GAMEINFORMER®

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The City Needs A Hero. The City's Out of Luck.

CRACKDOWN 2

ISSUE 198   OCTOBER 2009
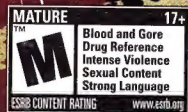
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XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PS3 PLAYSTATION.3 Artificial Mind & Movement Bethesda SOFTWORKS a ZeniMax Media company

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MISTAKE GRACE FOR WEAKNESS

THIS WORLD IS OUR PARADISE, AND THE ELYOS WILL

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cover story

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CRACKDOWN 2

Game Informer went all the way to Scotland to get the world exclusive first details on the highly anticipated sandbox game Crackdown 2. Pacific City has been overrun by genetically mutated freaks in the approximately 10 years since the first title, and it's up to a new agent to bring it back under Agency control. Learn all about this new setup, as well as Crackdown 2's four-player co-op and 16-player competitive play, in this month's massive cover story.
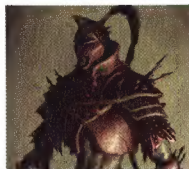
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FITNESS TESTING

We had a professional personal trainer put five recent games, including Wii Fit and EA Sports Active, through their paces over several weeks to separate marketing hype from fitness reality. The results might surprise you.

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GUESS WHO?

We look at long-lost early images of popular gaming icons and get the developers to walk us through the creative process that resulted in the final look for these highly recognizable characters.

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ENSLAVED

Heavenly Sword developer Ninja Theory is pulling out all the stops for its sophomore effort. Game Informer toured the company's London offices to bring you this exclusive first look. Enslaved is a post-apocalyptic journey through a deserted USA that touches on themes of community and friendship – and dismantling evil robots with your bare hands. A proven developer hungry for excellence, and Hollywood talent like Andy Serkis on board to step up the cinematography, have Enslaved on a promising path.

departments

NEW AXE INSTINCT
FRAGRANCE WITH THE POWER OF LEATHER

THE ORIGIN OF A COVER STORY

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Celebrity and fashion magazines make a splash with mug shots and models. Game Informer has its cover games. The cover story is the single most sought after story that we put in any issue. The trials and tribulations of the birth of a cover story are hard to put into a couple of paragraphs, but I'm going to try.

In terms of the most frequent questions asked by readers, "How do you decide what you put on your cover?" is right up there, with "How do I get a job at Game Informer?" We don't follow one simplistic formula, but the routine for each cover is about the same.

Sometimes it starts with a game development studio sharing its vision of a new game with us. Other times the public relations team give us the heads up as to when a game is coming to gauge our interest. To give you an idea how far out this process starts, we've already had conversations and even seen early footage of games coming out as far away as 2011.

Knowing a game's name and premise is only half the battle, as we have had upwards of five or six amazing games all vie for the same month's cover. Sometimes we can work with the publishers and developers to move the announcements around to get all the games we want to showcase, but other times you just have to pass on some amazing products in favor of another. One of the hardest decisions we ever had to make was putting Halo 2 on the cover over the original God of War.

Which brings me to the selection process. Obviously, some games are no-brainers. When Activision approached us with Modern Warfare 2, we already knew that Infinity Ward is talented and makes some of the best games the world has ever seen. But even when it comes to a game like this, we still ask to sit down with the developer so we understand its vision and design goals before we take a look at the game.

New properties are the hardest, but they are also the most exciting, especially if it comes from a developer that doesn't have much of a history. Batman: Arkham Asylum is a great example, where we looked at Rocksteady's past, what its limitations were on the previous game it made (Urban Chaos in this case), and evaluated whether we thought with additional resources the companies involved were capable of making a great game. In that case, we thought so, and they did.

We have made other big bets in the past as well. The Chronicles of Riddick, BioShock, Crackdown, and Infamous were all games we were very excited to show the world for the first time. Other breakout hits like Assassin's Creed, Gears of War, and Uncharted were all shown for the first time on our covers, and all were extensively researched before the decision to put them on the cover was made.

The bottom line is the Game Informer team carefully chooses the games that grace our cover each and every month. No outside source, marketing department, or voice from above influences that decision – just the opinions of our dedicated staff of gamers. We spend months researching new titles to guarantee we can bring you the inside story on those we think are shaping this industry, regardless of whether the game will sell 10 million or 10 thousand.

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Finishing Up Game Informer's Redesign And Web Launch, Twitter@GI_AndyMc, Preparing To Spam My Blog **Dislikes:** That People Think We Engineered The Epic Fail Story Last Month To Somehow "Get" Microsoft, WoW's Recent Content Patch That Basically Requires You To Do Heroic Dailies As A Raider **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Professor Layton And The Diabolical Box, Shadow Complex (Though The Card Controversy Certainly Taints It)

Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Adventure **Interests:** Classic Adventure Games On iPhone (A Perfect Fit), Console Price Drops, Guitar Hero Backwards Compatibility, Tripping Icarus (Shameless Plug), My Twitter (@Andrew_Reiner) **Dislikes:** NXE Avatar Toys & Clothing (2009's Horse Armor), Battlestar Galactica Rebooted Again (This Time As A Film), Being Caught Up On Games With Nothing New To Play **Current Favorite Games:** Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, Assassin's Creed II, Shadow Complex, Batman: Arkham Asylum, New Super Mario Bros. Wii

Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Puzzle, Action/Sports **Interests:** Double Bird (Punk's Not Dead, Or At Least Semi-Conscious), Glass Block Windows, El Taco Riendo (Tinga Del Pollo Tacos Are My Anti-Drug), My Sweet New Lawnmower **Dislikes:** My Noisy Neighbors Across The Street (Yeah You, White-Mike-From-The-Wire-Lookin'-Boy!), Town Hall Meetings, My Inability To Kick Non-Diet Soda (A Real Coke Habit Would Be Easier), The Worst Summer Blockbuster Movie Season In Memory, Invoice Beef **Current Favorite Games:** Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, The Beatles: Rock Band, Guitar Hero 5, Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story, Wet

Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/RPG, Action/Adventure **Interests:** Humbug By Arctic Monkeys, The Return Of Mad Men, The Kundalini Target By Steve Cradock, Glazed Donut Pancakes, Out Of The Summer Sports Abyss & Into The Fire **Dislikes:** When Little Rodents Die In Your Walls & Leave You The Stench, Waiting For The Beatles: Rock Band Full Album DLC, Unreadable Track Maps In Racing Games, Still Not Being Able To Save Mid-Game In A Sports Title **Current Favorite Games:** NHL 10, Dirt 2, Madden NFL 10, Guitar Hero 5

Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Getting Classic Games Running Well On My PC, Digital Distribution That Works Like It Should (Which Is Most Of The Services These Days), Seeing Nerdy Baseball Stats Get More Mainstream Acceptance (Dear Jonah Keri, You're A Light In The Darkness That Is ESPN) **Dislikes:** Most Of The Morons On ESPN, Obscure Mouse Driver Issues, Waiting For Windows 7 To Release, Windows Vista (I Have To Run Alpha Centauri As An Admin? Seriously?) **Current Favorite Games:** Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri, Trine, Mega Man 9

Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Magic For Beginners By Kelly Link, More Mad Men, Avoiding G.I. Joe: The Rise Of Cobra At All Costs, Blowing Things Out Of Proportion **Dislikes:** Running Out Of Seasons Of The Wire (Five Is Not Enough), Scribblenauts' Refusal To Acknowledge Risque Words, No Console Release For Valkyria Chronicles 2 (PSP?! No Thanks!) **Current Favorite Games:** Crackdown 2, Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story, Persona PSP, Muramasa: The Demon Blade, Valkyria Chronicles, Shadow Complex

Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** The Misc Templar, Mad Men Season 3, The Return Of Dark Sun In 2010, The New Mechanics Behind DJ Hero, Across The Nightingale Floor By Lian Hearn **Dislikes:** Water Mains That Break On My Block, The Announced Cost Of DJ Hero, Microsoft Increasing The Use Of Avatars In Games **Current Favorite Games:** Cave Story, Batman: Arkham Asylum, Shadow Complex, Trine, Machinarium, DJ Hero

Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com
Handle: Lord Carnington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** The Return Of Don Draper, The Family By Jeff Sharlet, Death Panels (Where Do I Sign Up?!), Ditching Vista For Windows 7, The Hangover, Waiting For More Elder Scrolls **Dislikes:** Pathetic Vikings Fans Who Welcome Lord Favre With Open Arms (He'll Disappoint You, Just Give It Time), Reiner's Twitter Whoring, Elder Scrolls MMO Rumors (Just Give Me Co-op), Activision Crapping On Kurt Cobain By Skinning His Image Over Right-Handed Guitar Playing Animations **Current Favorite Games:** Madden NFL 10, Shadow Complex, NHL 10, Batman: Arkham Asylum

Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com
Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Racing, Stealth **Interests:** The Ending Of 'Splosion Man (Best Credit Sequence Since Portal), World War Z: An Oral History Of The Zombie War By Max Brooks, The Undercover Economist By Tim Harford **Dislikes:** Open Mic Nights, How There's No Female Equivalent To Taking A Guy Bra Shopping (You Can't Make A Girl Uncomfortable While Shopping) **Current Favorite Games:** 'Splosion Man, Shadow Complex, Batman: Arkham Asylum, Metroid Prime Trilogy, Persona, Zuma

Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Dehumidifying The Basement, Sickened By Julie Gregory, The New Mad Men Season, Catching Up On Flight Of The Conchords and Eastbound And Down, The Annual Up North Vacation **Dislikes:** Buying A Dehumidifier, What I'll Have To Throw Down To Get Into A Golden Gopher Football Game **Current Favorite Games:** Shadow Complex, Professor Layton And The Diabolical Box, Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days, The Beatles: Rock Band, Guitar Hero 5

DICK MARCINKO

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1 Ben and Meagan spend time with the God of Comic Books, Mr. Stan Lee, along with Bianca Harzbecker of Activision and Ashley Hay of girlsentertianmentnetwork.com **2** GI goes to the ultra-exclusive Capital Grille with the Warner Bros. posse – Remi Sklar, Megan Korns Russell, and Jessica Brunelle **3A&B** Baltimore area tattoo artist Halo Jankowski turns heads with custom Final Fantasy auto art. Unbelievable! **4** Witchblade creator Mark Silvestri hangs with a posse of Witchblade cosplayers at ComicCon, including our own Meagan VanBurkleo **5** Ben hangs with Sega's Tali Fischer. While his pose is clearly constructed to show off his guns, something about the angle of this photo makes his hair look abnormally large, as if it's a sentient being taking over his body. Frankly, GI Spy finds this a bit disturbing **6** United Front Games' William Ho and Sony's Scott Goryl stopped by to show us some awesome new ModNation Racers gameplay. On the left the Best Intern Team in the Business, the talented and pretty Jeff Marchiafava and Tim Turi **7** Just another normal day in San Diego during ComiCon…

Parties and Beyond

I'm a huge fan of the Xbox 360 and I have a question about Project Natal. All of the trailers I've seen make it look like the Wii. Same with the games – I didn't see one action, horror, adventure, or thriller game… just party games. Is that what Natal is aiming for?

Josh Toth
via email

The games shown at Natal's E3 unveiling were not meant to encompass the entirety of the software the device will support. In fact, very few of them could be considered games at all – they were mostly just demonstrations illustrating how the technology works and what it can do. When Natal releases, we're sure there will be a few party games designed to showcase its features, but Microsoft has stated Natal has applications in more traditional genres (like FPS and racing) as well. We won't deny that Natal and Sony's motion-sensing wand look like blatant attempts to rope in a casual gaming demographic the Wii helped create, but it isn't fair to assume either of these peripherals will fall victim to the same glut of party-oriented shovelware.

Not Forgotten

I consider myself a hardcore Wii gamer (the Wii being my only console), and I generally consider GI an unbiased magazine. However, I noticed that in the two years that I've been reading your publication, no Wii game has been given the honor of gracing your cover. Dead Space Extraction and Punch-Out!! were given features, but not the full-blown cover treatment. Although it does have a rather dismal library in some areas, you can't deny the Wii has some excellent games. They don't just pop out of the blue, so what's the deal?

Kyle Trevor
via email

The last Wii-exclusive game we put on the cover was Red Steel back in issue 157. That may seem like years of neglect, but we've also featured several major multiplatform titles with Wii versions as well, like Ghostbusters and Star Wars: The Force Unleashed. Regardless, you have a point: Nintendo doesn't make our cover as often as Sony and Microsoft – but that isn't entirely our fault. Nintendo is the most difficult of the three companies to work with, since it regulates information about its first-party titles so aggressively. Thankfully, other publishers have more freedom to talk about their Wii titles, so gamers don't get left in cold completely. Be sure to keep an eye on our cover in the coming months!

PS

I just received Issue 197 and saw that you had chosen to respond to my email about the lost Oddworld game. This was a huge thrill, and I'd like to thank you very much for replying to what I had to say, but more importantly, I realized that I may have unintentionally kicked dust in the face of people who are trying to innovate and be creative. I stick by the thrust of my original letter: It's a real shame to see games like Fangus Klot go under, but I don't want to downplay the contributions of developers like Infinity Ward, Jonathan Blow, The Behemoth, Double Fine, Vanillaware, and Insomniac. They are the reason the current gaming landscape is great, but sometimes I crave something a little…odder

Adam Condra
via email

Thanks for the follow-up, Adam. The rising cost of development means we're seeing fewer risky and experimental games this generation, and that's disappointing. On the other hand, it is difficult to complain too loudly when so many high-quality titles are coming out every year. We can remember the old days fondly, but the game industry has changed – generally for the better.

One Wasteland to Rule Them All

I was reading your story on id's Rage, and it reminded me of Bethesda's Fallout 3 a lot. It pretty much looks like a rehash with a few added tricks. Fallout has the Capitol Wasteland, Rage is just wasteland (and both are full of raiders and bandits). Fallout has Vaults, Rage has Arks. The only real differences are that in Rage you have working cars and television, and no V.A.T.S. It sure has a great look to it, but right now it just looks like a rehash, sequel, or just the same game as Fallout 3.

Tom Hodges
via email

I wasn't surprised to see you shy away from parallels between Rage and Fallout 3, since it would seem accusatory. Still, I did notice a bunch of similarities. The near-extinction event (asteroid in Rage, nuclear fallout in Fallout), Mutant Bash TV and Galaxy News Radio are both seemingly the last remaining mass entertainment to survive the event, and the Eden Project versus President Eden. One of the characters pictured in the article actually had the same '80s punk look that was characteristic of Fallout. Do you guys see a lot of similarities too?

Eric Peck
New York, NY

Fallout 3 and Rage both take place in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, and there are some parallels in the two games' vision of the future. But before you single out Rage as the copycat, keep in mind that the title has been in development for years; the team at id didn't play Fallout 3 and say "Let's scrap all the work we've done and copy this!" Furthermore, the Fallout series did not invent the concept of post-apocalyptic civilization; even before the original Fallout released, books and movies had been exploring ruined wastelands for years, and both games show the influence of the classic Mad Max series. The desolation and desperation provides a compelling backdrop, and there is plenty of room for multiple games to mine the setting for ideas.

Nothing To Grin About

Now that Grin has closed its doors, I think it's safe to say game reviewers (including you) created the rifts that brought down the now-defunct developer. Three games developed by Grin were released this year – Bionic Commando, Terminator: Salvation, and

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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:
Of the games delayed from 2009 to 2010, which one do you find most disappointing?

Red Dead Redemption. I've really been looking forward to this game, and it's painful to have to wait a while longer. But if they need the extra time to make sure it's a blockbuster experience, then I'm all for it.

Cheech11

I was both disappointed and happy to hear that Splinter Cell: Conviction was delayed. Disappointed because I've been waiting forever to play it, but also happy because I want it to be a polished game that lives up to its predecessors.

LaurenIsSoMosh

Sure, it was never "officially" slated for 2009, but it still stinks to have to wait until next year for Heavy Rain. It really looks to be a huge leap in terms of storytelling, and it could raise the bar for games altogether.

Metellice89

Those delays don't really affect me; I'll likely be playing Tekken 6, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2, and Silent Hill: Shattered Memories well after the delayed games' releases.

Testament_ggx2

Definitely Dark Void. I want to live my Rocketeer vs. space mutant fantasy now, not in 2010 when this original non-sequel will get lost in the shuffle of all the other delayed releases.

not_a_bumblebee

I have been eagerly awaiting a return to Rapture since finishing BioShock for the fifth time. When the sequel got delayed I… well, let's just say I don't think I've ever wept over a video game before.

boogieman29
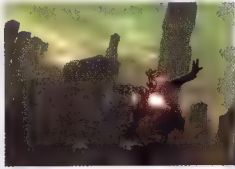
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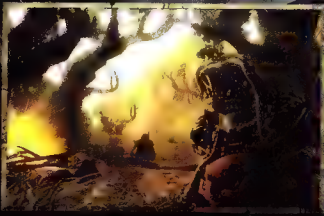
Wanted: Weapons of Fate – and they all got crappy reviews. Maybe you should consider your influence a little more before you completely trash a game.

Hasani Ennis
Farmington Hills, MI

The closing of a development studio is always unfortunate, and we wish nothing but the best for Grin's former staff. While low scores may have contributed to the situation, you can't blame reviewers for not liking games that aren't good. If we were to have said that Bionic Commando was a great game, that might have made more people decide to play it…but it wouldn't have been the truth. Tearing apart bad games is difficult, because we know that lots of talented people put time and effort into creating the experience. However, how much we like a studio or its employees doesn't magically transform a bad game into a good one. We have to give games the scores we think they deserve.

Fail Away

I just read your "Epic Fail" article in issue 197, and I have to say I'm truly disappointed in you guys. That article was completely bogus and full of falsehoods. Why do I say that? Well, it's simple: You used a survey. A survey is not an accurate source of information, because people can completely lie on your questions. This article is proof, and it was designed simply to stroke Sony and Nintendo's egos. Now, I can understand Microsoft being on the bad end on some things, but every single category? Are you kidding me? Presenting this information is completely dishonest, and very poor journalism. I usually trust you guys to be independent, but this article was clearly designed to make Microsoft look bad.

Dan Brown
via email

Our survey about console failure rates wasn't intended to make anyone look good or bad. We were just curious about our readers' experience, and a survey is a good way to get a rough idea. We used a third party to conduct the survey and tally the results. Yes, we wrote the questions themselves, but they were exactly the same for all three consoles and contained no comparative assessments (you can see them for yourself at gameinformer.com). It wasn't a web poll (so no one could vote more than once), and we received a statistically valid number of responses. Sorry to break it to you, but our survey isn't what makes Microsoft look bad – the company's persistent inability to make a reliably functional system does.
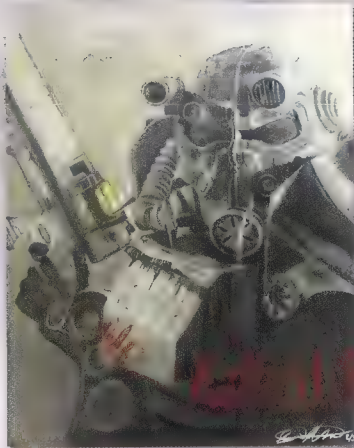
SCOTT HAWXHURST Regular power armor? This guy needs to upgrade to Enclave Hellfire Armor

reader art

MEGAN NASH We think this is a drawing about Kingdom Hearts. Can any of our readers under five years old confirm that for us?

HEATHER O'NEAL Link is wolfin' it up, wolf-style. Wolf!

LOUISA VENTURA Before being cast as Vincent, Vincent tried out for the part of Sephiroth…which went to Sephiroth instead

ANDREW LINN Why would Mario and Luigi loan these guys their signature hats? Oh…

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news

The PS3 Slims Down to $299

Price Drop For All PS3s

Some rumors only die once they become true. Sony killed two long-airborne birds with one stone by releasing a slimmed-down PS3 at a reduced price of $299. Gamers have been clamoring for a cheaper PS3, and even executives at third-party companies like Activision and Ubisoft have demanded a more cost-competitive system from Sony.

This 120GB $299 PS3 brings the price of the console down into the realm of Microsoft's 120GB $299 Xbox 360 (see below) and Nintendo's $249 Wii.

The new PS3 – which is one-third smaller than the original – replaces the 80GB version (which has also been reduced to $299) as the defacto PS3 as soon as stock of the 80GB runs out. Similarly, the 160GB PS3 received a price drop to $399. Sony director of network operations Eric Lempel says that additional versions of the new, slim PS3 with different hard drive sizes and software bundles could come in the future. However, Lempel tells us that nothing is planned at the moment.

The new PS3 maintains the original's sleek look at a smaller footprint while also retaining almost all of its features. You can no longer install Linux or an alternate operating system on the console, but the new model adds the ability to sync with Sony Bravia TVs so you can control the PS3's cross media bar and turn off the system with your TV remote. This PS3, however, still lacks backward compatibility with the PS2's software catalog.

Matte Finish & New PS3 Logo

The reset and eject disc buttons on the front face now depress

Microsoft Matches Price

Not to be outdone, Microsoft announced a price drop of its own to match the PS3, which was as widely expected as Sony's. The 120GB Xbox 360 Elite dropped from $399 to $299, and the move pushes out the 60GB Pro model, which will be discounted to $249 until it sells out. That leaves just the Elite and hard drive-less Arcade models.
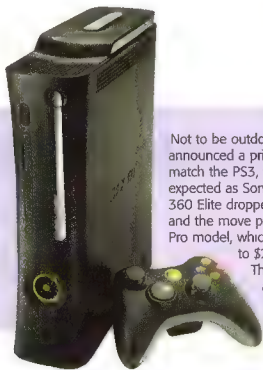
The main dimensional difference with the old PS3 is its height. Sony says the new unit is 32 percent smaller and 34 percent lighter. The company touts a quieter fan as well, but we didn't notice a huge difference.

PS3 (old)

PS3 (new)
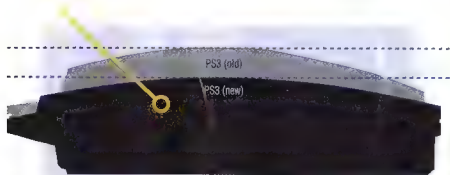
While you can't install an alternative operating system like Linux onto the new PS3, you can sync it with your Sony Bravia TV so that you can use the TV's remote to control both it and the PS3. Sony says that this only works if you're using a HDMI cable and Bravia models from 2008 and 2009.

Bite-Sized Content for the PSP
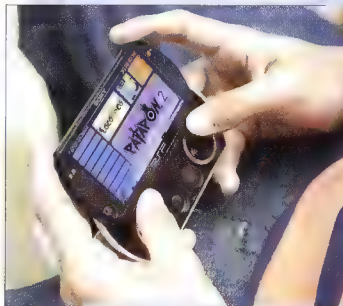
The new PS3 wasn't the only Sony announcement at GamesCom 2009 in Germany. The company also unveiled a new section in the PlayStation store that features titles available exclusively for the PSP, called Minis. These downloadable titles (for both the old PSP and the PSP Go) are 100MB or smaller, and EA has already signed on with versions of Sudoku and Tetris. The PSP Minis service goes live on October 1. Sony expects 15 titles at launch, with 50 more by the end of the year.

A digital reader service also comes to the PSP this December, with new content promised every month such as digital comics from Marvel.

The $299 price point will likely become the new standard for the next-generation consoles for the next year. It is possible that both consoles may reach a $249 price point 12 months from now, but that will likely be the lowest prices will get in the next two years. It would not be out of the realm of possibility for Microsoft to include Project Natal as a standard attachment with all Xbox 360 systems in 2011. The same goes for Sony's new motion controller that is currently in development.

— Jesse Divnich, Electronic Entertainment Design and Research director of analyst services, on where pricing may go from here

The on/off switch has been removed, meaning the unit is always on standby unless you unplug it. Sony claims this PS3 model does, however, consume less power.

This new PS3 is not compatible with the old power cord. Instead it uses a traditional two-prong cord, just like the PS2.

Video Games Find A Home on LATE NIGHT WITH JIMMY FALLON
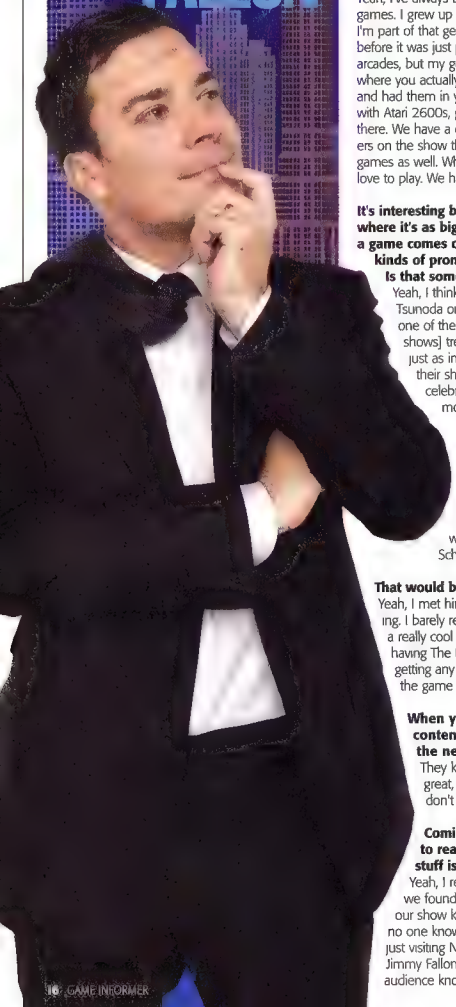
Since taking over NBC's late night slot from Conan O'Brien, former Saturday Night Live star Jimmy Fallon has been courting a younger audience of viewers. A lifelong gamer, Fallon has brought his passion to the show, which has prominently featured gaming related guests, segments, and demos. We recently spoke with Fallon about his show and his interest in gaming.

■ Fallon has prominently featured video game-related guests on his show. He recently bested Tiger Woods at his own game on the Wii (above) and Microsoft's Kudo Tsunoda demonstrated Project Natal for Fallon (below)

Since taking over Late Night, it seems you've made an effort to include a lot of video game related segments. Was this something you planned from the beginning?

Yeah, I've always been into video games. I grew up with video games. I'm part of that generation. I think before it was just pinball games and arcades, but my generation was where you actually took the games and had them in your home. Starting with Atari 2600s, growing up from there. We have a couple of producers on the show that are really into games as well. Whenever we get a little off time, which is rare, we love to play. We have stacks of games in the office.

It's interesting because the game industry is at the point where it's as big as movies, music, or television. But when a game comes out you don't see them making the same kinds of promotional appearances that a movie would. Is that something you guys hoped to change?

Yeah, I think we're starting to change it now. We had Kudo Tsunoda on to show us Project Natal. We were probably one of the only shows to have him on. I don't think [other shows] treat these people as guests, even though they're just as interesting as anyone they're going to have on their show. Everyone is just so used to booking a celebrity. You rarely see the director of a movie; it's more the people acting in the movie. The people behind the scenes don't really get a chance to come out and talk about it, but I think we're on late enough at night that we're just really looking for interesting conversation. If we can get the developer or a programmer, not just someone that's the voice of the game, I think it'd be so interesting to talk to them. I think we're going to have [Brütal Legend creator] Tim Schafer on.

That would be great. Tim is really funny.

Yeah, I met him once in San Francisco and we went out drinking. I barely remember the second half of the night, but he's a really cool dude. I think we're going to have him on. We're having The Beatles: Rock Band on. I don't know if we're getting any of the Beatles; I think we're just going to have the game on.

When you guys started doing more game content did you have to fight skepticism from the network?

They kind of left us alone. Our ratings have been great, so I think it was one of those "if it's not broke don't fix it" things.

Coming from SNL, you must have the ability to read an audience. Do you feel like the game stuff is going over well with the studio audience?

Yeah, I really do. We're almost 100 shows in. I think we found our audience. The people that come to see our show know what to expect. When you first come out, no one knows what the show is yet. Some people were just visiting New York City and were like, "Well, let's see the Jimmy Fallon show. What is it? A cooking show?" Now the audience knows I love video games. [We want] to get up

and to show that it's not coming from a false place; it's a genuine love that I have for video games. Tiger Woods came on and they were like, "Do you want to hit balls with him?" I said, "How about I play him on the Wii?" Then we told EA about that and they get excited because no one wants to do stuff like that. It was great. I beat him, by the way.

Apart from when you have guests like Kudo or Tiger come on, you've also tried game-related comedy bits. You mocked up fake celebrity video game boxes like John & Kate Splinter Cell and some others. Do you feel that people recognize games as pop culture references now?

That exact bit didn't go over that well, but it was the first time we did it. Usually if you try it again you just go for harder jokes. Just turn up the joke so it's a little bit harsher so people will laugh at it. If it doesn't work then, then I don't know if I can do it anymore. If it does work, I can try it a third time.

So you didn't think that one was a successful example?

Yeah, it wasn't that good

We thought it was funny, but we're in the target audience for it.

We liked it too, but I think the audience response was like, "Alright...how many more do you have left of these?" We did the John & Kate Splinter Cell, we did Kobe Bryant where he just plays every team by himself. There was no pass button.

So you have to hit a balance of a game joke and a pop culture joke?

Completely, yeah. You have find out what's a good combo mix so that people who aren't into games can still understand what it is. I think that one might come back; we'll try it again. It just takes a long time for the graphics department to make those fake game boxes, so it's just gotta work. When it doesn't work, that's hours of work that goes into those boxes just for one day. It's like, "Uh, you don't understand. Edmond in graphics works so hard on these things and they're flopping." We'll bring that one back. We're actually excited to make our own video games. We might start with iPhone apps, because we do a whole bit about iPhone apps.

You're going to actually make comedy games?

Yeah, funny and weird games, and just make them cheap.

Do you have guys on staff that are capable of doing that stuff?

No. Not at all. We're going to hopefully [talk to] somebody this month. We have pages of ideas for the games, and I don't think NBC is set to make games these days. We're looking to start small with iPhone apps and just show that we know what we're doing, and then we can give people some cool, fun games to play. Then we could make it a big thing.

What games have you been playing lately?

Right now on pause is Fight Night Round 4. Mohammad Ali vs. George Foreman. I'm just getting killed. It's all about blocking.

Do you have particular genres you like? Sports?

My favorite games in the history of the world are any of the Legend of Zeldas. Some of the other RPGs are just too much. I don't really like watching a movie during the game. Sports games have been big hits in the office because people can jump in can and [then] leave if they don't have that much time to play. It's two minute spurts. I just lost my DSi, but that was my favorite. That was the greatest invention ever, I loved it. I have thousands of games for DS. Professor Layton is great, and Phoenix Wright. I never thought I'd be into being an attorney. [Laughs] ■ ■ ■

MMO NEWS AT GAMESCOM

DUST 514 ANNOUNCED, GUILD WARS 2 FINALLY UNVEILED

EVE Online developer/publisher CCP blindsided convention-goers at GamesCom 2009 in Cologne, Germany with its announcement of Dust 514, a massively multiplayer FPS for consoles that ties into EVE's persistent world. This unique title has players engaging in ground combat on planets across the galaxy. Gameplay details are scarce, but we know that maps are created by a combination of hand-crafted geometry and procedurally generated terrain, which CCP touts as allowing it to populate thousands of planets with unique battlefields. Similarly to Battlefield 2, a commander will set waypoints for each team and set up deployables to support his troops on the ground. The game will have limited PvE bot play, but CCP is making no bones

about the fact that its focus is squarely on competitive online multiplayer.

The relationship between EVE and Dust 514 hasn't been fully revealed, but CCP has let a few details out. The outcome of battles in Dust 514 helps determine which player faction in EVE controls the planet and its output. The publisher is releasing a game-centric social networking site that will allow players of both games to interact in that way, and it's a good bet that EVE's dynamic player-driven politics and factional warfare will have an impact on Dust 514's social structures as well. Dust 514 has no announced release date.

Guild Wars 2

NCsoft and ArenaNet finally released images and info for the long-awaited Guild Wars 2, also at GamesCom. The teaser trailer doesn't convey much (other than the fact that ArenaNet still employs fantastically talented artists), but the developer was willing to shed light on one of the game's new features: the event system. In similar fashion to Warhammer Online's public quests, GW 2's events offer a dynamic way for players to work together to impact something in the gameworld. ArenaNet shared an example of a centaur raid on a military outpost, where the outcome of the raid determines whether the next battle takes place as the human forces counterattack to either retake the outpost or go after the centaurs' base. Unlike the first game, Guild Wars 2 features a persistent world like most MMOs, though the relative balance of instanced content to public space is as of yet unknown. NCsoft has yet to announce a release date for the title.

Guild Wars 2

LOOSE TALK
Hot Gaming Gossip
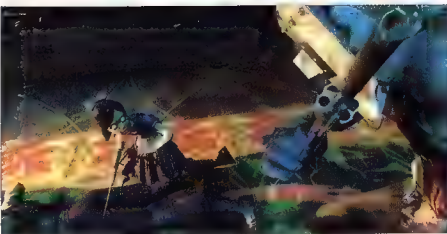
BIOSHOCK 2: HELP STILL WANTED

Last month BioShock 2 developer 2K Marin signed French studio Arkane Studios to help with the game, bringing the running total of studios working on the title to four. Some in the industry have pointed to this amalgamation of developers as a troubling sign for the game. Whether that's true or not, Loose Talk heard another potential red flag. Among those 2K Marin has turned to for help on BioShock 2 recently was Ken Levine, designer of the original BioShock. What's more unfortunate – that they had to go back and ask Levine for his help at this stage in development, or that he wouldn't do it?

WHAT IS BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2?

Nothing has been clear about Beyond Good & Evil 2. A brief teaser trailer was shown for an upcoming but unnamed Ubisoft project in 2008 that had no release date, but it featured characters that looked like they were from the franchise. BG&E creator Michel Ancel has said the project is in the works, but Ubisoft itself has countered by saying that working on the game doesn't necessarily mean it'll be released. Now news comes out of GamesCom that the whole thing – whatever it is – has been put on indefinite hold. Ubisoft wouldn't comment on the rumor.
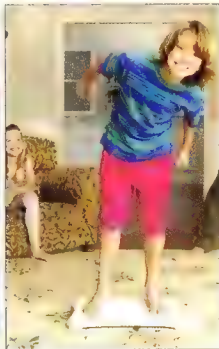
Wii FIT BOARD PROBLEM SOLVED?

Wii Fit Board owners are limited to using one board at a time while playing Wii games, but Nintendo is looking to fix the problem. At GamesCom 2009, Loose Talk overheard a Nintendo representative talking to a suit from Ubisoft about the possibility of using two boards simultaneously for multiplayer.

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

NAME THAT GAME
Test Your Sight

The NES had Mario as a mascot, and the Genesis had Sonic. What did NEC's TurboGrafx-16 have? A prehistoric caveman who destroyed things with his large forehead as he side-scrolled through levels collecting power-ups and other items. Despite being the hero for the TurboGrafx-16, this character appeared on other systems, in arcades, and some of his games can even be downloaded via Wii's Virtual Console. What was the TurboGrafx-16 title that started it all?

(Answer on page 26)
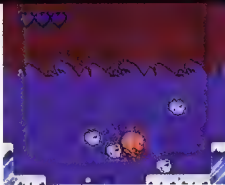
WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE

THE GAME DELAYS THAT ARE SHAPING 2009 & 2010

Publishers are delaying games by the boatload, moving their 2009 release dates into 2010. Some are delayed for development reasons, but a lot of companies are saying straight up that they want to avoid being a casualty in the upcoming 2009 holiday massacre – shot down dead by cold-blooded retail assassin Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, which comes out in November.

With so many games moving to 2010, it brings up the question: Which titles are going to move out of the first half of 2010 because it's too crowded? After all, God of War III, Mass Effect 2, Heavy Rain, and Alan Wake are just some of the games already camped out in the first quarter of next year.

Here a list of just some of the 2009 titles that have been moved into 2010.

- **Starcraft II: Wings of Liberty** (PC) – First half of 2010
- **Battlefield 1943** (PC version) – First quarter of 2010
- **BioShock 2** (PS3/360) – Mid-2010
- **Splinter Cell Conviction** (360/PC) – First quarter of 2010
- **Red Steel 2** (Wii) – March
- **I Am Alive** (PS3/360/PC) – 2010
- **Singularity** (PS3/360/PC) – First quarter of 2010
- **Singularity** (PS3/360/PC) – First quarter of 2010
- **MAG** (PS3) – January 26th
- **Dead to Rights: Retribution** (PS3/360) – Spring
- **Mafia II** (PS3/360/PC) – Spring
- **Red Dead Redemption** (PS3/360) – Spring
- **Bayonetta** (PS3/360) – January
- **Dark Void** (PS3/360/PC) – Early 2010

Red Dead Redemption

Red Steel 2

Starcraft II: Wings of Liberty

LAST MEN STANDING

What games are coming out this year?
Here are some of the titles sticking around.
For now...

- **Halo 3: ODST** (360) – September 22
- **Alpha Protocol** (PS3/360/PC) – October 6
- **Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars** (PSP) – October 6
- **Brütal Legend** (PS3/360) – October 13
- **Uncharted 2: Among Thieves** (PS3) – October 13
- **Borderlands** (PS3/360/PC) – October 20
- **Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City** (360) – October 29
- **Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time** (PS3) – October 27
- **Dragon Age: Origins** (PS3/360/PC) – November 3
- **Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2** (PS3/360/PC) – November 10
- **Assassin's Creed II** (PS3/360/PC) – November 17
- **Left 4 Dead 2** (360/PC) – November 17
- **New Super Mario Bros.** (Wii) – Holiday
- **The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks** (DS) – Holiday

■ Call of Duty:
Modern Warfare 2

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Unfulfilled BlizzCon Fan Wishes

10 Felicia Day in-game companion, complete with "writhe on loot" animation

9 Announcement that new MMO project is actually a Call of Duty tie-in

8 Release dates. For anything. Ever

7 Removal of all color from Diablo III palette

6 Ability to post to Facebook and Twitter from Battle.net 2.0

5 A few more $60 editions of StarCraft II

4 The complete annihilation of anything related to Mountain Dew GameFuel

3 Blizzard refusing to call Andy and apologize personally for 3.2

2 New Deckard Cain rap for Diablo III

1 Confimation that Alliance will be utterly wiped out in Cataclysm

The latest Wii edition of Punch-Out ended over a decade's drought in Nintendo's revered boxing franchise. Was it too similar to the original games? Should players be able to control enemy boxers in multiplayer? Where the hell is Mike Tyson? Our forum users team up to pose tough questions to Nintendo and developer Next Level Games.

KENSUKE TANABE
Manager, Production Group No.3
Software Planning and Development
Division, Nintendo Co. Ltd.

BRYCE HOLLIDAY
Producer, Next Level Games

KEN YEELOY
Game Designer, Next Level Games

PUNCH-OUT!!

doodlemonster3000: Were there any second thoughts about adding the same boxers with the same weaknesses? I know it's a remake of a classic game, but doesn't it seem that the game will be a little repetitive?

KEN YEELOY: This was intentional, but I don't think it ends up being repetitive and here's why. The first 13 fights all have elements of the original fights. They generally have the same weakness (and that was a specific nod to the original), but we incorporated some new moves within those fights to make them feel updated. We didn't want exact carbon copies of the original fights. The next 13 fights (Title Defense) are about the boxers evolving and learning something from their first experence. For example, Glass Joe has headgear to protect his fragile jaw. Those fights are completely new and our intent was to evolve each character's story.

KENSUKE TANABE: Nintendo and Next Level Games agreed that we had to answer to traditional fans of the series. To that end, the NES game came up as the best option of choosing fighters. But once we started choosing them, we found that we couldn't cut anyone, and we ended up maintaining ALL the fighters of the NES game. So our strategy was to include a limited number of improved fighters from the original version rather than creating a bunch of new boxers. Since we allow players to take on these returning characters with new moves in Title Defense mode, we felt this is where the experienced players would find the sense of freshness that they craved.

Beater_of_ass: Why not allow for players to control others beside Little Mac in multiplayer? I was hoping to put a beat down on my friends with Glass Joe or, even worse, Disco Kid.

YEELOY: We actually did consider that feature, but it never worked out well enough for us to feel comfortable including it in the final game. We decided that focusing on Little Mac – with the addition of Giga Mac – helps to make our multiplayer mode a fresh new addition to the series.

aubradley84: Was there ever consideration given to implementing MotionPlus controls?

TANABE: We discussed it, but we found that the Wii MotionPlus controls weren't necessary. Since our game is not a traditional boxing simulation, we did not feel that the additional accuracy provided by Wii MotionPlus would enhance the overall experience for the player.

Thekid: Why was Mr. Sandman promoted to final boss status over Super Macho Man or Mr. Dream?

BRYCE HOLLIDAY: Sandman was promoted to the final boss mostly due to the nature of his persona as compared to Super Macho Man. We wanted the end guy to be fearsome rather than funny, so we pushed Sandman further into the villain category and made it feel like he could beat any of the other boxers.

Wii_Master: Sometimes the game is so difficult, I want to throw my Wiimote across the room. On a system that has many casual games, what made you decide to make this so hard?

YEELOY: Yes, but you keep picking it up afterwards to play it again, don't you? I do the same thing! In our minds, hearing people say that means we were successful. Our goal was to create enough of a challenge to satisfy the experienced fans, but at the same time have something that the casual users could get into easily. That's not an easy feat to accomplish. With 27 fights, we were able to tune the game so the first 13 fights would be accessible to the casual user and the Title Defense mode would be satisfying to the experienced user.

TANABE: Any experienced gamer today started their career as a casual player, right? When a casual user encountered a great, immersive title, he or she started to transform into an experienced gamer. I would be pleased if Punch-Out could offer similar encounters for casual players on Wii.

var5592: Was it hard to modernize Little Mac or any of the other boxers for this generation?

YEELOY: We've got really great, creative artists here, and being fans of the original, it seemed they just knew what the characters had to look like. Little Mac probably took the longest to approve the final look but he's the hero, so you have to make sure he gets the most attention.

xenosaga_freak: Did you guys ever have even the slightest consideration of including Mike Tyson, bringing back memories of the days of old? You know, before Tyson ate people's ears?

YEELOY: He didn't really match the direction and feel of the game we were creating.

Baron_112: Why are there only two new characters in the game, Disco Kid and Donkey Kong?

HOLLIDAY: We came up with some ideas for characters in the early stages of development, but then the Title Defense mode became the core piece of the game for fans of the original game. Since we knew we would have two unique versions for each character that meant a lot of new characters and lesser-known older ones were cut from the production list. On top of that, we knew early on that we essentially wanted to deepen the experience for fans with characters they already loved by creating new puzzles, dialogue, and idiosyncrasies.

TANABE: In the early stages of development, we made a decision to focus on returning fighters. Disco Kid was an exception; he showed the potential to have some outstanding characteristics, so Nintendo and Next Level Games agreed to add him. As for Donkey Kong, he was suggested by an executive at Nintendo of America when we were considering adding a special character. When he was suggested, we all agreed he was a great fit. We hope that longtime Punch-Out fans were surprised when they first learned he was in the game!

R0ut3r: Why did you change Piston Honda's name to Hondo? Capcom doesn't have any problems using the name E. Honda.

YEELOY: I think it's safer to stay clear of company trademarks.

TANABE: Additionally, his name "Hondo" in kanji represents the main hall of a traditional Buddhist temple. I think it adds another layer of "Japanese-ness" to his character. Please welcome him as Hondo from now on!

not_a_bumblebee: Can we expect a timely sequel or will we have to wait another decade?

YEELOY: Ha ha! Hopefully we won't have to wait that long.

TANABE: The more requests for a sequel we receive, the more we have to seriously consider it. Personally, I would like to consider making a different type of game than we have created so far that utilizes the characters of Punch-Out in a new way.

Street Fighter IV

Game Informer scours the leaderboards to find the best of the best, uncover the people behind the handles, and learn their strategies. If you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.
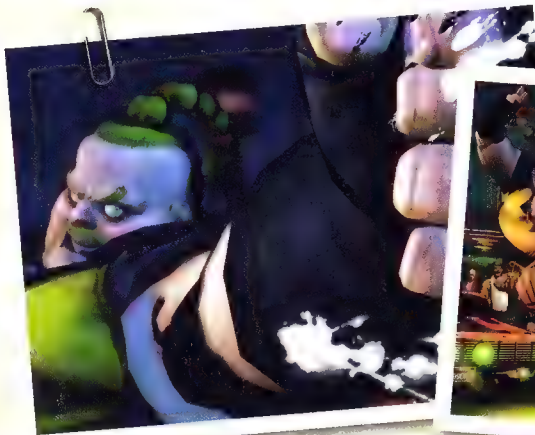
VITAL STATS
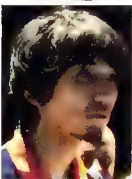
Daigo Umehara

Age:
28

Hometown:
Tokyo

Favorite Fighting Games:
Street Fighter IV and Vampire Hunter

Favorite Fighting Character:
Ryu (Street Fighter Alpha 3)

Weakest Character:
None

Practice Time:
20 to 30 hours a week leading up to tournaments

Rivals:
Iyo, Justin Wong

Accomplishments
Daigo most recently won the Evo 2009 Street Fighter IV Championship in Las Vegas in addition to a long line of tournament victories in the U.S. and Japan over the years.

Balance in Street Fighter IV
Forum chatter around the Internet suggests that Gouken, Akuma, and Ken are too powerful. "When you look at other games, there are so many characters that some of them turn out unbalanced," Daigo says. "When you compare SF IV with them, SF IV's balance is fairly well done. Not many people know much about Gouken in Japan since we don't play the home console versions. Akuma, for sure, is strong, but Ken is not really considered overpowered."

Getting into Tournaments
"The very first time I participated in a game tournament was at a large arcade center I used to go to," Daigo says. "I saw a flier posted there, and I thought of trying it out. It was 17 years ago. I didn't win. I lost in the second round, but I enjoyed it very much. There used to be lots of small-scale tournaments held at arcade centers, and I registered for another one. Each followed one after another."

Evo 2004 – The Parry
If you haven't seen it yet, look up Daigo's insane parry as Ken versus Justin Wong's Chun-Li on YouTube. "I can pull that off at the right time on a regular basis, but the particular circumstance with large crowd cheering and rooting for Justin made it difficult for me to make it happen," Daigo says. "The move itself is not hard at all under normal circumstances, but the noise, the fact that I was at the end of the line, and all that set the psychological bar higher than normal. It was the indication that I was able to perfectly focus on myself. In that regard, I was very happy with the result."

Life Outside of Street Fighter
Daigo says he loves trying out and evaluating new restaurants on a regular basis.

Improvements for the Next Street Fighter
"One of the things I don't like about the game is grappling/throwing defense," Daigo says. "It's just too easy. I've never liked this system since its introduction. It's like a clinch in boxing. When you come to watch a boxing match, you don't want to see two players holding onto each other. You want them to fight. It is stressful and uninteresting for both audience and players. I strongly feel that it should be either removed or at least fixed. If they could revive the Guard Clash system, that'll balance out the bad grappling/throwing defense system."

VITAL STATS

Justin Wong

Age:
23

Hometown:
New York, NY

Favorite Fighting Characters:
Rufus, Sentinel, Storm

Weakest Characters:
Dan, Dhalsim, Sakura

Other Favorite Games:
Left 4 Dead, Guitar Hero

Practice Time:
20 hours a week

Rivals:
Daigo Umehara, Desmond Pinkney, Sanford Kelly, John Choi

Accomplishments
Justin Wong came in a close second in the Evo 2009 Street Fighter IV Championship. He also placed first in Street Fighter III: Third Strike team play and second in Marvel vs. Capcom 2 at the tournament. He has won many fighting tournaments over the years.

Getting into Tournament Play
"The first tournament I ever entered was for Marvel vs. Capcom called the East Coast Championships," Wong remembers. "I didn't know what I was doing; people just took me and invited me to the tournament. I was maybe 13 at the time. So I got fifth place out of like 400 people, and was like, 'Hey, this is pretty fun.' So Marvel vs. Capcom 2 came out and I just started playing that a lot, and from there I started going to MvC 2 tournaments and winning. I just kept going to tournaments because it's so fun meeting new people."

Life Outside of Street Fighter
Wong likes to shoot pool and go bowling with his girlfriend and buddies, and doesn't find the need for a day job. "I make a pretty good amount just from Street Fighter IV and competitive gaming really," Wong says.

How Does Street Fighter IV Stack Up?
"A lot of people can get into it [because] it's easier to play and it looks pretty," Wong says. "It's a showoff game, compared to the old school Street Fighter, where only hardcore gamers knew about like Street Fighter III: Third Strike or Capcom vs. SNK 2. But a lot of people can get into this one because of the depth."

Balancing Act
"Not a lot of characters are overpowered to the point where if you pick this character you win," Wong says. "On the tier list Sagat is the best character in the game, but at Evolution 2009, there were no Sagats in the top eight at all. A lot of people complain about Ken, Ryu, Akuma, and Sagat on Xbox Live because of the whole online lag system. People are just not used to playing Street Fighter IV online. They just keep getting hit by a Shoryuken all the time."

Last Minute Switch
In the Evo finals, Wong made a surprise change from his standard character Rufus to Balrog. "I played Balrog against Daigo in the finals because I felt like I would have a lot easier time with Balrog," Wong says. "I just don't like Rufus vs. Ryu matches at all. I just can't win in that match. He knows that American players choose more than one character, so he was probably expecting it throughout the whole tournament."

MMO report

BY ADAM BIESSENER

If you care about WoW at all, you're already familiar with the announcement and key features of Cataclysm, the game's third expansion. I would love to have been in the room when Blizzard was brainstorming ideas for Cataclysm. I like to imagine that ideas for new settings were thrown around (crystal starships full of space goats! Just kidding, nobody would suggest anything that lame) until some brilliant designer suggested that the old world is a ghost town. Why not fix it up and fill in the geometry so that players can finally fly there? Hell, why not just blow the whole damn thing up?

WHY NOT, INDEED?

After the disappointment of 3.2, I'm inclined to agree. I'm not talking about the "epics for casuals" outcry; a soft gear reset in advance of Wrath of the Lich King's final raid makes plenty of sense. Adding an emblem grind to collecting the next tier of armor sucks, and just makes geared raiders steamroll boring heroics for emblems. Gating the Coliseum's encounters by time to milk its miniscule content as long as possible screams, "Icecrown is behind schedule! Please don't cancel before it comes out!" I'm sorry, but yet another batch of daily quests no longer counts as new content. I loved 3.1, but 3.2 is a sorry excuse for a major content patch.

All of that makes me wonder: How are Cataclysm and 3.2 coming from a single company, much less teams behind the same game? Cataclysm is a demonstration of the kind of stones that Blizzard is often accused of lacking, with the destruction of huge swaths of content that cost tons of time and money to make. On the other hand, 3.2 is conservative to the point of being stagnant, offering very little new content and no shakeup of the existing order of WoW. Obviously there's a world of difference between a patch and an expansion, but the difference in philosophy behind the two couldn't be starker.

Cataclysm looks amazing from a content perspective. The lure of having dozens of new zones to explore, plus the tie-in to the lore built up over five-plus years of WoW, is strong. I know I'll log in just to see the Barrens ripped in half (justice for all that I've endured in that tiresome, trackless savannah). Players have been begging for rated battlegrounds forever. Guild progress and achievements are good ideas shamelessly ripped from other games, but I've got nothing against that. New races are always fun. The feature list reads a lot like a fan wishlist, and it's hard to complain about that.

The geometry isn't the only thing being nuked from orbit in Cataclysm. Blizzard is ripping out significant chunks of the math behind the game and redoing it nearly from scratch. Right now, you have to understand at least three different rating stats, three to five core attributes, and a power number in order to optimize your character for high-level play. Cataclysm is changing all of this. The new system will focus almost entirely on core attributes like Intellect and Strength while rolling ratings and less obvious stats into a catchall mastery number. Along with the new reforging profession, which allows limited customization of the stats on gear, this looks very promising for giving players choices as they outfit their characters, while dramatically reducing the overall complexity and impenetrability of the system. The developers also intend to rebuild all of the talent trees in the game, focusing on fun talents that add functionality to skills while removing bland passive bonuses. These sorts of brave re-envisionings of the game's core are exactly what an aging MMO needs to stay relevant.

It's not all sunshine and rainbows, though. Archaeology sounds a lot like the timesink hell of EverQuest's alternate advancement points, or Dark Age of Camelot's masteries. Blizzard is hardly averse to putting in crushing grind requirements -- remember the Argent Dawn stuff in Eastern Plaguelands, or the original honor system, or the dozens of reputations in Outlands? That's not a game I want to play any more, and I'd be surprised if anyone else does. Wrath of the Lich King has been much better about the grind, though, so hopefully Blizzard won't be headed back down that dark path.

My other question in the wake of the Cataclysm announcement is whether or not I have any more World of Warcraft left in me. It's been five years, and the game doesn't hold the same wonder and joy it used to. I've got a lot of in-game friends, and I'm still very attached to both my mage and druid. I'll almost certainly pop in, tour the new zones, and find whatever next year's version of Mankrik's wife is. Being able to level in revamped areas without having to stare down the barrel of old-school Stranglethorn Vale holds a certain allure.

Climbing up another tier of armor, grinding out a few more levels, and leveling a new secondary skill are things we've all done before, though. I have no doubt that Blizzard will make Cataclysm the most polished, kickass way to do those things around; that's what the company does, and it's very, very good at it. Relative to five years ago, though, many more polished options are available in the MMO genre that offer other, potentially more engaging gameplay vectors. I wonder if the traditional formula that has survived for decades, from MUDs through Ultima Online and EQ and into WoW, hasn't run its course.

Reborn IN Fire

BlizzCon brings huge World of Warcraft news, but what does it all mean?

Fitness Testing

Game Informer Gets the Straight Story on Wii

Wii Fit

Publisher: Nintendo • **Developer:** Nintendo
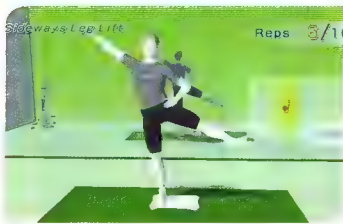
The Good
They have good tracking and journaling. You can stamp off days – there are some good things to keep you motivated, which is very good…. There are [also] a lot of things to unlock, which is a common strategy in video games.

The Bad
There isn't a way to get consistent time out of your workout. If you're looking for any type of fitness benefit, especially aerobic, with a sustained heart rate, there has to be rhythmic, consistent movement for an extended period of time. There's too much stalling in this game when you have to constantly select the next exercise; you can't just figure out your workout and go. That's the big downside. The game also uses the balance board to measure your Body Mass Index [a calculation based on your weight and height – *Ed.*] My BMI is relatively high because I carry a lot of muscle mass. That's one of the inherent problems with using BMI as an indicator of fitness because it doesn't take into account body fat and lean mass. You could have two people that weigh 200 pounds, one eating chips on the sofa with 26 percent body fat, and an athlete that weighs 200 pounds with only seven percent body fat. But according to this index, they are in the same category. I was considered borderline obese. My Mii swelled up right in front of me, so I thought, "That's an interesting message." I'm not sure how I felt about that.

The Bottom Line
This is not a suitable replacement for professional fitness instruction. If you want to do yoga, you are much better off going to a yoga class where you can get examples and ask questions.

Fit Factor
2.5 out of **5**

My Fitness Coach

Publisher: Ubisoft • **Developer:** responDesign
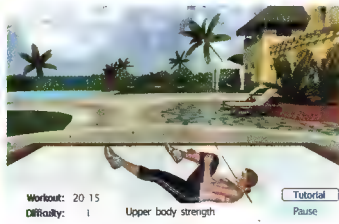
The Good
My Fitness Coach is more user friendly, because you can choose the length and difficulty of your workout. They have a scrolling bar that goes along the bottom of the screen that tells you how long you have left with that exercise. You can also choose the type of workout. You can do a yoga, cardio, strength, core-focused, or equipment-based workouts – if you have hand weights or a fit ball, you can work them into your exercise.

The Bad
The audio cuing annoyed me; it seems like you are always being congratulated or encouraged. Every 10 or 15 seconds it will come back four or five times. As for the exercise, I did a 30-minute core workout with a fit ball and hand weights. After the first nine minutes, however, I was still warming up like you would for a cardio class, which seemed a little off. We didn't do any exercises that used any of the items I selected.

The Bottom Line
The background and animations are good, but the mechanics are not great. Since My Fitness coach focuses on bodyweight and calisthenic moves, you'd think form would be important. She does things onscreen that I don't think human beings are capable of doing – like how she gets down to the ground and how she comes up from a push-up. It's not realistic modeling. If someone did it that way they could get hurt. I had some of the same issues with the yoga. If you can't see the television, you can't see the postures to know whether you're doing it well.

Fit Factor
2 out of **5**

Fitness Titles From Personal Trainer Keith Nelson

Jillian Michaels' Fitness Ultimatum 2009

Publisher: Majesco • **Developer:** 3G Studios

The Good
Jillian Michaels' Fitness Ultimatum is set up like a boot camp. If you go to the cafeteria you can get nutrition tips or recipes, but you have to unlock this stuff by participating. This game has good flow because you can pick out the workout length and it will have you do exercises the whole time.

The Bad
Basically, you're on a trail with a very boring, third-person, top-down view. You walk and jog. Trees go by – there are no people – like I said, very boring. At the end you can go one of two ways; one is a question mark and the other is an activity. The question mark could be another challenge, or just more jogging. One example of an activity is loading a cannonball into a cannon then firing it at a target. You only get 15 seconds to read the instructions before you go into the activity, and then I spent the majority of the time trying to manipulate the controls to make it work. I couldn't do it. Another activity has you kayak with your knees crossed on the Wii board and mime paddling. I tried it a half-dozen times and couldn't get it to work. I kept trying to shift my weight to make it work. Novices may become very frustrated in a very short time and quit.

The Bottom Line
Given the clunky controls, this was the most frustrating one for me. I have a good mastery of movement, so if I can't make the thing work, I'd imagine many people would be chucking their controllers across the room. I had to cheat to make it work. One activity makes you pump your legs up and down to make a handcart go. I almost threw my back out trying to make it work. I think they are just relying on Jillian Michaels' status to sell the product.

Fit Factor
1 out of **5**

EA Active

Publisher: EA Sports • **Developer:** EA Canada

The Good
EA Active is more interactive and engaging than the others. EA Active starts with a 30-day challenge with preselected workouts. The game uses a similar format to Wii Fit, where you incorporate different exercises, but here it's seamless. You might be running on the track, and then all of a sudden you jump from baseball throws to bumping volleyballs. The control feels precise – if you're playing volleyball, you have to hold it a certain way and get the timing right. You can also edit and delete exercises from the workouts. With customizable workouts, you can tailor the exercise to your favorite activities; if you like boxing, you can make a 40-minute routine of boxing. EA Active also comes with a resistance band. It's the only game that comes with any type of kit, which is a step in the right direction.

The Bad
Overweight people will not be happy about the tight, uncomfortable thigh strap, which is made of neoprene and doesn't breathe very well. I placed it over my shorts, and while it's a bit restrictive, it wasn't that big of a deal. The biggest downside is that you can never see what you're doing, which is a negative aspect of almost all of these games. Someone might be two weeks into a 30-day challenge and think their back is sore due to good exercise, but in reality they might be hurting themselves.

The Bottom Line
EA Active and Gold's Gym are tied for first. Some of the activities are intense, because the setup keeps you honest. If you're doing a squat they will have an online meter where you have to break a certain line – because the nunchuck is on your thigh. There's a lot of variety, it operates very smoothly, and the graphics are awesome.

Fit Factor
4.5 out of **5**

Gold's Gym Cardio Workout

Publisher: Ubisoft • **Developer:** Rocket Studios, Inc.

The Good
Gold's Gym is a very straightforward exercise program. When you create your user ID, it immediately goes to "shape boxing," which is basically cardio boxing. It works just like Guitar Hero; there are thin, wide bars that scroll vertically up the screen. Your coach is facing you, which is great, because then you can mirror them. They give very clear instructions on how to perform the punches. The punches are timed on tempo with the music, and you see a boxing glove come up the screen and they have a target range. As long as you throw the punch in that range, you get an excellent score. The game teaches you combinations and stepping patterns. From an instruction standpoint, these guys did the best job of being concise. They don't give too much information, but it's reflected well onscreen so you get a sense of what you're doing the right way. They even have examinations. When you first begin, you can see if you pass with proper form and technique.

The Bad
The grading system is a little gray because you could just flick the remote to cheat, but there's at least a system in place for them to make you aware that form is important.

The Bottom Line
I like it because the music is up to date and the instructions are very clear. I've been boxing for years, and they did a good job. I saw a boxing company on the back of the box, so Gold's must have hired them to help. I could feel that playing the game. They didn't go hog wild and try to do a million things in one game. It's primarily boxing, and that's good.

Fit Factor
4.5 out of **5**

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE
... you know if it was left to me, I would raise the prices even further.

– Activision CEO Bobby Kotick thinks that expensive peripheral bundles don't cost enough

GOOD
Like a zombie who won't stay down, Valve's Left 4 Dead just keeps on comin'. The company announced that it is supporting the original game with an update entitled Crash Course, which contains new content for the game's multiplayer, co-op, and single-player modes, including a streamlined version of the game's Versus campaigns. Crash Course takes place after the No Mercy campaign and features new locations and dialogue recorded by the original cast. The update will be available sometime this month and is free for PC users or 560 MS points for 360 players. If you've got a problem with the fact that PC owners get it for free and 360 ones don't, it's Microsoft's fault, not Valve's. We don't need any more misguided anger than is already out there.
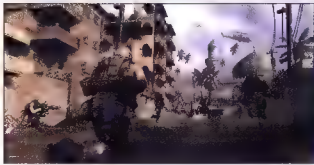
BAD
The story of Six Days in Fallujah may be over before it ever began. Developer Atomic has been unable to secure new funding after Konami pulled out as publisher earlier this year. The outlook for the game's release does not look good.

BAD
A USC Annenberg School of Communications study found that characters in video games don't accurately mirror the people who play them. For instance, the study says that while Hispanic kids play more video games than white kids – citing an earlier study by the Kaiser Family Foundation – Hispanic characters make up less than three percent of game characters. "For identity formation, that's a problem," says social psychologist, assistant professor, and study leader Dmitri Williams. He also believes that this kind of misrepresentation may keep some groups from becoming developers themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle.

GOOD
It's getting better all the time. Harmonix is releasing two classic Beatles albums as DLC: *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (November) and *Rubber Soul* (December). The pair will show up after the already promised *Abbey Road*, which comes out in October.
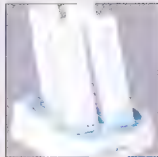
BAD
A product recall has been issued for third-party peripherals company Griffin's Psyclone Essentials and React Wii recharge station. The remote's battery packs may overheat, a situation that has caused minor burns in a pair of owners. Those can't be the only two people feeling burned by a Wii right now.

Name That Game Answer Bonk's Adventure

FIRST LOOK: FABLE III
IT'S GOOD TO BE KING

Peter Molyneux and the crew at developer Lionhead are already working on Fable III, which Molyneux says will come out holiday 2010. The game takes place 50 years into the future of Albion and puts you in the shoes of your offspring from Fable II as he/she strives to capture the throne of Albion and deal with ruling the kingdom. The game's move into the future opens the doors for industrialization, complete with ships and more metal war machines. The land of Albion is split, and is looking for a king or queen to step up and unite the land. Of course, how you rule, how you get there, and what you're willing to do to stay there is up to you.

GUESS WHO?

How Your Favorite Video Game Characters
⟨⟨⟨⟨ Evolved ⟩⟩⟩⟩

Icons like Mario and Link may have sprang into existence after arranging a few pixels into recognizable shapes, but today's video game characters take months of discussion and redesigns before their final look is settled on. Take a look at these early design sketches for some modern video game superstars. Can you tell which icons they grew into?

4

3
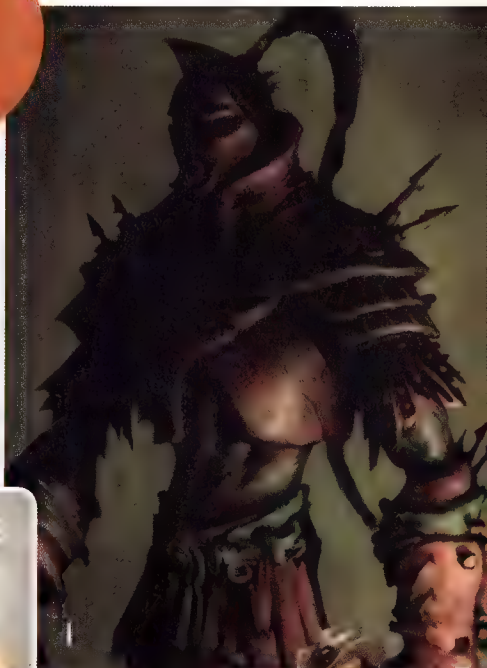
UNLIMITED ENABLED

Check out our Unlimited section online this month to see how new characters are made with our creation of a Big Daddy feature from BioShock 2

Kratos
(God of War)

We began the God of War creation process by developing the main character. Our game needed a hero. David Jaffe wanted an iconic character that would stand out in a crowded marketplace. This particular early version of Kratos was created by Charlie Wen and was a fantasy take on the classic Greek gladiator. Many of the early concepts centered on a fully armored Spartan warrior. These resembled what we had come to expect from a mythological Greek character. However, it soon became apparent that by covering the hero in armor, we were covering the raw emotion of the character. The less armor he wore, the more brutal he started to feel.

— Ken Feldman
Art Director, God of War III

Marcus Fenix
(Gears of War)

From contemporary SWAT-style design, to looks influenced by the Vietnam era, to a futuristic samurai appearance, we took our time finding a style for the COG soldiers. As we moved along, we kept in mind that the war on Sera had been raging for decades, so these guys would be hardened and battered from such an extended time in the trenches. We began focusing on Marcus Fenix after settling on an armor design for the soldiers. We wanted an "intelligent badass" who had almost predatory features — sloping forehead, pronounced jaw line, thick brow, etc. These guys had been in serious combat, and they would be bulky, bruised, weathered, and scarred. A decision was made to give Marcus a scar to give him a bit more of a "used" look and to add character to his face.

— Chris Perna
Art Director, Gears of War 2

Eddie Riggs
(Brütal Legend)

At first we were trying to make him look like an ultimate grizzled old roadie, maybe a little older and been through a lot of stuff, so he looked a little bit like Lemmy from Motörhead, you know? Then we were like, "Well, I think we want to have him be a little bit more like Jack Black's character in *School of Rock*, where he is just this really enthusiastic fan of the music, really just loves rock and metal." So subconsciously we started making him look more and more like Jack Black. And then when it came time to cast the voice, we were like, "Who should we get?" and like, "Well, it's kind of like a Jack Black-ey character, why don't you just get Jack Black?" And I went, "Nooo… We could never – he would never talk to us. We must be silly."

— Tim Schafer,
Director, Brütal Legend
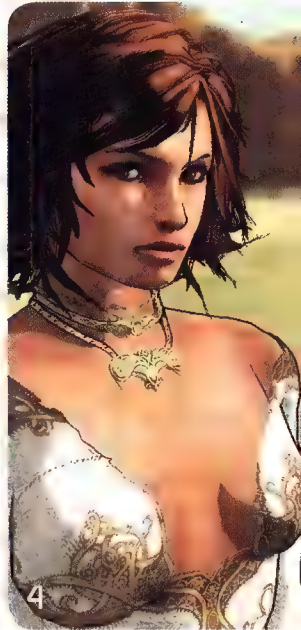
Elika
(Prince of Persia)

In the original design of The Prince and Elika, The Prince looks dynamic, combat oriented, and his dress shows elements of luxury and culture as well as pure functionality. Elika is seductive, magical (note the glowing white hair) but still strong and independent. Unfortunately these designs did not test very well either internally or with focus groups. The Prince looked too much like a ninja and out of place in the fantasy Persian environments we planned to use. Elika's style and glow did not test well because they made her too ethereal and thus unapproachable for a human – it would be impossible for the two to fall in love. Taking this feedback, we went back to the drawing board and came up with the designs for the characters we used in the final game.

— Ben Mattes
Producer, Prince of Persia

cube
MOBILE DEVICE

A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Jeff Cork

A mere 20 years ago, little distinction was made between "games for kids" and "video games" as a whole. Video games were seen as a childish hobby, and as such, parents didn't necessarily face the same concerns about content as they do today (never mind the fact that kids could kill Hitler in Bionic Commando or smash in heads with abandon in Splatterhouse). In the two decades since, the industry has exploded, and developers create games that cater to audiences ranging from hardcore veteran players to kids who are picking up a controller for the first time.

Obviously, what might be considered appropriate to an adult isn't always going to line up with what's acceptable for a three-year-old child. While a number of organizations are happy to fire off press releases when the latest Grand Theft Auto hits store shelves, parents have fewer resources available to them when determining what games are OK for their kids, let alone which ones are actually fun. And there are other issues, too. Should parents place time limits on gaming? How early is too early for kids to start gaming?

As the parent of two young boys — ages two-and-a-half and seven months — most of these concerns are still hypothetical in my house. Our youngest son is still figuring out how to use his hands, so I don't need to worry about him wrenching a controller from me anytime soon. My older son enjoys banging on the Rock Band drums in practice mode (and then getting distressingly close to banging on his younger brother's face) and coloring on his Leapster.

Even if he's not playing many games, he does watch me play on occasion. We're very media conscious in our house, and we do our best to limit how much screen time our oldest gets. When I do play games around my son, I'm keenly aware of what kind of content a particular game contains — or at least I used to think so. I work in an office filled with games and gamers, so I should be an expert, right? Actually, it's been an eye-opening experience.

In the past few years, I've played a lot of games geared for the younger set. Part of it was to prepare myself for parenthood and to get a better idea of what kinds of games were out there. If I could play these games firsthand and determine for myself what was and wasn't appropriate for my family, I didn't see why I shouldn't do so (let's just pretend that my ballooning Gamerscore was a happy side effect of all of this "research"). After playing (and at times enduring) dozens of kids games, I've come to a few conclusions.

On the whole, kids deserve better

With a few exceptions, the majority of games designed for kids are merely adequate. "A lot of times when I run into developers, there's sort of this attitude of, 'Well, it's bigger buttons, and shorter words, and I'll dumb it down a little bit,'" says Carla Engelbrecht Fisher, a children's technology developer who's worked at PBS Kids Interactive and Sesame Workshop. "And if you do that, you're doing a huge disservice to kids. I think there's some of that going on, and there's this forgetting that we can't remember what it's like to be a kid."

Kids are certainly naïve in many ways, but they're also quite savvy when it comes to technology and games. Sure, they can find hours of entertainment with empty boxes. That doesn't mean that games designed for young people don't need to have the same QA standards applied as "regular" games. I don't know how many times I've fallen through floors or gotten stuck in geometry in kids' games. It also doesn't help that I'm typically simultaneously being assaulted with horribly short looped songs and obnoxious sound effects.

But it's not all bad

The biggest shock I've found is that the 3D platformer is alive and well – it's just hiding under a coat of licensed paint. You'll definitely want to try them out before spending any cash, but games based on Dreamworks and Pixar movies are generally above average, even for experienced players (notable exception: Wall-E). Ratatouille has some tricky jumping sections, and Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs packs in a ton of variety. They might not be up to the high standards of a Mario or Ratchet & Clank title, but these games are breezy doses of fun.

Ratings are only so helpful

"Telling a parent to never let a child play a video game before you play it yourself is not realistic," says Dr. David Walsh, founder of the National Institute on Media and the Family. "A lot of parents can't do it. They don't have the skills to do it. Nor do they have the time, because we're talking about video games that are hours and hours and hours long. That means that they really need to rely on solid information that can, in a snapshot, give a solid indication on what the game contains and whether or not it's appropriate for our kids."

A lot of talk is spent on what merits an M rating from the ESRB. How much dismemberment or sexual content can gamemakers squeeze in before getting cursed with an AO? An equally interesting part of the conversation is what the organization considers appropriate for younger players. The "Fantasy Violence" tag includes things like paramilitary units firing assault weapons in the E10+ game G-Force. Nancy Drew: The Haunting of Castle Malloy is rated E (with a "Mild Violence" descriptor), but it contains references to abusive relationships and alcohol use. Those examples don't point to the apocalypse, but they show how flexible ratings can be and why it can be hard for parents to know what's appropriate for their family without playing games firsthand.

In future columns, I'll be talking with experts in the field of child development, game design and regular parents. Gaming is a great hobby, but parents need to know what their kids are playing. Games for kids don't have to be awful. There are plenty of great games out there, and I'll be sharing my recommendations. ■ ■ ■

impulse
BY MATT MILLER

Freeware becomes WiiWare, Trine finally releases, and Machinarium is like nothing you've seen

>>>

■ Cave Story

■ Trine

■ Machinarium
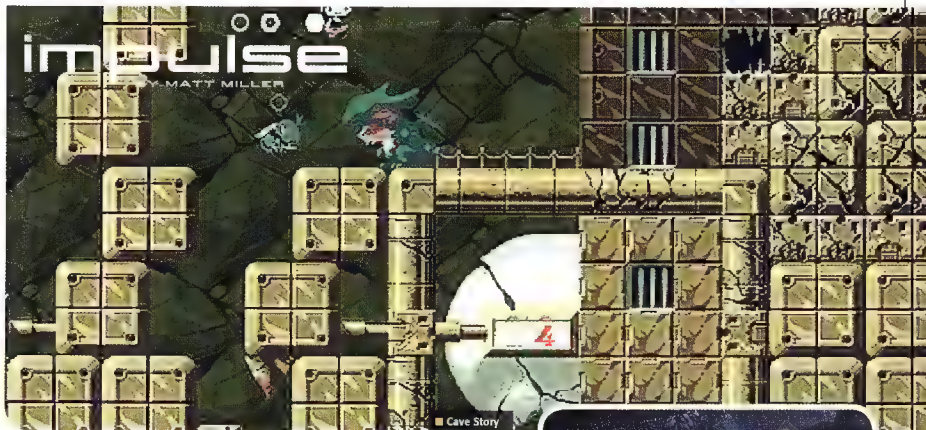
Each month, this column points to the very best in the downloadable scene, no matter the platform. Oftentimes in recent months, that has meant a focus on PSN and Live Arcade. That's not to say that Wii or PC owners are out of luck – far from it, as this month's column illustrates. Dozens of great smaller PC games come and go every few months, and WiiWare gets its share of exclusive games as well. Take a look at some of the best.

Had **Cave Story** released in 1989, it may have been crowned one of the greatest games ever made, and we would have had endless sequels by now. This exploration-based PC freeware action game originally released in 2004, and a graphically retouched version is now headed to WiiWare thanks to developer Nicalis. While Live Arcade's Shadow Complex offers a high-tech approach to the side-scrolling collect-a-thon explorer, Cave Story is decidedly old school. Though the visual presentation appears primitive, the game has a unique beauty reminiscent of your favorite 8 and 16-bit classics. The novel storyline is far deeper than you'd imagine at first glance. It begins with an amnesiac boy in a forgotten cave, but creates a huge mythology over its many hours of gameplay. Dozens of characters, a complex fiction, and multiple endings are only the beginning. The weapon and item upgrade system is vast, and the world is equally large, filled with secret passages and hidden power-ups. If you never experienced the game on PC, Cave Story makes for a phenomenal addition to your Wii library.

Trine is headed to both Live Arcade and PSN in the coming months, but if you want to be among the first to check it out, your best bet is PC gaming service Steam. This gorgeous platformer brilliantly merges puzzle and action components. The game gives players three completely different heroes, but only one of them can be onscreen at once. The wizard can manipulate the environment, the

thief can traverse it, and the knight can fight against it. Each character is almost like a specific Mega Man power-up – each has a prescribed use, and it's up to the player to figure out when to use them. Did I mention how stunning this game looks? The visuals often had me pause to marvel at the detailed backdrops. Of course, a pretty picture is all for naught without some gameplay to back it up. The environmental puzzles often have multiple solutions, and usually leverage the game's intriguing physics system. Combat encounters are brief but fun, utilizing a simple dueling mechanic reminiscent of the original Prince of Persia titles. The constant change between action, puzzle solving, and navigation is a thrill, making Trine one of the best downloadable titles of the year.

Machinarium is unlike any game I've played in several years. The PC exclusive won this year's Independent Games Festival prize for excellence in visual art. The reasoning behind that well-deserved accolade is on display from the moment you begin, with its evocative grunge technology backgrounds and strangely emotive automatons. Players adopt the role of a little robot put out to scrap as he makes his way back home after being thrown away. Emulating old-school adventure games, every screen is a puzzle, demanding you carefully observe the environment and put together a path to continuing forward, often by combining seemingly innocuous items. The game's singular nature comes from the endlessly clever nature of these puzzles, along with the
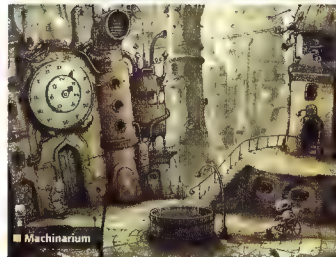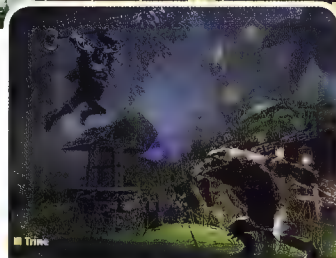
humor and standout visual presentation. Game progression is slow and challenging, but filled with "aha" moments to keep you going. A WiiWare and Live Arcade version are both rumored. ■ ■ ■
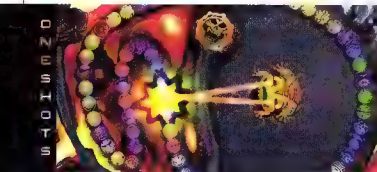
Zuma's Revenge
Zuma's color-matching, ball-shooting action is intact and as fun as ever. Revenge adds a few little additions, like boss battles and new puzzle models. It's currently a PC exclusive, but does anyone care to guess how long before we hear about a Live Arcade version?
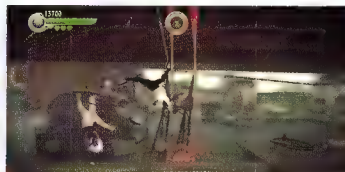
Invincible Tiger: The Legend of Han Tao
PSN and Live Arcade play host to this fast and intense kung fu fighter that focuses on hand-to-hand combat. Stylish, humorous, and challenging, Invincible Tiger is a great action release for fans of classic martial arts flicks.

Contra Rebirth
Little information has surfaced about this apparent WiiWare installment of classic Contra, but just the fact that it exists should be enough to have you strapping on your spread gun. It hits Japan soon, and Konami would be crazy to not bring it stateside in short order.

thetop gaming 10 screw-overs

Challenge is part of the fun of gaming. However, sometimes games aren't just hard – they're completely unfair. Unreasonable difficulty spikes, flagrant rule breaking, and unavoidable lost hours of progress doesn't make for good entertainment. These are the most infuriating examples of video games resorting to dirty tactics to make life hard for hapless gamers.

1 Turbo Tunnel (Battletoads)

Battletoads' Turbo Tunnel is the most infamous screw-over in gaming history. Instead of focusing on combat, this level puts your toads on hover bikes and has them plowing headfirst into a series of oncoming walls. The only way to avoid getting squashed is pure memorization, trial-and-error, and a level of saintly patience that few possess. This sequence alone prevented most gamers from ever discovering that Battletoads has more than three levels.

2 WarMech (Final Fantasy)

Crossing the bridge leading to Tiamat's chamber, you may encounter WarMech – an ancient machine far more powerful than the boss you are only steps from confronting. Unfortunately, WarMech is beyond your party's ability to beat when you first meet it, so you inevitably die in the first round of combat. Without save points, this defeat means redoing the whole dungeon.

3 The "End" (Ghosts n' Goblins)

As if Ghosts 'n Goblins weren't difficult enough, the game doesn't even throw you a bone when you defeat the final boss. Instead of getting a happy ending, you have to play through the whole game again…and it's even harder the second time around.

4 Zodiac Spear (Final Fantasy XII)

Don't get that treasure! If you want to obtain the Zodiac Spear in Final Fantasy XII, you need to leave four otherwise unremarkable treasure chests untouched. The chests are in set locations, separated by hours of gameplay, and opening any one of them ruins your chance of obtaining the game's ultimate weapon.
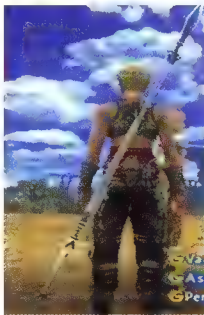
5 Katze (Bushido Blade)

What's the best way to win a swordfight? A shameful disregard for the rules! At the beginning of this battle, Katze whips out a revolver and blasts your sword-toting samurai in the face. You can beat him if you're quick, but a long-range weapon in a game about elegant swordplay is more than a little cheap.

6 Lou (Guitar Hero III)

You might think that Guitar Hero is all hitting the right notes, but that's not the case in the guitar battle against Lou. Instead of rocking out, you need to horde random power-ups while praying that Lou gets all the duds; your skill plays almost no part at all. If the arbitrary sequence doesn't go in your favor, you lose. Just like a real concert, right?

7 Catch-Up AI (Madden)

Sometimes your opponent just needs to swallow defeat. That's easier said than done in Madden, since computer-controlled teams pull miraculous plays out of nowhere in order to keep the game close. In real life, a 21-point comeback in two minutes (resulting from three consecutive turnovers) isn't luck; it's divine intervention. Or an average Detroit Lions game.

8 Flash Kick (Street Fighter II)

The perfect counter to any aerial assault, Guile's flash kick usually involves charging for a few seconds by holding down on the joystick. As an AI opponent, these rules don't apply; Guile can flash kick whenever he wants. "The computer is cheating" is normally a lame excuse for losing, but it's valid in this case.

9 Single Save Slot (Gears of War)

You're close to beating Gears of War, but your buddy wants to play co-op, so you start up a new game. You get some warning about overwriting saved data, but you don't think it concerns you. Surprise! Gears of War doesn't have separate save slots for single-player and co-op modes, so you just lost all of your progress. Of course, any headway you made with your friend also gets erased when you try to restart the solo campaign.

10 The Cat and the Rat (King's Quest V)

Passing the bakery in King's Quest V, you may see a brief scene of a cat chasing and catching a rat. Little do you know that you just watched the game render itself unwinnable. Unless you throw something at the cat (in the few seconds you have to act), you will face an avoidable death hours later, when you're trapped in a cellar and bound by ropes a grateful rat could easily chew through. Time to restart!

Video games and the Stargate license have a rough history together. Cancellations (Stargate SG-1: The Alliance), indefinite delays (Stargate Worlds), and outright mockeries (Acclaim's 16-bit Stargate) are all this license has had to show in the video game space since 1994. If you recall having fond memories of a game called Stargate, you're likely remembering the Atari 2600 game of the same name that has no connection to the television series or films.

Despite the rocky track record, the series' premise of mankind utilizing wormhole gates that connect to an infinite number of alien worlds remains an ideal playground for game developers. Even without a game to offer, MGM hopes gamers will flock to Stargate's third television series, *Stargate Universe*. Debuting on October 2 as a two-hour movie event on Syfy, *Universe* introduces viewers to Eli Wallace, a hardcore gamer who spends most of his waking life in a fictional MMORPG called Prometheus. One of the puzzles that Eli's Prometheus avatar stumbles upon is believed to be unbeatable, a joke of sorts implemented by the programming team.

As it turns out, this puzzle is tied to a mathematical proof implemented by Stargate Command. "None of the brilliant minds at Stargate Command could solve the problem," says series creator Brad Wright. "And so one of the clever folks there decided to embed the mathematical problem in an MMORPG. Eli solves the math proof in order to solve a problem in the game. He thinks it's going to get him to the next level of his game, but what it really does is get the Air Force knocking at his door."

This set-up eventually leads to Eli being a gamer in space, a character who compares new worlds to those in Star Wars, and their residing aliens to Halo. A big gamer himself, actor David Blue knows how to play him. "I love my video games," says Blue. "The more I've worked over the past few years has made it harder to find the time, but hell, two nights ago we had a Rock Band 2 get-together at my place, with myself, Brian [J. Smith] and Elyse [Levesque]."

Most shows bring in video game consultants to attain a realistic representation of the interactive medium. With Stargate Universe, MGM doesn't need this assistance, as Blue has willingly taken on the duty.

"That's probably true in general," Blue says. "Anything about quantum physics I probably know about; anything about the show the other actors usually call me to get me to explain to them; and then video games – hell, just upstairs Brad was telling me something about a storyline, and I made a Star Wars reference before I realized I need to be careful that they don't actually think that I am Eli."

MGM is also tapping a believable source for the Prometheus game used in the show. In fact, the previously mentioned Stargate Worlds game is the foundation for Prometheus. Wright elaborates, "We had been working with the people from Stargate Worlds [Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment]. And we asked them, 'Would you please create this scenario for us?' And they did."

Whether Stargate Universe's gamer-savvy content can win over gamers remains to be seen, but it's great to see a show taking games seriously and casting an actor who lends credibility to the scripts. ■ ■ ■
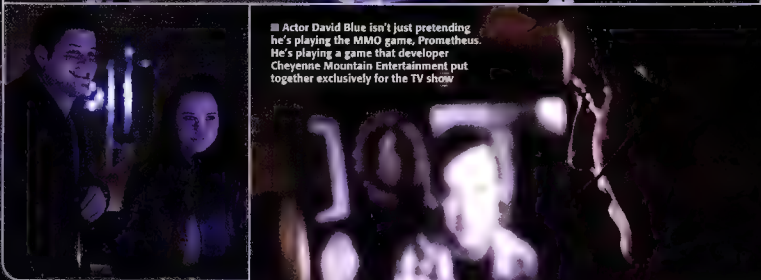
Stargate Universe...
...Gamer TV?

How SyFy's new television series targets the gamer demographic

■ Actor David Blue isn't just pretending he's playing the MMO game, Prometheus. He's playing a game that developer Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment put together exclusively for the TV show

DAVIDCAGE

CEO, QUANTIC DREAM

>> Quantic Dream is one of the industry's most unique development houses, earning a rabid cult following for visionary games like Omikron: The Nomad Soul and the classic noir adventure Indigo Prophecy. With the dramatic PS3 title Heavy Rain, the company hopes to finally win a mass audience to go along with its critical accolades <<

Your games since Omikron haven't featured traditional gameplay. There's no running around, jumping, or shooting. How did your vision for a different kind of gaming evolve?
Omikron was, in a certain way, a traditional game. There was some shooting, some fighting, a story, and some adventure. It was an attempt to make a mixture of everything in one experience. I thought that the most interesting parts in Omikron were not the parts where you were fighting or shooting. It was when you really got the feeling of being part of the world, the emotion of being someone else. I thought, "Why don't we just focus on this and get rid of the boring old traditional shooting, jumping, and driving?" My son -- my son is nine years old -- he absolutely enjoys that, but he's nine and I'm 40 years old. I don't want to play that anymore. I'm not interested in shooting as many people as I can or driving as fast as I can. I've done that. I've played

a gun. Maybe in the next scene you'll be chased. In the next scene you will have a car chase. Maybe in the next scene, something else. All this with one interface. It means that I don't have to twist my story anymore to justify the same action sequence again and again.

Your games feature a lot of player choice. Somes games are starting to offer choice but there's generally the good path or the evil path. You guys introduce a lot more moral shades of gray.
I learned a lot from Indigo Prophecy, because I went through a very depressed phase around the end of the development where I was thinking that nobody would understand what we were trying to achieve. I was really, really surprised by the feedback we received on Indigo. The reviews were extremely positive worldwide. What I learned from

front of disgusting guys, that's just one interesting moment. I was really surprised to read how uncomfortable the people were. This is what you should expect from Heavy Rain. You feel things you may not have felt in front of a game before.

Are you concerned about any possible controversy?
Honestly, we try to create a major experience. This scene takes place in the story. There is a context for it and there is a reason for it. Yes, it's a strong moment and it's a very uncomfortable moment for the character. But if we managed to make you feel uncomfortable it is because at some point we make you believe you were Madison. We made you forget you were in a video game and that nothing bad could happen to you. You will play the game and discover that there is nothing gratuitous in this game. It's not gore for the sake of gore. It's not

games since games existed. Thank you, I've had enough. I don't watch the same movies or read the same books today when I'm 40 than when I was 15. That's a good thing, I hope. But they still give us the same games to play. What I wanted to create was experiences based on emotional involvement and creating journeys -- interactive journeys.

Did you look at these quicktime events as a solution to the idea of engaging the people without bogging it down in traditional gameplay?
When you want fighting sequences you develop a fighting engine or shooting engine, and then you put that in the story. But since you've developed the shooting engine, you need to have the shooting sequence every level. [Then], you have to twist the story so that you have a shooting scene every 10 minutes, to the point where it becomes ridiculous. How many enemies can you kill and tell a story at the same time? Where's the tension? Where's the pacing? It's just shooting, shooting, shooting, shooting until everybody is dead so we can move to the same level and do the same thing again. What I wanted to do was to find a way to create contextual action. Which means yes, that you can fight with your bare hands, but in this next scene you will use

that is that people are clever. If you're sincere in what you do and you try to do it the best way, and you try to put your emotions into what you do, I think people feel it. I'm not interested in making characters that are black and white. I try to create characters that are gray. The way we all are. Sometimes we are good, sometimes we are bad, because we have history. I just tried to create this background for these characters and put the players in their shoes in difficult situations where the choice is not easy to make.

In the E3 demo, there was a scene where the character Madison goes to the club to meet a crime boss. It escalates to the point where she is forced to strip for him at gun point. It was very well done, but it genuinely made me feel uncomfortable.
Fantastic. You know what? That is exactly what we wanted. Exactly. It was really funny to read the reactions to this scene because people were kind of confused. They feel really uncomfortable because it's really a strange situation. First you control a girl and you're forced to strip in front of a guy, and the guy is really disgusting. You say, "I really don't want to get naked in front of this guy." It's a very different situation. The game is not about girls stripping in

sexual for the sake of being sexual. But it deals with serious themes and we try to do it in a serious way.

Some people in the industry say that games are starting to approach movies in terms of storytelling and writing. Do you think that's true?
No. We are light years away from movies. I had a very interesting experience last weekend. I played a very good video game that is very popular at the moment. I won't name it, but it's very good. There's was nothing to criticize about it. It is one of the best video games out right now. Then I went to watch a movie and I watched Up from Pixar. When I left Up, for 20 or 30 minutes I was still in the movie, thinking about what I'd seen and feeling excited and sad for the old guy. I compared the experience watching this movie to playing the game I had just finished. When I thought of the game there was a vacuum. The game left nothing in me. It didn't change the way I feel or see things. Where a movie like Up made me feel something very strong…what games make you feel that? Where are the creators able to generate this kind of emotion? Where are they? They're nowhere just because video games at the moment is a very conservative industry.

HEAVY RAIN'S
MASTER
STORYTELLER

David Cage poses
in Quantic Dream's
Paris offices, where
his team is hard
at work creating
Heavy Rain. The
game caused a
stir at E3 with its
innovative (and
possibly controver-
sial) storytelling

Crossing Over

FORGET THE STUFFY OFFICE – TAKE YOUR MMO TO THE COUCH WITH THE MAINGEAR AXESS

Maingear Axess HD Gamer

VERY GOOD

Partnered with the Phantom keyboard and a 1080p HDTV, the Axess is a great way to bring PC gaming and the couch together. Maingear takes the hardest of hardcore gaming rigs and sticks it in your home theater stand. The black, slim-profiled case complements any A/V setup, and thanks to the video and CPU horsepower provided by the Intel i7 processor and dual Nvidia GeForce 9800 GTs, you have enough juice to do everything from streaming HD videos to playing the latest games. Resource-heavy titles like Empire: Total War perform great, but perfection has its price; the high-end model pushes past the $2,000 barrier. The included media remote allows easy access to one of Microsoft's best products, Windows Media Center, an application built specifically for the living room. We were a little disappointed at the lack of HDTV tuners, however, as the Axess should double as a DVR with its huge 1TB hard drive. The necessary fans also are much louder than one would hope for considering the living room setting.

$2,337.34 • www.maingear.com

Samsung VN55B8000 LED TV

$3,999.99 • www.samsung.com

Warhammer: Chaos in the Old World

From the team at Fantasy Flight Games, which brought us the World of Warcraft and Battlestar Galactica board games, comes this new strategy title based on the Warhammer universe. Players get to play as one of the four gods of Chaos as they try to corrupt and conquer sections of the world. At times, the game requires players to work together to prevent the denizens of the Old World from banishing them to another dimension. Chaos requires cunning and could take months to master, but that just means you'll be enjoying it that much longer.

$59.95 • w.w.w. ... es, flight.com

Sony VAIO P Series Notebook

PASSABLE ■■■■■■■■■

Men worried about their image should be careful how they carry Sony's new P series VAIO; the system is so attractive and tiny that it could easily be mistaken for a woman's clutch purse. However you hold it, this little device comes with some sweet features, such as Bluetooth compatibility, built-in GPS, and a stunning eight-inch widescreen LED display. We love how easily it glides through the Internet, but its cramped keyboard and analog mouse nub slowed us down a bit. The system's 1.33-GHz Intel processor doesn't pack a ton of punch, so we wonder why this overly expensive notebook's battery is running on fumes after a couple hours.

$2,000 00 • www.sonystyle.com/vaio

Raptr

SUPERB ■■■■■■■■■

Remember the old days when you had to call somebody to see what they were playing? Now you can spy on them from work using Raptr. This nifty IM client works with services like AOL, Facebook, PSN, and Xbox Live to let you chat with friends and set up online matches. The program also ranks your compatibility with other users, tracks the games you and your friends play, and recommends new titles for you to check out. We only wish the service were more compatible with the Wii – right now you have to manually type in the games you've played on those systems. Raptr's beta already has millions of users, and, better still, it's free.

FREE • www.raptr.com
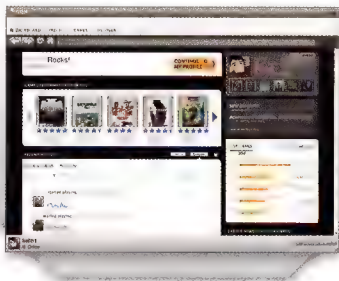
Alienware OptX Monitor

GOOD ■■■■■■■■

Alienware's first attempt to release a company branded monitor is a home run. This 1080p PC monitor with 2ms response time has an incredibly sharp and vibrant picture. While surfing the web, playing games, watching movies, and looking at high-res photos, every image popped with clarity. The slick design features a stylish, adjustable stand, slim profile, and touch sensitive menu buttons. With two HDMI ports for your Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, the OptX makes a great college dorm addition. While $299 is high for a 21.5-inch monitor without a built-in webcam or 3D support, the picture quality and stylish form factor are indisputable.

$299 99 • www.alienware.com

1. Everquest: The 10th Anniversary Collector's Edition

Celebrate Everquest's first decade with this coffee table book that includes concept art for both games, outlines of the original storylines, and interviews with its developers.

$34.99 • www.bradygames.com

2. Fables Vol. 12: The Dark Ages

What if every fairy tale character existed in the modern world? How would they live? What would they fight over? Vertigo explores this idea in one of the most exciting continuing comic series on the market.

$17.99 • www.dccomics.com vertigo

3. Second Skin

Check out the freaks who play online games; you might recognize a few friends. This thoughtful documentary covers many aspects of the online gaming community, and is filled with scads of interesting statistics.

$19.95 • www.libent.com

4. Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters by Jane Austen and Ben H. Winters

From the publisher of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* comes another irreverent modernization. Adding giant lobsters and two-headed sea serpents to Austen's original text makes *Sense and Sensibility* surprisingly readable.

$12 95 • www.quirkclassics.com

5. Unknown Soldier Vol. 1: Haunted House

In Northern Uganda tourists are hacked to death with machetes, and 12-year-olds fight wars with AK-47s. When doctor Moses Lwanga finds himself caught in the middle, he's surprised to discover he has a soldier's skill for fighting back.

$9 99 • www.dccomics.com/vertigo

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SO YOU CALL YOURSELF A 'GAMER'...

HAL HALPIN
PRESIDENT
ENTERTAINMENT CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION

As an influencer in this industry ... it's crucially important that you're aware of your rights ...

If you're a reader of this publication and taking the time to read a feature story, you're most likely a core gamer. As an influencer in this industry – one that any game marketer would tell you is worth the hundreds of billions of dollars spent to sway your opinion -- it's crucially important that you're aware of your rights. You should understand who is trying to change them and why, and what you can do about influencing your own destiny. Here are some of the leading issues facing you as a game consumer.

DIGITAL RIGHTS
One of the most important changes our industry will see is a move from packaged goods product to digitally distributed goods. While you may be able to access content more quickly with digital product, the downside may be that you sacrifice ownership rights to that content. For $60, you've had a reasonable expectation that you'll own the game that you're buying. You can legally re-sell that game once you're done with it, and use that money on a new or used game. With digitally-distributed content the question of what you bought comes in to question. In fact, the new question becomes *if* you bought it at all! It could be that instead of buying the game, you actually just licensed it. Over the next few years, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) working in conjunction with trade and consumer representatives will be examining the issue closely.

DMCA
The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) is a federal law in the United States that empowers rights holders and government agencies to proceed against individuals and businesses that infringe upon their rights as though they were criminals. DMCA has since become a lightning rod for all things "digital rights." Consumer groups argue it has ceased being the democratizing tool it was initially intended to be, and instead become a heavy-handed weapon wielded by deep-pocketed trade organizations to arbitrarily force the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to have their Immigration &

Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency pursue their piracy agendas.

NET NEUTRALITY & UNIVERSAL BROADBAND
How we download, play, and interact online at present is something we all take for granted. However, this is not the path that service providers see going forward. From their perspective, they have invested a lot of money in the infrastructure of their networks. They argue that they've made an investment and someone's gotta pay, so it may as well be you or their competitors. Consumer groups have risen up vocally and ardently in the past few years, countering the statements made by service providers with as-logical counterpoints such as: those corporations have made their return on investment already, that they're now looking to Internet-related services to cover the costs of their other less stellar or unprofitable business units. Net Neutrality is the key priority for both sides of the matter, and it's not a subject open to debate or compromise for either, since it's so black and white by nature. While the debate rages on, the related issue of universal broadband – that every resident should have the ability to have access to connect to the Internet at broadband speeds – is more of a common-ground matter. ISPs are eager to get Congress to give them stimulus and other government funding to build out their infrastructure and increase their services to new urban and rural customers. So with both of theses issues, how you play and surf is where the rubber meets the road for gamers.

REGULATION & TAXATION OF GAMES
Probably the highest-profile advocacy issue on the list, the regulation of game content is the potential restriction of the sale or rental by the state or federal government. In short, the bills that trade and consumer groups have been fighting and defeating time and again in state and circuit courts are efforts by legislators to hamper the First Amendment rights of makers, sellers, and/or consumers of interactive entertainment. Industry and consumer groups have an unbeaten track record, winning each and

every time that one of the anti-games or anti-gamer bills become law, on appeal. The groundwork is so soundly against them that many gamers feel as though this is a non-issue and that any efforts will be met with the same fate. That complacency is precisely what their opponents are hoping for, remaining true to their convictions and incessantly hammering away at their messaging. One new such path that they have found is to apply sin taxes to gaming. If they can't prove that games should be legislated and treated like alcohol, tobacco, and firearms, then maybe they can tax them similarly. Consumer and trade groups were quick to point out that no such sin taxes exist for music or movies, so why should games be singled out? The efforts to tax gaming have lessened recently, but not because they're backing off. It's because of where we are in the legislative cycle...elections. If and when it's advantageous to propose them again, believe me, they'll be back.

BECOME INVOLVED
These are just a few of the leading issues facing gamers today and for the foreseeable future. If you're interested in more in-depth information on any of these or other advocacy issues, please visit the Entertainment Consumers Association at www. theECA.com for more details and to find out how you can get involved. Because you've taken the time to read through this article and understand your rights, we're going to offer that membership to you for one year for free. It's a limited-time offer for readers of Game Informer magazine 18 and up who are residents of the U.S. or Canada. Go to the website and use coupon code "GIMAG" to get your one-year free trial membership in the association, take advantage of our forums to talk about the above issues, and engage with other gamers. There are also a whole host of affinity benefits, including discounts on games-related purchases and rentals as well. ■ ■ ■

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

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat

02

Can't get enough Halo? The ODST Rookie Figure should be on shelves now!

03

october

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

Alpha Protocol — 10/06

06

NEW RELEASES
- Alpha Protocol – PS3, 360
- Demon's Souls – PS3
- Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars – PSP
- HAWX – Wii
- NBA 2K10 – PS3, 360, Wii, PC, PSP
- NBA Live 10 – PS3, 360, PC
- Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising – PS3, 360
- Painkiller: Resurrection – PC
- Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus – Wii, DS
- Saw – PS3, 360

07

So you thought Civil War was a big deal, and the events of Secret Invasion changed everything you knew about your favorite comics? Just wait until you see what Marvel has planned in this month's universe-changing series, The List. Expect involvement from the X-Men, Avengers, Punisher, and the long-absent Daredevil. This series changes everything!

09

A touching period piece about forbidden love in Victorian England, Zombieland hits the theaters today. So grab your friends, lovers, and parents and prepare to enjoy a subtle and restrained drama with the understated acting of Woody Harrelson. That guy really tugged at our heartstrings in Kingpin.

Brütal Legend — 10/13

NEW RELEASES
- Brütal Legend – PS3, 360
- Cars: Race-o-Rama – PS3, 360, PS2, PSP, DS
- Cop: The Recruit – DS
- Fallout 3: Game of the Year Edition – 360, PS3, PC
- Imagine: Artist – DS
- Ju-On: The Grudge – Wii
- Learn Chess – DS
- Mario & Sonic at the Winter Olympic Games – DS
- Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes – DS
- Petz: Pony Beauty Pageant – DS

- Silent Hill: Shattered Memories – Wii, PS2, PSP
- Spore Hero – Wii
- Squeeballs Party – Wii, DS
- Sushi Academy – DS
- Tony Hawk: Ride – PS3, 360
- Uncharted 2: Among Thieves – PS3
- Way of the Samurai 3 – PS3
- Where the Wild Things Are – PS3, 360, Wii, DS

15

Dan Brown's new book is going to tank. The reason for this won't have anything to do with church, politics, the main character's personality being as dry as Tom Hanks', or Dan Brown using the same template for all of his books. All cash spent in bookstores will be going to this year's book of the year, LEGO Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary. Most of the Star Wars vehicles are shown in brick form, and this book also comes packaged with an exclusive Luke mini-figure.

16

The first Wild Things was pretty good. The second one... well, it didn't have Neve Campbell in it, so it wasn't as good. The third entry in the epic trilogy, Where the Wild Things Are, opens today. The previews show tons of huge hairy monsters (one might be Cameron Diaz), so we're betting the threesome scene will be righteous!

Borderlands — 10/20

NEW RELEASES
- Astro Boy – Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- Bakugan – PS3, 360, PS2, PSP, DS
- Ben 10: Alien Force Vilgax Attacks – 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- Borderlands – PS3, 360
- CSI: Deadly Intent – 360, Wii, PC
- CSI: Deadly Intent: The Hidden Cases – DS
- Diner Dash: Flo on the Go – DS
- Dragon Ball: Revenge of King Piccolo – Wii
- FIFA 10 – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS

20

- Half-Minute Hero – PSP
- Korg DS-10 Plus – DS
- Lips #1 Hits – 360
- Marvel Super Hero Squad – Wii, PS2, PSP, DS
- Naruto: Shippuden Clash Ninja Revolution 3 – Wii
- Remington North American Bird Hunt – Wii
- Secret Saturdays: Beasts of the 5th Sun – Wii, PS2, PSP, DS

23

Roger Ebert thinks the success of G.I. Joe and Transformers indicates a dark age for the film industry. Today, his argument holds no weight as audiences are crushed beneath the cinematic splendor of Astro Boy, Saw VI, and Ong-Bak 2: The Beginning. Next thing you know, Ebert will tell us that Crank 2 shouldn't win Best Picture.

Forza 3 — 10/27

NEW RELEASES
- All-Star Cheer Squad 2 – Wii
- Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader: Game Time – 360, Wii, DS
- The Backyardigans – DS
- Biggest Loser – Wii, DS
- Dance Dance Revolution – Wii, PS2
- DJ Hero – PS3, 360, Wii
- Dora the Explorer: Dora Saves the Crystal Kingdom – Wii
- Dora the Explorer: Dora Puppy – DS

- Drawn to Life: Next Chapter – Wii, DS
- Forza 3 – 360
- Grand Theft Auto IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony – Xbox Live
- Grand Theft Auto IV: Episodes from Liberty City – 360
- Hasbro Family Game Night – Wii, DS
- Nerf N-Strike Elite – Wii
- Ni Hao, Kai-Lan: New Year's Celebration – DS

27
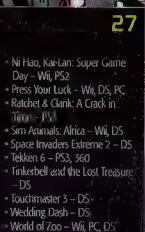
- Ni Hao, Kai-Lan: Super Game Day – Wii, PS2
- Press Your Luck – Wii, DS, PC
- Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time – PS3
- Sim Animals Africa – Wii, DS
- Space Invaders Extreme 2 – DS
- Tekken 6 – PS3, 360
- Tinkerbell and the Lost Treasure – DS
- Touchmaster 3 – DS
- Wedding Dash – DS
- World of Zoo – Wii, PC, DS

30

With each passing year, Michael Cera's Hollywood age gets lower. In his new film, Youth in Revolt, he plays a 14-year-old. In a decade, he will be old enough for the Look Who's Talking sequel. He's a real life Benjamin Button... except his movies don't suck.

something
EPIC
is brewing

Next month Game Informer unleashes

a storm of epic proportions with its

new design and website relaunch,

and the star of the show is

someone you just might know...

> "Peace at last. You overthrew the world's most evil criminal masterminds and their dominant empires. You have returned law and order to Pacific City. You gave the people back their lives. Thank you."

CRACKDOWN 2

These words of congratulation are your reward for finishing Crackdown. At first, the ending appears to be a happy one; by systematically eliminating three organized gangs, you thought you were making the streets safer – but you were only clearing away the resistance. You paved the way for the sinister Agency to assume control of the city with an oppressive and authoritarian regime, squelching individual freedom in the name of protection.

Obtaining power was the easy part – holding on to it proved more difficult. A dangerous virus (which you inadvertently released) ravaged the population, rendering large areas uncontrollable and uninhabitable. The Agency abandoned these sectors one by one all while using the media to reassure the public that everything was under control. People weren't buying it; the citizens started an underground revolt to fight the Agency and the growing infected masses. Now, the people of Pacific City struggle to survive during the day, and hide for their lives when night falls.

Your actions in Crackdown have resulted in a city fraught with conflict, blood-crazed freaks terrorizing the streets, and citizens living in constant fear and desperation. Well done, agent – now it's time to clean up your mess.

XBOX 360

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** RUFFIAN GAMES
> **RELEASE** 2010

A New Home

The original Crackdown introduced gamers to a new kind of open world experience – one where the phrase "go anywhere, do anything" had real meaning. As a super-powered agent in a city overrun by gangs, the main objective was to hunt down and eliminate three criminal kingpins. Instead of accepting a chain of story missions, players simply decided when and how they wanted to tackle the bosses; the three islands of Pacific City were all open from the start, with no arbitrary roadblocks restricting access to certain areas. Players navigated the city with incredible agility, bounding across the rooftops while using a high-tech arsenal to neutralize gang members below. With so many options for offense and mobility, the only limitation was your willingness to put your agent in harm's way.

Gamers received Crackdown's fresh take on the sandbox genre with widespread enthusiasm. The title sold over 1.5 million copies, winning the hearts of critics and consumers with its mixture of freedom and mayhem. In the video game industry, that kind of success virtually guarantees a sequel. Anxious fans waited for the inevitable announcement, but over two years passed since the game's 2007 release with no more than vague rumors of a follow-up.

Microsoft finally confirmed the existence of Crackdown 2 at its E3 press conference this year, but with a surprising twist: Original developer Realtime Worlds would not be involved with the title. Instead, a brand new studio called Ruffian Games is handling development duties. This raises a puzzling question: How did an unproven studio inherit one of the biggest sleeper hits of the current console generation? Ruffian Games isn't as unconnected to the first Crackdown as it seems.

At one point, the team at Realtime Worlds was prepared and eager to begin work on Crackdown 2, but couldn't get a green light for the project from Microsoft. Time passed, and the developer began to focus its efforts elsewhere. When Microsoft finally decided to go forward with Crackdown 2, Realtime Worlds simply didn't have the resources to devote to the project.

"The circumstances in which Realtime didn't end up working on Crackdown was disappointing for everyone," says Ruffian producer James Cope. "It was a disappointment because it was one of those situations where two businesses are trying together and it's just not working out." For some, the situation went beyond disappointment; it was a reason to take action.

Billy Thomson, creative director at Ruffian Games, was not content to let the chance to work on Crackdown 2 go by. Thomson and key members of Ken Studios (who helped develop Crackdown) formed Ruffian Games with the intention of securing the game that Realtime Worlds was forced to pass up.

"There was an opportunity to start a new company and start pitching new IPs to publishers. So I left Realtime Worlds to join Gaz [Liddon] and Gareth [Noyce]," Thomson says. "The goal was to get Crackdown 2. Failing that, we would probably go to other publishers. Thankfully, we never had to go that far."

Ruffian Games opened in Dundee, Scotland – the same town as Realtime Worlds. Once Ruffian secured the contract from Microsoft and began taking on new staff, many members of the original Crackdown team submitted applications, eager to continue work on the franchise. "The thing that happens when you make a game if it turns out well, as Crackdown did…there's loads of things we want to do to make the follow up, and the opportunity to take it on again was too much for people to not try and get involved," Thomson observes.

With almost all of the key staff from the first Crackdown in place, Ruffian set about crafting the sequel it had been waiting years to create.

Times Are Changing

Approaching Crackdown 2, the team's first order of business was isolating what worked and what didn't in the original. In the pursuit of making a bigger and better experience, the first thing that changes in most sequels is the setting; if you want to show the player new sights, it stands to reason that you're going to need a brand new location. That isn't the case with Crackdown 2 – agents return to the sprawling metropolis of Pacific City for another tour of duty.

For all of its towering skyscrapers and gang activity, Pacific City never had much personality. Rather than see that as a reason to abandon the setting, the team saw it as an opportunity to address one of gamers' main complaints from the first game: the lack of narrative framework.

"I did regret the fact in Crackdown 1 that there wasn't much of a narrative to go through," admits Cope. "There wasn't much compelling reason to do it beside blowing things up."

Not every game needs to provide players with nuanced motives, but the return to Pacific City for Crackdown 2 gives additional context to the players' actions when compared to the previous installment. After all, a story lurks beneath the surface of any location that has changed drastically. The observatory is in ruins, a Volk monument has toppled over, and an ominous new skyscraper cuts into the horizon. By returning players to familiar surroundings and showcasing how the once-pristine areas have degenerated, every corner of Pacific City takes on new meaning.

Players believed their actions in Crackdown restored order to Pacific City, albeit in service to the goals of the Agency. However, the destruction of the Los Muertos, Volk, and Shai-Gen gangs marked the beginning of the city's descent into lawlessness – and it all started with a seemingly routine raid on a bioengineering facility.

"One of the Shai-Gen missions actually had a research lab that hid all of these freaks inside it," Thomson explains. "The idea is that when they escaped, they moved into Pacific City. Over the course of the next couple years, the freaks slowly started to populate the city and started taking over the sewers. Bit by bit, they were coming up to the city streets and killing civilians. The Agency tried to deal with it, then tried to cover it up. They were doing their best to keep track of all of this and they slowly started to lose control."

At nightfall, the freaks flooded the streets, and during the day people used their meager resources to buy what they needed to survive. Citizens left to fend for themselves started to resent the Agency and its inability to maintain order, so they took matters into their own hands. Forming a resistance group called the Cell, the civilians fought back against the Agency and the freaks, creating a three-way power struggle that turned the entire city into a war zone. In a calculated act of sabotage, the Cell managed to destroy the core of the Agency: the agent program.

Without its super-powered enforcers to impose its will, the Agency was driven back – by both the Cell and the freaks – from every neighborhood. Soon, all the organization controlled was the Agency Tower, while the Cell became the dominant human power, adapting vehicles and cobbling together strongholds across all three islands to help fight back the freak menace.

Though the Agency lost control of the city, it silently continued working toward its mysterious goals – something players learn more about in Crackdown 2. "We want the player to find out more about who the Agency is." says Cope. "And, of course, the welcome return of a very familiar voice."

As Crackdown 2 begins, the Agency is ready to make its move. The Cell needs to pay, and the freaks need to be taken down. The agent program is being brought back online for the first time in years – but the problems in Pacific City have grown to a greater magnitude now. It will take more than a couple of agents to bring them under control.

Before and After

Even though years pass between the stories of Crackdown and Crackdown 2, gamers familiar with the first title will recognize several landmarks in the new Pacific City. Some old buildings have crumbled, and others have been constructed, but the road grid itself is the same (rewarding those who learned how to navigate the old streets). These comparison screens illustrate some of the changes players can expect to see in familiar places around Pacific City.

Crackdown
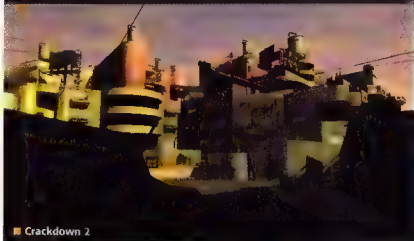
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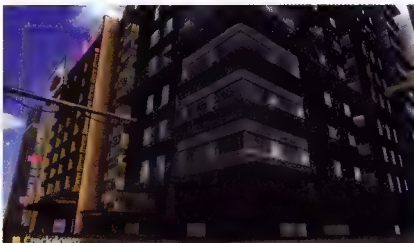
Crackdown 2

Crackdown 2
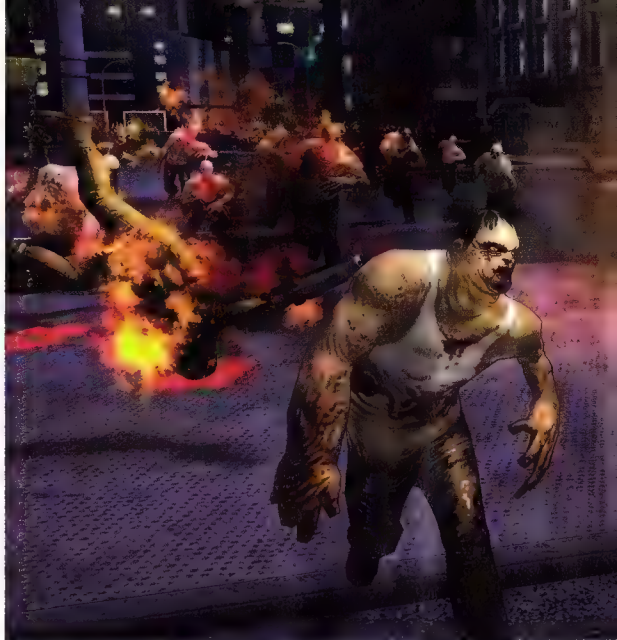
Teaming Up

The first Crackdown introduced several innovations to the open-world genre, but the most significant was the inclusion of cooperative play. In single-player, Crackdown was already full of destruction and chaos; once you invited a second player to join your world, the game became a wildly entertaining flurry of explosive rockets and hurled cars. Amid all the mayhem, the term "co-op" came to mean two different things: "I will help you," and "I occasionally won't try to blow you up."

The fun atmosphere cultivated by two-player co-op kept gamers coming back to Crackdown – a fact that certainly did not escape the notice of Ruffian. Co-op is back for Crackdown 2, except it now allows up to four players to wreak havoc across the city.

Unlike the original, Crackdown 2 is designed with cooperative play as a primary focus rather than just a feature. You can still play through the campaign by yourself, but certain objectives are better handled as a group. For instance, we

Vehicles like trucks and buses have room for mounted turrets, which makes them excellent options for getting around in co-op

■ Supply points from the original Crackdown are gone. Agents can now call in for ammo and support anywhere in the city

A Little Help

Some skeptics are hesitant to give Crackdown credit for its own success, attributing its popularity to the free Halo 3 multiplayer beta included in the box. While the beta certainly gave the original game a sales boost, the Crackdown 2 team isn't bitter about the pairing. After all, regardless of what drove the purchase, once gamers had Crackdown in their hands, they had a blast.

"We loved the fact that we got to have the Halo beta because we wanted to get the game out there, and piggybacking a franchise like that is great. But it also gave us a way to get the game out to more people," explains producer James Cope. "The best thing about it all is we hear lots of stories about people getting it for the beta and coming out and playing Crackdown, and having fun with it. To us, that's job done."

"I think it was a bit of genius to be perfectly honest," creative director Billy Thomson adds. "If they want to do it again, we'll have it."

played through a sequence at night where freaks were pouring out of a breach in the ground – we saw at least 50 of them rampaging though what used to be the Volk's territory. At a low level, wiping out these creatures and closing the breach would be impossible alone. On the other hand, four agents working together might have a shot.

"Crackdown was very much a one-player campaign, and you've got a mate that can join in," Cope says. "This time there's serious barriers where you're going to think, 'I need help.'

It's about making that setup for a four-player campaign…it's more about having a serious threat against you and thinking, 'I want my mates to be a part of this!'"

"That's not to say that we're going to have blockers in the game that require you to have additional players," Thomson adds, "But there are going to be elements where it would be a lot easier to get through if there are a couple of your friends online that could help."

Just like the last game, players have five skills that level up as they are used: agility, strength, driving, firearms, and explosives. In Crackdown 2, each level in every skill grants players an ability or advantage they didn't have before, so players can form more varied strategies depending on their skills and those of their companions. If your agility is high enough, you can barrel down the street with a dash move, sending cars and people in your path flying. If one of your co-op partners has reached level 5 in driving, that agent gains access to the new Agency helicopter, which has some obvious perks. If taking the aerial approach isn't your thing, all four agents assaulting a Cell stronghold with maxed-out firearms skills is sure to produce spectacularly gratifying carnage.

Your strategy will also change depending on your opponents. Members of the Cell are most like what players faced in Crackdown 1; they may look a little ragged, but they know how to handle weapons, and their vehicles have all been modified for maximum offense and protection. They are often found defending key installations in the city, so they will typically have the advantage in terms of position.

The freaks are an entirely different story. These creatures will try to swarm you, charging aggressively and trying to overpower you with sheer numbers. The good news is that the freaks are so densely packed in the streets that a few grenades can thin out the lower ranks quickly, leaving only the more advanced mutations for your agent to deal with. You'll be introduced to new evolutions of the freaks as you progress; the early forms are little more than zombies, but the end-game mutants can fill a full-fledged agent with fear.

We saw one hulking freak that picked up and attacked with objects around the environment, and when the agent jumped up to the rooftops to escape, the creature was leaping right up behind him. "The top level freaks are almost on par with the player-controlled agent," Thomson says. "We almost want to give the feeling that you're playing against a level 5 agent. That's where things go really over the top."

The combination of players, their chosen skills, and their enemies are a few of the ways Crackdown 2 provides a greater degree of variety in how you tackle goals. But the goals themselves are also seeing a major overhaul. Instead of hunting down a series of gangsters, your agent faces a new set of challenges.

The Good Fight

In concept, systematically taking down three crime lords and their lieutenants sounded great. However, gamers in the original Crackdown found that charging into a complex, singling out the boss, and slowly plugging away at its health got a little old after a dozen times.

"The thing that annoyed me most [about Crackdown 1] was repetition and just pure s— of the boss battles," Thomson says. "I loved the level design, I loved the progression through the levels, the multiplayer – all of that was great all the way up to the point where you had to kill that boss. I think, possibly, that is the worst thing in Crackdown…that's the bit that we've completely bent."

For better or worse, the freaks and the Cell are not as well organized as the crime lords, so Crackdown 2 won't just be a series of assassinations. Your primary goal is still reclaiming territory in the name of the Agency, but you'll accomplish it by completing a wider variety of objectives, like raiding underground freak tunnels or sabotaging Cell installations across the city.

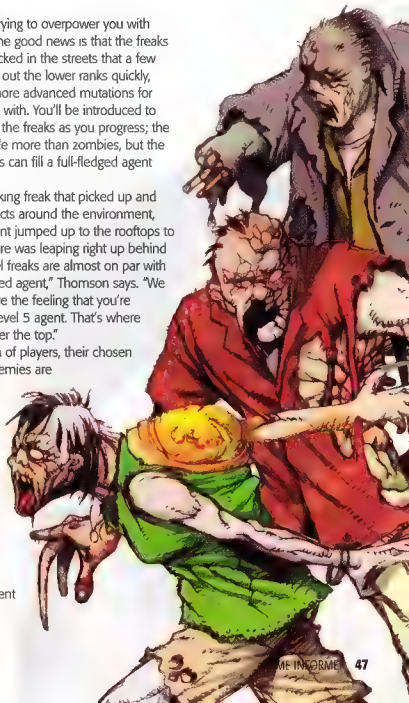Even without the gangs, the missions remain connected. You won't be weakening a group's vehicles or recruitment specifically, but your actions will have consequences. Ruffian isn't going into details on exactly how this will play out, but Cope emphasizes that "your influence in the world has effects across the rest of the city. We definitely retain the spirit of Pacific City being a living, breathing thing, and your influence on the city is great."

One mission has players taking control of a heavily guarded electrical plant powering a nearby Cell compound. This helps the Agency in the short-term, but it also impacts future objectives in the area. Without electricity, the Cell compound is vulnerable, especially without power to run their lights.

Ultraviolet light is lethal to the freaks – hence the underground caves and nocturnal lifestyle – so the circumstances of each mission changes depending on the time of day. If you try to storm a Cell refinery during the night, you're likely to encounter an onslaught of freaks that could complicate the operation. On the other hand, if you've taken out the power plant, waiting until nightfall could mean that the guards at the Cell compound might have their hands full with a full-on freak assault – making it easier for you to get inside and administer Agency-brand justice.

Roaming around the city at night also has a different vibe. You won't just encounter scattered pockets of enemies; hordes of the freaks are everywhere. In the first Crackdown, each gang was confined to one of three islands, but the islands no longer provide a discrete separation between the difficulties of foes you encounter. Instead, each island has its own problem zones – the sections of the city where the freaks first gained control and forced the Agency out. These areas have been completely lost to the freaks, and are dangerous to explore even for advanced agents. This means that you won't simply be clearing one island and then moving on to the next one

"It's more about the visual progression of the level of decay, deterioration, and destruction," Thomson explains. "The difficulty as far as fighting freaks and the Cell increases as you go through the epicenters. So it's not really island specific, it's more cut in sections across the entire city."

Areas still exist where low-level agents don't stand a chance of survival, particularly in the old Shai-Gen area where the outbreak began. In the parts of town where the freaks reign supreme, you're going to be glad the Agency has stayed on the cutting edge of weapons development.

Gear and Gadgets

Being strong and agile is good, but how you use the array of tools at your disposal ultimately decides who rules Pacific City. Agents still ride in style; all of the Agency vehicles from the first game are back, including the ones in the downloadable content (like the race car and dune buggy) Each vehicle has received a fresh design overhaul, and there are even new additions like the Agency helicopter, but the real changes in your agent's gear focus on the revamped arsenal.

"One of the things we're trying to do is get a decent weapons progression," lead designer Steve Iannetta tells us. "The first game failed in that you could go across to one of the later islands, get a more powerful weapon, and basically rocket-launcher your way to success."

While some gamers enjoyed the fire-and-forget nature of combat, it didn't foster much variety. To correct that, Ruffian is building an array of weapons with different advantages and drawbacks while ensuring each gun is up to Agency standards in terms of looking awesome. "One of the problems we had in the first game was, when you reached level 5, you were this big beastly rock of a man and you were standing there holding an M16," Iannetta laughs. "It just looked totally embarrassing."

One of the new weapons is a UV shotgun, which uses a burst of light to decimate freaks at close range. If you prefer to keep your distance, the

The agent's face is currently only visible at first level. This means players will probably all be given the same character rather than selecting an agent at the outset

Agency has developed a high-power sniper weapon that looks more like a rail gun than a rifle. The homing rocket launchers also return, but the coolest new toy we saw is currently being called a "mag." They are essentially sticky grenades that, instead of blowing up, form a magnetic bond with other mags, linking whatever objects to which they're stuck. The potential for fun with these things is huge; if you stick a mag on the side of a building, and then throw the next at a car, you'll see the vehicle get pulled off the street, dangling from a magnetic rope. Even better, each mag automatically daisy-chains with the last one you threw, so your car hanging from a building could quickly become five cars, which can then be used as an improvised ladder to climb up the building. Or, if you prefer a less utility-oriented approach, you can throw a mag on a civilian, another on a gas canister, and then shoot the valve off to send them both rocketing away at top speed.

To make these new weapons and gadgets usable in the campaign, as well as competitive multiplayer, the targeting system in Crackdown 2 is seeing some adjustments. Players can no longer just flick the analog stick to automatically target specific areas. The new mechanic requires more precision.

"One of our concerns with the original targeting system was that it would be a massive exploit for PvP games, because you could just headshot, head-shot, headshot," Cope says. The team's solution meets halfway between a manual and an automatic system; by keeping your reticle in a general target area – like around the head – a circle gradually grows smaller around that spot until you've locked in your shot. If you move your aim out of the area, it gradually expands again. This allows players who aren't great with manual aiming to still pull off some stylish shots, but it also rewards players with skill. You aren't required to wait for the circle to shrink, so if you think you've got a headshot lined up on your own, you can go ahead and take it.

More variation in the weapons means players will need to consider which guns they bring along. It isn't all about the homing rocket launcher anymore
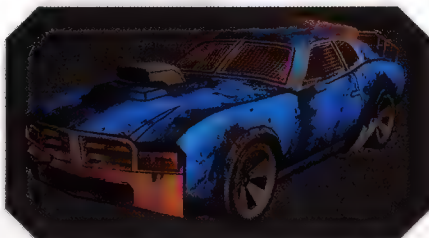
Most of the cars in Pacific City are the same ones from the first game. They have been modified with weapons and armors to survive the new hazards of city life

You'll obtain skill orbs by using the relevant ability. Ruffian adding other ways to get the orbs as well, so you won't spend as much time buffing your driving or explosives
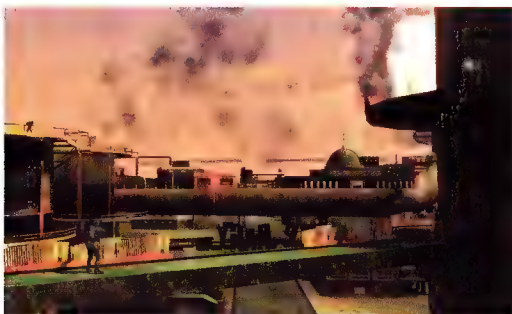
PvP

In addition to trying out four-player co-op, we also played Crackdown 2's competitive multiplayer. Even at this early phase in development, the mode is a ton of fun; up to 16 players can face off in a match, collecting special weapons, bonuses, and gadgets as they blast each other from the rooftops.

"It's too bad that we didn't get to do more with online [in Crackdown 1]," says producer James Cope "I think there are very good parallels made to the number of people playing Halo 3 and Call of Duty 4 and everything now, and that's something we really want to do as well. It's nice that we can have an opportunity to really push that area up."

The big difference between Crackdown and a series like Call of Duty is the mobility; agents aren't likely to stay in one place (or even on the ground) for long. Since your opponents can make incredible leaps, it requires players to take skillful advantage of short windows of opportunity to score kills and rack up points. Ruffian isn't talking about what exactly those points do in a given round, but the game does have a built-in progression for agents, so increased skills along with improved weapons and vehicles are likely candidates
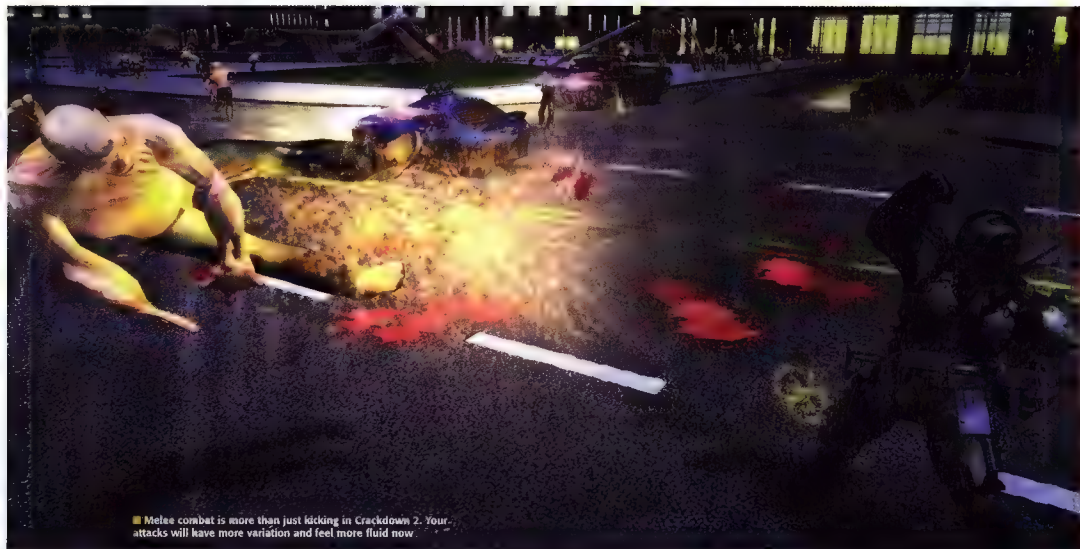
Melee combat is more than just kicking in Crackdown 2. Your attacks will have more variation and feel more fluid now

Ruffian plans to release the Keys to the City mode as DLC, which allows players to spawn items and play with the game's parameters in order to engineer outrageous situations

Standing Out

As disappointing as it is to lose the ability to effortlessly shoot a car's gas tank from mid-air, we are much more excited about what Ruffian is adding to the overall Crackdown experience. Pacific City is more than a collection of buildings, the citizens are more than collateral damage, and your foes are more than a spray of bullets from an adjacent roof. In addition to retaining the fluid and fun gameplay of the original, these details are what will set Crackdown 2 apart.

The distinguishing characteristics are more important than ever considering multiple titles – like Infamous and Prototype – now provide open worlds for players to flex their super-human abilities. Gamers have more choices in an arena that Crackdown once had largely to itself.

"I think it's good that the genre has gone off in a different direction," Thomson says. "You've got your GTAs and your Saints Rows, and across our side you've got things like Prototype, Crackdown, Infamous. I don't think competition is a bad thing. I think it's actually quite good. It means if everybody wants to go that route, they're going to have a hell of a time. Make sure your game is better than theirs."

The team at Ruffian Games doesn't seem too worried about the competition – not that it should be. Crackdown was an inventive and entertaining title that carved its own unique niche out of the open-world genre. With so much of the invested, talented staff responsible for making the original a hit, we don't doubt Ruffian will do what it takes to keep moving the experience forward with Crackdown 2. ■ ■ ■

VEO

One hundred and fifty years into the future, there are no wars. Not because we stopped fighting — there are no longer enough people left to fight wars. With humanity nearly extinct, once-great cities teeming with people now lay empty and overrun by nature. Giant mechanical airships troll across the countryside, snatching up the remaining inhabitants and carting them out west. You lived a lonely life, always on the run, always one step ahead of the machines — until she came along. She inserted herself into your life and disrupted everything. Now she wants you to be her protector. She wants you to travel beside her and safeguard her on a long journey back to her village. You are going to do as she asks. Not because you want to. Not because you like her. But because if you don't, the small headband strapped to your skin will shatter your skull. You must obey. You are enslaved.
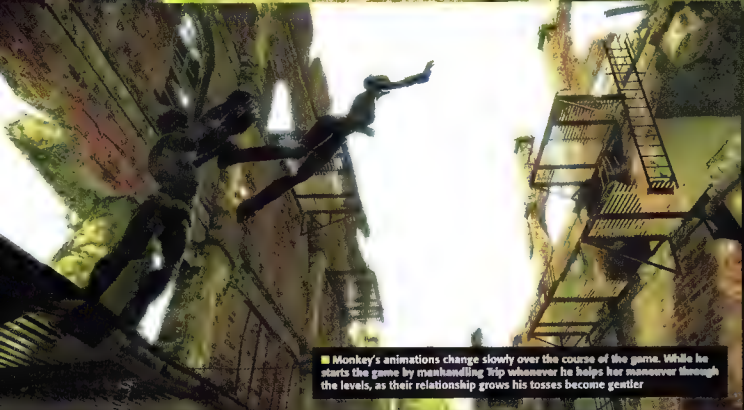
■ Monkey's animations change slowly over the course of the game. While he starts the game by manhandling Trip whenever he helps her maneuver through the levels, as their relationship grows his tosses become gentler

There is a belief among psychologists called the 7%-38%-55% Rule. This principle breaks down how human beings understand information during an emotional exchange. Simply put, the theory postulates that when somebody is speaking only seven percent of their emotions are displayed in the words they say, while roughly 38 percent of their emotional intent can be derived from the tone of a their voice, and a surprising 55 percent comes from physical cues such as body language and facial expressions. What we say isn't what we're saying; it's how we're saying it that states our true meaning.

Storytellers understand the importance of an expression, because 55 percent is a lot of information to lose. If the rule is applied to gaming, it means that video game stories have never maximized their emotional impact. Voice actors do their best to bring pathos to a role, but there is only so much sentiment one can give a card-

board cutout. Until the current console generation, video games just didn't have the technical muscle to allow their characters a full range of human expression. The ability to animate a digital face has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years, introducing emotionally vibrant stories for the first time.

One developer leading the charge to bring more humanity into its digital creations is Ninja Theory. The studio's 2007 release, Heavenly Sword, remains a brilliant showcase for humanlike physicality in the digital realm. The impressive cutscenes and stylish combat wowed many critics, and even today, its characters' facial animations hold up as some of the best in the business. Since the release of Heavenly Sword, Ninja Theory has been hard at work on its next IP, Enslaved. But more important to the studio than just making another highly polished action title is telling the meaningful story that happens between the action.

Andy Serkis is no stranger to working in the digital space. The actor – famous for bringing Gollum to life in the Lord of the Rings films and performing the motion capture for King Kong in the Peter Jackson remake – worked closely with Ninja Theory on Heavenly Sword. Not only did Serkis voice the antagonist, King Bohan, he was instrumental in the casting process and directed all of the game's cutscenes. For Enslaved, Ninja Theory asked Serkis to return to the director's chair, where he helped cast the entire ensemble, fleshed out much of the story, and even gave voice to the title's protagonist, Monkey.

"Looking back at Heavenly Sword, it feels like we were taking the first steps towards bringing emotionally engaging characters through a traditional game design keyhole," Serkis tells us. "This time our sights were set beyond creating dramatically compelling cutscenes and focused on the higher goal of trying to redefine how storytelling might work in games."

The character Monkey – which Serkis has also done all the motion capture for – lives in a far different world than the one we recognize. Almost two centuries into the future, humanity has suffered through the third and fourth World Wars. Economic disasters ruined once powerful nations. Famine and disease ravaged urban landscapes. All this turmoil has resulted in a massive population crash. Where cities filled with millions of people were once common, in Monkey's time only roughly 100,000 people live spread across North

America. The humans who do still exist are too isolated from one another to share a common culture.

Monkey is a man of the wilderness. Like the self-sustaining fur traders from the 19th century, he prefers to stay away from the few pockets of humanity that dot the countryside. "Monkey is a guy who's spent all his life learning to survive on his own, destroying robots with his bare hands. He's not the kind of guy you want to get in a fight with," says Tameem Antoniades, the co-founder, co-director, and design lead at Ninja Theory. Whoever raised Monkey trained him to stay away from clusters of people because they were the ones most likely to get attacked by the roving slave ships – ancient remnants of a long-ceased conflict.

Monkey can't hide forever, though, and the game starts just after he's imprisoned inside one of these giant ships. This is where he meets a young girl named Trip. "Trip's really the opposite of Monkey," Antoniades says. "Where Monkey is brutish and alpha, she's very educated, and she's all about the community. She's good with machinery; her community is great at scavenging equipment and hacking the technology."

Trip helps Monkey escape from the slave ship by hacking into its controls and causing the vessel to crash. In this opening level, players control Monkey as the two perform their escape. "The escape sequence is a tutorial where you learn the basics of combat and movement," Antoniades explains. "But it won't look like a tutorial at all. As you're escaping the slave ship everything is basically short circuiting and breaking apart. You're flying over the sea and then you can see New York City underneath. The whole time you're just trying to get to safety. It's really intense." As the ship crashes through some of the massive skyscrapers, Monkey blacks out.

He wakes up in the middle of Grand Central Station as Trip cowers in the corner. She used the time Monkey was unconscious to reprogram a slave collar, which she placed on his forehead. She has noticed how resourceful Monkey is, but she knows he won't willingly help her return to her village, so she forces him into compliance on threat of death. "You've got this character that effectively has control over you, but who totally depends on you to rescue her," Antoniades says. This tension creates an interesting dynamic that leaves the two in an uneasy alliance. Monkey doesn't like having another person around, and he isn't happy about being used. It's insinuated that as soon as Monkey helps Trip get back to her village and she takes off his headband, he's going to rip her head off.

The composer for Heavenly Sword, Nitin Sawhney, who worked on films like *The Namesake*, returns to work on Enslaved

"The journey in the game isn't just a physical journey about trying to get Trip home. It's also about how the characters change," says chief designer Tameem Antoniades. "Monkey goes from this brutish loner to someone that sees value in other people's lives, and Trip goes from her narrow, community minded views and starts to see more of Monkey's point of view"
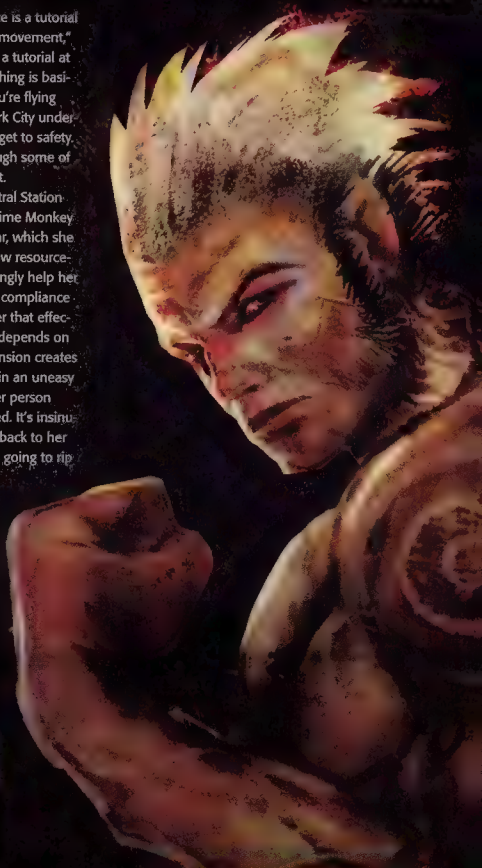
THE REAL MONKEY

Enslaved's narrative recalls the famous Chinese children's novel *Journey to the West* by Chinese poet Wu Cheng'en. Written in the 16th century, *Journey to the West* is considered one of the four great Chinese novels. It tells the tale of a rebellious Monkey god whom Buddha brings under control after having a priest place a magic headband over the god's brow. This headband causes Monkey great pain whenever the priest speaks a few magic words. Enslaved is only loosely based on this Chinese epic, but Chinese history buffs might recognize the homage paid to the famous fable.

camera class

To tell a story on the level Ninja Theory wanted, it
needed to bring in someone who not only under-
stands video games, but knows how to tell a compel-
ling narrative. Serkis was instrumental in fleshing out
many of the games characters, but for the full script,
Ninja Theory needed a professional writer. The team
approached screenwriter Alex Garland (*28 Days Later*,
Sunshine) and asked him if he'd be interested in work-
ing on Enslaved. A huge gamer, Garland agreed, and sat
down to pen every line of dialogue. "Every week Alex
would come to the office and we'd sit down with the
design team and we'd work through the level layouts,"
Antoniades says. "The gameplay and story are inter-
linked. They are one. Stories aren't just in cutscenes,
they go throughout the level."

This blending of story and gameplay is demonstrated
as Monkey and Trip explore New York's skeletal streets.
As Garland helped envision, the two have no concept of
what the past was like, and they often misinterpret the
things they see in the world around them.

As the two leave Grand Central Station, Trip notices all
the windows among the cliffs they're walking beside and
wonders aloud, "what is this place?" After puzzling over it
for a second she realizes that they are in what was once
a city. "There must have been thousands of people here,"
she exclaims.

Monkey responds curtly, in a gruff voice, "No, more."

Trip pauses a second then asks, wide-eyed, "Tens of
thousands?"

"Maybe," Monkey shrugs.

These characters have no clue that they are walking
through streets that once housed millions. Through their
dialogue, which is scattered through all parts of the
game, players get a glimpse into just how far from con-
temporary society humanity has fallen.

"The game is driven by the relationship between these
two characters," Antoniades says. "Heavenly Sword was

obviously very story driven, but we wanted to take that
to the next level where as a player you've got this deep,
connected relationship with this NPC character that has
her own mind, her own thoughts, her own personality."

Though Monkey and Trip may not get along, if they
want to survive they must work together. Trip can
help Monkey solve environmental puzzles by squeez-
ing through passages too narrow for him, or hacking
computers. Monkey can toss Trip across gaps and help
her reach otherwise inaccessible areas. Although Ninja
Theory has no plans to include a co-op feature, Monkey
can issue rudimentary commands to Trip. For example,
he can tell her to distract a turret gun so that he can
quickly run up behind the nuisance and dismantle it.

While a portion of the game involves climbing over
obstacles and exploring multiple paths through environ-
ments, few of those routes are free from danger. The
world is still littered with weapons from ancient conflicts.
The studio compares these weapons to landmines –
they've been waiting years for someone to walk by and
trip them awake. However, unlike landmines, these
weapons are human-sized robots programmed to kill.
"There are different generations of robots," Antoniades
explains. "There are the older robots, which are more like
the ones you would expect in a movie with pistons and
things like that, then there are the more evolved second
and third generation robots. They have synthetic muscles
and coolant in their bloodstreams. They're much more

agile, much more dangerous, more like hunters." To get past these kinds of threats, Monkey must rely on Trip.

Trip has a special camera she keeps in her hair like a barrette that's really a mechanical dragonfly. This camera can fly around the environment and feed information directly into Monkey's headband. It's useful for helping the two navigate their surroundings, and it also detects weaknesses in enemies. Even robots from similar production lines will have different imperfections after decades of wear and tear. If Monkey knows all of these defects he can use them to his advantage in combat.

Monkey's primary weapon is a large staff. Similar to Heavenly Sword, players have one low attack button and a stronger charge attack with which to build up combos. A series of evades and grapple takedowns help Monkey maneuver through the battlefield. In addition, Monkey's staff can fire off a few long-range projectiles, which will stun enemies or slow them down, giving Monkey time to close the gap.

Still, Ninja Theory hopes Enslaved's action will feel more strategic than Heavenly Sword's. This is where the enemy defects come into play. One enemy might have a weakness in its machine gun mountings. After depleting its health to a certain point, Monkey can rip off the gun and use it against the other robots he's fighting.

Another robot might have a power supply problem, which Monkey could overload during the scuffle, turning the machine into a time bomb. Monkey can then kick the machine into a larger group of enemies causing splash damage. The order in which players dismantle their foes changes how each encounter plays out. "There are several different levels of combat," Antoniades says. "There is the basic action – the button-based level of combat – and then there is tactical decision making. 'Who should I go for first?' You always have to think about 'how can I beat these guys in a more clever way?' Ninja Theory is planning dozens of these kinds of enemy takedowns, so players should have plenty of opportunities to experiment and see how using different weaknesses in conjunction affect their combat strategy.

As Monkey and Trip plot a path out of a dilapidated New York, the sights they see will become less recognizable for players. There is a place just outside of the city called the Titan Graveyard. "This is where the last big battle between mechs was fought," Antoniades says. "Everything from first generation mechs to giant mechs almost the size of aircraft carriers. It feels like an elephant graveyard. There is still residual power in some of these machines, and you might see some of them twitching or moving around." The atmosphere takes on a horrific feel as Monkey and Trip travel through this haunted place. They notice something following them, scuttling under the debris. They are about to face foes and see things they've never dealt with before.

Looking at the work Ninja Theory has put into crafting this world, it's clear that the team cares about offering a compelling narrative. It has been lucky enough to recruit talent like Andy Serkis, Alex Garland, and Hollywood composer Nitin Sawhney to share that vision and help tell an emotionally charged tale.

"We're not trying to say that we're making a Hollywood blockbuster, because we're not. We're making a video game," Antoniades says. "We're taking the production of all aspects of video games very seriously; bringing in the best people we can find and working closely with them to make sure that every area of the game is as high production as we can possibly make it." ■ ■ ■

■ Monkey and Trip can find audio files and other journals scattered throughout the environment that help flesh out the world's history

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Assassin's Creed II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17

THE NEW STORY

If you're like us, you've been counting down the days until Assassin's Creed II releases to find out if wandering through Renaissance Italy will be as exciting as promised. This month, we posed some questions to Corey May, the scriptwriter from both the original game and the soon-to-be-released sequel. He filled us in on some exciting new details.

"Assassin's Creed is Desmond Miles' story," May explains. "As such, the events in the present start right where the first game left off — although this time you'll be visiting a very different historical time period. You will indeed find more sequences in the present that are faster-paced and more action-packed than in the first game. We'll also be providing a lot of answers to questions raised in AC 1, though we'll be posing plenty of new ones along the way. The duality between the two characters — past and present — remains ever critical to our story." Reading between the lines, we can only conclude that we'll finally get to see what lies beyond the Animus room, and also see Desmond do more than pickpocket an old scientist.

One of those lingering questions May alludes to is the connection between the first game's protagonist, Altaïr, and Ezio, our new hero. Gamers will have to wait until the game's release to reveal the answer to that mystery. "I don't want to give too much away at this point since we touch on the topic a bit in our game and it's an area we'll hopefully explore further in the future," May explains. "Obviously at some point, one of Ezio's ancestors made his (or her) way over to Italy. I'll say this much: it wasn't Altaïr."

May also filled us in on the team's general approach to storytelling, which has shifted toward less rigidity in the narrative structure. "It all became very predictable after a while. Things evolve more organically now — as you move from one mission to the next. What's going to happen, as well as where, how, and why — all of it's a lot less predictable this time around." This creates a faster pace, shorter cinematic sequences, and dramatic scenes where the player has a much greater control of the action.

"I think you'll also find the characters (Ezio included) have a bit more life this time around as well," May continues. "Assassin's Creed was all about epic landscapes and dramatic speeches — now it's all a little more intimate — the banter between characters, humor, quirks — little things like that."

Ubisoft Montreal has put a tremendous focus on delivering variety throughout the game experience — one of the major critiques they faced from the first installment. To hear May describe it, there are now any number of different tasks and special events to tackle at any given time. Many gamers got a chance to see Leonardo da Vinci's flying machine level at E3 this year, but that's only one of many exotic gameplay moments the team has planned. We saw a brand new sequence involving a desperate carriage chase across the Italian countryside, and May also told us about swimming and gondola missions that should further flesh out your time diving through ancestral memories.

May shared more information about the newly added economic system as well.

"Income will come in many different ways," he says. "You can gain money by completing some missions or finding treasures scattered in the city. The crowd is also a good resource: you can now pickpocket anyone in the crowd. The assassin will also have the ability to strip and loot soldiers of their wealth once they have been battered and weakened."

So, what can Ezio do with all this acquired affluence? New throwing daggers, smoke bombs, and other resources are all available for purchase. In addition, an armor upgrade system will let Ezio improve different elements of his wardrobe, from shoulder pieces to torso protection or better boots, all of which can be re-colored with the help of one of the local tailors. In addition, local thieves, courtesans, and mercenaries can be hired out to confound or defeat Ezio's enemies

When asked what he thinks will surprise players the most in Assassin's Creed II, May concluded that the sheer size of the game is astounding. "There's so much to see and do — even if you never step off the main narrative path. And if you do… " ■ ■ ■

Players will have a far greater variety of missions to tackle and gameplay to experience

Ezio will participate in the historical conflict between the Pazzi and Medici family, interweaving real-life assassination plots with the fiction of the game

The presence of two hidden blades is sure to come in handy

Most weapons can be taken from enemies and used against them

Grand Theft Auto IV:
The Ballad of Gay Tony

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR
> DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR NORTH > RELEASE OCTOBER 27

DEFYING EXPECTATION

From the hot coffee sex scandal to alleged virtual hate crimes against Haitians, Grand Theft Auto is no stranger to controversy. With the next entry in the series bearing the name The Ballad of Gay Tony, some might expect the Stonewall Riots to head east toward Rockstar's Noho office. While Rockstar's satirical views of society are strongly conveyed, nothing we've seen in our hands-on demo with The Ballad of Gay Tony should drum up controversy. If anything, Rockstar deserves kudos for presenting a gay character in a non-stereotypical way.

Our hands-on demo with the game consisted of three missions that focus on the new playable protagonist, Luis Fernando Lopez, a Dominican-American born and raised in Liberty City's Algonquin borough who serves as Gay Tony's bodyguard and business partner. Unlike GTA IV protagonists Niko Bellic and Johnny Klebitz, Luis is on the other side of the velvet rope – he runs with the upper class. This hierarchy shift affects every aspect of the game. Luis undoubtedly finds himself taking out the trash in the same way Niko and Johnny do, but the demands of the people around him are of a much higher billing.

When he's not keeping Tony's creditors at bay, Luis works with Yusef Amir, a real estate mogul who isn't afraid to flash his money and is up front about his desire for more. He literally wants to own all of Liberty City. This crazy idea includes snatching one of Liberty City's trains. In this mission, Luis finds himself riding on the roof of Liberty's red line, shooting grenades and new explosive shotgun rounds at helicopters. If Luis times his ability to cling to the train's roof precisely, players are treated to a cinematic slow motion sequence of Luis ducking a chopper. This mission concludes in style, with Luis detaching a train car, and a transport helicopter swooping in to steal a precious piece of Liberty City.

Each mission ends with a new ranking system that intricately details your performance, such as damage taken, shots fired, and time taken to complete the mission. Like Chinatown Wars, players can freely replay missions with the hope of getting 100 percent. Certain performances are rewarded with bonuses that appear in Luis' safe house.

Along with an assortment of new cars that reflect Luis' standing in the world (think Bentley), Rockstar North has implemented new TV shows, songs, DJ chatter, websites, and a slew of new weapons ranging from sticky C4 to an enhanced sniper rifle. More exciting yet, this game also marks the return of San Andreas' parachute.

We used this handy item as much as any of Luis' firearms.

One mission concludes with Luis knocking a target out of a skyscraper window, then fleeing the scene by base-jumping from this window and landing on the flatbed of the getaway truck. Over a dozen base-jumping challenges are littered across Liberty for players to put their skills to the test. Additionally, if you perform well in these challenges, a parachute appears in your safe house, meaning you can use it at any time.

Airplanes are still not a part of this GTA experience, but tank-class vehicles of destruction make a comeback. This APC doesn't have tank treads, but it packs just as much of a wallop as previous series incarnations and should be an integral part of Luis' campaign, as well as multiplayer carnage. All of the new vehicles and weapons are available for competitive matches.

We've only seen a small fraction of what The Ballad of Gay Tony offers, but it's clear that Rockstar is going to great lengths to make this experience dramatically different than anything you've seen in the series before. Come back next month for the verdict on this expansion, or head to gameinformer.com on the game's October 27 release date for a full review ■ ■ ■

■ In this mission, you'll likely destroy 20 police choppers

■ Since Luis rolls with Liberty City's elite, he can freely enter any club in the city

One of Luis' missions introduces a new attack chopper

The tank returns! Let your wife know!
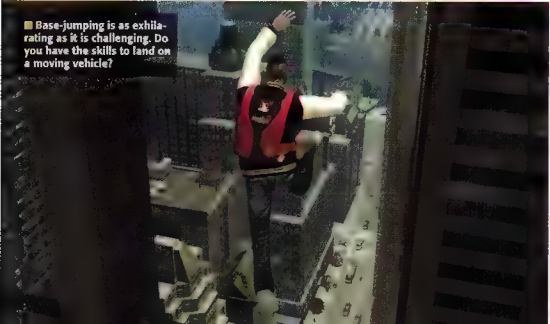

Take that, J-Lo's yacht!

Yusef Amir wants to own Liberty City

Over a dozen base-jumping challenges are included in the heart of the city

Base-jumping is as exhilarating as it is challenging. Do you have the skills to land on a moving vehicle?

Whoever smelt it dealt it, but whoever flees from it is genius

ModNation Racers

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

IT'S A MOD, MOD NATION

ModNation Racers might feature cute, chubby little characters and user-generated content, but don't you dare mention the "L" word around the game's designer. "A lot of people have asked us, 'Why don't you have Sackboy?'," says William Ho, of United Front Games. "We're like, 'Well, we don't have just one mascot, we have a lot of them.'"

Go ahead and make LittleBigPlanet comparisons — Ho's heard it before. "We didn't really know what was going on with LittleBigPlanet when we started with this game," he says, adding that his team and Media Molecule have been in communication since LittleBigPlanet shipped. While the two games are wildly dissimilar, they both share the Play, Create, Share ethos (or "Race, Mod, Share," in ModNation's case). But while LittleBigPlanet lets users create their own platforming games, ModNation Racers is all about creating your own character and customized kart to tear around high-octane tracks.

You start out with a blank Mod character, which can be tweaked with a shocking amount of decals, costume elements, and decorative parts. Want to make a completely unauthorized C3PO clone? By adjusting a few sliders, the Mod takes on shiny, metallic yellow properties. After adding a few appropriate facial stickers and other elements, we had a version of the droid that would make George Lucas' lawyers salivate. Our attempt at making a reptilian Santa (don't ask) was a bit rougher, but still recognizable. Even with concessions like having a fez stand in for Mr. Klaus' trademark hat, our Ssssanta was ready to roll.

Karts are equally pliable, giving you the choice to ride in a traditional-looking dune buggy to something a bit more esoteric, such as a locomotive with wheels made out of cheese. The tweaks you make to both car and driver are purely cosmetic. ModNation Racers might have a solid physics engine under the hood, but slapping a dilithium crystal-powered motor on your kart will just make it look cool — no warp speed for you.

Ho says his team was wary of people finding the optimal setup, effectively nullifying the incentive to make cool-looking stuff. In a game that allows you to deck your driver out in a raw-meat helmet and mismatched eyes, experimentation and creativity are critical.

Once you hit the track, you're treated to a familiar — but finely tuned — arcade-style kart racer. Ho says that incorporating physics into the game makes the handling feel more satisfying, and he's right. When your kart drifts through a hairpin turn, there's a sense that you're working with (and against) momentum. Bashing into rival karts feels solid, too, like each of the vehicles has a substantial amount of weight to them. The physics also allow for some interesting weapons. ModNation Racers has the usual missile and mine attacks, but it also delivers some unconventional tools such as one that manipulates gravity on the fly. Even missiles behave properly; we fire one off in midair and watch it bounce and skitter as it grazes the track's surface.

In spite of the crazy character and kart customization, the real star of ModNation Racers is the track editor. This intuitive tool lets you go from a blank slate to a drivable course in less than a minute. Previous demos have focused on grassy hills and modern buildings, but United Front also shows us a completely different desert theme. Ho's team consciously didn't get too specific with these presets, so one track designer can create a mesa-inspired course fit for Wile E. Coyote,

while another could slap together a place that would make a Persian prince proud.

After placing a starting line, you zoom through your soon-to-be track in real time, adjusting elevation and turns on the fly. Once you close the loop, the game does a quick pass, putting ground under the road where it needs to be. Then you can paint in details like trees or buildings, bank your turns, and place weapon drops. If you're feeling lazy, you can have the game auto-populate your creation, and the course fleshes out in surprisingly short order. You can take a test drive at any point, too, letting you instantly check things out. When you're done, you can share and race your creations with the ModNation Racers community.

ModNation Racers is drawing attention for its urban vinyl-inspired look, but it's much more than just a pretty face. The creation tools look deep enough to remain fresh, and the track editor in particular hits a fantastic balance of being accessible while still providing enough options for hardcore builders. Unless United Front inexplicably takes things in a strange direction, ModNation Racers looks like it could breathe some much needed life into the stagnant kart genre. ■ ■ ■
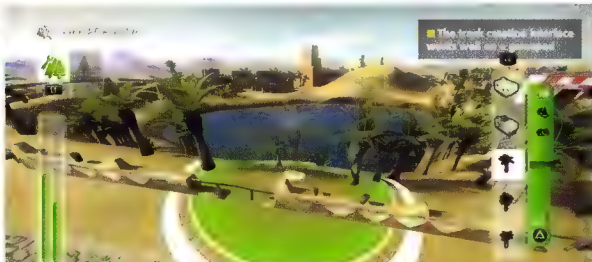
You can theme your driver to match your kart, but you don't have to

The limits to how much stuff you can put in a created track seem generous

PLAYSTATION 3 I XBOX 360 I PC

Mafia II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** 2K CZECH > **RELEASE** 2010

BUILDING AN EMPIRE

C ritics showered accolades upon Mafia
for its intricately detailed missions, but
the sparse open world failed to captivate
gamers in the same way as other sand-
box games like Grand Theft Auto and Saints Row.
For the sequel, 2K Games and its Eastern Europe-
based developer 2K Czech (formerly Illusion
Softworks) are focused on crafting a more engag-
ing world. The 1940s era metropolis Empire Bay
eschews the barren city streets of its predecessor
in favor of a more active populace, dynamic
police patrols, and several side missions that
branch from the overarching narrative of Vito's
rise from petty criminal to made man. Like AMC's
hit drama *Mad Men*, Mafia II transports you back
to another era, with authentic cars, clothing, and
music that change with the years as the story
progresses into the 1950s. ■ ■ ■

Running From the Fuzz

Any two-bit thug can pull a heist or
commit a crime in broad daylight. The
tricky part is evading the inevitable police
pursuit. In Mafia II, 2K Czech tapped a
unique resource when designing the
police intelligence — common sense.

Unlike other open world games that
require you to evade police Pac-Man
style or take down the squad cars on
your tail, Mafia II employs a philosophy
that adheres much closer to reality. If the
cops don't see you commit the crime
and there are no witnesses, the men in blue are
less likely to begin a citywide manhunt. If they do
begin pursuit after a bigger crime, it's much easier
to lose them by skillfully evading the cars and
diving into a darkened alley before they have the
chance to turn the corner on you.

"Mafia II is set in the 1940s and '50s, so we want
the police to be period-authentic," says 2K Games
producer Alex Cox. "Police back then didn't have the
same tools as modern cops. So, if you dive unseen
down a back alley you'll quickly lose the heat…
unless the cops noted your license plate, of course."

Just because you've evaded the cherries in your
rearview mirror doesn't mean everything is back to
normal. Police will dispatch a warning to all nearby
cars detailing your make, model, and car color. The
only way to lose the heat on that car is to ditch it for
another or get one of your associates to change the
plates or repaint your vehicle. Cops also take note
of Vito's outfit if he commits a crime on the streets,
which necessitates a change of clothes so you don't
match the description being sent across the wire.

Put Up Your Dukes

While Vito gets in his share of shootouts, he's also not above throwing the occasional punch.

"The melee combat is very much inspired by street fighting," says 2K Games producer Alex Cox. "The guys we are dealing with are street thugs, not kung-fu masters."

Rather than develop a complicated combat system with intricate combinations, 2K chose to focus on the visceral experience. The control layout sticks to the basic two attack buttons and a dodge button, but 2K created a pool of over 200 individual animations to choose from during battles to keep the combat interesting. Players can string together combinations with the two buttons, or enlist the help of the environment. Characters throw each other into tables, lean on objects while falling, and grab dynamic objects to use as weapons for ultra-violent finishing moves.

"It's pretty awesome to drag an enemy out of his car then beat him unconscious against the front grill," says Cox. "Actions like this have a great mobster feel to them."
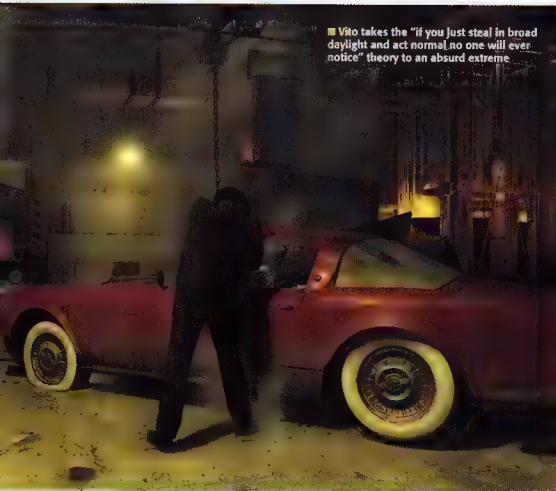
■ Vito takes the "if you just steal in broad daylight and act normal no one will ever notice" theory to an absurd extreme

Expanding the Narrative

Vito's journey from small-time thug to Mafioso features twists and turns on par with classic mobster flicks, but developer 2K Czech knows a strong narrative isn't enough to carry an open world game. In between missions, Vito will come across optional side quests. Secondary missions branch from the main storyline to reveal more information about key characters and lead you to less-frequented corners of the city.

"The best way of thinking about how the subquests work is like an extended cut of a movie – bonus enjoyment for people that want to delve deeper, but it won't spoil the main game if you choose not to do them," says 2K Games producer Alex Cox.

To give an example, 2K shares a scene that starts with a lady of ill repute putting her clothes on in Vito's apartment after an assumed romp in the sack. Vito and the girl both leave the apartment, but as he drives off he witnesses her car get rear-ended. The situation quickly escalates, and the angry driver starts getting rough with her. It's up to you to step in and save the lady of the night or neglect the situation altogether.

Vito can also do favors for mobsters, which reward him with extra money to spend on new cars, clothes, and weapons.

■ Social events in the 1940s were so much more relaxed than they are these days

Don't worry. Bahamut is probably easy in this game

...le of the Lilties ...ved in major technological advances

Grab and throw enemies using the Wii's motion controls

Wii

Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles The Crystal Bearers

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** 2010

REINVENTING A SPIN-OFF

Any Final Fantasy fan will tell you that the best games in the franchise are the ones with names that contain only the words "Final Fantasy" followed by a roman numeral. Some of the spin-offs are worth checking out, but none meet the high bar of quality set by the main series. That could change with The Crystal Bearers

Forsaking the multiplayer emphasis of previous Crystal Chronicles games, as well as most of the trappings of the role-playing genre, The Crystal Bearers attempts to fuse the focused storytelling of a traditional Final Fantasy with the intensity of an action game. Set 1,000 years after the first Crystal Chronicles, The Crystal Bearers presents players with a world that has changed and matured. The entire Yuke race has been wiped out by the Lilties, who have ushered in an age of science and technology. The arcane powers once so prevalent have been outlawed, and magic can only be used by a select few. The game's protagonist, Layle, is one of these rare individuals; a crystal in his cheek gives him the ability to use telekinesis.
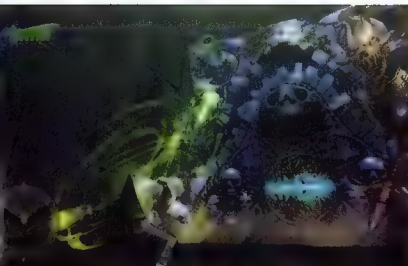
Layle's telekinetic power is at the heart of the gameplay.

Instead of casting spells and whacking monsters with a sword, players battle with the Wii remote by using objects in the environment. You can also grab enemies directly to attack them, or use them against other nearby foes. Layle also taps this ability in non-combat situations to solve puzzles and stir up mischief.

Other crystal bearers possess different powers. Early on, Layle has a run-in with the primary villain, a Yuke named Amidatellion. Presumably the last of his slaughtered race, Amidatellion's crystal gives him the ability to bend space; as Layle attacks him, the objects simply phase out and reappear behind the Yuke. Of course, Amidatellion wins this first battle, but as players progress through the single-player narrative, Layle will find new allies and powers to help his chances for the next encounter.

Since its initial launch on GameCube, Crystal Chronicles has been a difficult series to take seriously. With more sophisticated themes, a more mature art style, and a story full of mysteries, Crystal Bearers might turn that perception around. ■ ■ ■

Layla can use teleki-
nesis to hurl objects and
shake down townspeople
for money

Chocobowned?

Old Lllty Woman

The world is still colorful, but the
character designs are less deformed
than previous Crystal Chronicles games

Combat can take
many forms, like this
shooting sequence

Wii

A Boy and His Blob

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** WAY FORWARD > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 13

A BLOB FOR ALL SEASONS

Looking back at A Boy and his Blob on NES, many gamers fondly remember turning the blob into strange objects, like a rocket or a jack, in order to overcome obstacles. Overshadowed by those cool moments, the manifold frustrations of the game faded from memory as the years passed. Thankfully, developer Way Forward's upcoming re-imagining of this classic concept is more about recreating what people loved about the original rather than duplicating the specific mechanics. You won't find limited quantities of jelly beans and random leaps of faith through endless caverns; the new A Boy and his Blob focuses heavily on solving puzzles in clever ways. We played through the game's starting area in order to give you a full report on your blob's first seven forms and how they come in handy. ■ ■ ■
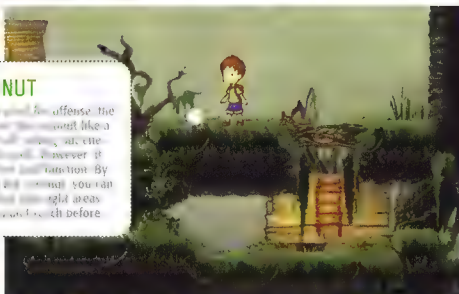
BALLOON

HOLE

PARACHUTE

TRAMPOLINE

ANVIL

COCONUT

LADDER

PLAYSTATION 3 I XBOX 360 I Wii I PLAYSTATION 2

DJ Hero

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC (2-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION/RED OCTANE
> **DEVELOPER** FREESTYLE GAMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 27

THE EARLY HOURS

D
J Hero is a big game. Activision expects to ship 93 mixes crafted from 100 different songs, split between dozens of artists and DJs. Knowing how much there is to explore, we took Activision's new turntable controller for a spin and wasted no time in investigating the first several hours of playtime with this unique new variation on the music game formula.

The turntable itself looks and feels great. A cool covered nook near the top hides the d-pad and other game controls. The platter spins freely and feels good as you scratch. The crossfader is the part of the controller that likely sees the most abuse as you flip back and forth between tracks. It feels solid, and has a helpful little click near the center that helps to not swing too far one way or another. Even so, the hardest initial task to master is keeping that crossfader centered during the majority of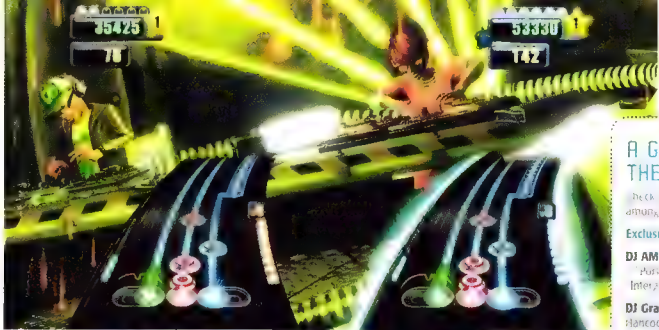 the time that it is not on one track or another. The controller also works well and sits comfortably on a raised table or your lap.

Your choice of difficulty determines a lot about your experience with the game. For instance, the medium difficulty level has little crossfading, mostly focusing on basic beat matching using the buttons on the platter. Jump up to hard, and crossfading shows up constantly, with spinning also becoming commonplace. On expert, most spins have a designated direction attached. If our office music game fans are any indication, most dedicated Guitar Hero players can hop in on medium or even hard pretty quickly. Given the challenging new play mechanic, Freestyle has wisely implemented a no fail approach to play, so feel free to tackle a higher challenge level if you enjoy the intensity. Just be aware that only strong performances unlock new venues and mixes in your career.

Simply put, the music is a blast. DJ Hero is filled with some fantastic work from DJs all around the world, so the game offers a chance to hear hours of new music from some of the best in hip hop and electronica. The audio tracks showcase a lot of variety, but the various mixes also do an admirable job of helping you learn the major differences between DJ scratching styles.

We spun the record for a long while by ourselves, but the two-player mode is equally fun. Both players tackle the same track, but each can choose his or her own difficulty. Alternately, the limited guitar/turntable mode sets aside certain songs that you can play with the two separate instruments.

While Guitar Hero 5 and The Beatles: Rock Band spend this fall battling it out in familiar territory, DJ Hero has the potential to be the far more innovative and complex music title. The $120 entry point may end up being a questionable decision for Activision, but what we've seen of the game so far is top notch. ■ ■ ■

A GLIMPSE AT THE MIX

Deck in

among the

Exclusive DJ Mixes

DJ AM – Belt Bu Tr
Poison vs Beast Boy
Interg Mache

DJ Grandmaster Flash – Herbie
Hancock - "Rockit" vs N.E.R.D.
"Lapdance"

DJ Jazzy Jeff –
Snoop vs Eric B & Rakim
B F Provideo"

DJ Shadow – David Bowie
"Let's Dance vs Eagle Nari
Productions – Jack Of Spades"

DJ Yoda – The Jacks in a
Want You Back vs Gang Starr
"Jazz to Get a Rep

DJ Z-Trip – Foreigner - Jukebox
Hero" vs DJ Z Trip It Mars - "DJ
Hero"

Scratch Perverts – Common -
"Universal Mind Control - LMC
vs Masta Ace - "Jeep A" Camar
(Re mix)"

Other Mixes

50 Cent - "Disco Inferno" vs
David Bowie - "Let's Dance"

Bell Biv Devoe - "Poison" vs
Cameo - "Word Up!"

Wale - Lookin' At Me" vs Black
Eyed Peas ft Tippa Irie - "Hey
Mama"

Dizzee Rascal - "Fix Up Look
Sharp" vs DJ Shadow - "Organ
Donor (extended Overhaul)

Herbie Hancock's "Rockit" Beat
Juggle

Young MC - Bust A Move
vs Public Enemy

Vanilla Ice - Ice Ice Baby vs MC
Hammer - U Can't Touch This"

M.A Cape P Am
Lock A A

Marvin Gaye - "I Hear It through
the Grapevine" vs Baur Bowie -
"Let's Dance"

The Rulers Act dj Fole Me
vs Eric Prydz - Pjano

Guitar vs. DJ Mixes

Billy Squier - Big Bear vs
N.E.R.D. - "Lapdance"

Raza ro Edg Ea vs Killer
Sure thin Me

Foo Fighters - Monkey Wrench
vs Beast'e Boys - "Sabotage"

Mot X vs
Noisia Cro r Shop"

■ Your cats will be so jealous

■ Little guy hasn't learned fear yet. That'll change
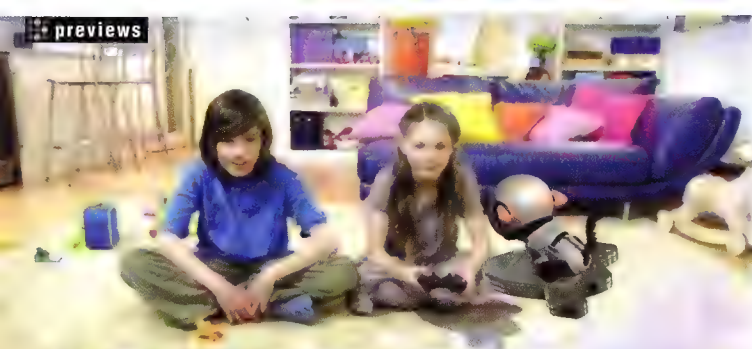
PLAYSTATION 3

EyePet

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER SIMULATION
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17

A TASTE OF MOTION CONTROL

The appeal of EyePet was apparent in the first announcement trailer. Using a PlayStation Eye camera pointed at a table, you can watch yourself onscreen playing with a virtual furry pet that skitters around on the surface. In our hands-on time with the game it looks promising, if a little rough around the edges. Interacting with the pet produces a similar enjoyable feeling of playing with a real cat or dog once you get the camera tuned just right. This should dazzle your non-gaming friends just from a technology standpoint. But how does it work as a game?

It begins like LittleBigPlanet, with instructions coming from a British guy in a white lab coat. He gives you an egg and instructs you to grab the "magic card" that comes packed in with the game. By holding this card like a screen in front of the egg, you get an x-ray view of the pet inside. Then you set the card down on the table beside the egg so it becomes a warmer that you pump to get the egg to crack. Next you must roll the egg back and forth with your hands until eventually a little furry pet pops out. You then name it and start playing with your furry new friend, who chases your hand around. Over the next half hour we fed it with a baby bottle, bounced it around on a tiny trampoline, gave it a bath, styled its fur and outfits, and used it as a bowling ball to knock over some pins. Holding the EyePet card makes it seem like you're actually grasping and manipulating in-game objects like the trampoline or hair dryer. It feels like an early step in the motion control demo Sony showed at its E3 press conference.

These various activities count as challenges in which you can earn gold, silver, or bronze awards. These translate into credits that can be spent on various unlockables like outfits and activities. Built around a daily training regimen, you can complete a max of four challenges a day and then come back the next day for more. All activities are spread over 15 days, and you can scan your pet for tips on what activities it needs to do to develop in certain areas.
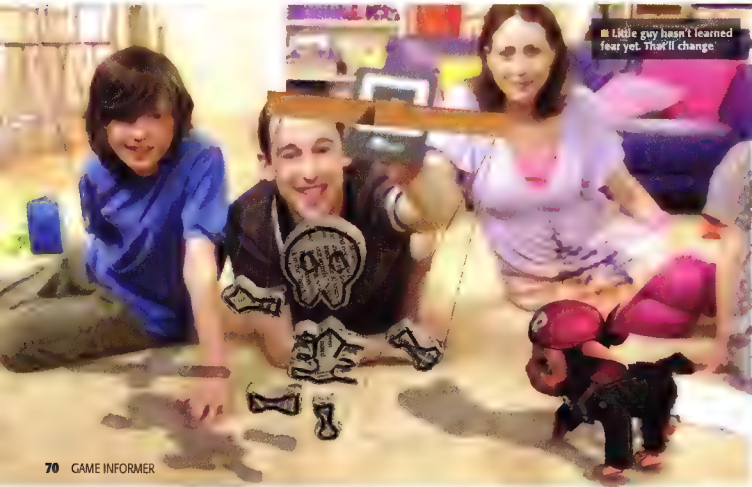
Online features include a downloadable content store where users can buy toys, clothing, styling effects, and more. The social networking tool allows players to post, browse, and rate people's profiles and videos from inside the game. EyePet comes bundled with the PlayStation Eye Camera for $59.99 or game-only for $39.99. ■ ■ ■

Final Fantasy XIII

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE 2010

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR HEROES

With Final Fantasy XIII only months away from its Japanese release, the gaming world will soon be full of facts regarding the long-anticipated title. While gamers wait patiently for the deluge of details, these profiles can help you familiarize yourself with the key characters and where they stand when the story begins. This is just a small slice of the undoubtedly larger cast, but it's something to hold you over until the game's North American release next spring. ■ ■ ■

Name: Hope Estheim

Weapon: Boomerangs

Background: The government was deporting Hope and his mother when Lightning and Sazh stopped their train. Unfortunately, his mother was killed in the fight that followed. Hope blames Snow for getting her involved, and wants revenge.

Random Fact: We predict that Hope joins the ranks of Quina and Cait Sith in the infamous League of Never-Used Characters.

Name: Sazh

Weapon: Dual Pistols

Background: Sazh is a friend of Lightning's from her military days, accompanying her on the game's opening train-rescue mission. Sazh's reactions to events around him are often exaggerated, making him the party's most likely source of comic relief.

Random Fact: A baby chocobo lives in his hair.

Name: Lightning

Weapon: Bladed Gun

Background: Lightning is a former soldier who now fights against the government she used to defend. She is a powerful warrior, using her speed and acrobatic prowess to her advantage. She seems aloof when dealing with others, and makes calculated decisions.

Random Fact: When she summons the eidolon Odin, she is able to ride his giant horse while attacking.

Name: Vanille

Weapon: Lashed Rod

Background: Vanille is a friendly and energetic young woman, and is on the same train as Hope and his mother when they are rescued. She helps take care of Hope after the death of his mother, and the two of them develop a close bond.

Random Fact: Her weapon appears to be a cross between a bow and a whip, sending several lashes flying toward enemies.

Name: Snow

Weapon: Fists

Background: Snow heads an anti-government resistance called Team Nora. He is a charismatic leader, and strongly believes in the cause for which he fights. Several other members of Team Nora have been friends with Snow since they were kids.

Random Fact: The developers referred to Snow as "Mr. 33cm" before his name was revealed (it's a reference to his shoe size).
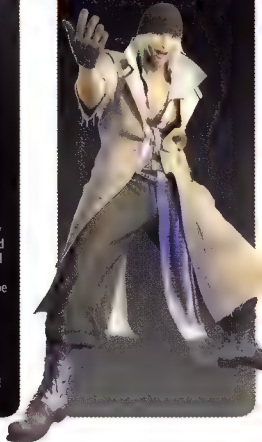
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resonance of Fate

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE > **RELEASE** SPRING

CHANGE OF SCENERY

I n the gaming landscape, swords-and-sorcery fantasy settings are just as plentiful as dour space marines and evil empires. Instead of putting players in another familiar situation, Tri-Ace is going in a different direction with its next project, Resonance of Fate. This RPG from the developer behind Valkyrie Profile and Star Ocean tells the tale of a technologically advanced city and its denizens, with a distinctive artistic vision that combines steampunk technology with a stylized anachronistic fashion and architecture.

The game takes place in a towering city built around an ancient machine that regulates the life and death of all residents. After living in the city for generations, no one remembers the machine's true function – they believe it simply protects them from the harsh world beyond the city walls. When sectors of the machine start failing, players take control of a small group of mercenaries to restore functionality and unravel the mystery.
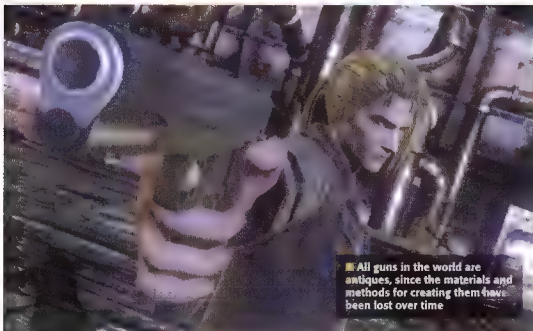
"The traditional sword-and-magic world setting has been used too much, and I don't feel inspired by it any more," admits director Takayuki Suguro. "I wanted to do something different. Also, I had a new battle system that proved pretty hard to realize with swords and magic."

Combat attempts to blur the line between turn-based and real-time battles. Time elapses whenever a character attacks or moves on the field, but stops when no action is taken,

giving players the chance to strategize while retaining an element of danger. Fans of Valkyrie Profile 2 are already familiar with this concept, but it is definitely receiving an overhaul for Resonance of Fate. "This is a completely new system," Suguro says. "At the same time, we made some efforts to make this appear familiar to older fans."

One major difference is the focus on gun combat. Almost all of your attacks are performed at range, with the option to charge shots for increased damage – though the type of damage you do depends on the gun you have equipped. Automatic weapons have lots of ammo, but only do temporary damage. However, if you follow up with a direct damage weapon (like a pistol), the temporary damage becomes permanent. This system encourages players to coordinate their characters' attacks, and even allows you to perform special combination moves later in the game

Resonance of Fate's compelling setting and unique combat could provide an enjoyable change of pace from traditional fantasy fare. Tri-Ace has had a little trouble getting its footing this generation (with titles like Star Ocean: The Last Hope and Infinite Undiscovery), so we hope these departures from convention – along with new publishing partner Sega – are enough to get things back on track. ■ ■ ■

You won't see any vegetation due to the highly industrialized setting

All guns in the world are antiques, since the materials and methods for creating them have been lost over time

A guild functions as the game's central hub. Hunting out new missions and keeping tabs on completed missions

XBOX 360

Magnacarta 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER SOFTMAX > RELEASE OCTOBER

NOT A SEQUEL TO THE 13TH CENTURY LEGAL DOCUMENT

Magnacarta 2 opens without breaking any expectations, but evolves into a deeper and more complex role-playing experience with each passing hour. In the beginning, few things help the game stand out from the dozens of RPGs that arrive on shores from over the Pacific every year. The early hours are dominated by familiar fetch quests and a simplistic battle system reminiscent of traditional MMOs. It's only after that tedious introduction that players will encounter the real meat of the game experience -- the complex and enjoyable group battle mechanics.

When navigating a single character through the world, monsters are visible on the field, and you engage them with a simple mix of standard and special attacks, while being careful not to exhaust the character and overheat. Once multiple characters join the party, Softmax makes a fun dynamic out of the constant switching between party leaders. Complete the process correctly, and you chain your attacks together between characters for damage boosts and other advantages. Since each character has a unique suite of powers and abilities, the juggling act of character switching engages you immediately.

The gameplay variability is further enhanced through a number of customizable features for the characters. Every character has two types of weapons, such as a hammer and axe, which they can use in battle. Each weapon style has its own set of upgradeable skills. In addition, every weapon can receive special enhancements to further craft your fighter's abilities. The game world is also filled with free-floating magic called Kan. The level of Kan for a particular element, like fire or water, is different in every area, so choosing the right character and abilities for each situation pays dividends in challenging fights. Taken together, the game gives you a lot of optimization details, without overwhelming you with a feature set that must be mastered to allow progression.

Magnacarta 2's story involves a sprawling fantasy world in the midst of a devastating civil war. Familiar tropes, like the amnesiac main character and the dutiful but sweet princess, could be done without. Clichéd characters and familiar plotlines abound, and the script is sometimes embarrassing, but at least the world is well realized. That world is all the more interesting thanks to a fully voiced script throughout. In addition, Korean artist Hyung-Tae Kim has contributed art to the game, lending an attractive (and frequently buxom) manga style to the proceedings.

Our playtime with an early build showed a lot of promise, though the early hours weren't as exciting as we might have hoped. We're eager to learn whether the later sections are as involving as the many customizable systems suggest they are. ■ ■ ■

■ Many of the bosses are huge, and require interesting strategies to overcome

■ No, we're not stupid for spelling Magnacarta as one word – that was Namco Bandai's call
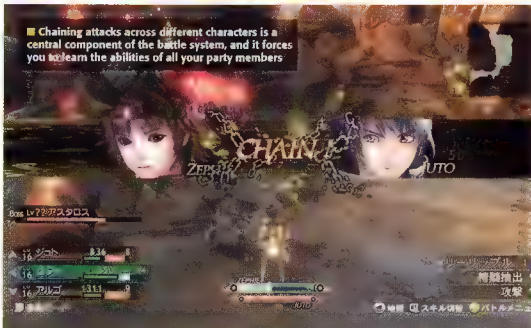
■ Chaining attacks across different characters is a central component of the battle system, and it forces you to learn the abilities of all your party members
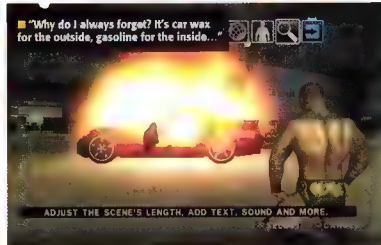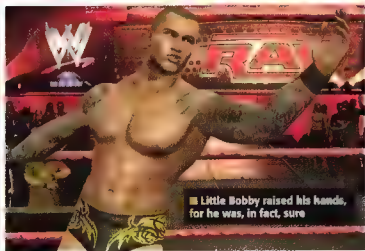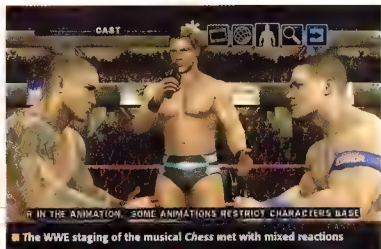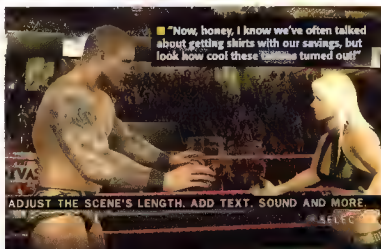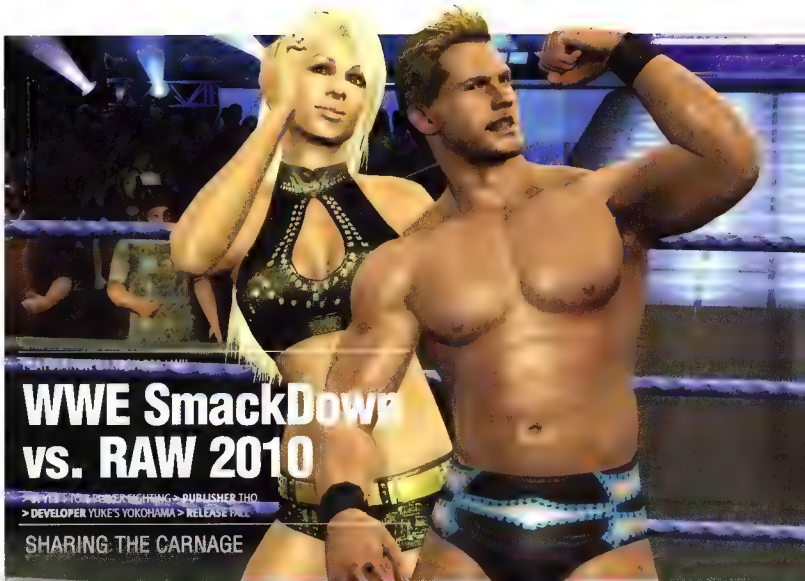
After making us swear to the video game gods that we wouldn't spill the beans on the details of this game before the big WWE SummerSlam announcement, THQ agreed to show off its latest entry in the popular SmackDown vs. RAW franchise. Right after the game loads up, a training facility appears onscreen where players practice moves on a customizable AI opponent. A checklist pops up every time you perform a specific move so you know for sure if you've performed a move correctly.

After playing around for a bit, we move on to the improved Create a Superstar mode. Players can now create custom tattoos and body paint without being tied to templates. Combined with online sharing, this opens the door for the artistically challenged to benefit from the character creation skills of others. On-disc accessories also help you create the weirdest dude you can think of using props like a chicken head, samurai helmet, and black executioner mask. After you design your in-ring attire, you can choose a ring entrance outfit and a seperate look for cinematics. You can even choose a custom static pose for the versus screen. Real wrestling stars can finally be tweaked as well, albeit only in clothing color, but we'll take what we can get.

Next it's time to create a custom finisher, and this time around diving moves are available. You can choose a taunt before you jump from the turnbuckle and then select a variety of acrobatic aerial flips and twists before slamming down with a knee, elbow, full body splash, or a brutal stomp. You can even adjust the arc of the jump and the speed of the aerial manuevers to see if you can squeeze a few more in. Once you've got everything ready to go, you can bring this character into the Road to Wrestlemania and start the climb to fame. With simple contextual button presses, you can make decisions throughout your career to determine who your friends and enemies are. Say a guy is getting a serious beatdown out in the parking lot – you can choose whether to join in or to fight off the attackers, and the implications will carry along for the rest of your career.

To truly have control over what happens in your career, the new story designer allows players to recreate their favorite storylines from wrestling's past or make something completely new. You'll make a schedule ranging from a week to an entire TV season and determine which wrestlers will be involved, where the camera is, what emotion runs across a character's face – you can even write out all of the dialogue with a USB keyboard. Match condition options are all at your fingertips as well. Our favorite example in the demo was the option to run over someone with a car

Almost any created content in the game, including these custom stories, can be uploaded online for others to download, rate, and comment on. Now instead of having to duplicate the attributes of a well done character you saw online, you can just download him. We can't wait to see if a fan can craft a story that's possibly more absurd than a real wrestling plot. ■ ■ ■

WWE SmackDown vs. RAW 2010

> STYLE 1 TO 6 PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER THQ
> DEVELOPER YUKE'S YOKOHAMA > RELEASE FALL

SHARING THE CARNAGE

■ "Now, honey, I know we've often talked about getting shirts with our savings, but look how cool these tattoos turned out!"

ADJUST THE SCENE'S LENGTH. ADD TEXT, SOUND AND MORE.

■ The WWE staging of the musical Chess met with mixed reactions

■ Little Bobby raised his hands, for he was, in fact, sure

■ Girls' night out went horribly wrong after it was suggested in passing that blondes might not, in every case, have more fun

■ "Why do I always forget? It's car wax for the outside, gasoline for the inside..."

ADJUST THE SCENE'S LENGTH, ADD TEXT, SOUND AND MORE.

■ Bloodlines features the same verticality the franchise is known for

■ A greater variety of missions supports gaming on the go

■ Also new to the game? Flying witches, apparently

■ Altaïr has some new moves up his sleeve – in addition to his trusty hidden blade, of course

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PSP

Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** GRIPTONITE STUDIO/UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 17

THE RETURN OF AN OLD FRIEND

The success of Assassin's Creed not only ensured future sequels, it introduced players to one of today's most interesting new video game characters, the Middle Eastern assassin Altaïr. When news struck that Altaïr's descendent Ezio is taking over in Assassin's Creed 2, fans were understandably disappointed, begging for more game time with the memorable character

Ubisoft producer Frederic Lefrançois agrees. "Actually, Altaïr is probably the most popular character ever created by Ubisoft," he tells us. "It would have been sad to end his adventures after the first game." The result of this shared sentiment is a brand new Altaïr-fueled adventure for the PSP, Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines. The transition from console to handheld is an adventure in its own right, fraught with danger; one design misstep could spell disaster (i.e. the DS flop Assassin's Creed: Altaïr's Chronicles). But Lefrançois believes that despite the challenges of working on the PSP, the team has succeeded in crafting an experience authentic to the fledgling franchise, assuring us that Bloodlines offers players the same freedom and "climb anywhere" gameplay Assassin's Creed featured. While he couldn't directly compare the size of Bloodlines'

cities to its predecessor, Bloodlines features two full open-world cities – Limasol and Kyrenia – each sporting a minimum of four districts. Both cities are on the island of Cyprus just west of Syria, one of the settings of Assassin's Creed. Cyprus was also once controlled by the Republic of Venice – where part of Assassin's Creed 2 takes place. It's one example of how Bloodlines ties the two games together, but the story isn't the only facet receiving additions.

According to Lefrançois, all of Altaïr's signature moves are once again available to gamers (as well as some new ones), and the game sports new challenges and mission types – something the original Assassin's Creed could've used.
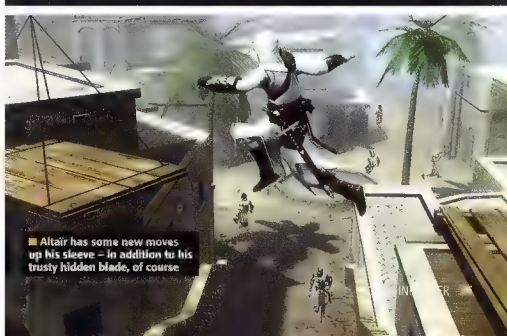
As you can see, the first screenshots look promising, and Bloodlines is poised to give people exactly what they want: the continuation of Altaïr's story. This includes more face time with Maria, the female Templar Altaïr spared in the first game (we're guessing that's going to be awkward), as well as additional information that will flesh out his past. Lefrançois also promises, "You'll learn more about Altaïr's legacy through the writing of his codex." We're not sure what Altaïr's codex is, but we can't wait to find out. ■ ■ ■

■ Hopefully Codemasters isn't pulling our legs with these screenshots – the smoke in the build we saw running didn't look nearly this good

■ It's incredibly rare to engage enemies at less than 30 or 40 yards

PLAYSTATION 3 I XBOX 360 I PC

Operation Flashpoint:
Dragon Rising

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (32-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
> **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 6

NO QUARTER

The original Operation Flashpoint retains a cult following despite an archaic presentation and a slew of technical issues that have been slowly worked through since its 2001 release. That title's appeal is rooted in its hardcore military simulation; it's not quite one-shot-one-kill, but it's close. Codemasters' long-delayed sequel is finally nearing release, and one could apply all of those points to it just as well – archaic graphics and all.

Dragon Rising takes place on a set of fictional oil-rich islands that the U.S. and China are warring over. The scale is impressive; over 200 square kilometers of terrain await players. Codemasters intends the game to be the first sandbox-style title in the military simulation genre, and the setting certainly supports that. From what we saw, however, the practical applications of this huge area are limited. You get yelled at for going off-mission in the single-player campaign, and we can't imagine how 32 players will find each other if the entire landmass is open for play.

Given the title's unbending realism, engagement ranges are much longer than gamers are used to. The gameplay we saw revolves around trying to find enemies before they find you, and sniping them from hundreds of yards away. The end result is that you'll spend a lot of time trying to determine if a tiny brown block is an enemy's helmet or just another brick in the wall. Once combat breaks out, tactics like bounding, flanking, and suppressing fire come into play. In single-player, you can access commands for your AI companions through the d-pad, though none of the shortcuts or contextual single-button orders that console gamers are used to from Rainbow Six or Ghost Recon are available.

As uncompromising as the game can be, its toolbox is broad. A slew of vehicles and weapons, the ability to call in off-map support, and varied mission objectives all contribute to Codemasters' goal of creating the definitive military sim. Full four-player co-op through the campaign is a great feature. Both multiplayer modes strongly emphasize teamwork, putting players into squads and encouraging them to cover each others' butts.

It's hard to find a kind word for the game's presentation. Except for the long draw distance and thick foliage, the Xbox 360 build we saw in action could be a last-gen game. Smoke looks flat and unrealistic. Models are low-poly and stiffly animated. Everything simply looks dated. The early concept art and target renders released for this title are misleading, to say the least.

The franchise's original developer already released a PC-only spiritual successor to its niche faithful, Arma II. Codemasters hopes to draw more players in with this multiplatform release, and it'll be interesting to see if the console crowd embraces Operation Flashpoint's strict ruleset. ■ ■ ■

We know what you're thinking: where does this guy buy shirts?

Wii

Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM
> DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE NOVEMBER

AIM FOR THE HEAD

Horror fans, prepare to take your Dramamine. Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles, the sequel to 2007's Umbrella Chronicles, introduces a Hollywood-inspired shaky cam to the series' traditional on-rails action. While the unstable footing makes nailing the perfect headshot more of a challenge, our time with the game convinced us that it also ramps up the intensity when half a dozen zombies rush at you. We sat down to talk with Resident Evil producer, Masachika Kawata about the genesis of the new camera system.

"The use of the camera is such an important element in horror," Kawata says. "But, of course, in all the Resident Evil games up until now we had to concentrate on always showing the character in the main shot. Putting the game on rails allows us more freedom to really concentrate on bringing out those horror elements."

While developing the first Umbrella Chronicles the team didn't have a lot of time to play with camera effects, so players ended up gliding through halls as evenly as if the floors had been coated in butter. "We didn't think that was very good," Kawata admits. "So when we set out to develop Darkside Chronicles, we decided to intro-duce this much more shaking camera that really helps you get involved and get into that horror atmosphere."

Like the original Chronicles, players revisit locations from previous entries in the RE franchise, such as the streets of Raccoon City from Resident Evil 2 and the hidden Umbrella laboratory from Code Veronica. "We wanted to go back and look at those parts that the fans really loved," Katwata adds. "But I think that by itself would not be terribly interesting, to be honest with you. So we intend to have original scenarios and some original characters in the game as well." Even when players are using established characters like Leon Kennedy and Claire Redfield, the story focuses on the darker impulses of those famous heroes.

Those who get scared of being alone shouldn't worry; Darkside Chronicle's two-player co-op experience has been given a few upgrades as well. During our travels through the streets of Raccoon City, a scripted event caused our partner to become overwhelmed by zombies. We had to quickly shoot off the infected corpses before our friend was turned into one himself. "We've definitely increased the feeling of horror in the game," Kawata says. "It's much more terrifying than it was before."

Umbrella Chronicles was a great way to kill time with a buddy, and with Darkside's branching paths, multiple difficulty levels, and selection of new customizable weap-ons, we're ready to sign up for another trip through the series' haunted halls. ■ ■ ■
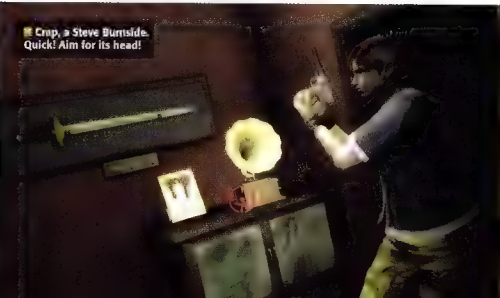
Crap, a Steve Burnside. Quick! Aim for its head!
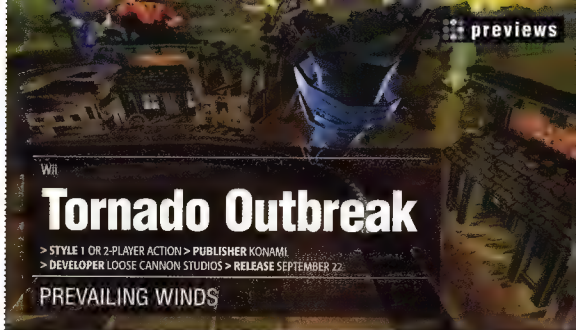
Wii

Tornado Outbreak

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER LOOSE CANNON STUDIOS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 22

PREVAILING WINDS

Can you imagine how much destruction a tornado would cause if it gained speed as it tore through a city? Such chaos wouldn't be called a force of nature; it would be super-natural. This is the premise of the Katamari Damacy-inspired title from a group of ex-Sucker Punch employees called Loose Cannon Studios.

Originally titled Zephyr: Rise of the Elementals, Tornado Outbreak is the story of a group of cosmic beings that spend most of their time roaming the stars. One day, a cosmic wind warrior named Zephyr runs across a being called Omegaton. This transient alien from another universe is dying because his six life-sustaining orbs have been stolen and scattered across Earth's continents. Zephyr agrees to retrieve these missing gems, but there is a catch: Our hearty yellow sun is actually deadly to Zephyr, so in order to survive his world-spanning scavenger hunt, the little alien has to stay inside a tornado-like shield.

Zephyr begins each of the game's 11 missions as a tiny dust devil, picking up pieces of trash and shrubs to build up steam. As objects are added to his swirling mass, he'll eventually build himself into a full-on F5 weather anomaly capable of tearing apart farmhouses and throwing cows across the state. Enemies called elementals are scattered across the levels, and are capable of inflicting damage on the Zephyr. By sucking up these creatures and chaining together destruction, Zephyr gains speed boosts that will help him complete special time and point-based challenges. However, if he fails to collect enough elementals, he'll feel the wind start to go out of his sails. ■ ■ ■

Nobody told us we'd have to fight dragons! Wait, what's this game called?

Dragon Age: Origins

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 3 (PC, XBOX 360), LATE NOVEMBER (PS3)

OFF TO A GOOD START

"Uh, she was like that when I got here?"
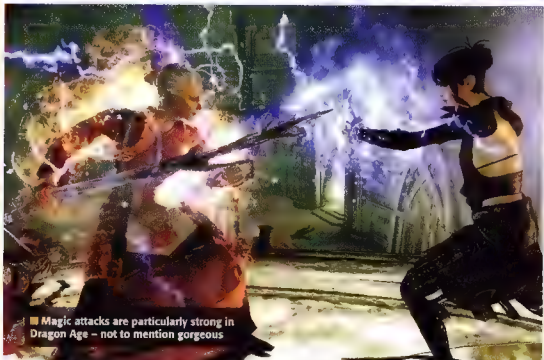

This fallen enemy will have the last laugh, when his blood causes the warrior's armor to completely rust out

Battles leave characters drenched in blood, which lingers over into cutscenes

"Dude, that dragon totally just kicked you!"

Magic attacks are particularly strong in Dragon Age – not to mention gorgeous

ioWare has been good to RPG fans over the years, with games like Mass Effect and Jade Empire. But for players that prefer elves and orcs to aliens and kung fu, it's been a long wait for a more traditional, D&D-style adventure. With Dragon Age's release just a few months away, the wait is almost over. After some more hands-on time with the PC version, it seems all of BioWare's hard work is ready to pay off.

The most impressive aspect of Dragon Age thus far is BioWare's continually refined story-telling abilities. Usually, the more narrative freedom a game offers players, the more diluted that story becomes, with generic cutscenes and a series of isolated plot points. Dragon Age seems like a prime candidate for such a problem, with its six different introductions to the game via the Origin stories and the continued effects that your race and class choices have on your interactions with NPCs – not to mention the innumerable decisions you make throughout the game. But in our time with Dragon Age, something strange happened; BioWare somehow kept the plot potent, the characters unique, and cutscenes cinematic – all to a level usually reserved for highly linear games. We've yet to see everything Dragon Age has to offer, but ultimately the game's biggest success might be the balance between telling you a story and letting you meaningfully

affect that story with the choices you make.

Which is not to say that the gameplay disappoints; although combat seems deceptively simple at first, the complexity multiplies as you unlock new talents (moves) and acquire items. Battle Tactics add another layer to the strategy, allowing you to select basic behavior patterns for party members or script your own individual actions. This helps take advantage of spell combos, and allows for you to tweak your approach for specific skirmishes.

Trust us, it all comes in handy; some of the enemies you face are as cunning as they are dastardly, employing traps, ambushes, and powerful spells. The game successfully endows a real sense of survival. The first few missions we played outside of the main camp not only left our party (and gaming ego) mortally wounded, but imparted a sense of urgency to get back to safety so they could rest and recover – and to give us a break from the tense and tactically heavy battles. While the combat can feel overwhelming at times, health and stamina quickly regenerate after battles, and a forgiving autosave staves off any feeling of frustration. So far Dragon Age has just been damn fun. Check out our timeline on the right, and prepare yourself; the adventure starts November 3rd. ■ ■ ■

Dragon Age: An Introduction

Your time in the first hours of Dragon Age depends entirely on the character you choose. Here's what happened in our first few hours of play.

Hour 1:
We make our character, a warrior with the human nobleman origin. It isn't an easy choice; each race has a unique place in Dragon Age that affects your experience long after your Origin story plays out. Some tweaks to the standard set of facial features left us with decently distinguished character, rather than the abominations customization sliders usually result in. After wading through the plethora of skills and talents available, we take our first steps in the world of Dragon Age around our father's castle.

Hour 2:
We acquire our first party member, a Mabari hound who was terrorizing our long-time nanny in the pantry. We name the dog Barf, and fight our first fight against – what else – a pack of giant rats. When mom asks how it went, we can't help but select, "Nan's head exploded and my hound ate the kitchen staff." Fans of the jerk dialogue option won't be disappointed with Dragon Age.

Hour 3:
All hell breaks loose as enemies storm the castle. The cinematics and voice acting are top notch, but the voiceless main character is distracting. Combat requires thoughtful consideration; we set Barf's behavior to "Aggressive," and teach him to attack enemies knocked down with our "Shield Bash" move. The combination works well. Our Origin story is complete – time for revenge!

Hour 4:
Duncan – a Grey Warden we met earlier – introduces us to his apprentice, Alistair, and King Cailan. All of the characters seem complex; it's hard to tell who's good or bad, and how much is affected by our character. We're given a mission in preparation for our induction into the Grey Wardens, which requires a journey into the Korcari Wilds.
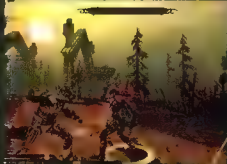
Hour 5:
We face our first formidable foe. A Hurlock Emissary leads us into a group of bear traps outside his camp, and we are slaughtered in the ensuing ambush. A change in approach – using our bows to pin down and pick off foes from a distance – ultimately leads to victory. Fallen warriors are revived after battles, but suffer persistent injuries that penalize stats. By the end of the mission one member is deafened, one has a cracked skull, and another has head trauma.

Hour 6:
We meet Morrigan – holy cleavage! After becoming a member of the Grey Wardens, we battle more Dark Spawn. We have to change Barf's "Aggressive" behavior; he was charging into battle like Leeroy Jenkins, and got the party killed more than once. We defeat my first Genlock Emissary, an enemy skilled in magic. Alistair finishes him with a special death blow, slicing his head clean off.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii
## Where the Wild Things Are

Given the sacrosanctity of Maurice Sendak's 1963 children's book *Where the Wild Things Are*, it's probably best that the game doesn't tread across the same narrative ground. As an extension of this fall's live action film, the game puts players in control of Max after he has been crowned King of All Wild Things. Max must tame the wild monsters and save them from the mysterious, seemingly hostile island they call home. Most of the game plays like an action platformer as Max explores and solves environmental puzzles. The brief segment we played had us throwing pollen at bees and making one of the Wild Things sneeze so we could use his molted feathers to glide across large chasms. The game looks a bit generic, but *Where the Wild Things Are* is a story about discovering the unexpected, so we're hoping to be surprised when the game releases just before the film on October 14.
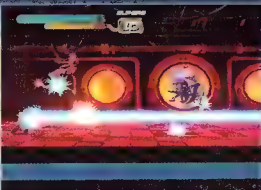
UNLIMITED ENABLED
Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS
Astro Boy

Finger lasers, arm cannons, red rocket boots, a special drill attack, and a set of machine guns that pop out of his ass – with such an impressive built-in arsenal, how could Astro Boy not star in video games? High Voltage Software (The Conduit) is working on the Japanese icon's newest video game adaptation based on this fall's CG film. The game features drop-in/drop-out co-op, allowing two players to join forces and stop the nefarious President Stone's robot army from taking over Metro City. Inspired by Sega's 2004 GBA release, this version of Astro Boy features a mix of 2D shooter levels and side-scrolling beat 'em ups sections, and is set to release in conjunction with the movie this October. Check out our interview with film director David Bowers in this month's Unlimited section.
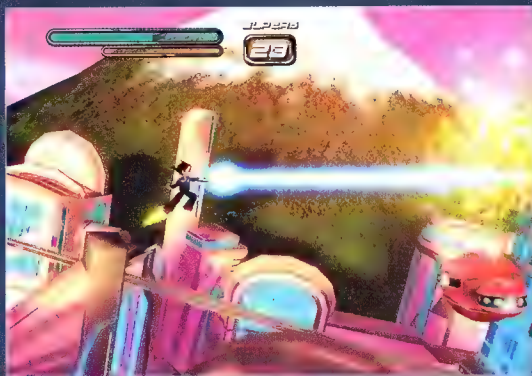
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
Iron Man 2

Last year's Iron Man game was a disaster, but Sega is hoping to make his next console outing a little more graceful. Not only has it handed the franchise off to a new internal developer, but the company has brought comic writer Matt Fraction on board to pen a script not tied to the film. Even though Tony Stark has stopped designing weapons, he discovers that many of his old designs have gotten out into the wild. Now he has to travel the globe and make sure that his prototypes don't end up in the wrong hands. On the gameplay front, players will now have a larger pool of hand-to-hand combat to pick from, and will be able to switch between various combat styles on the fly. Iron Man will no longer have to manually adjust his suit's power settings, which will make flying through the air a simpler task and give Sega a chance to showcase larger, building-sized enemies. A further focus on destructible environments should also help Iron Man make more of a bang than a plop this time around. (Check out our full interview with the *Uncanny X-Men* and *The Invincible Iron Man* scribe, Matt Fraction, in this month's Unlimited.)

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | NINTENDO DS
Band Hero

In what seems like the 76th Guitar Hero release this year, Activision and Neversoft are bringing it family style this November with the first E10+ rated game in the music series. A weird-looking representation of Taylor Swift appears in the game, along with songs from Lily Allen, The Jackson 5, and The All-American Rejects that players can enjoy on guitar, drums, and vocals. The DS edition remains incompatible with the new DSi, but adds silly drum attachments and a vocal mode that will make you look like a whack job on the subway.

Wii
Super Monkey Ball Step & Roll

AiAi, MeeMee, GonGon, and Baby are coming back in early 2010. Sega's monkey-in-a-ball franchise has experimented with new control schemes since its early days almost a decade ago, which had players tweaking a banana shaped joystick. Over the years, the tilting has met the DS's touch screen, the Wii remote, and most recently the iPhone's tilt sensor. It was only a matter of time before Sega got around to using the Wii Balance Board as the primary form of control. Expect new puzzles and party games, though the latter could be tough since Wiis can only sync one board at a time.

NHL 10

With unrivaled stickhandling and skating mechanics, EA Canada's next-gen NHL series has always had style. In NHL 10, the developers add grit to make this the most complete hockey game ever made. With board play, first-person fighting, and grinding third lines that focus on checking superstars into submission, NHL 10 captures the true essence of the sport. Add the EASHL online hockey league and a dramatically improved franchise mode, and you have the firmly entrenched favorite for sports game of the year.

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

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 — Horrifying. Worse then a movie written by Michael Bay and directed by Kevin Smith.

> **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

REVIEWS INDEX

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Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

Mario & Luigi are a prolific duo, and in recent years have proved to be just as comfortable in the action/RPG genre as they are in their native platforming. The latest in their long-running series, Bowser's Inside Story takes the usual formula and swallows it whole – right into Bowser's gut. From there, the game proceeds on two levels – Bowser on top, and our heroes inside his body – to new heights of ingenuity and comedy.

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inc edge

Where 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.

C Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	**M** Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
E Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	**A** Content suitable only for adults.
E10+ Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.	**RP** Product is awaiting final rating.
T 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, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i ("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

bloom – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces

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

cel shading – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels

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

framerate – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement

frontend – 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

Metroidvania – A stupid portmanteau that Andy McNamara hates

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 PlayStation 2

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross

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

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A term for 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 Ikaruga and Gradius

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

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

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

Need for Speed: Shift

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

REALISM ONLY TAKES YOU SO FAR

As gamers, a certain portion of our brain responds positively when we hear a game is going to be more realistic – particularly in racing games, where this can signal gains in the physics models, replication of the real-life tracks, and the car specs. But going down this road has as many liabilities as it does benefits. Up until now, aiming for more realism in your driving game has led to games that are challenging because of their simulation of what happens when velocity, tire grip, and physics collide. Nothing is wrong with sim-based racers, but Need for Speed: Shift ends up plying the same trade as the Forzas and Gran Turismos before it, and not necessarily to dramatically better results.

Shift's Driver Profile is one area where the game plots its own course. You are given points during races for either driving aggressively or skillfully. The former includes blocking opponents from passing or sliding through corners, while the latter is for hitting the correct racing line or mastering a corner. You earn points in either category, and it's not like you're forced in one direction or another. As such, your Driver Profile serves as little more than a glorified progress indicator that comes with its own medals. I'm all for the bells and whistles – as inconsequen-
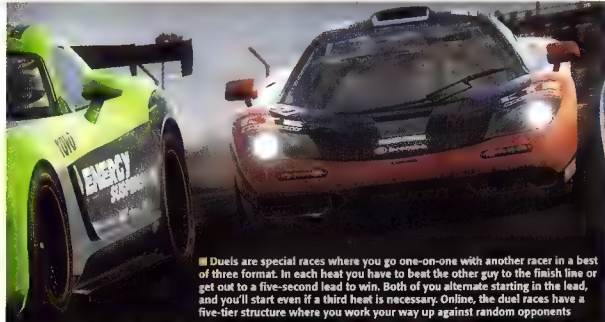
Duels are special races where you go one-on-one with another racer in a best of three format. In each heat you have to beat the other guy to the finish line or get out to a five-second lead to win. Both of you alternate starting in the lead, and you'll start even if a third heat is necessary. Online, the duel races have a five-tier structure where you work your way up against random opponents

tial as they might be – but I don't think that the Driver Profile adds much, even in the intangibles category. Furthermore, I wish the game didn't splash Driver Profile graphics all over my screen when I'm trying to race, especially since the HUD itself is

poorly done. I consistently had trouble reading the map, and an even harder time finding out which place I was in.

Shift's career structure and driving thankfully serve as better anchors than the Driver Profile. New race types and locations open up freely thanks to the game's star system (which opens new racing tiers as you collect more stars), and the five career tiers give you plenty of options from which to choose. Shift's driver duels (particularly online) are the only highlight among the race types, but we can all be thankful that the racing itself is strong enough to carry the game. The cars' power, strengths, and weaknesses are apparent, and Shift offers plenty of challenge. The game's very forgiving damage system belies the driving realism, but who am I kidding? I like to cross the finish line above all else.

This game goes from zero-to-60 fast enough, but that only brings it upon the question of "now what?" that much more quickly. I don't want to say that being a sim-racer is a dead end, but it's hard to know where the Shift branch of Need for Speed can go from here.——**KATO**

> **Concept:** The Need for Speed series goes more sim, and ends up going down the same one-way street

> **Graphics:** When you crash the screen goes hazy and grey for a few seconds to simulate your disorientation

> **Sound:** Nothing you haven't heard from every racing game going up and down the street

> **Playability:** I really didn't like the HUD, from the race map to the Driver Profile updates that splash up on the screen

> **Entertainment:** This game gets you revved up pretty easy, but you won't redline

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

The Need for Speed franchise has had its wheels stuck in the mud as of late. With Shift, EA abandons the arcade racing of the series in favor of a solid racing sim in the vein of Forza that offers a lot of content, from fast cars to great track variety. The core driving experience is a drastic change from previous titles, moving the series away from easy arcade play to a gritty challenge. While the presentation is clean and modern, the simplistic career structure basically mimics Gran Turismo. However, the Driver Profile progression uses a clever, real-time experience system that shows everything the player does as it's happening. While these changes to the franchise may not be extraordinary, they result in a great racing experience —**NICK**

for the many.

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Wolfenstein

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE/RAVEN > **RELEASE** AUGUST 18 > **ESRB** M

FADING GLORY

No one can knock Wolfenstein's pedigree. The first supernatural shooter, Wolfenstein 3D from id Software, is the unquestioned foundation for the modern first-person shooter. In the years that have passed, however, myriad World War II games have dulled our taste for Nazi slaughters, and haunting thrillers like F.E.A.R. have raised the bar for atmospheric shooters. The latest title from the storied series features many nods to its predecessors, but ultimately clings to convention to a fault.

After successfully dismantling the SS Paranormal Division's Übersoldaten program in Return to Castle Wolfenstein, special agent B.J. Blazkowicz accepts another mission deep in Nazi territory when intelligence reveals that the SS is harnessing a dark energy called Black Sun to create an army of mutated men with supernatural powers. Upon arriving in the fictional German city of Isenstadt, Blazkowicz joins an underground resistance group called the Kreisau Circle and begins disrupting the latest far-fetched occult-based Nazi scheme to turn the tide of the war.

Isenstadt serves as Blazkowicz's base of operations, where he can consult with resistance fighters to receive new missions, purchase weapon upgrades on the black market, and search abandoned buildings for intelligence or gold. While the hub serves these practical purposes, the limited Nazi skirmishes in these regions come off as nothing more than minor hindrances between missions, and the barren city streets feel like a wasted opportunity to create an oppressive mood and lend the world some much needed atmosphere. Maybe if there was more activity within the city I could buy the fact that the Nazis can't find the rebels even though the resistance emblems on the safehouse doors are larger than the signs for local businesses.

B.J. frequently leaves the city limits to infiltrate the Nazi ranks at nearby mines, farms, and castles. On the battlefield, Wolfenstein vets will find comfort in the array of WWII and supernatural weapons, including bolt-action rifles, machine guns, tesla cannons, and weapons that harness the Black Sun energy. The occult medallion in B.J.'s possession also enables him to access The Veil, an alternate dimension that exists between Earth and the Black Sun. Here he can survey the battlefield with a pseudo night vision, deflect bullets with a shield, and pierce through light cover and energy shields with ammunition.

Despite B.J.'s array of engaging weaponry, the gunfights fall flat thanks to the limiting corridor-based environments and meat grinder AI. The Nazi soldiers feature the decision-making of chess pawns, either poking from cover in predictable fashion or running right into your crosshairs to take the place of a fallen comrade. Even the the stronger Nazi enemies fall prey to poor AI; one supernatural soldier wielding Black Sun powers ran into a nearby fire and killed himself.

In contrast to the single-player campaign, Wolfenstein's multiplayer demonstrates a degree of evolution with persistent ranks, unlockable weapon upgrades, and well-tuned maps. Unfortunately, the 12-player cap keeps firefights firmly entrenched in mediocrity, since many of the objective-based battles end quickly due to the limited number of soldiers stationed in strategic positions.

Speaking of strategy, Wolfenstein is in dire need of a new one. Grinding through waves of predictable enemies in corridors is no way to pay homage to the franchise's unquestioned legacy in the genre.——**BERTZ**
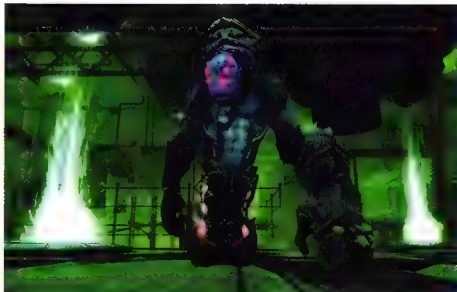
"HE STORMED OUR POSITION AND SLAUGHTERED MY ENTIRE PLATOON. HE LET ME LIVE TO TELL THE STORY."

ALPHA
PROTOCOL
THE ESPIONAGE RPG

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dirt 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (8-PLAYER LOCAL OR ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T

DIRT 2 COVERS THE WORLD OF RACING

Dirt 2 is supposed to be an offroad specialty racing title. Maybe that conjures images in your mind of ATVs or sand buggies, but don't be fooled – this is a racing game for everybody, not some niche title. Dirt 2 retains its focus on rally, rally-cross, baja, and cross-country racing, but much-needed changes in the career structure and online portions give the game enough juice to jump up to the big leagues.

This sequel puts a much greater emphasis on the car buying experience, which is a marked improvement from the first title. I felt a stronger connection to and enjoyment in the rides I bought. Even though their performance isn't upgradeable and doesn't offer the kind of hands-on customization of a Forza, the game throws a steady stream of liveries and dashboard trinkets for you to personalize your cars. I wasn't as much into this as the fact that as you progress you buy conversion kits that enable the cars in your garage to follow you up the game's career tiers. This creates a lasting pride in the cars that you've used and abused over their miles of dedicated service.

The career hub features a race day atmosphere and your own camper, which fills up with trinkets from your travels around the globe

Dirt 2's online portion has expanded to include full-on multiplayer races (as well as traditional staggered start rally races). Whatever mode you're in, the game tracks your stats and presents them to you while you're moving around your career camper/hub. The game even takes your 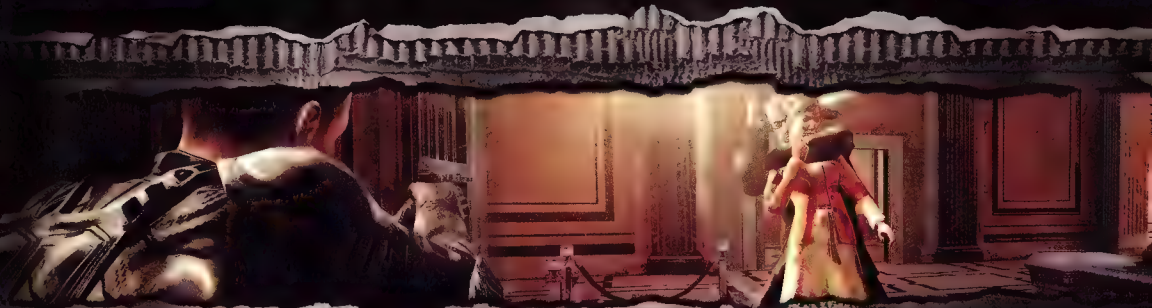offline activities – like how long you've been airborne – and seamlessly folds them into weekly online leaderboard tournaments.

Your garage and achievements help make Dirt 2's career mode more personable, and its open structure is another of its strengths, offering even more choices than the first Dirt. Locations around the world open up fairly frequently, and there are always races open in multiple disciplines for you to try. My one complaint is that you end up re-racing locations like Battersea's rally cross track a few too many times.

Dirt 2's amenities aren't the only thing it has going for it. Codemasters' bread and butter – racing – comes through loud and clear. The speed and hair-raising moments of rally racing or the more technical rally cross tracks require different racing mindsets, and the more offroad truck races (no semis this time, though) are another matter altogether. The game contains the sophistication of a sim-racer while still packing enough pick-up-and-play fun for anyone watching from the couch. I don't imagine, however, that there are going to be a lot of people content to simply sit and watch Dirt 2 without getting their hands on it.—**KATO**

Dirt 2 is simply gorgeous. I prefer the cockpit mode – and not just to see the cool water splash effects on your windshield. The dashboard and rearview mirror trinkets can be swapped out for each of your rides

"HE WENT INSIDE UNDETECTED, RESCUED ME, AND THEN HE WAS GONE."

ALPHA
PROTOCOL
THE ESPIONAGE RPG

The Party Play Mode is extremely flexible

> **Concept:** The eight millionth Guitar Hero title released in the last two years shows some notable improvement

> **Graphics:** The animations and character models take a significant step forward, if only the art direction would mature with the series

> **Sound:** At 85 songs, it's a huge soundtrack, and it feels more diverse and better curated than World Tour. Still, no one should have let Zakk Wylde within 50 yards of Public Enemy's classic "Bring the Noise"

> **Playability:** As always, Neversoft makes some solid improvement to the interface and gameplay

> **Entertainment:** Guitar Hero keeps improving, but at this point its biggest enemy is its own glut of releases

> **Replay Value:** High

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 2K10

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE **5.5** With unresponsive skating and stickhandling skills, NHL 2K10 is a troubled hockey prospect. After taking the ice with a polished game like EA's NHL 10, going to Visual Concepts' latest hockey game feels like switching the channel between a pro hockey game and a high school hockey tournament. The new skating system falls flat on the ice, with cumbersome, rigid movement that lacks agility and stubbornly relies on speed burst and backpedal buttons. These feel like antiquated holdovers from previous eras, considering real hockey players skate all out on every shift and switch effortlessly between skating forwards and backwards. Coupled with wooden animations, limited pro stick controls, a bare bones franchise mode, and inferior online team play compared to the EASHL, NHL 2K10 sails too many shots over the crossbar. With so many red flags, we recommend passing this prospect over.——BERTZ

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Guitar Hero 5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 > **ESRB** T

THE LONG HARD ROAD

You can't knock Neversoft for resting on its laurels. In what seems like the umpteenth GH title released this year, the company delivers yet more solid work. Guitar Hero 5 is clearly aimed at correcting some gripes shared by long-term fans of the series.

Lots of legacy issues concerning the user interface have been fixed. There are now multiple tracklist sorting options. Signing in and out of multi-player games in career mode is much easier. Most impressive is the new no-fail Party Play mode, which allows you to jump into a song from the title screen with the press of a button. From there, friends can jump in and out of multiplayer at will and can even change instruments on the fly. This emphasis on accessibility is mirrored in the Quickplay mode, which unlocks all 85 of the game's songs from the get-go. In addition, all Guitar Hero: World Tour downloadable songs and (for a nominal fee) nearly all of the on-disc songs can be imported into GH 5, and will even work with the game's new features. I think I speak for all Guitar Hero fans when I say,
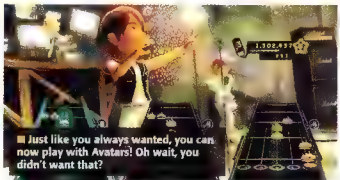
"It's about damn time."

On the gameplay side, there's a host of new "Rockfest" multiplayer modes that, frankly, I found a lot more interesting in theory than in practice. They all have various ways of awarding scores and placement, but at the end of the day it all comes down to hitting the notes correctly. More compelling were the Bonus Challenges, which are included in every song in Career mode, with three levels of success (Gold, Platinum, and Diamond). Some of these might include whammying for a certain number of seconds, or scoring a certain number of points in Star Power. For experienced players, it adds another layer of competition to the game, and allows you to unlock a variety of in-game extras. You'll also find enhancements to the online and GHTunes studio mode.

Even with this long list of new features, it's Guitar Hero through and through, and at this point I doubt we're ever going to see anything radically new from the series. For most fans, this game comes down to the tracklist, which is one of the strongest to date. From Dylan to Children of

Bodom, it's extremely diverse and for the most part well selected. The dumb plotlines of past games are cut out entirely, leaving only sponsorship challenges and in-game celebrity cameos to suffice as a loose narrative.

However, forcing Johnny Cash to cavort around onstage with the now playable Live Avatars is just humiliating. (By the way, perhaps it would have been better to leave Kurt Cobain out of the game entirely if you were going to be so tacky as to allow players to have him jumping up and down like an idiot to a Blink 182 song as a playable character. Seriously gross.)

Guitar Hero 5 is a well-done sequel with high quality production values and a good feature set. If something seems, well, missing, I guess that's just the natural passage of time. The music genre has been extremely successful, but I'm not sure the crazy days of 2007 are ever coming back. Come to think of it, at that last party I went to, no one even suggested playing Guitar Hero or Rock Band.——MATT

The Guitar Hero monolith marches on, undaunted by the huge number of releases in its genre over the last two years. Admittedly, most of those are other Guitar Hero games, which have done a fine job of diluting my enthusiasm for the next big release. What once was a major event when a new installment came out has become background noise in an endless stream of new guitar games. Neversoft goes to great pains to pull players out of the over-stimulated doldrums with Guitar Hero 5. Numerous tweaks to the front-end menus and progression system deliver new perspectives on the familiar formula. My favorite addition is the bonus objectives for each song, which demand that players focus on a special goal beyond song completion. Many of the other new features are built around added accessibility – easier drop in and drop out instruments, a streamlined music creator, and more party play options. I'd like to see some work in future installments on more balanced mixing of the audio tracks; the instruments being played really drown out the other tracks at times, but I'm willing to acknowledge this as personal preference. With a varied song list, generally easier difficulty, and streamlined interface, the game tries hard to be everything to everybody. It's a vain attempt, but I can't fault Neversoft for the ambitious scope of its efforts.——MILLER

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Heroes Over Europe

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** TRANSMISSION GAMES
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE **6.5** This is a strangely lackluster effort from Ubisoft, given that its recent flight games have shown such promise. Heroes Over Europe feels incomplete, with little variety in the action and levels, and controls that need some refinement. In-flight maneuvers feel slightly off, whether you're trying to hone in on a Luftwaffe plane that remains just out of sight, or attempting to steer your RAF fighter through a tight turn. The ace kill mechanic, which encourages one-or two-hit takedowns on enemy planes, is the most original thing in the game. But even that is frustrating, since it doesn't work while you are shooting normally, or while enemies are shooting at you. And why is every level in the first half of the campaign moving back and forth between the same two environments, but then the second half of the game offers far more interesting objectives and locations? Strange missteps abound in Heroes Over Europe, but glimmers of fun from WWII arcade flight shooting shine through from time to time.——MILLER

Just like you always wanted, you can now play with Avatars! Oh wait, you didn't want that?
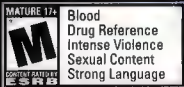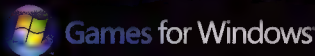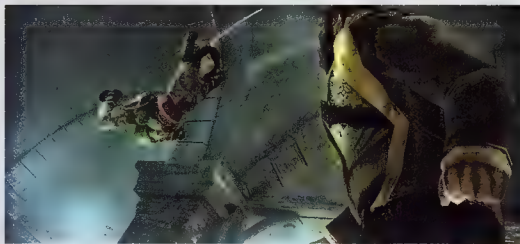
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Wet

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > **DEVELOPER** ARTIFICIAL MIND AND MOVEMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** M

GET RIDICULOUS

W et wears its inspirations on its sleeve. Quentin Tarantino's B-movie tributes *Kill Bill* and *Grindhouse* both figure heavily into Wet's visual aesthetic – right down to the scratchy film filter that turns your 1080p into a slightly malfunctioning projector (an effect which I had to turn off after about five minutes because it was making me ill). From games, it swipes Max Payne's slow-motion diving, God of War's cinematic quick time events, Prince of Persia's platforming, and The Club's gonzo, multiplier-heavy arcade shooting.

As befitting its gameplay and presentation, Wet's plot is a mishmash of hyperactive action clichés. You've got a hot, badass hero named Rubi, whose sole purpose favors leather and dual pistols. From the explosive opening, you guide her through a series of ever more ludicrous plot points involving plane crashes, a variety of evil foreigners, a

mysterious suitcase, someone named "Rat Boy," and – by my count – two separate characters that "control the designer drug trade in Hong Kong." It also features some notable voice talent in Eliza Dushku and Malcolm McDowell, which you'll appreciate when they deliver lines like "Say goodbye, f—tard."

But you know what? The whole mess sort of works for me. It's boneheaded to its spandex-clad little soul, but like a good late night cable flick, the creators seem to be in on the joke. I love how there's no attempt to provide any sense of reality. The developers don't even bother with a reload function on your main pistols and there's no cool-down timer on your bullet time abilities, translating into battles that are somewhere between Jet Li and a gymnastics meet on amphetamines. It's not polished enough to hang with the games that inspired it – the action gets messy to the point of frustration far too often, and

the level designs are rudimentary to say the least – but if you're looking for a weekend sugar-rush you could do much worse.—**MATT**
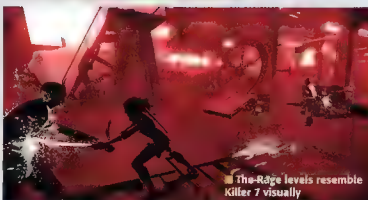
The Rage levels resemble Killer 7 visually

> **Concept:** A badass chick travels the world killing dudes in a variety of acrobatic ways. Double crosses and carnage ensue

> **Graphics:** The animations and character models are great, especially in the scripted quick time event sequences. Still, for a game that aims for balletic grace, the animations are clunky

> **Sound:** For once, a game that picks a musical aesthetic and sticks with it. Wet's soundtrack is filled with Cramps-inspired psychobilly artists like Corpse Show Creeps. Actors Eliza Dushku and Malcolm Mcdowell lend their voices to the project

> **Playability:** There's not a new idea in this game, but it does the basics of bullet time pretty well

> **Entertainment:** There's something about a game that knows how silly it is. Like the B-movies that inspired it, Wet is rough around the edges but has a sense of sleazy fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **7.5**

In Wet's best moments, it is a thrill ride of absurd action and stylish violence, steeped in the cinematic traditions of Tarantino and Rodriguez. At its worst, it's a frustrating dive through endless slow-motion sequences and random gunplay. The reality, which lies somewhere in between, is a game that is heavy on panache and light on substance. There's a certain insane bravado about basing the entirety of the game's action in slowdown sequences; the gimmick begins to wear a little thin over time. Nonetheless, the battles come at you non-stop, and the development team has done an excellent job of providing breaks from the norm with frantic car chases, bloody red-out sequences, and occasional diversions into simple platforming challenges. I found myself liking Wet despite myself. It's a game that has embraced its craziness, and demands you come along for the ride.—**MILLER**

Section 8

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION (32-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPEAK GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** TIMEGATE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 > **ESRB** T
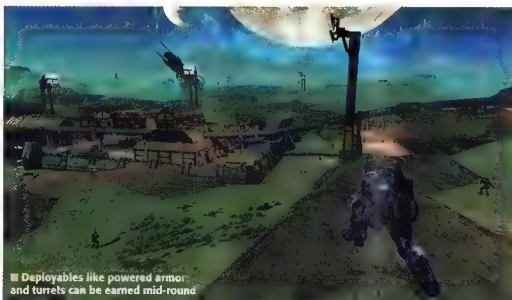
■ Deployables like powered armor and turrets can be earned mid-round

STORE-BRAND SHOOTING

N obody wants to eat caviar every meal; sometimes a plain old hamburger will do. When you have a hamburger that reappears after you eat it and never goes bad, though, why would you ever buy a new one? That's the problem with bland video games in overpopulated genres. Section 8 only minimally distinguishes itself from many space marine FPS titles already available.

The differences between Section 8 and the games it apes are mostly superficial. Like the Unreal Tournaments of the world, it's best if we pretend that Section 8's terrible single-player component doesn't exist. Online, two 16-player teams race to collect 1,000 points by controlling objectives and killing enemies, just like in any number of other titles. Here, though, players plod at a snail's pace as they chip away at each others' massive health pools. By engaging their powerful jetpacks, players can jump in and out of trouble – which has the side effect of making matches between experienced combat-

ants a matter of wearing down their jetpack charge as much as their armor.

The one cool innovation in Section 8 is its randomized missions. As an example, an objective like a convoy will occasionally spawn. One team gets tasked with protecting it, the other with destroying it. Whichever side wins this skirmish gets a healthy point boost, and often an in-game bonus like a new outpost or a super-powered tank. These one-off side missions are a great addition, throwing much-needed wrenches into Section 8's well-worn gameplay.

Ultimately, these missions are not enough to give this title the boost it needs to make a name for itself in a crowded genre. The nice backend clan support is wasted since the game just isn't much fun to play. The shooting lacks the high-intensity lethality of Counter-Strike, the lightning-paced speed of Tribes, and the great cooperative mechanics of Battlefield. You won't spit this hamburger out, but you probably won't tell your friends about it, either.—**ADAM**

■ The maps have as little personality as the rest of the game

> **Concept:** Mix Tribes and Battlefield in an online shooter with slow movement speeds, impressive jetpacks, and massively inflated health pools

> **Graphics:** You'd have to really try to come up with a more generic space marine look

> **Sound:** The soothing female announcer could be pulled from any sci-fi show or game

> **Playability:** Hooray for customizable controls! Get used to jumping around more than you have since Quake 3

> **Entertainment:** Sure, if you absolutely must have another team-based multiplayer sci-fi shooter, this is certainly that

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **6**

Go play Section 8 at a mall kiosk, because the best part of this game will take you about five seconds to experience. When you first drop into battle, you fall thousands of feet from an orbital drop ship and slam headfirst into the pavement. It's a cool effect, and if you aim well you can do some damage to the chumps foolishly standing under you. The second your feet touch the ground, however, Section 8 becomes a generic team-based shooter. The game's weapons feel largely derivative, its maps are sprawling open areas with few exciting set pieces, and your trooper moves about as fast as a traffic jam. Hardcore shooter fans could waste a few hours here, but this isn't going to steal anyone away from the genre's heavy hitters.—**BEN**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 10

> **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX 360) (12-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E10+

GOING TOP SHELF

Game one of the Stanley Cup playoffs. The Minnesota Wild is visiting the Shark Tank, and the San Jose crowd is downright hostile. While the fans bang against the glass and wave their towels in confident support of their favored team, the puck drops and the Sharks scramble to keep up with my first line. After three minutes under an aggressive forecheck, a tired Sharks skater gets frustrated, slashing my star rookie defenseman, who collapses in pain on the ice. This will not stand. I grab the assailant and pound him into oblivion via the new first-person fighting engine, much to the chagrin of his teammates. From here it gets ugly. After three periods, six goals, three more fights, and two injuries, no one is a winner but the fans. With the crowd on its feet giving the Sharks the energy to pull out the overtime victory, I steal game one with a shorthanded goal. The crowd falls silent, but I'm standing up pumping my fist for winning the war of attrition. Welcome to NHL 10.

While one-timers and screaming slap shots from the point make the highlight reels on SportsCenter, true rink rats know that hockey games are won in the corners. NHL 10's dedication to the little things starts with the new board play, which allows players to pin opponents against the boards so teammates can dig the puck out. This addition makes aggressive forechecking a viable strategy for the first time in the series, allowing you to dump the puck behind the goal line and move the possession battle from the neutral zone deep into the opposing team's end. Other subtle, yet effective, gameplay changes include more loose pucks in front of the net, unpredictable bounces off the boards, and a greater emphasis on defensive positioning, all of which result in a gameplay style that realistically mimics the NHL. The only strategy NHL 10 mishandles is the breakouts, which suffer from too many skaters standing still.

Last year, the Be A Pro and EASHL modes debuted to critical acclaim. Both return with minor alterations, the most popular sure to be monthly seasons in the online hockey league. EA instead placed the majority of its effort into rebuilding NHL's franchise mode, now dubbed Be A GM mode. The center-piece of the improvements is an RPG-style system that awards you experience points for meeting the expectations of the ownership, whether that be scouting eastern European defenders, signing a free agent, or clearing cap space with a trade. Accumulated points can be used to improve your scouting, medical staff, and coaching staff. While this system adds a needed layer of achievement to the experience, many of the requested moves seem arbitrary. Why would I clear cap space when I'm $9 million under already?

The trade interface is vastly improved, with a versatile hub that allows you to place players on a trade block, keep track of trade rumors, and adjust sliders to indicate which draft picks, positions, and player ages you are interested in dishing and receiving. Consequently, trades are more prominent throughout your season, as your phone rings with offers from the NHL Draft right up to the frenzy of activity at the trade deadline. Free agency, on the other hand, is a mess. Teams often dump first round draft picks before they ever sign contracts, too many skilled players are left unsigned, and you cannot edit your lines during the offseason to see where your roster holes still exist.

While the franchise mode has its faults, it's still vastly improved over last year's offering. Coupled with the other outstanding modes and the most polished gameplay in the sports genre, NHL 10 is still more than worth the price of admission.—**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> **Concept:** Add board play and other hockey subtleties to improve the best sports game on the planet

> **Graphics:** New crowd animations bring playoff intensity to tight games

> **Sound:** The stellar commentating from Gary Thorne and Bill Clement bring back memories of ESPN's National Hockey Night

> **Playability:** New play styles offer everything from arcade-style play to hardcore realism

> **Entertainment:** With Be A Pro, Be A GM, and the EASHL mode, NHL 10 offers myriad ways to feed your puck passion

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

The video game that changed the game of hockey is changing again. The new pinning system is sweet because it allows you to forecheck effectively without throwing the game's offense/defense balance out of whack. The new Be A GM mode is welcome, and its pacing is quicker than Be A Pro mode, even if it asks you to make trades you don't want to just for the GM points. Other new additions like getting attribute boosts for equipment (like Tiger Woods) and some lingering AI problems (CPU players pass way too much) aren't as cool as the new manual passing, but this game has taken another step forward.—**KATO**

■ Each of your three equipped swords has a special attack, though many are totally useless

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** The creators of Odin Sphere mix 2D sword swinging with Japanese folklore

> **Graphics:** Simply gorgeous. The backgrounds and character designs are perfect examples of artistic direction done right

> **Sound:** All of the voicework is in Japanese, which works well considering the setting

> **Playability:** Two difficulties and straightforward controls make it an easy game to pick up, but a hard one to master

> **Entertainment:** Lots of fun when you're fighting, which you aren't doing enough of the time

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Wii
Muramasa:
The Demon Blade

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** VANILLAWARE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 8 > **ESRB** T

■ The bosses you fight depend on which character you select

AT LEAST IT'S PRETTY

A lot of hope rests with Muramasa. A samurai-infused 2D action game from the makers of the exceptional Odin Sphere, Muramasa is a visual masterpiece with the potential to appeal directly to the Wii's hardcore base. But simply wanting to like Muramasa isn't enough; it also needs to hold up its end of the bargain as a piece of entertainment – a feat it manages only sporadically.

No one can deny that the game is beautiful. The vibrant backgrounds, hulking bosses, and flashy combat make Muramasa a treat to behold. I definitely took a little extra damage because I was staring at the gorgeous art instead of paying attention to my enemies. A little more context behind the characters and their breathtaking surroundings would have been nice, but narrative clearly isn't a priority. Instead of getting a story, you'll traverse the Japanese countryside, encountering random ambushes by various ninjas and mythical beasts.

Combat is where Muramasa's sharpened blade truly shines. Movement is quick, controls are responsive, and the intense action puts your reflexes to the test. Mid-air clashes over the rooftops and effortless dashes through enemies give combat an exhilarating kinetic vibe. Unfortunately, most encounters don't last more than a minute or two, forcing you to sheathe your blade just when you're warming up.

As much as I enjoyed the battles, the system doesn't get deeper or evolve. The moves you perform during the tutorial are the same ones you'll use against the final boss, save for your sword-specific special moves. You never get the sensation of becoming more powerful as you progress; the swords you forge grow stronger, but so do the enemies, so nothing really changes. In a particularly lame decision, the two playable characters even control identically.
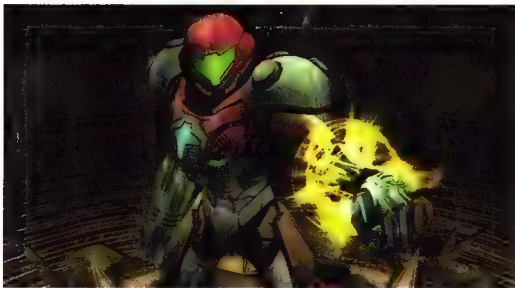
Apart from the disappointing ramp-up, Muramasa's other major issue is backtracking. Certain swords essentially act as colored keycards, breaking down previously impenetrable barriers – often in areas you've long since beaten. This means you need to take an uneventful run back, fighting weak enemies along the way. The process serves no purpose other than artificially extending the game and snuffing out your enthusiasm in transit.

Even in the face of some structural missteps, Muramasa is a visually stunning game that is entertaining in the heat of battle – though that heat eventually cools down due to short and shallow encounters. Without better pacing and a lot more depth, Muramasa isn't fit to run with the top-tier action titles.—**JOE**

LOOKING FOR A CHALLENGE?

Muramasa has two difficulty modes, Muso (easy) and Shura (hard), which you can switch between at any time from the pause screen. Each one facilitates a different style of playing the game; Muso allows you to tear through most encounters, including bosses, without breaking a sweat. Shura is much more punishing and precise. While Muso is an excellent way to experience the beauty of Muramasa without any frustration, Shura is the only avenue that will force you to learn and appreciate your full capabilities.

■ You can view a small or large portion of the map over the action

■ A decent variety of surroundings keeps things interesting

Wii

Metroid Prime Trilogy

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** RETRO STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 25 > **ESRB** T

PRIME TIME

Super Metroid is timeless. Even by today's standards, the game manages to suck me in and keep my hands on the controller until the credits roll. Gameplay principles laid out in that 2D masterpiece are still making an impact on modern games like Shadow Complex. I wonder if one day we'll look back at Metroid Prime with similar wonder. Seven years after its initial release, I still find myself overwhelmed by Metroid Prime's diverse landscapes. I still thrill over solving Prime's puzzles and eagerly hunt for the secrets tucked into every corner. Everything about Prime's world, from its enveloping ambiance to its perfectly paced upgrades scattered like breadcrumbs through an alien labyrinth, scream that this world is worth revisiting. If you haven't explored Tallon IV yet, what are you waiting for?

This package comes bundled with two sequels that iterate well on Prime's blueprint. The hardcore will love Echoes' old-school difficulty and challenging level layouts, which have you bouncing between light and dark worlds to solve

puzzles. Echoes was also famous for introducing multiplayer to the Metroid series, but this is little more than a novelty today, and hardly worth revisiting.

One of my favorite aspects about the third entry, Corruption, is how it utilizes Samus' gunship as an interactive prop. Not only does it blow obstructions out of the environment, it lets you fly to different worlds in the system. However, Corruption's greatest contribution to the series is its Wii-specific control scheme. The first two titles received a lot of complaints about how they gave players only one analog stick with which to move and look around. Corruption fixes this by letting players aim with the Wii Remote in a much more natural way that few Wii shooters have been able to emulate. The addition of this control system for the first two titles makes me wish I could go back in time and experience them for the first time all over again. Those who haven't already are lucky indeed.—**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Exploration, action, puzzles – the Prime games have it all. Now they're all in one package

> **Graphics:** The art design for all three Prime titles is top notch, and the visuals hold up even after all these years

> **Sound:** The Prime games have great soundtracks and some haunting, immersive audio effects

> **Playability:** One of the smoothest, most accessible shooters on the Wii is back, and it lends a helping hand to its two GameCube brothers by updating their control schemes

> **Entertainment:** Three games for the price of one, there is a lot of value on this disc, even if you've played one or two of these games before

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

The original Metroid Prime is one of the best games of the previous generation, and its sequels are competent – at the very least. This collection would be a great deal if it added anything at all to the original titles, but its sole innovation is grafting Corruption's Wii interface onto the two earlier games. Aiming and panning your view with the remote is inferior in every way to the traditional scheme from the GameCube titles. Since there is no way to play with a classic or GameCube controller, you're stuck playing good last-gen games with a gimpy waggle interface. The Metroid Prime series is still strong, but even new players who never picked up the originals would be better served tracking them down in bargain bins than struggling through this subpar collection.—**ADAM**

Wii

Dead Space: Extraction

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** VISCERAL GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** M

FRIGHT-LIGHT SHOOTOUT

The horror of being hunted in the vacuum of space never quite takes grip in Dead Space: Extraction, a Wii-exclusive prequel to the exceptional Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 space drama. Whether that's due to the perspective switch from third- to first-person, the lack of dynamic lightning, or weaker scripted scares can be debated. One thing is certain: I didn't jump once while playing this game. Without a suspenseful atmosphere, there isn't much to fear, or, conversely, to draw you in.

Dead Space: Extraction runs on rails, pulling the player forward at a scripted pace. Developer Visceral Games did a commendable job of making this experience feel more organic. Shaky cameras constantly distort your field of view, and you can hear your character's labored breathing. As intended, the bobbing camera combined with dancing shadows plays tricks on your eyes, and can lead to a few shots being fired at nothing.
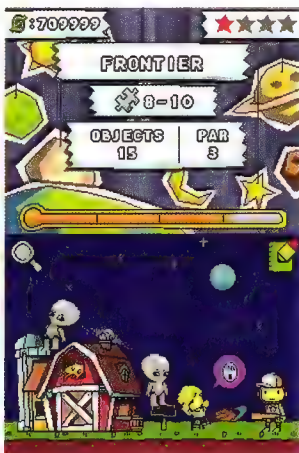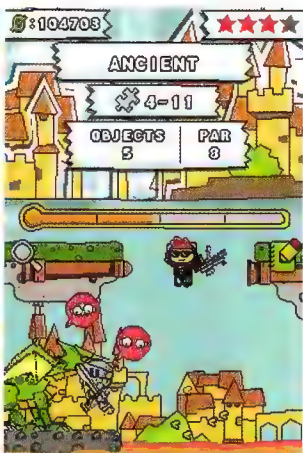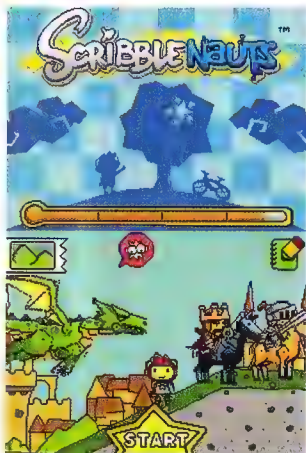
This dynamic viewpoint clashes with the targeting reticle, a gigantic, beach ball-like display that takes up far too much of the screen, hiding the excessive brutality and highest quota of dismemberment per enemy body in any game. If you're playing the game co-op, with two vibrantly colored cursors on

screen, you're not going to see much unless an enemy gets on top of you. This is another area where the game doesn't retain the charm of its predecessor. Not having to worry about the positioning of your character makes for easier battles. Since the dev team held true to its fiction and hasn't altered the enemies to attack in different ways, their sloth-like assaults are easy to repel.

Storytelling is the only area where Extraction shines, even more so than the original game. The plot implies that other things may be afoot in this universe than players may have thought, and the way this information is doled out – through multiple playable characters – is executed beautifully, especially when you don't know if your character at the time will survive. Several of the story sequences conclude in horrific ways (more than just the chance of a good guy dying), and also connect nicely with the founding tale.

The action doesn't do much for the series, or even the genre for that matter. The pacing is much slower than your typical House of the Dead, and the firefights never feel like a stressful ordeal. Dead Space fans should check it out for the fiction. All other interested parties should look elsewhere for a suspenseful shooter.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** A rail shooter that lacks the genre's intensity and the franchise's suspense. The story is the only notable component

> **Graphics:** Amazing animations and environmental effects. The lighting isn't as dynamic as I had hoped, and the obnoxious targeting reticle blocks far too much of the action

> **Sound:** Excellent voice work, and great attention has been paid to tying sound effects to each environment

> **Playability:** The weapons offer plenty of variety, but the action never heats up to a point where you feel you have to conserve ammo or use a specific firearm for a specific battle

> **Entertainment:** Even in this uneventful game, the series' fiction stays strong

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 8.75

A refreshing surprise amongst a sea of unsatisfying Wii adaptations, Dead Space: Extraction's unfaltering intensity and intriguing storyline makes the game worthy of the Dead Space moniker. New monsters, weapons, and characters expand upon the groundwork laid by the original thriller, and the realistic execution and pace of gameplay makes it easy to forget that you are on rails. Responsive controls, stellar voice acting, impressive visuals, and noteworthy unlockables make the game's gravitational pull that much stronger. Minor flaws keep Extraction from making par with its predecessor, most notably the large reticles that obscure the bulk of approaching Necromorphs – making cutting off their limbs more of a gross estimate than a precise task. As with many rail shooters, gameplay is formulaic at times, particularly in the case of boss battles. But Extraction is every bit as creepy as its predecessor – perhaps more so since the game's rails pull you around that corner. Dead Space: Extraction isn't a simple substitute for those who missed the first iteration. It's a must-play for fans of the franchise and newcomers alike.—**MEAGAN**
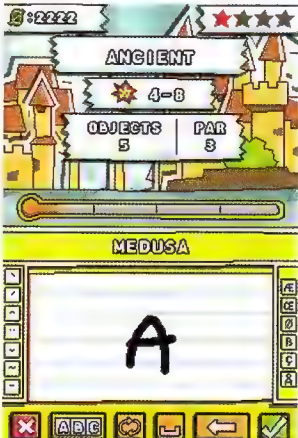
NINTENDO DS

Scribblenauts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** 5TH CELL
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E10+

AN ADDICTIVE TWIST ON USER-CREATED CONTENT

Scribblenauts is more than a game; it's a brilliantly devised test of one's imagination. The artists, programmers, and designers from up and coming developer 5th Cell intentionally neglected to implement solutions for the game's 200-plus puzzle challenges. The hope is that players can flex their creative muscles in just the right ways to generate their own resolutions. In a way, the player becomes a designer, a twist that makes for one of the year's most original, satisfying, and irresistible experiences.

So how does the player fabricate solutions? The

By no means does this shortchange the actual game. All of the challenges stimulate your creativity in different ways, and many are unlike anything you've seen in a game before. How do you stop a cruise ship from running into an iceberg? How do you reunite a duckling with its family while avoiding the appetite of a hungry cat? How do you steal a museum's most prized possession? Envisioning solutions is both hard and rewarding, but solving the riddles by using as few objects as possible (which the game pushes you to do through golf-like scoring system) is where my creative juices were joyously sapped. I spent hours on individual challenges, look-

protagonist, who looks like every high school's nerdy A/V club outcast, has the magical gift of being able to write a word on a notepad and have the physical representation of that word appear in his world. This is essentially the text equivalent to Harold's purple crayon or Mickey Mouse's wizard hat. If you write "boat," a nautical vessel will be inserted into the game world, capable of transporting your character across water. If you write "snowstorm," a blizzard will blanket the playfield. Real world functionality and physics are tied to all of the objects. You can use them for their intended purposes, and also in unexpected ways. To catch a butterfly, I could have fabricated a butterfly net. I instead lowered the butterfly into grab distance by placing an anchor on top of it.

I spent countless hours inserting objects into the world to see how they could be used. If you create a vampire, it will come after your character. However, you can counter its assault by creating a vampire hunter. In total there are over 10,000 different objects to play around with, many being recognized with multiple words. From this endless sandbox experience, it wouldn't matter if there were a game here or not. Just messing around to see how the items you insert into the world interact with others is an impressive feat of programming.

ing for newfangled solutions to raise my score. The mind-churning search for solutions is also enjoyable for groups of friends huddled around one screen.

When Scribblenauts is working the way it should, it is an undeniable blast. But unfortunately, this game's skies are not always sunny. The touch-based character controls are touchy to the point that one miniscule tap on the screen can lead to a stage being restarted or a carefully planned strategy falling apart. Moreover, some of the objects I summoned into the world didn't function the way I thought they would. NPCs also get in the way, blocking your ability to pick up an object. These irksome moments pop up more than I care to see. But in the end, I learned to work around them. It's a bit of a crutch, but if you learn to play it through trial and error, you can manipulate the system to work in your favor.

Like LittleBigPlanet before it, Scribblenauts invites players to express their creativity in ways I never imagined. It's one of my top games this year, and a DS game that has near limitless appeal.—**REINER**

All of Bowser's minion attacks use the touch screen, like tapping goombas to light them on fire
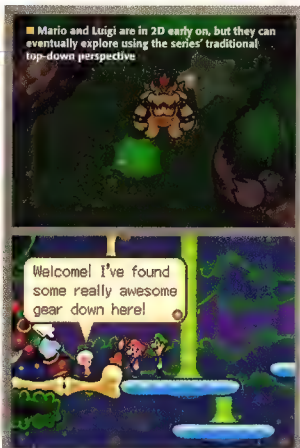
Mario and Luigi are in 2D early on, but they can eventually explore using the series' traditional top-down perspective

Welcome! I've found some really awesome gear down here!

NINTENDO DS

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** ALPHA DREAM > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** E

SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE

I enjoy complex role-playing games. I like allocating multiple types of points, poring over skill trees, and managing a balanced party. Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story doesn't have any of that. The Mario & Luigi series has always favored humor and accessibility; with the genre's traditional complicating factors stripped away, Bowser's Inside Story is an ideal RPG for people who don't normally play RPGs.

I'm not dismissing the habits of the non-hardcore crowd – especially since complexity doesn't necessarily equal quality. In this case, simple controls within inventive scenarios result in one of the most polished and consistently entertaining titles on the DS. Mario and Luigi's adventure through (and subsequent escape from) Bowser's insides takes what people love about the series and adds an array of cool new twists.

Switching between the plumbers' 2D platforming and Bowser's isometric exploration injects variety at all the right times. Just when you feel like Mario and Luigi have tromped around in the koopa king's stomach for long enough, you suddenly
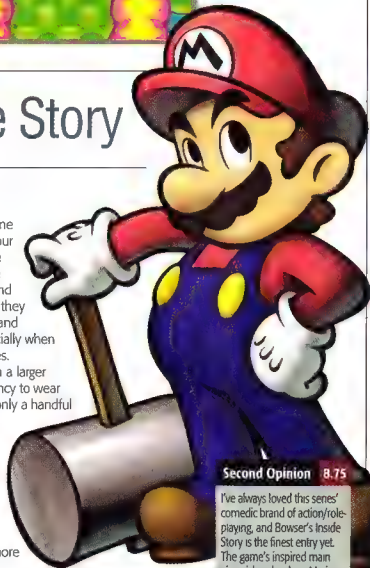
find yourself controlling an awesome Godzilla-sized Bowser, or timing your button presses as the brothers use tendons like trampolines. Even the implementation of touch screen and microphone controls is done well; they aren't pervasive, but they feel fun and natural when they surface – especially when performing Bowser's minion moves.

While the pacing is successful on a larger scale, regular battles have a tendency to wear thin. In any given zone, there are only a handful of possible encounters, and it gets old dodging the same attacks and using the same strategies repeatedly. While this is a problem in many role-playing games, it is particularly noticeable here. It gets even worse as the enemies become more difficult, because the fights are longer and require more precise timing.

A few flaws on the battlefield aren't enough to stem the flow of laughs generated by the game's exceptional writing. The return of Fawful as the main villain ensures plenty of hilariously nonsensical one-liners, but the impatient and aggressive Bowser steals the show. He has no depth beyond a constant desire to incinerate, punch, and stomp everything, but Bowser's Inside Story isn't a tale full of nuances. It is, however, a title with lots of variety, plenty of great dialogue, and rock-solid mechanics that any gamer can understand and enjoy.—**JOE**

Yep, that's Bowser fighting his castle

GREAT!

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COMING SOON

NINTENDO DS

Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL) > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX/H.A.N.D > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 29 > ESRB E10+

DAYS OF SUMMER

After years of inactivity, the Kingdom Hearts series returns. This time, anxious players get to experience Roxas' story of his days in Organization XIII leading up to his awakening in the intro sequence to Kingdom Hearts II. Certain hallmarks of the series return, like fun combat, good production values, and an intriguing story. But what used to be a key advantage, the connection with Disney, has proven extremely limiting to Square Enix. Any single world in 358/2 Days has already appeared in Kingdom Hearts, and the Disney characters don't serve much of a purpose in the game. Do we really need to be introduced to Genie again or investigate why Beast keeps a woman in his castle?

Wisely, the developers have focused most of the story on their own characters in Organization XIII. The tale of Roxas, Axel, and Xion is a touching one, and should be experienced by any fan of the series, though it could have been told much more concisely. You'll spend way too much time chatting and eating sea salt ice cream. As it ramps up towards the end, however, it helps make up for these dull moments.

The melee combat and upgrade system work very well. As you complete the game's bite-sized missions you'll consistently earn useful goodies that can be applied to

the innovative Tetris-like grid system. Placing things on your ever expanding panel unlocks new keyblades, combos, leveling multipliers, defensive maneuvers, magic, and more. Bashing the heck out of the wide variety of enemies satisfies in a classic way and the lock-on system does a good job of keeping foes in view. For some reason, the lock-on goes out the door when it comes to magic. You'll get steamed as a precious fire or ice spell drifts pathetically past its intended target, and then you'll just stop using magic altogether.

The short mission structure is tailored for handheld play. Indeed, there are plenty of fun missions and challenging boss battles, but things get repetitive fast. You can replay missions to collect all the items, replay them with special challenge conditions, or replay them in mission mode with or without friends. Fortunately, you can skip many extraneous missions and still be powered up enough to beat the game. And that four-player co-op? It's local, you can only replay missions you've already beaten, and you can't trade any items. Single player is up to snuff, but multiplayer is a clear missed opportunity.—BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Kingdom Hearts on the DS. What took so long?

> **Graphics:** Excellent production values both in rendered cutscenes and in-game graphics

> **Sound:** Recycled music slightly offset by nicely voiced cinematics

> **Playability:** Camera controls make the journey from the PlayStation analog stick to DS shoulder buttons without too much trouble

> **Entertainment:** Despite repetitive missions and a drawn out story, the tent pole moments still pack a punch
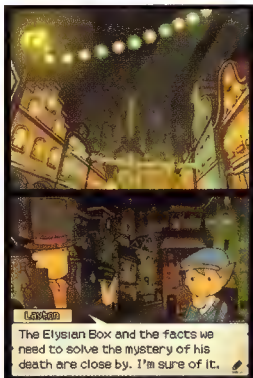
> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

Most companies only get to use the art it created for a game once. Square has recycled nearly every environment in 358/2 from Kingdom Hearts II. What's more surprising than this bold move is the fact that I didn't really mind it. Not only is it impressive to see these PS2 levels running on the DS, the reused environments are appropriately framed to a story about Roxas' first year with Organization XIII. Gameplay-wise 358/2 also feels a lot like KH II, and while I could have done without the one-hour tutorial, the action is fun. Even the new Panel leveling system adds a unique puzzle quality to upgrading your character. Kingdom Hearts fans won't want to miss this portable romp through the Magic Kingdom.—BEN

NINTENDO DS

Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE/PUZZLE > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER LEVEL-5
> RELEASE AUGUST 24 > ESRB E10+

The Elysian Box and the facts we need to solve the mystery of his death are close by. I'm sure of it.

NATALIE

Pet House

Your hamster is attracted to this adorable little house when it's within three spaces of him, but he always ignores it and heads toward a nearby apple if the choice exists.

Arrange items to make the hamster walk as far as possible

LIKE A GENTLEMAN

Diabolical Box sticks with the first game's formula almost exactly. While it may not be a fresh concept, more story and puzzles are all the Layton series needs to appease fans.

The plot follows Luke and Layton as they investigate the death of Layton's mentor, supposedly caused by opening the legendarily dangerous Elysian Box. Clues guide them to hitch a ride on the Molentary Express and travel from town to town. This structure allows for much more environment variety than the single city backdrop of the first game, though the on-train sections become tedious once you've gone back and forth a few times.

Puzzles are tied more closely to the world this time, as you'll swap train cars to clear the tracks ahead or solve a puzzle on a door to get through the lock. Most of the puzzles are still random challenges from a townsperson, however. You trace the paths of tangled wires, try to imagine 2D drawings

The strange antique is infamous for killing anyone who opens it.

in 3D space, and jump a knight around a chessboard. I didn't come across any challenge as obtuse as the chocolate bar in the first game, but having a knowledge of Level-5's previous bag of tricks helps in solving this new batch.

Most of the new content is found in the collectibles and minigames. You collect toys to exercise a fat hamster so he can find hidden hint coins. Grabbing camera pieces will eventually unlock a picture matching game, and your tea set will get a workout trying to make the perfect blend for the townspeople you come across. These entertaining tasks do a great job of keeping you on the lookout for extras while hoofing it through town and pumping sources.

I enjoyed the storytelling in Diabolical Box, as well as the new characters like Sammy, the rock 'n roll train conductor. But some of the big reveals are particularly groan worthy, and two story clichés are unfortunately repeated in this sequel that I hope aren't carried over to the third entry.—BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** You solve puzzles while the Professor solves the mysteries

> **Graphics:** Far more animated (and fully voiced) scenes are sprinkled throughout

> **Sound:** The signature accordion returns

> **Playability:** Players should have the ability to erase only parts of their hand scrawled memos instead of losing the whole thing

> **Entertainment:** All the charm and challenge of the first game. Surprisingly absent cameo Lisa Kudrow

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

I love Professor Layton's quiet, slow-paced approach to puzzling, and the Diabolical Box brings more of what made the first installment so engaging. This newest adventure changes the setting and adds some new characters to the mix, but the focus on short, unique brainteasers is identical to last time. The best of the new puzzles involve careful critical thinking. However, like last time, several puzzles rely too heavily on giving convoluted written directions, and forcing you to quiz out what the game is even looking for in an answer. By and large, I'm impressed by the breadth and uniqueness of each of the challenges, and the hint system and ability to return to unsolved segments keeps frustration at bay. Like the professor himself, the charming game stands apart from the crowd, but its deliberate pacing isn't for everyone.—MILLER

PSP

Shin Megami Tensei: Persona

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** T

■ The battle system uses a grid to determine the range of your attacks

A SECOND CHANCE

In the PSone era, Persona was an obscure spin-off series. Now, after picking up a fresh contingent of followers with its last two PS2 entries, it is one of the RPG genre's big names. Leveraging this recent success, Atlus is giving fans the chance to see where it all started with this enhanced port of the original.
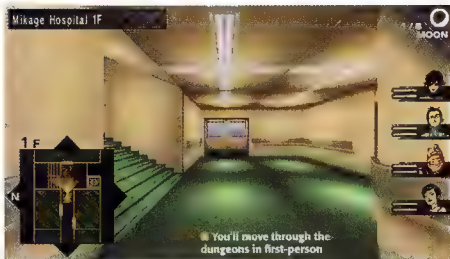
Demonic forces are invading present-day Tokyo, and you'll fight back by controlling a group of high school kids who can summon magical guardians called Personae. The unusual premise is still interesting after all these years, and this version's story is made even better with the inclusion of new cutscenes. Most problems from the PSone release have been addressed with features

like shorter load times and the ability to skip battle animations, leaving you free to enjoy the depth of the combat system. The strategic battles, along with collecting and fusing various monsters, are compelling and addictive even by modern standards.

Controlling your characters in first-person and the angled third-person view feels awkward at first, but you'll get accustomed to it after an hour or two. I should also note that this entry doesn't have the focus on the social simulation found in more recent games in the series. If you've only played Persona 3 and 4, Persona on PSP may not be what you're expecting, but it's a landmark RPG regardless.—JOE

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** The original Persona plus a few tweaks and improvements

> **Graphics:** Pretty sharp, though the character and monster models are a little small to fully appreciate

> **Sound:** The poppy new soundtrack is certainly catchy

> **Playability:** Navigation can be clunky, but the interface works well otherwise

> **Entertainment:** A grim tone mixed with cool combat creates an atmospheric and addictive experience

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

HOW TO BUY?

You can pick up Persona in two ways: buying it off store shelves, or downloading it from PSN. Both options carry the same $40 price point, so which one you should choose depends on how you want to play. The retail release is on UMD and comes packed with a two-disc soundtrack, whereas the PSN version can be played on the PSP Go when it comes out in October.

■ You'll move through the dungeons in first-person

Second Opinion 8

Some sweet new tunes and great animated sequences help this cult classic find its place in today's crowded market. I absolutely loved this game's eerie Japanese horror vibe and quirky approach to storytelling. While the turn-based random encounters still feel a little old school, the first-person dungeon exploring and ability to talk with demons in battle keep this RPG fresh, and differentiate it from most games in the genre. The game could use a better minimap, as I was never sure where I was supposed to go, but if you're willing to do some exploring, Persona deserves a second chance.—BEN

PSP

Soulcalibur: Broken Destiny

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER LOCAL)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** PROJECT SOUL
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 > **ESRB** T

A GAMEPLAY-PERFECT PORT

For all intents and purposes, Broken Destiny's gameplay is a one-to-one port of last year's excellent Soulcalibur IV. Namco once again delivers rock-solid framerates and reflex-testing action with this release. Though the fighting is indistinguishable from the series' console flagship and the roster would be impressive on a home console, two problems prevent this from living up to the high standard set by SC IV.

The single-player content in Broken Destiny is a huge step backward from the surprisingly deep offering in SC IV. The Gauntlet tells an insipid story in between mostly 2- to 10-second challenges, and is useless outside of teaching new players about Soulcalibur's A/B/K paradigm and series-specific concepts like Guard Impacts. Beyond this, you're stuck with standard modes like Arcade and Training.

The second issue with this title is that multiplayer is ad-hoc only. That means you can only play versus another human if you both have PSPs and are in the same room – and let's be honest, who plays Soulcalibur like that? If you have a buddy and a couch, get SC IV and do it right. If you don't, you're stuck with Broken Destiny's unremarkable single player.

As for the two new characters, Kratos and DamPierre, they're as polished as anyone on the roster. Kratos is a slow, juggle-based warrior who has gaping holes in his attacks to make up for his silly combos. Think of him like Ivy, with better range and much less versatility. DamPierre is most reminiscent of Voldo in that he relies primarily on deception and often puts himself in a backwards or prone stance – either of which he can explode out of with punishing assaults.

The way you prefer to play your fighting games indicates whether Broken Destiny is for you. If Arcade mode versus a CPU opponent is all you need, this port's remarkable gameplay will be a great fit. More social players who don't have regular access to fellow PSP owners will be disappointed despite this title's technically sound execution. Either way, this is undeniably Soulcalibur despite its smaller package.—ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** A high-fidelity port of the franchise's excellent fighting action, this brings all the combat but leaves behind some of the series' recent single-player improvements

> **Graphics:** Soulcalibur has always been known for its visuals, and the PSP's crisp screen does not disappoint

> **Sound:** The voices are poorly digitized, but the battles sound fine otherwise

> **Playability:** Soulcalibur doesn't really use two shoulder buttons, much less four – and it plays better on a d-pad anyway. The PSP is a great fit

> **Entertainment:** A bunch of nerds around a TV is still the One True Way to play Soulcalibur, but this delivers given its constraints

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

This impressive retouching of Soulcalibur IV looks and plays great on PSP, and that should be enough to satisfy many fans of the series. A closer look reveals some cracks in the armor: the single-player progression is lackluster, the new characters are of questionable quality, and the writing is, as ever, poorly translated and presented. The actual fights are exciting, and the various characters' movesets are as varied and entertaining as ever. The act of stuffing so many great looking characters onto the UMD, along with a fully featured character creator, is a major feat. The fact that they all look as polished as they do, and move with such ease only adds more to an already sweet package. It's too bad the game does such a poor job leveraging its epic loop and characters – do that, and Broken Destiny becomes a real legend.—MILLER

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2009 Based On Units Sold

### 1 WII SPORTS RESORT (Wii)

Charts is going out of business. Everything must go; we're practically giving these jokes away. Take this gem for example: Wii Sports Resort might be the perfect vacation. We took a real vacation once, and it was terrible; our family was there. Ba-dump! Get it? We'd have to be crazy to tell jokes like that, so come on down for our bi-annual Going Out of Business Sale.

2 NCAA FOOTBALL 10 (360)
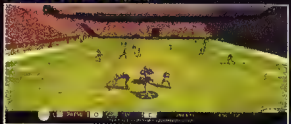
We don't really like college football. The only thing college football is good for is sheltering oafish ninnies from the real world, because after college they won't be able to get a real job, and they'll have to start working at the used car lot their uncle owns, where they spend the whole day making fun of the IT guy. Screw you, Trent.

3 NCAA FOOTBALL 10 (PS3)
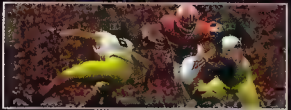
Just kidding. See, we're crazy!! We must be with jokes like these and prices this low. That last joke didn't even make sense. Did you read it? How much would you pay for that joke? Not much, right? You would try to sell a joke anyway? Only someone crazy enough to lead a humor revolution! Or someone going out of business.

4 WII FIT (Wii)

Okay, we'll come clean. We need money. We've been spending our paycheck on stupid things like Grey's Anatomy DVDs, WoW-flavored Mountain Dew, and used copies of Ready 2 Rumble Revolution. We traded in our car for an ostrich; now that's poor spending. We've tried recouping our losses by canceling our gym membership and using Wii Fit. That's how cheap we've become.

5 MARIO KART (Wii)

Oh bum, that whole last paragraph was just another joke. And we got you. You probably couldn't even tell because it wasn't funny. We're that crazy! Here are a few things to remember before we go. Don't take laxatives and sleeping pills at the same time – it leads to bad things. Never use Birdo in Mario Kart, it makes you look like an armpit-sniffing chump. Don't play leapfrog with unicorns. This is Charts signing off.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Wii Sports Resort	N/A	Wii	7.5	07-09
2	NCAA Football 10	N/A	360	8.5	07-09
3	NCAA Football 10	N/A	PS3	9.5	07-09
4	Wii Fit	5	Wii	8	04-08
5	Mario Kart Wii	8	Wii	8.5	04-08
6	Mario Kart DS	18	DS	8.5	11-05
7	Pokémon Platinum	14	DS	8.5	03-09
8	Fight Night Round 4	6	360	9	06-09
9	New Super Mario Bros.	20	DS	9.25	05-06
10	EA Sports Active Bundle	3	Wii	N/A	05-09
11	Wii Play	16	Wii	7	02-07
12	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	4	Wii	8.5	06-09
13	Fight Night Round 4	7	PS3	9	06-09
14	UFC 2009: Undisputed	2	360	8	05-09
15	Punch-Out!!	15	Wii	9	05-09
16	Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen – Autobots	N/A	DS	N/A	06-09
17	Prototype	1	360	7.25	06-09
18	Major League Baseball 2K9	N/A	360	7.25	03-09
19	The Legend of Starfy	N/A	DS	7	06-09
20	NCAA Football 10	N/A	PS2	N/A	07-09

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld ®/TRSTS ®

TOP 10 JAPAN

| Rank	Title	System
1	SD Gundam G Generation Wars	PS2
2	Monster Hunter Tri	Wii
3	Dragon Quest IX	DS
4	Tales of Vs.	PSP
5	Tomodachi Connection	DS
6	Wii Sports Resort	Wii
7	Kamen Rider: Climax Heroes	PS2
8	SD Gundam G Generation Wars	Wii
9	Color Changing Tingle's Love Balloon Trip	DS
10	J-League Winning Eleven 2009: Club Championship	PS2

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	NHL 10	N/A	multi
2	Guitar Hero 5	N/A	multi
3	Dirt 2	N/A	multi
4	Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story	N/A	DS
5	Batman: Arkham Asylum	1	multi
6	The Beatles: Rock Band	2	multi
7	Metroid Prime Trilogy	N/A	Wii
8	Madden NFL 10	3	multi
9	Shadow Complex	4	360
10	Cave Story	N/A	Wii
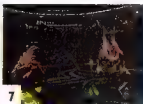
The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	The Sims 3	1	$49
2	Nancy Drew: Ransom of the Seven Ships	N/A	$20
3	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	4	$37
4	The Sims 2: Double Deluxe	3	$20
5	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	5	$37
6	Spore	8	$40
7	Spore: Galactic Adventures	6	$30
8	World of Warcraft	7	$20
9	Starcraft: Battle Chest	10	$20
10	World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	N/A	$29
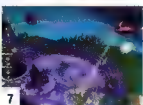
Based On Monthly Units Sold

PLAYSTATION 3

Title	Score	Date
50 Cent: Blood on the Sand	8	Apr-09
Afro Samurai	7.75	Mar-09
Batman: Arkham Asylum	9.5	Oct-09
Battlefield 1943	8.5	Aug-09
Beatles: Rock Band, The	8.75	Oct-09
Bigs 2, The	7	Aug-09
Bionic Commando	6.25	Jun-09
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	7.75	Jul-09
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood	8	Aug-09
Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, The	9.5	May-09
Damnation	3	Aug-09
Dynasty Warriors 6 Empires	6.25	Oct-09
Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard	7	Apr-09
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
Fight Night Round 4	9	Aug-09

8.75

The Beatles: Rock Band – PlayStation 3 - Oct-09

Title	Score	Date
Fuel	7.75	Jul-09
G-Force	7.75	Oct-09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra	3.5	Oct-09
Ghostbusters	8	Jul-09
Godfather II, The	5.5	May-09
Guitar Hero Smash Hits	8	Aug-09
Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
H.A.W.X.	8.75	Apr-09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	7	Oct-09
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	6.5	Oct-09
Infamous	9	Jun-09
Killzone 2	8.75	Mar-09
King of Fighters XII, The	7	Oct-09
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-09
Madden NFL 10	8.75	Oct-09
Major League Baseba	2K9	7.25	Apr-09
MLB 09: The Show	9	Apr-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
NCAA Football 10	8.5	Aug-09
Overlord II	6.5	Aug-09
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Prototype	7.25	Aug-09
Red Faction: Guerrilla	9	Jul-09
Resident Evil 5	9.5	Apr-09
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	7.75	Jun-09
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection	8	Apr-09
Stormrise	4	May-09
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Terminator Salvation	5.5	Jul-09
Tiger Woods PGA Tour10	8.5	Jul-09
Tomb Raider: Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	6.25	Oct-09
UFC 2009 Undisputed	8	Jun-09
Virtua Tennis 2009	7	Oct-09
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	6.25	Apr-09
Watchmen: The End is Nigh	5.5	Oct-09
Wheelman	8.5	May-09
WWE Legends of WrestleMania	8.5	Apr-09
X-Blades	5.5	Apr-09
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	8	Jun-09

XBOX 360

Title	Score	Date
50 Cent: Blood on the Sand	8	Apr-09
Afro Samurai	7.75	Mar-09
Batman: Arkham Asylum	9.5	Oct-09
Battlefield 1943	8.5	Aug-09
Battlestations Pacific	6	Jul-09
Beatles: Rock Band, The	8.75	Oct-09
Bigs 2, The	7	Aug-09
Bionic Commando	6.25	Jun-09
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	7.75	Jul-09
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood	8	Aug-09
Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, The	9.5	May-09
Damnation	3	Aug-09
Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon	4.5	Feb-09
Dynasty Warriors 6 Empires	6.25	Oct-09
Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard	7	Apr-09
FEAR 2: Project Origin	8.25	Mar-09
Fight Night Round 4	9	Aug-09
Fuel	7.75	Jul-09
G-Force	7.75	Oct-09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra	3.5	Oct-09

Title	Score	Date
Ghostbusters	8	Jul-09
Godfather II, The	5.5	May-09
Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and Damned	9	Apr-09
Guitar Hero Smash Hits	8	Aug-09
Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
H.A.W.X.	8.75	Apr-09
Halo Wars	9	Mar-09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	7	Oct-09
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	6.5	Oct-09
King of Fighters XII, The	7	Oct-09
Left 4 Dead	9.25	Jan-09
Lord of the Rings: Conquest, The	4.75	Mar-09
Madden NFL 10	8.75	Oct-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Naruto: The Broken Bond	8.25	Jan-09
NCAA Football 10	8.5	Aug-09
Ninja Blade	7.5	Jun-09
Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad	6	Apr-09
Overlord II	6.5	Aug-09
Prince of Persia	8.75	Jan-09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	8.5	Jan-09
Prototype	7.25	Aug-09
Race Pro	7	Mar-09
Red Faction: Guerrilla	9	Jul-09
Resident Evil 5	9.5	Apr-09
Rise of the Argonauts	6	Feb-09
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	7.75	Jun-09
Scene It? Box Office Smash	8.5	Jan-09
Skate 2	9	Feb-09
Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection	8	Apr-09
Star Ocean: The Last Hope	7	Mar-09
Stoked	7.5	Mar-09
Stormrise	4	May-09
Street Fighter IV	9.25	Mar-09
Terminator Salvation	5.5	Jul-09

8.75

Madden NFL 10 – Xbox 360 - Oct-09

Title	Score	Date
Tiger Woods PGA Tour10	8.5	Jul-09
Tomb Raider: Underworld	8.75	Jan-09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	6.25	Oct-09
UFC 2009 Undisputed	8	Jun-09
Virtua Tennis 2009	5.25	Jul-09
Vevet Assassin	7	Oct-09
Wanted: Weapons of Fate	6.25	Apr-09
Watchmen: The End is Nigh	5.5	Oct-09
Wheelman	8.5	May-09
WWE Legends of WrestleMania	8.5	Apr-09
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	8	Jun-09

Wii

Title	Score	Date
Bigs 2, The	7	Aug-09
Boom Blox Bash Party	8.75	Jun-09
Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars – Director's Cut	7	Jun-09
Conduit, The	7	Aug-09
Deadly Creatures	7	Mar-09
Excitebots: Trick Racing	8.5	Jun-09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	7.75	Apr-09
G-Force	7.75	Oct-09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra	3.5	Oct-09
Ghostbusters	6.5	Jul-09
Grand Slam Tennis	7	Jul-09
Guitar Hero Smash Hits	8	Aug-09
Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	7	Oct-09
House of the Dead: Overkill, The	8.5	Apr-09
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	6.5	Oct-09
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	5	Jul-09
Klonoa	7	Jun-09
Let's Tap	5.5	Jul-09
Little King's Story	8	Jul-09
Madden NFL 10	6	Oct-09
Madworld	9	Apr-09
Major League Baseball 2K9	7.25	Apr-09
Major Minor's Majestic March	3	May-09
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	8	Mar-09
MySims Party	6	Apr-09
NASCAR Kart Racing	6.75	Apr-09
New Play Control! Mario Power Tennis	8.25	Apr-09
New Play Control! Pikmin	8	May-09
Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad	6	Apr-09
Overlord: Dark Legend	7.5	Aug-09

7.5

Wii Sports Resort – Wii - Oct-09

Title	Score	Date
Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity	6.75	Jul-09
Punch-Out!!	9	Jun-09
Ready 2 Rumble Revolution	1	Apr-09
Rune Factory: Frontier	6.75	Apr-09
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	5.5	Feb-09
Sonic and the Black Knight	5	May-09
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	6.5	Apr-09
Tiger Woods PGA Tour10	8.5	Jul-09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	5	Oct-09
Virtua Tennis 2009	7	Oct-09
We Ski & Snowboard	6.75	May-09
Wii Sports Resort	7.5	Oct-09

PLAYSTATION 2

Title	Score	Date
Guitar Hero Smash Hits	8	Aug-09
Guitar Hero: Metallica	8.75	May-09

PC

Title	Score	Date
BattleForge	6	May-09
Battlestations Pacific	6	Jul-09
Call of Duty: World at War	8.75	Jan-09
Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood	8	Aug-09
Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena, The	9.5	May-09
Codename: Panzers - Cold War	6	May-09
Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor	7.5	May-09
Cryostasis	8	Jul-09
Damnation	3	Aug-09
Demigod	8	Jun-09
Drakensang: The Dark Eye	6.75	Mar-09
East India Company	6.5	Oct-09
Empire: Total War	9.5	May-09
Godfather II, The	5.5	May-09
MLB Front Office Manager	3	Feb-09
Sims 3, The	9	Jul-09
Vevet Assassin	5.25	Jul-09
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II	8.75	Mar-09

NINTENDO DS

Title	Score	Date
Age of Empires: Mythologies	8.25	Feb-09
Avalon Code	7	Apr-09
Big Bang Mini	7.75	Feb-09
Blue Dragon Plus	5.5	Mar-09
Chase: Fate Meets Felicity, The	6	Feb-09
Dark Spire, The	7	May-09
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	7.5	Mar-09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	7.75	Apr-09
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon	7.75	Apr-09
Flower, Sun, and Rain	5.5	Jul-09
Gardening Mama	6.5	May-09
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	9.25	May-09
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	7	Apr-09
Iron Chef America: Supreme Cuisine	4.5	Feb-09
Knights in the Nightmare	7	Jun-09
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	5	Mar-09
Legend of Starfy, The	7	Aug-09
LEGO Battles	7.5	Jul-09
My Pet Shop	5	May-09
My World, My Way	6	Mar-09
Peggle: Dual Shot	8.25	May-09
Pokémon Platinum	8.5	Apr-09
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	6	Feb-09
Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity	5.5	Jul-09
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	8.25	Apr-09
Retro Game Challenge	8.5	Feb-09
Rhythm Heaven	7.5	May-09
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor	8	Jul-09
Tokyo Beat Down	7	May-09
TrackMania DS	6.5	Mar-09
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume	6	Apr-09

PSP

Title	Score	Date
Dissidia: Final Fantasy	6.5	Oct-09
LocoRoco 2	9.25	Mar-09
Pangya: Fantasy Golf	7	Oct-09
Patapon 2	7	Jun-09
Prinny: Can I Really Be The Hero?	8	Apr-09
Resistance: Retribution	8.75	May-09
Rock Band Unplugged	8	Jul-09
Star Ocean: Second Evolution	7	Feb-0

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Mastering the Mad House

By Ashraf Mohammad, QA supervisor at Rocksteady Studios

GENERAL TIPS

Action Camera: The action camera shows Batman executing certain moves in a cool view. For example, if you hold the RT button while glide kicking a thug from a vantage point, the camera changes to show Batman swooping down from the thug's perspective. You can also use the action camera with certain gadgets, for example, pressing RB instead of RT to fire the Batarang makes the camera follow it, which is great for Batarang-to-face close up shots.

The Riddler Map: The Riddler has left maps around Arkham that give you the location of all the secrets. If you fancy some treasure hunting, keep an eye out for the maps. These are useful when trying to unlock all the challenge maps, as most of them are unlocked after you have collected certain Riddler secrets.

The Riddler Secrets: Collecting The Riddler secrets replenishes some health and gives you tons of experience for upgrades. When playing the game on hard difficulty, it is best advised to spend some extra time getting upgrades, as these will help you immensely.

Gadgets: Batman obtains a variety of gadgets during the game, but some can only be obtained via the upgrade system. To fully appreciate the depth of the game and the character, players should make good use of all the gadgets and not get into a habit of using certain ones, especially if you really want to have fun in the Invisible Predator rooms.

Upgrade System: The upgrade system can be categorized into three different areas of focus: combat, armor, and gadgets. Naturally players that love combat would go for the combat upgrades, however the upgrades don't just enhance your gameplay and give you cool new skills, they really help you out. For instance, if you are playing on hard difficulty, enemies do more damage, so the armor upgrades

are a natural choice. Sometimes you have to fight hordes of enemies, and if you find them too much to handle, the Combat Takedown upgrade lets you take out thugs in one move once you've built up the required combo.

INVISIBLE PREDATOR ROOMS

It is possible to complete every Invisible Predator room without being seen, but you must learn a few essential tips.

Enemy Patterns: First, when you enter an Invisible Predator room, find yourself a vantage point and observe the enemies. Study their patterns, patrol routes, etc. This helps you find weaknesses in their initial patterns so you can plan an attack.

Invisible Predator Level: The second important thing to know is the layout of the room. As you progress through the game, enemies become more aware when one of them is missing. When this happens they will detach from their initial patterns and start looking for Batman, making it harder to take them out as their movements become random. It's also useful to plan escape routes.

Traps: Making good use of Batman's gadgets and the environment to set up traps can help you complete a room in a short amount of time. Keep an eye out for things like weak walls that you can blow up onto thugs using your explosive gel.

COMBAT

Find A Rhythm: Try to keep your combo going. The higher you build your combo the more powerful your moves get. This will help you take out thugs in a shorter amount of time. You can also make use of combo upgrades, like combat throws, when you build up your combo.

Timing: It is important to have good timing in combat. Knowing the right time to counter, stun, and evade can save you from getting hurt badly, especially when there are a lot of bad guys. In hard mode

enemies are faster and stronger, and you won't be notified when one of them is going to hit you, so you must rely on skill and timing to survive.

Gadgets: Batman can use some of his gadgets as part of the combo and they can be very useful. For example, once you have unlocked the Combo Batarang upgrade, you can use the Batarang to knock an enemy down, giving you more time to take out other guys. This is really useful if an enemy in the distance is prepping a gun to shoot you.

FUN STUFF

Batclaw: You can pull the unsuspecting enemy over railings with the Batclaw. This is a very effective way to take people out and can lead to hours of fun. You can even drag them off ladders.

Steerable Batarang: Once unlocked, you can use the Steerable Batarang to take out multiple enemies.

Ladder Bomb: Spray explosive gel on the landing at the top of a ladder, wait for a thug to climb up, detonate the gel and watch him fly. Once you have unlocked the Auto Proximity Detonation upgrade, you won't even have to detonate the explosive, which is very useful.

Lure Traps: Take out a thug in front of a weak wall. Set some explosive gel on the wall, and make sure it blows over the downed thug. Some thugs should come to investigate their downed ally, and when they do, detonate the gel. The debris from the wall will take them all out.

Combat Throw: Once unlocked, you can throw one thug onto another and knock them down, or throw the thug onto tables or over railings.

Strung Up Thugs: With the Inverted Takedown attack unlocked, you can string up thugs onto vantage points. If other thugs come to investigate, you can cut the thug down onto them and knock them out.

1. The Early Origin Years

Warren Spector studied film in college, but ended up spending much of the '80s in tabletop RPGs. By 1990, the constraints of those rulesets helped drive Spector to a new career. The video game world almost lost one of its greatest stars when Spector briefly considered taking a job with Disney as an "imagineer", helping to craft rides for their theme parks. However, the job offer at Origin Games came in first, and Spector joined the company beside such industry luminaries as Richard Garriot (Ultima) and Chris Roberts (Wing Commander).
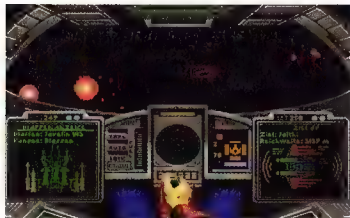
2. Through the Looking Glass

While still tied to work at Origin, Spector also participated in projects with legendary, now defunct Looking Glass Studios. There, he worked with Doug Church during the creation of System Shock and spent time producing Thief: The Dark Project, one of the original stealth games, among other titles.

"I've been making video games for 20 years now. I've spent that entire time trying to break down that barrier and get back to that freedom and joy of players actually controlling the story in a tabletop, face-to-face game."
— On tabletop RPGs and video games

"With Wing Commander it was one of those things where the clarity and power of Chris' vision was so overwhelming. You could see what he wanted it to be and what it could be. I had all that film background. I knew I could help make those cinematics better. It kind of exercised a different part of who I am."
— On Chris Roberts and Wing Commander

"In computer games I just saw the opportunity to tell stories in a brand new way. All of the tools and techniques that you learn as a film production guy or as a film critic, they sort of translate over to this new medium pretty well. At least I thought they did. At the end of the day as a paper game guy and a movie guy, I think I had to unlearn more than I actually brought to electronic games, but I'm still telling stories 30 years later."
— On his move into video games

"In terms of learning, influence, and professional growth, working with Richard Garriott on Ultima 6 was incredible. I spent two weeks at Richard's house planning out Ultima 6 and that was a master's degree. It was unbelievable. I learned so much from him in those two weeks it was scary."
— On Richard Garriot and Ultima

"The big leap for System Shock was the realization that we don't need all of that behind-the-scenes, die-rolling-traditional-RPG-stats stuff. It's you in this world. Nothing reminded you it was a game. That was at the time a revolutionary idea, and still is now – that it's you, not some goofy little puppet that you're driving around."
— On System Shock

"We worked together on Underworld, Underworld 2, System Shock, and Thief. Good lord, the guy is the unsung hero of video games and needs to get more credit than he does. Anyway, my job was to work with him to make sure we were making the game that we should be making, to make sure that creatively it was on the right track, to help him out with creative input when he needed it, to make sure that the game was being executed at the highest level."
— On Doug Church and Looking Glass Studios

Unlimited enabled

Warren Spector's projects over the years span some of the most critically acclaimed franchises in gaming history. The breadth of genres and styles in which he has worked demonstrate a remarkable facility for adapting new ideas. Next month, Game Informer will showcase the newest sprawling game from Warren Spector – the first from his new studio, Junction Point. Before that happens, get the story of Spector's video game career from the man who lived it.

In His Own Words:
A Profile of Game Creator Warren Spector

"You know, it sounds like such a good idea to let the inmates run the insane asylums, and it really isn't. You really do need adult supervision to do something like this. Ion had no adult supervision. There were incredibly talented people. John Romero, his heart is so in the right place and he loves games so much, but running a company may not be playing to his strengths. Tom Hall, same thing. None of us should have been running companies at that point in our lives, I guess. That was the big problem. We all felt like we were talented, creative guys with big ideas, and if the big bad publishers would just get out of the way we can do amazing things. It just doesn't work out that way. Real creativity happens within constraints, not without constraints."

– On Ion Storm

"Deus Ex is still the [career] highpoint for me, personally. One of the things about making games, at least for me, is you start out with a vision of what something can be and you close your eyes and you imagine this thing. A couple of years later, you open your eyes and the thing you created could be wonderful, but it's not like the thing you imagined originally. Deus Ex is the one and only time I ever opened my eyes after three years and said 'holy cow, this is what I imagined.'"
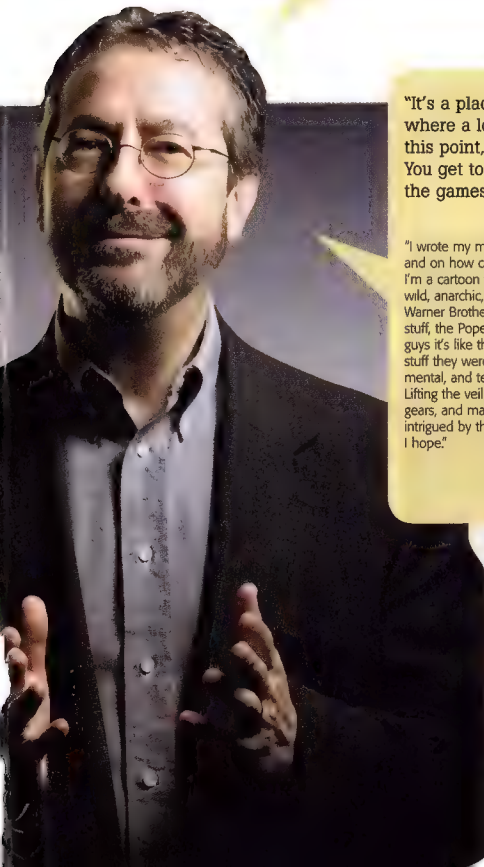
– On his favorite project

3. The Great Experiment

By 1997, Spector joined a cadre of game industry heavyweights, including Doom creator John Romero, at Ion Storm. By the time Spector joined the burgeoning community of developers, a Dallas office was already up and running. Spector founded an Austin branch, which turned out to have great success, particularly through its release of the groundbreaking Deus Ex.

"I think the big innovation of Deus Ex was it was the first game where play style mattered. Other games had offered some branch points and some choices, but I believe – whether it's true or not – I believe we were the first game to offer choice with consequence. The choices really mattered. If you went and killed everything that moves in the game, you had a different experience than the player that killed nobody."

– On the innovation of Deus Ex

"It's a place where a bunch of genres come together, and Junction Point is a place where a lot of things can come together and you can go anywhere. You can come to this point, this Junction Point, and decide 'do I want to go left, right, up, or down?' You get to decide the path you take. That expresses what I think is important about the games we're going to make here."

– On the name Junction Point

"I wrote my master's thesis on Warner Brothers cartoons and on how cartoon characters develop over time, so I'm a cartoon fanatic and always have been. There's this wild, anarchic, experimental spirit in classic cartoons. The Warner Brothers stuff, the early Disney stuff, the Fleischer stuff, the Popeye cartoons, the Betty Boops, all of those guys it's like they were smoking crack or something. The stuff they were doing was crazy, and modern, and experimental, and telling audiences all about how movies work. Lifting the veil and exposing all the sprocket holes, and gears, and magic behind how a movie works. I was really intrigued by that. I've always loved cartoons. I always will, I hope."

– On cartoons, while hinting at his future project

"This is so freaky, but there have been a couple of people that have written master theses about the games I've worked on. There was one I read, and it pointed out that three things have appeared in all of my games. There's always a basketball court; that one is on purpose, by the way. The second thing is there is always an altered state of reality. The last thing that this academic pointed out to me was that every game I've worked on has in some way been about a family relationship. It doesn't necessarily mean a literal nuclear family, but it's always about the close bonds that we form with each other and how they break up. Maybe I've just been in an extended therapy session for the last 26 years."

– On the ties that bind his games together

4. A Junction Point

Warren Spector left Ion Storm in 2004 to found his own development house, which he called Junction Point Studios, after a never-released MMO he had worked on years earlier. The studio was purchased in 2007 by Disney Interactive. Rumors of his next big project have circulated for years. His longtime interest in film, storytelling, and classic cartoons offers a major hint of what's to come.

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The projected release dates for upcoming games have been jumping around more than a spilled bucket of crickets. Name a blockbuster that was due near the end of 2009, and it's highly likely to have been delayed to sometime next year. One can't help but wonder what it must be like to be a developer navigating the chaotic calendar year. Is your game delayed due to mismanagement or marketing? Add up your score to see how your game would fare amidst the postponement pandemic.

1 What video game genre is not represented in recent DS title Retro Game Challenge?

- **A.** RPG
- **B.** Platformer
- **C.** Driving
- **D.** Sports

2 In which game did Mario's classic man-child nemesis Wario make his first appearance?

- **A.** Wario's Woods
- **B.** Wario Land
- **C.** Super Mario Land II: Six Golden Coins
- **D.** Mario is Missing
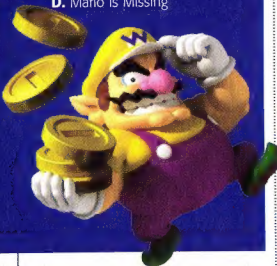
3 In which Final Fantasy is the recurring character Cid an enemy?

- **A.** IV
- **B.** VIII
- **C.** XII
- **D.** IX

4 Tom Brady has won three Super Bowls, two Super Bowl MVP awards, and numerous sportsman of the year awards, so it makes sense that he's been on the cover of:

- **A.** All-Pro Football
- **B.** NCAA Football
- **C.** Backyard Football
- **D.** Madden

5 How many total carrots can Link feed to Epona before running out in Ocarina of Time?

- **A.** 8
- **B.** 7
- **C.** 6
- **D.** You fool, they regenerate!

6 In the Earthworm Jim level "What the Heck," what music plays in the background?

- **A.** Mussorgsky's "A Night on Bald Mountain"
- **B.** Elevator music
- **C.** Tortured screams
- **D.** All of the above

7 In the classic N64 platformer Banjo Kazooie, which of the following is not something you morph into?

- **A.** Pogo Stick
- **B.** Crocodile
- **C.** Pumpkin
- **D.** Washing Machine

8 Which of the following censorship edits were not made to the Super Nintendo version of Wolfenstein 3D?

- **A.** German Shepards become mutant rats
- **B.** Swastikas are removed entirely
- **C.** Hitler loses his mustache
- **D.** Guards speak English

9 For which PlayStation game did The Police's drummer, Steward Copeland, compose the soundtrack?

- **A.** Apocalypse
- **B.** Spyro the Dragon
- **C.** Tomba
- **D.** Twisted Metal 2
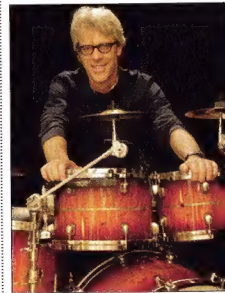
10 In Mario 64, how many of those pesky red coins did you have to find in each stage to get a star?

- **A.** 7
- **B.** 8
- **C.** 50
- **D.** 100

BREAKDOWN

1 Euro is how much Midway's UK and France offices cost managing director Martin Spiess to purchase. Europe has crazy value menu deals.

400 MS Points ($5) is the new max price for XBL Indie Games – half of what it used to be. Seeing as how every other title is a "massage" game, it's probably a good decision.

3,166,880 is the number of possible weapons randomly assembled in Borderlands. Where's that gun rack when we need it?

21% is how much more video gaming is going on this summer compared to last, according to The Nielson Company. Being outdoors is entirely overrated.

2 sizes too small is how tiny our hearts are, because we won't shell out Microsoft Points to clothe our avatars.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1 When your team can manage to get your game up and running, it's an abysmal mess. At this rate your new release date will coincide with the Rapture. Even worse? No one even noticed – or cared – when you announced your delay.

2-3 You're looking at a significant delay for the worst reason: there's nothing particularly wrong with your game, it's just not fun. Time to hire some fresh talent and approach your dream game from a different direction.

4-5 The single player aspect of your game is great and ready to go, but the execs just told you they want you to shoehorn in a multiplayer mode, because teh kids these days love their Haloz. Your release date has been blasted into next year.

6-7 There's a reason cockroaches will inherit the earth – some bugs just won't die. You need a few more months to get all the kinks worked out, but you remind yourself that your fickle fans are only mad because of how much they're looking forward to your game.

8-9 Just a little more polish and you're ready. Instead of late summer, you're going with early fall, and your fans are more than willing to wait.

10 What do ya know? You're all done and right on time. Seeing as how everyone else is delayed, the spotlight is all yours. Good job.

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. D 2. C D 3. C 4. C 5. C & D 6. D 7. A 8. D 9. B 10. B

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FOR YOU.

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IT ENDS WITH YOU. VOLUNTEER FOR SERVICE AND FIGHT SIDE-BY-SIDE
WITH THE FIERCEST WARRIORS THE HUMAN RACE HAS EVER KNOWN:
THE ODST. JUMP INTO HELL—FEET FIRST. AND WHEN THE COVENANT
LOOK TO THE HEAVENS AND SEE OUR JUDGMENT RAINING DOWN, THEY
WILL UNDERSTAND THAT HUMANITY'S LAST BREATH IS NOT SO EASILY
EXTINGUISHED—AND THEY WILL KNOW FEAR.

PREPARE TO DROP

HALO 3
ODST
ORBITAL DROP SHOCK TROOPER

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood
Language
Violence

XBOX
LIVE

Microsoft
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