



E3 HOT 50

FEATURING MORTAL KOMBAT, TWISTED METAL, & ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

NINTENDO 3DS

HANDS-ON IMPRESSIONS



gameinformer



DRAGON AGE 2
A NEW CHAMPION RISES IN THE
BREATH-TAKING SEQUEL TO BIOWARE'S
AWARD-WINNING RPG

boringness forever...”

—G4

Shaun White

SKATEBOARDING

“It needs to be seen to be believed...”

— GamePro

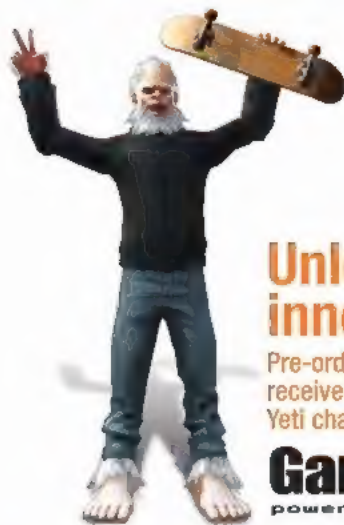
“Brings a new angle to the genre...”

— MTV

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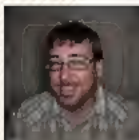
What exactly is your Inner Driver waiting for? We're thinking something with the superb handling of a sport-tuned suspension. Maybe the fuel-sipping economy of 35 MPG; a more spacious cabin than the Toyota Yaris 5-Door and a responsive 1.5L engine. And probably a lot of that other stuff. What's it called again? Oh yeah. Pure exhilaration. In other words, the all-new 2011 MAZDA2. It's Zoom-Zoom. Concentrated. Starting at \$13,980.*

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Pre-rendered CG, Your Day Has Come



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

Read my column or comment on this letter at gameinformer.com/mag or follow @GI_AndyMc

I don't remember the first time I saw a pre-rendered computer-generated movie in a video game, but I was floored. The promise of where video game graphics would one day be astounded me. That dream led to the oft-repeated battle cry of "Toy Story graphics" in reference to the — at the time — jaw-dropping graphics of Pixar's first computer-generated hit. One day, everyone said, interactive entertainment would look just like Toy Story.

For the last 15 years, games and pop culture have chased that watermark. I'm not here to say that video games have surpassed that mark, though I think we get closer and closer every day. At the same time, the mark continues to move away as pre-rendered graphics get closer to reality. My point is entirely different. I think grandiose, pre-rendered cutscenes have gone from enhancing games to interfering with the medium.

I love a great pre-rendered trailer or movie like the rest of the world, but their place in the game itself — outside of an opening movie before you hit start — is finished.

When you defeat the Lich King in World of Warcraft, you are "rewarded" with a giant pre-rendered movie. While it's impressive to look at, it isn't nearly as engaging as the script that plays out in the game engine. The difference is that one is part of the suspension of disbelief, and the other is so far from the source material it doesn't even look like the same game. The imagery is so highly detailed it could be a different world entirely.

These movies may be cool to watch, but I don't believe they serve the narrative of the stories, and can often ruin an otherwise fantastic looking game. After I watched the pre-rendered movies for Final Fantasy XIV, I was hyped to see the game, only to be disappointed to see that the world really doesn't look a thing like the CG movies. The game looks fine on its own, but can't hold a candle to the CG. Final Fantasy VII anyone?

Developers and publishers should spend less time making flashy pre-rendered movies for their games, and spend more time, money, and effort ensuring that their worlds are one cohesive piece. At the end of the day, gamers don't care about your expensive pre-rendered movies. We care about the story and the gameplay that make the worlds you create the places we want to spend our time.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

Editor interviews and Q&As are now available at gameinformer.com/mag

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Dragon Age II

The Grey Wardens aren't the only heroes to step up in Thedas' darkest hours. BioWare's Dragon Age franchise is establishing its own identity by showing a different perspective on the epic fantasy setting through a new champion's eyes.

by Joe Juba

Feedback

We're here for you, the readers, to assure you that it's okay to like Pokémon. We won't judge you

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Our wall-to-wall E3 2010 coverage begins with reports on the three console makers' press conferences, an in-depth six-page look at Nintendo's 3DS, and much more

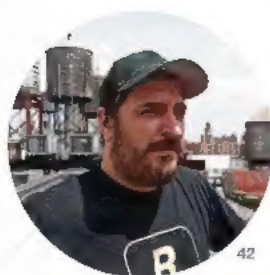
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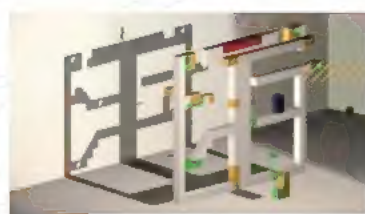
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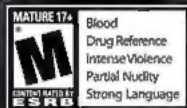


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T

his month in Feedback we contemplate the future of Bungie, defend Pokémon, complain about content that doesn't come on the disc, and hope that Ubisoft doesn't take our manuals away.

Pokéshame

I am a middle school student, and I have realized over the past few years that people who enjoy playing games that are meant for – but not limited to – younger gamers are tormented for their choice of game. My experience with this is the Pokémon games. I think that they have a great leveling up system and strategic battles, which I thoroughly enjoy. The problem is, these games are targeted towards a younger audience. This leads to me (and not just me – some of my friends, too) being ridiculed for liking Pokémon. I was wondering what your opinion is on this matter. Are we Pokémon gamers doomed to being stereotyped as nerds for the rest of our school years?

Matt Bernsdorf
Via email

The main entries in the Pokémon series are fun and well-made RPGs, and there is no shame in enjoying them. That being said, you may want to expand your horizons. The simplistic systems in Pokémon can be the perfect lighthearted break in your busy gaming schedule, but they don't offer much depth or complexity. Now that you're acquainted with the basic concepts of an RPG, maybe you should check out other DS games in the genre, like *Dragon Quest IX* or *The World Ends With You*.



Question of the Month

If you could pick one game to make the case for video games as an art form, what game would you pick?

Email your response to feedback@gameinformer.com

Contact Us

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Today's Most
Cool Item

Save Our Manuals

I clenched my teeth reading Andy's thoughts on Ubisoft eliminating paper manuals in issue 206. I've always considered my penchant for manuals a bit old-fashioned, but they are an essential part of my game-playing ritual. Before completely going over my heart and soul to a game, I sit down - with the TV and computer off - don my reading glasses, and crack open the manual (however scant it might be) to orient myself and allow the anticipation to build. I can't believe I am alone in this ritual, either. It's an essential part of the fun!

W. Keith Duffy
Schuylkill Haven, PA

Andy's defense of the video game manual was awesome. I'm all for helping the environment, but getting rid of game manuals is just not worth it. Why not just make game manuals out of more environmentally responsible materials, like recycled paper? Besides, it's not like people are taking their game manuals when they're done with the game and burning them in a giant bonfire with a dumpster full of plastic, oil, and endangered animals inside a wildlife reserve. As long as my manual is being used, how can it be considered wasteful? If you want to help the environment, Ubisoft, there are better places to start.

Kal Rogers

Manuals are important to many gamers, but not necessarily because of the information inside. In-game tutorials are so prevalent that you may never need to open the instruction booklet, but these letters (and many more like them) illustrate that manuals are still a valued part of the video game package. Some gamers have rituals tied to them, and others feel like a game without its manual is incomplete - a gap in their collection. Whatever the reason, gamers love their manuals, and taking away something people appreciate is not a good way to keep customers. How about this, Ubisoft: You can take away that useless page labeled "notes" at the back of every instruction book, but please leave us the rest.

Answer of the Month



Last Month's Question:
Who would win in a fight, Master Chief or Samus?

Samus: 52%
Master Chief: 46%
Tie: 2%

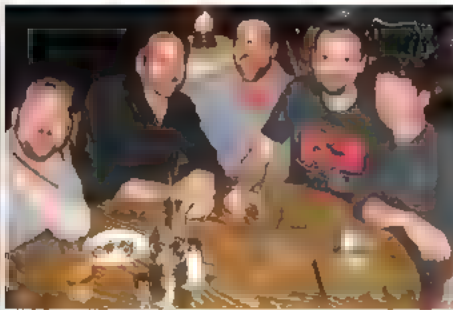
Breakdowns

- 1 of Andy's alternate ideas for the cover text was "Now Even Dragon Ageier"
- 94 percent of the answers to the Master Chief versus Samus question took the whole thing way too seriously
- 6 emails beginning with "Howdy" were sent to GI this month. They were all from readers in Texas.
- 90 percent of Bryan's comments while playing LEGO Harry Potter were entertaining

Most Corrected Mistake



Last issue, the review for Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands (for 360 and PS3) incorrectly spelled the name "Malak" as "Malak." A surprising number of readers noticed. We'll just hide behind the classic "We wish every game was Knights of the Old Republic" excuse.



(Left) Dan and Annetta meet the Original Gangster, Mr. Tracy Marrow (that's the ice T to you mark ass busta). (Right) Power Plays: Nike's Hayden Walling, Irabornal's Ken Levine, Joe Reiner, and Bethesda's Todd Howard partying in Los Angeles.



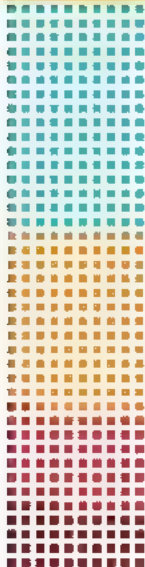
Halo: Reaching

I am a huge fan of the Halo franchise. I'm anxiously awaiting Halo. Reach like most of the gaming world, but I heard a rumor that Bungie is running out of ideas for new Halo games. Is this true, or can I continue to know that my favorite series is still on a roll?

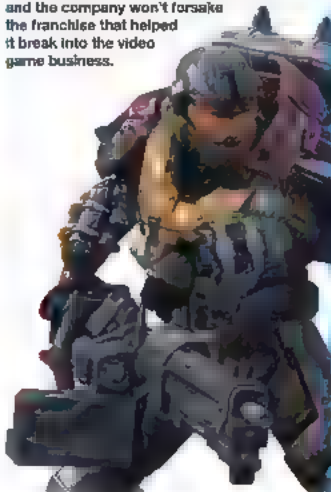
Justin Breedlove
Victorville, CA

The concept of a studio like Bungie "running out of ideas" is ridiculous. The rumor you heard is almost certainly false, but Halo might still be facing some changes. Don't worry - Halo isn't dying. It's one of the juggernaut franchises of the gaming industry, and it will keep going as long as each installment continues to sell millions of copies. However, Bungie's involvement in continuing the series is still uncertain. The developer's recent publishing deal with Activision proves that Bungie is eager to branch out and work on non-Halo projects. Even if Bungie isn't at the helm, you can bet that the adventures of Master Chief will continue. Microsoft owns the Halo brand, and the company won't forsake the franchise that helped it break into the video game business.

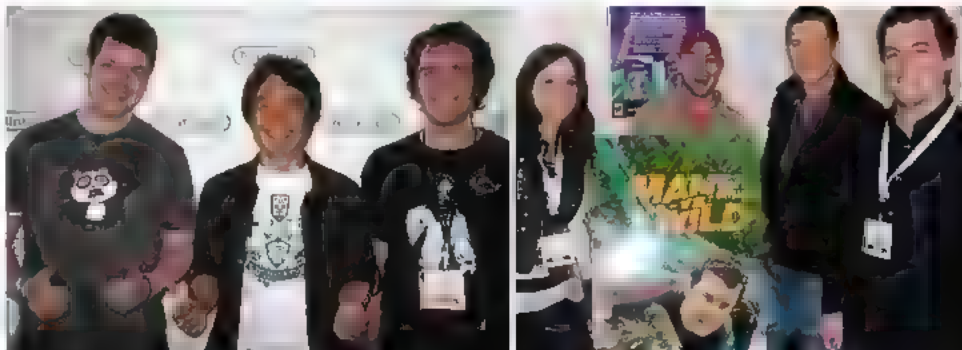
On Your Mind



- E3 2010 **46%**
- Next-Gen Realization **32%**
- Are games on? **17%**
- 3D Gaming (hub) **14%**
- 3D Gaming excitement **0%**

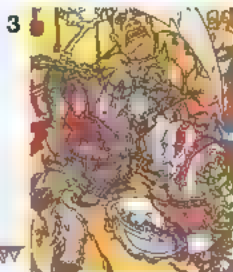
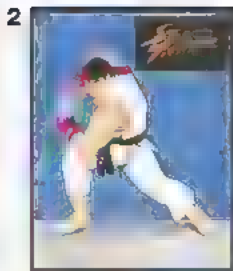


(Left) Dan and Ben hang out with Shigen Miyamoto, a man who has never been photographed without a smile (Right) Meagan Deibert Shoopman and Bryan Tang with Man vs Wild star Beau Grylls. After this picture was taken, they ate a raw muskrat





WINNER 1 Stephen G. Queja Koopa Troopa tries to convince Mario to ditch the kidnapping-prone Peach for Rosalina. **2 John Lueros** Ryu struggles to get his hoodie on past 'Dan Hibiki' size after a late night on the town. **3 Harry Vargas** Dante and Kratos duel to the death on the gigantic hand of 'Lost's John Locke'. **4 James Ambrosius** Claptrap quickly learned that Skag Gully isn't the best place for his dance parties. **5 Andrew Johnson** A collection of legendary gaming protagonists. And then there's Zitz from Battletoads.



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

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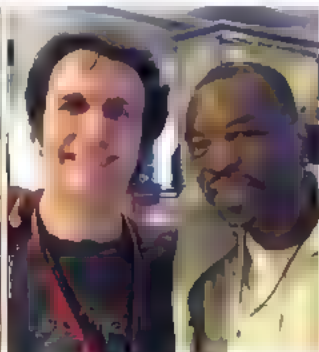
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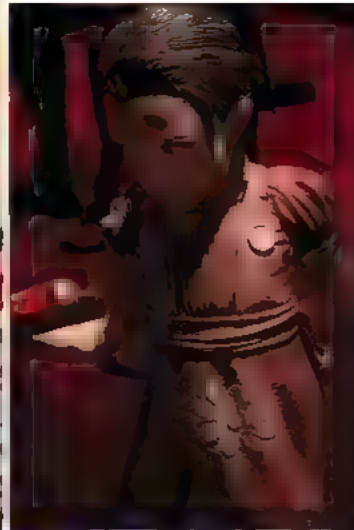
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(Left) "So... if we have one hand control, Sha and one hand control the swinging monkeys." Stephen Spielberg contemplates using the PlayStation Move for the video game adaptation of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Center) "Levar Burton is always giving back to the community. The Reading Rainbow star was recently at E3, helping troubled adults learn to read (it didn't work with Dan, sadly). (Right) Robert Waddell (pictured here with GI's Nick Ahrens) won a custom Chris Forsberg NOS Nissan 370Z after posting the fastest time in the NOS/Game Informer Need for Speed: Shift challenge.



In addition to the excitement surrounding new peripherals and handhelds, there was the usual onslaught of would-be blockbusters – and a good number of quirky, under-the-radar gems. From strong showings for perennial franchises like Metal Gear Solid, Gears of War, and Fable to surprise returns of long-lost favorites like Donkey Kong Country and Twisted Metal, there was more than enough to keep people talking. Read on for all the news and announcements from the show, plus our press conference grades for Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo.





Nintendo president Satoru Iwata shows off the company's new handheld, the Nintendo 3DS.

Nintendo **Impresses**

with 3DS & surprise titles

Nintendo has struggled with its E3 press conferences in recent years, the worst example being the 2008 briefing that angered its core fans to the point where company president Satoru Iwata apologized afterwards.

This year, the company came out swinging with a punchy conference that spent little time trumpeting sales figures and focused instead on the upcoming 3DS handheld and a host of promising software.

As expected, Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime emceed the proceedings (the controversially chipper Cammie Dunaway was missing from the conference entirely), claiming that E3 is the place where you can "feel the buzz, and that buzz begins with technology." The technology he was talking about wasn't Sony's 3D TV displays or Microsoft's controller-free Kinect, but... Wi MotionPlus. It's not the most cutting-edge technology, but it doesn't have to be when Nintendo announces a new Zelda game - the E3 press conference equivalent of throwing a steak into a room of pit bulls.

The latest in the storied series, *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*, requires the Wi MotionPlus and offers a new motion control scheme that simulates holding a real sword and shield. Conference staples Shigeru Miyamoto and Bill Triner led the demonstration, which

was unfortunately plagued by wireless issues, making the game look a lot bigger than it was on the show floor.

Nintendo made only a few references to the company's casual audience, in the form of announcements for *Mario Sports Mix* and *Wii Party*. The former has the familiar Mario gang lacking dodgeball, basketball, volleyball, and hockey. *Wii Party* is, natch, a minigames collection that features your Miis. Neither was impressive, but they didn't take up enough time to drag down the conference's momentum.

The rest of the presentation was devoted to quality new games - a number of which were welcome surprises. Legendary game creator Warren Spector came onstage and gave an extensive demo of *Epic Mickey*. The visually striking Wii exclusive looked in fine form, particularly the level that featured an early black and white version of Mickey.

From here, Nintendo delivered a series of previously unannounced games. First up was *GoldenEye 007*, a new Activision reboot of the storied N64 shooter featuring the likeness of current Bond star Daniel Craig. Judging by the applause, many in the crowd have fond memories of *GoldenEye* multiplayer, even if the new title looks rough graphically.

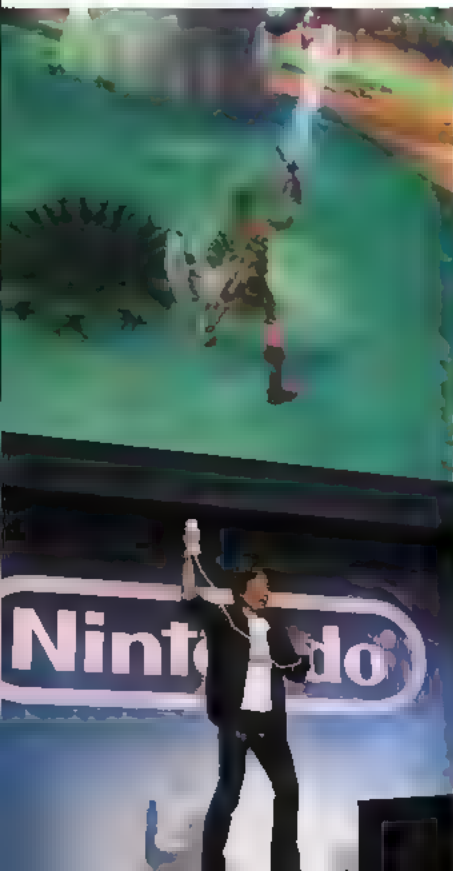
More impressive was Kirby's *Epic Yarn*, a new sidescroller starring Nintendo's venerable pink puffball. The visuals turned heads with clothlike

textures that resemble *LittleBigPlanet*. Though they could just have likely been influenced by the often-overlooked N64 game *Yoshi's Story*.

For those wondering what Retro Studios have been up to since leaving the *Metroid* franchise, the next segment revealed *Donkey Kong Country Returns*, a 2D platformer that harks back to the series' glory days on the SNES. Again, this was manna for the hardcore Nintendo fans.

The remainder of the conference was devoted to the Nintendo 3DS, the company's new glasses-free 3D handheld. Satoru Iwata came back with an actual unit in hand. While the technology behind it seems sound (read the following pages for more on 3DS), the one problem was that - unlike Sony which distributed 3D glasses at its press event - the tiny unit and its display couldn't be accurately showcased onstage. Aware of this fact, Nintendo marched out an army of models holding 3DS units for the crowd to inspect up close.

The final shock of the show came when one of the most enduring Nintendo E3 rumors finally came true with the announcement of *Kid Icarus: Uprising*, a brand new game that Nintendo had previously referred to as *Project Sora*. The game looked impressive, showing aerial combat that suggests that the 3DS is somewhere between the DS and the Wii in terms of graphical power.



(Above) *Mario Sports Mix*, *Wii Party*

(Left) Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrates *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* live onstage at the Nintendo press conference

Nintendo has enjoyed tremendous success in the last few years, but its E3 press conferences have left a lot to be desired. Whether it was Cammie Dunaway's awkward banter with Shaun White or wasting valuable time detailing oddball ideas like the Wi Vitality Sensor (we're still waiting, Miyamoto!), the company's presentations have lacked pop. This year was just about perfect, outside of the technical glitches during the *Skyward Sword* demo. New *GoldenEye*, *Kirby*, *Kid Icarus*, and *Donkey Kong games* have the potential to both resonate with the hardcore while attracting some of Nintendo's new, more casual audience. It's clear that the company has been paying close attention to how much more successful the 2D *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* has been than *Super Mario Galaxy 2*. Given Nintendo's track record in the handheld market, it's hard to bet against the 3DS being anything less than a breakout success. After seeing the unit up close, our impression of the system only improved. The 3D really works, glasses be damned.



*Nintendo
Unveils The*

3DS

Nintendo loves to innovate. Whether it's adapting video games to the household with the NES, creating a handheld market with the Game Boy, or opening the industry up to new consumers with the Wii's motion controls, the company is constantly thinking outside the box and driving gaming forward.

A few months ago, Nintendo announced its next feat of technological alchemy. It might as well have been talking about turning lead into gold, because a handheld device that displays 3D images without the need for glasses sounded like science fiction. So when Nintendo unveiled the device at this year's E3, the question on everyone's mind was, "How well does it work?" Its debut was so impressive the 3DS became the most talked about product at the show.

You'll have to wait to get your hands on the system yourself to understand how its glasses-free 3D technology works, but in the following pages we break down all the other reasons to get excited about Nintendo's new handheld.





thickness is based on actual dimensions

Nintendo says the 3DS models on the show floor weren't final, but they still highlight all the features we can expect to see on retail units when they release sometime before March 2011. The company is announcing the unit's price at a later date.

1 3D Screen

This 3.53-inch widescreen LCD has an 800 x 240 resolution allocating 400 pixels to each eye. This allows the system to display images and video in 3D. No glasses necessary.

2 3D Slider

This lever adjusts the depth of the 3D display. Everyone views 3D a little differently, and with this slider, players can adjust the 3D to a comfortable setting or turn the effect off altogether.

3 Slide Pad

The button layout is remarkably similar to the DS. The one important addition, however, is this slide pad. This analog joystick doesn't provide the same kind of leverage as a larger console stick, but it feels like a step up from the analog nub on Sony's PSP.

4 Touch Pad

The bottom screen lacks 3D effects, but still features touch controls. This 3.02-inch LCD has a 320 x 240 resolution.

5 Home Button

Console owners are already familiar with how this button works. The Home button can be used to quit a game and go back to the system's main menu, check battery levels, or even browse digital instruction manuals.

6 Headphone Jack

Pretty straightforward. Plug in your headphones here so Mario's "Whoo-hooos!" don't irritate the guy on the bus seat next to you.

7 Cameras

The 3DS is equipped with three 0.3-megapixel cameras — one inner camera and two more on the outer shell — all of which have a 640 x 480 resolution. Why two cameras on the outside? They allow 3DS owners to take and share 3D pictures.

8 Wi-Fi

The 3DS supports multiplayer gameplay via local wireless connections, as well as over the Internet. The device periodically searches for Wi-Fi hotspots and other 3DS systems even while in sleep mode, meaning it can receive title updates and other information any time of day. This sounds good in theory, but Nintendo's approach to online play in the past makes us wonder how well all these features will be implemented.

9 Game Card

3DS games come on 2GB cards that look very similar to the original DS game cards. While normal DS games are compatible with the 3DS, a small tab on 3DS games prevents them from being inserted into other DS systems.



Nintendo
Unveils The

3DS

From a distance, the 3DS looks like the DS Lite – a clamshell design, two screens, four face buttons, etc. But there is a lot more going on under the hood of Nintendo's new system. Unlike the DS, the 3DS has built-in motion sensors and a gyro scope. While we didn't get to see this tech in action, their inclusion indicates future 3DS titles will have some kind of motion or tilt functionality.

Nintendo announced that the 3DS would be capable of displaying 3D movies as well as games. While the company was reticent to announce any specific plans, partnerships with Warner Bros, Disney, and DreamWorks were briefly mentioned, and trailers for the animated films *How To Train Your Dragon*, *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole*, and *Tangled* were running on several 3DS systems across the show floor.

The human eye is only capable of capturing two-dimensional images. However, we perceive the world around us in three dimensions because we have two eyes. If you blink – looking through each eye alternately – you'll notice that objects closer to the foreground seem to shift more than objects in the background. This is because each eye sees the world from a slightly different perspective. Your brain takes these two slightly varied images and calculates the distance of objects in front of you, which allows you to perceive the world around you in three dimensions. The 3D illusion takes advantage of this mind trick by presenting images to each eye in which objects have been shifted slightly.

English inventor Sir Charles Wheatstone discovered the 3D optical effect in 1838 when he invented a device similar to modern Viewfinders. Current 3D displays present these dual images at the same time, but for the effect to work, you must wear glasses that filter one of the extra images from each eye. With each eye receiving a slightly different picture, the brain does its calculations and perceives certain objects to be closer than others. So how does Nintendo's 3DS pull off the same trick without glasses?

The top screen of the 3DS still stacks two images on top of one another like most 3D-ready displays, but instead of requiring the viewer to wear special glasses, a parallax barrier has been placed on top of the LCD display. This parallax barrier is a thin layer of material featuring a series of precise slits that essentially angle the two images in different directions, one towards each eye. This technology isn't new; Sharp has been experimenting with this kind of display for nearly a decade. The problem is that parallax barriers only allow for a very narrow viewing angle – sit too far to the side and all you see is a blurry mess. This is bad news if you're trying to sell a family of four a 60-inch television, but works flawlessly if you know that only one person will be standing in front of your product at any given time.





The Library

Dozens of games are already in development for the 3DS. Here's a list of a few titles that have been announced so far.

Atlus

- » Shin Megami Tensei (three titles in the works)

Capcom

- » Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition (working title)

Electronic Arts

- » FIFA Soccer
- » Madden NFL
- » The Sims 3

Harmonix

- » Jittered music game

Hudson Soft

- » Bomberman
- » Kororimpa

Konami

- » Baseball (working title)
- » Contra (working title)
- » Frogger (working title)
- » Pro Evolution Soccer (working title)

Majesco Entertainment

- » BroodRayne: The Shroud
- » A Boy and His Blob

Namco Bando!

- » Dragon Ball (working title)
- » Gundam (working title)
- » Pac-Man & Galaga (working title)
- » Ridge Racer (working title)

Nintendo

- » Animal Crossing
- » Paper Mario
- » Star Fox 64 3D
- » Steel Diver

Sega

- » Sonic (working title)
- » Super Monkey Ball (working title)

Square Enix

- » Codename: Chocobo Racing 3D
- » Dragon Quest (working title)
- » Final Fantasy (working title)
- » Kingdom Hearts (working title)

Teemo Koei

- » Dead or Alive 3D (working title)
- » Dynasty Warriors (working title)
- » Ninja Gaiden (working title)
- » Samurai Warriors 3D (working title)

THQ

- » De Blob: The Underground
- » Kung Fu Panda: Kaboom of Doom
- » Marvel Super Hero Squad: Infinity Gauntlet
- » Puss in Boots
- » Saints Row: Drive-By

Ubisoft

- » Assassin's Creed: Last Legacy
- » Battle of Giants: Dinosaur Strike
- » Driver: Renegade
- » Ghost Recon
- » Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

Warner Bros

- » Batman franchise
- » LEGO franchise

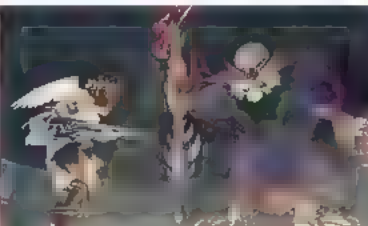


Nintendo
Unveils The

3DS

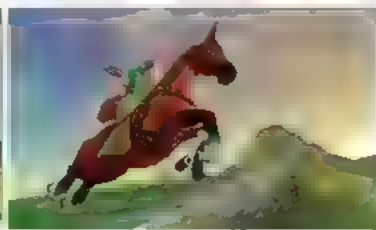
The Games

The most exciting technology in the world doesn't mean much if there isn't any software to take advantage of it. Check out some of the exciting games that have already been announced for the 3DS.

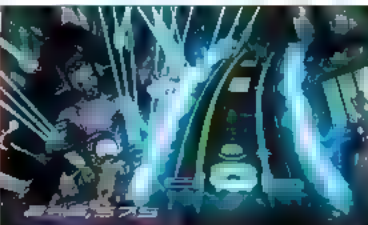


Brawl

Younger gamers probably only know Pit as "that cupid character from Super Smash Bros. Brawl," but others remember this classic Nintendo franchise from when it was on the NES nearly 25 years ago. *Brawl* is being developed by *Kirby and Super Smash Bros.* creator Masahiro Sakurai, and looks to be a fast-paced blend of aerial and ground-based shooting. Pit teams up with a goddess named Palutena, who grants him the power of flight for limited stretches of time. While Pit shoots down an army while flying through the sky, he will eventually be forced to land and continue his assault against Medusa's underworld minions from the ground.

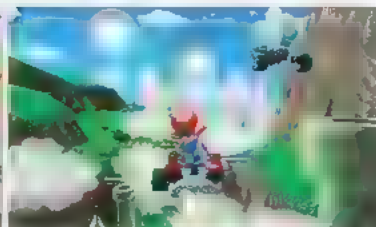
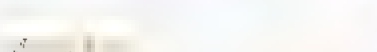


Nintendo said this was originally just a tech demo, but later announced plans to bring one of the most popular entries in the beloved franchise to the 3DS. The system's touchscreen controls allow for instantaneous item equipment, but few other details about this remake are available. We'd love to see Nintendo add a few new sidequests or an extra dungeon to this adventure. Regardless, we'll gladly take another trip through the N64 version of *Hyrule*.



DJ Hero 2

The portable version of Activision's DJ-centric music series doesn't bother with clunky turntable peripherals; the 3DS's touchscreen works just fine. Players can tap notes, switch tracks, and scratch records by simply sliding their stylus across the screen. Activision hasn't announced any of the game's tracks yet, but we played a mash-up of 2Pac's "California Love" and B.o.B's "Nothing on You," and found the controls surprisingly responsive.



It wouldn't be a proper Nintendo system if it didn't feature Mario Kart. Nintendo didn't talk much about the 3DS version, but did say the game would include a host of wireless multiplayer features. Mario's combat racing formula is so polished, we're sure this game will sell millions of copies like it always does.

NOS

ENERGY DRINK

presents:



E3 2010 was one of the most exciting expos ever. From ground-breaking peripherals to breakthrough games, gamers have lots to be stoked about. We take a look back at some of our favorite moments *Beyond the Games*. Raise your NOS Energy Drink and toast, because 2010 is the year of the Gamer!

Leading up to E3 we held a sweepstakes for an all-expenses-paid trip to L.A. and see the biggest gaming expo. What the five winners didn't know: They were going to play *Need for Speed: Shift* and one lucky gamer would win the fully modded Chris Forsberg NOS Nissan 370Z!



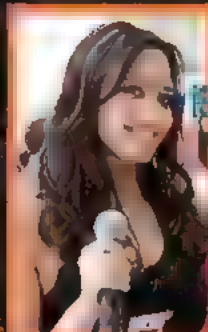
BEYOND THE GAMES



1. Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days look over the streets. Rickah new style.
2. Our NOS girl welcomed E3 visitors as they enter with a bottle of our new NOS Loaded Cherry. You're very welcome.
3. Those *Klonoa 2* guys are always so serious...seriously!
4. We went to E3 and a *Plants vs. Zombies* fight broke out. Actually, a breakdance battle. Ever seen a zombie headspin? Priceless.



Arriving at E3 in L.A., the winners received the red carpet treatment. Nikk Andrews, Robert Waddler, Carol Takas, Leslie Rathbur, and Ho der Humphreys couldn't wait to check out the hottest games of the year.



On the last day of E3, M. Lynn hosted the 1 mile Race *Need for Speed: Shift* s London track for the Chris Forsberg NOS Nissan 370Z.





1. The *Homefront* soldiers fuel up for their upcoming battle.
2. Just-launched *Virgin Gaming* entices gamers with a serious cash load. We're all competitive, but this changes things a bit. *Whoa, whoa!*
3. "How you doin'?" What the! Um... never mind. *Dead Rising* changes the way we look at booth girls for the rest of our lives.
4. *TRON* shows us what a real bike looks like. (Note to self: trade in my Schwinn and start saving.)
5. We stop in at the *Game Informer Live* set where Nick Ahrens is good to go.

Want more NOS Energy Drink *Beyond the Games* coverage? Fuel up with more insider pics and an exclusive video at <http://gameinformer.com/NOS>



Three exciting Jays of E3 and the L.A. nightlie took a toll on the contestants, so before the race they refueled with NOS Energy Drink to get focused for their biggest race ever.

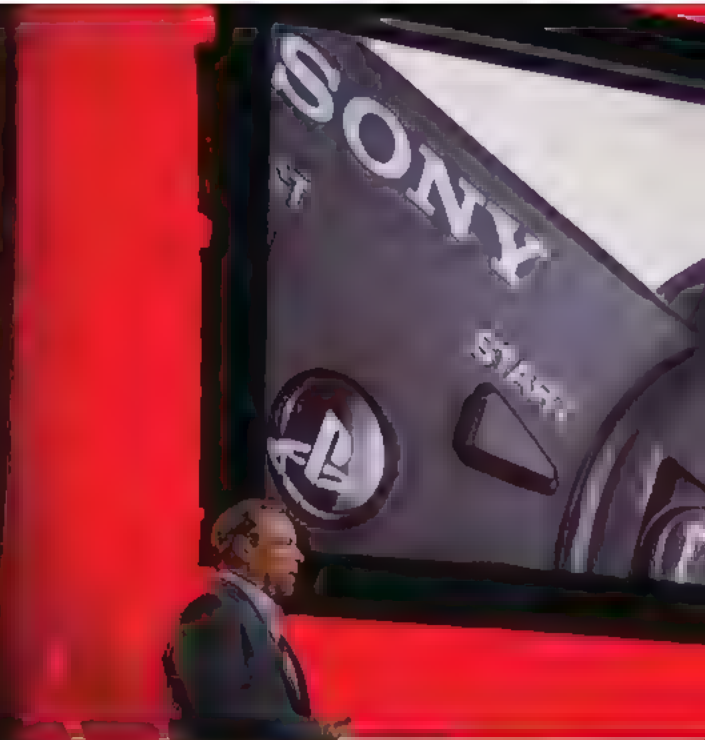


It came down to Holder's very last turn. But in the end Robert narrowly escaped with the victory, celebrating to the cheers of the crowd. Now that's what we call fueling victory. A trip to L.A. tickets to the best E3 in years, and riding into the sunset with the brand new Chris Forsberg NOS Nissan 370Z. Who says gaming doesn't pay off?





Sony Comes Out Strong



PlayStation Network

By David Jaffe

Sony unveiled its long-talked-about upper-tier PSN subscription mode, called PlayStation Plus. For \$49.99 a year or \$17.99 for three months, you'll get exclusive content from Sony and third-party partners like full PSN games, PSN mini early demos, beta invites, and PlayStation Store discounts. Joining PlayStation Plus also awards you with services like auto-downloads for demos, videos, patches, and updates. The games are yours for as long as you continue to subscribe, but DLC and other bonus content remains yours even if you cancel your subscription. By the time you're reading this, PlayStation Plus should be available, and Sony is celebrating the launch with a limited-time three-month free trial.

The subscription's first goodie drop features *Wipeout HD*, an *InFamous 2* trial, the PlayStation mini games *Fieldrunners* and *Age of Zombies*, avatars, map packs, and *DCU* (or as yet unannounced games) and the online PlayStation mag, *Qore*.

If you don't want to pay for PlayStation Plus, you can still enjoy all the PSN features - including free online play - you do now.

Twisted Metal's Sweet Tooth brings back the car combat series in style and introduces developer Eat Sleep Play's Simon Campbell and David Jaffe (*Batlem*). The appearance of *Portal 2* on PS3 was the surprise of the press conference, and Valve co-founder and PS3 critic Gabe Newell drew laughs when he thanked Sony for inviting him and "not repeatedly punching me in the face." Newell went a step further and promised that *Portal 2* on PS3 will be "the best version on any console" by virtue of using Steam for auto-updates, downloadable content, and more.

This should be good for getting gamers more patches, and Newell threw a sly dig at Xbox Live's reportedly more strict structure by praising PS3's "open approach."





Gamers weren't expecting much from Sony's E3 press conference, assuming it would be devoted predominantly to the full unveiling of the PlayStation Move. While the motion controller got plenty of stage time (turn the page for more), it was just one initiative showcasing how the company is firing on all cylinders.

Whether it was Move, Sony's full-throated support of 3D (including an impressive gameplay demo of Killzone 3), the fistful of exclusives, or simply more Kevin Butler, Sony had something for everyone. Looking at the games lineup—Twisted Metal, Portal 2, Killzone 3, LittleBigPlanet 2, Infamous 2, God of War: Ghost of Sparta (PSP), Gran Turismo 5, and more, the landscape looks nothing like it once did when Valve's Gabe Newell declared that the system needed a "do over."

Even the unfulfilled potential of PSP Go and Home, as well as the strength of Xbox Live, hasn't stopped Sony from its continued support of the PSP brand and PSN. This exemplifies the company's larger attempts to move forward instead of sulking because it has sold fewer consoles than its competitors. Now all that hard work and persistence is starting to pay off.



Only on PlayStation

Sony's press conference lacked a big third-party exclusive like last year's Agent from Rockstar, but the company grabbed what it could, getting exclusive DLC missions for Mafia II and Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood, as well as two special edition releases from Electronic Arts: The Medal of Honor special edition includes a remastered HD version of Medal of Honor: Frontline and a Move-enabled iteration of the previously Wii-only Dead Space: Extraction will be packed in with the Dead Space 2 special edition. Although Square Enix has talked about possibly bringing Final Fantasy XIV to the Xbox 360 since last E3, for now it remains a console-exclusive PS3 game.



Butler Brings Down the House

In commercial character Kevin Butler, Sony has found its most effective pitchman since the original PlayStation days, when Crash Bandicoot stood outside of the Nintendo offices with a megaphone and called out Mario. Apart from a few jabs at the competition, Butler roused the press conference attendees with a call to arms for gaming itself. "I love Games," he declared. "Gaming is having a ridiculously huge TV in a tiny one-room apartment. It's staying up until 3 a.m. to win a trophy, that isn't real—but it is!" Butler was at his best when he closed his speech with the impassioned cry: "And though we may pledge fealty to different flags, deep down inside, we all serve one master: one king, and his name is gaming! Forever may he reign!"



Not everyone is thrilled about Move or 3D, but Sony's ability to fight a multi-front war might be more of an advantage over its competitors than a drag on the company's overall efforts. Garnering exclusive third-party content—not to mention the coup of landing Portal 2—flips the tables on Microsoft and puts Sony on the attack. Although we were disappointed that the likes of The Last Guardian and Resistance 3 weren't at the show, there was plenty of impressive software. Sony looks to be in a good position no matter the numbers, and the PlayStation 3 is building dangerous momentum.

PlayStation Moves

the E3 Crowd



- Move wand: \$49.99
- PlayStation Eye camera: \$39.99
- Navigation controller: \$29.99
- Move, Eye camera, Sports Champions, Move demo disk bundle: \$99.99 (\$399.99 with PlayStation 3)

At GDC earlier this year, Sony formally announced the PlayStation Move and a flood of launch titles that had been kept under wraps since the company first announced plans for a motion controller last E3. This left us wondering what Sony would have left to show at this year's expo aside from 3D-enhanced gaming. Since the official tech announcement was already out of the way, Sony's Move presentation during its E3 press conference focused primarily on games and pricing.

In comparison to Kinect's rumored \$150 price, the PlayStation Move setup is slightly cheaper. The wand costs \$49.99, the PlayStation Eye camera is \$39.99, and the navigation controller is another \$29.99. The full set of peripherals will hit your bank account for roughly \$120, though this price doesn't take families interested in multiple controllers into consideration. The bundle-minded gamer can pick up a Move controller, Eye camera, Sports Champions, and a Move demo disk for \$99.99, though the navigation controller is notably absent from this setup. Another bundle that includes the PS3 costs \$399.99. Nintendo's latest Wii bundle, which includes all needed accessories, only costs \$199.

To support the technology, Sony expects about 20 Move games to hit stores on September 19, with more than 40 titles available by the holidays. Sony-developed Move titles will cost \$39.99, but third-party pricing has yet to be announced. If you're looking to engage in the full Move experience this fall, it'll cost you. However, with near spot-on accuracy and solid development support, Move has the potential to be the Wii HD solution we've been waiting for—minus the shovelware.

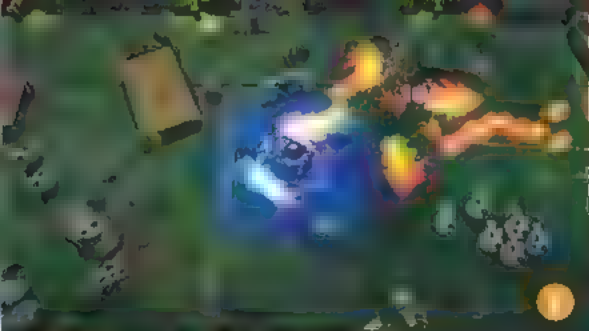


Titles designed specifically for Move with Sony's backing took up the bulk of the company's E3 booth. Sports Champions, The Fight Lights Out, and SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy Seals were among the highlights. Real shooter The Shoot, pat owner simulator EyePat, and SingStar Dance are also designed with Move in mind, and use the PlayStation Eye camera in different ways.

Third parties had a fairly light Move showing though we're told 40 developers and publishers are working with the technology. Thus far the roster notably includes Disney Interactive's Toy Story 3 and Iron: Evolution, Namco-Banda's rail shooter Time Crisis, Razing Storm, and Ubisoft's real-time strategy title R.L.S.E. EA Sports Active 2 and Ubisoft's Child of Eden were demoed at E3 using Microsoft's Kinect, and will be released on the Sony platform as well, though Move support is still in question.

Many third-party developers we spoke with said they are more comfortable working with Move as an extension of a standard game controller, as opposed to developing a Kinect game from the ground up. Judging by the number of existing PS3 titles receiving software updates via PlayStation Network to add Move functionality, including EA's Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11, Capcom's Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition, and Heavy Rain, it doesn't seem like too much work to implement Move support.

For more updates on PlayStation Move, check out [gameformer.com](#)



Games That Move

1 LittleBigPlanet 2

The motion controls won't be available at the game's November launch, but Media Molecule tells us the Move control scheme will work with the creation tools and it is currently working on ways to implement them for platforming as well.



2 The Sly Collection

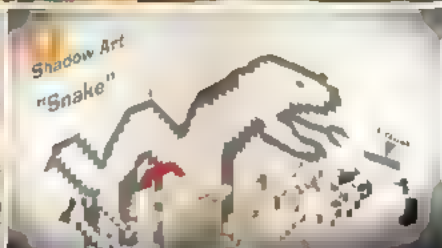
The Sly Collection, the 3D high-def port of Sucker Punch Production's classic Sly trilogy, will support the Move in its unlockable minigames.

3 Heroes on the Move (working title)

This action-adventure cross-over of Sony franchises stars Ratchet, Clank, Jak, Daxter, Sly, and Benley. With their combined skill and cunning and your hand-eye coordination — you must help save the heroes' home worlds from evil. A friend can join the fray for two-player co-op.

4 Killzone 3

Killzone 3 took center stage at the press conference to show off its 3D support, but Sony also says the sci-fi shooter supports Move.



5 Echochrome II

This follow-up to the original PSN hit puzzler uses the Play Station Eye and Move controller to rotate levels and control light and shadow effects as you lead your character through each stage.

6 Sorcery

The Nightmare Queen threatens to cover the kingdom in darkness. It's up to you, a sorcerer's apprentice, to learn the arcane arts and defeat the queen's minions. Use the Move controller to conjure spells, mix and drink potions, solve puzzles, and zap baddies to rid the kingdom of eternal night.





E3
2008

Microsoft Pushes Casual Gaming

This year, it was almost as if Nintendo and Microsoft traded places. During the last few E3 conferences, Nintendo's hardcore fan base felt left out in the cold in favor of the broader Wii audience. This year it was the Xbox faithful thinking thoughts of desertion.

Things started well enough. The show kicked off with a demo for Activision's highly anticipated Call of Duty: Black Ops, which appears to be continuing the series' penchant for high production value shooter mayhem. The encore was an equally impressive trailer for Kojima Productions Metal Gear Solid: Rising. Microsoft's Don Mattrick also revealed that a deal is in place to ensure that all future DLC in the Call of Duty franchise will debut first on Xbox 360, a move that further cements the console as the FPS fan's system of choice.

From there, everything that followed was exclusive to the 360.

The best titles were, unsurprisingly, three of the franchises that built the Xbox empire: Gears of War 3 (which showed its four-player campaign mode for the first time), Halo: Reach, and Fable III. The anticipation for all three of these titles is sky high. Thankfully, all of them looked more than capable of meeting expectations. Peter Dinklage's stage appearance was especially charming; the man is a fan favorite for good reason.

While this portion of the press briefing provided some triple A products aimed at hardcore gamers, it was devoid of any surprises with the only exception being a teaser for Codename: Kingdoms, a new franchise by Crysis developers Crytek that drew comparisons to 300 and God of War.

The rest of the conference focused on Kinect. What followed was an uninspired set of "casual" titles that did little to dispel the perception that Microsoft is playing catch-up to the blockbuster success of the Wii. While the Kinect technology looks impressive, most of the games shown were derivative, dressed-up versions of shallow-but-successful Nintendo games.

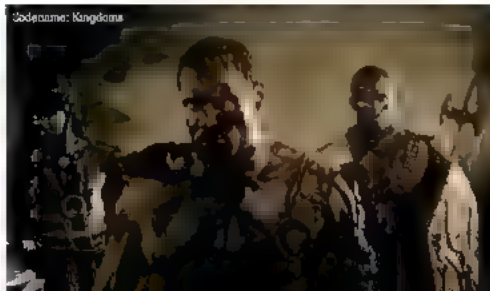
Kinectimals, an interactive animal sim clearly owes its existence to Nintendogs. Kinect Joy Ride is nothing more than a kart racer with controller-free "steering" and avatars.

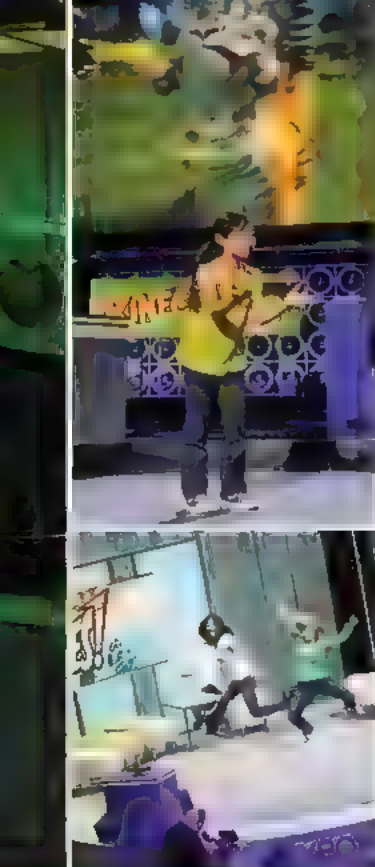
Kinect Adventures is a collection of gimmicky party games, including a rail ride where players must jump in place and lean to steer. Kinect Sports is a direct rip-off of Wii Sports, as its name suggests.

The Kinect lineup made only a couple of nods towards the hardcore crowd. A demo of an on-rails lightsaber Star Wars title looked intriguing, but not terribly compelling.

The best Kinect games were provided by third-party companies: Harmonix's impressive Dance Central and Ubisoft's exercise title Your Shape: Fitness Evolved. In both, the Kinect seemed to accurately track the player's movements, giving real feedback on whether or not the players were doing the moves correctly. It was clearly superior to what is possible on the Wii, and perhaps points the way towards how the Kinect should be used in the future. A

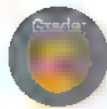
Kinect Forza demo demonstrated some wheel-free steering and the somewhat useless ability to let players "walk around" and inspect virtual cars.





Microsoft finished its press conference with the unveiling of the long rumored Xbox 360 "slim" hardware, which began shipping to stores during E3 for a price of \$299. The new unit is smaller than the original Xbox 360 hardware, and features several improvements. It ships with a whopping 250GB hard drive and built-in 802.11n Wi-Fi capability. It also has a dedicated port for hooking up Kinect.

Most importantly, its improved build quality means that the unit is significantly quieter than previous 360 models, and is said to have safeguards against overheating and the "red ring of death" system failures that have plagued the console. In fact, it can technically "red ring" as Microsoft took the red LEDs out of the power button array. However, that's no guarantee the system can't fail.



A Strange Coming Out Party

The night before its E3 press conference, Microsoft held an "Experience Project Natal" event that might be one of the zaniest nights in E3 history. The show featured the famously weird Cirque Du Soleil. Upon entering, attendees were given white robes outfitted with shoulder pads that had hidden LEDs.

What followed was a presentation that blinked the imagination. A giant fake elephant walked in between editors. Acrobats and dancers performed odd rituals. A boy climbed rocks that represented different steps in gaming history, finally ascending to a giant ball with a glowing green Xbox logo and stretching his hands to the heavens. Couples climbed in unison. A preternaturally cheerful family was suspended (sometimes upside down) high above the arena, playing Kinect with a manic energy. Avatars flew through outer space on giant video screens. Then it was over.

We're not sure what the evening was meant to convey, but it was certainly memorable. Perhaps the most telling moment of the event came from legendary *Dead or Alive* creator Tomonobu Itagaki, who reportedly walked in, stared at the proceedings for a moment, then promptly turned on his heels and walked out.

Microsoft has the hardcore gaming community on lock, but after this conference the faithful might begin to wonder if they are being taken for granted. While the new *Gears*, *Fable*, and *Halo* titles look fantastic, these are long-established legacy franchises. It's worrisome that Microsoft seems to be lagging in establishing new, hardcore-focused gaming IPs as it chases Nintendo's huge casual audience. Why was *Crackdown 2* absent from the proceedings? [Our review on page 111 may have some clues. **ED**]

We'd be more inclined to forgive this slight if the Kinect software was more impressive. Nearly every game shown—even the more interesting third-party titles like *Dance Central* and *Your Shape*—are derivative of Wii-established titles. "Do what Nintendo did three years ago, but without a controller" isn't an innovative strategy. We're on board with the new, slimmer 360, but Kinect needs to show more compelling games before we're sold.

Kinect, ESPN add new features to Xbox Live

Over the years, Xbox Live has transformed from a dedicated multiplayer gaming network to an all-in-one social media hub. This E3 saw Microsoft strengthening the service on a number of fronts. The biggest splash came with the announcement that ESPN is offering exclusive live and archived sports programming to Xbox Live Gold users for no additional cost. More than 3,500 sporting events are planned for the first year, many to be broadcast in full HD.

ESPN SportsCenter anchors Josh Elliott and Trey Wingo came onstage midway through Microsoft's E3 press conference to deliver the news. Engaging in their familiar banter, the duo demonstrated some of the interactive features that will distinguish watching sports on Xbox Live. Using Kinect, the pair requested instant replays of last year's Ohio State vs. USC college football game from alternate angles with voice commands. You can also choose a rooting interest, see how many viewers share your allegiance, and participate in real-time polls and trivia.

One caveat worth noting is that we assume that the ESPN broadcasting available on Xbox Live will be subject to local television blackouts and other national contracts (like TNT's NBA games or Notre Dame football), so watching your favorite team play might not be an option. When Microsoft showed the sports available, the NFL—America's most popular sport—was also notably absent.

Another segment of the conference detailed VideoKinect, a new video chat service that utilizes the new camera peripheral. A Microsoft engineer, using only hand gestures and voice commands, easily set up a live chat with her sister in Austin, TX. From there, they browsed a variety of media together. They watched a trailer from the upcoming film *The Last Airbender* while engaging in some stilled canned repartee. One cool Kinect feature showcased in this segment was the unit's ability to track head and body movement. As one of the chat partners moved out of the frame, the Kinect perfectly adjusted the camera angle to keep her centered.



Project Natal Becomes

Game Informer dives into the game library and other

Before its official press conference, Microsoft used a staged performance involving a faux elephant, glowing "interactive" ponchos, and a Cirque du Soleil troupe to give an official name to Project Natal: Kinect. During the event and the press conference the following day, Microsoft also showed off a handful of launch titles to go along with its new motion-controlled device. The game demos were revealing, not just for what they showed individually but as an overview of Kinect in general.

According to the marketing spiel, Kinect is supposed to give players a direct 1:1 interface with their Xbox 360s. Does it work that way in practice? After spending about an hour with the device, we'll answer that with a resounding, "kind of."

Input is occasionally jigggy, with noticeable delays between your physical actions and their onscreen translations. To be fair, at least some of that is due to the way games are designed. A true 1:1 input would be frustrating for games that involved actions like jumping or leaning

(i.e. most Kinect games). For instance, some people might not be able to physically jump high enough to clear a virtual hurdle because they're short. To compensate, Kinect interprets actions such as jumping and then registers earned animations. The timing window to clear a hurdle in real life may be extended in a game to make the experience more enjoyable for the less athletically inclined. That does, however, lead to times when a player lands on the carpet long before their Avatar completes the jump. Those balancing tricks may make games more enjoyable for the casual set, but skeptical gamers are already scrutinizing the device.

Microsoft hasn't officially commented on how much Kinect will cost, but all signs point to \$149.99. A cluster of major retailers such as GameStop, Best Buy, Amazon, Wal-Mart, and Target have posted that price on their websites, and Microsoft itself has listed the same price on its official store. In addition to being sold separately, Microsoft has said that a bundle will be available that packages a slimmed-down Xbox 360 console alongside a Kinect unit. GameStop had two versions of the bundle listed for \$299 and \$399, but has since

pullled the listings from its site.

As for the games, Microsoft isn't saying whether new releases will cost the standard \$59.99 or if Kinect titles will be available at a lower cost. After playing with some of the games, unless Microsoft is holding back most of the good stuff, the company would be insane to cross the \$39.99 barrier.

Kinect could end up being a pricy solution for families without a 360 looking to get into motion gaming. As opposed to the Wii, which costs \$199 and includes a game, it could cost upwards of \$300 for a similar experience with Kinect. Once you add a game or two, that figure could hop past the \$400 mark. Of course, that's assuming that these initial prices are accurate and that Microsoft won't package a game with the device. Regardless, that's a sizable investment. The Xbox 360 offers things the Wii cannot, such as streaming HD content, video chat, and a seamless online experience, but will casual players looking to bowl a few frames with their grandchildren care about those bells and whistles?



Kinect

aspects of Microsoft's new motion-controlled device

How Does It Work?

Kinect uses several different technologies in tandem to work its magic. A standard RGB camera is used for facial recognition and video chatting. The infrared camera and emitter on the unit's face allow Kinect to recognize depth and movement—even in a pitch-black environment. Four microphones handle voice input. The unit also has a motorized swivel allowing it to track users if they move out of the frame.

Microsoft says that much of Kinect's innovation comes from the software, which orchestrates how each piece of hardware works together. Kinect can supposedly track up to four users simultaneously, and ignore interference from other players. If you were planning to waggle around like a maniac hoping to screw up your buddy's game, save your energy. The system can also read the skeletal anatomy of a player, make a guess if it's a child, and adjust a game's difficulty accordingly.

One big hurdle that Microsoft has to overcome is the current limitation that users must be stand-

ing. Voice commands clearly don't have that limitation, and we don't know about manipulating menus and media playback, but the games we demoed wouldn't work if players were sitting on a couch. Microsoft says it's working on a solution, so hopefully it's addressed by the time Kinect launches.

A New Way To Interact

In addition to the obvious gaming applications, Kinect offers a new system-wide interface for Xbox 360 users. After visually registering a new user—a process that takes about a minute—the system can recognize players and automatically log in their appropriate gamertag.

Once logged in, waving at the unit brings up a special Kinect interface, which replaces the usual scrolling panes of content with eight large icons. Holding up a hand pulls a virtual hand onto the screen, and players can then browse and select the content they wish to explore. To select a specific item, players hold the icon over it for a few seconds.

Microsoft's goal is to replace the remote or controller whenever possible. While watching Zune videos or browsing content from the upcoming ESPN feed, for example, viewers can raise a hand to skip to specific portions, pause playback, and perform other basic functions. Voice recognition is also available, allowing users to say simple phrases such as "Xbox, play" or "Xbox, pause" to perform the appropriate function. We tested out that voice functionality ourselves, and it worked without any kind of training. It recognized our commands immediately, as well as those from a female journalist with a decidedly different voice, even with E3's intrusive background noise.

Microsoft says some applications, such as Netflix streaming, don't currently support Kinect functionality. It is being worked on however, and Microsoft hopes to incorporate Kinect support for most of the Xbox 360's core applications by the device's November launch or shortly thereafter.





Kinechimals

Give the number of hours: match... when Microsoft announced Kinechimals at its press briefing. The premise is simple and more than a bit familiar: You adopt a pet and care for it with it. With Kinechimals, players can interact with adorable young jungle cats such as lions, tigers, panthers, and leopards. Pets respond to voice commands and can learn a variety of tricks. You can take their cub through a daily routine or play with one such as jump ropes. Our only concern with this one is its longevity. Once you train your cats and go through the wilderness, will players have a reason to keep coming back to their monkey cave? Also, is it that gratifying to pet a tiger in a pet cube? We'll see. In the meantime, www.ms.com.



Your Shape: Fitness Evolved

Microsoft's latest fitness game uses Kinect to scan users, creating a personalized avatar with accurate vital signs. Once they're in the game (represented by an odd clay-looking blob), players can exercise through a bunch of fitness mini-games or take on a more focused approach. A personal trainer guides players through their workout based on fitness goals, and Kinect provides plenty of immediate feedback for form, and to make sure players are keeping pace. Kinect is going to have a lot of fitness games — that's how we announced so far — so we'll have to see how Your Shape stands up to the competition when it releases.



Kinect Sports

Does anyone else's vision get in the shadow of a serious competitor in video sports, and the team is embracing that extra scrutiny. The hurdles aren't anything special — run in place, jump, repeat — but Kinect Sports' bowling game is quite good. Unlike Nintendo's version, players don't have to reach for a controller and press buttons to set up their ball orientation or spin angle. Everything is done with Kinect, and it's surprisingly accurate. You can even throw the ball overhead if you'll see. Other genres not shown at the show include table tennis, soccer, boxing, volleyball, and a multi-event track and field competition. Here might be watching a well-worn path at this point, but it's doing so with confidence.

It's...Purple?

To help consumers visually differentiate between standard games and those designed specifically for Kinect, the company has designed a specific color accent for the box art. "The Kinect purple is going to be used as a way to wayfind," says Josh Hutto, director of console marketing at Xbox. "When you go into retail, whenever you see purple you know it's Kinect."

It makes sense for Microsoft to make it as easy as possible for new users to delineate between regular Xbox 360 games and games designed for Kinect. We just have one question: Won't players who add Kinect to their libraries of Xbox 360 games end up with shelves resembling week-old bruises?



More Kinect

In addition to the playable titles at E3, a slew of other Kinect titles were announced. They include



► Adrenaline Maxis



► Dance Masters

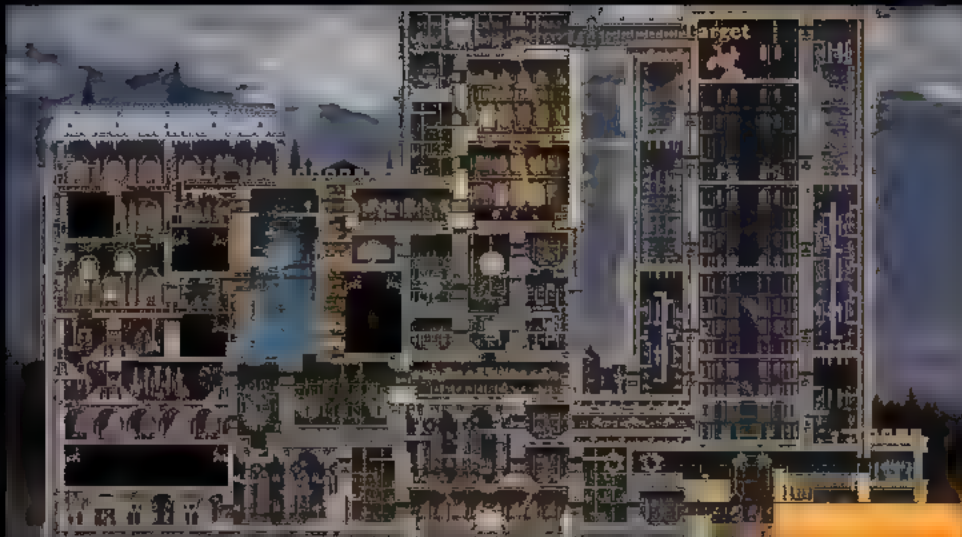


► Motor Sports



► Jettied Star Wars game

- EA Sports Active 2
- Game Party In Motion
- Sonic Free Riders
- Child of Eden
- DECA Sports Freedom
- Forza Kinect
- Zumba Fitness
- The Biggest Loser Ultimate Workout



E3
THE
SOLO

Explore the best downloadable games of the show by Matt Miller

This year's big convention in L.A. had an enormous number of downloadable games on display. Keeping an eye on the big titles coming to XBLA and PSN had me running from booth to booth all week. Strangely, we had almost no support; Nintendo neglected to highlight any upcoming titles. The other consoles picked up the slack, showing off many fascinating new products,

Castlevania: **Harmony of Despair** was one of the most exciting and unusual new games on display. Xbox 360 and PS3 players already have access to the excellent *Symphony of the Night*, but this brand new Castlevania entry is coming exclusively to XBLA. Like most Castlevania games, *Harmony of Despair* is a 2D sidescroller, but it also includes six-player online multiplayer. Fan-favorite characters like Alucard and Soma Cruz each have special abilities that let them access unique areas of the levels, and by working together they can reach new ones that neither could reach on their own. As you split up across the level, it's easy to keep track of one another and all the monsters thanks to an awesome real-time view that pans out to display the whole map. Anytime a player opens a chest, all the players get a reward, which encourages exhaustive exploration. This surprising change-up in the Castlevania formula has me intrigued. I'm stoked to check it out

when it releases this summer.

I've been eager to get my hands on **Super Meat Boy** for months now, and I finally dug in for a lengthy session at E3. The challenging action/platformer casts the player as Meat Boy, whose darling Bandage Girl has been kidnapped by Dr. Fetus. With that ridiculous premise established, the game rolls out dozens of fast-paced, platforming levels. Meat Boy leaps improbably high and clings to walls he can ascend and descend, calling to mind the best elements of the ninja-themed *N+*. Warp zones hidden throughout the levels bring back memories of previous console gaming eras, with stages that emulate the visuals of the Atari 2600, NES, Game Boy, and other platforms. The game includes unlockable characters from popular indie games like *Braid* and *Bit.Trip Runner*. The developers at Team Meat hope to release the game on XBLA, WiiWare, and PC before the end of the year.



Echochrome II follows in its predecessor's footsteps with a gameplay concept designed from the ground up to make your brain twist in new directions. This time, it's all about light and shadow. Rather than merely rotating the onscreen levels, players must use the new PlayStation Move controller as a flashlight, using the onscreen shapes to create a background shadow that the figure onscreen can walk upon. Like manipulating shadow puppets, players must find the correct angle to shine the flashlight to create a path. Colored objects in the foreground have special effects in the shadows, like certain balls that become jump pads. The game also has a more approachable vibe about it, bright colors and lively music replace the stark and meditative overtones of the original. Jsr-created levels return to add replay value. *Echochrome II* will release this fall to join the launch lineup of the new controller.

I've been following **Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light** with great interest for several months now, and the more I see the game the more excited I become. The isometric view of the action pans back to give a good sense of the landscape, and controls are in line with traditional dual-stick shooters. However, Crystal Dynamics has instilled its keen sense of platforming and puzzles into the experience.

Movement and animation look and feel amazing, mixing the best of overhead action games with the classic Tomb Raider style. I love the feel of running through the world as your character starts slowly and breaks into a sprint to navigate the extremely large levels. Lara has a co-op partner named Tofac; this time around, and it's fun working together to solve environmental puzzles and mow down assaulting creatures. We'll get to play the final version in a few weeks when it releases on XBLA, with subsequent entries on PSN and PC.

The makers of *Splatoon Man and The Maw* are working on their next title, **Comic Jumper** and I love what I've seen so far. Targeted to release on XBLA later this year, *Twisted Pixel's* amusing new project is far bigger and more ambitious than its previous efforts, boasting four distinct art styles, over three hours of spoken dialogue, and a wealth of unlockable extras. Captain Smiley is a lauded superhero that travels through multiple periods in comic history. Modern, over-the-top action comics Conan-esque graphic novels in the style of Frank Frazetta, the stark and bright colors of Silver Age comics, and quirky Japanese manga are all on the menu. Much of the action is side-scrolling gun and melee combat, but there are breaks in the form of Space Harrier-style

forward-scrolling shooters. Captain Smiley regularly breaks the fourth wall to chat with the developers at *Twisted Pixel*, and special powers sometimes focus on the link, like the ability to call down an a video-captured version of *Twisted Pixel's* CTO Frank Wilson to head-butt all the onscreen enemies. If that kind of zany-ness appeals to you, *Comic Jumper* is right up your alley.

BlackLight: Tango Down stands apart from the pack. This downloadable offering on XBLA, PSN, and PC delivers a full-fledged multiplayer experience that rivals big retail releases in complexity and breadth. Set in the near future, the shooter has the pacing and flow of *Counter-Strike*, and features a vast array of customization tools to make the game your own. Through seven gameplay modes across 12 maps, players fight it out with weapons they've built to specification themselves. Want a scope on a shotgun? Sounds stupid, but go for it. The futuristic setting imparts a number of cool gadgets with which players can experiment. A special visor lets players sneak around the field and track enemy movements. Digi-grenades can be used to scramble an opponent's visor HUD. Perhaps its most impressive feature is the \$15 price tag.



"BlackLight: Tango Down stands apart from the pack."





continued from page 95

Anyone who
enjoyed the
remake of the
original game
last year will
be stoked
about Bionic
Commando
Rearmed 2.

I have to admit a fondness for **Tales from Outer Space: About a Blob**, a cute new PSN exclusive coming later this year from a small developer called Drinkbox Studios. You play an alien blob that has crashed onto the planet only to get imprisoned by an over-zealous scientist. By devouring everything in sight, the blob grows bigger à la Katamari. The gameplay becomes increasingly complex as the blob bounces and climbs through the scientist's lab and eventually eats the planet. Objects you ingest can be spit back out to attack or knock over other objects. Players can also squeeze into tight pipes to reach new areas and jump on objects to attack or manipulate them. The game is undeniably charming, and can be tackled cooperatively.

Anyone who enjoyed the remake of the original game last year will be stoked about **Bionic Commando Rearmed 2**, which is headed to PSN and XBLA early next year. This is a brand new adventure for Nathan "Rad" Spencer featuring several tweaks to improve gameplay. A jump mechanic enables navigation around small obstacles, and Spencer can shoot napalm for an explosive screen cleaner. The bionic arm can be upgraded with active and passive abilities to ease the steep challenge. In addition, the background environments are now far more varied, moving beyond the militaristic vibe to show off vibrant jungles and seaside wharves. I loved the first Rearmed, and the great gameplay on display at E3 indicates

the series is headed in the right direction.

The XBLA game **Hydrophobia** also impressed me when I played it on the busy E3 show floor. This action/survival game has remarkable visuals on par with retail games. You play as Kate Wilson, an engineer on a massive city-sized ship of the future. When terrorists attack, Kate is stuck in the ship's flooding lower levels. Through a combination of exploration, gun combat, and puzzle solving, she must escape. Incredible water simulation is the hallmark feature of the game. It's a joy to see liquid pour through cracks in the wall or watch Kate get thrown by the water's force. She can interact with the ship's systems with a mobile computer, which leads to a number of amusing minigames to unlock doors and uncover lost information. I'll be interested to see if the game holds up to closer scrutiny over an extended play period. **Hydrophobia** is the first chapter of a longer story about Kate's experiences on the massive ship, and if the game succeeds developer Dark Energy will likely get to continue the chronicle.

Looking for more info on downloadable and independent games? Check out our [impulse](http://gameinformer.com/impulse), which features previews, updates, and weekly release schedules. In the meantime, don't miss out on our review of *Limbo* (p. 110), as well as our E3 Hot 50 entries on *Journey* (page 92) and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (page 97).

E3
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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

NEWS WITH A SARCASTIC SPIN



(ABOVE) Battlefield: Bad Company 2 Vietnam is the first expansion pack for the hit game developed by DICE. Beyond the jungle location, it naturally features new weapons, vehicles, unlocks, awards, and four new multiplayer maps.



(LEFT) FPS lovers and second amendment warriors can now unite under Electronic Arts' Gun Club, a rewards program that appropriately doles out in-game weapons, early beta & demo access, and more to players of EA shooters who sign up (and have an EA account). The Gun Club is currently available for Battlefield: Bad Company 2 VIPs, and entering now will get you an M24 sniper rifle in the upcoming Medal of Honor as well as early access to that game's beta. Remember, it's the virtual bullets that kill online gamers, not the fake guns themselves.



(ABOVE) Capcom has delayed Dead Rising 2, pushing the zombie-muncher from August to a September 28 release date. Maybe there's a good reason for it. Check out page 96 to find out how the game looked at E3.



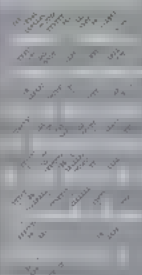
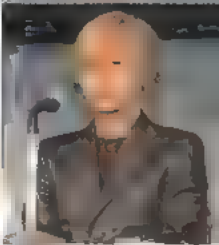
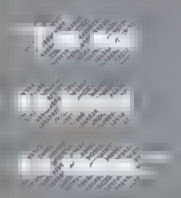
(ABOVE) At THQ's Homefront E3 party, new THQ partner and Devil's Third developer Tomonobu Itagaki accidentally fell into the rooftop infinity pool at downtown L.A.'s Standard hotel. Dude, that's what you get for wearing sunglasses at night: you're no CoreY Heat! Not to be deterred, Itagaki went and changed and came back to hit on the ladies and smoke some cigarettes.



(ABOVE) Here's our own Bryan and Tim modeling their shoulder-padded ponchos at the Microsoft Kinect event before E3. Self-leeching is the one fashionable look that never goes out of style. Even a trip to the bathroom couldn't wash off the stink of shame that these two and hundreds of others left after being forced to take part in the surreal scene. The only good use we can think of for these is that it might prevent people from seeing your arms falling while playing Kinect. Can it detect ponchos?



(ABOVE) Take note of Ubisoft's Battle Tag, because years from now when we do another installment of the Top 10 Embarrassing E3 Moments (see page 40 for our first edition), you can thank back to the year's E3 and brag that you were embarrassed from the beginning. Ubisoft debuted this Laser Tag spoof at its press conference, and the mix of real-world tagging and virtual stat-keeping is exactly why most gamers would rather pretend to be a badass in a video game than actually try and act like one.



massive

The MMOs of E3 2010

As the resident PC guy at GI I spend the entire E3 show looking at titles that most of our staff has never heard of. This year, the majority of those games were MMOs. Your Star Wars: The Old Republic needs are taken care of on page 84, but the rest of this year's MMO crop exists in a different space. The hottest project on the floor, Jumpgate: Evolution, leads the charge. For more on the rest of these games (and extended PC coverage of non-MMO titles as well), head to gameinformer.com/e3.

E3
2010

1 *Jumpgate Evolution (Gazillion/NetDevil)*

Beta: TBA
Release: TBA

Jumpgate Evolution, unlike the original *Jumpgate*, focuses on space dogfights to the exclusion of all else. It's a better game for it. Rather than bogging players down in minutiae, it offers fast-paced action in a dynamic universe.

Players enter the galaxy as "the new guy in Delta Force," as developer NetDevil puts it. As a hotshot pilot in your faction's elite squadron, you're thrown into a civilization-defining battle seconds after you leave character creation. The corporate Solrain estate

seeks "profit through conflict." The confederation of Greek-like city-states that make up the Quantar faction believes in "honor through battle." Fascist, imperialist Octavian children are taught that "domination through war" is the true path. Whichever side you choose, continual battle awaits you in *Jumpgate Evolution*.

Plenty of progression and socialization is available, and the space dogfights are legit. No numbers are crunched under the hood to determine hits, misses, or the like - this is an action game through and through. That part is easy enough. *Jumpgate Evolution's* distinguishing feature is its dynamic sector warfare system. Available in both PvP and PvE flavors, this system puts several objectives in front of players. These goals change with the situation in the sector, keeping players engaged in various scenarios within huge non-instanced public spaces.

In a PvE setting, the objectives might consist of destroying a progression of defenses on an NPC space station, then gunning down the fleeing escape pods after blowing the reactor. These story-based sectors have a set loop that they go through. After finishing up the sequence of events, the sector reverts to its initial state and waits for more players to come along and start it up again. Developer NetDevil showed off its ability to use this structure to tell interesting stories, as a simple "report to the dreadnought" objective turned into "destroy the aliens" when a nearby moon exploded to reveal an enemy jumpgate vomiting hostile ships into space.

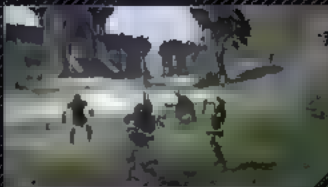
PvP sectors, which appear to be *Jumpgate Evolution's* true endgame, offer an ever-changing battlefield where the three factions fight over vital resources and other strategic objectives. These sectors never reset; the objectives continually shift to reflect the state of the sector. The idea is to have hundreds of players duking it out in a bunch of different settings. NetDevil points to its three-faction setup as key here. Other PvP games like *Dark Age of Camelot* (and *Jumpgate's* own closed beta test) have seen the strongest faction often being ganged up on by the other two, which results in more engaging battles than, say, the Horde getting swarmed under by 3:1 odds at Tarren Mill.

In both PvE and PvP, AI-controlled ships are at war with each other as well. More than 700 AI ships were actively fighting in the PvE zone that NetDevil demoed live at E3. The game can automatically scale AI activity depending on the number of active players in the area, giving

it a sense of being in a massive space war without having so many AI ships out there that you're tripping over them instead of blowing up bad guys.

Jumpgate Evolution's visuals are outstanding, pushing detailed ships through gorgeous skies. Clever use of fullscreen effects is a great complement to the impressive explosions. Space is more colorful than it is in real life, but the overall aesthetic is cool enough to forgive this minor detail.

NetDevil looks like it has an excellent shot at cracking the tricky problems associated with creating a compelling space-based action MMO. Provided the dynamic content generation system lives up to its potential, *Jumpgate Evolution* will be a dream come true for old X-Wing fans.



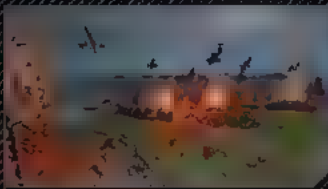
2 *EHR: Planes of Telara (Trion Worlds)*
Beta: Late summer 2010
Release: Early 2011

The WoW-like fantasy MMO has a fascinating dynamic content-generation system (the apocryphous mits) that needs to pan out for it to have a shot at greatness. It looks good so far.



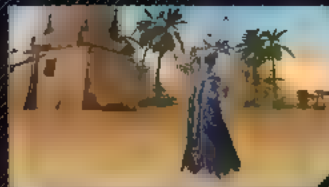
3 *Wrath of the Titans (Blizzard Entertainment)*
Beta: TBA
Release: Fall 2010

It's not quite *God of War: The MMO*, but it's the closest thing out there. Whacking dudes in this violent, physics-based, free-to-play brawler impressed on the E3 show floor.



4 *End of Nations (Trion Worlds)*
Beta: Early 2011
Release: 2011

An MMO RTS is a ridiculous idea if taken at face value, but if anyone can pull it off, it's these guys. The visuals are already great, but a lot of gameplay details have yet to shake out.



5 *Perfect World (Perfect World Entertainment)*
Beta: Winter 2010/2011
Release: TBA

Chinese giant Perfect World is taking aim at Western audiences with this pet-centric fantasy game. I'm reserving judgment on whether it understands U.S. gamers until I get my hands on it.



6 *Warhammer: Age of Sigmar: Dark Millennium (Vigil Games)*
Beta: TBA
Release: By March 2013

A brief video and few details makes this a tough one to judge just yet, but the Warhammer fans at Vigil have the look down. More info to come at August's GamesCom.



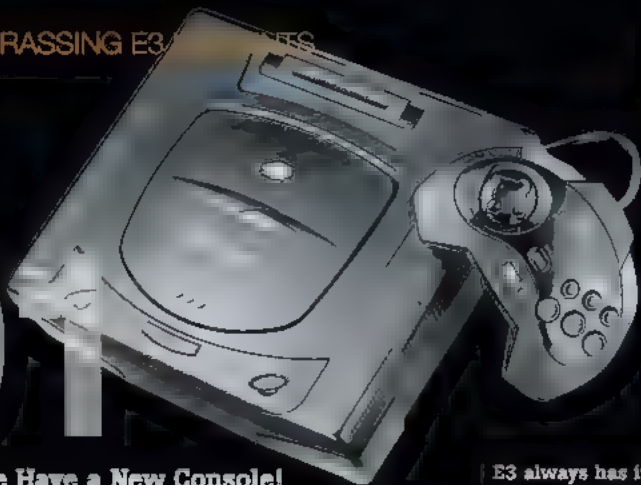
7 *The Agency (Sony Online Entertainment)*
Beta: Fall 2010
Release: 2011

I'm as surprised as you are that *The Agency* didn't look horrible this year. Perhaps the troubled project turned a corner since its last disappointing showing?

By Matt Helgeson



01



Surprise! We Have a New Console!

Sega made a lot of mistakes as a console maker, but none were more perplexing than its surprise U.S. launch of the ill-fated Saturn system. At the beginning of E3 in 1995, Sega revealed that the Saturn, which had been scheduled to release in September, was actually shipping to stores that day. This was a disaster. In 1995, the Internet was far from dominant, so most of the print press at the show wouldn't have the story out for another few weeks. Third-party publishers, who had been planning for a September launch, were furious and didn't have games to support the system until months later. Retailers were caught unprepared and supply problems resulted in many receiving no consoles at all. KB Toys was so mad it refused to stock the system at all. For Sega, this was the beginning of the end of its run as a console manufacturer.

E3 always has its share of bad vibes, but these 10 moments go past being merely lame and boring to achieve cringe-inducing embarrassment. Ever wanted to go to E3? This hall of shame might make you think again.

Jaime Kennedy's Nuclear-Level Bomb

Actor Jaime Kennedy is revered for such films as *Malibu's Most Wanted* and *Kickin' It Old School*. Oh wait, he's actually not. He is available for hosting press conferences, and for some reason Activision decided to hire him to host their 2007 E3 event. Simply put, it was a disaster. A hung-over (or still drunk) Kennedy barely seemed to be aware of what was going on, and bumbled his way through the proceedings telling lame "gamers are nerds" jokes like "There are so many virgins here that... Richard Branson is doing this event." Even the normally genial Tony Hawk seemed to want to punch him. Kennedy got his just desserts when he asked an English-born Activision developer "Should I do this interview as Ozzy Osbourne?" and got the response: "I thought you already were." After Kennedy berated the American crowd for not being on his side, someone yelled, "He's funnier than you!" Ouch.



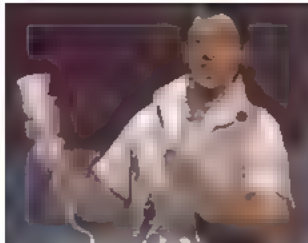
02

Sony's 2006 Press Conference Does Massive Damage

Defining success depends on your goals. Perhaps the goal for Sony's 2006 press conference was to generate a record-setting number of Internet memes. If so, mission accomplished. With "Attack its weak point for massive damage," the "Rillidge Racer!" scream, "Giant enemy crab," the unforgettable "I heard the graphics on it was crazy," and — most importantly — "599 U.S. dollars!" this press conference was a treasure trove of material for YouTube pranksters. Unfortunately for Sony, the bad vibes generated by this botched conference were a major setback for the PlayStation 3 brand, which is only now beginning to gain its stride.



03



Will Music Causes Discord

Nintendo built *Wii Music* under the premise that music games were too hard (and, apparently, too fun) for you. Unfortunately, no one could work the damn thing, especially the poor souls tasked with demonstrating it onstage at Nintendo's 2008 E3 press conference. The first victim was befuddled "professional" drummer Flavi Drums, who became an Internet joke after struggling with the botched air-drumming interface for three long minutes. To cement the game's reputation, Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto led some Nintendo staffers in a Caribbean marimba-flavored version of the Mario theme that sounded like an '80s Carnival Cruise commercial having a grand mal seizure. Before they started, Nintendo's Bill Trinen said: "Bring the house down, guys!" Did they ever.



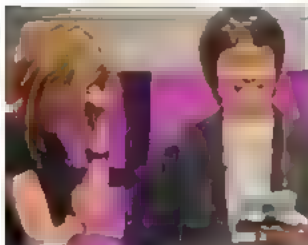
The Strange World Of N-Gage

had the weirdest dream once. There was this thing called the N-Gage—a cell phone that played games—but to use it, you had to hold it to your head like you were taking into a plastic bag. Suddenly, it was at an E3 press conference and all these breakdancers came out and performed mobile game-themed slam poetry. Then a bunch of Scandinavian executives came and talked about how Nokia (Nokia! As if) was going to dominate video games in the future. They sort of sounded like Goldmember. Oh, and John Romero said something! But nobody in the dream cared. Then this girl came out, danced around, and took her shirt off to reveal "S299" painted on her belly. In the dream, nobody clapped or said anything because it was all too bizarre. They didn't know what to say.



High School Massacre

Daney Interactive topped off its 2007 press conference in truly humiliating fashion. After touting its new *High School Musical* karaoke game, the host asked for two "volunteers" to demonstrate. These clearly planted actors pretended to be novices, struggling with the microphones and looking confused. Then, as soon as the music started, they began belting out the number like Broadway veterans. All hell broke loose as dozens of dancers dressed as cheerleaders flooded the aisles, throwing around beach balls and inciting the dumbstruck crowd to join in the choreographed dance number. The jaded crowd of journalists and analysts looked at them like they were crazy, forcing them to start trying to grab people out of the audience. It would have been horrifying if it weren't so hilarious.



Miyamoto Gets Creepy

We like to think of Shigeru Miyamoto as our eccentric, lovable uncle. He's always bringing us weird presents for our birthday and playing bongo at family gatherings. So, we don't like it when he stanks out on a TV host live onstage at E3. Not cool. This horrific incident happened during Nintendo's 2004 conference during a live demo of Nintendo's with then-G4 personality Tina Wood. After coming onstage to help Wood show off the game, things got ugly. First, their virtual dogs got a little snaky. We say, frisky, prompting Wood to say, "I did not teach her that." Then Miyamoto said, "You don't know all the software yet, would you, like me to show you a few more tricks?" After Woods agreed, he leeringly added, "Please follow me backwards" and put his arm around her. A startled Woods stammered, "Oh... okay." The rest of us tried to wash our brains out with bleach.



Jeff Bell Gets Jiggy With It

Microsoft's former global VP of corporate marketing made a huge splash with gamers at the company's 2007 E3 press conference, but not for the right reasons. The exec's stiff corporate-speak was bad enough, but it was during a live demonstration with NFL player Reggie Bush that he truly made his name. Awkwardly engaging in pseudo-street trash talk like, "Pass or run? Pass or run? What's it gon' be?" and "Why don't we show 'em this game got game?" After Reggie broke for a big run, Bell bowed out, saying, "You schooled me on that one, brother—you did it." After the message boards went crazy bashing Bell, he managed to make it worse by posting on the infamous NeoGAF forums, asking a critic, "And your contribution to society is... what?" Oh, Jeff, never feed the trolls. We don't need an MBA from Harvard to tell you that.



Rock Revolution's Blitzkrieg Bloop

Though it created the music genre with *GuitarFreaks*, Konami's *Rock Revolution* didn't have the chops to challenge *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band*. Jang your press conference to demonstrate just how bad the game sucks isn't a great idea. *Rock Revolution*'s victim was senior product manager Lauren Faccodomo. During a live demo of the game, Faccodomo struggled to limp through the Ramones' classic "Blitzkrieg Boogie," fumbling notes and dropping in and out of the mix before finally falling out. Mumbling "That was my fault," she unceremoniously ended the press conference, leaving the crowd mystified. Her failure at the game was all the worse for the fact that she had just played the same song perfectly on her old-gf Ramones tribute band on-stage with a real bass.

Grown Men Cry For Zelda

Nintendo's 2004 E3 press conference was a dark day for gaming. This was the day that Miyamoto took the stage and showed off *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* for the first time. What's embarrassing about that? Nothing. What still makes us cringe were the grown men and supposed journalists who transformed into blubbering 12-year-old girls at a Justin Bieber show. That's right, you guys cried. It's not an urban legend; we were there. We saw you. If this didn't require a good slapping, we don't know what does. This makes us wish those memory-erasing pens in *Men in Black* were real.



interview



Photo: [unreadable]

Rockstar's Gamer in Chief

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1987 A LIFELONG PASSION

Garza became his love affair with gaming with his Commodore 64 home

1992 CALL FOR HELP

Garza proves his first job in the industry as a game contractor for Sega's cult hit *Golden Axe*. He plays guitar by the dozens, helping frustrated gamers over the phone with ups and downs

1993 PUBLISHING SECRETS

Tim Schafer goes to Sega, Harbort goes to Prima, helping a series of code and hint books called *Secrets of the Ages*

1994 CRYSTAL DAYS

Garza gets his first break into game development at Crystal Dynamics. His first project is the 3D0 title *007: International*

1996 STARTING UP

Garza leaves to start his own game studio, Blinn Entertainment

1997 FATEFUL MEETING

Rockstar adds Garza and Sam Houser to the team. They are working for BMG Interactive. BMG signs

1998 STARS ALIGN

Garza joins the team. Houser and Garza found Rockstar. James

2000 A BLOCKBUSTER

Rockstar releases *Grand Theft Auto*. The game eventually sells over 14 million units worldwide

2004 GOLDEN STATE

Garza and Houser announce *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The game is released in 2004

2010 OUT WEST

Garza and Houser announce *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. The game is released in 2010

far since the company was founded in

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You've been around since the beginning of Rockstar. A lot of people don't remember that early evolution of the company, the games before GTA III.

In the first year we had GTA London, GTA II, Thrasher, Monster Truck Madness, Rune, Viking Warlord, and we did the console versions of Railroad Tycoon for Take-Two. Early on, Sam [Houser] and Dan [Houser] had a vision of where we could take the industry, and that was in line with what I wanted to do—I wanted to get away from what people back then called "mainstream games." I knew we could create something cooler in this medium. When you get a group of people that have the same mindset, you can make it happen. Along the way, we had to pay some bills, but we are very proud of *Grand Theft Auto: London 1969* and *Thrasher* was very cool for its time. I still think it holds up as a skating game. But *GTA III* blew the doors open.

Was there a moment when you realized that *GTA III* was becoming a phenomenon? Not really. I think it's because we were sort of "heads down," doing the sequel right away. We shipped *Vice City* a year after it came out. When you have such conviction in the art that we do, we're just sort of blinded by making the best stuff possible. The success didn't go to our heads. We weren't all driving flashy cars or anything like that. It just gave us an opportunity to make more cool stuff.

You have a pretty low profile in the industry compared to guys like Tim Schafer or Will Wright. Why is that?

It's about letting the games speak for us, for all of us. It's not just me working on these games. It's hundreds of people. From the top down, everybody is very important. We like the game to speak for itself. I'm in a position where I get to do a lot of the PR, but it's kind of embarrassing sometimes because there are so many people behind the game that are way more talented than me. And I'm sure the Tim Schafers of the world would say the same thing.

Of course, I'm not saying Tim or anyone else is arrogant, but he is definitely more of a public face for his company.

That's the thing. For us, our logo says everything. You know what kind of a game you're going to get. It's not like the movies, where you can pin an actor to a product. It's a very big, collaborative effort. I don't think that a game needs a spokesperson. The game is the game.

The Rockstar brand means something to fans and represents the way that you guys make games. What does Rockstar Games mean to you?

What does Rockstar Games mean to me?

That's kind of a "What kind of tree would you be" question. [Laughs]

It's actually pretty easy to answer. What Rockstar Games means to me is passion, creativity, and blowing down the doors of the medium. It's pushing the envelope. It's doing the next thing. It's the vanguard of our industry.

What's your role in developing the games at Rockstar? I get the sense you bounce to a project towards the end of development.

No, I work on a lot of different things at once. It's best summed up as literally hours and hours of playing the game every day. I'm basically a fancy QA guy.

So you sit down and play for 10 hours and take notes on what you think is wrong and come back to the team?

Yep. We literally work on our QA database and fill it up with bugs and comments and to-dos. We work on something until we feel that it's just right. That means a lot of playing games. Guess what I did today? Played *LA Noire*.

You guys aren't afraid to push something back if you feel like it can be better. Is that a battle you have to fight sometimes?

It's a tough decision for anybody to make, and it can make or break a game. It's pretty obvious with the titles that I think need more time.

It seems that every Rockstar game is said to be a disaster in development, until they come out and they get 9.5 ratings.

That's the thing. Nobody knows what the games really are until you're working on them. The only time anybody's ever said that [a game is in trouble] is based on speculations and rumors.

What's it like working with Sam and Dan Houser on a daily basis?

They're amazing guys. They're also my friends. This is going to sound really sappy, but we work really hard together, and the kind of camaraderie that we've built, not just with them but a lot of our key members, is really special. Like me, they're touching the games every day, which I think is very rare for people in their positions at other companies.

Rockstar has its own aesthetic. If I'm racing a buggy in *Red Dead Redemption*, there are the little plumes of smoke from *Midnight Club* to guide me along. Your games seem to influence each other as they evolve. How much do you look at games outside of Rockstar?

Obviously we're big gamers, so we play a lot of games and we're influenced by what we play. We do play our games as well. When I was younger I thought it was cool when you played

Capcom games and they used similar items and iconic things to help you through the games. I always liked that.

Rockstar seems to know how to make open worlds compelling. What's the secret? Never break the illusion is number one. If there's something in the game that screams at you to want to do it, you have to be able to do it. If you dissect our games, it's not one thing; it's the thousand little details. People go, "Oh, Rockstar has such attention to detail." That's the secret. It's out there for everybody to look at.

Another big way that you guys have changed things in the industry is that you make games that are engaged in pop culture as a whole, with music, film, just street culture. Do you just get an inspiration that sticks in your head and research it?

Yeah. It's definitely a lot of research. It's what influences us. It's where we are in our lives at that moment. I think it's also important that we surround ourselves with people who aren't just from the games industry. Our music guys and even Sam [Houser] come from the music industry originally. It's about finding people who really want to make games and can bring something to the table. A lot of game companies are like, "You have to have experience making games to work for us." It's sort of a Catch-22. You might have the coolest DJ or graffiti artist out there, but because he's never made a game you're not going to hire him. For us, it's like, "You've got real talent, let's try to figure out a way to use it."

A lot of your projects seem pretty risky commercially—like *Bully*, for instance. Is that a concern for Take-Two when you bring them ideas?

I'm sure that's got to be a concern for somebody, but the strength of our conviction is we want to make nothing but the best stuff out there. We feel that about all of our projects. If you make something that's cool and something that's quality, people are going to want to play it. That's the goal. People really freak out when I tell them that we don't do focus group testing.

Who are some of the game creators over the years that have really influenced what you do?

Obviously we love Nintendo, and Miyamoto's amazing. We definitely highly respect Kojima. I love the Grasshopper guy. Would answer the same way that any fanboy would answer. Tim Schafer. Sid Meier. Ken Levine. Anybody who makes a game I admire, because it's so [explicitly] hard. [Laughs]

This handheld powerhouse for Sprint's new blazing-fast 4G network is all about speed. Sprint is just beginning to roll it out in many cities, and the marketers are promising data speeds 10 times faster than the current 3G network. While our experience with the phone didn't quite reflect that, the phone blazed while surfing the web and downloading files.

The big draw to the EVO may be the 4G network, but there is so much more to love. The handset is wider than your typical smart phone, which gives it the real estate for a gorgeous, 4.3-inch capacitive touchscreen that outputs vibrant colors with its impressive 800 x 480 display. The phone also sports two cameras – one on the back

with a powerful 8-megapixel sensor and LED flash, plus a 1.3-megapixel front camera for video calling using Qik. On the video side, the 720p video recording brings concert bootlegs to the next generation. While the video quality suffered from occasional digital artifacts, the 8MP images aren't bad considering we're talking about a phone.

The Evo uses the Android 2.1 operating system and HTC's proprietary Sense Experience, which basically cleans up a bunch of Android quirks and tops it off with a sexy UI. While we normally shy away from proprietary software, Sense is a well-implemented system that doesn't prevent the phone from reaching its full potential. The added layer of UI design is possible thanks to the powerful 1-GHz Snapdragon processor. None of the applications we used suffered from lag. The only downside to such a powerful engine is it cuts into battery life, so make sure you invest in extra charging cables.

While the games on Android are still playing catch-up to Apple's App Store, the EVO 4G has access to some of the coolest productivity and creativity applications around. Throw in Google Navigation, wireless tethering, an FM receiver, and mobile TV access, and you have a competitive contender to the iPhone.

\$199.99

(with two-year Sprint contract)

www.sprint.com



by Nick Ahrens

When it comes to home theaters, knowing how to navigate the controls of your various components is imperative to maximizing your couch time. Logitech makes it simple with its line of Harmony universal remotes. We took three of its newer offerings for a spin, ranging from the simple and basic controller to the feature-heavy touchscreen navigator.

Logitech Harmony Extend-Up



Harmony 300

The Harmony 300 is the gold standard for high-quality low-cost universal remotes. Instead of guessing your way through inputting manufacturer codes to get the remote to work, the 300 plugs in to a PC just like high-end remotes to give its users an easy-to-use system with a database of nearly every product on the market. While the remote lacks the fancy LCD screen, people looking to combine their basic equipment into one package without breaking the bank should start here.

AT&T

logitech.com



Harmony 700

The rechargeable Harmony 700 is Logitech's mid-range universal remote. Featuring a customizable color LCD and support for up to six components, users can bring their console, TV, DVD player, and receiver under one umbrella. This was our favorite remote we tested, and would make a great addition to any home theater setup.

AT&T

\$149.99
logitech.com



Harmony 1100

With its touchscreen controls, the 1100 looks more like a *Star Trek* gadget and is the ultimate remote control. It features an RF system, which allows for multi-room control and hidden components. While the Harmony 1100 is a sexy piece of hardware, it's harder to hover your finger over the touchscreen while fast-forwarding or pausing a show than it is to rest your finger on a button and rely on muscle memory. In practice, the 1100 may require more brain power than the average person would want for basic functionality.

AT&T

\$389.99
logitech.com



2 | Traxxas Slash

Cooking in at over 30mph out of the box, this remote-controlled racing truck is a blast. The long-range controller and four-wheel independent suspension give racers precise steering and control from over a city block away. Because of the way Traxxas builds its vehicles, the Slash is also very durable. Impressive shocks, super strong bumpers, and waterproof components allow you to zoom through puddles and roll the vehicle without worrying about heading to the body shop. Owners looking for an extra edge can also upgrade the vehicle's speed and longevity by adding new parts like higher output batteries. Thanks to the long-lasting battery and quick charger, you won't have to wait

too long in between off-road races, either.

AMT

traxxas.com

2 | Razer Onza

For console gamers, good third-party peripherals seem to be rare and expensive, while bad ones are cheap and in abundance. Razer offers a glimmer of hope in a sea of cheap, gimmicky sharks. The Onza, the company's first shot at an Xbox 360 controller, embodies Razer's obsessive quality and service to the hardcore. Sporting longer triggers and a d-pad that uses independent buttons



for the directions, this thing is built for serious gaming sessions. The most interesting feature, however, is the adjustable tension on the thumb sticks. Combined with in-game sensitivity settings, adding or reducing tension will give the most seasoned sniper an added level of control. Microsoft does not let third-party companies make wireless controllers, but the 12-foot cable ensures even the biggest living room won't pose a problem.

\$49.99
razerzone.com

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

MEDIA SHELF



LOOK AROUND YOU

The *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening describes this classic documentary series about math and science as "one of the funniest shows I've ever seen." Coming to us from the BBC across the pond, *Around You's* '70s-style classroom experiments are wrong, impossible, and completely hilarious.

\$19.98

bbcamericashop.com



MYTHBUSTERS COLLECTION 8

To continue our science theme, we're bringing in the TV king of experiments. Mythbusters Adam and Jamie bring more of their insane explosions and high-speed camera work to a DVD collection that is fun for your inner nerd kid.

\$49.99

store.discovery.com



THE PLATO FILES

Epic, mad and awesome TV personality Neil DeGrasse Tyson flexes his brain muscles to explain the science surrounding Pluto losing its status as a planet. We've had a lifelong love/hate relationship so many fans

\$23.95

books.www.orton.com



Logic In Motion

Sony and Microsoft are targeting the Wii audience with Move and Kinect, but gouging their pocketbooks for access to minigame collections is a poor strategy

by Matt Bertz
Content manager,
Game Informer

In the wake of the Wii's massive success, copycat products were inevitable. As the hype built for this year's E3, all eyes centered on the me-too motion control initiatives from Sony and Microsoft. Could Move gain momentum from its GDC debut, and would Natal (renamed Kinect at the show) hold up to closer scrutiny?

Over the course of the conference, the companies' blatant cash grabbing attempts at offering a Wii alternative took a backseat to Nintendo's 3D handheld, the redesigned Xbox 360, and a deluge of enthusiasm for best-in-show games like *Portal 2* and *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. In fact, more people I spoke with on the show floor wanted to talk about Microsoft's disastrous *Cirque du Soleil* event than they did about Kinect or Move.

The backlash and disinterest from core gamers and enthusiasts was predictable. Before E3, polling data from research firm OTX found that purchase intent for the new motion controls was tracking below 10 percent for both consoles with core gamers. After years of watching the Wii bring entry-level gaming to senior citizens and other family members uncomfortable with the steep learning curve the traditional controller presents, many of us have come to terms with the fact that these motion controlled platforms are not being made for us. Which is fine—that's what *Gears of War 3*, *Infamous 2*, and *Klonoa 3* are all about.

Microsoft seems to understand this as well. The company's high-brow attempt at communicating the value of Kinect through use of a fake elephant, nymph-like circus performers, and a nuclear family suspended from the ceiling was a sales pitch to minivan-driving soccer moms, not gamers versed in the finer points of managing experience points to create the ultimate spellsword in *Oblivion*.

While the controller interfaces and game libraries target the same casual gamer demographic as the Wii, there is one large barrier for both the Move and Kinect blocking access: to those masses—affordability. At the start

of this console generation, the Nintendo Wii's appeal was greatly boosted by its affordable price. In comparison to the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, Kinect is rumored to cost \$150, and if you want the total package for the Move it will cost you nearly \$120. That may look appealing in comparison to the Wii's \$199 price, but add the cost of an Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 and you're talking \$400 to play sports minigame collections in high definition.

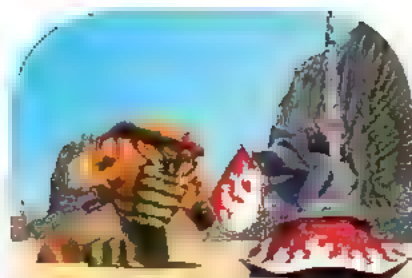
This considerable cost has not gone unnoticed by publishers and developers. Activision-Bizzard COO Thomas Tippit agrees this could pose a major problem for both platforms. "I think as a publisher, you have to be concerned

about how the price drives a lot of the outcome of how big of an install base there's going to be [for the hardware]," he told Gamesutra.

In repositioning their consoles as devices for the masses, perhaps a more realistic strategy for Sony and Microsoft is not to target new users, but to aim for the rest of the family members in the 75 million households that already have a 360 or PS3. Nintendo has the rest on lockdown, and the steep price of admission for both Kinect and Move won't alter that fact any time soon.

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

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



03
Galactic Tar Ball



12
Star Wars II



13
EXPENDABLES



10
Mad Max: Fury Road



18

EXPENDABLES

24
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days



25



27



31
Metrod: Other M

August

03 New Releases

Down of Hellas: ICS
Galactic Tar Ball (PS3)

04 The Not So Funny Pages

Kano and Jaxx's video games, intricately designed functional dials, return to video games on August 24. If you can't wait 20 days to be reunited with these usability-makers, you can read their unlock story in Wildstorm's comic series. This story fills in the gaps between the two games, and will likely include "TAS" (TAI TAI) onomatopoeias on each page.

06 Finally a Movie Worth Seeing

DC's *Cap'n Jack*, *Spazzes? Cap*, *Earthquake? Oh!*. The real future of Hollywood is Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg. The duo stars in today's theatrical release *The Other Guys* with a supporting cast of Samuel L. Jackson, Devyne "The Rock" Something, and Michael Keaton. This has to be the movie of the year. It even has a Grand Theft Auto reference in it.

10 New Releases

Local Hero AAA: Heroes of the Ring (Wii, PS3)
Hidden NFL 11 (PS3, 360, Wii, PC) PSP

13 The Super Smash Bros. of Cinema

The Expendables opens in theaters today, and features a list of names normally only seen at the Oscars or at Jay-Z's birthday party. The movie stars Sylvester Stallone, Jason Statham, Jet Li, Dolph Lundgren, Mickey Rourke, Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and every other notable action star from the '80s. Steven Seagal is still waiting patiently by his phone, the call ain't coming, man.

17 New Releases

Big Beach Sports 2 (Wii)
Combat Wings: The Great Banker (Wii)

18 Marvel Through The Ages

Captain America is broken in! The Hulk lost long lockstar hair! A purple rabbit is telling the Avengers what to do! Time travel is crazy! If you're new to comics, the stories unfold in *Avengers* and today's release, *Age of Heroes* offer the perfect jumping-on point, as well as a little more on the Hulk's backstory. *Avengers* must include heroes. For some reason Peter Parker, the amazing Spider-Man, has not been a part of this tale.

24 New Releases

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days (PS3, 360)

25 Toys From Heaven and Hell

This new Sweet Tooth action figure series led off of the announcement of a *Twisted Metal* sequel at E3. How'd the accompanying Nerf toy line at a Heavenly Sword continuation as well? Both figures stand over six inches in height, and offer the same

outstanding quality found in Sony's previously released Rachel & Clark and Resistance figures.

27 One Step Closer to a Jaws Requel

After seeing *The Expendables* and *The Other Guys* you're probably sick of seeing good movies. *Planet 51* opens in theaters today, and despite Ramer claiming it will make more than *Avatar*, we promise you it will be terrible. For the record, Robert said *Deep Blue Sea* would make more.

31 New Releases

Carrie Hook: The Final Jam (X360)
Dead Rising 2 (PS3, 360)
Gully Party (Wii)
Astro Boy: Other M (Wii)
Valkyrie Chronicles 2 (PSP)

2010



Platform:
PlayStation 3
 Xbox 360 • PC

Style:
Player Role-
Playing

Publisher:
Electronic Arts

Developer:
BioWare

Release
Date: 2011

DRAGON



AGE II

by Joe Juba

Dragon Age is not merely the story of a Grey Warden slaying a demon and quelling the war. It exploits in Dragon Age II what made the world of the first game better. Ferelden is a region on the continent of Thedas. It was crossed by a river, the darkspaw, and was the home of the world's first Grey Warden. It fought the lowa battles for survival of the world. Dragon Age II is a multiplatform Xbox and a single game novel or comic. It is only with a light on one page at a time. With Dragon Age II, BioWare is shifting its focus to a new region, a new story and a new tale that will expand the larger Dragon Age universe. While the Hero of Ferelden was allying allies against Nevea Loghain, a new legend was arising in the doomed village of Lothering.

BioWare is one of the premier RPG developers in the world, so the success of *Dragon Age: Origins* didn't surprise most gamers. After its release in November last year, the game enjoyed strong sales and critical acclaim. In light of these triumphs, one could easily forget that *Origins* was a considerable risk for BioWare's Edmonton studio.

Presented as the spiritual successor to *Baldur's Gate*, *Origins* was charged with carrying on the legacy of a PC game released in 1998. In the intervening years, the role-playing genre has grown and evolved in many directions across multiple platforms. How players would react to traditional elements like a solitary hero and highly tactical combat was difficult to predict, especially with titles like *Mass Effect* setting new standards for conversation systems and cinematic presentation.

Any reservations about the design were put to rest with *Origins*' release. Due to BioWare's skillful implementation, gamers accepted and embraced the old-school aesthetic in *Origins*. But nostalgia can only carry a series so far. Where does one draw the line between homage and aging design? BioWare views *Dragon Age* as an enduring property spanning multiple installments, and the Edmonton studio believes that future games in the franchise can't endlessly go back to the well of fond memories.

Dragon Age II is more than just a sequel—it's here to establish a new identity for the *Dragon Age* universe. With success to call its own, *Dragon Age* is no longer bound by the concept of being a spiritual successor to another series. BioWare is making some major modifications to the formula, giving the story and mechanics a more contemporary twist while retaining the essence of what fans loved about the original.

"At the core, what we're doing is trying to give *Dragon Age* a shot of adrenaline," says executive director Mark Derrak. "It means amping everything up that maybe was a little lacking, but keeping what already works."

Dragon Age II isn't forsaking its roots. It still places you in the role of an exemplary hero, reacts to your choices, and allows you and your allies to work together in tactical combat. You'll just experience these elements in new ways while diving deeper into the lore of the *Dragon Age* mythology.



"Will we see any character from *Origins* in *Dragon Age II*? We are certainly not done with Morrigan's story," hints executive Mike Anthony. "I can say that."



We only saw the male warrior in action, though BioWare says players can choose either gender.



The silent hero is gone in Dragon Age II. Instead, Hawke's interactions unfold in a "Silent Client"-like conversation system.



Darkspawn are still a threat in Dragon Age II, but they are less dangerous without an Archdemon to lead them.

Consistent Universe

Choice is an important element of any BioWare game, and in the last few years, the studio has found a way to make your decisions have repercussions beyond a single game. Commander Shepard's actions from Mass Effect carry over to Mass Effect 2, and players can expect a similar level of consistency with Dragon Age II.

"It's really important that Dragon Age feels like a consistent world for the player," explains lead designer Mike Laidlaw. "Origins did such a good job of letting you craft Ferelden into your Ferelden it would be a shame to lose that."

You may be controlling a different character in Dragon Age II, but the choices your Grey Warden made in Origins are still imported from your save and reflected in the world: Who is leading Ferelden? Who defeated the archdemon? Those questions are vital in determining the current state of the Dragon Age universe, and the team at BioWare wants to make sure your decisions carry over — even if you want to play Dragon Age II on a different platform.

"We're not getting into specific details, but the goal will be to make it so that even if you played the first game on the PC and the second game on console, we'll be able to react to your choices," reveals executive director Mike Derrah. "We'll see what Microsoft and Sony have to say about that."

Unlike the Mass Effect series, you won't feel left out if you haven't played Origins. The team has an established canon if you start fresh, and since the game is a direct continuation, Dragon Age II will be a great entry point.

Thyre (left) is from Dragon Age: Origins.

The Champion

Who is the Champion of Kirkwall? Some citizens of the Free Marches will tell you that he survived the destruction of Lothering. They say he found something in the deepest parts of the abandoned dwarven kingdoms. Some claim he is a powerful mage, while others swear he is an unstoppable warrior. As Dragon Age II opens, all players will know for certain is that they are Hawke, the Champion of Kirkwall, and his story is theirs to define.

Hawke is a legend in his own time, and like all legends his history is shrouded in speculation, mystery and exaggeration. He escaped Lothering as it was being razed by darkspawn, then fled to Kirkwall, a major city in the Free Marches north of Ferelden. But what happened between his escape and his rise to prominence? The answer to that question is the driving narrative force behind Dragon Age II.

"We're not necessarily setting up an ancient evil you have to defeat," says lead designer Mike Laidlaw. "Instead, we're posing something for you to answer. By playing the game, you're not just finding out the answer — in a lot of ways, you're telling us what that answer is."

As the new main character, Hawke is a more defined individual than the Warden from Origins. While players can still customize Hawke's appearance and class, certain features of the character are set in stone. You won't choose your race, and every player will experience the same origin story. Hawke is a human, and he starts in Lothering as it is being destroyed — an event that occurred off-screen in Origins.

When compared to Origins' selection of races and origin stories, Dragon Age II may appear more limited. However, with the beginning of Hawke's tale predetermined, players aren't making fewer choices, more choices are just being made as the story progresses, rather than on a character creation screen before you start playing.

The focus on Hawke as a known quantity also allows the team to address an area of concern from Origins, voice acting for the player character. In this case, BioWare took a cue from its own Mass Effect series, which has been lauded for its cinematic feel and believable conversations between characters. These goals are difficult to achieve if the main character is mute. "Especially when compared to Mass Effect, this is something that prevents it from telling a really immersive story, so we're going to add player VO," Derrah says.

Not only will Hawke speak, but you will also have a new way to select his responses. Dragon Age II uses a conversation system similar to Mass Effect's, where players select paraphrased versions of the dialogue from a wheel. An icon in the middle of the wheel even illustrates the line's basic intent (like aggressive or sarcastic), so you can focus more on the interaction rather than reading and analyzing your dialogue choices.

"We do know that, in Mass Effect, most people do not skip the dialogue. They actually sit through it and experience it as a whole," Laidlaw says. "It tells us that people are experiencing it in a more cinematic way, in that case. Whereas the Origins style is a little more choppy, where you read and listen and read and listen."

You'll still direct Hawke's choices and shape his personality, but he won't be a blank slate where the player needs to fill in all the gaps. He can speak when not spoken to, and offer contextual insight. Even better, the characters around Hawke will have something to react to, eliminating the stilted, stop-and-go dynamic of Origins. Just as Commander Shepard provides a compelling anchor for the Mass Effect series, the Champion of Kirkwall will be a mythical and charismatic figure.

A Story In Pieces

All of the events in *Dragon Age II* are tied to the story of Hawke, but the goal for the franchise is to ensure that each addition to the canon expands the player's understanding of the universe as a whole. "A lot of RPGs are about a character. In the case of *Mass Effect*, it's Shepard's story," Darrah says. "In *Dragon Age*, it's really the story of Thedas."

When looking at ways to help players get a more complete view of the *Dragon Age* universe, the team saw an opportunity to make the story of *Dragon Age II* span a decade. However, taking advantage of this opportunity meant messing around with the classic narrative structure that has served as the basis for most of BioWare's games. Go through the intro, open up the world, beat a handful of standalone areas, and then do the final mission before watching the credits roll.

"We've done a lot of games now," Laidlaw says. "It's easy to look at us and go, 'Oh, you guys are going to do one of your stories again.'" Not this time. *Dragon Age II* has a framed narrative structure, which means that the exploits of Hawke occurred in the past, but are being retold in the present. At the current point in the timeline, Hawke is already the Champion of Kirkwall. Narrators with unique insights into the events in question tell the tale of his past adventures.

"There's a story being told within a story," Darrah explains. "A popular example that most people have heard of is *The Usual Suspects*. *The Usual Suspects* is really about Verbal Kint telling the story of this heist that's gone terribly wrong. That's the way the story-telling is going to happen in *Dragon Age II*."

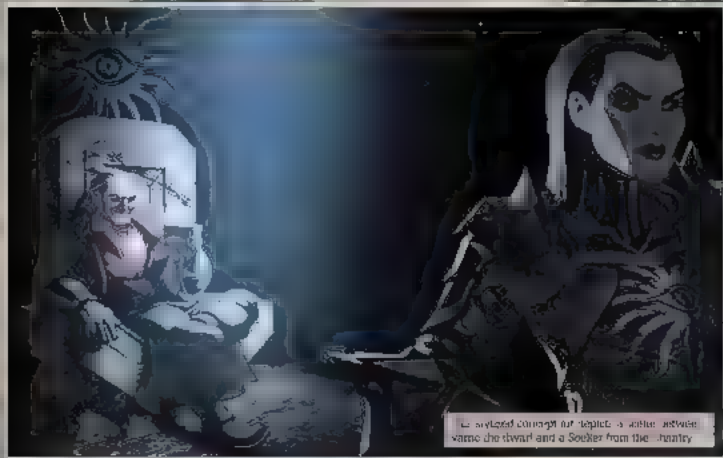
As our demo begins, we witness an

exchange between a male dwarf named Varric and a female Chantry Seeker – a position that is essentially Templar Internal Affairs. In the outscene, we learn that the world stands on the brink of war, and the Seeker believes that understanding Hawke's actions can help explain and resolve the volatile situation. She wants to know how Hawke escaped from Lothering, and Varric reluctantly tells the tale. At least he tells the version he wants the Seeker to hear, and the scene fades to Lothering and shifts to Hawke's perspective.

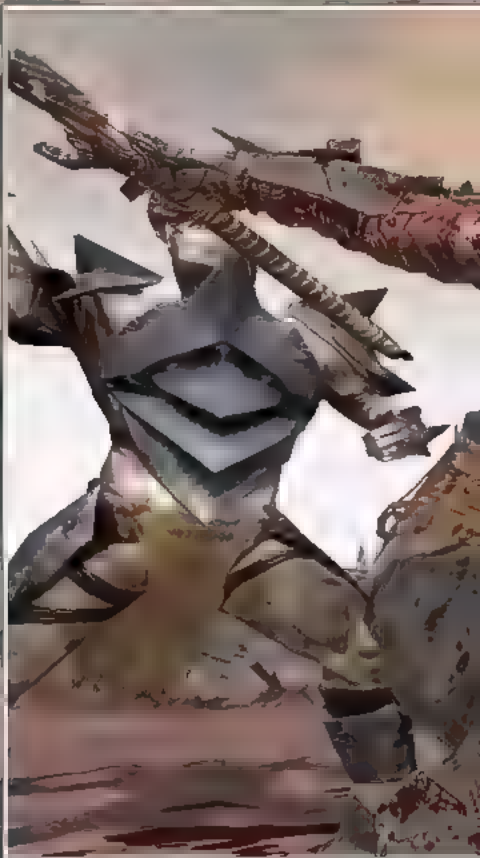
"By having a narrator – having a focus on storytelling that moves me around with a direction and a purpose – I can hear the best parts," Laidlaw says. "As a result, we can cover a bigger scope than we have in the past." In other words, the narrative progression is less restricted than in *Origins*. Events don't necessarily need to unfold chronologically, and the structure allows the team to skip over uneventful periods of time, keeping players in the action and cutting down on the excess travel time.

"What that actually allows us to do is really focus on the key moments that are occurring in *Dragon Age II*," says Darrah. "We can skip the interstitial between the key action moments, the key decision moments, the key universe-shaping moments."

By the end of *Dragon Age II*, players will have guided Hawke through multiple quests, victories, and defeats. The framed narrative conveys 10 years' worth of adventures, heroism, and consequences – a tapestry of stories sewn together and unified by the threat of war currently looming over the Free Marches.



A stylized concept art depicts a scene between Varric the dwarf and a Seeker from the Chantry.





The world and characters will have a different look thanks to changes in the Dragon Age art style



Dragon Age 2 begins as the events of Origins are still taking place, so you may see some familiar events from a different angle

Make Your Choice

Disposing of the rigid morality system that tends to accompany your decisions in most role-playing games, Origins distinguished itself by providing a more nuanced perspective on choice and consequence. That tradition continues with Dragon Age — and the framed narrative makes it even easier for the team to convey the gravity of your decisions.

Because of the larger span of time the game encompasses, players will see the result of their decisions sooner. If you save a city under siege, it (and its grateful citizens) will be there for future sections of the narrative. On the other hand, if that city gets destroyed, you will see how it affects the region in the years that follow.

"This is, I think, the most reactive game we've ever done," Lakdaw says. "As we move forward through time, the narrators are offering these comments, instead of waiting 80 hours for an epilogue that tells me who got married and who did what. I get to see those interactions within hours."

Your decisions in these situations define Hawke's history as the Champion of Kirkwall. Like Origins, players can expect a range of minor and major choices. BioWare isn't getting into the details of the specific situations yet, but Lakdaw offers an interesting tidbit regarding the nature of the choices and their repercussions. "I think Dragon Age, if it's about anything, is about human weakness: the inability to see the larger threat. Honestly, that's where your consequences come from."

Not all of Hawke's choices tip the scales of power in the Free Marches — some of them are aimed at establishing a rapport with his followers and allies. Your party members still respond to your actions and words, gaining or losing respect based on their personal views. However, even if they disapprove, you don't need to worry about them ditching you.

In Origins, party members were incompatible with certain moral stances. For example, Leliana and Wynne wouldn't tolerate cruelty, and would abandon the Warden if their approval rating fell low enough. This led many evil-inclined players to avoid using Leliana or Wynne even if they were optimal characters in terms of balancing the party. This kind of meta-game is no longer necessary in Dragon Age II.

If a character disagrees with your choices, they may still complain, but it isn't necessarily bad. In fact, you can even be openly hostile to your party members and still unlock combat bonuses — a benefit previously reserved for those who established positive relationships. Finally, players can tell off the characters that annoy them.

"They won't necessarily leave. They may still join you, but they're going to try to show you up, and that may influence battle in a different way," Darragh says. "We do really rather encourage players to be consistent in their interactions with characters, rather than have to play toward the gamey-ness of the system."



A Makeover for Thedas

If you were playing the PC version, Dragon Age: Origins was a good-looking game. Unfortunately, the visuals didn't translate well to consoles. When combined with Origins' traditional fantasy vibe, the result was an experience that didn't have its own visual identity. That's changing with Dragon Age II. The team is making a comprehensive effort to "hot rod the art," and make it more distinct. It isn't just a question of graphical quality; it's a matter of revamping the game's entire art style.

"The art in Origins — maybe because of the sheer size of the game — was a little bit messy, kind of overworked, pretty generic," admits art director Matt Goldman. "So, 'hot rod the art' means we're going to strip it down to the essentials and come up with a more elemental, ownable art style."



As showcased in some of the screens and concept art on these pages, the new style involves better use of negative space and more angular, grim depictions of your surroundings. Dragon Age is a world of dark fantasy, and the team feels that the previous whimsical qualities of the art didn't reflect the austere nature of the world and its politics. With the sequel, BioWare hopes that the bloodier, sexier visuals will convey more of what makes the universe unique.

"Whenever you see a screenshot of Dragon Age II, you're going to be able to say 'That's Dragon Age II,'" says Goldman. "You're not confusing it for Lord of the Rings."





This dragon is more than it appears: After swooping down and grabbing a darkspawn in its talons, it transforms into a familiar figure from *Dragon Age*: Suli, holding the dead darkspawn in his hand. Florneth walks through the flames and approaches Hawke, saying, "Well, well. What have we here?"



Warrior, rogue, and mage are the three base classes, but each one will feature even more specializations.

A Better Battlefield

The story and characters tend to take center stage when discussing any RPG, but they are only part of what made *Dragon Age: Origins* such an enjoyable experience. The game's tactical combat system allowed players to utilize their party members' individual strengths to turn the tide of battle.

Dragon Age II is as much about keeping what worked well from *Origins* as addressing what didn't, which is why players can expect a similar emphasis on abilities, spells, and character customization. The three base classes—warrior, rogue, and mage—make the transition to the sequel, though the team hopes to refine each one to create more distinct play styles.

"Warrior, mage, and rogue are archetypes for a reason, but I don't know that *Origins* delineated them enough. I didn't create enough space between them. A rogue dual-wielding was just a warrior with less armor in some cases," Laidlaw admits. "What I want to do is make sure that you feel like this unstoppable juggernaut is like super-ninja, or field artillery."

A large part of creating a unique sensation for each class is ensuring that the ability trees accommodate a wide range of tactical options. *Origins* had a lot of abilities, but some of the trees (particularly for mages) were of extremely limited usefulness. In *Dragon Age II*, the team is focusing on adding depth rather than breadth to the feats your characters can perform.

"What we want to do is give the player more depth of choice," Derrah explains. "So you might really like the fireball. We're going to let you customize and enhance fireball itself, so by the end of the game you're actually tailoring that spell to the way you want it to be." While this approach could mean fewer abilities in terms of sheer numbers, it also allows you to make more meaningful decisions and craft Hawke according to your preferred tactics.

Enhancing the strategic possibilities on the battlefield is the other major way *Dragon Age II* is adding depth to the combat. Similar to the spell combinations from *Origins*, all of the classes can combine abilities for specific advantages. Before, players could only combine magic—like casting fireball on a greased area. Now, a warrior may Sunder an opponent's armor, and when a rogue comes up to perform backstab, the combination of the two abilities will create an additional effect that is more than the sum of the two individual attacks.

Hopefully, this approach will result in players exploring more options in combat instead of relying on a handful of standby abilities (crushing prison is returning, by the way). By emphasizing teamwork and depth, the battles in *Dragon Age* should feel even more varied and satisfying. "I want you to be up in enemies' faces," Laidlaw says. "I want you to be taking heads off, and I want everything to feel faster—but more importantly, responsive. If I tell someone to go kill, I want them up there and fighting immediately."



Interview with the Doctors

How does BioWare approach continuing the Dragon Age franchise without having direct story progression from one entry to the next?

Greg Zeschuk: We see the world of Dragon Age as having a huge range of potential stories around the intriguing historical events of the timeline, and we love having the option of exploring different events and possibilities. Sometimes our content will directly link events and at other times (like in the case of Dragon Age II) we'll provide a different and unique view of events that are familiar or even partially explored in other Dragon Age games. We love having the options to provide our developers the greatest possible range of creativity.

The console version of Dragon Age II seems to be a much bigger focus than it was for the first game. What drove the decision to refine the console experience?

Ray Muzyka: We learned the hard way in Dragon Age: Origins how hard it is to work initially on PC and then convert the game back to console. In the case of Dragon Age II we're doing all versions simultaneously (PC, 360, and PS3) but we're definitely ensuring the features we put in work well on console as well as PC, because it's typically much easier to convert them back to PC. The PC has a wider range of potential control options and can thus accommodate different designs easier in many cases than consoles can. Both consoles and PC are important to us, and we have great fan communities we plan to support in the future on all of these platforms.

Has BioWare's success with the Mass Effect series affected the studio's approach to Dragon Age?

GZ: We're always trying to evolve all of our games, so it's fair to say that Mass Effect has had an influence on Dragon Age. A common problem in the games business, and one key thing that we try and avoid, is being reactive and not seriously considering the implications of even the smallest feature changes in our games. We're always trying to make our games more accessible and easier to play while not removing any of the depth and detail that players value. Essentially, you don't want to fix something that isn't broken, so it's a careful balancing act. Finally, the ultimate design of the game is driven by the passion of the team and what they want to create; that's how we achieve quality.

Based on your experience with Origins, is there still a healthy audience looking for strategic, pause-and-play RPGs?

RM: Absolutely! Dragon Age: Origins has been very successful commercially as well as critically, and we've been able to build a very successful post-release content plan supporting the game. All signs point to the health of the traditional RPG space both on PC and console. We've always had the belief that people will support a great RPG, and Dragon Age: Origins really proved that thesis.



Mage spells can now fight crushing blows, obliterating an enemy explode with crushing power.





Two Dragon Ages

While the basics of the battle system were the same for the console and PC games, BioWare acknowledges a disparity in the gameplay on the platforms. Where the PC entry emphasized a pause-and-play approach heavy on strategy, the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions couldn't deliver tactics on the same level. "What we have in Origins is a control experience on the PC that is a lot closer to where we want it to be. On consoles, it just had farther to come," Darrah admits.

The console versions of Dragon Age already feature huge improvements over Origins—a feat the team accomplished by pulling the PC and console entries further apart rather than closer together. The PC version implements the same strategic approach afforded by a mouse-and-keyboard control scheme. You can examine the battlefield closely, make decisions from a top-down view, and direct your party like a general.

Rather than try to mimic the PC experience on consoles, Dragon Age II has a battle system more tailored to the strengths of the PS3 and 360. You can still issue orders and switch between your party members, but the team aims to make the action feel faster and more responsive—no more shuffling into position as you wait for your maneuver to activate.

Fans of the classic pause-and-play bread of strategic combat can stick with the PC release of Dragon Age II. As for

consoles, we played the Xbox 360 version, and can confirm that it is faster, more responsive, and more fluid than before. As soon as you press a button, something happens. As a warrior, Hawke threw down special strikes and used a new dash move to slash through dark-spawn with ease. It isn't on the Dynasty Warriors side of the spectrum, but with obvious improvements to the targeting system and animations, playing Dragon Age II with a controller finally feels natural.

No matter which platform players choose, they'll still get the same content. The major elements that have distinguished BioWare's catalogue of titles—the narrative, quests, characters, and choices—are still intact across all versions. "We're still BioWare," Darrah says. "We still know how to make a great story."

For now, the team is guarding the specific details of Hawke's adventures. A huge fantasy universe allows players to uncover the lore for themselves, experiencing the thrill of discovery as the story twists and turns. We're content with not knowing the whole story until Dragon Age II releases next year. BioWare has already proven its capacity for telling a gripping tale in this world, and we can't wait to get more pieces of the puzzle. "In terms of how big the Dragon Age universe is, I think we've just scratched the surface," Laidlaw teases. ♦

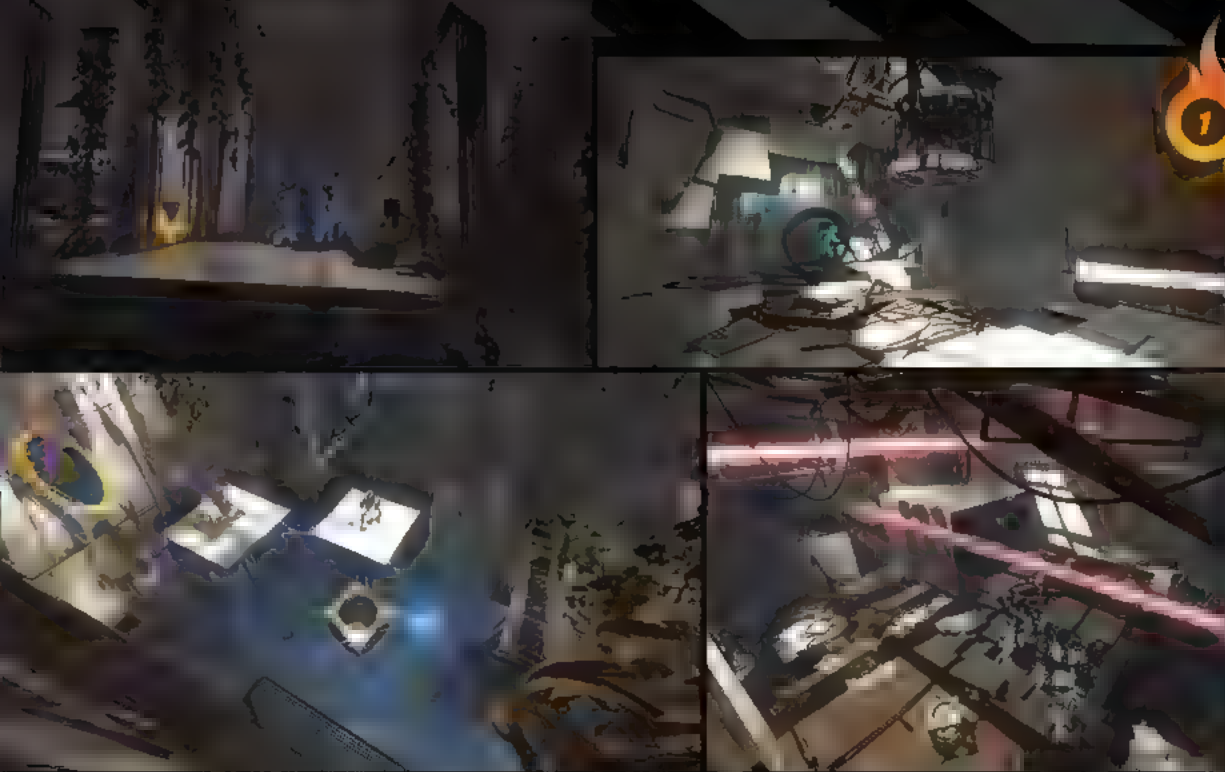


THE

E3

HOT 50

The E3 show floor is always awash with billboard-sized LCD screens, booming speaker systems, booth babes, and amazing games. This year was no different. Even in a year such as this, where many high-pedigree games like Red Dead Redemption, Mass Effect 2, and God of War III have already found their way to our shores, the annual game blitzkrieg was jam-packed with promising new titles. Here are the top 50 games that captured our attention.



Portal 2

Valve's critical darling doesn't disappoint

Navigating through the crowded E3 show-floor, one expects to be assaulted by military shooters, big-budget crime games, and other flashy franchises both gratuitous and gory in nature. This truth makes it that much more impressive that the sequel to Valve's surprise hit garnered our vote for Game of the Show.

Portal 2 aims to intrigue players with new gameplay mechanics that challenge the way they approach games without defaulting to increasing the difficulty. In short, augmented gameplay should keep the game fresh, not frustrating. Valve provided us with the first extended look at Portal 2 since our exclusive cover story, and gave us a chance to try out co-op for ourselves.

A new opening vignette stoked our already smoldering excitement. A flythrough of the Aperture Science facilities being rebuilt by GLaDOS illustrated firsthand the damage caused by Chell's insolence. With such a large amount of time passing between installments, organic life has infiltrated the outermost structures, and most rooms are in a serious state of decay. Approaching reconstruction with the intensity only a dispassionate machine can muster, GLaDOS stouges off old modular panels for shiny new ones and assembles a new army of turrets to recapture the facility's former sterile

sheen. Electronic music plays in the background featuring sampled vocals from GLaDOS herself.

The demo then moved onto the new gameplay mechanics. A tractor beam takes center stage to showcase how a series of quickly fired portals can transport a cube (or a turret, co-op bot, and more) across a room. Aerial Faith Plates prove an expedient method of transportation, allowing the player to chain together a series of jumps without stopping or slowing down.

In another room, Valve demonstrates the Thermal Discouragement Beam's utility by using a refracting cube to redirect the laser to sweep across a throng of oblivious turrets, who sheepishly utter "ouch" as their components crackle. After clearing the room, the player then repositions the laser to connect with an ailing receptacle, opening the door to the next chamber. A Pneumatic Diversity Vent provides another opportunity to clear a chamber. With a clever use of the portal gun, the player redirects the vacuum to create a swirling vortex that sucks turrets and debris out of the way.

Lastly, Valve highlights two types of gels (previously referred to as "paint") that transfer properties to surfaces on which they are sprayed. Repulsion Gel bounces the player from surface to surface, which allows the player to ricochet to an otherwise unreachable alcove. Propulsion Gel

rockets Chell to high speeds so she can avoid a nasty row of converging spiked plates.

The true treat came when we got our hands on the co-op bots and tested a few introductory levels. Communication is key to solving these puzzles, more so than any other game we've played before. Coordinating tactics and syncing up timed puzzles requires constant dialogue.

The puzzles often required us to divide and conquer — one player used a redirection cube to open doors or raise platforms while the other quickly traversed timed traps. At one point we decided to take the demo less seriously, using Repulsion Gel to ricochet off a wall and then each other — mildair. Our bots met an untimely death as a result, but Valve encourages horseplay with friends. Destroying the bots is significantly more fun than toying with the notably more fragile human protagonist. Co-op interactions also allow for amotes such as high-fives.

While we were disappointed in Portal 2's delay to an undisclosed window in 2011, Valve made up for the news by announcing that the PlayStation 3 has been added to the platform roster. Original, innovative, and massively entertaining, Portal 2 is easily our most anticipated game of next year. — Morgan Kaufmann

- Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC, Mac
- Style: 1 or 2-Player Puzzle
- Publisher: Valve
- Developer: Valve
- Release: 2011



Dead Space 2

The necromorphs won't know what hit them in Visceral Games' sequel



Platform:
PlayStation 3
(Xbox 360, PC)

Style:
1-Player Shooter

Publisher:
Electronic Arts

Developer:
Visceral Games

Release
January 23, 2011

When *Dead Space 2* was announced, there were rumblings that development was drawing more inspiration from shooters than survival horror — something that made fans of the first game a bit wary. After getting our hands on the game, it's clear that Visceral Games is definitely taking cues from its first-person contemporaries, but mostly where it counts: the controls.

Isaac Clarke is much nimbler and easier to control in *Dead Space 2*, and his expanded repertoire of handy tricks fills encounters with more possibilities. Telekinesis is faster, and Clarke can do devious things like rip a slasher's arm off and then impale the creature with its own talons. The addition of center-point aiming removes the oddly contextual feel from gunplay of the first game, making it easier to attack with surgical precision.

This time around it seems as though Clarke's experience as an engineer is more than a bullet point on his resume. In the first game, much of Clarke's time was spent acting as an errand boy, walking from point to point on the doomed ship USG Ishimura and pressing buttons on consoles. In *Dead Space 2*, Isaac can open doors by cracking open panels with his fist and essentially hot-wiring the innards. It's a small detail, but it shows that Visceral is open to exploring the character and making relevant gameplay adjustments where appropriate.

The stasis module is also a returning favorite, and it's been retooled to become more useful in combat. In the first game, players could use the device to slow down time in a localized area. It was tremendously helpful for getting through out-of-control doors and making combat with faster enemies manageable. The problem was



that it consumed energy that had to be refilled at stations throughout the ship or via packs that took up precious inventory space. Now it recharges on its own, a change that could give players a reason to stop hoarding it.

We made great use of the stasis module in an encounter with the pack, a new enemy type. Unlike most of the necromorphs in *Dead Space*, the pack are easy to kill and don't need to be systematically dismantled. Their strength comes in their numbers, and players who don't pay attention are likely to find themselves overwhelmed. To even the odds against them, we fired off a stasis shot and then picked them off as they slowly made their advance. It was also a great opportunity to test out the javelin gun, another new addition. It fires off a spear-like spike, which impales enemies against floors

or walls. Even if they survive that kind of shot, they're effectively out of commission. The alt fire finishes the job in those instances, charging the projectile with an electric blast that can then set its victims ablaze.

Neither EA nor Visceral Games are talking much about story at this point, but we can make a few guesses. Much of the demo we played took place in the civilian space station *The Sprawl*, particularly around the Unitologist church. At one point Clarke battles an especially nasty tentacled necromorph while fending off fire from a military-looking gunship. Surely, a government wouldn't take a "wait and see" approach to a necromorph attack. Would it?

We'll have to wait and see ourselves this January, when the game ships. — JEFF COLE

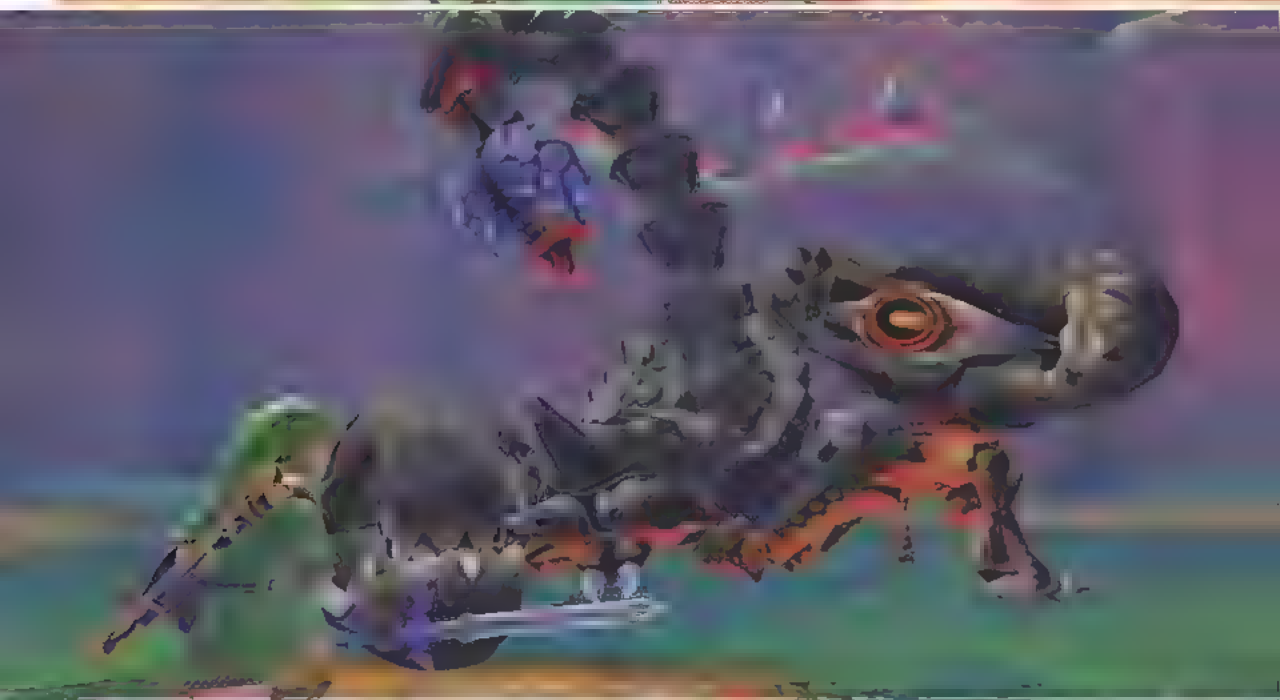
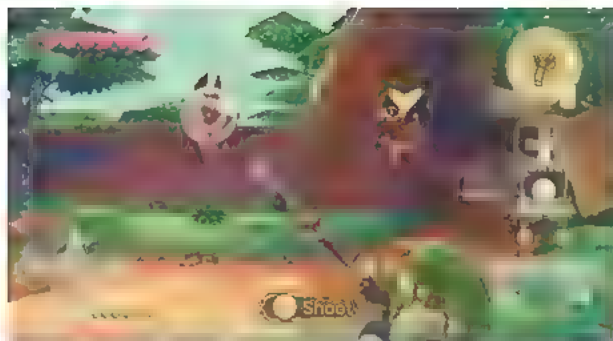


Only On PlayStaion

Players who might be on the fence between the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions of *Dead Space 2* may have been given a little push from EA. During Sony's E3 press conference, the publisher announced that PS3 owners will be getting a nice little bonus: the 2008 rail shooter *Dead Space Extraction*.

The game, previously available only on Wii, is getting an HD makeover and full Move support. It'll be available in one of two ways. First, the game will be packaged in with the Limited Edition version of the game, which is exclusive to the PlayStation 3. If you don't want to spring for that version but still want to play *Extraction*, fear not. It'll be available on the PlayStation Store as a downloadable download!

Either way, you'll be able to play the game and see what happened before the events of the first *Dead Space*. While it's been updated to use Sony's then-new controller, players will be able to use their trusty Gamecube controllers, too. That's good news if you have a preference or have only sprung for one Move controller and need a co-op buddy.





The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Nintendo impresses with its first Wii-specific Zelda adventure

Gamers have known that a new Zelda was being developed for the Wii ever since a piece of concept art was shown last year but little was revealed about the project prior to E3. We all expected its presence as we walked into the Nintendo press conference, but we were surprised to see the company lead with a full-on reveal. No time was wasted, as those in attendance were treated to a sharp trailer and a visit from series creator Shigeru Miyamoto.

As the legendary designer demonstrated the newly named Skyward Sword, many viewers were concerned about what appeared to be technical issues. Miyamoto tried to aim Link's bow, but the controls behaved erratically, causing him to shoot arrows into the ground. After playing through a section of the game, however, I can confirm that this truly must have been a fluke technical error during the conference - the controls are fantastic.

MotionPlus integration is immediately apparent, as Link swings his sword in a much more precise and accurate manner than the canned animations from Twilight Princess. As the game's title would indicate, your sword gains special abilities when pointed towards the heavens. We don't yet know how crucial this will be to gameplay, but it grants Link a stronger sword swipe in the demo we played.

New motions will control various advanced attacks in Skyward Sword. As I swiped the Wii remote and nunchuk together from left to right, Link performed his trademark spin slash. Swipe them together in a downward motion, and he performs an impressive (and powerful!) flipping vertical slice.

Many foes feature movement patterns that require Link to alter the direction of his slash. New deku-bobba plants open their mouths either vertically or horizontally, and you'll have to aim your slices in accordance with this alignment. I encountered what appeared to be a Staff of Knight at one point, and his guard patterns forced me to switch up my attack patterns on the fly. Aiming your sword swipe correctly is absolutely crucial to getting past enemy defenses in Skyward Sword.

One significant change to the series' history

is the item management system. Ever since the original NES Zelda, switching weapons required the gamer to pause. Skyward Sword makes this process far more convenient and intuitive, as holding in the B button will bring up an item wheel without pausing the action. At one point, I encountered a swarm of bats while my bombs were equipped. As they flew at me, I ran away, held the B button to bring up the wheel (while still running), rotated the wheel with MotionPlus control, and let go to select my whip. The action doesn't stop at any point, but it's still easy to move around and select your new item while avoiding danger.

Another interesting implementation of motion involves bomb control. You'll pull the explosive out with the B button, and can either throw it or roll it across the ground depending on the motion you use with the remote. Instead of slashing at one particular deku-bobba, I baited him into lowering his mouth to the ground and finished him off by bowling a bomb directly into it.

Skyward Sword's E3 demo also included a flying beetle, bow, and slingshot. The beetle is thrown and then maneuvered by moving the remote around, and the controls are spot-on. You can use it to collect items, annoy enemies, explore areas, and more. Slingshot use is fairly basic (point and shoot), but the bow more closely resembles Wii Sports Resort's archery minigame. You'll aim in first-person mode, hold the C button to steady your aim, pull the nunchuk back, and

release to fire your arrow. It feels natural, and it's certainly more interesting than simply hitting a button while pointing at the screen.

Few gamers would call Twilight Princess a disappointment, but it left Wii owners wanting more out of their console. Considering that it was essentially a GameCube port, the game wasn't specifically designed around the Wii's capabilities. With Skyward Sword, we finally have a built-from-the-ground-up Zelda experience that takes full advantage of the system and its underused MotionPlus accessory. » Dan Ryckert

- » Platform: Wii
- » Style: 1 Player Action
- » Publisher: Nintendo
- » Developer: Nintendo
- » Release: 2011





Infamous 2

Hands-on impressions and the moral conundrum

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
- » Style
1. Player Action
(Multiplayer TBD)
- » Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment
- » Developer
Sucker Punch
Productions
- » Release
2011

Sucker Punch Productions was reluctant to reveal any new information about *Infamous 2* at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, but it did tease that the biggest changes to this sequel have not yet been revealed. How Cole's morality is judged could be one of these big changes.

Infamous 2's producer, Brian Fleming, was quick to sidestep any questions relating to Cole's stance in the world, but did point out that Sucker Punch wants players to feel like "the ultimate super hero or super villain." This statement certainly falls in line with the moral arc from the first game, but Fleming did add that Cole will begin this sequel with many of the powers he wielded before, such as the power line grind. This, of course, brings into question what path the player chose and whether or not the game will read a save file like *Mass Effect 2* does. Fleming wouldn't even offer a hint, insisting "we're not talking about morality at this point."

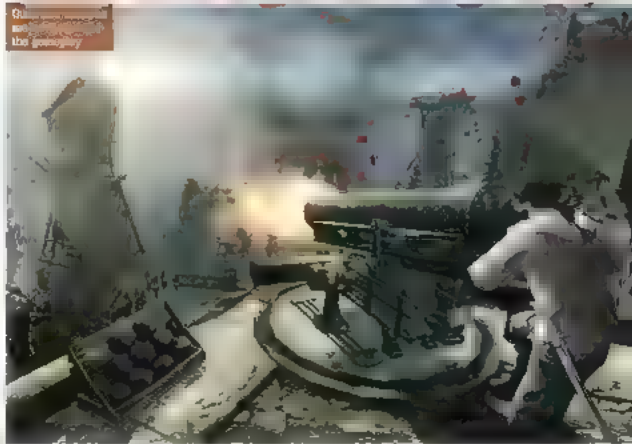
In a move similar to giving a crying baby a pacifier, Fleming silenced my rapid-fire questioning by handing me the controller. The game is still early in development, but the gameplay already feels as polished as any major retail release. Cole's ability to scamper up buildings is as fluid as before, but as I found, why ascend buildings to reach your foes when you can level the structure they are standing on? A series of grenade tosses will do the trick, but his newest move, an electrical tornado, will do the trick instantly...and it will also suck up every car, trash can, and civilian as it spins chaotically across heavily populated streets.

Cole's newfound affection for cross-quarters melee (and large whacking sticks) showcases stylish Spider-Man-like animations, cinematic camera positioning, and snail-paced slow motion for players to savor the moment. Not to flip my hat as to how I will play *Infamous 2*, but one of the most rewarding moments in my hands-on time was to knock civilians into cars with a swing that would make Ryan Howard proud.

My time with *Infamous 2* concluded with a tease of how large the enemies can be. My view of a gorgeously detailed cathedral was blanketed by a gigantic green creature that must have been between seven- to ten-stories tall. The creature screamed and thrashed violently, and before Cole could engage it the screen faded to black.

If the additions and changes I've outlined are deemed "small" by Sucker Punch terminology, fans of the series have much to look forward to when *Infamous 2* hits the streets in 2011. — Andrew Remer

To see *Infamous 2* in action, visit www.gametrainer.com/mag





Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

Far more than an expansion

When *Brotherhood* was first announced, a lot of gamers assumed that the continuing adventures of Ezio would amount to little more than an add-on to the existing game. That might have been fine, but Ubisoft has far bigger ambitions in mind for this latest installment. The company took the opportunity at E3 to show off the many ways that the new Assassin's title will stand out from its predecessors.

The biggest change is the addition of multi-player. Dr. Vedic is using the dozens of Animus machines seen at Abstergo in the second game to train his Templar to fight Desmond and the other Assassins. In *Brotherhood*, players adopt the roles of these trainees as they learn the arts of subterfuge and deceit.

We played a thrilling new game mode called Wanted, in which every player slips into a unique Renaissance persona, from enticing courtesan to sneaking prowler. Every player is assigned a target, another player hidden in the crowd. Simultaneously, each player is being hunted as well. Amid the many similar-looking figures walking the streets of the city, it's a genuine challenge to pick out your target. On defense, you can protect yourself by keeping a low profile and blending well with the crowd. Inevitably, someone makes a wrong move, and the chase is on. The franchise's rooftop chases carry a much greater threat when a real player is on your heels. Special abilities allow players to morph and hide in the environment, or gain special offensive strikes like a long-range gunshot. The ultimate effect is a brand-new dynamic for multiplayer: all about deception and agility—a perfect pairing to the single-player experience.

That single-player campaign is receiving some equally exciting additions and developments.

As the story begins, Ezio has struck down the corrupt pope and returned to his villa in Monteriggione, only to have it besieged by more of the devilish Borgia family. All the hard work building the villa is lost as cannons and siege towers assault the walls.

When the day is done, Ezio has lost everything, and is forced to begin anew in Rome. Now fully trained as a master assassin, he begins to gather fledgling recruits to his cause. Even as he wanders the streets of Rome fighting the Borgias, he continually grows and trains his troops, sending them off on assassination missions across Europe to prepare them for the fights that lie ahead. Every member of your brotherhood gains levels and abilities, and can then be called upon in exciting *Brotherhood* Assistance Moments (BAMs) to strike out at enemies. Call down an

assassin from the rooftops to stab a rifeman lookout. Send a flurry of crossbow bolts into a phalanx of guards. Have your men hurl a bevy of smoke bombs into a well-protected church. The game does an amazing job of communicating that Ezio is now a leader of a small army, and the player gets to reap the reward of that sensation.

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood had a surprising and exciting showing this year, sweeping aside many doubts about the viability of a sequel so soon after the last installment. While we're eager to see where the next generation of the franchise is headed with the inevitable *Assassin's Creed 3*, this year's E3 made it clear that another turn with Ezio should be more than worth our time and attention. — Matt Miller

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

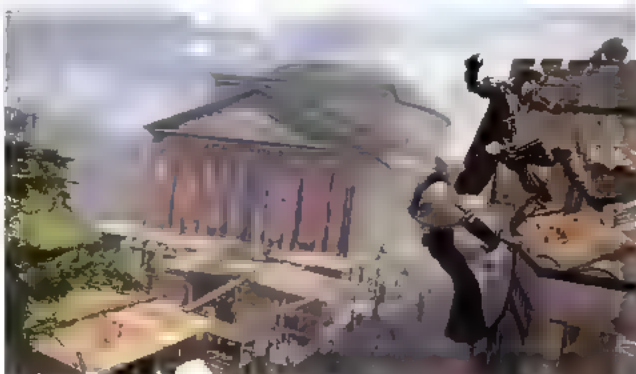
» Style
1-Player Action
(8-Player Online)

» Publisher
Ubisoft

» Developer
Ubisoft Montreal

» Release
November 16

to see the multi-player mode, visit gameinformer.com/na





Bulletstorm

Encouraging your sadistic side in 2011

- » Platforms
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC
- » Style
4-Player Game
(Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher
Electronic Arts
- » Developer
People Can Fly/
Epic Games
- » Release
February 22, 2011

In *Bulletstorm*, run of the mill enemies are not supposed to conjure fear or terror in the player. Rather, developer People Can Fly wants you to look at these meatbags as opportunities to demonstrate your demented creativity for wanton destruction.

Bulletstorm had a prime-time slot during EA's E3 press conference, with Epic producer Tanya Jessen enthusiastically walking the audience through a new section of gameplay that follows protagonist Grayson Hunt and his cyborg sidekick Ishi Sato as they fight through a facility swarming with badxies in order to get Ishi a recharge.

The behind-closed-doors demo was the same scenario we checked out for our *Bulletstorm* cover story. Armed with a Peace Maker Carbine (PMC), flail gun, and electric leash, Grayson faces small groups of unimposing badxies served out in increments, with the battle culminating in a skirmish with a huge plant-like monstrosity.

You're the conductor of this blood symphony, and *Bulletstorm* offers tons of choices for brutalizing your foes. The game doesn't restrict you to simple frag your enemies with lead. Instead, you're encouraged to use more creative methods, like killing enemies off the ground with the leash and lodging bullets in their skulls or groins. Using the environmental hazards littered around the world to your advantage also yields major points. Kick dudes into mutant cacti, tie them up with an explosive flail gun round and send them flying into a group of compatriots before detonating the round, or send an explosive barrel their way — the choice is yours. Once you rack up a decent amount of points, you can use them to buy over-charged upgrades for your weapons.

Like all Epic games, the controls feel tight, the particle-effect-filled environments look fantastic, and the humor is stylishly sophomoric. Gamers gravitated en masse to *Bulletstorm*'s explosive, over-the-top action on the E3 show floor, and we're looking forward to spending more time in this destructive playground. — Matt Bertz



Gears of War 3

Waking a mile in their shoes

- » Platform
Xbox 360
- » Style
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(10-Player Online)
- » Publisher
Microsoft Game Studios
- » Developer
Epic Games
- » Release
April 2011

It should come as little surprise that Epic Games is tackling some new challenges with *Gears of War 3*. The new four-player cooperative campaign looks amazing, the visuals and action scenes display a notable step up from the last installment, and the battles we witnessed look positively insane. However, the coolest new feature on display at the show was the newly announced Beast mode.

Beast mode shares much in common with the familiar Horde cooperative mode. Like that popular game type, players work together through waves to defeat the enemy. Unlike Horde, you'll now be on the other end of the equation, becoming one of the Locust Horde as they attempt to sweep aside the pathetic remnants of humanity.

The new game type starts out with a choice — which member of the learning locust army will you become? In a common match of 10-15 waves, players will have a designated selection of monsters to choose between. This set will be customizable by players to form just the game they want to play.

During our time with the game, choices in the early waves included a number of low-power locust. The joker could charge into battle, assault a fortified position, and blow up. The wretch could clamber between cover points, trying to get close enough to complete a devastating melee assault.

As the waves continued, more substantial enemy types became available. We were able to choose among any number of different boomer variations. The savage boomer could shoot out underground explosive projectiles called diggers to burrow past cover. The mauler boomer charged into battle with an enormous ball and chain swinging wildly above his head.

By the end, we were playing as a giant serapede, a massive multi-legged worm that could sneak into battle and wreak havoc on the enemy. When he finally went down, we joined in as a Berserker. She has terrible vision, so the screen became extremely blurry. But her devastating charge pulverizes any human that gets in her way.

As the game progressed, we began to see just how flexible and strategic this new Beast mode could become. By cooperating with allies, it's possible to field an impressive array of Locust attackers to assault the enclosed human positions. Combined with the stellar presentation of the campaign in action, the latest *Gears* installment revealed itself to be no less than we had expected: one of the definitive games to watch as we move into 2011. — Matt Miller







Mortal Kombat

Pouring buckets of gore on gaming's bloodiest series

» Platform:
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style:
1 vs. 2-Player Fighting
(Online TBD)

» Publisher:
Warner Bros. Interactive

» Developer:
NetherRealm Studios

» Release:
Spring 2011

When Midway Games filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2009, most of the company's development studios and game properties found new homes. Midway Chicago, the team behind the *Mortal Kombat* series, quietly joined the Warner Bros. Interactive family, and it didn't take long for Warner to reveal that this studio was working on a new *Mortal Kombat* game.

When this news hit, the Internet immediately latched onto the idea that Ed Boon and his team (renamed NetherRealm Studios) was working on the sequel to *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* (another property owned by Warner). As much as I enjoyed watching Scorpion harpoon Superman, *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* wasn't really a *Mortal Kombat* game.

In the weeks leading up to this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, NetherRealm Studios released a teaser video for its new product. Fan reaction couldn't have been greater. Like *Street Fighter* before it, *Mortal Kombat* is returning to its 2D roots, and it will be bloodier than ever.

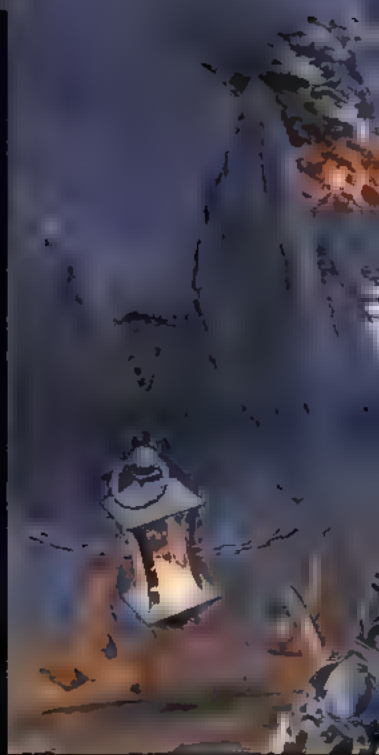
The game is being designed like a band's greatest hits album, collecting the most beloved characters and arenas from the series' past. Sub-Zero can freeze Scorpion in his tracks as the angry trees from the *Living Forest* look on. Are you tired of watching Johnny Cage hit Liu Kang in the family jewels? A perfectly timed uppercut will send him flying into the pit.

Most of the characters are equipped with moves and weapons previously seen in the series, but the fighting that unfolds and the combos that are constructed are based mostly off of player ingenuity. "I want players to discover their own combos," says Boon. The game offers plenty of pre-scripted combos for each character, but players will find new ways to chain the

sequences and special moves together. You'll even be able to create combos that link the attacks of tag partners.

Pummeling your opponent doesn't just bring sadistic satisfaction. As the hits land, you'll also be powering up a Super meter that can be tapped to enhance any one of the character's special moves. When the Super meter is filled, you can tap into an X-Ray move. As the name implies, this move highlights the brutality inflicted on the bones and organs of a fighter's body through a zoomed-in x-ray lens. You'll see jaws shatter, spines snap, and if you're using Sub-Zero, you'll see what happens to a liver that is frozen and crushed by a hand.

These moves are as brutal as anything the series has offered before, but they don't stack up to the level of gore tied to the new Fatalities. I wouldn't be surprised if Ed Boon told his team to make these finishers as disgusting and controversial as they could. Scorpion slices his opponent in two at the waist, and as their torso precariously balances on the legs, he severs their head, which also balances like a grotesque game of Jenga. Not finished, he kicks the opponent's torso to disassemble the pieces. As the head twirls through the air, he cuts it clean in half with a vertical slice. To say this game is violent is an understatement. To say it could be the most violent game ever made may be a fitting descriptor. — Andrew Reiner

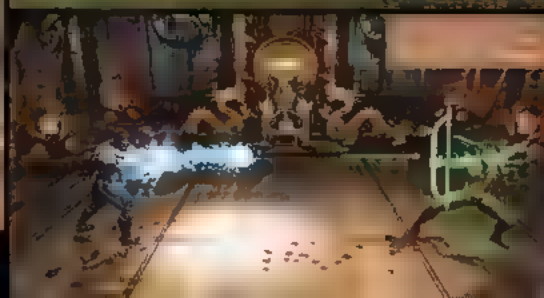




The roster so far

The character select screen shown during the E3 demo features 26 slots for characters with additional slots set for random selections and DLC. While not the definitive size of the roster in *Mortal Kombat 11*, Armageddon, this is a sizeable list that Boon says will consist of fan favorites, as well as a few surprises. Who's who's been revealed so far:

- » Johnny Cage
- » Shao Kahn
- » Sonya Blade
- » Boon
- » Kung Lao
- » Mileena
- » Nightwolf
- » Raiden
- » Ripstix
- » Scorpion
- » Sektor
- » Shao Kahn
- » Sub-Zero





Halo: Reach

Still a contender

» Platform

» Style
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(16-Player Online)

» Publisher
Microsoft Game Studios

» Developer
Bungie

» Release
September 4

Halo has been a sales juggernaut and a critical success for nearly a decade. Some have wondered whether Bungie has the wherewithal to bring another blockbuster entry to gamers this fall. For those who saw the game on display at this year's show, those concerns have been largely dispelled.

Reach's campaign is the story of one gigantic battle that stretches across a planet. The scope of that conflict was on display this year in a level set about halfway through the game. The new heroes of the Spartan Noble team assaulted a launch facility in a daring gambit to turn the tide of the engagement. Blasting through orbital drop pods populated by dangerous Elites, we saw the way armor abilities can change the battlefield even during single player. One Spartan threw down a protective shield just as an enemy Ghost vehicle charged. We also saw how execution moves could be used to drop an enemy from behind in a close-up melee flourish. However, it was the second half of the demo that changed the game.

Noble 6 breached the building and leapt into a Sabre – a high-powered space fighter that went hurtling into orbit. From there, the ground combat we've become familiar with over the years transformed into a thrilling outer space shootout, with Covenant Banshees and Seraphs swooping about streaming plasma trails. Debris hits and spins through the void. The defending station finally comes online to launch a hail of gunfire into the attackers. It's a great example of how Bungie still has some tricks up its sleeves to keep Halo players on their toes.

E3 also offered Bungie the chance to reveal their heavily redesigned Firefight mode. The cooperative fight against waves of enemies returns, now with full customization options. Players can set number of waves, what enemies show up, weapon selection, and active skull effects – including the addition of custom skulls. Your personal game settings can be saved and shared over Xbox Live, so the best combinations will rise in popularity over time and perpetuate across the community.

New game types like Generator Defense change up the action. In this game type players work together to hold off the Covenant attackers from destroying a vulnerable power generator. Players can focus their efforts on a single generator or try to keep them all alive. They can also lock down the generator for a short period of invincibility during dire situations. We also played through a hilarious game of Rockfright, a firefight with infinite rocket ammo and huge waves of enemies.

New weapons premiered, like the super-heated plasma rounds of the Covenant concussion rifle. There was even a new armor ability called the drop shield, which heals and protects allies, allowing for some players to adopt a medic role on the field. Taken together with the excellent campaign presentation, Reach is looking as good as we hoped. We're only a few months away from seeing how it all comes together. » Matt Miller



LittleBigPlanet 2

Sackboy returns with a slew of genre-bending creation tools



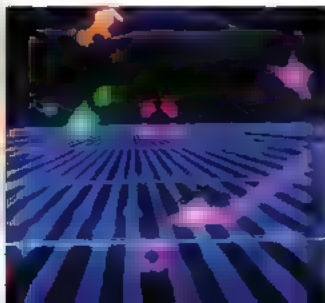
When Media Molecule's charming gem first hit the scene two years ago, the adorable platformer spawned a creation revolution. Talented users from across the globe created levels that rivaled the best. Media Molecule had to offer with its robust toolset, and over two million levels have been shared to date. LittleBigPlanet 2 will give this community of budding developers the chance to create not only levels, but entire games across multiple genres with its vast set of creation tools.

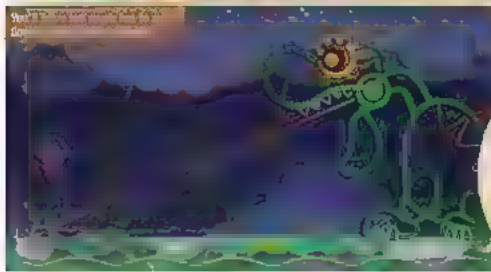
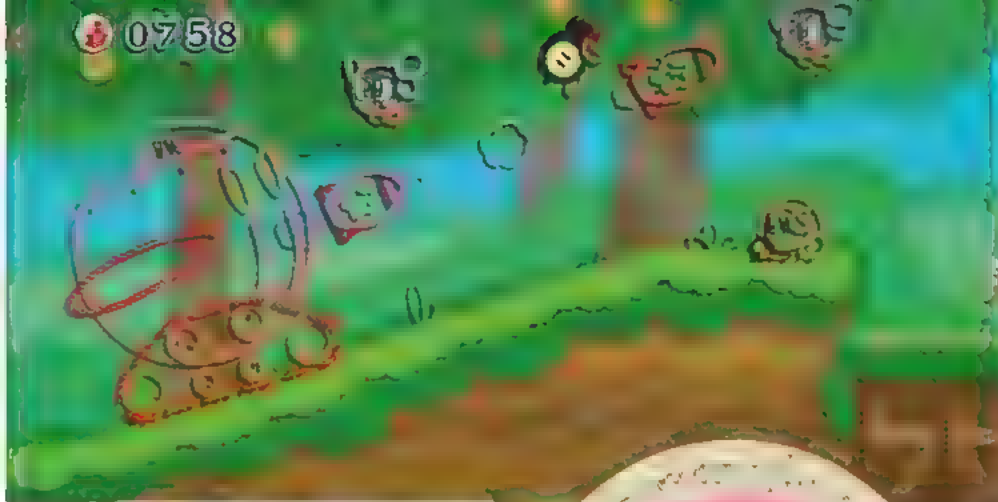
Media Molecule showed off a series of levels that were part of its Community Game Jam, an event designed for top creators in the LittleBigPlanet community. During a studio visit, the users were shown developer-created levels from the sequel and were then tasked to create their own using the toolset from LittleBigPlanet 2 in a mere 24 hours. The results were impressive. We saw a real-time strategy game, a retro space shooter, a 2D brawler, a sumo wrestling game, and more. When playing these levels, we were amazed not only by the range of genres users explored, but how each level's design was different down to every piece of geometry. It was also apparent that users caninker with physics, which can make a zero-gravity adventure in space or a game of bumper cars feel that much more realistic.

We were shown several of the new creation tools during the demo, but one of the standouts was the ability to create Sackbots. These AI bots can be any size you wish, plus you can customize their proportions and costumes. AI logic can be applied to these bots, which can be programmed to follow you around, attack you, or simply follow a path of your choosing, allowing you to create tons of mini-Sackbots for your own version of Pikmin or to develop the next Ico. If you simply want to create your own music video and make the bots groove, you can record motions performed manually using the analog sticks and triggers. Once you stop recording, the motions are looped for an adorable dance sequence. Though seemingly complicated, the interface's labeling is straightforward and easy to navigate.

Needless to say, amid the gunshots, explosions, and bloodspatter on the E3 show floor, it's refreshing to see this family-friendly innovator get all the attention it deserves. We cannot wait to see what the community will come up with when LittleBigPlanet 2 releases in November. —Azzette Gonzalez

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





Kirby's Epic Yarn

Kirby is still cute as a button

- Platform: Wii
- Style: Action/Platforming
- 1 or 2-Player
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Developer: Good-Feel, HAL Laboratory
- Release: Fall

After all these years, hordes of gamers still have a soft spot in their hearts for Kirby. From hardcore FPS players to grizzled MMO addicts, Nintendo's little pink cream puff has successfully clogged our arteries. That's why Nintendo's announcement of Kirby's Epic Yarn for the Wii has droves of gamers smiling with childlike anticipation. Two-player co-op, lighthearted gameplay, and a texturized aesthetic are just a few reasons this game has Wii owners excited to revisit their old friend.

Kirby's Epic Yarn features a hand-crafted veneer not unlike LittleBigPlanet. Everything in the colorful world is composed of cloth, zippers, buttons, yarn, and other items you'd find in your grandmother's knitting basket. The needlework presentation doesn't merely serve as a visual gimmick, however; as many items react like they would in real life. Jnzipping two pieces of cloth causes one piece of fabric to realistically flutter downward, revealing secret passages behind. Buttons are even used as anchor points for Kirby's yarn whip. The best-looking Wii games often accept the Wii's graphical limitations, resulting in creative marvels such as this.

Epic Yarn's striking visuals are sure to motivate nearby friends to seize the Wii Remotes, but with 2-player drop-in/drop-out co-op you won't have

to worry about passing the controller. With the press of a button of Kirby's pal, Prince Fluff, can pop into the game to help whip enemies into shape and make platforming easier. Both characters have access to the same moves. While lassoing baddies, swinging from the yarn whip, and throwing one another onto tricky platforms takes center stage, other classic Kirby transformations return. Each character can transform into a destructive brick, submersible submarine, speeding car, or floating parachute. In one section the duo combine like cuddly Power Rangers, morphing into a screen-filling tank armed with swarming missiles and a rocket-powered boxing glove.

If you're fretting a motion-controlled mess, stop right there. Kirby's Epic Yarn is controlled NES-style, with the Wii Remote turned sideways. Old platforming skills spark to life instantly, as the game's intuitive controls are easily mastered. With this simple control scheme in place, developers Good-Feel (Mario Land: Shake It!) and HAL Laboratory (Super Smash Bros.,) are free to incorporate motion gameplay in interesting ways such as steering the fist of the giant Kirby mech.

Unlike other old-school platformers, the Kirby series has been known less for its blistering difficulty and more for its approachable fun.

Epic Yarn is no different. Kirby and Prince Fluff collect loads of colorful gems throughout the game. Each time they take damage the shiny collectibles shake loose, lowering their end-of-level scores. The more forgiving penalty replaces death, so less-experienced gamers can keep on rucking even if they take a wallop.

While the padded difficulty is guaranteed to polarize Kirby fans, Epic Yarn's gonzo boss fights are sure to entrance everyone. A giant yarn-crafted dragon is the first massive threat Kirby and Prince Fluff must defeat. The fire-breather spews out flaming buttons, which must be lassoed and return-fired by the player. Hefty damage causes the beast's button-tipped tongue to lol from its mouth, begging to be whipped. After wrangling the dragon's tongue, players pull back and let it rip. Watching a hulking, mythological beast get taken down by two adorable puffs is ever-satisfying, and moments like this are sure to have co-op buddies cheering in tandem.

Kirby's Epic Yarn is shaping up to be the Wii game you didn't know you wanted. The winning combination of rock-solid gameplay, enchanting visuals, and slick co-op make this one title to keep your eyes on leading up to its release this fall. — Tim Tur.

Rage

It crawls out of the hallways

Agoraphobes might be upset about the direction id's taking with its latest shooter. *Rage*, but the rest of us couldn't be happier. Rather than developing yet another corridor shooter, the company is tearing down the walls and delivering its first wide-open experience. It is id, however, so don't expect placid glades, lush fields, and tranquil spaces. The world might be a more open place, but it's been ravaged by the lingering effects of a meteor collision and overtaken with a fascist regime and rampaging mutants. Good thing you've got your guns.

Players carry an arsenal of weapons in *Rage*, and they're a bit more specialized than the "pistol, shotgun, rocket launcher" template we've become accustomed to. The wingstick is a razor-edged boomerang that removes limbs (and heads) with aplomb. Handguns can fire a variety of ammo types, including electric rounds that provide a fatal jolt to enemies unfortunate enough to be sharing the same puddle. Engineer items can also be deployed, such as a bomb-equipped RC car or spider-like turrets. Players cobble these things together with scavenged spare parts, and id says blueprints for new items are scattered throughout the world.

The game's engine, id Tech 5, makes exploration a visual treat. The engine's biggest bullet point is also the easiest one to spot. The

game's world has been crafted using megatextures, which allows the studio's artists to create areas by hand without resorting to smaller, repeating textures. The demo's opening expanse, set in a wide canyon, demonstrates the tech to great effect. The area is filled with rocky outcroppings, boulders, and steep walls and it utilizes a stunning amount of variety. Areas really do look unique, without the strange quilted quality that other games with large worlds often resort to.

That was perhaps demonstrated best in a level shown at E3 for the first time. The Dead City is an area ordinarily off limits to survivors. It's essentially a ruined downtown center

that's been reclaimed by mutants, and as we saw, worse. The palette is almost overwhelmingly gray, but structurally it's stunning. As we walked down the cracked asphalt street we spied crumbled parking garages and more than a few buildings that seemed as though they might fall at the slightest provocation. After tearing through a grenade-launching creature the size of a *Fallout 3* supermutant, we thought the worst was over. Far from it. The demo ended with a glimpse of a mutant large enough to straddle the two-lane street with ease.

If that's what we're up against, it's definitely good that we've got some room to run. - Jeff Cox

- » Platform PlayStation 3 Xbox 360 • PC
- » Style 1 Player Shooter (Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher Bethesda
- » Developer id Software
- » Release 2011



Civilization V

The genius is in the details

Big changes are coming to the godfather of strategy games. New lead designer Jon Shafer and the team at Firaxis are shaking up the Civilization formula in a lot of ways. But *Civ V*'s E3 showing replaced our fear of change with excitement for the future.

You already know about the big new features: a hex grid instead of squares, the removal of army stacking, and the addition of minor nations. What stuck out at the show were smaller details. Money is receiving a needed boost to make it attractive to pursue wealth rather than go all-out on research. Gold can buy additional tiles for your cities to work and is a major component of

the expanded diplomatic options - particularly with minor city-states. Firaxis says that improved automation options allow players to let the AI handle more tasks like the details of city governance and research paths, leaving players free to focus on big-picture strategy without gmping their empires. Most importantly, *Civ V*'s community support looks amazing.

Rather than downloading a file from a third-party website and unzipping it into a specific folder in your Program Files directory (and hoping that you got the latest version of it and that it's compatible with your game version), *Civ V* players can use the in-game mod browser

to easily coordinate all of the details. *Civ IV* has one of the most active and engaged modding communities in the world, and that's without much post-launch support from Firaxis. With this addition, *Civ V* has the chance to be something truly special.

Civilization V releases on September 21, so we don't have long to wait before judging whether it's a worthy successor to arguably the best strategy game to date. Adam Biesenzer

Visit gameinformer.com to read an interview with lead designer Jon Shafer and more.

- » Platform PC
- » Style 1 Player Strategy (Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher 3K Games
- » Developer Firaxis Games
- » Release September 21





Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Weren't you waiting for this revolution?

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Action/Shooter

Publisher
Square Enix

Developer
Eidos Montreal

Release
2011

After years of no information following its announcement, Deus Ex: Human Revolution came out of nowhere and surprised a lot of gamers at this year's E3. The biggest shock? Rather than watering down a beloved franchise, the team at Eidos Montreal is focused on sticking to what made the earlier Deus Ex games great: a complex conspiracy plot, beautiful world design, and the ability to choose between multiple solutions for every goal and enemy encounter.

Many of these choices come courtesy of protagonist Adam Jensen and his cybernetic enhancements. Jensen's whole body can be augmented based on your playstyle. Some augmentations help him accomplish incredible take-downs— instant kill moves performed at close range— such as one where he punches through a wall to snap the neck of the guard standing on the other side. Others will improve his stealth ability or allow him to leap greater lengths. There's also a whole set of yet-unrevealed aug-

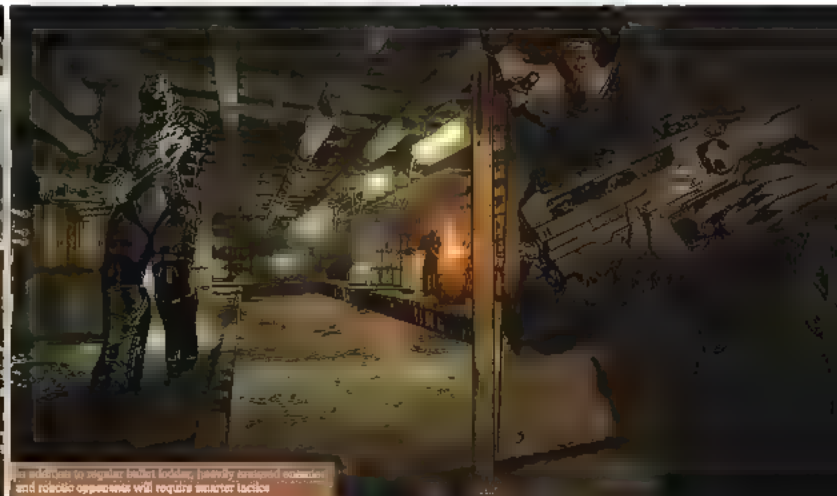
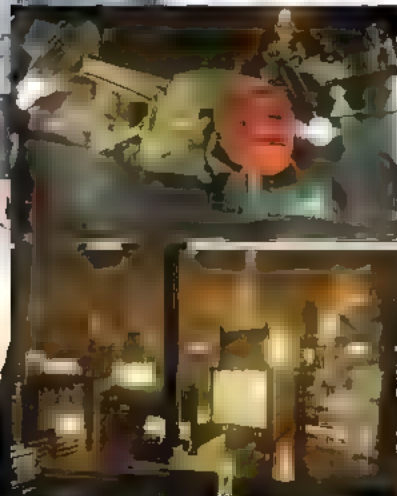
mentations to help Jensen's social and hacking paths. And Adam's not the only augmented individual in Human Revolution; the E3 demo ended in a confrontation with a Southern-accented musclehead whose arm transforms into a chain gun, hinting at some of the powerful (and insane) opponents Jensen will face.

All of the character building would be interesting enough even if Human Revolution were just another shooter, but Deus Ex has a fascinating world to back it up. Of the two levels saw at E3, the social/exploration-focused bar setting was especially intriguing, teeming with NPCs that convincingly went about their everyday activities. Jensen will be able to talk with every non-enemy NPC in the game, sometimes gathering new information or amusing anecdotes, sometimes even picking up a request that could help further one of his main goals.

The game's art style and color palette call back to the Renaissance (as does Jensen's intense dream/nightmare in the awesome E3

trailer that Square Enix released). Eidos Montreal creative director Jean-François Dugas says that this design will help set them apart from a sea of shooters that all look very similar, and he's correct. The almost sepia-tone golden hue that Human Revolution is bathed in is striking. I'm curious how the Renaissance style might tie into the game thematically, but the plot as a whole remains a mystery right now. The dialogue saw was engaging, well-written, and paired with excellent voice acting, but it's still too early to tell if the story will be good.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution fills a niche that I didn't even fully realize I'd been looking for. It's still more shooter than RPG, separating it from the BioWare and Bethesda breed, but it has more compelling choices and a more unique world than most first-person shooters. Whether the game's scope will span out as perfectly as hope remains to be seen, but the E3 demo was an enticing slice of how awesome the full game could be. — Phil Kollar



In addition to regular bullet fodder, heavily armored enemies and robotic opponents will require smarter tactics.

Donkey Kong Country Returns

Metroid Prime developer steps in for Rare

He predales Mario, but it's been a while since we last saw Nintendo's brutish gorilla in a game all his own. U.K. developer Rare brought the character back to relevance in the mid-'90s with Donkey Kong Country, but it's been nearly 15 years since Donkey Kong Country 3 landed on the SNES. Recently it seems like Donkey Kong has been limited to appearing in ensemble titles like Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart or relegated to starring in offbeat titles like Donkey Konga. We've missed the big ape, so we were happy to hear Nintendo announce Donkey Kong Country Returns for the Wii at this year's E3. We put the game's new co-op mode through its paces at the show and walked away wondering why it's taken Donkey Kong this long to return to the jungle.

In Donkey Kong Country Returns, a group of evil Tik creatures have taken control of all the animals on Donkey Kong Island. Of course, their first order of business is to sneak into Donkey Kong's secret banana hoard and steal the big guy's precious supply of bananas. When Donkey Kong discovers that his stash has been raided, he loses his calm and enlists his nephew, Diddy Kong, to help hunt down the missing fruit and torch some Tiks.

Retro Studios, the developer behind Metroid Prime, has been tapped for this rebirth, and the studio has focused on building a Wii platformer that will appeal to fans of the classic SNES series. Barrel cannons and mine carts are strung together throughout the levels, creating tricky platforming sequences that are rewarding to navigate. Just like previous games, the letters K-O-N-G can be collected

to unlock a bonus at the end of each level. While Returns may be built on a 3D engine, a fixed camera (à la New Super Mario Wii) gives this game a classic 2D feel.

In co-op, Diddy Kong joins his uncle's quest. Both characters are able pound the ground, which stuns nearby enemies for a short time, but only Diddy comes equipped with a jet pack that allows brief hovering and a peanut pop gun. Diddy will also be able to jump on Donkey Kong's back at any point in the game. While riding piggyback, Diddy won't have much control over where the duo goes, but he will be able to shoot peanuts at their enemies. He won't have to worry about navigating some of the trickier platforming sequences, making Diddy a good choice for less-experienced gamers.

Donkey Kong Country Returns won't hold your hand or coddle you to sleep with soothing nursery rhymes; the game is an unapologetic challenge. When we faced off against one of the bosses—a giant rhino-faced toad—it took us a few tries to get a hang of the mechanics needed to successfully jump over its spiked nose and slap the weak spot on its back. Retro Studios' take on Metroid included some drastic changes, but with Donkey Kong it seems the studio has taken a more conservative approach, sticking to a design formula that made the earlier Donkey Kong Country titles so popular. Donkey Kong Country Returns should make a great holiday gift for Nintendo fans when it comes out near the end of the year. — Ben Reeves

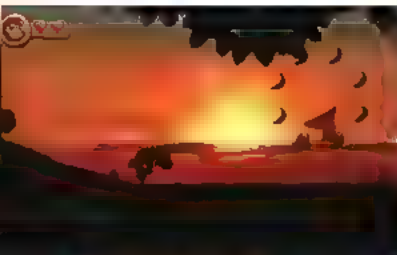
» Platform
Wii

» Style
1 or 2-Player Action/
Platforming

» Publisher
Nintendo

» Developer
Retro Studios

» Release
Holiday



Twisted Metal

Sony's ultimate car combat series gets a much-needed multiplayer makeover



Platform
PlayStation 3

Style
1 to 4-Player Action
(Online TBA)

Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

Developer
Eat Sleep Play

Release
2011

In the mid-'90s, David Jaffe gave gamers one of the first must-have titles for the original PlayStation. *Twisted Metal* had personality oozing out of every pore, and backed up its wicked sense of humor with fantastic car combat gameplay. Its sequel improved upon everything that was beloved about the original but a switch in developers caused the rest of the PSone titles to be mere shadows of their former selves. Jaffe brought the series back to the quality it had once seen with the PS2's *Twisted Metal: Black*, but the series has been dormant since its 2001 release (outside of a PSP title and subsequent PS2 port). At E3 this year, Sony sent the message loud and clear: *Twisted Metal* is back.

Jaffe's Eat Sleep Play studio presented its new take on the series at the end of Sony's press conference, and it is wilder than ever before. While still focused on insane characters driving ridiculous armed vehicles, it appears that multiplayer will be more of a core element to the title than we've seen in the past.

While local multiplayer has been a series staple since the beginning, online play has never really taken off. *Twisted Metal: Black Online* was released during a time when most gamers didn't have their PS2 connected to the Internet. *Twisted Metal: Head On* for the PSP allowed

online play, but the handheld nature of the game didn't offer the scope of a console title. With the series heading to the PS3, this will be the first true chance for Jaffe to show off car combat with an online focus.

The team showed off *Nuke* mode in depth. It plays like the most deranged version of capture the flag that you've ever seen, with bodies being dragged behind cars in place of flags. We saw two factions: *Clowns*, led by Sweet Tooth and Dolls, led by Dollface (driver of *Darkside* in *Twisted Metal: Black*). The endgame is to destroy your rival faction's massive effigy that's looming over the city. How you accomplish this is a bit involved.

Things start out in basic CTF format, except the flags are represented by your rival faction's leader. In the demo we saw, Sweet Tooth and Dollface were manning turrets deep in their own territory. Your first objective is to secure the rival leader and drag them near your team's missile launcher. Driving over them automatically ropes them to the back of your car, and their body comically flails behind the vehicle as you speed back to your part of town.

Once you get them within your missile launcher's perimeter, it starts belching flames and transforming. Keep the leader within the circle long enough and you can sacrifice them to this

demonic contraption. This launches a missile which you then steer towards the other team's effigy. As it's in the air, the other team must scramble to shoot the projectile out of the sky or destroy the pilot near the launcher itself.

It's a wild and ridiculous multiplayer mode, but we'd expect no less from a franchise featuring a homicidal clown as its mascot. This new title may have more of a focus on factions and team play, but that doesn't mean we won't be seeing the series' trademark story segments. According to Jaffe, "We're going for edgy *Twilight Zone* stories rather than the dark, depressing stuff we did in *Black*." He also said that the team is pushing for a Teen rating that would be more in line with *Twisted Metal 2*'s style rather than the grisly violence of *Twisted Metal: Black*.

Vehicles won't be tied to specific characters this time around, as they need to be more flexible for online play. So far, we've seen a handful of the 12 to 16 total cars expected to be in the final version. *Roadboat* is a large vehicle that can pull in enemies with a magnet. Once attached, it can fling them across the environment or ram them into walls. *Vamin* is an exterminator vehicle that launches remote-controlled rat missiles. If you select the tow truck, you'll be able to spawn taxicabs behind you to use as makeshift projectiles. An ambulance launches a helpless patient on a



Twisted Metal is a sequel to some psychological, multiplayer
 online version of the original game.



Twisted Metal was a helicopter game in Black, but this one
 is a motorcycle game. It's a sequel to the original game.

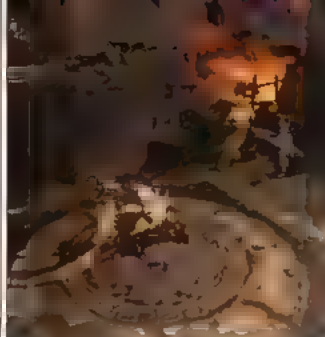
stretcher that you can steer and remote detonate. If you're not worried about armor, you can pop wheelies with the motorcycle and toss flaming chainsaws at your foes.

A brand-new addition to the series is the helicopter. With it, you can easily transport your teammates across the map to health pickups or multiplayer objectives or drop enemies from great heights. However, the increased mobility comes at the cost of flimsy armor.

Longtime fans are no doubt familiar with the method traditionally used to fire supplementary weapons, like freeze blasts and mines. Instead of having to remember fighting-game-style button inputs this time around, all of these functions are assigned to the d-pad. As your energy meter fills up, you'll be able to deploy mines, freeze enemies, shield yourself, or rear fire with the press of one d-pad button. In addition, the jump ability is as easy as pressing **U** and **R1** at the same time.

This new installment seems to hit every checklist point that a fan could have: more accessible moves, a wider selection of vehicles, and (most importantly) fully fleshed-out multiplayer. Odds are good that **TM 2011** will properly introduce a new generation of gamers to the carnage of Twisted Metal. — **Dan Ryckert**





God of War: Ghost of Sparta

More monsters and mythology for Kratos to wreck on PSP

» Platform
PSP

» Style
1-Player Action

» Publisher
Sony Computer Entertainment

» Developer
Ready At Dawn Studios

» Release
Holiday

If you thought that God of War III put a cap on the story of Kratos, think again. Sony will continue building the franchise this year with God of War: Ghost of Sparta. Like Kratos's previous handheld adventure, Chains of Olympus, this PSP outing will fill in some gaps in the series lore, specifically exploring what happened between the first and second game in the main trilogy. As a game, though, Ghost of Sparta looks to be a better effort than Ready at Dawn's already awesome previous God of War release.

The biggest reason for this improvement is the inspiration that Ghost of Sparta takes from God of War III. This ranges from little things like the button prompts for quick time events now

appearing on the sides of the screen rather than in the middle, to more important changes like a greater focus on cinematic moments and set pieces that break up the game's bloody action.

Ghost of Sparta will expand Kratos's impact on Greek mythology even further, pulling in many first-time appearances for the franchise, including the monstrous Scylla, the cursed king Midas, and more. Most importantly for fans, this side story was plotted out alongside God of War III's development, so there are certain references in God of War III—such as Poseidon's cryptic exclamation that "Atlantis will be avenged" early in the game—that will finally be explained in Ghost of Sparta.

As far as new moves for Kratos's arsenal, the

biggest addition comes in the form of Hyperion's Charge, a special grab that lets you follow up with multiple options: beating your opponent with your fists, slamming them into the ground repeatedly, or tossing them away. Kratos will also gain a new chain lightning spell and a spear and shield combo that should allow for a more defensive play style.

God of War III may have offered up a satisfying conclusion to the saga, but that doesn't mean we're not interested in more. As long as Sony keeps putting talented teams like Ready at Dawn on the job, this is one franchise we have faith in. —Phil Kollar



Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds

Capcom's fighting gem plays as good as it looks

» Platform
PlayStation 3

» Style
1 or 2-Player Fighting (Online TBA)

» Publisher
Capcom

» Developer
Capcom

» Release
Spring 2011

As it takes its one look at Marvel vs. Capcom 3 to recognize not only the iconic characters, but also the legendary franchise's unique flair. Entries in Capcom's classic crossover games are unmistakable, and each is anticipated more ravenously than the last. Capcom finally let eager pugilists get their hands on the arcade stick and join this epic clash. The verdict? This is shaping up to be a fighting game for the ages.

Marvel's influence is obvious, with thick shading dancing across every character, creating a look somewhere between 2D hand-drawn sprites and Street Fighter IV's 3D character

models. Brilliant strokes of color accent each claw swipe and gun blast, painting a vibrant portrait of the devastating attacks. Each character is faithfully recreated—The Hulk's head obscures health bars and Dante moves with a flashy grace that only he possesses.

Like any true fighting game, MVC 3 is best played with an arcade stick. As with SF IV, controlling 3D characters on a 2D plane feels tight and snappy. You can use Dante's upward sword swipe to launch foes into the air, then tag in Captain America for some high-altitude slapping. Once you've got the timing down, you can swap in your third fighter to either juggle your opponent

higher in the air or slam them to the ground. If you've got Dante, Deadpool, and Chris Redfield in your party, why not finish them off with a learn hypercombo, in which all three riddle the competition with relentless gunfire?

These screenshots are only an appetizer to the gorgeous combat. You need to see the game in motion to admire the pugilistic poetry Capcom has brewed. No new characters have been revealed since our last feature, but we can't wait until there's more to share about this high-octane fighter. —Tim Turi





I take a big man to admit his mistakes, and when it comes to his problems with Fable II, designer Peter Molyneux is as gigantic as his reputation. During our E3 demo of Fable III, Molyneux laid out all of his criticisms of the series, and detailed exactly how Lionhead Studios is going to fix them.

Molyneux started the demo with a stark admission: He didn't like Fable II's story, and considers it generic and forgettable. With Fable III, the team at Lionhead set out to craft a story that is instantly understandable and appealing. Your mission is to amass enough power and fame to overthrow the tyrannical dictator of Albion, then step into his shoes and rule the land yourself. Your coronation will come roughly halfway through the story, and introduces a variety of new gameplay elements, as you allocate your kingdom's wealth, settle disputes brought before you in court, and decide whether to honor or forget all the promises you made to your sup porters on your rise to power. You'll still have the ability to travel the countryside slaying hobbes and searching for treasure sure with your trusty pouch, but you'll probably have to don a disguise in order to be left



alone. Molyneux stated players will learn certain truths about power, which may result in you, acting more like your despicable predecessor than you would like.

Molyneux's criticism of Fable II didn't end with the story: the worst part of the game, he told us, was the start button—the player was constantly drowning in statistics and lists and never really felt like they were leveling up or amassing a fortune. For Fable III, all of the items that were previously hidden in menus now reside in the Sanctuary, a series of rooms that house your various collections. Your faithful buller Jasper (voiced by the hilarious John Cleese) assists you in each of the Sanctuary's areas. These include a dressing room with the hundreds of clothing items you have acquired; Jasper will lay out select costumes for you, on mannequins; an armory that displays all of the weapons you've collected or crafted; and a treasure room, which will slowly fill with mountains of gold as you accumulate wealth (there was also a co-op room, but Molyneux wasn't talking about it yet). As Molyneux showed off a long line of customized swords—the visual style of your weapons now evolve based on how you use them—it was instantly clear how much more rewarding collecting items will be in Fable III.

A variety of other improvements we saw reinvigorated our love of the series. Magic is now bound to enchanted

gloves, which can be mixed and matched to create different effects based on each glove's level and ability. Co-op has also been revamped, now providing a complete experience. Your visiting friend can bring all of their weapons and powers into your game, and the two of you can travel independently to wherever you want in the world. Thanks to the new Victorian-era time period, the game has more of a distinct style than most fantasy games, too.

Molyneux is infamous for making impossible claims about what his games will deliver to players, but from what we saw at E3, we are once again hopeful that Microsoft's seminal RPG won't disappoint fans. — Jeff Marchisava

- » **Platform**
Xbox 360 • PC
- » **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action/RPG (2-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Microsoft Game Studios
- » **Developer**
Lionhead Studios
- » **Release**
October 25

Your actions will garner you followers, which will replace traditional XP.





Killzone 3

We tour Heigman in 3D

» Platform
PlayStation 3

» Style
1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

» Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» Developer
Guerrilla Games

» Release
February 2011

We had a solid half hour with Killzone 3 on a Sony Bravia 3D TV, and some active-shutter glasses and saw how the game's much-touted 3D effects held up. While there was some slight ghosting on the images from time to time, we never felt the nausea that sometimes comes with 3D gaming. There is a very slight downgrade on the visuals since the image has to be doubled and offset for the 3D effect to work, but the dip isn't that perceptible.

The first segment of the demo begins in a ship flying through wintry canyons while you blow away incoming enemies with a turret that's not long before you crash and have to hoof it through a snowy base. One of the first nice 3D touches is hearing snowflakes that dance around onscreen at all times. Using the iron sight on the rifle could easily make you cross-eyed, but it's handled in a way that isn't jarring and manages to make the gun feel more like a real physical object. As far as enemy attacks go, the pocket shots have the most impressive 3D effect so far, since you can see them blasting toward you, as opposed to mostly invisible bullets. The most amusing weapon to use was the new WASP. The standard shot blasts a series of wild, springing missiles toward your target while the air fire works like an air strike that can wipe out a tank in a single shot.

The jet pack introduces a new platforming element to the series. Surprisingly, it controls like a dream. You hit L1 to get a generous vertical boost and press the X button to shoot forward. Not once did we have to worry about falling off an icy platform. The pack also provides some nice alternative tactics to the standard run-and-gun strategy. In one area there was a small, vaulting hill of enemies all shooting at us through the windows. Normally, this fortified position would be tough to infiltrate, but the jet pack opens up a new option. We flew over tactics, on the roof and tossed a few grenades down through a hole and that was that. — Bryan Vore



Rock Band 3

We come back to easy difficulty, suckers



» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • Wii

» Style
1-7-Player Rhythm
(Online TBA)

» Publisher
MTV Games
Electronic Arts

» Developer
Harmonix

» Release
Fall

Just when we're getting over guitar games, Harmonix pulls us back in with a keyboard peripheral, a pro mode that simulates real instrumentation, three-part vocal harmonies, 83 new songs, and backwards compatibility with all previous Rock Band on-disc and DLC (except The Beatles and a handful of RB 1 songs).

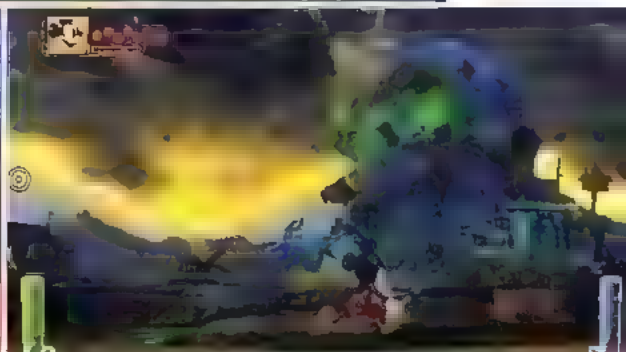
We got our hands on all of the new and modified instruments, and were shamed from the heights of expert and hard difficulty down to pro mode's easy and medium settings. The 25-key keyboard (\$80) takes about half a song to figure out where your hands are in relation to notes onscreen, but it's fun finding chords and tapping in time to a Huey Lewis synth. Only Bryan thinks playing Huey Lewis songs is fun. Don't judge the rest of us. Ed? If you already own a real MIDI keyboard, a \$40 adaptor can make it work with Rock Band 3.

The pro drums are the easiest instrument to adapt to, since Harmonix simply added three cymbals (\$40) to the standard Rock Band kit. Scrolling onscreen notes are now shaped like toms or cymbals to differentiate where you should hit. This adds a new dimension to drumming without slipping on a bunch of confusing new colors to the note charts.

The most drastic and exciting advancement, however, comes in the guitar department. We played with a real Fender Stratocaster specially outfitted with gaming electronics, and it actually works. Using standard guitar tablature layered on top of scrolling gems, players are playing the real parts of the song during pro difficulty. The price for this setup has yet to be determined, but if you'd rather not mess with changing strings and spend presumably less money, there's also a new plastic Fender Mustang controller (\$150) that simulates all of the frets and strings of a real guitar.

If you'd rather stick with traditional five-button gameplay, the game plays like classic Rock Band. But we've got a feeling plenty will be tempted into dabbling with the pro guitar parts. — Bryan Vore





Epic Mickey

Hands on with Mickey's grand adventure

With an impressive showing at the Nintendo press conference and on the E3 show floor, Epic Mickey continues to position itself as one of the most compelling third-party titles on the Wii.

As detailed in our cover story last December, Epic Mickey is divided into three types of play. The meat of the game centers around Mickey's painterly interaction with the world; his behavior in these "action zones" greatly influences the experience. Hub worlds offer Mickey a brief respite from his adventures, allowing him to stop, gather information, and interact with other inhabitants of the Westland. Two-dimensional side-scrolling segments are transitions between the two, paying homage to classic Mickey cartoons like Steamboat Willie.

Our demo begins in a hub called Venture Land, where notorious Captain Hook yos man Smee grovels for help. His pirate posse has been carted off to Skull Island and is being converted to soulless Bostlework creations. To aid him, Mickey must first secure boat parts. One particular pirate is willing to part with a piece if you help

him woo a lady friend. To do that, you need flowers. The Sam devoid of color to represent his animated origins - has some in his shop, but he requires you do yet another task to receive them.

Here you are presented with a moral choice: Sam asks you to ferret out three masks hidden throughout Venture Land. The player can scour the island and find all of them or stop after securing a single one. You could then give the first mask to Sam, erase an entrance into the back room of his shop, and steal it back. Repeat his deceit another time and the flowers are yours.

Once all the parts are in your possession, Skull Island awaits. Several massive chains have rendered Smee's ship immovable, and the anchors must be erased to set the ship free. Located in a vast ocean of thinner, Mickey must carefully platform between a series of smaller islands in order to avoid being "puddled." Puddling is Disney's answer to traditional death, with Mickey respawning without penalty after a few moments' time.

On Skull Island we meet the Tints and Turps (short for turpentine). When Epic Mickey first

debuted, Junction Point head Warren Spector showcased his "playstyle matters" mantra visually through Mickey's appearance. Frequently using thinner would result in a rat-like protagonist. Restore the world with paint and Mickey would stand tall and proud. After months of careful consideration, Spector benched the idea in favor of a single, uniform aesthetic. Now, Tints act as a guardian and visual indicator for heroism. Conversely, Turps will circle Mickey if the player prefers a more destructive playstyle.

After erasing all four anchors and freeing the ship from its sizable burden, Smee is free to sail the seas again. With his objective met, Mickey can return to the hub or rescue the remaining pirate crew from their automated fate.

The standout feature of the demo was the impressive visuals. Lighting models, texture, and animations have been polished across the board. While controls feel more like a work in progress, Epic Mickey looks to be on track for its end-of-year release. - Meagan VanBurklee

» Platform



» Style
1 Player Action

» Publisher
Disney Interactive Studios

» Developer
Junction Point Studios

» Release
Holiday

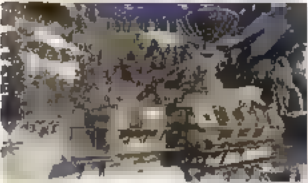


23

Call of Duty: Black Ops

by Adam Bressner
 10.26.09 5:31 PM ET

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



What's left to say about the Black Ops single-player campaign? We've gone over the Treyarch-Infamy Ward angle. The Cold War setting is old news. Everyone knows about the new vehicle levels. Rather than spend our time musing over the main character's (admittedly glorious) murder let's talk about what Black Ops means to the biggest franchise in first-person shooting.

The Call of Duty: Black Ops E3 presentation focused on two things: blowing the hell out of everything with a helicopter, and Treyarch's take on delivering the kind of tense cinematic moments for which the series is known. Piloting a stolen Soviet-built Hind attack chopper on what appears to be a mission to jump down half of southeast Asia looks like a blast. The fury unleashed by the gunship is impressive, with choppers ripping enemies to shreds and rockets blowing up everything from bridges to tanks.

Don't get your hopes up for Battlefield levels of vehicle integration, though. The Hind in Black Ops operates like the AC-130 did in Modern Warfare. It's more of a rewarding change of pace than a major gameplay feature. Yes, you can pilot it in two dimensions. The copter's altitude is automatic. On the plus side, you won't get news. Living the chopper into hillsides with no z-axis control, and Treyarch can put in levels like this for easy, breezy fun.

The Vietcong tunnel sequence shown off at the Microsoft press conference illustrates the tension that Treyarch is gunning for in the Black Ops single-player campaign. Lit only by handheld flashlights, these tight tunnels evoke a claustrophobic reaction, just short of the real thing. When an unexpected assailant leaps out of the darkness and stabs the guy in front of you with enough violence to spread gore all over the walls, it's hard not to jump.

Multiplayer is still a big unknown, but if what we've seen so far of Black Ops is indicative of its quality start to finish, Treyarch may be able to brush that IW-sized chip off its shoulder at last. — Adam Bressner



Medal of Honor

A satisfying blend of Call of Duty and Battlefield multiplayer, but where's the campaign?

With Call of Duty: Black Ops, the Battlefield, Bad Company 2, Vietnam expansion pack, and Medal of Honor all slated to release this year, fans of military shooters will have no shortage of options for fragging their friends this holiday. We got our first taste of Medal of Honor's multiplayer on the E3 showfloor.

After a few rough games in the series that hardly registered a blip on the online charts, EA stopped messing around and handed the multiplayer mode over to DICE, the studio best known for its critically acclaimed Battlefield franchise. Rather than create a straight-up Battlefield clone, DICE is shooting for a Call of Duty/Battlefield hybrid. Like Call of Duty, the fast-paced action takes place on smaller scale maps; bullets do more damage so death comes quickly, and players can earn kill streak attacks. Like Battlefield, Medal of Honor uses the Frostbite engine, features a soldier class system, and rewards your tactical prowess with medals, ribbons, and awards.

The first part of my hands-on demo featured a 24-player team deathmatch that took place on the streets of the decimated Afghan capital, Kabul. Like Battlefield, you select one of the three soldier classes before joining the map. The rifleman class looks to be the jack-of-all-trades, with assault rifles like the AK 47 and M 16, plus a grenade launcher attachment. The Special Ops class uses a smarter assault rifle, the M-4, but can also use combat shotguns. The sniper class uses wait-for-it sniper rifles. You can also tweak your loadout by altering the rail attachment, barrel, or ammo clip. Choices include a laser sight, red-dot sight, iron sights, and hollow point bullets that increase your deadliness in close-quarters but lose effectiveness when shooting from long range.

The Kabul City Ruins map reminded me a lot of Call of Duty maps in that the level is designed so you're never safe from getting sniped. With multi-story buildings, bombed-out storefronts, and tight back alleys, you always need to be aware of a potential bullet to the back of your head. If you string together an

impressive score chain, you can unlock a tactical support option. Like the kill streaks in COD, these give you access to devastating attacks like mortar strikes and cruise missiles. If you'd rather give your side a boost on the battlefield, you could deploy health or armor bonuses to your teammates instead.

Medal of Honor's ranking system has a unique angle in that you start as an Army Ranger with the goal of becoming a Tier 1 Special Forces expert. Your reward for proving your worth on the battlefield? A sweet, bushy beard just like the badass gracing Medal of Honor's box.

The second portion of our hands-on demo shifted from the Team Assault mode to an objective-based mode, like Battlefield's Rush mode. The teams are divided into attackers and defenders, with the aggressors moving to capture objectives in a timely fashion. If they succeed, the map area enlarges and a new objective is created. The map we played, the Helmand Valley mountainside, required the attacking team to capture five total objectives up a mountain pass to win the skirmish.

Gaining even ground with our insurgent enemies was paramount, as they had the vertical vantage point to thwart our advances. As we pushed the frontline toward our ultimate objective—a weapons cache that needed destroying—we gained access to Bradley fighting vehicles that made quick work of our enemies. Though you can control the tank, the operating area is very narrow and restrictive so the advantage only lasts until the opposing team switches to their rocket launchers and blows your million-dollar vehicle to smithereens.

As a big fan of the Battlefield and Call of Duty franchises, my hands-on time left me very excited for Medal of Honor's potential. Though the multiplayer looks to be in good shape, we're only a few months away from the game's release and have barely seen a glimpse of the single-player campaign. Could this be a sign of problems for the high-profile series? It's too early to tell. Hopefully we'll get a look in the coming weeks. —Matt Bertz



PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» Style
1-Player Shooter
[24-Player Online]

» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
EA G.A. DICE

» Release
October 12



Star Wars: The Old Republic

Together: the best of BioWare's past and MMO's present

» Platform PC » Style MMORPG » Publisher LucasArts » Developer BioWare
» Release Spring 2011

Things like about World of Warcraft: Strategic, measured gameplay that's flexible and fast enough for solo play, but deep enough to make group play interesting; an addictive quest structure that keeps players moving from one location to the next in a huge world; loads of loot and frequent upgrades.

Things like about Mass Effect: A complex, intergalactic plot weaving together the politics and conflicts of various alien races; well-written dialogue; meaningful player choices that help steer your char-

acter's morality and determine how others in the world will react to you... high-quality voice acting.

Things like about Star Wars: The Old Republic: All of the above. BioWare wasn't showing many new features on their long-awaited MMO at this year's E3 outside of the announcement that every player will have his or her own starship, but I was impressed with its masterful blend of what keeps me coming back to other MMOs and what makes single-player RPGs exciting. » Phil Kollar



Dance Central

Harmonix will make a dancer out of you

» Platform Xbox 360 » Style 1 or 2-Player Rhythm/Music » Publisher MTV Games
» Developer Harmonix » Release November 4

Harmonix is ditching plastic instruments for its Kinect exclusive title, Dance Central. Whether you're a professional dancer or have two left feet, Dance Central has something to offer.

The Kinect camera scans your body to create a player signature that recognizes your motions. Navigate the menu, with a few hand swipes and jump right into one of the game's modes. Break It Down mode teaches you moves step by step and slows down the pace to help you learn the choreography. Perform mode takes off the training wheels and has you dance through

an entire track in real time with onscreen prompts that display your accuracy. Other modes have yet to be revealed, but we do know there will be more than 90 routines and 600 moves to master.

No one at GI is a trained dancer, yet we found the songs to be fun and accessible thanks to great onscreen feedback and a steady difficulty curve. We can't wait to hit the dance floor with a fresh set of moves when Dance Central releases this fall. » Annette Gonzalez



Fallout: New Vegas

Guns, gambling, and Geiger counts

» Platform PlayStation 3 Xbox 360 » PC

» Style 1-Player Role-Playing

» Publisher Bethesda Softworks

» Developer Obsidian Entertainment

» Release October 19

A few months back we delivered an exclusive six-page spread on *Fallout: New Vegas* filled with details on the game's storyline, a look at some of the new characters, and a peek at the weaponry. At E3, we had a chance to revisit the same build in another hands-on session. We didn't see anything significantly new, but it's always nice to hit the tables (and a few Caesar's Legion slave drivers).

New Vegas shares more than a surname with its familiar real-world counterpart, including a variety of playable casino games. If you message your luck skill enough, you can make a killing on the tables. After playing a few hands of blackjack or spins at roulette, you can expect

a personal thank-you from the floor manager. Free drinks and steaks are nice, but the real high rollers can get cramped rooms — not too shabby. That level of hospitality is fleeting, though. Hit the jackpot on the slots and you're likely to get a personal escort out of the casino. The house has to make some money, too, so you're only welcome up to a point.

Out in the Mojave Wastelands, far from "civilization," we tested a few of the game's new weapons. The throwing spear is a handy and powerful new tool for impaling fools. Incendiary grenades pack a deadly punch, with a flaming blast that occasionally sends enemies skyward. If you see one of those things dancing around

your feet, run. The C4 packs we played with in our first hands-on experience are still a lot of fun, particularly if your sneak skill is high enough. Mega-jerks should know that you can plant these devices into NPC inventories and wait for just the right time to detonate them. If your mind is spinning as you imagine the possibilities this opens up, you're not alone.

Fallout: New Vegas is stacking up to be a welcome new dose of *Fallout*. We're still eager to dig deeper into the story and develop our own character (unlucky dummy, here we come). Until then, at least we can say the superficial aspects of the game are coming along nicely. » Jeff Cork



Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

Criterion brings this series back on track



Need for Speed fans have been clamoring for the old days, when the series was built on a basic premise of evading the cops. This addictive game mode has been noticeably absent from the EA racer recently, but now Burnout developer Criterion is behind the wheel of Need for Speed. This studio knows how to deliver a core experience that'll blow your hair back.

The premise of Hot Pursuit may be simple, but that doesn't mean the game is shallow. The game offers two separate career paths for the cops and the getaway driver, though Criterion didn't go into much detail about these modes. It'll be interesting to see how these career campaigns try to keep the game's chase essence fresh, and we hope that the two paths are different enough for both to warrant their own playthrough.

One differentiating factor between the two is the various weapons each side has at its disposal. In the demo we saw the cops could con-

jure up roadblocks, spike strips, aerial support and an EMP blast that screwed up the other driver's controls momentarily. Racers, meanwhile, have their own aids like radar-jamming equipment, a powerful nitro boost, a visibility cloak, and the power to throw out a decoy signal to fool the police. These weapons are initiated by pressing the d-pad, become available as you race, and each has its own cool-down time.

We played a short demo as a cop, and although it didn't seem to have the insane sense of speed of Burnout Paradise (at least not with our cruiser), there was some strategy to using the weapons. As a cop, my job was to damage the other guy into oblivion by any means necessary - whether that's through ramming him with my own nitro boost, causing him to make a mistake and hit something in the environment or via ally assistance like a roadblock, I liked to throw up a roadblock or spike strip as the perp was about to head around an upcoming curve to surprise them on the other side. If you're being

chased, you must use the game's open world and your own driving skill to pull away.

Burnout Paradise erased the line between online and offline play, and Hot Pursuit continues this through a persistent XP system called Bounty Points. As you rank up, you unlock upgrades, cars, and new levels. The experience system also keeps track of your every move and lets you share your achievements with friends. Hot Pursuit encourages communication among friends through various messaging features and the Autolog, which broadcasts challenges to everyone based on what you and they have accomplished.

Criterion isn't a developer that does things in half measures - just check out all the great DLC it provided for Burnout Paradise - and what little we've seen up to this point is likely just the tip of the iceberg. We'll chase down new details as soon as they become available. - Matthew Kato

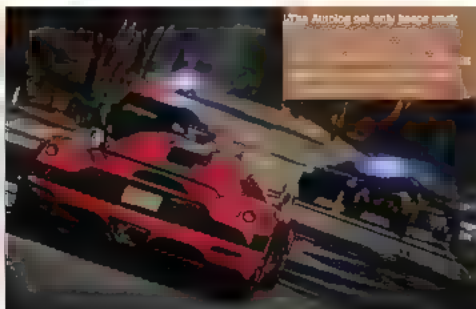
» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 - Wii

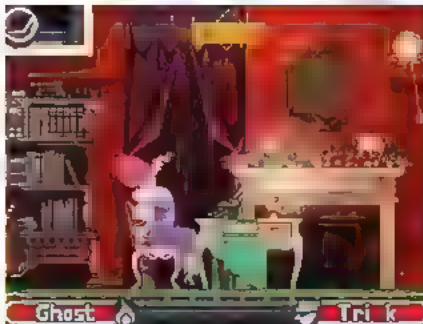
» Style
1 to 4-Player Racing
(8-Player Online via
PS3/Xbox 360), (Wii
Online TBA)

» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
Criterion Games/
Euant (Wii)

» Release
November 16





Think we can safely assume the cause of death was... the bullet he took in the chest.

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective

Phoenix Wright mastermind deivers haunting whodunit

» Platform
Nintendo DS

» Style
1-Player Adventure

» Publisher
Capcom

» Developer
Capcom

» Release
Winter

With the huge glut of games coming out of E3, it's easy to overlook titles lacking million-dollar budgets. One such lesser-known game is Capcom's *Ghost Trick: The Creator of the Ace Attorney series, Shu Takumi, has had another burst of genius. Now he's bringing his brand of crime-solving drama into the spectral dimension.*

Players start off *Ghost Trick* dead as a door nail, but that's where the fun starts. Sissel, the deceased protagonist, possesses objects scattered around two-dimensional levels. Using the DS stylus, players can use Sissel's soul to take over and animate environmental items like

blenders and wrecking balls. The catch? His soul has a limited range, so he can only enter nearby objects. This creates a Rube Goldberg-like series of events, transporting Sissel from one point to another.

One level takes place in the apartment complex of a snooty writer. As the drunken bourgeoisie pecks at her typewriter, Sissel possesses an attic door and opens it. A rat falls from the opening onto a fridge, and then again onto a lower shelf after Sissel knocks it down using a drinking bird toy. The frightened lady then swings at the rodent with a wine bottle. Players interact with the game world in small ways such as the

building up to more climactic moments like causing a chandelier to crash down on the beleaguered tyrist.

If *Ghost Trick's* unique premise and gameplay don't reel you in, the vivid visuals and humor will. Each character and object is animated exhaustively, resulting in fluid, realistic movements. Charismatic cast members also come equipped with quirky personalities that embody a similar humor to the *Ace Attorney* series.

Ghost Trick surprised and impressed many E3 attendees, and for good reason. You'd have to be a fool or dead to let Capcom's fresh DS adventure pass under your radar. — Tim Turt



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II

Burying a ridiculous plot twist with gameplay variety

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBD)

» Publisher
LucasArts

» Developer
LucasArts

» Release
October 26

My first look at *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II* didn't kick off with a blast of Force lightning or a stormtrooper getting his face Force rammed into the side of an AT-AT. Instead, the demo began with protagonist Starkiller free-falling down the side of a Kamino skyscraper.

(I should note this skyscraper must be the tallest in the galaxy. Starkiller plummets beside it for



a good minute. The gameplay led to this visually stunning segment, is surprisingly varied. As Starkiller weaves left and right to dodge energy blasts, he must use the ability to destroy balconies full of stormtroopers and the TIE fighters closing in for the kill.

This sequence is one example of the way LucasArts hopes to add variety to *The Force Unleashed II*. Another is through the Force. Starkiller has grown more powerful and learned how to use a Jedi mind trick, turning enemies against their own ranks. He's also learned Force fury, a rage-induced action that overpowers all his other Force moves. With Force fury activated, Force push will knock stormtroopers into another galaxy.

LucasArts is addressing enemy variety as well. In addition to new stormtrooper types, Starkiller

must face different variations of the AT-AT as well as a new boss like Carbonite Heavy droid that spits molten metal at its foes. The final strike Starkiller delivered to his droid harked back to the cinematic finishers from the first game, only this time without the button prompts obscuring his action.

Starkiller's double-saber style looks more inviting than the repetitive single-saber play from the first game, but I'm still having a hard time wrapping my brain around this game's story. If Jedi can be cloned, like Starkiller has been, why is the Empire still using clones of Jango Fett? — Andrew Reiner

To see the *Batman* CG short film, go to gameinformer.com/11/11.



In the first game, Starkiller learned the art of the Jedi. Throughout the sequel, he'll learn to use his Force powers in a variety of ways.

Red Faction: Armageddon

Clashes collide in this new destructible FPS

If you were to compile a list of the most entertaining guns in gaming history it would likely include weapons like Doom's BFG, Half-Life 2's gravity gun, and at least half the arsenal from the Ratchet & Clank series. However, if developer Vollition has its way, you'll soon be adding a new weapon to that list. The magnet gun featured in *Red Faction: Armageddon* isn't just one of the coolest new toys we've seen in a long time, it perfectly showcases all the improvements the development team has made to the series' legendary destruction engine.

Those who played through last year's *Red Faction: Guerrilla* can forget all about the peace they worked so hard to forge. Harmony never lasts long. Fifty years after the *Red Faction* resistance movement helped free Mars, new bombs start to explode on the planet's red soil. The surface soon becomes uninhabitable, pushing the remaining colonists into underground mines. But when Darius Mason—grandson of revolution hero Alec Mason and Samariya—accidentally unleashes a long-dormant alien threat, this civil war quickly becomes an alien armageddon. The resulting battle takes the survivors through the storm-blasted core of the planet, pushing them past ice caves and lava flows, and forcing them to go face-to-face against an unappealable threat.

Anyone who's played a *Red Faction* game knows that the series is about destruction first and foremost. However, *Armageddon*'s new

enclosed environments and more streamlined level design have allowed Vollition to ramp up the level of detail its destruction engine cranks out. The magnet gun takes full advantage of this. This weapon works simply enough. Players shoot electronic magnets at any two objects within the environment: a piece of geometry, one of the game's structures, or even an enemy. Electromagnetic energy turns the first object into a bullet, firing towards the second target at high speeds. We watched enemies fly through walls, cars zip into groups of enemies, and the second floor of a building get shorn off under the force of these powerful magnets. It seems that nothing is spared from the sheer destructibility of the *Red Faction* engine.

Of course, destruction is only half the story in *Red Faction: Armageddon*. Players will be able to rebuild their environment with a device called the Nano Forge. Using the power of millions of tiny machines, the Nano Forge allows players to restore destroyed colony defenses. This proved

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Action/Adventure;
Multiplayer TBA

» Publisher
THQ

» Developer
Vollition

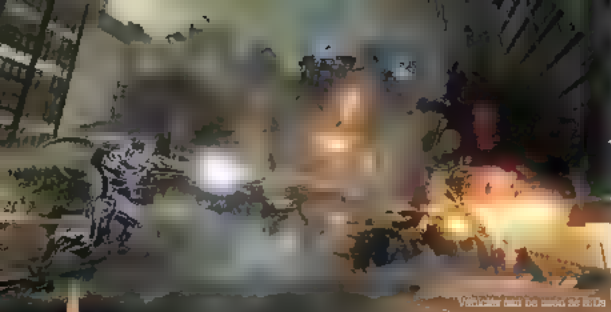
» Release
March 2011



to be a valuable tool when used in conjunction with the magnet gun. After tearing apart the side of a building with cannon fire, we stepped into the structure then rebuilt its walls, which shielded us from incoming enemy fire.

We adored *Guerrilla*, and if the magnet gun and Nano Forge are as fun to play with as they appear, then we can't wait to start causing some cave-ins on Martian mines early next year. » Ben Reeves





Crysis 2

Make New York your own urban warfare sandbox

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

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer 75A)

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

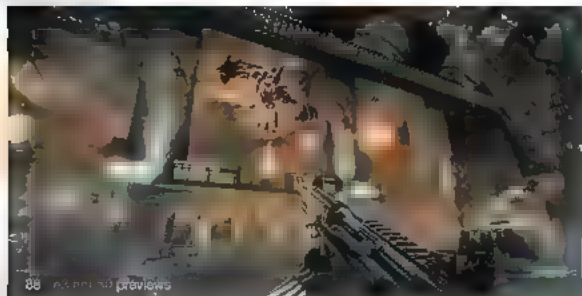
» **Developer**
Crytek

» **Release**
Holiday

In such an over-represented genre, making sure your first person shooter stands out from the competition is not an easy task. That's exactly what Crytek did at this year's E3, with a demo that highlights Crysis 2's strengths. Nomad's wide range of weapons and abilities, the engine's signature bleeding-edge graphics, and what may be the jillmole FPS sandbox, New York City.

The demo takes place in Grand Central Station, as the Mannes are attempting hold back alien invaders long enough for the remaining citizens to evacuate the area. As gunfire breaks out, the sequel's improvements begin to emerge. The aliens you'll face are more agile than before, and there's a greater variety in species, which Crytek says will accommodate (or complicate) different gameplay styles. Luckily, Grand Central Station has been turned into an impromptu armory, and everywhere Nomad turns there's a new weapon at his disposal. As he shoots up a few hulking bipedal aliens, we see how impressive the destructible environments are. Nomad's heavy arsenal drops chandeliers and electronic displays from the ceiling, while luminescent blasts from his enemies rip apart the iconic building's marble railings and pillars.

After the small aliens are out of the way, a gigantic alien mech called the Finger smashes through the multi-story window at the front of the building. The Finger releases powerful electrical attacks, knocking out the station's lights and reducing much of the environment's cover to rubble. Nomad uses a succession of high-powered weapons to take the enemy down, including rockets, a multitude of grenades, and a few blocks of C4 for good measure. When the mechanical beast finally collapses in a swirl of red flames, Nomad only has a few seconds to make his escape. High above, a series of glowing projectiles hit the adjacent building, causing debris to shower down on the station's glass ceiling before the towering skyscraper crashes down on the station. If Crysis 2 can deliver gameplay as satisfying as its graphics, there may be a new champion in console shooters this holiday season. — Jeff Marchiafava



NHL 11

A new era of physicality



» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 to 8-Player Sports
(PS3); 1 to 4-Player
(Xbox 360) (12-Player
Online)

» **Publisher**
EA Sports

» **Developer**
EA Canada

» **Release**
September 7

When I first saw NHL 11's new physics-based animation system in action during a brief demo, I came away impressed. Every hit looked different, and the thought of taking out a whiny star like Sidney Crosby with several different kinds of hits along the boards, benches, and in open ice is a proposition too good to pass up. But will the procedural animations still wow me after playing the game a few times?

On the E3 show floor, I got the chance to find out. Firing up a game with my star-crossed Minnesota Wild franchise, I took to the ice against the Stanley Cup champion Chicago Blackhawks. The Wild don't have the skill to match the likes of Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane, but once two-time NHL All-Star Cal Clutterbuck took to the ice, I had my chance to even the score with physical play.

NHL 11 did not disappoint. Whether I delivered the brutal of Clutterbuck's force into an unsuspecting skater or merely clipped him with a glancing blow, every check looked different. When my headhunting ways were noticed by a ref, got busted, and to my surprise, pressing the Y button in the area of the ref caused Cal to (unsuccessfully) plead his case to the stripes.

The new quick dekes were equally impressive at creating space in crowded areas, and once I finally lit the lamp revealed in the moment by selecting a custom celebration. For hockey fans like myself, NHL 11's September release date can't come soon enough. — Matt Bertz



There's one real-time physics to start the celebration



GoldenEye 007

The granddaddy of console shooters gets a face lift

Few video games conjure up as many fond memories as GoldenEye 007 for the Nintendo 64. The game not only put console shooters on the map, but united countless dorm rooms in heated multiplayer matches. Though GoldenEye's impact on the industry is profound, the gameplay itself has not withstood the test of time. Now it's time for Activision to polish up the nostalgic-rich property with a remake of sorts.

Activision is quick to assert that GoldenEye 007 isn't a remake of Rare's 1997 title, but rather a new game based off the film. Despite this assertion, many elements of the single- and multiplayer are ripped from the N64 game.

Pierce Brosnan is gone. In his place is the much grittier, darker Bond portrayed by Daniel Craig. In the demo, he and 006 (Alec Trevelyan) infiltrate a snowy Russian dam to silence some communists. As the camera pans over the setting, it's clear that this is a reconstruction of the classic first level from the original game. Everything from an army truck rolling across a ramp to the sniper rifle tucked away in a guard tower screams fan service. Even the coloring of certain textures and enemy design hark back to the Nintendo 64's glory days.

Homage aside, the gameplay of the single-player experience is drastically different. You are free to engage situations however you please. Bond and Trevelyan can take cover behind objects to hide from the Ruski's sight. If they catch a sentry unaware, they can execute a timed button press to take out the enemies covertly, either via silenced weapons or brute force. The single-player portion of the demo concludes with the two infiltrating the infamous facility level via a van in an on-rails shooting segment.

While GoldenEye's single-player set standards back in 1997, it was the multiplayer that had over-caffeinated gamers clutching awkward N64 controllers until dawn. That trademark four-player split-screen returns, along with eight-player online matches. Players fond of the old specialty game types such as paintball and "snappers only" will be pleased to learn that match presets are customizable.

Multplayer resembles the adored N64 title, but it plays much better. I used the new Classic Controller during my hands-on with the standard deathmatch mode, so no motion control was involved. This multi-buttoned, dual-analog stick device made the game feel immediately recognizable. It plays like many other modern

shooters, complete with iron-sights aiming and one-button melee attacks. Using newly honed FPS skills in such a beloved environment is a blast. Eurocom manages to preserve everything good about the original's gameplay (radar, bloody death screens) while ditching the bad (intrusive auto aim, weapon pick-ups).

Classic multiplayer characters return to the fray as well. Oddjob is still terribly overpowered, this time sporting a one-hit kill bowler's hat (in addition to his diminutive profile). Jaws returns with custom grenades and a lethal melee attack. *The Man with the Golden Gun's* villain, Scaramanga, makes his debut as well. After all these years it's still entertaining to see these iconic characters face off against one another.

From what's been shown thus far, GoldenEye 007 is shaping up to be a game that should not be dismissed. Diehard fans of the original game can look forward to replaying an old favorite without the aged gameplay. Everyone else should brace themselves for what could be the best Wii FPS so far. — Tim Turi

Check out gameinformer.com/mag for close looks at single and multiplayer.

- » Platform: Wii
- » Style: 1 to 4-Player Shooter (8-Player Online)
- » Publisher: Activision
- » Developer: Eurocom
- » Release: Holiday



original GoldenEye's opening level





Gran Turismo 5

Start your engines: GT 5 is almost here

» Platform PlayStation 3 » Style 1 to 4-Player Racing (16-Player Online) » Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment » Developer Polyphony Digital » Release November 2

Polyphony Digital revealed a lot of new details on Gran Turismo 5 at this year's E3, but the most impressive announcement was that the game finally has a solid release date: players can get behind the wheel of Sony's top-tier racer on November 2. Even better, Polyphony Digital has used the extra long development cycle to pack in a staggering amount of content, including over a thousand cars to unlock, NASCAR racing that features licensed drivers like Jeff Gordon

and Dale Earnhardt Jr. and an impressive 3D mode. The 3D mode will even support head tracking via the PlayStation Eye, which pans the camera around the cockpit as you move your head. Polyphony also showed off an upgraded photo mode, robust online options, and in-game content from the popular television show *Top Gear*—all of which have us believing that Gran Turismo 5 will be worth the wait. —Jeff Marchant



Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

Ninja Theory's new action game takes to the clouds

» Platform PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 » Style 1-Player Action » Publisher Namco Bandai » Developer Ninja Theory » Release October

Back to *The Future II* made hoverboards a tangible dream for an entire generation of sci-fi geeks, and since then dozens of video game heroes have hopped on similar vehicles. Namco's *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* is the latest game to continue the tradition of riding air—and based on our time with the game, it has a few tricks that would make Marty McFly jealous. Nicknamed Cloud, the hover board in *Enslaved* will prove useful whenever players need to cross large bodies of water or launch off of ramps to reach otherwise

inaccessible areas. The device moves at stealth fighter speeds over any environment, but Monkey can hop on and off the board with the quick press of a button. Thankfully, the rest of the game also seems to be coming along nicely. The action sequences we played were fast and stylish, and the platforming sections have a rhythmic pacing similar to recent Prince of Persia titles. Namco hasn't announced an exact release date yet, but the publisher has promised that the title should be ready for retail this October. —Ben Reeves

Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned



Propaganda Games introduces moral choice to Pirates franchise



» Platform PlayStation 3 Xbox 360 • PC

» Style 1-Player Action/RPG

» Publisher Disney Interactive Studios

» Developer Propaganda Games

» Release Spring 2011

The latest title in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise does not base its story on scripts from any of the recent blockbuster films, but instead introduces RPG elements and moral choices that will give players greater flexibility in the outcome of their swashbuckling adventure.

In *Armada of the Damned* you'll play as Sterling, a pirate who arrived to the Caribbean at the worst possible time as he becomes cursed and is forced to slay. To keep with the RPG trend of moral choice, his actions determine whether he becomes a dashing Legendary pirate or a menacing Dreaded pirate. Legendary pirates are friendlier in appearance, agile, and use wit and trickery to get by. Dreaded pirates have a dark demeanor, access to magic, and rely more on brute force in combat. Regardless of your pirate type, there will be ample opportunities to shape Sterling's appearance using varied clothing options. To customize ability progression, two distinct skill trees will be available for sea and land-based actions. Sea-based abilities will come in handy when navigating Sterling's ship, *Nemesis*.

Ship-to-ship combat as well as the ability to board enemy vessels for melee attacks feels fresh and fast. Light and heavy attacks are interchangeable for quick combos in melee, or you can switch to your pistol for more range. Curses can be passed on to enemies to change the tide of battles and can lead to great finishing animations. When not in combat, you can interact with NPCs in a dialogue tree similar to that of *BioWare* titles. This is also how you gain missions to keep the action moving.

Armada of the Damned was a pleasant E3 surprise overall considering the history of the franchise and its previous lack of critical success. The game already looks incredibly polished and still has plenty of development time before it hits Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC next spring. —Auriette Gonzalez



Batman: The Brave and the Bold

The Dark Knight finds some friends in this Wii beat-'em-up

38



Start naming the first DC Comics superheroes that you can think of. Most of you probably began with Batman and Robin, maybe Superman. From there, perhaps you moved on to the Flash and Green Lantern. Probably very few thought of Hawkman or Blue Beetle, and only the truly hardcore comic readers will have acknowledged the existence of Booster Gold. Whatever your level of fandom, though, you'll be able to play as or team up with most if not all of these choices (as well as many more) in WayForward's upcoming 2D beat-'em-up, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*.

Don't pay too much heed to the Batman name on the box. Bats stars in every level of the game, but he's largely there as an easy point of entry for casual comic book or cartoon fans. The game could just as well have been called "DC Universe: The Brave and the Bold," as its sole purpose seems to be providing a simple, fun game structure into which they can pour gallons of fan service.

Each set of levels covers a different, self-contained storyline that sees Batman teaming up with a new hero. Players can choose to take on

the role of the Dark Knight or his current partner in crime fighting, with two-player co-op available if you want to fill both spots. If you have a DS version of the game, you can even bring in a third player (controlled using the DS) who plays as Bat-Mite, a magical impish creature that flies around in a miniature, too-light version of the Batman outfit. Yes, even Bat-Mite has made it into this game.

The core gameplay of *The Brave and the Bold* is straightforward, but that's not a bad thing. Enemies stream onto the screen, and Batman and company take them out with a mix of kicks, punches, throws, special gadgets, and powers. In addition to having a partner accompany you, you also choose a buddy to summon from a huge list of heroes at the start of every level. Between the option to call this bonus sidekick in at any time and your own screen-clearing special move, you'll have numerous ways to dispose of however many goons get thrown your way.

In between knocking out criminals, levels contain light platforming and exploration. You'll need to use Batman's Batgrapple to get from one perilously placed ledge to another. Go out of your

way to find grapple points, and you may discover hidden locations with bonus collectibles. Some levels will break up the pace by suddenly changing the gameplay — one level switches to a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up in space and another has Batman and Robin attempting to escape from what looks like a giant ball made of rubber bands rolling slowly toward them, Indiana Jones-style.

Fans of the cartoon series this is based on will appreciate the hours of dialogue recorded for the game — over two feature-length films worth. The cutscenes are light-hearted, but from what I could hear from the loud E3 show floor demo, they're also genuinely pretty funny.

With last year's *Arkham Asylum* finally proving that really great hardcore Batman games can exist and a sequel on the horizon, *The Brave and the Bold* seems like the perfect treat: to tide over batfans and more casual superhero lovers alike. This approachable title isn't going to tax the brain of the world's greatest detective, but it should be enough to keep him entertained. — Phil Kollar

- ▶ Platform: Wii • Nintendo DS
- ▶ Style: 1 to 3-Player Action
- ▶ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive
- ▶ Developer: WayForward
- ▶ Release: September 7





» Platform
PlayStation 3

» Style
» Player Action/
Adventure (2-Player
Online)

» Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» Developer
thatgamecompany

» Release
2011

The creative minds behind *Flow* and *Flower* quietly announced their third downloadable game at E3, and the new project is proving to be as enigmatic and intriguing as their previous efforts.

The inspiration for *Journey* arose from several sources. Creative director Jenova Chen described a lunch meeting many months ago he had with a real-life NASA shuttle pilot. The pilot explained that he had never set foot on the moon (he was piloting), but he had traveled with others who had. Without exception, he said, these people came back changed, with a new spiritual and emotional perspective on life brought on by the sense of isolation and vastness they felt standing upon the lunar surface.

Chen was fascinated by this phenomenon, and decided to explore the concept in his upcoming game. Chen also spoke about how the nature of many modern video games was about the fantasy of power, and he was interested in creating a game that evoked the opposite sensibility – a sense of powerlessness brought on by being alone and isolated. Such a game character would crave contact with others, in the same way people in real life seek out connections and meaning through relationships. In addition, Chen noted a personal fascination with the comparative mythology writings of Joseph Campbell, the same author George Lucas often cites as an inspiration for *Star Wars*.

From this stew of ideas, *Journey* began to

take shape. The game begins as the player wakes on a vast open desert filled with sweeping sand dunes and blowing wind. A beautiful, lonely cello melody picks up in the soundtrack. The main character is an unusual figure in a long red cloak. He can walk with the left stick, pan the camera with the Sixaxis tilt, jump, and let out a keening song with another button. Climbing to the peak of a nearby dune, the player can see a distant mountain that exudes a pillar of light into the sky. With nowhere else to go, the strange mountain becomes the definitive destination for the game that follows.

As the red-cloaked hero runs along the dunes, the ground responds like real sand, tumbling down around his footfalls, and letting him slide down steep surfaces. The sand has an almost magical quality: it rolls and rises like sea waves that break against the dunes. The hero can catch these waves, and surf along them as if they were water.

Mysteries abound in the desert. Strange stone monoliths come to life and bestow runes upon the hero's cloak. Pieces of cloth float free in the air, and can be gathered to allow for bursts of flight. But no mystery is greater than the sight of a lone figure on a distant dune – another player lost in the wasteland.

Journey creates a unique multiplayer experience. At any time, a single other player can appear in your game. The two players cannot speak or identify each other. They can ignore each other, or work together. Chen hopes the experience helps players to explore a new emotional palette revolving around how loneliness forces us to reach out for companionship. The game sounds like a fascinating social experiment, and the combination of visuals, audio, and unique gameplay are truly entrancing. Only time will tell if thatgamecompany's unusual poetic vision will draw in a curious audience. — Matt Miller



The mystery of the wasteland
monoliths waits on the horizon.



Child of Eden

Mizuguchi's latest multi-sensory shooter will tickle your senses



Ubisoft kicked off its E3 press conference with kaleidoscopic visuals and synchronized techno beats introducing Child of Eden, a "synesthesia shooter" from Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the master mind behind Rez, Space Channel 5, and Lumines. Q Entertainment's current project tells the story of Eden, the futuristic version of the Internet. Eden has been plagued by viruses that you must purify, not destroy – a zen-like approach to shooter gameplay. Your ultimate goal is to save Project Lumi from the virus attack so that it can

reach completion and reproduce a human personality in Eden.

Mizuguchi demoed the multi-sensory rail shooter onstage at Ubisoft's press conference



using Microsoft's Kinect. Mizuguchi's hands controlled the reticule on screen as it traveled through abstract, neon locales. Pulsating beats followed in time with the shots on screen, and intensified in speed and volume as he progressed. Child of Eden is made up of five stages called "Archives" that will change after each playthrough.

Though the demonstration used Kinect, standard controllers can be used as well. We're told the developer is currently looking into Move support.

With seamless fusing of stunning visuals and impressive sound design, you can bet Q Entertainment will have your senses tingling when Child of Eden releases next year. — Annette Gonzalez

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
- » Style
1-Player
Rhythm/Music
- » Publisher
Ubisoft
- » Developer
Q Entertainment
- » Release
2011

Homefront

Future war comes home to roost

Overmind that North Korea is a miserable wasteland of subsistence agriculture and horrific poverty. What if it rose to global power and conquered the U.S. in 2027? Homefront showed off impressive technical chops and a first-person storytelling aesthetic reminiscent of Half-Life at E3 this year.

Kaos' obsession with near-future military toys continues from Frontlines: Fuel of War. The Gekoth, a drone tank that could be the Christian Bale Batmobile's older brother, wrecks whatever targets you designate with more firepower than a platoon of today's infantry. We know that directly controlled vehicles are also in what other cool gadgets might players stumble across in tomorrow's occupied America?

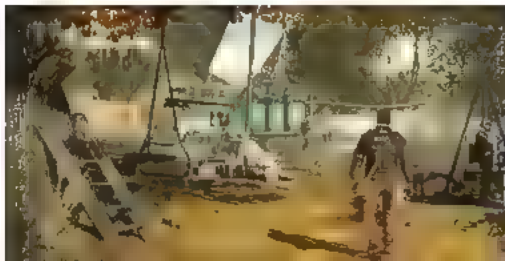
The horrors of war and oppression are your constant companions in Homefront. We saw allies and enemies alike engulfed in flames



screaming in their death throes as their bodies proved no match for the future's weaponry. Desolate shantytowns in formerly idyllic suburban neighborhoods house the American insurgency. The setting isn't quite Half-Life or Terminator, but it's a step closer to those than Call of Duty.

Kaos is a talented studio, and Homefront has been cooking for a few years now. The game's release early next year will show whether Kaos can put that talent to good use. — Adam Blessezer

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 / PC
- » Style
1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher
THQ
- » Developer
Kaos Studios
- » Release
Q1 2011





The Witcher II: Assassins of Kings

A role-playing game for the hardcore

Platform
PC

Style

1-Player Role-Playing

Publisher

CD Projekt Red/ Atari

Developer

CD Projekt Red

Release

Q1 2011

We've spoken at length about *The Witcher II* already, but seeing the combat in action at E3 put a big lingering doubt about the game to rest. The original's goofy timing-based click mechanic is gone, replaced with a responsive system that allows players to string items, magic, and melee attacks together into creative combos.

One portion of the E3 demo (which you can read an extensive report about at gameinformer.com) had protagonist Geralt protecting two distracted companions from waves of aggressors. The witcher flowed smoothly between sword strikes, magical assaults, and item use as he gracefully obliterated his enemies. Combining these moves allows players to easily react to changing situations. Though it's hardly groundbreaking, this simple system is incredible compared to the cumbersome combat mechanic in the original game.

The RPG elements that made Geralt's first adventure great return in the sequel. Most situations have multiple resolutions, depending on how you approach them. CD Projekt assures us that NPCs remember your actions through the entire game, and will react accordingly should you come across them later on. The witcher still likes to pass the time (ahem) in the company of a lady friend, but no longer obtains audio cards commemorating his conquests. CD Projekt hopes this will allow them to squeak by the ESRB and release an uncensored version in the U.S. this time.

Though *The Witcher II* is only confirmed for a PC release at the moment, CD Projekt demoed the game on a 360 pad at the show and all but confirmed a forthcoming console release. The more people who get a chance to check out this Polish gem, the better. —Adam Bessener



WWE All-Stars

NBA Jam vets bring their over-the-top action to the squared circle



Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • Wii

Style
1 or 2-Player Fighting
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
THQ

Developer
THQ San Diego

Release
TBA

Back in 1993, NBA Jam did something few sports games have accomplished — win over gamers who don't even care about the actual sport. Sal Divita was one of the key figures behind that title, and now he wants *WWE All-Stars* to strike the same chord. Even if you haven't seen one second of Vince McMahon's testosterone-soaked circus of athleticism and theatrics, the game's ridiculous action and explosive moves should impress gamers looking for a great arcade-style wrestling experience.

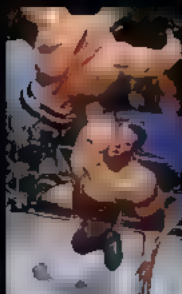
All-Stars' trademark is the action figure look of the grapplers. John Cena and The Rock may be massive in real life, but they're downright cartoonish in this new title. Wrestling's already-ridiculous finishers like The People's Elbow and the Attitude Adjustment are enhanced with 10-foot jumps and mid-air flips.

Gameplay takes an entirely different approach than *Smackdown vs. Raw*, resembling a fighting game more than a wrestling sim. You can pull off juggle combos, tossing in a couple quick hits or an additional slam after bouncing your opponent off the mat with a powerbomb.

As its name implies, the roster is made up of superstars from WWE's past and present, though only John Cena and The Rock are confirmed thus far. Stars currently signed to TNA (Hogan, Hall, Nash, Flair, Angle) are up in the air, but legends like Stone Cold Steve Austin and Bret Hart are likely.

In the '90s, a cartoonish take on WWE (then WWF) was attempted in the form of *WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game*. It featured the Undertaker breaking tombstones over people's heads, Doink the Clown electrocuting foes, and Yeh Yeh flying out of Yokozuna's pants. However, Divita doesn't want to reach that level of ridiculousness this time around. Exaggerated moves and the cartoonish art style are the highlights, not props and fish pants.

WWE All-Stars doesn't have a release date yet, but fans of fighting games or arcade titles in the vein of NBA Jam should certainly keep an eye on it. —Dan Ryckert



MotorStorm: Apocalypse

Sony's racing game's reborn from the ashes

The first *MotorStorm* burst out of the gates with many of its racing fundamentals in place. The sense of speed was great, the environment and different vehicle classes influenced racing and created some strategy, and the graphics were stellar. Unfortunately, the sequel didn't build upon the promise of the first title, leaving some fans wondering where the franchise was heading and what it had left to offer. Thankfully, this new *MotorStorm* is going all out to recapture the excitement and redefine the series.

Burning buildings crashing down on the track, rubble-strewn streets, subway tunnels engulfed in flames, and other fantastic situations will challenge racers in over 40 tracks spanning urban environments and other locales. You play the main career mode from the perspective of three different racers, seeing the world in various states of decay based on who you're playing and where they're at when the s— hits the fan.

We raced a couple laps of *Apocalypse*, and the game's anything-can-happen attitude shined through. We sped our cars up stairs and through the insides of skyscrapers, narrowly avoided being squashed like a bug as the environment crashed around us, and encountered enough fiery debris for a lifetime. As if hitting pedestrians wasn't fun enough, the game also supports 3D (assuming you have the right TV). Seeing hapless fools strook over your hood in 3D is a sick thrill that we have no problem admitting we love.

The game's core principles of boosting, cool downs, and varying vehicle classes is back, and there are four new types of rides including motor cycles and minis. Depending on how sturdy your vehicle is, you'll be able to burst through parts of the environment, which should add a dimension to the series' emphasis on selecting the right path on the track to suit your vehicle. That being said, the game's art director, Simon O'Brien, told us that, unlike past *MotorStorm* titles, *Apocalypse* allows players to enjoy the levels no matter what they're doing.



While *Apocalypse*'s gonzo approach to racing is a big differentiator compared to the rest of the *MotorStorm* titles, its online portion is a giant leap forward. You can create races—including the ability to set the win criteria, boost parameters, etc.—and share them with others online. The game also creates a community atmosphere with online gambling for XP and car upgrades. Finally, there is a perk system that rewards you with upgrades in handling, combat abilities, and boosting.

Titles like *Split/Second* and *Blur* have grabbed gamers with their explosive exploits, and the time is right for the *MotorStorm* series to show what it can bring to the table in this escalating and thrilling

video games arms race. So far, it sounds like playing waste to the world is definitely the way to do it. —Matthew Kato



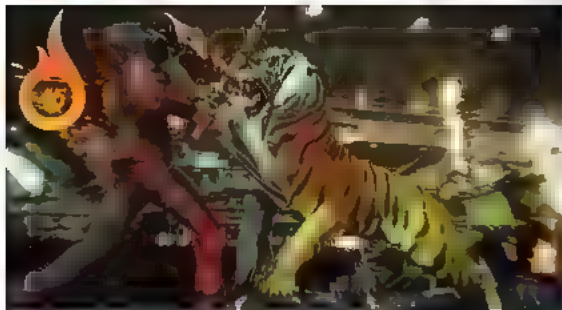
Platform
PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Racing
(10-Player Online)

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Evolution Studios

» **Release**
Spring 2011



Dead Rising 2

Fighting off the crowds

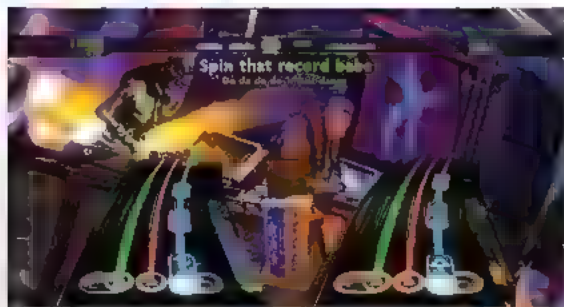
» Platform PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 » Style 1 or 2-Player Action (4-Player Online) » Publisher Capcom » Developer Blue Castle Games » Release September 28

We've played Dead Rising 2 for several hours over the course of several demos, builds, and multi-player events. However, this E3 marked the first time we've had the chance to check out the full intro from title screen to gameplay.

As Chuck fights to clear his name from a zombie outbreak frame job, he runs into a few survivors in the overrun Fortune City. Directing those survivors to the safe house is similar to the first game, though the pathfinding and general competence seem to be improved. Chuck also encounters

Leon Bell, a cocky Terror is Ready contestant with a penchant for ripping zombies (and survivors) in half with his sicko cycle. After a tense exchange, Bell taunts Chuck into a motorcycle chase through the zombie-filled plaza. As the undead splatter around us, we couldn't help but notice the frame rate spitter trying to keep up with all the action.

Technical hiccups aside, the demo left a solid impression. Let's just hope those issues are addressed before the game's fall release. — Jeff Cork



DJ Hero 2

More multiplayer enters the mix

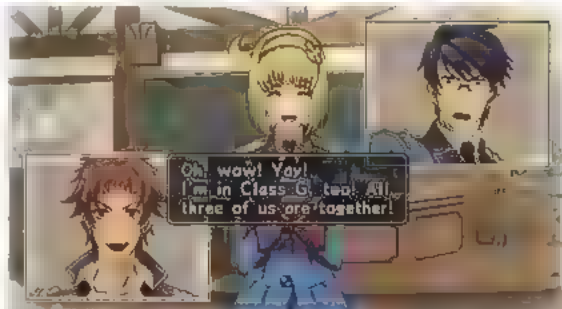
» Platform PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • Wii » Style 1 to 3-Player Rhythmic (Online, TRA) » Publisher Activision » Developer FreeStyleGames » Release Fall

The DJ Hero franchise returns later this year with over 70 mixes featuring music from artists like Dr. Dre, the Chemical Brothers, Kanye West, Metallica, Lady Gaga, and Rihanna. This time, however, you can finally play with two turntables and a microphone, with distinct tracks for both DJs to play. In our time with the game, it seemed strange to bring parts from two songs back and forth,

but it beats the pants off having no structure to the vocals at all like the first game. Activision has wised up on pricing as well, launching the turntable and game bundle at \$99 (according to online retailers), which makes it \$20 less than the original. A "party bundle" including two turntables, a mic, and the game will also be available for \$149. — Bryan Vore

Valkyria Chronicles 2

Ga-a to arms again



» Platform PSP
» Style 1 to 4-Player Strategy
» Publisher Sega
» Developer Sega
» Release August 31

Valkyria Chronicles was a pleasant surprise—a visually beautiful and mechanically deep strategy game for the PlayStation 3. While the game wasn't a runaway sales success, a cult following and critical buzz were apparently enough for Sega to start work on the sequel, which we got hands-on time with at E3. The most important thing to note about Valkyria Chronicles 2 is that it hasn't lost much in its transition to the smaller screen. The graphics aren't as sharp or interesting; it's now less like a sketchbook and more like an anime, but the controls feel natural.

The biggest change for the sequel is the scale of the battlefield. Not only are significantly fewer enemies on the field at any one time, but players can only deploy six units—enough room for a tank and a small variety of classes. Maps are now often split into two or three smaller, self-contained areas instead of one large zone.



Mission objectives seem more focused on capturing bases, which open up the ability to transfer troops between the different areas.

That may sound potentially disappointing, but the game also has some interesting changes to make up for it. Your soldiers now have skill trees that allow them to develop into multiple different specializations from their base classes. For example, the sniper is now a specialization of the base scout class. These specializations eventually allow for a grand total of over 30 classes, which should leave plenty of room for developing interesting strategies. There's also a new armored soldier base class thrown into the mix that mostly sticks to melee attacks.

If you own a PSP and missed Valkyria Chronicles two years ago, this sequel is stepping up to be the perfect opportunity to see what the hype was about. Watch for our full review in time for the game's late summer launch. — Phil Kollar

Ghost Recon Future Soldier

Optical camouflage FTW



In the olden days (like, say, 2009), U.S. soldiers and Ghost Recon players preferred to do their shooting from afar. Why get up close when you can take aango down from 400 yards and keep his comrades in the dark as to your position? In Ghost Recon Future Soldier, things get much more up close and personal.

Armed with ass-kicking near-future technology, like exo skeleton suits and optical camouflage, the Ghosts in the latest Tom Clancy sequel aren't afraid to move in for the kill. Ubisoft showed off the first live gameplay at E3, and the action was anything but impersonal.

The Ghosts are tasked with securing a northern European beachfront for an upcoming convoy. They move right into the hot zone undetected thanks to their Predator-like camo. One of the soldiers sneaks right behind an unsuspecting enemy and plunges a knife into his neck before he has a chance to scream. With the first target dealt with, he turns on the crosscom interface to scan the area for other hostiles. The augmented reality eyepiece immediately fills the HUD with targets in the area, one of which turns out to be a wanted war criminal.

With a high value target in the area, the mission dynamic switches to a snatch and grab. Moving through the area like 21st century ninja assassins, the Ghosts methodically eliminate threat after threat until they reach the mark. Three soldiers are standing in close proximity to him, which makes things more difficult. As the primary Ghost moves close in preparation for grabbing the target we see three infrared lasers target the other three enemies. The Ghosts initiate a countdown, and seconds later three buddies simultaneously blow the dust as the Ghost leader moves to secure the target!

This ambitious new gameplay dynamic feels markedly different from the previous Ghost Recon titles. Whether or not this new direction will appeal to longtime fans remains to be seen, but it certainly looks badass. » Matt Bertz

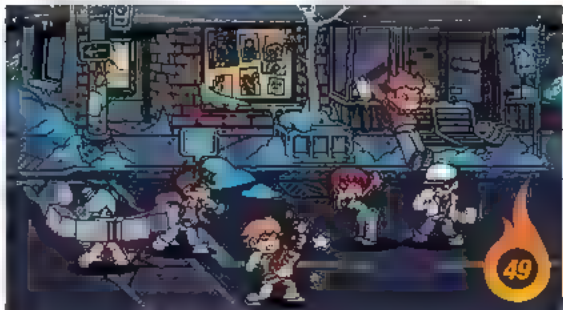
Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 PC

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



Developer
Ubisoft
Ubisoft Paris

Release
Spring 2011



Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

Ramona and Stephen join the fray

Platform PlayStation 3 » Style 1 to 4-Player Action » Publisher Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montreal/Ubisoft Chengdu » Release August 10

Scott Pilgrim's appearance at E3 showed off the first world, Snowy Toronto, and two new playable characters. Ramona Flowers specializes in open palm strikes and purse swinging, while Stephen Stiles prefers big slugs and elbow drops. Most of the level takes place along Toronto's snowy streets, where you fight an assortment of hipsters, emos, and

Doberman Pinschers. We also took our first steps through Ramona's subspace travel, decorated with rainbows, intentionally glitchy graphics, and flying piggy banks. The stage ends, of course, with a battle against Ramona's first Evil Ex, Matthew Patel, who summons plenty of Demon Hipster Girls and surrenders \$2.10 Canadian upon defeat. » Bryan Vore



XCOM

An early look at the classic strategy reboot

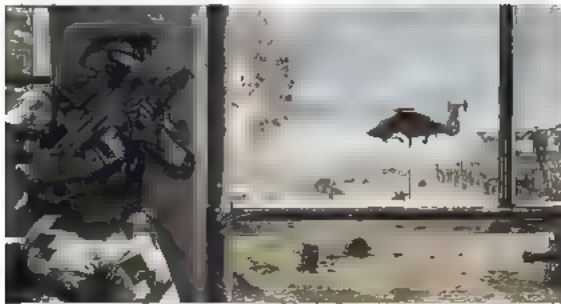
Platform Xbox 360 PC » Style 1-Player Shooter (Multiplayer TBD) » Publisher 2K Games
Developer 2K Marin » Release 2011

Blizzard 2 developer 2K Marin's re-imagining of classic strategy series X-COM is a first person shooter set in 1950s America that aims to take the franchise in a new but familiar direction.

An unknown alien threat looms over the U.S. and it is up to the XCOM organization to bring it in the hands off demo special agent William Carter and two other officials embark on a mission in a neighborhood straight out of Leave it to Beaver. A trail of black sludge leads to an upper-middle class home under attack by what appear to be sentient oil slicks. Research photos are snapped on the way, an important gameplay element that will help XCOM scientists find more efficient ways to defeat the threat.

Weapons spawned from field research include the blobolov (a Molotov cocktail-like weapon) and a lightning gun that can stun groups of enemies. The agents use these weapons in the explosive battle against the sludge, forcing their way through the home and rescuing an endangered housewife in the process. The fight for survival moves outside as a morphing alien orbisik reduces the number of agents to one.

Though an early build, 2K Marin's latest presentation showing off their character models, level aesthetics, and unique weapon design has made XCOM one to watch. » Annette Gonzalez





E3 2010 SOLO

PS3 • 360 • Wii • PC

H.A.W.X. 2

As a part of the H.A.W.X. 2 squadron, a division so secret the government doesn't know it exists even though it paid for the planes, players pilot tomorrow's aeronautic breakthroughs. The F-35's vectored thrust capability is yours to control, and you'll also be the first to lay eyes on the top-secret Enhanced Reality System. When experimental technology fails, you can ~~activate the experimental system~~ activate the ERS, which now has the ability to shatter enemy ~~defenses~~ defenses. ~~It's the only way to survive in H.A.W.X. 2.~~

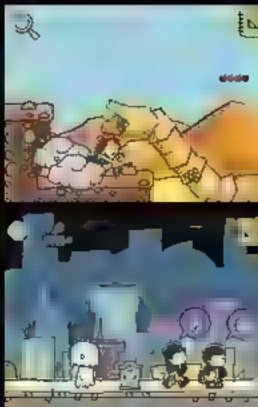
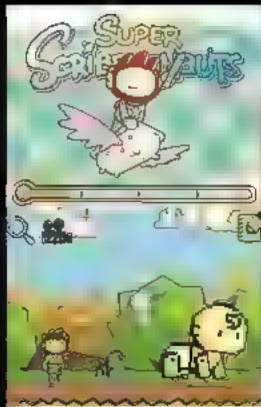


PS3 • 360

Devil's Third

This year at E3, Torihiro Itagaki announced his first title since splitting with Teicmo and creating his own game company, Valhalla Game Studios. All of the legendary designer's trademarks are intact in this THQ-published action game: oddly dressed protagonists with bad attitudes, cute girls with samurai swords, and lots of masked enemies missing limbs.





DS Super Scribblenauts

As if 5th Cell hasn't already exhausted the strained vocabularies of gamers, the developer is now throwing adjectives into the mix. In addition to being able to modify objects with more descriptive entries, Super Scribblenauts offers an alternative control scheme that lets you move the game's rooster-tailed wardenish with the control pad, solving the previous title's biggest drawback.



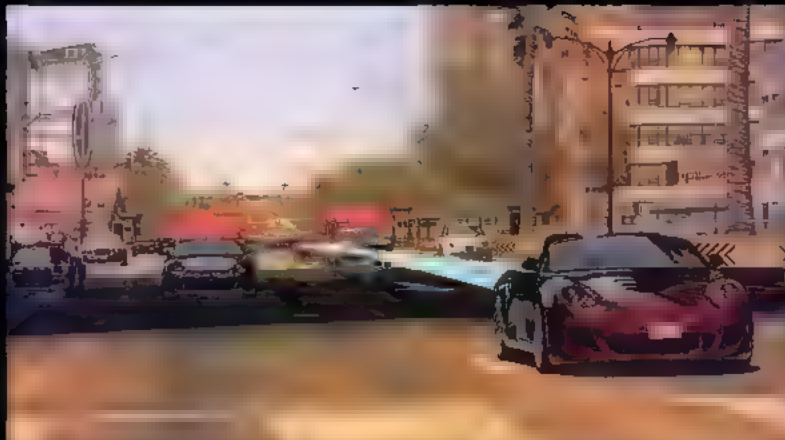
DS Professor Layton and the Unwound Future

In Unwound Future, Layton and his assistant use a time machine to embark on a trip 10 years into the future. Hopping between London and Future London presents some tricky situations for the perceptive pair, setting up puzzles both mind-bending and time-bending. While Japanese DS owners have had the puzzle-solving professor's third game since 2008, U.S. gamers won't get their styluses on it until September 20.

PS3 • 360 • Wii • DS

De Blob: The Underground

Comrade Black is back, and so is his wicked war on color. De Blob: The Underground unfolds in a new metropolis—Prisma City—where Black assumes control under the guise of Papa Bianco. Brainwashing the city's tenants through a forced baptism of sorts, the easily controlled citizens have made it their prime directive to stop Blob and halt the color revolution. The gameplay is similar to the last game, but anytime De Blob enters an interior or underground space the game switches to a 2D, side-scrolling perspective. The game also features a Mario Galaxy-inspired co-op mode. Look for it next spring.



PS3 • 360 • PC

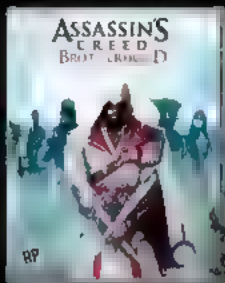
Driver: San Francisco

By bringing original protagonist John Tanner back to the hills of San Francisco late this year, Ubisoft hopes to rediscover the fun that made the first game such a hit. The most alluring (and strange) aspect of this entry is the new shifting mechanic, which allows Tanner to warp to any car in the city at any time. Story details aren't exactly clear, but since Tanner's in a car, he can somehow possess anyone and drive whatever sweet, fully licensed vehicle he wants.

DS Golden Sun: Dark Dawn

Dark Dawn resumes the Golden Sun franchise by mixing classic turn-based RPG combat with Zelda-like environmental puzzles that use the handheld's stylus. Most of the puzzles we tried simply involved lighting torches or moving objects onto switches, but the battles looked just as engaging as ever, thanks to the return of series' magical Djinn. Get your hands on it late this year.

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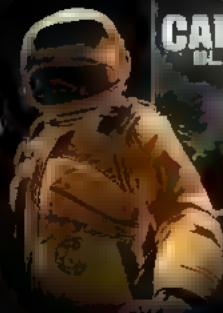


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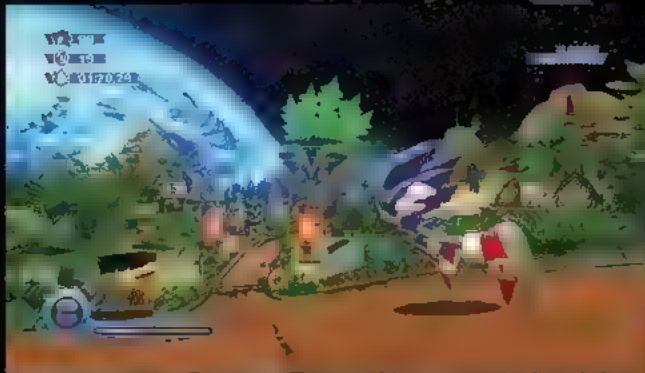
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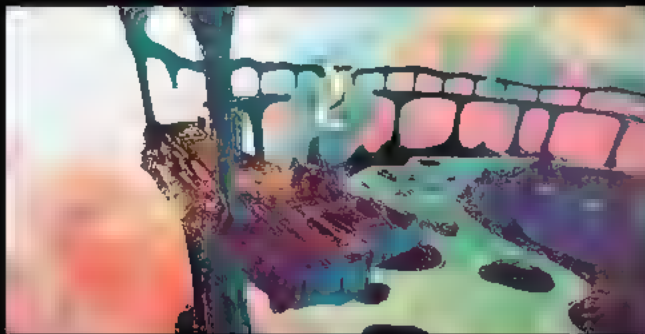
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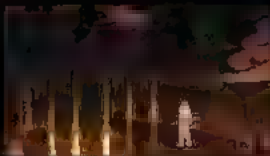
Wii Sonic Colors

Sonic Colors combines the fast-paced 3D segments of Sonic Adventure with the simple brilliance of Sonic Unleashed's 2.5D platforming. This promising mixture, combined with colorful wisps that enable Sonic to drill through the ground and morph into a laser, result in the most promising console title starring the Blue Blur in a long time. Look for it during the holidays.



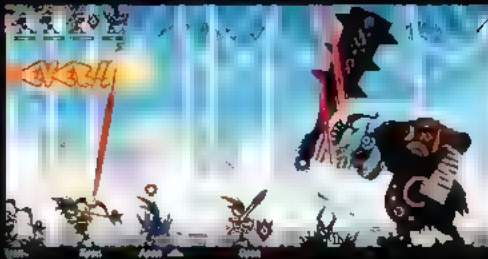
PS3 • 360 El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

One of the more visually striking games at E3, El Shaddai puts players in the boots of Enoch, a man tasked with tracking down fallen angels for God in order to save mankind. Just because you're doing the Lord's work doesn't mean you won't be kicking some serious ass, thanks to your bladed bow called the Arch. Expect plenty of fast-paced combat and a bit of platforming and puzzle solving as you explore El Shaddai's surreal landscape.



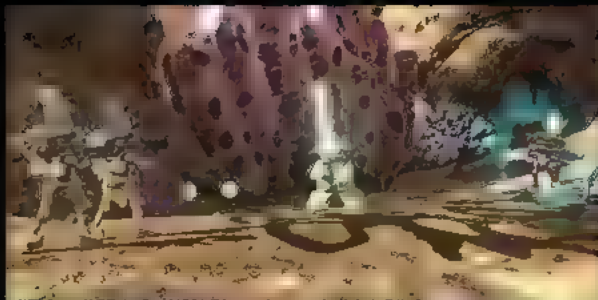
PSP Patapon 3

PSP owners finally got some good news at this year's E3 with the announcement of a third title in the handheld's critically acclaimed Patapon series coming this fall. This time around players will lead their rhythmic army into battle via a Super Hero Patapon, which can be leveled up during play by collecting items. The game also features eight-player online modes and sports new designs from graphic artist Rolito.



PS3 Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock

As opposed to last year's overload of Activision band games, the publisher is putting all its eggs in one basket with Warriors of Rock this fall. This time around, things get weird with a quest mode that transforms GH characters like Johnny Napsalm into a teleporting Nightcrawler with Wolverine claws. Now you can earn up to 40 stars per song instead of the standard five or six, (for some reason), and KISS frontman Gene Simmons narrates.



PS3 • 360 • Wii • PC LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

We weren't sure the world needed another LEGO Star Wars game, but after seeing The Clone Wars in action, we're ready to give George Lucas's space opera another go in 2011. Along with considerably upgraded visuals and a new combo system that helps spice up lightsaber duels, The Clone Wars finally ditches the annoying ship-quest combats, allowing you to pilot your ship the way you see fit. If you're still not convinced, look on the bright side: It can't possibly be as bad as the new movies, right?

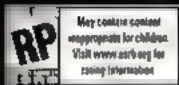
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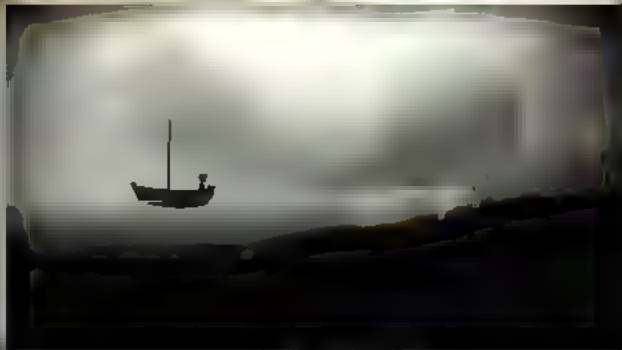
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reviews



gameformer GAME OF THE MONTH

109 NCAA Football 11
111 Limbo

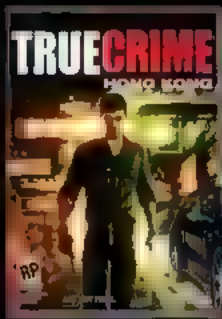
This month we played two entirely different but equally great games, and we ultimately decided that both deserved Game of the Month honors. Limbo is a stunning new downloadable XBLA title that mixes platforming and puzzle-solving in a nightmarish world of black and white. You can read the full review on page 110. Back on page 109, you can read about NCAA, a revamped franchise that has a spring in its step thanks to its new locomotion engine and improved presentation.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Fleeced. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be instantly reworked or not integrated into the experience.
9	Experts. Just shy of getting a five, this seems to be a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Just. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either maddens or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right stroke for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably not...	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath appalling gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing to write home about.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so riddled in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more revealing game experience.	1	Quality hip hop dancing.

AWARDS

 PLATINUM	Awarded to games that score between 8.75 and 10
 GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 8 and 8.5
 SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 6.5 and 8.75
 GAME OF THE MONTH	The reward for the most outstanding game in the issue



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Toy Story 3

Out of the box approach pays off in Avalanche's inspired licensed game

Style 1 or 2-Player Action Publisher Disney Interactive Studios Developer Avalanche Software Release June 15 ESRB E10+

Licensed titles are in one of gaming's lower circles of hell, at least the condemned can peer down and laugh at the majority of games designed for children. Kids' games are often poorly designed, shoddily built, and rushed to market before they're ready. They're also cheap to develop and dependable sellers, so publishers don't have much incentive to reevaluate the status quo. Why mess with a successful formula?

Fortunately, Disney Interactive and Avalanche Software have strayed away from the genre's quick and dirty inclinations with *Toy Story 3* after realizing that such an approach serves no one particularly well. It's bad for the audience and can only diminish a license as cherished as Pixar's *Toy Story*.

The bulk of *Toy Story 3* is divided into two modes. The first is standard fare for licensed games, taking key scenes from the movie and transforming them into levels. A *Toy Story 2*-inspired section starts with Buzz Lightyear showing off his rail-shooting prowess and platform-hopping capabilities before letting him flex his brain with some rudimentary puzzles. One of the later sections in the game requires quick switching between Buzz, Woody, and Jessie as they lap their unique abilities to advance through a garbage dump and rescue their friends from a trash compactor's gnashing metal teeth.

Exploring the levels and playing through the story is enjoyable enough, but the game really

takes off with a second player on board. Reiner and I played through the game cooperatively, though at times we stretched the definition of the term. The game is designed so that skilled players can carry their partners through the experience, similar to how *Traveler's Tales* approaches co-op in its LEGO games. Players can also literally carry their partners, opening the door to some hilarious moments of sabotage. It's not unlike *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*, where players can knock their friends into hazards or pick up their buddies and chuck them directly into pits.

Playing through the movie's story is fun, but it's not nearly the most interesting thing in *Toy Story 3*. The second mode, the toy box, lets you hop into a Woody's Roundup-themed zone and mess around in an open world. At first, there's not a whole lot to do but smash barrels and pick up item-filled capsules. After getting a few missions from Hamm, Slinky, Slinky Pete, and a few others, the world opens up. You can buy new buildings and playsets from Al's Toy Barn, some of which allow access to new areas and unique missions. After pouring a few hours into the

town, I had developed a bustling little community filled with customizable people, buildings, and plenty of tasks on my to-do list. One moment I was capturing escaped bandits and tossing them back into the jail. The next, was tossing plastic paratroopers into the air and guiding them onto their targets.

As with the story missions, the entirety of toy box can be experienced with a friend in tow. Better still, players can act independently. Every once in a while I'd glance over at Reiner's half of the screen and see him painting a building for a mission or tossing renegade cows in a pen. Activities like races require the two players to join up, but you can play through the majority of the mode doing your own thing should you desire.

Toy Story 3 ultimately succeeds in the same way that Pixar's films do: it's attractive to young people who get a great surface experience and for older audiences who appreciate extra layers of depth. It also poses a challenge to those who are satisfied with churning out half-baked licensed games. You can do better and the results of that effort are worth it. — Jeff Cork



The Wii Difference: 6

Unfortunately for Wii owners, *Toy Story 3* doesn't shine as brightly on Nintendo's system. The expected visual downgrade isn't a big deal, but the restricted toy box is a deal breaker. Only one person can play in this mode, and nearly all of the deeper town customization has been stripped away. What's left is a near slog through a series of similar missions. If you have a choice, stay far away from the Wii version.

8

PS3 • 360 • Wii

» Concept

Tell the story of the Pixar film while letting players explore the *Toy Story* universe in a separate, ambitious sandbox mode

» Graphics

Fuzz, Woody, and company look great and are faithfully animated

» Sound

The score is peppy and fun, but if you aren't already tired of "You've Got a Friend in Me," you'll want to shove *Toy Story* in your ears before the end credits

» Playability

The platforming segments control nicely, and the toy box interface is simple and effective

» Entertainment

It won't convert the hardest of the hardcore, but players who are looking for a solid family game should look no further

» Replay Value

★★★☆☆

Second Opinion 8

Toy Story 3 made me feel like a kid again, and then it did it again, using my imagination and creativity to bring a new assortment of toys to life. Similar in concept to many of Peter Molyneux's games, the player assumes the role of a god ruling over a world made of plastic, dressed out of my townfolk, a flower-pink dresses, painted all of the buildings to look like clown fish, and removed the sun just because could. The challenges at this sandbox experience are engaging and varied. One second you'll be asked to save a herd of cows, the next you'll find yourself parachuting army men. Useful rewards (such as new buildings, cars, and cars) are thrown out liberally, and give players plenty of reason to explore every inch of this world. Designing your own toy kingdom is a blast, especially with the help of a co-op friend. *Toy Story 3* delivers that same fun-for-everyone charm of the LEGO Star Wars games, yet offers a rich experience you can't find anywhere else. — Andrew Reine

Singularity

Fairly few, a great job, the... ..

8.5

PS3 • 360

• **Concept**
A heavily influenced FPS that taps familiar components to create a unique and compelling adventure

• **Graphics**
Grenade explosions are noticeably absent, but the remainder of this world is gorgeously detailed and loaded with visual variety

• **Sound**
The silent protagonist role is pulled off thanks to solid performances by the supporting cast

• **Playability**
Time manipulation is as easy to wield as a pistol and combat is executed without error, but more variety in the environmental puzzles would have been nice

• **Entertainment**
This FPS values its story and world just as much as its gameplay. The seven to eight hours of play it offers fly by

» **Play Like**
Modrain



Style | Player Action (12-Player Online) Publisher Activision Developer Raven Software Release June 26 ESRB M

Singularity is a thrilling, provocative, yet oddly familiar journey through the fabric of time. In this alternate take on historical events, Joseph Stalin's role in the Cold War is heightened when Russian scientists discover a new element on the island of Katgora-12. This element holds untold power and even though it's unstable, Stalin accelerates the experiments. Death, contamination, and unexplainable phenomena are all Russia has to show for its efforts. Katgora-12 is quarantined and forgotten. History stays the course until you arrive on the island in 2010.

Katgora-12 is a place of scientific wonder and supernatural horror. Rather than letting players free fall down this rabbit hole, Raven Software sends them down in a bathysphere. Katgora-12 is bathed in Russian colors and propaganda, but the architectural design feels like it was stripped from the notebook of BioShock's Andrew Ryan. This Russian base has an amusement park feel to it, and just like Ryan's Rapture, its history is detailed in audio recordings, video reels, scientist

notes, and hastily written wall messages. The guiding voice even bears a physical resemblance to Andrew Ryan, who (surprise, surprise) tries to blow your mind in a similar way to Ryan's "would you kindly" reveal.

Raven doesn't hide the fact that Singularity is heavily influenced by BioShock. Rather, the developer uses this familiar design to paint a unique picture. Sure, I found myself thinking about Ayn Rand's objectivism at certain points, but this story's most intriguing moments are tied to the greed of an empire and the conflicting voices within it. Raven does a phenomenal job delivering the fiction. The experiments, and people conducting them, are fascinating and believable. This tale runs out of magic roughly halfway through the game, but it picks up in the later stages and concludes with three satisfying alternate endings. The good ending, if it can be called that, made me do something never thought I would in a game—a powerful moment, to say the least!

Singularity's gameplay starts strong and ramps up as the adventure ages. Thanks to a time manipulation device, your protagonist can degenerate or revitalize the age of an object. This device can revert war-torn staircases and rusted electrical boxes to as-good-as-new states. A handful of great puzzles are attached to environmental repair, but these opportunities are surprisingly rare. When they pop up, Raven recycles the same techniques used in previous puzzles.

Most of the time powers are reserved for combat. Singularity makes you feel like a badass with its excellently crafted gunplay. Throwing time manipulation into the arsenal makes you feel like an unstoppable god. Pointing a finger at a Russian soldier can lead to his body aging a thousand years in a second. Highly age-

enemies that bounce off the walls and creak on the ground can be frozen in a temporal distortion bubble. As they sit there in a helpless state, you can fill their bodies with as many bullets as you want. Slowing time turns sniping into one of the most relaxing actions I've come across in a game. I rarely died in Singularity, but that doesn't mean it lacks challenge or excitement. Most combat scenarios unfold with a high-octane, "use everything you have in your arsenal" urgency. New enemy types, powers, and weapons are doled out all the way up to the final conflict.

I jokingly told my co-workers that Singularity is more BioShock 2 than BioShock 2. While meant as a subtle jab at Singularity's "borrowed" designs, this statement relates to finding a gaming experience that transports players to a new world filled with discovery and the unexpected. Singularity's greatest shared quality with BioShock is Raven's realization that gamers want new experiences, not another taste of the same trending flavor.

This can even be said of Singularity's multiplayer component. Rather than making sure it has every mode from every other FPS, this experience focuses on something different, creatures versus soldiers. Several beasts from the single player game, including the basketball-sized phase tick, are playable, and prove to be exhilarating weapons in their own right. The multiplayer experience is a good time—and quite different than single-player (most time powers have been excess)—but it doesn't have any depth or a progression for players to follow. At the most, it's a fun distraction. The single-player game, however, should not be missed. —Andrew Reiner



LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4

Traveler's Tales casts a

7.25

PS3 • 360 • Wii

Concept Paste the LEGO skin over another beloved franchise

Graphics

Ninety-five percent of all the characters look alike except for their hair colors

Sound

It's always fun to hear mumbled versions of the characters' voices

Playability

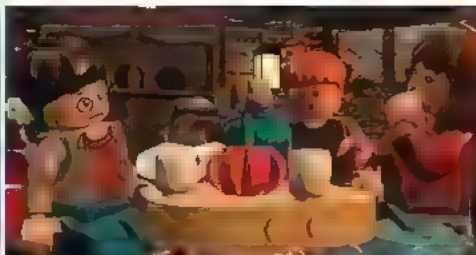
Spell targeting is lily at times

Entertainment

Co-op fans will have to keep it local until a free patch opens up online play shortly after release

Replay Value

Moderate



Style 1 or 2-Player Action Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive Developer Traveler's Tales Release June 28 ESRB E10+

Traveler's Tales tried to break out of its LEGO formula with Indiana Jones 2, and the results weren't that great. The studio has returned to the classic structure for LEGO Harry Potter. For the most part, it works. Wizard powers are quite similar to the Force, so you'll float pieces into place without stretching the fiction too far. The game leans on this mechanic frequently, so prepare yourself for plenty of exploration and "puzzle solving." The reason for those sassy quotation marks? Outside of a few challenging rooms, most puzzles consist of breaking everything, holding down a button, watching a structure build itself, and

then using said structure to jump to a higher platform. I turned my brain on autopilot for most of the game. Harry doesn't spend a lot of time battling minions in the books. It's more about discovering the wonder of Hogwarts and maybe taking on a school rival or evil wizard. To stay true to the material, combat is scaled back considerably from previous LEGO titles. The only real battles in the entirety of the Year 1 section are against the bathroom troll, Professor Quirrell, and some wasps in the forest. Combat picks up later on but if your favorite part of LEGO games is cutting down an endless flow of stormtroopers with a

lightsaber, this may not be the one for you. Despite these setbacks, it's hard to not be charmed by LEGO Harry Potter. Traveler's Tales maintains its reputation for amusingly silly interpretations of characters and story points, and I found myself constantly looking forward to how the team would handle the next thing around the corner. The constant flow of unlocks in Gringotts Bank and shopping along Diagon Alley stirred up old feelings of addiction I had playing the Star Wars titles. While Harry Potter doesn't offer much innovation for the LEGO franchise, it at least puts it back on track. — Bryan Vore

Limbo

3

360

Concept Take a deadly journey through an enigmatic world of shadow and light

Graphics

The slightly blurry black and white visuals perfectly match and accentuate the game's tone

Sound

Ambient sound effects bring the world to life, and the lack of music adds to the experience

Playability

Controls are as simple as could be — move, jump, and action

Entertainment

A short but engaging play that will remain with you long after you finish

Replay Value

Moderate

Style 1-Player Platform/Puzzle Publisher Microsoft Game Studios Developer PlayDead Release July 21 ESRB T

It's challenging to speak about Limbo without ruining what makes it so amazing. As you enter its world, it has that unusual quality of a dream that is slowly transforming into a nightmare. Stark black and white visuals make you question where you are. There is no music and the audio is oddly amplified, memorably pulling you into the dark forest where this little boy awakens. You begin walking, and the horrible danger and beauty of your surroundings begin to take shape. Through a brief but brilliant adventure, you feel yourself completely absorbed in the game's shadowy netherworld.

On the surface, this downloadable XBLA title is a side-scrolling platformer of jumping, climbing, and puzzle solving. Pull switches, push boxes, activate contraptions — many of the standard genre mechanics are in place, but channeled through a filter of evocative visuals and original design concepts. It has almost no story to speak of beyond a vague description of a boy's search for his sister.

I found myself applying my own interpretations to the unfolding quest and its startlingly abrupt conclusion, but those ideas are best left for players to sort through on their own. Along the way, gamers encounter one puzzling situation after another, each challenging them to think in a new way. In every case, the physics of the world are at play — first in normal ways, like how a ball moves on a sloped surface, and later in increasingly abnormal ways, like how gravity functions in a world without traditional rules. The game triumphs because every one of these



encounters stands alone. Each time you think you have a grip on where you are, who is chasing you, or even the nature of the world, every thing changes. That's all the more impressive because each event flows seamlessly into the next, blurring the passing between environments and puzzles. The only constant is the extreme pain. The presence of the little boy should by no means communicate this as a game for children. The hero regularly dies in gruesome, painful ways as you make inevitable mistakes, and his age makes those scenes all the more startling. Limbo has some challenging hidden achievements that will reward subsequent playthroughs, but the initial run is only five or six hours long. I beg you not to let that dissuade you from trying it out. As I played, fellow editors would occasionally tap my shoulder and draw my attention away, and I would catch myself jumping — not because I was scared, but because I was so engrossed in the experience that I felt jarring to be pulled out so suddenly. Play it. Turn up the sound. Challenge you not to feel the same. — Matt Miller



360

Concept
Reproduce the Crackdown experience without changing the city or the game mechanics, but remove the gangs and the bosses

Graphics
Some of the texture work in this game may be unfinished. I swear there are sections of Pacific City that looked better in the first Crackdown.

Sound
The game's score doesn't impress, but the booming voice of your handler is back.

Playability
Plays like the first game to a fault. Your character still falls to grab onto ledges occasionally, and enemy AI is as mindless as before.

Entertainment
This is a good trip down memory lane, but manage your expectations. Crackdown 2 does little to earn that "2".

Replay Value
Moderately low

Second Opinion 2

Just after the first Crackdown came out, I joked that, as a then hypothetical follow-up could not be as good as the first, I'd love being a ship-thrower and agent in a gang-filled city as much as I enjoyed going around in its sandbox with a buddy. Still, that's not a

terrible idea. The series has battles and the lack of any real storyline, but that's what sequels are for, right? Well, after playing the sequel, Crackdown 2, I'd like to go back in time and just travel out a puddle was expecting to see a replacement of the first game's concepts.

What's more, the sequel is a more interesting experience. The new mechanics, like gravity weapons, gliding collectibles that run away from you, don't make up for the improvements that were removed. Yes, the lights with gang leaders got old after a while in the last game, but they insured a sense of progress. Without them, you're just jumping around ruins (remnants of the same old pieces, cracking down: nearly 1,000 cities, and working through the same pair of "hot on all" story missions until the credits roll). Crackdown 2 is a sequel, not an ambitious sequel. It's a sequel that's clearly trying to be a sequel, and a sequel opportunity. — Jeff Cook



Style: **Player Action/Shooter** (6-player online) Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Ruffian Games** Release: **July 6, 2008** MS

In the original Crackdown, Pacific City had character. Its three colorful districts—ruled by three competing gangs—all presented their own unique landmarks and platforming challenges. In Crackdown 2, 10 years have passed: the gangs are gone and the city is derelict, overrun by masses of zombie-like mutants. Police barricades block off street corners, smashed storefront windows sit neglected, and a thick layer of dust oppresses the entire city. A once-great metropolis lies tarnished, much like my fond memories of the first Crackdown.

I went into this game hoping to be amazed, and I am. I'm amazed that Ruffian Games developed a DLC-quality experience. I'm amazed that Microsoft has thrown it into a box and stamped the numeral "2" on the cover. Mainly, I'm amazed that this game took three years to produce.

Crackdown 2 doesn't merely follow the formula laid down by its predecessor; it delivers an experience that is, in many ways, indistinguishable from the first Crackdown. You still play a cybernetic super cop sent to clean up the streets by a mysterious booming voice. You still collect orbs and level up your various abilities by pulling off crazy driving stunts, jumping across the city's skyline like Daredevil, and using rockets to turn enemy nests into volcanic eruptions. That part of the game remains a blast. However, Crackdown 2 sticks so rigidly to the first game's

formula that it just comes across as lazy. We're still exploring the same city, still driving many of the same vehicles and still firing the same weapons.

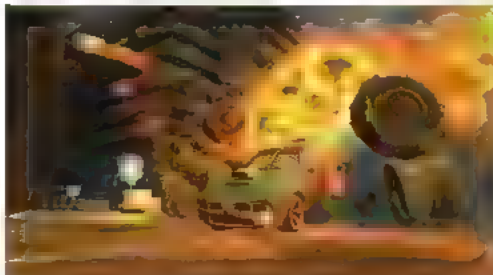
A jolt has happened in the video game world since the original Crackdown's release. Games like Assassin's Creed and Infamous have

changed how players expect to navigate large cities and engage in open world combat. These advances make many of the first Crackdown's quirks—such as the inaccurate melee combat, enemies who juggle you through the air with rockets, and fussy platforming sections—seem like major flaws.

I wish I could at least say, "If you loved the first game, you'll love this," but in many ways this feels like an inferior replica. Crackdown's colorful gangs have been replaced by a single terrorist organization called The Cell, a flavorless enemy who tries to thwart your attempts to rid the city of its mutant population for reasons that are never entirely clear. In fact, the mutants themselves are about the only unique twist to Crackdown 2. The game does a good job of throwing hundreds of enemies at you, without a hiccup, and the action can get pretty frantic once the ranks of flesh-hungry mutants start closing in.

Crackdown 2's worst mistake is how it changes the series' overall structure. In the first game, the city was broken into districts, each controlled by a different criminal organization. By taking out key figures, you would gradually chip away at the gangs' infrastructures and take down their kingpins. This freiform approach to open-world design was unique, and it offered up some rewarding goals and delivered a sense of progression—two things lacking in this sequel.

Crackdown 2 feels like it tried to duplicate the first game's freiform structure, but missed the point. There are no crime bosses in



Crackdown 2. Instead, every main story mission literally falls into one of two categories: liberating terrorist strongholds, or activating beacons so you can clear out mutant spawning grounds. Only side missions like racing and orb collecting provide any variety in the formula. Then, just when you think the game is about to change its pace, the credits slip you in the face. Even the twist at the end is a regurgitation of the first game's closing revelation.

To experience the handful of cool tweaks to Crackdown 2's combat, you have to nearly max out your abilities. For example, when you reach level five in your agility skill, you are able to glide short distances. And when you reach level five in the explosives skill, you gain access to a weapon that lets you magnetize two large objects together, allowing you to send vehicles colliding into large groups of enemies. Unfortunately, you can easily beat the game before making out many of your stats, so you spend most of the game without these new talents, making them a wasted improvement.

What hurts the most about Crackdown 2 is that I would have been content with a simple by-the-numbers sequel with a few token improvements. But this isn't even a Xerox sequel; it's more like a photocopy of a photocopy. The structure is largely the same, but some of the colors have faded, and parts of the picture are missing altogether. Let's just hope that Microsoft uses some fresh ink for Crackdown 3. — Ben Reeves

Multiplayer Mayhem

The first Crackdown offered two-player co-op. Crackdown 2 knocks that number up to four. If you can get that many friends together, it's wholly worthwhile. Noting from the single player experience is lost, and in some cases you'll have an easier and quicker time completing mission objectives. Co-op isn't the only multiplayer experience in Crackdown 2, either. Crackdown 2's deathmatch and rocket-tag gameplays are worth a solid weekend of your time. All the bugs are based on sections of the city from story mode and the frenzied action doesn't require a lot of skill, but the hyperactive gunplay and the building-sized explosions are enough to make up for that.

Metal Gear Solid; Peace Walker

A few casualties can't stop Big Boss.

8

PSP

► **Concept**
Learn more about Big Boss' past and how he built his army of loyal followers

► **Graphics**
Character models look great, animations are smooth, and the cutscenes are still impressive

► **Sound**
Voice work and music are top-notch, and I have to give a special nod to the infectious base emitted by your opposing robotic opponents

► **Playability**
The three core activities each make different sacrifices, so none of them feel perfect in all situations

► **Entertainment**
An improvement over Portable Ops in some respects, but a step back in others

► **Replay Value**
Moderately High

After seven canonical entries in the Metal Gear saga, fans have little choice but to play each new installment. Skipping a single chapter in Hideo Kojima's signature series means that you will miss out on key character developments, plot points, and the ever-changing web of intrigue. Given Metal Gear's tradition of quality, this isn't usually a problem — but *Peace Walker* is the first game in the main series that I have reservations about recommending.

Peace Walker follows in the tradition of 2007's *Portable Ops*, building the legend of Big Boss as he slowly evolves into the villain of the franchise's first entry. This sounds exciting in concept, but the narrative is disappointingly weak. The meager revelations are spread too thin across the 20-plus-hour storyline, and the supporting cast members all feel like superfluous hangers-on (except Master Miller, complete with aviator sunglasses). Even the series' hallmark boss fights are straightforward endurance bouts against robots and vehicles, though the designs of your mechanized foes are among the coolest in the series.

Peace Walker may not be everything fans expect from a game bearing the Metal Gear Solid name, but it is still an entertaining stealth-action experience. The missions themselves are better across the board, with more diverse environments broken up into smaller areas. Big Boss sneaks through forests, research labs, and excavated cities, completing equally varied objectives. You'll also find no shortage of content; dozens of story missions and extra ops can



keep you busy for hours, and new incentives and mechanics surface after the first (!) ending to hold your interest until the true conclusion.

On the battlefield, the game feels smoother than *Portable Ops* in almost every respect, though the PSP controls are still too clumsy to make the action sing. You have an even wider array of options to finish your objectives, and various types of guns, grenades, and non-lethal alternatives make every playstyle viable with the right equipment. I just wish it were easier to select your items on the fly; expect to eat some gunfire as you scroll through menus looking for your rations or rocket launcher. This is especially unacceptable during the boss fights, which already push the control scheme beyond its capabilities.

Peace Walker's most significant feature is the addition of cooperative missions. Co-op adds a fresh spin on the classic stealth dynamics, allowing you to play through almost every mission as a two-player team (boss fights accommodate four). The ability to flank, distract, and overwhelm your foes is a sensation the series has failed to capture until now. Unfortunately, you can only engage in local multiplayer unless you also own a PS3, since the home console's Ad-Hoc

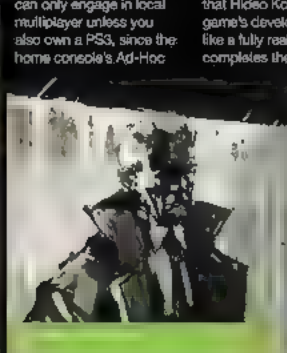
Party application is the only way to connect with people not in your line of sight. If you're more of a lone wolf, you can still play through the game solo, though I found that a couple of the boss fights were inordinately difficult (and poorly balanced) without at least one partner.

Accomplishing missions is only part of *Peace Walker*'s gameplay. A large amount of your time will be spent managing the offshore military complex Big Boss and his army use as a base. It's not nearly as dull as it sounds — in fact, just like with *Portable Ops*, I became obsessed with collecting skilled soldiers (which are now extracted with hassle-free Fulton balloons), deploying them on missions, and assigning them to teams in order to optimize my intelligence and research. Even better, you'll eventually start production on your very own Metal Gear, though it doesn't pay off until the final chapter of the game.

Peace Walker has a lot to offer, including tons of missions, cool multiplayer, and the sense of establishing your own mercenary army. Even so, a few critical shortcomings in the narrative and control departments keep the game from truly capturing the Metal Gear spark. Despite the fact that Hideo Kojima was directly involved in the game's development, *Peace Walker* doesn't feel like a fully realized chapter in the saga — but it still completes the mission. — Joe Juba

Making Space

The massive amount of content in *Peace Walker* comes at a cost — it takes up a lot of space on your memory stick. The save file alone is 32 MB, with two full save slots; the game itself is 336 or 380 MB. You definitely want to install the game; it adds voiced dialogue that would otherwise be missing from certain conversations, and it makes the load times more bearable. If you haven't bought a new memory stick in the last couple years, you should add that cost to *Peace Walker*'s sticker price.





Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies

ALICE BROWN'S SILENT STORY BY TONY MCKAY
OF NINTENDO GAMES

Style: 4-Player Role-Playing (4-Player Local) Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Level-5 Release: July 11 ESRB: E10+

Taken in the context of the series, Dragon Quest IX is a strange game. It's the first in the franchise to debut on a handheld, and it changes up the classic formula in some significant ways. In many cases, these changes push the game in interesting directions, but they never go far enough. The end result is an enjoyable Japanese RPG with mere hints of greatness.

Dragon Quest IX is full of unique and potentially groundbreaking features compromised by lackluster implementation. A class system opens up around 10 hours in, allowing you to change jobs at any time, but you have to start over at level one with each job, so there's not much incentive to switch. Luckily, the battle system is as fast and enjoyable as it is ever been.

Random encounters have been stripped from the game—you now run into monsters on the map to engage them in battle. This wise change helps rid most of the short but well-designed dungeons of the grinding that the series has become so synonymous with. The game clings to a few outdated conventions

(my resurrect spell can fail? Really?), but it's still more accessible than the series has ever been.

Dragon Quest IX's biggest thrills come from exploring its colorful world. Even when the core plot breaks down into JRPG clichés, I always found myself eager to discover the next locale and see what vignette would play out. The high point of the game's world design comes with Swinedimples Academy, a take-off on Harry Potter that provides a clever change of pace and a self-contained story that had me smiling.

Where DQ IX falls particularly short is in the failed promise of its multiplayer offerings. In addition to pulling in up to three other players at any time during the main story, you can wirelessly exchange treasure maps that spawn randomly generated dungeons full of powerful bosses and loot. These features would have extended the game's life for me greatly if I could use them online, but they're only available via local wireless. The 50-plus hour story and tons of sidequests are good; it's just too bad about that icing on the cake. —Phil Kollar



8

DS

« Concept The longest-running JRPG series that isn't Final Fantasy mixes up the formula at its first handheld-only entry

« Graphics Not as crisp or colorful as Dragon Quest VIII, but some of the best visuals on DS

« Sound A fully orchestrated score would be beautiful, but DQ IX's music is still suitably epic and catchy

« Playability Isar-friendly MMO-style quests and no random battles make the otherwise old-school combat mechanics easy to pump into

« Entertainment Limited multiplayer options disappoint, but fans will be pleased with the solo experience

« Replay Value High

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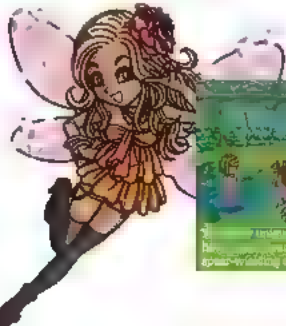
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Head to gameinformer.com/mag for our interview with DQ IX producer Ryujin Ichimura and for an extended review.



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E3 2010 History Lesson

Like every year, many of the titles shown off at this year's E3 are sequels or reboots from existing franchises. How much do you know about the lineage of the biggest E3 games?

1. What is the subtitle of Donkey Kong Country 3?

- a. Diddy's Kong Quest
- b. Donkey Kong's Double Trouble
- c. Funky Kong's Freaky Flight
- d. Dixie Kong's Barrel Bonanza

2. What vegetable can Pit be turned into in the first Kid Icarus?

- a. Cauliflower
- b. Broccoli
- c. Carrot
- d. Eggplant

3. In what area do you encounter Minion in Twisted Metal 2?

- a. The Rooftops
- b. Amazonia
- c. River Park Rumble
- d. London

4. What was the name Fable went by during development?

- a. Project Fae
- b. Operation Mllo
- c. Project Silpheed
- d. Stone and Whine

5. Which of these cities was not in the original Driver?

- a. Miami
- b. San Francisco
- c. New York City
- d. Chicago

6. Which character could drop an arcade machine on top of his opponent in Mortal Kombat 3?

- a. Johnny Cage
- b. Scorpion
- c. Liu Kang
- d. Stryker

7. Which weapon was not available in GoldenEye 007 on the Nintendo 64?

- a. Moonraker laser
- b. Golden Gun
- c. Oddjob's hat
- d. Slapping

8. LittleBigPlanet featured a downloadable level pack based around which of these franchises?

- a. Metal Gear Solid
- b. Ratchet & Clank
- c. Resident Evil
- d. Jak & Daxter

9. Which Zelda title introduced the Hookshot?

- a. The Legend of Zelda
- b. Zelda II: The Adventures of Link
- c. The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past
- d. The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

10. The Ultron Corporation has been featured in Red Faction and which other series?

- a. Deus Ex
- b. Fighting Force
- c. Spec Ops
- d. Saints Row



ANSWERS:

1-b, 2-d, 3-b, 4-a, 5-d, 6-c,
7-c, 8-a, 9-c, 10-d

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