



ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD
10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW PG.62

THE LAST GUARDIAN
EXCLUSIVE SCREENS & INFO PG.68



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RESISTANCE 3

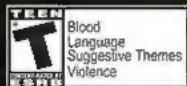
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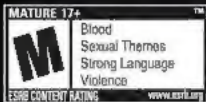
ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD

NOVEMBER 16



"One round in multiplayer has us sold"
- Game Informer

"The single-player looks like
the best in the series"
- Destructoid



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The Future Is Ringing, Will Someone Please Pick Up

Everyone came out of E3 shot-out-of-a-rocket amazed at the Nintendo 3DS. The fact that you didn't have to wear 3D glasses overcame the biggest obstacle facing the born-again technology, and the list of partners supporting Nintendo's new platform is a who's who list of talent. Though the tech is impressive, I have to wonder how Nintendo will maintain its handheld market share without built-in mobile phone capabilities.

Apple and every other mobile phone company on the planet is targeting handheld gaming, and the argument that there is only so much pocket space for mobile devices calls into question the draw of gadgets that only handle one aspect of mobile computing, even if they do that one thing extremely well. Handheld sales have continued to decrease over the past year, but the Nintendo camp isn't panicking. With the power of mobile phones continuing to increase, however, you have to wonder where the tipping point is. When will convenience outweigh what gamers perceive as "true" gaming?

Since the debut of the poorly designed N-Gage, I have said that a single device is the future of handheld gaming. It's just a question of who will create the silver bullet that will change the handheld market forever. Some believe that device already exists with the iPhone. While it may be the closest device on the market to demonstrating the future of mobile gaming, I don't think it's there yet. I know some mobile phone lover is going to tell me mobile phone gaming is already on par with handheld devices, but that is simply not the case. Angry Birds, Solipskier, and Poodle Jump are all amazing games, but pale in comparison to the richer experiences games like Chrono Trigger or Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story offer. Mobile phones tend to lean towards quick in-and-out experiences, whereas the dedicated handheld devices offer longer, more involved sessions.

I travel with my DS, iPhone, and PSP but if Nintendo or Sony teamed up with a mobile manufacturer to create a device that handled smart phone duties and delivered games at the level I expect from handheld gaming devices, I would ditch my collection of gadgets and jump on board in an instant. If they want to protect their place in mobile gaming, those companies need to embrace the future and start including smart phone capabilities in their handhelds as well.

I can't wait to play the 3DS, but I get the sinking feeling that it will only pacify us until this inevitable innovation happens. If Sony and Nintendo don't build the one device to rule the pocket of gamers everywhere, someone else will.

Cheers,

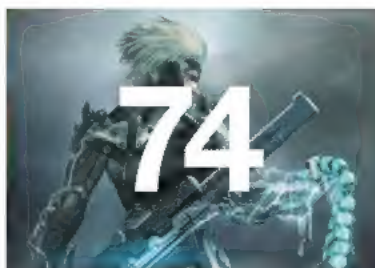
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Resistance 3

The Chimera have taken over the entire planet. The human population is a tenth of what it was. One man, previously serving under Nathan Hale, is doing everything he can to reach the remains of New York City to save his family and the human race from extermination.

by Tim Turi



regulars

» 8 Feedback

Matt's piece on his crappy Gamerscore gamers a plethora of responses, and readers share their incorrect opinions on what the best Zelda game is. Hint: It's not Twilight Princess.

» 16 Connect

It's that time again: hatin' time! You think that you're not going to write in about how we're horrible people because of this edition of the Sacred Cow Barbeque, but you're wrong.

» 24 Previews

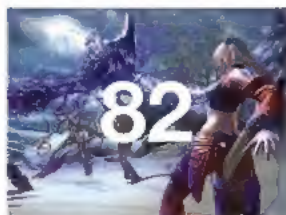
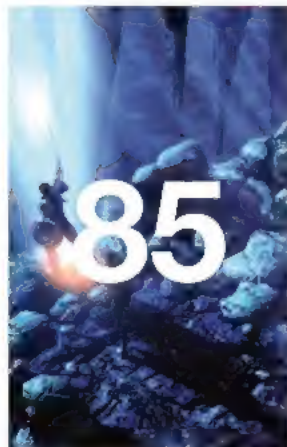
Contrary to popular belief on the internet, they do still show games at Tokyo Game Show. The TGS crop this year is headlined by Metal Gear Solid Rising, and we've got the latest.

» 90 Reviews

Are you so totally over the music genre, or will Rock Band 3 bring you back in?
by Matt Miller

» 100 Game Over

We talk to infamous developer Sucker Punch about the evolution of protagonist Cole MacGrath.
by Matthew Kato



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See how the nutrients
in lowfat milk help Chris
refuel after a game at
bodybymilk.com/chrisbosh

Power up. got milk?



This month in Feedback we discuss the importance of Gamerscores, define what it means to be a fanatic, see the world through the eyes of a StarCraft II addict, and identify a new disease plaguing some of our readers.

The Bat and the Cat

I'm writing to say that September's cover was a great image, and a nice change of pace. Much of 2010 has been big dudes with guns/blades/electricity and carnage, and that Arkham City cover was clever, interesting, and most importantly, makes me want to play the game to see how the friend/enemy dynamics of Batman and Catwoman play out.

Kevin
Colorado Springs, CO

I have had a love/hate relationship with your magazine in the past, but have been a subscriber since issue #1. Issue 209 marks the first time I have ever felt compelled to provide feedback to your editorial staff. As an adult gamer with children in college who are gamers, I have to say this is one of the most intellectually stimulating issues I have ever seen you produce. The minimalistic yet seductive cover, "The Lab Rats," which provides a new fascinating view of the industry; the Opinion article regarding Gamerscores - you have outdone yourselves. This is one issue I am not just going to skim through and toss to the kids, saying "They have Halo: Reach in this one," but one I'll share and talk to them about.

Juan Lara
Pennsburg, PA

Empty Achievements

I am amazed by the Opinion article in issue 209. Matt's stance against Gamerscores shows some serious integrity, especially being a senior editor of a gaming magazine. The concept of Gamerscores or achievements is just one more

wedge separating gamers. Just like the division between hardcore and casual, your score puts you into a group in which you're judged. It seems at some point games stopped being about fun and started being a tasteless competition of one-upping each other. I'd rather keep the competition in the game and not let it be about what kind of gamer I am.

Nicholas
Carson City, NV

I just wanted to thank Matt Heigeson for his Gamerscore article. I spent a good portion of the summer chasing trophies. Matt's article brought me to a realization; I enjoyed gaming much more before Sony implemented the trophy system. I was saved from years of trophy-grinding by this. These days, most people spend too much time focusing on achievements, and ignoring the finer points of most games.

Henry Hoffman
Kansas City, KS

I agree that gamers should never be judged based on their Gamerscore, but achievements give me a chance to get everything out of the game. I always play the game through once (usually on an easier difficulty to experience the story) without looking at the achievement list, so as to not spoil anything. After I look at the list and see all the weird stuff I could have done, I'll play it on hard mode and try to get whatever achievements I can. This adds more playtime and challenge if you ask me.

Brannigan Carter
Via Email

Our readers brought up some great points as to why achievements are a fun distraction for some gamers, and a waste of time for others. One thing we can all agree on: The best achievements are the ones that provide interesting and unique tasks to tackle, instead of mindless repetition.



Question Of The Month:
Did Halo: Reach live up to your expectations?

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com

A Rebuttal For Fanatics

Not that Game Informer needs anyone to stand up for them, but I'd like to point out to the ignorant subscriber that called your magazine "biased and dishonest" for giving negative reviews to Nintendo games when in issue 208, GI gave Nintendo the best rating from E3. Additionally, if a game sucks, I would like to know why it sucks and how bad it sucks. This is GI's advice to help us not blow our time and money. I have only bought and played games that have gotten a 7.5 rating and up from GI, and I have to say that I have yet to be disappointed. If the writer wants the same experience from Nintendo, he shouldn't expect it to come from terrible games.

Mike Ayers
Ohio

The defining characteristic of a fanatic is their unwillingness to acknowledge or accept any information that runs contrary to the object of their infatuation. However, letters like the one you're referring to do serve an important purpose: When we receive equal amounts of hate mail from Wii, Xbox 360, and PS3 zealots, we know we're doing our job!

Goldie Locks Syndrome

I really look forward to getting GI each month, mainly because of the comical feedback section. It appears to me that the vast majority of the feedback you get is what I refer to as Goldie Locks Syndrome. "My porridge is too hot," "my porridge is too cold," but it's never "just right." I find your responses very satisfying, because you very nicely answer whatever is being cried about without just telling them to stop complaining.

Stephen B.
Lexington, SC

We find your analogy intriguing, but we have a clinical diagnosis of our own for these fickle gamers: Big Whiny Baby Syndrome. The only cure for this terminal illness is a stone cold burn, and luckily for them we never tire of doling out prescriptions - it's just one of the invaluable services we provide to our readers every month!



Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

16. "How bad is the video game so bad they buried it in a desert?"

Yes.

17. "Who do you guys think would win: The Necronomicon, The Covenant, The Flood, or The Space Pirates?"

Space Pirates. Every time.

18. "See you, removed the penis from the Victorian Man?"

Some things are better left unseen...

Worst News Tip Of The Month:

Why aren't you coming out before my sister's birthday?"



(Left) Ben before fighting EA's Jason Barnes

(Right) Ben after fighting EA's Jason Barnes. Kids, let this be a lesson to you!

The Great Zelda Debate

In issue 209, we asked gamers what the best Zelda game of all time is. Out of the hundreds of responses we received, here are some of our favorites.

Although titles like Ocarina of Time and Twilight Princess added more gameplay elements and better graphics, they are just recreations of A Link to the Past. The characters, the enemies, and the way they are defeated, the preliminary dungeons that must be beat to open the more expansive ones – A Link to the Past would have been Ocarina of Time if it were created five years later.

Anthony McDonald

There are three of us in our household answering this question, ages 8, 15, and 56. The 8- and 15-year olds said that Wind Waker was their favorite, and the answer came last. I'd say Legend of Zelda is my favorite, can go wrong with an oldie but a goodie.

Kathy Southworth

The best Zelda game ever? I suppose you will get a million and two emails about why one game is better than the others. Let me simplify the matter. The original Legend of Zelda would have to be the best. If it wasn't for the immense success of this game, we would not have been blessed with the countless unforgettable adventures that followed.

Matt VanBenthysen

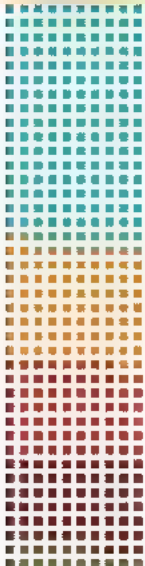
Close Call

I just got issue 209 and in the Timeline it says that Naruto Ultimate Ninja Storm 2 is for the 360??? am debasted! [sic] I spent \$350 to buy a PS3 just to get this game! My mother is a lawyer and she said that this is plausible for lawsuit. I really hope for your sake that it's a typo. Reply as soon as you can!

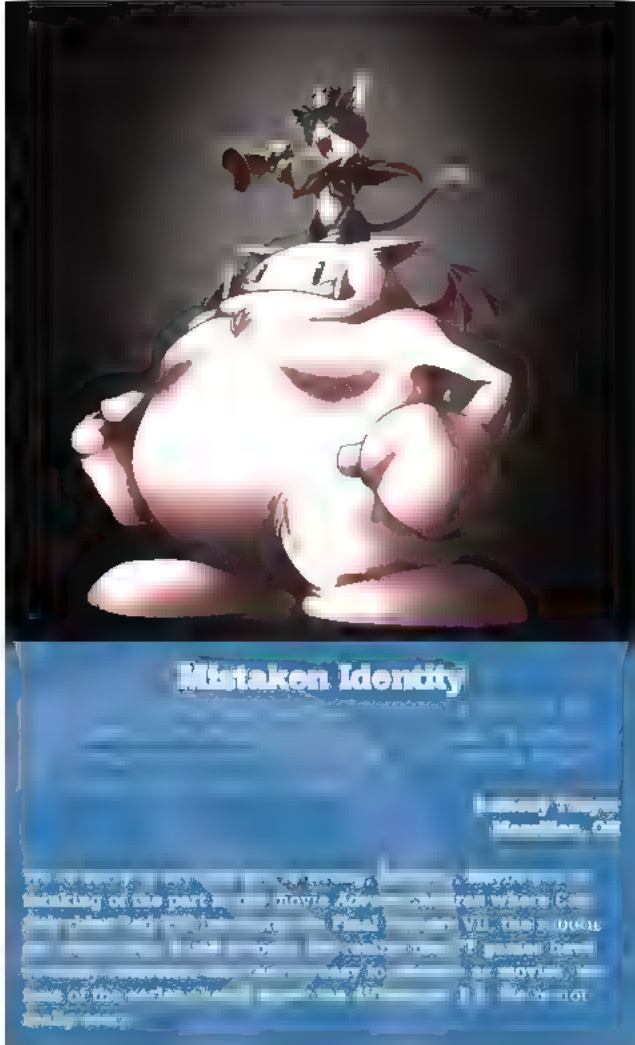
Markus Renberg
Via Email

No need to be "debasted!" Markus, **Naruto Ultimate Ninja Storm 2 is in fact coming out on both the Xbox 360 and the PS3. Please inform your mom that the only person she should sue is her son for spending that much money to play a Naruto game.**

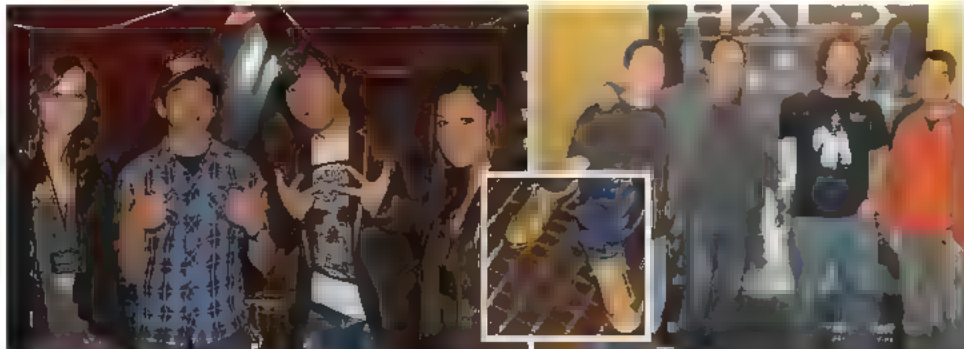
On Your Mind!



- The Best Zelda Game Ever **42%**
- Design For Retrogamers **21%**
- Companions From Nintendo Fans **17%**
- Nintendo's New Nintendo Fans **11%**
- Ray-Ban's in Movies **4%**
- Pre-patch **4%**

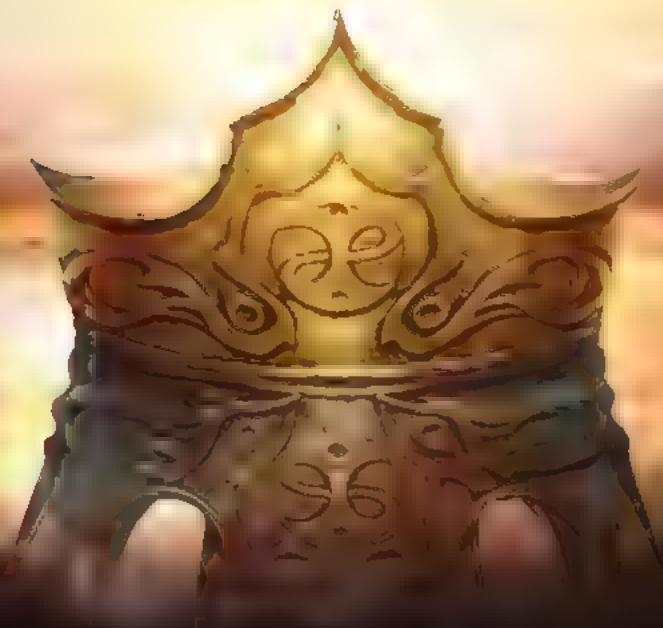


(Left) Meagan and Annette hang with legendary game designers Shiny Mikami and the elusive Suda5. (Inset) Suda was wearing these super al golden sneakers he bought a year ago just for 165 2010. (Right) Dan is still in a pos. Reach buZ have pictured with Microsoft's Mike Stout. Halo Reach executive producer Joe Tung and Editorial PR man Mark van Comma



ON OCTOBER 26TH THE KING OF ALBION
FACES HIS GREATEST THREAT.

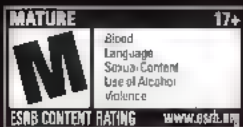
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XBOX 360

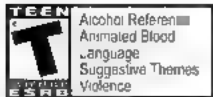


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Fallout

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Gaming's longest running joke is almost over, and Duke Nukem is getting the last laugh. Since its announcement in 1997, the troubled Duke Nukem Forever project has continually flirted with vaporware status and almost lived up to its initials DNF, which coincidentally stand for Did Not Finish. Borderlands developer Gearbox confirmed rumors by announcing at PAX that it purchased the project and the rights to the Duke Nukem license from former developer 3D Realms. Studio head Randy Pitchford says Duke Nukem Forever is on track to appear for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC in 2011, with 2K Games handling the publishing.

Gearbox's acquisition comes after years of investment by Duke's creators. Back in 1997, 3D Realms announced a 1998 release date for the game, but as has often been the case in the title's history, this declaration proved to be premature. For the next decade and beyond, 3D Realms periodically teased fans with announcements, leaked screens, and even live demos. These spurred the public's excitement, but after enough time, these showings felt hollow. No one believed that Duke Nukem Forever was any closer to completion, and all the announcements did was keep the longest running joke in the video game industry alive.

Duke was stuck in development purgatory largely due to 3D Realms' quest for perfection. Obsessed with keeping Duke on the vanguard of gaming technology, mercurial designer George Broussard constantly shifted the development goals for the project, often forcing his team to switch to different game engines mid-project and ~~add new features based on whatever another~~ game was doing at the time. As the number of full-time developers on the project dwindled and legal battles with publisher Take-Two ate away at 3D Realms' pocketbooks, Broussard finally waved the white flag, laying off what was left of the staff in May 2009. Many assumed Duke finally had bitten the dust for good.



Many of Duke Nukem Forever's cinematic have remained intact during its 2-plus years of development



For a game that has gone through as many changes as Duke Nukem Forever, many of the original ideas are still intact. We got our hands on the game at the recent Penny Arcade Expo and it retains many elements from its 1998 predecessor Duke Nukem 3D, like the shrink ray gun, Cycloids, and, of course, Duke's bawdy attitude. When coming across a three-breasted alien invading Earth, Duke is undeterred. "I'd still hit it," he boasts.

The gameplay featured Duke punting the head of a huge Cycloid through the field goal posts of a rain-drenched football stadium, driving sequences through desert canyons, bloody battles with re-imagined versions of the series' pig aliens, and Duke taking a leak - complete with first-person controls.

Duke Nukem Forever looks surprisingly good and so far doesn't seem to have been adversely affected by its long development cycle and numerous iterations. Throughout its history, the game consistently garnered praise whenever it's been publicly shown, but it's been a tantalizing experience that has always disappointingly never fully materialized. Until now.

Timeline

Here are just a few looks at the game in various incarnations - sometimes with different engines throughout its long history.

1987



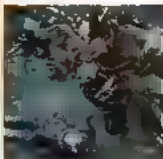
1999



2001



2007



2008



2009



Expose your computer to spyware

by opening a mysterious email attachment

and a cybercriminal can follow your every move,

making you paranoid,

to the point where you won't leave the house,

you stop trimming your nails,

and begin wearing empty tissue boxes on your feet.

Allow

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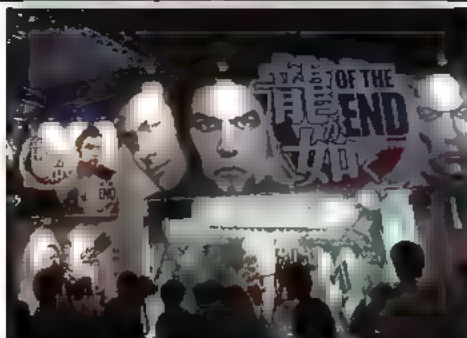
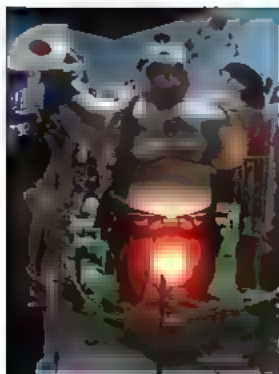
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Norton
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TGS 2010

The magical shrinking show



For a geek, nerd, otaku, or any other identifying terminology, the first time you step foot in Tokyo is magic. The sights and sounds and general acceptance of all things enthusiast results in a high you really can't get anywhere else in the world. For most, the enchantment of Tokyo never really goes away, and for me personally, the first time I visited Japan that enthusiasm was further fueled by the thought of attending the largest video game event in the country, the Tokyo Game Show. At some point, however, the luster began to fade and the wonderland of Tokyo failed to mask the truth: TGS is becoming more and more underwhelming every year.

Returning for my third consecutive year, the cool air and quiet halls were immediately indicative of the state of the show. Instead of bustling with energy, everyone seemed to move at a leisurely pace. While recent years have seen the Electronic Entertainment Expo successfully return to its ostentatious roots, my qualm with TGS isn't one of slowmanship. The level of grandeur, scale of booths, and extravagance of press events are all going on a substantial downward built of games. In this regard, TGS continues to disappoint.

Yes, a few gems stood out amongst the throngs of lackluster titles. With lack of support from major industry players, however, I found myself wondering what the future of the Tokyo Game Show holds. This year, the biggest news didn't even break at the show itself. At an event before the show commenced, EA debuted its collaborative effort with Grasshopper Manufacture, *Shadows of the Damned*. The

same night, Capcom also announced a reboot for the laudible *Devil May Cry* series developed by UK based studio Ninja Theory. By the time TGS kicked off, the biggest news was already out of the bag. At the show, Microsoft attempted to reaffirm its commitment to Japanese development by announcing five partnerships with domestic developers for Xbox-exclusive content and Sony stepped up to the plate with new *The Last Guardian* and *Gran Turismo 5* details. Then the floor fell quiet.

Last year, Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune spoke candidly of Japanese development, stating at a *Dead Rising 2* event: "When I look around at all the different games on the TGS event floor I said, 'Man, Japan is over. We're done; our game industry is finished.'" Following up with the *New York Times* a few weeks back, his sentiments seemed much the same: "I look around Tokyo Game Show, and everyone's making awful games. Japan is at least five years behind Capcom; it's barely keeping up."

Is Inafune right? Is Japanese development dead? I'm inclined to say no. Instead, it's shifting more toward global development and global appeal. Japanese developers partnering with Western publishers is a snowballing trend. With innovators like Gaikai, Suda Shini, Mikami, Fumito Ueda, and Inafune himself making headlines this year, no one can call the time of death on Japanese development quite yet. That being said, one point cannot be contested: The Tokyo Game Show is the largest domestic showcase for Japanese game development, and that presentation is sadly anemic at best. — by *Keisighi Yamamoto*



Dante's New Look

Ninja theory refreshes
Devil May Cry

Capcom has talked a lot recently about how it wants to branch out to create more global appeal for its franchises. For the classic Devil May Cry series, the company is executing this strategy by handing development duties to British studio Ninja Theory. The team that brought us Enslaved (see our review on page 100) and Heavenly Sword is rebooting the stylish action series with the tentatively titled DmC: Devil May Cry.

When an external developer (and a Western one, at that) takes over a popular Japanese franchise, it's often met with reservation from hardcore fans. Some of those fears were confirmed when Ninja Theory revealed the new-look Dante, who now sports a short, black hairstyle. The haircut looks to be a blatant attempt to cash in on the emo vibe made popular by recent teen flicks like *Twilight*. Taking a look at the initial trailer, at least Dante has something to mope about. Part of it shows our hero in an uncharacteristically vulnerable position, chained up in a blood-stained cell, presumably waiting for the next round of torture.

Dante isn't going down without a fight, as the trailer also shows him mowing through crowds of enemies that look like anime versions of the first game's scythe-jimbed marionettes with his trademark guns and blade. For the finale, he takes the carnage to another level by piercing a nearby car and hurling it at an oncoming wave of foes.

DmC: Devil May Cry is coming to the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, but a target release date hasn't been announced.

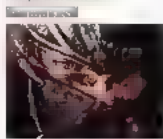
TGS DataFile

Valkyria Chronicles III Only PSP-Bound



The U.S. version of *Valkyria Chronicles III* hit stores a little while ago, and if you like that you'll be happy to know that Sega has more for you with VC III. The game comes out in Japan sometime in 2011. We hope to hear about a J.S. release in the future.

Ninja Gaiden 3



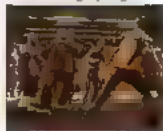
Tomonobu Tagaki may have left Tecmo, but the publisher is forging ahead with *Ninja Gaiden 3*. Details are scarce, but a lone art poster for the title hints at a bloodier tone than last year's *Sigma 2*.

Yekken Tag Tournament 2 Joins the Fray

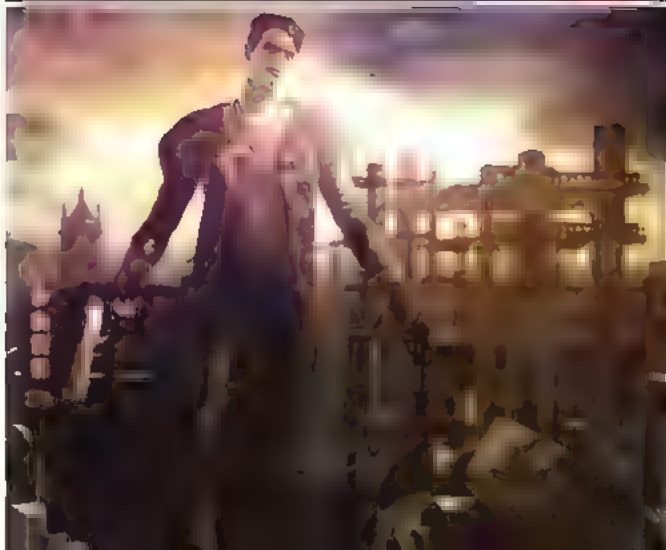


Namco Bandai announced a new *Tekken Tag Tournament* title for Japanese arcades in 2011. The game allows players to initiate combos from tags, but unfortunately the company did not mention a U.S. console release.

Frank West Returns in Dead Rising Epilogue



Capcom recently announced *Dead Rising: Case West*, an Xbox 360 exclusive download-only title set after the events in *Dead Rising 2* featuring Frank West from the original title. In other *Dead Rising* news, Capcom has purchased DR 2 developer Sikeo Castle Software, which is being renamed Capcom Games Studio Vancouver.



195 2010

Kinect Comes to Japan

Microsoft debuts five new titles

Despite the company's perennial third-place status in Japan, Microsoft is still plugging away with the Xbox 360. To the strategists at Bandai Namco, Kinect represents a new opportunity for a fresh start for the system, so a Tokyo Game Show, the company announced, will have a wide range of games slated for worldwide release.



1 Rise of Nightmares

Deja Vu

The idea of using Kinect to make your way through a horror title (or to flail in fear) is an interesting one. This game has everything from electric chairs and butcher knives to torture tables.

2 Steel Battalion

Heavy Armor

Capcom

Capcom is resurrecting its cult-classic mech title, and Kinect will replace the previous title's elaborate cockpit controller. The grainy trailer footage of soldiers storming a fortified beachhead along with mechs is striking, but it'll be interesting to see how intriguing the game is without the elaborate controller that was part of Steel Battalion's original allure.

3 Suda51

The New Blood

Midway

The setting for this game is an evil amusement park filled with the kind of crazy characters only Suda51 could dream up. The short trailer for the game shows the protagonist holding a flaming baseball. Perhaps this is Suda51's take on knock 'em down carnival games using Kinect.

4 Project Draco

Panzer Dragoon

Game Boy Advance

Panzer Dragoon fans will be pleased to know that the game's director is returning with this dragon-flying title that comes complete with online play.

5 Haunt

Naughty Dog

PlayStation 3

This title is appropriately set in a haunted house. While the game is said to be family friendly, it doesn't look kiddy or cartoony. We'll be interested to see how Haunt and Rise of Nightmares stack up against each other.

Rated For Sale

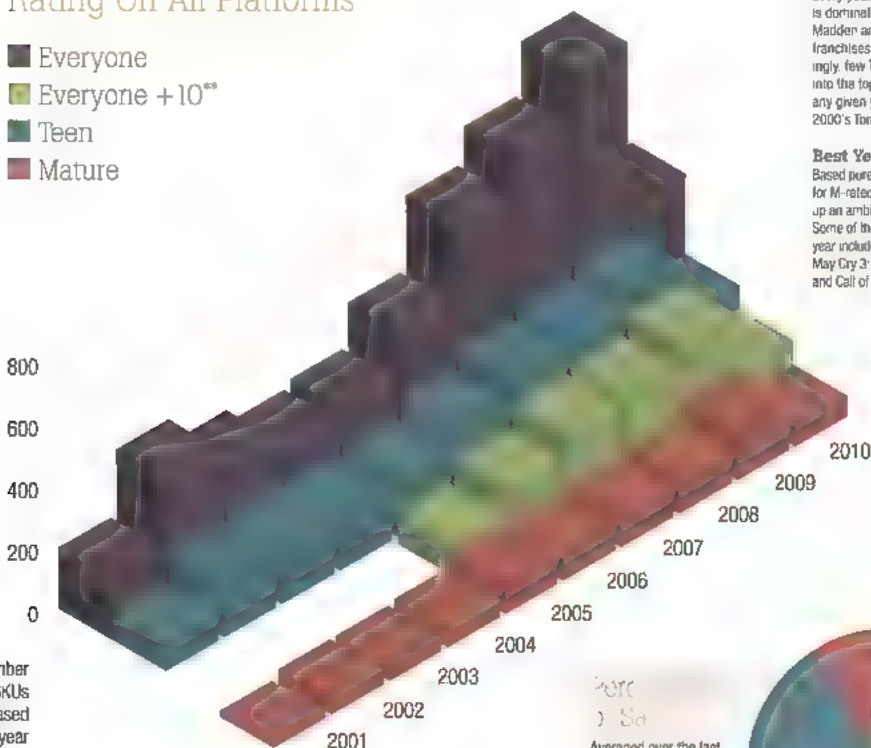
How games sell based on their ESRB ratings

By Ben Reeves

Games Released by ESRB Rating On All Platforms

- Everyone
- Everyone + 10**
- Teen
- Mature

Number of SKUs released each year



Critically acclaimed M-rated titles like *God of War*, *Call of Duty* and *Grand Theft Auto* make headlines with record-breaking sales, but did you know that the overall sale of M-rated titles only makes up a small fraction of the market? Some years, M-rated titles comprise less than 10 percent of overall game sales. Impressively, almost every year, more E-rated titles are sold than both T- and M-rated games combined. We turned to the number crunchers at BEDAR to help us get a better picture of the gaming marketplace. Here are the sales data for all video games sold over the last decade based purely on ESRB ratings.*

Does It Pay To Be T?

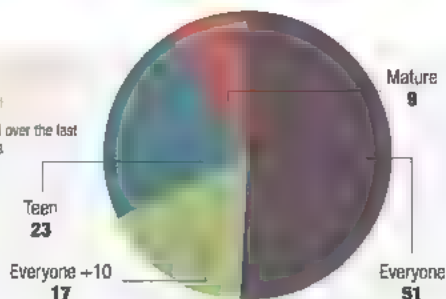
Every year, the list of top-selling games is dominated by E-rated series such as *Madden* and *Pokemon*, as well as M-rated franchises like *Grand Theft Auto*. Interestingly, few T-rated titles ever seem to break into the top three best-selling titles of any given year. One notable exception is 2000's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*.

Best Year for M

Based purely on market share, the best year for M-rated titles was 2005, when they took up an ambitious 13 percent of the market. Some of the notable M-rated titles from that year included the original *God of War*, *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening*, *Battlefield 2*, and *Call of Duty 2*.

Percent of SKUs

Averaged over the last five years



*2010 data is based on incomplete mid-year sales numbers. **E10+ Rating first introduced in 2005.

Shaun White

SKATEBOARDING

Transform your world.



CHARTING MASS EFFECT'S FICTION

01 Mass Effect: Revelation

This novel takes place prior to the events of the first Mass Effect game. On the edge of colonized space, ship commander and Alliance war hero David Anderson investigates the remains of a top-secret military research station. The smoking ruins are littered with bodies and unanswered questions. Who attacked this post, and for what purpose? Where is Kahlee Sanders, the young scientist who mysteriously vanished from the base hours before her colleagues were slaughtered?

Sanders becomes the prime suspect, but leading her creates more problems for Anderson than it solves. Partnered with an alien agent he doesn't trust, Saren, and pursued by an assassin he can't escape, Anderson battles impossible odds on uncharted worlds to uncover a sinister conspiracy—one he won't live to tell about, or so the enemy thinks.

02 Mass Effect

The story of Commander Shepard begins aboard the SSV Normandy, an experimental Human Systems Alliance ship commanded by David Anderson. The Normandy's first mission is to investigate a Prothean beacon discovered on Eden Prime. To aid in the beacon's recovery, the Citadel Council sends Spectre Nihlus, an elite agent of the governing body. The beacon isn't the only discovery to be made on Eden Prime. A synthetic alien race known as the Geth have waged war against Eden Prime's colonies, and are also after the beacon. Nihlus is killed in battle...not by the Geth, but by their leader, Saren. Like Nihlus, Saren is also a Spectre.

What is Saren after? Why would he betray the council? The race for answers begins, and the fate of the galaxy hangs on every discovery.

03 Braving Down the Sky DLC

An asteroid in the Asgard system is on a collision course with Terra Nova, a world that millions of people call home. The asteroid's trajectory was not decided by the cosmos—it's a terrorist act orchestrated by a Batarian extremist group. The fate of Terra Nova goes in the hands of Shepard.

04 Mass Effect: Ascension

This novel takes place between the two Mass Effect games. Scientist Kahlee Sanders has left the Systems Alliance for the Ascension Project, a program that helps gifted biotic children harness their extraordinary powers. The program's most promising student is 12-year-old Gillian Grayson, who is borderline autistic. What Kahlee doesn't know is that Gillian is an unwitting pawn of the outlawed black ops group Cerberus, which is sabotaging the program by conducting illegal experiments on the students.

When the Cerberus plot is exposed, Gillian's father takes her away from the Ascension Project and flees into the lawless Terminus Systems. Determined to protect Gillian, Kahlee goes with them...unaware that the elder Grayson is, in fact, a Cerberus operative. To rescue the young girl Kahlee must travel to the farthest ends of the galaxy, battling fierce enemies and impossible odds. But how will she be able to save a daughter from her own father?

05 Mass Effect Galaxy

This iPhone game takes place before Mass Effect 2 and tells the story of Jacob Taylor—a new party character in Mass Effect 2. This biotic-powered super-soldier stumbles across a plot to terrorize civilization's greatest beacon of hope, the Citadel.

06 Mass Effect: Redemption

Dark Horse Comics worked alongside Mass Effect lead writer Mac Walters to create this comic, which takes place in Mass Effect 2 before Shepard wakes up on the Lazarus station. Following Saren's attack on the Citadel, Commander Shepard has gone missing and Liara T'Soni is intent on finding her former commander. But she isn't the only one. The Shadow Broker is working alongside the Collectors to find Shepard as well. Liara makes new allies, confronts dangerous foes, and even falls on the Shadow Broker himself in this four-part series.

If you wanted to digest every morsel of Star Wars fiction released between 1977 and now, you'd have to dedicate years of your life to the cause. LucasFilm has transformed Star Wars into an entertainment giant, spanning movies, television, video games, novels, and comic books. Figuring out the chronological order of the fiction offered in each of these categories could take years.

BioWare is grooming its science fiction soap opera *Mass Effect* to be the next Star Wars-like multimedia giant. Since the series' debut in 2007, *Mass Effect* has produced two games, three novels, a prequel mobile game, and nearly a dozen slices of downloadable content. If you want to expand your knowledge of this fascinating universe, or are eagerly awaiting its release on PlayStation 3 next year, here's a chronological timeline of *Mass Effect*'s fiction thus far. *by Andrew Reiner and BioWare's Mass Effect team*

11 *Mass Effect 2* Firewalker Pack DLC

The Firewalker pack includes five new missions featuring the Hammerhead, a heavy assault vehicle that hovers over the battlefield, travels at speeds up to 120 kilometers per hour, and features a guided missile system ensuring accuracy even during aggressive maneuvering.

10 *Normandy Crash Site* DLC

Players revisit the crash site of the Normandy SR-1 in this emotionally stirring expansion mission.

09 *Stolen Memory* DLC

Cerberus has procured the services of Kasumi Goto, the galaxy's most enigmatic master thief. In return for her help, Kasumi has asked for Shepard's help on a dangerous heist to infiltrate the vault of a deadly master criminal named Donovan Hock. Shepard must gain Kasumi's loyalty on the planet Bekenstein, where Hock is throwing a party for some of the galaxy's richest and most deranged criminal minds. The duo must infiltrate the party to recover data of great importance to Kasumi and the galaxy at large.

08 *The Price of Revenge* DLC

The Price of Revenge includes a new squadmate, Zaeed Massani, and his mission on planet Zorya. Zaeed served in the Alliance military before building a reputation as one of the deadliest guns-for-hire in the Terminus Systems. For 20 years he waged war for profit, but now he wishes to retire from his life of bloodshed and mercenary work. Shepard recruits him for one last job.

07 *Mass Effect 2*

Having thwarted Saren's plans, Shepard now faces a far greater threat—the return of the Collectors. Waging a merciless war against the galaxy, the Collectors are abducting entire colonies, and humans live in fear. After a two-year absence, Shepard returns. Without a crew or a ship, Shepard forges an alliance with Cerberus, a fringe organization that cannot be trusted. Together they wage war against the Collectors. But in saving the galaxy, are they only angering a sleeping giant?

12 *Mass Effect 2* *Overlord* DLC

When sent to investigate a Cerberus research base that's mysteriously gone silent, Shepard arrives to find Geth overrunning the base. The sole survivor, Chief Scientist Archer, paints a dire picture. An experiment to fuse a human volunteer with a virtual intelligence has created a dangerous hybrid called VI Overlord. The rampaging VI has already attacked three other Cerberus bases, controlling any technology it finds in an attempt to break free, and unleashing Geth across the planet. Unless Shepard can infiltrate the VI's fortress and shut it down, this homicidal intelligence will bear itself off the planet and wreak havoc on other systems.

13 *Mass Effect 2* *Lair of the Shadow Broker* DLC

Lara T'Soni is tracking down the mysterious Shadow Broker, and no one is safe. She'll do anything to recover the man the Broker kidnapped, and the Shadow Broker's agents will do anything to stop her. Team up with Lara and chase clues from the luxurious heights of Illium to the Shadow Broker's own secret lair.

14 *Mass Effect* *Retribution*

This novel takes place roughly after the conclusion of *Mass Effect 2*. The mysterious Illusive Man, leader of the pro-human black-ops group Cerberus that cooperated with Shepard during *Mass Effect 2*, is hell bent on discovering the Reapers' secrets. To do so he's devised the perfect plan—implant a human subject with Reaper technology in order to study the enemy. He also has the perfect test subject in Paul Grayson, an ex-Cerberus operative. Grayson betrayed Cerberus in order to save his daughter. When Grayson is kidnapped and made the subject of Cerberus' evil experiments, the Illusive Man will finally have his revenge.



Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

After years of open-world video games, Spider-Man was his biggest disappointment. Thankfully, developer Beenox came along with some fresh ideas and produced the most critically acclaimed Spider-Man title in years. Though the game was received well, Marvel's mascot still couldn't save players from a touchy camera, a hackneyed storyline, and a bunch of soft-minded AI thugs. We talked with *Shattered Dimensions*'s lead designer Dan Slott about how he and his team managed to create four different worlds for Spider-Man. *Shattered Dimensions*

Spider-Man's last few games were not well received. Were you worried it would be hard to turn the franchise around, or that it might be hard to get people excited about a Spider-Man game again?

When we were presented with the opportunity to work on the next Spider-Man game, our team was ecstatic. Saying that we were fans of Spider-Man is probably an understatement. We knew we had a challenge ahead of us—mean, who doesn't love Spider-Man? This superhero is well beloved among millions and millions of fans, so we had to make this game true to the character and the license. We saw that as one of the best opportunities we'd ever had, and took it on with only one goal in mind: to make the best Spider-Man game ever.

Considering Spidey's history of open-world titles, did you consider making another open world Spider-Man game, or did you always know you had to do something different?

From the get-go, we wanted to go back to something more straight forward. Before doing another open-world game with Spidey, it was necessary to go back to his roots and make sure that we felt what we called the "Spider-Man DNA." It was crystal-clear in our minds that every level had to be tailored specifically for each villain, and that we needed as many different locations as possible which wouldn't be possible in a traditional open-world game.

How involved did Amazing Spider-Man writer Dan Slott get in story development?

We had the basic concept (four different worlds), but were unsure about how to link all that together. That is when Dan Slott was brought on board. We flew him to Quebec City, showed him our prototypes, and basically gave him the mandate to tie all that together while respecting the Marvel universe. There are a lot of lines of dialogue in the game, so we had to hire some help for Dan because his head probably would have exploded if he had to do all the work by himself.

Some of the levels near the end of the game aren't as polished as the first half. Were there any sections of the game that you had to cut due to time?

Well, it's always easy after finishing a project to look back and see all the things that went well, as well as all of the hiccups we had during the process. Believe me, we are more critical of ourselves and our game than anyone else. But it's actually surprising that almost nothing was cut from the game. Now that the game is done, we've spent some time going back, and we definitely see a few areas of improvement that we're going to focus on in our future projects.

In the Ultimate comics, Spider-Man only wore the black suit for a few issues, so it was strange to see him wearing it in the game. Why did you guys decide to put him in the black suit again?

It was very important for us that not

only every level looked different, but that they also played and felt different. To better differentiate the look of the character and the combat style of Ultimate Spider-Man from Amazing, we decided to use the black suit for one of them. The only remaining question was, Amazing or Ultimate? We chose the Ultimate universe for the black suit because we really wanted players to experience the iconic vibe of the Amazing Spider-Man with his classic blue and red costume.

It sounds like it would be hard to design four unique approaches to combat. How did you go about making sure the action in each of the four worlds felt fresh?

It's all about dedication. We had a lot of people working on making sure every world was different, be it designers, animators, or programmers. To be honest, the concept was bigger in scope than we anticipated, so reallocating resources to important parts of the game was crucial in making sure the game would be enjoyable.

What inspired the first-person Punch-Out! sequences? Were you worried that the gimmick might grow stale near the end?

There's a reason why you only get a handful of these sequences in the game; even though it's a nice addition, we knew that having too many of them had the potential to end up feeling gimmicky. As for the inspiration, it was all about putting you behind the mask and making you feel like you actually were the

friendly neighborhood Spider-Man, thus making a first-person sequence like that was relevant to the goal. That's also why most of the in-game cutscenes are presented in first-person point of view.

Spider-Man Noir isn't very popular, and fans had nearly forgotten about 2009 before now. Why did you guys decide to include these specific versions of Spider-Man?

Again, it was all about variety. You get to play Spidey in the past and in the future—how cool is that? Anyway, we know right at the beginning that these worlds were not well known, but we thought that would work to our advantage and that we had an opportunity to have people discover these nearly unknown worlds, especially for people that are not necessarily fans of comic books. Also, those worlds allowed us a lot of creative freedom, with the inclusion of Hammerhead and the mutation of Osborn for Noir, and the creation of Hobgoblin and Doctor Octopus for 2099.

Do you feel like you would have had more time to polish all of the game's different mechanics if you had just done one or two worlds instead of four?

That's a hard question to answer. Maybe. Maybe not. We strongly believe that having four different dimensions was and is what people get most excited about in the game. Once we had the idea to do multiple dimensions, we never thought about limiting ourselves to just two, in fact. If time permitted we would have done more than four. More time is always something every developer craves after a project is done, so hopefully this is something we can plan for in the future.

Were there any versions of Spider-Man you would have liked to have included but didn't have time to put into the game? At the same time, were there any villains you would have liked to include in the game but didn't?

There were a couple of villains that we thought of using but ended up not using for different reasons. But we're really satisfied with our choices, we don't have any regrets about what we put in the game. As for the worlds, right at the beginning of the project, during the concept phase, we made a list of the all the universes we'd like to have in the game, and we ended up with four of them in the actual product. I think that's a pretty good ratio. I know that's a little vague, but if there happens to be future games in the *Shattered Dimensions* franchise, we don't want to have any potential ideas revealed too early.

We noticed a few references to Spider-Man in the game. Would you guys make a Spider-Man game if you had the chance?

Definitely! It wouldn't be the same kind of game, but we have a few interesting ideas for a game with Spider-Man. Who knows, maybe we'll get to do one of them in the future? ☺

How does a one-man studio impress and

It seems dear friends that our development team has succumbed to Minecraft addiction.
— the official Team Fortress 2 blog

Part game, part toy, all dangerously engrossing, Minecraft (£10 from www.minecraft.net) is a small indie game that has gotten big attention in the last few months. At first download, the draw is a mystery. You're given no objective, your inventory is empty, and the world is made up of giant blocks with hilariously low-res textures. All you can do is slowly dig through dirt, sand, and trees to pick up the blocks that they drop.

But wait... a log can be crafted into four planks. Planks turn into sticks. Combine a full 2x2 crafting interface worth of planks, and you get a workbench. In the resulting 3x3 grid, you can affix wooden blades to the resulting poles to create simple tools: axes, pickaxes, shovels, even a crude sword. Dirt and sand can be piled on top of each other to create rough structures. Pickaxes can quarry stone out of the ground, which can make a furnace. Feed the furnace with wood and put some sand on top, and you get glass blocks. Windows, at last.

And then night falls: you can't see anything, and a zombie creeps up and explodes all over your face. Respawning with an empty pack once again, you roll up your sleeves.

Six hours later a mighty stone castle overlooks the shore. Furnaces blast away, smelting iron and gold into useable bars. A bubbling spring feeds a walled garden where wheat grows by torchlight. You grow the battlements, picking off zombies that

come wandering by with the fine bow you've crafted. The mountain in the distance begs to be explored, and as soon as day breaks you're off to go digging for precious ore... or perhaps diving into a dangerous spider-filled cavern.

Minecraft is all this and more. You can build mine cart tracks, complete with powered rails carrying passengers and/or goods. Redstone can be "wired" and used to create logic circuits, the possibilities of which the game's sizeable community is just starting to explore. Pressure plates and trap doors can be combined to make monster-slaughtering traps. Want an underwater lair with a hidden entrance and a lava spring feeding furnaces deep below

the waves? It's not only possible, but there's probably a YouTube video showing you how to get started. If it isn't possible now, it might be soon. Minecraft is currently in an alpha state, and the developer has been adding new stuff nearly every week.

Is there a point to all this building? Not really. Is there a point to building an awesome tree fort, or a olive hut to have a vantage point to proudly gaze down at your (obviously lesser) neighbors? Minecraft provides nuclear fuel to that creative impulse within all of us. It's a three-dimensional construction sandbox that occasionally explodes. Stupid zombies. — *By Nolan Beetsavay*



1. Multiplayer was recently added. Sharing your creations and watching others' grow is sublime.
2. Search YouTube to see this ten-modeled Columbia that drew praise from Irrational.
3. Levels can be generated as random or writer-directed. Developer Mojang Specifications intends to add shifting seasons in a later update.

"Oh, Minecraft, how long can I avoid your siren call?"
— BioShock creator Ken Levine via Twitter

FEAR FACTORS

How developers score the real-world
players on design decisions

Some horror enthusiasts argue that the survival horror subgenre has been on the decline in recent years. Though there are a few notable gems, recent titles in this category often stab at scares by mixing uneventful spooks with stale gameplay, losing what made playing game-changers like *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* so enjoyable (and terrifying). While fear is subjective, properly placed jump scares, moody environments, and frightening sound design can elicit sweaty palms and an irregular heartbeat in even the most hardened horror junkie. We take a look at the chilling elements that make up successful horror games and pinpoint which titles get them right.

Running For Your Life

What gets your blood pumping more than being chased by a horde of bloodthirsty demons? Take the elevator sequence in *Dead Space*, where an unnamed Clarke runs from a group of Necromorphs through the narrow corridors of the USS Ishimura, just barely escaping. Any situation pitting your character against an enemy you're hopeless against is a recipe for terror. Nothing will make you crap your pants quite like coming face to face with a grizzly bear in the middle of dimly lit, dilapidated warehouses in *Condemned 2: Bloodshot*. Stephen Colbert is right to fear those godless killing machines.

Starving The Player

One criticism of recent action horror titles is having an overpowered main character and ample access to ammo and weapons. Back in the Resident Evil days, players had limited inventory slots, making every weapon pickup and ammo discovery precious. Rationing inventory drives the fear of eventually running out and makes each enemy encounter a terrifying exercise in combat efficiency. Even though access to resources is a design decision slated toward accessibility, greatly limiting resources and inventory slots at higher difficulties is a plus for the hardcore player who is seeking a challenge. **D**

Macabre Imagery

Most horror titles offer some degree of terrifying imagery, whether it's in enemy design, lighting effects that play tricks on your eyes in dark sequences, or unexplained blood splatters trickling down walls. Games like *Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly* mix haunting black-and-white cutscenes, disturbing apparitions, and a combination of light and shadow to create a frightening mood. The amount of detail in creating this atmosphere has never made us more afraid of dolls.

Fearsome Foes

Memorable enemies elicit an instinct to run upon first glance, and are a vital component to any horror title. Nemesis from *Resident Evil 3* is one such character—a large, pudgy beast wielding a bazooka who has stalker-like tendencies and an unforgettable grumble is enough to make anyone wet their pants. *Silent Hill 2*'s Pyramid Head, the mysterious lady killer and serial rapist masked beneath large headgear and a butcher's smock, is another prime example of great character design. Who can forget the first time you encountered a Big Daddy in *BioShock* and faced the wrath of its massive drill? With each encounter you wonder what's the deal with these characters, though you're probably better off not knowing.

Unpredictability

The biggest factor in a game's replayability is unpredictable AI paths. Having enemies respawn from different locations during each playthrough helps the game maintain an element of surprise. Valve's *Left 4 Dead* uses an AI Director system that places the undead in different positions based on the current situation, status, and overall performance of the players. A simpler version of the AI Director was used in *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, and is something Valve wants to keep using going forward, and the team designing *RE.A.P. 3* is using a similar tactic. This sort of random respawn technology is something that future horror titles could benefit from as well.

Surprise Spooks

The most elementary scare tactic in horror games is the jump scare. Nothing like a fallen enemy springing back to life or a creature jumping down from an overhead vent to cause you to pause the game and drop the controller to catch your breath. While a game should never solely rely on jump scares as a fear generator, sprinkling a few memorable instances—such as rabid zombie dogs bursting through windows in a narrow hallway in *Resident Evil 4* or unexpectedly finding a female corpse in a blood-filled bathtub in *Eternal Darkness*—keeps players on edge and makes them hesitant to turn a corner or examine an object thereafter.

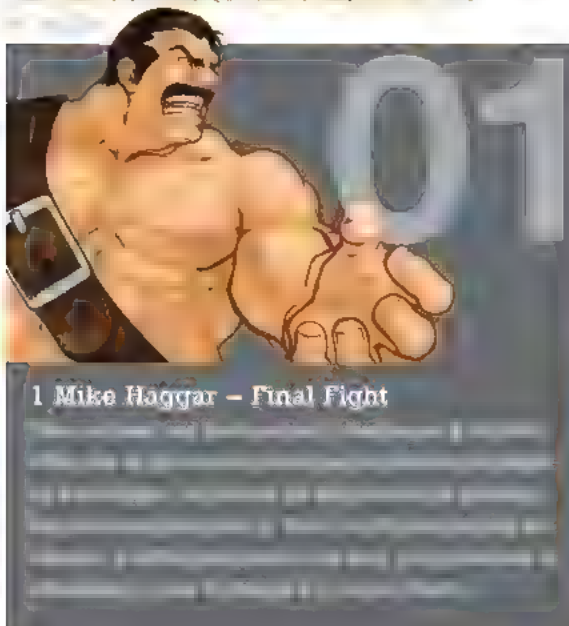
Solitary Confinement

One of man's biggest fears is being alone. More often than not, horror titles leave an everyman with no real skill in weaponry or combat in unfamiliar territory to fend for himself. Psychological horror fan favorite *Silent Hill* follows a man on a search for his daughter around fog-filled territory occupied by hellish creatures. Isolation is proven to be an effective scare tactic. This is part of the reason why the addition of multiplayer in established single-player horror franchises causes panic among fans.

The Sound Of Fear

The usual protocol for playing a horror title is turning off all the lights and cranking up the volume, making a disembodied scream, grunt, or dragging sound on the other end of a dark hallway absolutely terrifying. *Dead Space* won several awards for its ability to build tension with sound. Unseen Necromorphs shuffling within vents, hazardous electrical cables whipping around, fluffy doors creaking open and shut, and most importantly, not always knowing where some of these sounds are coming from effectively sends chills down the player's spine. On the other end of the spectrum, minimalist sound design, as in moody indie game *Limbo*, can also give you the creeps. Light footsteps and snapping bear traps are more than enough to cause the occasional jump.





2 Dr. Wily - Mega Man
Apparently mad scientists only have enough time to shave their neck, chin, and cheeks. Dr. Wily has an outrageous set of whiskers. If the shiny eyebrows don't convince you of his evil, his hair and mustache look like matching pairs of batwings. Is the doctor's dastardly facial hair the reason he never dared to construct Razor Man?



3 Landon Ricketts - Red Dead Redemption
Landon Ricketts' signature soup strainer is the bushiest mustache in the West. Did you know the bandana was invented to make showdowns with this cowboy fair? Ricketts' walrus-like nostril fuzz would stun opposing gunmen before they could even reach for their guns. That, and too many in nonmetallics were accidentally shot upon bumping the handsomely hairy fella.



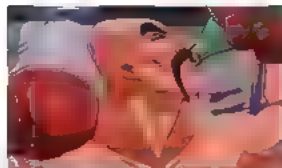
4 Old Snake - Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
In Metal Gear Solid Snake was a clean-shaven, soy-faced gov. efficient operative. After going rogue and philanthropic in Sons of Liberty Snake grew a wazy, is after park oesio and muller in Guns of the Patriots. Old Snake grew an old man mustache because well, he's an old man. That's what old men do. Or maybe Fox Die has some very tapper side effects.



5 Wario - Super Mario
Lulu, 2. Sir Golden Coins. Mario and Luigi have been sporting lush hair - slashes since the 8-bit era, long before Wario came along with his rocket pipe cleaners. But Mario's convincing doppelganger beat those guys on the lust fronts to sheer grotesqueness. Seriously, it looks like two fuzzy waterpillars crawled from Wario's nose and were then electrocuted.



6 Dr. Robotnik - Sonic
A video game character based on President Theodore Roosevelt has to have a stately stache. Approximately 60 percent of Dr. Robotnik's facial real estate is taken up by his antimycin leather musters. You may be able to know that the inclusion of Sonic's nemesis on this list was delayed due to a hasty mustache inspection, we had no good authority that Dr. Robotnik's plumage was actually the result of an attempt to snort tails.



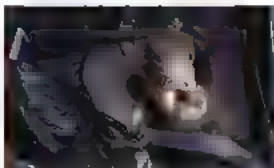
7 Soda Popinski - Punch Out

Gelatin, beat down by a soda-smiling Russian is bad enough, but it's even more demoralizing when steering into the face of such beastly crates. We lost two dozen matches straight in Punch Out thanks to Soda Popinski's distracting lip looks. You thought that bones strengthened by drinking milk were important for boxes? Nope, the sticky, soda-infused mustache is the real key.



8 Mucho Macho Mustachio - Ninja Town

This mustache is a mustache on a mustache, which double-qualifies it for our list. Do we give credit to the flying stepla that carries it, or to the mustache it wears? We may have stumbled upon a tear in the fabric of reality here. Looking upon this furry mess is like going into the gaping endlessness of an infinity mirror.



9 Captain John Price - Call of Duty

The mustachioed, gun-toting captain of the Call of Duty series has taken down waterfalls, lited a smking ocean, inskilled renegade leaders, destroyed the International Space Station, and escaped prison. You'd think that Price would have died somewhere along the way, but thankfully he got that bushy handbar on the middle of his face he can use to hang on for dear life.



10 Lance Vance - Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Some say that Lance Vance grew his slim and debonair mustache to keep his upper lip warm, but we know it's actually to keep the ladies warm at night in Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. We are led to believe Lance's paragon causes him to betray Tommy Vercetti, but we think the fallowes of his sleek pencil mustache spread into his mind, took root, and made him drunk with power. Stache power.

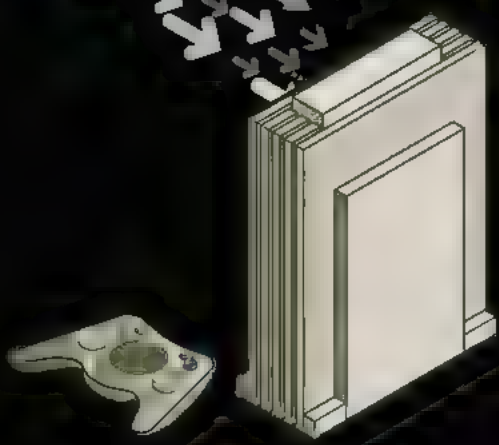


DLC

Diagnosis

No aspect of the gaming marketplace is as unpredictable and inconsistent as downloadable content. DLC is the Wild West of gaming, and publishers are doing everything they can to strike it rich by honing the balance of timing, price, and worthwhile content. Game makers are searching for a consistent winning formula, and we've taken a close look at the DLC approaches that we'd like to see more and less.

by Tim Turi



What We Want:

Well-Timed Single-Player Expansions When we love a game, we already want more of it when the credits roll. Several games have nailed the timing window with great single-player DLC. Remedy's first Alan Wake episode, *The Signal*, delivers fun, chaotic gameplay for free (or \$7 if you don't buy the game new) approximately two months after the game's release—more than enough time to complete the main quest. Grand Theft Auto IV's *The Lost and Damned* and *Ballad of Gay Tony* downloadable episodes delivered awesome new gameplay mechanics and more digestible storylines for Rockstar fans, and only made them wait months rather than years for follow-ups. *Fallout 3* (on Xbox 360) at least got five sequential DLC expansions approximately every two months following the game's release, leaving the carrot dangling on a long enough stick to keep *Wasteland* warriors hooked.

More Than A Demo Previewing a game before it releases is nice, but retracing steps you've already made when the final game launches is a pain. Capcom schemed a winning formula with *Dead Rising 2: Case 0*. This prologue chapter to the zombie-butcherin' title is not only dirt cheap (at \$5), it expands the story, offers a new setting, and packs hours worth of content. Even better, gamers can transfer their leveled-up Chuck into the full game. We hope more developers copy Capcom, because getting a head start on highly anticipated games is great.

New Characters Tons of beloved characters exist in the world of gaming and adding more via DLC is a great way to keep fans interested. Capcom treated *Mega Man 10* players with retro rival Bass via DLC, with all new shooting mechanics. *Transformers: War for Cybertron* fans who preordered the game received free characters like Jazz and Demolisher, and later Activision released more bots via DLC. We want to see more downloadable characters moving forward. We're looking at you, *Super Street Fighter IV: Märu* vs. *Capcom 3*, and *Street Fighter X Tekken*.

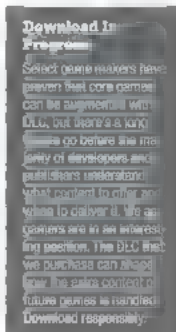
Game Alteration When rabid *Portal* fans discovered Valve altered bits of the PC version of its beloved game, excitement ensued. Valve's intriguing (and free) method of sneaking new content into its highly replayable masterpiece has us wondering what other games would benefit from postmortem Easter Eggs. These refreshing tweaks could be as subtle as *Portal*'s sequel hints or as grandiose as mixing up enemy types, item locations, or endings.

Download Kiosks Potential DLC customers would benefit greatly from retailers touting new game content in stores. It would make even more sense to offer consumers the option to use kiosks to download new DLC onto a portable storage device which they can then take home. This would not only be convenient, but could help and the alienation of gamers deprived of Internet connections or online-enabled subscriptions. This would have helped disconnected gamers who held out for GTA Episodes from *Liberty City* and *Borderlands Double Game Add-On Pack* at retail.

Consistent Content Reliable release dates are something the gaming industry has struggled with for a long time, but with sparse DLC exposure, regular releases are imperative. Harmonix has vowed us with its weekly *DLC Rock Band* songs, and *LittleBigPlanet*'s constant stream of new level packs is equally impressive. Shopping for new game content becomes more convenient when you can look forward to a day rather than rely on vague release windows.

What We Don't Want

On-Disc DLC We often hear DLC doesn't make it on retail discs because there isn't enough storage space, which is acceptable. When 2K released the Sinclair Solutions "DLC" for *BioShock 2*, however, players discovered that the content was already on the disc. The publisher justified consumers paying for on-disc content because it didn't split the multiplayer player base. This was also the case with the free *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* VIP map packs, which enabled players to play existing modes on existing maps that were already on the disc. EA passed off the extra modes as bonus DLC, but we see this as both developers tricking content for which gamers already paid.



False Promises Nothing upsets fans more than withdrawing previously promised content. Several developers have canceled or indefinitely delayed DLC plans due to underwhelming game sales or other reasons. Quantic Dream killed off the *Heavy Rain* DLC after one episode to work on the *Move* version of the game, which puts the developers at risk for being too late if they return to it. New characters Quin Chi and Harley Quinn were nearly finished for *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*, but when Warner Bros. purchased Midway the company put the kibosh on it.

Taking Us Out Of The Game *Mass Effect 2*'s Cerberus Network is a good example of DLC advertising, but BioWare's other RPG *Dragon Age: Origins*, dropped the ball with

intrusive in-game content peddling. We're not fans of being offered a brand new, exciting quest and then being prompted to exit the game and throw down money to play it. This jarring obstacle can interrupt the fluid pace of an otherwise masterful experience.

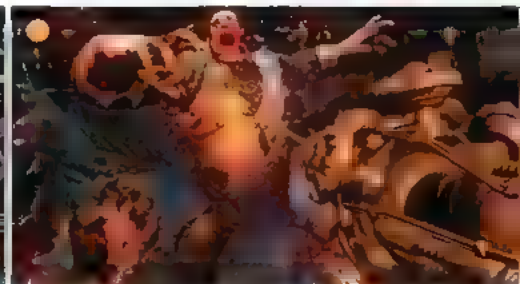
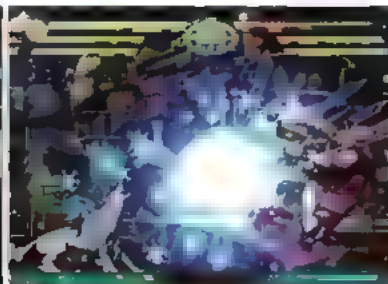
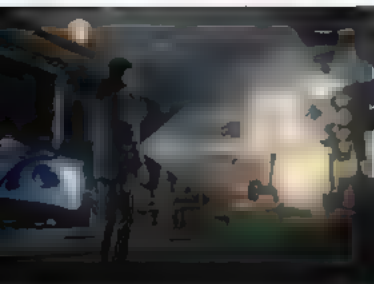
Tacked-On Modes How many developers have offered a variation of *Gears of War 2*'s Horde Mode as DLC? This cutting and pasting is a lazy replacement for more interesting and fresh content. *Borderlands Mad Moxie's Underdome Fio!* is guilty, as are *Uncharted 2: Lost 4 Dead*, *BioShock 2*, and *Allens vs. Predator: Battlefield: Bad Company 2*'s free DLC mentioned earlier was already suspect, but the paid DLC *Onslaught Mode* is an even greater offender as it's basically a *Rush mode* against AI bots on existing maps.

Expensive Map Packs Developers attempt to appease the feral hunger of gamers by releasing multiple map packs, specifically with shooters. Activision offered two *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* map packs for the steep price of \$15 each (the same price as any of XBLA's *Summer of Arcade* titles). Sales surpassed the five million mark as of June, so obviously gamers are willing to pay a healthy sum for five maps for infinity Ward's sterling FPS. What worries us is less popular games asking for the same amount of money as *Call of Duty*. Hopping into matchmaking months after a game's release only to find the player base has been split between several map packs takes the itch out of our trigger fingers.

Alan Wake
Alan Wake's first DLC toyed with fans' perception of the game's ending, something we'd like to see in more DLC.

Märu vs. Capcom 3
DLC characters in fighting games could end the need for updated "super" versions.

BioShock 2
BioShock 2 is a double offender with on-disc DLC and a single-player horde mode copycat.



Six new downloadable games to watch

by Matt Miller

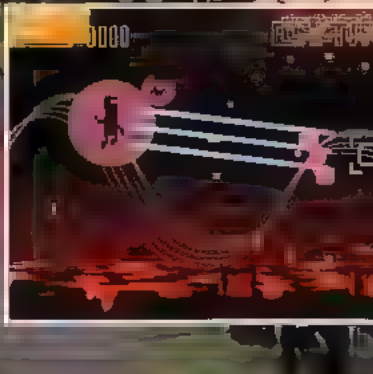
One of the coolest things about covering the downrightable game scene is discovering the gems that come out of nowhere. Love watching new studios and established developers alike who take chances on new ideas. This exciting and dangerous approach to development is typified by **Bastion**, a stunning action/RPG from new studio Supergiant Games. Founded by several ex-members of EA's Command & Conquer team, the studio has worked on this beautiful game for the past year. I played an extended demo and was instantly charmed. After the Calamity shatters the world into a series of floating islands, a protagonist named the Kid must construct a new safe haven. The environments feature vibrant backgrounds and incredible detail. Along his journey, to find survivors and collect supplies, the Kid battles strange beasts with melee combat, ranged weapons, and special skills. Bastion's real standout feature is the audio. The awesome score melds acoustic guitar with a more modern electronic touch and a gravely voiced man narrates the entire

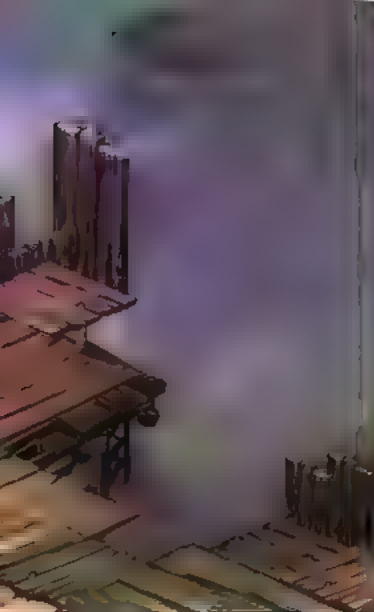
game, relating the story of the Kid as he moves through the world, describing the items he finds, sharing recollections of the Kid's life before the Calamity, and adding excitement to fights with vivid descriptions of the monsters and battles. Bastion is targeting release on XBLA and PSN next summer, but Supergiant Games hasn't nailed down a publisher yet. Whichever company is smart enough to recognize the game's potential may have a hit on their hands.

Ubisoft is also delivering a new franchise next year with **Outland**, an intriguing new platformer from Super Stardust HD creator Housemarque. Outland unabashedly combines Prince of Persia style platforming with Super Metroid style exploration. The fantasy game stars a modern-day man of Mayan descent beset by dark visions that send him trekking in the Yucatan jungle for answers. Stark, shadowy landscapes recall elements of Shadow of the Colossus, and a new soundtrack from Ar Pulkkinen, the composer who scored Trine, complements the gorgeous visuals. As he moves through the fantastical setting, the main character must jump and climb past traps and other dangers. As players

navigate the world, they can flip back and forth between a light and dark state just like in the classic Japanese shooter Ikaruga. Your choice of polarity determines which enemy attacks can hit you and factors into the platforming challenges. Outland also features an extensive combat component, with massive boss encounters peppered throughout the game. Can't wait to get my hands on this game, which releases early next year and looks to be a strong contender.

If you've been following the series, then you know you have reason to be excited about the newly announced **Bit.Trip Fate**. I played several hours of the incredibly challenging shooter and the game is just as entrancing as its predecessors. The game puts a new twist on the old school side-scrolling shooter formula, with your character moving along a designated curve from which he cannot diverge. To dodge enemy projectiles, you must find a place on the line that is safe from attack while simultaneously dishing out punishment on your foes. The series' trademark pixel art and 8-bit inspired music is in full effect, as is the steep difficulty and hallucinogenic visual effects. Every one of these games has been

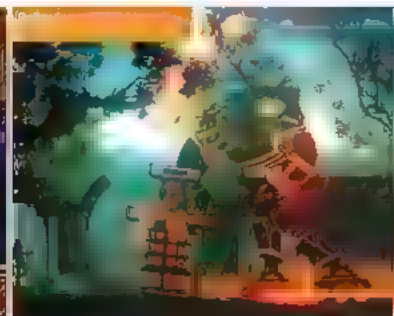
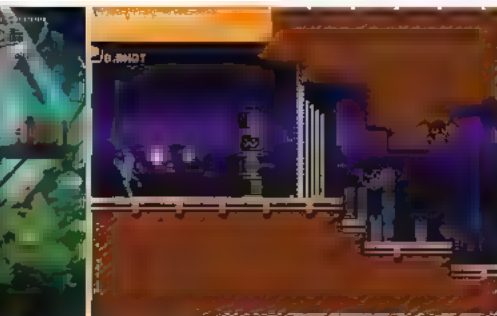
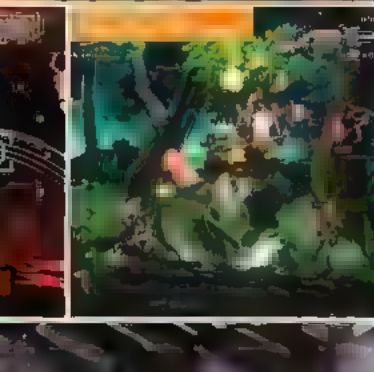




new high-octane shooter this month and came away impressed by several new features that help move Konami's franchise forward. Uprising features a big shift in its art style, and the new anime sensibility serves the ridiculous action well. The coolest gameplay innovation is the new upgrade system. In Rising mode, your point totals become Corps Points (CP) that can be used to purchase new abilities, health upgrades, additional lives, and weapon power-ups. These purchases can be enabled and disabled to affect difficulty, and each character can be upgraded separately. The extremely challenging arcade mode returns for punks as well. The early levels played were filled with constant enemy waves and set-piece action moments. Add in online co-op on PSN and XBLA, and my solid, hard Corps Uprising should be out late this year.

A while back, I shared some tidbits about Capcom's mysterious **Mega Man Universe** project. This month I had the chance to see the game in action. The game is a playground for Mega Man fans, delivering high-end character customization and level creation. Capcom is including a remade version of Mega Man 2 within the core game, but the real deal is that you get to slare and download user-created levels. Players can choose from a wide array of playable Capcom characters, from the many Mega Man variations to other favorites like Street Fighters Ryu. Players can tweak each character by changing out body parts, abilities, and colors to create a unique hero. I'm excited by the possibilities of a limitless Mega Man levels to explore and conquer.

For more coverage of independent and downloadable games, visit gameinformer.com/impulse, which releases daily e-mails on the best indie indie news, and weekly spotlights on indie developers and their indie titles. And don't miss our reviews of some of the highlights of PlayStation and Xbox 360. bit.ly/3P



unique, and after Fate's fall release, I can't wait to see how Gavin's unannounced, sixth installment of the WiiWare exclusive series comes together. British studio Just Add Water made headlines recently by announcing its Oddworld revival. Its first project is a remake of **Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath**, the excellent but underappreciated final entry in the series that debuted on the Xbox in 2005. It sounds as if the game will be a faithful remake, albeit with a graphical overhaul that improves the visuals to meet contemporary expectations. If you never had the chance to try Stranger's Wrath, you missed out. The game stars an unusual bounty hunter in the Oddworld equivalent of the Old West. Players shoot "live ammunition" in the form of giant insects and small mammals, and the storyline includes an awesome twist near the end that reveals a lot about the hero's motivations. I'm excited to revisit the game, and even more intrigued by the possibility of having a new studio building more games within the fantastic Oddworld universe.

It may not have Contra in the name, but make no mistake: **Hard Corps: Uprising** is the next installment in the storied franchise. I dug into the



It's back! Just when video game icons thought it was safe, the Sacred Cow Barbecue returns with a heaping helping of hafin! While the last two BBOs focused on some of the all-time classics in gaming history, this time around we've focused on some more recent hits:

worse, believe us.

by GI Star • artwork by Zander Cannon





We don't love our children. That's the only possible explanation for why we've now let nearly two generations of our young people suffer through the Pokémon series. Unlike the rest of this list, we couldn't narrow down this entry to just one game in the series, for the simple reason that Nintendo has been releasing the same damn games over and over again for well over a decade.

got an art house game that's every bit as hard to sit through as art house films. The game stars character-free hero Tinko, who's only recognizable for wearing a schoolboy suit he obviously stole from MAG/DC's Angus Young. Tin is on a quest to rescue a princess. Shockingly, at the end of every level, we find that she's in another locale. In any other game, this would just be a Mario rip, but because it's so

just for to be the hi-fi genre. It's basically a dumbed-down version of Final Fantasy releases, but with worse graphics. This franchise would be fine enough if it stuck to carrying nine-year-old hand-drawn owners out of their allowance money, but Pokémon didn't stop there. Why, it now has spawned a feature TV show, a few feature films, plus a plethora of products and merchandises. We won't even get into the


trying to rescue all along with suddenly running from you! That's right. You were the good guy all along! Tale is a completely whiff

You loved Star Wars growing up, so did we. But there comes a time when fans must grow up. Everything that happened in the universe after the first two *Trilogy of Returns* of the Jedi has been a total disaster. In high time we stopped deluding ourselves, so let's start by admitting that the Wars' most beloved *Knight of the Old Republic* is just plain suck. Is it better than the previous *Knights*? Okay, fine, sure it is, in the same way that crowning in water is better than growing in peas.

Developer BioWare is known for its engaging writing and vivid characters, so they weren't content to recycle Star Wars standbys like Han Solo, C-3PO, Chewbacca, or Darth Vader. Instead they created the memorable line of fake Han Solo, Tala, Tala R2-D2, and fake Chewbacca. We know what you're thinking: "Okay, but those characters suck, but what about HK-47? He's a robot...and he's the really one who's people and sent. That's an awesome!" Heah? We had that character later when he was *Rescue as Fiktoria*, and he's really scary.

This is a BioWare game, so that means you have to deal with mediocre gameplay to experience the show-your-own-adventure. The plot, why have one great story when several bad ones will do? As always, the moral choices are about as subtle as if you're space puppy from a burning building (I believe it'll) your job on the line, someone "screw you more and back" and take a cheap on a head dump. Aside from these occasionally strange options, the whole experience ends up with a completely slow-down reveal (see *Lord of the Rings*). Hell, by that point we wouldn't care if the main character turned out to be *Keyser Söze* — just end this game already!

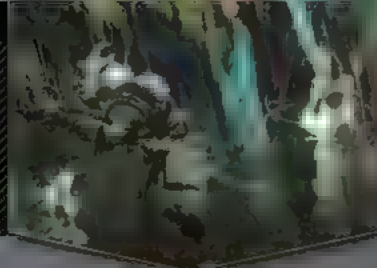




massive

The Impending Dynamic Content Future

Nothing short of making Blizzard from orbit is going to stop World of Warcraft from chugging along and doing its thing, but the next generation of MMORPGs is nearly here. Dynamic PvE content – zones, quests, and objectives that change over time based on player actions – is one of the watchwords of the coming MMO landscape. Rift, Planes of Telara and Guild Wars 2 have dramatically different ways of approaching the concept. Which one fits your gaming taste?



Guild Wars 2

The event system in Guild Wars 2 is basically Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning's public quests taken to the extreme. The game doesn't have what we think of as "standard" MMO quests—all of the outdoor PvE content is tied into these events, which are happening all around you all the time. Events range from rescuing a farmer from bandits to teaming up with dozens of players and NPCs to take down a menacing death dragon.

Rift

Rift has large swaths of traditional MMO design with its signature rifts layered on top. These tears in the dimensional fabric of the world allow the malevolent forces of the elemental planes to enter the physical realm, wreaking havoc on the landscape and the wildlife in the process. If they continue unopposed by players, rifts escalate into full-scale invasions that can and will wreck entire cities until players deal with them.

EMERGENT

AESTHETICS

ACCESSIBILITY

TRACK RECORD

VARIETY

GAMEPLAY

AMBITION

RELEASE

Overall Edge: Guild Wars 2

It's tough to bet against Guild Wars 2. Developer ArenaNet has longstanding experience creating and maintaining innovative, successful MMOs, and everything it has shown of Guild Wars 2 to date has been nothing short of incredible.

On the other hand, upstart Trion is making a bold entry into online gaming with Rift, and I like what I've seen so far. I have to give the edge to Guild Wars 2 for now, but these are the top two non-Cataclysm MMOs on my radar for good reason.

interview



Photo: G. Brown

Treyarch Taking the Lead

Mark Lamia's long career at Activision led him to his current position as studio head of research and development, which helped make the studio into one of the world's best. In a recent interview, Lamia spoke to IGN about his career and how Treyarch hopes its upcoming Call of Duty: Black Ops will help cement its reputation in the industry.

How has it been making the transition from creating games in a WWII setting to a Cold War setting in Black Ops?

It's inspired a burst of creativity. It's fertile ground where the creative people I have at the studio can stretch themselves into doing something new. It's a very interesting era. It's the dawn of real black ops; there was a lot of political intrigue with the CIA and Soviet Union. That whole era was wild. Also, it's much more documented. There was so much more communication then. It will be a lot of very exciting storytelling. People will be surprised by the things we did in making it our own.

More modern games like Medal of Honor and Modern Warfare 2 have generated controversy in the press. What are your thoughts on that intersection between real life and games? Is anything off limits?

We don't approach it from that perspective, but I do have a feeling about it. My feeling is that there are all sorts of movies and books and entertainment that touch on these subjects and don't receive the kind of scrutiny that games receive. I think that it's insane that people don't think we're an art form. If you know game developers, you know how we're treated and how we're treated. We're treated like these guys. But people that have grown up with games understand that this is our art form. If it was a movie, no one would be even asking that question. But because it's a game, people ask that quite often. This game is not about Vietnam War, but it does have that historical feel. That's part of what's appealing about this game because people think they know about Vietnam. Our game is about what occurs under the surface with the Black Ops

How did the messy divorce between Activision and Infinity Ward affect Treyarch as a whole and you personally?

It didn't affect the studio because we were already halfway through with Black Ops. It was a relief to not hear about it; it was all over for us. It was like any divorce, people were surprised that they thought it was unfortunate for me personally. I know those guys and I worked with those guys. Even though I was focused on the studio here, you have relationships with people. The Infinity Ward was an incredible development organization. Some of those guys that left were incredibly talented, but the guys that stayed are incredibly talented, too. I don't think anyone would say that it was a good thing for either side, but it happened. I know that Activision is focused on the people that are still at Infinity Ward.

Did the situation present an opportunity for Treyarch to really put your stamp on the Call of Duty franchise and take the reins, so to speak?

The only thing I can say about that is that we were hoping to do that anyway. [Laughs] We've been working hard for a long time with the

learn, and I think that this game represents the best work we've ever done. We're putting attention to detail and refinement into everything. This is everything we got, so we were hoping that [this – not to the exclusion of anyone else – I would be] creatively identified with this studio. We felt that this was our opportunity to establish us as a creative force.

World at War is regarded as your best work; it's still one of the most played Xbox Live games. Why did that game come together the way it did?

It's a culmination of a lot of years of making Call of Duty. While there are always new people, a lot of the mains and senior leads had made multiple Call of Duty games. We had more time than we'd gotten on any of the other games. With [Black Ops], it's the same thing. After 2008, after we shipped Spider Man, World at War, and Quantum of Solace, we decided we needed to consolidate our focus. That's one thing that Infinity Ward always did very well. They focused on quality. Not that we weren't focused on quality, but when you're making multiple titles you have to split your attention, time, and resources. Now that we've just been focused on making Call of Duty, everyone's rowing in the same direction, and it's made all the difference.

Will you remain a one-game-at-a-time studio or will you go back to multiple games in the future?

For the foreseeable future, it's all Call of Duty. This sort of game – stories from a first-person perspective, multiplayer, cinematic first-person action – is the focus. Now how is that broken up? I need to talk to my Activision counterparts after I finish putting the bow on Black Ops.

So you'll be working exclusively within the Call of Duty franchise?

Well, that's my intention. Unfortunately, I don't get to make the decision myself, but my intention is to continue work in the Call of Duty franchise. It's a type of first-person shooter game and I want to continue to advance our capabilities in that area. You learn a lot about your team after every game.

Does Activision dictate the next project or do you have a say?

We have a really strong say, but it is a partner ship. We will go to them with our ideas for what we want to do next, and then we'll marry that with what the business realities are. That's one of my key responsibilities here at Treyarch, to make sure we're doing what we want to be doing. I can tell you that after this game ships we're not done – we're going to keep supporting it with the help of our partners. While we're not announcing our next project, we do have a vested interest in Call of Duty's future.

Modern Warfare 2 had a lot of issues with cheating and balancing. How are you planning to deal with those issues?

We've actually engineered quite a bit of security measures into the game. Due to the popularity of World at War, we've had a lot of experience with these types of issues, and we released a lot of updates to that game to fix cheats and hacks. That gave us good insight into how we wanted to design our engine this time around. More importantly, there's a commitment. We'll fix something, and someone else will try to hack something else, and we'll just be on them constantly. So it's a technical thing, and it's also just a determination to deal with it more aggressively. It's a bummer when you're working really hard but there are a bunch of people on the leaderboards that have clearly hacked in front of you.

Bobby Kotick has made some comments that have suggested the future of Call of Duty might be – not necessarily an MMO – but perhaps a larger, persistent world of some sort. Is that something you are thinking about?

It's not something I spend a lot of time trying to figure out right now, but I think that online is clearly a huge part of Call of Duty. It wouldn't surprise me if you saw a new business model emerge that wasn't just box product. Whether that's transaction based or subscription based, we're starting to see some of them. EA's done some of that with their Battlefield game that was supported by transaction. I think every publisher is looking at those things. If you're not looking at that, that's probably a big mistake.

As an FPS developer, do you think that Move or Kinect will ever be able to offer you the kind of quick, responsive controls you need?

I think there's a place for gesture-based movement in the game, we do it with the Wii version of Call of Duty. I can tell you that we did not consider Wii, Move, or Kinect for Call of Duty: Black Ops. [and we] have no plans for that. Black Ops wasn't designed that way. I wouldn't want to take your hand off the controller. But I could imagine a game with the pacing where that works. There are a lot of hand gestures in the military where you could put that off. Whether that's fun or not, that's up to the creators.

Whether it's Call of Duty or Spider-Man or James Bond, you've always worked on games based on existing licenses or IPs. Do you have any ambition to create an IP and a universe from the ground up in the future?

In my career, I've helped build new IP including Call of Duty, but as far as Treyarch is concerned, it wouldn't surprise me if some original property comes out of it in the future. It wouldn't surprise me the least bit. It wouldn't surprise me if the Call of Duty franchise spawns its own spinoffs. Do you know right now? I honestly do not, but I think in order to create triple-A IP and for a publisher to back you, you have to be able to produce the highest quality content in the industry. *

interview by Matt Heggen

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1980 BASIC TRAINING

After not letting things bother him, FPS BOO Lamia brands his own making his own games by copying B&B's "demo programs out of books and magazines."

1985 POWERFUL STUFF

Lamia falls in love with Halo: a politics strategy game created by legendary designer Chris Sawyer.

1989 A NEW DIMENSION

Lamia plays a 3D PC game for the first time.

1990 HIGHER ED

Lamia attends his first college planning class at TA during San Jose State's computer era.

1993 RISE OF THE SHOOTERS

Now in law school, Lamia hits

1995 A BIG KICK

Now with a law degree, Lamia decides to follow his heart into gaming, creating an early Xbox production at Activision. His last job entails running CDs for the studio's various development teams.

1998 PRODUCING KINETIC

Lamia gets his big break producing the game Halo for PowerGen.

2000 BIG TIME

Lamia is promoted to VP of Activision's North American division. He works with several major and external marketing ID software.

2002 LIGHTNING BOLT

Activision signs Infinity Ward.

2006 NEW GIG

Lamia transfers from Activision to Treyarch, joining them as VP of COO. He is in his studio home in MD.

2008 ON FIRE

Lamia works on World at War, the most work to date. This game is highly popular on Xbox Live.



Apple iPod Line

Apple has once again tweaked its legendary

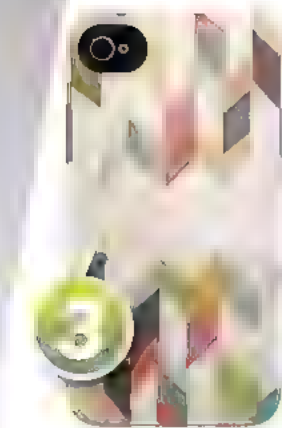
series of iPod products. This year features the most drastic changes to the players in several years, with a completely new Nano and upgraded Shuffle and Touch.

The aesthetic changes to the Nano line are immediately noticeable. Slimmed down to the same form factor as the tiny Shuffle, the Nano is now a touch-screen-only device perfect for anyone on the go. With a built-in FM radio, support for Nike+iPod, and Genius playlists, working out never sounded so good. Apple also claims it has a 24-hour battery life. While the new version doesn't have video support, the touch screen does display a clock app that crafty consumers have already turned into a high-tech wristwatch.

Apple brought back the face buttons to the Shuffle as well as a cool feature that speaks the name of the song or artist playing using a text-to-speech system. The iPod Touch has also undergone some handy upgrades, including a lot of the features that came to the iPhone 4 – a high-resolution Retina display, HD video, FaceTime video calling, and the new Apple Game Center.

Shuffle \$49 (2GB)
Nano \$149 (8GB)
Touch \$229 (8GB)
apple.com





1 | Logitech G930 Headset

Logitech takes another swing in the fight for the ultimate gaming headset with the G930. This 7.1 surround sound wireless system may be a little bulky, but the G930s are more comfortable than they look. The well-designed headset sports customizable G keys, a volume roller, and mute button. The pivoting microphone glows red when muted, but seeing it requires the aim to be in a very specific place in front of your face. The sound quality is good, though the extra two channels in the 7.1 aren't very noticeable. The real issue with the G930s is the battery life. While Logitech claims around 10 hours before a charge, we were lucky if it lasted for five.

AVAILABLE
\$159
 logitech.com

2 | Nikon D7000

If you're enthusiastic about taking photos, maybe it's time to step up your gear. Nikon's latest camera, the D7000, takes you, from the boring world of point-and-shoot to the much more awesome "prosumer" level. Sporting a 16.2 megapixel CMOS sensor, full HD video capture with autofocus, and the ability to mount hundreds of lenses, the D7000 gives you the

flexibility of a professional camera with the comfort and ease of use of a point-and-shoot. The new camera also sports an upgraded 39-point autofocus system, dual SDHC card support, and a rugged magnesium alloy body. If you want to start shooting with the big dogs, the D7000 is a great tool for turning you into the next David LaChapelle.

\$1,199
 nikonusa.com

3 | Uncommon Deflector

Protect your iPhone in style with an Uncommon Deflector. Unlike other case companies that use decals or stickers, Uncommon uses a proprietary printing system called 3DTATT that embeds the image into the plastic of the case. This prevents fading and wear problems associated with paper stickers. It also means that you can upload a high-resolution photo of your beloved pug wearing a sailor suit. Uncommon also has designs available by other artists and users on its website. The case itself is a thin, hard plastic that features a special anti-glare camera ring that prevents interference with photos.

\$34.95
 getuncommon.com

4 | Xbox 360 Wireless Controller

When Microsoft surprised us with a refreshed controller with a new D-pad, everyone in the office let out a collective cheer. While the Xbox 360 controller remains our landslide favorite, in overall design the D-pad has always been the lone offender in an otherwise solid controller. This silver beast features a grayscale aesthetic, and a twistable D-pad that reveals the raised "plus" shape that we all know and love. While the physical button feels different, the D-pad's responsiveness only delivers slightly better results than the old model. The analog sticks have also been slightly tweaked with a new concave ridge to help your thumbs stay in place. Even though the new D-pad doesn't perform as we hoped, the Xbox 360 Wireless Controller is still the best option for 360 players.

AVAILABLE
\$64.99 (with Play and Charge kit only)
 xbox.com

MEDIA SHELF



BACK TO THE FUTURE 25TH ANNIVERSARY

AVAILABLE
\$19.98
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TOP GEAR 13

We can't get enough of the British thrashome of Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond, and James May. In this season, they race through Abu Dhabi in a Lamborghini, act like 17-year-olds in cheap cars, and race the post office from England to Scotland in a Porsche.

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HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

How hard can it be? Jeremy Clarkson adds a new twist to his The W...
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It's All Temporary



As you've probably guessed, I'm a gamer. If all goes according to plan, I intend to remain one well into old age. There's an inherent problem in this assumption, however. It's what you call a TAB — temporarily able-bodied person. This isn't a condition unique to me — you are afflicted, too. Advocates for accessibility in gaming use the term TAB as a great equalizer. The truth is that our health, physical prowess, and mental faculties are all only temporary. This obvious, inescapable reality is why gaming accessibility should be a mounting concern for industry players and consumers alike. The ability to enjoy video games unhindered throughout the span of your life is in the hands of developers.

Despite the looming threat of games being yanked out of my aged hands, I only lead with the above concern to make the issue easier to digest for those unfamiliar with game accessibility. Lack of awareness or intentional marginalization on the part of developers often leaves gamers with disabilities — visual, auditory, speech, cognitive, physical, or otherwise — on the sidelines. There is no denying that the vast degrees of disabilities make it impossible to create a universally accessible game, but there are simple steps developers can take to make their games more inclusionary.

The harsh reality is that in the current video game climate, the majority of hardware, software, and peripherals are inaccessible to many gamers. Blockbuster titles still ship without subtitles, eliminating the deaf community from having the chance to enjoy creative works well deserving of their time and appreciation. In other instances, a developer's unwillingness to allow for reconfigurable controls makes it impossible for a gamer with a physical limitation to use a custom controller for play — a controller for which they were more than willing to pay hundreds of dollars.

The severity of disabilities can range from unnoticeable to inescapable. Chances are you

know someone with a disability, be it a slight case of colorblindness, a mild manifestation of autism, or full-blown muscular dystrophy. Whether or not you have a disability, accessible technology benefits all gamers. The same way closed captioning helps you keep tabs on your favorite sports team in a loud bar, or wheelchair ramps are a salvation when struggling with heavy luggage, accessibility features in gaming can be used by everyone. I want closed captioning implemented in my favorite games to ensure I don't have to shelve my playtime late at night when family is visiting. At this point, it seems inexcusable not to include closed captions. After being called out for skipping closed captioning in the original *Assassin's Creed*, Ubisoft promised to include the feature in all games moving forward, a commendable move, on its part.

As for reconfigurable controls? Ask my fellow editor Annette Gonzalez what a godsend they were after having surgery on her shoulder. For a more potent and relevant example, consider all the war veterans returning home to their previous lives. Many are young and consider themselves gamers, but are now forced to contend with unexpected physical or mental impairments that prevent them from returning

by Meagan VanBurklee,
associate editor,
Game Informer

play as they once had.

Contending against the diversity of disabilities is difficult when it comes to game design, and I understand that accessibility features aren't always easy to implement. But at what point do we begin to hold developers to a higher standard and demand that steps are taken? Not all considerations are massive undertakings. Allowing for customizable text size and scroll rate in both dialogue and user interfaces can help alleviate symptoms of visual disabilities. Something as simple as including multiple difficulty settings can go a long way in allowing gamers with cognitive or physical impairments to engage in play. If balancing multiple difficulty settings requires too much commitment, then how about the inclusion of cheats for non-competitive play? God mode would not only help newer and inexperienced gamers fully enjoy a title, but also allow for a gamer with a disability to enjoy a game to which they might otherwise not have access.

Some accessibility considerations would require only a minimal amount of education on the developer's end. The tendency to rely on color as an important visual indicator is dangerous, for example. Considering the high rate of colorblindness in

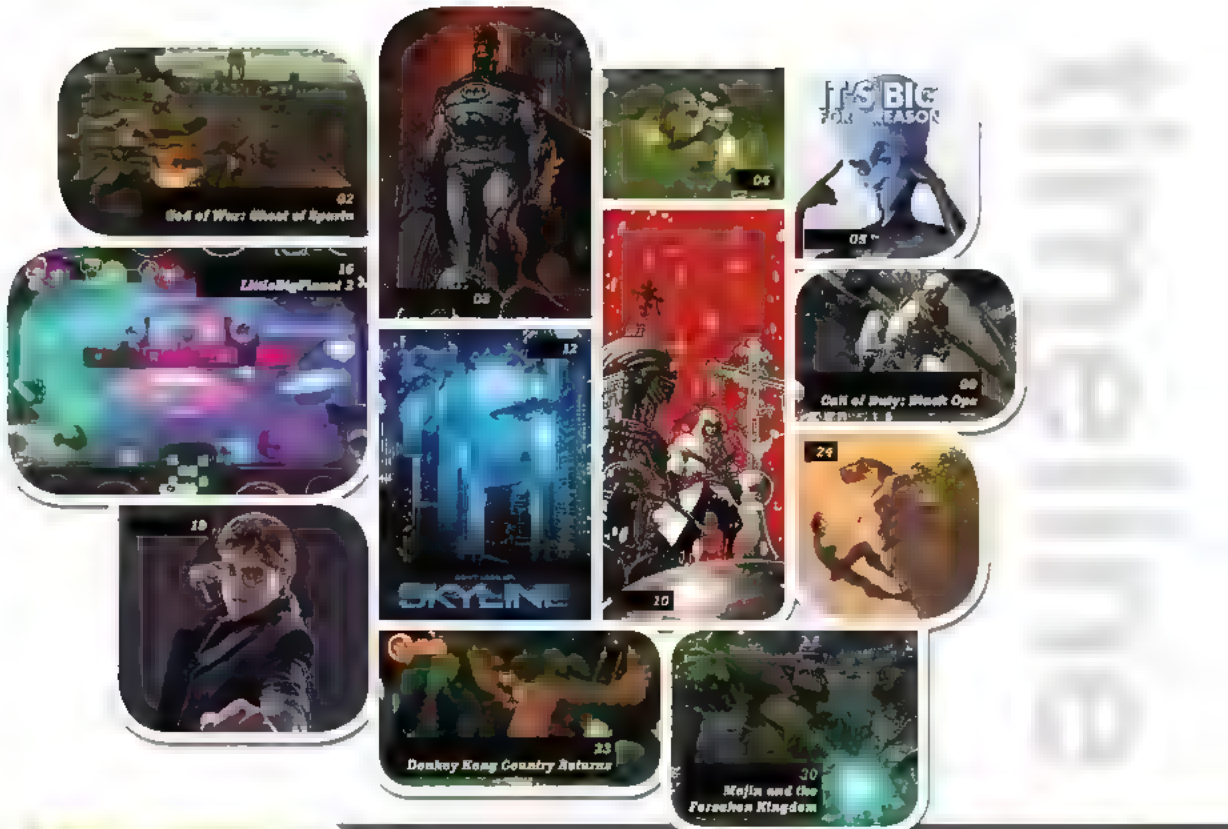
males, it always surprises me that color is the main differentiator of teams in multiplayer first-person shooters.

These small-but-potent changes are the bulk of what gamers with disabilities desire. They aren't demanding game-breaking additions or that a majority of resources should be reallocated to suit their unique needs. Rather, they simply ask to be a part of the development process from the beginning.

Is there such a thing as a universally accessible game? No — and there never will be. Lack of awareness and limited resources are the most commonly echoed sentiments I hear in regards to the reason accessibility features are ignored by developers. This makes me wonder if we will ever reach a point that accessibility features are relegated as essential game design instead of a pleasant afterthought. How long will these excuses cut it? Will the issue of accessible design remain on the back burner until it becomes personal? Because it will. Remember, it's all temporary.

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 Heinyard at matt@gameinformer.com



November

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02 New Releases

Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Search for Aang (DVD)
 Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Search for Aang (Blu-ray)
 Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Search for Aang (DVD)
 Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Search for Aang (Blu-ray)
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 Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Search for Aang (DVD)
 Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Search for Aang (Blu-ray)

03 Redout (PS3, X360)
 Wheel of Fortune (Wii DS)

03 Redout: The Bat

DC's iconic cap is in a safe direction for Batman. Once again, the company is giving fans behind-the-scenes a peek with a new game, set in the world of the movie and the Dark Knight universe. The new Redout game is powered by Grant Tinker's Gotham City, featuring the character in the role of the main character. The game series are ongoing, as it really promises any thing they'll be replacing in a year or two by something else.

04 Microsoft Rolls Out Controller-Free Gaming

Microsoft's Xbox 360 console is now available in three different configurations. The first is the standard Xbox 360 console, which costs \$299.99. The second is the Xbox 360 console with Kinect, which costs \$399.99. The third is the Xbox 360 console with Kinect and the Kinect for Xbox 360, which costs \$499.99. The Kinect for Xbox 360 is a motion-sensing device that allows you to play games without a controller. It's a great way to experience games in a new way.

05 Will Ferrell: Who Cares?

Will Ferrell's comedy film "Who Cares?" is a hilarious look at the life of a man who is a total mess. It's a comedy that will have you laughing out loud. It's a great way to spend your time.

06 Halo: Reach (X360)
 Halo: Reach is a first-person shooter game set in the Halo universe. It's a great way to experience the Halo universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

08 New Releases

09 Halo: Reach (X360)
 Halo: Reach is a first-person shooter game set in the Halo universe. It's a great way to experience the Halo universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

10 A New Wrinkle in The Assassin's Creed Mythos

Assassin's Creed II will likely debut a new protagonist, who'll be a 15th-century Italian assassin named Ezio. In the new game, Ezio will be a young man who is a great fighter and a great leader. It's a great way to experience the Assassin's Creed mythos in a new way.

12 Budget War Of The Worlds

The new addition to the Skyline series is a budget-friendly game that's a great way to experience the Skyline series in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

11 Halo: Reach (X360)
 Halo: Reach is a first-person shooter game set in the Halo universe. It's a great way to experience the Halo universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

16 New Releases

17 Halo: Reach (X360)
 Halo: Reach is a first-person shooter game set in the Halo universe. It's a great way to experience the Halo universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

19 Harry Potter VII: Part 1 Of 15

Since the story of the books ends with an incredibly intense battle, it's likely that the movie will be a bit of a cliffhanger. It's a great way to experience the Harry Potter series in a new way.

21 New Releases

22 Halo: Reach (X360)
 Halo: Reach is a first-person shooter game set in the Halo universe. It's a great way to experience the Halo universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

24 New-Age Disney Schlock

When a Disney movie is released, it's a great way to experience the Disney universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

30 New Releases

31 Halo: Reach (X360)
 Halo: Reach is a first-person shooter game set in the Halo universe. It's a great way to experience the Halo universe in a new way. It's a great way to spend your time.

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
PC
One-Player Shooters
Online TBA
ESRB Rating
M
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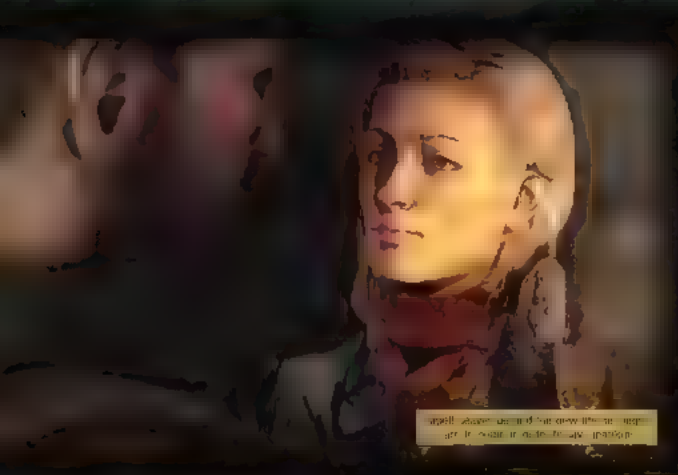
RESISTANCE 3

When Freedom Falls, A Hero Must Stand

Nathan Hale is dead. The Chimera have won. America is dying. The country is pocked with smoking craters, like the one in the head of Joseph Capelli's former lieutenant. Mercy made him end Hale's life, an easy way to stop the Chimera virus from consuming the war hero. Unlike Hale, Capelli couldn't purge the six-eyed evil from Earth with a single bullet, or a thousand. That futility is why he defected from the military, hung up his gatling gun, and tried to start a family in hiding. But the scant surviving humans on the planet are being frozen and scraped from Earth's surface like warts. With his family threatened by the screeching parasites, **Joe Capelli embarks on the trip of his life.**



by Tim Turi

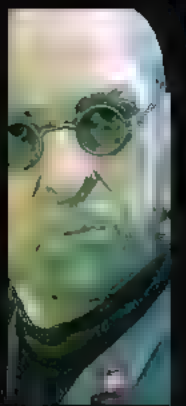


Capelli, who once worked for the military, says he made it hard to leave the profession.

Malikov Lives!

Fyodor Malikov is Resistance's genius scientist, and the man who's responsible for engineering the superhuman Sentinels, powerful soldiers using the Chimera virus to their advantage. He also unintentionally spawned Resistance 2's antagonist. An intel document in Resistance 2 suggests the doctor was contemplating suicide, but we now know he had a change of heart.

"Obviously, he feels responsible and a huge amount of guilt for all the pain and suffering he's caused," lead writer Jon Paquette explains. "With Project Abraham he actually created Daedalus, and in a way he was responsible for Hale's death because Hale succumbed to the Chimera virus and Capelli was forced to kill him. Malikov came to his senses and said, 'You know what? I'm the world's expert on the Chimera virus. I know the Chimera better than anybody. I'm either going to die trying or eventually overcome.'"



Human units hanging on a tattered hook in a kitchen suggests chaos reigned in his brutal world.

Insomniac is known for its uncanny ability to continually churn out polished critical darlings.

From its PlayStation offerings like *Spyro the Dragon* to the consistently awesome PS2 and PS3 Ratchet & Clank games, the company has been among Sony's top guns for over a decade. As a testament to its pedigree, Insomniac is continuing to evolve: Its developmental prowess will soon spread to Xbox 360, and the PS3-exclusive Resistance brand has become one of Sony's treasured franchises.

The California and North Carolina-based developer crafted a premier launch title out of a brand new IP with Resistance: Fall of Man and Resistance 2 was an ambitious game that crammed a ton of content onto its Blu-ray disc. These two titles were high-quality gaming experiences, but Insomniac is certain it can deliver an even more polished experience with Resistance 3's extended development time.

"As a philosophy at Insomniac, we now believe the more time you can spend watching people play the game, making tweaks, and getting in there and turning the knobs, the better your game is going to be," says Insomniac president Ted Price. "It's that last 10 percent that you hear developers talk about all the time that is so important to get right. Usually that 10 percent is the difference between a game that's good, and a mega-hit." Sony gets it, and the publisher granted an entire extra year of development time for Resistance 3.

This exciting new title marks the studio's first departure from its standard two-year development cycle, and the benefits of extra time already show. The biggest change in the design process comes from behind the wheel, as series creator Ted Price is handing the reins to former Resistance project manager Marcus Smith. "We've always had a very collaborative approach to the design process, so it's not as if I'm giving up my baby," says Price. "A lot of people have been heavily invested in Resistance and Marcus is one of them, so it was great to see someone else bring their enthusiasm to leading the team creatively."

"I have big shoes to fill," Smith admits. "Ted is a charismatic leader and is a great guy to work for. He really knows how to unify a team in a way that I've really not seen."

Marcus makes it clear that Insomniac's goal is to not only embrace and polish the inventive gameplay that made the series a critical hit, but also to create an engaging drama of a man traveling to save his family.

A World In Ruin

At the end of Resistance 2, Lieutenant Nathan Hale and Joseph Capelli eradicate Casdelus and an entire Chimeran air fleet. Following her triumph, the Chimeran virus, which gave former series protagonist Nathan Hale his regenerative powers, began overtaking him. Hale then looked to the skies as he spoke in a haunting alien voice about the beauty of Earth's inevitable downfall. Fellow virus-enhanced Sentinel Joseph Capelli drops his usual disrespectful attitude to deliver on a promise: "Forgive me, sir. It was an honor." Capelli says before putting a bullet through Hale's head, ending his life and the Chimeran influence on him.

Video game fans are known to cling onto their beloved characters. Look no further than the fan backlash regarding Cole's redesign in *InFamous 2*. It gets even more treacherous with wholesale replacement with Metal Gear Solid 2's Solid Snake's swap

with pretty boy Raiden serving as a strong example. Spotlighting a new main character is tough enough, and unapologetically murdering your protagonist is even rarer.

"I think internally we were really excited by the idea," Smith reveals about killing off Hale. "We were like, 'Oh my god, yeah! Let's do that! I guess moving into Resistance 3, it became more of a marketing question: Are people going to accept us with moving in a new direction? Who cares, let's make a great game!'"

If you think that Capelli's turn in the spotlight comes out of nowhere, Insomniac begs to differ. "In Project Abraham, the alternate reality game that we did, Joe Capelli was a very big part of that experience," explains director of brand development Ryan Schneider. "We played up that tension between Capelli and Hale at the very beginning of telling the larger Resistance tale. It's not too big of a surprise that Capelli would take on such a center stage role, because we've been setting that up throughout Resistance 2."

During the four years since Corporal Capelli shot Hale like debris from the crumbling SRPA (Special Research Projects Administration), gives up his



Capelli's return, we're going to have a look at a much more complex

killing ways, abandons his bad attitude, and starts a family. The Chimera now completely occupy North America and the rest of the world. Having converted enough humans for their army, they're now in the process of exterminating the remaining pests. One such genocidal attack reduces the Capelli home in Haven, Oklahoma, to splinters. Survivors in the town emerge through underground tunnels to defend their homes. Following a futile last stand by the town's inhabitants, Capelli reunites with his wife Susan and their joy wick. Devout Resistance fans will recognize Capelli's wife as Nathan Hale's stepsister from William Dietz's novel *Resistance: The Gathering Storm*. Their son is very ill from the frigid temperatures caused by the Chimera. Susan says there's a way to save the boy: Dr. Malikov, the foremost expert on Chimera, told her so. But to find if Capelli must travel to New York.

"Malikov managed to extract some blood from Nathan Hale and discovered that he had some special antibodies inside of him," explains Jon Paquette, lead writer for Resistance 3. "From that they were able to develop a Hale vaccine, which is essentially a cure for the Chimera virus." Now

continued on page 58



Capelli's return, we're going to have a look at a much more complex

continued from page 54

Capelli must somehow use the Hale vaccine to inoculate the small number of surviving humans.

Insomniac remains cryptic regarding further plot specifics, but the trek from Oklahoma to New York City suggests that the Hale vaccine could save the remnants of humanity if brought to the Big Apple, which is likely rotten by now. Malkov decides to accompany Capelli throughout the quest, but it won't be easy.

"Malkov has become a little older, he's become a little more frail," Paquette explains. "He's not going to be a gun-toting, shooting guy in this game. But he is going to be with Joe Capelli on his journey... Joe's changed ways and Malkov's impatience result in a strained relationship early on, but Paquette suggests the duo will learn to cooperate during the journey."

Survival In An Unforgiving World

One leg in the journey to New York finds the pair boating across a flooded town on the way to St. Louis, Missouri. Floating along what was once a high school football field, they pass the disturbing image of a waterlogged school bus. A moment later they confront something even more unsettling—alien plant life. Capelli curiously fires a Magnum round into the glowing yellow plant's swollen yellow bulb, causing a volatile explosion that knocks over a nearby sign. This, along with huge icy shafts jutting into the earth, are signs that the Chimera are terraforming their new home.

Even grander evidence of Chimera occupation lies further down in the murky waters. The enormous carcass of a Kraken is splayed across a section of a collapsed bridge like a nightmarish rotting island. Its exposed entrails are being consumed by a pack of "scapers." The Chimera's formerly domesticated beasts are now feral and populate the planet, killing on their own terms.

Novelty candy canes and other Christmas decorations float by in the water as Capelli and Malkov's boat nears the center of town. An eerie silence chills the men as they pass a motel. Malkov calls out for any potential survivors, and the only response is the dull puffing of the boat's engine. Suddenly, something moves across a motel window, knocking something over with a crash. In the blink of an eye a massive torrent of Grims rush from the ravaged building, leaping and yawning as they claw their way onto the vessel.

"Everyone in the town gathered here after the Liberty Tower Defense System fell to decide what to do, to stick around for the military to evacuate them or to try to get out themselves," Smith explains. "Half of the town left to try to make it out by boat. The other half stayed here... and bad things happened."

The Grims swarm Capelli and Malkov unhindered, their tendency to overhear remedied by the artificially lowered temperature. Capelli quickly reaches for his Marksman rifle, using its alternate fire to drop an electrical turret at the ship's stern. He then produces his upgraded Magnum handgun, firing several remote detonated rounds into the dense mob, which fragment into smaller explosives. Once Capelli hits the trigger, each round combusts, sending a handful of the stinking bastards and a Santa decoration flying skyward. He cleans up the remaining Grims with his trusty Fossmore shotgun, thanking his maker he brought the whole arsenal this time.

In the last game, Hale was limited to carrying two weapons at once, a fact lamented by many reviewers


who loved the great weapon variety in the first game. Capelli has no such restrictions in Resistance 3. "The move away from the two-weapon system of Resistance 2 to Resistance 3 is less a reaction to anyone in particular and more about making the game that we want to make," Smith comments.

Inventive weaponry is one of Insomniac's calling cards, and granting players access to the robust armory opens up more strategic opportunities. Returning weaponry consists of the updated classics like the previously mentioned, along with the Bullseye and Auger. Players can now accumulate points by using specific guns and use that currency to upgrade their weaponry. Human weapons aren't the cut-of-the-crate army issue guns of previous games, however. They're appropriately cobbled together out of the salvaged scrap of a post-apocalyptic world.

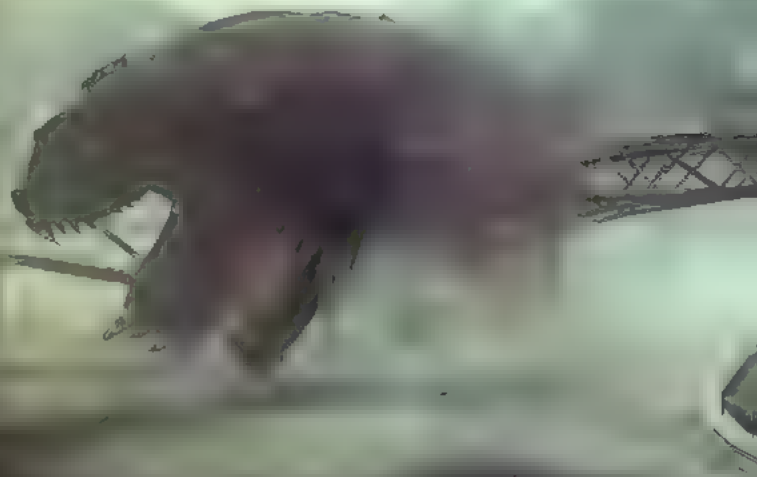
"We're trying to make everything look a little more improvised by the human resistance," Smith clarifies. "Even the fragmentation grenades is much more hand-made. Its model is a can of beans with nails strapped around it."

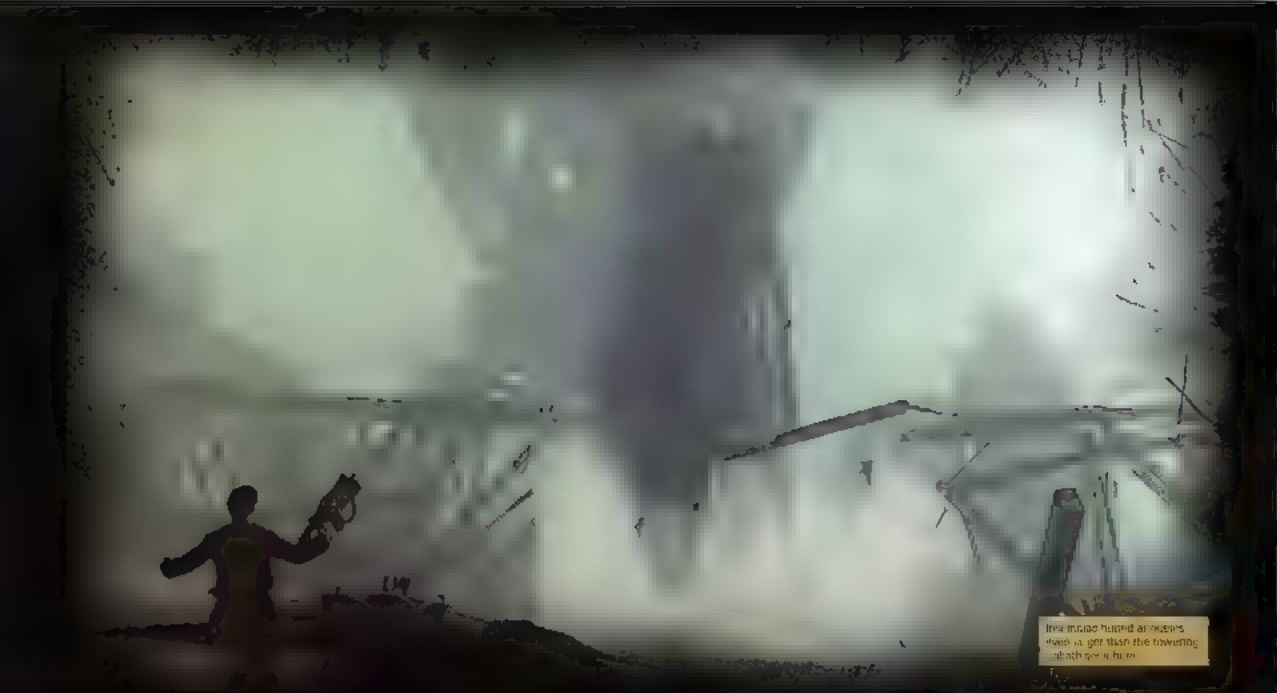
Back on the boat, Capelli and Malkov's aquatic voyage funnels onto a swoller. Over Malkov checks the map and discovers they're on the Mississippi heading towards St. Louis. Before the two have time to talk specifics, a terrible noise rumbles from the distance. Turbulent waves are coupled with the sound of crashing water and grinding machinery. Cold yellow

continued on page 56

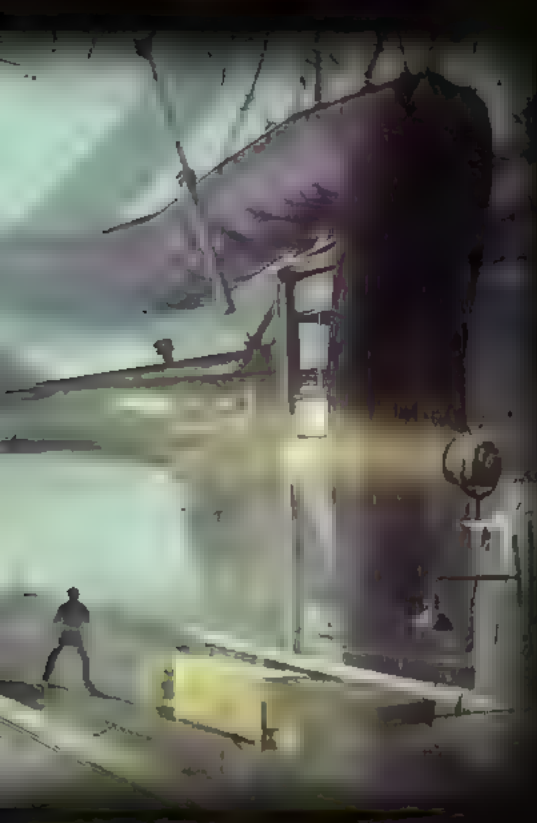


It's a Kraken, the most dangerous of all the things that live here.





These mobile hunters are easier to keep at bay than the towering, stationary behemoths.



Building Better Bad Guys

For an alien species capable of conquering the world, the Chimera's AI wasn't very clever in the first two Resistance titles. In the first game enemies could fire at you from across the map with impossible precision. Resistance 2 attempted to remedy this by implementing a proximity-based awareness system, which resulted in enemies who ignored you until you crossed an invisible threshold. Insomniac is addressing these issues by finding a sweet spot between the two approaches. Foes no longer begin firing at you immediately on sight. Rather, players have a moment to conceal themselves before coming under fire. For example, if you attack an enemy through the window of a darkened house, they'll confusedly seek out your location instead of instantly zoning in on you. In addition to shooting you after being spotted, the crafty creatures now try to cut off and flank your position.



Cinematic Traversal

Not only are the Chimera getting smarter (see pg. 57), but they're also becoming more agile. Previous Resistance games featured enemy movement that was hand-scripted by developers. This newest Chimera could only enter a window or climb a wall if designed to do so. Insomniac's Cinematic Traversal technology bestows the Chimera with a suite of context-sensitive movement options. No longer will waist-high cover prevent a Hybrid from cracking your skull open with a melee attack.



Cooperative Concessions

Malikiev isn't the only company players will have throughout the campaign. Rather than sticking with the standalone cooperative concept from Resistance 2, Insomniac is allowing two players to team up during Capell's Journey to New York. Capell's partner is named John Marpac, but nothing more is being revealed about this mysterious sidekick. "We are focusing more on creating a fun experience than integrating it into the story, so that people aren't constantly trying to find story loopholes," explains creative director Marcus Smith. "He's integrated into the story a little bit, but largely it's made for two people to have fun with."

So why did Insomniac ditch their eight-player standalone co-op mode from Resistance 2? "The biggest shift in our focus on co-op is really trying to focus and have a uniform experience for the player—playing single-player, playing with a friend, and having that same unified experience and really crafting that into an outstanding player experience," Smith remarks. "That is more important to us than trying to craft a whole different mission-based system. Getting players in and experiencing the same high level of quality in the single-player game is really our biggest goal."

Following Ravagers return from the planet's surface.



The Mutator

This piece of devastating new weaponry harnesses an infectious biological agent designed to give the Chimera a taste of their own medicine. The weapon's primary fire pellets a target in sticky green mist, causing bulbous cysts to erupt all over its body and mutating the target into a combustible land mine that infects nearby Chimera. Alternate fire unleashes a diseased mist that disorients all enemies in the area, leaving them vulnerable to a volley of shotgun blasts. The Mutator can be upgraded to affect the Chimera on a cerebral level as well, causing them to go berserk and attack their teammates. Even the lumbering Ravagers can be soaked in the nasty stuff.



Hold The Line

Insomniac is committed to the online competitive multiplayer, but don't expect the novel 60-player battles of *Resistance 2* to continue with the single-player campaign, the team is aiming for a more focused experience.

"The approach to *Resistance 3* is to really streamline the things that were really popular with *Resistance 1* and *Resistance 2*," says creative director Marcus Smith. "Obviously weapon usage is a big one, but we also have our progression through multiplayer which is a lot tighter. It's going to reward people as they go. We're also setting the location of all our multiplayer maps in various locations around the world. During the single-player campaign you'll be having specific bits of a side story of those battles as you're progressing through the game."



Hold The Line

Like Capelli, Insomniac's path into the future is unclear. The company announced a partnership deal with EA Partners last May that became a multiplatform developer. This could lead some to believe that the Sony-owned *Resistance* franchise may be waning with Insomniac's loyalty split between the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

Some of the hardcore PS3 fans express disappointment because they assume we would be diminishing our efforts on PS3 somehow, but that's not the case," Ted Price assures us. "With *Resistance 3* and with the announcement of *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*, we're proving that our dedication to PlayStation 3 is just as strong. I hope that at this point that both multiplatform owners and PS3 fans are happy."

When asked whether *Resistance 3* will be the closing of a trilogy like Sony's popular *God of War* series, Marcus Smith takes a moment to ponder the question. "I don't think so," he replies. "I think *Resistance 3* is a story within the *Resistance* universe that can be expanded upon. There is definitely going to be a beginning, middle, and end, but we're really trying to make it something people won't have to finish *Resistance 1* and *2* to get a great experience from. We want fans of the franchise to get a lot out of it, but we don't want to be bogged down as much in the storyline that new players won't understand what's going on. I believe there will be doors closed, but they won't be slammed." ☺

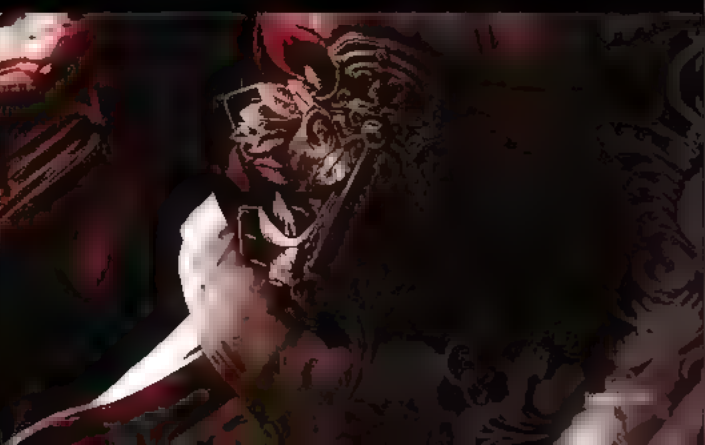
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THINGS TO
KNOW BEFORE
YOU PLAY
ASSASSIN'S
CREED:
BROTHERHOOD

BY MATT MITCHELL



Who knew what to make of Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood when it was first announced. Would it be a direct sequel to the last game or offer up a new protagonist? Was it an expansion? When E3 rolled around, it became clear that the new game has a lot of surprises in store for its players, from the addition of multiplayer to an entirely new system for building a personalized order of Assassins. When we visited Ubisoft Montreal this month to play the game for a full day, we found out the surprises were just getting started. In advance of the game's November release, we've gathered the 10 must-know features to prepare you for the biggest and most complex game yet in the franchise.



BUILDING THE BROTHERHOOD

Ezio was once a lone assassin rising through the ranks of the guild. Now he is the one master, and others flock to his banner. As Brotherhood progresses, players can train up to 12 unique individuals, each with his or her own equipment, costumes, and abilities.

The process begins with recruitment: potential assassins are scattered throughout the city vainly fighting back against the Borgias. Save them, and they'll join you. With their loyalty assured, Ezio can assign any number of his recruits a contract from any pigeon coop, hideout, or conquered tower. These unplayable missions take place in a tearaway city where the recruits will gain experience and shape the course of history. Many of the most challenging contracts are based on real-life assassinations from historical records of the period, and by completing them Ezio earns special unlocks and from rewards. Be careful whom you choose for these missions; if your ally falls, he will die.

When they return from a successful mission, your assassins will level up. Each of the 10 levels offers a single skill point that can be assigned to weapons or armor. You can also choose their outfit colors, creating a standard uniform for everyone or helping each one to stand out. At level 10 they join Ezio as a full-fledged member of the Assassins' Order.

We started recruiting right away, and finding leveling can go pretty quick with regular attention. Distant missions only take a few minutes. One cool assassination contract mission in Moscow — a historical turning point for the city — demands quite a bit of talent. We assign a level-six ally, but a 40-percent chance of success works out. And we add two level-four assassins as well. We send all three off and hope for the

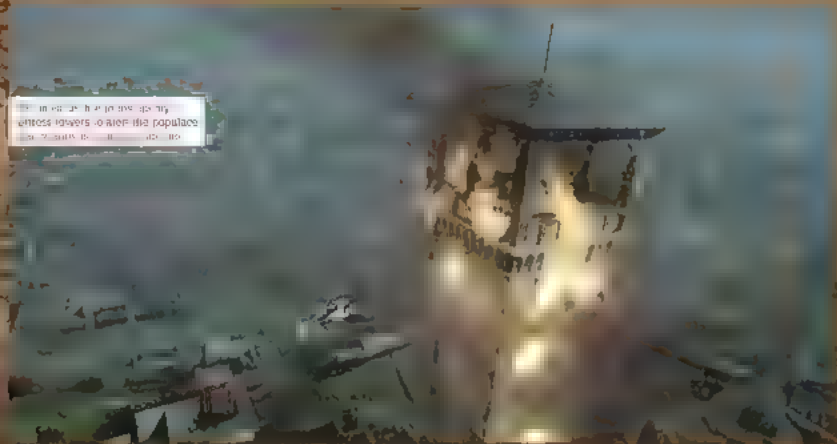
the more guards there are, the more likely it is that an assassination target remains in place, but it's not always that simple.

A ROMAN RENAISSANCE

The Borgia family has taken the new Spanish capital of Rome by storm. With the Borgias' help, the powerful Medici family of Florence has been overthrown, and the Medici family has been replaced in the city. During a

the next 10

the more guards there are, the more likely it is that an assassination target remains in place, but it's not always that simple.



ABSTERGO'S PERSPECTIVE

The multiplayer component of *Brotherhood* is tightly wound into the fiction, taking place both in the present day and during the Italian Renaissance. Abstergo is using its Animus machines as training tools, dropping its recruits into the past to learn the techniques of the assassins.

As one of these recruits, players experience multiplayer through an exciting ladder of unlocks and upgrades. Characters can equip two unique abilities that offer triggered actions to aid in attacks and escapes, such as hidden guns and smoke bombs. Players also gain two passive perks, like the ability to blend into the environment with greater ease. Players also get to chase kill streak and loss streak abilities—these special conditions only trigger after a successive set of failures. A kill streak might offer increased experience points for a string of assassinations, while a loss streak might trigger a reset of your ability cooldowns. You can set up to three profiles, each with different abilities, perks, and streak bonuses. Each player also gets to pick his or her character's costume before each match; each one has a unique style and animation suite.

We spent two hours exploring the new Alliance game mode, the cooperative variation on the cat and mouse gameplay that enthralled E3-goers earlier this year. We formed up into a two-person team and each adopted the priest costume before wading into the carnival-like setting of Siena. In one memorable exchange, our teammate was stalking our target when it became clear that she was being stalked herself. We ran past and dropped a smoke bomb, turning the hunter's attention away from our teammate and simultaneously triggering a sprint ability to put some distance between us. He pursued, leaving our teammate to continue her deadly approach and finish off our original target with a guisarme knife kill from behind. Her silent approach assured high point values for our team—the edge we needed to win the round.

with a flashy, rotating, contoured trend of the franchise—preference of the graphical realm and



9

• STORYLINES AND MISSIONS

From the story we learned upon him by his wife. After escaping, the rebellion for the assassination of the Pope is swift. Young and dangerous Cesare Borgia leads an army to devastate the Villa Audencia. Escaping to Rome, Ezio must rebuild his life, his family, and the assassins' guild that now looks to him for training and guidance.

Spanning across the years between 1499 and 1507, the game tells the second half of Ezio's adventures. If the last game was the story of Ezio's rise to prominence and power, this is the story of what he does with that owning and capability. The narrative is focused on themes of leadership and sacrifice, with missions that show Ezio's leadership skills and his ability to lead others. The story is rich on exposition and high on character development and plot.

At one point, having taken over a large estate, Ezio is given a large estate of his own. He adopts his guild. Outside, the other guilds follow our lead as we walk through town, heading to the great unknown site of a grand party where our assassination target is to be found. Walking blindly along, the guards behind us comment about Ezio's unusual route, thereby giving audio clues as to the right path. By commenting it is well, we can hear their questions, and we can hear the guild leader's question, and we can hear the guild leader's question.

with a flashy, rotating, contoured trend of the franchise—preference of the graphical realm and



A PAIRING OF EPIC PROPORTIONS

by Annette Gonzalez

Platform

PlayStation 3

Style

Action Adventure

Publisher

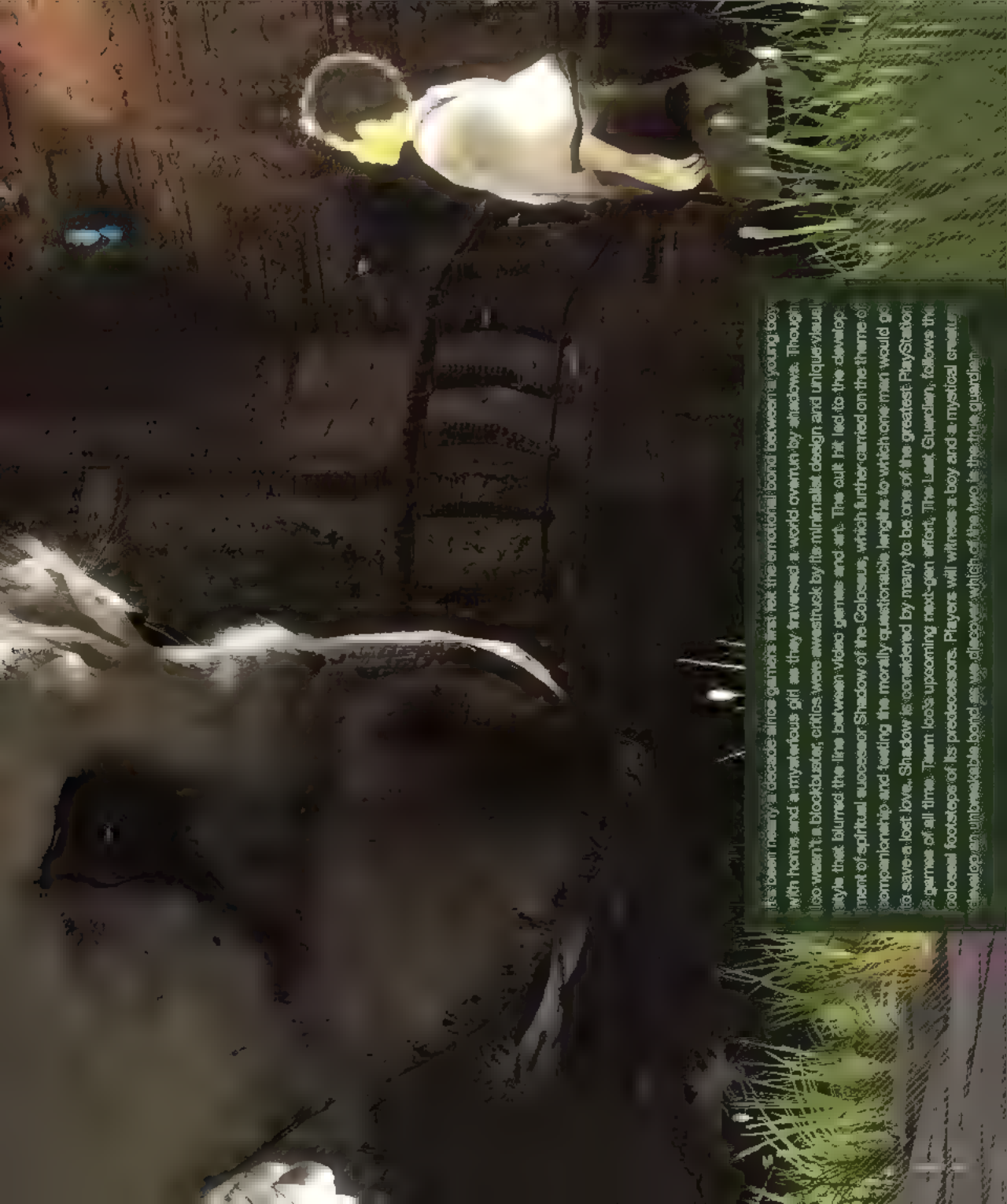
Sony Computer Entertainment

Developer

Team ICO

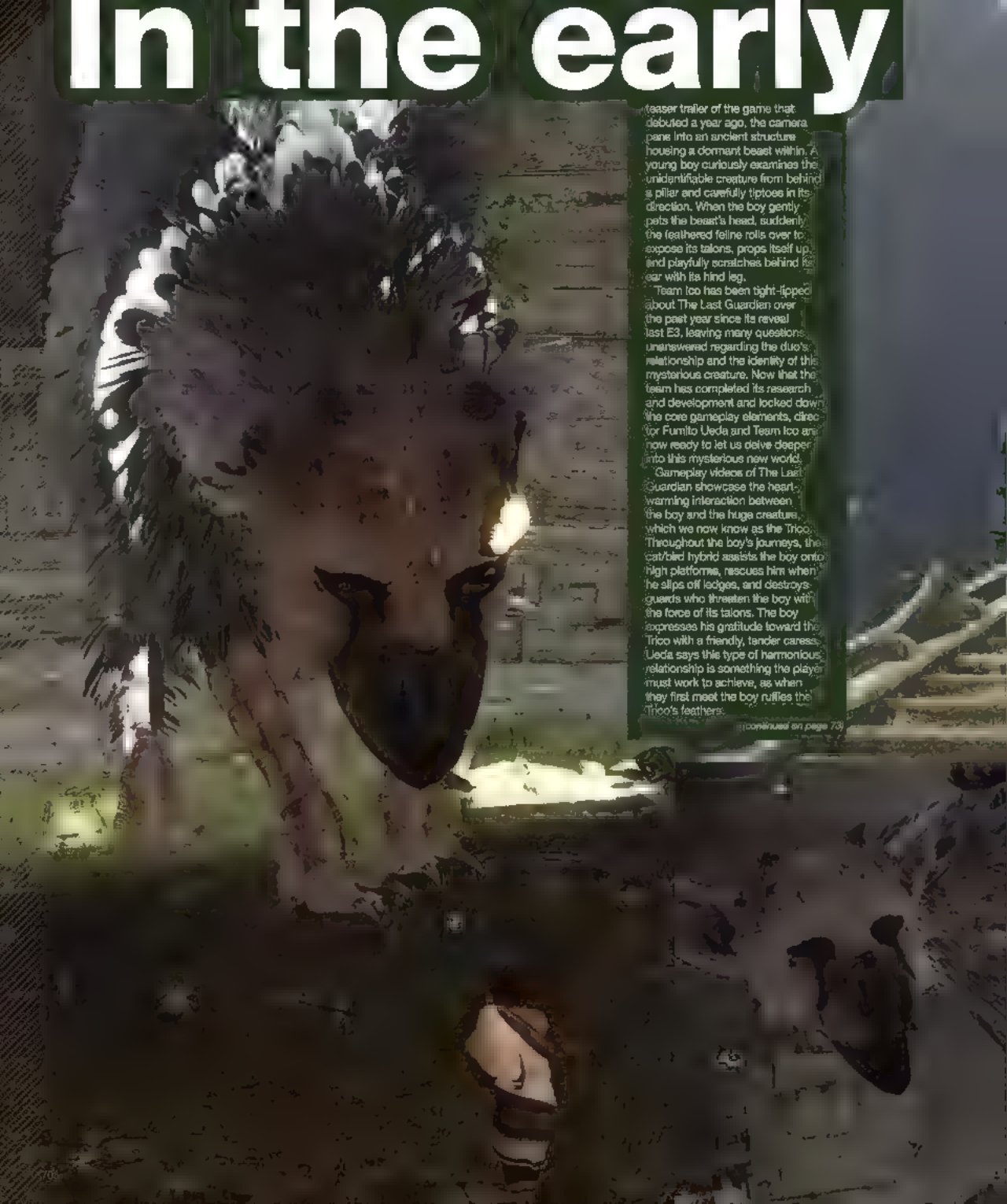
Release

February 20 1



It's been nearly a decade since gamers washed the emotional bond between a young boy with horns and a mysterious girl as they traversed a world overrun by shadows. Though also seen as a blockbuster, critics were awestruck by its minimalist design and unique visual style that blurred the line between video games and art. The cult hit led to the development of spiritual successor Shadow of the Colossus, which further carried on the theme of companionship and testing the morally questionable lengths to which one man would go to save a lost love. Shadow is considered by many to be one of the greatest PlayStation games of all time. Team Ico's upcoming next-gen effort, The Last Guardian, follows the colossal footsteps of its predecessors. Players will witness a boy and a mystical creature develop an unbreakable bond as we discover which of the two is the true guardian.

In the early

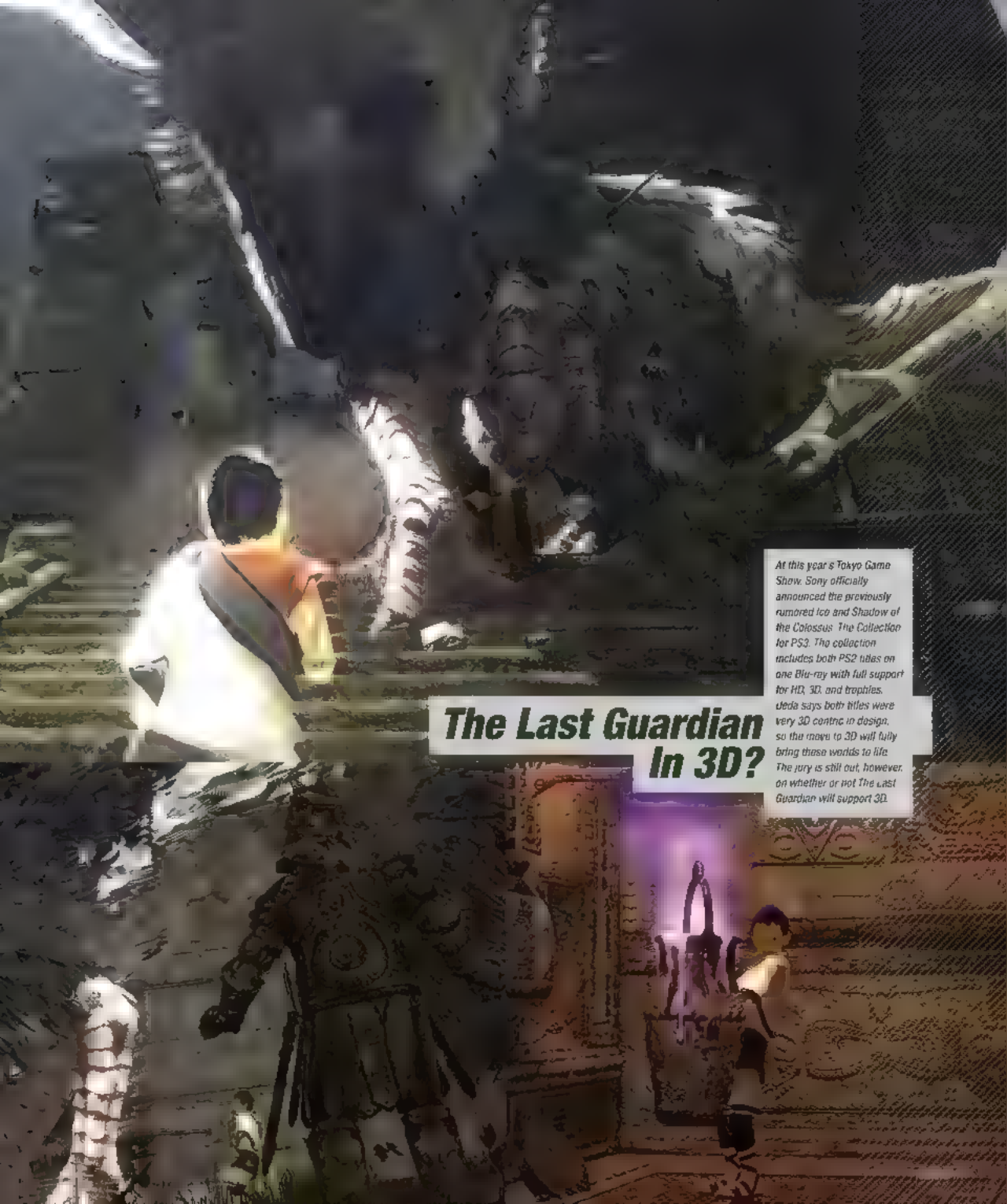


teaser trailer of the game that debuted a year ago, the camera pans into an ancient structure housing a dormant beast within. A young boy curiously examines the unidentifiable creature from behind a pillar and carefully tiptoes in its direction. When the boy gently pets the beast's head, suddenly the feathered feline rolls over to expose its talons, props itself up, and playfully scratches behind the boy with its hind leg.

Team Ico has been tight-lipped about *The Last Guardian* over the past year since its reveal last E3, leaving many questions unanswered regarding the duo's relationship and the identity of this mysterious creature. Now that the team has completed its research and development and locked down the core gameplay elements, director Fumito Ueda and Team Ico are now ready to let us delve deeper into this mysterious new world.

Gameplay videos of *The Last Guardian* showcase the heartwarming interaction between the boy and the huge creature, which we now know as the Trico. Throughout the boy's journeys, the cat/bird hybrid assists the boy onto high platforms, rescues him when he slips off ledges, and destroys guards who threaten the boy with the force of its talons. The boy expresses his gratitude toward the Trico with a friendly, tender caress. Ueda says this type of harmonious relationship is something the player must work to achieve, as when they first meet the boy ruffles the Trico's feathers.

(continued on page 73)



At this year's Tokyo Game Show, Sony officially announced the previously rumored Ico and Shadow of the Colossus: The Collection for PS3. The collection includes both PS2 titles on one Blu-ray with full support for HD, 3D, and trophies. Ueda says both titles were very 3D-centric in design, so the move to 3D will fully bring these worlds to life. The jury is still out, however, on whether or not The Last Guardian will support 3D.

The Last Guardian In 3D?

Connections To The Past

When Team Ico originally designed *Shadow of the Colossus*, the project began as an independent concept from Ico. It was only toward the end of development that Ueda and the team decided to connect the two. Both titles feature horned characters as protagonists, and both encounter shadowy figures. Ueda hasn't confirmed whether or not there will be a connection between *The Last Guardian* and its predecessors, but you may have noticed protruding bumps between the Trico's ears. Many have speculated that like Ico and *Shadow of the Colossus*, *The Last Guardian* will feature a heartbreaking ending, but Ueda says that the conclusion will be open-ended.

The current model of the Trico is meant to resemble a cat, which the team agreed to after scrapping previous iterations that looked more like a dog, or, in one case, a camel. Ueda says the cat and bird combo turned out to be most effective from a design standpoint because it can jump higher, duck lower, fit into smaller openings, and is more agile overall. This emphasis on the Trico's ability to move and adapt to dynamic spaces was a direct result of level design. Instead of building environments around the size of the massive creature, the team instead decided to design levels around the size of the small boy to accentuate the Trico's large scale. Thus, the Trico had to be flexible enough to fit into smaller spaces.

Designing The Boy And His Trico

During early stages of development, the protagonist was actually a girl. But after discussing the design implications, Ueda says the team moved away from this concept because the girl would have smaller hands and a weaker grip, and a skirt-wearing protagonist would make for awkward camera angles since a large component of *The Last Guardian* is climbing. In the end, the team settled on an energetic boy who is much younger than Ico. To emphasize co-dependency when progressing through levels in *The Last Guardian*, Team Ico didn't design the boy to be completely self-sufficient, but strong enough to hold onto the Trico's feathers.

Lost In Translation

In Japan, *The Last Guardian* is called *Mitoku no washi Toriko*. This literally translates to "Man-Eating Giant Eagle Trico" or "Trico the Man-Eating Giant Eagle." Ueda says the reason they chose this name because it signals that the boy will not know if the Trico is a friend or foe when they first team up. Though to us "man-eating" makes the Trico sound like a terrible creature, the term is commonly used in Japanese children's books and fairy tales. The word "Toriko" is also worth noting. It can mean prisoner or baby bird, and may be a hybrid of the Japanese words for bird (*tori*) and cat (*neko*).

(continued from page 70)

Part of Team Ico's

Inspiration for building *The Last Guardian* around the dynamic relationship between a boy and an animal character was the powerful emotional impact the relationship between Wander and his horse Agro had on players in *Shadow of the Colossus*. While Ueda has yet to explain how the boy finds the animal bound in chains, we're told the Trico is initially confused by the young boy and will not always respond to commands until the boy can gain its trust. Rather than adopt a fictional language as its predecessors Ico and Shadow of the Colossus did, in *The Last Guardian* the boy communicates with the Trico by calling its name or attracting its attention with a barrel or other object of interest. Getting the creature to follow instructions will present a challenge to the player in the game's stages, but the Trico will warm up to the boy as the story develops. Team Ico didn't reveal any of the core story elements, such as why this unlikely duo is teaming up or what they are trying to accomplish, but the developers did open up about their level design and gameplay philosophy for the project. *The Last Guardian*'s level designs are very vertical, so in order for the duo to progress, they must cooperatively

solve puzzles to make their way up a dilapidated ancient structure. For instance, if the boy needs to access a room that is out of his reach, he must lure the Trico into a position that will allow him to climb its back. To do so, the boy must toss a barrel onto the level above, which piques the Trico's interest. As it walks toward the barrel to investigate, the boy has an opportunity to climb onto its back and successfully leap toward the platform above. The boy and the Trico are traversing an aged, crumbling structure, so environments dynamically change depending on your actions. This causes puzzles to increase in complexity as you progress.

Ueda won't reveal many more specifics on *The Last Guardian*, which isn't surprising. Anyone familiar with Ico and Shadow of the Colossus knows that the developer offers very little information to the player, leaving the overall experience up to interpretation. In fact, Ueda says part of the reason the team chose the title *The Last Guardian* is because it can be construed in many ways. Is the last guardian going to be the boy or the Trico? We won't find out until it releases next year. ❖

previews





Metal Gear Solid Rising

A slice of what's to come

With a few stylish swings of a high-frequency katana, Metal Gear's Raiden made his triumphant return at this year's E3 as he made short work of a slew of bad guys and a defenseless watermelon. The latest installment in the legendary stealth franchise emphasizes blade combat—a fact highlighted in the E3 trailer as a sentry robot and a group of generic soldiers are dissected in a fit of lightning-quick swordplay.

During Microsoft's press briefing at Tokyo Game Show, the crowd was treated to a live demo showcasing the free-cutting mechanic at Rising's core. Players will have the ability to slice objects from just about any angle, as

demonstrated by a set of bowling pins set up on an outdoor table. Raiden slowly aims at the pins, revealing a red line that represents where the blade will pass through the object; then unleashes the blade for a clean cut.

Next, an innocuous set of stacked watermelon slices suddenly reveal the franchise's signature exclamation point: Hiding behind the fruit is a Scarab, one of the orb-like robots that appeared in Metal Gear Solid 4. The Scarab picks up a watermelon, which it proceeds to spin on one of its fingers (like a basketball). Then it juggles bowling pins and balances one of its own kind above its body to showcase Raiden's ability to slice and dice moving objects

The Scarab applauds Raiden for his efforts at the end of the demo right before it splits in half.

From bowling pins to watermelons, Rising's free-cutting mechanic looks more and more enticing with each swing of Raiden's katana. We look forward to chopping up enemy cyborgs and random inanimate objects when we get to experience the "lightning bolt action" for ourselves once the game hits PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, though Konami still hasn't announced a release date. **Annette Gonzalez**

For more details on what Metal Gear Rising's swordplay offers, get the interview with producer Shigenobu Matsuyama on gameinformer.com.

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
Player Action

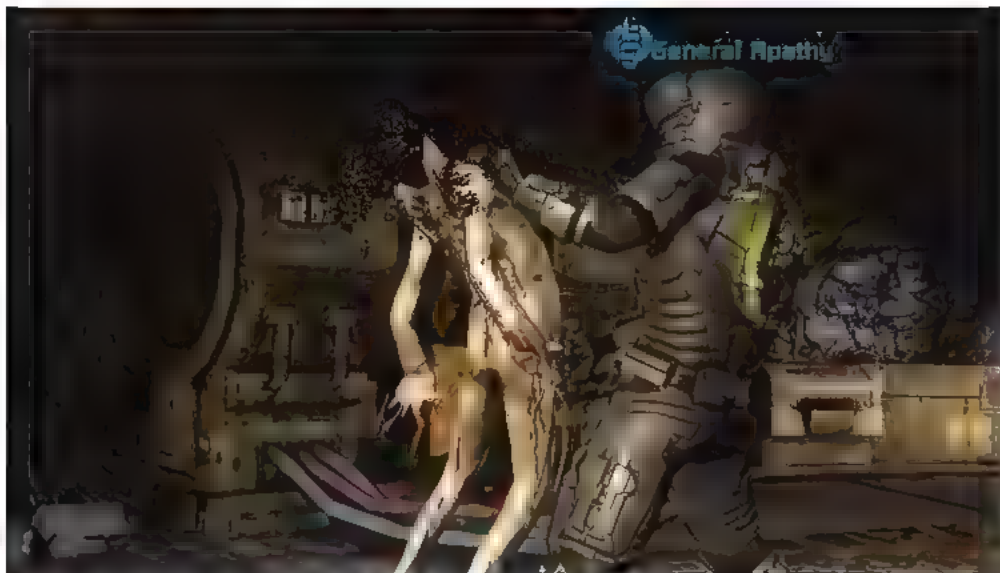
Publisher
Konami

Developer
Kojima Productions

ESRB
TBA

Dead Space 2

Dismember friends online as human or necromorph



» Platform
PlayStation 3

» Style
1. Player Action
(6 Player Online)

» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
Visceral Games

» Release
January 25

The first *Dead Space* was a smashing success that didn't invite much criticism from fans: Gamers loved the space horror vibe and slice-and-dice gameplay so much that many lamented the absence of a multiplayer mode. While strategically dismembering AI opponents is still a core component of the single-player experience in *Dead Space 2*, ripping live opponents apart online as a human or a necromorph sounds equally enticing.

As this is the first multiplayer outing for the *Dead Space* franchise, the team at Visceral studied games like *Left 4 Dead* for inspiration. *Dead Space 2* multiplayer features four-on-four

matches across five objective-based maps unique to the multiplayer campaign. Each match is comprised of two rounds, one of which you play as Sprawl security guards and another in which you control necromorphs. Humans are equipped with special abilities such as stasis and memorable weapons like the plasma cutter, pulse rifle, and line gun. Necromorphs are more melee-focused, with a few ranged attacks that mainly involve spewing toxic bile on opponents. As players work through the maps, weapons can be upgraded and necromorph attacks increase in damage when players level up.

For our first look at *Dead Space 2* multiplayer, Visceral showed off one of the five objective-based multiplayer maps, Titan Mine. In this map, humans scramble to collect three parts of a shock mine needed to open a passageway. All the while, necromorphs are on the prowl, ready to rip humans to shreds and prevent them from reaching their goal. Playing as a human is second nature if you're familiar with the single-player campaign, as the control scheme remains the same. Necromorphs take some getting used to, but once you get the hang of their attacks, laying down the hurt on Sprawl security is a blast.

Playing as one of the demon-child-like Pack creatures allows you to scurry toward a human, leap onto them, and tear away with your claws by executing quick button presses much like the Hunter character from *Left 4 Dead*. This leaves the human victim vulnerable to other attacks. As the name implies, Pack creatures are most effective in groups. The other necromorphs bring other abilities to the table. Walkers can scale along walls and ceilings and deliver long-range fire, leaving an unsuspecting opponent below open for



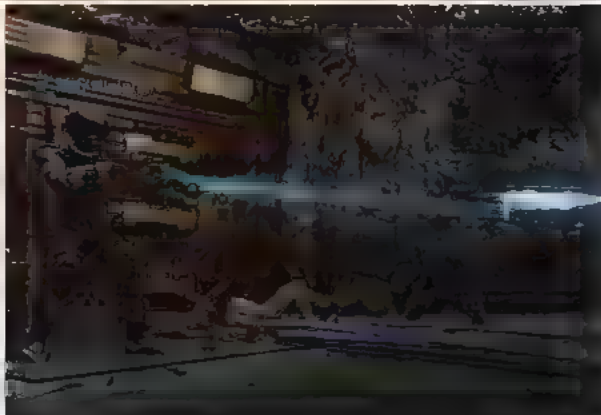
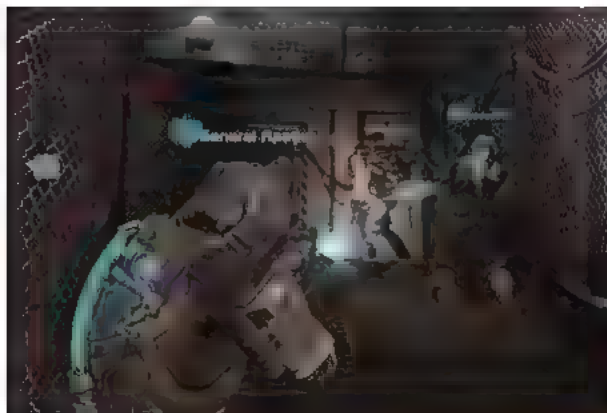
attack. It's a great way to startle your enemies. The Spatter and Puker can switch between melee and projectile bile spewing from different ranges, leaving opponents with burning faces full of goo. Learning the strengths of each of these character types keeps things fresh and fun.

From what has been shown so far, fans yearning to experience the *Dead Space* universe in an online space with friends have plenty to look forward to when this game ships next year. —Annette Gonzalez

on more Dead Space 2 multiplayer details, check out our interview with producer Scott Probst at gameinfan.com/interv



Lashina can scale walls and ceilings.



Killzone 3

Multiplayer makes its debut

» Platform
PlayStation 3

» Style
» Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

» Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» Developer
Guerrilla Games

» Release
February 22

This far most of the talk about Killzone 3 has focused on the single player campaign, 3D capabilities, and Move function ally. Guerrilla Games finally cracked the door open on multiplayer for fans who have waited patiently for details since Sony announced the game earlier this year.

For the third installment, Guerrilla Games is revamping the level progression to give it much more flexibility. Instead of just 15 ranks like in the last game, Killzone 3 features 45. Rather than simply tossing in a bunch of arbitrary ranks, Guerrilla changed things up so that players could be rewarded more frequently. This time players earn points that they can choose how to spend and players will no longer be stuck with a gun or ability that they don't like.

Guerrilla also rewrote the matchmaking logic so that players are better paired with opponents of similar skill levels. The team also added a party lobby, so that groups of friends can easily stay together from match to match. Each match gives your friends headset priority so they're always louder than random strangers. Clan support returns as well, with regional leaderboards and unranked matches so your crew can get practice in without damaging its reputation.

Before each match, players select from five different classes - engineer, infiltrator, marksman, medic, and tactician. Each class has six unique abilities players can earn over time, and the weapon unlocks for each tract are tailored to work best with that specific play style. For example, the medic must always watch his or her back when healing others, so when you level up that class gains the ability to equip a mini drone that follows you around and blasts enemies for a limited amount of time. The drone can also attempt to patch you up if you get shot down.

In an effort to up the scale of the battles, some maps now include vehicles. The exoskeleton



from Killzone 2's single player campaign is available in multiplayer for the first time. This walking tank has the firepower to dominate the entire opposing force, but the thin glass windshield offers a glaring weakness for snipers to exploit. The jetpack seen in earlier demos of Killzone 3 is now confirmed for certain multiplayer maps as well. These environments are designed with more vertical action in mind to take advantage of the extra axis that players can traverse. These devices won't keep you in the air for more than a few seconds at a time, so don't get any ideas about dogfighting high above a blown up city scene.

Guerrilla Warfare, the first mode we tried out is essentially a team deathmatch featuring capture points that teams must secure to respawn. With Guerrilla's dynamic respawning system, players will respawn in locations close to the action but not so close that they'll get blown up instantly by a random grenade.

The Operations mode is an attack and defend

match with a series of objectives. In the map we saw, one side must defend an important dam while the other schemes to destroy it. The first section involves blowing up the outer doors; if the attackers succeed, they'll see a brief cutscene starring all of the players involved in the conquest, complete with custom outfits and gamer tags floating above their heads. The better you perform, the more prominent a role you'll have in the replay. A less integral player may be running around in the background, while the best player is the hero setting the charges. On the flip side, high-ranking defenders will appear as the ones issuing commands for further measures like releasing nerve gas or detonating an EMP. When the dam ultimately is blown, the actors fly away heroically on transport while we look like chumps getting swept away by the flood. Unfortunately, our revenge will have to wait until Killzone 3's February 2011 release. **Bryan Vore**







Alice: Madness Returns

We're all mad here

» **Platforms**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 PC

» **Style**
1 Player Action
Multiplayer TBA

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Spicy Horse

» **Release**
20 1

Alice returns to Wonderland thanks to a surprise reunion between EA and American McGee, who now sits at the helm of a new studio. In the original, McGee turned Alice into an older, wiser, and mentally unstable character to craft an intentionally disturbing tale of one woman's slipping sanity. The sequel continues her struggle to differentiate fantasy from reality.

The team at developer Spicy Horse claims *Madness Returns* has a much stronger narrative focus than the first title. The sequel begins a decade after the events of *Alice*, as our protagonist is released from Rutledge Asylum and into the care of a psychiatrist in London. Overwhelmed by the change in scenery and still bearing the mental and physical scars from the events that led to her parent's death, Alice retreats into the dark recesses of her mind once more. The familiarity and security of Wonderland lures her, offering something Alice can't find in the real world.

Our demo begins on a rooftop in London where Alice is joined by an elderly woman tending a garden. Without notice, the woman con-

verts into a menacing creature before her eyes. Unfortunately, the woman then falls from the lofty height, and when Alice tries to flee the scene, a weak spot on the roof gives way, and she spirals down the rabbit hole once again.

Wonderland is in a state of disrepair, but as before, the fantasy world holds the key to Alice's recovery. Restoring peace throughout the realm will mend her fractured mind. However, the old woman's transformation indicates that reality and fantasy are starting to bleed together for Alice. *Wonderland* has escaped the confines of Alice's mind and begun to permeate her London home. The opposite is true, too. As Alice steps into a familiar domain, the veil of Tears childhood toys litter the level. Another familiar site greets her: a disembodied Cheshire grin.

In terms of gameplay, much of *Madness Returns* stays true to Alice's roots. Heavy emphasis is placed on platforming, and we watch Alice double jump her way from mushroom cap to mushroom cap throughout the veil. When she happens upon an oddly colored waterfall, the enticing words "drink me" scroll nearby. A single sip gives Alice the ability to

minimize her size on a whim. She can also use Shrink Sonar, a hint system that surveys the level and determines when her diminutive form is needed. The skill can come in handy during combat, too.

Combat doesn't take center stage until we enter Mad Hatter territory. Enemies are puzzles in their own right, and Alice must evaluate the best method for dispatching each new foe she encounters. Mechanical weapons are the post-of-choice in his level. A angled shot to their mechanical eyes momentarily stuns them, allowing Alice to close the gap and attack with the Vorpal Blade.

Teeth erupt from beasties, enemies and serve as the currency in Alice's demented domain. These can be exchanged for upgrades to her arsenal and for unlocking combos. Collectables like memory fragment audio logs also populate Wonderland.

While we've only peered briefly into Alice's new nightmare, we can't help but be intrigued. **Meagan VanBurklee**



Neverdead

Devil May Cry meets Kataman Damacy

In the world of video games, protagonists don't generally survive a close range grenade explosion. Ordinarily you'll see a game over screen after the grenade goes off. In *Neverdead*, however, death and dismemberment is only the beginning of a unique new game mechanic.

The hero, Bryce, is an immortal who can withstand any manner of punishment and put himself back together if need be. When he fought and lost against the demon king 500 years ago, he was rewarded/cursed with an invincible demon body. Over the centuries he's developed into kind of a jerk and has taken up the trade of demon hunting.

Konami is working closely with Aliens Vs. Predator developer Rebellion in an increasingly more common East-meets-West partnership. Shinya Nohji, producer on the Konami side, came up with the original concept and oversees design while Rebellion develops the game with its proprietary engine.

"At the beginning I wanted to make a game with an immortal guy, but I needed to make it different from the others because immortality is a common theme in movies and novels and also in games," Nohji says. "I conceived the idea to make the player dismembered. He's kind of like a zombie, but not a zombie."

In the brief footage we saw of the third-person action title, Bryce wields two pistols in battle against the demon horde. If he gets bashed especially hard, his torso will separate completely from his head and limbs. Players then control the head and must roll over to the other body parts to get back in the action. Any order works, so you could have an arm sticking out the side of a rolling head and still fire wildly at your enemies. If you get your torso next, you'll crawl around with no legs. Reattaching one leg allows you to hop around clumsily until you pick up the next.

Bryce doesn't have to wait for an enemy to dismember him. He can choose to rip off various parts of his body if it suits him. If there's a particularly high ledge he can't reach or small space he needs to get through, he can rip his



head off and toss it in the required direction. Bryce can also throw his arm and still shoot his gun remotely, which is especially strange when dog-like demons pick the limb up and run around while the pistol's firing. Somehow he can also detonate his thrown limbs like a remote controlled grenade. Using the surrounding environment to his advantage is another option. Bryce can destroy ceilings to bring down rubble on top of himself and all of the surrounding demons. They'll all be toast while he simply rolls out of the wreckage.

Co-op and competitive multiplayer are confirmed, but Konami isn't talking specifics just yet. We wouldn't be surprised if the second player took control of the female government agent, Arcadia, who partners with Bryce in the single

player campaign. Since she's a normal human, we wonder how Rebellion is going to make her as fun to play as Bryce. We're also curious as to how the dismemberment mechanic is going to apply to competitive multiplayer. Punting an opponent's head to the other end of the map after you've taken him down sounds like a fun possibility to us. » *Bryant Vore*

- » Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
- » Style: 1 Player Action (Multiplayer TBA)
- » Publisher: Konami
- » Developer: Rebellion
- » Release: 2011





1 Heinrich and Gretchen will have to combine their powers if they want to succeed.

Knights Contract

A hack and slash in the purest sense of the term

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
» **Player Action**
» **Publisher**
Namco Bandai

» **Developer**
Game Republic

» **Release**
2011

The meat shield and glass cannon are two of gaming's most dependable archetypes. Together they're a great combination: one distracts enemies up close while the other picks them off from a distance. With *Knights Contract*, Game Republic has taken that classic gameplay relationship and spun an entire game around it.

Players control Heinrich, an immortal executioner armed with a massive spring-loaded scythe. His companion is Gretchen, a resurrected witch. Both have a vendetta against Dr. Faust, who has poisoned medieval Europe with supernatural creatures of his own design. Heinrich's connection to Faust is particularly

tense. Faust killed him at one point.

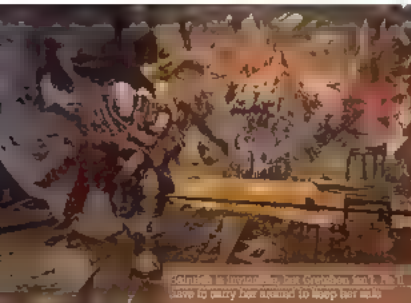
Heinrich is invincible, which frees players from having to be overly concerned about health. As a hack-and-slash game in the vein of a *Ninja Gaiden* or *Batla Witch*, Heinrich can unleash furious scythe-based combos and other physical attacks. Gretchen isn't impervious from harm, however, so players must make sure that she's safe at all times. Sometimes that means running over to her side and killing whatever monstrosity happens to be chewing on her face. Other times Heinrich must pick her up and physically move her to a safer position.

Just because she isn't indestructible doesn't mean that Gretchen is a liability on the battlefield.

She's capable of whipping up a variety of spells, such as summoning thorn-covered vines from underground, which launch enemies into the air. At that point, Heinrich can slash at them while they're temporarily off-balance. She also has access to elemental attacks like ice.

Knights Contract's bosses are grotesque. One creature is a beefy salamander-looking freak with two muscular arms and a single leg. After a chase through a burning village, players have to pin that thing flat down to the ground and then hack at its numerous eyes.

Moments like that make us glad to be invincible. It certainly beats the alternative. — Jeff Coak



2 Heinrich and Gretchen will have to combine their powers if they want to succeed.



3 Heinrich and Gretchen will have to combine their powers if they want to succeed.



4 Heinrich and Gretchen will have to combine their powers if they want to succeed.



Battlefield Bad Company 2: Vietnam

DICE has another 'Nam flashback

Battlefield: Bad Company 2 won over multiplayer gamers with its unique squad-based gameplay formula, wide-open maps, vehicular combat, and destructible environments. But interest in the title waned and the community strank over the past six months as EA failed to deliver new map packs, opting instead to repurpose existing maps for other game modes. The wait for new content is almost over, as DICE returns to a familiar battlefield - Vietnam - this winter.

The four new multiplayer maps are playable in both Conquest and Rush mode. From an aesthetic standpoint, the jungles of Vietnam offer drastically different scenery ripe with new opportunities for creative warfare. In the Phu Bai Valley map we saw, rice paddies populate the landscape and contrast with lush foliage in the foreground that serves as great cover for

approaching soldiers. Foxholes and trenches litter the battlefield, adding another layer of strategy to the maps. DICE is also taking measures to ensure the action feels authentic, recording new wartime chatter genuine to the period. We haven't been told if any of the unannounced maps draw from the original Battlefield: Vietnam, but we'd be surprised if DICE didn't take the opportunity to pay tribute to one of its early works.

Fifteen new Vietnam-era weapons join the fray, including the Navy SEAL XM22 machine gun, the standard issue M16, and the M79 grenade launcher. Each new weapon features proficiency stars players can collect. The maps also feature six new vehicles like the Huey chopper, Russian T54 tank, and PBR patrol boat. As in the original Battlefield: Vietnam, vehicles have radios featuring tunes from the era. This time

players can choose from eight radio stations and 49 tracks like Creedence Clearwater Revival's protest song "Fortunate Son."

The rest of the Battlefield gameplay has been retooled for the new era as well. Instead of planting C4 explosives, players use dynamite and a plunger to blow crates. The medic uses syringes to save fallen soldiers instead of a defibrillator, and tank turrets leave you uncomfortably exposed instead of placing you safely within the confines of a modern vehicle. Longtime players will be happy to know that your progression from Bad Company 2 ties into the Vietnam expansion, and any experience points you earn will go toward advancing your rank.

EA still hasn't handed over two important pieces of intel on Vietnam - the release date and price - but that doesn't make us any less excited for this long overdue expansion. - Meagan VanBurkleo

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

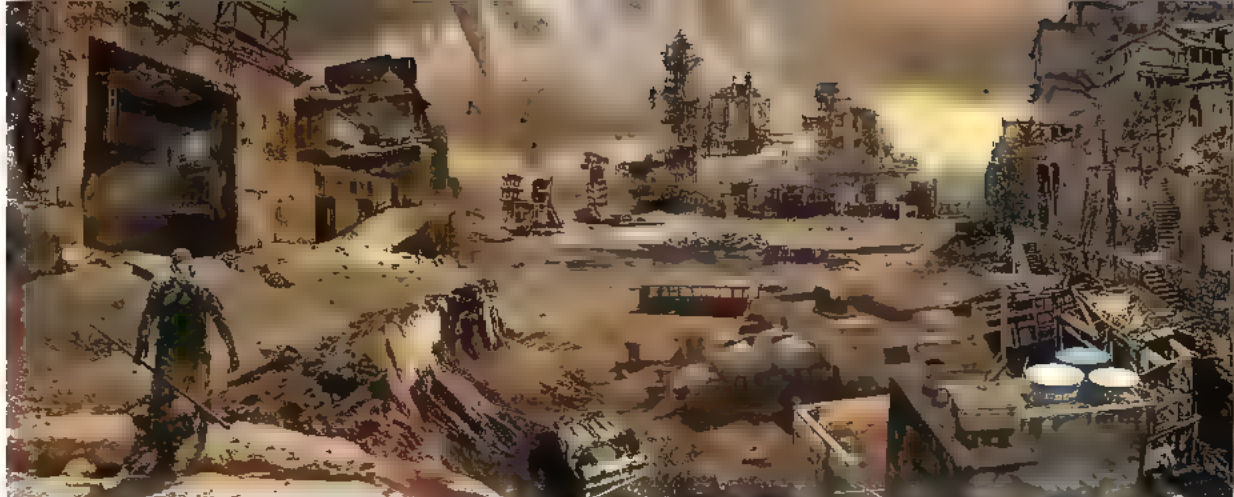
» **Style**
1-Player Shooter
[24-Player Online]

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
DICE

» **Release**
Winter





Inversion

Looking at the world from a different angle

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1 or 2-Player Action/
Shooter (Online TNA)

Publisher
Namco Bandai

Developer
Saber Interactive

Release
2011

Gravity is considered one of the weaker forces in the universe. We counteract it every day when we get out of bed or pick a controller up off the couch. The new sci-fi shooter from Saber Interactive, on the other hand, bends the rules of gravity so much that they are about to snap in half. When an army of human-looking aliens invades the planet, they start screwing with the natural order of physics, literally turning the world on its side. Fortunately, players can fight back with some gravity-altering abilities of their own... let's take a look at some of the ways Inversion lets you abuse Isaac Newton's universal law of gravitation.

Gravitational Control

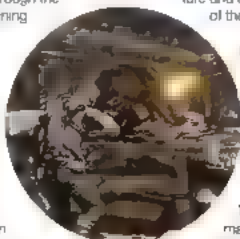
Inversion's main weapon is a device that allows players to manipulate gravity. It lets players pick up objects within the environment and either use them as a shield or throw them at enemies. We've seen this mechanic before, but Inversion puts a twist on the technique by allowing players to pick up liquids as well as solid objects. This means players can pick up globules of a flammable liquid, douse their enemies, and then set them on fire. Players aren't limited to manipulating objects directly in front of them, either. Inversion allows you to fire an antigravity pulse that nullifies the gravitational effects of cer-

tain objects. For example, if a few enemies are holed up behind cover, you can turn off the gravity on those objects and watch your enemies' faces turn red as their protection floats skyward. Enemies are susceptible to this energy pulse as well, and watching them float through the air should provide some entertaining shooting gallery moments.

Bringing Down The House

Saber Interactive knew it would need an impressive physics system to deliver the kind of experience for which the team was aiming. To that end, the developer partnered with middleware developer Havok to create a new physics system called Havok Destruction. Thanks to this system, little pieces of debris start to rise off the ground whenever a player sends out an antigravity blast. Little ambient touches like these are nice, but Havok Destruction really shows off its merits when players start using the environment as a weapon. We witnessed one sequence where Inversion's main character manned a heavy turret and started blasting away at the first floor of a nearby building. After decimating the building's main support

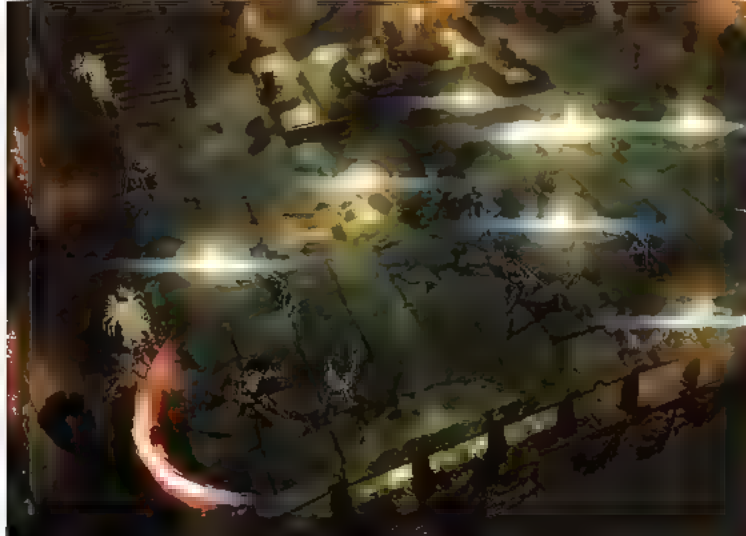
pillars, the structure collapsed, taking out a troop of enemies stationed inside along with it. Inversion's new physics system is sturdy enough that buildings will collapse differently every time, depending on how the player attacks the structure and how gravity pulls on the weight of the building.



Navigating Though Altered Gravity

In the world of Inversion, gravity is malfunctioning. Sometimes this means players must navigate fields of zero G, and other times this means gravity pulls objects in unusual directions. The invading alien force is manipulating the environments, setting off antigravity charges that could literally shift the area on its side at any moment. You might start a level on the city street, but after a gravity event sweeps across the district, you could find yourself standing on the side of a building. Alleyways along ordinary city streets become endless chasms that players must traverse as they fight along the sides of skyscrapers. — Ben Reeves





Dungeon Siege III

More co-op ess A.

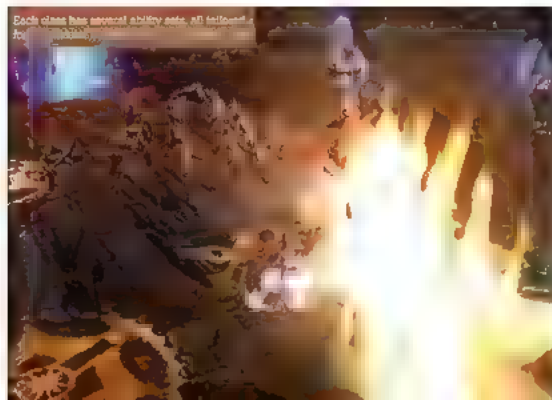
Forget everything you know about Dungeon Siege. This console sequel, being developed by veteran RPG studio Obsidian Entertainment, has more in common with Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance than it does with the Dungeon Siege that spawned franchise creator Gas Powered Games. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.

What we've seen of Dungeon Siege III so far suggests it's the kind of story-driven cooperative fantasy dungeon crawler that we haven't seen on console in a couple of years. The distant third-person camera allows for easy tracking of the high-flying, explosive abilities players unleash against multiple enemies at once. Characters can flip between stances at will, whipping out a two-handed weapon to clear out swarming foes with sweeping arcs and switching to a sword-and-board setup to handle their leader after the minions are culled.

Building your character is a matter of personal taste, as each of the several playable classes can level up along different paths. Obsidian isn't ready to share details on the progression yet, but the developers assure us that the choices will be significant.

A Mass Effect-like conversation wheel and cinematic camera work deliver storytelling interactions far beyond what action RPGs traditionally offer. Obsidian has proven that it can do amazing things in this realm (see Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II), and Dungeon Siege III has a solid technical foundation on which to build.

The developers happily showed off the game's two-player drop-in/drop-out local co-op play, but remained curiously silent when asked about online co-op or the fact that Dungeon Siege has always featured four-character parties. Does anyone seriously think that a triple-A quality game like this will have couch co-op but forgo online support? We certainly don't. — Adam Bressner



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PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
-Player Action
» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
Grasshopper
Manufacture

» Release
2011

Shedding light on a highly anticipated collaboration, EA and Grasshopper Manufacture finally unveiled *Shadows of the Damned* at this year's Tokyo Game Show. Driven by the combined talents of iconic Japanese developers Goichi "Suda 51" Suda (No More Heroes) and Shinji Mikami (Resident Evil), it's obvious from the debut "raier that both are infusing their signature styles into this third-person shooter.

Conceptualized by Suda six years ago following the completion of *Killer 7*, *Shadows of the Damned* was born after the Creative Artists Agency brought the project to EA. Soon thereafter Mikami joined in an official capacity, branded a psychological action thriller. *Shadows* follows professional demon hunter Garcia Hotspur through Suda and Mikami's unique interpretation of hell.

"What I want to do is introduce the audience to a brand new experience," Suda explains. "I want this to be a very exciting experience that isn't like a normal action game. Not normal at all. That is where we came up with the idea of a psychological action thriller."

After learning that his love has been captured and is being tortured in the underworld by vengeful demons when you take out the damned for a living, they develop a chip on their shoulder - Hotspur dedicates his life to rescuing Paula. Despite legions of dark foes standing in his way, he won't stop until he brings hell to its knees.

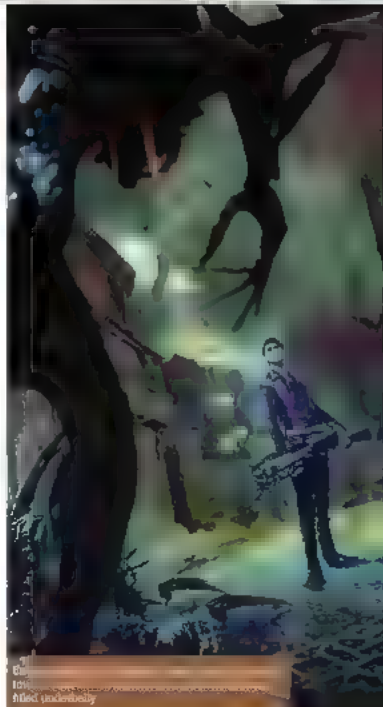
Suda says the dark atmosphere of movies like *Seven* were highly inspirational, but that he intends to balance the mood with the puppy action of Robert Rodriguez films. The short teaser trailer begins with Hotspur riding his motorcycle on an empty road at night to a

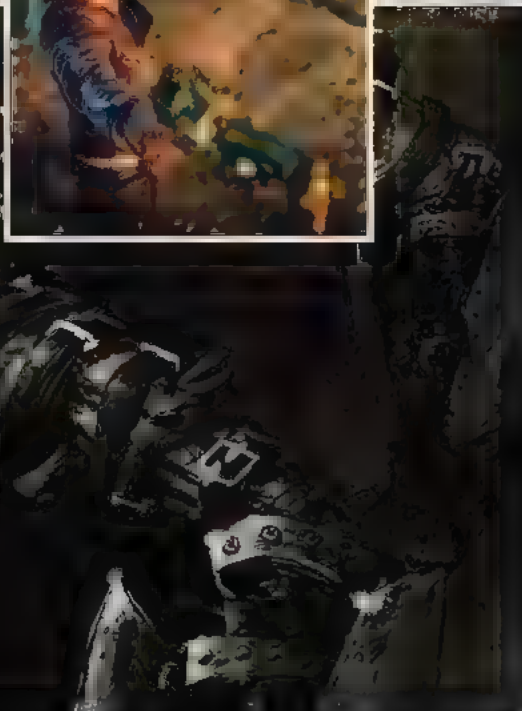
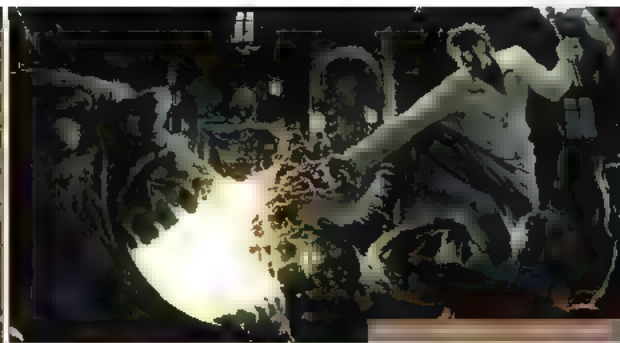
heavy metal soundtrack, with just enough light from the flickering lampposts to illuminate his significantly scarred face and tattooed torso. Hotspur approaches a giant gate, kicks it in, takes out his gun, and says, "Let the bloodbath begin!" After massacring a few enemies, he stops to shout, "My name is Garcia Hotspur. My wrath is your hell!"

Hotspur's character design looks very familiar: Dark, dangerous, and clad in a leather jacket (a signature Grasshopper style), Hotspur feels distinctly spawned from Suda's mind. Hotspur's over-the-top arsenal feels like vintage Suda as well; his skull-adorned shotgun makes a statement without even firing a shot. Hotspur is joined on his quest by a flaming skull, a reformed demon who can transform into said weapons.

Mikami's influence is evident everywhere in *Shadows of the Damned*. While descending further into hell, players must confront a twisted array of creatures and solve a series of dermented puzzles, all infused with Mikami's unique style. The game features an over-the-shoulder camera and shooting mechanics that look very much like *Resident Evil 4*. Boss battles are also being created under his watchful eye.

Despite the macabre setting, obvious punk rock overtones permeate the game. "I think survival horror is very serious in both visuals and gameplay," Mikami says. "However for this game, it really has a punk rock flavor. It isn't always serious. It's very easy to get into and is a very stylish game. I want players to always be excited when they play - is very different than a normal survival horror game, despite the subject." - Meagan VanBurkleo







Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon

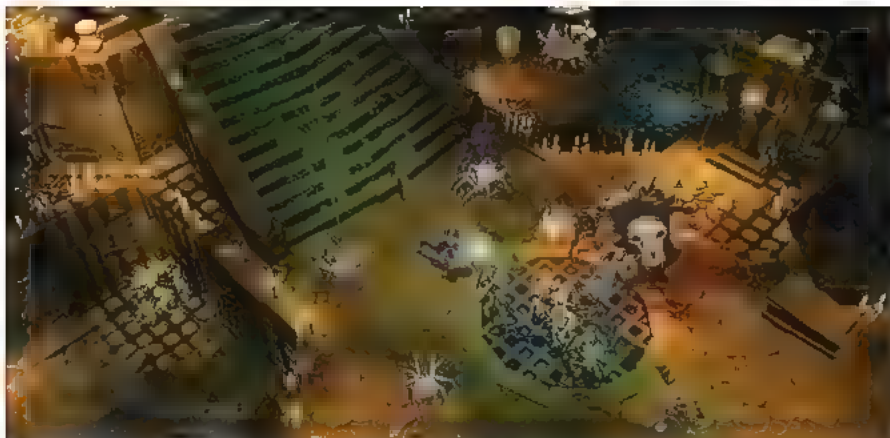
In this follow-up to Earth Defense Force: The Black Widow, 3D and developer Vicarious Visions are building on the campy B-movie vibe that made the original a cult hit. EDF fans can expect more weapons, plenty of ridiculous enemies, and the addition of online co-op. Get ready to send those giant bugs back home to space in spring 2011.



Microsoft Entertainment

Ubisoft Montpellier is handling dev duties for the only home console version of this dancing game that is not getting delayed. Due to Kinect and Move difficulties, the PS3 and 360 versions won't release until early 2011, but Wii users will be moonwalking to "Bilie Jean" and dance pointing to "Beat It" on November 23.

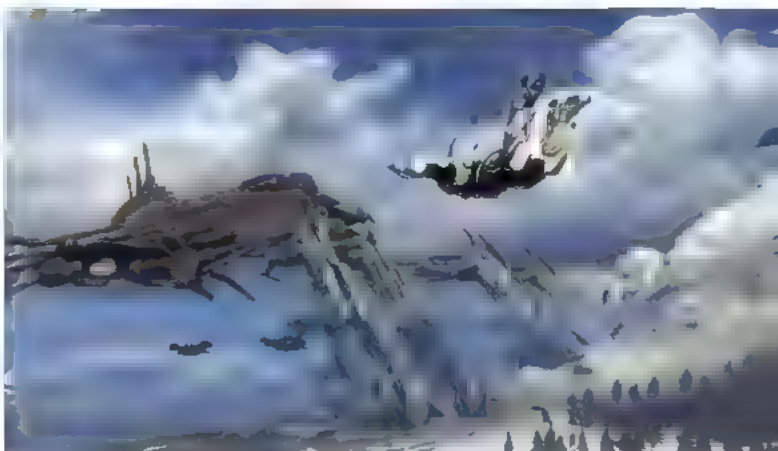




Torchlight
 If there's anything Torchlight needs to complement its solid hack n' slash dungeon-crawling gameplay, it's new classes with more than a handful of unique skills apiece. Good thing that's the biggest thing this sequel is adding when it comes out next year. Oh, and co-op. Did people want that? That's in, too.

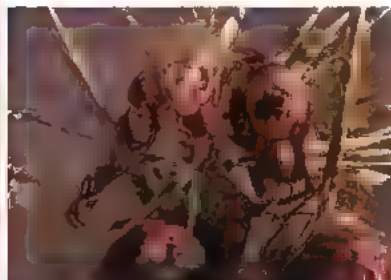
Star Wars

The sci-fi shooter is bringing its tactical multiplayer combat to a new level with shinier graphics and more than 50 customizable weapons. A proper single player campaign is promised as well. Prejudice isn't confirmed for consoles yet, but we're guessing it will show up on 360 as well as PC when it ships next year.



Asura's Wrath

Developed in conjunction between Capcom and CyberConnect2. Jack Naitoh with Mega Man's Keiji Inafune at the helm as executive producer. Asura's Wrath is an upcoming brawler coated with Japanese influence and a unique art style. No word on a release date, but we're hoping to hear more details soon.



TOP GAMES



Special Honors GAME OF THE MONTH



Civilization IV

gamestar.com GAME OF THE MONTH

96 Dead Rising 2

Chuck Greene's resourcefulness with duct tape and pressure-washers with improvised weapons have earned him one of the top slots this month. Chuck's adventure is too good not to share - which is why the game's co-op is such a great addition. You'll want to bring a friend as you battle your way through the undead apocalypse. Read our full review on page 98.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

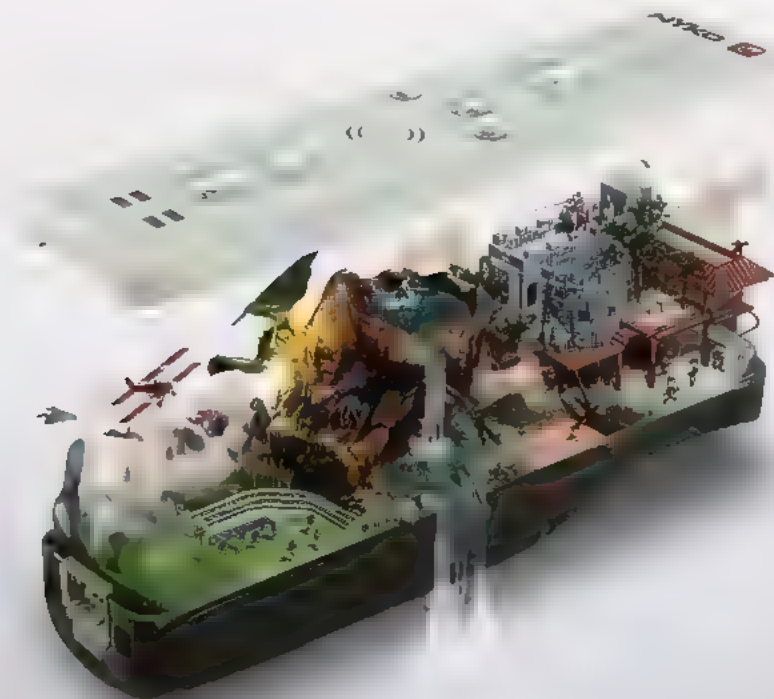
10	Exceptional. It's rare that one game performs as well as this. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Good. It may be chosen for the occasional special properties, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Mild. While some things work as planned, the majority of the title either misfires or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are really good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Pointed. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and common execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but it's nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Brown. Basically unplayable. The game is so inaudible 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 requiring this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Like APR, this won't make it to CD days before the price is pulled.

AWARDS

PLATINUM	Recommended games that score between 9.5 and 10
GOLD	Awarded to games that score between 8 and 9.5
SILVER	Awarded to games that score between 6.5 and 8.5
GAME OF THE MONTH	The award for the most outstanding game in the month

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7.75

PS3 • 360

» Concept

A direct sequel that shatters continuity by recruiting players with a dead man

» Graphics

Most of the level designs don't offer much eye candy, but every little effect and texture detail in these are works of art. This is easily one of this generation's best-looking games

» Sound

The voice work for Starkiller is hit or miss, but John Williams' familiar melodies bring each scene to life

» Playability

Lightsaber combat offers more depth, and the Force powers are as explosive as ever. The enemy lock-on still brings frustration

» Entertainment

Short, yet far from sweet. The story holds an otherwise fun game back

» Replay Value

Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

The Jedi Unleashed let players harness the power of the Force. And that concept is still at the core of this sequel. In fact, a touch of the first game's charm in Force Unleashed 2. You already feels like you're in a new game, and feels better, but most the so-called improvements. I don't see anything, but the dual lightsabers (which are just cosmetic). I like the new addition to your repertoire. Even though the gameplay hasn't much, I won't complain about it. It's an excuse to obliterate hundreds of Imperials. I had a blast against my opposition. The Force powers alone are reason to be warned that the game will be a disappointment. If you thought the narrative in the last game was the adobe and interesting. The Force Unleashed 2 has some moments of pure excellence, but the disappointments and missed opportunities are too many.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Inventive storytelling drains his entry of its magic

Style 1 Player Action Developer LucasArts Publisher LucasArts Release October 26 ESRB T

In *The Force Unleashed*, Darth Vader's crusade to rid the galaxy of the Jedi was interrupted by a young boy named Galen Marek. After playing Galen's father, Vader secretly brought on the child as his apprentice. Despite being trained in the dark arts from a young age and carrying Vader's torch against the Jedi, Galen—under the guise of Starkiller—still clung to the good inside of him. His softer side eventually caused him to fall in love with Juno Eclipse, free himself of his oppressive master, and form a rebellion against the Empire. In the end, Starkiller sacrificed his life to save his friends and give the galaxy a fighting chance against the Empire.

The Force Unleashed II picks up where this tale left off, but it doesn't focus on the rise of the Rebel Alliance or Vader's unrelenting quest to hunt them down. In a twist that comes dangerously close to breaking *Star Wars* lore, Starkiller returns as a clone, or so Vader tells him. Haunted by visions of Starkiller's past and the love he has for Juno, this supposed doppelganger's mission is to find answers as to why he exists, all while battling or embracing ghosts from a soul that may not be his.

The story starts out with a shaky concept and never finds solid ground. Cameo appearances by Yoda and Boba Fett and up going nowhere. Yoda's role is relegated to that of an animatronic Disney character in front of a ride, and Boba Fett looks a big game, but never once confronts Starkiller. "Boba Fett? Boba Fett? Where? If you can put yourself in the mindset of the prequel movies, where you're willing to tolerate a green-inducing narrative for the tradeoff of Jedi doing badass things you never thought were possible, *The Force Unleashed II* delivers in a big way.

It may be a clone, but Starkiller's handle over the Force has grown significantly. When a situation calls for improvisation, Starkiller shows a flair for the dramatic. Whether this means beheading a squadron of stormtroopers or guiding a large space cruiser inside of a cloning facility, his actions almost always inspire awe and are usually tied to fun gameplay sequences. He can also turn enemies on their own ranks through mind control—an act that always rewards the player with a hilariously visualized betrayal or suicide

When a battle calls for a little extra firepower, Starkiller summons his Force powers. It's not magic, but it's a fun way to bring down a mining droid, an adversary that can normally withstand a dozen lightning blasts and a handful of saber slashes, in one powerful strike.

Combat still has that distinct *Force Unleashed* feel, but refinements to the mechanics, such as the ability to easily pick up and throw items, make it a more fluid experience. Whether you are Force throwing a stormtrooper or crushing a TIE Fighter, the physics convey a true sense of weight and appropriate visualization. I didn't have any issues with the lightsaber combat in the first game, but many fans felt it was too shallow. *LucasArts* addresses this minor irritation with Starkiller's acrobatic duel-wielding abilities. If you don't want to rely solely on the Force, you can let the lightsabers do most of the talking. The enemy lock-on is the only tool that still doesn't quite work, as it is solely based on Starkiller's position.

The texture work and animation for both Starkiller and his opposition, rank among this generation's best. *LucasArts* also went well out of its way to avoid camera clipping. Every shot is framed beautifully, delivering a cinematic view that mimics the motion pictures. The camera work also brings you closer to the action than any *Star Wars* experience before it.

Many of the environments are set in Kamino,

or the space around it, which didn't entrance me like the varied levels in the first game. The only iconic locations are a gameplay-free pit stop at a familiar setting from the original trilogy, and a trip to an intergalactic casino that was surprisingly disinteresting. My favorite stage-based moments were the free fall sequences where Starkiller plummeted dangerously toward the ground.

Most levels conclude with a repetitive by-the-numbers boss fight. The last boss fight is particularly nauseating; it lasts far too long, is too easy, and concludes with one of the most uneventful send-offs I've seen. *LucasArts* hardly offers a compelling conclusion to this story. Most of the key plot points are open to interpretation, and the logic applied to many of the narrative twists make Vader look like a schizophrenic madman who sabotages his own plans moments after making them.

In a similar vein to the Starkiller clone's role, *The Force Unleashed II* is a shadow of its former self. The graceful gameplay offers a higher level of excitement, but the plot and characterization—two large components from which expect great things from any *Star Wars* journey—makes this experience one of 2010's biggest disappointments. » Andrew Reiner

For details on the game, visit www.lucasarts.com/games/forceunleashed2



Rock Band 3

A whole new challenge



9.25

PS3 • 360

Reinvigorates the music genre with new ways to play

» **Graphics**
Excellent visuals catch the band scene, and well-animated transitions carry you from the menus into the game

» **Sound**
An eclectic and excellent set list takes full advantage of the many instruments

» **Playability**
The new pro instruments are challenging, but extensive training helps you along

» **Entertainment**
A massive title that's more like several games in one; Rock Band 3 could keep you entertained for months

» **Happy Value**
High

Harmonix was founded on the principle that everyone should have access to the joy of creating music, even if they never had the benefit of learning a real instrument. The premier music game developer fulfilled its goal in developing *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, but *Rock Band 3* is a whole new ball game. While continuing to polish the experiences that established the *Rock Band* brand, this new installment also offers players the opportunity to take the next step and learn to play the instruments we've been pretending to rock out with for the last five years.

The core of any music game is the song list. *Rock Band 3* features the most unusual and varied in the franchise, but it also has fewer widely recognizable tunes. Willie Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" and Huey Lewis and the News' "The Power of Love" vie with several other historical chart toppers, the meat of the setlist lies in artists like The Smiths, Metric, and the Flaming Lips. The more I dug into this eclectic selection of tunes, the more it reaffirmed my confidence in Harmonix's song selection team. With each part I played, I fell more in love with the interplay of instruments. As a result, the only people I envision being disappointed could be folks who choose to play only one instrument. With guitar, bass, keyboard, drums, vocals, and harmony vocals all vying for attention, not every song will shine for everybody in the band.

With the new songs come new instruments. The keyboard in particular has several songs that highlight its flexibility and fun. I really like this newest peripheral; it's small and light, and can be played from a number of positions (lap, table, or strapped up like a keytar). I also admire

the onscreen notation system that shows off the many keys that need to be played in pro mode. By the time you're rocking the highest difficulty on pro mode, you're playing the full right-hand parts to the songs in question. It's a thrilling sensation, whether you've ever played piano or not.

The new pro-guitar system is remarkable, even if the high cost of entry and steep challenge make it prohibitive for some players. A phenomenal tutorial system introduces the basics of fretting, barre chords, and finger placement, along with all the other skills you'll need to play the world's most familiar rock instrument. Nothing replaces a real teacher, but *Rock Band 3* does a good job of approximating the real thing.

The notation system for this new guitar is based on traditional guitar tablature, with some notable differences in the visual representation of chords. It takes a while to pick up, as the game demands you learn the unique shapes that correspond with each chord on the guitar's neck. The only way to dive into this new experience at launch is with the Mustang guitar—a reasonable approximation of a real guitar with buttons instead of frets on the neck. I liked the Mustang, but it's a far cry from the challenge of real strings, and it's not a true guitar that can be plugged into an amp. The Squier peripheral, which releases in a few months, solves these problems. It will likely cost the equivalent of a true guitar, but this is far since it is one.

Even with a focus on these new toys, *Rock Band 3* is still excellent with existing instruments. I loved soaring through the guitar and bass parts with the old instruments; several of the songs have great solo lines, and there's a nice mix of rhythm and lead play throughout

the setlist. Normal drums continue to be a blast, and the transition to pro mode with three additional cymbals is the easiest "pro skill" to make, thanks to clear visual cues that distinguish cymbals and pads. Singers have a bunch of fun melodies to explore, and harmony vocals return from the Beatles game for all those wanna-be-backup vocalists.

It may be far less glamorous than new setlists and instruments, but the revamped user interface that underlies the whole experience is the game's most unqualified success. Fixing nearly every problem from previous installments, and layering in a whole new career structure, the new format is brilliant. Each player has their own pop up menu to drop in and out of play and adjust their options. Setlists are sortable, saveable, and shareable. Players can rate songs to determine their likelihood to show up during random selections. New road challenges offer bite-sized tours that can be conquered in a night of play. Hundreds of goals span across all modes of play, delivering progression no matter the way you spend your in-game time. Innumerable tiny changes also make the game more fun and easy to play, from the ability to disable drum pad navigation to the option of continuing to play a song after falling out.

In many ways, *Rock Band 3* is a culmination of Harmonix's efforts to bring music to the masses. But it's also a new chapter in the franchise that starts the gradual merging of real and game-based music. Plenty of naysayers have already declared music games dead. Harmonix certainly hasn't gotten the message; this band is primed for a new tour. —Matt Miller

9.5

PS3 • 360

Concept Survive a zombie attack using improvised weapons while uncovering a massive conspiracy

Graphics

Tons of zombies appear on the screen particularly near the end and the game handles it without a hitch

Sound

Intentionally bland mall music juxtaposed against snarling monsters helps sell the creepy ambience

Playability

Blue Castle's efforts to alleviate frustrations from the first game succeed

Entertainment

A lot is going on in Dead Rising 2, and it all works together wonderfully

Replay Value

Moderately High

Second Opinion

Dead Rising 2's ultimate selling point is the ease and scope of the title. You'll never run out of activities to occupy your time. The new weapon manufacturing mechanics ate up hours of my playthrough; it's so engaging that I let critical business pass without care. The open-ended nature and ability to start the narrative over while maintaining character progression encouraged me to explore every facet of the game, resulting in an extremely personal and fulfilling experience. I spent my days rescuing survivors, taking on increasingly demanding side quests, playing slot poker for money (using an horrible new console), and simply exploring the grandeur of Fortune City before addressing Chuck's pressing problems. While indisputably impressed with the experience, I wish it was a storage system that would allow players to set aside valuable weapon parts for a later time. Similarly, the magazine system still seems archaic, especially with weapon fabrication making inventory space a precious commodity. Fortune City never sleeps, and neither did I while playing through Dead Rising 2. With a seemingly endless supply of engaging content, I'll sleep when I'm tired. —Meagar VanBuren



game from GAME MONITOR game from

Style: 1- or 2-Player Action (4-Player Online) Publisher: Capcom Developer: Blue Castle Games Release: September 28 ESRB: M

Dead Rising was an early example of what the then-new Xbox 360 hardware could do. Running through vast crowds of zombies in a mall was wish fulfillment for a generation of people raised on George Romero movies, and slaughtering them wholesale with improvised weaponry was blood-red icing on the cake. A finicky save-game system and terrible AI created two outspoken camps: those who couldn't stand the game, and an equally vocal group of apologists. For the sequel, Blue Castle Games and Capcom took a long, hard look at the first game and addressed nearly all of its major annoyances. The end result is one of the most enjoyable games I've played this year.

Former motocross champ Chuck Greene is a likable guy, which makes his plight all the more engaging. His wife was killed in a zombie attack in Las Vegas—the same attack that left his daughter Kelsey infected with the deadly virus. To get doses of the expensive Zombrex drug, which keeps her infection in check, Chuck has had to do some unsavory things. That path has led him to Fortune City, Nevada, where he hopes to cash in on the gruesome show *Terror Is Reality*.

The most dramatic improvement Blue Castle Games made is in the way that players interact with other survivors. Let's face it: escort missions are rarely fun. When the people you're

escorting have no regard for their safety and a complete indifference for avoiding obstacles, it can make you want to throw a controller. Guiding survivors to the safe house in Fortune City is a big part of the game, though it's much less annoying than it was in the first one. Maybe there was a carbon monoxide leak in the Willamette Mall.

NPCs follow Chuck at the press of a button and they can be guided to a specific place by adding a trigger pull. This second option, which was critical in the first game, isn't nearly as important this time around. I never had a problem with survivor AI, even during points when I had a train of six followers. They kept pace with me wherever I went, navigating stairs and other potential obstructions with ease. I never felt comfortable having the AI shadowing me in the first game, but there were points in *Dead Rising 2* when I was bummed to say goodbye to them.

Chuck can combine specific objects at special stations to create super weapons. If you think a fire axe and sledgehammer are effective against zombie skulls, you'll be impressed with what they can do when they're duct-taped together. Chuck's not a photojournalist like Frank West was, so using these items replaces snapping pictures as his way of earning experience. Items that can be combined are marked with a wrench icon, and building new weapons is addicting.

Players can use trial and error to discover new combinations, but more obscure ones—such as combining a wheelchair with a car battery to make the "electric chair"—are more likely to be discovered through combo cards. Players receive these for helping certain survivors or completing battles against Fortune City's psychopaths. Even though Blue Castle Games is based in Vancouver, the team nailed the first

game's goofy interpretation of American culture. This is probably most noticeable in the psychopaths. As in the first *Dead Rising*, the zombie attacks completely derail some folks who were probably a bit unhinged to begin with. They're not undead, but they're no less deadly. Some are gross and silly, like a memorable run-in with a cannibal chef, though other encounters have a poignancy one might not expect from a game about killing zombies. I felt guilty fighting more than a couple of these sad sacks.

Certain aspects of *Dead Rising 2* are bound to be deal-breakers to some, but they shouldn't be as polarizing as the problems in the first game. The sequel features save-game slots, so it's not as easy to punt yourself into a zombie-infected corner. Even though I usually had half a dozen or so missions going on around me at once, rarely felt overwhelmed. Time is still the ultimate enemy in *Dead Rising 2*, though it seems to have relaxed its hold a bit.

It's still possible to claw your way into an exceptionally difficult position, though. The game is designed with replayability in mind, as character progression carries over between playthroughs. If you try to beat the game straight from beginning to end, it's going to be tough even with a co-op buddy. Instead, found the optimal way is to join a friend's game and help them progress a while before starting your own game. That way, you'll begin with a more experienced Chuck who can carry more items, has more health, and knows a few fighting moves. Earning cash by playing the excellent *Terror Is Reality* online multiplayer mode—which features an entire game's worth of silly zombie-themed minigames—is easy and enjoyable, too.

Even after playing for dozens of hours, you'll still find new things in *Dead Rising 2*. I won't spoil anything, but there's a lot of variety to be found in the game beyond obvious things like the number of objects that can be used as bludgeons. This game is designed for multiple playthroughs and is looking forward to each and every one of them. —Jeff Cork



Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 3D, rated by Sony, is a dark and bloody



PS3

Style: 1-Player Action Publisher: Konami Developer: MercurySteam/Kojima Productions Release: October 5 ESRB: M

Vampires surround Gabriel Belmont with hisses and bared fangs, lusting after his blood as he waits for the gate to slowly open. Sticky, pale skin clings to their gangly bones and huge tattered bat wings beat as they encroach. Gabriel swings his barbed chain whip widely, rending their flesh and repelling them towards enormous boarded windows. The beasts are merely eluded, but Gabriel capitalizes by snaring his whip on the planks barring the windows. Sunlight drenches the room as he shatters the ancient wood; vampire flesh flutters from the bones like macabre rose petals. With hope renewed, he turns to the gate. It is only halfway open when dusk lays its dark suffocating blanket. Ghostly bellows herald the second wave of abominations. The warrior's holy blood runs hot in anticipation.

My excitement for Castlevania: Lords of Shadow was tempered with apprehension. Ever since Castlevania 64, 3D has been a dirty word for the franchise. To my sublime enjoyment, MercurySteam's collaboration with Kojima Productions plays the series' three-dimensional demons. This feat is accomplished by merging the best elements of some of Sony's biggest hits. This Frankenstein's monster is a formidable combination of God of War's combat Shadow of the Colossus' boss fights, andUNCHARTED 2's platforming.

Players have access to a familiar suite of showstopping light and heavy whip attacks, as well as high-flying enemy juggling ripped off wholesale from Kratos. Light and shadow magic add dimension to the fluid combat. Gabriel's

health is restored with each successful attack when light magic is activated, and shadow magic makes the whip stronger. Alternating between magic types mid-combo is a rush, and the engaging boss fights later on force players to swap tactically.

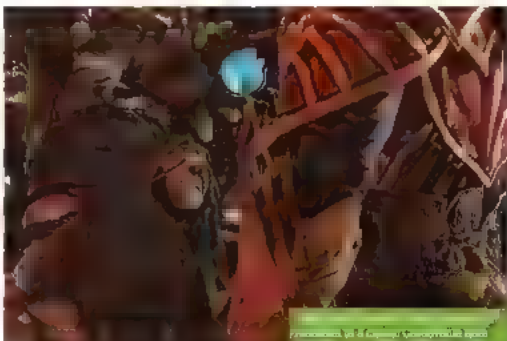
Just like in Castlevania's 2D offerings, Lords of Shadow delivers a plethora of innovative, expertly balanced boss fights. Gabriel scales colossal titans, searching for and surgically pounding their weak spots to dust. He scrambles to destroy a deadly vampire general before it dines on the bloody contents of an iron maiden. Castlevania also has the widest variety of enemies I've ever seen in a game of its ilk. Chupacabras abduct your powers, forcing you into a game of hide and seek, and burrowing zombies attack from under ground as their decapitated heads float after you.

If at any point your interest in combat begins to wane, a puzzle comes to the rescue. These range from mundane crank-turning capers to engaging quagmires, like coaxing a murder of crows towards a scarecrow by shaking their perches. Platforming also breaks up the action. Players shimmy and leap across rock faces UNCHARTED 2 style, using the chain whip to rappel and scale ledges in style. Geometrical snags occasionally rob these climbs of their fluidity, which is frustrating when a hand grip is crumbling away; in later levels, Lords of Shadow fools itself into thinking it has the 3D platforming finesse of *Mano Galaxy*. Expect repeated deaths.

Gabriel's cliché quest to resurrect his wife is fraught with both obvious and confusing twists. Each of the 50 levels begins with a monologue

by Patrick Stewart's character, many of which would have been better as cutscenes. However, much is redeemed by the game's post-credit ending, which is among the coolest video game finales I've millennium.

Castlevania takes a few hours to get rolling, but once it sinks its fangs in you'll be absorbed. After putting nearly 20 hours into Lords of Shadow, I emerged satisfied and ready to play again. This polished, action-packed adventure has me ecstatic to see not only what's in store for the next 3D Castlevania, but also what talented developer MercurySteam does next. Don't let the deluge of fall releases or the 3D Castlevania stigma keep you from this amazing quest. —Tim Turi



9

PS3 • 360

- » **Concept**
Konami finally produces an awesome 3D Castlevania by ripping off awesome games and infusing its signature style.
- » **Graphics**
Not even mediocre human character models can spoil the breathtaking environments, vibrant colors, and cool-looking enemies.
- » **Sound**
Lacks classic Castlevania tunes, but the epic orchestra is a solid replacement. Some sound effects seem absent.
- » **Playability**
A natural control scheme provides satisfying Devil May Cry and God of War-style combat.
- » **Entertainment**
It starts slow but builds up with incredible boss battles, rewarding exploration, and an unforgettable conclusion.
- » **Replay Value**
High.

Medal of Honor

EAs' most fails to polish a diminished series

7

PS3 • 360 • PC

Concept
Transplant the Medal of Honor series away from its usual World War II setting to modern-day Afghanistan

Graphics
The desert environments are convincing enough, but the character models are bland. EA/GA and DICE did a great job keeping a visual parity between the campaign and multiplayer modes

Sound
With a proper sound system, you'll feel the gun battles in your gut

Playability
The single-player mode's default aim assist does everything but pull the trigger for you

Entertainment
It doesn't do anything new or risky, but Medal of Honor is an adequate shooter. That may not be enough at this point

Replay Value
Moderately High

A look a chance with the latest installment of Medal of Honor moving the series from its World War II origins to a contemporary setting. It's no secret that the franchise has lost its way over the years, and it has the declining review scores to show for it. Those who pinned their hopes on the change in venue versus fixing the problems are likely to be disappointed by the results.

The single-player campaign isn't bad, but it hardly feels inspired. If you've played any of the modern-day military shooters, you've experienced most of Medal of Honor's set pieces—a helicopter-based rail shooter segment, a section where you paint targets for air support, and other levels where you and your bearded buddy sneak through camps as snipers. Medal of Honor's campaign lacks the excitement that would help it stand tall against the considerable competition. Character animations are gmy, weapons feel slightly underpowered, and the AI is downright suicidal. This works to your advantage when enemies show a complete disregard for cover rolling out of safety to stake out firing positions in the open.

The story is standard fare, with players taking on a variety of raids and infiltration missions throughout Afghanistan. The narrative switches perspective several times, but since none of the characters are particularly memorable, it's tough to care too much about what's going on. The pacing bounces around a bit, too, with one nighttime ATV section in particular dragging on too long. (And don't ask me why they chose two of the loudest vehicles imaginable for the night time raid, either.)

Admittedly, a lot of people won't bother with the campaign. After all, the biggest draw for most military shooters is the multiplayer. Battlefield alums DICE took on the task for Medal of Honor, and while the experience is technically competent, it ultimately doesn't have the same spark as the developer's flagship franchise.

Style | Player Action (24-Player Online) Publisher Electronic Arts Developer EA/GA/DICE Release October 12 ESRB M



There are three classes in multiplayer—rifle men, Special Ops, and snipers. Each class levels up independently, with experience unlocking new gear. There aren't any Modern Warfare-style perks, so you know that every player you face on the battlefield can take as many bullets as the next.

Combat Mission is the most ambitious of Medal of Honor's multiplayer modes. Coalition forces must work through a series of five connected missions while the insurgents try to prevent them from succeeding. For instance, in the Mazar-Sharif Airfield level, the Coalition starts on the outskirts of a dilapidated airfield. Their ultimate goal is to download data from a laptop on the far end. To get there, the team must destroy a roadblock (allowing tanks to pass farther into the battlefield), blast through some hangar doors, secure an area with the help of a mounted rocket launcher, kill enemies around a downed helicopter, and then work toward the building containing the computer. The fast-paced mode is complemented well by the game's generously short respawn times.

Sector Control is essentially Battlefield's Conquest mode, with two sides fighting to control three objectives. In Objective Raid, Coalition forces have to defend a pair of objectives from enemy sabotage.

As players rack up score chains—points earned racking up kills, meeting objectives, and supporting your team—they're rewarded with offensive and defensive bonuses. You can, for example, choose to rain fire on the opposing team by calling in a mortar strike, or put a JAW online to temporarily display the enemy locations on your radar. Better still, you don't lose this bonus ability when you die, though your score chain will be reset.

The game's eight maps are diverse, drawing inspiration from pivotal moments in the single-player campaign. Mazar-I-Sharif provides plenty of hiding spots, as players sprint from hollowed airplane shells to hangar and back. Snipers will

undoubtedly fall in love with some of the game's more urban settings, including Diwagal Camp, which features insurgent emplacements in caves perched above the village's mud huts.

The Shahikhot Mountains map unfortunately highlights a larger problem with the game's balance: Defenders are holed up in a small camp tucked into a snowy mountaintop. With only a few paths into that camp—most of which are easily monitored by snipers—attacking quickly becomes futile. After a few waves of spawns are neatly killed, defenders rack up the kills and can then use the bonuses to ensure that the momentum doesn't shift. Once a team has gained the upper hand, it's quite difficult to stage a comeback when the enemy team can blast chokepoints with rocket barrages. Teams could work the score chain system to their advantage on offense as well, unleashing a coordinated hoard of rockets and mortars.

The obvious solution for comebacks is to stop dying, but the spawn system doesn't do players any favors. If you're on the insurgent team, you'll spawn in predetermined points. Coalition players who spawn on teammates don't get to specify which member they want. The AI is supposed to invisibly link players into predetermined squads and use that to choose optimal positioning, but it often plopped me down right into an enemy's sights. This works both ways. I'd be in the middle of blasting someone apart when one of his teammates would pop up beside him out of thin air. It's easy to take advantage of their temporary confusion and make it a two-for, but those kills feel hollow.

All the parts for a great multiplayer experience are here—class unlocks, a variety of familiar modes, lots of guns—but they don't come together in a way that makes Medal of Honor a must-play shooter. Military buffs may enjoy the game on some level, but in such a densely packed genre, EA must try harder to stand out. —Jeff Cox



Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock

Guitar Hero goes gonzo

Style 1 to 4-Player Music (8-Player Online) Publisher Activision Developer
Neversoft Release September 28 ESRB T



If you thought *Guitar Hero* had already jumped the shark, *Warriors of Rock* is akin to hopping in a hot rod, revving the engine, and jumping through a flaming hoop over a school of mega sharks. *Warriors of Rock* welds the series' familiar gameplay to action game elements like elaborate cutscenes and character transformations. Now, instead of just selecting your character and plowing through selfists, you must go through custom sets created for GH characters old and new, earning a ludicrous number of stars to unlock their new "warrior" forms. Pretty soon, good old Lars Urliak is a giant death metal pig with pierced nipples, Casey Lynch is a half snake woman, and Johnny Napalm is... a punk rock version of *Nightcrawler* from *X-Men*? Sure. This is about as over-the-top as I gets, and it's topped off with a paper-thin plotline about defeating some giant beast with your axe of rock [Brutal Legend anyone?] with narration by Gene Simmons of KISS.

Neversoft injected the familiar gameplay with steroids, a host of character-specific power-ups allow you to get previously impossible numbers of stars. Casey's Shield Guardian gives you two

recharging shields that protect your note streaks. Judy Nails can overflow her rock meter, garnering two extra stars. Others include a five-percent Star Power boost for every 10-note streak and an Ankh talisman that saves you from failing out of a song.

This basically amounts to grade inflation. I'm certainly not as good at *Guitar Hero* as I once was, but remember what nailing a song feels like. What would have been a three or four-star run-through of a song now nets you six or seven stars. If that makes you feel better, fine, but I'm not going to delude myself.

The powers become more interesting later in the game, when you must assign the characters into two bands to face the final boss. Here it's important to wisely combine your powers in order to maximize your advantage. For example, I constructed one band to focus on Star Power and the other for multiplier and note streaks. After you've finished the game, you can tackle it again in Dominate Quest, where you have all eight powers enabled but must get 40 stars on each song. If you're playing well, you can play an entire song with Star Power on (and a 36x multiplier

running). This arcade-style experience carries over to the new Quickplay+ mode as well, which adds cool Star Challenges that let you gain points to level up and unlock new rewards and items.

The soundtrack is a meat bag. The earlier stages are well balanced and focused, giving you genre-oriented sets like Johnny Napalm's puny gig at CBGBs or new character Austin Tegas's classic rock block. The game's centerpiece is a marathon playthrough of Rush's sdeign 2112 suite. As a big Rush fan, I loved it, though I'm not on board with having the band members do an awkward recitation of the album's silly story. The end of the game amps up the challenge with a final boss battle that features some ridiculously hard new Megadeth songs and a bonus tier of metal shredders. Frankly, I think most of these songs are terrible and felt like a chore. I had much more fun coming back to earlier tracks on the Dominate Quest.

Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock is often stupid and frequently silly, but I got caught up in shredding my way through the ridiculous experience. It doesn't matter if I was laughing with the game or laughing at it. I was entertained. » Matt Rejeson

8

PS3 • 360 • Wii

» Concept Takes the familiar *Guitar Hero* gameplay on a ridiculous fantasy adventure

» Graphics This is definitely the most ambitious eye candy ever seen in a music game

» Sound At first the soundtrack is diverse, but later levels overemphasize shredding metal

» Playability The new special powers add some interest, but mostly it's the same old runway and notes

» Entertainment Audacious or stupid (or both)? This game will sharply divide fans

» Replay Value High

Vanquish

A one-note burst of adrenal

Style 1 Player Action Publisher Sega Developer Platinum Games
Release October 19 ESRB M

If *Vanquish* were a movie instead of a video game, the most appropriate comparison would be *Cranic*. Like that Jason Statham vehicle, *Vanquish* moves along at a breakneck pace, briefly stopping on occasion to offer blink and you'll-miss-them scenes that push along the barest possible skeleton of a plot. While some of the action is exhilarating, the game's generic characters and one-note gameplay keep it from reaching the high standards set by *Shin*, *Mikami*'s other works.

After a brief tutorial, you're immediately thrust into a futuristic U.S. vs. Soviet Union conflict

...long story short, you have crazy battle armor, the Russians have an army of robots that want to kill you, and a crazy dude wants to blow up New York City. Cutscenes are brief and don't do a fantastic job of pushing the narrative forward, but something tells me that the story wasn't the first order of business for Platinum.

Your player is Sam Gideon, a tough-as-nails chain smoker whose voice resembles a Muppet impersonating Solid Snake. Outside of that, you don't learn much about your protagonist. What he lacks in personality he makes up for with his Augmented Reaction Suit, which is a fancy way of saying "awesome body armor that lets you rocket-slide into robots.

Most of the fun *Vanquish* offers is related to this suit's abilities, whether you're rocketing from cover to cover or performing a missile dropkick on a robotic

commie. If a dozen enemies are coming down a staircase towards you, it's hard to not feel like a badass when you rocket-slide away from them in slow motion while throwing a grenade over your shoulder. The game is at its best when you're using these abilities during one of the many giant set-piece moments.

However impressive the action is, the game is a one-trick pony. Boss fights start recycling early on; the weapons aren't particularly impressive and you won't care about the story for a second. Outside of a "snipe the spotlights" section and a ridiculously brief zero-gravity area, most battles are of the "stand here and survive until the elevator is ready" variety. The game is also very short. Don't be surprised if you finish your first playthrough in four hours or less.

If *Vanquish* had been fleshed out with better characters, more variety, and a more substantial campaign, it could have been great. As is, the awesome suit amounts to little more than a fun toy in a forgettable world. » Dan Ryckert



7.75

PS3 • 360

» Concept SHOOT BOOST SHOOT BOOST SHOOT BOOST Smoke

» Graphics Everything moves along at an impressive framerate, considering how much crazy crap is constantly happening onscreen

» Sound Spastic techno soundtrack and cartoonish voices. Prepare to hear Sam scream "Out of the way!" anytime you're among within 20 miles of an ally

» Playability The shooting mechanics and the suit abilities both work without a hitch

» Entertainment It's a blast at the beginning, starts to grow old not long after that, and then it's over

» Replay Value Moderately Low



NBA 2K11

needed franchise at etc

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (ID-Player Online) Publisher 2K Sports
Developer Visual Concepts Releases October 5 2010 E

Developers of sports games do an admirable job of capturing the essence and excitement of the modern leagues, but few tap the deep well of history in service of the sport. This is often chalked up to logistics since the players from bygone eras no longer are serviced by player unions, the developers must sign each individual athlete to craft a historical concept. Visual Concepts loved with this concept with *All Pro Football 2K8*, but with no league license the experience rang hollow. In doing the groundwork to retell the storied past of basketball's most decorated legend, Michael Jordan, 2K Sport has proven the results are worth the effort.

The Jordan Challenge is my favorite new sports game mode of the year. Visual Concepts painstakingly recreated 10 memorable events from the career of His Airness, signing all the players from the era, animating them with signature shots, and even providing historical commentary to give gamers the context of Jordan's achievements. The attention to detail paid to Jordan himself is remarkable - 2K nailed the jump shot, crossover, ball fake, signature dunks, tongue wagging, and even the competitive stare of its cover athlete. This is a mode every hardcore basketball fan should experience, and other developers should follow suit in recreating classic moments of other sports with this level of dedication.

This attention to craft is also apparent in the Association mode, which for years has stood as the best franchise experience in the sporting realm. With many of the finer details already in place, this year the mode received a subtle makeover in several areas. The new "trade finder" is helpful in finding willing suitors to unload a troubled player or unwanted contract. The draft

day features more trade activity than ever before. The AI-controlled teams are more aware of when they should be starting a free sale, collecting young players for rebuilding, or grabbing a veteran player to make a little run. The only nagging absence in the mode is the inability to sign players to contract extensions during the season.

Last year 2K unveiled its My Player mode, a stunted attempt at putting you in the shoes of a young player trying to make an NBA roster. The mode is more enjoyable this year thanks to an experience system that results in better rewards for good performances. The reward logic is still touchy - you get knocked an absurd amount of points for letting your man score and you hardly receive any bump for draining shots yourself. The skewed system also over-rewards you for playing out of position - for instance, point guards get an uncharacteristically high bump for grabbing rebounds under the hoop. But once you get the hang of the grading system you should start stringing together strong performances. One carryover complaint from last year: The mode still starts you out with too low a rating. A 40-rated player would never get drafted in the first round, so if you're going to let me get selected this high, shouldn't I have a commensurate rating?

The only area the inferior NBA Elite game beats 2K11 is online. You can create a Crew and import your My Player to play in five-on-five matches, but with no online league infrastructure it's not the destination mode it could be. The on-court play runs smoothly for the most part, but I did notice brief moments of lag.

On the court, 2K delivers many subtle changes that should please hardcore hoops fans. The off-the-ball defense is drastically improved -



8.75

PS3 + 360

» **Concept**
Recreate the biggest moments from the best player in basketball history's career

» **Graphics**
A fantastic array of generic and signature player animations gives this game the look of a real live broadcast

» **Sound**
Solid commentary and the best sports game soundtrack of the year

» **Playability**
You can break out of animations more frequently and the rest of the solid controls return from last year

» **Entertainment**
A total package marred only by small gameplay glitches

» **Replay Value**
High

players more actively police passing lanes and rotate properly. The game has a better sense of differentiation between untalented ball handlers and gifted dime-dishing point guards - no more outlet passes from your backcourt after a basket to beat the defenses to the paint. The refined collision system looks great, and the tweaks to the dribbling mechanics make the complicated system more accessible. My favorite new feature is the informative new playcalling system that draws the plays right on the court so you know where you should be at all times.

The only complaints I have are the return of a few legacy issues like poor sideline negotiation, players shooting balls off the side of the backboard when shooting from the baseline, the strange magicalism that redirects your player while playing defense, and the fundamental problems with help defense. Players often don't face the right way or attempt a proper steal when double-teaming.

While its competitor struggles to find its shot, NBA 2K11 keeps refining its game and opens a new door to the sports genre with the must-play Jordan Challenge mode. With solid presentation, a great franchise mode and strong gameplay, NBA 2K11 is an impressive package. - Matt Bertz



Sonic the Hedgehog 4: Episode 1

A S O N I C G A M E



8

**Style 1-Player Platforming Publisher Sega
Developer Sonic Team/Duops
Release October 12 (PS3), October 13 (360) ESRB E**

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Scrub away a decade of bad Sonic games with bleach and HD

» **Graphics**
When Sonic first hits the Genesis the vivid colors popped off the screen. They still do

» **Sound**
The same iconic sound effects from the '90s coupled with ho-hum music that's too jolly

» **Playability**
Genesis-like paragon play feels off, but the homing attack smooths it over

» **Entertainment**
A must-play for Sonic nuts and a solid download for side-scrolling fans

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

My relationship with Sonic dates back nearly 20 years. Things were great in the early days, we ran through the fields and thwarted a mustacheed mad man's evil plans together. But after a few years of bliss we hit rocky times. Sonic exorcised with 3D and hit rock bottom. This rust shattering downward spiral continued for almost 15 years, but now Sonic has promised change. Unlike Huey Plur's return to mobility and 2D enough to reignite the blissful old flame? Yes, but some of the magic has faded.

Sonic 4 sets the tone with a fitting tribute to Green Hill Zone. The hedgehog tears across the lush green environment trailing vivid blue streaks that evoke fond 6-bit memories. Treks through casino, water, and factory themed levels not only show off the game's gorgeous visuals, but also serve as breezy remixes of the best Sonic levels.

Each level is packed with familiar enemies, power-ups, and speed jovi set pieces like loop de loops. The goal is still to blaze through these stages while taking in enough rings to play special stages and score seven chaos emeralds—a challenging but rewarding task. If you've played a classic Sonic game in the last year you may struggle with the way he controls now. While he accelerates fine without constant spin dashes, Sonic's signature momentum wanes without a constant press of the analog stick. However, an efficient and fun new homing attack overshadows most frustration caused by the not quite apt controls.

This new title looks, feels, and sounds like an upgraded Sonic game. Easily digestible torch-lighting puzzles and nine act segments do well to break up the game's pacing, but more variety would have been welcomed. Playing four stages within one level's theme gets repetitive. Additional incentive for enduring frustratingly difficult special stages to collect arbitrary gems would have been nice, too. Super Sonic and a teaser ending just doesn't cut it anymore.

Sonic does his best to make things like they used to be, but all the candlelit dinners and chaos emeralds in the world can't hide the fact that we've both changed. It may not be the be all end all Sonic game that professed enthusiasts like myself have been waiting 15 years for, but Sonic 4 is a fun, frenetic download for fans and newcomers alike. —Tim Turi



Plants vs. Zombies

Xbox 360 version provides lawn defense for two

9



**Style 1 or 2-Player Puzzle Publisher
PopCap Games Developer PopCap Games
Release September 8 ESRB E10+**

360

» **Concept**
Pond off starving zombies using a wide variety of plant life in original and new modes on XBLA

» **Graphics**
Cartoony visuals look great in HD

» **Sound**
The music never gets old, with haunting-yet-lighthearted arrangements complemented by the sounds of zombies yearning for brains

» **Playability**
Controls are just as easy to pick up on the 360 controller as they are on other platforms

» **Entertainment**
If you've somehow missed the inclusion of co-op and multiplayer makes the XBLA version of Plants vs. Zombies a worthy selection

» **Replay Value**
High

In just over a year, Plants vs. Zombies has sprouted across multiple platforms, further establishing PopCap as a household name post Bejeweled. Whether on PC, handheld, or mobile platforms, each installment oozes with PopCap's signature charm and polish, and the most recent Xbox Live Arcade version is no different. To further enhance an already solid and addictive offering, PopCap has included engaging cooperative and multiplayer modes to keep things fresh.

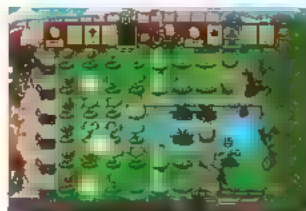
In case you've been living under a Wall-Nut, Plants vs. Zombies requires you to defend your home (and your brain) from a zombie invasion using a variety of plant life to keep the hordes at bay. This time around, however, a second player can join in for the main adventures 50 levels. Each player selects and places plants independently, but having an extra set of eyes becomes helpful during later levels when zombie hordes are seemingly endless. You'll also find separate co-op levels outside of adventure mode that gives each player four slots to choose plants. Sunlight needed to set up your defense isn't shared, however, so what begins as a harmonious team effort can quickly turn into a shouting match for hogging all the energy or misplacing a plant—and that's all part of the fun.

versus mode puts one player in control of the plants, with the other commanding the advancing zombie horde. The plants are no different than in adventure mode, but as zombies you're tasked with protecting your army from opposing plant projectiles with properly placed tombstones while driving zombies toward the plants' home. The inclusion of multiplayer and cooperative modes to the franchise is a welcome addition, and the seamless execution of familiar gameplay mechanics when exploring new soil with a second player makes these modes feel like they have been part of the beloved game from the start.

If the new control layout on the 360 is of concern, don't sweat it. PopCap has continually done a fantastic job translating the control scheme across platforms (from computers to touch screens) and the 360 controller is no exception. While navigating the grid with the left stick is probably the least light among platforms, it takes no

time at all to adjust to the new scheme, making it just as easy for veterans and newbies alike to get the gameplay down.

If you have yet to pick up Plants vs. Zombies or want to once again engage in zombie stomping (or brain munching) action with a friend, the XBLA version is a worthy addition to your library. —Annette Gonzalez



NBA Jam

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Canada Release October 5 ESRB E

In the height of the arcade era I probably spent the GDP of Burundi raining threats and shattering backboards in NBA Jam. But after years of success, the franchise found itself in a scoring slump and inevitably retired to the bench. After Midway liquidated its assets, the

franchise license fell into the lap of EA, which just happened to hire original NBA Jam designer Mark Turmell shortly thereafter. Queue the Rocky comeback training montage and overdub it with a Boomstoloka. NBA Jam is back—and it's as good as you remember.

This over-the-top take on the NBA trims away the fat from team rosters to deliver glorious two-on-two gameplay with the most recognizable faces in the sport, as well as a few guest appearances from celebrities and politicians. Most teams have unlockable legendary players from the original games as well, with a few glaring exceptions like Charles Barkley, Reggie Miller, and Shawn Kemp. The art style takes a page from *South Park*, as pictures of player faces are Photoshopped onto animated bodies with hilarious expressions that change as they perform different actions on the court.

The tried and true gameplay remains largely unchanged. Each game is filled with thundering dunks, bombs from three-point range, and an excessive amount of blocks, steals, and flying elbows. Hitting three shots in a row without letting the other team score sets your player on fire, but this doesn't increase your shooting accuracy as much as in years past. EA did an admirable



8.25

» **Concept**
Revive a classic arcade franchise with a contemporary touch

» **Graphics**
The charming Photobop-ness-pixelation art style works well

» **Sound**
Classic commentator Tim Kitzrow returns to call every Boomstoloka and block with fervor

» **Playability**
Controls are more competent than most Wii games, though you'll still suffer from some unpredictability. The game also supports the classic controller

» **Entertainment**
This nostalgic trip down memory lane is the perfect multiplayer game. So why no online support?!

» **Replay Value**
High

Second Opinion 8.25

Rather than trying to revolutionize the core of the game, this reboot plays just like classic NBA Jam with updated rosters, hilarious visuals, and some entertaining game modes. EA nails the presentation, from the high diving tomahawk slam to the commentary from Tim Kitzrow. While it may look and feel like the same game you pumped countless quarters into back in 1993, the Wii controls can be a hindrance at times. It's frustrating to watch your character go for jump shots when you want a dunk, or when the remote miscalculates a slight hand motion as an attempt to block, a slight bit also disappointing to see that being "on fire" doesn't give you quite the dominating edge it did, back in the day. Despite these minor issues, NBA Jam absolutely delivers if you're looking for a concentrated shot of nostalgia. — Dan Ryckert

Wii Party

4.5

Style 1 to 4-Player Party Publisher Nintendo Developer Mid Cube Release October 3 ESRB E

» **Concept**
Remove Mario Party's charm by taking out classic characters and replacing them with booby Mii

» **Graphics**
"Spin-On!" successfully emulates the gaudy look of a game show, but everything else is bland and lacks style

» **Sound**
Plan to turn down the volume before you're overwhelmed by elevator music and an annoying gibberish-speaking host

» **Playability**
Learning to control each new minigame is a slight challenge, but there's little strategy in the minigames

» **Entertainment**
If you dug Mario Party, maybe you'll enjoy this, but there are far better party game options on the Wii

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Last month, I reviewed *Guilty Party*, one of the best examples of a party game in this generation. It has a light-hearted atmosphere, but it also requires strategy and forward thinking if you want to win. By comparison, *Wii Party* is unmitigated, uninteresting chaos. Believe it or not, *Wii Party* is worse than the Mario Party series.

Wii Party's 80-plus minigames share the same uneven quality I've come to expect from Mario Party, which makes sense given that many of them are iterations of games from that series. The minigames are even worse. Whereas Mario Party gave players multiple boards to play through, *Wii Party* features multiple game types each less exciting than the last.

Board Game Island and Globe Trot adhere

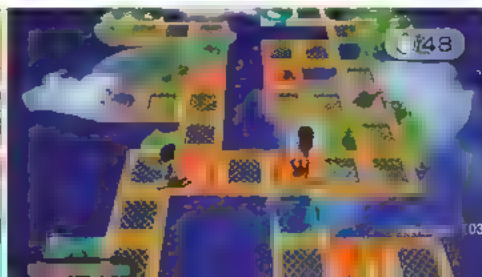
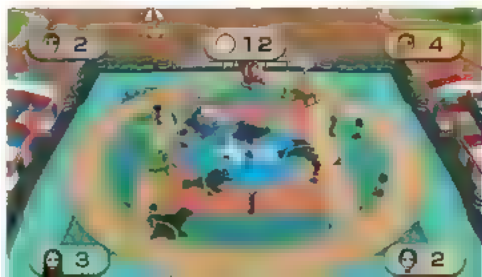
most closely to the Mario Party tradition. If you're going to play any portion of the game, *Globe Trot* is the best. You choose how many spaces you move by playing cards in your hand, so you have more control over what's going on.

Game types such as Spin-Off are full of random crap that keeps determining the winner out of your control. In my first few rounds of this *Wheel of Fortune* rip-off, the bank filled up with 50,000 coins that subsequently won in a minigame, making it nearly impossible for me to lose. This wasn't due to any sort of skill on my part. It was dumb luck. My reward? Having to sit through 10 lull-like rounds of other players spinning the wheel, unlikely to ever catch up.

If that isn't enough to put you to sleep, why not try one of the several games based around

the thrilling activity of matching Miis who are wearing the same color? There's even Mi Bingo. Yes, Mi Bingo. That should give you a good sense of the brain-dead crowd this game is targeting.

can already hear complaints rolling in about how it's not part of *Wii Party*'s intended audience, but I don't think that's true. I love getting friends together to play goofy games like this, but plenty of other Wii releases have done what *Wii Party* is attempting in better and more interesting ways—even Nintendo's own *WarioWare Smooth Moves*. The only impressive thing about *Wii Party* is how Nintendo dumbed down and removed the soul from a franchise that was already as stupid and soulless as Mario Party. — Phil Kollar



Civilization V

Reformed into a masterpiece

9.75

PC

► Concept

Build a mighty civilization from a humble wandering tribe

► Graphics

Performance isn't what you'd hope for from a strategy game, but the art deco aesthetic works well

► Sound

Real accents in their actual languages for rival leaders is a great touch. The soundtrack does up to Civ IV, though

► Playability

One horrible mistake in diplomacy is the only blemish on the interface. Everything else is perfect

► Entertainment

This is the best strategy game in years. Don't miss it

► Replay Value

High



Style 1-Player Strategy (8-Player Online) Publisher 2K Games Developer Firaxis Games Release September 21 ESRB E10+

COMPARING CIVILIZATION V TO OTHER CONTEMPORARY strategy games is entirely pointless. Imagine if Modern Warfare had come out alongside Quake II. There is simply nothing comparable out there, not least because the strategy genre has become the province of indie developers and niche publishers. Civ V is a towering triple-A release with millions of dollars worth of polish in an era where questionably localized Russian titles are all that strategy gamers have to tide them over for months at a time. It's also a delightfully fresh take on a formula that has been slowly iterated on for more than two decades.

The heart of the Civilization fantasy is unchanged: You still manage cities, developing them from crude collections of mud huts into gleaming modern metropolises. Vast armies and armadas are again at your command, waging global war for conquest, defense, or resources with everything from spears to nukes. The land must still be worked, the primordial wilderness tamed through your people's sweat and blood. Your ultimate goal is yours to choose: Diplomatically unite the people of the world under your bangin' leadership, launch a viable colony ship into outer space, conquer the globe

through force of arms, or create a glorious utopia through enlightened civility.

Civ V's genius lies in the way that Firaxis has aggressively chopped the number of decisions that a player has to make during the course of a game while taking away almost none of the meaningful ones. As a hardcore Civ player, appreciate some of these ancillary aspects of the design, but the removal of all the fat is unquestionably Civ V's greatest accomplishment.

A perfect example of this elegance of design is the new concept of "embarking" units and removal of transport ships. In previous games you'd build separate transport units, load your armies onto them, and send them across the ocean to land on foreign shores. As your military got larger, managing this became extremely cumbersome. The concept of land units being vulnerable and slow while embarked (the entire point of transport units) is perfectly replicated by Civ V's system of allowing armies to move across water on their own, albeit slowly and defenselessly.

Firaxis applied this sort of critical examination to legacy systems across the board. Some remained nearly unchanged, such as constructing improvements like farms and windmills on your land. Others were scrapped entirely, like Civ IV's religion system. Many others survived in altered forms, and I embrace the changes without exception. This is by far the most approachable game in the series, even edging out the stripped-down console entry Civilization Revolution, but Civ V's remarkable gains in accessibility have not come at the cost of strategic depth.

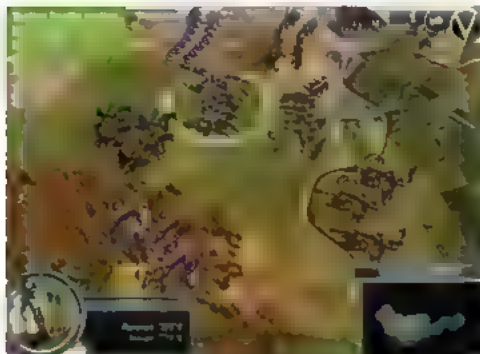
The major changes to the Civ formula may be hard for veterans to accept at first, but most will quickly realize that they haven't lost any control over their empire's development. The change to research and revenue looks drastic on the surface, but your input has merely been moved from the commerce allocation slider to managing citizens and specialists within individual cities. Religion's old role in spreading culture and affecting diplomacy is ably filled by the newly expanded role of gold, and creating a trading

financial powerhouse civilization is finally a viable path to victory. And as for combat—swallow your pride and your love for the old stack of doom tactics and gentlemen, because the one-unit-per tile new model is infinitely superior in tactical and strategic options while decimating the amount of time it takes to manage an active war.

The design focus on gold and resources is a fantastic approach that lends a lot of texture to diplomacy and opens up new possibilities for non-violent conflict—but it's a pain in the rear to fully take advantage of because the interface lacks a good way to track your incoming and outgoing resources and gold. Every time you want to sell off some cotton to Montezuma, for instance, I have to manually count how many I'm collecting myself, how much I'm getting in trade from other nations, and how many I'm already trading away. Stupid. Also, one specific early game strategem nearly guarantees a win on its own: using the Great Library's free research advance to net the expensive Civil Service technology can double your growth rate, putting every other empire at a massive disadvantage.

Multipayer is functional, but the only way I suggest spending any time with it is with friends playing cooperatively against the AI. For a number of reasons, including the Civil Service slingshot above, Civ V's design does not lend itself well to cut-throat human-versus-human play. That said, I didn't come across any technical issues that prevent playing with friends from being enjoyable.

I encourage everyone, from strategy nerds who spend most of their time in online FPS matches to noobs who could teach me a thing or two about the optimal distribution of forces in hex-based combat, to give Civilization V a shot. As a hardcore strategy gamer who is no stranger to planning out my empire's production dozens of turns in advance, I've already turned to Civ V for my world-conquering needs—but at the same time, if anything is going to rear a new generation of strategy gamers like the very first Civilization did for me, it's this. —Adam Bressner



Amnesia: The Dark Descent

Horror done right:



9.25

PC

» **Concept**

Blend audio, video, and interactivity in a convincing argument for the power of video games as emotional experiences.

» **Graphics**

I've never had a visceral reaction to light and darkness like I do in Amnesia.

» **Sound**

Play it loud. From ambient noises to environmental interactions and scripted events, the audio design is perfect.

» **Playability**

Rather than combining two arbitrary items to form an improvised lockpick to open a window, you can throw a chair through it. You don't have to have Myst-style patience for these puzzles.

» **Entertainment**

"Entertaining" is perhaps not the right word, but this is a journey well worth taking.

» **Replay Value**

Moderately Low

If there is any justice in the world, the sizable contingent of gamers who incessantly bleat about the lack of new experiences in modern video games will purchase Amnesia: The Dark Descent right now. This indie project is an expertly crafted tale of horror and discovery that uses its interactive nature to enthrall players as deeply as any tale in any medium. Amnesia is barely a game in the traditional sense, leaving the nearly two decades of horror gaming tradition since *Alone in the Dark* by the wayside and forging its own twisted path.

Daniel's story is a tragedy from the beginning: Waking up in a decrepit Prussian castle with no memory of his past, he soon learns that his amnesia is self-inflicted. "I can't tell you why, but know this: I choose to forget," reads the note his former self left for him, dated August 1839, before intentionally blanking his own memory. His reasons for this drastic act remain vague, but the horrible reality of the castle gives reason enough to squeeze your eyes shut. A literal living nightmare relentlessly pursues Daniel through the castle as he struggles to piece together enough of his past to make sense of his former self's final directive: Find and kill Alexander of Brennenburg.

Going into further detail would spoil the mystery; Amnesia's setting is too intricate, and the pacing of reveals is too well-crafted to disrespect. The backstory parallels Daniel's current quest. Amnesia follows the tradition of Lovecraft, Poe, and Shelley, weaving a tale deeply tied to the 19th century's spirit of discovery, power, and glory. The journal notes you unearth tell a story of hubris and curiosity inexorably pulling a fascinating cast of characters through their own

descent into madness, which leads to the current predicament. The story drew me reluctantly onward, even when I wanted to walk away — not out of frustration or boredom, but because I was outright scared of what awaited me down the next dark hallway.

I'm not ashamed to admit my fear. Amnesia is terrifying. Slow footsteps and ragged breathing might be part of the ambient audio track — or they might mean that a nightmarish creature is behind the next door. A door flying open could be a clue to where you need to go next. It could also be a precursor to a horrible monster charging at you. I literally jumped out of my seat several times per hour. Developer Frictional Games has discovered a strange alchemy that mixes pacing, interactivity, and presentation into pure suspense.

The first-person gameplay itself is simple. The castle slowly opens up to you as you explore its many chambers, revealing the secrets that have kept it and its occupants shrouded in a cloak of occult mystery for centuries. Gathering your nerves to venture into the next darkened room is the hardest thing about Amnesia; action sequences are used sparingly to capitalize on built-up tension. The primary mechanic is your sanity level, which slowly drains as you spend time in the darkness. Standing in the light makes you an obvious target for any enemies, though, which makes the light-dark tension a constant. Cool fullscreen effects make everything more menacing as your sanity spirals downward, and Daniel's breath echoes in his ears as he loses his grip on reality. Advancing through the game is the only method to regain your wits, which creates a feedback loop that pulls you ever

forward rather than encouraging the meticulous scavenging behavior that is a hallmark of so many games.

Inventory management is limited, as players only need concern themselves with a bare handful of resources as well as the occasional puzzle piece. Unlike *Alan Wake* (or nearly all horror titles, for that matter), the gameplay never takes away from the suspense or sense of immersion. This comes at the price of action, as you generally have no viable combat option in Amnesia. Then again, the ass-kicking protagonist is a concept foreign to the horror genre in every medium but games.

If *Resident Evil* is *Affairs*, Amnesia is *Affair*. Frictional Games has created something wholly unlike the traditional horror game. Amnesia shows us by example that gaming has entirely new realms to explore. The price of admission is only \$20 through your digital retailer of choice. Do the right thing. — Adam Bleszkear



8.75

DS

Concept
Expand Maxwell's already impressive vocabulary with the addition of adjectives

Graphics
The simple, endearing graphics and animations haven't evolved much from its predecessor

Sound
The upbeat music suits the tone of the game perfectly

Playability
The inclusion of d-pad controls helps eliminate some of the frustration from the first title

Entertainment
Vague goals can get in the way of pure puzzle bliss, but the euphoria from solving riddles keeps the enjoyment high

Replay Value
Moderately High

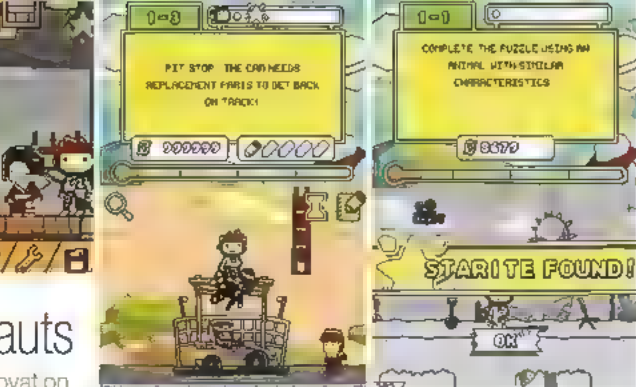


Super Scribblenauts

Adjectives add intrigue and innovation

If you enjoyed Scribblenauts, slipping into the sequel feels like meeting up with an old friend. The building blocks of the game remain unchanged, retaining the cleverness and replayability that made the original so charming. Instead of overhauling the basics, SiH Cell opted to augment the tried-and-true formula by adding adjectives and building upon the impressive vocabulary that brings your creativity to life.

Adjectives allow for increasingly humorous and complex methods of solving puzzles. When asked to make a cross between a building and an animal, successful solutions included a "furry condo," and a "hairy house." Sadly, a "drooling apartment" didn't fulfill the criteria (fur was apparently a requirement), but summoning a salivating



Style: 1-Player Puzzle Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Developer: SiH Cell Release: October 12 ESRB: E10+

residence into existence was gratifying in its own right.

Maxwell's available vocabulary isn't the only thing that has expanded; the puzzles feel more varied, too. New challenges have you dueling a witch by summoning monsters with specific traits to counter her concoctions, matching ingredients in a grid according to a recipe, and even more complex chains of interactions like colonizing a planet. Even if I was slightly frustrated by a puzzle, curiosity always got the best of me and pushed me forward. "Just one more puzzle" is an easy habit to fall into.

Super Scribblenauts' biggest downfall is the same as its predecessor's. Because of the freedom of choice and the overall ambition of

the project, it's that much more disappointing when an elaborate scheme on your end doesn't come to fruition. Some exclusions are mystifying in the library of 10,000-plus modifiers, could summon a "mopey car," but a "loud car" was out of the question. Additionally, a handful of objectives were cryptically worded, so much so that it took a lot of trial and error to even understand the goal.

Super Scribblenauts still stands head and shoulders above its puzzle brethren in terms of innovation and originality. The ability to tackle puzzles again to find new solutions, the addition of a puzzle creator, and special levels that focus on action-oriented play give Maxwell's adventure surprising longevity. —Meagan VaaBurkleo

Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light

Old-fashioned for its own good

6

DS

Concept
Make an RPG that ignores all advances in game design from the last 20 years

Graphics
Some cool visuals in towns, but the charm of this style is wearing off

Sound
The music is my favorite part of the whole game, bringing back fond memories of old-school Final Fantasy soundtracks

Playability
Why won't you let me select which enemy my characters attack? Why?

Entertainment
If you want a classic-style RPG, play a real one instead of this motor

Replay Value
Low

Style: 1-Player Role-Playing (4-Player Local) Publisher: Square Enix Developer: Matrix Software/Square Enix Release: October 9 ESRB: E10+

Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light employs old-school basics to recapture the charm of a bygone RPG era. From the predictable plot to the four heroes, this spin-off takes inspiration from the minimalist approach of the 8-bit Final Fantasy titles. Nostalgia may be a powerful force, but it isn't enough to make 4 Heroes of Light worth remembering, fondly or otherwise.

Developed by the same team that handled the DS remakes of Final Fantasy III and IV, this game could be said to have a classic vibe, but that's being charitable. Everything about the adventure is pulled straight from the big book of RPG tropes: "Desert town? Spoiled princess? No way! Nothing about the characters or plot is surprising.

Without a strong narrative to draw you in, all you're left with is a wreck of a battle system thrown into this by-the-numbers adventure. On one hand, the turn-based combat lines to be simple and accessible; the job system is easy to understand, and the elimination of MP means you aren't constantly managing resources. At the same time, the limited inventory space and rough boss encounters will leave you longing for basic features found in just about every real RPG made since the late '80s.

The worst offender is the targeting—or the lack thereof. You can't specify which enemies you attack or which allies you heal. Instead, you select the action you want to perform, then place your trust in whatever hidden, under-the-hood calculations the system uses to determine your target. It does okay most of the time, but fails frequently enough that you can never formulate reliable strategies.

Four-player co-op could have patched some of these wounds, but it doesn't. The local-only multiplayer is only good for grinding, since only the host can make story progress (and you can't save until you exit the whole model). Your core party isn't even static, so you may only be able to do two- or three-player co-op, adding an extra barrier to playing even if you and three friends are sitting on the same couch.

What this experience lacks in novelty, it makes up for in frustration. Your objectives are often left unclear, and when you figure it out, you're rewarded with clunky battles and a story you don't care about. Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light isn't glitchy or broken, but that's the highest compliment I can muster. —Joe Juba



Professor Layton and the Unwound Future

The best Layton story yet, featuring a

by [unreadable]



Style: 1 Player Puzzle Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Level-5 Release: September 12 ESRB: E10+

8.25

When Professor Layton and the Curious Village came out in the U.S. a couple of years ago it was a fresh concept. The French cafe soundtrack, the distinct animation and art style, and Layton and Luke's insatiable desire to solve mysteries made it stand out from your ordinary puzzle. The second game was on a similar but puzzle-wise but it had a strange vampire plot and ending with a series of wacky explanations.

This time around, the duo travels to what may or may not be a future version of London, so it's not like things are suddenly grounded in reality. However, the cast really sells it. I won't spoil any new or returning characters, but it's easy to see why the charming professor gathers a crowd of amateur puzzle enthusiasts on his trek, making the player feel like a team member as well. The biggest departure from previous Layton titles is that it actually ties into the professor's past. We learn that he's not just a suit-manners-obsessed robot. It's also worth mentioning that this is the last entry in a distinct finale, so fans have to check out the surprisingly epic finale (the next Layton trilogy is actually a requiem).

From a puzzle-solving standpoint, don't expect too many changes from previous titles. You'll still have plenty of block shuffling, route figuring, and "how did it do this sister?" phrasing tricks. However, Level-5 finally revamped the memo system, and it makes a huge difference. Now you can change ink color, line thickness, and most importantly, erase specific notes instead of being forced to clear out everything at once. There's also a new Super Hint that unlocks after you've spent three coins on all of the previous puzzle hints. The one costs two coins and pretty much spells the answer out. Of course, they should only be used if you're extremely stuck, but it essentially eliminates the need to look up answers online.

Bottom line, if Layton didn't float your boat the first time around, nothing is going to change your mind here. But it's definitely worth it for fans to jump back into a world where you can't walk five steps without finding a puzzle to solve. — Bryan Vance

DS

» **Concept**
The puzzle gameplay into an outrageous mystery just like always

» **Graphics**
The brain-teasers look as simple as ever but this has easily the most droll animated sequences of the series

» **Sound**
Doesn't stray far from the traditional accordion music backing Layton's proper British accent

» **Playability**
Slight tweaks to the puzzle solving tools help bring the series forward

» **Replay Value**
Nothing rocks the boat here, but the total package is the best of the trilogy

» **Replay Value**
Moderate



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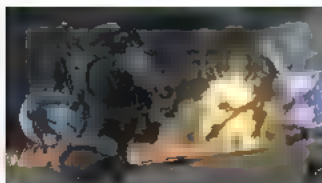


It may be getting cold outside, but the excitement is as hot as ever at Virgin Gaming. Don't miss it. Play To Have Game!



9.5 Halo: Reach

Platform 360 Release September 14 ESRB M
Issue Oct 10



An anti-pop-culture series fans felt after ODST should be completely washed away thanks to Reach. Make no mistake about it: this is the best Halo game yet. It's a little more of the same, but it's a little more of the same. This is the best Halo game yet. — Dan Ryckert

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8.5 F1 2010

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 21 ESRB E

Combining ease of use both on and off the track is the key to why this game stands out. I can't say that either, as the game is the most involved you are going to see, but simply having interviews and team objectives in and of itself is great for a season-based racing game. Couple that with actual racing with an eye towards realism and Codemasters' solid delivery delivers an F1 game everyone can enjoy. — Matthew Kato

7.5 John Daly's ProStroke Golf

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release August 5 ESRB E

Unlike John Daly himself, this game is devoid of personality. That being said, the ProStroke controls have their advantages over Tiger in some cases (except for when using the PlayStation Move) and with such a bare career mode I hope this game takes advantage of the fact that it has room to grow in future iterations. — Matthew Kato

6.5 Blade Kitten

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 21 ESRB T

Blade Kitten attempts to marry the essence of old-school 2D platformers with the bright visuals and gonzo storyline of a Japanese anime. While Krome Studios has certainly attained the latter, sketchy mechanics keep Blade Kitten from being as fun as its fore-runners. — Jeff Marchafava

3.5 Kung Fu Ride

Platform PS3 Release September 7 ESRB E • O

To say Kung Fu Ride fails to take advantage of Sony's Move hardware would be exceedingly generous. This is a game that is not only a riding officer, and through some reverse miracle, the developer actually managed to make the game stupider than it sounds. — Jeff Marchafava

6.5 Elemental War of Magic

Platform PC Release August 23 ESRB T

My intense 4X fandom has been conquered by Elemental's nonstop meta-games. I'm putting it down for now, but I'm not writing the game off forever. For now I'm not recommending this to Civilization nerds, much less strategy-curious gamers. — Adam Blessener

classic



The Twisted Tale of

Tetris

How challenging it is to be a publisher in a competitive market

by Ben Reeves

In the 1980s, Tetris was one of the most popular video game properties in the world. Dozens of companies raced to acquire the rights to it, and in 1989, Tengen bought the license from a European company called Mirrosoft. After being on store shelves for only a month, the publisher was forced to recall hundreds of thousands of unsold Tetris cartridges. A tiny problem had emerged—Mirrosoft didn't own the license to sell the game, and Nintendo had already purchased the rights to distribute Tetris from the game's original owners, the Soviet Foreign Trade Association. Nintendo sued Tengen, and Tengen's version was pulled off the market. The custody battle over Tetris is just part of a bigger story of Tengen that involves patent theft, corporate backstabbing, and underfunded business dealings.

A Focus on Atari's Atari

Atari rose to dominance in the '70s as the world's leading video game company, but after the industry crash in 1983, Atari was sinking fast. In order to recoup costs, the company sold off its home video game division. This new company started producing PC hardware under the name Atari Corp, but it ran into a problem when it decided to break into the video game business a few years later. The original Atari was still producing games under that label, so this new Atari needed a name that would set itself apart from the competition.

Atari was named after a term from the popular Japanese board game Go. The Atari offshoot followed suit, rebranding itself Tengen, a term that refers to the center point of a Go board. It may have been arrogant to assume that this new publisher would become a focal point for the video game industry, but its name turned out to be somewhat prophetic. Within a few years, Tengen became one of the most talked about companies in the industry, not because of the games it was publishing, but due to its shady business practices.

The Keys to Nintendo's

A. A. A.

To maintain quality control of the titles released on the NES, Nintendo installed a lockout chip called the 10NES into every unit. Only games that made it through Nintendo's licensing and approval process were given the microchips to bypass this system. At the time, Nintendo restricted its licenses to five games a year, and every title had to remain exclusive to the NES for at least two years.

Tengen wasn't happy with this arrangement. It could make a lot more money by producing more games, so Tengen executives met with Nintendo to see about renegotiating the licensing agreement. The execs felt that Nintendo's licensing fees were too expensive and they didn't like being restricted to releasing only five titles a year. When Nintendo shot down Tengen's proposition, the young western company began looking for a less diplomatic solution. They decided to hack Nintendo's lockout chip.

Numerous manufacturers had already discovered a way to override the 10NES lockout chip, but this required zapping the chip with a voltage spike. Tengen engineers worried that this might cause irreversible damage to a customer's NES console, unnecessarily exposing the company to liability. Additionally, Nintendo was aware of this workaround and constantly made modifications to the 10NES chipset to prevent hackers from spiking the system.

Tengen's hive of engineers worked in secret to reverse engineer the 10NES chipset, but the console proved to be a lock they couldn't pick. The company refused to give up, and eventually switched tactics. Tengen's lawyers contacted the government copyright office requesting a copy of Nintendo's lock-out system, claiming it needed the materials for a fictional lawsuit. Nintendo had fled against them. Blueprints in hand, Tengen had no problem creating its own version of the 10NES chipset. Tengen had its own master key to the most popular video game console on the planet. Announcing that it had developed a chip that allowed non-licensed companies to bypass Nintendo's lockout chip, Tengen started releasing its own games on a gray market. For a short time, the future looked very profitable.

The Fall of Tengen

The reason most NES cartridges look exactly the same is because Nintendo manufactured them all. No matter who developed a game for the NES, Nintendo handled the production of the actual cartridges. When Tengen started publishing unlicensed products, however, it had to manufacture its own cartridges. The company put its games into rounded black cases that resembled early Atari carts, something that immediately set its games apart from the competition.

Many of Tengen's titles were popular, but most of the company's library consisted of arcade hits like Pac Mania, Ms. Pac Man, Rolling Thunder, and Kix. Tengen also licensed popular Sega titles like Shinobi and After Burner and ported them to the NES. Business was booming, and Tengen was riding high on its success.

In December of 1988, Tengen kicked off what would turn into a long series of legal battles. It accused Nintendo of a monopoly and sued the Japanese publisher for \$100 million. By November of 1989, Nintendo had seen enough. Tired of Tengen's bullish behavior, Nintendo pushed back hard, countering the company for breach of contract and copyright infringements.

ment over the copied 10NES security chip. At the same time, Nintendo started secretly meeting with various retailers, threatening to reduce or hold up shipments of Nintendo products if their stores didn't stop carrying Tengen games. At the time, Nintendo was the biggest name in the toy industry, and the NES was one of the

hottest commodities on the market. It wasn't a hard decision for retailers.

The ongoing legal battles – compounded by the Tetsis fiasco from earlier in the year – depleted Tengen's financial reserves. Tengen fought Nintendo in the courts for as long as it could, but eventually settled with Nintendo before a decision was reached. The end finally came in 1994 when media conglomerate Time Warner bought a majority share of Tengen's parent company, then folded Tengen into its Time Warner Interactive

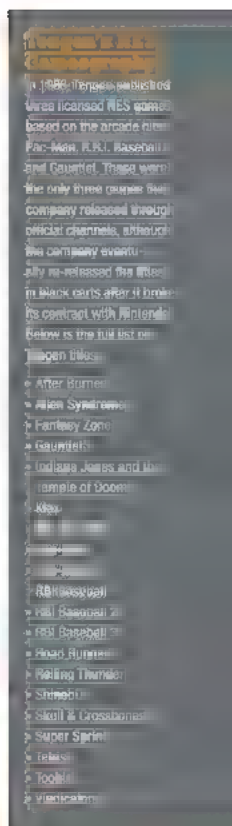
label. The name Tengen disappeared from video games forever. But somewhere out there, hundreds of thousands of black NES cartridges serve as a reminder of its existence.

"Tengen had its own master key to the most popular video game console on the planet."

Tengen manufactured its own cartridges, avoiding out of black plastic, which helped save its games a lot of money. Tengen also used game retailers for distribution.

Tengen's lawyer Ed Logg, who also famously created the lawsuit that led to the release of the Nintendo version of Tetris, which released that same year.

In June of 1989, Tengen was forced to release its stock of Tetris copies. Only around 100 copies were sold.



Resources:
Steven Kent, *The First Quarter: A 25-Year History of Video Games*. Bantam Books, 2000.

Leonard Herman, *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Video Games*. New Jersey: Palenta Press, 1997.

The Evolution of Cole MacGrath

Infamous 2 producer Brian Fleming says that the team at Sucker Punch loves changing

and improving its work, but fans got hostile when Cole MacGrath was redesigned and unveiled in our cover story earlier this year (issue #207). However, that's not the only time Cole and his conceptual predecessors have gotten a makeover. Here's a look at what's happened throughout the character's conception and some of the reasons why.

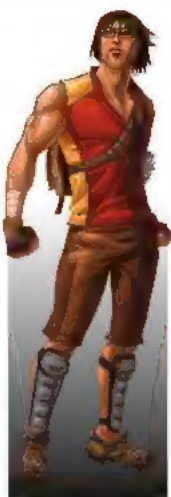
by Matthew Kato



2006

+ Talon

Infamous started out with the codename True Hero, and the team wanted an athletic urban character (but not necessarily ethnic, per se) Talon and all the other names you see here before Cole MacGrath were simply internal names. Fleming says this early iteration of the character reveals a more stylized look reminiscent of the studio's Jay Cooper days.



+ Gear Wolf

"At the Talon phase he wasn't a bike messenger, and of Gear Wolf, bike messenger was the defining thing," says Fleming, who explains that pinpointing this facet of the character was a major breakthrough.



2007

+ Chance

One change in the character's look relates directly to Infamous' gameplay. Cole - unlike Chance here - doesn't have a gun. Although the team felt that giving a superhero a gun was cheating, they saw it as a challenge to make his superpower cool enough to render the pistol impotent. The choice of a face-obscuring mask was an odd one, and Sucker Punch ditched it because it made conveying emotion from the character difficult. What is clear, however, is Chance's lack of hair. The reason? "Baldness is actually easy to render."



+ Cole MacGrath

Cole MacGrath was originally named Dylan in our original Infamous cover story (#183), but this was changed because Sucker Punch learned that Marvel Comics's Electro - who also had electricity superpowers - was named Max Dillon.



2009

+ New Cole

Fleming says that the first iteration of Cole for Infamous 2 was an attempt to get back to how they saw Cole originally in the first title before he got quippy. "There's a string of decisions that you make, and I think we got a little ahead of ourselves and changed him away from the essence of who Cole was at the end of the last game. I know it sounds crazy, but it's really easy to do. It's a stupid mistake on some level, but on another level it's really reflective of who we are. We like to work on things and change them and try our best to improve them every day."



2011

+ Classic Cole

After fans protested the sleek new Cole, Sucker Punch went back and rediscovered Cole's less stylized essence. Some elements of Classic Cole are still incomplete, however. Fleming told us: things like the hand tapes may return, but the main work is finished. "I would never say it's not going to change, but in terms of who the guy is - no, we're at the end of that. We had a fun summer, let's just put it that way."

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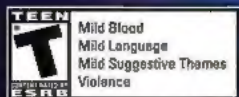
*"...it's looking like one hell of an MMO."
(Best of E3 2010, MMO Game of Show)
— Gamespy*

*"...the game not only looks Jim Lee-style great
but also functions Kratos-style smooth."
— Gamepr0*



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