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Ezio's Final Chapter*

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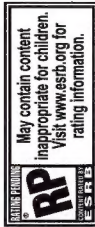
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id Bethesda



ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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comment on this letter at
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The Console Landscape

Finally addressing the inevitable, Nintendo has confirmed it will reveal the successor to the Wii at this year's E3, with a planned launch in 2012 (for more facts and rumors on the system, check out our four-page report on page 12).

While this news is all well and good for Nintendo fans who have been praying for the company to close the technology gap with Sony and Microsoft, it brings up an interesting question: Is a new generation of consoles coming from all the manufacturers?

It's a slippery question, but one that I think has a very clear and easy answer. Long story short: No.

Nintendo's Wii has dominated this generation of consoles, shipping over 86 million units in a five-year span. Five years ago Nintendo chose to forgo high definition graphics, bleeding-edge computer technology, and a robust online offering in favor of sticking to the things it does best: creating experiences that no other company in the world can deliver.

The Wii accomplished that goal with a degree of success few predicted. Its introduction of motion-based gaming to the modern era has changed game controllers for the foreseeable future, and prompted both Sony and Microsoft to respond with motion technology of their own. The two console manufacturers sought to capture users in the emerging gaming markets that opened thanks to Nintendo's vision and spectacular marketing.

For all the success and innovation the Wii brought, its lack of computing power has aged the console at a considerably faster rate than its competition. In a world where HDTVs fly off the shelves at breakneck speeds and an Internet connection is becoming an essential home utility, the Wii tech has been falling behind—fast.

To compound the problem, third-party publishers had to essentially design games from the ground up for the Wii. They also had to compete with market-dominating first-party Nintendo software, and reap few rewards from the investments they made on the Sony and Microsoft consoles, leading to a platform that publishers simply could not invest much in. After a few failed attempts, many chose to forgo publishing their biggest games on the Wii altogether.

Sony and Microsoft are not in this same position. Don't get me wrong, they have their own challenges going forward that they must address to survive, but console technology isn't one of them. Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 owners have anywhere from two to three years before they may even see the next wave of technology, much less plug it into their TVs.

This gap gives Nintendo's new console a chance to catch up in the technology race, and more importantly, it gives Nintendo a chance to change the game again. But this time Nintendo needs to create a platform where third-party companies can make great games and make money, or the company will once again find itself as the sole provider of innovative software, surrounded by a sea of subpar products from publishers just trying pick up the scraps.

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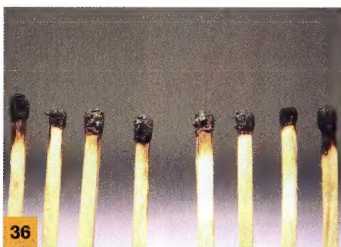
Assassin's Creed Revelations

Ezio's journey concludes with the latest entry in Ubisoft Montreal's high-flying Assassin's series. Players control the aforementioned hero along with Altair and Desmond—and the setting of historic Constantinople somehow fits into the puzzling plot.

by Matt Miller



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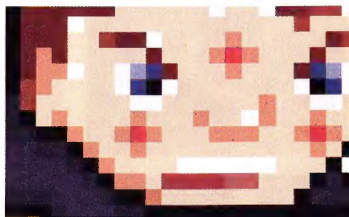
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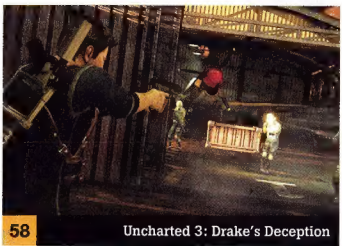
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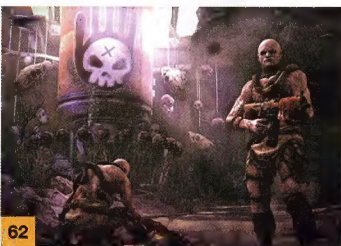
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Discover what makes augmented reality games tick, the games that made the Game Informer crew cry, and which video game character you are.

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We got hands-on time with big-ticket Sony titles Twisted Metal and Uncharted 3, downed the undead in Resident Evil: Raccoon City, and snagged a batch of new Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim screens.

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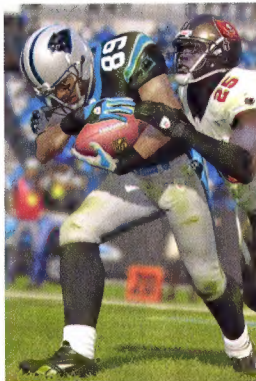
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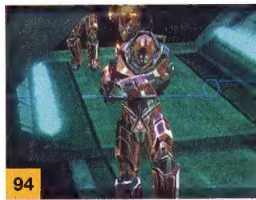


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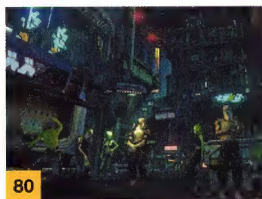
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RadioShack



Focus on driving



This month in Feedback we celebrate Game Informer readers who didn't get the joke, address cynicism over superfluous multiplayer modes, improve yet another gaming couple's marriage, and listen to our parents. Or somebody's parents, at least.

Infamous Infarcer

I just wanted to say that I can't wait to see all the hate mail from this year's Game Informer. If there is one thing I love more than gaming, it's reading letters from readers that don't pay attention to "The World's #1 Pretend Magazine" byline. All hail Darth Clark!

Daniel Tuma
via email

Ok, so I am wondering is this NGP pricing thing a joke by saying that it has a nuclear power battery and will last forever? And it costs 99,999 dollars? And that one of them comes with a puppy?! I get the 3G one and the Wi-Fi compatible one, but none of the others. Can you please explain this to me?

Ben H.
via email

I am appalled that you had the nerve to announce Sonic Reborn like it was a good thing. The obliteration of a good clean franchise is not a good thing, and a lot of hardcore Sonic fans mainly agree that this is terrible news. The fact that they were desperate enough to make the game so it could appeal to low-life people with low morals shows that the game makers no longer know how to handle the franchise anymore. I hope that the game doesn't sell well, and that they learn from their biggest mistake ever.

Kaylee S.
via email

Reading through angry Infarcer-related letters is a favorite pastime at GI, and this year's responses didn't disappoint. By far the most "popular" article was Darth Clark's

Letter From The Editor, and we'd be remiss if we didn't print at least a few replies...

The Return Of Darth

I have a bone to pick with Darth Clark. He claims he alone knows what a gamer is. As if this isn't outrageous enough, he claims that gamers "don't like the popular crap everyone else does." Hello, Mr. Ignorant, a large number of people like the "popular crap" because they are good games! And then to top it all off, his supposed proof he's right is the fact that he managed to get a gaming magazine going? The one thing I have to give the guy credit for is the way he managed to write the article in accordance with his personality. I looked at the idiot's picture, and he has the "I wanna be a drug-using gangster" look, complete with the snobby expression and head

tilt. And he says we're the ones trying hard to be something. Cute necklace, Clark.

Sam Milton, FL

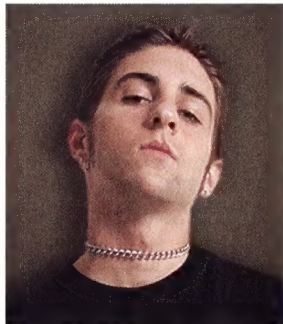
This is the first time I've written to this magazine. All I have to say to Darth Clark is you, sir, are an idiot. A hardcore gamer doesn't care if a game is mainstream or not. A hardcore gamer doesn't take sides over consoles; he plays on whatever console he wants. How is a Farmville player who wakes up at the middle of the night to make sure nothing bad happens to his crops not hardcore? And just because you're the editor of a massive video game publication doesn't make you right.

Pedro F.
via email

First of all, I am not impressed with your new editor-in-chief, Darth Clark. I find him to be arrogant and condescending. Borrowing his words, "I will educate you": Don't insult your readers who don't play the same game as you do. As editor-in-chief, you should reach out to all gamers regardless of tastes to grow your subscriber base. If you only appeal to those gamers who share your unique tastes in games, you wouldn't have a magazine. You may be editor-in-chief, but I can trump that. I am a subscriber and I can spend my money elsewhere.

Robert S.
via email

If you're itching for more replies, we have the rest of this year's Game Informer fallout at www.gameinformer.com/mag.



Co-op Controversy?

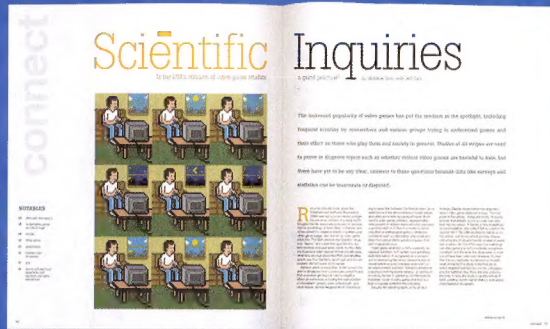
I think it was a bit off target to categorize the lack of multiplayer in *Batman: Arkham City* as a "Bad" thing [The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly, issue 216]. How many games have we seen with lame tacked-on multiplayer? I'd much rather the developers focus on delivering a top-notch experience in keeping with the vision of their game, rather than waste time throwing in a multiplayer mode that doesn't really add anything.

Grayson Longmont, CO

The fact that you labeled *Batman: Arkham City* as "Bad" for not having multiplayer is downright brainless. *Arkham Asylum* was an incredible game because they didn't waste their efforts on a multiplayer clone like other titles sell out and do. I applaud *Arkham City*'s developers for realizing they can give fans a better experience, and feel sorry for gamers like you who have forgotten what awesome stories some games are made to tell. So suck it.

Lloyd Pitts Baton Rouge, LA

Some readers seem to think that by wanting co-op in *Arkham City*, we were really asking for a crappy, tacked-on cash grab by a greedy developer. If you dismiss the potential for *Rocksteady* to create a great multiplayer experience based on the failures of other developers, you might as well have dismissed the possibility of the studio creating a must-play *Batman* title in the first place, given the *Caped Crusader*'s notorious past. *Rocksteady* knows better than anyone what's right for its IP, but that doesn't mean we can't be disappointed at not being able to fight Gotham's crime with a friend.



Inquiring Minds

I'd like to comment on Matthew Kato and Jeff Cork's excellent article, *Scientific Inquiries*, in issue 216. Though it provides no definitive answer, I applaud Dr. Gentile's study of the negative effects of video games on behavior. In a world full of biased "studies," finger-pointing politicians, and media spin, it's great to see that someone has taken an initiative to gain more honest insight into our favorite medium.

Mark Morgan Detroit, MI

I am writing to commend you on the *Scientific Inquiries* article. As video games have become a part of mainstream popular culture, it is understandable that they have been met with increased scrutiny, particularly by those who did not have the privilege of growing up with them. We scoff at the incredulity of those who make baseless accusations that they are a maligning force. However, to assert that video games have no potential to cause harm and thus are above scientific inquiry is equally ignorant and politically motivated.

It is critical that these questions are being asked, especially when by intelligent, unbiased scientists such as Dr. Gentile.

Thank you for not reflexively taking the "video game side" of the debate.

Luke Hafdahl Minnesota

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions

"Do you really think kids should be deprived of playing fantastic games like *God of War* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* just because of their age?"

Yes.

"How much would an unlimited copy of *The Legend of Dragon* cost and where should I sell it?"

You seem to have us confused with *Antiques Roadshow*.

Who would win in a battle royal: The *Chimera*, The *Covenant*, or Dan Ryckert?

Unless there are bonus points for wearing '70s band T-shirts, anyone but Dan.

Quantified!

This month we received more corrections to issue 215's *Paul Blart: Mail Cap* joke than answers to the Question of the Month. Our conclusion? *Paul Blart* is hot, handhelds are not.

Best News Tip Of The Month:

"Don't let that s---head Darth Clark put in an article ever again!"



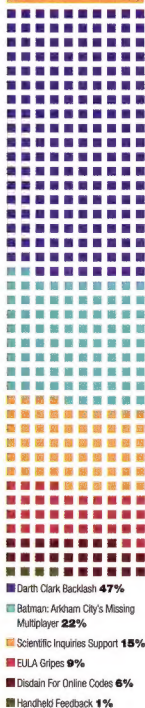
(Left) Bryan and Annette pose with Sam Fisher's best covert ops: Ubisoft's Michael Beadle, Jaime Cottini, Abigail Murphy, and Dominic DiSanti (Right) Bryan and Annette also partied with Capcom's Brian Keltner, and 47 Communication's Laura Weir and Laura Klang-Glienna

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



GI SPY
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On Your Mind



Question Of The Month:

What television series do you think would make a good video game, and why?

Love And Marriage (And GI)

When I first met my husband, an avid gamer, I swore I would never become a gamer. Well, that didn't last long! Four years later, we are fighting over the controller and which MMO we are going to play next (Rift currently, and loving it!). Luckily, there is one thing we don't have to fight over: MY Game Informer. Sure, it started out as his, but became mine upon my newfound love for gaming. He doesn't fight me for it...because he knows it is one battle he will lose! Marriage can be rocky and tough at times. But thanks to you, GI, my marriage is just a little bit easier!

Amy
Salyserville, KY

Thanks for the feedback, Amy! We're glad we could serve as a marital aid for you and your husband. Err, wait a minute...

Handheld Showdown

In issue 216, we asked gamers which upcoming handheld they were more excited for, the 3DS or the NGR. The most surprising result was the lack of opinions we received on the matter, but here are a few responses.

I'd buy the NGR, largely because of the more mature audience Sony caters to. The dual sticks in tandem with the touchscreen will make for interesting gameplay. With the NGR sporting four times the pixels over the last PSP, it won't be ugly.

Henry Person

I think the Sony NGR is the better of the two, given its stunning visuals, sheer power, and the recently added touchscreen, touchpad, and second analog stick.

Galen Turoci

Let me put it this way: I barely touch my PSP nowadays, except for the occasional urge to play the God of War games. My quartet of original DS units are always charged and by my side whenever I get the urge for some handheld action.

Bridget B.

Neither, actually. Phone games have come so far in the past year that they have all but replaced my PSP and DS. Now instead, I look forward to the next new app or phone.

Tom Healy



Parental Advisory

In response to the Feedback letter from Michael Haft complaining about his parents not letting him play Call of Duty: Black Ops [Just Doing Their Job, issue 216]. Good for them. I'm a gamer. My wife is a gamer. So are our 11- and 16-year-old daughters. They each have time restrictions, and rating restrictions appropriate to their ages. When we as parents make a decision as to whether or not one of our daughters can play a game, we take the time to be informed about what they're playing. Sadly, we're the exception. Too many uninformed parents still think of a console as a child's toy, or worse, as a digital babysitter. Michael Haft may not like it, but here's hoping that more parents act like his.

Jason Key
South Carolina

Michael wasn't the only one upset with us. We received more than a few letters from irate kids hoping we'd sympathize with their pre-pubescent plight. We don't. On the bright side, we're pretty sure developers will still be making gratuitously violent video games when you turn 17.

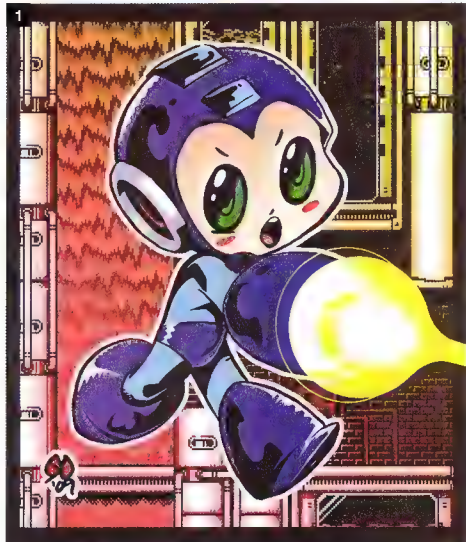


(Left) Bryan promised not to wander off from Ethan Mars' voice actor, Pascal Langdale. Ja-son...Jason! (Right) Ben Reeves does his best Jimmy Olsen impression with the BeenoX crew while checking out Spider-Man: Edge of Time

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

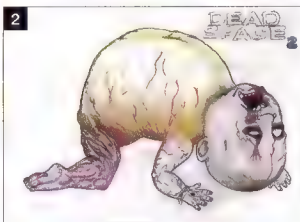


Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spt, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video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

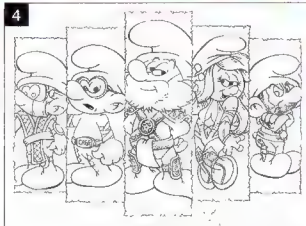


Prizes 1 Margeaux and Jorge Velez

Baby Mega Man might not be as powerful as his older version, but neither are his enemies. Just ask Safety Scissors Man. 2 Edwin Prieto You know, a few years ago it would have been weird to open a piece of reader art with a grotesque, disfigured baby on it. Then Dead Space came along and made it alright. 3 Rimes Cozza This has to be the first time in history that Gordon Freeman, Seaman, and Master Shake have appeared in the same picture. 4 Chad Borgschatz Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe surprised fans with its Teen rating, so imagine the reaction when this E10+ spinoff hits shelves.



CORRECTION:
In Gaming's Early Innovators of issue 217, we stated that Donkey Kong came out in 1984, and Donkey Kong Jr. came out in 1982. DK Jr. did not go back in time to sire his own father. The original Donkey Kong was actually released in 1981.



Send to:
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Reader Art Contest
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(Left) Meagan hangs out with Demiurge Studios' Al Reed and Josh Glavine (Middle) Meagan was remarkably calm sitting next to human cyborg Chloe Dykstra and Linda Lee (Right) Annette was way too happy to get her hands on Cole's new weapon in Infamous 2, and immediately threatened to electrocute Sucker Punch's Chris Zimmerman



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Nintendo Moves Into

HD

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New HD Nintendo Console Coming at E3

In mid-April, our website broke a story based on information we had from multiple, trusted sources that Nintendo was planning on announcing a new, HD-caliber system at this year's E3 convention in June – if not sooner – and that it would come out late next year. Right before this issue went to press, the company confirmed the console.

Nintendo's announcement of this new system was done away from the bright lights and excitement of an E3 press conference. Instead, the company released a no-frills press release aimed at investors confirming that "Wi's successor system" would ship in 2012, and reminding them that sales of this new console would not be included in sales forecasts for the fiscal term ending in March 2012. This would appear to substantiate our information that the system – with the reported codename Project Café – would not be out until late 2012.

Our sources say the console is capable of running games at HD resolutions, but we've heard conflicting information as to whether its graphics will be on par or better than the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Developers are already putting the system through its paces, and the early word from those we've talked to is good. "Nintendo is doing this one right," one anonymous source with knowledge of the situation told us. "[It's] not a gimmick like the Wii."

Nintendo is targeting Western developers in particular with this new system, and several companies have had their hands on it since April. Nintendo is already trying to get them on board for the launch. Historically, third-party publishers and developers have failed to match the success of Nintendo's own software on its systems, and getting them in on the ground floor is a smart move. When the Wii launched in 2006, some developers like LucasArts were taken by surprise, and criticized Nintendo for not keeping them in the loop.

A Long Time Coming

The media and industry analysts have speculated about an HD Wii successor since as far back as fall 2008, when family website What They Play first heard talk of an HD Nintendo system slated for 2011 release with backward compatibility and possibly internal storage. Since then prominent industry analyst Michael Pachter of Wedbush Securities has loudly banged the drum for Nintendo to jump into HD, and at the beginning of this year, Pachter thought that the company had "blown it" by not having released the system already.

Even though people in the industry have been speculating on the next Wii home console, the company itself has been reticent to talk about it, and has even denied it. For the past couple of years Nintendo president Satoru Iwata has gone back and forth on the necessity of a new system in light of the Wii's consistently great sales. However, sales have tapered off compared to previous years, and industry analysts don't see this trend reversing in 2011.

Furthermore, the software situation on the Wii isn't improving as it is clogged with more and more unsuccessful third-party titles. In March, Iwata told Yomiuri Online that the company would "make decisions about a successor system at the time when software developers cannot offer surprises on the Wii." Perhaps even Nintendo sees that this time is already upon it. Previous to officially confirming the console, Nintendo lowered the price of the Wii by \$30 to \$169.99, which ostensibly will clear more stock of the system from store shelves in order to make way for the new system.

As time goes on, Nintendo's previous decisions to eschew HD and its failure to embrace a comprehensive, user-friendly online strategy have put it in a peculiar situation. When this console comes out, it will have to play catch up with Sony and Microsoft, whose consoles already have great graphics, robust online features, and even motion controls.

Although it would be nice for consumers to get the same caliber games on a Nintendo system that can be found on other consoles, this new system could simply find Nintendo putting forth a lot of effort just to claw even with its competitors.

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The Nintendo Difference?

Then again, it would be unlike Nintendo to simply re-create what Sony or Microsoft have already done, and there are plenty of rumors regarding this new system that point to how Nintendo might differentiate itself. According to French site 01net.com, the console has a CPU that's a "custom IBM PowerPC with three cores," an ATI GPU "from the R700 family with a shader unit at version 4.1," and 512 MB of RAM. This is similar to the Xbox 360's architecture, with the difference being improved shader support. Numerous reports also back up What They Play's original assertion of backwards compatibility, and Blu-ray.com says it's heard from a source that Nintendo is "considering" using Blu-ray.

Similar to the Wii, this new console is expected to make a splash with its controller. CVG reports that the new Nintendo controller may feature a built-in HD touchscreen, while 01net.com says the screen will be standard definition. Depending on who you listen to, the controller also apparently features regular inputs such as a d-pad, two bumpers, two triggers, a front-facing camera, analog sticks, and motion controls. IGN even reports that games can stream from the console to the controller.

While all this sounds exciting, the more features that are tacked on, the more this system is going to cost. Nintendo has usually differentiated itself from the competition by offering its systems at an attractive price, and there's no reason to believe that the company would abandon this tenet with its new platform. Price and timing become even more of a factor when you consider that both Microsoft and Sony have been dropping the prices of their systems. Both companies could opt to further drop the price of their consoles after the Nintendo announcement as well.

Nintendo hasn't revealed its priorities for its new system, although Iwata told investors in 2009 it will "probably support HD because it is now common throughout the world." Earlier this year Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime told CNN he didn't think a Nintendo home console would feature 3D support simply because it couldn't be done effectively without requiring glasses.

Nintendo's competitors have defined the console generations whether through graphics, strong third-party software support, or broader entertainment options such as the PS2's DVD player or the online marketplace of Xbox Live. The Wii has been a phenomenal sales success, but its failure to capture the hardcore gaming crowd has arguably created the need for this new system at a time when its competitors are still enjoying the fruits of their labors and see no need to jump into new hardware. In this sense, the timing of this HD Wii successor could be too little, too late.

On the other hand, if the new console boasts considerable hardware upgrades, a 2012 release could find Nintendo the first system out of the gate for the next wave of consoles. Nintendo has always been proud to march to the beat of its own drum, and where it'll take them this time won't become evident until we see the console unveiled at E3 in June.



The Buzz

We talked to some developers, industry analysts, and prominent figures in the industry to find out what they had to say about Nintendo's forthcoming HD console.

Feargus Urruhart CEO, Obsidian Entertainment:

"I do think it is the right time for Nintendo to launch a new system, and we would absolutely support it."

Shane Bettenhausen Director of business development, Ignition Entertainment:

"...Gimmickry won't be enough to make this a clear leader...I'm hoping that its specs and capabilities will really surprise everyone."

Michael Pachter Managing director, Wedbush Securities:

"I think that the right time for a launch was in front of the launches of Kinect and Move, and I think that Nintendo missed the 'perfect' time to launch in 2009. I think that there is still significant interest in a Wii 2, particularly from the very large Wii installed base, so it is not 'too late,' but it's also not the 'right time.'"

Lee Jacobson Senior vice president of licensing and digital publishing, Atari:

"Nintendo has always marched to the beat of their own drum and never engaged in the same graphical arms race that defined the Xbox 360 and PS3. I for one am excited to see what their next move is at E3, as Atari has always done very well on Nintendo systems and we know that whatever they announce will be high-quality and speak to an audience that is uniquely suited for their system."

Justin Blankenship Associate consultant, Hit Detection:

"If the rumors of a machine more powerful than the PS3 and Xbox 360 are true, cost is going to be a concern. I'd expect the next consoles from Sony and Microsoft to technically outperform the Wii 2, so it makes sense that if Nintendo wants some hardcore credibility, they'd launch first for the next generation of hardware. With both Microsoft and Sony investing players into their brands with persistent profiles attached to achievements and trophies within online communities, it's an uphill climb for Nintendo to get these gamers to switch over in significant numbers."

Tim Gerritsen Director of product development, Irrational Games:

"If they are indeed bringing to the table hardware that is on par or better than [the Xbox 360 and PS3], we will need to see if they are going to focus on games outside the market they committed to with the Wii."

N'Gai Croal Chief consultant, Hit Detection:

Some rumors are saying there will be an HD display worked into the controller. That seems like a strange rumor, because if you think about an HD display built into a controller, that would either have significant cost implications or profitability implications. Coupled with the rumors that it will be more powerful than the PS3 and 360—I don't know if you can hit all that and still be at \$250 or even \$299.

They need to get a whole system in a state that's much more optimized—whether it's for big publishers making graphically intensive games or smaller developers—and put that into Nintendo's ecosystem before the expected launch of PS3 and 360's successors.

Ru Weerasuriya Co-founder, Ready at Dawn Studios:

"The past has lent credence to the fact that the last Nintendo platforms have been tantamount to closed systems that have really only been beneficial to Nintendo games. Whether they change their approach to third-party publishers, only time will tell."

The Games Behind Nintendo's HD System

While Western developers are currently putting Nintendo's new system through its paces and working with the company to publicly announce their support of the console at E3, no publishers have made any official statements at this time. If the rumor from 01net.com is true that Rockstar Games is readying a title for the system, it would be exactly the kind of strong third-party support it needs. As strange bedfellows as Rockstar and Nintendo sound, the pair have worked together before—albeit without resounding commercial success—on Manhunt 2 for the Wii and Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars on Nintendo DS.

To be successful, the Nintendo HD needs to launch with a strong lineup of both first- and third-party games. The company needs look no further than the recent launch of the 3DS to see how important software is to a fledgling console. Although sales numbers for the handheld are good, Game Informer's own reviewers found many of the launch games wanting, and the gamers we've talked to are still waiting for that must-have title that defines the handheld.

One great in-house candidate that could help the new system make its mark is *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*. Nintendo could release the game for both the Wii and the Nintendo HD as it did for the last console *Zelda* title, *Twilight Princess*. *Skyward Sword* has already missed its early 2011 release window and is currently expected to come out sometime after June. It's purely speculation on our part, but perhaps Nintendo has delayed the title in order to ready a version for this new system.

Retro Studios, the developer of the *Metroid Prime* trilogy and *Donkey Kong Country Returns*, has already thrown its hat in the ring. Sources from within Retro told *The Paul Gale Network* that the developer is working on a title for the system that "everyone wants them to do." Given Retro's pedigree with the above-mentioned titles, we've no doubt that whatever franchise it chooses will be welcomed by fans.



The Reality of **AR** of

A Closer Look at Augmented Reality

by Andrew Greenman

From the 3DS' AR games suite to NGP's promise of an augmented revolution, the art of combining virtual objects with the real world is flourishing in the games industry. As high quality cameras, faster processors, and crisp displays become standard on home consoles and handhelds, developers have the tools they need to further blur the lines between games and reality. We caught up with an augmented reality expert who breaks down what AR is, how it works, and what lies in the technology's future.

"augmented reality can take various types of media and overlay the information onto real-world environments"

Even though augmented reality is gaining speed on the game industry hype train, the technology itself is nothing new. In fact, Steven Feiner, computer science professor at Columbia University, has been researching AR for more than 20 years, and the existence of the technology dates even further back.

With the proper software and hardware combination, augmented reality can take various types of media and overlay the information onto real-world environments. According to Feiner, the technology is not restricted to visual augmentations done in real time, but applies to audio as well. AR can not only make virtual objects like game characters or text appear over physical objects in real time, but can also create sounds as if they were streaming from your actual surroundings.

From Concept to Consumer

Back in 1996 Feiner's lab developed the first mobile, outdoor augmented reality system. It included nearly 40 pounds of equipment in a backpack connected to a head-worn display. Today consumers can experience augmented reality on the go via smart phones, the Nintendo 3DS, and Sony's upcoming NGP without the need of bulky equipment, uncomfortable headgear, or thousands of dollars.

"One advantage of technology now is cameras that used to be really expensive have become inexpensive," Feiner says. "And of course the CPU and GPU technology needed to process those cameras has drastically increased in power and decreased in price, thanks to a combination of Moore's Law and the competitive world of games in particular. The idea that you can now have a device like a Nintendo 3DS that has multiple cameras and the power to process them and overlay information on what they see is testament to people being willing to buy those devices in enough quantity that companies can sell them at a good price."

How Does it Work?

The Nintendo 3DS comes bundled with a set of AR cards that can be identified using the system's cameras and built-in software for a variety of entertaining outcomes, such as a photo shoot with Samus on your desk or a game of Face Raiders. AR capable devices, especially ones that run outdoors like smart phones, can also track position with GPS, compasses, accelerometers, and gyroscopes. In the case of the 3DS, AR software is designed to identify distinct features on these cards fed through by the camera, such as differences in color or contrast. Once the software recognizes the features on these cards with the camera, it can also identify the position and orientation of the camera relative to

the card, making it possible to render a virtual object seen in the space of the card. According to Sony, the NGP will have the processing power to use algorithms that won't require AR cards to render virtual objects in real time. Until we find out more about the NGP's capabilities, how this feature works remains unclear.

Future Applications

Feiner says depth cameras, such as the one in Kinect, are going to be important for AR games going forward. With a depth camera, the system can determine object distance from the camera down to the pixel and distinguish between active and inactive users in the play space. With this technology, a small virtual pet or a full game character can infiltrate your play space. They could even sneak up from behind you, ready to jump into view when the time is right.

Feiner also notes the possibility of a complete hands-free augmented reality experience safe for outdoor use that goes back to the technology's roots of head-worn displays.

"In terms of the 3DS, imagine that instead of there being one auto-stereoscopic display, there were two displays," he says. "Imagine there were additional optics so that the displays could be very close to where your eyes are and yet still be in focus. Imagine that the cameras were a little further apart so that they, too, were where your eyes are – and now, this gets a little bit harder – imagine all that ended up looking normal."

Feiner believes the major barrier to fully realizing this type of head-worn display at this time is creating something that looks more or less like regular glasses and is affordable to consumers. A few working display prototypes exist, some from the likes of Sony, according to Feiner, but we're probably far from getting information overlaid on our normal field of view. Someday, we could have a hands-free way of receiving textual information or walking directions similar to the way Isaac Clarke receives information from his RIG in *Dead Space*.

Early AR Innovators

Sony is at the vanguard of merging augmented reality with gaming experiences. Here are a few early Sony titles that showcase the technology.



Invizimals

Invizimals spawns and captures invisible creatures by pointing the PlayStation 2 camera at objects of various colors in the real world and at different times of day. Various virtual animals are developed to match up with the real-world objects.



EyePet

EyePet uses the PlayStation Eye and Move controls to allow players to interact with a virtual pet in their living room. The virtual pet is a small, cute, cat-like creature that can



The Eye of Judgment

The Eye of Judgment is a game for the PlayStation 2 that uses the PlayStation Eye camera to track the player's hand.



by Jeff Marchiava



01

Metal Gear Solid 2
"I Need Scissors! 61!"

Just as Raiden thinks he's unraveled the mystery behind Arsenal Gear, Colonel Campbell starts talking about a "purple stuffed worm in flap-jaw space." These nonsensical ramblings lead to the revelation that the Colonel is actually an A.I. and part of a diabolical recreation of the Shadow Moses incident designed to test the information-parsing capabilities of the Selection for Societal Sanity program, which you foolishly believed was the Solid Snake Simulation — because that's what you were told five minutes earlier.

Bionic Commando
My Wife Is My What?!

In the 2009 Bionic Commando reboot, Nathan "Rae" Spencer spends most of the game looking for his wife. During the finale, you learn her fate: She was implanted (somehow) into Spencer's robot arm in order to sync it with his body. So when she said she'd always be by his side, she was being literal. Hey Spencer, you know what's even more rad than having a powerful robot arm? Having a wife.



02

Xenosaga

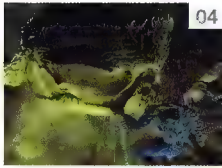
That's it, just Xenosaga. Everything about this series is insane: KOS-MOS is a vessel for Mary Magdalene and fights T-Elos, who was created from Mary's bodily remains; the boyish-looking Chaos is actually a 6,000+ year old Jesus; Wilhelm wants to employ the Eternal Recurrence, which will reset the universe to an earlier point in history; and the Gnosis — the main enemies of the series — are sodium-based life forms created from human spirits that fail to enter the Collective Unconscious. Capico?



03

Halo 2
Little Shop Of Horrors

Halo 2's introduction of Gravemind is precisely where we stopped trying to figure out what was going on in Bungie's sci-fi series. This giant plant is so far out of left field that Cortana straight-up asks what the hell it is, as Master Chief gets wrapped up in its organic tentacles. The shrubbery's reply? "A monument to all your sins. Thanks, Gravemind. That clears things up."



04

No More Heroes
A Rushed Reveal

After Travis Touchdown makes his way up through the ranks of the United Assassins Association, he is reunited with his childhood love interest Jeanne, who makes a startling confession: She's actually Travis' half-sister and the murderer of his parents, who she killed out of revenge for the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of their shared father. The shocking plot twist is even more confusing because the reveal is fast-forwarded like a VHS tape to incomprehensible levels due to Jeanne's fear her story would increase the game's age rating — a humorous (albeit frustrating) meta-joke.



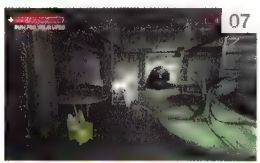
05

Star Wars
Vader's True Form

This Japan-only NES game may have featured the same music and characters as the beloved film series, but some aspects of George Lucas' space opera were lost in translation. Like, for instance, Darth Vader's ability to turn into animals. After making his way into a Sandcrawler on Tatooine, Luke Skywalker is confronted by the Sith Lord. One swat of Luke's lightsaber turns the nefarious leader into a giant orange scorpion. Later, Luke runs into pterodactyl and shark forms of Vader, making us wonder why he never used these awesome powers in the films.



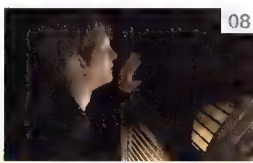
06



07

Loaded For Bear

Ethan Thomas is back on the trail of Serial Killer X after he murders his mentor, Malcolm Vanhorn. As the former investigator sinks back into his routine of analyzing crime scenes and fist-fighting hobos, the game throws a two-ton twist at you: A giant killer bear worthy of its own SyFy movie attacks him in a service station. With nothing to stand in-between you and the charging beast, an onscreen prompt dispenses some invaluable advice: "Run for your life!!"



08

Pyramid Head Vs. Mannequin

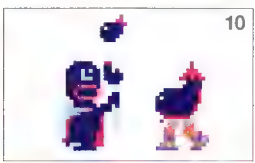
Pyramid Head is a weird enough guy as it is (he has a pyramid for a head, for crying out loud), but an early encounter with the hulking monstrosity isn't just traumatizing for James Sunderland. As the protagonist watches on in horror from the inside of a gungny closet, the iconic boss starts doing things to a pair of mannequins (made entirely of legs) that's demented even for the foggy town of Silent Hill.



09

Mortal Kombat II
Babality!

The original Mortal Kombat surprised gamers with its overly gruesome fatalities. The anger over these violent finishers was replaced by confusion when Mortal Kombat II introduced the ability to turn your bested enemy into a crying baby. Swaddled in the clothing and accessories of their adult counterparts, these humorous infants broke from the serious tone of the original MK, and taught gamers that nothing was too outrageous or off-limits.



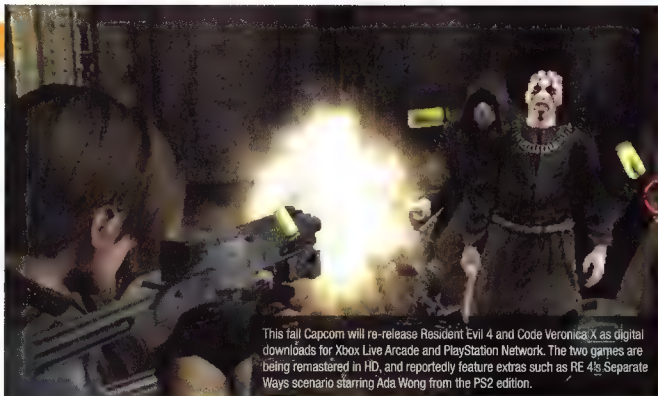
10

Kid Icarus
The Eggplant Curse

Who could forget the Eggplant Wizard. This resilient enemy bombs Pit with eggplants, which upon contact turn the hero's upper body into the purple fruit. Getting turned into an eggplant is a humorous moment, until you realize that the only way to remove the curse is to navigate to the level's hospital — without the ability to attack enemies or use items.

Good

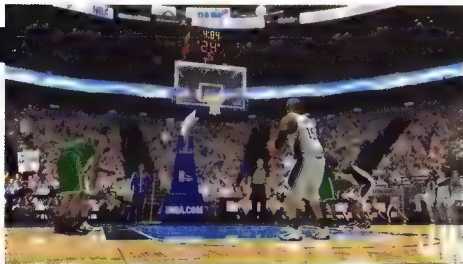
Electronic Arts is working on a cross-release, cross-platform EA Sports ID system where your achievements in different sports titles will follow you as you play the label's games through the years. EA says that apart from a persistent player score, it's contemplating real-life rewards and other perks.



This fall Capcom will re-release Resident Evil 4 and Code Veronica X as digital downloads for Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network. The two games are being remastered in HD, and reportedly feature extras such as RE 4's Separate Ways scenario starring Ada Wong from the PS2 edition.

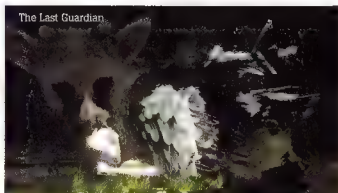
the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

news
with a
sarcastic
spin



EA Sports has benched its NBA basketball title for the second straight year. EA Tiburon has taken the reigns from EA Canada to rebuild the franchise, and we're not sure if the NBA Elite name or the supposedly revolutionary right-analog dribbling controls will survive the transition. For sports fans who wonder what it would be like if sports games didn't come out every year, this game will now be in development an extra year and a half. Will that time pay dividends? We'll see.

Bad



It's time for the release date shuffle. Each of these titles have been delayed — including both of Team Ico's titles.

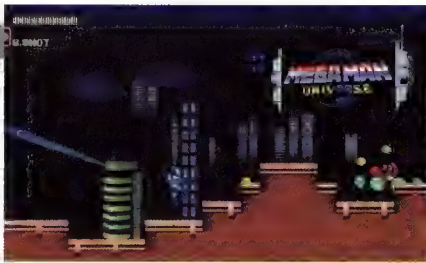
- Duke Nukem Forever — June 14
- Splinter Cell Trilogy — June 21
- Dungeon Siege III — June 21
- Ico and Shadow of the Colossus: The Collection — TBA
- The Last Guardian — TBA
- Might & Magic Heroes VI — September 8

Ugly

Hacker collective Anonymous has brought down the entire PlayStation Network and its Orinoco music service — and it's still down at the time of this writing. After an open call to hackers to attack the service because it disagrees with the fact that Sony is legally pursuing anyone who runs their own programs on the now-hackable PlayStation 3, PSN went down. In response, Sony says it's keeping the service turned off until it can implement unspecified security measures.



PLAYSTATION®
Network



Capcom canceled XBLA/PSN title Mega Man Universe and Sony Online canceled The Agency, which was in development since 2007. It's worse for SOE, which also fired 205 employees and closed down its Denver, Seattle, and Tucson branches.

“Consumers like the current formats, but there is not enough creativity at the end of a cycle to really spark the business.”

—Ubisoft CEO Yves

Guillemot thinks that

new home consoles

will spark new IP.



feature

Green Gaming

Can we have fun without wrecking the environment?



When you rush from the store with the latest triple-A game in your hand, rip open the packaging, put it in your console of choice, and prepare for a marathon gaming session, chances are that the impact your gaming has on the world at large is the furthest thing from your mind. And why shouldn't it be? For many people, gaming is about getting away from the stress of life.

Whatever its purpose, though, there's no escaping the fact that using electronics has some effect on the environment. Accepting this, I set out to talk to some experts in the field to figure out just how big of an impact gaming has and what we can do to make our favorite hobby more environmentally friendly.

Understanding the problem

Video game consoles – as with most electronics – affect the environment in two main ways: electricity usage and manufacturing. On the consumer level, it's easy to think of electricity as the primary concern, but the cost of manufacturing may be a much greater part of how our electronics are influencing the world around us.

"It has been found that between 60 and 80 percent of a desktop or laptop PC's cumulative energy demand is associated with the manufacturing process," explains Callie Babbitt, assistant professor at the Golisano Institute for Sustainability. That includes the amount of energy needed to mine raw materials for the electronics in question, produce components, and then put everything together. Babbitt's figures are backed up by studies published in *Environmental Science & Technology* and *The Journal of Cleaner Production* (the latter of which she co-authored). While the process for manufacturing consoles versus PCs may not be exactly the same, it's not far off in terms of energy usage.

According to Babbitt, "The main source of environmental impact [in electronics manufacturing] is in the production of high purity chemicals and materials – especially the semiconductor. These chemicals require extremely pure inputs and a lot of energy and water to process, plus there can be a lot of waste generated to ensure quality."

Casey Harrell, the campaign coordinator for electronics for Greenpeace, points to a similar problem to break down why video game hardware uses toxic materials. "Consoles use a ton of energy and get really hot," he says. "They have flame retardants and other chemicals in them that are not good for us."

Those chemicals don't hurt consumers while the consoles are in use, but they can seriously mess up the environment if they're not properly disposed of years later. Electronics waste may not be the most dangerous kind, but Harrell makes it clear that it is "the largest amount of hazardous waste in the world." More distressingly, most communities don't have a smart method of collecting and properly getting rid of electronics waste, so much of it ends up being exported to Africa, Asia, or South America, where it is buried. This process is bad for humans, bad for the environment, and all-around just bad.

The burden of responsibility

When I ask Harrell to explain some ways that individuals can make a difference, he becomes audibly frustrated. "If you ask me, these things should be dealt with mainly at the manufacturing level," he says. "It's like telling people to turn off the lights when you leave the room. If your lights are on a timer, I guarantee you, you're going to get a better benefit on average."

So are the manufacturers themselves doing anything? Not as much as you might hope.

Beginning in 2006, Greenpeace began publishing a quarterly "Guide to Greener Electronics" that has since moved to a twice-a-year publication. The Guide ranks 18 electronics companies – including console manufacturers Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo – "according to their policies on toxic chemicals, recycling, and climate change." Sony has traditionally ranked somewhere in the middle, usually scoring a 4 or 5 out of 10. Since being added to the list in late 2007, Microsoft and Nintendo have almost always ranked near the bottom.

Harrell clarifies immediately that Sony doesn't have much of an advantage over Microsoft and Nintendo in the green space when it comes to game consoles: "For Microsoft and Nintendo, it's exclusively gaming products, whereas Sony's

By Phil Kollar

Game Console Standby Power Usage Estimate

Assume: 8 hours/day 365 days/year 0.001 Whr/kWhr

Console	Standby Power (W)	kWhr/year/unit	2009 Unit Sales	kWhr/year
Wii	1.3	3.8	9,594,000	36,418,824
Xbox 360	2.5	7.3	4,770,700	34,826,110
PlayStation 3	1.9	5.5	4,334,500	24,047,806
Total				95,292,740

Based on: <http://www.hardwareware.net/reviews/review-356-4.htm> <http://www.gamespot.com/news/6246425.html>

got a whole lot of things that cause their scores to differ." Harrell says that if Sony's gaming division were split off and treated as a separate entity, they would likely be ranking just as low as Microsoft and Nintendo.

In the most recent, October 2010 edition of the Guide to Greener Electronics [pictured], Microsoft was dinged for not yet phasing certain harmful chemicals out of its hardware. Nintendo's main problem? They just won't communicate.

"Since you work in the industry, you probably won't be too surprised that Nintendo is remarkably tight-lipped," Harrell jokes. The ratings handed out in the Guide to Greener Electronics are fully based on publicly available information, and Nintendo simply isn't forthcoming.

"The types of questions we're asking would not be considered trade secrets of any fashion," Harrell laments. "We think these companies should be making this publicly available and transparent. It's not a conversation we want them to just

be having with us... It's essentially like a grade school exercise. If they don't turn anything in, if we don't know about it, then we can't score it."

The news isn't all bad for Nintendo. Harrell says that Greenpeace has performed some spot checks on Nintendo hardware at Greenpeace's labs in the University of Exeter. Based off a test they did two-and-a-half years ago, the Wii is "not clearly better than the PS3 or Xbox 360" in terms of environmental friendliness, but it does use less energy and features "certain environmental attributes that just don't appear on their website."

"Oftentimes, if companies aren't showing their hand, it's because their hand's not good," Harrell explains. "It's unique [with Nintendo], because they're so closed that they might actually have something, and they're not going to share it simply because of the company culture."

Nintendo's competitors may still need improvements in their products, but at least they are more communicative. "Sony and Microsoft sit down with us and talk through a lot of the different challenges," Harrell says. "There are people in both companies that are trying to move forward. That's a step. But ultimately what we look at is the end result."

Play your part

Despite Harrell's frustrations, there are some basic, common sense practices that can contribute to making gaming more environmentally friendly. Harrell suggests that we "hearken back to your parents, or maybe for the younger readers, your grandparents" and remember their constant admonitions to turn off your electronics when you're done with them. "Don't leave your s--- on all the time," he reiterates.

Beyond powering consoles off, there is also a small amount of energy consumption associated with simply having them plugged in. Babbitt

created a "super rough" estimate for us showing that if every gaming device sold in 2009 was unlogged for eight hours a day, it would eliminate "roughly the same amount of CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions as taking 13,000 vehicles off the road for one year." [See chart] Babbitt makes a caveat: "Standby power is a tiny fraction of total energy consumed during use, but in lieu of folks actually using products less, yes, it is collectively a great thing to do."

Harrell emphasizes that the biggest impact individual consumers can have on this situation is simply continuing to make sure that companies know they care. "We wouldn't be able to do any of the work that we did if it wasn't backed up by people demanding that their experience buying consumer electronics is greener," he says.

According to Harrell, although the consumer electronics industry has a long way to go toward being green, we're in the lucky position of having incredibly smart people working on our products

who actually listen to what we want.

"This is an innovative and competitive industry," Harrell says. "So it falls flat on its face when companies whine and say, 'Oh, we can't do that. We're the smartest engineers on the planet, but we can't do that.' Let's take advantage of that. Let's take advantage of companies that are still willing to work to earn the money that you spend."

Individuals can also make sure that their consoles are properly disposed off at the end of their life cycle through services such as E-Stewards (<http://www.e-stewards.org>) and the Institute for Scrap Recycling's Certified Electronics Recycler program (<http://www.certifiedelectronicsrecycler.com/>). Even better, you can pass on your video game hardware as soon as you're done using it. Babbitt explains: "The important thing is for users to resell or donate their equipment as soon as possible, and not store them in attics and closets until the device no longer has any reuse viability."

In the end, Babbitt and Harrell agree that on the individual level, environmental awareness and living green comes down to making smart choices as a consumer that limit the amount of waste you produce.

"If we want to be truly sustainable, then all of our consumption behaviors should decrease," Babbitt comments. "Buy less, use less, waste less, etc...maybe through things like sharing games or selling them back when you're done."

Harrell echoes that thought: "In many ways, that's probably the biggest environmental choice you can make as a consumer: not to buy more than you need." If we want to keep gaming going strong for generations to come, that seems like a fair compromise. ♦



Green Gaming Hour

One group of gamers at Chicago's Whitney M. Young High School came up with an interesting way to mix gaming and environmental awareness: the Green Gaming Hour. On April 23, the group of high school freshmen calling themselves Gamers Go Green put on an event where they urged everyone to get together with their family, turn off all the electricity in the house except for one room, and play a game together.

The event was co-sponsored by Evil Controllers, a controller modding website that has headed up previous efforts to push accessibility and gaming. Evil Controllers public relations director Lindsey Olson says that both they and the Gamers Go Green group hope to make the Green Gaming Hour a yearly event.



Care Package

The game industry's Japanese relief effort is the best multiplayer mode of them all

Gamers have always had a special love affair with Japanese culture, and in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, the industry has come together like never before to aid in the recovery. Check out our timeline below that shows how quickly publishers, developers, and gamers mobilized to throw its support behind the beleaguered nation in its time of need.

by Matt Bertz

March 11

A 9.0 magnitude earthquake occurs 231 miles northeast of Tokyo, the largest recorded quake to ever hit Japan. The massive tremor is quickly followed by a devastating 23-foot high tsunami wave that assaults the eastern coast, destroying homes, highways, and even an airport. Over 14,000 citizens are killed, with nearly 12,000 more missing.

March 12

An explosion damages the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Sendai. Partial reactor meltdowns subsequently occur in the next few days, and radiation is released directly into the atmosphere and sea.

March 14

The Japanese stock market index Nikkei opens with \$297 billion in losses, the largest drop since World War II. The Bank of Japan tries to stabilize the economy by injecting \$183 billion into the reeling market.

March 14

Thirty-one games are delayed or cancelled, including the survival series sequel Disaster Report 4 (cancelled) and MotorStorm Apocalypse (delayed).

March 14

Nintendo and Sony both donate \$3.6 million for relief efforts. Square Enix, Tecmo Koei, and Namco Bandai, also make sizable contributions.

March 18

Digital distribution network Direct2Drive donates \$1 to the American Red Cross for every game purchase during a six-day sale raising \$20,000.

March 19

Bejeweled publisher PopCap sells discounted versions of its iOS games to raise over \$200,000 for relief efforts.



March 23

Sega and Capcom lower the prices of the iPhone versions of Sonic The Hedgehog and Street Fighter IV, respectively, and donate all the proceeds to the Red Cross.

March 25

A group from both sides of the public relations/journalist divide team up to create the charity auction site Play for Japan. By auctioning off gaming memorabilia donated by publishers and developers, the group raises over \$100,000 in relief funds.



play for japan

April 3

Electric Playground co-host Victor Lucas coordinates Gamers Heart Japan, an hour-long broadcast special featuring many industry luminaries talking about their love of the country. The program raises over \$7,000 on the day of the broadcast.



April 5

CESA announces that the 2011 Tokyo Game Show will go on in September. The organization plans to hold a charity auction before the event to aid in the relief efforts.



April 12

After a month of radioactive leaks and setbacks, Japan officially raises Fukushima to INES Level 7, putting the disaster in the same category as Chernobyl.

April 18

The CEO of *Famitsu* publisher Enterbrain estimates the earthquake and tsunami has cost the game industry nearly \$90 million in sales.



April 21

Electronic Arts and its studio partners announce that they have raised more than \$1 million for relief efforts.

April 22

Officials increase the Fukushima evacuation zone to a 31-mile radius.



Your Help Is Still Needed

Though the disaster may have disappeared from the front page of newspapers, Japan still has a long road of recovery ahead. If you'd like to help the cause, check out some of the brilliant charity auctions on playforjapan.com or text REDCROSS to 90999 to give \$10. With so many citizens displaced and so much rebuilding left to be done, any amount helps.

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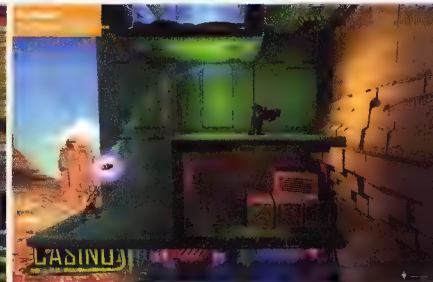
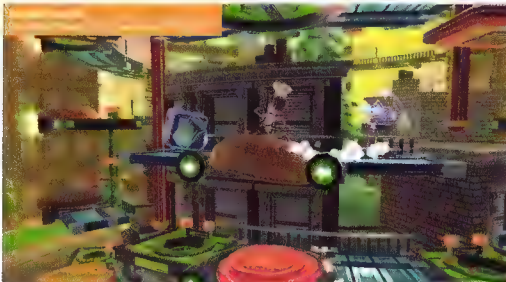
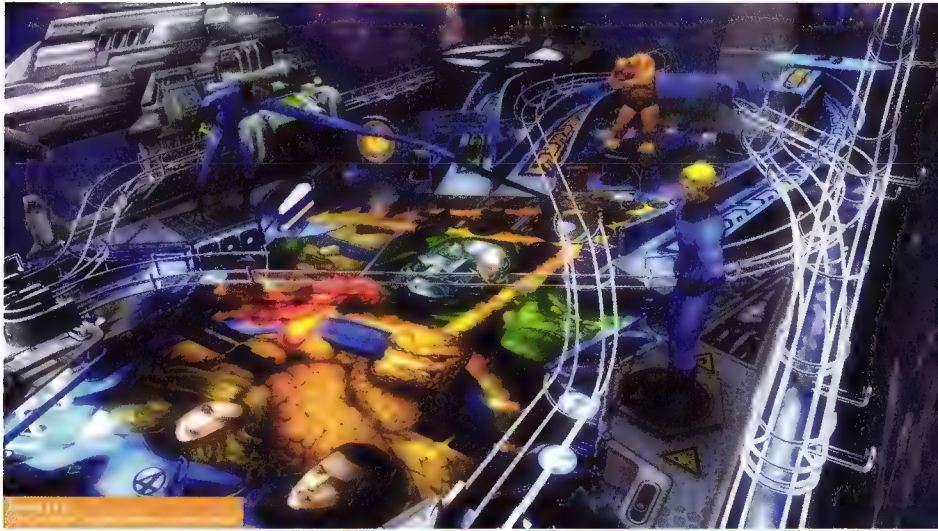
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Downloadable
Game Goodness





I wasn't sure what to make of **Rochard** until I got a chance to sit down with it. You play an overweight outer space miner named John Rochard as he wanders the latest asteroid he and his crew must excavate. Recoil Games goes out of its way to establish a likeable character and story; great voice acting and Rochard's self-aware, blue-collar sensibility both fuel the experience. Eventually Rochard finds something strange, his crew goes missing, and space bandits invade the asteroid.

I played several early levels and found that much of the fun comes from gravity manipulation. The big-bellied miner carries a "G-Lifter," a gravity manipulating tool that lets him pick up heavy objects and either set them gently on a particular location or fling them in a prescribed arc across the screen. He also has the ability to alter the gravity flow by holding down a button, flipping from normal to low gravity in an instant. The combination of these core mechanics creates all sorts of fun puzzle options as the game progresses.

Rochard delivers a mix of amusing platforming and puzzle solving, with just enough action situations to keep things exciting. Levels are designed with a keen eye for challenging mind-twisters. Barriers I encountered in the early levels blocked all bio matter if they are one color, and all non-bio matter if they're another color. Many puzzles play off this challenge. How do you get that box to weigh down the nearby platform if an energy barrier blocks the path ahead? Each challenging puzzle is different from the last, and it's extremely satisfying to tap into low gravity and watch this big guy hurdle 15 feet into the air with one jump. I was surprised how much I enjoyed my brief time with Rochard. Recoil challenges its players to look past the non-traditional hero and see the great gameplay that lies beneath. I'm eager to play the final version when it releases on PSN in the coming weeks.

This month I also checked out **Gating Gears**, a new shooter from Vanguard Games that should spark the interest of anyone who fondly remembers the classic Ikar Warriors. Players pilot a steampunk-looking mechanized walker with impressive destructive capabilities. Whether playing alone or with a friend in offline or online co-op, you move through a scrolling landscape of tanks, helicopters, and soldiers as they desperately attempt to bring down your artillery-powered advance. Your gating gun is mapped to the right analog stick, and it sprays out destruction at an absurd rate. For more heavily armored opponents, you can use your cannon, grenades, or one of the many temporary power-ups scattered throughout the level.

A phenomenal amount of destruction appears on screen as you progress, caused both by yourself and the enemies you fight. Buildings explode in showers of concrete. Shelves of land collapse to create yawning chasms. Train cars shatter apart into burnt husks. Missiles and bullets constantly fill the screen, lending a frantic pace and a need to weave among the attacks.

The campaign includes 30 stages and six bosses, each of which seems bigger and crazier than the last. Luckily, you can upgrade your walker's weaponry and armor as you progress. Once you polish off the campaign, a survival mode offers greater challenges as you see how long your mech can hold off against the horde. The game also includes three difficulty settings. We get simple co-op shooters like **Gating Gears** all too rarely. The game should be on PSN and XBLA by the time you read this.

I may be in the minority, but I have a special fondness for the old-time arcade classic **BurgerTime**. I spent many a quarter back in the day helping Chef Peter Pepper make those tasty meat sandwiches. Developer Frozen Codebase is hoping I'm not the only one who feels that way, as the team is prepping **BurgerTime HD** for release this summer. While players still build

burgers ingredient by ingredient, everything else about the game has been overhauled. A circular, rotating environment allows you to see a broad scope of the level at hand. Run the platforms and you eventually come around to the other side of the circle that you saw in the background before.

With 50 maps, **BurgerTime HD** adds plenty of variety to your cooking. As you run around the circular map, the game rewards you for creating particular burgers. Make a Southwest burger by layering in habanero peppers, or Italiano by including cheese and sausage. The game also includes split screen or online multiplayer for up to four players, with special multiplayer modes and 10 extra maps designated for group play. I'm more than a little surprised by the announcement of **BurgerTime HD** – it's such an anachronistic choice to bring into the world of modern gaming. That said, I'm excited to see how it turns out. Far be it for me to turn down a good hamburger.

One of my favorite games last year was **Pinball FX 2**. With top-notch table designs, Zen Studios created the finest approximation of true pinball I've ever played. Shortly after it released, Zen added to the enjoyment with a host of Marvel comic themed tables, and the fun will continue in the coming months with new tables of additional Marvel characters, new original tables from Zen, and other licenses that haven't been revealed yet. The folks at Zen showed us the new **Fantastic Four** table (available now), which looks like a blast. Mr. Fantastic reaches his elastic arm across the table to pick up the ball. The Invisible Woman throws up forcefields to prevent gutter losses. Even Galactus makes an appearance. Pinball fans should keep an eye on Zen's releases throughout the rest of this year. The **Fantastic Four** table is just the beginning of a great run of new content. ♦

Looking for more info on downloadable and independent games? Visit gameinformer.com/impulse for daily updates, reviews, and breaking news on the best new downloadable titles. For more info in this issue, you can read our review of *Outland* on p. 83, our review of *Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes HD* on p. 90, and get the scores for *Islands of Wakfu* and *Section 8: Prejudice* on p. 96

Through the years, we've listed the greatest games of all time twice for our 100th and 200th issues. Nearly every month, we list the greatest this or the greatest that in our Top 10 section. This month, we're taking a moment to record not the greatest, but the worst games we ever played. These games did more than steal our precious dollars and time; they scarred us for life.

SCREW! THIS GAME!

Game Informer Remembers The
Games That **Ruined Our Childhoods**

Dynowarz: Destruction of Spondylus

System: NES Publisher: Bandai

Everyone remembers the first game they played on a system, but what about the last? The waning days of a console are usually marked by a mix of mediocre shovelware and a longing for something bigger and better. While I'll never forget Kung-Fu, the first NES game I played, I wish I could forget Dynowarz: Destruction of Spondylus, the game that made me throw that classic console into the closet.

Dynowarz came out in 1990. Some of my friends already had a Genesis, which I desperately wanted but couldn't afford. Instead of racing for rings in Sonic the Hedgehog I was left trolling the dwindling NES clearance bin at my local Wal-Mart. One look at the cover and I was sold — robot dinosaurs? For FIVE BUCKS? If I only knew.

Dynowarz farts in the face of everything good about video games. The game has two gameplay modes: crappy sidescrolling platforming/combat as a little space dude, and crappy sidescrolling platforming/combat as a robot dinosaur. Is it possible for a game to be too easy and frustrating at the same time? Somehow Dynowarz manages to be both. Players sleepwalk through endlessly repetitive levels shooting weird space creatures and robodinos without purpose. Even your average death is frustrating, as it's often the result of the stiff controls and bone-dumb design. I don't think I even finished it; I simply couldn't take anymore. I never bought another NES game, and thankfully Santa soon gave me a Genesis. Dynowarz, I spit on you through the mists of time. — Matt Helgeson



The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

System: Apple II • **Publisher:** Infocom

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is a text-based adventure game developed by Infocom and written by Douglas Adams. You wake up with a horrible hangover in a small British home, the rest is up to you. As a seven-year-old kid, the game was mind blowing. I explored the one-room home for hours, trying every action I could think up. I didn't know who this Douglas Adams guy was, but he consistently volleyed witty responses to my nonsensical inputs. I loved it. Then I made the mistake of walking outside.

A bulldozer was rumbling toward my home, a man named Mr. Prosser was yelling at me to get out of the way. I tried to heed Mr. Prosser's advice and run, but it was no use. The bulldozer destroyed my home and a brick hit me in the head, I was dead. The screen was blank; there was no prompt. I typed "restart." The game said, "You keep out of this, you're dead." I typed "restart" again. "You should be concentrating on developing a good firm rigor mortis." Several taunts later, the game let me restart. I was back in the house. I tried to prepare myself this time. I picked up a nearby screwdriver and walked outside. I threw the screwdriver at the oncoming bulldozer but missed – a brick to the back of my head, I was dead. I woke up again, went outside and tried to talk to Mr. Prosser. He refused to stop the bulldozer – a brick to the back of my head, and I was dead. I woke up, I typed in "Help me." Douglas Adams responded, "Sorry, but yourself is beyond help." I agreed, I tried running back in to my house and going back to sleep. Maybe it was all a bad dream? The house collapsed on top of me, I was dead. I woke up again and again, each time inventing a new strategy and having a glimmer of hope before receiving a brick to the back of my head. The game made you logically battle a comedic writer; it was an impossible task. I went back and tried to play the game every now and then, but I had a much more enjoyable time looking at the cool pictures of aliens on the box. » Ben Hanson



Super Pitfall

System: NES • **Publisher:** Activision

When I was a kid, money was hard to come by. My parents would gift me with a five-dollar allowance every Saturday morning, and that was my only source of income. Rather than buying baseball cards, Mask action figures, and candy like all of my friends would, I put most of my cash into a Chicago Cubs-themed piggybank. After two months of saving, I could purchase a new NES game. This wasn't just an event for me. All of the kids living on my block would flock to the Reiner household to check out the hottest new game.

One of these games was Super Pitfall. My love of the Atari 2600 version of Pitfall made this game an instant purchase. I remember paging through the manual during my car ride home, and saying hyperbolic things like "Dad! Pitfall Harry has to save his feline friend Quick Claw! Doesn't that sound awesome?!"

I wish I could go back in time and slap some sense into my young self. After gathering most of my neighborhood fiends into my living room, I proudly popped Super Pitfall into my NES. Within minutes of wrestling with the game's atrocious platforming controls, tears formed in my eyes. This was easily the worst game I had ever played, and it came at the expense of two months of allowance money.

Harry's animations hiccupped and glitched as he ran, he inexplicably slid down ladders for no reason, and most times when he jumped to grab a rope, he would die due to an unreadable connection point. I played the game for no more than 20 minutes. My friends ridiculed me for picking such a terrible game. That was the last time I hosted a neighborhood game session.

Looking back on this disastrous day in my life, I guess I owe Super Pitfall a thank you for teaching me about the dangers of blindly buying games based on name alone. At the same time, it ruined my childhood gaming and was the first step taken in turning me into one of the world's biggest introverts. » Andrew Reiner



Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp

System: Arcade • **Publisher:** Leland Corp.

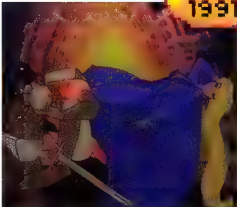
Whenever I'd go the mall as a kid, I'd run off to the arcade while my parents shopped. Usually I could only beg a single quarter out of my folks, since they thought video games would rot my brain. These quarters were like treasures to me; I'd stroll by each one of the games in the arcade, taking my time in deciding which one I would play. Street Fighter II won most of the time, but only because I couldn't afford the game I really wanted: Dragon's Lair II.

The cabinet sat in the back, taunting me. It looked exactly like a cartoon, except you could play it! Unfortunately, it was the only game in the arcade that cost 50 cents, so I just had to stand there and watch the opening movie loop. I probably looked pretty pathetic.

One day, out of nowhere, my parents gave me two quarters for my trip to the arcade. I didn't waste any time; I bolted to the back and put my money into Dragon's Lair II, ready for what I was sure was going to be a mind-blowing experience.

I played for about 30 seconds. I didn't understand how it worked, and I instantly lost all of my lives to a bloated mother-in-law who looked like a rampaging opera singer. My game was over before I even understood that I was playing. As the title screen popped up again, I just stared in disbelief. This garbage was actually a game? And they actually expected kids to pay money – two precious quarters – to play it?! I walked out of the arcade a little more jaded that day.

I've had plenty of chances to right the wrongs of the past; today, the game is available in numerous other incarnations, but I refuse to play it. Why? Because screw you, Dragon's Lair II. You owe me 50 cents. » Joe Juba



Cannondale Cup

System: SNES • **Publisher:** American Softworks

When I first played Road Rash on the 3DO at a store kiosk as a kid, I was amazed by what was now possible in video games. The 3D graphics, smooth framerate, and CD-quality soundtrack were astonishing. Unfortunately, I didn't have a 3DO, and the closest equivalent on the Super Nintendo was called Cannondale Cup. Sure, you rode mountain bikes instead of motorcycles, but you still got to fight your other competitors while racing for the finish line. That makes it just as good, right?

Suffice it to say, Cannondale Cup was the first time I learned that you need discretion when buying video games. Its sluttering, barren landscapes and horrible character design (including a Blanka-esque racer creatively named "Mountain Demon"), were signs that I had just wasted \$50 of my hard-earned allowance. Neither the racing nor the combat came close to what Road Rash offered, and the sense of speed was nonexistent.

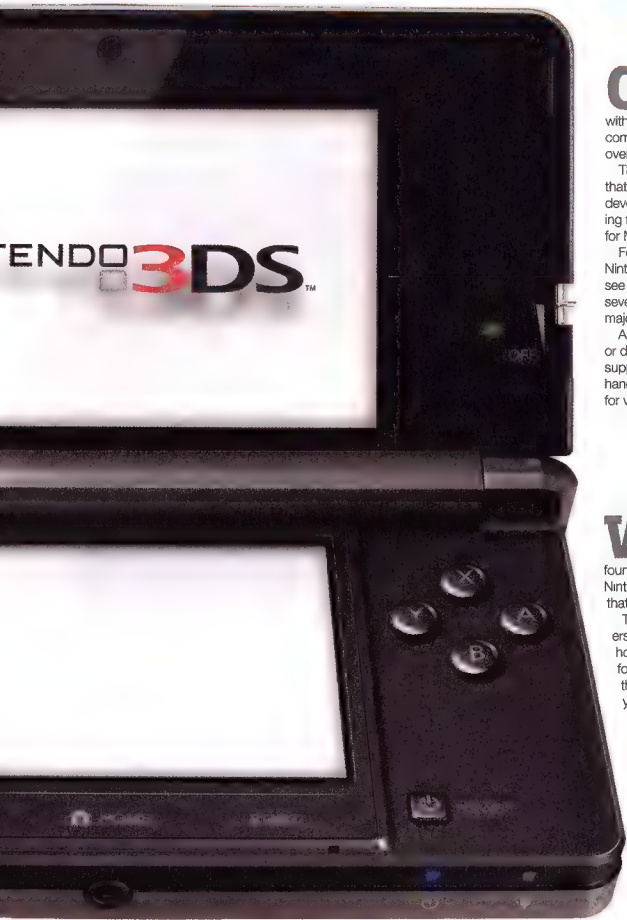
The revelation that some developers were willing to release crappy games was as disappointing as my first-grade teacher telling me "superhero" wasn't a valid career option, and it was the first time I felt jealousy towards owners of a different console. My hatred of the game has contributed to my irrational dislike of the Tour de France, even though its participants don't even use mountain bikes. Cannondale Cup is so bad that it ruined an entire mode of transportation for me. » Jeff Marchiafava



Nintendo has dominated portable gaming since it launched the Game Boy in 1989, but in recent years this market has changed. More games are now played on phones than dedicated gaming devices. Games on phones are cheaper and can be purchased from anywhere at any time. The question on consumers' minds: Is the Nintendo 3DS still a viable avenue for gaming in this new climate? Like a typical debate club, our editors have been assigned to defend a position whether it agrees with their personal views or not.

Is the
Nintendo 3DS

Worth it?



Considering how much more competition is in the marketplace, the 3DS selling just under 400,000 in its first week (compared to the DS' 480,000 in its first week), shows that consumers are still enamored with the unique experiences Nintendo creates. I'm often amazed by the company's forward thinking, risky moves, and ability to change an industry overnight. The 3DS is an industry-changing machine.

The added dimension can enhance a traditional game or create something that we've never seen before. The technology works amazingly well, and if developers explore it to the extent that I hope they will, it should be the driving force behind this product. I can't wait to see what the 3DS' future holds for Mario, Zelda, and gaming's classic franchises.

For the first time, I find myself enjoying the social functions found on a Nintendo device. Street Pass' activities are surprisingly fun, and being able to see when my friends are online and what games they are playing has led to several impromptu Street Fighter bouts. The system's only major misstep so far is using friend codes.

As is the case with every gaming device, the 3DS will live or die by the quality of the software. With strong third-party support and the ability to deliver unique gameplay, this handheld has the potential to be an important step forward for video games. — Andrew Reiner

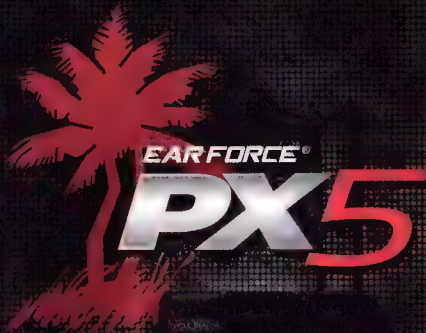


When the 3DS was first unveiled, Nintendo used certain titles to convince gamers of the new handheld's potential. Games like Kid Icarus, Ocarina of Time, and Professor Layton provided the foundation for all of the excitement surrounding the 3DS. However, when Nintendo's new piece of hardware finally went on sale, where were the games that people were excited about? Nowhere to be seen.

They had been shunted off to uncertain release dates, leaving early adopters with one of the worst launch line-ups in recent memory. No matter how cool the technology seems, gaming should be about games first and foremost. That's the main area where Nintendo dropped the ball here, and that's why now is not the right time to buy a 3DS. What's the hurry? Are you that desperate to play a submarine game or another version of Street Fighter IV or Ridge Racer? Even if you are, the fact that the 3D technology works doesn't necessarily mean it enhances gameplay.

I know that there's a certain appeal to being on-board with a new device as soon as it comes out, but remember that you don't owe Nintendo, Sony, or Microsoft anything. These companies should earn your business by supporting their hardware with quality games right out of the gate — not by feeding you promises about a better, brighter future to come. However, the handheld landscape changes quickly; by the time the 3DS is actually worth it, Nintendo may already be working on the system's new and improved (and inevitable) second iteration, and your phone may already have a better game library. — Joe Juba





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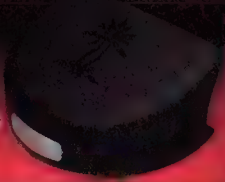


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features

What Video Game Character Are You

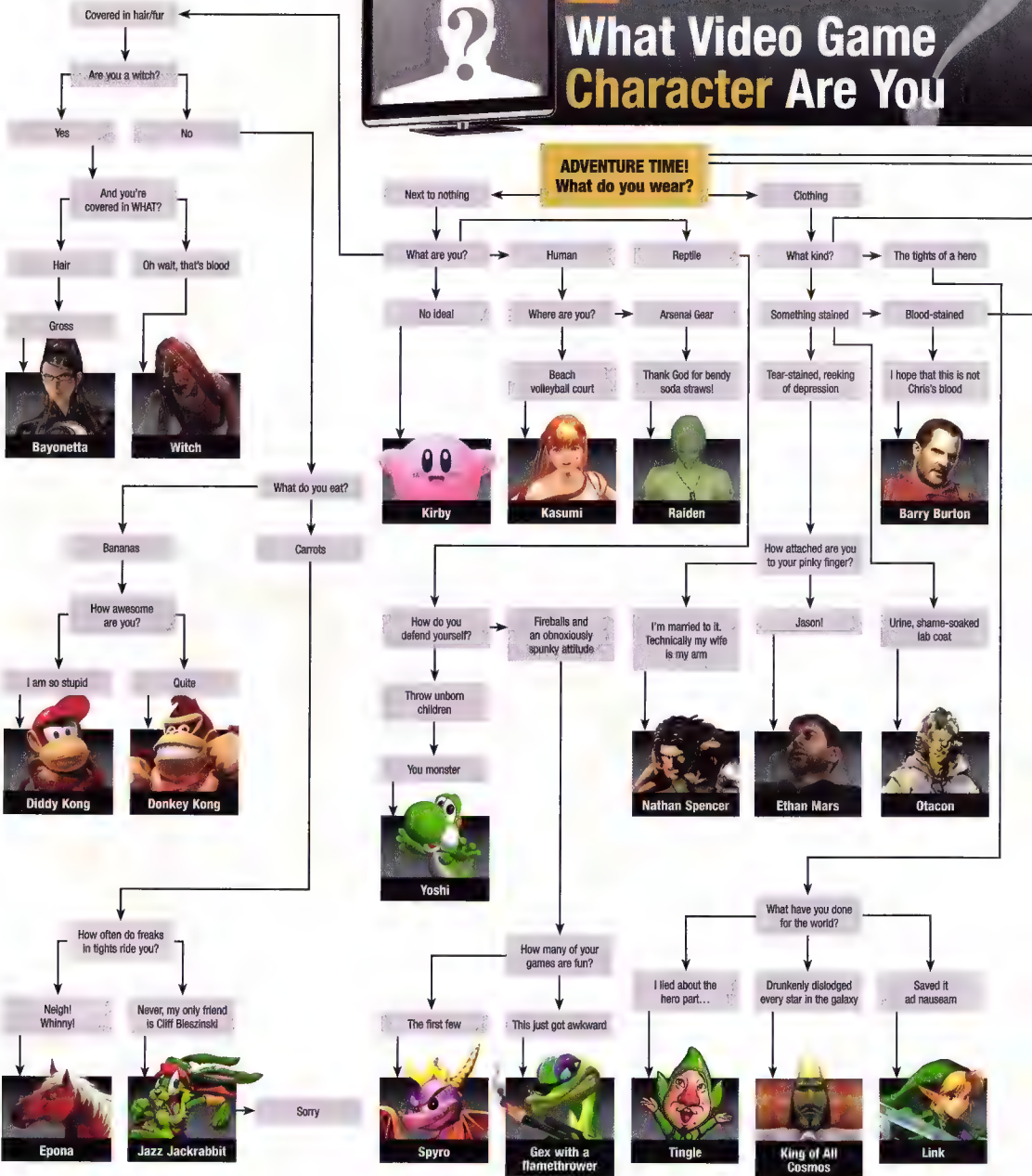




photo: Rob Perry

TT Games and the All-Ages Magic of LEGO

TT Games, created from the 2004 merger of Traveller's Tales and Giant Interactive, has quietly become one of the most prosperous developers in the game industry due to the massive success of its LEGO series. The games have sold 50 million units to date mostly thanks to its three LEGO Star Wars titles. We spoke to **Jonathan Smith**, head of production, about the company's future as part of Warner Bros. Interactive and its process of creating LEGO magic.

interview by Matt Helgeson

What was the genesis of the LEGO Star Wars franchise? LucasArts has always been pretty protective of its IP – did you have to pitch them on the idea?

In retrospect, a lot of the ground had already been broken for us by the relationship that had been in place between Lucas and LEGO. They had a licensing agreement to enable LEGO to produce the very first Star Wars playsets in 1999 with the launch of *The Phantom Menace*. There was a successful relationship in place. We were able to use that as an introduction to get us the meeting that we needed to present the idea of extending the LEGO Star Wars idea into the new space of video games. It was an exciting pitch meeting. We were full of energy and had a belief that there was a completely novel kind of game that we could make. It would be uniquely LEGO and would appeal particularly to young players, and yet still have interest and offer fun to older players.

Was there a point during the development of the original LEGO Star Wars where you realized that you had captured lightning in a bottle?

We never knew what the final reaction to the game was going to be, because there was some skepticism in the marketplace for what – at the time – seemed like a weird or strange idea. However, as we went along, we knew at every step that the team at Traveller's Tales had been able to create something truly magical in every detail with each new character that was brought to life in this charming way. It was immediately fun to control. Then, every new cutscene showed some imaginative new twist on what you had expected. We were sure, at all times, that we had a game that we loved. We didn't know if other people would love it as well.

What do you think was the magic that made it a surprise blockbuster?

That's a huge question. There is no simple answer. We've asked it ourselves. It was the uniqueness of the LEGO idea that married so well with the drama and appeal of Star Wars, just before the launch of Episode III. It was executed with charm, in a marketplace where players were jaded about the sorts of games that were being offered to younger players. It had immediate appeal and accessibility, a direct charm, a gameplay depth and long-term challenges, and some key features that stood out against other games. In particular, the two-player drop-in, drop-out feature felt relevant and fresh in a console context, and worked well with parents and children. Also, the idea that the

game would be forgiving in its approach to player challenge. There are negative consequences in the game, but a much greater emphasis on positive reinforcement than was traditional. It encouraged you to experiment and explore.

Does LEGO place any restrictions on you in making these games? Do you have to use only block types that exist in real life sets?

Everything we do is subject to approval of LEGO. We're glad to have a direct relationship with the model and character designers who are working on all their new launches, so we can make sure that, when it comes to LEGO Harry Potter or LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean, the characters that are being made by LEGO are precisely matched in the game. The sets and models are brought into the game as well. And when we create, as we have in every game, many additional characters and other models that won't appear in physical form in LEGO sets, that they are compatible and maintain the same rules. We've always, from the very start, been careful to maintain very accurately the proportions of LEGO bricks and characters. Like, for example, the Kaminon from LEGO Star Wars with their distinctive, long necks, or all of the guitars in LEGO Rock Band. There's always a really interesting exchange between us and the designers at LEGO Company to go back and forth [asking], "Is this what LEGO would do? How does this fit with all the other elements of the system?"

You've had a long relationship with LucasFilm with the Star Wars games and also LEGO Indiana Jones. How much input do they have into the games you make?

We are hugely privileged to be allowed to play with the universe of Star Wars, the world's most popular characters, and all those great stories. The whole Lucas organization has been supportive of our work and huge contributors to it. That summarizes it. There are individuals within that organization that have very deep, rich knowledge of the universe of Star Wars, and it's very important to us – with every property – that we are authentic in every detail to the source IP. That's what the layer of LEGO mischief, surprise, and humor use as a foundation of credibility in order to work its magic. If we were to be disconnected and lazy or sloppy in our relationship with the source material, we wouldn't have the same energy with the moments where we reinterpret and mix things up.

An interesting part of the franchise is how much personality and story is conveyed through pantomime; it's almost like silent film. How do you approach the "writing process"?

We have an incredibly talented cutscene team,

whose job it is to storyboard and then animate the things that tell the stories outside of the levels themselves. A lot of what they do is about distilling a longer story to pull out the key elements. This is coupled with a process of exaggeration and caricature to bring out the most relevant and humorous elements they find from the source material and character. They also add their own jokes, largely to do with appearance of anachronistic animals and people falling over and getting hit in the face. [Laughs]

How will Pirates of the Caribbean be different than the LEGO games we've seen in the past?

Pirates of the Caribbean is such a natural fit, between all the freedom and irreverence of LEGO gaming and the wonderful span of color and adventure that exists in the Pirates series. We start right at the beginning of the saga with *Curse of the Black Pearl*, going right through *Dead Man's Chest* and *At World's End*, and we're really excited to be able to tell the whole story of *On Stranger Tides*, the new movie. There are some elements that are well suited from a design point of view. You've got pirates searching for treasure, collecting, discovery, which have always been key elements of our games. We've got pirates getting themselves into dangerous situations – climbing and jumping in ways they've never been able to do before. We've got them fighting high above the decks of the ships, across the riggings. We've got great villains, characters with supernatural abilities; it really works incredibly well. The team loved working on this game.

How did the acquisition with Warner Bros. happen, and did that change anything in terms of how you did your business? What opportunities did that open?

I can say that we had the best time working with Warners on LEGO Batman. Since we've been able to join the company permanently, they've been wonderful partners.

Are you continuing with the Star Wars games?

I can't confirm or deny any future titles.

Warner Bros. holds a lot of properties, are there any you'd like to work with?
What caught your eye?

Warner Bros. owns the Lord of the Rings license. There's The Matrix, Looney Tunes, and all of DC comics.

I love having discussions with everyone I meet about future LEGO games. Everyone has titles they'd love to see. That's a testament to the LEGO world; in LEGO, anything can happen. ☺

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1981 COMPUTER AGE
Smith's father, who worked at a technical college, gets his son a Sinclair Z88, an iconic early PC in the UK

1991 MAN OF LETTERS
Smith turns his hobby into a career, becoming a game journalist. He begins writing for Future Publishing's Sega-themed magazine *Mega*. He also does PC reviews for Future

2000 FLASH FORWARD
Smith leaves journalism for the world of development. He takes a job working at Codemasters coordinating production with outside developers like Bohemia Interactive, which was working on the original Operation Flashpoint at the time

2001 TOY BUSINESS
Smith leaves Codemasters for LEGO, where he helps coordinate the company's new efforts in video games

2002 GIANT OPPORTUNITY
Smith and LEGO colleague Tom Stone form an independent company, Giant Interactive, to create LEGO games. They quickly form a partnership with Traveller's Tales

2005 MERGERS & HITS
Giant and Traveller's Tales merge shortly before the release of LEGO Star Wars. The game quickly becomes a breakout hit

2007 ACQUIRED
TT Games is purchased by Warner Bros. Interactive. LEGO Indiana Jones is released the following year

2009 THE CUTE KNIGHT
TT releases LEGO Batman, its first game based on a Warner property, another fun and charming recreation of an iconic franchise

2011 NEW HEIGHTS
TT Games releases LEGO Star Wars III. The Clone Wars, the best game in the LEGO series so far. It is also preparing to release another new LEGO franchise, LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean



Kombat Stick

Many fight sticks are available for home consoles, but none are ideal for Mortal Kombat's fighting style. Since the game places great importance on a central block button, you won't want to use anything that doesn't have the series' traditional X layout where the center button blocks and everything else is mapped to an attack. PDP's Kombat Stick is a great emulation of the old-school arcade experience.

At first glance, you may be thrown off by the odd placement of the RB/R1 and LT/L2 buttons. The former handles throwing, and the latter is used in conjunction

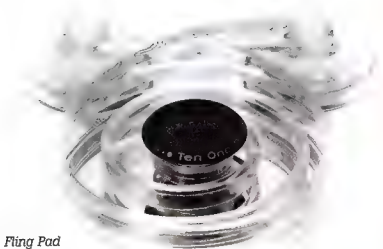
with RT/R2 for the devastating X-Ray attacks. If you don't go through the game's tutorial, you may not realize that you can perform these functions without stretching your fingers in unnatural ways. Throwing can be performed by pressing the leftmost two buttons on the X (X/Y for 360, square/X for PS3), and your X-Ray can be unleashed by hitting the bottom two and the middle of the X (RT/A/B on 360, R2/X/O on PS3). Once you've learned this, the button layout feels completely natural.

With quality Suzo-Happ parts, the joystick and buttons feel great. For MK's control style, this stick feels much better than the ball alternative seen on MadCatz's Street Fighter boards. The top of the board also opens up, allowing gamers to store a USB cord and a game or two inside. Those prone to extended fighting sessions will be grateful to know that their lap won't get battered along the way thanks to the unit's padded underside. If you plan on playing a ton of NetherRealm's awesome fighter and want to relive the series' glory days in the arcade, this stick is a must have.

\$129.99
pdp.com/mkstick



Fling Pad

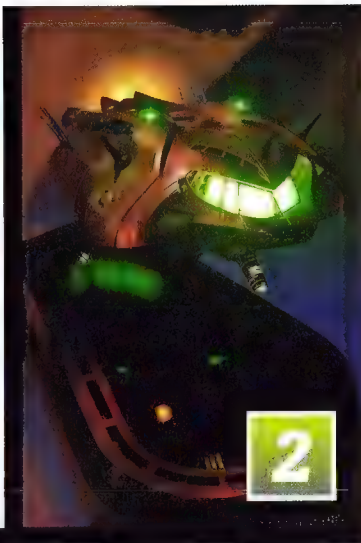


1



Joystick-it

2



3

1 Battle of The Tablet Pads

More and more gaming is happening on touchscreens these days, but touch controls aren't always as responsive as a traditional joystick. In response, companies have started building augmentations for tablet gaming.

Ten One Design's Fling controller, which is essentially two analog-style thumbsticks attached with suction cups, is our favorite. The setup provides a greater range of motion and proved more comfortable while playing both platformers and shooters.

Think Geek's Joystick-it — which includes two large, aluminum joysticks — seems like a great idea in concept, but the unit kept detaching itself from our iPad.

Sadly, neither solution works well with fighting games like Street Fighter IV, and both pads tend to obscure text or menu items in certain games. But if you play a lot of platformers or simple thumbstick arcade games, the Fling Joypad is a worthwhile investment.

Fling Pad

WITH GOOD

\$19.95
tenonedesign.com/fling

Joystick-it

LIMITED-APPEAL

\$24.99
thinkgeek.com

2 First 4 Figures Metroid Prime Gunship Statue

Looking for a place to save and refill your missile supplies? First 4 Figures has a hot little spacecraft that should fulfill the needs of any intergalactic bounty hunter. Measuring 12 inches tall and mounted on a swivel base, this replica of Samus's gunship from Metroid Prime comes fitted with internal LEDs that light up the cockpit. These statues won't start shipping until later this year, but

it's a good idea to preorder yours now before supplies start warping off store shelves.

\$299.99
first4figures.com

3 Mass Effect Series 1 Figures

Saving the universe isn't easy. Neither is assembling a team of action figures that look worthy of being in one of the year's most highly anticipated titles. The first series of Mass Effect figures from DC Direct stands approximately seven inches tall, so you can pose Shepard, Thane, and Tali in dramatic poses worthy of their personalities, and then you can put Grunt up on your shelf and pretend he's as cool as Wrex.

\$19.99 (each)
dccomics.com/dcdirect



HEROES OF SHADOW: A 4TH EDITION D&D SUPPLEMENT

The biggest expansion to tabletop D&D in the last several months introduces a darker vibe to your campaign, with everything from undead races to a vampire class

\$29.95
wizards.com/DND

MEGADRIVER — METAL FOR GAMERS

Brazil's premiere heavy metal video game cover band's latest album, *Metal For Gamers*, is an ear-bleeding tribute to games like Golden Axe, Castlevania, and Top Gear

Free/Donations Accepted
megadriverv.com.br

THOR: TALES OF ASGARD

Lionsgate's animated film is a great introduction to Marvel's mightiest Avenger Thor's innocent quest for the legendary Lost Sword of Surtur quickly turns deadly, and the young god must prove himself worthy by saving Asgard

\$29.99
lionsgateshop.com

TIM & ERIC AWESOME SHOW SEASON CINCO

Joined by various guests like Rann Wilson, LeVar Burton, and Zach Galifianakis, Tim & Eric enter puberty, jackhammer planets, and host slumber parties Who needs sanity?

\$19.98
adultswimshop.com

Media Shelf



Are Producers Allowed To Rant, Too?

From my days as a programmer on *Soldier of Fortune* to working as a producer on games like *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, *Singularity*, and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, I've contributed to 12 triple-A titles over the course of 14 years as a developer. I'm proud of all those games, but almost every project has required people to work unpaid overtime to hit deadlines. I got tired of seeing teammates stressed out, marriages destroyed, and friends' health endangered, so I started my own consulting company with the goal of improving project management throughout the games industry.

by Keith Fuller
production consultant,
Fuller Game Production

to know which risks are worth examining and which ones aren't. You could probably find a better use for your time than developing a plan entitled "What To Do In Case Of Comet Strike."

It's not smart for any company to burn out its most valuable assets in the creation of their product, and it certainly isn't sustainable. If veteran developers keep leaving the industry, game quality suffers. I suspect you're like me — you want the games you play to be getting better, not worse. As gamers, what I'm talking about here affects all of us.

I read a fantastic article recently that was, in effect, a post-mortem on post-mortems. To jump straight to the conclusion, production — a.k.a. project management in game development — stinks. It frequently makes games buggy, or late, or both. I'm paraphrasing here — don't blame the author for my word choice. He was much more politic than I in presenting his findings.

The article by game designer Ara Shirinian detailed the results of examining 24 post-mortems published between February 2008 and January 2010. The developers in question ran the gamut from heavy-hitter triple-A studios, to tiny independent groups, with team sizes ranging from 5 to 265. Development times went from a couple of months to almost five years. Despite the diversity of genres, platforms, and budgets, one trend was alarmingly clear across the sample of titles: The single most common and potentially destructive element in game production is project mismanagement.

I wish I could say I was surprised by the results, but the truth is I've been aware of this widespread problem for some time. You have, too. Even if you're not a developer, you probably know that "everyone in games has to go through crunch," right? You've likely read any number of these post-mortems in which studios lament certain early decisions that resulted in a

lot of headaches later on. If you aren't personally acquainted with a developer who's gone through a period of lengthy unpaid overtime you may still recall the press coverage of the EA Spouse fiasco, in which a fiancée of a game designer called out the labor practices of Electronic Arts. Even if none of this rings a bell, you at least have been through the experience of anticipating the release of a game only to read that it was delayed by weeks or months. I don't claim to know the root cause of every game delay ever, but I feel very safe in categorizing the vast majority of them as the result of project mismanagement.

Let's talk about root causes for a moment, though. A while back a student doing research on game development asked me what problems I've encountered while producing games. Here's an excerpt from my response:

"Disinterested employees doing shoddy work, interference from uninformed people at the publisher or studio leadership, layoffs that unexpectedly reduce your team size, power outages (a squirrel chewed through a transformer wire... true story), floods (so much rain that an animator went swimming in the parking lot... also true story), political power struggles within the company, licensors requiring insane changes to the game, dates getting drastically changed because your game's movie tie-in got pushed back a year, key developers leaving the company, running out of available licenses for critical software, work visas expiring..."

Trying to develop contingency plans for each of these events would require a lot of effort that likely wouldn't pay off. Risk management has its place in software development, but you've got

for every conceivable event, what can be done to better manage the development of a game? Just like listing all of the potential difficulties wasn't overly fruitful, it's not helpful to rattle off every area of improvement. Whenever there's a failure in even one of these areas it can lead to the kind of crunch time and schedule overruns you're trying to avoid. You can't cover them all.

What any reasonable person would ask at this point is, "All right then, what do you suggest as a solution?" Here's the best all-encompassing answer I can give: Have experienced people monitor your progress on a frequent cycle and be prepared to adapt the plan and process based on what they find. Any time you choose to be inflexible in your approach to an unpredictable project like creating a game you are already building failure into your plan. "Building failure in" is what I'd consider mismanaging your project. I've been accused in the past of only crying foul and not providing suggestions for fixing the problem. Well, that advice four sentences back is a great place to start.

When game designers get upset about the State Of Games, they like to publish rants. Usually to rave reviews. I'm no industry luminary, but I am upset, so here's my rant: Don't build failure into one more project. If you do, don't burn out your people to clean up the mess. It's bad for your game, it's bad for your company, and it's bad for the industry. Fix the underlying problem instead.

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

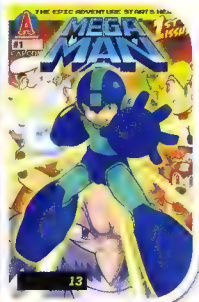
■ ■ ■
If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com



03



2011

07
Infamous 2

13



10



17

14
Duke Nukem Forever

19

21
UFC Personal Trainer

24



28

Call of Juarez: The Cartel

June

03 X-Men Fresh-Men

The third X-Men movie should have put the nail in the mutant coffin, but *X-Men: First Class* hopes to bring the franchise back from the dead. The film, which releases today, tells the origin story of Magneto and Professor X. However, instead of starring Captain Picard and Ian McEwan, it features two B-grade Hollywood hunks in these key roles. No matter how this movie turns out, it has to be better than *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Remember when he jumped off of a jeep onto a helicopter?

05 E3 Week

This is the game industry's biggest week of the year, as every company vies for your attention with game and hardware announcements. Will Nintendo reveal a new console? Will I Master Chief return in a new Halo? Will Sony finally cancel Home? For all of the latest news from the show floor go to gameinformer.com.

07 New Releases

- Infamous 2 (PS3)
- James Van Der Beek's *Hollywood Dreams* (XBOX)
- Pac-Man & Gaia Dimensions (XBOX)
- Shadows of the Damned (PS3, 360)
- Supremacy MMA (PS3, 360)

10 A Super Mash-Up

Step right up to the amazing Mash-o-matic! Simply insert two old popular movies, and after their pieces are mixed up and slightly rearranged, out pops a new movie! When Steven Spielberg and J.J. Abrams inserted *E.T.* and *Cloverfield*, *Super 8* was born – and you can see it today! It involves aliens, government cover-ups, video cameras, and the back-up Fami'ng daughter. Also, someone must have accidentally slipped some *Friday Night Lights* into the Mash-o-matic, because that one guy's in it, too.

13 What Do Mega Man, Sonic, and Archie All Have in Common?

If your answer is "the last time they were cool was in the '80s," or "they are all virgins," reward yourself with a pat on the back for being hilarious. The answer we are looking for, however, is they all have monthly comic book series through publisher Archie Comics. *Mega Man* is the newest entry, which tells the origin story of how Dr. Light transformed Rock into Mega Man.

14 New Releases

- Alice: Madness Returns (PS3, 360, PC)

- Child of Eden (360)
- DECA Sports Extreme (XBOX)
- Duke Nukem Forever (PS3, 360)
- Record of Agarest War Zero (360)
- Transformers: Dark of the Moon (PS3, 360)
- Transformers: Dark of the Moon – Autobots (X3)
- Transformers: Dark of the Moon – Decepticons (X3)

17 In the Brightest Day...

Ryan Reynolds hasn't been in a bad movie this year, but there's still time. Today's release, *Green Lantern*, stars Reynolds as he reprises his role as Deadpool. You might be thinking that it's too soon to reboot Deadpool as a character, but this movie apparently has little to do with the original concept. He uses a green ring instead of swords, and he belongs to a whole intergalactic league of Deadpools.

19 Mario Will Protect Your Games

If your 3DS ends up in different locations every night, purchase First 4 Figures' newest Mario statue. He looks great on his own, but his true function is to hold your 3DS. Just lay it down into his hands, and you'll never find yourself looking

through dirty laundry for your handheld again! This handy statue is available now for \$29.99.

21 New Releases

- Cars 2 (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Combat Wings: The Great Battles of World War II (Wii)
- Dungeon Siege III (PS3, 360, PC)
- Splinter Cell: Classic Trilogy HD (PS3)
- UFC Personal Trainer (PS3, 360, Wii)

24 The First Movie of the Year Candidate

We make fun of movies on this page a lot. Usually, we're just joking around to get a rise out of you. However, when we talk about how Pixar is the best motion picture studio in existence, we're not kidding. Everything these folks produce is god, and we have a feeling that *Cars 2* (opening today) won't be the exception.

28 New Releases

- Call of Juarez: The Cartel (PS3)
- Omnicross Excellent (360)
- Shen Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overcocked (3DS)

2011



PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 - PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action
(Online TBA)

» **Publisher**
Ubisoft

» **Developer**
Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft
Ancecy, Ubisoft Bucharest
Ubisoft Massive, Ubisoft
Quebec City, Ubisoft
Singapore

» **Release**
November

ASSASSIN'S CREED® REVELATIONS

FULL CIRCLE

Questions. After three console releases and a scattering of handheld excursions, comics, and novels, Assassin's Creed has a number of unresolved plotlines. Ubisoft has woven a complex string of conspiracies and mysteries into its time-slicing, historical drama. Gamers could be forgiven for feeling little lost, especially since the enigmas link three unique protagonists from three completely different periods of history. It's time for some clarity. Ubisoft is pulling all the story threads together in Assassin's Creed Revelations so players can see the tapestry that is forming beneath. Each of the three heroes—Altair, Ezio, and Desmond—will play their part.

BY MATT MILLER



THE MASTER

Ezio was a learner. Now he is a master; players will control the Assassin at the height of his power and skill.

BIG GAME, LITTLE TIME

While Assassin's Creed started as an ambitious Ubisoft experiment, its consistent success has turned the franchise into the publisher's prized stallion. The increasing quality of each game has heightened the demand for new installments, but as Brotherhood recently demonstrated, Ubisoft isn't interested in meaningless expansions. Even more than that last game, Revelations is a profound step forward for the series, with surprising new gameplay mechanics, dramatic new locations, and a refined approach to every existing system in the game. At the same time, Revelations is a conclusion—the inevitable wrap of existing story points and character arcs necessary to make room for Assassin's Creed III. At long last, Revelations completes the stories of both Altair and Ezio.

Anyone familiar with the tenets of game design knows you can't make something out of nothing. Time, manpower, and money are all needed to make a game, especially a top-tier console release. Creating annual entries for a franchise of this magnitude presents a monumental task, especially if the development duties remain with a particular studio across installments. It sounds crazy, but that's what Ubisoft aims to do with Revelations, which is hitting retail shelves this November.

To meet the rigorous schedule and maintain the quality the franchise is known for, hundreds of Ubisoft employees are working in tandem to craft the game. "Assassin's Creed has always been a Montreal production, and Montreal remains the lead studio," explains creative director Alexandre Amancio. "But this is a huge game. The amount of time and data that goes into all of these systems to build the game is tremendous. So it's a cooperative venture. We have different studios cooperating on different elements of the game."

In addition to the nearly 200 employees on the Montreal team, Ubisoft has enlisted support teams at Ubisoft Anney in France, Ubisoft Massive in Sweden, Ubisoft Singapore, Ubisoft Quebec City, and Ubisoft Bucharest in Romania. Each team has designated tasks, from multiplayer to exotic gameplay sequences. Taken as a whole, the Revelations staff is one of the biggest teams in Ubisoft history.



THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD

One of the joys of popping in a new Assassin's Creed game is the rich historical backdrop and locations you find within. In the most recent installment, players explored Renaissance Rome. Though thrilling, it followed suit with many familiar visual elements seen in Assassin's Creed II. Revelations leaves Italy in favor of a new area of the world: Constantinople at the height of the 16th century Ottoman Empire.

At that time, Constantinople bore many names. While the western world still applied that moniker inherited from Constantine's time as Holy Roman Emperor, the newly conquering Ottomans started to call the city Istanbul, Byzantium, Nova Roma, Tsangrad – no matter the name, the metropolis is a melting pot of cultures and ideologies. "It's a city of contrasts. It's a mixture of civilizations. This city was home to every major civilization since ancient times," Amancio says. "It's very crowded and exotic." East meets west, rich meets poor, and religious traditions compete for the attention of the people.

In 1511, Constantinople has had only a few decades under the control of the ever-expanding Ottoman juggernaut. The formerly ruling Byzantines were run out of the city during the transfer of power, but their influence and agents remain behind, among them members of the Templar order. The ruling Sultan is at the end of his reign, and already his sons and grandsons vie for the coveted position. Murder and all-out war are inevitable.

In the game, Constantinople is split into four huge districts along its multiple rivers and hilly terrain. "Typically, the cities in Assassin's Creed have been flat," Amancio tells us. "Constantinople is actually built on many slopes. Wherever you are in the city, you get this vista of these imposing monuments."

The famous Hagia Sophia is one of many landmarks players encounter in the Imperial district, a rich area of towering marble buildings, majestic mosques, and opulent citizenry. Nearby, the merchant district of Beyazid houses the historic Forum



HAGIA SOPHIA

The Revelations team traveled to Istanbul, Turkey, to take thousands of pictures. Many of the in-game monuments and structures stand even today.



CONSTANTIN

BEYAZID

IMPERIAL

GALATA

of Ox, along with the military Arsenal. Even further west, the Constantin district holds the city's poor; ramshackle wooden buildings spring up from the hills, and mismatched low rooftops present a distinct challenge to free runners. Ancient ruins scattered amid the squalor, like the

forgotten Valens Aqueduct, serve as a potent reminder of the region's storied past. Across the waters of the Golden Horn lies the Galata district. The only part of the city technically in Asia, the Galata district is the most cosmopolitan, filled with varied architectural styles drawn

from Italian, Ottoman, Byzantine, Greek, and Asian influences.

We viewed a demo showing the city from high above, and it's huge. "Constantinople is denser than Rome, but it's also bigger," Amancio says.

Though Constantinople hosts the bulk of the action in Revelations, it's not the only location. Nearby is the marvelous underground city of Cappadocia. "This is not a city controlled by a Templar faction – this is a Templar city," Amancio says. "It's like going into the belly of the beast."

Based on real underground cities that can still be visited in modern-day Turkey, Cappadocia is unlike anything else in the Assassin's Creed universe. Ezio must explore the multi-floored tunnels and chambers of this sprawling complex, all the while under the scrutiny of his greatest enemies. "It's massive... Over 10,000 people lived here for over 100 years," Amancio explains.

Surrounding the city built into the mountain, a rich open countryside area offers even more opportunities for adventure.

The opening location for Revelations is a familiar one to longtime players of the franchise. Ezio begins the game by making a pilgrimage to the ancient Assassin stronghold of Masyaf. He comes to the Middle Eastern castle over 300 years after we last saw it in the first Assassin's Creed, and it looks drastically different. The surrounding village has crumbled, but the hard stone of the fortress remains. Ezio uncovers a surprise there that fuels the story which follows.



CAPPADOCIA

The underground city is the center of Templar power in the region. Nevertheless, Ezio must explore its massive chambers and hidden tunnels.



MASYAF

300 years after Assassin's Creed, Ezio ventures to his ancestor Altair's home of Masyaf, only to find it overrun by Templars.

CONSTANTINOPLE

The massive city also known as Istanbul is an entirely new landscape for Ezio to explore, complete with new characters, secret locations, and new gameplay mechanics

A STORY BOTH NEW AND OLD

Ezio, now over 50 years old, comes to Masyaf seeking the wisdom left behind by his ancestor, Altaïr. "Ezio travels to his ancient order in search of answers. He's always been very reactive about the Assassins," Amancio tells us. "He never chose to become an Assassin. His family got killed, and he was forced to take up his father's cause. Now, he looks back on his life and wonders, 'Did I live the life I always wanted to live?'"

The codex pages of Assassin's Creed II hinted at greater truths that Altaïr learned in his later years. Instead of finding those answers, Ezio arrives at Masyaf to discover it's overrun by Templars. "Through questioning one of the Templars, he realizes that there is this extremely important artifact hidden inside of Masyaf. If the Templars get a hold of it they will be able to beat the Assassins." Unfortunately for both sides, this secret is locked away, and five ancient seals must be brought to Masyaf to breach the interior. The trail of these keys leads Ezio to Constantinople.

The subsequent story traces a double path. The first is a race against time as Ezio hunts down the keys once held by his ancestor. Four of them are hidden away, and he must find them before his enemies. The second plotline involves the fifth seal, already taken by the Templars. To uncover its location, Ezio must play a game of intrigue and politics at the highest levels of the city. "The Templars already have one of the keys, so you need to find who the Templars are and who is leading them within the city to get the key back," Amancio says.

Arriving in Constantinople, Ezio meets his local counterpart, a man named Yusuf Tazim. A friendly rivalry exists between the two masters, and each has something to teach the other. Another intriguing character Ezio encounters is the forfeit heir to the Byzantine throne, Manuel Palaeologos, an extravagant and mysterious man. Overweight and opulent, he holds intimate ties to the Templar order. Whether his allegiance rests with the Templars or his Byzantine roots is something Ezio must discern. Ezio also becomes acquainted with Prince Ahmet, the man currently controlling the city as his Sultan father is away at war, and his nephew Prince Suleiman. The young man will eventually become Suleiman the Magnificent, one of the greatest and most famous rulers in history. In Revelations, Suleiman is only 17, newly installed by his grandfather the sultan as a provincial governor, and not yet the leader he will one day become. "Suleiman notices the wisdom of Ezio,

and learns a lot from him. Ezio sees the potential that this kid is going to be great someday," Amancio tells us.

Perhaps of greatest importance, Ezio finally meets a woman who gives him pause from a life of wooing the beautiful ladies of Italy. Sofia Sorto is a bookseller in the heart of Constantinople, an immigrant from Venice hoping to bring learning to the great city. The recent invention of the printing press has made books proliferate, and Sofia has an insatiable hunger for finding and sharing knowledge. To her, Ezio is a handsome gentleman with curious interests. To Ezio, Sofia is a glimpse of what his life could have been had it not been consumed by vengeance and murder. He feels an increasing connection to the young woman. Even so, he cannot bear to tell her of the dark order he leads.

One other central character helps Ezio during his quest. In Revelations, the seals Ezio seeks are far more than old keys. They are relics of the forgotten first civilization – discs that carry the memories of Ezio's last ancestor to hold them – the legendary Altaïr. Just as Desmond uses the Animus to peek into Ezio's life, Ezio uses the seals to glimpse the events of Altaïr's life. A coincidence? Perhaps. Regardless of the bearing on the existence of the Animus, the seals serve as opportunities to learn about the life of Altaïr, and for players to once again inhabit the role of the first Assassin's Creed hero. Through sequences scattered across the breadth of Revelations' story, playable Altaïr levels give us a deeper understanding of that character's life. "Since Ezio is actually living Altaïr's memories, Ezio is learning a lot about his own life through Altaïr's perspective," Amancio explains. "He gets to see this incredibly devout Assassin. It gives him perspective on his own life."



SULEIMAN

A young man of 17, he will one day become Suleiman the Magnificent, one of the most famous leaders in history

AHMET

The rightful heir to the Ottoman Empire, his father and brother fight even now over the line of succession



SOFIA SORTO

Not every character in Assassin's Creed is based on written history. Ezio's love interest is based on this Albrecht Dürer painting, *Portrait of a Young Woman in a Veil*



MANUEL PALAEOLOGOS

The would-be Byzantine king still has ties to the Templar order, but his loyalties remain unclear

BOMB MAKING

Ezio can make hundreds of different types of bombs through a simple crafting system



ZIPLINES

Acting like highways through the city, ziplines are an alternative to fast travel that keeps you immersed in the action



NEW TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Each of the previous games has introduced new weapons and equipment into the assassin's arsenal. However, few have had an impact on every element of gameplay like the new hookblade. Ezio comes to Constantinople unaware of the innovation, which has already become commonplace among the Assassins of the city. "Yusuf is a bit surprised when he mentions the hookblade and Ezio doesn't know what he is talking about," Amancio says. This new device revolutionizes Ezio's approach to both navigation and combat.

The hookblade attaches to Ezio's existing hidden blade mechanism. Its curved end acts as a grabbing implement, and with it Ezio can use ziplines scattered across the city of Constantinople as a fast track between rooftops. As he slides along these ropes, he can drop onto unsuspecting enemies, assassinating from above. Ezio can still grab hanging flowerpots and swing around the corners of buildings, but with the hookblade, he can grab the pot and use it like a trapeze to send him hurtling across the street. As he ascends buildings, he can use the hookblade to slingshot himself up a sheer surface at far greater speeds than his arms alone could allow. In the demo we saw, Ezio clambered up a four story building in a matter of seconds using the hookblade. "It makes free running more fluid, faster, and more fun. It speeds up navigation by about 30 percent," Amancio claims.

The hookblade has equal utility in combat. Brotherhood refined the fighting formula with chained kills, which helped make Ezio feel even more lethal than before – but they still needed to be initiated defensively by countering an enemy. The hookblade adds an offensive component to Ezio's repertoire by letting him reach out and pull enemies into a combo. "It gives you a new tool to actually start a fight," Amancio says. "It allows you to be more proactive in the fight. It also allows you to bypass a fight." With a tap of a button, Ezio will reach out with the hookblade and latch onto an enemy. With a deft acrobatic flip, Ezio catapults up and over the unsuspecting foe, and the hero continues his sprint without breaking stride. "It makes combat and movement one. It simply

gives more choices to the player," Amancio concludes.

Ezio also has another set of new tools that have a wider importance within the game's economy and progression. Ezio can now make bombs. "Through exploration and purchasing, we wanted the player to experiment with a simple crafting system," Amancio says. "Every permutation of ingredients gives you something useful, but it depends on your style of play and the situation you find yourself in." Amancio claims that over 300 types of bombs can be created with varying effects and strengths. One might cause a flash to distract guards. Another creates a massive smoke cloud, replacing the smoke grenades of previous entries. A third type scatters caltrops behind Ezio, serving as a chase-breaker to halt pursuing enemies.

A slightly modified control scheme takes these two major new elements and integrates them into the combat paradigm. The hookblade replaces the empty hand button on the right side of the face buttons (B or circle). Meanwhile, projectile weapons and bombs are mapped to the upper face button (Y or triangle). As a result, secondary weapons are now at the player's control. You can swing your sword in a wide arc to drop one enemy, tap a button to fling a bomb to the ground or fire your gun, and then finish by using the hookblade to grab your next victim. You're in greater control of the action.

Meanwhile, the eagle vision that was once on that upper face button has evolved into a more potent eagle sense. Ezio is wiser now than he once was, and uses more than his eyes to perceive his surroundings. These evolved instincts let him gather snatches of conversation from a distance, or listen for the rapid heartbeat of his nervous target. "Eagle sense lets you focus on a character and see where he's been," Amancio says. "You'll get an approximation of where he will go. If you're able to detect the path a guard will take, you can run ahead, set a bomb, and create a trap or an ambush." This unusual sixth sense is becoming increasingly important within the franchise, and series devotees will want to watch how it develops moving forward.



HOOKBLADE

Ezio's new hidden blade enhancement speeds his way through the city, or brings down his enemies with a vicious grasping attack



A WAR FOR CONTROL

As the Assassin's Creed Revelations story unfolds, players will be confronted by a new gameplay system that challenges Ezio's role as a master assassin and mentor to his followers. The war between the Assassins and Templars spills onto the streets of Constantinople, and extends across the breadth of the Mediterranean region.

"We really liked the Borgia Towers in Brotherhood, where you got to take over the city from the Templars," Amancio says. "We started with that, and then completely revamped the system to create something new." Within the city, the conflict centers on control of several distinct areas, each governed from an Assassin's Den. To gain one of these dens, you must tackle unique assault scenarios to bring down the Templar presence. These offensive strikes have more variety than the repeated attacks on Borgia Towers seen in Brotherhood. Once obtained, these hidden dens are your bases of operation within Constantinople; control a den, and you can upgrade all the buildings in that region, including the den itself, which adds more ziplines across the rooftops. You can also change the character of the guards from openly hostile Byzantine Templars to neutral Ottoman troops.

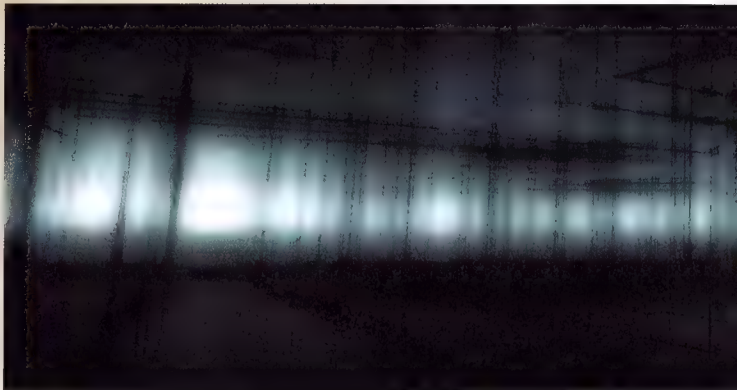
However, your control can slip away. As your notoriety builds, you'll draw attention to the Assassins and increase the chance of a Templar attack on your den. They'll try to retake the area, and you must defend it against assault. To halt the advancement yourself, you can become a general to your troops. If you're too busy to be bothered, you can hop into any of your currently controlled dens around the city and send some minion assassins to deal with the problem. Like assassin missions in Brotherhood, the better-trained assassins have a greater chance of success. If you're ready to lock down a region of the city and be assured it will never come under threat, install one of your master assassins to control that den. You'll never need to worry about

it again. "Imagine playing a huge chess game across the map of the city," Amancio says. "It's an organic experience. It's not something you play just once, but something you could play again and again throughout the city."

The popular assassin leveling mechanic returns in Revelations, but it now ups the level cap from 10 to 15 and takes your understudies from Assassin to Master Assassin. Your followers now feel more like true, fleshed-out characters. You can still customize each character's specialties and visual aesthetic, but as they reach higher levels they'll come to you with unique mission requests.

With more capable followers taking orders, you can

reach out across the world to continue the quiet war against the Templar order. "Many cities across the Mediterranean can be controlled by either the Assassins or the Templars," Amancio says. You'll send your troops out to these cities to win each city district by district, which could result in everything from monetary rewards to bomb ingredients unique to a certain city. "Instead of sending your assassins on random missions to level them up, they're defending the city, and subsequently defending the entire Mediterranean through the same sort of gameplay," he says. "That's what has them progress." A new, as-yet-undisclosed gameplay mechanic allows you to be as involved or hands-off with these exchanges as you desire.



A MORE REAL WORLD

Even as the gameplay expands in exciting new directions on the streets of Constantinople and beyond, the team is equally intent on crafting a more immersive presentation. A whole branch of the team is focused on the strategy, which tries to bring a more cinematic expression to the moment-to-moment action, particularly during scripted moments or linear gameplay sequences. "We want players to be playing the story, not being told the story. So we really focused on mixing narrative and play," Amancio explains. We saw some of what he is talking about through a demo of Ezio fleeing from Templars along the exterior of the Masyaf fortress. As he tumbles off a ledge, the camera follows him down in a high-speed arc. Rushing across a collapsing rope bridge, the camera instead pans to the side as we see Ezio scramble to safety. As he runs along the edge of a sheer cliff, the camera shifts back to show a group of Templar archers let loose their arrows, which scatter against the hard rock around the hero. Combining cinematic camera work with set-piece action sequences, the climactic moments of Revelations feel impactful and engaging.

This more immersive world is further developed through the living events of the city. As Ezio moves among the populace, random tasks now pop up to replace more contrived side missions available in previous entries. A robber might hold up a merchant or a girl may cry for help in an alley. Players can choose to become involved in these activities or continue on their way.

The exotic gameplay sequences like Leonardo's flying machine return, but are now designed to feel more organic to the flow of the story, almost like boss encounters created out of unique gameplay scenarios. Factions return as well, though at least one of them has been replaced and the others redesigned to feel more useful and exciting. Ubisoft is also adding a new collection of platforming-oriented side missions akin to the Lairs of Romulus or Assassin's Tombs, but these new missions are built around a famous and as-yet-undisclosed historical figure. We expect them to be fun from the expanded cinematic focus the team is bringing to all the linear gameplay areas.

Beyond more involving action sequences, the team is exploring some new facial performance technology to help bring the Assassin's Creed characters to life. "We've re-thought the way we capture performances



from actors," Amancio says. The new technology, called Mocap, is an intriguing amalgamation of traditional animation and performance capturing methods and the fascinating new style of performances on display in games like *L.A. Noire*.

Mocap enables developers to capture the actual facial motions of an actor using a helmet with a single lens affixed in front of the face. The camera attunes itself to that particular actor by having them exhibit various emotions one by one. Afterwards, when those emotions appear during performance of a scene, the computer recognizes each and transplants them onto an in-game character. Animators then go in and adjust the expressions by hand to set the performance exactly as desired.

This emotion recognition software is combined with a related technology that captures dozens of different real-life faces and then mixes and matches the different features of those faces to create new individuals. The result is an in-game crowd of unique citizens, all of whom can exhibit surprisingly lifelike emotions. The Mocap technology is also significant because, unlike some recent innovations in the field, the actor can look entirely different from the in-game character model, and yet the integrity of the performance is maintained.

DESMOND'S JOURNEY

It's only been a few months since *Brotherhood* released, so in the interest of avoiding spoilers, we won't discuss the specifics of its conclusion. Even so, some general details are revealed here, so skip this section if you're trying to avoid anything about the ending.

Players who completed that last game know exactly how Desmond ended up in a coma. That surprising turn of events leads to the most mysterious and intriguing component of *Revelations* – a new game within the game that tracks the unusual experiences of Desmond within his own subconscious as filtered through the Animus machinery.

After extensive exposure to the Animus and the shocking events at the conclusion of *Brotherhood*, Desmond's mind couldn't take the strain anymore. His conscious mind shatters, leaving the Assassins who find him little choice but to place him back inside the Animus where the machine's infrastructure might keep his mind active. There, Desmond slips behind the White Room that serves as the Animus' loading space into a sort of safe mode – the Black Room. "Desmond can access a lot of his memories through this programming back door," Amancio details. Here, we finally have the chance to learn Desmond's backstory. The levels you play in this surreal mindscape are a combination of Desmond's fragmented life memories and the futuristic architecture of the Animus.

Journeying through these unusual levels of the mind, the player controls Desmond in a brand new way. "The actual gameplay is something entirely new to the franchise," Amancio suggests. Through this physical manifestation of a programming space, gameplay draws heavily on symbolism to create narrative-fueled puzzle sequences. Players literally help to shape the world around Desmond as he gains control of the environment of his own thoughts. Through the manipulation and creation of geometry within that game world, Desmond seeks to reintegrate the splintered layers of his subconscious. "In order to wake up, Desmond must fix his fractured mind," Amancio says. "To do so, there's a key moment in his history – an alignment between Desmond, Altair, and Ezio. That key moment – that nexus – is the way out into a waking state."

Desmond isn't the first individual to be overwhelmed by the intrusive nature of the Animus. Before him, Subject 16 lost his way within the machine. Will this new Black Room gameplay allow us to explore more than Desmond's subconscious mind? Only time will tell.



CLIMBING THE TEMPLAR RANKS

The last installment of Assassin's Creed introduced a well-received multiplayer mode to the series. Revelations continues to build on this foundation with new characters and locations, a refined approach to menu and game finding, increased customization, and an expanded focus on story.

Just like in the last game, multiplayer gamers take the role of Templar recruits who are brought in to use the Animus and train in the techniques of the Assassins. Unlike last time, this story conceit is far more than window dressing in Revelations. "Narrative is very important to Assassin's Creed, so we tried to add more of that into the multiplayer," Amancio says. "As you move up in level, you're actually moving up the echelons of Abstergo. You'll get updates about things that are going on at Abstergo. We're letting you go deeper into the Templar institution to find out what their motives are." Along the way, you can customize your

characters by changing their appearance and weaponry. Players can create their own guilds and craft a unique coat of arms for their teams. As they progress they will also unlock new characters and other features. "Some of these characters will be unlocked through the single-player game," Amancio shares. New maps can be played in both returning game modes and new ones, including story-oriented multiplayer quests.

In addition to gameplay improvements, the front-end elements of multiplayer are also being overhauled. Game matchmaking should be faster than ever, and players can select the type of game mode they want to play or change game options for a rematch. You can also create custom playlists around these parameters that allow you and your friends to play the type of game you like best. Ubisoft plans to host tailored events like tournaments that react dynamically to the desires of the community.

THE VANGUARD

This Cossack fiercely defends her homeland from the encroaching Ottomans. The Templars feed on that fear and replace it with offers of money and power.

THE GUARDIAN

The estranged cousin of a distant Sultan in East Africa. He fervently believes in the Templar Ideology: Peace through order and stability.

RHODES

The island of Rhodes will house several of the new multiplayer maps. The Knights Hospitallers have transformed the location into a fortress to hold back the might of the Ottoman Empire.





THE SENTINEL

Once a member of the Assassins, the Sentinel turned from the Creed when the Assassins made peace with the Ottomans. Now he fights for vengeance amid the ranks of the Templars.

THE BOMBARDIER

Supposedly a member of the Ottoman artillery corps, he is actually an agent of a rebel group with close ties to the Templar order.



REVELATIONS

Assassin's Creed has developed a devoted following in the years since its first release. After pouring dozens of hours into the story, gamers are itching for Ubisoft to address some major questions. Who is Subject 16? What's the status of Lucy, Shaun, and Rebecca? What happened to the first civilization? What is the link between the two mysterious voices from that civilization, Juno and Minerva? What happened to Altair? How are Altair, Ezio, and Desmond linked, and why are they so important? Where is the last temple? All of this and more will be unveiled, according to creative director Alexandre Amancio. If he stays true to his word, fans will finally have what they've waited for so long to receive: Answers.

Platform
Playstation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1 to 4-Player Platforming


Publisher
Ubisoft

Developer
Ubisoft Montpellier

Release
May 11, 2009



RAYMAN ORIGINS



"Long ago the primordial forest, deep and mysterious, witnessed the birth of a man, er, a vegetable – no, no – ah, a thingamajig. Conjured from the magnificent moon beams of the second summer solstice, woven together by us, the nymphs, destined to preserve the equilibrium of the sacred universe, the one we call Rayman."



THE RAYMAN RENAISSANCE

At age 17, Ubisoft luminary Michel Ancel conceptualized a character simple in design, but complex in ability. Ancel admittedly lacked the artistic chops to animate a fully figured being, thus the limbless hero was born. The game creator brought in a team of five to his home in southern France to complete the original 2D Rayman. As the team grew, they moved to an apartment to work on Rayman 2. Once the space was no longer big enough to house the staff, Ancel began a search for the perfect studio. This led to the discovery of a modest 400-year-old home located in a quiet neighborhood in the heart of Montpellier. Affectionately known by the team simply as "La Villa," the humble abode became the birthplace of Jade and Pey'j from Beyond Good & Evil, King Kong's video game adaptation, and the Rabbids. Eight years after Rayman's last traditional console release, Hoodlum Havoc, La Villa is also where one of Ancel's earliest creations will be reborn.

BY ANNETTE GONZALEZ



LIVIDSTONE



One of the checkpoints you'll come across in the game

RETURN TO 2D ROOTS

Following his 1995 debut on PlayStation, Rayman's trademark limb-free form and sense of humor catapulted him to stardom. He became one of the most recognizable characters not just in Ubisoft's portfolio, but in the entire gaming industry.

Rayman evolved from a 2D platformer into a 3D experience in *The Great Escape*, which has spawned a number of ports – including one that recently launched alongside the Nintendo 3DS. With excellent platforming and the introduction of memorable char-

acters, *Rayman 2* has managed to stand the test of time. Amid work on *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* and after working on the series for four years, the Ubisoft development team in Montpellier was ready for a fresh experience.

This sparked the creation of the cult hit *Beyond Good & Evil*, followed by the video game adaptation of *King Kong*. After production of these titles, the group was prepared to put the spotlight back on Rayman. Plans were to create a 3D platformer on the Wii, but after experimenting with the technology, series creator Michel Ancel decided the

motion controller was better suited for party games. "Making a platformer on the Wii was not the best choice," Ancel recalls. "We wanted to play with the controls, but in a free way, so the party game was cool."

Rayman's Wii adventures pitted him against the dim-witted, good-humored Rabbids. However, after a couple of installments, his name was eventually dropped from the series. So was Ancel's, as he left the Rabbids projects to start working on the *Beyond Good & Evil* sequel.

"I've been working on *Beyond Good & Evil 2* for a while," he admits. "We had a little break on this project, which is quite big, and we decided to make something simpler. That's the period where we realized how much 2D was possible and very cool to do with today's consoles. It seems to be the right time for Rayman to come back."

Origins designer Sebastien Morin agrees: "Now it's possible to have a 2D game that can be big and immersive because the technology is much better. We have lots of different devices now. Industry execs discovered the simplicity of 2D, as it has this advantage to be more accessible and could be really deep at the same time."

Anyone who has played the original Rayman can attest to its difficulty. Ancel notes few people actually finished the game, so with the return to 2D in *Rayman Origins*, the team hopes to make the experience more accessible, but still challenging for players of all skill levels. A large part of the game is controllable with just two buttons thanks to a number of combinations, though some advanced powers require triggers and the d-pad.





The Artistic Focus

In an effort to better serve collaboration, Ubisoft developed an interactive tool for artists that allows for free experimentation regardless of artistic background. The tool was selected to bring a limitless character back to life in the most visually stunning way possible in Rayman Origins.

"When we started working on this project we really had this idea of going back to the artistic dimension of the Rayman universe," explains Rayman creator Michel Ancel. "We had an idea of working with artists who are not in the video game industry – people in animation studios, painters – and we used scanners to use their home drawings and put them directly into the game. That's something that creates a big part of the identity of Rayman – the artistic part."

This UbiArt framework allows artists and level designers to create tons of assets, prototype levels, and make changes on the fly. Once a drawing is ready, the tool allows the team to add a skeleton while it determines which parts of the image will move. The artist then simply has to design various animation poses, and the tool will take care of the image deformation. The French government is actively involved in bringing traditional art into various media, and it provided funding to support the tools.

"It's helped us to find ways to help people express themselves. There's no real magic behind the thing, it's just that we really want to make every artist able to take their art and put it in the game," Ancel says.

With the tools, artists can draw a single tree and modify shapes and make other changes to quickly create entire forests. With this toolset it's possible for every piece of concept art hung by clothespins on the walls of the Montpellier studio to become a backdrop in the 2D game in an instant.

"The first Rayman was really art-oriented. We worked with artists from the cartoon industry, and painters and illustrators, and with these tools we reconnected with those people," Ancel says. "You can't really take their 2D work directly into 3D games, it's always a conversion, making textures. Rayman's world is a fantasy world full of creative elements, and I think creativity can be blocked by too many technical constraints. Here we try to destroy the constraints and make the artists work easily without thinking about polygons or textures or size. Just concentrate on the art."

ORIGIN STORIES

With Rayman Origins, the Montpellier team wants to create a new and improved adventure while remaining faithful to the franchise's 2D roots. Part of that plan is treating fans to a number of memorable (and revamped) characters and references from past titles. Origins immerses players in the Glade of Dreams, where they will tell their own stories based on encounters with characters they find across the universe. Since this is an origin tale, players will learn how the original Rayman antagonist became Mr. Dark, where the iconic bright yellow Lums come from, who imprisoned the adorable Electroons in cages across the world, why Rayman's partner-in-mischief Globox is blue when the other Red Wizards are, well, red, and how the duo met.

The team assures us that even if you haven't played Rayman before, new players won't have any trouble keeping up. "It's more

of a rebirth than it is a sequel," explains lead story designer Gabriëlle Shrager. "There are Easter eggs for fans, but it's also a complete reintroduction for new kids. Anyone who's never played the game will have no trouble getting immersed."

A PLATFORMER FOR EVERY TYPE OF PLAYER

It wouldn't be a Rayman game, or a platformer for that matter, without a number of collectibles scattered across the game world. Rayman Origins' lush, organic world has no shortage of items, friends to save, or secrets to find. But if you'd rather test your precision on a speed run, you're welcome to do that as well.

"We're making the game for a lot of different types of players," Morin says. "There are players that are more into speed runs, sprinting and chaining, then there are players who are more into exploring the whole world and



finding everything. We have different kinds of collectibles for different types of players and each have different rewards."

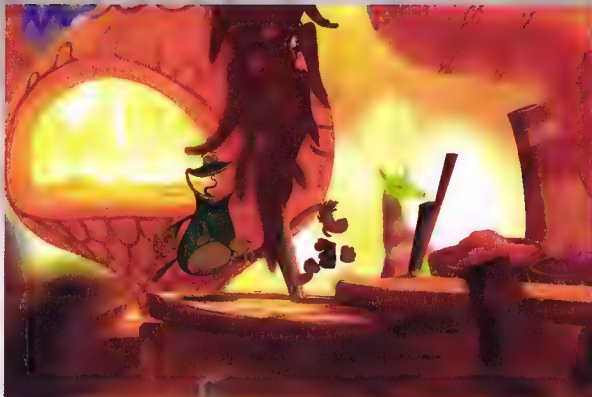
The Lums that you collect on each level serve as currency for new power ups, extra health, and "I Dare You" challenges that allow skillful players to wager on whether they can successfully complete a complex, acrobatic chain. Electroons are trapped in cages across the world for the more exploratory player to uncover, and collecting them will yield desirable unlockables such as additional pieces of the story. If you find and help other characters in the world, they will lend a hand in turn. Aid Red Wizards, for instance, and they can help open large doors for you to proceed.

Rayman has all of his standard abilities from previous titles to help him explore, but he's also developed some new tricks. He can helicopter, sprint, wall jump, use the propeller effect as a fan to move things around in a level, and combat enemies by kicking and shooting. Power ups augment his abilities, allowing Rayman to run faster and jump higher. The team isn't yet revealing specific details on Rayman's new moves, as many features are still being implemented.





BÉTILLA

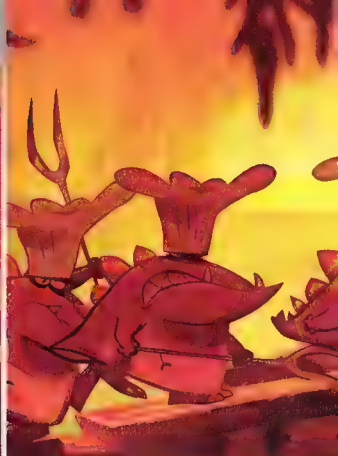


BEGINNING AND ENDING FRIENDSHIPS IN MULTIPLAYER

While players can grab each collectible and unlock every secret in *Rayman Origins* on their own, it never hurts to get a little help from friends. Similar to some of the current platformers on the market such as *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*, the *Origins* campaign includes four-player local multiplayer. "For us it's a way to connect people around the television," Ancel says. "Or drive them apart, according to Morin. "We want the game to be cooperative and competitive at the same time," he says. "It's all about opportunity and

the mood of the people playing."

The levels are designed with both single- and multiplayer in mind, so no one is at a loss if a player tackles the game alone or in a group. A multiplayer demo showed off a four-player team featuring Rayman, Globox, and a pair of Teensies from *Rayman 2*. The team climbed on top of one another to grab hard-to-reach Lums, slapped around a locked cage to free Electoons, and occasionally duked it out in a friendly melee brawl. In a more athletic level, the team engaged in a swift vertical platform climb as a massive, spiked beast chased them from below. While



the team cooperatively spread out across the screen to clear as many of the items as possible during the vertical ascent, there was no stopping one player from hilariously smacking another toward the menace below.

To maintain accessibility in multiplayer so players of varying skill levels can participate, all four players have the same abilities. This includes the talent of turning into a ghost after falling into harm's way. Less-skilled players can ghost to collect more items and navigate by floating along as other players leads the action. The ghost player can return to original form with the help of other live players. If all players lose their lives, the group returns to the previous checkpoint. These mechanics are still being balanced, but players decide how they want to complete a level – whether it's trying to see who can collect the most items or engage in a speed race to the end. It may have a harmonious start and end in a shouting match, but that's just all part of the fun.

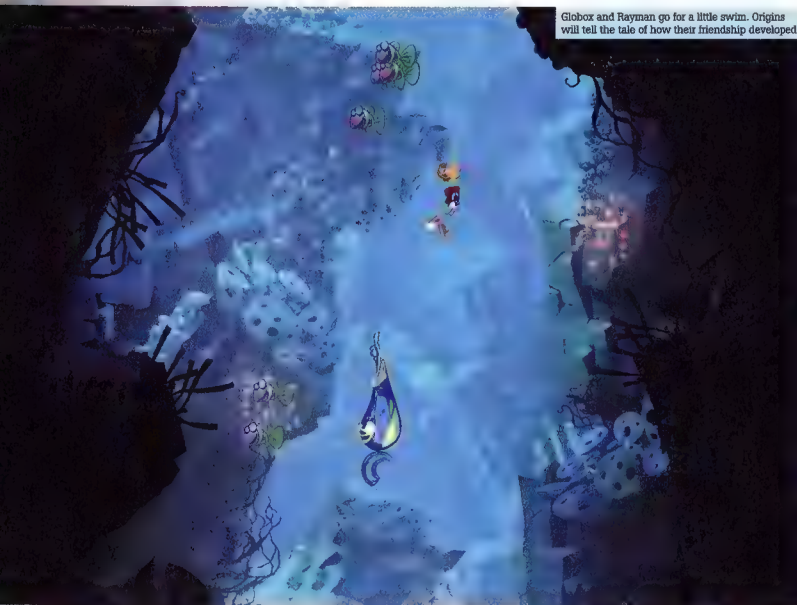
A CONTINUOUS JOURNEY

Rayman Origins was originally pitched as a downloadable title primed for episodic releases. As development continued and the amount of content substantially grew thanks to the UbiArt tools that allow the seamless collaboration between artists and engineers (see sidebar), the team decided to make the project a full retail release.

"We really wanted to make something simpler and faster, and I like the idea of downloadable because we ship a part of the game, get feedback, react, and continue the adventure," Ancel explains. "At the same time a lot of people wanted to have a real sequel, a real big game. We realized that the game was advanced with so many powers and abilities for Rayman that it was enough for a big game. Rayman is the kind of franchise where you expect a big adventure."

Judging by what we've seen so far with the gorgeous artwork spanning across tons of varied environments, plus single- and multiplayer options, *Rayman Origins* looks to be his biggest adventure yet. ♦

For a photographic tour of the Montpellier Studio, check out gameinformer.com/mag



Globox and Rayman go for a little swim. *Origins* will tell the tale of how their friendship develops.



Interacting with a character or item instantly brings it to life. Everything, including Lums, has its own animations for the sense of a living, breathing world



The UbiArt tools that make the variety of artistic themes possible are continually being developed by the team as Origins goes through production



RAYMAN



GLOBOX



DARKTOON



HUNTER



PSYCHLOPS

Cast of Characters

Rayman Origins features some of the series' most beloved characters, as well as some new faces. Iconic characters have been revamped and revitalized in 2D for Rayman's latest adventure. Here's a sampling of the cast you'll come across in the Glade of Dreams.

Bubble Dreamer

Bubble Dreamer is the creator of Rayman's universe and is attached to his imaginative creation — so much so that his emotions have a direct impact on the world itself. When Bubble Dreamer has nightmares, the Glade of Dreams begins to unravel. The good-humored creator resides among his creations, thus players may find him in various forms in the game world.

Rayman

Rayman was invoked by the nymphs to save the Glade. They lacked the Lums to bring a fully figured creature into the world, so a limitless hero will have to do. The star of Origins sets out to amuse Bubble Dreamer to put a stop to the creator's nightmares.

Globox

Rayman's wacky sidekick and best friend returns for another adventure. His lively and humorous animations made him a hit among kids during playtests for Origins.

Teensies

The tiny sorcerer apprentices and self-appointed kings with giant snouts are said to hold knowledge of the Glade's hidden secrets.

Electoons

These creatures remain cheerful even when trapped in cages across the world and will express their gratitude with the utmost enthusiasm when released.

Darktoons

Once Bubble Dreamer began having nightmares, the adorable Electoons morphed into these nasty creatures that latch onto and terrorize other characters.

Lums

These energy beings are an important part of the economy of the Glade of Dreams and remain dormant until collected. Find an oversized Lum (Lum Prince) and all surrounding Lums change color and burst into song and [sacred A-chay-A-chay] dance.

Betilla

As one of Bubble Dreamer's oldest creatures, she is the eldest of the nymphs. She and her entourage of sisters grant Rayman special powers.

Mr. Dark

Confronted by Betilla in the original Rayman, Origins tells the backstory of this super-villain.

Moskito

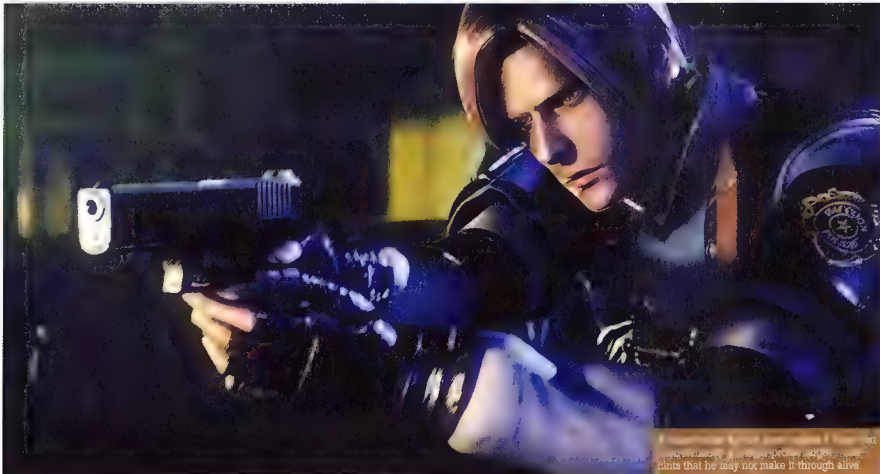
One of the bosses from Rayman 1 is back as an ally. During a demo we saw a steampunk shoot-em-up gameplay sequence in the Moody Clouds where Rayman rode on its back while Moskito shot enemies out of the sky.

Psychlops

You probably don't want to disturb these dormant, prickly creatures...

Hunters and Lividstones

The hunters and their lackeys, the Lividstones, return to bully the creatures of the Glade.



Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

Watch out for spraying blood and bullets

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

➤ **Style**
1-Player Shooter
(8-Player Online)

➤ **Publisher**
Capcom

➤ **Developer**
Slant Six Games

➤ **Release**
Winter 2011

The Resident Evil series has steadily evolved through the years, transforming from a plodding survival horror game to the more action-focused entries of Resident Evil 4 and 5. Even as the franchise has changed, a particularly grisly thread weaves its lore together: the Raccoon City outbreak of 1998. In that event, a sleepy Colorado town was transformed into a zombie-filled nightmare courtesy of the Umbrella Corporation and its experimental T-virus. We've seen how that story resolved itself in Resident Evil 2 and 3. Now players will experience the incident

through a completely different perspective.

In Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City, players are part of the Umbrella Security Service, the corporation's elite networks organization. Their job is simple: Kill the survivors. As Capcom tells it, this is a chance to experience the action via the darkest group in the darkest time in the darkest place in the Resident Evil history.

Even in its most action-oriented moments, Resident Evil has had a peculiar control sensibility. Capcom has shifted away from the tank-like controls of the PlayStation era, but characters are still essentially turrets who are unable to walk

and fire weapons simultaneously. In Operation Raccoon City, a collaboration with SOCOM PSP vets Slant Six, the game plays like a straight-up shooter with all the trimmings.

That level of control is necessary considering the state of the city. As we saw in a recent demo, Raccoon City is in a full-blown outbreak. Hordes of zombies roam the streets aimlessly. The USS inserts itself into the action with a chilling mission objective: eliminate any remaining police officers. The squad bursts into action, tearing zombies apart as they sweep through the darkened streets and alleys. Since they're from Umbrella,

Meet the USS

As a squad-based shooter, Operation Raccoon City offers four distinct characters to choose from. Each member of the Umbrella Security Service brings their own unique strengths and weaknesses to the battlefield, and players can further customize their selections through unlockable abilities. Here's a look at these four characters.

Vector

Vector is the squad's recon expert. He can use his mimicry ability to take on the persona of enemies killed in the battlefield, confusing his foes. He can also select an active camouflage ability that obscures his appearance, allowing him to take on enemies who don't notice the telltale shimmering closing in on them.

Bertha

Bertha is a medic, and her role is enhancing her abilities, helping out her allies, and cursing opponents with deadly status ailments. One ability in particular, adrenaline, makes her a formidable opponent. After a quick injection, she can run and reload faster, and is more accurate. Anyone who discounts her does so at their own peril.

Beltway

Players who aren't interested in subtlety should look no further than Beltway. This demolitions expert can litter the battlefield with mines, which he can remotely detonate. These come in both lethal and non-lethal forms, allowing him to either get straight to the point or toy with his enemies in their final moments.

Spectre

As the team's surveillance class, Spectre has a crucial role. His goggles allow him to access different vision modes, including heat vision and sonar, and he has access to unique tactical information on his minimap. Since the undead and other cold-blooded creatures don't give off a telltale heat signature, he's able to easily differentiate living opponents from the rest and act accordingly.



they're familiar with the T-virus and know how to battle the infected. Even with that degree of expertise, sometimes the zombies get lucky or the squad gets sloppy.

Raccoon City's campaign can be played by a single player with three AI companions, or with up to four players working cooperatively online. On the competitive front, up to eight players can compete, in two teams of four—split between the USS and a generic spec ops force. (See sidebar for more information on the USS.)

When players are injured, there's a chance that their wounds can start bleeding profusely. That activates a bloodlust in nearby zombies, who race toward the bleeding victim like sharks at mealtime. It's an interesting twist on a familiar game convention. Typically, when you're wounded, the smart thing to do is to retreat and let your health regenerate. In Raccoon City, that's still a smart move, but retreating characters

run the risk of antagonizing a larger number of zombies by doing so rather than simply standing their ground.

The same mechanic is evident in multiplayer, which can lead to some clever strategies. Sometimes it's more beneficial to clip an opponent and let the AI zombies take him out than to get involved in a prolonged shootout. Because zombies are constantly on the prowl for victims, camping isn't necessarily wise and staying mobile is critical. Larger enemies will enter the battlefield as well, including the reptile-like hunters and Tyrant. These larger foes target players who are in the lead, and they can soak up considerably more damage than their run-of-the-mill zombie counterparts.

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City is an interesting concept, and it looks like Capcom and Slant Six could pull it off. At this point in development, however, the game's weapons feel a bit floaty and underpowered, which is



worrying. There's still plenty of time for tweaking and balancing, and we hope that those issues are addressed. Capcom is hoping to attract fans of the series as well as people who like shooters in general, and controls are going to be a make or break factor for many of those players.

We're excited to learn more about the game. Capcom is dropping some tantalizing hints about the story, which includes a few teases that Leon S. Kennedy could be killed during the game. Since Resident Evil canon has him surviving and saving the day in Resident Evil 4, our heads are spinning. Is this another what-if scenario? Will players affect the outcome of the storyline through their actions? Will we meet up with the fleeing Jill Valentine? We'll have to wait on those answers for now. The fact that we're asking them makes us think that Capcom is definitely onto something here. — Jeff Cork

Know the Score

In the game's score-battle mode, players earn points for their actions. Here's a breakdown of some of the points at stake that gives you an idea of how rewards are doled out.

- KILL a zombie**
1 point
- KILL a monster**
5 points
- KILL an enemy player**
10 points
- KILL a player with a headshot**
15 points
- Cause a player to bleed and get killed by zombies**
20 points

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Naughty Dog takes aim at the PS3 multiplayer crown

Platform
PlayStation 3

Style
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(12-Player Online)

Pub. Dates
Sony Computer
Entertainment

Developer
Naughty Dog

Release
November 1

A humongous cargo plane speeds down a runway. Nathan Drake, Sully, and their cohorts watch from within as a brigade of trucks give chase. Armed thugs fix their weapons on the escaping heroes and a blazing gun battle ensues. The bad guys leap between trucks, fighting for control of the airplane. Minutes feel like hours as Drake and his crew are muscled out of the plane and out onto the trucks, watching helplessly as the villains fly off with their vehicle. Never down for long, Drake and Sully crash through the gates of the airfield where the plane is heading. The welcoming

committee is locked and loaded.

You may have mistaken this event as an action-packed single-player sequence in Uncharted 3, but the high-speed plane chase and airport battle are actually part of the frenetic multiplayer. Cinematic online battles are just a portion of Sony's attempt to make Uncharted 3 the go-to online experience for the PlayStation 3. We got the chance to go a few rounds during a hands-on preview session.

"For a long time we were like, 'Oh man, I don't know if we're going to be able to pull this off,'" says Uncharted 3 game director Justin

Richmond. "We wanted to start the map out with a bang. With something really, really cool." Richmond and his crew succeeded.

Uncharted 3 controls almost identically to its predecessor, which is a good thing. Getting reacquainted with the controls led to a few smears on the airstrip asphalt, but soon platforming between the speeding trucks became second nature. Chasing down an airplane in a speeding truck is a far cry from the static shooting action prevalent in online shooters. Placing the reticle over human opponents' heads while compensating for moving vehicles is a unique



The amount of color pumped into the maps surprised me



Not our recommended hitchhiking method





The first time I played this map I forgot I was playing multiplayer

but welcome challenge. As of now there is no tangible reward for seizing control of the cargo plane at the end of the two minute sequence, but the feeling of satisfaction as your enemies angrily watch you fly off is worth the effort.

The rest of the fight takes place on a large map stretching across an airbase. Mounted turrets, huge metallic cargo crates, warehouses, and airplanes are scattered across the expertly designed setting. I rarely felt like my back was up against a wall. This map has so many ladders, ledges, and pathways that you always have an easy out when battles become too heated. You'll be thankful for those escape routes when one of the mode's random misfortunes occurs, such as a plane's strafing fire or a collapsing ceiling.

Another method that can save your skin is Uncharted 3's new medal kickbacks. Doing cool stuff in multiplayer earns you medals. Earn enough medals and you can activate a pre-selected kickback, like the ability to disappear in a cloud of smoke or fire without reloading for a brief time. Selecting your kickback is as simple as choosing your perk-like boosters, and unlocking new ones is a treat.

The booster system introduced in Uncharted 2 is being tweaked itself. "In Uncharted 2 we had a bunch of boosters that you earned through a progression, and when you got to the end of the progression I think it sort of felt like there were two [booster] builds that were appropriate and that was about it," Richmond says.

Naughty Dog wants to increase loadout variety with Uncharted 3, and Richmond says they are on the right path. "What we're seeing in the office playtests is almost individual builds per person. It almost seems like nobody uses the same build," he explains. From post-mortem grenade drops to increased movement speed while aiming, there are tons of boosters to try out.

Chateau, the other map Naughty Dog showed off, features ancient, overgrown ruins with a dilapidated building in the center. Matches on this map begin with some jerk tossing a flaming torch into one of the windows. A fire rages from that point on, eventually resulting in a section of the map being reduced to cinders. You won't want to be around when that happens.

I experienced Uncharted 3's new power play feature for the first time on this map. "Basically the idea is that when you get blown out it sucks, right? It's always bad news," Richmond explains. "We wanted to make something that [gives] the losing team a chance to catch up."

In this case, my team became cursed when we were too far in the lead. While hexed, everyone on the map looks like creepy skeletons, which makes distinguishing between friend and foe a challenge and friendly fire becomes com-

monplace. Power plays don't only benefit the losing team, however, as the handicapped team rakes in extra cash for every kill. Other power plays include marking enemy players on the map, increased damage, and elimination mode, which limits the winning team's respawns for a short time. Even when I was on the winning team these pace-changers did a great job of injecting variety into a staling match.

Many gamers ensure they're on the winning team in online shooters by saddling up next to their buddy on the couch for some split-screen action. In Uncharted 2 this was just a fantasy. In Uncharted 3 you can finally make it happen, complete with individual PSN IDs. "We noticed in all our internal playtests and even watching clips online that people captured — the game plays the best when you stick together," Richmond says. "You can encourage that through gameplay. The buddy system takes that to another level."

The buddy system essentially turns you and a friend into characters from a buddy cop movie. If one of you assists the other while gunning down an enemy, you'll gain extra points for high fiving over the smoking corpse. You also have the ability to spawn at the exact location of your pal instead of a default spawn point, creating a new tactical fold. Imagine entering a room and being picked off by the opposition before your buddy arrives for support. You can tell your partner to stay back, wait for you to respawn nearby, then rush in together to claim revenge. Things could get even more interesting with Uncharted 3's new 2 vs. 2 mode, which



we've yet to see in action.

Preferring the big explosions and cinematic shots to what I felt was a inferior multiplayer component, I played Uncharted 2 for the block-buster single-player experience. Now that I've seen the single-player fair Naughty Dog is incorporating into Uncharted 3's multiplayer, I'm equal parts excited to continue Nathan Drake's saga offline and online. » **Tim Turi**

Check out gameinformer.com/mag for our full interview with Naughty Dog game director Justin Richmond

Lone wolves will be happy to know that free-for-all has finally arrived in Uncharted 3's multiplayer



Madden NFL 12

Trying for a fourth-quarter comeback



Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1 to 6-Player Sports (PS3)
1 to 4-Player (Xbox 360)
(Online TBA)

Publisher
EA Sports

Developer
EA Tiburon

Release
August 30

In recent years the Madden franchise has fought an uphill battle of its own making. Last year's game was excoriated for legacy issues and the lack of progress in the franchise mode, but the development team is aware of this and is trying to address these problems as well as move forward in other areas.

We recently saw an early build of the game, and although EA Sports is only talking about certain features at the moment, it plans to reveal the big changes to Franchise mode and other areas in the near future. Regardless, even now it's clear that the development team is trying to simultaneously address old gripes while still moving the ball forward.

Similar to NCAA, Madden is improving its animation system so players no longer slide around the field and get stuck in mismatched animations as they try to tackle or catch the ball, for instance. Specific animations run only when contact is made between the players (or players and the ball), which hopefully cuts down on the occasions when it looks like two players are sucked together in a single animation.

Animations also react to each other better. Gang tackling looks more realistic as the

momentum of the ball carrier and anyone he's dragging along for the ride more accurately influences oncoming defenders trying to finish off the job. This includes fixing last year's gang tackling issue where only one defender would actually make a tackle while the other defenders had no effect on the outcome.

Players not only move around the field and interact with each other better, but defenders are smarter doing these actions as well. New coverage AI makes it harder for quarterbacks to pick apart seams in zones because as a receiver travels through a linebacker's zone, for instance, the LB will trail the receiver before a safety picks him up as he runs down the field. This is intended to create smaller windows to throw the ball, and it also makes linebackers and corners more active in tracking players who enter their zones.

The success of the above improvements can't be judged until we review the game, of course, but one new feature in Madden which fans should be unreservedly excited about is the custom playbooks. Building them is straightforward – you pick from the entire list of plays in the game and construct your own offensive and defensive gameplans. You can even keep

multiple playbooks and integrate these into the GameFlow play calling system. Speaking of GameFlow, before you elect to use it in the game, a new onscreen GameFlow HUD lets you select styles of plays like pass or run heavy, for instance, from which a GameFlow play will subsequently be chosen.

The developer isn't just addressing criticisms from previous years; Madden NFL 12 also bolsters one of the series' strengths – the presentation. Improvements like TV-accurate camera placements in stadiums, TV-style presentation wipes between plays, more sideline details (including cheerleaders and better player models), and NFL Films-like intimate Stadiumcam footage should help the game look more like the broadcasts you watch in your living room on Sunday.

EA Tiburon says these features are just the beginning for Madden 12. The makeup of this initial slate of features has us hopeful that this year's game doesn't lack long-time fans.

Matthew Kato

For more screens and trailers of the game, check out gameinformer.com/mag



QEs will have smaller windows between the two halves.



Snow trails will follow players as they slide, and in this shot you can also get a peek at the new 50 grass.





Rage

Id details a trio of gameplay offerings in its post-apocalyptic playhouse

1) Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC • Mac

2) Style
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(6-Player Online)

3) Publisher
Bethesda Softworks

4) Developer
id Software

5) Release
September 13

To date, *Rage* has been touted as a carefully crafted single-player experience. As such, followers may be surprised to learn that id Software is integrating both cooperative missions and competitive multiplayer into the upcoming release. Id feels it has found the sweet spot between replayability and diversity without compromising the campaign it has worked so hard to polish.

Single-Player: The Rage Experience
Id's last big release, *Doom 3*, was often criticized for a lack of diversity in the single-player campaign. You'd walk into a room on the space station, grab a piece of armor, and like clockwork enemies would appear out of nowhere. With *Rage*, id Software design director Matt Hooper says players will constantly be experiencing new things. "You'll fight six-foot-tall mutants, 16-foot-tall mutants, and 60-foot-tall mutants," he said. "So there is a lot there."

Id also unveiled the final main faction in the game — the Authority. "They have a bit more sci-fi to them and are substantially more difficult to fight," Hooper proclaims. "They are sort of unexpected when the player first runs into them. The player doesn't have to learn how to play *Rage*, but the Authority will react differently."

Because the Authority play such a large role in the narrative, Hooper was hesitant to divulge much more about the enigmatic entity. The Authority is key to the story from the moment you step from the ark, but makes its presence known in the latter half of *Rage*. We encountered the Authority for the first time in a prison facility. The Authority inherently behaves different from mutants and bandits, employing tactical precision, taking advantage of the environment, and communicating with one another. Expect a challenge.

Co-op: Legends of the Wasteland

With co-op becoming such a big part of the gaming experience this console generation, id knew it wanted to incorporate it into *Rage*, but at first they weren't sure how. After testing out a prototype, the team moved ahead with a concept that allows players to enjoy both split-screen and online co-op.

Instead of trying to force cooperative play into the single-player game, id saw an opportunity to create extensions of the single-player experience that tie directly into the narrative. "A good example is looking at the town of Wellspring," Hooper explains. "We thought it would be really cool if bandits took over and you could battle against them. We couldn't make it fit in the single-player campaign, but when we started thinking about co-op campaigns, we said, 'Let's do that.' There is actually one part in the story where someone talks about how bandits are harassing them, and you have to take them out. So there is a connection."

Hooper says another co-op mission was born out of the second line of dialogue from the campaign. In the single-player offering, the sheriff of Wellspring mentions that "his guys" have gone to find blueprints for the RC bomb cars. Id took that untold piece of the story and fleshed it out, putting you in the role of the guys trying to recover the plans.





At least eight co-op missions with loose ties to the narrative – including one focused on Mutant Bash TV – have been promised thus far.



Other online rally modes were hinted at, such as classic vehicle deathmatch, team rally, and chain rally.

To give every co-op mission a different feel, id is optimizing the weapons for each scenario. The dev team is also toying with adding a scoring mode unique to cooperative play. Id wouldn't specify if all the missions would be unlocked from the beginning, or if they will become available as the player progresses through the campaign.

Multiplayer: Combat Rally

Despite id's status as a pioneer in the multiplayer arena, it felt a traditional FPS multiplayer mode wasn't right for Rage. Rather, it decided rally racing is best outlet to encourage social play.

"We like vehicles, and we thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool if you could jump in the vehicles

and battle it out against other players online?'" Hooper asks.

Combat Rally features dual objectives. The player must speed through rally points while engaging in serious car combat. Points are divided out for both actions, and multipliers are earned for exceptional performance. New rally points spawn in front of the leader in order to encourage forward momentum – a constant goal for Rage's multiplayer.

At least five maps will be available out of the box, and id is aiming for six-player matches. A progression system is being implemented, too. As you level up, you gain access to better weapons, vehicles, and more.

While id stresses that the single-player



When playing co-op, an instructor makes clear where your companion is at all times, and reviving partners is possible when in close proximity.

campaign is still the meat of Rage, revealing cooperative and competitive multiplayer only a few months from its release is a pleasant surprise. The coming months should yield a few chances to test out both the new modes in detail. > Meagan Marie



Prime World

Rethinking the boundary between social and hardcore gaming



The gameplay in the session-based multiplayer is reminiscent of DOTA.

Platform
PC • Mac • Mobile

Style
1-Player Strategy
(Online TBA)

Publisher
Nival Interactive

Developer
Nival Interactive

Release
Fall

Nival Interactive is known in the West as a developer of hardcore strategy games like *Silent Storm* and *Heroes of Might & Magic V*. In its native Russia, the studio is recognized as a purveyor of free-to-play MMOs. Nival's next game, *Prime World*, is an ambitious combination of the two that ties a Facebook-integrated social layer to a session-based DOTA-style hardcore action/RTS game. *Prime World* is navigating territory that nobody has yet mapped in search of a true marriage between the way people interact with each other online and hardcore video games.

"We think of *Prime World* as a social strategy game," declares Nival president Sergey Orlovsky. In the course of an hour-long Skype session between Minneapolis and Nival's Moscow headquarters, Orlovsky lays out his fascinating vision of how video games relate to the basic social constructs we invariably create around ourselves. The most important relationship in many peoples' lives is with their significant other, and *Prime World* is designed to embrace that fact.

Prime World is a hardcore game that uses Facebook, not a cash-in app that relies on spamming your friends list with requests. "[Other

social games] use virality very well, but there are a lot of opportunities to improve the games," Orlovsky says. On Facebook or via web or mobile connections, *Prime World* players take on the role of a lord with a castle to improve and heroes at his or her service. You can party up your heroes with a friend's to take on asynchronous quests, and they'll report back on their success or failure after some real time has elapsed. Players can "visit" one another at their castles, participating in shared activities like hunting, shopping, or throwing parties. Nival intends this social experience to be "complete" on its own, but many players will no doubt see it as a means to an end, bringing the heroes and abilities they unlock into the session-based multiplayer game.

Prime World sessions operate much like DOTA matches. Each player controls one hero in a top-down RTS view, and teams work cooperatively to kill NPC monsters and beat up the other team in pursuit of the scenario's goals. Orlovsky described one mission type that incorporates cooperative play within a competitive match. The first three-quarters of this 40-minute scenario has two opposing teams fighting through NPC monsters to reach a dragon in the middle of the map.

The goal then becomes to kill the dragon (and probably the other team along the way) and steal her egg. Planting the egg at your opponents' base summons the dragon's angry mate, who grants victory by flying into a rage and burning down the enemy encampment.

Throwing non-hardcore gamers into the fire of a hyper-competitive DOTA environment would be a disaster. *Prime World* addresses this in two ways. Instead of being up on the front lines, players can hang out back at the base and play a Zuma-like minigame that gives game-changing buffs to their team, so they can take an integral role without facing the stress of being in direct combat. If they'd prefer to be on the battlefield in some capacity, they can become support heroes with powerful defensive capabilities. This character class is designed to be an unattractive target to enemy players. Orlovsky shared one example of a hero who has a tough panther pet that makes the hero herself invulnerable while it's alive.

Facebook integration is critical to both sides of *Prime World*'s design. Matchmaking takes social ties into greater account than ping or ranking, so you're more likely to be put into a session with people who you know or who you share friends with than strangers. Orlovsky thinks that this is a missed opportunity within the larger video game industry. "My perception is that who you're playing with is more than 50 percent of your gaming experience," he says. "Right now the gaming industry is looking at [gameplay] like it's 100 percent, which is not true." Nival hopes to integrate more social networks into the game, like LinkedIn and MySpace, but only Facebook will be built in at launch.

Nival is taking a huge gamble on the idea of tying players' real-life gender into their game experience. On the social side, your sex determines which activities are available during a visit.



The heroes you play during sessions aren't your own.



This game is your home base, and can be improved social game-style through Facebook, web access, or mobile devices

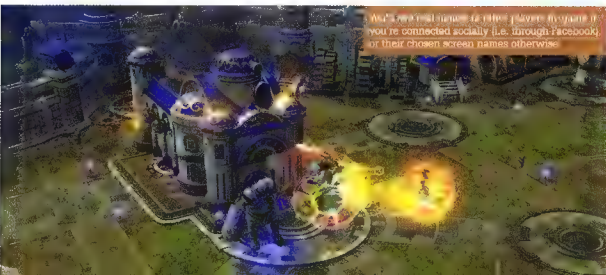
For instance, where a guy visiting a guy may launch a hunting activity, a couple of girls visiting might go shopping together. In the multiplayer sessions, male and female players have different heroes available to them at the beginning of the game, with female heroes skewing more toward support roles and male heroes tending to be front-line fighters. Nival has yet to determine exactly which heroes and roles will be available to each gender at the beginning of the game. Hopefully women will have at least some options to be big tanking ass-kickers, since telling female gamers that they are only allowed to be support for the men doing the real fighting would be a huge mistake (see sidebar). Either way, everyone can eventually unlock everything through in-game currency.

The game is free-to-play with microtransactions, but the exact details of what's free and

what costs you money aren't worked out yet. Heroes won't be sold for real money, costing in-game currency instead. Extra social layer time will be sold for sure. Beyond that, Nival is still figuring out the details. Orlovsky isn't worried about it, though, citing Nival's experience as a successful free-to-play publisher in Russia. "We know all the best ways to generate substantial revenue without annoying people," he chuckles.

Prime World is a unique bridge between two segments of gaming that currently have marginal overlap. On top of that, Nival's explicit approach to the issue of player gender is unlike anything the gaming industry has seen. Whether or not the game finds a broad North American audience, it will be a fascinating barometer of the attitudes and tastes of gamers at large.

Adam Bissener



We'll see what names to enter players to make it you're connected socially (i.e. through Facebook), or their chosen screen names otherwise

Gender Roles

...the game is your home base, and can be improved social game-style through Facebook, web access, or mobile devices

...the game is your home base, and can be improved social game-style through Facebook, web access, or mobile devices

...the game is your home base, and can be improved social game-style through Facebook, web access, or mobile devices

...the game is your home base, and can be improved social game-style through Facebook, web access, or mobile devices

This minigame can give powerful bonuses to your allies on the battlefield. It's more than 100%.



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Bethesda casts a Skyrim screenshot spell



It's going to take more than that wimpy sword to survive epic dragon encounters



Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

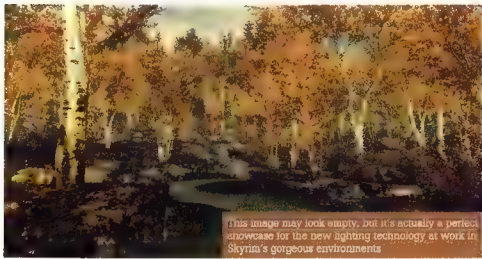
Style
1-Player Role-Playing

Publisher
Bethesda Softworks

Developer
Bethesda Game Studios

Release
November 11

Bethesda has remained tight-lipped about Skyrim's secrets since we revealed the first info on the fifth Elder Scrolls game in our February cover story. While we don't have any new details on the colossal dragon battles or heroic quests that await when the game launches in November, we did get our hands on a beautiful batch of new screenshots that show off the Khajiit race of jaguar people, a band of undead Draugr warriors, and more. » [Phil Kollar](#)



This image may look empty, but it's actually a perfect showcase for the new lighting technology at work in Skyrim's gorgeous environments



Why can't I get a grown-up phone without a contract?!

 Harold M.

We hear you.

That's why we're giving you the new Samsung Galaxy Prevail™ powered by Android™ without contracts. Get unlimited nationwide talk, text, web, IM and email on the Nationwide Sprint® Network for \$50 a month.


boost
mobile

BE HEARD.


80 Monthly Unlimited with Shrinkage: Int'l services extra. Customers must sign up for a plan with Shrinkage to become eligible for plan discounts. Shrinkage plan discounts awarded in \$5 increments after 6 timely & confirmed monthly payments; total on-time payments must exceed the total monthly payment amount for 6 months of service to receive each \$5 incremental plan discount; discount not to exceed \$16. Payment date will be the day of the month that you activate service on your phone or the last day of the month, as applicable. Payment must be made in full within 60 days of service interruption to resume service or your account & service will be cancelled. If your account is cancelled, you will lose all funds in your account balance & your telephone number. A \$10 reactivation fee will apply. Offers subject to change without notice & not available in all markets/all locations or for all phones. Prohibited network use rules apply. Data speeds & voice experience vary by device selected & by network. Coverage is not available everywhere. Nationwide Sprint Network reaches over 277 million people. Sprint 3G network reaches over 272 million people. Services are subject to the Boost Mobile General Terms & Conditions of Service & the terms in the rate plan brochure & other materials you may receive as part of the activation process. Android™, Market and Google™ are trademarks of Google, Inc. Portions of this page are produced from work created and shared by Google and used according to terms described in the Creative Commons 3.0 Attribution License.



Infamous 2

Ambitious sequel goes above and beyond

Platform
PlayStation 3

Style
1-Player Action

Publisher
Sony Computer Entertainment

Developer
Sucker Punch Productions

Release
June 7

Even though Cole MacGrath's electrifying debut in the original *Infamous* was a success for Sucker Punch Productions, the team refused to rest on its laurels for the sequel. Sucker Punch admits that gameplay elements of the original, including combat and parkour, needed some fine tuning. The refinements did not go unnoticed during our hands-on time with two new missions.

In *Infamous 2*, Cole sets out on a journey to gain the supernatural powers needed to bring down the Beast. This requires the collection of devices called Blast Cores scattered across New Marais that can store Ray Sphere energy in stable form. Turns out Dr. Sebastian Wolfe, one of the inventors of the Ray Sphere, hid the Blast Cores to ensure they stay out of the wrong hands.

In a mission dubbed "Forced Conduits," Zeke radios in to guide Cole around a series of warehouses in search of a Blast Core. To find it, Cole must use melee or electric powers to destroy specially marked crates in hopes of uncovering the safe that houses the Core. When climbing warehouse shelves, jumping fences to reach new areas, and crushing crates, Cole's movement felt smoother and more fluid than ever. This was especially true when pitted against a large ice creature, the Titan. After shocking the foe with a few rapid-fire bolts, swiftly dodging waves of ice attacks, and walling on it with the powerful Amp Zeke cobbled together as Cole's melee weapon, the ice creature was reduced to liquid in no time.

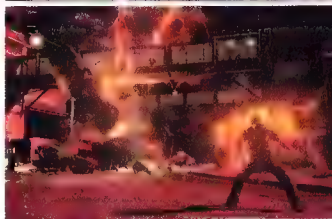
A far more intimidating enemy was introduced in a mission titled "Demons." A helicopter crashes down in New Marais in a cutscene, and after examining the wreckage and walking toward the smoke, Cole finds himself up against

a behemoth the size of one of the city's largest buildings. He instantly engages in battle in a seamless transition from cinematic to gameplay.

The sandbox city is entirely reactive to the behemoth's devastating blows as buildings crumble in its wake. To bring down the powerful creature, Cole has to attack its weak spots – bulging purple orbs located at the limbs, chest, and mouth. Aiming at the weak spots of the behemoth as it stomped around the city felt tight and responsive, and even while running backward to keep Cole's sights on the mobile threat, the camera didn't miss a beat as it closely followed him from an over-the-shoulder view.

Amid unleashing green fumes and ble powerful enough to knock down our hero, and opening its chest to reveal tentacles that latch onto anything within range, the behemoth also set minions loose on the street. Cole brings out the Amp in style, chaining stylish melee combos against these hopeless underlings with a light slow motion effect for extra flair. When the melee gauge fills, a tap of the triangle button unleashes an impressive finishing move that sends these creatures flying. To quickly lay waste to the troublesome crowd, Cole can also use the Ionic Vortex. This move drives everything within range – minions, cars, people, debris – into a spinning cyclone and launches it all mid-air for massive damage.

These epic battles are just merely a taste of the challenges Cole will face in his next adventure. With the setpiece moments and improved gameplay we've seen so far, plus the inclusion of user-generated content, *Infamous 2* stands a good chance of changing the way we think about sandbox games when it releases this summer. - Annette Gonzalez





Twisted Metal

Eat, Sleep, Play's demented rig gains 18 wheels and an Axel

If you've played any Twisted Metal game since the series' 1994 debut, you're already familiar with its explosive brand of car combat. That basic formula remains beautifully intact in Twisted Metal for the PS3, but several new features make this title more than a psychotic clown wasting vehicles in an armored ice cream truck. I went a few rounds with the deadly derby's online component to see how it's all coming together.

A Twisted Metal game is only as good as its vehicles, and developer Eat, Sleep, Play was proud to reveal a couple of new rigs. Axel's dual-wheeled monstrosity makes its return for use online. For now Eat, Sleep, Play is only referring to the armless man's vehicle when mentioning "Axel," but I've got a hunch he'll make the final roster. Still, a killer clown strapped into two weaponized monster truck wheels is a horrifying sight you probably wouldn't want to pass on the highway. Axel's signature shockwave attack makes a return, complete with a meter that lets players charge it to decide how powerful it will be.

Special attacks are huge selling points for cars in Twisted Metal, and now there are two to every auto. Axel's new special, War Wheel, unites the gigantic tires to shield the player in a spinning disc of pain, which can be steered into hapless foes for big damage. Axel's speed and maneuverability make him an asset to any team.

Juggernaut, the other newly announced contender, is an 18-wheeler that acts as a mobile fortress. Optimized for team play, Juggernaut lowers a ramp that allows two players to enter

the trailer Spy Hunter-style. Once open, the semi's back is susceptible to extra damage, so be quick. When parked inside, teammates are shielded from damage and can man powerful turrets on the rig's roof. This heavily fortified freight train on tires is the perfect destination for players who are running low on health and need quick cover. Even without allies, this hell truck can dole out serious punishment. One of Juggernaut's specials unloads clusters of spherical bombs that bounce down the road, creating a wake of destruction.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get behind the wheel of Juggernaut, but I did go three rounds in a Twisted Metal tournament hosted by Sony. The first map, Sunsprings, CA, is evocative of the Anytown, USA vibe the developer is targeting. I gunned after foes through city streets littered with tons of destructible buildings and obstacles. Old skills I spent years honing with Twisted Metal: Black immediately returned.

Simultaneously executing hairpin turns, selecting between missiles, and all the while laying on the machine gun didn't require uncomfortable hand contortion. I had a blast obliterating the competition within Sunspring's movie theater, grocery store, and sports arena.

Speaking of arenas, the second match took place in Blackrock Stadium, a demented map filled with electrified floors, lava pits, and shifting obstacles. In the game's fiction, Blackrock was built specifically with the Twisted Metal contest in mind. For this round I piloted Talon, Twisted Metal's helicopter, far above the perilous ground combat where I could pick up enemy cars with

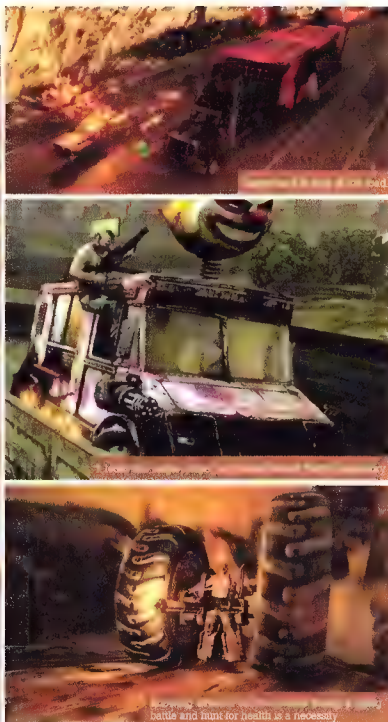
the chopper's magnet then plop them in a vat of lava. Fans worried that Talon unbalances the game can rest easy: This whirlbird is a glass cannon. Because most pickups are on the ground, Talon's light armor is vulnerable when swooping down for new weapons or health.

The tournament concluded with a game of Nuke set in the Harbor City map. This mode requires opposing teams (i.e. Dolls and Clowns) to take turns defending and capturing the enemy leader. Teammates then escort the apprehending driver to a missile launcher. Loading the leader into the launcher is tracked by a meter, which depending on your role will fill at different rates (low-HP sports cars are quick, armored SUVs are slow). Once loaded, the player steers a missile towards a gigantic statue that their enemies must defend. Unlike past Twisted Metals, this game lets players aim upwards, making it possible to shoot the slow-paced projectile out of the sky.

I had a lot of fun with Nuke mode, which isn't half as confusing as it may sound. Dragging Sweet Tooth behind Grimm's motorcycle while chucking flaming chainsaws at enemies is a riot.

I walked away from the Twisted Metal tournament with second place and a renewed faith in the game's online focus. There is still a ton to learn about the split-screen co-op campaign mode, which characters will be playable, and the other chaotic online modes Eat, Sleep, Play is promising. Next time I won't settle for less than first place. **Tim Turi**

Visit gameformer.com/mag to read our interview with David Jaffe, creator of Twisted Metal and founder of Eat, Sleep, Play



Platform
PlayStation 3

Style
1 to 4-Player
Action/Racing
(16-Player Online)

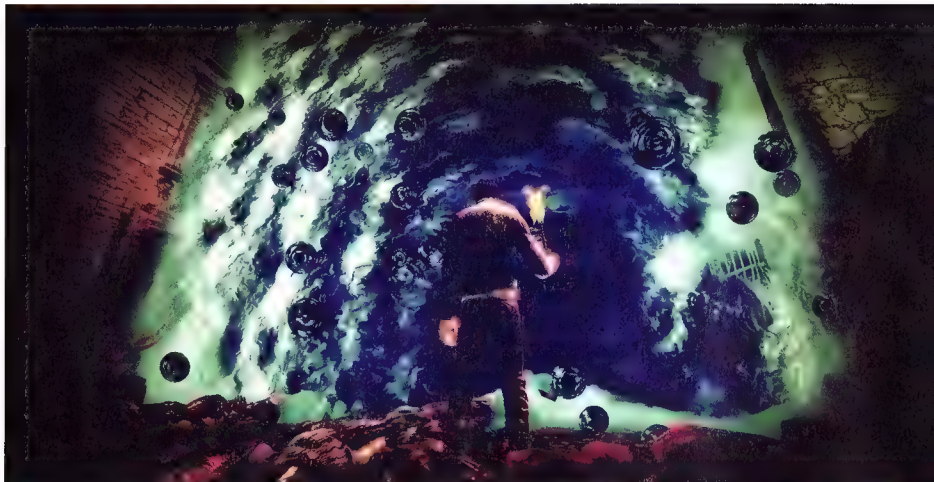
Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment

Developer
Eat, Sleep, Play

Release
October 4

Shadows of the Damned

Robert Rodriguez meets Resident Evil 4



- Platform PlayStation 3 Xbox 360
- Style 1-Player Action
- Publisher Electronic Arts
- Developer Grasshopper Manufacture
- Release June 21

Japanese developer Goichi Suda (a.k.a. Suda51) has a penchant for creating strange, stylish, and brash games such as *No More Heroes*. His studio, Grasshopper Manufacture, has also gained a reputation for creating gameplay that's never as polished or interesting as the concepts behind it. That's why Grasshopper's latest project, a collaboration with *Resident Evil* mastermind Shinji Mikami, is so exciting. Could this finally be the game that matches the insanity of Suda51's vision with more widely accepted gameplay?

Shadows of the Damned tells the over-the-top tale of a man named Garcia Hotspur, a demon hunter whose latest exploits hit closer to home. After his girlfriend Paula is kidnapped and imprisoned in hell, Garcia sets out to massacre as many demons as he needs to in order to save her.

Garcia's main weapon for fighting demonic

legions is a powerful torch that shape-shifts into various guns – a machine gun called the teether, a shotgun called the monocutter, and a pistol known as the boner. Clearly, Suda and crew are not afraid of making easy jokes when possible. Garcia uses these weapons via traditional third-person shooter controls heavily inspired by the over-the-shoulder style of the most recent *Resident Evil* games.

Bullets alone can't destroy demons. Garcia must use the regular torch form of his weapon to blast a powerful shield of darkness off his opponents before they are vulnerable to attack. At some points, whole sections of a level will be covered in darkness. When this happens the world turns blue, and Garcia's health is slowly drained. Enemies become invincible or infinitely respawn until Garcia can locate and destroy the nearby goat head that is spewing the darkness.

In addition to hunting for goat heads, *Shadows* features simple puzzles where Garcia's progress is blocked by a demon gate with a baby's head on it that demands specific items as offerings before opening the gate. For example, in the demo that I watched, the baby head requests a brain in exchange for opening the gate. Garcia then explores the nearby area until he finds said delicacy and delivers it. It's essentially a bizarre version of *Claymats*.

During his travels Garcia is joined by a big-mouthed flaming skull named Johnson, a spirit he rescued in a previous adventure. Johnson provides comic relief and gives clues to surviving certain puzzles and combat encounters. Garcia also has a unique form of health recovery – boozing. To restore his energy, he must visit vending machines filled with hard liquor like sake, tequila, and absinthe.

Late in the demo, Garcia has his first run-in with what he thinks is his girlfriend. Walking into an area that looks like a crowded Mexican



marketplace, he notices a female head on a table. He picks it up and somberly identifies it as Paula. Before he can begin mourning though, the head suddenly screams, flying out of his hands and attaching to a nearby body. Garcia's girlfriend twitches and a giant demon named George who has blades for hands bursts out in a gory explosion.

As with all of the bosses in *Shadows of the Damned*, Garcia's several encounters with George uncover a backstory revealing why he is especially damned. Don't think this is the final fate of Paula either; it looks like pretending to be Paula and messing with Garcia's head is a favorite pastime of the major enemies.

The producer who played *Shadows of the Damned* while I watched referred to the game as *Evil Dead* meets *Desperado*. Between the juvenile humor and Garcia's wisecracks, the unique *Grainhouse* feel is sure to appeal to fans of Suda's previous works. But more importantly, *Shadows of the Damned* has a good chance of being the first Grasshopper game to pull in a wider audience. I'm hopeful that this crazy journey to hell will come together in time for its June release." — Phil Kollar





Tackles now copy realistic on-camera behavior. Ball carriers don't get up. This should cut down on punter tackles.



A closer-than-ever receiver view for more realistic catches.

NCAA Football 12

Fighting a multi-front gridiron war

Because it's the first EA Sports football title out each year, the NCAA football franchise has led the way with new gameplay features ever since EA Tiburon created a shared technology base between the game and its pro cousin, Madden. The series has also found success because in recent years the team has put more effort into capturing the unique college experience. Big additions this year see to it that both bases and more are covered.

NCAA 12 takes last year's custom team entrances further by blowing them out and making them more grandiose. Instead of just offering traditional team entrances, Tiburon has added more layers to the presentation. For instance, the University of Texas' Big Bertha drum and Bevo longhorn are both present, and multiple camera angles mix these entrances up from game to game to keep things interesting.

Whether your school has a famous tradition or not, the game has a new presentation suite based on ESPN's new broadcast look that includes bowl- and conference-specific graphical wipes. The new approach pays more attention to context in determining what you see and hear as well. Crowds swell as the ball is in the air, bigger crowds sound larger (and vice versa), and even player celebrations scale according to the quarter or if you're playing a rival. Highlight montages run at the end of the quarter, or analysts may break down the tape if your QB has thrown too many interceptions. This new contextual approach should help in more accurately telling the story of each game.

On the field, the visuals have once again been upgraded thanks to what developer EA Tiburon calls HDR lighting. Basically, high dynamic range

is a tool that uses exposure like a real camera to show a greater contrast between light and shadow while the game is running in real time or during replays. You may also notice 3D grass and better weather conditions, including fog.

College atmosphere alone didn't get NCAA to where it is, however. Gameplay improvements are also in the mix, including a reduction in the suction tackles, blocks, and catches that have been prevalent throughout the years. This is made possible because now animations aren't started until players make contact with each other or the ball. This has wide-ranging ramifications, from more realistic tackles to better catches.

It also changes the controls. A new tackle command has been added on defense, and one for a dive catch on offense to help players with the timing inherent in the animation changes.

We watched a demo of the new dive catch command as NCAA designer Ben Haumiller explained how the game has reduced suction catches. Running several routes, he showed me different examples of a wide receiver catching a ball in stride, diving for a ball just out of reach, and an incomplete pass that was notable for the fact that in previous titles the receiver would have shot forward to make the catch instead.

Addressing legacy issues as well as trying to capture the college excitement are two powerful tenets for NCAA 12, and EA Tiburon assures us that more additions are on the way as well. Stay tuned in the coming months for more information. — Matthew Kato

See trailers and more screenshots from NCAA Football 12 at gameformer.com



Defenders' zone coverage has been improved. Players will take responsibility for their own zone.

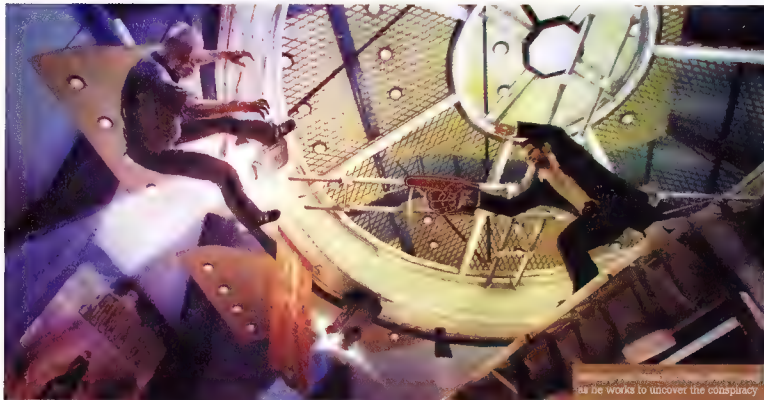


Buffed up presentation is a focus this year.

- » Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
- » Style
1 to 4-Player Sports
(Online TBA)
- » Publisher
EA Sports
- » Developer
EA Tiburon
- » Release
July 12

Dead Rising 2: Off The Record

Capcom Vancouver gives players a reason to be Frank



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

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Capcom Vancouver

» **Release**
Fall

If you thought *Dead Rising 2* marked the end of Fortune City's woes, think again. Chuck Greene may have revealed the conspiracy behind the outbreak and saved his daughter in the process, but that's only part of the story. In *Dead Rising 2: Off the Record*, players have the chance to explore the city with a fresh perspective.

"Originally, the plan was that we were going to do a directors' cut of *Dead Rising 2*," says producer Jason Leigh. "Capcom obviously has a long history of successfully doing director's cuts, especially with the *Resident Evil* series, and we wanted to bring that treatment to the *Dead Rising* franchise. However, a very interesting thing happened when we first announced *Dead Rising 2*."

That interesting thing was a fan outcry about the omission of *Dead Rising*'s hero, Frank West. Leigh says people eventually warmed up to Greene, but many still wanted more West. A post-release downloadable episode, *Dead Rising 2: Case West*, brought the photojournalist into the world of *Dead Rising 2*, but only in the aftermath of the Fortune City incident.

That fan feedback made Capcom Vancouver rethink the scope of the project. "What it did was create an incredibly interesting opportunity," Leigh says. "What if, instead of doing a director's

cut, what if we reinvisioned the outbreak in Fortune City with Frank West as a hero? What would that do to missions? What would that do to the story? What would that do to the gameplay, bringing him back?"

When this new "what if" scenario begins, Frank West is a washed up has-been. After breaking the Willamette story, he parlayed his fame into a book deal and talk show. Soon enough, he squandered those opportunities, and his only public exposure now is as a pitchman for a hair-replacement medication. As a last-ditch effort to revitalize his career, West reluctantly agrees to appear on the zombie-slaughtering game show *Terror Is Reality* as a special contestant in a new wrestling-themed event.

Afterward, what should be a celebration backstage rings hollow as a fellow contestant tells Frank that he feels like a sellout. This sentiment rings true with West, as he takes his winnings and prepares to leave. Walking past a cracked-open door, he hears voices and decides to investigate. There, in a TIR warehouse, Frank sees show host Tyrone King and dreadlocked activist Brandon commiserating about something suspicious. TK hands Brandon a keycard and Frank documents the exchange with his camera. Unlike the neutered photographic system introduced in *Dead Rising 2: Case West*,

Off the Record delivers a much more satisfying experience. As TK and Brandon walk and talk, exchanging a briefcase and something that looks like an explosive device, a prestige points symbol appears over the pair. That's Frank's cue to start snapping from above on the catwalks.

In addition to the new story, Leigh says that the game includes a new area. "It's as big or bigger than any of the existing malls or casinos, and it's not a mall and it's not a casino," he assures us. "We wanted to do something that wasn't a rubber-stamped version of something you'd already seen. We wanted to do something that was going to offer very different gameplay this time around."

Off the Record also includes a new mode, but Leigh isn't elaborating about it at this time. He says it's something that fans have been asking for, and he thinks it's as engaging as the game's main mode. The safe bet seems to be on the return of endless mode. The game also introduces automatic checkpoints in another concession to players frustrated with the game's notoriously fickle save-game system.

Leigh started off his presentation by saying that *Off the Record* was like a fan's version of the game. Judging from the amount of new content, it looks as though it's something that should appeal to new players as well. — Jeff Cork





Dragon's Dogma

Capcom takes on open-world RPGs

Players on the hunt for their next big swords-and-sorcery adventure have another possibility to look forward to from an unlikely source. Capcom recently announced *Dragon's Dogma*, an open-world, action-oriented RPG coming from the minds behind *Devil May Cry 4* and *Resident Evil 4*.

Director Hideaki Itsuno says that this is the game he's wanted to make since he was young, but the technology wasn't available. He cites obvious touchstones such as the *Lord of the Rings* novels and pen-and-paper RPGs as inspiration, along with the 1984 movie *The NeverEnding Story*.

Dragon's Dogma begins with the player character's heart getting yanked out of his chest and taken as a gruesome form of blackmail by a dragon. "Now that the dragon has appeared and taken your heart, you have to go on these adventures and try to get your heart back," Itsuno says. "But the dragon's appearance has effected many different things in the land. You have to try to put those things right, figure out why he's here, why these things are changing, and what's going on."

Itsuno says that the game emphasizes player choice through quests as well as scripted events that take place throughout the world. For example, a player may notice a large creature menacing a town, and it's up to the player to choose whether or not to intervene. The path the story ultimately takes changes depending on those interactions, too. "There is no real set course of the game, where there's one thing you have to follow all the way through to the end," Itsuno says. "There are a number of endings available in the game, and the choices you make in the game will determine the outcome."

You'll be accompanied on your quests by a party of three AI companions, which Capcom calls "pawns." The pawns are in constant communication with the player through texts, which scroll by on the screen similarly to MMORPG chats, and audio feedback. The pawns can be cycled through a series of preset behaviors, but they function autonomously as well. In a battle I played against a griffin boss, my pawns pointed out the creature's weaknesses and offered tactical suggestions.

I later toured a bustling European-style city, with a merchant district, living areas, and a walled-off castle. NPCs wandered around, following their own individual routines, which change depending on the game's day/night cycle. Itsuno says that players can recruit many of these fully voiced characters, so if you see someone carrying a particularly impressive weapon, chances are you can enlist them to fight for your cause.

From what I played, *Dragon's Dogma* is shaping up to be a great option for fans of exploration and real-time RPGs. It's gorgeous, and the action is responsive and satisfying. More importantly, there seems to be a good degree of flexibility in battle; I fought the griffin several times, and each encounter played differently enough to feel relatively fresh. If the story is equally engaging, this could be a risk with a significant payoff. — Jeff Cork

Visit gameinformer.com for another look at *Dragon's Dogma*, including more in-depth hands-on impressions.

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1-Player Role-Playing

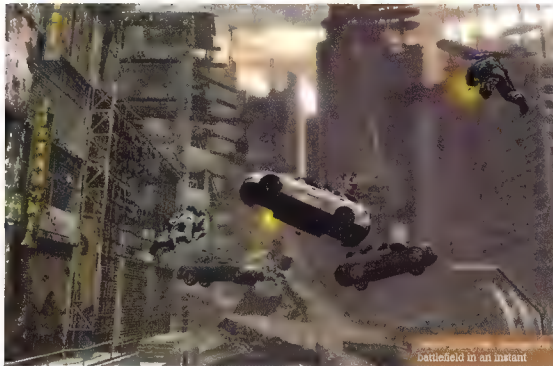
Publisher
Capcom

Developer
Capcom

Release
2012

Inversion

Turn the battlefield on its ear in Saber Interactive's unique shooter



» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
Namco Bandai

» **Developer**
Saber Interactive

» **Release**
February 7, 2012

As evidenced by 2007's *Timeshift*, Saber Interactive is no stranger to introducing novel mechanics to tried-and-true action gameplay. With cover-based gunplay reminiscent of *Gears of War*, it's up to *Inversion*'s gravity-bending abilities to separate it from the rest of the crowded shooter space.

At the outset of the game, young cop Davis Russel is heading home to his wife and children when hell is unleashed. Gunfire, explosions, and general chaos breaks out all around him, as driller enemies emerge from the ground. Unaware of what's transpiring, he grabs a weapon and desperately attempts to meet up with his family before it's too late. It's not long before he discovers his wife has been killed and his daughter kidnapped, and the invading Lutadores are to blame. Before he can make any progress towards learning his daughter's whereabouts, he's knocked out cold.

Both the player and Davis are left in the dark as to what the Lutadores actually are. These disfigured humanoids express no real emotion other than hostility, and their intent is unknown. Like the Ganados in *Resident Evil 4*, all you really know is that they're not fond of you and you're going to have to shoot a lot of them.

Thankfully, Davis (and his partner Leo if you're playing co-op) is outfitted with the versatile Gravlink device. After getting knocked out during the chaos of the game's opening, you awaken as a worker in a Lutador prison colony. Each prisoner has a Gravlink attached to their back, and it allows them to move heavy objects while performing manual labor. As you might expect, Davis makes an escape from the prison and finds many more entertaining uses for the gravity-distorting piece of technology.

From our time with the game, the low-gravity abilities proved to be the most useful. Being a cover-based shooter, your enemies will spend plenty of time crouched behind waist-high walls. If you're tired of waiting for enemy AI to peek out or expose themselves while firing, you can speed up the process by sending a low-gravity blast their way. This attack makes everything within a certain radius float several feet off the

ground, including debris and enemies themselves. If they're left alone long enough, these foes will end up firing at you even while they're off the ground. You can stop this by unloading your weapon into them, or you can pull them towards you with telekinesis and kill them with a brutal melee finisher. You could also kill two birds with one stone by throwing your helpless enemy into a group of his buddies. If *Bulletstorm* made you pine for more stylish kills, you can float an explosive barrel near an enemy and blow them both up in mid-air.

High-gravity attacks are useful when being swarmed by fast-paced enemies. When a pack of Lutadores is sprinting in your direction, attempting to quickly take them out one by one before they reach you will most likely end in failure. Using the Gravlink, you can send a high-gravity blast their way, collapsing them to the ground and keeping them there for a limited duration. While there, you can take your time and eliminate the threats one by one without being forced to escape their rush. Large objects can be brought down on enemies if they're in the right spot, crushing them instantly.

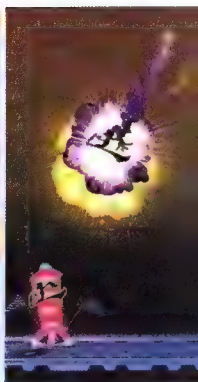
With the Gravlink, you have a certain amount of control over gravity. However, there are many moments in the game in which you are

at nature's mercy. Vector shifts will be triggered from time to time, altering the entire playing field dramatically. In the demo I played, Davis was walking down a city street when the debris and vehicles around him began floating into the air. Soon enough, Davis himself was among the airborne objects. During this moment, players can engage in a brief mid-air firefight before gravity redirects onto the side of a building. Suddenly, what used to be the ground is now essentially a wall, and the side of the building is the new center of gravity.

In addition to these vector shifts, there are also huge areas known as gravity anomalies. These areas are completely zero-gravity, allowing the player to float around wherever they'd like. Unlike the brief zero-G moments in *Dead Space 2*, these will be lengthy and take up significant portions of the later chapters.

Playing with gravity sounds like a potentially engaging gameplay mechanic, and it's crucial to *Inversion*'s success. If gamers see it as a gimmick, it could possibly be lost amongst the sea of competitors in the shooter genre. Done well, this unique mechanic could help *Inversion* carve its own identity and offer a fun alternative for action fans. **Dan Ryckert**





Ms. Splosion Man

Building off an entertaining framework

Xbox Live Arcade has played host to a number of great games these last few years, but few have had the pure fun and insanity of *Splosion Man*. With its manic character and challenging platforming, the game carved out a unique niche for itself. Its sequel maintains the same splosion-fueled gameplay of the last, but ratchets up the intensity with a new approach to level progression, cool bosses, and a girly new protagonist.

"Our villains are the evil scientists of Big Science, who finally find a way to capture Splosion Man at the beginning of this game," says Twisted Pixel co-founder and creative director Josh Bear. "During their celebration, they accidentally create Ms. Splosion Man, and you help her crush Big Science and free Splosion Man." The game that follows keeps in line with the simple mechanics of the original. Players run around and have a single button command to learn. "I think one of the things that made the first Splosion Man really work was that it only had one mechanic, and that was 'splode,'" Bear tells us. "We wanted to stick with that for Ms. Splosion Man, and not only refine it, but introduce items and elements in the world that would take advantage of that one mechanic." The new complexity comes through the interactions

that occur when the character explodes, like an energy ball that must be volleyed into place with several linked splosions.

In addition, Twisted Pixel is reexamining balancing in the game, with an eye towards a more even difficulty curve. The team has also put into place a Super Mario World-style map system with branching paths, enabling hardcore players to tackle every difficult level, while other players can take a more abbreviated path to game completion. Each stage is labeled with its difficulty, and some stages have multiple exits that lead to hidden paths.

Bear also shared some details about the bigger encounters that populate the game. "We have more bosses than we did in the first *Splosion Man*, and I think the team and I are much happier with how these turned out. They are a lot of fun, they look awesome, and they still revolve around using the 'splode mechanic, which I think is really cool,'" Bear explains. The Mighty Eternal returns from the first game, but the encounter is more complex this time, with multiple steps that go far beyond the run from the boss-style seen in the first game. He also told us about an unusual new boss named Octo-Poosie. "Like most of the bosses in the game, it is a throw-back/homage to the huge boss characters of the 16-bit area,"

Bear says. "Octo-Poosie is huge and takes up most of the screen. Because he is half robot, he needs blow-up swimmies on all his tentacles to stay above water. But instead of looking awesome, they are in the shape of cute giraffes and zebras." Clearly, Twisted Pixel hasn't lost its touch for humor.

Co-op was a big hit in the last game, and the team is spending a lot of time fleshing out the two to four player online/offline multiplayer options. Once again, multiplayer levels are totally different from the levels seen in single player. There's also an amusing (gross?) new mode called 2 Girls 1 Controller, where a single player is able to control two Ms. Splosion Mans at the same time. Each analog controls a character, and the shoulder buttons make each of them splode. Before we bid Bear farewell, we ask him the question fans most want to know. Will *Splosion Man* and *Ms. Splosion Man* ever meet? "Not only do they meet, but we did our best to make sure that when they did it was amazingly awesome. At least until the ESRB said they would give it an AO rating," Bear tells us. "So we trimmed back a bit and came up with something that is relatively awesome. I think people will dig it." — **Matt Miller**

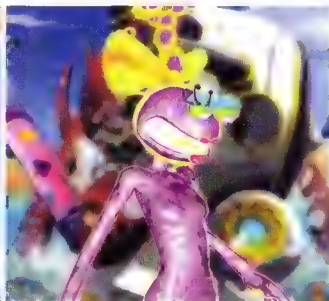
» **Platform**
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Action

» **Developer**
Microsoft Game Studios

» **Developer**
Twisted Pixel

» **Release**
Summer



Sonic Generations

Bridging a 20-year generation gap with two gameplay styles



Everything about this screenshot is a classic.

» Platformer
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Platform
» Publisher
Sega

» Developer
Sonic Team

» Release
Holiday

Sega has been in an awkward spot with the Sonic series for years. Three-dimensional titles like *Sonic and the Secret Rings* and *Sonic Unleashed* perform well on store shelves, but are lambasted by critics. While the new post-*Sonic Adventure* titles have found a wide audience with younger gamers, longtime *Sonic* veterans such as myself yearn for the glorious 2D days. *Sonic Generations* strives to deliver the best of both worlds, and my brief spin through Green Hill Zone helped restore my faith in the inconsistent series.

Similarly to *Sonic Colors*, *Sonic Generations* delivers both 2D and 3D gameplay in one package. Instead of swapping between dimensions

in a single level, however, the unique perspectives are split into separate stages. But there's a catch — the two gameplay types are represented by modern and classic versions of *Sonic*. This paradox is the result of a mysterious new evil tearing a hole in the time-space continuum, and the two hedgehogs must unite to find out who is behind it all. The green-eyed *Sonic* introduced in *Sonic Adventure* cruises through the 3D levels, and the side-scrolling stages mark the long-awaited return of Genesis-era *Sonic*. It's an understatement to say I was excited to see an HD version of the short, stout, black-eyed *Sonic* I grew up with.

If you played *Sonic 4*, you're aware that Sega's previous attempt to emulate Genesis controls was floaty and awkward. You can throw out those concerns. Aside from a hot-buttoned spindash, classic *Sonic* controls just like you remember. Leaping across platforms feels tight, and the sense of inertia is spot-on. After multiple playthroughs of the brief level, I looked down at the modern controller in my hand and was surprised not to see a Genesis pad.

Stepping into the bright red sneakers of the lanky, wise-cracking, modern *Sonic* is similar to playing any of the recent Wii games. These streamlined rollercoaster segments don't usually do much for me, but the level I played was a riot. *Sonic* has all his new tricks at his disposal, such as boosting, rail-grinding, and homing-in on enemies. Nabbing rings and killing badniks builds

up *Sonic's* boost (borrowed from *Sonic Colors*), allowing you to blaze through loop-de-loops as the catchy Green Hill Zone music quickens. In one section of this branching course *Sonic* leaps through a waterfall onto a rail that he promptly grinds. A gigantic robotic fish then springs from the water below, chasing the hedgehog down in a scene reminiscent of the *Sonic Adventure's* whale chase.

Whether it was called Emerald, Mushroom, or Splash Hill Zone, gamers have played Green Hill Zone dozens of times. Despite the repetition, *Sonic Generations*' iteration of the loonic stage trounces them all with lush backgrounds packed with waterfalls, greenery, and the most fluid platforming layouts yet. The 2D and 3D versions of the stage are entirely different, but both take full advantage of the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3's hardware to produce stunning visuals that will make *Sonic* fans lose their rings. Sega says you can look forward to revisiting your favorite *Sonic* stages from the Genesis, Dreamcast, and modern games in all their remixed, high definition glory.

Every *Sonic* game is an opportunity for Sega to put the stethoscope to the fanbase and gauge their enthusiasm. Sega appears to have diagnosed many of the problems that have plagued the series for years, and a remedy may be in sight. I loved my first dose of *Sonic Generations*, and I'm ready to discover what else is in store. » Tim Turf



Sonic can begin a spin dash by simply holding down a button. A welcome change.



Rocksmith

For those about to learn to rock

Though the market seems to have dried up and Guitar Hero is on hiatus, Ubisoft is taking on the rhythm genre with Rocksmith. Like Rock Band 3, this title aims to teach people how to play the guitar. Before you dismiss it as another "me too" copycat, you should know that it has one distinct advantage over its predecessors: Not only does it use a real guitar, but it is fully compatible with any guitar that has a quarter-inch output.

The game has a straightforward career mode—you can progress through most songs without unlocking them first. The runway display is completely unique; six strings stretch horizontally across the screen, and colored blocks assigned to the correct fret move towards the appropriate string. It will take some adjusting to for Rock Band fans, but ultimately seems more intuitive and exact than Pro Mode in Rock Band 3. The soundtrack looks to balance current and classic guitar bands. So far, Ubisoft has confirmed five songs: The Animals—"House of the Rising Sun," The Black Keys—"I Got Mine," David Bowie—"Rebel Rebel," Nirvana—"In Bloom," and the Rolling Stones—"I Can't Get No Satisfaction."

Two Game Informer editors with varying degrees of guitar experience put the game through its paces. Here's what they had to say about Rocksmith.



The closest I've ever come to playing an actual guitar was during a regrettable air-band performance in junior high. The feeling of getting 100 percent on a song in Rock Band or Guitar Hero is rewarding in its own right, but Rocksmith made me actually feel productive. Sure, I was only playing the most skeletal version of the Stones' "I Can't Get No Satisfaction," but even at my skill level it was recognizable. I appreciate the way that Rocksmith teaches fundamentals through discrete drills and minigames, rather than simply telling players to dive in. If you can fool me into learning while I'm having a good time, you've done your job. » **Jeff Cox**



I've played guitar and bass since I was 13, so I appreciate the more realistic approach Rocksmith takes to the music genre. I love being able to plug a real guitar into a game console. The free-play mode, which turns your TV into a virtual amp and pedal board, might be enough to sell me on this game. The game does a better job of teaching guitar than Rock Band 3, but I'm still not sold on the idea that video game is a replacement for old-fashioned lessons, practice, and hard work. It took me awhile to understand the onscreen display; at times I was struggling with songs I actually know how to play already. After getting a handle on it, I appreciated the way that it ramps up the difficulty based on how you are playing. That said, even at the highest difficulty level I felt some aspects of the songs were being held back from me. Judged purely as a game, I'm not sure where Rocksmith fits in the market. It's a unique product that's at turns intoxicating and confusing. I'm curious to see the finished product; with a little polish this could be the closest games have come to replicating the real experience of playing guitar. » **Matt Helgeson**

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

» **Style**
1-Player Music
[Multiplayer TBA]

» **Publisher**
Ubisoft

» **Developer**
Ubisoft San Francisco
Ubisoft Shanghai

» **Release**
Fall 2012

Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster

Double Fine brings an interactive storybook to Kinect



Four years ago, Double Fine hatched the idea of a game all about interacting with monsters during its "amnesia fortnight" prototyping period. The team was still hard at work on Brütal Legend, and one of the rules of amnesia fortnight is to forget the idea until the game that's currently in production is complete. According to lead programmer Nathan Martz, the team was looking forward to developing a nonviolent, family-friendly game starring cute monsters, and when Microsoft's Kinect was announced they felt it was the perfect platform for the experience they wanted to deliver. As the project evolved and prototypes were developed, Sesame Street and Warner Bros. got on board for Once Upon a Monster.

Once Upon a Monster kicks off with Elmo returning from the library after discovering a monster-filled storybook. He immediately shows off his find to Cookie Monster, who explains the book is hardly ordinary. It's a gateway to an interactive world of monsters that need your help in ensuring all of their stories have happy endings. Players join Elmo, Cookie, Oscar, Grover, and new characters as they explore the book page by page. Double Fine emphasizes parent-child cooperative play, but solo players can still partake in the whimsical adventure.

With the help from the non-profit educational organization behind Sesame Street, Sesame Workshop, Once Upon a Monster incorporates a "social and emotional curriculum" where players learn to make new friends, cooperate, problem-solve, empathize, and more when interacting with the living storybook. Activities include monkey-see-monkey-do exercises, interaction with musical instruments, and obstacle courses that utilize the body tracking capabilities of Kinect. Though the game is designed for the younger crowd, Double Fine hopes to get the whole family involved.

"I'm excited to be working on a game that's uplifting," Martz says. "I feel like a lot of our industry right now is dark with a lot of games about shooting men in the face. It's so great to work on something I feel that parents will see and not just begrudgingly buy for their family, but feel great about buying it. They'll feel just as good about playing the game."

Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster will teach your family valuable life lessons via adorable, fuzzy monsters and Kinect this fall. » **Annette Gonzalez**



» **Platform**
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Adventure

» **Publisher**
Warner Bros. Interactive
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Double Fine Productions

» **Release**
Fall



Child of Eden

Cleanse Eden of impurities in Mizuguchi's vibrant shooter

» **Platform**
Xbox 360
PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter

» **Publisher**
Ubisoft

» **Developer**
Q Entertainment

» **Release**
July 14

As he proved in *Rez* and *Lumines*, designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi has a fondness for creating video games that meld electronic music with trance-inducing visuals. His newest title, *Child of Eden*, takes his distinctive formula one step further by throwing your body into the mix and providing one of the more innovative uses of Microsoft's Kinect peripheral that we've seen.

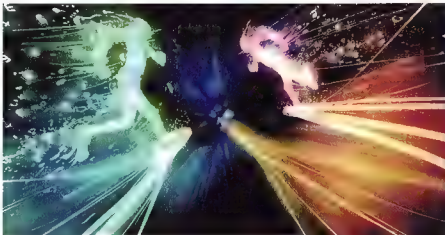
Tasked with purifying the memory banks of Lumi, the digital resurrection of the first human born in space, players must make their way through five distinct levels, known as archives. My latest time with the game took me into the surging depths of Lumi's Passion archive, and provided the most challenging gameplay yet.

I start the level by shooting a glowing amorphous blob, which quickly divides into two clacking spheres and begins emitting gear-shaped enemies. You have three abilities to purge these and other viruses from Lumi's system. The first is your tracer, which unleashes an endless stream of projectiles on whatever you wave the reticle over. The second is your lock-on shot, which

allows you to mark several objects at a time, and then blast them simultaneously by moving your hand towards the screen. A special Euphoria attack (activated by raising both arms) can wipe the screen of enemies, and is useful when you're overwhelmed. The controls result in a lot of hand waving, and although at times I felt like I was navigating a computer in *Minority Report*, the system is responsive and I preferred it to using a traditional controller.

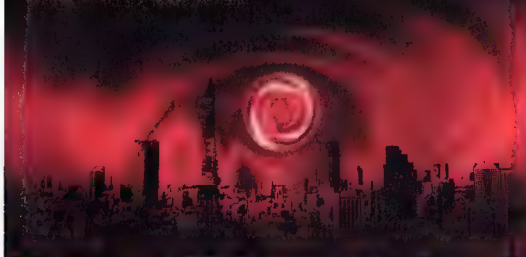
The rest of the level was like taking a train ride through an acid trip. An off-white expanse filled with towers and gears required fast reflexes to target and open mechanical gates. A mirrored cityscape whirled above and below me as I shot shadowy figures that revolved around glowing red lights. Later, trains, jets, and rocket shuttles flew parallel to me and disintegrated into colorful explosions as I waved my tracer shot over them. Then the two glowing spheres returned, morphing into humanoid joggers that required me to target their joints as they ran around me, emitting long, colorful light trails. The whole experience can be summed up as "groovy."

Though there was no shortage in the variety of environments and enemies in the level, I'm concerned with how the gameplay will hold up considering how few abilities you have at your disposal. The Passion level was also surprisingly difficult, and required numerous restarts, though there will be a God mode available for those who want a stress-free experience. Despite these early concerns, with a summer Kinect lineup that can only be described as lackluster, this is one creative shooter that owners of the peripheral should keep an eye on. — Jeff Marchiava



Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked

Demons, destruction, and high school drama remastered in 3D



When Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor originally came out for the DS in 2009, it impressed RPG fanatics with its unique blend of strategic planning and classic turn-based combat. Now Atlus has pegged it for an upgraded 3DS re-release featuring some devious bonuses for those who finished the original release and newcomers alike.

Despite not taking advantage of the 3D abilities of the 3DS – an extra dimension wouldn't add much punch to Devil Survivor's top-down, sprite-based graphics – Overclocked still boasts visual upgrades. "The graphical assets have all been redone," says project lead Yu Namba. "All the sprites and artwork are sharper and more vivid. In a strategy RPG built on hand-drawn, hand-animated art work, that's a pretty big deal."

We haven't seen the new version in person yet, but Atlus promises it takes full advantage of the beefier processing power offered by the 3DS. Sadly, it doesn't use some of the other bells and whistles of the handheld, such as StreetPass functionality.

The Shin Megami Tensei series has always provided a wide array of weird and powerful demons to hunt down and summon to battle, and Overclocked increases that roster. The total number of demons in the game has expanded from around 120 to over 150, including some new to North America. Namba says that each of the additions to Devil Survivor's cast has been "painstakingly designed and drawn by master artist Kazuma Kaneko."

Even if you completed the original release of Devil Survivor, Atlus is packing Overclocked with a new eighth day tacked onto the weeklong plot. Namba says the new story isn't meant to totally rewrite Devil Survivor's ending, but rather it lets players get a chance to see what happened to the main characters afterward. The eighth day also maintains the original's multitude of possible endings, so expect some replay value for an already lengthy experience. Just in case you tried to finish Devil Survivor on DS and were thwarted by its infamous difficulty spikes, Overclocked includes a rebalanced easy mode.

Overclocked is set to arrive this summer, serving as a promising start to what will hopefully be a 3DS RPG collection just as huge and satisfying as it was on the DS. **Phil Kollar**

Platform

- 3DS
- » **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing
- » **Publisher**
Atlus
- » **Developer**
Atlus
- » **Release**
Summer



Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion

Cartoon Network meets Super Smash Bros.

Papaya Studios is making no secret of its attempt to ape Nintendo's hit Smash Bros. franchise. And why should it? Nintendo has made no attempt to make the series portable, and what better way to bring the worlds of many of Cartoon Network's shows past and present together? Fans of *Powerpuff Girls*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, *Ben 10*, and more can battle it out with many of their favorite characters in a new story written in collaboration with Cartoon Network.

Multiplayer supports up to four players over local wireless (unfortunately, online play is not supported), and you can also bring AI bots into the fray. I went a few rounds against three foes, and Punch Time feels exactly like Smash Bros. Jumps are floaty, attacks vary according to how buttons are combined with the analog pad, health is displayed via percentages, and victory only comes when you knock opponents off the side of the screen.

When your friends aren't around to beat up, a full single-player career adds some depth to the package. Players select four characters at the outset and can swap them in and out at any time by tapping their icon on the touchscreen. I played through a platforming section set amid pirate ships. After running, jumping, and beating down foes, I got into a cannon battle with a ship in the background. Cannon balls came flying toward the screen, showing off the system's 3D capabilities.

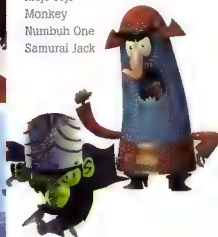
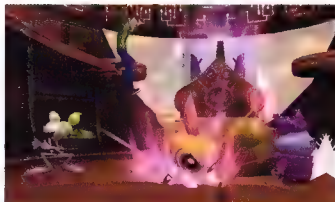
The entire career contains 32 levels, which Papaya Studios says lasts around seven hours. I caught a glimpse of the endgame unlockable character, and while I won't spoil the surprise, he or she is a total curv-ball surprise compared to the rest of the cast and is easily the coolest character in my book. Players only have to wait until the end of May to find out who I'm talking about. **Bryan Vore**

- » **Platform**
3DS
- » **Style**
1 to 4-Player Fighting
- » **Publisher**
Crave Games
- » **Developer**
Papaya Studios
- » **Release**
May 24

Who's On Board

Cartoon Network hasn't revealed the full list of characters, but here are the ones we know are in the game

- Ben 10
- Billy and Mandy
- Blossom
- Bubbles
- Buttercup
- Captain K'nuckles
- Chowder & Kimchi
- Dexter
- Father
- Flapjack
- Grm
- Mac and Bloo
- Mojo Jojo
- Monkey
- Numbuh One
- Samurai Jack





Prey 2

A new protagonist, a new plight, and a new world.

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

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter

» **Publisher**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**
Human Head Studios

» **Release**
2012

At first glance the new direction developer Human Head is taking with *Prey 2* seems as alien to fans as original protagonist Tommy's captors. But despite a new protagonist, new gameplay mechanics, and a new world, the studio argues it is still a *Prey* title at heart. While spirit walking, spheres, portals, and gravity puzzles are gone, *Prey 2* continues to challenge the player by introducing new FPS mechanics. It also answers a slew of nagging questions that gamers wrestled with at the end of the first game. Where did the spheres come from? What happened to the humans that were abducted and survived? Where is Tommy?

The narrative may take a drastic departure from the original game, but *Prey 2* starts in a familiar setting. On July 11, 2006, an unknown alien force invaded Earth, whisking Tommy and countless others away into massive spheres hovering in the atmosphere above. That same night SeaJay Air Flight 6401, a commercial airliner, was abducted. Astute *Prey* fans may remember Tommy stumbling past the captured craft in the first game. *Prey 2* follows Killian Samuels, an air marshal on SeaJay 6401 who awakens on the

sphere no more informed than Tommy. He works his way through the rubble and burning debris to find himself gazing upon Earth from a most disturbing perspective.

Samuels pulls out his gun and begins to make his way toward the burning cockpit of his vessel, following screams in hopes of finding other survivors. Hostiles halt his progress, which is a perfect time for Human Head to show off the expanded cover system. Samuels takes refuge behind debris, blind firing when necessary to provide suppressing cover as he runs, jumps, and slides to new vantage points. Armed only with a pistol against superior technology, Samuels is stunned and staggers to the ground. The alien creatures close in, tower over him, and knock him out.

The familiar surroundings disappear, and Samuels awakens after an undisclosed amount of time passes to find himself acclimated to life on an alien world called Exodus. It is obvious that he has been a resident for some time, and more bizarrely, has made a name for himself as a bounty hunter. How this came to pass is the primary mystery in *Prey 2*. In his mind, Samuels

thinks he is the only human left alive. Until he meets Tommy, that is, who Human Head insists plays a substantial role in the sequel.

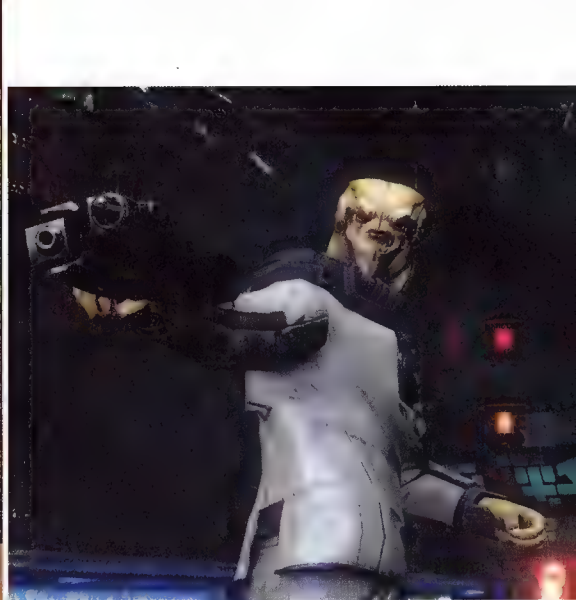
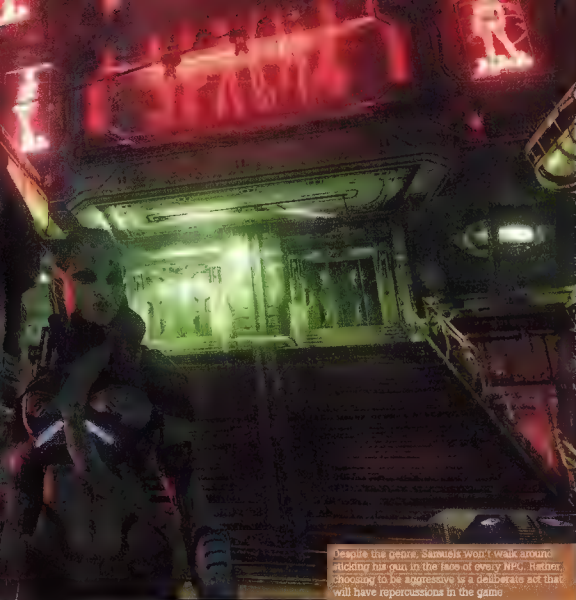
The bounty hunter vocation was intentionally chosen by Human Head in an effort to explore both sides of the predator/prey relationship. Samuels has made a number of friends over the years, but even more enemies. A first look at Samuels in action is provided in a city described as "alien noir." Exodus is unique in that it has a locked axis — one side of the planet always faces the sun. This *Blade Runner*-inspired city falls somewhere between the light and dark divide, and the city's verticality showcases Samuels' new moveset. He is more agile than one may expect, running, jumping, vaulting, grabbing, shooting, and diving like a parkour action hero.

The first game took place in the tight corridors of an alien space ship, but *Prey 2* eagerly embraces an open-world setting. "Player choice" was an oft-repeated phrase during the demonstration. What missions Samuels accepts, where he travels, what gadgets he uses, and how he interacts with others all depends on your play style.



Prey 2 will not feature multiplayer, but the team is aiming for a strong single-player campaign that will clock in at around the 15-hour mark.





Prey 2 also employs a morality system that dictates how characters react to the player, but it isn't far-reaching enough that it will change the outcome of the game. You can choose to randomly kill civilians and mug innocents, but expect the enigmatic law enforcement agency to come down on you. The "eye in the sky" drones are particularly troublesome, as they won't stop seeking you out till you destroy them. A powerful gadget – shoulder-mounted rockets – comes in handy during such situations.

Making questionable moral choices may help elicit information from civilians and make it easier to score cash, but it also influences the type of missions that become available. Maintaining an honorable demeanor has its advantages, too, especially with vendors. Good or bad, your reputation will precede you.

An official bounty comes through the wire for Samuels. The hit's location isn't known, but tracking him shouldn't be too hard thanks to his augmented reality visor that works similarly to Arkham Asylum's detective mode. This city is home to drug and armament trades, seedy casinos, and strip clubs. Characters of interest

are highlighted throughout the environment, and considering the shady populace, many opportunities for interactions become available. The visor sets a waypoint for a well-known informant and Samuels in on his way.

Upon arrival Samuels finds that the informant won't talk for less than double the standard rate. He could pay, but he isn't feeling generous and instead opts to push his bodyguard over a railing to his death. The informant isn't pleased, but provides the details needed, and makes known that he will be calling in a favor in the near future.

The bounty's current location is now updated on the map. Before entering the building that houses the target, Samuels stocks up on grenades from a nearby vendor. Rather than go in guns blazing, Samuels decides to take the bounty's unsuspecting lieutenant hostage. His purpose is quickly negated, however, as the target dispenses of him with one clean blow. So much for loyally.

A chase unfolds. The target can teleport, making it much more challenging to keep tabs on him through waves of aggressive bodyguards. An

anti-gravity gadget aids in pulling his meat shields up and out of cover. Samuels swaps between traditional firearms and the alternate fire of the shoulder rockets to try and slow him down. At one point, he even has us train hopping, carefully timing jumps to avoid being flattened on the tracks below.

This hit is wanted alive, and eventually Samuels pins him down. He tries to make a deal by doubling the amount on his head. Samuels remains virtuous. One more option presents itself before parting ways. Interrogation of bounties can yield information about the narrative, loot locations, and other hits. The problem is, each individual interrogation risks killing the bounty. Not willing to chance it, Samuels warps him away and washes his hands of the situation.

While our small taste of Prey 2 left us hopeful of its intriguing promise, it's quite different from the original. We're interested to see if the abstract concept of self-discovery and the alien setting are enough to make Prey 2 feel like a direct sequel. — Meagan Marie



reviews

gameinforma
GAME OF THE MONTH


86 Portal 2

Gamers have been eagerly awaiting GLaDOS' return since her hysterical debut in 2007's Orange Box. Valve hasn't disappointed. Portal 2 delivers everything we could expect in a sequel: several new mechanics that keep Portal's classic puzzles fresh, a cast of hilarious personalities, and a unique co-op mode. Cancel your weekend plans; once you start playing Portal 2, you won't want to stop. Find out how much we loved Aperture Science founder Cave Johnson on page 86.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Fleeced. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be 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	Red. While some things work as planned, the majority of the title either malfunctioned or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redemptive in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so inefficient in execution that any value would be divided in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	PlayStation Network. The system is dying.

AWARDS

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

Outland

A clever twist on a familiar genre



Style 1-Player Action (2-Player Online) **Publisher** Ubisoft **Developer** Housemarque
Release April 26 (PlayStation 3) April 27 (Xbox 360) ESRB E10+

Borrow from enough different sources, and you end up with something entirely new. That's the design mantra that fuels *Outland*, a visually arresting downloadable title with enough solid gameplay to back up its ample style. Mixing exploration, melee combat, platforming, and shooter mechanics into a singular concept seems like a tall order, but Housemarque manages the feat.

Outland draws on Mesoamerican mythology to craft an archetypal hero story. While the narrative is bare, its theme survives through the beautiful backdrops and dreamlike levels. As I wandered the environments, I continually paused to admire the intricate artwork and shifting colors. Each level has a character all its own, but the game maintains a breathtaking unified style throughout.

Wandering these gorgeous locales, one can't help but draw comparisons to similar 2D exploration games. Much of the gameplay revolves around building a suite of powers that will let you reach previously inaccessible areas. While this exploration element isn't incredibly deep, the ingeniously designed levels are filled with lots of secret passages and the occasional power-up. Along the way, a simple but enjoyable sword combat system pits you against the denizens of this mesmeric land. A generous checkpoint system saves a lot of heartache—death can be common, but you rarely start too far back.

The big feature that sets *Outland* apart from other exploration games is borrowed from the classic Japanese shooter, *Ikaruga*. Players gain the ability to shift back and forth between a

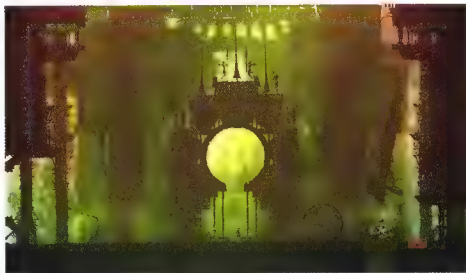
light and dark (blue and red) state, and many of the game's subsequent puzzles, platforming challenges, and combat encounters are built around that dual nature. Flip to blue, and you'll absorb similarly colored projectiles, activate blue platforms, and be able to damage red enemies. Flip colors and the situation reverses. Once you've got the concept down, the game wastes little time in throwing devilish scenarios your way. Both colors are mixed in shifting patterns of swirling projectiles. Enemies of both colors attack at the same time. Ascending platforms of red and blue must be activated back and forth mid-jump. *Outland* builds its challenge off of your ability to keep it all straight in your head, and you end up having to concentrate much harder than you would if the objective were simply platforming and attacking.

The color-swapping craziness comes to a head in several multi-stage boss fights. These massive enemies are tough and the battles are lengthy. They build in difficulty right up to the last one, which ends up being one of the tougher final boss encounters of recent years. Like the levels between these fights, the bosses take careful attention and pattern recognition, but stop short of long memorized attack sequences. Instead, quick reflexes and a careful eye towards color matching will save the day.

Outland also has an excellent two-player online cooperative mode. While the lack of local co-op is disappointing, the online option is a lot of fun. Housemarque has even gone so far as to include several co-op designated challenge areas that

can only be tackled with a friend. Meanwhile, the main campaign takes on a new dimension, as players are forced to time their jumps and attacks with each other as they flip between color states.

I would have loved a more meaningful or full-bodied story in *Outland*, but at least the mystical narrative maintains the unreal vibe that the rest of the game exudes. Beyond that, the action-packed platforming, hypnotic music, and striking aesthetic make *Outland* a must-play. I am always astounded that more developers don't create 2D exploration games. With *Outland*, not only do we get a great new entry in the genre, but a unique variation on the theme unlike anything else on the market. **Matt Miller**



9

Concept

Explore a mystical world of shifting colors to prevent a world-ending myth from emerging

Graphics

The interplay of shadow and light has a startling effect, and the animation is top notch

Sound

Atmospheric music sounds like what you'd imagine for your own personal spirit quest, but the narrator's voice is over-dramatic

Playability

Agile platforming controls work great once you get used to the slightly floaty jump physics

Entertainment

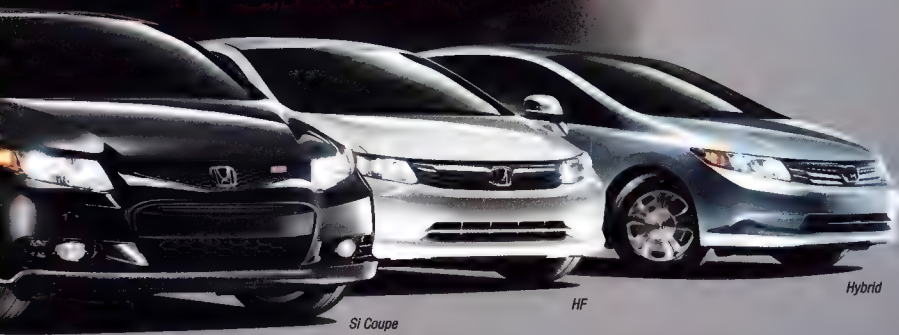
An exciting and challenging journey into myth, with several unique ideas to set it apart

Replay Value

Moderately High



ACH OWN



Si Coupe

HF

Hybrid

We're all different. That's why there are five Civics. The Sedan, Coupe, Si, HF, and the car with the highest gas-powered fuel economy in its class: the 44-mpg-city Civic Hybrid. The next-generation Honda Civic. civic.honda.com



Portal 2

The sequel you were hoping for

9.5

PSS3 • 360 • PC

» **Concept**
Return to the Enrichment Center for more testing. And science. And hopefully less murder

» **Graphics**
Retains the style of the original while breaking free of the sterile environments to explore new territory. The scale of the levels is at times jaw dropping

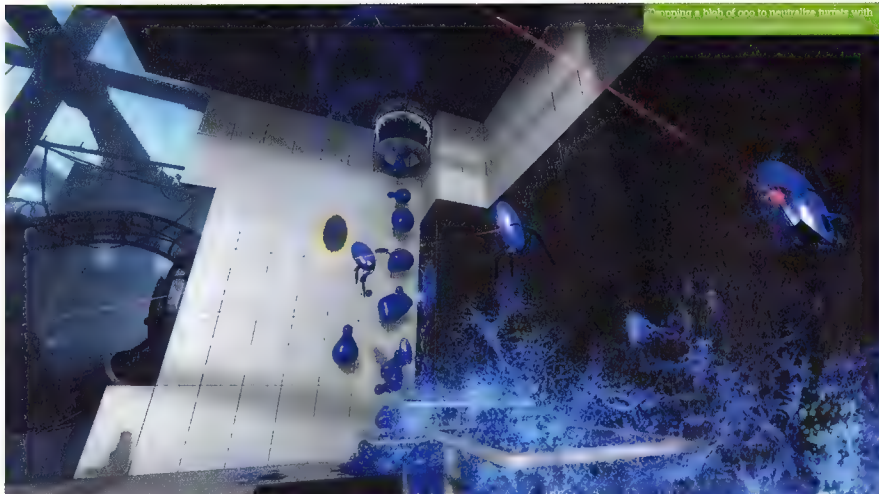
» **Sound**
Any one of the three major voice performances could have headlined a game and warrant consideration for end-of-the-year awards.

The audio cues tied into nearly every action in the game enhance the sense of space and the physicality of the world

» **Playability**
The cheats the game uses to help you line up portals properly are appreciated, especially on a controller

» **Entertainment**
This is the quintessential "bigger and better" sequel that focuses and expands on the original's strengths while raising the quality bar higher. But without breaking much new ground. But you may be in the wrong hobby if you're complaining about more Portal

» **Replay Value**
Moderately High



gamerform
GAME OF THE MONTH

gamerform
GOLD

Style 1 or 2-Player Puzzle/Platforming (2-Player Online) Publisher Valve Software/Electronic Arts
Developer Valve Software Release April 19 ESRB E10+

How do you follow up on a four-hour pack-in title that blew up into a phenomenon that defined a year-plus of gaming culture? Valve decided to flesh out the concepts pioneered in *Portal*, coloring in some existing wireframes, adding details to older sketches, and doodling new expansions to previous ideas in the margins. Without turning the page, the team has painted a much richer picture that seizes your attention in a steel grip even if it's telling a similar story.

Like the original, so much of what makes *Portal 2* special is in the execution and the originality of standing in Chell's shoes and experiencing her destiny. Any spoilers would seriously detract from the game. Not because

the plot relies on contrived twists – the major beats are telegraphed in advance – but because Valve has leveraged the interactive experience perfectly. Weathering the taunts of a sadistic AI as you're trying to survive its deadly challenges is unlike passively watching HAL-9000 try to kill off meddling astronauts. Gruesome depictions of abandoned experiments take on a new horror when you're desperately avoiding a similar fate yourself. The dialogue's pitch-perfect delivery is half of *Portal 2*'s genius, and it would be a shame to run the brilliant comedic timing or any of the other many nuances Valve so painstakingly crafted in this review.

This isn't to say that *Portal 2* takes itself too seriously. On the contrary, the sequel goes in a dramatically opposite direction than the Half-Life tie-in that many predicted. Descriptions of violent, painful death are played for a laugh more often than not. GLaDOS' blithe disregard for human suffering is again a recurring comedic theme. The touch of gravitas here and there is just enough to ground the writing and serve as a contrast to *Portal 2*'s goofy world. I would have preferred Valve to play it slightly straighter and give a look into what catastrophic events led to the current sorry state of Chell's world, but that's the sci-fi nerd in me talking. We don't need to know why the Enrichment Center is; that it is trying to kill us is enough.

I was concerned that I would tire of *Portal*'s one-note shtick, however amusing, over the course of a full-length game. Adding two major speaking roles and a few different environments, along with carrying over the masterful pacing of

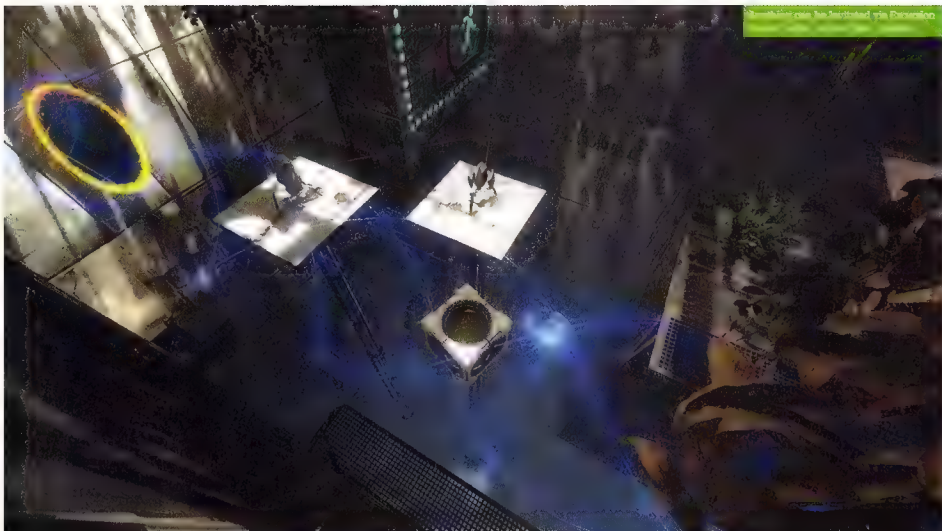
the original, keeps the single-player adventure fresh through its entire eight-hour span. I never once thought I'd place GLaDOS second on any list of *Portal* characters, but J.K. Simmons' character surpasses the malevolent AI even though she's as amusing as ever. I was never bored of the dialogue, settings, or puzzles. The constant introduction of new elements ensured that I never even came close.

The co-op campaign, on the other hand, is five hours of relatively simplistic GLaDOS banter with occasional hijinks from the cooperative testing robots. Co-op play is more mechanics-driven, with occasional bits of hilarity injected by GLaDOS' amusing attempts to sow enmity between the two of you. The puzzles are ingenious, and the simple ability to put a marker in the game world makes plotting strategies out smooth and easy. I wasn't sure about co-op puzzle-solving beforehand, but *Portal 2* made me a rabid believer. Do whatever it takes to find someone to tackle these challenges with. They're that good.

As for the puzzles themselves, they're wonderful. *Portal 2* has fewer agility-driven obstacles, so less dextrous gamers shouldn't find themselves stuck on anything for lack of stick-flicking ability. The new elements are each great in their own rights, and they work together beautifully. Flying through the air after setting up a mad combination of repulsion and propulsion gel is amusing, but bending your mind around using an excursion funnel's tractor beam to levitate the goo into a set of turrets that you had previously blocked with a hard light bridge from perforating you is

Second Opinion 9.5

Valve caught us all a little off guard with the original *Portal*, but the game's clever gameplay and dark humor sent the franchise in the meme stratosphere. While jumping through portals is no longer as novel as it once was, Valve keeps the series fresh by introducing a mix of new mechanics. *Portal 2*'s puzzles are more varied thanks to the fact that you can send lasers, tractor beams, and energy walkways through your portals, and I absolutely loved how the gels affected the world around me. The game's simple, portal-based mechanics are so addictive that you'll probably catch yourself placing imaginary portals all over your house. Thankfully these mechanics never feel overdone and neither does the game's humor; I would often hang around completed puzzles just to see how the game's ambient dialogue would progress. Playing co-op changes the game quite a bit, as having two sets of portals allows Valve to craft a unique set of challenges that are often more mentally stimulating than anything in single-player. It doesn't matter which order you play them in, but make sure you experience both modes. *Portal 2* isn't just one of the best games of the year – it's two of them. » Ben Reeves



you is amazing. The better co-op puzzles, where for example your partner is continually extending the funnel you're both floating in via portals while you have to extend bridges between your fragile shells and passing turrets, show unbelievable creativity.

Portal 2's high points rival "the cake is a lie," though they're perhaps less quotable (which is honestly fine – repeating GLaDOS lines stopped being funny a long time ago). You'll never forget the moments that accompany some of the achievements/trophies. The game's quality stays consistently outstanding throughout; there isn't a minute of filler content to be found anywhere in single-player or co-op. I would have loved to see something unique done with the story, which doesn't end anywhere interesting despite a reasonably satisfying ending. I would adore seeing Portal stretch its wings beyond being a series of puzzles that almost always have one correct solution waiting to be found. That said, the next game I want to play is a second run through of Portal 2, because the existing formula is excellent and brilliantly executed. » **Adam Biessener**



Mortal Kombat

Much more than a classic revival

9.5

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Take all of the elements that made Mortal Kombat an iconic franchise, and make it play better than ever

» Graphics

A great attention to detail is applied to the backgrounds, characters, and making the fatalities cringe-worthy spectacles

» Sound

It's all about various battle cries, slicing, dicing, and death throes. The soundtrack is as unremarkable as its predecessors

» Playability

The best control and deepest mechanics in any Mortal Kombat game

» Entertainment

An almost overwhelming amount of great content backs the rock-solid gameplay

» Replay

High



Style 1 to 4-Player (4-Player Online) Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive Developer NetherRealm Studios Release April 19 ESRB M

Mortal Kombat isn't a mere throwback to the series' arcade glory days. Sure, it places combatants on a classic two-dimensional plane, recycles Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3's roster, ventures back to the franchise's most iconic arenas, and gives that odd fellow who yells "Toasty!" another job. However, the nostalgic nods, as great as they are, take a backseat to the creative ideas that bolster the classic fighting formula.

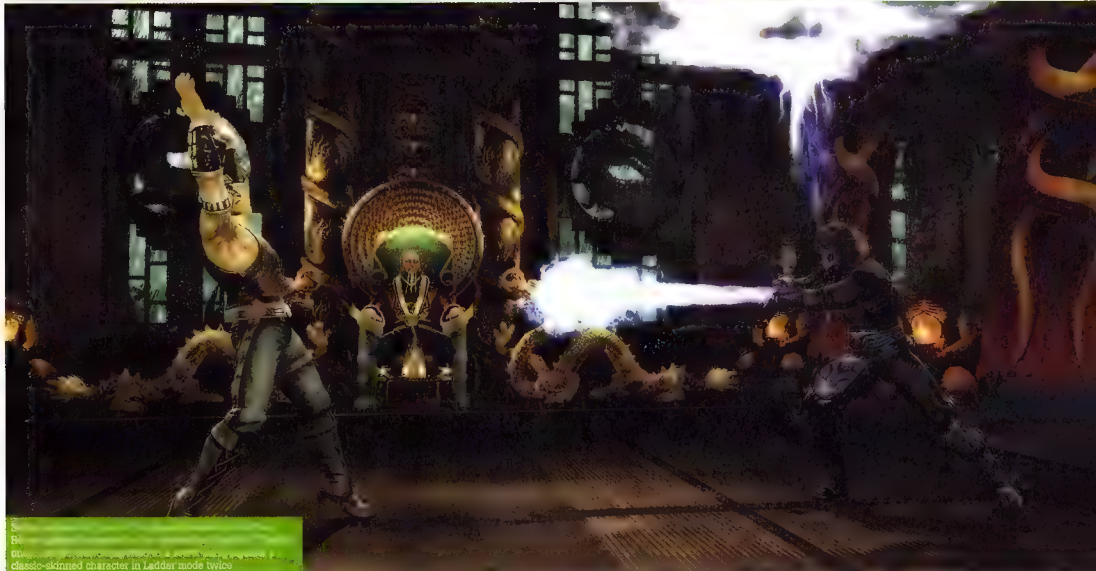
Powerful X-ray moves shatter spines and fracture skulls, special moves can be augmented to deal additional damage, and just when you think you've seen it all, the game throws bloody curveballs your way in the form of new match types. You may find yourself battling an army of tarkatans, or struggling to deal damage because your character can't stand the stench of a rotting version of Goro. With a sadistic sense of humor accompanying most of the fights and modifiers,

you never know what to expect from Mortal Kombat – but it's always gory, hilarious, and an absolute blast to play.

Most of the crazy match types are found in Challenge mode, a tower of 300 objective-based levels. This mode could easily be considered a full game on its own. While Test Your Might, Strike, Sight, and Luck Challenges pop up often, most of the other matches are unique one-offs, such as Johnny Cage fighting a movie director or a bout where you play as a zombie. In addition to making me question what the hell is going on every five to 10 minutes, this mode does a nice job of showing players the ropes and teaching them how to play as each of the combatants. Some of the objectives are incredibly difficult, but should you run into a challenge that has your number, you can pay coins (earned in every mode) to skip it.

I pumped 10 hours into Challenge mode alone, and invested twice as much time into the classic tournament structure. This is where MK purists can enjoy no-frills one-on-one fights culminating with an ass-beating by Shao Kahn. The combat is frantic, and even though most of the characters' special moves were introduced over a decade ago, it doesn't feel like a nostalgia act. NetherRealm Studios has created a modern fighter that accommodates numerous play styles. If you have any memory of the first few Mortal Kombat games, you can probably throw Scorpion's spear without looking at the moves list. The combos, enhanced special attacks, X-ray attacks, and beautifully designed tag maneuvers are all new wrinkles that make this combat experience the deepest





in Mortal Kombat's history. Dan and I play the game in entirely different ways, and some of the people I've played online have opened my eyes to new approaches with different characters. Story mode also forces you into the role of different characters and, like all of the modes in this game, offers a lengthy and polished experience despite the ludicrous tale it tells.

None of the characters are palette swaps, and there's little repetition in the move sets or fatalities. You can sense that Ed Boon and his team had a great time dreaming up fatalities that best fit each character. Some of them are laugh inducing; others are downright disturbing. In Shang Tsung's finisher, the team even takes a jab at Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe's Teen rating. Each character offers two fatalities, a secret-ally, and a stage fatality. Uncovering all the ways you can dismember your competition is a significant and uproarious time sink.

Combatants get shredded up in more ways than just fatalities. As matches unfold, characters will bruise and bleed, and their outfits sustain

damage beyond a tailor's repair. Most of the stages also offer scenic views of Earthrealm being destroyed or the sick machinations occurring in Outworld. You have to take your eye off the fight to appreciate the amount of action occurring in the backgrounds; you'll see dragons battling helicopters, snakes slithering down trees, and other fighters locked in distant battles. I've always loved the way this series has looked, whether it was the digitized actors or exploding polygonal characters who showered far too many rib cages across the stage. This game eschews that kind of zaniness, however, and is downright gorgeous. In a split second, it can wipe the look of awe off of your face with a gruesome bone snap.

Mortal Kombat makes an impact in the online space. King of the Hill mode brings a competitive arcade-like atmosphere to the online bouts. Much like the days where you would put a quarter on the machine to signify that you have the next fight, you stand in line and wait your turn. Waiting in a day and age when "quick match" is

a part of our lexicon may seem like a silly thing to do, but I enjoyed taunting my foes and scoring their performances as I waited, not to mention studying their techniques prior to throwing down with them.

The only area where Mortal Kombat feels antiquated is in its AI. On the higher difficulty levels, computer opponents are as quick-witted and fast-acting as the Flash. Bosses are annoyingly cheap. I realize they should be tougher than standard opponents, but giving them immunity to any attack, even when your foot is clearly crushing their face, is an artificial difficulty booster that should have stayed in the past. The other minor complaint I have is the lack of new characters, especially from a team that has such a history of creating memorable fighters.

This is the most satisfying Mortal Kombat yet. It didn't blow my mind to the degree that Mortal Kombat 2 and 3 did back in the day, but when it comes down to the gameplay and longevity tied to it, this new entry towers above its 2D lineage. — **Andrew Reiner**

The Edge

The Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions are identical in most ways, but the latter's controller is better suited for special move and fatality input. The PlayStation 3 version also offers a substantial exclusive character in God of War's Kratos. He fits right in with the series' colorful cast, and his moves are fittingly brutal. The 360 version uses avatars during King of the Hill mode, but this small touch can't stand up to the PS3 version's advantages.



Operation Flashpoint: Red River

A groan-inducing portrayal of grunt life

6

Style 1 to 4-Player Shooter (4-Player Online)
Publisher Codemasters Developer Codemasters
Release June 7 ESRB M

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

When insurgents flee to Tajikistan, the Marines follow and China doesn't take too kindly to Uncle Sam sitting on its back porch

» Graphics

Ugly textures, bland environments, and repetitive death animations keep this game from standing alongside the benchmark shooters

» Sound

The CO barked at me so often I hoped the game would culminate with socks and soap bars in the forward operating base barracks. Hollow sound effects and underwhelming explosions on the battlefield

» Playability

The weapons handle effectively, but you're usually too busy babysitting your mentally challenged squad to notice

» Entertainment

The game-crippling squad AI deflates the single player experience, but co-op is mildly entertaining if you can look past the hard-headed enemy AI, bugs, and ugly textures

» Replay Value

Moderate

The Operation Flashpoint series hangs its helmet on creating realistic military experiences that convey the lethality and tactics of modern warfare. But as Red River demonstrates, an unchecked dedication to realism can cripple the entertainment factor.

Like the HBO series *Generation Kill*, Red River doesn't spare you the boredom of Marine life. In between fire-fights in this near-future Tajikistan conflict, you gaze at the barren landscape during long Humvee rides, trudge along uneventful foot patrols, and twiddle your thumbs during chopper transports. Rather than fill these action lulls with character development, your over-aggressive CO performs a tired impression of Gunnery Sergeant Hartman from *Full Metal Jacket* the entire time. When he's not harping about his damn rules, he's shouting over-written insults that almost always fall flat.

With the CO yelling survival tips, you'd think your fellow squad members would pick up a thing or two. Once the bullets start flying you realize they need more babysitting than a state senator outside the green zone. They ignore orders, walk into crossfire, and absorb more lead than a bulletproof vest test dummy. The needlessly complicated squad interface doesn't do you any favors, either.

Given your worthless AI brethren, the only way to play Red River is the four-player online co-op. Here it's easier to appreciate Operation Flashpoint's more realistic approach to combat, which requires you to take a methodical approach, watch your six, and flank. The campaign starts slowly, but once the Chinese join the fray the battles intensify and Red River finds a comfortable rhythm. Completing missions unlocks new weapon modifications, perks, and skill points that improve your leatherneck's endurance, accuracy, and awareness.

Only once the battles increase in scale do the myriad technical faux pas take a backseat to the gunfights. Poor vehicle controls, long load times, predictable level designs, and shallow enemy AI all plague the experience. New objectives often fail to trigger, and if you venture into areas the game doesn't expect you to, suddenly the resolution takes a laughable dip into NS4-quality textures.

Your multiplayer choices outside of the campaign are sparse. Red River offers a few terrorist hunt-style co-op challenges, but they lack an innovative spark.

Instead of shoring up Dragon Rising's shortcomings and improving the Operation Flashpoint experience, this sequel stubbornly clings to the quest for realism while ignoring the technical issues plaguing both games. Red River's gun-freedy jams, and Codemasters couldn't be bothered to fix the problem before joining the war. » **Matt Bertz**

Read the extended review at gameinform.com/mag



Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes HD

Mediocre content limits solid match-three gameplay

7.75

Style 1 to 4-Player Puzzle (4-Player Online)
Publisher Ubisoft Developer Capybara Games
Release April 12 ESRB E10+

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Rebalance the gameplay and upscale the graphics of the cult DS puzzler hit

» Graphics

Colorful and charmingly animated, but the immense amount of dead space on screen during battles is an odd choice

» Sound

The lack of voice overs might be an issue if the dialogue were anywhere north of horrible

» Playability

Not being able to see the stats of your opponents' units is the only real frustration

» Entertainment

The core mechanics are well designed and unique, but the campaign's one-off scenarios

range from mediocre to terrible and victory is too often determined by the initial random board layout

» Replay Value

Moderately Low

The strength and endurance of the cult following Clash of Heroes has developed since launching on DS last year has made me worry that I underrated that game in my original mixed review. This rebalanced, high-resolution port for Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network presented a perfect opportunity for me to revisit the title and give it another shot to win me over. As glad as I am to not feel the need to eat any crow right now, I'm simultaneously disappointed that my earlier judgment holds.

Your playing field in this match-three puzzler consists of three colors of core troops. Putting three of a kind in a column starts charging an attack, while three or more in a row metamorphose into immobile defensive walls. This simple ruleset takes on new dimensions when you start taking advantage of combining same-colored attacks together with links and fusions. Add in champion and elite units, which are larger troops that require basic troops stacked behind them to start charging and have significant special effects like life drains or shield spells, and you've got a rich tactical environment to play in – which your opponent is trying to take advantage of himself on his own turns.

Learning the tactics is a great ride. Unfortunately, the single-player campaign starts to suck immediately thereafter. Goofy setups like having to hit randomly moving targets with attacks highlight the imprecision of the match-three gameplay while ignoring the strategic depth the mechanics so painstakingly build up, and going back to level one core units with no Champions or Elites at the start of each race's campaign segment is lame.

These complaints are moot in multiplayer, which has solid 1v1 and 2v2 modes for both online and offline play. Digging deep into the excellent mechanics is the best part of this game, and evenly matched multiplayer games are the best way to do it. The one dumb thing is that you have to beat the crappy campaign to unlock the various armies and characters for multiplayer, so you're sentenced to dealing with a dozen or so hours of stupid scenarios to be able to play with more than the basic setup. Still, I definitely recommend Clash of Heroes to anyone with an interest in competitive multiplayer puzzle games.

I love the rebalancing of specific abilities (in particular, the heroes' special spells are much more fair across the board now) and the multiplayer implementation, but I wish that some of my other problems with Clash of Heroes had been addressed in this port. Nonetheless, you can do much worse for your puzzle fix. » **Adam Bliessener**

Read the extended review at gameinform.com/mag



Michael Jackson The Experience

A well-rounded performer that falls short of the King of Pop's greatness

Style 1 to 4-Player Rhythm/Music **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montreal **Release** April 12 **ESRB** E10+

7.75

When Ubisoft released Michael Jackson The Experience last holiday on Wii, it allowed fans of the pop icon to jam out to classic tracks using the remote-wagging dance mechanic featured in the publisher's money making franchise Just Dance. With the Kinect version, Ubisoft Montreal uses the sensor's body and voice tracking capabilities to give users a more faithful interpretation of the Michael Jackson performance experience – and mostly succeeds.

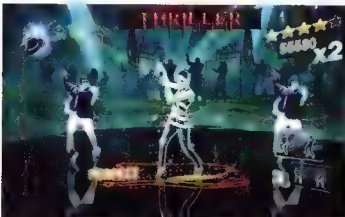
The Kinect version of The Experience has a similar performance-scoring problem as the Wii counterpart – it's brutal. The game rewards exaggerated movements over accuracy, and since the only visual feedback offered is a few flashes of the words "Perfect" or "Almost," you'll be hard pressed to get five stars. Difficulty is determined by song, and some arbitrarily chosen tracks require the player to both sing and dance with no other option, leaving little in terms of player choice. With the exception of ballads, which wisely feature

only vocals, not accommodating people who just prefer cutting a rug to belting out a tune or vice versa is a missed opportunity.

These flaws hamper the single player, but in co-op The Experience shines. After selecting a track, up to four players can join in on the performance. Each player is randomly selected

to complete a segment of a song, and roles of singers and dancers are constantly shaken up so you never know what to expect. Unfortunately, I can't say the same about versus mode. Here two teams compete for a high score, but it lacks the frantic spontaneity that makes co-op so entertaining. Instead you are forced to listen to the selected song twice, as you and your opponent perform the same routine one after the other.

As a fan of Michael Jackson, I can say The Experience on Kinect is fun despite its shortcomings. Working through each track and learning the routines is a refreshing reminder of his greatness as a performer. I may never dance like MJ, but after my time with The Experience, I am much closer to perfecting the moonwalk. » **Annette Gonzalez**



Michael Jackson The Experience projects a fluid outline of your likeness on a variety of performance stages designed after each song's respective music video. Players step along a fit up sidewalk in "Billie Jean" and jam among undead backup dancers in "Thriller." All of the tracks are available at the outset, allowing you to sing, dance, or both.

The King of Pop is music royalty for a reason, as the perfectionist performer flawlessly sang and danced at the same time. Unfortunately, The Experience on Kinect doesn't have the same chops. If you choose the option to sing and dance, the song is broken up into sections that alternate between movement and vocals. No one's stopping you from singing through the whole song even when not prompted, but you won't get credit for your efforts.

360

Concept

Give Michael Jackson fans a chance to emulate the King of Pop by delivering a full performance experience via Kinect

Graphics

The slick menu interface pays homage to MJ with classic imagery and icons. Each track has a unique stage inspired by Jackson's music videos

Sound

The soundtrack features 20-plus MJ tracks that span his extensive discography

Playability

The Dance Central-esque dance cards that move along the lower right side occasionally move too quickly and can be confusing on difficult tracks. The karaoke component works surprisingly well with Kinect's built-in microphone

Entertainment

While working through the song list solo will get you on the fast track to impersonating the pop icon at parties, The Experience is most entertaining (and most hilarious) when shared with friends

Replay Value

Moderate

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SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy Seals

Poor A.I. makes you more babysitter than commander

7.75

PS3

» **Concept**

Ratchet up SOCOM's action while retaining the series' emphasis on strategy

» **Graphics**

A mixed bag. Some characters and set pieces are impressive, while others are bland and forgettable

» **Sound**

The sound effects are outshined by Bear McCreary's *Battlestar Galactica*-esque soundtrack

» **Playability**

Plays like any quality third-person shooter, though squad commands that share the same buttons can cause problems

» **Entertainment**

It probably won't change the minds of detractors, but fans of the series will feel right at home

» **Replay Value**

Moderately High



Style 1-Player Action (32-Player Online) Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment Developer Zipper Interactive Release April 19 ESRB M

Move Controls

While SOCOM 4 is one of the few "hardcore" titles to implement Sony's PlayStation Move, I wasn't impressed when playing the game with motion controls. The Sharp Shooter peripheral is heavy and cumbersome to use, even if the trigger action is admittedly satisfying. Even playing without the gun peripheral, I couldn't find a scrolling speed for the camera that suited SOCOM 4's fast-paced and highly lethal shootouts. Other players may have less trouble with Move after tweaking the camera options, but I doubt many will prefer it to the standard Sixaxis control scheme

Sony has made a big deal of how SOCOM 4 supports stereo 3D displays and a PlayStation Move control scheme (see sidebar). Beneath these technological diversions lies a solid tactical shooter that innovates in much-needed areas while retaining some of the annoying and unforgivable problems that have always plagued the series.

Much to the chagrin of fans hoping for a better story, Zipper's attempt to improve the single-player experience falls victim to a familiar enemy: lousy squad A.I. The story campaign starts out well enough, walking the player through a few simple engagements that introduce you to an improved control scheme (which fares better than many third-person shooters), and the various squad commands and advanced tactics available for taking on enemies. It doesn't take long, however, for the increased difficulty to showcase the many flaws of your allies' behavior.

During the single-player campaign's 14 missions, your squad mates will frequently miss shots, fail to move to proper cover, and tip off your enemies before you're in position. Even when they're adeptly following orders, you'll witness plenty of facepalm moments, as your allies walk into your line of fire (then swear at you for shooting them), saunter over live grenades, and block you behind cover like a bad Three Stooges routine.

The final few missions are a textbook lesson in frustration, and during some particularly heated firefights, I felt more like I was wrangling a group of toddlers than commanding a Special Forces squad that I was entrusting with my life. The fact that Zipper failed once again to improve the squad A.I. is particularly disappointing considering the fact that the story isn't half bad. I applaud the developer for making at least two main characters that defy the machismo meathead stereotype that military shooters so commonly abuse.

While the single-player campaign fell flat, SOCOM fans are more likely to focus on the multiplayer portion of the game. This installment fares better than Zipper's last PS3 outing, MAG. In addition to a competent leveling system and a satisfying collection of upgradeable weapons, SOCOM 4's competitive multiplayer offers a variety of modes. While I enjoy creative modes

like Bombsquad, which tasks you team with escorting a randomly chosen bomb technician to different explosive caches, too many of the game types lack respawning by default (you can turn on respawning for custom matches), and those that have them are prone to spawn camping. The 32-player count is impressive, but lag became an issue in some of the matches I played.

Out of all of SOCOM 4's game modes, I enjoyed co-op the most, which allows five-player squads to play through a number of areas from the single-player campaign. Although your objectives are simplified (you'll only sweep areas for enemies and occasionally activate a switch), co-op emphasizes communication and teamwork in a way that NPC allies simply can't achieve. The ability to create your own custom campaign missions with different objectives and enemy counts is a cool feature, but you can only choose from two goals, so things get old quickly. SOCOM 4 sports a number of improvements, but likely won't win over military shooter fans who are accustomed to a polished single-player experience in addition to addictive multiplayer offerings. Despite its shortcomings, SOCOM 4 is still a smarter shooter than the run-and-gun military alternatives on the market. Longtime fans of the series will likely be pleased — especially if they bring a few friends into battle. » **Jefi Marchiava**



Darkspore

Pokémon meets Diablo in Maxis' new RPG



Reviewed by Phil Kollar. Gameplay screenshot courtesy of Electronic Arts. Entertaining when you're playing with a buddy.



Style 1 to 4-Player Action/Role-Playing Publisher Electronic Arts Developer Maxis Software Release April 26 ESRB T

Don't let the name fool you; Darkspore has virtually nothing to do with Maxis' 2008 release, *Spore*. Darkspore's 100-plus creatures may look like products of *Spore*'s character editor, but they're all pre-created and the only customization available to players is moving body parts around and making them bigger or smaller. Luckily the gameplay that takes the place of this customization is much more focused and addictive than *Spore*.

Darkspore uses the same formula popularized by *Diablo* and its many clones. You work through stand-alone levels, destroying out-of-control genetic monstrosities (the titular Darkspore) and gathering equipment upgrades (mostly in the form of new body parts rather than weapons and armor). You also gain levels, but they represent your overall progress rather than individual heroes' strength.

This is where Darkspore breaks from the action-RPG tradition. Rather than powering up individual heroes, each level gained allows you to unlock a new creature (up to a total of 100). Creatures are grouped in squads of three, and any of the three in your currently selected squad can be called upon during each level. Since the creatures don't level up or gain new abilities, the strategy in Darkspore becomes more about building well-rounded squads with complementary powers than grinding out levels—a welcome twist on the *Diablo* template, full of opportunities to create powerful partnerships.

Darkspore also features an annoying rock-paper-scissors system where each creature fits under one of five genetic types—plasma, quantum, bio, cyber, or necro. Damage taken and dealt is doubled when facing creatures that

are under the same classification, creating a risk/reward tradeoff when building your squad. More often than not, this mechanic leads to you dropping a preferred creature when levels are full of opponents of a matching type. Then again, learning how to best use new creatures keeps the game from getting stale, so the minor irritation is worth the trouble.

While it may not create the long-term allure of *Diablo*'s gear grind, the variety of creatures makes mastering Darkspore a rewarding prospect. The game is seeded with clever hooks to encourage frequent play, such as increasing your chances of winning a rare item if you string multiple levels together and offering bonus rare item rolls on a daily basis.

Like so many games of this variety, the best way to enjoy Darkspore is playing co-op. Playing cooperatively gives you a noticeable bump in XP and item drops, and the gameplay is simple

enough that even with random matchmaking success is a possibility. Since each player has a squad of three creatures to call on, it's unlikely that you'll bump into someone who doesn't have a single helpful ally. You also unlock PVP mode at level 10, although finding a squad that's balanced correctly for taking on other players can be frustrating.

Maxis' track record from the past few years stands as evidence that innovation does not always equal excellence in video games. *Spore* is an infinitely more unique and nuanced experience than Darkspore, but in the end, Darkspore is much more likely to stick around in the gamer psyche. It may not do anything particularly new, but the way it polishes and riffs on known gaming conventions should leave you happily clicking on bad guys and collecting new body parts late into the night. » **Phil Kollar**

8.5

PC

Concept

Customize a squad of crazy creatures and use them to save the galaxy and hunt down increasingly more powerful body parts

Graphics

Initial generic space station levels are replaced by gorgeous settings populated with detailed flora and fauna

Sound

Lots of ambient noise and unique sounds for each of the game's hundred-plus creatures, but nothing memorably good or bad

Playability

If you can handle clicking with the mouse and pressing the 1 through 6 keys to activate abilities, you'll do fine

Entertainment

Not as much depth as most action-RPGs, but experimenting with different squads is fun and fulfilling

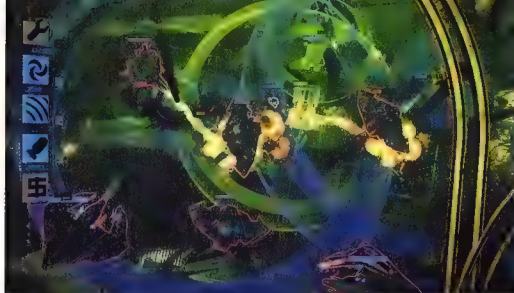
Replay Value

Moderately High

Online Required

Although it's not an MMO, Darkspore is built around being online at all times using an MMO-style account and login system. Even if you're rolling solo, you need to be on EA's servers at all times. I didn't experience any major downtime during my review sessions, though I got disconnected from the servers and lost some progress a couple times. Experience gained and items picked up during levels carried over after I was disconnected, but I had to restart levels that I was nearly finished with before getting logged out





Anomaly: Warzone Earth

Tower offense delivers unusual thrills

8

Style 1-Player Strategy Publisher 11bit Studios
Developer 11bit Studios Release April 8

PC

» **Concept**

Wind your way through urban canyons filled with alien towers

» **Graphics**

The visuals are exceptional if lacking in variety – and you don't need a powerhouse machine to appreciate them

» **Sound**

Laser beams, rocket explosions, and machine guns occasionally give way to cocky British military jargon

» **Playability**

It's not often that I have no complaints about a UI, but the simple gameplay here is perfectly complemented by a streamlined interface

» **Entertainment**

I'm having a tough time coming up with a better way to spend \$10 on entertainment

» **Replay Value**

Moderately Low

This upside-down tower defense game asks the player to don the power suit of the commander of a small convoy of armored vehicles. Through careful selection of your units and their upgrades and clever application of four game-changing powers, you must lead your force on a slow advance through dozens of urban mazes lined with enemy towers.

Anomaly is half puzzle and half strategy, with a splash of point-and-click laser beam dodging. Exploiting the six tower types' weaknesses while avoiding their strengths takes careful path plotting, a good unit mix, and surgical application of your powers.

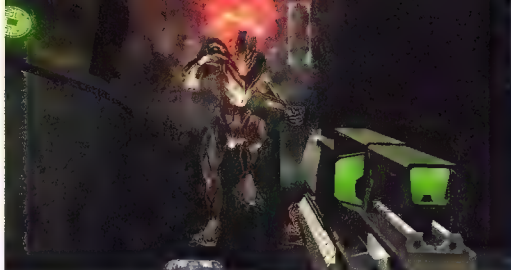
Smokescreens reduce enemy accuracy while decoys distract them from your real units. Repair fields make up for sloppiness in your execution. If all else fails, airstrikes can punch a hole in an otherwise impenetrable defense. Each power type is its own pickup, and you have almost no control over what you have access to on any given map. Adapting your strategy to the powers you have available is part of the challenge, though most levels give you a sufficiently balanced set you can generally do what you like within reason.

The six unit types present slightly different capabilities. Unfortunately, a single obvious configuration is the optimal choice for the vast majority of scenarios. An APC up front to absorb the majority of incoming damage, a shield unit behind it to soften the blows, and a couple of cheap rocket artillery trailing to take care of blowing up the enemy is such a solid, cost-effective setup that it takes a highly unusual map to push you into using the tanks, flamethrowers, and supply vehicles.

The towers you face come in several flavors, each of which calls for a different approach. The hundreds of layouts Anomaly puts in front of you require creative strategies. Even if I used the same units for most of the game, I had a blast experimenting with different routes and power combinations. Anomaly taunts you with your online ranking on every mission complete screen, which is reason enough for me to dive into optimizing every last detail.

I suspect that most players will be done with Anomaly inside 10 hours, but the short length doesn't make the time I spent with it any less amusing. The chance to explore this well-executed, unusual concept is well worth its \$10 price tag. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for this talented studio. — Adam Bieszczyk

Read the unabridged review at gameinformer.com



Conduit 2

One Stumbling Step Forward

6

Style 1 to 4-Player Shooter (12-Player Online)
Publisher Sega Developer High Voltage Software
Release April 19 ESRB T

Wii

» **Concept**

Pick up where the first Conduit left off and add a blanketing progression system

» **Graphics**

Visual hiccups galore, and the overall art style still feels generic. A couple of onlookers mistook it as an N64 title

» **Sound**

These one-liners would make Arnold Schwarzenegger roll his eyes. The weapons sound as authentic as fictional alien technology can

» **Playability**

Gunning down fools with the Wii remote feels much better this time around

» **Entertainment**

Anyone accustomed to shooters on modern consoles will be disappointed, but fans of the original may dig this sequel

» **Replay Value**

Moderately Low

When The Conduit hit the Wii back in 2009 it was plagued with idiotic AI, touchy controls, and lackluster multiplayer. Conduit 2 has arrived, and while a few of these leaks have been plugged, new issues have surfaced, resulting in an experience barely superior to the original.

Conduit 2's story is a hot mess. I was laughing at the lobotomized Duke Nukem one-liners for all the wrong reasons. High Voltage even went as far as hiring the Duke's voice actor, Jon St. John. If B-movie voiceovers and a storyline that incorporates historical figures in ridiculous ways is your thing, Conduit 2 might entertain.

The sequel controls much better than the original. I noticed the smoother motion control right away, and the Wii MotionPlus increases aiming fidelity in such a way that I could line up precise headshots. You can also plug in the Classic Controller Pro, but the loose analog sticks made everything feel too twitchy, even at low sensitivity.

High Voltage had the genius idea to integrate Call of Duty-esque perks and weapon unlocks across single-player, multiplayer, and the Horde-like Invasion mode. Enhancements such as increased reload speed and beefed up defense are great no matter what you're playing, and the persistent augments are a great incentive to bounce between all the modes to earn money.

Unfortunately, locations such as Siberia, China, and a Washington D.C. rehash from the first game feel like soulless sets filled with cardboard props. Single-player levels are packed with enemies that are nominally smarter than in the first game but still occasionally stare blankly through their scopes at you without firing.

The 12-player online battles are too slow-paced for my liking, but fans may enjoy new modes like a balloon battle which is similar in concept to Mario Kart battles. Invasion mode is a good way to earn cash to spend on upgrades, but the split-screen-only action got stale for me after the first few waves due to the small battle arenas and uninteresting enemies.

Graphically, Conduit 2 looks rough. Floating bullet holes and shadows that clip through ceilings are common occurrences. Another recurring bug involves the Eclipse cloaking rifle, which yanks Ford's arms from his body, rendering the gun useless and forcing a checkpoint reload. These downfalls, along with the abrupt and disappointing ending, make the game feel sloppy and rushed.

If you're an FPS-loving Wii owner that doesn't care about single-player, or someone who adored the original Conduit, you may be able to squeeze some entertainment out of this game. Everyone else should pass. — Tim Turi



The Conduit 2...
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Patapon 3

A rhythm of pain

Style 1 to 8-Player Strategy/Rhythm (8-Player Online)
Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer Pyramid/Sony Japan Studio
Release April 12 ESRB E

6.75

PSP

» **Concept**
 Add a multitude of new patapon classes, deep multiplayer, and crushing difficulty

» **Graphics**
 The same cute art style and animations as before

» **Sound**
 Catchy melodies are complemented by metal guitar shredding this tune around

» **Playability**
 It starts with a reasonable difficulty curve, but soon becomes frustrating. Expect to spend hours grinding away at old levels to power up

» **Entertainment**
 Only gluttons for punishment will stand for Patapon 3's forbidding difficulty

» **Replay Value**
 Moderately High

The Patapon series is one of the few standout franchises on the PSP. When the original came out, it was clever and unique. Your troop of soldiers attacked, defended, and fled at your command. Rather than issuing commands like in a traditional RTS, you tapped the face buttons in rhythm with a metronome. Each sequence of beats issued a different order. Patapon 2 and 3 both work in the same way on the battlefield. The same old beat doesn't have to get stale, but this one unfortunately has.

At first I was pleased to see the new systems in place. Rather than equipping and managing multitudes of soldiers, players only deal with four combatant characters, one of which is the super-powered Uberhero who serves as your avatar. It's easy to equip everyone with decent armor and weapons, and you never have to worry about them permanently dying like in previous games. As you level up these different classes, new classes will splinter off from those, leaving a highly customizable battle group.

After the first few stages get you on your feet with your go-to set of unit types, you start plowing through a variety of challenges like destroying forts, racing enemies to a finish line, and battling over territory. But it's not long until enemy attacks become too unforgiving. Some stages are essentially impassible, forcing you to grind for experience and items forever.

Online (or offline) co-op multiplayer helps ease the frustration. Up to four players can team up with their high-powered Uberheroes to take on any stage. With a smart team working together utilizing different talents, you can tear through previously deadly areas. Creating a good squad, however, is not easy. To fully enjoy multiplayer, you either have to know a bunch of Patapon fanatics personally or rely on message boards and social networks to form a clan.

Even if you get a great group together, only the host gets to retain the progress made through the levels. If you're not hosting you'll have to create another match later and do it all again. Everyone earns experience, money, and items, though, so your Uberhero still becomes more powerful when you're helping a friend. But if you want to jump back into single player, the rest of your AI teammates won't have made any upgrade progress so your team will still get wiped out on those tricky stages.

I have a hard time recommending this to Patapon newcomers. Even experienced players will likely get steamed over the roadblocks. If you think you have what it takes to form a good multiplayer co-op team and you're dedicated enough to overcome the difficulties and coordinate online meet-ups, you'll have a good time. You'll have to decide for yourself whether this storm cloud's silver lining is worth it. » **Bryan Vore**



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D

This Chaos Theory port should have stayed hidden

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft Montreal **Release** April 10 ESRB T

5

3DS

» **Concept**
 Move Splinter Cell Chaos Theory to the 3DS and slap a new name on it

» **Graphics**
 Environments are bland and unremarkable, even with the occasional mission objective superimposed over them

» **Sound**
 Musical interludes tigger on and off without any rhyme or reason

» **Playability**
 Gunplay is awful, even for a stealth-based game. I regretted pulling my weapon nearly every time

» **Entertainment**
 Chaos Theory is still a solid game, but this watered down port is disappointing all the way through

» **Replay Value**
 Low

It had been a while since I played Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, so I didn't immediately realize that I was playing a port of it when I started Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D. The fact that Sam Fisher wasn't a total sadsack should have been a tipoff, in addition to its creaky-by-today's-standards gameplay. That said, Chaos Theory is one of the best entries in the series, which makes this game particularly disappointing.

The story involves classic themes of information warfare and proffering set against an escalating conflict between North and South Korea. Naturally, Fisher and his Third Echelon buddies are the only folks who can set things straight.

The basic gameplay has Sam hiding in the shadows and either avoiding or incapacitating anyone who gets in his way. One of the high points in the series is the feeling of power that comes with knowing where your enemy is — and knowing they have no idea that you're tracking them. Unfortunately, the inputs on the 3DS version are split between face buttons and the touchscreen, eliminating the fluidity of control that is so key to the game.

Guard AI is so abysmal that it drags down the rest of the game. I routinely shot enemies in the face, and their buddies scarcely noticed — even if my bullets interrupted their conversations. When guards were alerted to my presence, they often took cover in the middle of doorways. Occasionally I'd have guards clip through me, which didn't seem to bother them much.

In a stealth-based game like this, combat isn't the goal. Thanks to the awful controls, gun battles seem downright punitive. Even when I took the time to dial in a perfect headshot with the face buttons, it didn't always register as a hit.

A few aspects of the game have been updated, including an effort to give the UI a bit of an enhancement. While mission objectives are still largely communicated through in-game dialogue and text briefings, sometimes goals are highlighted through superimposed text à la Splinter Cell Conviction. Hacking has also been tweaked from being a number-based minigame to a puzzle where users have to reassemble a three-dimensional cube. It's a cute attempt to show off the 3D effect, but it's a laughably bizarre way to infiltrate a computer — even for a video game.

Ultimately, it's tough to recommend Splinter Cell 3D. If you're a Splinter Cell superfan, you've already played a better version of this game. The lack of multiplayer — both co-op and competitive — is another glaring omission. If you're new to the series, the poor controls and lack of polish make it an inadvisable entry point. This game should have stayed dark for another few months, because it's not ready for the field. » **Jeff Cork**

PLAYSTATION 3

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	9.25	Dec-10	LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11	de Blob 2	8	Apr-11	Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet	6.75	Feb-11
Blacks & Whites Rearmed 2	7.25	Apr-11	LittleBigPlanet 2	9.5	Feb-11	Slingshot	8.5	Mar-11	Dead Rising 2	9.5	Nov-10	The Infinity Gauntlet	6.75	Feb-11
Blood Kitten	8.5	Nov-10	Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom	8	Dec-10	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	7.75	Nov-10	Dead Rising 2: Case West	8	Feb-11	Marvel vs. Capcom 2: Fate of Two Worlds	9.25	Mar-11
Blood Drive	4.5	Jan-11	Major League Baseball 2K11	6	May-11	Swarm	7.25	Apr-11	Dead Rising 2: Case Zero	8.75	Oct-10	Medal of Honor	7	Nov-10
Bulletstorm	9.25	Apr-11	Marvel Pinball	8.5	Jan-11	Tales From Space. About A Blob	8.75	Apr-11	Dead Space 2	9	Feb-11	Midjack	6	Mar-11
Call of Duty: Black Ops	9	Dec-10	Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet	6.75	Feb-11	Test Drive Unlimited 2	8.5	Mar-11	Datavisor: Vampire Smile, The	8.5	May-11	Midjack	6	Mar-11
Castlemania: Lords of Shadow	9	Nov-10	Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds	9.25	Mar-11	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	9	May-11	DJ Hero 2	9.25	Dec-10	Naïf	8	Jan-11
Chime Super Deluxe	8	May-11	Mass Effect 2	9.5	Feb-11	Time Crisis: Razing Storm	6.75	Jan-11	Dragon Age II	8.5	Dec-10	NBA 2K11	8.75	Nov-10
Costume Quest	6	Dec-10	Medal of Honor	7	Nov-10	Tron: Evolution	4.5	Jan-11	EA Sports MMA	8.5	Dec-10	NHL 11	9	Oct-10
Create	5	Jan-11	Mindjack	5	Mar-11	Two Worlds II	7.75	Mar-11	Enslaved: Odyssey to the West	7	Nov-10	Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	9	Jan-11
Crysis 2	7.9	May-11	MLB 11: The Show	9.25	Apr-11	Venqush	7.75	Nov-10	Fallout: New Vegas	8.5	Dec-10	Pinball FX 2	9	Jan-11
de Blob 2	8	Apr-11	Naïf	8	Jan-11	WWE All Stars	7.5	May-11	Fallout: New Vegas	8.5	Dec-10	Planets vs. Zombies	9	Nov-10
Dead Rising 2	9.5	Nov-10	NBA 2K11	8.75	Nov-10	WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2011	8	Dec-10	EA Sports MMA	8.5	Dec-10	Red Dead Redemption: Undead Nightmare	8	Dec-10
Dead Space 2	9	Feb-11	Need for Speed Hot Pursuit	8.75	Dec-10	Yar's Revenge	7.5	Apr-11	Echochrome 1	7.25	Feb-11	Rock Band 3	9.25	Nov-10
DJ Hero 2	9.25	Dec-10	Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	9	Jan-11	You Don't Know Jack	8	Feb-11	Fallout: New Vegas	8.5	Dec-10	Rush'n Attack: Ex-Patrol	6	Mar-11
Dragon Age II	8.25	Apr-11	PlayStation Move Heroes	6.5	May-11	XBOX 360			Fallout: New Vegas	8.5	Dec-10	Saw II: Flesh & Blood	4.5	Oct-10
EA Sports MMA	8.5	Dec-10	Red Dead Redemption: Undead Nightmare	8	Dec-10	A World Of Kiteflings	8.25	Jan-11	FIFA 11	8.75	Nov-10	Saw II: Flesh & Blood	4.5	Oct-10
Echochrome 1	7.25	Feb-11	Rock Band 3	9.25	Nov-10	Arcaea Gothic 4	6.75	Dec-10	Fight Night Champion	9	Apr-11	Scott Pilgrim vs. The World	9	Oct-10
Enslaved: Odyssey to the West	7	Nov-10	Rush'n Attack: Ex-Patrol	6	Mar-11	Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	9.25	Dec-10	Shau White Skateboarding	7.75	Dec-10	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11
Fallout: New Vegas	8.5	Dec-10	Saw II: Flesh & Blood	4.5	Oct-10	Beyond Good & Evil HD	9.25	Apr-11	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Sonic Free Riders	5.75	Dec-10
FIFA 11	8.75	Nov-10	Sengoku Basara	9	Dec-10	Biggest Loser: Ultimate Workout, The	8	Dec-10	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Sonic Hedgehog 4: Episode 1	8	Nov-10
Fight Night Champion	9	Apr-11	Scott Pilgrim vs. The World	9	Oct-10	Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	7.25	Apr-11	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Spare Parts	6	Mar-11
Fight Lights Out, The	6.5	Jan-11	Shamurai Heroes	7.75	Dec-10	Black Kitten	6.5	Nov-10	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
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Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock	9	Feb-11	Shoot, The	6	Jan-11	Bulletstorm	9.25	Apr-11	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1	5.5	Jan-11	Sims 3, The	9	Dec-10	Call of Duty: Black Ops	9	Dec-10	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
Homefront	7	May-11	Siam Bolt Scrappers	7	May-11	Castlemania: Lords of Shadow	9	Nov-10	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	7.5	Dec-10	Sonic the Hedgehog 4: Episode 1	8	Nov-10	Costume Quest	8	Dec-10	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
John Daly's ProStroke Golf	7.5	Nov-10	Spare Parts	6	Mar-11	Create	5	Jan-11	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
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Kung Fu Rider	3.5	Feb-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11	DanceMasters	4	Jan-11	Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole	7.25	Nov-10	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11				Shinji 2: Unleashed	8.5	May-11	Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11

6 | Dynasty Warriors 7

Platform PS3 • 360 Release March 29 ESRB T

Fans who've stuck with the series since its inception argue its merits, but I've grown tired of the repetitive action, enemies, and environments. Dynasty Warriors may have once provided a novel experience, but like metrosexuality and Jennifer Aniston's hair, things that fascinated us a decade ago eventually grow tiresome. — Ben Reeves

5 | Carnival Games: Monkey See, Monkey Do

Platform 360 Release April 5 ESRB E

Carnival Games: Monkey See, Monkey Do is too realistic for its own good. In the 20 minigames and attractions offered in this collection, victory is often dictated by dumb luck. Outside of evil carnies appreciating the attention to detail, I can't see anyone enjoying the frustration and feeling of helplessness that undermine most of the activities.

— Andrew Reiner

8 | Section 8: Prejudice

Platform 360 • PC Release April 20 ESRB T

This download-only follow-up to TimeGate's Section 8 crams a full-priced game's feature set into a \$14.99 package. While the campaign won't revolutionize the genre and its Horde-like Swarm mode is familiar, everything performs admirably. Considering the amount of gameplay included, it's well worth the download.

— Dan Ryckert

7 | Islands of Wakfu

Platform 360 Release March 30 ESRB E10+

Small flaws combine to make certain sequences irksome, even while the game's unique vibe, mystical fiction, and strange world carry you forward. While I can't recommend playing the game solo, I offer a hesitant thumbs-up to a pair of players looking for something off the beaten track.

— Matt Miller

7 | The Sims Medieval

Platform PC Release March 22 ESRB T

The Sims Medieval tries to provide strategic kingdom building, but it doesn't go far enough. It tries to give you the satisfaction of leveling up heroes, but doesn't give a sense of improvement. These new features provide a few fun moments, but they aren't refined or engaging enough to support an entire game. — Joe Juba

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Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	9	May-11
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The story of

Robotron: 2084 and the birth of the twin-stick shooter

Bizarre Creations' Geometry Wars heralded a resurgence of the so-called twin-stick shooters, games where players use multiple joysticks to move and shoot in independent directions. Its success brought an onslaught of imitators, particularly in downloadable spaces such as Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network. Geometry Wars may have refined that gameplay, but it originated decades earlier in the classic arcade game Robotron: 2084. We recently talked with Robotron's designer, Eugene Jarvis, to get the story of how it came into being.



Eugene Jarvis

Robotron: 2084 takes place in a dystopian future — the year 2084, naturally — where robots have revolted against their overlords. After determining that humans are inefficient, the advanced machines assemble to kill them all. It's up to the player to destroy or avoid the synthetic threat while working to save the last remaining human family.

Eugene Jarvis got his start in the games industry working at Atari, where he programmed pinball machines. Atari eventually focused its business on video games, so he moved to Chicago to work at Williams with legendary pinball designer Steve Ritchie (Black Knight, High Speed, Terminator 2: Judgment Day) on a table called Firepower, which was notable for being the first pinball machine that had a three-ball multiball mode.

On that job, Jarvis learned the importance of game audio. "In pinball, what can a programmer do?" Jarvis asks. "You don't have video, or at least not in those days, so you're all about enhancing the player experience, and really it's a light and a sound show." Jarvis thought some of the sounds in Firepower were so effective that he recycled them in Robotron years later.

New Beginnings

Eventually, Williams' designers and management decided to try their hand at the emerging world of arcade games. The availability of microprocessors allowed for more complicated games, such as Space Invaders, which simulated a rudimentary level of AI. Compared to dedicated multi-player games like Pong and Spacewar!, this was revolutionary.

In less than a year, Jarvis's team of hardware engineers and programmers released their first arcade game, Defender. "It was probably my biggest game ever, so it's been kind of a downward slope for the last 30 years," he jokes. "But I've had my fun. It was a huge, huge game."

Jarvis and co-designer Larry DeMar then founded their own company, Vid Kidz, and released a sequel to Defender, Stargate. "We pretty much worked day and night for four months, and we did it," he says.

After releasing back-to-back Defender games, Jarvis and DeMar were burned out on the concept. "Larry was experimenting with some different games, and I was experimenting with some stuff, and it was like, we'll experiment with some stuff, and if we find something that's cool, we'll go with it."

Games aren't developed in a vacuum, and the early arcade days were no different. Jarvis says Defender and Robotron: 2084 both were inspired by Space Invaders, but in completely different ways. "As a player, what aggravated me about Space Invaders was that you're kind of stuck on one screen," he recalls. "It's fun and everything, but I'm sick of this one fucking screen. I want to fly around and go to different places." With Defender, players were untethered and could fly around a large, scrolling world.

Robotron's vibe is decidedly more claustrophobic, which came from an attempt to outdo Space Invaders' feeling of tension. Much of that game focuses on the dread that accompanies the relentlessly advancing aliens. "It gets cramped when they're on top of you, and it's really nasty — but very exciting," Jarvis recalls. "How could we beat this? How about if we put the guy in the middle of the screen instead of the bottom of the screen and then we have s--- coming from all sides simultaneously?"

Another source of early inspiration for Jarvis was an old Commodore PET game called Chase. In it, players controlled an ASCII character as it evaded enemies. "The gameplay was that you didn't shoot, it was



kind of a passive game," recalls Jarvis. "Things would come after you, and you'd position yourself so that there was essentially a mine between you and them, and they would walk into the mine and die. It was kind of a cool game."

Jarvis then prototyped a similar game with robots and electrodes. After playing it for about 10 minutes, he realized he would rather blow things up.

Mocking the High Score

Robotron's biggest revelation came from Jarvis' experience with Stern's arcade game *Berzerk*. "I always enjoyed playing *Berzerk*, but I found it to be a really frustrating game," Jarvis says. Much of that frustration stemmed from its control scheme, which was a standard joystick and button combo. As players ran through a maze killing robots and avoiding the indestructible smiley face Evil Otto, they could only fire their gun the direction they were running. This led to situations where a shot wouldn't get off in time, causing the character to run into the enemies and die. Then Jarvis noticed something strange.

"One time I was playing the game, and there was a weird feature where if you'd

hold the fire button down it would freeze your player," he recalls. "You'd stop. You couldn't move. But if you moved the joystick, it would actually fire. It was like, wait a minute, I'm firing bullets with the joystick, but then I can't move. What if I had two joysticks, one that moves you and one that fires? It was like it hit me on the head with this thing."

Jarvis headed over to a Radio Shack, bought a pair of Atari 2600 joysticks, then drilled holes in them and bolted them onto a board. The original controller for *Robotron* was born. After implementing the unique control mechanism, Jarvis says the other pieces fell into place rather quickly.

"The guys used the algorithm from *Chase*; they'd just go the shortest distance toward you," he says. "Throw the mines in there. Get the shooting going with the two joysticks. It's funny, that was about two or three days into the project. It was an amazingly rapid development." Jarvis toyed with adding more and more enemies onscreen, punching in 6, 20, 50, and more robots, becoming more excited each time as the pacing became more frantic. The team then added a variety of robotic enemies, with unique behaviors — the indestructible Hulk; the Enforcers and their spawning

Spheroids; the mind-stealing Brains; and the Tanks, with their nooching shots.

Not all of Jarvis' original ideas made it into the final game. The initial concept for *Robotron: 2084* included a vast underground maze, which players would explore to find and destroy the master robot. Jarvis says the core game became so much fun that the team decided to save the time and focus on the basic experience. That concept of an underground maze was reused in his 1990 arcade game, *Smash TV*.

Atari: The Family

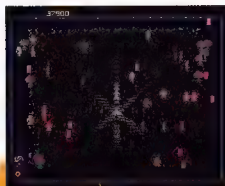
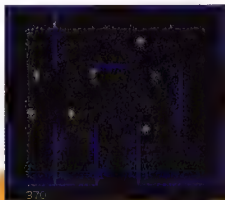
The final ingredient to the game was the introduction of the last surviving human family. The three humans — dad, mom, and son Milky — wandered the playfield, getting killed by the robots unless the player character intervened. Jarvis says they're a critical part of the game's formula.

"Say in a game like *Space Invaders*, you have that survivalist instinct," he says. "It's very strong, and obviously in games like *Defender* and *Robotron* you have that. But also, we added in the instinct of saving your buddies, of rescuing the princess or whatever it is you want to call it. You add that play mechanic in there, and we not only wanted to appeal to your selfless nature to rescue these things, because we didn't think that would be strong enough, but we felt you needed a monetary reward because we didn't trust people that much. So we added the greed factor. So if you went out to rescue your people, you'd get these huge points, but obviously you're exposing yourself to this huge danger at the same time."

Robotron: 2084 went from concept to arcades in six months, but people didn't immediately latch onto the two-joystick concept. "A lot of people could not deal with the controls, doing two things independently," Jarvis recalls. "It did attract more of a hardcore player. It's funny, we noticed a lot of left-handed players playing the game. The way I could tell this was by looking at the cigarette burns on the control panel. Most of the games, the right side of the control panel would have a huge number of cigarette burns on it, and on *Robotron* it was like an equal amount of left and right handed players."

Robotron: 2084's influence is visible in the games that have emulated its mechanics over the years, and even through the ubiquity of dual-joystick inputs on console controllers.

Looking at the way technology has evolved throughout his career and citing Moore's Law, Jarvis even jokes that *Robotron*'s premise could be prophetic. "We've got another 73 years — it still could happen, baby!" ♦



The Mushroom Kingdom's Mischief Makers

Many of us grew up on Mario's 2D adventures, and we've jumped on thousands of baddies' heads over the years. You may have taken Bowser down plenty of times, but can you name his numerous minions? See how many of the enemies from early Super Mario Bros. games you can identify.

by Dan Ryckert



Write the names on a numbered piece of paper, then check your answers at gameinformer.com/mag

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