shoots a projectile that allows brief control of the enemy before blowing him up.

At the press of a button, four weapon slots appear, corresponding to the directions on a d-pad. Willits selects the machine gun and moves on. In fact, the entire demo is being played with an Xbox 360 controller plugged into a PC — a stark change for a developer with such a strong PC legacy.

"We don't let them use the mouse right now because the largest chunk of our market's going to be on the consoles," says id co-founder and technical director John Carmack. "That's actually a pretty strict dictum around here. Tim will go around and whack your hand with a ruler if you're using a mouse playing the game. I mean, yes, you can use the mouse for it, but it's critical that the controller be the way that we design the game."

We approach the fallen foe and tap a button over his body. A loot screen

Continued on page 45 >>

Replay Value

"[Rage] won't be like Doom 3, where you killed the bad guy and that was it — turn the game off and you were done," says creative director Tim Willits. After the main story is complete, players can continue to explore the world, earn all the upgrades, go for achievements, and compete for the best times on the racing leaderboards.



The Blu-ray Issue

Since Rage is running on the powerhouse id Tech 5 engine, the developer is having a tough time squeezing everything onto standard DVDs for the PC and 360 releases. "We would love to set the thing up where it filled one Blu-ray disc versus three DVDs, which is about the right mix, but the game just... we can't cut it into a third size that," Carmack says. "We can cut it into two pieces. We've got two large waste-ands on there. We just couldn't make an arbitrary cut. But Doom 4 is being set up so that it's almost certainly going to be cut up to three DVDs versus one Blu-ray. At least they've got the ability because of the way it's structured"



■ Mayor Clayton



■ The enemy bot functions like a temporary co-op partner



Where's The Mac Version?

Though the Mac was one of the four announced platforms for *Rage*, we didn't see a live demo of it in action.

"The Apple version is not there because we are behind on it probably by about a week," says lead programmer Robert Duffy. "Up until we started getting really busy on getting the first look build together we were keeping it up to date, running every day. Apple and Nvidia just made a driver pass for us not too long ago — got it up to speed. But keeping it up, building and compiling and running usually falls to me and since I've been busy on other stuff I haven't."

"We're treating it as a first class system," he continues. "The plan was to have it up running around in Wellspring. But it's all there. It's building and compiling. Looks good!"

Console Comparisons

During our visit to id, we saw *Rage* running on PC, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360. From our brief glimpse, they all looked quite comparable, though the color saturation on the PS3 version was not fully tuned yet.

PC:

"You can run a higher resolution, more anti-aliasing, and you've probably got faster page in times on the textures but it's essentially the same game across all four different platforms."

—John Carmack
id founder and technical director

PS3:

"We're getting along with the PS3 really well. We took a lot of time early on in the development cycle on learning it."

—Robert Duffy
lead programmer

"There's a little bit more theoretical raw performance on the PS3, so we've got a little bit more headroom."

—John Carmack

360:

"The 360 was easier to certainly get to where we are right now. More sweat equity had to be put into the PS3."

—John Carmack





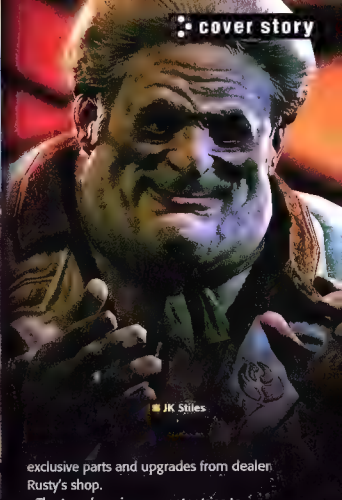
Continued from page 43

appears showing what kind of ammo and items we can swipe. Getting rid of flying boxes is one of the many small changes id is making as it modernizes some of its longstanding conventions. Another is the inclusion of regenerative health.

"I don't want to get into it too much, but you, as an ark survivor, have certain physical characteristics that make you special, one of which is the ability to heal," Willis says. "Your heart has functionality that, even after you die, you can bring yourself back to life. So you are more special than just a generic kind of guy. You have special physical characteristics."

Clearly outnumbered as we approach the next room, we set up a turret to distract the guards as we move to cover. With the turret chipping away at the foes' health, we move to a flanking position and finish them off with little effort. For the next group, we use a small sentry bot equipped with a machine gun to take the brunt of the damage before we enter the room. We toss a couple of grenades in to weaken their position, sending a few bandits flying through the air in the process. We throw out a wingstick and the bandits jump and roll out of its path. However, this also means they've left cover, so we mow them down with shotgun blasts. All that's left now is to blow up the second cache of bomb materials and we're out of there.

We pull back into the garage in Wellspring and have Mick fix up our ride. In the final game, he'll offer congrats on the latest completed mission and point you towards any new developments in town. Since we've got experience driving around the wasteland, now it's time to see if we can handle going pro in the racing circuit. Placing well in these events nets us racing certificates that can be used to purchase



JK Stiles

exclusive parts and upgrades from dealer Rusty's shop.

The town's racing promoter tries to lure us in. "Greetings. My name's Jackie Weeks and I'm the impresario who runs all the high speed races in Wellspring... and I do mean all of them," he says. "If you're interested in testing your skill you can go talk to my business associate over there, Slim."

We sign up for a three-lap race on a stretch of abandoned highway to the south. Instantly, we're at the starting line alongside three opponents waiting for the green light. No one starts with any boosts or ammo, creating a mad scramble for the power-ups strewn about the track. Hostiles shoot at racers as they pass by. We whip around a couple turns, ram a rival out of the way, and grab some bullets. We unload into the back of the next racer, but lose him as he grabs some air from a ramp in the latter section of the track. However, it's not long before we catch up and transform his ride into a massive flaming wreck. We place first, taking home 15 certificates plus a few more for taking out other racers along the way. A deep parts system allows players to bump up stats like acceleration, suspension, and traction. Other tweaks include boost upgrades, a magnet that draws power-ups towards your vehicle, and new combat options like tire rippers, bombs, and EMP shields.

Other early race examples range from solo time trials to six-man rally races through the wasteland, possibly driving RC bomb cars. Right now, however, we're interested in the top prize for a high profile race only open to sponsored drivers. To earn a sponsorship, Jackie drops a tip that Mutant Bash TV may be looking for a driver.

We hit the wasteland again in search of the television studio. A massive sign

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John Carmack Speaks Out

On The Flashlight

"Doom 3 did wind up having this set of things we identified that were problems for people. It was a very dark game. We had to be very careful because every light you added added cost on there, so we were always trying to only have two or three lights present on any given surface. I still look back and horribly regret the whole flashlight decision about not having it as a continuous thing. I was all paranoid about, 'Oh it's killing our frame rate. We've got performance issues,' and stuff like that."

On Leaving The Corridors

"I decided to do an outdoor game - and that was one of the other knocks against Doom 3, is it was all tight, confined, indoors. Even when Quake 4 opened it up a little more, but still clearly it was an indoor engine. That's what I did; dark and indoors. We wanted to step away from that. We've opened it up so that we can do these vast, huge, open spaces with the big wastelands, and the vegetation, and the big mountains and all that stuff going on there, which we didn't have the capabilities to do before."

On Texture Tech

"[Mapping] technology evolved with Rage into a much more general purpose, pagged virtual textured system where we can use it with everything in the game - practically; the characters, the vehicles, the landscapes, the buildings are all done with virtual textures. So, from a run-time perspective, there is no limitation on how much texture you can use. I had one of the new artist hires come up and just thank me for giving him this ability to do whatever he wanted with textures, and how at his previous job he was always beat down about the texture limits. Now they can just kind of go crazy."

On Console Focus

"We've never targeted consoles in our primary platform before. Doom 3 was designed around the Xbox 1, and I still look back as one of our other tragic mistakes in that period, which was not doing the Xbox version in-house, but working with another company and having it come out separately. We should have done it together, because we are doing that here and we know exactly what we've got to aim at. [Current consoles] are not going to get better in a couple of years, so we better make sure the game behaves the way we want it to today."

On Changing Roles

"I am very much a figurehead of the technology side of id, but I have an awesome team behind me on the system side. It's true that up through the development of Quake III basically I wrote everything. I would have one assistant programmer that would work with me on different aspects of things there, but now I work on this little section of this smaller section of this huge code base. It's too much for any one person to be involved in at a detailed level. That is how my role here has evolved. Robert is the lead programmer because he's the one that manages the fifteen programmers doing all the different things here, so I can still sit and make contributions to the code and the technology."

On iPhone Games

"Then again it's been a ton of fun for me recently to go and do some of the iPhone project work on Wolfenstein 3D Classic and Doom Classic. Which is the complete switch around, where every aspect of it is dependent on me. So it's kind of fun to switch gears in that different space. I actually have a technical plan for us to be able to leverage the id Tech 5 pipeline on the iPhone. If people don't mind downloading half a gig or so, we can make something that looks really freaking incredible."





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and freaky down face entrance welcome us inside. Portly producer JK Stiles is surrounded by a multitude of monitors and swivels around on what looks to be a futuristic perma-toilet to greet you (can't miss a moment of the show, you know).

"You want a sponsorship and I need a contestant," Stiles says. "The game is easy. You enter my little arena and the game begins. The rules are pretty simple. Kill or be killed. Make it through alive, give me a good show, and you'll have your sponsorship. Easiest sponsorship in the wasteland. You ready?"

Like that we're shuffled into a gloomy hallway. The game show announcer's voice crackles through the speaker system. "Welcome to Mutant Bash TV: the show where carnage is king. We've got a fresh new competitor here today! A live crowd cheers with delight watching some far off real-time feed.

In the first room, mutants stream out of doors and holes in walls. We use a shotgun to keep them at bay and a satisfying "ka-ching" sound effect rings out for each kill. The next room is decorated in a jungle motif and mutants jump from branches toward us. A giant spinning fake gorilla rotates around the room, its multitude of blades grinding up any mutant or contestant that gets in its path. Room three contains an oversized slot machine with randomly appearing targets to shoot that grant bonus cash whenever

three dollar signs are lined up. The final area, dubbed "shipwreck cove," features random spikes springing up through the floor, forcing us to keep in constant motion as we blast mutants. Once they're all taken down, a final door rises and a massive mutant with a tentacle arm charges out. He whips it around forcing us to take evasive action, toss grenades, and unload some buckshot. Eventually he goes down and we are presented with our payday: \$755. We're welcome to try again to better our accuracy, total time, and slot machine prowess. Either way, we can tag new mutants out on wasteland plains as we come across them so that Stiles can add to his house of horrors.

So ends the demo of id's latest game. But that doesn't mean we didn't gather hints as to what's in store later in the game. Looking over concept art, we see crashed airliners in the desert and stranded ships in bone dry former seabeds. Moving beyond the wasteland, there appears to be some dead cities and a dark neon subway colony.

"Historically, in a lot of the id games, the story starts right when you show up and it's over at the great finale at the end," Willis says. "We really wanted to try and create a Rage universe. We don't necessarily need to do Rage 2, 3, 4, 5. But we can do games within the Rage universe that people are familiar with. Star Wars does a great job of this. The environment and the character and the history of the world, we want that to be just as important as the story that you play through. Characters will tell you backstory. The Authority and how it's presented will lead to the fact that they have a place in the past and the future. Even the big climax at the end is definitely a good endgame, but it leads to something that could be bigger and greater later on." ■■■■

When It's Done

It's one of the few developers in the world that has complete flexibility on when to release its products. "It's impossible to nail down exactly when things will wrap up so we'll still keep [the release date] up in the air," says creative director Tim Willits. "But we are making good progress."

"It's actually a luxury we have, and hopefully gamers will appreciate it because we get to put on that layer of polish," says lead designer Matt Hooper. "That when it's done" thing that means a lot to id. It always has. It's not just John's pat answer to annoy people."



Go to www.thefirstimpact.com and enter the password "General Cross" to access further details on Rage. Also, check out this month's Game Informer Unlimited for info on id's recent buyout by ZeniMax.



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



XBOX 360

Splinter Cell: Conviction

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE FALL

THE FISHER KING

No perfect formula exists for making a great game. Even a game from an established studio with solid concepts can sometimes turn flat during development. Sometimes to do a project right, you need a little extra time. *Splinter Cell: Conviction* went through such a trial, but it looks like the extra incubation time was well spent, because the game emerged at this year's E3 looking like one of the most polished titles of the show.

In 2006's *Double Agent*, Sam Fisher's only daughter was killed by a drunk driver. In *Conviction*, new evidence surfaces that leads Sam to believe that Sarah was killed as part of a

more elaborate government plot. The game starts with Sam looking for clues, hot on the trail of an arms dealer named Andre Kobin.

From the get-go, it's obvious that *Conviction* is focused on delivering a brutal and fast-paced gameplay experience. The demo starts with Sam kicking one of Kobin's enforcers into a public bathroom's urinal. The other men in the room scatter as Sam's opponent draws a gun, but Sam is faster than the man's trigger finger and wrenches the man's arm into an awkward angle. The stray bullet chunks into a nearby wall. A man on a toilet fumbles for his trou-

sers as Sam throws the goon against the stall's wooden door. In *Conviction*, most areas feel alive with activity. But Sam is focused on the man in front of him. His hand wraps around his victim's throat as he barks, "Who killed my daughter?"

Sam's gone rogue. He doesn't have friends back at Third Echelon chirping in his ear anymore. In order to give players all the relevant information they'll need, Ubisoft devised a novel projection system. As Sam interrogates his victim, several pictures of Kobin flash across the walls of the bathroom. These are visual representations of the thoughts



■ Sam's lone wolf status means that sometimes he has to MacGyver his way through events. For example, near the beginning of the game, Sam smashes the side mirror off a nearby truck and takes the glass so he can look under doors.



■ The projection system gives players their objective and helps guide them through the game.

going through each character's head. This projection trick is used throughout the game to direct players through the levels, provide contextual flashbacks, and accentuate dramatic moments.

Once Sam has the information he needs, he throws the man's face through a porcelain sink, and we get to see how smoothly Conviction transitions from one scene to the next. The camera zooms in on the blood in the sink. With a snap it zooms back out, but now we're looking at a painting inside an art gallery. The camera continues to zoom out, passing backwards through a keyhole until we see the outside of the

building. This is Kobin's mansion. The camera winds past several guards, down a nearby city street, and around a dark alley where we see Sam step into view and the controls are back in the players' hands. The whole transition flashes by in a matter of moments, masking the game's loads better than the elite super spy himself.

Being a lone wolf, Sam no longer has easy access to many high-end government weapons. However, he's still a formidable opponent thanks to a few handy spy tricks. One new feature, called Last Known Position, displays a shadow in the last position where Sam was seen. While enemies are focused

on his former location, Sam can sneak up behind guards and take them out with a variety of close combat takedowns. These hand-to-hand maneuvers earn Sam the opportunity to mark and execute targets. With this skill, Sam can queue up targets then execute them in quick succession. We see Sam look under a door, marking a light and a guard. After hitting the execute button, he kicks down the door and shoots out both targets in a matter of seconds.

Let's just hope Sam doesn't sneak past his fall release, because we've been waiting long enough to play what's looking like one of the best games of the year. ■ ■ ■

PLAYSTATION 3

The Last Guardian

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER TEAM ICO > RELEASE 2010

MY MONSTER AND ME

Playing *ICO*, did you ever wish you could ride piggyback on Yorda's shoulders instead of holding her hand? In *Shadow of the Colossus*, did you ever try to befriend a towering Colossus, only to be pummeled into dust? Team *ICO* sympathizes with you. The *Last Guardian* combines thematic and gameplay elements of *ICO* and *Shadow of the Colossus* to provide the framework for a friendship of epic proportions.

The game hinges on the tale of a young boy and his gigantic animal friend. The boy's safe keeper is a humongous yet graceful beast that could be described as a giant puppy with horns, feathers, talons, and a furry tail. Despite looking like a failed attempt at a zoo-themed jigsaw puzzle, the colossal creature tugs heartstrings with its enormous doe eyes. The boy and his beast are rarely seen apart, indicating a strong emphasis on cooperation throughout the game. The boy clutches onto the beast's fur in order to ride safely through land, sea, and air. Terrain navigation looks similar to the way *Shadow of the Colossus*' Wanderer climbed patches of grass on Colossi. The animal also appears to help his human companion in platforming sections, elevating the boy to lofty ledges. To motivate the creature into cooperation, the boy tosses barrels of food into the giant's maw, which it then promptly chews apart. It will be interesting to see how deeply the caretaking mechanic develops. Hopefully, Team *ICO* isn't taking any cues from the dance sequence in Peter Jackson's *King Kong*.

The beast is unquestionably powerful. In one sequence, it knocks an unsuspecting sentry into oblivion with one tremendous talon swipe. The behemoth also appears

capable of enduring quite a beating, its entire body is peppered with arrows and spears from past conflicts, jutting out like acupuncture needles. The feeding interaction combined with the boy's ability to climb all over the beast leave open the possibility of caring for his guardian's wounds, potentially adding another layer to the relationship.

The boy is not always accompanied by his protector, however. Several instances show armored guards patrolling ancient ruins, with the protagonist sticking to the shadows. As the boy is completely unarmed, we assume stealth will be one of his go-to tactics. In one instance where conflict cannot be avoided, the boy is shown hurling a barrel at a guard, which sends him reeling back into a support beam that breaks and causes a shelf packed with barrels to avalanche.

The environments trade the rolling plains of *Shadow of the Colossus* for acres of archaic ruins. The architecture is so detailed it looks as though Team *ICO* pieced each structure together brick by digital brick. The landscapes are indisputably dumbfounding, but the critter is the real eye-turner. The majestic monster has been rendered down to every last individual feather and hair, each one rippling realistically in the wind. All the footage from the E3 trailer (which you can view on gameinformer.com) utilizes the *Last Guardian*'s in-game engine.

If *ICO*'s history on the PlayStation 2 is any indication, *The Last Guardian* is bound to leave more jaws agape as information is revealed. What the development team did with *Shadow of the Colossus* was awe-inspiring, and that was last-generation technology. With the PS3 breaking down technical barriers, the possibilities with Team *ICO*'s next masterpiece seem to be endless. ■ ■ ■



■ The beast silently wonders if all his neck-arrows might look better sticking out of the boy instead



■ Round one: Fight!



■ The boy will need to step carefully when he doesn't have his guardian



■ The creature can help the boy reach otherwise inaccessible areas



■ One rusty chain can secure a hulking chimera, right?



■ Team Ico has a knack for developing relationships between its characters



■ "Who's a good boy who definitely won't die at the end of this game? Yes, you are!"

Wii

Super Mario Galaxy 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** TBA

GOING GALACTIC ALL OVER AGAIN

Nintendo usually introduces new Mario games about as often as the U.S. changes presidents. Since the SNES, each new Mario iteration has been a huge, system-defining reinvention of the series. While that's definitely made each new Mario game a major event, it's also been frustrating for fans who long for sequels to legendary games like Super Mario 64.

Like so many aspects of its highly successful Wii, things will be different this time around for both Mario and Nintendo. Super Mario Galaxy is seeing a sequel in this generation, though Nintendo hasn't confirmed a release date for Galaxy 2.

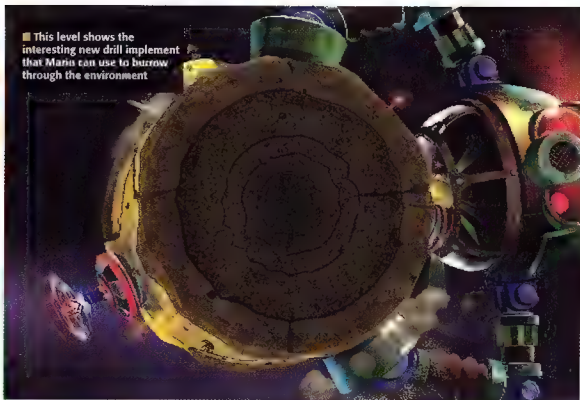
Nintendo hasn't revealed much about this game, but a well-received video that played during their E3 press conference gave a tantalizing view of what should be one of the company's most anticipated upcoming Wii games. The game looks to follow in the footsteps of its predecessor, using unique level designs to transform platforming clichés into fresh and inventive set pieces. The most exciting new gameplay feature allows you to

ride Mario's faithful steed Yoshi. After that, we saw glimpses of what will no doubt be another tour de force in platforming for the plump plumber.

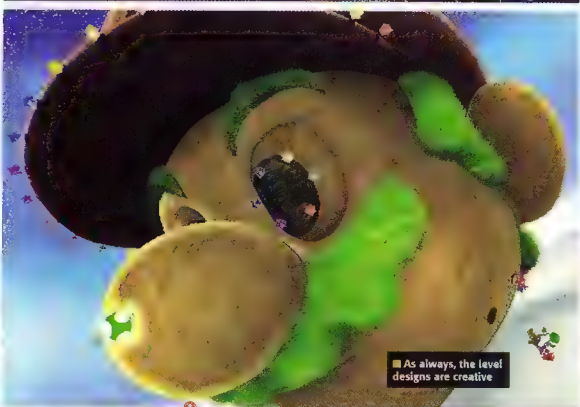
One of the new features that caught our attention was a drill type device that allows Mario to burrow through to the opposite side of one of the game's spherical or circular worlds. We also noticed ice levels in which Mario could hit a switch to change certain areas between ice and water. Similar mechanics allowed him to switch the world between black & white and color as well, although we don't know how this affects gameplay.

The already attractive game has received a boost on the visual side as well, as we saw huge enemies like giant goombas and a good deal more vegetation and plant life on some levels. Suffice to say, this is a welcome surprise from Nintendo, which seems to be going out of its way to make amends to the hardcore fans who felt slighted by last year's show. ■ ■ ■





■ This level shows the interesting new drill implement that Mario can use to burrow through the environment



■ As always, the level designs are creative



■ Those are some big Goombas




A screenshot from a Mass Effect 2 demo showing a character from behind, holding a glowing blue energy weapon. The character is in a dark, industrial environment with various pieces of machinery and equipment. The lighting is dim, with some blue and purple highlights from the environment and the weapon.

XBOX 360 | PC

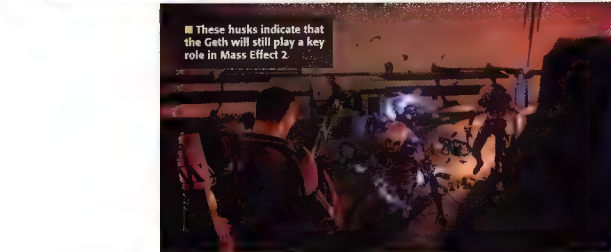
Mass Effect 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER BIONWARE > RELEASE EARLY 2010

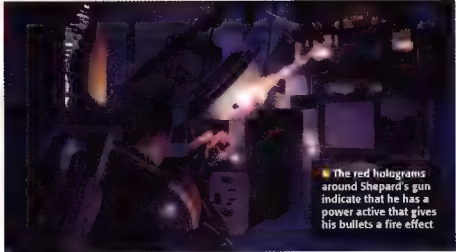
NOW RECRUITING

A screenshot from a Mass Effect 2 demo showing a character from behind, holding a glowing blue energy weapon. The character is in a dark, industrial environment with various pieces of machinery and equipment. The lighting is dim, with some blue and purple highlights from the environment and the weapon. A large, bright yellow and orange explosion is occurring in the background, illuminating the scene. A small figure is visible near the explosion.

■ During our demo, we got the impression that if Shepard does kick the bucket, Mass Effect 3 could continue regardless

A screenshot from a Mass Effect 2 demo showing a character from behind, holding a glowing blue energy weapon. The character is in a dark, industrial environment with various pieces of machinery and equipment. The lighting is dim, with some blue and purple highlights from the environment and the weapon. Several husks are visible in the background, some of which are glowing with a blue energy.

■ These husks indicate that the Geth will still play a key role in Mass Effect 2

A screenshot from a Mass Effect 2 demo showing a character from behind, holding a glowing blue energy weapon. The character is in a dark, industrial environment with various pieces of machinery and equipment. The lighting is dim, with some blue and purple highlights from the environment and the weapon. Red holograms are visible around the character's weapon, indicating a power active.

■ The red holograms around Shepard's gun indicate that he has a power active that gives his bullets a fire effect

Commander Shepard isn't dead. Despite rumors to the contrary, the galaxy-saving hero from the first Mass Effect is alive, well, and ready to take on a new mission in this highly anticipated sequel. However, Shepard isn't out of danger yet; according to BioWare, the Mass Effect 2 teaser trailer that hinted at Shepard's demise was meant to introduce players to the idea that Shepard could die during the game. Considering that the plot involves Shepard recruiting allies for an apparent suicide mission, it may even be difficult to avoid.

The story was the main draw of the original game, and BioWare's desire to include cinematic action and shocking twists hasn't changed. However, judging from our time playing Mass Effect 2 at E3, the gameplay supporting the epic sci-fi tale is undergoing

a host of improvements – particularly in combat.

Firefights have a more natural flow thanks to the way BioWare streamlined the issuing of orders to allies. Your two party members are each assigned a direction on the d-pad, and pressing that direction sends the character to whatever location you're aiming at. If you're targeting an enemy instead, pressing the d-pad directs your ally to use a pre-determined ability on your foe. This mechanic allows you to position individual allies and use their powers without having combat grind to a halt by pulling up the command wheel.

Shepard's combat capabilities are also more refined. The concept of overheating weapons has been scrapped, replaced by a more intuitive ammo clip appearing

under your crosshair (not circular) reticle. The supply of bullets for most weapons is still infinite – you just need to reload when your clip empties instead of managing the overheat meter. These enhancements alone could pacify many players who complained about the first game's gunplay, providing that BioWare backs up the changes with environments that take full advantage of their potential.

Addressing one of the most prevalent criticisms of the original, the team is creating more variety in all of Commander Shepard's duties, so it won't feel like you're raiding the same cookie-cutter bunker every time you answer a distress call. The role of the planet-roving Mako is getting a total overhaul; in addition to improved controls, aimless driving won't be such a major component of

missions and sidequests.

Despite all of the areas where fans cried for change, the huge following garnered by Mass Effect is a testament to the game's quality. The rich world and cool characters came together to create a riveting adventure, and gamers can expect more of those elements this time around. For instance, one new character is a penitent assassin named Thane, who brutally takes out a group of soldiers and his target – then prays for forgiveness. Scenes like these, along with the looming shadow of Shepard's possible death, lend Mass Effect 2 a darker tone. When you are the only hope for the galaxy's survival, making the tough calls is all a part of the job. ■■■



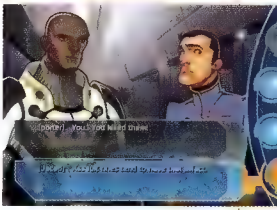
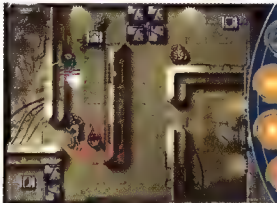
■ Certain heavy weapons have limited ammo that Shepard will need to collect



■ This Quarian looks awfully familiar. Characters from the first game will make appearances in Mass Effect 2, assuming they survived

THE SHRINKING GALAXY

Mass Effect 2 isn't the only new game in BioWare's rich sci-fi universe. The recently released Mass Effect Galaxy for iPhone expands the fiction with a side story about a character named Jacob Taylor. The game is approximately two hours long, focusing on story and top-down shooter combat. Though Taylor makes an appearance in Mass Effect 2, BioWare has assured gamers that one needn't play Mass Effect Galaxy in order to enjoy the full-fledged sequel.





PLAYSTATION 3

God of War III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER SONY SANTA MONICA > RELEASE MARCH 2010

BIGGER AND BIGGER

Centuars can command groups of skeletal soldiers, making them priority targets in large battles

CARRYING OVER

By looking at the screens, astute God of War fans should notice that Kratos still has a couple of the items he obtained in the previous game: The Golden Fleece is still on his arm, and he is still able to use the wings of Icarus. These mythical objects are being retained and integrated into Kratos' normal capabilities. For example, in addition to helping him cover distance with jumps, Icarus' wings now allow Kratos to fly vertically (with some help from steam vents). From what we saw, these high-speed sections resemble the Pegasus sections of God of War II, requiring quick reflexes to dodge incoming obstacles. The presence of these two items could mean that there is no Metroid-style power drain at the beginning of God of War III, but it seems unlikely that players will be able to use all of the spells and abilities gained in the last entry.



Kratos isn't the kind of guy who sets reasonable goals. When he goes after something, he aims high and over-delivers with unparalleled zeal and overwhelming brutality. The team at Sony's Santa Monica studio is adopting the same philosophy in developing God of War III, making sure that the final installment in the trilogy has Kratos performing the most barbaric kills and taking down the most terrifying foes of the entire series. If this really is the last chapter of the story, Kratos is certainly going out in style.

With one of the longest lines on the E3 show floor, the playable demo for God of War III showcased several new tricks Kratos uses in his continued assault on the gods and Mount Olympus. The core of the action is still using his flaming chain blades to tear apart mythological threats, but a few key improvements promise to make that process even more entertaining.

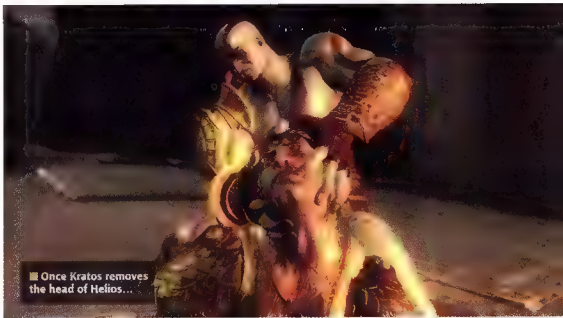
Where previous God of War games usually had Kratos fighting off advancing enemies, God of War III incorporates more mobility into combat, giving you more options to control the fight. When you grab an enemy, you now have a bull rush option in which Kratos holds the victim in front of him and plows

forward, breaking through clusters of other foes. The combat grapple also has more utility, since Kratos can throw his blades out to an enemy and pull himself into them (or pull them over, depending on the enemy). This works whether your target is on the ground or in the air. Mastering these crowd-managing moves will be crucial, since this entry can have up to 50 enemies onscreen at once.

Like previous installments, Kratos can use weapons other than his signature blades, but the team has currently only revealed one: the Cestus. This pair of vicious gauntlets is ideal for close-quarters fighting, and they provide a distinctly different feel to the combat — something that alternate weapons in God of War games have struggled with in the past. To further encourage variety in combos, certain special items (like the fire bow) draw from a recharging meter instead of your magic reserves. This gives players more freedom to experiment with combining the blades with other attacks, since the bar will just refill in a matter of seconds.

As much as we enjoyed testing out the new mechanics, we were most impressed by how God of War III continues to up the stakes in an already epic setting. We saw Kratos pull out a cyclops' eye, stab a chi-

mera with its own horn, and gut a mighty centaur — and that was just during standard encounters. With the massive titans waging war, more gods entering the fray, and Kratos determined to topple Olympus, God of War III will be packed with jaw-dropping moments worthy of passing into legend. ■ ■ ■



Once Kratos removes the head of Helios...



...it becomes one of his most useful (and bizarre) tools



Taking to the air is still a great strategy when faced with many enemies



THE PARISH

Now the black guy is also the old guy, and the office professional is wearing a jacket instead of a tie. Yep, Valve's really mixing it up this time around



XBOX 360 | PC

Left 4 Dead 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION | 2-PLAYER ONLINE > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER VALVE > RELEASE NOVEMBER 17

NOT AN EXPANSION

Valve isn't known for being a speedy developer. Even the six-year development cycle on Half-Life 2 seems paltry compared to the 11 years it took to release a Team Fortress sequel. So imagine the number of jaws that dropped when Valve announced it is releasing Left 4 Dead 2 only a year after the original hit shelves.

The game starts in Savannah, Georgia before the infection has hit critical mass. CETA posters hang on the sides of buildings encouraging people to wash their hands to prevent the spread of the virus. Players assume the role of one of four new characters — Coach, Nick, Ellis, and Rochelle — as they make their way to New Orleans along the swamps and back roads of the Deep South.

Like any good sequel, L4D 2 features several variations on the game's classic weapons. Silenced uzis, automatic shotguns, and new versions of the assault rifle are just a few tools players have to protect themselves from the infected. Scattered across the maps players can find a variety of weapon upgrades, such as incendiary ammo, which is a handy alternative to Molotovs when you're starting a zombie barbecue.

Melee weapons also make their debut. We got to play around with the frying pan, which is useful for knocking back enemies and clearing a path. The axe, on the other hand, comes in handy if you want to turn one zombie into many smaller zombie pieces. Some melee weapons even have special uses; if you sneak up behind a witch and plant the axe in the back of her head, you'll take her down in one hit.

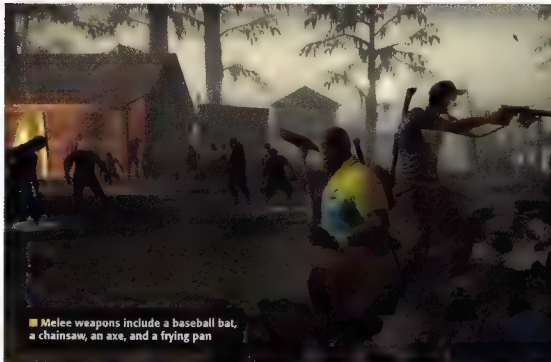
Each campaign area now has its own unique zombie unit. As we entered New

Orleans we ran across one of the locale's special hazmat zombies. When the city started to go to hell, some of the early relief workers showed up in hazmat suits. The extra padding didn't stop the virus from getting into these poor fools' bloodstream, but it does make their zombie remains fireproof, and you'll see them run unscathed through your defensive walls of flame.

Another nasty enemy type we ran across is called the Charger. The Charger is an over-all-wearing fat zombie who barrels into the fray and knocks over everyone in your party. Once the whole group has been brought to its knees, he jumps on the nearest survivor and continues pounding them against the pavement until he's eaten enough bullets to kill an elephant and finally keels over.

The Director — L4D's unseen master AI — takes full advantage of these new zombies. If your party is camping out on high ground, it might send a charger your way to disrupt your defenses and force you to change your strategy. The director is smarter in other ways as well. It will now make survival difficult by changing the weather effects or altering the pathing of a level, so you won't find yourself walking down the same battle-scarred streets every time.

When Valve announced L4D 2, certain fans in the community cited, saying Valve is milking its fans with content that should have been available in a patch. But with five new campaign maps, more than three new enemies types, and a whole new multiplayer mode the developer isn't willing to talk about yet, this "patch" sounds like a substantial upgrade to us. And it's not like getting more Left 4 Dead is a bad thing. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

The Beatles: Rock Band

> STYLE 1 TO 6-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER MTV GAMES/ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER HARMONIX > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 9

SIX OF US

Over seven months since The Beatles: Rock Band announcement, Harmonix finally debuted the game and songs to open the Microsoft press conference at E3. The most drastic gameplay change adds in three-part vocal harmonies to the guitar, bass, and drum mix. This enables up to six players to join in on songs, or allows instrument players to sing along with the help of a mic stand. To perform harmonies, players hook up three microphones and follow separate pitch lines located in the traditional scrolling vocal area at the top of the screen.

In our extensive time with a 10-song

demo of the game, we experimented with this new mechanic and tried out the upcoming wireless Lips microphone compatibility. Lead vocal lines appear in blue, and harmonies are orange and brown. Singers can go for any part they choose at any time, but the only way to get "Double Fab" and "Triple Fab" score bonuses is to hit all the respective notes at once. In addition to bringing more players into the game, the harmonies also provide a fresh challenge to music game veterans.

The game contains 45 tracks on the disc, with extensive DLC to follow. Harmonix CEO Alex Rigopulos confirmed that the entire

Abbey Road album will be available "shortly after launch." Players can work their way chronologically through the Beatles career or just hop into quick play to try out any song on the disc without having to unlock it or enter a code. No fail mode is now easily toggled on and off in the instrument select screen, so you won't have back all the way to the extras menu anymore.

We can't wait to get our own copy of the game back at the office, but for now we've compiled a list of confirmed on-disc and DLC songs in addition to some highly suspected tracks. ■ ■ ■

THE SONG LIST

ON-DISC

- "I Saw Her Standing There"
- "I Want to Hold Your Hand"
- "I Feel Fine"
- "Day Tripper"
- "Taxman"
- "I Am the Walrus"
- "Back in the U.S.S.R."
- "Octopus's Garden"
- "Here Comes the Sun"
- "Get Back"

Songs conspicuously appearing in the intro trailer

- "Paperback Writer"
- "Twist and Shout"
- "A Hard Day's Night"
- "A Day in the Life"

DLC

- "All You Need Is Love" (Xbox Live exclusive)

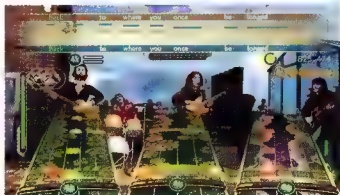
Abbey Road

- "Come Together"
- "Something"
- Maxwell's Silver Hammer
- "Oh! Darling"
- "I Am You / She's So Heavy"
- "Because"
- "You Never Give Me Your Money"
- "Sun King"
- "Mean Mr. Mustard"
- "Polythene Pam"
- "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window"
- "Golden Slumbers"
- "Cry Baby Cry"
- "The End"
- "The Long and Winding Road"

CAN'T BUY ME INSTRUMENTS

The new Beatles-themed instruments look and feel great, but without any knockout new features it may be hard to justify the price unless you're a huge Beatles fan.

- Limited Edition Premium Bundle: Hofner bass, Ludwig Rock Band 2 drums, microphone and stand \$249.99
- Rickenbacker 325 guitar: \$99
- Gretsch Duo Jet guitar: \$99



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Assassin's Creed II

> TYPE: 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE: NOVEMBER 17

THE RENAISSANCE

The eye-catching Assassin's Creed II had a fantastic showing at E3, committing to a November release date and wowing crowds with its stunning visuals and gameplay. The 15th century Italian setting is ripe for intrigue and action, and the development team has focused its efforts on improving gameplay diversity. If this chief dilemma from the first installment is addressed, this sequel may be something special.

The Italian Renaissance is rife with political and social unrest, a perfect setting for players to drop into the role of another ancestor to Desmond. New hero Ezio Auditore di Firenze begins the game with little training in the ways of the assassins, but you wouldn't know it from watching his rooftop antics. In our demo, we saw Ezio explore several new features unique to the sequel.

One of the coolest additions is the dramatically expanded

reputation and notoriety system. In a given city, Ezio's actions affect the way allies and enemies alike view him, which affects his ability to recruit distinct factions to his cause.

Whether it's the beautiful young courtesans of Venice or the street thugs of Florence, completing tasks draws these groups to your aid in a much bigger way than the first game. With their involvement, you can infiltrate well-protected areas, elude pursuing guards, or hide in plain sight.

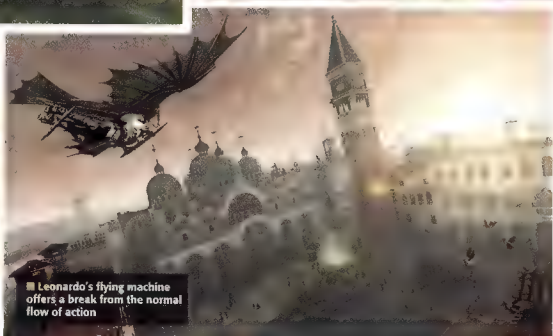
Combat is also receiving a dramatic reinvention. Our favorite new trick is the disarm, which allows Ezio to grab his opponent's weapon and strike him down with it. Pikes, swords, hammers, and maces all make an appearance, and each has its own animations, giving fights an authentic and varied visual style. What if there are too many enemies to take them all on at once? New tools like the smoke bomb allow Ezio to escape with panache.

World traversal, platforming, and navigation were strengths of the first game, and we didn't notice many dramatic changes in those departments. If anything, the silky smooth movement appears even faster and more fluid. Small adjustments to the control mechanic make taking enemies out on the run even easier; you can now pull them from ledges, or assassinate two targets simultaneously as you sprint. Perhaps the biggest adjustment is the addition of swimming, which should make the canals of Venice an intriguing set piece.

We can't hide our enthusiasm for Ubisoft's big holiday adventure. The development team recognizes room for improvement, and it's striving to tackle trouble spots head on. We'll know more about whether our high hopes are justified as we get hands on time with the game in the coming months. ■ ■ ■



■ Ezio's actions are personally motivated; he's on a quest for vengeance



■ Leonardo's flying machine offers a break from the normal flow of action

PLAYSTATION 3

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

STYLE | PLAYER ACTION | OFFLINE ONLINE | PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT | DEVELOPER NAUGHTY DOG | RELEASE WILL

DRAKE'S FORTUNES ARE LOOKING UP



■ In those same mostly city settings, the game has a lot of secret localities that have yet to be revealed



Uncharted 2 was one of Sony's standout titles at E3, and for good reason. Some of the biggest oohs and ahhs from showgoers came after Naughty Dog revealed its new single-player demo, which included some of the most detailed and remarkable visuals anyone's seen on the PS3 to date.

Nate Drake's adventure retains the tone and style of the earlier game, but he now has a bunch of new moves up his sleeve. The enhanced melee system delivers some bone-crunching sequences as the treasure hunter tackles enemies at close range. The cool depth of field effects for ranged combat also blew us away. When Nate aims his gun at a particular enemy, other characters and environmental details blur slightly, creating the illusion that Nate's eyes are focusing on his target.

The game's visual details are mind-boggling, as hundreds of dynamic objects in the world react to the situation at hand. Due to new technology being pioneered by Naughty Dog, every character and object on screen responds in real time as their environment moves around them. To show this off, the demo included a section where an entire building begins to topple as Nate scrambles to get out before being crushed. During the event, desks, chairs, dead bodies, and everything else in the room slides down the rapidly steepening slope. It's quite the sight to see in motion.

We'd be remiss to not mention the return of a familiar face.

While we knew Nate was now running around with bad girl Chloe, the return of Elena in our demo had us cracking some smiles. Love triangle, anyone? Apparently she now has a cameraman tagging along in dangerous situations, and, sure enough, he manages to get himself injured. We witnessed a great sequence where Nate helps the injured man make his way through an enemy-strewn city, slowed to a snail's crawl by the injured party. In what might be considered an expected plot twist, Chloe shrewdly recommends leaving the man to die, while sweet Elena won't hear of it. Who knew those two wouldn't get along?

Much of the multiplayer features have been revealed before, but they bear repeating. The five-versus-five team deathmatch mode works as you would expect, with players using cover and wall climbing to get the advantage over the enemy team. Plunder is a variation on capture-the-flag, where a single heavy treasure must be retrieved to home base. For us, the most exciting addition is the co-op mode, where three players fight through levels unique from the single-player campaign that focus more on action and combat than world navigation.

With the addition of multiplayer features, Uncharted 2 is a much larger and more complex game than its predecessor. Our time with the game left us confident that Drake's second big journey may be just what Sony needs to draw in PS3 doubters. ■■■■



■ Wall climbing and platforming add a cool twist to the traditional deathmatch



■ The three-player co-op mode emphasizes combat over navigation and exploration



■ ModNation Racers looks to fuse classic kart racing gameplay with forward-looking technology and features

PLAYSTATION 3

ModNation Racers

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** UNITED FRONT GAMES > **RELEASE** 2010

LITTLEBIGKARTRACER?

Following the success of LittleBigPlanet, Sony has made the creation-centered platformer's philosophy the linchpin of a new line of games it calls "Play, Create, and Share." While it promises a variety of gameplay styles, the common thread they share is a focus on player-created content, ease of play, and character customization. At the company's E3 press conference, we got our first look at the next title to embrace this new philosophy, ModNation Racers.

While it's clearly in the spirit of LittleBigPlanet, ModNation Racers definitely has its own identity. The character designs are infectious, inspired by collectable vinyl figures made by companies like Tokidoki. The game gives players even more options for customizing their character than LittleBigPlanet, down to tiny details like tattoos. Even better, you can also create and share your own vehicles. Developer United Front Games believes that the game will shine by giving players the tools to shape the game in any way they choose.

While the character and vehicle creation tools look state-of-the-art, the track creation mode impressed us the most, blowing the status quo out of the water. The creation tools look even more intuitive and easy-to-use than

LittleBigPlanet's level editor. Basically, creating a track is nearly as easy as playing a level of Mario Kart. We watched as the developers laid down a basic track by simply driving and letting the game autofill the track behind their vehicle. From there, nearly every aspect of the track was manipulated with a few easy paintbrush-style tools. You can create hills, valleys, or lakes instantaneously, and jump into a real-time playtest at any time. Placing power-ups and weapon pick-ups is as easy as clicking a button. The terrain and city-building tools blew the assembled crowd away. Creating cityscapes, forests, or mountain ranges to run alongside your track is as easy as dragging your cursor over the environment. Imagine how some games let you paint ground textures, but in this case fully modeled, procedurally generated 3D houses and buildings pop up instantly behind your marker.

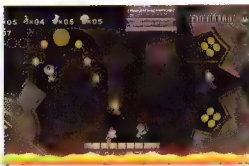
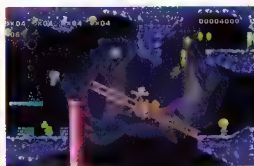
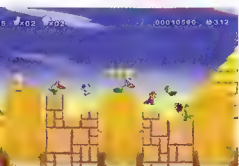
Even in a show packed with huge blockbusters, this brief demo stood out as one of the most impressive feats of the show. If the gameplay shows even half the potential of its customization tools, ModNation Racers might be the game that finally drags the kart-racing genre into the 21st century. ■ ■ ■



■ You can customize your character and vehicle in a mind-boggling number of ways



■ The game features some of the most intuitive and innovative level creator tools we've ever seen



Wii

New Super Mario Bros. Wii

> STYLE | TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE HOLIDAY

FOUR TIMES CLASSIC

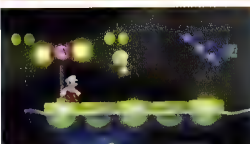
Nintendo's E3 press conference featured many surprises, but none were more welcome than the announcement of something we've been waiting for since the SNES era: an all-new 2D Mario platformer for a home console. For the generation of gamers brought up on Nintendo consoles, there's nothing that generates a feeling of old-school excitement like the sight of Mario or Luigi bouncing through a colorful level, knocking out koopas.

While New Super Mario Bros. Wii looks back towards a gentler era in gaming, it also pushes forward with one of today's biggest trends: cooperative multiplayer. Like *LittleBigPlanet*, this new Mario allows you and three friends to tackle a host of new and classically themed worlds together. While the game sadly does not feature online co-op, experiencing the four-player mode at the Nintendo booth during E3 gave us a lot to be excited about.

For one, the camera capably tackled the issues that come from having four independent players on one screen. The view pulls in and out very subtly, and at no point did we feel like the camera wasn't showing the action accurately. Sometimes keeping up with your teammates is part of the challenge, as in one vertical platforming level we played where you have to keep up or risk death. Thankfully, the afterlife is usually a short affair; deceased players quickly come floating by the other players in bubbles, at which point they can be popped back into play. There's no guarantee your friends will save you, as the game creates an intriguing balance of cooperation and competition.

The game plays remarkably like the Mario games we remember so fondly. Jumping, fire flowers, mushrooms — it's all here. However, the game trailers also show some interesting takes on old-school 2D level design, like circuit-based platforming puzzles, spinning hills, entire levels that list from side to side, and even a brief shot of the gang riding on the backs of large flying manta rays. We also saw two new forms of the classic power-up outfits introduced in *Super Mario Bros. 3*. The helicopter hat suit allows for super high jumps, and the penguin suit comes in handy in ice levels.

There definitely were bigger, more graphically impressive games at E3, but we'll be surprised if many of them are as anticipated as *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*. ■■■■



Wii

Metroid: Other M

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER PROJECT M/TEAM NINJA > RELEASE TBA

LIKE A NINJA

Despite her appearance in roughly a dozen titles over the course of more than 20 years, little is known about gaming's premier heroine Samus Aran. Where is she from? How did she become a superpowered bounty hunter? Who are the characters that made her what she is? These are just some of the questions that series creator Yoshio Sakamoto says he's addressing in *Other M*.

Sakamoto's team worked on the GBA *Metroid* games, and is joining forces with Team Ninja (*Ninja Gaiden*, *Dead or Alive*) to create an action-packed, story-focused *Metroid*. Samus bounces around the screen

like Team Ninja's signature character, Ryu. Hand-to-hand combat looks to be more important this time around, since in the span of a two minute trailer we saw Samus doing cartwheels through the air, putting enemies in headlocks, and tossing foes into walls.

But *Metroid* purists needn't worry that *Metroid* is losing its focus. Sakamoto promises this is a return to classic *Metroid* sensibilities. Nintendo's trailer also shows Samus laying on the deep freeze with her ice beam and performing a Speed Booster-like dash to smash through walls faster than the Kool-Aid man. *Other M* just shot to the top of our list of Wii titles to watch. ■ ■ ■



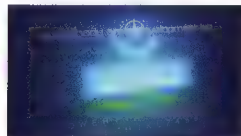
■ *Other M*'s story will take place between *Super Metroid* and *Metroid Fusion*. Hopefully we'll learn the origins of Samus and Ridley's epic rivalry.



PICTURES WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS



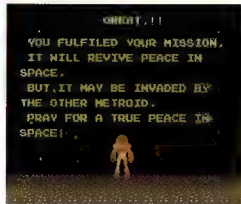
Nintendo already stated *Other M* returns to the style of *Metroids* past, but does that mean it plays like a side-scroller? Even though the environments are clearly in 3D, the brief gameplay snippets we saw made it look like Samus was moving along a 2D plane. One twist to this traditional style seems to be that Samus can now fire into the background or foreground as enemies approach her from any angle.



This screen flashed by too briefly during Nintendo's E3 trailer. Gamers have known for a long time that Samus isn't a normal bounty hunter. She is capable of contorting her body into a small ball and upgrading her abilities on the fly during missions. The video shows Samus talking with a female scientist. Perhaps she was once a test subject of this Living Body Arms Development Lab.



Nintendo isn't ready to abandon all the work pioneered by the *Prime* series. Portions of the trailer showed Samus shooting Space Pirates from a first-person view, but these scenes only left us with more unanswered questions. Can players switch in and out of this view at any time, or will it be confined to special first-person segments? Can Samus move around while looking through her visor? Will we still be scanning every terminal, enemy, and algae-covered rock we come across?



Players who beat the original *Metroid* were greeted with this screen. It was greatly overshadowed by the revelation that Samus was a woman, but if you read it carefully, the game warned about the possible invasion of "the other *Metroid*." Could the title *Other M* be a reference to this as-of-yet unseen threat?

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

BioShock 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (10-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
> DEVELOPER 2K MARIN/DIGITAL EXTREMES > RELEASE FALL

MULTIPLAYER?

■ 2K Marin is fully focused on the single-player campaign, with Digital Extremes handling the separate multiplayer project

Unless you've been in hiding the last couple of months, you probably already know the details regarding BioShock 2's sprawling new single-player opus. You play as the original prototype Big Daddy, years after the events of the first game, as the mysterious Big Sister seeks to restore Rapture. What you might be less familiar with is the newly announced multiplayer mode.

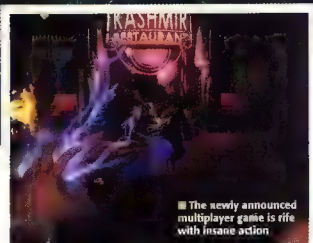
Developer Digital Extremes, which worked on the PS3 port of the original game, is taking the reins on the multiplayer. Rather than attempt to shoehorn a multiplayer concept out of the new fiction of the sequel, Digital Extremes opted to tell a story of its own, albeit with far fewer complications. The multiplayer game is set approximately a year before the first game, when Rapture is still largely untouched by the erupting civil war. As battle lines are being drawn, you adopt the role of one of the unfortunate citizens of Rapture being brought along for the ride.

Each game starts in a unique multiplayer lobby—an apartment of your own in Rapture that you can explore while simultaneously preparing for your next match. Once in the game, gunfire and plasmid explosions are

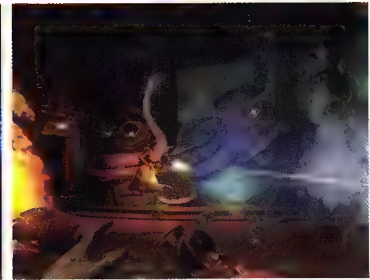
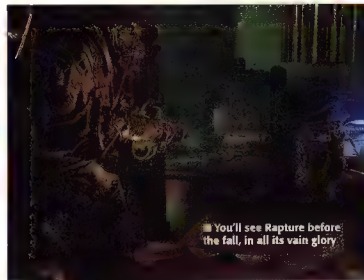
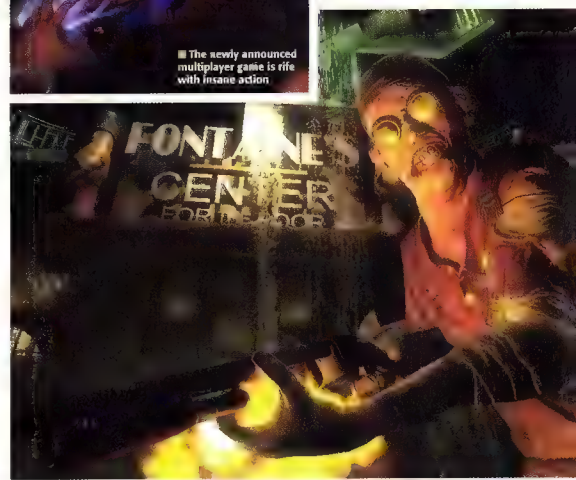
everywhere; we saw lightning, ice, fire, and bullets flying everywhere during our action-packed demo. As you play, you'll unlock ever more useful loadouts for your character. Increasingly powerful plasmids can give you the edge in the next fight.

The multiplayer maps themselves are filled with interesting surprises. Hacking allows you to set up turrets and other traps for your opponents. In addition, every level includes a single Big Daddy suit to discover, which can be donned for absurdly increased defense and firepower. The levels themselves offer a fascinating view into the mythology, since we finally get to see Rapture before its fabled fall from grace.

Some skeptics may question the decision to move the game into a multiplayer arena. Our concerns on that point have been largely assuaged, since it's clear the multiplayer features stand independently from the single-player story. In addition, the fact that a separate developer is handling the duties helps to assure that 2K Marin stays focused on delivering a solid follow-up to the first game's storyline—a tale that many have already hailed as a modern classic in the medium. ■ ■ ■



■ The newly announced multiplayer game is rife with insane action



■ You'll see Rapture before the fall, in all its vain glory



XBOX 360

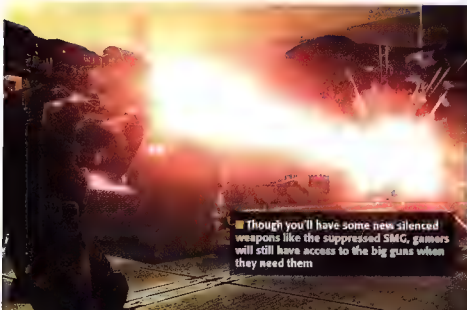
Halo 3: ODST

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT
GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER BUNGIE > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 22

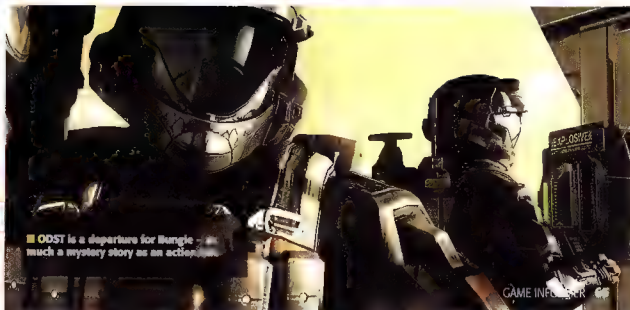
SAME NAME, DIFFERENT VIBE



■ The ODSTs aren't Spartans, so players can expect some differences in the way they fight and heal



■ Though you'll have some new silenced weapons like the suppressed SMG, gamers will still have access to the big guns when they need them



■ ODST is a departure for Bungie, but much a mystery story as an action game

While Bungie's next game may share a title with its earlier hits, ODST is anything but a rehash of concepts from the Halo trilogy. During our demo of the game, it became clear that ODST has an entirely new design aesthetic guiding its development. While a familiar mythology and setting are in place, expect a surprisingly different gameplay experience when the game comes out this fall.

ODST is structured much like a mystery story. In the beginning, you play as an orbital drop soldier preparing for the assault on New Mombasa, during the devastating battle depicted in Halo 2. As he and his squadmates make the drop, the Covenant ship creates a slipspace rupture directly over the city, and chaos ensues. The hero wakes up hours later, and proceeds to explore the sprawling streets of a ruined city. The game is non-linear, allowing you to wander to new locations as the desire strikes you. Trigger points send you back into the experiences of the other members of your squad, each of whom has unique skills and weapon loadouts. Along the way, you'll get to know the Superintendent, New Mombasa's struggling AI, which is desperate to help you retake the city. Beyond the change in cast and level structure, also expect new features like low light vision, target acquisition on your HUD, the use of medkits to recover, and light puzzle elements as you search for clues in the world with the use of your visor.

Perhaps taking a cue from the popular Horde mode in Gears of War 2, ODST also includes a four-player Firefight co-op mode, where players tackle increasingly difficult waves of Covenant enemies. The mode includes both vehicles and the potential for collecting and using skull modifiers as you move through the game.

Halo 3: ODST will release on two discs. The aforementioned campaign and co-op mode are accompanied by an Extras menu that gives players access to the Halo: Reach beta, the next big installment in the series. The second disc includes every single multiplayer map and game mode yet released for Halo 3, plus three new multiplayer levels new to ODST. Even with these great features, we were disappointed to hear that the game now carries a full \$60 release price. We'll see if the valuation decision was worth it for Microsoft in a couple of months. ■ ■ ■

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Dirt 2

- > **STYLE** | PLAYER RACING (ONLINE TBA)
- > **PUBLISHER** | CODEMASTERS
- > **DEVELOPER** | CODEMASTERS
- > **RELEASE** | SEPTEMBER

PAVEMENT IS OVERRATED

Codemasters has quietly become video games' go-to company for innovation in the racing genre. The company's two prominent releases this generation, *Dirt* and *Grid*, are benchmarks for both rally and circuit racing. In both of these titles, innovation fuses with white-knuckled intensity to create a racing experience unlike anything else out there. With the announcement of *Dirt 2*, a large question was left looming: Will Codemasters reinvent the wheel to make *Dirt* a fresh experience again, or will it create a sequel that retains the structure of the original game?

From what we've seen, Codemasters has no intention of driving on the same track again. *Dirt 2* is a huge departure from the original game, as it now drops hundreds of tons of dirt, sand, and mud onto the streets of thriving metropolises. The game still delivers an ample amount of traditional rally cross tracks, but in addition to weaving a hair's length away from rocks and trees, players now careen dangerously around buildings and storefronts.

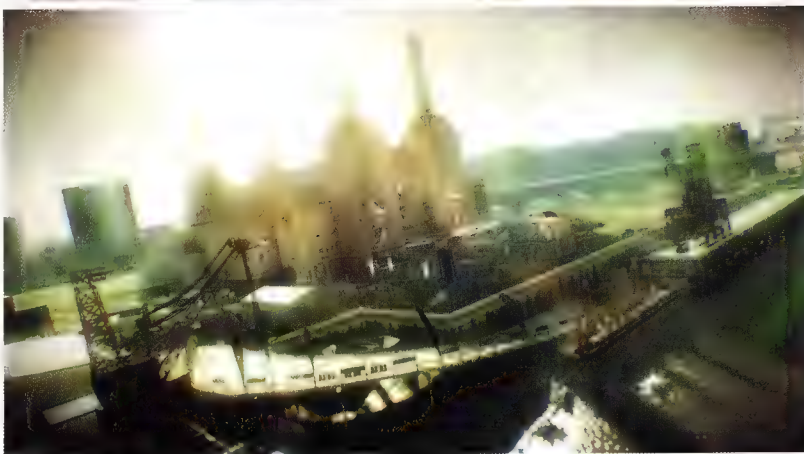
The first city track is set in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. This track won't allow players to crash through buildings, as it is set up like a traditional street race with roadblocks protecting the city's architecture and onlookers. Regardless, the towering geometry creates blind turns and a suffocating sensation as you dart at breakneck speeds over hills and loose straightaways. This track also showcases *Dirt 2*'s enhanced weather system. The original game featured rain and puddles, but neither greatly altered the way you raced. This time, puddles and pools will slow you down. The Shibuya track featured a water hazard situated before a large turn. A jump after the turn launches you over the pool again, making for two quick situations where you could be bogged down in water.

All terrain types will give you a different feel, making the vehicle you bring to the race much more important. Codemasters wouldn't reveal all of the vehicle types for *Dirt 2*, but in addition to your typical rally cars like the Mitsubishi Evo, we witnessed a truck event set in Baja, Mexico. This narrow, twisting course made it hard to focus due to its amazing background imagery stealing our attention. If anything, this race allowed us to view *Dirt 2*'s new crash mechanics. With the vehicles featuring twice the detail and new impact effects, even Burnout fans will take notice of these frightening rollovers.

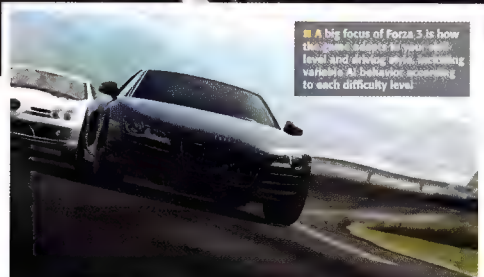
The development team is confident it will have *Dirt 2* polished and roaring for its September release date for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. We're eager to see what other cities Codemasters has transformed into rally circuits. ■ ■ ■



■ The new city locations bring a different level of intensity to the rally circuit



■ When you're not on the track leaping to your death, you'll spend most of your time in an RV, where all frontend menu navigation is handled



A big focus of Forza 3 is how the game will scale the number of AI drivers at each difficulty level, allowing you to choose the number of AI drivers to match your skill level.



Forza 3 will ship on two game discs.



XBOX 360

Forza Motorsport 3

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER TURN 10 > RELEASE OCTOBER

SOME THINGS YOU JUST CAN'T SIMULATE

Microsoft and developer Turn 10 have positioned the Forza Motorsport franchise as a simulation series, complete with all the trappings that the sub-genre brings. While sim-based racers usually include mammoth garages with a fleet of faithfully replicated cars, they also bring aspects that have fallen out of favor: boring careers, unyielding difficulty, and the personality of wet cardboard. Perhaps spurred by titles like Codemasters' Grid, Forza Motorsport 3 is taking cues from the competition and incorporating new elements in an attempt to show that simulation racers don't have to be slaves to the grind.

Forza 2 built its career structure around the traditional pattern of unlocking cars and races, but Forza 3 augments that by creating a custom calendar of racing events. Your docket is filled with 250 events that run the gamut of circuit, oval, drag, drift, and timed racing styles. While the game creates the calendar for you based on factors such as your skill and the cars and events you like, you can pick from three suggested races that have been chosen for you each time. If you want to motor through all the events, you can do that too.

Apart from stacking your racing calendar, you have a significant influence in how races unfold from moment to moment. The game's AI scales to your difficulty level, so the lower it is, the easier it will be to rattle AI drivers as you get on their back bumpers.

Higher-level AI racers, meanwhile, have the mettle to withstand your challenges. If you crash, you can avail yourself of the rewind feature, which automatically puts you back 10 to 15 seconds before you wiped out. This is unlimited during a race, and not something you earn tokens for like in Grid. It will be turned off, however, when you're racing friends online.

While some simulation racers like Gran Turismo don't want you to get so much as a fingerprint on their beautiful cars, Forza 3 lets players customize their vehicles to new heights. Cars can be decaled to death and then shared with others, with the best creations tracked via a user-creation leaderboard. Your favorite cars can also be visually and physically changed via damage, and full rollovers have been added for those times when you misjudge a corner by 100 mph or so.

Some simulation punts may scoff at being able to rewind races or having a non-traditional career structure, but it's good to see a game like Forza 3 take a stab at trying to get our hearts redefining by doing more than just showing us a sports car with a shiny paint job. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 3

Heavy Rain

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER QUANTIC DREAM > RELEASE EARLY 2010

DANGER AT THE CLUB

Last month we covered the junkyard exploits of the first announced main character of *Heavy Rain*, Norman Jayden. At E3 we meet the second of the four protagonists, Madison Paige, as she ventures into a shady club looking for information on the Ongami Killer. At this point in the story, the impetuous reporter has somehow gotten mixed up in her own investigation of the serial killer.

The Blue Lagoon is crowded with dancers, flashy lighting, and thumping music. Madison edges through the crowd with surprisingly natural movements on her way toward the bar. She asks the bartender about a man named Paco, and he points to the back corner where a skuzzy, goateed man is lounging in a private area. Madison walks over to Paco, but his bodyguard tells her to buzz off.

As she schemes a new approach to the situation, Madison watches as Paco invites a sexy dancing blonde behind the velvet rope to hang with him. Using contextual button presses linked to Madison's hands, hips, and legs, players can try to get Paco's attention with some smooth moves, but it doesn't have the desired effect.

Madison heads to the ladies' room to see what she can do about her conservative appearance. Using more button prompts, players help her apply makeup, undo a couple blouse buttons, and tear off the lower edge of her skirt. Back outside, her dancing combined with her new appearance gets Paco's attention and he invites her over. Madison suggests they go somewhere more private.

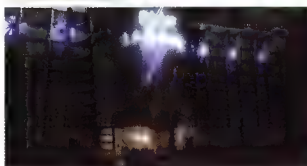
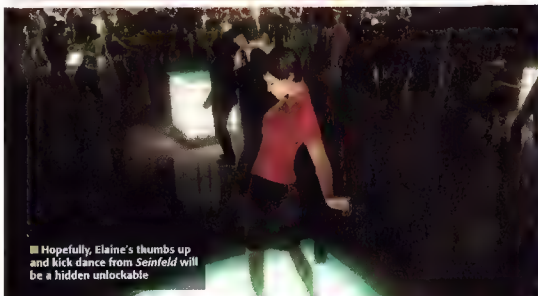
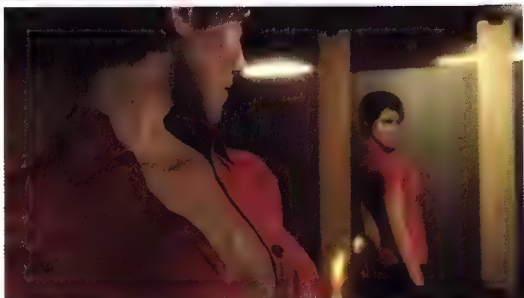
As they go up to Paco's office, Madison checks on the gun in her purse to give her the confidence to face the potentially dangerous situation. As soon as she enters, Paco

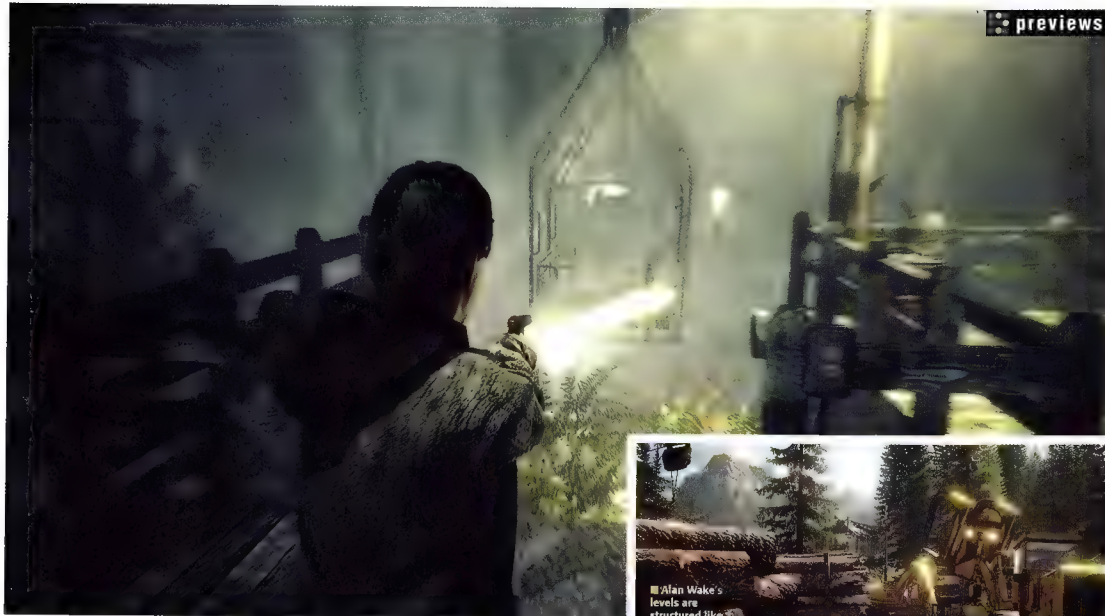
ushers her to the other end of the room, haphazardly tossing her purse onto a couch along the way. When he asks Madison to strip, several gameplay options float around her blurring in and out of focus. At first she tries to talk her way out of the room, but Paco pulls a gun and forces her to continue. Madison removes her blouse and skirt and casually moves toward an end table. As Paco is entranced, she grabs a lamp from the table and smashes him in the face.

When the scene fades back in, Paco is tied to a chair and a fully clothed Madison approaches him. Using the motion capabilities in the DualShock 3, the Quantic Dream developer giving the demo swings the controller a few times, translating to Madison slapping Paco across the face until he wakes up. When he comes to, Madison points a gun at him and asks about an apartment that he rents out that may be connected to the Ongami killings.

Suddenly, one of Paco's bodyguards knocks on the door and asks if everything's OK. Players have only a few seconds to select what to do next. Madison ends up going the sexy moan route and the guy decides to give his boss some privacy. She then crushes Paco's groin in a vise-like grip until he gives up the info. Madison then escapes shaken, but unharmed.

With *Heavy Rain*'s flexible branching paths, things could have turned out much differently. Madison could have died at several points in the encounter and there would have been no game over screen. The story, Quantic Dream says, just adapts and continues down a new path. We can't wait to meet the remaining two protagonists in the upcoming months to see if they, too, can dodge a gnsly end. ■ ■ ■





XBOX 360

Alan Wake

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER REMEDY > RELEASE SPRING 2010

STILL EXISTS

Authors have a way with words. Like a warlock crafting a spell, a good writer knows how to use the symbols on a page to convey meaningful concepts. An expert writer can make a story come alive as you read it, but the story doesn't come alive on its own. Unless that author is Alan Wake.

Alan is vacationing with his wife in the fictional coastal town of Brightfalls when he discovers pieces of a book manuscript written in his name. The supernatural thriller recounts events happening in the small town, but he doesn't remember writing it. What's stranger is that these events are slowly coming true. When Alan's wife goes missing, he begins a frantic search for the missing pages of this book, hoping they'll lead him to his wife.

During the E3 presentation, Alan is heading to meet a local patrolman named Rusty who claims to have several pages of Alan's mystery novel. Just as Alan approaches the barn where Rusty has agreed to meet, the windows flash with a howl of gunfire. By the time Alan gets inside the floor is covered in blood, and Rusty has escaped into the nearby forest. Alan pursues him and his mysterious attacker.

Alan's real enemy is the darkness, a seemingly spiritual entity that can possess objects, animals, and people. If Alan wants to survive his adventure he'll need to fight off this darkness with light. Any object in the environment could be a threat. Several objects randomly attack Alan during his trip through the forest, but Alan quickly dispels these

poltergeists with the focused beam of his flashlight. Unfortunately not every enemy is so easily pacified.

As Alan pursues Rusty and his book pages, a couple giant pine trees fall over, and a few shadowy human figures emerge from the foliage. These faceless enemies are engulfed in a darkness shield, and Alan must use light to remove these shields before they can be damaged by gunfire. Special items, such as flares, can protect Alan when dangerous enemies come out of the woodwork by the dozens. If things get too hairy, Alan can throw a flare at his enemies and shoot it while it's in the air to create an explosion that does massive damage to any monster in the vicinity.

Alan starts up a gas generator to shield himself with powerful floodlights, then takes refuge in a nearby home. But nowhere is truly safe, and outside a large diesel motor roars to life. It belongs to a nearby bulldozer, which drives itself into the side of the house, pushing the whole structure into a nearby lake. Just as Alan is about to descend into a watery grave, the words "to be continued" pop onscreen.

Alan Wake has been in development for a long time. During that process it has taken on some strong survival horror tones, but Remedy promises that the adventure elements first talked about when the game was announced are still present. While we still have nearly a year before this spooky narrative finally hits the Xbox 360, it looks like the title will be worth the long wait. ■ ■ ■



■ Alan Wake's levels are structured like a television show, complete with "previously on" recaps and cliffhanger endings



■ Remedy showed off a brief driving scene during our demo, but we're still not sure how integral these sequences will be to the overall experience





■ "God, I hope they have an elevator."



■ "Locked! Now where have I seen that shape before..."



■ Giant boss battles are so passé. New for 2009? Giant crotch battles



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS/MERCURY STEAM > RELEASE 2010

FREE TO DESTROY

Fans of Castlevania can look forward to beginning a new, ass-whipping adventure in 2010 — one that gamers have unwittingly known about for quite some time. This year at E3, Konami revealed its previously announced action title, *Lords of Shadow*, is really the latest installment of the beloved vampire-slaying franchise.

Described by Konami as a "radical re-imagining" of the series, *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* is a collaboration between the Madrid-based Mercury Steam (creators of Clive Barker's *Jericho*), and Konami's Kojima Productions. This puts oversight of the project in the hands of Hideo Kojima, the mastermind behind the *Metal Gear* franchise — an interesting and unexpected change for the series.

While we're sure hiding in the medieval equivalent of cardboard boxes is definitely not part of the "re-imagining," *Castlevania* fans can say goodbye to teleport rooms and health-bestowing candles; both the gameplay and storyline are heading in new directions.

Taking place during the end of days, players must struggle to bring balance to a world plagued by undead souls and evil creatures. We're holding out hope that Dracula will be somewhere among the ranks of the *Lords of Shadow*, but even if he is, it won't be a member of the Belmont family tasked with dispatching him. This time the protagonist is Gabriel, a holy knight belonging to the

Brotherhood of Light who is guided by the soul of his dead wife.

Konami has also ditched the Belmont lineage's infamous Vampire Killer whip. The whip is replaced by the awesomely sacrilegious-sounding "Combat Cross," a monster hunter's version of a Swiss Army knife — which, coincidentally, features an extendable chain whip. It's good to see some aspects of *Castlevania* made the transition, and it will come in handy for those times when you want to latch onto the eye of a gigantic, muscle-bound ogre.

Judging from the trailer at E3, the gameplay looks like the unholy lovechild of *God of War* and recent installments of *Ninja Gaiden*, with a Southern European twist. Set in the Middle Ages, *Lords of Shadow* is full of Gothic architecture, religious imagery, and — werewolves! Completely absent from what we saw, however? Vampires.

We're not sure if straying from *Castlevania*'s tried-and-true formula is a good idea, and with Konami merely stating that Kojima Productions is offering "advice and support," it's hard to tell how much the legendary Hideo Kojima is involved in the project. But if the final game can live up to the excitement caused by the trailer (which also revealed the voice talents of Patrick Stewart and Robert Carlyle), *Lords of Shadow* may finally give gamers a 3D action title worthy of the *Castlevania* name, even if some series staples are missing. ■ ■ ■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Brink

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWAREWORKS
> **DEVELOPER** SPLASH DAMAGE > **RELEASE** SPRING 2010

THE BRINK OF CONVERGENCE

Developer Splash Damage is known for creating great multiplayer additions to previously existing franchises. With popular games like Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory and Quake Wars proving the developer's mettle, Bethesda is giving the talented team a shot to make its mark with a title all its own, Brink.

In Brink's near future story, it looks like AI Core wasn't just whining about global warming to sell books and DVDs. In the year 2035, the polar ice caps have melted to the point where the ocean has engulfed most of the continents. The only refuge? An awesome life vest, or citizenship in the gated, floating metropolis of Ark. As the Earth's land mass dwindles, a war has erupted between Ark's population and those seeking entrance. The once model green habitat is now a war zone overrun with guns, explosives, and desperation.

Ark is the testing ground for Splash Damage's new dynamic gameplay model,

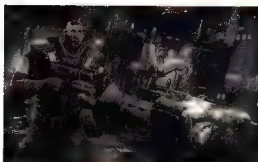
which blends single-player, six-player co-op, and 16-player multiplayer modes into a unified experience by way of character persistence across all gameplay modes. Players pick sides between the resistance and the Ark security forces, customize their character, and develop skills by fragging enemies and completing mission goals. Even the battle experience is customizable, as players can change their role in the battle on the fly to earn more experience points by clearing more difficult objectives.

The action goes beyond the typical FPS fare thanks to the SMART button, which allows players to move through the environments like a parkour runner, contextually vaulting over barriers and climbing to higher elevations. Like Mirror's Edge, the movements look natural and don't disrupt players from training their eyes on threats.

We're not sold on the "virtual texturing" art style, but the clever new ideas at play make Brink a game worth tracking. ■ ■ ■



■ With the SMART button, players can vault across environments like a parkour runner



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Borderlands

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

BRING AN EXTRA LOOT BAG

With its hot new art style the first thing that gets mentioned in discussions, it's easy to lose track of Borderlands' other endearing qualities: the open-world structure, heavy RPG elements, four-player co-op, and even insane amount of weapons to peruse on the carcasses of your fallen foes. The E3 demo given by Gearbox Software president Randy Pitchford gave us more insight into the game's promising action.

Borderlands takes place on Pandora, a wasteland planet populated by bandits, dangerous alien wildlife, and tons of loot. Treasure hunters from around the galaxy flock to the planet in search of powerful alien technology. Though the world looks like a dustbowl, the muted, cel-shaded art style makes it vibrant and inviting.

Like a classic RPG, players choose from four upgradeable characters. The soldier is a weapons expert whose specialties are shotguns, assault rifles, and shield turrets. The agile Hunter prefers to kill with melee weapons and sniper rifles, and is aided by his winged friend the Bloodwing, which can also be upgraded to improve its attacks.

The Siren uses strange alien technology like the Phase Walk, which allows her to move undetected through enemy ranks and lay waste to unsuspecting troops. The Tank is the bruiser who can lay waste to enemies with brute strength, rampages, and heavy weapons like missile launchers. These persistent characters retain all of their skills whether you're grinding through single player or teaming up in the four-player co-op.

With a huge open world, 20 to 30 narrative missions, over 100 side quests, and untold numbers of minions to dispatch, Borderlands is heavily inundated with loot. Each dead enemy drops weapons, which are color coded to quickly tell you if they are worth pocketing. A quick button allows you to automatically equip a new weapon if it's better than yours. As with Diablo, stronger enemies (dubbed "badass" in the game) drop better gear. With fast-paced action, strong co-op, and this much variety, we can't wait to gather some treasure hunters and start exploring this promising wasteland. ■ ■ ■

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Homefront

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER KAOS STUDIOS > RELEASE TBA

THE NEXT FRONTLINE

Developer Kaos Studios' last game, *Frontlines: Fuel of War*, drew mixed reactions from critics and fans. The company is taking another shot at near-future combat with *Homefront*, a recently announced first-person shooter that takes place in an America occupied by a foreign power. The game's E3 demo is a gripping, intense demonstration of *Homefront*'s capabilities.

The single-player game starts in a sleepy refugee village in the Colorado mountains. Players take control of a hero of the

American resistance who wakes up wounded in this dirty hamlet. The local leader gives a tour of the facilities, touting the citizens' industry in getting enough electricity flowing for a few hours of power every night. Throughout this exchange, it's obvious a lot of work has gone into *Homefront*'s story presentation. Facial expressions, ambient sounds, and detailed artwork make this gathering of poor American refugees believable.

Unsurprisingly, the unnamed occupying power makes an appearance. These masked antagonists burst onto the scene firing out

of fearsome black APCs. Using an RPG, the player takes out one as it charges into the town square. The flaming wreck screams past a few feet to the player's left, thanks to the game's ability to direct dramatic moments toward the player's location. As refugees exchange fire with their enemies, it quickly becomes clear that the Americans are badly outgunned.

The leader directs the player to pick up a nearby laser designator and choose a target for the Goliath. Upon doing so, a massive six-wheeled battle tank crashes through the

lower floor of a dilapidated house and trains a military-grade laser on one of the attacking APCs. The resulting fireworks are awe-inspiring. Guided by the player's laser, the Goliath makes quick work of the rest of the invading force, ending the demo.

Based on what we've seen, *Homefront* should easily eclipse Kaos' previous efforts. Though it wasn't shown or talked about in detail, large-scale multiplayer is a major component of the game as well. It may only have been a brief E3 demonstration, but what little we've seen of *Homefront* looks good. ■ ■ ■

■ Kaos assures us that *Homefront* will feature many near-future gadgets, all based on current military research.



■ Cover plays a large role in combat; the gameplay is typical FPS fare

■ You won't find any fault in the environmental detail



■ Aren't you supposed to wash the clothes before hanging them out to dry?





■ Online play is the majority of LoL's draw.

PC

League of Legends: Clash of Fates

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** RIOT GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** RIOT GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

DEFENDING NEW ANCIENTS

Massively popular Warcraft III mod Defense of the Ancients is a game unto itself. Much of the talent behind that mod now works full-time at Riot Games on League of Legends. Having played the game extensively at E3, we can confirm that it belongs in the top tier of PC titles coming out in 2009.

In control of a single champion, players fight to turn the tide of battle between two AI armies, much like in Demigod or DotA. Champions gain levels and money to buy new items with, dramatically growing in power over the course of 15-30 minute matches. The gameplay is familiar to anyone with any experience in the subgenre. Many aids for newbies, from suggested item purchases to detailed tooltips, are available to smooth out the learning curve.

The variety on display is remarkable. Each of the dozen or so champions playable at E3 has a distinct gameplay style. The items on sale at the shop allow uncountable

ways to customize your champion. Much more will be available in the final game, so players won't run out of combinations and builds to try any time soon.

A significant persistent element is present as well. Players gain access to different (though not necessarily better) abilities as they gain experience, any two of which can be brought into a single match. Advanced stat tracking and matchmaking, as well as server-hosted games, should make the online experience pain-free.

League of Legends' most striking feature is the incredible polish evident in every aspect of the game. Every question we asked about a common problem in DotA — from advanced topics like kill denial to basic issues such as the harsh newbie environment — garnered an exhaustive response detailing the steps being taken to remedy it. We've spent a lot of time with DotA and similar games, and League of Legends is clearly the most exciting title in the subgenre to date. ■ ■ ■ ■



■ A leveled-up champion is an incredibly powerful wrecking machine.



■ Yeah, there's some kind of robot dinosaur breathing fire at a bunch of hovertanks.

XBOX 360 | PC

Supreme Commander 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES > **RELEASE** 2010

SMOOTHING THINGS OVER

This real-time strategy title is backing off of the more radical designs of its ambitious predecessor, while at the same time moving further down a path never trod by the rest of the strategy genre. Supreme Commander 2 is far from a standard "bigger, better, more!" sequel, and we came away from its E3 showing impressed.

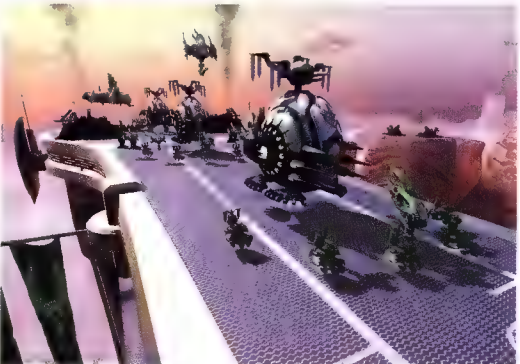
The demanding economic model of the first game is toned down in the sequel. SupCom 2 is still very much a resource-driven game; don't expect a completely different gameplay experience. However, Gas Powered Games wants players focused more on the action and the impressive spectacle of hundreds of units blasting each other away with imaginative sci-fi weaponry.

Upgrading has been similarly revamped. Players now progress along a global research tree like in a typical 4X game. Units receive improved capabilities as you devote more resources to technology,

rather than being replaced by new troops. We saw a fleet of tanks suddenly grow anti-aircraft cannons as appropriate research finished, and Gas Powered Games assures us there is much more where that came from.

Several technical breakthroughs dramatically improve the game's performance. Gas Powered Games claims the sequel runs noticeably better than the original, pushing more impressive visuals at higher frame rates on the same hardware. In addition, the developer is handling the Xbox 360 version itself this time around, so console players shouldn't be stuck with such a sub-par port as the original.

The altered vision for the game sounds promising. On top of everything else, Gas Powered Games hopes to tell a more engaging story with help from publishing partner Square Enix. We're looking forward to seeing more as we near SupCom 2's 2010 release. ■ ■ ■ ■



Wii Sports Resort

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE JULY 27

CASUAL LEADER

Partially due to its simplistic, family-friendly controls, and partially due to the fact that it comes packaged with the console, the original Wii Sports is one of the most played Wii games. Even today, when uninitiated friends and family come over to play the Wii, they are often introduced to the experience with bowling or tennis. While the original title felt like a collection of slightly evolved tech demos that many quickly tired of, the competitions in Resort are well rounded minigames gamers might play beyond giving friends a Wii taste-test.

The game starts by parachuting players onto a tropical resort called Wuhu Island. The first thing players see is their Mii jumping out of a plane, and the Wii remote determines the Mii's movements as it falls through the air. To familiarize gamers with the new Wii MotionPlus controls, players can perform a host of mid-air tricks. Once your Mii's feet are firmly on the ground, however, you can participate in up to 12 different events. Here is a quick rundown of the activities you and your friends will play during your resort vacation.

Air Sports – You hold the Wii remote like a paper airplane and puppet an onscreen plane, which you can use to tour the island. Air sports also features a dogfighting multiplayer mode. Resort's opening skydiving sequence also falls under this umbrella.

Archery – Pulling back the nunchuk like a bowstring while holding the Z button opens an aiming circle. The circle slowly shrinks to assist your aiming at various targets, but if you wait too long, you are thrown out of the view and have to re-draw the bow.

Basketball – The Wii remote measures the arc of your throw as you compete in three-point shoot-outs or jump into three-on-three pickup games.

Bowling – This fan favorite returns. In addition to the standard 10-pin game, a 100-pin game lets

you knock down an army of pins, and a mode called Spin Control sees how well you can bowl past a lane filled with obstacles.

Canoeing – Swing the remote like an oar to navigate your canoe through a watery obstacle course, racing friends and the computer to the finish.

Cycling – Race around the island with 30 other cyclists as you twirl the remote and nunchuk like pedals. Cyclists need to draft behind racers to catch some tailwind, but if you pedal too hard, your Mii could tire out.

Frisbee – Nintendo has already showed us its Frisbee fetching dog, but that's not much of a game. A Frisbee golf course should appease all those links players too hip for clubs.

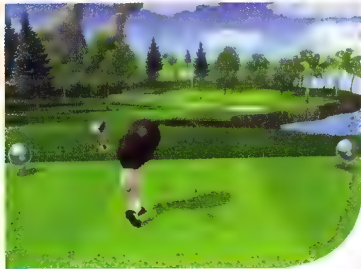
Golf – The other returning sport. Aside from two 18-hole courses and improved Wii MotionPlus controls, not much has changed.

Power Cruising – This is the Jet Ski event Nintendo initially announced with the game. In addition to speeding through slalom courses, you'll also be able to take on your friends in head-to-head races.

Swordplay – In addition to the Duel mode Nintendo showed off at last year's E3, you'll be able to race against friends to cut household items in half or fight off hordes of evil Mii's on your own.

Table Tennis – Similar to the table tennis game found in Wii Play, but now you have greater control over the ball. The Wii MotionPlus allows you to twist the remote during your volleys, adding extra backspin to your lob.

Wakeboarding – Turn the Wii remote on its side, holding it like a classic controller. You can ramp off jumps and perform tricks as a boat pulls you through a lagoon. ■ ■ ■



The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** FALL/WINTER

ALL ABOARD!

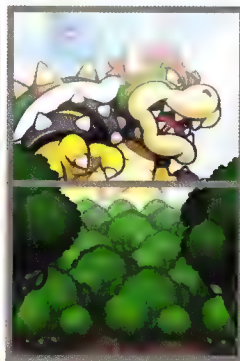
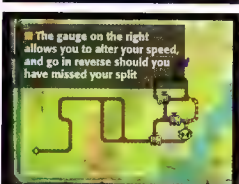
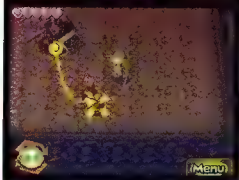
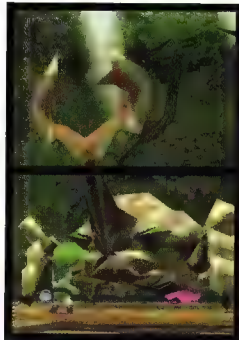
The success of Phantom Hourglass has brought an inevitable sequel, but Nintendo's vision for this follow-up moves the series past its traditional fantasy setting and into an industrialized age.

If Link's traveling by train is any indicator, his faithful steed Epona may be stabled in a glue factory. The railroad system is used for more than just speeding up the blonde bombshell's means of travel through Hyrule. While conducting the train, Link can sound the whistle to frighten animals that have stupidly taken to napping on the tracks, and more impressively, he can mount a cannon to blow away enemies intent on derailing his luxurious ride. As Link charts the best route through hostile territory, he also has to keep an eye on the engine's speed.

While the name of the game implies some sort of ghost train, the "spirit" may actually be a play on another aspect of Link's adventure. Within a dungeon we played at E3, Link was joined by a phantom companion, a large lumbering purple suit of armor that could be controlled by sacrificing control of Link. The armor is immune to fire, which came into play in a number of different puzzles, such as Link jumping on its shoulders to cross a lava pit, or having it standing in the way of fire spray so that Link could cross safely. Switching between characters is as easy as tapping an icon on the screen.

If you feel like a fool blowing or yelling into your DS microphone, you may want to avoid playing Spirit Tracks on the subway or airplane. By blowing into the microphone, Link can once again summon a gust of wind, this time in the shape of a green whirlwind. We used this power against a gigantic beetle-like boss. For whatever reason, a cloud hides the beetle's backside. If you run behind him and blow into the microphone, the whirlwind evaporates the cloud, revealing a sensitive spot for a sword strike.

In a roundtable discussion, Zelda mastermind Shigeru Miyamoto announced Spirit Tracks offers four-player multiplayer with the inclusion of competitive train battles. Here's hoping that head-on collisions are a part of this vision. ■■■



NINTENDO DS

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO/ALPHA DREAM > **RELEASE** FALL

ANATOMY OF A VILLAIN

The handheld Mario RPGs have always been both hilarious and a blast to play. This latest adventure for the world's favorite plumbing brothers should be no exception. Never a company to turn down a good pun, Nintendo recently announced Bowser's Inside Story, a journey that takes Mario and Luigi into the body of their long-time rival. The story finds the normally heated adversaries working together to some degree, although to different purposes. Bowser is out to stop another arch-villain who is trying to take over his castle, while Mario and Luigi are out to rescue you-know-who, since she's managed to get swallowed by the big guy as well.

The gameplay is similar to the other Mario RPG titles, albeit with some clever new twists. The A and B buttons control Mario and Luigi as they move through a 2D world inside Bowser's body. Whether playing as Bowser or the two brothers, the focus is on clearing the way or otherwise aiding the other party. For instance, Mario and Luigi travel to the big green guy's arms to pump up his muscles, and Bowser drinks a bunch of water to clear debris out of the way of the plumbers inside him.

As we expect from the franchise, the visuals look colorful and detailed, and the brief snatches of dialogue we saw were both funny and quirky. We came away impressed with the amusing new direction. ■■■





PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Avatar

James Cameron's *Avatar* looks to change the world of film this December. While our expectations for the Ubisoft game aren't nearly as high, this third-person shooter still could deliver a good time. Set in the 22nd century, *Avatar* takes place on a small moon called Pandora, inhabited by an indigenous race called the Na'vi - a sentient, co-friendly species who look like 10-foot-tall versions of Nightcrawler. War breaks out between the Na'vi and a group of humans who have touched down on the planet and started mining its resources. Players take control of a member of the RDA Corporation, and will eventually have to take sides. Like the film, the game supports 3D technology, and should hit consoles prior to the movie's release.



XBOX 360 | PC

Arcania: A Gothic Tale

Is *Arcania IV* or isn't it? In some ways, *Arcania* is both. Seeking a fresh reboot for American audiences who lacked the patience for the often buggy and unpolished gothic series, European publisher JoWood is moving in a new direction with this action/RPG. Like *Gothic* before it, *Arcania* is set in an expansive open world and gives players remarkable freedom to shape its destiny. Unlike its predecessors, *Arcania* adopts modern RPG conveniences like minimap-based quest tracking, a table-like progression system, and lock-on combat. If JoWood can solve some of the technical issues that have plagued the franchise for years, this first console outing could be a nice surprise when it releases this November.



PSP

Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny

Broken Destiny isn't a straight PSP port of *Soulcalibur IV*, but it's pretty close. The character list is trimmed down from the console entries, though it includes many old favorites, plus a guest appearance from Kratos. Most of the gameplay systems are intact, including the armor breaks and critical finishes introduced in the last console version. *Broken Destiny* lacks online multiplayer, though local wireless play is available. Even so, a faithful *Soulcalibur* experience on a portable system is worth something. Namco plans to release *Broken Destiny* on September 22.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Nier

Considering Square Enix's expertise with grim, heroic, sword-wielding giant swords, it was only a matter of time before the company stepped into the third-person action/adventure space. The result of this foray is Nier, a stylish combat game in development at Core (the studio to blame for Bullet Witch) and slated for 2010. Using a mix of weapons and magic, Nier slays legions of shadowy foes in his search for a cure to a virus that has infected his daughter. He integrates a variety of weapons into his combo-laden attacks, each with different strengths and special moves. How Nier will distinguish itself from its competition (like God of War III and Bayonetta) remains to be seen, but as long as it clears the bar set by The Bouncer, this should be a step forward for Square Enix in the genre.

PLAYSTATION 3

Demon's Souls

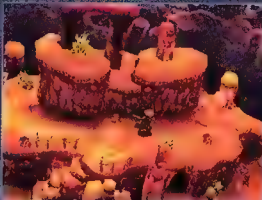
Players take the form of dead adventurers trying to collect enough demon souls to return to the world of the living in this free-roaming action/RPG. Though the action feels stiff relative to the fluid acrobatics of God of War, Demon's Souls offers innovation in different areas. A unique online component replays the final moments of other players' deaths if you touch the bloodstains where they perished, and three-player cooperative and four-player competitive online options exist for more direct interaction. Gameplay is modeled in some ways after the roguelike genre, with punishing difficulty and limited resources creating the kind of challenge we don't see often any more. Demon's Souls comes to our shores this fall courtesy of Atlus.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PSP | NINTENDO DS

LEGO Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues

If you have a copy of LEGO Indiana Jones lying around, pick it up, and throw it into the trash. LucasArts apparently views its first attempt as garbage, as LEGO Indiana Jones 2 is essentially a remake of the original game. This means you must play through *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Temple of Doom*, and *The Last Crusade* again with completely new levels and challenges. The game also includes *Kingdom of the Crystal Skulls* for the first time, so you get to nuke a fridge and ride on a motorcycle as Indy's son, Mutt Williams. This sequel boasts over 60 playable characters and newly enhanced whip mechanics. This game also does what all LEGO games should but for whatever reason haven't – it allows players to build their own levels and objects in the new Build Your Own Adventure mode. If you play co-op, you are no longer bound to staying close to the other player. You can now venture off on your own – a move the game handles through an on-the-fly split-screen shift. Is this enough new content to warrant playing the same stories again? We have to wait until the game releases this fall to find out.



NINTENDO DS

Golden Sun DS

Nintendo teased the return of classic Game Boy Advance RPG series Golden Sun in its E3 press conference, but the company was unwilling to discuss anything more specific than the fact that the game exists. The graphical style has shifted to 3D from its hand-drawn 2D roots, and original developer Camelot still holds the reins. It seems protagonist Isaac is back as well, judging from the gameplay teaser. What little Nintendo has revealed should tantalize RPG fans. Even without much to go on, Golden Sun DS looks like a promising addition to the DS catalog.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Def Jam Rapstar

Thank God someone is finally going to make us forget Eidos' horrid Get On Da Mic. Def Jam Rapstar is a unique partnership between the legendary record company, developer Terminal Reality, and new production company 4mm Games (founded by some Rockstar Games ex-pats). The game aims to be much more than just a rap karaoke game, although with its full speech recognition and phonetic sensing it delivers an accuracy of gameplay that we haven't yet seen in a vocal oriented music title. By offering players the chance to create their own custom videos, form "crews," battle other regions in multiplayer contests, and even upload freestyles over new custom beats, Def Jam Rapstar hopes to become the platform by which the next generation of great rappers are discovered. For the rest of us, there is plenty of fun to be had performing hits by superstars like Kanye West, LL, Rihanna, Young Jazzy, and the Notorious B.I.G.



Oh no, it'll fly.
I've got power...right here!

Wii

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers

Not better or worse, the Crystal Chronicles series has served as an avenue for experimentation under the Final Fantasy banner. Crystal Chronicles titles always try something different, from connectivity to cross-platform play, and the newest entry is no exception. The Crystal Bearers is the first Final Fantasy title developed solely for the Wii, making extensive use of motion-driven controls that range from piloting airships to shooting enemies out of the sky. The protagonist, Layle, possesses a magical crystal that grants him telekinetic powers – also activated with the Wii remote. Square Enix hasn't nailed down a release date yet, but since the game was announced back in 2006, action/RPG fans shouldn't have much longer to wait.

Wii

Shaun White Snowboarding: World Stage

The Wii version of Shaun White Snowboarding fared much better than the PS3 and Xbox 360 games, so it makes sense that Nintendo's console is the only one receiving a sequel this holiday. Picking up where Road Trip left off, players continue traveling the world as a part of Shaun's crew, but this time you're going pro. From a half pipe in the middle of New York's Times Square to the most prestigious competitions in France, Canada, and Japan, Wii snowboarders (or balance boarders) face off against the best of the best in up to 75 different worldwide challenges. At any point in the game, up to four people can steeze over the slopes together in the game's co-op campaign. We just hope Ubisoft expands Shaun's simplistic trick system.



PC

East India Company

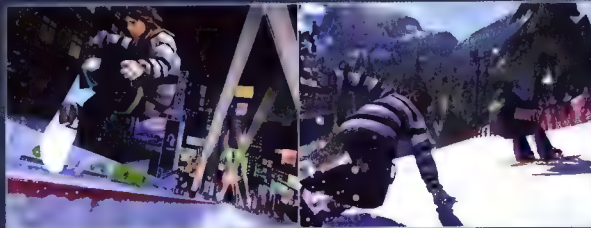
Economically minded strategy games are becoming increasingly uncommon, but Paradox's East India Company proves the subgenre isn't dead. As the trading company of one of eight great colonial powers in the 17th and 18th centuries, players vie for access to ports and goods as they turn a profit shipping valuables between Europe and India. Under the hood, an in-depth economic model determines prices, supply, and demand. Diplomacy with neutral ports and rival powers is a powerful tool in securing lucrative trade routes, but no less important are the size of your guns. Tactical naval combat, which is as visually impressive as Empire: Total War's, is the final piece of the puzzle. East India Company will be available July 28th, so look for our full review soon.



Wii | DS

Drawn to Life: the Next Chapter

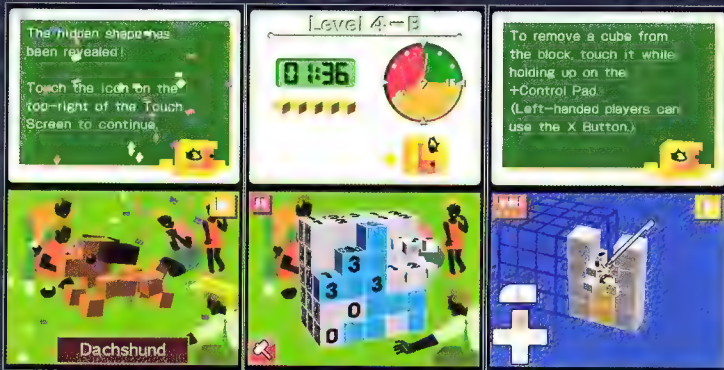
Combining user creativity with traditional platforming, the first Drawn to Life allowed players to bring their drawings into the game using the DS touch screen. Planet Moon Studios and THQ are taking the concept even further for the next entry, this time on the Wii. In addition to more customization options for your hero, you'll use the Wii remote and new drawing tools to create even more outlandish objects. And no, we are not using "outlandish objects" as a euphemism for genitalia. Each level will surround you with your own bizarre versions of flowers, platforms, and special items. A new DS installment of the same name is also in the works at 5th Cell (the developer of the original), but it is a separate experience that picks up the story where the Wii game leaves off. Look for both titles this fall.



NINTENDO DS

Picross 3D

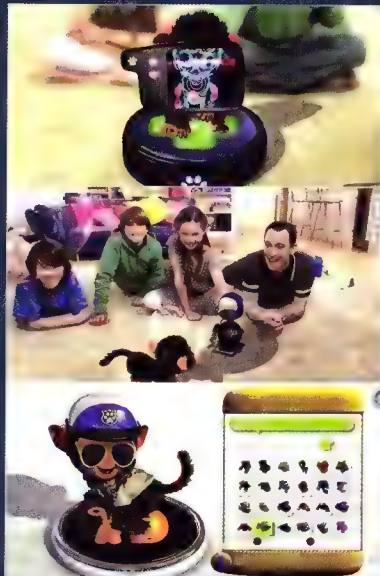
The Picross series is one of Game Informer's all time favorite puzzle franchises. If you haven't played the excellent Picross DS, do so now — we'll wait. Okay, now that you've finished the game, get ready for HAL's dramatic reinvention of the classic Picross 3D is exactly as the name suggests. Instead of the familiar grid system, you now create various shapes by removing blocks from a 3D cube based on the numbers on the edges that display how many blocks are grouped together in that row. In essence, it's the same formula as traditional Picross. It sounds complicated, and can be at times. Will this move to 3D be off-putting for longtime fans? It's too early to say, but kudos to Nintendo and HAL for pushing this series in a new direction.



PSP

LittleBigPlanet Portable

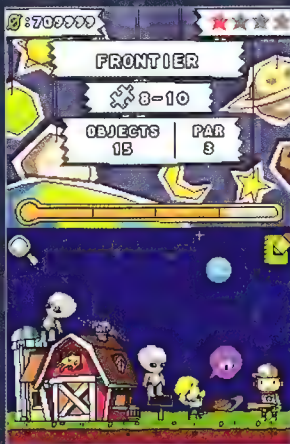
Sackboy is so cute we want to take him with us wherever we go. Sony anticipated our desire and is hard at work on a portable version of Media Molecule's hit PS3 platformer. Just like its console brethren, players can create their own diabolical levels, and then set them loose on the world and race through them with friends. Uncreative individuals will be happy to know that this version of LittleBigPlanet also features a brand new adventure mode filled with levels developed specifically for the PSP. If the release date rumors hold true, you should be able to take Sackboy with you as you do all your holiday shopping.



PLAYSTATION 3

EyePet

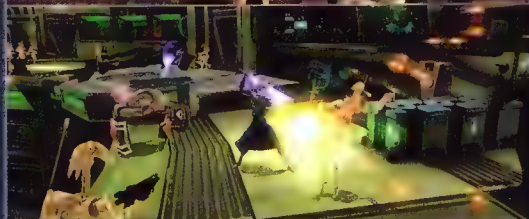
For all the talk of Microsoft's Project Natal at the conference, most overlooked Sony's EyePet, which actually does much of what Natal intends to do with Sony's already released PlayStation Eye camera. Unlike most virtual pet games, EyePet uses the camera to project you and your virtual pet onscreen together in your own living room. From there you can tickle it, play fetch, or even scan in pictures you draw to create things like toy cars for it to play with. You can even customize the look of your pet with over 250 unique items and clothing options. Because it's running on the PS3, the game features animation and character models that are leagues beyond the DS pet games released to date. Based on the trailer Sony ran at E3, this family-oriented game features some impressive and forward-looking technology. A release date has yet to be determined.



NINTENDO DS

Scribblenauts

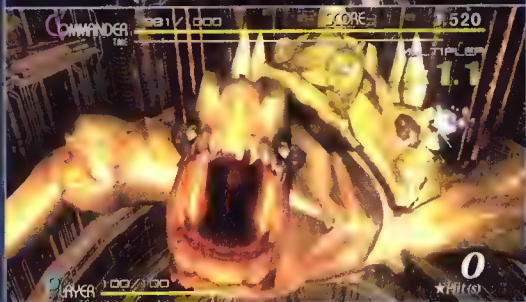
This innovative and clever game design concept comes to us courtesy of Warner Bros. Interactive and 5th Cell. You help Maxwell, through 200 levels on his quest to gather the starites. Each starite can only be reached by creating objects, which you summon by writing their name on the screen. If a starite is stuck in a tree, you might write "ladder" to create a ladder and climb to the top, "airplane" so you could fly there, or "axe" to just chop down the tree. Any solution you think of should work, and each level has a par for the number of items you can create to complete the level. Warner Bros. claims the game will recognize over 10,000 objects, which sounds amazing, and the game even corrects your spelling mistakes. Warner Bros. is prepping the game for a fall launch.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS

Star Wars: The Clone Wars – Republic Heroes

Despite the spectacular disappointment of the animated *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* movie, the television show on Cartoon Network has a devoted following. The hallmarks of the show, like a cool cast and plenty of lightsaber combat, are also the focus of the upcoming Republic Heroes. The story picks up right where the first season ends, putting you in control of Jedi heroes like Mace Windu and Aayla Secura. Sometimes you must rely on brute force instead of the Force as you play through levels designed specifically for your favorite clone troopers, like...the yellow one? With two-player co-op and lots of battle droids to destroy, the fight for the Republic is likely to get a few more soldiers when this game hits in September.



Wii

Sin and Punishment 2

The original *Sin and Punishment* released on the Japanese Wii in 2007. Seven years later, the game finally made its way to the states via the Wii's virtual console. Nintendo won't be making us wait that long for the sequel to Treasure's spastic shooter. Copying Space Harrier's fashion sense, *Sin and Punishment*'s characters wear jetpacks and take to the skies following scripted flight paths during combat, though the game is still basically an on rails, over-the-shoulder shooter. In addition to the various long-range attacks, players can take down waves of enemies that get too close with special sword attacks. Nintendo hasn't announced an official release yet, but we expect this one in early 2010.



PC

Torchlight

First of the veredige of Mythos developer Runic Games, Seattle comes Runic Games. The team also includes key members of the team behind 2005's well-regarded action/RPG *Fable*. Its first project, isometric dungeon-crawling hack n' slasher *Torchlight*, is in the same vein as those two titles. The single-player game, which will be priced in the \$20 range, will ship with powerful editing tools intended to allow modders unprecedented power to create their own adventures. *Torchlight*'s online offering is free to download and play, incorporates all the community features modern RPG fans expect, and is supported by some form of microtransaction model. The game is in the early stages of development and therefore didn't have a huge showing at E3, but the team's track record is enough to interest us nonetheless.



Wii
No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle

No matter your opinion of the first *No More Heroes*, there's no denying Suda 51 and his team at Grasshopper crafted a game unlike anything else on the market. They're hoping to up the ante with *Desperate Struggle*, another Wii exclusive set three years after the original game. Punk wrestling and anime fanatic Travis Touchdown once again breaks the fourth wall as he cuts a bloody swath through his enemies. With his best friend murdered, the revenge plot brings him back into the UAA tournament. He'll need his new ability to wield two beam katanas to come out on the right side of these huge boss battles. Ubisoft will handle publishing duties in early 2010. Our hope for the game? More toilet-related humor. Boy, that stuff is funny.



NINTENDO DS
Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box

Unlike many sequels, Professor Layton's latest outing doesn't tout a list of new features and mechanics. Instead, it gives players more of what they loved about the original: over 150 brain-bending puzzles couched in a chilling mystery. This time, Professor Layton and tagalong extraordinaire Luke investigate the death of the professor's mentor, Dr. Schrader. Once the duo cracks the case, the challenge can continue; as with the original, players can download 33 new puzzles — one every week following the game's August 24 release. On the plus side, that's a lot of puzzles. On the downside, it's also a lot of listening to Luke say "Professor, I've solved it!" in his sissy voice.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

LEGO Rock Band

The Beatles is getting the lion's share of attention for the franchise right now, but *LEGO Rock Band* may end up being the first choice for families and younger gamers when it releases this holiday. Traveller's Tales and Harmonix join forces to deliver this amalgam of their two hit franchises. The song list highlighted by catchy tunes like Carl Douglas' "Kung Fu Fighting," Europe's "The Final Countdown," and the Jackson 5's "I Want You Back." A Super Easy mode has been added for the youngest of rockers, but the higher difficulties are similar to other games in the franchise, so it won't be a simple



ride for experienced players. Beyond the obvious visual overhaul, *LEGO* features show up in the ability to build characters, instruments, and your own personalized rock den for between shows. We played several songs and had a blast. If people don't mind the shift in tone for the music, the game could draw in a broad audience.



PSP | PLAYSTATION 2

Jak & Daxter: The Lost Frontier

It's surprising to see Jak and his furry little buddy headed to a portable console instead of the PS3, but our first look at the game left us happy with the new direction. Picking up from the conclusion of the first trilogy, Jak is faced with a planet becoming dangerously short on the precious Eco resource. Searching for a cure, the heroes head to the distant frontier at the edge of the world to find a solution. Only to be challenged by a contentious group of sky pirates. Much of the gameplay focus has moved to titanic air battles with these opposing forces, but our brief time with the game showed that the classic platforming and ground action is still very much in place, including a cool gunstaf weapon that serves as Jak's primary tool of destruction. Look for the game to release toward the end of the year.








theoretically,
it seats 6.75 billion.



the INSIGHT. a new hybrid from Honda. The more hybrid drivers, the better. For all of us. So we made the Insight appealing to everybody, with an i-VTEC® engine, the new Eco Assist™ system and, most importantly, an affordable price tag. It's the hybrid designed and priced for us all. The new Insight.  from Honda. for everyone.



REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To



Fight Night Round 4

Fight Night Round 4 delivers another punishing knockout blow to gamers looking for the best in video game boxing. The series' pioneering all-analog control scheme is improved and streamlined, and a long and compelling career mode lets you take your boxer from obscurity to legendary status. Plus, it's got the most impressive lineup of classic and contemporary boxers ever assembled including Mike Tyson, Muhammad Ali, and Manny Pacquiao.



Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

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.
- 9** Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.
- 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.
- 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.
- 6** Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.
- 5** Passable. 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.
- 4** Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
- 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.
- 2** Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
- 1** Ban! The bottom of an avatar's shoe.

> Concept: What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> Graphics: How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> Sound: Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> Playability: Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> Entertainment: Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> Replay Value

High - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

Moderately High - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

Moderate - Good for a few months or a few times through.

Moderately Low - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

Low - You'll quit playing before you complete the game.



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37

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal
This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

ESRB C CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR ALL AGES	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	ESRB M CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 17+ AGES AND OLDER.	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
ESRB E CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 6 AND OLDER.	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	ESRB TEEN CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 13 AND OLDER.	Content suitable for teens.
ESRB ES CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 10 AND OLDER.	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.	ESRB RP CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB PRODUCT RATED FOR PENDING FINAL RATING.	Product is awaiting final rating.
ESRB T CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 13 AND OLDER.	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).

1080i – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The “i” means that the video is being interlaced.

1080p – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format.

480p – Progressive scanning, the option (“p” = progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480 (“i” = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

720p – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The “p” means that the video is in progressive format.

4X – A term we use for games like Civilization and Total War. The abbreviation means “explore, expand, exploit, exterminate.”

action – A term we use for games like God of War and Devil May Cry.

ad hoc – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity.

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies.

adventure – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island.

Moem – An effect that emulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces.

board – A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mario Party.

cell shading – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cells.

CG – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics.

DLC – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games.

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry.

first-party – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system.

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive.

FPS – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase “frames per second,” or how many animation frames happen in one second.

frame-rate – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement.

front-end – A game's menus and options.

HDTV – High Definition Television.

HP – Hit Points. A numerical representation of a character's remaining life. Common in RPGs.

HUD – Heads Up Display. The various status indicators overlaid on the screen, like mini-maps and health bars.

infrastructure – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances.

IP – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within.

isometric – Three-quarters top-down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.

jaggies – Graphical lines that look jagged when they should be straight.

LAN – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay.

Michael Baying – The process of adding excessive sloppiness to a movie that should be about giant robots fighting each other.

MMO – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft.

motion blur – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed.

music – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band.

NPC – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans.

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time.

platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank.

pop-up – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance.

PS2 – Sony's PlayStation 2.

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console.

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Pacman.

racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls.

RTS – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer.

shooter – A term we use for games like Halo and Gears of War.

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Tap Spin.

strategy – A term we use for games like Dagea and Fire Emblem.

third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NCAA Football 10

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA GAMES > RELEASE JULY 14 > ESRB E

THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

A lot of things make college football unique. The fans, the rivalries, the dynasties, the big plays — NCAA tries to encapsulate all of these aspects. At times it syncs nicely with what happens on a Saturday afternoon, but in other areas the game doesn't quite embody the sport. NCAA 10 is a jigsaw puzzle with all the pieces accounted for, but they aren't always in the right places.

The drama of the college game isn't captured by the lack of bowl-specific presentation or the newly skinned Road to Glory mode, which has highlights of your created player's career complete with Erin Andrews video segments, but it is very much present in the gameplay. Over-the-shoulder bombs, jump balls, and shoelace tipped ball interceptions now pepper your games with oohs and aahhs thanks to improved QB precision passing and the QB throwing ducks as he's being tackled. You'll even squirm in your seat when the controller vibrates as you're about to get sacked.

The interior running game may still be a little jumpy or automatic in its animations, and you see the occasional ball morph right through a player, but overall the game has done a better job than previ-



ous years in blending its animations. This makes magnet catches less obvious, and sequences such as bump-and-run coverage, sideline catches, and rushing the QB (now with defensive moves on the right analog) more fluid and natural looking.

The chess game of coaching strategy is also mixed in NCAA. I found the counter-recruiting, in-game gameplanning, defensive player targeting, and linked plays yielded nebulous results, but I enjoyed the QB quizzes to regain composure and being able to make the call to risk playing slightly hurt players or sitting them on the bench. As hard as it can be to track the effectiveness of the in-game

gameplanning (where you can set aggression levels for your players), it's better that it's more vague than a pure one-to-one correlation.

The power of college football dynasties is represented throughout NCAA 10, and you can build your own via online dynasties, the Season Showdown, and TeamBuilder modes to name a few. It's nice to get collectable points for playing CPU and human opponents in Season Showdown, but I was especially impressed with the TeamBuilder. I easily spent an hour (and could have spent an hour longer) creating my team with the online browser, and was impressed with the uniform options and control over the roster. You can write in your own names and even customize each player's skills. Creating an overall play-style for the team trickles down to what kind of individual players the computer generates for you.

While NCAA is certainly a game with its hits and misses, I come away from it more excited than in previous years. The features are there, and I'm glad that the on-the-field play is making strides forward and that it captures the excitement of a college football program that isn't dominant, but which is more than capable of thrilling its fans. —KATO

> **Concept:** The TeamBuilder is the big feature here, but some small additions take the gameplay a step forward

> **Graphics:** Player models are essentially the same, but the animations are blended better to make the game smoother overall

> **Sound:** Somebody needs to stuff Lee Corso's mouth with a sweetie jock

> **Playability:** QB precision passing makes a huge difference from last year

> **Entertainment:** NCAA 10 is more fun to play than 09, but not all the effort that went into the game — like Road to Glory mode — pays off

> **Replay Value:** High

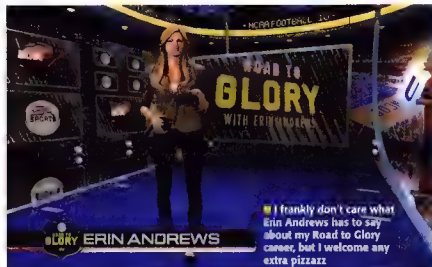


Second Opinion **8.5**

NCAA returns to the gridiron equipped with many positive gameplay changes. TeamBuilder is the best creation system yet, the revamped blocking mechanics make playing a defensive lineman fun again, players finally negotiate sidelines correctly, and the improved dueling between receivers and the secondary makes the passing game more dynamic. These changes improve the on-field action, but several controversies are brewing in the locker room, most notably the new purchasable Dynasty Accelerator options that pervade the menu system, constantly begging you for money to improve everything from recruiting to training. Most beggars get lost when you say no, but the Accelerators never leave the menu system. Worst of all, these can be used in the online dynasty, which creates an unfair playing field. Campus Legend (now dubbed Road to Glory) features an improved running commentary on your career courtesy of Erin Andrews, but Tiburon did nothing to improve the experience (coaches still call the worst plays at the worst possible times). Progress in some areas, minor setbacks in others — sounds like a team breaking water. —BERTZ



■ The TeamBuilder online browser gives you myriad uniform options, as well as the chance to choose your stadium and tweak your roster



BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Add boxing intricacies to make the franchise more of a boxing game and less of a fighting game

> **Graphics:** The bloody spray and meaty, pounding body punches make this title gruesome without gore

> **Sound:** Teddy Atlas provides the best color commentary I've ever heard in a sports game. I was still hearing new bits many fights in

> **Playability:** Having shortcuts for most body punches is a god-send. Now if only there was a way to do that for the body jabs

> **Entertainment:** Thanks to the gameplay and feature set additions, this game goes the distance

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **9.5**

No matter how many versions I play, I always go through the same learning curve with *Fight Night*. I come in as a rookie headed, trying to slug it out with superior competition, and end up getting my ass whooped. Then, I settle down and realize that *Fight Night* is the greatest boxing series ever because it forces you to actually learn the sport. Round 4 does what I thought impossible: It improves the basic gameplay in significant ways. The streamlined controls allow you to be even quicker in the ring, and the way the game takes into account things like reach and height make the bouts even more strategic. In the ring it's got everything it takes, and the presentation is great, too.

The training modes actually — gasp! — help you learn in-ring techniques instead of just buffing your stats. The game's lengthy career mode is chock full of all-time greats, and the commentary is some of the best I've ever heard in a video game. Another first round KO for *Fight Night*. —MATT



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fight Night Round 4

> STYLE: 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER: EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER: EA CANADA > RELEASE: JUNE 23 > ESRB: T

ROUND 1

Fight Night Round 4 is one of those rare titles that taps into and exploits your emotions—the fear when you know you're one punch away from being knocked down; the anger and frustration that sets in when you're not landing your best blows; a buzzing excitement you feel when you rock your opponent on his heels and go in for the kill. Keeping these emotions in check and using them at the right time is how you steel yourself for 10 rounds of punishment and ultimately achieve glory. Only a powerful game can elicit this kind of rollercoaster ride. Like a wise trainer, EA prepared its pulp for this moment, easily crafting its best boxing game yet.

Gameplay improvements are at the heart of what makes Round 4 a great title. Not a lot has been added, per se; it's more about the execution. Boxers' arm lengths add a layer of strategy. Depending on what kind of fighter you are, you will want to maintain or close the distance between you and your opponent. Reach is so important, it's fundamental to every punch you throw, and that just goes to show

how the game's focus on getting the basics right resonates throughout the entire experience.

Instead of punches either counting as hits or misses, the game also registers miss-hits, glancing blows, and blocks. This makes a typical exchange between two fighters anything but typical or scripted. Your punch selection must be gauged to play to your strengths. Trying to perform a hook while you're in too tight can leave you vulnerable, and throwing punches that don't land properly depletes your stamina or leaves you open to a counter-punch. In a worst-case scenario, a low stamina bar can lead to your blocking attempts being shredded or you ending up on the mat prematurely. I'm not saying that you have to measure and over-think every punch, but this is an example of how something as simple as the length of your arms can influence a fight's outcome. Think about it before you start going at it hammer and tongs with Mike Tyson.

Fight Night Round 4's tight interplay between punches, blocks, and boxer movement makes counter-punches important. Still, there are odd

times when counter-punches aren't rewarded, and I wonder if the game's definition of what earns you a counter punch is too strictly defined. As I moved up the career ladder, most fighters I faced relied heavily on a counter-punch strategy to the point that many of them boxed the same—including leaving their heads wide open to repeated jabs.

Apart from getting the fundamentals correct, *Fight Night Round 4* also improves its online and career modes, bringing them up to par with other modern sports games. They aren't groundbreaking—it's hard to get away from the train, fight, and repeat formula—but they cover the obvious bases and offer a much better sense of progression and accomplishment than previous titles in the franchise. I like the requirements before you can jump up to the next career level, as well as the spontaneous events like rematches.

It's hard to reinvent a sport that's... well, already a sport. But, developer EA Canada has done a marvelous job with bringing a focus to the fighting that brings out the sweet science. —KATO





Prototype

PLAYSTATION 3 / XBOX 360
 > STYLE: PLAY ACTION > PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
 > DEVELOPER: RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE: JUNE 10 > ESRB: M
 A FLAWED HERO

- > **Concept:** Prototype is built on the established superhero mold, and seems afraid to veer off it even when the protagonist's powers cut out for different experiences
- > **Graphics:** The amount of carnage displayed at any given time is impressive. Alex's animations have a unique touch to them, giving him an identity all his own
- > **Sound:** The voice acting is spot on and the soundtrack blends nicely with the tone of the game. If your system supports it, you can enjoy it through Neural 71 surround sound
- > **Playability:** Alex can get around town, but combat often becomes a chore. I should note that the helicopter controls are perfect
- > **Entertainment:** Capable of producing mayhem, but this is ultimately a frustrating and unimpaired superhero experience
- > **Replay Value:** Modest

Alex Mercer is a shape-shifter. He can assume the identity of anyone he kills, turning their bodies to mush and digesting what's left of them through his pores. By tapping into this ungody power, he can imitate military personnel — a move that grants him the opportunity to lay waste to aircraft before they take to the skies. If he's being chased, he can consume an elderly, arthritic man to blend into New York City's sprawling walk of life. If he is searching for answers, he can digest the brains of someone in the know to view their memories. Alex can become anyone he sees fit, but no matter what skin he hides behind, the person he reminds me of the most is Spider-Man.

As Alex blundered across rooftops, scampered up walls, and slung enemies with a black tendril of gooey webbing, I couldn't shake the feeling that he was following in the footsteps of Marvel's wall crawler. This isn't a bad thing, but Prototype seems so focused on emulating Spider-Man that it fails to establish an identity of its own.

Alex's moveset isn't the only familiar trait. Prototype clings tightly to the open world conventions found in most superhero games. Outside of military bases, all of the combat unfolds on city streets. If you want to veer off of the story missions, you can hunt down hidden orbs, or take on side missions, which (surprise, surprise) include timed races, skydiving, and combat challenges. All

combined, this package is entertaining on a basic level, but its familiarity prevents it from generating a lot of excitement.

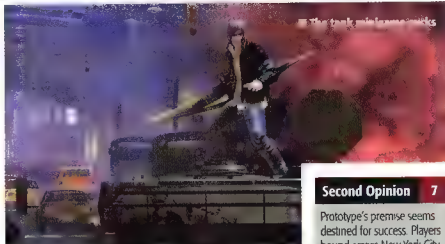
This is a shame, as Prototype rewards players well for going out of their way to tackle side content. For almost every action Alex makes, he is rewarded with experience points that can be exchanged for new powers and upgrades. The list of obtainable powers is extensive, and loaded with attacks that I couldn't wait to try out. This ever-expanding arsenal is effective in changing the way you approach combat, and helps keep the repetitive battles somewhat fresh.

This deep well of powers doesn't move Prototype away from feeling

like a well-worn pair of shoes. Developer Radical Entertainment made no attempt to reinvent the superhero wheel with this game. When new ideas are injected into tried and true formula, the gameplay falls apart. The only time I felt like this game was firing without fault was when Alex wasn't being pursued. The methods with which he can ascend skyscrapers or quickly bolt over a crowded city street are beautifully captured in both control and animation. Sadly, in a game that grants you god-like abilities, exploring the city ends up being the biggest thrill.

Problems arise when you attempt anything else. The stealth mechanic lets you sneak behind enemy lines, but for whatever reason, walking nonchalantly sometimes sets off an alarm, whereas dropping off of a skyscraper right in front of a general does nothing. Alex's vast arsenal of moves can be tapped to deliver a pounding on tanks, monsters, and helicopters, but as fluid as the actions are, the success of these attacks is tempered by shoddy targeting and a fussy weapon wheel. Don't get me wrong, I love throwing tanks at helicopters, and slinging a mutant tin two is a satisfying conclusion to a fight, but I didn't always feel like I had complete control over my actions. When the action is as frenzied as it is in this game, the slightest of delays can spell disaster.

Prototype also makes mistakes that I thought the open world genre had solved a generation ago.



Second Opinion 7

Prototype's premise seems destined for success. Players bound across New York City with superhuman speed while tearing apart monsters and military vehicles using a vast selection of bizarre powers. Radical Entertainment overcomes the concept's inherent appeal with an onslaught of poor decisions and spotty implementation, leaving Prototype with few redeeming moments. Instead of a wrecking machine, I felt like a faceless chump doing repetitive missions in service to a throwaway story. Combat is crippled by stupid enemies and temble targeting, and your moveset is restricted depending on your equipped weapon — though changing that weapon is stilled and awkward, especially in the heat of battle. The only thing Prototype really nails is mobility, scaling buildings and gliding through the air is fast and fun, allowing you to traverse the city with the same thrilling ease as Spider-Man or the Hulk. Unfortunately, once you arrive at your destination, the entertainment drains away and Prototype takes on the sickly pallor of a flawed open-world game waiting to be forgotten. —JOE



Alex's high-level attacks can decimate a city block



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii

The Bigs 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** BLUE CASTLE
> **RELEASE** JULY 7 > **ESRB** E10+

STEROIDS, PEDS, & THE BIG SLAM

The Bigs 2's main attraction is a story-driven career. Your player once had the makings of a five-tool Hall of Famer, but an injury knocked him out of the league. For reasons the game leaves to your guesswork, he travels to Mexico to rehab. After just a two-game stint, he makes a miraculous return to the majors. The road ahead is to regain your former skills so that you can make a final run at the Hall of Fame.

While this story smells of used needles, I enjoy this game's approach toward Hall of Fame election. A committee of players and sports writers won't review your career numbers. In this game, the only way to make it to Cooperstown is to beat the best at their own game. It's just a game of baseball, mind you, but the way the game delivers it has the tone of a Mortal Kombat match. As amusing as it would be to play them in their current age, you won't be staring down a 42-mile an hour fastball from Nolan Ryan. All of the players have magically reverted back to their prime, and as The Bigs 2 suggests, have been fed nothing but a steady diet of steroid burgers.

Outside of the legendary match-ups, your player is asked to complete goals throughout a number of shortened seasons (none lasting over 15 games). Fun side challenges also pop up from time to time, such as a timed games of spifire contact swings against Chippier Jones. The problem is that every goal must be completed before your player can move

on to the next challenge. In one game, you may be asked to beat the opposing team, get a single, and steal a base. If you miss one of these goals (such as swiping a bag with a slow player), you must play the game again. More accurately, it's playing it again, and again, and again.

The gameplay also proves to be an untimely culprit, thanks mostly to the new Big Slam power-up. This balance-breaking ability grants the offense with four swings — the first three are for singles, and the fourth is a mighty home run strike. This power-up can create a dramatic finish to a game, but moreover, it will drive the player on the receiving end insane because he has no control over the outcome. For whatever reason, the pitcher only gets to place the first pitch. The AI controls the remaining three. Why on earth would you strip away control for the biggest play of the game?

Minor aggravations, at least in comparison to the humiliation suffered from the Big Slam, also surface from faulty AI. Pitchers don't always cover first base. Runners on second often retreat to the base on a slow ground ball hit to the right side of the field. The computer also over abuses Legendary and Great catches.

If you're willing to play the game of "try, try again," you can have fun with The Bigs 2's career mode. However, if you're looking for a multiplayer game or an experience based on skill, the unbalanced run scoring and Big Slam will drive you crazy. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** A straight-up sequel with storytelling flash and unwanted gameplay changes

> **Graphics:** A detailed view of what every player would look like on steroids. Carlton Fisk looks like the Hulk!

> **Sound:** Believe it or not, a baseball announcer can be worse than Joe Morgan, and he's calling games in The Bigs 2

> **Playability:** Pitching feels great, yet the timing for hitting seems slow. Ultimately, the Big Slam power-up breaks the competitive spirit of the game

> **Entertainment:** The idea is sound, but the execution leaves much to be desired

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

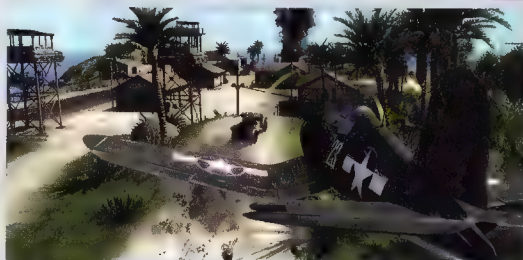
Second Opinion 6.5

Bad ideas don't get better when they are implemented well. This technically competent arcade-style baseball title is a perfect example. Its franchise is solid, and the career mode lays out a smooth path to "roiled up stadium, out the package as a whole is boring. Baseball is a game whose character is hidden in its nuances. Adapting to the unique strike zone of an umpire, or a pitcher changing his strategy around the eroding velocity of his fastball, is the sorts of subtlety that baseball does well. A game built around superluminal turbo fastballs and mammoth home run blasts knocking down scoreboards misses the point. —ADAM

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Battlefield 1943

> **STYLE** 24-PLAYER ONLINE ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** DICE > **RELEASE** JULY 9 > **ESRB** T



A FLASHBACK WORTH HAVING

Remaking a classic is always a dangerous proposition, but when the developer happens to be the same outfit that created the landmark game, apprehension dissolves into exhilaration. With Battlefield 1943, DICE triumphantly returns to World War II by enhancing the solid gameplay of one of the original multiplayer-only titles and adding a new layer of depth.

Battlefield 1943 recreates three popular maps from its predecessor — Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, and Wake Island. Each map maintains its trademark layout, but DICE went the extra mile in tailoring these maps for 24-player battles (the original had 64 players) by adding trenches, jungle, and destructible environments courtesy of the Frostbite engine.

Once the community for the respective platforms reaches 43,000,000 kills, EA will unlock a fourth map, Coral Sea, which features its own Air Superiority mode. Soldiers can either take to the skies in fighter planes or stay on the aircraft carrier to defend with flak cannons. While this mode will appeal to dog-fighting fans, the planes take time to master and are more effective in bombing situations than they are in air-to-air combat. Shipping another highly regarded infantry map that plays to its strengths — like Stalingrad, Berlin, or Market Garden — would have been a wiser move.

To streamline the gameplay, DICE trimmed the amount of soldier classes from five to three: Rifleman, Infantry, and Sniper. Since Battlefield 1943 uses a regenerative health

system, there is no need for medics. Each class also comes armed with a tank busting weapon, so you're never left defenseless against hulking masses of steel on the battlefield. Each weapon handles wonderfully, with the crisp, responsive controls Battlefield vets are used to.

Battlefields are awash with the cacophony of firing jeep turrets, bombing runs, and exploding tank shells, but players must also listen for air raid sirens if they want to stay alive. New to the game, the air raid stations scattered across the maps in neutral territory allow the first soldier that lays claim on the bunker to control bombing runs with a squadron of planes, targeting map areas with the largest concentration of enemy activity. It was no small coincidence that the team in control of the air raid station often the battle in our skirmishes, creating another layer of strategy for players to consider.

While there is no questioning the quality of the entertaining battles, the same can't be said for 1943's awards and statistics support. The game tracks your overall score, time played, and number of kills, but that's it. No kill-to-death ratio, star tracking by kit, or vehicle stats, which stands in stark contrast to the rich feedback other modern Battlefield games offer.

While the game lacks the feature depth of other Battlefield titles, 1943 is a fairly priced, solid core to build around with more downloadable content. If EA introduces weapon packs and additional maps from the franchise's stoned past, I'll be playing right up to the release of Bad Company 2. —BERTZ

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Re-fight the good fight in the Pacific Theater in this remake of the PC classic

> **Graphics:** The Frostbite engine fantastically recreates the maps to put them on par with modern Battlefield games

> **Sound:** Surprisingly detailed audio for an Xbox Live Arcade/PlayStation Network game

> **Playability:** Solid, responsive controls pulled straight from Bad Company

> **Entertainment:** With its limited \$14.99 cost barrier, all inbred shooter fans should enlist

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

EA and DICE bring the series back to its World War II roots with its first download-only title. Battlefield 1943 boasts just four island maps revived from 1942, with one of those devoted solely to dog fighting. The classic gameplay is in full effect here, with generally tight controls and a great multiplayer experience. Infantry and vehicle combat fits like a glove, but the flying is a bit loose. EA has included a level system that just misses the bar by not rewarding players for anything other than simply progressing. It would have been nice to see some weapon unlocking or stats attached. The Coral Sea dog-fighting map is wide-open and exciting, and the three full maps are completely detailed battlegrounds. Battlefield 1943's gameplay is downright awesome and one of the most polished download titles to date, but the lack of depth and maps may be a turnoff for the mildly interested. —NICK



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero Smash Hits

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (4-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** BEENOX STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 16 > **ESRB** T

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Is it too early for Guitar Hero nostalgia? Seems premature, but we live in an accelerated culture, and video games move fast. Here we are, only four years after the release of Harmonix's original PlayStation 2 Guitar Hero title, facing Smash Hits. As the name suggests, it's a greatest hits compilation of tracks from earlier GH titles, now featuring the full band play introduced in World Tour.

The title is designed with one thing in mind: creating for revenue for Activision. This is especially odd in light of the fact that it feels like something that could be addressed through downloadable content, as Harmonix has done so well with Rock Band. While my instinct is to be a curmudgeon, once I dug in, I got caught up again in playing the songs that taught me what music gaming was all about, like "Killer Queen" or "Bark at the Moon." It's especially edifying to find out how much fun it is to play old favorites like "Freyja" by The Sword on drums. In addition, some of the GH I and II songs that were covers are now straight from the original masters. While some of the note charts have been altered (and not always for the better), for the most part it's great fun.

Smash Hits does absolutely nothing to advance the GH brand in any way, but if you've long since packed up your PS2 it's a great way to get your hands on some old-school favorites. You're basically paying \$1.25 per song, which is lower than DLC pricing. Not a bad deal if you can handle jamming yet another Guitar Hero box into your racks. —**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Guitar Hero experiences a landmark in any rock star's career: the first "greatest hits" repackaging of old songs

> **Graphics:** While the songs are old, the visual presentation is similar to World Tour of Guitar Hero: Medieval

> **Sound:** Although there's nothing we haven't played before, an awful lot of really great songs are here

> **Playability:** It's interesting to see some differences in the note charts between the original tracks and these new remakes. For the hardcore drum crowd, there is Expert+ mode for a handful of songs

> **Entertainment:** While it's definitely product-for-product's sake, we can't help but get a warm feeling of nostalgia playing these old favorites in a new context

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

I'm a big fan of music games, but I'm frustrated at the seemingly unending flow of Guitar Hero titles coming out every few days. Smash Hits is a nice bookend to the first several entries in the franchise, gathering some of the best songs from the first five games in the series, and releasing them with the full-band treatment seen in World Tour. I was disappointed that so little has been done to polish the user interface and career structure, but the songs in Smash Hits are strong and well drafted for play in most cases. Some players will wonder why they're paying full price for a game with far fewer songs than were on World Tour, all of which have been on previous installments in some form, and they'll be justified in their complaint. I, for one, enjoyed my old favorites, but I'm more excited about this game moving forward than remembering its past. —**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Overlord II

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** TRIUMPH STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 23 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Control minions and cause mayhem as the newest evil overlord

> **Graphics:** Lots of funny expressions and animations for the minions, and some of the environments look cool

> **Sound:** The music evokes generic ominous evil, and there is way too much repetitive dialogue

> **Playability:** A convoluted control scheme makes heated battles unnecessarily complicated, especially if you hope to use magic

> **Entertainment:** Funny, but not fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Overlord II is devilishly hilarious (your minions are so evil they fear apart a village's pillow), but if you played through the first game, this quest feels like déjà vu. The new map reduces the frustration that came with being lost in the first game, and I did get a kick out of transforming into a minion, but the game's progression is too similar to its predecessor. Oh look, I'm tasked with unlocking the ability to use fire, water, and poison minions against! Moreover, this adventure feels as though it were hastily taped together in the eleventh hour. The cutscenes are not framed well, animation glitches abound in the gameplay, and the level designs and objectives feel like afterthoughts. It's not a polished experience, and new ideas are too thinly spread throughout the adventure. Even with the much-needed map, this follow-up isn't nearly as entertaining as the first entry. —**REINER**

NOT GOOD

Evil never dies, but Overlord II illustrates that it can decay over time. The first Overlord was a charming and humorous study in cartoonish malevolence, though it was difficult to appreciate in the face of its flaws. I had high hopes this sequel would rectify the issues and tap into the potential of the original. Instead, Overlord II just trades old problems for new ones...and the new ones are considerably worse.

The lack of a minimap was the most grievous offender in the first game, but the feature's inclusion in Overlord II does not improve things much. When level design is this dull, you just don't care where you are. The other new features, like sailing ships and possessing minions, are either half-baked or entirely broken; the attempt at a stealth section is particularly terrible. Variety is nice in theory, but it also needs to work in execution.

Tweaks to the combat and magic systems don't fare much better. Casting spells is useless; when I tried to use my fully powered-up shockwave spell on a swarm of guards, I was lucky if it even interrupted their attack animations, much less hurt

them. While managing and controlling your minions works better than the last entry, the whole process of combat is a chore, since you're just repeating a handful of encounters using the same tactics.

With so many missteps, clever writing and funny moments with your minions remain the only real reasons to take up the overlord's mantle. Watching your gremlin-like thralls ravage towns, break things, and put crazy stuff on their heads is always good for a laugh. In most games, those little details act as the icing on the cake; in Overlord II, the icing is a weak attempt to cover up the cardboard prop cake underneath.

The real shame is that Overlord II can be entertaining. It shamelessly embraces its evil heritage, and goes to great lengths to put the hilarious minions front and center. On the other hand, it just doesn't play well. The controls are clunky, the pacing is unsatisfying, and the multiplayer feels tacked-on. While the original Overlord was a compelling game at heart, Overlord II just feels like an unpolished retreat of familiar ground. —**JOE**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** TECHLAND > **RELEASE** JULY 3 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** From the dark Civil War battlefields to the windswept Mexican deserts, take two brothers on a journey into the Old West

> **Graphics:** Phenomenal environment art highlights this great-looking game

> **Sound:** Excellent voiceover work and an era-appropriate score pull you into the setting

> **Playability:** Some variations on the normal first-person control mechanics take getting used to, but it all works well if you give it a few levels

> **Entertainment:** This is a great ride through a classic genre, if you can look past some technical and AI hiccups

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

Brothers Ray and Thomas McCall solve most of their problems with six-shooters. Techland employs a similar tactic with *Bound in Blood*, wisely ditching the cumbersome stealth levels from

the original in favor of more intense shootouts in the picturesque Western prairies, mountains, and ghost towns. While a touchy cover system, tricky dueling mechanic, and lack of melee disappoint, the brothers' distinct slow-motion kill systems highlight an otherwise solid shooter.

The story beats in strongly with the first game, even recycling settings in service of the game's tale of just, greed, and betrayal. While some of the cheesy dialogue details emotional moments (why would the brothers crack jokes while running to save their family?), Techland's Spaghetti Western plot has more going for it than most games in the genre. Add in the creative outlaws vs. lawmen multiplayer mode, and this gunman has a decent draw. —BERTZ

THE RIGHT MIX

Bound in Blood serves as a prequel to the first *Call of Juarez* game, laying the groundwork for characters and plots from the original and telling an engrossing yarn of its own along the way. While it is one of the better looking first-person games to come out this year, it isn't the most technically savvy. The gameplay isn't perfectly honed, but an ever-changing mix of clever ideas, evocative locations, and engaging characters tap the best traditions of the Western genre.

The core first-person shooting mechanic delivers solid thrills, whether you're hitting a rooftop sharpshooter with your rifle or busting through town with both revolvers blazing. Enemies make some questionable decisions as they fight. Then again, dropping seven thugs in a saloon before they can squeeze off a shot does have a certain appeal.



different modes. While some standard multiplayer modes are in place, the cool objective-based game type gives players different missions for each map. Old West bank robbery, anyone?

Whether you're playing alone or multiplayer, the game isn't the most polished action experience, but that's not the reason to get excited about *Bound in Blood*. Look to the gorgeous locales, the spot-on tone of your favorite dusty old Western movie, and the chance to sling a six-shooter with the best of them. —MILLER

Both of the two main characters have their own specialties, and I enjoyed flipping back and forth between the two as the game progressed. It's a shame the design doesn't allow for a cooperative game mode, as the story and level structure seem tailor-made for that addition. Nonetheless, the two unique characters allow for compelling replay potential; that potential is magnified by a few light RPG touches, such



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Damnation

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** BLUE OMEGA ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MAY 26 > **ESRB** M

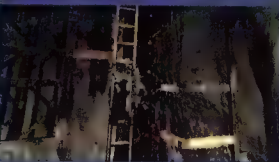
BUGNATION

In 1999, Alan Moore wrote *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. It proved two things: One: Classic literature is still cool. Two: If you are going to write about an alternate historical reality that meshes steampunk with ancient mysticism, you'd better be a damn good writer. *Damnation's* story isn't terrible per se. It's just confused and in such a hurry to get to where it's going that it forgets the "little things," like character development and coherent narrative.

This sub-par shooter isn't aided by its lack of cover mechanic or aim assist. *Damnation's* levels are built so that you can platform around combat encounters, but your acrobatic skills lack any diversity, and you quickly tire of awkwardly crashing through windowpanes to get at enemies who only occasionally chase after you and rarely succeed at hitting their target.

It's a shame *Damnation* can't get a grip on its gunplay, because the game is filled with evocative imagery — building-sized tanks, bury professor gunslingers, and cliffside structures built to the sky. Unfortunately, these elements are wasted on the game's repetitive environments; you'll spend most of your time navigating areas so poorly designed that Blue Omega should have hung arrow signs pointing players in the right direction. The added gunslinger antics are actually preferable to traversing these mazes.

Damnation's biggest problems are the unintentional mistakes. The game is a mess of bugs. I saw enemies shoot through walls, hover across the ground while crouched, and magically teleport across the screen because the game couldn't keep up. More than once I stood in front of an enemy for several seconds before he noticed me. It's comedic gold, but I imagine the dev team isn't laughing. This isn't a premier blend of pulp fiction. It's just a pulpy mess. —BEN



BOTTOM LINE 3

> **Concept:** Take action/platform conventions and make them unplayable

> **Graphics:** Enemies stupidly fire at you in still, animation-free poses

> **Sound:** Sometimes characters talk to one another, but you won't likely understand where those conversations are going

> **Playability:** A lack of cover system is the least of the game's problems; *Damnation* is buggier than a road trip through Alabama swampland

> **Entertainment:** As bad as the game is, it's so easy I was never frustrated with it. If you're interested in witnessing a train wreck, bring a friend, slung for co-op. Just skip the multiplayer.

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4

The only reason to consider playing *Damnation* is if you find it the \$5 bin and can convince a friend to laugh his or her way through it on co-op with you. The hilariously terrible story plays out like a 13-year-old boy wrote it during math class, and the platforming is a constant, bop-pain in the ass. Combat fares no better, with its slow-to-appear aim-reel and silly puns. Enemies love to show off their backs or camp over your dead body and kill you the instant you revive. They also get tripped up on the environment, the last boss got stuck in a wall and I just shot his foot until the credits started rolling. Multiplayer lives up to the crappiness of the campaign with barebones features and maps that have you climbing around looking for nubs rather than shooting them. —BRYAN



■ Radar that always shows players is a powerful tool



■ Melee attacks are surprisingly useful

Wii

The Conduit

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** JUNE 23 > **ESRB** T

LOW VOLTAGE

There's nothing terribly wrong with The Conduit. You can move around, shoot things, and collect stuff. If the Wii is the only platform available to you, The Conduit is an acceptable FPS. Those of us who have spent any time with the genre since the turn of the millennium have no reason to pick this up.

A dozen or so hours of banal conspiracy story about shadowy government agencies and what may or may not be an alien invasion comprises The Conduit's single-player game. For the vast majority of the campaign, you slog through corridor after hallway, blasting away at simpletons. Some moments of solid design are sprinkled amid the monotony, like fending off constantly spawning enemies while trying to download critical data in a secret White House situation room. For the most part, though, the single-player mode is little more than a thinly disguised sequence of arenas whose doors magically unlock after you've cleared the area of hostiles.

Online play works better than I expected on the Wii, which is to say that it's slightly better than what PC gamers had circa 1998. Matchmaking works well enough, and latency issues are present but not catastrophic. An interesting take on free-for-all deathmatching, dubbed Bounty Hunter mode, subtly changes the game by only scoring points for

players who have wronged you in the past, giving you an onscreen objective arrow to the current location of your most bitter foe. Beyond that, the old standbys like capture-the-flag and team deathmatch round out a capable online experience. The Conduit's bright spot is its inventive weaponry. Several firearms can be charged up for alternate attacks, and slight tweaks to familiar weapons, like the ammo-friendly grenade launcher, make the arsenal fresh and fun to employ. Particularly in multiplayer, the array of armaments creates a great gameplay dynamic.

The interface has been The Conduit's biggest question mark, and the answer is decidedly mixed. Aiming is mediocre without being hideous. Tracking the slow-moving AI enemies isn't much of a problem, but drawing a bead on a human opponent is tough even with the game's ploddingly slow movement speed. That said, it's not impossible to get used to, and I'm certain the scheme will have its

defenders as players spend time with it.

The larger problem is the poor secondary button placement on the Wii remote. It's difficult to use the d-pad without drunkenly jerking your view around, and you end up with common actions assigned to those buttons no matter how you configure the controls. I applaud the broad leeway High Voltage allows players in customizing The Conduit's interface, but no amount of clever programming can fix the way Nintendo designed the Wii remote.

There's not much to hate about The Conduit outside of some lamentably uninspired design decisions. There isn't much to love, either. It feels like a 10-year-old game at times, albeit a reasonably polished one. It's on Wii, though, and that will be enough for some people. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **Concept:** Make a Wii first-person shooter that doesn't suck

> **Graphics:** This is far from Modern Warfare for obvious reasons, but the framerate is solid and it won't give you glaucoma or anything

> **Sound:** Weapons boom satisfactorily, but the voice work is painful

> **Playability:** The control is less horrible than you might fear. However, it falls well short of a vanilla dual analog scheme — not to mention mouse and keyboard

> **Entertainment:** If all you have is a Wii and you absolutely must play an FPS, this is fine

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



■ Multiplayer level design is nicely varied

Second Opinion **7.5**

Some think that the Wii represents the future of FPS, but almost everything about this game screams mid '90s. Take into account the overly linear level design, enemy spawn portals, and AI that dopily stands behind a cardboard box as though it were good cover, and the Conduit feels like a remake of some long forgotten N64 title. It's not bad, but games have evolved past this. High Voltage's version of a near-future Washington is a dangerous place, not because it's secretly run by an insidious government organization, but because every 10 feet some explosive barrel is ready to blow up in your face. While The Conduit's controls feel lighter than most Wii shooters, its shaky aiming still doesn't prove that the Wii can do FPS better than other consoles. Fortunately, the game is one of the best looking titles on the system, features some of the most creative weapons I've seen since Ratchet and Clank, and has some amusing multiplayer. But that's not enough to make up for the fact that it plays like it fell through a time portal from the GoldenEye era of console shooters. —**BEN**



■ Charged-up shots can be devastating



■ What few puzzles exist are little more than "find something and use the gadget on it"



Wii

Overlord: Dark Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** TRIUMPH STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 23 > **ESRB** T

FOR THE MASTER

Don't be confused. Overlord: Dark Legend released on the same date as Overlord II, but it's a totally different game. This Wii exclusive takes full advantage of the system's features, and benefits most significantly from the motion controller. Pointing and sweeping your minions around the field, it's hard to imagine the game never really develops into more than a distraction, as our antimacabre playthrough confirmed.

Dark Legend is a coming of age story about a young, untrained lord of evil. That is, if your coming of age included dozens of gremlin-like minions, destruction of the surrounding countryside, and fomenting war between the neighboring countries. The story is never more than an excuse for silliness, but it serves its purpose right up until the end, when an

abrupt conclusion leaves you scratching your head.

The Wii remote allows a straightforward and intuitive mechanic for getting things done. One button sends your little guys out to cause wanton destruction in the direction of your cursor, and another button reins them back in. An anchoring marker never really works the way you want it to, but everything else feels smooth.

The game's design is overly simplistic, perhaps as an attempted nod to younger players. It hurts the experience, since it feels like you've won every fight before you even begin, even against bosses.

It's rare that any puzzle or battle requires more than the mildest attention. Even knowing that, Dark Legend benefits from its clever premise — one that certainly stands apart from the rest of the Wii catalog. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Guide mischievous minions through familiar fantasy tropes with the aid of a motion-controlled pointer

> **Graphics:** Lots of environmental variety and color, but these textures look bad

> **Sound:** Coofy voices repeat canned lines again and again

> **Playability:** With the exception of the troop gatherer marker system, the motion controls work remarkably well

> **Entertainment:** This is a mildly fun but overly simple adventure, but at least it's been built from the ground up for the Wii

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7.5

Overlord: Dark Legend brings a wicked sense of humor to its minion-mangling gameplay. Seeing your little scamps running roughshod over the environments, trashing and looting everything in their path is a treat. The basics of the Pikmin-esque gameplay are well done (love the pointer control), but ultimately the game feels too shallow. After you understand what units are good for which tasks, the rudimentary combat and puzzle solving begins to feel like a holdover from the last generation of gaming. It's a fine bit of comic mischief, but this concept can be carried out to much greater effect — as in the recent Little King's Story. —**MATT**

NINTENDO DS

The Legendary Starfy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** TOSHIBA
> **RELEASE** JUNE 10 > **ESRB** E



THE NEW BLOB IN TOWN

The Legendary Starfy is a new Nintendo platformer for DS that might bring about déjà vu. You see, Kirby Starfy is a amorphous pink-yellow blob-starfish who can assume a number of different forms that grant him abilities like breathing fire or throwing bombs. Over the course of the game you'll float-swim through a variety of themed worlds, exploring and unlocking new secrets as you go. Similarities to Kirby aside, I actually came to like Starfy. He's not exactly innovative in platforming, but the game shows a mastery of the genre's conventions. While your move set starts small, the game does out new

Starfy forms and abilities at a constant pace, keeping you motivated to see what's around the next corner. In addition, in certain instances you can have a friend jump in and join your solo campaign on the fly via a wireless connection (which works even if they don't have a cartridge of their own).

The game isn't mind-blowing, but it's well crafted and bolstered by some genuinely funny writing. I was constantly amused by little asides in the script, like when a bad comedian says "I'm the shrimp folks, I'll be here all week!" after a particularly bad joke.

The controls vary from form to form, but are usually tight enough to pass muster. While there are definitely some flaws — the "daze" effect that stuns you after spin attacking too many times is extremely annoying, the boss battles are clichéd affairs, and the turbo run could be better tuned — it's a nice little game. That said, there's really nothing here you haven't seen a million times before, and I did find my attention flagging at certain points. A fun, but disposable, game. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** A long-running Japanese platforming series finally makes it to the States

> **Graphics:** In the classic Nintendo fashion, it's cute, crisp, and colorful

> **Sound:** Amiable, if slightly forgettable tunes won't exactly have you reaching to turn it up

> **Playability:** Hits all the basics, though I don't understand why there is a cooldown period after repeated spin attacks

> **Entertainment:** Pleasant — almost to a fault. If you like the less strenuous platforming of Kirby, this is a fine time

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

If one thing can be said about Starfy, it's that he does what he does well. The problem is he doesn't really do anything innovative. Despite a platform-centric gameplay, a cast of endearing characters, and upbeat music, nearly everything about The Legendary Starfy feels all too familiar. The battles are laughably easy and Starfy's tendency to overport himself and become dizzy when performing his trademark move is a bit annoying. Still, with collectables to scavenge, secret areas to unlock, diverse locations and a comically cute character in the lead, it's hard not to enjoy the game — even if you feel like you've played it before. —**MEAGAN**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

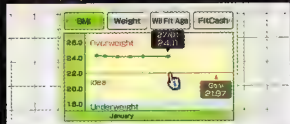
Listings Based Upon NPD Data For May 2009 Based On Units Sold

1 UFC 2009: UNDISPUTED (360)



When your UFC game has inspired us to live a healthier lifestyle, so we've started working out, sweating style. After getting hyped up on Powerade and Twizzlers, we had a few friends break chairs over our heads. Afterwards we sprayed down with baby oil and let a 98-pound monkey work us over on the mat like an oversized banana. We've lost four pounds.

2 WII FIT (Wii)



No wonder people like Wii Fit. Gyms are scary places filled with swollen, screaming people; it's almost like a medieval hospital filled with smallpox patients. On our last visit, we ran into an old lady with headphones who randomly spoke Spanish, and one highly toned infant who looked like he wanted to beat us up. We ran to the store and bought Wii Fit.

3 EA SPORTS ACTIVE BUNDLE (Wii)



Then again, if you are the kind of person that needs a gym atmosphere you could buy EA Active. Try putting a sign on your door that says "hot tub down for maintenance," mute Ellen, then invite an old guy to beer as you watch he walks naked through your bathroom. Voila! Instant health club ambience.

4 UFC UNDISPUTED: 2009 (PS3)



Sure these new UFC games are selling, but we miss the old days of wrestling where any dingus named Terry Bollea could take his vitamins, say his prayers, and become a real American. Yeah, back then it seemed like any balding mullet man could start his own failing movie career then go on to star on reality TV where he blows every chance his daughter has at having a social life. Wrestling is just too much of a production nowadays.

5 INFAMOUS (PS3)



Infamous is our kind of workout. It's like an exercise for your morals. Do you electrocute a homeless man and steal his socks? Or do you kindly make all his pain go away by turning his brain into fried ziti? Do you pick a fight with a deranged woman on the street because she smells funny? Or do you do the neighborhood a favor and silence her crazy rants by blowing 4,000 volts of electricity through her vocal cords? The game is like with moral dilemmas.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	UFC 2009: Undisputed	N/A	360	8	05-09
2	Wii Fit	1	Wii	8	04-08
3	EA Sports Active Bundle	N/A	Wii	N/A	05-09
4	UFC 2009: Undisputed	N/A	PS3	8	05-09
5	Infamous	N/A	PS3	9	05-09
6	Pokémon Platinum	2	DS	8.5	03-09
7	Mario Kart Wii	3	Wii	8.5	04-08
8	Punch-Out!!	N/A	Wii	9	05-09
9	X-Men Origins: Wolverine	N/A	360	8	04-08
10	Wii Play	4	Wii	7	02-07
11	New Super Mario Bros.	7	DS	9.25	05-06
12	Mario Kart DS	8	DS	8.5	11-05
13	X-Men Origins: Wolverine	N/A	PS3	8	04-08
14	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	360	10	11-07
15	Gardening Mama	N/A	DS	6.5	05-09
16	Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	N/A	360	7.75	05-09
17	Call of Duty: World at War	17	360	8.75	11-08
18	Rhythm Heaven	13	DS	7.5	03-09
19	Halo 3	N/A	360	9.75	09-07
20	Gold's Gym Cardio Workout	N/A	Wii	N/A	03-09

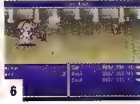
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Infinite Space	DS
2	Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days	DS
3	Sloan and McHale's Mysterious Story	DS
4	Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth	DS
5	Shin Sangokumusou 5: Empires	PS3
6	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
7	Play on Wii: Chibi-Robo!	Wii
8	Wii Fit	Wii
9	Evangelion: Jo	PSP
10	Arc Rise Fantasia	Wii



TOP 10 GI

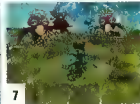
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Fight Night Round 4	N/A	multi
2	Battlefield 1943	N/A	multi
3	NCAA Football 10	N/A	multi
4	The Sims 3	1	PC
5	Red Factions: Guerrilla	2	multi
6	Final Fantasy IV: The After Years	N/A	Wii
7	Guitar Hero: Smash Hits	N/A	multi
8	Plants vs. Zombies	3	PC
9	Punch-Out!!	4	Wii
10	Infamous	5	PS3



The Sims 3 Favorite PC

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	1	\$36
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	2	\$20
3	Left 4 Dead	7	\$29
4	World Of Warcraft	6	\$20
5	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	3	\$40
6	Empire: Total War	5	\$50
7	Spore	N/A	\$41
8	Fallout Trilogy	N/A	\$20
9	Bejeweled Twist	N/A	\$14
10	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	11	\$20



Best Of Monthly Units Sold



ONLINE

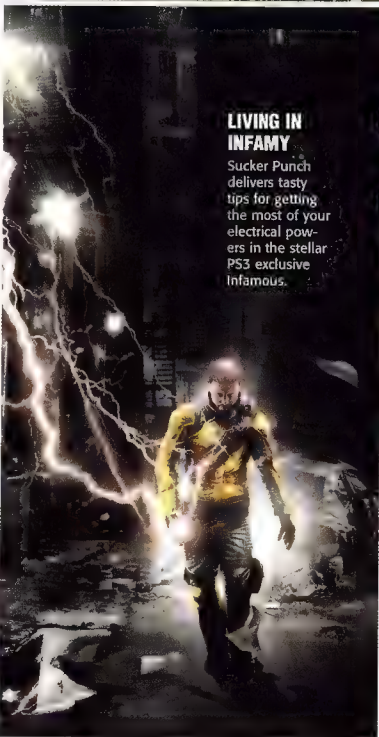
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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: JUL. 16



E3 '09 HOT LIST

Game Informer expands our list of great titles at E3 from 10 to 50, plus our favorite teaser trailers.



LIVING IN INFAMY

Sucker Punch delivers tasty tips for getting the most of your electrical powers in the stellar PS3 exclusive Infamous.



ZENIMAX ADOPTS ID

Learn more about the ZeniMax acquisition of id Software in our interviews with id co-founder John Carmack and ZeniMax CEO Robert Altman.



THE PARTNERS

Dig deeper into why so many great development studios are flocking to EA Partners in our extended interviews with Starbreeze, id Software, and Epic Games.



Also Online This Month:

Game Informer Online heads to the San Diego Comic Con to geek out and make fun of Meagan as she cos-plays with the best of them.



sp34k your mind

on the many

features of the

Honda INSIGHT

enter the

Honda INSIGHT

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The Sims 3

Putting the Style in Life



By Grant Rodiek, Associate Producer

MOODLET MANAGEMENT – Happy Sims are better at their jobs, building skills and relationships faster, and earning more lifetime happiness points. Keeping several strong moodlets is the key to a Happy Sim. The first step is to pick traits that work with your play style. Loner Sims get the “enjoying solitude” moodlet when alone and “loves the outdoors” moodlet gets bonuses when outside. Secondly, if your Sims get a full night’s sleep on a quality bed, they’ll have “well rested” for most of the day. Complement this with a quality prepared meal, and your Sims will have the good, great, or even amazing meal moodlets. Finally, take advantage of the easy grime moodlets, like “minky breath” from brushing your Sim’s teeth, “having a blast” from doing fun activities (e.g. watching TV or playing video games), and several moodlets just from having a quality conversation with another Sim.

Unfortunately, negative moodlets also exist. In order to not completely offset the positive moodlets gained, you should be aware of activities that directly contradict your Sim’s traits. For example, “technophobe” Sims hate using electronics. “Can’t stand art” Sims are miserable at the art gallery. Whenever a negative moodlet appears, hover your mouse over the icon to find out what it is so that you can solve it immediately.

LIFETIME HAPPINESS REWARDS – Sims earn lifetime happiness by satisfying wishes and being quite happy. These points can be spent on incredibly powerful benefits. Some will fundamentally change how much free time your Sims have, such as steel bladder, hardly hungry, and dirt defiant, which more or less remove a Sim’s need to pee, eat, and shower respectively. Others can dramatically improve your Sim’s effectiveness at work, such as professional stalker (no penalty for slacking off), office hero (better at socializing with co-workers), and multi-tasker (that increase in work performance). Finally, some are geared towards improving your Sim’s skills. “Super green thumb” makes

all plants grown by your Sim a higher quality and “acclaimed author” dramatically increases royalties earned for writing books. Woe to the Sims player who does not take advantage of lifetime happiness rewards!

NEIGHBORHOOD BENEFITS – When you first start playing, your Sims probably won’t have the funds necessary to buy everything you want for them. No worries, because the neighborhood is full of free ways to improve your Sims’ lives! Send your Sims to the gym to work out for free and earn a powerful moodlet. Learn skills for free by using the books at the public library. Rummage through neighbors’ garbage cans to find various goodies. Finally, if your Sims have a little extra cash, send them to the bistro or theatre for some entertainment and high quality food (both of which come with powerful moodlets).

COLLECTION CAPERS – The neighborhoods are full of things to find, both to fill your Sims’ homes and bank accounts. Butterflies and beetles can be caught, then placed in terrariums at home or sold to the science facility for Simoleons. Over 20 species of fish can be found in various locations and time of day. Some are worth quite a bit, especially those swimming in the graveyard or behind the science facility. Rare and precious gems and metals can be found around the neighborhood, particularly around the old mine. Don’t forget to pick up seeds to plant at home, because some plants, like the money tree, can lead your Sims from rags to riches. If you look just a little bit you’ll find plenty of things for Sims to collect in their spare time.

IT’S A LIVING – Every Sim should get a job the first time you play The Sims 3. It’s the best and easiest way to make money, and it’s many features. Careers will teach you how to manage your Sims’ moodlets, how to develop skills, what opportunities are, and how to get around town. They also provide your Sims an easy way to socialize with co-workers and their bosses. Some careers will earn your Sims some

handsome rewards on top of a hefty salary. Sims in the law enforcement career will be given their very own squad car with some sweet sirens. Musicians can more or less set their own work hours when they reach the top, and business executives can hold meetings whenever they want to earn some side cash. High-level chefs will be given free appliances, including an incredibly useful fridge that gives a moodlet to everyone in the room. Stick with a job and your Sims will be rewarded handsomely.

SKILLFULLY EXECUTED – More than ever, Sims can use skills as a fun pastime or even a self-employed career. For starters, every skill has an associated personality trait that will take your Sim to the top. For example, athletic Sims make the best athletes, and natural cooks prepare the finest culinary delights. One of the more profitable skills is writing. Though slow to start, Sims can eventually earn royalty checks of several thousand Simoleons every week for several weeks per book. For the outdoor inclined, fishing and gardening can also be quite profitable. Furthermore, these two skills complement each other perfectly. Gardeners can grow produce to be used as bait for fish, and fish can be used to fertilize the garden. Both can be sold to the supermarket for ample Simoleons. Painting is one of the most versatile skills, as it can earn your Sims quite a bit of money and help them fill their home with incredible paintings. Don’t forget that a well-decorated home provides powerful moodlets to all Sims who live there. Skills are vital to almost every career, so even if your Sim isn’t a self-employed guru, developing a skill will almost always help them at work.

BUILDING A HOME – When you feel up to the fun task of building your own home, for your Sims, it’s best to keep a few things in mind. Firstly, keep it simple. Start with a bedroom, living room, dining area, kitchen, and bathroom. Focus on simple layouts and cheap to moderately priced furnishings. Take advantage of the auto-roof tool and don’t blow your Sims’ bank account on things like doors and light fixtures. Secondly, spice things up with Create-A-Style. Even when on a budget, any home can be turned into a marble mansion by changing patterns and textures of your furniture. Take advantage of the handiness skill, which allows your Sim to upgrade cheap objects with helpful tweaks that turn them into high-value equivalents. Beware that failure can lead to household mishaps, up to and including fire and death. Finally, a little landscaping can vastly change the aesthetics of a home. Add a small hill, a pond, a garden area, or a small grove of trees. Your Sims will appreciate it and your eyes will thank you.

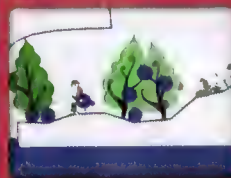
Mod World

Blueberry Garden
<http://eriksvedang.wordpress.com/>
<http://blueberrygarden/>



The grand prize winner of the 2009 Independent Games Festival, Blueberry Garden recently released on Steam for a mere \$5. This atmospheric adventure is technically a series of puzzles. However, the experience of playing Blueberry Garden has more in common with Flower than Professor Layton.

In control of a weird birdlike dude in a top hat, players explore an ecosystem populated by odd creatures. Several different fruits grow on scattered trees and grant various powers when eaten. The story of this strange world unfolds as you navigate obstacles and reach new areas. Blueberry Garden is undeniably short, but its terse message is none the worse for it.



Blowing winds, haunting piano lines, and unearthly visuals combine to draw you into this bizarre land. There’s not much to the game from a technical perspective, but its artistry is on par with anything in the medium. Along with fellow IGF winner Braid, this title is a fantastic counterpoint to any argument denying video games their status as art.



Code of the Month



Red Faction: Guerrilla



Few things in this world please us more than razing an entire mining colony to the ground on another world. This month in Secret Access we bring you two codes to add a little more style to your destruction – as well as a few more maps to foster your destructive tendencies. From the main menu screen, select Options, followed by Extras, and finally Enter Code. Both codes must be entered in all capital letters.

Enable the **Fortress, Gulch, Scrapheap, and Transmission Maps in Wrecking Crew Mode** – MAPMAVHEM
 Enable the **"Gold Breaker" Hammer in Single-Player Mode** – HARDHITTER



Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases bugger than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gamenformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

PS3 • XBOX 360



Prototype

From the main menu, go to Extras, then select Cheat Code, and press the following button combinations.

Body Surf on Enemies – Right, Right, Left, Down, Up, Up, Down

Wii



Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings

If you read our review of the Staff of Kings in last month's issue, you know the best thing about this Wii title is the inclusion of the classic graphical adventure game, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, as an unlockable extra. At the title screen use the following code to start playing this old-school hit immediately.

Unlock Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis – Hold Z, then press A, Up, Up, B, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, B

NINTENDO DS



Lego Battles

From the main menu, select LEGO Store, then Cheat Codes. Type in the following codes to unlock additional characters and abilities:

Fast Building – QMSLPOE
Islander – UGDRSQP
Ninja Master – SHWSDGU
Space Criminal Leader – ZVDNJSU
Troll King – XRCTVVB

"GI Droid"
 (location unknown – Last seen trying to pass off target render videos as in-game footage)

[GEEKED AT BIRTH.]



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"I Gotta Believe!"

The Story of Parappa the Rapper

Long before plastic guitars and games like Rock Band and Guitar Hero became centerpieces to house parties across the nation, the idea of a music-centric video game seemed foolish. Focusing a game's mechanics entirely around timed button presses and scrolling icons was almost laughable. At best, this was a passable idea for a minigame. According to this line of thinking, music wasn't supposed to be the focus of a game; it was best used as background noise. Then a cartoon dog came along and did the unthinkable.



The Musician



Masaya Matsuura

In the late '80s, Masaya Matsuura had no intention of making video games. As the front man for a J-Pop band called Psy•S, he was enjoying a moderately successful musical career. The electronica-focused band made a decent living by licensing songs to popular Japanese animes such as City Hunter and To-y.

Then in 1993, Matsuura produced a CD-Rom called The Seven Colors for Mac platforms. The digital package allowed users to interact with music in new ways. "I'm sure most people think that music is something that is recorded on a CD or MP3, but practically, this is just one element of its existence," Matsuura says. "For example, if we think of a musician as a fluid thing, then a CD or MP3 is comparable to a snapshot capturing a specific moment. In order to observe and appreciate this from a more multi-angled approach, I felt that a shift to interactive media was necessary."

When Psy•S broke up in 1996, Matsuura started exploring these different angles by further blending technology and music. Matsuura formed a production house called NanaOn-Sha, and began exploring his ideas with Sony's brand new PlayStation video game system. He knew he wanted to create a game that was different from the norm. He knew that he wanted his main character to be a rapper, and that he wanted to put players in direct control of the music. But the game was missing something. Matsuura knew that he needed someone to come along and give his rapping game a distinctive look. That man was an American artist best known for his work in children's literature.



The Artist



Rodney Alan Greenblat

By the mid '90s, Rodney Alan Greenblat had become fairly successful in the art community. Several exhibitions of his work had opened across the country as early as 1982, and in 1986 he showcased his art to a slightly different crowd when he painted the cover art for alt-rock band They Might Be Giants' self-titled release. "As a child I watched cartoons and went to Disneyland, and was also able to look at books on Picasso and Miro," Greenblat says. "I think it is the combination of cheery pop culture and early modernism that led me to my style. For me inspiration can come from anywhere at anytime, so I try to keep an open mind at all times."

Greenblat moved to Japan in the early '90s to help draw character designs for an unrelated Sony Computer Entertainment project, but Matsura, who was already a fan of Greenblat's work, recruited the artist to draw the characters in his quickly evolving rapping game. "He wanted me to create characters for a PlayStation game," Greenblat recalls. "But I was a little worried. I didn't have any idea how my 2D work would translate to 3D." Fortunately, Matsura had already figured that part out. He didn't want his game to look like every other video game on the market. This rapping game was going to have its own style.

"We wanted to preserve the essence of Rodney's artwork," Matsura remembers. "Things like buildings translated decently enough to 3D, but at the time things weren't sufficiently advanced, either in hardware or software, to enable satisfactory renderings of characters in 3D." As a result, all of the characters in Matsura's game were given a flat, almost whimsical 2D quality. It was a decision — made partially out of necessity — that would earn the game several awards and plenty of praise.

With Greenblat's bright artistic direction, Matsura's rapping game took shape. The tale emerged about a little anthropomorphic dog who — in an attempt to woo his heart's desire — takes up kung fu lessons, learns to drive, and gets a job at a local flea market earning extra cash. His adventures almost always end disastrously, but in the end he gets the girl. His name, Matsura decided, was PaRappa.

Each stage of PaRappa's adventure centered on a rap song, which Matsura helped write. Players would match the rhythms of the music with icons representing the controller's buttons as they scrolled across the top of the screen. This system has been refined a thousand times over since that day, but back in 1996 no one had attempted anything so novel.

"I really did not have any expectations for PaRappa when the game first appeared in the market," Greenblat says. "The PlayStation platform was new, so it was hard to imagine having a hit." Greenblat wasn't the only person to have reservations. Matsura recounts, "When we finished making PaRappa the Rapper, nobody was really sure if it was a 'music game' so to speak. I remember that there were naysayers within the industry who claimed that it wasn't a game at all!"



PaRappa



Lose Yourself In The Music

If you liked the original PaRappa, hunt down some of these other classic music titles from Masaya's development house, NanaOn-Sha.

UmJammer Lammy (1999)

Released for the PSone, this spinoff to the PaRappa series featured rock music instead of rap and followed the adventures of a guitar-playing lamb named Lammy.

Vib-Ribbon (1999)

This unique title was only released on Japanese and European PSones. It allowed players to match the beats of any musical CD they placed inside their PlayStation.

PaRappa the Rapper 2 (2002)

This PS2 title continued the adventures of PaRappa in an exponentially stranger plot that had him dealing with the hassles of winning a 100-year supply of noodles.



This Month In Gaming History

On July 21, 1999, during the Macworld Conference & Expo, Steve Jobs announced the game that would eventually make Microsoft's Xbox a success, Halo: Combat Evolved. Jobs claimed the game would release for Mac, OS and Windows simultaneously. The game developed quite a buzz around the fan community, and was especially noteworthy since the trailer was rendered on a now ancient Macintosh G3 computer. A year later, Microsoft bought Bungie Studios, ensuring that Halo would never see the light of day on a Mac platform.





GAME OVER

Wow! You Lose!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

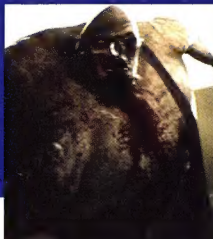
For gamers, E3 is an exciting chance to see all of the newest technology and fun gaming ideas the industry has to offer. But for the companies and presenters, it's a grueling war of sales pitches and one-upmanship, with the show's weakest contenders running a gauntlet of disparaging insults that only the Internet is capable of providing. Take our quiz to find out how you would fare in the heat of the E3 spotlight.

1 E3 has spawned quite a few internet memes over the years. Which one of these did we just make up?

- A. Reaction Guys
- B. Giant Enemy Crab!
- C. More Hamsters. NOW
- D. Easily Distracted Translator

2 This year's E3 brought news of Left 4 Dead 2, as well as a new special Infected class. What's the name of this new, lopsided character?

- A. Dozer
- B. Charger
- C. Rusher
- D. Popeye



3 The "Imagine" brand game series sure has a lot of different titles. Which of these is not yet a real game?

- A. Imagine: Makeup Artist
- B. Imagine: Wedding Designer
- C. Imagine: Animal Doctor
- D. Imagine: Nurse Practitioner



4 Speaking of proliferative brands: The Petz game series is out of control! Which of these wild animals have not yet spawned a Petz title?

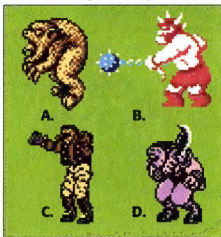
- A. Tigerz
- B. Prairie Dogz
- C. Monkeyz
- D. Dolphinz

5 Moving on...What does the "S" stand for in this Contra power-up?

- A. Spread Gun
- B. Spray Shot
- C. Scatter Shot
- D. Super Shotgun



6 Which of these bosses is not from the original Ninja Gaiden?



7 Now that you've spotted the imposter, which game is he really from?

- A. Legacy of the Wizard
- B. Dragon Unit
- C. Ninja Crusaders
- D. Zelda II: The Adventure of Link

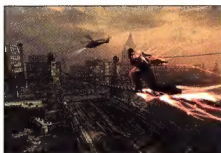
8 Figured that one out did you? You must think you're pretty old school. OK, then - what console featured the four games pictured below?

- A. Atari 2600
- B. Bally Astrocade
- C. Colecovision
- D. Intellivision



9 Back to the present day; which of the following games does not feature a world called "Empire City"?

- A. Infamous
- B. Gun
- C. APB
- D. Mafia II



10 We just flew back from E3, and boy are our arms killing us. According to the movie Die Hard, what's the best way to unwind after a long flight?

- A. Beer. Lots of beer
- B. A hot shower and hotter cup of coffee
- C. Walk barefoot on a rug and make fists with your toes
- D. I don't know, your opening joke was so lame I stopped reading

BREAKDOWN

35 is the age of the average gamer, according to a new ESA study. Additionally, 43 percent of online gamers are now female, and 68 percent of all U.S. households play some type of computer or video game.

\$686 million is how much will be spent on in-game advertising this year, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers. Next year? An estimated \$1.4 billion.

12 years is how long Duke Nukem Forever was in development before finally being cancelled. That's almost 1/3 of the average gamer's age!

34,991 is the number of gamers (as of press time) that have signed an internet petition to boycott Left 4 Dead 2 because it's being made too soon.

0 is the number of GI staffers who believe an internet petition is a good idea - ever.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1 You've placed your company's fate in a brand new peripheral. It's similar to the peripheral on that other console, only doesn't do as much, requires eight AAA batteries, and the journalists at the demo laughed until your lifestyle models cried.

2-3 Your great new idea for a video game is still six months from launch and a strikingly similar title has beat you to market with better graphics, smoother gameplay, and additional features that put your project to shame. Grab some antacids; it's back to the drawing board.

4-5 You got a blogger to play your game at E3! And he didn't walk away after thirty seconds! When you asked if he liked it, he only replied, "Meh." But "meh" is better than "lame," right? Right?!

6-7 You were commissioned for a sequel to someone else's hit franchise and you delivered it on time, adding a few personal touches that you think are cool. Reviews are only slightly better than the original, but you're already fielding offers for your next project.

8-9 Everyone who walks away from your game has a big smile on their face, despite the long time they waited in just to play it. You're trying to keep your expectations low, but people keep telling you it's a definite day one purchase.

10 No one expected your vision for the future of gaming, but everyone wishes they had. You're game is topping everyone's Best of E3 list by not only breaking conventional gaming genres, but redefining them for years to come.

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[heavy sweating]



[hairy pits]



[sensitive pits]

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[what's your pit type?]

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